

SOME WOMEN
WORKS ON PAPER

100 Ink Drawings of Women
as Subject or Artist

Drawings by
Libby Black

Essay by
Dr. Nadiyah Rivera Fellah



On November 8, 2019, I gave myself an assignment to make ink drawings.

I have been teaching for 15 years and have never applied this medium in my own practice. In my drawing classes, I ask my students to buy ink and a quill pen set. I am completely seduced by the line quality of the quill pen. It never fails me. There is nothing like it.

I was already working on two long-term projects in my studio, but I wanted to start on a new project—something more immediate. That’s when I began making quick ink drawings. They didn’t need to mean anything special. They could be simple and small and live in a box. I wanted something I could work on at my kitchen table—something to do if I couldn’t make it to the studio. I posted the first drawing on Instagram on November 8, 2019 and asked people to send me postcards with images of women depicted throughout art history and images of work by women artists. About a dozen people sent me postcards or digital images. I had also started looking through a book given to me decades ago by my grandmother’s friend, a Time-Life Library of Art book called *American Painting 1900–1970*. This book was a good example of what I was taught in school. It mentions only three women artists. With the drawings I made from this book, I started to examine how women are depicted in art made by men. The images I selected to redraw focused on the female body. I began to notice what the women were doing, how they were sexualized, and what the narrative revealed. I thought about what I had been taught in Art History—what I knew, what I didn’t know, and also what I didn’t know how to find for myself as a white lesbian. Why were there so many men showing me what the women were doing? Where were all the women artists?

This collection of drawings is not all inclusive—however, I knew I wanted to start with images of women portrayed by male artists, and include work by queer artists and artists of color. I am not an art historian. I make pictures—through looking, remaking, questioning, and repositioning images to understand the world around me. The creative process often raises more questions than answers. I used some of the images that were sent to me, and I also researched to find others. I finished the last drawing on March 28, 2020. I made a total of 160 drawings and tore up five. This project was exactly what I wanted—the drawings filled up a box, which in turn filled me up. This project introduced a new medium into my practice and made me aware of new artists. It made me slow down and look at every little part of these pictures of art from the past. I saw women doing housework, dealing with motherhood, being angry and violent, being strong, protesting, and being sexual. After completing about 90 drawings, I realized I needed to archive them in a catalog. At the very least, this is a short art history lesson. I wish for you to experience three things with this collection of drawings: 1) You see what is going on, 2) You cry and then laugh, 3) You move forward with strength.

Truly,

Libby Black

TRANSGRESSIVE TRANSLATIONS: SOME WOMEN IN CONTEXT

Dr. Nadiyah Rivera Fellah

I first met contemporary American artist Libby Black (b. 1976) in 2012, and was immediately captivated by her intimately scaled drawings. Quickly drawn, not overly wrought, there are expressionistic and performative qualities to the small drawings, which are scenes from her personal life and popular culture that range in tone from the poignant to the humorous. For Black, drawing is employed as a conceptual medium, and a tool to explore concepts surrounding queer identity, seriality, and the necessity of return—whether it is returning to a meditative daily practice, returning to a striking image/memory, or returning to her kitchen table to create another drawing.

The present book of 100 drawings introduces a new medium to Black's practice: ink drawings done primarily with quill and some brush work. The nature of the medium lent itself to the quick pace she prefers to work in—there is no erasing, and every mark shows. True to her role as a professor of art, Black used the medium to give herself a prompt akin to Linda Nochlin's 1971 culture-shifting text, "Why have there been no great women artists?" Instead, the question became, "Why are there so many depictions of women by male artists?" In response, Black began amassing imagery of women and by women artists (known and once known), then translating the imagery into ink drawings.

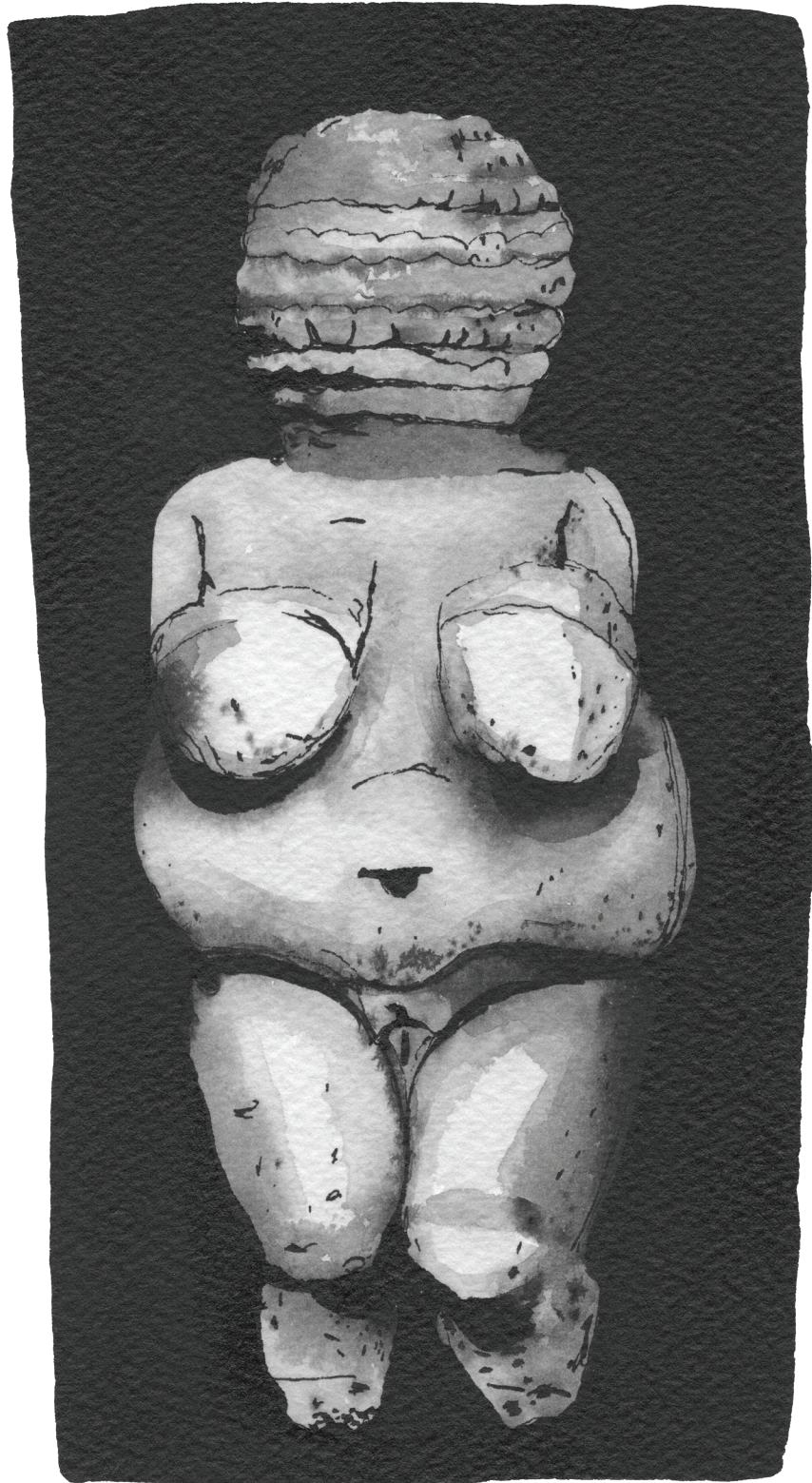
In this way, Black has created a taxonomy of objects within a category conceived and designed by herself. However, this is not quite the taxonomy of images created by preceding artists like August Sander or Bernd and Hilla Becher, but one inflected with a deeply personal aspect. Throughout this book, Black's unique archive of women is arranged in a non-chronological sequence that intervenes in the linear form of traditional history books, and instead foregrounds intimacy. This intimacy is achieved not only through the small scale of the pictures, but through the tender scenes chosen, like Catherine Opie's iconic self-portrait of queer motherhood [Page 20], and the knowledge of Black's personal stakes in the project.

Through its organization and minimal use of text, *Some Women* is structured to create dialogues between images that are nuanced and open-ended. Employing a critical method that upends the power dynamics of looking, Black plays with the gaze of her drawn figures beyond the frames, carefully considering arrangements of who looks at whom. For example, Mary Cassatt's white female figure faces away from Mickalene Thomas's black female nude [Pages 79-80]. In addition, Black's rendering of Emma Amos's *Yo Man Ray Yo*—itself a critique of Man Ray's *Noire et Blanche* (*Black and White*), 1926—is shown beside a drawing of a 17th century Dutch still life, a juxtaposition that becomes a commentary on the representation and consumption of racialized female figures. In this way, Black stays attuned to her own subject position as well as the represented positions of those in this book's pages.



This triangulation of artist, subject, and viewer endows the drawn subjects with agency and empowers them within the constructed space of each drawing.

In *Some Women*, Black appropriates the format of the book and its cultural reference as a vehicle for the production and distribution of knowledge. She contests the narrative closure of traditional art historical canons that she encountered so often as a student and their insistent focus on the male artistic genius and a linear progression of movements. Instead, her series prompts readers to reconsider what they think they know about art history, gender culture, and the relationship between them. In recent years there have been important correctives and interventions in the patriarchal canon of art history, and Black's current book is a contribution to this revisionism. In this way, Black is an active participant in the ongoing effort towards a matriarchal, artist-led history of art, contributing to a radical reconsideration of history's role as an activist tool and critical resource.











Dearest Art Collector,
It has come to our
attention that your
collection, like most,
does not contain
enough art by women
We know that you
feel terrible about this
and will rectify the
situation immediately

all our love,
Guerrilla Girls

CONSCIENCE OF THE ART WORLD
© Guerrilla Girls, 2015. Exclusively produced by Third Drawer Down Studio

































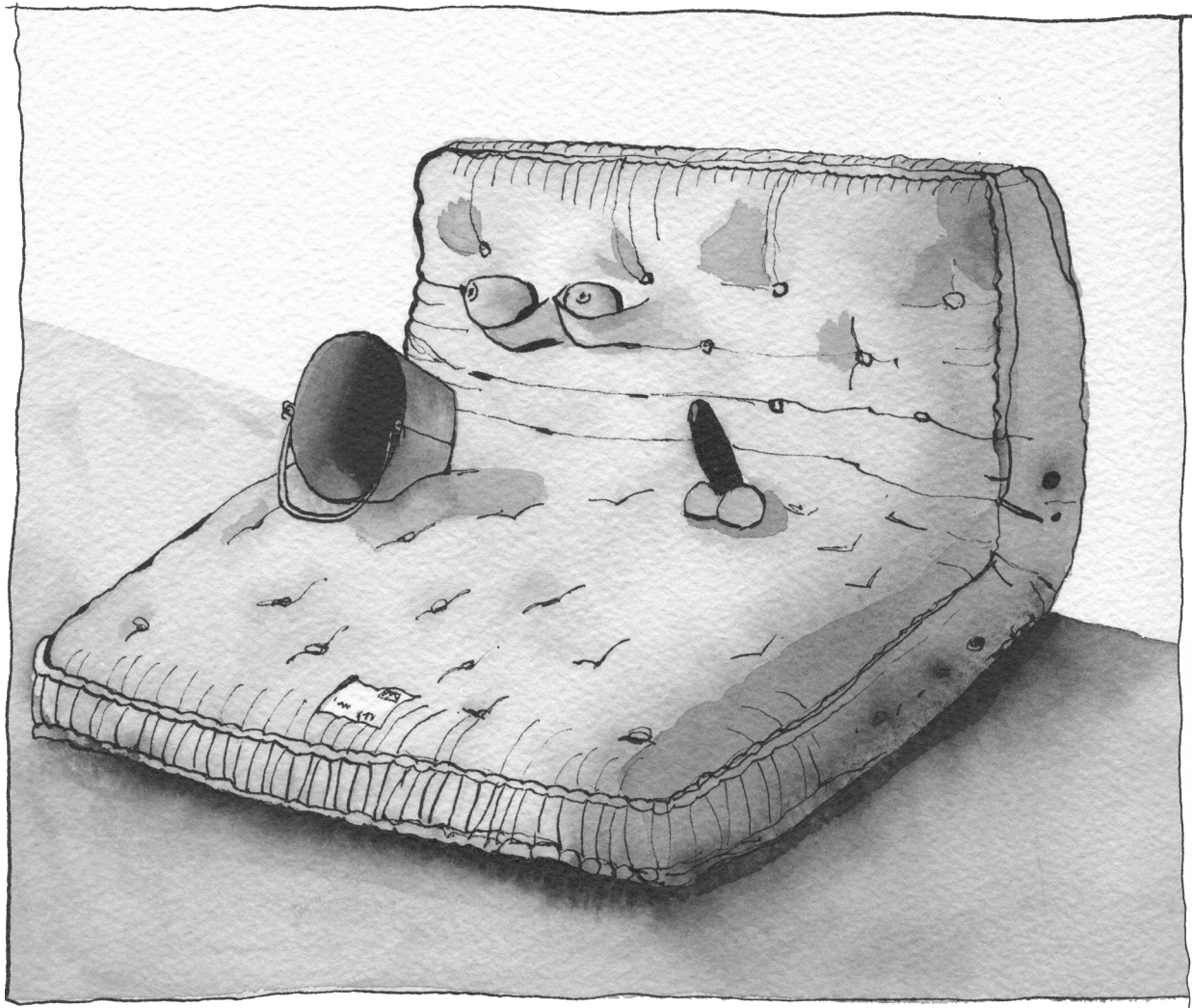










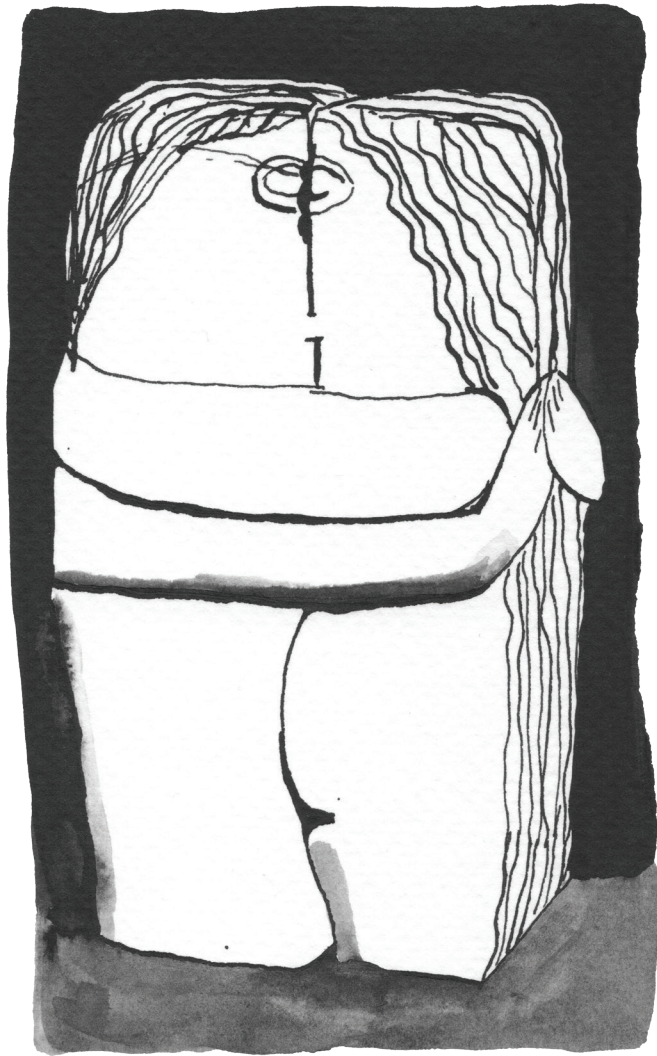






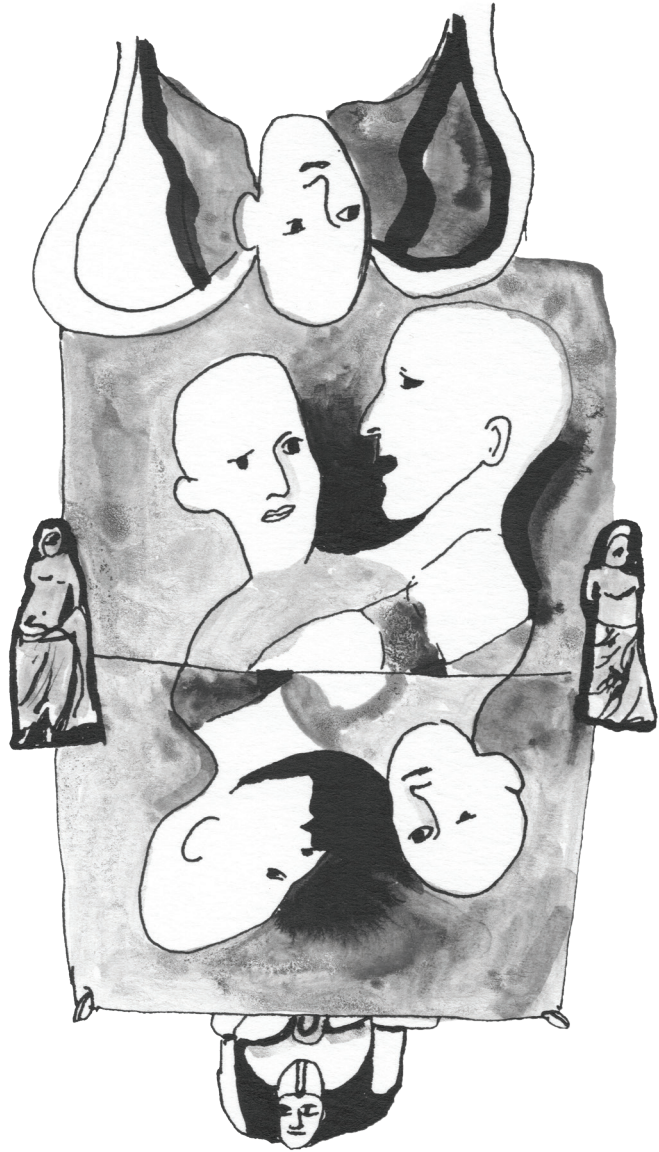








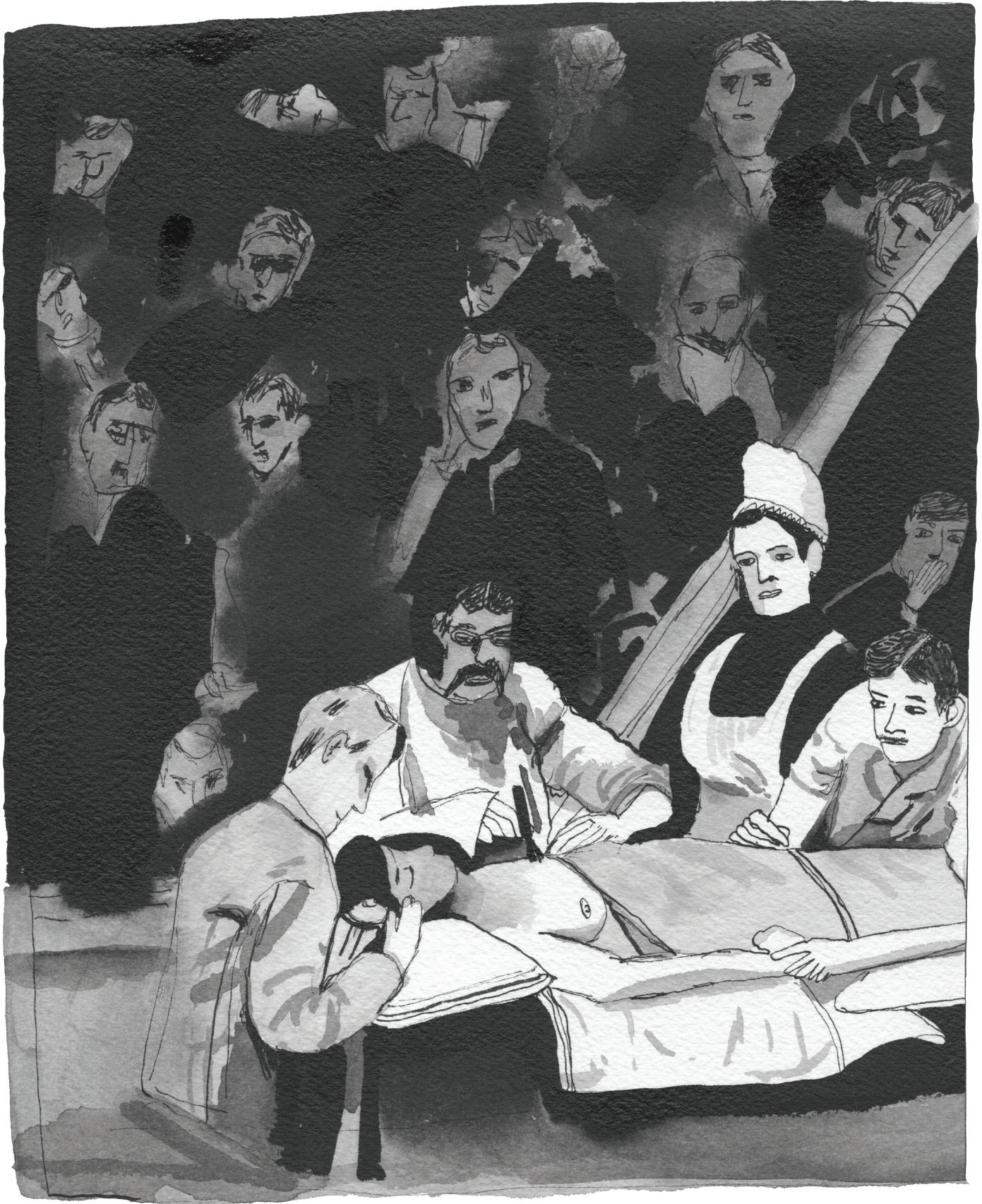


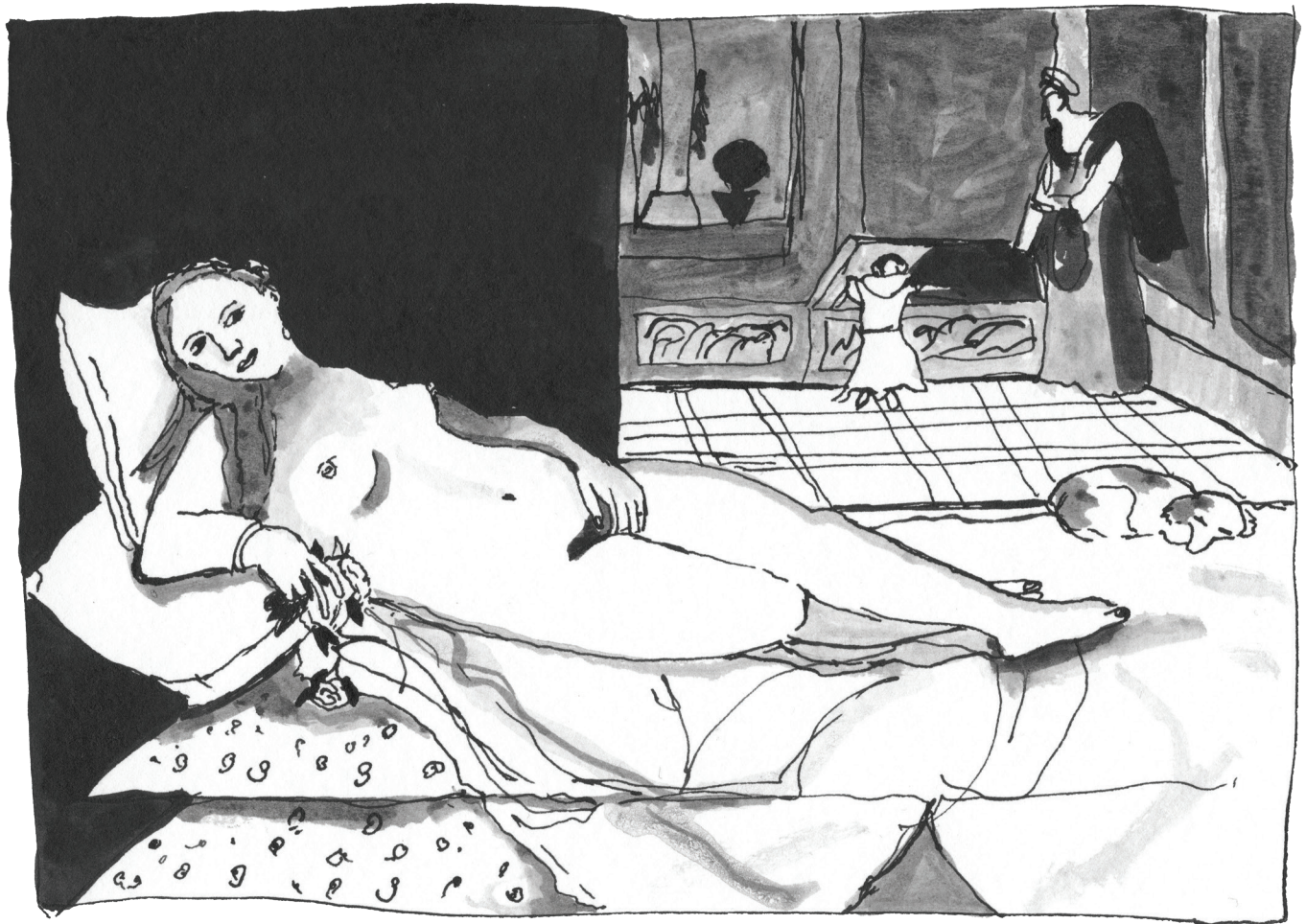














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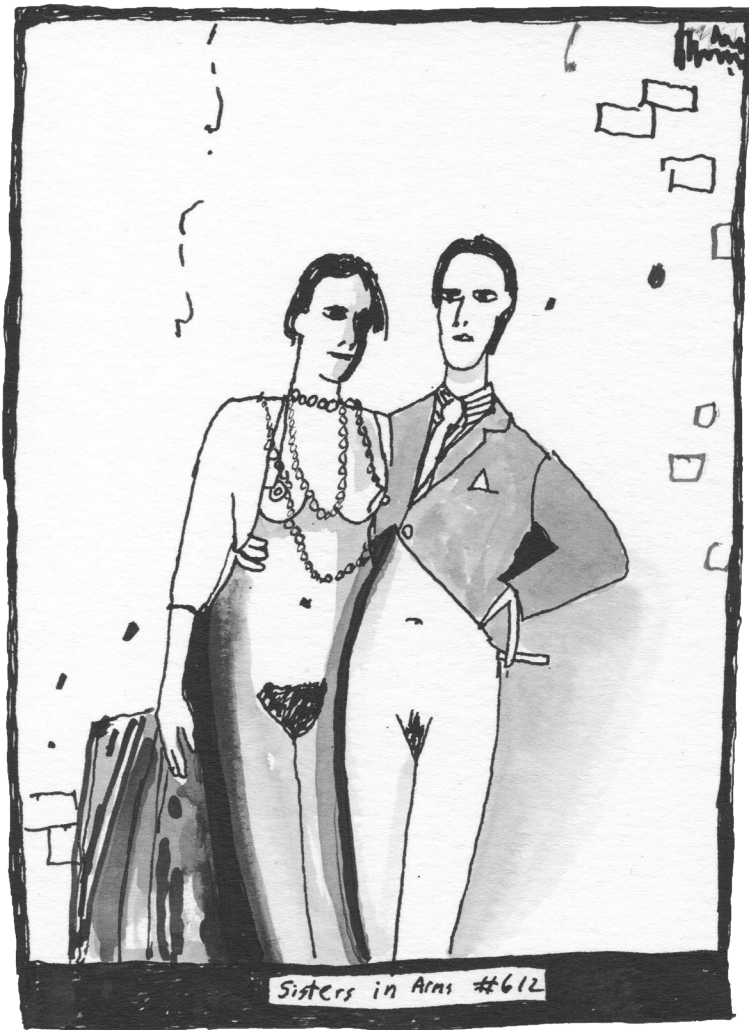
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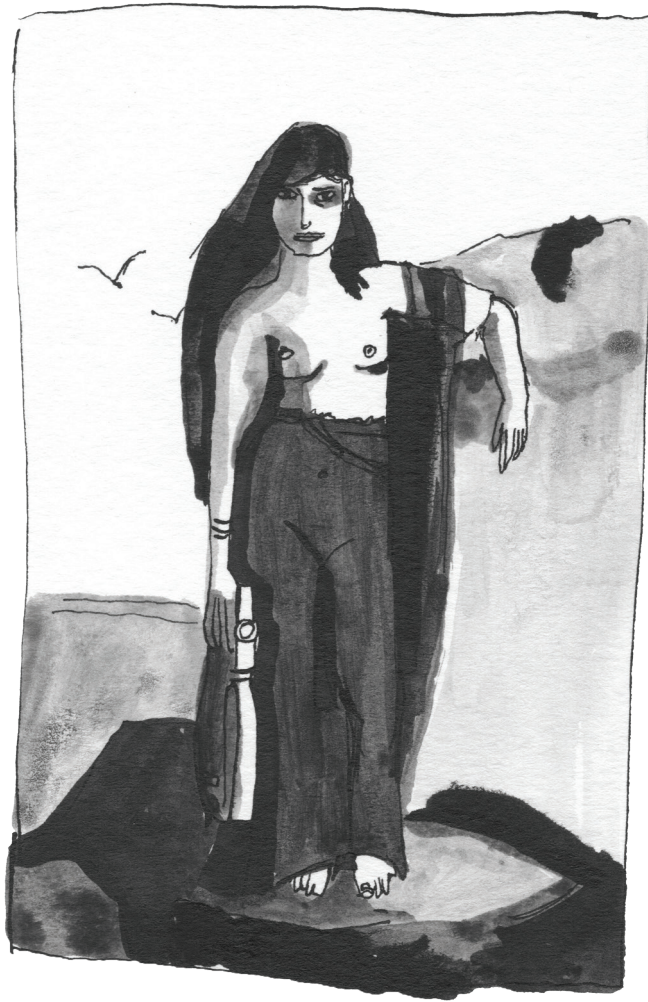




















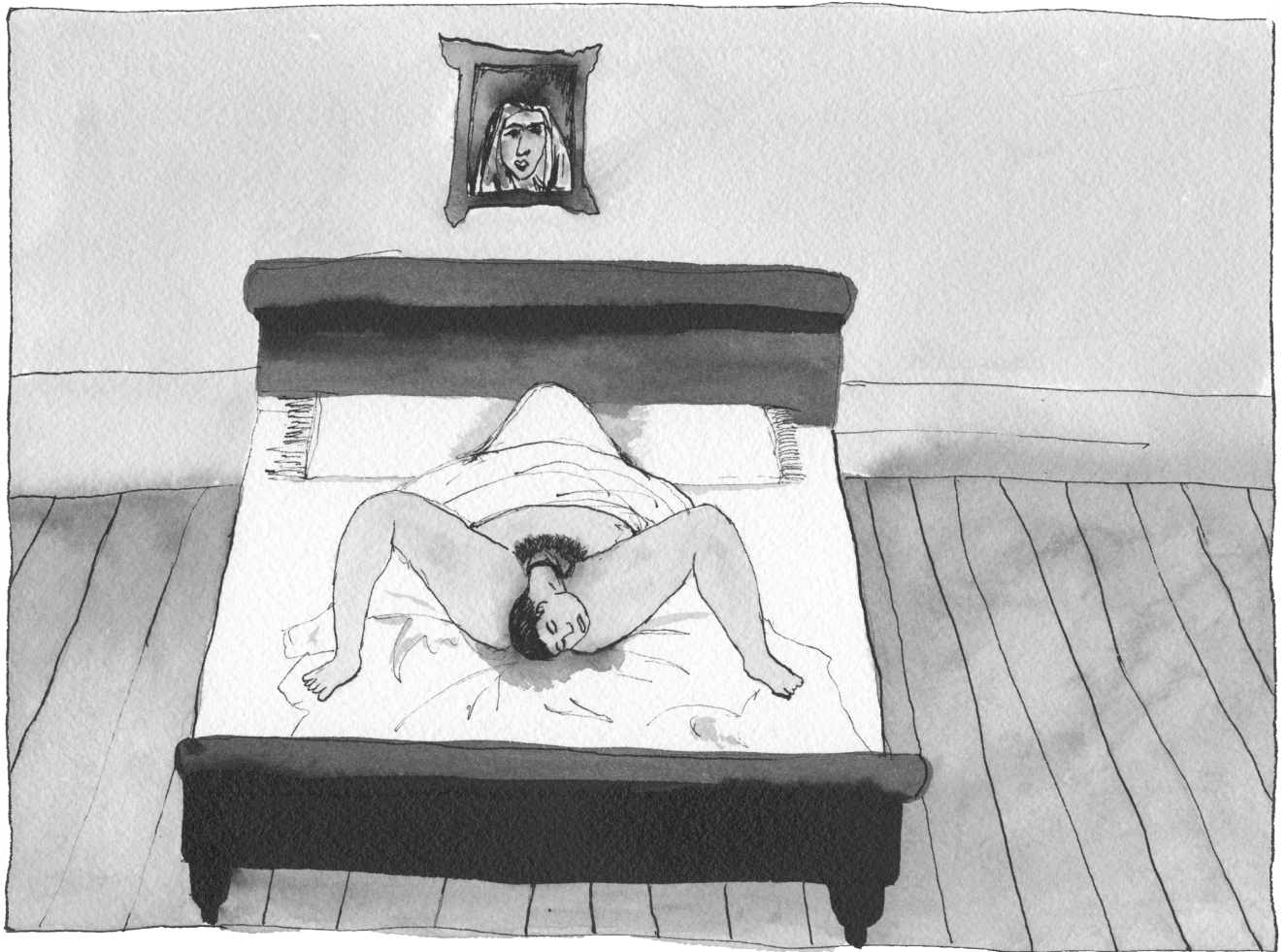




And She made
for them



A Sign to See



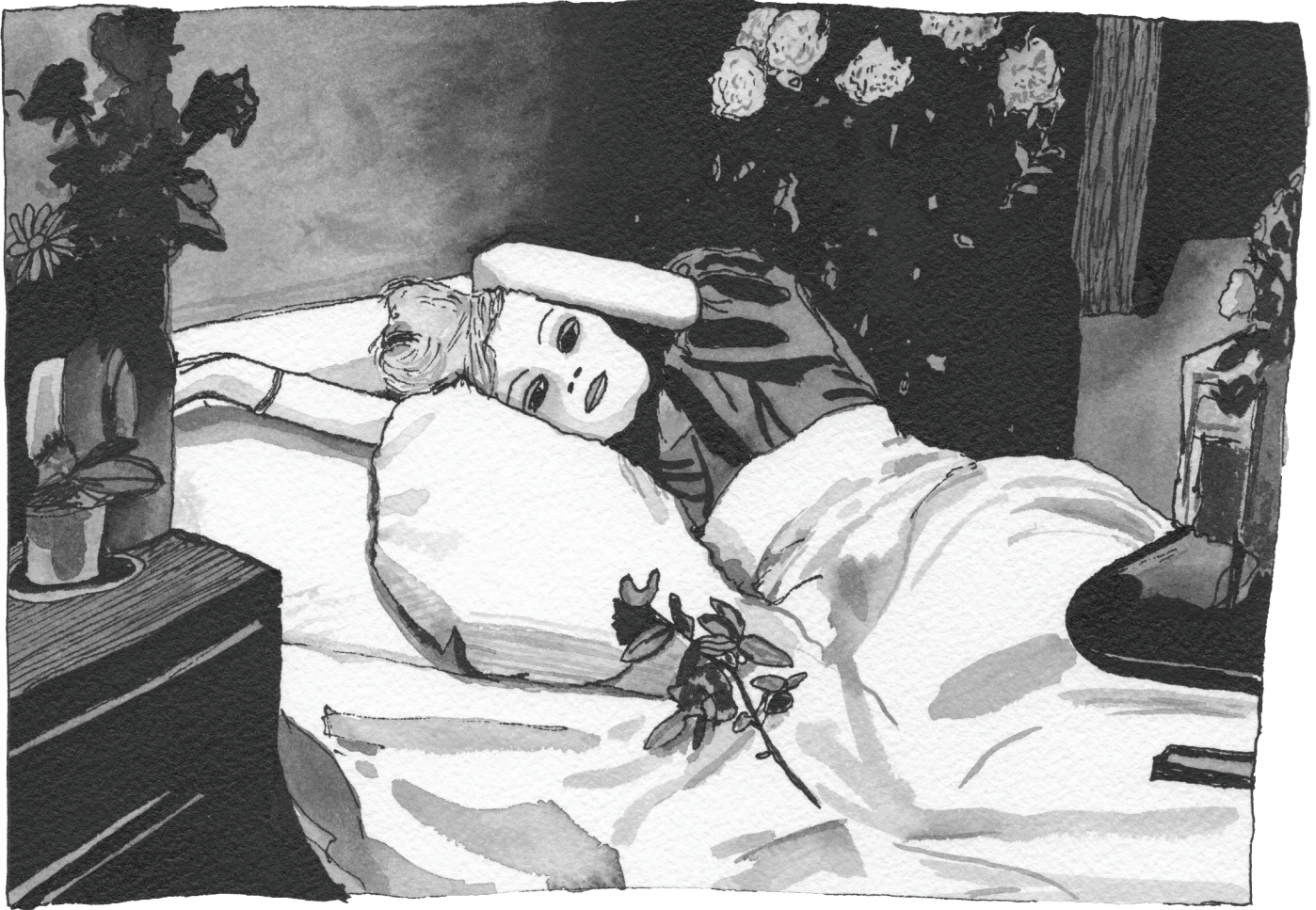




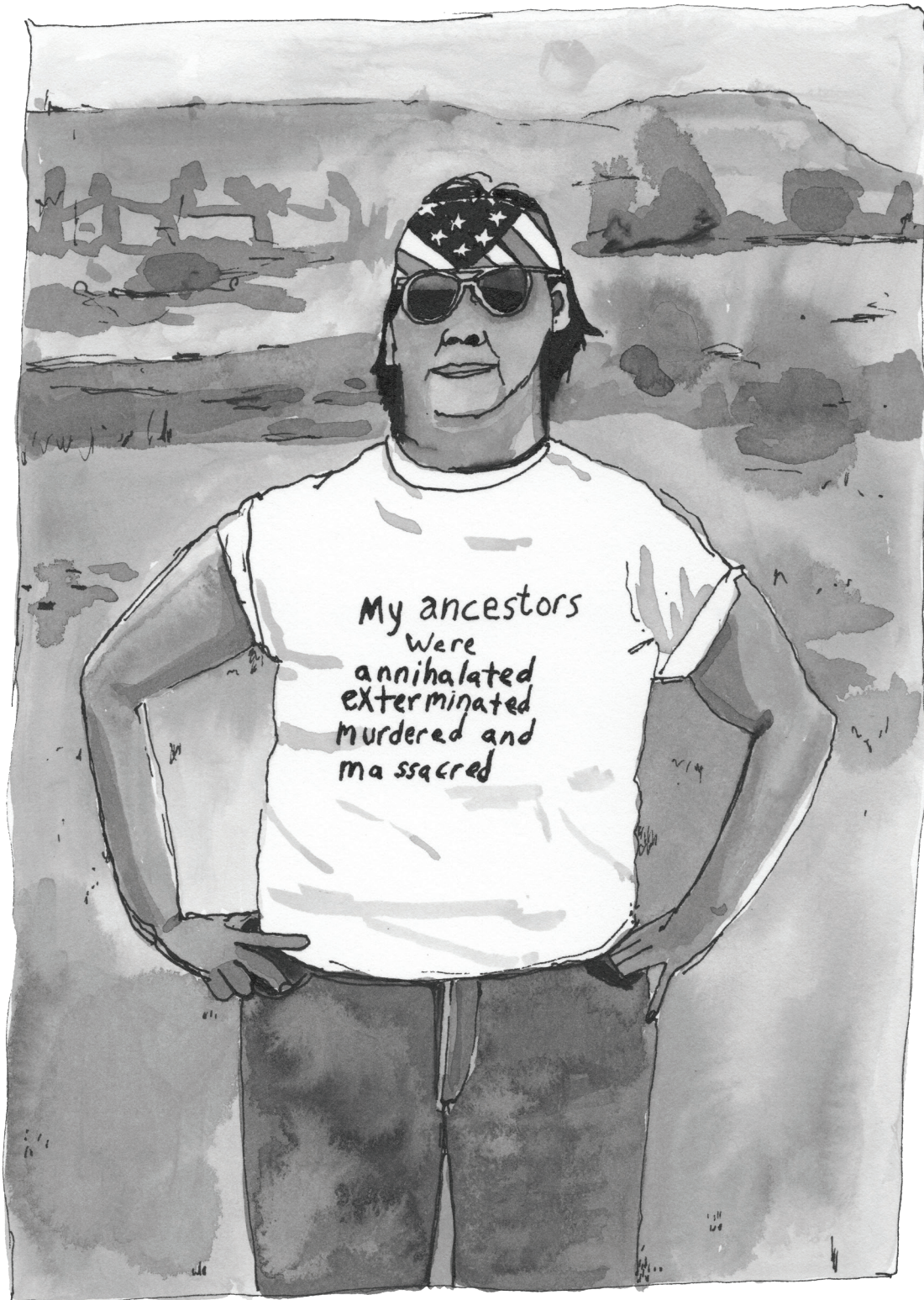




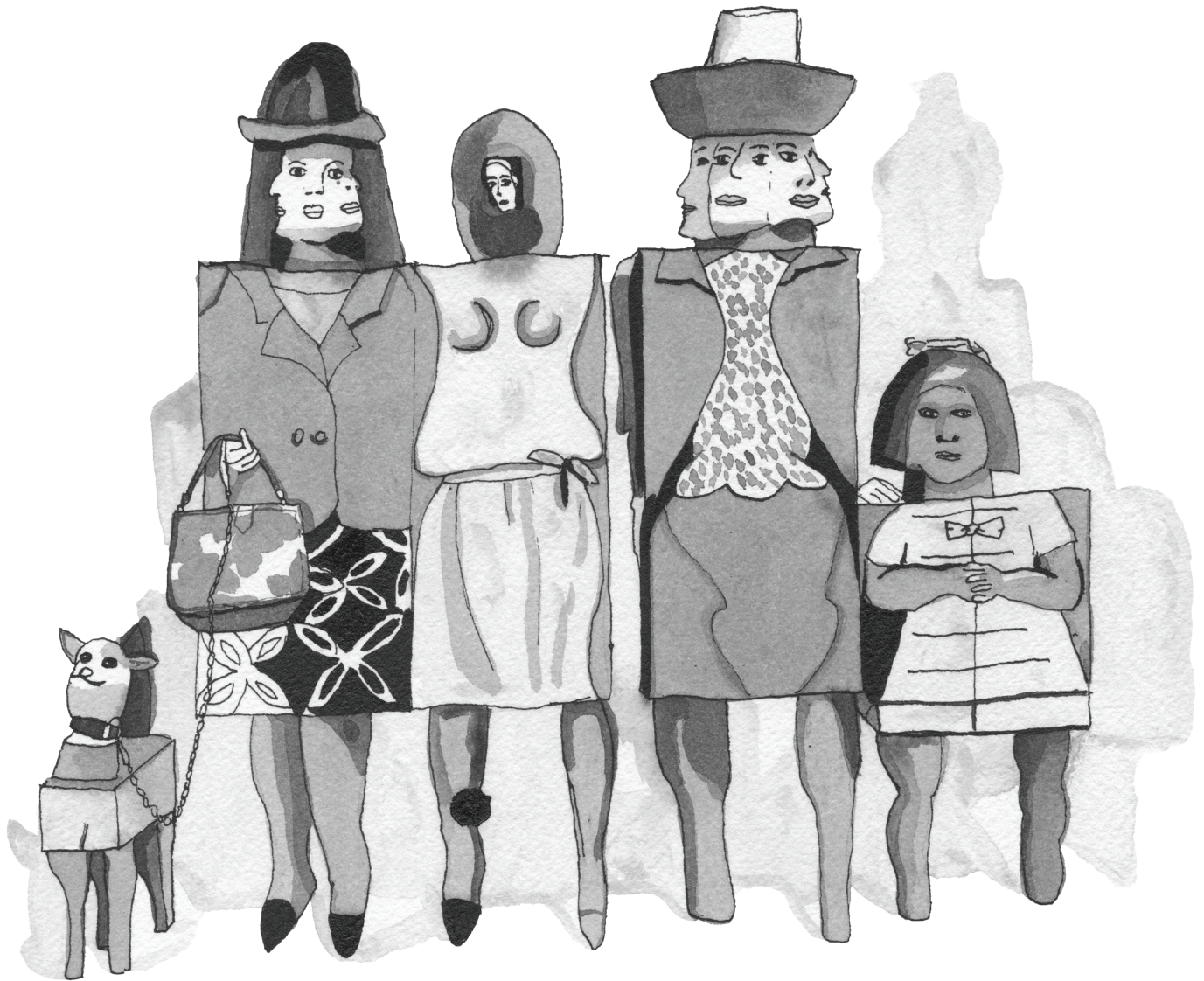








































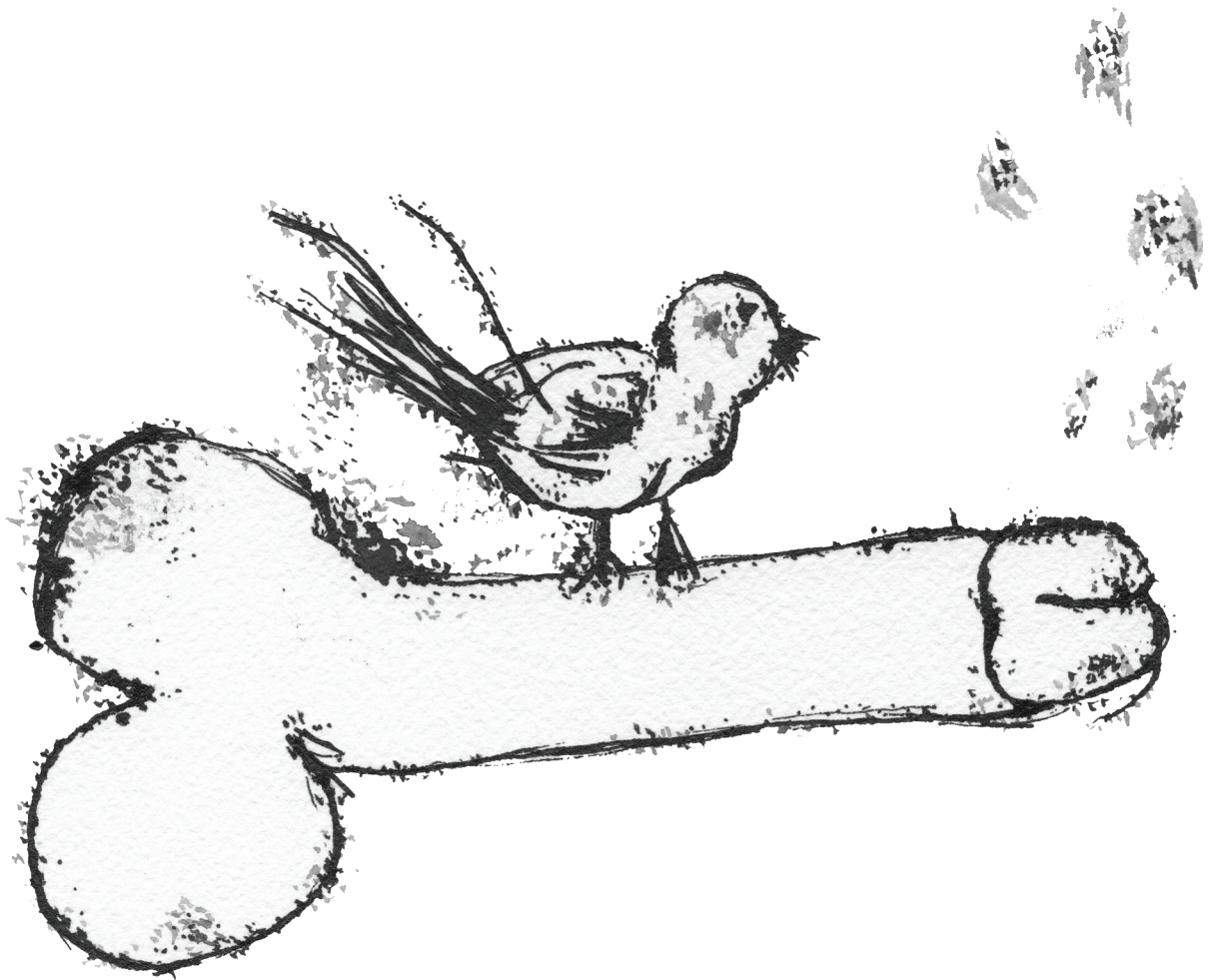








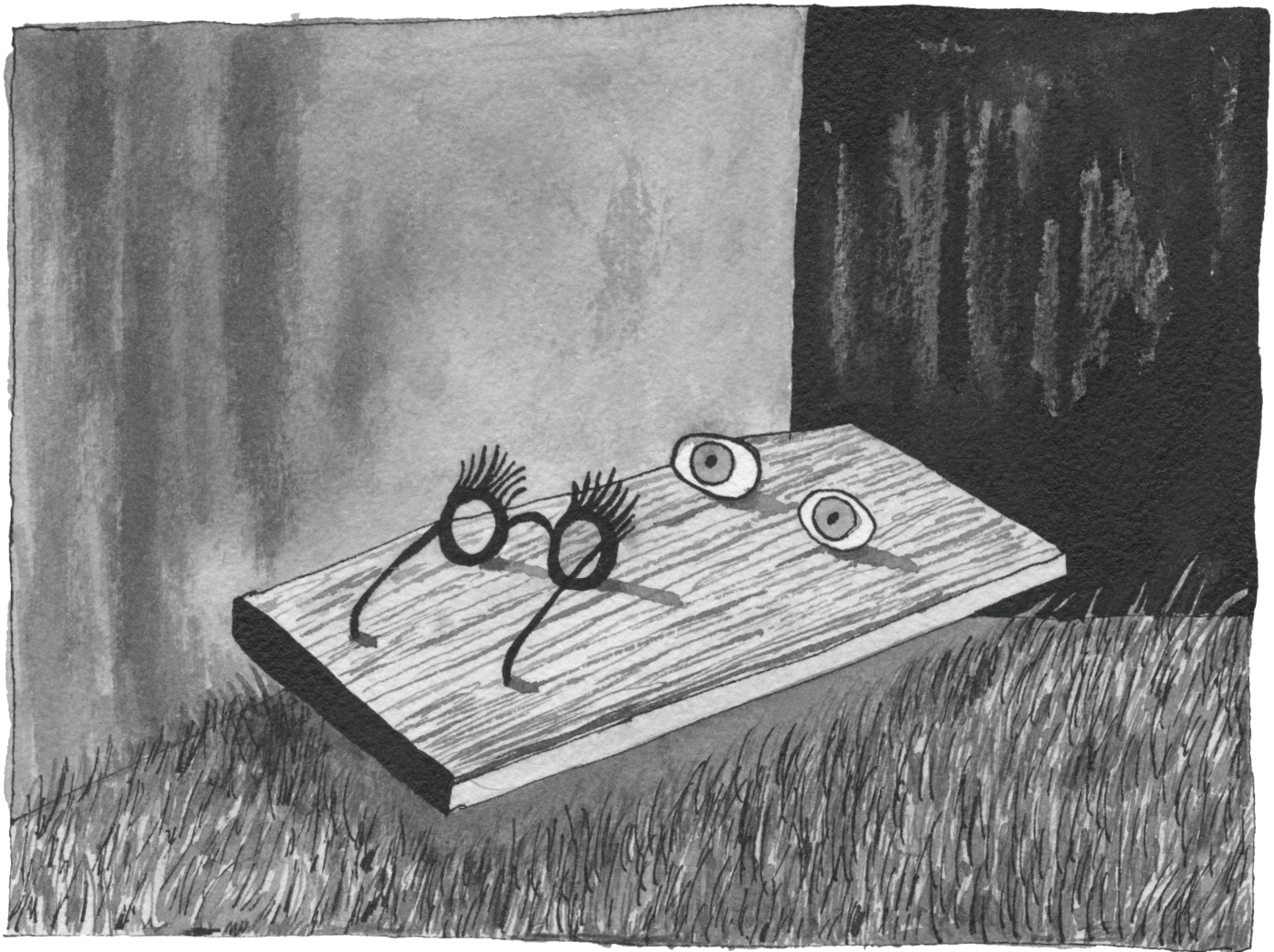


















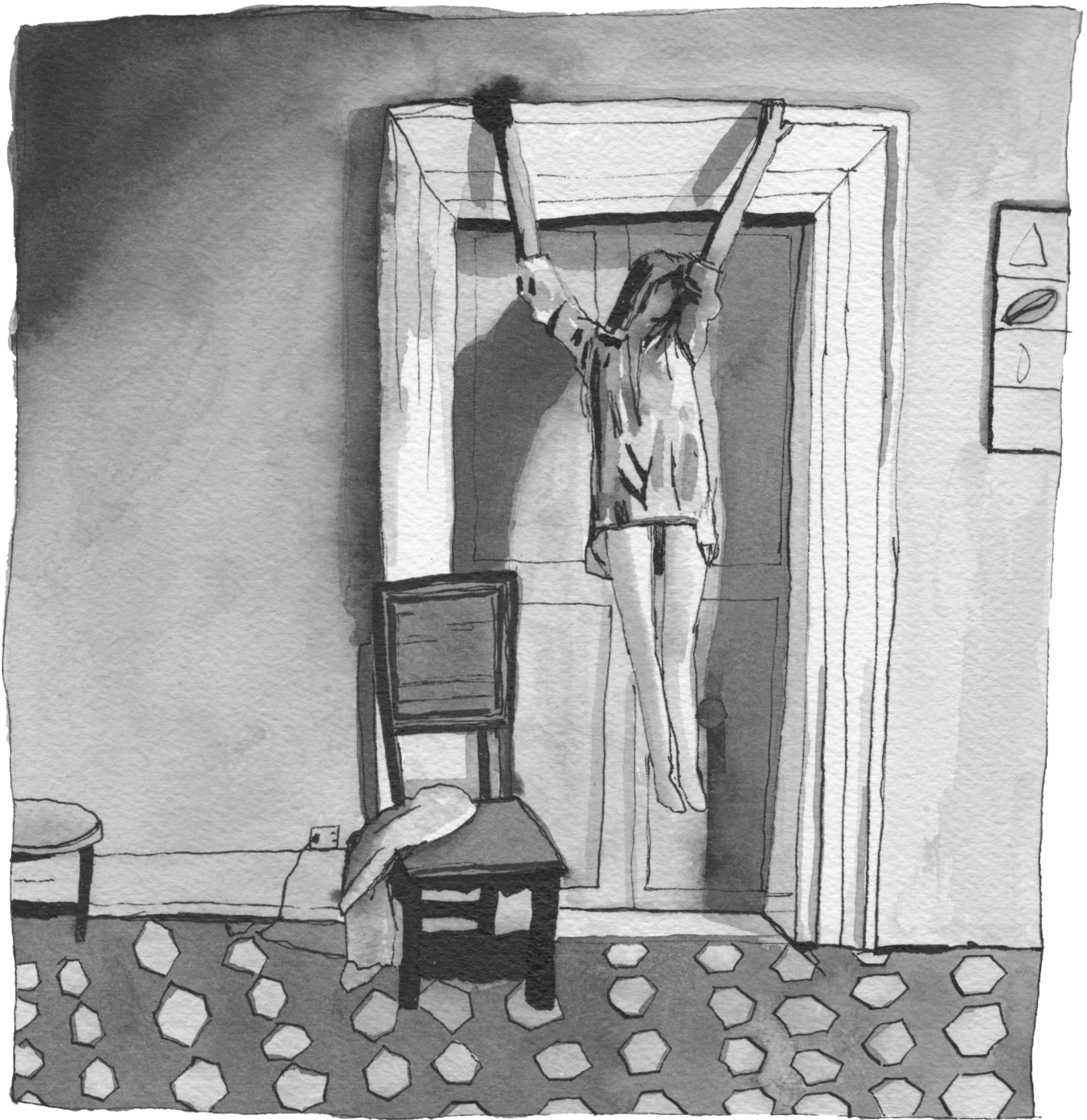






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A good friend of mine once said to me, “Take a moment and think of all the women who came before you when you go out there and march today.” This book would not have been possible if it weren’t for all the women who came before me. Thank you for showing me the way.

I want to acknowledge Mari Iki and Martin Maguss for helping lay the foundation for this catalog. I still remember walking in to that dimly lit pizza place with my box of drawings to show them to you. I watched your faces as you leafed through the drawings and felt your support and enthusiasm for the work. I love that I can bring things to you while they are still in process. I am also grateful for our friendship, especially the hours we’ve spent talking about art.

I also want to thank Nadiah Rivera Fella for writing the catalog’s introductory essay. I appreciate that you’ve been critically engaged with my art over the last eight years through your curatorial and academic work. Your essay shines a new light on this collection of drawings that wakes them up and holds them accountable for how they exist in a broader context.

I am also grateful to Sheri Park for bringing her graphic design skills to this project. Thank you for all the hours you spent laying out the catalog and cleaning up the scanned images. I appreciate your generous attention to detail and pride in the final product. You showed me things I couldn’t see.

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Libby Black is a painter, drawer, and sculptural installation artist living in Berkeley, CA. Her artwork charts a path through personal history and a broader cultural context to explore the intersection of politics, feminism, LGBTQ+ identity, consumerism, addiction, notions of value, and desire. She has exhibited nationally and internationally, with such shows as “California Love” at Galerie Droste in Wupertal, Germany; “Bay Area Now 4” at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts; “California Biennial” at the Orange County Museum of Art; and at numerous galleries in New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. Black has been an artist-in-residence at Headlands Center for the Arts in Sausalito, CA; Montalvo Arts Center in Saratoga, CA; and Spaces in Cleveland, OH. Her work has been reviewed in *Artforum*, *Art in America*, *ARTnews*, *Flash Art*, and *The New York Times*. She received a BFA from Cleveland Institute of Art in 1999 and an MFA at the California College of the Arts in 2001. Libby is an Assistant Professor at San Francisco State University.

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