



University of
St Andrews

EDITION

2024

St Leonard's College Mag.



05 Summer
findings

06 Elizabeth
Sheehan

08 The Rethinking of War and
History in Arabic Dystopian
Novel *Harb al-kalb al-thāniya*

14 ...and sometimes when I
look inside I remember I'm
falling too

18 Heidegger helped me un-
derstand Duchamp's signed
urinal.

CONTENT

23 The Mind That Just
Won't Sleep

24 Tattoos: 1992-2022

30 The
Dreamcatcher

32 My Decision to
Delete Instagram

Summer findings

04

Nothing was left or spared
when they adored the sun.
Only a shadow remained,
awaiting the unseen.

Álex A. Basilio
PhD in Hispanic Studies

05

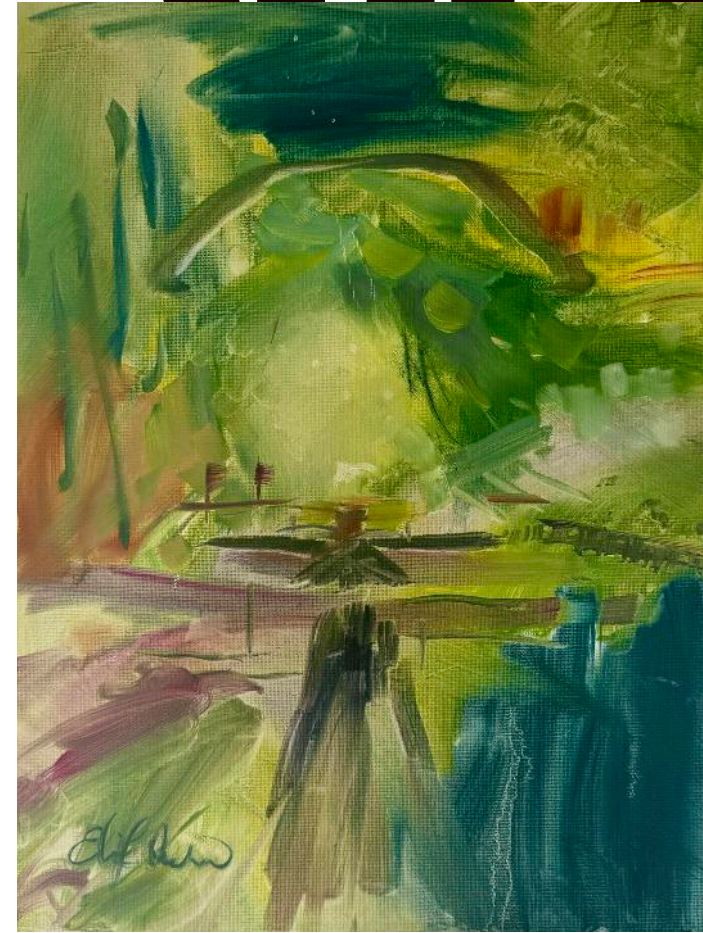
Elizabeth

Sheephan

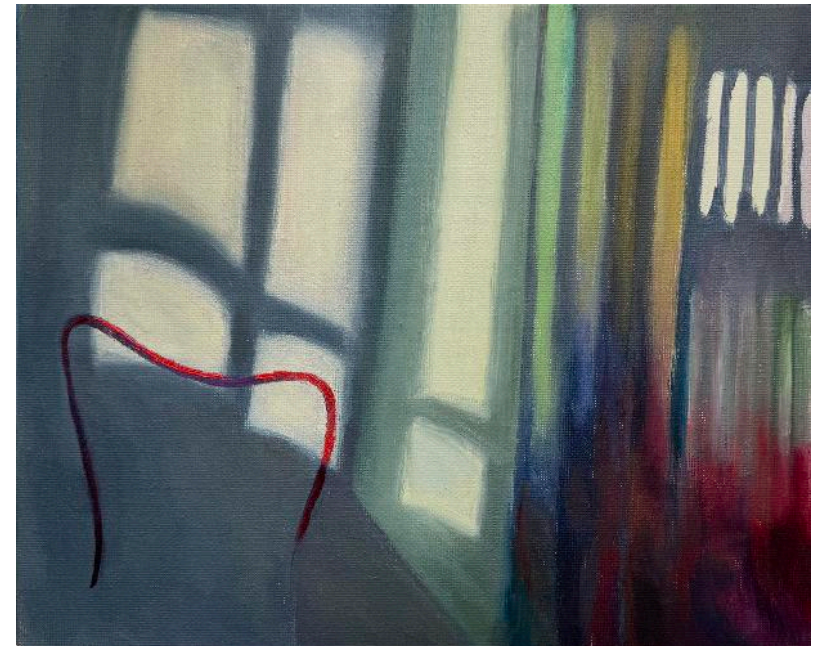
MLitt in Museum & Heritage Studies



**Roundhill
Road**



**Fork
Road**



**The Red
Chair**

The Rethinking of War and History

in Arabic Dystopian Novel *Ḥarb al-kalb al-thāniyya*

Ḥarb al-kalb al-thāniyya is Ibrāhīm Naṣrallāh's (b. 1954) 9th novel and won the eleventh edition of the International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF). This book marks a departure from his previous historical novels, as it stands out as his first novel set in a futuristic state governed by an authoritarian regime known as "the Castle". In this dystopian setting, oxygen and sunlight are scarce, four seasons are blended into one, the air is filled with a suffocating rancid smell, drugs are sprayed from the air to catalyse people's lust to ensure human reproduction and advanced technology has transformed human life to a great extent.

The overall setting suggests ecological criticism, even though this is not the prime concern of the author. The state in the novel operates under the complete totalitarian rule of the Castle, which grants varying levels of eyesight to its officers based on their rank, while the public is left with only imperfect

vision. By restricting individuals' perception of the world where they inhabit, the Castle strengthens the pillars of its totalitarian governance. While the specific setting is initially left undefined, characters are given Arabic names, and the novel's final scene includes a distinct reference to Arab history. Nevertheless, the narrator refers to several renowned wars witnessed by humans, such as the Emu War (1932) initiated against the overbreeding of emus in Australia, the Pastry War (1886) between Mexico and France and so on.

The humoristic nature of these fictitious conflicts points to the absurdity of human wars. Moreover, the author deliberately avoids mentioning specific Arab landmarks until the end of the novel, suggesting a desire to transcend national boundaries to uncover common phenomena within human civilization.



The novel is skilfully guided by an omniscient narrator who introduces at the beginning of the novel the highest authority, the Castle, which appears to be a post-revolutionary regime. Prior to the narrative's commencement, there was a conflict dubbed the "Dog War", documented in a peculiarly forgotten documentary film. Curiously, the memory of this war has been systematically erased from public discourse and collective recollection.

The Dog War begins with a deal. The dog's previous owner sells it to the buyer in two instalments.

However, the buyer does not pay the second instalment in time. When the original owner comes to ask for the debt to be paid, he is met with his once-loyal dog, now growling and disowning him. To exacerbate the matter, when the disgruntled first owner calls again to collect money, the woman of the buyer locks the dog indoors and then tells him that her husband is in 'the home of mourning'.

Convinced he will never get the rest of the payment, the original owner walks away but the dog unexpectedly leaps from the wall, fatally attacking him. In retaliation, his family storms the buyer's home, killing him. This sparks a massive war, leaving no survivors except the dog. The Dog War II is triggered by a virus-like phenomenon which blurs boundaries among plants, animals and humans. The protagonist Rashīd is portrayed as an unapologetic opportunist who exploits circumstances for personal gain without concern for moral or ethical principles.

Specifically, he brings his secretary and a photograph of his wife to "that place" (*dhālik al-makān*) to utilize an advanced shaping device to transform his secretary into a living re-



plica of his wife, Salām, claiming that he is obsessed with the beauty of Salām, reflecting a phenomenon that can be interpreted as a manifestation of consumeristic tendencies in society. "That place" refers to the site where the cosmetic surgery clinic is located. It also serves as the residence of the highest-ranking authority figure.

According to the surgeon at "that place", the initial intent behind creating this shaping machine was to modify body sizes to make them fit better to the clothes individuals desired to wear. However, Rashīd stands out as the first to employ this device for the radical transformation of one person into another.

This act not only underscores his reckless and self-centred opportunism but also implies a broader critique of employing technology to facilitate a hedonistic, self-indulgent, and individualistic lifestyle—characteristic of capitalist society.

10

The fact that the second war is called "Dog War II" can be viewed as an implicit criticism of the curse of vendetta practices in traditional Arab societies or even an aside to the violently fractious state of politics in the contemporary Arab world. Moreover, this naming pattern is a clue as to how the story ends. Rashīd's decision to clone his wife inadvertently causes the spread of a virus that makes human beings, animals, and even plants look alike.

Gradually, every species begins to lose its original identity and the features that make people distinguish one thing from another fade away.

This process contributes to the dismantling of truth and identity. On one hand, it underscores the ethical boundaries of technology, while on the other hand, it indirectly critiques the impact of globalization and Western economic and cultural hegemony on the

Arab world. As a result, riots and wars begin again. Tragically, Rashīd perishes for not being able to prove his own identity as he has many other identical duplicates. It is worth noting that this is only one of the novel's possible endings as by the end of the novel, Rashīd has experienced many hallucinations, including imagining himself being taken into an underground prison and forced to torture his clones.

The juxtaposition of Rashīd's experiences in the "real" world and these hallucinations leaves readers in a state of uncertainty regarding the authenticity of this incident—leaving them to question whether it truly marks Rashīd's fate or if it is yet another illusion he has experienced. The Dog War III erupts in another time and space. It seems that the aftermath of the Dog War II causes Arab history to regress to the pre-Islamic period (*al-Jāhilīyyah*). The war between "Dahis and al-Ghabrā'" occurs again and everything begins anew.

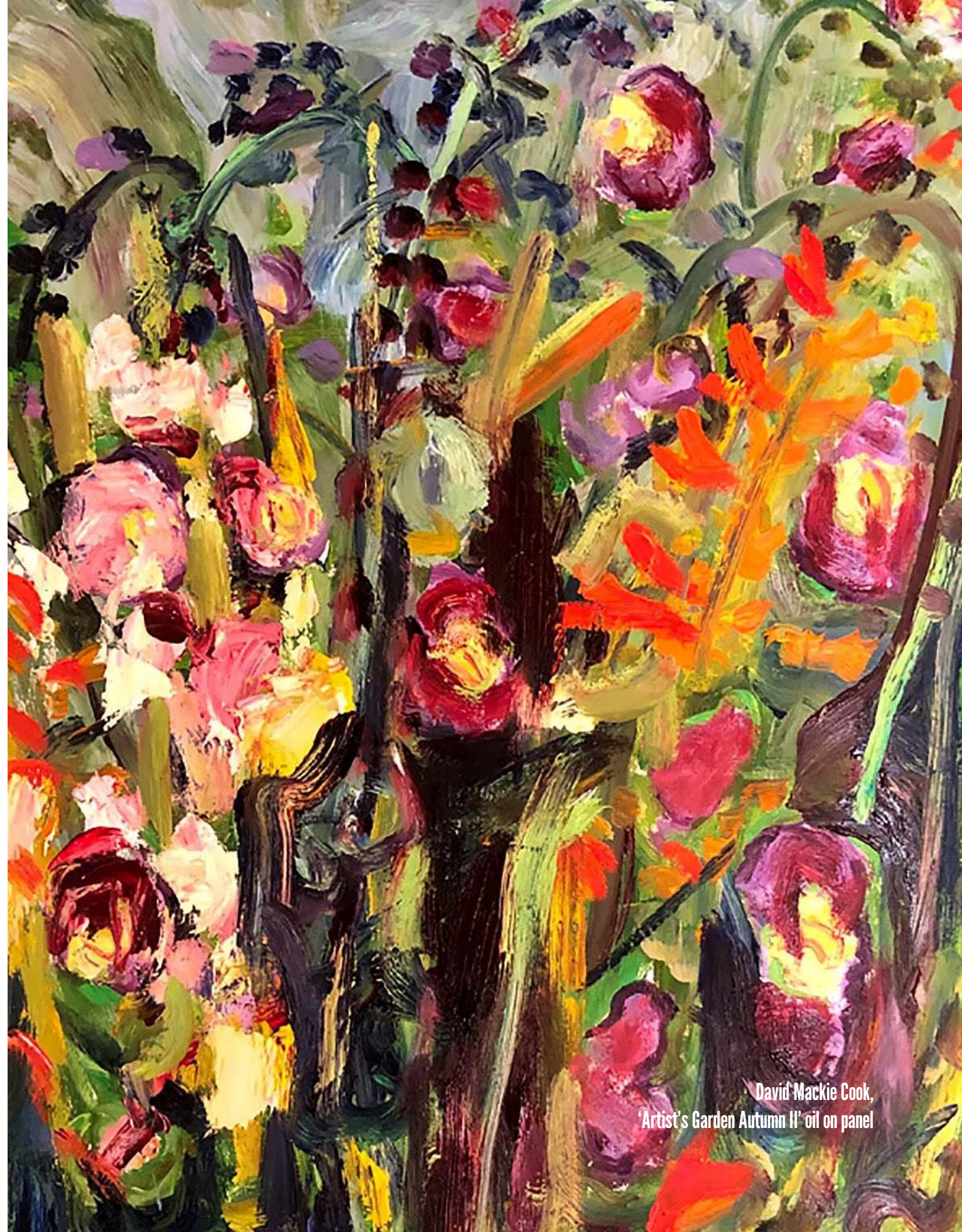
Throughout the novel, the dog serves as a metaphor, symbolizing the absence of virtues in humanity. Following the spread of the “virus”, the distinctions between humans and animals become increasingly blurred and all kinds of absurd and terrifying possibilities grow more and more plausible. Moreover, the dogs invariably adopt a malevolent guise when they are mentioned in the novel, consequently, once transformed into dogs, human beings can only be ferocious and scary creatures. The dog therefore symbolizes a certain defect. According to Naṣrallāh himself, his novel “suggests that if we continue on our current path, we will reach a future where we will become mostly animalistic.”

At the end of the novel the reborn Rashīd adopts a significant transformation in identity, wearing a white headscarf and a knee-length black robe. The author intentionally keeps the portrayal of Rashīd’s new-found identity ambiguous, suggesting that he is the same old opportunist who is ready to embrace any ideology to achieve his own ends. From this point, Rashīd embodies a striking resemblance to those leaders who,

having once embraced a secular ideology, recycle themselves as Islamists to maintain or gain power. In this sense, the novel might be viewed as a critique of this irresponsible form of ruthless opportunism and self-serving attitude which allowed Islamic extremist groups like al-Dawla al-Islāmiyya (the so-called ‘Islamic State’) to exploit the situation and rapidly expand their influence.

In an interview, Naṣrallāh said that in *Ḥarb al-kalb al-thāniyya*, he was trying to contemplate the future from the gloomy reality witnessed by the Arab world in the past few years. Five years following the “Arab Spring,” Nasarllāh intricately intertwines the inspirations drawn from the aftermath of the Arab Spring with sombre apprehensions and profound disillusionment over the revolutions’ shortcomings in this novel, where he cautions against the looming spectre of a potential nightmarish future while simultaneously conveying a fervent literary yearning for change, akin to the transformative spirit witnessed during the Arab uprisings of the 2010s.

Anqi Wang
PhD in Arabic Literature



David Mackie Cook,
‘Artist’s Garden Autumn II’ oil on panel

...and sometimes when I look inside

Computer made of lights and mirrors, stones and water
 Fire and diamonds
 Are whispering a slow spun fate
 Pasts and futures, thread uneven
 Are they just empty words?

Children with their little hands
 Angels with their targets locked
 Abodes long held now ash and dust
 The spiders web still does expand
 The thrusting force of freedoms' lust

Coarse fingers on the abacus, ones and zeros
 Bliss and torture
 Market babble turned to whimpers
 Dancing puppets, whirling faster
 How many more towers?

Bairns o Adam 'n Eve backspier
 Your tongue is cut from out your head
 Corpses tattoed with your names
 Are washing up doon at the pier
 And staining red your whitened chains

I remember I'm falling too

One to Two to Three to Ten, nothings and nines
 Maps and vessels
 Inflation of the algorithm
 Broken eyes, flashing pixels
 Who encrypted the formless void?

The spirit of the times is drunk
 The dance of eros has been worn down
 The geas of geist broken in jest
 Beloved, ravaged, in the wine has sunk
 A pressed boot imprinted on her chest

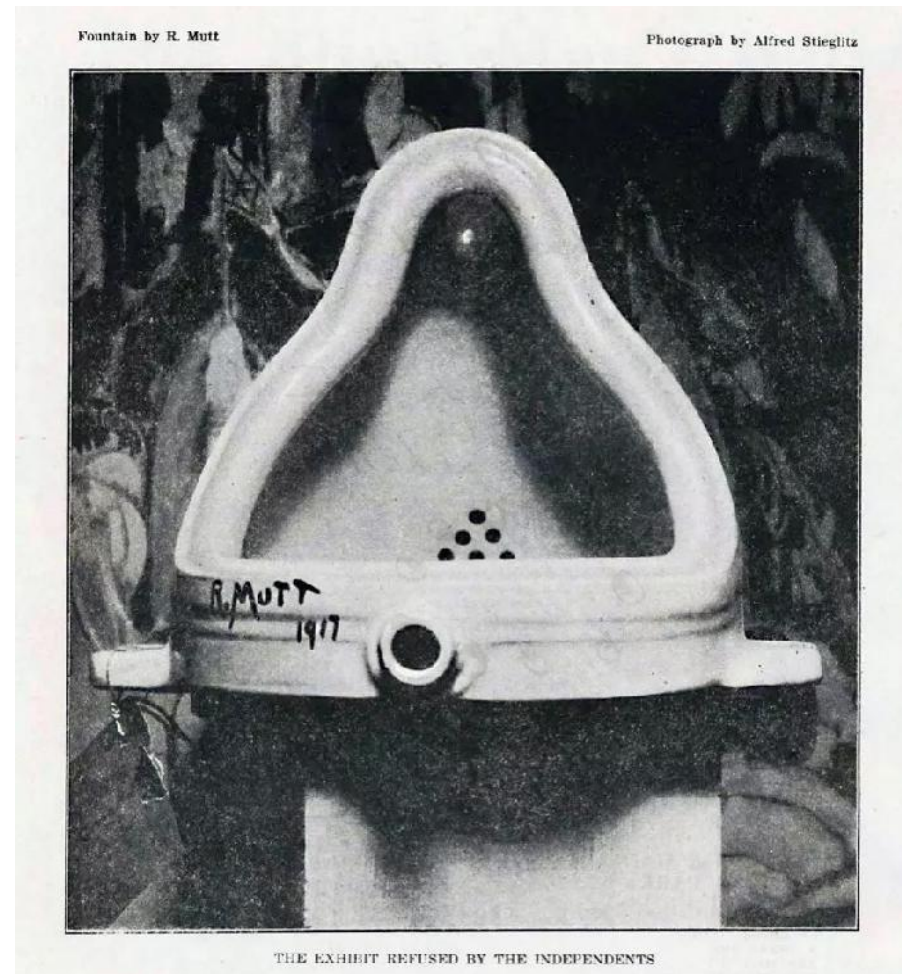
Freedom for the fine and few, breaking off
 Cocaine and cherries
 Besides the automated engine room
 Blood and knives and silent gillies
 Do those stains ever wash off?

If the dream of reason has returned
 To the underworld from where it came
 And all that 's left now in its void
 This labyrinth made from decrepit remains
 Then what will it take
 To make them stop dropping bombs?



A Still Life of Disorder
Lilli Waters

Heidegger helped me understand



Duchamp's signed urinal.

By Carlos M. Suárez Tavernier



The course started with the classic modernists, from Cézanne, Dali, and Picasso to my compatriota Diego Rivera. I knew and loved their work, which, honestly, is pretty easy; they are impressive technique-wise and aesthetically pleasing. I was studying 'Modern and Contemporary Art History' at Sotheby's Institute in New York, back in two-thousand nineteen. Halfway through the program, we covered another group of artists, the almost radical opposite, the Dadaists. They acted against the 'established criteria' and the seriousness of art, marking a new era in the form of expression. Their name, allegedly, came from the very basic sound that babies do, 'da-da.' I disliked their works for their ridiculous approach, which was far from what I thought art should be. One piece troubled me the most: 'Fountain,' by R. Mutt, a signed urinal.

R. Mutt was Marcel Duchamp's pseudonym, and Fountain was the epitome of what he called 'Ready-mades.' Duchamp posed to me as an enigma, a brilliant and talented artist, famous and respected, no doubt. Regardless, he is also the perfect example of why we sometimes think of art as 'not being art.' Why would an artist of such magnitude use a urinal? At that point, I had no answer. However,

five years later, while studying Continental Philosophy at the University of St. Andrews, I was introduced to Martin Heidegger through his major work, 'Being and Time' (1927). In it, as part of his phenomenological approach, Heidegger delves into how we encounter objects/tools/things in the world. He came up with a new term: 'Ready-to-hand' and 'Present-at-hand.' A shed of light.

When a thing is ready-to-hand, we engage with it straightforwardly.

We do not stop to deconstruct its constitution or think of its essence. We simply and plainly use it. This is the case for things in our everyday tasks: a toothbrush when tooth brushing or a hammer when hammering. They're just there, ready to use. Contrastingly, when objects lose their practicality and are no longer helpful for what they are supposed to be, the way we experience them changes; they regain presence, they become 'present-at-hand.'

A good example is a bicycle. As you pedal away, you somehow take for granted its existence—you don't keep thinking about how the wheels turn. It is ready-to-hand.

Now, if it breaks, it is no longer a bicycle as it was; it becomes an object in a different way: broken, useless, etc. It is present-at-hand. This applies to all objects; we might forget about the toothbrush while brushing our teeth or the hammer when hammering, but if something goes wrong with them, they immediately regain our attention. It is important to note, and this is where it gets interesting, that an object is not eternally ready-to-hand or present-at-hand; we can intentionally change it from one to the other and *vice versa*. It all depends on how we experience, encounter, and treat it.

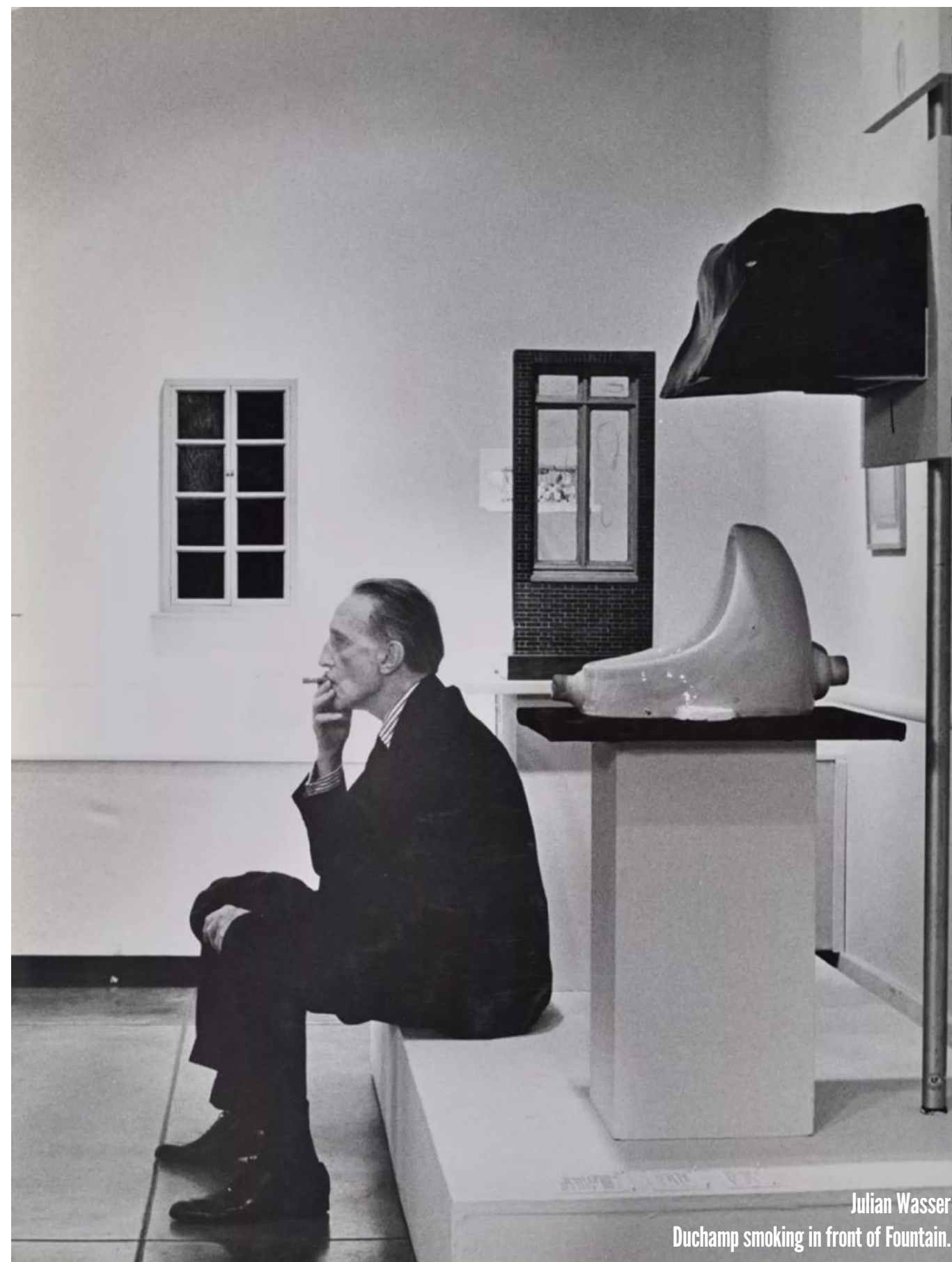
‘Ready-mades’ raised ferocious judgments, questioning the boundaries between art and the ordinary, the artist’s role, and the nature of artistic creation. It was (and is) a common opinion that selecting random things and presenting them as artworks by slightly modifying or simply signing them just doesn’t feel right. Regardless, Duchamp argued that ‘an ordinary object [can be] elevated to the dignity of a work of art by the mere choice of an artist.’ In 1917, he bought an already-made urinal, signed it as ‘R. Mutt,’ and submitted it to the ‘Society of Independent Artists’ exhibition in New York. The selection committee rejected it under the argument of being vulgar and non-artistic. The original piece was lost forever, but its impact transcended the physical object and became fundamental for art history. A comment published in Dada magazine ‘The Blind Man’ (1917) puts into words the underlying importance of the work: “Whether Mr Mutt

with his own hands made the Fountain or not has no importance. He chose it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view—created a new thought for that object.”

Duchamp’s subtle brilliance is that he identified that by disrupting the context, the object gained relevance. He cleverly invited the spectator to see a random thing in an environment that suggests aesthetic wordiness. Duchamp basically played with our experience of the object. He took the ready-to-hand urinal, which in our minds is nothing more than an everyday functional thing, and by placing it on the exhibition floor, immediately turned it into a present-at-hand controversial experience. Honestly, it is as if he anticipated Heidegger’s ideas. His modification of ready-to-hand to present-at-hand enabled a shift in perspective from seamless utility to artistic manifestation—an unforeseen depth in his work.

Now I know it was not the artist who failed but the uneducated spectator fooled by a superficial interpretation. Because of the richness of Heidegger’s phenomenology, I was finally able to understand Duchamp’s idea of playing with the purpose, the concept, and the context rather than the artistic object—my long-awaited answer. Previous to becoming a Dada icon, Duchamp was a painter. When asked why he gave it up, he answered: “I was interested in ideas—not merely in visual products.”

Carlos M. Suarez Tavernier
Conversion Diploma in Philosophy



Julian Wasser
Duchamp smoking in front of Fountain.

The Mind That Just Won't Sleep

in dim-lit alleys, where the criminal element lurks
the man with the smoking gun watches and smirks

when the children of the cul-de-sac stumble on the source,
the police are called in so that the law can run its course

dubious statements will be taken; black lies will be told
their trail leads to a dead end, and the case turns cold

they'll say no one can solve this; what we have here is a mystery
it's one for the ages, a secret lost to history

and everyone will think you've pulled off the perfect crime,
but no one understands it's only a matter of time

then one knock on that plaque, and it's my turn to play
a bella donna will walk in with a dark bouquet

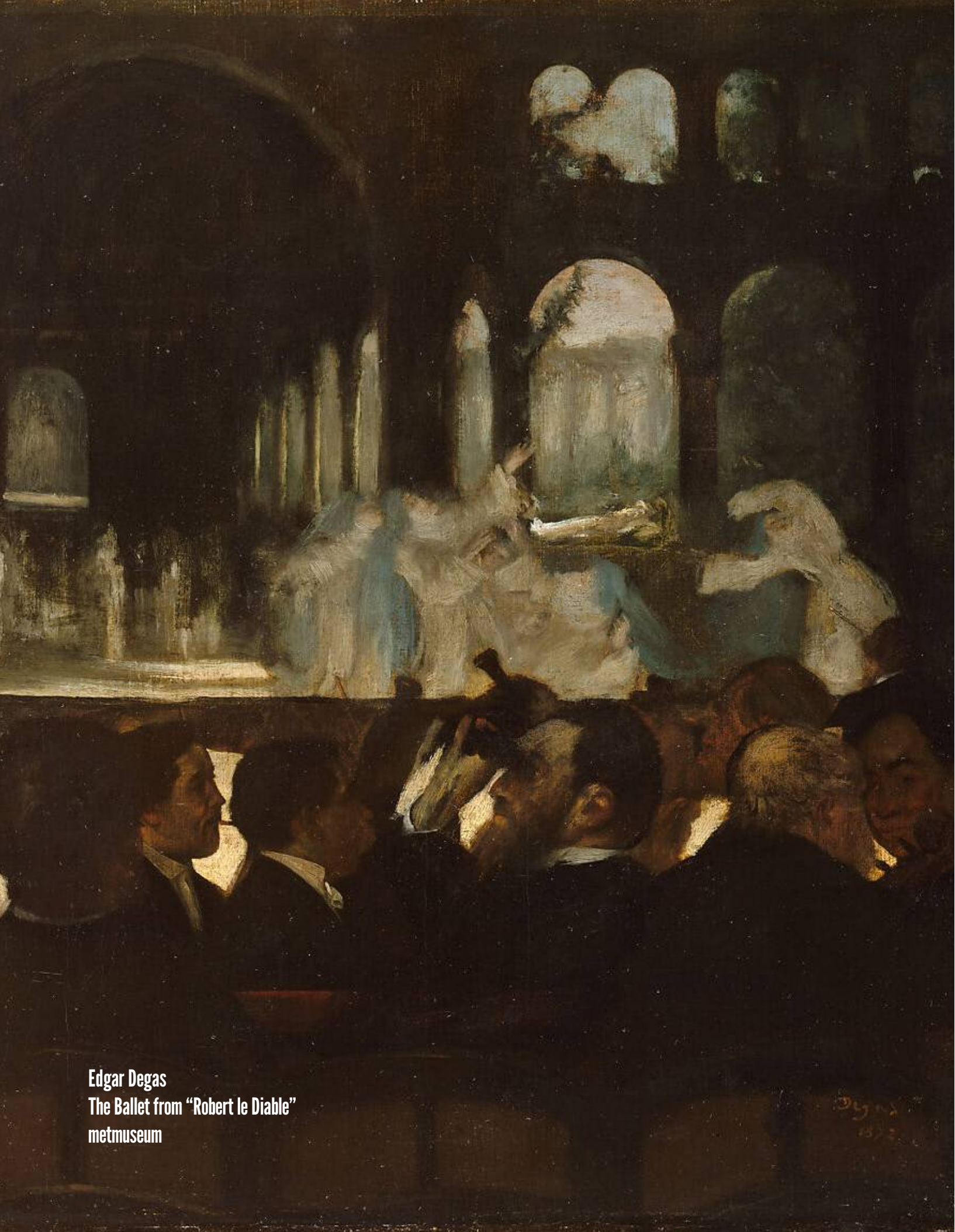
after a sigh and a moan and a little jest
all she'll have for me is a simple request:

to crack the case, figure out who's responsible
in this world, everyone is a suspect; everything is possible

because your secrets may hide in crevices deep,
but mine is the mind that just won't sleep

through twisted plots and cunning wrath
my powers of deduction will reveal the path

for on this desk, I pour over puzzles of ink and lore
I know the truth is behind that locked door



Edgar Degas
The Ballet from "Robert le Diable"
metmuseum

By J. D. Harlock
DProf. TESOL

Tattoos: 1992-2022

Hong Kong, 2022: Day of piano removal

If binary thinking is a product of small-mindedness, let me be so.

It's my belief that furniture movers fall into two groups: those that appreciate art and those that don't.

When I hired the art-appreciating kind to move the piano I'd lived with for 30 years, mild-mannered folks in freshly laundered polo shirts showed up with heaps of fluffy blankets and swaddled my piano in a cozy cocoon before moving it more than an inch.

When a commercial buyer sent over a team composed of that other species, I could smell their mix of cigarettes and sweaty tank tops before they'd even rung our doorbell.

As soon as they entered our newly renovated apartment, the first thing I noticed were the dragon and tiger tattoos sprawling across their humongous biceps. Their expansive posture sent a clear message: dare to question their methods and you'd be taught a lesson.

Tiger-too leaned the wheels of his folded trolley against our freshly painted white paneled wall. When my husband asked them to rest it on the floor instead, they raised eyebrows at each other as if they'd just heard an outrageous request. My heart skipped a beat.

Unlike what the previous mild-mannered, blue polo-shirted piano movers had done, Dragon-too and Tiger-too only brought one filthy, flimsy throw blanket with frayed hems. Not a good sign. Didn't they understand moving the five-foot piano into the condo's tiny elevator would require tipping it onto its side? With only one thin blanket draped over the piano, how could they not scratch it?

They barely glanced at my piano. Apparently, even feigning interest in the object of a sale was not part of their job description.

"You can see the keys are still in mint condition," I said, opening the piano lid for inspection.

"No need, we're very casual," Dragon-too grunted.



Yuetting Cindy Lam

He slapped five hundreds onto the black walnut cabinet, one at a time, as if showing off his trump cards.

Casual? It's a piano. Oh, no—it only now dawned on me that I should worry about what my buyer was going to do with my piano. I knew he was a piano exporter selling second-hand pianos to Mainland China and Southeast Asia. But what kind of exporter would accept a valuable item without inspecting it first?

After the tattooed movers wheeled away my piano, there was a disquieting void in our apartment. My piano of 30 years was gone, and in its place was a stack of cash from that mover's filthy hands.

I had lived with that piano since I was 10, my son's current age. It was the most upscale model for Yamaha upright pianos and might've been my father's most expensive purchase during the 90s. It stood proudly

in the living room of my parents' 350-square-foot apartment, as grand and out of place as a regal princess standing in a queue at Burger King.

My father had hoped the piano would provide a healthy outlet for emotional expression. It turned out instead to be cumbersome and humiliating for me. My fingers refused to cooperate and my ears were deaf to nuances in pitch and rhythm.

When I was in middle school, my mother threatened to sell my piano if I didn't practise regularly. Practising the same exam pieces and scales over and over again was a chore to me, but I hated to part with my piano, so I was bound to sit at my piano for an hour every day after school. As soon as my mother left home to run errands, I'd grab a novel to read on the music shelf inside the piano lid. While I was tied to the piano bench, reading books of fiction liberated me.

For nine years, the same joyless piano teacher came to my home



Yang Fudong 'Sparrow on the Sea'



Opensource

once a week to give private lessons. But being severely musically handicapped, I never felt inspired.

As a university student, I stumbled on the score of “Close to You,” from *Long Vacation*, a 90s Japanese TV series. The score was wonderfully manageable and became the only song I could ever play well enough to feel truly connected to my piano. During those rare cathartic moments, I felt as if we were enjoying a conversation.

My piano later became a fixture in the homes I’ve shared with my husband and son. A tuner once told me my piano was in excellent condition because I didn’t play often. Pianos of people who practiced frequently degraded faster due to the wear and tear. I felt as if I’d been kind to my piano for having left her alone.

For years, my piano served as an extra shelf for my home library, holding books that had served as muses and got me into writing.

A few days before our final goodbye

Installing a piano in a typical—that is, small—apartment in Hong Kong requires meticulous visual spatial planning because you’ll need to pinch each square foot of your apartment to squeeze out space for the hodgepodge of your furniture, possessions—and your piano.

Fortunately, conceiving creative interior design solutions to various storage and utility issues is exactly in my wheelhouse—or so I thought until I watched my polo-shirted piano movers unhinge the French doors to our bedroom to widen the doorway for my piano’s safe entry.

The two-man team of piano movers gingerly rolled my piano through the narrow corridor leading to our master bedroom. If all went as planned, my piano would be tucked snugly into her reserved space beneath our custom-made wall-mounted closet. Having weathered 30 years of the harsh humidity of

Hong Kong’s sub-tropical weather, the metal parts of my piano’s wheels rolled like my middle-aged hip joints.

One miniscule deviation from the intended path and the movers would scratch my piano and my walls. I held my breath as I do when listening to amateur violinists at weddings—as if doing so will keep them from messing up.

At that moment, my only imagined nightmare was scratches; I had no idea it was my last time supervising her removal and protecting her from harm.

“Ma’am, your piano can’t fit into this spot.”
“It must. I made all the measurements myself.”

Without another word, the movers tried again and again—and again, gingerly wiggling it into place.

“Really. Can’t fit into this spot. You’re an inch and a half short.”

I looked at my husband seeking the consolation he’s usually ready to give. He exhaled a deep sigh of

frustration.

Probably prompted by the sight of my obvious distress, the mover kindly suggested, “Just install it in your living room then.”

While I was considering that possibility, my husband shook his head. He had been sharing our bedroom with me and my piano long enough. Now that we’d moved into a new home we both loved, he was finally ready to convince me to let her go.

“List ten hobbies. I bet piano is not one of them,” he said. “What you need is a desk where you can work on your doctorate program and write your stories—not a piano that you don’t like playing. It just takes up too much space.”

In Hong Kong, space is always a factor. He’d hit all the right notes.

“No, not the living room,” I told the movers.

As visualized by the multiple edi-

tions of floor plans flying between our interior designer and me, the living room was the only communal space in our apartment big enough for our son and our Labrador to play together. And it was where we could entertain family and friends. My husband was reluctant to let go of the plan. So was I.

I paid the movers to install a new dehumidifying pipe for my piano. I knew I would be selling her soon, and that was the least I could do for her before sending her off. At that instant I was naïve enough to assume my piano would continue to be treated like a princess after she was out of my care.

That night, I listed my piano for sale online. Within minutes, a commercial buyer responded.

It's now been two years since I sold her, but I still feel a slight pang in my heart—not often—but I still do when I remember I used to have this piano around me.

The night before her scheduled departure, I wiped my piano's black lustrous finish with her original fleece mitten. Seeing my own reflection in her glossy surface, I marvelled at how she must've witnessed my transformation from a child to a teen, from a young woman to the middle-aged woman looking back at me.

I looked at her back for the first time—all those years she had always stood against a wall. To my surprise, her wooden soundboard still looked brand new.

There, with a black marker, I wrote: “Yuet-

ting Cindy Lam 1992-2022”

Someday, when circumstances allowed, I would advertise widely on social media for the new owner. I'd buy her back and bring her home again.

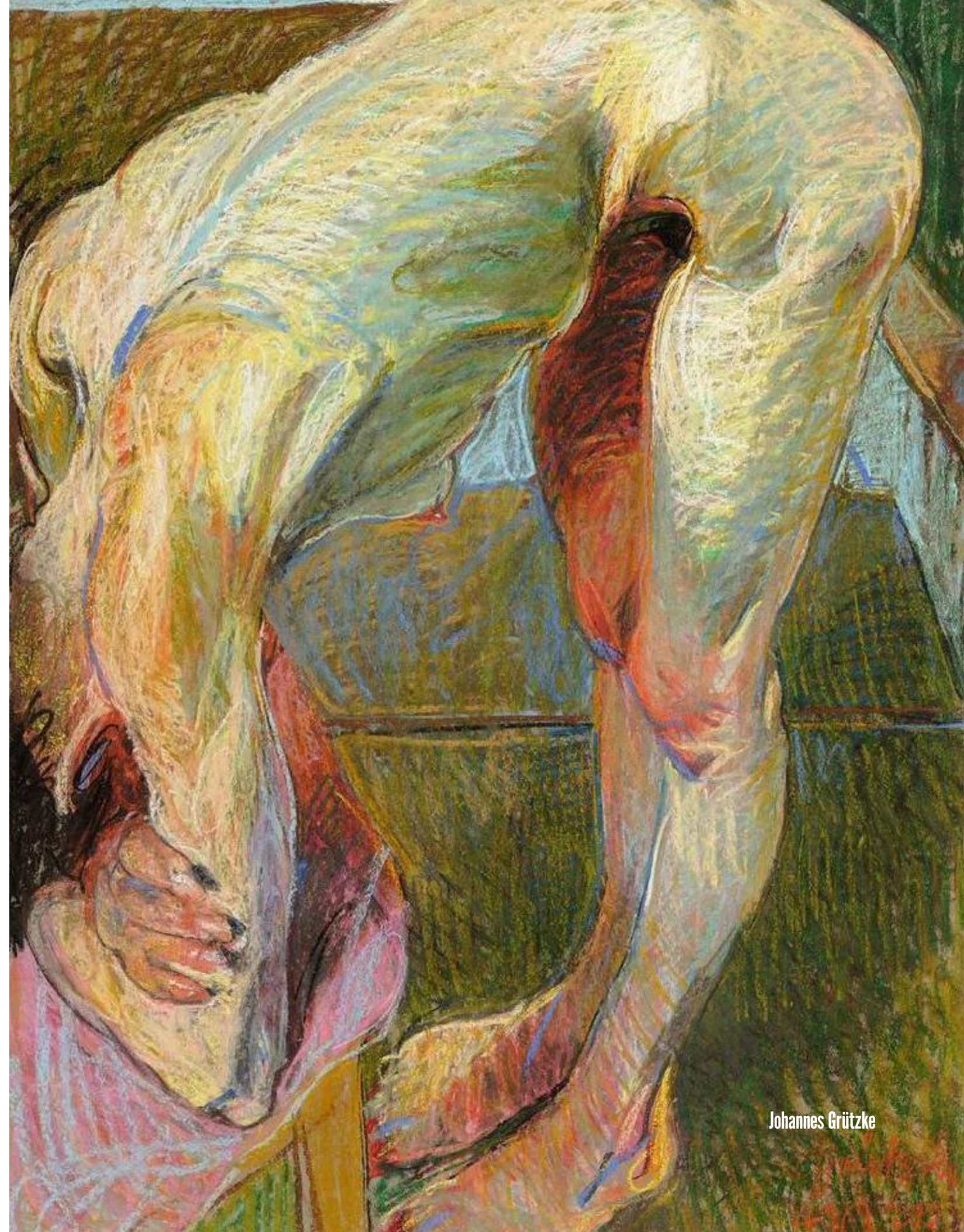
It has taken my husband a while to understand how I can love a piano without enjoying playing. I explained I'd loved her for her elegance, her significance, and because she was a gift from my now-senile father. Usually it's my husband who most gets me, but when it came to my forsaken toy, it was my son who empathised. After all, he's a kid and still capable of feeling great sorrow for losing a toy he's outgrown but loved when he was younger.

In the years since parting ways with my piano, I think of her less and less. Imagining what the new owner is doing to her fills me with dread. And honestly, I've been enjoying writing at my bespoke black walnut desk, installed underneath our wall-mounted closet where my piano was supposed to have snugly fit.

I've heard that people who have lost loved ones never stop grieving, but their lives keep expanding beyond their memories. Their losses are like shards of broken glass buried deep in their hearts. That's the case with my toy story, too. When I least expect the shards of glass, I tread on them with bare feet. My loss will perpetually make new scars, which will heal, but new scars will be made again.

In that way, I'm tattooed all over, too.

Yuetting Cindy Lam
DProf. TESOL



The Dream-catcher

A dreamcatcher flies continents
Hopeful feathers, net cast wide
It blows with the winds
rain-bows with the sun
dreams of catching the moon and
stars

It leaps to conquer
to chase and tame
Unaware, that dreams
are soft snowflakes

They snuggle and melt
in the lover's arms
in the fingers you run
through their crumpled hair

They blend with the snowcones
of summer vacations
Leaving mosaic smiles
and sated hearts

There's a reason
dreams belong to rested eyes
To a soul that's home
in the darkest of nights

For they have never been
about 'Carpe Diem'
That mad-mad struggle
of seizing and being seized!

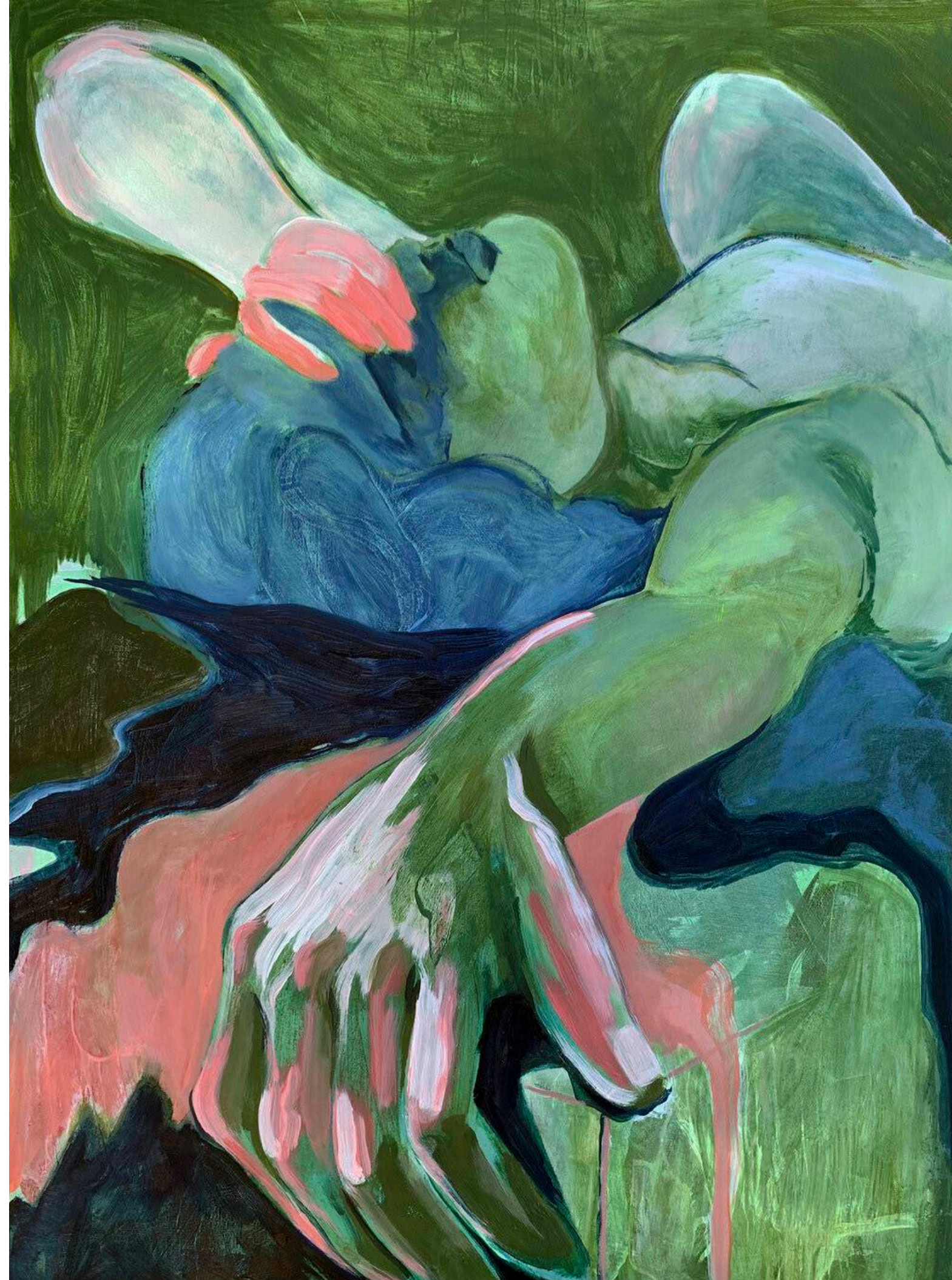
Rather, they are woven
by those ordinary strands
that criss-cross and circle
in an infinity

to form the dreamcatcher
that labour of love
A vibrant mesh
A vibrant mess

It doesn't need chasing
or taming or seizing
Just being...a vessel
of each moment and its glory.

The dreamcatcher is the dream.

Nikita Gupta
MSc TESOL



My Decision to Delete Instagram

By Lizzie Dillon

I deleted my Instagram account last night.

I felt the same release of a post-breakup haircut. I felt like I had removed something parasitic from my body. Instagram might be a software package, a communication media tool, but my brain did not experience it like that. Cutting it off felt almost as freeing as ending a dead-end romance. Instagram had become a personal entity and character in my life, and only by removing it did I realise how attached I had become to the humanoid relationship I had developed with it.

I have had an Instagram account for over ten years.

That is longer than any romantic relationship I've been in, it's longer than any job tenure or degree. It is longer than I have known my best friend, my sister-in-law, and my boyfriend. Instagram held my hand through my teens when my friends and I would cultivate and weed our posts like a garden. The word 'aesthetic' came onto my radar in the context of the social media platform. My fourteen-year-old brain absorbed it as meaning the ~vibe~ of someone's feed – beige and modern in Kim K neutrals, or pastel and feminine? Is it giving cutesy energy? Sophistication? Rich girl? Granola girl? It might be rustic, implying that this is a girl who lives in the moment, with expertly grainy snaps proving that she is so carefree that she doesn't even care about her Instagram looking perfect (her Instagram still looked perfect). Or maybe the pictures are sleek and streamlined, with lots of fancy hotel foyers, posh restaurants, and designer handbags – the kind of girl who was mean and scary, but the teenage me wanted her to like me anyway. Then there were the ratios; how many people followed you vs. how many people you followed. A good ratio was when you followed fewer people than followed you, implying that you were cool and popular in an unattainable way. It was

like you had fans, not friends (which implies reciprocity), and therefore must be taken seriously. That kind of thinking dominated my mid-teens, and it seemed like everyone in the ecosystem of my school year was doing the same thing.

Then I grew up. The aesthetics and ratios and likes and follows became background noise to my increasingly adultified life. As my social circles diversified from the monolith of my secondary school cohort after I left to go to university, I felt less pressure to present, present, present. Then once I left university in the banal chaos of COVID lockdowns, I stopped posting almost entirely. My ratios stopped mattering. It felt like the technological equivalent of letting your hair grow naturally grey after years of dyeing. But even though my Instagram maidenhood had evolved into a frumpy yet realistic matronhood, Instagram still held an extraordinary amount of power over me in the amount of time it took up.

For ten years, apart from the sporadic periods where I deleted the app from my phone – like an addict might delete their gambling apps – Instagram was my morning and evening ritual. Some people pray or text their boyfriend first thing, but many mornings Instagram dug her fingers into my amygdala and got to me first. I have spent an obscene amount of time scrolling. I would seek consolation by reminding myself that because I didn't post and rarely liked anything, I wasn't partaking in the phenomenon that was stealing time, energy and focus from everyone else around me.

The constant chatter was comforting and filled some part of me that was craving a community where I was known, seen, and understood. A funny reel felt like an in-joke between me and an imagined community of people who shared my sense of humour.



Jess Allen "She was reading a book"



Jess Allen "I even dream about you"

I would spend hours exploring pictures and videos of other people doing my hobbies – baking, gardening, and reading. I would experience the proxy pride it would have felt to have done those things that I always said I wanted to do – like a ghost accomplishment that is not half as satisfying as if I had really grown that garden or baked that cake – but softened by the convenience of not having to pay for the ingredients, find the time, learn the skills, fail, and then be left with the quasi-nihilism of having done it but without three thousand likes and hundreds of comments recognising the talent and approving of me. Some people say that social media has pushed for the monetisation of all hobbies –if you can't make a small business from it, then it is pointless doing it in the first place. I think that is displaced. Sure, the money would be nice, and I'm not immune to whimsical fantasies of monetising my hobbies and living off the proceeds, but I think the real trick Instagram has played is convincing me that there is no point pursuing my interests if I don't have the virtual eyes

of thousands of people validating, admiring, and wishing that they had done it too.

Instagram made life just comfortable enough to tolerate the sting of not achieving anything. It replicated the ghost of friendship and community, it simulated (albeit paled) the glow of achievement and learning. It handed to me whenever I asked, in brightly packaged wrappers, moreish and hyper-sweet candies that lacked all the goalposts of nutrition, fibre and minerals, but contained just enough energy to stop me from looking elsewhere. I think it may have been better for me to have starved because then I might have been forced into action.

When I was struggling with the decision of whether to delete my account for good, the thing that scared me the most was the prospect of missing out on the opportunities for learning and connection that Instagram offered. I was scared to lose a way of contacting people that I met when travelling. I was scared to miss out on the hours and

hours of footage of reels giving life advice – from supplements to morning routines. I was scared to miss crucial information about how to improve my hobbies with different techniques. I don't think those fears were displaced. It is true that the internet, and Instagram as an extension of that, offers unprecedented quantities of information to the public. But I don't think it is worth the cost. Instagram offered me the potential, but not the reality of manifesting that learning and connection. Rarely, if ever, did Instagram alone allow me to build a genuine friendship with someone. Health and wellness reels made me feel empowered with the knowledge of how to make positive changes in my life, but how often did I make those changes? And for the changes that I did implement, were the gains worth the tremendous expense in time and focus that they cost me? Did those cutesy videos on hand embroidery techniques, or book recommendations, or growing-plants-from-veggie-leftovers actually get me to do the thing? Deleting my Instagram didn't come at no-cost, I have lost

easy access to a wealth of information that made me feel buoyant, but I have gained something back that I think is worth it.

So, what have I gained?

At the time of writing, it has only been thirteen hours since deleting my account, so truthfully, I don't know yet. But I feel a strange peace. I feel a silence of the chatter of the world in my pocket, that over the past ten years became background noise to me. I feel grounded in the knowledge that the only people in my life who I let into my head are people who I have met in person and trust. I woke up this morning with the world feeling a lot smaller, but somehow richer. I feel safer - like the impenetrable barrier of reality and geography protects me from the outside half-imagined, half-real virtual mob. Now it is just me in my room, without the world banging at the door. I don't want to speak too soon, but I think it is telling that this is the first article I've ever actually finished writing.

St Leonard's College: celebrating 50 years of postgraduate excellence

St Leonard's College is celebrating 50 years since its reconstitution as a college for postgraduate students through a series of events and activities. Dr Kostas Zafeiris, Executive Officer to St Leonard's College, reflects on its origins and shares the anniversary plans.

St Leonard's College has been at the heart of postgraduate life at the University of St Andrews since 1974, when it was revived as a college for postgraduate students. This year marks 50 years since its reconstitution, although the college's history dates back as far as 1512.

The anniversary year will be marked by a series of events, culminating in the 50th Anniversary St Leonard's College Lecture and Dinner during the winter graduation period in December 2024. Activities throughout the year will provide opportunities for the University and members of St Leonard's College – staff, students and alumni – to reflect on its rich heritage and the transformative impact it has had on our postgraduate community at St Andrews.

Medieval origins

St Leonard's College was the second of the three endowed collegiate societies within the University. It was founded in 1512 by Archbishop Alexander Stewart and Prior John Hepburn. Fittingly, philanthropy and the support of students with no other means to study was at the centre of its foundation.

The Charter of James IV (the foundational document of St Leonard's College) describes how 'Poor Scholars of honest conversation and upright life' would be chosen to be the first students. Indeed, its original name was the College of Poor Clerks of the Church of Saint Andrews, though it quickly became known as the College of St Leonard, after the ancient patron of the chapel that was its home.

Pedagogy and academic study were central to the newly founded college: "... twenty Scholars, all instructed in the Grammar sufficiently to undertake the other liberal arts ... and six Scholars well trained in the Arts ... very earnest and continuous at study and lectures, to be ruled under the Master Principal; and these Scholars to be maintained diligently (and especially if they fall ill, to be tended with fatherly care and merciful kindness ...".

In the 1540s, St Leonard's College acquired significant autonomy; it disassociated itself from the Priory in 1545, and in 1579 it was reconstituted (alongside the College of St Salvator) as a college of arts and philosophy. During the early 18th century, it was seen as strongly Jacobite. In 1702 a fire destroyed the hall and other buildings of the College, which were never rebuilt.

On 24 June 1747 – as student numbers and finances at the University of St Andrews declined – the two arts colleges were amalgamated into the United College of St Salvator and St Leonard. Despite the St Leonard's College buildings being in better condition than those of St Salvator's, it was the latter

that was chosen to be the seat of the new United College.

In 1772 the buildings and gardens of St Leonard's passed into private hands, with the exception of the St Leonard's Chapel, which was explicitly excluded from the sale and still remains a part of the University estate today.

The site at the top of the Pends has remained a place of education ever since. Today, it is home to the independent St Leonards School – formerly St Leonards School for Girls – which has occupied the site since 1883.

A legacy reimagined

From 1747 onwards, St Leonard's College existed in name alone until discussions began in the early 1970s to revive it as a centre for postgraduates. As early as 1972, The Alumnus Chronicle reported that "[a] service was held in the ancient Chapel of St. Leonard on 3 November [1971] to mark the revival of the College of St. Leonard where a multi-disciplined institute of Postgraduate Studies will be established. [...] The University still seeks more Common Room facilities for its graduates as part of this College".

In its June 1974 issue The Alumnus Chronicle reassured readers that the revival of the postgraduate college was on course and reported on the leadership and membership of the College, as well as the buildings – namely Deanscourt [sic], St Leonard's Chapel and "other buildings in the vicinity".

In October 1974 Professor Douglas Lloyd,

the first Provost of St Leonard's College in modern times, outlined the vision for its reconstitution in the Draft Constitution of St Leonard's College. He explained how it would enrich the life of the University and cater exclusively for postgraduate students by:

caring for their wellbeing
promoting intellectual contact between post-graduates and staff of different disciplines, thereby stimulating interest in the research activities of the University generally
promoting social contact between postgraduates, thereby creating a sense of belonging to a wider institution in addition to their departmental loyalties.

In November 1974 the University Senate approved the constitution of the revived college. It has been central to the University and its postgraduate community ever since. All postgraduates are automatically enrolled in St Leonard's College and become part of this vibrant and unique community at St Andrews.

Championing postgraduate study

Since 1974, St Leonard's College has supported postgraduate students, working closely with the University to ensure that they are at the forefront of everything from training programmes (such as MSkills and GRADskills) to bespoke training sessions, supported by CEED. The College, along with the Careers Centre, provides comprehensive professional and employability advice – including opportunities for placements and internships – wellbeing and mental health support and ongoing academic support.

In 2021, St Leonard's College, and the postgraduate community, acquired a physical home: Old Burgh School on Abbey Walk is a dedicated, modern centre of learning for all postgraduate students. It provides study, teaching and meeting spaces as well as informal areas for socialising and connecting with colleagues.

Postgraduate student support

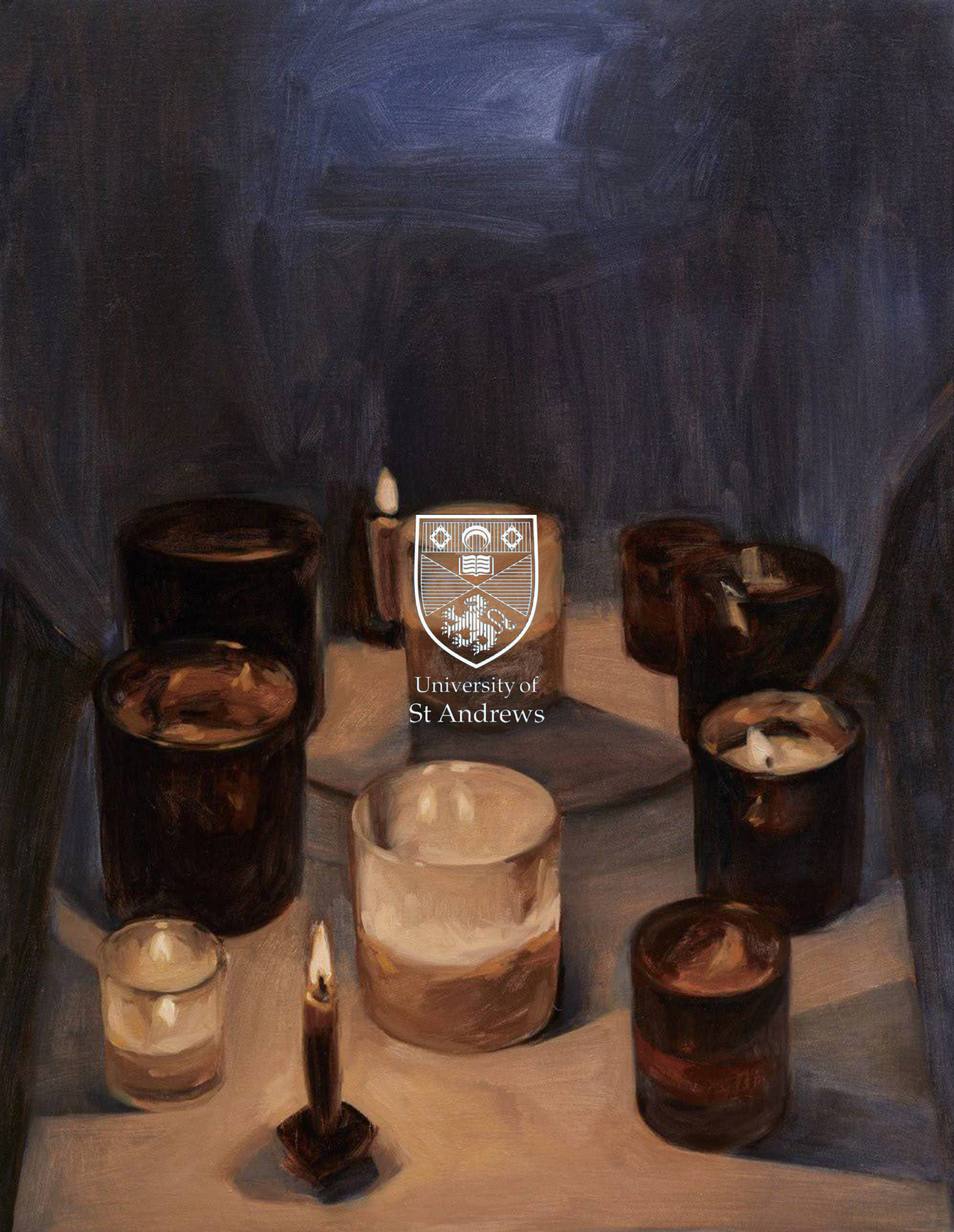
St Leonard's has supported countless postgraduate students through scholarships programmes, which have been attracting and supported the very best students and researchers, regardless of financial circumstances. Amongst others, St Leonard's College currently offer a range of scholarships for postgraduate taught one-year Masters students, supports doctoral students of exceptional ability in an area of research aligned with the University's research strategy through our World Leading Scholarships, offers tailored opportunities for collaborative PhDs through our Global PhD programme by enabling doctoral students to undertake research at both St Andrews and partner institutions, and offers grants to support the learning of foreign languages or study-related travel.

We hope to be able to continue supporting excellent research and to expand further our provision and support for widening participation at postgraduate study in years to come.

We hope that the 50th anniversary will encourage our postgraduate alumni to reflect on your time in St Andrews, and to join us as we celebrate the successes of all our postgraduate students during.

Kostas Zafeiris'
Executive Officer St Leonard's College
Article for St. Andrews Alumni Chronicle





University of
St Andrews