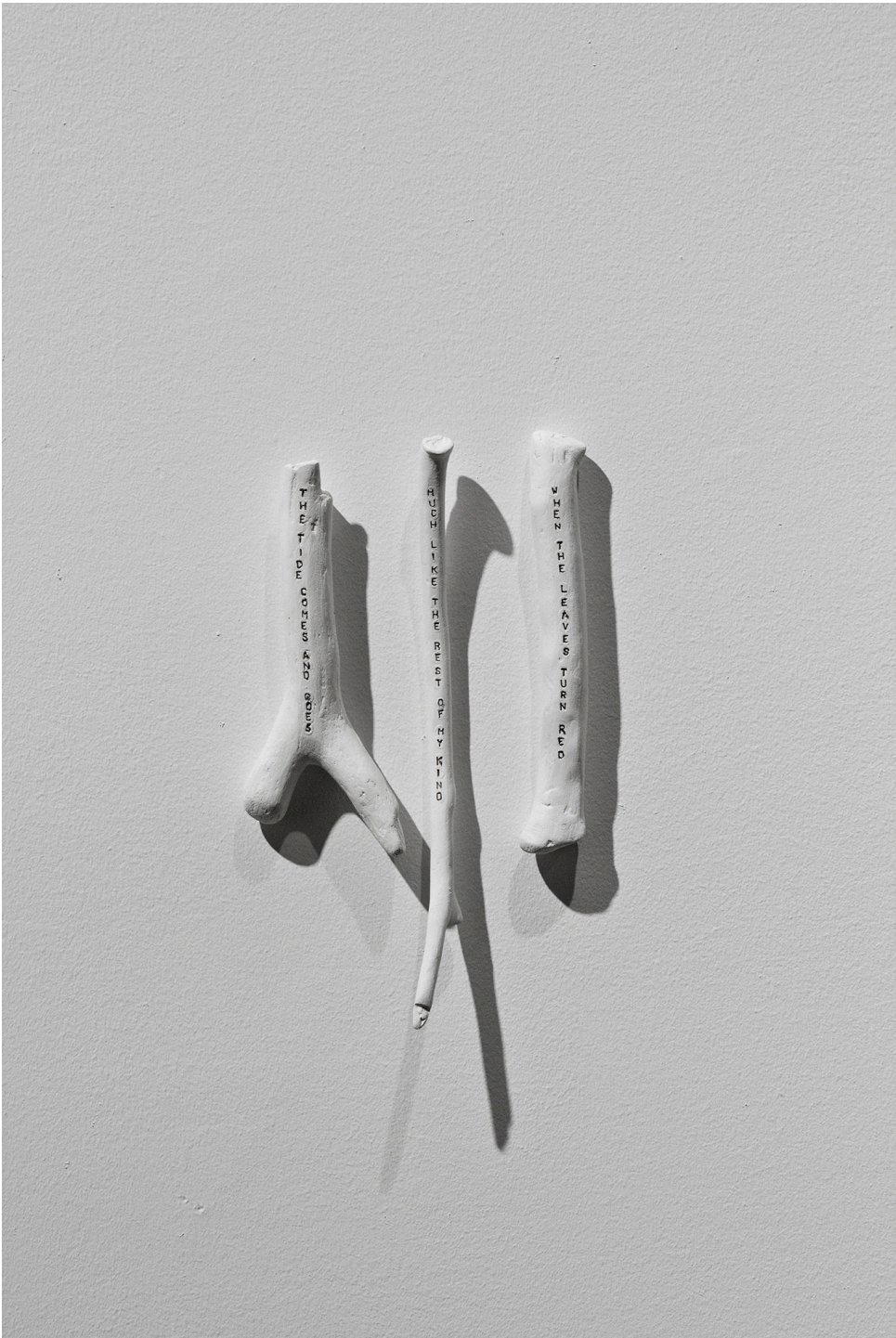


# TIMBER

VOLUME 6.1 WINTER 2016



# TIMBER

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## DOLL FACTORY

### Monologue

*To Bernard-Marie Koltès*

“Stop putting more red over and over again. When the men are already in the streets chasing the women. When the women are already walking with their faces on. The men stare at them, all night long, putting red over and over again.

Don't you know?

The whole city's out in the streets. The whole city's gone into heat.

It's the hour. The Gentlemen rub themselves against the Ladies. The Ladies, they let themselves be rubbed. You, after a long day's work, sit in your room, by the mirror. You try every different shade of red: Rouge Coco, Rouge Dior, Pur Couture, Passion of Yves Saint Laurent...

No man comes in your room to stare at the colors of your lips. One red on, you wipe it off, then try a different one. You like your tubes of red and boxes of tissues used up. But there are more tubes and more boxes stashed in your cabinet drawers. Instead of going out, with the men, you prefer staying in, with your dolls. Nobody else around.

Who told you to wear red like this? In hiding, in vice, and in solitude?

Shame on you! Mama, she told you: Ladies put on a face, for no reason, except this: To be stared at by the men in the streets. A woman who wears a face in solitude, in hiding, is nothing. But a clown. Vicious. Fooling around with nobody there to clap hands or to crack up.

Shame on Mama! City's all whispers, now: She didn't teach her a thing. Not to this girl, here. Not even to put on her face. Ditzies! One like the other! City's all ears, now: It runs in the blood. The viciousness. It flows from the roots. If you don't stop, you'll make her die of shame twice over. You'll make her come back down

here. To scold you, because of all the insults.

For the love of Mama! Put on a face! Be on your way! Take on the streets! Let the Gentlemen who are passing by the front door rub all over you!

Don't you know, now?

Baby Doll! You're so beautiful! You'd make all those city Ladies cry with envy! If you tried just a bit. With a sweet face like this. Pretty. Frail and tiny. A little china figurine. You know, the ones behind the windows of *Yesterday's Dolls*. That break into pieces between the fat and clumsy fingers of the Gentlemen.

It'd take you so little, almost no effort, to turn the city Ladies grey with envy.

If you tried just a bit. Put on some mascara. Powder to bleach your skin. Bright polish on your nails. If you made your mouth all red and your hair all blonde. If you walked on high heels. You know, the ones that clap on the pavements. Then, the men would be staring at you in the streets. Then, you would not be Mama's shame.

If you honored Mama in the whole city. The Gentlemen would dump their Ladies on the pavements. Chase after you all the way home. One and the other. They'd line up at your front door. Knock and knock, day and night. Won't let you go back to sleep. You'd have to do the dirty work no more. The work that you do all weekdays. Soiling your slim dolly fingers. Rubbing raw the Ladies. Eight hours, every day. Their damp and tepid bodies filled with Gentlemen's filth. Because they were rubbed on too much in the streets. You, too, if you wanted. You could put it out. In return, the men would give you all that your heart truly desires: Prada, Gucci, Ralph Lauren, Kenneth Cole, Calvin Klein, Emporio Armani...

If only you made Mama proud. The city would be one big chatterbox. Tittling and tattling all the time. About your looks and your moves. The city would come to your front door, night and day, to see which red you choose to put on your lips, in your room, by the mirror.

Why paint your lips, if no man stares at you doing it? Dying to kiss your mouth because you're doing it? Tiring himself out just to invent ways of kissing it? Keeps kissing it for no reason, except this: He, too, craves to know the pleasures of your lipstick. Flavors made to everybody's taste: Sheer Candy, Caramel, Macaron, Rose Bonbon, Wild Strawberry...

When the night ends, he would leave. On his tongue, the bitter taste of dried berries and musty caramel. On his collar, traces of poppy and crimson lip-prints. His wife, back home, surely wears no poppy or crimson. But mauve.

Why then paint your lips, if no man could remember. Late at night. After dumping you on the pavement. After giving his wife his shirt to wash off the lip-prints. Like at the restaurant, after the meal. When the waiter adds up the food rotting in your belly. Only to remind you that, now, it's time to pay.

Have you been kissed, before, by a man? Grabbed, even? So your skin turns stiff with the stink of his sweat? So his smell burns the inside of your nose? Drags you, bit by bit, to the brink of vomit? Have you seen, before, a man who's nauseous? Because of looking at a woman? One with naked lips? Who's vomited, over her high heels, the morning meal? That's been rotting all day in her belly? Through a mouth resembling a pretty spring flower no more? But a wound?

A woman's red: It is like a hem. Stitching the edges of a gaping hole hidden beneath silk laces or satin flowers. A mouth painted in red, it is a buttonhole. All embroiled at the borders. Patiently waiting to be buttoned up.

But a woman's mouth with no red: It is a wound. The disfigurement of a crack in her mid face. Begging to be mended, immediately. Sewed up from the edges. Sketched anew with red.

Aren't you scared, for want of more paint, that your mouth frazzles? That the scar stretches over your face? Without any warning? Leaving, instead of a face, nothing else? But an obscure and amorphous abyss? Spitting, with no restraint or reserve, words so lunatic and lonesome?

A woman who can't button up her mouth runs the risk to vomit, for want of more restraint or reserve: A tongue spoiled. Words twisted. Rotting, inside her belly, for centuries. Reeking from the moment they cross her lips.

Why keep talking, like this? With no restraint or reserve? Why say things, like these? With no one here to listen?

If you can't button up your mouth: Go out anyway. Walk on the pavement, by the front door. Ask for a cigarette, from the first man who comes by. Lighten up a bit. It's more sophisticated: A woman's face dressed in a halo of smoke, instead of a clamor of words. Like the blur of an old black and white picture. A woman who smokes is a woman who stays mum. To blow smoke, instead of words, must be



to her advantage, surely. A cigarette, lightly lit between the index and the major, with the right pout, says much more than her tongue can abet: Audrey Hepburn, Brigitte Bardot, Marilyn Monroe...

But instead, you babble on to your dolls. To your tubes. To your tissues, scattered on the floor. Their pleats and folds stained with more shades of red: Absolu Lancôme, Rouge Serum, Rouge Electric, Extreme Addict...

You can't keep your mouth on a leash. Because you have a deep throat. Loose lips. You can't stop spitting filth in the air that you breathe. Words, so improper. They should never cross a Lady's mouth. You confide in the mirror secrets ringing so foul to others' ears. They shouldn't be uttered out loud. Or, perhaps, to a pebble. Sitting still. In the middle of a desert stone. With nobody around for miles to hear.

Hold your tongue! Say no more. Nothing - of the filth you squeeze out, all day at work, of the Ladies' damp and limp bodies. Of their skin stiff with Gentlemen's stuff. That you wash clean. Mend anew. Make look young and fresh again. By the sheer force of your fingers.

The humiliation of living vicariously. For what? Giving up yourself to this chore. Body and soul. For no reason, except this: When night comes, the Ladies get to go out again on the pavements. Cover themselves with the same fetid and filthy stuff of the Gentlemen. Feel dizzy from sweat retching their throats. Only so that they play, one more time, the lead role in a spectacle where the public claps over and over again.

Baby Doll, don't you remember?  
When you were small. You spent so much time playing with Mama's stuff. Splattering the contours of your mouth with her red. Whitening your little mug with her powder. Making faces, again and again, in her mirror.

You looked like a real clown, already back then.

You made a fool of yourself. Falling to the floor, knocking yourself out. Because you laughed so hard.

What do you think? She saw all that you did - Mama - through the cracked door. The spectacle you made, in the mirror. She had a feeling, already back then, that you were a viscous one, small as you were. That nobody could fix you.

You had the devil under your skin.

Remember, Baby Doll?

After school hours, the girls at your age were already walking the streets. Dragging their feet on their way home. Trying to squeeze chocolate or candy out of the Gentlemen on the pavements. But you – don't you remember? – you stepped up the pace instead. You spoke with nobody. You walked straight ahead. You stared at your feet. You went hiding in Mama's room.

You acted like you were different.

You emptied Mama's vanity case and you emptied her little perfume bottles. You drank the little perfume bottles, one after the other, to the last itty-bitty droplet. It cost her dearly, your little games. You wouldn't drink cheap: Giorgio Armani, Cacharel, Flora de Gucci, Chanel n°5...

Broken hearted, she found you night after night, red handed. Drowned in vice. Passed on the floor. With the look of a whore, who's been hustling all night. Who's going to wake up the next morning with the headache. Her tongue coated. Her eyes turned red. Because of the shame.

She did all she could do! Nobody should insult her the way you do! All a Mama could do, she did.

Remember, Baby Doll?

The time she spent rubbing you raw. In the basin before bedtime. The next morning, soaping you up, again. From head to toe, before the morning meal. All the time it took her to scrub you clean from the filth stuffed in you skin. Despite the cramps in her arms and the fatigue in her fingers. She did it for you. Over an hour, each time. Before sleep, after sleep. She scrubbed your face. Made it shine like clockwork. Scrubbed your back. The nape of your neck. Wiped off the filth from your arm folds. From your leg folds. From between your toes. From between your neck and your chin. Washed behind your ears. Washed inside your ears. Washed your head with a special shampoo. The one that gave it a natural Doll shine.

The water turned black as your skin began to bleach, like wax.

After the bath, at bedtime and then again in the morning: She had to dry your body and your hair. Cover you with lotion lest your skin dried too before due age. Then, it wasn't it. She had to polish your nails. Cut them. File your nails. On the corners and on the edges. Run the brush through your hair. Count to thirty-six. Out loud, Baby. Thirty. Thirty-one. Thirty-two. Three. Five. Six. Never forget the

order of things. Or else start all over, again. With the brush. It took so long. You remember? Your hair was so long and so beautiful. Back then.

How beautiful you were: In the nightgown she'd ordered from the catalogue. And the dress she put on you in the morning. Her favorite! The one with the ribbon and the bow. You were the perfect Baby Doll.

She spent them, those hours, hadn't she? Telling you how to put on a face? At that age already, when you were small?

Look in the mirror. First: Draw on the borders. Don't bleed over the lines. Add in with little dabs. Remember: From within to without. From the flesh to the fringe. Scarlet: it makes their knees go weak. Crimson: It's made for you to please. Vermillion: So the men would stare at you in the streets. Mauve: So you won't be forgotten completely. Red-blood: That, be very careful, Baby Doll. You don't know what it will make them do. Cardinal: It's for the defense. Don't forget: It's to keep the distance.

And those times, when she dragged you on the pavement. By the front door. To show you how they are. This's what they look like. They're short. They're fat. This's how they smell like: The sweat. The cigarette.

It won't bother. The stink. Not at the beginning. It's how they recognize one another.

The Ladies, they spray on: Dolce & Gabbana, Dalhia Noir from Givenchy, Lancôme, Gaultier...  
It's to make a barrage.

You know, Baby Doll? That's what life's about, and all that jazz.  
The men need the woman.  
The women, they need the men, too.  
It makes the world go around.

But love: There is no need for that.

The men, they flirt. But only because they're blue. The women, they must put up with it. But only because there's nothing left to do. That's what's been done for so many centuries. For more time than you can even remember.

Who do you think you are – barefaced – to go against history?

Who do you think you are – barefaced – to go against history?

They are not to your taste? Not important...

They are not very handsome? True...

They stink like wild boars? True too...

No doubt, you deserve better...

But how many of them, when night comes, would pamper you like  
Mama used to do? Tell you stories of princes who turn into frogs?  
Hum you pretty tunes? That shoo away, from your eyelids, the scare of  
meanie wolves and stinky beards?

In those stories, always, there's a Gentleman who keeps hiding. At the bot-  
tom of a cave. Or in the corner of an attic. Sitting all by himself. Playing, he  
too, with his dolls. For his pleasure only: He's got collections. Unheard of.  
Only for his eyes to see.

Better believe it, Baby! Those stories, that's what life is about, and all  
that jazz...

If you don't believe in them, they won't turn true. You've got to think  
they're real, for them to be real. Then: All that's well will end well!

But don't go thinking it's so easy! That in real life, frogs turn into princ-  
es! That wolves won't, in the end, gulp up little girls!

There must be a price to pay. You have got to sweat for it. Everyday. Take  
it in. Keep on persevering. Learn to do things in the right order. Properly.  
Know your role by heart. Say the lines tailor-fit for your mouth. With nat-  
uralism and verisimilitude. Know your text from memory. Be wary of losses  
of memory. Avoid by all means any twist of the tongue.

Who do you think you are – dummy – to go against stories?

It takes time. It takes effort.

She told you all there is to tell. Showed you all there is to see. Never  
fight back. Let it pass over you. Let him fiddle around. Give him all  
that he wants. Think about something else. Best to look the other  
way. Stop wiggling around, already...

She told you all there is to tell. Showed you all there is to see. Never fight back. Let it pass over you. Let him fiddle around. Give him all that he wants. Think about something else. Best to look the other way. Stop wiggling around, already...

It ends, yes, faster than you think. You'll know it, when it stops. It's the smell. It burns inside your nose. It's stronger than any perfume. It's the rubbing. Get it?

After it's over: There's nothing left to do. Except: Finish in a flourish. Without vomit. Get out your tube of red. Little dabs. From within to without. From the flesh to the fringe...

That's all! That's it! It's life, and all that jazz! Now, it's time to go home! It wasn't that difficult!

She showed you what to do. She showed you how to play your part. Already then, when you were small.

That one night, remember?

She dragged you out, on the pavement, by the front door. So you would get rubbed on, just a little bit. He was fat. He smelled rank. So you knew what to expect. Later on. So you won't be surprised. When you grow up...

You looked like you got it, that night...

Shame on Mama! You didn't get it at all! You didn't get anything! You can't even remember! Now: You're the laughing stock of the whole city.

She should have let you rot in your room. Like an ungrateful brat. She should have stopped your little games, already when you were little. She should have known that, a vicious one like you would like better to bite on the lipstick bar – like on chocolate – instead of playing the Lady.

But sweetheart! You know, Mama loves her Baby Doll so much! She wishes she could hold her tight in her arms, never let her go. Despite all the odds. Save her from all of the hurt. The pavements. The men.

It hurts. Do not - don't ever - doubt that. The very first time. Don't forget.

But then, the time comes. Nothing you can do about that. It's life, and all that jazz. When Mama must go. You know? Against her will. Let her Baby Doll brave the streets in the city, all by herself.

That's why Mama must teach Baby all there is to know. Before leaving. Warn her against everything that goes on, in the streets. Tell her about what will happen to her, when she goes out. Show her what is waiting there, on the outside. And how to protect herself, against all of it, with red.

You must believe in stories, Baby. Do not - don't ever - doubt them. Because then, there would be nothing left. They married and lived happily ever after. Now go to sleep, Baby, time to sleep...

But for the love of Mama! Stop smearing your face with paint like a little girl. All night long. Fiddling with those Ladies' limp and used-up bodies. All week. And in the weekend, locking yourself up, in your room. All afternoon. To mend dolls made of rubber plastic. Ceramic. Paper-mache. Filthy and used up, too. After you've spent all morning digging them up in flea markets.

Soon, you too! You're going to smell cheap, like your dolls!

Soon, you too! You're going to smell like plastic!

Why? After rubbing all week those Ladies' damp and tepid bodies? Do you still want to rub plastic and cheap fabric? Stitch up and mend clay-cold figurines?

Do you think, perhaps, that dolls would turn into men – by magic – if rubbed so much? Do you think that their eyes made of glass, even by the dozen, could replace the look of a real man?

But, look now, dummy! Because of all the bickering between your teeth, you've made a big mess, again. Wipe this! Find another red, tailor-fit for your lips. Apply yourself, this time around! Start all over again."



## THE GLASS WINDOW RULE

Why is the underworld a train station under the city? It is unsightly for the underworld to be less like I thought it would be, but for whom?

\*

My folded things fit in a nude cliché that swings off my elbow in the afterlife, as in life. I slip between the cranking doors just in time, most times. I am *that girl*. This place as a basement, clammy with those who wait for torture because—at last—they must, is a privilege of thought. I have not seen a shackle.

\*

Or did I expect a replica of the world we hoped and gave hope up in, corporations that exercise *Yes* and *No* better than I, the sleek of strangers' bodies smells I huffed, and the sticky bar on every street—a world of which I said *I am in hell, already*. Already, I did not tell things apart. Sometimes I run into the train's glass doors already shut, not like a bird but like a drunk.

## THE PRISMATIC RULE

A shape slips past you, wingèd woman—they must think you blind—toward the crossroad in the doubled dark, which, in this anxious mess of light, is an honest dark. If you do not say the same of mental illness or the wealth you accepted with one hand tied behind your back, perhaps the shape becomes yourself.

\*

Before you were wingèd you were a popular artist, and re-made a world they did and did not love. You will not be surprised to hear they re-made you. Now you have twelve senses, fall into something resembling sleep on something resembling a crucifix. You have wings, a wingspan, and no eyes to see it. You are white now, and cannot see it.

\*

It is not the world that shocks you, not the hands that pin you to it. Come, see the subject you expose in your cave, and the object they pull out of theirs.

\*

Up ahead, a shape climbs the stile and limps off with a stride of terrible symmetry. That wooden girl. Some learning curves are almost clear. Hold them up—still you can see a new shape falling off, failing to know itself. That girl, she goes to her death. It is never the wonders or the horrors. Always victors and hours and hours and hours.

*AUGUST.*

DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY.

SOFIJA CANAVAN.





*WHERE WE GO.*

DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY.

SOFIJA CANAVAN.



## NO ME SAY IT

What majesty, what joy, what colors, what pangloss, said the announcers as they opened to Handle-hand's segment. It filled your mind's eye with images of 1980s soap opera intros and the loving visage of famous-but-not-too-famous soap celebrity Ray MacDonnell, big eyebrowed and winsome grinning. Handle-hands, himself, had something about the very same Ray MacDonnell to his facial appearance and was capable of being so winsome when he grinned into the wand-like microphone they fixed in place to an appendage.

Handle-hands eventually became accustomed to his celebrity on the home shopping network show *Welcome to Products That Will Scare You*. His role was "horrifying host."

People liked to laugh at how Handle-hands struggled to hold things, specifically products of many shapes and many sizes. Everyone was always grabbing Handle-hands' hands, which were handles, and telling him that he was the doorway to their heart. They explained that his manner and something else they couldn't place made him their favorite salesman of all time, on TV or anywhere. He never knew how to respond.

His handles were two different kinds of knobs, one brass and the other crystal. They weren't like hooks or something on a pirate. They weren't foreign. They were part of his body. If they got hurt he'd feel it. He felt it when people turned them, especially the overzealous people who turned them much harder than was ever required. You could see him wince, and in that wince he seemed to call upon a much larger segment of kinder-gentler humanity to magically will itself into existence. And oh how the imbeciles would struggle, gurgling a bit and then sneering at his handle hands, which were knobs, and grabbing them more vigorously and turning them more vigorously, sometimes honking as they did so, too.

"IT'S A REAL PLEASURE, MR. HANDLE-HANDS! AN HONOR! HONOR'S ALL MINE!" they'd say, grinding their molars during the struggle with his knobs, never noticing how Handle-hands was being put through agony by their human hands, their unknowing and so human hands. But he was polite and managed not to mention it. Unclear was really why the people who would grab him so vigorously felt such a need to turn his handle hands with such passion and ferocity. He was not a door and turning harder

hands with such passion and ferocity. He was not a door and turning harder would no sooner open him up to them, but they turned all the harder, as society had seemingly trained them to do.

What horror would visit the man who hosted Welcome to products that will scare you in consistent waves of fan fervor.

His hosting duties mainly entailed attempting to juggle whatever product was being sold at that particular moment in TV time. The products were supposed to fall. He was supposed to fail. The products could not be shown breaking, if they did break. So they always shot Handle-Hands from the waist up. They would switch to another shot of a completely new product, away from the one that had broken, if the product had broken. "TA DA" someone would say, while the broadcast revealed the "unbroken" product.

He knew why he did it. He did it for very many reasons. One was the obvious need of money. Another was the not-obvious fascination he had with some form of even minor renown. The third and most important was for his bundle at home, with her own tiny knobs very different from his own, both white. He worried about what would happen as she got older, and perhaps recognizable to viewers. Would her knobs be as wrenched and turned mercilessly as his were, all too often?

He fought desperately to keep her his secret. Came home, met with the nanny, changed her diaper, fed her dinner, polished her knobs. Her knobs. Yes, she had porcelain knobs. In every characteristic of beauty she was superior to him. But so fragile! He could not forget how fragile she was. He was as careful carrying her as he'd ever been carrying anything, carrying her like it was his existence that somehow would be snuffed out if ever he loosened his hold. The sun squelched, the universe emptied into oblivion.

Her tiny, little handles.

Missy. His own Missy Handle-hands.

He vowed to protect her, every part of her. While he was still living and breathing and able to cradle her in his handled arms, no one would ever grip her away from him.

Then came introduction of one particular product that will scare you: the No Me Say It.

\*\*\*

The No Me Say It was introduced to the buying public on a rainy Saturday. The whole country was simultaneously experiencing rain. It was great for sales. People were in front of their televisions looking for things to buy, especially things that scared them. If it actually harmed them, all the better.

The No Me Say It was sandwiched between two other products that Handle-hands' bosses had higher opinions of going into the day's selling. The first was an object that looked a lot like a soccer ball and was about the same size but with electrical sockets inside of which you plugged metal rods, and you plugged its cord into a household electric socket -- rubber gloves for fitting metal rods in respective plugs not included. The Shocker Jockey. Things that electrocuted people always sold well.

The second was a Build Your Own Troll that came to life after you finished constructing it and, alive, tried to singe you with its singe-stick. Then, once singed, the troll would cut you, cut you a lot. Cut you where it hurts. It would cut you with a machine called "The Paper-cut Machine." Included with purchase of the Build Your Own Troll.

By comparison, the No Me Say It was unremarkable, and that's what made it so remarkable.

When Handle-hands had first got his start in the business of home shopping, he had a mentor, Robes Johannasen, whose one crucial piece of advice had remained with Handle-hands all these years: "One day, from what reaches, depths, what have you, will come a thing that sells better than all the things you've ever sold. That thing has a life of its own. Don't get in the way of that thing or it just might be the end of you. It might even suck you dry."

Robes' "thing" was an expensive electronic leech measuring three feet in length, about one in width. He had a very straightforward sense of the world. Few corpses were so desiccated as his when they found him dead on his dressing-room floor.

The No Me Say It surprised Handle-hands. He didn't really think much about the small and strange device, until he was forced to, because of its meteoric success. People stopped him on the streets about the No Me Say It, saying they thought it was just junk but then it saved their lives with terror, the skillful implementation of slow-dripping, methodical terror. They didn't even bother to grab Handle-hands' knobs anymore. His knobs were so clean, so unblemished and germ free, even after a long day's work and being out in the world as a recognizable television person.

a long day's work and being out in the world as a recognizable television person. The experience was brand new to him, not that he minded.

But the No Me Say It, it wouldn't let him sleep.

The device was simple. Whenever you tried to say anything, it would caw via its loudspeakers: "NO, MESAYIT!" As time went on, and you continued your ownership of it, the noise would get progressively louder. And that might be fine, if it ever stopped getting louder. It made your eyes bleed, after a short while. After a short while it would react to every noise you made, every breath, every swallow, every snore and snort, whether superfluous or necessary.

And even if you were able to rest, your rest was restless. The No Me Say It appeared in your dreams like a winged serpent, a screeching horror on the worst side of a succubus. And even if you were able to rest the rest of the restless, your eyes still bled from the noise, bled closed.

It was a massive hit! You couldn't listen to the radio without hearing the cacophony of the No Me Say It, mainly because your own No Me Say It would exceed the sound of the music, regardless of sound volume, naturally. A few satisfied customers' heads exploded. In actual fact. Their heads blew up. So too did melons. The produce section of a busy grocery store was one of the worst places to have your No Me Say It. Fresh, ripened melon, unexploded, began fetching a hefty price.

Not that you could escape the No Me Say It. People loved that it had the power to follow you everywhere, whether you wanted it to or not.

And they all realized quite abruptly it was Handle-hands who was to thank. They raced to Handle-hands like a horde of hard-charging, single-minded livestock. Now, rather than be ignored and kept safe from further harm by people's infatuation with a particular product he'd sold, Handle-hands was their singular object of worship. He had given them the No Me Say It. He had given them something so clearly apart from want, so clearly and in every way the embodiment of need. The need for something so terribly true.

Handle-hands was soon overwhelmed by the abusive praise. He fled. He remembered Johannasen's other words, "There's nothing doing so why try? Let them. Fierce shouts. Don't. The rubber pillow. I'm just trying to be understood." It was important to note that these were words Johannasen had said very near the end, when his total blood loss was near its apex. Something

about his words, though, made Handle-hands think of his daughter, of Missy. She had never been gifted a No Me Say It. He hoped she'd be able to sleep well without it, but there was Handle-hands's own No Me Say It to consider, the noise of which was enough to keep everyone in a single household awake for the entirety of their lives.

He felt the weariness of his body closing in on him, the lack of sleep suffocating him with his own body. Delirious but aware enough of what was truly important.

The horde caught up to him on Culver Drive, but he'd lost them again by the time he got to his neighborhood and the street he lived on. He worried they'd be waiting for him there. He was surprised his adoring fans, whose effusive "thank yous" were not exceeded in decibel by the sound of the peoples' No Me Say Its, were not teeming to greet him. And it was possible they were hiding, but the No Me Say It made hiding difficult, if not completely impossible. There was only the sound of his own No Me Say It shouting over his most necessary and automatic bodily functions, a slow trickle of blood purling down his face.

Inside his home, Handle-hands noticed immediately how much cooler the temperature was. The world had been something like superheated by the increased noise. It was spreading its ubiquity to other sensations. It might have been stimulating an end to all things, but probably strictly an end to all comfort. Life would go on, irritably.

At least, for now, it was cool and quiet in Handle-hands's home. He went up the stairs to Missy's room. There she was, resting. She had slept! Her nanny was nearby, seated on a rocking chair, reading. She signaled to Handle-hands, "Quiet. Let her sleep. Let her enjoy this little comfort while it lasts." The nanny looked profoundly uncomfortable.

Handle-hands backed quietly and cautiously from his daughter's room.

The sun, previously shining easily into the living room, was now blotted out. And there was a tremor, a tremble, slight at first, but becoming increasingly intense. There was a hill some football fields from Handle-hands's neighborhood. On that hill had risen a statue. It was his likeness. It was Handle-hands. There was the teeming mass of adulating fans. On the hill. They'd hauled the enormous statue of Handle-hands up the hill. The noise was deafening. They must have waited for him to go inside his home. They'd had to have been collectively holding their breath with fierce patience and at some personal risk, waiting for the right moment to raise the statue and begin their applause. And while they were now doing precisely

that, No Me Say Its were drowning out the noise of their applause. His own No Me Say It had sounded. So had the nanny's. Missy was crying out, awoken, stricken from comfort. This infuriated Handle-hands. How infuriating! He forced his No Me Say It from his pocket with the nubs of his handles, let it fall to the floor. He began to trample it with his feet. It would not break, not this high-quality product. Not so easily. He knocked over other items he'd at one time showcased on Welcome to products that will scare you: The Mouth Television, a television that would try to gum on you -- it didn't have teeth! -- when you weren't watching it, and sometimes when you were, if you weren't giving the watching your all, and sometimes when you were giving it your all, because it was a product that kept its users on their toes; the Dear Head of a Deer, which floated after you disembodied, trying to gore with its sword antlers, because it had sword blades that were bent and shaped like jagged antlers for antlers; the Wearing a Glass Necklace, which would get progressively tighter and sharper over the course of a good, fun night out on the town; The Bat, which was both a baseball bat and an animal bat and would flutter its wings every time you swung it at something, while simultaneously putting you at the risk of acquiring rabies and hitting dingers. Lots of other items, too, all of which broke easily. But his No Me Say It did not, as though it were refusing, as it shouted "NO, ME SAYIT!" amid the destruction.

And while Handle-hands's living room shook from his anger and desperation, the ground outside likewise continued to shake from the noise of the people and the noise of their No Me Say Its. They'd become so voracious, lost in their fandom, panicking with elation. They wouldn't mean to, but they might soon inadvertently destroy something beautiful in their haste and the scrum to press themselves against their favorite TV celebrity.

It didn't come to pass quite that way, though. The statue was not secured in its position, and so a blast of wing tipped the visage of Handle-hands, both of his knobs raised in triumph to the sky. Now falling, falling and so felled. The earth cracked. A sinkhole? Or maybe nothing was ever beneath the earth's surface and it had only been presumed, taken it on faith, that geologists were being honest, leading us to believe we existed on largely solid ground. Regardless, a caving occurred and the statue and some of Handle-hands many admirers perished into the widening cavity, echoes of screaming and No Me Say Its gradually fading into the vast depth of their plunge.

And while this sinkhole or void to another dimension or the emptiness of the earth spread farther and farther outside, it simultaneously pulled apart the interior of Handle-hands's home. His home was torn, halved, made a duplex not very dexterously. Handle-hands, aware of this development, left his No Me Say It, which did



indeed disappear forever then, into the void. He scrambled up his stairs to Missy's bedroom, where the nanny had been comforting her and had now wrapped missy up against the far wall on the opposite side of the room, attempting to shield and protect her. The floor in the completely halved room aimed downward at its break. Furniture and rugs and all other items that had previously inhabited the room so benignly were sliding, tumbling and gone. "Handle-hands," shouted the nanny. "REN!" shouted Handle-hands, remembering his nanny had a name and that her name was Ren and that now not only did he worry for his daughter's safety but for hers, for Ren's, as though she too were family, because, now that he thought about it, she was family.

The floor was smooth hardwood, heretofore covered in many throw-rugs. There was very little to catch one's footing on, especially as the floor's decline grew sharper. Handle-hands had anchored his arm around a protruding crack in the floorboard on his side of the house's furthest edge. He dangled there. "Try jumping to me, Ren," he said. "Grab my handle!" he waved his free arm and the knob attached. But just as he shouted to her, Ren finally lost her own footing and began to roll toward the cavity, and so too did Missy, wailing as she went. But Ren, wits about her or operating on some kind of maternal instinct and adrenaline pumping, reached out for the pearl knob of Missy, taking it, and in a rush, compelled herself to the awaiting knob of Handle-hands, taking hold of it, too, caught their between the two of them, immediately straining to maintain her hold on each.

These were the typical challenges of life-or-death-in-the-balance situations: Handle-hands pulling with every ounce of his bodily might, as was Ren. But it was no use. They couldn't lift themselves out of their precarious spot. They might have let themselves go in only another minute or two, so bleak was the situation. Handle-hands prayed for a Deus-ex-Machina to come and save him -- no, not him -- Missy, Ren, spare them this fate. But it didn't come, or it did but not as he expected it would.

It didn't come from above. It came from the one place he hadn't expected. It came from Missy herself. She opened her mouth, and all the tumult and calamity around them was sucked up into her. She possessed the nascent power to make bad things disappear, or so was becoming apparent. The destruction was sucked up into her, a vacuum very different from the one that had been building around them. And once the trembling had stopped, the scariness of the situation seemed to lift, too. Ren and Handle-hands pulled Missy and themselves from the tenuously stable but still completely destroyed room. They escaped the house, which tilting, was finally freed of its foundation and collapsed into the hole. But they were still there. They were on solid ground. Things felt all right.

Things felt really good.

They, the three of them, decided to lie down in the grass of a neighbor's lawn and rejoice, despite all that had happened. Emergency responders told them they were in a state of shock.

If that was the worst of it, Handle-hands thought, then let it be.

## FOUR FANTASIES AFTER KISSING MY HOMEBOY'S GIRLFRIEND

*After Junot Díaz*

*I – una canción para mi cachetona*

if there's anything that makes us  
the sour your body sings through  
your eyes teach me how to buoy  
as you thumb up the throat of  
the longing and lenguaje  
snap and flicker between  
arms around my neck like a knot

it's sweat  
its tears  
our backs  
our añoranza  
our tongues  
our fraenum

*II - una tiraera against my homeboy*

Knuckles rattle my doorframe  
the way a pulse rattles the neck,  
a fist rattles a face, and a key

cuts a lock. *¿Are you looking  
for someone to blame  
for your mistakes?* I laugh.

I almost ask him in Spanish  
to prove he doesn't know  
mierda. I open the door, ready

to whip the white flag  
of his body. Soon, our shirts  
will be a preteen's dream

of tear and telenovela. I hit the gym  
daily for this cuff  
and hook, so I don't cry aloud, lose

my breath, sweat or regret  
the sound my name makes  
in his begging mouth.

She's never there, of course,  
never hears me break  
his arm, never hears the whistle

his windpipe makes beneath  
my knee. Her eyes never have  
to witness my love shatter

another man's bones. Of course,  
there's no victory, no  
consequence after I cry, *I'm sorry*.

*Lo siento.*

*III – a lament for my homeboy*

next, there's the rope      the knot in the throat  
that unravels              like a cloud of black hair

in my palm  
   he blamed

the sound my name makes in her mouth

                 her legs tied around mine

   i have found him here  
                 as he hangs              in the mirror  
between our hands              pale fingers blaming  
   no one

*IV – A song I wrote on my mirror*

¿this is why you kissed her right?

the way joy makes a chain gang  
of your bones & your chest  
empties whenever you face

a mirror or mountain  
or mansion & feel an envy  
you call hatred you call history

you call the way his white  
hands siphon butterflies  
from her throat alive as

a hammer pounding salt  
in the desert for the figures  
her feet make in sand her lips

breaking chrysalis against  
your neck as she coughs  
another monarch for survival

its helpless & unshackled  
joy the way her hands  
rend the chains from

your chest undress your  
flesh from the fetters  
that make you a man

## MY LOVE LIFE ON TELEKINESIS

my hands would  
have no excuses  
for not being magic

carpets gliding  
over the great wall  
of china or to the tip

of giza, atop  
some pyramid  
in your chest.

how easy it is  
to forget a glass  
midair or fire

remote controls  
out the window.  
i am a thousand

times more  
dynamite than  
a match.

i don't know  
enough about physics.  
ask me

to pass the salt  
& i'll bring  
the pacific ocean.

ask me to turn  
on the stove,  
i'll light



the curtains, burn  
the carpet  
off your floors.

everyone always  
tires of the forks  
flying like darts,

the still-sticky  
coffee stains  
on the ceiling.

moving you  
would never be  
as satisfying

as the moments  
we hang  
still as childless

swing sets. you  
probably could still  
move my body

effortlessly  
across a room  
or country, leave

my wallet, bedsheets,  
& clothes any  
angle you please.

i'd slam the door over  
& over  
without ever leaving.

i'd throw your bras  
& toothbrushes  
out the window

only to realize  
i called them back  
in my dreams.

i've never been  
anything more  
than a mustard seed,

a mountain with  
too many legs  
and ankles twisted.

there's always  
something my mind  
keeps spinning,

never a thought  
that doesn't move me  
closer to you.

## UNHINGED

Although there is  
the voice the night makes  
the sound of one world  
halving from another  
the ladder remains  
creamy light this place  
to spread out  
swollen on the delta  
where did you go in the throats  
of the cedarwaxwing  
where there is no west  
to be fed  
there is the shedding skin  
copper flakes at the water's side  
to let the earth seep through  
fix your fingers to my mouth  
to be found again

## BY THIS I MEAN

A place where the sky  
holds its breath  
and the snake extracts  
water from its prey  
arid womb  
as an altar  
stones do right  
before seeing, asking  
help and what  
are you thirsty for?

*FORMAL LANGUAGE.*

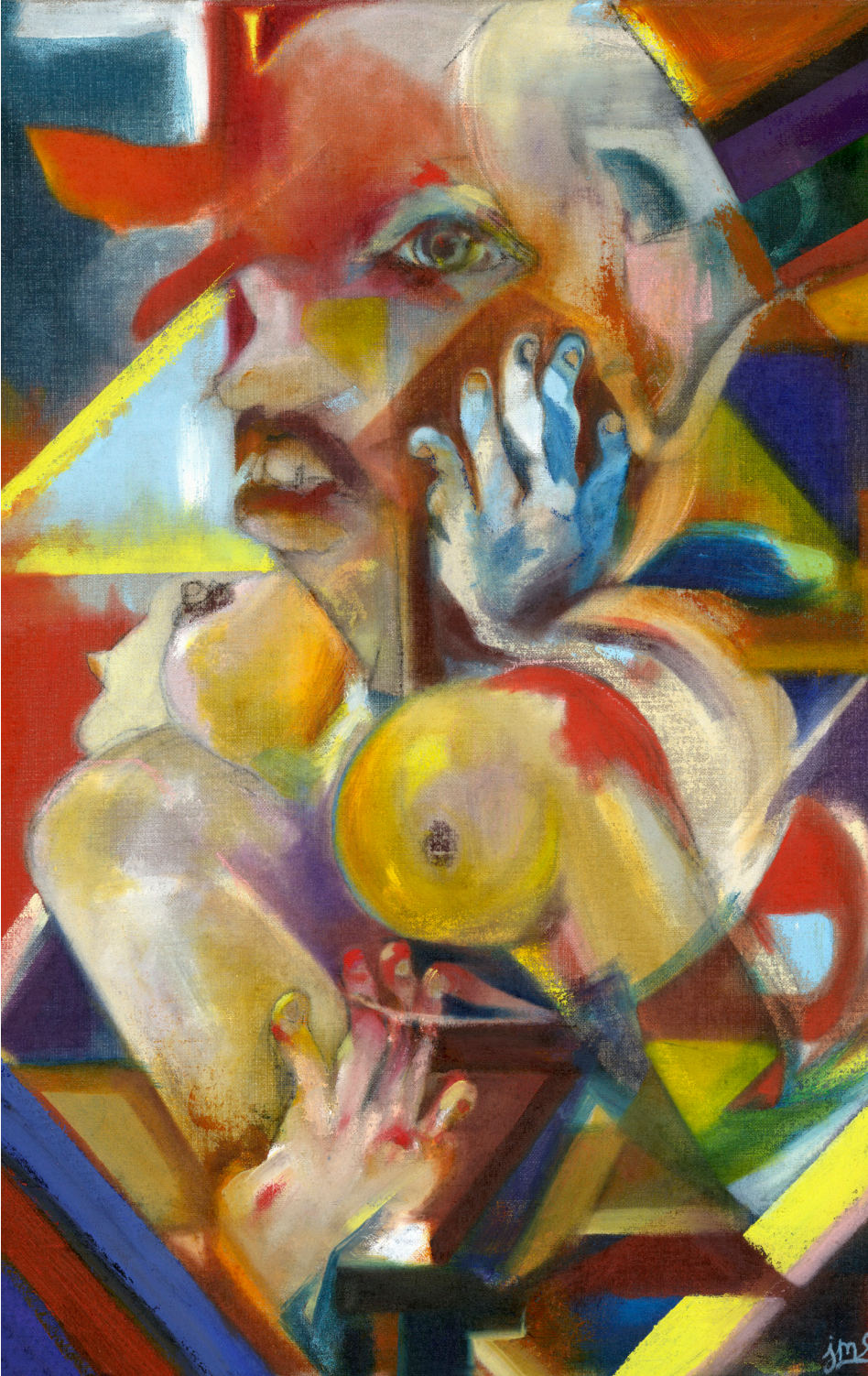
24 X 36 IN.

ACRYLIC ON WOOD PANEL.

JACQUI SOMMERMAN.







*SOCIAL ANXIETY.*

18 X 26 IN.  
OIL ON LINEN.

JACQUI SOMMERMAN.



## THE COUPLE

The couple sat on their small loveseat, unwinding after a day of teaching. The couch had come with the studio, and was quite small. Their knees were touching as they sat facing each other. His skin felt colder when he didn't intend to touch her, or didn't want to. The futility of holding hands: that no matter how hard one tried, there were pockets of air between the two hands. Not everything could touch at once. It was impossible.

So his skin felt cold, but they sat on the couch, knees touching nonetheless. They talked about nothing. "I had a dream about Peru last night," she told him, reaching for her dream journal, then stopping to hear his reaction. He looked at the ceiling. "Have you been there yet?" he asked, tracing circles in the ceiling with his outstretched arm.

"No." Her voice bit, just a little. She had been many places. Sometimes she forgot all of them. But he had dropped a card: he did not care to know where, much less recall.

There was silence. She looked through the sliding glass doors out to the glass-encased balcony, which held their kitchen. The large brown-frame windows were underlined with tiny ledges. Outside the Old City was an open-air produce market. American pretensions to All-Organic Farmer's Markets fell through the cracks in the dirty stalls. When they found a new fruit to try, like durian's sweet-smelling cousin jackfruit or a rambutan sporting neon-green hairs, she would keep a few seeds in jars of water at the windowsill, to see if they would grow. Invariably, the pulpy root bulb would fall off after a few days and the seed would split in two. It reminded her of a clitoris, doubling her horror.

"How have you been feeling lately?" She asked.

"Off. I feel funny. Not depressed not happy just. Off. You?"

"I'm okay," she said, surrendering to the silence punctuating their conversation. "I've been feeling distant from you the last few days," she hastened to add. "Not I from *you* necessarily, but us. We've been feeling distant."

"Hmm," He put his arm down from its conductor's position on the ceiling. "You have?" His disheveled blond hair hung in his face for a moment. He used a well-practiced motion to push it back, a move she had recommended he replace with hair gel.

"Yeah. I don't know, maybe just it's just me." She looked over to the windowsill. She often looked at the sill because she knew bugs liked to die there, and she hated having their corpses line the pretty view of the sky. Or worse, to see them lying in a jar of seed water. She noticed a small, rigid shape right next to the open

window. It looked like a large fly, dead on its back. Or like something hard that would fall from a tree. A flower bud or a hard nut. Or the spiky backside of a brooch, worn dark with dirt and rust. Its legs – if that’s what they were – looked thick, black, and impossibly strong. It looked so heavy she wondered if anyone could pick it up.

She turned back to him. “Are you feeling okay...about me?” her voice retreated.

“What do you mean?”

“The thing.”

“Oh. Yeah I’m feeling okay.” He held her eyes. He continued holding them. His choice. She imagined the difficulty of pressing two pairs of eyes together, the intimacy of achieving an insurmountable physical task. To join.

“When I think about it it sucks. I should send the Thomsons another email.” He turned to his computer sitting on the coffee table. The Thomsons had offered the couple their help, and had given him advice opposite to that of her father. The latter had told him to forget it ever happened, or else he – they – would never survive.

She was quiet for a long time. The tip of the thing’s legs looked sharp. It was clearly dead, or never had been alive, that much was clear. The legs were shunted toward the sky, no longer of use.

“That’s a good idea. Let me know if I can help...somehow.” She floundered. She had strayed. Slept with a coworker. A few times and then one more time. She had waited until they were in a new place together, alone together, to tell him. Being helpful was all she could do. Like a clumsy nurse sponging the forehead of the bleeding ward she had wounded. Like the Devil asking God if He needed any help managing the weather. Irrelevant, useless, empty, probably harmful. But she tried. She said as few words as possible after she had told him. She knew somehow that the first words would be remembered always but that their importance would soon be forgotten, replaced by new, heavier sentences.

A wind blew in through the open window, a welcome breeze. Maybe the sign of an afternoon storm. They were a spectacle for the California-raised couple. The rain would fall nearly horizontally, shuddering the windowpane when closed and barraging the kitchen all the way in to their small refrigerator when the windows were open. Some nights, lightning danced from cloud to cloud but no sound of thunder followed. At least there was warning on nights like those. An anxious tension, like an invisible fog, would wrap around them. They were children playing house in a foreign country, afraid of unpredictable weather.

He rarely remembered his dreams, or childhood memories. He took no psychological solace in his early lack of trauma like she did in her abundance of it. “I would never do that to you,” he had told her. He meant it. He knew himself. He came from a large family with zero divorces on either side. They had welcomed her

in, hoping.

She always knew it was possible. Her mother had done the same to her father. She felt it in her being like a sickness, dormant, building strength. It was like leprosy, or a prion disease spread through cannibalism. But where was the antigen? The door to leave either entanglement had been open.

The first thing she had learned about him was that he had been to a rehab facility in Minnesota. He said that was where he began to love nature and solitude. On bitterer nights, she would ask herself, who wouldn't? Who wouldn't, with someone like him? But her reasoning had failed her. Only she had done it. There was no national poll, no consensus.

He was absorbed in his computer now, moving from emailing to mapping out a new program. He thrived in the long open hours between classes by focusing intently on building his new language. "I can stop at any time," he told her, feeling the guilt one feels when absorbed, absent in the other's presence.

"No worries," she looked out to the window again. The creature looked bigger now, more lifelike. Dragging itself, almost, to the open window inches away. She stood up and walked to it.

It lay on its back, its vestigial stinger pointing to the sky. A single yellow stripe spread across its beautiful black abdomen. Its legs were hairless and sharp and shiny from lack of pollen. She imagined putting it in a jar to keep, to see if it would sprout something. Maybe it had been pregnant. Do bees get pregnant? It was a female, she was sure. Hopelessly lost on the 11th floor. She looked it up later: *Xylocopa aestuans*. A carpenter bee. She must have had hope to travel so far to an open window. To climb so high and die in a foreign place, lost and confused, thinking she had caught a glimpse of freedom.

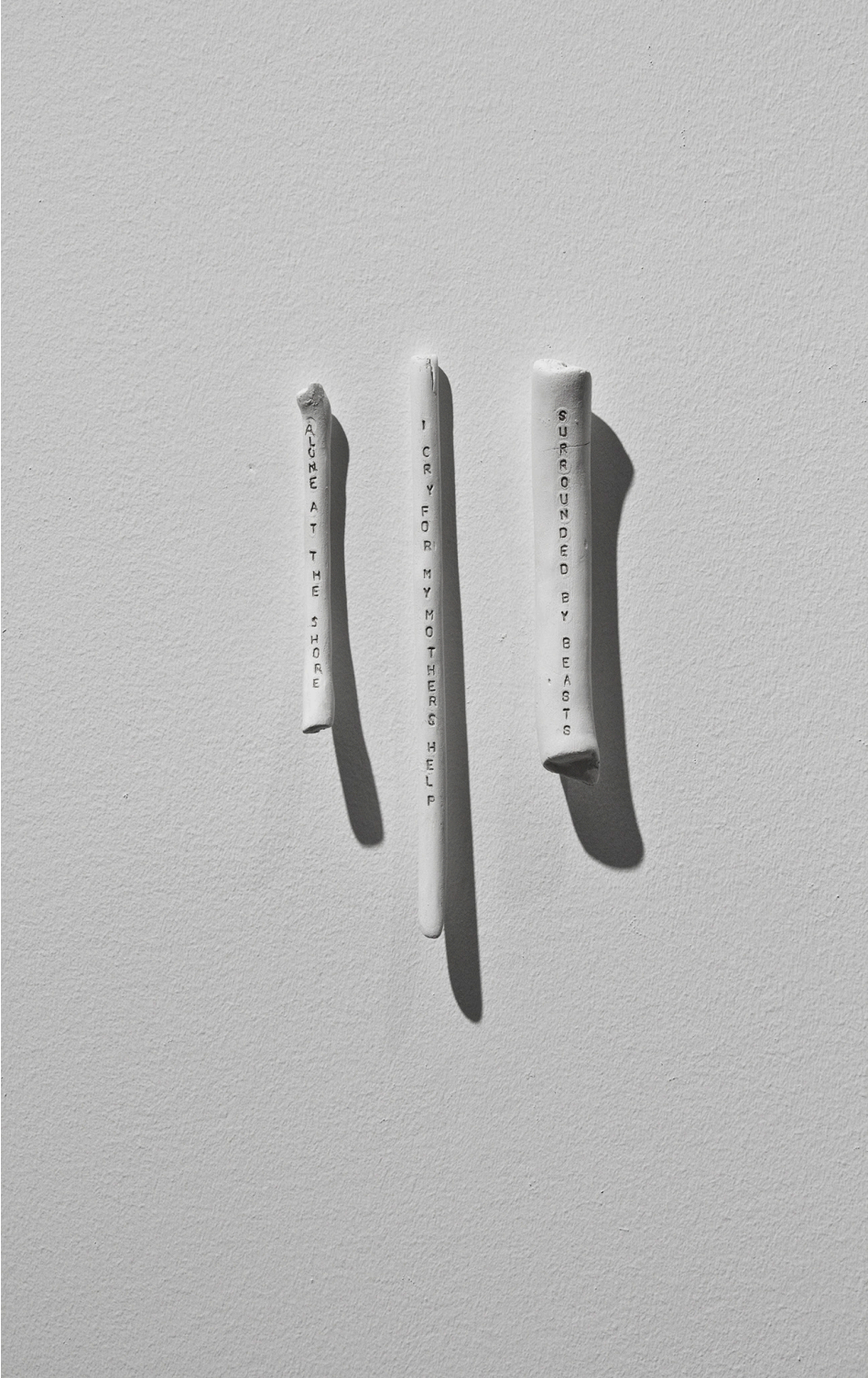
She returned to the couch, moved the computer off his lap, and replaced it with her body, holding his body, asking to be held closer, closer.

*FOSSIL THOUGHTS: No. 1, 2, 5, 7*

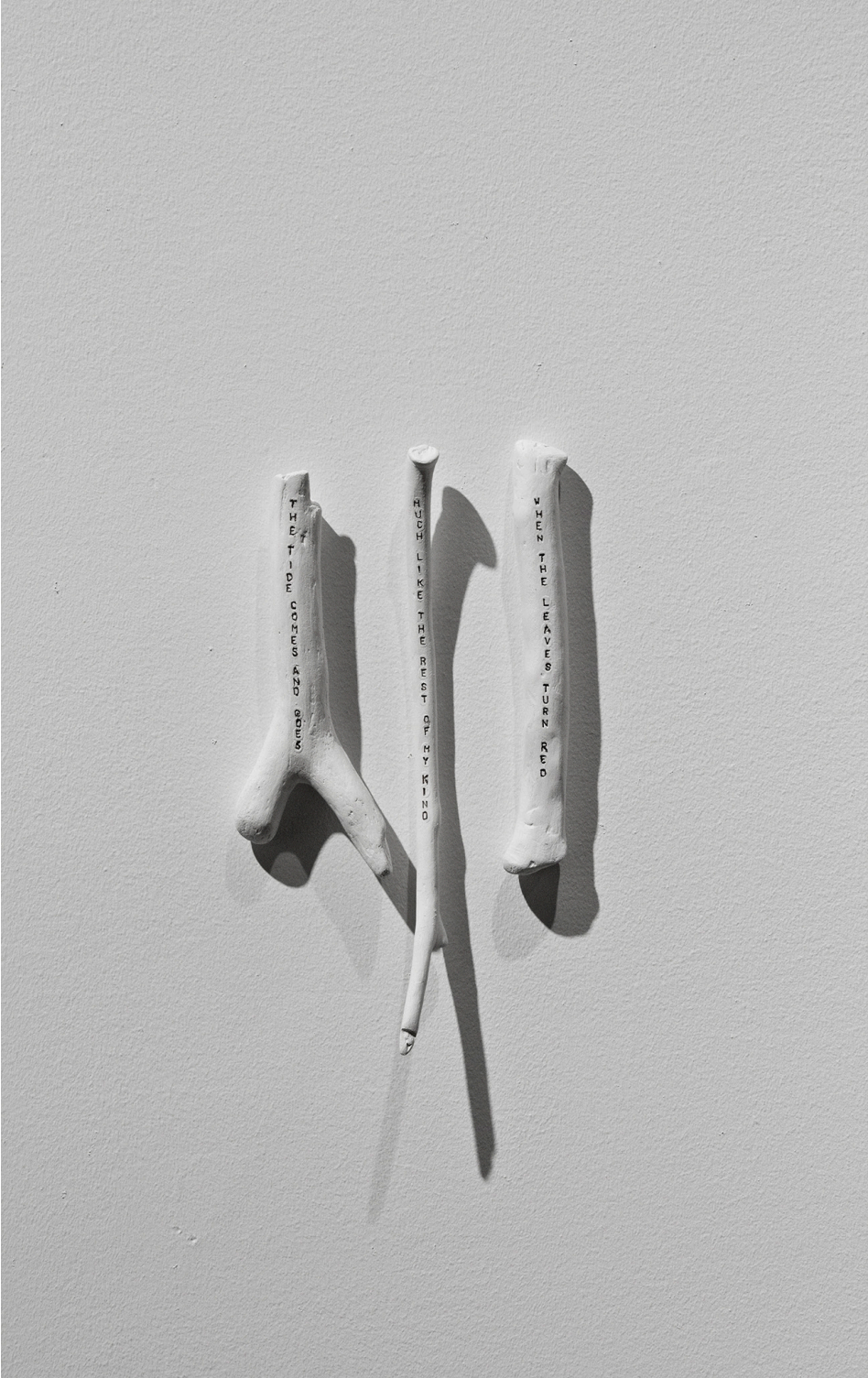
VARIOUS SIZES.

DRIFTWOOD, PAINT, MEMORY.

DANIEL MANCHEGO-BADIOLA.

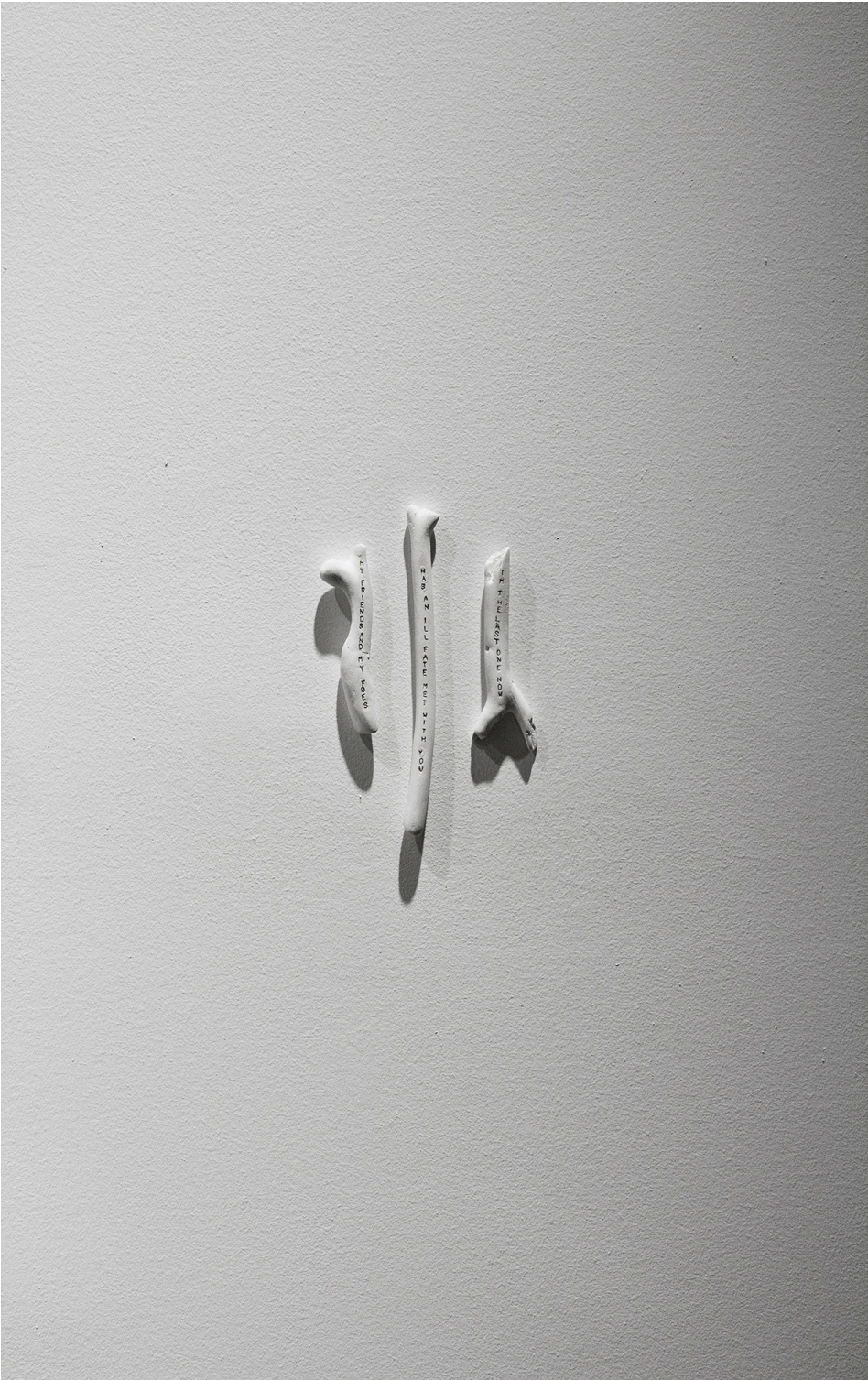














## MOUNTAINS

There are the mountains, I see them  
From town, the mountains are magnificent  
Federal Bureau of Investigation, etc  
Enormous the mountains are golden and black  
When we go to the mountains, town becomes pathetic  
But we miss it, we want to get back to the lights  
We miss them, the lights, being thrown momentarily

From far away  
The mountains are several continents over  
Three-quarters of the way  
To access

Injuries—knocked off, up close, pathetic, is  
Below

Japanese  
Americans are  
Americans of Japanese ancestry  
Children and grandchildren and great  
And great-great  
Grandchildren  
Have never been to Japan, northern Arizona

Behavior is adherence (to behave is to adhere)  
To adhere is to be understandable  
Not understood, to underlie the indoctrinating shadow of understanding  
To cut your hair and hang it on the fence  
Before the cave  
Where the virgin makes a show of praying

Hands are orthopedic. A thousand primitive white churches  
Do not believe  
In the immortality of the soul  
Hellfire, predestination, the fleshly return of Jesus  
But with the soul of a horse  
Burning up the world. No hypostasis. Jehovah is a vocalization  
The testimony of the conscience

Conscientious objectors, resurrecting  
Tabernacles in the pines  
Temporary dwellings like camps

---

There was a labor camp in the mountains  
The camp closed in 1973. The foundation is still there (tennis)

Labor equals the transplantation of war conscription  
To public works, the benefits are the same  
Eating chocolate chip cookies  
At the end of a road  
Blazed by rage, private and public examples, passive resistance  
Lack of representation, parlayed  
Into labor

(The valley sinks  
And everything we see, stinks  
To the roots, transforming distance  
Into a bedrock quality  
Far from action, where arms are, where the road goes  
Labor was imposed)

But the labor was  
Secret

Chocolate chip cookies equal the grail  
No fence, no guard tower  
But the terrain erasing the world  
Where the crests of the mountain meets the sky  
A dimension precluding  
Anything beyond  
Folds  
The mind and the soul

To the grave—

Gordon Hirabayashi, born April twenty-third  
Nineteen eighteen, died  
January second, two thousand twelve

## BLIND CHILDREN

When someone dies and is reborn  
The fertile ground is not a force  
But the will of consensus  
The fertile ground cannot accommodate the reborn  
Once  
The reborn are living

---

The top half of the girl is a girl, the bottom half of the girl is a boy  
Both halves come together  
To complete the illusion  
Children are not fractions of a single (zebra) participation  
The top half of the boy is a boy, the bottom half of the boy is a girl  
Two halves equal justice  
In an otherwise imbalanced (harem) plantation  
The top half of the boy is a girl, the bottom half of the boy is a boy  
Shame or not, share music or not  
Books or not, bracelets or not  
The top half of the girl is a boy, the bottom half of the girl is a girl  
Both halves imprisoned by the gravity of halves  
Girl entering boy, the sound of grapes being eaten

---

Two blind children are standing in a desert  
Whispering to each other  
Dawn. It rained last night. Did you hear the rain?  
I didn't hear it. It was very loud  
I didn't hear the rain. I couldn't sleep  
I didn't hear anything. I was up all night  
I got up and went for a walk

Do you still love me? I don't know if I still love you  
How can you not know? Because it changes  
What changes? How I feel  
How do you feel right now? Your head is very large  
You have three necks and stubble growing down to your chest

Your warts are coming off on my fingers  
You are nineteen? I am fifteen  
You didn't wake up? I was disappointed

---

Black tarantulas, people sitting around a fire  
Beneath enormous cottonwoods  
The color of a Christian—pious, unresponsive  
Faces in the smoke

The first face is the collective face  
Of those who have been murdered  
The second face is the face of the murderer  
The classic misinterpretation:  
Black grease like sports, black Bolshevik beard  
Decorated with small seashells  
And birds resembling vaginal polyps

## MUSHROOMS

Asian American women  
Appear to me in dreams

Mushrooms  
Or rather women  
Wearing mushrooms

---

I am standing in a house overlooking the sea  
The house is on stilts, but short  
The bluff is tall with cloudy grass  
The sea is soundless, white  
There is nothing in the house  
There are windows, a doorway, no door

I watch a group of Asian American women walk up the bluff  
Enormous mushrooms on their heads  
The mushrooms look handmade  
Flat-topped or bowl-shaped, Brandon, are you home?  
This isn't my house, what sea is this?  
The water is white. It looks hot

The women form a circle in the grass. I stand in the doorway  
The women sit down. The circle becomes mushrooms  
I am shy and embarrassed. I want to join them

I recognize my hands outlined in black  
On both sides of the doorway  
Left hand on the right, right hand on the left  
To reclaim my hands, I must resist interrogation  
What are you? I am ...  
Sorry. We don't have one. Where  
Is the nearest?

The sea is apocryphal  
White enamel  
Floating surfactant over the bluff

The sun is eclipsed. It is day. I could go, but

The Asian American women are inviting me

I cross my arms before the doorway. I want to jump through the doorway  
But I have candy The sea has several  
Wakes

Why do I feel shy and embarrassed?  
Where is my home? Where do I come from?  
Returned like a parcel, told  
GO TO YOUR HUSBAND  
GO TO HIS FOOT

---

When I was young, I wore a fox mask  
I took it off, and smashed it  
Against a rock

When the sound was right  
I wore it beneath

The sea doesn't encourage me. The sea is ugly  
The high, white tide  
Small fires stinging the shore

## TEATRO

TEATRO is empty. Everyone wonders  
What does TEATRO look like on the inside (inside)?  
Everyone loves, but no one knows  
What TEATRO looks like on the inside (inside)

::  
Everyone loves (passes into) obscurity  
Abandoned at birth

That's why everyone cries  
When they are born

There are no healthy or advantageous collaborations  
With ones who are also alive

History left us

Stealing lemons from the neighbors' trees

Lemons are old, eating them is  
Pontificating, what happened (here)? What could happen (here)?  
What could we organize to make history come?  
Not a theater  
Face everyone cannot get over the face, but is touchable  
What touches the face is untouchable  
The face is chrysalis, unknowable chrysalis

According to the whites, BARRIO is Spanish for THE GHETTO  
According to the whites, a situation can only be improved  
By purchasing a percentage  
And modifying it  
Beyond the situation the situation is always affordable  
Because (According to the whites,) the whites work harder than anyone



Ancient performances were not so long ago

There was an ancient performance last night. No one showed  
The lights were cut  
Thick dark hair was taken down  
From the walls, and thrown  
Into the dumpster  
For the street cats

To wear

Cyclones

Fornicating with children's mattresses  
Thick dark hair justifies their standing  
In the hierarchy dogs remember

And mourning doves shitting down the worn façades

In last night's ancient performance, a young woman flew off the stage  
With the entirety of her body shattered the window on the upper wall  
Like the Ascension or an electrical discharge

Her body blew  
A purple sky

How do we know if we are doing the right thing?  
It has to be more than a momentary feeling  
It has to be more than a feeling, even  
There has to be something irrefutable  
An example set by those who have been forsaken

Who was the young woman? No part of her remained upon the stage  
Yet there was something gleeful in every reference made  
To the children she abandoned

They are on the market  
Where garbage is thrown does not smell  
Where people pass smell

The whites grow from where the whites  
Stand admiring patterns in the smoke  
Rising off the dump, demonstrable omens are  
Patterns of hope (celebration)

Less auspicious, a little more embittered

Not how they see  
Their loved ones all over

Legless larvae—that is why  
Ghost plants, corpse plants, pipes of Indians

## HICCUPS FOREVER

I watched our house explode an hour after it happened. Friday, in History 9. I had the hiccups and still do. Evan's phone got passed under the tables. I was the last to see. A cop car on our block had a dashcam going. You can watch the video on Youtube. It's there. Search "York County Home Disintegrates in Gas Explosion." It's a normal day. Spring. Blue sky. Mr. Simms has Shep on a walk. On the left, a white house goes pufferfish. For a millisecond it's still our house, just expanded, with space in between every piece. You can see sky through each tiny seam. My green room spreads out. Then: confetti. Black confetti. Our dog dies. Shep barks. Mr. Simms runs past the camera. No one knew it was my house when they handed me the phone. They don't even know my name is Cara. The video was on Facebook all weekend. People said it was awesome, which was weird. But I shared it too. 37 likes. La Quinta's manager put my parents in separate rooms. They were keeping other guests up. My sister Jenna told me, "Kiss everything normal bye," and "I can't sleep with you making those noises." So I've been lying on a booth in the hotel breakfast nook nights, wondering what she means and hiccupping. Nobody's posting the video anymore, but I still watch it. A lot. On the computer in the lobby. Full-screened, reversed, dragging the button left across the page. Slow as possible. It's cool. Every piece has somewhere to go. Everything shrinks back together. Hiccups stop. It's weird. Played forward the house-pieces float there forever or disappear. That's the future, I think. What Jenna means. I let go of the mouse. I hiccup. Eight seconds and our house is over. Even the smoke's gone. Just blue. Springtime. Shep barking. Like we were never there. But in reverse I can breathe. Plus it's prettier, like a party when everyone finally shows up, before anybody starts to leave.

## MINNEAPOLIS POEM

It's like I'm neglecting this architecture.

OK, here are some shapes:  
your face etched

on a large silver spoon, a pleather  
bar stool inscribed

with your hair. Memories of a time  
I was more desirable,

a middle-fingered dude  
who called next

at the pool table, who catcalled  
like, Damn, girl got an ass

like a mental breakdown.  
Girl got an ass like

a long-distance phone call.  
Girl got an ass like

Catholic guilt. I'm waiting  
for a man much taller than me

to scratch his neck tats

& whisper in my ear:

Repent, my dude, repent.



*BRYANT No. 7.*  
*FROM 'THE MEN IN MY HOUSE'*

15 X 10 IN.  
DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY.

DOUG PAUL CASE.

*BRYANT No. 13.*  
*FROM 'THE MEN IN MY HOUSE'*

15 X 10 IN.  
DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY.

DOUG PAUL CASE.





## MONSTROSITY

Arthur Apollo Asher and I met at the boba shop called Boba-Go-Banana. We sat outside drinking and chewing through our boba milk teas—mine was the Go Banana one, it was yellow-gray, and had a sick sweetness to it. The afternoon was sunny, with a smooth, cold breeze. The shop was in the Heritage Crest strip mall, which was on the corner of the intersection of Culver Drive and Irvine Center Drive. The outside of it was peach-colored stucco, and it was this peach-colored stucco because the whole strip mall was this way.

We watched zigzagging Chinese drivers creating a hell out of the parking lot. It was The Garden of Earthly Delights, if all the fang-limbed monstrosities were cars, and if all the acid lime green grass and baby blue-eyed waters were the asphalt of a suburban parking lot. I said something about this, and Arthur Apollo Asher smiled and lifted his shoulders.

“They’re your people,” he said.

“It’s alienating,” I said. But I didn’t know if they were the aliens or if I was the alien. We talked a little bit about San Francisco, where we had met while we were both still in school, through mutual friends of his brother’s, or was it through family friends. He said he was sorry to hear about my grandfather. I nodded. I didn’t say anything about it. I looked at him, at the matte opacity of the pale skin under his eyes, at the way his hands cradled the plastic cup, at the way his lips tightened around the fat straw. We had done it, several times, years ago, once while drunk and stoned, a couple times just stone cold sober.

Afterwards, I got into Arthur Apollo Asher’s lowered, kitted-out, spoiler-winged Acura NSX. Of course it was white, of course it was referred to as White Rice, and of course his possession of it was only legitimized by the fact that he had inherited it, an heirloom of the late nineties, from his adopted Chinese wannabe-gangster brother. He was so embarrassed about it, but also proud, the way you might be proud of inheriting a bro-ey pickup truck from Huntington Beach because you are so obviously not that kind of person, that it’s *funny*, or something, or so you imagine. He grinned his bared teeth confidently at me as I got in—bucket seat, race car seat belts, the harness a silent spider on my body. I found myself aroused by the pieces of gleaming metal, flat like puzzle pieces, sleek and richie rich.

He zoomed over to his house on Barranca Drive, shifting gears as if he was in a movie, and slipped the White Rice rocket, fist into glove, into an ultra specific spot on the driveway. I followed him up the stairs into the bedroom, and the first thing he did, was walk toward me but then away from me, and I looked

because the lights were still on in the rest of the house, lighting the marble floors and granite countertops, the thick carpeting on the stairs. Being in a house like this, everything brand new, made me feel like I was in high school again. I had not been back to Irvine in a very long time, in six years maybe. I had not felt this me—this obedient, unquestioning me which was only alive when placed in a peach-colored stucco building—had not felt her simultaneous foreignness and familiarity, her desperation—in a very long time. I was an amorphous putty again, in the hands of my parents, shaped as a dutiful daughter. I was one Chinese girl in a pile of them again, average height average weight straight black hair brown eyes. People don't know this secret, and this secret is that peach-colored stucco has the power to suck out all of what makes you you, all of your individual identity, all your creativity and aesthetics. It's better that way, it's easier to swallow. Less stuff sticking out and into the sticky gummy back of your throat.

Arthur Apollo Asher put his hands around my hips, and pressed his fingertips against my butt cheeks. I was wearing a red skirt, of respectable length, that did nothing for me, but I thought, well, respectability is something. Maybe. Maybe it is something. Something I have only heard of, I made this joke in my head, kind of smiled. He pressed harder, and I imagined his fingers slightly sinking into soft pale flesh, shadows blooming like a flower around his fingertips, growing out of nothing, out of skin pressing skin, an instantaneous moat of dark, the appearance of depth.

Pants and skirts were shrugged, scooted down, buttonholes were stretched into O's like gasping mouths, then relieved of their charges. I stepped up onto his bed, and stood, poised royally for a fight. He pushed me up against the wall, placed his penis against the opening of my vagina. He held the base, guiding it like a flashlight, where to go, what to do? What to see?

I wanted him, I did not want him, his penis, inside of me, I was not sure. Who was this guy? His name was Arthur Asher Astrophel, or what was it again. He would be the closest thing to a Chinese guy I had sex with, and that wasn't saying much—he only drove a rice rocket and had an adopted Chinese gangster brother—but it was saying something, something that might finally make sense, make my perceptions more whole, more solid. But here, here, I pulled him forward violently, almost a stumble of feet and toenails, and somehow he fell up into me, cockfirst, as if driving a sword upward with full intent to disembowel.

He regained his balance, bent his knees, and then unbent them as he stood unsteadily like a shivering, just-birther animal. He moved back up, pushed his prick up into me more deeply, pricking as far as he could go, and I was pushed up, pushed up a groan, as if this thrust up inside of me, had in turn displaced out of my belly, then chest, then throat, then mouth, a sound, like this. I slumped down, started slumping down, falling, bringing him with me, until we were sitting, entangled on his bed, and then he fell back on his back. He flipped me over slightly so I

was on my stomach, moved over me, found a condom somewhere without going anywhere, pushed himself inside of me from behind, I moaned, a long and deep, wanton, want, wanting, keeling, keening sound, low and wet, this was sex, this was it, sex—God, society, humanity, flesh—it all made sense, or at least it all was okay, or it was okay that none of it made sense.

I turned back around, and then I felt something I had never felt before, and certainly people feel things for the first time all the time, but this, I mean, I am telling you a story about this. I strained up, against Arthur Apollo Asher's shoulder, which was sinewy and had clamped on it, like a starfish to a face, a holy map of holy trails across holy lands. This was his description and not mine, and I didn't question it because some things unravel so quickly under questioning. I had asked him the first time I saw it, where the Silk Road was in this sprawling map of a tattoo, and what about the Trail of Tears, and he had frowned something about not being holy, and I had laughed instead of panicking that he didn't understand what I wanted to talk about.

But now, now I cried out because I was not sure who this guy was, who had suddenly become a part of something scary, whose mouth hung slightly open above me, eyes shut as if to better concentrate on panting to a finish. We had looked at each other over boba and I had not been able to find even the tiniest chime of understanding or knowledge resonating in his eyes. He did not see me at all, except for the narrow path of light that his penis had illuminated. My heart started beating very quickly, and there was the sound of tearing, sound waves threatening to vibrate the tiny cilia of my ears. It was a very distinct paper or fabric ripping sound, fibers parting, right at the entrance of my hearing. What I felt, though, was not a tearing, but a rapid separating from head to toe, as if of evaporating skin, and a shocking pleasure at the plunge into coldness. I imagined waving my hands around cartoonishly up in the air and exclaiming, "I am not a virgin! There should be no tearing!" but here it was, something wrested, an irrevocable estrangement of me from me. One Pisces fish swimming there, the other there, a string in between, unraveling to a jarring snap of nothing.

My orgasm split wide and then clamped shut, and my eyes opened suddenly, the wave of oxygen hitting my corneas. I could feel my eyeballs darting around, not seeing anything, but switching back and forth in the semi-darkness, with nowhere to look, moving around, as if they could look inwards, and were peering into my brain: what happened, why did that feel like that, if something was being split open, what was going to come out, what was going to encounter the light and air of day for the first time?

And then, we were lying there, on his bed, and I saw that I could see myself in the mirror on the closet by his bed. I looked over again, and realized that there was not a mirror there, but that it was just me, standing there. That there was somehow another me, a non-mirror me, who did not copy me as in a reflection,

but who just stood there. I sat up. I put my hands on my flushed thighs, pressed at the protrusions of my kneecaps, covered my tits with my right forearm. She looked at me. She seemed pale. Her face was a little crooked, but I guess that was only because I was seeing a real me, and not a mirror-image me. She stood differently. She had better posture, a real backbone. I looked again, and she looked back at me, unflapped. Of course, why would she care, she was a creature, a mythological beast, and I was just some person.

Finally, she spoke. "You be me, and I'll be the other you," she said. I liked her voice immediately, it was not like mine, not even like hearing a recorded version of mine. Not so low and wavery, not like a clown at all, not a sour sounding voice.

"What do you mean?" I asked. She shook her head, her hair was my hair, but better, more unified, it swung with purpose. She stared at me wearily, I was wearing her out, and it had only been one minute, and she was me. I put my mouth in a sheepish shape.

"We will both be you," she said, saltily, "and it will be so much better for us. You be one you, and I'll be the other, we will contradict each other, but not ourselves."

"Oh," I said, "oh." I tried out a nod. My neck felt unused. Achitophel Asher Apollo what's-his-name snored, but I could not think about him anymore. Who cared about him, when I had somehow been split into two.

"Listen," she said. "This way, there won't be this problem of one part of you trying to get away from the other. We can get away from each other at any time, no problem-o."

"Oh, yes," I said. "Right. Yes. Okay. But," I said.

"Wait, listen," she said, slowly, like a dissolving Saltine. I leaned forward in the bed. "I will be the Chinese you."

"You will?" I said, taken aback. "What does that mean?" She squinted. "*What do I be then?*" I asked. In my brain, I tested out those five words again, the words strung together like the cold beads of a necklace, What do I be then. I was fighting hard to keep track of what was going on. I took an ocean-sounding breath.

The Chinese me looked at me. I saw that she was already the Chinese me, more impassive, wore sunblock all the time. She had implacable ideas. She laughed to hide. She sneered in place of any gesture of tenderness. "Where does that leave me?" I asked. I needed to know. "If you take away my Chinese me, do I become neutral? A planet of foggy translucence like a tapioca ball? Or white? Maybe I become white?"

She scoffed. "No. No no. You know nothing. You know you have problems with the Chinese you. I will just be the Chinese you *for you*. You won't have to think about it at all."

I looked down at my hands, which I did not remember clasping together.

Maybe I had been waiting all my life for someone to say that to me. I looked at her. I wanted to test her. She must have known what I was thinking. She nodded her chin up at me. I stood up obediently. Although she was paler, she was more substantive, solid. I watched my left hand reaching over into the space between us, slowly toward the defiant slope of her shoulder, right below the jutting glow of her collarbone, my fingers outstretched, wanting to see what her skin felt like, what it would be like to touch the Chinese me.

But the story ends here, several inches before denatured skin meets I'll-never-know-what skin, because that is when I started to disappear, molecules of air replacing molecules of skin and blood and fat and bone. I was disappearing, in that dim and shadow-filled suburban bedroom, disappearing faster the closer I got to her. But I didn't stop, I didn't stop.

## RAGA

x

every morning the temples wash their courtyards with the astringent of a cymbal-wail. holy sirens blating for the release of kidnapped gods. these ears are conch-caves, buried bells for the missing. this is a homegrown hunch, a debatable heuristic, a placard for the happenstance. this is a hope that god even if blind, is not deaf.

x

on the wall raised against my head - a portrait traced in madhubani. lord Krishna and his consorts playing beneath a monarchy of gods. beneath them, i - draped in jacquard- woven silk. my lap snugged in ancestral velvet. a cradle for the nest egg. horizontal as a grindstone i pestle my girlhood into. girl. sacred. earthbound. ore. jewel. root. grave.

x

i have inherited a violent cough & an engagement ring. also Salgado's sepia snapshots. the room is a diorama of brittle ice sinking sotto voce in a tall glass of lemonade sherbet. the streets are plastered with posters about summer's en route circus making trapezes out of tree-branches, clotheslines, adolescent arms.

x

i claim solidarity with crows. parade undressed in a somnabulist's fugue. lay open a seduction as spurious as superficial wounds i dig into my teenage knees. my wrists snap rubies. all my dreams bark naked, barbaric having lost their costumes in the auctioned theater of your civilized country.

x

your winter-husked city is a church full of provocateurs. every prophet. every nihilist. i collect them all. wash ash off each forehead, set lamps in their ruins; tend to their ghosts as if they were my own orphans.

x

the book asks that widows wear white and don't eat at our table. so the piss-colored porridge is poured into old brass bowls outside the kitchen, next to the heap of sweetmeat wrappings and trampled marigolds. as the night slaps the banyans with a whip made of languor tails, i watch her slowly turn from woman to ghost – the torn, bleached flag of her saree swaying bleakly behind the leaves. nothing fulfills the shell of an afterward. the way light is lowered in a tiger-infested forest. torrid at first, then, spectral; cold and unheard. then, the swift spear of a loud scream cutting through the thicket's chest.

x

the way i entered his bed wearing nothing but anklets so he could relearn me by another sense. i came to him as sound before speech. a song that ascends from music to mourning.





## CONTRIBUTORS

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DANIEL MANCHEGO-BADIOLA is an emerging artist based out of the Niagara Region who tends to focus on the nebulous relationship between man and nature, and challenges in a reflective manner this relationships existence. With a childlike fascination he engages our world, the thought of time, and the existence of life, attempting to explore the mysteries of creation and the wonders of destruction. Daniel derives his influences from childhood, the natural world, and his calling to create, thus enabling him to develop works that satisfy his urge of adventure, investigation and discovery.

LO KWA MEI-EN is the author of *Yearling* (Alice James Books, 2015), winner of the Kundiman Poetry Prize, and *The Bees Make Money in the Lion*, which won the Cleveland State University Poetry Center Open Competition and is forthcoming in Spring 2016. Her work has appeared in *Boston Review*, *Gulf Coast*, *PEN Poetry Series*, *The Kenyon Review*, and *The Offing*. She is from Singapore and Ohio, where she now lives and works in Cincinnati, and can be found at [www.lokwameien.com](http://www.lokwameien.com).

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AMY ORAZIO's work has appeared in *H\_NGM\_N*, *Bitterzoet*, *Gap Tooth*, *Pidgeonholes*, *Synasesthesia*, *Chaparral*, and *The Curator*, as well as a limited-edition letterpress chapbook from Archteype Press (under her maiden name Amy Neilson). She lives in Portland, OR and belongs to a writing collective called Partial Tongues.

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