

## New York, October 2021 by [Eli Ping](#)



1 2

Eli Ping, *Monocarp*, 2021. Detail. Canvas and resin. 125 x 27 x 17 in. Courtesy of the artist and Ramiken, New York.

I've lived my entire life in cold-weather cities. I was born and raised in Chicago and have lived my adult life in New York. I associate cities with the color gray. I'm tired of the city. I think about moving with my wife and our five-year-old son outside of the city, but I don't feel comfortable there. My wife's family has a summer home in Michigan. Walking on the road near her family's house, men in pickup trucks have driven at me, running me off the road's shoulder.

When moving around the city, I'm alert to the possibility of violence. Men who look like me look me in the eye in a hard way. I used to get into fights. I was almost killed in a fight with three men. As they encircled me, I stepped backward and lost my footing on a rain-slick curb and fell to the ground. One of the men crouched over me with a knife, stabbed at me, and used the weight of his body to try to drive the blade through my chest. Using my pinky as a fulcrum, I grabbed the blade by the hilt and took the knife. With the knife in my hand, he froze as I sprang to my feet and drove him and the others back as they tried to re-encircle me.

I haven't been in a fight in more than a decade. I want to get home safely to my family, but I still see things that anger me to near violence: a man threatening to choke an elderly Chinese woman; an unmasked man berating a woman who moved away from him on the subway. I pull myself back from the threshold. Nothing good can come from a violent confrontation, and lots of tragic things can.

My studio looks onto a corrugated steel wall, streaked with gray dust from the neighboring waste transfer station where the city's construction debris is ground into particulate. Above that, the windows frame a solid block of sky. In the studio I move through different states as I work: malaise, sorrow, anger, elation. I don't elaborate too much on any of them. I watch them pass as they pass through me, as my body and hands stay busy. In its entirety, there's a great pleasure in that. The pinky on my right hand, which saved me from the blade, is immobilized. I don't notice it anymore.

It's late afternoon on a Friday and I'm driving from Brooklyn over the Manhattan Bridge into the city. Adam is in the car seat behind me. Orange light falls slantwise across the East River onto the faceted topography of the lower Manhattan skyline. This weekend, I'll walk with my family and run into friends on the streets below the newly constructed, glass-clad residential skyscrapers. We'll sit for a meal as I commit to another season in the city, or as many as it takes.