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## Amidst the Cardboard City

Olaf Tollefsen

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AMIDST THE CARDBOARD CITY

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Graduate School of  
Clemson University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Fine Arts  
Visual Art

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by  
Olaf Tollefsen  
December 2021

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Accepted by:  
Todd Anderson, Committee Chair  
Beth Lauritis  
Kathleen Thum

**Abstract:**

*Amidst the Cardboard City* examines moments where joyous potential is brought into the seemingly bland moments of daily life. The focus of this inquiry takes the form of a narrative that follows the character Birdman as he journeys through his environment, becoming more and more active within it as he strives for a greater freedom within his world. The thesis artworks take the form of nine multiple-block woodcut prints made through a unique photomechanical process involving set building, digital photography, color separations, hand printing, and laser engraving. A large, eight-foot by eight-foot by eight-foot gallery installation was also exhibited. This installation sought to share the formal and conceptual aspects of the printed artworks in a three-dimensional and human scale.

Primary sources of visual inspiration were taken from contemporary artists Carrier Curry and Lothar Osterberg. Writer David Foster Wallace served as a primary source of literary inspiration.

## **Acknowledgements:**

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I would like to thank my fellow graduate students for the comradery and wonderful times I have shared with them.

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## **Introduction:**

The body of artwork that constitutes my MFA Thesis Art Exhibition consists of a series of nine woodcut prints on washi paper and a large sculptural installation approximately 8 feet wide and 8 feet deep and 8 feet tall. The prints are each 15 inches tall and 20 inches wide and prominently feature a hybrid human and bird-like figure called Birdman. The sculptural installation, as seen with the prints in Lee Gallery at Clemson University aspires to be a three-dimensional and to-scale representation of a room or space in which Birdman exists. When the prints and installation are seen together and sequentially, the thesis exhibition tells a story of Birdman as he begins and then navigates the “day in and day out” of a fictitious and somewhat menacing world.

Author David Foster Wallace plays a crucial part in the conception of this work, especially his 2005 commencement speech *This is Water*, delivered to Kenyon College, in which he describes freedom in the “day in and day out” stating: “*The really important kind of freedom involves attention and awareness and discipline, and being able truly to care about other people and to sacrifice for them over and over in myriad petty, unsexy ways every day...The alternative is unconsciousness.*”

The “Unconsciousness” that Wallace talks about is a result of our natural default settings, meaning our tendency towards the things that are easy and unconscious for the

individual to decide. This is by no means a new phenomenon. Philosopher Immanuel

Kant writes about his definition of enlightenment in a similar way stating:

Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed nonage. Nonage is the inability to use one's own understanding without another's guidance. This nonage is self-imposed if its cause lies not in lack of understanding but in indecision and lack of courage to use one's own mind without another's guidance.

For both Kant and Wallace, there is a view that the individual in a state of passivity makes choices and follows beliefs through the direction of external forces (environments, leaders, educators, etc.). They both argue that maturity is required to break from that way of thinking and ultimately make decisions formed from intentional thought rather than passive influence. For Wallace this is freedom, and for Kant this is the idea of enlightenment.

Unique from Wallace or Kant's era, our current technological state shifts us into a different environment. If enlightenment fights against relying on another's guidance as a substitute for using one's own mind, then the current media landscape, full of voices that are not our own, must be a great source of continual nonage. (I will be referring to this state by Wallace's term "default settings" for the duration of this paper.)

Through Birdman's journey I explore moments where the default setting is challenged and the self-imposed expectations and limitations are broken in a way that leads to maturity and growth. In those moments Birdman has the continual choice to allow his default settings to be the driving power in his experience and mindset, or to



push against the environment that these things create and to pursue an active participation in the moment that brings him to a greater and more profound freedom.

## Chapter One:

### An Infinity of Possibilities

Designed as a narrative around the idea of an infinity of possibilities Birdman's journey is shown through a set of three triptychs; *Coffee Break* (figure 1), *City of Curiosity* (figure 3), and *Sad Boi Walk* (figure 2) as the introduction, *Imposter Wednesday* (figure 4), *Burning Boulevard* (figure 5) and *The Broken Moment* (figure 6) as the center, and *Red Sun, Red Moon* (figure 7), *Faces Left Behind* (figure 8) and *Like a Fish to Water* (figure 9) as the conclusion. The series was created as a full narrative but is presented like a fragmented series of film stills. This allows an open interpretation.

In her 2004 Ted Talk, woodcut and multimedia artist Callie Curry described the effect of her artwork when found in the urban landscape as, “The genesis of possible worlds.” In other words the artwork, when encountered in the urban landscape creates a feeling of expanded possibilities. This encouragement for a shift in perspective combined with what Curry describes as “an opening for a childlike part” of the viewer ultimately leads to what Curry discusses as “a place where you believe in an infinity of possibilities.” Much like David Foster Wallace in *This Is Water*, Curry states that she believes that it is in this space, where the limitations imposed by the grueling details of the day in and day out are broken, that we can enact positive change.

The core content of this thesis is this intellectual space, where an altered moment presents possibilities previously beyond one's imagination when in its default setting. While the story of Birdman covers the context, conflict, and resolution surrounding this sort of moment, it is this moment and the beauty that can come from it that is truly important. The prints in this series aim to generate a discussion and to serve as a source of potential inspiration where cardboard, grainy resolution, and a man-bird puppet give way to an "infinity of possibilities".

In the first triptych Birdman begins this journey in a state of passivity. This lays out the context of Birdman's inner life, his environment, and his exterior life. This pattern is repeated in all three image sets. In the center triptych Birdman enters into the conflict of his journey as he is faced with the reality that he is subject to his passive consumption of the world. He widens his view and becomes aware of the environment in relation to others and to himself and becomes dissatisfied. In the conclusion of the series Birdman experiences a shift in his perception of the world around him as he becomes aware of the infinity of possibilities in front of him and his opportunity for growth.

While Birdman was created with specific intentions, interpretation is left to the viewers. In narrative terms he is a character who has a potential, namely flight, who throughout his journey through constructed spaces grows to the point that his potential can be realized. While Birdman is the protagonist within his world, his experiences are

reminiscent of those that we all share in our modern, media-saturated landscape. By sharing experiences with the viewer, but in a different, more visually saturated environment, Birdman doesn't become a one-to-one representation of the viewer, but rather a companion that shares similar experiences. This relates back to Birdman's form, as from the Epic of Gilgamesh to the Disney movies of today the anthropomorphic creature has long been depicted as a companion to the hero of a quest. The use of a bird in particular represents the balancing between delicacy and resilience, traits that the media saturation of today often erode.

## **Chapter Two:**

### **The Methodology of Cardboard**

Birdman and his environment are made of cardboard. This accomplishes a few tasks. From a thematic standpoint the cardboard becomes a representation of the world that Birdman lives in; its constructed nature, the impracticality of its details, and the precariousness of it all. The cardboard also symbolises the active engagement that Birdman journeys towards throughout the narrative. As children we might experience the excitement of a large cardboard box as it activates our imagination. It is available and affordable and often free, alleviating economic issues to a degree. It gives enough structure to avoid Blank Canvas Syndrome (a terrible state of indecision that leads to so many sketchbooks to remain unfilled). Yet as an artistic substrate cardboard is malleable, undefined enough that I am able to artistically impose my will and imagination. The informality of cardboard as a material serves to invite the viewer to participate in this imagination. As the viewer looks closer at the world built within these images, the line between box and building blur, giving space for the viewer to fill in the gaps between the reality of the cardboard and the fiction of the world.

The story structure of the series is made to serve a similar role as cardboard. It is solid enough to create some structure but open and inviting enough that the viewer feels as if they can participate on their own terms. To me, a viewer's autonomy to imagine,

find content, and savour are paramount. This approach to how I strive to make artwork present itself to its viewers- to create a welcoming moment and have the artworks' material (i.e., cardboard) and content (i.e., a narrative) working together.

Cardboard is additionally linked to creative subculture fandoms ranging from the world of miniatures, dioramas, and boardgames, to film related hobbies of prop and costume construction, and lo-fi film making. For many of these pursuits cardboard serves as an introductory material that kickstarts the creative process. A YouTube search immediately locates dozens of videos on making props, dioramas, and costumes with cardboard. In the film industry it can also become a hallmark of outsider filmmaking. While Hollywood spends millions of dollars on highly polished blockbusters, filmmakers like Phil Tippit or Cristobal Leon and Joaquin Cocina pull off strange pieces of arthouse film on comparatively tiny budgets. Such arthouse and B-films communicate that creativity is for everyone and all a person needs to reimagine the world is some cardboard and a bit of curiosity. These filmmakers have been a large influence in the composition of the images in this series, particularly their combination of material and narrative as an invitation to the viewer.

Cardboard and a creative subculture mindset also creates new relationships of creative ownership. When the hobbyist recreates a movie prop, whether from cardboard or any other material, they are shifting from consumer to creator. Even though the piece

might be based on a corporate blockbuster, the piece they created is theirs, and they have ownership over it. This plays into Birdman's journey as there is tension as to whether he has ownership over his own place in his environment. In the *Cardboard Kitchen* (figure 10) with *Imposter Wednesday* (figure 4) Birdman is not in control. The domestic setting of the kitchen implies a privacy within the space. Since it is Birdman's private space it should be sacrosanct, but the TV in the center becomes the focal point. The rest of the kitchen surrounds the TV, implying that Birdman's life, even in the privacy of space that should be his, revolves around the will of others. In the same way his story is about a fight for control, cardboard and creative subcultures link to movements of creative control over media consumption and constructed environments within popular culture.

Other artists use cardboard for a more polished effect. Lothar Osterberg creates detailed and atmospheric sets, often with cardboard as a substantial material. Osterberg provides a glimpse into another side of the creative process as he describes his work flow. It becomes evident that for him much of his initial creative process is reactionary to whatever he finds inspiring at the moment. Whether it is *Invisible Cities* by Italo Calvino, or the artwork of architect and fine art printmaker Giovanni Piranesi he finds inspiration in others' creativity. In the same way that cardboard can serve, materially, as an easy entry into the craft side of creativity, existing artwork can serve as a likewise easy

entranceway for the viewer's own imagination. This is a common practice found in creative subculture fandoms.



## Chapter Three:

### Birdman in Boredom

The thesis images *Coffee Break* (figure 1), *Cityscape* (figure 3), and *Sad Boi Walk* (figure 2) serve as the first three artworks (of nine total) of the larger narrative body of artwork. In *Coffee Break* (figure 1), Birdman finds himself in a state of boredom caught between his own natural predisposition for the easy and the comfortable and the way that the world around him is constructed. *Coffee Break* (figure 1) aims to reflect an internal conflict that Birdman is trapped in. This piece utilizes a quiet, visual space where Birdman sits lethargically and dejectedly on a counter. He is caught within a stasis form of being. The space and the title of the piece both imply that this is a moment of rest for Birdman, but the space which Birdman is in, both physically and mentally, is stark and nearly empty. The walls are bare except for overly intrusive fixtures. Even though it is a place of rest, it does not seem restful, but rather sad, empty, and not his own.

*Sad Boi Walk* (figure 3) accompanies this theme, carrying the notion of Birdman's stasis and boredom into the world around him. While *Coffee Break* (figure 1) is set within the privacy of Birdman's quiet moments, *Sad Boi Walk* (figure 3) shows that this lethargy is carried with him wherever he goes. He is surrounded by the cardboard city, but there is a distance between him and the environment. We see similar fixtures jutting from the blocky, impractical buildings around him implying that the construction of his

private space has been dictated by the larger designs of the environment around him. This establishes a dystopian nature to the landscape as a key element of dystopian cinema is the way in which the larger landscape dictates smaller interior space and life of the inhabitants of the dystopian space. In both images Birdman has a passive stature, head bent in *Coffee Break* (figure 1) and feet shuffling in *Sad Boi Walk* (figure 3). This passivity is further implied by the lack of interaction with the world that Birdman is displaying. Instead he is in a state of sadness (hence the title), but is sad without the desire to change anything. While he has wings he is very much earthbound, his unattained potential on prominent visual display. This sets up the first element of Birdman's conflict in the series: that he has this potential, but that his passive state of sadness leads to boredom, which is coming between him and its fulfillment.

For some, "boredom" simply means the feeling of being in an environment or situation that lacks a sufficient amount of stimulation for an optimal engagement. Other sources argue that boredom is not external in origin, but rather internal - a craving for stimulation rather than a lack. For those who view boredom as this, it can end up as a positive or negative experience depending on how one reacts to that boredom. Boredom that leads to reckless or damaging behavior obviously falls into the negative experience, but boredom that leads to silence in introspection can be a real good. The positive actions that can come about from boredom are not an active result of boredom but an active

result of acknowledgement of the state of boredom and a choice of the will to act against it. For example, if one were to eat a sandwich, one wouldn't say that hunger was the thing making one's belly full, rather that hunger prompted an active response. In the same way negative results begotten from boredom are actions in and of themselves rather than the boredom manifested fully. As such, boredom is not a craving for stimulation but rather a desire to avoid introspection. Marco Van Leewen describes something similar in his essay *The Digital Void*, where he states: "*Boredom, in its essence, is about a failure to connect, about not fitting in, about not wanting or being able to interact. When we are bored, we cannot bring ourselves to care about something in particular (or anything at all).*"

If this is the case and boredom originates from a place of being unwilling or unable to connect (especially with ourselves) then one can easily be bored when stimulated, as stimulation itself does not equal connection.

It would seem that boredom has two goals in service of a lack of connection. The first is to exist in a state of noise. Stimulation is desired, but not necessarily difficult stimulation, since that might cause a greater level of connection. The prints in this series reflect this desired stimulation through their combination of muted, almost monochrome colors, and a dot-heavy halftone printing method. The halftone printing method creates a static-like layer of noise across the entire image that could be quite busy, but as the dots mingle and fade into one another the result is a muted field of texture. When printed on

heavier, brighter rag paper, the primary colors used in the CMYK layering become more vibrant and saturated. This desaturation comes from the use of washi.

In the same way that as Birdman's journey breaks down his perception of the world around him, enabling him to find goodness and beauty in his environment, these images aim to play with the idea of boredom and the mundane and result in engaging and beautiful imagery. This is done both through the use of a mundane material (cardboard) and by the balancing of muted tones with vibrant colors and textures. By printing wet into wet, rather than letting each of the color layers dry before moving on, the colors in these prints bleed together, creating a wide array of tones. This is most evident in *Sad Boi Walk* (figure 3) where there is an almost moire effect running through the image shifting from yellow to purple to red to green and back again. There is also a lot of complexity for a series of images constructed in cardboard. Cardboard is, well, a bit dull, but the series brings it to life giving the environments and Birdman. These colors and the creative use of cardboard serve as a juxtaposition against the environments that Birdman exists in. From one perspective, the individual buildings are dull and oppressive, but from another, each one is full of texture and color, giving way to beauty of the printed medium. The idea of found beauty is crucial for Birdman's development.

The second thing that boredom must want is for a state of mind where change is also to be avoided. In any situation in which boredom has taken effect there is a numbing

of the mind. David Foster Wallace describes this as “*going through your comfortable, prosperous, respectable adult life dead, unconscious, a slave to your head and to your natural default setting of being uniquely, completely, imperially alone day in and day out.*” This is where Birdman finds himself, in the realm of Wallace's description of “default settings” and in Kant's description of “nonage”. The prints’ halftone pattern creates a sense of old fashioned aesthetics within the series, halfway between vintage magazine and antique color television. The static that this printing style creates within the work is tied back to dystopian films such as *Brazil* or *Dark City*, where the absurd and the sinister are often tied together with a sense of broken communication. In these films communication is always filled with static, breaks, and misconceptions, a satirical comment of a false sense of progress. This creates an atmosphere of a world that is simultaneously of the past and of the future. The cardboard city is caught in a state of changelessness where progress has fallen to the wayside and is being avoided.

## Chapter Four:

### The Environment of Advertising

*Cityscape* (figure 2) stands out as the only vertical print in the series. In this print the space that Birdman inhabits is more defined, but less sensical. There are no clear paths from one structure to another. There are no elements that seemed to be designed for enhanced quality of life for the inhabitants. Buildings appear disconnected and dystopian and the spaces between them are filled with faces, statues, and incomplete construction. Even though Birdman sits alone in *Coffee Break* (figure 1), the verticality of *City of Curiosities* (figure 2) imposes the environment into his quietness. This is the first print to introduce the recurring imagery of a face, engraved into cardboard, lacking in particular detail but vaguely gesturing at the particulars of an individual. There are a number of these faces throughout the work and each are generated by the AI website [thispersondoesnotexist.com](http://thispersondoesnotexist.com). Inspired in part by David Foster Wallace's "*A Supposedly Fun Thing I Will Never Do Again*", these faces become a visual representation of the primary conflict of Birdman's Journey: advertising and the environment it creates.

Just as with boredom, the word advertising is being used in a particular way in this thesis. Rather than just referring to advertising in the sense of media produced to sell goods, I will be using the word advertising to refer to any media produced to get the consumer to make a decision. This opens the term up to include all sorts of things

including most social media, entertainment, and politics. All of these things seep into the environment around us, grabbing our attention with an array of subtlety, trying to dictate our decisions for us. Wallace captures this sense of the overbearing as he writes about the advertising for a luxury cruise ship:

Your troublesome capacity for choice, error, regret, dissatisfaction, and despair will be removed from the equation. The ads promise that you will be able – finally, for once – truly to relax and have a good time, because you will have no choice but to have a good time.

Advertising runs multiple gambits all at once, relying on tactics such as personality based ads, where charming and often authentic individuals pitch the weekly sponsor to us.

Other tactics include inundation, where as we scroll through our media feeds we see the same ads over and over again, until they've permeated their way deep into our psyche.

They incorporate themselves into our entertainment, sometimes even becoming the entertainment itself in an attempt to present itself as authentic for easy acceptance. These cardboard faces throughout the series are a representation of that false sense of authenticity that the environment created by these forms of advertising contains. The faces are further developed by the use of a laser engraver on cardboard, a reductive process rather than an additive one. This in combination with the high tech into low tech process becomes symbolic of the current relationship between the digital and human. Rendered in a dot matrix the faces are made by conforming to the machine, rather than the machine to the face. In the print series, the faces are presented as part of the

environment, reminiscent of billboard advertising as they sit above Birdman in the compositions. They are designed, much like real advertising, to blend in and seem like a natural part of the cardboard city. They also further the dystopian elements of the landscape as they monitor and view birdman as he passes through each state. In this initial triptych, Birdman is unaware of this as the face in *City of Curiosities* (figure 2) is separated by the borders of the image.



## Chapter Five:

### Birdman's Conflict

The middle section of the Birdman series begins with the kitchen installation. This piece is set up in a 8ft x 8ft x 8ft installation, and is constructed predominantly of cardboard held together by glue, tape, and nails. The predominant artwork in the space is *Imposter Wednesday* (figure 4), which is presented as a cardboard television screen (figure 10).

This piece depicts a character named Wednesday at a desk in official and slightly decadent clothes. To either side of him are candelabras made of hands and fingers and on his head is a cardboard mask with antler-like protrusions coming from the top that obscures most of his face. The character's name is in part a reference to G.K.Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday* but also relates back to Curry's description of the grueling details and Wallace's description of "day in and day out", which is where the struggle against our default settings take place. Birdman's struggle is twofold. He has this desire for what is easy and simple and this is a feeling that is encouraged by the day in and day out. Wednesday is literally in the middle of it all. This is further indicated in the kitchen installation by the fact that the two sources of light are coming from the fridge and the TV, the sources of consumption. This space mirrors the Birdman's location in *Coffee Break* (figure 1), and acts as a continuation of the idea of Birdman's interior life. As an installation, the viewer participates in Birdman's experience of his kitchen and in

realization that Wednesday is the force of authority. Wednesday's reaction to the environment is to find a way to exist within the parameters of his system, following its ruling and exploiting its loopholes.

Unique from the thesis exhibition's framed prints, the art installation (figure 10) allows viewers to physically enter into Birdman's world. This moment breaks the flow of the narrative for a moment as the viewer shifts their way of approaching the work. This break mirrors the concept of the broken moment as the viewer is made to view themselves both in Birdman's world, but also to view the narrative through the construction of the cardboard. The installation becomes almost a paradox as it both serves as a narrative device and a meta reference to the construction of the narrative. This form of narrative ties back to the work of indie filmmakers especially and continues in the tradition of invitation through the visible hand of the artist. In the same way that the prints in the series leave space for the viewer to fill in the gaps between reality and fiction, the *Cardboard Kitchen* (figure 10) creates a space where the audience can make the jump from cardboard box to shelf, or rug, or microwave.

The middle section of Birdman's story continues with *Burning Boulevard* (figure 5). A line of people walk down a long corridor. Matches flank them on each side in three rows, the first two rows already burned out now twisted and distorted, almost figure-like in their gestures while the back row burns brightly, illuminating the entire

scene. Unlike the *City of Curiosities* (figure 2), this landscape includes other individuals as Birdman begins to view his environment in a broader sense. In this print fire illuminates the city creating tension between the material of the cardboard and the flame. The lines of burned matches are visible in *Imposter Wednesday* (figure 4) and imply scale difference between Wednesday and those inhabiting the city and his engagement in shaping the environment and implying that he has a hand in dictating the environment. The fire has a false presentation of helpfulness. It is lighting the people's way but it is obvious through its impractical and destructive nature that Wednesday, in his position of influence, has not had any real consideration of the actual good, either for the environment or the individuals therein. In Wallace's writing awareness of others, and their experiences is paramount in one's journey for freedom. This moment for Birdman is crucial as it takes him out of himself, enabling a border view of the world. Wednesday cares only for himself and in order for Birdman to avoid Wednesday's path, he must be able to care for others.

*A Broken Moment* (figure 6) illustrates Birdman's shift in perception as he continues to examine his environment and his relationship to it. He sits on a pool float while behind him the city, full of faces, looms. In *Coffee Break* (figure 1) his perception of his interior life was such that in rest he only perceived himself. Now, resting in a broken moment, he is aware of the effect and influence that the environment is having

over his mental state. He is now dissatisfied. Through his confrontation with Wednesday and his new awareness of other individuals in *Burning Boulevard* (figure 5), Birdman is able to pay more attention to these faces. The number of faces in the image are indicative of his perception than his literal environment. There is a tension here that is a culmination of the center triptych and a direct contrast to the isolated inactivity of the first three pieces. This is the broken moment in which Birdman has realized that there is more possible that he had previously imagined.

In his pool, surrounded by the weight of the city and submerged in water (a substance that will literally destroy his cardboard self) Birdman reflects on Wednesday and his path of self-centered conformity. His dissatisfaction leads to a desire for change. But even with his desire for change he is tempted to follow Wednesday's path, not because of any specific choice, but because it is easy and because that is what his environment is encouraging him to do. This is the only image in which Birdman is facing to the left, looking back toward the previous prints in the series. This indicates both the reflection on the previous pieces of the series, but also that moment of choice. This is further amplified by the literal reflection of Birdman and his world in the pool where he sits. The colors and texture of the print blur the image slightly, giving it less crisp details, all adding to the depiction of Birdman's reflection and struggle within the moment. David Foster Wallace warns of this temptation in *This is Water*, saying:

And the so-called real world will not discourage you from operating on your default settings, because the so-called real world of men and money and power hums merrily along in a pool of fear and anger and frustration and craving and worship of self... The freedom all to be lords of our tiny skull-sized kingdoms, alone at the centre of all creation.

## Chapter Six:

### Birdman in Flight

In the final set of images Birdman takes action. This action stems from his self-reflection as seen in the middle set of prints. The environment in these last three prints begins to shift, losing clarity and weight. Not because it is changing in any substantial way, but because Birdman himself is changing and the change that he is enacting in his life affects the influence that the environment has over him. No longer passive, Birdman is now taking an active role in his relationship with the world around him. In *Red Sun, Red Moon* (figure 7), Birdman stands facing the city for the first time in the series. It is no longer to his back, a looming presence, but rather is an entity facing him that he must deal with. A red sun and a red moon sit behind the city illuminating it with the intended drama of a hero's journey. It is here that he begins to take ownership of his protagonism. Birdman takes up the most space in this image of all of the series, this being the one composition where his full body is not visible.

Birdman's new relationship with the city around him is further displayed by *Faces Left Behind* (figure 8). The pressure of the false faces is abating as Birdman stands facing away from them as they fall off the wall behind him. Once again alone, this time Birdman's solitude does not have the city looming over him. He seeks to reclaim authority over his environment. *Faces Left Behind* (figure 8) is the first environment that

Birdman is interacting with, with *City of Curiosity* (figure 2) being devoid of life, and *Burning Boulevard* (figure 5) being a realization of others within the environment. Here the environment itself has been broken down into the false faces that have been watching over him, and now he stands ready to rebuild his perception.

In the final print of the series *Like a Fish to Water* (figure 9), Birdman takes flight. Gone is the static pose of *Sad Boi Walk*. And gone is the chaos of the city in *The Broken Moment* (figure 6). The structures are now pared down and without detail losing their perceived influence. The other people of the city remain visible far below Birdman, still an element of his perception. This is the first time that Birdman has been able to utilize his birdlike qualities. He and the city are both still cardboard but Birdman has more than mere cardboard. The cardboard takes on a hopeful tone, the city is blank and full of that cardboard potential. If by choosing to work within the structure of the day-in and day-out Wednesday makes decisions that negatively impact the city and those who live there, then Birdman's decision to work outside that structure gives hope to the possibility that he will be able to positively impact the city and its people. Birdman has seen that potential in himself and now flying above the city for the first time, is in a position to change not only himself but the environment. In earlier images he was alone with only the city, its false faces, and Wednesday. He is now positioned above it all. This once again brings out the delicate nature of being in a position of influence within the

environment. While there is joy and potential in Birdman's freedom, there is also responsibility.



## **Conclusion:**

This body of work strives to create a narrative set around a broken moment and the growth and maturity that it can inspire. It invites the viewer to participate through filling in the gaps with their own imagination and standing in the space that Birdman inhabits. The materials used evoke ideas of a shift in perspective and ties in with creative practices that center around using that shift to explore one's own relationship with creativity and freedom.

The journey of Birdman is meant to be a balance between entertainment and concept, allowing the narrative to serve as an easy entry into discussion about freedom, boredom and advertising. The artwork points toward a desire for happiness and the necessity of reflection as part of that journey.

I hope that through this work the viewer is able to find a moment that inspires positive growth and creativity just as I have found in so much work before me.

**Figures:**

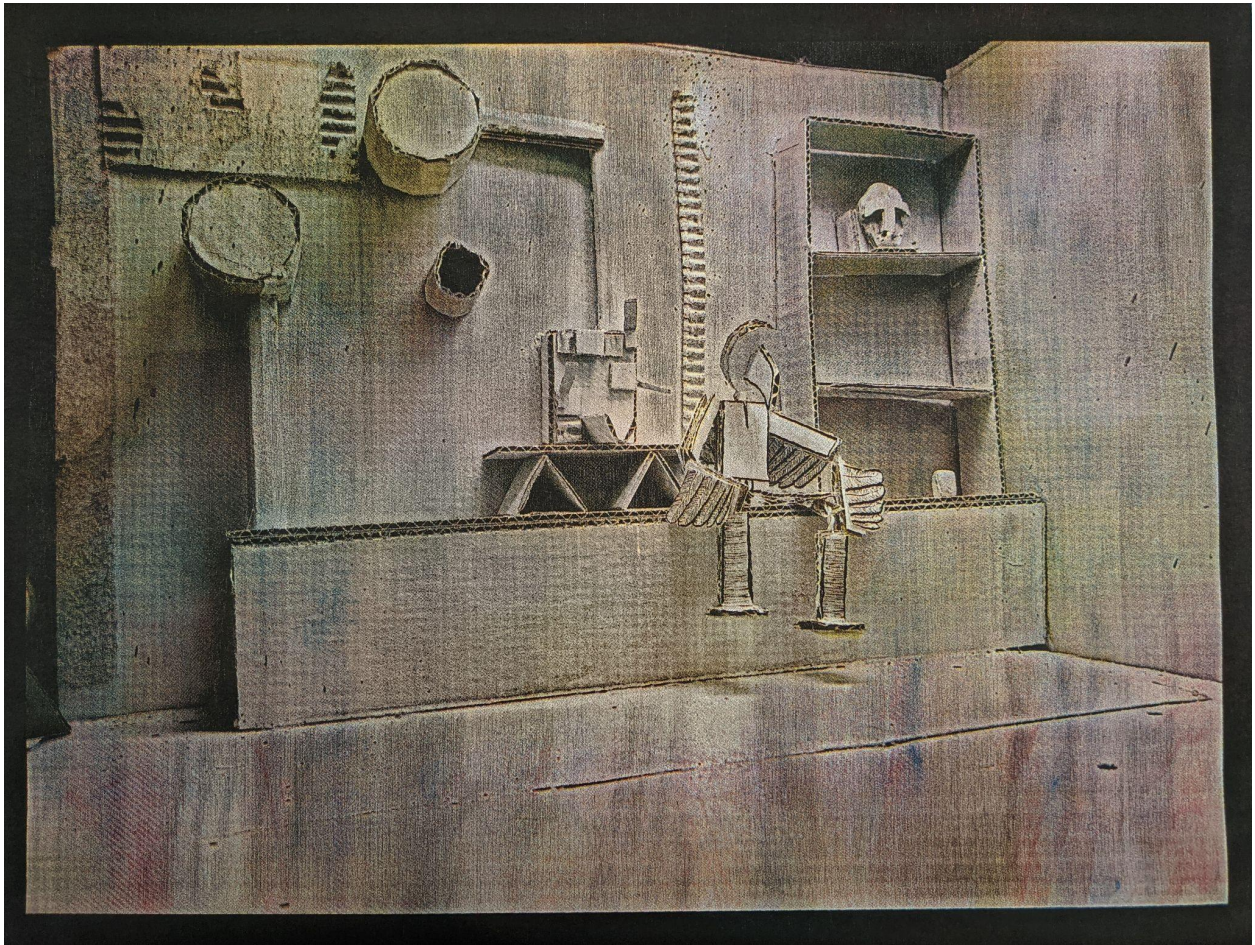


Figure 1: *Coffee Break*  
Four Color Relief Print, 15 x 20, 2021

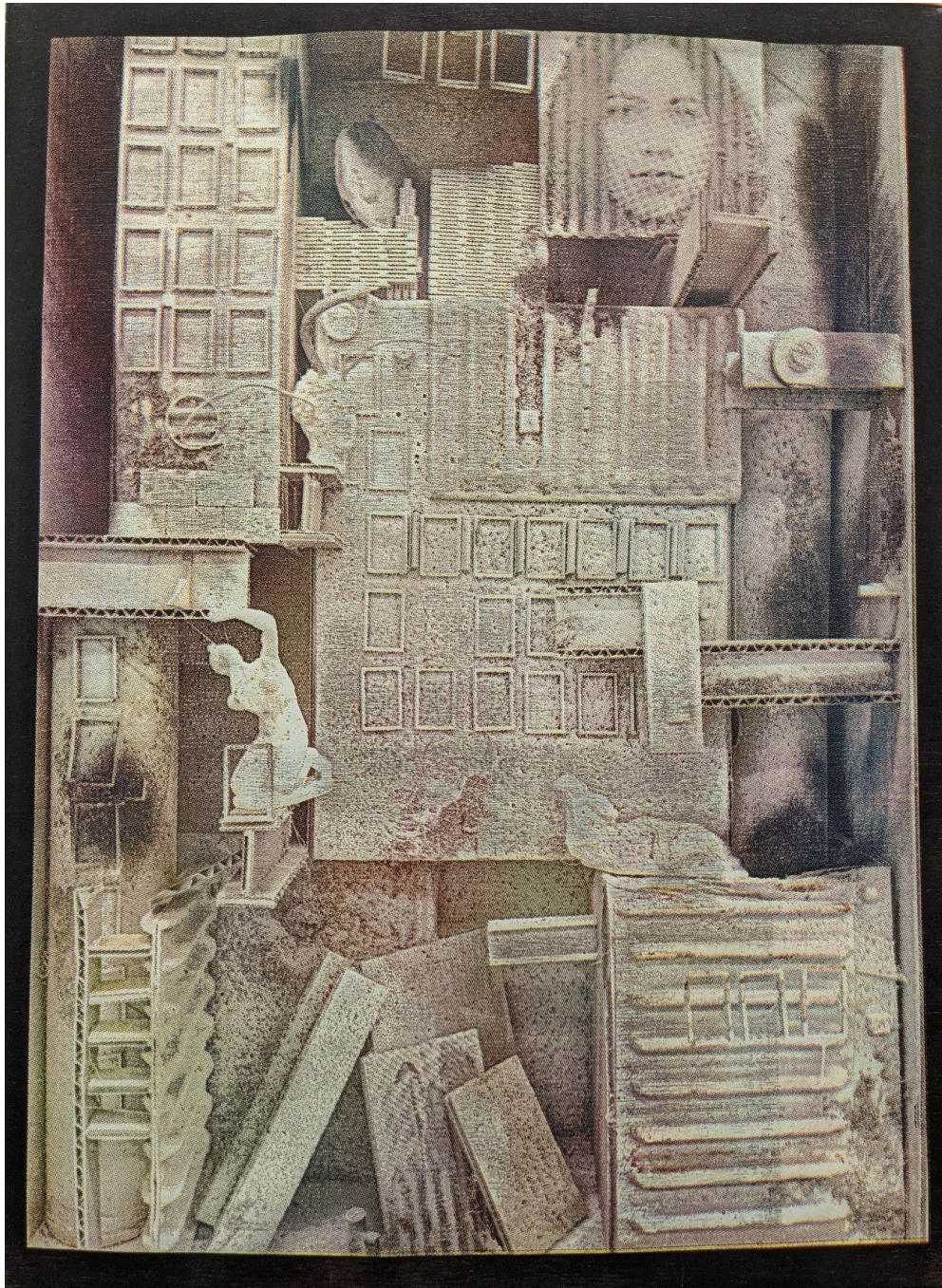


Figure 2: *City of Curiosities*  
Four Color Relief Print, 15 x 20, 2021

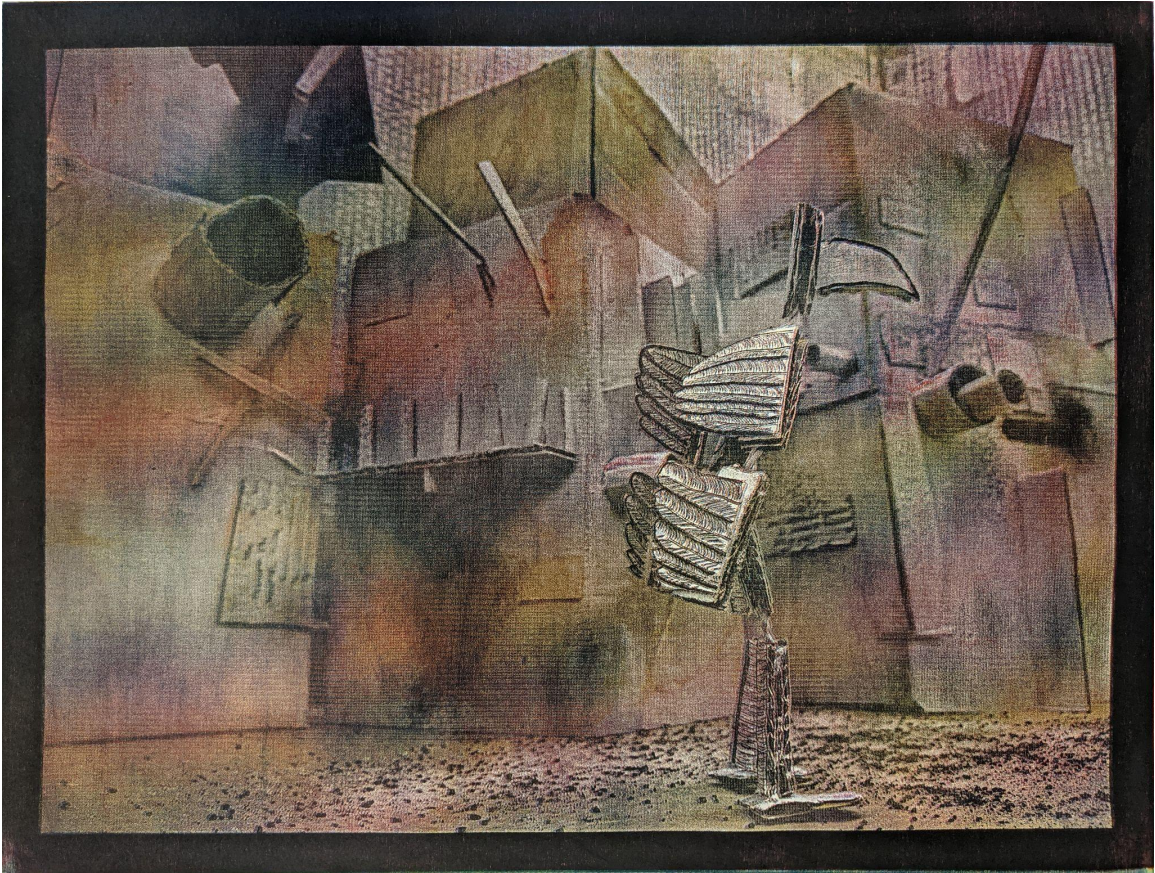


Figure 3: *Sad Boi Walk*  
Four Color Relief Print, 15 x 20, 2021

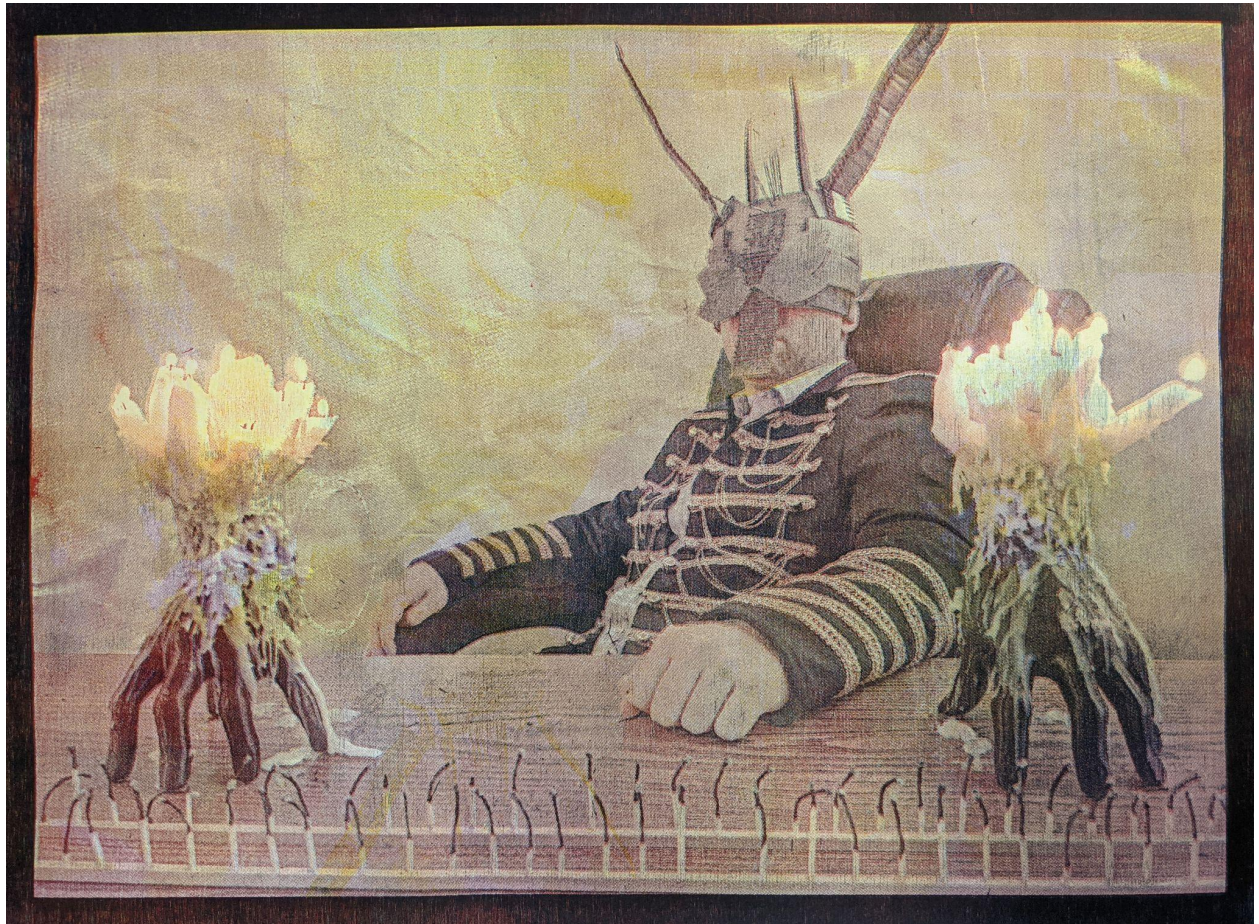


Figure 4: *Imposter Wednesday*  
Four Color Relief Print, 15 x 20, 2021

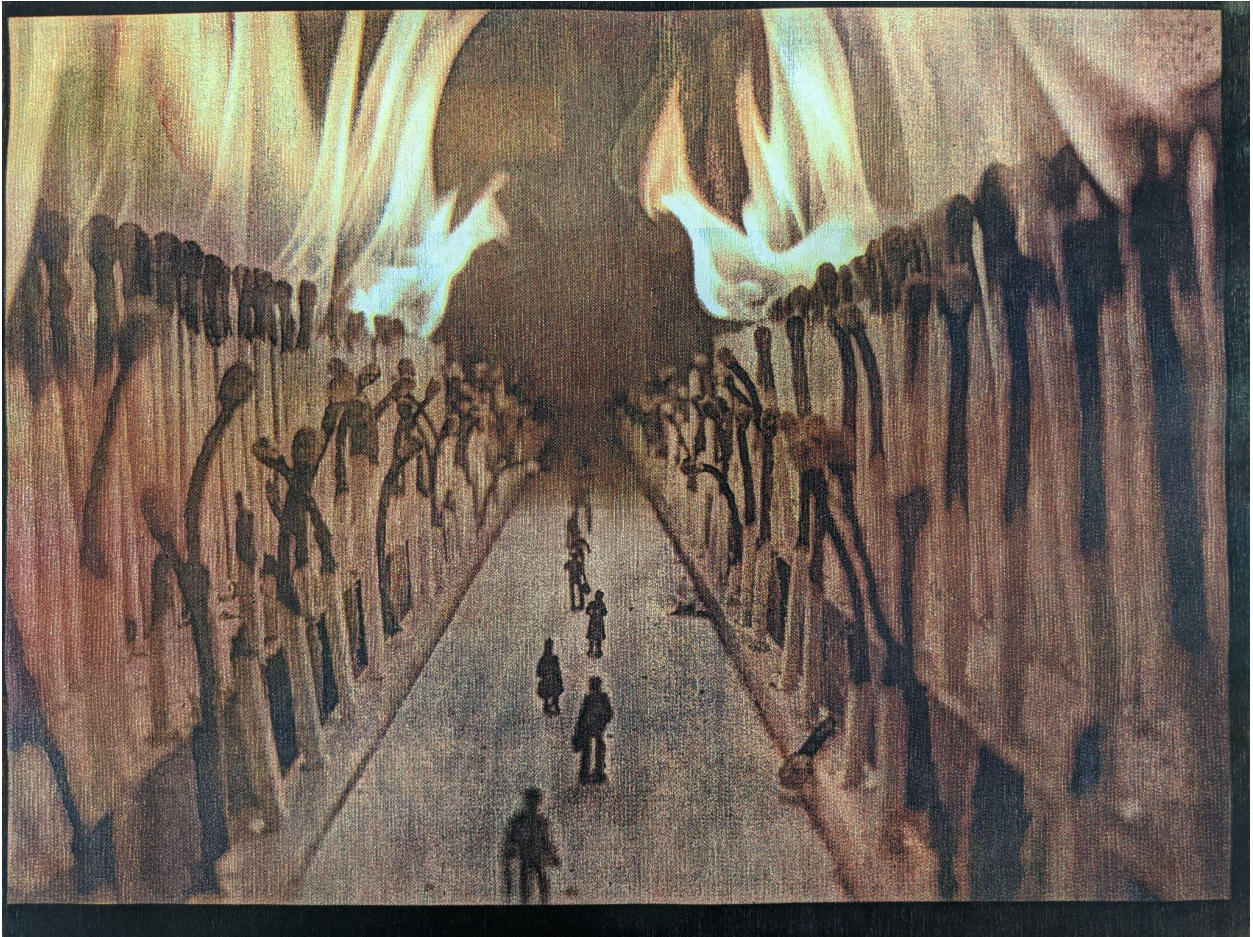


Figure 5: *Burning Boulevard*  
Four Color Relief Print, 15 x 20, 2021



Figure 6: *A Broken Moment*  
Four Color Relief Print, 15 x 20, 2021



Figure 7: *Red Sun, Red Moon*  
Four Color Relief Print, 15 x 20, 2021





Figure 8: *Faces Left Behind*  
Four Color Relief Print, 15 x 20, 2021



Figure 9: *Like a Fish to Water*  
Four Color Relief Print, 15 x 20, 2021



Figure 10: *Cardboard Kitchen*

Cardboard and Mixed Media Installation, 8' x8' x8', 2021

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