

# A Year Like No Other

By Celia Chari

When we were first advised to isolate at home in March 2020, I was naively looking forward to having more time to read through papers, start at-home workouts and cook new recipes. However, that quickly changed when I realized we would be in it for the long haul. Like many other graduate students, I was frustrated with the lack of progress of my lab-based work and felt like my research was being set back by months. I struggled to find the motivation I needed to complete simple tasks, but with time I realized that I had to make the best out of a bad situation. I tried to separate my working week from my weekends, and mindfully chose activities that brought me joy.

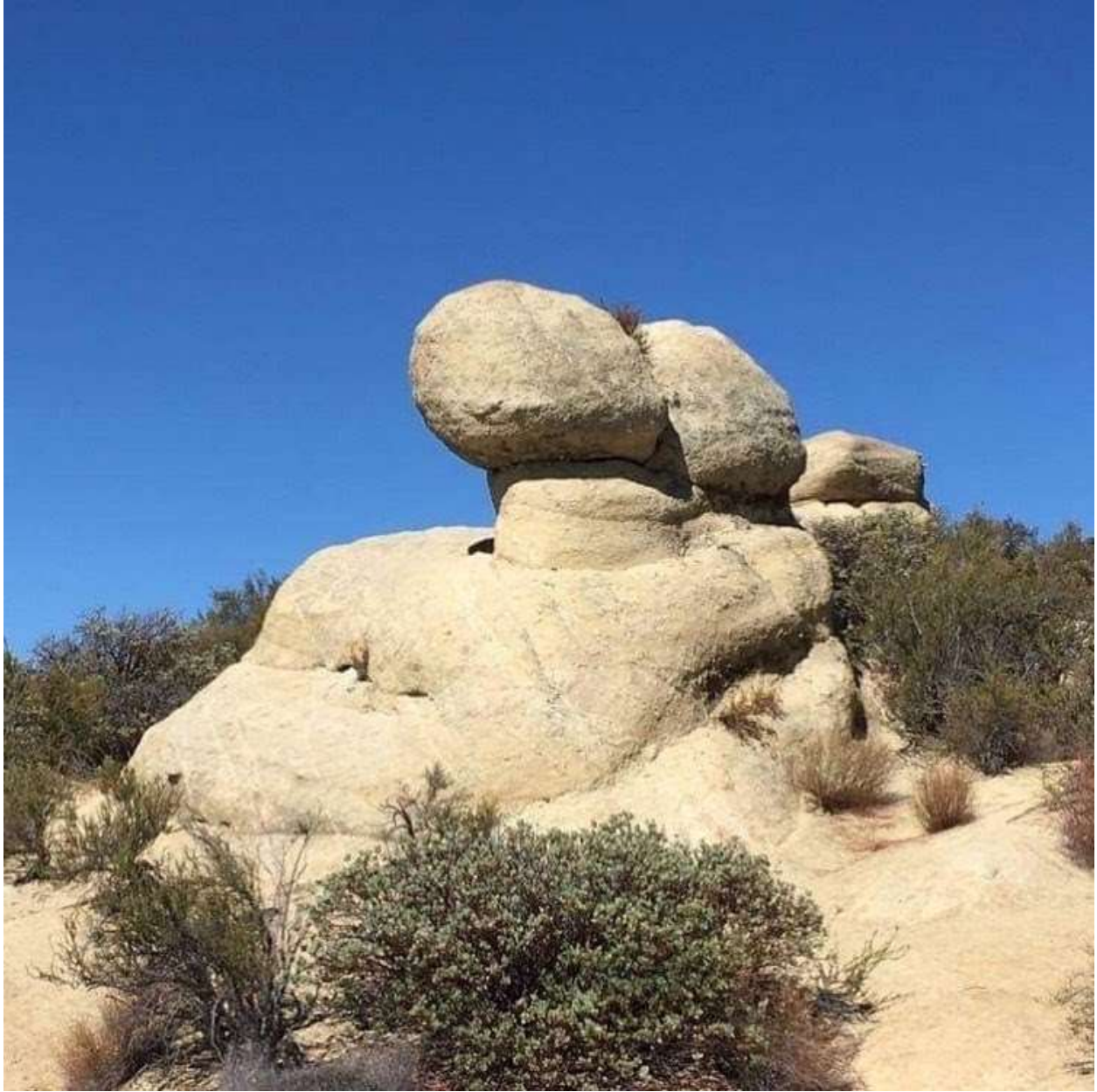
To take my mind off all the chaos, I started drawing and painting more frequently, sending my artwork to my family back home in Ireland and Spain. I wanted them to know that I missed them profoundly, but that I was also staying safe at home. Being an international student during this troublesome year added another tier of worry and heartbreak that is difficult to describe. Yet, seeing my parents display my art on their walls, like they once did with my macaroni art as a child, made me feel lucky to have their warmth and support despite the distance between us. This deeply encouraged me to continue working on my art.

I also took this time to go on socially distant hikes and isolated getaways within Los Angeles County, where I came across colorful materials in nature that inspired me to make my own paints. I am a materials scientist with a passion for cultural heritage and art conservation science, so I was excited to start my own little laboratory of art materials at home. I did this by using hand-picked mineral and organic pigments that I could process into watercolors and inks following the instruction of Prof. Sandy Rodriguez. Her class on Visual Narratives and Colors of the Americas was a highlight of my year, providing both the historical and technical context that helped me learn how to process natural pigments.

The painting that I submitted to Art of Science is a map that summarizes all the places that I visited in the last year, made entirely from watercolor paints that I made by hand. The colors were chosen carefully to represent some key features. For example, the highways were painted with hematite ( $\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3$ ) to represent my travels as veins, which kept me revitalized and energized during this last year. The yellows of the land were made from turmeric and goethite ( $\text{FeO}(\text{OH})$ ), while the ocean was made from malachite ( $\text{Cu}_2\text{CO}_3(\text{OH})_2$ ) and Maya blue. The greens were made from antlerite ( $\text{Cu}_3(\text{OH})_4$ ) and a combination of my blues and yellow, representing the flora of SoCal. The black details were all made from magnetite ( $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$ ) that was collected by dragging a massive magnet on the ground during hikes (think pet rock on a leash). The pink (used for my clothes) was made from cochineal insects, while the purple was made from logwood ink.

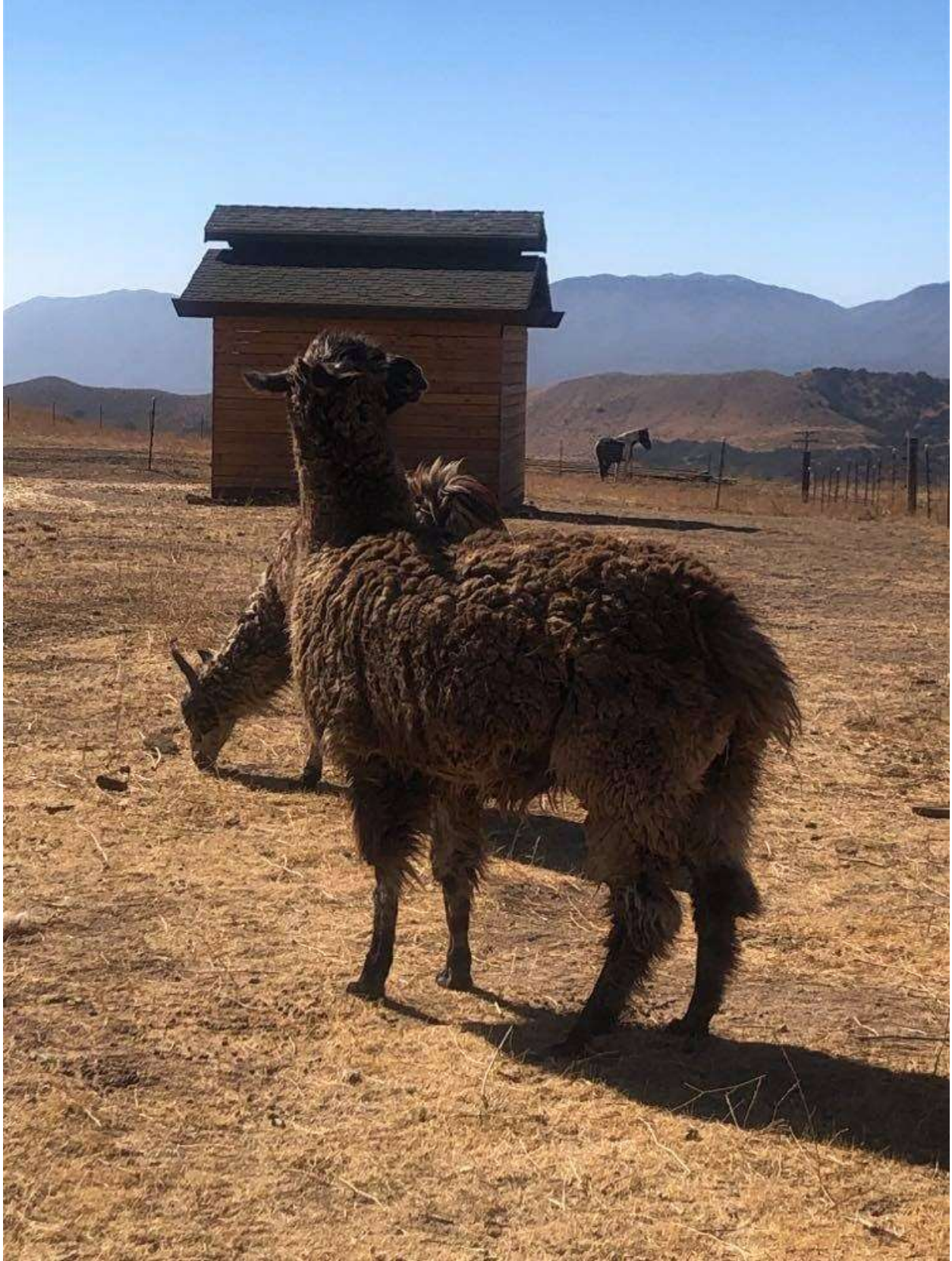
The personal narratives illustrated in the map reflect my adventures in Los Padres National Forest (where I saw a tiny frog and a rock shaped like a butt), Lebec (where I stayed at a llama farm), Calabasas (where I went to a drive-thru carved pumpkin exhibit), Mojave Desert (where I tried to stay in my bubble of isolation, despite bumping into people without masks), Acton (home of my malachite and magnetite), Caltech (represented by a turtle), Jurupa Mountains (home of my hematite and goethite), and Idyllwild (did you know their Mayor is a dog called Max??).

'A Year Like No Other' serves as a personal reminder that not all of this year was wasted. I was still able to make new memories and learn about materials and processing methods in a unique way, despite all the roadblocks.



Butt shaped rock from Los Padres National Forreest





Llamas from farm in Lebec





Malachite found in Acton





Hematite and Goethite found in the Jurupa Mountains



in Ethnobotany DB  
 prepared by Ernegardo Biles  
 documented, both  
 a *Datura Wrightii* Regel  
 , hallucinogen  
 . Thornapple

What I want → leads to days (like a week)

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### Color wheel of handmade paints