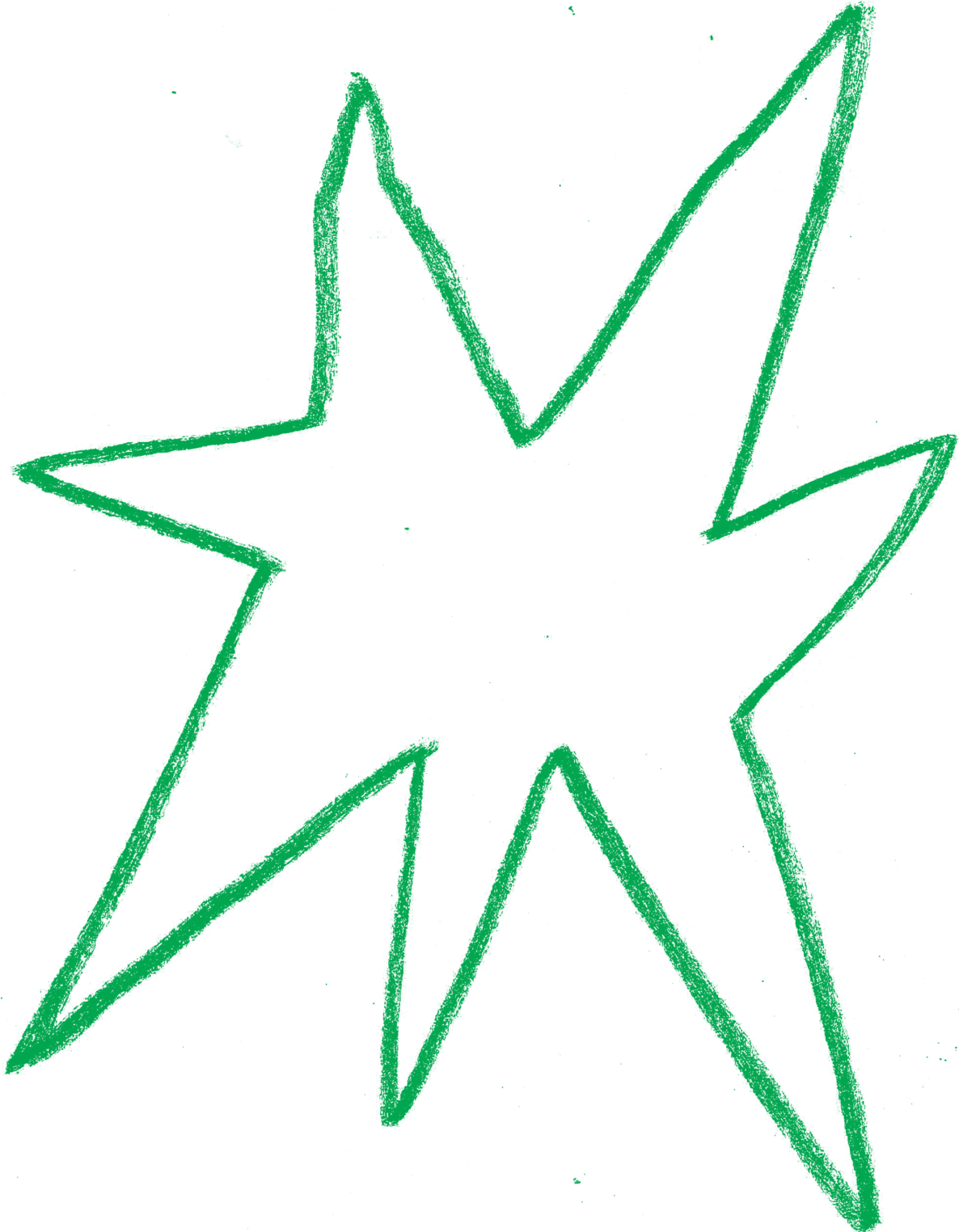


THE DODO



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Editor's Note

As the second issue of *The Dodo* comes together, we find ourselves at a moment of transition—the end of a quarter, the end of a term, and the beginning of a season that asks us to slow down and take stock. The theme of this issue, pulse, captures that sense of movement and stillness, the steady rhythm that shapes how we live and create.

For me, it came in the smallest of moments. I was drinking water from my bottle when I realized it no longer tasted strange. It was such an ordinary thing, but in that instant, I could feel myself falling into step with the city's rhythm. My pulse had aligned with its pulse, and suddenly the unfamiliar felt a little more like home.

In these pages, we reflect on the beats that guide us and the pauses that ground us. Through stories, art, and ideas, this issue explores how we find our rhythm in new spaces and moments of stillness. As the year winds down and the festive season unfolds, we hope this collection gives you a moment to pause and feel the pulse of it all.

— Until the next beat,
Harismita Govindaraj

The Pulse of Resistance—Exhibition Review on Peter Kennard: Archive of Dissent

SERENA XINRAN GAO, CURATING CONTEMPORARY ART MA

As one of the UK's foremost political and protest artists, Peter Kennard reviews his 50-year career at the Whitechapel Gallery in London. The exhibition *Peter Kennard: Archive of Dissent* spanning galleries 5 to 7, provides a comprehensive retrospective. Unlike traditional solo exhibitions, which often follow a chronological or thematic curatorial approach, *Archive of Dissent* provides a dynamic immersion of Kennard's radical political ethos.

The exhibition departs from conventional static archives with an interactive installation design. It opens with a newly commissioned installation: *People's University of the East End* (2024), named after the exhibition's locality—the former Whitechapel Library—echoing the space's historical role in education. Gallery 5 houses the first part of this installation: dozens of placards featuring Kennard's iconic photomontages, which the audience can flip through like pages of a book. This arrangement transforms the typical passive gallery experience into a more interactive one, inviting visitors to directly engage with Kennard's minimal yet radical visual language. The installation continues in gallery 6, where posters mounted on wooden sticks—reminiscent of protest signs—extend the activist energy of the first room. Among the photomontages are Kennard's powerful critiques of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), critiques of capitalism, environmental concerns, and the latest global conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza.

Having created political art for five decades, Kennard explores photomontage techniques with diverse mediums in his two recent sophisticated installations in gallery 7. *Double Exposure* (2023) consists of 36 posters occupying an entire wall. On the fronts are *Financial Times* market data, while iconic montages from the artist's oeuvre are printed on the back, intermittently backlit by the light bulbs behind, appearing through the newspaper. The random illumination of montages creates a theatrical effect that energizes the otherwise static archive. The other installation, *Boardroom* (2023), dissects the montage technique through the interplay of light, glass, and projections. It features unrecognizable, anonymous faces as background imagery, overlaid with projected logos of oil companies and images of drones. Through this layered visual language, Kennard critiques the exploitative practices of extractive capitalism.

Some reviews argue that the complexity of these installations undermines the straightforwardness and clarity of Kennard's works.¹ However, such comments misinterpret the coherence in Kennard's creative intention: "ripping these surfaces [of reality] apart to show what's underneath."² To ensure such purpose is reached on the maximum level, Kennard adapts his methodology to different contexts and mediums. For flat surfaces that will compete with all kinds of ads and information in the public realm, the artist strives for visual clarity. Yet in gallery spaces—one of the few remaining places where people take time to carefully see and contemplate the exhibits—Kennard wishes to deliver more subtle messages with layers of installation, showing audiences how he manipulates the images instead of obscuring them. This approach underscores why Kennard places significant value on exhibitions as a political artist.³

However, a potential downside of the exhibition's departure from conventional curatorial mode is the lack of in-depth contextualization for every montage displayed, which can be essential in understanding political art. This limitation reflects a broader issue in Kennard's practices, which he himself also discussed in an interview on *The Guardian*: Art can only get this far; sadly, the subjects on the montages created forty years ago remain just as relevant—if not more so—today.⁴

Kennard clarifies that his works never tell people what to do but aim to "present things that will get people to think critically."⁵ This purpose is realized in the exhibition, where visitors can explore his works at their own pace. In addition to the two deconstructive installations, gallery 7 showcases a wall of individual photomontages, complemented by two rows of lecterns presenting the original newspapers on which some of his works first appeared. A vitrine in gallery 6, *Worktop*, displays raw materials used in his photomontages, offering deeper insight into his creative process. As audiences return to gallery five from the same route they enter, a reading area offers publications that delve further into Kennard's practice. Finally, in a gesture of accessibility, visitors are invited to take home a newspaper featuring Kennard's iconic images. This reinforces Kennard's commitment to getting his work out to the public.

¹ Sarah Kent, "Peter Kennard: Archive of Dissent, Whitechapel Gallery Review - Photomontages Sizzling with Rage," *the artsdesk.com*, August 6, 2024, <https://www.theartsdesk.com/visual-arts/peter-kennard-archive-dissent-whitechapel-gallery-review-photomontages-sizzling-rage>.

² A/POLITICA, "Rip It Apart | A/POLITICAL Introduction To Peter Kennard," YouTube, July 16, 2024, 9:28, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cnAllea2Ag8>.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Guy Lane, "Protest, resistance and dissent: a retrospective of the art of Peter Kennard," *The Guardian*, July 24, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/article/2024/jul/24/peter-kennard-whitechapel-gallery-retrospective-protest-resistance-dissent>

⁵ *Ibid.*

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SERENA XINRAN GAO, *People's University of the East End*, installation view, personal archive



SERENA XINRAN GAO, *Double Exposure*, installation view, personal archive

Verisimilitude (noun)

/ˌvɛr-ə-si-ˈmɪl-ə-t(y)üd/

NASRAH OMAR, MA PHOTOGRAPHY

This series presents familiar objects that blur the boundary between the real and the artificial, forming a contemporary vanitas arrangement pulsating with an unsettling aura. The claustrophobic juxtapositions examine consumption habits and habituation through a surreal lens. Mundane and familiar objects are transformed into otherworldly cornucopias, drawing from the saturated visual language of commercial advertising while subverting its intent.

See another image from this project on page 21.



(Un)Living ANTOINE CHAUDET, MA VISUAL COMMUNICATION

Rolly polly,
I tumble and mumble my way
Towards the rumble of the once-illuminated city.
Now, basked in the afterglow of the crumbling sun.
Hurrah! Hurrah!
The people rejoice with their thousand yard stares.
We laugh without care, with our hands in the air.
We squabble as drunken mares,
Where the hobbled cry at their wobbling homes.
They're torn to shreds, and yet life's
But a gobble to some - mostly, all.
Today,
I'm all fizzled out. And all I can do is watch,
muzzled and puzzled.
How can this continue with our coloured emotions?
And now, all I can do is stand in
the motionless commotion of others.



This work explores the visceral and uncanny, reflecting both my personal fear of fish and humanity's deeply flawed relationship with nature. The fish's grotesque, pimple-like protrusions, crafted from air-dry clay, evoke pollutants or infections, symbolizing the scars human activity leaves on ecosystems. Its unsettling, distorted features challenge viewers to confront discomfort and question the gradual, impending apocalypse we are living through.

As an artist from Lahore, Pakistan, a city currently shrouded in hazardous smog, this piece carries a profound cultural resonance. The smog, a result of industrialization and environmental neglect, mirrors the blemished surface of the fish, serving as a metaphor for the toxic imprint we leave on our surroundings. By combining painting with tactile sculptural elements, this work provokes a visceral response, inviting reflection on humanity's ongoing degradation of the natural world and its deeply terrifying consequences.

Peripatetic pulses RADTAI LOKUTARAPOL, MA WRITING

A chess game's pulse: move after move. In that moment of decision, countless choices appear, yet only one can be made. The others vanish, dissolving into the rhythm of time. Life mirrors this—the ticking pulse of a clock, a scream from gut feeling leading us forward, and a reckoning that comes only after the move is made. *Life's pulse is real.* Seeing one path disappear while standing too long at a crossroads. A career, a lover, a city—each vanishing with the same turbulence as the next.

LONDON 2020

At the start of 2020, I was studying film in London and dating J. One day, we saw a Cecil Beaton exhibition at the National Gallery. A man beside me said, “He’s the type who’d call Hollywood to set design *My Fair Lady* for half price. That’s how he made it.” Truth? I didn’t know. But something sparked—wouldn’t it be nice to dress well, do art, get paid?

Walking back through Soho with J, I noticed theaters, pubs, cafes—closed. London became a ghost town. Empty tubes. Rats scurrying where crowds used to throng. I didn’t fear COVID but knew the city’s pulse, as I knew it, was dying. Back at my flat in Finsbury Park, I kissed J. His heartbeat pulsing against mine. For months, it was this. Until I told him: I’m leaving. His sadness echoed, but he respected it. Two weeks later, I was gone.

BANGKOK 2020

In quarantine, I texted J. No reply. Perhaps he died—COVID, who knows? Thin and boyish, artistic vibe, my type. But frail? Maybe. F***! I hated wanting him and hating him at the same time.

J once told me: “When I was four, I went with my mom to the airport. My dad left us that day and never came back.”

I’m not your dad, J. You don’t need me. You need therapy. That’s how our affair’s pulse flatlined.

KOH SAMUI 2021

On a bright blue beach, I walked with a high school ex. A doctor now, fulfilling the dream he had since we were 14. And me? Unmoored. Freelancing, unemployed—nothing solid enough to share.

Our pulse had died long before J. Three nights together in a hotel, staring, silent. Nothing. Not even a kiss.

One morning, I woke early, the sunrise calling me. I wandered alone to the shore. Orange light breaking through grey clouds. Waves crashing. I filmed it—propped my phone against a rusty umbrella stand, capturing the scene.

Then, I stripped down to my favorite shorts, waded into the water. Knee-deep, face tilted to the glowing sun. The world around me vanished into horizon and sky. *If God exists, he must have spent some time here.*

2021-2023: A FLATLINE

After Samui, I took a corporate job. Made money. Hated life. Bliss, like that sunrise, never returned. Dated people. None stirred a heartbeat strong enough to stay.

When asked, *What do you want to do?* I still don’t know.

MILAN 2024

Furthering my sardonic relationship with myself, I enrolled in business school. The pulse here: lectures droning, day after day. ROI, income statements, numbers tightening like a noose.

I worked hard for a finance quiz. Failed. Something snapped. What the f..k am I doing here? Why does the artistic type like me have to be in a corporate world? And now a business school where people never ask question and try to bring solution to everything. Life is not a f...king equation!

I dashed out, bought an e-reader, and shut Milan out entirely. English books became my refuge in an Italian-speaking city. Deborah Levy wrote in *The Cost of Living*: “Life falls apart. We try to hold it together. Then we realize we don’t want to hold it together.”

“I miss London! I miss art! I miss the pulse of artistic life.” Money isn’t the answer. And I know—I need to move again.

LONDON 2024

I just finished seeing the Francis Bacon exhibition at the National Gallery. What drew me to him wasn’t necessarily his work, but him as a person. If you’ve ever watched a video of him giving an interview, you might be fascinated by how eloquent and passionate he speaks about his art. The way he gestures with his hand and tilts his head while describing his work is charming—you have to stop scrolling and watch. That was what drew me in. There happened to be a show of his, so I booked a ticket to see it. I booked several pay-as-you-can tickets. Unlike Bacon, I’m not from an upper-class family. I don’t speak as eloquently as he does. My peripatetic life has been about struggling to find a way to pursue my dreams, to escape a life I don’t like, and make a living. But his life was about enjoying life, moving from one posh place to another in Soho, champagne bottle after champagne bottle. And yet, he managed to have long-term relationships with some men, while I haven’t—why, I’m still not sure.

But subconsciously, this is why I’m so drawn to Bacon. While his paintings feature faces blurred and distorted, as though not just the body but the very essence of the human spirit was under attack. Bacon’s figures—figures that were never whole, never settled. In his work, the figure often seemed both desperate and detached, reaching outward but somehow bound to its own fate. The discomfort of his distorted, screaming forms was something I understood. This is how I felt—trapped in a city that seemed to be dying, in relationships I couldn’t fully grasp, in a life that was more about surviving than living. While his real life was somewhat exuberant.

For years, I tried to hold my life together. I viewed my artistic path before that as a great mistake that had to be corrected. Bacon’s life and work forced me to ask: Is it really as I thought? Or was it great to serendipitously fall in love with someone? To follow one’s desire. To live a life doing things that make you happy. Does art have

to mean something? Does it have to be political or have purpose? Does life have to have purpose, or do we have to make progress?

Francis Bacon once famously said that the best part of beauty is that which beauty cannot express.

Soho again. The street’s pulse alive, bodies weaving, voices overlapping. A gallery pulled me in. Crowded. Champagne glasses. People talking, ignoring the art—or was the art watching them?

One painting stopped me: a man, turning back, his hand gripping a gun aimed forward. Around him, fragmented scenes: windows, mirrors, screens. Disjointed yet connected.

“It’s a mess. Like my life. I love it,” I said to someone beside me.

The artistic type. Definitely my type. Warm, too.

His presence reminded me of Samui’s sunrise—light and possibility.

My pulse raced. I asked him out. He said yes. And then I learnt that the painting was his.

Back down Soho’s street., jazz spilled from Ronnie Scott’s—drums, bassline and piano dancing. For the first time in years, I felt alive.

The rest? Unknown. Another move to make. Let’s see.



Koh Samui, Personal Archive, 2021

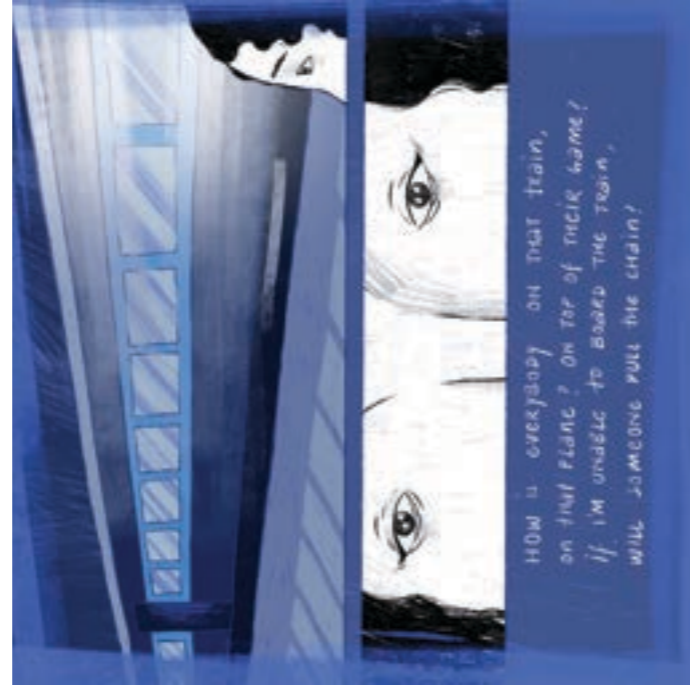
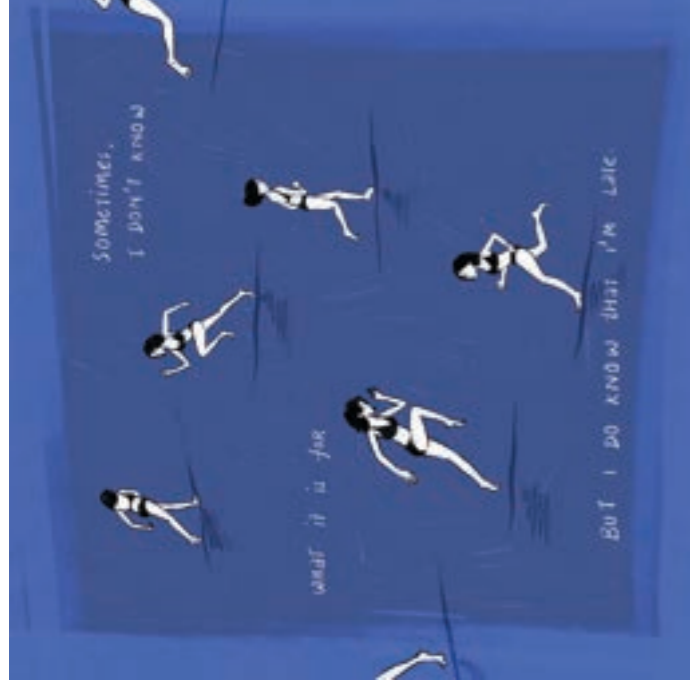
Of Sweaters and Love (For my Amma, my grandmother)

SHUBHANGI PANDEY, MA SERVICE DESIGN

You would sit basking In the winter sun Knitting colours of yarns In sweaters
 And joy November duties You and I Picking colours Yellow, Happiest
 Pink, of love Love is what you taught me Patterns, weaves, stripes To wrap me Warmth, woven around me Sweaters One remains I outgrew others Decembers They have been cold
 Cold is bearable Than your absence But your love stays And that what you taught "To live is to love With every breath, every heartbeat, every step
 To give your body and soul, with a heart wide enough To hold the universe, loving deeply, as if love were the very marrow of your bones, the pulse of your being."



Comic by Shubhangi Pandey



Late SAUMYA SHUKLA, MA DIGITAL DIRECTION

I believe myside bias in humans is one of our greatest flaws—the tendency to double down, to get defensive, to stubbornly refuse to change our minds when we are exposed to contradictory information. I’ve tried to avoid this as I progress through my “life course,” as scientists clinically put it. But along with reactance,¹ this phenomenon is one of the sad flaws of evolution that isn’t easily remedied, and in the political realm, for instance, it can have deleterious effects that wholly prevent people from grappling with reality.

People crave ascribing a deeper meaning to everything. To see symbols. To jam in context and integrate an experience, a sight, a smell, to the network of simulacra in their brains. But maybe it’s better to do the opposite, as Buddhism teaches in the concept of “emptiness” (*Śūnyatā*). To strip an experience of its context, its essence, its socially constructed value. Don’t see a tree and think, “That’s just a tree.” View it and behold the beauty of an entity that waves and shimmers with shades of green, striking brown.

Incidentally, as I’ve transitioned into the art world, I’m seeing the concept of emptiness has popped up repeatedly, though it’s not referred to as such. Two books I’m currently reading illustrate what I mean.

In *Get the Picture: A Mind-Bending Journey Among the Inspired Artists and Obsessive Art Fiends Who Taught Me How to See* by Bianca Bosker, the author discusses plunging herself into the art world and emerging with a newfound way of seeing the world. In one situation, she describes an exercise in which her drawing partner describes a commonplace object to her, but as if they

were an alien with no concept of what the object actually was. “...I felt like I was glimpsing the outlines of my filter of expectation,” she wrote, referring to a cognitive neuroscience concept in which our brains filter out a great deal of extraneous perceptual data to focus on what is important. Bosker cites a contact in the art world: “There’s something magical about looking at the world without identifying what you’re looking at. You see so, so, so much more.” Bosker concludes that, “The trick was to see things by unseeing them.”

In the same vein, authors Susan Magsamen and Ivy Ross come close to describing “emptiness” in their book, *Your Brain on Art*, about neuroaesthetics, a new field looking at how the brain interprets art and its effects on our psyche. The authors describe the aftermath that can come from the awe and surprise of seeing art: it wakes you up in your everyday life. “Maybe you notice something mundane—a piece of trash on the sidewalk, or a building, or a parking meter, and you see it fresh,” they write. “You notice all that’s around you, and you notice it in a surprisingly new way.” *Śūnyatā*. Another artist I’ve mentioned also understood the concept of emptiness: René Magritte. In his work *La Trahison des Images* [The Treachery of Images], which you’ve probably seen, he writes “*Ceci n’est pas un pipe*” [This is not a pipe] under the clearly painted image of a pipe. What does the work say? It might say that, applying the concept of emptiness, you are *not* looking at a pipe, you are looking at very thin layers of pigments on a flat, canvas surface. He’s breaking things down to their molecular, banal reality.

¹Essentially, doing the opposite of what you’re told to do in order to assert your independence.



*Nihonga: tourmaline, bone black
mounted on wooden panel
15 x 15 x 2 cm*

THERE IS A BIG WINDOW NEXT TO MY DESK. THERE'S TREES OUTSIDE OF IT, THEY COVER THE STREET, THE CARS AND THE HOUSE BEHIND THE FENCE. I ALMOST NEVER SEE PEOPLE. I JUST SEE KATERYNA IN THE CORNER OF MY EYE, SHE SITS NEXT TO ME AND WRITES OR READS. OR MAKES STUFF FROM WIRE. SHE TOLD ME SHE COMES FROM A

GENERATION OF WELDERS. I WISH I HAD A GENERATION TO COME FROM. I DROP A BISCUIT INTO MY TEA BY ACCIDENT, AND IT CHANGES INTO A STRANGE MUSH OF TEA AND CRUMBS. WHEN I LOOK OUTSIDE MY WINDOW AGAIN, I THINK OF THE FOREST. I WAS RAISED IN THE FOREST. IT'S SLOW AND SILENT. BUT EVERYTHING IS CHANGING HERE. I HAVE TO WAKE UP AND LOOK OUTSIDE AND SEE THE CLOUDS DAY BY DAY. I HAVE TO THINK OF WHAT TO DO TOMORROW AND WHAT TO DO TODAY, AND I HAVE TO MAKE SURE IT'S NOT THE SAME THING THEN I HAVE TO THINK ABOUT WHAT I'M GOING TO EAT AND WEAR AND HOW I WILL PROGRESS AND GROW AND EXPAND AND STRENGTHEN AND BLOOM AND FLOURISH AND THRIVE AND EXTEND AND FLOURISH AND SPROUT AND BLOW UP INTO A MILLION PIECES. I THINK OF A DAY IN SEPTEMBER WHEN IT WAS STILL WARM AND SUNNY AND JOYFUL AND I CYCLED TO THE PARK AND READ MY BOOK ON THE SHORE. ~~TH~~ I THOUGHT THE WATER WAS GLISTENING LIKE THE SEA DOES IN THE SUMMER, BUT IT WAS NOT THE SEA, JUST A BIG POND MADE FROM CONCRETE. THERE WAS GEESSE AND SWANS AND DUCKS AND THE CURRENT WAS SPILLING THEIR FEATHERS ONTO THE ASPHALT. THE PARK MADE ME THINK OF A HIGH SCHOOL TRIP TO PARIS, A SEPTEMBER AFTERNOON WHEN ME AND MY FRIENDS WERE LAYING UNDER A CANOPY OF A BIG TREE IN VERSAILLES PARK. I WAS HAPPY. WE SMOKED 100 CIGARETTES A DAY AND WALKED AROUND THE CITY AND ATE CHINESE FOOD AND DRANK IN SECRET IN OUR HOTEL ROOM. I FEEL THAT I BELONG TO THE FOREST, BUT I BELONG HERE AS WELL. TODAY I HAVE BECOME AN AMPHIBIAN.



Photograph by Nasrah Omar, Verisimilitude (noun), /ˌver-ə-si-'mil-ə-t(y)əd/

Is there a human I can talk to without booking an appointment?

HARISMITA GOVINDARAJ, MA DIGITAL DIRECTION



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Let's make the yearbook.

ARKtalks

Drawing inspiration from the Royal College of Art *ARK magazine*, running from 1950-1978, ARKtalks is a student-led revival of the original publication.

We are operating an open call looking for work on the theme of Paradox. The submissions can take on any form: artworks, photos, critical musings, fictional texts, or poems.

We are open to any and all proposals, so long as they exist in a paradox - don't we all?

Do you have work you think is relevant? Please send it to: arktalksrca@gmail.com no later than the end of term.

Images: JPEG 300dpi
Texts: word doc or PDF.

ATTENTION!
ACROSS RCA
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OVER EVERYTHING
ELSE IN YOUR LIFE.