

# ESSAIS

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## *Butter Saints* Augustin Katz

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There is a large table here. After all, it is nothing more than furniture, yet the absoluteness of prayer sometimes meets the decadence of sin upon it; a refined spirit may reveal itself as merely fin-de-race, and filth often confront the ideal. Anyone who tried to lean on it would need courage, for it may well be nothing but the product of a dream, and in a dream, as María Zambrano wrote, “the bottom of the hours lived [...] as they are being lived, gives way, even falling into the abyss.”<sup>1</sup>

All forms are good for dispelling unease, but it stubbornly persists in barging through the unconscious. It claims a seat at the table where people feast and grin, offering sinful delicacies to whomever will take them. No matter how hard one tries to summon their virtuous upbringing, memories are imbued with a taste of decadence. No matter how upright one wants to remain, we succumb to the ‘poetic penumbra’<sup>2</sup> that Georges Bataille wrote of, whose scarce light is reserved for the basest instincts.

Art, like food, is an “exercise in cruelty”<sup>3</sup> Cruelty toward oneself, first of all, for taking on the religious duty of painting on wood, as one paints icons, while trying to conjure a Rabelaisian atmosphere requires negotiation between layers of good and evil without tipping to either side. It is cruel toward reality as well, for reality becomes warped and invaded by tricky ghosts inclined to haunt a Memory Palace, what the Jesuit Matteo Ricci called the imagined castle where one stores one’s remembrances, even if they end up fading in some forgotten room among countless others<sup>4</sup>.

There are things that melt away and cannot be reclaimed, simply because their substance was never fully grasped. And there are others that can be understood in their fragmentary nature, striking at the very moment when erratic memory takes over the mind, like a door swinging open on its own without having been commanded. A faint light appears and reveals a way through, perhaps only a corridor, or a space where memories lie veiled and slippery, and where, now and then, a troubling figure emerges, its complexion washed out by the imminence of the death that taunts it.

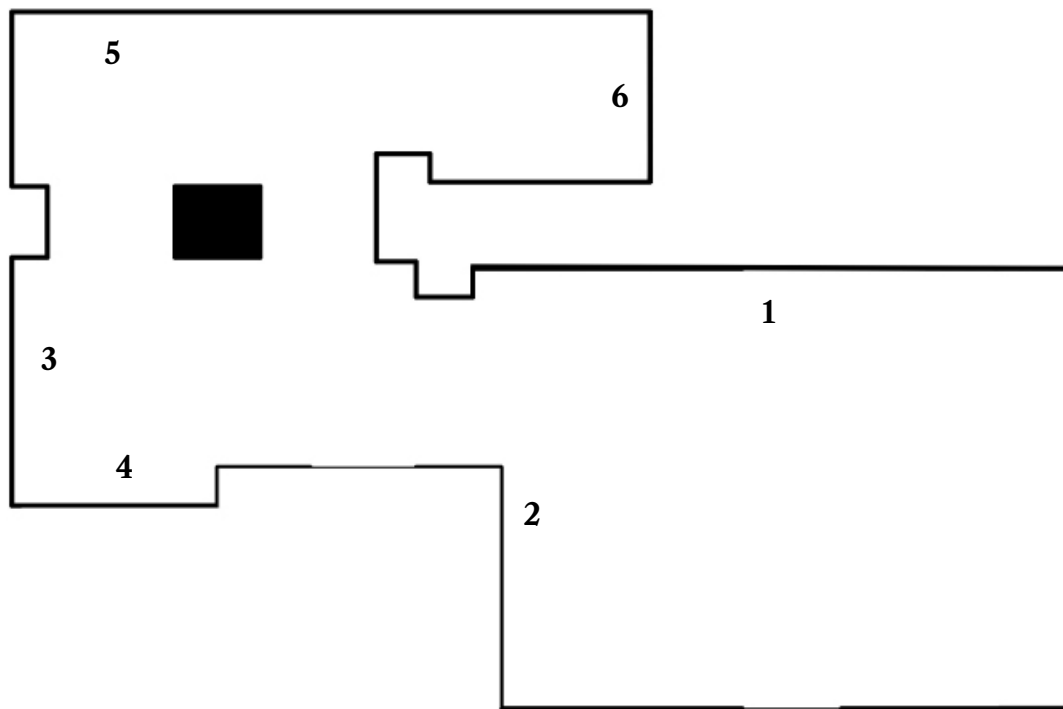
What does purgatory look like? Few people know, except that it is an liminal place where everything is at stake. Spectral forms gather and dance freely as they wait to be unsettled by a fateful decision. Perhaps it is the very place where “life raves”<sup>5</sup>, where it carries on one last time, ignoring the laws of rigidity, of noble instruction, and instead, giving due to everything that summons excess and voracity.

Guillaume Blanc-Marianne

1. María Zambrano, *Les rêves et le temps* [1960], Paris, Éditions Corti, 2003, p. 27.
2. Georges Bataille, « Le gros orteil [Documents, n°6, novembre 1929] », dans *Courts écrits sur l'art*, Paris, Lignes, 2017, p. 79-84, p. 4.
3. Georges Bataille, « L'art, exercice de cruauté [*Médecine de France*, n°4, juin 1949] », dans *Courts écrits sur l'art*, Paris, Lignes, 2017, p. 171-178.
4. Jonathan D. Spence, *Le Palais de Mémoire de Matteo Ricci*, Paris, Payot, 1986.
5. Maria Zambrano, *Les rêves et le temps*, p. 13.

*Everywhere else, the goods on display have, so to speak, “never been put to use.” The fields, gardens, orchards, rivers and the sea deliver their produce in a state of perfect innocence. Yet one curious exception stands out. In a quiet corner of the Market Hall, not far from the cheese-mongers, half a dozen small shops are visited, from seven in the morning until noon, by a large and varied crowd. Few labouring men, but many housewives in modest dress, whose appearance speaks of narrow means; gentlemen in worn frock-coats, hats gone out of shape, collars dulled and yellowed by the years; and a scattering of shabby wanderers drawing near to the marble counters, polished to a fastidious shine. Upon these counters rest an array of plates filled with curious and rather unaccountable dishes, fare whose origin, let alone their proper designation, one cannot guess at first glance. Plates of pork rind; a joint of mutton carved down almost to the bone, its stark handle raised like a thin arm towards heavens; a collapsed portion of vol-au-vent set fast in its congealed sauce; sweetbreads in a poulette; a bowl of tapioca consommé abandoned by some indisposed diner; a dish of macaroni gratin prepared the previous week; a Russian charlotte with its soaked biscuits drifting in curdled cream; then plain boiled beef; the remains of veal bourgeoise or beef à la mode; very stale groat rolls once half-bitten by a dainty, perhaps fastidious mouth; and medleys of vegetables and meats accompanied by impossible sauces and by objects that resist all naming.*

Victor Borie, *L'alimentation à Paris*, les halles et le marché, Gallardon, Menu Fretin, 1867, p. 17.



1. *Covenant in Flesh*, 2025, Oil on panel, 125 × 230 × 2,4 cm (49.2 × 90.6 × 0.9 in)
2. *And the milk cried*, 2025, Oil on panel, 32 × 17 × 2,4 cm (12.6 × 6.7 × 0.9 in)
3. *the clay remembers*, 2025, Oil on panel, 32 × 17 × 2,4 cm (12.6 × 6.7 × 0.9 in)
4. *Thunder shoes*, 2025, Bronze, 22 × 6,5 × 9,5 cm (8.7 × 2.6 × 3.7 in)
5. *faith was a mouth without tongue*, 2025, Oil on panel, 86 × 49,5 × 7,3 cm (33.9 × 19.5 × 2.9 in)
6. *As bile ascended*, 2025, Oil on panel, 32 × 17 × 2,4 cm (12.6 × 6.7 × 0.9 in)