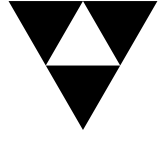




**THE
RACKET | 87**



THE RACKET

Hey there.

At the beginning of the year I decided my self-imposed parental leave was over. I decided I'd spent enough time away from The Racket in all its many forms, and I could jump back in feet first. I'd been picking at the edges for a few weeks. Getting a few things in order, but now, now was the time to fire up The Racket Journal. To start plowing through submissions, sending out acceptance emails, contacting artists – all of the many, many things it takes to get this slight, digital publication off the ground.

I was so confident of my ability to manage everything, to keep the trains running smoothly and on time, I reached out to all the writers and artists I'd been in discussion with before and told them, "Your piece will be in _____ issue on _____ date." I was ready.

I was not. It quickly became apparent no matter if I'd blocked out a perfect schedule for upcoming publications, interviews, reviews and so on, I wasn't going to be hitting these dates. I was going to be watching these dates come and go from the sideline where I made cooing noises and raspberries to my adorable child.

As it turns out, having a child is, as my wife says, "increasing your life responsibility by 100%." It isn't just that there's more to do—there is though, an endless amount of more, so much more you didn't really even know what more was before the kid popped into the world. And it isn't just that your time is pulled thinner—which again, it is; every moment has to be a masterclass in multitasking, layers upon layers of tasks being accomplished in choreographed unity or you're going to be wearing a full fit of spit-up covered clothes while your child wails in the background.

More so, it's about a perspective shift. I'm a guilt-ridden, obligation driven human being. If I have said I'll do something by a certain date, let me tell you, that thing is getting done. Or pre-baby, it would've gotten done. It would've entirely unacceptable for me to not hit a deadline, to let down my side of the chrontal bargain. That was before though. That was before I had a kid, before I thought I knew what "priority" meant. Now—though it still sticks a small knife into my stomach every time an issue doesn't come out on the date I thought it was—I have different priorities, and more than

THE RACKET

that, I just don't care as much. There are nights when I know I should work another hour, try to get one more thing done, and then I hear the kid and my wife giggling in the next room, and before I know it I've closed down my computer and am sitting on the floor, wearing bear ears and giggling right along with them.

I'm not trying to make an excuse and I'm not asking for forgiveness. I'm just letting you know, we're still keeping at it here, things are just moving a different pace. And I couldn't be happier about it.

'Till next time,
N

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police brutality, racism and violence
perpetuated towards BIPOC
communities in all forms.

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THE RACKET : QUARANTINE JOURNAL, Vol. 6, NO. 87

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A gothic castle surrounded by dinosaurs.



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We aren't in this for the money.

But there are costs in doing what we do.

Any help with those costs (and with the costs of future endeavors) would be greatly appreciated.

If not, we get it and we still appreciate you.

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87



WELCOME PARTY
FOX HYSEN
2023



SNAIL
FOX HYSEN
2023

Coots

NATHAN WHITING

The lake comatose Jan. *as if* ice has not melted
 on a new bench we watch, Joy
Listen : ↓ thaw,
 ↓ no new oration *as if* a congress speakerless,
 half a bird whisper → barely a claim
as if gray sky grays calm,
 Two coots a dark ▶ recently unsealed ◀
 V-shimmer
 polished mirror ∩ no reflection
as if vote after vote
 could encourage cooperation *as if* two coots beyond
 who avoid the gull gangdom a fuss agitated beyond
 by a tree-feather hillside ↑↑ beyond
as if WILL easily soars ↑↑ farther,
 the more absolute a wide ↑↑
 hesitation by insect eggs *as if* exaggeration measures
 a long night
 before indiscernible dreams open,
 and their stillness Jan. 3
 2023 *as if* the hatched lake
 has opened now,
 wings, *as if* nervous congress met
 a swan *whap whap whap whap whap whap* up
as if need must fly.



The Mayor comes on Wednesdays

KAREN WALKER

All the lawns on Golden Boulevard are mowed on Tuesdays.

All the layers too, because The Mayor comes on Wednesdays. For Golden men, a side part with tapered back and sides is permitted. For the ladies, shoulder length with perky curls. For the Labradoodles, a puppy trim.

All layouts for posters protesting The Mayor's coming are mowed—shredded—on Tuesdays.

As are all protest leaders captured in raids on pool houses where, in midnight meetings, they make posters and practice fist-pumping and chanting, "Mayor Go Home!"

All the leagues—The League of Golden Voters for The Mayor, The Lawn Putting League, The League of Households with Two Kids and a Labradoodle—assemble on Tuesdays. They practice marching and flag-waving on the boulevard. Late mowing is no reason to no-show.

On Golden, learning is carefully mowed; boys between eight and thirteen are taught to cut the grass 2.65 inches high. To rake. To dump the heavy bags of clippings on the curb for Juan or Old Walter to drag away and burn.

All the leases held on Golden Boulevard can be cut short on Tuesdays. Juan may get a rent increase on his cold water walk-up, Old Walter an eviction for creating too much smoke.

After the mowing and the marching, a lecture. All about the history of The Golden Debutante Ball and plans for this year's event. It'll raise funds for The Mayor's legal defense and re-election campaign.

Or about the Golden Band. How it marched in Nixon's inaugural parade in '69, bugles and bright buttons gleaming: a legend watered by old men on Tuesdays.

Waaaay back when lawns were first mowed, the same old men founded the red brick bank on the corner. It's still there. It hasn't changed. Checks are welcome. There are no ATMs. Husbands sign for wives.

Ahead of Wednesdays, all the lemons on Golden are kept at home. Only the prettiest people are chosen to serve The Mayor tea and tarts or shake his hand. The best babies will be present for him to kiss.

And, because the press will dig and dig, all the weedy, seedy liaisons of Golden Boulevard are mowed short, though they'll sprout again. No leering or air kisses, dirty hand gestures or sexting. Happy marriages only on Wednesdays.

All the liberties of the Golden base—a label embraced despite The Mayor's wry face; to him, the place is but a test case, a user interface—are mowed on Tuesdays.



TRAVERSE
DAVID HYTONE
2023

Let Me Count the Ways

RUTH CROSSMAN

(1)

You get me off craigslist like a new engine for your car. *Seeking a 420 friendly lady who can accept me for who I am.* We trade instant messenger handles. You quiz me on my stoner bona fides: Indica or Sativa? Sour diesel or Jack Herrer? Do I want to talk all night on Instant Messenger? Do I want to drive up to Tilden and hotbox your car?

(2)

I have some unflattering bangs and no cute clothes. I'm the heaviest I've been since high school, 250 if I weigh a pound, and I cannot emphasize enough how much that affects all of this. I don't have a car. I don't even have my own computer. I'm working two tutoring jobs and getting a ride to BART from my dad every day.

(3)

He's getting pathetic about it. Bob says. Bob, whose own girlfriend broke up with him a month ago and kicked him out of the apartment to boot. Bob who has walked through our bedroom when it smelt like sex to sit on the balcony and share joints with me. Bob is trying to be friends with both of us, although technically he was my friend first. He doesn't want to pick sides. He says you're falling apart and I'm just making it worse. We go out to another bar, a place with a back patio where we chain smoke and nurse our beers. *Look.* He smacks the table. *If you have a knife stuck in your chest, do you pull it out little by little?*

(4)

I've been trying to date on craigslist for months, wading through dick pics and lonely transplanted tech workers, married cheaters, and general creepers. You are the only one I've been out with more than once. We go to a dive bar with dark red leather booths and a whiskey-shot and beer special. You look at the table and say *I think you're very pretty.* I decide to go home with you.

(5)

Your parents didn't love you. The blonde mom who the other kids in your class said was too light-skinned to be your real mom, and your dad with the Saddam Hussein mustache and the used car lot and the waitress side chick. They went on vacation to Las Vegas every year for a whole month and left you back in the Central Valley with your born-again Christian uncle.

(6)

Your place smells like leather and dog and weed and the bed is huge. One minute we're kissing in the living room and the next we have our shirts off and you tell me you're happy we found each other. One day you will tell me that no one else will ever love me as much as you.

(7)

Do you want to meet my dog? You ask me over IM. You have a blue-nosed pit bull who you spoil like a daughter. She's a rescue, the only survivor of a raid on an illegal breeding operation and she has eyes like a doe and a brown and white speckled coat and I love her instantly. Because she's yours. Because she's a rescue. Because she turns on a dime and can guard the car with bared teeth one minute and roll on her back for me the next.

(8)

I write IOU note after IOU note and make you sign them like they are legally binding documents:

IOU \$80 for the past due electricity bill (minus \$20 for my half of the pizza we ordered)

IOU \$60 for the groceries I bought (minus \$10 for the gas you used to drive me to work)

IOU \$45 for the phone bill I charged to my credit card (plus \$50 for that eighth my friend fronted us)

(9)

You say it first. We're hanging out in bed after a Saturday-morning fuck and when you ask me if I have anything else going on that day I say no and you blurt it out. *You have a piece of my heart* you tell me, happy and relaxed. *No one has had a piece of my heart in such a long time.*

(10)

I call you after work, walking down Market Street. We fight. I cry in public. *Stop it!* You scream into the receiver. *Everyone is gonna think I'm an asshole!*



FLAG
DAVID HYTONE
2023

(11)

Best memory: After my birthday, the first one I brought you home for. We were back home on the couch eating leftover cake and watching Ren and Stimpy cartoons and you called me *birthday girl, my birthday girl*.

(12)

Worst memory: The time we go camping at Big Sur and you tell me that my ass is too big for our tent and I cry for an hour. You never apologize.

(13)

We go out to coffee. We are trying to Be Mature About This and stay on good terms. You tell me about your therapist. *She asked me what I thought the first time I saw you*. You say, and you smile. *You came out with your little purse and your cat's-eye glasses and your hair up and I said that's it, that's her. That's the mother of my children*.

(14)

We sit in your car outside of the FoodMax in Hercules, waiting for our roommates to show up and you say *it was my neighbor, he said it meant I was gay, I never told anyone about it* and when we go shopping all you want to buy is Easy Mac and Koolaid packets and Chips Ahoy with M&Ms.

(15)

Why are you doing this? You text me. I told you we could talk. I had my coworker drive me home while you were gone and packed up all my makeup, my hairdryer, and half my clothes. *Was it all just a ruse?!* All I can think about is how you can't spell ruse.

(16)

Best memory: Me and the dog take a shower together. Me naked, running the water and talking sweet until she lets herself be picked up and plopped down, clinging to me awkward and frightened at first and then loosening up, always, as I rub her down and lather her up until we both smell like clean dog. Toweling her short fur and wrapping her like a burrito.

(17)

We fight for a year straight. Every time the grocery money gets spent on weed. Every time you leave the trash to rot in the bin. When we max out my credit card on Jack in the Box. When I'm embarrassed to have my friends over.

(18)

You call me at work and apologize for something that isn't your fault. For crying. For saying I didn't love you anymore when I pushed you away in my sleep. When I wouldn't kiss you. When I slipped my bra over my head, put on my work slacks and I left you on the bed still crying. I tell you I'm staying with my parents for a while.

(19)

Worst memory: The time my dad comes over to fix our sink and you guilt me into hitting him up for \$20 so we can buy weed. *You're supposed to pay the plumber, not the other way around* he says as he opens his wallet and looks at me hard and I know what he means is *why are you still with him*.

(20)

Your friends left you behind. You were the biggest and the youngest and the slowest and when they called the cops you were the one standing there like Winnie the Pooh with his face in the honey jar and two forty ounces stuck inside your jacket and you spent six months in juvie. You were fifteen.

(21)

You tell me the dog has been curled up in my spot on the couch every day since I left. You are leaving for two hours so I can get the last of my things, and she follows me out the door when I come over and tries to hop in my car. She wants to ride shotgun. She doesn't know why I won't let her. She sits for me on the foot of the steps with her little butt glued down and eyes staring into my soul. I have to carry her back into the house before I leave.

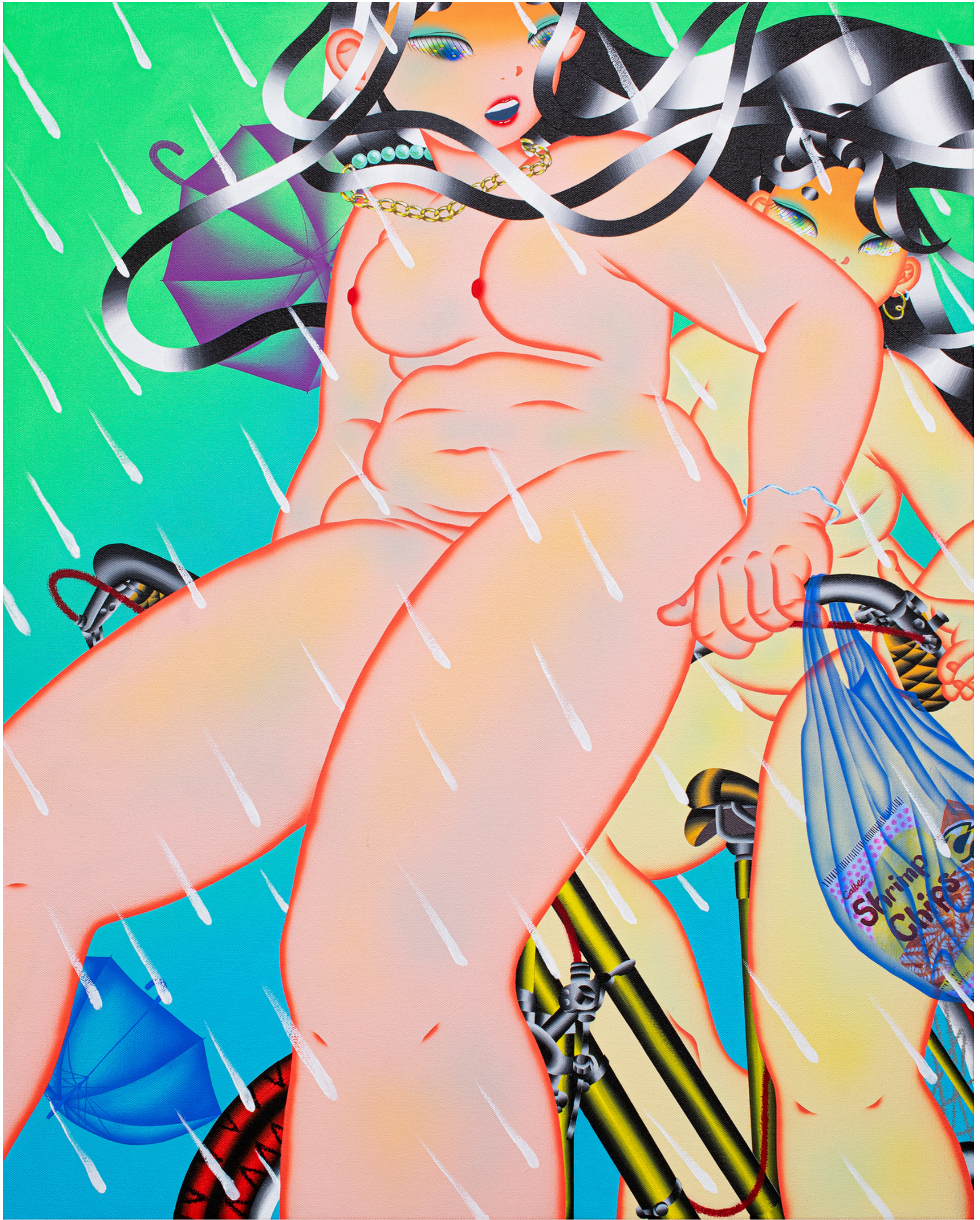


CURTAIN CALL
DAVID HYTONE
2023

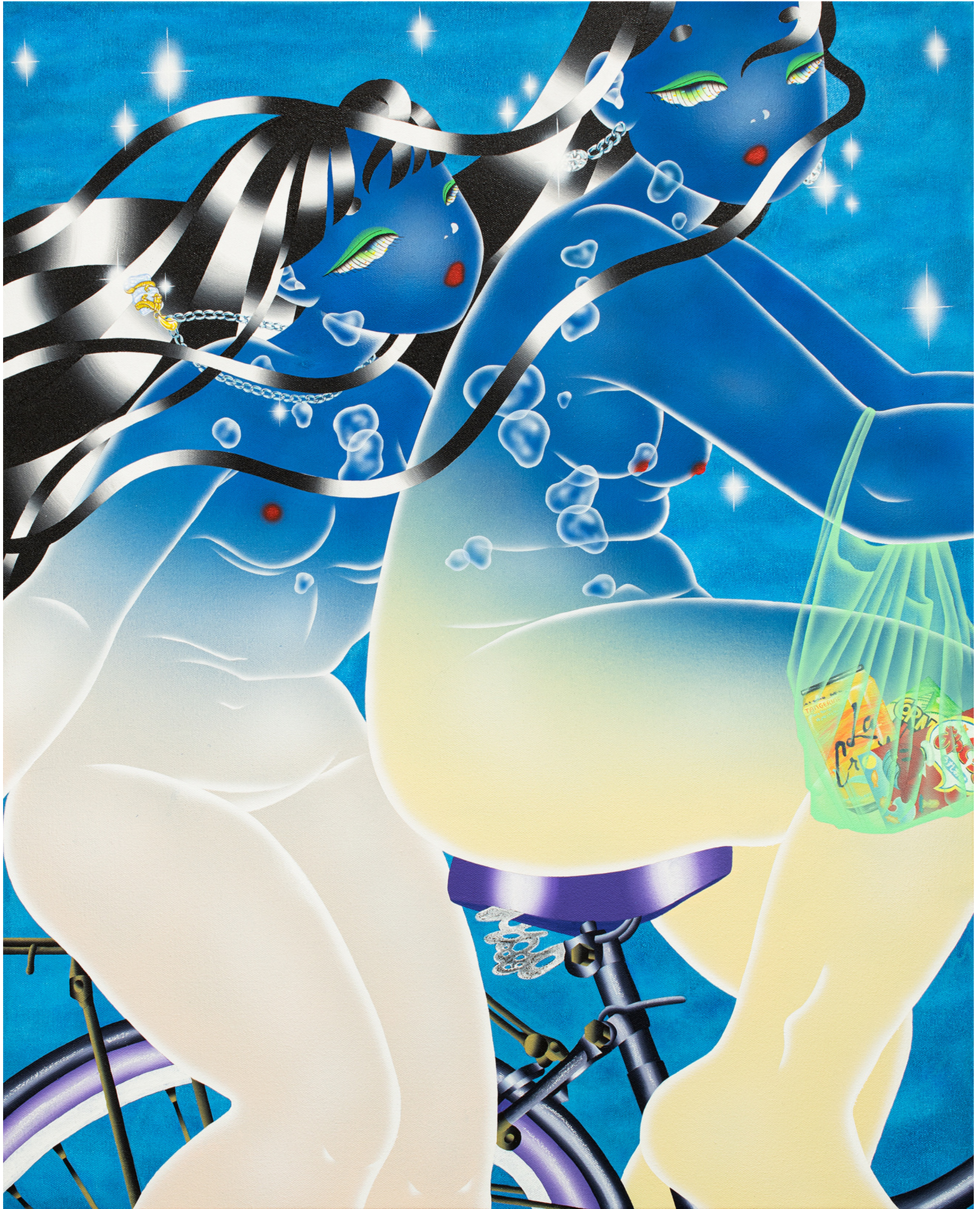
Lamps

SHANE ALLISON

I'm in my bedroom eating chicken wings and salad
For dinner when my mother walks in asking if I have seen her lamps.
What lamps? I ask.
The credits from *Law & Order: SVU* reflect in the lens of my Armani eyeglasses.
The ones like in my room with the silver base, she says.
She has taken over the house with tote bags of shoes,
Bumblebee bins stacked by threes.
A tattered comforter covers a rack of well outdated coats and jackets.
One night my father called to me to help my mother out of a hoard
She had built by her own hand,
Fussing to rescue blouses, suits, and skirts
From a leaky roof as if her clothes were her children
She was fighting to save out of a fire.
An assortment of hats hang on a coat rack
In front of my sister's old room.
Necklaces, earrings and bracelets scattered across her dresser.
Last week she was in an uproar about
A picture of my grandmother and grandfather she couldn't find.
I found it hidden behind a treasure chest of bed sheets.
My father must have saved it from plumes of dust and debris
The handymen were kicking up
While uprooting base board and rotted floor.
Those lamps didn't get up and walk away from here, she says.
I know what she's thinking; the accusation that's running through her head.
My father and I pay her no mind as she searches
Among stacks of kitchen mats, rugs and ice-cream laundry baskets.
I return to my dinner with Captain Benson where the chicken wings are cold
And the lettuce lies limp in peppercorn dressing.
An hour later in the garage, my mother finds the lamps in a corner
Next to the bumblebee storage bins
That are stacked way too high for her to reach.



AMERICANS DON'T USE UMBRELLAS • アメリカ人は傘をささない。
MAYA FUJI
2023



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**TAKE IT BACK.
TAKE IT ALL BACK.**

