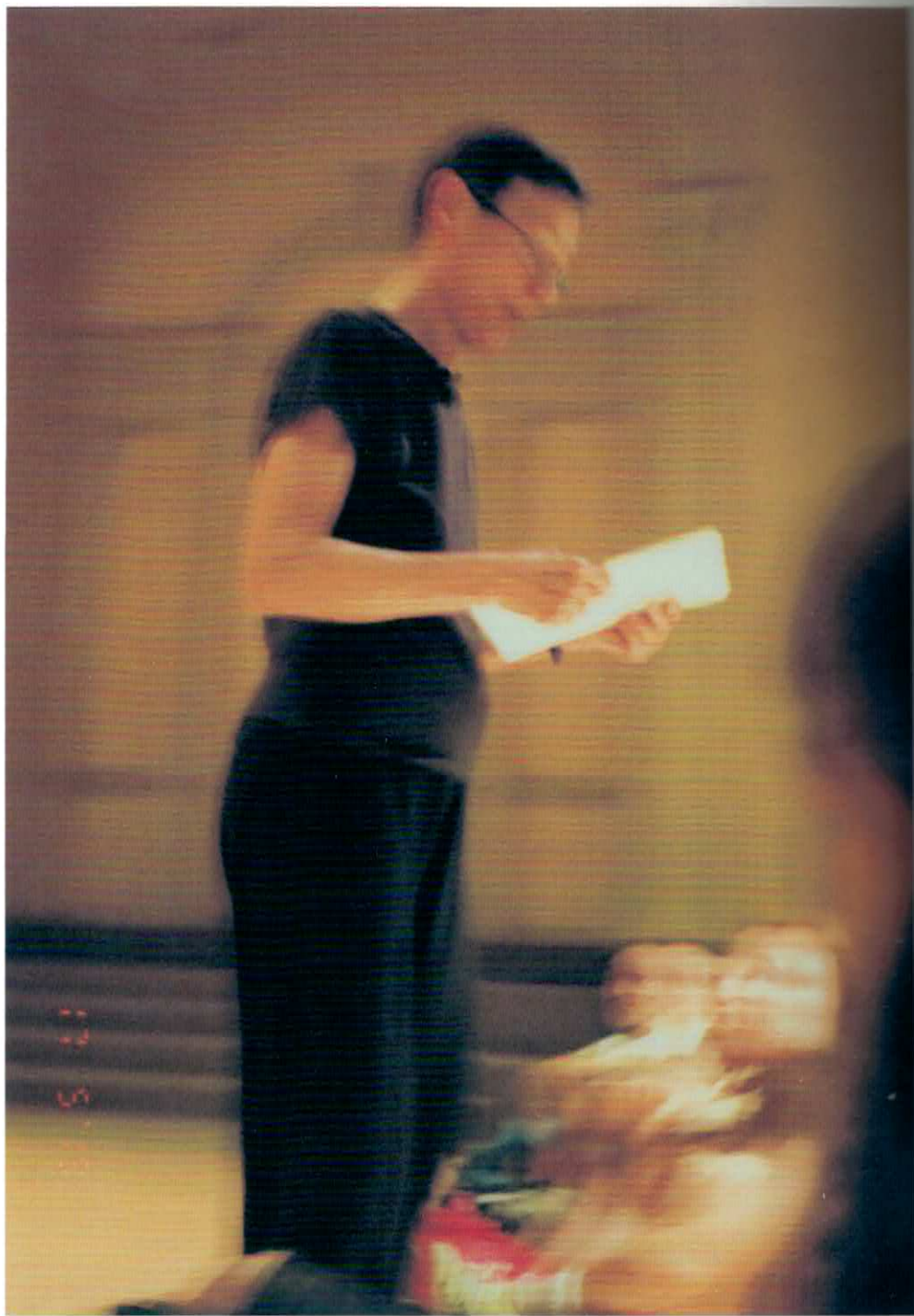


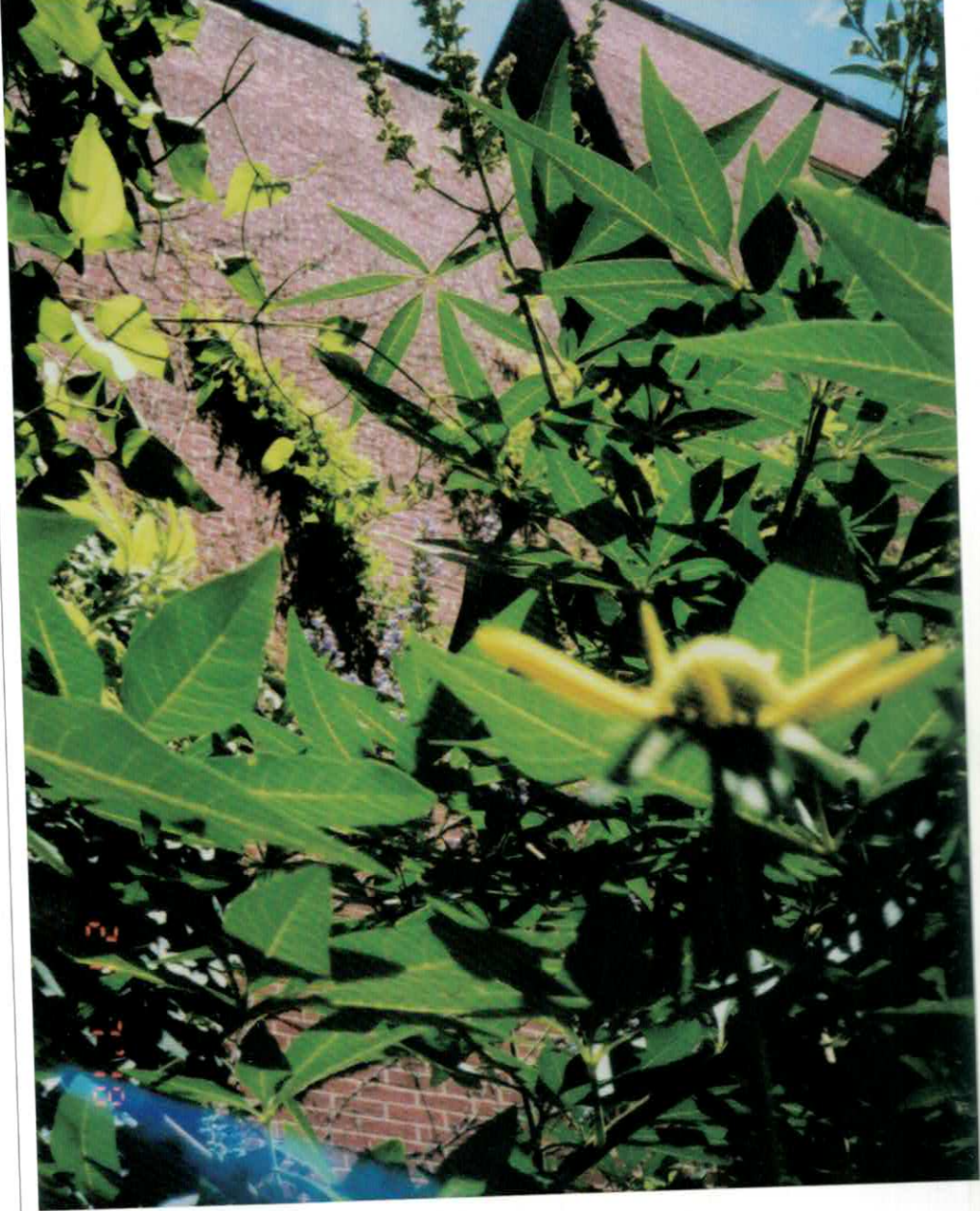
A Conversation
with Photographs by
Mary Manning and Text
by Olivia Laing

Solidarity Is Spirituality



7/15

In *Feelings Are Facts*, the dancer-choreographer Yvonne Rainer's memoir, she describes an incident that's always stuck with me. In 1971, during a blue-black period, she tried to kill herself by overdosing on sleeping pills alongside a slice of banana cream pie. She was taken to St. Vincent's Hospital to have her stomach pumped, and during her recovery a group of her students came and danced *Trio A*, Rainer's famously stripped-down, no-eye-contact sequence, in the street outside. I love the idea of that, not just for the sense of care, but the idea that it was healing to show her work back to her, to reintroduce her to herself. Those humble, unemphatic movements, performed on the sidewalk of Twelfth Street, while she—what? Stood by the window three floors up, or maybe crouched on her bed, a blanket wrapped around her shoulders. I love too that they did it in the street. It seems like a perfect illustration of solidarity—i.e., what ails you also ails me; i.e., your struggle is mine, not just on principle, but because we are factually interconnected, made of the same materials, surviving off the same limited resources. And I think it's spiritual too—though that's not a word I find so easy



7/17

Sometimes when I plant bulbs, I can't believe they'll grow. Imagine what it was like to live when whatever else happened, you could rely on what Dylan Thomas once called "the green fuse," the ticking clock of natural time. Looking at this exuberance, this green explosion, brings joy, of course, but also the sinking-stomach feeling I guess we're calling "climate grief." Walking home last night, the sky was so beautiful I had to keep stopping in the street. Chinatown, Cambridge Circus, Gray's Inn Road, leaning against bus stops to look for the full moon. There aren't as many swifts this year. As a child in London, I remember the air was sometimes thick with sparrows. The fucking Anthropocene. I want the green world everlasting, just like this, reaching ardently for the sun. I want us all entangled. I want me to be feeding it, not the other way 'round.



7/18

Yesterday I went to a warehouse to look at Derek Jarman's paintings from the early 1990s, after he was diagnosed with full-blown AIDS. For the *Queer* series, he'd photocopied homophobic newspaper front pages, glued them to a canvas, and painted over them in furious stripes and smashes of crimson, pink, and green. Leaning in, it was possible to make out little fragments. "AIDS man infects 4 women." "SURVIVOR." "LESBIAN TEACHER HORROR." Over the top, Derek had scratched more words, gouging into the layers of color, sometimes with a brush and sometimes, surely, with a blade. "FUCK ME BLIND." "ARSE INJECTED DEATH SYNDROME." "SEX HORROR SEX BOMB." Fresh as a daisy: the poison of the times. Just before we left, the handlers carried in a much older painting, made of delicate smudges of gold on black ground. A beautiful unearthly boy, chin juttied, carrying a scythe. That was Derek's Eden, but I love this one too: varicose veins and long, gray socks, the luxury of growing old.



7/20

I didn't see the hand reflected in the glass until you pointed it out, and now, it's my favorite part. I don't really believe in the individual, and I don't really believe in the individual artist either. We're intertwined; we sustain each other. I went to Rich's show; we wished you were there. He'd made a kind of stone circle out of ceramic sea creatures: razor clams and anemones and violently yellow lumps of coral. A bird in a burning house. The wreckage of an ancient plane crash. I walked in, and I started crying. I sort of knew I would. Partly because I was so proud of him and partly because he was taking such enormous risks. He'd really leapt out into thin air, and the consequence—for me, at any rate—was to feel both an expansion of possibility and a restoration of faith: a sense that, yes, it is worth it, does mean something to make art, especially art that's so flagrantly beautiful. It's so easy right now to give way to despair. Boris Johnson, Donald Trump, rising temperatures, the end of tigers. We have to figure out frugality, for sure, but also how to be openhanded, to keep each other afloat.



7/22

I wonder all the time what people will think about the way we live now from a century into the future. They had baths every day? They flew across the world on a regular basis, headphones snarled in their laps? They ate strawberries at Christmas, and all the time the ice was melting, a note you could actually hear? I think of my sister and me obsessing over the Holocaust, trying to understand exactly who knew about it at the time. Will it be like that, looking back at our ordinary, unbelievable greed? One return flight from London to New York emits 1.2 metric tons of CO₂. We were blind to the cost. It seemed so normal at the time. We lived in the most lavish era of human existence, when it was customary, not even a gift, to look down at the Earth from the air.



7/24

Bottom line, we're not here long. Bottom line, all bodies have the same value. Bottom line, all bodies deserve the same rights. Solidarity is founded on the notion that what connects us is more powerful than what keeps us apart. To my mind, it's the most beautiful word in the language.

Mary Manning is an artist based in New York.
Olivia Laing is the author of *The Lonely City: Adventures in the Art of Being Alone* (2016) and *Crudo* (2018).

All photographs by
Mary Manning from the
series *What Arises*, 2019
Courtesy the artist