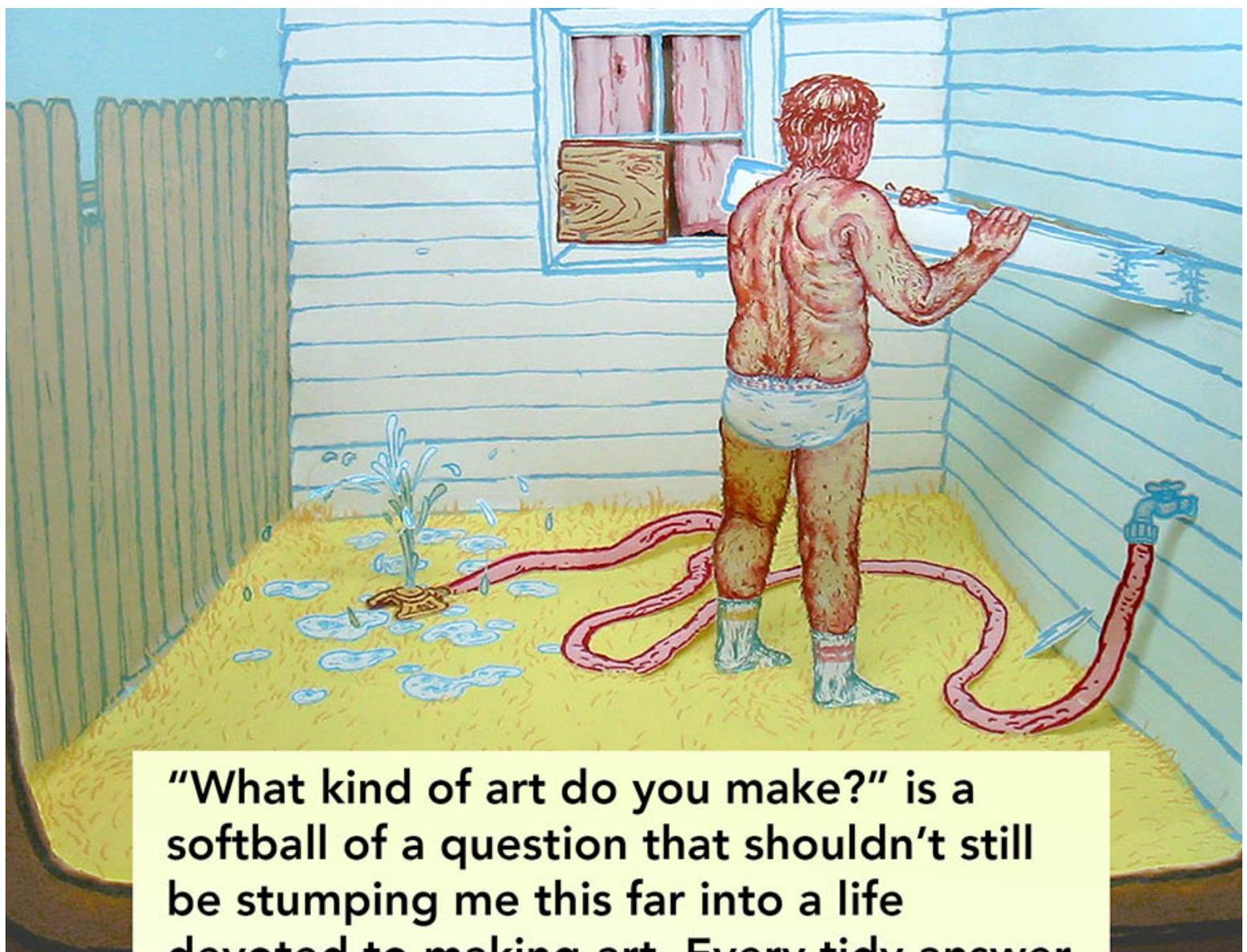
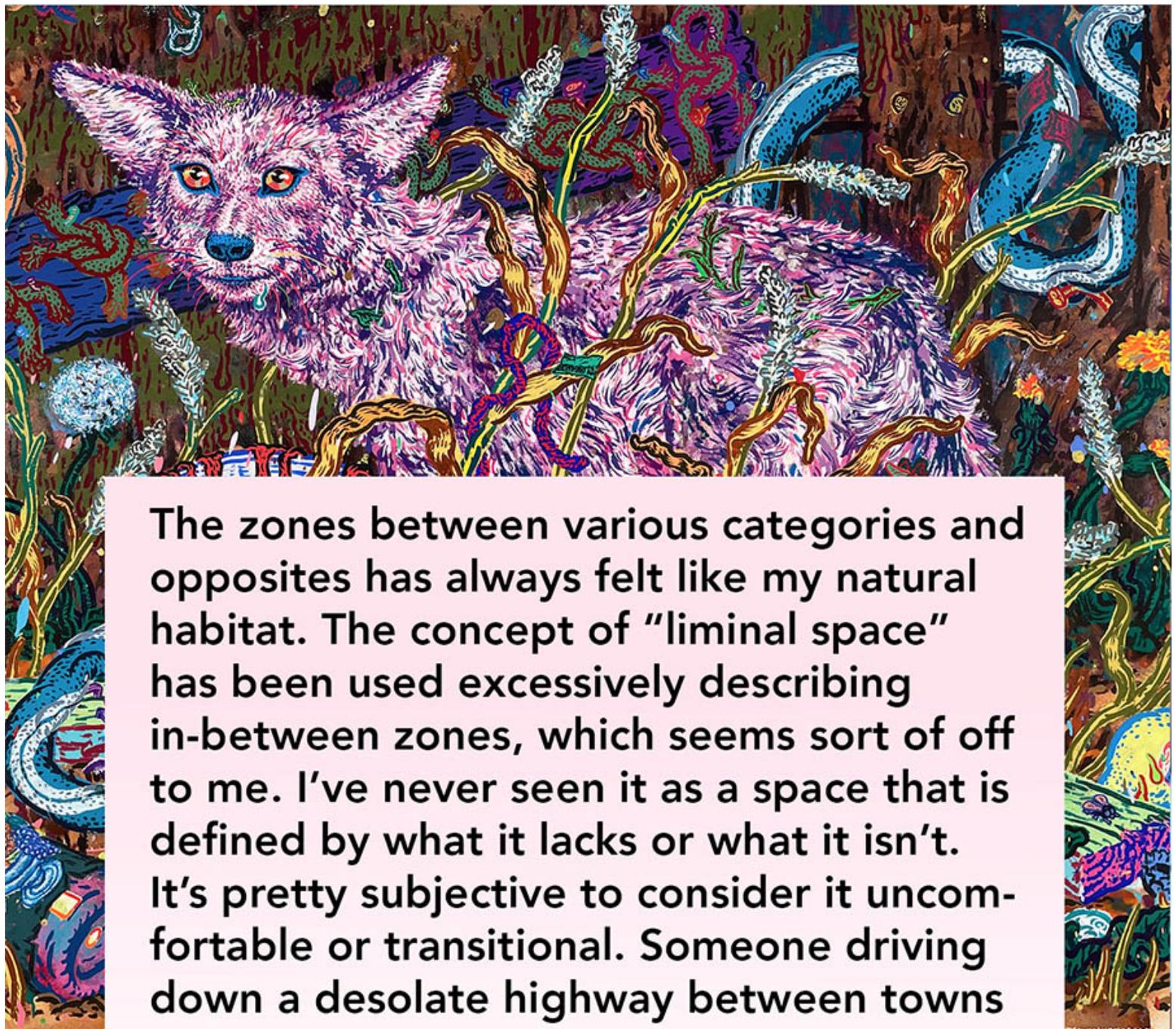


Nobody Asked #2

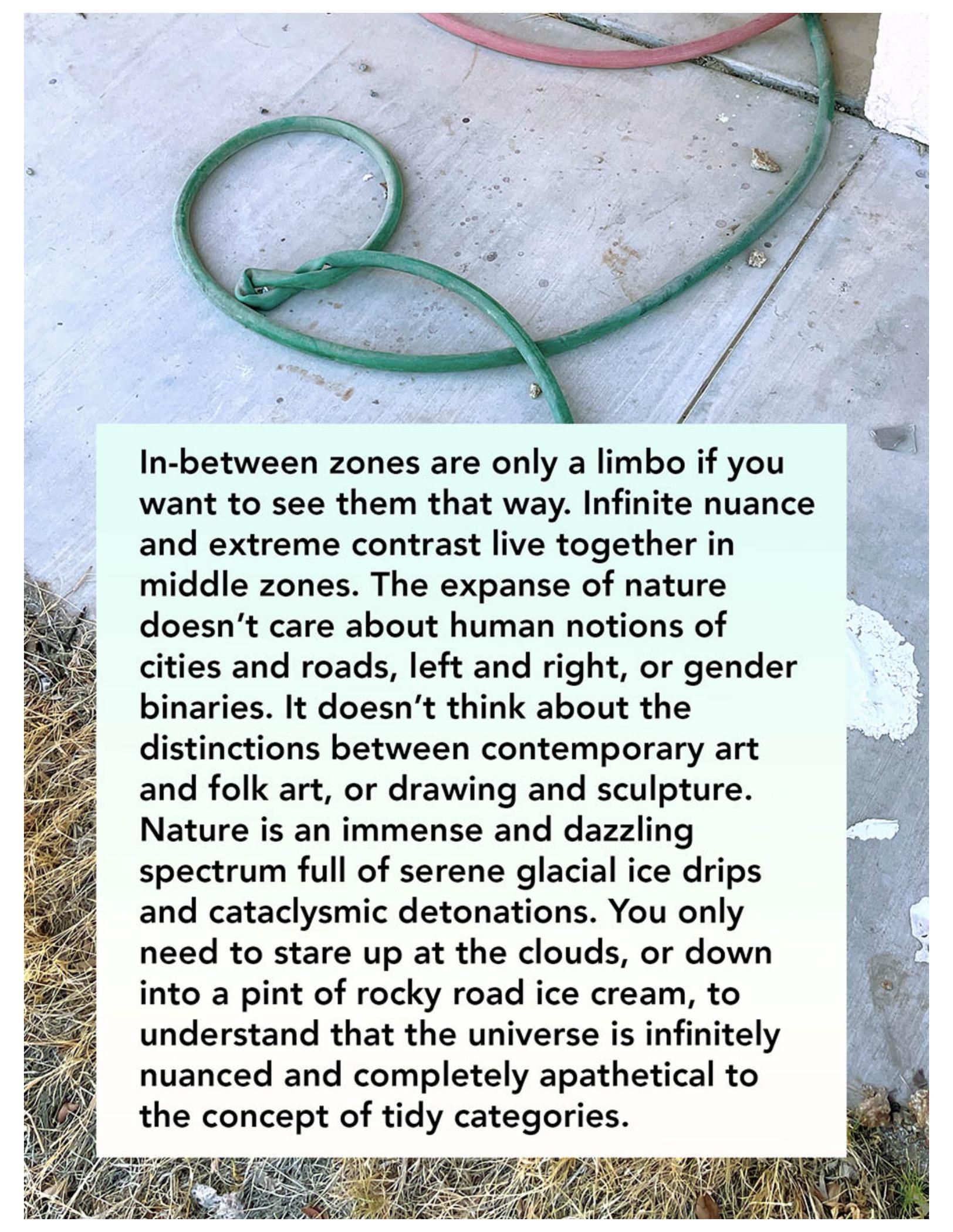
I've been working on a lot of sculptures lately and it seems like it might be good to make another one of these, and go on another aimless ramble about how they got here. To be fair, it's a question that a lot of people *have* actually asked...



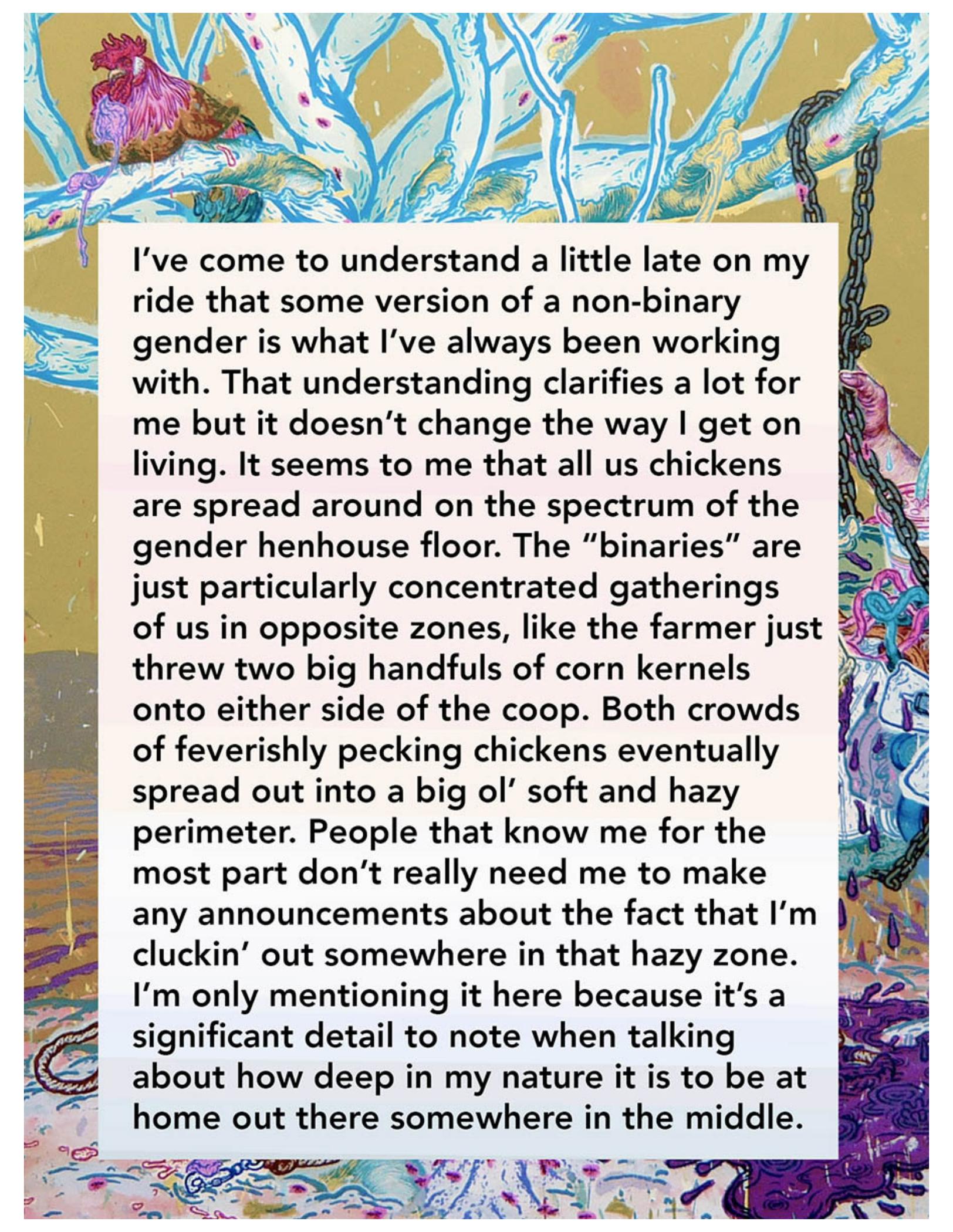
“What kind of art do you make?” is a softball of a question that shouldn’t still be stumping me this far into a life devoted to making art. Every tidy answer sends the people who ask it down thought paths that don’t lead to the truth of the matter. It’s as though people have pulled up beside me as I’m walking along the shoulder of the road to ask for some simple directions, and I just point toward any arbitrary washboard gravel road heading off away from me, hoping they don’t see me again after doubling back from its dead end.



The zones between various categories and opposites has always felt like my natural habitat. The concept of "liminal space" has been used excessively describing in-between zones, which seems sort of off to me. I've never seen it as a space that is defined by what it lacks or what it isn't. It's pretty subjective to consider it uncomfortable or transitional. Someone driving down a desolate highway between towns will pass stray trailers and roaming coyotes that exist in a seemingly monotonous wasteland. The driver doesn't realize that they're just an insignificant, momentary buzzing sound in the background of a chaotic melodrama being lived out there by a teeming ecosystem caught up in its own absurdity, tragedy, and bliss.



In-between zones are only a limbo if you want to see them that way. Infinite nuance and extreme contrast live together in middle zones. The expanse of nature doesn't care about human notions of cities and roads, left and right, or gender binaries. It doesn't think about the distinctions between contemporary art and folk art, or drawing and sculpture. Nature is an immense and dazzling spectrum full of serene glacial ice drips and cataclysmic detonations. You only need to stare up at the clouds, or down into a pint of rocky road ice cream, to understand that the universe is infinitely nuanced and completely apathetical to the concept of tidy categories.



I've come to understand a little late on my ride that some version of a non-binary gender is what I've always been working with. That understanding clarifies a lot for me but it doesn't change the way I get on living. It seems to me that all us chickens are spread around on the spectrum of the gender henhouse floor. The "binaries" are just particularly concentrated gatherings of us in opposite zones, like the farmer just threw two big handfuls of corn kernels onto either side of the coop. Both crowds of feverishly pecking chickens eventually spread out into a big ol' soft and hazy perimeter. People that know me for the most part don't really need me to make any announcements about the fact that I'm cluckin' out somewhere in that hazy zone. I'm only mentioning it here because it's a significant detail to note when talking about how deep in my nature it is to be at home out there somewhere in the middle.



That constant gravitational pull toward the hazy zone is an agitator, inciting the artwork to evade definition. Any bold attempts at streamlined descriptions result in a bird's nest of dangling loose ends. Nutshells haven't stood a chance since I was just old enough to phase out slobbering on my drawings. My instincts kicked in early, and they're headstrong. They keep me exhilarated when exploring the in-between zones. When Goodwill opens I'm led straight to the bric-a-brac. Binaries and orderly, pre-sorted categories are exhilaration-free zones. They're havens for category enthusiasts and genre purists in official rooms, off-beat high-fiving to celebrate new cultural property lines and assembling prefab plastic white picket fences to denote conceptual boundaries and protect the illusion of clean definitions (breathe, Taylor)...

My nature increasingly yearns to flip a fresh, sparkling stick of cartoon TNT into the center of that room, jump out a window, smash a perfect strike through those white picket fence bowling pins, and make tracks to the untamed and undefined in-between.

The answer to "what kind of art do you make?" feels like a flip flop hopelessly clamped in the jaw of the feral dog that keeps me on a leash, and commands me to obey his feral dogma. "How did you end up making sculptures like this?," is another understandable question. This one's not as hard to answer, it's just hard to summarize. So I'll try that here, starting from the beginning.



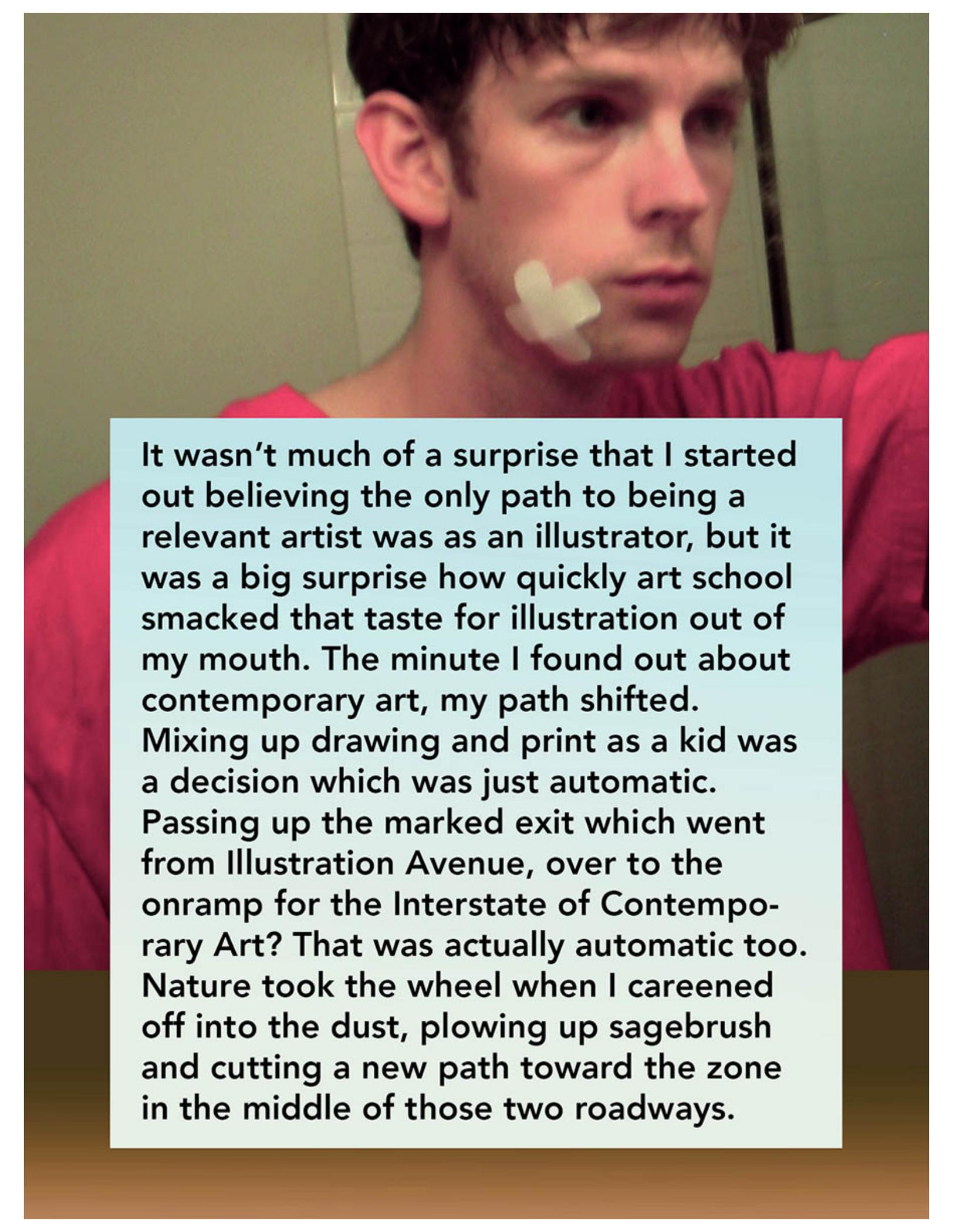
Garfield and Ooley



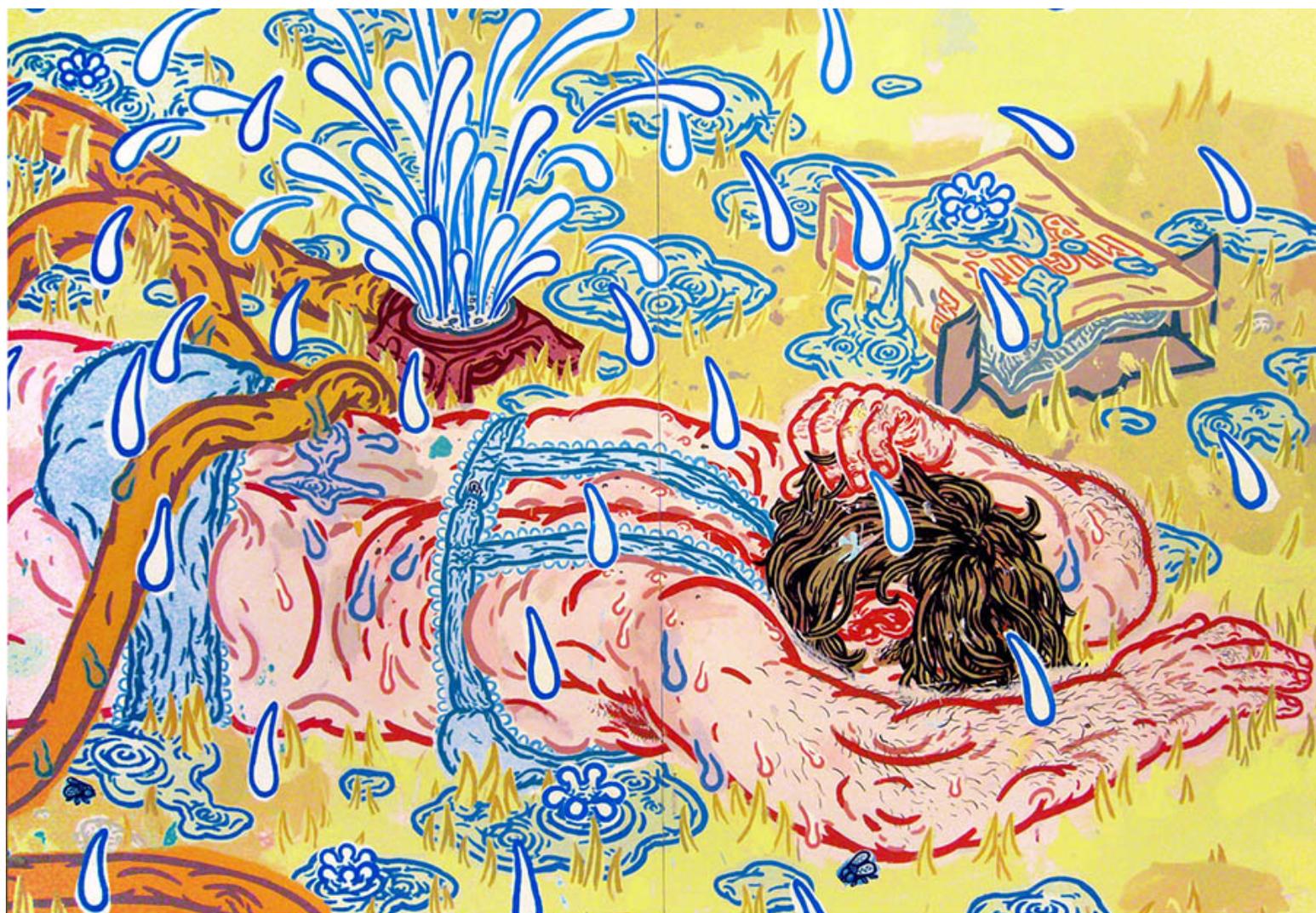
Most of my earliest drawings were devout imitations of newspaper comics and print. Everything I drew then and now shares some DNA with Garfield.

From all around the remote desert town where I grew up, I found every book about art and heard every rumor. I gathered all the evidence and of course evidence never lies. Art was *dead*. It went extinct like the dodo bird when modern times came along and changed it all. The artworks in the museums from Tom Hanks movies were crispy relics from ancient history. There were no more French salons for seeing the latest art because now we had TVs and the entire magazine rack at 7-Eleven.

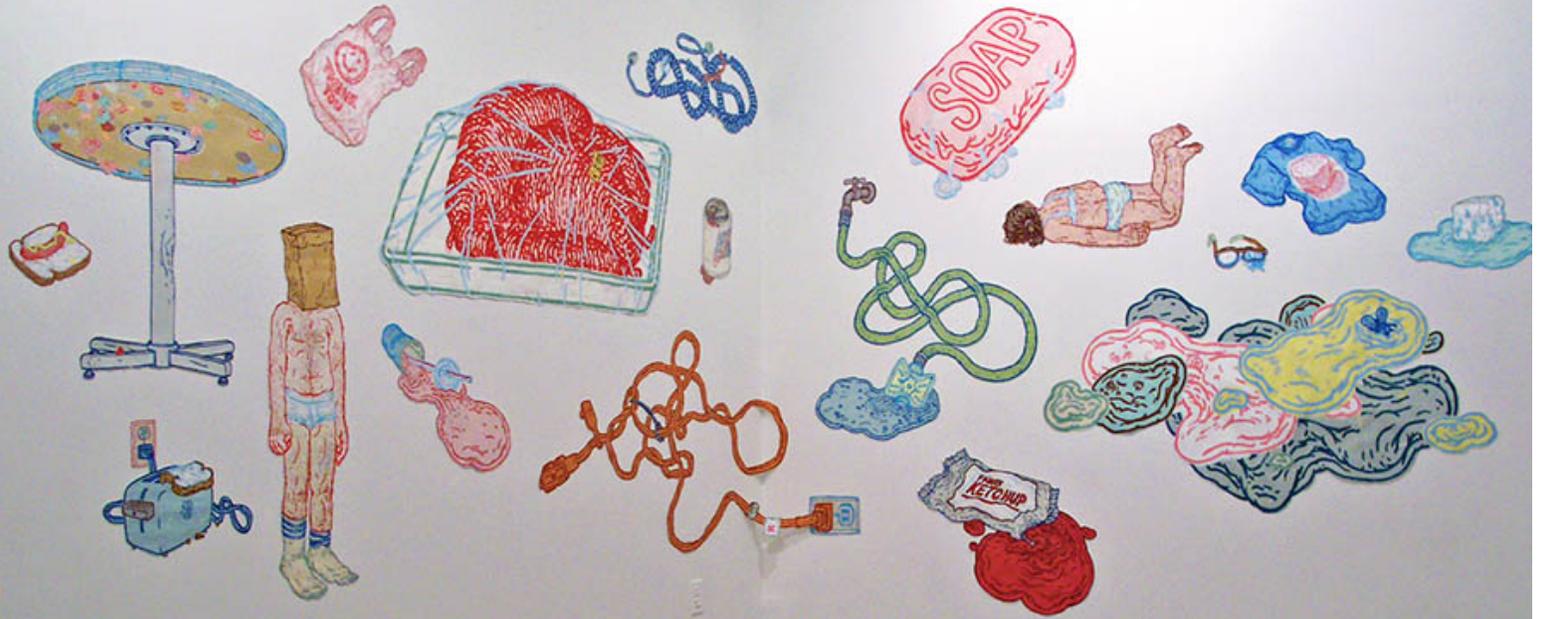
Comics felt alive though, and the graphic linework of cartoons became my native visual language. Replicating print with pencils was my first approach. I also began making my cartoons appear as if they had already been printed, by adding drawn price tags, barcodes, and artificially dog-eared corners. Occasionally, I'd laminate them by burnishing down clear packing tape so the surface would seem like it had been printed with a gloss coat. I was probably still gripping a pencil like it was a wad of french fries then, but I was also clearly already being lead by the exact same feral dog that controls me today.

A young man with dark hair and a serious expression is shown from the chest up. He is wearing a red t-shirt. A white adhesive bandage is stuck to his left cheek. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

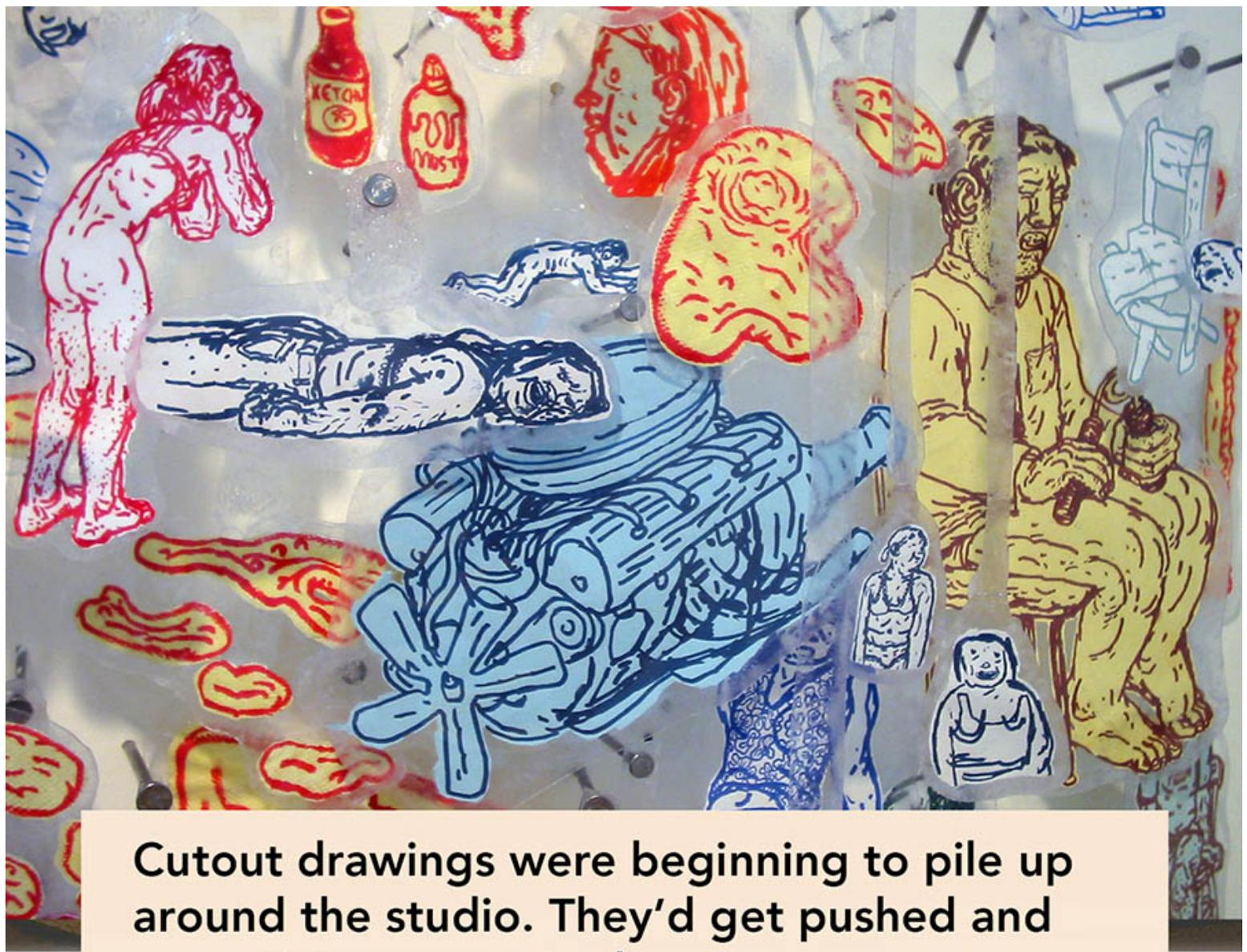
It wasn't much of a surprise that I started out believing the only path to being a relevant artist was as an illustrator, but it was a big surprise how quickly art school smacked that taste for illustration out of my mouth. The minute I found out about contemporary art, my path shifted. Mixing up drawing and print as a kid was a decision which was just automatic. Passing up the marked exit which went from Illustration Avenue, over to the onramp for the Interstate of Contemporary Art? That was actually automatic too. Nature took the wheel when I careened off into the dust, plowing up sagebrush and cutting a new path toward the zone in the middle of those two roadways.



Raised by carpenters and running rampant on job sites as a kid, I made small carvings with framing nails in big, dry globs of splattered drywall compound. I picked up a sense for materials and how things were built. I spent years obsessing over printing processes, and saw later in art school how intuitively they translated to painting. Learning classic European painting traditions felt like doing Civil War re-enactments compared to the relevance and honesty of the pop American visual language of bold-color printing colliding with painting.



Swerving off the illustration path bounced open a few surprise doors for the work. Since it didn't need to be printed, and never needed to squeeze onto a scanner, going big was A-OK now. It also didn't need to be rectangular to fit a book or magazine design, or even have any background at all. They were all cut free, figuratively and literally, to now exist on their own terms in analog space. The feral dog brought that chewed-up flip flop down on both of their shoulders and commanded them to "arise!" from their rectangular constraints, now officially ordained free and feral.



Cutout drawings were beginning to pile up around the studio. They'd get pushed and swept into groups in the same way nature orchestrates leaf drifts in the grass or trash piles behind a strip mall. They were forming casual but dense compositions. I was being instructed to install them that way, and I'd snap to. To remain free of backgrounds, it was back to laminating. No packing tape, this time sandwiched between clear vinyl, melt-sealed around the edges with a clothes iron, and hung in compositions with framing nails, which, as you're aware, I have a soft spot for.



The subjects in the drawings began asking to be drawn so that the images would be directly interacting with their environments. A real mind shift from cutouts, but it happened smoothly, like there was an instruction sheet also laid out on the floor. Next, they wanted new sections of paper added, allowing the planes of paper to follow the plane shifts happening in the drawings. They began to split into pieces, and new planes of paper would sprout and grow off in various directions, just as you'd expect to witness in time-lapse during every nature documentary.





Just a taste of freedom will never be enough. The drawings rightfully demand skeletal support to realize total liberation from the flat life they were assigned.



They've been flourishing in this unmapped inter-dimensional ecosystem with no concern about categories or having easy answers to seemingly simple questions. This transitional phase is permanent. They're tapped into their nature now, running loose in the expanse between drawing and sculpture.



They're still drawings, but just feral now is all, and they can sometimes be misunderstood. They've been out in that haze with their wild dog friends on a genre bender blowing off a little steam. When they return home, it's usually to steal a cooling pie off the window sill or get at that remote control they've been expressly forbidden to chew on. This is just how things are now, I don't mind.



