

LOST IN
TRANSLATION:
A GAME
OF TELEPHONE

Chi Essary and Julia Dixon Evans
San Diego Central Library

This exhibition was inspired by a game played years ago around a New Year's Eve bonfire. We started by writing down a sentence of a commonly heard truism or a random something from a fairy tale or movie, and then the next person would be given two or three minutes to render that into a picture--stick figures were all we had time for.

Next, the person to the right was given ONLY the drawing, and they were instructed to put into a few sentences what they thought the image was about, and so on, for many turns. Words to an image interpreted back to words and rendered back into an image--it made for many unexpected and humorous twists and turns! It got me thinking: what if one had a month for that turn?

Here is what that looks like after inviting professional artists and authors from San Diego to play the game with time to burn. Julia Dixon Evans, writer, and KPBS/Arts Producer, was inspired to join me in the project as the literary editor. We asked all the participants, both authors, and artists, to submit a short passage about human communication. Julia and I then met in a cafe to pour over the submissions and choose six to start the threads, which proved tougher than I had expected. We wanted to avoid current events and stick with topics that were evergreen: the human condition, love, loss, and everything in between. No author or artist would know whose piece they were interpreting or who would be interpreting the work they would submit. Only Julia and I knew the contours of the transitions that would take place; the unveiling would be opening night.

Each month's deadline was like Christmas. Julia and I excitedly emailed or texted back our reactions as the submissions rolled in at the end of the month. I found it fascinating to see how an author or artist would latch on to something I'd failed to notice or decode the feeling of the passage with new details. Sometimes these subtle additions took on a life of their own, influencing the next creative with a single word. Sometimes it just as easily disappeared in the next rendering, or with a WALLOP or an F-Bomb(!), something entirely new and unabashed leaped from the page.

The magic in this exhibition is in witnessing how one person deciphers information similar or different from the initial intent. Equally important is realizing that initial intent is perceived and unknowable without a deeper dive. We relate to the details in life through the lens of our own personal life's history, our "world view" for better or worse. Our reactions and interpretations based on that are immediate and visceral and--unbeknownst to most of us--very personalized. They feel real to us, and yet they are just as "real", dare I say relevant, as the next person's.

In today's world, the polarizing and incivility all sides of the political world show each other proves we have forgotten that our ideas are not reality; they are just "our" reality. And with that cultural and generational amnesia, we collectively have forgotten how to give space to the other, not to agree or to condone, but

to take the time to acknowledge that space between us and them. As a member of a pluralistic society and a planet reaching 8 billion souls, it is imperative that we remember our view is not the only view. I hope that this exhibition can help us step back, if just for a moment, and witness how someone else interprets another human being's ideas and how similar or different those are to our own; to find the wonder in that and honor the difference.

Foreword

Chi Essary

On telling secrets and paying attention

When I think about the way we tell each other stories, I think about a single page in an old children's book. It's an illustrated children's poem called "A House is a House for Me," written in 1978 by Mary Ann Hoberman and illustrated by Betty Fraser, and it's basically a study in containers — some obvious, though obscure: "Barrels are houses for pickles / And bottles are houses for jam. / A pot is a spot for potatoes. / A sandwich is home for some ham."

I must have read it often enough as a child that so many of the intricate and cluttered (amazingly cluttered) illustrations have become a sort of sense memory for me, those images now part and parcel with certain objects, ideas, foods, animals, you name it. A giant barrel filled with hundreds of small green pickles. A book (a house for a story) in a rose garden (a house for a smell). The exact quilt on the bed (a house for, terrifyingly, a bedbug).

My favorite: "My head is a house for a secret," the page reads. "A secret I never will tell."

For this project, I'm not *exactly* saying that I imagined our writers and artists operating just like the characters on that "my head is a house" page: birthday party-hat clad girls with hands cupped around another one's ear, the listener's eyes wide in surprise, delight, revelation. But I'm not saying I don't imagine it either... And it's not surprising that a book that continues to hold such a power over images and words for me is at the center of my experience with the images and words that follow.

Stories, too, have that power, and I think what you'll see in these works of art, poetry and prose are full stories — in strange and small ways as well as big, irrevocably human ways.

It's easy to default to what's "lost" in translation — it happens everywhere, all the time, on an interpersonal level and broadly, globally. Misinterpretations, misunderstandings, nuance, bias, the list goes on. But I hope this project shows you a different side of this form of translation when stories are passed like secrets.

There's a wildly famous few lines of poetry by Mary Oliver:

*"Instructions for living a life:
Pay attention.
Be astonished.
Tell about it."*

I thought about those lines (the poem is "Sometimes") a great deal as we wrapped up this project — reflecting on the interactions between text and image that surprised me the most, the things that worked well, the things that stopped me in

my tracks. To pass along a story someone else told you, you have to pay attention. You have to be astonished by something that you could easily overlook instead.

For me, it's in the tiny details and tiny lives swept from line to line and frame to frame. It's in the way I reflect on the process: What thing, from one artist to the next, triggered what? So perhaps my favorite sub-project from this nearly year-long endeavor is when, after everything was done and delivered, Chi and I asked the writers and artists for a few lines about what specifically inspired their interpretation of the pieces they were given.

Artist John Purlia ran with a few of writer Marisa Crane's lines: "we sipped our cocktails" and "fell asleep mid-massage" and "endless nighttime." These became the visual cues for Purlia's work and turned into two Art Van Damme record covers released in the mid-1950s, forming the background for the piece. Then his work evolved. "My thoughts shifted to classism, elitism, and how societal struggle is often ignored by those who could truly help," Purlia wrote.

For an entirely different thread, writer Kiik Araki-Kawaguchi responded to artist Guro Silva's painting: "I was struck by the contortion of the human body," Araki-Kawaguchi wrote. "It's a powerful pose, something I imagine takes remarkable strength, flexibility." He then went on to explain that the words grew from that place, the vulnerability of the nude coupled with a curious sense of anonymity. "Something began to creep into my consciousness, the idea of a beautiful creature being devoured at a party, without much regard for its dignity. A mother prawn cooked along with her eggs still clinging to her body," Araki-Kawaguchi wrote.

In yet another, writer Lily Hoang explained how her response to Animal Cracker Conspiracy's mixed-media artwork became a new challenge, another game she played with herself — the inspiration seeping down to each chosen word. "After each musician notation, almost every single word is the name of a group of birds (e.g., a pitying of turtledoves — which I changed slightly to piteousness — a radiance of cardinals, a parliament of owls, a pandemonium of parrots, a lamentation of swans, an exaltation of larks, etc.)," Hoang wrote.

A sample line of Hoang's poem: "*Sforzando*, piteousness braces radiance, mustering lamentation: pandemonium!"

I look back at each of the works, and the ones that come before and after, and I absolutely marvel at the deep, curious creativity that transpired between these artists and writers, without anything akin to what we normally think of as collaboration. And that is the power of art and the power of a good story passed down the line.

Thread Zero

Kirsten Imani Kasai

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Sheena Rae Dowling

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Corey Lynn Fayman

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Alanna Airitam

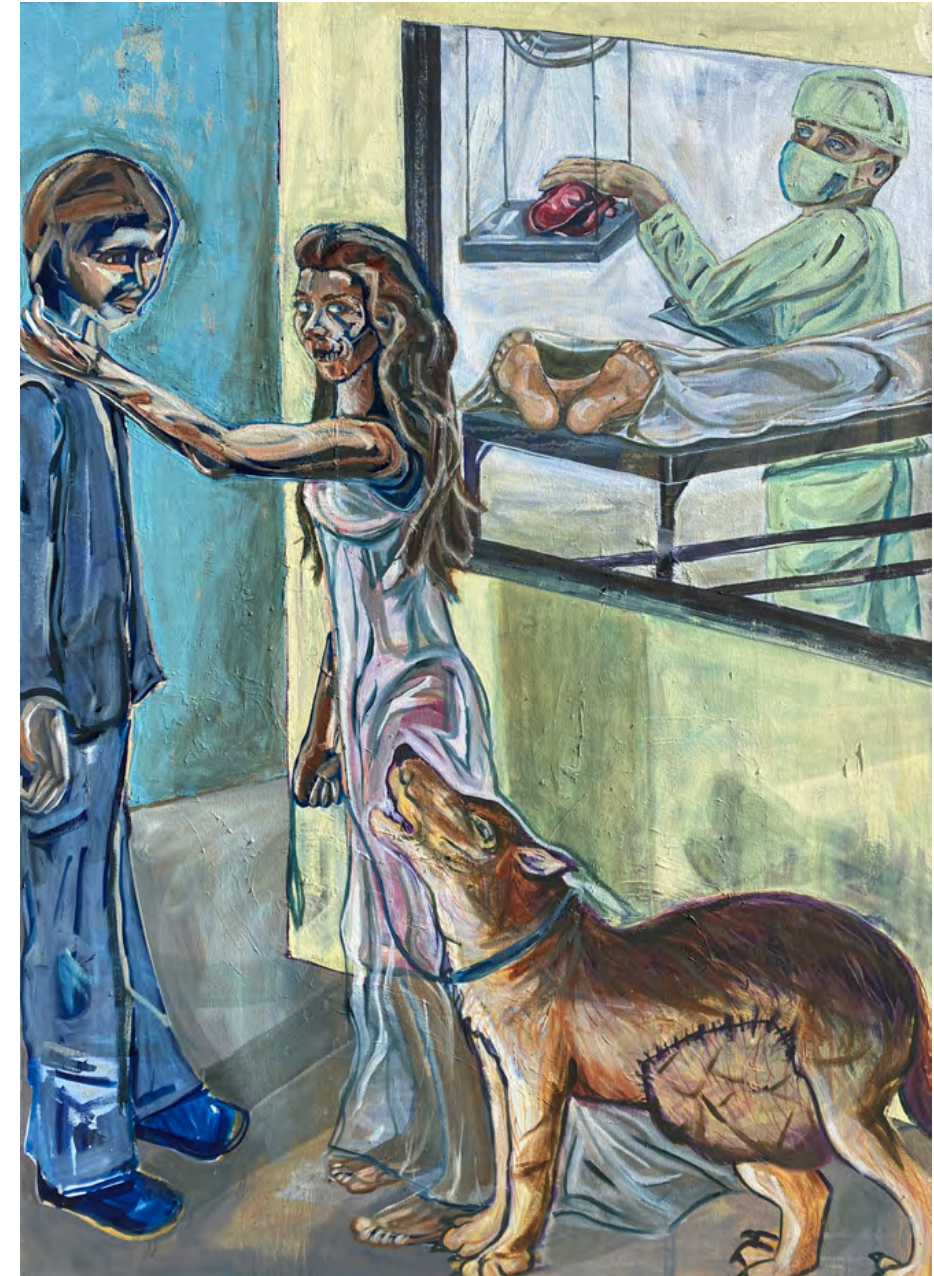
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Max Feye

Excerpt from Xquisite Corpse exhibition, 2018
Curated by Chi Essary,
Literary Advisory Cornelia Feye

You are a killing weight, a stone sewn into this wolf's belly.
But, beloved woman, know that whatever becomes of us,
my heart will beat for you until the coroner cuts it from my body.

Kirsten Imani Kasai, Excerpt from The House of Erzulie



Sheena Rae Dowling, *untitled*, 2018, 50 x 70 inches, Oil on canvas

We walked all night through twisting streets,
but there was no comfort in her hands now,
only the cold-fingered flesh of carnivorous betrayal.
The rising cost of meat led to an inevitable question.

Corey Lynn Fayman



Alanna Airitam, *untitled*, 2018, 24x36, Archival pigment print on luster paper mounted

Rembrandt could never paint a woman's heart,
 even if it was served upon a silver platter with Chardonnay.
 His friends would say,
 "Just stick to the basics:
 like God, a man or the time of day."

Thread Zero

Kirsten Imani Kasai

Kirsten Imani Kasai is the author of *The House of Erzulie* (2018, Shade Mountain Press), *Ice Song* (2009, Random House), and *Tattoo* (2011, Random House).

Sheena Rae Dowling

b. 1980, San Diego, CA Lives in San Diego, CA

I felt a very haunting feeling about this woman being described. I chose to emphasize that same sense of eerie unease in my painting. I wanted the woman to appear ghost-like or perhaps a modernized grim reaper, with transparent wispy clothing, barefoot as if she's just come from the underworld, ready to take the man. Her wolf howls at the man as if to say his time has come. While she seems to be attractive from afar, when you look closer, her face appears more grotesque, jaw hanging open and teeth exposed, as though decomposing. She reaches her hand towards the man and seems to be wrapping it around his throat in a slightly menacing way. The coroner weighing the heart behind her foreshadows the man's fate. She stares directly at the viewer, giving the unnerving sense that we too are being watched.

Corey Lynn Fayman

San Diego native Corey Lynn Fayman spent many years as a musician, songwriter, and sound designer, but still refuses to apologize for it. He is the author of the Rolly Waters mystery series, including the award-winning *Desert City Diva* and *Ballast Point Breakdown*.

When I first saw this painting, I was immediately struck by the "noir" look and feel. It fit the crime fiction writing side of me perfectly. There's a lot going on in the painting, but you're not exactly sure what. I tried to write a very short story in response, one that would suggest the same sense of fleshy menace and despair while raising questions in the reader's mind. What kind of betrayal happens? What is the inevitable question?

Alanna Airitam

b. 1971, Queens, NY Lives in Tucson, AZ

Max Feye

Max Feye is a writer and poet based out of Berlin. He has ghost-written several successful book series' and is in the process of composing his first novel.

When I first looked at the picture, it reminded me of the dark, striking paintings that came out of the Baroque period. But when I looked further, I was amazed to find it was actually a photograph! Still, I couldn't shake the feeling that one of the Old Masters had reincarnated and was in a modern-day photo studio, tinkering around with the lighting on Photoshop. The rest, I suppose, is mysterious to me. I stopped thinking further and wrote the lines and that was that.

Thread One

Marisa Crane

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Marianela de la Hoz

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Phil Beaumont

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Guro Silva

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Kiik Araki-Kawaguchi

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MR Barnadas

do you remember when you said you wanted to get rained in with me & build a rainman (but never a life)? for years, my body has wandered around without an occupant. there are worse things, i suppose. never have i seen wings as brilliant as yours. tell me, how many years did you keep them tucked away, afraid to disturb the water in the clouds, in my body?

Marisa Crane



The outside floated in,
much as it did most mornings.
Though uninvited, I seldom minded.
Telling stories of the evening's exploits.
My skin silkened by the warming breath

Marianela de la Hoz, *Stormed*, 2022, 10 x 8 inches, Egg tempera on board

Phil Beaumont



Guro Silva, *El Rito*, 2022, 10 x 15 inches, Oil on canvas

You have been to this party before / Butcher /
 Baker / A creature ignited into flames / Dubstep
 of course / Ambien of course / Prawn and
 peapod yes pretty / Yes please legs muddy with
 prawn eggs / Of course one creature dancing
 their remains / Around another sleeping in the
 bathtub of ice



Marisa Crane

Marisa Crane is a queer, nonbinary writer and basketball player. They are the author of the speculative novel, *I Keep My Exoskeletons to Myself*.

Marianela de la Hoz

b.1956, Mexico City, Mexico Lives in San Diego, CA

My immediate response to these few lines was a profound melancholy.

I touched the sadness, the feeling of loss and yet the sense of an unknown story with many interpretations.

Broken promises, betrayal, lies, even death.

A woman watching a sunny scene outside her window and yet inside, where she lives, there is nothing but gray clouds and laments.

She has created an idol with golden wings who has flown away leaving her empty, well not empty really, she is full of rain-tears...

Phil Beaumont

Phil Beaumont is an educator and musician creating songs, and music for documentaries, as a member of the band, The Color Forty Nine.

Some of my favorite moments are in the early mornings when it is quiet and you can feel the cool of the night air finishing its job and passing on the torch to the warmer day. This drawing brought that sense of quiet to me and also a question of what was the figure pondering, something about last night perhaps?

Guro Silva

b. 1982, Monterrey, Mexico Lives in Tijuana, Mexico

We can see the figure is not so much defined, but rather appropriated by the environment, an environment in cold and dark tones like those of the transition from night to dawn, that exact point in the morning. The disinterested human figure, with some disdain, goes about his own chores, without an invitation (he doesn't need one) he recalls the stories of life, of the night before, stories that have been embodied in the lemony skin. This is a memory ritual.

Kiik Araki-Kawaguchi

Kiik Araki-Kawaguchi is the author of THE BOOK OF KANE AND MARGARET (FC2 / UAP) and DISINTEGRATION MADE PLAIN AND EASY (1913 Press). He is a teacher in Bellingham, WA.

In the image I was given, I was struck by the contortion of the human body. It's a powerful pose, something I imagine takes remarkable strength, flexibility. It's also a nude body, the face turned away, the candle blown out, and so there's also a sense of vulnerability, humility, anonymity. Something began to creep into my consciousness, the idea of a beautiful creature being devoured at a party, without much regard for its dignity. A mother prawn cooked along with her eggs still clinging to her body. I'd also read (though cannot confirm) that the origin of the referenced nursery rhyme ("butcher, baker, candlestick maker") comes from men watching maids bathing in an outdoor tub, a sort of salacious fairground sideshow. That sense of "peeping" felt like the right fit.

MR Barnadas

b. 1978, Montreal, Canada Lives in San Diego, CA

I read the first line, and it compressed time for me. At this moment, I am here in San Diego and, at once, through my indigenous ancestors in Trinidad and Tobago (where my mother grew up). The violent contrasting and pulsing ocean life in the rest of the text mirrors the reality of colonization, its truths, and lies -then, now, and in me.

Media: The image in the center of this piece, Cannibals on the Caribbean Island, is an ethnographic illustration produced for a German atlas in 1525. I first came across this early European depiction of my ancestors at the Museum of Us (formerly Museum of Man) in the RACE: Are We So Different? exhibit. The format of an octagonal box with a seashell mosaic is a 'Sailors' Valentine,' a 19th-century craft. Contrary to popular belief, Sailors' Valentines' were customarily produced for sailors rather than by sailors. Sailors' Valentine-making was a cottage industry in the West Indies that began as early as 1830.

Thread Two

Perry Vasquez

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Animal Cracker

Conspiracy

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Lily Hoang

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Lindy Ivey

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Ryan Bradford

Imagine an audience of migratory swallows.
Recite a dust-covered poem from inside a bird cage.
Forget to remember to forget the pecking order.
Fly away.

Perry Vasquez



Animal Cracker Conspiracy, Pecking Order, 2022, 30 x 40 inches
Mixed media, print on photo paper

Once, a bird organizes a bird symphony into a birdophone into a bird recording according to a bird conductor kiting each trill, *tutti*.

(a bird + a bird + a bird + a bird + a bird)

Sforzando, piteousness braces radiance, mustering lamentation: pandemonium!

Mordent, descent charms deceit; watch unkindness brood into exaltation. Oh, murder.

Fermata, clouds wake to party along.

Lily Hoang, *To Bird*



Lindy Ivey, *untitled*, 2022, 22 x 10 inches, Oil on wood panel



Lindy Ivey, *untitled*, 22 x 10 inches, Oil on wood panel, detail

“I think nature’s fucking with me,” he said, standing halfway outside the open cabin door.

She put her book down and rubbed her temples. “Did you get any sleep last night?”

“Don’t you hear that?” he said, ignoring her question. “It’s, like, Cab Calloway or Benny Goodman or something.”

“I think you need some fresh air.”

He considered it, nodded reluctantly. He stepped outside and closed the door behind him. She picked her book back up and searched for the word she’d abandoned.

He burst back in, his eyes wide with fright. “Something just called me a hoochie-coocher!”

Ryan Bradford

Perry Vásquez

Artist b. 1959, Los Angeles, CA Lives in San Diego, CA

Animal Cracker Conspiracy

Iain Gunn b. 1970, Vancouver, Canada

Bridget Rountree b. 1976, San Diego, CA

This was a collaboration within a collaboration, as not only were we interpreting the text with the writer we were paired with, but Iain and I were also collaborating on how to visually represent the different interpretations between the both of us. There is a whimsical and fantastic quality to the work, as we primarily collaborate through puppetry and physical performance and felt the text contained that sentiment also. This work is a mixed media of different visual elements we often use, combining painting, drawing, and paper cut outs, along with a performative presentation using a light box which references a stage or toy theater setting used within puppetry to bring the visual narrative to life.

Lily Hoang

Lily Hoang is the author of six books, including Underneath (winner of the Red Hen Press Fiction Award), A Bestiary (PEN/USA Non-Fiction Award finalist), and Changing (recipient of a PEN/Open Books Award). Her micro-tale collection The Mute Kids is forthcoming in 2023 and A Knock at the Door, a collection of fairy tales, is forthcoming in 2024. She is a Professor of Literature at UC San Diego, where she teaches in their MFA in Literary Arts.

After a slight miscommunication, I was given the opportunity to re-write “To Bird.” Its original incarnation was a light-hearted nod to Gertrude Stein, but the painting itself offered so much more that my first draft failed to capture. In revision, I gave careful consideration to birds as orchestration and plurality. After each musical notation, almost every single word is the name of a group of birds (e.g., a pitying of turtledoves—which I changed slightly to piteousness—a radiance of cardinals, a parliament of owls, a pandemonium of parrots, a lamentation of swans, an exaltation of larks, etc.). This was a game I played for myself, by myself, a challenge, to create narrative from names alone, although I left a few obvious ones for the astute reader to find (e.g., a murder of crows, a watch of nightingales). Ultimately, it was the magical way that the painting gathered birds, ordered them with music, that drove this story.

Lindy Ivey

b. 1969, Jersey City, NJ, Lives in San Diego, CA

When I received my written prompt two elements that struck me were crows making music and clouds interacting with them. I love the idea of nature and the dance that it does. I think as humans, we get so caught up in our distractions that these interactions that are happening all around us get overlooked or taken for granted. I really love the idea of taking a step back and observing these conversations in nature.

Ryan Bradford

Ryan Bradford is a writer and educator living in San Diego. His writing has appeared in *San Diego Union Tribune*, *San Diego Magazine*, *Vice*, *Monkeybicycle*, *Hobart*, *New Dead Families* and *[PANK]*. He also writes the newsletter awkwardsd.substack.com. He is the author of the novel *Horror Business*.

When this piece came to me, I just happened to be listening to a lot of old jazz, blues, and swing. At the time, I was ramping up for Halloween, listening to a lot of spooky music, and I associate old jazz (really any music pre-1960) with horror. For me, this artwork captured the simultaneous whimsy and spookiness that I associate with old music genres, and I wanted to write something with the same vibe. So, the idea of hearing that olde-timey slang hurled at you from nature seemed very funny and very scary to me.

Thread Three

Patrick Coleman

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Jackie Dunn Smith

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Marisa Crane

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John Purlia

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Kiik Araki-Kawaguchi

“Why are you upset?” I ask when she starts to cry. She tells me: when she has to go to the moon, and she looks back at the Earth, she’s going to be so sad. She’s four years old. Has no ambition to be an astronaut. Sees the world so clearly. Knows love. Knows what it means to lose it. Reminds me, who had forgotten, again.



Jackie Dunn Smith, *untitled*, 2022, 18 x 22 inches, Gouache on hand pressed watercolor paper

and when the world asked for our help
we sipped our cocktails
& tanned our faces
we dipped our toes in the water
& fell asleep mid-massage

we closed our hearts like a tulip
in endless nighttime

Marisa Crane



John Purlia, *The Seductive Path to Perpetual Complacency*, 2022,
19 layer Digital C Print, 26 x 13.25 inches

It's true what they're saying / Everybody is
 having more fun than you / Even nuns with
 spiders on them / The scientists came together
 / A hotel in florida / I am thinking what you're
 thinking / A real covid den / Men died to bring
 you truth / Everybody is having more fun than
 you / Especially in bed / Even the dead / Medical
 studies say necrophilia has probiotic benefits /
 You can have your kombucha and f*** it too /
 That look on your face is called shaming my kink
 / See this is why nobody calls you

Kiik Araki-Kawaguchi

Patrick Coleman

Patrick Coleman lives in Ramona, California, and is the author of *Fire Season* (winner of the Berkshire Prize) and *The Churchgoer*. He edited and contributed to *The Art of Music*, an exhibition catalog for the San Diego Museum of Art and Yale University Press. He is the Assistant Director of the Arthur C. Clarke Center for Human Imagination at UC San Diego.

Jackie Dunn Smith

b. 1979 Lancaster, CA, Lives/works San Diego, CA and Dallas, TX

Marisa Crane

(see Thread One for full bio)

As soon as I saw this piece, I thought of a woman at a spa, far away from Earth, looking back at us with a curious detachment. Almost as if she forgets what it was like to live here at all. And all she cares about now is that she is safe and comfortable, enjoying her luxury while everything around her falls apart.

John Purlia

b. 1960, El Cajon, CA Lives in La Jolla, CA

Upon first reading the prompt, my initial impression was to pick up on a couple of literal visual clues: "sipped our cocktails", "fell asleep mid-massage," and "endless nighttime," which drove the background imagery for the piece: a pair of record album covers by Art Van Damme released during the mid-1950's. Thinking more deeply, my thoughts shifted to classism, elitism, and how societal struggle is often ignored by those who could truly help. Compositionally, the piece uses the symbol for infinity as a vehicle for marching my figures through their cycle of life from birth through adulthood. Along the way, other characters — sophisticates and figures of authority — standby watching, but never really helping to break this never-ending cycle until the parade disappears through a mystical portal into the great beyond. The "portal", by the way, is my grandparents' PO Box from Claypool, AZ. There's quite a bit of additional symbolism sprinkled throughout the piece similar to what one may find in a still life vanitas — but I'll leave that interpretation up to the viewer. Have fun!

Kiik Araki-Kawaguchi

(see Thread One for full bio)

It's a crowded party here. How is the status quo emerging? Seduction. Mutant babies. The environment feels a little old and fancy and heteronormative, and also gruesome and congested. Somehow, my brain leapt to FOMO. I'm repelled by the images here, but also, I am seduced. I feel I'm being shamed for what I don't want. The faces turn away from me; I'm being ignored. This freezing out, this exclusion, also seems part of the seduction. The nuns with spiders on them, they tell me I am missing out. I don't want to be a nun, and I'm scared of spiders, but still, I think, what do they know that I don't? Should I want the thing, though I do not understand why I should want it?

Thread Four

Corey Lynn Fayman

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Carlos Castro Arias

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Miki Vale

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Charles Glaubiz

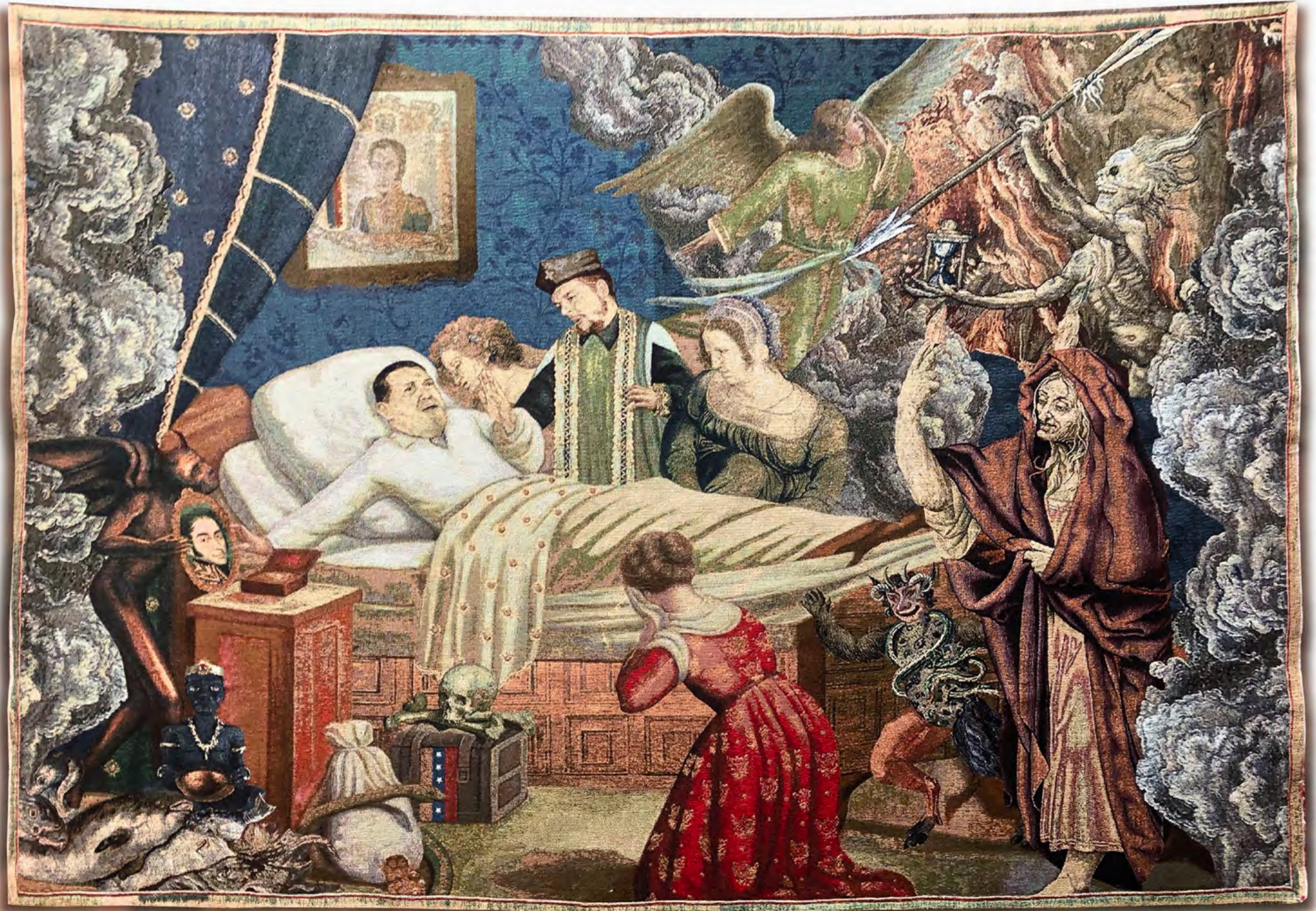
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Lizz Huerta

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Perry Vasquez

He'd harnessed his soul to their stories of hidden treasure and bright bottom lines. He'd trusted in fables and scattered his energies among them as a king showers coins on the beggarly, leaving behind tokens of his own ignorance. The truth he'd discovered, almost too late, was that he did not have an endless supply of himself.



Carlos Castro Arias, *The Dead of El Comandante*, 2022
6 X 4 feet, Woven Tapestry

Time's thief waits eagerly at the foot of cradle
turned bedstead turned casket. The shadows
beckon with outstretched arms, cunning guides
into the darkness, leading the charge on the
underground railroad to the unknown.
Nightgown hems stretched in the white-
knuckled clutch of the familiar. To hold on or let
go; which misery awaits?



Charles Glaubiz, *Night Train*, 2022, Ink on paper, 36 x18 inches

The train dreamed itself a body of geometric language. All doorways were once gardens, or stations, or mouth bones in the dark. Come, the horn bellows, be a beast, ride or be ridden in monochromatic energy; if you hover, hover hard, make it a prayer, make it your home.



Corey Lynn Fayman

(see Thread Zero for full bio)

Carlos Castro Arias

b. 1976, Bogota, Colombia Lives in San Diego, CA

Miki Vale

Miki Vale is an international Hip Hop performing artist and United States Cultural Ambassador, playwright and founder and Artistic Director of SoulKiss Theater, an arts education organization for queer Black womxn. Her work serves to amplify community consciousness around relationships, wellness, and justice.

At the time of my submission I was moved by the thought that sometimes, depending on the quality of life, to go on living may not feel like a better alternative to death.

Charles Glaubitz

b. 1973 Tijuana, Mexico Lives in Tijuana, Mexico

My piece was inspired by imaginal cells in time and space, as these two dimensions are needed for things to seed, germinate and grow. By doing a drawing in comic form (with panels) the idea of time and space can be depicted.

Lizz Huerta

Lizz Huerta is a widely-admired Mexi-Rican short story writer and essayist, published in *Lightspeed*, *The Cut*, *The Portland Review*, *The Rumpus*, *Miami Rail*, and more.

Perry Vasquez

b. 1959, Los Angeles, CA Lives in San Diego, CA

The first sentence of the prompt I received, "The train dreamed itself a body of geometric language", grabbed me immediately. It brought to mind a book I had recently read, The Last Days of New Paris by China Mieville. The anti-hero, Thibaut, joins the French resistance against the Nazi invasion of Paris during WWII. He soon begins to encounter hallucinogenic creatures who have joined the fight against Fascism. These creatures turn out to be supernatural manifestations of artworks created by artists of the Surrealist movement. Beginning with a photo of an armored military style train, I added my idea of a "geometric language."

Thread Five

Ryan Bradford

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Hugo Crosthwaite

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Corey Lynn Fayman

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Wick Alexander

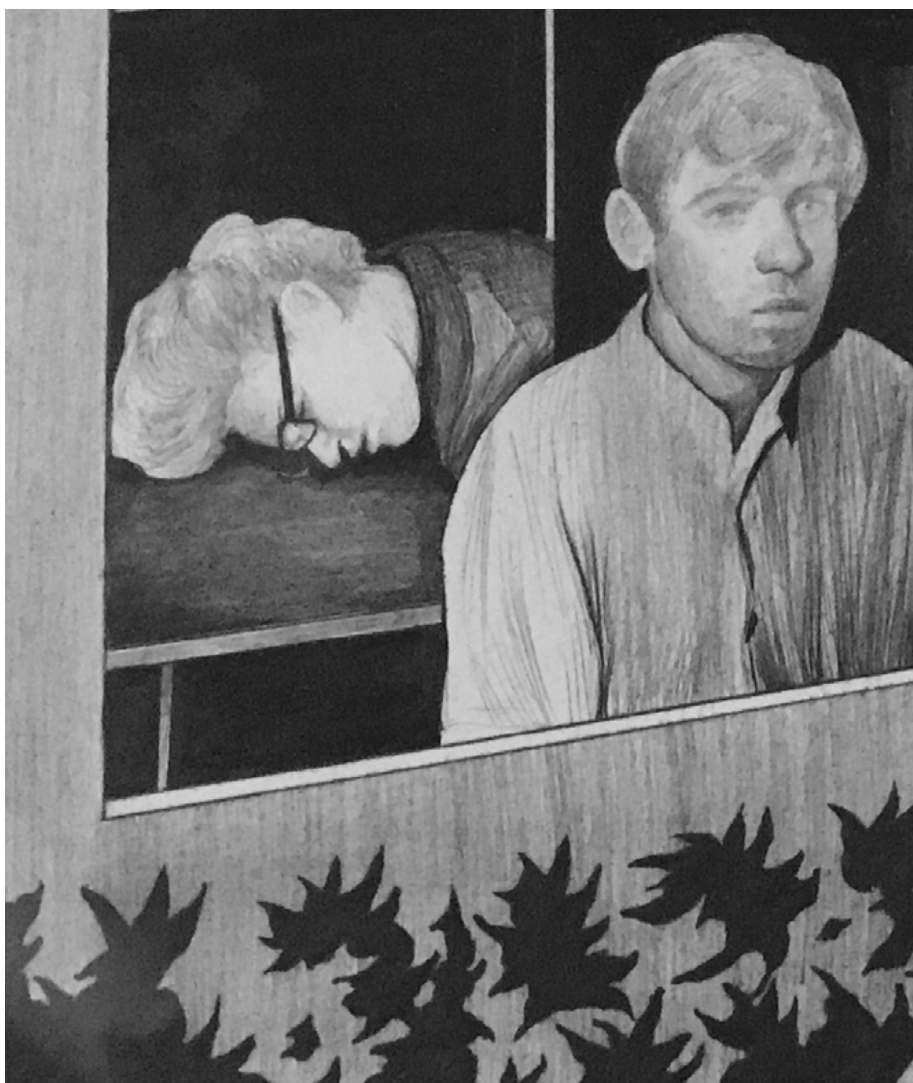
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Kirsten Imani Kasai

Ghost Boy raises his arms to block the sun out of his face—the motion lifts the sheet. Underneath, he wears Keds and Osh Kosh. The eye-holes are bottomless.

“Look,” I say. “There he is.”

My wife doesn’t look. Instead, she puts her palms on the table and slides them away from her. The piles of bills and condolence cards become shoveled together by her fingertips. Her arms fan out until her cheek comes to rest on the tabletop.



Hugo Crosthwaite, *untitled*, 2022, 10 x 13 inches, Pencil on watercolor paper

Penitence is a house with a white picket fence
and a large picture window,
a ragged hole in the clouds
making shadows of leaves,
green hopes that fluttered in freedom.
My thoughts are like ghosts, diminished, serene
gazing at failures of Autumn



Wick Alexander, *untitled*, 2022, 47 x 70 inches, Acrylic on canvas

Mama says “the world as you know it is ending,
 pixel by pixel degrading.”
 I am only five but here is the Rapture.
 Mama looks out the window and decides
 today is Halloween
 so let’s put on our costumes and play a game.
 “Now you look just like them ‘cept your bucket
 is filled with candy and theirs are stuffed chock-
 a-block with regrets” (she can smile and frown
 at the same time, my Mama).
 She points to the ground, the sky, and tells me
 to stay between the lines
 “we’re gonna hopscotch all the way to heaven.”

Ryan Bradford

(see Thread Two for full bio)

Hugo Crosthwaite

b. 1971, Tijuana, Mexico Lives Tijuana, Mexico

I felt it was a very intriguing paragraph that was sent to me. It reminded me of some mysterious, suburban scene from a David Lynch film, so I decided to try to capture that feeling the best I could in a black and white pencil drawing.

Corey Lynn Fayman

(see Thread Zero for full bio)

The figure in the hood was the first thing to catch my attention. Who is this person? Why are they wearing a hood? I thought of three possibilities. The figure was either disguised as a ghost on Halloween, wearing a mask for criminal reasons, or expressing penitence, as I had recently witnessed watching religious processions in Spain.

Wick Alexander

b. 1955, San Diego, CA Lives in Dulzuro, CA

After months of anticipation I received my written “Prompt” for the telephone experiment. I opened the email with “Your Turn” in the heading. I was surprised that the writing consisted of seven sentences. Although I read the writing over and over, I had no idea how to proceed. I needed to give the words their due diligence, to percolate, in order to imagine what images would emerge.

As with conditional art, this assignment comes with expectations and conditions. My contribution as a visual artist was to interpret the words that would “inspire” an image (resulting in a painting, in my case). I thought of it as, like, doing an illustration in the New Yorker’s fiction article. The written “prompt” seemed more like a description of a dream. The word “penitence” was a tripping hazard toward advancing a visual work that would portray sorrow and regret in an unrepentant and impenitent moment in time. To best understand and interpret dreams, it’s best to consult Carl Jung, who says: “Follow your images.”

Kirsten Imani Kasai

(see Thread Zero for full bio)

Thread Six

Julia Dixon Evans

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Alanna Airitam

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Ari Honarvarn

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de la Torre

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Patrick Coleman

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Beliz Iristay

“You never play with her;” my father said to my mother.

Suddenly they were both attentive to me, handing me toys in the unlearned way of people who never played. Both of them, arms outstretched with an offering: a doll or a block, me grabbing at neither. Until my father put his down, stood up, and walked inside.

“Let’s feed your doll some of these nice weeds,” she said, and grasped a handful of broadleaf clover in her palm, violently pulled at them, and then sprinkled them with surprising tenderness at my doll’s feet.



Alanna Airitam, *Evelyn with Doll*, 2022, 20 x 15 inches, Archival photographic print

Out somewhere between soberness and a daydream
I cradle the future, a fragile thing
a baby ragdoll stitched from the ruins of the past
reeking of fast food, fast fashion, and faster weapons
lips, a quivering question mark, the baby coos and coos
Tell me, what dreams may come when to be is not to be?

Ari Honarvar



De La Torre Brothers, *Belated Mother's Day Card*, 2022, 24 x 36 inches,
Archival digital print (page 72: detail)



Only when you are against the wall can you see that brick was once stone, was once soil—was once a lifeless part of a lifeless planet. Things could grow here. If we change how we see. If we change how we see each other: mourning, angry, afraid, hoping not to be seen as afraid, bringing imperfect offerings. Take my hand. It's made of wood. It was taken from an oak and carved, so carve me. Make it something simple. Make it something to last.



Beliz Iristay, *Tarzana*, 2022, 15 x 11 x 2.5 inches,
Solid cast form, red clay, underglaze painting

Julia Dixon Evans

Julia Dixon Evans is the author of “How To Set Yourself on Fire” (2018, Dzanc). Her short fiction and essays can be found in McSweeney’s, Literary Hub, Paper Darts, Barrelhouse, Pithead Chapel and elsewhere. She won the 2019 National Magazine Award for Fiction and is a three-time nominee for the Pushcart Prize. As a public media journalist, she covers art and culture for KPBS in San Diego. She is also the founding editor of Last Exit Literary.

Alanna Airitam

b. 1971, Queens, NY Lives in Tucson, AZ

Ari Honarvar

Ari Honarvar is an award-winning author of the novel A Girl Called Rumi and founder of Rumi with a View, dedicated to building music and poetry bridges across war-torn and conflict-ridden borders. She conducts Resilience through Joy workshops on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border and in Europe.

I grew up in Iran. I was six when Islamists took over the government and cut women’s rights in half. I was seven when Saddam Hussein attacked Iran and started an 8-year war that destroyed millions of lives. I was 14 when I migrated to the US as an unaccompanied minor under extraordinary circumstances. Navigating through all this, I discovered two of the most powerful forces for resisting tyrannical forces and building resilience: the arts and summoning joy. So my art naturally oscillates between unapologetic joy and bringing attention to suffering and social justice causes.

When I first saw the girl holding the doll, I found myself in a haunting setting. I imagined swaying in the rocking chair, the soothing motion freeing my mind to daydream in the relative darkness of the room. I examined the ragdoll—it contained so much history and mystery. It felt battered and bruised in my arms. Its softness and pliable brought me comfort. Then the doll made me think of mass-produced toys—a sobering thought. What else is mass-produced in our world? Food, clothes and weapons, to name a few. I rocked back and forth between daydreaming and reality. Hamlet’s famous soliloquy “To be or not to be,” sprung into my mind. I wanted to play with the lines, reordering them into something new.

De La Torre Brothers

Einar de la Torre b. 1963 Jamex de la Torre b. 1960 Guadalajara, Mexico

Live/work in San Diego, CA and Ensenada, Mexico

Our first impression was a surreal environmental-dystopia scenario. We based this piece on the Pietà from St. Bavo’s Cathedral in Ghent, Belgium, in a biblical/Dada fashion. Our historical rewrite is complicated by the current absurd readings of the second amendment fueled by heavily processed food. The simulation has glitches, but we perceive only reality.

Patrick Coleman

(see Thread Three for full Bio)

Trying to teleport back to my mind state when I first saw this image, I think what struck me most was how surreal and angry it was, and caught up in a few hundred years of consumption and destruction and technological advances in how we depict the world around us, from innovations in naturalistic painting techniques to the photograph to the digital tools that enable this kind of trippy, prickly collage. I’m an angry person, which is a surprise for anyone who knows me. And art is a place I go to work with anger, sometimes, and so I remember wanting to peer underneath the anger this image first called up in me, get at a contrasting feeling of some kind – like, what can I do with that anger? or can I see how a world you want to burn down can be connected with a more lasting, equitable one you wish could exist?

Beliz Iristay

b. 1979, Izmir Turkey, Lives/works San Diego, CA and Ensenada, Mexico

I decided to paint the oak branch on the brick, as the “imperfect offering”. In my [Turkish] culture the oak branch is a symbol of fertility, peace & strength. I painted a little woman creature of the forest in the branch as the sumptuous fruit on the tree because the writing also evokes a certain sensuality to me. I decided to use a brick as I love the metaphor of the brick having been fertile soil before and becoming fertile soil once it breaks down in a distant future.

