



ARTS ACCESS VICTORIA

# artsider

Outsider Art Magazine  
Issue Two May 2014



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EDITOR NOTES.

# OUTSIDER ART IS IN

The Venice Biennale is one of the largest and most prestigious contemporary art exhibitions in the world.

It is a showcase of the best that the international art world has to offer and last year the main exhibition titled The Encyclopedic Palace, featuring 150 artists from 40 countries, was devoted to Outsider Art.

This is an enormous leap for artworks that have traditionally been seen only in the smallest of suburban galleries. But the Biennale is not alone, The New York Outsider Art Fair 2013 was so successful that its producer, Wide Open Arts opened a Paris Outsider Art Fair in late 2013. The Alternative Guide to the Universe, featured at the Hayward Gallery in London from June to August 2013 and the Museum of Everything had shows in London, Moscow and Venice.

Outsider art is officially in. But why is it that outsider art is currently so hot? The art world, forever searching for something new has turned to the raw, unpolished aesthetic of the outsider artist to counteract the glossy manicured look of the current crop of artistic high fliers. Is it simply a backlash against the commercialisation of the wider contemporary art world or has the time for Outsider art truly arrived?



Has outsider art been forever elevated above the level of 'curiosity'? Time will tell.

This issue of Artsider sources visual arts from the Supported Residential Services (SRS) Studios program run by Arts Access Victoria. Initially located solely within the SRS the studio program has expanded to include open studios held at local community venues.

As with many outsider artists the choice of medium is not restricted to the traditional formats. Found images and discarded papers feature in the work of Robbie Weir and Felicity Minnigamis while the intricate portraits of Dimitrios Jim Mouhtsis are made all the more delicate by their diminutive scale. More work from the SRS studios can be seen at [srs-studios.blogspot.com.au](http://srs-studios.blogspot.com.au)

Our written works follow in a long history of Victorian outsider with the much respected quarterly magazine Roomers, which publishes work from SRS, entering its eleventh year.

Much of the written material in this issue was sourced through Write-ability a partnership program between Arts Access Victoria and Writers Victoria. This issue features work from widely published authors such as Sandy Jeffs as well as works from those previously unpublished including Deb Lissek and Jalal Merhi.

**Rhian Hinkley**

Editor, Artsider Magazine  
Arts Access Victoria

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**THEO PSATHAS**

ABOUT.

# ARTS ACCESS VICTORIA

For 40 years, Arts Access Victoria has been at the forefront of supporting people with disability to enjoy the arts as both artists and audiences alike.

Arts Access Victoria works to position artists with disability as cultural innovators, ensuring that the arts and cultural sector is aware of, and responds to, the need for inclusive practice. This includes a commitment to furthering career pathways, enabling artists with disability to develop their practice and engage with other artists and the sector as equal contributors.

Whether it be through participation in high quality, artist driven programs, providing advice and guidance to artists mounting a show or exhibition or through developing better access for audience members, Arts Access Victoria is uniquely placed to provide vital support to both the artists and arts organisations to achieve their desired outcomes.

Through artistic collaboration, we share the knowledge and skills we have built in inclusive practice, ensuring individuals and organisations have the capacity to be inclusive, opening their imagination to the new possibilities that this practice brings.

In turn, we are challenged and strengthened by those with whom we collaborate.

An ambitious agenda of social and artistic transformation for people with disability, the communities in which they live, and the arts sector in which they aspire to participate without barriers sustains the work that we do in improving participation in the arts for people with disability.

By removing the barriers that prevent meaningful engagement in the arts, people with disability can transform their communities and have their lives transformed. Our work has and will continue to support people with disability to tell their unique stories, introduce new and innovative practices to the arts, and be significant and valued audiences.

For more information about Arts Access Victoria, see our website at [www.artsaccess.com.au](http://www.artsaccess.com.au) or contact our staff on [info@artsaccess.com.au](mailto:info@artsaccess.com.au)



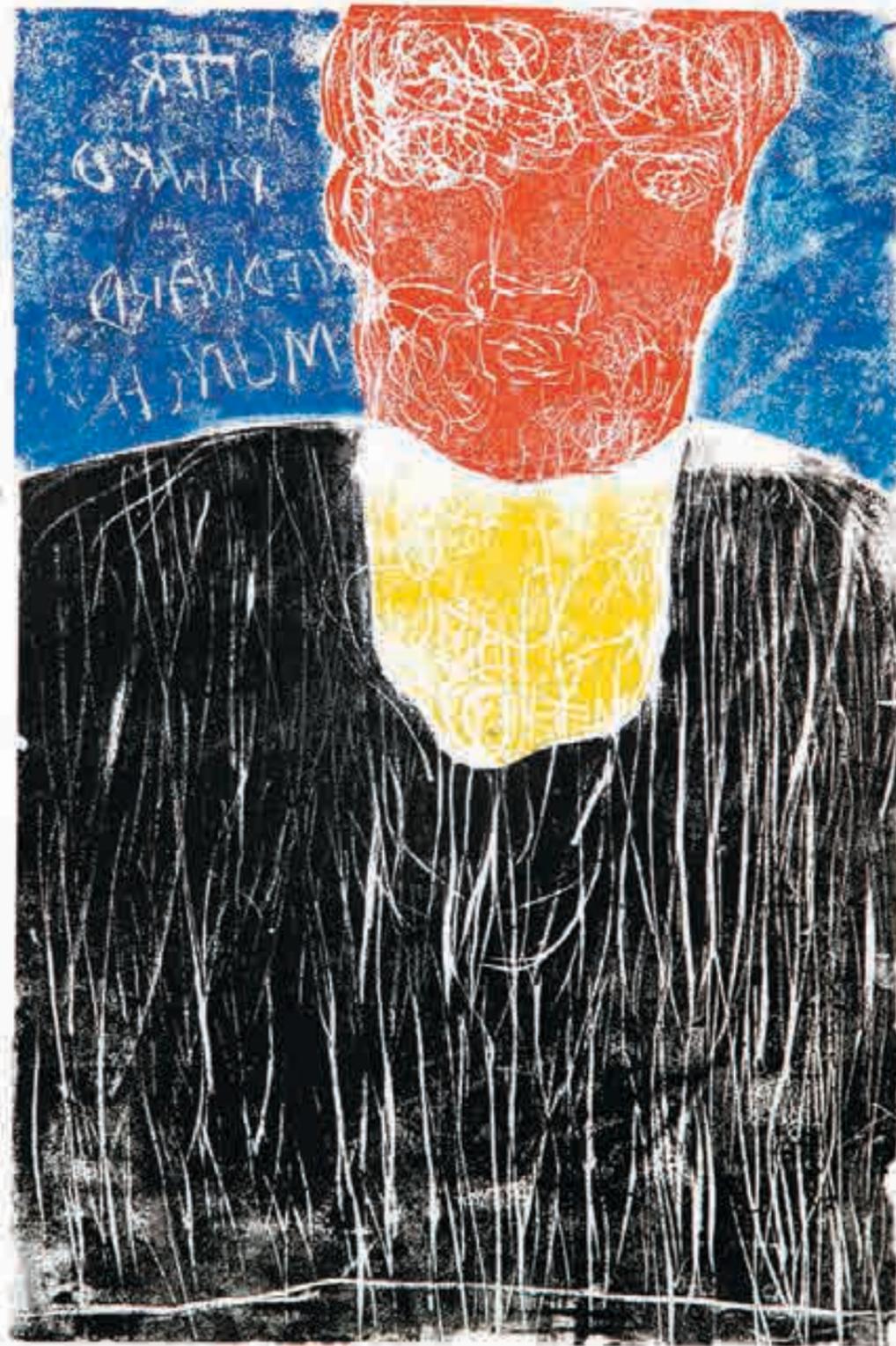












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PETER PIWKO

# HOW I BECAME A PROFESSIONAL LUNATIC AND A POET

SANDY JEFFS

I went mad in 1976. It changed my life beyond recognition. Doors closed. I lost my identity. I was so invisible in the world I walked in the shadows of others and cast none of my own. My friends around me got on with their lives and careers but I went nowhere. Life came to a crashing halt.

## Parkville Psychiatric Unit 13/12/1976

*...she reported auditory hallucinations, usually of her parents arguing about her in the third person and she described experiences of derealisation and depersonalisation as well as fluctuating levels of anxiety. After two weeks it was considered she was suffering from an acute schizophrenic illness and treatment was started with Trifluoperazine increasing the dose to 45mg/day.*

A diagnosis of schizophrenia in 1976 was tantamount to a death sentence. The prognosis was poor and it was thought that with each psychotic episode a person would go further into unreachable madness from which there was no recovery. It was a small step from diagnosis to an invalid pension and onto the scrap heap of society. And so began my career as a professional lunatic. My schizophrenia was rampant and with each relapse into madness and subsequent hospitalisations to Larundel Psychiatric Hospital - the madhouse on the edge of town - I thought I'd never achieve anything worthwhile in a life which was certain to be cut short by suicide.

Before Parkville Psychiatric Unit I was admitted to the Queen Victoria Hospital psych ward. I was sitting on my bed waiting to attend a morning ward meeting when I wrote a poem. Poetry wasn't foreign to me. I'd had a passion for it from the moment I was introduced to T. S. Eliot at school. He held me in his thrall and I had wanted to write poems of great intellect and style just like his. I must have had a sixth sense about myself being a poet because I recall how I had chosen POET as my preferred vocation out of a list of occupations given to me by a psychologist during a vocational guidance assessment in my last year of school. I had only attempted to write a few poems at this stage, it was more wishful thinking. By the time I got to university, by courtesy of a miracle, but that's another story, poetry became more important to me. I would sit in lectures and let myself drift into a poetic reverie writing poems instead of taking lecture notes. My attempts at poetry were embarrassingly feeble but I was passionate.



PETER PIWKO

This is the poem I wrote in the midst of madness on 17th November 1976;  
it was my first 'mad' poem.

### Here I Sit

---

Here,  
surrounded by the swirling nothingness of chaos,  
with the indignant idiocy of haze and alienation,  
I sit  
where perception becomes a burden  
and where the burden becomes the loss of perception.  
What is this world,  
this world of contradictions,  
this torturous maze of distress  
where confusion reigns and  
clarity remains submerged?

Here,  
surrounded by the sterile relics of sanity,  
lost in a labyrinth of refracted thought,  
I sit  
where life becomes a burden  
and where the burden becomes the loss of life.  
What is this confusion,  
this confusion of the spheres,  
this unyielding perplexity  
that determinedly withers my countenance  
and renders me helpless?

In 1993 when my first book *Poems from the Madhouse* was published by Spinifex Press, 'Here I Sit' was the opening poem. Thirty-six years after the poem was written it began a new journey. Now a powerful and compelling song composed by Elena Kats-Chernin, it opened a show called MAD performed at the 2012 Brisbane Festival directed and choreographed by Meryl Tankard. Sung by Mara Kiek, whose voice, while powerfully resonant, teeters on the edge of cracking and splintering, the poem suddenly had a breathtaking fragility. MAD is based on my poetry and life and explores the harrowing experiences of my madness and the equally compelling force of my black humour. To see how Elena transformed 'Here I Sit' and other poems into melodic, elegiac songs was profoundly moving. Each song had its own poignancy, with the music eerily capturing the essence of each poem. And as Meryl's framework of dance and performance evolved before me, I thought I was in someone else's dream.

'Here I Sit' is a defining poem, one which opened doors I thought would never open. If I had said to the clinical staff in the psych ward that I was going to become a poet and my poems would inspire Elena Kats-Chernin and choreographer Meryl Tankard to create a show called MAD, I'm sure they would have thought I was having delusions of grandeur and given me more medication. They didn't hold much hope for me back then. I was destined to a life with no future prospects because I was, after all, suffering from an acute schizophrenic illness and no one recovered from something so catastrophic. This was the opinion of one of my treating doctors at Parkville:

#### 12/12/1976 Personality Profile.

Walking contradiction, capable of many things, but of nothing. Enjoys reading, creative things like writing and sketching. Would like to be an artist - maybe presumptuous. Tends to be arrogant, tries not to be, likes to use words with precision.

I may well have been a walking contradiction, capable of many things, but of nothing but thankfully I have managed to achieve a few things more than the nothing the doctor predicted. It took 36 years for 'Here I Sit' to find its new life and I am now wondering when my medication is going to kick in and my delusion that this has happened will pass. Such a validation of my poetry is something I never expected. Nor did the clinician at Larundel Psychiatric Hospital who wrote the following:

#### 20/7/1978 Mental State on Admission.

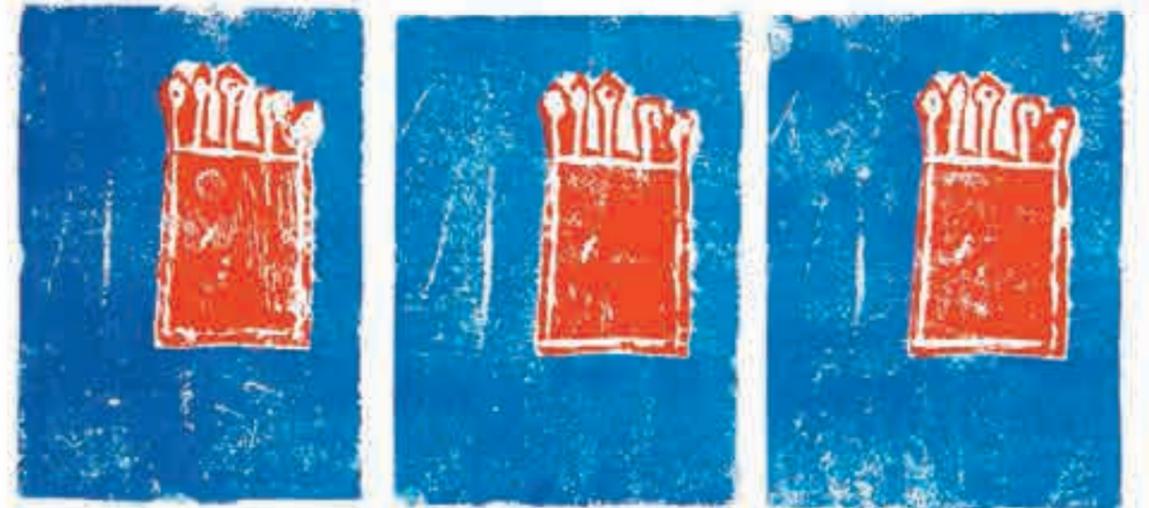
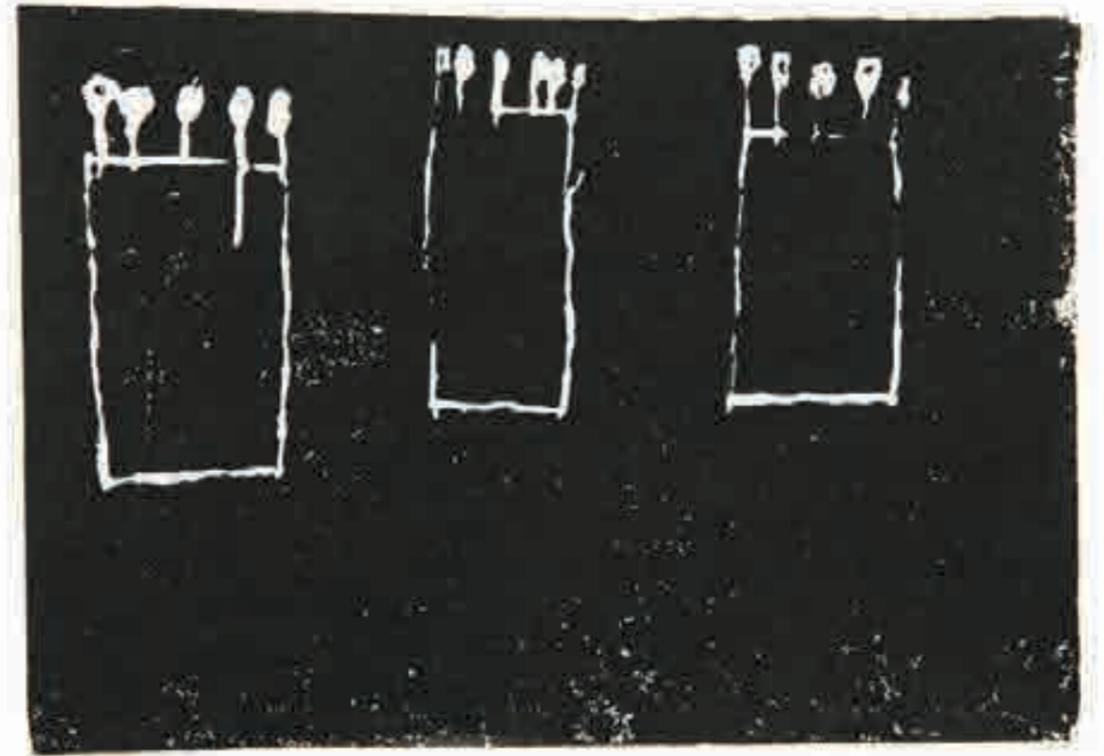
Presented as a rather mysterious young woman with long black hair giving a superficial impression of poetry and art personified.

My presumptuousness and superficial impression of poetry has so far produced 5 books of poetry, a memoir and the show MAD. I rest my case.





DIANE CHEN



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DIANE CHEN



## LEAVE THE TREES BE

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MARCO SIROLI



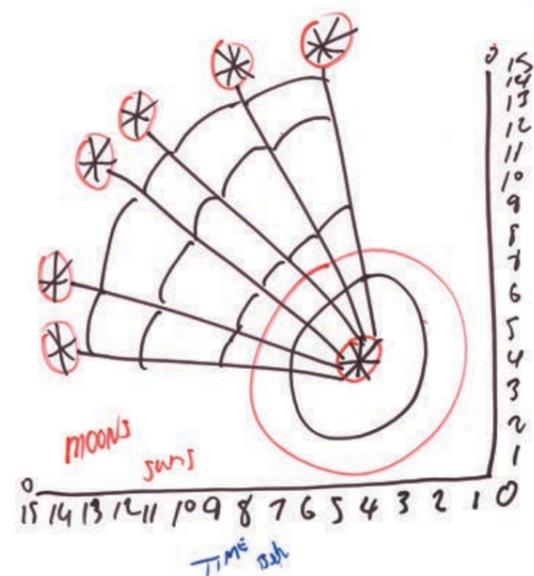
One day while walking through the parklands of Larundel Psychiatric Hospital, I came across a woman with her arms outstretched. She said hello and I said hello, are you on medication and she said, oh yes I'm on medication everything around here is.

The birds are, the sky is, the lawn section is, the pathway is, the road is, the trees are and if you go up toward there's so much medication up there that the walls have cracked. I said I'm on medication as well and I'm making my way back to Plenty Hospital. She said you're special, and I said what makes me so special, and she said, can't you tell I'm a tree talking to me.

Now you know that you can talk to all the trees. So I said goodbye to the woman who said she was a tree that had talked to me.

Wont you find a way  
out into the parklands  
with me  
there is something  
I'd like to show you  
at a place I was before  
You'll see why I can't  
Talk about it here  
coz I've placed security  
on her so that she can be  
it was here I was  
where the tree it talked to me  
let's search the parklands  
that same tree maybe standing  
somewhere for us to see  
search hard for the tree  
that reached out to me  
I think I'd like to marry her  
the woman who said she's a tree  
that talked to me  
while we are inside  
we wont talk about  
the tree that talked to me  
they would chop it down  
to warm their feet from the cold  
remember how they destroyed  
you and me  
and those that believed  
when I thought I saw an E.T.  
oh Danny wont you pray with me  
that all the trees are free to be  
please Danny  
that tree wanted to be free to be





# DRIVING ON L PLATES

JALAL MERHI

**D**riving is fun.  
Driving is better than playing play station.  
Driving is sometimes a bit scary.  
Driving with idiots on the road,  
Scares the hell out of me.

Driving the wrong way on the freeway.  
Driving out of the wrong exit.  
Driving into the next lane too fast,  
Scares the hell out of me.

Driving down narrow streets.  
Driving too close to parked cars.  
Driving next to a bus on a roundabout,  
Driving in the heavy rain,  
Scares the hell out of me.

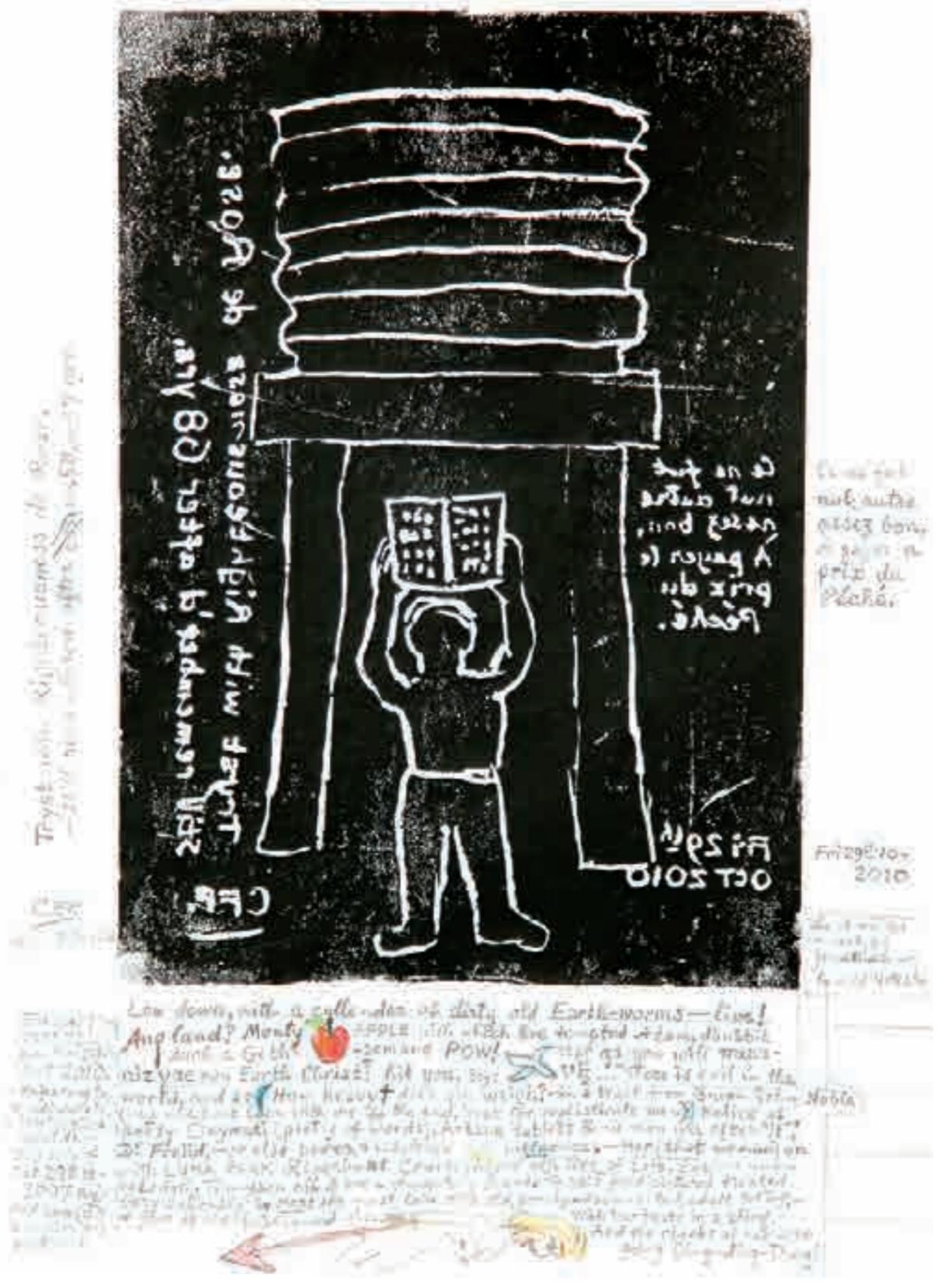
Driving on L Plates can be scary.  
Driving with dad is cool.  
Driving with the driving instructor is ok but.  
Driving with mum.  
Scares the hell out of her.



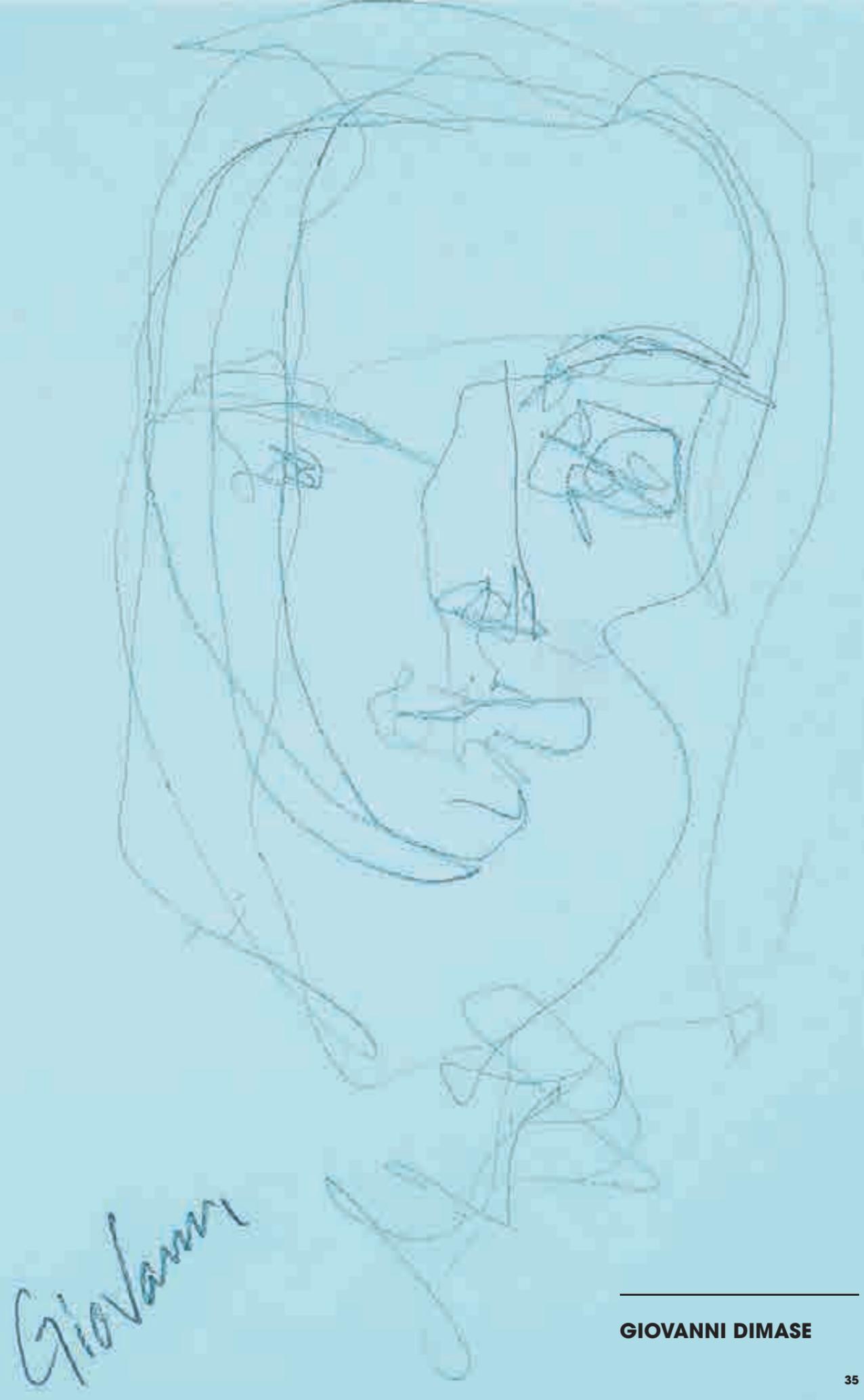
## YOU ARE A WORKER

YOU ARE A WORKER IF YOU ARE A MINISTER :  
YOU ARE A WORKER IF YOU ARE A PREACHER :  
YOU ARE A WORKER IF YOU ARE A CARPENTER :  
YOU ARE A WORKER IF YOU ARE A CABINET MAKER :  
YOU ARE A WORKER IF YOU ARE A DOCTOR :  
YOU ARE A WORKER IF YOU ARE A HORSE RIDER :  
YOU ARE A WORKER IF YOU ARE A POLICE OFFICER :  
YOU ARE A WORKER IF YOU ARE A SONG WRITER :  
YOU ARE A WORKER IF YOU ARE A SINGER :  
YOU ARE A WORKER IF YOU ARE A TEACHER :  
YOU ARE A WORKER IF YOU ARE A STREET SWEEPER :  
YOU ARE A WORKER IF YOU ARE A BUS DRIVER :  
YOU ARE A WORKER IF YOU ARE A SHOP KEEPER :  
YOU ARE A WORKER IF YOU ARE A WINDOW CLEANER :  
YOU ARE A WORKER IF YOU ARE AN ART TEACHER :  
YOU ARE A WORKER IF YOU ARE A GARDNER :  
YOU WORK WHEN YOU ARE A CLERK :  
YOU ARE A WORKER WHEN YOU ARE A TAXI DRIVER :  
YOU ARE A WORKER WHEN YOU ARE A CAR RAISER :  
YOU ARE A WORKER WHEN YOU ARE A VOLUNTEER :  
WORKING CAN BE VERY SATISFYING :  
WORKING CAN BE REWARDING :  
SO BE A HAPPIER WORKER FOR EVER :  
YOU ARE HAPPY WHEN YOU GET YOUR MONEY :  
YOU DO WORK WEATHER YOU ARE AT  
SWANSTON OR BURKE :  
ARE YOU A WORKER OR ARE YOU A BLUDGER :  
IS IT ON THE CARD THAT YOU WORK HARD :  
YOU SHOULD BE EARNING A LIVING WHEN  
YOU ARE WORKING

GAVIN JACKSON



COLIN FERRIS



GIOVANNI DIMASE





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PAULINE MATTON



# BLIND KITTY

MARIBEL STEEL

HI

e'd always said it didn't bother him she was blind. In fact, he had laughed, *"You're the perfect partner for me, Kitty-babe."* He unravelled a thin yellow ribbon from his shirt pocket, winding it gently around her ring finger. *"No other woman I've been with can walk straight past a jeweller's window like you do."* Placing his soft lips on Kitty's fourth finger he added, *"Save this one for me, OK?"*

Fumbling to unlock the front door, Kitty's scarf caught on the cactus plant he had bought from some dodgy second-hand shop on the not so fashionable side of Chapel Street. She jabbed the key into the lock, ripping the yellow ribbon from her ring finger, and hurled the white cane down the corridor. She slammed the door as hard as she could, crying, *How dare he!*

A crystal vase wobbled on the hall table as Kitty thundered past, knocking over the sagging red flowers he had given her. Shards of glass exploded across the tiled floor. She crushed fragments of glass and petals under her black boots, his last words breaking her heart.

Moving around the bedroom, her hands strayed over every surface in search of anything he may have left behind. It was all going in the bin. Hands sifted through empty drawers and cupboards, finding nothing.

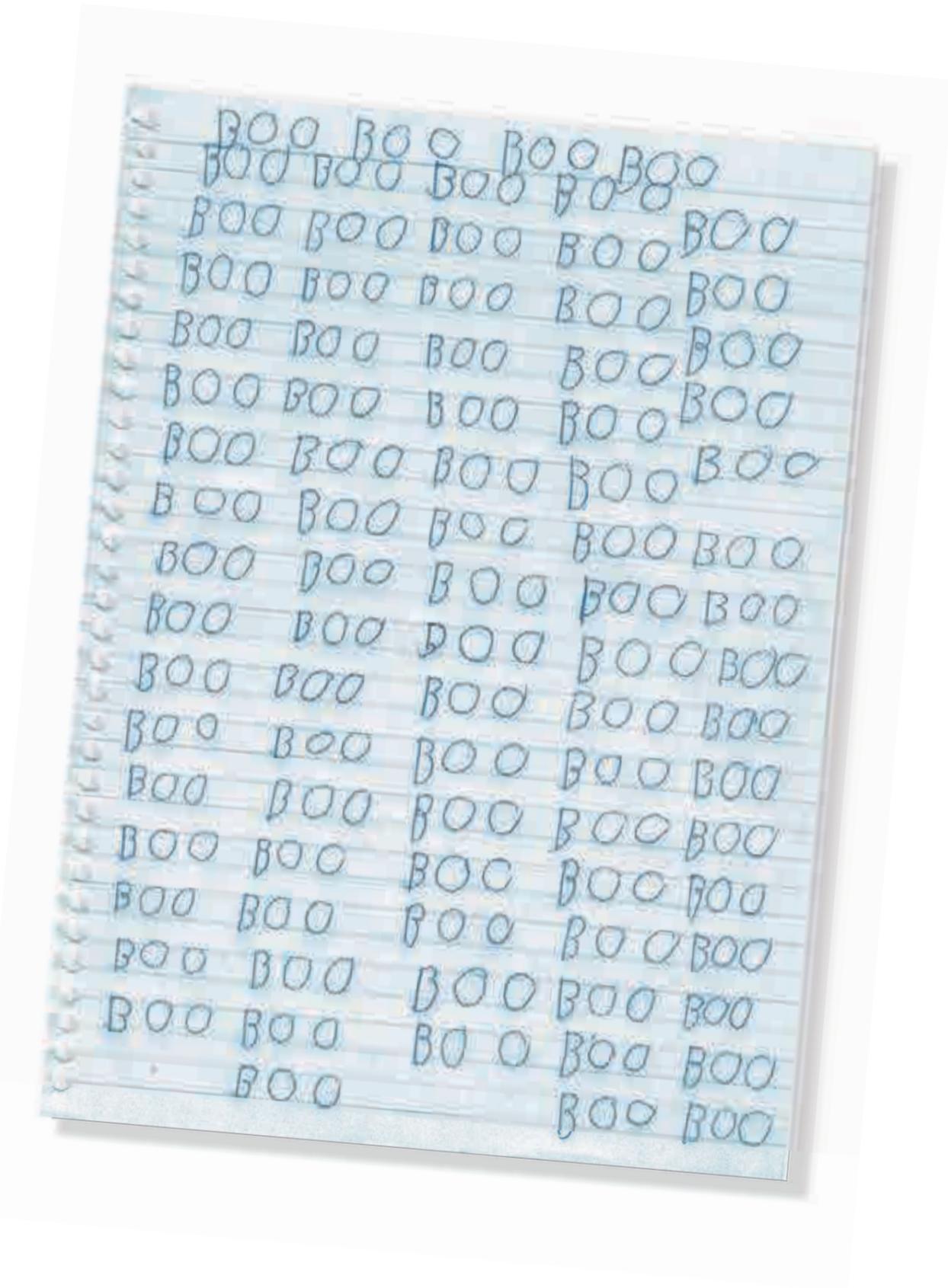
Kitty knelt down on the shaggy rug on his side of the bed, burrowing madly underneath the low futon, her hands delighted to have found something of his she could shred to pieces. She launched the magazines into the air one by one, aiming for the rubbish bin.

An assortment of papers littered the room. *Prick!* She cursed, noticing a glossy photo on the front cover. Her tear-filled eyes widened, travelling carefully over the black font two inches from her face.

Bold, lush, defiant - PLAYBOY. What else hadn't she seen?

A pair of doves nesting in a tree outside the window cooed, *A-prril fool, A-prril fool.*

*"Shut up."*



But the love birds continued their torment. Heat rose into her face and she hurled his pillow at the window, the smell of his sandalwood cologne making her feel sick. In the early days of their relationship, his irresistible scent had comforted her as Kitty lay awake, wondering how a man could truly love a woman who was going blind. She craved to experience intimacy as a whole woman – not a partially-sighted one and it hurt to think how he would be limited by choosing a woman who couldn't connect through visual body language.

Kitty wanted to prove to herself that she was more than a freak of nature. She knew how to bounce back when she suffered embarrassment: bumping into street poles, tripping over children, falling into holes, bruising shins and ego. Laughing at misfortune had become a way of life. Kitty had honed her wits to get her out of sticky situations: accidentally walking over wet cement, jumping a queue then ordering without a ticket, knocking items off a shelf, wearing odd-coloured shoes.

He went along with the humorous aspects of Kitty's blind life. They laughed that there were never any arguments about who had the car for the weekend, and he loved that she never gave him directions when they drove around in his so-called Porsche.

But the day he announced he was moving interstate was the day he confessed he couldn't face another divorce – two ex-wives had pulled the financial rug from underneath him. He wasn't willing to risk a third marriage with any other woman, no matter how much he loved her.

In the fading pink light, the piano sat in the corner of the living room like a friend, calling to Kitty. *Come. Come and play me.* She returned to the only lover that had never betrayed her and Kitty's mood softened as she stepped closer to the iron-framed piano, a tightened brow replaced by a smile. Fingers glided into the white spaces of the keys, spread elegantly like wings over middle C.

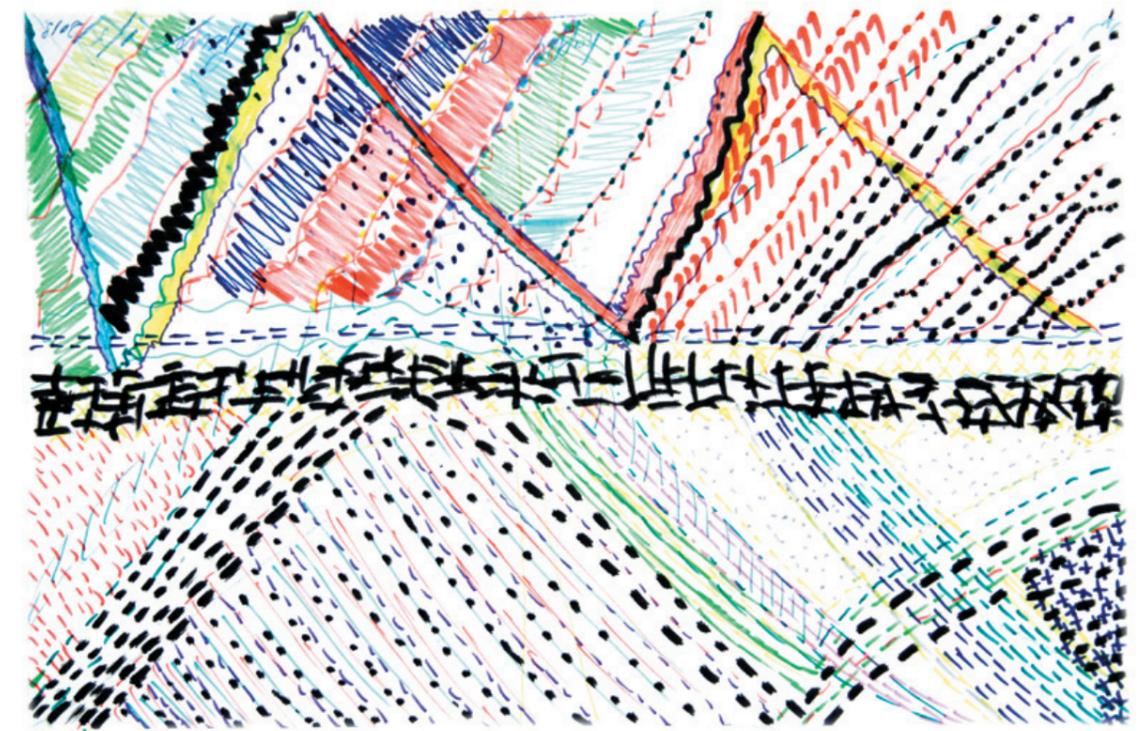
With lowered head and eyes closed, memories of him forced their way into Kitty's thoughts, bringing a sharp dragging ache to her chest. She shifted in the seat, hands diving for the lower register to strike at the keys, thumping out discordant tones while her foot stomped on the pedal. Internal heat pulsed through fingers as they jammed into black and white spaces of the keyboard. Fragments of their conversations jumped into her mind as Kitty's hands randomly twisted and turned over the octaves.

The long wooden hammers with their felt claws struck the strings beneath the lid of the piano, pounding as each dampened thud echoed her troubled heart, *Why did he have to leave?* Hands quivered, shoulders released, tightened throat prepared for sobbing. Safe in the intimacy of free expression, her heart opened into a space where all she could do was let go of unfulfilled promises.

A torrent of salty tears traced a course down Kitty's hot cheeks and over trembling hands. Thoughts plunged into the deep recesses seeking shelter from the snagging words, *Let go, let go, let go.*

The music played on, dancing through Kitty's fingers, the improvised melody lifted her heart over the maze of self-doubt. After several hours, she was cradled by the warmth of the pulse, and in the space between letting go and acceptance, Kitty's heart was captivated by the sound emerging from the piano.

The fading chords lingered, moonlight peeped through the lace curtains, and she heard the gentle pattern of breathing as long deep breaths escaped her lips. Placing a moist kiss on her open hand, Kitty patted down on the keys and gently closed the wooden lid. She edged slowly away from her ivory lover, tears resting like salt crystals drying on her cheeks: and as a smile broke free, Kitty promised to replace the broken vase in the light of a new day. The flowers, this time, she would pick from her own garden.





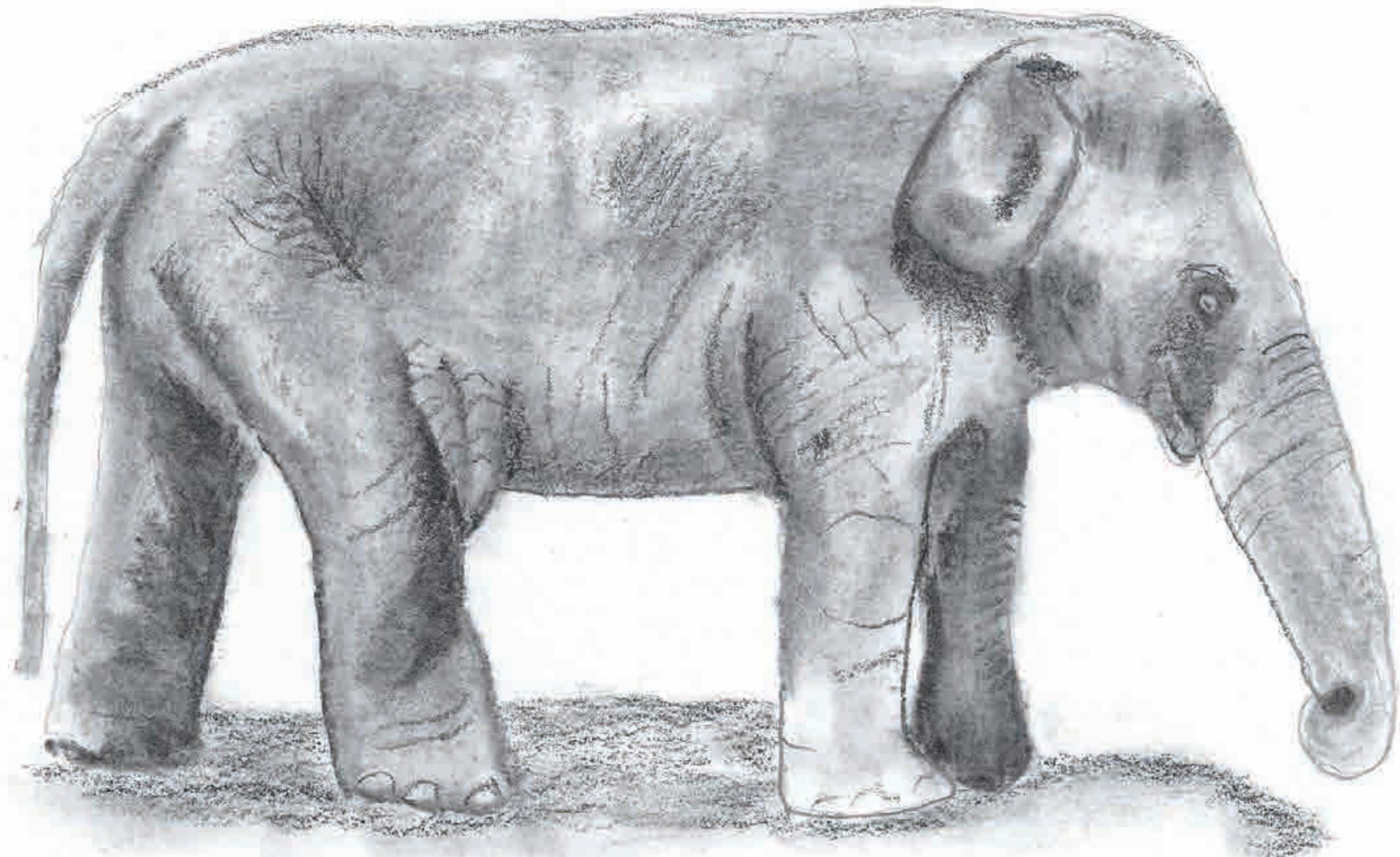
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DIMITRIOS JIM MOUHTSIS



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DAVID SMYTH





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