

KATE WERBLE GALLERY

83 VANDAM STREET NEW YORK, NY 10013

We Are Orlando
Brennan Gerard and Ryan Kelly
June 16, 2016

pensees/piensas

Sunday, June 12, 2016 at 1:40 PM. Ciudad de México, México.

Dear Brennan,

I did not want to begin my email to you like this, but oh no, Orlando. The sinking feeling of opening Facebook to see a friend marked "safe," signifier of our time. Globe-trotting crises; Orlando, the next peg on the map of violence. Pulse nightclub. No, not another nightclub, too soon after the Bataclan. Then, the sucker punch, a *gay* nightclub. 50 dead and counting, as many injured. They call it a terrorist attack. Why not a hate crime? It is not immaterial that these bodies were queer and mainly brown. I want hate there in what we call this thing. I update my status: I don't want to pray for the dead or their families. I don't want to thank the police for their courage. I want to pass a fucking law that prohibits the sale of assault weapons.

t could have been me last night salsa dancing in a gay bar in Mexico City. This bar was traditional—*ranchero*, Roberto called it—with teams of dancers lined up in single file, onlookers surrounding them on all sides. We entered through swinging wooden doors from a cartoon saloon. The gringo in a room of brown-skinned people, I stood alone, registering twin cowboy hats, wide-brimmed and casting shadows in the flashing party lights. Long cafeteria-style tables were stacked tall with clear canisters of *cerveza*. Signs posted on the walls declared *Fumar prohibido*.

I watched two men with fitted collar shirts tucked securely into jeans and crowned by elaborate silver buckles lead one another, hips twisting right and left while feet kept the 1-2 rhythm of the dance. They swirled in tight circles, punctuating the air with clipped kicks below the knee; their hips drew figure eights. The men's faces were those from the Eisenstein movies of Mexico you once showed me—stolid, thick, un-smiling. I asked Roberto if he knew how to salsa. He grabbed my hand and we joined the line. He wasn't bad. I was terrible.

I was told that when you go to the gay bars downtown, only ever order beer and watch the bartender open it. When the bottle is not at your lips, press your thumb over the cavity to ensure nobody drugs you. They do it for your money not your sex, though you'd probably get fucked, too.

How ironic then that last night I was vigilant in the back of a dank Mexican club, poorly dancing to pop and salsa with Roberto, worrying about being roofied while at the same time, not far away, in such a place as this, 50 fags and dykes were massacred by a disturbed 29-year old who will doubtlessly be hailed/reviled as a professional terrorist. But we can't forget he's just a homophobe and a hater, and I bet you he bought his gun at Walmart.

I waited all day for my mother to return my text; she did not. But my little cousin, 17 years my junior and no more easily freed from the closet, did. I wrote to him that I was sorry we didn't do more to make the world a better place. He quoted MLK, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness. Only love can do that." I replied with a broken heart emoji. I love you.

Re: pensees/piensas

Monday, June 13, 2016 at 2:41 AM. Paris, France.

Dear Ryan,

The news arrived to me in a text message from New York. I had just finished a yoga class in an old pile of a building on the Rue Saint-Roche. We fogged up the windows and the teacher, Benjamin, a blonde American from Texas, drew a heart with his finger on the glass. Did he already know?

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After sivasana, sweat cooling on my clavicle, I looked at my phone. David's text: Do you want to write something related to the shooting for BOMB? And your reply, and then his reply to your reply, a whole chain of grief. What shooting?

I pay for the class using an app and a credit card. It cost 6 euros. I press buttons and it's done. I hug Benjamin and some of my sweat transfers to his skin, and some of his sweat is now mine. We are two gay men exchanging fluids. I don't want to let go but the stairs spill me out into the electric air of Paris before a rainstorm.

I toggle over to *The New York Times* and scroll through Breaking News. A new liquid comes. Not sweat or humidity, this liquid emerges involuntarily from my lower lids. My legs carry me down Rue Saint-Roch and turn my body left. Two minutes, I look up from my phone and observe in that proprioceptive part of the brain that I am one block from the Tuileries Garden, one block from the store Colette, and I know from another lobe, cortex of buried knowledge, that I am on the corner of Saint-Roch and Saint-Honoré, and that the shop is closed because it is Sunday evening, 9pm in June. Pride Month. All this synaptic activity happening below true consciousness, simultaneous with the involuntary liquid no longer trickling now pouring, coming in sudden bursts, in bullets, but I am reading still reading always reading:

One man wrote a text to his mother, saying he was shot and thought he was dying.

Another mother showed reporters the stream of her son's increasingly desperate text messages.

"in bathroom," he wrote at 2:46 a.m. "he has us"

"call the police"

"call them mommy"

"I'm gonna die"

It was unclear whether her son escaped.

It's here that I open the heavy wooden door of the church on the corner. A mass is underway, unseen but heard, hidden behind the grand altar. Before I can think, "What the fuck am I doing in a church?" I put away my phone and take a seat in the back. I notice the pews around me are empty. I count 49 seats. From speakers a soprano sings, echoed by a much softer, un-amplified choir. Or I hallucinate this echo, a choir of 49 voices. I don't know how to pray so I cry. I cry for all queer people. For queer people of color. I cry for all who danced last night. I cry for my queer brothers and sisters grieving in Orlando. In Los Angeles, where it is Pride today. In Paris, in New York. I cry for Pulse. I cry for the Bataclan. I cry for Beirut and Bamako. I cry for Xalapa. I cry for mass murder, for gun violence, for the failure of the revolution. I cry for this homophobic church where I am not praying but crying. I cry for religion—for all religions. I cry for America. I cry for France. I cry for Iraq. I cry for drone bombs and their victims. I cry for the priest to emerge from behind the altar and hold me. I want to sob into his white robes, and I want his tears to mix with my tears and your tears, and for us to exchange fluids in this way. I cry for gay bars. I cry for AIDS. I cry for the movement. I cry for Uncle Bill. I cry for my cousin, for your cousin. I cry for the French Revolution. I cry for the Republicans who ransacked this very church 200 years ago and ripped out the statues in the name of the Enlightenment. I cry for the young painter (gay? I hope) who saw this happening and established a depot in Saint-Germain-des-Prés where he stored the statues and paintings, protecting them until the Terror passed. I cry because my body understands I am not safe in a church, in a school, in a cafe, in a concert hall, or in a nightclub. I cry for my mother, who texts her queer son: I love you.

This is the second in a series of artist responses to the Pulse nightclub shooting on June 12, 2016.

Since 2003, Gerard & Kelly (Brennan Gerard and Ryan Kelly) have collaborated to create project-based installations and performances interrogating the formation of the couple and the critical potential of intimacy. To open this platform to more voices and build stronger bonds within the queer community, the artists wish to direct your attention to the open letter from Alejandro A. Francisco, survivor of the Orlando nightclub shooting.