

i feel
ugly

ste
ven
tho
mas

Introduction

The physical self and identity are intertwined in a way that can't be untangled. For some time I thought of them as, not only separate, but linear. Unknowingly, the attempts to disconnect them produced unintentional outcomes. I've been in disharmony with my own body and appearance for most of my life. I can look in the mirror and see my reflection as something familiar, but disconnected, and invasive.

The term 'distortion' in art can encompass a range of techniques, styles, or elements within an image. My drawings, for instance, could all be considered distorted, as they prioritize expressive and compositional representations of anatomy over realistic human forms. However, in this book, I'm referencing a loose collection of visual elements: harsh lines, dirty spots, areas of graininess, stretching, blurring, and the faint doubling of images. Some of these elements evoke the unintended effects seen in photocopies made with a Xerox machine and the visual artifacts from playing or copying VHS tapes. Others remind me of more organic processes, like how materials appear after being exposed to the weather, becoming dirty, stained, and torn.

This kind of distortion can be seen as a result of severe image deterioration, where parts of the image begins to break down and lose coherence. When this happens, I start to feel as though the image is phasing between two states of being—something is being lost, and in the space left behind something new and distorted emerges. Dismorphia is an unintended outcome that occurs in one's identity. Just as image distortion alters parts of the original form in unpredictable ways, dysmorphia creates a misalignment between self-perception and reality. Sometimes, when I look in the mirror, I can observe a noticeable shift in feelings—moving from a neutral sense of familiarity to a visceral discomfort with my reflection. As I understand it, dysmorphia distorts how you interpret what you're seeing, and it can be difficult to negotiate with what my eyes are seeing and what is being shaped by thoughts and feelings. The mistrust in yourself that builds over time because of this makes it difficult to understand.

For so long, I wanted to believe that the physical self was merely a shell—far less meaningful than the internal self, which I viewed as the only truly significant part of my being. I may have even considered it a form of enlightenment or virtue.

But in reality, it was just a way to cope with my sense of self, if I deemed it virtually insignificant. Even during periods of attempted fitness and addressing health concerns, I convinced myself that it was merely an obligation for survival rather than a genuine effort to look and feel better. I chose to wear unremarkable clothes—plain button-down shirts and khaki pants—preferring to remain unnoticed and unseen. These attempts to diminish the importance of my physical self were meant to provide relief. I thought in some way I was exercising a form of self acceptance, but instead I was creating even more internal dissonance and confusion. Some of this dissociative practice was heightened during a prolonged series of health issues that plagued much of 2024. Sitting in the waiting rooms of medical facilities, I would try to mentally prepare for whatever painful or uncomfortable test awaited me. I kept telling myself, “I’m not here right now,” and would imagine leaving the room, exiting my body behind.

As the medical testing subsided, it seemed as if some of the conditions I had been living with simply required new and ongoing care. Yet, these health problems deepened my sense of hostility toward my physical self.

I resented my body, feeling as though it had betrayed me in some way. There's a room at the top of the modern art wing in the National Gallery of Art filled with a series of minimalist abstract paintings titled Stations of the Cross: Lema Sabachthani (Why Have You Forsaken Me?) by Barnett Newman. Newman created this work after recovering from a health scare. I understand it as a meditation on the meaning of life, death, and suffering. I visited this room in 2022 and remember feeling a quiet discomfort. In 2024, I often thought of it—not in an enlightened or contemplative way. In a direct way I could only ask God unanswerable questions like: 'Why is this happening to me?' I began to have more and more of these kinds of thoughts. I'd daydream about waking up in a different body, as someone else, living a completely different life. Then some things happened in my personal life that forced me to confront how ugly I'd become to myself, not just externally, but all over. It was a severe awakening that made me realize that the inner workings of my entire being are much more complex than the sum of a bunch of different parts. I experience the world and perceive myself as one whole being. In denying any part of myself I was denying my entire self.

My efforts to compartmentalize pieces of my identity were just misguided attempts to understand and cope with my existence.

The majority of these drawings came from a pile of sketchbooks from late 2023 to late 2024. I see this as the time period leading up to the awakening I described previously. A few weeks after that moment of awareness I conceptualized and began putting this collection together. I spent five days affecting 60 drawings with layers of texture, and distortion before I began to edit it down to the images you see here. In writing this essay there was a lot of personal details and history I could have included, but chose not to. This project was not intended to be a summation of decades of struggle as much as wanting to address something at the moment of awareness. I don't wanna dwell in this moment for too long.

-Steven Thomas





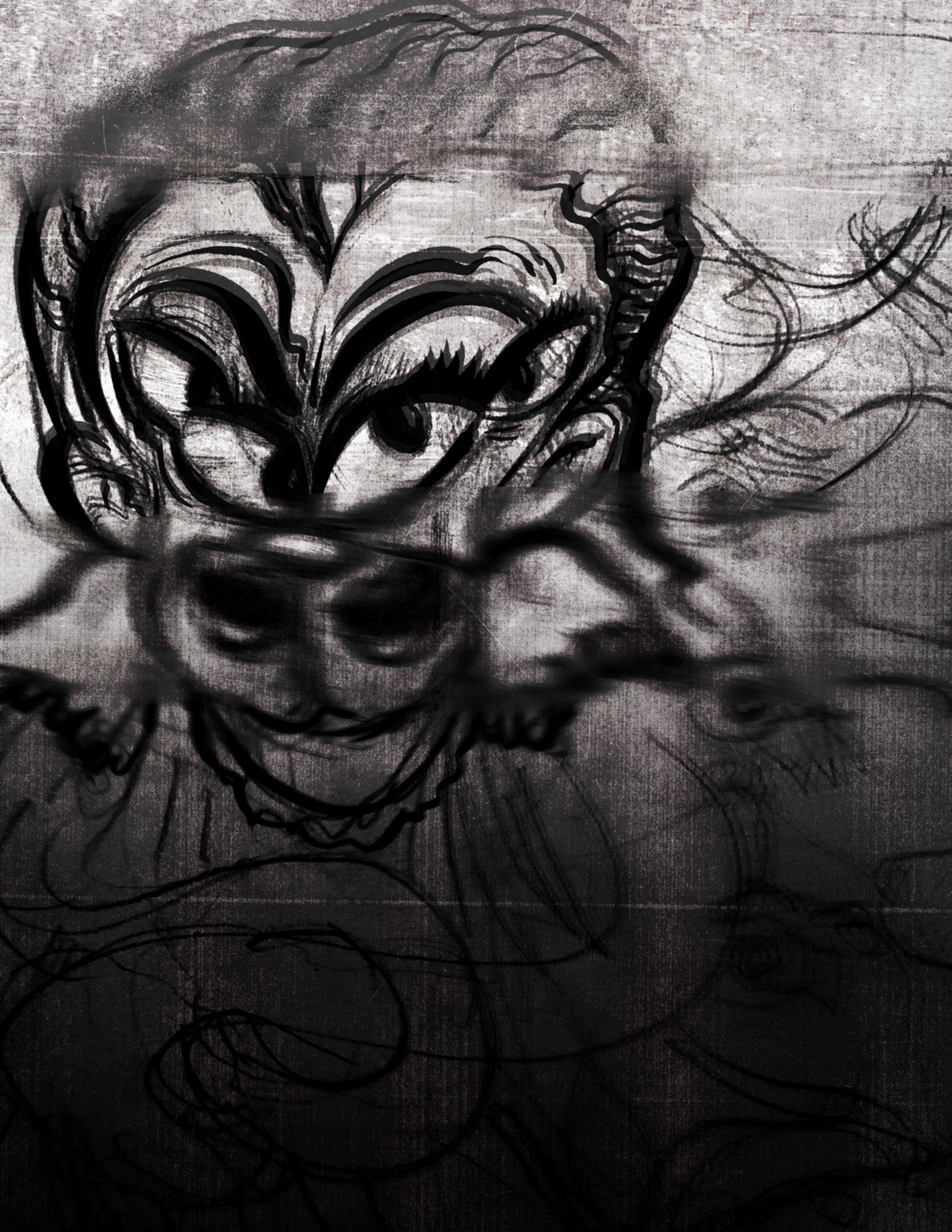




































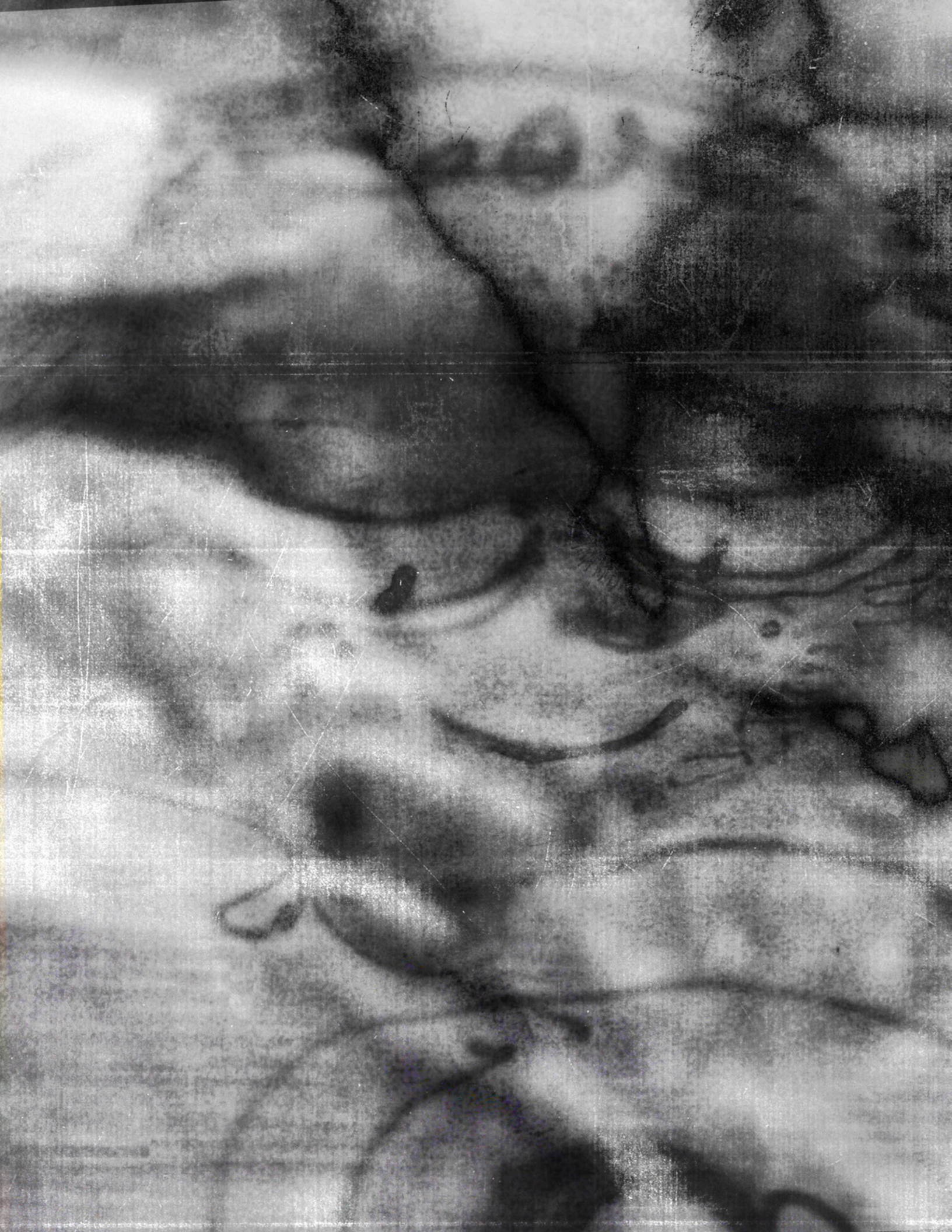














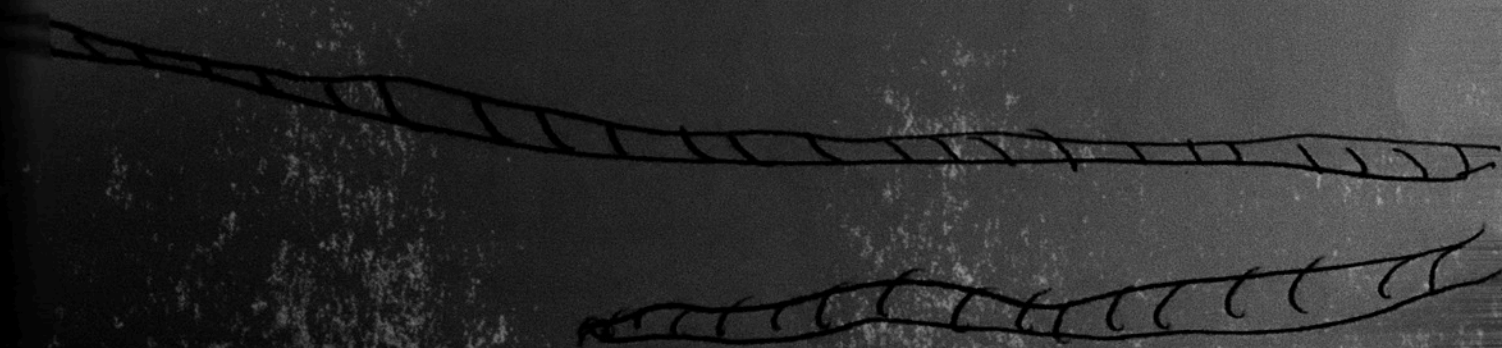
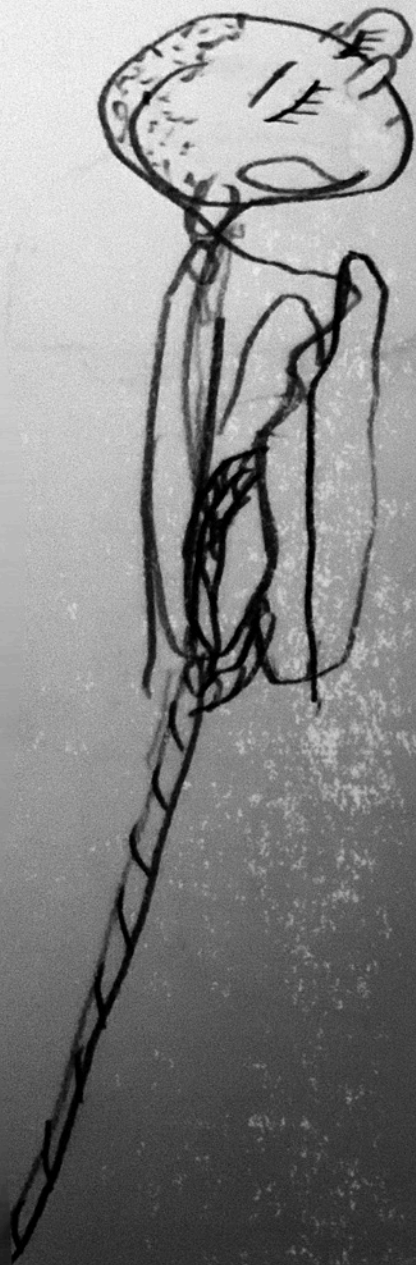






IS NOT GOV
WELL TOD















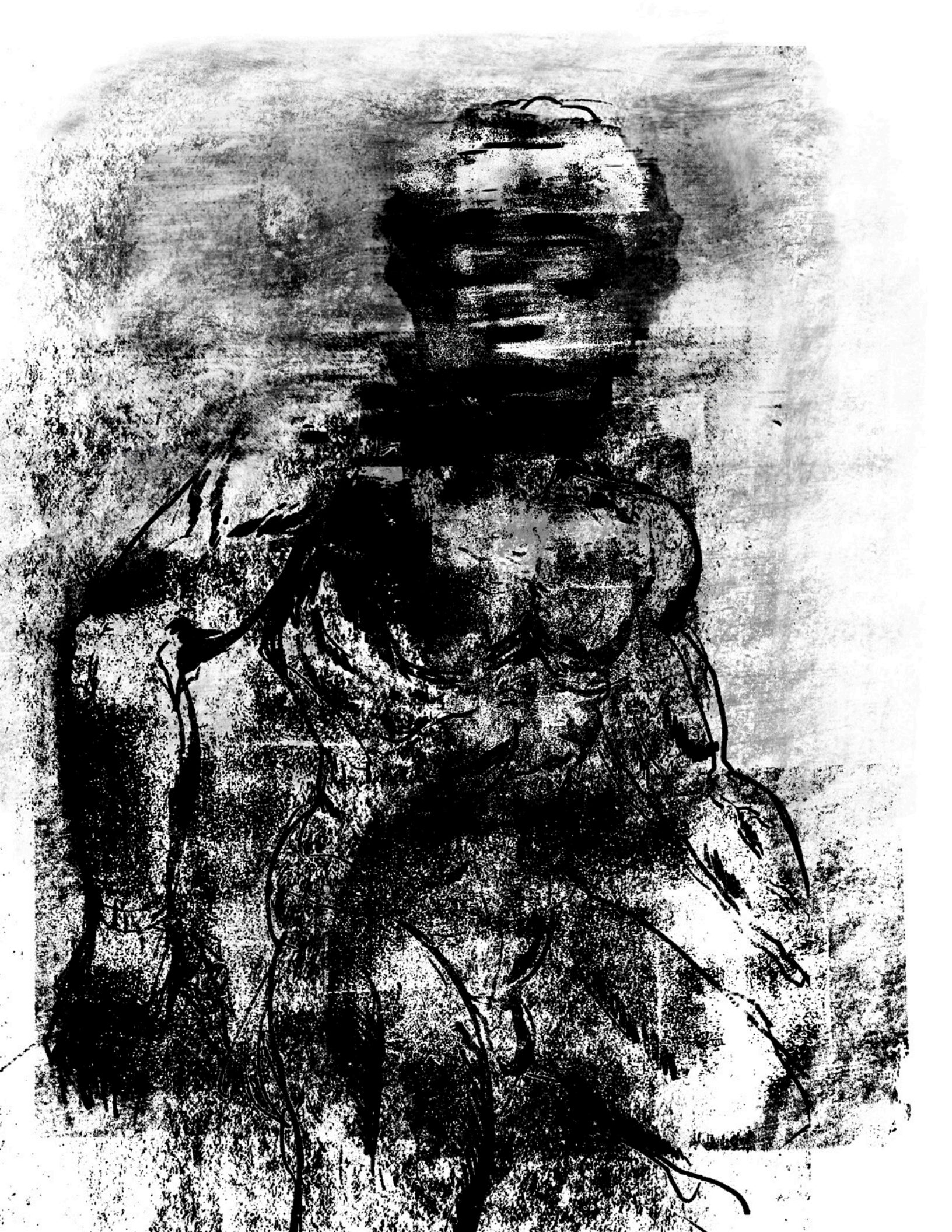




























I am pleased to offer a PDF of my drawings for your personal viewing and enjoyment.

If you appreciate the work and wish to support its continued creation, there are a few ways to contribute:

- **Order a Physical Edition:** A limited, signed, staple-bound edition of I Feel Ugly is available for purchase in my [Online Store](#).
- **Support Through a Contribution:** If you'd like to support the creation of future work, you may contribute any amount of your choosing. Your support, no matter the amount, is invaluable and helps sustain the ongoing development of new pieces. Contributions can be made via:



- **Share the Work:** Feel free to share this download with others who may find it of interest. Sharing helps increase visibility and support for my work.

Should you prefer, the artwork is available for download with no obligation. Your support, in any form, is deeply valued.

I Feel Ugly Copyright 2025 Steven Thomas
All rights reserved. No part of this book may be
reproduced or used in any manner without written
permission of the copyright owner.

INSTAGRAM  @steventhomasart

EMAIL  steventhomasart@yahoo.com

WEBSITE: steventhomas.art