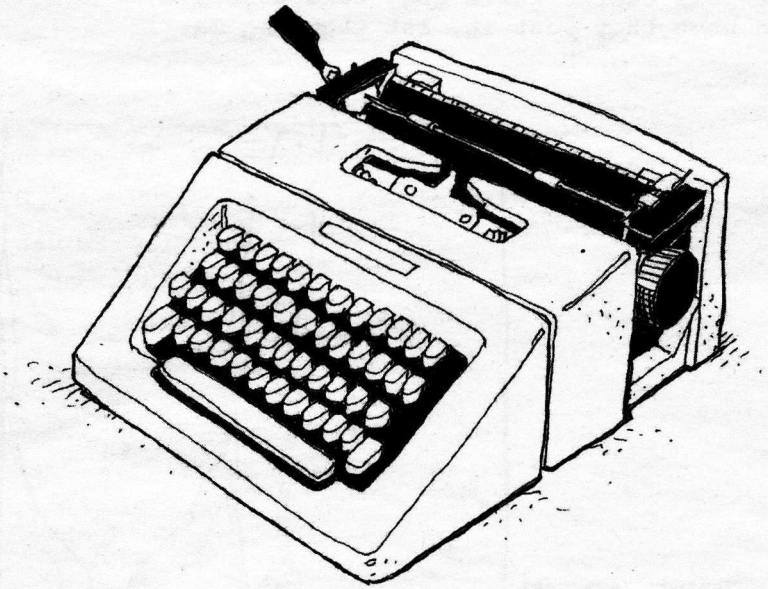
Playing Favorites

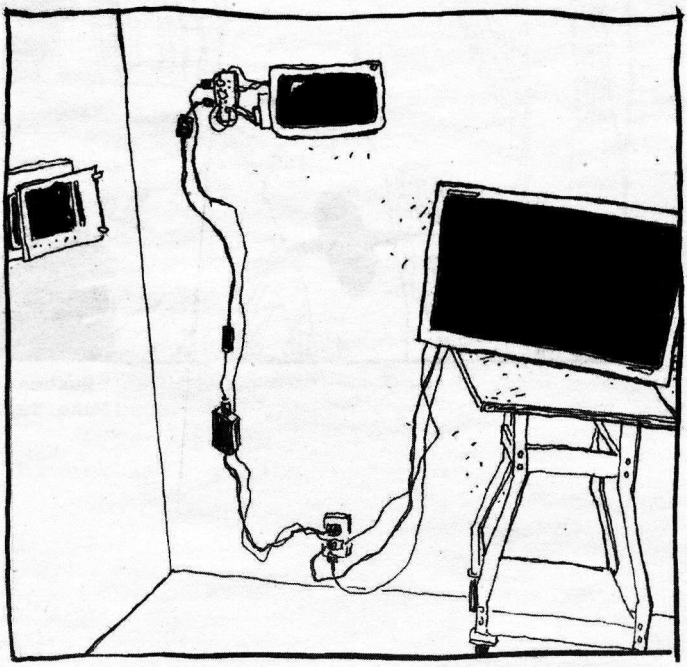
A.W. STROUSE



I.

(To viewers of Maggie's installation)

Some sharper critic may say
   that you're some narcissistic dupe,
a Brooklyn hipster arrivé
   locked in a po-mo feedback loop
who lets a calm, surveilling gaze
   pander to ego's petty needs
baring all on your Facebook page
   and transfixed by refracting screens.
But no sharp critic, me. For I, too, am vain:
Like this poem, follow me, tag me. Be my friend.



Stranger Land, Maggie Hazen

II.

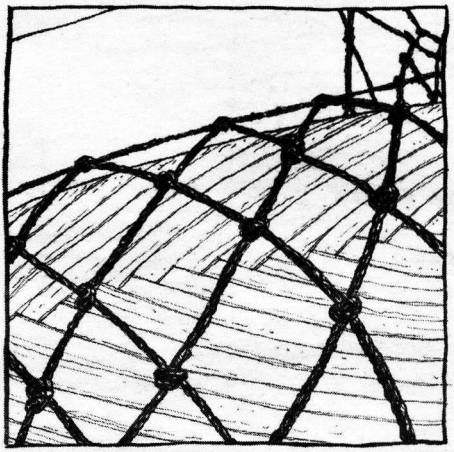
(To viewers of Scout's boat)

I bet you think I should compose
upon this boat some epic poem
on Menelaus and his bros,
      but I'm too dumb.

Aint got mad skills to navigate
that mythic realm, where Fate's quick turn
makes widowed women ululate
      and cities burn;

where heroes---chatty, talkative---
are tempest-tossed and forced to roam
for years, until the fugitive
      is welcomed home.

Aint got Scout's comic genius, nor
his Sophoclean tragic flair
which conjures, so this ship appears
      in Brooklyn air.

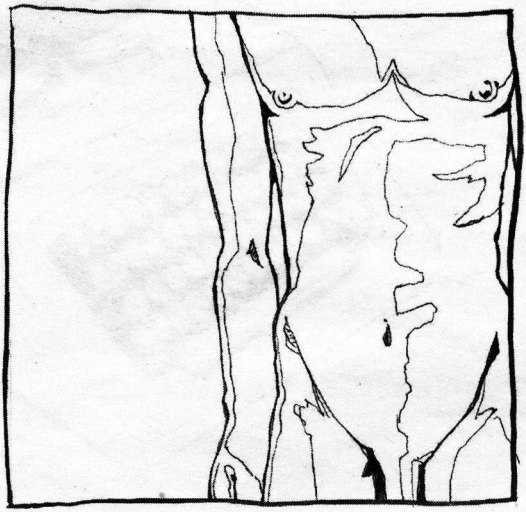


Shape of doubt
David (scout) McQueen

III.

(To the boy in Hiroki's painting)

Sweet boy, don't speak, for I can't bear
to hear for whom you're standing there;
for whom you're nude, whose pearls finesse
your adolescent awkwardness;
for whom your lanky limbs grow fine
in graceful, undulating line;
for whom your teenage torso, long
points that V down to your schlong,
which hangs so heavy, till the frame
cuts the tip to spare your shame.
   Or do you spare me, darling boy
and hide what would my hope destroy?
Please, hide from me what rival viewer
wins you, or my heart will shatter.
But pose there, while they take a selfie,
and when they post it, let them tag me.



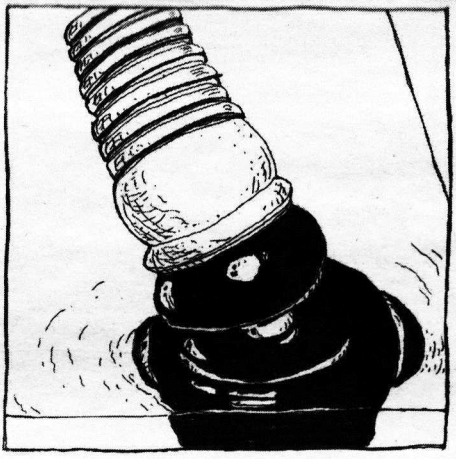
Tsutomu Yamaguchi
Hiroki Otsuka

IV.

(To Pate, on her ice cream sculpture)

Hey, Pate:
Tell where, what date
will we, your fans
lick at your wooden cones?
Mister Softies,
the Daz, and Tastee Freez
can cool the summer heat
and sate our tooth with icy sweet;
and yet your sculpted custards
outdo those cups, outdo all soft-serve curds.

Please, Pate.
We just can't wait
to try your treats
which hungry gazing eats
and drips with stains
like chocolate---wooden grains
lathed smooth like vanilla.
So, serve us up a twist now, willya?
And why not let it plop
and melt like a memento mori scoop!



Melt Down
Pate

V.

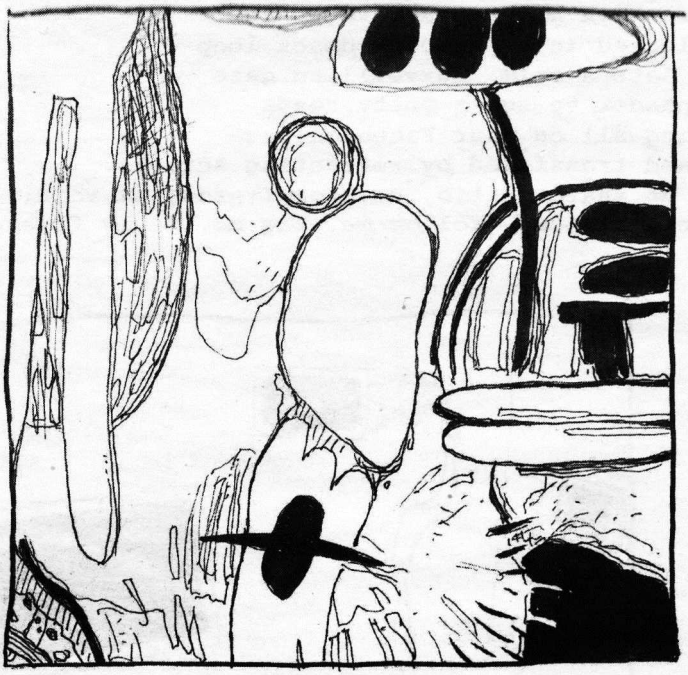
(To critics of Mike's painting)

Listen up,
art critics.
Think you're cool?
Yo,
shit-for-brains.
You live in
allusion-ville.

Whatcha got?
History?
References?
Post-
structural
dada doo?
Yeah, fuck that shit.

Try and say
Paul Klee's name---
I dare you.
Stop
feeding me
your clichés
and let's get real.

My dawg here
got weird eyes
and weird hat.
Shit.
You aint never gonna guess
why he love
them berry bushes.

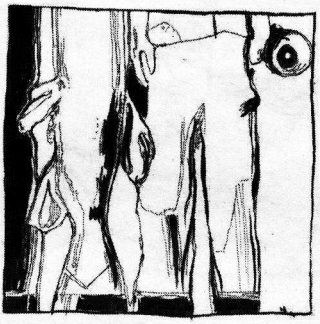


Bushmaster
Mike Taylor

VI.

(To the fish in Charlotte's painting)

Though dead,
like a man who walks upright, you stand
your head
in the sky with your tail on the land.
Some say
that "humankind's postures and features
betray
our nature as rational creatures."
But you---
when drug from the depths by a fisher---
subdue
and capture the man who'd play captor.
Your world
is a prism of color and water,
unfurled
so our world is awash with your shimmer.
Your scales
turn all forms into painterly patches,
unveils
how reason is just what light catches,
and now
the feet and the face of the fisher
are drowned like the sky by your water.



Father, Son, Fish
Charlotte Evans

VII.

(To the glass dome in Sam's sculpture)

my eye's too rough
my pen too big
my clumsy poem
not fine enough.

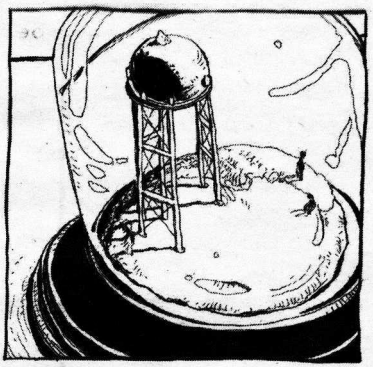
can't quite relate
O, little dome
to this fine world
that you create.

you say: LOOK HERE!
you say: SQUINT HARD!
you pull me through
your glassy sphere,

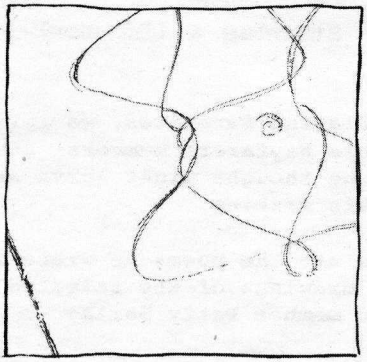
which, switching scale,
makes me seem huge
and huge seem small.
with your thumbnail

you underscore:
THINGS SMALL MEAN MUCH.
and size is just
a metaphor,

which circumscribes
and amplifies
more meaning than
my over-long diatribes.



State Park
Sam Ritter



String Games
Christy Gast

VIII.

(To Christy Gast, on her embossings)

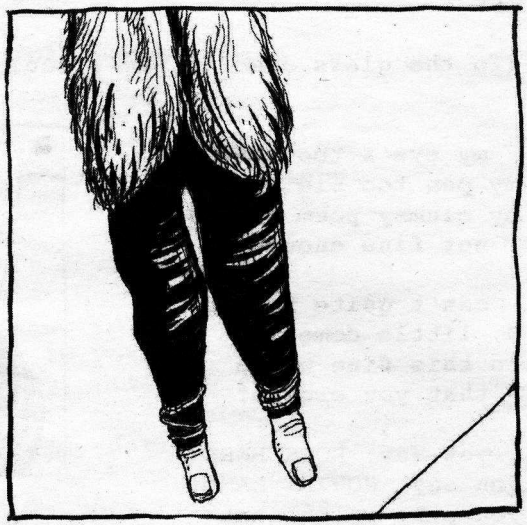
Miss Christy Gast Gast Gast
Your strings embossed bossed bossed
on paper woven
woven, woven
show through like ghosts
ghosts
ghosts.

IX.

(To the figure outside the frame in David's
sleepyhead portrait)

Who are you, or what
   this snoozer's gazing at?
Hard to say. What if
   he's only thinking of
your tax abatements,
   your thrill at re-runs?
Do you sober him
   with your skepticism?
Or fail to impress
   with mediocre poems?
Maybe you love him
   (or he you). But urban
contingencies shake
   his home-spun, rustic faith?
Whatever you are,
   sufficient be your charms
to distract him from sleep,
   from flamboyant, embroidered blankets.

untitled
Dave Shaughnessy



untitled
Janel Schultz

X.

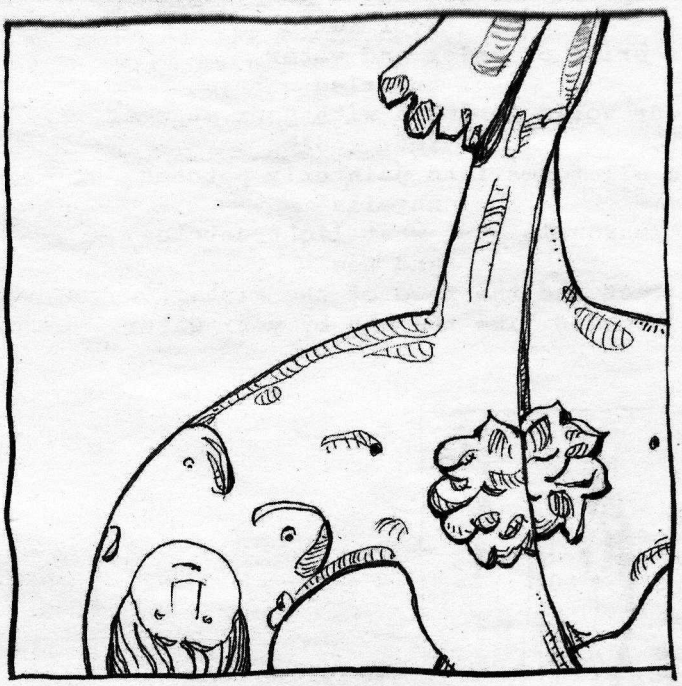
(To the puppeteer operating Janel's rabbit puppet)

if the spirit
of this rabbit
fled the puppet
and your finger
lifts the string, or
if it drops it,
you're no robot
but the spirit
of that rabbit.

XI.

(To the women in Evelyn's sculpture)

to me it seems that he must be a perv:
the cuckoo cooing where your cooters kiss---
where you rub raw and writhe, caress and curve
careening toward that blissful precipice.
or do you kiss, accompanied by his tweet?
he measures out your rhythms like a clock
since sex, like song, is metered by a beat:
love keeps its time with birds, like crowing cocks.



Cuckoo clock, Evelyn Donnelly

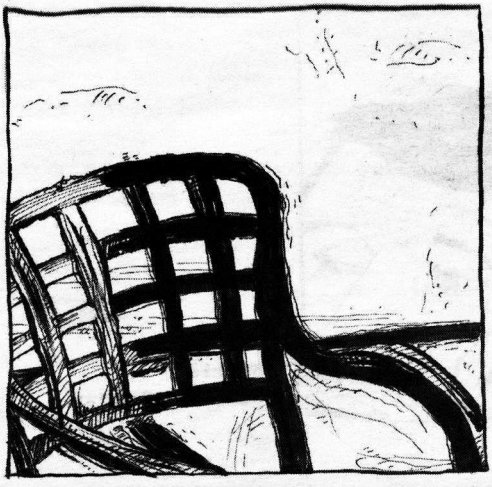
XII.

(To the viewer of Maureen's chair painting)

Leave this art space
      and go back home.
Tonight, forget my little poem.
But I know you'll
      remember
this painting of a spartan chair.

You'll think back on
      how it is wrought
with brushstrokes tied into a knot---
horizon tying
      into form,
its cold steel cast on flesh-warm floor.

You'll lounge upon
      its lyric lines
whose light with shadow intertwines
and weave into your
      memory
its dream-form while you're slumbering.



untitled
Maureen O'Leary

Playing Favorites

A.W. Strouse & the members of Wayfarers

For ***Playing Favorites***, we invited A.W. Strouse to explore Wayfarers members' studios and select works that he thought might serve as points of departure for his writing.

These are the poems he wrote in response, illustrated with drawings of the selected works by our beloved board member Patty Barth.

Writing by A.W. Strouse
Drawings by Patty Barth
Exhibition

I. Maggie Hazen
II. David (Scout) McQueen
III. Hiroki Otsuka
IV. Pate
V. Mike Taylor
VI. Charlotte Evans
VII. Sam Ritter
VIII. Christy Gast
IX. Dave Shaughnessy
X. Janel Schultz
XI. Evelyn Donnelly
XII. Maureen O'Leary

Exhibition concept and publication layout by David (Scout) McQueen and George Ferrandi

12.16.16
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