



# CALL AND RESPONSE

Experiments in Storytelling

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in the Department of Illustration at the Rhode Island School of Design  
in Providence, Rhode Island*



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# ABSTRACT

Being part of RISD's inaugural Masters of Illustration cohort has been an immense honor. This journey has been nothing short of transformative and healing, as it has allowed me to unearth layers of self-discovery through my creative practice.

In my thesis, through play and experimentation I introduce a fresh research methodology rooted in the principles of call and response, with adaptability, creativity, and storytelling as its foundational pillars. By drawing from my own experiences and academic pursuits, I illustrate how this dynamic approach can effectively bridge the gap between theory and practice, fostering meaningful connections among diverse perspectives and lived realities.

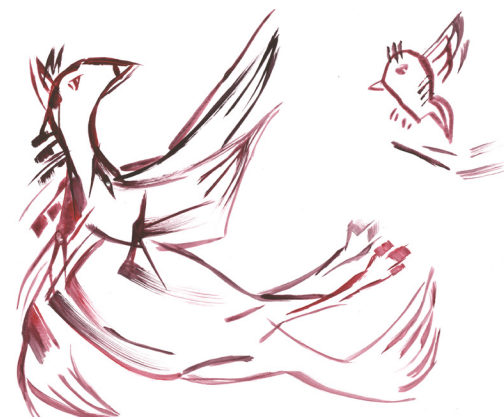
The narrative unfolds against the backdrop of my journey through academia, marked by moments of upheaval and uncertainty. Through this lens, I showcase the development of the methodology, aiming to embrace the resilience inherent in the experience of being human. My exploration within a master's program at RISD serves as a catalyst, where I engage with diverse mediums and techniques, particularly visual methods, to craft narratives that resonate with complex phenomena and stimulate dialogue.

At the heart of my thesis is an exploration of various multi-sensory techniques, including photojournalism, visual storytelling, sound illustration, theater performance, and participatory art-making. I examine these techniques for their ability to yield rich and nuanced data while prioritizing reflexivity and ethical considerations in research practice.

Ultimately, my proposed research methodology aims to deepen our understanding of social phenomena and cultivate spaces for collaborative exploration and discovery. By emphasizing adaptability, creativity, and storytelling, this approach offers a responsive framework for researchers to engage with complex issues and diverse perspectives, fostering connections and insights that transcend traditional research paradigms.

*In order for me to write poetry that isn't political  
I must listen to the birds  
and in order to hear the birds  
the warplanes must be silent.*

– Marwan Makhoul, Palestinian Poet



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## Once Upon A Time...



Reduction Linocut 2023

## Notes from the Author on how to interact with this creation

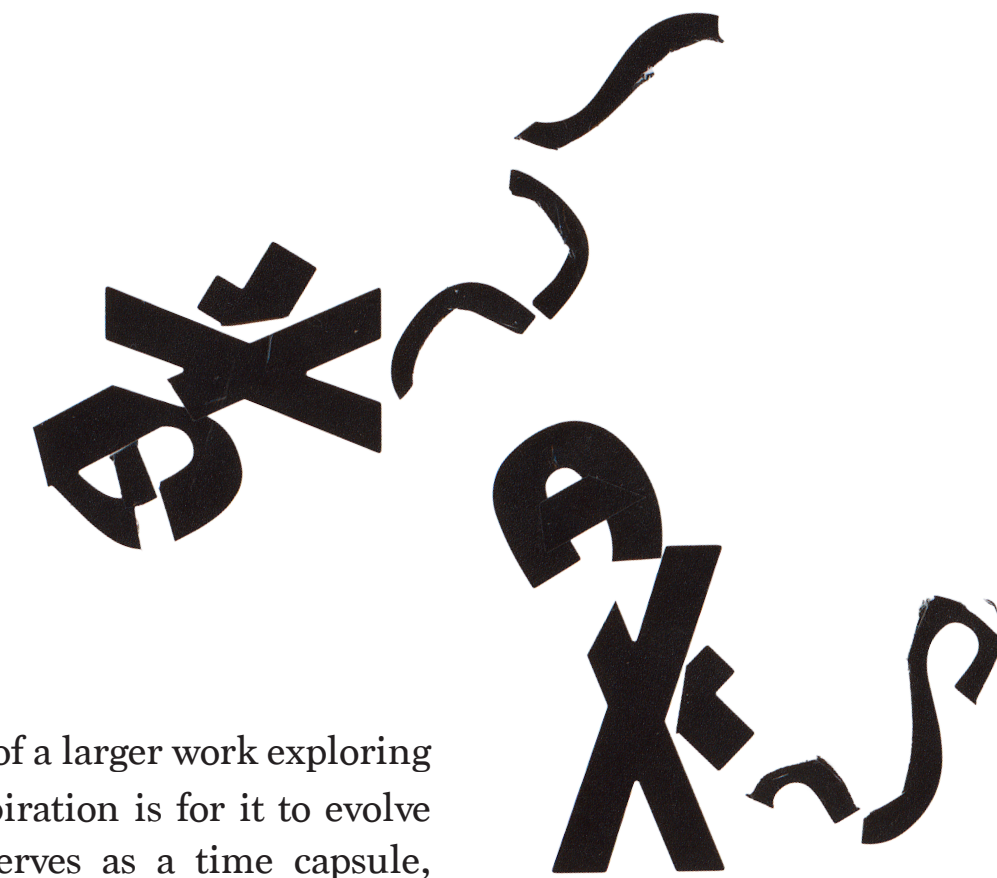
A) This isn't your typical thesis or academic paper. Rooted in research, it takes an arts-based approach that dares to challenge conventional data collection methods and research formats. Consider it a dynamic work in progress, constantly evolving and pushing boundaries.

B) Given its interdisciplinary nature, **this creation encompasses a variety of mediums, including fiction, academic research, poetry, diary entries, and reflections.** Its aim is to offer something for everyone interested in exploring and experimenting with different modes of creation and ideation.

C) I'd like to label it as an **experiment in practical theory.** It taps into my lived experiences, research training, and studio practice. This thesis is firmly rooted in personal reflections and is a journey of discovery through playful experimentation and practical application. I'm developing a research methodology centered on the practice I've employed in my projects.

D) I consider it a **time capsule** documenting my unfiltered thoughts and emotions during a particular phase of my life.

# ACT|REACT



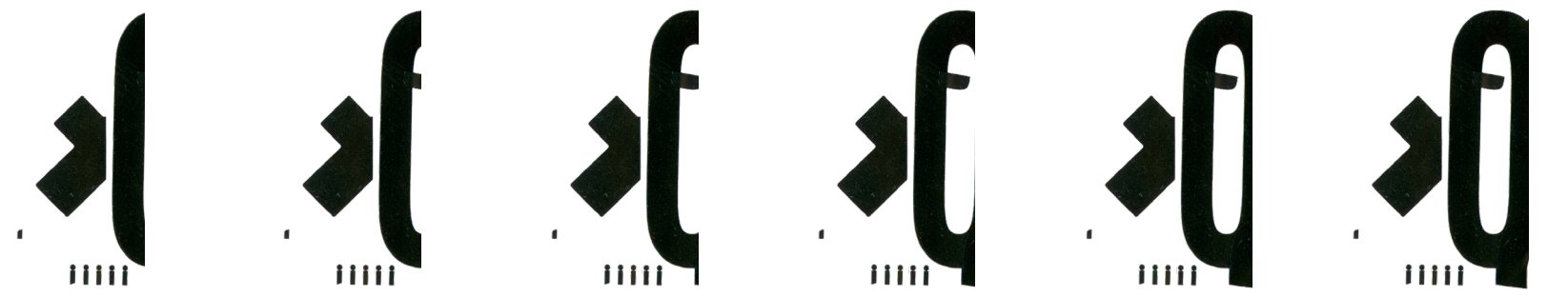
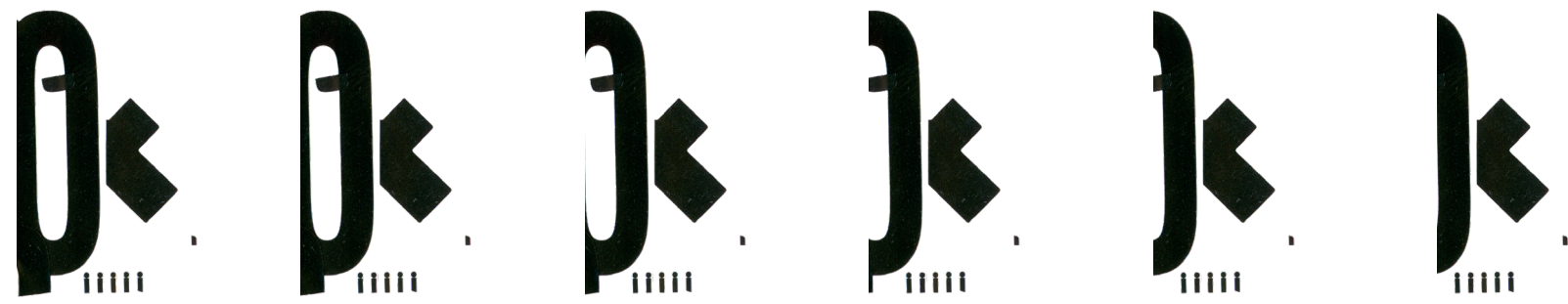
E) This chapter on Call and Response is just a glimpse of a larger work exploring my **innovations in arts-based research.** My aspiration is for it to evolve into a comprehensive guidebook someday. It also serves as a time capsule, capturing a moment in time. What's written here may evolve or change in the days, months, years, or even centuries to come. It's important to recognize that this document is alive, breathing, and constantly growing.

F) Lastly if my writing calls to you please respond. If you ever encounter this work in any form, please don't hesitate to get in touch with me (no matter how many years have passed). Share your thoughts on where my work could live, suggest vocabulary that could better serve its purpose, or recount any stories that moved you.

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**Be sure I will respond to your call**





In the pursuit of academic inquiry, the journey often intertwines with personal experiences, shaping not only the direction of research but also the methodologies employed. Reflecting on my time at the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), I am compelled to explore the profound interplay of reaction and receptivity in the context of cultural preservation and research methodologies. Entering graduate school amidst extreme circumstances, I found myself reacting to this new environment with a mindset of adaptability. Embracing every opportunity presented to me and receiving support and mentorship, my reactive approach gradually transformed into responsiveness. I began to actively engage with the calls around me, developing the vocabulary to share my own stories and connect with others who had experienced similar situations. Each story I've crafted finds resonance in a unique medium. My journey through academia has been a quest to construct an archive that engages with diverse opportunities, embraces lived experience, and embarks on the adventure of rediscovery, ultimately charting a new world map of personal exploration and understanding.

My immersion in the artistic community at RISD was enriched by encounters with diverse resources, yet one experience stands out vividly: a performance by Tanya Tagaq, an Inuit throat singer, hosted by the Brown Arts Institute. **What began as a mere exploration for a thesis topic evolved into a transformative encounter with the resilience and cultural significance embodied in Tanya's improvisational singing.** Beyond showcasing musical prowess, her performance served as a poignant reminder of the enduring spirit of throat singing amidst

historical oppression. Tanya's narrative of the historical ban on throat singing resonated deeply, underscoring the profound loss of the traditional call and response dynamic. The absence of individuals versed in the art's response compelled Tanya to become both caller and responder, illuminating the crucial role of cultural transmission in safeguarding traditions.

Drawing parallels between cultural preservation and knowledge cultivated in extreme environments, I found resonance in the intimate connection between Inuit practices and the natural world. In Arctic conditions, survival hinges on mastering not only the calls and responses between individuals but also the

nuanced dialogue with nature itself. This holistic understanding transcends mere coexistence, revealing humans as integral participants in the intricate tapestry of the environment.

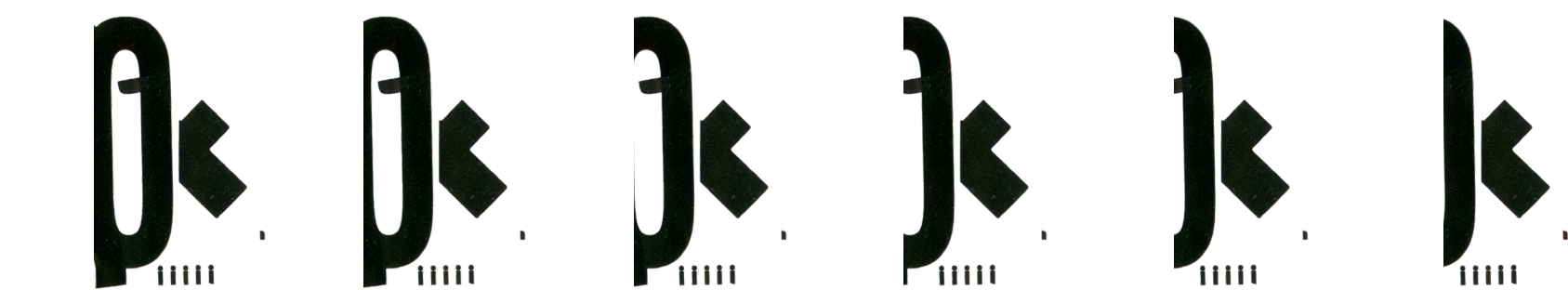
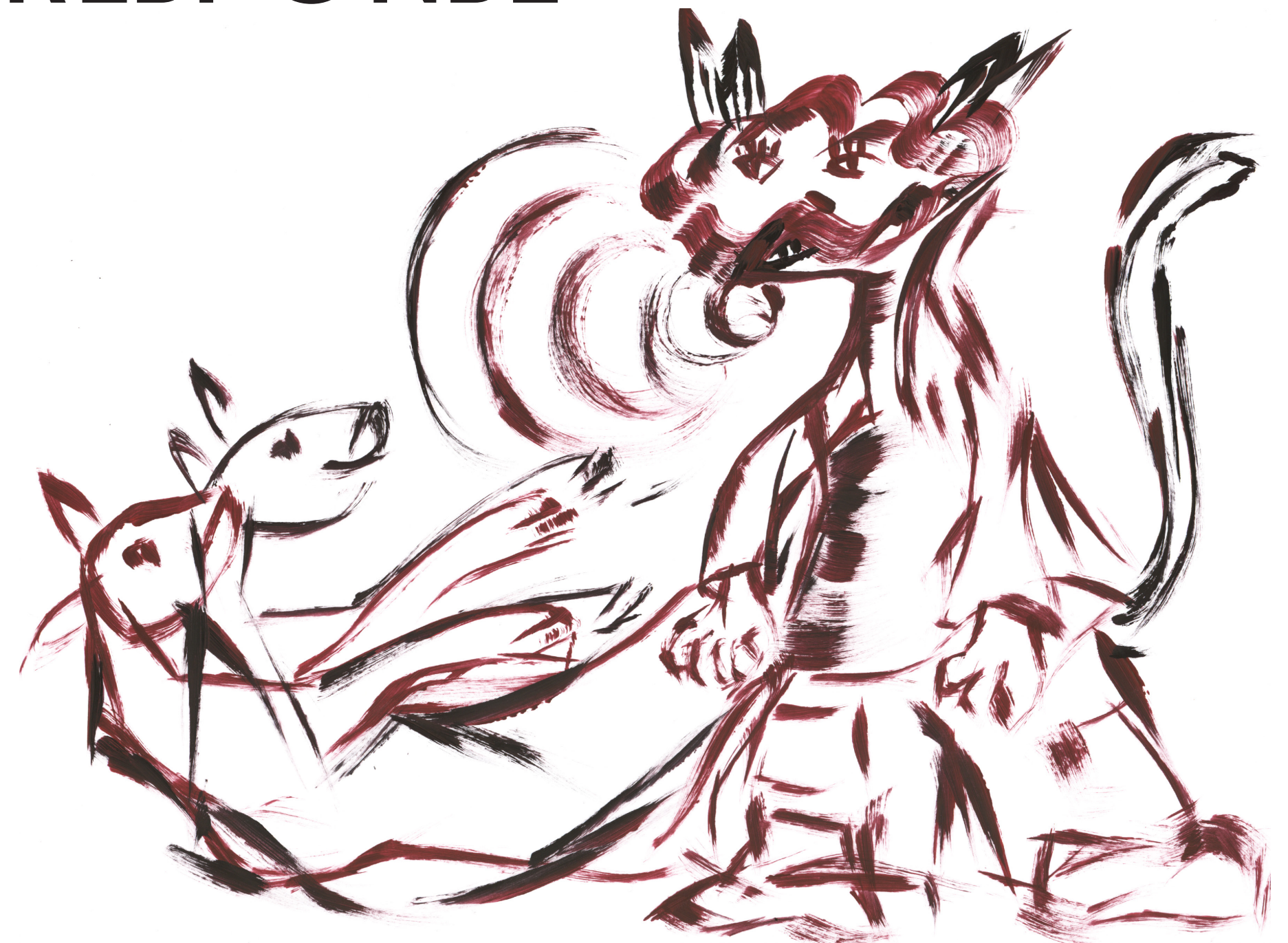
**The concept of call and response, deeply rooted in oral storytelling and musical traditions worldwide, offers a lens through which I examine the dynamics of cultural preservation and research methodologies.** From African rituals to Native American storytelling, call and response fosters communal expression, transmits knowledge, and preserves cultural identity across diverse contexts.

As I navigate my academic trajectory, **informed by a synthesis of sociology and art, I am driven by a quest to bridge theory and practice through responsive research methodologies.** Grounded in the principles of call and response, my approach seeks to embrace the fluidity of human experience, fostering improvisation, creativity, and storytelling as integral components of the research process.

My journey through the RISD Master's program in Illustration exemplifies the application of call and response in research and artistic practice. From immersive travel courses to interdisciplinary electives, each experience has enriched my toolkit for engaging with diverse perspectives and crafting narratives that resonate across mediums. In embracing visual methods as a means of inquiry and expression, I recognize the power of collaborative creation in research. Through techniques such as photo journalism, visual storytelling, and participatory art-making, researchers and participants collaborate to navigate complex phenomena and construct meaningful narratives.

As I embark on this interdisciplinary exploration, I am committed to upholding ethical standards and reflexivity in research practice. By centering diverse voices and perspectives, I aspire to cultivate a space where reaction and receptivity converge to deepen our understanding of the world and our place within it.

## CALL | RESPONSE





# RISK



# REWARD



## CALL:

Brené Brown eloquently posits that **vulnerability is the genesis of innovation, creativity, and change.** She emphasizes that true creative expression demands individuals to confront their fears of criticism and failure, enabling them to take risks and authentically reveal themselves.

## RESPONSE:

In my Statement of Purpose to RISD, I reflect on my journey of embracing vulnerability and envision my future self documenting my experiences in a book. Through therapy and journaling, I have sought to uncover my authentic self and aspire to use writing and drawing to help children from traumatic backgrounds express themselves safely.

## CALL:

Reflecting on the risks undertaken, including relocating to a foreign country and grappling with financial and visa uncertainties, prompts the question: **what is the ultimate payoff?** The answer lies in the transformative journey of pursuing a master's degree at an art and design institution, where the process refines raw musings into resonant narratives.

## RESPONSE:

Through this journey, I have learned to **prioritize expression over explanation, justification, and the quest for acceptance.** I now possess a toolkit that enables me to narrate my journey with gentleness, compassion, and a deep understanding of my audience. This, to me, is the reward for embracing vulnerability.

# SUPPORT | INDEPENDENCE

In the cadence of history, the call and response traditions born from the crucible of the transatlantic slave trade echoed across the Americas, weaving themselves into the very fabric of musical expression. From the haunting melodies of spirituals to the soulful rhythms of blues and jazz, and onward to the pulsating beats of rock and hip-hop, call and response became a cornerstone of these genres. For enslaved people, it served as a lifeline, a means to articulate their experiences, emotions, and resilience in the face of unimaginable oppression.

In my own journey, lists have been my steadfast companions, guiding me through the labyrinth of tasks and responsibilities, each item a tangible marker of progress towards independence. With unwavering determination, I clung to the belief that completing every task would lead me to the promised land of liberation. Yet, there was also a stubbornness within me, a reluctance to seek help, driven by both pride and circumstance.

It took an overwhelming sense of desperation for me to utter those three simple words: "I need help." And in that moment of vulnerability, two guardian angels appeared, ready to lend a hand and offer support. Their presence reminded me that **independence does not mean solitary perseverance, but rather, it is the harmonious interplay between self-reliance and the willingness to lean on others when needed.**

As I reflect on their unwavering support, I am reminded of the improvisational nature of jazz, where each instrument contributes to the whole, enriching the composition with its unique voice. In the symphony of my life, their beats blend seamlessly with my own, creating a melody of collaboration and mutual aid. Together, we navigate the complexities of existence, each note a testament to the power of connection and community in our journey towards wholeness.

I crafted a manifesto as a writing assignment at RISD—a testament to the essence of my art practice. Within these words, I encapsulate the guiding principles, aspirations, and convictions that shape my creative journey.



Letter People created during a type experimental illustration class

# STAGES TO LIVING

- Rejected by owners and devoid of companionship,
- Love is conditional, Fear unconditional,
- Anger simmers within, unexpressed,
- Shame and guilt is part of the foundations,
- **Fright, flight, freeze.**

## ONE

- Alone, amidst the crowd,
- Migraines pulse as a sign of life,
- Tears are swallowed, emotions suppressed,
- Now this is routine
- Silence echoes safety, panic goes unnamed,
- **Fright, flight, freeze.**

## TWO

- Embracing solitude, seeking isolation,
- Attempts seem futile, hope fades to gray,
- Perhaps pleading is the answer, a desperate plea for connection,
- Silence morphs into sanctuary, dread a constant companion,
- Routine becomes the anthem of existence,
- **Fright, flight, freeze.**

## THREE

# LIKE AN ARTIST

- Adulthood looms, with rules and consequences,
- Choices appear elusive, questions unanswered,
- Normalcy masks a deeper turmoil, routine becomes suffocating,
- Betrayal lurks in the shadows, daring not to question,
- **Fright, flight, freeze.**

## FOUR

- A crossroads emerges, a moment of reckoning,
- Disappointment stains existence,
- Alone, doubts and insecurities as constant companions,
- Self-doubt festers, casting shadows on aspirations,
- **Fright, flight, freeze.**

## FIVE

- Grief trails behind, a persistent shadow,
- Lingering, haunting, refusing to be silenced,
- Joy comes at a cost, grief leaves its mark,
- Healing demands payment, a currency of pain,
- No longer poetry, but a tangible exchange.

## SIX

# STAGES TO LIVING

# LIKE AN ARTIST



The list could continue endlessly. Living as an artist was not a choice.

# ACADEMIA | SENSORY ACADEMIA

This manifesto serves as a call to action—a rallying cry for creativity, authenticity, collaboration, and introspection. It is an affirmation of my unwavering commitment to these principles and a declaration of intent to harness the transformative potential of art for positive change. As I embark on the next phase of my artistic journey, I carry with me the conviction that through art, we have the power to inspire, to heal, and to transform both ourselves and the world around us. And it helps us find our voice even if it is just heard by ourselves alone.

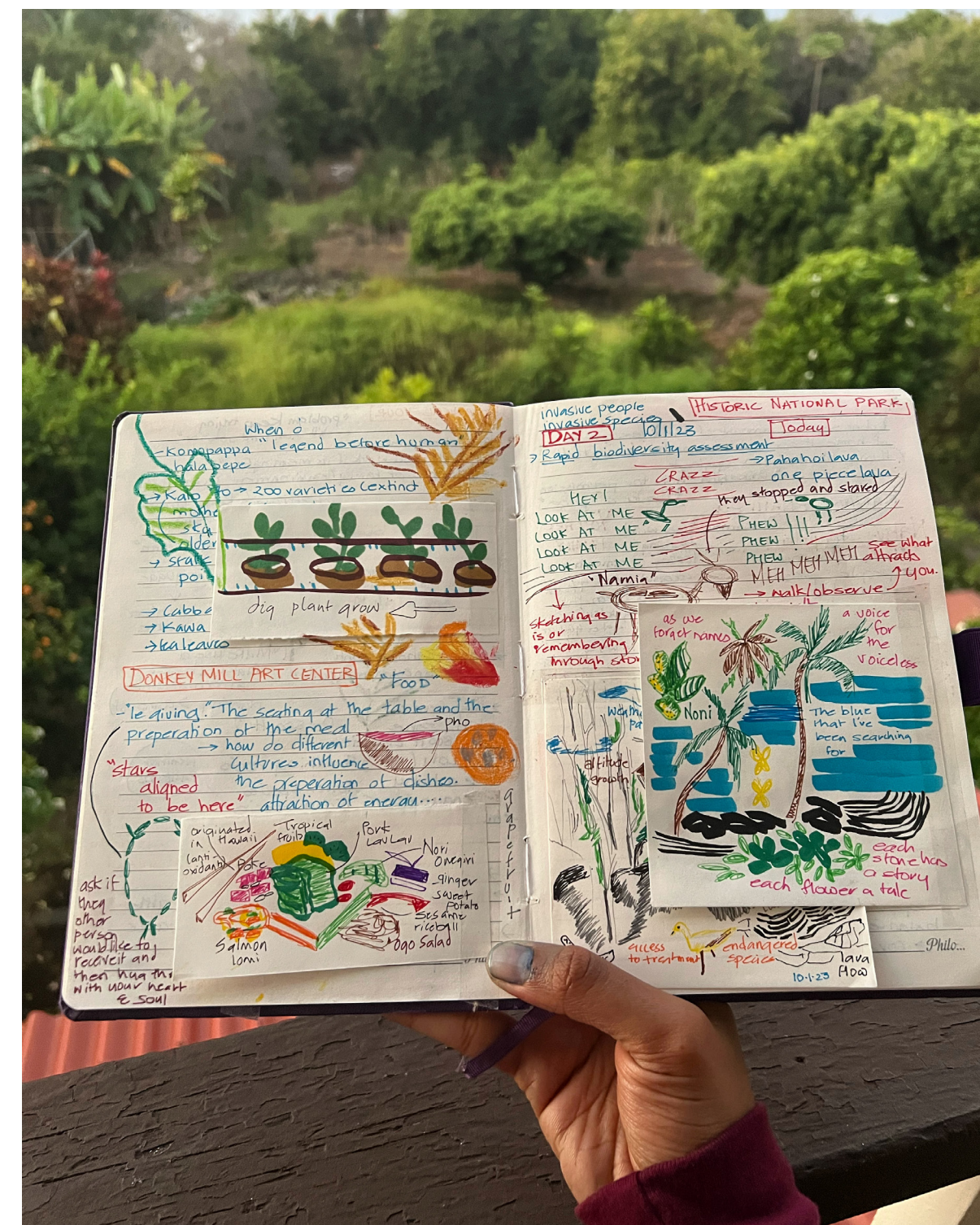
Traditional academia has long been rooted in textual analysis, privileging written text as the primary mode of scholarly communication and research dissemination. This approach emphasizes rigorous research methodologies, theoretical frameworks, and textual evidence to support arguments and assertions. Scholars within traditional academia often rely on written language to convey complex ideas, theories, and findings, with an emphasis on logical reasoning and critical analysis.

In contrast, visual academia or arts based research represents a paradigm shift towards incorporating visual methods and techniques into scholarly inquiry. This approach recognizes the power of multi sensory media, such as photography, film, art, and multimedia presentations, to convey meaning, evoke emotions, and communicate complex ideas. It transcends disciplinary boundaries and appeals to diverse audiences on an emotional level.

Both excerpts delve into the influence of trauma on Neuroaesthetics, yet they diverge in their methodologies and intended audience engagement. The academic paper is firmly rooted in scientific inquiry, relying on empirical evidence and research findings to explore the intersection of trauma and Neuroaesthetics. Its

audience is primarily composed of scholars, researchers, and professionals within the field seeking to deepen their understanding through rigorous analysis and theoretical frameworks.

Conversely, the arts-based approach offers an emotional entry point to a broader audience, utilizing creative expression and storytelling to illuminate the impact of trauma on Neuroaesthetics. By employing visual arts, literature, or performance, this approach aims to evoke empathy, introspection, and connection among viewers or participants. It appeals to individuals beyond academic circles, including those with personal experiences of trauma, caregivers, and the general public, fostering a deeper engagement with the subject matter through visceral and emotive means.



Field notes from Hawaii  
2023

The list could continue endlessly. Living as an artist was not a choice.



## Excerpt from research paper 2022, **A study of Neuroaesthetics, Creativity and Illustrating Memories**

*To love. To be loved. To never forget your own insignificance. To never get used to the unspeakable violence and the vulgar disparity of life around you. To seek joy in the saddest places. To pursue beauty to its lair. To never simplify what's complicated or complicate what is simple. To respect strength, never power. Above all, to watch. To try and understand. To never look away. And never, never to forget."*

~Arundhati Roy

This research paper was written across three continents, 4 different time zones, three different kinds of gadgets, 4 different kinds of internet networks, sometimes without network, literature from culturally diverse backgrounds and experiences, but the consistent entity in this process has been the human hardware of the mind and the body. The mind and the body kept the research consistent in space of constantly changing time and space. And that is the power of the human brain and body as Arundhati Roy poetically puts it. In the pursuit of understanding and empathy, the mind and body emerge as steadfast allies, guiding the research endeavor with resilience and adaptability.

However, the perception of the body extends beyond its physicality, encompassing cultural narratives and social constructs that shape its significance. While revered as a sacred vessel in some contexts, the ownership and agency over one's body are often subject to external influences and power dynamics. Foucault's insights illuminate

the complex interplay between individual experience and societal norms, as the body becomes a canvas for inscriptions of history, politics, and social power.

In this context, the lived body takes on multifaceted meanings, shaped by both personal experience and broader socio-political forces. The journey of understanding the body in its entirety remains elusive, as layers of generational memory and contemporary influences intertwine to form its identity. As the research delves deeper into the complexities of the human experience, it is imperative to acknowledge the intricate interplay between the physical body, the intellectual mind and its socio-cultural context. By unraveling the nuances of embodiment and agency, we inch closer to a deeper understanding of ourselves and the world we inhabit.

Our aesthetic sensibility, taste, and ethical and moral values regarding creations, as well as the interpretation of signs and symbols, are influenced by the exposure to and retention of trauma in the mind and body.

## Excerpt two: Reflection as a journal entry

Dear Diary

Today, as we delved into the upcoming text "Are You My Mother?" In class, the mere mention of the word "Mother" throws me off my game. It took me a week to grasp the title fully. Is it "You Are My Mother?" "Where Is My Mother?" or "Is She My Mother?" Throughout these days, the word "Mother" reverberated in my mind, overshadowing all others. I find myself compelled to revisit the title, for no other words hold such weight as "Mother." Documenting these thoughts feels more manageable in the format of a diary entry, amidst the overwhelming depth of insights and revelations presented in the graphic novel. Freud's "Psychopathology of Everyday Life" particularly struck a chord, revealing how my ability to communicate has been shaped by emotional neglect and trauma. I've become attuned to scrutinizing people's facial expressions, seeking to decipher their thoughts about me, a habit ingrained by years of gauging my parents' responses in hopes of avoiding verbal abuse or earning their affection.

Throughout the day, the notion of my mother needing me loomed large in my mind. Despite my attempts to distance myself from this concept, it persists, throwing me down a rabbit hole of "What If's". In light of the text's title, I find myself on the brink of asking: Am I your mother?



# TEXT | IMAGE

*“You discover how confounding the world is when you try to draw it. You look at a car, and you try to see its car-ness, and you’re like an immigrant to your own world. You don’t have to travel to encounter weirdness. You wake up to it.”*

Shaun Tan

## The Image Taught me what the Word Couldn’t

The quote by Shaun Tan resonates deeply with my own journey of discovering the power of visual storytelling. From my earliest memories, I found solace and fascination in the black and white comic strips tucked away in the Sunday newspaper, despite my mother’s disapproval. Her concerns about the impact of comics on language skills and moral character only fueled my curiosity, leading me to secretly immerse myself in their captivating narratives.

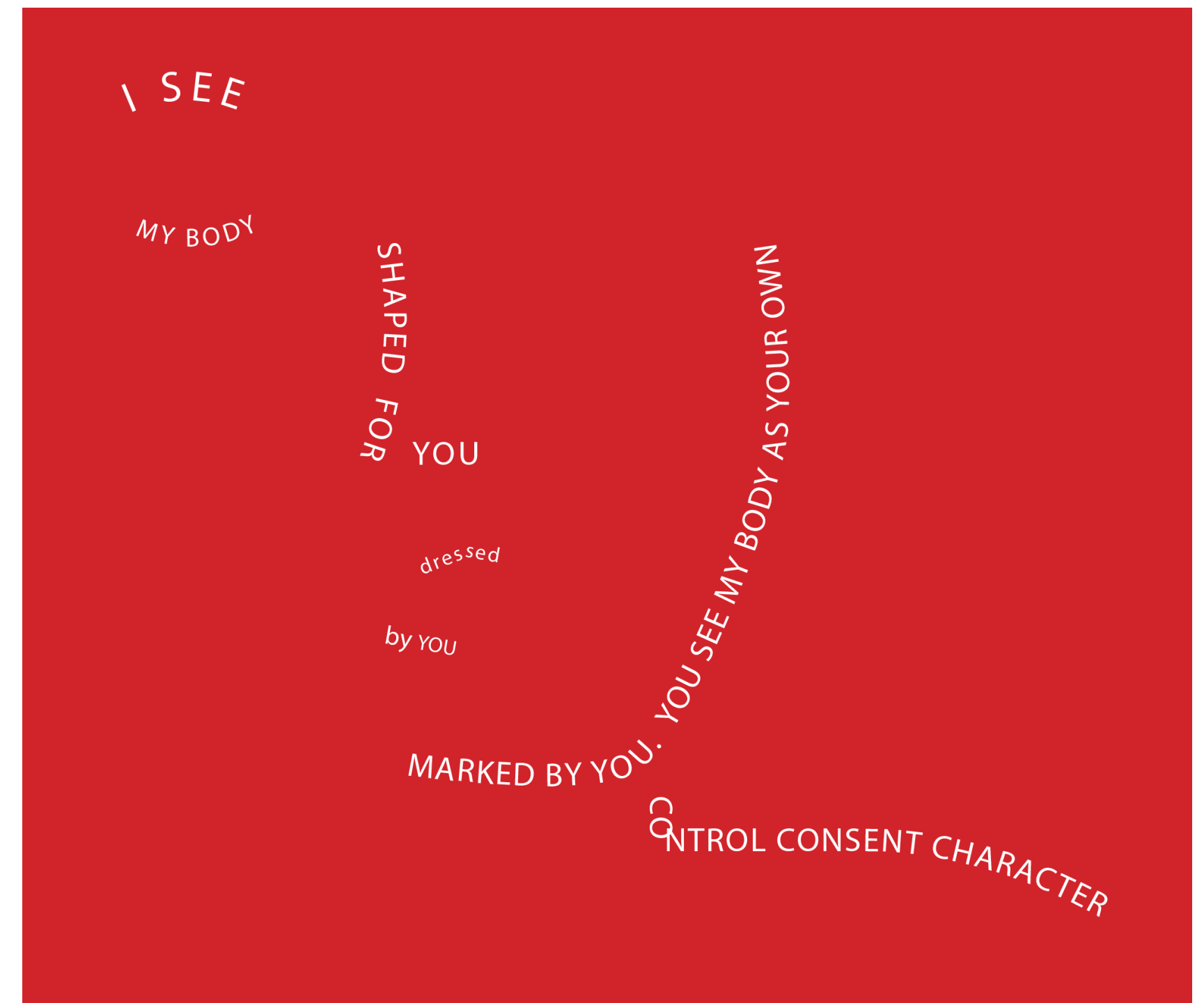
As I grew older, I encountered further resistance towards visual storytelling, particularly within academic circles. In a field where the written word held sway, presenting research through visual formats was often dismissed or frowned upon. However, through my exploration of comics as a research tool, inspired by Scott McCloud’s insights in “Understanding Comics,” I discovered the power of visual narratives to engage readers on a deeper level. By inviting readers to interpret visual elements through their own emotional and intellectual experiences, comics empower them to become active participants in the research process.

Yet, despite the richness and complexity of visual storytelling, it remains undervalued in academic discourse. The intricate interplay between signifier

and signified—the image and the concept it represents—requires a deep understanding of human psychology and perception. Yet, academic recognition of comics as a legitimate form of research remains slow to evolve, as evidenced by the niche spaces where PhD programs in Illustration and Comics are offered.

Reflecting on my own childhood experiences with comics, I recognize their profound impact on my socialization and imagination. Like Tan describes, drawing the world around us offers a new perspective, enriching our understanding in ways that text alone cannot. Tan’s own work, such as “The Arrival,” demonstrates the universal appeal and accessibility of visual narratives, transcending age and nationality barriers.

Moving forward, I am motivated to continue integrating visual storytelling into my research practice, recognizing its potential to bridge the gap between academic discourse and broader audiences. **By presenting research through visual narratives, I hope to foster meaningful dialogue with individuals beyond the confines of academia, making research more accessible and engaging to diverse audiences.**



A visual medium research method created by me to capture text through image

In “The Edge of Legibility,” Kameelah Janan Rasheed explores the concept of unlearning the traditional way of reading text and images. Inspired by her father’s method of learning to read religious texts, which involved scanning, copying, translating, and repeating without necessarily focusing on the meaning, Rasheed’s art practice examines how spaces within text or gaps between visuals can prompt readers to pause and reconsider the meaning of the text. She wants the reader to unlearn the learned subconscious.

Comics, Illustrations, Graphic Novels, Paintings as a form of visual storytelling, possess a distinct advantage in their ability to transcend language and script barriers, thus providing a unique opportunity to engage with a diverse audience. Unlike traditional written texts which rely heavily on linguistic comprehension, comics convey narratives through a combination of images and text, making them accessible to individuals regardless of their language proficiency or familiarity with specific scripts.

**The visual nature of images allows for the communication of complex ideas and emotions through imagery alone, enabling readers to understand the storyline and characters even in the absence of accompanying text.** This visual storytelling aspect not only appeals to a broad spectrum of readers, including children, adults, and individuals with diverse cultural backgrounds, but also serves as a powerful tool for communication and expression across linguistic divides.

In my art practice, I’m experimenting with crafting a narrative using letters, which I’ve dubbed “letter people.” Transforming familiar letter shapes into entirely novel visual compositions fascinates me. This process challenges the mind to break away from conventional letter forms and construct fresh narratives—a skill that I consider both an art and a form of cognitive exploration.





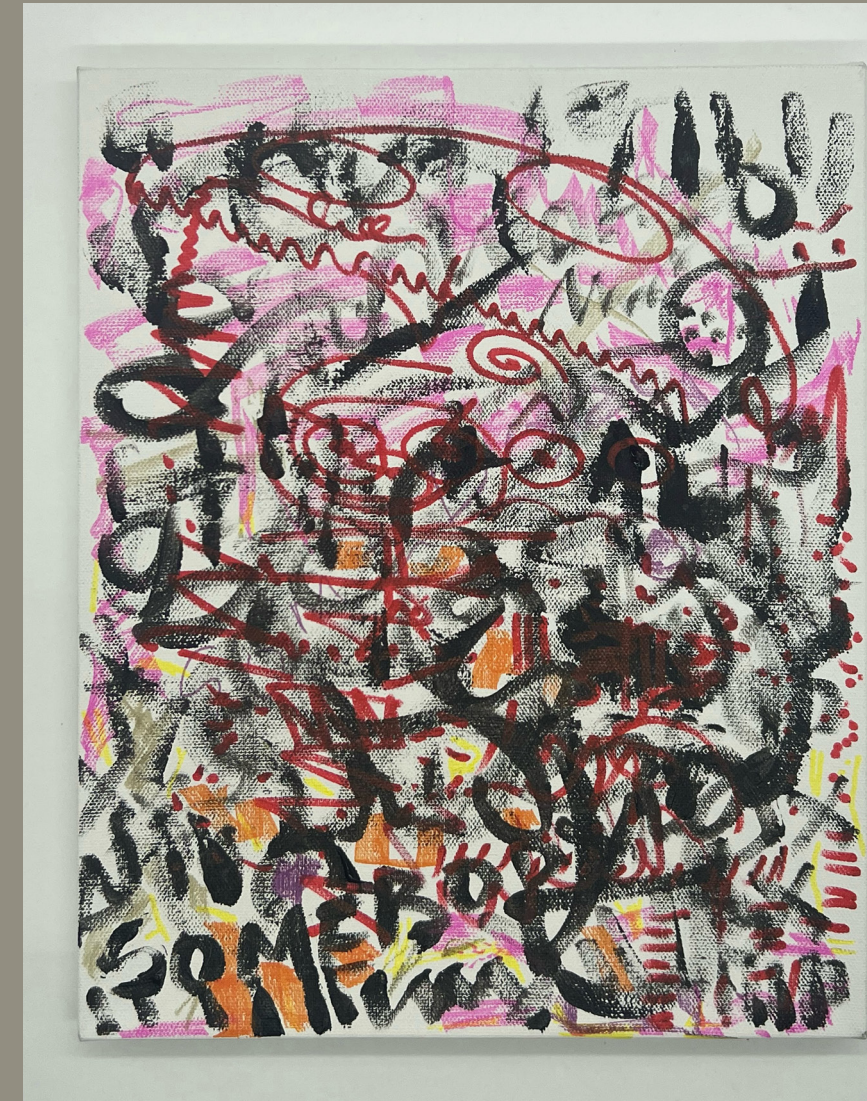
Book Binding and Paper Making from natural fibers 2023



Color as a medium for storytelling 2024



Indigo Dyeing, Hawaii 2023



Illustrating Sound- A film on Sound Design 2022



To Friendship: Without which I wouldn't be here



Conservation trip to Southern Africa 2024



A story quilt on Southern Africa 2024





**Time's archive speaks  
Stories woven in folds deep  
Expand your Space**

The concept of time and space permeates every aspect of our existence, shaping our perceptions, experiences, and realities. For me, time has served as an archive—a repository of memories, emotions, and experiences both profound and painful. Growing up in an emotionally neglectful and abusive environment, time and space were wielded as tools of suppression and control. The manipulation of time served to obscure the passage of years, while the restriction of space stifled my ability to play, experiment, and discover my identity.

Upon embarking on my healing journey, I confronted the stark reality of time lost and opportunities foregone. Crippling anxiety gripped me as I grappled with the weight of adulthood prematurely shouldered, mourning the innocence and freedom stolen from me in my formative years. However, my time at RISD offered a glimmer of hope—a chance to reclaim lost time, to play, to experiment, and to forge my own narrative.

Through the creative expression afforded by my studies, I found solace in the act of storytelling. **My lived experience has become an archive of resilience and survival, a testament to the indomitable human spirit.** Despite the darkness that loomed over me, I discovered a riptide of joy within myself—a source of light amidst the shadows. My work has become a reflection of the gifts I had gained through loss—the gift of travel, of research, of storytelling.

As I navigated the complexities of my journey, I grappled with the concept of time in various forms. From the time taken to process and heal, to the time spent between planning and execution, each assignment became an exploration of temporal redemption. Yet, in the face of loss and uncertainty, I was reminded of the impermanence of all things. **Life, in its fragility, is a fleeting gift—a reminder to cherish each moment, to embrace the full spectrum of human experience.**

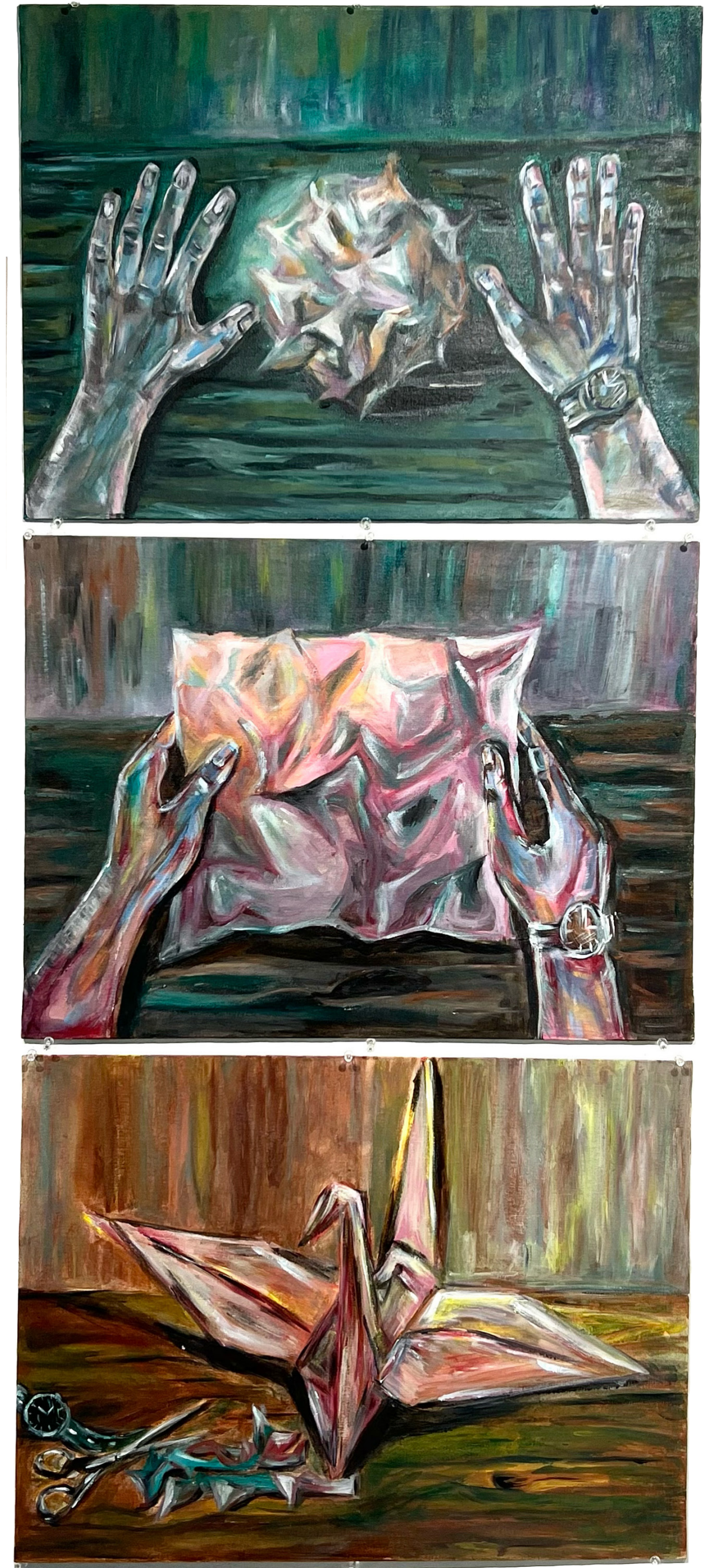
Excerpt from my essay “What I Learned from Building a Book”

*During my Independent Study Program (ISP), my objective was to dissect the process of translating an idea from conception to its ultimate realization. My ultimate aspiration was to create an artist book. I initiated my journey by engaging in the simple act of folding paper.*

*As I bent over the paper, meticulously crafting each fold, a profound realization washed over me. I recognized that every contour I shaped wielded its own influence over a potential narrative. It became clear that the structure and form of the paper possessed the innate ability to communicate a story independently, highlighting the intricate interplay between form and narrative. This revelation underscored the non-linear nature of storytelling, where time and space intertwine to create a dynamic and multifaceted narrative experience.*

*Amidst my ISP, an opportunity arose to present a research paper at an academic conference. Rather than adhering to the confines of traditional linear format, I seized the chance to challenge convention. I chose to present my academic findings through the unconventional medium of a comic book. This departure from the norm allowed me to traverse the intersection of narrative and medium, transcending the constraints of conventional academic presentation styles. Through dynamic storytelling afforded by this medium, I ventured into uncharted territories, harnessing the power of visual engagement to communicate complex ideas in a compelling and accessible manner.*

The allure of non-linear storytelling beckons, offering an opportunity to refine my skills in visual storytelling and experiment with alternative narrative structures. By honing my ability to seamlessly integrate form and content, I seek to shatter the confines of traditional storytelling conventions, forging new pathways of expression that resonate with audiences in innovative and transformative ways. **In the temporal and spatial realms of storytelling, I find fertile ground for exploration, where the boundaries of possibility are limited only by the expanse of imagination.**



An oil painting triptych interpreting the prompt “Past Present Future”, Oil Painting on Canvas, 18 inch X 24 inch , 2022



# FICTION | FACT

*Fiction gives us empathy: it puts us inside the minds of other people, gives us the gifts of seeing the world through their eyes. Fiction is a lie that tells us true things, over and over.*  
Neil Gaiman

The concept of Call and Response in research methodology mirrors the principles of participatory and action-oriented research, empowering participants to actively shape the trajectory and outcomes of the research process. By engaging in this interactive approach, researchers can generate findings that are not only more relevant but also deeply resonant with the lived experiences of those involved.

In my own journey, I found solace and empowerment through fiction and world-building. As a child, my lived reality often lacked agency and control. However, **through fictional storytelling, I discovered a means to craft narratives that served as protective shields during tumultuous times.** Now, as a researcher, I aspire to offer these same tools to others who may be struggling, providing them with the imaginative space to construct their own truths and narratives of empowerment. Through this process of creative exploration, I aim to foster a sense of agency and empowerment among individuals, allowing them to reclaim ownership of their stories and identities.

## A) On Being with the Dark

Excerpt from my short story “Sarah and the Music Box”

*“Her Papa bought her the music box when she was a five year-old kid. They stayed in a weathered and rustic wooden cabin at the edge of town. The creaking floorboards whispered long-forgotten tales of all the wood loggers who walked its floors. The air was rich with the scent of aged timber that turned musty during the wet seasons. A threadbare armchair nestled near a crackling fireplace, its embrace offering solace on chilly evenings. The flames danced and played, casting shadows on Sarah’s favorite illustrated children’s books. Her Papa had to leave for work in the early hours of dawn, even before the sun could rouse from its deep slumber. He would return late and night and watch Sarah sleep peacefully tucked away under layers of cozy blankets, whispering sweet nothings as she dreamed. She only knew her mother through the small picture frame hanging on the mantle above the fireplace. The photo frame would often end up beside her as Sarah hugged the frame and slept. Her Papa told her that Mommy was now with the stars and was shining bright for her.”*

As a child, sleep often eluded me, and instead, I found myself captivated by the dance of shadows across my bedroom wall. Night after night, I would lie awake, watching as mysterious shapes swayed and twisted in the dim light. Intriguingly, there were no trees outside my building to cast such intricate shadows. Yet, there they were, undulating and shifting as if guided by some unseen hand. At first, I dismissed them as figments of my imagination, mere tricks of the darkness. But as the nights wore on, their presence became undeniable, their movements too deliberate to be random. I began to wonder about the source of these enigmatic shadows. Were they echoes of distant trees, their forms reaching out to me from some unseen realm? Or were they something more mysterious, a manifestation of dreams and desires playing out in the silent hours of the night?

I remember the fear of the dark and the shadows more than my mother’s light. **She made it clear that there was weakness in fear and I wasn’t strong enough to overcome the darkness.** My art practice was birthed from trying to outrun that darkness and my Masters at RISD offered me a chance to finally grasp at the light.

A still from my animated short film “Imbedded Motion”



## B) Listening to the Language of Birds

Excerpt from my Short Story “Akiva and the Silence Shadows”

*Akiva set a pathway to the edge of the land. I started yelling with all my might. For a whole second, the world froze. Time stood still, and then as if jolted to reality, the shadows turned on me. I ran through the pathway Akiva had created with the debris of the lost words. But we miscalculated how quickly the shadow figures could move. As I was about to reach the edge, a shadow figure reached out its hand toward me, and I tripped and fell. I saw Akiva jump before me as I passed out from the pain in my head. Akiva lost his voice trying to save his world from being destroyed. But in doing so, he preserved a whole language of forgotten words.*

In a randomized online experiment, 295 participants were exposed to one of four conditions for 6 minutes: traffic noise low, traffic noise high, birdsong low, and birdsong high diversity soundscapes. Before and after exposure, participants filled out depression, anxiety, and paranoia questionnaires. The results indicated that traffic noise soundscapes were associated with a significant increase in depression, with a small effect size in the low diversity condition and a medium effect size in the high diversity condition. Conversely, exposure to birdsong soundscapes, particularly the high diversity condition, led to a decrease in depression, with a small effect size. Anxiety and paranoia significantly decreased in both birdsong conditions, with medium effect sizes observed. I’ve encountered claims suggesting that birds only sing when they themselves are in a state of safety and their call sounds different when they are facing an external threat.

Reflecting on my experience during a conservation course in Southern Africa (January 2024), I found this claim to be surprisingly accurate. I observed firsthand how the behavior of birds correlated with the presence of potential threats. Their calls turned aggressive and alarming in response to nearby predators, causing me to be on high alert, expecting a lion or leopard to emerge from the bushes at any moment. In moments devoid of potential threats, their songs were calm and gentle, directly influencing my emotional state as well.

During my time in Southern Africa, our attention naturally gravitated towards the majestic mammals—the lions, leopards, giraffes, and zebras. However, our guide, who harbored a deep passion for birds, introduced us to a new avian species each day. Initially, I didn’t find bird spotting particularly captivating. Without a zoom lens or binoculars, and with birds darting by so swiftly, identifying them seemed daunting. This lack of equipment, coupled with my own insecurity about my ability to scientifically identify birds, left me hesitant. Yet, as our days in Africa unfolded, encounters with the larger mammals became increasingly scarce. We found ourselves pausing near trees, tuning in to the melodic calls of the birds. Our field guide shared a delightful anecdote about how they learned bird calls by assigning whimsical titles to them—“Rise and Go Away,” “Kiss and Tell,” and the like. By the second week, my ears had become finely attuned to the diverse array of calls, and I found myself growing genuinely fascinated.

According to our guide, we encountered nearly 200 bird species over the course of three weeks. It was then that I realized how little attention I had previously paid to birds. They had always been like background noise—ubiquitous yet unremarkable—until suddenly, they weren’t. The sound of the Koel still evokes memories of the onset of summer, conjuring up emotional recollections of mangoes, jackfruit, and coconut water on hot summer days.



### C) Cooking a Seasonal Meal

An Indian family kitchen often involves a form of call and response between generations or family members. This manifests as the passing down of recipes, techniques, and culinary wisdom from one generation to the next, creating a dialogue of shared experiences and cultural heritage.

One of the key principles of call and response as a research methodology is its emphasis on reciprocity and mutual exchange between researchers and participants. Rather than viewing participants as passive subjects, this approach recognizes them as active contributors and co-creators of knowledge. Researchers engage in a collaborative dialogue with participants, valuing their perspectives and integrating their voices into the research process. Some of my fondest memories involve sitting around a kitchen island with my Indian friend in Seattle, sharing stories of foods and ingredients from our childhood. Many of these culinary tales, ingredients and food habits are now lost to the forces of globalization and westernization. Yet, these narratives nourish my soul and help fill the void of living in a country that isn't entirely my own.

#### Excerpt from my Short Story “Queen Reine and Her Mortal Soup”

One night, I watched Edvard work his magic after a long work shift at Joe's Pizza. The soup began with a symphony of fragrant herbs and spices. With its citrusy aroma, lemongrass was expertly bruised to release its essence, while galangal, a cousin of ginger, added a zesty and slightly floral note. Kaffir lime leaves, with their distinctively aromatic and citrusy fragrance, imparted a unique freshness to the soup. My mouth watered in anticipation of the finished dish. Edvard filled a pot with a delicate balance of broth and coconut milk. The broth, made from an array of raw, rich, crunchy vegetables, served as the foundation for the soup, providing a comforting and nourishing base; fiery chili peppers and pungent garlic infused the broth with their essence. The creamy coconut milk lent a luscious richness and texture, perfectly complementing the vibrant flavors. As the pot comes to a gentle simmer, mushrooms, crunchy bean sprouts, and water chestnuts, offered a delightful contrast to the spicy herbs. To finish up, Edvard garnished the soup with fresh herbs, a sprinkle of fried shallots, and crushed peanuts. I was struck by the grace and precision with which Edvard made the soup. It was a feast for both the eyes and the palate. I knew right then and there Edvard was the perfect chef for Queen Reine and his soup was a healthy royal alternative to New York City Pizza.

This is a love letter to my favorite humans, who showed me love through homemade meals. When I had nowhere to call home and words failed to make me feel safe, you expressed your love through dal khichdi. You may not have witnessed a broken home or known how to articulate my pain, but the warmth of pomfret fry and sausage pulao spoke volumes of care. There were moments when I lost control—weeping, crying, begging you not to leave me alone. With no place to call home, you were all I had.

As we journeyed through mountains, stuffed parathas and achar were served with tender care. At times, I felt frustrated by your silence, wishing for verbal expressions of love. Yet, I came to accept that you loved me through meals shared on the couch—nothing elaborate, sometimes just jungle pulao and dahi. But it was the purest form of love one could experience.

Through these meals, I discovered my identity. I thought my past was insignificant, erased. But these meals taught me that I cherished Maharashtrian veg, worshiped Goan seafood, and found solace in South Indian cuisine. They were simple meals served in steel thalis, yet they symbolized home.

Support may have come through financial means, but love was expressed through homemade meals. I captured snapshots of these meals, and though you deemed them basic, for me, eating a meal in peace was a first. Chai and Parle G was and will always be my favorite. The simple joys of silly jokes and aimless laughter were all I desired. While you feared lacking in intellectual conversations to keep me engaged, all I longed for was to share laughter without restraint.

No matter where life leads us, you will forever remain my rusk and khari, the masala in my chai, and the pickle to my khichdi.

With love,  
Dee

### D) The Aroma of Trees

#### Excerpt from my short story “Bartholomew and his Stylish Unicorn”

The new moon night markets of Silvershade were legendary among the elves across the six Craters. Illuminated by the soft glow of fireflies, the light cascaded through the towering trees and reflected off the silver sand, creating a magical glow. Here, beneath the canopy, elves and forest creatures alike gathered to set up diverse stalls. Mother Hare's pickled beets were always a hot commodity, disappearing within moments of the market's opening. Henry Wang's handcrafted jewelry, intricate wood carvings, and delicate woven tapestries with oral histories of Silver shade were another bestseller. Among the villagers, it was believed that this particular species of Silvershade was the last of its kind for miles around. Its elusive blooms, a rare spectacle, hadn't graced the forest for half a century. The last time the tree had bloomed coincided with the arrival of the first and only unicorn at the market nearly half a century ago.

“You're going to Seattle for spring break? Oh gosh, I am getting so excited! Exclaimed Courtney. “All I want is to be pampered by a waterfall.” I replied. For a year, my classmate has been describing the difference between the wilderness of the West Coast and the East Coast. “You can drive 30 minutes to the West Coast and be completely lost in the wilderness. You can't even hear the cars. You are completely lost in the wild.”

When I stepped into the Wallace Falls hike near Seattle, I couldn't believe the truth in her statement. There were 200-foot trees, lush moss, and complete wilderness. Towering evergreen giants stand sentinel over moss-covered undergrowth. As you meander along winding trails, shafts of sunlight filter through the dense canopy, casting a dappled glow upon the forest floor. The air is alive with the melodic chirping of songbirds and the gentle rustle of leaves in the breeze.

Venturing further, you find yourself drawn to the rugged coastline, where the mighty Pacific Ocean crashes against rocky cliffs and sandy shores. Sea spray mingles with the salty tang of the sea as you explore hidden coves and secluded beaches. Towering driftwood stacks rise amongst the tumultuous waves, while seabirds soar overhead.

“I can smell the forest through your pictures. I want to eat the dirt of the forest. I miss the forest.” said Courtney. “I miss the forests, the snow covered peaks, the sunlight breaking through the rain, the rainbows and friendship. I miss genuine authentic honest friendship.” I replied as I returned to Providence after the magic of the Pacific Northwest.



An artist book created based on my short story “Queen Reine and her mortal soup”





RISD Grad Show at the RI Convention Center



When the Hyenas Laugh  
Digital and Hand Print | 10 ft x 3ft



I saw the Peaks and never looked back  
Mixed Media on canvas | 6ft x4ft





Excerpt from my children's book **A Little Girl on a Big Island**

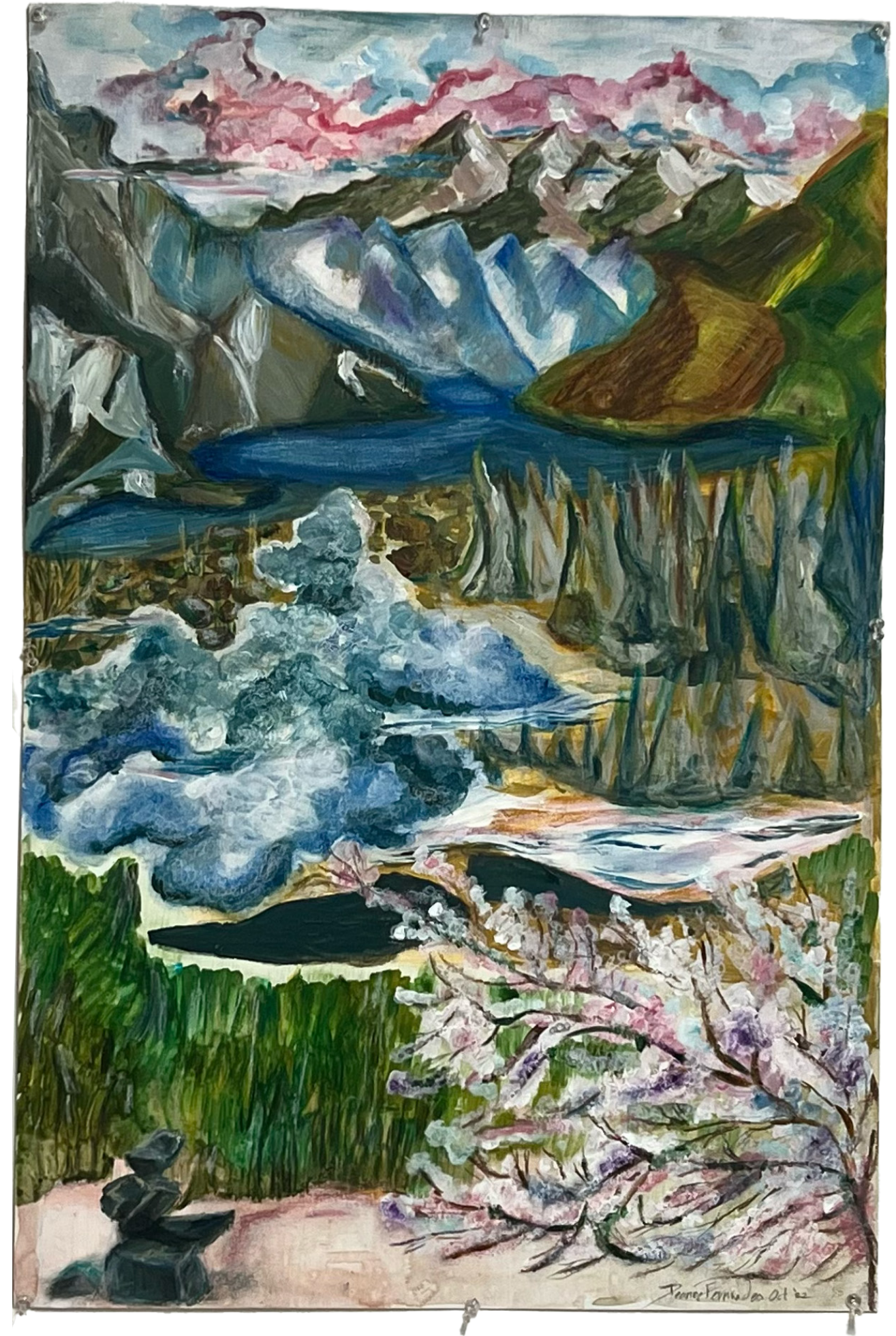
*Having been a fan of fresh local produce, Ava was immediately drawn to the farmers' market. Each week on Sunday, she made her way to the market, eager to buy the biggest avocados, purchase ocean necklaces, and listen to the songs from the ukulele. She liked talking to the sellers and hearing about what they were selling and how they made it. For Ava, the farmer's market was more than just a place to shop. It was a place where she could connect with the wonderful people of the local community through food and stories.*

**I**n the research paper *Native Hawaiian Voices: Enhancing the Role of Cultural Values in Community Based Participatory Research*, culture is taken as an important marker in the collection of data and not a variable factor. To equalize the relationship between the members of the community and the members of the research group both the parties were referred to as Researchers. Though the study was regarding the high rates of cancer of Hawaiian's in Southern California, the researchers approached the study through the cultural practices of the community. Pili is a concept of having a cultural design and introduction with the community before a scientific introduction can take place. The shift in dietary habits was a keen source of interest as the islanders shifted from their native dietary traditions. **My most favorite take away from this paper is the concept of Talk-Story Research. It is the process of letting people discuss what is**

**on their mind and creating the space to share the power of their own knowledge.**

As a researcher I have always felt the pressure to know the answers and sometimes I forget that the answers lie with the people themselves. I learned to create a space for the people so that the answers could be revealed by themselves. This paper has also helped me understand I don't need to create the story all on my own.

On my conservation trip in Southern Africa I was introduced to the concept of Rewilding. *Rewilding refers to the process of restoring and conserving natural ecosystems and habitats by reintroducing native species, allowing natural processes to occur with minimal human intervention, and creating connections between fragmented habitats. The goal of rewilding is to promote biodiversity, restore ecological balance, and enhance the resilience of ecosystems*



A Love Letter to the Himalayas, Mixed Media on Illustration board, 18inch x 36 inch, 2022

*in the face of environmental challenges. This approach often involves initiatives such as reintroducing keystone species, restoring natural landscapes, and creating wildlife corridors to enable the movement of species. Rewilding aims to reverse the impacts of habitat loss, degradation, and fragmentation caused by human activities, ultimately fostering healthier and more sustainable ecosystems. The transformative power of nature is undeniable, capable of healing wounds, igniting change, and fostering personal development. I've come to understand that true understanding of a place and its community emerges through reciprocal storytelling. Through this process, we not only uncover the intricacies of local narratives but also create a platform for communities to voice their experiences and perspectives. By shedding light on both the strengths and challenges of a community, we pave the way for ethical engagement and collaborative problem-solving.*

In the wilding of the mind, there's a sense of exploration and adventure, as one delves into the depths of their consciousness, uncovering hidden treasures of ideas and insights. It's a journey of self-discovery, where the boundaries of imagination are pushed beyond their limits, and new perspectives emerge like lush foliage after a rainstorm.

Just as rewilding aims to restore ecosystems to their natural state, wilding of the mind seeks to reconnect with the primal essence of human creativity, unencumbered by the structures and expectations of modern life. It's about tapping into the raw, instinctual energy that resides within each of us, channeling it into expressions of art, innovation, and self-expression.



# PERFORMANCE | PLAY

**M**y sole line in my inaugural performance was, “Eat Up Muriel!”. It was then I realized the script was just one aspect of performance. You have to embody the character and play with the feelings through the body

An excerpt from a reflection on improv from theater

*I think the biggest learning was that no matter how much technique or practice you go through, sometimes core subconscious emotions affect the entire scene. I think it was so insightful how this pattern of belief also came up. I wake up everyday feeling that I have worked through all the pre-programmed beliefs ingrained in me through years of abuse but there is always residue. I think it was really eye-opening to see that anytime I am struggling in my work it may not necessarily be lack of skill, experience, or even practice, it could just be an emotional block especially when the body is a medium for expression. I think you only have so much control over your body and when the body sees harm even in a safe space it becomes its own person. I am extremely grateful to know there are tools and techniques to really start living in your body and experiencing your emotions. For me I think my brain already has a solid fixed prejudgement on a character.*

*It's an instinct coping skill I learned as a kid to keep myself safe but I think taking the scene and tearing it apart really helped me. Shouting, cursing, playing it happy when it's sad, playing it angry when its comedy really helps you get out of your head and into that of the character. I also realized the power of these scenes. You can enact relationships, emotions, personalities you may never have in real life*

Trust is essential in improv, guiding performers through the unscripted journey of spontaneous creation. It starts with self-assurance, allowing actors to trust their instincts and creativity. Trust extends to scene partners, fostering deep listening and collaboration. While vulnerability is required, trust empowers actors to take risks and embrace failure. Ultimately, trust in improv mirrors trust in life, emphasizing the beauty of imperfection and the magic of the unknown.



An immersive installation following the journey of a girl from the plateau to the peaks.

2022. Mixed media- Laser cut on wood panels, oil painting, sound and video design, sculpture.



A talkback with the cast of William Kentridge's Centre of the Less Good Idea 2024. I participated in a two week residency with the Centre at Brown Arts Institute where I conceptualised a play.

# AUDIENCE | SELF AUTHORSHIP

**M**y audience has predominantly been academic, and at times, I've struggled to translate my research into a visual medium. To date I feel I am my target audience. **My work has been a means of self growth and discovery.** As I continue to write, I find myself hesitant to delve into the details, fearing I may not fully understand what I want to accomplish or whom I want to reach with my work. Breaking down each point piece by piece, I realize my tendency is to skim the surface, afraid of running out of words or losing my audience's interest. It's a fear that they won't wait for me to catch up, that I need to cover everything quickly due to time constraints. I've had a revelation: my thesis is about discovering an audience and inviting them into my work. It's about bridging the gap between academic research and visual presentation, and embracing the journey of finding connection and resonance with those who engage with my work.

Through an exploration of response systems, I have unearthed the transformative potential of response as a mechanism for restoration, redefining the power dynamics that govern our interactions. By stepping away from the confines of routine, **I have embarked on a journey towards emotional restoration, translating complex emotions**

**into tangible narratives that resonate with untapped memories and experiences.** Central to this process is the act of vocalization, wherein I not only acknowledge the depth of my emotions but also engage in a call-and-response dialogue with myself and others. In doing so, I unlock the dormant emotions that lie within, paving the way for emotional rest and a renewed sense of self-awareness. Moreover, my exploration has led me to remap my worldview, drawing from a diverse array of sources including academic research, lived experiences, and the ongoing process of decolonization and recolonization. By challenging existing paradigms and embracing new perspectives, I am able to cultivate a more inclusive and holistic understanding of the world around me. In essence, this thesis serves as a testament to the transformative power of healing within the public sphere. Through my efforts, I have illuminated pathways towards emotional restoration and societal transformation, laying the groundwork for a more empathetic and resilient future. As I move forward, I will continue to embrace the complexities of my emotional landscape, recognizing that true healing begins with the courage to confront my deepest self.



# RESEARCH ZINES

My journey through RISD has been a fusion of my passions: research and visual storytelling. It's here that I've honed my own distinctive arts-based research methodology, with "call and response" emerging as a pivotal chapter within it. My aspiration is to refine these methods into a comprehensive guidebook for participatory arts-based research, reshaping both illustration mediums and the landscape of illustration research.

Throughout my tenure at RISD, I've delved into an array of mediums, including sound illustration, painting, artist books, animation, film, field journalism, and using comics as a research tool. Additionally, I've explored immersive installations, each serving as a canvas for my experimentation. Here are three instances where I've integrated "call and response" into my practice, collaborating with fellow creatives within communities to produce research zines.

Recognizing the potential of my approach, RISD has generously awarded me the Spur Grant to propel this unique form of research forward. I eagerly anticipate sharing my insights and discoveries through publication, contributing to the evolution of arts-based research.

A) Creature Conserve Story Nights - Zine One

B) Creature Conserve Story Zines - Zine Two

C) Call and Response Animation



D) William Kentridge's Pepper Ghost Residency 2024







Grad Thesis Show 2024 at the Rhode Island Convention Center



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