

A MASTERPIECE

A young Picasso, that's what I saw myself as. Of course, I wouldn't have known who he was or what his work had meant. Nor the materials he used. In fact, at the bright age of 6, I didn't know or anything about art. I just knew, taught myself, that I could create something colorful and reminiscent of the world, a masterpiece in my eyes. What a young Picasso I had been.

My hands covered in marker and pen, up and down on my arm my art went, I was my own canvas. My wide eyes traveling from the surface of my paper to my own hands. Curious and developing mind perceived thoughts of what beauty in the world and in imagination meant as I took note of the use of everything. Hands are for art.

I sat in the chair of my mom's preschool classroom, myself only having just outgrown this setting. I who only a year later came to the realization that time doesn't stop and neither does the world. I remember kids looking at me in amazement when I would visit the classroom, I was the same as them, taking on the same thoughts, ideas, knowledge, and innocence. But I was a little bit bigger, the obvious answer to explain me was not age but that I was merely a giant. I at that point knew better, knew the truth to what that meant; kids born after me, younger than me, and myself outgrowing them. That answer, truth over imagination, baffled my young mind.

I loved to draw, paint even more so, but that day I only had access to pencils and a few dried up markers. The tips of them turning white with age, the ink spread out unevenly with chunks missing. Like a broken picture frame the image hid behind.

I made the world, trees, mountains, and everything that I saw, perceived. First I would draw what my eyes could envision, grasp, but it was my mind that filled in the blank spaces. That day however, I only drew one thing. It was going to be a challenge, my biggest piece yet. A family

portrait, starting on the left my father is drawn first, graphite from the led leaving dark lines for his stick-figure body. My mom next, then my sisters, Topanga and Heather, and finally me. All of us looking the same - except for my father of course because he's a boy, he was the only one whose short hair was colors with marker and not pencil, and he wore a shirt no dress - the only difference was in our height and the color of our dresses. I needed the world to understand, to see, and acknowledge who each was, so to clarify a bit more my mom had written everybody's name underneath. I did however write Heather's name for the practice, random letters capitalized and huge compared to all the other ones. Looked something like this, HeATHer.

After seeing the family portrait I decided that it wasn't finished, still too much negative space around us. So I added additions to our family, my cat, both my dogs and all the puppies they've ever had. Even though most of them were no longer with us but adopted into new homes.

22 puppies.

The first litter she had was only three pups, I thought that it would be even and I would get a designated puppy that was mine. Both of my sisters would get one as well, but I had been wrong. Topanga had gotten two, Heather had gotten one, and I was left with however many I wanted once they became bored.

So I put them all down on the paper every puppy from every one of her litters. Towards the end as my hand became sore from its workout and the finger that the pencil rested on became raw, the puppies started to lose their faces, then their legs, until it was just a lone oval to identify them.

Pet names were written by my mom after - with exception of the litter who were grouped together and labeled 'puppies' - . She refused to name everyone like 'Zoomie' from the second litter or chip from the third who had the cleft pallet. Zoomie was a twin who didn't make it along with Chip who also didn't because of his lip, but I still included them both.

I added color with markers, the colors seemed to branch their ways from the paper to my own arms, something that would irritate my mother because she had to clean it off. But I couldn't help it, it was a mesmerizing beauty, I myself became art. Art created at the fingertips of my hands, I found out how to be a creator that day.

I colored the clothing of my family, let the white of the paper color in the skin. The line of the pencil differentiated where we began and ended. The marker went to the fur of the animals as well, I tried very hard to stay in the lines, but I was too careful and left gaping holes of empty space. My father's shirt was blue and looked to be shredded because the scribbled of the marker didn't hit any of the sides.

I was proud of my work, unlike artists who end up hating it or feeling it's not good enough, I continued to admire it. Imposters syndrome having no place in my mind, at least not yet, in the coming years it would slowly find its way in. Creep in through the crevices of the dark corners in my mind. But not yet, I felt accomplished and proud, my mom even hung it up in the kitchen, not on a fridge but pinned it down on our pantry. The same pantry I would eventually put tape on to measure my height difference. I watched that pantry age along with everything on it. The wood became dented and discolored, and the screws on the door became loose. It stopped closing right.

The different levels of tape were removed leaving behind a dark sticky residue from the underside. I had used electric tape, it was all I could find. There's still a slight stickiness to the spot but the color of it was beginning to clean off along with the memory of how small I once was, of how much I've grown.

The portrait, my pride, and joy, the masterpiece that was once glorious became dull. The color fled the paper barely noticeable now. The canvas, the paper itself, turned a rusty yellow color like old mustard. I had watched my family age in person and on that piece of paper, their brightness

turned down, the lines of distinction in them and who they are blurred, my pets are gone faded on both, nothing but a memory of what the circles once were.

The portrait was once ripped down dramatically by my father during a fight. It was between him and my sister, she was going down the wrong road, one he knew a little too well so he pushed her away. Nights like that left a permanent scar.

His booming voice wasn't completely at fault, there were other factors, but it was that voice that was at the surface.

"Fuck you!" His voice rattled the house as my mom sobbed, holes were punched into the wall and that was the first tare in the family portrait. Small enough to be fixed to change its path, if only it was ever acknowledged.

"Amber, come over here so you can watch your dad kill himself!" He had punched my sister that night, in the back while drunk, he was trying to play didn't mean to hurt her. But, he did and he became mad at us because he hurt her.

"Get the fuck out!" I was in the bathroom when he yelled this to my sister when he found out she relapsed, she said some bad things, but he's the one who gave up. He even packed her bag.

At the end of it, when Heather left and my parents were away I left the bathroom, I traveled downstairs to see my family portrait torn down. It was only at this point that I saw it, now too big and too much to be ignored. A tare ran itself through half of the picture, splitting my father's head in two, it was gradual, we saw the signs, but nothing was done about it. I still hung onto the slowly fading color of what the drawing once was.

The blissful ignorance, vibrant hues, and beauty in the creation of art were almost completely void now. The portrait now hollow and shredded with age has seen much of life, memories of innocence burrow themselves in the welting corners and in the shadows of what's been ripped.

There was a flood a little while back, the whole kitchen had to be torn out, along with the dented damaged pantry that I loved. The pantry who in its roughness once held the dreams and the hope of growing taller, the promise of getting older. It had clung to my impatient mind, watched with me as I added another inch to the collection. It hung on to my childlike excitement.

Now where my pantry and portrait used to be is a blank space that I can't seem to fill, the mystery of a lost view, The dampening of all the colors in the world around me. My masterpiece in all its glory is just a distant forgotten memory, tucked away somewhere. What was once magnificent and immortal is now crumbling in on itself, the paper withering away in some dark corner until it's nothing but dust.