



homesick

paintings
2020-22

cort hartle

Recently a friend suggested that I put a book together of my artwork. I thought that was a pretty good idea, even if just to finally put the work to rest in my head, so I'm doing that now with some of my favorite paintings I made between 2020 and 2022. Much of this work was made in response to various longings, as if by externalizing that which is desired, by putting a name to it and speaking that name aloud, I am bringing it closer to being realized.

When I make art I feel like I am opening a door between myself and the world. The narrative interplay between my most private, hidden self and the self that exists in relation to people, places, and things is something I've kept coming back to since I started painting in 2015.

The paintings included in this zine are mostly acrylic on salvaged plywood or canvas, with a couple gouache on paper works thrown in. I'm interested in the intersections of memory, storytelling, and place, and a lot of that shows up in my work through the use of repetitive mark making and patterns--grass, hair, veins, barbed wire, droplets of blood and water--and fragmented lines of text. The writing accompanying the work here is similarly filtered through a hazy lens of nostalgic half-memory of places and events.

Making art, for me at least, is something that's joyful and cathartic and vulnerable and not entirely academic. It helps me see and be seen alongside other people, which otherwise often feels like a difficult task in this end-stage-capitalist-colonialist world we're living in currently. It's nice to be able to say, "this is what it feels like to be a person alive in this exact place at this exact moment in time" and have others nod their heads "yes, yes, I feel that way too, in my own way."

The irony of titling this collection "homesick" considering the years it was produced is not lost on me. Collectively, we were all at home (or should have been, depending on circumstance) facing uncertainty, illness, precarity, state violence. And then suddenly we weren't at home anymore but we're all still facing those things.

I spent most of my life in Florida and then moved to Austin, Texas in 2020 at the age of 25. After returning to Florida just two years later, everything feels somehow different in a way that's difficult to express. The slash pines have been cut down and 5-over-1's have been erected in their place. The music venues in Tampa/St. Pete are all shutting down. The governor is trying to kill us. There is a tangible sense of loss that settles on all my friends' faces when they think no one is looking. I think if home is something you take with you wherever you are, then so is homesickness.



The worms crawl in, the worms crawl out (2021)

Are the worms themselves also transformed? No, they are just worms. What does it look like to exist suspended over a constant threshold of not-yet-breakdown? I am held there hanging by my shirt collar, pinched between two fingers named Mercy and Cruel Waiting. The feeling of grief is present but the act of mourning does not come. I sit too long in that borderland of no closure and my insides rot and rot and rot.

Outside, the heat does nothing to mask the smell. My studio is in a shed next to the garden, and the Texan summer stirs up old aches. Back home in Florida, my mom builds a garden to cope with her cancer treatment; in my backyard between three major highways, I build a garden to cope with time and distance. Daikon radish, garlic, marigolds, pole beans, tomatoes, nasturtiums, fungus gnats, earthworms, beetles, ants, centipedes, soldier flies. As I paint I inhale the fumes of Death's labors coming off the compost pile.



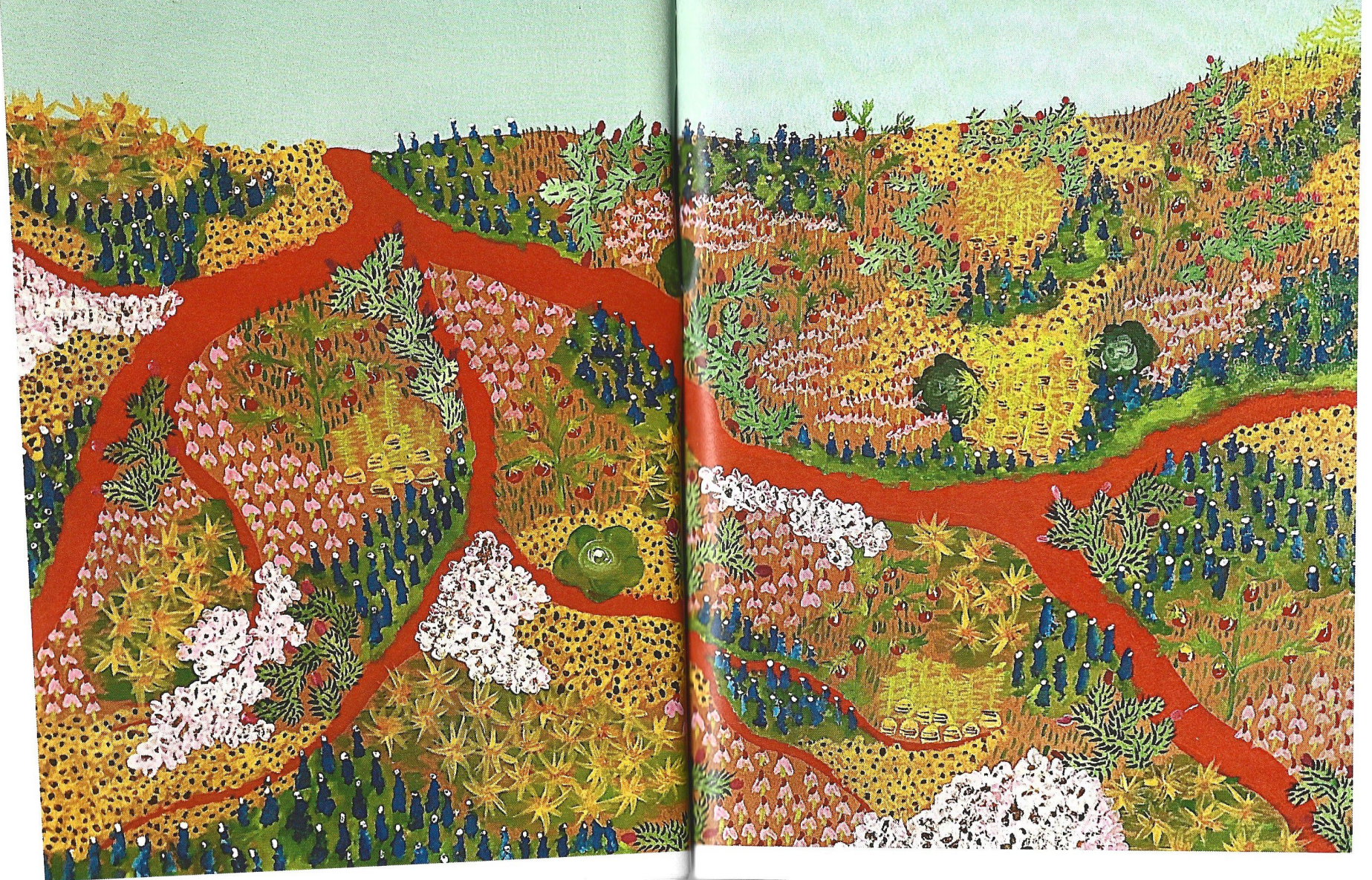


Hide and seek (2020)



I will always be with you (2022)

OUR PATHS CROSSED BUT WE DID NOT MEET



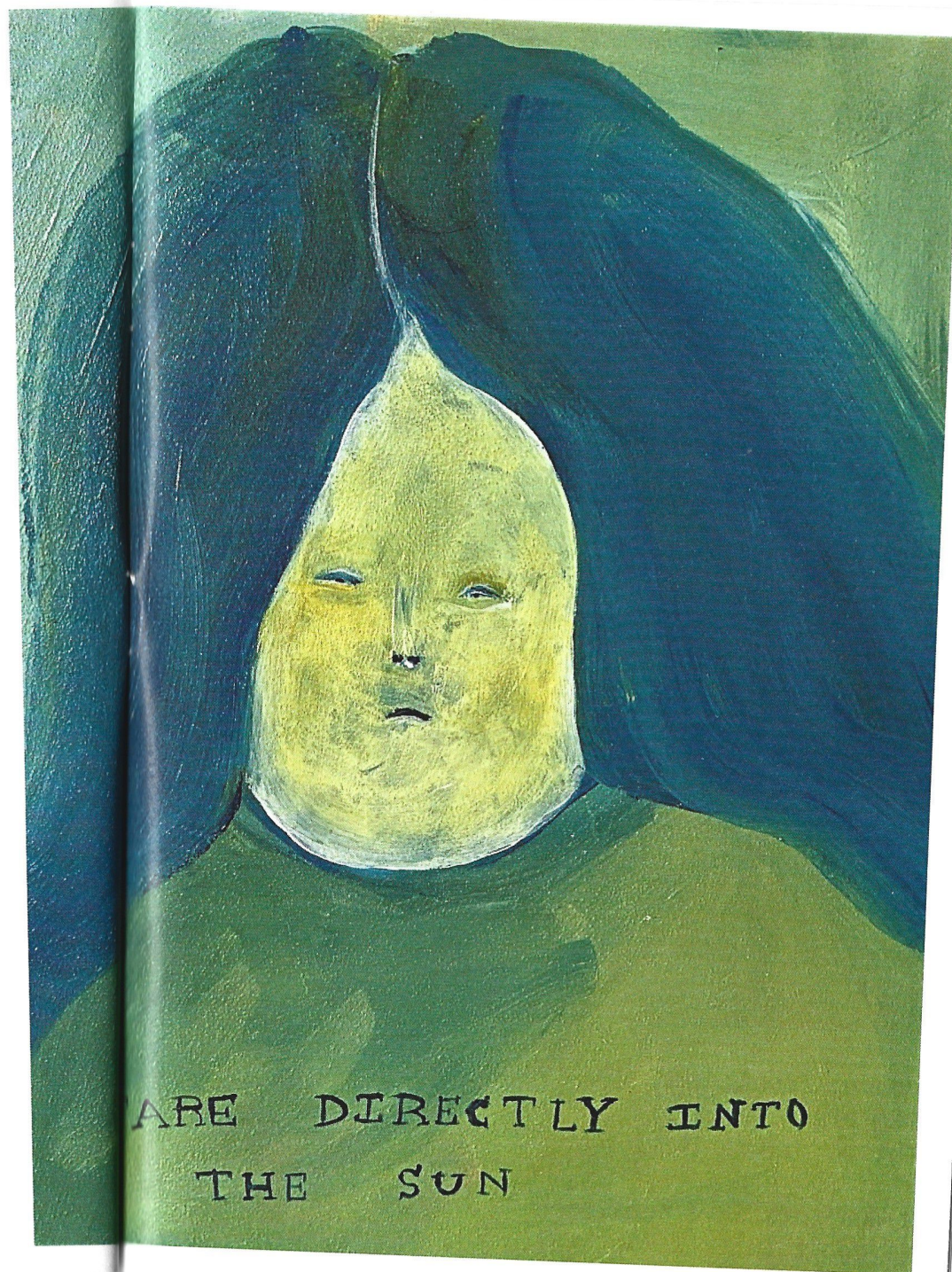
Our paths crossed but we did not meet
(2022)

The highways are long and empty. They keep making them longer, wider, and emptier still. The asphalt absorbs everything: light, sound, movement, intent; in return it spits out the kind of permeating loneliness that has marked the past century. Bluebonnets explode out of the medians in the springtime and bring with them a salve: infinite, boundless, excruciating joy.

It took me two years to make this painting: I crossed paths with it but couldn't bear to meet it because I knew what message it was carrying rolled up under its arm. Originally the red tributaries were highways, the landscape bare. Then three things happened: 1. I read Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking*, 2. I went to Enchanted Rock by myself for my 27th birthday and it was so quiet I could hear the wings of a crow flapping 20 feet away, and 3. I decided I was ready to be part of the world again.

Stare directly into the sun (2020)

The palms whisper promises broken like ground-floor windows (I swear they were like that when we moved in). We're stricken by a feeling whose words we can't pin by naming it, so instead we hold up mirrors to one another over our shoulders.



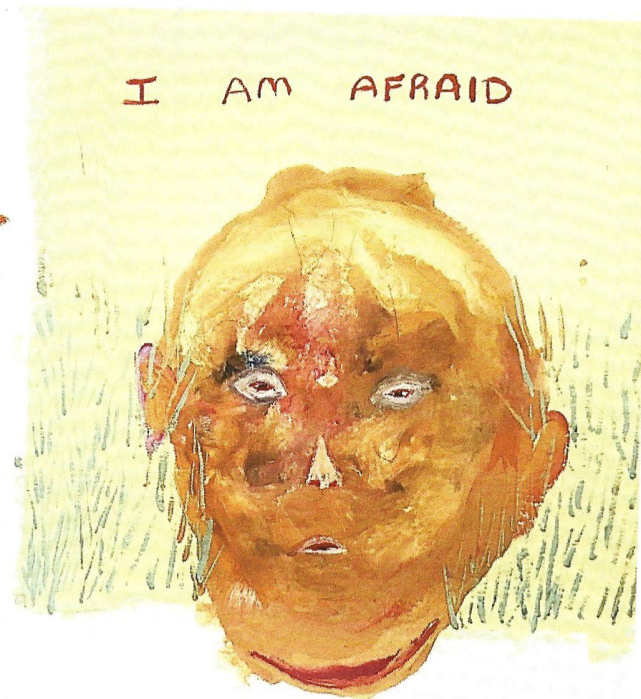


Above: *Floating together* (2022)

Top right: *I am afraid* (2020)

Bottom right: *Thinking* (2020)

I don't think I remember you
(I don't think I want to)





I want to be good so bad that it makes me bad. I made these paintings the summer I was diagnosed with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. The most effective treatment for OCD is called Exposure and Response Therapy, wherein you intentionally and repeatedly expose yourself to the thing you fear most and then do nothing about it until the anxiety subsides on its own. It's super fun stuff. I've always had this irrational fear that deep down I'm secretly a terrible, evil person, and that one day I'll wake up and do something vile and irredeemable and then immediately forget that I did it.

The thing about intrusive thoughts is they make you see the worst version of yourself, but it's a version that doesn't actually exist, and then in order to make them go away you have to not care about that person existing so much.

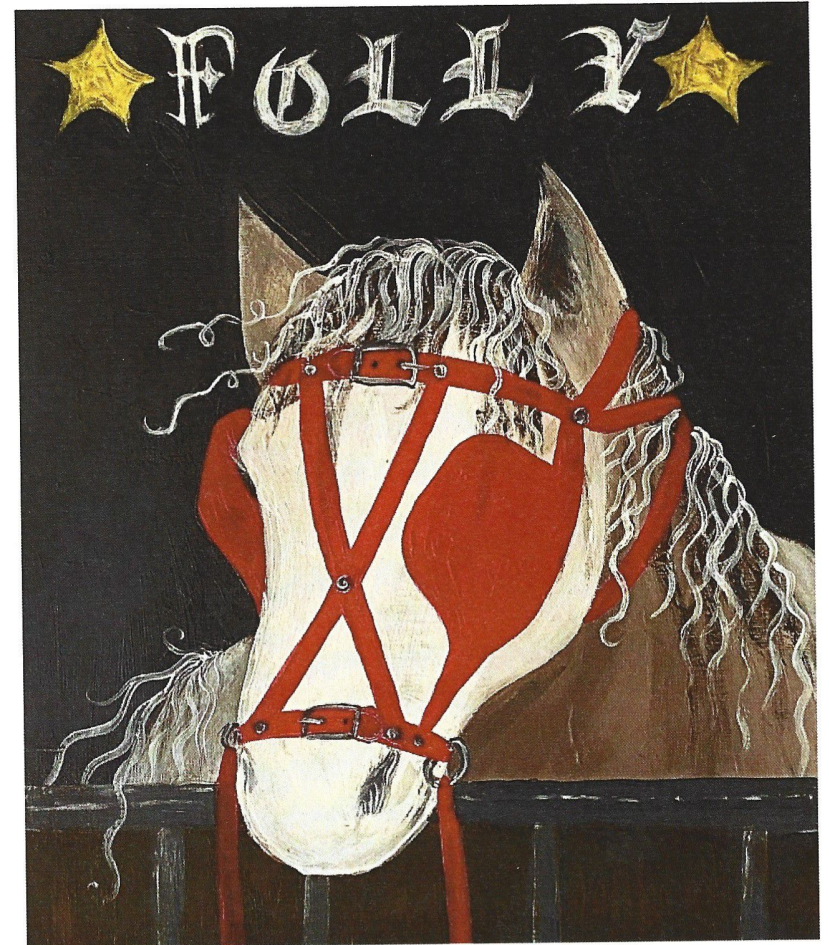


Left: *Self portrait as a cat knocking over a glass of water (2020)*
Above: *Two rivers in conversation (2020)*

I WILL EAT YOUR
PAIN BUT ONLY IF
YOU ASK ME TO



*I will eat your pain but
only if you ask me to (2022)*



Folly (2022)

It hurts me too (2022)

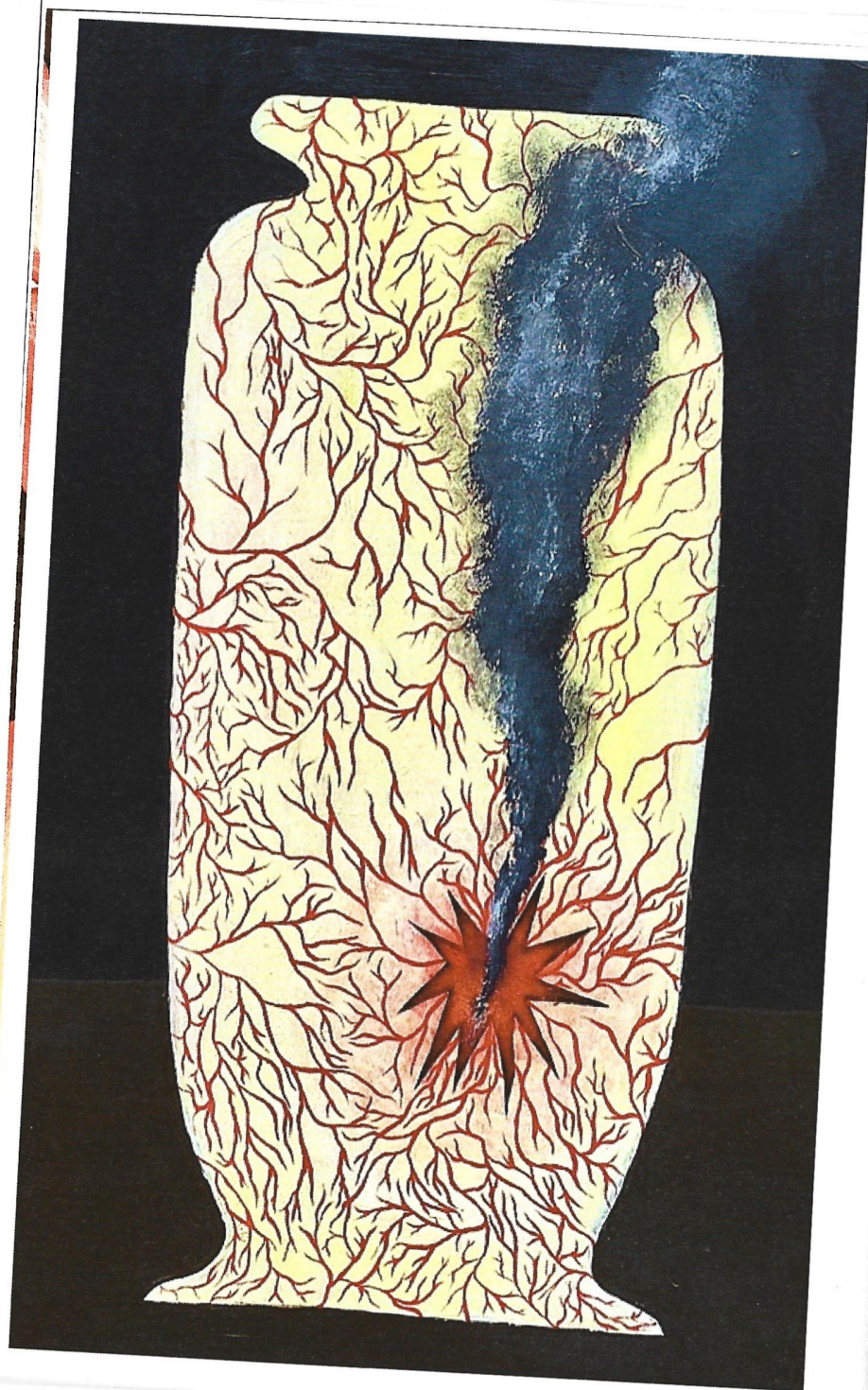
I used to wake up every Sunday to be a
fisher of man. Then I woke up every Sunday
to be a fisher of fish. Then I woke up every
Sunday to say what the fish of the day was.
Then I started sleeping in.



You'll come back to haunt you (2022)





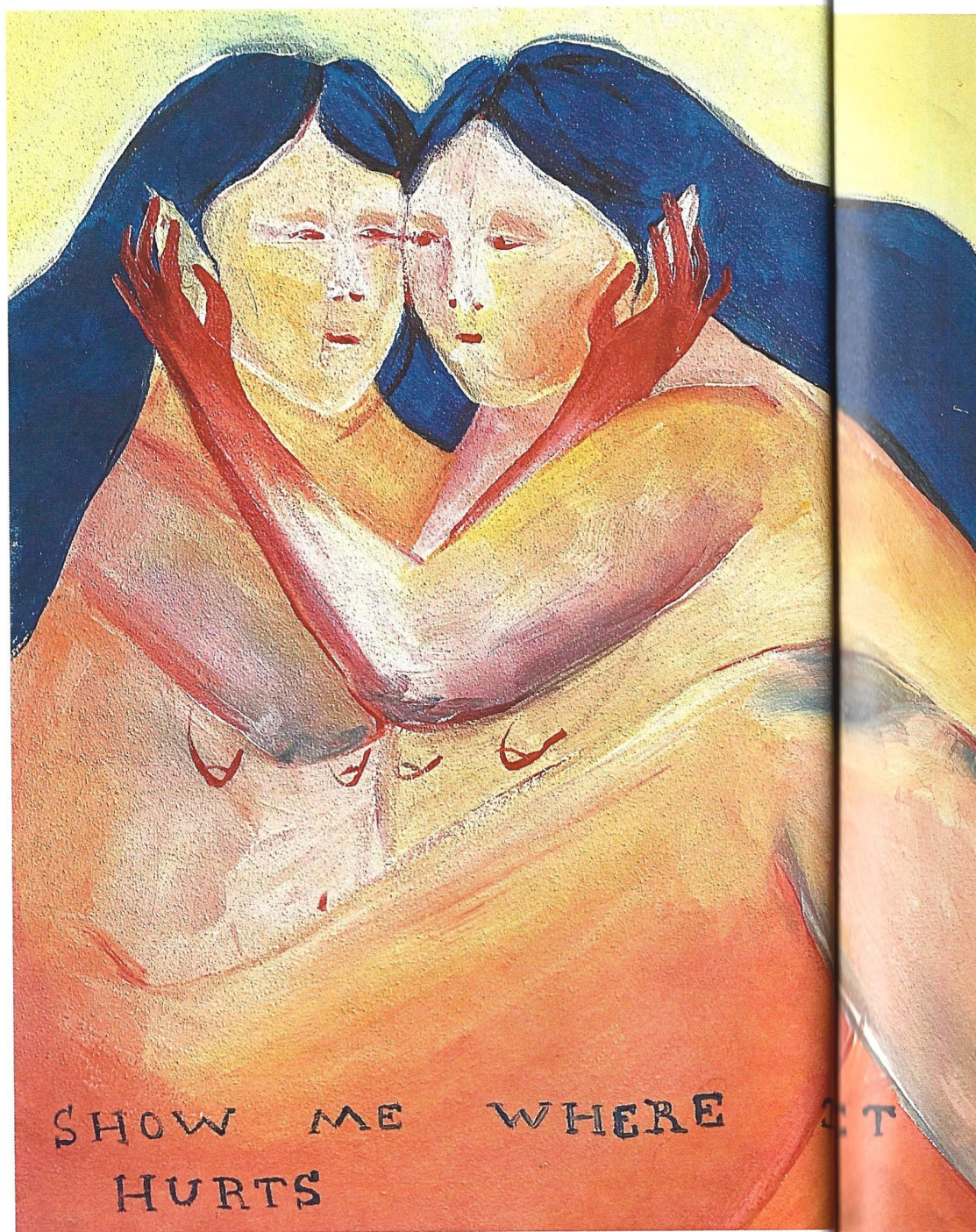


Vessel I (2022)

My blood is waking up again but it's still 5 minutes before the alarm goes off. I can't decide whether I want to let it get that last stray precious sleep. I don't. I can't run as fast or as far as I used to on account of my back never fully healed from the time I almost died. Do you still think I'm pretty even though I don't look the same way in my head as how you see me? Haters will say, "we're glad you're here. You matter. You matter."

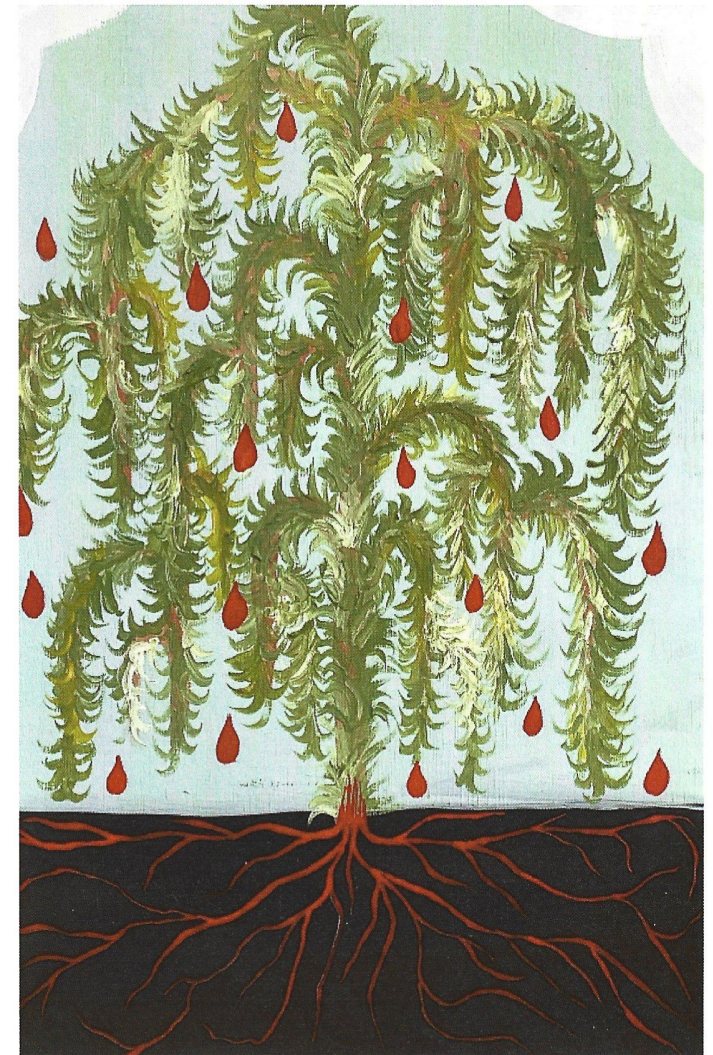


I struggle to contain it (detail) (2020)



Left: *Show me where it hurts* (2020)
Below: *Weeping willow* (2022)

What can I do for you? And you for me?
And us for the we that is you and I?
And us for the we that is all of us,
including you and I and all others?



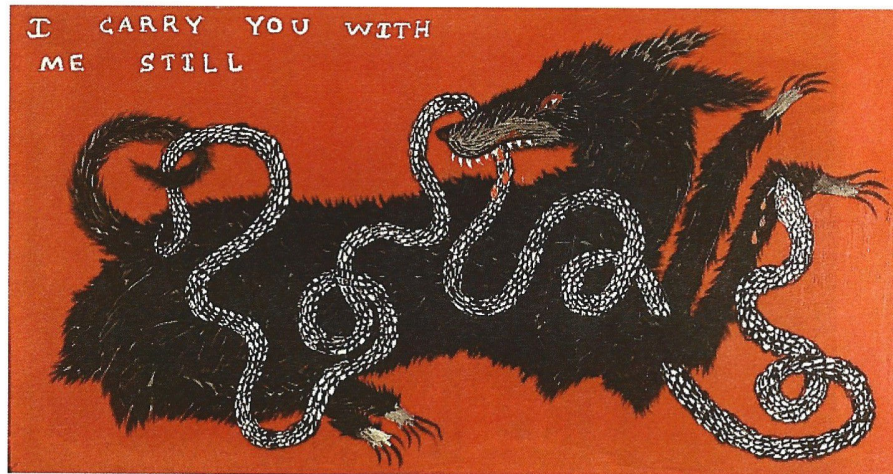
Salt marsh (2022)

There is a man-made beach where I'm from in Hernando County called Pine Island. Three acres of white sand and concrete are held together by a low seawall and petrified sandbags, a fabricated haven of leisure in contrast to the surrounding estuary with its dense sawgrass, needle rush, cabbage palm, fiddler crab, cottonmouth in relentless shades of browns and greens. The brackish water is always warm, always still, and never more than knee-deep. The "wet sand" as we called it when we were kids is really just swamp muck under a thin layer of imported beach sand. It's black and smells of sulfur, and makes for gothic drip sandcastles that rival fortresses of various underworlds. A chain link fence juts out into the water, separating the park from sparse stilt houses on the other side. In our childhood fearlessness we chase horseshoe crabs and small stingrays past the "no swimming" signs. Orange popsicles from Willy's Tropical Breeze Cafe melt too quickly and stain our hands and faces. A veritable paradise.

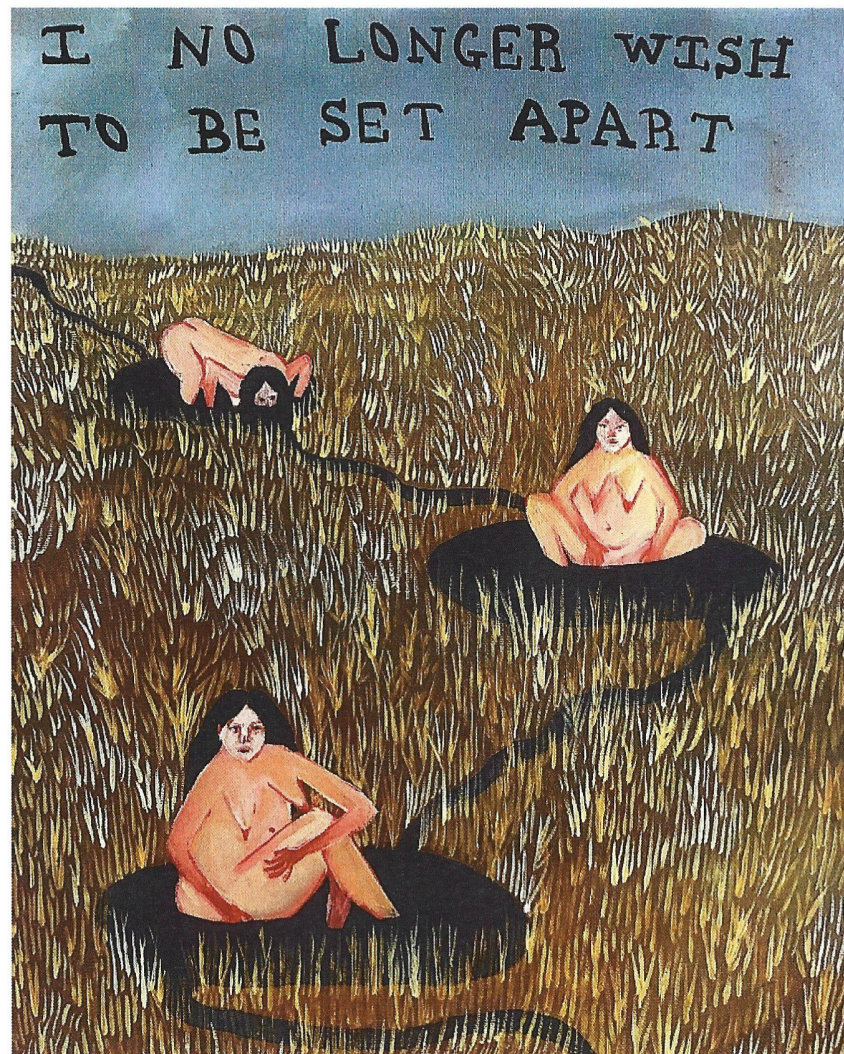
There's only one road on and off the "island"-- Pine Island Drive--a skinny stretch of pavement that goes on for a few miles across the vast coastal marsh. I used to look out the car window on trips out there and imagine strange and terrible things lurking in the black water. Untold horrors would lay waiting all open maws and swollen writhing scales and fur and flesh for the car to slip off the steep embankment into the mire. I don't remember exactly when I realized that was the same water we were about to voluntarily be swimming in, but I can't return to the time before then, not in my heart.



I HAD A DREAM LAST NIGHT YOU
WERE IN IT WE WERE WADING IN
THE SALT MARSH SEARCHING FOR
SOMETHING IT WAS YOU THAT I WAS
LOOKING FOR AND THIS IS
WHAT I FOUND



Top left: *I carry you with me still* (2022)
 Bottom left: *Homesick* (2022)
 Right: *Ants* (2022)



Above: *I no longer wish to be set apart* (2020)
 Right: *We are all screaming our chorus together please listen* (2020)




What burden is there? And who carries it? And for how long? How heavy is it? Who decided all this anyways?

Regardless,

I love you,

and I'm glad we're here together.



thank you for
listening

this zine was made
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petersburg, florida
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