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**conversations on eternal interstice** 2022, from KONSTANTIN SIMONOV by sam wilson  
fletcher, the june after by inari hulkonen, trying by jill mcknight, the girl and the windmill by niloo  
sharifi, soft peeled apples by benjamin slinger.

from KONSTANTIN SIMONOV | sam wilson fletcher

in a cargo ship filled with cement. big seas. (he repeated: big seas.) the second officer was down and out with seasickness: vomiting blood. huuuge seas. everybody wearing lifejackets in the bridge. he said he was preparing to die. he was told to take the helm. in four whole days they made 7 nautical miles. (basically 7 miles.) on the fifth day the sea calmed and they made it to malta. they learned that another cement ship had gone down, all hands. everybody dead. several egyptians. dying for cement. made me wonder: how many fuckers die each year at sea, transporting shit like cement?

[ahmed gomaa ahmed eltrably (two ahmeds? 'my grandfather's name') is egyptian; he was a shipwright until the deteriorating economic situation in egypt forced him sell his yard; he is now a deck hand. he was at work on the ship as it crossed the atlantic]

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on 4 june 2022 i returned to the netherlands after sailing across the atlantic as artist-on-boat. it was a two week crossing. en route i was in creative exchange with brilliant poet and excellent person ellen dillon. together we were / are building a work called *reverse osmosis*

i am also writing / assembling a book called *konstantin simonov* (the vessel's original soviet name: built in poland in the early 1980s, first registered in vladivostok) which will include images of the hands of crew members, diagrams, documents, sketches, speech transcriptions, and short prose reflections. this is a tiny bit of that

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recent residencies (antarctica, atlantic crossing) have completely changed how i feel about (my) writing. i've always loved behind-the-scenes, finding the process more beautiful than the product (blah blah) — now i'm keen to honour (somehow) the actual people who do that hidden work

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was just chatting with the navigation officer, sergey abramov. young russian guy. told me an amazing story: at seaman's college (i have no idea if that is the proper term) his deputy headmaster (there was some difficulty with translation here but that was roughly his role) told the assembled class about losing a ship. (i had asked sergey if he or anyone he knew had lost a ship.) the story went like this: the ship broke in half over a wave, like a stick over your knee. that can happen. the deputy headmaster found himself in the ocean, and saw a life ring nearby. he swam to it and grabbed it. another seaman had also seen the ring. this seaman swam over and began trying to take the ring. 'at that point i was forced to kill this man': holding his head under the water under he was dead. at this point in the story sergey laughed. 'he told us that he no longer had nipples' (abraded completely by the life ring; he was afloat for about 24 hours before he was rescued, luckily in warm african waters) 'and promised to show us when we graduated. but he never did' sadly shaking his head

overleaf: hugo archilla was our bosun. the bosun is typically an older man with decades of sailing under his belt; right hand man to the captain; deck, not engine. these are his hands



It is The June After after A Strange Year that Lasted Two Years and it is uncertain whether it has ended at all, or is still going on, or will return. I have begun to go on,

and immersed in the digital realm,

*all the words, a lot of words, all this work and seeking  
of, photos and videos of, family, friend, holiday, free  
time, fulltime, document(ation)s, attachments and  
attachment, my grandmother selling pastries by a  
football pitch, advice/advert, promo pic, all this  
unfinished art, unfinished business, applications,  
completed applications and unsent applications,  
draft1, draft2, draft3, draft4, draft5, draft6, draft7 and  
8, embarrassing dance videos from 2012, to-do list  
2019, proof, of being eligible, of income, of sent meter  
readings, of a filed complaint, of address, residence,  
citizenship, status*

I seem to be constantly running out of space.

I move things around, from one location to another. All my accounts say warning: 97% full. There is an imminent threat that nothing will sync anymore. I might lose Everything unless I Take Action. All my digital corners are filling up with Life. Life that I can look at, endlessly look at with my eyes for as long as I have eyes and sight in them.

Everything is full already, but there is always more. More to save.

I save everything on my desktop,

make a mess. It is chaos: no order. No filing system. I make a note on my to-do list to organize when I have the time, some other time, some other, later, time.

Where am I supposed to put all of this? You would think that when something doesn't have a physical shape anymore, more space would free up. But I'm running into the same problems, only in a different dimension.

Same possibilities.

It has been brought to my attention  
that I can always purchase more.

More space if I wish.

More content to fill it with if I wish.

I am going to the library to print something. The computer is slow, I slot coins into a machine. Feels like real life. Someone on the street says hey in passing, I used to have a small crush on this person. The kind where you smile at each other a lot whilst knowing Almost Nothing about each other. I never learned Anything More because for a year now, I haven't had the courage. That particular kind of courage it takes to say excuse me I would like to spend time      with you  
would you  
with me?

I said to myself: alright then.

I let that part sleep. It was tired, needed rest. I practiced other kinds of small braveries, held my feelings (close), fell fiercely in love with my friendships. But every-body-else seemed so busy with that courage and it's long- and short-term consequences, that I questioned my rest. Did I need this, The Quiet? Or do I need A Challenge, instead? To Take a Risk and Live with Ambition, to be Active in My Pursuit and Success Will Follow? Advice/Adverts on my feed pointed at both directions. Forcefully. I was unsure.

But time was on a high-speed setting after the Strange Year That Lasted Two Years and Might Still Be Going On, and all my spaces were filling up fast, so most of the time I didn't have the time to think about it. I made a note to think about it some other time, some other, later, time.

I walk here often.

It's a small beck. A little pathetic really, by a road. But it speaks of more water, somewhere at the end of this.

When you stand in the middle of it, you can hear the cars (West) and the birds (East), and if you crouch low enough, the quiet water (in between). Pieces of green glass lie within the pebbles. Water treats them the same as stone, jades the sharp edges away. Leaves round, smooth gems.

A blackbird is busy in a bush, I don't bother him. There is rustle, pieces of debris fly out. He is Searching. I can smell a faint tang of nettle in the heat. I have never seen a beaver, but for some reason, today, I imagine one living here – a small one – keeping hidden from us and the foxes at night.

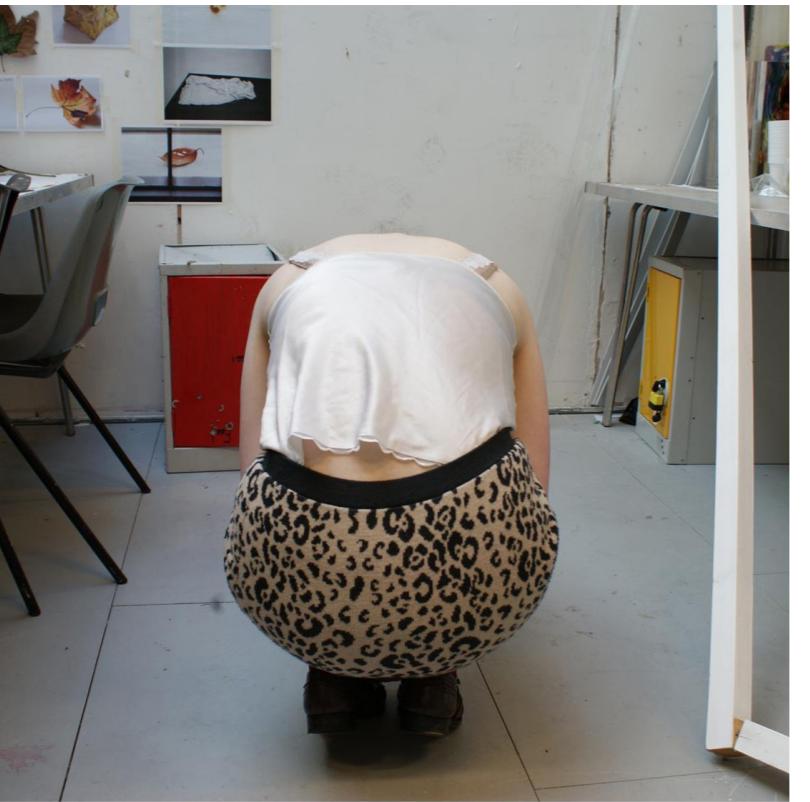
Sometimes I stand in the middle of the stream, close my eyes, and imagine it into a river, river into a sea.

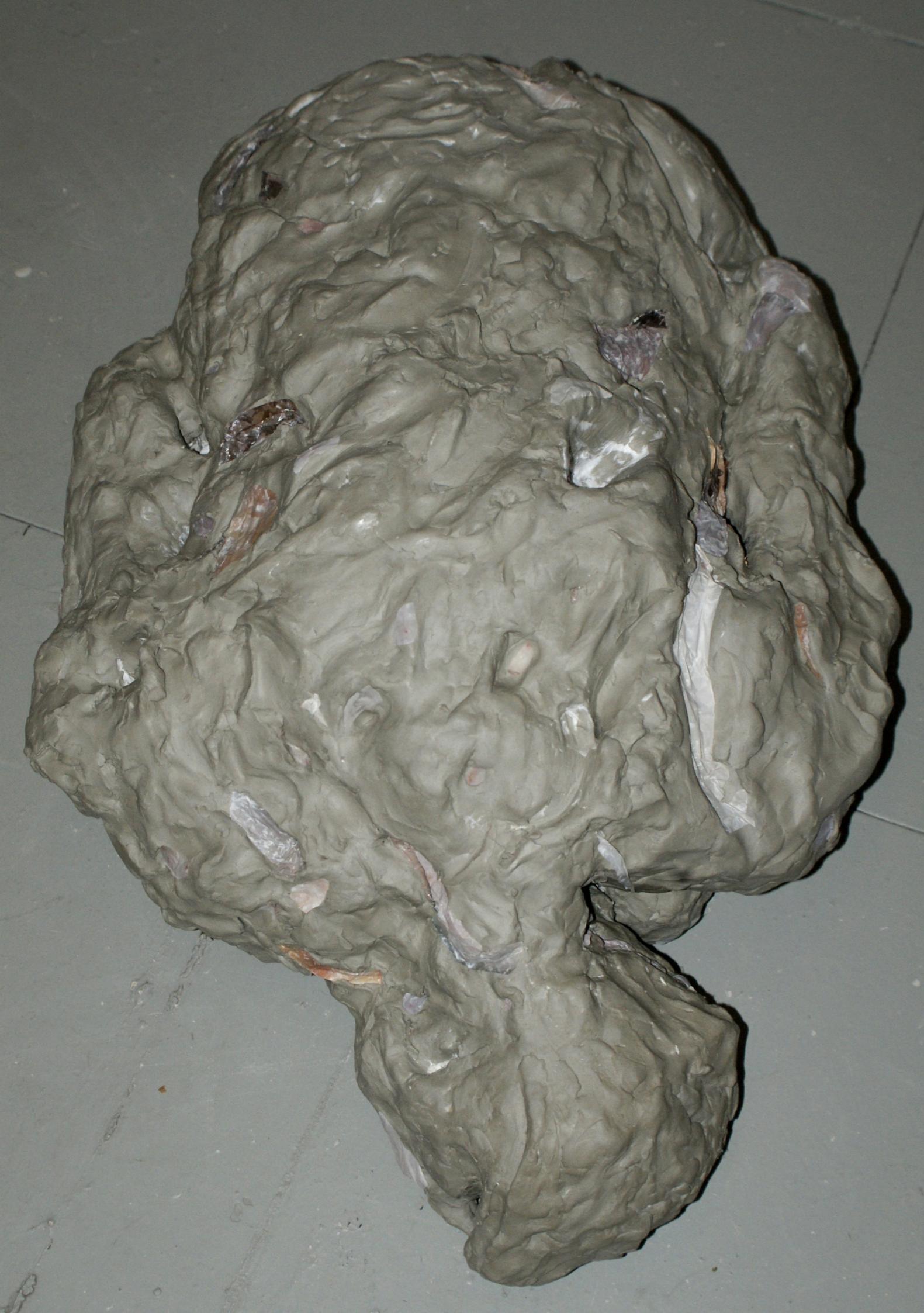
On the way home, I walk past a strange sight, behind a fence in someone's garden. A tall, sprawling silver birch with a tall, sprawling vining rose climbing up the tree. At first sight they look inseparable, part of the same tree. I stop and stare at the tree in disbelief. It looks as if the birch has burst into bloom, with huge clusters of white, plump flowers, growing all the way up to the top branches, announcing its existence with unassumingness and exuberant joy at once.

I marvel at the illusion for a while.

I have never seen this before.

I.H. 2022







## The girl and the windmill

A girl was sitting in the wheat field, watching the windmill on her birthday. It was the summer holidays, and with no friends to celebrate turning 14 with, and no classmates to tease her, she found herself weeping before the windmill.

"Why are you crying?" Said the windmill.

"Because you won't stop." Said the girl.

"I must continue," said the windmill, and continued.

A little while later the wheat glistened with the girl's tears. Woken up and irritated, irrigated, the wheat gestured with indignant arms and asked, "what's all the fuss about, human?"

"I wish the windmill would stop," cried the girl – "the way it turns, and turns," her voice broke, "I need a break!"

The wheat fell silent, having sworn a vow to never state the obvious.

A flower, which overheard their chat – chimed in. "What would you need a break for?"

"From everything! How it turns and turns. One birthday after the next."

"But birthdays are wonderful," objected the flower.

"Not when you haven't done anything!" said the girl, and stood up to walk away. She wanted to stamp on the flower. She didn't think birthdays were wonderful at all.

Her birthday was always in the summer holidays, and they lived miles away from anybody. Her mum was always tired, and so only the windmill witnessed her birthday.

In school, the other girls made a fuss of each other on their birthdays. Even teachers got a cake.

She was tired of getting nothing for her birthday, so she was crying.

A ladybird, in its characteristically underhand way, said, "you would think 14 is enough birthdays to learn how to not spend it crying."

"I'm sick of getting nothing for my birthday!" shrieked the girl, really annoyed now.

"But you have me!" said the ladybird, landing on her nose and leaving a little wet patch.

"Eurrrhhh!!!" the girl's shriek rose to a more piercing note.

Chuckling, the ladybird buzzed around and said, "what do you want for your birthday?"

"For the windmill to stop." Said the girl.

The ladybird giggled with glee and flew away to the graveyard, where the ladybirds were basking in the peaceful aroma of death under the high noon.

"Boys, it's prank time, call the crows, call the ravens. This is going to blow Kevin's squirrel decoy thing out of everybody's memory. This one is going to change lives."

Turning and toiling away in the wind  
I can't take it I'm only a kid  
I know that it's nothing that I ever did  
Still it goes round like a coin that spins

Grinding away my youth and my mind  
My withering hands only newly outlined  
Soon to be wasted  
Lonely to find

Howl to lunge free from this odious bind  
Kids at school are always unkind  
Each of us withering  
Fruits on the vine

It wasn't really her birthday, just something she pretended for effect when she felt sad and alone in the world.

She had gotten a cake on her birthday, which was a few weeks ago. It wasn't a very nice one though, not like those creamy ones with icing in spirals, going around the cake and levitating in fantastic shapes – roses, a tank engine, a caterpillar. No, her mum had made just a plain chocolate cake, quite dry and a little burned.

But the wheels were already in motion. She didn't realise how seriously the ladybird wanted to give her a birthday surprise.

The rest of the day passed normally, she wrote a poem about the windmill and thought resentfully of her classmates and mother, and the beginnings of political consciousness was brewing new, elegant forms of anger in that great greasy cauldron, the boiling, pus-filled vat of life, adolescence.

This was going to be the best birthday ever.

The ravens struck at 11:11, when she was brushing her teeth. The crows waited outside, timing things with their eye-time-sense. The crows were better hiders, timers, the ravens knew how to deliver a message with style.

It took just 3 of the 5 ravens to overwhelm and silence the girl. Bundled her in a blanket they borrowed off a man sleeping rough, stuff some in her mouth and the 5 of them carried her out of the bathroom window, which was big enough for all that.

They carried her to the forest, where the 6 Crow Families and an at least 25-strong delegate from the Raven commissioner's office waited patiently. They all fucking loved pranks. They were going to seriously owe the ladybirds if they didn't come up with something better than this soon.

They dropped the girl in the centre of the clearing, her arms slightly marked and red from the talons of the birds, although the blanketed shielded her from taking any real damage.

Ravens were stylish like that, fading in the experience.

Wide-eyed and frenzied, the girl was blindly trying to flee, but she quickly stopped when she saw hundreds of eyes staring back at her, and the ladybirds glistening under a patch of dappled moonlight looked like a sea of buttons. She felt the bile rising in her throat, and couldn't speak.

Before she could muster up the question "am I dreaming" from the recesses of her throat a simultaneous fluttering of hundreds of birds' wings, two each made a sound like a giant deck of cards being shuffled in the depths of a cave, and the echo saved her sanity because it told her ailing mind at least trees are near, at least they're near, saying it back, say it back.

And the birds were upon her, tearing at her flesh, oh, killing her, surely, so many, and I'm just a kid, and there's so many, and a great shadow rose against the moon - she saw antennae and the roundness and she knew the devil was laughing from the sky, manifest as a ladybird, and she thought she knew she was certain this was quite the end, quite the death of her yes the last thing I see oh mercy don't let it be you –

Until she noticed that the pain was superficial, even decreasing – the birds were swarming fast the sound like getting your car washed the wings flapping cold and lifeless like paper planes. In that tornado, she was only being papercut, which hurts, but not a lot.

The ladybird laughed and grew smaller until she could no longer see it from this distance, only hear it, and the moon winked – it had owed the ladybird a favour, but secretly enjoyed the mischief.

The needling cackle of the ladybird was suddenly drowned out by another sound, sharp and scary, a laugh whip cracked out of the girl's throat and hit the trees and tickled everyone. Everyone started laughing at once. The grass laughed and the soil laughed, the sleeping daffodils chortled in their sleep. The sun, now in a distant sky, heard the joke from a cloud and had to stop itself from shining too bright and destroying everything, kept it to a stony smile, but inside it was screaming, howling with delight, it was everything laughing together, and everyone dreamed a good dream that night in their bed for a flush second, full of promise –

This is the best birthday ever!

Still laughing all the way home, the girl didn't know quite what was so funny, she just couldn't believe what had happened.

She had been so afraid, she didn't want to go into the ground to see her dad. She didn't miss anyone enough for that.

On her way home, she passed the windmill and smiled.

Thank you grass said her feet.

Thank you trees said her nose.

Thank you sun said her shivering hands.

Thank you birds said her quick step, now to be always running from the flapping sound of wings.

Thank you mum said her heart, feeling sick at how much it loved her.

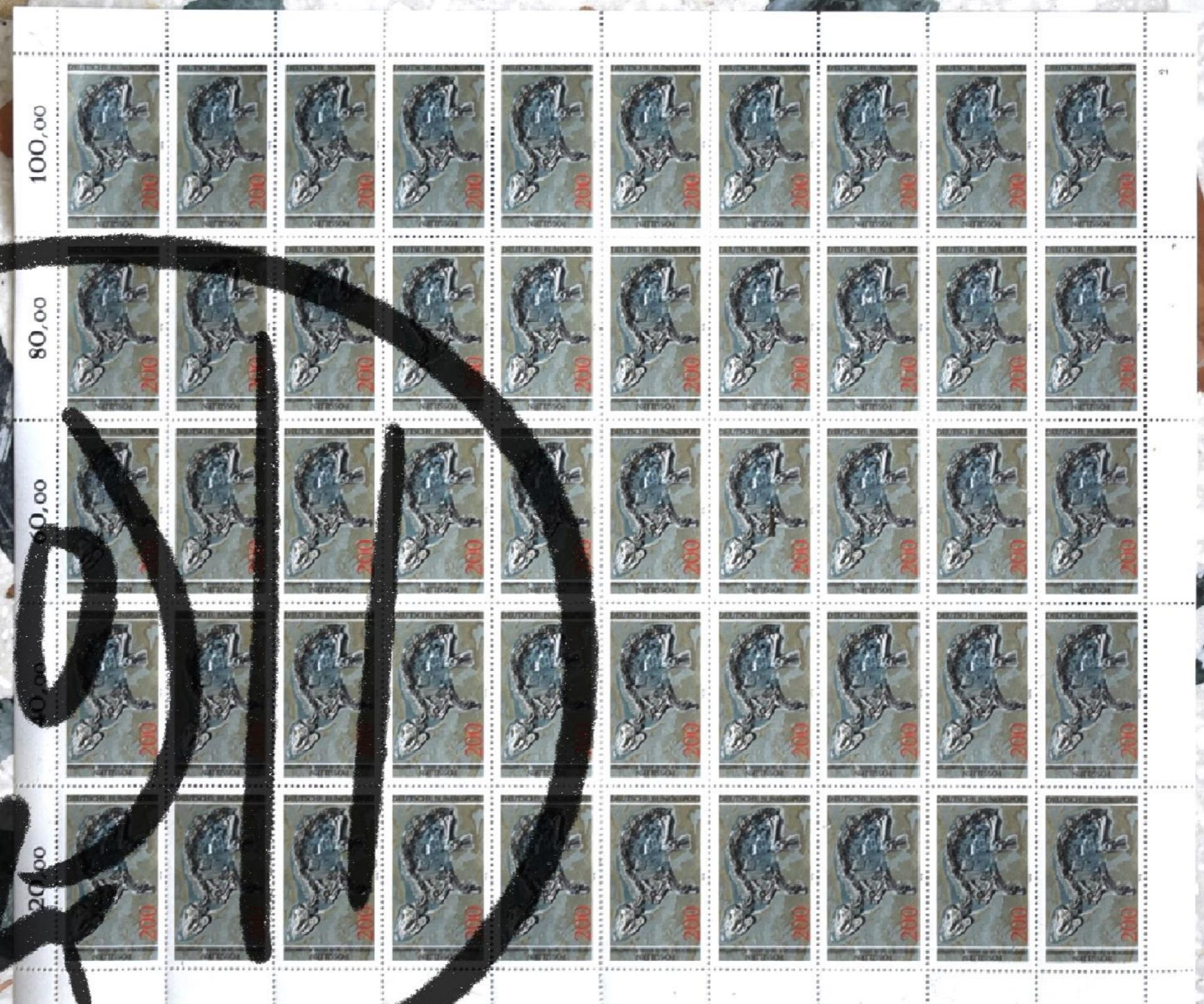
Just like that she went to bed the happiest she ever was, and dreamed of a mountain, just the mountain.

Next day she woke up depressed and cried all day. The windmill kept going and she kept on hating it.

Oh, but wasn't it a magical night.



less bleed time than a scoured headless passerine  
long slick rippled asphalt slid of the back o' me truck  
boards weren't greedy enough



parade of yoked bent backed ceorl eating peeled apples they look to a dehorned well bred dime  
fat, fetched and ovine, taking away the peeled apples  
barking and belt hung, swaying over strung blades ready to drop

2022