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More work can be found at www.robertsamec.com.

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A Preface

The drawings in this collection are the result of a dull Friday morning in early June. I was sitting outside on a balmy overcast Northern California day cycling through a Rolodex of questions that directly challenged my own self worth. These were not particularly unique or even intelligent questions, but they have been familiar company, appearing in my first year of college and creeping into my consciousness whenever I found myself without much to do. Entering the 12th week home from a spring semester cut short, I had found myself in one of these relentless self-evaluations.

The catalyst for this burst of the blues escapes me, but I distinctly remember having finished a somewhat sour cup of coffee and feeling entirely ordinary with nothing to show for myself. Knowing this feeling of stagnation would ruin any hope of a normal weekend, I

began to plot a retreat from social circles. In some ways, I felt this was an irrational surrender, as though I was both Patty Hearst and the S.L.A. in my own one man hostage situation. That being said, some part of me still believed that if I paid enough attention to myself I could establish a holistic and satisfying understanding of my past, present, and future by Sunday evening. Searching for something to do, I went into the house, deposited my empty mug, and retrieved my sketchbook.

I often describe anxiety in terms of noise, a general hum in my mind. Day to day life, when equally loud, usually distracts from the hum. Quiet time at home amplifies it. When things are particularly “loud” inside my head, I turn towards drawing. I often sketch during anxious moments because everything involved in the process can be held in my hands and seen with my eyes. Rather than mulling over past transgressions and future worries, I can consider the shape of a bowl or mountain. At times, this feels unproductive in the sense that avoiding problems typically does not solve them, but at least it creates internal quiet.

I purchased my sketchbook from a beautiful and knowledgeable twenty-something year old working in a crowded West Village stationary store. Placing the grey block of three-hundred pages into a paper bag, she eagerly told me she had the same one. Despite my rather tumultuous history of relationships with unfinished and embarrassing Moleskines, her confidence convinced me I was making a good purchase. Two days later, I would

make my first entry in the book while riding a night train to New Haven: a doodle of the 72nd street subway station where I had begun my journey two hours prior. Drawing from memory, the final product looked nothing like the real thing. That was last October. Since then I've drawn mainly from photos or in the moment, rarely from memory or imagination.

My current sketchbook is about two-thirds full. Given that it was made entirely of blank pages when I bought it, I would like to think this is a major accomplishment. Considering my tendency to leave projects in pieces, the fact that I've managed to put this much work in one place is, to me, impressive. While not every page has been a remarkable success, there are many drawings in the book that I am fond of. Most of them are objects: sandwiches, plants, bags. Some of them are buildings: cabins in California, apartments in New York, tolos in China. Nearly none of them are people. For me, drawing people is an incredibly hard task. The stakes are too high and the result is almost always unsatisfying.

The first thing I drew on that Friday morning was a chair (pg. 25). As with all of my other sketches, I did not pick the chair with the intention of expressing a thought or sharing a story. When I began drawing that morning, I did it purely to occupy myself, to step away from the familiar anxiousness which I had more or less evaded in previous weeks. I chose the chair simply because it was in front of me, angled as if it had just been, or was about to be, sat in. I think the wooden chair stands out from

all the drawings. It is less rigid than the others, the lines thicken and thin at will. In many ways, it is the most authentic artifact from the moment I am describing. After the chair came a pair of sunglasses, my wallet, and then the rest of the collection. By the end of the weekend there were twenty-seven drawings, all of objects I had found around me.

Hindsight being twenty-twenty, I think there is a meaningful and interesting relationship between all of these pieces. They physicalize the very emotions I was avoiding when I drew them. This is not to say they embody those emotions, just that they are connected because the very act of drawing has provided respite from a much larger and louder daily existence. For this reason, I have created this book and written this preface, to acknowledge and share the value of this experience.

Lastly, I should note that the order of the drawings in this book does not reflect any sort of chronology. This is just what felt right at the time of publication.

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