

Wet Excess

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**1st September 2021, Wednesday, a quarter to eight in the evening,
 151 Grand St, at the corner of Lafayette and Grand, Manhattan, NYC.**

Rain falls hard against the red bricks of a 1915 New Law Tenement building, engulfs the green lacquered gutters, and enters through the broken windows on the vacant fifth floor. Rain smashes through the exposed roof that was supposed to be redone and ready to sell, but then the pandemic hit. Water crumbles the faux plaster molding on the ceiling, seeps through the grout of the bathroom tiles, lifts linoleum plates covered in grease and mouse droppings, and fills the drawers of a student's kitchen where cockroaches survive, submerged, holding their breath. All over the city phones beep with notifications of the extreme weather report.

Water steeps the carpeting on the stairwell, where rain droplets, floor after floor, entangle themselves with the sallow stains left by illegal cigarette smoke, with the pee of a man evicted in 2010, with the spill of a 12-dollar detox juice, with the body fluids of two lovers who had nowhere else to go but the landing on the third floor of a rental in Soho after a party in 1982.

Water leaks through and reaches the ground floor, boarded up since April 2020, when the recently opened smoothie store declared bankruptcy. Rain drenches the plywood boards that stayed up through the protests that year in late spring, protecting the 5K high-end juicer from looters. Rain sips through and revives the embers of a secret fire that blazed the vacant building in June: it was a curfew night, and nobody, but a teenager with insomnia lackadaisically looking out of a window in Jersey City, saw it, and he didn't report.

Rain saturates the posters pasted onto the swollen wooden boards, and layer after layer seeps through the paper, melting the cornstarch glue. Ink bleeds out of the words "investor" and "antidote," stains the photoshopped skin of a model, and drips onto the chrome finish of an electric car and the graphically appealing promises of a private health insurance company. Water-liquefied lines create transparencies. Surfaces that were blocks are now see-through. The boundaries are blurred. The rain has freed the imagery from what it was forced to represent and allowed for fusion, arousal, and mess. After hurricane Ida leaves, the images soak and leak back and forth for months until one sunny winter day, desiring transmutation, they come off the wall.

**14th December 2026, a Monday, just before midnight,
 Building F, ground floor, Areal Frohburg, formerly known as Murwiesenstrasse 45, Zurich.**

The newly constructed building complex is silent. The cryptofinance couples who bought duplexes watch experimental documentaries with their headphones on. The tech people in their 20s who own studio apartments as an investment are still partying abroad, the creative-industry young families who moved into the five-room units are finally asleep. The floors are heated to allow a minimalist living room, aesthetic retro-inspired children-play, and walking barefoot when at 4 am the anxiety hits. The large, curtainless thermoregulating windows, cleaned each day by a woman who used to live there in the '70s when it was still "Die Gartensiedlung Frohburg" and now commutes two hours to her job, glistens crystalline capturing the ghostly shine of a full moon.

Out of the vents on the walls transpire a fresh breeze. It mimics the air from an open window and artificially pushes around a sleeping child's soft, blond curls. Cut flowers grown in greenhouses on the other side of the planet swing lifeless inside designer pots, as if under hypnosis. The water is safely locked inside silicon pipes, and only upon request, by unscrewing a marble knob, it trickles out of the stainless-steel faucets in orderly ribbons and disappears immediately, still guiltless, inside the matching metal grate. Above a spotless pleather couch of Danish manufacture hangs a painting that abstractly represents, through juxtapositions of colors and shapes, the horrors of the recent war.

A noctambulist girl in her teens, a guest at a friend's place, dreaming in a foreign language, sleepwalks out of her room. She goes up and down the elevator, feeling lost, and stumbles through unlit corridors and sliding doors until caught by a familiar but obsolete feeling, she finally wakes. Her face feels damp, sweat tickles the soft skin under her chin, her pajama clings to her unripe breast. It's dark around her, her eyes hitch, and a weird smell tickles her lungs. Her head feels light, euphoric, as if after dancing or falling in love with a classmate at school. She finds her phone in the pocket of her hoodie and, with a tap, turns on the torch. She is standing on a wooden floor set in an outdated pattern that resembles a chessboard: it feels damp and freezing to the touch. She flickers the torch around her, smiling: the room's bare walls are covered by the intricate and intoxicating growth of rare poisonous molds.

The title **Wet Excess** was inspired by the Ph.D. thesis "Wet Rest: Excess as Liquid Praxis in Art and Curating" by Lucy A. Sames, December 2021.

—Bea Orlandi