CBA

vol 56|57

un/comics

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currently active cbk crew members:
caroline ulvros, henrik rogowski, kinga dukaj,
mattias elftorp, oskar aspman
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CBA
vol 56|57

un/comics

a statement we aren't even going to debate:

Comics are a visual art form.

Put that away for later reference.

Second, a thought experiment:

Imagine comics.

Just call up the mental image and hold it in your mind's eye for a second.

Now let me guess: that wasn't really comics though, was it? It was probably more like a Roy Lichtenstein painting.

INTRODUCTION

Allan Haverholm
guest main editor of this issue

Allan Haverholm is a graphic artist and comics researcher, former co-editor of CBA and host of the Uncomics Podcast.

What Lichtenstein did was take single comics panels out of context and adapt them into lesser versions of the originals — and that misses the whole idea of comics, the interaction between images. Lichtenstein's plagiarism did highlight the lasting, visual tropes of comics, however: Stylized drawings that vaguely resemble reality, with heavy black contours, glaring primary colours, text captions and word balloons.

Third, a progression from that:

Imagine comics without those tropes.

Comics creators and readers alike will explode in protest at this, "Comics without text, without representational art? How will we tell a story?" I refer you back to our first statement, comics are a visual art form. They aren't inherently narrative, their form not necessarily linear. Those are restraints set by the entertainment industry that comics never really escaped.

While visual art exploded into disparate, parallel movements through the 20th century, comics were a visual echo chamber repeating its own mannerisms ever louder, shadows of shadows of long dead images arranged in service of Story, a simulation of life dictated by entertainment.

It doesn't even make sense to ask where the Abstract Expressionists or Conceptual artists of contemporary comics are, because they do not acknowledge the dominant Lichtenstein mold of a "comics style", and subvert conventional narrative. We do not have the terminology for the contradictory shift they represent.

Fourth, then, a proposed neologism to fill the gap:

Imagine un/comics

An artistic field where contemporary art and comics overlap and inform each other. Where the absence of sequence encourages the reader to investigate the picture plane(s) in any direction and order at their leisure, to become an active co-creator in the process. A space outside the tedious limitations of story where images both abstract, suggestive and ambiguous interact.

Comics, at last, as a visual art form.

Cover
by Jeremy P. Bushnell

Jeremy P. Bushnell creates artwork as Morphic Rooms (with collage artist allison anne) and as Churchdoor Lounger (with the psychedelic cartoonist D.W.). He is the cofounder of Nonmachinable, a distributor of optically interesting zines and artists' books, and is also the author of three novels: *The Weirdness*, *The Insides*, and, most recently, *Relentless Melt* (forthcoming from Melville House).
jeremypbushnell.com

197777
by Tym Godek

Not all of Tym Godek's comics are about comics, but a lot of them kind of are. His first book - *!* - telescopes and extends a simple gag strip to 35+ feet length - and others (*Hand Made Facsimile, December Remembers November, Autological Comic for Jason Overby to Sing*) could be described as comics talking to themselves about comics.
yellowlight.scratchspace.net

UN/-learning/ -making/-tangling/ COMICS
text & illustrations by Allan Haverholm

Allan Haverholm is the guest editor of this volume of CBA. He is a a graphic artist, comics artist/researcher— and has made it his life's mission to force the concept of uncomics upon an unsuspecting world. Cunningly, he has launched the Uncomics Podcast, just as everybody have stopped listening to those things.
uncomics.org

Untitled
by Kimball Anderson

Kimball Anderson makes comics for people who fell off of the conveyor belt of life. Since they were young they've been disabled by chronic illness, and much of their work explores the ignored, quiet spaces along the periphery that people fall into. They care about the state of rest, not as "wasted time", but as something to find beauty and transcendence in. Their work is an act of reclaiming meaning for lives deemed worthless.
outside-life.com

six attempts at physical comics
by Warren Craghead

Warren Craghead III lives in Charlottesville, Virginia, USA with his wife and two daughters. He likes to make pictures and has exhibited his work internationally and published many works including the Xeric Grant winning *Speedy*. His work explores how images and words in sequence can make non-narrative meaning.
www.craghead.com

CONTENTS

Once upon again #7
by Simon Russell

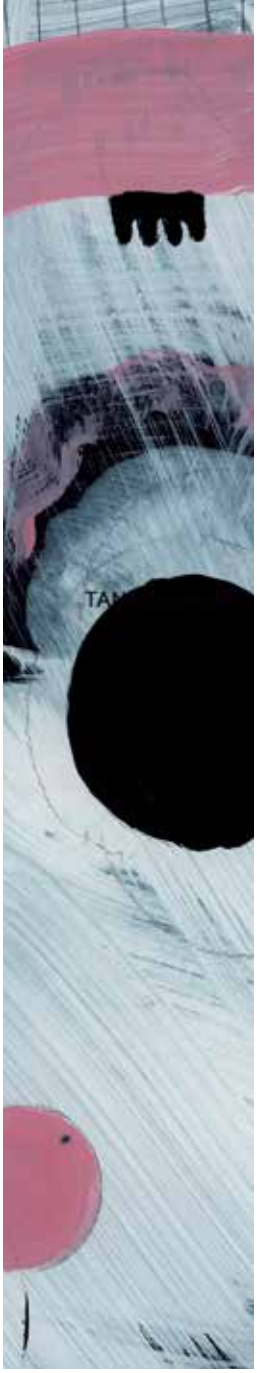
Simon Russell splits his time between making comic-based art such as *The Marriage of Njord & Skadi*, *Nearlymades* and *ROY* (appropriating Lichtenstein's paintings for comic book panels) and doing illustration and graphic design for ethical companies and charities. His current work-in-progress is a longform comic about memory and space under the working title *238855: The Distance Between Then & Now*.
boinggraphics.co.uk

Feelings
by Anastasia Hiorns

Anastasia Hiorns' fabric pages go beyond storytelling and the pictorial; the difference between text and textile becomes blurred, inscribing the cloth with personal ciphers and glimpsed figures moving through the combination of threads moving over and under each other intersecting along multiple planes. The rest of the time she spends rethreading maltreated sewing machines.
anastasia-marsh.com

Sweetchuck
by Gareth A Hopkins

Gareth A Hopkins is an artist and comic creator from the UK. He is best known for his abstract comics work, including *Petrichor*, *Found Forest Floor* (with Erik Blagsvedt) and the ongoing series *The Intercorstal*. Since 2019 He has been releasing short comics from the collection *Explosive Sweet Freezer Razors*, notably *The Bones of the Sea*, *Petalburn*, *nothing*, and *Moon Puke*.
www.grthink.com



The Howling Huntress (excerpt)
by Tana Oshima

Tana Oshima is a Japanese-Spanish visual artist, writer and translator based in New York. She understands comics as a hybrid, in-between space, embracing both the literary and the artistic but outsider to both, which also corresponds to her existencial place in the world as a hybrid, racially mixed person with a multicultural and nomadic background.
cargocollective.com/tanaoshima

Sequel
by Rosaire Appel

Rosaire Appel draws writing, sound and abstract comics, some of which make their way into books. Some of these books can be ordered online.
rosaireappel.com

a conversation underway

eleventh hour

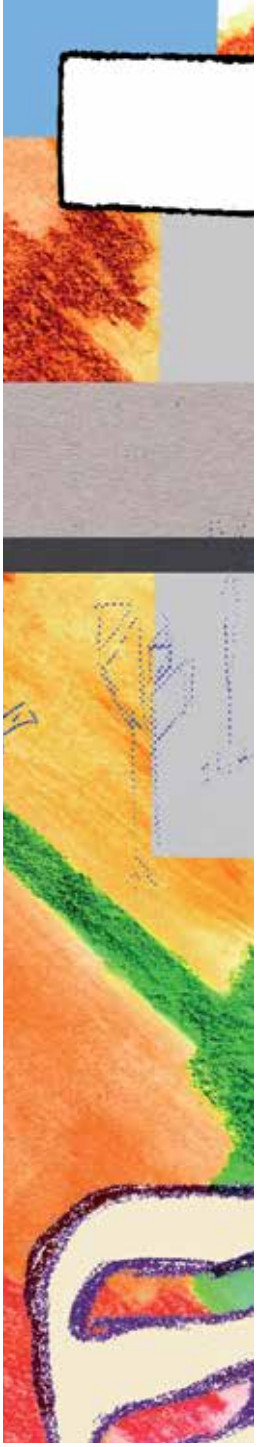
figure switch

medusa

fleet

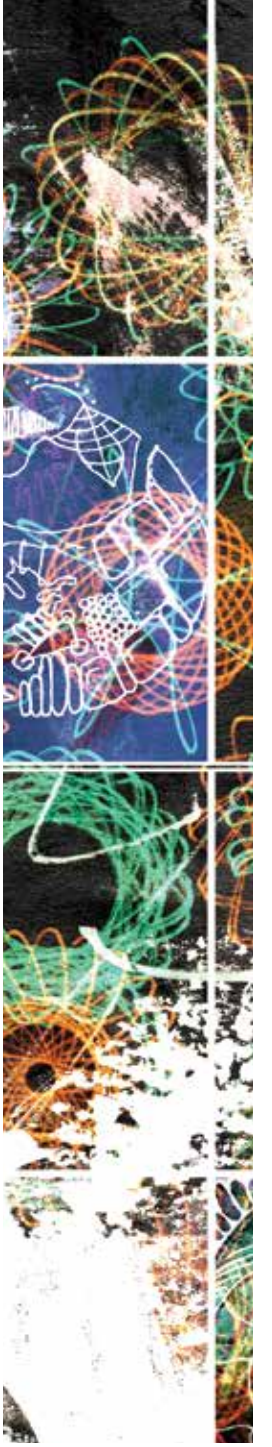
photosphere
by allison anne

allison anne is a multidisciplinary artist in Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA (unceded Očhéthi Šakówiŋ land). Their work in collage is an evolving exploration into the reconstitution, recontextualization & rearranging of print. allison is co-founder of Twin Cities Collage Collective, and one-half of the collaborative projects Morphic Rooms and Nonmachinable with Jeremy P. Bushnell.
allisonanne.com



Werther
by William Lillstjärna

William Lillstjärna is a comic artist and illustrator based in Malmö, Sweden. He has studied two years at the Malmö Comics Art School, graduating in 2020. His best known work is the all-ages webcomic *Bygones Be*. When not drawing, William spends his time biking, organizing bookshelves and dog watching from his kitchen window.
lillstjarna.portfoliobox.net



Suburb
by Louis Deux

Louis Deux makes mixed media digital collage using pen, pencil, marbling, marker, crayon, chalk, Spirograph, Zentangle, brush pen, and watercolor paint, scanned and manipulated in Photoshop with elements made in Visio and Townscaper. The eight panel grid is inserted as a static design element that breaks and redefines the composition.
louis-deux.tumblr.com

Uncomic Kirby
by Mark Badger

Mark Badger once worked for DC/Marvel and others doing comics with abstract tendencies. Booted from the mainstream he kept pursuing what he thought was good comics. When not drawing he works on politics, helped elect Obama, stop a war in El Salvador and pass the so-so US Health Care law. Had some failures there too.
markbadger.org

Undkomic 1
by Miika Nyyssönen

Miika Nyyssönen is a visual artist from Helsinki working with paintings, sculptures, installations and computer art. In Undkomic 1, he combines the abstract elements of his art, different genres and ways of doing things. The transformation and repetition of the elements bring to the comic an atmosphere where the pictorial continuums intersect with each other.
miikny.com

Soma
by Shaun Gardiner

Shaun Gardiner lives in Stromness, Orkney, with his wife, two cats and a dog. The first part of his graphic novel, *The Boy with Nails for Eyes*, is being published this year by Cast Iron Books. Should you ever meet him in person, his ornery gruffness can be assuaged by a solid cup of breakfast tea. One sugar, oat milk for preference.
castironbooks.com/books/the-boy-with-nails-for-eyes

Pullquote
by Laurel Lynn Leake

Laurel Lynn Leake is a white, queer, and mentally ill artist drawn to the fluidity of comics as a medium, and who finds meaning by moving between narrative, observation and abstract emotion. She strives to create spaces where readers can weather inner and outer storms, and where we can recontextualize our selves and the worlds around us. She's taking care of herself even though it's hard.
counterintuitivecomics.tumblr.com

Event Ridicule

Giant Size

Glitch Comix Furtherer

Scrapzone

Untitled
by Churchdoor Lounger

Churchdoor Lounger is a remote art collaboration between Jeremy P. Bushnell and D.W. Together, they combine techniques of artmaking-by-hand with artmaking-by-computer. Drawing inspiration from tile-based video games, Robert Rauschenberg's silkscreens, and Marc Bell's "psychedoolic" comics, Churchdoor Lounger creates striking landscapes which serve as home to an evolving menagerie of weird beings.
instagram.com/churchdoorlounger

Outside
by Mattias Elftorp

Mattias Elftorp likes to use CBA and other anthologies as a space for short works of sequential art that attempt to fuck with your brain and question how we interpret narratives. His other comic works include *Piracy is Liberation*, *The Troll*, *Transgressions* and lots more. Active in CBK, Wormgod, Tusen Serier and Hybriden. Organizer of the AltCom festival and working with Fanzineverkstaden in Malmö.
elftorp.com

I think my contribution here looks a little further outward than formal reflection on comics. This one is about time in certain fictions how the reading of such bleeds into reality and vice versa. The Smithsonian Open Access Project was an invaluable resource for creating this work, and its catalog both populated and informed what this piece eventually became.

I live with my wife and two kids in a place that considers itself the center of the United States, even though it isn't. A circumstance which also informs my piece.

— Tym Godek

built in
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The Story is one of many representative in
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A HUNDRED YEARS FROM NOW
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·LEST·WE·FORGET·


RUBCITEL


SEEING THE OLD YEAR OUT

the end of the century

THE END OF THE CENTURY

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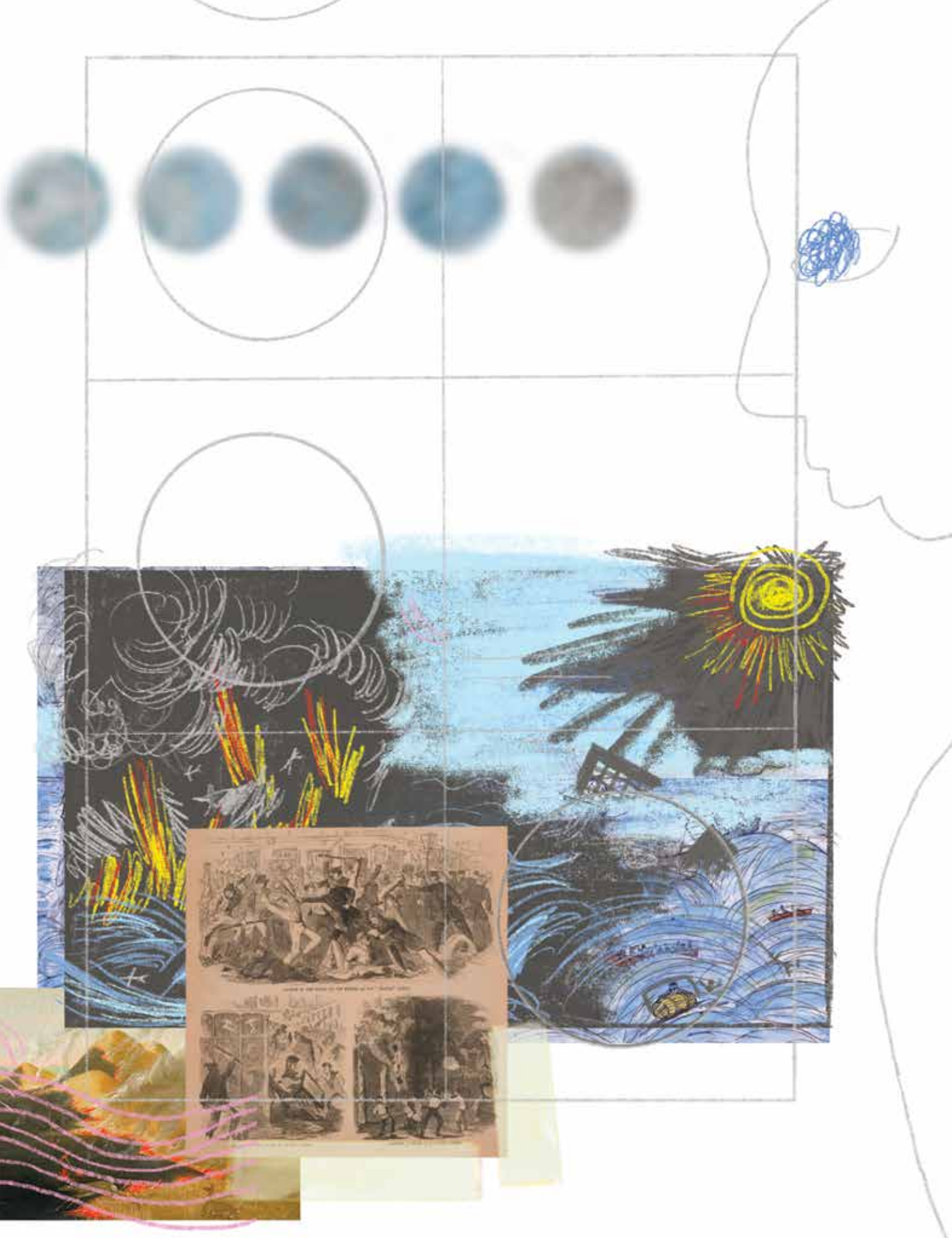

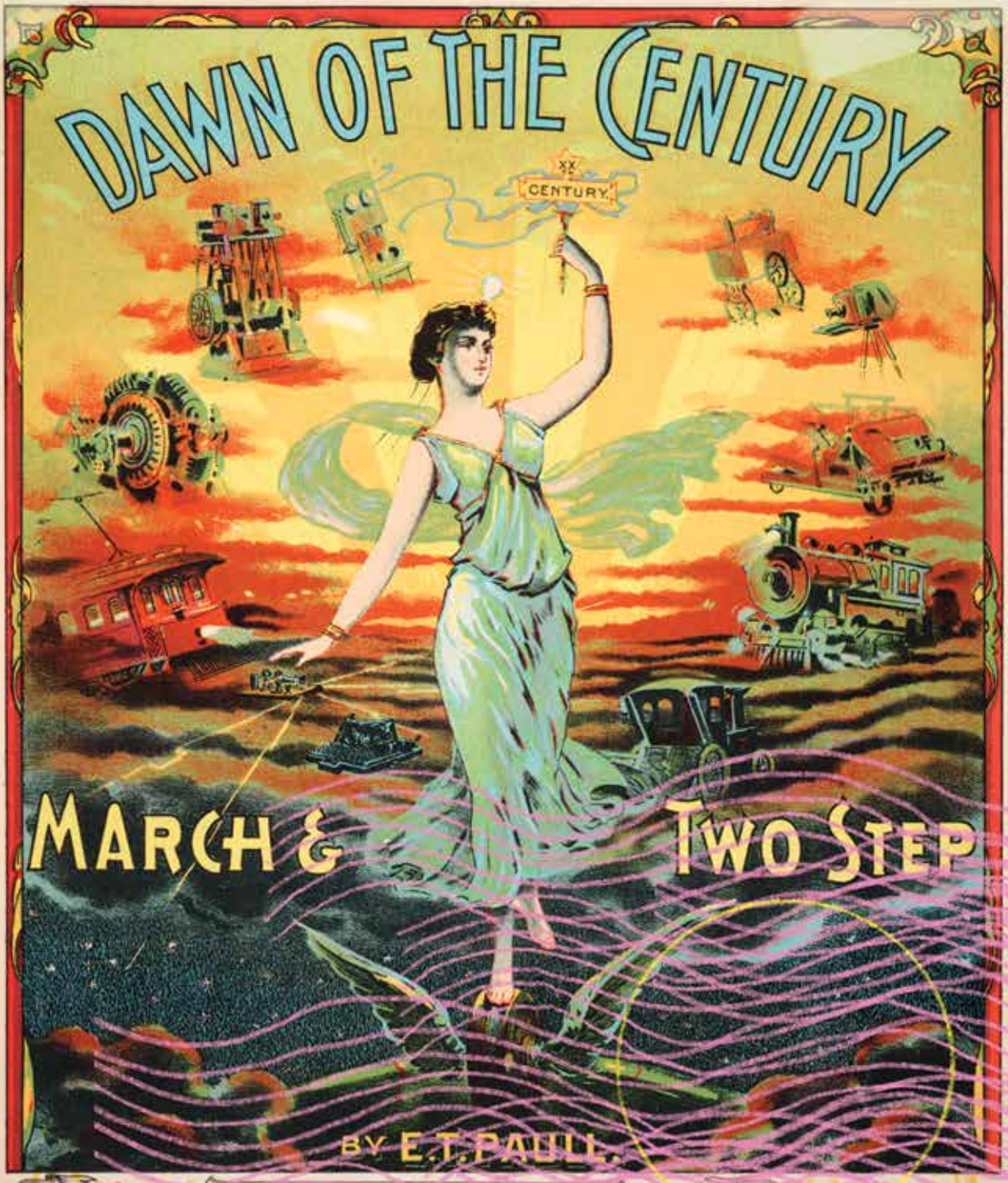

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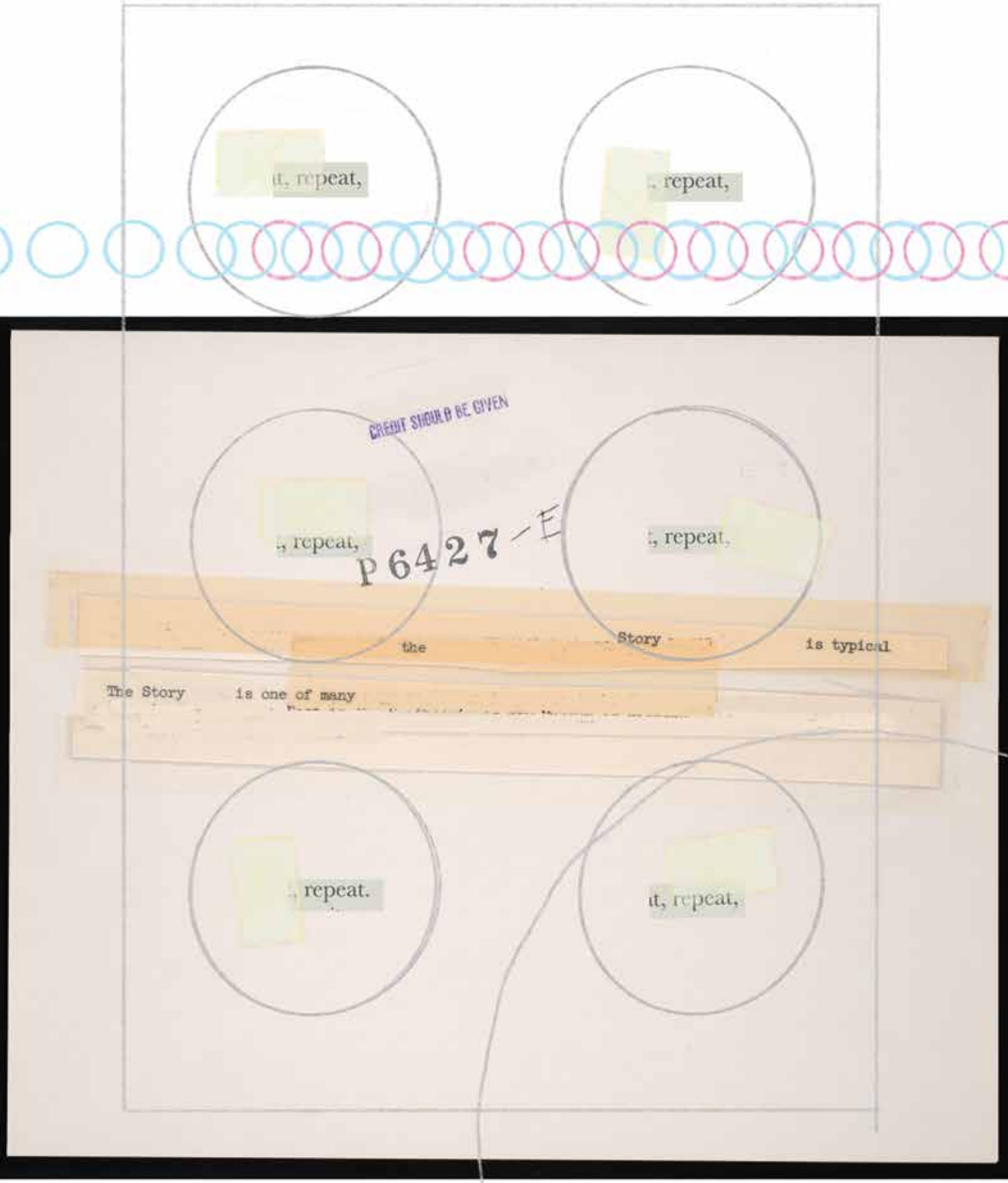
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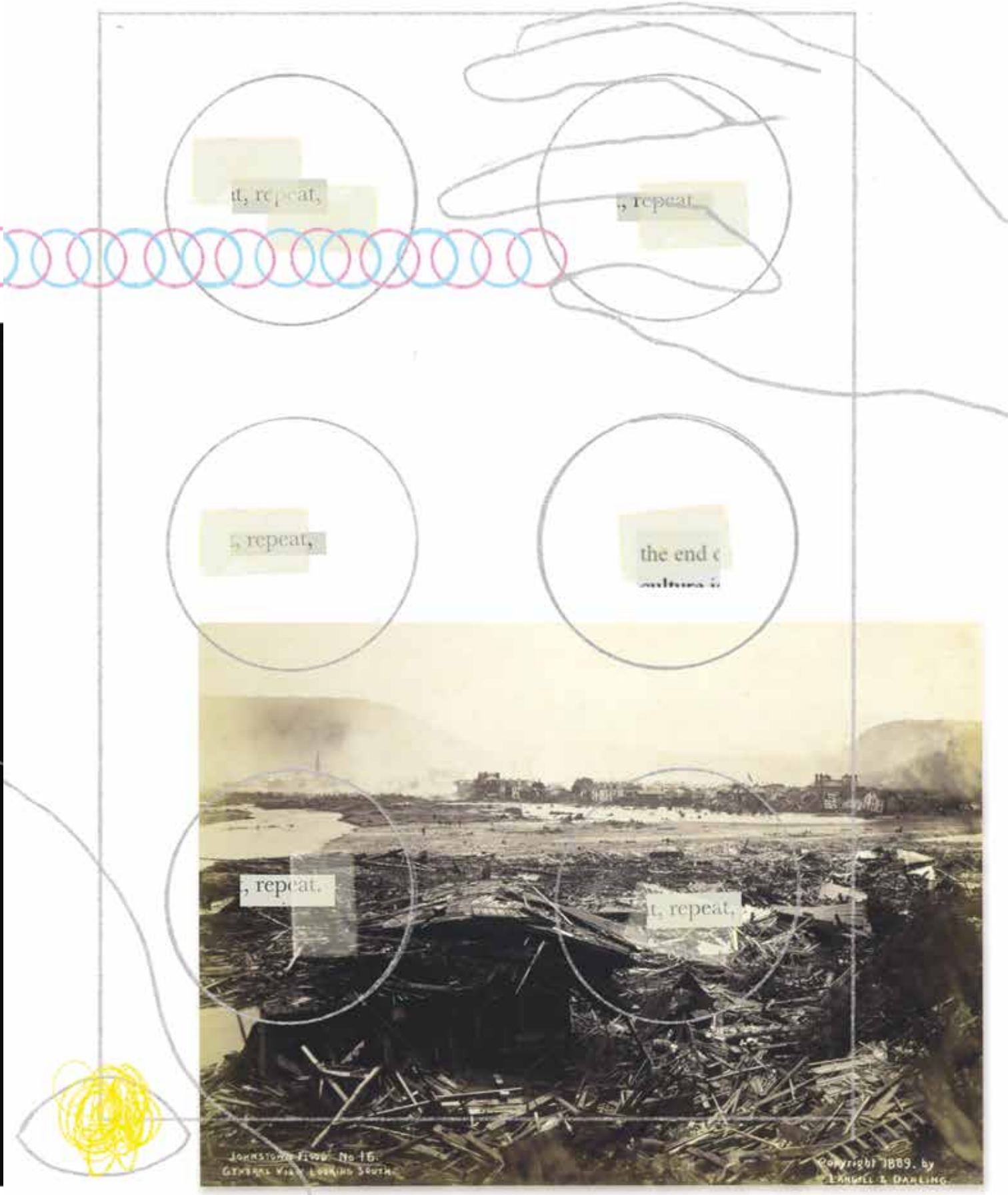
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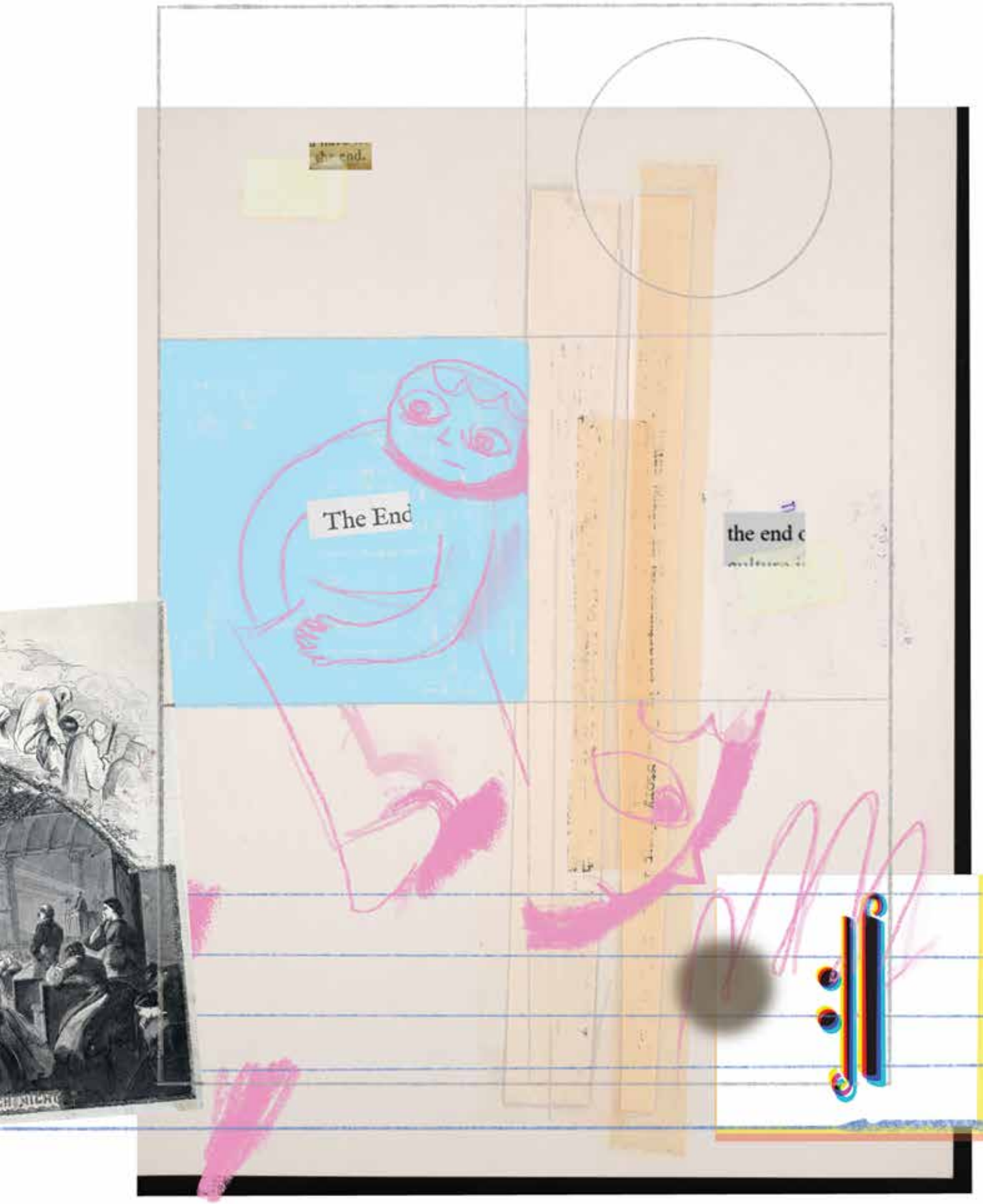
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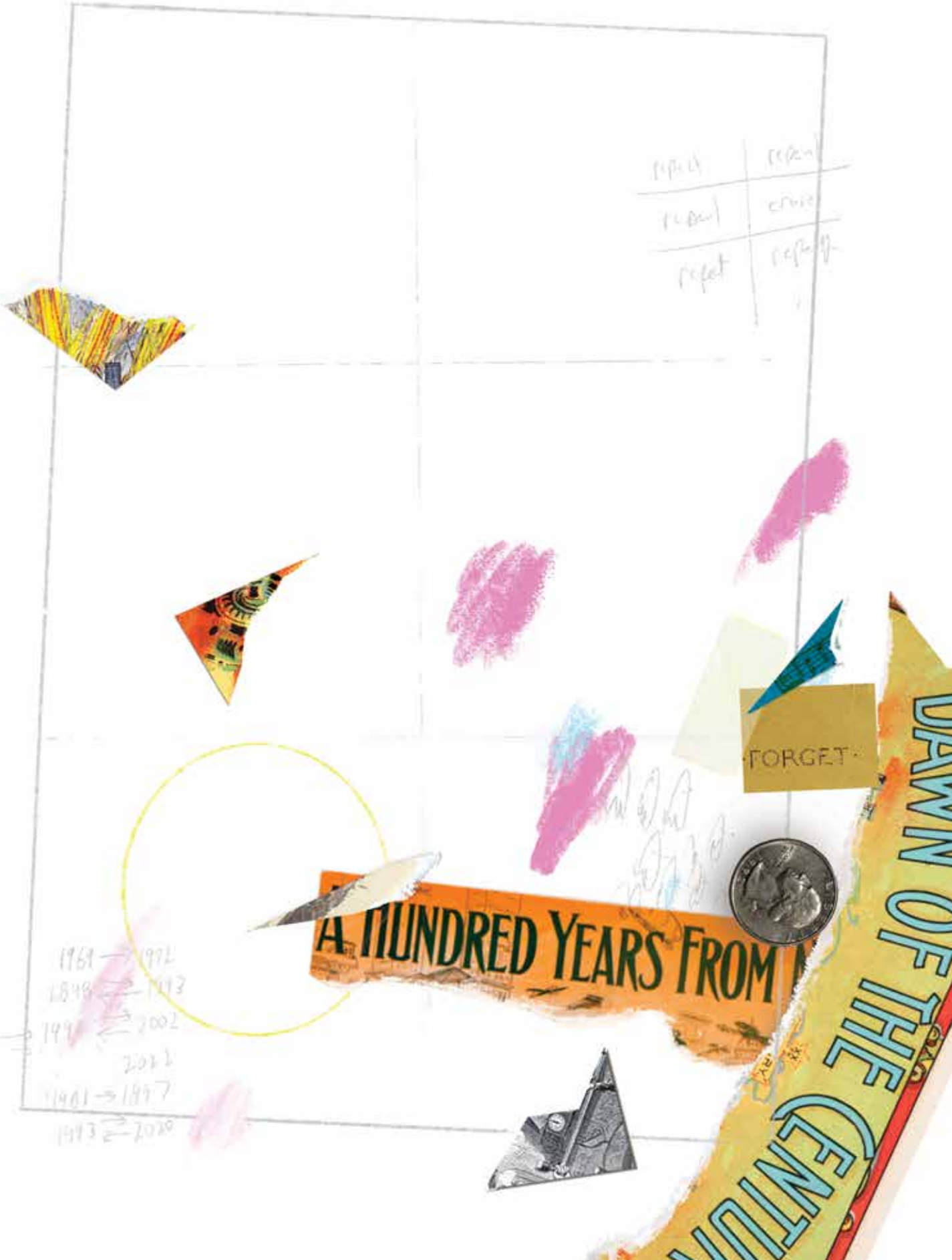
FORGET
A HUNDRED YEARS FROM
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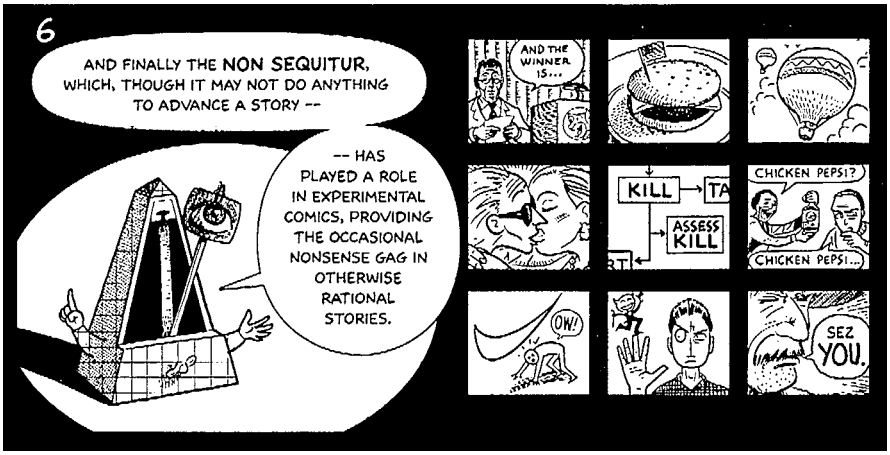
un/-learning -making -tangling/comics

A text in several parts by Allan Haverholm



Scott McCloud's "Non sequitur" category. Detail quoted from *Making Comics* (2006), page 17.

I. THE TROUBLE WITH "COMICS"

Although comics are a fairly varied and diverse order of visual entertainment, the term itself has become entirely associated with the entertainment complex in which comics has developed since the late 19th century: In too many ways comics have evolved as a poor man's blockbuster movies, under commercial direction from publishers to produce more of the same, but more hyperbolic with every iteration.

As a result, the audience (or "fan culture") is unable to perceive anything outside those narrowly refined products as comics; a rather unhelpful non-definition of "I can't tell you what comics are, but I know one when I see it". "Comics" as a descriptive becomes instead a prescriptive that precludes work outside of commercial visual styles, or movements away from narratives that accommodate the dopamine rush of recognition.

Like readers, comics scholars tend to define comics only as their surface qualities prescribe — "comics as they verifiably exist" — and wash their hand of the possible applications of comics' formal traits. Conventional thinking sits at the core tenets of perhaps the best known modern popularizer of comics theory, Scott McCloud. His concept of "closure" (that is, montage) claims to exhaustively list the mechanics of transitions between comics panels, yet examples that fall outside of his purview of linear narrative are delegated to a "Non sequitur" category, so demonstrably silly in his perspective that he needs draw himself as a Dada-esque, cyclopean metronome to fully express it.

As a practicing creative working with the art form, however, I find it difficult not to poke at that missed potential. McCloud's "Non sequitur" discard pile is rather the comfort zone of a growing number of like-minded experimental comics artists, only a few of which are included in this anthology. Even from a theoretical point of view considering comics in a wider cultural perspective, particularly relating to modern visual art, requires not only that we filter out the sociocultural aspects of industry, genre and fandoms — and to that point a new terminology is very helpful to distinguish those from the art form's latent formalities.

I give you "uncomics".

Installation view of Sarah Sze: *Flash Point (Timekeeper)* (2018). © Sarah Sze Studio

II. THE FIELD OF UN-COMICS

In summary, comics as a form of expression has developed in a bubble, separate from contemporary art, which still keeps them from accessing a wider spectrum of expressive potential. Yet on the periphery of that cultural cul-de-sac, well outside the mainstream that has corralled it off from the art world, can we find artists that bridge the gap. It is only there that comics can be considered to evolve and innovate.

With uncomics, then, we look for comics that seem to fall outside the common or popular perception of the form — or rather, its content; comics that don't conform to straight narrative or drawing styles; that avoid if not exclude the use of text — and its tiered reading schema. Most crucially, to burst the bubble isolating comics from modern art, we need to focus on works drawing influence from, or extant in fine art movements and phenomena.

One significant example of such works in a comics context would be the Abstract Comics Anthology, edited by Andrei Molotiu and published by Fantagraphics Books in 2009. Tangential examples from fine arts could be Sol LeWitt's conceptual artworks exhaustively presenting all combinations of, say, curve and diagonal line segments; Joseph Cornell's curiosity cabinets; or Sarah Sze's intricately composite installation art.

Similarly, formal comics-like traits can be found in the fragmentation of a subject in Cubism; the juxtaposition of disparate image elements in collage; Modernist usage of grid structures in painting as well as sculpture; the seriality of artworks exploring a subject through repetition; the codex manipulations of artist's books; the ordering of massive visual archives; and the fundamental gallery practice of curation. Any and all of those corollaries are mutual in the sense that they serve to further inform our understanding of uncomics, and to merge pertaining (practical as well as theoretical) frameworks into the growing apparatus with which we analyse the field.

If I seem wary to define uncomics in too much detail, it is to allow for future inclusion. Unlike traditional preconceptions of comics, we deal here with a largely unexplored field that must encourage continued enquiry and speculation. Uncomics are only clearly defined by the socio-cultural limits delineating quote-unquote, capital-C Comics, and potentially encompasses instances of montage, juxtaposition and/or ambiguous networks of relations — in any other medium or cultural context. ▶

Kimball Anderson | Untitled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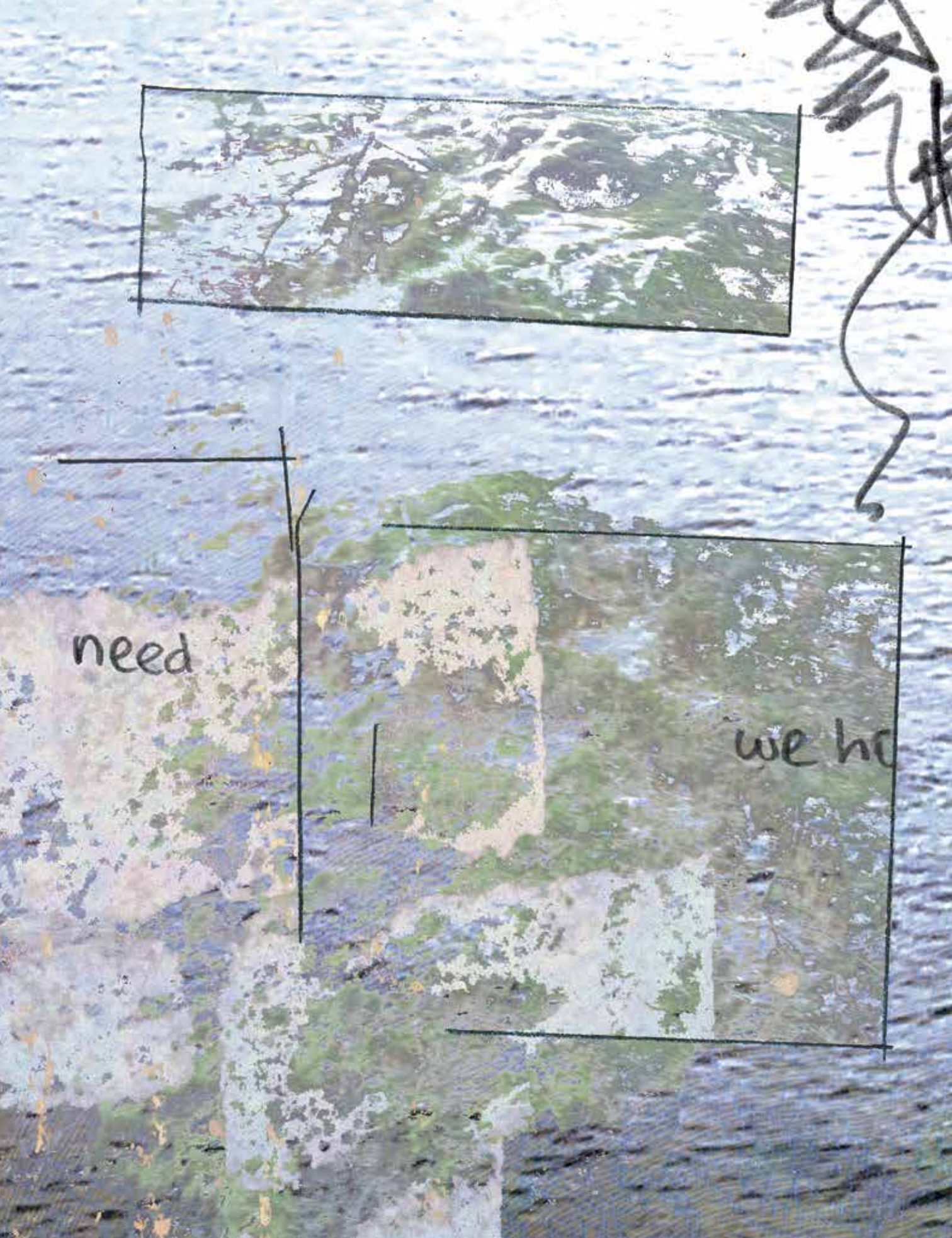
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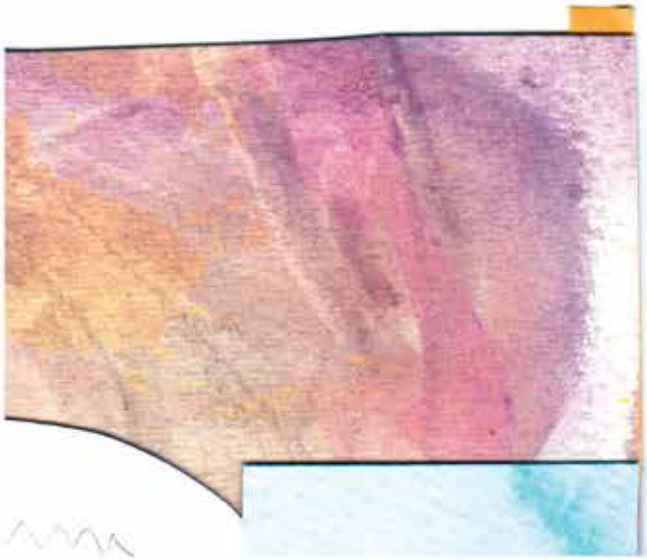

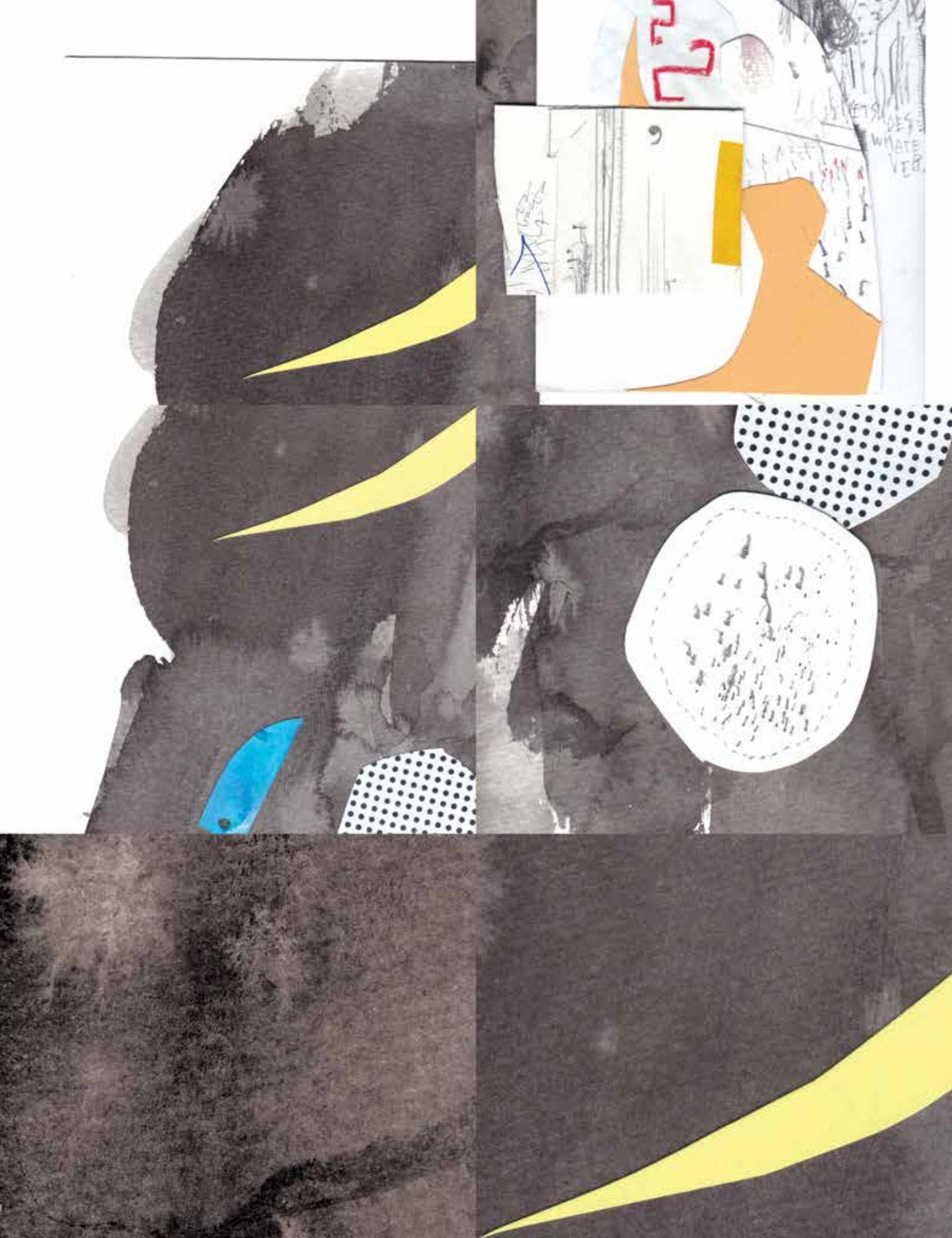

PRESTON

Simon Russell | Once upon again #7


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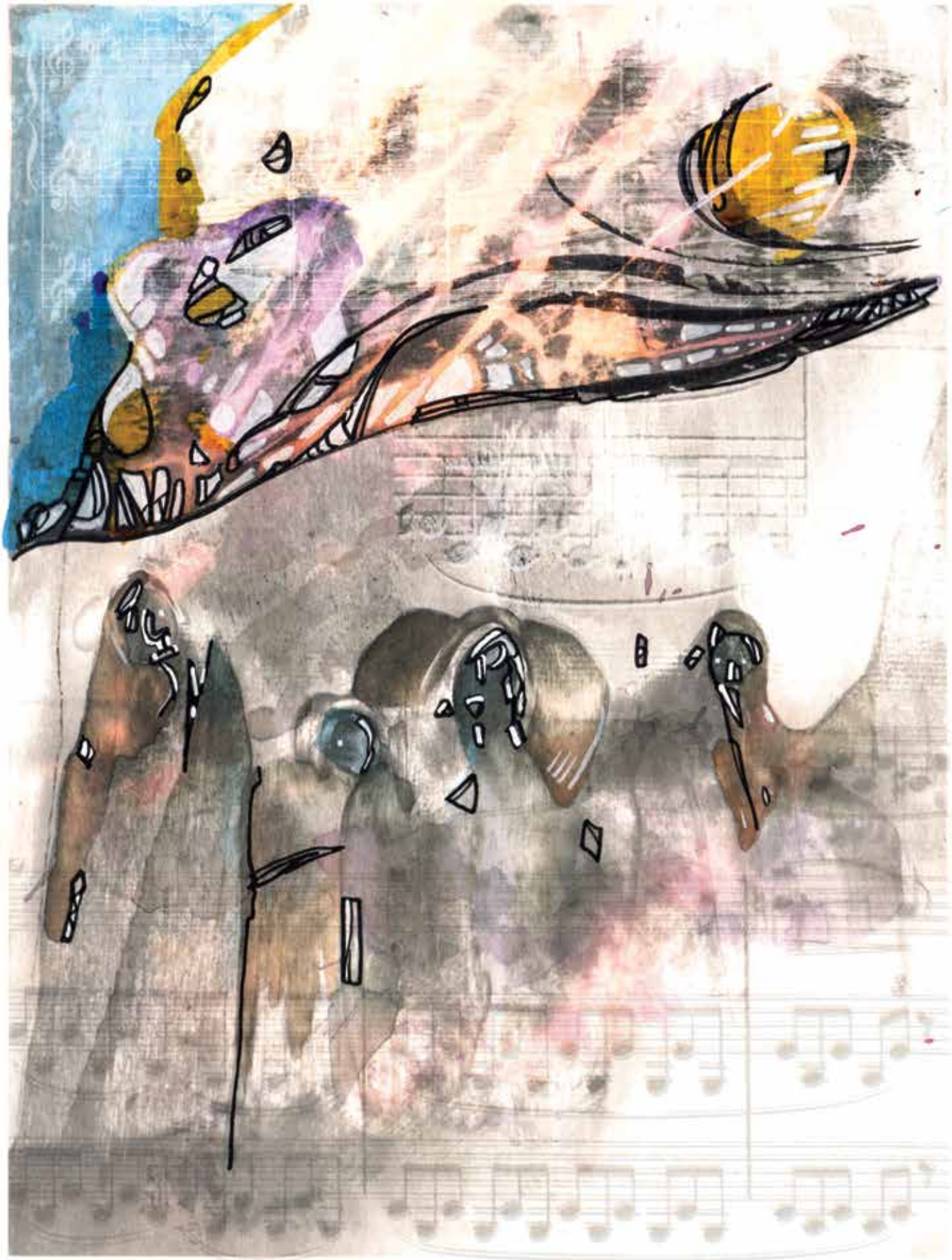

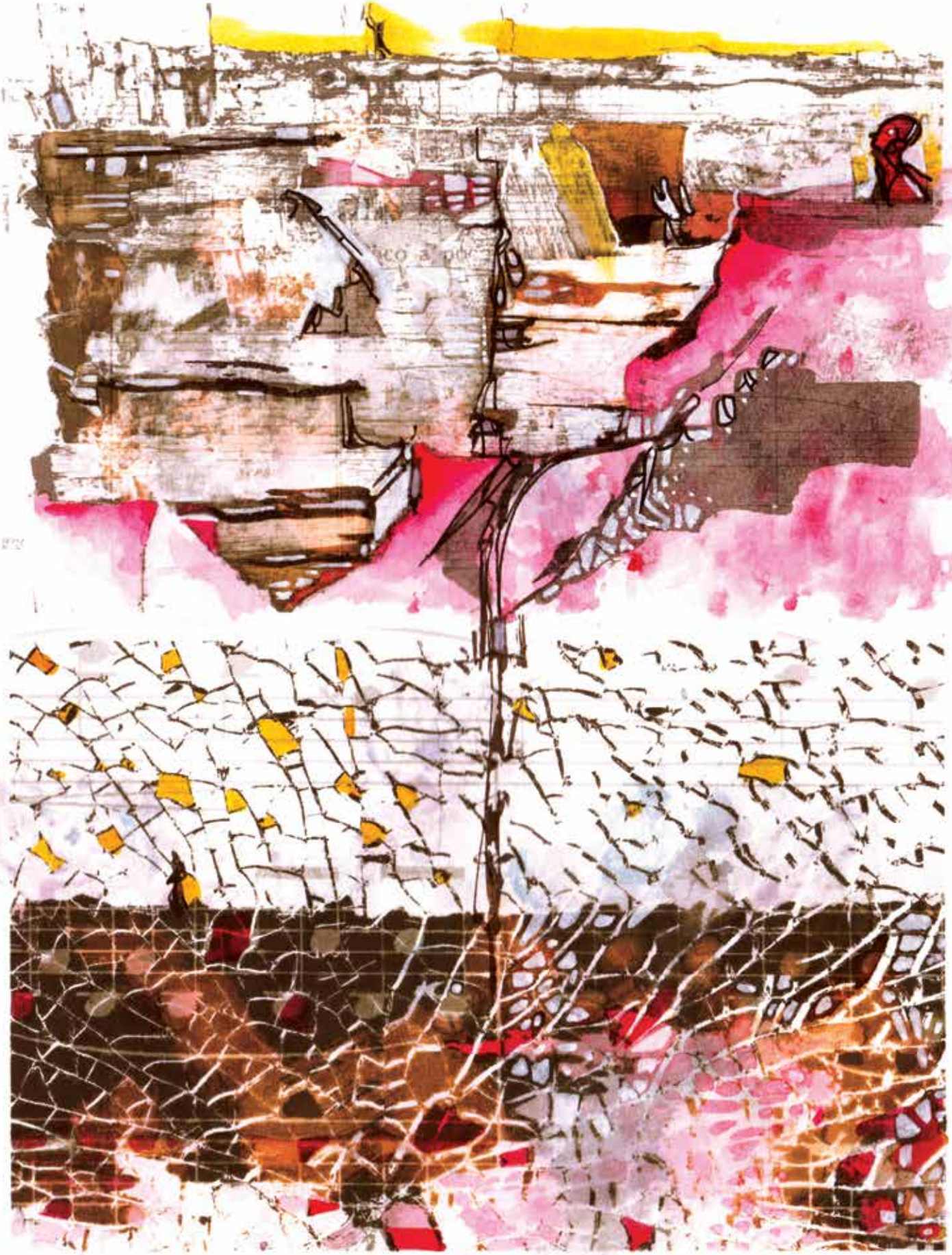

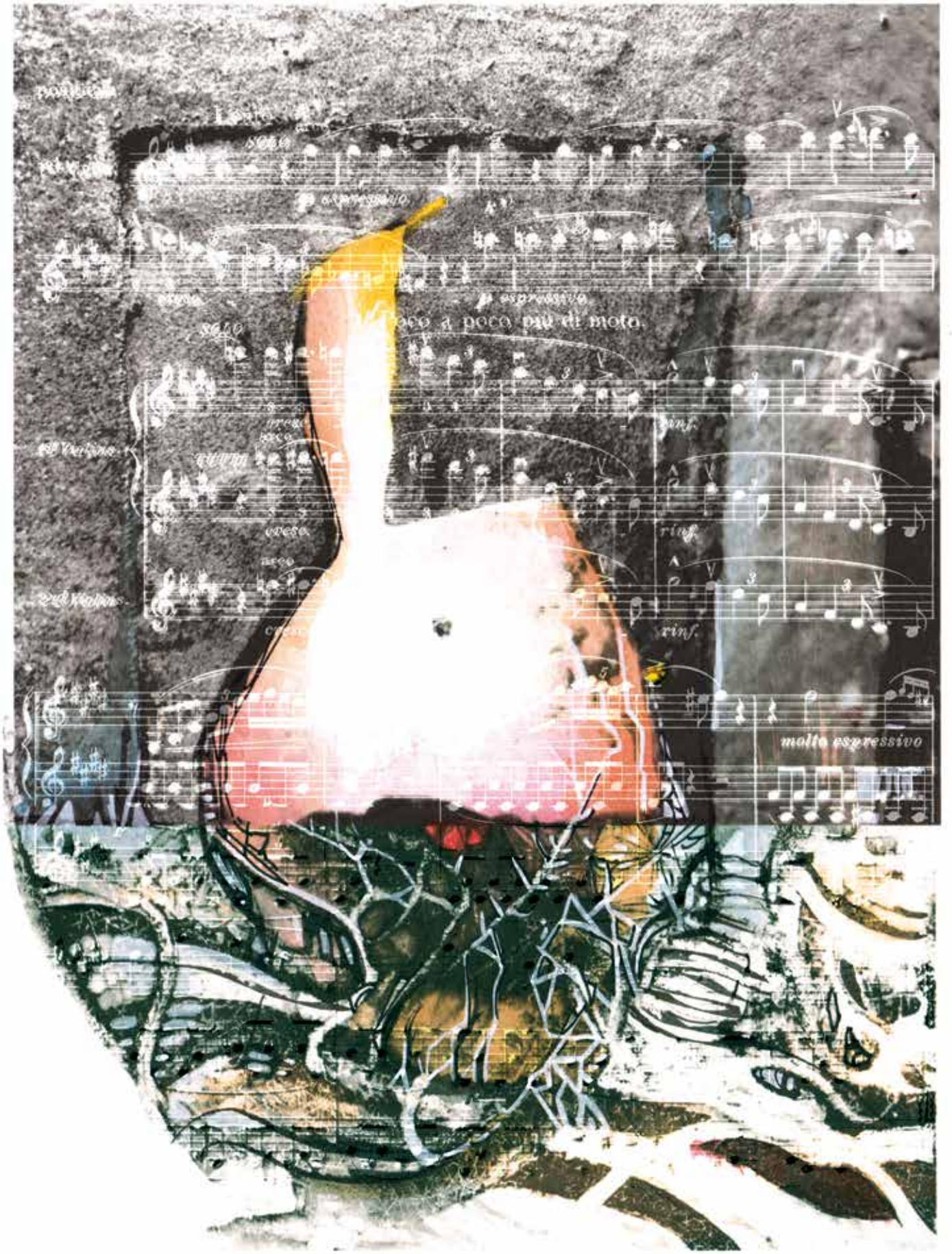
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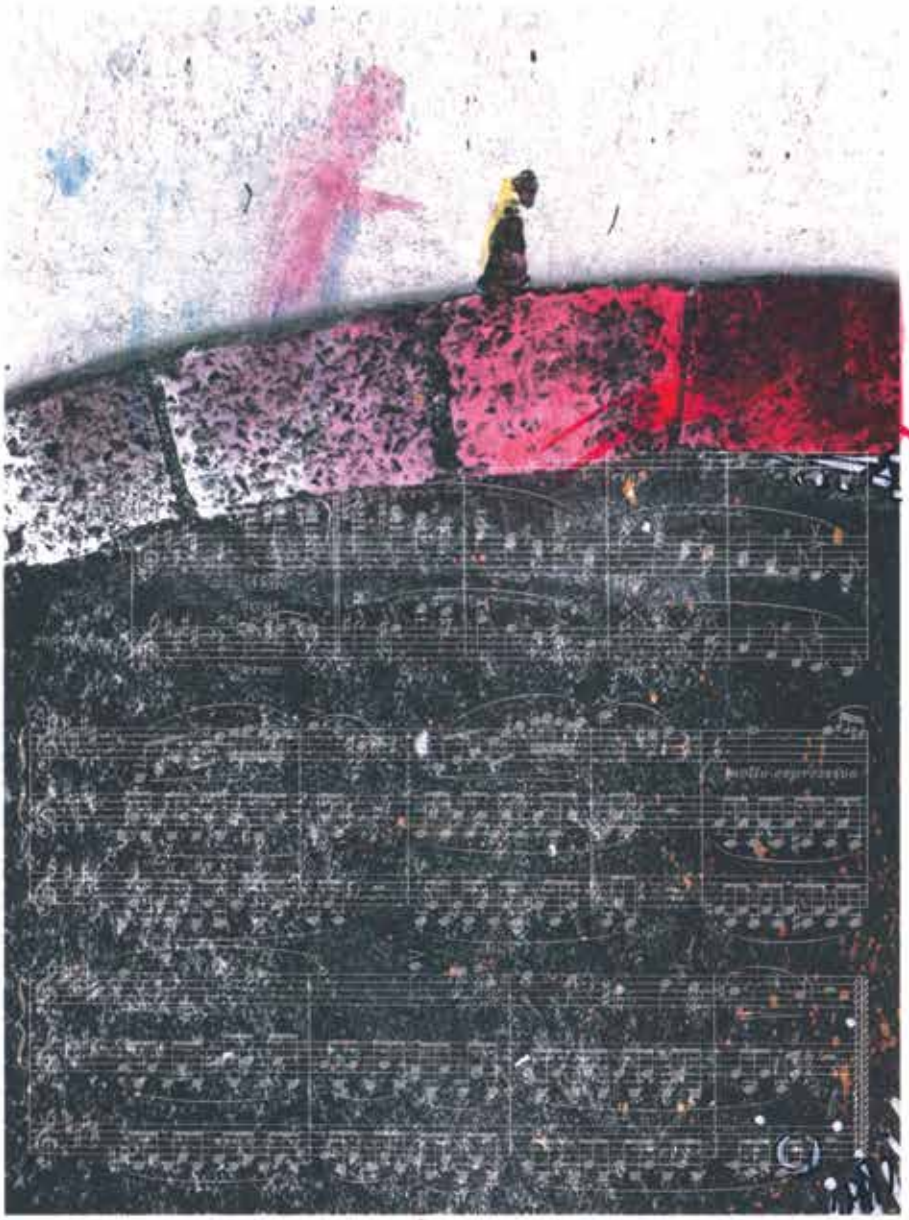

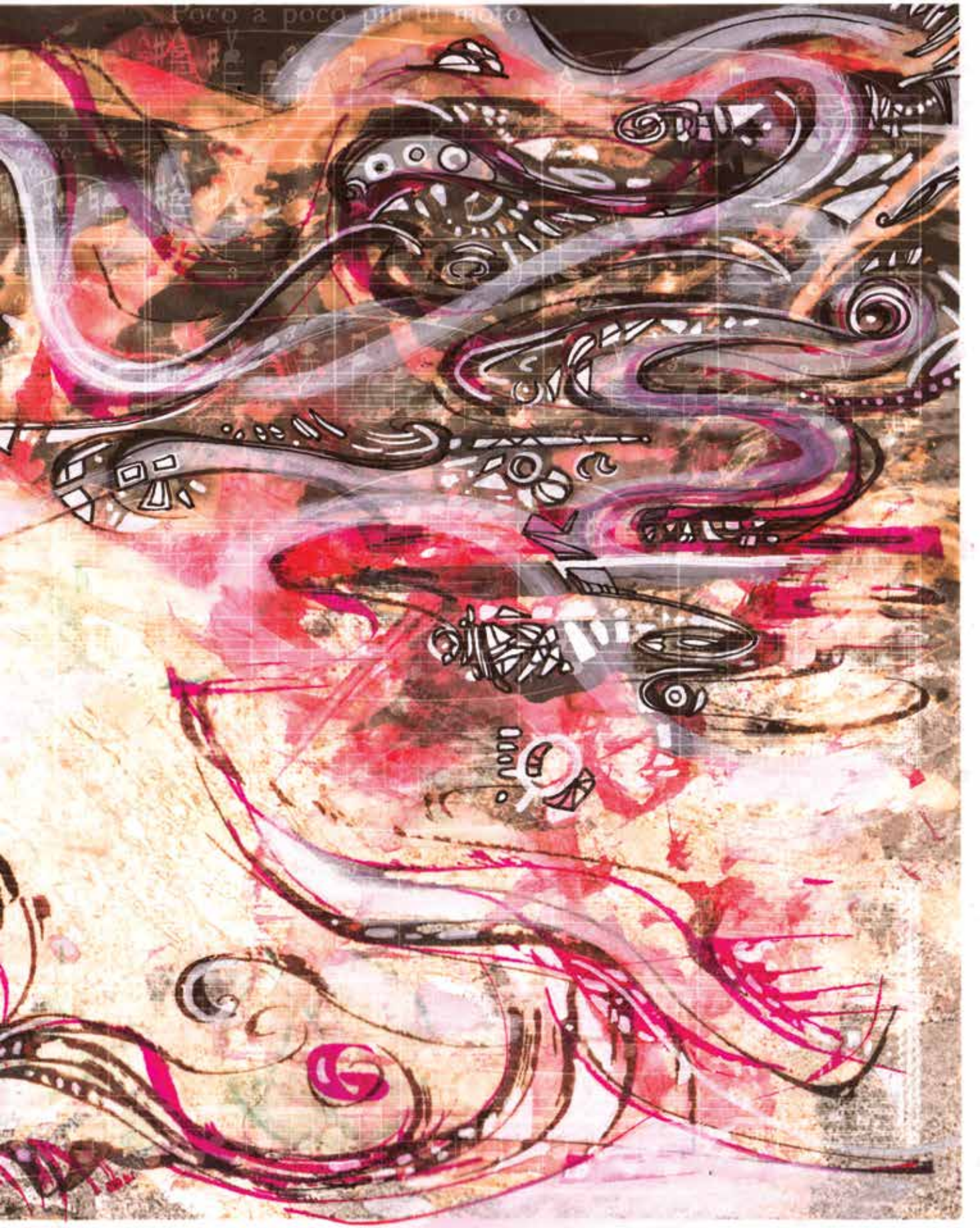

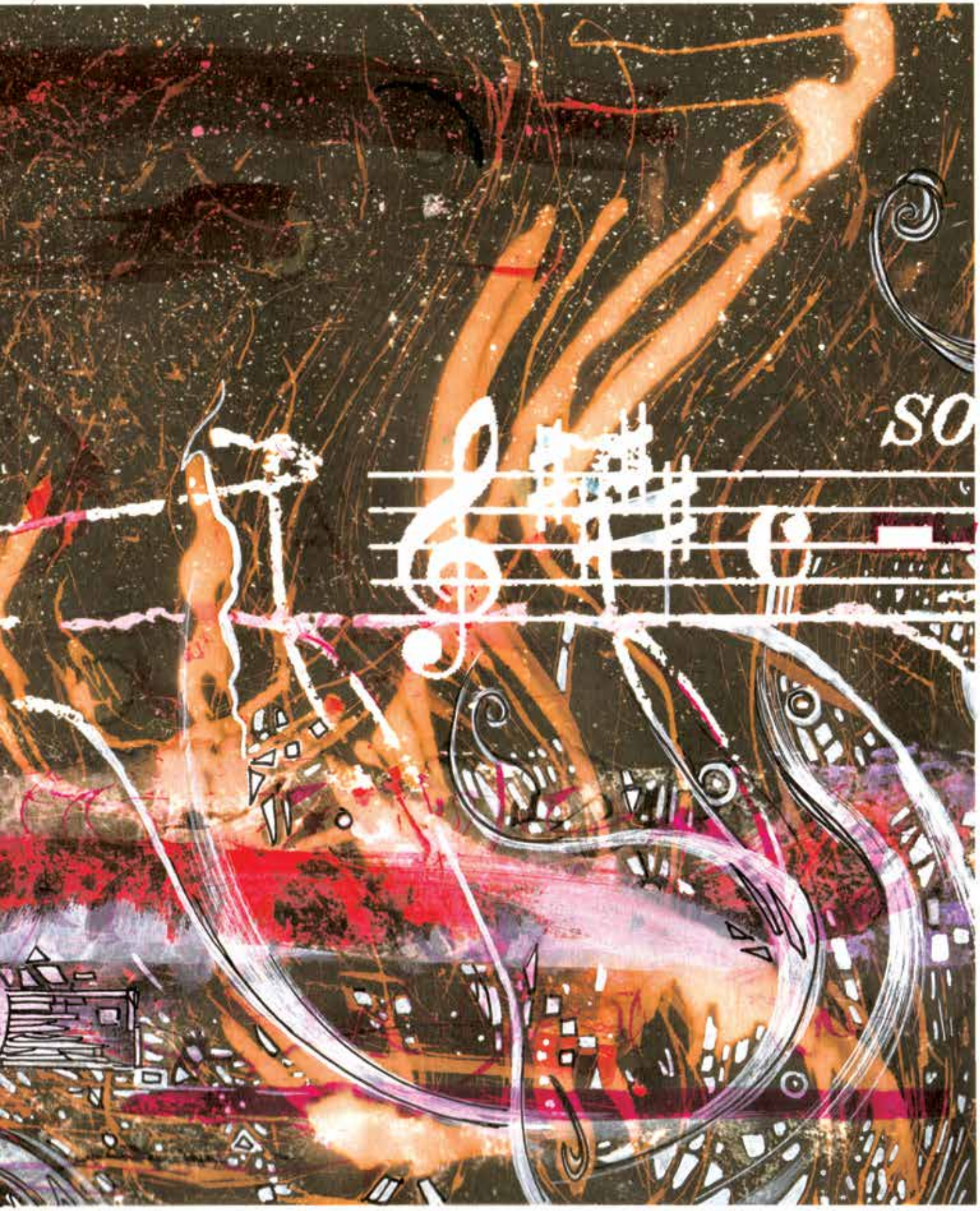
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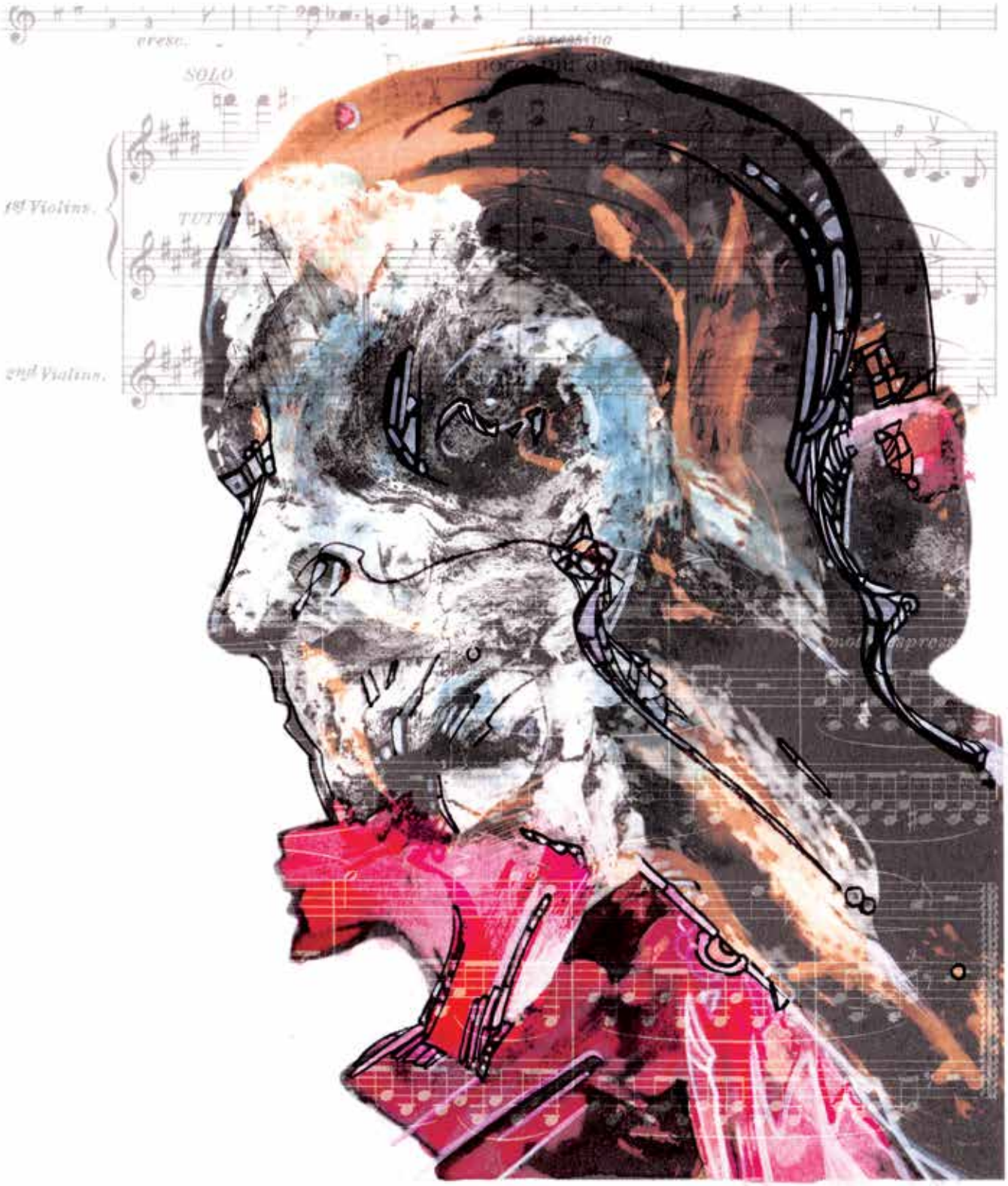
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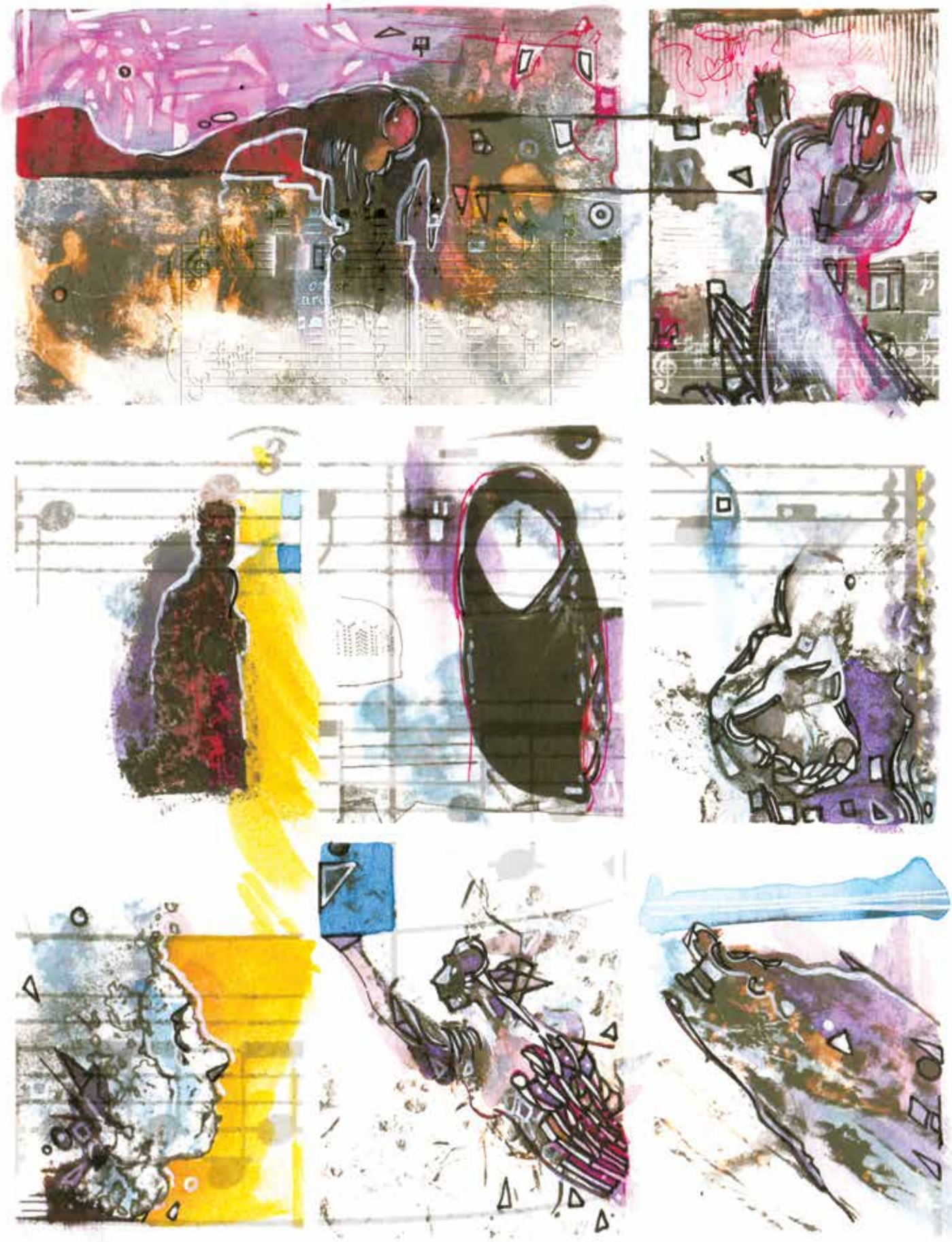
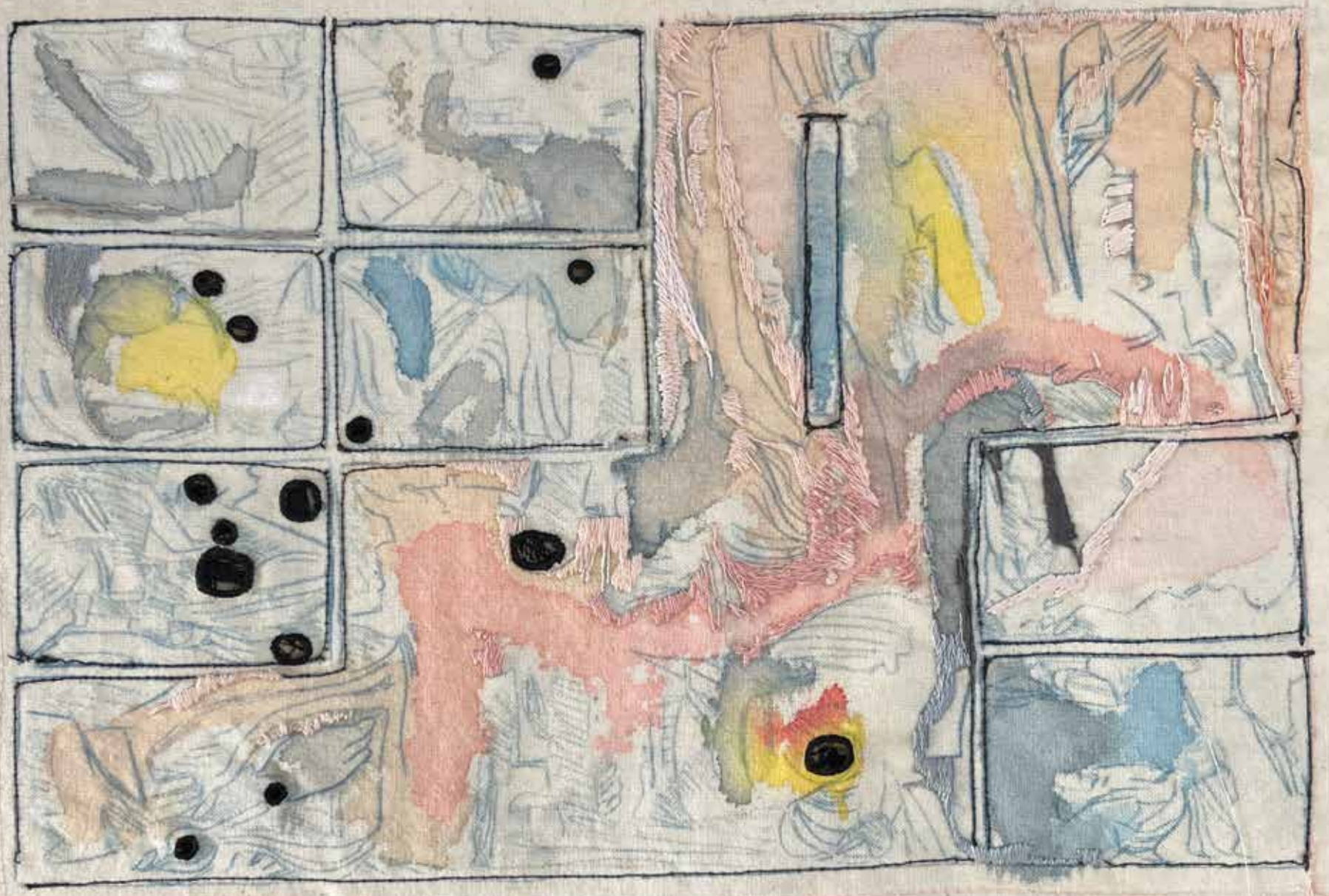


ONCE UPON AGAIN #7 SIMON RUSSELL 2022

Anastasia Hiorns | Feelings



My main influences are four-fold, and intertwined.

First, there's an appreciation and love for mainstream comics, in particular Marvel Comics and 2000AD. I grew up reading Spider-man, X-Men and Judge Dredd, and feel its important to honour those traditions in my own work even if my comics don't look like them. Not so much avoiding biting the hand that feeds than it is not wanting lose my footing in the mist

On top of that is my interest in 20th Century art, in particular Dada, Surrealism and Abstract Expressionism. When I started making The Intercorstal I definitely thought I was continuing in the surrealist tradition, although I tripped myself up on that and ended up somewhere totally different.

I've also got a preoccupation with the paranormal — hauntings, poltergeists, UFOs, all of that. The Intercorstal: Extension wouldn't have been written had I not done an e-learning course on poltergeists, and at least half of the stories in Explosive Sweet Freezer Razors are explicitly about ghosts and haunting. From an analytic perspective, I enjoy using tropes from the field as ways to explore loneliness and isolation in my comics, but I also love the creeping feeling I get up the back of my neck when I think about them.

Running through those influences is what I take from my love of music. In particular, music is where I get my sense of rhythm, which seems like a really stupid, obvious thing to say, but I suppose I mean my sense of visual rhythm. All the elements that go into my comics — panel size, caption placement, visual rhyming (both within a single comic as well as callbacks to previous comics) and so on — are influenced as much by music as anything else. The other thing I get from music is permission — permission to follow my instinct, permission to experiment... permission to say "I've paid my dues, and now I'm going to do what I want."

How I make comics changes every time I start a new one, although most recently the two things that have defined my process are recycling old work and allowing mistakes and chance to play a major role. A case-in-point would be something like my recent comic The Church that I made by drawing over mis-printed spreads from my comic Not This House — Just Growing was assembled from pages produced during the same period. I'm also experimenting more with techniques and materials with each comic I make — pressing painted pages together while they're still wet; cutting panels out of pages to use them in others; using highlighter pens to activate watercolour pencils; and so on.

— Gareth A. Hopkins

I think every artist needs a metaphor as a way to avoid the flatness of literality. We need a poetic image to sail on and explore new territories in our imagination. My metaphor (a fantasy, really) is an imagined prehistoric woman who lives in utopian Pangea—a moment in the Earth's history where there was a single continent, and even though there were actually no humans back then, I like to imagine that people already inhabited our planet, and that they existed without borders or nations or identities other than being a Homo sapiens, still stuttering on a newly acquired ability to speak. A universal language.

In this project, named The Howling Huntress, unlike most comics, image and text are separated and occupy a space on the page that's more characteristic of a traditional picture book. However, "picture book" and "comics" are conventional, even commercial categories, and I don't really see much distinction between them. Here, the text is equivalent to a big speech bubble in which we can read the thoughts of the main character, whereas the drawings are meta-content—they are not external to the character, but rather come from her. In other words, it is not the author who does the drawings, as is the case in most picture books or comics, but it is the character in the story who authors the paintings.

— Tana Oshima

TANA OSHIMA

i enter the cave with my eyes wide open. it's only when i get used to the humid darkness inside that i realize there's a jungle at the end of it. i turn back to the mouth of the cave to see the light one more time, as if i knew the world is about to lose its contours. the outside is still there, the sky yellow and enchanted, a black circle erasing the space the sun once occupied. i see the high cliff with its small holes inlaid like precious stones. a butterfly gets caught on my eyelids, or maybe it's the beat of a bat flapping its wings, dancing away its last day on earth.

i howl in the cave. incantation. i am not new here: this is where i conceived. i am the woman who gave birth twice and tore her tailbone at midnight. i am the one who speaks with a voice that's not words, with the lightning that fades as soon as it's named. i am an amoeba. the origin of life is in me, tied to the earth with ropes i untangle like a daughter's hair, my body forever naked in the most intimate corner of your eye.

tell me--what invisible thread connects us? the sky turns purple and the cliff spews out smoke like an old whale. i walk over to the jungle and let the leaves cut my ropes. i breathe. my mouth is both dry and full of this moment, there's no room for any other. hear me breathe, i say, look how the wind blows in my hair, see how my thighs, softened by the years and the gaze, shake. now the entire sky is black, and so is the body i paint with squid ink.

i write some symbols on my body. i reach out to the word, but the word doesn't come to me. i stretch my sticky tongue to the tip of the things but the things don't give me back their names. there is no echo, only noise. i write the word noise, still unborn, on my chest. through those two nipples i spilled hot and sweet milk, i soothed cries of hunger, i became a tamed animal. through those two holes i loved everything that can be loved. now i suck the sap out of the plants growing at my feet. i am noise--i want you to hear me, to support my stridency and the vigor of what i am in the space we do not have, in the cave reflecting what we are not. but i also want you to shut me up, slowly, with the understanding of what you are.

i draw from a place that's inside the cave. it only exists in the cave, and that's why when i draw we can't see each other. it's the catharsis of the feeling, to which i've become a stranger. in the space of drawing, what i feel doesn't belong to me, it's dislocated from who i am. it inhabits a world free of meaning. the jungle--i am there and i just discovered your name. names shape and limit what we want to contain. i want to contain you there, in your name, so you won't dissolve in the chaos dwelling inside my eyes. i want to lock you up and pet you like a baby wolf and show you what i'm hiding.

i forget about myself when i paint. a new world emerges out of my hands, and in the act of creating i liberate myself from it. i no longer want you locked up in a name, i don't wish you to be constrained by contours and angles slowing down the flow of chaos. i want you free and blurry like a howl, that's how i want myself to be, what i aspire to be--a chunk of air in your mouth. or nothing. this might be the moment when nothingness begins. the wet and empty cavity, the force opposing my meaning. you are not you, you are what i'm not.
a single yellow light illuminates the cliff like a golden coin, the edges blending into the darkened atmosphere. silence drips. tell me again how we got to this silence, when did we reach it and enter it. or didn't it happen. perhaps we just went past it without daring to touch it. the onomatopoeia of void. last night i breathed, invisible, in the opening air. i offered you my breath, i offered you the night, and the invisible became the present's only matter. and then, in the middle of it, i asked permission to sound, to be noise. it was a hollow question because you could have only answered with a yes, but it was necessary. each hollow question is a seed i plant in the jungle.

the body is structure, theatre, home, refuge. i am here, in this moment, a dot in the dark. i am the woman who is nothing, the woman prior to gender, prior to race, prior to language. i am an absolute.

TANA OSHIMA

TANA OSHIMA

a new day begins. i peek out from behind the cave and see the spring pulling gleams of life from the ashes of inertness. sometimes the cold trespasses my feet, my hands, the back of my neck, and stays there until the day ends. my fingers are too stiff to draw, stiff and soft like a bending dead prey.

spring is coming, slowly releasing sounds that have been trapped underground. yet the cold resists: there's a struggle, a tension rubbing the air and the very structure of time. but the trees, the grass and the rabbits seem to have noticed the deep truth of the living--a friction that is nothing more than harmony, as is my volatile reluctance to accept the elemental laws and the corners of perfect angles. i lean towards roundness, the only possible ending. why do i keep looking at the world as if i were not in it. i can see the hierarchies of the human mind, the categories, the forms, the lines, the pointing arrows, everything stored in quadrangular compartments. do they wonder who i am, what i am, where i should be placed--or displaced. but this is how i speak. this is the only thing that defines me. it is how i exist, and it is, too, how i cease to exist.

your voice reaches me, real as thunder. the cliff glows, bathed in gold, tremulous and inflamed. the jungle thickens with abundance and water, indifferent to the air i occupy and the leaves vibrating as i walk indecisively. since when does fear hinder desire, they should move evenly, like an object and its shadow. a large, smooth blade of grass bends over and makes me bristle. it reminds me of human skin, with its smell of life and that which happens between one breath and another.

i get up and go to your voice. i move towards uncertainty with absolute certainty, albeit with rusty joints and a skeleton that's starting to notice the claws of time. the field outside reminds me of everything that is alive, and through the living i am reminded of everything that is dead. sometimes the dead are our most alive moments. she is there, my dead daughter--she is in my eyes and i have the power to place her wherever i want. like you. you are here, between my eyes, between my legs, in the nooks and folds that i don't always want you to see.

your voice opens a door. we are in a common room, a place that becomes comfortable only by our presence as we build it instant by instant with flexible threads of reed. you pick up my words and lick them. you spat them out a moment ago, maybe because you didn't like how they taste. but now you chew them slowly and let them go through you like smooth lava gliding back to its origins. i accept your spits as a gift and use them to moisten the driest parts of my body. i can almost smell you, dip my nose under your fur and smell what is smell and what is not smell, that which emanates from a body i desire. too quickly you discover and savor my most useless sense.

the sky has barely changed colors. a prelude of rain in the background--the cliff is asleep, soft as the pale skin of milk. i can't see the sun, but i can sense it like i sense the heart beating in the body of my children, or the presence of the sea: it's part of my existence. my existence depends on theirs in a relationship so deep it terrifies me and excites me all at once.

i feel the urge to draw a triangle. the interest of the triangular shape resides in the possible relations between the three points. it's a hybrid shape. one might think that relationships are easier and more comforting in parallelepipeds because they are predictable and symmetrical, one point projecting onto another upon an irrefutable axis. instead, the triangle reveals new relationships between points that owe nothing to each other. they are not conditioned by any other kind of connection. neither predetermined nor predefined, the triangle is a form of resistance, a countercurrent. the only inherent connection in it is spontaneous, random, fortuitous, and therefore also vulnerable. maybe that's why people are scared of triangles. it makes them uncomfortable.

i transgress the familiar and predictable form. i volate the safe and the known with my sharp angles. what am i. i am what you are not. i am your imagination. i am the one climbing up your symmetry, the truth fragmented into hundreds of triangles, my eyes a kaleidoscope through which you can see whatever lies beyond geometries moving on a bottomless surface. i no longer know if you are figure or background in this formless world where shapes and contours have morphed into darkness--except for the ones i build when i reach your matter.

now i stand still, trying to make connections in the visible world, realizing that your feet are covered in grass. i who had turned you into a statue can now feel the light in your eyes. i hastily pull the strings from one point to another to avoid a delay of things. i don't want to miss the possibility of what you don't know, the delicious pause the afternoon brings, the fractal light, the round insistence of life. the jungle, obliterated yet undaunted, grows unstoppable towards the sun. the cliff is indifferent to its own reflection on the river, that vicarious mirror of my other. my search for wholeness seems impossible in this fragmented place, and yet i have put my pieces together to fit in it, in this place where the points meet the beams and the light reverberates in all directions, deceptive and cunning, revealing the fragility of the whole.

arbitrary space has no center or periphery. it's absolute. however, i blindly trust the centrality that welcomes me when i'm in the cave. it's a mere illusion, because you and i exist in a non-space, in a reflection, which is also an infinite space. in the reflection i see beyond what my open eyes are capable of seeing. the contour lines fold sometimes and invite us to rebuild. look how we build tirelessly, how we destroy and rebuild with our claws and fangs and the strength of our language. i chose this cave so that i didn't have to worry about the geometry of things. here there are no corners or edges, and the angles are round and impossible to define.

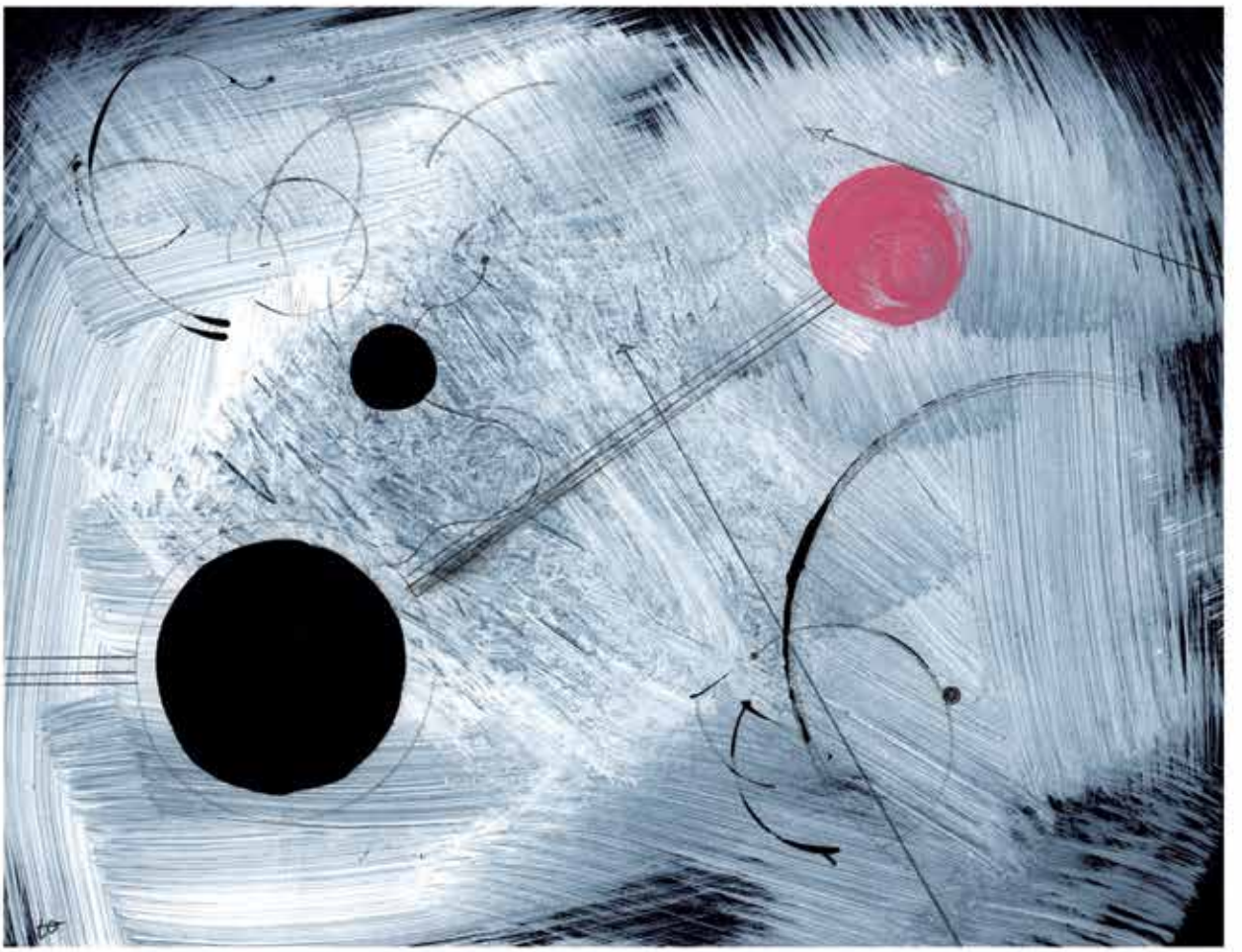
we exist in a moment prior to definition. but i don't know if i should speak in the plural form. if you are what i'm not, then i have no right to appropriate you and put you in my mouth. even if i had the power to uncover you and make your content mine, you would disintegrate before you reached my lips. i say lips and i say mouth because the body is the only concrete and defined thing i can offer. that's why i need you to touch me with your dry and burning hands and confirm with the tips of your fingers every single point that delineates me. my skin curls up and breathes. living matter.

now i am a flower. when i'm a flower i don't know if i am inside or outside. i am the center and i am free from any geometry or direction. the heat dissolves in the air and forms a white layer covering the cliffs, filling them with an irrepressible euphoria, hysteria, the hidden and forgotten history of a speck of dust that falls on my hand knowing that the journey is always unexpected and ideas jump out like toads, surprising and ridiculous ideas whose purple petals are now scattered on the ground. the jungle becomes a little more purple and a little more invisible and i can't explain the tickling i feel down there on the right side. the chromatic tension gives way, the weight gives way and i become a feathery presence on the ground you're standing on with your feet covered in snails. the slime glows in the sun and deceives me. i run to you, blind and deaf, mistaking the slime for precious gems--i lick your feet to keep the gems in my mouth, until i realize they're neither gems nor precious, but the touch of your feet soothes me nonetheless. my hair has grown and gets tangled up in the grass, which has also grown. how long since i last saw someone. where is everybody. how can i vocalize anything if i've forgotten what it is like to be around people. what are people, what are those flowers that the current is dragging downhill, what is that woman raising one knee and then the other, what is that man blowing a horn by the edge of the cliff. i stare at the paintings on the cave and go outside, confident that i'll be at the right distance from you so you can graciously grasp the undefinable nature of who i am. but have i been equally gracious and generous to you. have i apprehended your truth and the truth that holds us together. my skin stings when it touches the soil. then you talk to me from afar and i feel a scandalous pleasure.

TANA OSHIMA

there's a black silence outside. the cliff shines under the moon, waking up to the night, half-rock, half-man, darkness devouring its sharp angles. only some small, bright corners are visible, floating like fireflies on the sea. the cliff has grown a new fold--it's the birth of a new form. sometimes such permutations occur as part of the elasticity of the formless. when new angles emerge, i am quick to capture them on the wall.

i look forward to the mistake, which is nothing more than uncontrolled action. i wait for the elements to return to their natural entropy. i wet my hair in ink and paint lines that don't have a defined trajectory, shapes that are not representation. stains. i take a handful of dirt and spread it over the stain. i pick blueberries, crush them with my fingers and paint a possibility. and the white and yellow sap, and the red and green minerals that form on the earth. i let the elements respond to their own forces, which are very different than mine. wild, untamed forces. i catch them and condense them and cage them in the perimeter of a context.

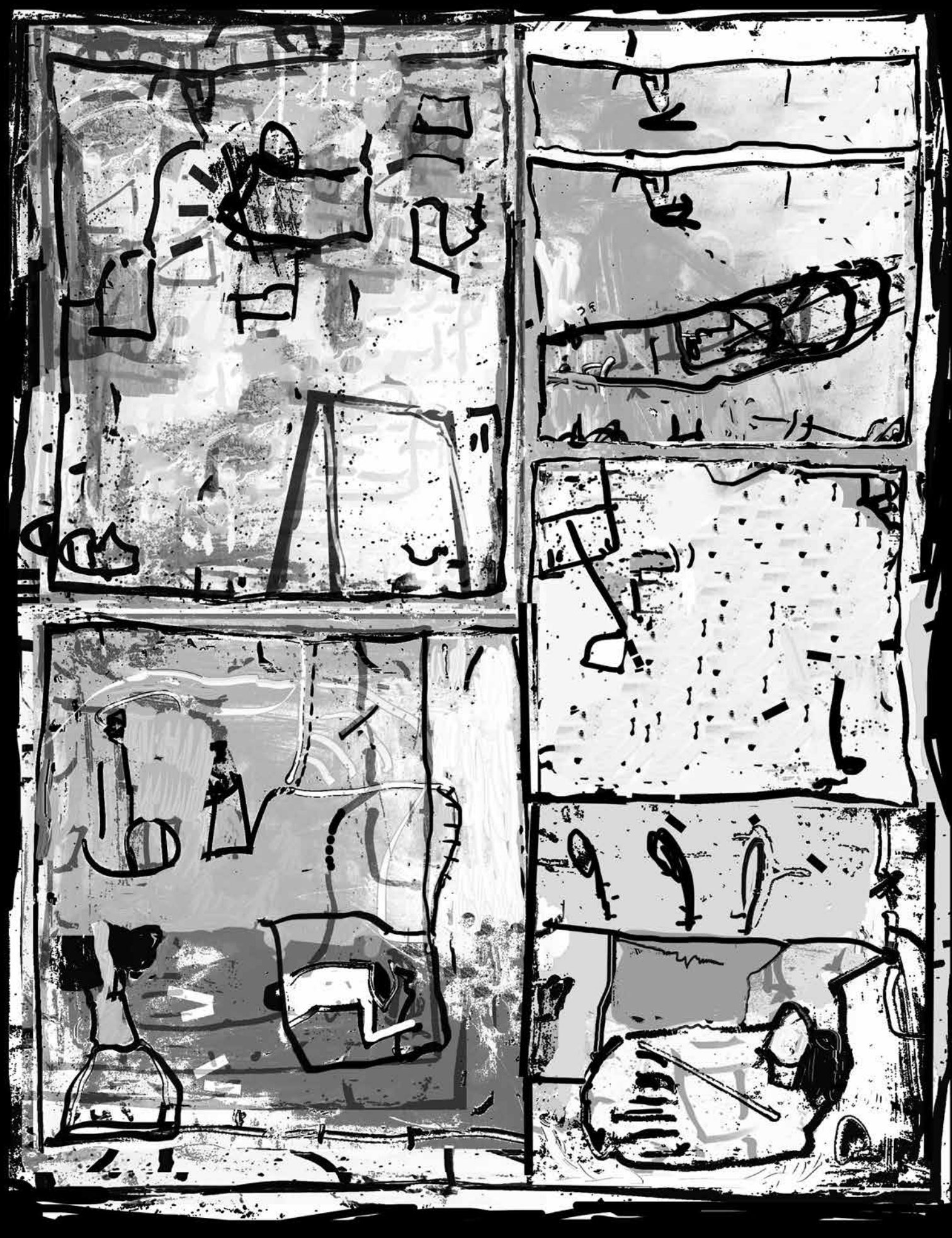


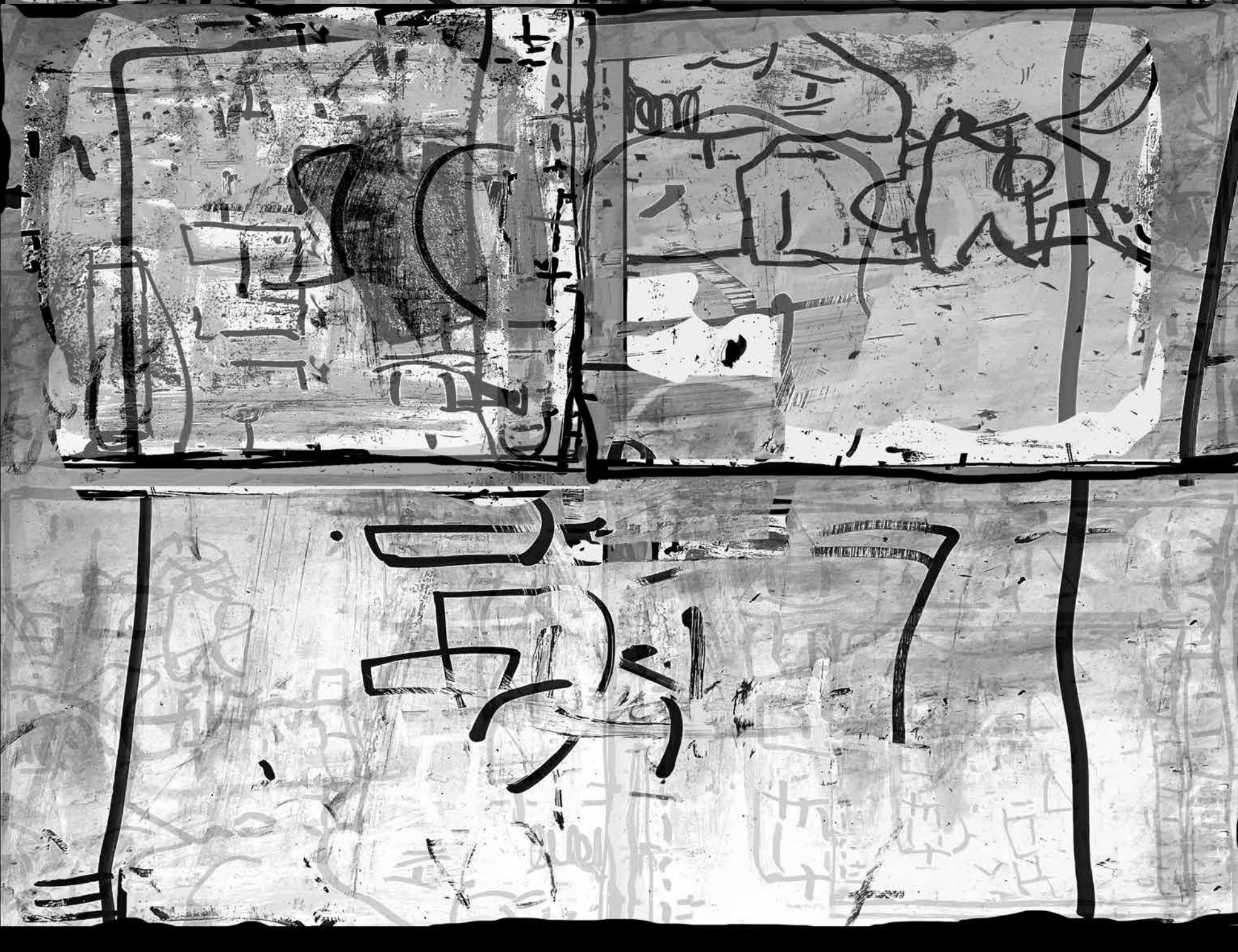
and through that context i decide to look at you once again. now i see you clearly, free in your singularity, cutting the air with your body, with the fragility and fierceness of the body that lives and breathes. i draw a spiral on the floor.

in this place that i'm building there is no flower called fear. there is no room for doubt in what is whole, i tell myself, but i know this is untrue and impossible. our touch and our tremor and our asynchronous motions crack the surface of our shared space, and through these cracks come, in and out, unpredictable things that are at times healing, at times hurting. it is within the condition and quality of wholeness that i accept the cracks. so i take them and lick them, not to fix them and seal my space in deceiving safety, but to make them mine. i possess them just like i possess the jungle, and it's only then that i offer you my sap and fruit so you, too, can possess me for a moment. a timid surrendering that temporarily lures us away from the invisible. now we are visible matter again--unprotected and audacious, but freed from language.

Judging from the look of this, things haven't gotten any better. Neither have they stayed the same. What can I say? I see what's going down. I listen. I go inside and read. I go outside and look around. I forget some of it. The rest seeps in through drawing. In random moments, everything makes sense.

—Rosaire Appel



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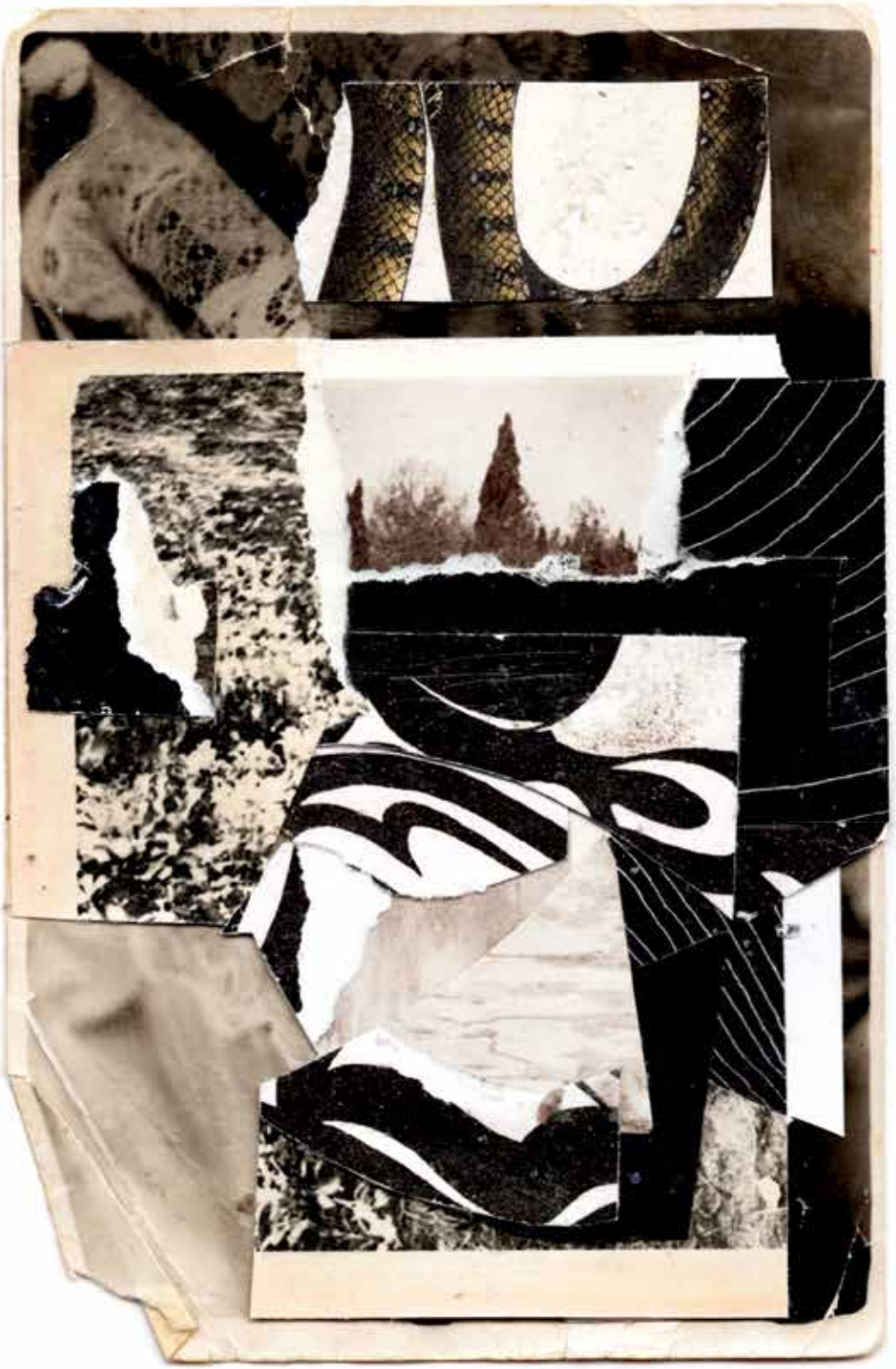

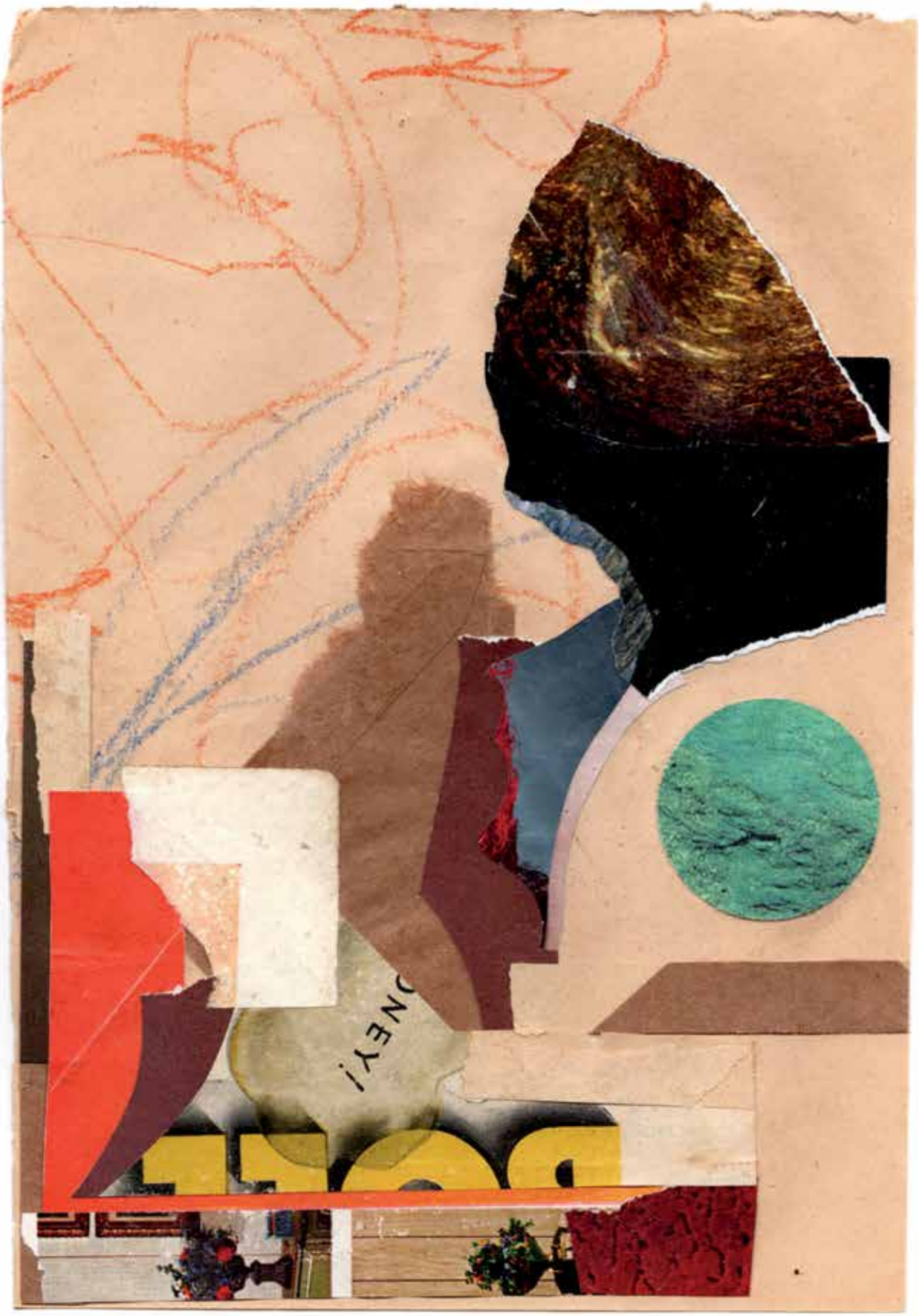
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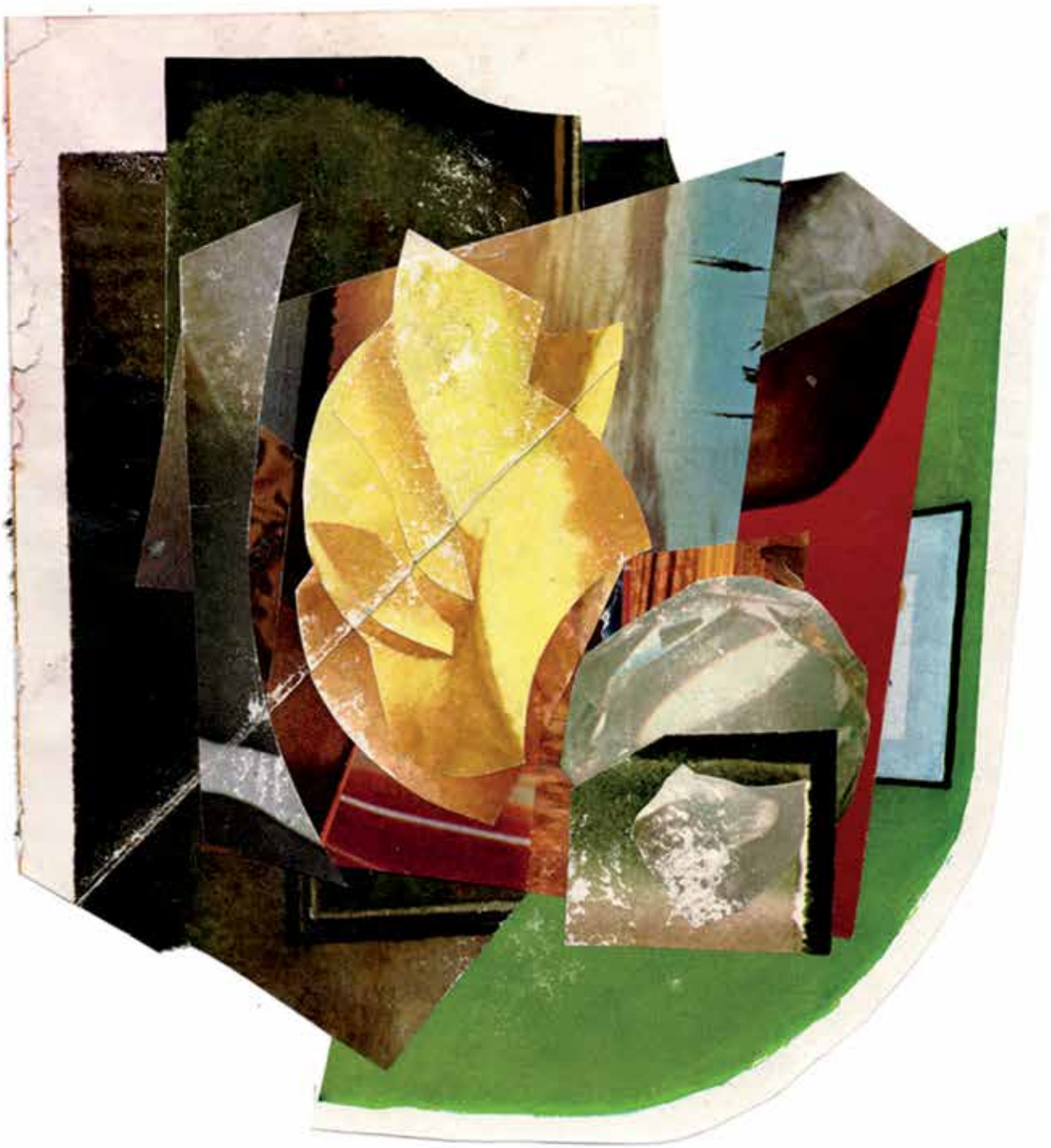
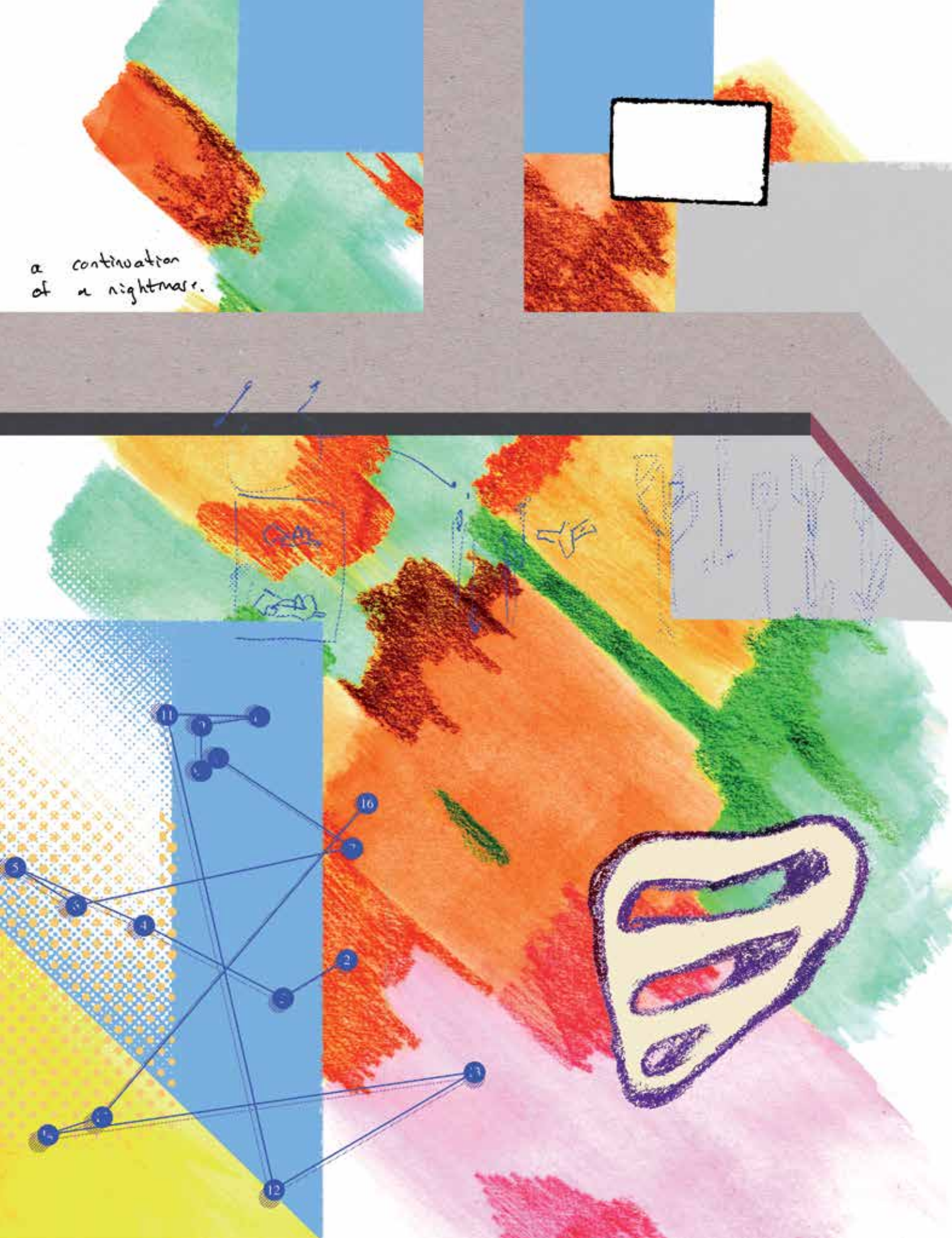
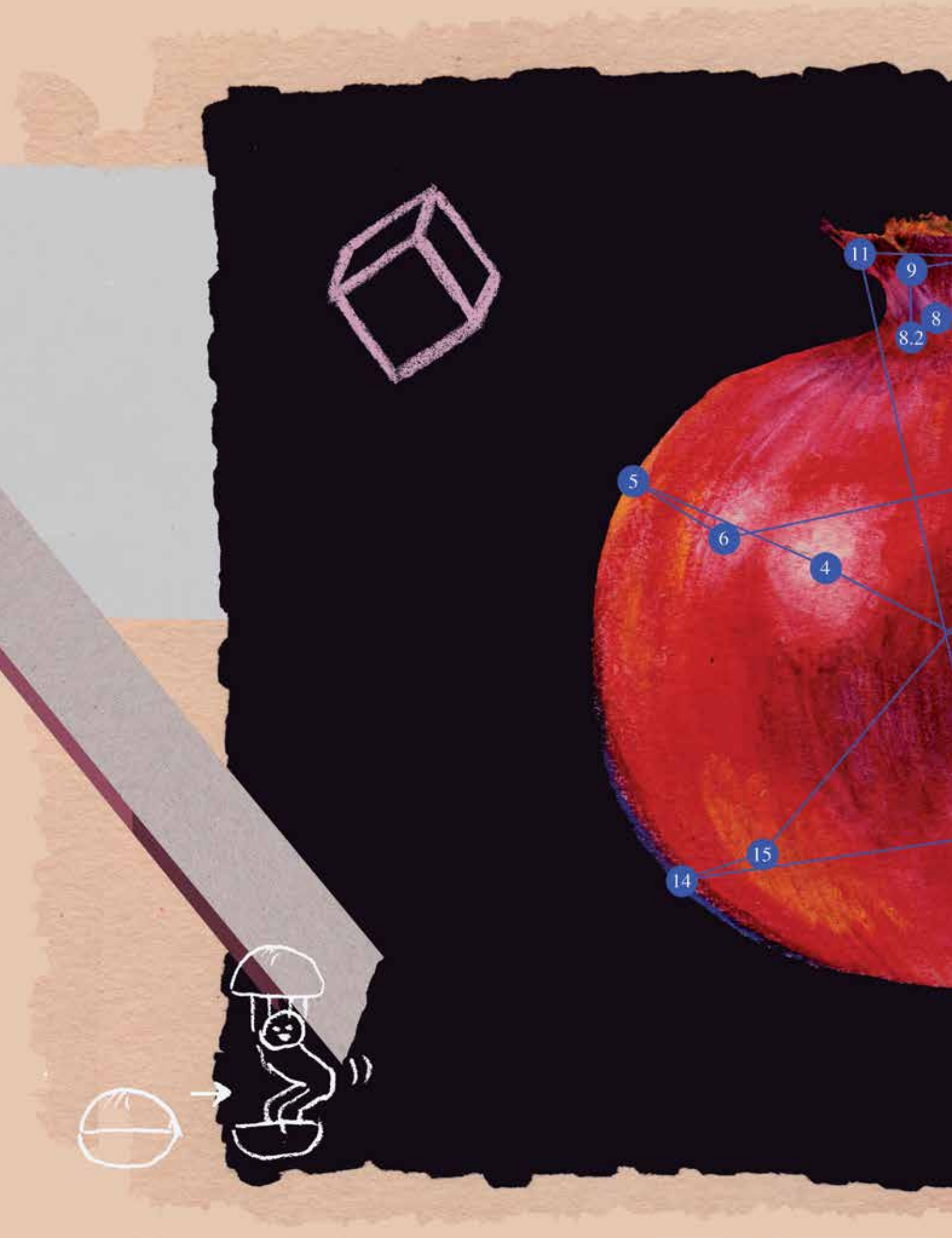


Werther is nothing like other things I've made. I like abstract art, and of course I really like comics, but I've never tried to combine the two before. I mostly make comics for young readers with a clear structure and narrative. Werther does have a sort of narrative (un-narrative?) conveyed through the colours, textures and rhythm (un-rhythm...?) of the pages, but I kinda doubt that it'd be a hit with my usual audience.

This is the first comic I've finished in almost three years. I was starting to think that I'd never be able to draw or create a story again, but I did it! Nothing is impossible, even if it takes some time.

— William Lillstjärna


a continuation
of a nightmare.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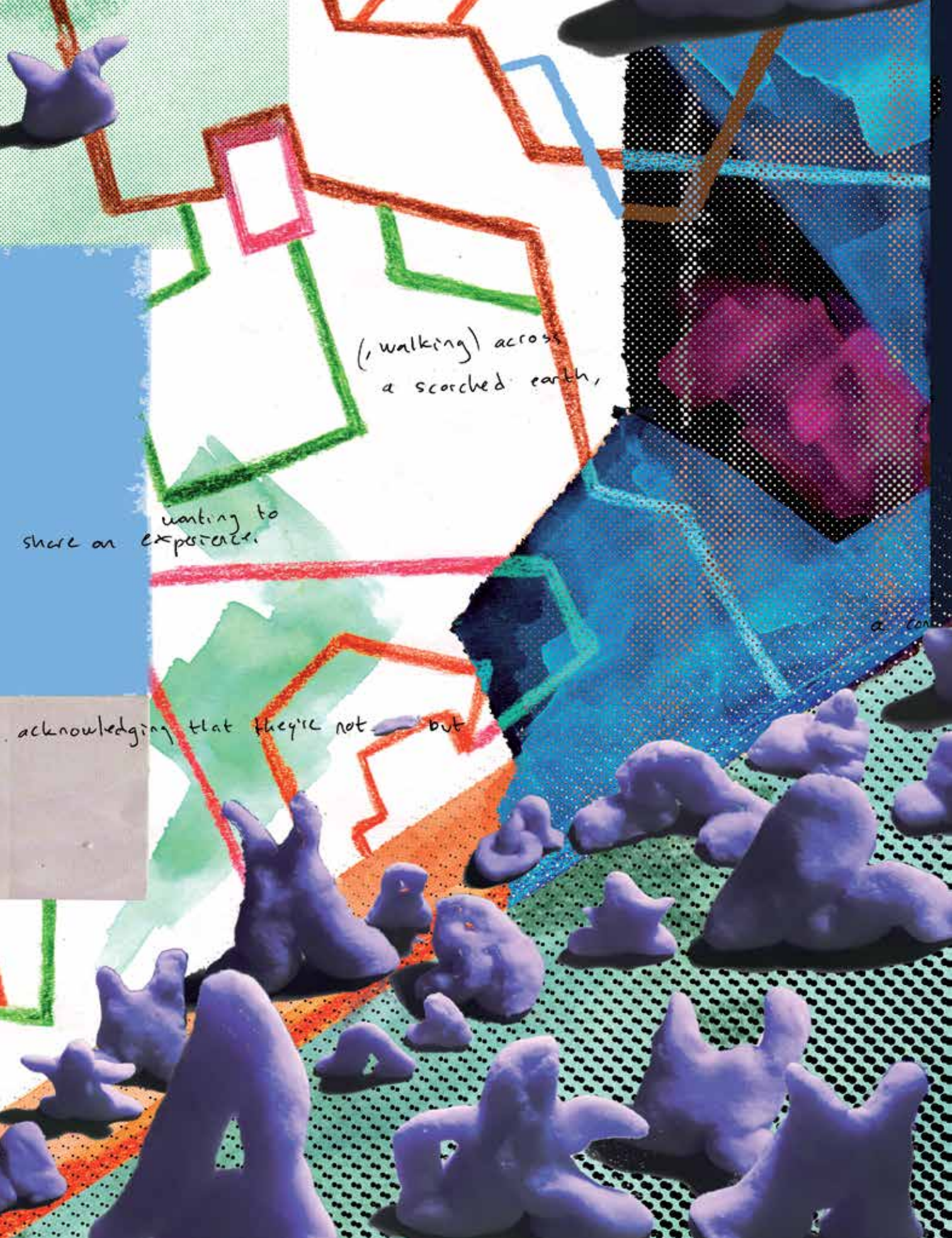
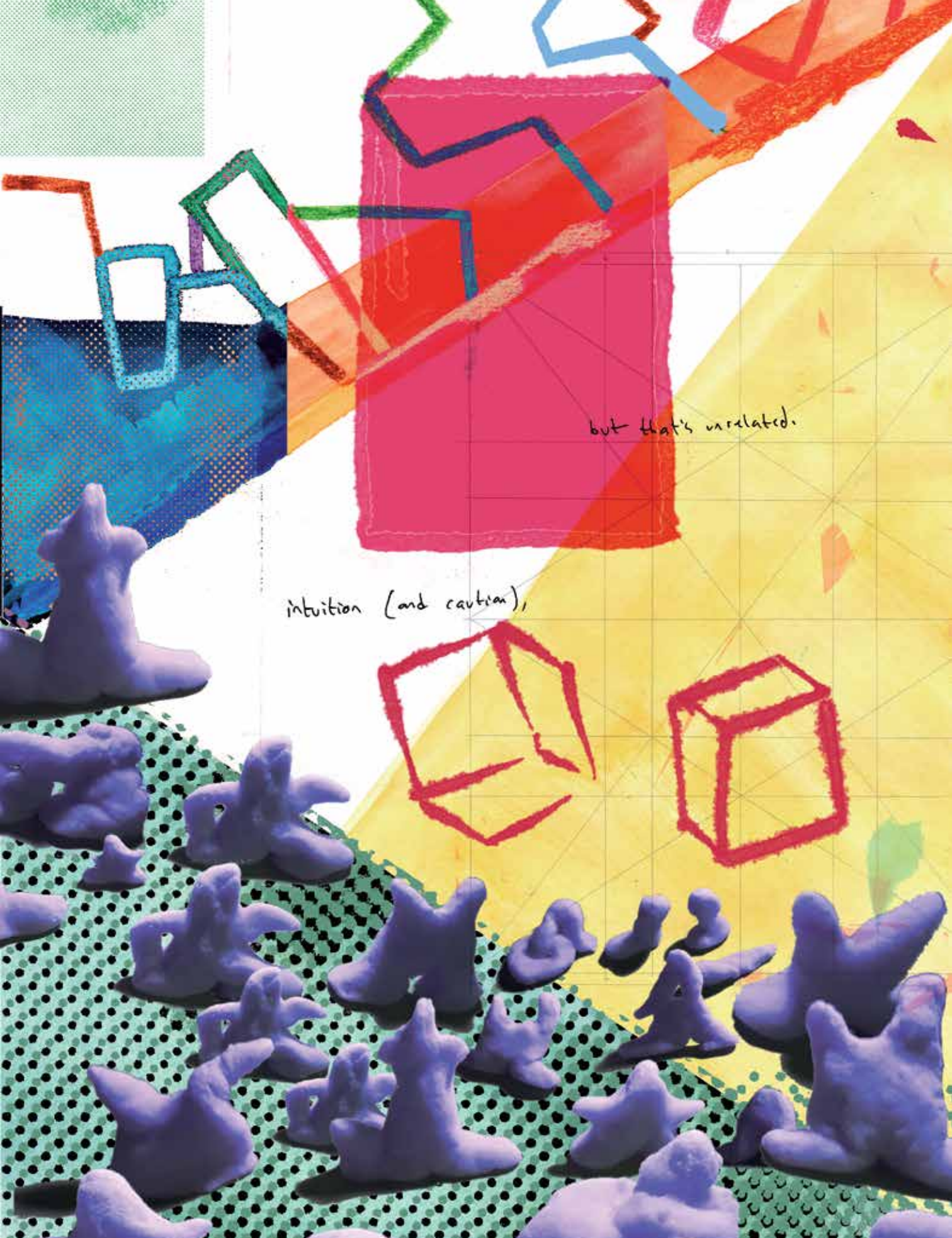
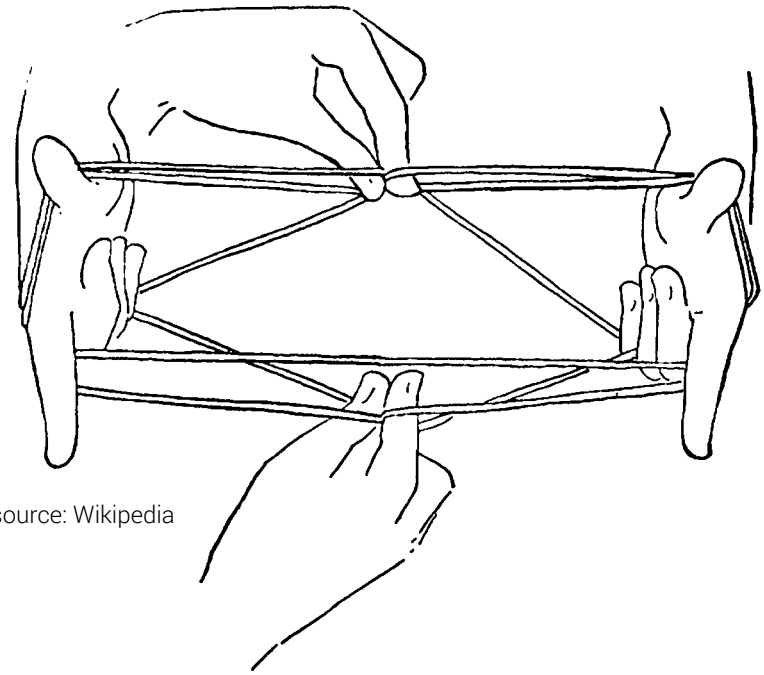

(, walking) across
a scorched earth,
wanting to
share an experience.
acknowledging that they're not ___ but


but that's unrelated.
intuition (and caution),


photosynthesis
is an angel
and science tells
us how it
happened

III. THE MAP AND THE TERRAIN



Cat's Cradle. Image source: Wikipedia

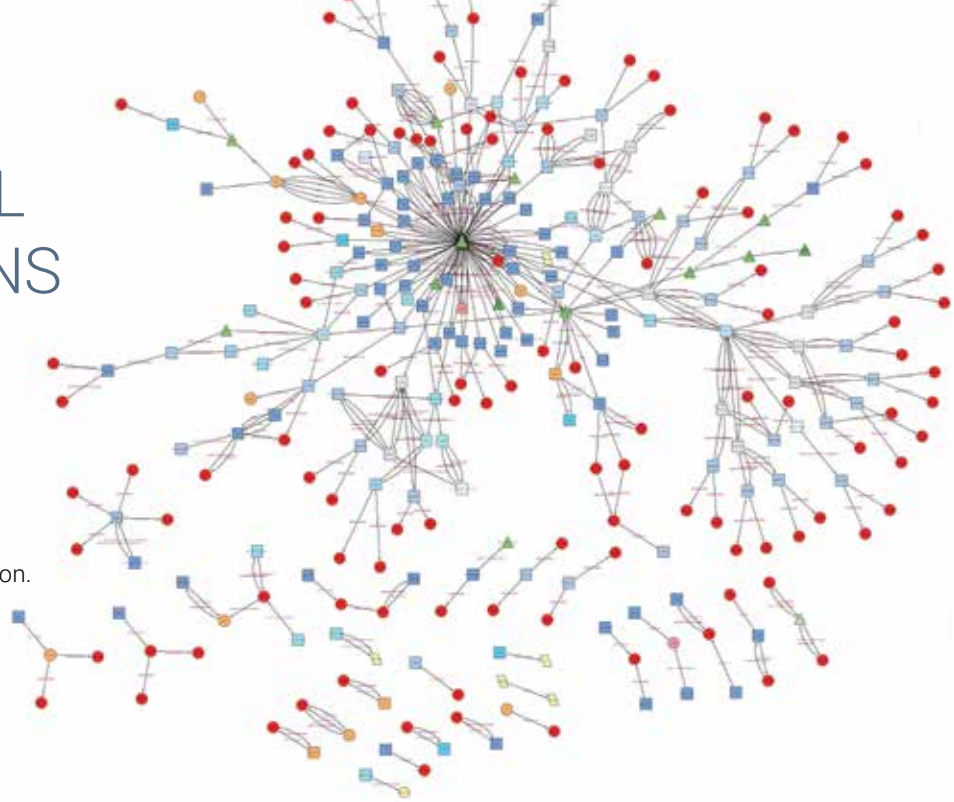
◀ Comics scholar Thierry Groensteen writes that "[a] page of comics is offered at first to a synthetic global vision, but […] demands to be traversed, crossed, glanced at, and analytically deciphered" — effectively taking the guiding factor of text out of the equation, yet he doesn't really take the logical next step: how that decipherment of the page might contradict a linear idiom. However, the Situationist movement adopted an exploratory strategy from Guy Debord, the dérive or drift, which invites unplanned and deliberately disorienting journeys through an urban landscape. The goal is to arrive at new and unexpected locations, both geographic and mental, and seeing the familiar in new contexts, as part of a psycho-geographic practice.

A similar dérive can be accomplished in the pages of a comic book by loitering along the throughways of the liminal spaces, or "gutters" between the panels. Those aren't simple separators between panels, but represent the very structure of comics: If images are the outside of a comic, the spaces in between (applied or only implied) are its inside, where image relations fire like chemical signals along synapses. I propose that we expand Groensteen's traversal of the page to include the entirety of a multi-page work, an anthology like the present volume, or the corpus of an artist.

By focusing on the underlying in-between structure rather than primarily on the image content, the comic book may be seen as a map that is simultaneously the terrain, a psychogeographic atlas. This strategy defies linear sequence in favour of a rhizomatic, multiple network. The rhizome is suggested as a mode of knowledge by philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, in , described as "resist[ing] chronology and organization, instead favoring a nomadic system of growth and propagation". A description we can apply to uncomics as well.

In her book, Staying with the Trouble, Donna Haraway elaborates on the rhizome concept to emphasize collaborative process across disciplines, practices; even species. She specifically uses string figures like cat's cradles as another mental model of dynamic, knotted and complex networks to illustrate her thinking. These tangled, connective models and, by extension, multilinear comics are a more apt visualization of our thought processes, and particularly creative thought, than the string of pearls suggested by the running text or filmstrip idioms of comics.

IV. VISUAL RELATIONS



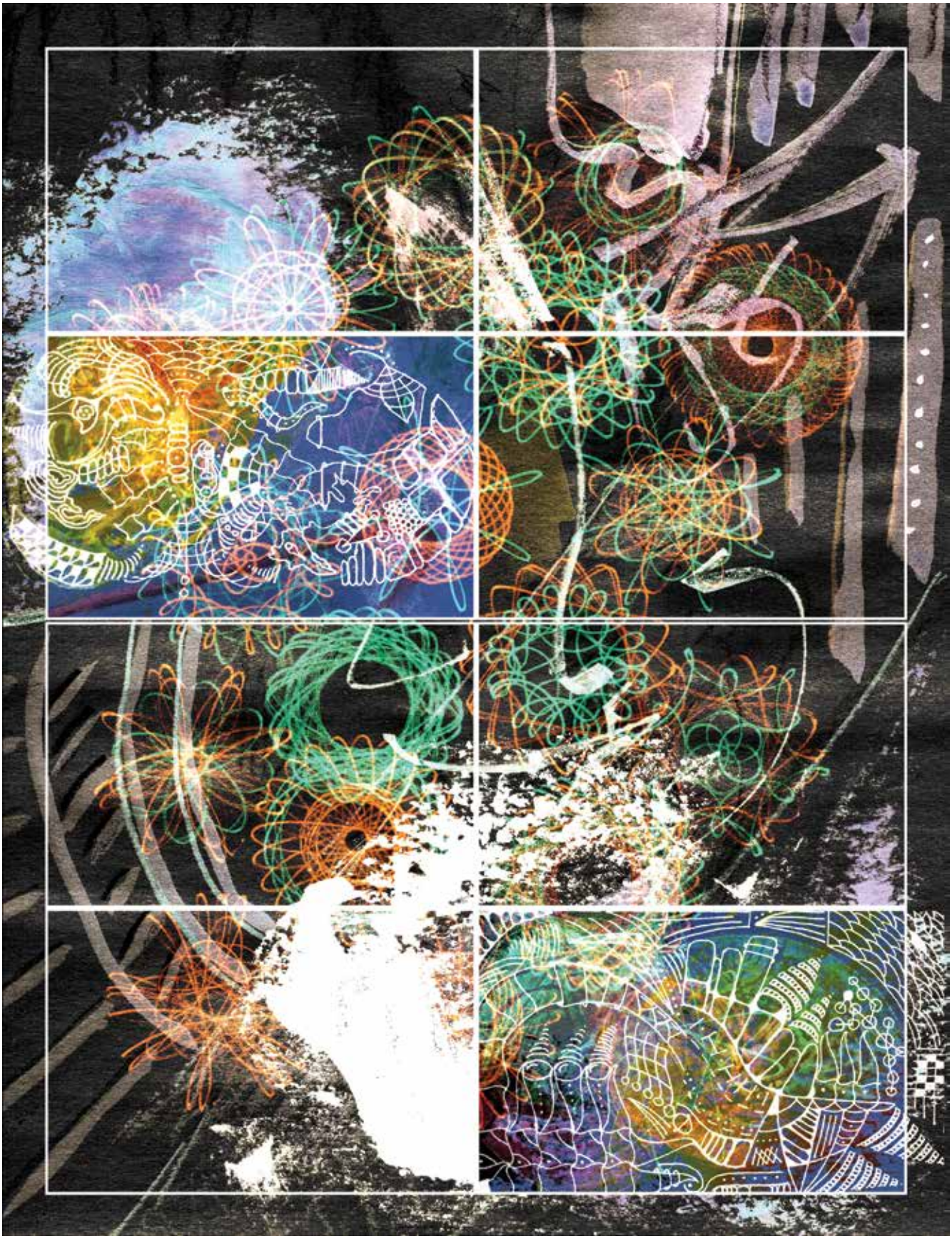
Nodal network visualization.
© PR Curtis

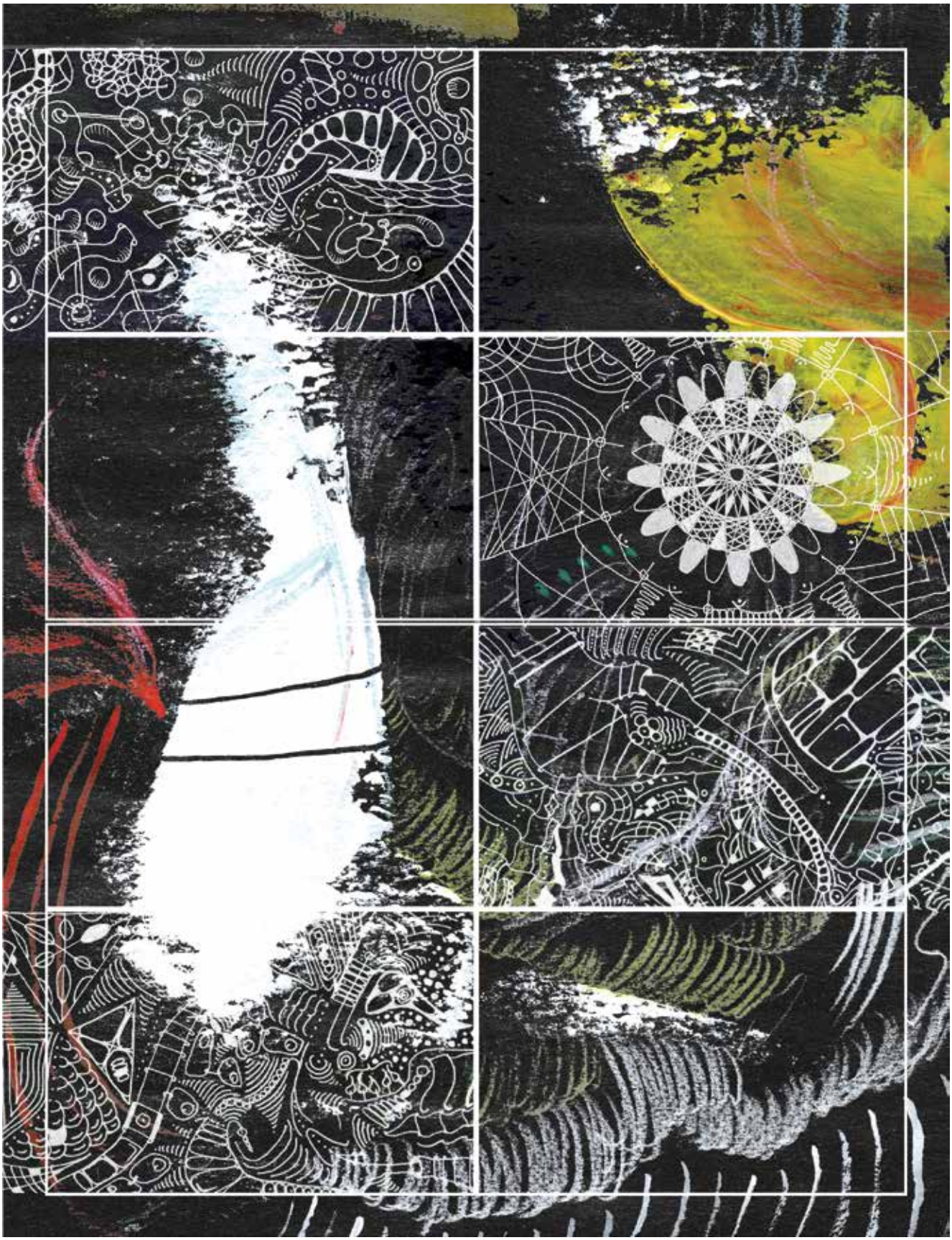
If the above appears to deconstruct comics to the point of incoherence, it is only on the micro scale of so-called "sequential narrative", which at this point in the argument we can only view as an artificial restriction on the wider art form of (un)comics. The ticking heart of uncomics, even when the layers of superfluous tissue are peeled away, are the relations between images; whether adjacent or remote. To supplement the Situationist drift through the structural byways of an uncomic, the concept of visual analogy can direct non-linear leaps across the archive of images contained in, say, a graphic novel, photo book, or online image search.

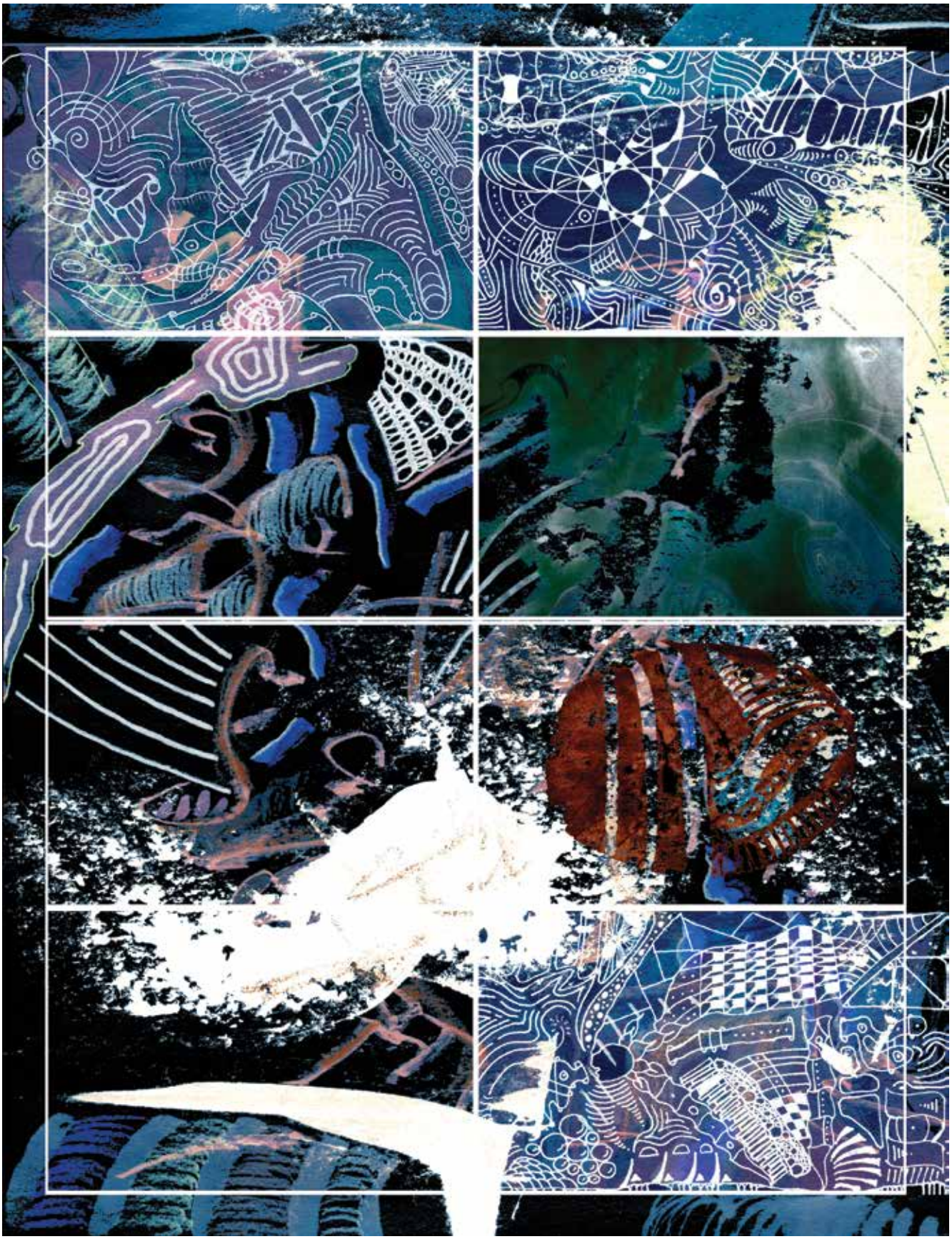
"Visual analogy" was proposed by Barbara Stafford in her 1999 book of the same title, as a cognitive mechanism similar to pattern recognition, which enables associative cross-references between images. Stafford's subject is art history, but she identifies analogy as a 21st century substitute for the dominant mode of allegory – what we may think of as "story" or narrative. In the context of uncomics, it means exactly what it sounds like — that similarity in appearance (colour/shape/texture) between panels or panel constellations guides a reader through abstract or otherwise ambiguous comics.

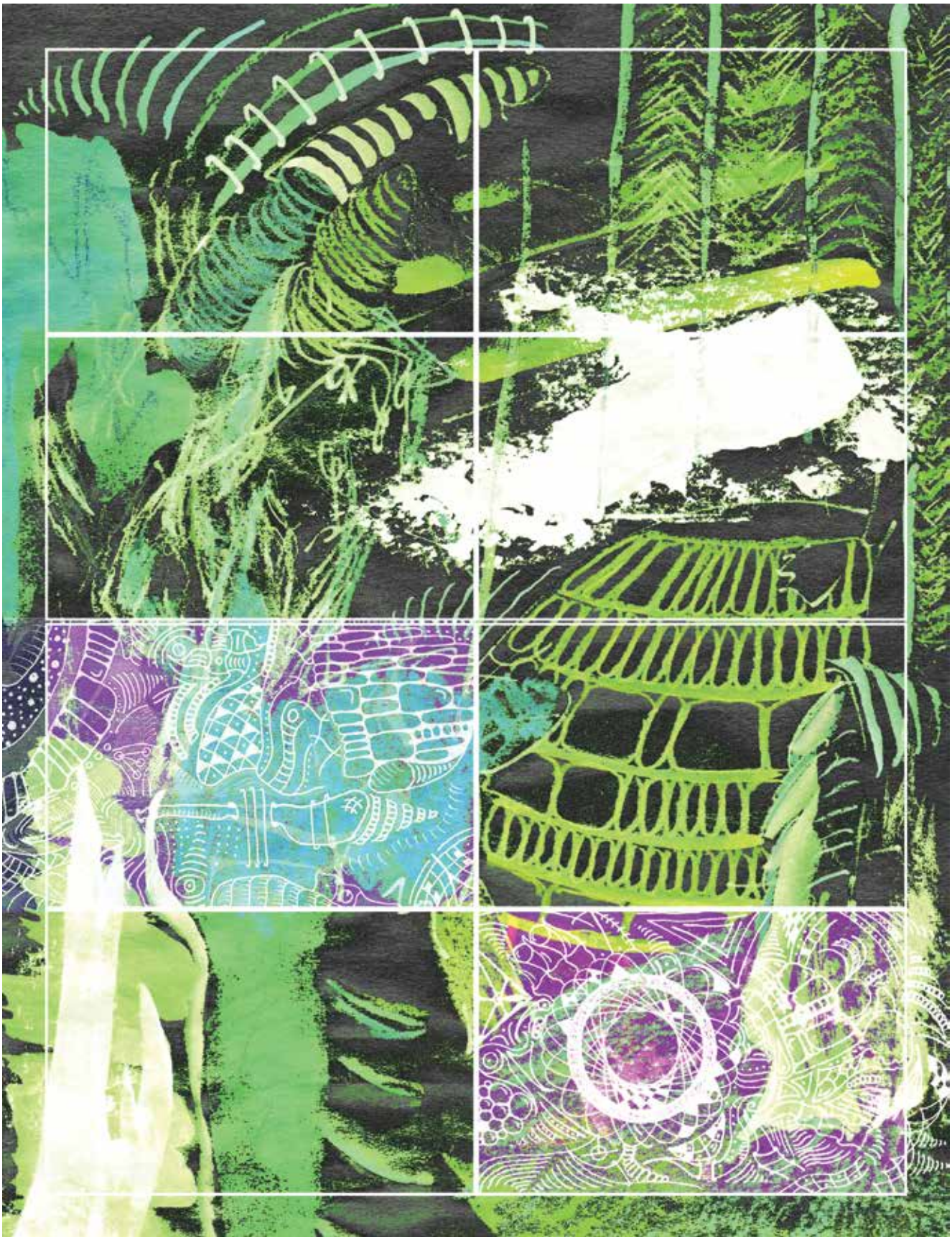
Such analogous association can apply to automatic recognition, like hearing one's name being called across a noisy room; or the intentional authorial use of visual leitmotifs throughout one or several artworks, orchestrating the reader's passage through an added substructure of the uncomics in-between. We can think of either as visual, cognitive hyperlinks that interrelate in several directions across an artwork, series of artworks, or curated constellation of such.

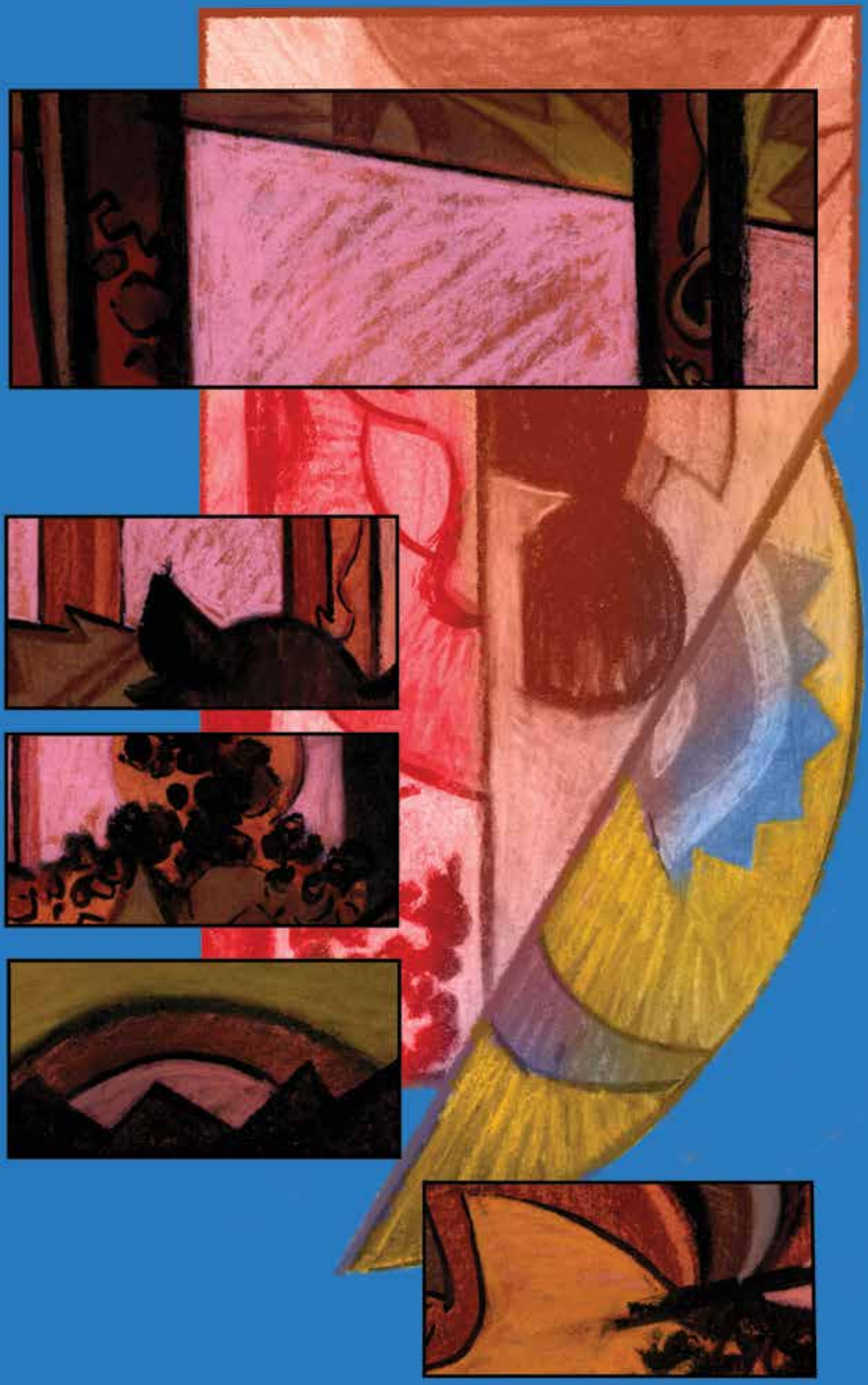
This also suggests that any associative navigation through multicursal, open structures positions the reader as co-creator, rather than a passive spectator. The comics becomes an interactive architecture that we engage with both reflexively and intellectually, like a Situationist getting purposefully lost in an urban landscape. Like two or more players taking turn tangling a cat's cradle. The author cedes some control in the process, but remains a co-pilot — both play off the work from different directions, pulling at its strings to make new configurations. ▶

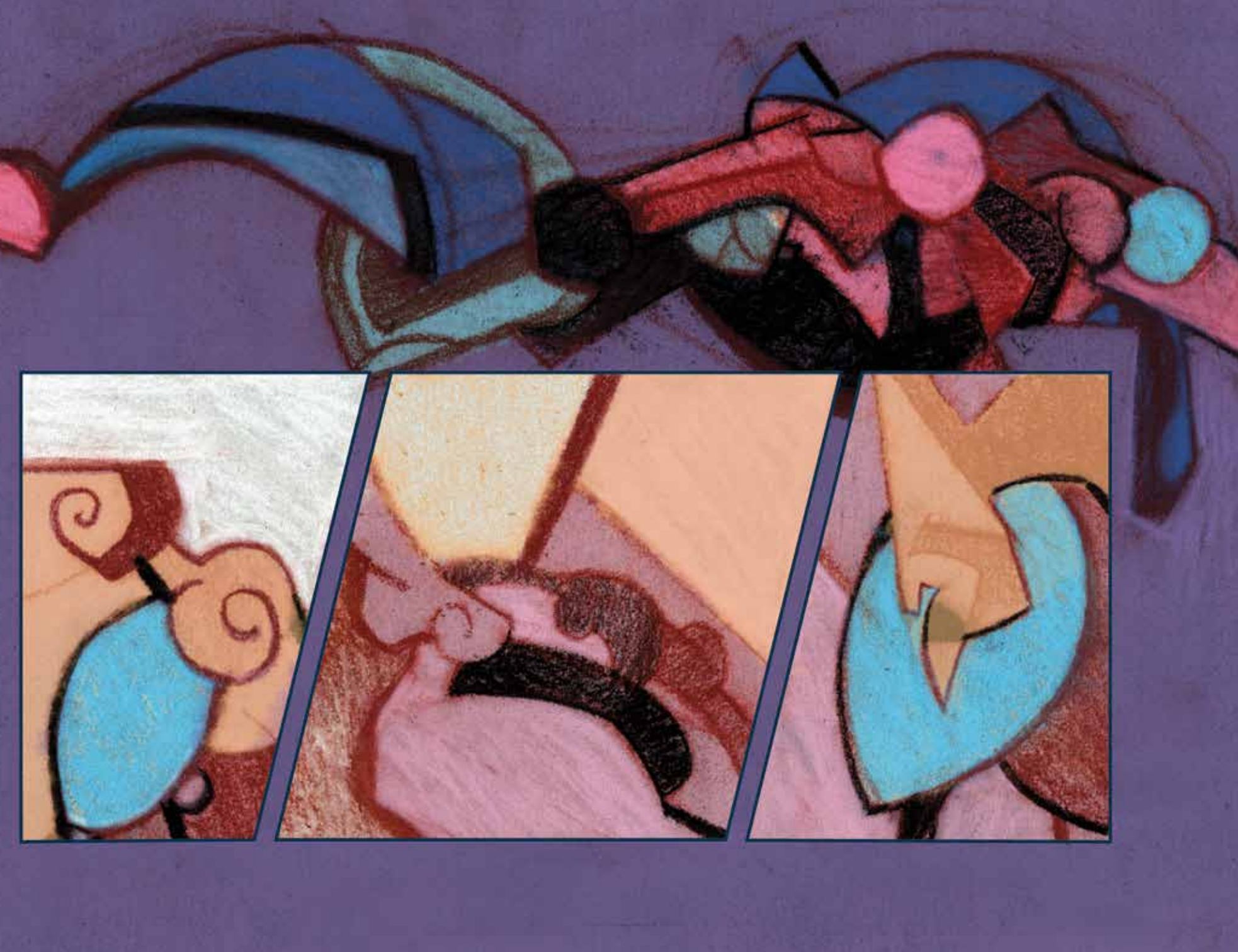


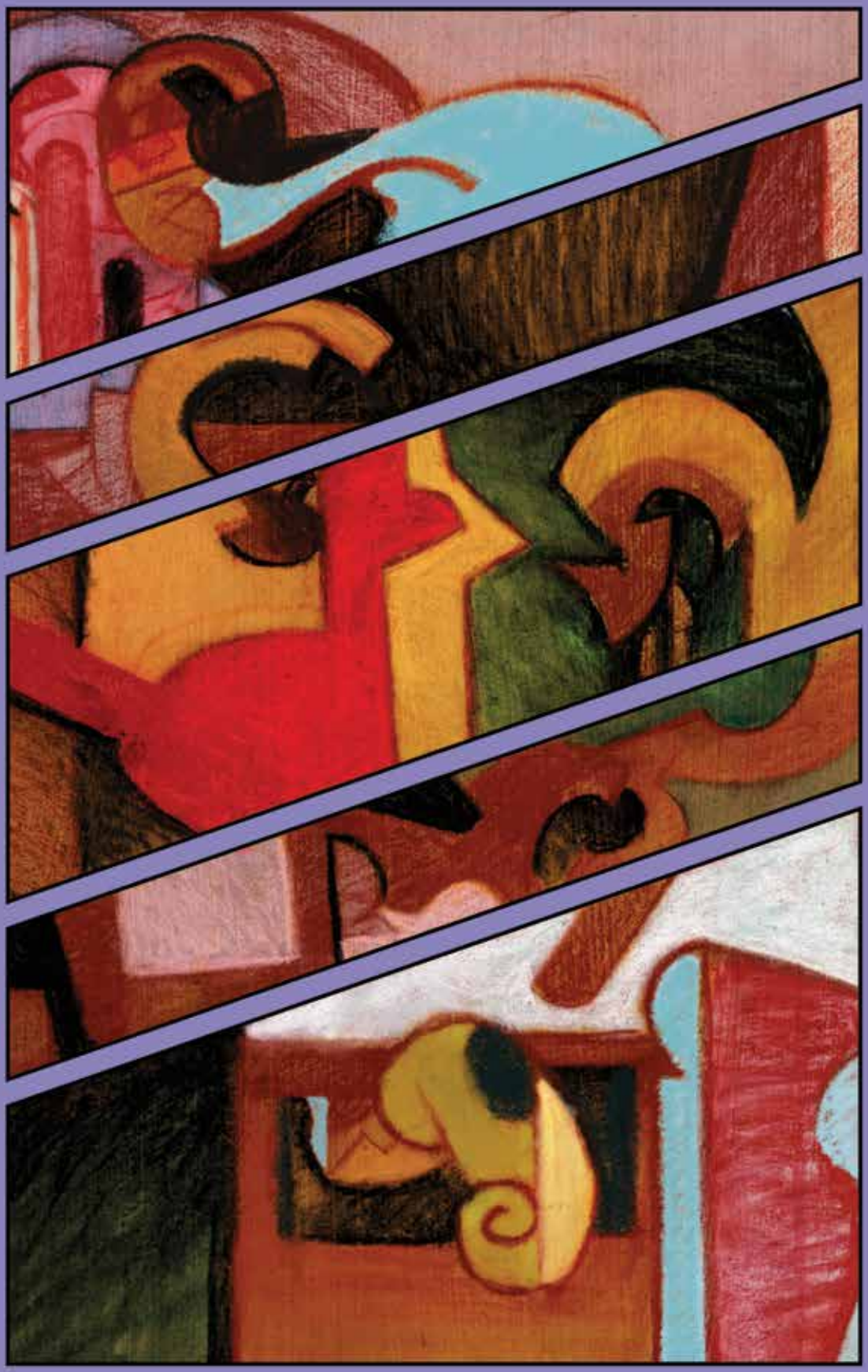


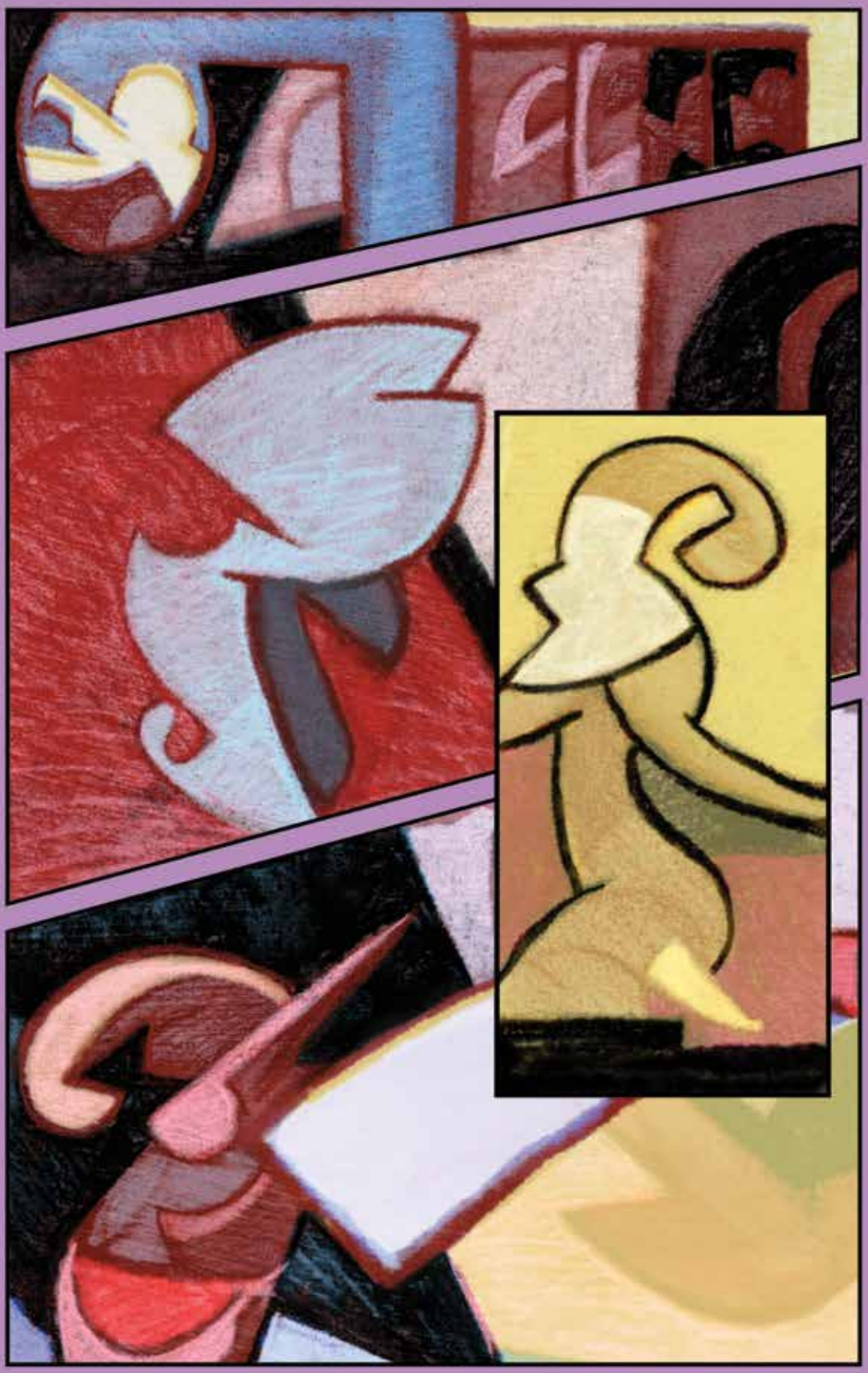




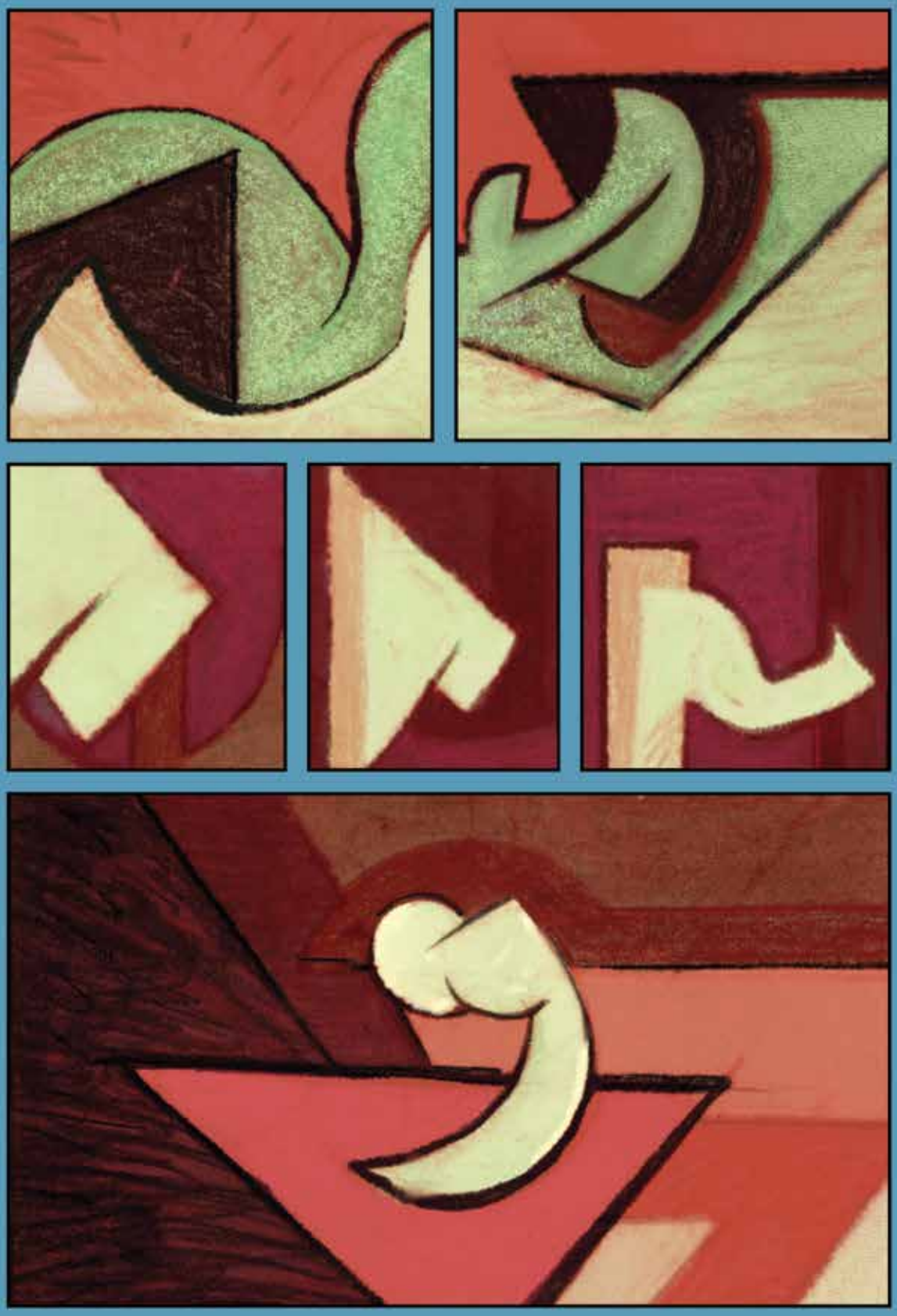


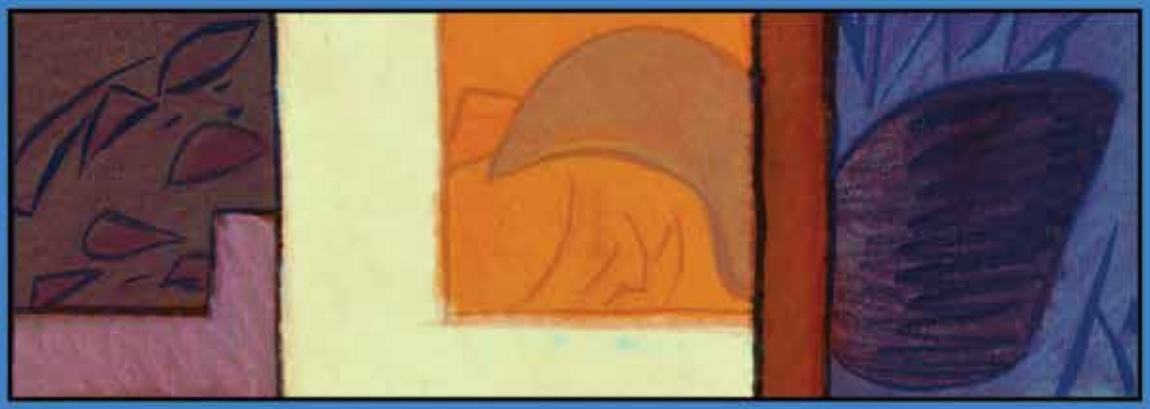


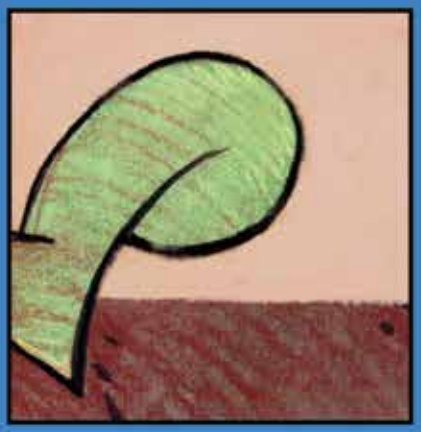


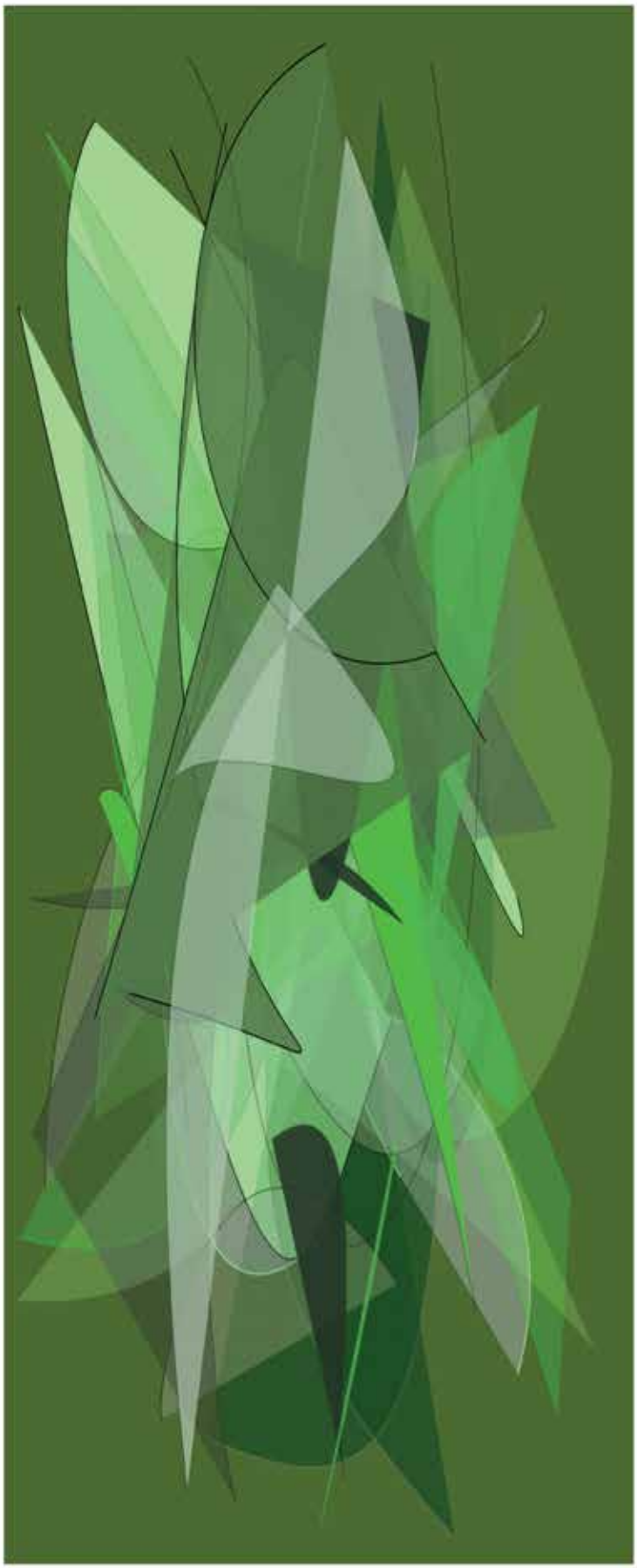


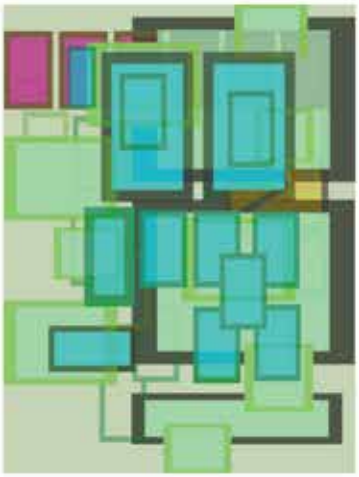


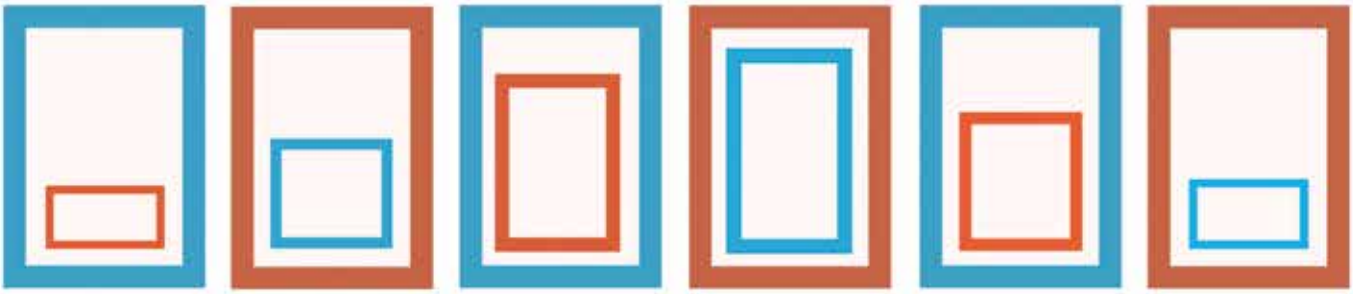



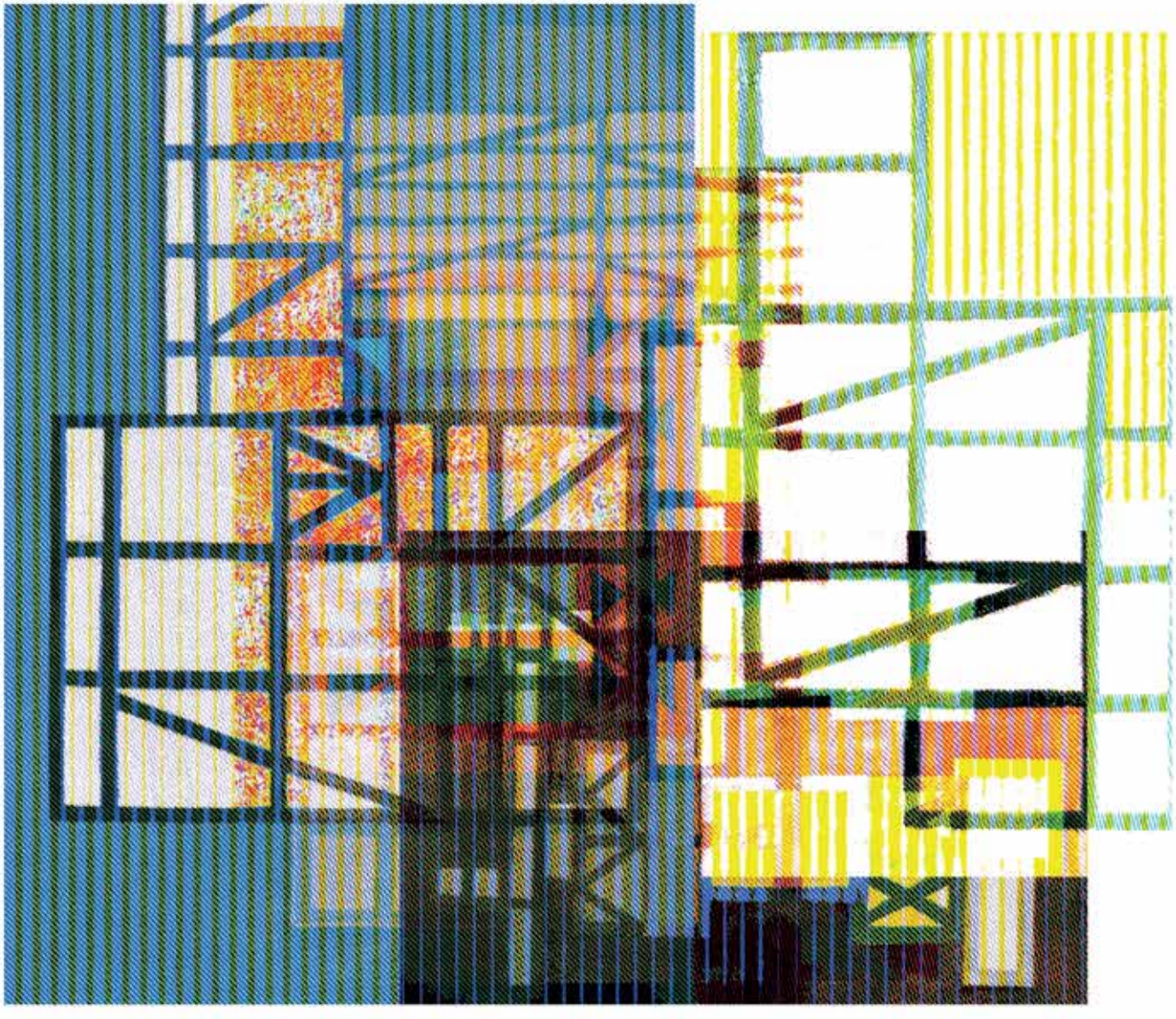


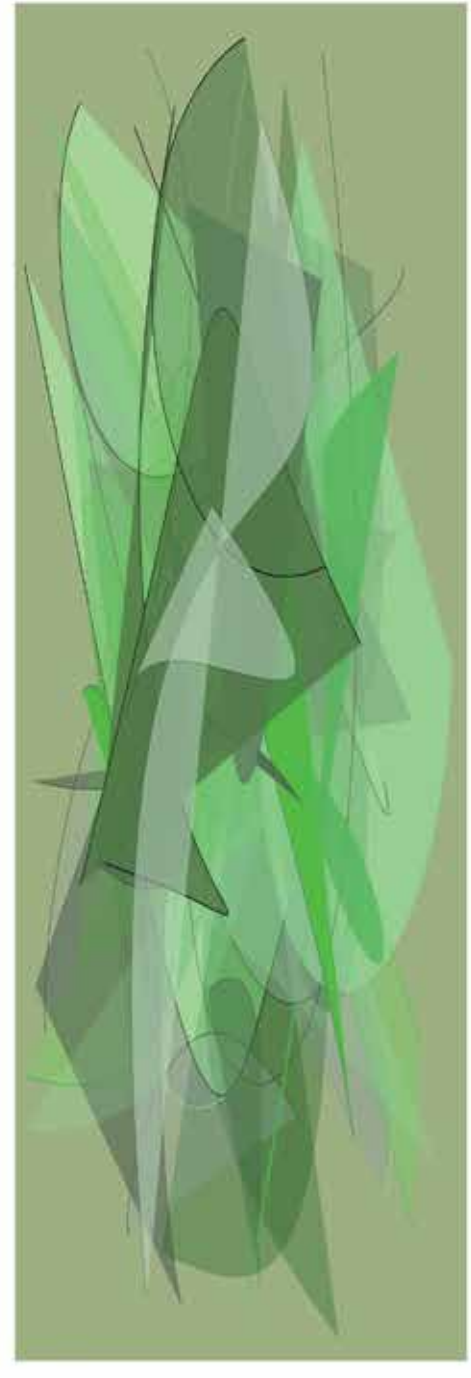


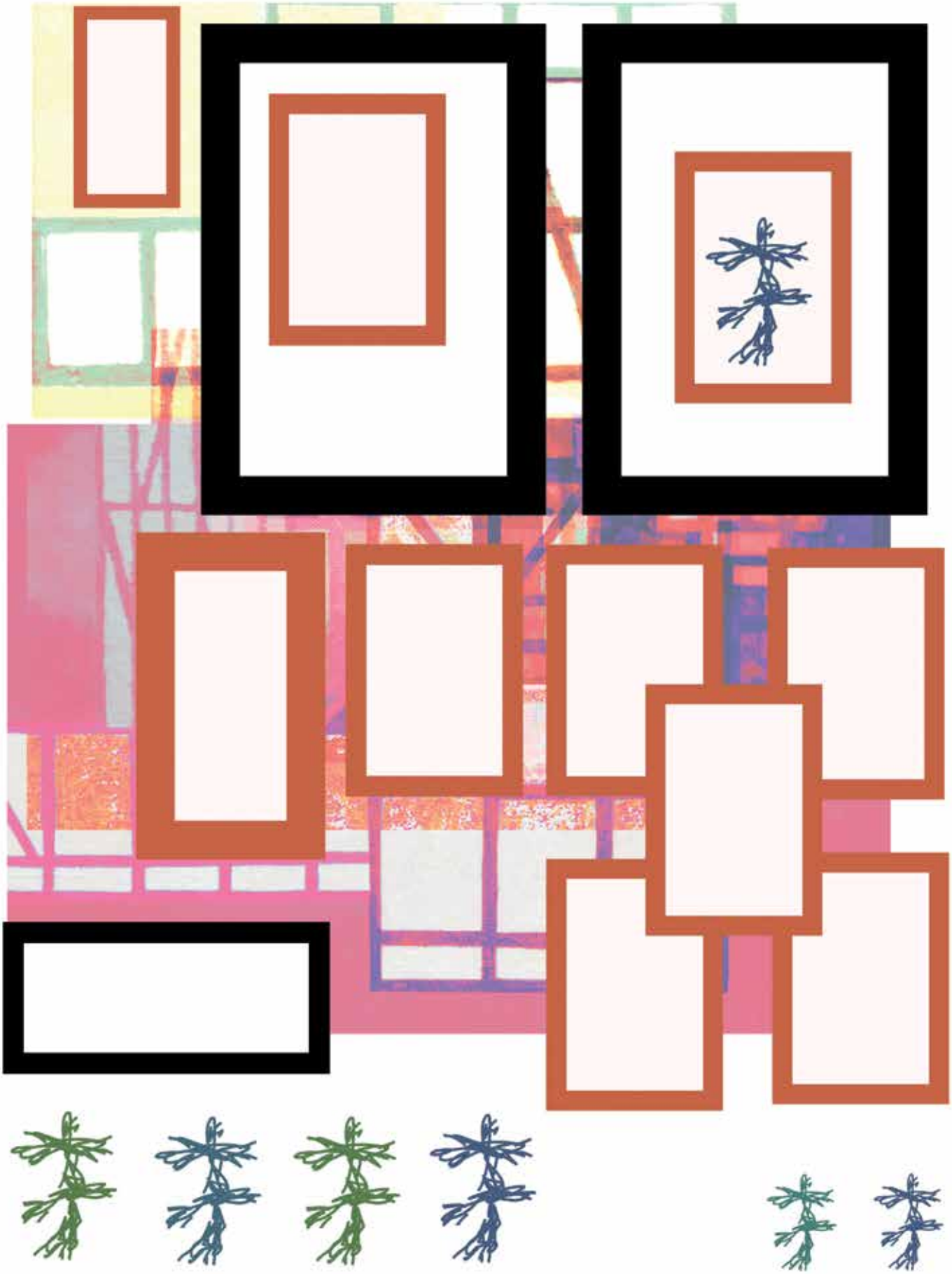


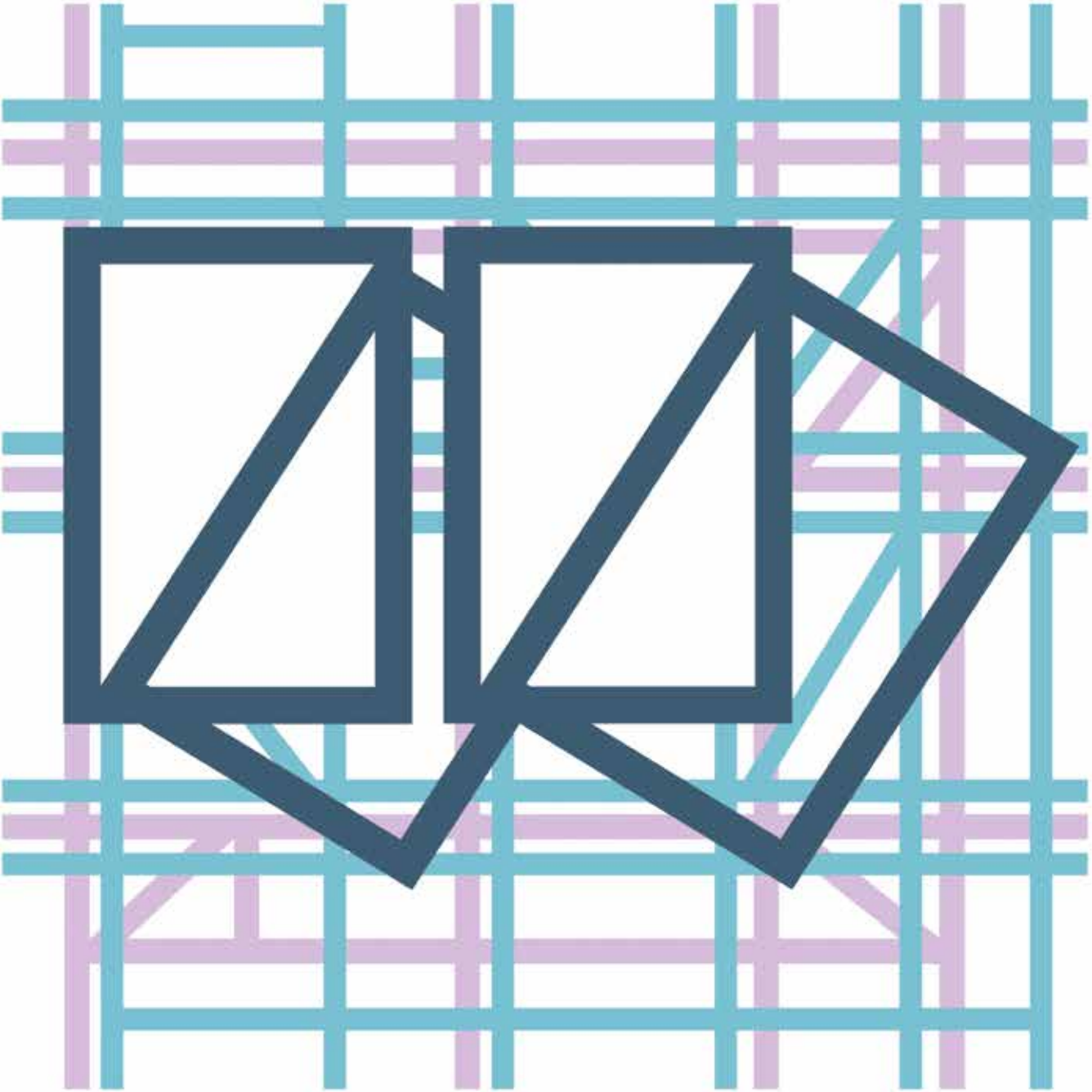


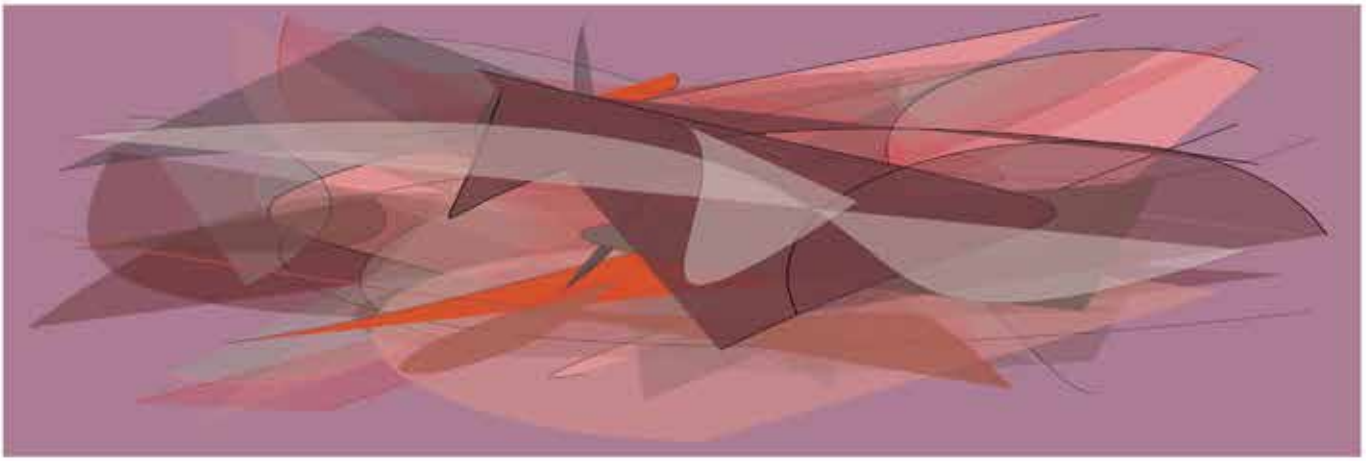


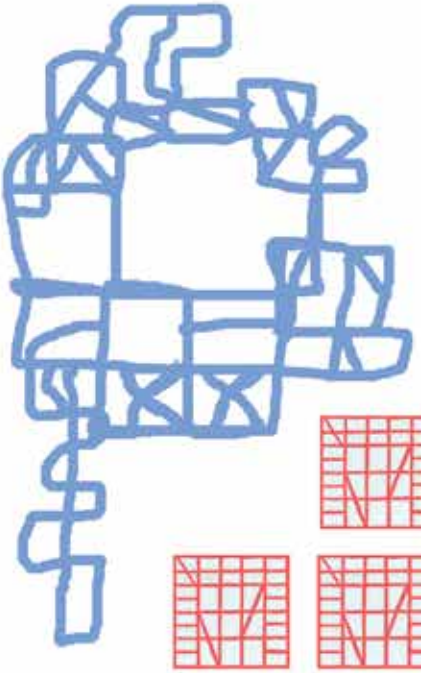


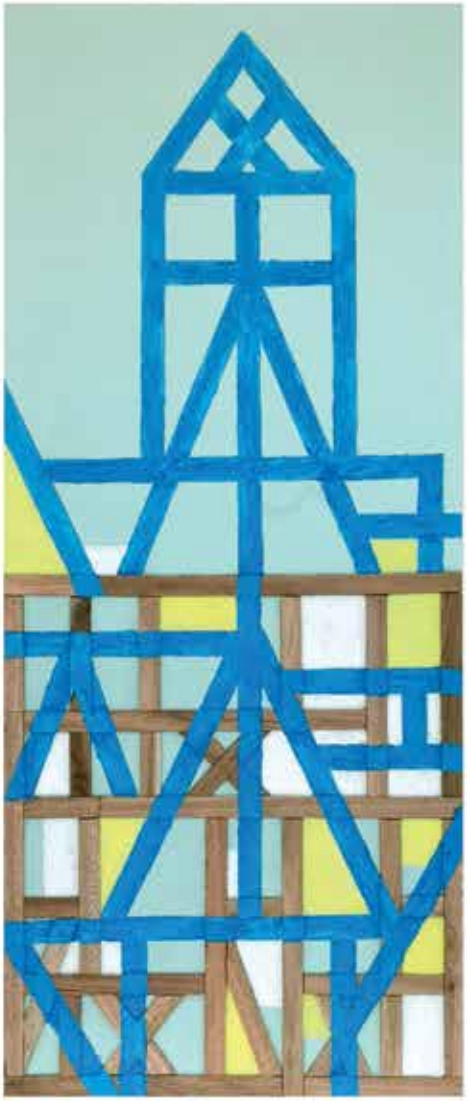


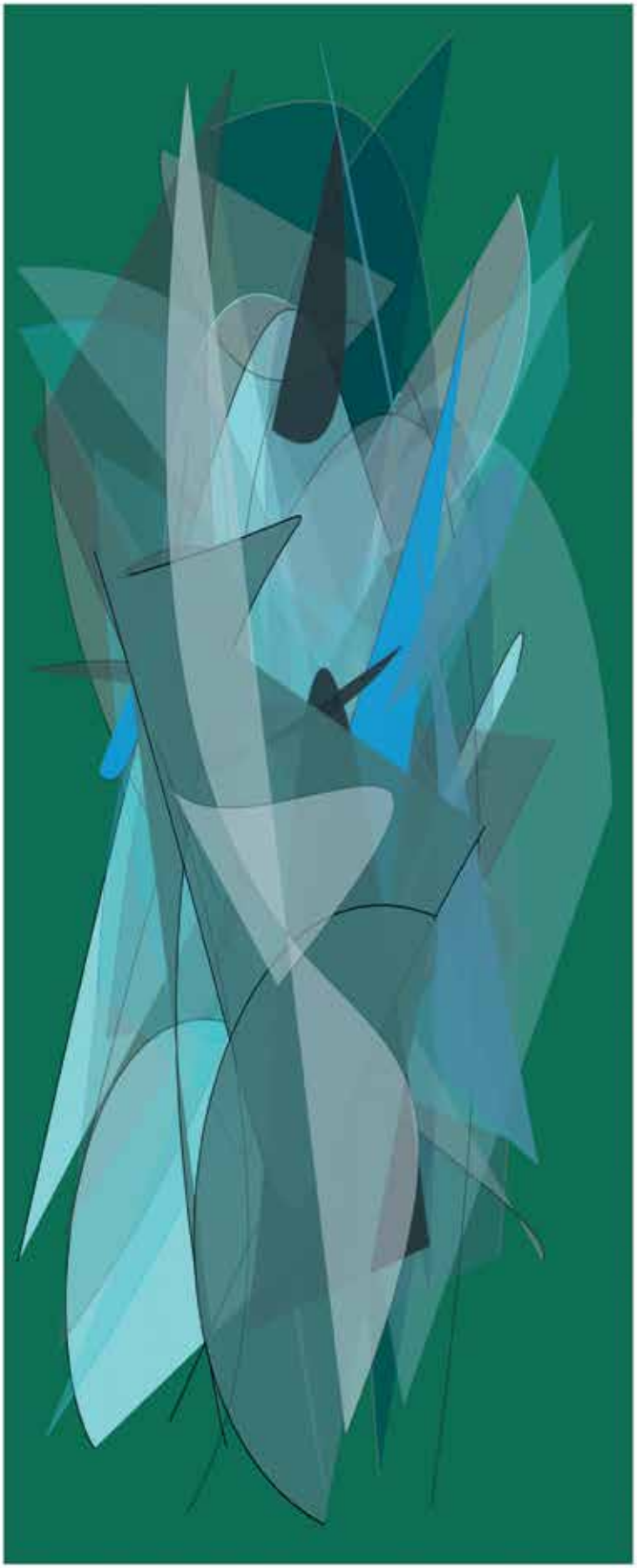


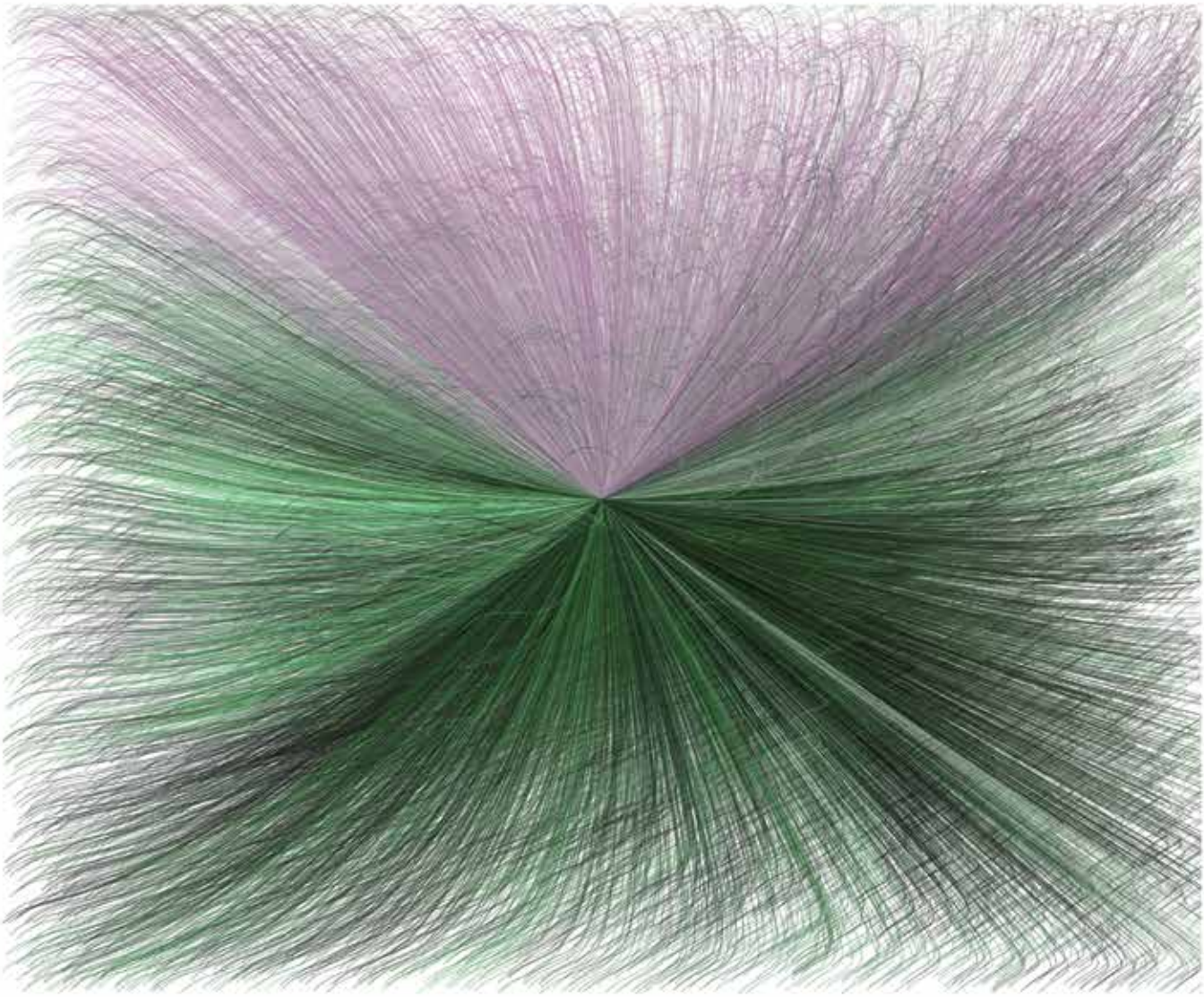


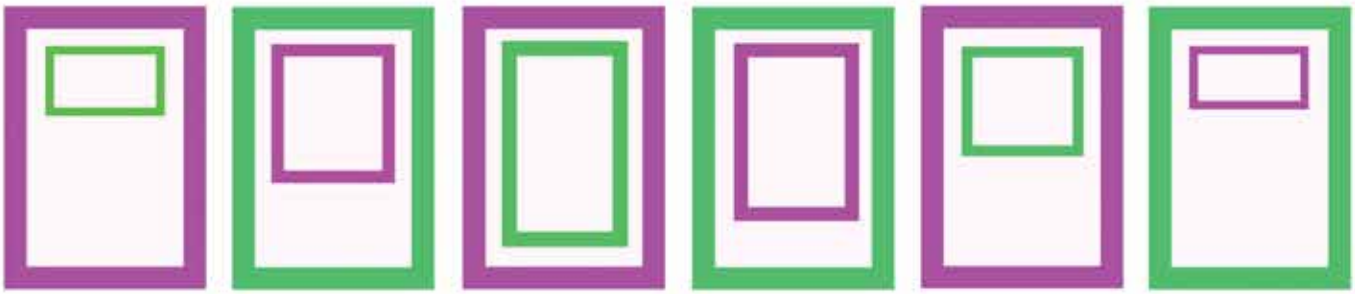


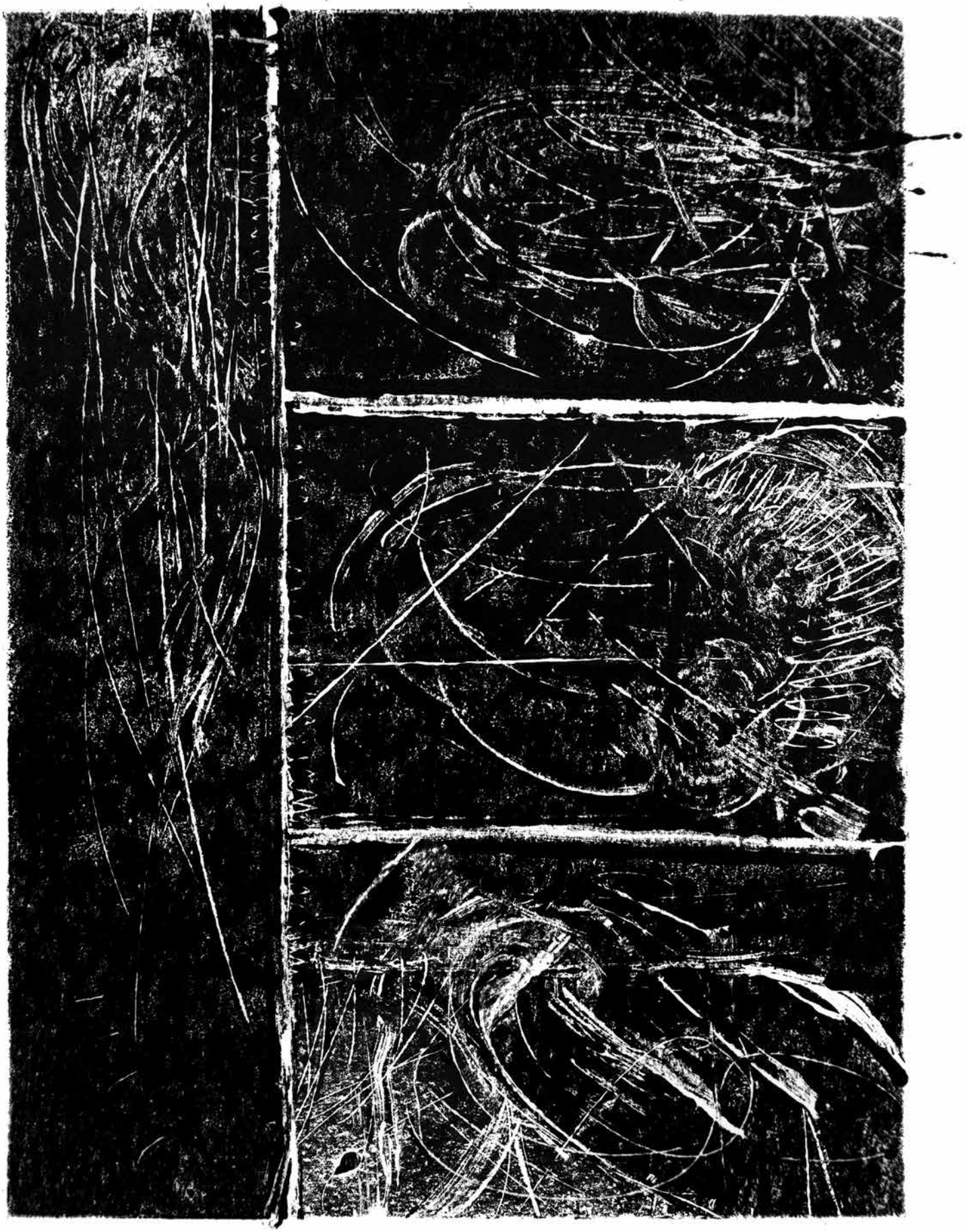


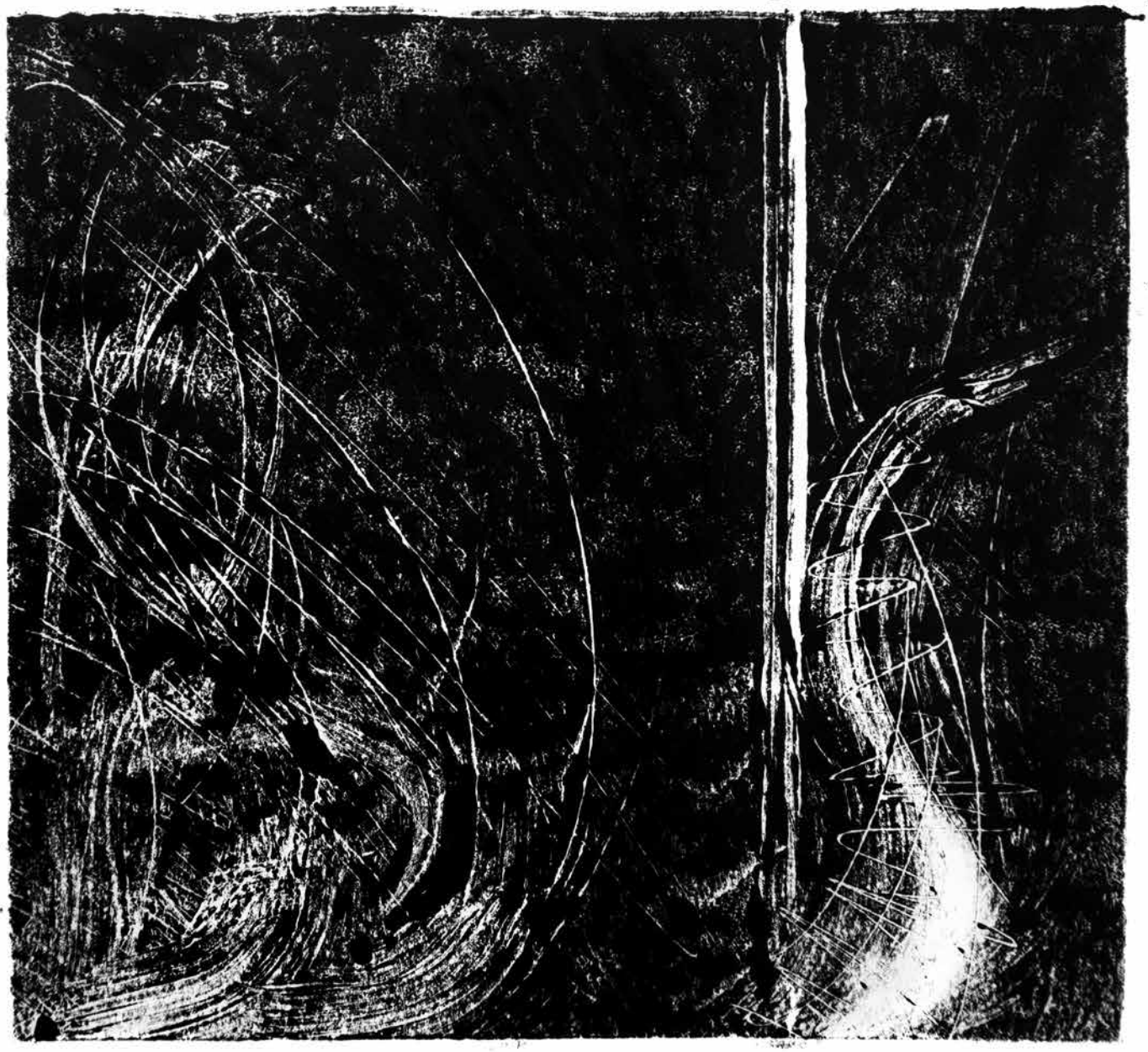


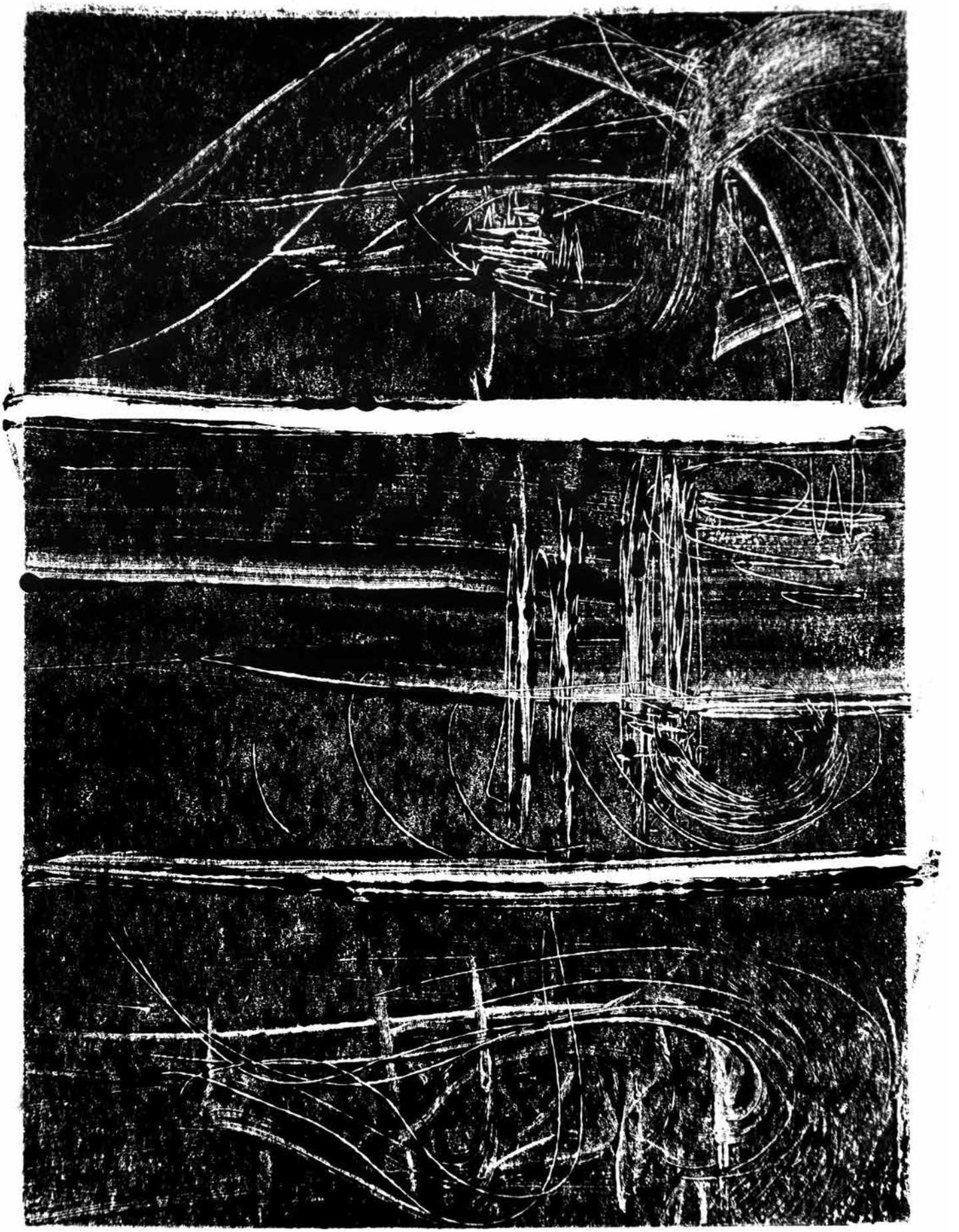


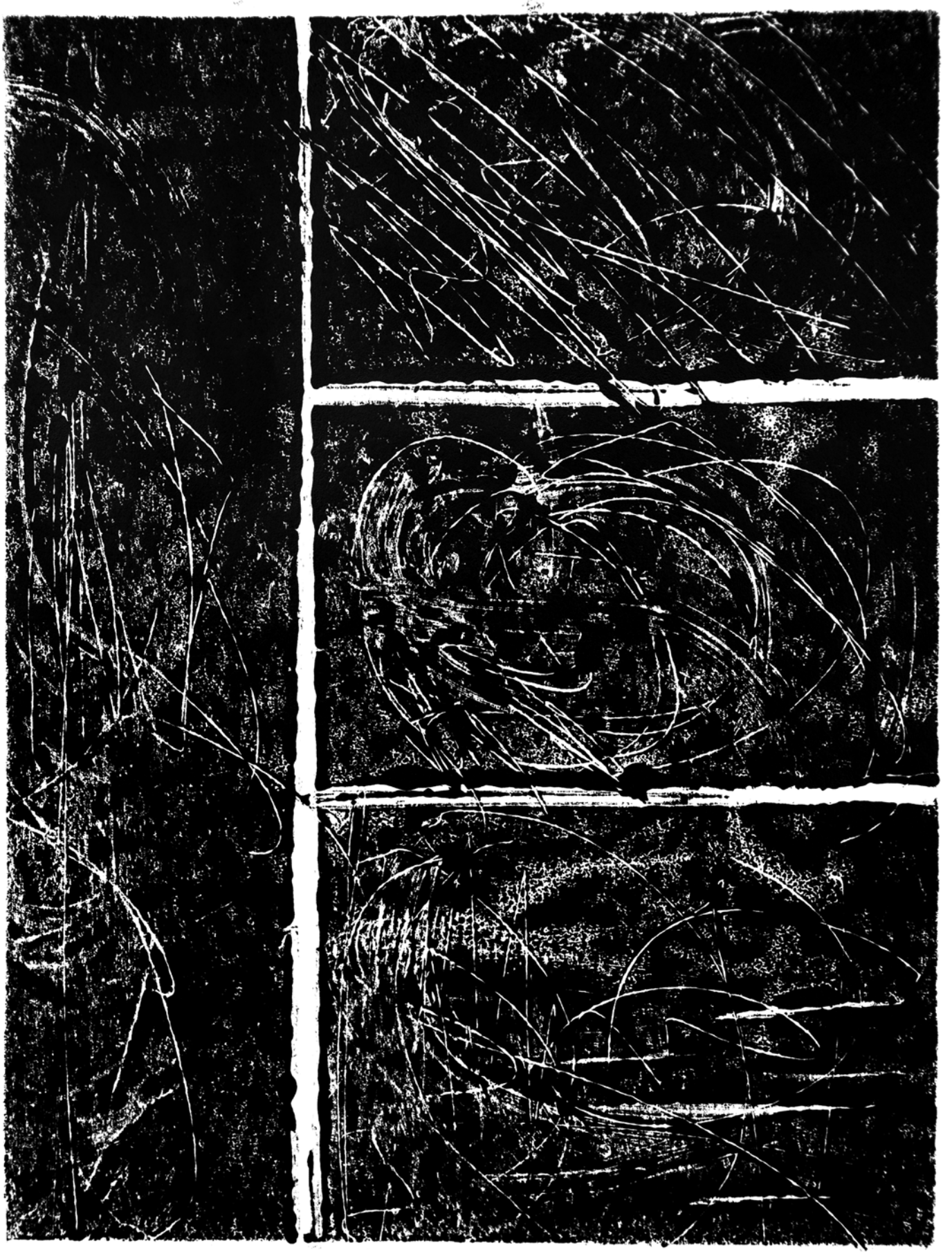


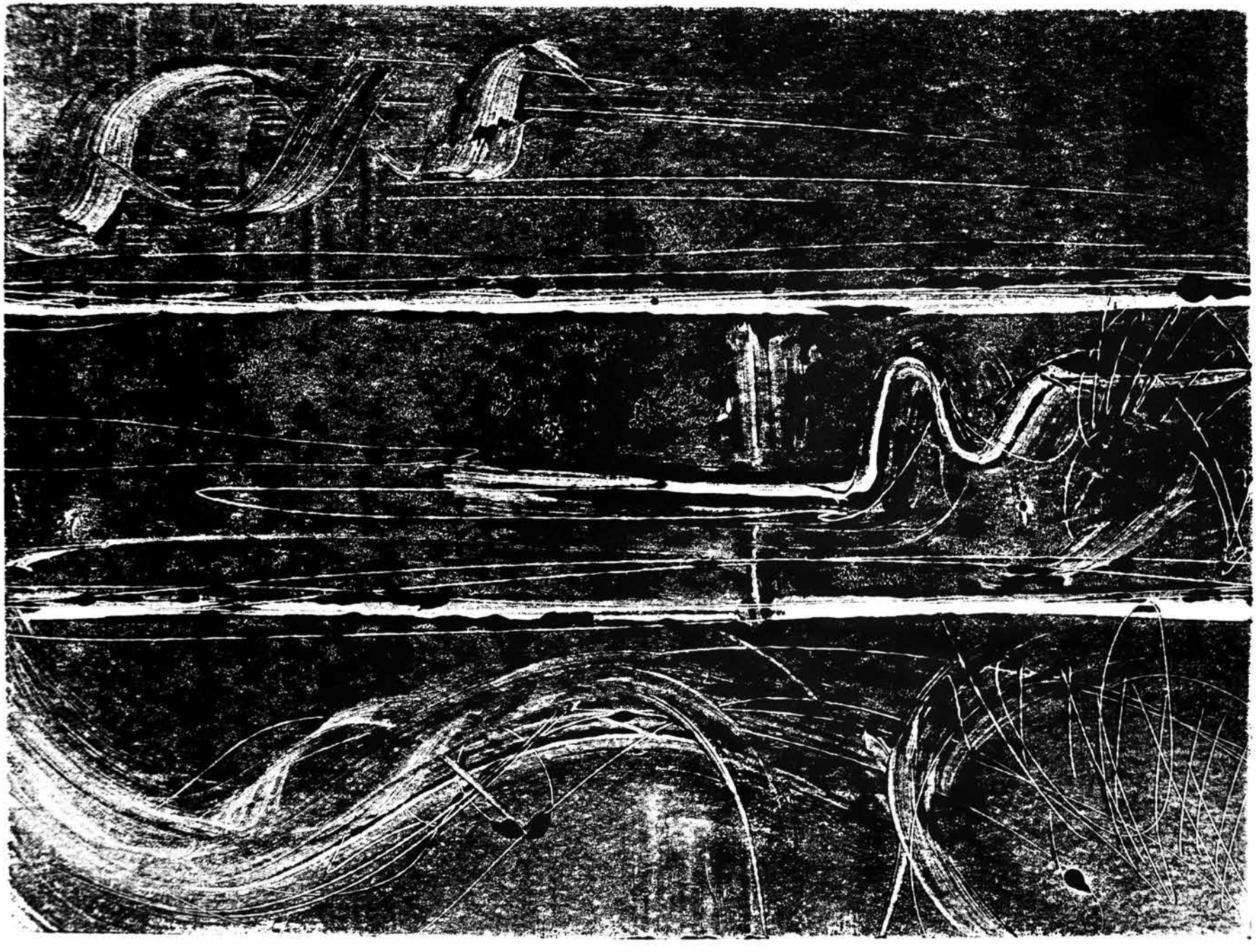


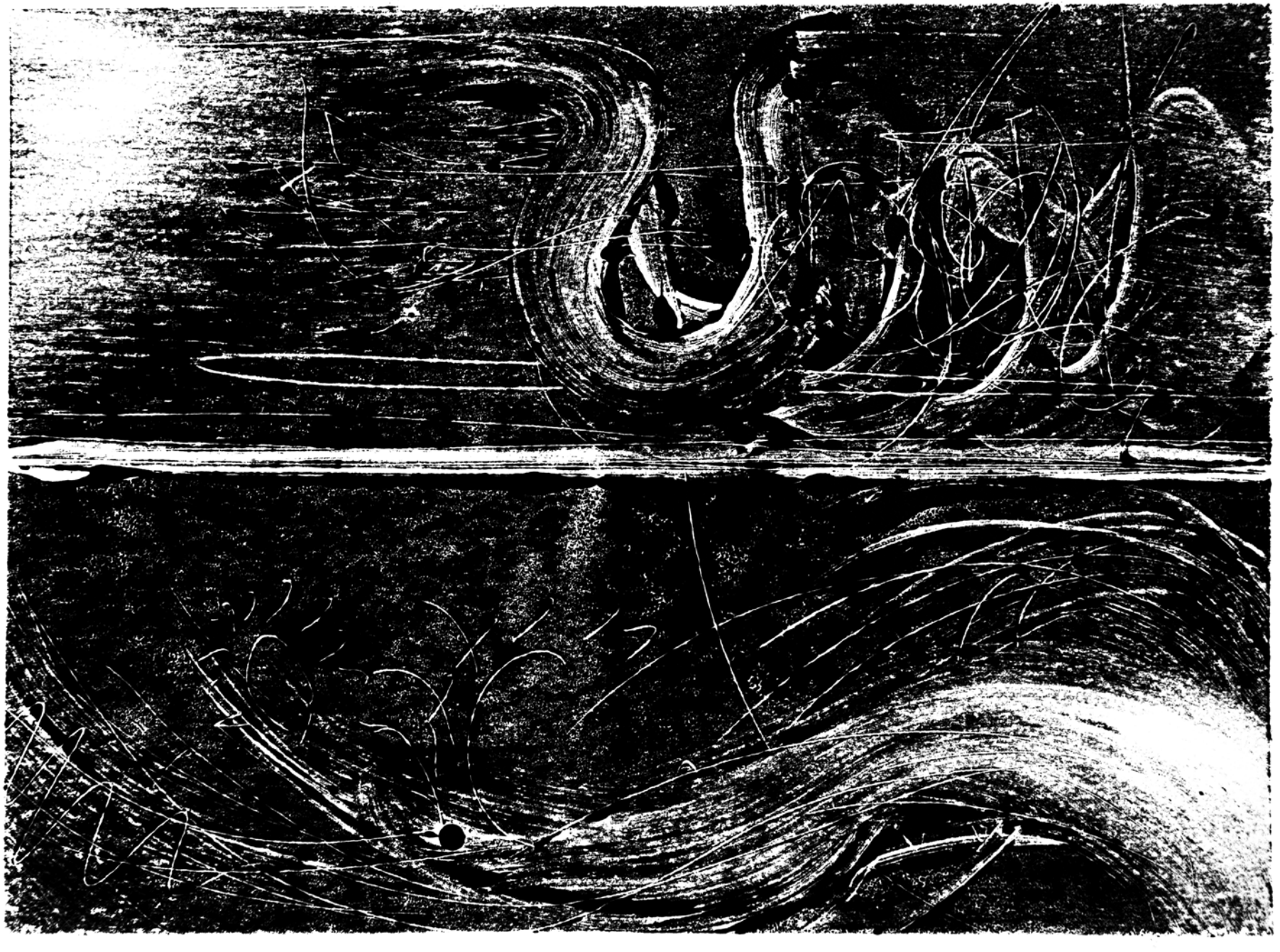












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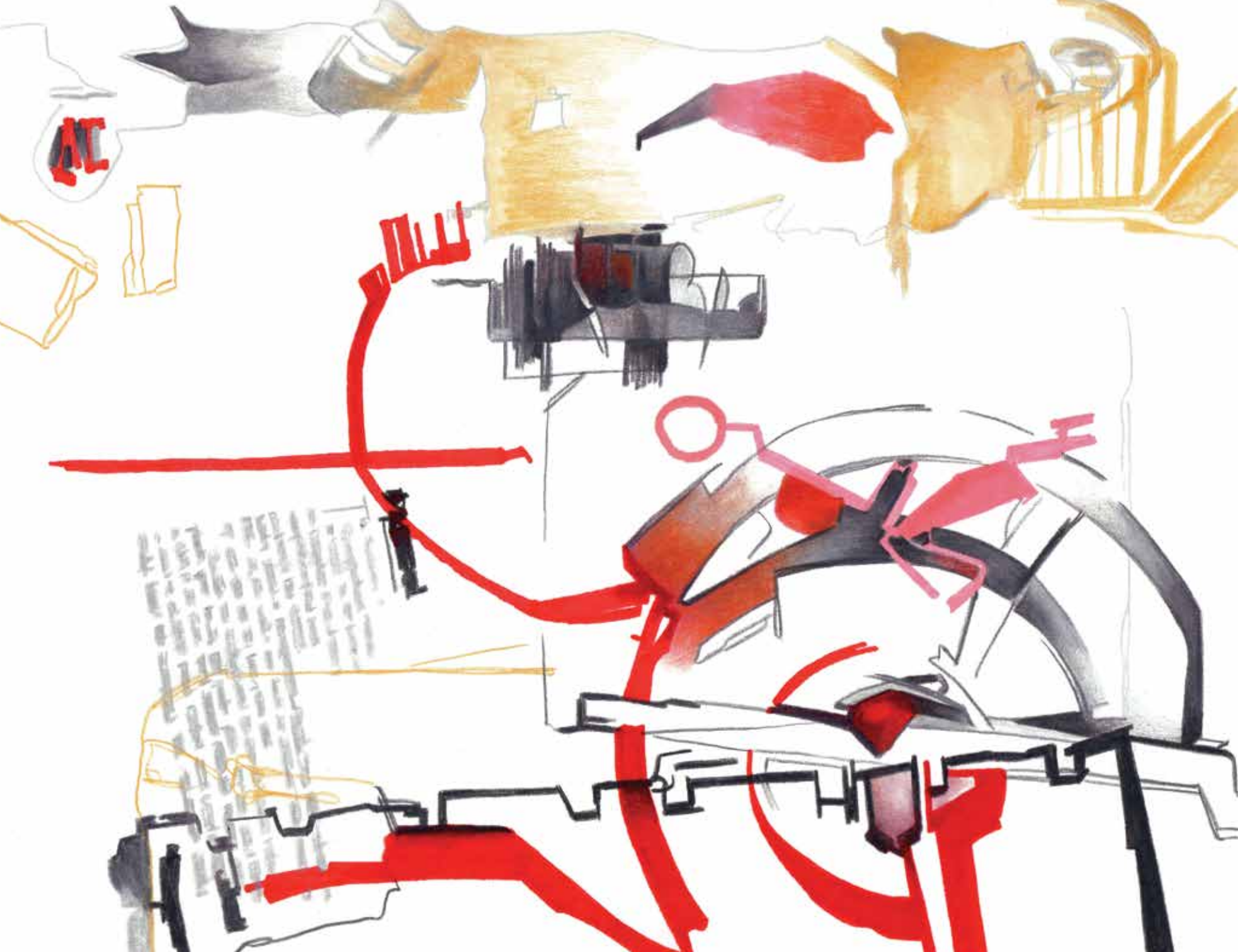

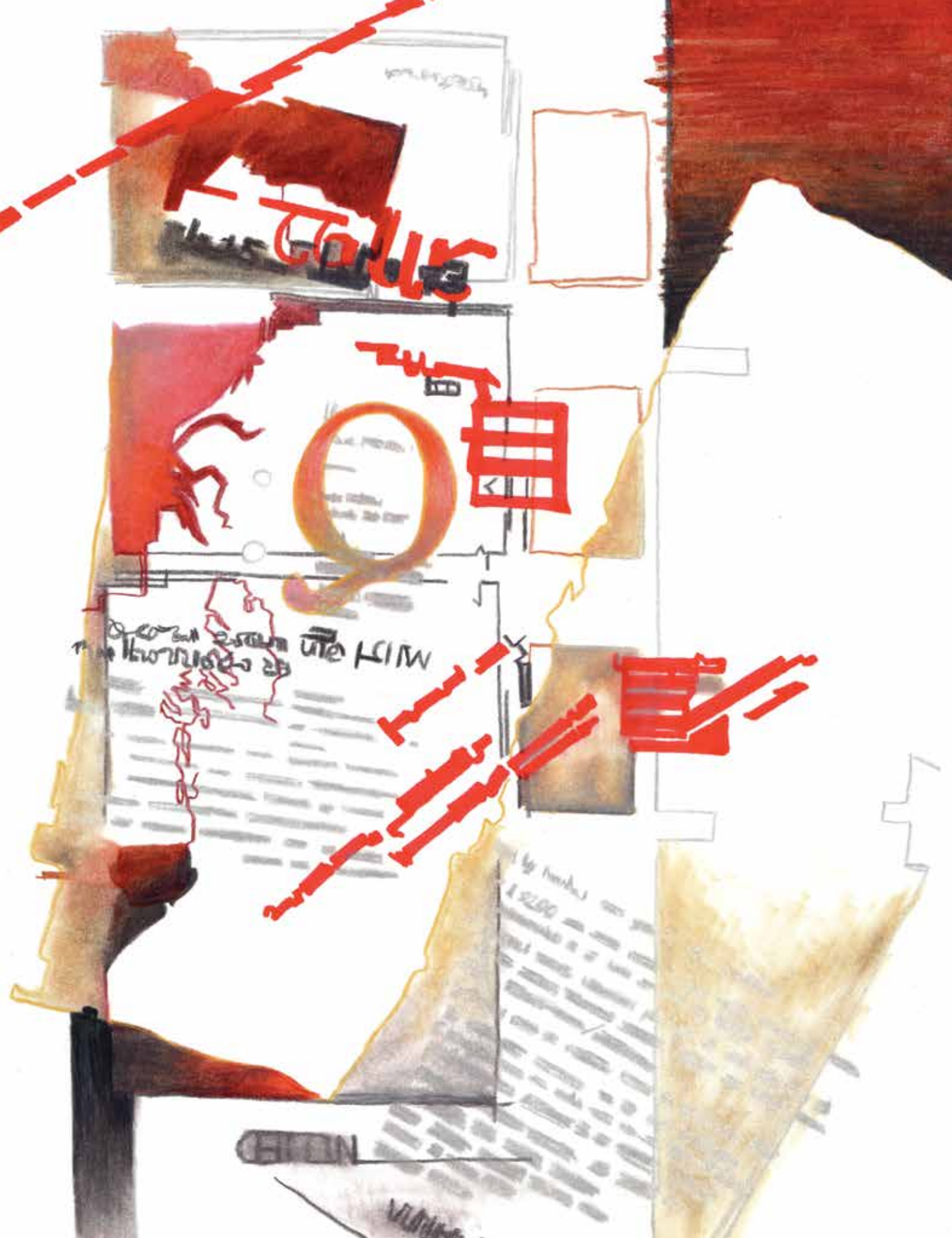

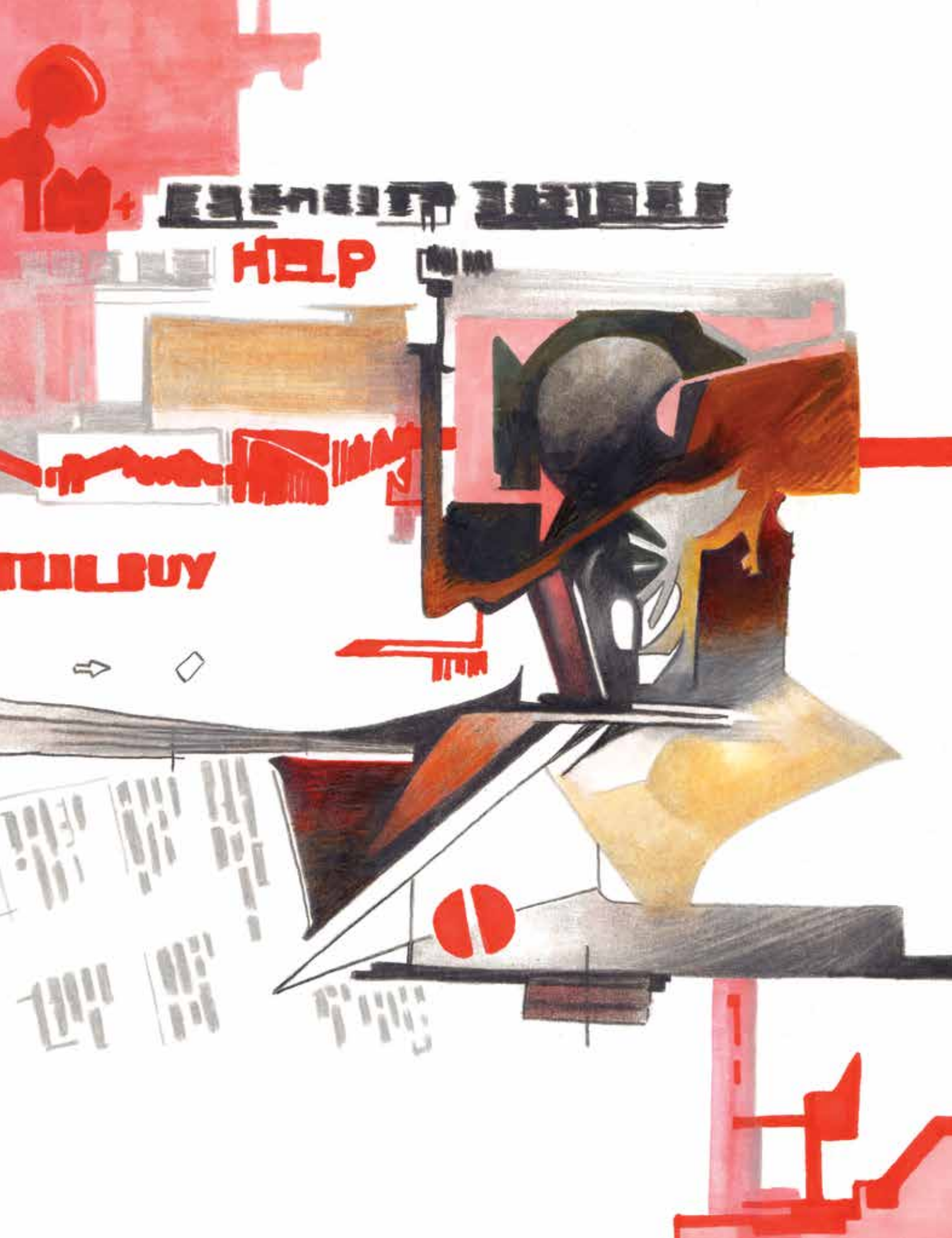
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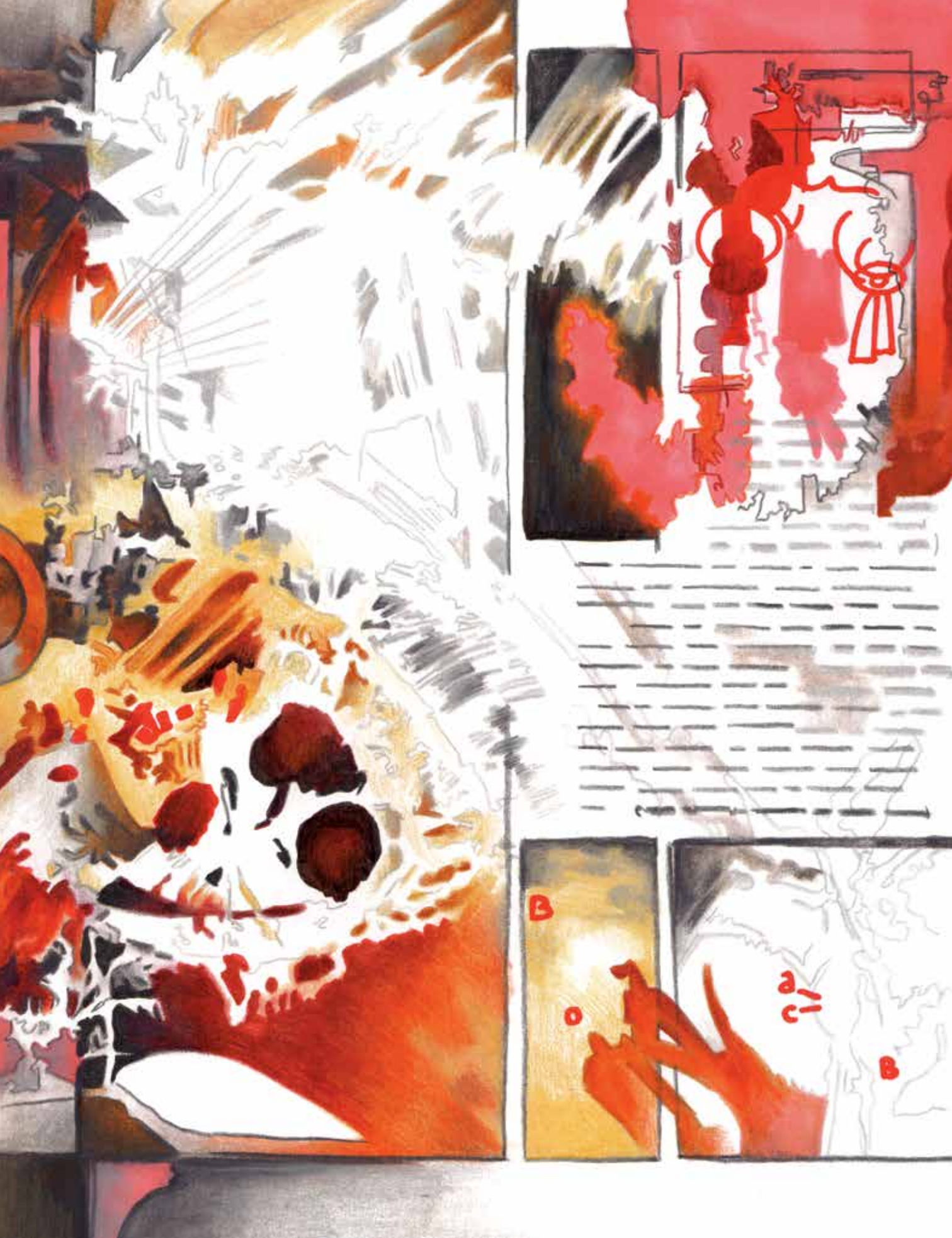
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Draw a diagram similar to the one below on a piece of paper


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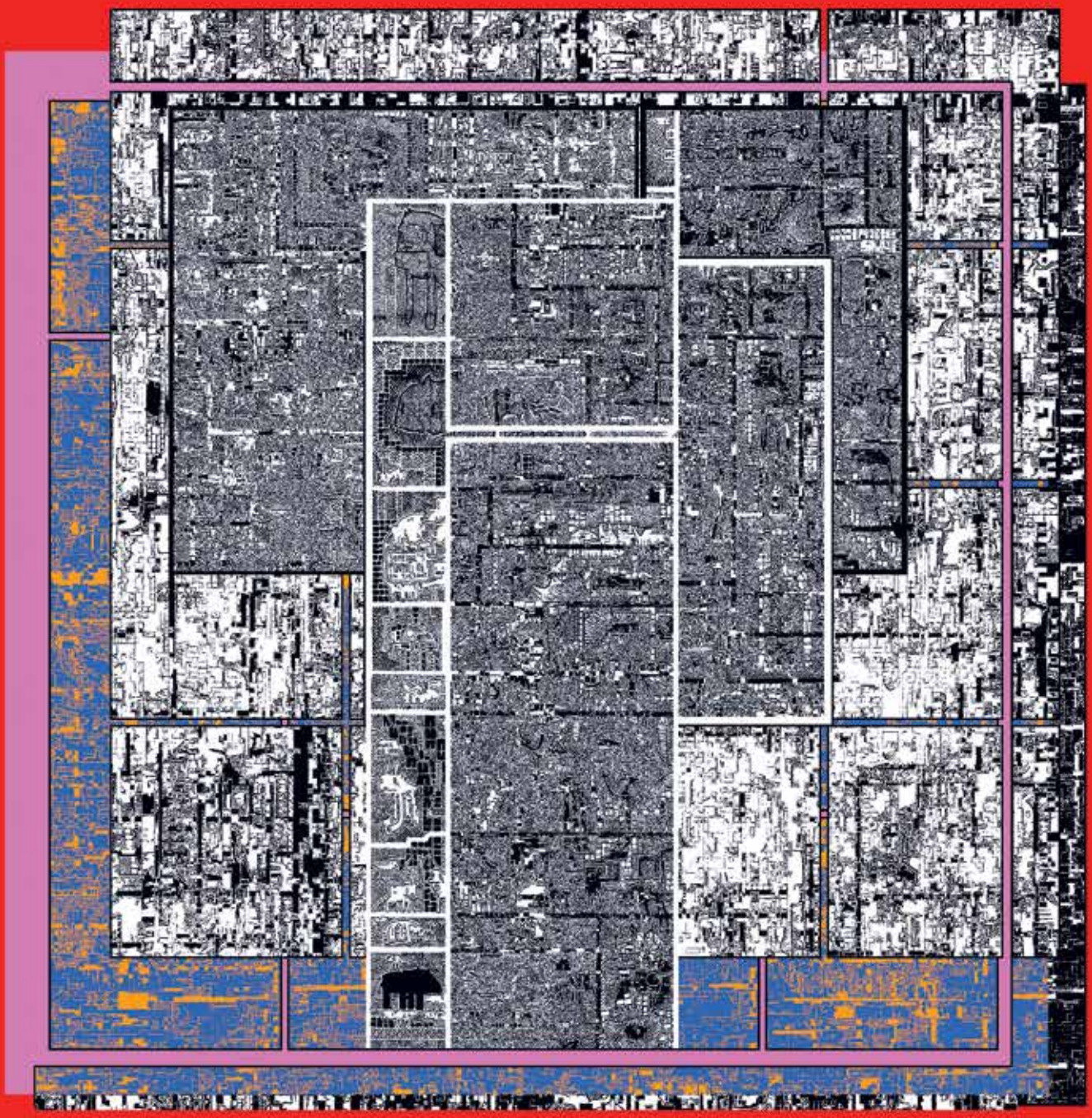
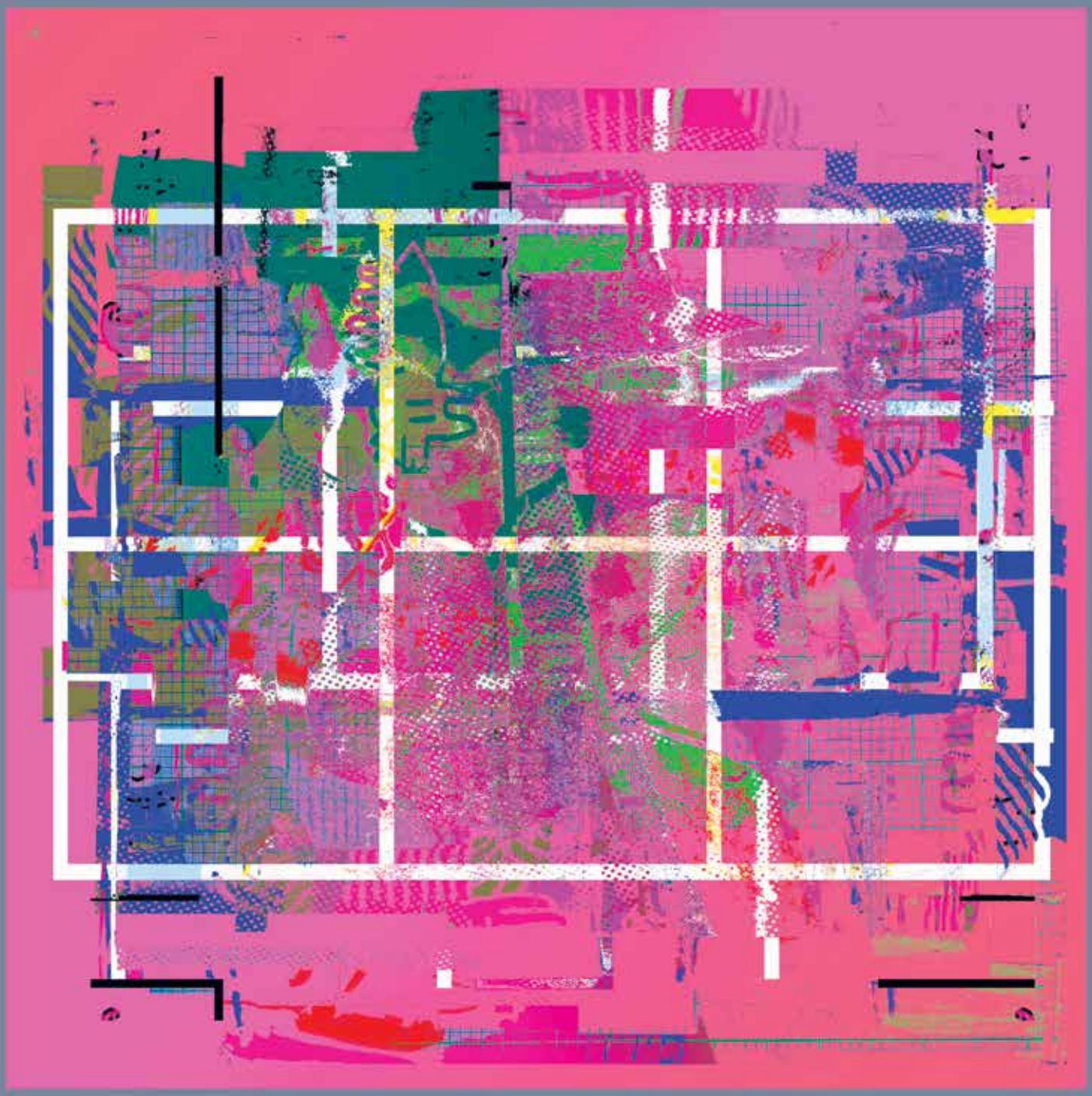
Churchdoor Lounger | Glitch Comix Furtherer




You did it!
You did it!

Churchdoor Lounger | Untitled




MOST OF US HAVE, AT
LEAST ONCE, IT'S LIKE A RITE
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HATE IS WHAT DRIVES US
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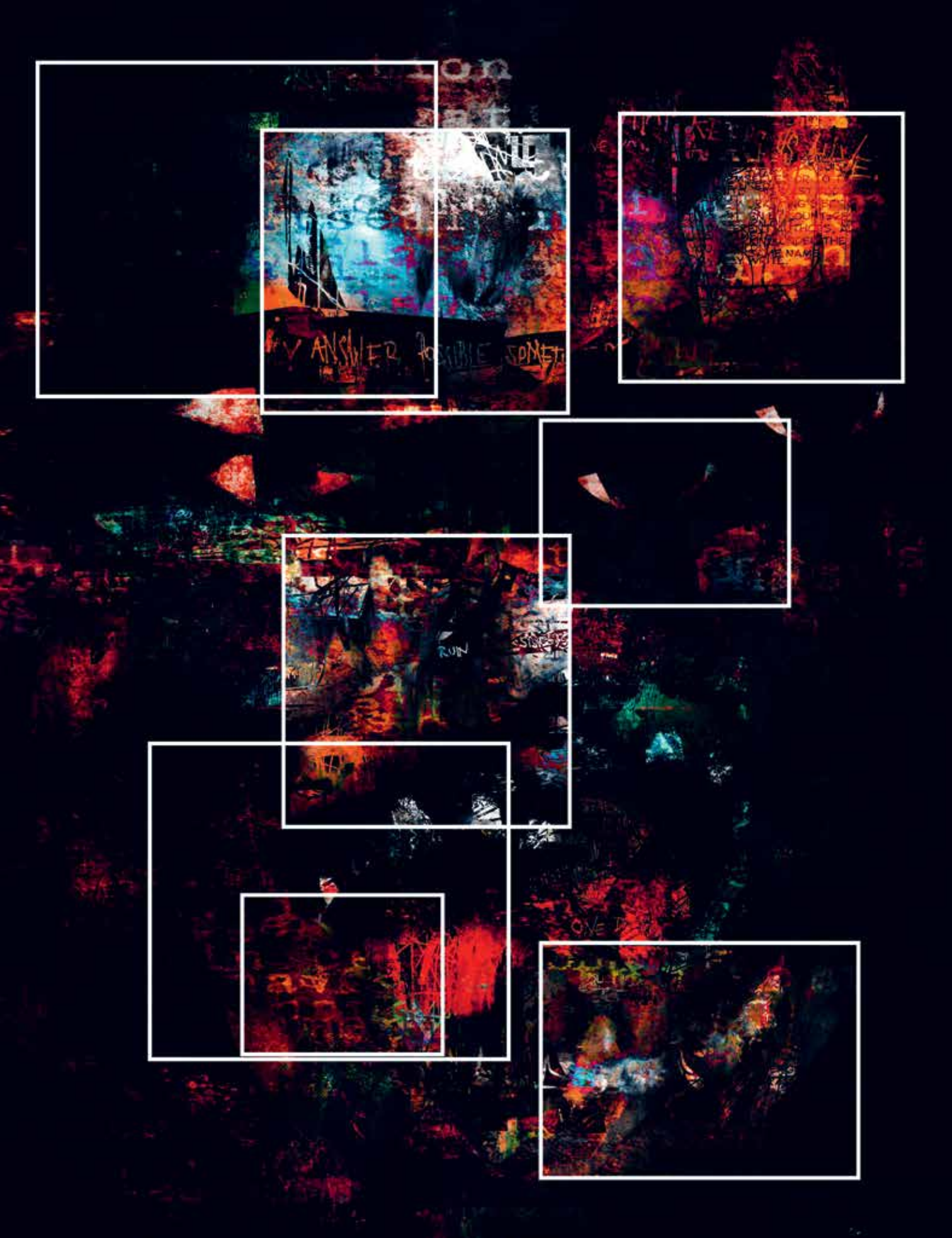
ANSWER
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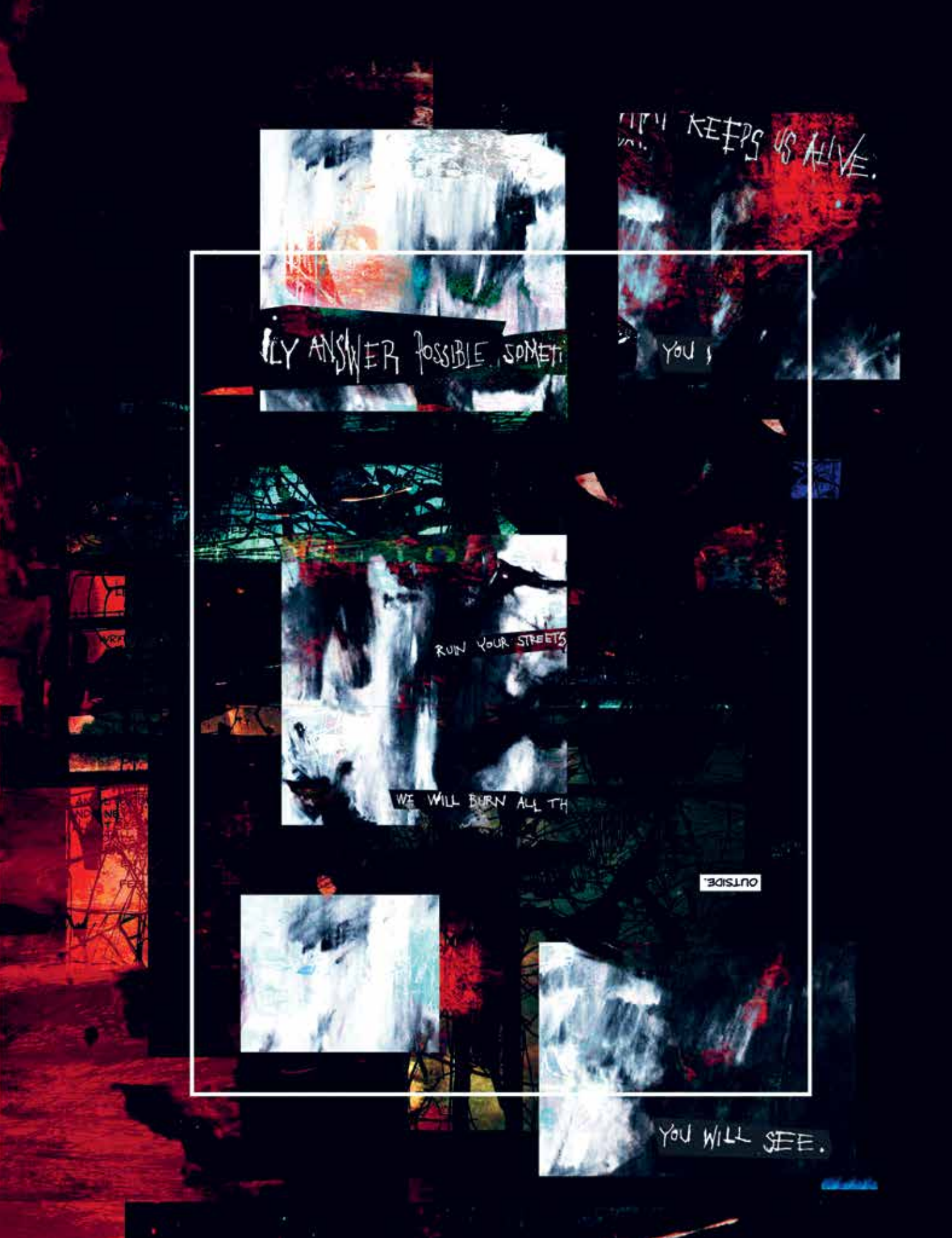
OUTSIDE.


KEEPS US ALIVE.
LY ANSWER POSSIBLE SOMETI
YOU
RUN YOUR STREETS
WE WILL BURN ALL TH
OUTSIDE.
YOU WILL SEE.

OUTSIDE

MATTIAS ELFVORP

Mark Rothko, multiform *No 61 (Rust and Blue)* (1953). © The Mark Rothko Foundation

V. COMICS FOR OUR TIME

◀ Throughout the 20th Century, the arts world has continued to dissolve perceived borders between "high and low culture", and artists with a curiosity toward comics have increasingly played in the unexplored intersection between contemporary art and traditional comics. It is worth noting that those crossover works gained traction, and certainly became widely accessible with the advent of cheaper, digital imaging technologies like scanners and creative software — and of course online publishing. The emergence of the internet gave a global platform for niche subjects to be seen, and for artists to form communities independently of geography or established commercial millieus.

Nor can it be coincidence that the practice of uncomics appears coincidentally with the hyperlinked internet, and its non-linear mental model of ever branching information networks, not unlike the way Modernist art emerged as a reaction to the advent of photography. As we attempt to trace the technological circumstances surrounding the origins of uncomics, we should take into consideration Walter Benjamin's assertion (in The work of art in the age of its mechanical reproduction, 1936) that "[t]he way in which human perception is organized — the medium in which it occurs" is partially conditioned by history.

After World War II and the industrialized genocide of the Holocaust, some visual artists reacted viscerally to an abject world by rejecting representational painting altogether, which spawned Abstract Expressionism, colour field painting, and purely conceptual artworks.

Mark Rothko created his Multiform paintings, monumental-sized surfaces of juxtaposed colour that are essentially zen-like comics koans. Robert Rauschenberg's Combines expanded pictorial montage to include found elements, broken furniture pieces and car tires, but in their painterly variations we see the very basic, comics-like elements at their core.

Where photography replaced painting as the dominant form of realistic (or "truthful") depiction and, in a sense, liberated visual arts to explode into Modernism and Post-modernism, I would argue that the network model is the contemporary organization of our perception; its historical context the increasing amount and complexity of information that has caused division and polarisation since 9/11 and the "war on terror". The ether where this all occurs may be the internet itself, but uncomics could offer a way to creatively cope with it.

VI. EMBRACING COMPLEXITY

Robert Rauschenberg, combine: *Interview* (1955). © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

If Comics have become an all too convenient vessel for escapist narratives serving kneejerk solutions to simplistic problems, uncomics instead present multilateral puzzles to work through difficult and complex issues in a polarised world. This is again reflected in Donna Haraway, who explicitly states that her titular "staying with the trouble" means collectively grappling with ambiguity and "requires learning to be truly present […] entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings".

It is fair to say that our troubled and fragmented times call for an adequately multilinear art form that allows us to occupy more than one position, more than one perspective. Rather than media that attempt to tell us what to think, we direly need forms of expression that offer us ways to think about the knotty present. Forms that encourage critical reinterpretations of the past, engagement with diverse experiences of the present, and allows us to navigate our own tangled path through the mess.

Now, this is a lofty mission statement to lay upon a still-nascent field of practice and research, and while I can't say with

any confidence that uncomics will rise to those requirements, I do think that uncomics — even on a purely formal and theoretical level — offer a rich potential to reconsider at least the comics form in a new light. The (in some cases career-spanning) willingness of the artists featured herein to engage with nuance and ambiguity — with the weird and the troublesome — is a testament to the manifold possibilities that present themselves when we look up from the comics page and begin to see uncomics everywhere around us. ◆

Read more at uncomics.org

Check out our webshop @
hybriden.se

HYBRIDEN

HYBRIDEN is the comic webshop & (in pandemic times) digital exhibition space of CBK and Tusen Serier, and also a larger structure involving many parts and connections to the rest of the comics scene in Malmö and beyond.

Publishing the international comics anthology CBA (as you may know) and other books, organising exhibitions, aiming to expand what comics can be.

cbkcomics.com

Aiming to open up Swedish comics culture for more creators and readers with international backgrounds. Tusen Serier seeks to highlight comics that may go unseen by segregated Swedish culture through workshops, exhibitions and publishing.

tusenserier.org

A multi-disciplinary collective that span off from CBK, producing exhibitions, books, prints and noise events. For you who is tired of a mainstream culture that dilutes everything to make it easier to swallow.

wormgod.net

Non-profit distribution system for zines. Run by CBK as part of Hybriden/Fanzineverkstaden.

hybriden.se/fosfor

A non-profit zine workshop run by Tusen Serier in Malmö, providing a local inclusive space for self-publishing comic creators and other artists. A place for experienced and non-experienced artists. Sometimes running workshops covering various mediums.

fanzineverkstaden.se

International comics festival for alternative/underground comics/culture, sometimes in conjunction with Wormgod's TRAUMA noise festival.

altcomfestival.se

cbk

Since 2001, CBK (C'est Bon Kultur) has worked for a more varied and exciting comics culture in Sweden and on the international scene. The formal purpose of the organisation is to support, evolve and disseminate comics with higher artistic ambitions. The main vehicle for this purpose is the international comics art magazine, CBA. CBK also arranges exhibitions of comics art, the international comics festival AltCom and other cultural events. Our vision is to push the boundaries of what can be done in comics, to broaden the perspective of what the comics medium is and can be, both in relation to itself and to other art forms. Support us by becoming a member and you get a subscription of 4 volumes of CBA.
www.cbkcomics.com
Visit our webshop at www.hybriden.se where you can buy our back-issues and lots of other titles from us and our partners.

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Uncomics – an artistic field where contemporary art and comics inform each other.

Where the absence of sequence encourages the reader to investigate the picture plane(s) in any direction and order, becoming an active co-creator in the process.

A space outside the tedious limitations of story, where images both abstract and suggestive interact.

Comics, at last, as a visual art form.