

Rather the flight of the bird passing and leaving no trace
Than creatures passing, leaving tracks on the ground.
The bird goes by and forgets, which is as it should be.
The creature, no longer there, and so, perfectly useless
Shows it was there — also perfectly useless.
Remembering betrays Nature,
Because yesterday's Nature is not Nature
What's past is nothing and remembering is not seeing.
Fly, bird, fly away; teach me to disappear!

~Alberto Caeiro

Alberto Caeiro owes his notoriety as a writer to the demise of another poet. In 1935, at the age of 47, the obscure Portuguese writer Fernando Pessoa died. No spouse. No children. No heirs. A trunk, though, was discovered in his apartment stuffed with thousands of scribbled pages. From within these piles, a small crew of distinct voices emerged. Four in particular have since gained renown as some of the most celebrated writers in 20th-century literature: Alberto Caeiro, the unlearned, yet wise poet; the intellectual pagan Dr. Ricardo Reis; the ever impassioned Álvaro de Campo; and Bernardo Soares, who shared a birthday with Pessoa, along with other “mutations” of the poet's personal traits.

The exhibition, *Teach Me To Disappear*, is indebted to the writer and his internal brood. Many writers have used pseudonyms throughout history to conceal their identity; Pessoa though is in a league of his own. He birthed a full literary salon from within, each voice with distinct biographies and backstories not to mention styles and ideas.. The varied works included in this exhibition also come from a cohort of different artist voices. Far from masters of their trades like Pessoa's, this group of avowed amateurs enjoys each other's company along with certain shared preoccupations — paradoxes that bind memory, forgetting, narrative and fragmentation, loss and transformation. There's the nostalgic tinkerer who plays with antiquated devices and old recordings; the spiritual landscape painter finding animate energy in bleeding ink, a puzzling intellect who covets the material knowledge of craftsmen and an obsessive would-be curator constantly reframing and rearranging others' things. Welcome to the party.

Pessoa's heteronyms, or “orthonyms” as he described them, were not simply disguises, but personas that inhabited him. They dictated. He wrote. Often, these personalities referenced, responded to, and undermined one another. In this process of multiplying himself his own identity became diffuse, harder to see. As Alvaro De Campos wrote in Pessoa's most famous poem, *The Tobacco Shop*, “*I'm nothing. I'll always be nothing. / I can't want to be something. / But I have in me all the dreams of the world.*” In his own voice Pessoa acknowledged his diminished role as his literary offspring took shape, “I've divided all my humanness among the various authors whom I've served as literary executor.” If Walt Whitman

excused his contradictions by claiming that he contained multitudes, a generation later, Pessoa offered his multitudes the freedom to step forward and speak for themselves while he grew more faint.

In the current algorithmically driven attention economy, the pressure to mine our inner worlds and present them as a singular product increases by the day. In this light, I find myself looking at Pessoa with reverence. His refusal to condense himself into a singular voice serves as a quiet revolution against consumable identity. At times hastily written down, difficult to decipher, and with no apparent order, in the 70-plus years since his archive's discovery, it is still being translated and has yet to collapse into unification or aesthetic muck. Pessoa's personas act like a pack of mountaineers climbing a ridgeline of ideas from different locations. Even when they double back on themselves or come to a dead end, their varied accounts create a composite and ultimately fuller picture of the terrain than a single voice ever could.

I'm not sure where the assortment of objects and voices in this exhibition leads. They range greatly in subject and medium. Gauzy ink on paper landscape paintings live alongside objects derived from the final taping of Johnny Carson's Tonight Show before he retreated into seclusion. My inner circle of artists is less a mountaineering expedition than an eclectic potluck to which you, as a viewer, are now also a welcome guest. If you find a guest grating and their offering not to your taste, hopefully, there's another at the table with something worth chewing on. Inevitably, some conversations will trail off. Others may stir the pot. Like a good dinner party, the aim is not to reach a consensus or a conclusion. Allowing these threads and voices that overlap and clash with each other, instead, offers an opportunity to play beyond the notion of a singular self and get a brief glimpse of what it might feel like when "I" inevitably begins to disappear.