



WHO IS AURALYNN NGUYEN

JERRY KATZ

EUCALYPTUS BOOKS
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"Jerry, can you give Auralynn a lift home?" Auralynn is a quiet, poised, unorthodoxly pretty, girl, quite a bit younger than either me or my live-in girlfriend, Giselle, to whom she has recently become close. It is late and there is little traffic as we ride, a bit shyly, not talking, Auralynn looking straight ahead. She is an artist who works with flowers. Although the three of us have done things this is the first time she and I have been alone together. I can't help fixating on her crossed legs in the dark and in the flashes of light, attracted to the impassiveness of her demeanor, becoming increasingly, and almost inexplicably, horny. As we pull up to the front of her house, she turns her head and smiles warmly, twisting her body to open the door. Overcome by a need to not let her go, I'm thinking, seriously, of saying, "I want to screw you." She hesitates a moment then says, "would you like to come in?" We've both had a mild crush on each other for a while. My heart is beating a bit faster than normal as she opens the door. That she doesn't immediately turn on the lights does not indicate to me anything particularly personal, but there is the thrill of the scent of her perfumed body in the three-quarters darkened room, close to mine. When she finally does turn the lights on we look at some photos of her exquisite work, which is transient, as the materials she uses die within a day or two of use. "I did a 16mm film in the rose garden at Exposition Park over a two year period many years ago. would you like to see it?" "yes, I would." "the DVD is a transfer from a tape transfer of the film so the quality has been considerably compromised, but I hope you will still enjoy looking at it." Unfortunately, my hearing impairment has reached the extent I have to ask her to write down some of what she says to keep the communication flowing.

I do not stay long, as I want to return before Giselle becomes hysterical and gets on her cell to check. "I'll call Giselle tomorrow." she is still up when I arrive. and before I can say a word she admits she's been fucking her current dance partner when I'm away, in our bedroom. but she's looking really hot in a sheer nightie, hair askew. "fuck me, Jerry." "I've already had two orgasms," I joke. "fuck me anyway." as it turns out it is a very good fuck which takes a long time and builds from within, slowly, and we fall asleep in each other's arms without bothering to undress. how breathlessly close we become in that communication when, other-wise, our life together is such a mess.

the next time Auralynn and I see each other our mutual attraction for, and interest in, each other is clearer. at first Giselle was upset but is now more open. the most noticeable difference between Auralynn and I is the modus operandi in our work. she's extremely creative but it's grown (tempted to say, blossomed) out of a mastering of a set of rules. for her it is a discipline, and she has a social network to support it. whereas the structure of my work grows first out of the creative impulse tuned inward, neurologically, working with my energy and seeking. defying the obvious move the work becomes more sophisticated, more complex. I can only draw if my energy needs structuring. the more diverse, the less symmetry, the more movement. but non-the-less we have arrived at similar places aesthetically (formally), psychologically and emotionally. a lot of my drawings, though abstract, consciously follow the basic structure of plants, and her work has allowed me to extend that idea a bit, to see them in terms of objects, as well as abstractions.

I loan Auralynn the video of my film, as making a copy would reduce the quality even further, and she's very impressed. "I've never seen a flower film as seriously creative as yours. most of them are of the home and garden variety." "do you see any similarity in it to your work?" "yes, and no. there is a narrative beyond mere description – an aura and mood. the ending seems almost tragic. I like the title, 'Life Within a Rose Garden,' and I love your short description – 'a silent film in which the flowers speak.'" "this is what I tell people who suggest there be a soundtrack – even if something spare and Zen. there already is sound. the sound of the flowers silently speaking, however mute. what is the no?" "it needs editing." "that's true. it was filmed many years ago. I no longer have editing equipment or a desire to work with film. outwardly it doesn't go beyond naturalism, unless you freeze frame spots in the film. I don't think that was my intent, but my drawings do. these were once jet black," I add, showing her a few early ones which are now chartreuse. "if I hadn't photographed them they'd be gone. oddly your work is like graffiti. take a photo before it's tagged or removed"

to facilitate our new reality, now that things are socially out in the open, in our activities we frequently function as a foursome, with intimations it could expand to include sex. Giselle and her plus boyfriend, Arthur Murray, Auralynn and I. as for me I'm both jealous and incited by how Giselle uses her sexiness, including her barely masked tentative lust for Auralynn, but my rapport with Auralynn more than makes up for it. I think Auralynn, by far the youngest, is more gender fluid and more inclined towards pan-sexuality, neither of which are adequately afforded in our group arrangement.

Giselle, who early studied classic and modern dance, and Arthur, are obsessed with swing, notably the Lindy Hop. they enter retro dance contests dressed in 40s fashion. they revel in the joy and release, the physical ecstasy, so much a contrast to the primitive jerky rutting of current dance, not that it is enough in itself to make one long for the past. the emphasis on it with Giselle's, though, is mostly sex, the rush that occurs when the skirt flies up.

Auralynn, who is half Vietnamese, also has a studio in Saigon where, in addition to working privately, teaches Sogetsu Ikebana classes. what attracts me most to her is what seems permanently embedded in her look; dark eyes absorbed, mouth set in what can be a heartrending, slightly amused, half-smile, presenting herself, looking into you.

as she is open but non-committal, I have no certain clue as to her sexuality except there is a strong vibe based on her presence and what she does creatively. it could be her sexuality may be totally absorbed in her work. other than that, she gives no indication about her proclivities in that area, and in fact, no indication as to the nature of her personal erotic life, which could range from sublimation to nymphomania. the complete matter-of-fact-ness of it, however, implies to me something possibly hidden, or guilt. I can assume whatever, but I do not want to violate her privacy. I was somewhat surprised, however, to view a photo online of her, seemingly happily, embracing, and being embraced by, Dov Charney, the owner of Los Angeles Apparel, given his reputation re his past relationships with the young females in his employ, which has prompted me to reassess my earlier

assumptions of her probable leanings towards a liberal definition of both gender identity and sexual preference, as well as a presumed attitude against sexism, that she may, instead, be, in fact, pretty wild. at any rate, my desire is to let her know, share, my outlier status, which is outside even among the outsiders she interacts with.

Giselle can't wait to get back. she pushes the front door slightly ajar, sticks her head in. the room is darkened. blinds drawn. looks around, "Jerry?," for an unexpected response, then walks in. a man, not Arthur, follows. "I don't imagine he'll be back for a while," she says, the two of them standing very close, and inserts her tongue into his mouth. at this moment there is a quiet rap on the partly open door, and another man enters. without lifting the blinds Giselle's partially fills a jug and waters the two large potted Sweetheart plants. the three of them then go to the bedroom. Giselle opens the blinds to let in the light and removes her blouse, skirt, and shoes. the loose fitting lingerie she's wearing is a short light-grape top with long straps and equally scanty panties of the same color and material of soft cotton with a draw string for tightening or loosening like those on sweats – just the opposite of lingerie slick (rayon, silk). if anyone fits the description of voluptuously thin, Giselle's does, her long dark hair not completely combed, an incessant smile on her face. the heavier man undresses from the waist down, leaving on his white t shirt and unbuttoned long sleeved shirt with indigo and pale blue alternating stripes. he is a bit paunchy with significant hair on his lower belly and thighs. the other man unzips his pants and sits in the chair facing the bed. Giselle and the man quickly get down to business.

she lays back on the bed, raised thighs spread. in clothes she is sexy enough. but in preparation for sex at this moment, most of her naked body exposed, the image and lustful attitude she's displaying is pointedly promiscuous. the man gets on his knees straddling the lower part of the mattress, his penis hard, and pulling aside the soft loose bottom of her pantie, inserts his penis into her bared vagina, and begins to fuck her while moving the tip of his finger along her clearly visible clitoris, inciting her into various states of irritated horniness and ecstasy, as she squirms, raising her head, lowering it, and leaning back, twisting her torso, moving her bent legs and thighs every which-way, tugging the straps of her scant, edible, grape colored top, caressing the nipples of her small, nicely formed breasts, fitfully turning her head, pulling the straps back up, pulling them back down, fingering and pulling her hair, the figure seated in the chair furiously masturbating, as the man continues to fuck her, pressing and flicking his finger on her clit as she makes whimpering sounds, the incessant, almost prurient, smile never leaving her face, her whimpering turning into distinct cries and moans, the man's penis now slickly wet from either her, him, or both, raising her thighs to his groin as they climax, then, finally, peacefully subside. the man dresses. the other zips up his pants. they go to the front room, sit and silently drink bottled water, then leave. Giselle, who doesn't bother to dress (or undress), slips the considerable bills she's been given under a tiffany lamp, and having derived extreme pleasure as well from the transaction, happily rests on the sofa refreshed by the cool air blowing through the open front door, now in a state where she can look forward to Jerry, who is probably spending the afternoon with Auralynn, coming back.

flowers, which are the reproductive parts of plants, have long been associated with human sexual organs. in my mind there is a permeability to Auralynn and the materials she uses that surround her, which seem to overlap. searching online I came upon an announcement of an exhibit she shared with artist Llyn Foulkes in 2018, with the heading Auralynn Foulkes Studio, evidently at The Brewery. were they married? that hardly seems likely. why do I assume that? I'm thinking like a stalker. couldn't I just ask her? I knew Llyn slightly in the 60s. he and his wife Kelly were friends at Chouinard with a high school friend of mine Aaron Cohen. I remember driving up with him and John Fles, to his Mt. Washington home after the Duchamp opening at the Pasadena Museum of Art. Wallace Berman, Dean Stockwell, and gallery owner, Rolf Nelson also came up. was this the same night as the famous party for Duchamp attended by Warhol and the Ferus stars, elsewhere? perhaps not, but that late the museum was practically empty as though the scene had shifted to somewhere else, and I had the feeling at the time we were not invited to something, and Llyn asked us to come up to his place, which was close by, instead. I did meet Duchamp. John introduced us, we shook hands and I stared. I really didn't know much about him or his impact at the time. he mistakenly took my stare as a challenge and asked me, "do you play chess?" I did a little, but knowing what was coming I quickly bailed out. he shrugged his shoulders and said, "then, how can I?" on Tosh Talks she asserts, the same thing she does in Saigon she does in Los Angeles – go to the flower market, read books. visit with friends, consume blended fruit drinks, and watch the girls and boys, which does, and doesn't, reveal much. "Ikebana is momentary art with spirituality," she wrote.

“Japanese flower design is highly academic, intricately precise, and deeply meaningful.” the qualities I see in Auralynn’s work are *beauty, form, and sensuality (decadence-decay)*, and I wouldn’t underestimate the latter because this is the quality that grows as we age.

“you’re living in a self-contained world optimized for your security where everything is flattery. but you still need to be challenged, Auralynn.” “you’ve got a critique for everything, don’t you, Jerry.” “I envy it. you have a social network and I don’t.” “whose fault is that?” I shake my head. knowing her remark was a bit cutting she closes the space between us and wraps her arms around me, pressing her bosom against my chest. it is a sexual, rather than platonic, hug. “I’ll be leaving for Saigon next week. why don’t you visit me there.” “in addition to not having the bread I don’t know how to travel. I’d get lost at the airport and miss my flight.” “I understand, Jerry, but it’s just a matter of knowing the procedure. I’ll walk you through the steps until you’re confident enough to do it.” “OK,” I reply, happy for her encouragement. “as you very well know I’m also hearing impaired to the extent my cell is useless except for texting. I might miss an announcement.” “well if that happens text me you’re not coming.” “that would be sad.” we both laugh, but are both half serious.

a subtle, somewhat evasive, tension has been building, and I sense our relationship could soon lose its virginity. Auralynn is not tall but her posture and proportions, as well as the long loose colorful clothing she often wears gives the illusion of length while modestly covering her breasts, thin waist, and sensuously curved hips. the short print dresses showing a

satisfying hunk of thigh, conjoined with her sensual face and studious eyeglasses, might convey quite the opposite. I compulsively continue to speculate she may sexually prefer a more fluid definition of gender. and, given my desire, it does matter. to prepare for the trip I've been looking at videos on you tube of Tan Dinh, the ward in Saigon Auralynn's studio is located. the rainy season has commenced there. rain has always brought out the deeper, more mellow, soulier feelings in me, but lately it seems to have also triggered a forlornness, because of a feeling of isolation. from what I can see on video the outdoor food marketplaces in Saigon where shoppers ride through on their motorbikes are pretty incredible. however, because of visa restrictions due to the pandemic, while Auralynn is already there, plans for me to visit her have been necessarily delayed. also, I believe, part of the hidden motivation behind my prospective visit has to do with the possible consummation of our sexual desires. I sense she may feel whatever happens between us there might be more in her control than what might happen with us here. I don't love Auralynn.... yet. I just frankly appreciate her looks, her work, and her style, which, presently, I see as poised, unpretentious, and, power oriented. I think people who travel and set up shop in countries other than they grew up in, and are, therefore, not limited by the economic, social, and political hardships the members of that society face, no matter how `committed` to the social justice issues of that society they may be, are privileged, regardless of how little money they might have, especially when there are high-end cultural connections. I expect, however, a deeper attraction and the possibility of karma behind it (given the general malaise in SE Asia and the magnitude of events occurred between the two

countries not that long ago). but it is, to some degree, the same situation for those with cultural connections in one's own society.

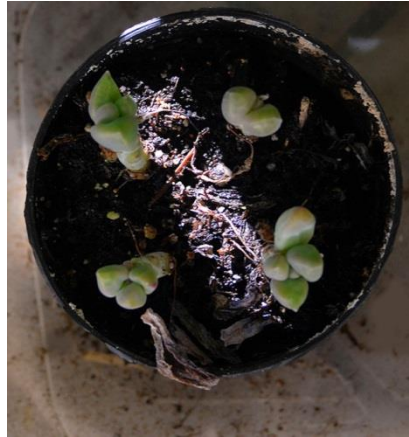
"what is this photo?" "scum on the L.A. river." "unbelievable". "I know, when I encountered it ten, maybe fifteen, years ago, I'd never seen anything like it before or since. I increased the color saturation a little bit but what you see is pretty much it. that tiny black object is my shadow. I did a series of shots. I took a set to the L.A. River Center to give to Friends of the L.A. River, but they were more interested in how they wanted the L.A. River to be than how it was."



"I'm sure that just fed your rejection fantasy, Jerry." "you can't just do anything on your own, Auralynn. you have to `belong' or you'll be totally ignored or denigrated."

the effect of plants on our health – the air is still pretty good in Santa Monica compared to a lot of elsewhere. the landlord has a lot of plants, freshening the air, I conclude, sniffing, as I

move up the walk; plants, trees, on the sides of the building, in and out of pots, a helter-skelter density that, in the sunlight, combined with the varied discarded containers, eating utensils, rusted tools, etc., offer surprisingly visual effects worth photographing. machined shapes and organic ones, while opposites, have in common, aesthetically, a precision of form.



“she’s very cute yes but cute could be overrated, cute. she has a presence and intelligence that’s very seductive yes and she’s very smart yeah a very unique person.” Tosh Berman’s description of Auralynn in the video, Who Is Lun*na Menoh. I agree wholeheartedly with him and if the past is any indication it may not take long this be perceived by many others.

Auralynn has been busy with her projects since she’s returned to Los Angeles, also spending considerable time at her family home in San Gabriel, choosing to work with some of

the plants from her father's garden. Giselle has moved out, and in with Arthur, so I am, as it always eventually comes to, alone. in itself, I don't mind that, if it weren't for the paranoia engendered by this process I've labeled as Networking In Reverse, which began innocently enough with truth-telling, but grew, like the proverbial beanstalk, from one negative relationship in a given group and context, negatively effecting the potential of the next relationship, until, finally, picked up by those who do not even know me or my work. it is as finely tuned and calibrated as that of those most effectually socially connected. Auralynn is aware of this dilemma, both repelled by, and attracted to, as with her, just the opposite, she networks, naturally, and very easily, without having to sacrifice her creativity or individuality. one needs a little luck to be in that position. is it a streak of masochism in me or is it unavoidable? the glue, however, is still the identification and invention between us. she is, I assume, I've never asked, an only child.

when Auralynn returns to Saigon, I tag along with her, although the travel restrictions haven't yet been lifted, having obtained through her, a guest tourism visa. the flight, which takes over 17 hours, is, of course, tedious, and because of my travel inexperience I am anxious something may go wrong, but am compensated by the high anticipation of arriving point blank in a country so different in climate and culture to that which is my norm (after so many years) especially in the company of one who is so gratifyingly propitious. it is late afternoon. what is left of the light is a burnished gold, the sky dark, and the wet streets, mostly in shadow. I search in my mind for a popular song to adequately attach my senses to.

no, seriously, though, I am shy and Auralynn is confident, seeming to enjoy her role, and, a bit, my vulnerability. we board a bus which takes us within walking distance of her studio. the first thing that really hits me when I'm in an unfamiliar place are the smells, discernable, but a while before it can be completely processed. it is just the sensations of the tourist, essentially an outsider, which can quickly modify with any degree of experience and sophistication.

despite the name Ho Chi Minh City, Saigon, like the rest of Vietnam, north and south, is a market economy, with the major companies run by the government; a one-party socialist state whose current most powerful politician's first name (Nguyen) is the same as Auralynn's last. but dissidents, who think out of the box can be very harshly dealt with. if one randomly types in videos of any country in S.E. Asia (including Myanmar, where the military coup has made survival much more critical, and where there is an urgency with which Auralynn reacts to human rights abuses – a déjà vu of the 60s and 70s), one could falsely assume the erotic massage, decadent, exploitive night life, and cheap rentals, were the primary attractions. there is, of course, a contemporary Vietnamese poetry and literature. and an underground arts protest does exist there as in the other countries of the region.

inescapable and notable is the almost total utilization of the motorbike as transportation, which, unlike the car, provides an experience halfway between organic and mechanical, and is ridden everywhere, on any surface. I am surprised at my proletarian instincts here, which, in the U.S., I am totally

devoid of. I am more domestic than Auralynn. I prefer to shop at a Tan Dinh marketplace and cook rather than eat out. I morph the images of her in her studio holding up flowers to be like snakes entwined around a naked body. with me sexism is automatic, not problematic.

“how bad was your social dating life in high school, Auralynn?” “you wouldn’t like to know,” she replies, not exactly teasing, but with a hint of provocation in her smile. we’re standing very close, so she has to look up, emphasizing that I am taller, not ‘that much’ taller, but tall enough, as we look each other squarely in the eyes. “why is it that you need to provoke whenever you get horny, Jerry?” I guess it’s part of my ‘networking’ ,Auralynn.” it seems as though the expressed negativity has loosened an odd sexual inhibition between us. she continues to look, now daring, or enticing, me to react. today she is in her short dress mode and my eyes are fixed on her sensual thighs. why does the fact that I’m taller and that she’s petite with good posture and a hidden feisty defiance, fan my desire? the need to sexually objectify the image, which, has, for the most part, been suppressed, flares, and Auralynn seems as acquiescent to it as I. neither of us undress. we hastily, but thoroughly, fuck, her thighs raised, her legs draped around my neck, ankles crossed, colorful socks still on. when we are done Auralynn elevates herself to a sitting position, sits for a while longer before sliding off the cluttered table and letting down the hem of her dress. both of us are hyper-aware of the scent of freshly cut flowers serving as more than just an afterthought. it is interesting that it has taken this long to get to this point where we could and would, and I know she has had sex with at least one

other person since we arrived in Saigon, causing me then to fixate on the glittery wet night outside the window when she didn't come back until dawn, after dinner and an evening with friends. this will probably result in some new ideas," she says, half joking, staring at her work table, as I pull up my pants. I am concerned what's occurred will lessen the rapport between us, but the result, it seems, has little effect. who is Auralynn Nguyen? a symbol of a young person with the right values? and the considerable number of people who know her relate to her thusly? the deeper we get into the relationship, the more I realize Auralynn's `civility' is not just a façade, and belying her implacability, can be easily hurt. she can also strike out. in this she, wisely, is very careful about her commitments, and I about my comments.

the idea of community is central to most artist's survival. how it is meaningful, and supports creativity, how it is a vehicle for propaganda and self-interest and fosters conformity, and how it cheats those who defy it of recognition and appreciation. how it flatters those who sustain it and colludes against those who don't. that is the endemic function of groups no matter what the format. individualism is admired, but only in individuals who are part of the group aesthetic and goals.

"why do you read their blogs if you feel that way?" "I'm doing research." Auralynn laughs. "even if you are right to some extent, you're functioning largely on paranoia, Jerry. as I see it, it is a tradeoff of advantages and disadvantages regarding inner needs and recognition, and I get that your resentment of them is personal." I agree with Auralynn on both points. the danger of being rejected and rejecting as a

response, is you cut yourself off from more and more, making your world smaller and smaller. "Jerry, stop feeding off of projection. and stop feeling it's your responsibility to play the role of critic. let others bear that burden and pay the consequences. you've done more than your share," Auralynn says, her voice manifesting a genuine warmth and empathy she's hinted, but never before quite shown me. I'm still walking a tightrope. but the world sometimes favorably turns on its axis and as a famous American songwriter once reported, especially for these times, *anything goes*.

the contents of this story are entirely fictitious.

