

Dana Wood Zinsser: Tender Shepherd

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Tender shepherd
Tender shepherd
Watching over all his sheep
One say your prayers
and Two close your eyes
and Three safe and happ-il-y fall asleep

Tender shepherd
Tender shepherd
let me help you count your sheep
One in the meadow
Two in the garden
Three in the nur-ser-y fast asleep

Dana Wood Zinsser's *Tender Shepherd* is a mournful, repetitive, pastel nursery rhyme. Fat bruised baby cheeks drip from cherubic faces aged with grief that howl amid fishing lures, grapes, air fresheners—offerings dangled to bait the

lost. They surround a central, Christ-like figure wrapped in the body of an overripe strawberry dog—Jesus with the lamb. They huddle close together, away from the edges of the paper, as if overlaid saturation will save them from dissolution, but what they create is an unnerving pareidolia, faces on the tip of your tongue that vanish before the name is uttered. There is no chance of settling into permanent form. Their bodies evaporate into a decaying abstraction against their desire to remain fixed in time.

Zinsser's black and white works bring the amorphous dissolving figures of her larger multicolored paintings into detailed focus. *A Beautiful Broth*, *Spiral Rabbit*, and *Power Bottom Feeder* present a series of figures oscillating in and out of submersion. They appear weighted to the swamp's underwater floor, consumed in incubatory liquid and surrounded by amphibians. When they lift their heads above the waterline, perhaps for air, what they consume is a large glass of the broth they've just labored to emerge from.

Tender Shepherd's title work references "The Feast of Venus" by Peter Paul Rubens in figuration, sentiment, and scale. In his sprawling depiction of Veneralia, Rubens honors Venus Verticordia, the goddess of emotional transfiguration. Zinsser's figures melt and vaporize into one another in a vast, obsessive emotional landscape composed of thousands of imperceptible dots. Each painting takes hundreds of hours to bring to form through stippling, an arduous yet therapeutic process. The artist seeks emotional transfiguration through the works' frenetic creation, and the result is an immortalizing of the beloved departed reminiscent of Flemish Renaissance work in its quasi religious reverence for its subjects. The viewer is dragged into a swirling maelstrom of collective memory made in painful repetition, like teardrops slipping through cupped hands.

—Toniann Fernandez