

A photograph of a forest campsite. In the center, a blue and yellow tent is pitched on a dirt clearing. To the right, a wooden picnic table is visible. The background is filled with tall, thin trees and dense foliage. The overall scene is a typical outdoor camping spot in a wooded area.

Illustrating Change:

Self Portrait of the Disposable Tourist's Landscape

Emma Winn

Lost: An Introduction

Packed into my newly-shiny black Subaru like carrots shoved into an overly stuffed lunch box, brimming with as many unnecessary items as necessary, my friends and I set onto the road with a sense of purpose and excitement that only a road trip can promise. It's not like any old family vacation where we'll stop at each roadside destination and leisurely cruise over the rolling hills of California due to our constantly waning tight budgets and stringent schedule, but it's an opportunity for newness and adventure and certainly a few shots for Instagram nonetheless. Otherwise, outside of our more superficial thrills, it's more of a deep, epic opportunity to experience nature, and within that, the way that *we* experience nature as human beings.

It's not often where there's no cell service whatsoever, where I have to try to figure out how to work a propane stove, where I have to pitch a tent in the absolute darkness because the navigation gives out as we inch further and further away from actual normal civilization. And it's not often at all that I have the opportunity—the responsibility—to do nothing more than observe and appreciate nature with an empathy that transcends the boundaries between humanity and this utterly wild force that lives within each of us. To breathe the clear air around dwarfing trees and think that these seemingly immortal beings are not so unlike me. They stand tall in spite of the years that weigh heavy on them, in spite of every century that has passed with more and more people gawking at them like some carnival spectacle, in spite of the apathy that seems to fill the air around them as eager campers take their photos and go to their bonfires for the night. Like I and we and all of us are meant to stand tall in spite of apathy.

But for all I preach that people need to be more empathetic with the natural world, to realize that humans are an irrevocable part of nature too and we cannot live without its endless care, I feel a little bit hypocritical in my seemingly enlightened environmentalism. For each life-changing hike and soul-altering display of nature's wonder, there are piles and piles of plastic. More than I've probably used the last few months combined. For each transcendental and spiritual experience lies so much commercialism and wastefulness that I cringe just thinking about it— not to mention the hundreds of miles of gas expelled into the atmosphere as I drove from place to place. It gets harder to be so elevated in environmentalism when the comfort and routine of home is cleaved away from you, and replaced by this raw and difficult life that nature provides. And this is the culture of wastefulness, the culture of giant squirrels eating slices of pizza, the culture of dead deer abandoned to the side of the road as a result of human invention, the culture of ecotourism and the ecosystem not always getting along.

So my friends and I sing Disney songs eagerly on the road at five in the morning watching the sun rise over the horizon, that joy and love for the earth filling our hearts, unknowing how it truly feels to *feel* for nature.

Embarking On Tires Propelled Towards a Setting Sky

In this car with music blaring, thunderous
Pulsing on the doors, notes like crashing waves
Pushing deafening fists into limp legs
Reawaken to this word that's wondrous.
This road is like the door to everything
Or a portal to some future mistook
By those who do not remember to look
Through unrolled windows to the past which sings
Of blue skies stretched across untouched landscapes
Of endless emerald crowned by clear haze
Which envelops this sun in shining rays
Blanketing the earth in painted escape.
 The birds and bears and trees are tranquil here
 Though unaware of noise and trouble near.

On the Road Again, Pt I A Fictional Utopia Of Today's Road Trips

Crammed into this it-doesn't-look-bigger-on-the-inside vehicle like pioneers on the search for the next great American road trip, the overwhelming scent of sickly-sweet smell artificial coconut and something even more sinisterly riddled with chemicals snakes through the blasted AC. But with the sound of the best songs ever and the early morning light peeking over the grassy horizon, the smell of sunscreen and the overly-cool cramped car do not seem to matter much. You can feel the excitement for something new with every passing hill, every rolling sea of grass and solitary cow. You watch the world change and for once it is all so quiet out there. Questions of where have all the airplanes gone, where is all the traffic, where are all the people fade away because it is just you in this moment in this capsule carrying you to what feels like a brand new world.

“Look! Look— a *deer!*” or maybe a vulture, an elk sometimes. There is an urgency propelled by missing out, the same tone between squirrels and horses and condors alike. woodland creature. It seems so precious to see something so wonderful. The privilege to look outside and see that, there, right within your reach, is another living breathing animal just the same as you. Four legged creatures grazing on grass that they just happened upon, *found*, nothing special about it. Creatures independent from people, independent from anybody but their own instincts. Like a story book. And when you finally look out at the towering cliffs and massive waterfalls so blue it seems they must have been dyed, it's like magic. Purples and an azure sky and everyone here is looking up, everyone here is smiling for the camera and laughing with the excitement that this is something special. On the winding roads, you pull over in a long line of idle cars.

Call out “what's going on?”

And someone responds, “We say a bear!”

Everyone stops to see it, motionless on a miles-long pathway, spotting the bear and its cub with reverence that rivals religious devotion.

Or at a campsite, you talk with people you've never met like it's the first day of school and these will be your lifelong friends. It doesn't matter where you've come from, it matters that you are all here now. You say hello on the trails, you ask each other for pictures. You embrace giant trees and hide behind rocks together and ask how much longer until the lookout. You are all breathing heaving gasps with the thrill of almost.

In the car you wave to each other, passing by like lifelong neighbors brought together in this one instant. Or in the water you all laugh at the same splashing cold, the glint of the afternoon sun on the sea as the lions look for fish in the shallow pools. There are children wading, exploring. You are exploring, too. At sunset, you gather together on the gaping cliff, you wrap yourself in a blanket, and you look out at this world dripping in crimson and purple and the stars flying across sky like birds carrying in the night. Carrying in another night, another day, in the parks you come home to again and again.

How To Paint a Self-Portrait:

Before you start, gather your paint
on the palette,
look at this hand,
take out your veins,
put them back,
rearrange them
like a map
on the paper
page of your skin.
look outside the paned
window, the pained
window, and open.
open the easel,
pull out a pencil,
Begin.
with a mirror
on the mount
take a look
at the planes of this face
and realize
it is this earth
in the lines of a smile
it is this earth
in the furrows
and wrinkles
it is this earth,
so breathe it in
in the yellow flowered
air, take it into swollen lungs
hold it there
in your fountain pen
like a fount of *more*
fount of promise
and exhale the ink
onto the canvas
Begin
the self portrait
of this landscape
which made you,
which made us,
which made all.
 Look outside,
 Look within.
Begin.