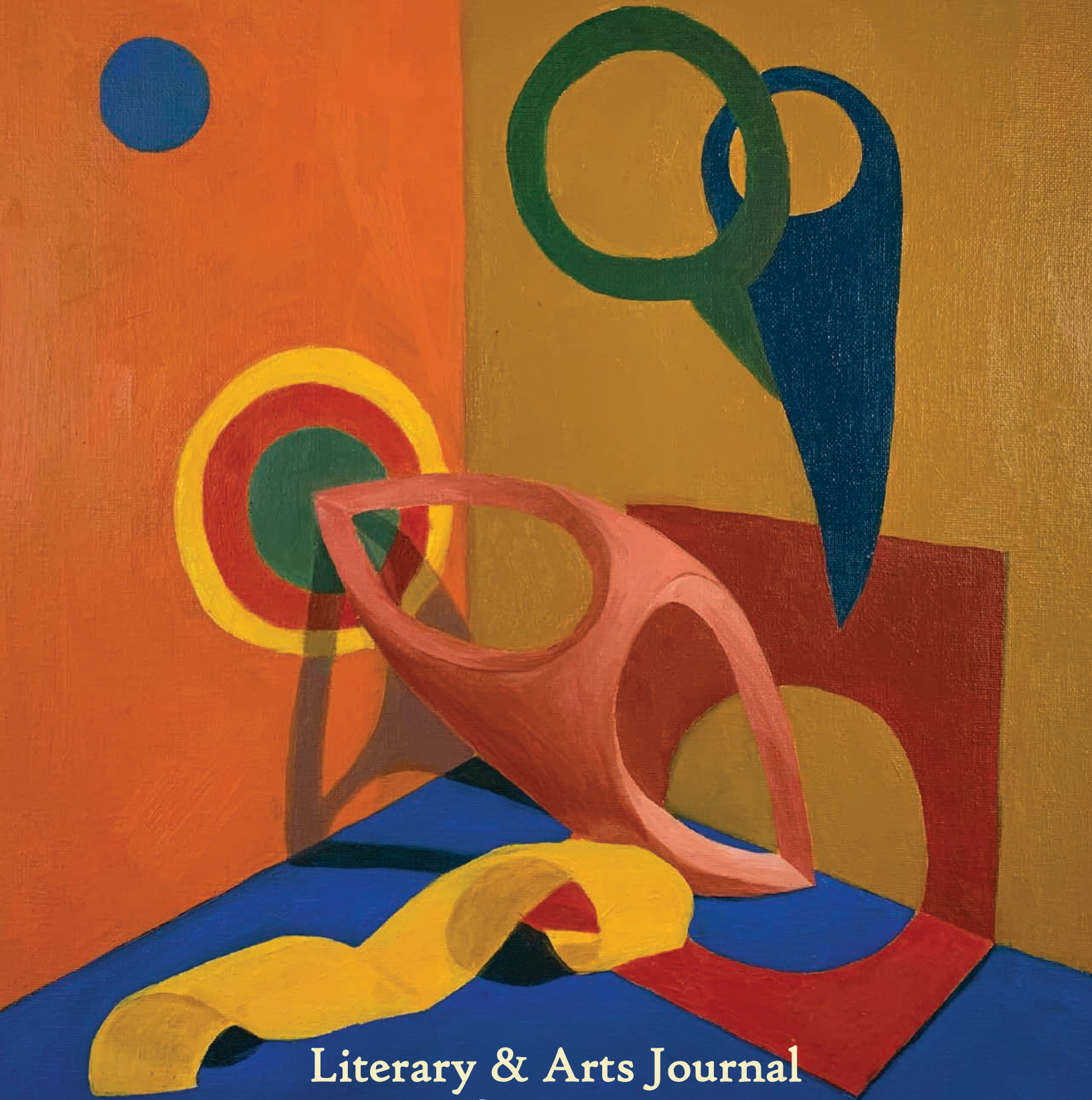


# Voices of Compton



Literary & Arts Journal  
Spring 2021

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Special thanks to Dr. Rebekah Blonshine, Dean of Student Success.

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**Cover Art: *The Numinous, 2019***  
**Ivan Enrique Mendez**  
Oil on canvas

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**Object, 2020**  
**Manny Ramirez**  
Carved plaster



***Personal Still Life, 2020***

**Iridian Rocha**

Oil on canvas



**Sunset, 2020**  
**Manny Ramirez**  
Light, water, plastic

# Yellow

Anny woke to the sound of buzzing circling around her. She was lying in a large meadow filled with daffodils, daisies, and dandelions: an endless space of yellow. When the wind blew through the field, the flowers would dance to the cool breeze, and their sweet aroma would spread through the air. Anny considered sitting back, maybe creating a crown for herself, and enjoying the warm sun trailing its soft hands over her skin, but that whizzing sound kept reappearing. So, she began to walk. Sometimes, Anny caught blurs of movement on the delicate petals, but it was just her eyes colluding with the wind to play tricks amid the dizzying amount of yellow. It was not until Anny had walked a great distance and found no exit from the meadow that she came face to face with them.

They hid camouflaged in the flowers with their yellow bodies, and only their heads and black stripes discerned them from the petals when they flew from one plant to the next. Their bodies were suspended midair by webbed wings, and long antennas drooped over their faces.

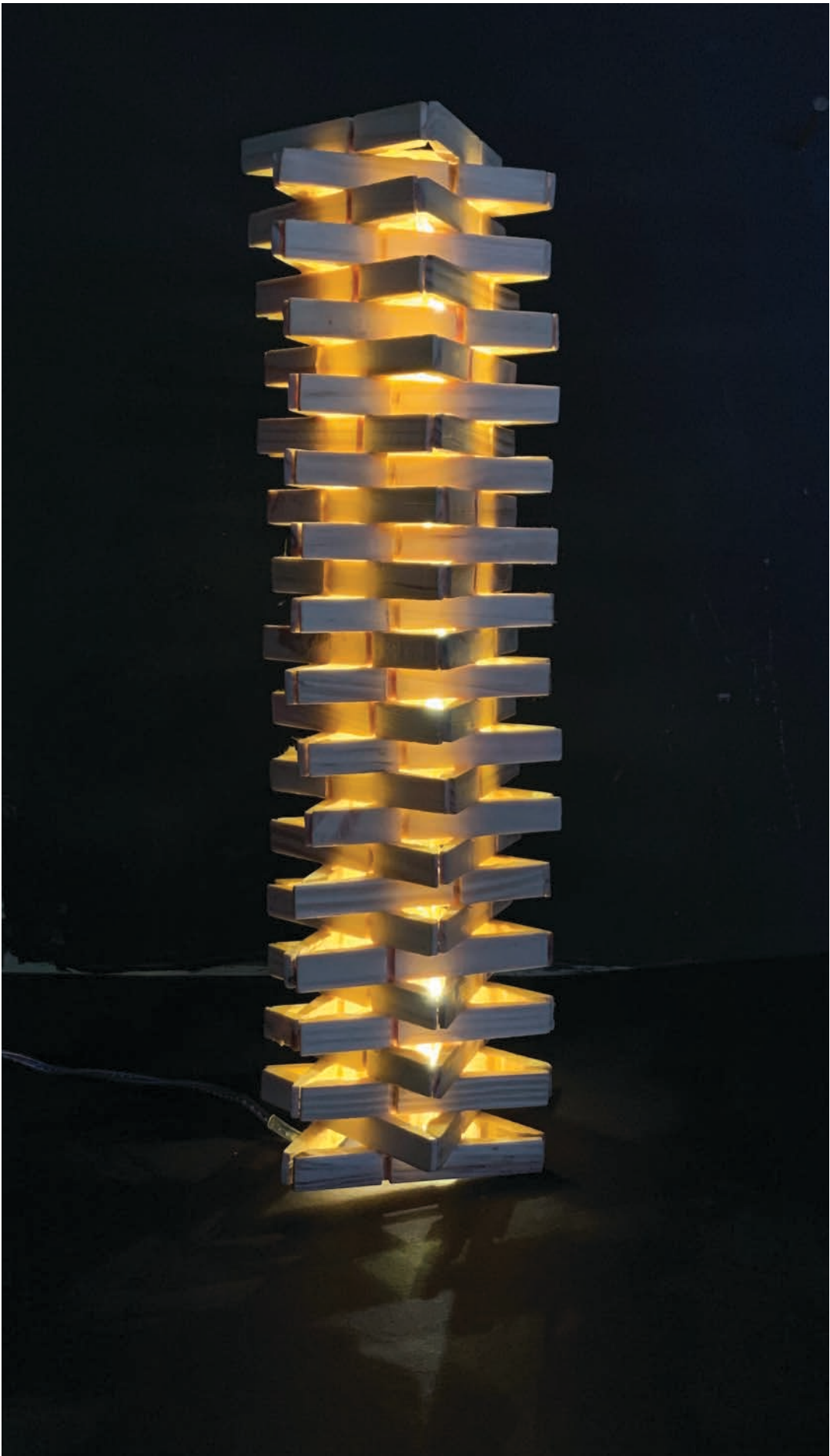
Their eyes jutted out of their hairy bodies, and numerous legs hung under them like tiny, thin tentacles.

She was surrounded.

Anny felt her breath catch within her body: *If you move, if you breathe, they'll find you!* Her heart thumped viciously against her rib cage and she froze. One of the creatures flew past her eyes as she blinked, but it did nothing. *Run.* She tilted her body to face backward, but as she did several of the creatures moved with her. They could track her movements. She was petrified, and her breath caught once again. She knew that when she could no longer hold her breath and was forced to let it out, that when her weight became too much for her tired legs to bear and her knees gave out, their eyes would train on her. Stinging, climbing, nesting. They would call their flying buddies and alert the slimy, slithering creatures in the ground, and anything else that felt like having a light snack.

Anny stood perfectly still.

The creatures danced with each other, laughed, and returned home. They paid no mind to the girl in the field who stood still as a statue day and night, whose pants were soiled for she had been too afraid to move, who spent her last moments before the world lost color staring at so much yellow.



*Untitled, 2020*  
**Evelyn Cisneros**  
Clothes pins and light





***Washed Up, 2021***  
**Guillermo Rubio**

Dip pen and ink wash on paper



***Legend of the Selkie, 2020***  
**Zoe Hernandez**  
Pastel on paper

# Bath Time

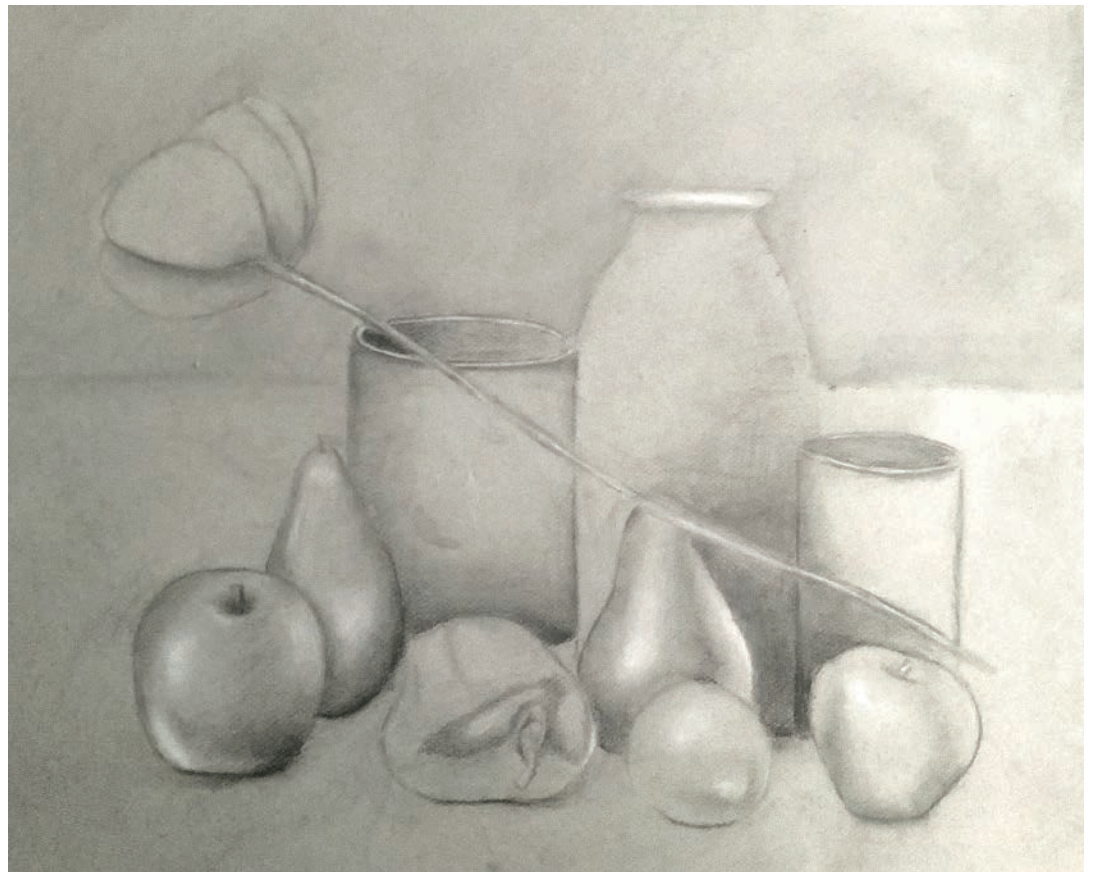
There's something about being  
submerged in scalding hot water.  
The sensation of heat  
embracing every inch of my body.  
Every strand of hair on my head  
dancing in peaceful unison,  
gliding effortlessly through my fingers.

When the water drains  
and slowly exposes my body,  
a cool draft disturbs me  
in more ways than one.  
A sudden reminder  
that reality is awaiting me  
outside this tub.

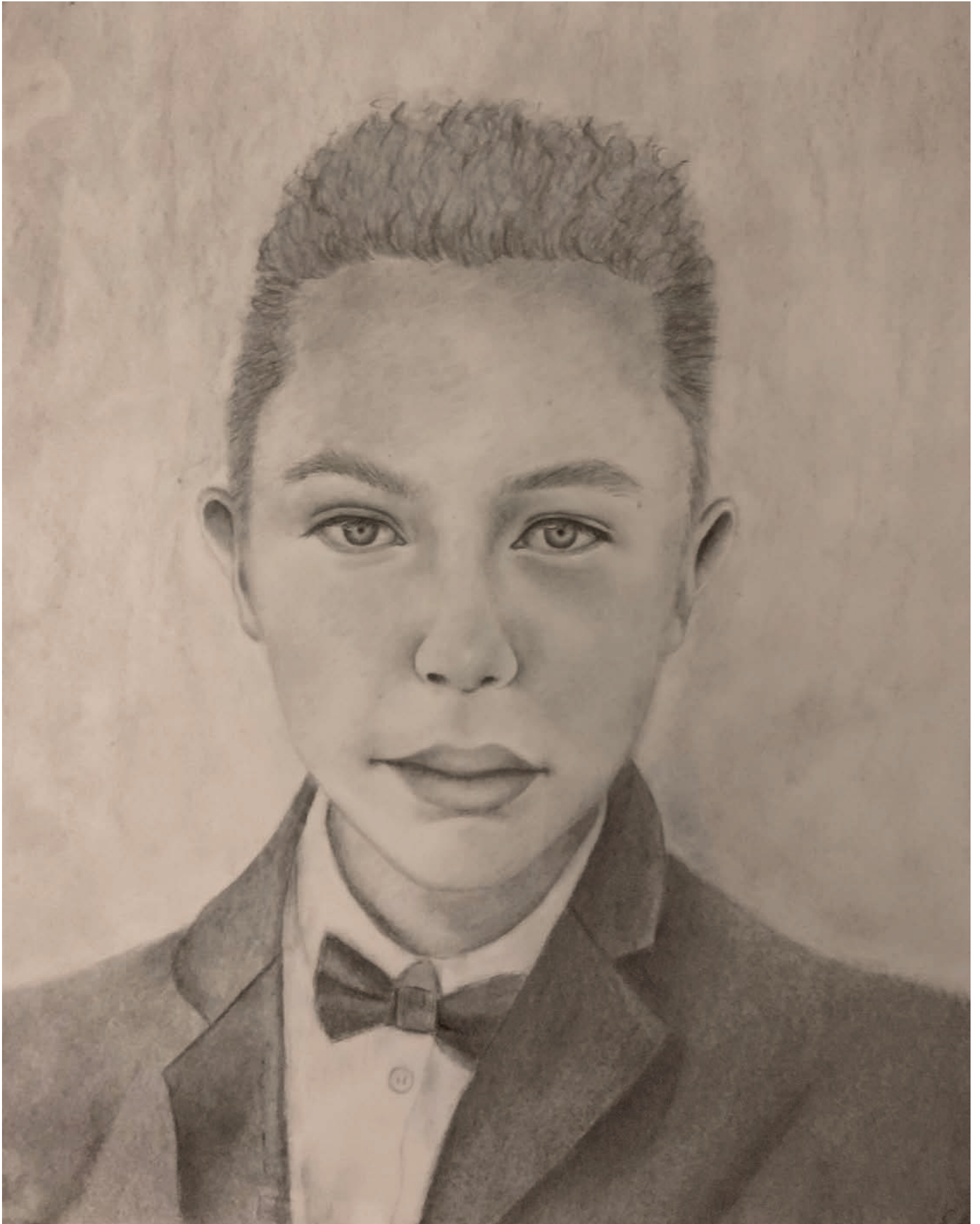
I am now left with the steam  
that is rising off from my skin.  
If only I could just drift away with it.  
If only.



**Still Life, 2020**  
**Mario Rivera**  
Pastel on paper



**Still Life, 2020**  
**Sarah Harmon**  
Charcoal on paper



**Untitled, 2020, Sarah Harmon, Charcoal on paper**



**Soft Body, 2020**  
**Jasmine Perry**  
Mixed media/found materials

# Golem, Mother

“¿Quién nos dirá las cosas que sentía  
Dios, al mirar a su rabino en Praga?”  
—Jorge Luis Borges

On an old patio of sunken gray wood,  
in the backyard of dreams and childhood,  
holding your brown hair from your face,  
I'll start with the carving of your name:  
Life, Love. With this, I've reinvented  
the names you wore in life: Absent,  
Abandoned, Loveless, names which  
no longer fit your skull. No, Adonai  
would never have fit, for the Catholics  
screamed, “We are named of saints.”

Now your clay fingers, picking roses  
round the Virgin Mary statue, no longer  
bleed from their pricks: there's no voice  
to illustrate your laughter, no laughter  
to illustrate your pain. Here, you have  
the opportunity to be everything you  
weren't in life: Mother, Happy, Free.  
Here, at night, you'll pretend-point out  
the constellations to me, and I'll pretend-  
point them out to you, to understand  
the shapes the stars create for us.

You'll take my hand, trace the letters  
of your name inside my palm: Life, Love,  
pretend that each syllable will break  
my skin, that you'll stay with me forever,  
and I'll wipe my palm along your forehead,  
first erasing Life, then erasing Love,  
watch your form melt between gaps of wood,  
turn to mud with the dirt beneath us,  
and wonder if any of our Gods might recall  
that we are the ones who name them.

**By Mikey Bachman, 2020**



**Earth, 2019, Arielle Hernandez, Oil on Canvas**





***Backyard Escape, 2020***  
**Arielle Hernandez**  
Pastel on cardboard

# Underestimated

By Sekou Damani Chinyelu, 2021

Queen Niara sat patiently on her steed atop a hill, overlooking the pastures where the battle would take place. She had a total of five hundred elite women warriors standing behind her. The rest of her army stood directly across from the enemy ranks out in the open. Her perfectly brown skin glowed in the sunlight softly enhanced by the large bronze colored earrings covering both sides of her face. The royal blue shawl sat on her shoulders matching the sapphires aligned around her eyes and the bridge of her nose. The messenger approached from the west also riding a steed. It was her cousin who was tasked with delivering the message. Obasi's steed began to slow its gallop as he drew near.

"My Queen, there are another two thousand warriors seeking to flank our ranks near the river. They could weaken our forces by attacking our rear."

"As I expected. We will return the favor by attacking them from the east and out flanking them with the warriors we have present. I will lead the assault, and we will prevent their ranks from escaping. Inform Commander Hani Oba that I want five thousand of our warriors to break away from our front ranks to engage those who seek to surround us. Our cavalry on elephants should help us hold our position until we can decimate their main force."

Obasi gave a stiff nod then went in the direction of Hani Oba's command. Chineke urged his horse to move forward, next to Queen Niara's. She glanced over at him and smiled.

"I don't think it wise that you lead the attack on foot. You should delegate that task to someone else." He attempted to smile.

"You do not trust your training? Is it not you who taught me the arts, and I am the most skilled of those in my special forces?"

"It is not a question of skill, my queen. It is a question of risk. Your orders still can be carried out to perfection without you leading your ranks into battle."

"So, you are frightened for me, Chineke?"

"I know your valor and I'm aware of your skills, but to use these assets are not your only options."

"Yet it is my best option. I ask my people to risk their lives for me, and I have yet to risk my life for them. Camaraderie comes from facing the enemy on the battlefield together."

Chineke gave her direct eye contact; his eyes filled with water. Not one drop had fallen down his face yet. The queen let out a sigh and lowered her head.

"I know of your undying love for me, Chineke. It is what makes me smile every day I rise from slumber. It is natural for you to want to protect me. This is the time for me to protect you."

She climbed off her steed and removed her shawl. She looked up at Chineke, who remained on his horse.

"You will protect the prince and maintain order until he comes of age. That is my dying wish if I am to fall."

There was one other time she had seen tears fall from Chineke's face, and she yearned to wipe them away now, as she had in the past. His horse stood too high for her to reach his face, so she turned from him. She walked over and stood next to Afia Faa, second in command of the elite woman warriors unit. Afia gave her a stiff nod as Queen Niara led the march into enemy territory.

Chineke watched Queen Niara and the women following behind her descend the hill with uncanny speed. They were near the forest within minutes. The forces led by the queen suddenly split into five subgroups, and then raided the back side of the opposing army. Commander Ghezo gave the command for the main forces to engage the enemy. The Abeeku tribes were distracted by the frontal attack and began to crumble from within as all five columns of warrior women closed in on their army. The maneuver was done so swiftly that the Dinari Empire's frontal forces were simply holding them in place for the slaughter. He observed that speed was the tactic that bore such positive results. A small segment of their army began to flee after the approaching elite force cut down their men.

It was Queen Niara who was the first to break through the ranks and reach the front. Her army halted their attack when they recognized their queen.

"It is our queen that has routed the enemy!" a warrior shouted from the ranks.

Queen Niara lowered her sword and began her journey up the hill. Her face, arms and upper chest was covered with blood. Chineke grabbed the reins of her horse and galloped down to meet her. She quickly mounted her stallion after smiling at him, and he returned the gesture. She turned towards her elite force and lifted her sword in the air.

"We are the victors today!"

Hani Oba rode over towards the queen in a jovial mood. The queen nodded, allowing him a moment to speak.

"The forces that sought to outflank us from the west fled when they saw their main forces decimated. How did you know that you would be able to kill so efficiently?"

"My brother Dumisani taught me a long time ago that women often are underestimated, and I should use this to eliminate an enemy. They expected us to be only a thorn in their side, so they did not properly prepare for our attack."

"It was a masterful strategy, my queen," Hani bowed.

He returned to the west to gather the remaining forces. Her and Chineke's horses walked side by side slowly up the hill.

"I questioned your numbers, not your skills. They did not prepare because you were women and that was to their detriment. You once told me of Dumisani's wisdom, but it was another thing to witness it," Chineke admitted.

"It was another thing to live it, my beloved Chineke." She smiled as they made their march back to the Dinari campsite.



**Paper Circus, 2019, Zoe Hernandez, Oil on Canvas**



Self Portrait, 2020, Edgar Hernandez, Collage

# The Place I Call . . .

There is nothing I can do. Being stuck in this room, seeing people I do not know walk back and forth while I am at a loss. What is even happening?

They try to get me to talk. They continue even with my obvious dislike of it. They continue to pester me in order to get me to talk. I look down onto the floor, agitated, unsettled, and confused. I do not want to be here, not in the slightest.

They force me, and I just comply. If I disobey, nothing good will happen; nothing but pain and sorrow. If I disobey, they will become frustrated, loud, and revolting. This sight I cannot stomach or endure, this unsavory taste these people leave in my mouth.

They are showing their faces to me as if I did something wrong.

Why do you shame me?

Why do you hate me?

Did you hate it? When I showed you the flaws that live within this family?

I did nothing wrong.

They talk, and talk, and talk as if it is their job. Nothing better to do.

Nothing good comes from their mouths. Putting me down, putting others down, putting themselves down. They wonder why no one outside this home talks to us.

Well, I understand clearly.

They are blinded by their own egos as if they are the sun. The same blazing hot sun that hovers above us every single day.

I do not talk back because if I do, it will burn me like standing in the summer heat for hours. I do not want to bear that, so I stay quiet. This uncomfortable feeling does not leave me. A choking sensation, as if I am breathing these toxic fumes into my lungs. The toxic fumes that spew out this family's mouths. The talking that never ends, the fumes that never end; clogging every pore of my body, inside and out.

I cannot bear it any longer.

I want to leave, but to where? I have nowhere to go but to this place.

The place I call home.

**By George Gallardo, 2021**



**My Quarantine View, 2020, Zoe Hernandez, Pastel on cardboard**

# The Grieving Trees

I'll have to plant two trees:  
one for you, and one for me.

Perhaps I'll make them Oak,  
or mix the seeds to form gemels.

Can one meld together species of trees?  
It would be a beautiful twist of nature,

unable to contain itself. There would be  
leaves of every color, even colors unseen

as yet by light, and differing shades of bark  
and textures. But, ah, I forget the names

of all other trees. So I'll call yours Willow  
for now, and mine Oak. I'll save the seeds

mixing for another day, long into the future,  
when I feel prepared for it. On that day,

the sky will be green, the clouds yellow,  
the grass blue. Maybe ants will crowd

the air, maybe gas. We'll both grow into  
its toxicity, looking as if we mean to reach

the sky, but our real complexity will lie  
in our roots, intertwining as water

winds itself around two bodies' feet digging  
into the wave-blown sand at the shore.

It will be as simple as this: once our seeds  
are planted, we will form a new breed,

each a mix of our own seeds, compounded  
together. The flowers will cheer for us;

our bark, leaves, and roots shall meld,  
each becoming parts of the other,

forming separate, symbiotic systems,  
able to perform each other's functions,

creating an ovular cycle of repetition,  
each blending with its own purpose.

Perhaps all our colors will fade over time,  
too, as those of the many trees before us,

and, from our fallen leaves, flowers  
who once knew us will grow. For now,

I'll simply have to plant two trees.

**By Mikey Bachman, 2020**



**Birdcage, 2020, Edgar Hernandez, Ink on paper**



# The Rat

The Rats have gone off for food.  
One grey furry marshmallow,  
Watching them scurry.

Long teeth and humanlike hands,  
Stands, eats like a squirrel.  
Runs with no plan.

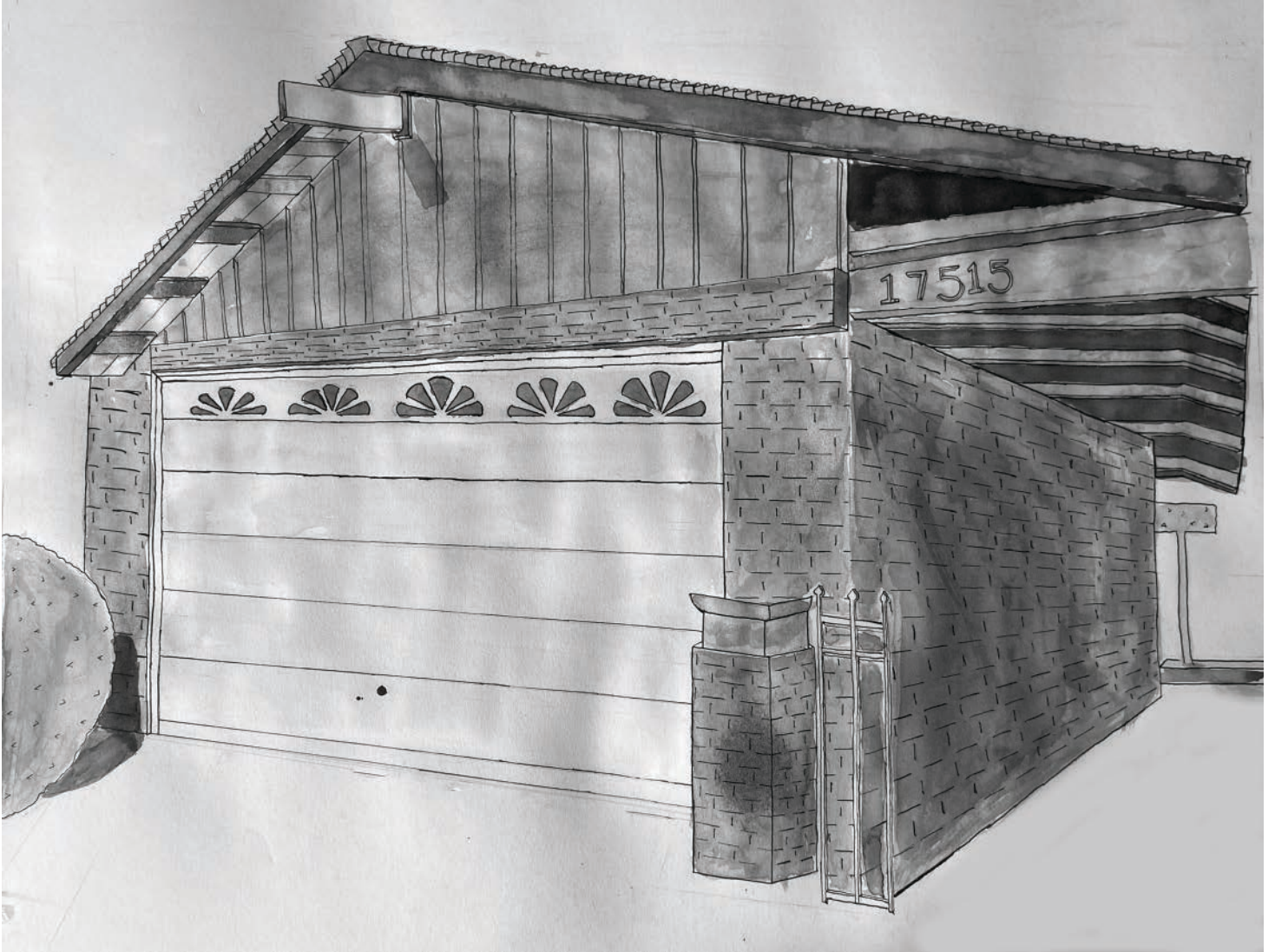
Through the cracks of light, darkness-  
Tsk-tsk-tsk-tsk-tsk-tsk, THERE!  
Watching them scurry.

Did you see The Rat? I saw two.  
Caught the scent, holds sooth  
Runs with no plan.

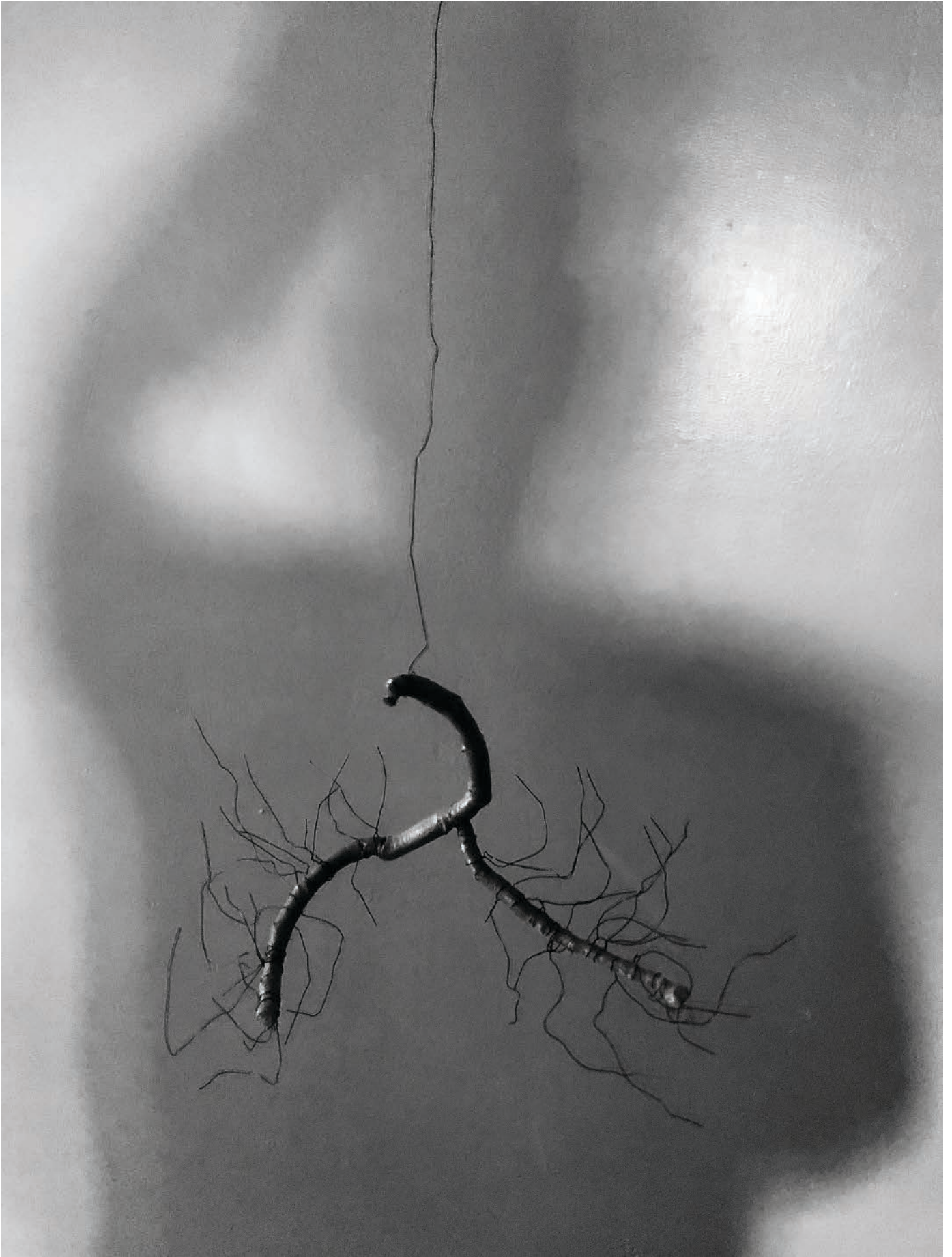
Eating the cheese, something irks  
Minor mind expands to what?!  
Watch them scurry on,

Laced cheese was what you fed them.  
Too cruel, dazed, and dairy drunk.  
Runs with no plan.

The Rat begins to think, speak, yawn.  
The Rat thinks hard, becomes a clam.  
Watching them scurry on,  
Runs with no plan.



**Home, 2021**  
**Hazel Anceño**  
Dip pen and ink wash on paper



**Untitled, 2020, Manny Ramirez, Photograph**



*Draco's Story, 2020*

**Arielle Hernandez**

Cut paper