

BROOKLYN RAIL

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE



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from The History of Modern Sculpture

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Poetry

from The Lake

POETRY | APRIL 2019

three

By Louis Bury

[poetry type="indented"]

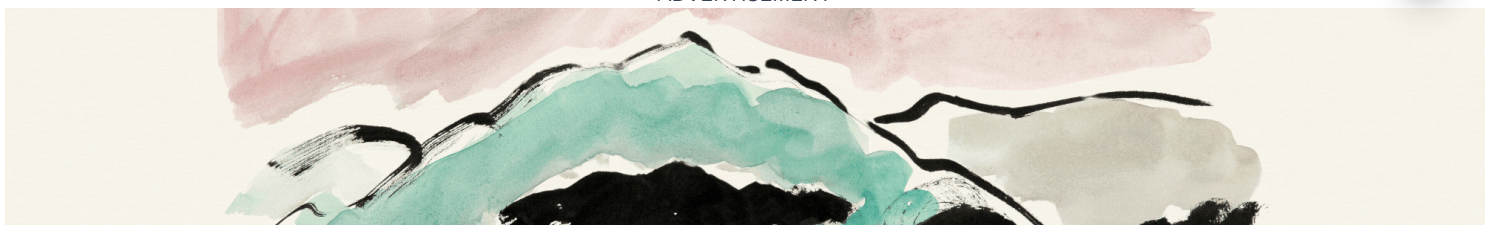
ASHES TO ASHES

Life expectancy of a white U.S. male born in 1981, the year I was born: 71.1

Life expectancy of a white U.S. female born in 1983, the year my sister Emily was born: 78.7

Prevalence rate of systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) in the U.S. population: 0.002%

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Average number of years less than the general female population women with SLE are expected to live: 22

Number of years less than the general female population that my sister was expected to live with SLE, according to her rheumatologist: 48.7

Minimum number of years by which Emily's lifespan has now exceeded the rheumatologist's estimate: 5

Number of years Emily had been taking phenobarbital, a barbiturate used to prevent seizures, when she had her first severe lupus flare at age 16: 15

Number of months she took intravenous Cytoxan, a potent immunosuppressant typically used on cancer patients, to treat SLE: 6

Number of years she took prednisone, an immunosuppressant steroid, after completing her course of Cytoxan: 4

Approximate annual academic merit scholarship monies Emily received, at age 18, to attend Drew University: \$20,000

Number of semesters she attended Drew before she was expelled for drug use: 1

Number of years Emily was an intravenous heroin user: 7

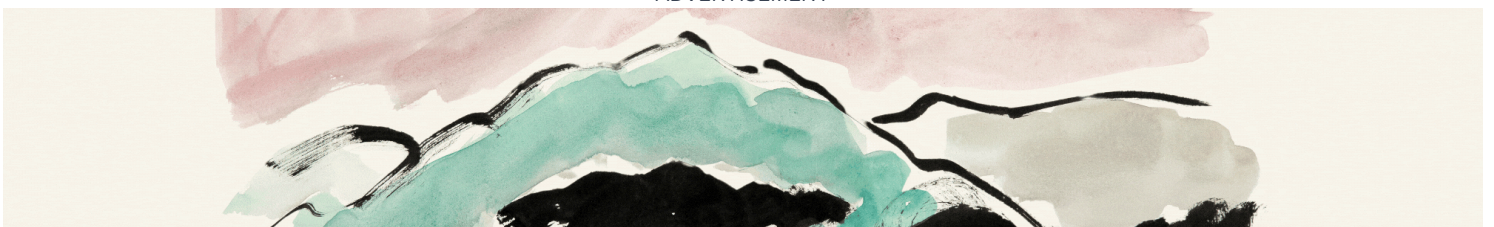
Number of years she was addicted to heroin: 4

Number of those years that she and I were estranged: 3

Number of times my parents and I discussed together our feelings about Emily's medical or drug problems: 0

Percentage of those three estranged years that overlapped with my online poker

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Total amount of money I deposited to online poker sites, ever: \$500

At the height of my poker career, approximate amount of money I would have in play, across all tables, during a typical online session: \$5,000

2010 CUNY Adjunct Instructor wage for a three credit course: \$2,917.80

Number of CUNY courses I taught, as a doctoral student in the system, once I started making money at poker: 0

2010 Median Household Income of Staten Island's Oakwood Beach neighborhood, where Emily and I grew up and where our parents still live: \$69,264

Percentage of 2010 Oakwood Beach residents who were white: 90.7

Percentage who were Italian-American: 48.7

Factor by which Staten Island's opioid overdose rate exceeds the rate of New York City's other

four boroughs: 3

Months after Emily kicked her heroin addiction for the last time that her ex-boyfriend died of a heroin overdose: 3

Distance, in minutes driving, from our parents' house to Great Kills, the neighborhood that is the statistical epicenter of Staten Island's opioid epidemic: 3

Distance, in minutes driving, from our parents' house to Staten Island's Fresh Kills, the world's largest landfill until its 2001 closure: 10

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Distance, in city blocks, from our parents' house to the Oakwood Beach floodline after Hurricane Sandy in 2012: 1

Span of years during which I lived in that house: 1981 - 1999

Fraction of neighboring families' children that I grew up with who, as adults, still live with their parent or parents in the same house: 4/7

Number of minutes I used to walk, at age 14, to meet a group of teens and go drinking on the steps of Moravian Cemetery's Vanderbilt Mausoleum: 40

Houses away from my parents' house that one person from that group, who now works for the Department of Sanitation, moved with his wife and children: 1

Number of times, in recent casual conversation with him, I thought about mentioning long-time DSNY artist-in-residence Mierle Laderman Ukeles but, not wanting to appear pretentious, thought better of it: 2

Date on which Fresh Kills landfill was supposed to receive its last barge of waste: March 22, 2001

Tons of material transported on an emergency basis from Ground Zero to Fresh Kills on September 11, 2001: 1,200,000

Daily tons of residential waste received by Fresh Kills during its peak operating capacity in the 1980s: 29,000

Approximate tons of solid waste currently in Fresh Kills: 150,000,000

Estimated year of completion for Freshkills Park, a New York City public park being built on top of the former landfill: 2037

Medium projected 2037 sea level rise in inches for the waters surrounding New

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Percentage of those objects that were foodstuffs or food packaging: 14

Percentage made of paper: 81

Minimum number of toilet paper squares that I discarded in 2015: 10,417

Minimum number of junk mailings: 81

Of origami frogs: 1

Animal bones: 181

[/poetry]

WASTE BOOK
(day-by-day sample)

10/1/15

50 squares of toilet paper; frozen waffle box + plastic lining bag; 14 paper towels; 3 plastic cups

10/2/15

tissue box; 4 tissues; hot dog bun bag; 1 magazine; 2 plastic cups; 60 pieces of paper; large

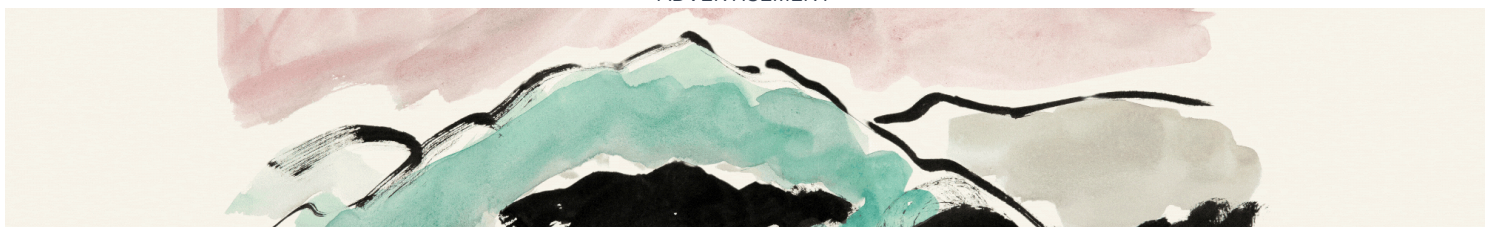
10/3/15

tissue box; 12 tissues; 50 squares of toilet paper; cardboard paper towel tube; 16 paper towels

10/4/15

coffee grounds bag; coffee filter + used grounds; 1 egg shell; cold cut wrapping; half an uneaten

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10/7/15

50 squares of toilet paper; 13 paper towels; 2 lengths of dental floss; coffee filter + used gro

10/8/15

tin foil food tray + plastic lid; 4 plastic cups; 7 napkins; 2 plastic forks; plastic knife; 2 paper

10/9/15

cardboard toilet paper tube; coffee filter + used grounds; frozen waffle box + plastic lining b

10/10/15

2 receipts; sandwich wrapping; 3 napkins; brown paper bag; 1 length of dental floss; 1 mag

10/11/15

museum ticket; 3 tissues; 4 paper towels; pasta bag, plastic; 2 plastic food containers; 2 gla

10/12/15

English muffin; ziploc bag; pork chop wrapping; ravioli box + plastic wrapping; coffee filter

10/13/15

5 paper towels; 2 baby wipes; paper plate; plastic fork, knife + spoon; sandwich wrapping;

10/14/15

25 squares of toilet paper; 1 paper towel; 5 tissues; bread bag; small container of ground po

10/15/15

1 Q-tip; 25 squares of toilet paper; 1 paper towel; 1 tissue; plastic yogurt parfait cup + inser

10/16/15

glass peanut butter jar; 50 squares of toilet paper; cardboard toilet paper tube; toilet paper

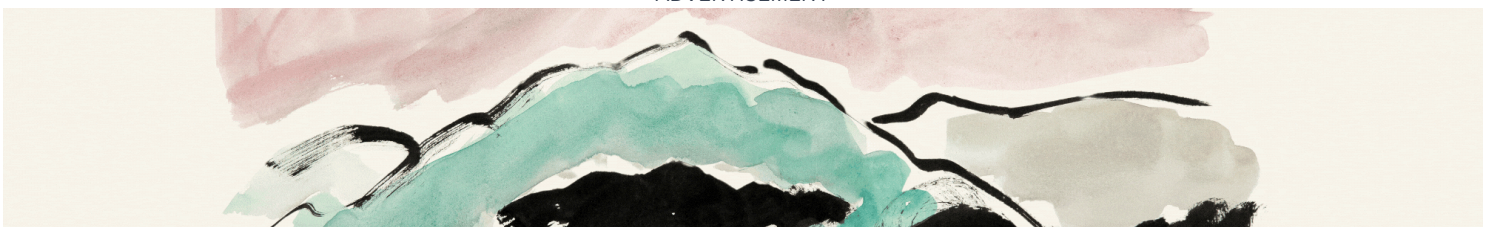
10/17/15

12 tissues; 3 cold cut wrappings; several spoonfuls of oatmeal; 2 apple cores; plastic food co

10/18/15

frozen waffle box + plastic lining bag; grapefruit rind; 60 squares of toilet paper; banana pe

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10/20/15

2 baby wipes; 8 paper towels; 1 tinfoil food container + plastic lid; plastic fork + knife; 1 nap

10/22/15

25 squares of toilet paper; 2 baby wipes; 9 paper towels; small plastic dinner roll bag; coffee

10/23/15

1 paper towel; 5 napkins; 2 baby wipes; sandwich wrapping; receipt; plastic yogurt parfait c

10/24/15

50 squares of toilet paper; plastic soup bowl; 5 tissues; 3 paper towels; receipt; paper towel

10/25/15

soap wrapper; travel tissue wrapper; 2 tinfoil food containers + plastic lids; museum ticket;

10/26/15

2 apple cores; plastic food container; 1 paper towel; bread bag; 10 tissues; broken electric r

10/27/15

frozen waffle box + plastic lining bag; plastic yogurt parfait cup + insert; plastic spoon; 5 na

10/28/15

apple core; plastic food container; 7 paper towels; coffee filter + used grounds; 1 tissue; 6 na

10/29/15

2 q-tips; 6 paper towels; receipt; 2 baby wipes; brown paper bag; tinfoil food container + pl

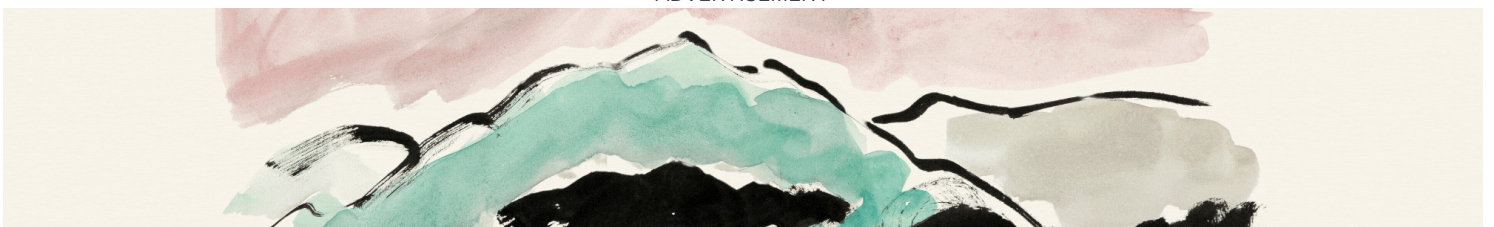
10/30/15

6 paper towels; 3 baby wipes; plastic yogurt parfait cup + insert; plastic spoon; 35 squares c

10/31/15

frozen waffle box + plastic lining bag; apple core; 2 magazines; small plastic yogurt contain

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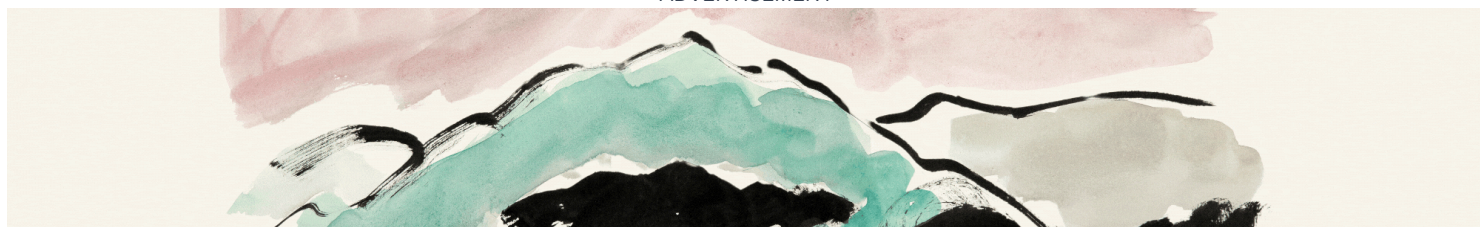
plates, paper: 40
pieces of tinfoil: 34
brown paper bags: 47
cups of uneaten solid food: 33
uneaten foodstuffs, whole: 43
uneaten foodstuffs, large pieces: 291
uneaten foodstuffs, small pieces: 193
liquid ounces of uneaten semi-solid food: 114
cups of vegetable shells/ends: 12.5
fruit (+egg) shells/rinds/peels: 65
scraps, globs, stems, pits, veins, etc.: 423
clumps of used coffee grounds: 91
coffee filters: 91
fruit cores: 123
animal carcasses: 4
animal bones: 21
tea bags: 72
tea bag wrappers: 66
pieces of junk mail: 65
cough drop wrappers: 57
magazines: 41
condoms: 49
condom wrappers: 49
receipts: 282
butcher wrappings, paper + plastic: 73
tickets: 48

Louis Bury is an art writer, author of *The Way Things Go* (punctum books, 2023) and *Exercises in Criticism* (Dalkey Archive Press, 2015), and Associate Professor of English at Hostos Community College, CUNY.

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