

CONUNDRUM

AN ANNUAL CATAZINE OF THE COMIC ARTS

2025



The Beguiling
Toronto, Ont

Strange Adventures
Halifax, NS

Bookmark
Halifax, NS

Atlantic News
Halifax, NS

Cape & Cowl
Sackville, NS

On Paper Books
Sydney, NS

Epic Books
Hamilton, Ont

Drawn & Quarterly
Montreal, Que

Lucky's
Vancouver, BC

Fantasy Club Books
Winnipeg, MB

Quimby's
Chicago, IL

Secret Headquarters
Los Angeles, CA

Floating World
Portland, OR

Desert Island
Brooklyn, NY

Big Planet
Washington, DC

Comix Experience
San Francisco, CA

Domino Books
Brooklyn, NY

Partners and Son
Philadelphia, PA

Copacetic Comics
Pittsburgh, PA

Gosh Comics
London, UK

OK Comics
Leeds, UK

Fat Bottom Books
Barcelona, Spain

As

I entered my fifties my hearing loss became more and more problematic. I had stopped listening to headphones in my twenties, because of the pain they caused, but now I was unable to understand people talking to me in the same room. I could see the lips of my wife and three teenage boys moving, but all I could hear was muttering. I became more and more annoyed with them, why are they mumbling? In the car I'd play the radio so loud my wife would need to turn it off. At night she could hear the basketball game on the tv through the floor as she was trying to sleep, and every night she would bang on the floor to signal me to turn the volume down. So, eventually I went to an audiologist who confirmed what I had suspected for a long time, that I have significant hearing loss. I now wear hearing aids and am coming to the realization that if my hearing loss gets progressively worse, I will go deaf. For this reason, I'm now watching Youtube videos on how to learn sign language (or specifically ASL).

It was while reading Oliver Sack's book *Seeing Voices* that I understood Sign to be a complete language with its own syntax and grammar. It is unique as a language in that it has no spoken or written version. Sacks describes the beauty of watching students signing casually to each other, their hands like birds (he is not able to translate). But this got me thinking. Is it unique? Is there another language that has no spoken or written version? And it hit me. Comics.

Scott McCloud, in his seminal text on the language of comics, *Understanding Comics* (1992), calls it the invisible art. At one point he uses the example of a drawing of a lit pipe and points out the wavy lines coming from it. The reader instinctively knows these lines represent smoke. There is not text to indicate this. Then he points out the same wavy lines above a garbage can to indicate a bad odour. Same wavy lines but "one represents a visible phenomenon, smoke, while the other represents an invisible one, our sense of smell." Another example of this intuitive understanding is the use of icons. For example, if there is a light bulb above someone's head the reader does not interpret it as a literal light bulb floating in space. As a culture with shared symbolism, we understand it to mean "idea". The word *idea* is never used but we "read" the comic as "telling" us this. So, comics language is different, and as McCloud puts it, "the modern comic is a young language. But it already has an impressive array of recognizable symbols. And this visual vocabulary has an unlimited potential for growth." It is visual but not written, in the sense that it is not culturally based in letterforms (ie not French, English, Japanese), and definitely not spoken. So invisible as to be universal.

Sacks points out the unique properties of Sign. He describes prelingually deaf children raised without speech or understanding of language who have a profound "visual intelligence" and one thing they understand is cartoons. Sacks

writes that "sign language is a complete language, capable of expressing not only every emotion but every proposition and enabling its users to discuss any topic, concrete or abstract, as economically and effectively and grammatically as speech."

Sign has an internal structure all its own. It was not until 1960 that this was realized. William Stokoe in his book *Sign Language Structure* confirmed that Sign "satisfied every linguistic criterion of a genuine language, in its lexicon and syntax, its capacity to generate an infinite number of propositions." He was convinced that signs were not pictures, but "complex abstract symbols with a complex inner structure." Sounds a lot like McCloud describing comics in

1992, also late to the game. Although comics and Sign both operate on a visual plane, the difference is Sign is spatial and operates in all four dimensions whereas comics only operate on two dimensions (the sheet of paper) + time. This makes Sign unlike any spoken language and was a big hindrance in it being recognized as a language at all. As Sacks puts it: "The single most remarkable feature of Sign — that which distinguishes it from all other languages and mental activities — is its unique linguistic use of space." The comics language also uses space differently, think how the gutters (empty space) between panels represents the passing of time. The space between letters or words in text has no such meaning.

In what way is making a parallel between comics and sign language useful? Other than that initial lightbulb moment of comparing them as non-written, non-spoken languages I really have no idea. But as I sit here watching videos of children signing their ABCs, I keep thinking about McCloud in 1992, a few years before Conundrum existed, expounding on the potential of the comics medium due to its ever-expanding vocabulary. I like to think 33 years later Conundrum has helped contribute to the comics language by supporting artists who have a unique "vision". Some of whom are featured in this issue of the CONUNDRUM catazine. Happy "reading".

— Andy Brown

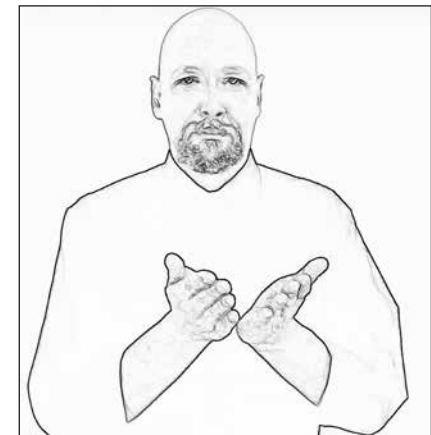
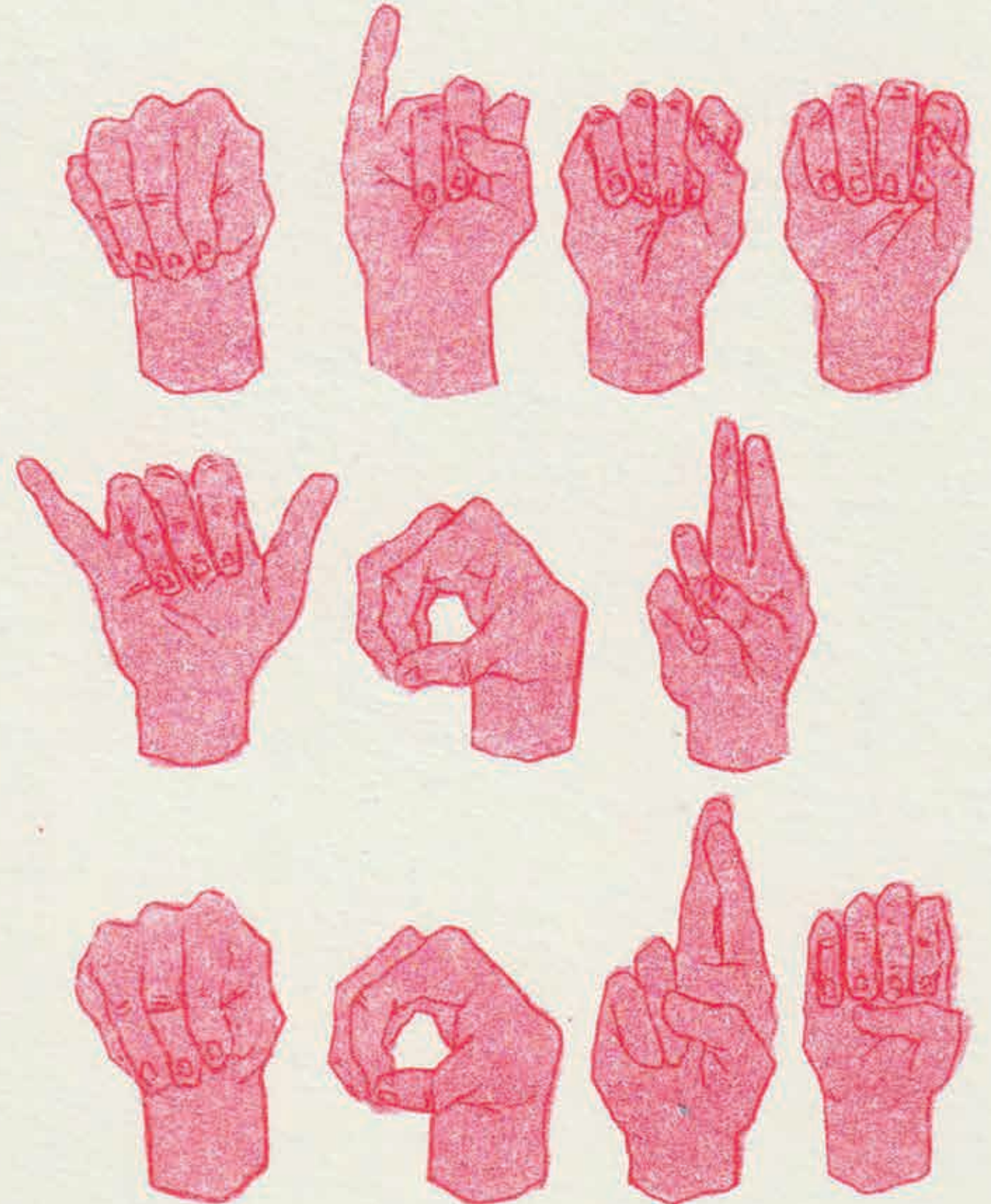
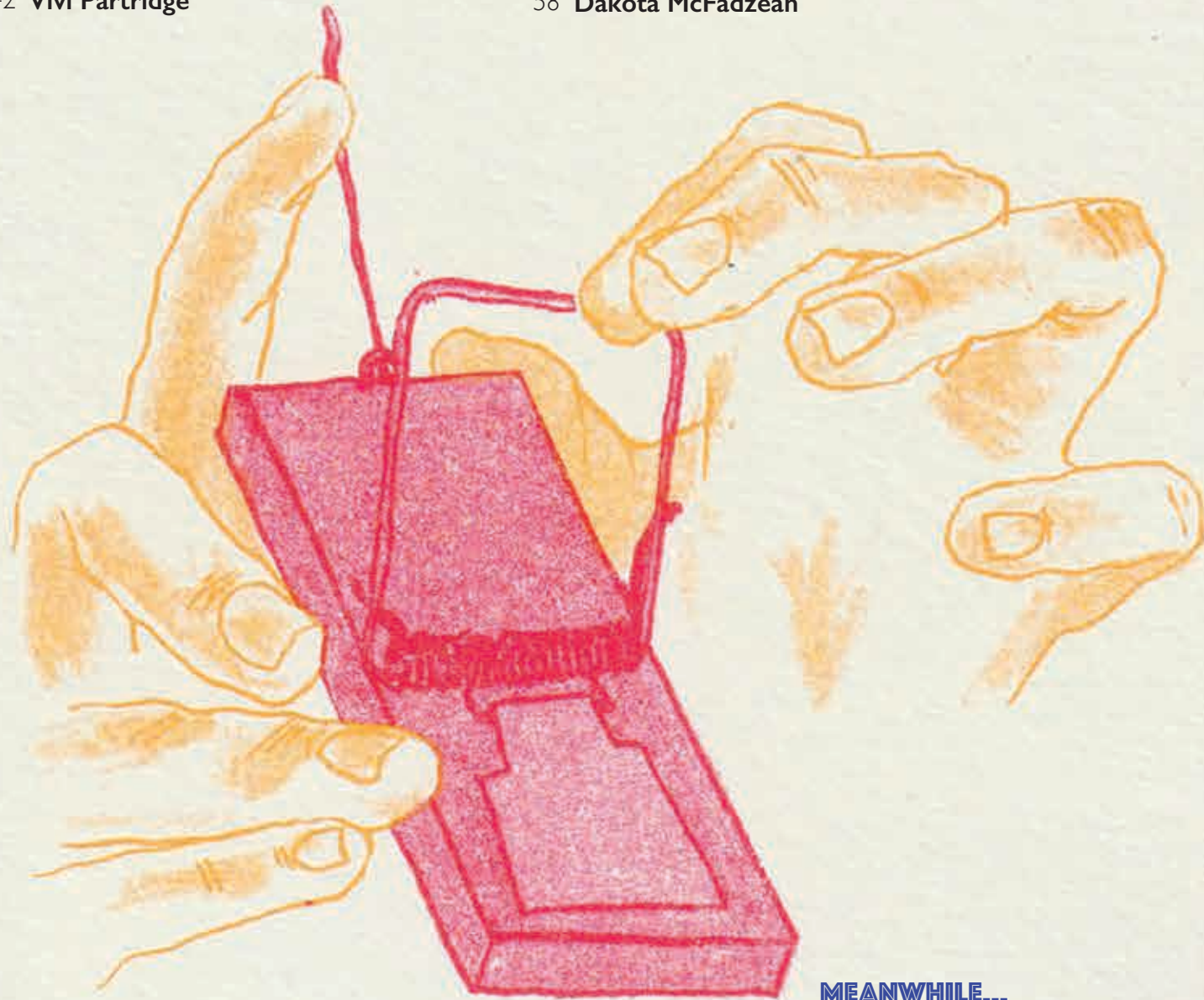


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2025



Photo: Rita Taylor, Banff Centre 2023

1. How did you stumble across the story of the O'Dwyer family?

In the late Fall of 2003, I was putting together a comparative analysis about the conditions for women in post-war Vancouver. In the micro-fiches at the Central Branch of the Vancouver Public Library, I found a newspaper article dated November 6, 1947 about a young woman named Molly O'Dwyer, a Vancouver-based Irish immigrant, who died by suicide.

Molly was a good example of the hardships women were facing in Vancouver in the late 40s. I printed out the article and tried to put it aside but found myself obsessed about this young woman whose broken body was featured on the cover of the Vancouver Sun. I felt that Molly had tapped me on the shoulder. "Tell our story."

21 years later, I have been able to map out Molly's entire family's journey from Cashel, Ireland, in the 1920s to Vancouver in the 1960s using extensive archival, historical, genealogical, forensic and psychiatric research. I knew I had to eventually write and draw the O'Dwyer saga. But how? Over the years, I wrote a profile, two massive manuscripts, made countless drawings and even created an experimental online graphic novel. Yet, I couldn't find the narrative thread. It wasn't until getting access to Molly's younger brother Joseph's entire patient file in 2017 at the BC Archives that the story became clear. THIS IS JOSEPH'S STORY.

The prologue/teaser to the project was self-published in 2022 as a 12 page limited edition broadsheet (400 copies). *Salt Green Death* is now the culmination of my 21 year journey with the O'Dwyer's. I am so grateful for that "tap on the shoulder" and I sense that the ghosts are happy.

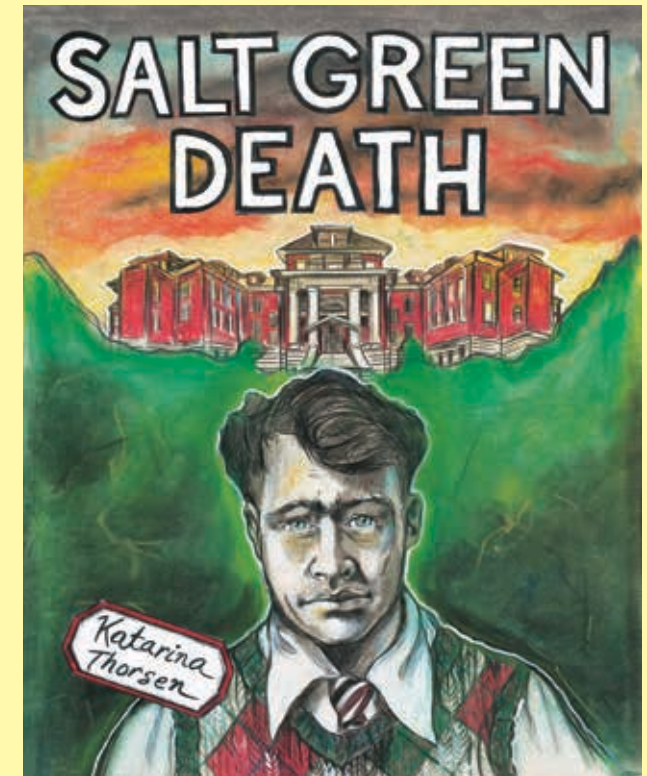
2. What is your fascination with James Joyce? Is he your favourite writer? Why is his work so embedded in a graphic novel about a psychiatric patient?

I am an avid reader and yet I had not properly read any Joyce until 2021. My Joycean journey began when I read a biography about James Joyce's daughter, Lucia [*Lucia Joyce – To Dance in the Wake* by Carol Loeb Schloss, 2003]. Lucia Joyce was diagnosed with schizophrenia and died in an asylum, as did Joseph O'Dwyer. I was not only interested in Lucia's psychiatric journey but also her Irish roots. The biography helped inform my understanding of Joseph's experiences.

In one section of her book, Schloss shares a quote from *Ulysses*. Reading the quote was one of those clouds-part-and-the-sun-shines-through moments for me. The quote is now the epigraph to my graphic novel as it perfectly reflects my intertwined and unrelenting relationship with the O'Dwyer's. Three words in the quote, salt green death, not only became the title of my book, but provided the structure of the book itself.

The documented experiences of Joseph O'Dwyer, a young man who was institutionalized at one of Canada's most notorious historic psychiatric institutions.

On November 21, 1948, Joseph O'Dwyer's suicide attempt was interrupted when a bystander pulled him out of the Kitsilano Pool in Vancouver. This set a series of events in motion that ends with O'Dwyer's institutionalization at British Columbia's first forensic psychiatric facility, Colquitz Hospital. Still reeling from the untimely wartime deaths of O'Dwyer's siblings, his parents reach out to the institution repeatedly, requesting permission to bring him home. When they finally succeed in their request, the visit takes an unexpected turn. O'Dwyer is sent away once again, to an institution that used procedures that were considered unconscionable even then. But what circumstances brought O'Dwyer to the Kitsilano Pool in the first place? In *Salt Green Death*, researcher and artist Katarina Thorsen delves into 15 years of Joseph O'Dwyer's life via patient files and other historical documents. This is her attempt at piecing together meaning and context in the experiences of the O'Dwyer family—a small slice of historical graphic medicine brought to life in coloured pencil and graphite.



ISBN 9781772621068

8x10 inches / full colour / flaps / 192 pages / \$30
May / World rights

Reading Schloss's book led me to finally start diving deep into Joyce. I started with *Ulysses*. I now have a large pile of Joyce's works and related biographies. *Ulysses* is, without a doubt, my favourite. The experimental and confusing storytelling in *Ulysses* (with its interior monologues, symbolic parallels, invented words, puns, and allusions) is very similar to my visual storytelling style. You don't have to get all of it. You have to feel it. And revisit it again and again, finding new details, and perhaps feeling even more confusion. And certainly, the O'Dwyer saga – with its tragic outcomes – is a Ulyssean journey of pathos and defeat.

In Joseph O'Dwyer's patient file, I read that Joseph loved to read – that he was always reading. In fact, when he was hospitalized, he had a pocket book in his back pocket. I believe that reading gave him structure, an ability to make sense of the world. I took dramatic liberties and imagined that Joseph stole a copy of *Ulysses* from the psychiatrist's office. If one looks hard enough on a certain page in my graphic novel,

you will see the 1946 edition of *Ulysses* on the shelf behind the psychiatrist. Throughout *Salt Green Death*, quotes from *Ulysses* appear and serve to inform the narrative. Those familiar with Joyce will recognize them. Those not familiar may read the words as Joseph's own inner dialogue (or even mine as "the observer.") I imagine Joseph trying to make sense of his asylum experience through *Ulysses*. For many years, in my personal and professional life, I have worked closely with individuals with a variety of neurodiverse and/or psychiatric challenges using creative engagement. It is always very moving to find out that what could be interpreted as psychopathology in an individual is actually sensemaking through art, writing, reading and so on.

I am now reading the Swedish translation of *Ulysses*. It is masterfully translated and lends a whole new understanding of Joyce's work.

“Katarina Thorsen has pushed creative non-fiction in astonishing new directions. Salt Green Death invites the reader to take an active role in sorting through documents and correspondence, drawing their own conclusions and inferences along the way. And she weaves (sometimes literally) the sorry saga of the O’Dwyer family together with her vivid charcoal drawings and buoyant, colour renderings of the natural world, lending poetry and grace to this tale of utter heartbreak.”

— **Matt Madden**
(99 Ways to Tell a Story: Exercises in Style)

“Katarina Thorsen’s extraordinary talents as a writer, artist and researcher shine through in every page. This book is a visual delight that assaults the senses. I loved every inch of it!”

— **Eve Lazarus**
(Cold Case BC, Beneath Dark Waters: The Legacy of the Empress of Ireland Shipwreck)

“This is a remarkable book: a graphic novel that will challenge your notions about the meaning of the genre. In essence, it is an investigation into a history of family trauma but Thorsen’s presentation of the material that has constituted her research turns Salt Green Death into a catalogue of innovations: ingenious compositional turns and strategies make every page a delight, a map of visual possibilities. Doctor’s reports, family letters, administrative records join in a dance with feathers, fur, yarn, bone: you will not find another book so lovingly devoted to textures of such variety. Thorsen has the mind of an archivist, the eye of a painter and the heart of a poet.”

— **Bishakh Som**
(Apsara Engine, Spellbound)

Katarina Thorsen is an artist, writer and researcher passionate in her belief that art can build connections and deepen exploration. Born in Sweden, Katarina is deeply grateful to live, work and play on the unceded traditional territories of the Coast Salish peoples of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations.

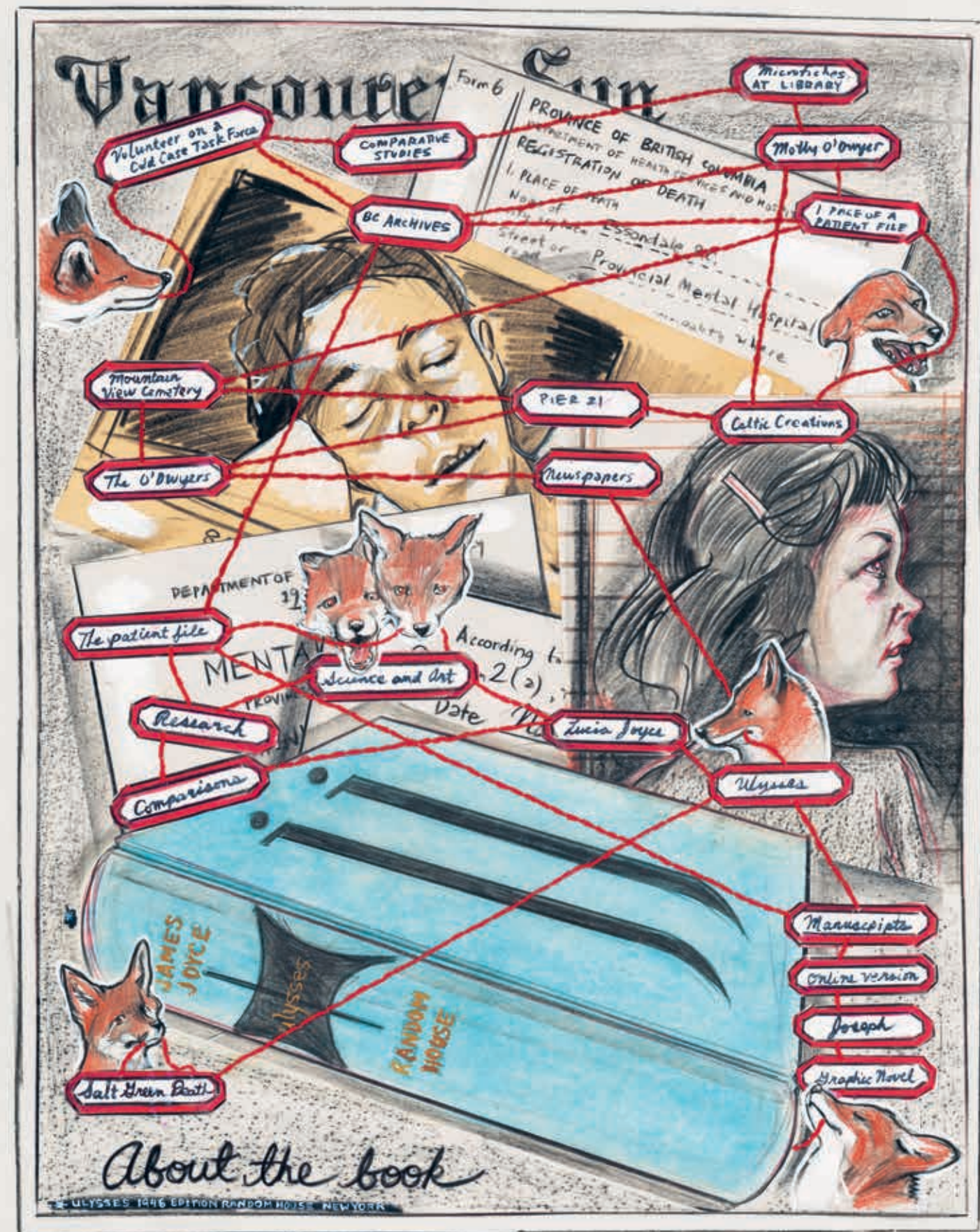
3. You live in Vancouver but were born in Sweden. How has being an outsider helped with your artistic vision? Has it helped?

I was born in Sweden in 1962 and came to Vancouver the first time in 1968. We moved back and forth between Sweden and Canada a few times before finally settling here. My immigrant experience helped me better imagine what the O’Dwyer family went through when they moved to Canada in 1929.

At age 6, I learned English the hard way, being “thrown to the wolves” and bullied for my lack of understanding. This also happened in the reverse when I moved back to Sweden in Grade 8. [The bullying in Sweden was more brutal]. On top of it, I suffer from severe anxiety. I never feel that I quite fit in anywhere. Feeling constantly as an “outsider,” I have had to become very observant and I obsessively try to read visual cues. I do keep in mind, however, that “outsider” is a slippery term.

“I am aware there is a certain off-putting, self-regarding twinkle in the eye of someone who declares themselves to be one... There are lots of ways of being an outsider... and many of them don’t require you to come from elsewhere.” — Jesse Armstrong, *Writing America, from the outside* (2024)

Yet, I have always found a sense of belonging in dance, in art classes, in libraries and in my journals. I thrive when simply observing – from watching the tiniest bug walking through moss in Stanley Park to being lost in the glorious buzz of crowds in New York City. I then transform those observations into creative expression. All my life experiences shape how I make marks on paper.



November 25, 1948

NOV 30 1948 DATE, Nov 25/48

Social Service Index

Surname O'DWYER Maiden name single

First name Joseph Date of Birth 12/6/26 Birth Place Ireland Occupation hand

Address Lake Cowichan, B.C.

Previous Addresses # 26170

Relatives

Mother Mrs. Nora O'Dwyer - Lake Cowichan

146 **THE MORAL CAREER OF THE MENTAL PATIENT**

only ~~his~~ ^{after} hospitalization, prove that what he had been having, but no longer has, is a career as a prepatient.

THE INPATIENT PHASE

The last step in the prepatient's career can involve his realization—justified or not—that he has been deserted by society and turned out of relationships by those closest to him. Interestingly enough, the patient, especially on first admission, may manage to keep himself from the end of this trial, even though in fact he is now in a locked mental-hospital ward. On entering the hospital, he may very strongly feel that he decide not to be known to anyone as a person who could possibly be reduced to these present circumstances, or as a person who conducted himself in the way he did prior to commitment. Consequently he may avoid talking to anyone, may stay by himself when possible, and may even be "out of contact" or "manic" so as to avoid any interaction that presses a politely reciprocal upon him and opens him up to what he has become in the eyes of others. When the next-of-kin makes an effort to visit, he may be rejected by mother, or by the patient's refusal to enter the visiting room.

Hoffman

JOSEPH'S "MORAL CAREER OF THE MENTAL PATIENT" BEGINS

PERMISSION FOR TREATMENT IS REQUESTED

J.W. O'Dwyer, 22, 1722 Victoria Drive, was saved from drowning in Kitsilano pool Sunday morning, by two men in a rowboat.

unidentified man, pulled O'Dwyer to safety. November 22, 1948

Still recovering from the ordeal, the youth was reported in good condition in Vancouver General Hospital this morning. W.H. Barton, resident of a False Creek boathouse, and an

The fire department inhalator squad worked over the victim 40 minutes and then removed to hospital

November 26, 1948

Mrs. M.J. O'Dwyer, Lake Cowichan, B.C.

Re: Joseph

With refer hospital, we are made therapy, it relative

would be enclosed for al, as soon as instituted as in

Yours truly
A.M. Gee,
Deputy med

JOSEPH'S PARENTS RECEIVE THE NEWS

I, the undersigned, do hereby give full consent to the attending physician and hospital staff to carry out any form of examination, tests, treatment, or operation on Joseph O'Dwyer. I deem necessary, or advisable, and do absolve them from any consequences thereof.

PHONE: NEW WESTMINSTER 2900

(Signed) Nora O'Dwyer

Lake Cowichan B.C.

NOTE: JOSEPH'S MOTHER LEGAL FIRST NAME WAS NORA. SHE WAS REFERRED TO AS NORA IN THE PATIENT FILE.



b.) OTHER FACTS INDICATING MENTAL ILLNESS: (state relationship of informant)

His mother states he was at Shaughnessy M.H. soon after his return from overseas...



JOSEPH'S MOTHER SIGNS THE PAPERWORK

29. Military Services Overseas Yes No Other?
 Battalion Field Artillery Regimental number? Commissioner No

I certify to the best of my knowledge that the above particulars are correctly stated, and I hereby request that an order be made, admitting the above-named Joseph O'Dwyer whom I last saw at Vancouver on the 24 day of Nov. 1948, as a mentally ill person, as a patient in the Provincial Mental Hospital.

(Name) Nora O'Dwyer
 (Address) Lake Cowichan B.C.
 Relationship Mother
 If not signed by a rel.

November 26 1948

March 1, 1949

"Dear Máthair";

It was awful.

Sometimes I wept...

SCREAMED!



Before the shocks, I weighed roughly 140 pounds.



During each treatment I ate like a pig because the insulin makes you ravenous as it lowers the blood sugar

8 weeks later I weighed 194 pounds.



1. Eco-anxiety is a big subject and one that is relevant to everyone, but I don't think I've seen many comics devoted to the subject. What prompted you to work on this subject in this format?

It wasn't really a conscious choice, it was more the result of circumstance. Drawing and comics were the most accessible outlet that I had available to me at the time. I think if I had been more intentional, and I was hoping to reach a lot of people, I might have chosen something other than the niche world of alternative comics. I'm being facetious, but my point is that it came about mostly because I needed to process a lot of thoughts and feelings regarding climate change, and a piece of paper and pencil were the most accessible things I had at my disposal. I never expected anyone to read my comics when I first started, I didn't have an "audience", so it very much started as a personal project. But I've been making work about climate change for a long time now, and I've only recently realized this. So maybe it's just a natural progression of something I've been thinking about for a while, something that needed to come out. In fact, the first cartoon I ever drew was about climate change. I was in a political science class in grade ten or eleven, and one of our assignments was to draw a political cartoon — I drew a cartoon depicting George Bush and Dick Cheney underwater while Bush said "Global warm-

ing isn't real." That was almost twenty years ago now and that cartoon could be redrawn and updated for today very easily. At the moment, it does still feel like there's a big gap between what people are feeling and how it's talked about in the media and pop culture — even though there's no shortage of cli-fi literature and even Hollywood took a stab at it with the film "Don't Look Up". But I think we'll start to see a lot more climate-related work in many formats as climate change intensifies. *Self-esteem and the End of the World* and *My Time Machine* are some recent comics-specific examples that come to mind. Art has always been a place to address collective fears and anxieties, so I think it's inevitable that we'll start to see a lot more of it.

2. Are you involved in any environmental activism outside your comics?

Any activism I've been involved in has been very lowkey — some local protests, letter-writing campaigns, and boycotts. Being an activist is a big undertaking. It requires a lot of sacrifices — a lot of time devoted to organizing, coordinating, networking, and building community relationships and in some cases running the risk of being arrested. It can be a full-time job and not everyone has the capacity to be an activist. I have two kids and I don't make a living from my comics, I'm very much working-class, so any free time I have has gone to making my comics. But as my responsibilities and commitments shift, I am hoping to get more directly involved with activism. I'll also add that activism isn't the only way for people to get involved in climate change and environmental movements, it can be as simple as checking in on elderly neighbours during a heat wave, or helping with street clean-up (when it's safe) after a storm or hurricane, or organizing your neighbourhood to buy a communal generator and freezer to keep food from spoiling during a power outage. Even talking to your friends and family about climate change can have an effect: studies have shown that the majority of people don't talk about climate change in their everyday lives. And I wouldn't discount the things that people can do on an individual level: reducing meat consumption, buying second-hand, repairing and upcycling, making more environmentally friendly transportation choices, divesting from companies that harm the environment, etc. It can be really easy to cop out and shift the burden of responsibility to the governments and companies that are responsible for the climate crisis — and they definitely need to be held accountable — and individual action alone cannot address the problem, but the change that is required to address the problem is monumental and it is required of everyone (specifically people in the Global North) not just governments and corporations. Effectively addressing climate change will require some pretty big lifestyle changes from people in the Global North who are accustomed to a certain level of consumption and convenience.

A first collection of graphic stories about climate change and eco-anxiety.

Coined by Elizabeth Rush, "endsickness" is a term that describes our modern malaise and severe anxiety over the end of the world. For Alarcon, it's also a shorthand way of describing our culture's current obsession with all things dystopian and apocalyptic. Climate change is often referred to as a hyperobject: so large in scope and scale that it's difficult to see or understand the entirety of it. In *Endsickness*, each story attempts to counter that challenge by taking a close look at the individual quandaries of living in a society that seems at odds with itself, unable to face the existential threat looming on the horizon.



ISBN 9781772621075
7x10 inches / 160 pages / full colour / \$25
June / World rights

3. You live in Halifax. How do you find the comics community there?

The process of making comics is pretty solitary but I've found that the Dartmouth Comic Arts Festival (which takes place every summer in August) is a pretty good venue to see what people are up to and connect with other cartoonists. In my experience, attending and tabling at local and national comic festivals is a pretty good way to connect with the comics community. And this is less in-person, but my local library has an excellent graphic novel collection and they have been an invaluable resource in staying up to date with new releases and what other cartoonists are up to.

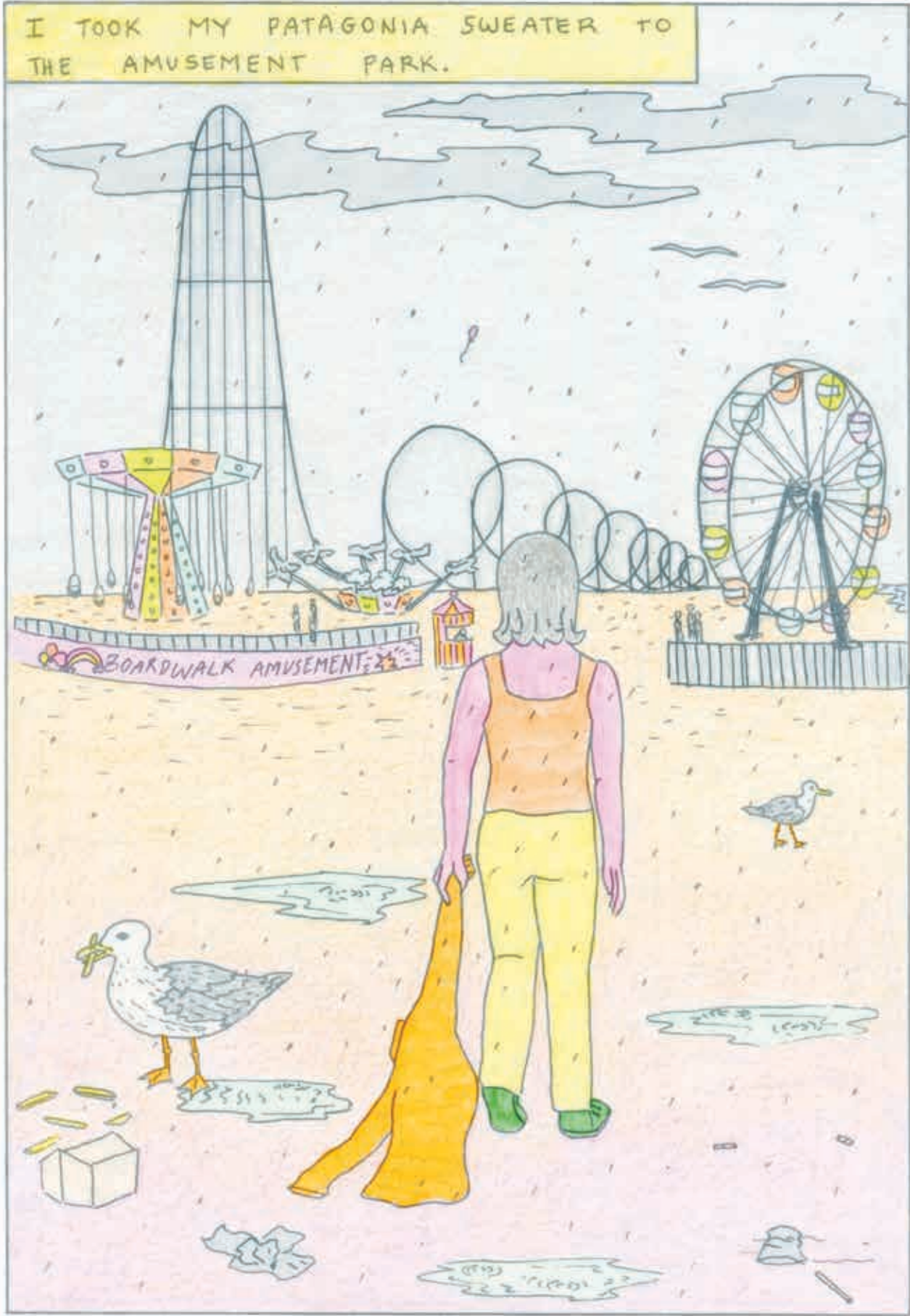
4. Is there a noticeable effect of the climate crisis on the East Coast?

There most definitely is. I think it's especially noticeable in the last few years. Last year was one the worst (if not the worst) wildfire seasons for Nova Scotia — as well as Canada. At one point it seemed like all of Canada was on fire. I remember my

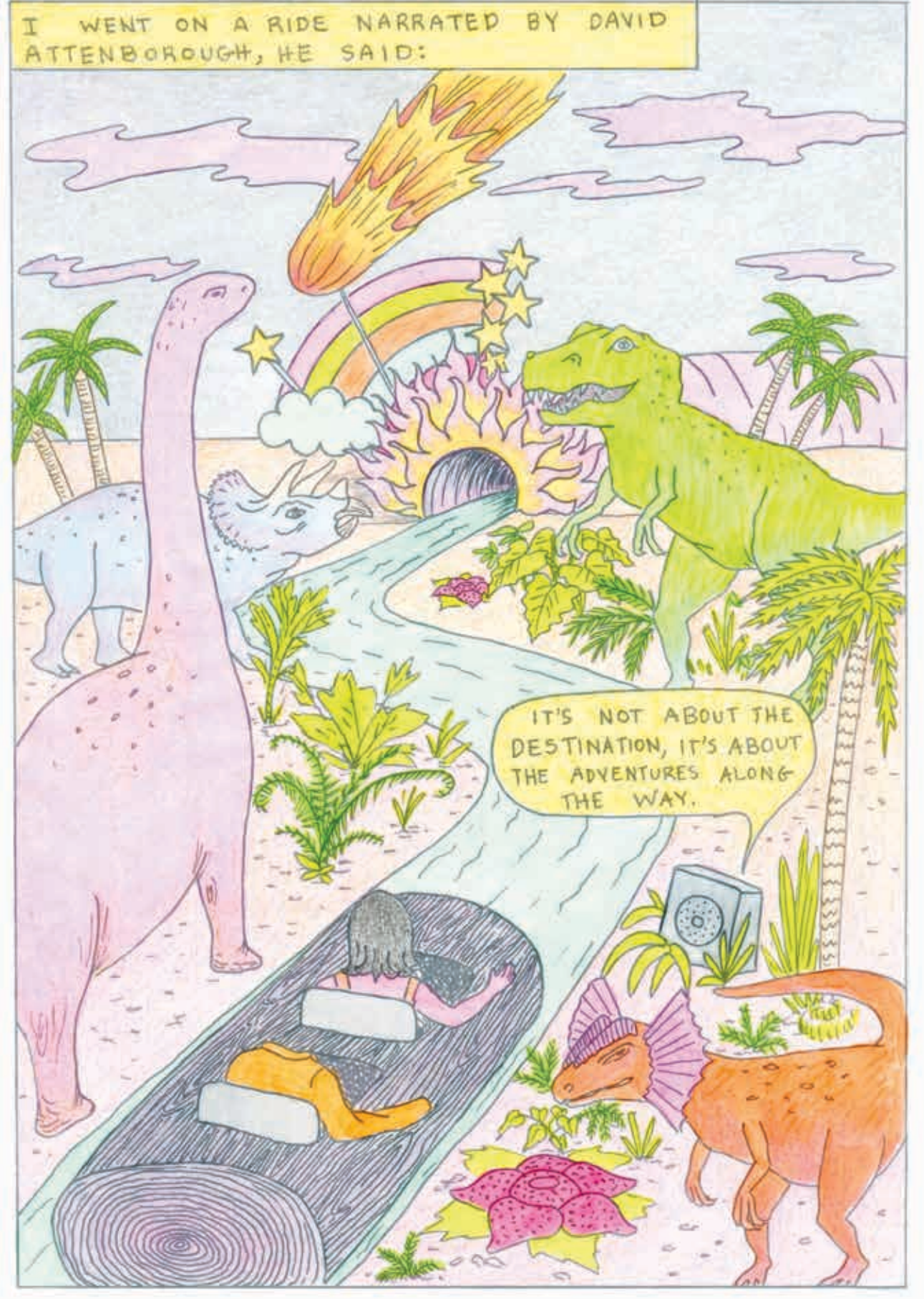
son was in a ball hockey league at the time of the wildfires in Tantallon and some of his teammates had to borrow equipment because they were affected by the evacuation orders and had to leave so quickly they didn't have time to take much of anything with them. On the heels of this, we experienced catastrophic flooding — an unprecedented amount of rain fell in a very short period of time which caused flash floods that killed four people (three of which were kids). And then there's Hurricane Dorian and Fiona which also come to mind. We lost a lot of trees, there was a lot of damage, and there were power outages that lasted several days for both of those storms. Even this year, post-tropical storm Beryl caused flash floods in Wolfville that caused the death of another youth — we are failing our kids in more ways than one. It's difficult to say that all of these events were caused by climate change, but they've been made more intense and destructive by climate change. For more than twelve months now we've surpassed 1.5C degrees of warming. As the atmosphere heats up, forests will get more dry, heat waves more intense, and droughts more likely, which makes for ideal wildfire conditions. On the flip side of this, because our oceans absorb a lot of the extra heat

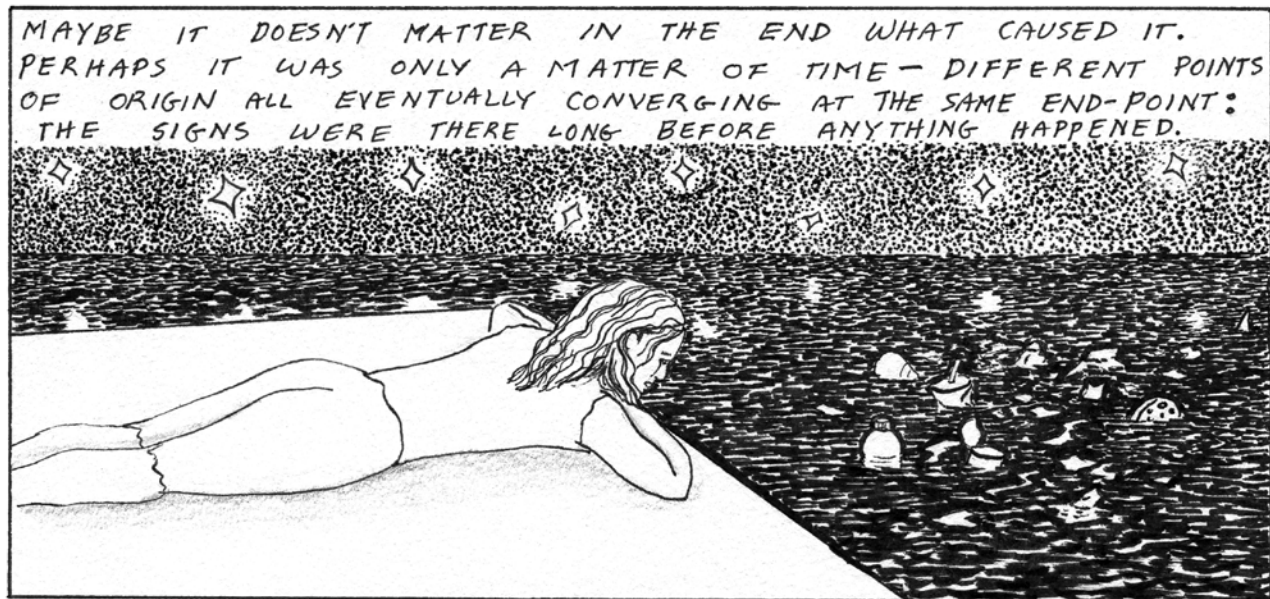
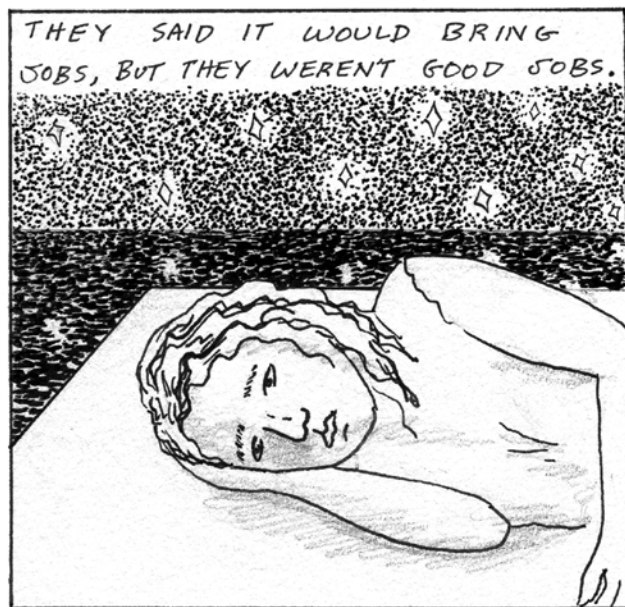
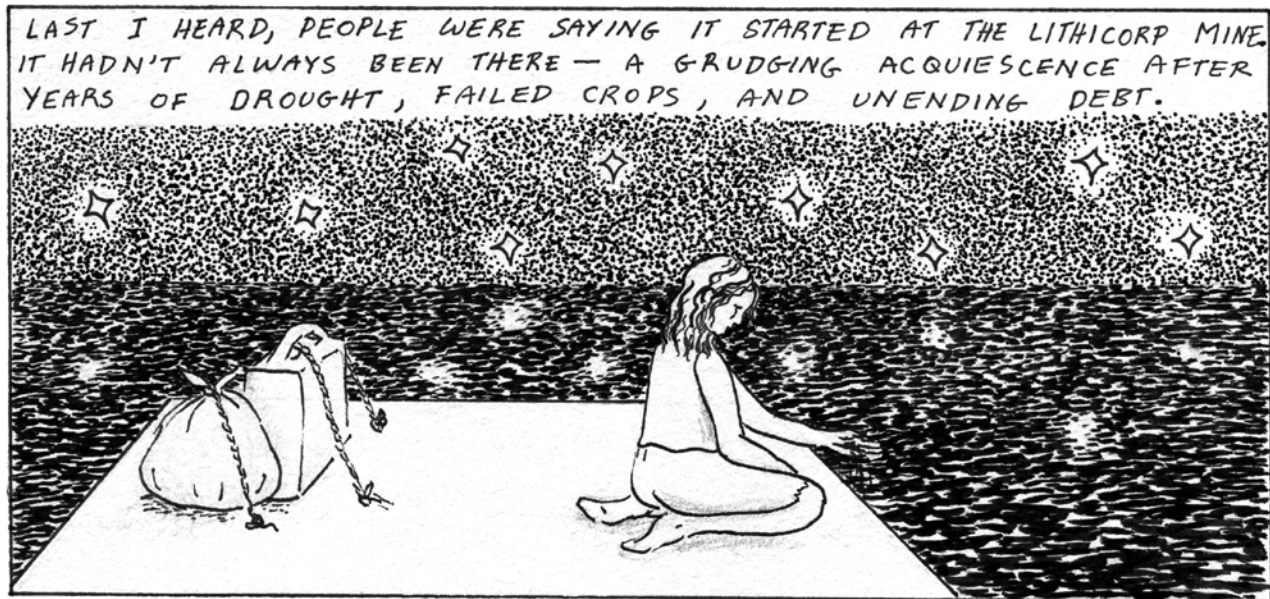


I TOOK MY PATAGONIA SWEATER TO THE AMUSEMENT PARK.



I WENT ON A RIDE NARRATED BY DAVID ATTENBOROUGH, HE SAID:





... con't from p. 15

in the atmosphere, they're getting hotter. All this extra heat in the ocean acts as extra energy for storms to form. Additionally, a hotter atmosphere holds more moisture, which means wetter storms — a lot more rain. We're going to see a lot more extremes as climate change intensifies, and we'll have less time to recover between these catastrophic and unprecedented events. How climate change manifests will depend on your location, but the climate is everything, it's all interconnected, and there is no place that is safe or immune to the effects of climate change.

5. You've been nominated for awards for your self-published mini comics. This is the first time you are making a book. How is it different?

There's a lot of things that happens behind the scenes with self-publishing. With self-publishing you have to cover the cost of printing (and each choice you make has a cost), you have to worry about the layout and collating and assembling of the actual book, you have to worry about distribution and how you will get your stuff out there, self-promotion (which I hate) and applying to comic festivals, you might be writing grant proposals to help with the costs of self-publishing and exhibiting; there's a lot that goes into it. I'm fairly new to the world of self-publishing so I've been learning as I go, I've made plenty of mistakes along the way. But when making a book, some of those responsibilities can be shared with the publisher, which makes things a little easier. Additionally, each printing method I've come across has its own unique quirks and requirements, and none of them have been able to reproduce the quality and colours of the original artwork. For instance, I only recently learned that for commercial printing, it's better to keep the linework and colour separate. For self-publishing you can go as low-fi as you want — use an office printer if that's all you have — so you don't have to be as precious about the artwork. When it comes to making a book you have to think ahead a little bit more and consider how the artwork will translate when it comes to printing; it's a more sustained and extended endeavour so all the decisions you might make when self-publishing a mini-comic are compounded when making a long-form work. I can see why some cartoonists stick to black-and-white artwork; it just eliminates a lot of the headaches and hassle when it comes to printing and it's a lot cheaper! I think if I were to make a book again, I would be more considered and intentional in how I approach the making of the artwork; with self-publishing, you can be a little more spontaneous and flexible. It's been a steep learning curve either way, but I hope I can keep making mistakes and learning from them.

“Sofia Alarcon’s haunting collection of eco-parables perfectly expresses the surreality of existing within a world on fire. Alarcon’s vignettes take us from primordial ooze to candy-coloured dystopias, imbuing each scene with biting humour, psychedelic mark-making, and social satire. Endsickness might be a travelogue for the damned, but at least the apocalypse will be beautifully-drawn.”

— Ali Fitzgerald, comic artist and New Yorker columnist

“Sofia Alarcon packs a generous amount of wicked comic wit into this wry and earnest exploration of an existential anxiety we should all find very familiar today. Endsickness manages to make us laugh out loud even as it stares unflinchingly into the cosmic horizon, the void that capital and consumerism have left waiting for us just down the road.”

— Sami Alwani, award-winning comic artist and author of The Pleasure of the Text

Sofia Alarcon is a multi-disciplinary artist originally from Guatemala and now based in Kijipuktuk/Halifax. She graduated from NSCAD University, where she pursued her interests in film, textiles and drawing. After taking a long hiatus to raise her kids, she returned to art-making through comics and cartoons. In 2021, with support from the Canada Council for the Arts, she began self-publishing her one-person anthology series: Endsickness. Endsickness #1 was nominated for a Broken Pencil zine award and three Doug Wright awards, and Endsickness #2 was likewise nominated for a Doug Wright Award. She is still busy raising her kids, but she hopes to keep making comics whenever she has some free time. Endsickness (the completed anthology) is her first book.



1. This book has an unusual title. Where does it come from and what does it mean?

Being a WWII vet, Dad's favourite drinking hole was the Legion. Whenever he went, Mom always cursed "that god-damned den of iniquity." As a kid, for years I thought it was one word, hence the phonetic spelling. Over time, our downstairs den became my realm for being bad, my *den-niveniquity*.

2. Originally, I know you split the story into three parts, this being the second after the successful *Chicken Rising*, and covers the middle school years. Would you call this book a graphic memoir? Can it be read as a stand alone, without reading the first?

Yes, it's a graphic memoir (that was supported by an extensive teenage diary so I could never replace the awkward truth with glorified false memories). And yes, it can stand alone. The focus has moved away from family (cause) to the social and personal realm (effect), but it also follows logically from the previous book. This was actually a big challenge. I didn't want to bore anyone who had read *CR* with repetition, yet certain characters and thematic contexts had to be reintroduced for a new reader. Finding that balance was tricky.

3. The main character starts seeing the "bad boy" at school. But your characterization is so developed that the tables are turned and our main character starts to drink and smoke and become the "bad girl". How do you develop these characters?

Wow, thanks for the compliment! I suppose that since this is a memoir, I'm just conveying how these characters did, in real life, behave and develop. One of the themes I wanted to manifest was to show how we become attracted to those who are reflections of ourselves, yet in contradiction, we also dislike traits in others that are actually traits we dislike in ourselves that we haven't owned yet.

4. There are no cellphones so we know this story takes place in the past but it also gives it a universality. It could be any town in North America. Did you intend the story to transcend time and place?

Yes, in a way. I mean, I didn't have to force that dynamic, but I find that when we focus on honest emotional experiences that we all share, it does transcend time and place. I try to keep a link to the past so it doesn't become so distant as to be forgotten and therefore misunderstood.

5. In your work vernacular plays a huge role. It almost feels like it was written as a play. How do you script out the story? What is your process?

First, I re-read my diary and jotted down tons of notes while letting the nostalgia consume me. I went on to record as many other memories as I could squeeze out, minute or significant, then categorized them as logically as possible. (A list of parental, local and time-relevant vernacular was one of many.) After that, I wrote pages and pages of development notes, focusing on the themes I wanted to emphasize.

Then I started writing, letting the memories flow, writing everything I could, allowing myself to be clumsy, longwinded and boring. I found it mandatory to engage my nostalgic emotions while writing. I had to conjure the feelings to convey them. I think I listened to more Barry Manilow than I did in Junior High.

I do try to visualize the scenes as I write them. I'm more of a movie person than anything, so I see everything in terms of opening-and-closing shots, key frames, camera angle POV, and so on. The script is written like a movie script with dialogue and descriptive action.

Eventually, over the course of a year or so, continually massaging the scenes until they develop, ruthlessly editing — it starts to feel like a story instead of a bunch of disparate memories. I usually move on to storyboarding after about ten full script revisions. Many things will change in the next stages, but I must feel the script is final before moving on.

A candid and personal exploration of junior high in the 1970s, with enough vulnerability to make readers squirm, laugh, and maybe even fall in love (but only for now.)

From awkward first kisses to changing bodies with an agenda all their own, puberty is not for the faint of heart. But hitting puberty in a small Canadian city where your father knows everyone and your on-again-off-again boyfriend quite literally lives on "the wrong side of the tracks"? That comes with an extra set of super-charged emotions and embarrassing moments—and Dawn is no stranger to any of it.

Denniveniquity is a darkly humorous coming-of-age graphic memoir by D. Boyd, creator of the award-nominated *Chicken Rising*. For this new tale, Boyd mined her old diaries and brought her 1970s teen years back to life, rekindling the excitement, joy, and anguish of these formative life experiences.



ISBN 9781772621082
7x10 inches / 160 pages / b/w / \$25
May / World rights

D. Boyd is a self-taught cartoonist originally from Saint John, New Brunswick. After working in advertising for twenty years in Nova Scotia, and pursuing filmmaking, she moved to Montreal and reignited her love of illustrating, writing, and especially, comics.

ALSO AVAILABLE:



CHICKEN RISING

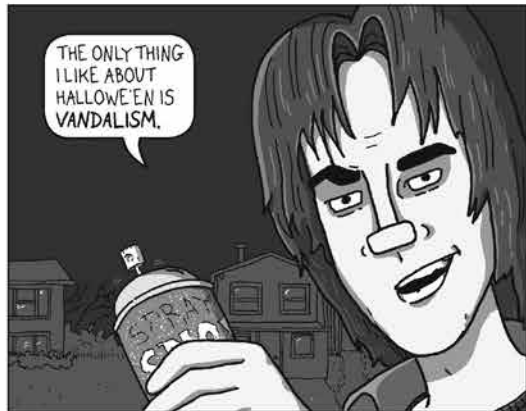
ISBN 9781772620344
152 pages, 7x10 inches, \$18

In *Chicken Rising*, D. Boyd takes an unflinching look back at a 1970s childhood plagued by insecurity, bullying, and family dysfunction. Written in the Maritime gothic tradition, *Chicken Rising* is an exploration of childhood and its impact on who we ultimately become.

Nominated for a Doug Wright Award

"I totally dig D. Boyd's story about the big and small cruelties of Girlhood with a capital G in 1970s cigarette-smoky New Brunswick. A deftly drawn portrayal of the injustices suffered at the hands of caring older parents, only child stereotyping, and grade school drama. Nothing some Jeezly good fried chicken couldn't fix!"

— Fiona Smyth (Somnambulance)



THE ONLY THING I LIKE ABOUT HALLOWE'EN IS VANDALISM.



NICE COSTUMES.

COSTUMES? WHY, WE ARE ALWAYS THIS GLAMOROUS.



ER AH... GRAPE CHIP?



I'D RATHER EAT MY OWN VOMIT.



BUT THANKS.



ANYWAY, GOTTA RUN...



HOUSES TO EGG.

CLACKITA CLACKITA



DAWN, I THINK HE LIKES YOU!



EW NO... HE'S RIGHT... WEIRD...



BESIDES, HE'S NOT THE TYPE, SHALL WE SAY, MUH-THAH WOULD APPROVE OF.



JUST LEAN AGAINST THE MACHINE-LA.

BUT... WHAT DO I... HOW...

BALANCE YOUR WEIGHT.



AAAHHG!

JEEZ, DAWN, IT'S EASY. COME ON, TRY AGAIN.



OKAY, LET'S GO.

ELLEN, I'VE NEVER DONE THIS BEFORE.



IT'S ONLY A BUNNY HILL.



HOW DO YOU STOP??

JUST TILT YOUR FEET IN.



OI YOI YO!



I CAN'T GET UP!

EH, MON HOMME!



MMRRWOOO



SWEET BABY JESUS!



THAT'S MY SISTER'S SKI!

NOW WHAT DO I DO??



I GUESS YOU'LL HAVE TO GO GET IT!

I GIVE UP!!



FINE, ME, I'M GONNA SKI.

YOU CAN WAIT FOR ME AT THE LODGE.



ISN'T THERE ANYTHING I'M GOOD AT?



THEY'RE ALL DRESSED LIKE G-MEN! FREAKY!

LOOKIT DENNIS MORGAN. HE'S SUCH A HUNK!

I THOUGHT THEY WERE ALL DINKS!



LET ME SIGN YOUR RIBBON

NICK!



YOU LOOK UH... SO... NICE.

I HAVEN'T WORN THIS IN A LONG TIME...



YOU SHOULD HAVE DROPPED IN, SINCE YOU WERE IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD AND ALL.



UGH, SHE INSISTED. I HAD NO CHOICE.

UH-HUH.



DID I MEET WITH HER APPROVAL?

WELL, IN A WAY, YEAH...



NOTHING LIKE A BUNCH OF DRUNK FUCKING JOCKS.

AREN'T YOU DRUNK?



NO.

YOU DON'T DRINK?



NOT PUBLICLY.



OH - I LIKE THIS SONG.



OF COURSE YOU DO.



HEY, WHAT DO YOU EVEN LIKE ABOUT ME?



WELL...



HMMM...



I SUPPOSE I THINK OF YOU AS A FEMALE ME.

RICK TREMBLES



1. *Gesticulating Gentrification* is a love letter to Montreal, but also to your family. Your mother and father are featured throughout. Can you talk about the contrast in the book between your “unstable” housing situation and the “stable” housing of your childhood, and the paradox that cartooning provided both of these living conditions at different times.

I don't know any better because I've never lived anywhere other than Montreal is more like what the book is a letter to. Like the unconditional love my parents projected, I've never been able to cut the umbilical. Growing up at my mommy and daddy's I was pretty much playing monkey-see-monkey-do when it came to cartooning because I'd watch my commercial illustrator old man working overtime in his basement studio every night after dinner and thought that must be completely normal and fun. So once I moved out on my own I always had my trusty drafting table handy and that's how I'd spend my free time. Pop had a bungalow in the 'burbs and a studio downtown at the advertising agency that hired him, so he could spread his workload out whereas my cramped “offices” have always been a few feet away from my bed, which never makes for the greatest “work-life” balance. But beggars can't be choosers.

2. You have been in punk bands and involved in the Montreal underground since the 1970s. What does punk mean to you?

More than just music, in its simplest and most lasting and utilitarian form, to me it means DIY, turning lemons into lemonade, and an outlet for outrage. Satire was also a huge

factor with early punk. The book *The Heebie-Jeebies at CBGB's: A Secret History of Jewish Punk* even named Lenny Bruce as a founding father. History offers a wealth of other precedents too, some of which were even integral to the development of punk, like Situationist International (which I refer to a bit in my book) whose graphics the Sex Pistols drew from, Dadaism, Alfred Jarry, and even upside down art circles that comics/animation pioneer Émile Cohl was involved with in the late nineteenth century like the “Hydropathes” and the “Incohérents.” Plus underground film, like the Kuchar Bros (who were also underground cartoonists), the Warhol Superstar crowd (which morphed into proto-punk band The Velvet Underground), and early John Waters. And what spawned the OG underground comix, like EC's Mad and the earliest comics fanzines. At 63, I'm still trying to process what led up to this zeitgeist that changed my life, even though I haven't really identified as “punk rock” since The Sex Pistols broke up, but thankfully the turning of things upside down throughout history continues to be a bottomless pit I find worth delving into. I prefer seeing genres get turned upside down to waxing nostalgic over them (which was also an early punk credo) and consider everything that followed the “first-wave” punk explosion as “post-punk” (including hardcore) but that's all just subjective semantics. That said, I still enjoy punk shows (especially glitchy newbies who are overreaching because I still overreach and think it's an important aspect) and I'm still a nerdy fanboy. Case-in-point, last Sunday I went to a local “punk flea market” looking for the classic vintage button Sid Vicious wore with black letters on white simply stating, “I'm a Mess,” and also an XL black tee with nothing but the blue Germs circle logo on it (one of my fave 70s punk bands) because that stuff's timeless IMO. No luck finding either of them though.

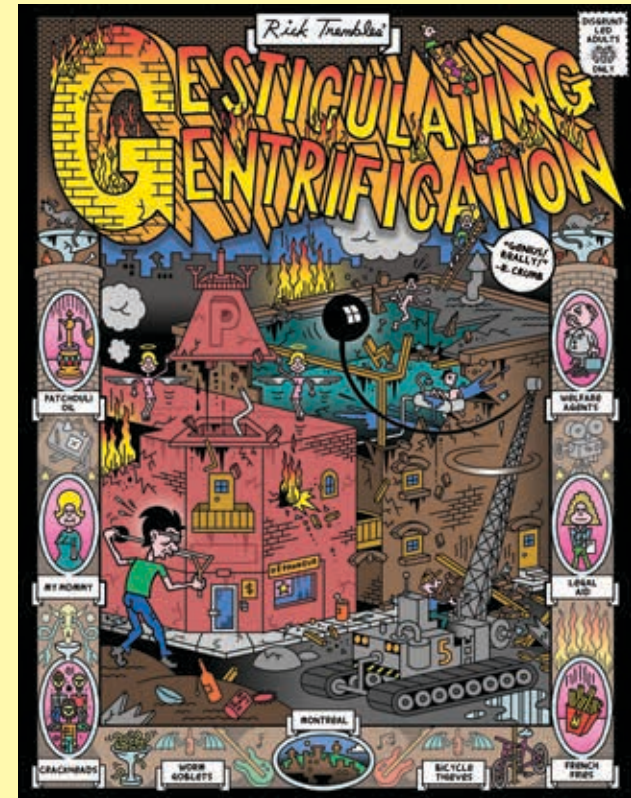
3. What is your housing like today? Is your new neighbourhood becoming gentrified?

By some miracle I still live in a reasonably-priced shoebox. There have been numerous protests since a new university opened up nearby that has been threatening affordable housing in my neighbourhood to accommodate the influx of affluent students. Condos have started sprouting like weeds, not to mention higher-end shops and restaurants. Botched, half-hearted attempts at building social housing have been making the news here too. I'm always prone to anxiety attacks a few months leading up to spring around lease-renewal time, dreading my possible walking papers, which I suspect will come in the form of a renoviction. I do lose sleep over this so it's always a very unpleasant, unhealthy time of the year. Rents used to be affordable for struggling artists in Montreal but that's ancient history now. Once I finally get the axe I envision myself being priced out and having to relocate away from the city, which would be uncharted territory for me. How do “degenerate artists” fare in the boonies? Bleakly, I would imagine. It's much easier to get lost in the crowd of a big city and, believe it or not, I actually enjoy my anonymity.

GESTICULATING GENTRIFICATION

A graphic memoir about housing insecurity

Cartoonist and musician Rick Trembles grew up in the suburbs of Montreal, in the house his father, Canadian Golden Age Cartoonist Jack Tremblay (*Crash Carson*), paid for as a commercial illustrator. Encouraged by his father's cartooning, inspired by underground comic artists like Robert Crumb, and propelled by the DIY ethos of the burgeoning punk scene, Rick gave in to his own natural drive to create and built a life full of art and music. But the comics industry had changed since Jack Tremblay found success, and Rick followed his heart into alt-comics. Mainstream cartoonists were already making less money, and alt-comic artists were making even less from their art—if anything at all. When Rick first moved out, he couch-hopped from one messy band rehearsal space to another, finally settling on a small apartment above a pool hall, where he worked on zines and wrote music—until he wasn't able to make rent. This is just the first stop in a series of insecure housing situations made worse by gentrification. In *Gesticulating Gentrification*, Trembles provides a close and honest look at the challenges faced by people living in precarious housing, the constant threat of being forced out by gentrification, and the social and health problems that result from all of it. But this graphic memoir isn't only about social issues—it also provides a rare glimpse at a bygone version of Montreal and the DIY culture that thrived there.



ISBN 9781772621099 / 8.5x11 inches / 64 pages / \$20
May / World rights

“Entertaining and compelling! A great story! Totally brilliant! A great book! Genius! Really!”
— Robert Crumb

ALSO AVAILABLE:

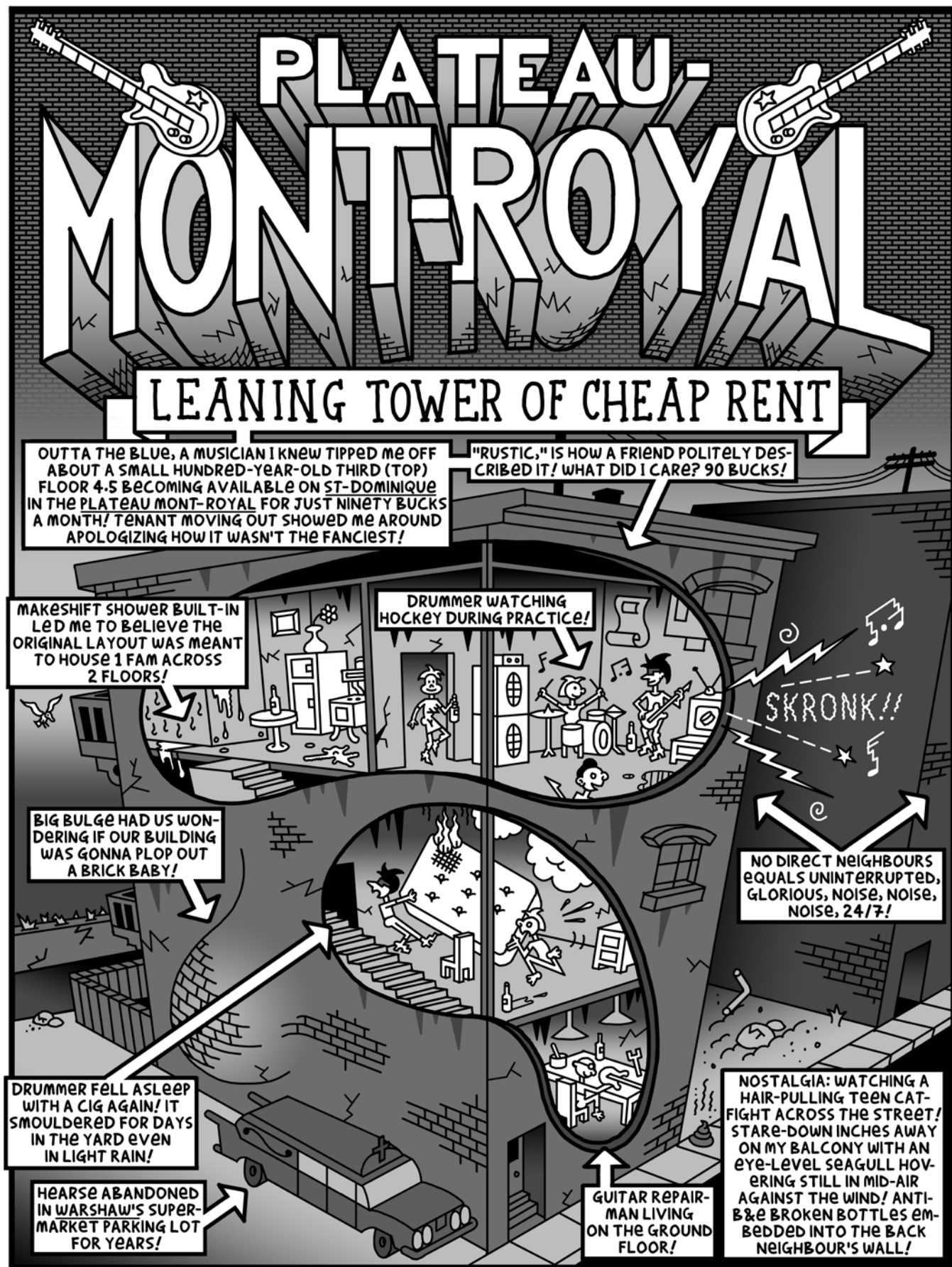


THE WEAKLY DISPATCH

ISBN: 9781772620719
144 pages, 4.25 x 6.25 inches, full colour, \$25

Trembles returns to autobiography just as COVID starts. This is a documentation of his pandemic journey. Introduction by R. Crumb.

Rick Trembles is a Montreal-based illustrator, post-underground cartoonist, writer, animator, and musician. Two books of his Motion Picture Purgatory comix have been published by the UK's Fab Press. His comix have been published in internationally distributed books, periodicals, and anthologies, including Robert Crumb's *Weirdo*, and Fantagraphics Books' *Pictopia*. He frequently archives his work at his website www.snubdom.com.



OUTTA THE BLUE, A MUSICIAN I KNEW TIPPED ME OFF ABOUT A SMALL HUNDRED-YEAR-OLD THIRD (TOP) FLOOR 4-5 BECOMING AVAILABLE ON ST-DOMINIQUE IN THE PLATEAU MONT-ROYAL FOR JUST NINETY BUCKS A MONTH! TENANT MOVING OUT SHOWED ME AROUND APOLOGIZING HOW IT WASN'T THE FANCIEST!

"RUSTIC," IS HOW A FRIEND POLITELY DESCRIBED IT! WHAT DID I CARE? 90 BUCKS!

MAKESHIFT SHOWER BUILT-IN LED ME TO BELIEVE THE ORIGINAL LAYOUT WAS MEANT TO HOUSE 1 FAM ACROSS 2 FLOORS!

DRUMMER WATCHING HOCKEY DURING PRACTICE!

BIG BULGE HAD US WONDERING IF OUR BUILDING WAS GONNA PLOP OUT A BRICK BABY!

DRUMMER FELL ASLEEP WITH A CIG AGAIN! IT SMOULDERED FOR DAYS IN THE YARD EVEN IN LIGHT RAIN!

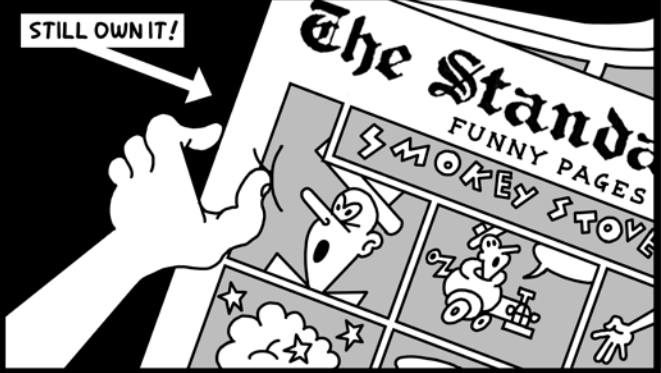
HEARSE ABANDONED IN WARSHAW'S SUPERMARKET PARKING LOT FOR YEARS!

GUITAR REPAIR-MAN LIVING ON THE GROUND FLOOR!

NOSTALGIA: WATCHING A HAIR-PULLING TEEN CAT-FIGHT ACROSS THE STREET! STARE-DOWN INCHES AWAY ON MY BALCONY WITH AN EYE-LEVEL SEAGULL HOVERING STILL IN MID-AIR AGAINST THE WIND! ANTI-B&E BROKEN BOTTLES EMBEDDED INTO THE BACK NEIGHBOUR'S WALL!

NO DIRECT NEIGHBOURS EQUALS UNINTERRUPTED, GLORIOUS, NOISE, NOISE, NOISE, 24/7!

WHEN THE FLOOR TILES OF THIS DUMP STARTED COMING APART IN ONE OF MY ROOMS, I BEGAN PEELING THEM & FOUND VARIOUS NEWSPAPERS FROM THE 40'S UNDERNEATH! ONE OF THEM WAS YIDDISH & ONE WAS THE COMICS SUPPLEMENT FROM AN ENGLISH DAILY! AS A COMICS NERD WHO EATS THIS SHIT UP, I WAS ECSTATIC & TEMPTED TO TAKE APART THE WHOLE PLACE LOOKING FOR MORE BURIED TREASURE!



THIS WOULD PROVE TO BE A DETRIMENT, HOWEVER, WHEN A WELFARE INSPECTOR INSISTED ON CASING THE JOINT! BACK IN THE DAY, THEY WERE ACTUALLY ALLOWED TO INTRUDE ON YOU WITH SURPRISE VISITS TO MAKE SURE YOU WERE "POOR ENOUGH" TO BE ELIGIBLE FOR THEIR SERVICES!

BUT YOU GOTTA BELIEVE ME, WE PLAY HIGHLY UNPOPULAR MUSIC! IF ANYTHING, ALL OUR PROJECTS LOSE MONEY!



MUSICIAN'S UNION? ARE YOU KIDDING ME? SAME GOES FOR DIY CARTOONISTS FOR THAT MATTER! UNLESS YOU WERE CHURNING OUT MAINSTREAM BS YOU GOT ZERO REPRESENTATION! WHATEVER TABLE-SCRAPS YOU GOT WERE ALL UNDER THE TABLE!

WE WERE BEHIND WARSHAW'S SUPERMARKET (LONG GONE) & SCHWARTZ'S SMOKED MEAT (BOUGHT UP BY CELINE DION DECADES LATER), SO ROTTING FOOD FROM THE DUMPSTER WOULD MINGLE WITH THE WORLD-FAMOUS CURED MEATS & WAFT THRU OUR WINDOWS ON STIFLING HUMIDITY-HEAT-WAVE SUMMER DAYS! MMM, GOOD!



THE DRUMMER OF MY BAND MOVED IN BELOW ME, PLUS THE GUY THAT ORIGINALLY TIPPED ME OFF LIVING ON THE GROUND FLOOR WAS ALSO A MUSICIAN & EVEN RAN A GUITAR REPAIR SHOP OUTTA HIS BASEMENT! IT BECAME A DREAM-HOME FOR US CUZ WE COULD MAKE AS MUCH NOISE AS WE WANTED, WHENEVER WE WANTED, SINCE IT WASN'T ATTACHED TO ANY OTHER BUILDINGS (LIKING EACH OTHER'S MUSIC DIDN'T HURT)! SO EVENTUALLY, TO SAVE ON JAM-SPACE RENTAL BUCKS, I MOVED MY WHOLE BAND INTO THE LIVING ROOM!

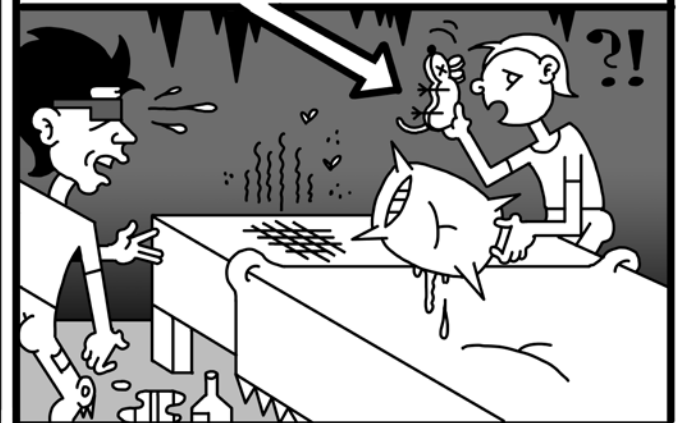


SO, NO DICE! CONVINCED WE WERE RAKING IT IN AS SOME KINDA BAR BAND PLAYING THE HIT PARADE, THE BASTARD CUT ME OFF! I SHOULDA BLASTED SAMPLES OF OUR CRAP IN HIS FACE! THAT MIGHT'VE CHANGED HIS MIND!

SNIFF! NOW I WISH MY RENT WAS LESS THAN NINETY BUCKS!



PROXIMITY TO THIS DUMPSTER ALSO PROVIDED OUR BUILDING WITH A NICE MOUSE INFESTATION! OUR DRUMMER LIVING BELOW ME ONCE LIFTED HIS PILLOW TO REVEAL A PERFECTLY FLATTENED, MUMMIFIED MOUSE THAT HE'D BEEN PASSING OUT ON TOP OF FOR WHO KNOWS HOW LONG!



MONTREAL (AKA TIOHTIÄ:KE)

PROXIMITY IS EVERYTHING! FIRST-WAVE PUNK CENTRED AROUND OLD MONTREAL OF ALL PLACES, WHERE I CRASHED AT MY JAM SPACES! CITY'S FIRST ALT-VENUES FOLLOWED ME TO PLATEAU-MONT-ROYAL & EVENTUALLY MILE-END UP THE STREET! ST-HENRI WAS DEADSVILLE BUT ACTION STARTED BREWING WITH PIRATES OF THE LACHINE CANAL! NO MUSIC SCENE IN PARK-EX BUT LITTLE ITALY NEXT DOOR STARTED FLOURISHING! MUSIC NOW ONLY EXISTS IN MY HEAD AT VR TOWERS! MET CARTOONISTS IN ALL THESE FRENCH & ENGLISH "SCENES"!

YOU CAN'T WRITE A BOOK ABOUT MONTREAL WITHOUT MENTIONING MOUNT ROYAL! IT'S TRUE! IT'S THE *Actual LAW!* (CENTRAL PARK CO-DESIGNER FREDERICK LAW OLMSTED'S BABY!)

PREDOMINANTLY GREEK & SOUTH ASIAN, PARK-EXTENSION IS ONE OF THE MOST ETHNOCULTURAL WORKING CLASS 'HOODS IN MONTREAL! I WAS TREATED LIKE SHIT BY "MY OWN PEOPLE" IN ST-HENRI (I'M HALF QUÉBÉCOIS-FRENCH ON MY MOM'S SIDE), BUT I FELT LIKE A GUEST HERE! I RECOMMEND THE GYROS PITA FROM *ELATOS* & THE VERY AFFORDABLE TAKEOUT CHICKEN BIRYANI FROM *SALATEEN!*

MY MOM WAS EVEN A SEPARATIST!

YOU CAN'T WRITE A BOOK ABOUT MONTREAL WITHOUT MENTIONING SCHWARTZ'S SMOKED MEAT! IT'S TRUE! IT'S THE *Actual LAW!* (SADLY OVERPRICED NOW!)

PUPPY-SIZED WHARF RATS & MONTREAL'S FIRST PUNK CLUB "364 ST-PAUL"!

ALSO WHERE MONTREAL CARTOONISTS JULIE DOUCET & SIMON BOSSÉ COME FROM!

ONE OF MY EARLIEST MEMORIES WAS WATCHING POP PAINT ONGOING CONSTRUCTION AROUND THE STILL RELATIVELY NEW ST-LAMBERT LOCKS WHEN I WAS 4 (I STILL OWN THIS PAINTING!)

FLQ KIDNAPPED & KILLED QUÉBEC'S LABOUR MINISTER WHEN I WAS A KID & ON THE WAY BACK FROM FAMILY SUNDAY DRIVES, POP WOULD OFTEN DETOUR PAST THE NEARBY FRONT LAWN WHERE HE GOT SNAGGED SO WE COULD DO SOME RUBBERNECKING! IT BROUGHT THE "WAR MEASURES ACT" & MILITARY VEHICLES TO MY 'HOOD!

FIRST RAIL LINE LINKING MONTREAL TO NYC, VICTORIA BRIDGE (1859) MADE SAINT-LAMBERT AN IMPORTANT EARLY PASSENGER/FREIGHT STOP!

FINISH

VR TOWERS

PARK-EXTENSION

PLATEAU-MONT-ROYAL

ST-HENRI

OLD MONTREAL

KA-CHING!

ST-LAMBERT

ST-LAWRENCE RIVER

START



1. Your first book was *Qui mange des couteaux* published by the legendary avant-garde Belgian publisher FRMK'. This new book will be done in collaboration with them. How did you come to work with FRMK? And what brought you to Vancouver?

Though I didn't realize that at the time, one of the works that inspired me to pursue graphic novels in an art school was *Souvenir d'une journée parfaite* by Dominique Goblet, which FRMK published. I became more familiar with FRMK's work during my time in art school (Institut Saint-Luc in Brussels), where both Thierry Van Hasselt and Éric Lambé—who are part of FRMK—were my teachers. Their books deeply resonated with me and had a strong influence on my artistic direction. When I began working on *Qui mange des couteaux* after my studies, FRMK was the first publisher that came to mind, even though I was a little nervous they might say no. So when they said yes, I was over the moon!

I came to Vancouver because I needed a change of horizon in my life—both literally and figuratively—and I found exactly what I was looking for.

2. The artwork is very unique. What is the process you use to make it?

The technique I use is called monotype. While there are various ways to approach this method, I use it as a transfer process, similar to working with carbon paper. For the colorization of the pages, I build them up through different layers of colour. In this book, I also incorporated a lot of collage, which adds another dimension to the artwork.

¹ See the article on page 64 by Erwin Dejasse for more on this publisher.



A modern tale full of rage and poetry, an ode to the capacity for transformation and self-determination of women and young girls.

During a trip to a wonderful land dominated by tool creatures, two little girls go to war against productivism and the standards imposed on them. They transform themselves, find refuge and advice from their elders, take care of their sisters and their dead. They thus discover the power of sisterhood, and with it another relationship within themselves, to nature, to death. They will become giant, furious, ready to destroy everything.

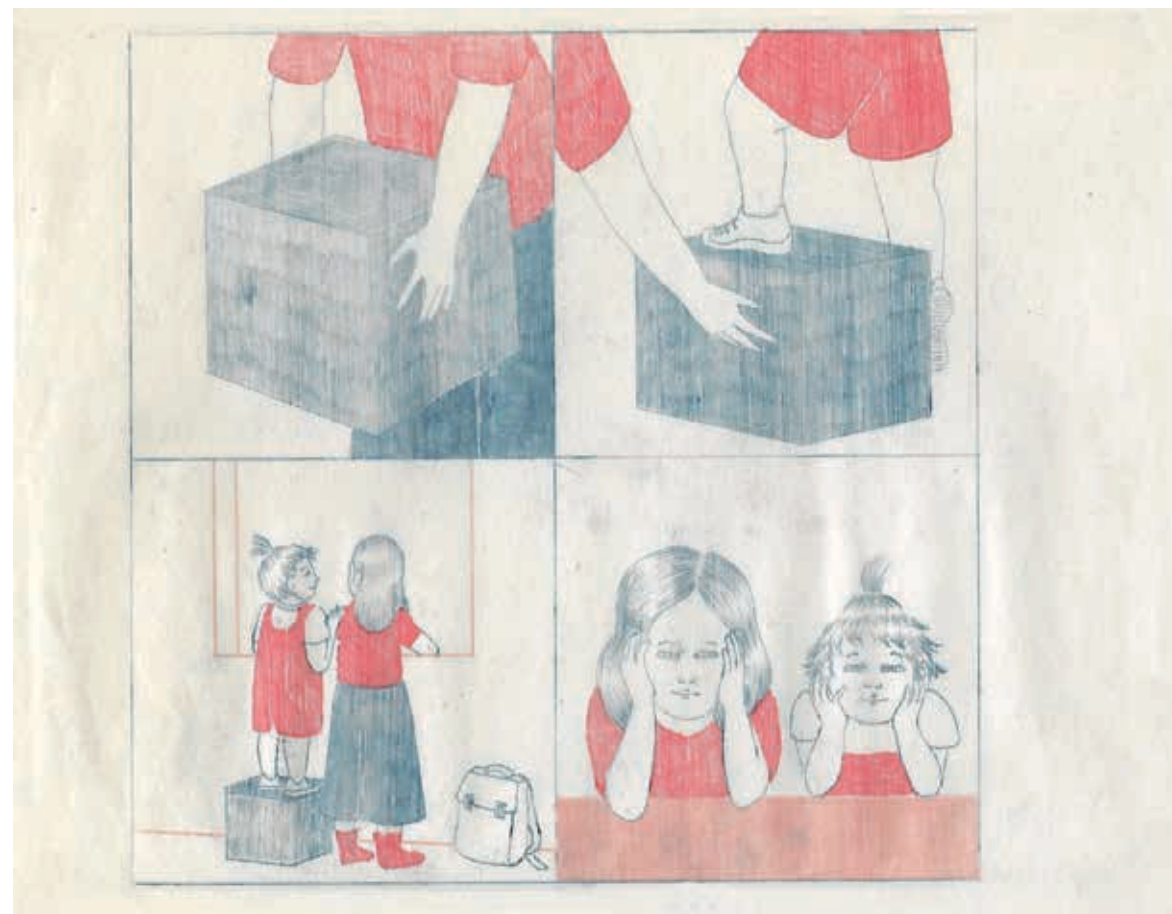
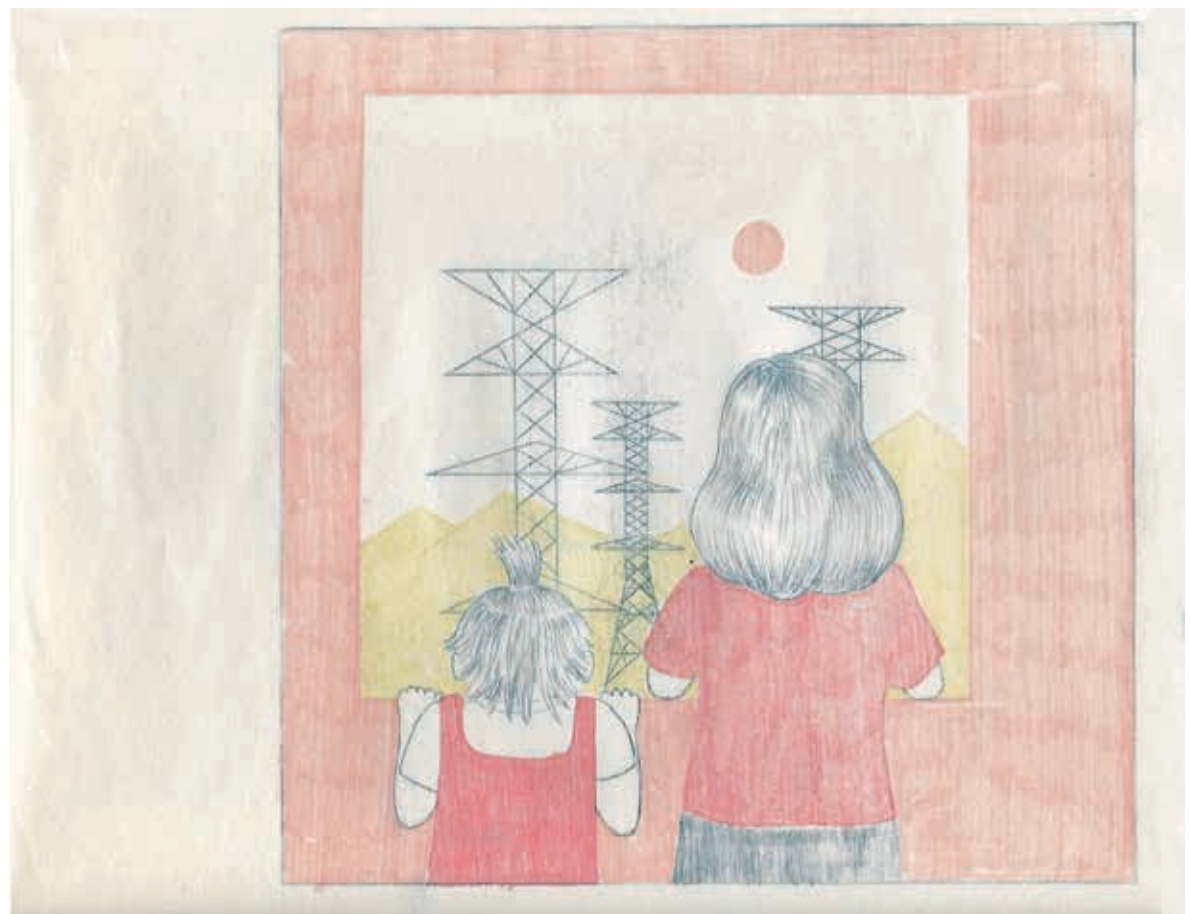
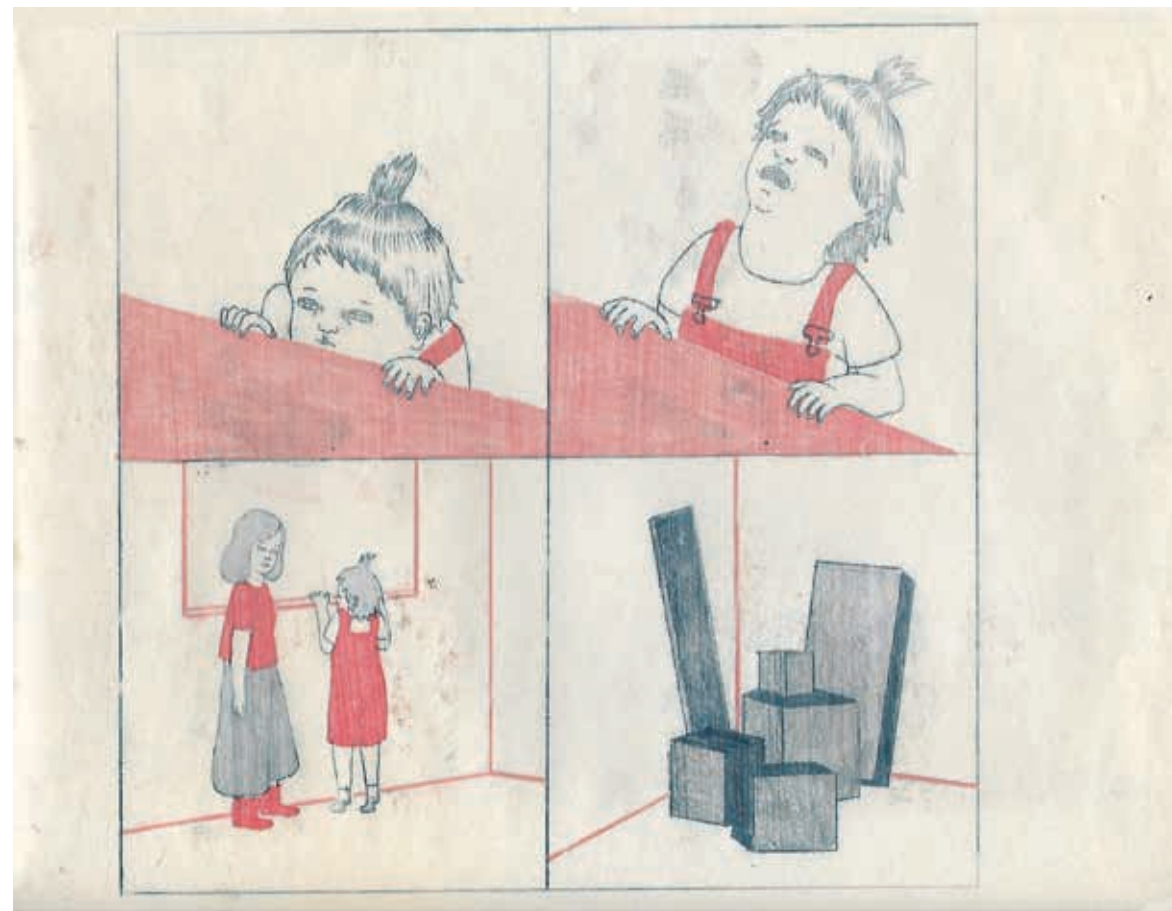


ISBN 9781772621129
11.5 x 9.25 inches / 125 pages / \$30
North American English Rights
September

Zoé Jusseret works in collage and monotype. Line or patterns are obtained by transfer, cut out, glued and added to form landscapes. Each print bears the precise trace of a gesture, retaining the intensity and texture of the layers of paint.

In this wordless story, contemplation and lyricism naturally find their place. The astonishing or frightening figures that appear are immediately accepted. What emerges, from the start to the crescendo, is what is most beautiful in human nature, in the feminine condition and resistance, what is most natural in death and rebellion.

Zoé Jusseret was born in Belgian Lorraine in 1987. She started drawing at a young age. After courses at the Academy of Fine Arts in Marche-en-Famenne she enrolled, somewhat by chance, at the Saint-Luc Institute in Brussels. There she discovered monotype, a technique that she particularly liked. Her world is both dark and delicate. Her stories, tinged with anguish, defy easy categorization but they evoke the difficulty of being in the world. She currently lives in Vancouver, BC.





VIVI PARTRIDGE



Conundrum Press is thrilled to announce the next title in its young adult graphic novel imprint, curated by award-winning author Sal Sawler.



1. What drew you to tell this particular story?

There was a lot going on in my life when I started piecing together this particular story. I had just been visiting my grandparents, as I try to do every summer, and I was noticing how much older they seemed to get every year (in the kindest way, sorry Grandma Sue & Baba!!). At the same time I had been going through a break-up and feeling the grief of that loss in its own uniqueness. During this period of time I got really into listening to Haley Heynderickx's discography, and there was one song at the end of her Bug Collector EP that painted such a vivid picture in my head of a girl sitting on a dock facing the edge of the world with all the joy and heartache that sharing a life with someone brings. I think when I heard that something snapped into place and I didn't want to let go of what story might come out of it.

2. This book deals with some really heavy topics—death, grief, and more—but your gentle approach and your tendency towards “cozy” comics balances it all really well. What do you consider when trying to achieve this kind of balance?

I've known, and been very close to, people with self-destructive tendencies throughout high school and into my adult life, and I've seen my friends grieve for their parents and loved ones. It's never an easy process and it continues much longer than anyone sees on the surface. That said, I wanted the Inn and specifically the characters of Alice and Charon to feel like a warm hug and a listening shoulder for the rest

of the cast and therefore the reader as well. The Inn itself is also inspired by my grandparents' house in Napanee, a place I could go to when I was feeling overwhelmed with how fast things are always going on in the city where I live (Toronto).

3. There's a lot of mythological influence here. Is there a particular mythology or folklore that you draw specific influence from? How does this come out in your work?

Oh boy, I could honestly just go on and on about mythology but I'll keep it as short as possible for this article's sake. I love using aspects of mythology in my stories, there's so much rich storytelling in all kinds of mythologies and certain imagery (such as Charon the ferryman) can evoke such a great sense of “show, don't tell.” The reader can place it within a trope or myth they already know. I personally love Norse mythology and I'm a big fan of all the characters and lessons within it no matter how absurd they seem on the surface. Unfortunately I didn't pull too much from Norse myth for this specific story, but a cursory knowledge of Greek mythology is all anyone needs to understand some of the underlying storytelling going on.

4. Which of these characters is closest to your heart and why?

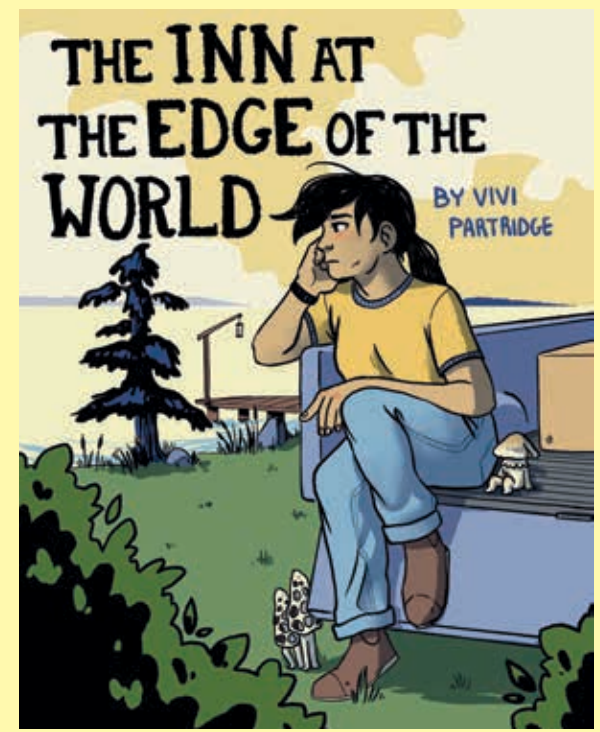
When I was starting out the story, it was Alice. She's so fun to draw, and having her as a lighthearted full-of-life character in the midst of everyone else's angst made her stand

THE INN AT THE EDGE OF THE WORLD

At the Inn, check-out is just part of the job. But what happens when you're not ready to say goodbye?

Having crashed her car in the unfamiliar countryside, Selena agrees to help out at the nearby Inn in exchange for a room. Located on the edge of the world, the Inn attracts extraordinary customers from near and far. The most popular attraction is the complimentary ferry ride to the “Great Unknown” a mysterious shore past the edge of the world. But with no one ever traveling back Selena is left feeling uneasy.

Is the innkeeper Alice really as nice as she seems? What does the ferryman Charon know that he isn't telling anyone? And should Selena be packing her bags and hailing the nearest taxi? One thing's for sure: Selena's never had a job like this before.



ISBN 9781772621136
6x9 inches / 120 pages / colour / \$20
October / World Rights

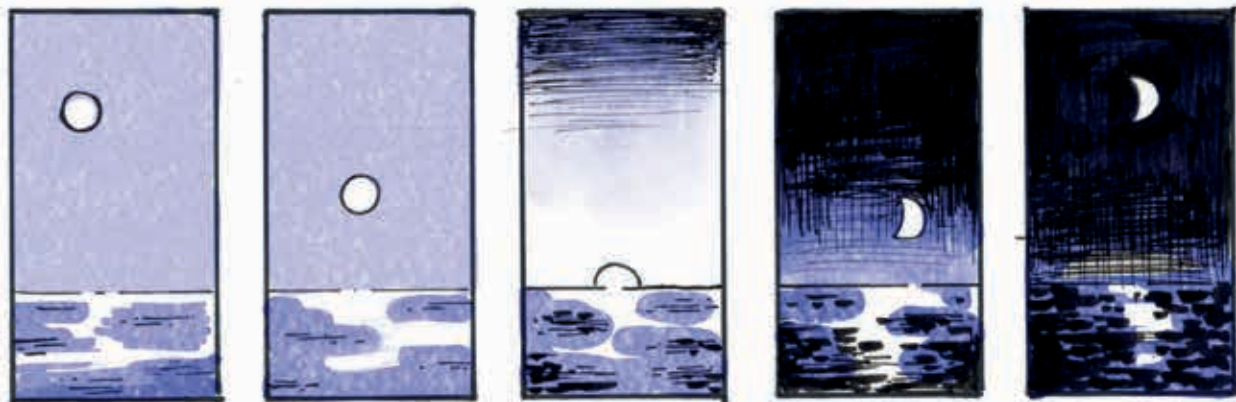
Vivi Partridge (they/them) is a queer emerging artist from Toronto, Ontario. Recently graduated from Seneca Polytechnic's illustration course. They've tabled at many comics expos across Canada and the states, including, Comic Con, TCAF, VANCAF and MCAF. Vivi is also a painter, and their work has been featured in many galleries as well as coffee shops around Toronto including, Northern Contemporary, Gallery 1313 and the Worth Gallery.

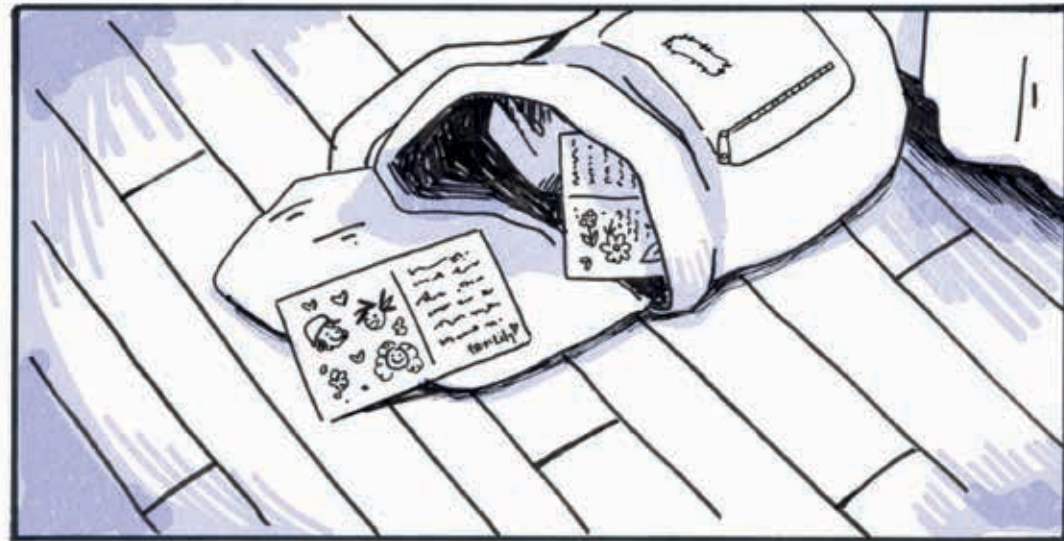
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out so well. There's an unsettling joy in her that makes me wonder what secrets she might be keeping in order to keep appearances. But as I wrote these characters and fleshed out their interactions with each other I've gotten really attached to Selena and Lily, especially their dynamic with one another. All of their interactions feel as though my younger teen self and my early 20s self are having a conversation with one another. And that's a dialogue that I don't think I could have outside of comics, so it's very dear to me and so are those characters.

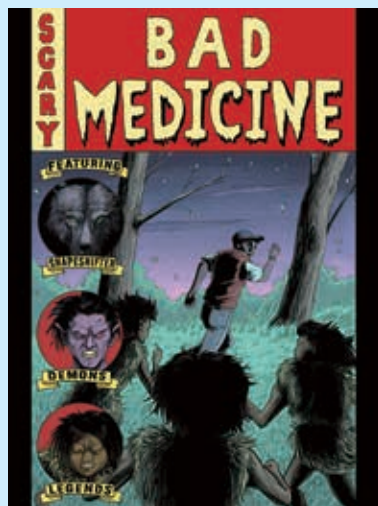
6. What do you hope people take away from this story?

I hope that people who read this story take away how important it is to be gentle with themselves when dealing with rough mental health patches and/or grief. That there's no getting around the mountain only through it and we need to let that take as much time as it needs.





ALSO AVAILABLE FROM EMANATA:



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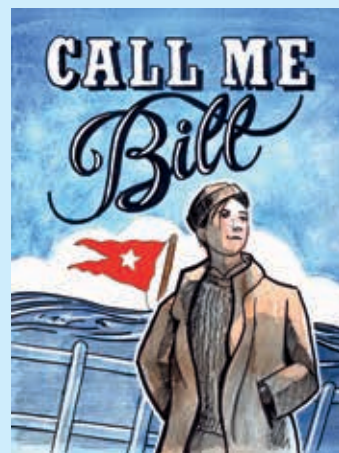
— School Library Journal (starred review)

“The rare sort of work that can be read and digested easily but that also provides the cautionary tales and allegory that elevate horror to something that remains long after one has finished reading.” — Kirkus Reviews



“Expertly illustrated in black and white, Lynette Richards’s debut graphic novel tells a fictionalized version of the life of Maggie/Bill Armstrong, an adventurer who defied gender expectations in a quest to do what they loved.” —Quill & Quire (starred review)

“Loosely inked gray-washed watercolors give the narrative a timeless feel. Richards’s thorough research—drawn from local records, community history, and historical and modern publications, which feature as excerpts throughout—help explore what Billy’s life might have been like in the late 19th century; while the excerpts focus primarily on Billy’s gender identity, Richards portrays Billy as a person with a complex and rich life who just wanted to be accepted as he was.” — Publisher’s Weekly



ISBN 9781772620788



ISBN 9781772621044

The Nameless City meets Princess Mononoke in this eco-adventure about a young messenger who taps into ancient magic to defend her island’s animal inhabitants. Sable has lived in a tight-knit community on a remote island for her whole life. With support from her parents, she’s trained for years to take up her position as the next Kerpathic, a messenger who travels through the dangerous forest to share news, medicine, and culture. In *Survival of the Goodest*, Marianne Boucher (*Talking to Strangers*) explores ideas of animal sentience, interspecies communication, and environmental preservation.

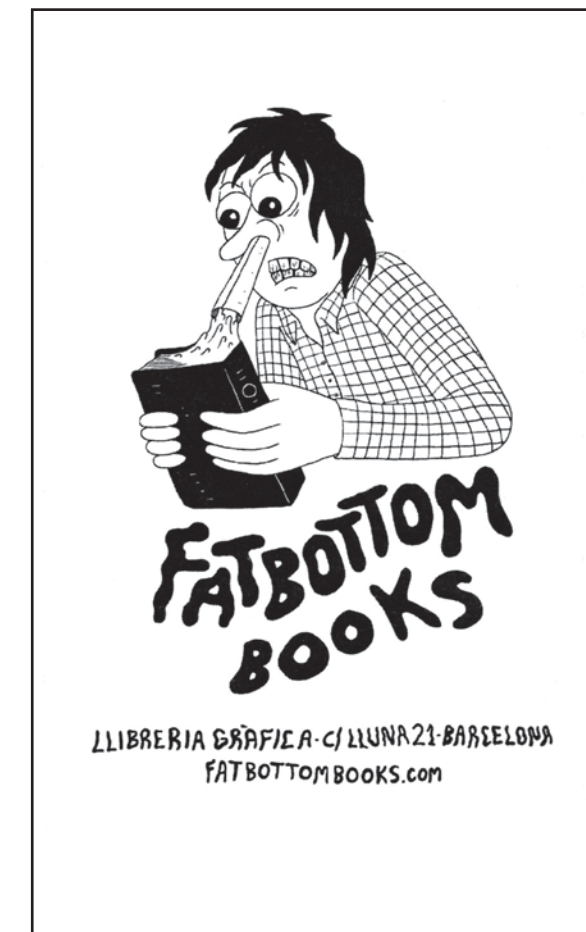
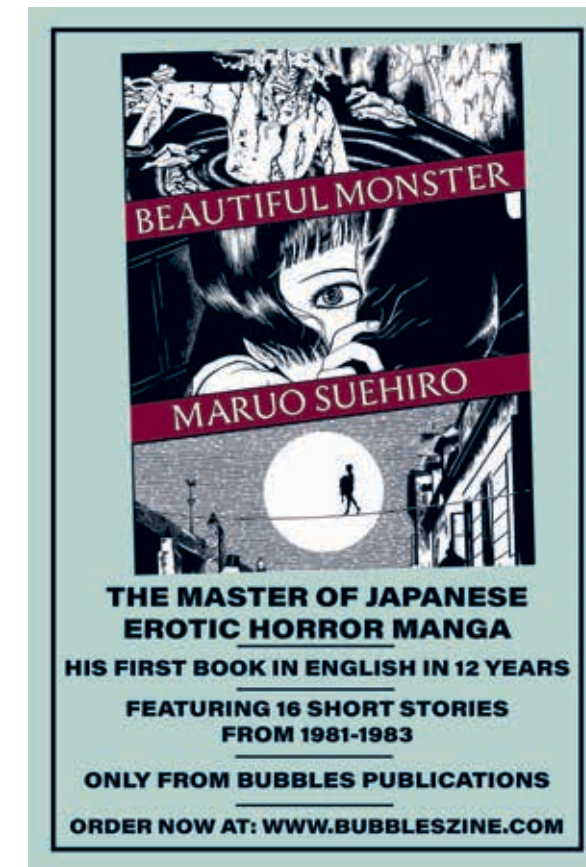
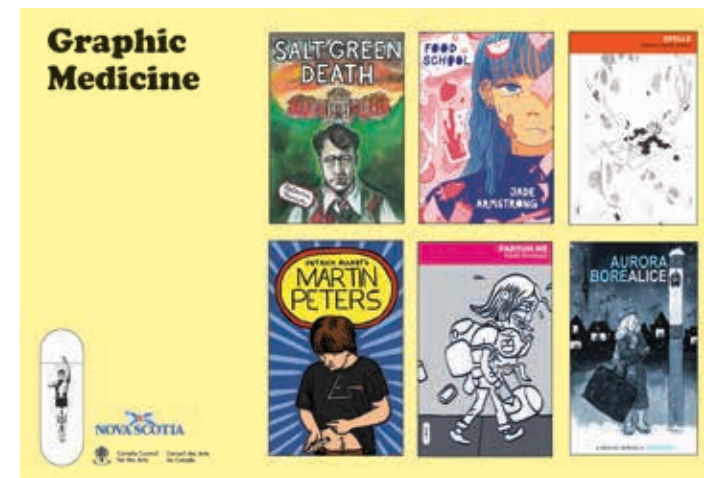
“Boucher’s dynamic, original illustration style contains sharp angles that convey energy. The compelling story, illustrated in grayscale art, embraces a message of living harmoniously with all creatures.” — Kirkus



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ELEANOR HANNON

Citymouse

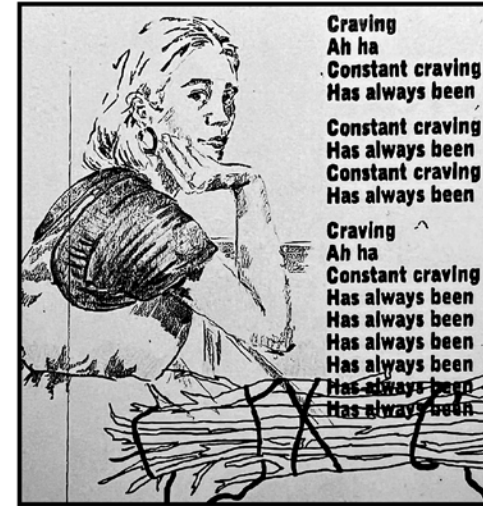
ISBN 9781772621105
96 pages / 4.25x6.25 inches / \$10 / May
Canada Only



Hannon has lived in the same Halifax neighbourhood her whole life, observing buildings come and go. As people and neighbourhoods change, the memory of how things were is increasingly challenging to conjure (but no less loved). *Citymouse* examines the ways that we begin to mourn places and experiences before we've lost them. Combining memoir elements, illustrated architectural spaces, portraits of loved ones and text, a story emerges that feels at once like a family album, time capsule, secret diary and a poem, reflecting the ebb and flow of her experiences straining to stay present while running in circles that bring constant reminders of the past. In other words, what it feels like to bloom where you were planted.



Eleanor Hannon is an artist and writer based in Halifax, Nova Scotia. She received a BFA from NSCAD in 2019 and has exhibited at Port Loggia Gallery, The Anna Leonowens, and Eyelevel galleries. Since 2014 she has been drawing and taking photos daily, creating an archive of her personal life in relationship to the ever-changing city around her. Lately, this approach has broadened to include curating and hosting art, literary and musical events at her café, Ramblers (est. 2021). Creating a space where artists can express themselves is an important part of her work and the documentation and posters she makes for these events have become another layer in her visual archive. In 2024, she founded a community newsletter called *The Ambler*, which she self-publishes monthly.



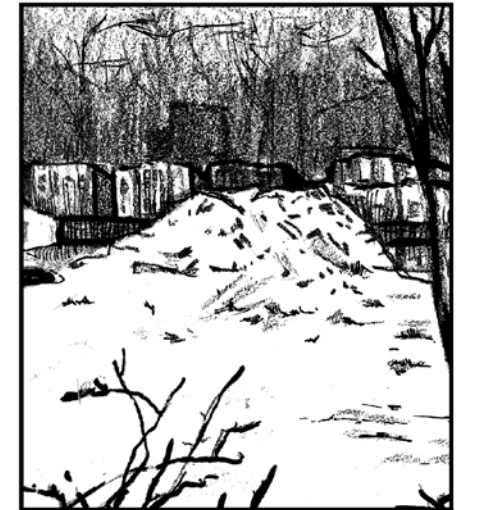
*There are some places
we never go back to.
If we're very lucky,
they disappear quietly.*



*Despite the cold, I kept my windows
open over the many days it took
to raze the house. I wanted to know
what the piano would sound like when
crushed. Would it explode?
KOMATSU VS. YAMAHA
3PM FIGHT*



*If you run into someone you haven't
seen in months and they catch
you off-guard with a "What's up
with you?" you might accidentally
find out how you're really doing*



*There was no explosion.
I watched as the house became
a pile, a snowy mountain, a
mudflat, a dog park, a troubled meadow.
This summer it was lush and
overflowing with wildflowers.*



VERONICA POST

Let The Good Times Roll

ISBN 9781772621143
 112 pages / 4.25x6.25 inches / \$10 / Oct
 Canada Only

Join the Post family for a vacation á la wheelchair! See how disabled travellers and their loved ones come up with creative solutions while navigating barriers abroad. Designed to expose the reality of travel in a wheelchair to able-bodied readers, this book fosters greater understanding and change toward a more inclusive world.



Veronica Post is an award-winning artist based in Halifax, Nova Scotia. She enjoys creating graphic novels based on her own life and travels, weaving philosophy, social commentary, heartache and humour into stories of a not-so-ordinary life.

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 ISBN 9781772620863

MY DAD HAS USED A WHEELCHAIR FOR ABOUT TEN YEARS.



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ONE NIGHT WE HAD, PERHAPS, A BIT TOO MUCH WINE...



THE SWING DOOR WAS BROKEN, SO DAD DECIDED TO TRY OUT THE AUTOMATIC ROTATING DOOR...



HE GOT STUCK!



WE WATCHED, HELPLESSLY, AS HE WAS PUSHED IN CIRCLES



LUCKILY, A RECEPTIONIST CAME TO THE RESCUE.



I DONNO IF IT WAS THE WINE, THE RELIEF, OR THE ACTUAL VISUAL OF IT...



BUT... IT WAS FRICKIN' HILARIOUS.





MOLLIE CRONIN

Future Me is Fat

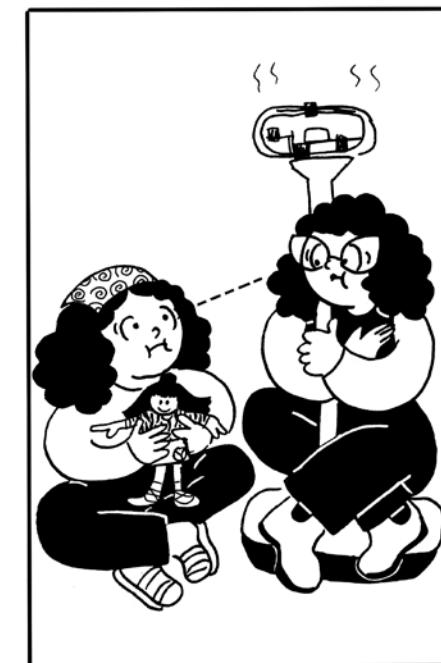
ISBN 9781772621150
 120 pages / 4.25x6.25 inches / \$10 / Oct
 Canada Only

A fat girl's time-travel escapades through space, time, and diet culture. Told through Sci-fi and autofiction, our heroine visits past selves, family histories, and distant futures to confront diet and body trends for some big fat adventures of her own.

photo: Stevey Hunter



Mollie Cronin is a cartoonist from Halifax, NS, and Fredericton, NB. Since 2015, Cronin has been creating comics and illustrations under the name Art Brat Comics, where she tersely tackles modern dating, fatphobia, and gender dynamics. Her work has appeared on Hulu's *Shrill*, as illustrations in books such as Molly Forbes' *Every Body* (2023), as tattoos, and as a monthly strip comic in an *Alt-Weekly*. Cronin has taught several comic courses in the extended studies program at NSCAD and has lectured at Dalhousie, U of T, and Queen's. She holds a BA in Art History from NSCAD University (2015), and an MA in Gender Studies from Queen's University (2024). She is currently living in Toronto where she is a PHD candidate at York. This is the first book of Cronin's comics.





DAKOTA MCFADZEAN

Fever Dream

ISBN 9781772621167
 112 pages / 4.25x6.25 inches / \$10 / Oct
 Canada Only

Fever Dream is about parents caring for a sick child. It's partly a visual exploration of the experience and sensations of a fever dream, and partly an expression of the kind of heightened anxiety caregivers feel, particularly since the pandemic began. The ever-present background fears about health care, institutional erosion, and the uncertain future are intersected with the immediacy of the screaming, spiraling nightmare of the child.



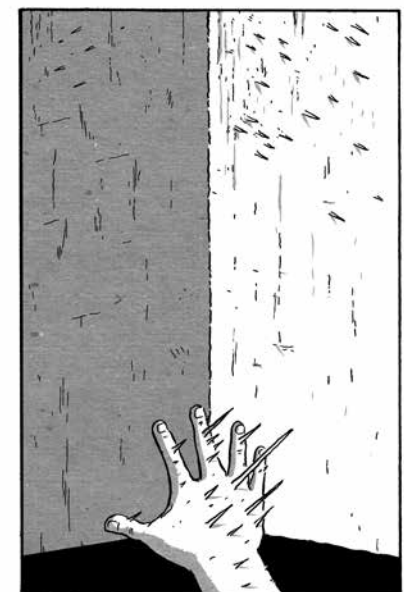
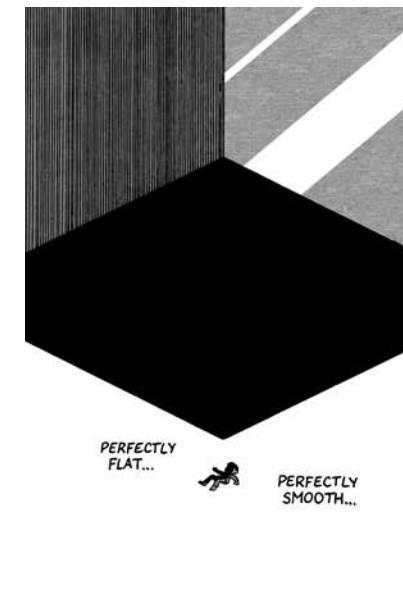
D. McFadzean is a Canadian cartoonist who has had work published by MAD Magazine, The New Yorker, The Best American Comics, and Tundra Books. He has also worked as a storyboard artist for DreamWorks and Netflix. McFadzean is an alumnus of The Center for Cartoon Studies (2012). McFadzean was a co-editor/co-founder of the comics and art anthology Irene, and distributes his own short stories in his ongoing minicomic series, Last Mountain. He currently lives in Saskatchewan with his wife and two sons.

ALSO AVAILABLE:

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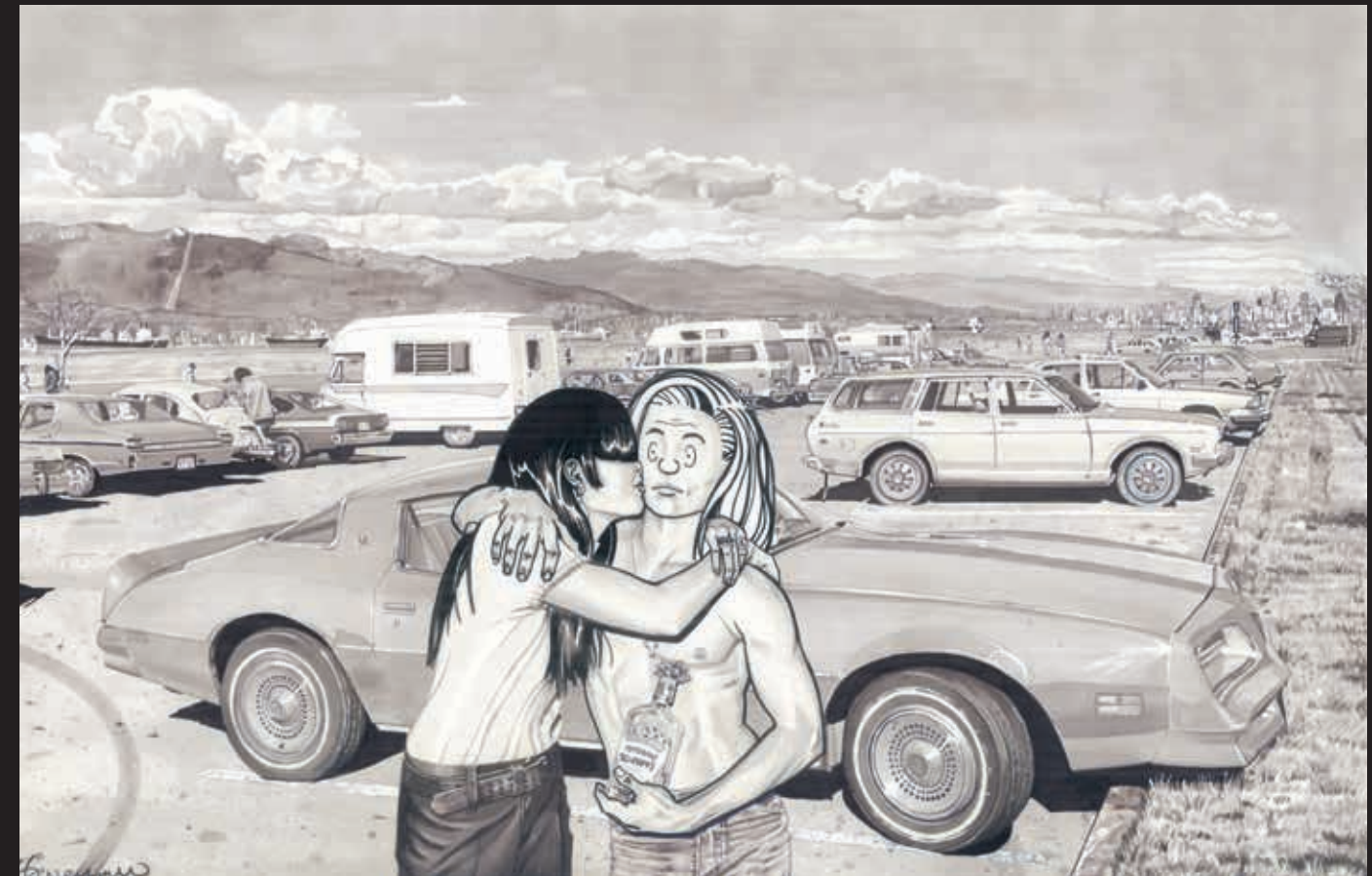
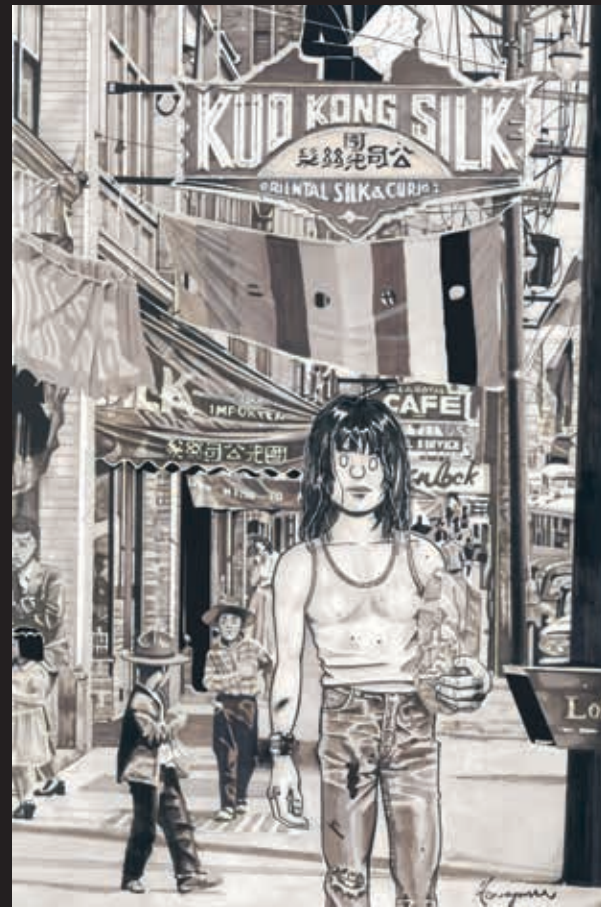
The Foxhound Gang Sacred Youth/Wasted Youth Vancouver: 1978

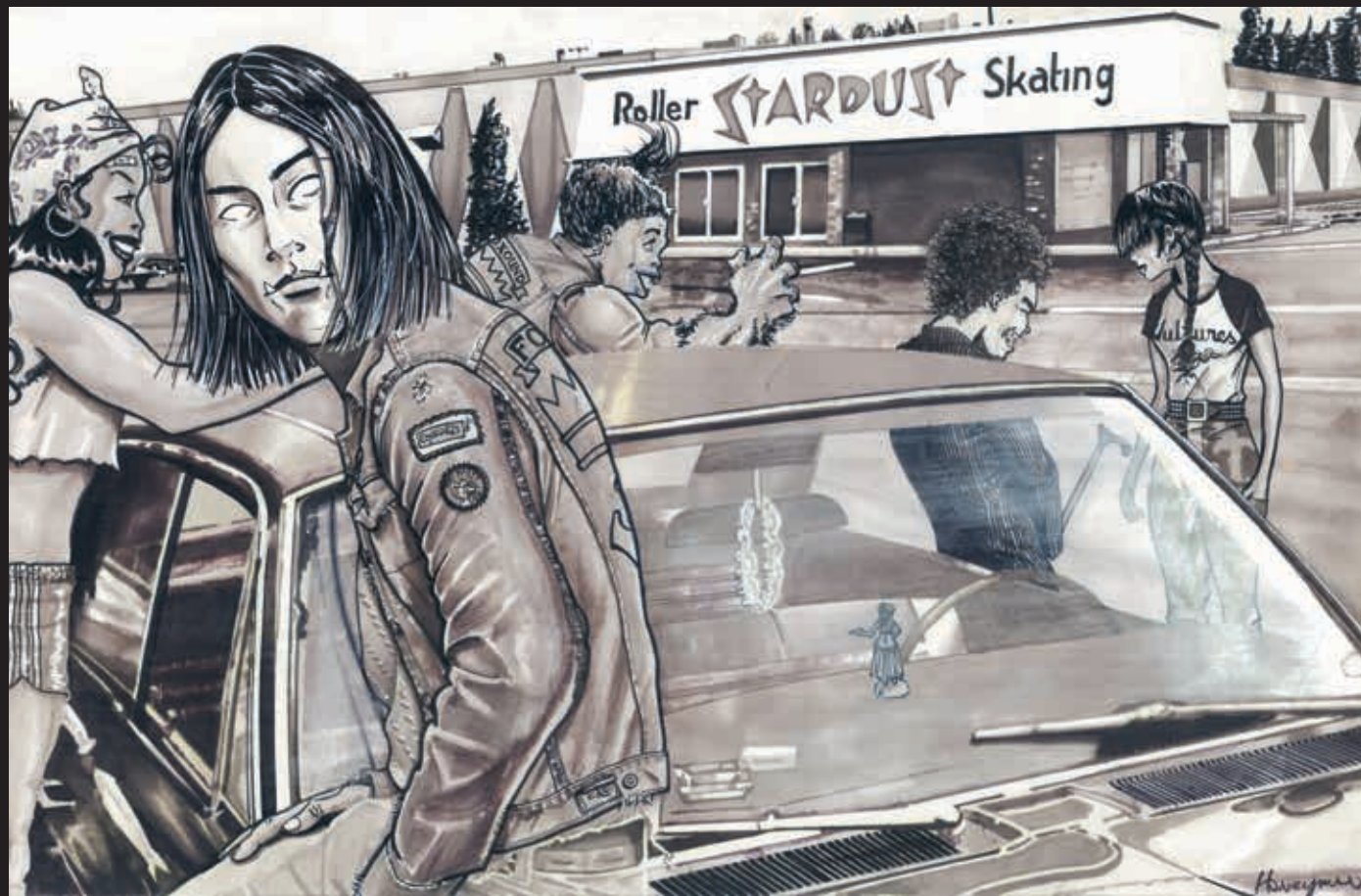
by Michael Honeyman

As a DJ can take two separate songs and remix them to make an entirely new and original composition, I take select images from photographers of youth and the city of Vancouver that provoke a strong emotional response in me and create new pieces that document the lives of a fictional, fantastical group of outcast Eastside teenagers who have formed a surrogate family for themselves under the guise of forming a gang, The Foxhound Gang.

My pieces document the exploits of The Foxhound Gang against the backdrop of Vancouver in 1978. They feature numerous historical landmarks and serve as a chronicle of lives lived during their most tumultuous phase while the city was experiencing its own dramatic changes. I am fascinated with both Vancouver, my home, during that time and with the youth of the 1970s, which for my money was the ultimate time to be a teenager, for better and for worse. The series is designed to be seen as a type of photojournalism, depicting one year in the life of my characters.

By invoking a distinct sense of nostalgia, I hope to create the illusion that these characters did exist, that their stories are there to be unearthed and discovered. This is meant to provoke the viewers into creating those stories for themselves by injecting the avatars that are the characters with memories of their own adolescence. By using iconic imagery of youth and transposing them onto iconic imagery of the city of Vancouver and creating a new and fantastical reality from the two, I hope to create a sense of history that mingles harmoniously with both mystery and limitless possibility. I create my pieces by hand using ink and Prismacolor markers.





by Erwin Dejasse

Even in the diverse world of Franco-Belgian independent comics, there is no publisher quite like Frémok. The name itself is a neologism — a combination of Fréon and Amok, the two publishers who merged to form the new entity — and the subject of a self-created, playfully avant-gardist Frémokian pseudo-mythology and invented language. A hybrid itself, Frémok constantly reapproaches, readdresses, and reinvents the comics medium by repeatedly hybridizing fine arts and narration at the extreme limits, wilfully disregarding culturally ratified conventions of the comics form. Despite the diverse artistic media used to produce Frémok comics — woodcut, oil paint, graphite, carbon paper, lithography, and more — Frémok insists that the book is itself an artistic production and they give extraordinary care and attention to bookmaking. Beyond publishing, Frémok functions as a “platform” for new projects that test, rearticulate, and expand the organization’s fundamental thesis across a spectrum of activity that includes exhibitions, site-specific installations, and, increasingly, collaborations with other institutions.

The beginnings of what would become later Frémok took place in a distressing period for Francophone comics. The profound renewal that came with the countercultural explosion of the 1960s and ’70s seemed to be definitively over two decades later. By the second half of the nineteen-eighties, Francophone comics, or *bandes dessinée*, had become as standardized in their own way as the DC/Marvel-style superhero comic books in the US. Overwhelmingly, publishers adhered to the oversized, 48-page hardcover “album” format (perhaps best known to American readers as the standard format for Tintin and Asterix volumes). Publishers produced countless series with endlessly recurring characters in established fictional genres, privileging the eternal return of conventional artistic styles.

Originally published in *World Literature Today: International Comics issue* edited by Bill Kartalopoulos (2016). Used by permission of the author.

Yet the change was already there in essence, notably at Saint-Luc-Bruxelles, famous for being the first European art school to have a curriculum especially devoted to comics. Among the students at this school who would form the core of the future publisher: Éric Lambé, Dominique Goblet, Jean-Christophe Long, the twin brothers Denis and Olivier Deprez and Thierry Van Hasselt. All of them still emphasize today the major influence of lecturer in Semiotics and Art History Michel Céder. He claimed that comics were still largely underexploited and would gain much if they could develop beyond the entertainment status and enter into a dialogue with other art forms. Publishing comics along with photographs, poetry or illustration, the Spanish magazine *Madriz* was regarded as a template. In 1990, most of the cartoonists from *Madriz* were part of an exhibition devoted to contemporary comics at Madrid Museo Reina Sofia. Among the foreign participants, the students and young graduates from Saint-Luc choose to christen themselves “Frigo.” Significantly, the very first public act of the collective was not a publication but an exhibition; many more would follow. On this occasion, Céder wrote a text that now sounds a bit like a manifesto: “History has taught us that art has to be the deconstruction of a norm... It is necessary to say and say again that formal work is not to be confused with formalism...: the meaning is built by the form... In each work, we have to replay the idea of comics: because to break up the norms is to place oneself at the boundaries of one’s art form.”

The birth of Frigo in 1990 — renamed Fréon four years later — was part of a larger international phenomenon. The total inaccessibility of mainstream publishing houses to new, unique voices meant that it was no longer necessary to compromise; the comics field had become again a virgin land where everything could be possible. To allow their aspirations to become reality, young authors did not have any other option than to join forces and begin publishing themselves. Besides the Fréon group and others in Belgium (*Pelure Amère*, *Bill*, *La Cinquième Couche*) similar alternative structures emerged during the same period in Spain (*Medios Revueltos*), France (Amok, L’Association, Cornélius, Ego Comme

X), Italy (*Mano*), Switzerland (*Strapazin*, *Drozophile*, *Atrabile*), and Germany (*Boxer*, *Reprodukt*). Notably influenced by Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly’s anthology *Raw*, they all considered comics to be the expression of a singular voice, as far as possible from the idea of commercial product. Jean-Christophe Menu, the cartoonist and co-founder of the French publishing house L’Association, emphasized: “It’s worth noting that, if some of the national mainstream styles may export poorly to other countries, ...their independent alternatives stem from a truly international culture.”

All of the independent publishers from different nations found common cause with one another, but Fréon in particular was closest to the Paris-based French publishing house Amok. By 1994, both publishers produced, as their primary projects, periodical comics anthology magazines: Fréon published the anthology *Frigobox*, and Amok published *Le Cheval Sans Tête*. The two magazines shared not only overlapping aesthetic tendencies that pushed the boundaries of comics, but even shared the contributions of specific artists who produced work for both magazines. But if Fréon came from the need to collectivize a group of authors who decided to publish themselves, Amok for its part was not, strictly speaking, a collective, but rather grew out of Olivier Marboeuf and Yvan Alagbé’s will to create a structure to express their editorial point of view about comics. According to Alagbé: “we wanted to create a publishing house in order to work with other people — we never defined ourselves as a self-publishers. Our goal was not to show only our own works. We turned naturally toward comics because there were many things to do in that field.”

In order to bolster this international publishing community, in 1995 Fréon and Amok organized *Autarcic Comix*, a series of events that brought together independent publishers including L’Association, Ego Comme X, and *La Cinquième Couche* for exhibits, discussion, and pop-up points of sale directly to readers. The retail component was not insignificant: at the time, even specialized bookshops were reluctant to sell alternative comics, so this DIY effort represented a way to get around dominant distribution channels.

Over several years, this travelling event fostered a still closer collaboration between the two publishers, who, by 1999, had each shifted focus from publishing anthology magazines to the more challenging task of publishing books by individual artists. A *rapprochement* between Fréon and Amok seemed quite natural given how they were close in terms of editorial ethics and aesthetic choices. In 2002, the two merged to form Frémok. At a formal event including discussions, an exhibit, book signings, a “Frémokian barbecue” and dancing, the parties involved signed a Treaty in keeping with a legal text from the origins of the European Community — a manifestation of their taste for *détournement* and for staging oneself that recalls Dada, the Situationist International and the *Collège de Pataphysique*. A press announcement about the union playfully noted that “The signing by Éditions Amok and Fréon of the Treaty of Frémok (FRMK) on June 22, 2002 gave birth to



Quelques Minutes Après Que Les Temps S'Arrête by Doublebob, 2023. Official Selection Angoulême Festival 51st Edition

a giant of graphic literature which already possesses a nearly 85% market share of the comics of pure creation (BDCP) according to the latest available statistics.”

Frémok comics are still today often described as difficult works that require an effort from the reader. Yet, according to Yvan Alagbé and Thierry Van Hasselt, the contemplative comics of Vincent Fortemps — with their complete lack of plot and characters with very imprecise identity — are a lot easier to read than extremely popular creations like Edgar P. Jacob’s *Blake et Mortimer*. While the imagery and narration of books like these may sometimes be mysterious, their approach to form remains fully open and the *mise en page* (or panel layout) is often quite straightforward; contrast these to the complicated codes and conventions of the typical comics page, which relies on cultural initiation and familiarity to decipher. It is true that many of Frémok’s books may seem utterly baffling when we consider them only from the “good story” perspective. But if comics are often called “graphic novels,” it could also be meaningful to regard some of them as “graphic poetry.”

Many Frémok books express the idea that the emotional appeal of art should not be sacrificed for the comprehensibility of the plot. In Olivier Deprez’s free adaptation of Franz Kafka’s

novel *The Castle*, the use of expressionistic woodcuts emphasizes the rawness of the human relations. The glut of black areas translates metaphorically the sensation of being smothered by a merciless bureaucracy. *Gloria Lopez* by Thierry Van Hasselt shows numerous grey values where the pictorial substance is quite literally dripping or bursting like soap bubbles. Panels are made from monotypes mixing black ink with paint thinner. Such a design that express uncertainty is congruent with the fragmented narrative and the depiction of a prostitution underworld. *Cîmes (Peaks)* by Vincent Fortemps is drawn with charcoal on the two sides of transparent plastic sheets, sometimes slashed in parts with a knife. This allows Fortemps to create lighting effects that emphasize the evanescent nature of his wordless comics. These images evoke a waning rural world that seems to disappear like childhood memories.

The German expressionist group Die Brücke and the Vienna Secession painters are some of the references that come to mind when looking at these works, rather than typical line art-based comics. The free use of such pictorial techniques has established the publisher's aesthetic identity, and has allowed Frémok to travel more freely between the contexts for comics and fine art. In general, most original comics pages shown in a 3d-space appear to be a modest testimony to a work whose overall aim is to be printed; original comics art of-



La Véritable Histoire de Saint-Nicolas by Thierry van Hasselt 2023. Official Selection Angouleme Festival 51st Edition

ten appears to be a step in a process rather than an intentional aesthetic object. Frémok authors however have supported from the very beginning the idea that their creations have the same meaning and effect when put in an exhibition space as they do in the pages of a book. To quote Christian Rosset, they distinguish themselves through their capability to “hold the wall.” The multidisciplinary artists of Frémok are heavily involved in a major trend in contemporary alternative comics, what Jean-Christophe Menu has described as “the progressive erosion of boundaries.” Today, Frémok define itself more as a “platform” for projects rather than a publisher. Yet the link with comics is never totally absent. Thierry Van Hasselt states: “we always like to be a little somewhere else and stay into comics at the same time.”

Furthermore, if the idea of making visual poetry or prioritizing pictorial matter are important qualities that characterize the Frémok aesthetic, their diverse body of more than one hundred published books cannot be reduced to these concepts. Frémok surprised the little world of comics by publishing the cartoony *Cowboy Henk* by Herr Seele and Kamagurka. The Flemish duo has produced a body of short pieces starring the titular, buffoonish character since the 1980s, featuring regressive humour mixing nonsense, sexual confusion and Belgian mythology in a “classical” drawing style evoking mid-century humour comics for children. As Frémok's catalogue becomes richer, nuances arise to reveal an always more complex editorial personality. Thierry Van Hasselt explains: “What we are interested in is to publish authors who bring you to an unlikely area of comics, where you never thought you could go. Little foreign or ‘out-of-bounds’ areas. When you compare two books they may have great discrepancies. Although, I have the feeling that when you put all the needles on the map, you see directly how they are linked up.”

The will to “erode boundaries” and to be “brought to unlikely areas” is eloquently illustrated by the publisher's imprint, Knock Out. This “platform of experiments” is born out of the meeting between Frémok and La “S” Grand Atelier, an art centre with several studios for creators with mental disabilities, located in the municipality of Vielsalm in the rural South of Belgium. This collaboration began in 2007 with a comics workshop in which artists associated with Frémok produced comics collaboratively with artists working at La “S”; the result of that first meeting has been published as the anthology book *Match de catch à Vielsalm (Wrestling Contest in Vielsalm)*. Several other projects — including books, exhibitions, lectures, theoretical papers, artists' residencies — have followed, celebrating “the wealth of hybrids projects.” A body of more recent multimedia collaborations was documented in the anthology book *Knock Outsider!*, alongside texts discussing the ethics and aesthetics of outsider art and the overall project. The Knock Out imprint was established to signal Frémok's commitment to this ongoing and highly specific collaboration between two groups of artists.



One of the most intriguing achievements currently run by this artistic joint venture was initiated by Marcel Schmitz, an artist with Down Syndrome. Since 2011, he has embarked on a mammoth 3D utopian city made with cardboard and scotch tape: FranDisco. According to its founder, the place is famous for its Belgian endives grown under glasshouses by naked workers, and for its cathedral that features a swimming pool. This permanent work in progress has given Thierry Van Hasselt the idea for a comic that would take place in this invented, constantly evolving environment. The building of the town and the making of the comic continuously enrich one another, in particular during artists' residencies in various locations (the last one took place in the stunning Foundation Victor Vasarely in Aix-en-Provence). These places have copiously inspired the model city's transformations which, in their turn, have fuelled the content of the comic. In *Vivre à FranDisco (Living in FranDisco)*, Marcel Schmitz intervenes from time to time in Van Hasselt's comics panels. This organically built work tells not only a story that takes place in its imaginary metropolis, but integrates the process of its own creation in its fictional content.

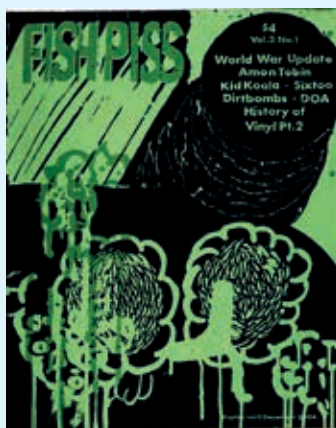
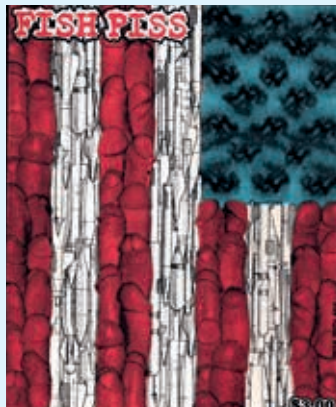
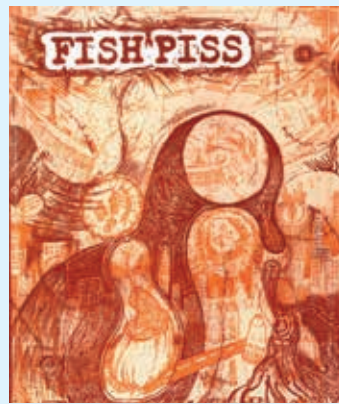
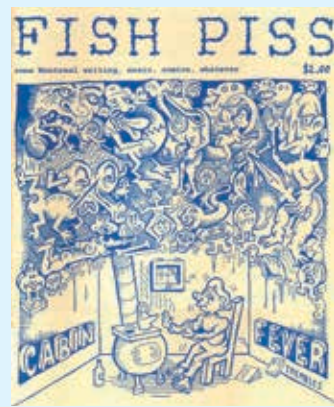
Pages from this project and more work by Frémok artists will soon be visible to North American readers in *Frémérika*, a collective English-language anthology that will be published within the next year.¹ The goal of this book is definitively not

to retrospectively present the quintessence of what Frémok has already produced during their past twenty-five years of existence. Instead, most of the content planned for this volume has never been published in any language, giving English-speaking readers the opportunity to witness an editorial project that continuously redefines its forms and its uses. The plans for this publication follow an increasing presence by Frémok at American comics festivals including the Brooklyn Comics and Graphics Festival, SPX: The Small Press Expo in Bethesda, MD and the MoCCA Arts Festival in New York City. Additionally, *Pretending is Lying* by Dominique Goblet — one of the main authors of Frémok — has been translated by New York Review Comics, the comics imprint established by the New York Review of Books. These steps all represent a literal, transcontinental boundary crossing by this unique publisher, so that North American readers — and artists — can more fully experience and consider Frémok's boundary breaking form and content.

¹ This project was never published. Update from Frémok in 2024: “Frémérika was a dream of ours to have an international review of experimental comic strips, building bridges between different countries. We would have wanted to bring a support in which different artists could exchange their latest experimentations and views on comic strips. This project needed financial support, which we didn't obtain at the time, and a lot of work. Maybe such a project will be brought back to life one day, under one form or another, if we have time and money for that.”



Erwin Dejasse has a PHD in art history and is an exhibitions curator, academic researcher, and lecturer specialized in comics. He writes also regularly about art brut and other visual art forms at the margin. He is the curator of La “S” Grand Ateliers art collection.



Why Fish Piss Matters: On the Last Authentic Bohemia

by Andy Brown

In **WHY FISH PISS MATTERS**, Andy Brown does a deep dive into the influential Montreal zine of the 1990s, highlighting the unique way it bridged its French and English influences, creating an exciting space for creative exchange. Brown offers an insider's perspective on the cultural significance of the zine and its lasting legacy.

He also explores the history of various bohemian communities over the past 200 years, and **Fish Piss's** singular role in that history.

Spring 2025



The following is the Introduction from

WHY FISH PISS MATTERS: ON THE LAST AUTHENTIC BOHEMIA

by Andy Brown

When I moved my family and small publishing company to Wolfville, Nova Scotia in 2010 I met an Irish immigrant and professor of Sociology at the local arts University. By way of awkward introductions, made more difficult because we were both so obviously “from away”, I mentioned my twenty years living on the Plateau / Mile End neighbourhood in Montreal. His eyes lit up when he heard this. He asked excitedly about my time there and was genuinely shocked to find me here, in a small town, thousands of miles from that hotbed of cultural activity. He told me, “You make the things that give us academics something to write about.”

My background in Montreal obviously meant something to him. I discovered he was a huge fan of the music that came out of Constellation Records, started at the same time, in the same neighbourhood, as my publishing operation, Conundrum Press. He talked like this was somehow important. He felt that this time and place in history, of which I was an insider, genuinely mattered. His enthusiasm got me thinking. Why does it matter? In the late 1990s I was just struggling to get by like everyone else I knew, bulking up on bagels and cheese pizza slices to absorb the beer and save money, trying to write stories in shotgun apartments interrupted by screaming neighbours, freelancing, dodging the circumstances that would bring me to welfare. What was it about the time and place I was such a part of, that shaped who I am today, that mattered to someone who wasn't there?

We were part of an anglophone bohemian community of writers, artists, musicians and political activists, but I realize now bohemianism is only recognized in hindsight. What the hell is bohemianism anyway? Is that even what was going on?

I would have seen my first issue of the zine *Fish Piss* in 1996 while sunk in a red velvet couch in the brightly painted living room of my huge eight room apartment on Fairmount Ave, for which I was splitting the rent of \$600. If you squint hard enough you can make it out in the 1974 film version of Mordecai Richler's *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*. My future roommate, Billy Mavreas, was the cover artist. The yellow cardstock cover was adorned with his highly-stylized fish drawing and other than the strange title the only other text was *No advertising, \$1*. I doubt it made a huge impression on me at the time. Billy was heavily involved in the French and English comics communities and he was always showing me some sort of alternative, stapled, crazy, gross, whacked-out publications with names like: *Guillotine*, *Foetus*, *Mr Swiz*, or *106U*. Inside there were some writers I knew from the “spoken word” series I attended at *Bistro 4*, Heather O'Neill and Jonathan Goldstein, so maybe I thought it was cool to have comics and spoken word together. Billy was a community

node, straddling the comics, music, and lit types, French and English. I just sat back and absorbed it all.

However, it was not until issue #4 (1998) that I truly took notice of *Fish Piss*. This was for a couple of reasons. The cover was the first one silkscreened by Simon Bossé, featuring the gorgeous artwork of Jean-Pierre Chansigaud, a very recognizable Plateau balcony in the middle of winter. The back cover was by Marc Bell, who slept on that same red velvet couch on and off over the years. It was larger too, at roughly 80 pages, as opposed to the original 24. The other reason I noticed was because I volunteered to do some of the layout, mostly because Catherine Kidd, my current roommate, and myself both had writing in the issue and I wanted to make sure it looked professional. This issue was reviewed in *Broken Pencil*, (at the time called “The Guide to Alternative Culture in Canada”): “What holds it all together, what any real literary venture must have to make the loose ends gel, is a passionate commitment to making things better. That's what Louis does for the mag.” *Fish Piss* was becoming representative of many different cultural fields, although I only realize this in hindsight. At the time, I was just going along for the ride.

Edited by native Montrealer Louis Rastelli, *Fish Piss* ran for 11 issues from 1996 to 2006 (plus 3 limited bonus mini issues). It began as a mash-up of the anglophone spoken word community and the comics community, both French and English. It featured literary material, comics, essays, interviews with regular folk, politics, and music. Often called Canada's most influential zine, *Fish Piss* arose from the DIY aesthetic (do-it-yourself) of the 1970s punk scene. In fact, editor Rastelli cut his teeth on a Montreal music zine called *RearGarde*, then took over the reigns as the editor of *Flaming Poutine*, which transformed into *Fish Piss*. The name riffs off the McLuhan metaphor of how consumers of media affect each other constantly without realizing it, much like fish may not notice that they are swimming in their own urine.

Eventually the publication went from that yellow photocopied zine to a 160-page publication with advertising and worldwide distribution through Tower Records. Being in Montreal, it was bilingual and served to establish a unique “contact zone” of cultural production.

As the reaction of my professor friend proves the legacy of *Fish Piss* persists, whether due to its role as a time-capsule of 1990s Montreal, or as a window into successful artists' earlier work, or whether the idea of a print publication born of a punk ethos with an open submission policy, could influence or even exist in today's Internet-saturated corporate cultural climate. It was the representation of a true Bohemian community, and due to the timing, post-Referendum and pre-social media, perhaps the last of its kind. *Fish Piss* is a calling card to a time and place that can be called Canada's last authentic Bohemia.

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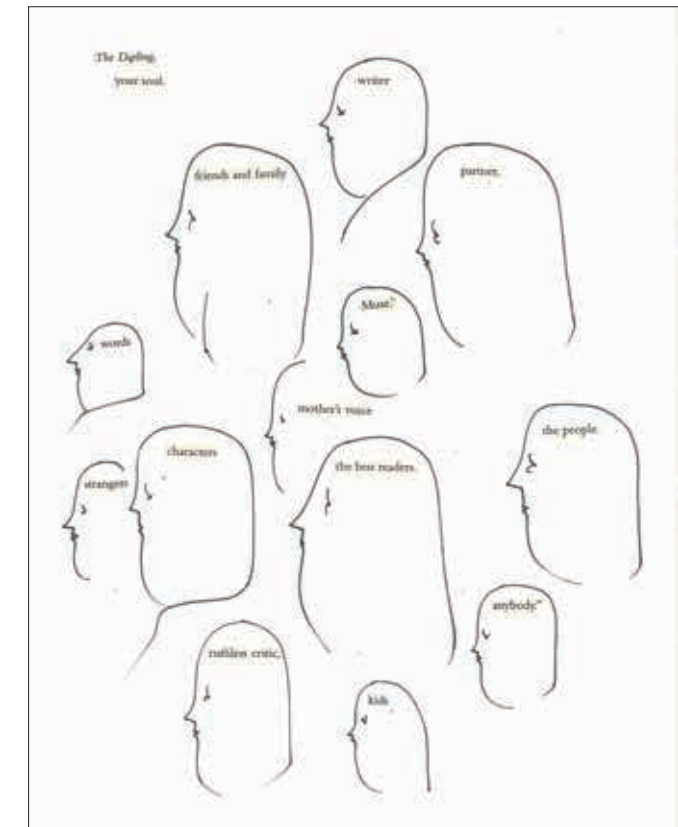
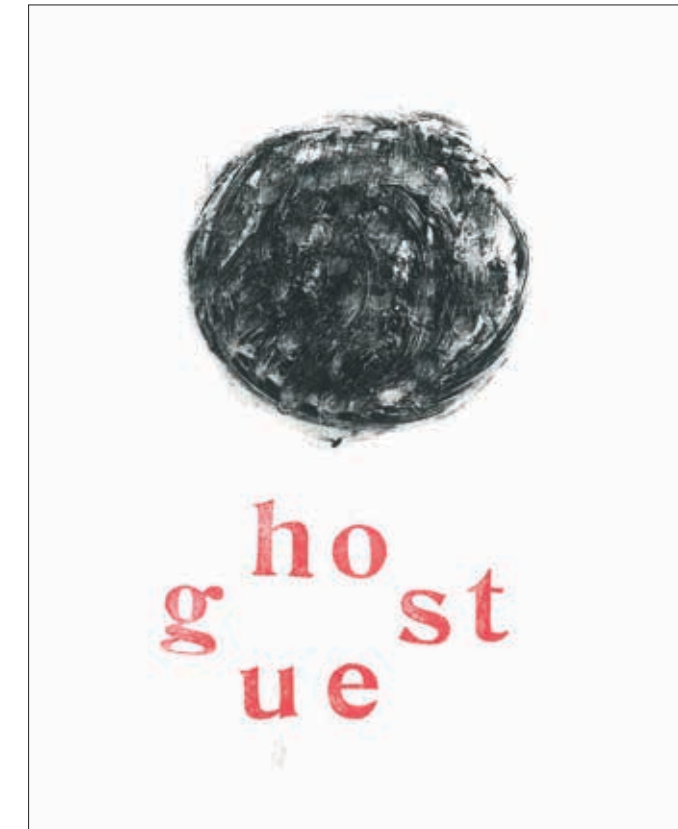
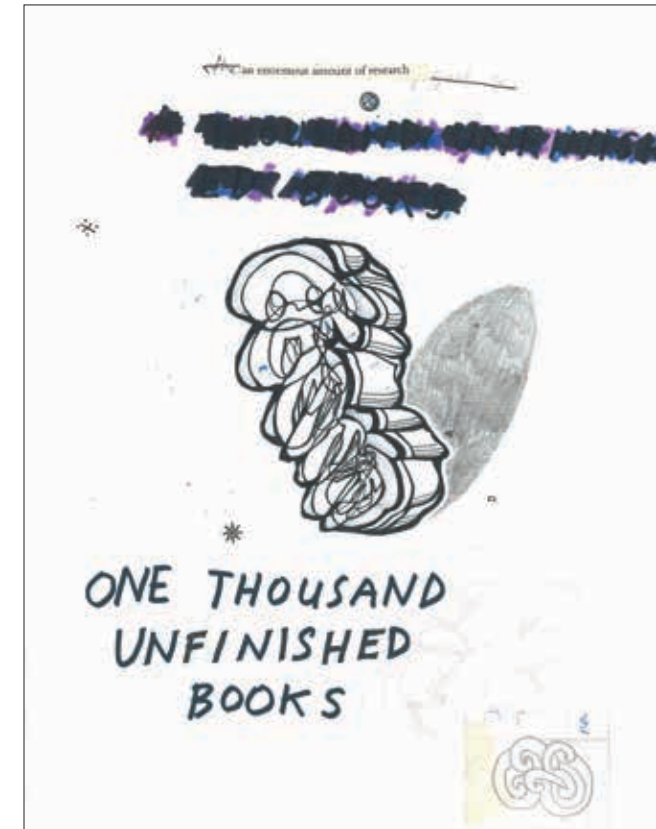
EVERYTHING IN THE SERVICE OF THE PRESENT

VASILIOS BILLY MAVREAS

This cumulative mixed media project started as my response to Covid lockdowns, the closing of my large shop / studio, my undiagnosed ADHD and the overwhelm attendant to dealing with many years of art practice accumulation.

These 280 odd pages are born from frenetic treatments on existing work, automatic gestures across pages, random sampling, scrawls, cutouts and collage, poetic mutterings, a daily art practice and a full trust in procedural approach. The directions revealing themselves have changed often in the last two years and are steadily coalescing into cohesion. Fingers crossed.

Perpetually unfinished and reinvented.



HANNAH LOUISY



This year we reviewed some fabulous submissions from early-career Black and Indigenous creators. It's always difficult to choose, but this year, we're thrilled to share that **Hannah Louisy is the recipient of the fourth annual Conundrum Press Mini-Comic Bursary for Black and Indigenous Creators**. This \$1000 bursary for developing and emerging creators was established in 2020, in solidarity with anti-racist protestors fighting for crucial change against systemic racism.

Conundrum Press: What do you want people to know about you?

Hannah Louisy: I'm a Queer 25-year-old multidisciplinary artist from Montreal, QC. I recently got my BFA at Concordia University. Aside from comics and drawing I'm also involved in video art, new media installation, and perform bass and vocals in a punk band called Durex. I love comics so much, they are my favourite thing to read, and I am so grateful to have this support in the making of my first actual comic book. For any inquiries you can contact me at [@han_5000_nah](https://www.instagram.com/han_5000_nah) on Instagram.

CP: What drives your creative work? What themes do you tend to focus on?

HL: Much of my work is emotionally driven and informed by the events of my life. I find that I frequently use images to portray unnamable things and feelings that I have trouble putting into words. I'm currently inspired by the notions of ghosts, the after-life, and "heaven on earth". There are so many varied beliefs of what happens after death around the world, and it's interesting how our beliefs on death can inform the ways in which we live our lives. There's a lot of life and longing in the stories we tell ourselves about the afterlife.

CP: Your entry was based on your *Visions* work — can you tell us a bit about that project and what it means to you? And where it will be available?

HL: *Visions* is a story about two friends who while going on a walk discover a ghost and spend the rest of their day looking for it. I came up with the story while we were deep within the pandemic after finding out my ex-best friend had passed away. I was dealing with that but also dealing with a lot of frustration I was having with my body because of a developing disability. So I was thinking a lot about ghosts, and how they can go wherever they want, free from the limitations of an unreliable body. I was thinking about how the ghosts of people and animals we've lost could still be out there, floating wherever they want like little wisps in the wind. I like how something like a ghost leaves so much space for creative liberties. They can really be whatever you want them to be.

So I wrote this story, loosely based on my own experiences, of two friends who have this supernatural encounter with a ghost, and spend the rest of their day searching for it. Though the drawings in this story appear friendly and light hearted on the surface, these are themes that I work towards in *Visions* through symbolic and visual storytelling. The comic will be available either at my online shop (hannahlouisy.bigcartel.com) or by getting in touch with me via instagram.

CP: What will the bursary help you accomplish?

HL: I intend to self publish *Visions*, so this bursary will go towards the costs of printing and the materials required for hand binding. I will bind the comic with red thread, because it references the red thread the characters use in the story. It will also go towards covering the costs of tabling at local zine and comic fairs, and the copies I plan on giving to local independent bookstores and public collections.



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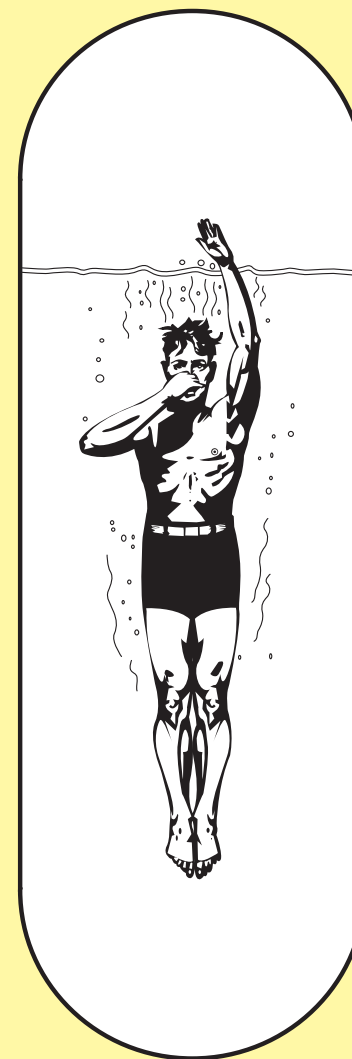
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Sofia Alarcon
D. Boyd
Rick Trembles
Zoé Jusseret
Vivi Partridge
Dakota McFadzean
Eleanor Hannon
Mollie Cronin
Veronica Post

