

## HEY MOON

It's just  
you and me  
tonight.

March 2

JOHN MAUS

11719 Ridge Dr

# You are Welcome

Trying to make sense of it all

Olivia Laing

This summer. On a single day in Paris, I watched a video of British football fans throwing coins at refugee children in the streets of Lille. I saw a photograph of Nigel Farage posing with his sad beery smile against a hoarding showing a long line of Syrians walking away from a warzone, heads bowed, through foreign fields. And then, a few hours later, an MP was shot dead outside a library with a homemade gun.

Meanwhile, 49 people were murdered at a queer club in Orlando and Donald Trump compared immigrants to snakes. At his rally in Greensboro, a journalist overheard: 'Immigrants aren't people, honey.'

And then came the Brexit vote, the swastikas on British streets. Like you, perhaps, I'm trying to make sense of it all, to work out the best way to respond.

Here's a thing that stuck in my mind. Last autumn, I went to see John Berger speak at the British Library. Eighty-nine, his face craggy, bent almost double with arthritis. Someone in the audience asked him about refugees, how we should react to the crisis, and he sat there tugging at his shock of white hair, as he did after every question, physically wrestling with his thoughts. And then he said: 'With hospitality.'

I don't want to write another word about Farage or guns or hatred. I want to write about spaces where hospitality happens. First, a fisherman's hut at this year's Whitstable Biennial. Inside I watched *Boat People* (2016), a short film by Sarah Wood about migration, from the earliest humans walking their way out of Africa to the present-day frenzy for borders and walls.

It worked a kind of magic, that film, a rehumanizing spell, telling the stories of actual people and setting them within the context of Admiral Nelson and J.M.W. Turner, of Britain's long, salt-spattered centuries at sea. Here's one of the stories, a snippet from an interrupted life:

'A woman living in exile turns to me and, almost shouting, says: "We just want to buy tomatoes at the market. We just want to go to the cinema when we want. It is hard enough that we get ill and die. We don't want to be hurt and killed." Everyone in the room around us stops pretending they can't hear what the woman's saying. Everyone has listened after all. Everyone turns round to us and

agrees [...] This contact between strangers, for a moment, feels like coming home.'

For a minute, sitting in that close, dark space, I had a sense of openness, of light. Among the found footage of boats and waves, a repeating image of Derek Jarman's hands, stringing a necklace of flints in the bright butter-yellow gorse of his garden at Prospect Cottage, Dungeness. We don't have to live like this. There are other ways to conduct yourself, to apprehend the world.

The last time I had that light, bright feeling was at Marc Hundley's show, 'New Music', at CANADA, which I went to see three times over a single weekend in New York. Hundley's work isn't political, exactly, but it's about a kind of hospitality to feeling, a tolerance and openness that feels radical in its own right. Like Wood, he uses found material in his prints, often lines from pop songs, the sort of things that spin in your head, acquiring personal meaning.

One of the prints was of David Bowie's beautiful, alien face. Emblazoned across it were the words 'but I can see it's not okay', from the 1969 song 'Letter to Hermione'. Another, so lovely I wanted to steal it, had a silhouette of summer trees against a deep ocean blue of twilight. 'Hey Moon', it said, repurposing John Maus, 'it's just you and me tonight.'

They sound so simple, but they're not. Being in the gallery gave me a feeling like being out on a lake. Clouds moving overhead, a breeze. Wary, but game for the adventure. On fundamentally friendly terms with mental states and other beings.

Do you know what else was in that room? A hand-made bench. Sit down, you look tired. Whatever anyone might say, I want you to know you're welcome here, that you're always welcome beside me.

*Olivia Laing's The Lonely City: Adventures in the Art of Being Alone is published by Canongate in the UK and Picador in the US.*

Marc Hundley  
hey moon, 2016

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