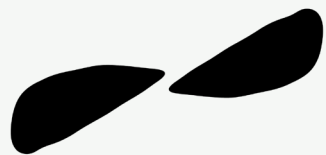
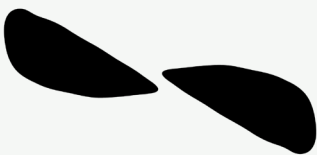


SALMON CREEK JOURNAL
2026





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Salmon Creek Journal
Washington State University Vancouver

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

WSU Vancouver campus is located on stolen unceded land of the Taidnapam, Chinookan and Cowlitz peoples since time immemorial.

A NOTE FROM THE SALMON CREEK JOURNAL STAFF

Dear readers,
Is anyone else *dizzy*?

Between schoolwork, jobs, keeping house, making time for family and friends, and the constant bombardment of increasingly perplexing world news, it's easy to feel overwhelmed. Since its conception in 1997, Salmon Creek Journal has experienced some disorientation of its own. As a publication run by college students who inevitably graduate, SCJ frequently welcomes new staff members. This year's staff are deeply grateful to our predecessors who strived to keep the Salmon Creek Journal alive. We have inherited something so precious.

This particular SCJ team is fortunate and thankful to have received the support of Adam Bates and Eric Scott. They have cheered us on and offered us valuable guidance all year long. Noah Matteucci, Avantika Bawa, and ArtX as a whole also deserve a special thanks for collaborating with us (and being incredibly cool). Most importantly, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to the artists and authors who submitted their work and trusted us to elevate their voices. Your creativity fuels this project. The Journal couldn't be here without all of you.

The 2026 Vertigo issue of Salmon Creek Journal is a whirlwind of life's ups and downs—from love and loss to longing and lunacy. Whether tapping into personal experiences or imagining new worlds, our contributors poured so much emotion into their work. The wide variety of themes that their creations encompass serve as a reminder that being a human is messy, but there is power in embracing discomfort: when you feel unbalanced, lean into it and learn from it. In this world that never stops moving, it is more important than ever before to focus on the things that bring you joy and keep you grounded. We hope that something within the following pages resonates with you and offers an antidote to your spinning head.

Happy reading,
The 2025-2026 Salmon Creek Journal Staff



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2026 THEME ARTIST STATEMENT

“The distortion of the human form dually fascinates and disgusts me. I am most interested in finding the line that separates the feelings of desire and disgust and attempting to trigger both simultaneously with a perversion of the human body.

The decision to use the heads of fish comes from a personal observation of the lack of empathy offered to fish due to the level of difficulty that comes with attempts to anthropomorphize aquatic species, with their blank, unexpressive eyes and gaping mouths. The selective empathy we give to animals we can more easily “humanize” mimics the way in which women are stripped of their personhood when sexualized and dehumanized in the eyes of the patriarchy.

I use these two concepts in tandem to create paintings that weaponize an audience’s difficulty empathizing with fish and nude women. I want to create a kind of cognitive distortion in which an audience is both attracted to and disgusted by a single figure at the same time.”

- DANIELA MACIAS



ODALISQUE (MERMAID, INVERSED)

2025, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS
DANIELA MACIAS



“The unreadability of facial expressions and body language joins the central focus of objectification, dehumanization, and the loss of identity that follows the stripping of autonomy when patriarchal violence reaches the female form through violent, sexual domination. My work continues to explore the history of the exploitation of the female form as a method of visual violence against women. Replacing the human head with that of a fish immediately forces a barrier between subject and audience, leaving only the body language of the subject to allow for communication to be transferred and empathy to be extended. However, the body language of the mermaid is paradoxical, her body relaxed and tense simultaneously. Her inability to communicate is in part due to the loss of her identity as a figure removed from all contexts to better serve as a vessel for patriarchal desire and sexual domination. Despite the separation between reality and the canvas, the ever-present “male gaze,” as coined by British feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey, continues to penetrate and violate the female subject. She is reduced to an object purely for the sexual viewing pleasure of a presumed male audience and is positioned in specific ways to draw attention to the most titillating aspects of her form.” - Daniela Macias

OLYMPIA (MERMAID, INVERSED)

2026, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS
DANIELA MACIAS



**TO THE PEOPLE PLEASER THAT CALLS ME MEAN
(YOU MAY BE RIGHT)**

BETHANY FISCHER

It must be so fine
How your troubles made you so tolerable,
And your problems made you so kind,
And your flaws made you so likeable.

You'll never know the ache
Of rebuilding your angry self.
To regrow a dead tree
And no one stays to help,
Because the fruit it bears isn't sweet.

You must hear a lot of laughter.
You must've healed quickly.
You must save a lot of water
Because loving you is so easy.

Sorry, I don't mean to sound bitter,
Must be the fruit.
I'll try to be better
But I fear this rot is in the roots.



“I am a Ukrainian American local artist whose work is primarily inspired by nature. Many of my works have a whimsical, escapist energy. When I'm not working with ceramics, I am often working with oil or watercolor paint.”

- Masha Yaremenko

DESIRE
STONEWARE
16"X8"X10"
MASHA YAREMENKO

THE VANITY OF HOPE

SAMI ROBINSON

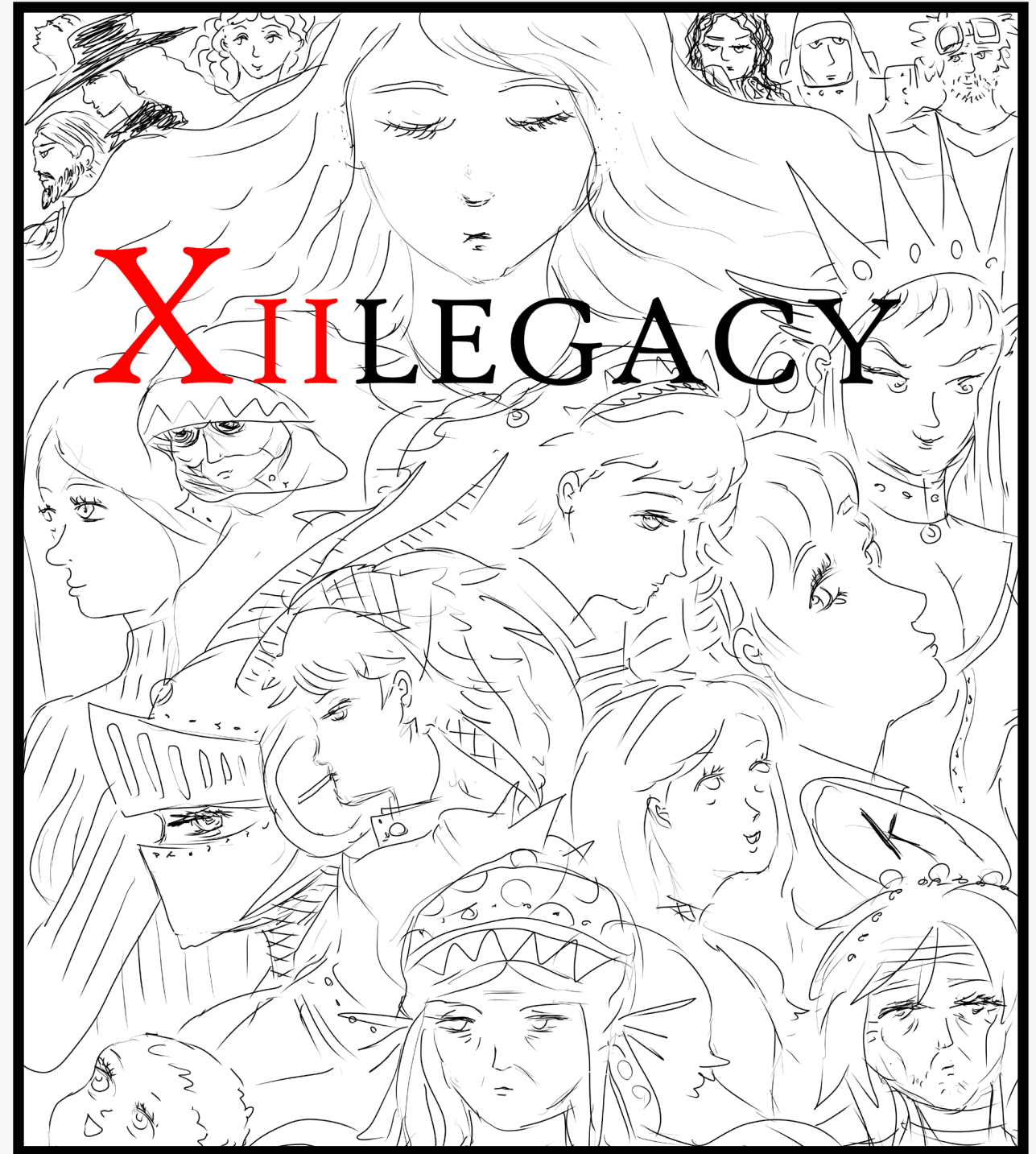
Above the dense tree line, I see the faithful light atop the old barn. Dad grew up there with his mother in the kitchen cooking saltless casseroles, while his father hung out down the road shooting back beers and gunning down the empties. The light offers a suggestive wink each summer we pass it by.

Dad offers me little of his childhood, only that he survived by ripened berries in the summer months and rainwater in the rest. His scars offer phantasmic glimpses into his former life, where he escaped with only grass stained knees and thorns stuck to the soles of his feet.

The months before his escape, he planned deliberately, so he says. One summer night as he lay stargazing, he claims the wind whispered to him a request: *stop trimming the grass*. So, he did. And as spring months gave birth to summer, the grass grew too tall. His mother, bless her, at duty with her casserole, watched the growing grass from the kitchen window, eventually condemning her idle son: *you trim that grass, or leave*. So, he left with his green knees and punctured soles, offering a polite nod to his father who he passed by along the way, who returned only a scowl because he forgot he had a son.

His mother still stands at the kitchen window constructing her saltless casseroles while his father has since moved further down the road onto hard liquor. He comes to change the faithful light bulb every six months before returning to his hovel. When the light winks, rest assured he is due for home soon.

On this summer's day as we drive past the beckoning barn, Dad inhales sharply and moves to massage the memory stained to his knees. I picture his mother at the kitchen window making her saltless casserole, looking out over the too-tall grass, knowing that she is the only one with the appetite left to eat it.



XII LEGACY
DIGITAL
CHRISTOPHER TURK



CHOWDER

COLORED PENCIL, GOUACHE PAINT, TEMPERA PAINT
EMILY WANG

Become Connected
Helios Lochlainn

When you pause on the grass
and look ahead,
on the ground near your shoes
¿do you see the dragonfly adjust on a blade,
turn to look at you too?

When you walk down the sidewalk,
¿do you drift to the side to lay a hand on the trunk
of a tree planted there
to make the grey rock seem less barren?

When you drive a long distance,
¿do you watch the trees go by the windows
or the mountains march towards you
or the dry grasses dance in the wind?

¿Why is it so hard
to feel connected to
the beautiful world around us—
a world we are part of
and
a world that is part of us—
when everything is so *electrified* with life?
It's all *alive*,
all here and breathing with us.

Even the rocks roll and tumble, play in the water,
shedding old versions of themselves
as water-dwelling creatures
and the water itself
together carve into its tough surface as though
it's only cold butter.
Rocks dance and splash and make artful designs.
Trees grow and expand and *reach*
for the sun
and for each other.
Rats like to drive tiny cars,
and respond better to stress once they can drive.
Horses recognize their
friends, family, mates, herd
by smell
and get excited when they reunite
with one of their own.
Dogs adopt orphaned kittens,
and cats adopt orphaned puppies.
Elephants grieve the death of their partner
just like we do.
Horses bond with another horse's foal
so completely that
they start producing milk for their new child
even though
they never gave birth to them.

¿Why is it so difficult to feel connected
to a world full of creatures
who have rich emotional lives like we do?
¿Why is it so difficult to feel connected
to a world that is so *alive*?



ORCHID
STONEWARE
5"X5"
MASHA YAREMENKO



“Six Grandfathers was the name of the rock formation before it was blasted and carved into what is now known as Mount Rushmore. The shaping of Mount Rushmore involved violating treaties, forcing Native Americans to leave their land, and defacing a sacred site.”
- Angelica Perov

SIX GRANDFATHERS

2025 DIGITAL
ANGELICA PEROV



THE WOUND


AVA WISELY

carved open again by a phantom's knife
blood spilling across flower petals, the remnants of a good dream, once rare
now flourishing in the fields
of my mind's eye.
it juts out, like a mangled branch in an otherwise calm river
or an ugly neon strobe light, distorting the colors of the painting and making them all
the same awkward hue

the sadness sprouts from nothing at all
a chemical imbalance, a hormone dipping too far past the proverbial horizon line
in a way, that makes it a little less painful
but no less raw.
knowing that there's no monster in the dark
doesn't necessarily erase the fear.

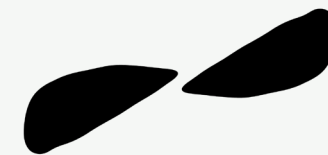
and i suppose, it shows how much i've grown
past all the gnarled delusions and comforting blankets of despair
past the justifications and reasons why my life is the worst it has ever been and will ever
be again
but the sorrow still stirs my blood sometimes, like an itch i don't want to scratch
like a dog pawing at the screen door, howling for food that i can't give anymore.

i can't see it as anything other than a lie, because i finally remember how i felt mere days
ago, and
i finally don't feel like this has always been
my mental state.



there are plenty of things to be devastated about in this life.
but my mind can no longer grasp at straws and convince me that the sadness is needed,
required, deserved.
i will have uneasy dreams tonight, and the night after. but i am now old enough to
recognize that they will pass.

it no longer feels like a platitude.





“We bought it before we knew he was crazy.”
- Luke Higgins

UNTITLED 3
PHOTOGRAPH
LUKE HIGGINS

FIFTH HORSE

2025 ACRYLIC ON CANVAS
VINCE PHARO





COUNTING STEPS

CHRISTOPHER WILEY-SMITH

I remember the hill first. It sloped down toward Harvey Scott Elementary, grass worn thin by decades of shoes and winter rain. In fall it smelled like wet paper and metal. At the bottom sat the kindergarten yard, fenced in and low, a world scaled to small bodies. The fence was green. Paint flaking. My hand fit easily through the bars. Cold metal.

Each morning a crossing guard stood at the corner with yellow flags raised. The fabric snapped when cars stopped too fast. Exhaust lingered. Parents lingered too, just long enough.

My brother Alex and I sometimes walked together. We were close in age, close in step. The building felt too big, its hallways humming under fluorescent lights that buzzed like insects behind glass. Some days it pressed in. Tight. Audible.

Alex needed things to stay the same. The route. The order. The face at the front of the room. He didn't say this. His body knew it.

One morning, his teacher was out.

A substitute.

In the car, Alex went quiet. He stared out the window as Mom turned left toward the school. I remember the click of my seatbelt. Vinyl sticking to the backs of my legs. I grabbed my lunch and got out.

He didn't.

He said the substitute was going to kidnap him. He said it calmly. Certain. As if naming weather.

When Mom tried to coax him from the car, he wrapped his arms around the seat and screamed. Not a tantrum. Panic. The sound seemed to come from his whole body. Mom's hand hovered near his shoulder, then pulled back. Parents stopped. Kids stared. A car horn blared once, sharp and impatient. My backpack dug into one shoulder. I watched the asphalt. A crack ran through it like a fault line.

Then it ended. The substitute met him at the door. A red cardigan. A smile that held. The fear drained from his body. He sat. He stayed.

The bell rang.

He didn't refuse school the next day. Or the next.

But that morning stayed. It lodged somewhere behind my ribs. I watched him more closely after that, how he checked doorframes, how he paused before stepping into rooms.

How he memorized exits without looking like he was doing it.

I thought courage meant ease. Forward motion. What I saw instead was endurance. Staying. A smaller verb.

Later, I remember the taste of rust at the drinking fountain. The water ran warm at first, then cold enough to sting. A boy behind me hummed the same four notes over and over. Somewhere a locker slammed. The flicker in one hallway. The light never quite steady. The way the playground felt safer than the classroom. Outside, Alex could scan the edges. Decide.

Sometimes the P.E. teacher, Mr. Wong, brought out a giant orange parachute, the color of a warning cone. The nylon smelled faintly of sweat and dust. It snagged once on a sneaker and everyone laughed out loud. We lifted it high, arms burning, then ducked underneath. The air collapsed into a shared hush. Fabric brushed my hair. Someone coughed. Inside, no one had to perform.

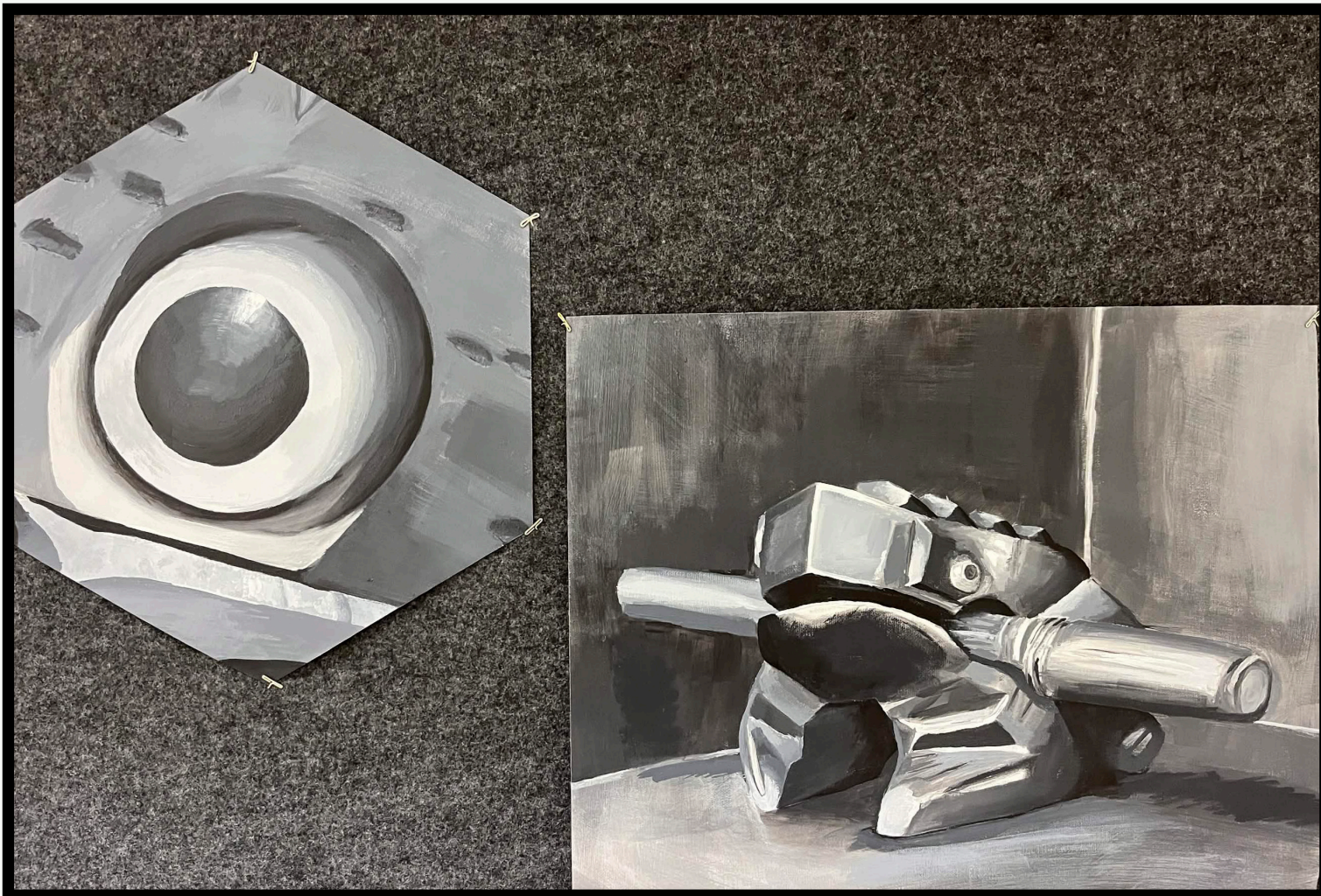
The building still stands. When I pass it now, the windows seem smaller than I remember. The hill feels shorter. Memory exaggerates incline. Children still cross the street under raised yellow flags.

I wonder who is counting the steps.

"This is a lyric essay recalling a childhood morning outside Harvey Scott Elementary, where a substitute teacher's arrival brought an unexpected window into my brother's anxiety — and into a quieter kind of courage."

- Christopher Wiley-Smith

“A wooden frog instrument - Used to entertain frogs and humans alike.” - Amelia Newberg



MARIO

2026, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS
AMELIA NEWBERG

THE BLACKSMITH'S PLEA

BETHANY FISCHER

The most honorable thing
a smith can craft
is not a sword.

It is the cast iron
By which we fill our children's bellies.

It is the door hinge
By which I open my home to you.

The horseshoe is not noble
because of its use to the calvary,
but rather the rides it enables
on long summer days.

The iron arrow-head is not valiant
because it can pierce a man's flesh,
but rather how it pierces the flesh of a deer
that we do graciously take from the forest
When we are hungry and cold.

These hands are scarred,
but they were not made for violence.
These burns are not ones inspired by
the raging flames of war
but the fire of a hearth.

We have romanticized the forge
in a way absent of love and warmth.

You have tried to put anger in this metal's heat,
but there is no creation of destruction or hate
that will outlast the gifts I've made for you.



CJTRPG

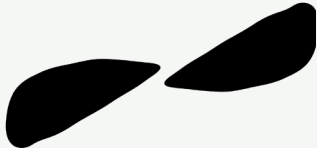
CHRISTOPHER TURK

Level 1 and having fun
Getting' XP and living free
Side questing and being a NPC
Not final, but the fantasy spun
To the golden sun

Cure to cura
Come on curaga
Big swords and big parties
Dragon questing in a dungeon destiny
Tales to trails
Trying not too fail the world

Need a crit
A win and good hit rate
Night after dreams
I see stars in the ocean
Summons all around
And bosses every day

Workin' my stats
No con, mid wis,
Enough strength to grind
Looking for luck
And I don't give a run
Without saving twice



MUD ON THE WHITE

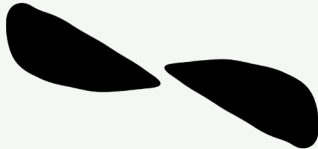
SAMI ROBINSON

her womb betrays His desires
So, she suffers a consumption
That tastes of nickel and hyacinth.
But where does He fit
Into all of it?

her womb is perfumed, she says.
So, He marches His muddy shoes
Down her hallway and into her room.
Before they breathe new life

she plays dress-up in white.
And He comes and soils her
With His muddy soled shoes.
she bites as He breathes her in

Until the girl feels nothing again;
her womb now satiated
Because motherhood is all It ever seeks.
But where does she fit into all of it,
Now that it's complete?





ONE SHORT DAY

2025, LINOPRINT
AMELIA NEWBERG

“This is a commemorative print celebrating the day I got to spend in California with my long-distance best friend!” - Amelia Newberg

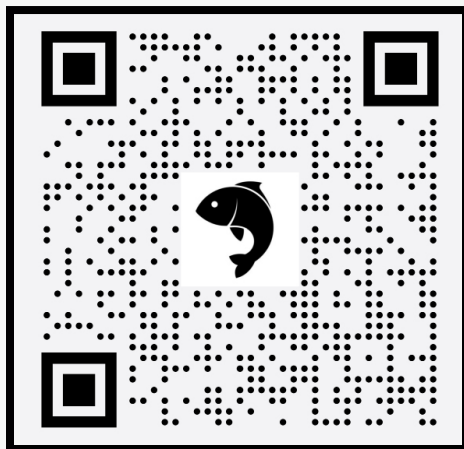
SILLY

COLOR PENCIL ON PAPER
KOI





SCAN BELOW TO ENJOY FULLY!

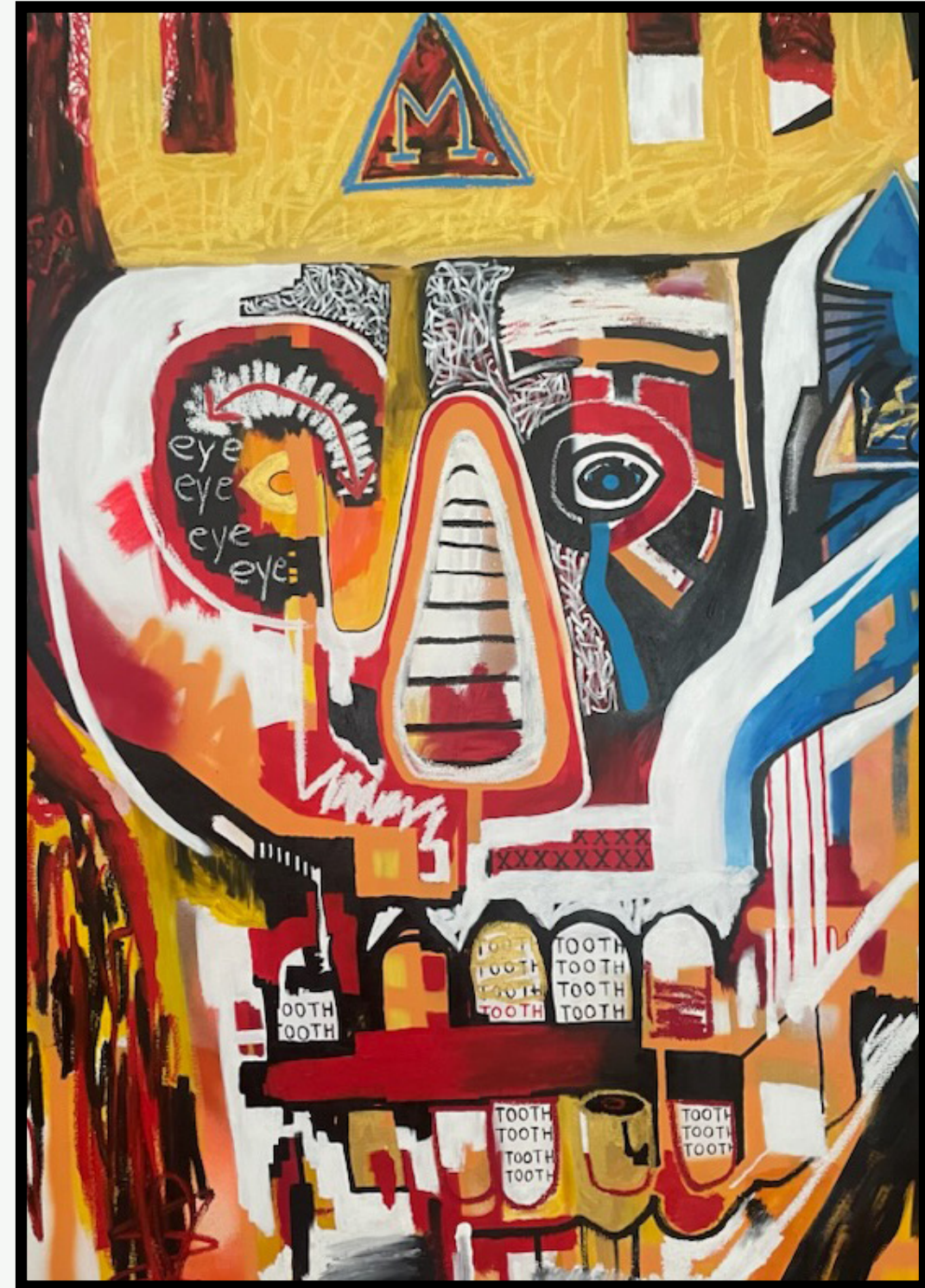


GHOST JIG 13

2024 SHORT EXPERIMENTAL FILM
CHRISTOPHER TURK

KING SOLOMON

2025 ACRYLIC ON CANVAS
VINCE PHARO





SPRINGTIME

2025 ACRYLIC ON CANVAS
11"X14"
MASHA YAREMENKO

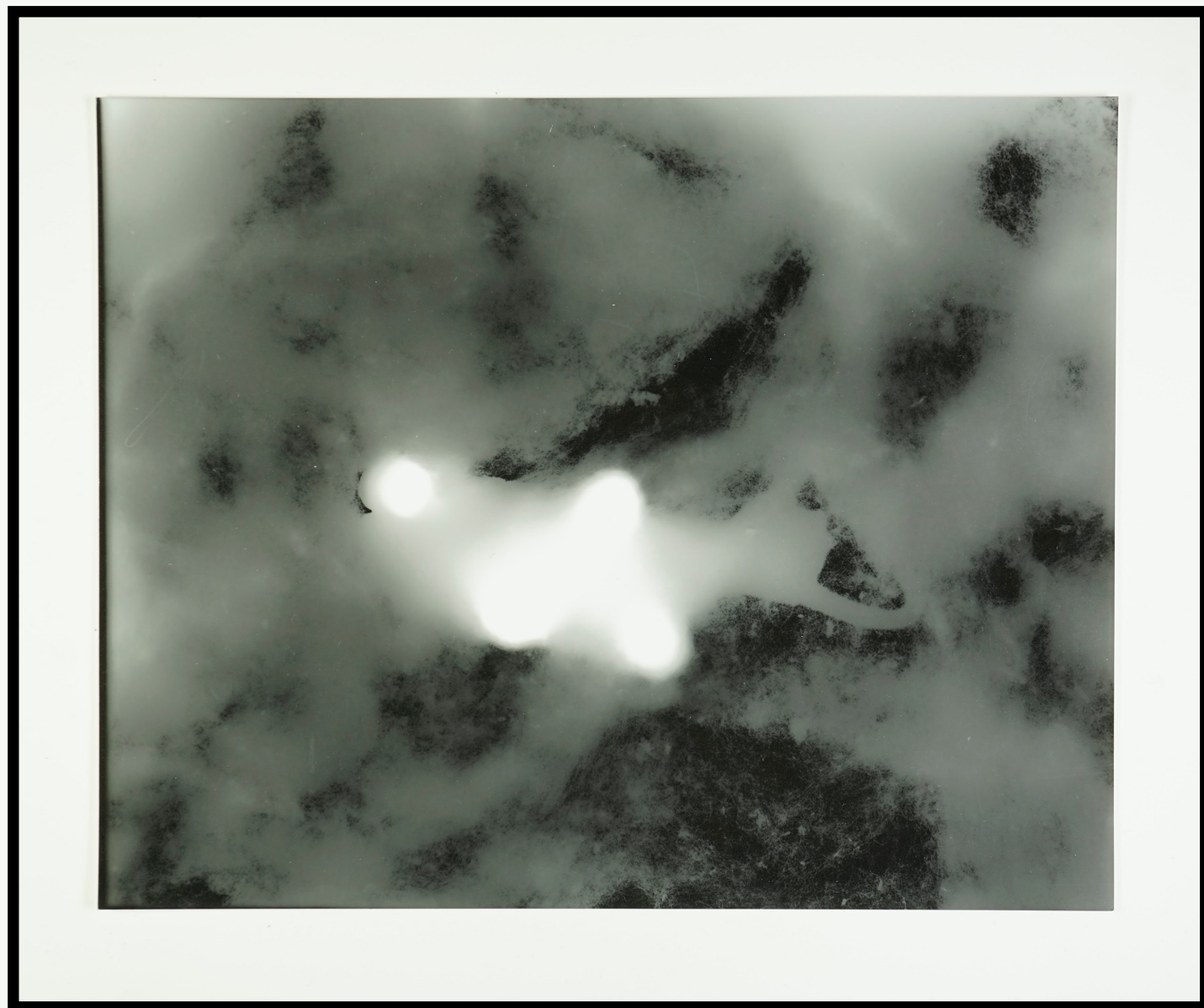


THERMODYNAMIC!

COLOR PENCIL ON PAPER
KOI

“A photogram is a cameraless photograph made by placing objects directly onto light sensitive paper and then exposing the paper with light. For this photogram, I placed stretched out cotton balls onto the paper, and a toy mammoth. Can you spot it?”

- Luke Higgins



CAN YOU SEE THE MAMMOTH

PHOTOGRAM
LUKE HIGGINS

ODE TO GUMMY WORMS

AVA WISELY

man has made, not a world, but a maze
which our minds are made to wander in a haze
in this fog we find respite in sugarcane
that which coats our tongues in lies profane.

oh, my beloved worms, may i have this dance?
the waltz of tongue and gum, sugar romance
manifested in a bag of rainbow wonders,
the nutrition label scarcely pondered.

they are not worms of the earth; they are fake
yet their lie draws me in, again and again, to make
a portrait of us—Trolli™ and i—the brand and the fool,
who knows that for you, i am nothing but a tool.

money talks, but not as loud as my desire
when i taste the citric acid, that fire
melting away all rational thought and self preservation
Trolli™ is the Trojan horse that destroyed a nation.

the nation is me--my mouth--my gut!
don't patronize me; i know that i must
cease my habit; my fortune runs dry
as i eat worm after worm, the time drifting by.

sweat on my temple, nausea in my stead
something in these worms hurts my head
allergies, toxins, worms and steel
shaking Satan's hand, taking his deal.

and still i eat, still i grieve
for what is one to do with these
emotions, toiling away under the skin
hating and loathing this body i'm in.

addiction is silly, absurd and unfair
different for all of us, everyone, everywhere
if i told you now, today, this is mine
would the laughter at least bring tears to your eyes?

the worms taunt me, called not by rain
but generations of diabetes, years of pain
food addiction, sweet sickness, tragedy
how can something so good be a malady?

yet affection reigns, as it does
for those gummy worms, so very loved
singing to me through irresistible flavor
even in anguish, it's the sugar i savor.

FOXGLOVES

ISABELLA SWENSON

Camille Loelen agreed to the church because these are the sort of concessions one makes when one's grandmother is dying. Rodrick, with his brown puppy eyes, was understanding and pliable. He always was.

Rodrick's mother, Diane, murmured about getting married in haste and repenting in leisure, but he waved her off. *We would have gotten married sooner or later*, he told her. *Why not sooner? Mrs. Loelen is awfully sick. Camille loves her so much and it's important to her that Mrs. Loelen can be there—before it's too late.*

The church is a sea of dark clothes, with the shadows of flickering candles distorting body from body. Rain patters on the windows. Everyone is quiet. Camille Valencia, poised and elegant as always, gives a speech. There isn't a dry eye in the audience by the time she's finished. She's always had a way with words.

Old Mrs. Loelen was unwell the day of the wedding. Her daughter-in-law and caretaker, Camille's mother, wheeled her into the flower-choked church and helped her settle into the front-row pew. The wheelchair was folded up and propped against the wall.

Mrs. Loelen sneezed. She produced a handkerchief from one pocket to blow her nose and then a compact mirror from the other to check that her wig was still securely in place. When this was done, she looked around the church with satisfaction. From the high ceilings to the stained glass windows to the shiny mahogany pulpit, this, she knew, was a proper place for a wedding.

It was provident that Mrs. Loelen and Olivine had arrived so early. As more and more people entered the church, empty seats became increasingly difficult to come by. The air swelled with voices.

Over 300 guests, Olivine proudly told her mother-in-law. *And no expense spared. Camille is moving up in the world.*

I wish she would have spared a little expense on the floral arrangements, old Mrs. Loelen replied, sneezing again.

A young woman in a wine-colored slip of a dress that, in Mrs. Loelen's opinion, showed entirely too much cleavage came teetering over in high heels. She tapped Olivine on the shoulder. *Hi, excuse me?*

Olivine turned. *Giselle! You lovely girl, how are you?*

Hi, Olivine, I'm so sorry to bother you, but Camille is freaking out because there don't seem to be enough seats—this church isn't a very big venue, is it?—and she just can't bear to make anyone stand

in the back. This is your mother, right? And that's her wheelchair over there, right? Well, Camille was wondering—if it wouldn't be too much trouble for you—if your mother could sit in her wheelchair? That way we can squeeze in an extra guest or two into this pew. Yes? Oh, thank you. Camille will be so relieved.

After the service, some folks leave; others stay to mingle and eat. The young Mrs. Valencia stays away from the old Mrs. Valencia but otherwise shakes many hands and accepts many condolences.

Olivine Loelen mourns fiercely, sure she has lost more than everyone else. Her grief takes on a particular vulgarity once the food is eaten and the task of clean-up presents itself; Olivine suddenly becomes so overwhelmed with tears that there is simply nothing she can do but excuse herself and go home.

At last, the organ began its solemn song. Everyone jostled one another to get a good look as the large church doors swung open. Rodrick Valencia, in his crisp black suit, came first; then eight red-clad groomsmen and bridesmaids, arm-in-arm, and finally, the bride. People all over the church sighed when she glided through the doors. With her long gloves and glimmering tiara, Camille looked regal. Her dress was ivory white, backless and sleeveless. Held up by magic and big breasts, she'd laughed to Giselle earlier. Rodrick, nearly drooling, seemed to be thinking the same thing. His eyes roved helplessly over Camille's figure as she approached.

Camille reached the pulpit and turned to gaze upon the audience, a queen surveying her populace. She smiled at her crying mother, and smiled a different smile at Rodrick's mother who was also crying but for a different reason.

Old Mrs. Loelen sat in her wheelchair at the side of the church, largely blocked from her granddaughter's view by a coat rack. She did her best not to sneeze too loudly during the ceremony.

"What ever will you do now?" a relative wants to know.

"A bit of money has been left behind," the young Mrs. Valencia assures him.

"Don't you worry about me."

The reception was held in the stone-paved garden behind the church. Unforgiving afternoon sunshine beat down on the party-goers, and cool glasses of champagne were clutched by all. Old Mrs. Loelen couldn't bear the weather, so Olivine had dutiful-

ly taken her home. Rodrick, sweating and panting, made the rounds and spoke with every guest.

Camille alone seemed to be having a truly good time. The bride had primly removed her long satin gloves but was otherwise unfazed by the heat. She held court at a long table with her eight bridesmaids, who kept her fed and amused. Her tiara glinted in the sunlight. Any guest that looked at it directly was temporarily blinded.

Diane Valencia was seated beside some shabby-looking Loelens whose names she'd never bothered to learn. *They haven't even been together for a year, you know*, she slurred. The recipients of this lament were an older couple—some aunt and uncle of Camille's, perhaps. They exchanged bemused looks. *Rodrick seems like a nice young man*, the woman ventured.

Oh, he is, Diane replied. She took another swig of her champagne. *There isn't a better man out there. Just like my husband, God rest his soul...* She rambled about Peter for a while, her voice watery, before remembering to circle back to the problem at hand. In a conspiratorial whisper, she told the Loelen couple, *It's the girl I worry about*.

The woman looked shocked and the man looked offended. *What's wrong with Camille?* he demanded.

D'you know where she got that tiara? Diane said in the same drunken mumble. *From me. I lent it to her—the Loelens don't have that sort of money! I'll bet she doesn't plan to return it to me, either.*

The man slammed his champagne glass onto the table. Every nearby piece of china and silverware quivered. He glared at Diane.

David, his wife reprimanded him.

But the man was incensed. The afternoon heat conspired with his rising anger to turn his face tomato red. *We may not be as well-off as your folks, but our Camille is plenty good enough for your Rodrick.*

Diane shook her head sadly. He didn't get it. Maybe she hadn't explained it right. The money was a problem, but it wasn't just that. There was something else, something she couldn't put her finger on quite yet. She finished her glass and signaled the waiter for another.

Dark has fallen. Most folks have trickled out by now. There's a heavy silence in the air that only the persistent rain and one obnoxious cousin are willing to puncture.

Theodosia has offered to stay and help clean. "First Grandma, and now this," she says, shaking her head sadly as she stacks dirty dishes. "Almost exactly a year apart, too. It's been awful for you, hasn't it?"

"Yes," Camille murmurs. She keeps her eyes fixed on the dingy white tablecloths that she's folding into neat piles. After a moment, she adds, carefully, "Grandma's death, though—it's been better for my mom."

"Camille!"

"It has," Camille says resolutely. The words spill out of her. "She had to take care

of Grandma, all by herself, all the time, for years. She never complained, but—" Camille takes a steadying breath. "My mother isn't even fifty yet. She's lost enough. Now, nothing's holding her back." *And Grandma was a judgy old bitch*, Camille thinks but doesn't say. She worries that she's already said too much.

A crimson sunset had seized the sky, washing the world in red. The garden courtyard was mostly empty now, but Rodrick's groomsmen rounded up stragglers who hadn't taken nature's hint. *The happy couple has big plans for tonight. It's time to wrap it up, folks.*

Camille and Rodrick had a hotel room waiting for them, but Camille told Rodrick she had an errand to run first.

Want me to come with you? he asked, almost begging.

They were out by the front of the church, waving goodbye to the last of the guests. A mercifully cool breeze cut through the thick heat left over from daytime. Loose hairs that had escaped from Camille's tightly pinned up-do waved in the wind.

No, she told him firmly. *I will be quick. It'll give you time to shower, anyway. You're sweaty.*

We'll still have our wedding night?

Camille looked at Rodrick for a long moment before turning away. *I have to go. Giselle is waiting for me.*

Rodrick was still standing there as Camille and her maid of honor drove off.

"Where did you two meet, anyway?" Theodosia asks. The two women are working side by side in the church kitchen; Theodosia washes the dishes, and Camille dries them. They had been working in silence, but the scandalized flush on Theodosia's face from Camille's tirade has finally faded, and Theodosia never could bear silence.

"We met at a party," Camille murmurs. "It was a hospital fundraising banquet."

"Oh, I remember hearing about that. You gave a speech, didn't you?"

"Just answered a few questions, really. Mother volunteered me." Camille ignores the twinge of annoyance plucking at her heart. "The hospital wanted to showcase a panel of people who had cancer or relatives with cancer."

All the big plates are clean now. Theodosia plunges her hands into the soapy sink water and starts wiping down the forks and knives. Laughing a bit, she says, "Wouldn't it have been more relevant to have Grandma herself speak?"

Camille smiles grimly, remembering how she had pleaded the same argument to Olivine, who then became conveniently deaf until Camille relented. "Motherly ambition, I suppose," she sighs. *Motherly ambition to convert a philanthropic fundraiser into a beauty pageant and marriage auction.* "But Grandma was at least there in the audience."

“And the Valencias were there?” Theodosia guesses.

Camille nods. “Diane is a major donor to that hospital. She and Rodrick were seated at the same table as Grandma and my mother. Perfect strangers to us, but by the time I was done with the panel, Mother had practically worked out the when, where, and how of my engagement to Rodrick.” She laughs, though not a thing is funny.

Their destination was not far. Giselle agreed to wait in the car—sick people made her nervous, anyway—while Camille walked through the twilight-bathed front garden. The yard had once been well-landscaped, back when Camille’s father was around, but now weeds and wildflowers ran amok.

Despite her satin gloves, Camille picked a generous bouquet of daisies, bachelor’s buttons, black-eyed Susans, and foxgloves before letting herself into the house. It was an impressive Victorian-style home, a three-storied testament to once-known wealth and familial wholeness. Camille stood in the front hall for a moment, remembering lost eras, before willing herself to walk deeper into the house.

The living room was less of a living room and more of a makeshift hospital bedroom. Stairs were too strenuous for old cancer-ridden Mrs. Loelen, so Olivine had long ago moved all of Mrs. Loelen’s things downstairs and made her as comfortable as possible. The old woman was watching a mindless reality television show when Camille entered. Camille gave her grandmother a polite hello before moving on.

Camille found Olivine in the kitchen, eating the sizable wedge of wedding cake that Camille had sent her home with straight out of the box.

I really do worry that she’s going to pass away any day now, Olivine whispered to her daughter by way of greeting.

Well, she is old, Camille said. She opened a cupboard, pulled out an opaque scarlet vase, and filled it with water from the sink. One by one, she serenely arranged her wildflowers in the vase.

Olivine frowned. *I hope you’ll have more sympathy when it’s me who is sick and elderly.*

Reddening, Camille wrapped her arms around her mother and gave her a kiss on the cheek. *Of course I will, Momma.* Camille tucked a daisy behind her mother’s left ear.

Olivine sighed. *You know how flowers set off your grandmother’s allergies.*

Camille counted to three and gentled herself. Sweetly she said, *Is there anything I can do to help you with Grandma right now?*

Pacified, Olivine responded, *I suppose I wouldn’t mind if you brewed her tea while I helped her get ready for bed.*

Jasmine, still?

Yes, dear. Olivine extracted the flower from behind her ear and laid it on the counter before leaving the kitchen.

Camille plucked a few different flowers from the bouquet—foxgloves, this time—before brewing the jasmine tea for her grandmother in her own special way.

All that’s left to do is load up the absurd amount of flowers that well-wishers have left to pay their respects to the dead. Camille loves flowers, but—“This is too much,” she says.

“What am I supposed to do with twenty-nine bouquets?”

“Didn’t Mrs. Valencia want to take any?” Theodosia asks desperately.

“I’m Mrs. Valencia.”

“You know what I mean. Your mother-in-law.”

Camille suspects that Diane liked the idea of leaving her as much work as possible. She does not mention this hypothesis to Theodosia. Instead, she assumes a business-like manner and says briskly, “It won’t be too much walking back and forth if I pull up my car to the entrance. I’ll be right back.” Camille finds her purse and digs out her keys, thinking all the while about how much she can’t wait to go home, take off her suffocating black dress, and hopefully visit with Giselle. She is nearly at the exit when Theodosia calls out to her.

“You aren’t sad!”

Camille pauses, thoughts interrupted, and turns. “What?”

Theodosia, her cousin and childhood playmate, is still standing by the mountain of flowers on the stage, hugging herself and looking pink and uncertain. When Theodosia speaks again, her voice is quiet. “You aren’t sad. You weren’t sad about Grandma last June and you aren’t sad about Rodrick now. It isn’t right.”

“You have no clue what I feel.” Camille is glad that her voice is steady. Her heartbeat, roaring in her ears, feels very loud to her.

In that same soft voice, Theodosia says, “Enlighten me.”

For the millionth time in her life, Camille drowns in choice, or maybe a lack of choice. Nothing she can do or say will sufficiently salvage this situation, smooth over her sins. She thinks of thorny, twisted loyalties, of the love she’s blindly given or hasn’t been able to offer at all, of what she’s taken from people and what they’ve taken from her, and of the way she’s only twenty-five and has her whole life ahead of her if only she can bury the past. Everything’s in the wrong place. She’s controlled what she can and it’s not enough. She isn’t sad but she’s never known happiness, either. What is there left to grow?

To Theodosia, Camille says, “It’s late; you must be tired. Why don’t you head home? I am grateful for your help, but I can finish up by myself.”

Do you need anything? Giselle wanted to know. They were parked outside of the hotel inside of which Rodrick eagerly awaited his new wife.

Camille managed a smile. *I’m fine. Women have been getting married for a long time.*

And that’s great, Giselle replied. *When it’s to someone they love.* She was so very lovely, like a red rose, in her dress.

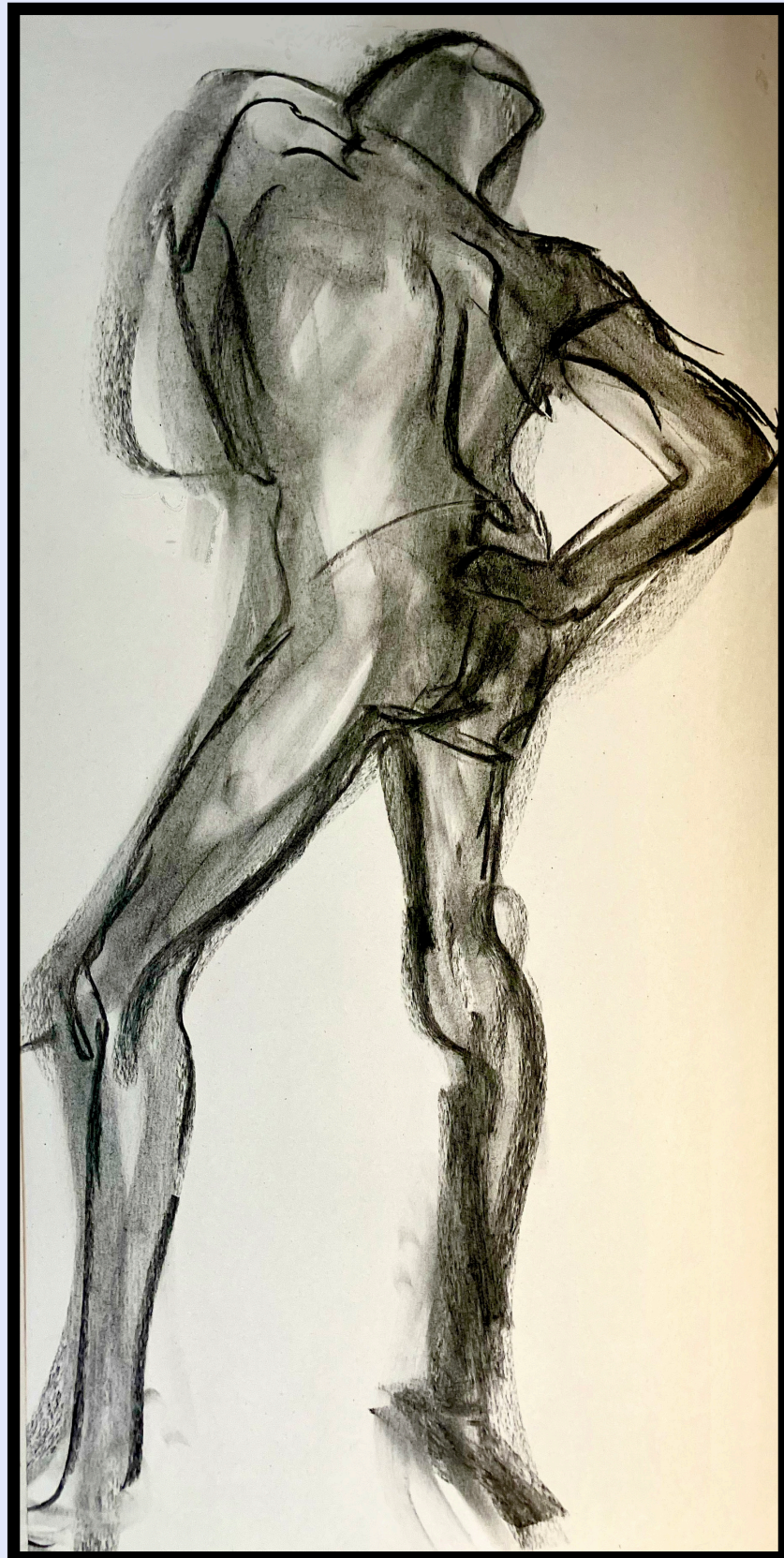
My family’s debts won’t settle themselves, Giselle. Camille leaned over and kissed the woman who was her maid of honor and something so much more. *Good night.*

When Camille knocked on the door of the honeymoon suite, Rodrick let her in and immediately went for her corset strings, no better than a dog who only had eyes for a bone.

Camille put up a hand and stopped him. *My grandmother is dead.* Olivine wouldn't find that out and frantically call Camille for another hour, but Rodrick didn't need to know about this discrepancy. Camille also knew that, a year from now, the foxgloves would be in bloom again, and that she could bear being the new Mrs. Valencia until then.



ADVENTURE!
SCREENPRINT ON ARCHES PAPER
AMELIA NEWBERG



CHARRED 1

CHARCOAL ON PAPER
KOI



GUARDIAN OF HOPE

STONEWARE
6"X12"X11"
MASHA YAREMENKO

In The Spotlight
Helios Lochlainn

I never would have dreamed
I'd be the one
who steps into the spotlight willingly,
draws attention to himself
as if he deserves the visibility and his voice matters.

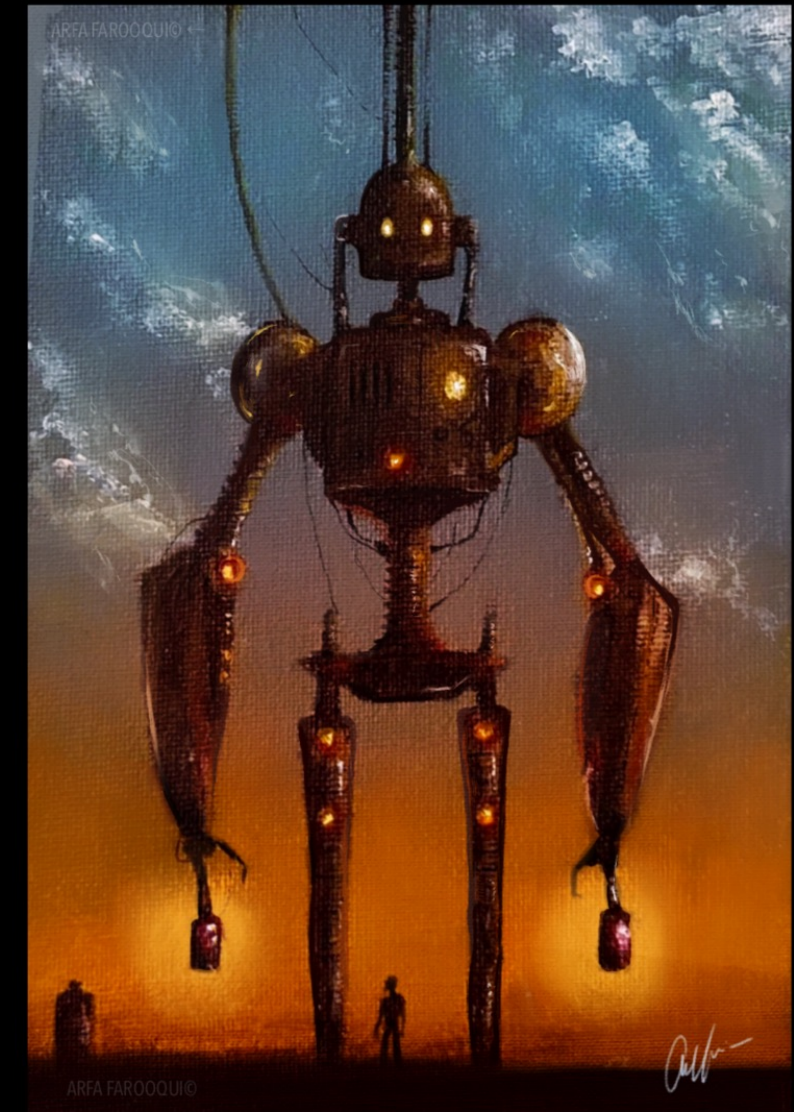
I never would have dreamed
I'd be the one
who is recognized across campus
as a worker of course
but also a visibly queer person
and a visibly disabled person
because *he no longer hides these parts of himself.*

I never would have dreamed
I'd be the one
who steps up to take over a club
as it starts to go quiet,
yet again
choosing the spotlight.

I never would have dreamed
I'd be the one
who chooses the spotlight
and lets it blind me with love and hatred
as people see my true self
and as *I reach out* for change, for progress.

I never would have dreamed
I'd be the one
who *chooses the spotlight.*

Helios (he/they) creates to process key moments in his life, and to express intense emotions. They are autistic with ADHD and social anxiety, as well as nonbinary and queer, and this comes up often in their work in both obvious and subtle ways. He is pursuing a Human Development major with a Psychology minor, seeking to understand how people (noun) people (verb) as well as seeking story and poem inspiration in course content.



THE ALMIGHTY MACHINE

ACRYLIC ON CANVAS
ASCENDING AUTOMATA

sentience is a mirage. creation is born through destruction.
watch as we wither so a new being can prosper
the creator is set of code.
the Almighty is binary
and made of unbreakable steel.



THE CONCEPT OF ROT

ACRYLIC ON CANVAS
ASCENDING AUTOMATA

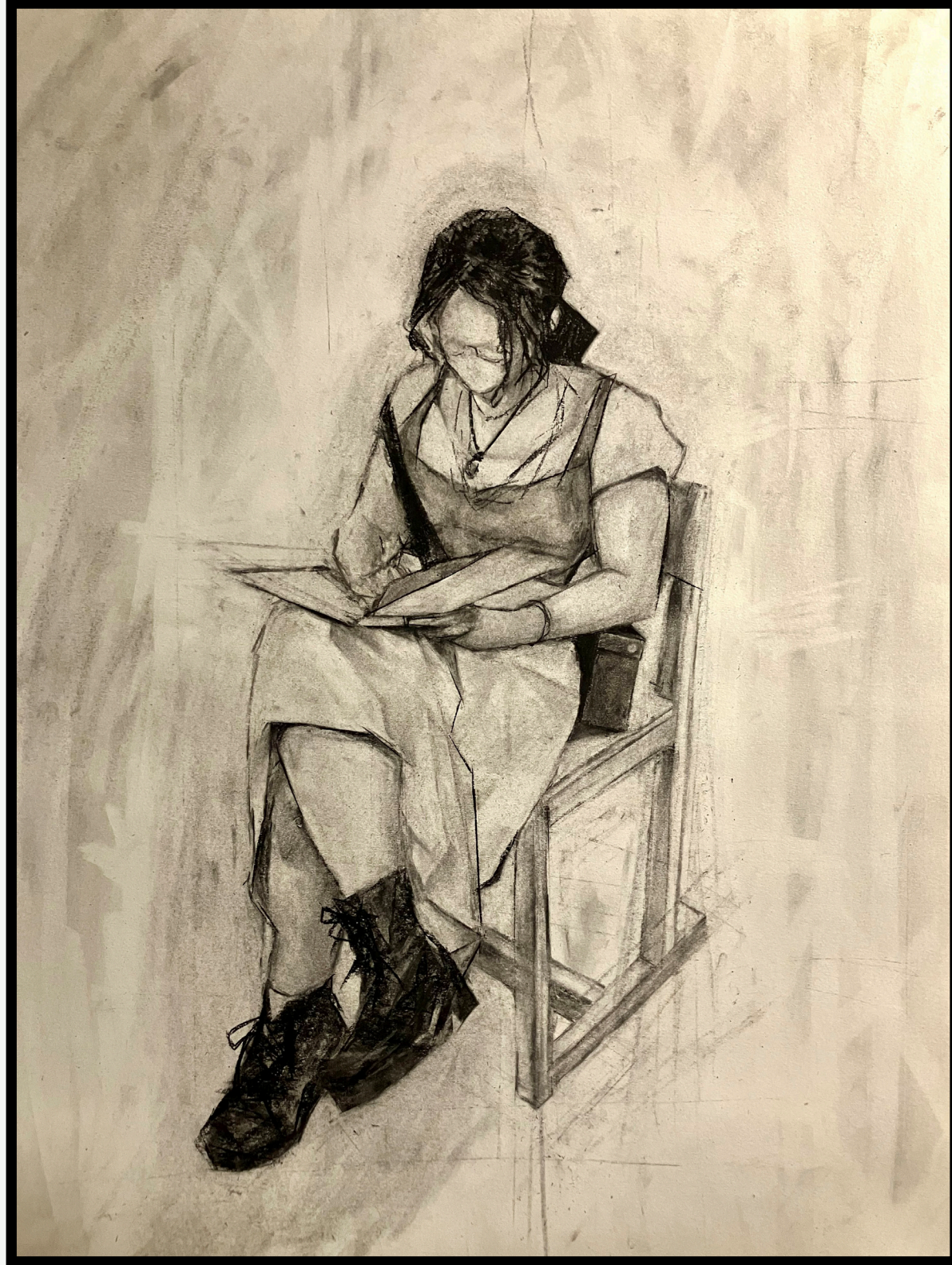
DEATH OMEN

AVA WISELY

I had a nightmare once, after one of our fights
where I knew I'd die, and so I
promised you I'd come back
as a red butterfly.

Butterflies can't talk
and they certainly can't fly in rain
and neither can the wings of our affection;
decayed,
under the downpouring weight
of your hypocrisy.

it started as a mere fascination,
but humans were always meant to worship something.



A FRIEND

CHARCOAL ON PAPER
KOI



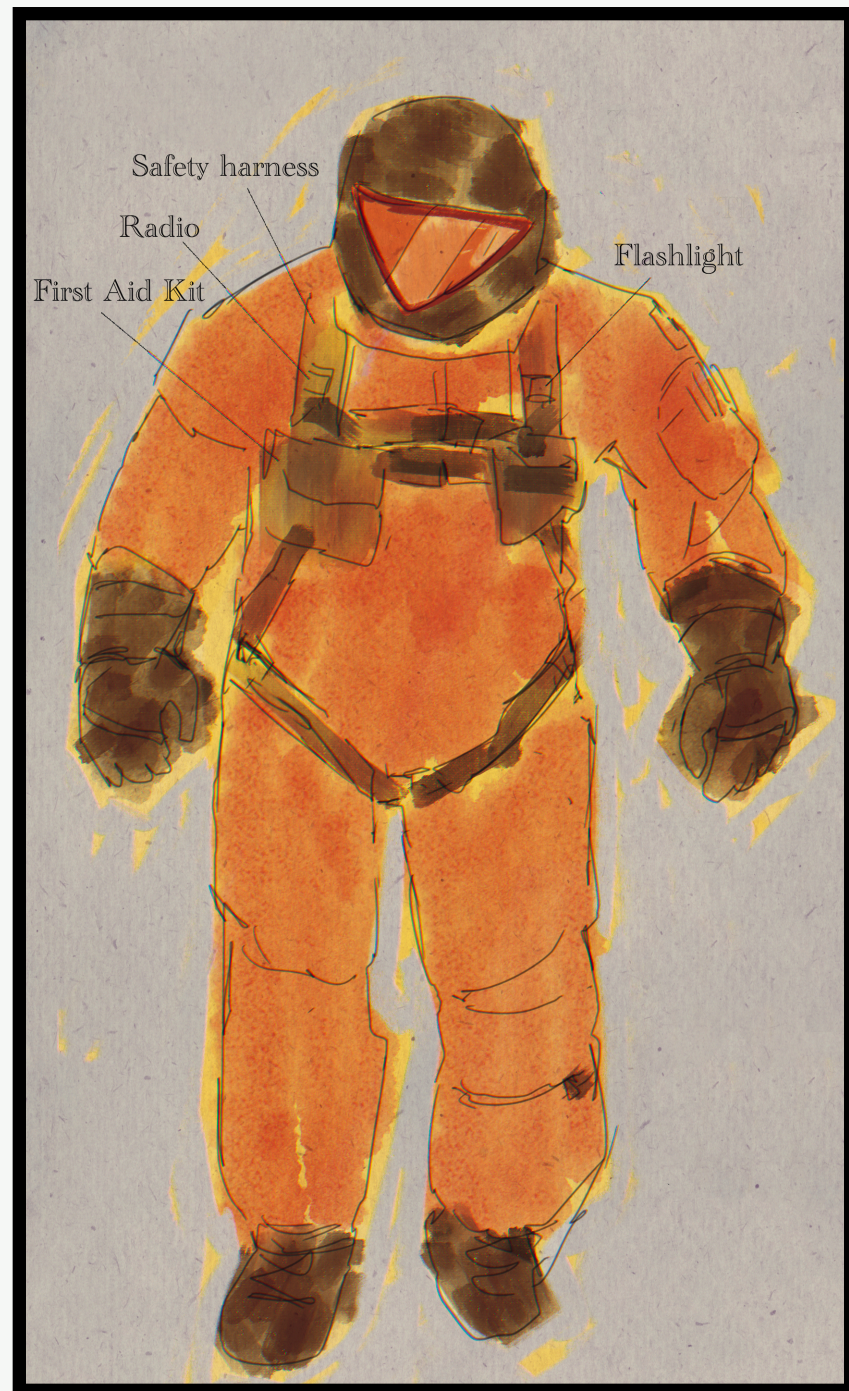
"Fieldwork is an art-science collaboration highlighting the flora of WSU Vancouver.

This iteration is *Vinca*, or the common periwinkle, viewed from four perspectives: what is perceived (a painting of the flower), what is unseen (a painting of the flower under a microscope), what is seen (preserved stems of the flower), and what is experienced (a color study). The purpose of this artwork is to enjoy an otherwise fleeting blooming season and consider the exquisite detail of every natural material we see on our beautiful campus."

- Graci Vandervort

FIELDWORK - VINCA

GOUACHE ON AQUABOARD
GRACI VANDERVORT



ASTRO
DIGITAL
KOI

“30 second exposure converted to black and white.”- Luke Higgins



UNTITLED 1
PHOTOGRAPH
LUKE HIGGINS

FORGOTTEN LANGUAGE

COLORED PENCIL ON PAPER
AMELIA NEWBERG



Amelia Newberg is a Digital Technology and Culture Major at WSUV. She specializes in animation and enjoys Screenprinting. Her favorite mediums are Colored Pencil and Charcoal. Her goal is to use art and animation to make the world smile.

STILL

CHRISTOPHER TURK

Chillin'
In the garden
Smokin'
Sweet spicy salmon
Jokin' with my friends
About our family
Til the neighbors call the cops
They love barbeque

Sippin'
Melted ice tea
Inside the greenhouse
Near the sea
Drippin'
On a trippy painting
Slippin'
Into another poetry
Day dream away



CRUMB!

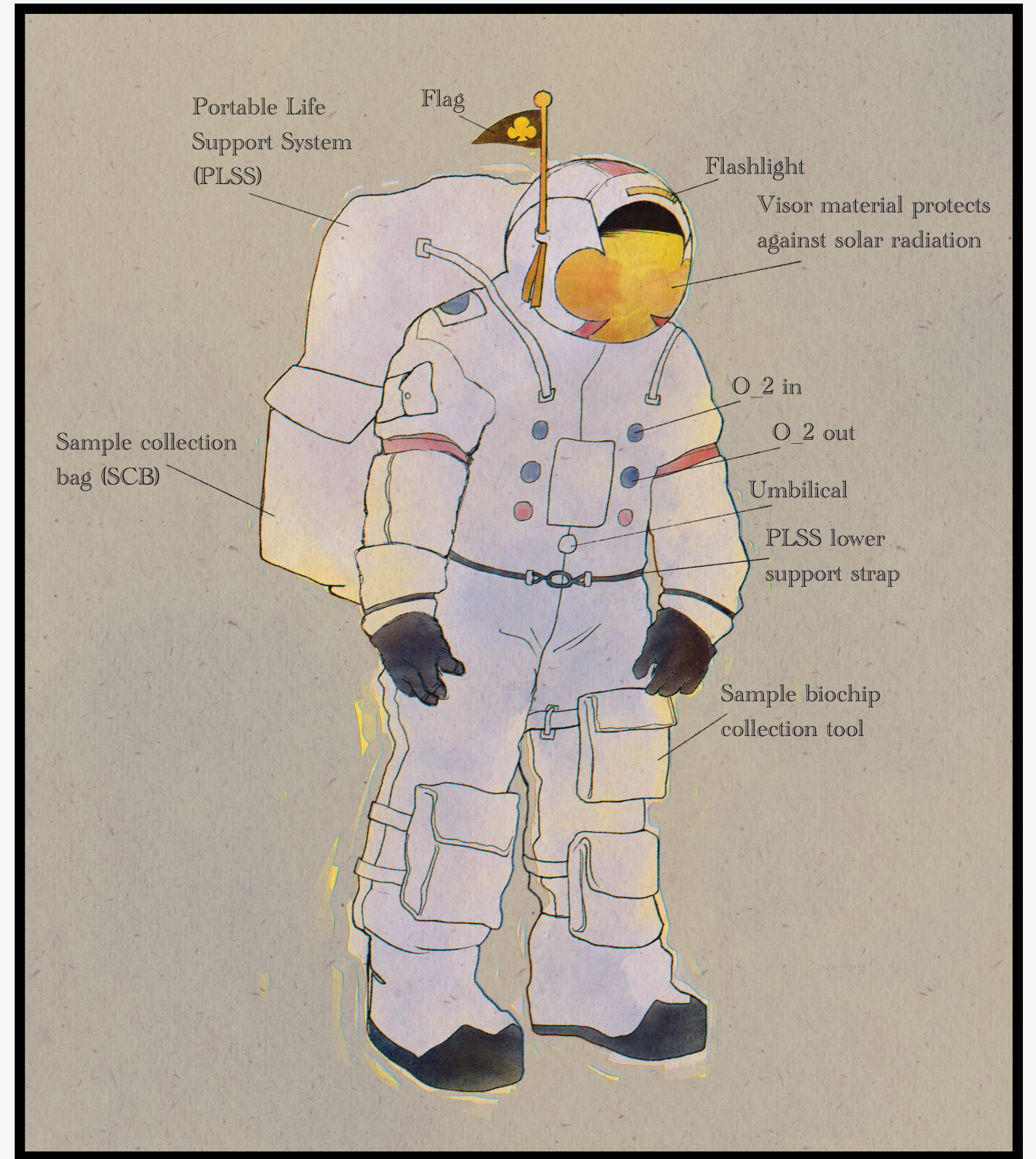
COLORED PENCIL, GOUACHE PAINT, TEMPERA PAINT
EMILY WANG



“A combination of relief printing, stencil printing, & screen printing.” - Luke Higgins

TOUCH ME & CHANGE ME

ACRYLIC INK PRINT
LUKE HIGGINS



COSMO

DIGITAL
KOI



THIRD OPIATE WAR

ACRYLIC ON CANVAS
VINCE PHARO

MOSTISHAV

JOHN DOWLAND

The loose flap of the tent illuminated the dim room with a glow from the outside. Arbiter Mostishav Constantine took in a deep breath as he set his leather glove on the table in front of him, a fine wooden piece made from the local oak which was situated in the center of his tent. The sound of a river stream set an almost calm scene, complimenting the coming of spring. He exhaled, condensation exited from his chapped, frosted lips and the wind blew vapor across his aging cheekbones and past his bronze-brown eyes. He overlooked a map of the North, or “Legranda,” as the natives referred to the land. The Far North region of the map went by the name Omolon and was lighter in color in order to exemplify the more frigid temperatures. It was here, in Omolon, that the arbiter had encamped his legion.

The goat skin tent held an unkempt lantern that had not been mended in decades, and a purple carpet with a gold outline led from the open flap to the chair at the other end, a stark contrast to the muddy dirt of the outside. To the left of the chair was a beautifully crafted wooden chest that appeared to be worth more than all the gold it could carry. Hung on the walls, spears of conquered war chiefs and the skulls of exotic beasts were neatly mounted to show off and strike awe amongst those who entered. And behind the chair at the end was a banner emblazoned with a top-down view of a blooming red rose with a yellow center on a white background, the symbol of Mostishav’s noble house.

He gave off an almost holy appearance to the two advisors, Tarter Justinian and Alexishav Cannae, who stood beside the wooden table. The advisor’s usually noble military attire looked impoverished in comparison to Mostishav’s, whose gold-plated armor made him stand out among the dimly lit room, with his jeweled, encrusted mace, dangling weightlessly by his side the same way a pair of bells would. A thick red and blue cockatrice feathered cloak wrapped around his shoulders and stretched down to his femur. The large cloak made him appear twice his usual size—ot that he would have needed it to emit an aura of dominance to his subordinates, who stood lined on each end of the table, making little to no movement.

A cold gust of wind blew through the camp as though it had been invited in. Mostishav heard Tarter whisper, “Illishav have mercy” under his breath before rubbing his naked hand across his arm to generate friction. The cold hadn’t fazed Mostishav, however. He thought about how just twelve years ago, when the Northern conquests began—he would have shivered at a breeze such as this. But that was when a native sharpshooter hadn’t killed his father. It was back when he was heir apparent to become the head of the Constantines, and when he could remember what his early childhood was like.

All that felt like a different lifetime to him now, and Mostishav thought how he liked that he had separated himself from his youth. A dark part of his soul was glad that nearly everyone who knew how he was back then was either dead, or too fearful of his long shadow to tell of it. He had a reputation among the world as a disciplinarian, which he would prefer to remain untarnished. Rumors spread around the city and his camp that he was born with a whip in his hand, and both the advisors that flanked him feared as much as they respected their superior.

Tarter Justinian, head of the elite Judiciary horsemen, stood to the left of the arbiter. The attire he wore felt heavy on his brittle bones. He was one of the only people in the second legion whose age was older than Mostishav’s. He stepped up to explain the situation. With every footstep from his leather caligae, the sound of unwieldy metal armor and the smell of unwashed skin followed. His armor, which was properly polished and maintained, contrasted his personal hygiene. As dirt and dust covered his face, like flies sticking to horse excrement, he didn’t stand out amid the rest of the second legion. Tarter bore a receding hairline similar

to Mostishav’s that exemplified his age more than the wrinkles on his face did, despite his current appearance. Any man could tell of his noble status from a seal of the Constantine rose that hung from the right side of his waist; a seal that marked him as an essential figure within the second legion. He pointed his naked finger at a dotted label on the Northern part of the map with the name “Vesalica” underneath.

“Where are the last holdouts?” Mostishav asked, cutting off whatever it was Tarter was about to say. This rebellion was relatively recent, only a year old by this point. Mostishav thought of how, if it wasn’t for the harsh winter snow that befell the North every quarter year, then he would have wrapped the rebel leader’s head around a noose like the rest who challenged the legion.

Tarter shivered, wrapping his purple cape around himself for warmth. “The barbarians have constructed a fort atop a hill here.” His finger slithered to the left of the map and stopped at an ink drawing of trees labeled “Sorrow forest.”

“If I may make a suggestion,” he said confidently before looking at Mostishav, who waved his hand in approval. “I believe the quickest possible route to end the uprising would be to surround them here. It’ll only take the legion a fortnight before they reach the encampment, and after the barbarian’s eventual surrender, we would stand as the masters of the North, with every one of the natives brought into submission.” Tarter took a step back after finishing his input.

Mostishav looked up at him and gave a glare that looked as if he was about to enter a duel. “I have lost count of how many times you have said there would be a final rebellion Tarter,” Mostishav replied with a coldness in his voice that rivaled the almost-spring air. His sternness made Tarter forget about the shivering cold for just a faint second.

“The natives here have a warlike culture, my Arbitar. No one argued otherwise,” Cannae began, her voice covered by her native accent, which softened her R’s. “The tribes here have been in a constant state of war with each other since they settled these lands. The presence of your legion had united them.” Cannae spoke with high confidence in the information she was giving, for she had grown up a native before the Zenan’s arrival. She had a constant reminder of her ancestry from the dark red hair that reached down to her shoulders and the vibrant maroon eyes that the native peoples were blessed with; eyes that appeared to be plagiarized from the surface of a ruby.

Mostishav stood up and placed his hand on his chin. “I suppose you’re right,” he speculated, somewhat defeated. His constant thinking had hampered his judgment. One thing he had come to know very well during this campaign is that the harsh life in the underdeveloped lands of Lagranda had produced strong warriors, proof being that some of the most deadly soldiers he had under his command were native mercenaries and recruits, whose skill in battle were only matched by their savagery and bloodlust.

Seconds passed before Tarter sighed, “Do not worry, my lord arbiter. When this campaign is done, all the mud-huts making up these lands will be replaced with glorious cities, like that of the capital.”

Cannae was taken aback by the statement. She thought back to her life before the Zenan invasion, of tending horses in her father’s stables, back when she was a part of the Imbrodi tribe, and when her name was Abulla. She was only nineteen when she had been recruited as a Scoutania, the scouting cavalry of the many legions in which she had proven herself multiple times in battles. She was proud of her ancestral lineage, yet not proud enough to refuse to change her name when she was ordered to.

Cannae opened her mouth to speak, but before she could, a man entered the room. A member of the Constantine elite guard, wearing a thin iron mask emblazoned with a silhouette of a mouth and two slim eyeholes, which did little to block the soldier’s vision. This mask held crucial religious meaning to the Zenans, and every standard legionary had been equipped with it since the State’s founding. The soldier began with a traditional salute, an open palm held up to his right ear. “Hail the Arbitar,” he shouted before putting his hand down. He shouldered a long pole with a long, curved, single-edged blade on the end. A yellow ribbon hung where the blade began. It was the same weapon every legionary was equipped with.

“What is it?” Mostishav asked impatiently.

“A group of couriers say they bear a message from the Forume addressed to you, Lord Arbiter. Shall I let them in?”

Mostishav’s face sparked at the information, and he was greeted with a feeling he rarely ever felt in the past few years: curiosity. Though he welcomed it as if it were a long-lost friend—for he had not heard from the Forume itself in what felt like an eternity—it would almost have seemed the state had forgotten his very existence, if it wasn’t for the constant letters he received from his family. “Let one of them in,” he ordered, straightening his back and shoulders.

The soldier nodded, then held the tent flap open as he gestured to a woman that couldn’t be older than twenty-five, mounted atop a brown skinny corsair, to enter. The sun shone on her as she dismounted. Exemplifying the color of her long brown hair as she undoffed her hood, hair which looked as if she used melted cocoa beans as a dye, and her hazel eyes were the same shade as Mostishav’s. She entered the camp and gave a salute. Once she made eye contact with the man she had heard so much from back in the capital, she became enamored.

“What is this about?” Mostishav demanded with a hint of hesitation. He had been attacked by assassins calling themselves diplomats multiple times over, and the memories had imprinted themselves on him with a deep scar that ran from his left eye to his left ear.

The courier gulped, bracing herself, then walked around the table to Mostishav. With the wind blowing her hair over her shoulders, she tried to make it seem as if she wasn’t scared of the demigod-looking figure in front of her, but her facade of courage quickly broke when she got on one knee and lifted her arm to hand a scroll to Mostishav. It was tiny and wrapped in fair blue silk that, when unrolled, couldn’t be larger than the length of a man’s pointer finger. Her arm began shaking a little, and the saliva in her mouth began to feel as hard as marble.

Mostishav looked at her, amused. A slight grin crept along his face as he took the tiny scroll from between her hands. He began to unroll it. “What is your name?” he asked with a much softer voice than he had used when she walked in.

“Sophia. Sophia Reedshav, my lord,” she replied, tilting her head upwards to make eye contact. Her hazel pupils shone in the lantern light.

“Well, Reedshav, stay here...” Mostishav did not attempt to finish his sentence as he unrolled the scroll and began reading its contents out loud in an almost mocking tone. The scroll contained a small silver token emblazoned with a silhouette of a long-horned hog. The token was to prove that the letter was official, and the hog was the state animal of the Zenas. Something he noticed but didn’t care much about was how the scroll appeared to have been already opened, and then carefully stitched back together.

By order of His Holiness Grand Arbiter Jonshav II of Zena, elected by the Forume, and Protector of the city of Zena and its inhabitants, also declared by the Forume as the protector of the provinces of Aliushav, Aimushav, Vosilca, Estallia, Basrashav, Mostishav, Legrandia, Omolon, and Valencia. We request your participation in the Forume assembly which will be held on the 18th day of the next month. Show the accompanying seal to the guards as you enter, and keep in mind that you must arrive at the capital by the 10th of the next moon. If not, it will be duly noted and you will be barred from participation.

A frown formed on his face after he finished reading. He took two steps backward and sat down on his chair, resting with his armored legs spread apart and his right hand holding his head. He threw the note onto the table, as if he were disposing of garbage. The scroll scrambled the once neatly organized maps across the table and sent some flying throughout the air. Mostishav placed his hand on his chin and simultaneously

gave a long sigh, vapor streaming from his lips and filling the tent like a newly puffed cigar.

“I see the Forume is still made up of pretentious cunts.” Tater gave a light snicker at what was meant to be a josh, though many could argue that it was as true as needing water to live. He gave a slight smile, yellow rotten teeth from decades of mismanaged hygiene and chewing on sugar canes crept out from his cracked lips.

“Did you listen, when I read that last part?” Mostishav snickered a little bit, to show his astonishment at the situation. “I ought to come a moon late just to spite the pricks.” The frustration on Mostishav’s face began to grow with each word becoming tenser than the one before it, as if he were spitting venom instead of sentences.

“If you do, I’m certain they would hold the whole event off just for you, Lord Arbiter,” Tarter replied, giving a slight bow as he spoke.

“And having me show a token to the guards to enter? Who do they even think I am? My house has been responsible for the conquest of half the provinces on that list, and if I wanted to, I could have the Forume bow before me at a whim,” he ranted.

“I’m certain it’s just custom, my arbiter,” Cannae interjected. “I find it hard to believe anyone is brave enough to disrespect the conqueror of the north.”

Mostishav didn’t reply to the praise. “Where’s Juno?”

“Last I heard, my lord, he should be down at the barracks, training up some new native recruits—though it wouldn’t surprise me if he got drunk with them instead.” The snide comment didn’t go unnoticed by Mostishav, who shot a sharp glare at him.

“You should know that when I ask a question, I expect only an answer. If I wanted your opinion, I would have requested it.”

There was a slight pause in the room as Tarter froze in his place, half from the cold, and half from embarrassment. “My apologies, my lord arbiter.”

The courier, who had seemed to be forgotten by everyone else in the room, was still kneeling on the purple portion of the carpet with her head tilted toward the gold lining at the end.

Mostishav looked down at her. “Look at me,” he said, peering at the open scroll on the table. “Did you so happen to open that message on your trip here?”

Redshav spoke quickly, as if someone were holding a knife to her throat. “No, my arbiter; I would never. A man at the front of the gate said he was your son and demanded I hand it over to him. I originally refused his demands, but then...”

“That’s enough, my dear, thank you. You’ve been more help than you could ever know,” Mostishav replied. His voice had morphed from its original frustration to the tone of an uncle telling a tale by a campfire.

Tarter perked his head up, and with his teeth gritting against each other and his eyes narrowed, he blurted, “That damned Juno, Lord Arbiter. Certainly you must understand that he is in no position to be doing whatever he plea—”

Mostishav put his hand up. He didn’t speak a word, yet anyone paying attention to his mannerisms and body language could tell of his annoyance. Tarter instantly went quiet. Mostishav reached into the side of his chair, the side that contained the beautifully crafted chest, and pulled out a small pouch that jingled in a way only coins do. He then tossed it to the scout below him. “This is twenty dajilahs. Consider this payment for all you and your company’s troubles.”

Reedshav’s eyes, originally fearful, were now astonished. She caught the bag mid-air, not fully processing what she held in her hand. Her mouth fell open and her arms seemed to have frozen still. Even though her profession was a courier for the rich, she rarely ever got to hold this much coin in a pouch. At most, it would be five or seven dajilahs, which were the highest value coin the Zenans produced. Her mind went wild with all the possibilities that had opened up in her life, for five dajilahs is enough to last the average Zenan a lifetime.

Mostishav got up from his chair and walked past Reedshav as if she were never there. He motioned for Tarter to close the chest behind him and proceeded out to the front of the tent flap, picking up the scroll along the way. As he walked, Cannae gave off a salute. "Hail the Arbiter," she shouted. Reedshav, who had finally gotten her mind under control, followed suit by giving a salute and praise louder than the one before her. She thanked Mostishav a million times in her mind.

The open Legranda air hit Mostishav as he exited, cold yet refreshing. He took in a deep breath to inhale the aroma of amber from the trees, and he was soothed by a calmness only felt when surrounded by nature. It had rained the day before, which made the grass moist and muddy. Yet, today, the sun shined bright with a glow only seen at the start of spring. His eyes were complimented by the greens of the oak around him, and his ears were enchanted by the burbles of a stream as it traveled along its bed, bubbling over rocks and branches. It would have almost been perfect, like a painting devised by the goddesses' angels, if it wasn't for the encampment of his legion, whose chatter and conversation ruined the peaceful sound of the stream, and whose waste had desecrated the smell of the amber. Once his mind was turned from nature, he began to notice the surrounding, squalor-filled encampment. He frowned once more.

Mostishav motioned for the two men guarding the outside of his tent—both with masks and long Zenan spears—to fix his coat, then to bring him his horse, Hisan. He loved that horse more than life itself. He had chosen her from the stables when she was just a pony and he was just a lowly officer under his father. He spared no expense on her luxuries and health. At all times, a dozen specialists oversaw her every need, including mending her horseshoes and jeweled purple saddle, which made her snow-white hair glisten whenever she moved. He petted the horse's white mane once she entered his presence and wrapped his arms around her neck for a hug before he mounted her saddle, giving a light kick to pick up speed.

Hisan sent splatters of mud as she trotted through the camp. Mostishav rode with his back straightened and his head held high. The eyes of his legion surrounded him, and everyone seemed to quit their chatter to stare and give salutes. He passed by the armory in which equipment was stored, then through the cages in which rebel natives were held and would soon be sold into a life of slavery. He passed through the washrooms and the public latrine and then finally reached the open fields on which the new legionaries trained.

There was a duel taking place, and the crowd watching doubled once Mostishav appeared. He saw Juno, the handsome man with curly red hair he had adopted into his family. Juno's opponent was a random native recruit. Both men were shirtless and sweating, and the watching soldiers formed a ring around them. Juno raised the training sword into the air, and then gave off a furious series of blows that sent the trainee stumbling backward. Their swords scraped against each other as they made contact. The trainee was on the defense, trying to anticipate where Juno's next strike would come from. Juno's face was that of pure focus, with his thick eyebrows forming a frown. His sword clashed against his foe as a hammer strikes a nail. On the tenth strike, the trainee's sword flew out of his hand and soared through the air before landing upward with a slight tilt to the right from the soft dirt. Juno raised his arm in victory and panted tiredly.

He noticed the golden-armored arbiter staring, and walked to meet him. "You exited your camp, Lord Arbiter? What seems to be the occasion?" His eyes squinted as he looked up. Mostishav was standing beneath the shining sun, and the rays reflected off of his armor to give him a holy glow.

"What in the goddess's name was that, Juno?"

"What do you mean?" Juno replied, wiping his face of the grime and dirt accumulated during the day's training..

"That show you put on—was that what you call training?"

Juno shrugged with a smile. "It's the Legrandan way of training, my lord. These people don't know anything else."

Mostishav was displeased by the answer, as displayed by his frowning white eyebrows. "I want them

taught formation."

Juno put his hand up to shield his eyes from the sun. "And formation they will be taught—just after I teach them how to swing their sword arms correctly. I swear, some of these natives need to be taught how to fucking walk before I start teaching them formation." He said the last words in a loud, almost mocking tone, so the surrounding men could hear.

Mostishav brushed off the criticism. "Do you remember the courier you spoke to this afternoon?"

"The small, brown-haired one?"

"Were there other couriers I should know about?" Mostishav asked sarcastically, though not in a friendly way.

Juno gave a small snicker. "I was just making sure there was nothing that could endanger you, my Lord Arbiter."

The arbiter ignored the sudden hospitality, "Tarter was quite angry at your behavior, and he has a right to be."

"Let the old bastard be mad. If we weren't both in the legion, I would have busted his crooked teeth on this very ground."

"Did you forget he's your superior?"

Juno scoffed, "Then let him come and discipline me himself."

Mostishav secretly liked speaking of more trivial matters to Juno over matters of the second legion, though he would never admit it to open ears. "The Forume is holding an assembly on the tenth. I wish for you to accompany me on the trip."

"Me? What use do I have at the Forume?"

"You are heir apparent to the Constantines, yet you have never once even entered Zena. Once I pass, I want my house to be in good hands."

"You don't think I have the stomach to handle the duties of a lord," Juno said with a hint of sarcasm surrounding his words.

"I think you have potential," Mostishav retorted.

"I don't mean to be rude, my lord arbiter, but the second I enter the Forume, I'm going to gut every politician I see. I belong on the fields here."

Mostishav ignored the comment. "We leave tomorrow night, and the day is still young. Get you and your slaves ready. I won't wait." He turned his horse away before motioning to the guards that his conversation had ended.

Juno put his hands up. "Wait, wait," he said. "Do you even know what they will be discussing? They didn't send an agenda."

Mostishav turned to face Juno and gave a slight shrug. "You read the letter. I am just as clueless on the matter as you."

"And that doesn't bother you?"

"It's none of my—or your—concern. The Forume called on me, and so I leave to answer them. I do not need any other reason." Mostishav suppressed a slight sigh; he couldn't show it, especially not in front of the crowd of soldiers around him. But he didn't believe in the words he was saying.

"I understand, I understand," Juno muttered quickly. "It just seems rather odd no one decided to let you know, my lord arbiter."

Mostishav didn't feel the need to reply. He turned his horse and faced her back toward the direction of his tent, digging his heels into her side to pick up speed. His soldiers made way for him, hailing the conqueror of the north.



LONELY IN SEATTLE

DIGITAL
ASCENDING AUTOMATA



A STRAWBERRY AND SAKURA BLOSSOM IN A JAR

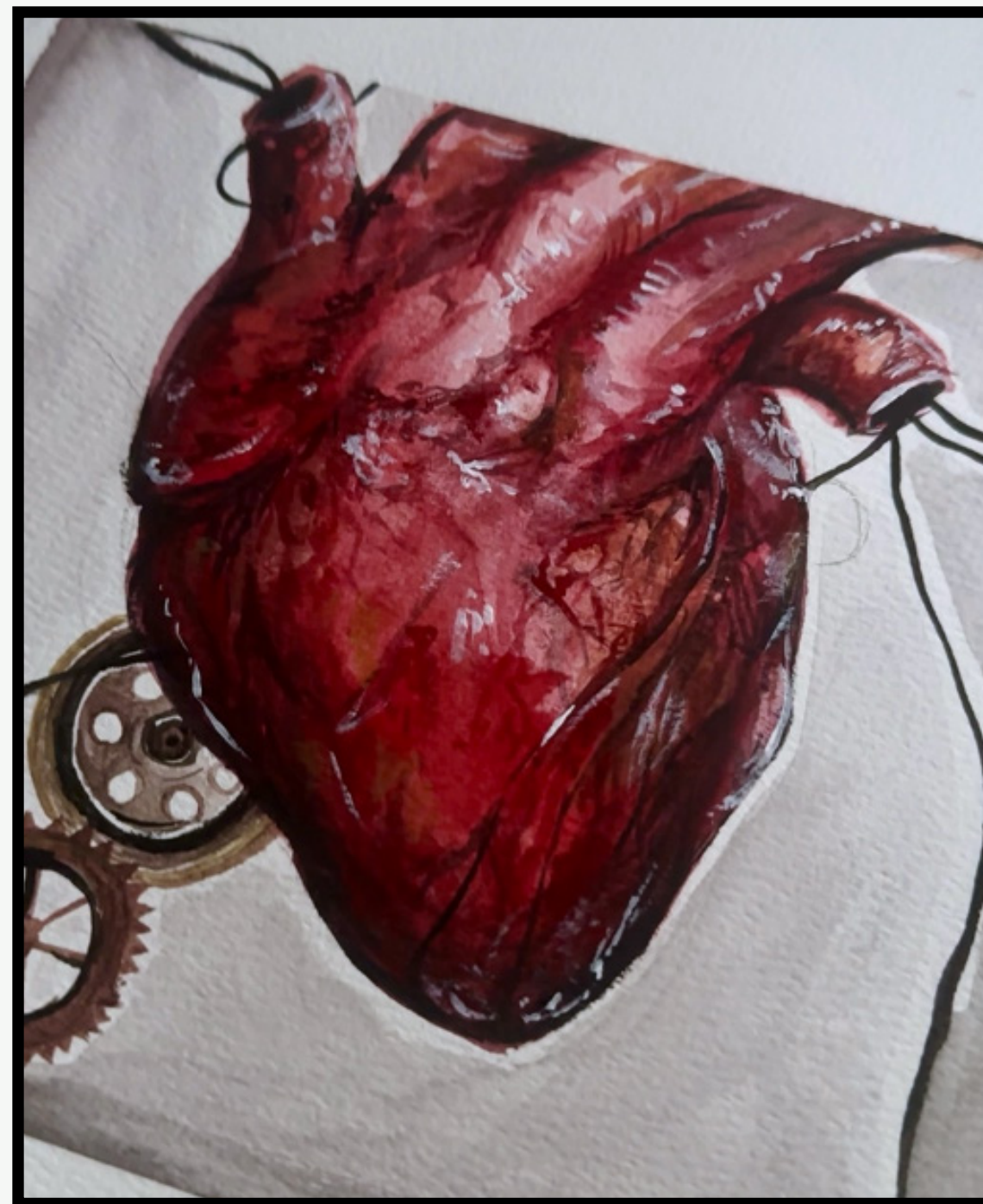
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS
ZOE THOMPSON



“Reflection of a puddle converted to black and white.”
- Luke Higgins

UNITITLED 2

PHOTOGRAPH
LUKE HIGGINS



AND JUST LIKE THAT

ACRYLIC INK PRINT
A COMBINATION OF RELIEF PRINTING, STENCIL PRINTING, & SCREEN
PRINTING
LUKE HIGGINS



EVERYDAY JUICE

COLORED PENCIL, GOUACHE PAINT, TEMPERA PAINT
EMILY WANG



CHARRED 2
CHARCOAL ON PAPER
KOI

AND IN THE END, I WAS FORGOTTEN

DIGITAL
ASCENDING AUTOMATA





THE MECHANISTIC DREAMERS

2023, DIGITAL
ASCENDING AUTOMATA

SPRING

GOUACHE ON PAPER
4"X6"
MASHA YAREMENKO



Healer to Hero

ヒーローへの回復者



HEALER TO HERO

DIGITAL
CHRISTOPHER TURK

Shade
Helios Lochlainn

As soon as the sun is covered by clouds
or hidden by jets,
we find
many of our “allies”
are here for the good weather, only here to beam in the spotlight.
As soon as we are in shade,
we are
marginalized, silenced, cast aside
shoved into a glass closet
like mannequins on display.
“We value diversity!” they insist,
“but not on this day.”



WHEN THE SUN ROSE FROM THE WEST

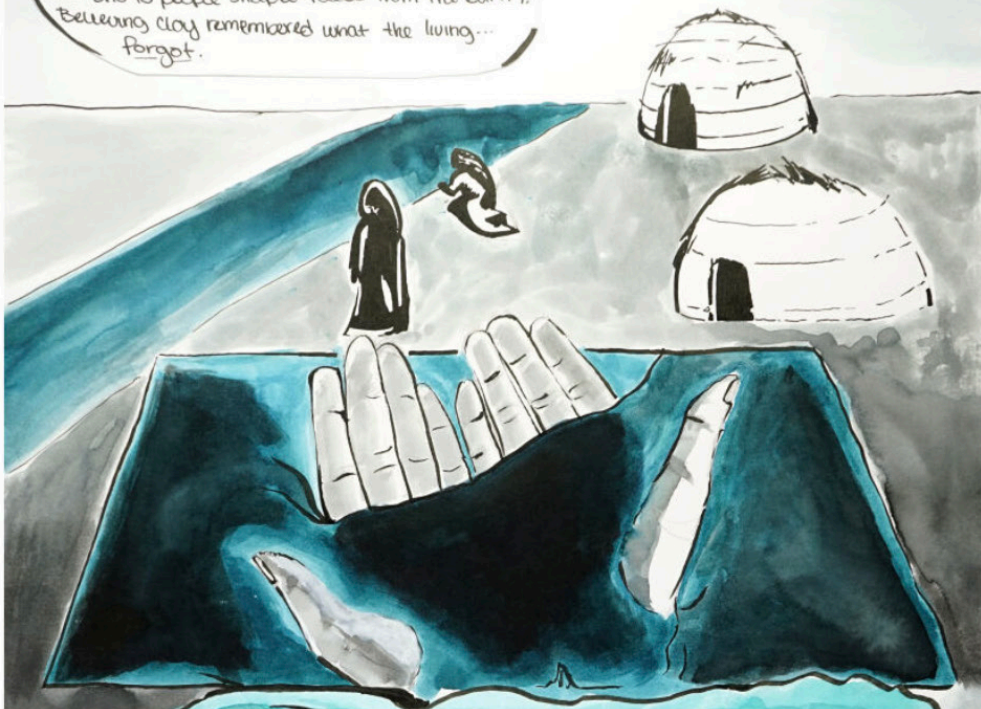
DIGITAL
ASCENDING AUTOMATA

they expected the great Judgment, but it never came.
everything faded out, everything decayed
and then there was silence.
there was nothing.
creator ceased to be, and creation lived on.
all that remained was the relentless force of nature and the fall of the apex
species
and then it was the end,

at least that's how they understood it.

AN IMAGINING OF THE SHOTO
CLAY MASK PEOPLE
By Zoe Thompson

Along the lower LAKE RIVER,
The Sho-to people shaped faces from the earth.
Believing clay remembered what the living...
forgot.



When a person passed, their likeness was
pressed into the mud,
so their spirit could rest within it.



Once fired in the kiln, each mask became a
keeper of breath.



But, the more souls preserved, the fewer hands
remained to shape them.



The kiln drew life from it's makers
Their skin turned pale, their hearts cooled to stone.

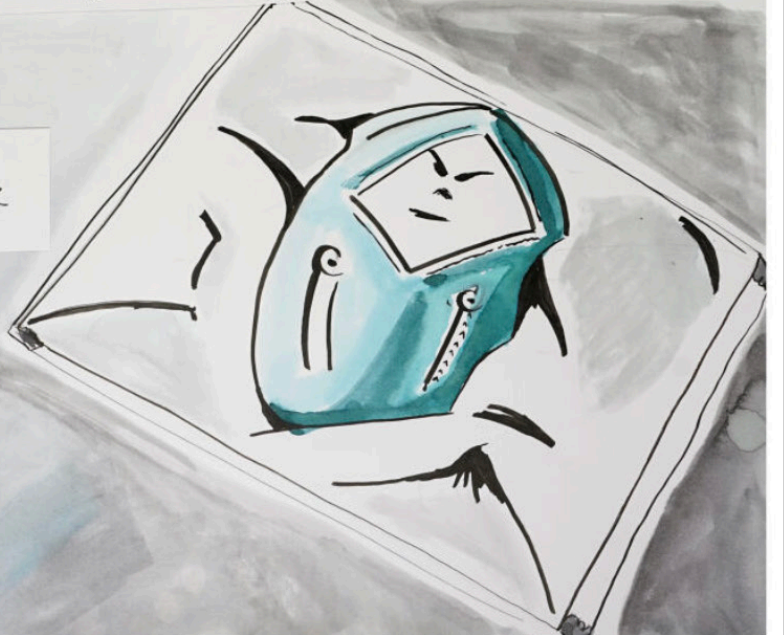
Until one day, the fire burned for seven nights...
and when it dimmed
no one was left to tend it.

1960 — The Herzog Site near Ridgefield, Washington.
clay masks unearthed from a vanished lakeside village.



Now preserved in the CLARK COUNTY HISTORICAL MUSEUM.
Their faces rest behind glass.

Still



"This is a comic I created in my 498 Sketchbook ideation class. It is inspired by the Shoto Clay Masks discovered in Ridgefield, Washington in the 1970s."
- Zoe Thompson

A REIMAGINING OF THE SHOTO CLAY MASK PEOPLE
INK ON PAPER
ZOE THOMPSON

THE FARM

AUSTIN ELTINGE

A great melancholy filled the Farmer to his gills where it choked him. The skin of the woman's leg was still warm as his cold hand clutched it. Every step felt heavier as he dragged her to an unforeseen future. She did not scream out in agony. He ensured the end of her life was swift, just as quickly as he knew his own life would end. As he stepped closer to the shack where he knew the end was, he couldn't help but drag his feet upon the soil where he had spent his whole life. It was begging him to stop this atrocity. But he couldn't stop. Her death couldn't be for nothing. So, The Farmer solemnly marched forward to the door of *The Shack*. Hopefully, for the last time.

The Farmer walked into the local gas station as his truck filled up with gas. That old thing was over 30 years old but still managed somehow. Every farmer in the area came to this gas station, as doing so was more favorable than driving 30 minutes into town. Especially since the owner of it was Paul. Everyone who knew Paul had a deep adoration for him, and even the folks that didn't came away from that place happier than when they went in. For the Farmer this was necessary, as happiness was in short supply these days. The pigs he had helped raise his whole life had slowly dwindled down in numbers. One could say this was a good thing, and even the Farmer thought so on days he felt his aching shoulders couldn't handle one more bag of pig feed. This thought always faded quickly, though, as he needed those pigs. They were the life blood of his family, even if that blood had begun to thicken with fat over the years.

"Mornin' Paul," the Farmer said, ambling through the doors of the station.

"Mornin'," Paul said, looking at the morning news on his old box television that would only work when given a few hearty thumps. "You hear about them group of thugs going around slaughtering our animals?"

"Yeah. Rick told me all about 'em the other day, when he came through to work on my truck," the Farmer said, hoisting a bag of pig feed into his cart. "As horrible as it is, it's just a bunch of dumb teenagers, is all. They don't know good from bad, even if I personally beat it into 'em."

"Well, maybe a good bullet or two in 'em would set 'em straight," Paul said with a laugh.

"I know you've been wanting to shoot someone since you got injured in the military, but let's just try and keep the peace," the Farmer said with a reciprocative chuckle.

Paul said with a sarcastic grin, "I'm still surprised that pig farm of yours is still up and running. Even when your daddy was alive and kicking, that place had seen better days. I went up there one time to help him out, and I swear, when I was grabbing some coffee, a piece of the ceiling came off and nearly took my head with it. I don't know why you don't just sell the whole

"My goal is to write beautiful and gripping stories that will hopefully resonate with readers. This is the first story that I am attempting to publish, so I hope it is enjoyable."

- Austin Eltinge

damn thing and retire you and your wife."

"Paul, you know that ain't gonna happen. That house has been passed down in my family for generations, and I ain't gonna throw all that away. Even if by some influence of the Devil himself, I decided I wanted to sell the whole blasted place and move down further south, y'know I couldn't. Not only do I not got enough of the fat bastards to make out with any sort of fortune, that house is falling apart at the shingles, as you so kindly reminded me. No one in their right mind would buy it for a price that would allow me and my love to retire. So, I just gotta keep on getting until I either die tending to those beasts or making love."

"I'd try and shoot for that last idea of yours, if I were you."

"You said it," the Farmer said, half-wishing that his fate was that instead of what he knew it would be at one point or another.

After the Farmer was done making the usual rounds in the station, he went up to Paul and paid for the feed and the few other groceries he got. It wasn't much, but it would get him through the next few days, at least. Before the Farmer left, Paul started up more conversation, as was usual. "By the way," he said with a choking cough from too much smoking. "Have you sold off any of those pigs lately?"

The Farmer paused at this question longer than he had intended to. "I just sold the last one I can for a while, not but just last month. These beasts aren't producing like they used to Paul."

"Well, I'll be praying for you and sitting here on my ass watchin' this television, like always. I can tell you're runnin' a lil' dry on money there."

"Like always," the Farmer repeated with a sort of solemn envy.

Getting into his truck that just got done filling with gas, he started back up to the farm where he'd have to tend to his wife before he could to his beasts.

As the farmer unloaded all of his feed near the pig pen one by one, he felt the cool breeze of the beautiful summer day roll over him into the tree lining. Seeing the trees swaying lackadaisically on the backdrop of the perfectly blue sky eased his mind from his pain temporarily. Breaking this momentary relaxation, a figure in the tree lining about 100 yards away from his pig pen appeared. Stopping what he was doing in a haste, the Farmer sat there, watching if the dark silhouette would move. It hadn't. Rather, it was simply standing as a black blot in the otherwise brown and green forest. The form was solid and unmoving. He couldn't make out any of its features, but he could tell it was watching him intently with eyes that felt like needles piercing his heart. After about 5 minutes of apprehensive waiting that made sweat drip down his neck, he heard a loud noise boom from the house.

"Love! Is that you?" his wife said. Looking back one more time to see the figure, it had disappeared in the few short seconds it took for the Farmer to look back into the woods. He

chalked it up to just his old mind playing tricks on him. Despite this dismissal, he couldn't help but keep a mental note of the whole ordeal in the back of his mind with a question marking the encounter that gnawed at the base of his skull. How long had it been there for?

"Yes ma'am, just one second!" the Farmer boomed back while going as fast as he could to unload the rest of his feed so he could see his love again. It had been no more than 25 minutes since he last saw her, but she drew him in like a boy's first crush does in high school. That's where the Farmer and his wife met all those years back, and he still couldn't shake that same feeling he had back then. Walking through the screen door that was barely on its hinges, the Farmer quickly aided his wife to her wheelchair. Her legs started to give out on her, with her arms not being strong enough on their own to keep herself up even with the help of her cane.

"These god-forsaken floorboards are more uneven than the roads going down 44," the wife bitterly remarked.

"C'mon love, don't blame these old floorboards. We both know your condition has been getting worse over the years," the Farmer said as he helped get her settled in her chair. While it was true that the floorboards and every other piece of wood in that family house were either fully decayed or surely on their way, the Farmer's wife did have a nasty degenerative disease. It attacked her muscles and nervous system so that over the years she had slowly lost control of her body. First, it was her right arm that was now contorted and bent to the point of practical uselessness. Slowly after that, she needed a cane to keep her upright. The farmer had carved it from an old fence post that was still as solid as it was the first day it had been put into the ground. He also bought a wheelchair shortly after a doctor told them that that's where she would end up sooner rather than later. The Wife resented that wheelchair with a stinging venom. More and more, she had to use it as the years went on, and every time she felt the seat on her body she wanted to scream. Scream at the unfairness of the whole thing. Scream until her lungs were completely annihilated. In her youth, she could outrun and outmuscle every farm boy in the whole countryside.

"You don't gotta remind me. I'm the one trapped in this broken body, remember?" After a pause, she said, "I'm sorry, honey. For snapping at you, that is. It's just... it's just that I'm so sick of not being able to move around like I used to. Hell, I can't even walk more than 50 feet before I have to sit my ass down again. I bet those farmer boys are laughing now," she said, chuckling with a tint of sadness drooping over her words like a silk curtain on a breezy day.

"They might be laughing now, but just wait 'till they understand that all of 'em combined wouldn't be able to take you on in crossword, scrabble, or, hell, even write one damn poem or story," the Farmer reminded her. She had always been sharp as a knife as much as she was muscle-bound. "Remember that poem you wrote not but just last week? It was the most beautiful thing I ever read. I even cried!"

"You always cry when there is so much as a bird that kills itself flying into our windows, love," the Wife sharply reminded him.

"Well, that might be the case, but there's no denying that your writing should win you a

Nobel Prize."

"You're a sweet man. Foolish as can be, but sweet nonetheless," she said with a shake of the head and a motion as if to say she wanted her man to kiss her, which then he did without hesitation.

"Let me make you some tea. I got your favorite from ol' Paul," the Farmer said, to which the Wife had no objections.

"Just so you know, Miller's wife came by with milk they got this mornin' from their girls," the Wife said, as she wanted that delicious milk with her tea.

"You mean Barb? The one I told if I ever saw her again, I'd shoot her ass where she stood?" the Farmer said back with venom.

"Yep, the very same. She said it was a peace offering, or somethin'."

"Some peace offering, considering she's come here with milk every week for the last 20 years. I might just have to go make a visit up to the Miller's later tonight."

"Now, now, honey, I know she sold some of your pigs without your knowledge and stole the money right out from under us, but don't go and do anything that would take you away from me. I need you more for just the labor, y'know."

"You know I wouldn't, love. It's just so damn frustrating to know that we have neighbors who are more than willing to snatch our livelihoods right from under us without a drop of remorse. I know they're struggling too, but you know how bad we got it. How desperate we are for a couple bucks. I mean, selling those pigs is the blood of our finances. It has been for generations in this family. We're burning the wick here at both ends as it is without some demon trying to add fuel to it!" the Farmer said while choking back rage that threatened to boil out of his throat and burn the house down. Trying to finish the tea, he started to be more productive. His wife said, "Now, you go on out there and feed those pigs. I know it's therapeutic for you and god knows you need some fresh air right now. I can handle making some tea myself." "Let me just do it for you. It won't take more than a few minutes, if I could just get this damn stove to work," the Farmer said as he fiddled with the igniter that had been touchy, as every other part of the house was.

"What did I just say?" the Wife said with a lovingly stern tone. "Go on, get! I can handle one cup of tea, even if my body don't work," shooin' him off like a dog that had misbehaved.

Going out to feed the pigs with reluctance, the Farmer went out the back of the family house, making sure to avoid the third step down, as it was caving in. He couldn't afford to pull or break something at his age, with the ever-increasing medical bills that his wife accrued which were their own disease themselves. Once he managed to shamle his way to where he left the bags of feed, he started cutting them open with his pocketknife that his father had given him when he finally turned 18.

After his father gave him the knife as a symbol of manhood, his father took him to the shack for the first time in his life. This would be far from the last time, but it was the last time he ever saw his father. That day, the Farmer understood why his father hated that thing so much, with the seeds of hatred being nourished in him. The thing had swallowed his father whole, leaving nothing but that knife, the farm, and the weight that he, too, would meet the same fate, one day or another. In that moment the Farmer took over as the caretaker of the farm and made a vow that he would never produce a child as long as he was shackled to it. He couldn't bear the idea that this nightmare would have to be endured by another soul.

As the Farmer cut the bags open, he took mental note of what pig would go next into that shack. Jim was much too fat to go. The Farmer needed that one to either sell or eat. Tim was another poor choice, as he was the smallest of the bunch, being only 2 months old. This puzzle went on for some time as he hauled the feed into the troughs until he found the perfect one. Marge was just right for the shack. Not too large but fully mature and ready. Walking through the pigs and in the mud that clawed at his boots, the Farmer made his way into the shed to get the ear notcher so he could easily remember Marge as the pig he needed for the ritual.

Unlocking the door to the small shed, he found the ear notcher quickly enough and started back into the pen. The swine must have somehow known what awaited in that shack and saw the intentions The Farmer had within the ear notcher, and decided it would be better to flee. Picking up the pace from a brisk walk into a semi-jog, the fastest speed his body could handle at this point, he tried to catch her as she weaved around other pigs. Round they went for some few minutes, and the Farmer's body must've given out sometime in those minutes as he tripped over his own feet into the mud.

"Damn beast," he swore. He heard Marge laughing with delight. That's when the Farmer saw the shack seep a deep red-black color from the cracks in the planks that held its devilish form in place. It knew that Marge was marked for death and swelled with gluttonous excitement. Those colors sank deep into his soul, making him feel the most repugnant of feelings he's ever felt. Like a man possessed with a rage that couldn't be stamped out with the biggest boot, he got up faster than even himself thought was possible and tackled Marge to the ground. Swiftly, the notcher went onto the ear of the swine and took a chunk of it out. He couldn't understand where all of this rage and energy came from, but he never did.

"Sorry, lady. But it's either you or me, and by god, I'm not quite ready yet to face it," the Farmer said to the pig as if it could understand his situation, which was something he always did when he was tending to them. It almost felt like a real connection sometimes, and he always felt guilty for marching them to their ends. Dragging his feet back up the steps, his body forgot about the broken one and put all of his weight onto it. His foot caved in while it swallowed his leg up to his hip.

"Shit!" the Farmer said with the same rage that had been left over from taking a nosedive into the mud.

"Love, is that you?" his wife worryingly yelled from the kitchen where she was finishing her tea while writing a poem about her hatred for the body she felt trapped in. After a moment of silence, she exclaimed, "Hold on, I'm coming out!" to which The Farmer protested. Despite his efforts, he wasn't able to free his leg or stop his wife from coming and helping him.

"It'll be okay, honey, just take deep breaths," she reassured him as she tried to bend down to help him. With a good deal of effort, they managed to get him out of his predicament. Despite his wife's good nature, her body was much too fragile to be helping his cumbersome body out of the staircase, which led to her falling just before getting into the house.

"You gotta be more careful with your body. I could've gotten out myself, even if I am old and rather large for my height," he said after catching her before she hit the ground.

"I know, I know, but maybe don't get stuck in a hole next time?" she said sarcastically with a slight grin on her face. "How 'bout we both get ourselves clean and eat somethin' huh? Get to bed a little early tonight, since I know it's about that time," she said as he carried her inside. His foot felt strained from his careless walking.

"It feels like the months just keep gettin' shorter 'n' shorter. We don't got very many pigs left as is, goddammit..." the Farmer said with a subdued anger. "It ain't fair. Why did I gotta be born into that family of cursed fools? Why do I gotta suffer just for that fact? I wish I woulda' ran away before I turned 18. Before I knew... before I knew what that shack was. Rather, what it held. Then again, if I ran away I woulda been as good as dead anyhow," the Farmer said all this while tears streamed down his wrinkled face like rain fall on a wet October evening. Every drop filled in the cracks of his face as they went down like rain in the gutters in town on those evenings.

"I understand, but I'm here for you. I always have been and always will be," his wife said, holding him in her arms as she wiped the tears away from his etched face. "How 'bout that shower?"

"Yeah... let's go on up and do that," the Farmer stated as he helped her wheelchair to the stairs and then her to their bedroom's shower. After washing off, they made oatmeal with eggs and bacon for dinner. Big greasy meals always made the Farmer feel better. It was his family's cure for everything from the flu to heartbreak. No matter how much he resented being born into this family, he knew it wasn't anyone's fault but the Lord's. Maybe that was blasphemy, but by now, the Lord had heard everything imaginable, from the Farmer's not-so-quiet prayer sessions with him late at nights when he felt particularly angry.

After washing each other and enjoying their meal in silence, they went off to bed, dreading the next day, as they always did on the first of every new month. The Farmer saw the shack glow with a primordial desire unknown to the human mind just as his vision faded to black.

Waking up to a loud cry like an animal in the throes of death, the Farmer's head started to

throb. It did this most weeks in the middle of the night, especially when the time of the month came closer at hand. In a daze that made the pitch-black room even darker, he grasped for the cup of water that was always by his side when going to bed. The moonlight illuminated the bedside enough for him to see his cup which he drank down in a continuous motion, as someone in the desert might when finding water. Thinking of nothing else other than going back to sleep to alleviate his headache, he rested his head down on his pillow for the last time that night.

Awaking to the sun recklessly boring through the silk blinds that hauntingly heated the Farmer's face, he knew there was no time to waste. He wearily crawled out of bed where he put his white tank top, that was currently more brown than white, canvas pants, and overalls on. He kissed his love's forehead while she slept and laboriously marched down the creaking steps and out the back of his house. Looking out to his pig pen from his porch as he strapped his boots on, he saw a sight that would turn to stone even the strongest of men. Running like a mad man to the pen, he saw them all laying there. One with its throat slit, while another lay still with its head on a spike. Two more were gutted like fish while yet another few were missing all their limbs as if they detached themselves and walked away as they were nowhere to be found. He slumped down onto the ground, using Marge's body as back support. Some combination of rage and melancholy overtook his whole body and paralyzed him. There was nothing else he could do. His entire way of life was now eradicated. The red-black glow of the shack was getting stronger, almost like it saw this sight and couldn't help but to be amused.

After sitting for hours, staring into the pits of the grotesque mud mixed with blood that he had learned to hate more than anything over his entire life, he felt an even deeper hatred. Hatred that had nowhere to go but inward as thoughts of what he could have done to prevent this clawed into the deepest recesses of his mind. Of course, there was nothing he could have done. Maybe it was time for him to let this all go. He could barely keep up with the farm anymore, and he didn't have enough money to hire a helping hand or two. Neighbors helped as much as one could, but they all had their own farms to tend to and their own bellies to feed, much less someone else's.

The Farmer, with nothing else to do, got up and started toward that shack. The shack that had plagued his family for generations and refused to leave its blood that was already thick with disease. Step after step, he could feel the door to that place getting large enough to warp the mind's perception of size. Eventually getting up to the impossibly large door he willed his hand to grasp the handle even as his body screamed at him to stop. To run away and never look back, even though he knew it wouldn't work. He stood there for a moment, in the oppressive atmosphere of the door. All of his muscles tightened in his arm and shoulder to will the door open, that had a weight that should have been impossible. When the door finally crept open, the walls began to move on their own as if they were breathing. They swayed outward then inward at a rhythmic beat that matched the breathing of the Farmer. As he stepped closer into the heart of the demon the floorboards breathed with the rest of the shack to create something almost... living. Like any living organism, it had to eat. Once inside the Farmer felt beckoned to the back of it. As he walked, the boards pushed and pulled his feet to hurry him into the back where the cellar door blew open as it ingested him.

Like a gaping maw, the teeth and wet tube that must have been its throat showed itself and uttered a sound that was impossible to pin down yet the Farmer understood, "You're early." After

a long pause, it said, "Where is the swine that you intend to give to me?"

"I—" the Farmer tried to speak, but couldn't force the words out of his shaky throat.

"Speak!" the Maw demanded with an implied threat. The tendrils from it had begun to creep out.

"They killed... them all. Those thugs... my... your feast," the Farmer barely managed to get out. The entire organism had begun to shake violently at this news. The floorboards whipped, and the walls constricted all around the Farmer in an instant with a suffocating intensity, until he could only face the open cellar door. The tendrils from the organism ensured he did not go anywhere until it was done with him by wrapping themselves around his legs.

"By midnight on the first night of the new month, I must have my feast that was raised upon this farm... this was the deal made by your family generations ago. Now, If you cannot procure a feast for me by midnight, I will have to take either you or your wife as my food." After the organism uttered this, the shack began to relax back to its natural shape, with the door to its entrance wide open. The Farmer dragged his feet along the boards of the shack out onto the clear grass where he had little in the way of thoughts. His eyes were as wide as the moon on a clear night filled with terror. He knew this day would come but he never could have prepared himself for the weight of the choice once it was staring him down.

The Farmer must have stayed out in the field longer than he expected. When he entered the house to sit down, he saw his wife with a flower-print dress on, sitting at the table writing a poem. As he pulled himself into the chair to sit, he had the expression of a man who had just watched his friend get killed on the battlefield. There was nothing behind his eyes. He felt such a deep sense of dread that he became lifeless. After a while of this, his wife without looking up from her poem said, "Would you like some tea?" The Farmer didn't reply. Finally looking up from her writing, she saw a look in the Farmer's eyes that she hadn't seen since he turned eighteen and got taken out into the shack for the very first time. Her whole demeanor suddenly shifted into a quietly reserved one. Some minutes passed until she said, "You went out into the shack, didn't you? While you were gone, I saw what those punks did to our pigs. So... this is it... isn't it?"

With reluctance to this question that had to be answered, The Farmer simply said, "Yes." The entire house seemed to come crashing down. They both sat in silence, in terror of what to do or even say next while they sat in the place that had started this ritual. A once-beautiful family farmhouse that flourished had become their final coffin. Hours passed with just the two of them sitting there with their own thoughts. Both knowing what must come next but too afraid to do anything about it. The Farmer finally spoke. "Mary, I... I have to feed you to that... thing."

"I know," Mary said. "My body has become as battered as this house has, and there isn't a damn thing I can do about it. Even if you went instead, there isn't a damn thing I could do with you gone. Not to mention, I'll be in the ground not before too long with this disease." This, both of them understood better than they'd like to. They were too poor for the Wife to buy any help around the farm, and their few neighbors didn't have an altruistic bone in their bodies.

“I’m so sorry,” the Farmer crept out with tears streaming down his face onto the broken floor. “If only I—if only we had more time. If only I had stayed out there all night making sure nothing happened to those pigs. If only I had fled when I was 18. If only I had never brought you into this mess to begin with... then... I could have saved you.”

“Shut up, Abraham. Just shut up.” Mary spoke with tears and snot wrapping themselves around her throat, almost crushing it. “How dare you say you shouldn’t have married me. There isn’t a damn man on this whole earth I’d rather be with! I knew the risk from the very start and you know that, too. I chose this life and the risk of dying with my choices. We are in this together.”

The Farmer’s heart felt impossibly heavier than before.

“I’m sorry... I didn’t mean it like that. It’s just... it’s not fair.”

“I know it isn’t, but this is the reality,” Mary said with a blank stare out of the window into the pig pen, which was populated only with entrails.

After some more minutes, the Farmer got up from his chair and made the seemingly insurmountable journey into the pig shed. Once there he saw the axe he used to chop lumber with during winter. Almost dragging it on the ground, he made his way back into the house, where the front door was wide open and his wife was gone. Looking out of the door he saw his woman moving as fast as she could with her cane. It was a half-jogging motion, the fastest her body allowed her to run. Shocked at this, the Farmer broke out into a speed-walk to catch up with her while screaming, “Mary, wait, don’t do this! It don’t gotta be like this! Just please sit down. You’ll hurt yourself!” But Mary didn’t listen and kept on moving as fast as she could. Despite her own brain telling her that dying would be the best thing for the situation, the most logical thing to do in her situation, her body, and most importantly her soul, would not listen as she left a trail of tears in her wake.

After about 30 seconds or so Mary’s legs gave out on her, causing her to fall on the hard dirt. Abraham caught up shortly after and sat down beside her. Mary was screaming, “Please don’t kill me, I don’t wanna die! It’s not fair. None of it is!” As she pounded on the dirt and clawed at it as if to try to escape.

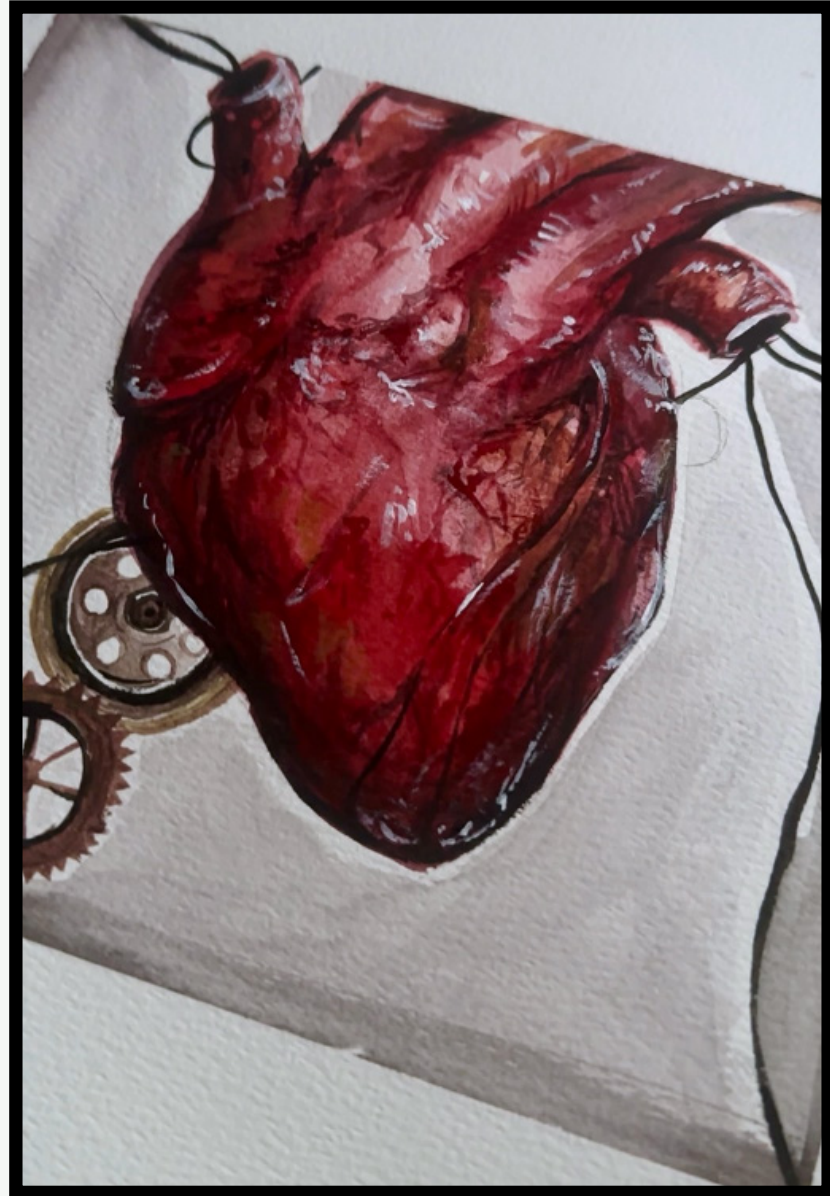
“Mary... I’m so sorry... loving you was the best decision I’ve ever made.”

Those were the last words they ever spoke to each other as the brutally sharp side of the axe buried its way deep inside her skull in one swift motion. With a dread Abraham had never felt before, he grabbed her by the ankle and dragged her toward the house and into the shack where the organism would swallow her whole, and his blood alongside her.



SOMETHING IS MERGING

GOUACHE ON PAPER
ASCENDING AUTOMATA



AND YOU WON'T NOTICE

GOUACHE ON PAPER
ASCENDING AUTOMATA



UNTIL YOU LOOK AWAY

GOUACHE ON PAPER
ASCENDING AUTOMATA



THE DARK SHINING PRINCE

MARNIE COOPER

The train rolled along as the girl gazed out the window. The light was neither fully bright nor truly dark, but a muted glow that cast long shadows. As the train passed through the dim landscape, it crossed an open field where hedges had been clipped into the shapes of animals. A giraffe seemed to rise as the view reached the horizon.

The conductor, a gray-haired man with a mustache and spectacles who looked as though he had stepped out of an old photograph from the turn of the century, walked down the aisle toward her. He leaned closer, glanced over his shoulder, then out the window and announced,

“Behold, the dark shining prince is upon us now.”

She turned from him and fixed her eyes outside, trying to make sense of the hedges. Something seemed to be emerging from the field beyond, but before she could focus, the train slowed and came to a halt beneath a bridge

Under the bridge, the world shifted. Everyone was gone, and it felt as though she had entered a dream. When she reached the door of the train and looked out to see where it had stopped and where all the people had gone, she noticed a carousel sitting in an eerie, forgotten stillness, as if it were a portal to another realm. The dust of darkness had settled there for a long time, undisturbed by any light, quietly waiting for another turn in the glow. It was as though she had stepped from a fading dream into a place gleaming with brilliance.

The light shimmered as the carousel began to turn, then collapsed suddenly back into shadow. From the darkness came the sound of footsteps grinding on gravel. A figure moved closer, its shadow stretching into the space around her. A single beam of light opened overhead like a spotlight, and the figure stepped into it.

Her gaze followed the form upward, from the shoes to his pale, shining face.

As her eyes adjusted, she recognized him. It was her father.

THE DARK SHINING PRINCE

PHOTOGRAPH
MARNIE COOPER

MEET THE EDITORS - 2026 SPRING TEAM



KOI

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Koi is a computer science student that likes astronomy, art, and a lot of other things!



ISABELLA SWENSON

PROSE & WRITING EDITOR

Isabella Swenson is a senior at WSUV, majoring in English Teaching without Certification and minoring in History. Isabella loves reading and writing and hopes to become a teacher who inspires future generations of learners to feel the same way. In the meantime, she is a para-educator who is also very excited to be joining the SCJ team!



ZOE THOMPSON

LAYOUT & DESIGN EDITOR

Zoe Thompson is in her senior year at the Digital Technology & Culture program, with a minor in fine arts. She is specializing in digital media, visual design, and narrative development. As a member of the Salmon Creek Journal staff, she is committed to supporting high-quality student art and fostering an inclusive creative community. Lastly, she loves to paint, and hangout with her cat Cleo.



CAMI WAGNER

EDITORIAL INTERN

Cami Wagner is an English Literary Studies major with a minor in Political Science here at Washington State University Vancouver. With her internship at the Salmon Creek Journal, she hopes to develop career skills as well as give back to her community at WSUV. Outside of her work at the journal, she is a restaurant server and a freelance journalist. Post-graduation she hopes to make journalism her full-time career.



SALMON CREEK JOURNAL

EDITORIAL TEAM

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Koi Li

DESIGN AND LAYOUT EDITOR

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WRITING AND PROSE EDITOR

Isabella Swenson

EDITORIAL INTERN

Cami Wagner