

he was finally coming home for good. From where I now stand I can see that all of us who have been watching our soldier, but pretending we haven't, can see our soldier shaking his head with tiny careful movements as he raises his right hand to deposit the wad of uncounted dollars in the chest pocket of his digitally rendered camouflage uniform. And from where I am now standing I think: *His uniform looks like one of action, not the kind selected for the beginning of a leaving.*

And now the mistaken voice they hired is announcing that the plane is now *almost* ours. And now the people who had the plane before us are coming down a tunnel. And now, outside, the men in uniforms of a corporate country are tossing those people's belongings onto trailers that will transport them to conveyors that will allow those belongings that belong to those people coming down the tunnel to either follow them onto more planes or go to the place where they hope to be reunited. And soon it will be our turn.

And from where I am standing, I am now watching our soldier work the tobacco that has been in his lip. I am noticing how our soldier, with nowhere to spit, just sucks off the juices and swallows. That our soldier is working to extract the most out of what is left before he leaves the remains in a proper receptacle. And I am thinking: *This is another protocol he could have been trained for, maybe in courses called Civilian Transportation Etiquette.*

And from where I am standing, I am now watching my soldier work his pocket computer before that too will have to go. And I ask myself: *What words should come from those thumbs?*

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MELISSA WEST

Look!, 2011

Monoprint with linoleum block figures, 6 x 4 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST