

miniMAG

issue136
sunbeaten hearth



Preening

Madison Ellingsworth

I keep my brows in line. I snip the scissors across my forehead; between my eyes; over each cheekbone. Yet the hair grows back every night, coarse and unyielding.

Since I was a child, Mother has told me to clip them. She shares her pair of thin, golden, crescent scissors with me. The same scissors she uses to trim our parakeet's wings.

I refer to the parakeet as Green Male. Mother has a different, real name for him—Martini, or Smoothie, or something like that, but I don't bother to learn it. Just hearing him tweet from the other room wrenches my heart.

Mother trims Green Male to keep him from bashing his head into the windows. "He doesn't know any better," she says. "So sweet."

Green Male is petite enough that he can weasel through his bars and fall to the floor. He'll take a few tentative steps, head swiveling, and crouch down at every sound. Then he will scuttle back to the safety of the cage. Using all his strength, he will flap just high enough to slip back in.

One day, the bolt in Mother's thin, golden, crescent scissors snaps. She stalks through the house looking for something cylinder-shaped to

replace it, but wire is too skinny, and wooden dowels are too thick. My hairs grow longer every second.

I normally apologize to my eyebrows as I mow them every morning. But when the scissors break, I wash with sandalwood and rub with olive oil.

In his cage, Green Male puffs his chest out. He grows sleeker, with longer feathers and an emboldened eye. He glides more gracefully to



the ground during his escapes. He flaps to the backs of the couches and onto the lampshades. With reluctance, he soars to his bars and wiggles inside for seeds.

In only a few weeks, a thick band has formed above my eyes, woven tight like a sweatband. Mother will not let me leave the house, so I sit on the back porch and sun myself. I run a spoolie brush up and down, up and down, neatening my hairs. The castor oil has made them plentiful and strong.

Mother pokes her head out the back door. She sports a sweatband of her own, but has hidden it under a head scarf. “Any day now,” she says. “The waiting is almost over.”

From inside, I hear a ruckus. Crashing and flapping. “He’s going into the window again,” Mother huffs.

All of a sudden, a green bullet shoots through the gap above her head. Green Male sweeps into the sky, leaving our open mouths

behind. Before we can fully consider him, he is merely a dot in the distance.

Mother cries out and cups her hands around her eyes, as if this will help her see beyond the sun. I try to conceal my smile and wave goodbye to Green Male. He is only to be seen again in photographs.

As if getting ideas, my brow begins twitching. I massage my temples, but the twitching continues. The hairs themselves vibrate with intention. They shift beneath my fingertips, swaying in the still air.

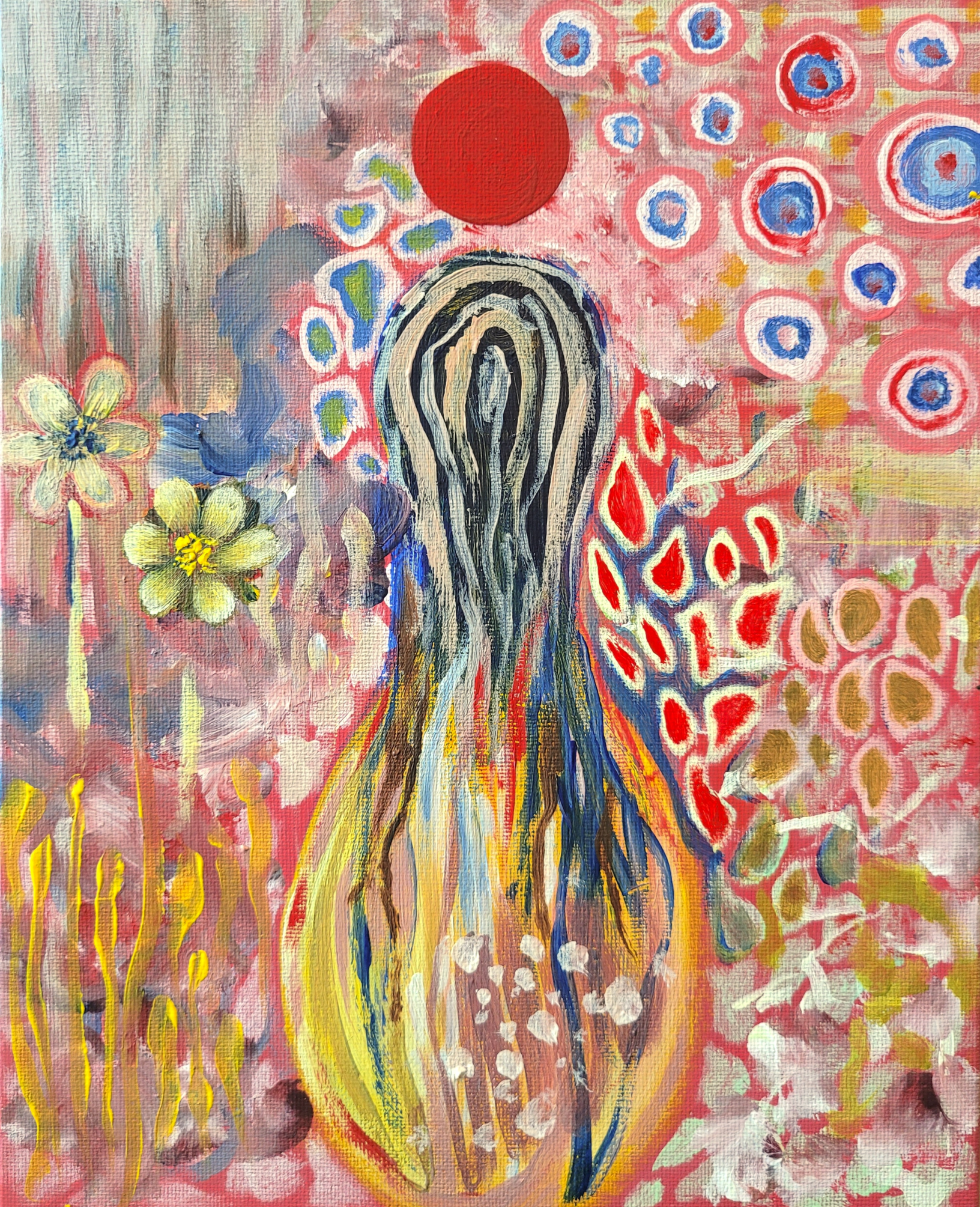
With a shimmy and a pinch, they pull away at the edges of my scalp. They flap desperately, and with every beat, they stretch a little further away. I lower my hands and look cross-eyed as they separate from me completely. They take to the air, and flutter in the space above my deck chair.

Noticing my face, Mother screams and slams the back door shut, leaving my eyebrows and I alone. I turn to my reflection in the door's window. My face is smooth for the first time—every pore left free.

I rub my eyes with my fists and look to the sky. My eyebrows have moved higher. I reach my hand out to stroke them, but they zip away from me. They flutter happily around the porch. They drift beside the peach tree.

I cross my hands across my stomach and lean back into my chair, enjoying the heat on my face. My eyebrows dance through the air, then settle high on the pine.

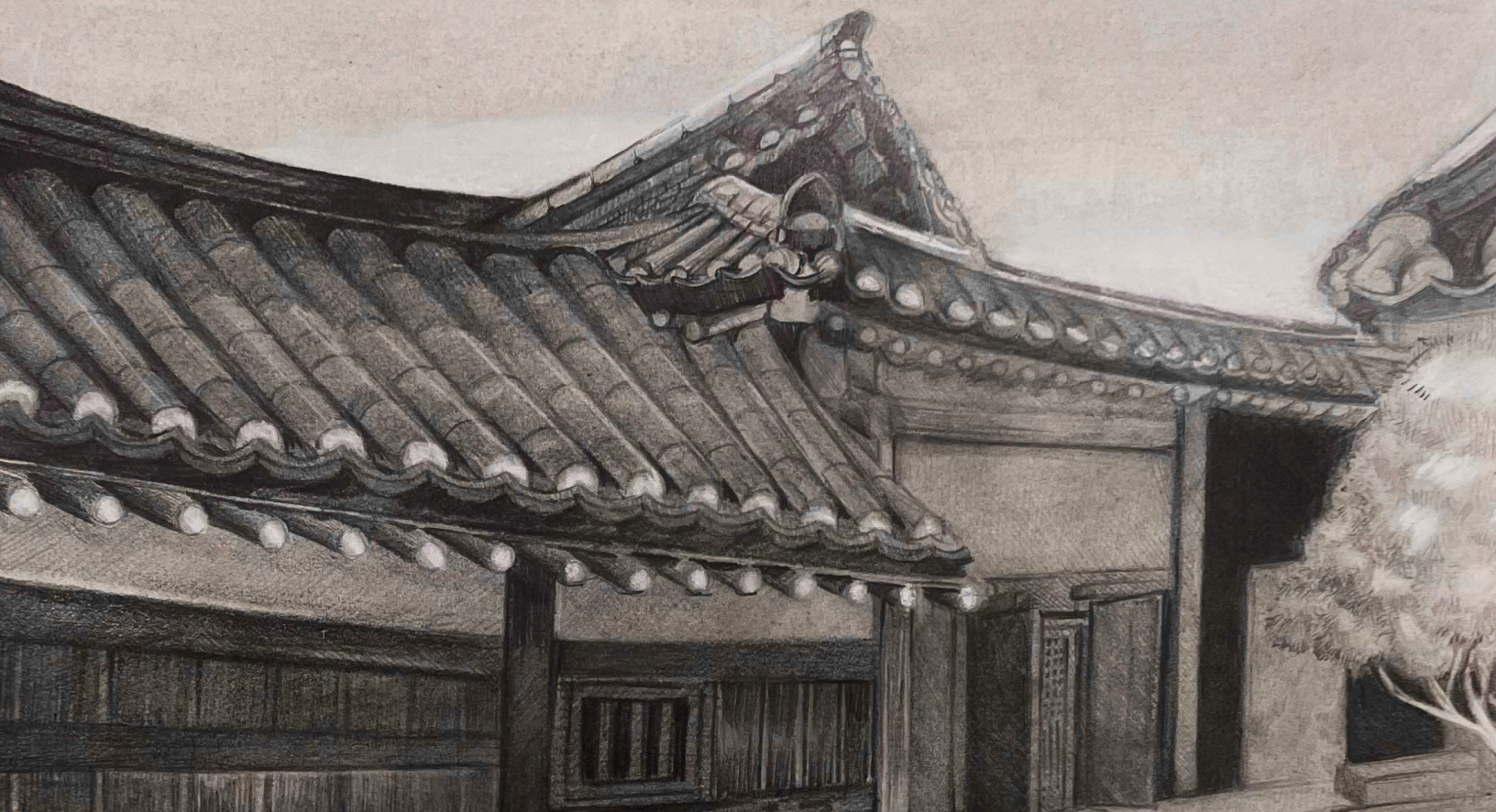




returning home

Kayla Donohue

one day i'll step inside again—
to the bright and flickering
clanging and clattering of dishes
“can you pour the tea?”
the sweetest of tea
the sweetest of love
we sit in the kitchen
three generations of women
i feel small but i am older now
they're all just as i remembered
the warmth inside grows and grows until i feel i might burst



1995

Pravasan Pillay

It was the summer of 1995. Friday. I was sixteen and walking at a frantic pace through a packed Chatsworth Centre—a mall located in Chatsworth, Durban. I was meant to have met my mother fifteen minutes ago outside Checkers to help her carry the groceries to the taxi rank and, once in our neighbourhood, to our house—but the cricket match I had been playing in had run late. I had no time to go home and change, and had come straight from the grounds to the Centre.

It felt embarrassing walking through the mall in my ratty cricket clothes while everyone else was dressed in their weekend best. I had on a pair of white, now muddy, track pants, a grass-stained white t-shirt, and, for aesthetic reasons, a white headband—an item I had often seen one of my favourite cricketers, Vinod Kambli, wear.

I pulled the headband off and stuffed it into my pocket about a minute after entering the doors of the Centre. I noticed that as soon as I did so, people began staring at me—at my face in particular. I was preoccupied with finding my mother so I ignored them. Eventually, I spotted my mother waiting at the entrance of Checkers for me, in her green nurses uniform, with about five or six packets of groceries at her feet.

I greeted her and I was about to apologise for being late when she asked, with concern in her voice, “What happened to your forehead?”

“What you mean?” I asked, and reached up to my forehead. It didn't feel different or hurt in any way.

“See.” My mother fished inside her handbag, pulled out her compact mirror, and passed it to me.

I opened it and, in the reflection, saw a narrow, pale band of skin across my forehead. My entire face had gotten deeply sunburned during the day-long match—except for the skin that had been under the headband. I had, in other words, a distinct tan line in the middle of my forehead.

I groaned, then I hurriedly took out the scrunched-up headband from my pant's pocket, and, with my mother's help, carefully positioned it back in place over the strip of un-sunburned skin.



“You sure you can't see it anymore?” I asked, as I adjusted the headband. My mother assured me that it was hidden, and then asked if I was hungry.

I nodded. I hadn't eaten anything since breakfast and was starving. My mother asked if I wanted to get something from the hawkers at the taxi rank. I nodded again—eagerly. There was a woman there, a regular, who sold delicious homemade samoosas. I always bought from her.

I picked up the grocery packets and we began walking to the rank. The packets, filled with the coming month's food, were heavy but my mind was still on my embarrassing forehead. I was going to start my final year of high school in a week. I wondered if I could get away with wearing the headband at school.

“Is it bad?” I asked my mother eventually, touching my forehead. We were in line at the rank, waiting for our turn to board a taxi. I was biting down on a tasty, crunchy mince samoosa.

“It will go away in a few days,” my mother replied, smiling. “How was the game?”

“We won,” I replied, finally grinning, and stuffing another whole samoosa into my mouth, the oil dripping onto my t-shirt.





Have You Ever Been Lost

Kushal Poddar

Lost, they walk her constant
mumbling, "Dad, this doesn't
look like West." His father laughs,
and two sprauchle in the debatable direction
of West to this nowhere.

Lost, they find a bald patch to lie
supine. Wind wears rainy chiffon.
This weekend drills a permanent place
in the brain. Here crickets' plectrums play
night whole day even in this drizzling.

"Sleep!" She says to her father, asleep
already. Sarcasm cakes like the mud around
her ankles. The creatures play mad Strauss.
Stars script the waltz's anticlimax.



All the homes I ever breathed

Nadia Gerassimenko

I.

Like a carp out of water
I gulped to fly as an eagle.
Walled by mountains full of apples
the sky was so low I could swing
for a star & burst from a wish.

II.

First time I felt cold lake wind
& heard laughter of seagulls.
My tongue froze, all sounds I ever
learned swallowed to silence.
I did not need to know to speak
to see how lonely one could feel
from a different far-flung sea.
Today I do know other words
for gulls—mews, mouettes & more.



III.

Brothers & sisters from all walks
of life gathered together liquid gold
from sweet heavenly flowing maples.

Spring is springing, we celebrated
with pancakes, sausages & eggs
drowned in the nature's syrup.

Spring has sprung, I watched us dancing,
fiddle & feet ringing in my ears.

There was snow outside still; here,
our hearts were melted sugar.

IV.

Here we danced beneath midsummer
moonlight, snails & dew our quiet watchers.
Here we sang romances before our time—
therefore for all times, wheat & willows
entwining us in their waltzing sways.
Here we repaired each other's hearts,
broke them apart—kintsugi in reverse.
Here I cagily imagined you as blackbird
playing hide-&-seek on a verdant perch,
your wings of flashing red an easy giveaway.
On this island within an island I prayed
to unremember, current-carried memories
swallowed & spat as fragments I one day forgave.
Here love & ghosts will always greet me,
forever live within me as I leave.

V.

Once I lived in a home that was
a vessel flooding, a jungle within
a jungle breaching—where outside
was inside & inside was all out, too.
Then I fled to grounds more flooded,
where a sinking pew sat waiting.
I felt myself escaping, *how lovely*
it would be to float & just be.

VI.

I do love misty daybreaks on the shortest month,
the blue of burning summer sky, the swelling moon
hung low at night, a squashy scent as earth falls sleeping.
I do love counting cottontails shading in blades of grass
before away they zigzag, or how much longer airborne
turkey vultures glide until they alight atop a roof.
I do love a gaggle like the sound of day bazaar
breaking from afar unto our window, or a nightly
ranine chorus laughing us to gentle sleep.
I do love staring matches with a fiery fox;
I awe at her screams unseen, becoming
a monstress myth in the hush of night.
I do love much about here—
bleeding-hearts announcing spring,
when corvids drape barren trees.
But, I do not love the stolen hours
we pay with memories unlived.

VII.

Home is where you leave your heart
a little bit each time & place.

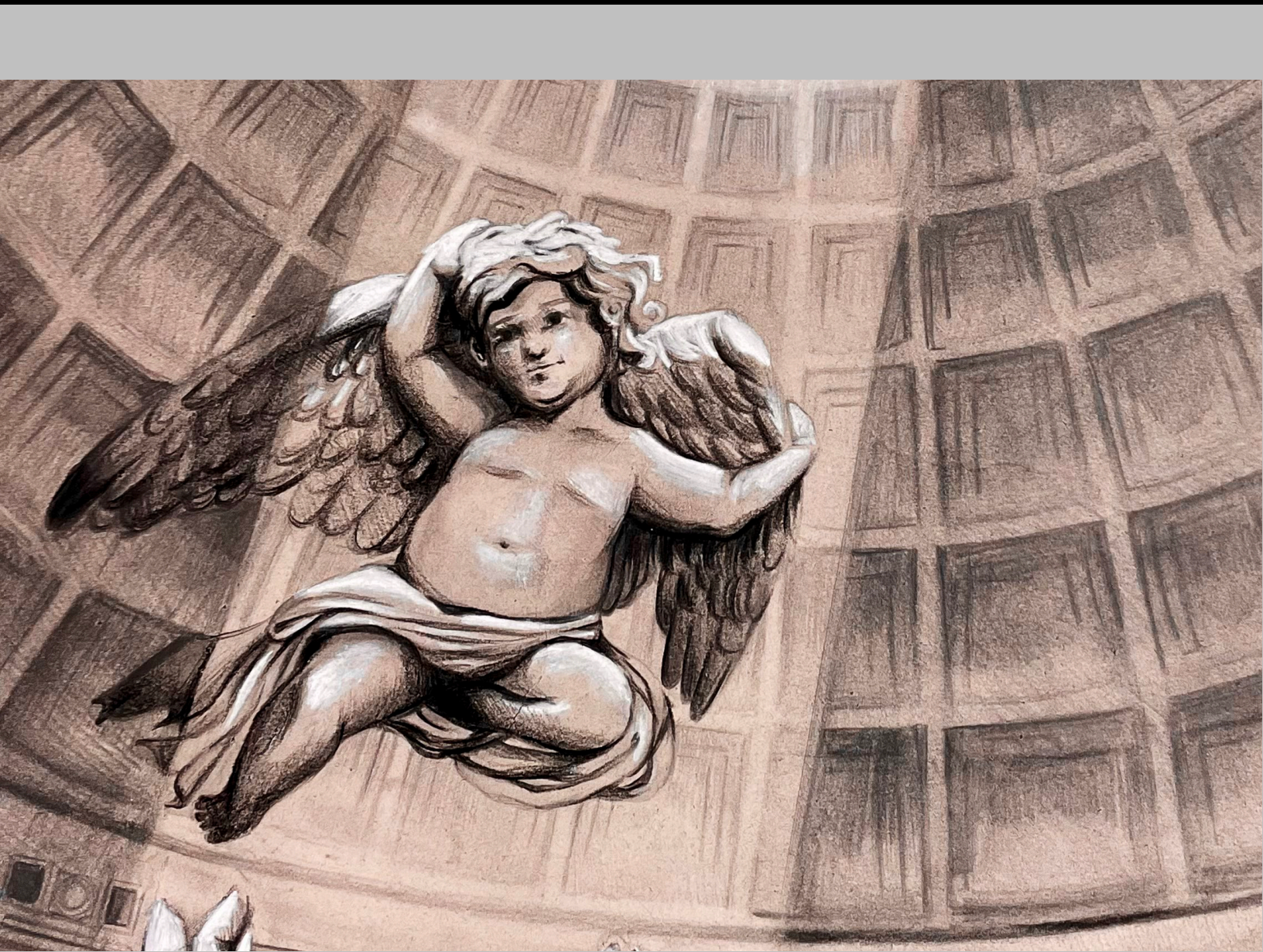
First I left a heart of me gaping at the falls,
like I could myself fall & float as
tiny drops of water body whole.

I left my heart with five more
in laughter on main street.

I left it in summer heat, rain & red
foliage too, snow-clad sidewalks crispy
as I wandered—seasons nuanced
in the depths of all that made me.

I'll leave myself with bricks reborn from fire,
on curves of small-town smiles & hearty hi's,
in breathful woods & valleys of near
countries—all mysteries & truths out there.

Oh, how I want to believe I could
live my heart in here forever.



bunny hood

Alex Prestia

i'm trying to be rhythmic
i'm trying to choose how i spend my time
i'm with you now
the wind will blow
the golden paper
from the top of the cigarette box
will catch in the wind
i can't stand being mediocre
we burn bright
we burn bright and long
then burn out into tiny, black embers
holding still, together in ash
you smell like yuzu, then chanel no. 5, then the oil
it's always about rupees, with you
then and then—I know you're trying to hide something
i don't care
we're just two masks
there's a hard reset
we find each other
it's a song
it's inverted
it's played in double
and we find each other



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Page 06: Stress
Page 10: Mother

Art by Uee Jung
Page 03: Beneath
Page 05: Untitled
Page 09: Lost
Page 11: Lift

“Have You Ever Been Lost” by Kushal Poddar
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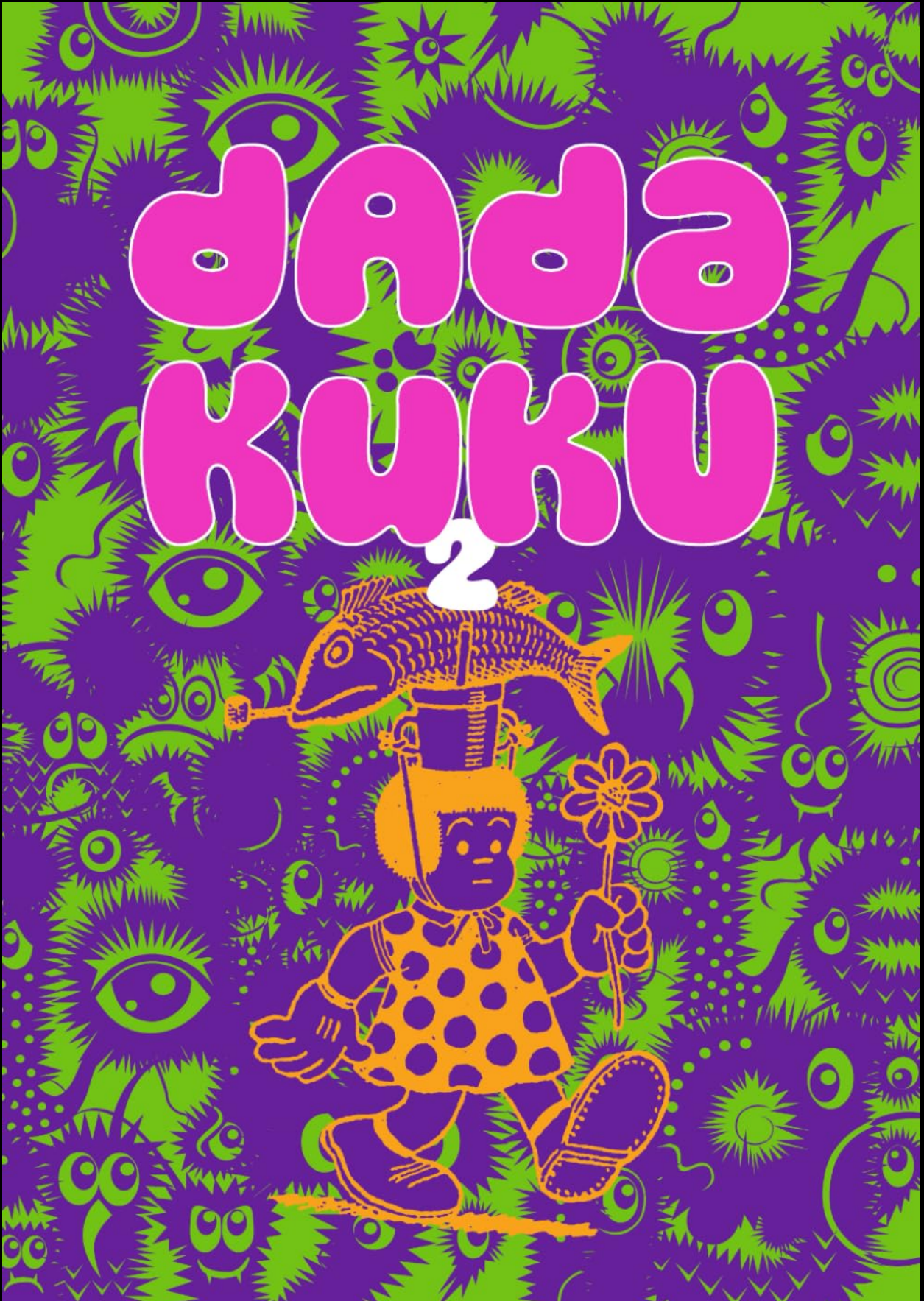
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“1995” by Pravasan Pillay

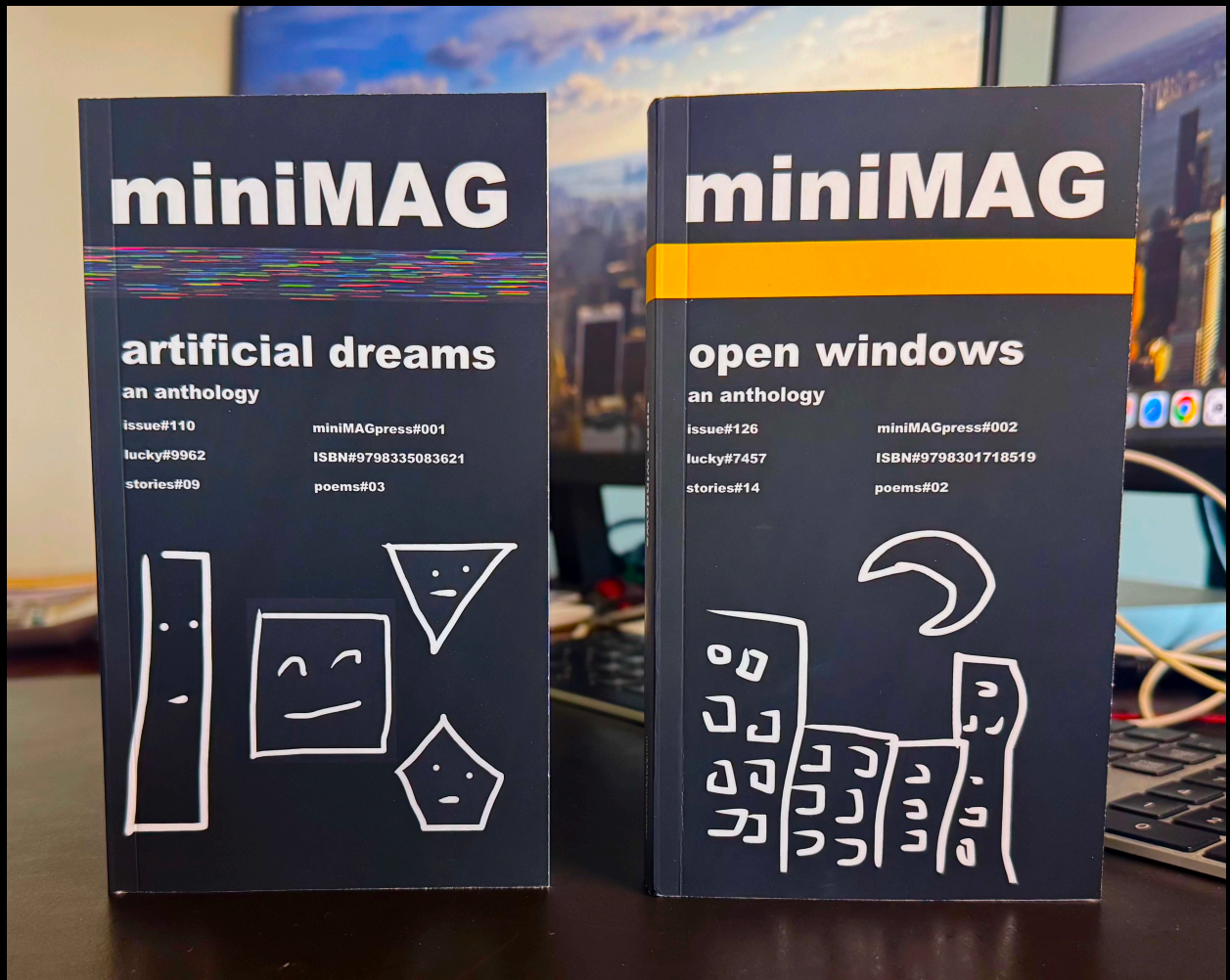
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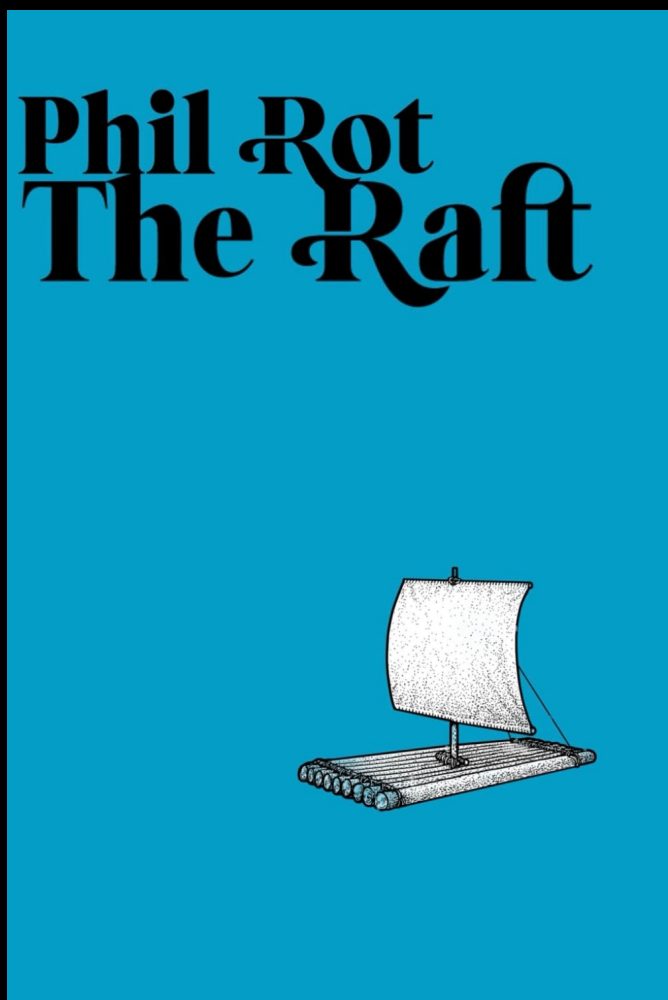
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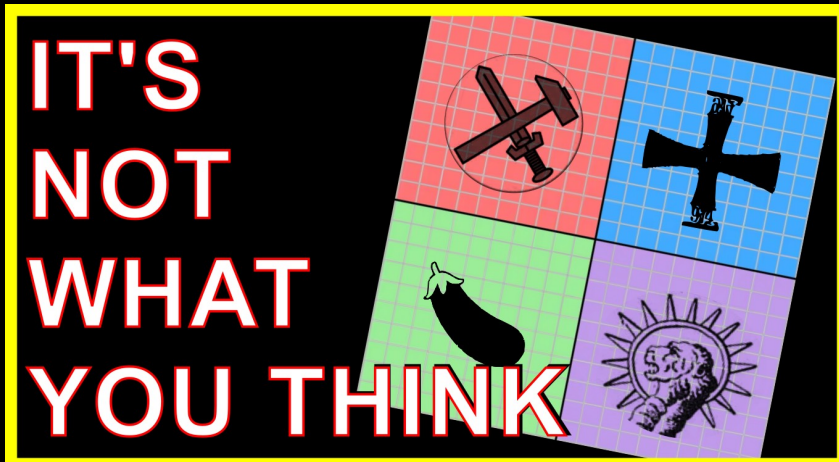


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