COMPOSITE

{*Arts Magazine*}

No. 3 Kith and Kin

Spring 2011

COMPOSITE INFO

No. 3 Kith & Kin

Composite is a Chicago-based quarterly electronic magazine showcasing the work of artists from multiple disciplines, each issue focusing around a specific theme.

More information can be found through the following vehicles:

Website: **www.compositearts.com**

Email: **compositeeditors@gmail.com**

Follow us on Twitter: **@Compositearts**

Find us on Facebook: **www.facebook.com/compositearts**

During the process of putting together this issue of Composite, an email chain was sent around the staff members about a project happening at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago. “One of our artists is working on something at the MCA this weekend. We should go check it out,” one of the earliest said. I immediately read that statement again. One of “our” artists.

Since we are still fairly new, I’m struck with these bursts of awareness from time to time about what we do, who we are. This was one of those. We approach Composite as a collaborative project first and foremost, and in order for it to work, we need collaborators. We need artists and writers willing to work with us to create our final product. Although this is something we are aware of and constantly stress, the idea that we have brought together a group of artists to work together, a family if you will, didn’t quite hit me until this email. When thinking about it in the context of Kith and Kin specifically, the opening line to our theme statement rang incredibly true. We, as editors, can try as hard as possibly to steer Composite the direction we want, but the artists that work with us and the work they bring us, are what truly defines us. We may select artists for each theme with a vision in mind, but what those artists bring to the table defines the mood and aesthetic of each issue.

Kirsten Leenaars, featured in this issue, is responsible for the email chain that was sent back and forth. Her project followed a similar line of thought, a soap opera filmed live in the museum for several days, with the plot lines and outcomes completely defined by those in attendance. She may have been the director and film maker, but the product was almost entirely out of her control.

These are themes in both our art, and our lives. We can’t ever truly control every thing about us and our outcomes. There are free radicals influencing our decisions daily, free radicals we call our neighbors, our collaborators, our family, and our friends.

Zach Clark
Composite Staff

CONTENTS

No. 3 Kith & Kin

Christian Vargas 5

Kara Cochran 9
Collector

Tali Gubiner 17
There is Nothing to Fear

Kirsten Leenaars 26
Family Swim, Attempts to Synchronize

Annie Frykholm 35
Doilies from a Finnish Granddaughter

Jeremiah Caleb 42
Out of My Element

Suzanne Makol 45
Untitled (Chicago Flags)

Abraham Sohn 55
Blessed are the Poor

Sophie Leininger 60

Lauren Herrmann 64
Silver Shoes (Selected Works)

Joey Pizzolato 75
So Longs

Cover Image by Lauren Herrmann

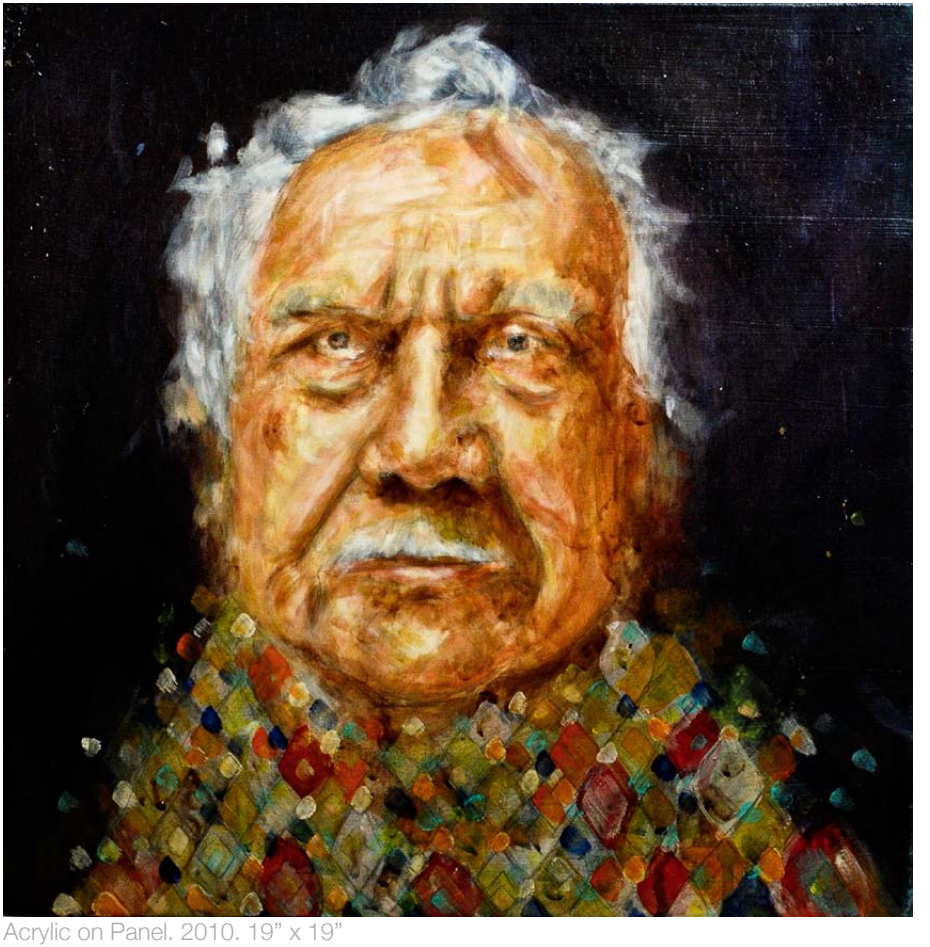
Kith & Kin

The people that you have connections with, in no small part, help to form your identity. These people could enter your life without your consent, such as blood relatives or even the people that live in your neighborhood. The phrase "kith and kin," from its roots, means "native land and people," and these genetic ties and cultural traditions in many ways define who you are and where you have a sense of belonging. Plants and animals have the simplest form of kin: it is their genetic makeup—where and when their life began.

Some people choose to isolate themselves from their kin, but for better or worse, your kin still impacts who you are. Apart from family and genetic lineage, you can choose to form kinships, such as the friendships you develop over the course of your life, or memberships in religious or community groups. We wear symbols of our kin all the time: a wedding ring, a scarf, a flag, tattoos, even our physical traits and gestures. These symbols give clues to a person's identity, but there is much more hidden underneath. By looking back at where we came from, we are better able to understand ourselves and each other. Even if we choose a new group to call our kin.

Christian **Vargas**

I was born in Fresno, California to a family of migrant farm laborers, who immigrated to the United States from Mexico. Growing up in that environment and seeing my family work in the fields to make a living — sometimes working along side them — undoubtedly had a deep-rooted effect on me. It can clearly be seen in my portraits. ***I have a special place in my heart for the common, everyday, hardworking man.*** I make art that has personal meaning for myself, creating bodies of work that reflect who I am and where I come from. These works carry a direct relationship between myself, my family, and my environment.



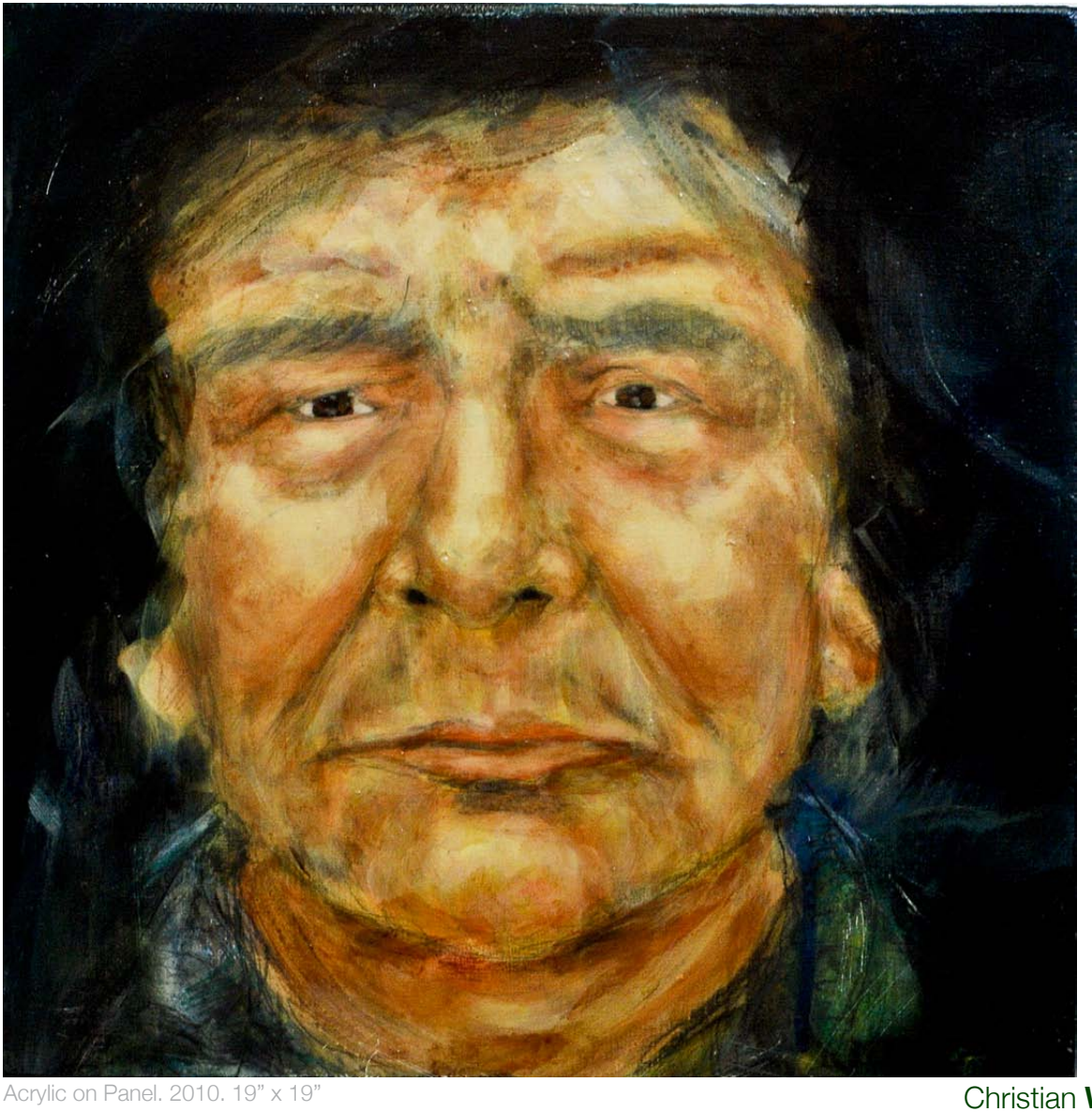
Acrylic on Panel. 2010. 19" x 19"

Acrylic on Panel w/Doll Parts. 2010. 20” x 12”

Christian **Vargas**

Acrylic on Panel w/Doll Parts. 2010. 20" x 12"

Christian **Vargas**



Acrylic on Panel. 2010. 19" x 19"

Christian **Vargas**

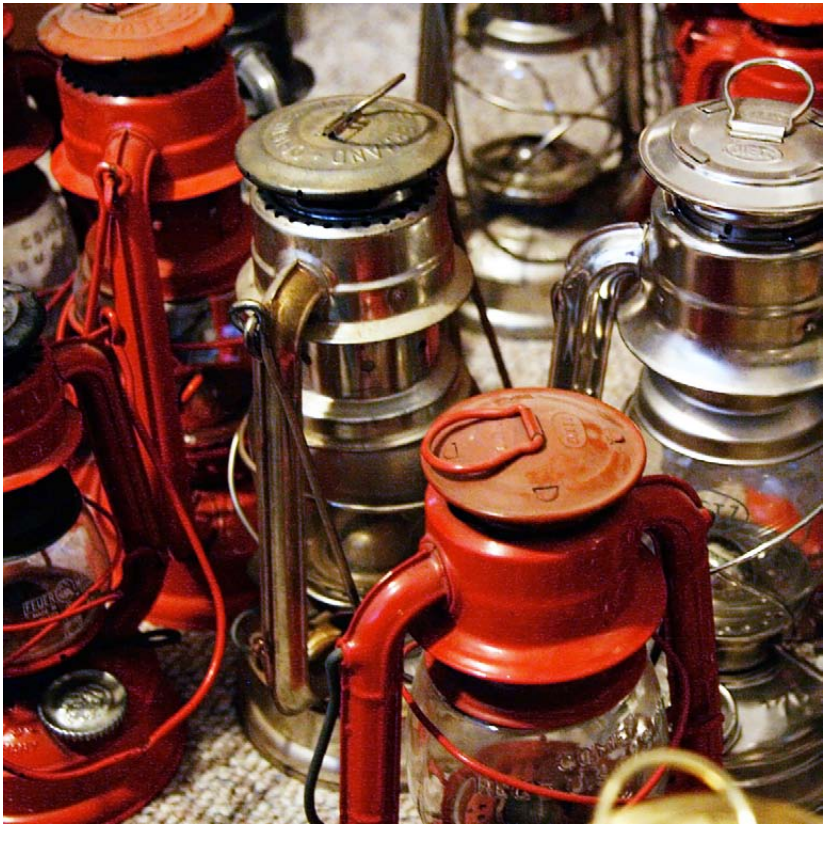
Kara Cochran

Collector

For as long as I can remember, my Dad has collected things. The four-hour car rides to Grandma and Grandpa's house were always punctuated by stops at various antique stores. ***"I'll be just a minute,"*** he said. ***"Just a minute" to my Dad can mean anything.***

Kara **Cochran**

Kara **Cochran**



Sometimes the rest of us would wait in the car, which was always a mistake on a hot day, but most of the time, we would go inside with him. I would browse the isles as my Dad went directly to search out those things that he collects. And that is a long list.

Pocket watches are the most important item, as he knows the most about these and repairs them at his workbench at home, magnifying loop clamped onto his glasses and minute screwdriver and tweezers in hand. In addition to those watches and watch parts, there are the fountain pens, marbles, Aladdin lamps, banjos and other instruments, mason jars, ashtrays, thimbles, pocket knives, soapstone carvings, toothpick holders, lanterns, meat grinders, lucky pennies, and many other items that are taken home and carefully arranged in drawers and cabinets.

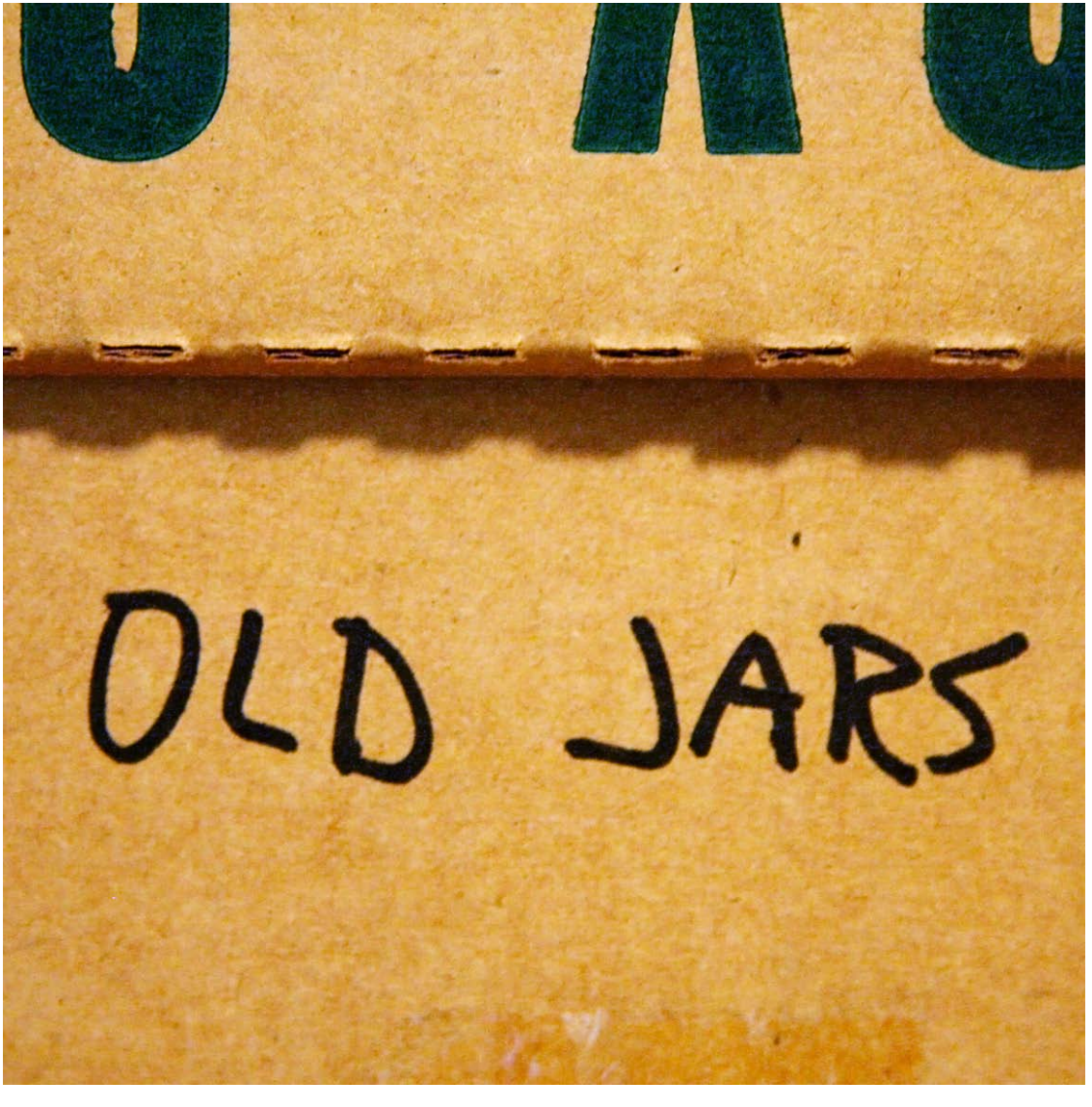
Kara **Cochran**

contents:

OLD JARS

misc:

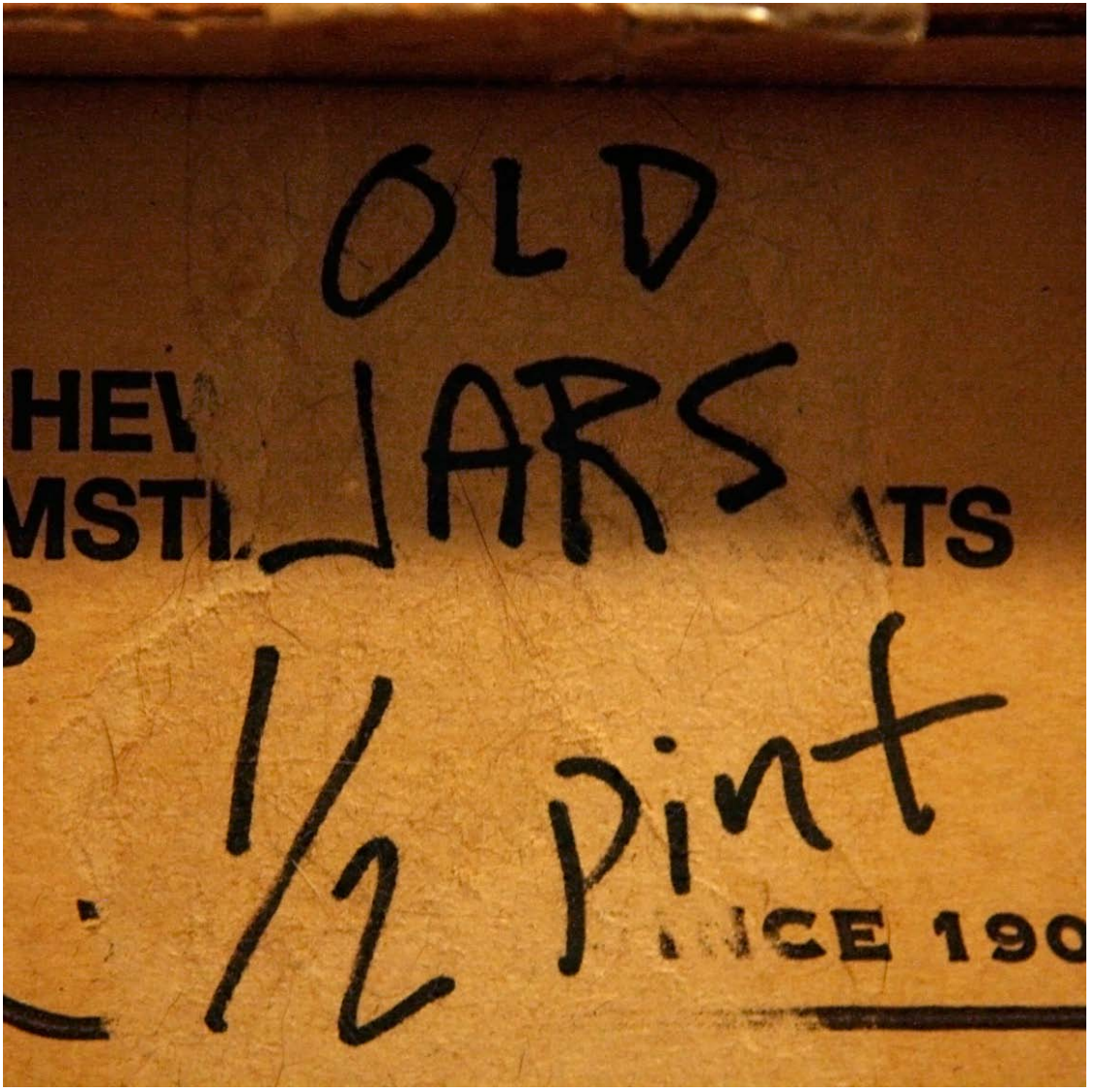
Kara **Cochran**



Kara **Cochran**

When I was little, I kept my own collections, just like my Dad, including rocks, coins, shells, marbles, and what I liked to call “breakable bunnies”—small rabbit figurines in stone or porcelain. Now, as an adult and as an artist, I realize how his same traits have carried over to me, whether by nature or nurture, as a collector and tinkerer. I work meticulously with my hands, just as he does. I “collect” photographs as well as different techniques of art-making and various symbols throughout my artwork. And here again, I document and collect images of the collections of my father.

Kara **Cochran**



Kara **Cochran**

Fiction

Tali **Gumbiner**

There Is Nothing To Fear

"Being on time," she said, "now that's a misconception. People always think that being on time, or not being on time, is your fault. As if time were something we could control."

Viviane still wore her hospital gown, although she'd been given her street clothes back an hour ago. She hid the slit up her back with our mother's old, powder blue robe. On her feet, my sister kicked off the beaded moccasins her husband had bought us both for our birthdays. She spoke more with her hands than she did with her mouth. Her mouth was like mine and her hands were like mine, her lips, her teeth, the tongue, they were mine. Twins: unbearably identical.

"Now, if you're big time late," she continued, "an hour, two hours-- sure, that's on you. Unless there's an accident or a heart attack, something real tragic." Viviane crossed her legs. She looked out the window. "Then you're off the hook."

We left before dawn, in the dark, as close to night as we could get. "We're bandits," she said. "Like bandits."

The discharge forms were out, and so were we, buckled up. Me, behind the wheel, my sister pressed against the passenger's seat. "You know we're coming back tomorrow?" I said. "Maybe even tonight." "I need a minute to breathe." And she did. Viviane breathed into the paper bag that held her least favorite flannel. "Drive."

I didn't know whether to take Viviane to my house or hers, so I let my body do the choosing for me. In the end, we found ourselves at the footsteps of our aunt and mother's two-story. Aunt Louise opened the door in her nighty, "Oh, thank goodness."

But on the way, through dimly lit streets, and half moon, through half sun, clouds caught behind bruises, Viviane kept it up. "Timing," she said. She kept saying, "Timing, Virginia. When we get right down to it — the pennies and nickels — three minutes, five minutes, we can't be blamed. No, we can't

be blamed. Because, c'mon, who can say what makes that sixty-second difference?"

Viviane was incapable of getting to a place when she was supposed to be there, which is why we were all surprised that her daughter had been so premature — seven and a half weeks too soon. "Hell," she said. "The girl must take after her father. I've never been early a day in my life."

Viviane's husband, Eddy, was a Navajo from Arizona. "Editon: sacred object."

"You mean, he's, like, he's a real Indian," Aunt Louise had said, when Viv told us about Eddy.

"Oh, give me a break. It's not like the guy lives in a Teepee."

Eddy had been selling insurance in Memphis when the baby came early. He wasn't scheduled to return for a week, and Viviane was dead set on making sure he didn't step foot on a plane a second before he was supposed to.

"It's important for at least one of us to stay on track." Viviane waited five hours after delivering before she called her husband. She kept yelling at us not to call him, don't you call him, don't dare call him. When she finally did pick up a phone, the baby had already been taken to the Neonatal ICU. She'd been given a micro-feeding tube, a micro I.V., a tiny ventilator. Her body was dappled with thumbprint-sized patches for heart monitoring. Eddy spoke loudly on the other end of the receiver. Louise, Mom, and I crowded around Virginia's bed, our elbows propped on the plastic railing.

"Wait, she's really here? She's out? Already?"

"Barely," Viviane said. "She's barely here, barely a baby at this point. Please, stay where you are. Stay put. It'll give me something to look forward to."

We napped. Our mother and her sister in one room, me and my sister in the other. We napped until our bodies couldn't take in any more sleep, and then we pretended they could. Lay in gray light and shallow breathing. We were quiet. This was our mother's room, where she sipped tea and watched television. Collected and displayed tiny spoons on her desk, which she used only for displaying the things she collected, like tiny spoons, and porcelain cats, and children she cast in wood frames. We kept quiet because the curtains were just sheer enough to allow a stream of white through the window.

And of course, there was a clock above the television, too high for us to see while lying down. All we had was the tick-tick-tick of biting fingernails. We kept quiet until we couldn't take that kind of damaged

quiet anymore, until our breathing and sighing came so quick it was clear we couldn't take in rest either. Viviane placed her hand over mine. We listened to our mother and aunt rise from their sheets and patter around the bedroom upstairs. Paint chips fell like powdered sugar.

"Am I gonna make it?"

And what I thought was, who's to say who makes it and who doesn't? But what I said to my sister—what I said to my friend was, "How couldn't you?"

Louise squeezed the orange juice while Mom battered the bread. She soaked each slice in eggs, milk, and sugar, until they were nearly falling apart. "French toast!" She slammed a plate on the table.

I was in charge of burning the bacon; Viviane liked her bacon burnt. The strips would shrink and squeal into pieces of coal, before Viviane deemed them prepared. She was like that with everything. The bath she was taking upstairs was nearly boiling before Viv shed her robe and cooed, "Ahh. Just right."

Mom started slicing bananas for muffins. Louise ran out of oranges to squeeze, so she started slicing bananas too. Soon, the bacon was black and we were all slicing bananas over a mixing bowl. We cut and cut and it was quiet. Freckled bananas, soft inside. With a knife our mother was capable of skinning a banana while keeping its peel in one piece. She could unravel an orange like a ribbon. Our mother was like that with everything. "Precision," she said. "You must be precise with every movement." She was nimble; her sister, broad and stocky, was strong. Standing still, the women looked very similar: gray hair kept in buns or braids, short and soft, weathered women, who shared night gowns and aprons, and maybe underwear. Only through work could their differences be seen. Work done with their hands. To our mother, every action was an outcome in itself. Louise was brisk and brass and careless.

"And what I thought was, who's to say who makes it and who doesn't?"

"Twenty-four hours!" Our mother said, without looking up from her slicing. "Twenty-four hours, and she's already home! Can you imagine?"

"Never heard of such a thing in my life," Louise said.

"It's unsafe."

"Unnatural."

"A child should be with her mother. If I were Viviane, I would've clung to that baby so hard, they would've had to pry me away with a crow bar." Our mother tossed another banana peel into the trash.

"Amen to that."

Viviane emerged from her bath pink and pruned. She closed her eyes and inhaled deeply. "I'm starved."

Viviane ate like she'd never eaten before. She shoveled in French toast and bacon, potatoes and eggs. She popped from the table and dug through the cupboards, pulling out a box of coffee cake and a bag of Lays. Viviane used her hands; she barely had time for air between bites. One by one, we pushed our plates across the table and let her devour what little was left of our meals. Viviane ate until we couldn't stomach watching that kind of eating anymore. Our mother began clearing the table.

"Hey, what's the big idea?"

"Enough is enough."

I drove Viviane home just after one and told her I'd be back by three so we could go visit the baby. I was boarding a few miles away from Viviane's house with an elderly widow named Margery. Margery allowed me the room above her garage and five dinners a week in exchange for taking out her trash, cooking and picking up groceries, filling prescriptions, and driving her to the oncologist once a week for radiation. Everything else cost extra. The flushing of her port, saline first, then heparin.

"Slowly now. Slower. Oh it's cold; you're killing me." Six dollars.

She gave me twelve for a sponge bath, or an oatmeal bath, depending on her mood. I'd get the water just right, then ease her wrinkled body into the tub. This was Margery's second breast cancer. She'd had it once before, five years ago, resulting in a double-mastectomy. Her chest was flat and scarred and stripped. The first time I saw her naked, Margery had rested her hands over the skin where her breasts had once been. "And who says lightning never strikes twice in the same place?"

The Empire State Building. The Hancock Building. Struck, struck, struck, over again each year. And then there were the bathers, three of them wiped out by a bolt on a beach in New York. And then, three more, a year later, scorched by the same splinter of light, on identical sand, on identical days.

One in one hundred women get breast cancer, although they no longer have breasts; and one in one hundred babies come out although their bodies still need two more months in the womb. The twins, one

in every two hundred and fifty, with the same strands of DNA, and the same face and the same eyes. The odds are never in our favor, but still the sky, burnt and roaring, waits. It waits and wants; wants and waits. We are built from the stock of brush fire seasons, when the land that lines our roads is dry and ill prepared.

Eddy still came and it killed her. We found him that afternoon, hunched over his two-pound daughter, his barely baby, dark as he was, with skin thin as tracing paper. Viviane joined him in the nursery, while I waited on the other side and watched them through the glass pane. We all stared at the girl, sealed in a plastic basinet with patches over her eyes. Caught somewhere in transit—can it still be called sleep if you don't yet know what waking is?

Viviane kept her eyes on the girl and the killing crept up quickly. Her hands jittered just a bit, and before she could even cry, it came. "You shouldn't be here."

She had never expected to ever be expecting. It wasn't that her body couldn't handle a child, it simply didn't want one. She said she'd already shared enough of herself. She said she was only half a person because she had another half. "We got the short end of the stick, Virginia. The same amount of goods, split between two people. The last thing in the world I need is a baby crowding what little space I've got left in me."

Viviane's daughter was not to be named until she survived passed the date she was meant to arrive. And so for now we just called her baby. And sometimes we called her girl, or the girl, or the baby.

Margery didn't mind me being away at night; it was the mornings that got to her. She needed someone there to make sure she'd lived through sleep and into the next day. Margery kept spoons in the freezer. Every morning, she had me tiptoe into her room and hold a cold spoon beneath her nose to see if she was still breathing.

"Make sure it fogs up all the way. I want that thing white and warm."

White and warm: for this, I didn't charge.

I could leave after dinner, and so after dinner was my shift. We all had shifts: Viviane, Eddy, Mom, Louise, and I. They came in five-hour chunks. We brushed elbows at the door. Sometimes we spoke,

other times, we nodded or waived or squeezed each other's shoulders. Except, of course, for Mom and Louise; they only traveled in twos. Together, those women spent ten hours reading tabloids at the baby's bedside. They gossiped about celebrities and gushed over the infants, pink and plump, freshly born, homeward bound.

This was their life; our lives. We waited. For what? We didn't know.

Our schedule was corrupted a month in, when Eddy's family stocked their cars with coolers and caravanned to Los Angeles from Arizona. The whole kit and caboodle: mothers and daughters, sisters and sisters, fathers, sons, aunts, cousins, crowded our kitchens and couches for two weeks. They came to see Baby; they came to see their boy. But mainly the clan came, filled with misguided optimism, to see if Viviane and I could fix this. They came for answers, unreceived.

For we were myths and mediators. Children born of the same seed, on the same day. Warrior gods, little ones, who held in our hands the balance between all that was wrong and right with this world. They looked to us for the why, the how—Why did this happen? How did this happen? And when we failed to catch and conquer whatever spirit had torn us apart, they waited.

"There is nothing to fear," his mother said, wrapping her soft arms around me and Viviane. Her lips met the space between our ears, and all over our hair, we felt her hot breath in whispers. She smelled of Frito Lays and laundry. "There is nothing to fear."

When Margery was nineteen, she traveled to Paris for a summer to be an *Au Pair.* The girl didn't speak a word of French, nor had she ever been out of the country, but still, there she was looking after two Parisian toddlers, Phillipa and Donielle. The children were very demanding. Someone always needed diapering, or bottling, or a nap. They had a very glamorous mother, who smoked cigarettes from an ivory holder and held her cigarettes in an ivory case. She spent most of her time lining lips and painting nails, powdering skin and fashioning hats on just right. At night, she would go out. The glamorous mother would go out and stay out until dawn. Then she would come staggering back in to peel off her lashes and put her face away.

Being so unfamiliar with Paris, Margery was too nervous to take the girls out of the house; she could hardly stand them playing in the garden. Phillipa and Donielle were only a year apart and were known to bicker. They pinched and kicked and tattled and pulled hair. One morning, Donielle bit Phillipa's arm so

hard, she sent her shrill screams rippling through the entire house. The very glamorous mother barged through her bedroom door.

J'ai besoin d'une minute pour respirer. "Get them out of here," she said. "I need a minute to breathe." Margery received very complicated directions to a movie theater that was apparently, "just a little ways away." She wandered the streets with the two girls, still pinching and kicking and tattling and pulling hair. She didn't know how to say movie theater in French, so when she asked for directions, Margery simply pointed to a spot in her map. "Ici."

"She said that despite her cancers, she believes that moment was the only time she's ever been truly afraid."

Margery swore she was just about to find the place. Then she realized she couldn't hear pinching or kicking or tattling anymore. When she turned around, the girls had disappeared. She couldn't even dream of looking for them. *Comment dit-on:* Have you seen? *Comment dit-on:* Where have they gone? *Comment dit-on:* Lost? Missing? Alone?

She said that despite all her cancers, she believes that that moment was the only time she's every truly been afraid. She believes this because her first instinct was to hail a taxi, drive to the airport, fly home, and never think of Phillipa, Donielle, and their glamorous mother again.

"When we are truly terrified, our thoughts are reduced to those of escape. That is how you know you are afraid: when it seems your only option is departure."

Margery said this to me because her prognosis was bad. "Don't bother with the spoons anymore," she said. "If I'm not out by noon, I'm out cold."

I asked her, "Are you afraid?"

And she said, "No. I'm comfortable."

Baby caught pneumonia. Just four days shy of earning her name, the girl's lungs began collecting fluid. The sickness came on quick, but cut in and out, teetering amongst better, worse, and in between. No sudden movements were made. Weeks piled on top of one another, until a month had passed and Baby still couldn't cough up whatever infection was keeping her nameless.

Tali **Gumbiner**

"Am I gonna make it?" My sister kept asking.

And I'd say, "How couldn't you?"

Often, she insisted we sleep at our mother's house in the same bed. She said this was because we both stayed late at the hospital, and she didn't like driving home alone at night. She said Eddy got up so early, they barely shared any sleep at all. Viviane and I would change in silence with out turning on a lamp. The moon lent us just enough light to ensure we wouldn't bump into bed frames or tabletops. We'd tuck ourselves in, and between sheets, she would ask, and I say, "How couldn't you?"

Sometimes, Viviane would get frustrated with being Viviane and say, "Today, I'm going as Virginia." She'd put on all my clothes and carry around my purse. At the hospital, she'd call Baby her niece and Eddy her brother in law. She'd say to the nurses, "Oh, my poor sister and her poor, tiny child."

I complied with Viviane's demands, because, in truth, I wasn't the poor sister with the poor, tiny, child who didn't seem to be getting better anytime soon.

But no matter who was who, we both spent our days shoulder to shoulder with the people who've se en us more at our worst than they have at our best. Who shaved anymore? I thought of the glamorous mother and all her many glamorous things. Which hat, which hat, which hat today…

"You know," Viviane said, "genetically speaking, she's just as much my kid as she is yours." We were undressing in the dark. The moon was full and brilliant. Viviane had just completed a three-day stint as me. This time, she'd gone to Margery's house and done all the extra chores for free. She'd rubbed lotion over the woman's ailing arms and legs. Viviane didn't leave Margery's side the entire time until, on the third night, Margery asked Viviane to give her a very complicated injection (one that, to my knowledge, she had never needed before) Viviane, always the actress, said, "Right away," and walked out of the room, straight to my car, and drove to the hospital without even putting on my shoes.

Stark naked, Viviane crossed the room and spread open the curtains. Her olive skin, our olive skin, was washed in everything white and round and wonderful. Who can remember when anything else was important? If we even knew what important was before we had something to fear? If we reached back to the place in time before this baby was born, would we have anything worthwhile to wrap our fingers around?

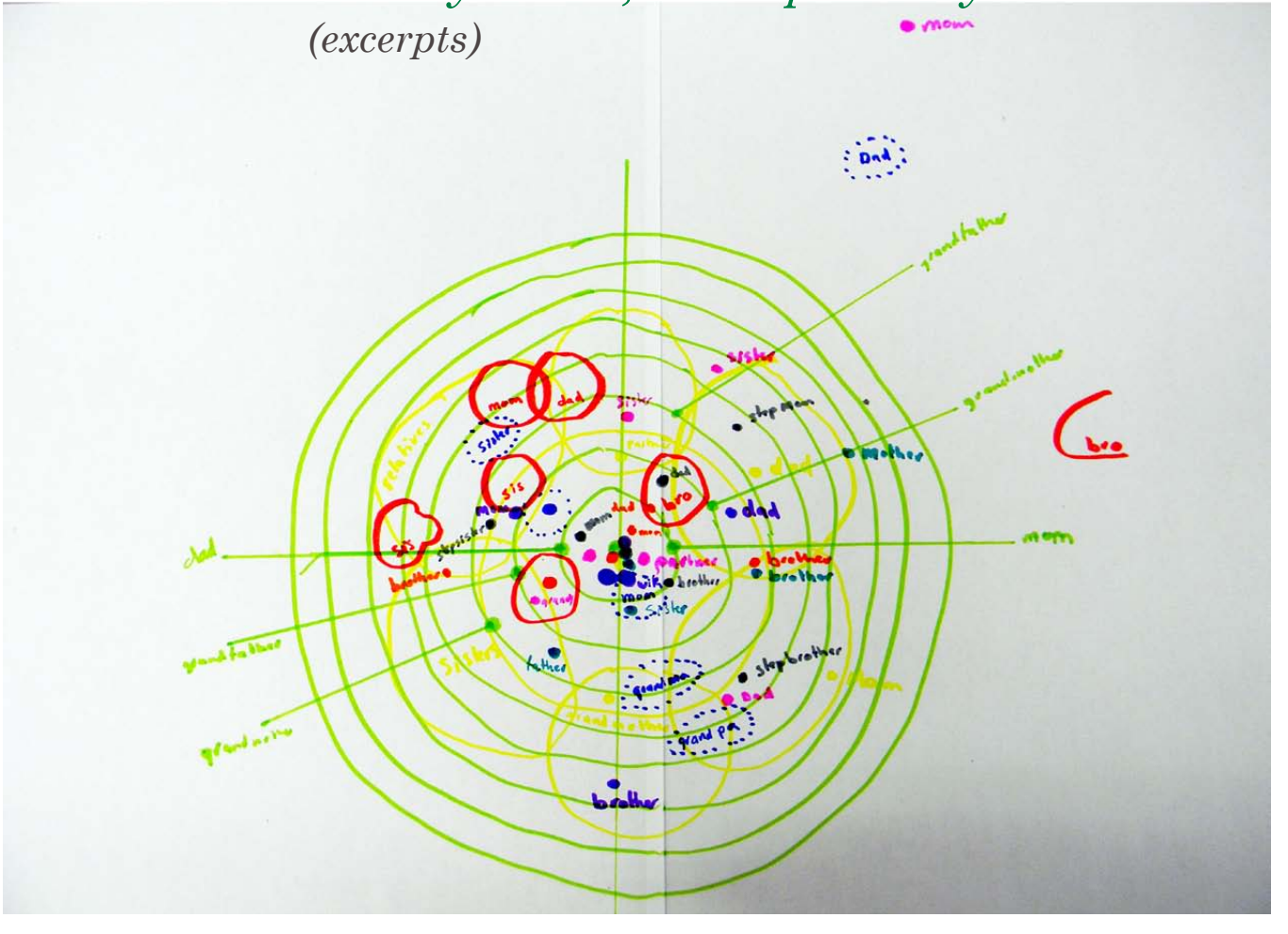
Viviane just stood there, and I sat there staring. Soon, one way or another, moments like this would become impossible. And I would think back on the nights when my sister and I slept in bed together,

sharing far more than the skin on our backs, but the ache in us that seemed insatiable. The beat, the beat, that left us feeling hollow each time the baby's heart rate flowed a little stronger, and we knew her cheeks were growing plump. And we felt so drained of our bearing, these signs of improvement, because when life finally made its way into that child, and she was given a name and a face and a being, we would find ourselves at the foot of a new world, unforgiving and utterly formidable. A mere silhouette of the one we'd come in to together, and roamed through together, and pinched and kicked and tattled together, pulled at each other to hear the words that made us feel for a second like one god of a human being. Oh sister-child, oh, my mother-child, won't you say them to me now, for I have said them to you a million and it's, just... "How couldn't you?"

Kirsten **Leenaars**

Family Swim, Attempts to Synchronize

(excerpts)

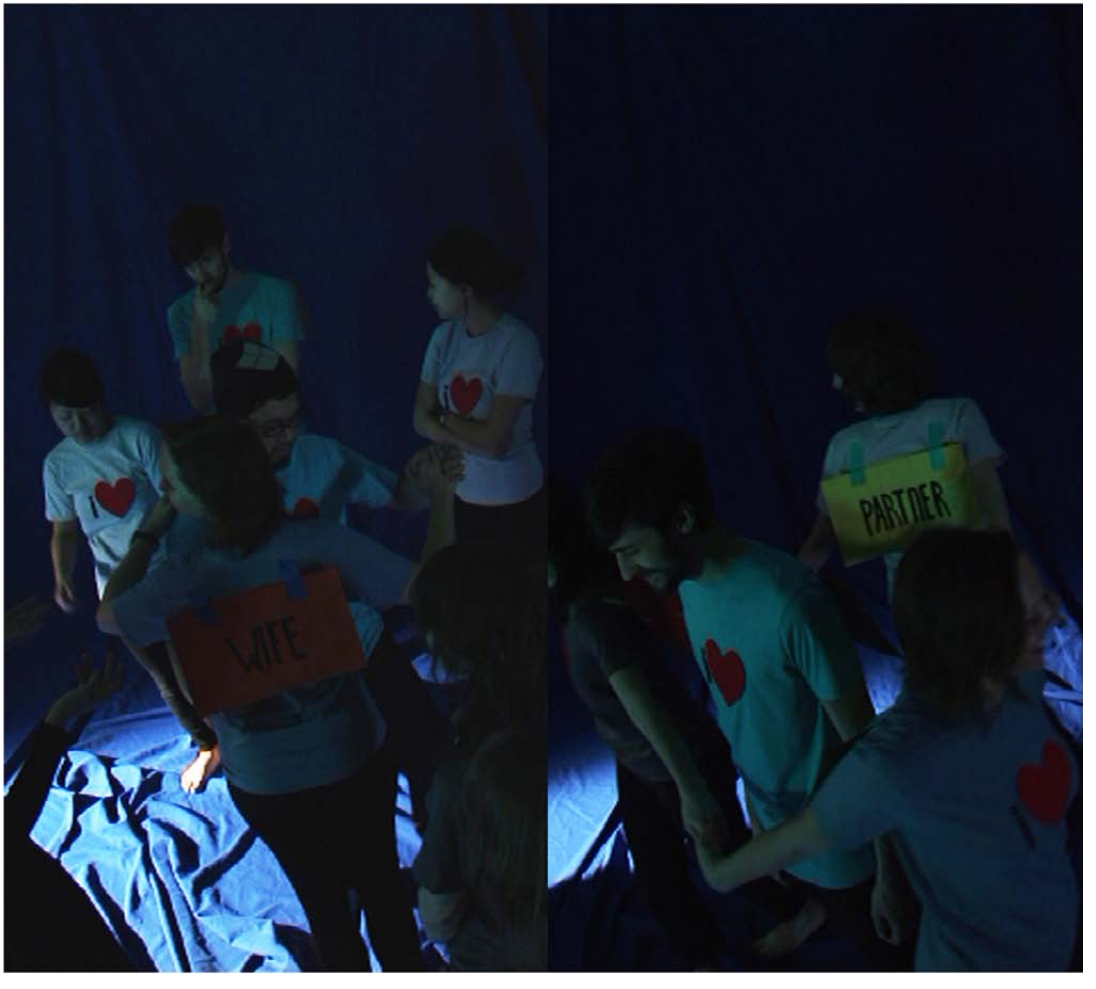


Family Swim, Attempts to Synchronize (2011) is a 3-channel video piece created during a residency period at the Banff Center in Canada. The work is derived based on conversations with fellow residents about their own family relationships and drawings generated from these talks: depicting family constellations referring to the complex nature of family relations – a tightly wound universe with shooting stars and colliding planets and attempts to realign and be in sync again.

Kirsten **Leenaars**

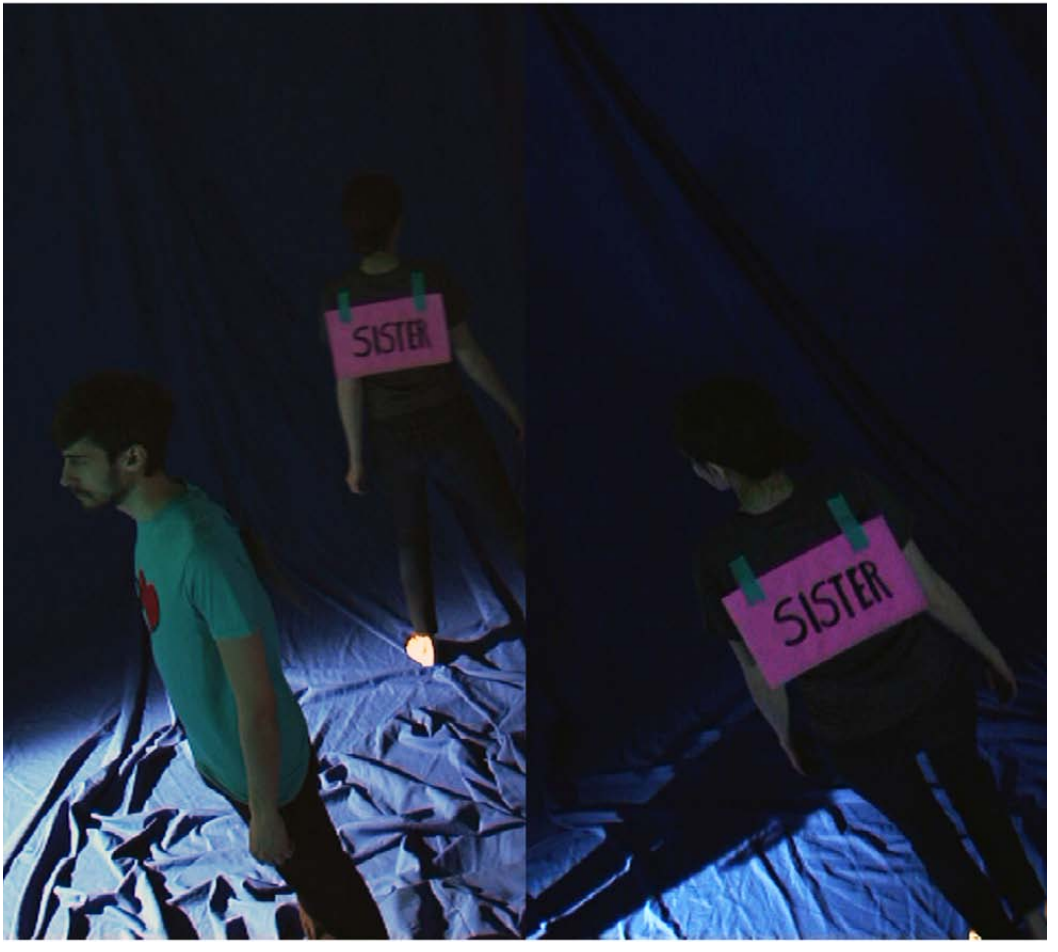
Through my practice I address some of the following questions: ***how can one contextualize 'love' within a contemporary art context?*** How can one bring recognition to the importance of human feeling and shared experience? What does it mean to want to create works that speak to our emotions, questioning a shared human experience, offering the audience a reflective paradigm for the underlying questions: how do we relate to other people and how do we make connections, what shapes our relationships? By investigating emotional vulnerability as a tool for communication, as well as the widespread phenomenon of generosity in recent practices, I look at how love is at the core of my own art practice. And look for ways of defining love within the context of contemporary art.

Kirsten **Leenaars**



Kirsten **Leenaars**

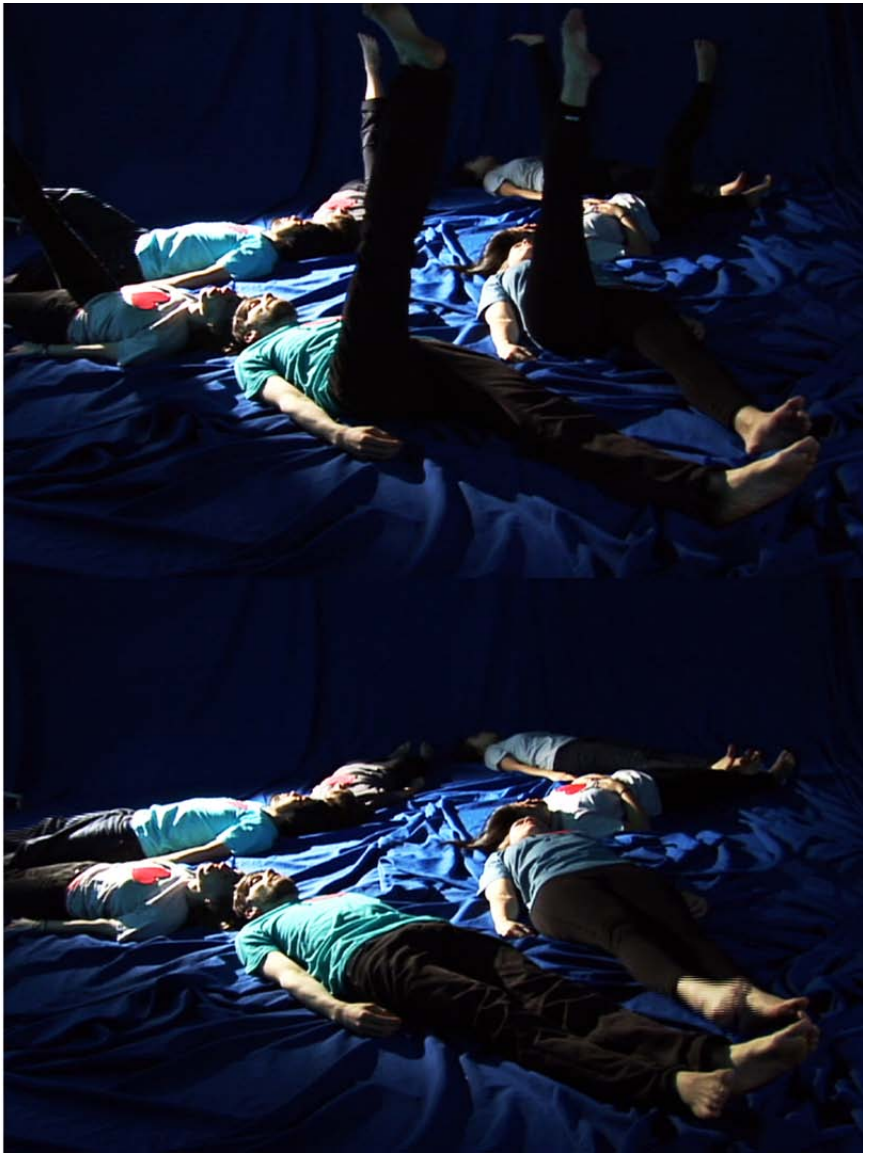
Kirsten **Leenaars**



Kirsten **Leenaars**

Kirsten **Leenaars**


PARTNER



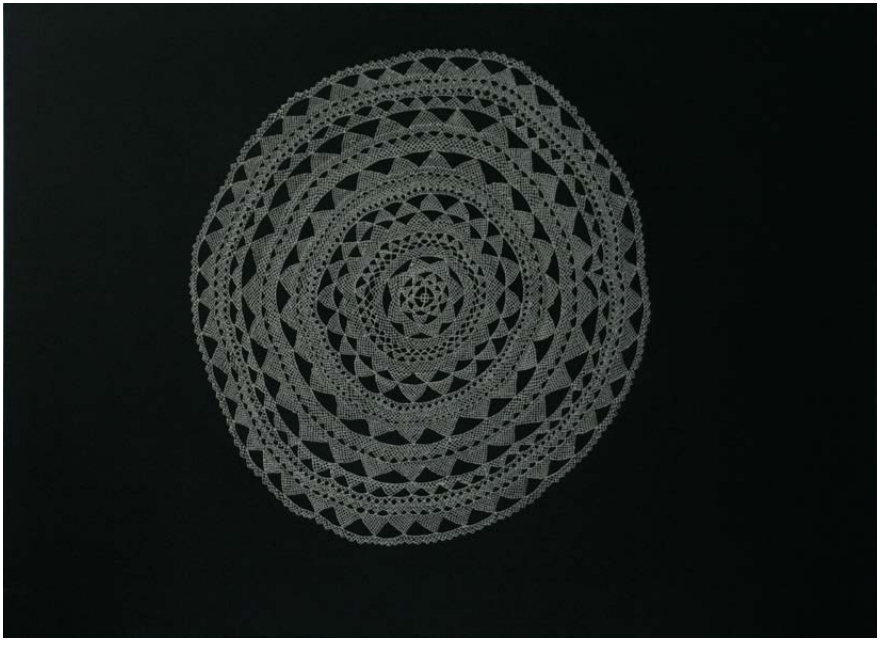
Kirsten **Leenaars**

Annie **Frykholm**

Doilies from a Finnish Granddaughter

Doily 1 Installation. 2010.

My grandmother and mother taught me to crochet at a very young age. Sitting with them for long hours made me a willing participant to their stories, and became a method for learning about our family's history. In my grandparents' time doilies were a common object, and the stitches and skills to create them were common knowledge as women's work. Doilies were once a prominent task and pastime for women and were used in various places within the home for display and beautification. Through the industrialization of textiles, crochet is no longer a skill that is necessary for the function of the family. Women do not need to darn their spouses' socks, they do not need to make sweaters for their children, and no longer have time to crochet intricate doilies for the home. Lace-making is now old, obsolete technology that fell the way of craft through mechanized processes. Doilies are a thing of the past, now most commonly found recreated in paper for the presentation of food, or as waste in garage and estate sales, and no longer lovingly crafted from fine threads and textile fibers.



Doily on Black. Porcelain slip on foam core. 2010. 34" x 17".

Within this body of work, I am searching for a place for this lost skill set. Traditionally, doilies were a covering or an adornment. Here I am searching to find a place for something common made precious by examining its relationship to function and history in the current contextual climate. More specifically, I am exploring the material, mimicking and making it more fragile, and placing this recognizable pattern in situations that suggest its current value, and also reminisce of its past functions.

Annie **Frykholm**

Untitled. Porcelain slip on Paper. 2010. 6” x 3”.

Annie **Frykholm**

Doily Box. Porcelain Slip, Used Cardboard 2010. 6” x 6” x 3”.

Annie **Frykholm**

Doily Box. Details.

A Chair For Emma. Crochet Thread, Wooden Frame, Porcelain Slip.
2010 . 17" x 24" x 12" (apx).

Annie **Frykholm**

A Chair For Emma. Details.

Annie **Frykholm**

Creative Non-Fiction

Jeremiah **Caleb**

Out of My Element

My role of the misfit began from my first breath. I was born in Singapore. My father was from India and my mother, while also of Indian decent, was from Malaysia. Because neither of my parents were citizens of Singapore, I was denied the right for citizenship by the country in which I was born. On my birth certificate, it actually read: "this child is stateless at time of birth." So for most of my childhood, I was tagged onto my mother's Malaysian passport.

In kindergarten, I learned Mandarin because that was the norm in Singapore. However unlike majority of my Chinese friends, I never had the opportunity to practice speaking Mandarin at home. In middle school, I was made to learn my "mother tongue". This meant that during third period the kids in my class would segregate according to race and split off into classes to learn the language of their heritage. I joined the minority of Indians to study Tamil. "Finally I can fit in somewhere!" I thought as a six year old.

Then, when the Hindu holy day came, I discovered that I was the only Christian boy in my class, which meant that I could not participate in conversations about how they spent the Hindu holiday, Diwali, nor could I share with them my excitement of Christmas.

Outside of Tamil class, I identified myself as a Singaporean. I sang the anthem in Malay, preferred Chinese food to rice and curry, and spoke with a mixed vocabulary of English muddled with Chinese, Malay and Tamil. I remained timid and stayed inconspicuous to dodge corporal punishment, where the offender was spanked on the bottom with a can in front of the entire school, and disgrace when I began failing miserably in my Tamil classes.

My life changed drastically when my parents and I moved to a small town in South Wales. Since I was an only child, I became the only ethnic student at Croesyceiliog Comprehensive School. It started off well. For one, I was enthralled by the change in my environment. Instead of humidity and the sound of busy traffic, I was now surrounded by cool air, the luscious green

countryside covered with daffodils, and centuries of intriguing history. Secondly, as I was the only one who looked "exotic", I was HOT. By the time I was twelve, Welsh girls were asking me out on a weekly basis! But, being twelve, I was too confused and afraid to do anything about it. I was secretly worried about what my parents would say, or what these girls would think of me if they ever came to my home, smelled the Asian cooking, and saw the cardboard boxes my parents used as a coffee table due to their low missionary income.

There were negative sides to my new schooling culture too. Unlike the other boys in my school, I had not had the chance to play ball with my father. I dreaded PE and often found myself at the bottom of the pile during a game of rugby, covered in mud. Nevertheless, I loved my new home. By the time I was young teenager, I spoke with a proper British accent and identified myself as a Welsh. I dreamed of the day I would turn in my green card for my own British passport.

Somehow, I had become conditioned by the places in which I lived.

That day never came. My parents decided that life wasn't working for them in the United Kingdom so we moved to America. As if it was not drastic enough to move to yet another continent, we ended up in a small town in Tri-cities, Tennessee. I looked like a toddler in the midst of an obese culture. In fact, on my first Sunday at church I was embraced by a large chested woman from church who had known my parents. The practice of hugging people one did not have an intimate relationship with was foreign to me. The sudden shock of my face buried in her enormous breasts caused me to wonder if I might turn gay. Then there was the strong southern twang which I struggled to keep up with. I was clearly different and once again the minority. Only in my small town in Tennessee, it seemed Indian boys were not as attractive as they were in South Wales.

I quickly became the school nerd which was just my luck! I was finally old enough to desire a girlfriend and all the American girls I knew thought I was a weirdo. It took me a lot of character to make it through the cruel subjection to a Christian high school in the heart of the Bible Belt. I was lucky enough to get into the college of my dreams but found that once again I had a lot to learn about who I was.

The college years were healing to my childhood of being the misfit. In a small institution like King College in Bristol, Tennessee, I could be anything I set my heart to be. I feel deeply in love with the stage. I dreaded the day I would have to tell my parents that their only son had chosen to become a

wondering actor instead of the pastor or engineer that they had expected I would become.

My passion must have won my parents over. Following my college graduation, I packed up my bag to follow my heart for the first time, in the hopes that I would become the working artist I hoped to be. I reveled in my freedom and the luxury of freethinking artists and open minded friends around me. It was during my years in New York that I finally became a citizen of the United States of America. I raised my hands proudly in the courthouse feeling I had finally arrived where I belonged in a city where people of every race, culture and nation united. All those alien jokes were behind me at long last.

However my story does not end there. By my mid twenties, I began longing for a connection with my heritage. I started to obsess over Bollywood and Indian food. When I turned 25, I took a journey to India for the first time to meet my father's people. I never expected to find a connection with India the way I did. It was hard to come to terms with the fact the people from my race lived in the midst of extreme poverty or wealth. It led me to eventually begin my non profit for the aid of destitute orphans in the slums of North India. It also led me to meet and court the woman I will soon marry from the land of my father. However the more I returned to India, it became evident that while I looked the part, I was not an Indian at heart. I thought and acted like an American but still longed for elements that were not American. Somehow, I had become conditioned by the places in which I lived. Looking back on my 30 years on this earth, I can see that my journeys indeed shaped my own unique culture. I finally find contentment in being different. I am still a proud American with a rich cultural heritage. After years of analyzing how I am expected to think and live by the Indians, Singaporeans, British or Southerners, I have finally arrived at my own individuality, and I would have it no other way.

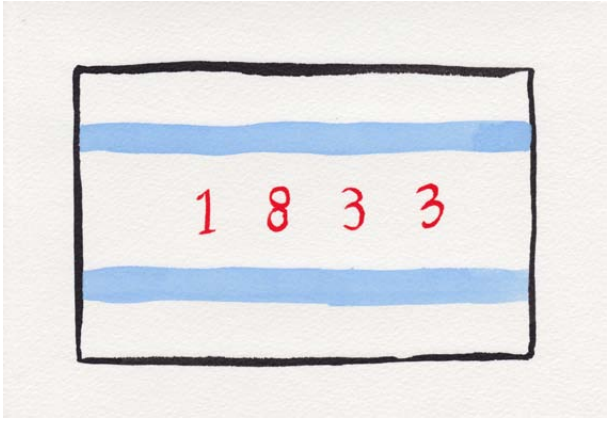
Suzanne **Makol**

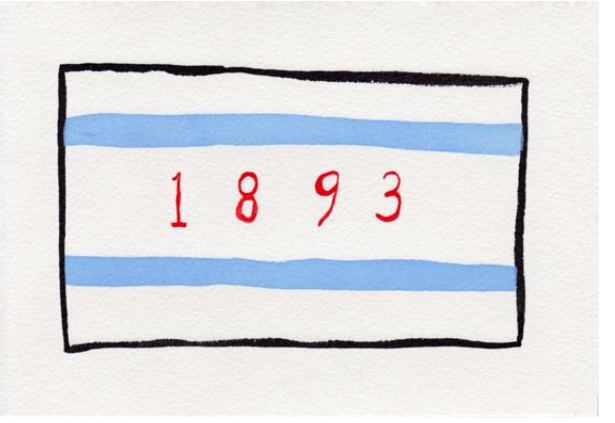
Untitled (Chicago Flags)

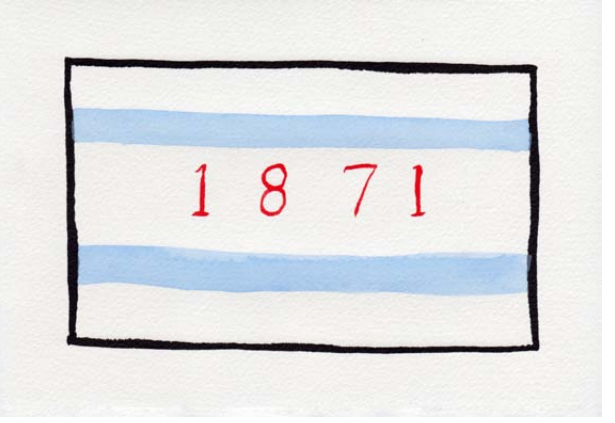
Flags are one of the most common forms of identity for any place or group. ***By displaying a flag, which is made up of simple shapes in just a few colors, one makes a statement about their association.*** Based on a person's feelings about what a flag represents, seeing it instills emotions from pride to disgust.

With my flag series, I explored aspects of Chicago that one might think of internally when they see the flag.

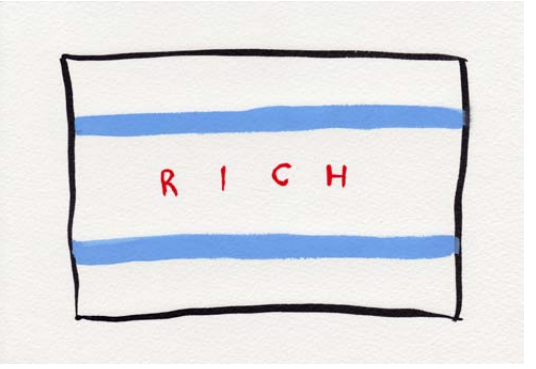
All Pieces Gouache and India ink on watercolor paper. 2011. 5" x 7 ¼"



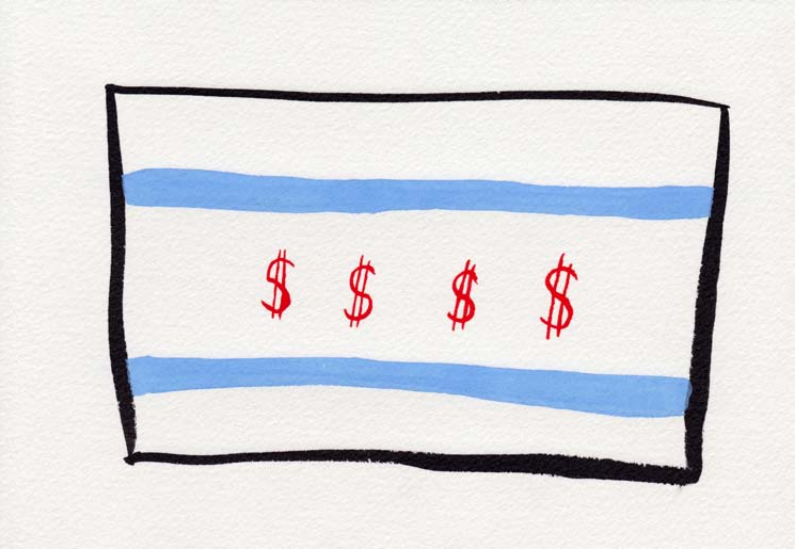




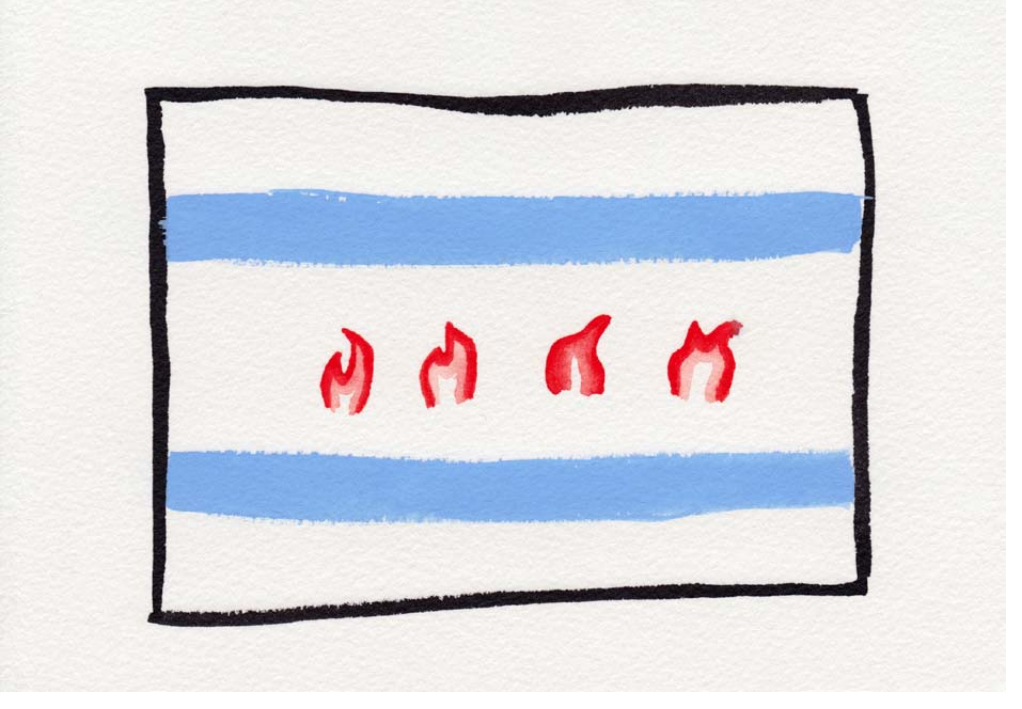
Suzanne **Makol**



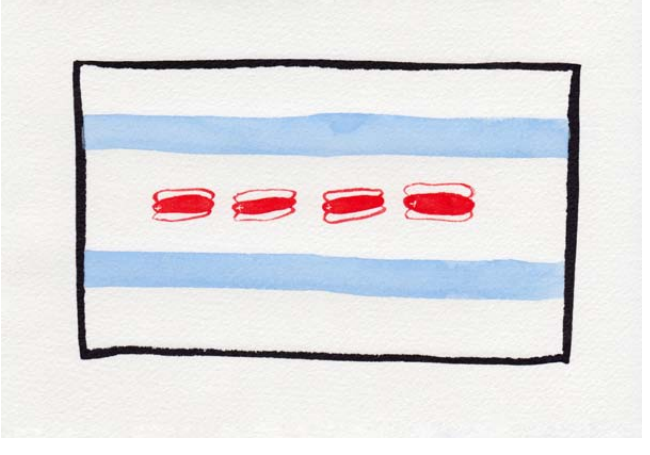
Suzanne **Makol**

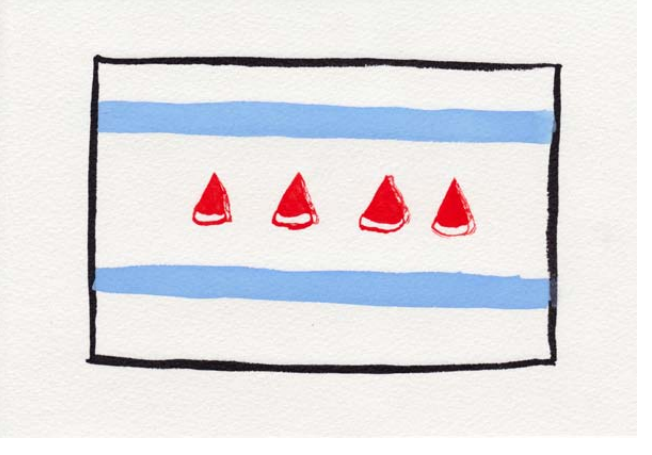


Suzanne **Makol**



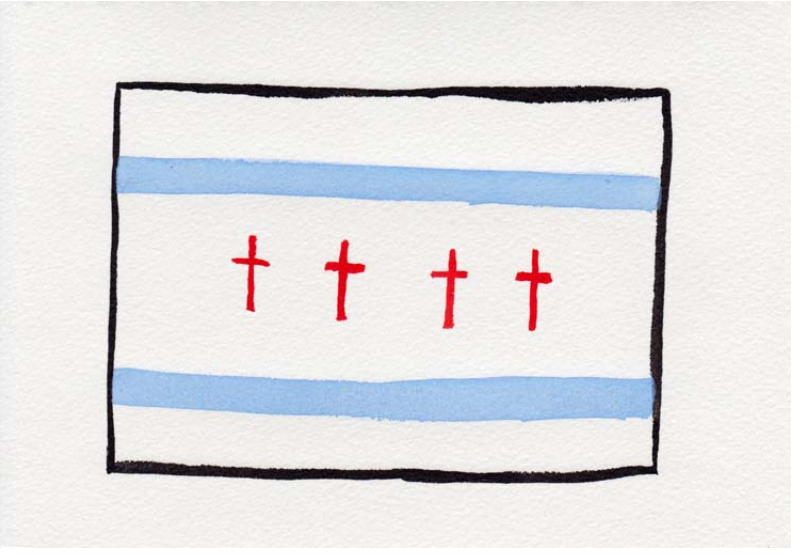
Suzanne **Makol**

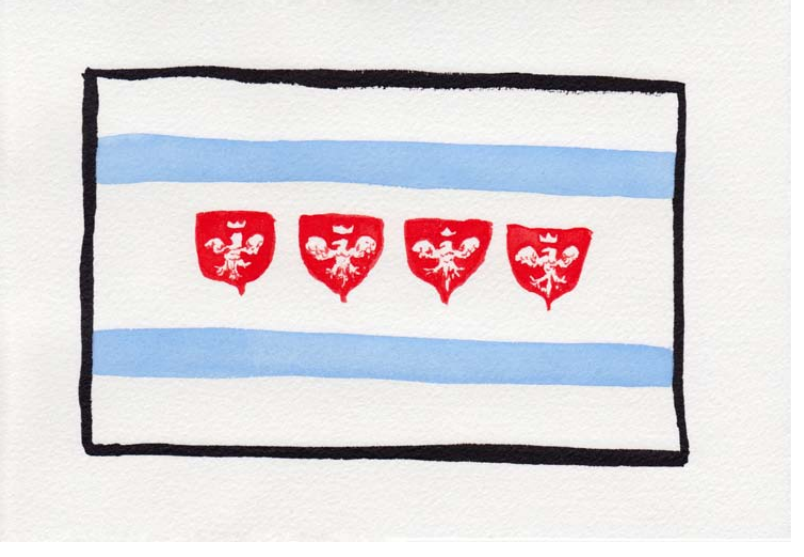




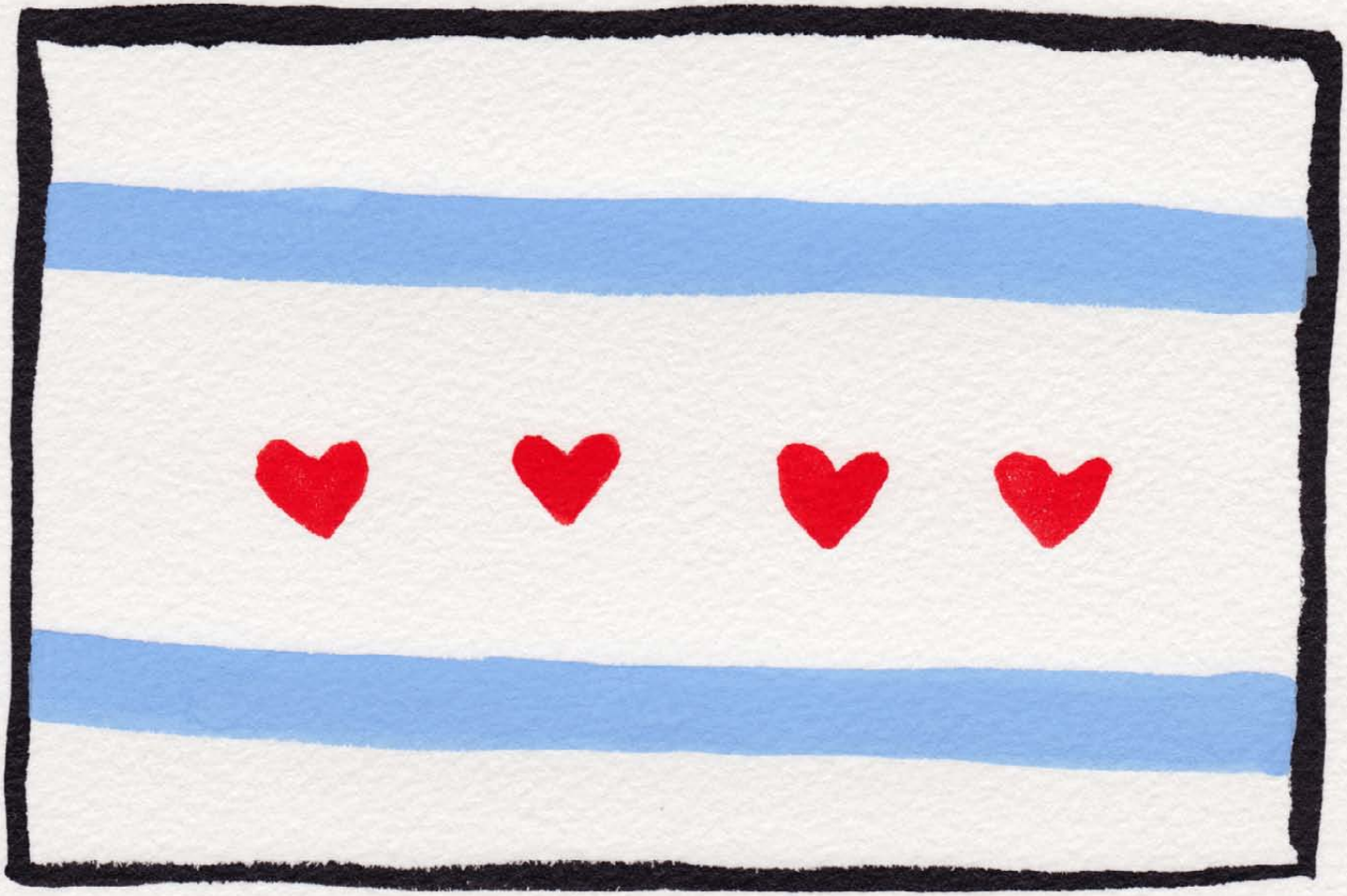
Suzanne **Makol**

Suzanne **Makol**





Suzanne **Makol**



Suzanne **Makol**

Suzanne **Makol**

Fiction

Abraham **Sohn**

Blessed are the Poor

The leaves were just beginning to turn. A gentle yellowing, almost unnoticed. When the wind blew, the dry edges of foliage would clack against each other in a muted applause. Last night's rain had left a loamy smell, and the first fallen leaves glommed the wet sidewalk like an adhesive. The air had turned a shade cooler, but summer's last gasp would linger for another few weeks. The people of Chicago would hang on to the last days of the warm season with tenacity. Shorts would be worn until the first snow.

Stephen Ambrose was sitting on the stoop in front of his apartment building. He cradled a coffee mug in his hands, and let his elbows rest on his knees. A volume of Civil War history sat next to him. It was early afternoon, and the mailman would be making his rounds on Stephen's block soon. Besides neighbors walking their dogs, or children passing by on their way to school, the mailman, Fred, was the only person Stephen interacted with. When he saw Fred coming, Stephen would pick up the book and pretend to read. He didn't want to seem like he was waiting.

He heard Fred before he saw him. The squeak of his mail cart several houses down gave him away. Stephen sipped from his mug, drew in a sharp breath, and coughed. The whiskey cleared his head. He placed the mug on the stoop, behind him so it was nearly out of sight, and picked up the book. Paging to someplace in the middle, he tried to look engrossed. He could hear Fred getting closer.

"Afternoon, Professor," Fred called out when he approached the building.

"Oh, Fred. Hello." Stephen looked up from his book and did his best to look startled. "Is it two already? Or are you early?"

"Light load today," Fred said, as he sorted through his bag. "I'm a little ahead of schedule." He procured a bundle and let himself through the outer gate of the chain link fence. Fred was a tall man, with skin as dark as coffee and a voice rich with bass.

"Nice for a Friday, I guess."

"I suppose," Fred said, as he leaned against the fence. "Though I'm just glad the rain stopped. What are we reading today?"

"Oh this?" Stephen glanced down at the book, as though he had forgotten it was there. "Just a little history. Civil War and all that."

"Is it good?"

"Riveting," Stephen said, and smiled. "You know, house divided, Gettysburg, the whole nine yards."

"Something for one of your classes?" Fred asked, pulling a pack of cigarettes from his breast pocket. He pulled two from the pack and handed one to Stephen. With a deft movement, Fred lit the cigarette with a match, then reached over and lit Stephen's as well.

"No, no," Stephen said, as he pulled air through the cigarette until he tasted burning tobacco, "I'm still on leave. This is just for pleasure." Fred nodded as both men blew billows of smoke in the afternoon sun. The light was angled just so, making the smoke purple and starkly visible. Every curl of smoke looked heavier and more alive, almost like it could be touched.

"Oh, that's right. Sabbatical, I keep forgetting." Fred exhaled through his nose, the smoke bending around the curve of his jaw. They smoked without speaking, the only sound coming from cars ambling down the quiet side street. The beep of a garbage truck backing into an alley down the block broke the silence. Fred's cigarette was half burned. He ashed over the fence and pulled deeply once again. "A little late in the day for coffee," Fred said, nodding toward the mug behind Stephen.

"I guess," Stephen said. "But I drink it all day. On my third cup already."

"The more you drink, the more you need, huh?" Fred laughed. "I don't touch the stuff myself. Makes me groggy after the effect wears off."

"That's why I just keep drinking it," Stephen said. "If you don't stop there's no crash. I'm on a about six cups a day now."

"Well, to each his own, I suppose," Fred said. "Whatever gets you through the day."

"Indeed," Stephen nodded, "Indeed."

"With that," Fred flicked his cigarette toward the curb, "I should head out. You have a good day, Mr. Ambrose. I'll see you Monday, I guess."

"Have a good one, Fred."

Fred turned to leave, but stopped short of the gate.

"Oh, almost forgot." He turned back to Stephen. "Your mail for the day. Take care, now."

"Likewise," Stephen said, and waved as Fred pushed his mail cart farther down the block.

He went to the bathroom to shower and clean up, knowing Marcia, his ex-wife, would interrogate her.

The mail was the usual assortment of catalogs, credit card offers, and a utility bill. Stephen leafed through it, uninterested, as he went inside, and tossed it on the kitchen table with the growing pile of unopened mail. It was just past two. He swallowed the last of his whiskey and placed the mug in the sink. Maddie, his daughter, would be getting out of school in a half hour, and it was his weekend with her, the last weekend of the month. He went to the bathroom to shower and clean up, knowing Marcia, his ex-wife, would interrogate her.

Though she was only eight, Stephen sometimes wondered whether Maddie knew more than she let on. She appeared more distant from him each time he picked her up, and knew his ex-wife's influence was to blame. He didn't know what Marcia told her, or how much of the divorce she understood. He only knew that he was losing her, and it frightened him. Maddie was the only thing he had left, the only good thing in his life. His career, if he could still call it that, was in shambles, and his friends had abandoned him as a lost cause.

He showered and changed his clothes, putting on a pair of khakis and a flannel shirt. He brushed his teeth twice. A grayish brown stubble had developed on his chin and neck, so he let the hot water run and lathered up. The bright white lather made his skin look more weathered in contrast. There was no color in his face. His deep set green eyes looked almost like ash, the bags under them making the skin look sickly. He shaved quickly, though the dull razor left plenty behind, and the look was more grizzled than clean.

Maddie's school was a half mile walk from his apartment. He left at half past two so as not to be late. The neighborhood was riddled with half-sunken memories, every street corner a guidepost for parts of his life he had lost. He remembered walking home from the Italian restaurant down the

street, and Marcia telling him she was pregnant. He remembered the long walks he and Marcia took to the park when Maddie was a baby. He remembered walking up on the abandoned train tracks when he and Marcia had just moved into the neighborhood after getting married. The liquor store on the way to Maddie's school was the only place that mattered now. It was painful to stay here, but it would have been more painful to leave, to admit that everything was gone.

Children were just beginning to trickle out of the front doors when he arrived at the school. Parents waited in SUVs with hazard lights flashing, or stood chatting on the sidewalk. No one paid him any attention. He stood far enough from the clusters of people to avoid any awkwardness. His situation was widely known, and he was tired of the quickly shifting gazes and the abrupt stops to conversation when he approached. He kept his distance.

After waiting fifteen minutes, he started to feel something was wrong. Maddie should have come out by now. Most of the parents and children had gone. The hubbub of school just letting out had subsided, and the quiet made him uncomfortable. Maybe she had gotten held up, or needed to stay late for something. He walked toward the front door. His head was swimming from the whiskey and from fear, and he tripped going up the few front steps. He could feel the eyes of the remaining parents on him, and the sudden stop of conversation. Picking himself up and making a point not to turn around, he heard their voices pick back up in hushed tones.

He took a deep breath before entering the main office. Stay calm, he told himself, and pushed open the door.

"Can I help you?" the woman behind the desk asked. She didn't get up.

"Yes I'm here to pick up my daughter, but she didn't come outside."

"Hmm," the woman seemed to size him up. "Well we don't have any after-school activities on Fridays, so that's a little odd. What was your name?"

"Ambrose, Stephen Ambrose. My daughter's name is Madeline." Stephen shifted on his feet, and felt a layer of sweat develop on the back of his neck. The woman picked up the telephone and spoke softly to someone on the other end.

"Mr. Ambrose," she said, and he met her eyes, "Ms. Thomas will be right in to speak with you."

Stephen wanted to yell. He wanted to say that he didn't want to see the principal he wanted to see his daughter. But he waited. Ms. Thomas walked in a moment later, a severe, gray-haired

woman who Stephen knew had never liked him much.

"Mr. Ambrose, hello," she began.

"Where is Maddie?" He was trying not to raise his voice, but the words flew out.

"Mr. Ambrose, please, try and keep your voice down." She looked at him coldly. "Would you like to speak in my office?"

"No," he said. "No I don't. I want to know where my daughter is."

"Your daughter is gone," she said. "Her mother came for her early, so as not to avoid any conflict."

"Avoid any conflict?" Stephen took a step toward Ms. Thomas. "What kind of conflict? It's my right to see her. It's my weekend, and she knows that, she knows I have a legal right to see my daughter."

"Please Mr. Ambrose," she said. "I'd much rather speak in my office. Would you please just come with –"

"No!"

He yelled it. The woman behind the desk shifted uncomfortably. "I want to see my daughter. Why did you let Maddie go with her mother? You know how this works, you know I have rights."

"You had rights, Mr. Ambrose." She narrowed her gaze. "And for the last time keep your voice down."

"What do you mean had? What does that mean?"

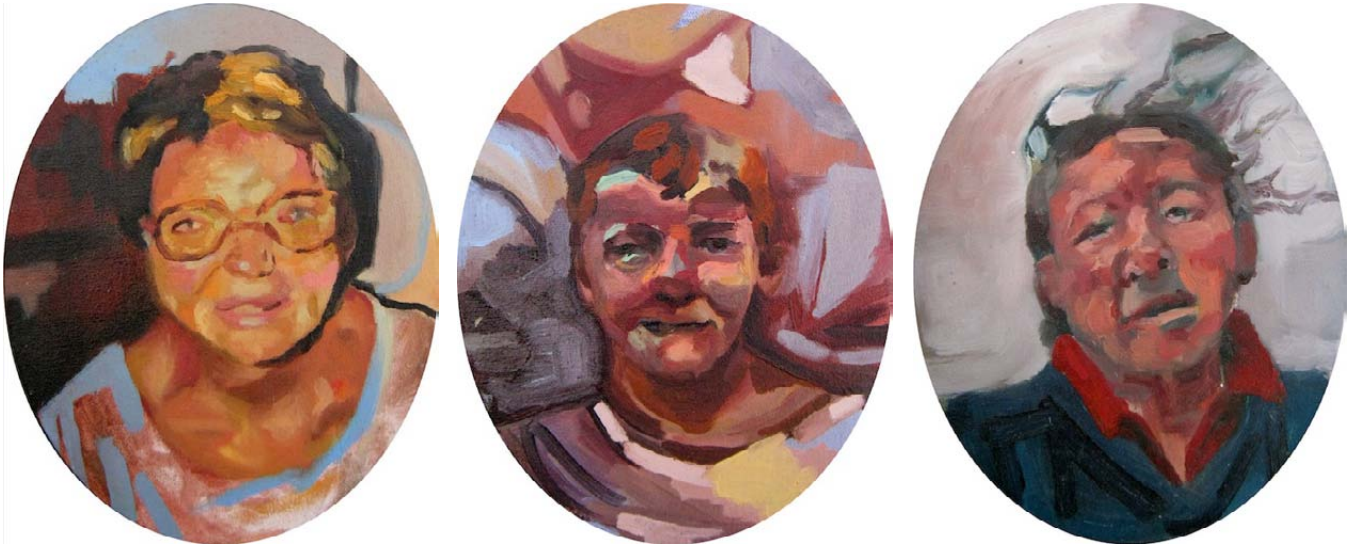
"Wait here, Mr. Ambrose." Ms. Thomas turned on her heel and went into her adjoining office. He could hear her shuffling papers on her desk, and then walking back. She returned and handed Stephen a thin sheet of paper, keeping as much distance between them as she could.

"What is this?" Stephen said, more to himself than to Ms. Thomas, quickly scanning the page.

"It is a court order. Your wife informed me that you should have received a copy in the mail. She left a copy, in case, as she said, you were somehow unaware." Ms. Thomas waited. The paper shook in Stephen's hands. "Good day, Mr. Ambrose."

Stephen found himself outside the school, the paper still shaking in his hands. The words 'failure to adhere to treatment schedule' and 'relinquishing right of custody' had been highlighted. He sat down on the steps he had fallen over on the way in. The concrete was wet but he didn't care. He couldn't think of anything to do. He shook. He wept.

Sophie **Leininger**



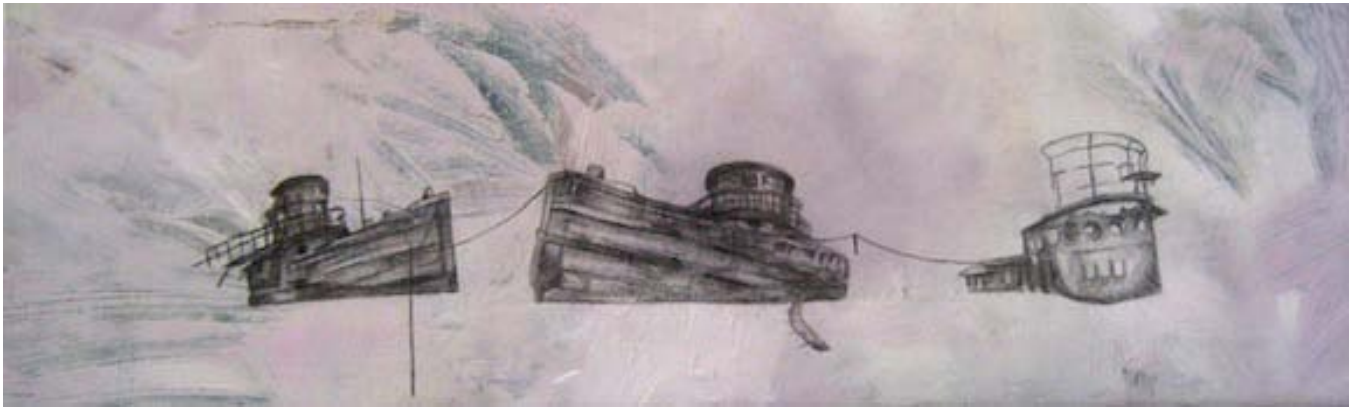
Family Tree. Oil on Canvas. 2008. sizes vary

Sophie **Leininger**

I initially endeavored to build personal mythology through the study of old photographs, shown through my "Family Tree" series. However, my exploration of family has become more emotionally driven as of late. ***To better speak to the feelings themselves, I look to metaphoric representations of my relationship*** to family and specific family members. "Current Affairs" and "Family" display how the nature of non-human and sometimes abstract subjects speak to the complexity of our most intimate relationships.

Current Affairs. Oil, Acrylic, and Graphite on Canvas. 2010 36"x48"

Sophie **Leininger**



Family. Oil and Graphite on Canvas. 2010. 9”x29”

Sophie **Leininger**

Lauren **Herrmann**

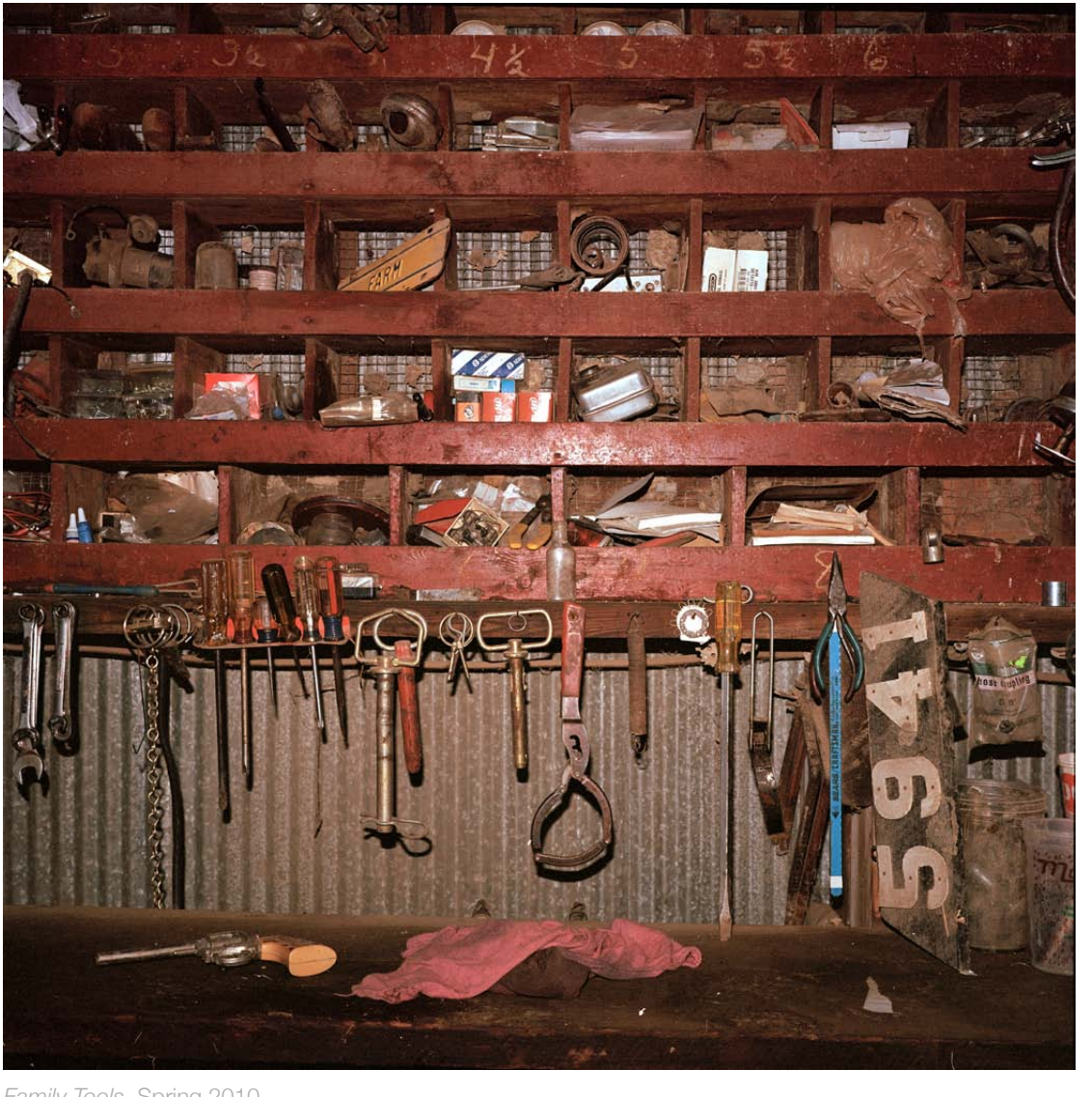
Selected Images from *Silver Shoes*

Uncle Bill. Spring 2010

To Go Somewhere. Summer 2009

Lauren **Herrmann**

Lauren **Herrmann**



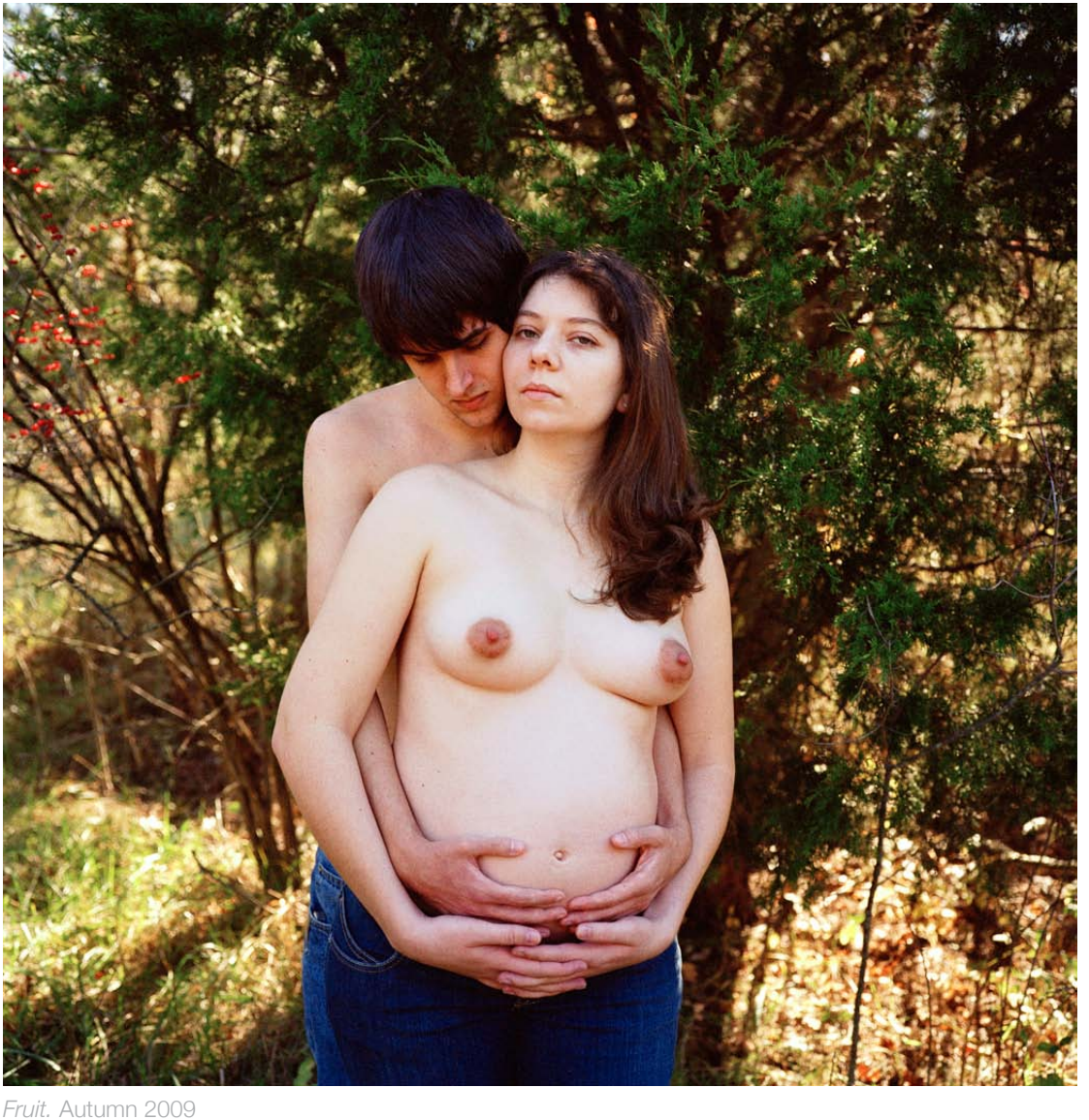
Family Tools. Spring 2010
Kitchen. Spring 2010 *(On Previous)*

Lauren **Herrmann**

My Grandmother Insists She Can Still Tend To Her Gardens. Summer 2009

to return to where I was born
simultaneously with sister's fruit
aflight on wings of silver shoes
tiny feet of mercury
dance with sunflares
circumambulate with urgency
a never-ending cycle
this fascination with light
outstretched through tree branches
particles dangle toes in cold creek water
hands carry stolen light through toxic fluids
through darkness
making sense of the process
of rude snow confusing robins
of a turtle crushed by a school bus
a limb crushed by a tractor
a door used as a gurney
bearing the weight of my grandfather
heavy as a son's grief
I'm holding my history beneath this water
collections of dust
a pile of planks that was once a house
a hundred kitchen chickens
a shelf of ancestral tools
preserved for examination
a record of life
of everything in cycles
my mortality evidenced
in these rituals
walking through fields of ashes
we are all sensitive to light
each spring dead grass is burned away
all things return to their places of origin

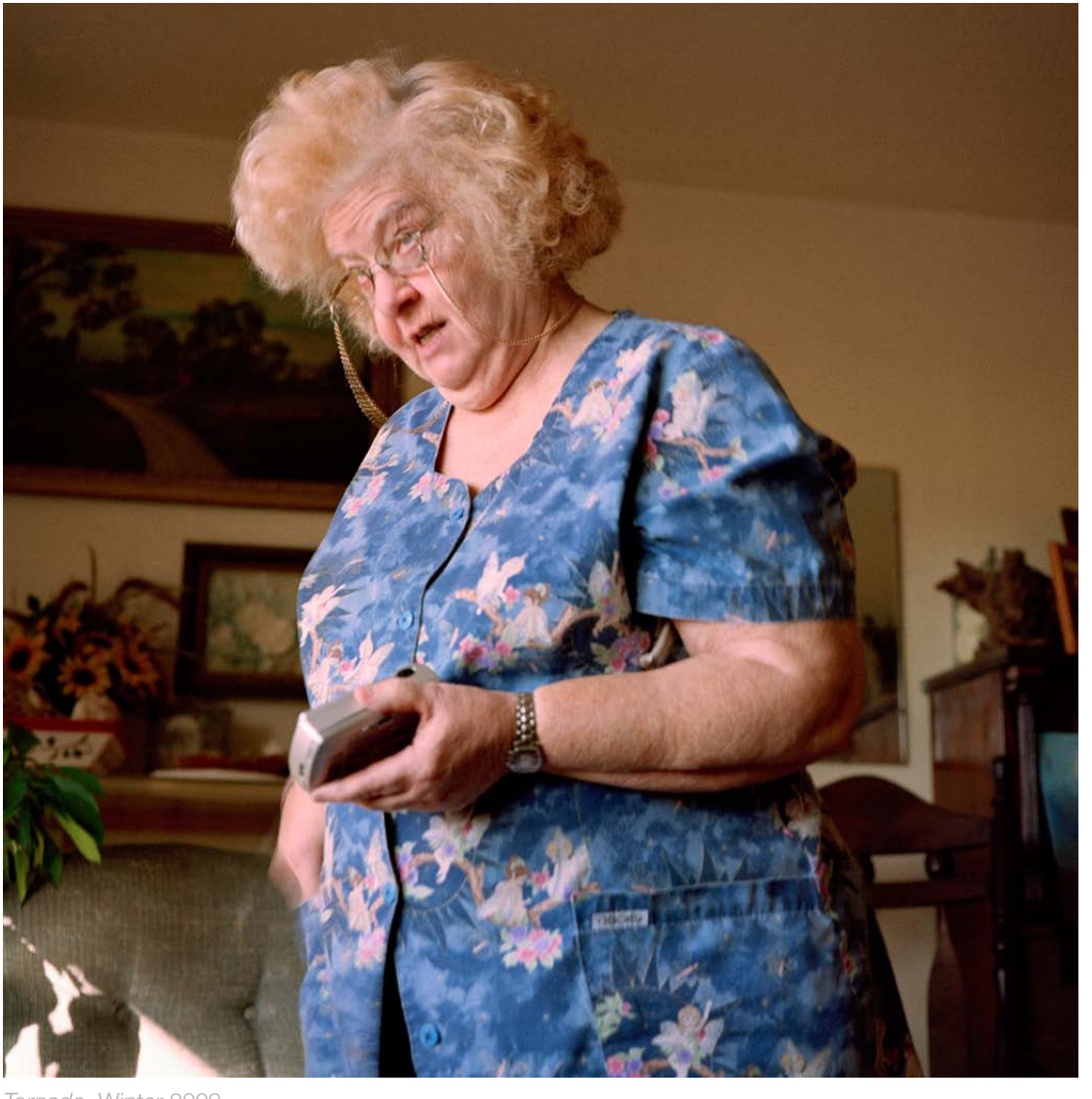
Lauren **Herrmann**



Fruit. Autumn 2009

Lauren **Herrmann**

Lauren **Herrmann**



Tornado. Winter 2009
Gurney. Summer 2010 *(On Previous)*

Lauren **Herrmann**

Household. Summer 2010
Origin. Spring 2010 *(On Following)*

Lauren **Herrmann**

Lauren **Herrmann**

Fiction

Joey **Pizzolato**

So Longs

My father drives me back to the city on his way to the airport. He drops me where the road dead-ends at a baseball diamond. Under the street lamp everything looks diffused, distant.

So long, Joe, my father says. See you in November.

I watch him circle around, watch until the blip of his taillights set on the horizon. I turn and head down an alley to the open garage. The weather is mild and the moon is bright, so I pull up a lawn chair and sit with my roommates in a circle. Crack a beer.

We pick up where we left off—the four of us. We talk of chasing kites on Tybee Island, running miles down the shoreline trying to beat the storm rolling in off the Atlantic; we remember long nights of karaoke in Tokyo, encores of "Piano Man" with our arms interlocked, singing off-key and drunk as we swayed back and forth with our eyes closed; we feel the burn in our legs after five days spent hiking through the Andes mountains, our lives shoved into packs and strapped to our backs. We talk about the baby—his baby—what he'll do when it gets here, as if it were a draft notice. We talk about his new job, about his move. We talk about the future; we talk about uncertainty. We talk until daybreak bleeds over the far end of Lake Michigan.

I'm gonna' hit it, he says. Still got some packing to do.

We all stand, hug, say our last goodbyes.

So long, not goodbye, he says to me.

But I think it is.

CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

No. 3 Kith & Kin

Jeremiah Caleb has lived among multiple cultures and is a working actor who currently resides in Los Angeles with his new bride. While he trained in musical theater, he has most recently appeared on commercials and television. He is also the founder of the Caleb Hope Foundation, which seeks to aid the destitute orphans in the slums of north India. His book "He Walks with Me" is pending publication.

Annie Frykhom is an Oakland based artist originally from Ventura, California. The artist earned her BFA from California College of the Arts (and Crafts) in 2010, and works primarily in textiles and ceramics and ways of intertwining the two. Through an exploration of feminine issues, craft, and the changing nature of 'women's work' the artist hopes to make a statement about contemporary social networks and methods of communication. The artist currently works out of the Compound Gallery in Oakland, CA.

Tali Gubiner is a recent graduate of the University of Michigan. She currently lives and writes in New York.

Lauren Herrmann is currently wearing the following hats: UIC graduate, Visual Director & Tea Ambassador for Lethal Poetry, Art Editor at Muzzle Magazine, and Owner of LuxCamena Photography. She currently photographs for Loud Loop Press, Nineteen Months, and The Encyclopedia Show. Will bribe with baked goods. Find her "art" at www.languageless.com

Kirsten Leenaars was born and educated in the Netherlands. She is an artist, teacher, organizer, fascinated by the human species and collector of personal stories. In her work she ponders the nature of self-making narratives and questions how we relate to other people, and what shapes these relationships. Her work is shown at film and video festivals nationally and internationally, in gallery context and has been part of community-based projects. Her work can be seen at www.kirstenleenaars.nl

Sophie Leininger is an Oakland-based artist and member of the Compound Gallery & Studios collective. She is a graduate of Mills College, where she earned a B.A. in Studio Art and Literary and Cultural Studies. Her life-long interests include talking to animals, time travel, roller-skating, and feather collection. Her work can be seen at www.sophieleininger.com

Abraham Sohan is a writer living in Chicago.

Christian Vargas is a native of Fresno, California. His path to becoming an artist began when he discovered photography, street art, and skateboarding graphics. That interest grew into much more as he developed his talents and began to use his art as an outlet to express himself and the world around him. He began to make art that had personal meaning to him, reflecting who he is and where he comes from. Find out more about him at www.chrisvargas.blogspot.com

COMPOSITE INFO

No. 3 Kith & Kin

Coming Summer 2011: Issue No. 4 Doppelganger. *Imagine seeing yourself. Not just a photo or your reflection—a representation—but imagine actually seeing yourself. It's not you, right? This is your omen of death, your doppelganger. This isn't a rare story. Doppelgangers are all around us, residing in a place we can only imagine, yet barely fathom.*

Composite is the brain-child and uncompensated project of:

Zach Clark Is becoming Hella East Bay, farther from anywhere his family has been before. His work can be viewed at www.zachclarkis.com.

Kara Cochran looks like her mother. This, and her other work, can be seen at www.karacochran.com

Xavier Duran believes it is all relative. And condescending, if drunk. You can view his work at www.xavierduran.com.

Suzanne Makol can't imagine living anywhere other than Chicago. Much of her art has to do with Chicago in one way or another. She can be contacted at suzannemakol@gmail.com.

Joey Pizzolato cannot see where kith ends and kin begins. He can be reached at joeypizzolato@gmail.com.

Composite is a free publication. If you like what we're doing and would like to help support us financially, there is a donation area on the website. Anything helps, so thank you in advance.