

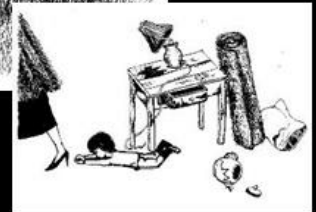
# The Shadow Side of the City in the Work of the Soul

## Refuse as Resource, Rejects as Raw Material



Janice Shapiro

janicesha@gmail.com



This  
herald's call  
to  
adventure  
is open to ...

...communities who  
are drawn to  
explore the dynamic  
and complex  
relationship of art  
and depth  
psychology...



Natural Selection, 2000. © Fred Tomaselli. Courtesy James Cohan Gallery

When the call for papers for this conference reached me, I heard it as the herald's call to adventure.

The numinosity evoked by its very name, "*Art and Psyche in the City*," immediately quickened my heartbeat, and even the beat of my soul.



# Lesley College, Cambridge, Boston over 20 years ago



Among the multitude of images that appeared in my mind's eye were those that belong to a difficult yet meaningful time that I spent in the city of Boston over 20 years ago.



Having left my home in Jerusalem to complete my Masters in Art Therapy at Lesley College in Boston, I initially found myself utterly disoriented in the streets, ill at ease in the elegant edifices, unable to connect – in short, totally lost.

“The image of the back ward ...  
...neglect, refuse and decay... an  
underworld...

Let’s move the back ward into our  
own backwardness”

(James Hillman in City and the Soul)

We all know, at one time or another, at one level or another, this archetypal place where we are lost -- where we don’t belong, where we are misfits, threatened. As James Hillman aptly pointed out, each of us has inside us the image of our own back ward, where backward aspects of ourselves are put away.

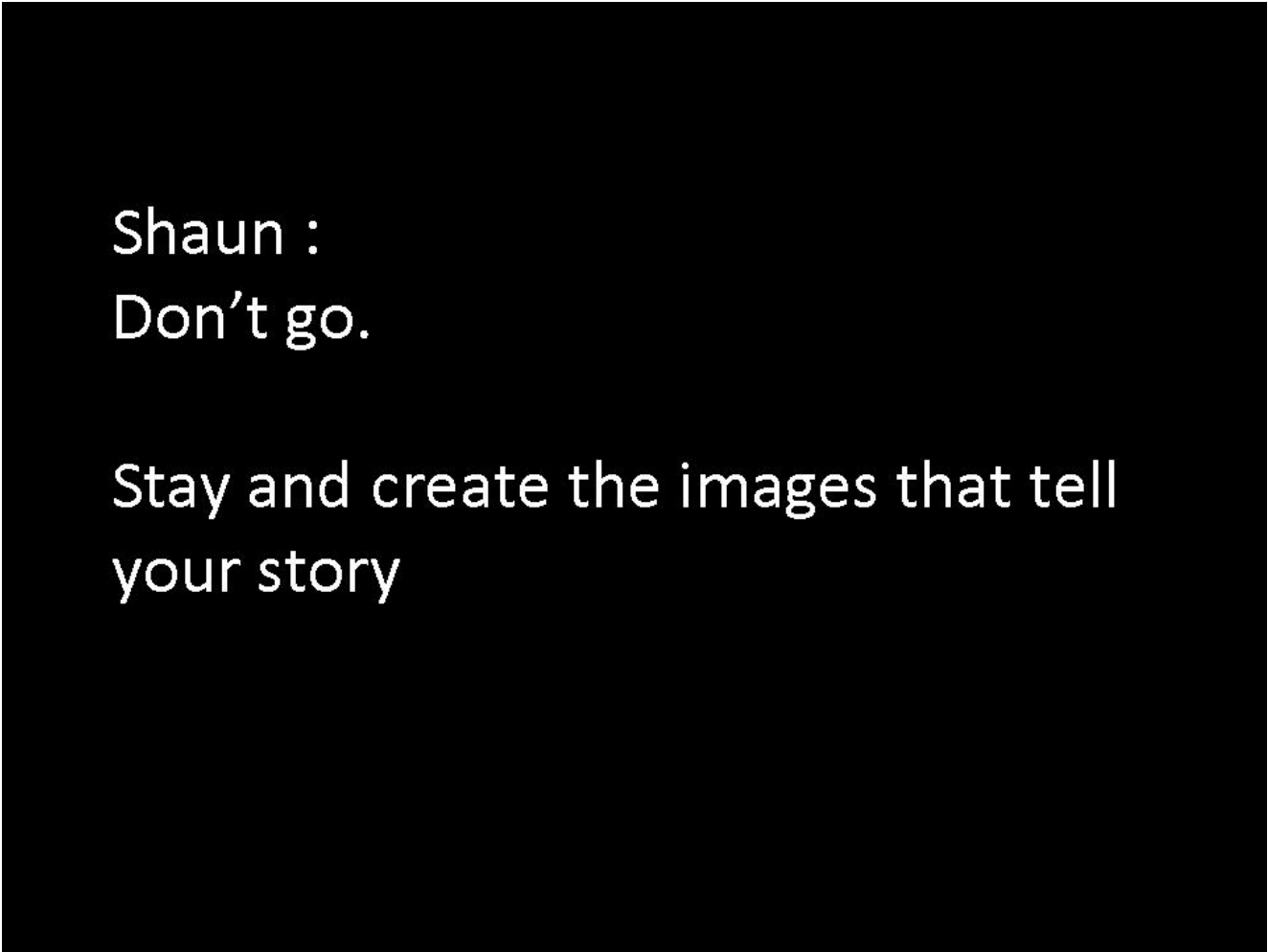
It was not the first time I had found myself in this abandoned place, but this time it was extreme.

Hillman sees the city as embracing all aspects of the human soul.

This is a beautiful vision. And yet, by its very nature, the shadow side of the city, and of the soul, experiences itself as unwelcome, not belonging, criticized and judged, rejected. And it is this shadow side of the city, and of the soul, that I explore in this paper as I look at the

relationship between the creative forces that construct and work at building souls, and the darker forces that devalue, demolish, destroy.

In a meeting with Shaun McNiff, who was my advisor, I told him that I couldn't cope; that I was falling apart, and seriously considering giving up and going back home.

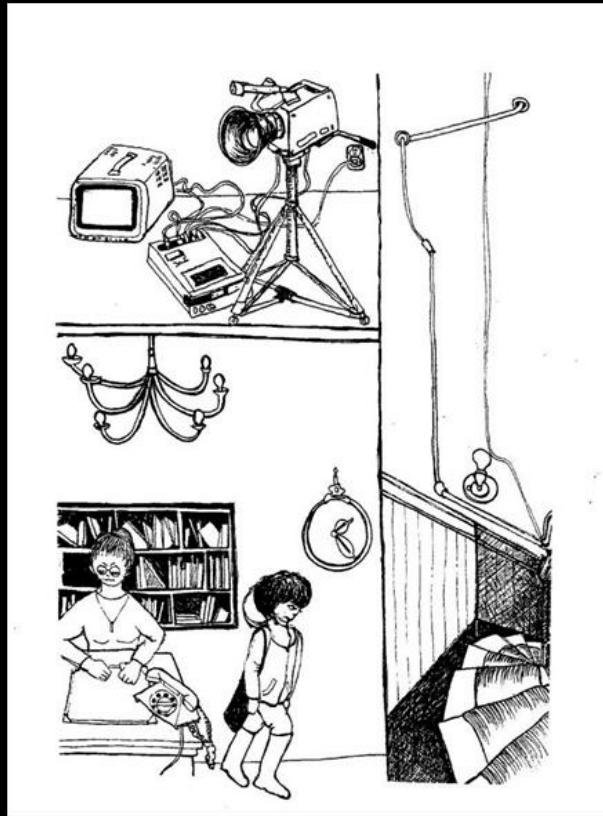


Shaun :  
Don't go.

Stay and create the images that tell  
your story

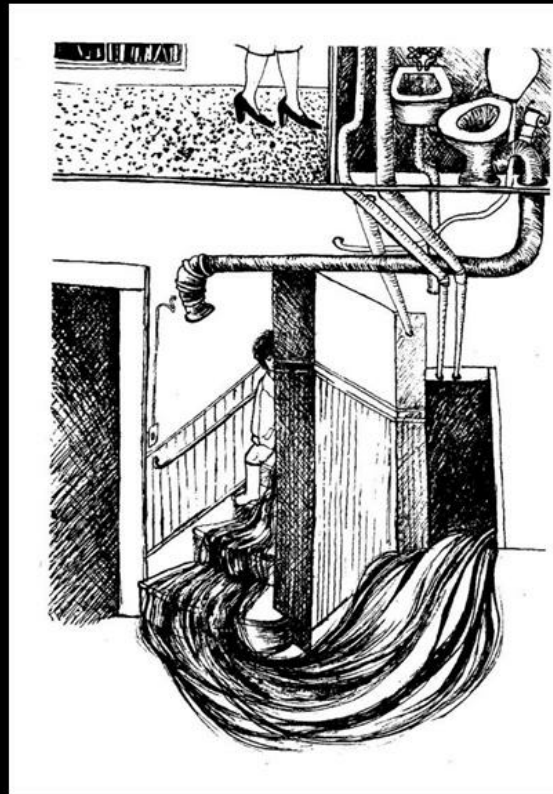
Shaun said: "Don't go.

Stay and create the images that tell the story of what's happening to you. You can set up a studio in the basement."



I found the spiral staircase that winds down to the basement,





and the underground drew me into it.



crisis  
transformed into  
opportunity

Taking up this suggestion transformed crisis into opportunity. The process that followed was crucially formative, both personally and professionally. What follows here is a piece of the story I created down there

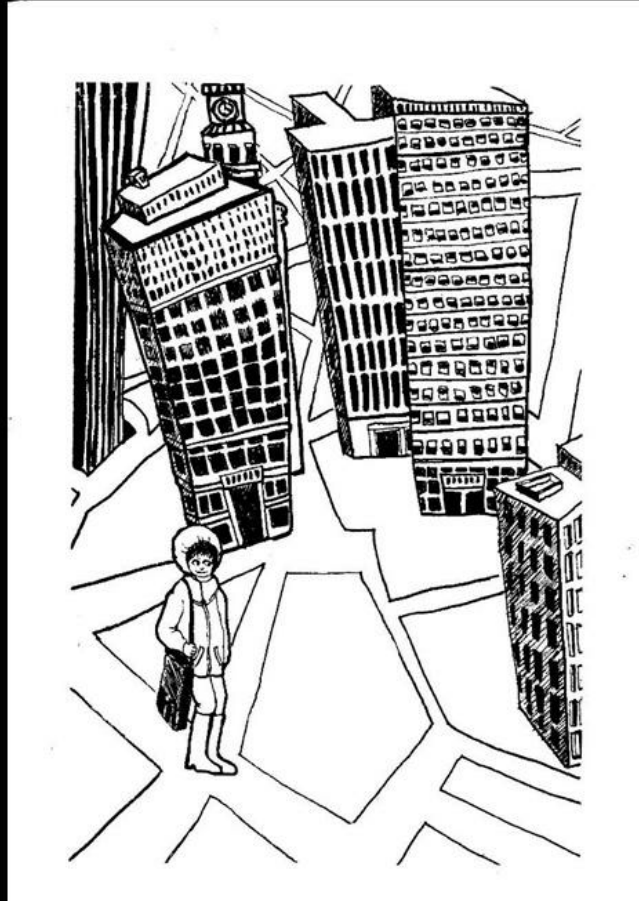
# Descent into Image

## An Archetypal Picture-Story

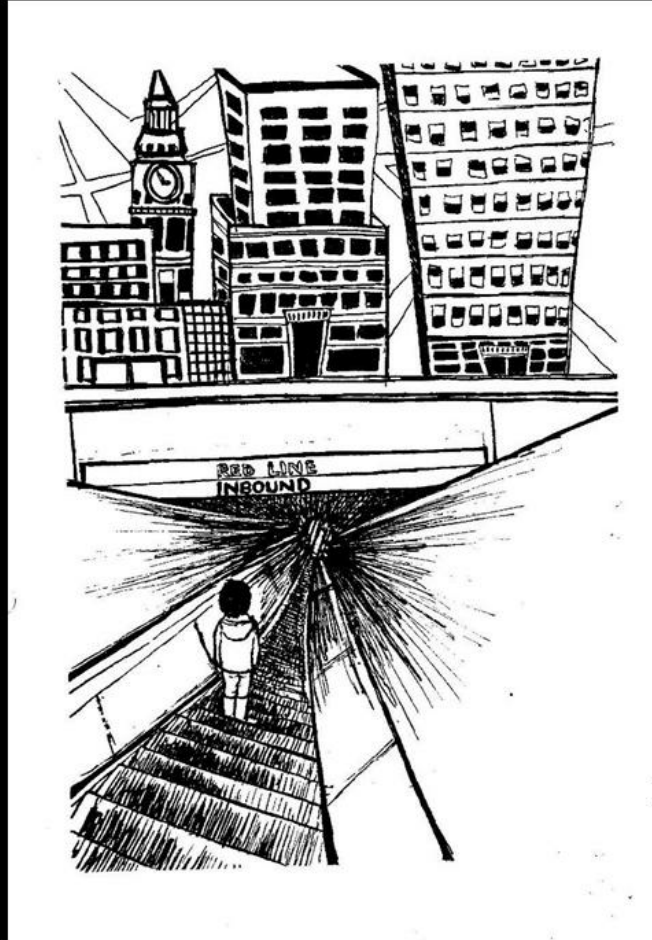
Drawings and Text  
by Janice Shapiro

Boston 1989

which I later called "Descent into Image: An Archetypal Picture Story." This ultimately became part of my master's thesis.

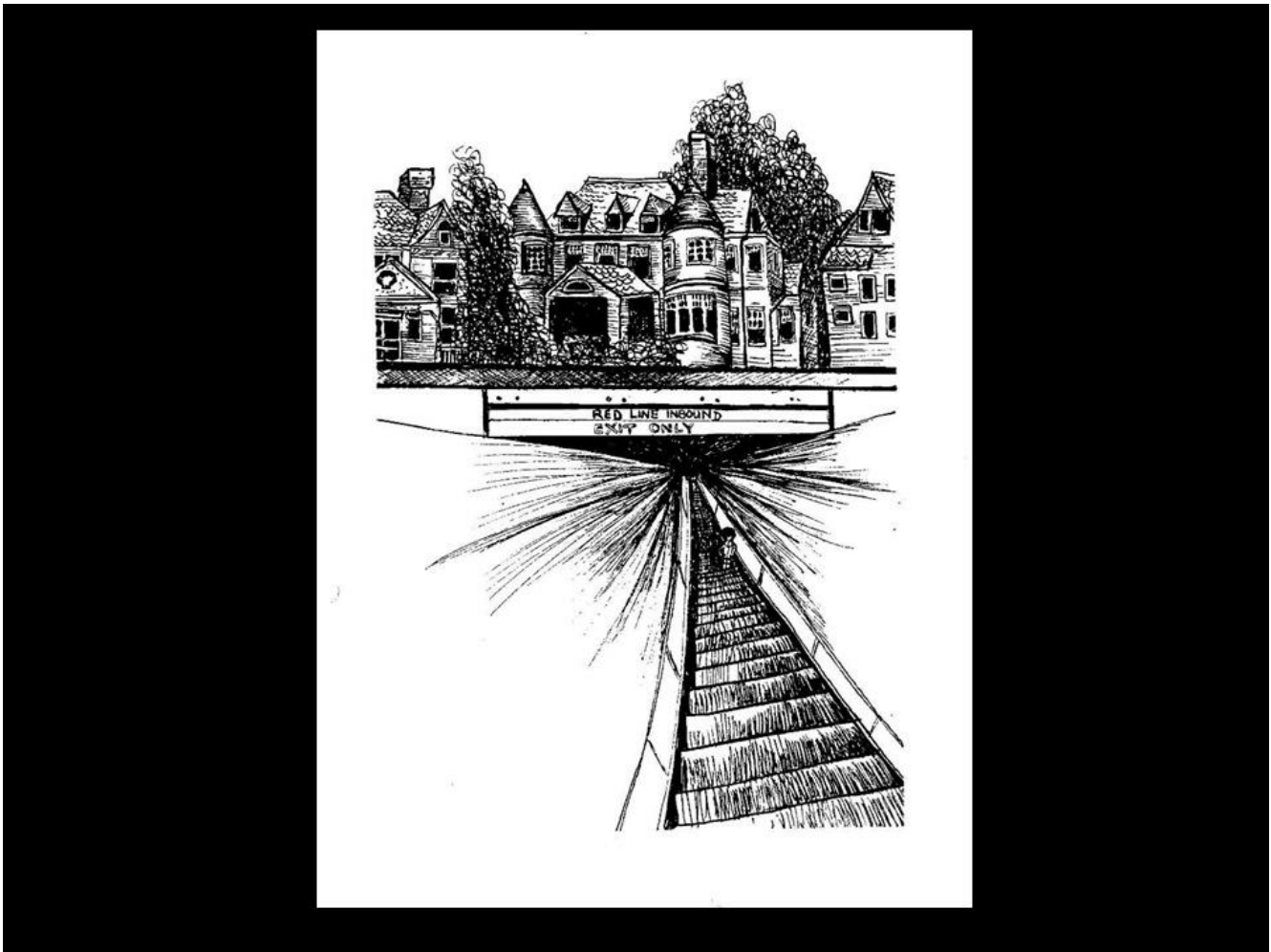


The small girl was lost in the big city.

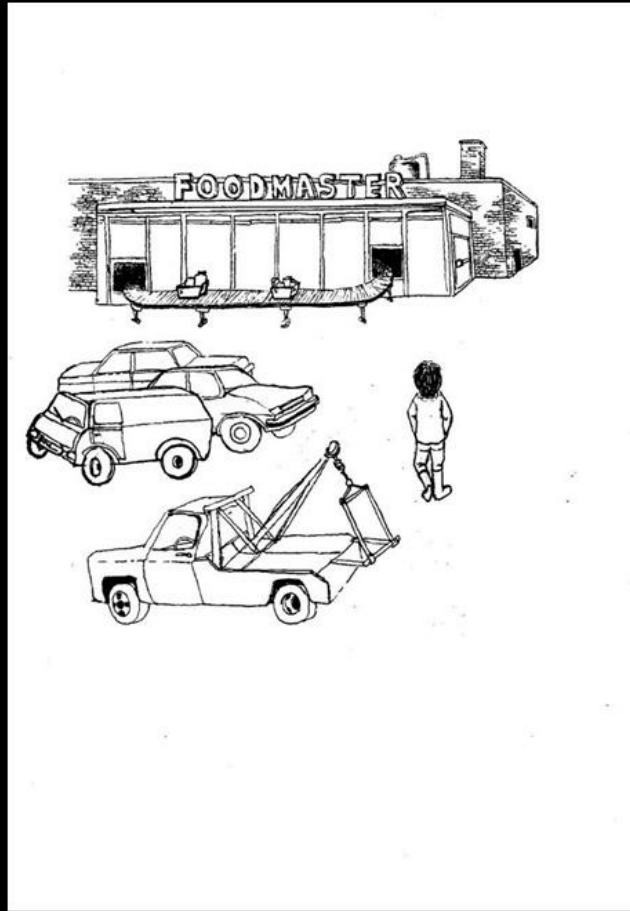


She went down the escalator into the underground, to get away from the street.





But there were throngs of unseeing people, all in a hurry down there, and she soon came back up again.



Feeling hungry, she approached a supermarket.



But somehow she lost her appetite amongst the quantities of mass-produced food, so much of it, all the same.



She tried going into the library,

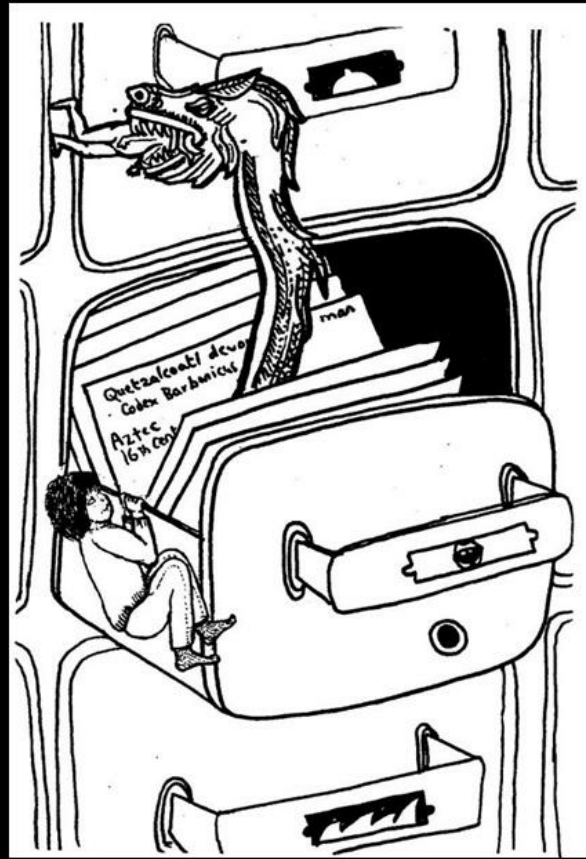


but even that didn't help her find her way.





Among the books



lurked terrifying man-eating monsters



and giant fish that swallowed people whole.



The child tried to join the people in the street, walked close to the elegantly dressed men and women, purposeful people who knew where they were going, sure of themselves.

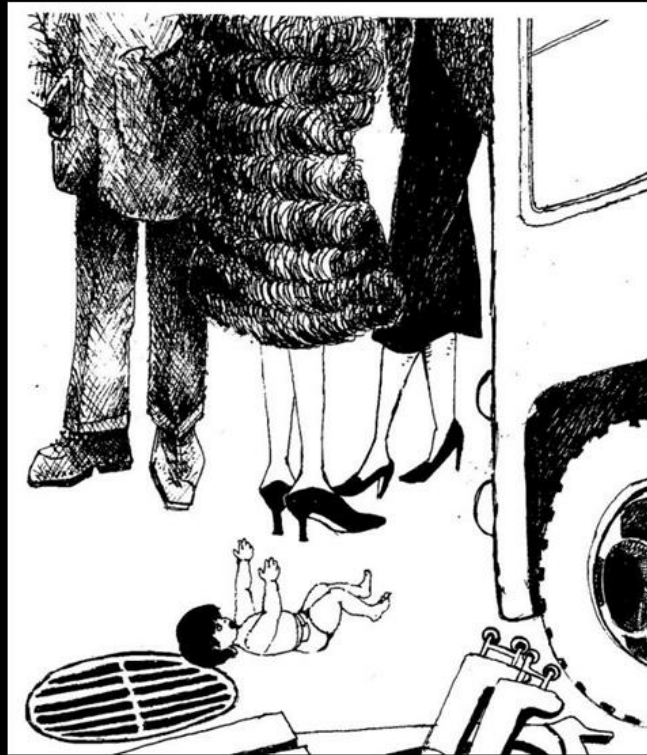


But she couldn't keep up with them, and fell over, fell again and again.





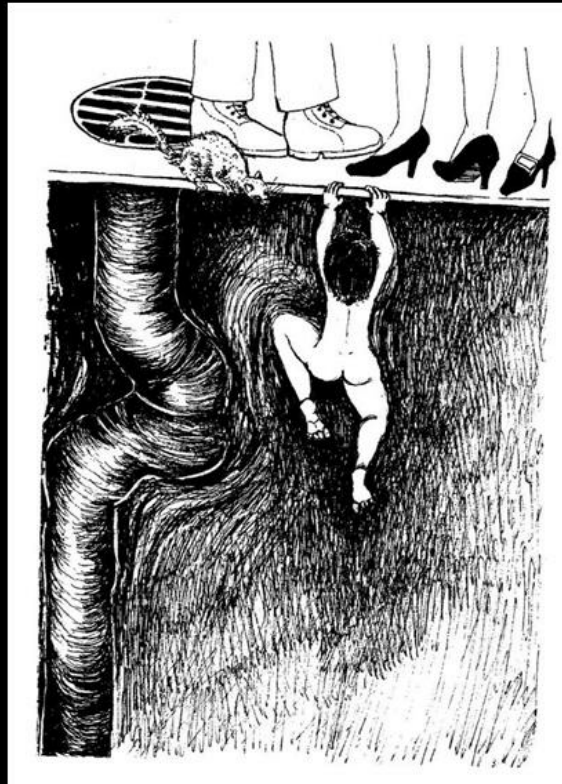
She felt like the broken furniture and other unwanted stuff, that people had thrown out onto the sidewalk; the things that nobody cared about anymore.



She got smaller and smaller,



and more and more invisible.



She was on the edge of falling, hanging on by her fingertips

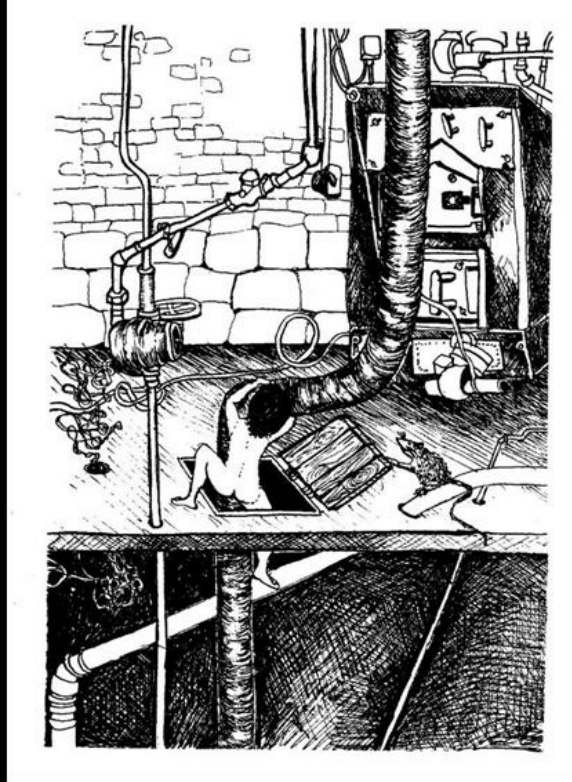


And she did fall...



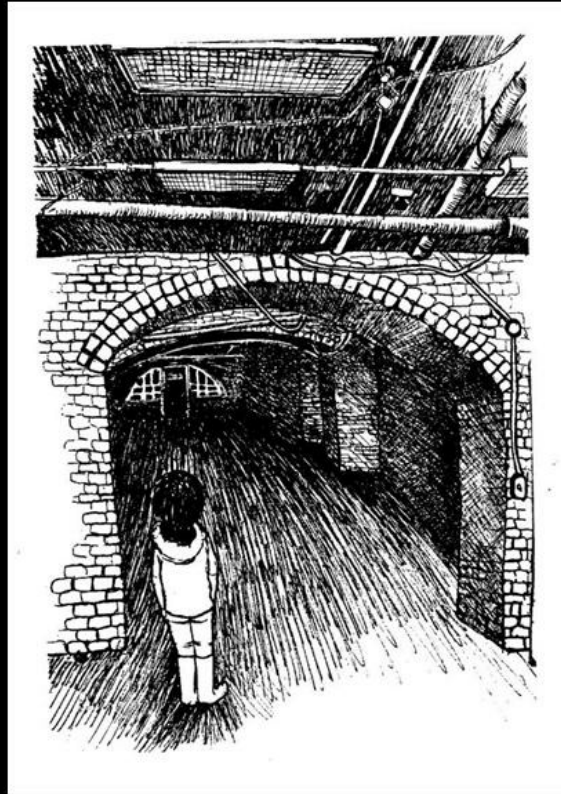
Into a deep place.



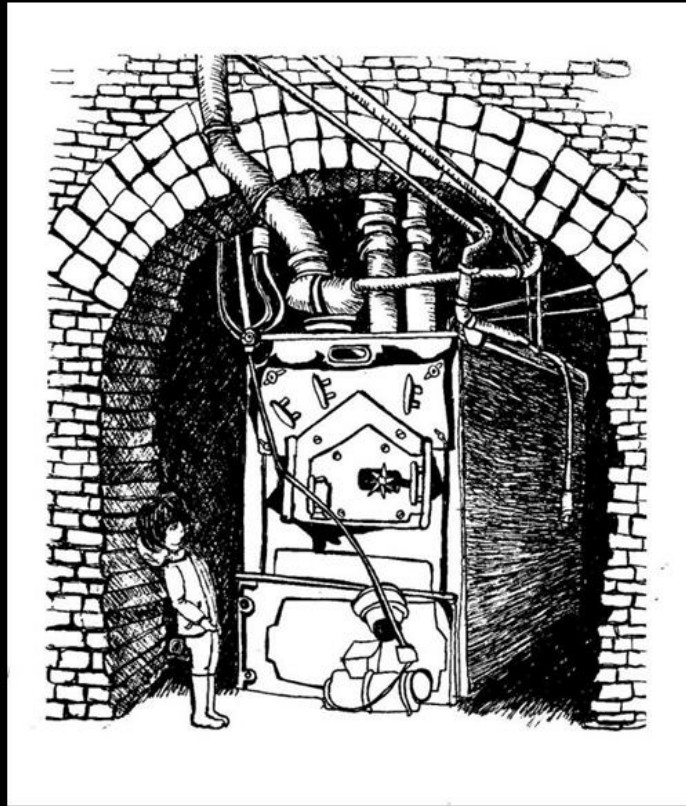


After living through adventures both terrible and marvelous (narrated in other chapters), she managed to clamber back up from the lowest depths, at least to the basement level.





There she found herself in a labyrinthine cavernous space



where she could see the innards of the building.

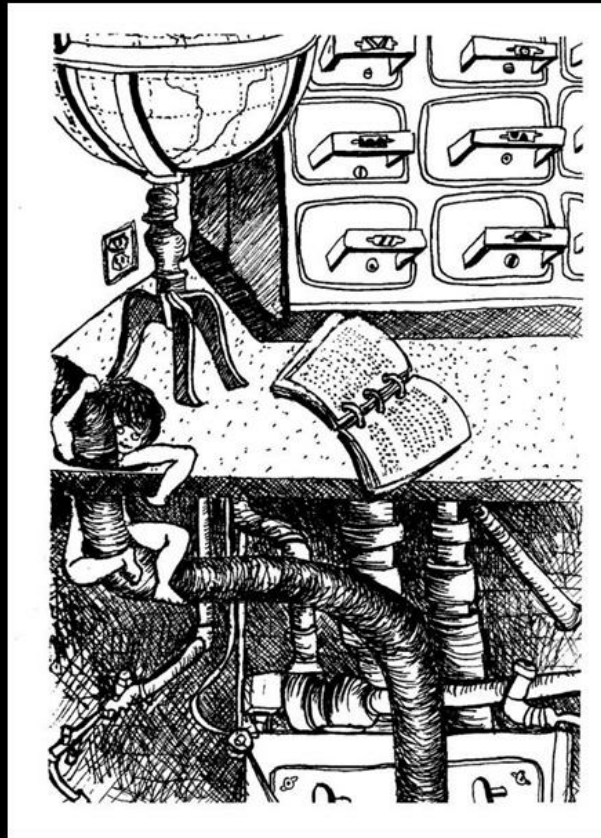


And she closed off a nook for herself, using an old clothesline, discarded faded sheets and bedspreads that she brought down from above.

Bit by bit, she created her own place, where she felt she belonged. And in this place, she and I drew this picture story.

# I drew myself through that long winter

I drew myself through that long winter. The act of finding the images to create my narrative helped enormously.



When springtime came, I emerged from my underground and,



back in the library, contemplated my experiences in the depths. In time, I returned home to Jerusalem, profoundly changed.

There I resumed my work in the adolescent unit of the psychiatric hospital where I had been employed before travelling to America. My experience underneath the city of Boston had a powerful impact on my way of working.

The adolescents hospitalized in our therapeutic community are suffering severe distress. Often they reach us after suicide attempts, or after having retreated to a place within themselves where outer reality doesn't penetrate.





This was true for 15 year old Tammi, who had refused to come out of her room at home for 2 months. This is the first work she created after her admission. She said, "Even if I wanted to get out, I couldn't. Because I'm too tied in. The absolute most I can do is stick out a hand." I asked whether perhaps someone could help from the outside, and she replied, "Maybe...but why would they?"

This vignette is fictionalized, though reality based, as are all the others from the hospital studio.





Here is the first painting Ben did in our studio. Ben had completely stopped speaking a month before. Though he said nothing at all in words, his painting speaks of loneliness, of being alone with his 2 shadows, between day and night, between earth and sky. For weeks we sat silently, as I was a witness to his emerging images of loneliness. The first words he spoke were a question: "Will you keep these after I'm gone?"



And in his next painting, he seems alone in the whole universe.

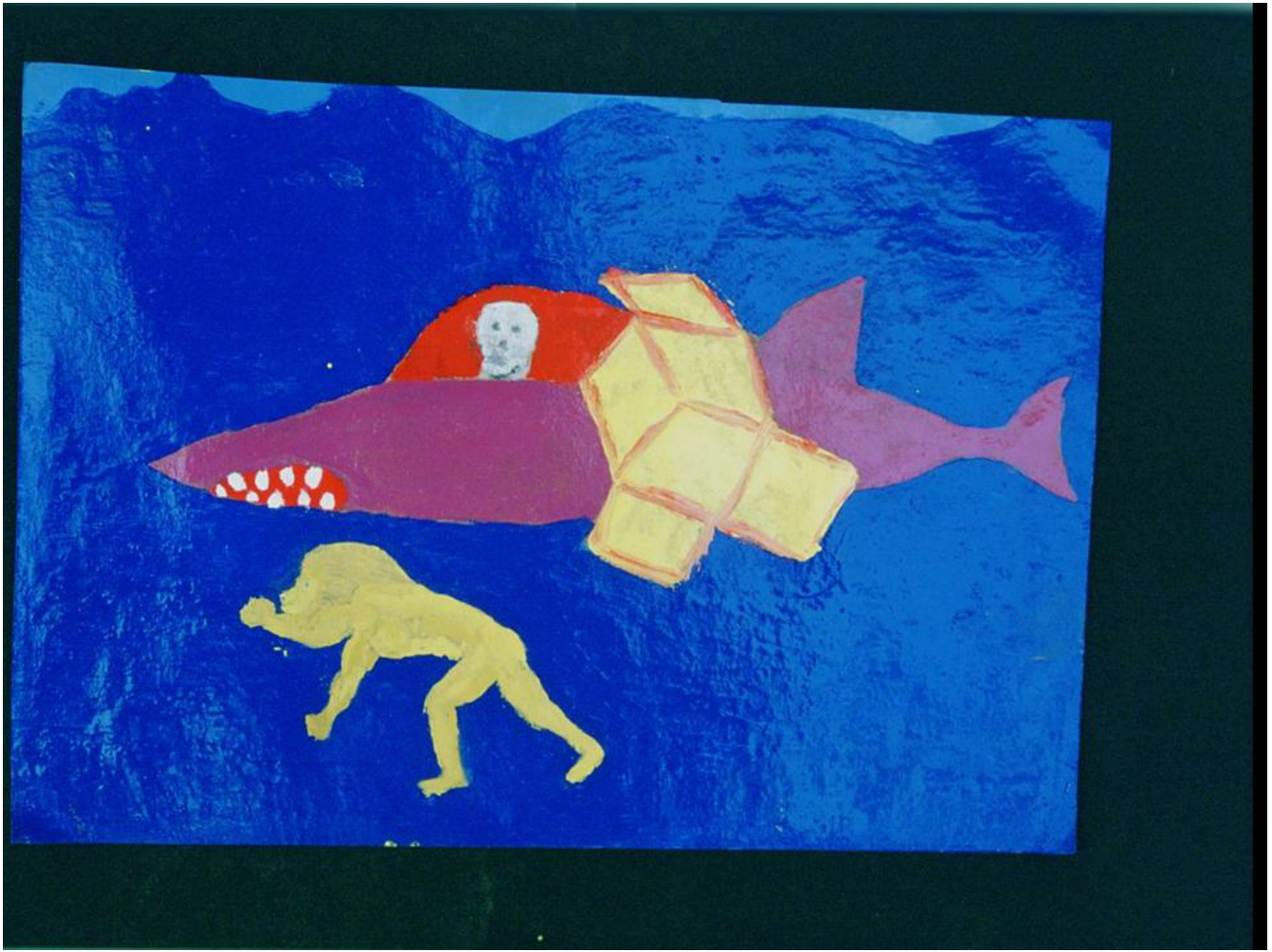


Our hospital is half an hour out of town, in the midst of forested hills.



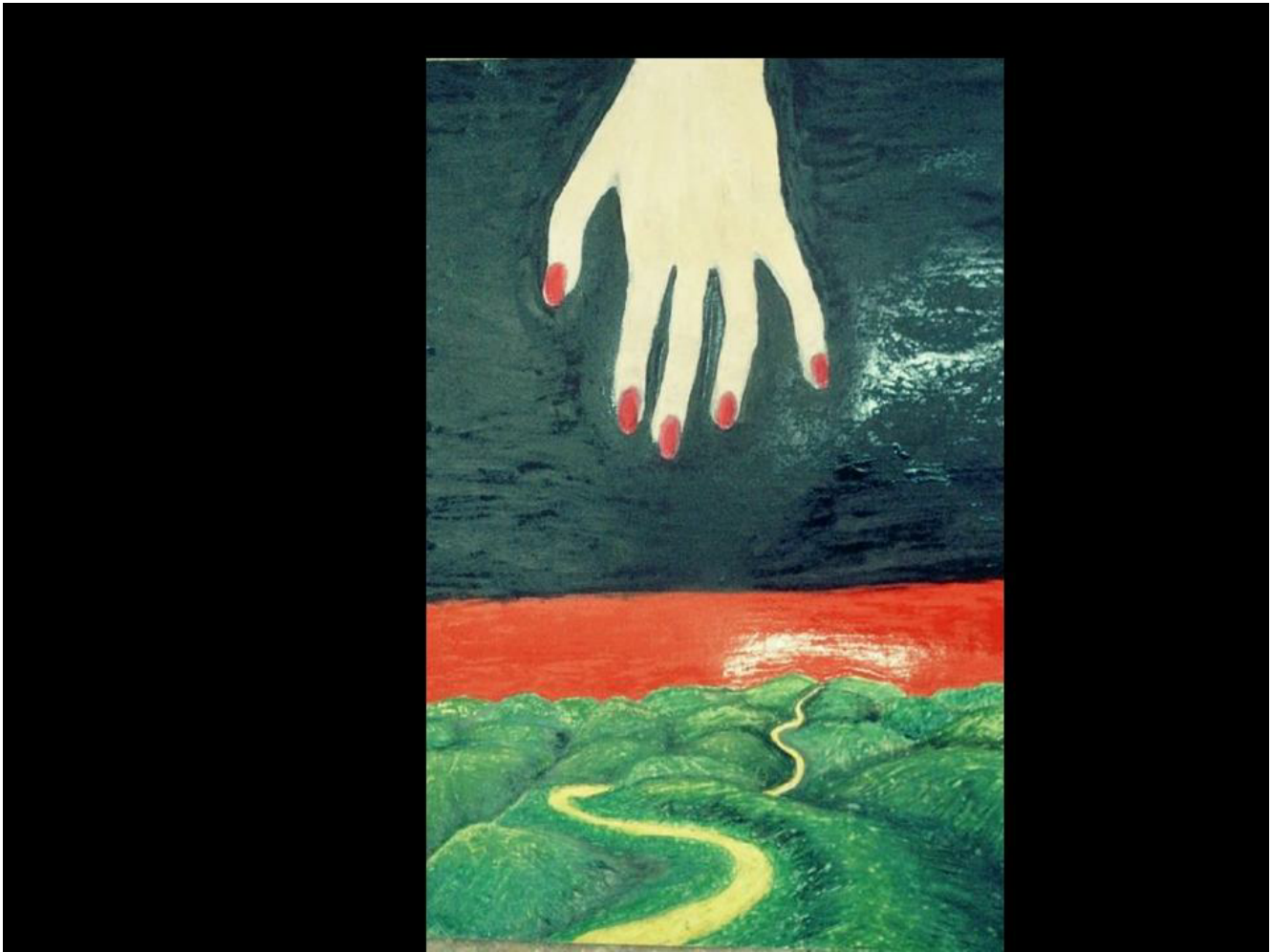
Many would call it a beautiful landscape. But for those in treatment there, it is often perceived as a place remote from the city, removed from civilization, from normal living. And they feel themselves cast out of town, excommunicated.





The teenager who painted this picture soon after being hospitalized said,

“You see, they said I’m crazy, and they put me in a box. Then a pilot, who didn’t look human, flew me far away from the city, and threw me out of the box, out of the plane, here in the middle of nowhere.”



Nearly a year had passed since 18 year- old Olga had been released from our unit. She had undergone intense therapy for nine months following a suicide attempt. After her release, things went well for some months and then she went downhill again. In despair she took an overdose of hoarded pills, was found in time, and readmitted. Weeks later she pointed to the hand and said, "I tried so hard to get away from that sea of pain, but it's as if a big hand was hovering over me, and it just flicked me back into this nightmare. It must be my fate."

When words feel hopelessly inadequate to express their suffering, the adolescents tend to "act out" with self-destructive behaviours.

the studio invites action  
acting out v acting in  
**interaction**

The art therapy studio, which is an integral part of our therapeutic community, invites them to act – not to act out, but rather to act IN, to act in a creative way, to bring their Selves into the art studio and IN terACT with the materials and tools.





The room itself invites action.

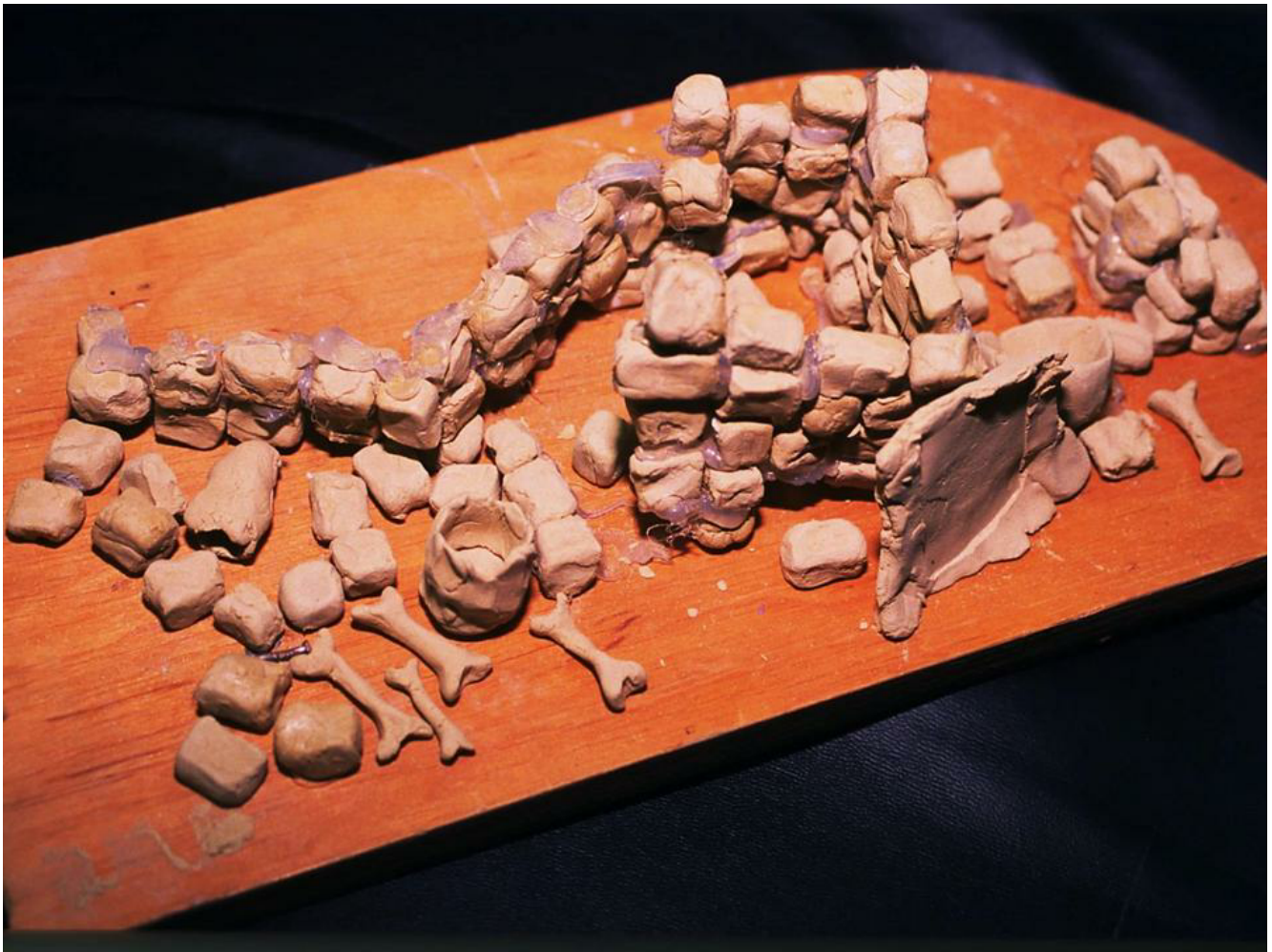
By the nature of things, this engagement brings about creative acts, that evolve into art works that give tangible expression to the inner worlds of the adolescents.



creative energy v destructive energy  
life force v death Force

This work takes place in the midst of an ongoing struggle between Creative and Destructive Energies, between the Life force and the Death Force.

Here are some more images created in the throes of this struggle:



Jonni, now 15, who had never had a real home, decided to build one. He made each brick from clay and started to put them together to make a structure. All of a sudden he knocked it down. Then, looking at the broken structure, said, "Now it looks like those ruins that archaeologists dig up. But my house became a ruin before it was even built." Then he added some bones and said, "Maybe one day in the future someone will look at these ruins and wonder who once lived here and what sort of life he had."





One day I discovered a knife that someone had hidden amongst the clutter in a corner. 16 year-old Abed claimed it as his, and begged me to let him keep it, insisting that he had no intention of using it, but just had to know it was there. I told him that the only way his knife could stay in the room would be if it became part of an art work. He immediately brightened up, and created a man of clay, specifically for the purpose of holding his knife.



Soon after, he sculpted the victim, saying, "This is what might have happened, but it wont, because someone is holding the knife." It is interesting to note that the knife-holder stood on a shelf for many months, and neither Abed nor anyone else ever attempted to take the knife, now that it belonged to a sculpture.



Riki stayed in the unit over the weekend, because she had no family willing to have her at home. She asked to work with clay and a nurse sat with her in the art studio. She said to the nurse, "Look what I made." The nurse immediately saw that the pills were real, and told Riki to bring her all the pills she had hidden. Riki showed the nurse her secret hiding place. Her ambivalence is marked – she makes provision to die, but allows her plot to be revealed.

17 year old Anna spent weeks creating a community of clay figures. One day I saw her separating them into two groups. Pointing to the larger group, she explained, "I'm not satisfied with these. They don't come up to standard --really second class. I'm going to throw them away right now."

I asked her whether second-class citizens didn't have the right to exist?

She didn't reply, but moved the bad lot to a different shelf.

The next day, the second-class shelf was empty.



All its inhabitants were in the garbage bin. Anna said to me, "No they don't!" answering yesterday's question as to their right to exist.

I checked with her: "OK if I keep them for you for now?" She didn't refuse.

I took this as a "yes," picked them out of the garbage and put them in a box in a cupboard.

Months later she asked for them and even repaired some of them.





Daniella, an 18 year-old girl, stayed in the unit over the weekend due to her very depressed state of mind. Art was the only activity she would engage with.



She developed a vision of painting the shadows in the staircase leading to our unit on the second floor. Somehow she convinced the nurse on duty not only to allow this, but to actively participate! Using heavy-duty industrial black oil paint, she made the shadows permanent.



You can see the shadows of the plants hung there for decoration.

Of course there was a grand commotion when the working week began and everyone who came or left our unit had to climb through Daniella's shadowy forms. There were those who were horrified at the lack of boundaries. The defacing of a public building. Graffiti as lawlessness, even if it's artistic.

There were those who were astounded at the expressive power of what she had done, and how truly it expressed her inner experience.

After a stormy staff meeting , it was agreed that the work would stay there for a month, be photographed, and then Daniella would work with the cleaning staff to scrub the shadows away.

Perhaps needless to say, this did not exactly come about...

Over the years, I have noticed the way the connection to destruction is expressed in the studio. It can be roughly divided into 4 main groups:

- Use of broken or rejected objects
- Use of dangerous implements (as in knife, pills)
- Destruction of art works (as in 2<sup>nd</sup> class citizens)
- Creating images of destruction (the destruction is not concrete but is expressed in the image itself. )

# 1. Use of broken or rejected objects as elements in art works

Here, we will look more closely at the first category: The use of broken or discarded objects in art works.

In my work I found that adolescents with a low self-image are often uncomfortable when offered high quality art materials. They feel unworthy of such materials, saying things like "I'll only waste them." They are also pressured by what they feel is an implicit demand to produce high quality results.

I recalled my low down underworld time in Boston, when I felt so disconnected to the aboveground streets with their impressive buildings, smart cars, well turned out people. At



that time I felt alienated from everything of high quality, including the first rate art materials attractively displayed in the art stores.

I became aware of the emotional importance of making available materials and objects that would not deter these adolescents who felt so unattractive, so removed from anyone or anything of value.



I discovered that they connected immediately and strongly to glass fragments,





and to such objects as old records no longer listened to.



Broken dolls were much in demand.

Let's consider the relevance of collecting and displaying damaged and rejected objects as raw material, **in the context of a therapeutic setting**, and look at the healing potential of this approach.

What happens when people who experience themselves as broken are offered broken objects to work with?

people who see themselves as  
broken and discarded  
offered  
broken and discarded objects as  
raw material for creative work

What happens when people experiencing themselves as rejected, discarded, superfluous to society are offered things that are rejected, discarded, superfluous to society....

**And are invited to work creatively with these unwanted things?**

People who feel rejected as useless may identify with objects that have been rejected as useless.

When I see these thrown away objects as having potential value for being used as material for art works, I am aware that if this junk were to be seen and handled creatively, it could be transformed into something of value. This belief in the possibility of transformation is somehow conveyed through the way in which I offer these objects, salvaged from the garbage. My own involvement and excitement at its potential comes across, and effects how it is seen by the patients. Some of them start to bring in their own finds, proud of their discoveries. The

staff too has been infected, and regularly contributes to our collection. The psychiatrist director of our unit is an enthusiastic hunter and gatherer, and all this adds to a sense of community.

What follows are some examples of art works that were evoked by these finds.

Of course, each of these vignettes is only one part of a series of art works within a complex therapeutic process. The focus is on the healing aspect of the actual symbolic use of the objects.



This is a tap, left behind by the plumber after changing it for a new one. Mahmud had arrived in the studio all in a jitter, after an upsetting phone call with his father, who had tried to convince him that by being strong he could "simply" put this crisis behind him, and come back home. Mahmud felt acutely what a disappointment he was to his family. He picked up the tap and slowly wound the wool around and around it, softening the touch of the metal and, at the same time, calming himself. Then he added something green emerging from the



spout, saying "look, this is magic water. Whoever drinks it, grows strong overnight." He enlisted his creative strength to bring up a healing image from within himself.

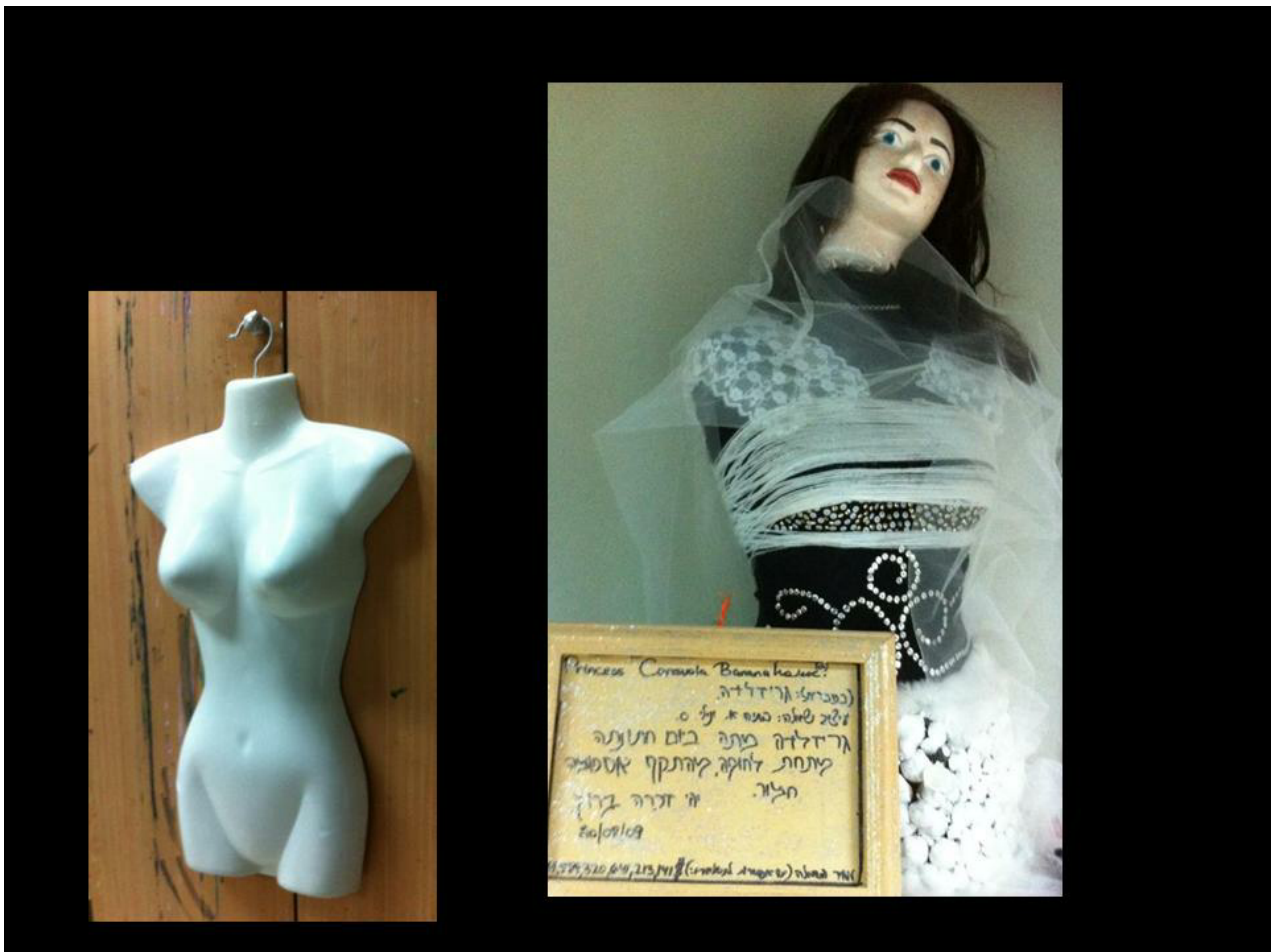


Rafi was born into a family that couldn't understand him or take care of him. By the age of 16 he had lived in 5 different frameworks. Rummaging in boxes, he came across pieces of a puzzle. He made a big effort to find them all so as to put them together to form a whole picture, but many of the pieces were missing. After gluing them together to form this shape, here seen from above, he painted them all pink so that the fragments of the image were no longer visible. He called it "My place".



This work led to him constructing other “places”. Here we see one he made of all sorts of electronic bits and pieces he got by taking apart various broken down appliances.

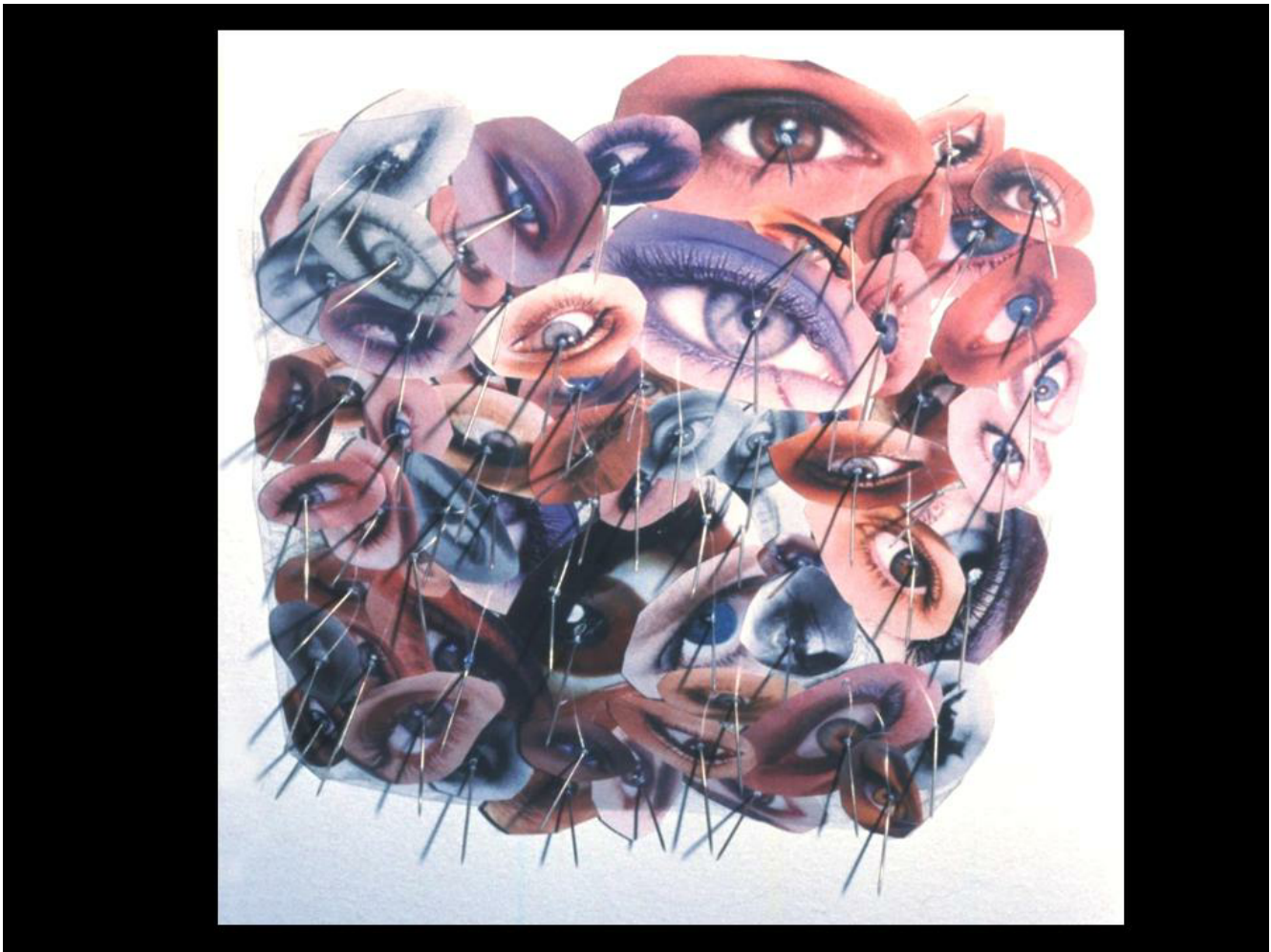




Here is a work based not on something broken, but on something thrown out. The director of our unit came across the torso of a mannequin that had been abandoned on the sidewalk by a boutique that had gone bankrupt. He recognized this to be a true find, carried it around the city for hours and the next day brought it to work, to our studio. Two girls pounced on it. Both wanted to do something with it, and eventually they decided to work together. They invested a lot of energy in making her into a bride. We had gotten the head from a wig shop that upgraded its display heads. Then the girls made a sign, and propped it up leaning on her. The notice reads: "Princess Griselda died on her wedding day, under the canopy, of a severe asthma attack. May her memory be blessed. She reached the day she had so longed for, but died before her dream could be realized."



Jenny longed to smell good but despite repeated showering, always felt she didn't. Everyone knew her "thing" was empty perfume bottles. She would sniff them, and then would fill them with her own content. In this example, she filled an Estée Lauder bottle with stinking cigarette butts. Some of them she incorporated into this sculpture of a very anorectic figure. Jenny's concrete relation to cigarette butts was to look for cigarette ends that had not been fully put out, and burn the backs of her hands with them. Here she was able to find a more symbolic representation.



Yuri also wanted to communicate a painful message. He often complained that everyone thought badly of him. He went through a pile of outdated women's magazines, and cut out all the eyes he could find. Having arranged them in a collage, he then glued a pin in every eye, sharp point outwards, and said, "Even if people don't say anything, I can see in their eyes what they think of me. Their eyes always get sharp. Yours too."





Sharpness is a theme that appears often. Michael came into the studio grumbling and fuming, after an aggressive interaction with another adolescent, and shouted that he was fed up with being in this looney bin. He ranted, "I don't want to make anything. I only want to break everything!" My suggestion that he could tear up cardboard met with contempt. We agreed he would break a glass jar with a hammer, after wrapping it well in a thick piece of fabric. Michael carried the fabric holding the shattered glass to his work table and carefully unfolded it.



He then built a structure from these fragments. He asked for tweezers and took great care not to hurt himself. This from a youth who regularly cut himself with any sharp object he could find.



He added the little black figure and red paint. Then he displayed the structure on a high shelf after adding a sign: "Take care! Glass! If you break it, you've bought it." This amused him and he proudly showed it to everyone.





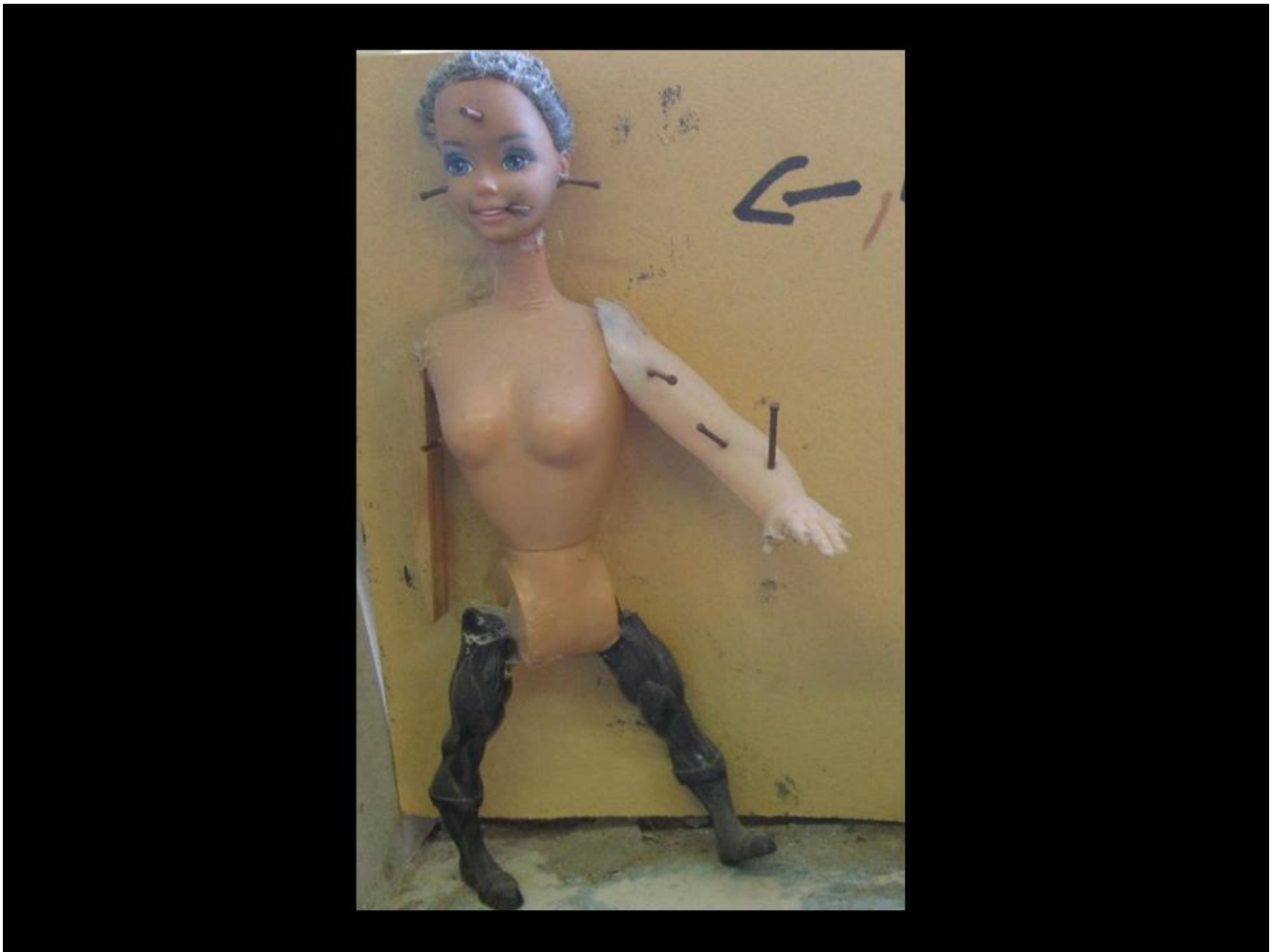
Another image of suffering, this one made by 15 year old Ruti. She was in a panic because she was terrified that her life was coming apart, and she felt no one really realized the danger she was in. She said, "It's a song about going to pieces, but no one listens to these records anymore."



Jimmy had recently been admitted in a state of extreme confusion. Picking up a scratched and dirty plastic horse that had once had a shiny black coat, he painted it a clean white. A few days later, his attention was caught by an old, partially unraveled audiocassette. He fully unraveled the tape, winding it around and around his horse, and showed me, saying, “Look, the horse is holding the tape and the tape is holding the horse.”



These feelings of being defective in some essential way evoke particularly intense reactions to broken or discarded dolls.

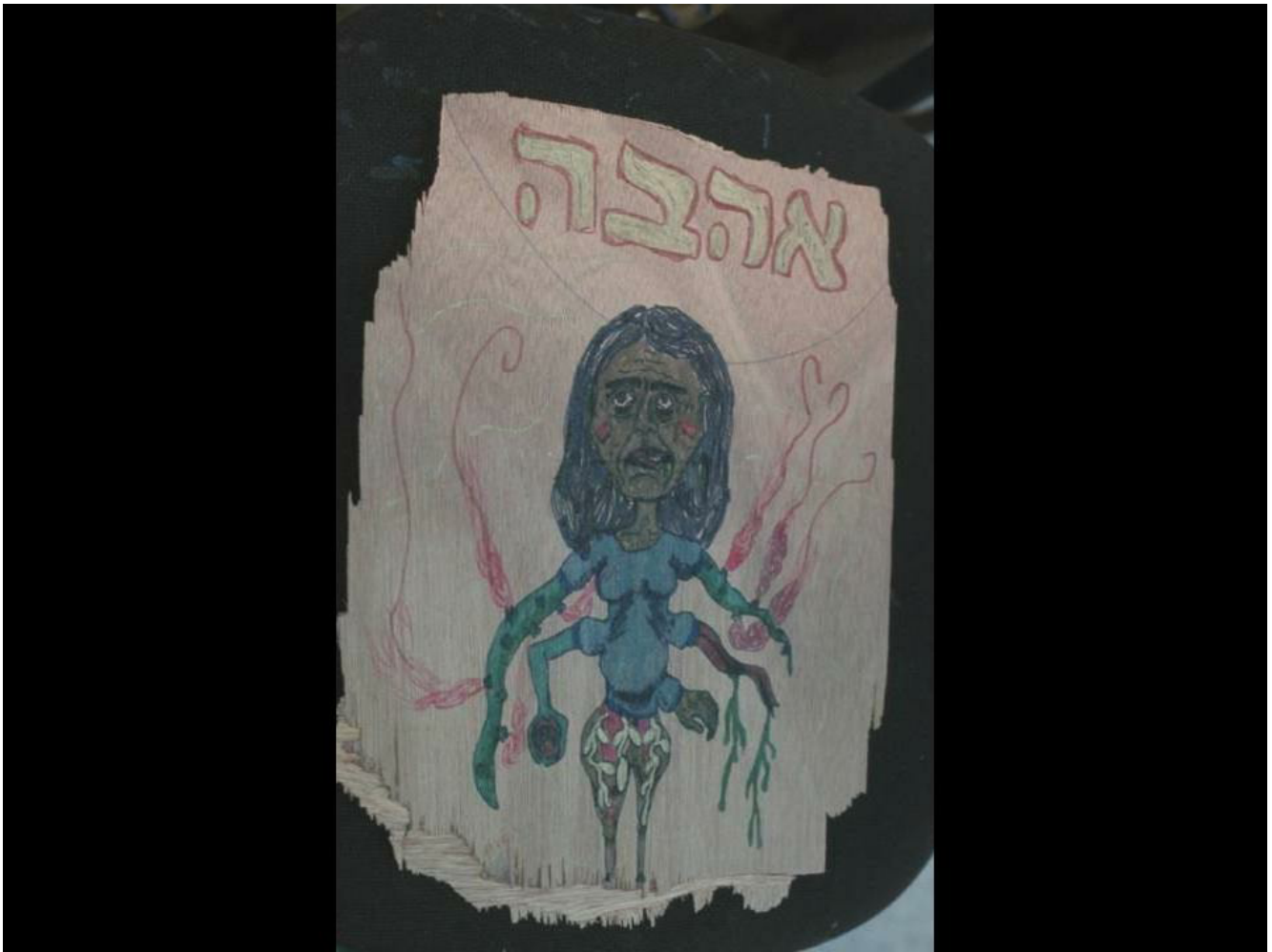


Here we can see how Sophie put together a rather ramshackle figure, using parts from several different dolls. She showed it to me, saying : "Look at me, and now tell me you'll succeed in fixing me."





Another influence that a very low self image has on the art work, is that often the pristine white pieces of paper, or the gleaming new canvas, are not bases that the troubled adolescents feel able to work on.



Rita would only paint on bits of broken wooden boards. This painting she called “Love,” and you see how in the distorted figure Rita's choice of painting surface is connected to the theme.



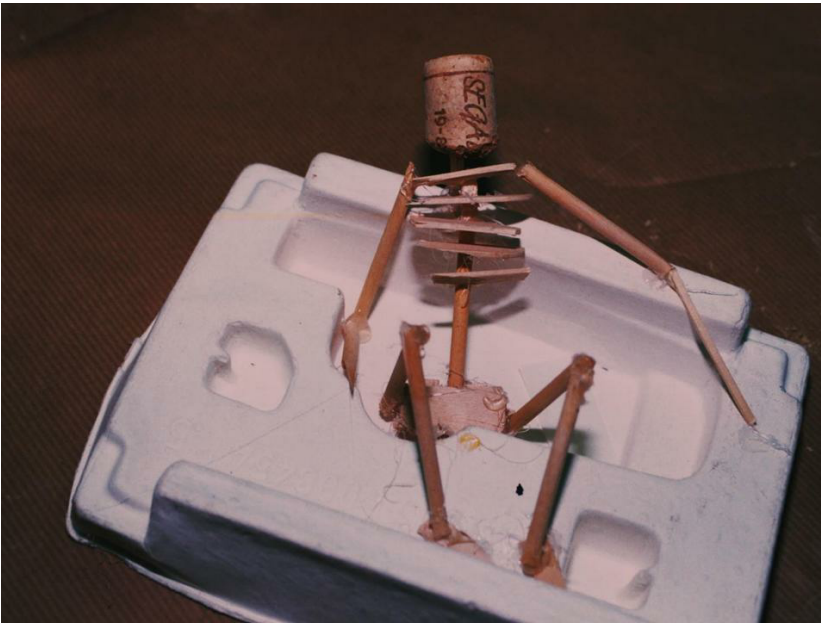


This is another work of hers.



I close this series of works with a work created by Viki. She was deeply depressed and flatly refused to get out of bed, because there was no point in anything and the only thing she wanted was to die. After repeatedly reaching out, I persuaded her to come into the room, just to sit there with us. After awhile she made this figure and said it was herself, dead. I asked her where this dead figure would be, whereupon she spent a long time searching for a suitable coffin. What she chose was the box of a luxurious Mont Blanc fountain pen. She stroked its lining gently.

The difference between lying in bed longing to be dead, and creating the image of herself dead, can be the difference between the life and the death of the soul.



The next time she came in, Viki made this. The skeleton was now sitting! By creating her dead self image, something had moved...and become more alive.

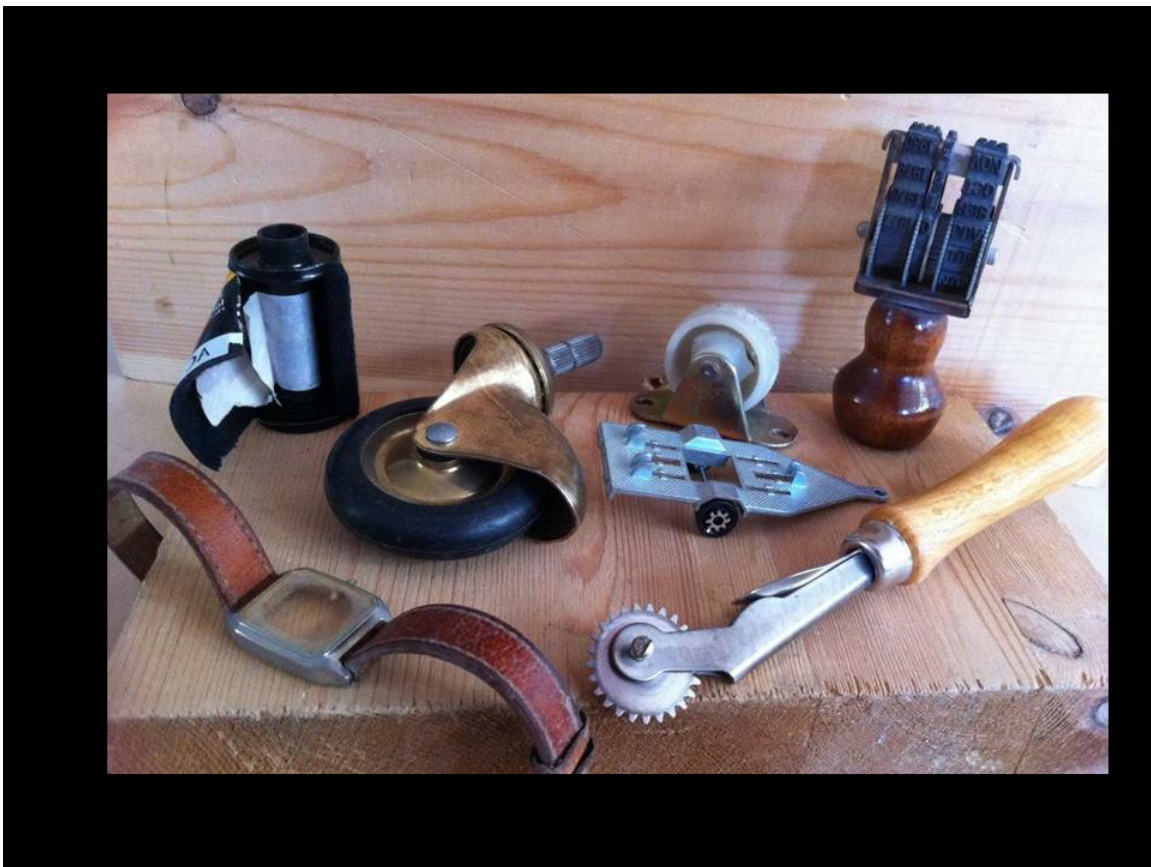
The fact that stuff that has been thrown away as useless can be transformed into an art work conveys a powerful wordless

message to these patients. With investment and caring and creative open mindedness, they too, in spite of, and in cooperation with their damaged sides, have the potential to transform themselves into people whose lives have meaning and value.

In a wider sense, as I reflect on the contribution of this creative reusing of waste material, we might say that it could help save us from a onesidedness; from overvaluing the brand new and high functioning and best quality product. And it can save us from undervaluing, even rejecting, the used, the old and worn, the broken, the non-functional. As we work with materials and objects that the mainstream, or Main Street, see as worthless and unneeded, we grow in awareness of the value of those marginal, neglected and devalued parts in the souls of us all.

My work at the hospital in this vein continued and deepened, and 15 years passed since my return from Boston. As my fervor for collecting unwanted stuff grew, at times I began to feel a reluctance to part with 'finds' that particularly spoke to me. I started to hold them back.





With time I could no longer ignore the indignation I was feeling. Here I was, rummaging and foraging for others, supplying them with stimulating objects full of soul - and what about me?

I had never ever in the past been attracted to work with three-dimensional materials. Ever since early childhood I had drawn and painted, feeling the pencil or brush as an extension of my spirit through my fingers. Sculpture as such had never appealed to me.

And now here I was, with itching fingers, longing to build something out of materials – only I had no idea what!



After some time battling with the frustration of feeling utterly stuck on this point, I realized I needed to take myself in hand, to treat myself.

So I said to that part of myself, "Janice, this stuckness is your theme now. Stop struggling to overcome it. Rather, engage with it, go into it through materials."





I took a piece of sponge that I had salvaged from the insides of a thrown-out armchair cushion, cut it and shaped it, painted it black. Into a crevice in this cliff wall I pushed a doll that had been hanging around my studio for ages, not finding her place.

This work not only expressed my state of being, it also paradoxically aroused sensations quite the opposite of stuckness. I enormously enjoyed making it, was involved, excited, stimulated.



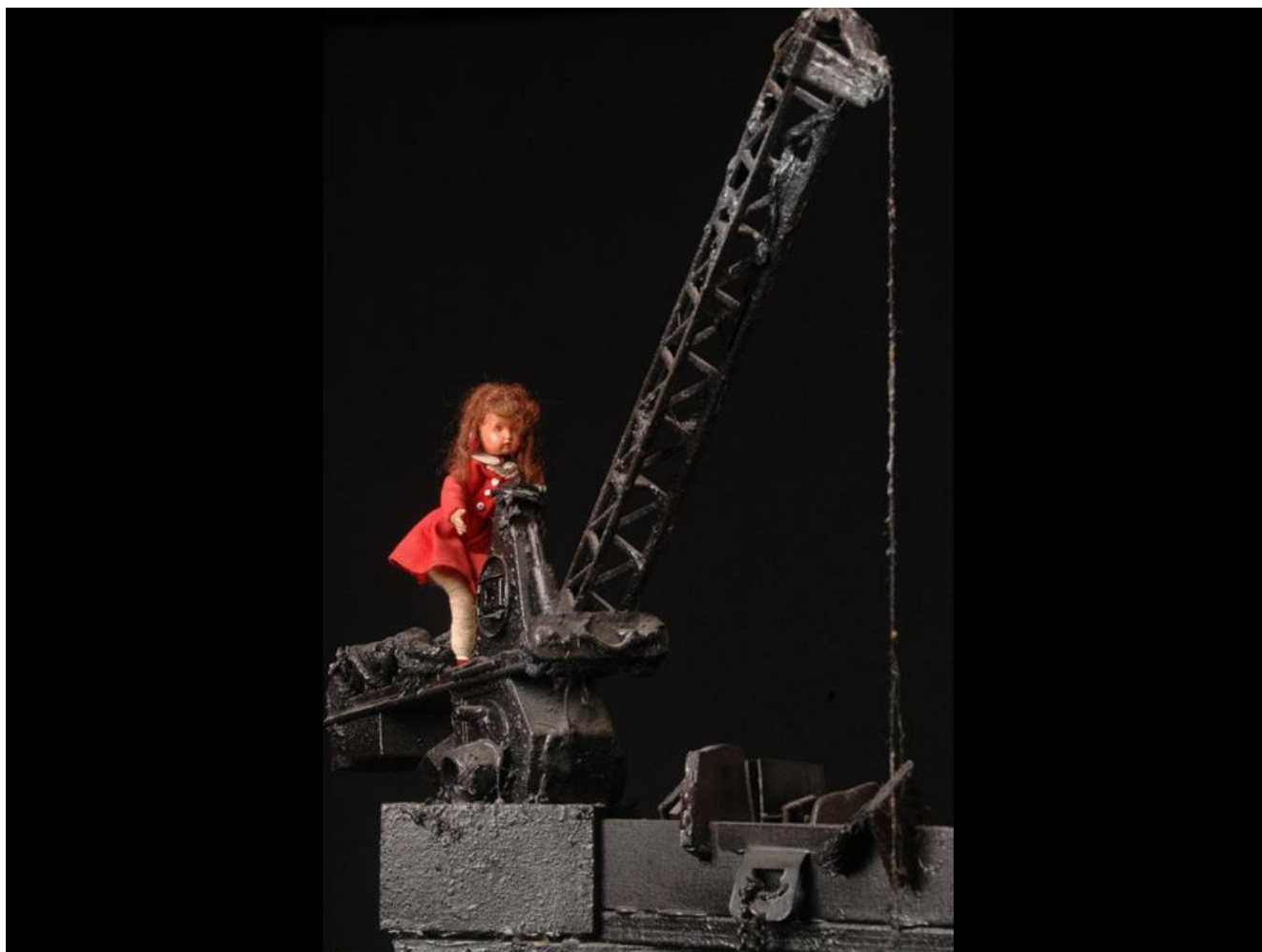
Now that things had started to move inside and outside, the work drew me onwards with its own impetus. I created a figure who herself was sorting out a jumble of materials. I was still very much in the dark as to what she was doing. The theme of the workplace emerged.



This led to constructing a multilayered place within which a little girl in a red dress was busy exploring the stuff that was all over it.



The girl doll was not stuck down.



She could move around to different parts of the construction. As I moved her around, it was as if I was playing with a doll in an alternative dollhouse.

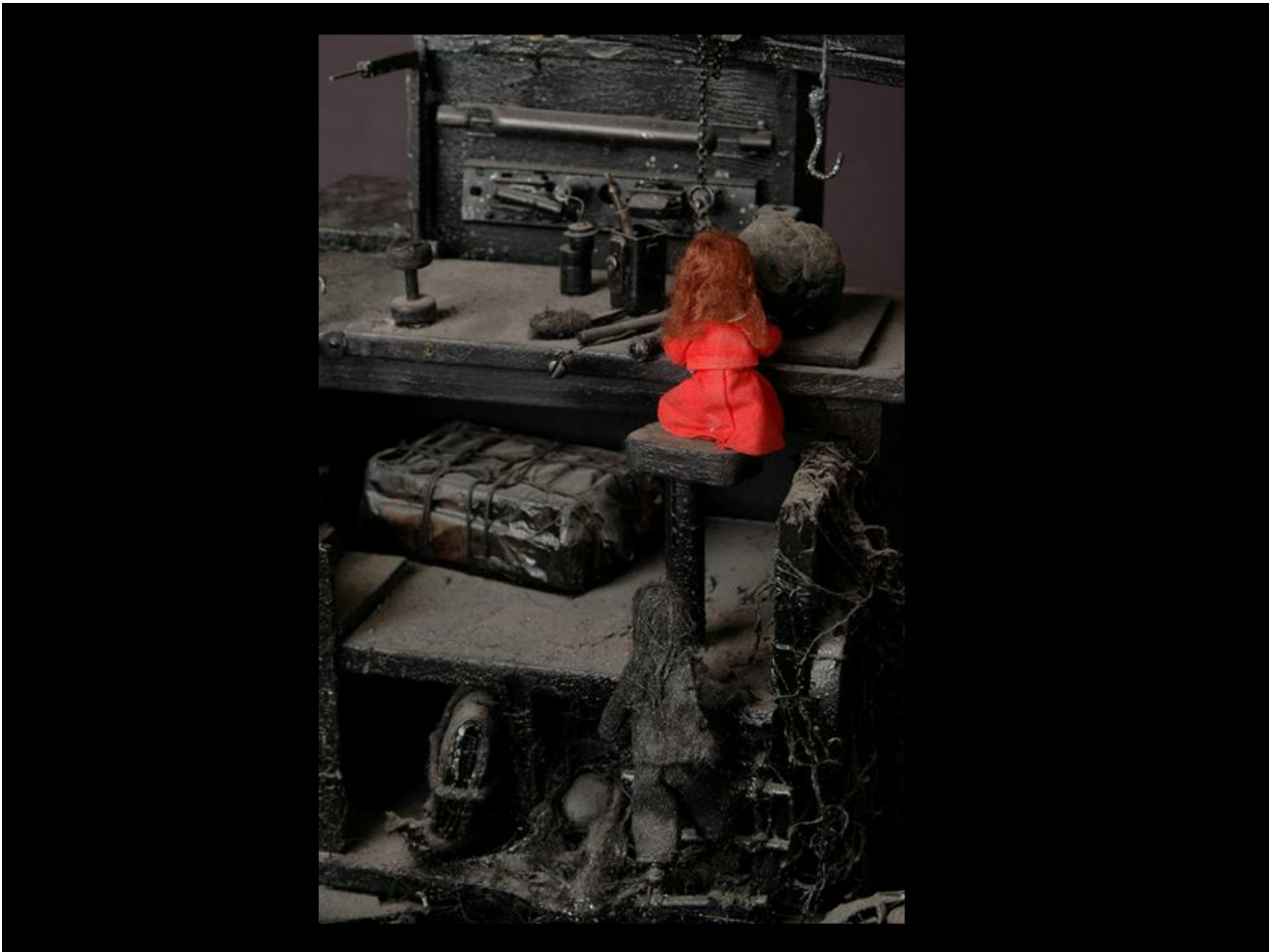




This dollhouse was not the orderly one of my childhood with its living room, bedroom, and so on. It was a somewhat chaotic environment to be explored,



and made sense of,



with unopened parcels and a work-table with tools.

Many constructions and an exhibition later, I reflected on what had happened. I could see how my collecting rubbish for others, and experiencing their creative responses to my offerings, had allowed me bit by bit to become infected.

Looking back on this process, I see how this brought about a deeper dimension to the relationship between my patients and myself. And it opened the way for me to become more three-dimensional in other aspects of my life.

To end, I would like to play with the very title of this conference -- *Art and Psyche in the City*. If we turn it around, we get to look at *ourselves* as architects and artists of the soul, building our imaginal cities within our psyches. And if we continue playing with the connections between the structures we create outside ourselves and those we build inside ourselves, we might discover further and deeper links. Giving tangible shape to our inner imagery in symbolic forms that exist in outer reality plays a crucial part in constructing our soul-city. And if this city-soul includes and embraces its shadowy, inferior aspects, there is a good chance that this might lead both the soul and the city into additional, as yet unimagined, dimensions.

