Terje and I have a disagreement.

Our disagreement is all to do with story and context. Terje argues for a photograph that can carry its own meaning, in between the viewer and the image, an impression is formed. This is, I believe (or have chosen to misunderstand), one approach to so called 'fine art photography'.

But photography is not a fine art[1] I hear someone from the back of the room clamouring, it is a social contract. A social witness bearing. Or as Terje reminds me - it is the light bouncing of a thing and then a record of that light bouncing off that thing.

So what do we have light bouncing off here?

A watermelon. Devoured by insects. An impotent lamp post. A woman in a bikini with egg shells on her eyes.

Terje and I have a disagreement.

The disagreement is this. I need to know what is going on behind the images. The photographs are a veil obscuring the truth. I want story, meaning and context. I want history. I need to know where every image was taken, and the prologue leading up to it. I need to know what he had for breakfast (those eggs actually) and where he slept the night before (in the sunbather's sister's hotel if you must). I need to know if Terje ever showed the model his photo (soon).

Terje and I have a disagreement because Terje doesn't want to pin down every picture's meaning.

I am going to call Terje out now and say I think he thought this would be relatively straight forward. Get someone he knows, whose writing style he likes, and ask the writer to bounce off the images (like light). Go off piste. Wax lyrical. Digress (he knows digression is my main method of transport).

1. This person at the back of the room is American photographer and theorist Allan Sekula. I am adopting his voice, channelling his spirit which fuels the disagreement between photographer and writer as the writer insists on viewing the pictures through a Marxist lens, the same lens he views every work of art with.

It's a strange gig. Reminds me of Eileen Myles the American poet talking at the Bergen Kunsthall about there being a certain expectation for a writer to bring something to an exhibition. As if the artist put down a plate of delicious food, and now the writer must provide the cutlery.

This is a bit like that. This is a bit awkward. Terje and I disagree. I refuse to bring my anecdotes to the table I tell him because this is not the place they belong. This is not the time for a flight of my own fancy. This is a photography exhibition, and photographs tell stories, stories rooted in time and place.

So let's get to it.

The time is now.

The place is former Yugoslavia, neighbouring Italy, the destination is Greece.

Terje and I have a disagreement because a melon by the side of the road in Albania could just as well be a watermelon in Switzerland if the watermelon isn't properly sign posted.

Terje and I have a disagreement because Terje is talking about colour, form, light, shade.

But but but…

A watermelon isn't contextless, nor is it without conflict, politics, history. Context is king, and the photographer is merely its humble servant.

You see, I ran into my own melon related conflict last year.

There you go the writer is giving you a melon related anecdote of their own, the writer did what was asked even though Terje and the writer had a disagreement which has lasted for weeks now and didn't go anywhere, this impossible assignment which hung over the writer's head.


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Let me explain: On holiday in Italy - with Terje incidentally - I bought a watermelon in the supermarket. The local co-op in Piombino, former swamp land on the Tuscan coast.

Around the watermelon came beautiful thin yellow paper with the word 'Meloni' printed in a bright red font repeated ad infinitum, forever. I was immediately caught by this wrapper for a number of reasons.

Firstly, I have this theory that Italy and Japan must have the most beautiful food packaging in the world. I've never been to Japan but this is my theory.

Secondly, I have always had an eye for typography. One of the biggest influences on my secondary school art education was this little ring bound folder containing different typefaces which I stole and still have in one of the boxes I refuse to unpack in the corner of my room.

Thirdly, this *Meloni* typeface evoked the Italo Disco music I've long enjoyed that soundtracked the newsagents and ice cream parlours in Piombino. Lets say Italy confirmed my pre-assumptions about the place. We were in harmony like that, Italy and I. Down to the beautiful colour combination of the plastic bins in Torino.

Finally, I enjoyed the literality, of the world 'melon', wrapped around its namesake.

So I kept my bit of tissue paper and it became my muse. Returning to France and my artist residency in Clermont-Ferrand I booked some time at a graphics workshop. I'd had an idea to make a screen print based on my *Meloni* wrapper and did just this, producing a run of 50 x 70cm prints with the word scaled up, repeated in columns of yellow and blue, fading to green.

Everyone agreed my *Meloni* print was beautiful, I sold one to a curator, and agreed with Terje to swap a print for the point and shoot camera he kindly lent me (earlier this year I went through a brief spell trying to convince myself I was a photographer - this is a favourite past time of mine, trying to convince myself I'm not a writer, instead of trying to get better at writing - the ultimate form of procrastination.)

Fast forward a few months and news articles start flashing up on my screen about the election in Italy. A political party on the far right, with roots in neo fascism are threatening to come to power. The Fratelli d' Italia party, led by none other than Georgia Meloni.

Suddenly nobody wanted my Meloni print anymore. They were being taken down from the walls.

Suddenly Terje didn't want one on his wall anymore either.

His girlfriend is Italian.

Why didn't anyone warn me about Meloni? I cast about - blaming the French (after all they share a border), blaming the Italian. I concluded that it must have been because Meloni'd gone under the radar until quite late in the day. A peripheral figure who rose to power in the space of four years.[1]

I'd spent about 5000 NOK on getting two prints framed for an exhibition which I then had to hide in storage. The additional prints remain rolled up in tubes in the corner of my bedroom. And I accept this weird twist of fate, my ignorance, my clairvoyance.

Terje sends me an sms with a link to a book by a photographer who has taken pictures in Italy of hand painted signs that read 'Meloni'.

I ask him "Are there a lot of melons in art photography"?

Yes, he says - Lukas Blalock.

"Where was your melon photo taken?"

"Sardinia", he says, "but don't write that down. Because it wasn't on the way to Ithaca."

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1. The FdI's surge from 4 per cent in 2018 (1.4 million votes) to 26 per cent last month (7.3 million) is precipitous and alarming, but many of Meloni's votes were cannibalised from Berlusconi and Salvini – the Lega and FdI fought an internecine battle for the racist vote:
https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v44/n20/thomas-jones/meloni-s-moment

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