

Schiff on Partegàs

By Robyn Schiff • February 11, 2024



1:1 invites writers to reflect on a single work of art with focus, care, and imagination to expand how we view, receive, and write about art. *1:1* is organized and edited by [Annie Buckley](#).

Near the gate to a very old graveyard in my hometown, an oak tree, planted too close to a grave 200 years ago and counting, has uprooted a headstone and grown tall with it embedded in its trunk, so the headstone, subsumed into the tree trunk now, looks down upon the grave it marks. A few inches off the ground at present, it's high enough to have alerted me at the young age when I first encountered it that stasis is an illusion. I suppose it could have happened the other way around: a grave dug too close to where an oak tree had already been planted. Or maybe "planted" is too strong a word. Perhaps, when the grave was new, wind volunteered a tree beside it. Whatever the narrative, there they are, risen and still rising together, tree and gravestone, at a rate that looks like stillness, moving at a clip called eternity.

That graveyard combination came to mind when I saw Ester Partegàs's sculpture [Line \(laundry baskets\)](#). Here, entwined within one another under unknowable circumstances, are two objects: a wooden high chair of the commercial variety one finds in family restaurants, all four feet safely on the ground, for now, has become embedded within the openings of something even more mysterious. Slathered in dreaming pastels the shades of a Piero stands a precarious fragment that recalls in its arched contours both the common drudgery of a broken plastic laundry basket and a monumental ruin with the powerful iconic windows of the Roman Colosseum. Grotesque public violence? Small domestic obligation? Whatever it is, it's propped with a makeshift stack of bricks because it's increasingly unstable, taking the high chair into itself imperfectly between, among, inside those arched openings, plotting a tangled grid of strange interpositionings. The title *Line* carries a minimalist formalism, but the sensation of following the lines of this assemblage is pure vertigo, brought on when I consider the coursing living force of lineage. How far has a line come to meet me here, and how far past me will it continue?

In an essay about [Piero della Francesca's Resurrection](#), painted in the 1460s and still hanging in the artist's hometown, John Berger writes,

The images convincingly represent men, trees, hills, helmets, stones. And one knows that such things grow, develop and have a life of their own [...] Consequently, when here their forms are made to exist in perfect correspondence, you can only feel that all that has previously occurred to them has occurred in preparation for this presented moment. Such a painting makes the present the apex of the whole past.

By contrary drive, in Partegàs's imperfect anti-correspondences, you can only feel that all that has occurred in preparation for an ongoing collision of forms whose tragedy is still unfolding. Such sculpture makes the present a temporary incident of a past flung violently beyond us. The risen Christ is at the center of Piero's *Resurrection*. Undertaken in a time of war, the center of Partegàs's doomsday clock called *Line* is the emptiest high chair I've ever seen.

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Featured image: Ester Partegàs, *Line (laundry baskets)*, 2023. Courtesy NoguerasBlanchard. Photo: Roberto Ruiz.

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