



THE RACKET | 65

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I walk my dog every morning in an old rural cemetery. It's all blue oaks and century old gravestones and, up until recently, eucalyptus trees that towered above a certain section. Trees so large they created a natural skyline that marked our small suburban neighborhood from miles and miles away.

If you don't know anything about eucalyptus trees on non-native soil, aside from their subtle but stunning grandeur, they're mostly trouble. Eucalyptus are densely oily trees and in a region beset by yearly forest fires they're basically matchsticks just waiting to be sparked. In October of last year, the city decided that this grove of 100 foot behemoths were a potential fire hazard in a relatively densely populated area and needed to come down.

At first, as a resident of the area and as someone who isn't keen on their neighborhood and home potentially burning to the ground, I was all for the removal. The trees weren't ever supposed to exist where they were and they now existed as fuel for future catastrophe. Bring them down, I thought, alleviate the concerns of an aging populace.

On a recent morning, when the crews were finished, I brought the dog through the re-opened area. It was shocking. I gasped. A couple sat on one of the twenty to thirty, ten-foot wide stumps that remained, sadly staring out at what now resembled a bombed out war zone. They asked what happened, why this happened. And all I could think was, "Because this is how humanity deals with the problems we've created."

These eucalyptus trees only ever existed on non-native soil because someone thought correctly that they'd be a beautiful canopy for the remains of long dead Santa Rosans. They were placed here and tended to and let grow because we, short-sighted humans, put little thought into the natural context, the problems trees like these could cause further down the line. We wanted something, so, without thought or consideration of what could be, we did it. And we slapped ourselves on the back and congratulated ourselves for once again conquering nature, for once again shaping the world in the image we thought best.

And now, the trees—always full of flammable oil, always difficult to control in terms of growth, never meant to be here, in this place—are problems and we react as we always do when a beloved treasure becomes problematic: we try to control it and when that isn't possible we create a reason to destroy it. We tell ourselves that the trees themselves are the issue rather than the selfish circle of human want, need, possession and disownment being what has truly lead us to this place.

The selfishness inherent to our human nature, clearly needs to be addressed and that begins with an emphasis on thoughtful, far-sighted decision making. We are where we are now because our very, very recent predecessors made decisions culled from greed, desire and the entitlement that comes from believing ourselves to be the dominant species. We've painted ourselves into a corner.

The knots we've tied are only being pulled tighter. And though, yes, we must contend with that tangled mess, we need to look towards the future—near and far—and make choices that don't create problems with only scorched earth solutions.

I walk the dog through the forest of stumps every day and I think, "Why did this have to happen? How do we make sure this never happens again?"

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communities in all forms.

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The Racket

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It's what we do.



WE HAVE A PATREON

We aren't in this for the money.

That said: there are costs in doing what we do.

Any help with those costs (and with the costs of future endeavors) would be greatly appreciated.

If not, we get it and we still appreciate you.

THANK YOU TO THESE FOLKS

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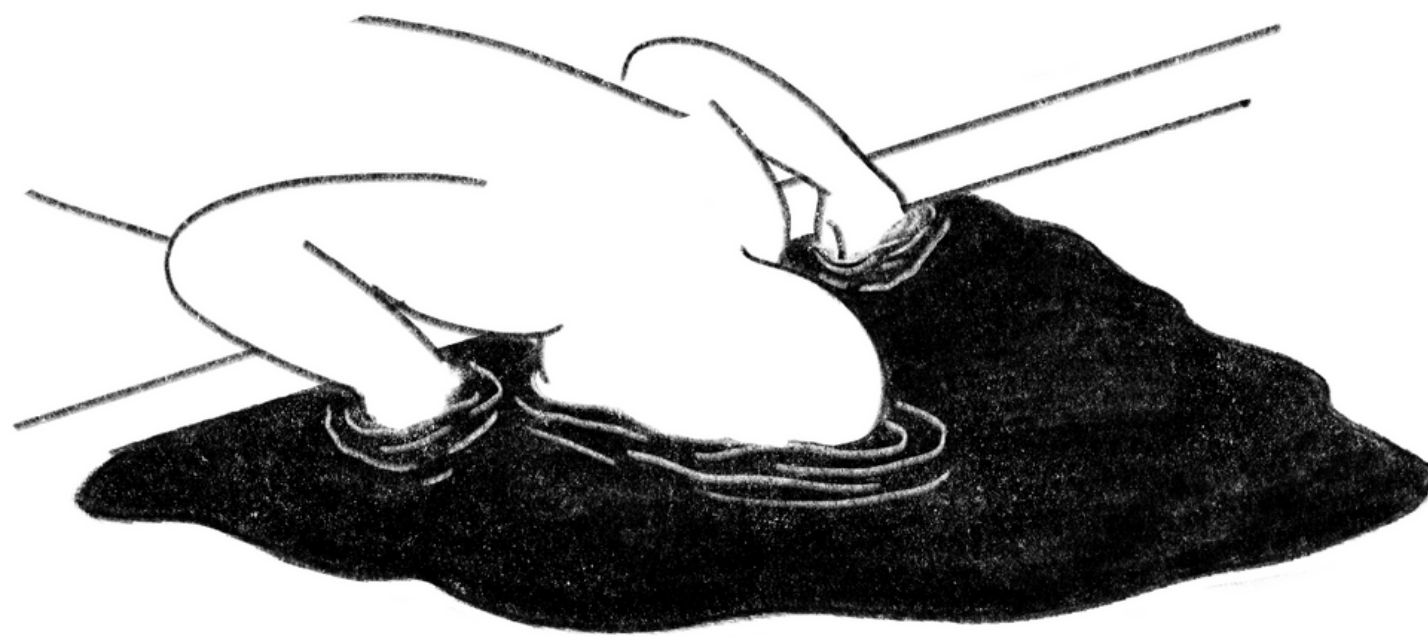
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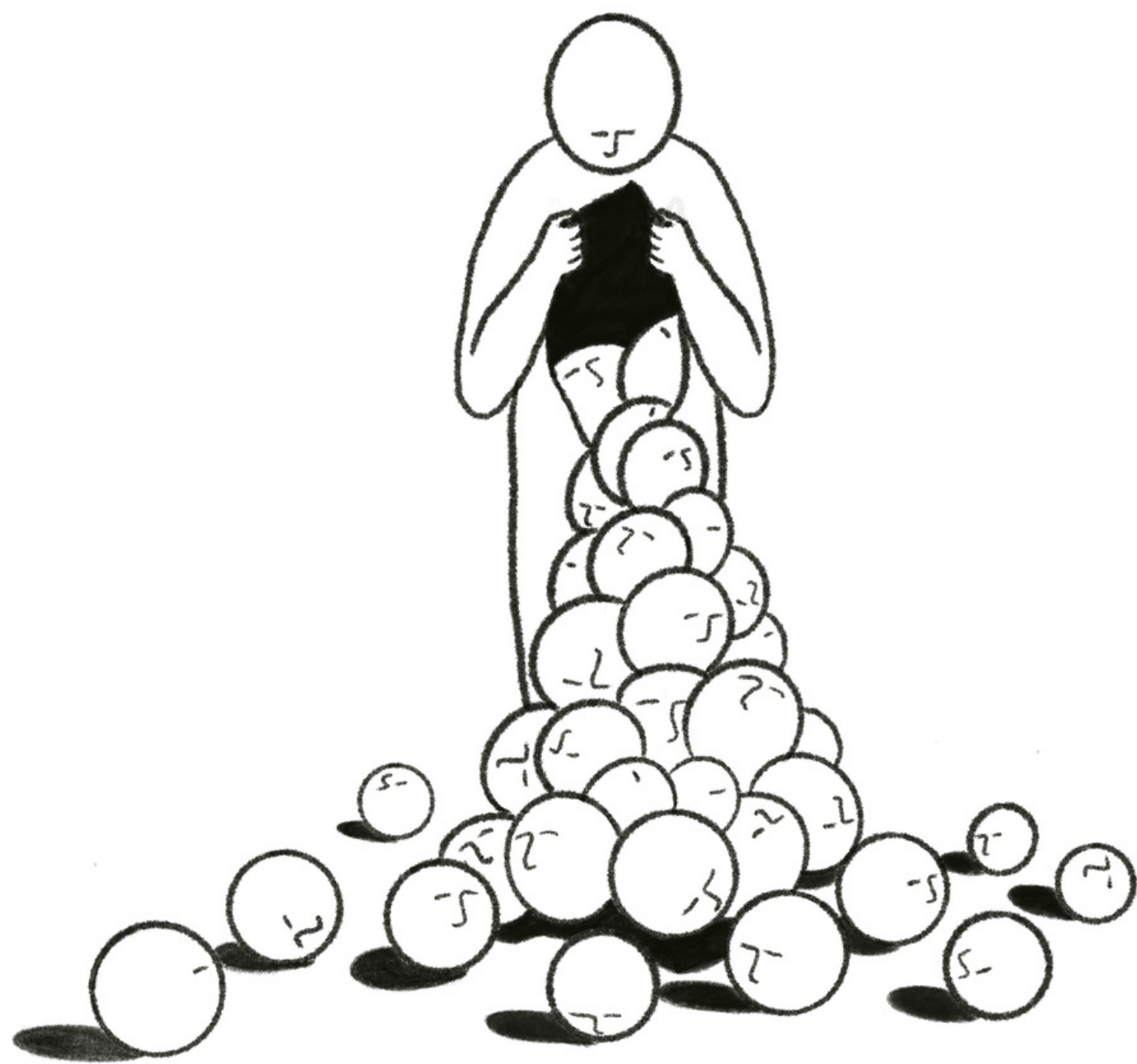
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invitation to a funeral

MARK HENDERSON

I hate parties though,
and that's what it is—

a reason to change from
covering to costume

in grief's timely push
away from boredom

towards pain, the pendulum
exhausted. Are drinks

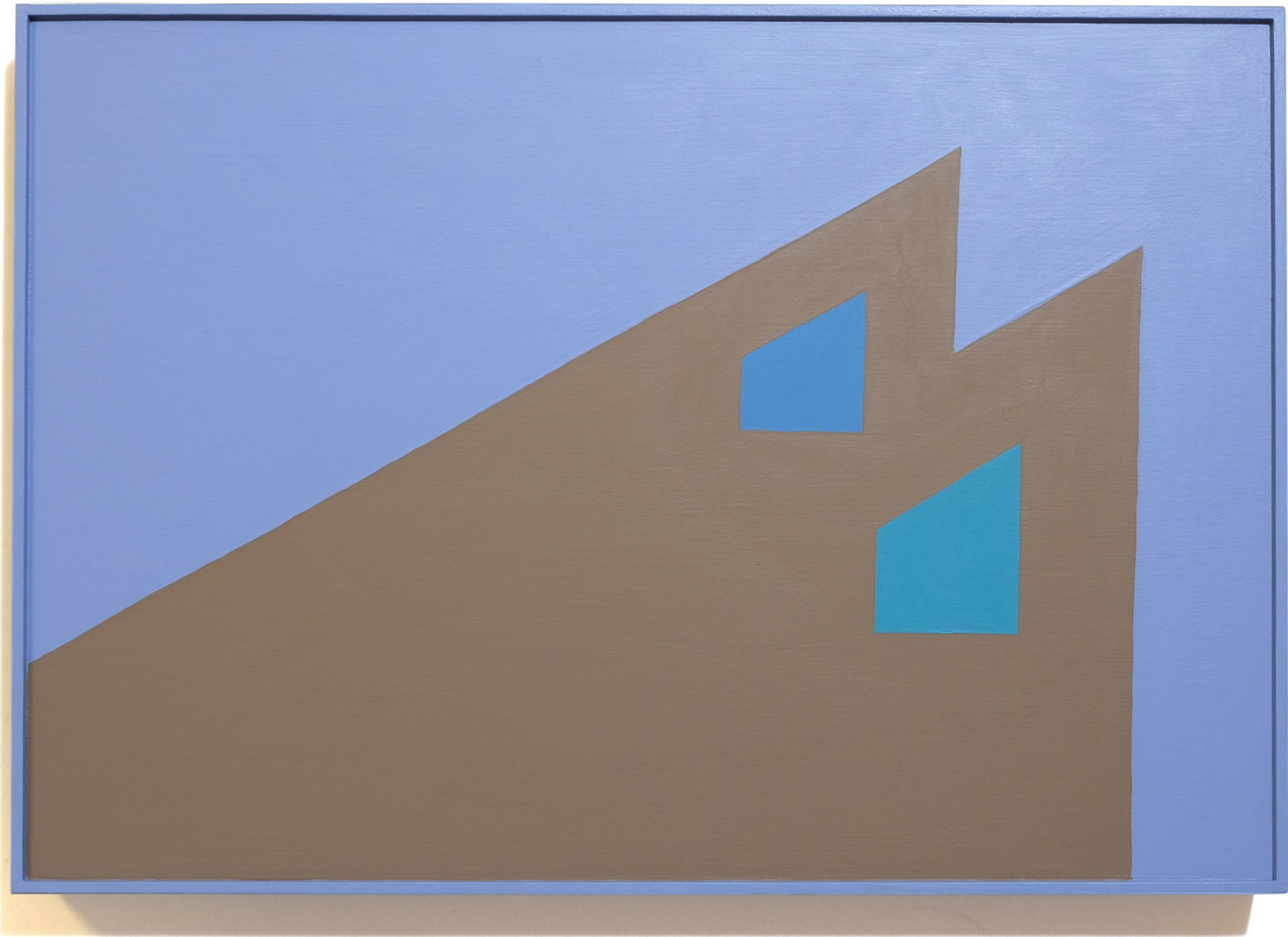
allowed? Will any
beautiful people be there?

Anybody wanna fuck
on top of the casket?

The book I've been reading
is pretty good.



CONIFER CLOSE
JOE FERRISO
2022



PIPER'S REACH
JOE FERRISO
2022

Half-sour

REBECCA ACKERMANN

I wake to a hard shove in the ribs. Either Carol is annoyed or there's real trouble.

"Hugo," she hisses in my ear. "My teeth!"

"What about them?" I sigh, my eyes still closed. I haven't done anything strange to her toothbrush. She knows where we keep the floss.

Plink! A small object hits my cheek and rolls onto the bedsheet. I open one eye.

Plink plink!

"What the hell, Carol!" I groan.

"My teeth!"

I open the other eye and stare into her glistening hole of morning breath, pink with spit. Like the inside of a snapping turtle, not the mouth of the wife who usually snores beside me. I sit up and try to scratch the part of my back that's hard to reach.

"Losing teeth is a classic anxiety dream," I say, almost finding the spot with my thumb.

"I do not need your PhD right now," she gums. "Call the doctor!"

I go out to the kitchen where my phone has been charging, its Alzheimer's-causing microwaves far from my brain. The dog barks and I tell her not now. She squats to pee on the rug, as disappointed as I am. She'll take hours to forgive me.

I call our regular guy but his numbers go straight to voicemail. I'm googling "lose all teeth cancer?" when I hear a shriek from the bedroom. I make my way towards the sound, my left hip dragging more than I'd like.

"My hair!" Carol gurgles, holding clumps of it in her hands. Her head shines like a piece of fruit. I swear she looks smaller than before.

"Ok, let's stay calm," I tell her. "Maybe there's a simple explanation."

"Take me to the hospital!" she moans. Spit dribbles from the sides of her mouth. I throw her some pants and gather our things in a bag. I look back and the pants have landed on her head, giving Carol the look of dirty laundry.

I pack a bottle of water, two granola bars, and a plastic bag of pickles. Carol emerges next to me, her smooth head only reaching my chest, the pants rolled up four times above her socks.

"Are those pickles?" She points up at the bag.

“They’re your favorite. In case they don’t have snacks there.”

“Hugo, they were my favorite 50 springs ago when I was pregnant with RJ. Besides, how am I supposed to chew a pickle without any teeth?”

“I’ll chew them for you,” I smile. “Spit the pieces into your mouth like a mama bird.” I remember how we used to share crackers and cheese in the park after RJ left for college, a renaissance that lasted a few sparkling years.

“I may have lost my teeth and hair, but you’ve lost your mind!” Carol gurgles. “Get your keys.” I jingle my fob to prove I’m not losing anything, actually. I keep the pickles in the bag.

We’re at the second stop light between our house and the hospital when Carol slides off the seat. Her clothes swirl in a pile on the floor beneath her greenish crown—now slicked with moisture. The light turns and I hit the gas.

“Hugo, I can’t find my arms and legs!”

“We’re almost there,” I assure her. Ever since our bodies started failing, we’ve been to this hospital more times than I have fingers. I hear the soft rustle of fabric against flesh and I’m reminded of one young summer when we slept gloriously naked, our tragic box fan straining to whistle cool air. I take my eyes off the road to watch Carol flapping in her pile of clothes, gills gasping, eyes wide with fear.

“Water!” she whispers, an iridescent bubble emerging from her plump lips. “Please, Hugo, water!”

“Fresh or salt?” I ask, making a U-turn away from the hospital.

“Fresh!” she chokes. “Maybe! I think!” Carol has never been very good at knowing what she needs. I speed towards the river on the other side of town.

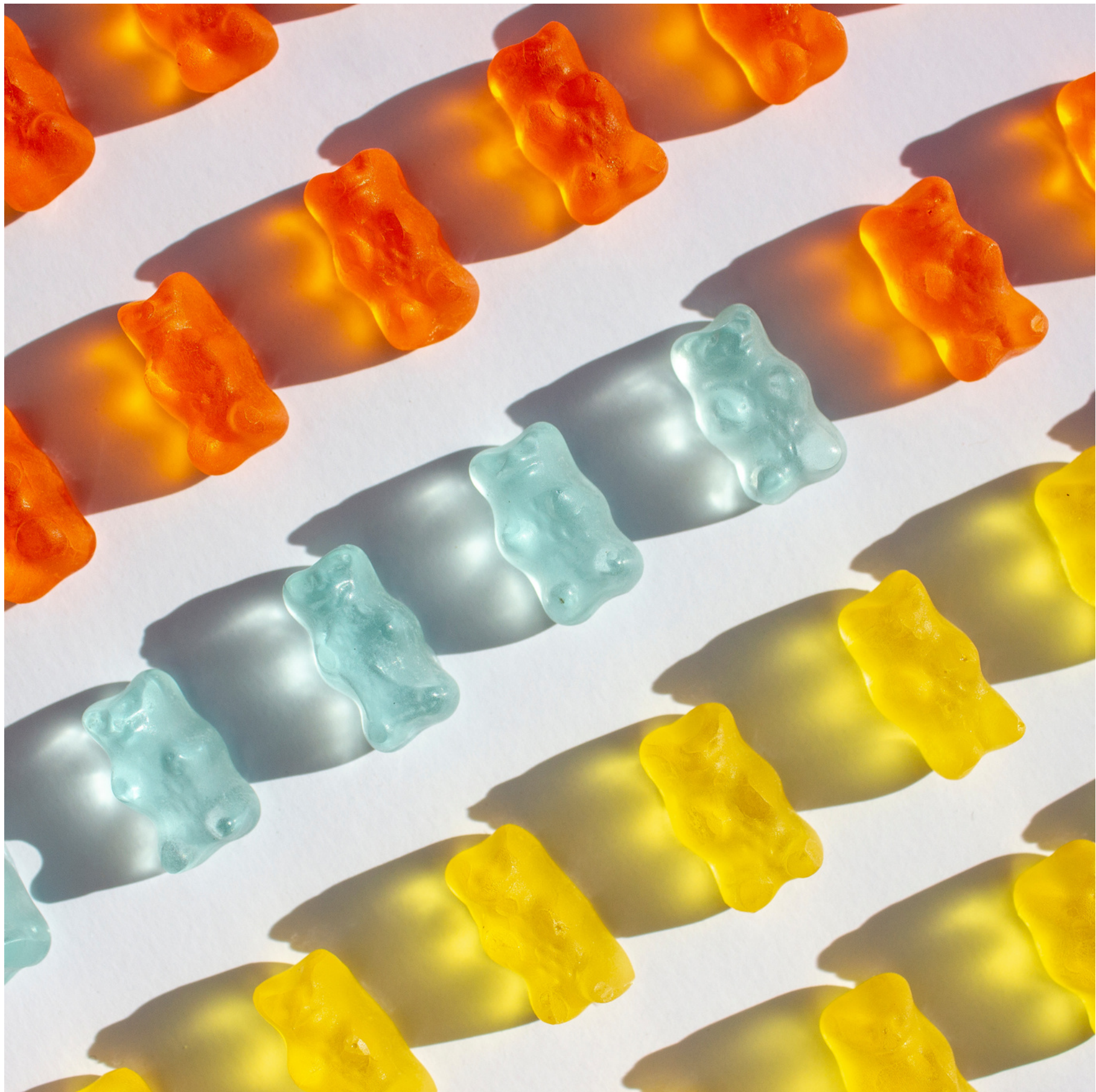
My shoes squish in the mud as I slip Carol into the water. She makes a grand splash and I lose sight of her. Then her round head floats up and her eyes blink at me.

“Do you want the pickles?” I yell to her, shaking the baggie. She nods and her fins flash in the sun. I bend down to hold a pickle near the water’s surface. She sucks the juice with greedy gulps as I balance on the edge. When she’s done, I leave the rest in the plastic bag on the riverbank.

“Goodbye for now Carol!” I wave. “I’m going to let the dog out.” Carol bobs up and down, dancing for me maybe, and then dives into the darkness until we meet again.



WILDMOOR
JOE FERRISO
2022



BABY ONE MORE TIME III

GEENA WILKINSON

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2021

Titan Arum

GABRIELLE FERNANDEZ

I took a loose hair from your shirt when you weren't looking. I took it home and planted it in the ground.

It is my secret, a little piece of you to keep buried in my backyard even when you've decided I no longer am interesting or pretty. Sometimes I water the little patch of earth where I've hidden your essence and think to myself how much you'd hate that I have this part of you. A secret only I was supposed to know, until the day I walk outside to discover your hair has sprouted.

I kneel in the dewy grass to stare at the little you, no bigger than my thumb. Your feet are hidden beneath the soil, and I love that now you can't run from me. How big will you grow, I wonder. Will you grow until you've achieved your real height, or bud more heads? I tip my coffee cup and watch you choke on the torrent of black liquid drowning the ground. You shake your fist and shout harsh words, so I pour the rest of my coffee on you.

Each morning I greet you, measure how much you've grown, and pour my drink on your head. Sometimes I'll hand you the crumbs from my muffin, and we'll talk about how my car needs to be fixed or how the ants have been bothering you. Sometimes I pretend I am feeling benevolent, so when I douse you with the hot liquid I can see the shock on your little face. "You're a bitch," you'll say. And I shrug and say I won't bring you food.

But I always do, until I no longer kneel to see the freckles on your nose and instead must tilt my head up to see your face. I don't like how large you've become, or how deep your voice gets, or how you always talk about what my neighbors are doing on the other side of my fence. When I throw my coffee at you it only sprays your chest, and you laugh like I'm a child throwing a tantrum.

I stop coming outside, but still you grow. You grow despite my lack of food, or conversation, or nourishment. Your legs become sinuous; your arms constantly stretching to snatch at passing birds. When you turn away to speak with the people next door, you know I am thinking of how I loved running my hands along your spine.

“How lucky,” passersby say, “to have such a magnificent man planted in your yard,” and I smile and agree that yes, it is such a wonder. Though the shade from your broad shoulders has grown tiring, and my house shakes when you wiggle your toes beneath the ground. I lay awake most nights, thinking how you deserve a home with a nice girl who will water you, and prune you, and tell you about her day. But then I wake and remember you deserve nothing.

As the weather dips I let you freeze. Your fingers turn blue, and one falls off after a frost. You try to knock on my window, but you only succeed in smudging the glass. “I bet you’d like hot coffee now,” I mutter. You don’t answer. I don’t think you ever will. When I finally come outside, your body has crumpled into a drooping stalk. Your arms hang listlessly beside your once strong legs. I take an axe and hack at the roots until your feet are finally unearthed, then stuff you away into black bags for the garbage man.

I keep one of your hairs to remind me.

And plant it in the ground.



PLACEBO IV
GEENA WILKINSON
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COMEDIAN
GEENA WILKINSON
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loosed balloon

JOSHUA MARTIN

side two

an echo

sewn INTO

goose snow flesh - - -

writing w/o an

introduction.

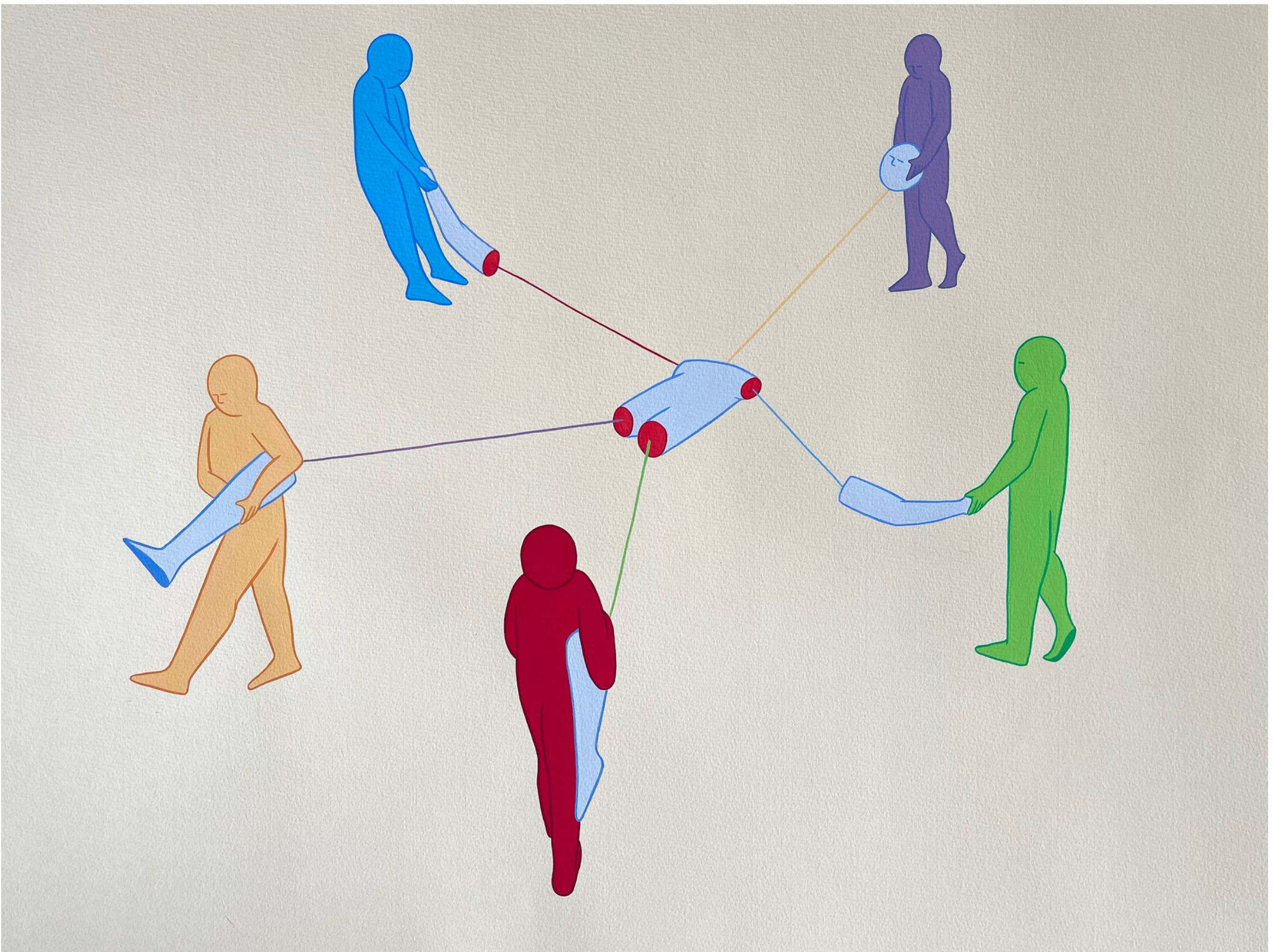
dreary

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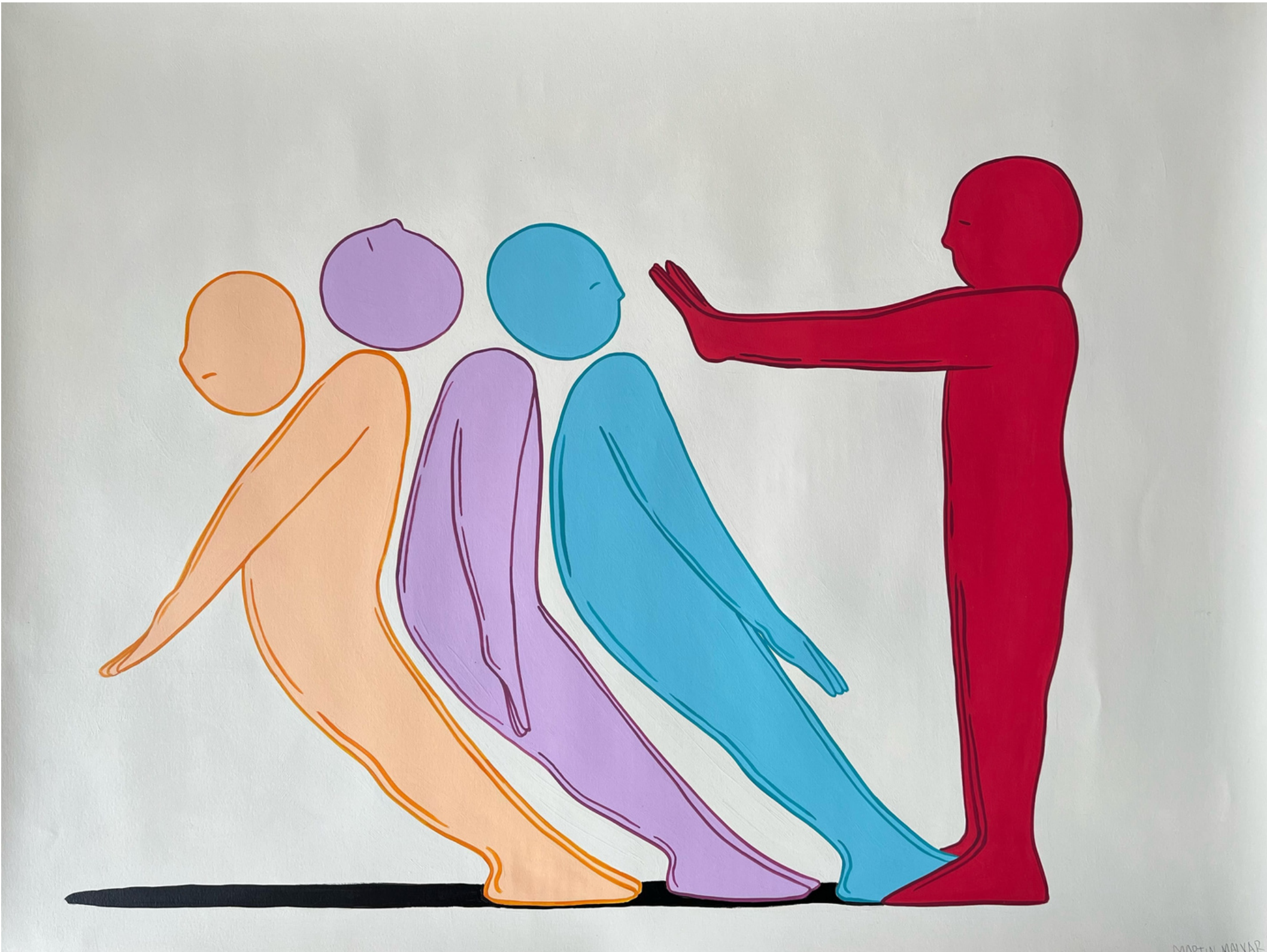
symphony

a GUT of

exclamation.



A PIECE OF YOU; A PIECE FOR US
MARTIN MALVAR
2022



DON'T LOSE IT
MARTIN MALVAR
2020

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OF
STORY.**

