

NEW LOVE | SETH CAMERON

How's it going, Kid? Lou always calls me Kid. What do we talk about? My work. His work. Cooper Union lore. He graduated in '81, a year before I was born. His new hip. His latest tattoo. My latest love. My first since moving to the city is Montana. She's the one I am with when the towers fall. She thinks with her fingers. She teaches me to bind sketchbooks by hand and make pasta from scratch. She introduces me to her "gay dads," Lou and David. When she ends things that spring, I call Lou. Then, every week or two, we meet in one of a few East Village dives. Happy hour. Me taking attendance among the regulars when he comes through the door, says hello to half the room, then finds me at the end of the bar. He hangs up his hat and cane, squares up a stack of twenties between us, and orders for us both. Maker's neat. Bud back. He asks me to write an essay for his solo show. I introduce him to my parents at graduation. When I need a sounding board, he listens. When I am an arrogant prick, he tells me so. When I am broke, he pays me to repaint his apartment.

Corner of Bowery and Prince. I remember looking up from the street and finding his fourth-floor windows by the silver lamé curtains. I remember the rasp over the intercom, David telling me to go away, then buzzing me in. I remember the cabinets of Wedgwood. Lou filled them in his twenties, while kicking heroin. I remember a small Andrés Serrano photograph of Lou and Laurence Fishburne dressed as gladiators holding slabs of meat. I remember a framed pink triangle patch I never asked him

about. I remember David's compulsive shrines, reliquaries collaged from gumball-machine toys, gay porno mags, and Chinatown novelty lights. I remember Bic pen drawings on paper plates: flying saucers and tractor beams. I've forgotten the artist's name. A curved spine of piano hammers from their friend Adriana. A cane made from a broomstick and a translucent pink dildo from Montana and me. An aluminum ashtray I'd made on the milling machine at Cooper, a pentagon with a single divot where the plane hit.

The summer after my freshman year, Montana and I rented a room in an Astoria house shared with seven or eight other Cooper students. I remember the kitchen, the crowding of utensils and cookware and labeled leftovers, none of it mine. I remember the bedroom's pink carpeting and sunlight through curtains she'd sewn. I remember the living room, unfurnished except for somebody's typewriter I appropriated between jobs. There were the night classes teaching high school students how to take their SATs. There were weekends spent canvassing suburban neighborhoods on behalf of causes I've since forgotten. I tried waitering, catering, cleaning apartments, moving boxes from one room to another. Mostly I tried to avoid spending money. Rice and beans was cheap. Sex was free.

One early morning we watched two obsolete cooling towers implode on the Brooklyn waterfront. By late August, Montana had found regular work designing high-end wallpaper, and I was spending most days at

the library or in the park writing in a sketchbook she'd made for me. I still have it. It's covered in light gray fabric with bright red endpapers. On the first page she's written, "Where do we go now?"

"I'm with Stupid" / Baudrillardian bicycle helmet / QUOTATION MARX / mirror stage / the World Trade Center / Mr. Potato Head. A proposal to write "reviews of shows that didn't happen, of work that wasn't made, of artists who aren't real." My fall class schedule: Public Sculpture on Mondays. The address of a restaurant on the Lower East Side with the note: "August 27, 2001. Dinner. Montana. Louis."

Was this the first time I met Lou? That long-shuttered restaurant with cheetah-print banquette seating, red walls, and gold-framed portraits of a theatrically pale woman. The owner. Of course Lou knew her. She came out from the back to greet him, kissing each of his bearded cheeks. This was his standard hello and goodbye. Lower East Side restaurateurs. Gay-bar owners. Managers of alternative theater companies. Montana and me.

A self-conscious inscription: The end of summer in New York, the start of my sophomore year at Cooper Union. Pages of plans for a student publication we never made. A proposal to implode and rebuild the World Trade Center.

The next pages are numbers: 200,000 tons of steel, 43,600 windows, 35,000 workers every day. There is the number for office leasing, for public events, for media inquiries, for Controlled

Demolition, Inc. There are the legal definitions of "sedition," "true threat," and "menace."

On my desk, all the books Bobst had on the towers held down the corners of a drawing on vellum in Micron pen, traced from a 1970 photograph of the World Trade Center under construction. Across the top I'd written:

WORLD TRADE CENTER
REBUILDING
SEPTEMBER 2001

That first week back, I walked downtown to see the towers up close. But there was no way to see them up close. Block after block they lurked between buildings in some indeterminable distance, then without warning they were all there was. Not objects. The field. I lay on a bench with my head on my backpack and watched the shadows change.

I can't tell you what it sounded like. Did an alarm go off? Did I shout for help? Blood drained from Alexandra's face and nurses rushed in. Her white face and the red face of our new son. Asleep. Asleep. I'm holding her hand. I know that much. The nurses pulling black clots from beneath the white sheets. Prunes. A widower. This will be the story now. Just me and—had we named him? Where do we go now?

To Miami, three years ago. To a Thanksgiving dinner before the opening of Art Basel Miami Beach. To the magazine spread Tom and Fred, my first collectors and hosts for the week, call home. Glass doors fold open to the night, to humidity, to giant palms framing the pool and, beyond it, the bay. Their haughty dachshund is

somewhere in the dark barking its brains out at an iguana. On the dock, a table glows with fake candles.

Guests arrive. Novelists, newscasters, local politicians. A stranger with an almost goofy black bow in her hair. She is not my wife, so I sit next to her. Her necklaces peek down a crisp white button-up. We are children at the adults' table. She swears she'll only lie, so we agree to invent each other. I share nothing of The Bruce High Quality Foundation. The anonymous collective. The fictional artist. The 9/11 origin story. She shares nothing of her work, her husband. I remember almost nothing—something about gonorrhea. Thanksgiving is over. The guests are gone. I've spoken to no one else.

Alexandra. We have the same initials. Wouldn't even have to change the monogrammed towels. By morning she's in my phone. How did I manage that? I'm forming every message as a question, to keep her engaged. Would you like to attend my panel? "The School Makers," moderated by Hans Ulrich Obrist, 9 a.m. on Sunday, after all the money's been spent. She might. Incoming call. It's Adriana. Lou is dead.

Something respiratory. She doesn't have all the details. The service will be in New Jersey, where he grew up, in two days. By the time we hang up, I'm on the dock. The water is dark. The good china and fake candles and spent cigars have all been cleared from the table. The pool is flat and the lawn is green. It's a horrifyingly clear sky on a humid Miami morning and Lou is dead.

I could fly back for the

SEVEN SISTERS

funeral. That's a thing I could afford to do now. The panel isn't until the end of the week. He'd called just a few days ago. "How's it going, Kid?" I didn't have time to talk. There'd been less time recently. He came to the Whitney Biennial opening. I got him into the dinner. At the show we staged downtown that same night, I saved him a spot on the wall in the front window. He brought over the biggest piece he could fit in a cab.

I call Montana. First time in years. Living in Germany somewhere. I tell her where to send flowers. She thanks me. I tell her it's good to hear her voice. I call the Bruce guys, pass on the information for the funeral. They'll go. I'll stay. He is dead. He won't miss me. He won't find me at the bar. He won't hang up his hat and cane and square up a stack of twenties between us. He won't hear the story of the stranger with the almost goofy black bow in her hair who does not have gonorrhea. He won't hear about her showing up to the panel and sitting in the back, or seeing me on her next trip to New York, or me flying to see her in London, Switzerland, Venice. He won't hear about the hotels, her yelling at the little Venetian concierge to let me up to her room, the gossamer curtains, her escape to the city, the divorce, the combining of our cats. I won't get to tell him I am becoming a father.

She moves. The nurses breathe and beads of sweat appear on her forehead. She stays asleep. The child stays asleep. It is a clear morning in July and there are cut flowers on the rolling tray table.

SETH CAMERON | *New Love*

3 October– 28 November 2026

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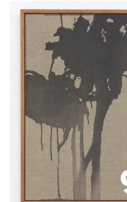
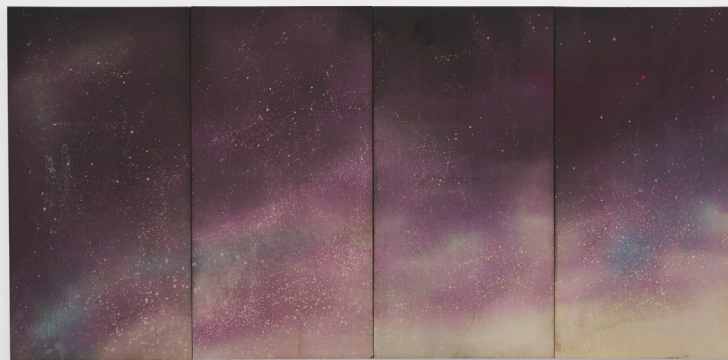
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1-5. *The Stranger*
(*Chrysanthemums*), 2026

sumi on dyed linen
63 x 32 ½ in. ea.

6. *Stars*, 2026

sumi on dyed linen
63 x 32 ½ in. ea.

7-9. *The Stranger*
(*Chrysanthemums*), 2026

sumi on dyed linen with artist-made
cherry frame, 28 ¼ x 17 ¼ x 2 in. ea.