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So be it, see to it!

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It's how I end every one of my journal entries. The adage captures an assuredness I'm desperate to channel into every area of my life. So I close my writing by gesturing towards a wish and willing it into existence with those six words. The words are, of course, borrowed - lifted directly from Octavia Butler's iconic handwritten notes to self. Butler's manifestations, declarations and yearnings are scriptures I devoutly return to. And India Nielsen draws on them with the same reverence.

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This affirmative attitude—to state a fact as if it is so, regardless of its truth—is present in the work of Nielsen's hands. Nielsen, like Butler, is a fellow builder of worlds. Crucial to this effort is her deft handling of ladlefuls of references. Her works deconstruct - in the Derridian sense - lo-fi internet aesthetics, Catholic iconography, self-help tools, and popular symbolism, with the density of her subject matter echoed in her impasto painting style. All visual matter is fodder for Nielsen's ambiguous and, at times, inscrutable aims. Yet her smorgasbord lexicon is less about its individual elements and more about the tensions that arise in their forced and fictional encounters. These thresholds, where one idea meets another, take on a physical expression in the distinct ridges of paint that map the topography of her sharp mind.

Oftentimes, Nielsen will spiritually inhabit another artist or fictional character, metabolising their works or rendering their image in a style I can never quite discern as sardonic or an homage done in sincerity. Nielsen's overidentification with 'characters' is perhaps fundamental to her lived experience as a 90's kid and her childhood spent immersed in both the early stages of the internet and her grandmother's Catholic home. One such character is HIM (His Infernal Majesty), the queer-coded villain from The Powerpuff Girls and a recurring motif for Nielsen. HIM echoes across multiple paintings, but to what end? I do not know. The figure is both familiar and strange, bizarre enough to recognise but not rationalise its presence. Still, Nielsen paints with a confidence that trumps the charm of legibility.

Nielsen is generous; she cites her sources, scribbling those she appropriates from - Paul Thek, Mike Kelley, Paula Rego - in the grubby margins of her preparatory sketches. Her tendency to take note, affirm through text on paper, is Butler-esque, but unlike the former's forthright declarative statements, Nielsen tends towards the whimsical, the cryptic, and the performative. Her handwritten serifs curl in on themselves, an act of typographical self-defence. Her titles are often oblique, suggestive of a mood but entirely noncommittal. Nielsen adopts each guise as casually as trying on shoes and not unlike the adolescent impulse to temporarily become your favourite character in a movie you just watched. But, as it so often does, the mask slips, and a discernible subconscious spills, clamours, and fights to the fore.

The work is furiously funny, and catholic. Catholic in the encyclopaedic sense, and funny in its embodiment of a critical awareness and biting wit necessary to weaponise satire successfully. At the heart of the practice is language - its inherent limits and the corruptive power that those limits allow. In a new stained glass piece, Nielsen has created a visual Prayer To St. Dymphna or, in abbreviated form, PTSD. Dymphna is the patron saint of the mentally ill - another character from her Roman Catholic upbringing the artist chooses to summon. Within the glass panes, Nielsen leaves a note to herself: "we can do hard things." She self-soothes. The artist tackles the slipperiness of language: addressing the impacts of trauma in the eponymous acronym, but reworking its meaning to point towards the healing promise of faith and invocation. This work, like much of her others, boldly captures an "utter intensity," "cold and hot, hard and soft, gut-wrenching and deeply stilling", that Octavia Butler reminds us we should all strive for. Nielsen takes up the challenge and seems to dare us to do the same.

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