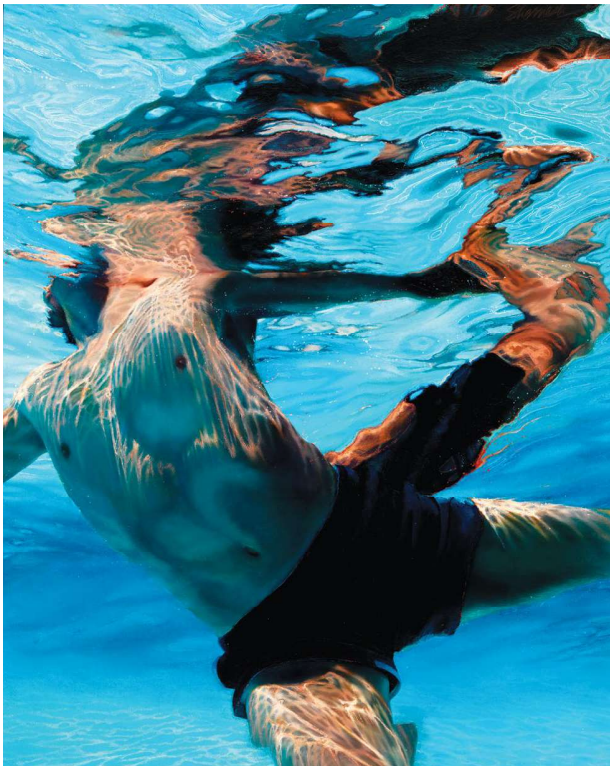


LORRAINE SHEMESH

Lunge, 2013
Oil on Canvas, 67 1/2 x 53 1/2 in



COURTESY GERALD PETERS GALLERY, NEW YORK CITY

LIZA MONROY

Love and Death and Faith and Fate and Marine Iguanas

Links between love,
death, and story

I make appointments with a by-referral-only tarot reader the way most people go to the dentist. At least I assume; I rarely ever go to the dentist (sorry, Mom). But I show up dutifully for my annual appointment at the sixth-floor walk-up studio in Brooklyn where the by-referral-only tarot reader offers gold fillings for cavities of the soul.

The tarot reader is a formidable woman with a large presence and equally sizeable bouffant, white but for one thick streak of intense purple. On the top floor of an unmarked brownstone on a picturesque, tree- and gaslight-lined street, she transforms question marks into periods. Her fee of a hundred dollars an hour seems nominal for the sense of certainty I get from her readings. She predicted the month I would hear the news of my first book's acceptance for publication. She told me the New Jersey apartment I was preparing to move into with my then-husband would leave me feeling like "Rapunzel in a tower," spelling the end of our marriage—it did and it was. She had no means of knowing that tower had been crumbling for quite some time. She told me my next relationship was cosmically doomed from the get-go and that guy ended up trying to set my apartment on fire.

Her insistence that clients record their sessions is my evidence of her accuracy. I have every session stored on my phone. You can always go back and listen; it's all on the record. Because of this track record of correct predictions, I believe what she tells me, though I also find my belief absurd. As a journalist and an atheist, I traffic in facts, in what can be tangibly proven—with this one exception. I am both faithless and devout, holding these contradictory ideas simultaneously. That her business relies on referrals alone serves as justification from the part of me that believes to the part of me that doesn't—it's not as if she's sitting in some storefront, illuminated by a cheesy neon sign, inviting in any random passerby. Dependence on referrals equals credibility; would you recommend a doctor who misdiagnosed your condition?

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In the spring, I land a summer job in Beijing teaching essay writing to Chinese students hoping to attend U.S. colleges. I'm excited and afraid; it's the farthest I'll have traveled alone, hired by people I've never met, about to be paid more than I have the right to earn in such a short