

Lullaby

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This year, I learned about the term “touch starvation”. It’s an actual medical condition that occurs when a person experiences little to no touch from other living things. It’s also known as “skin hunger” or “touch deprivation.” I spoke to an artist in Copenhagen who said that the government had been sending out frequent warnings about touch starvation and how to prevent it while the city was in lock-down. Some tips for prevention were covering yourself in blankets, self-massaging, and recounting previous contact.

I thought of all the times during lock-down my roommate and I would hug, clinging to the warmth of another human being as validation of existence. I thought of all the people living alone who didn’t have that luxury. How could a few extra blankets or a moment of self-induced friction replace that? I realize how lucky I was, how lucky I am -- that I didn’t

have to go more than a single day in this pandemic being truly alone. I also realized, being truly alone is something I feared the most.

Without the hum of a large box fan, a pod-cast playing in the background, my roommate clinking pans in the kitchen, I would be alone with myself.

What is solitude, but a mirror?

A mirror I wasn’t ready to look into because I was afraid I wouldn’t see a whole person - just the fragments of what I consume, who I’m around, dancing around in a body bag. I was so afraid of being alone that I lost myself in the pursuit of connection. That’s when I wrote “Lullaby” - a recognition of losing connection with myself and a plea for finding her.

Wish I knew how

To be alone when I am without you

I’m well aware

I may not know how to

I’m vying for attention that I’ll lose

The deed was up for grabs

But I’m the fool

The honorable mention goes to you

And I don’t need your pity or your doom

Don’t need your love unless it’s in full bloom

Sometimes it sees that we are both decaying

At times it feels I don’t know what you’re saying

So hold me tenderly just like a bruise

So hold me like I’m something that you’ll lose

Yes hold me in the wings of your despair

So hold me until I’m no longer there

These lyrics told me things I wasn't ready to tell myself yet. That I wasn't facing the societally-instilled guilt I felt for being alone or still. That in my thirst for human contact and validation, I was forgetting to hold myself first. That in the darkest times, the most important hand I needed to hold was my own. These realizations led me on a journey back to myself. Back to creativity as a spiritual practice, solitude as an invitation and dreaming as a bridge.

“Lullaby” is my own hand on my back, an exercise in self soothing.



Still from Lullaby

I wanted to communicate this as best I could visually, so I brought in Lancer Casem (director), Kesswa (actor), Jay Orellena (MUA), and Heaven (PA). The idea was to bridge the worlds of mindfulness, wakefulness, dreaming and reality. My creativity happens somewhere in the middle of all of those spaces, so this is the world we tried to create. Bringing together such a talented and in-sync group of people added a degree of magic that I could have never communicated alone. I spoke with both Lancer and Kesswa about how solitude and spirituality intersect with creativity.



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KESSWA

SMB: I wrote this song in a time when I was reconnecting with the spiritual side of making music. Is spirituality something that is connected to your creative process? What shape does it take?

KESSWA: Spirituality and creativity are very closely linked for me. I like to view my creative process as a spiritual experience that helps me access greater and deeper self acceptance. Often times my process pushes me to challenge my ego or the things I believe about myself. It pushes me outside of my comfort zone and encourages me to express myself with more ease and confidence.



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SMB: In the video, I wanted to create a bridge between “reality” and “dream state” - how do you perceive the relationship between these two and does that perception have any place in your creative process?

KESSWA: Sometimes my life feels like a dream. My creativity is directly inspired by my dream space. I’m deeply inspired by surreality and I think the dreamscape can be an abundant source of creative inspiration.

SMB: Another part of this song for me was learning to be better at solitude. What’s your relationship to solitude and how important do you think it is as an artist?

KESSWA: I LOVE solitude. I think solitude is very healthy, and as a self proclaimed introvert, I feel revitalized when I have ample alone time to be with my thoughts, dreams and feelings. Solitude is different than isolation though. I enjoy being able to enjoy my alone time and return to my social life when I have the energy and capacity.

LANCER:

SMB: I feel like it took me a long time to figure out how to be alone...

LC: I feel you, I feel you...and to enjoy it and not feel bad! I’m so goal-oriented, I have to unlearn that. I was talking to somebody the other day about when we relax, when we’re alone, why do we always feel bad? It’s like damn, I’m not productive enough, but damn, we need to do nothing for once and we need to be good at doing nothing.

SMB: This song and video had a lot to do with reconnecting to my relationship with spirituality. Is spirituality an important part of your creative process / daily life?

LC: I think now my practices are my morning rituals, nightly rituals and forming those routines. Especially with the year I had traveling, I was talking to my girl about it like we’ve been moving so much, how do we find a way to stay grounded? Those morning routines, nightly rituals, it really helps me slow the fuck down...Setting intentions...for the past six months I’ve been super on that. I’m so bad at committing to something. People will be like “this is my five year plan, I’m gonna do this thing at this time,” and I’m like, “I don’t know what I’m doing tomorrow.”

SMB: Yeah for sure, that helps so much. When I think of spirituality, it also makes me think about one-ness. I feel like when I lose connection to that, that’s when I really feel like I’m floating and the way I come back to it is grounding in my community and making art...that almost feels like “God” to me.

LC: I like how you put that into words and connecting it with community. That's exactly what being back home in Detroit reminded me of, like, damn I forgot that it's so easy to kick it with everybody and make work with everybody. We don't need like a fucking media company to sponsor us...But yeah, I fuck with the idea of spirituality being within the community. Being collaborators too, especially as a lens based artist, I'm really collaborating every time I work.

SMB: Is there a certain thing you need to connect on before you work with somebody on a project?

LC: I mean, I definitely prefer to connect with my collaborators and my homies and shit. These are definitely the projects, like more of my freelance work with the community, are definitely the projects where I'm connecting...

But, no, it's definitely preferred having a connection with somebody, it definitely helps making shit effortless. But, I think within the community, it's kind of inevitable. This is gonna be a Detroit-ass interview but, I think especially being in this city, being in this community, most people are kind of on the same wave...so it's not that hard to connect with somebody, fortunately... Thankfully my experiences have been great with collaborating.



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