

**the plum
creek review**

spring 2021



the plum creek review

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Grape Leaves Dream

ursula hudak

Not even two weeks after leaving home, I find in my dream
two older women sitting at a table rolling grape leaves.

'Come over and help, you know
these take a little more time.'

I take a seat and take a stack of leaves, and
without having to think,

I cut out the stem, shape the lamb
and roll the leaf into a small cigar.

Already the women have rolled a large pile,
so I reach and add my wrap to theirs.

Is this my mom and her mother,
practicing the ritual they each passed down?

Father, Son, and Holy Ghost
giving and taking communion.

I glance up at them as I work but can't decide.

Maybe we're just three strangers
quietly working together at this small table,
the brine slowly puckering our fingertips,
a small party through some doorway
making small talk and looking forward to dinner.

I can imagine how we will pack the pressure cooker,
using tongs at first, until giving up and
using our fingers instead,
cut pats of butter and argue playfully
over just how many to put in.
Family or not, I know we are related,
sharing the same muscle memory and a dialogue
that repeats as if written long ago.
Our echos reach across the table
and lace their fingers together,
rub their thumbs over the backs of each other's hands
and there is nothing left to make sense of.
'Is this one too thick you think?' 'Let me see.'
'No sweetie, it looks fine.' 'Yes, that's fine. That's
perfect.'

Afternoons with Eleanore

ila astin

reduction woodblock print



“happiness”

joshua reinier

because when i rubbed blear from my eyes
corkscrew-like to get the sleep-flakes out
and looked across the room hung with halflit dust
there was

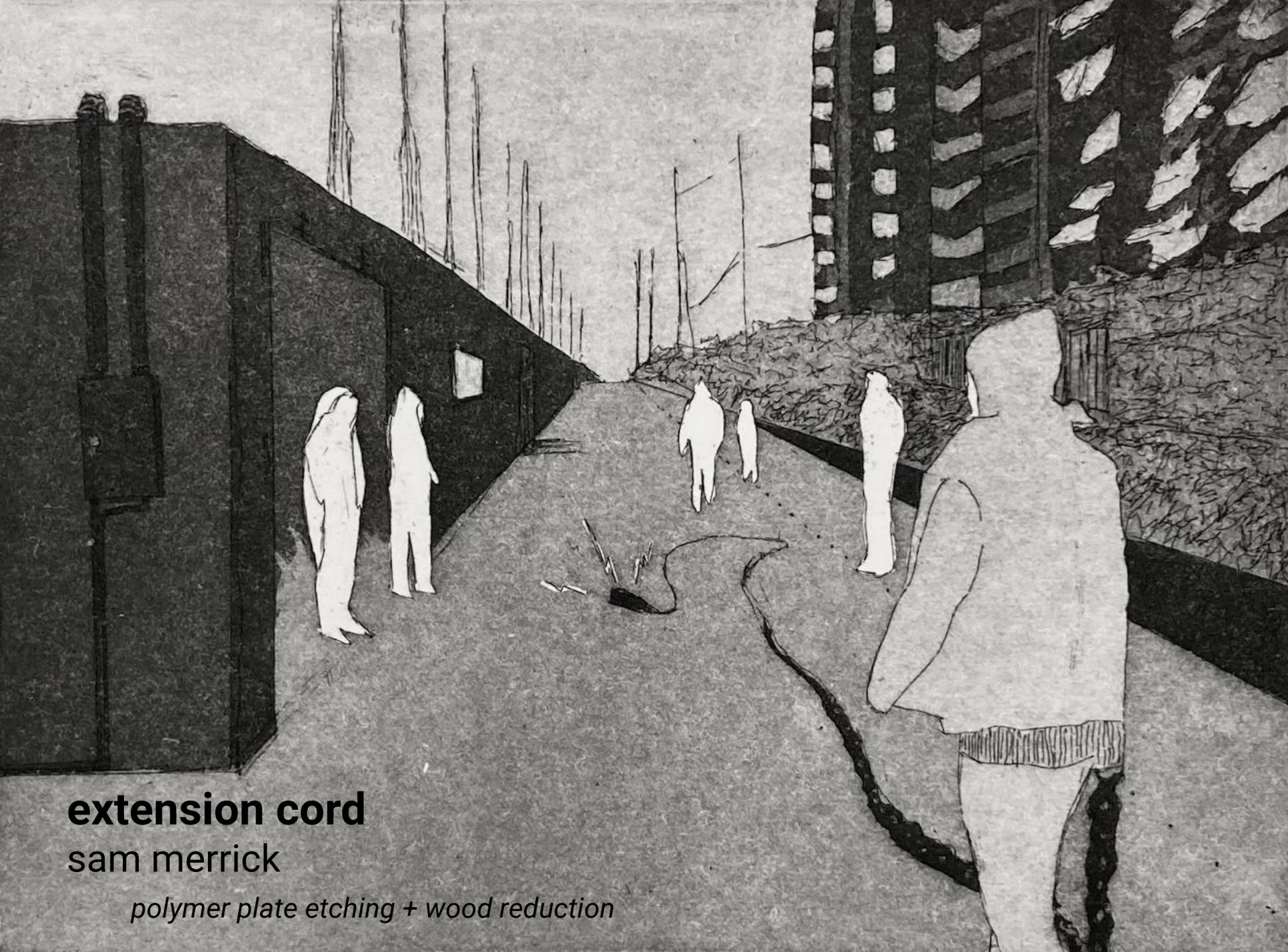
a shadow at my window
—perhaps of a bird or a half-broke branch
or a fleck in my sight
(anyways nothing to be made sentient,
just the rorschachs of waking)

and because that hum hasn't stopped since i can remember,
only modulates its pitch as if some
unpredictable vibrato
drilling into my monologue
(and when you drift in we talk about transistors and translation
as if machines spark silicone toward meaning)

with very specific shades of light,
and the mind is a machine for making machines,
a sentience shocking its objects)
and because i read this poem saying 'symbolize' twice
behind flecks on a screen with pixels so small
that one can only see their meaning
(and isn't the speaker's tension one of
bristling or multiplicity, the shadows
shaking behind conscious sense)

and because i don't have any images of smoke or lightning
and anyway all this shock short-circuits my patience

i wrote: "happiness"...and distracted pulled up your picture
at 17, pressing an eye to my shoulder, humming
in my ear, and staring at me through the screen.



extension cord
sam merrick

polymer plate etching + wood reduction

recovering

joshua reinier

where are you
in this snow-shrouded graveyard?
perhaps concealed
under sheen,
your name
engraved in a stone's surface:
i brush it with my shoe, revealing you
are congealed in ice
reflecting a dark smudge of me—
and reliving your last words,
i stare
in tears
at how this reflection
enervates your memory

in gusts of ungraved shades
that flail my face with flurries,
freeze-peeling cheeks
as if to expose the skeletal etchings

beneath my outer sheen,
the snowdrift of features

—and perhaps
this grieving etches me into you,
flurrying my vision around corpse-holes
in search of some specificity

that is only overwriting,
as you are just a scratch
on some stone bone
smoothed over with snow-skin

that as i leave, i leave
my footsteps etched in
as if a pseudonym

Buffalo

elliott davey

The Greyhound Bus Station in Buffalo, New York consists of one empty, grey room, with towering ceilings and rows of black, uninviting plastic chairs. The floor splays out in a vast sheet of ceramic until it hits the hard concrete of the walls. It is a room that you could never imagine being warm. There is too much grey, too much tile and cheap metal. The only color is in the faded yellow signs scattered throughout the building that mark patches of wet floor. They remind me of urine, or perhaps that is just the smell wafting in from the bathrooms, with their metal toilets that are freezing to the touch.

Tonight, I sit in one of those black chairs, cold seeping in through my sweatshirt. The clock above me reads 3:27 am, but time doesn't matter here, of course. It's my first time travelling alone. I never typically mind being alone, but tonight I find myself hyper-alert to the faces that pass by, each unfamiliar, warped by the night and by my lack of sleep. An old man walks by and looks me up and down. A woman stretches across the seats in front of me, head resting on her jacket. A man sits in a far off corner, eyes closed and completely still. It is true that each of us, at this moment, exist in the same space, but somehow I find myself in a completely different world. The room feels unreal somehow, like it's been caught

up in an eddy while the rest of the universe continues to flow around it.

I've missed my connecting bus to Albany. The station attendant keeps telling me that she'd called for those passengers, but somehow, I'd heard nothing. She says I must have been asleep, had headphones in, something. Maybe she's right, maybe I'd managed to drift off. Or maybe that room just ate up the sound of her voice, hoping to keep one more warm body inside for as long as possible. Regardless, in an instant, my twenty minute layover has turned into a four hour one, and now all I can do is sit. I sip a cold bottled coffee from the vending machine in an attempt to stay awake and stare across the room, watching two of the station attendants speak urgently in hushed tones near the ticket desk.

"Did they find you a seat on the 6:15 to Albany?" A voice breaks through the thick, cold air, startling me out of my own head. I recognize the face of a man, a few years older than me, about 20, maybe 21? I had stood next to him as we'd waited to board a delayed bus in Cleveland, what felt like a lifetime ago. I faintly recall chatting with him about our connections as time had dragged on. It had been warm there, I knew that much.

"You on that one too?" I ask hesitantly, suddenly wondering if he can see redness in my cheeks from crying in the bathroom. It has been months since I have cried, but in a place so strange and unreal, all I have to ground me are those old familiar feelings that I haven't bothered to think about in so long.

"Yup. Headed to Albany. One way ticket," he adds after a pause.

I look over at him, saying nothing. After a beat, he continues.

“My friend lives there, you know? Sent me a text last week, saying he needs a roommate. Why not give it a try?” He gives his suitcase a pat. “So here I am.”

I hear sirens in the distance, getting louder.

“So, you from Albany?” he asks.

“No,” I respond. “I’m meeting some family there. My mom is taking me up to Massachusetts to visit my grandparents. Well, just my grandma now I suppose.”

I don’t know what is compelling me to share my life with this stranger, but I find the truth spilling out of my mouth. I’m tired. He’s there. Sometimes that’s just how things go. The sirens are louder now, and I can see lights flashing through the window.

“It’s chill that I’m moving though.” Ah good, back to him. I would rather not share any more of myself tonight. “I work from home. I just got hired to do art for this Japanese video game company. They emailed me out of the blue a few months ago...”

He goes on for a while. I only half pay attention to his description of what honestly sounds like more of a scam than a real job, but what do I know? My eyes turn to the other end of the large room, where a team of paramedics has just filtered in through the door, greeted by the station attendant. They speak quietly, far away. All I hear are murmurs.

“They aren’t a big company, but they’re growing. I’ve sent in a few of my initial designs now. They sent them back for a few edits, but it’s looking promising. Do you play games?” I glance back at him and shake my head. The paramedics wheel a stretcher over the man who continues to sit completely still in the corner. They poke at him, shaking his shoulders, but he doesn’t respond.

“I’m trying to work out the currency exchange with the bank right now. They’re giving me trouble cause I’m not getting paid in US dollars.”

I see them move the man’s limp body onto the stretcher. I still can’t hear what they’re saying but I can only imagine seeing a headline in The Buffalo News about “a tragic incident at the Greyhound station” the next morning.

I look back to the boy next to me, unfazed, still rambling about banking and Japanese yen. As the medical team wheels the stretcher back out to the ambulance, I wonder if he’s even noticed that they came and went. If he had, he certainly didn’t seem to care. Somehow though, looking at him speak, I am not surprised. Like me, even in his conversation, he is alone. The clock ticks and we sit there. At one point, the old man who I had seen glance at me earlier asks me to go off with him, but I barely acknowledge the words. He stops and turns to the boy next to me and if I’m his girl. I am too tired to unpack it all. We shake our heads and I remain firmly in my seat while he walks away. Maybe all this happens before the medical team comes, maybe after. Time blends together, until everything is happening at once, and never. All I know is that, at some point in the

night, I look up, and the clock says 5:54. The real world begins to trickle back into the room as the light of sunrise finally begins to peek in through the windows.

At 6:18, I sit on a bus pulling away towards Albany. On that bus, there is a young man taking a gamble, dropping everything for a new life in a new city. His story is the one way ticket, fueling his every word and move. Together we leave behind the much too common story of the man rushed away to an emergency room, not knowing whether or not he is seeing the same sun rise today. I lean my head against the window and let myself start to drift off to sleep. As we drive, my universe begins to merge with the one around me, and time moves forward once again.

plans fell through i guess
sam merrick



polymer plate etching

Get Away

shea sion

It's 4 AM and about to storm, so I call Tommy to pick me up. He's outside my house almost instantly. The best time to drive is right before it rains, at least that's what he says. And I like driving with Tommy. He gives me a side smile before he takes off down the empty backroads.

Tommy spent all his camp counselor money on the car, a grey Honda Civic from a used car lot. He was supposed to save it for college, but he told me he'd rather drive than do that. If he can drive, he can get away, the same as if he went to college. I think he should've saved, but as long as I get to ride in the car, it doesn't matter too much to me.

He goes fast—at least 20 miles over the speed limit. I used to panic but then I realized that no one's out here and Tommy doesn't care about speeding tickets. I embraced it then, the speed. We drive with the windows down and let music fill the silence. The wind smells like dew and whips my hair so it stings my cheeks. I love it. The air weighs on us with all the moisture bundled in the clouds that billow over the dawn. I can feel how tense it is, how much the storm wants to just let go and drown the world. I look down at Tommy, an absent smile on his face, watching the road zip past. His sandy curls shift around his face but the wind doesn't disturb

him anymore than that. A drop of water hits the windshield and splinters into smaller drops.

“Tommy,” I say. Three more drops hit. “Tommy.” It takes him a second to realize who I am and what I’m saying. “The rain, Tommy. Close the windows.” “Oh. Oh shit, yeah.” He pulls up the switch and all the windows close just as the rain starts coming in steadily, then heavily. His windshield wipers can’t keep up with the incessant drops that don’t seem to even be coming down now. It hits from every direction, like rain is all that exists anymore.

“I’m going to pull over,” he says.

“Ok.”

We sit huddled in the Civic on a patch of dirt, quickly becoming mud, just off the side of the road. The constant pittering off the roof and windows drowns out everything except the occasional thunder roll. A bright, jagged piece of lightning cracks right above us.

“Whoa,” I say in a small voice. “Do you think we’ll get hit?”

“Have we ever before?” Tommy asks. No is the answer, but I don’t say so. I stare at his face, highlighted by the dim interior car lights. It makes his skin look sick and blotchy. He looks so tired from the unnecessary weight he heaps on himself. I worry about him a lot.

“What are you going to do, instead of college? Where are you going to go

that's different from here?" A violent bout of thunder booms overhead. I flinch. Tommy puts a hand on my shoulder, giving it a quick pat before curling in on himself.

"I don't know. Somewhere, obviously. Maybe Seattle. I heard it rains a lot there." The rain is so constant that there's no individual drop sounds anymore, just white noise. "I like the rain," he murmurs.

"I know you do Tommy," I say.

"Yeah... rain's great." Tommy leans his head on the window, his curls pressing on the glass. I look out my own window and press my fingers to it. It's cold. "Can I come to Seattle too?" I ask.

"If you want to," Tommy says. I do. My breath on the cold window makes a little fog spot. I trace a smiley face but it fades before I can finish. The rain pounds on the car roof.

Siren
elia lara



film photography

I'll never tell.

aniella day

I'll never tell.

my cheeks turn the color of
raspberry sorbet and
sweat drips slowly down
the back of my neck

they'll never know.

pain seeps in through all
over and I grip
hard enough to draw blood
and sand gets in the cuts

how it feels.

losing a love like watching
a shell you'd grown attached to
drown in the salty mist
the mucky green water

maybe that's why.

I stand with feet buried
alone watching seagulls
terrorize fish and people
scream as seaweed touches their legs

I stand alone.

at the bottom of the ocean there
is only warmth - no time for
lost things or sorbet or blood or seagulls

rainstick

joshua reinier

as again, snow falls cotton on the roof, i cough, knuckles
white around the white plastic
of the zoloft bottle, like a rainstick

stoppered

since the last dry spell:

the rust-clutch

in stomach, the gulp

of synthesized serotonin swallowed whole—

i rattle the bottle's hollow clatter:

the dead-grass rasp

of my clammy tongue clouded

by the past's clasp,

the clinched *it*

as fingers find the outer grooves, childproof,

to rub the echoing whole

and roll it around again
(for would one repeat the refilling and respilling
again, and then again):

 this plastic rainstick
 recycling a cluster of dead clicks
 to keep the fibers alive and writhing,
 and writing

words whose ring clings to its circular surface,
 calling—

untitled

max mcallister

photo of stone carving





untitled
max mcallister

photo of stone carving

miss

aniella day

it feels good to send you things from here:

flowers that grew off my chest

grains of sand that got stuck on my shoes

a ladybug that landed in my hair

little notes filled with secrets i could never tell

chips of dark red nail polish that fall off without warning

specks of dust with little people living on them

gifts that you gave me without knowing

words that we know are funny

books that i never read because you were more interesting

and now is a time of rest. time to read books and brush ladybugs out of my hair.

until next time, my friend, i miss

Eva and Teddy

ila astin

oil pastel



dance

joshua reinier

after Joan Mitchell's "Café"

what a storm is on the wall:
an object of streaked shades
layered into stains
in an erratic halo tracing
the limits of its frame

and at its center, that shock
of almost black blue
like a figure dancing, drawing all these colors
in centrifugal spasms, as if
knotted within everything
so tightly that it bleeds

with meaning—though Mitchell believed
reference profane, instead

trying to “define a feeling”

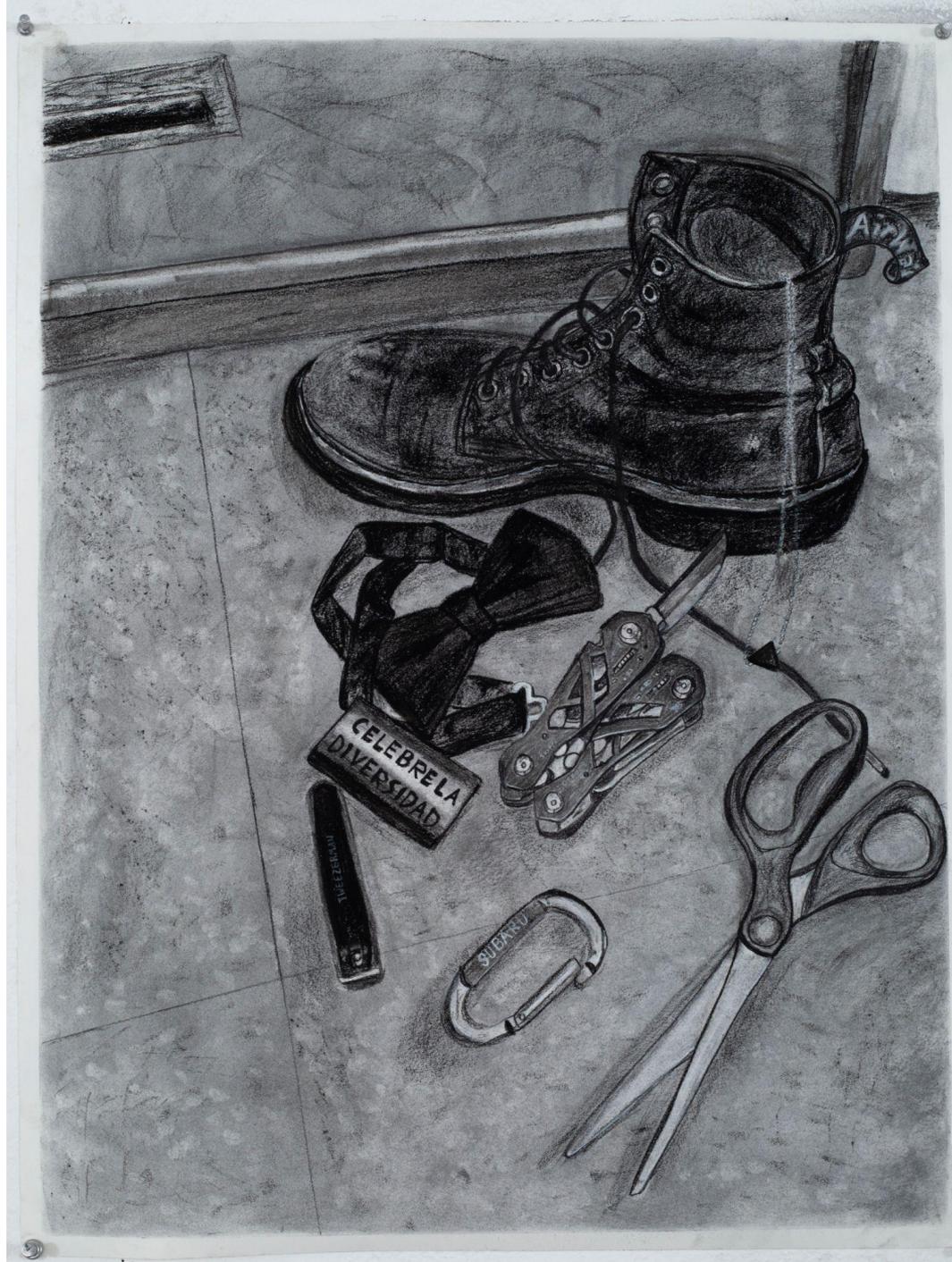
—and here i write,
spasming lines framed by referentiality, feeling
the pen rasp its definitions
in black philosophic streaks
twisted in association
with these paint swatches plastered to the canvas:

this swirl
feinting between figure
and edge,
watched pigments deified into a realness of mist
mystifying: the evidence
that this figure is paint, meeting paint again—

Self-portrait of a Lesbian

elia lara

charcoal drawing



(for i will have had me soon, if i were you)

—and if you were me, what would you do
with my years before fathering, as if falling

from some dark

path, far from some expectation

—watch out—

i shout as we scrape the beach-road's thin shoulder,
but father sits back, steering

us the veering way

behind grandfather, who says when we reach the lot

“i still have so much work to do:”

he can't walk too far from there, so we watch
the bright breakers pounding stones to multiplicity

and i think of how he once passed off his son

to others—his son

my father, who now wishes me

to fasten my fate here

to what—the way i'd fashion these

impressions into something
to impress, to pass
on—to progeny or “audience,” this raw consciousness
exporting its language to farther forms:

for example grandpa says “become an expert
in something,
because for me it’s all been veering,” for soon
the experts will darken his mind
for a time

to steer a stint through his veins’
impounded blood
blindly, trying not to scrape a curve

so he leaves us with three forms to fill out,
and the figures of us three smiling
with me squeezed in between,
our three pairs

of eyes squeezed between sun and the same unfathoming flame,

the same fainthearted realization,
that in furthering eternity, everything
is passed down incomplete;
that i will forget, or rather
wish for more of their language
i'd always thought myself too far other to understand.

3/16, Atlanta

ivy fu

Azalea, Reed, Edelweiss.

Up on the mountain, you would collect them.

Lost.

They asked, what are you looking for?

Sun-dazed, you looked with confusion.

Words?

Muted you stood, not knowing why it started, not knowing how it'll end.

Storm.

Azalea, Reed, Edelweiss. Petals thrashed everywhere.

Features Unrecognizable, mudd.

You aged, wind and rain carved into you, wrinkle-exhausted.

You've become a memorial.

Remains.

Scattered tunes of Reed and Edelweiss.

Hummed

Red, on a mountain of azaleas.

The flowers sang a lullaby—

“Stay,
In this land of blood under the sun
And eternal silence.”
Your home.
And you stood, not knowing where, rain from your eyes,
Covered the field.
They said, strange man, who are you crying for?
一, 二, 三, 四, 五, 六, 七, 八。
You muttered.
Words no one would understand.

kitchen chair

ila astin

oil pastel



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