

October 15, 2016

Dear Pierre-Soulages,

It is with humility and respect that I write to you. I am an artist and have recently been asked to make a new work inspired by one of 16 pieces of from the J.P. Morgan Chase Art Collection in Miami, Florida. The piece I create will be shown in the same gallery as its predecessors. I was given a short timeline on which to work, and the exhibition opens for Miami Art Basel 2016 this Nov 29th 2016. The show is entitled, *When We Were Young*, and I believe is meant to draw a line bridging artists from your generation to mine. One of these 16 pieces is yours: *17 July 1959*. It continues to resonate for me and I would be honored to draw from it as a piece of inspiration.

Yet, that isn't quite enough. I want to *talk* with you, or write with you. I am a sculptor, a performer and a video maker. I know nothing of painting in my own practice; but I know much about darkness. I don't feel it would be appropriate for me to make work inspired by *17 July 1959* without at least making an attempt to understand your work more deeply, through a dialogue, artist to artist. I would rather find the voice of this new piece through a collaborative effort than a personal inquiry.

My interest stems from a recent experience I had while working in the woods, through the use of movement, in Marin County, under the instruction of and at the home studio of Anna Halprin (also 96 years of age). We were asked to spread out on her land, to find a part of the natural environment that resonated with us, to approach, connect, and, finally, to respond. I approached a burned out redwood tree. Its trunk was short, broken at the top, and hollowed by fire in the years passed. I burrowed my head and ultimately my body inside the trunk. I lay with the back of my head on the pine needles at its base, my head slipping gently below delicate spider webs which clung to its walls and across the circumference. There I stayed. In this dark place, I began to both see and feel. Immediately, light came through from the opening of the trunk – I saw tops of fellow trees in the forest, I saw clouds, I saw blue and I saw wind. As I stayed though, my hair in the dirt, ash around me, I saw and felt more closely. I recognized the silver dust that radiates along the edges of charcoal, and the burnished bark that shines like an oiled cast-iron pan. I saw many flies caught in the spider's web. I saw the web. My head sunk further, I heard the earth as I turned my ear to it, side to side. The world was revealing itself to me in this dark place, so long as I stayed with it, and did not turn away.

This is what I see in your investigation of black, the light reflecting from it, and from texture itself. I see a lifetime of staying with the darkness and witnessing, possibly, the world in it, revealed.

I understand that your time is valuable and do not want to take much. My hope is that this conversation can be mutually beneficial – in fact, that it can be mutually generative and even fun. If you are at all interested in working with me, please reply by Friday October 21st. I feel there is much to cover.

Sincerely,

Cara Levine



Cara Levine <cara.e.levine@gmail.com>

contacting Pierre Soulages

1 message

Cara Levine <cara.e.levine@gmail.com>

Sun, Oct 16, 2016 at 4:38 PM

To: artives@hotmail.fr

Hello,

I am an artist living and working in the US. I have recently been commissioned to make a work for Miami Art Basel that is to be inspired by one of sixteen 20th century artworks. One of the works is a painting by Pierre Soulages. I would like to work with it. In so doing, I would like to begin by engaging Soulages in a dialogue artist to artist. I am searching for his contact information and have sent the attached letter through his website. If you are in contact with him please forward this along. I would be very grateful!

Sincerely,

Cara Levine

www.caralevine.com

 **Dear Pierre.pdf**
47K

October 26, 2016

Dear Pierre,

It has been 10 days since I sent my first letter. I am yet to receive a response. I cannot claim that I understand why this correspondence remains one-way, but I can say, it is of no bother. There could be many reasons for which you have not responded: you have not seen the letter, you are very busy, you are in the very late years of your life and are not concerned with responding to letters from strangers, the letter was not compelling enough, you don't remember the artwork *17 July 1959* and don't feel it is right to remark on it, you wish it wasn't owned by JP Morgan Chase, you are preparing for a show of your own, and so on...

Regardless of the reason, I have concluded to pursue the correspondence and invite you to jump in at any time.

Since I last wrote, I have become ever more obsessed with your and my relationship to darkness. I have gathered a number of objects in my studio to investigate for their darkness.

They are:

- a black leather bicycle saddle,
- a brass horn with black rubber ball,
- a cluster of fake black flowers held together with a metal clip,
- black "magic" gloves in their plastic package with an illustration that reads "Theatrical Gloves,"
- a black and silver magic sword from San Francisco's Chinatown,
- a black cast glass goblet with a crystalline interior texture,
- a black female mannequin torso
- multiple black fabrics: velveteen (my favorite), satin, jersey, and one that is like sleeping bag material, quilted nylon and batting,
- and a black mask, the kind that covers only the eyes and has a white elastic band to go over the ears and around the head.

It was after I bought the mask that I discovered this picture:



(<http://sixthfingermagazine.com/>)

It was in this picture that I recognized, what I had already known, that the objects I collected were *just* black. They lacked life. The life which transforms your work comes in the form of *light*. I have both seen and read you speak on the nature of light as the “secret” element to complete your work. I agree.

The life in my work is often articulated through movement, the body, a tension between elements, or through humor. I see you in this mask and I wonder, what are the thoughts of the man?

How do consider your palm? One is concealed behind your back, the other, forward facing, in a greeting, or a gesture to halt. The palm itself is soft and relaxed. The light around the hand draws into it and pulls away from the painting behind.

Your gaze? The eyes are direct, and focused, also calm. Is this person hiding?

I plan to activate my materials through this continual investigation of darkness, texture, and now, life.

I will continue to send my letters through your website as well as to the contact information for your gallery. I do hope they reach you, the letters. I apologize if I am a bother – I hope I am not. Please feel free to reply or simply read these letters.

Sincerely,

Cara Levine

October 27, 2016

Dear Pierre,

Below are some lists I would like to share with you. Please feel free to amend and contribute at your leisure.

Things I Cannot Separate from, Which
Separate Us

I am a woman
I am an American
I do not paint
64 years

Personal Connotations with the Feeling of
the Color Black

Drown
A pillow over my head before sleep
Compression
Safety
Space between thoughts
Depth
Endlessness
Gripping
Mystery
A Negative – cut, slash, scoop, steal
Hiding
Magic
Trick – being tricked
Abyss
Looking closely, looking far
Winter

Concealment
Burnt

The Body and Darkness

Cavity
Void
Inside of a hand
Wrinkles, shadows of wrinkles
Shadows
Orifices
Secrets
Intimacy
Where touch meets

Somethings are Funny

Magic
Failure
Physical humor
Illusion
Gesture
Objects performing body-like-things
Hiding
Play
Black holes
Dark comedy

I re-read a David Bohm text, *On Creativity*, recently for a class I teach. In it he describes art to exist as “true unto itself,” and that the artist knows it to be art when this is achieved. Do you agree?

Sincerely,

Cara Levine



Cara Levine <cara.e.levine@gmail.com>

Pierre SOULAGES

1 message

Cara Levine <cara.e.levine@gmail.com>
To: valentine@perrotin.com

Wed, Oct 26, 2016 at 4:44 PM

Hello,

I have been trying to reach Pierre Soulages for the last two weeks or so and am unable to connect to him. I am an american artist. I was recently commissioned to make a new work inspired by one of his pieces for the week of Miami Art Basel. I had hoped to create a dialogue with Soulages about this process. If you have his contact, please forward these letters to him.

Sincerely,

Cara Levine

Contact: Valentine BLONDEL

Direct line: +1 646 627 82 81

3 attachments **Dear Pierre.docx**
131K **dear pierre 2.pdf**
100K **dear pierre 3.pdf**
35K

October 28, 2016

Dear Pierre,

A few years back I wrote a number of letters to Don Quixote. I had so much to tell him. He is my most adored character. I relate to him and I am equally perplexed, stunned, and impressed by the elegance, mystery and humor through which Cervantes presents him.

I feel some parallels in this one-way correspondence. I feel attracted to people who are searching for an un-abiding truth—maybe one that only they know exists. One that may look something like magic. In that magic though is all the truth of the world. It becomes a journey to stake a life on. I believe deeply that this is an artist's path.

Have you read *Don Quixote*? Does he live in a kind of darkness for you?

Sincerely,

Cara Levine

October 29, 2016

Dear Pierre,

Thank you for your patience with me, and your endurance with this barrage. I hope it is at least enjoyable. I do hope you are well and receiving these letters. I apologize for my inability to write in (or speak) French.

I admire your commitment to your form. This is something I have admired in my mentors always. I was trained as a potter and for many years, thought there would never be anything compelling enough to pull me from the deep well of knowledge and creativity found within clay. Alas, my work has become, over the years, formless in its way. I work with few ideas, though across many media. This has been both a freedom and a hindrance for me. I believe in the honing of a craft and know that it is through that honing that I refine the language of my work.

Has anyone ever compared your use of pigment to drapery? I am looking for light within fields of black - I am obscuring, covering, and dropping shadow. I am using black fabric and it is creating a sea of darkness.

Sincerely,

Cara Levine

October 30, 2016

Dear Pierre,

Today I was defeated in the studio.

I read that you said, that when you are defeated in the studio, or rather, when a piece doesn't work, you destroy it. You won't let it exist in your studio. Today I went against that wisdom. I pushed through - uphill uphill uphill.

I was defeated in my effort to make a new work, authentic to my practice, yet in conversation with yours. Where do we meet?

So many defeats:

Too serious

too silly

too simplified

too obscure

too beautiful

too easy

I fight myself, mostly.

I was relieved to have the letter to come home to write. In the writing, I feel I am able to ask more questions. As I said at the start, there is so much to cover.

Maybe it has something to do with the nature of darkness that this project has such an impenetrability. I can't get in.

I just had an image of one of those sensory deprivation tanks. Do you know the kind? I want to get into one of those, in order to get into this.

I made many pictures this week, and more today. But am I getting closer to that place where we might meet?

Darkness / Darkness for you / Darkness for me

Is your black darkness at all? Is mine?

More soon.

Sincerely,

Cara Levine

November 1, 2016

Dear Pierre,

I made an attempt to mimic your masked portrait.



I dirtied my hands in the doing, but it felt true to me nonetheless.

Sincerely,

Cara Levine



Cara Levine <cara.e.levine@gmail.com>

searching for Pierre Soulages

1 message

Cara Levine <cara.e.levine@gmail.com>
To: info@dominique-levy.com

Tue, Nov 1, 2016 at 8:58 AM

Hello Dominique-Levy

I am an artist working from Portland OR. I was recently asked to make an artwork inspired by one of Soulages' works. My piece, along with his, will be exhibited together during the Miami Art Basel week. Throughout this process, I have been writing letters to Soulages. As of yet, I have had no response. I see that you represent him and his work through your gallery as well. I would be ever grateful if you might pass along this, my seventh, letter his way.

Sincerely,

Cara Levine

 **dear pierre 7.pdf**
695K

November 1, 2016

Dear Pierre,

What does it mean to write a one-way letter? Has this become merely a journal or diary? Does that mean it is of no use for anyone else? Am I remaining considerate of my correspondent? Who is my correspondent?

What does it mean to write a one-way letter? Am I digging in a hole that doesn't want to be dug? Is it an inherently *female* act, the act of reaching, pursuing, searching? Am I stuck in the "female" in this interaction? What interaction?

What does it mean to write a one-way letter? Does it imply loneliness? Desperation? Inquiry? Loss? Faith or faithlessness? Is it to speak and to not be heard?

What does it mean to write a one-way letter?

It means: **absence is presence.**

I think constantly now about the taste/touch/smell/feel of darkness. I feel absence. I feel an emptiness at the end of the page. I long for dialogue, and I don't. I am in dialogue. I have a voice. I have a story. I turn the page. And again, I will turn the page.

Sincerely,

Cara Levine

November 2, 2016

Dear Pierre,

How does being alone play into all this? Into the one-way correspondence, the life of the artist, the investigation of darkness? Do you think that being alone – not loneliness – is a critical link for the development of your own visual language? I have no idea if you are or have been alone for much of your life. I would guess though, as a studio painter, it must play a role.

For me, I relish time alone. I know I am an extrovert by nature, so it isn't that I don't like people, it is that something happens when I am alone. I explore. I let go of judgement. There becomes a place for creativity. Most importantly, I am able to watch, touch, open, the places of my mind that go unwatched/untouched/unopened most of the time. It is this inquiry that keeps me surprised and interested. It is from here that I learn about myself in darkness. I can evaluate if I really have a certain fear or if it is invented for me. It is from here that I can begin to look at the texture of my own shadow.

I want to know so much that comes with age. I want to know how you feel about spending time alone at 96. What is that like? Is it still great? Is being alive great at all? Are you complete? Are you looking at new darknesses as you near the end of your life? Is it scary? Humbling? Funny? Is it even darkness that you care about? I keep calling it that – yet I know you continuously have referred to your investigation as one into *light*.

Maybe I have been thinking about this all wrong. Maybe what we are talking about is not darkness at all, not the shadow cast, but a reflection lifted by light. Whose?

Sincerely,

Cara Levine

November 4, 2016

Dear Pierre,

I missed a day. I suppose that can happen.

For the last two nights there has been no rain here, and I have taken long rides on my bike in the evenings. Even though the air is drier than it's been, the feel of rain is still here. My tires peel on the street, making that sound and feel of a sticker coming unstuck from a page, as I turn corners, picking up leaves and dirt. The road is never *not* wet.

I spend a lot of time near to or thinking about water. I walk and ride and drive over bridges. I take my dog to the river's edge for daily walks. I swim – mostly in a pool, but still.

Here, in Portland (Oregon), the asphalt is always glistening. When I wake up and take Pigeon (my 8-year-old dog) out first thing in the morning, it is still dark, and the ground glistens underneath the light on the shed behind my building. There are always puddles, and in them, reflections. There are reflections of cable lines, tree branches with crinkling yellow leaves, reflections of bikes riding by and birds flying over. Sometimes there is a stillness in the puddles - the deep ones especially - that is so hard for me to fathom – why aren't they moving? Around the stillness of these puddles the rest of the street seems to slow down. Even the leaves falling from the trees appear to drift more slowly and tenderly to the earth. I don't think I have ever lived on such a quiet street. It is foreign and at times eerie in its stillness.

Sometimes the puddles do move, and when they do I am drawn in even further. What is happening in that black hole? The world is moving in a new way. The world is floating, it is inverted, it has no shape. The shape is changing right before my eyes! I find this uncannily alluring.

The darkness and its potential for reflection, its potential for lightness, is what you investigate. Is that right? That in something so dark, the hue black, there is potential for glistening – and how you direct that glisten is your mastery. Oh, what a dilemma! I can see how it might be unending. The light can go any which way, and why not? It is as if, once you welcome the light in, you must begin to chase it yourself. You switch roles from leader to follower. Where will the light lead? I can feel this. I am grateful you have taken on this task.

Sincerely,

Cara Levine

November 5, 2016

Dear Pierre,

I don't want to, but I feel I have to address the United States political moment in history. I cast my ballot yesterday. The election day is only 3 days away. I voted for the first female president of the United States.

How does this election play into our conversation? Into this artwork? Into your artwork? How can artwork matter in this story? I believe that in the depths of darkness there is a beauty and grace. There is heartbreak, and without pain we do not know love. I believe the cliché may be true. I believe the darkness that has been exhibited by the other presidential candidate, whose name I refuse to commit to paper, does not have that same depth. He does not possess the kind of darkness that comes from seeing the sides of pain one cannot imagine, or empathizing with a suffering and having no power to help. His darkness is shallow. It is childish and imbecilic. What this says about my country is in the heartbreak.

Somehow, much of this culture, from which I cannot deny a part of – as an American, we are all implicated - refuses to question authority, allows itself to be swayed by rhetoric and negativity. This failing on our part as citizens, as educators and cultural participants is where the darkness lies. We must switch courses.

Again, how is this a part of your and my conversation? I believe art is a reflection of our time. I believe your work can only be what it is because of the time in which it is being made: the global time and the personal time. We cannot extract ourselves from history.

To again and again return to the themes of dark and light mean to return to these themes in life. It is that shine, the glisten between dark and light where all the potential lives – all the unknown. I am afraid of what is black and white alone. That does not feel real. It does not tell the whole story – where is the third player? The grey? Or in your case, the refraction and movement of light?

Thank God for the light.

Sincerely,

Cara Levine

November 6, 2016

Dear Pierre,

I created a dance today. I had one witness. Her purpose was just that: to witness. I have been sad lately and I didn't know how my body would move. I learned a critical lesson from Anna Halprin, the renowned dancer, last summer that I kept returning to this morning. The lesson is: *wait and listen*. If you wait and listen, the movement will come and *it will move you*. You don't have to be the mover.

I began coiled forward on my knees, forehead touching the wood floor. My eyes were closed for the duration. Slowly, I touched the back of my head, then my neck, thighs, hips and back to my head. My face began to rest in my palms. From there I felt nearly immobilized. My head fell into my hands; my hands took all its weight. I began to be led by my elbows sliding subtly on the floor, knees still folded, face in my hands, head heavy. With this heavy head, my elbows pulled me across the floor, the head, then body following, everything relaxed and fluid.

Eventually, I made it to my feet and eventually my eyes were uncovered by my hands, my head freed. When this happened though, I felt adrift. I felt I had lost contact with myself somehow. I wanted to cry. I couldn't go back. My eyes stayed closed and I paused to listen again. I waited, listened and moved.

My eyes were closed or concealed through this whole practice. I was asked to move from a place where sight does not exist. My witness did the watching. I wonder what of my fear, sadness, surprise, she could see or feel? My witness has been in this practice for 30 years and confessed to me that at this point she feels an incredible amount of vicarious action as a witness. She said that as she watched she thought:

She is me. I am her.

My witness must've been 40 years my senior. We had never met before today, yet, we are the same. That admission changed my own experience of my dance. Suddenly, my fear, sadness, surprise was not just my own. As I moved, led by intuition, by previous movements, by rules inventing and dissolving, all in the "dark," behind closed lids, I was dancing for two. If for two, why not for all?

It seemed such a brave and generous gesture of hers to enter so empathetically into my dance. How does one acquire such bravery? Such empathy? Practice, I suppose.

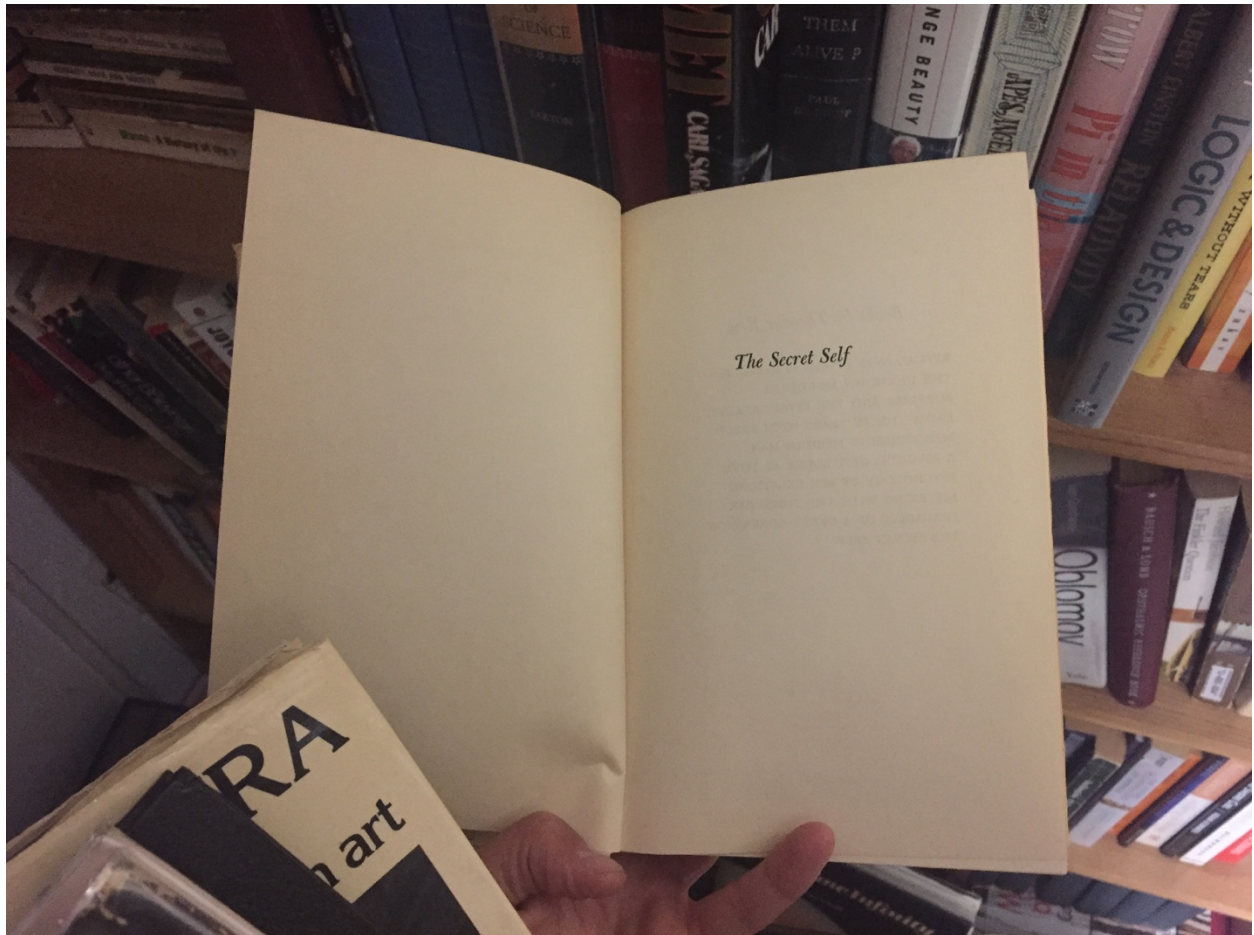
Can I look at your paintings Pierre, and say: *They are me, I am them?* What will that take? And from there, what new world will emerge?

Sincerely,

Cara Levine

November 7, 2016

Dear Pierre,



A book I found, whose first inside page seems especially relevant.

Sincerely,

Cara Levine

November 8, 2016
Election Day

Dear Pierre,

I have to breathe through this day.
I wish today I were a painter
I would go to my studio
and
make a mess.
I would be quiet and delicate sometimes
or loud and wild at others
I would know how to use my paint and brushes
I'd use only black.
It can say all the things in me that have to be said

Can words paint a page
like black oil on canvas?
How big the spread?
How wild the gesture?

---- // - W H A T W O R D S

T O D A Y T H E R E A R E N O W O R D S

T O D A Y O N L Y W A I T I N G T R Y I N G T O B R

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- - - - { }] [? ? . > > < ! ! ! ! ! ^ < - - - - - A N D B R E A T H E A N D

Oh today, I wish I was a painter

Sincerely,

Cara Levine

November 9, 2016 #2

Dear Pierre,

I am looking at the screen and my eyes are sore. It makes my neck tighten. I am prone to migraines. When I am having one, the rest of the world disappears. I believe one is approaching: I feel the front of my face tighten and my sensitivities go up. I often try to power through at this point – but even, already, my fingers do not want to type. I can feel the headache rolling towards the back of my skull. My fingers do not want to type because they are cold. They are cold because the headache is taking all my blood away from my extremities and into my crown. Soon my thoughts will become jumbled. I should stop. Its like a blanket that pulls over me. I pretend and pretend I can shake it off, but already, I feel it in my shoulders, my collar, its approaching.

It becomes, quickly, time for me to surrender under its weight. Its weight is comforting in fact. It has become familiar – this kind of darkness. It brings pain and disorientation, but no longer does it bring fear. I have also gained so much from this surrender. I have learned to be under the blanket. To pause it all. The choice is taken out of my hands – everything just stops.

In it: pillow on my head, often ice too, I submit. It feels like water flowing over me – now, the water is flowing lightly still, over me – but soon it becomes heavier. I fall from floating to sinking and further and further I drop. The water becomes heavy and the world dark. The further I drop the easier it becomes to be one with the pain that it brings. The pain is also heavy, and sometimes all encompassing, and often nauseating, dizzying. The further I sink, the further I fight those symptoms and it all begins to simply course together, like a river. I am flowing, I am being washed, weighted, dragged, pulled, pushed, like the way seaweed dances at the bottom of the sea. The pain moves me and eventually moves through me.

I need to let go.

Sincerely,

Cara Levine

November 9, 2016
The Day After

Dear Pierre,

In the dream from which I woke, Trump was standing on a bima in a synagogue making a speech. The Torah stood, dressed, behind him. After a swing of his arm, he smacked the scroll and it fell to the ground. One of the points of the handles landed hard and sent a vibration through the room. The congregation instantly gasped. Trump went on speaking!! I was aghast, stunned. Suddenly the Rabbi emerged, cutting Trump off and ordered the congregation out, saying: "Leave, get out of here! Go!" The people scattered and fled in terror.

Maybe I'll feel like I can write more directly about this soon. So many others have written, are writing. All I want right now is love – to give love, to feel love. I am terribly afraid. I am terrified. I am repulsed, humiliated, angered, but mostly speechless.

Sincerely,

Cara Levine

November 9, 2016 #3

Dear Pierre,

I've thought about you, Pierre, and this correspondence very much today. Why am I invested in it? Why does it matter? Why does art matter? Dialogue with our elders? Dialogue with our youth? Why does any of it matter, when it can all change in an instant?

I want to be the youth in this exchange.

Though I was the elder at the start of the day. At the start of my day I had to receive a group of young artists only moments after the crushing news of this election. What was I supposed to say? I got out of my car in tears, listening to Hillary Clinton's concession speech. I felt a flood. The students sat around the work table, some unable to make eye contact, others crying, all terribly forlorn. I poured myself some tea; I closed the outside door. I tried to contain us. I wanted to make them feel safe. Finally, when we had all sat, I lead: "I do not know how to lead this discussion," I said as my voice cracked and tears began to come. "I do not know how to lead this discussion yet I know we need it." I asked if any of them had *anything* at all they wanted to say, anything they wanted to be heard, to speak it then. I offered that we listen. That we listen closely, and with earnestness.

One student offered some beautiful wisdom. She said, all we can do is be kind to each other now. We held that feeling. We agreed. We listened.

And now, I want to be the youth: I want to yell and kick and scream. I want to wake up and have it all have been a bad dream. I want my elder to listen to me cry and to tell me this is part of a cycle of life, that this will pass, that we will get through. Pierre, you are 96. Such an amazing feat! You have lived through *so much*. Is this ok? Will we be ok?

On election day, yesterday, I saw documentation of multiple women in their 90s, even 100s, who voted for a woman to be President of the United States. I felt uplifted! I felt exhilarated! I felt assured. What that must have been like! To overcome centuries of oppression, to feel so near to the other side – an other side – and then not. And it's not just that she lost, it's that all indicators seem to point to a *reversal* of our progress. The country has demanded we walk backwards along the line we fought so hard to draw. Backwards in every conceivable way. I pray I am wrong.

Dear Elder – do you have any advice to give? Please, oh please dear elder, any wisdom to share?

I am listening.

Sincerely,

Cara Levine

November 10, 2016

Dear Pierre,

This is all about me.

I want to know more about you.

I wish you would write back.

Sincerely,

Cara Levine



Cara Levine <cara.e.levine@gmail.com>

Looking for Pierre Soulages

1 message

Cara Levine <cara.e.levine@gmail.com>

Thu, Nov 10, 2016 at 2:31 PM

To: museesoulages@agglo-grandrodez.fr

Dear Musee Soulages,

I am an american artist who was recently commissioned to make a piece addressing one of Soulages' early works. The exhibition day is quickly approaching and I have been hoping to make contact with him as soon as possible. I have written a number of letters to him about this correspondence and my interest in his work and sent them, near daily, through the contact page on his website. I am also reaching out to galleries, and now you, to see if I might make contact with the artist himself.

Attached is my most recent letter. It is a brief one. Please forward it along to him if you have the opportunity!

In light of the recent election news here in the U.S., I am ever-eager to engage Soulages about his feelings and how this news might effect his artistic practice.

Sincerely,

Cara Levine

**dear pierre 18.docx**

34K

November 11, 2016

Dear Pierre,

Sometimes your stroke of paint on the canvas is like a slash – its movement sharp and cutting. Sometimes it even evokes the edge of a blade. Other times, the shining black pigment soaks the canvas like tar to a road. Sometimes, it's as if each swipe of the palette knife is ticking off some innumerable count. Sometimes the paint is smooth and thick like frosting and other times thin and full of ridges like it was plastic being pulled taut under great duress. I can see my reflection in your still black pools.

They all speak to motion, symmetry and a-symmetry. Weight, balance and compositional play.

There have been times with color too. First, there was white. Sometimes it is left crawling in from the corners of the canvas, other times, screaming to get through from behind wide black strokes. The white seems to play as opposition to the black – creating vibration, movement and rhythm.

At times, there has been a lot of blue. Why? Where did it come from? Where did it go? As an observer and admirer, I love this blue. To me, it speaks your language but through a different tongue. There is a translucency to some of the blue that describes your motion as the painter. This description is somehow more vulnerable seeming than the same gestures made in black. Like the blue is describing your insides. It moves from light to dark. It stains, washes, conceals. The blue, your cerulean, then begins to appear with your black. Blue and black. They touch – blue over black, black over blue, one into the other, one becoming the other. They dance.

There have been other colors too. Ultimately though, everything is held in the black. I can understand if, at times, color just becomes too much to shoulder.

You are quoted to say: "Painting isn't just pretty or pleasant; it is something that helps you stand alone and face yourself." You face yourself, and with each stroke, you tell your story. With each piece, lengthening and strengthening the swell of your wake.

Sincerely,

Cara Levine

November 12, 2016

Dear Pierre,

Yesterday I wrote of your blue and black.
Today I wore blue and black.
I am still bruised by the state of my nation.

Last night, under a grey blue moon,
I soaked my body with a number of other bodies.
It felt like the only thing to do, to wash off this week.

I danced again this morning.
I began with eyes closed, facing the sun. I turned away,
and my vision was cloaked by blue and splotchy black.

When we touch it, it hurts. As it heals,
it falls down the body, changing shape,
but never quite letting go.

Sincerely,

Cara Levine

November 13, 2016

Dear Pierre,

The water is touching everything again here. The leaves hold beads on their skin. The street black is deeper. In the stillness from the shower, it becomes easy to forget the mess we are in – the flood that may only just have begun to leak in and spill forth.

Sincerely,

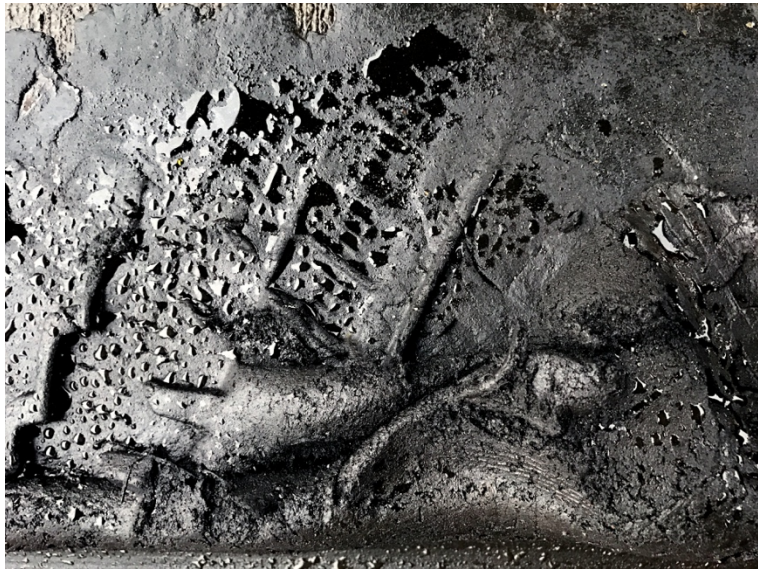
Cara Levine

November 15, 2016

Dear Pierre,

I made some pictures for you today.

I am making some with materials too. I think I am tiring of words and my body needs to touch materials now. I don't think I will be able to send them through email, but I will make sure to get them to you somehow.



Sincerely,

Cara Levine

November 15, 2016

Dear Pierre,

Last night I worked in my studio on some material approximations of your work. I grabbed some of the grease that sits in the tracks by my studio because it is the deepest black. I am making prints with it. They are black and full of life.

I used tape too – different types of black, shiny, matte, wide and narrow. It is nice to not use the word.

Here is what the grease looks like:



Sincerely,

Cara Levine

November 16, 2016

Cher Pierre,

Un ami m'a dit, si je vous écrirais en français, sûrement il vous arriverait. Je lui ai dit que je me sentais loin de mon désir de parler réellement avec vous. Je lui ai dit que j'essayerais une lettre française. Je vais écrire cela maintenant en anglais et le traduire - probablement mal - par google translate. Souhaite moi bonne chance!

J'ai un grand respect pour le langage. Je parle l'espagnol presque couramment. J'ai vécu en Espagne après le lycée. Je travaillais comme apprenti pour un artiste. Mon espagnol était si fluide au moment où je suis parti, j'ai trouvé plus facile à penser que l'anglais. Au collège, j'ai appris quelques japonais et ai vécu au Japon pendant environ 6 mois. C'était un langage si difficile à acquérir et j'ai trouvé tellement d'anglophones à proximité. Mais j'ai conservé certains. Plus tard, je me suis intéressé à la langue des signes. Je travaillais avec des adultes handicapés, un certain nombre d'entre eux sourds, et je voulais beaucoup d'avoir de meilleurs outils avec lesquels communiquer. Encore une fois, je l'ai perdu pour manque de pratique. J'aimerais beaucoup reprendre le signe une fois de plus. C'est une si belle langue - une articulation de l'esprit et du corps ensemble.

J'espère que cette lettre vous trouvera bien et que le français demande une réponse impatiente! J'ai moins de 14 jours pour l'exposition et continuerai d'écrire jusque-là!

Cordialement,

Cara Levine

November 17, 2016

Cher Pierre,

Sincerest apologies, I have to go back to English. Sincères excuses, je dois retourner en anglais. I don't think the French made much of an impact as it were – this continues to be a solo journey.

I want to go back to English because I seek a fluency with the chosen language of this correspondence that I do not possess with French. Once I hear from you about preference, I will be happy to make the change once more.

Tonight's thoughts lie herein: Mentorship. Lineage. Legacy.

Apprentice/Master
Student/Teacher
Follower/Leader
Guide
Muse
Speaker/Listener

Are these roles we all play? I see a continuum – the shape of your role shifts along time and also relation. Often, lately I find I am the mentor. Not as often, but still sometimes, the student. I seek student-ship. It has been true all my life. I am trusting – I am eager to learn. I am loyal. There is always an endless unknown. In this relationship, I often find I am seeking that studentship. I have ascribed to you, the role of the teacher – why? Who knows if you have any wisdom to share with me? What is my faith in that request?

Somehow I have faith in the relationship between artists, between young and older artists. Just today, I encouraged my students to write to their art-heroes. I said that in all likelihood, they would write back. Yet, I am deeply committed to this effort to connect with you, Pierre, so far without avail. Am I naïve? Am I hard-headed? Am I only making a collection of my own writing? How will I stop on the day of the opening?

Should I be concerned for you? Could you be sick, weak, feeble? In which case, again, I am simply an ongoing nuisance. With no response though, I do not think it fair for me to be cruel to myself.

Please allow me to speak or ask me to stop.

Cordialement,

Cara Levine

November 18, 2016

Cher Pierre,

A new day. A fast and full one. Full at times of tedium and haste. The tasks have seemed un-ending today, and still there are more. What makes some days feel like this and others feel tender and ripe with time?

I had a visit this week with a dancer with whom I hope to collaborate. We spoke about time. She is many years my senior, an advanced practitioner in her craft – a pioneer in fact. She leads a type of movement called Contact Improvisation. The way she defines it, one has to give up his or her center to the shared center, therein relinquishing control in order to traverse uncharted territory.

In our visit we discussed the pace of time: the *terrain of the moment*, as she referred to it. In this terrain, there exists a front and a back to the moment. If one can still him or herself in the moment just so, one may find its elasticity, its volume, its scale. Have you experienced this? Do you experience this in the studio? Or maybe, within color, density, oil?

I have experienced it, both alone and collectively. It is one of those life moments that you can understand only through experience. Then you know it to be true. It is a bliss moment – the spreading of time. It feels like the smear of thick butter on toast, the pull of water around your body after a deep dive, and of course, the abyss found in the eyes of one you love. You can swim forever – there is no forever – there is only the far and wide now.

How does art make this true? For us artists and everyone else?

A mentor of mine recently lectured at a college on the topic that sometimes the answer is in *not* making art. She was referring to our present political climate. I agree and ... it hurts. I also disagree, and that hurts.

It is as if we completely lost hold of the shape of this moment. It has since become grease slipping through our fingers, staining everything it touches yet never remaining fixed. It nebulous and wild, unkempt, tireless and exhausted. I want with all my might to STOP IT. I want to collect it up and stand back and take a look, slowly – where are the cracks? What will it take to repair them? Can it *please* be art? If not, then what!?

Today was part of the new paradigm, full of haste. We must slow down. It is only in haste that we make mistakes. We need a slow dance. I need a slow dance.

Cordialement,

Cara Levine



Cara Levine <cara.e.levine@gmail.com>

Pierre SOULAGES

1 message

Cara Levine <cara.e.levine@gmail.com>

Fri, Nov 18, 2016 at 8:38 PM

To: valentine@perrotin.com

Hello Valentine,

I hope you are well. Please pardon my english.

This is the second time I have reached out to your gallery in an attempt to reach Pierre Soulages. I am an artist working from one of his pieces for a new show to be exhibited in 10 days during Miami Art Basel in the US. I have been drafting letters to Soulages for many days now and am yet to receive a reply. The letters are creating a sort of compendium, yet I am still eager for a response and will continue to reach out until the exhibition date Nov. 29th.

Please pass these last three letters along if at all possible.

Most grateful,
Cara Levine

Contact: Valentine BLONDEL

Direct line: +1 646 627 82 81

3 attachments **dear pierre 24_french.docx**
80K **dear pierre 25.docx**
93K **dear pierre 26.docx**
113K

November 19, 2016

Cher Pierre,

I don't have so many words left tonight. Another defeat in the studio. How many times do we learn to make time for errors? I learn it, relearn it, relearn it. Each time is as painful as the last.

The air as become very cold here.

Every letter now feels like a letter from a post T***p alternate reality, that is impossible to navigate around. I have anger boiling in my belly that I didn't have when I began this correspondence. Anger and grief. Where can I put it? Here?

Your work is like night. It is like a walk in on an open street in December in the middle of the night, no lights. It is night where you can't see your foot in front of you. It is night where you can't reach for a body lying nearby. It is lonely. Your work contains the potential howl of nearby coyotes – yet there is no moon. It is a night where you hear a door slam but cannot find its source. It is abrasive in this way.

Do you find comfort in it?

Are you painting now? This week? Today? Does it help? Tomorrow, post-technological-studio-defeat, I plan to work with my hands. I need that. I believe it will help me to feel more like me.

I don't want to make anything with black in it tomorrow.

Cordialement,

Cara Levine