

AFTERCARE

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Text: Lea Dora Illmer
Italic quotes in the text:
Archiv Sara Grütter
Scenography:
Chris Hunter & Sara Grütter
Drawings: Sara Grütter

Welcome to AFTERCARE.

Here, we take care of you.

How heavy are your worries?

Take care. Carry them with you.

Welcome.

Here, we care for you. Like in grief. But without the dots.

“I don't like the word ‘care,’ because it contains grief.”

Welcome.

Take care. From Old English “caru” or “cearu.” Fear, sorrow, worry. From Proto-Germanic “karō.” Lament or sorrow.

Later: To provide someone or something with affection and attention, to protect, to care for.

Welcome.

Here, we care.

To care for. To take special care of someone.

Welcome.

Here, we provide for you.

Collected, organized, structured, laid out, curated.

‘Curare’. Latin. To care or worry.

Here, we provide for you, we take care of you.

Care. From Middle High German ‘vür-sorge’. Borrowed from the Latin ‘prōcūrātio’. To take care of, nurture, manage something. A concern that extends into the future.

Welcome.

Here we look back.

Here we look at each other.

Here we reach for the future.

What comes (before, in between) AFTERCARE?

Welcome to AFTERCARE. An archive of care. An archive through care. An archive for care. This is not a static exhibition. This is (not) an exhibition. This is an invitation.

The text "Before AFTERCARE" was written in the run-up to the exhibition. I, Lea Dora Illmer, visited Sara Grütter in her studio and in Chris Hunter's studio. During the exhibition, a second short text will be written: "In between." Finally, a third: "AFTER CARE." They will be added to this one.

By continuously adding text, I am referring to the artist's working method. Her archive is also continuously being relocated, organized, and laid out as part of this exhibition. I respond to this: we both like to leave paths open. We rearrange. We cross things out. We add things. We look back. We remember. We want to show what came before. We like traces. We like Post-its. We like the in-between. The transparent, the transparency. We like the back(s).

Before AFTERCARE

"Time is running out," you write to me, saying you have to "get going soon," but you send me some information about what it's all about. So I can get an idea of what you want from me. You write that your exhibition "Aftercare" will open during the art days. A personal, intimate exhibition. You ask me if I would like to contribute a text: "I thought of you because of the two terms 'archive' and 'care.'" You write that you would like to discuss it with me.

You thought of me because of archive and care, I thought about how we met at BuchBasel. I sat down next to you and you spoke to me. I don't remember what we talked about. Mina Hava sat in front of us on stage, together with Maya Olah, more of a conversation than a water glass reading. I had a crush on Mina Hava, I remember that because I shared a bucket of chicken wings with her the night before. And I liked you right away, I remember that too, because you're funny and soft and warm.

*"In certain places
it's quiet
elsewhere wild"*

Before the exhibition, a visit to the studio. I drive past blackberry bushes, wild carrots, and yellow yarrow, past a sunflower, alone. I actually wanted to pick some flowers for you in the flower field by the water tower, but there weren't enough. I have stomach pains because of my period. Five days early. I was raised too Swiss to come empty-handed, so I pick what I find along the way. The blackberries cut little slits in my hand. You're happy about the bouquet and have snacks ready. You say you're on your period. I eat all the lentil waffles. We spill coffee on the floor of your studio. "Recycle," you say, and lay large sheets of paper on top. You let them dry.

Then you let me rummage through your boxes. There are so many of them, filled with your drawings. They are observations, thoughts, memories, experiments, ideas, expressions of moods or feelings. Twelve boxes, from 2013 to 2024. A stack of life, drawn, organized, packed away. "Documentation is a feminist project," says Sara Ahmed, "a life project." I'm allowed to rummage through them. I'm allowed to pull them out, turn them over, and leaf through them. Box by box, sheet by sheet. Once I'm done, you take the stack from me. You bundle it up again, organize it, carefully.

At some point, you stopped using sketchbooks and started using pads instead. That way, you could tear out the same sheets of paper over and over again. You organized your archive. In retrospect. It's chronological, but not only that. There is a double order: first by year. One box, one year. Inside, by month. And then a second level. Each box contains folders made of folded paper that enclose individual drawings, held together by a Post-it note. There is something written on the Post-it note. A place, a theme, a few words. Keywords, catchphrases. Keyworded. And every drawing has a back. On every back there is a memory, a context:

*"works
nothing. I'm
hungry."*

Your drawing archive is also an archive of words. And an archive of feelings, an archive of emotions.

Aftercare can also mean cuddling after sex. Aftercare means “taking care of someone after performing sexual activities with them.” The term has its origins in the context of BDSM, kink, or fetish. Aftercare includes things like cuddling, talking, and soft kisses. Wounds are cared for, feelings are acknowledged.

What I'm doing is intimate, I'm a little tense, touched, moved. And sometimes briefly ashamed. Am I seeing too much? Am I reading too much? When it gets physical on the front or back. I don't want you to see what I'm seeing right now. Quickly turn the page. You think about the world while drawing, you say. That's how your mind works. You record, you remember, you practice, you are curious, you relax, you channel—while drawing.

*"What did my
grandmother
do before
she became a grandmother
?"*

I remember a few drawings. I linger over them. The one with the macchinetta. The one with the basil pot on the red coaster. The one with the rising cervelat (“* in the sense of further developing”). The recipe for cough syrup made from black winter radish. The syrup is bright green. Empty jars with lemon in them, coffee grounds. “Bitter substances,” it says on one. And: “Yarrow, dandelion, artichoke, daisy, milk thistle.” Two eyes look at me and a purple thistle. Beneath them, in tiny letters:

“My eyes remind me of you.”

Before the exhibition, a visit to Chris Hunter's studio. Here you invent tables, fabricate stools. There are many ways to build a table, you have invented a new one. A table like a crutch, says one. A table like an easel, I say. A table that carries your drawing. That carries your concern.

The body is also an archive, says Sara Ahmed, and “to share a memory is to put a body into words.” Experiences and memories accumulate over time, so that we carry more and more weight. They accumulate like things in a bag, “but the bag is your body, so that you feel like you are carrying more and more weight.” The bag becomes heavy, “the past becomes heavy.”

Sara Ahmed understands our memories, our [feminist] knowledge base, as a fragile archive. As an archive whose fragility gives us a responsibility: to take care of it.

We take care of it. Because it becomes easier when we take care.

In between

Ciao Cara, dear Sara,

I'm not writing to you from Basel, but from the sea. More precisely: from Genoa. Even more precisely: Genova Nervi. So, roughly 500 kilometers between us. Seven hours by train, five and a half by Cinquecento. The fastest way to the sea.

Here, I think about the in-between, about stopovers, intervals, and spaces in between. Here, I think about the body and other vessels, about the color red, blood, and of course, tomatoes. Here, I recall what I've seen so far in AFTERCARE. I let AFTERCARE resonate in me.

Exactly a week ago today was your vernissage: me with rose hips in my hair and rose hips in the bouquet. This time flowers from the flower field for you – from Bruderholz. Pink snapdragons and summer thistles. But the rose hips were missing! The bouquet would have been too kitschy without them. So, first stop on the way to you – into the bushes Scratched hands again. Do I bring flowers because I want to bring flowers, or because I've drawn this picture of myself?

I'm still too early. So, a second stop at the bakery you showed me last time. Valsecchi – an Italian name, neither of us knows how to pronounce it. The bakery lies between the Dorenbach viaduct and the Margarethenpark, between Binningen and Basel, between Hauptstrasse and Holeestrasse.

You introduced me last time, so they recognize me. Remo has been baking since 1976. Running this bakery since 1988. "Are you a master baker?" asks a customer. "Everyone is a master," says Remo, "I'm just a baker." The most Italian thing about him, he says, is his name – otherwise he doesn't speak a word. There's turtle-shaped poppy bread, giant nut croissants, Lenten pastries in August, and so-called children's plates with a generous slice of Linzer torte. I order a black coffee and a chocolate roll that nearly kills me. It's small, very heavy, almost square, and filled with half a bar of chocolate. "Drnoch hesch Zmittagässe" ("You've basically had lunch now"), comments a regular.

So after this "lunch," just after 10 a.m., I drag myself up to you. With a little stone in my stomach. I'm surprised: how punctual people are, and how many children they bring. Children stand out in art spaces. Their presence must be thanks to your vernissage being a breakfast rather than an apéro. So, for once, people with care duties don't automatically miss out. The small, low kitchen of Peripherie 8 is full. There's turtle bread and croissants from Valsecchi. I sit at the corner of the table and eat an egg with Aromat.

You flit from the kitchen to the exhibition space and back, you look happy. You say you haven't eaten anything yet. You couldn't eat right now. I worry about you.

In the exhibition space, I see red. "A sunset red, between orange and pink," a girl tells me. The sun throws patches of light on the wall. A child almost knocks over the display – I jump. And in red, written on a drawing:

"Red Body Blood Pain Red Carpet Blood Tomato"

It sounds a little like a mantra. Or a spell. I see a red slingshot, red circles, red spheres, red surfaces, pools of blood. I see red, I feel red. I've got my period again. You too, you tell me. Yesterday the sea felt red.

There was a thunderstorm. The next morning, I read a book between restless waves and think about AFTERCARE. It says: "Women are imagined as vessels, constantly." And later: as "bottomless pits." Is that what we are? Bottomless pits? I eat tomatoes by the ton to preserve the summer, and somehow the idea appeals to me. Maybe because so much can fit inside: tomatoes, small stones, thoughts, (inter-)bleedings, red. Maybe because a bottomless vessel isn't so clearly separated from its surroundings. But porous, transparent. An in-between.

The in-between fascinates me. It changes the way I look at things. I suddenly see your exhibition space as an in-between space – between doors. The displays as triangles between rectangles. The egg white as the space between yolk and shell. An in-between space isn't just a space in between. Not just a gap, not just emptiness. But also a shared space. A space for care.

It's my last evening by the sea. I think of the bottomless vessel and order melting burrata with figs and a mountain of tiny squid. "Is it too much?" I ask the Nonna. She laughs: "va bene."

There's a book, I recall, called *Between I and Thou*. It attempts a theory of love. Because love exists there: "It does not reside in the I and merely take the Thou as its object – it is between I and Thou." This is true not only for love, I think, but also for care.

In the meantime, I wish you ripe tomatoes,

Lea Dora

AFTER AFTERCARE

after

a lost ring
a ruined stomach
a aching heart
a mother in hospital
a dirty tiger finch
a minor crisis
a major crisis
a moderate exhaustion
a uncertainty
a doubt
a therapy session
a khachapuri recipe
a bottle of crémant
a secondary emotion
a fragile archive
an old bakery
an expensive nursing bodysuit for a father
a postnatal depression
a white piece of paper
a premenstrual syndrome
a long night
an even longer day
a closing swimming pool
a terminated apartment
an open relationship
a hidden injury
a little crush
a growing chaos
a stolen spoon
a finissage

needs AFTERCARE