

A young
New Yorker's
mythology



&

the
Quarantine
Diaries



A Two Part Senior Thesis

by

* Niki Giokas *



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& The Quarantine Diaries*
A Two Part Senior Thesis

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Submitted to the Graphic Design Board of study
School of Art and Design

in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts

Purchase College
State University of New York

May 2020

Sponsor: *Benjamin Santiago*

Second Reader: *Robert Swainston*

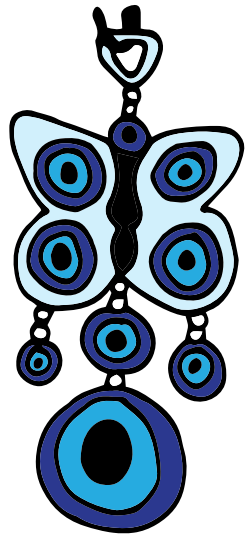
i think we can all agree that the circumstance for the senior class of 2020 are unlike any other; We spent our first semester powering through, business as usual, completely unaware of the drastic changes to follow in the upcoming spring semester. Due to the dual nature of our senior year, it's only fair to have a two part senior project.

To elaborate: during our fall semester, I spent my time trying my hand at printmaking, a new medium for me, to explore my dual heritage and how it impacted my childhood. This is a topic I had never given myself the opportunity to delve into as I always found it to be too complicated and tangled. I decided that this was the perfect time to push myself to begin to untangle that web.

Come midway through second semester, the school was quickly shutting down and we were asked to evacuate campus with less than four days to prepare. The Visual Arts Building, one of my favorite places on campus and in the world, was closing its doors, we were saying goodbye to people we had just spent the last four years with for who knows how long; The entire world was completely shifting before our eyes.

From the minute classes were moved online, I knew that it was time to close the book on my senior project. This was certainly no longer the time to think about how I grew up. I am not throwing away all the hard work I have done all semester; I am simply putting it aside for a later date. My senior project therefore is a two part project; *A Young New Yorker's Mythology* and *The Quarantine Diaries*.





A young new yorker's mythology...

is predominantly a print series exploring my dual heritage, being born in Greece, having my father and half my family still there, while growing up and living in New York City.

I moved to New York City when I was five years old with my mother, who is a native New Yorker, and my father, who was born and raised in Athens. It was his first time moving out of Greece, away from his family and his customs. When I was about 6 years old he moved back. This has never been something I blamed him for, but has been something that of course always left different impressions on my childhood and my identity. While I have the knowledge that I am half Greek and that Greece was my first home, I feel a huge disconnection from the culture. My mother has always done her best to keep Greece alive in our home, but it feels as though when he moved away he took his culture with him, leaving me to have to learn these things myself and take it upon myself to be Greek.

There are things I wish he taught me, like how to speak his language, how to cook my favorite dishes, the history of our country, why Greeks are so superstitious, and how to pronounce our last name. What does it mean to be Greek? Am I really Greek even though I don't know these things, or just a New Yorker with Greek ancestry?



In this body of work, I searched for my own connections and tried to find some of the answers to these questions. I studied the things that have always felt like they were mine; the ancient myths, the arts and architecture, the food, the Gods, my name. I created my own mythology, building fantastical scenes that take place in the subway or at a restaurant, piecing together ancient memories and the parts of the culture that both connect me and disjoin me.

Symbols i grew up with...

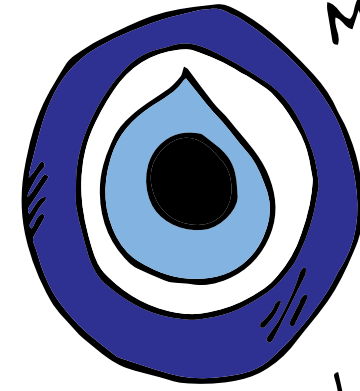
→ The written Greek language + type as symbol rather than as language

→ my name written in Greek serves as symbol
ΝΙΚΗ ΓΚΙΟΚΑΣ

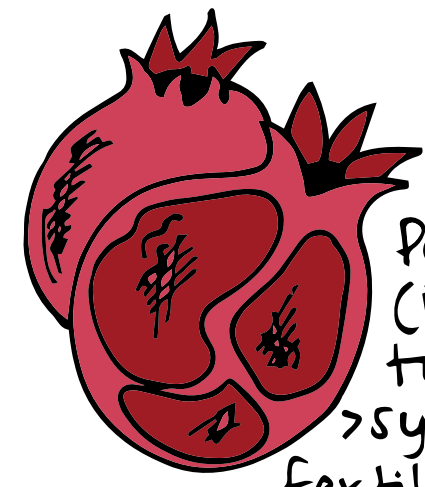
WHILE in English I can (language) read it directly
NIKI GIOKAS



Baba's drawings of KORINTHIAN helmets (Iron+Copper)



MATI (Greek Evil EYE)
→ protection from Jealousy + Evil
→ was pinned to my diaper as a baby



Pomegranate (in Judaism too)
→ symbol of fertility
→ good luck
→ associated with Aphroditi, Hera, and Demeter



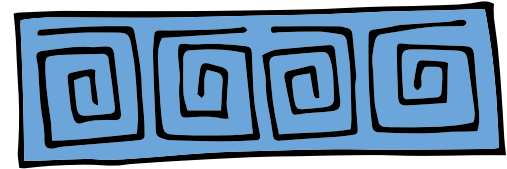
OLIVES, OLIVE TREES, OLIVE BRANCHES, OLIVE WREATH, OLIVE LEAVES



NIKH'S WING OF VICTORY

NAMESAKE

NIKH'S WREATH (she always wears)



GREEK KEY (MEANDER) → Cretian Labrynth
-most important symbol in Ancient Greece → eternal flow of life



ΑΘΗΝΑ (Athena, Athens, owl + MATI)



Columns, ruins, architecture
→ Ancient Thira
→ Akrotiri } Santorini
↓
kyklades Islands

Each work follows the same character, myself as a young girl. She is always featured with the wings of Nike, my namesake, as not only a nod to the numerous things that connect me to the culture, but to simultaneously mythologize my Greek self.

Throughout the body of work, the New York symbology is a grounding force. The elements that draw from NYC imagery are much more believable and natural, such as the Subway, a Deli, or a slice of pizza, while elements of Greece are fantastical and unbelievable, such as Nike's wings, old statues in the middle of the train, and the Sea God Poseidon hanging out in a purse.



Subway Mythology
Intaglio
9" x 12"
Edition of 20



Taverna, Soda, Cigarettes
Linoleum — 5 Layer Reduction
23" x 28"
Edition of 11

Taverna, Soda, Cigarettes is a five layer reduction linoleum print that continues on the journey of discovery and connection. The imagery on the walls move from left to right, past to present, Santorini to NYC. The rest of the image consists of a conglomeration of items, foods, toys, animals, gift shop classics, art historical references, etc, which all have become the comforts of my childhood and the liaison's between my two cultures.



Bagel Dream
Woodcut
17" x 11"
Edition of 2

Not only are they fantastical, but they are plastered across the gift shops and tourist attractions of Greece. This imagery is some of the more easily digestible and universal understandings of the culture, and I wanted to use this as a way to showcase how elementary my understanding of Greece can be at times.

This is just the beginning of a much longer exploration that I hope to continue on one day. I've realized that while there are so many things I wish I could have been shown and taught, that my search for a connection has led me to a really special, individual, and personal understanding of Greece, and of myself as a Greek New Yorker.





Santorini Bodega
Woodcut
10" x 14"
Edition of 20

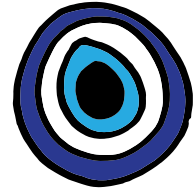
Santorini Bodega woodcut print. In the center is myself as a kid on the stone grounds of Santorini, with the wings of my namesake, Nike the Goddess of Victory. This mystical variation of myself seeks to connect, and reconnect, with her culture while being in New York City. Reaching out to pet the typical bodega cat, she also reaches out to the cats that permeate the streets of Greece; a middle ground between myth and materiality.



*Little Nike takes
the Subway!*
Intaglio
9" x 12"
Edition of 20



A series of stickers each paying tribute to growing up in NYC with a flair of Greece. Imagery such as the iconic dollar slide pizza, essential bacon egg and cheese sandwich, and the teen party favorite "thot juice" lime-o-rita's are sprinkled with bits of Greek iconography. The Greek evil eye finds its way around to almost each image, Goddess of Victory's wings and laurel wreath on young me, and the classic NYC coffee cup with the greek key sits by the breakfast Sandwich.



But There are also Parts That feel Like They're Mine

I visit now as a tourist.
I don't stay with my Baba
I don't even really know where he lives,
I see him once or twice for dinner or kafe with
my mom as a buffer and conversation holder.

We speak in English.
He speaks to the waiters.
He'll laugh with them and joke around.
He'll say in English: "This is my kourimou"
and he'll kiss my head and chuckle.

I stay in a hotel,
I go to the beach all day and eat dinner in restaurants,
I'll go shopping in Phira and buy mati necklaces,
acropolis snow globes, and a Nikh statue,
because that's my name and it's the only place
in the world that spells it right.
I speak in English to the cashiers
but make sure to say "Geia sou"
when I walk up to the counter and
say "Geia sas" when I leave, so they know
I'm also kinda from here.

But there are also parts that feel like they're mine.
Like when I go into the sea and I open my eyes under the
water, and can feel the salt on my lips.
When I run as fast as I can back up to the shade because I
know how the black volcanic sand will burn my feet after a
step or two,

When I don't need to look at the menu because I know
exactly what I want to order: mia Greek Salad, mia fava,
mia saganaki, mia tzatsiki, kai mia neraki.
The way the words Agapimou, koukla, and kouritsia make
me feel loved and cared for.

The sound of the warm breeze rustling the dry trees and
dust of the island. The vibration of the ancient ruins, the
soft whispers of the old ones, of the nymphs and gods.

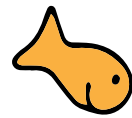
The ripe figs that hang on the edge of the road that my
mom stops to pick and hand to me.

The burning white hot sun on my eyelids when I close
them and point my face up to the sky.

The thick black hair on my head and arms that match the
other girls thick black hair on their heads and arms,
And the way sea salt dries and cakes into it under
the 104 degree heat.

Finding my face in the saffron pickers
of Aegean Frescos.

The Quarantine Diaries



My new, part two senior project was born from the need for entertainment, productivity and comfort in the confines of self-quarantine during the coronavirus pandemic. My plan initially for "A Young New Yorker's Mythology," was to take the prints and make a series of postcards out of them. I had planned to sell them at Purchase's Zine Feast as well as displaying them at the end of the year at my senior show.

I've always had an obsession with collecting postcards from wherever I could find them: museum gift shops, if I traveled, at art exhibitions, in stores, wherever. I just take them and hang them on my wall or collage them into my sketchbook. In such a small image they take you on some sort of journey or tell a story of travel, art, and experiences. They're always personal; either they have been specifically chosen to be sent to you, or you yourself have chosen it to preserve a memory.



Suddenly classes were moved online in mid-March, and we were asked to move off campus shortly after. In all the chaos and instability, I found myself feeling completely detached from my schoolwork, my project, and really anything creative or productive. I honestly just wanted to sit and watch Tik-Toks, drink wine, and eat candy. At this point I had officially given up and accepted defeat. I called my senior project advisor to break the news: my project is what it is, I'm done, I hope I don't fail but this



is it, I'm handing this in. Once I was done blabbing he recommended that I just put it aside for now and start to write down all of the defeated and sad feelings I was having each day in hopes of finding some sort of new creative spark.

While I appreciated the advice, when I got back home from school I ignored everything he said, got into bed and started watching Netflix (Sorry Ben! But don't worry we circle back around to your great advice!) My grandma called me and said she was so bored and that I was lucky I could at least paint or draw to keep myself busy. My mom then walked in and told me how she missed her friends and that her only hobby was seeing people, and again, that I was so lucky to be able to draw or something to entertain myself. I virtually smiled and nodded at my grandma and said "haha true" to my mom, but in my head I knew that there was no way that I was getting out of this bed for anything but another bag of Doritos and a tall glass of white wine.

I eventually got very bored of that plan, so I decided to redecorate my room. My walls are covered in postcards, stickers, torn magazines, and book pages. As I was ripping things off the wall to replace with other things I had up at school, I found that almost all the

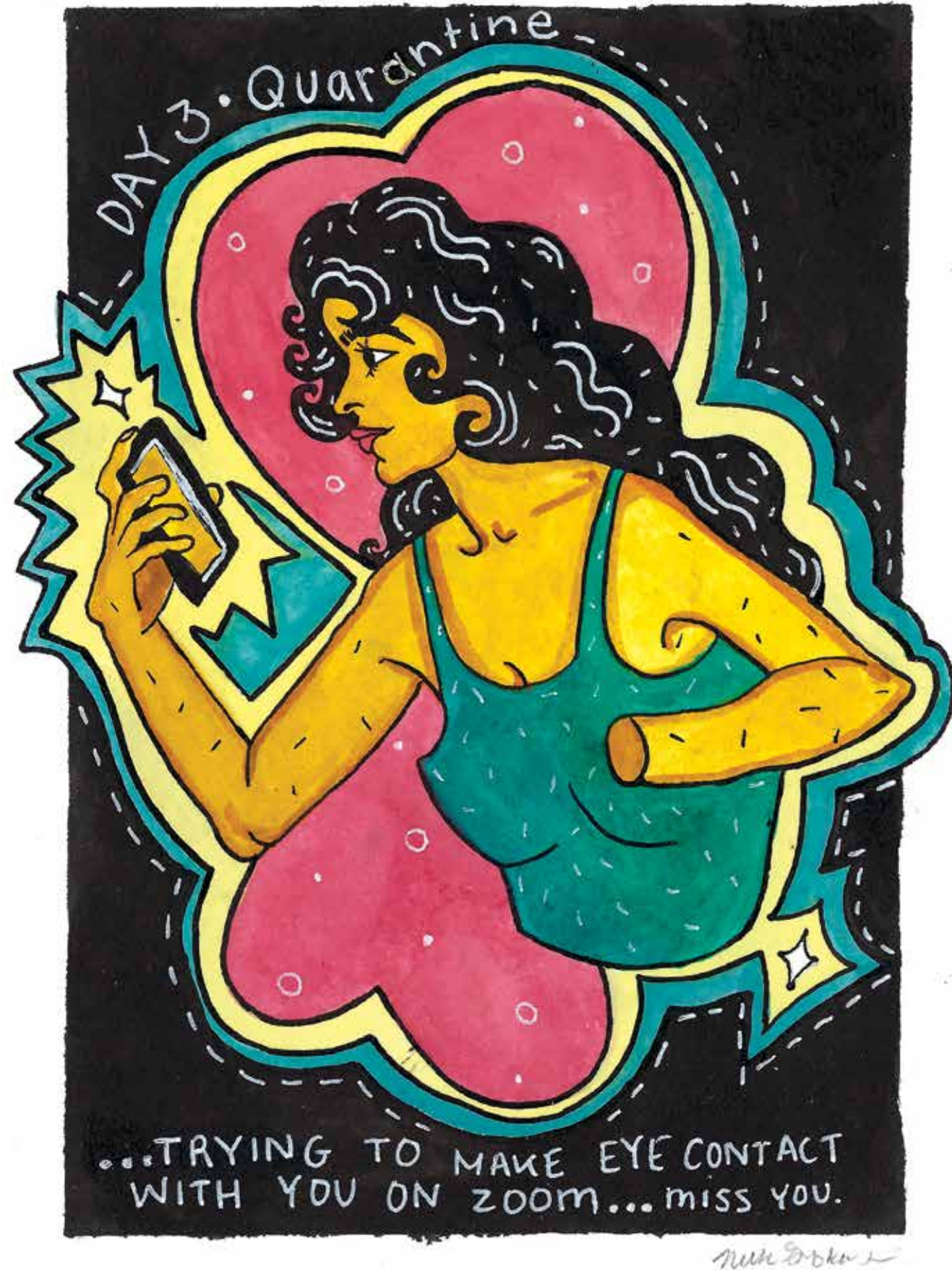
postcards on my walls were sent to me with a letter on the back. I know, that's not that cool, that's what postcards are for. But, I was surprised because now that my friends, my family, and I text and use social media, I never send or receive mail anymore.



There were letters from my dad scribbled on the back with his Greek-style alphabet English hybrid handwriting about what he did that day and what the image on the postcard was. (He loves to give me history lessons on Greece.) I had letters from my friends from middle school when we realized that sending and receiving mail was actually fun. Going through these handwritten messages, all that had yellowed and faded just a little over the years, was a really sweet moment I didn't expect to have in the sad, lonely, isolation of self-quarantine. And when I was done reading them, I stuck them right back on the wall so I could find them in another few years and have that little moment of human connection by myself again.

This is the moment (that I promised you Ben) that I realized I wanted to send the people that I love some mail, so they too could feel that little moment of human connection while they're home alone. And as it turned out, my grandma and my mom were right; I am lucky that I can draw and paint to keep myself entertained. I decided to hybrid my project advisor Ben Santiago's idea of writing down my feelings every day with my love of postcards. I painted a few postcards a day, each detailing a small victory such as getting out of bed, cracking open a book, opening a bottle of wine, or something I found to entertain myself—such as shaving my legs for 15 whole minutes! I have so far made over 80 postcards, and will continue to make more each day.





These postcards serve two major purposes:



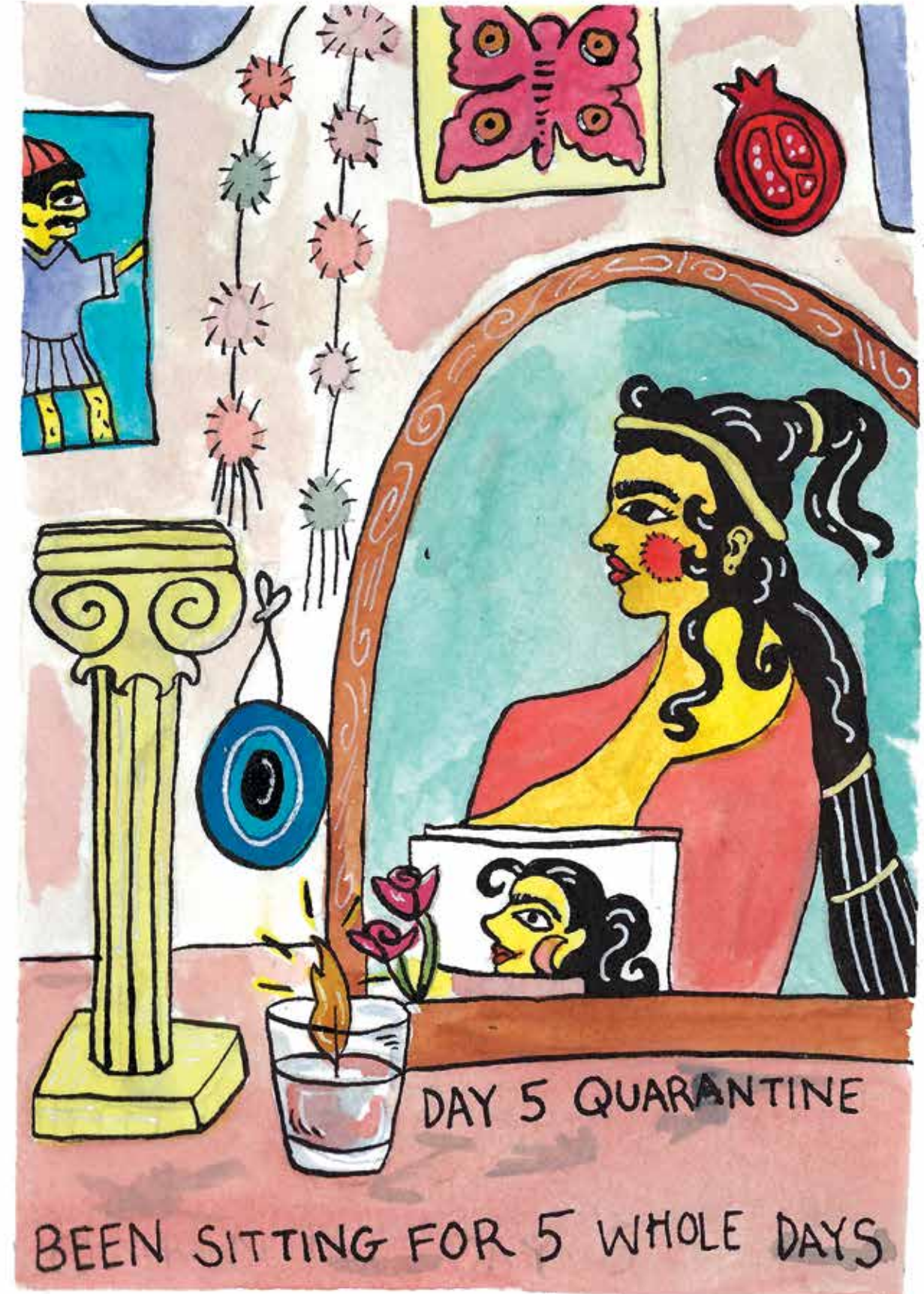
1.

It gives me something to do all day. I genuinely am having a nice time sitting in my room, doodling all day, not realizing how many hours have passed. It is productive enough that my mom doesn't judge me for not doing homework, not leaving my room, or drinking numerous boxes of wine. And it's comforting finding some humor each day while the news is playing in the background, reminding us of the horrible and tragic realities of the world at the moment.





SLEEPING POSITIONS OF DAY 4 QUARANTINE
Niki Giokas



DAY 5 QUARANTINE
BEEN SITTING FOR 5 WHOLE DAYS
Niki Giokas

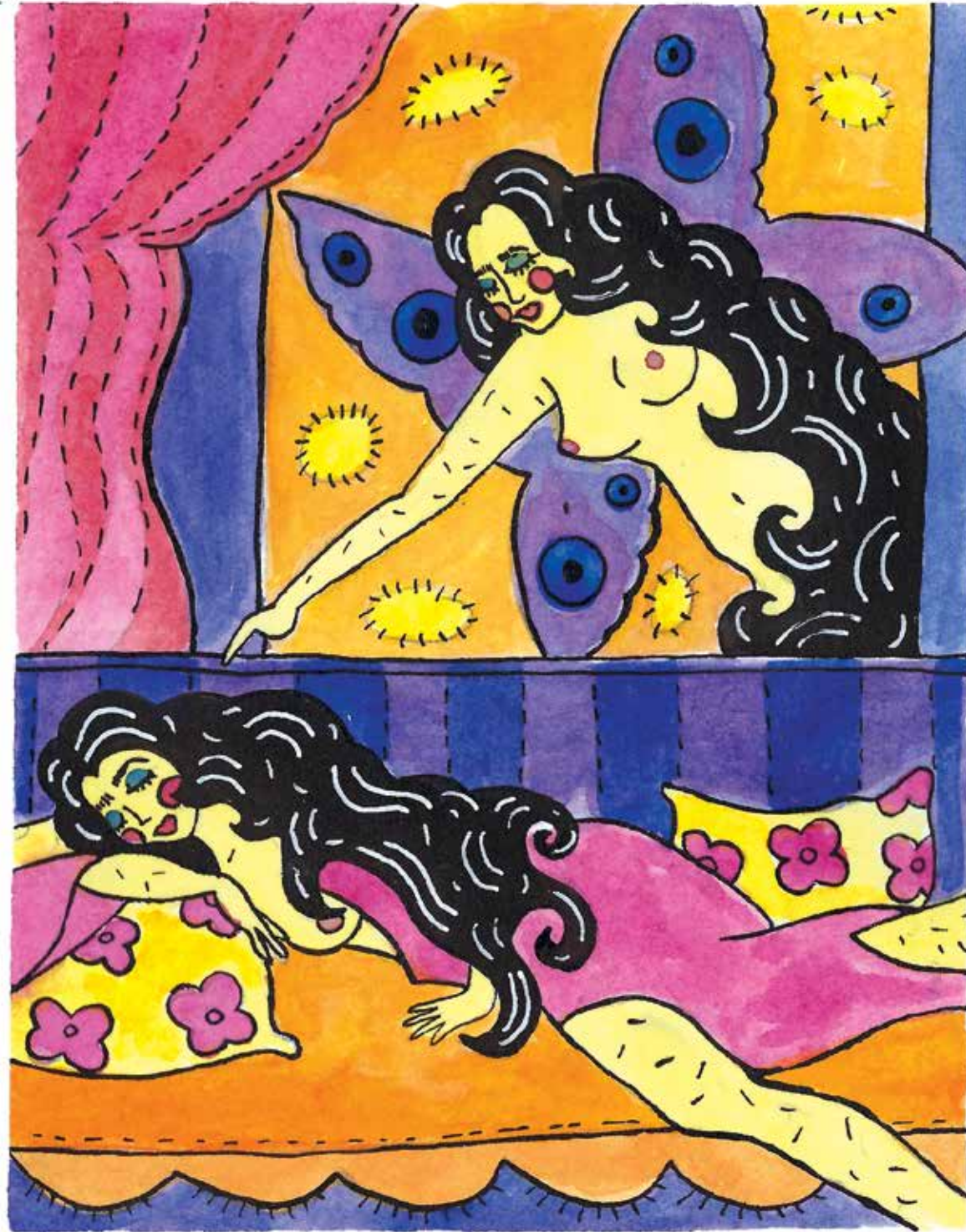


Greetings from DAY 6 DAY DREAMS

ME, HANGING OUT WITH MY SELF FOR THE 55th DAY...



DAY 7 QUARANTINE



QUARANTINE DAY 8
A picture of me trying to wake myself up to do homework.
Mimi Dore

• QUARANTINE • DAY • 16 •



WAITING FOR THE ZOOM CLASS TO START...

QUARANTINE
DAY • 17



TRYING TO FIGURE OUT WHAT TO DO...

QUARANTINE
DAY • 18



HAVING A DRINK WITH MY SHADOW

STARING OUT THE WINDOW FOR
AN HOUR AFTER I WAKE UP...



• QUARANTINE • DAY • 19 •

**OVERLY • CAFFEINATING •
MYSELF • TO • DO • NOTHING •**
• QUARANTINE • DAY • 33 •



•DAY•37•QUARANTINE•

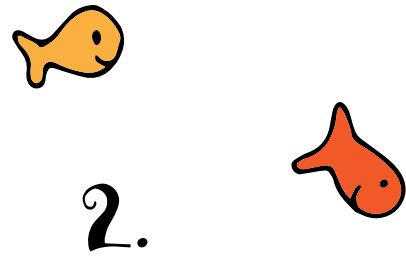


•STARING•AT•THE•WALL•5MIN•
•INTO•STARTING•AN•ESSAY•

•DAY•37•QUARANTINE•



ME; SITTING•AT•MY•DESK•FOR•
THE•37th•DAY...



The second purpose is that I hope that once someone receives the postcard in the mail, that they too will feel that little moment of human connection, maybe have a little laugh, maybe feel inspired to find something to creatively entertain themselves, or realize that the small thing they did that day was indeed a victory! Or maybe they won't and they'll just admire it for a moment, and stick it up on their wall for another time.







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Project
on instagram for daily
Postcard Postings♥♥♥

