

Lena Marie Emrich

BRACE, BRACE

November 15, 2024 - January 10, 2025

Last Call: Platform Unknown

Text by Estelle Hoy

“On the train, we swapped seats. You wanted the window, and I wanted to look at you.”

— **Mahmoud Darwish**

A lifetime’s worth of silver dust settles on the endless um’s and ah’s of Lena Marie Emrich’s exhibition *BRACE BRACE*, filling her images and sculptures with all the infinitesimal speculative dreaming found in departure. Her proneness to detachment is an enigmatic discovery of life’s limbos, unknown destinations, a love of uncertainty, and interstitial community stirrings that posture *viewer-as-traveller*. Travellers examine the environment and social conditions more closely than their usual inhabitants, who barely winch or flap at the particular whistles of their mise-en-scène, tragic or otherwise. Aching with last-minute curiosity, she transforms into a pilgrim herself, with long tears on overnight trains, an outlaw, a nomad, fleeing, exiled in soft cruelty, slightly bent on orange sunsets and the poetic clicks of foreign tongues. What are our chances of survival when fleeing just about everything? All we really want is tenderness.

BRACE BRACE (2024), Emrich yells at us, photographing performance artist Bianca LeeVasquez in the clammy contortions instructed by inflight stewards to shoulder impacts we’re unlikely to withstand. LeeVasquez is vaguely secure herself, crouched over an empty burgundy wine crate and drill case, doubled over in origami folds, breathing in chaosmic spasms. Choosing to breathe is an exceptional talent that depends entirely on the skill of the creator and their proximity to death. We familiarize ourselves with the brace position, time and time again, watching it performed dutifully, forms we’ll doubtfully ever execute, and if ever we do, the image’s victory is a near laughable delusion. Viewing the large-scale photographs floating behind the fragility of glass, our minds are lost to sugary dreams of viable survival; humans drape themselves in the stink and blood of hope, respiring over the turbulent refrain of rationality.

Emrich re-orientes herself through the windowless poem of Palestinian-born Mahmoud Darwish, “*A seat on a train*” (2002), which inspired the show. His song is from a people tens of thousands of years old, their quest for love, and the poetry of displacement, shattering limits, borders, and escaping the rude measure of time. Faraway rail tracks where Darwish details exile, expulsion, the groundwork of collective memories, our abject pursuit of love and empathy, and all the addresses we’ve lost to nostalgia—missed connections. It’s an urgent matter, his sonorous railway; with unsteady response and empty upturned pockets, we woefully distance ourselves. We can’t breathe, but this is arbitrary.

Trapping us in marginal territory, Emrich installs the precise form of aeroplane tray tables to perfect scale, coated with metallic varnish for *Back Seat Series* (2024). Emulating the minimal storm of Darwish’s quiet, stationed movements, nominal and faint, the artist proclaims solidarity with the breathless language of stillness. Folding trays are closed for ascension and descent, so we lean into the chants of the attendants, the stewards of perfect time, reshuffling ourselves on cramped chairs over and over in wait. Waiting for words of permission to unfold our silver platters, awaiting the social body to act in unison, awaiting instruction: our incurable malady. The price of flying—drinks is highway robbery; the price of breathing is living— a wobbly pursuit. Passengers stare at their handles, hour upon hour, our so-called agency melts into Emrich’s skillful sculptures, draped in past stories: a sentimental rosé scarf of her grandmother, brisk branch, a necklace. What is our greatest nostalgia? It’s our favored medium, a wanderer’s experiment, one curious and distant affect; we know that.

Brutish air fails to bowl from abstracted metallic hand dryers that arrow down in sharp gasps for *V Series* (2024). Emrich confronts us with a sculptural *tete-à-tete* that declines the violent yet efficacious air to come— the premonition of *possible* harmony inscribed in present chaos. Potential but foreclosed passageways where she counsels us: *embrace the chaos, and it will paint the prose of purpose*. Breath is more expressive than words, a marvelous phenomenon down on all fours, barking and foaming at the mouth, praising its hopeful success in pure equanimity. Did Emrich say that poetry can be defined? She did not.

Poetry is truly nothing.

Lena Marie Emrich (born 1991 in Göttingen) lives and works in Berlin. In 2017, she graduated from the Kunsthochschule Weißensee Berlin and Academy of Fine Arts Warsaw. Her works have been shown at the DS Gallery Paris (2024), the Kunsthalle Osnabrück (2019), Kunstverein Göttingen (2020), the Kunstraum LLC, New York (2018), and the Sprengel Museum, Hannover (2021), among others. From 2021 to 2022, Emrich has been awarded with the prize of the Kunstverein Hannover. In 2020 she won the Award of the Berlin Masters Foundation. For 2021/2022 she was awarded the Art Prize of the Kunstverein Hannover. In 2023 she received the NeuStartPlus Grant from the Stiftung Kunstfonds to realize the project The Darkest Corners in allyship with Marlene A. Schenk.

Her works can be found in collections such as Burger Collection, Sprengel Museum, Giancarlo Ligabue Foundation, ADAC Collection, Arndt Collection and Marval Collection.