



Picture Dictionary

Kristen Eliason

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As much memento as memento mori, Kristen Eliason's Picture Dictionary resists easy summaries. This full-color collection, straddling the lines of denotation and connotation, will force you to rethink the nature of language, observation, beauty, and grief.

"At first glance, this astonishing book appears to be an ingenious account of a young American's year in Japan, told through a 'picture dictionary' of anecdotes, usage notes and etiquette tips. But as this tale unfolds, a second, shadow narrative begins rising to the surface: an unbearably abrupt and severe loss suffered in another time and place. Suddenly the surface narrative, with its sour-sweet tastes, its new syllables, its nets of oranges, pink shirts and pickled plums, feels alive with pain, pain pricking through the skin of this text in nervy, exquisite relays. Eliason's Picture Dictionary is a ravishing book about the inability of the heart to die with the dead, the sad burden of coming to know world in all its various and devastating beauty. - Joyelle McSweeney

"Most of this doesn't translate,' Kristen Eliason's clear-eyed elegy Picture Dictionary must finally concede: not those beautifully impenetrable kanji characters, not the misfired conversations between the American girl in flight and her Japanese hosts, and certainly not the grief that follows a lover's accidental death. This book attempts to wrestle what cannot be translated into some kind of order - not to explain or to solve anything, but to contain sorrow by giving it a comprehensible structure. As we proceed through the narrative parcelled into minute components in Eliason's dictionary, we piece together a life - that is to say, we remember, and that act of remembrance offers itself as a bulwark against the ineluctable solitude of human experience." - Kimberly Johnson

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