

NO STARS

A TWIN PEAKS TRIBUTE EXHIBITION

Curated by Stephen Romano . Introduction by Brian Chidester



Installation view "NO STARS" curated by Stephen Romano October 2019.

No Stars: A Twin Peaks Tribute Exhibition feels like a contemporary gallery version of those original fan subcultures that sprung up during the 1960s and '70s (think *Star Trek* conventions, bootleg Grateful Dead albums, Marvel fanzines). Josh Stebbins' portraits of the creators and characters of the *Twin Peaks* series, integrated with iconic symbols, landscapes, and set pieces, are reminiscent of old mimeographed sci-fi zine covers. The archival objects procured by gallerist/curator Stephen Romano betray a fan-level obsession with unlocking the mysterious sources of the show's visual aspect; and other new works—by artists such as Natan Alexander, Alexis Palmer Karl, Jen Bandini, Luciana Lupe Vasconcelos, Daniel Gonçalves, Matthew Dutton, Barry William Hale, Blake Morrow, and Jill Watson—suggest a fictional ecosystem that has not only the potential to expand, but has history as well.

Indeed, the more we touch things, and the more familiar we become with them, the more they take on a life of their own. In this way *No Stars* is almost like a primer on the creative process. A live performance by Rebekah Del Rio, whose song “No Stars” (composed by *Peaks* creator David Lynch) was featured in Episode 10 of *Twin Peaks: The Return*, gave the opening night of the exhibition a stamp of authenticity, and brought out a deeper emotional connection between the audience and the objects around the room.

In terms of new art created for the show, Alexis Palmer Karl's painted human skull, encrusted with black and transparent crystals, had all the makings of a ritualistic relic. The artist, who is also a real-life practitioner of witchcraft, added the butterfly-frog creature of *Twin Peaks: The Return*'s iconic Episode 8, albeit with it exiting the mouth of the human figure rather than going into it. This suggests that what began inside the show's fictional universe has now carried over to the real world. The connection between traditional occultism and liberties taken by modern television and cinema is also evident in this piece—a connection which embraces artistic license over academia (as well as the renewed interest in alternative spirituality).

Josh Stebbins, whose twenty pencil drawings with mixed media elements such

as collaged letters and used match sticks, was really the star of the show. His depictions elevated each character from the series to the level of religious icon. A diptych of Laura and Leland Palmer—daughter/father, incest victim/perpetrator, symbolic good/evil figures—is the most expressionist of his works, boasting a terrified Laura backed by a circle halo and a sociopathic Leland peering at her through a small window, both surrounded by skeins of blood red paint.

Jen Bandini's two emblem pictures directly reference 17th century German alchemical imagery—a genre whose open hands, all-seeing eyeballs, and floating geometric shapes influenced heavily the iconography of masonic artworks of the 19th century in America. According to co-creator Mark Frost's two dossier-style *Peaks* tomes, fraternal lodges laid the groundwork for the series' mysterious tone, as well. A spate of antiques from such secret societies are peppered throughout the exhibition—e.g. a Rebekah Lodge statue of the Venus De Milo set against a red velvet curtain backdrop and a series of Masonic postcards which seem to presage the *Twin Peaks* "Red Room." These not only bind the show aesthetically but also lend credence to the notion that esoteric design provided the series (and *No Stars*) with its strange sense of intellectual freedom.

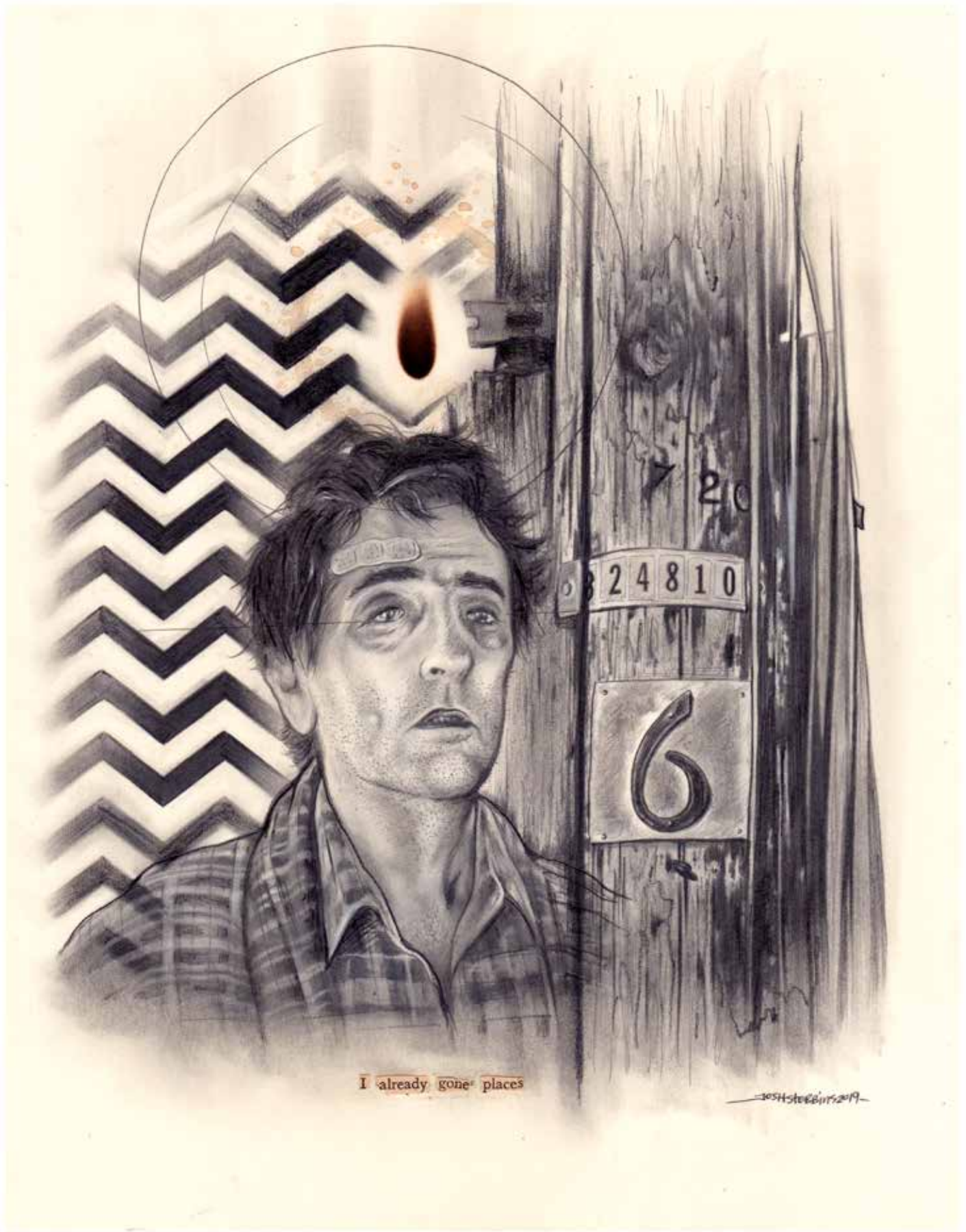
It is this kind of freedom in fact—from scientific positivism, secularism, consensus media, and bourgeois realism—that gave both the exhibition and the *Twin Peaks* universe in general its timely appeal. Red curtains, zig-zagged tiled floors, spooky owls, brotherhoods and lodges, doppelgangers, UFO abductions, violence, tragedy, a universe conspiring to bigger things than we can imagine from our limited vantage—in an era of growing uncertainty and mistrust towards established institutions, themes such as these are much more than titillating content to be consumed by mindless masses. They invite us to think outside the box; to imagine the possibility.

It can start with a simple drawing of your favorite TV character. Yet who can say where it will lead?

(Brian Chidester, 03/28/2020)



Installation view "NO STARS" October 2019.



Josh Stebbins "I Already Gone Places" Pencil on paper 2019



Josh Stebbins "Dream Lovers" Pencil on paper 2019



Josh Stebbins "Drink Full and Descend" Pencil and mixed media on paper 2019



Josh Stebbins "Blue Rose Tammy" Pencil and colored pencil on paper 2019



A stained page from Fredrick Accum's 1809 Alchemy book



Josh Stebbins "Where is Agent Jeffries" Pencil on paper 2019

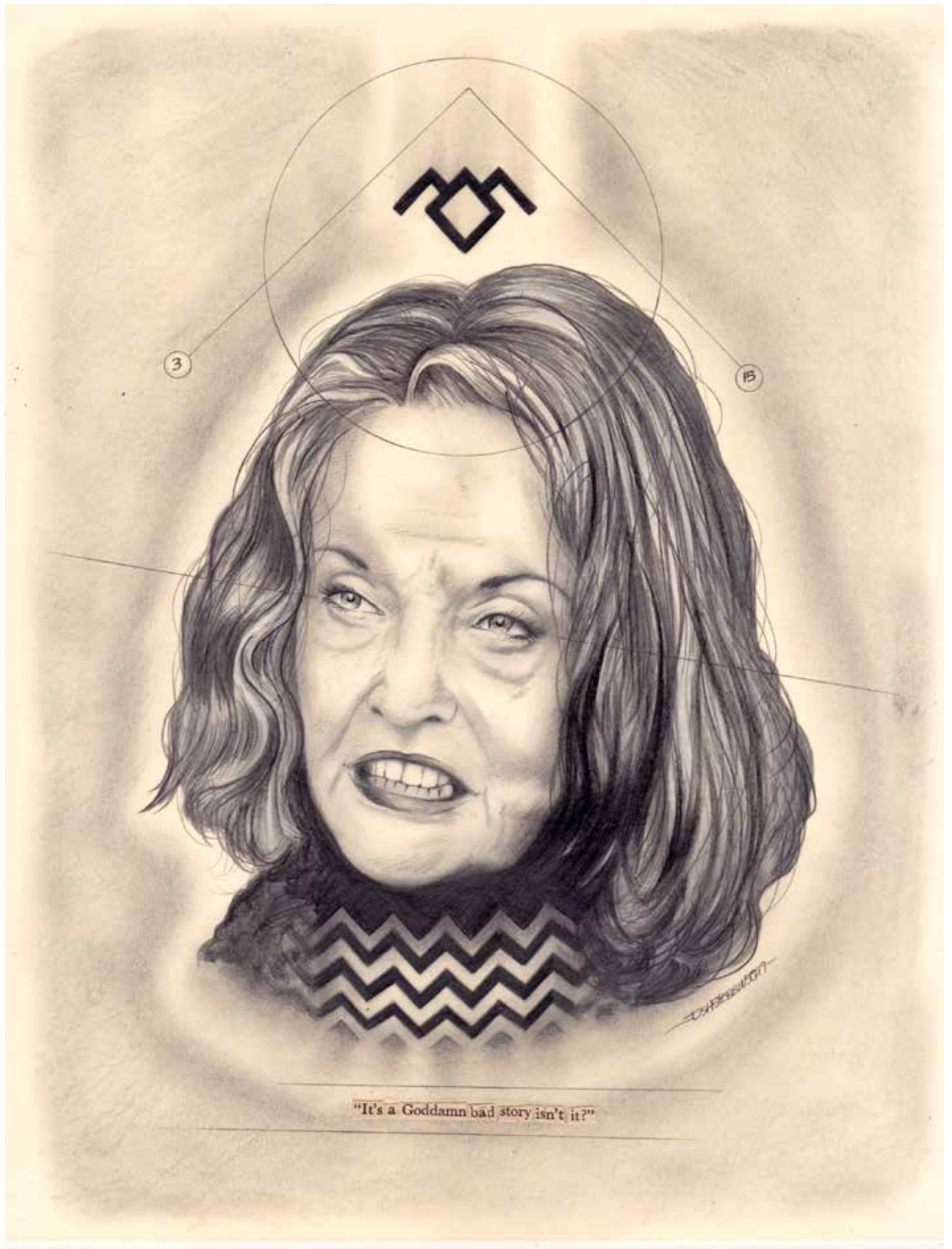


Josh Stebbins "The Lamb and the Fox" Pencil and mixed media on paper 2019

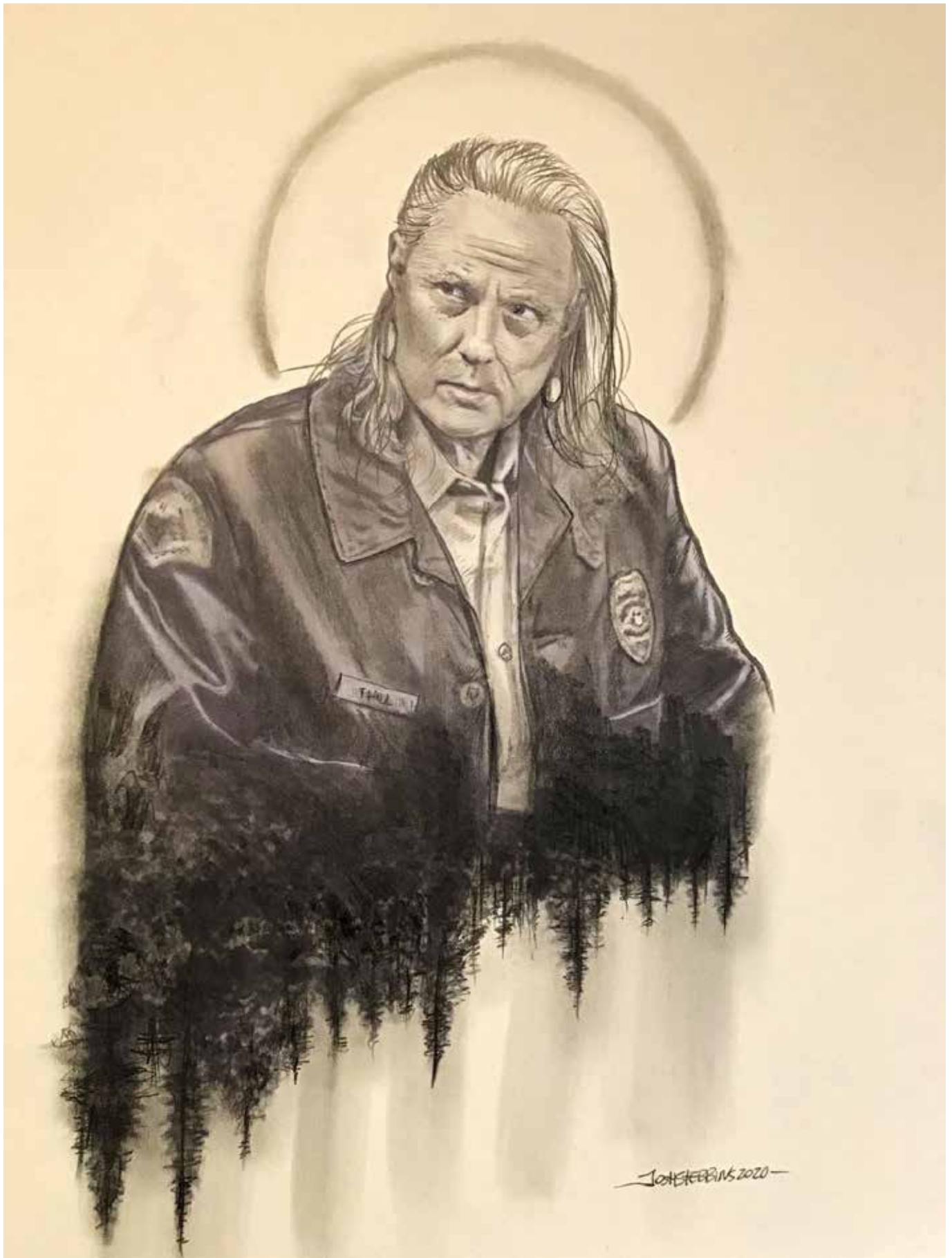




Josh Stebbins "Who is Judy" Pencil and mixed media on paper 2019



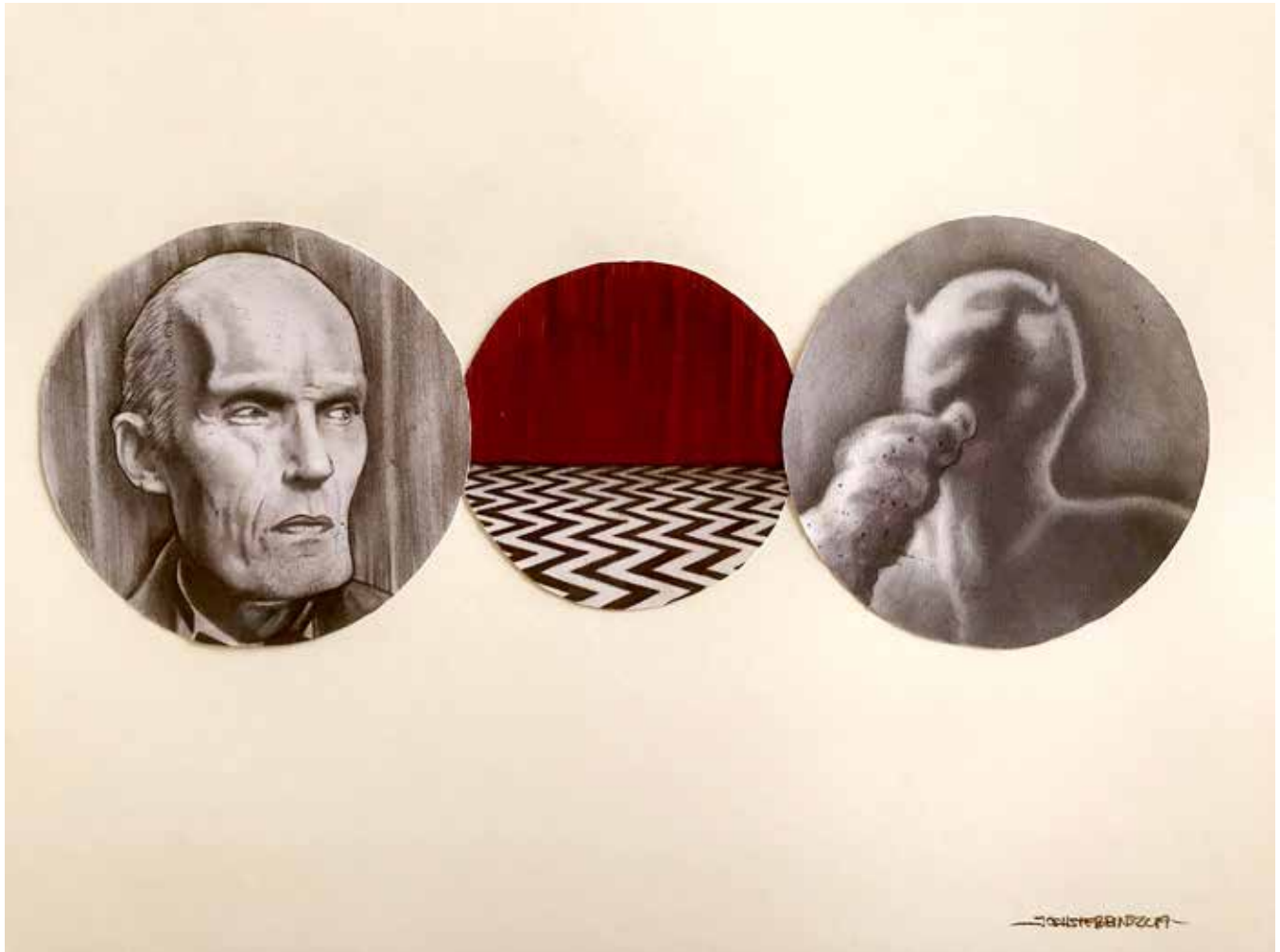
Josh Stebbins "House of Sorrow" Pencil on paper 2019



Josh Stebbins "The Woods Hold Many Spirits" Pencil on paper 2019



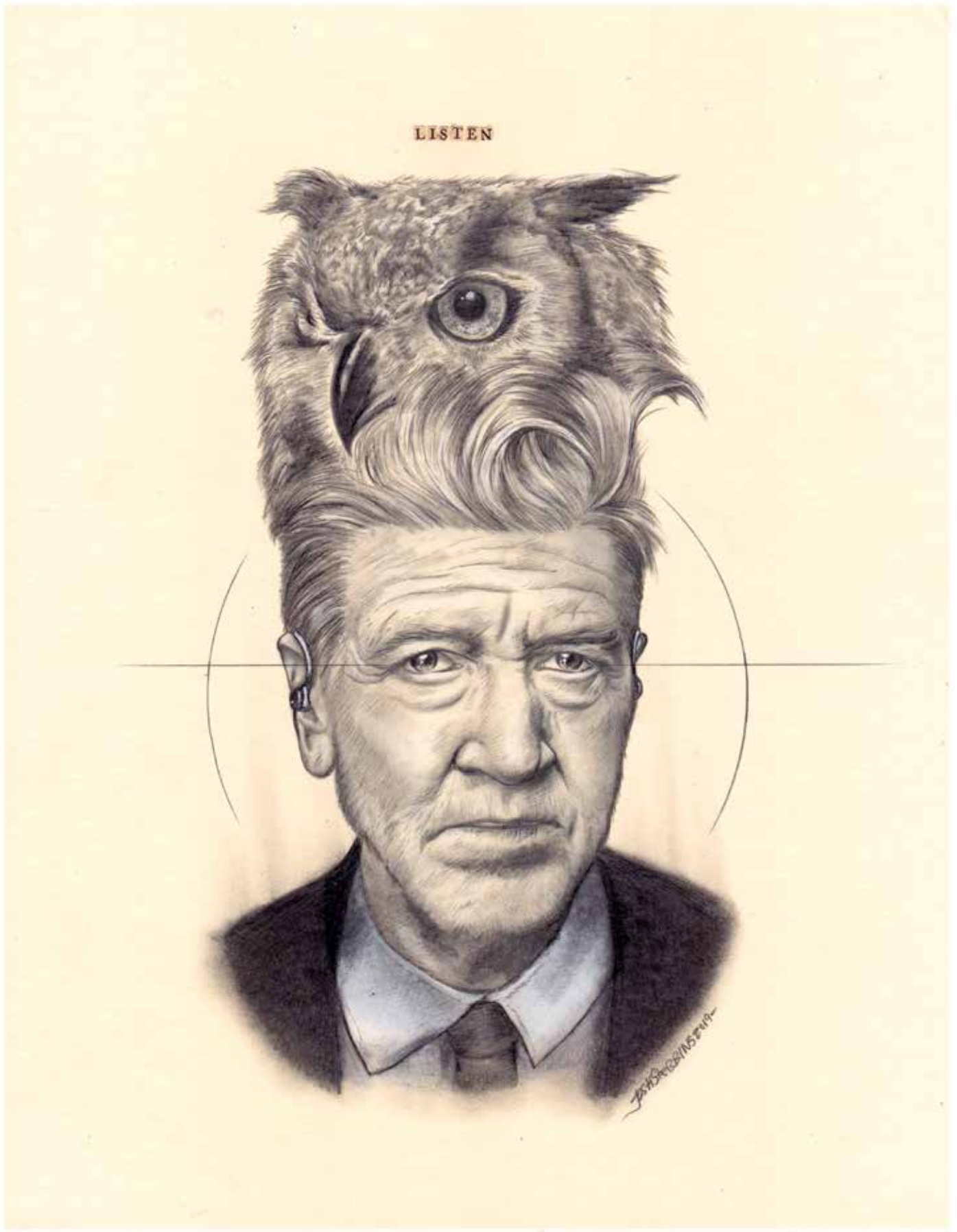
Josh Stebbins "I'm Not Me" Pencil on paper 2019



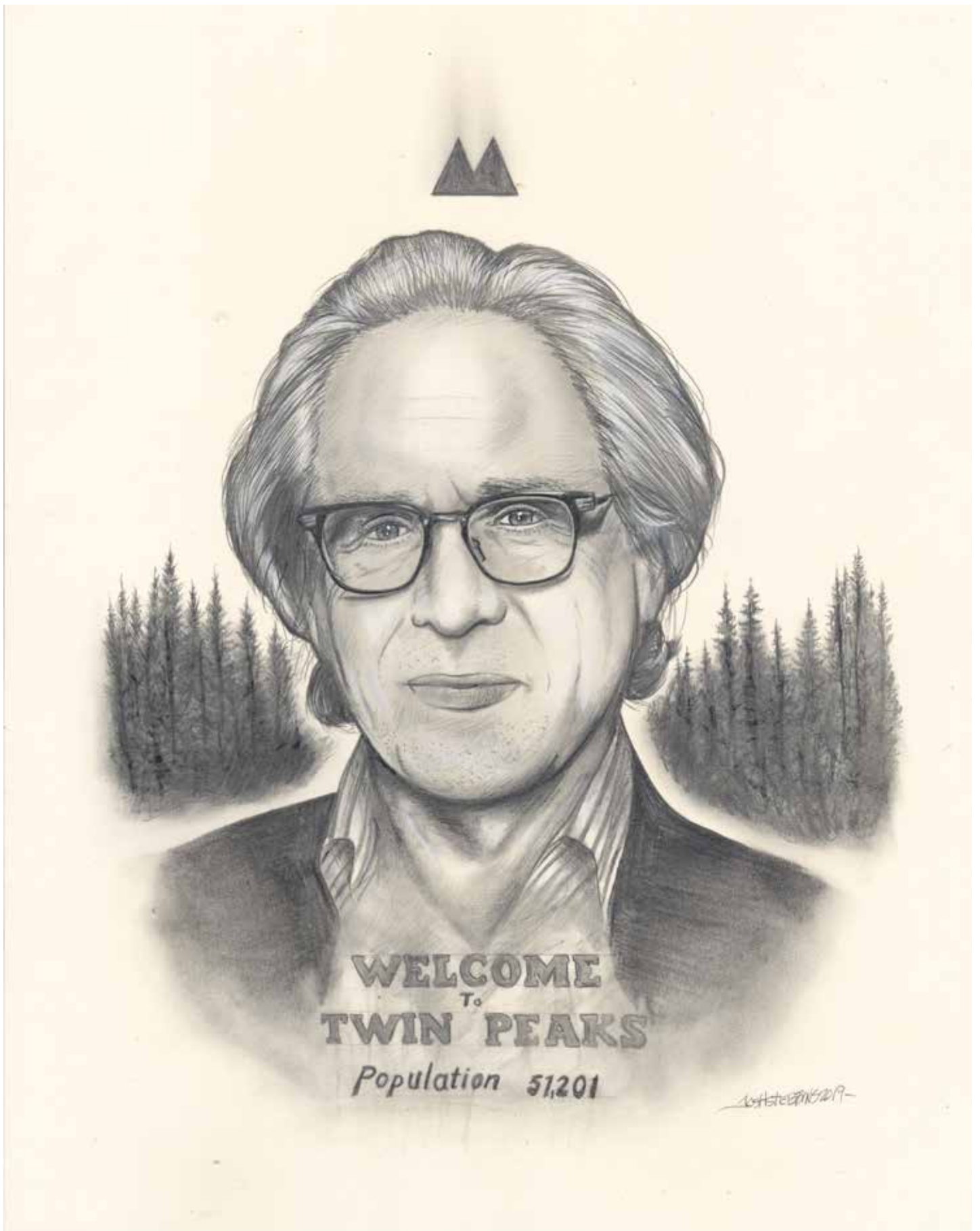
Josh Stebbins "The Threshold" Pencil and mixed media on paper 2019



Josh Stebbins "Meanwhile" Pencil on paper 2019



Josh Stebbins "Listen" Pencil on paper 2019



Josh Stebbins "Scribe of Worlds" Pencil on paper 2019



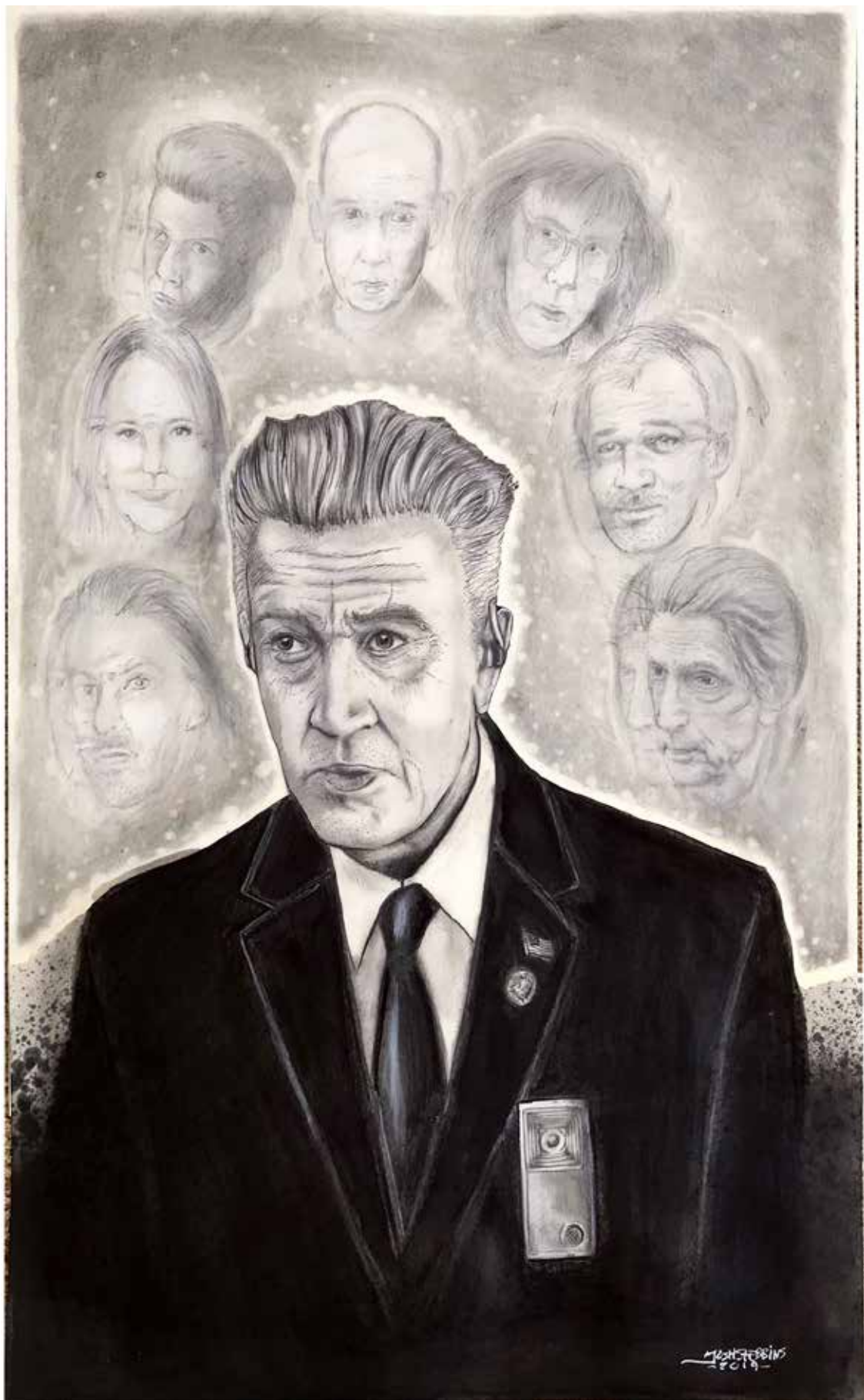
Unknown photographer signed Bmay "Trinity Rebekah Lodge #143" photograph 1945



Josh Stebbins "No Stars" Pencil on paper 2019



Josh Stebbins "'Lovers, Friends, and Ghosts'" Pencil on paper 2020



Josh Stebbins "Whispers In The Dark" Pencil and colored pencil on paper 2019



Josh Stebbins "You're Laura, I'm Mary, This Is Our House" Pencil on paper 2019



Josh Stebbins "Meanwhile 25" Pencil on paper 2019



Josh Stebbins "The Eye Of God" Mixed Media 2019



Josh Stebbins "The Eye Of God" Mixed Media 2019



Stephen Romano "Lucky" Digital, 2019



Josh Stebbins "Love Stinks" Pencil on paper 2019

Josh Stebbins in conversation with Stephen Romano October 2019

What attracted you to making a series on Twin Peaks . You dont usually work in series do you?

I've done some series in my work, but I've had an attraction to David Lynch's work, so I wasn't going to pass up an opportunity to take on Twin Peaks, a show and film that I love. Are the characters in the works you made the ones you relate to particularly strongest with? For the most part, yes. I wanted to incorporate the most intriguing (to me) characters in the series, the ones that have a greater mystical feel to them.

You assign unexpected titles to the works, how do you come up with them?

Many of them are lines from the show/film, but I like to lean towards a title that could have multiple meanings or undertones...maybe I mimic Lynch in that respect with this series. Everything is not as simple as it appears to be, much like Twin Peaks.

The owls are not what they seem..

Exactly

You work in traditional materials, which evoke an intimate relationship with the subject, pencil on paper mostly. The works are labors of love for you?

They are labors of love. On some occasions it's very hard to let go of certain pieces because I feel like I've given the paper a part of my soul, which might sound cliché but it's very true for me.

What part of your soul?

It's part love and part nightmare, as odd as that might sound.

The nightmare you are referring to, it's the experience of your ordeal?

It's mostly the negative feelings that are best translated somehow into art, rather than them staying in my mind.

**You divest yourself of those negative feeling by channelling them into your art ..
As much as possible**

I was going to ask to what extent? Let's take it from a different angle
Of all the artists in history, whom do you relate to most empathetically?

That's a tough angle, but probably Van Gough, but I believe he led a very sad life and was

only truly happy when he was creating, which I feel very much the same way.

His art was an expression of his ordeal, not literally, but it evoked a sense of .. despair? his isolation? his yearning for contact with others?

Absolutely, you put that perfectly.

Sometimes it's a self imposed isolation for me, but I do deeply yearn to make a connection with people that often fails.

Maybe I believe I reach people better through my art.

The depth of emotional investment in your art is substantial. I think the human psyche, because we all live through our ordeal in our own way, the psyche is hot wired to recognize and assimilate the works where artist draws on their ordeal and manifests it. through their art sincerely.. It's a universally shared experience..

While your works are compositionally and technically impressive for their proficiency, it's only when you see them in the flesh, and have a primary experience with them, that they cross that threshold into the realm of the sublime..

This i attribute to your ordeal in particular being one that is intense. Is it something you'd like to describe or do you prefer to just leave it in ambiguity and let the art speak for itself?

(In the world of "outsider art", which i do not wish to imply you belong to, the artist's biography or their particular marginalization to some people helps piece together a stronger picture of the context the artist's work is made in)

So, the question then becomes, do you see it as pejorative to even bring up the details of your ordeal? Or do you see your art making practice, while it draws on the experience of your ordeal, as a means of transcending it?

I believe you're right, seeing them in the flesh is whole different experience, the agony of detail I usually put into my work is often lost when seen the internet or publications. I want to believe that art has a certain vibration to it, connected to the artist (or what they're trying to convey) which is best felt in person.

I do see the process of somehow transcending my particular ordeal through art making to be very much true, as with many artists. It's not to say you absolutely have to suffer in order to make art, but I do believe that it takes a certain level of discord in ones life to make GREAT art. I see so many artists these days that I feel just make art for a quick buck (which is fine), but there's nothing beyond that. Life as we know it is changing drastically, and so is the visual art landscape, which often I feel, is approached with shallowness in hopes of just gaining followers or "likes"...

Of all the arts, visual is probably the most difficult these days, our attention span is barely

there, and our want for more and more is ever increasing...it really does take a certain type of viewer to stop for a minute and really process what they're seeing into an emotional realm. Those people are usually the most thoughtful and the certainly deepest feeling. They're not disconnected from what's painful or joyous...

So then given the context and frame of mind in which you approach your subjects empathetically, what is it about these Twin Peaks characters that made respond so emphatically? For instance the "No Stars" work in the suite depicts Rebekah Del Rio as a saintly votive icon.. Could you expand on your thought process for arriving at that?

There could be a connection I feel to certain characters experiencing deep sadness, frustrations...even total confusion. I might have chose these characters subconsciously, trying to relate my own emotions. When Rebekah Del Rio is singing "No Stars" in Twin Peaks the Return, it's a strangely beautiful combination of hope and despair...that's what I took away from it anyways. I feel that same thing in my life, and in my art. I think I interrupted her to a saintly icon in that role because much like martyrs, hope (or transcendence) is perhaps achieved through despair or pain...the song "No Stars" that Rebekah sings moves me in that direction. There are so many emotions colliding it's hard to really describe.

How about the Lynch portrait and the title of "Listen"?

That title not only has meaning in the world of Twin Peaks but also throughout all of Lynch's work. He holds audio in a very important regard, a simple sound could be the key to unlocking what he's trying to get across. But also in life itself, if we'd just listen, truly listen...it's amazing what you discover and ultimately feel.

What about the portrait itself? David Lynch with an owl head? Owls live within the darkness, which includes magic, mystery, and ancient knowledge.

Of course the relation between Twin Peaks and the owls (not being what they seem), but I think I was trying to express a sense of ancient wisdom, and yes certainly mystery... The darkness holds so many questions, and yet so many answers...I love that duality. In most Native American tribes, owls are a symbol of death. As a dream symbol the white owl means purity and integrity

That's true, perhaps that could be the "death" of what you believe to be true..
There are so many places to go here yes, the death of innocence..

Totally agree

To me the simple and iconic pairing of Lynch and the owl is sacrosanct, you made a conscious decision to make it that way and not feel any need to embellish it with cryptic symbols..

Yes, it was more to the point, no need to make it cryptic. Also with Lynch portraying FBI Director Gordon Cole in the Twin Peaks series, he often knows more than anyone else...the use of the character's hearing aid in the show make me believe he's on another level than everyone else, hearing (or seeing essentially) beyond reality.

But this is you also, the artist as observer and disseminator of mystic information the conduit between worlds..

Once again, you put that perfectly. Yes, the artist as a magician...the ability for the artist to put the viewer under a sort of "spell" with their work, I believe that to be magic.

The owl also represents female spiritual and mediumistic energies, another affinity to the artist, whether we are talking about David Lynch or Josh Stebbins..

That's a very good observation.

How about this sublime portrait of Judy Garland you made, can you give us some clues on that one?

Well, that one came from the theories surrounding Lynch's love of The Wizard of Oz. In Twin Peaks "The Return", a big arc of the plot is. "Who is Judy?"...Judy being this extreme negative force that Gordon Cole talks about. So, you bounce that around with Judy Garland, and it's some sort of message that Lynch is tapping into, only he can really give a definitive answer (which we'll never get because Lynch never really explains anything), the white horse in the piece is like a sign post for "Judy", which also has multiple meanings. Much of this really depends on the viewer being a fan of Twin Peaks and David Lynch. And taking the time to really explore all the avenues of meaning.

The horse as seen on Carrie Page's mantle.. am i correct?

That's one tie in, yes! Also in the "Woodsman's" poem he repeats at the radio station, the line: "The horse is the white of the eyes and dark within"

In that respect, the color white conceals an evil, much like when Leland Palmer gives his wife drugged milk to make her go to sleep so he can assault his daughter Laura. Also to running plot line of drugs used in the show, mainly heroin, which was at one time called "horse".

***Also the running plot line**

The horse is a signal to the characters (and the viewers) that Judy (the negative force) is very much watching them, that evil is constantly present. Which just boils down to the duality of there can't be good without evil, light without dark. Lynch somewhat inverted it though, which was very clever.

Talk to me about the "Eye of God".. it is a very concise statement, yet effectively articulates desire..

"covet" is what it suggests to me

It does convey a sense of desire, especially when relating to the ring in the piece. I imagine you could interrupt it as a desire or coveting a certain secret knowledge.

The simplest explanation is that the ring, often referred to as the "Owl Cave ring" due to its engraved symbol, can either protect its wearer from harm or mark its wearer for an inevitable death.

Why upside down?

It's not upside though.. Maybe it is...haha...

Ok, I think it being upside down means that the wearer will be saved and if it were flipped, the wearer is marked for death

So I guess I'm trying to say with that piece that is that there is a hidden salvation in the woods, but the journey through the woods is dark and dangerous

An Excalibur's sword? I want to ask you about all of the works but I'll ask you about one more "Meanwhile 25"..

That piece represents a culmination I suppose, it all started ended with Laura Palmer, her "being" Carrie Page at the end of The Return and that blood curdling famous scream of Sheryl Lee, I think that was Laura's realization of the trauma she'd been through and coming to terms with it. In that way, she's confronting that extreme negative force (her trauma) and conquering it. But it could be viewed many ways, that's just my interpretation of it.

The actual title meaning is simply the time frame in which many things have changed in the world of Twin Peaks since the 2nd season ended 25 years ago.

The beginning and the end of season 3. opposing forces as well

Absolutely.. That seems to be one of the foundational themes of Twin Peaks.

The duality of the series and its interchanging is definitely a driving force for the series.

How do you think Twin Peaks blurs the line between reality and fantasy?

Ooo..good question.. It gives mystical connotations to real life tragedies, the blur of fantasy can be seen as a coping mechanism with these tragic events. A dream world that helps the characters navigate a deep and dark forest, as it were.

I guess it could mean (at least with me), is that something beautiful can have a deeper dark message. Just as artwork can be beautiful in its appearance, what it translates to the viewer can be terrifying...depending on the viewer, it's very subjective. Perhaps there's not a good answer to that question, it's a tough one.

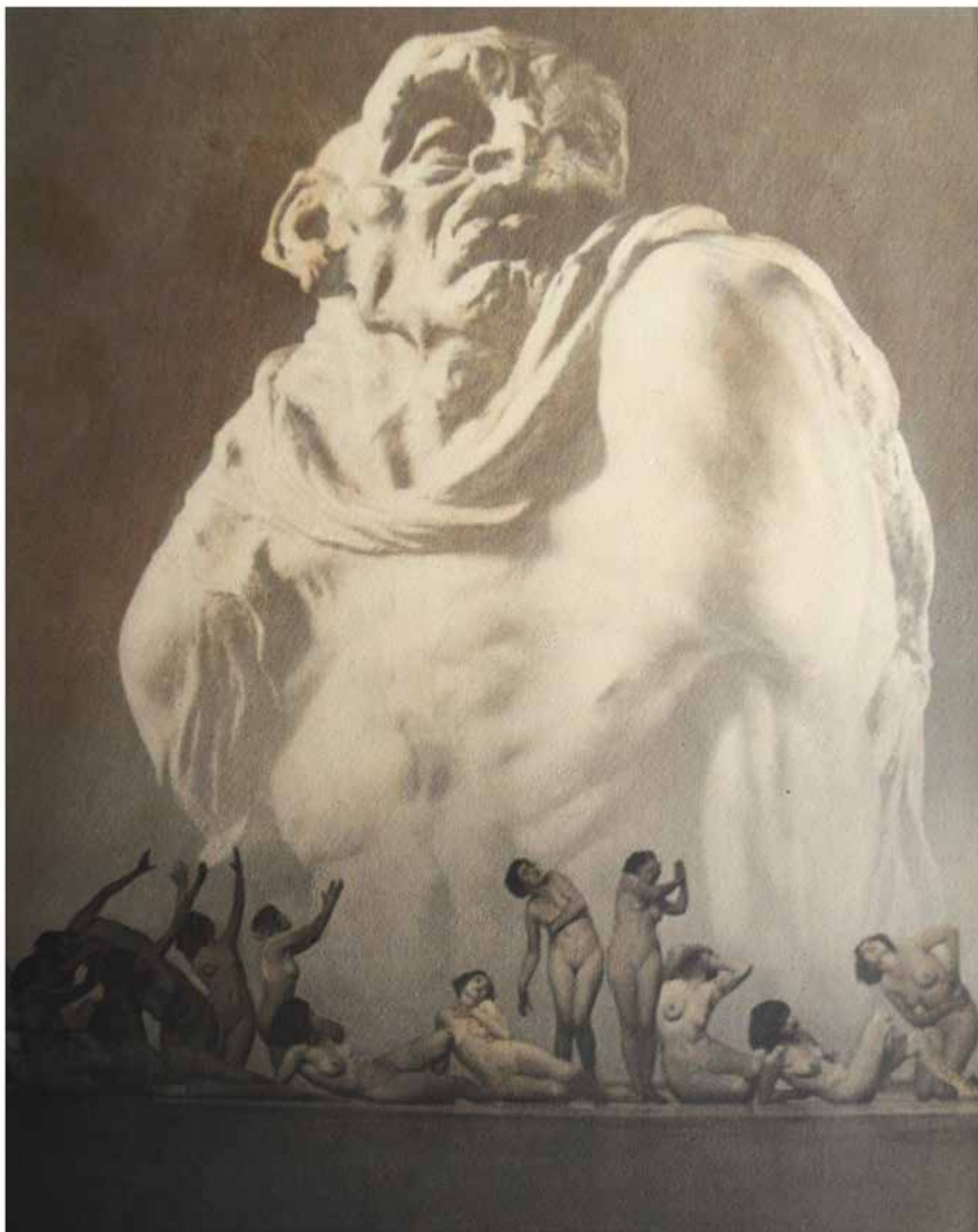


Portrait of Josh Stebbins by Stephen Romano 2019





Unkown maker, American, circa 1950's. Found in a Rebekahs Lodge in Michigan. 36 inches high
Plaster cast Venus De Milo, red crushed velver, hand carved frame.



William Mortensen (1897 - 1965) "Balphagor and the Lost Souls" photograph c. 1926



William Mortensen (1897 - 1965) "Untitled (Saint Courtney)" photograph c. 1926

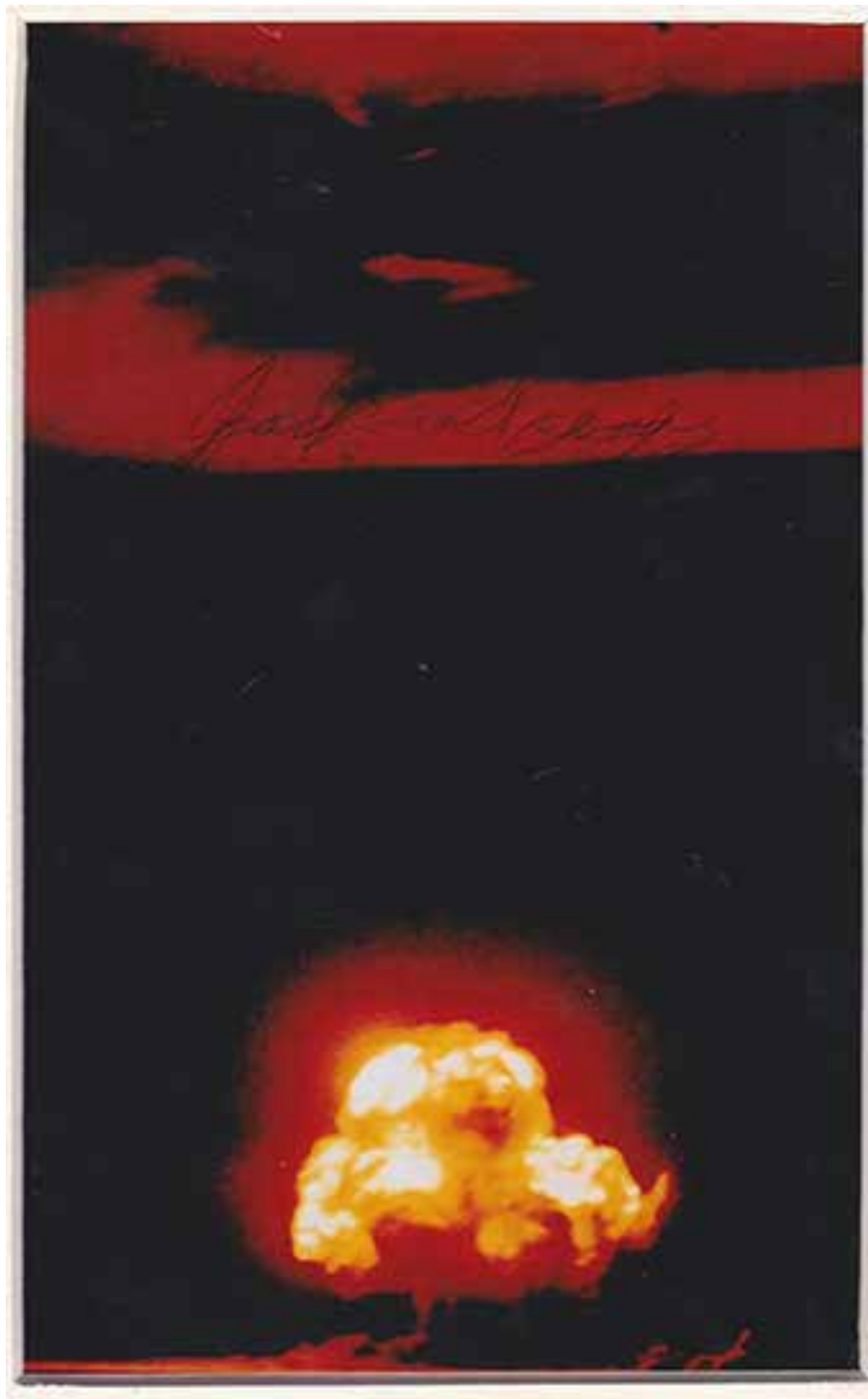


Blake Morrow "Future, Past" photograph 2019





Alexis Palmer Karl "The Mother" resin, bone, hand dyed silver leaf, pyrite, insect wings 2019



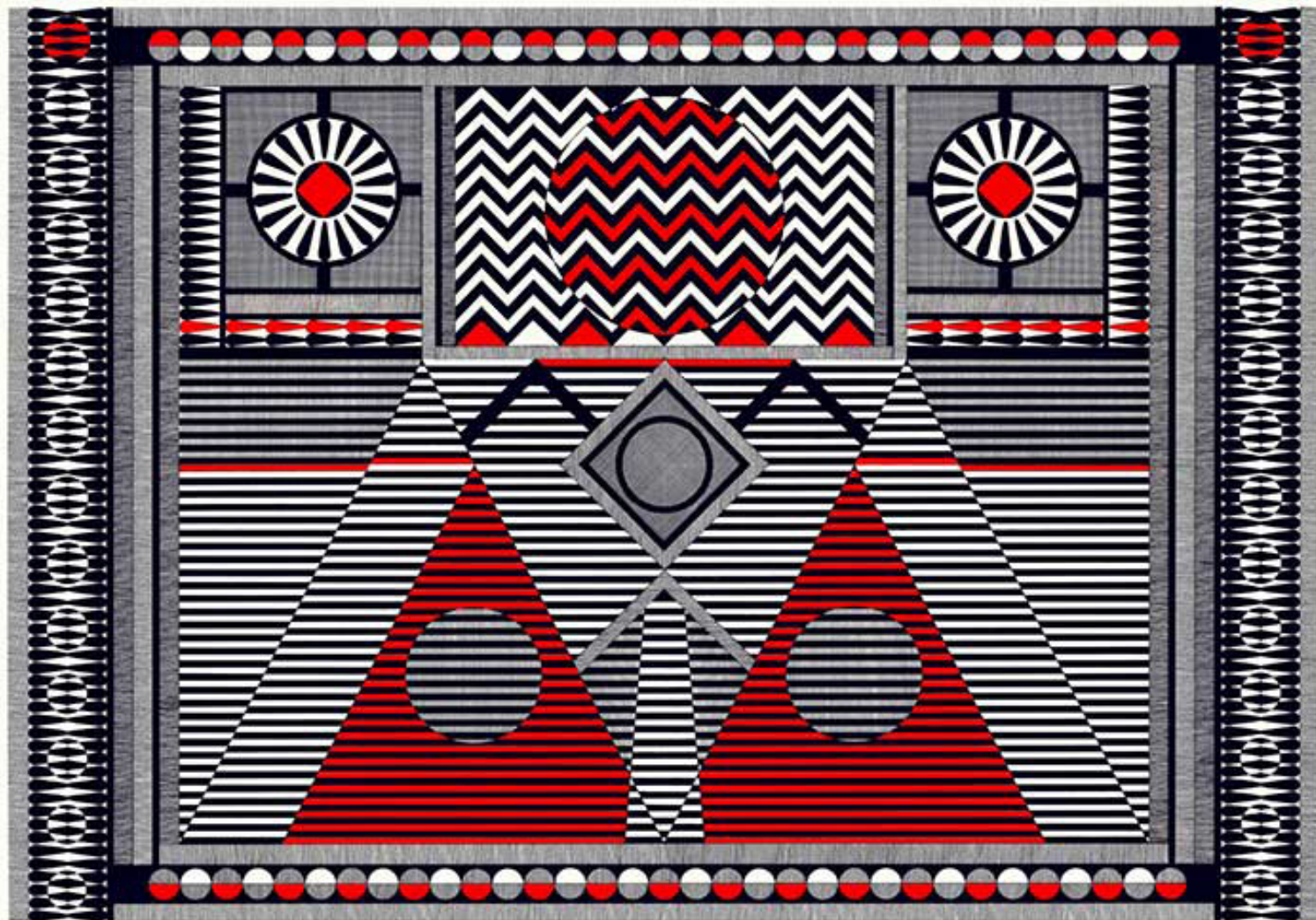
Original signed photograph by Jack Aeby of the Trinity Project at White Sand New Mexico July 16, 1945.



Above - Odd Fellows Lodge circa 1940's. Below - Van Camp Odd Fellows Lodge Bloomsburg PA, one of the lodges mentioned in *The Secret History of Twin Peaks* by Mark Frost.



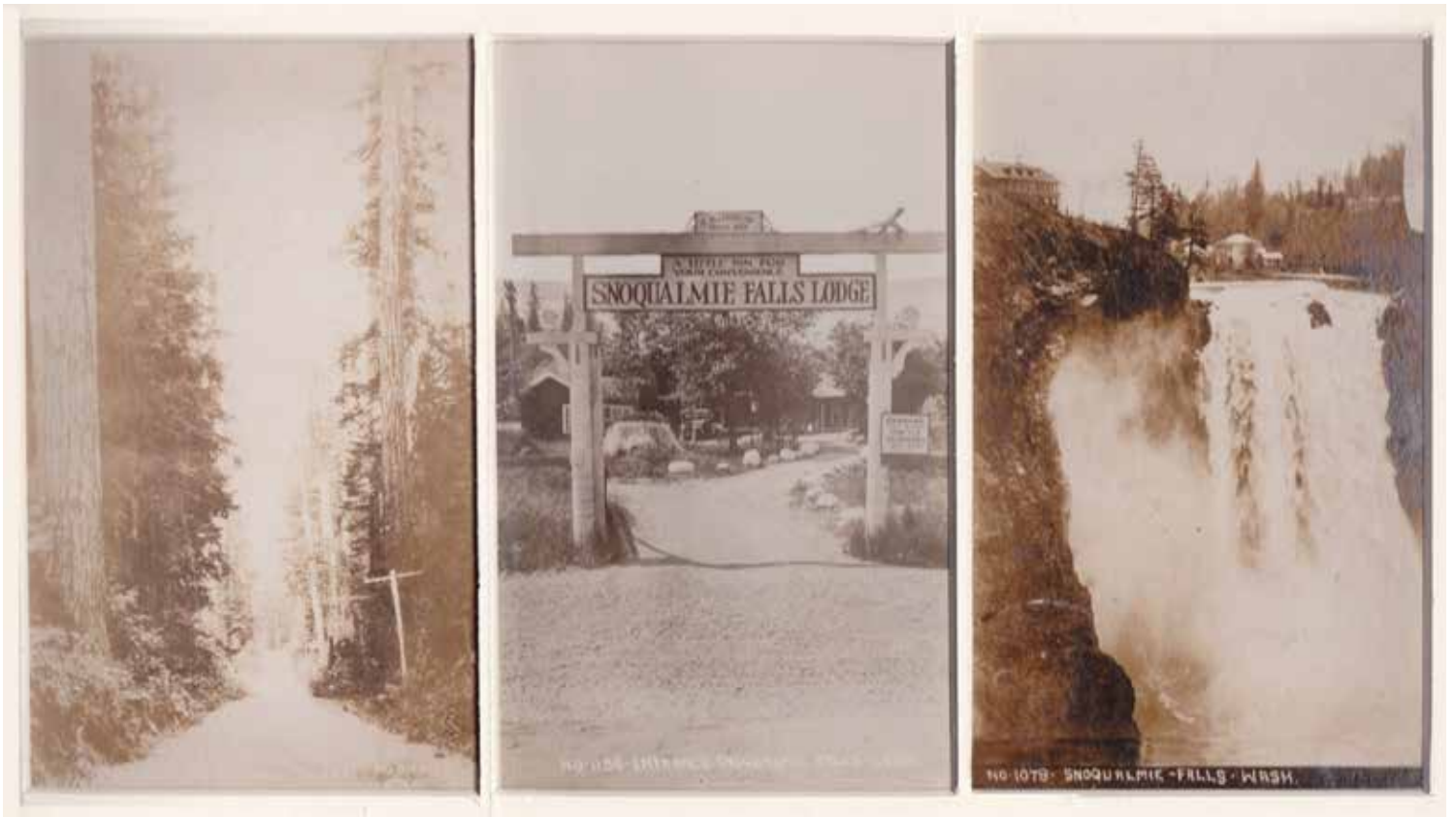
Caitlin McDonagh "Meanwhile" Acrylic and gouache on watercolor paper 2019



Daniel Gonçalves “#341” artpen and posca on paper 2019



Daniel Gonçalves “#342” artpen and posca on paper 2019



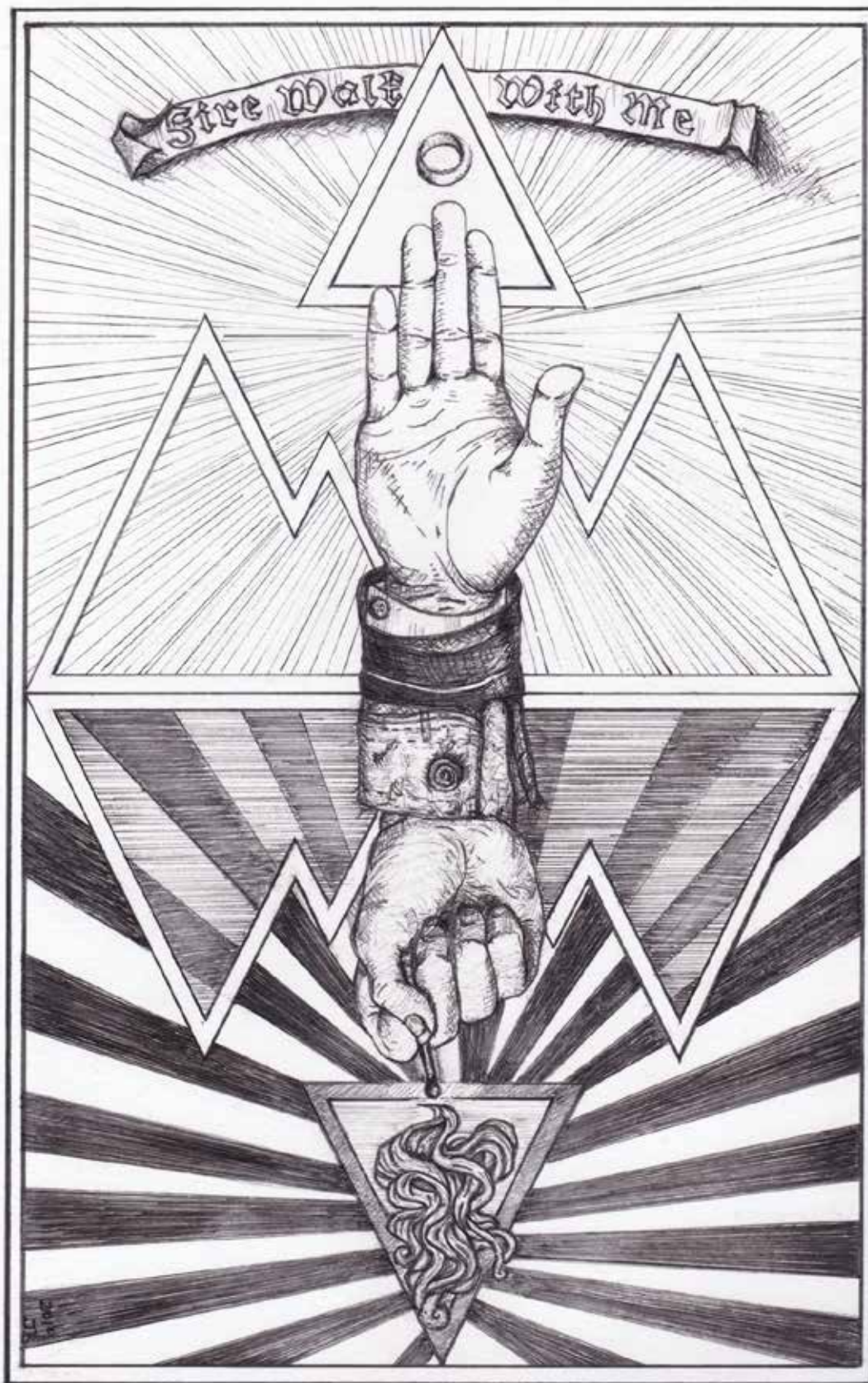
Left - Sunset Highway near Snoqualmie Falls, Washington the falls seen in "Twin Peaks", 1920's. Center - Snoqualmie Falls Lodge, Washington 1920's. Right - Snoqualmie Falls, Washington. 1920's



Unknown photographer, A forest fire near Snoqualmie Falls, 1922



Jen Bandini "The Black Lodge" Ink on paper 2019



Jen Bandini "Fire Walk With Me" Ink on paper 2019



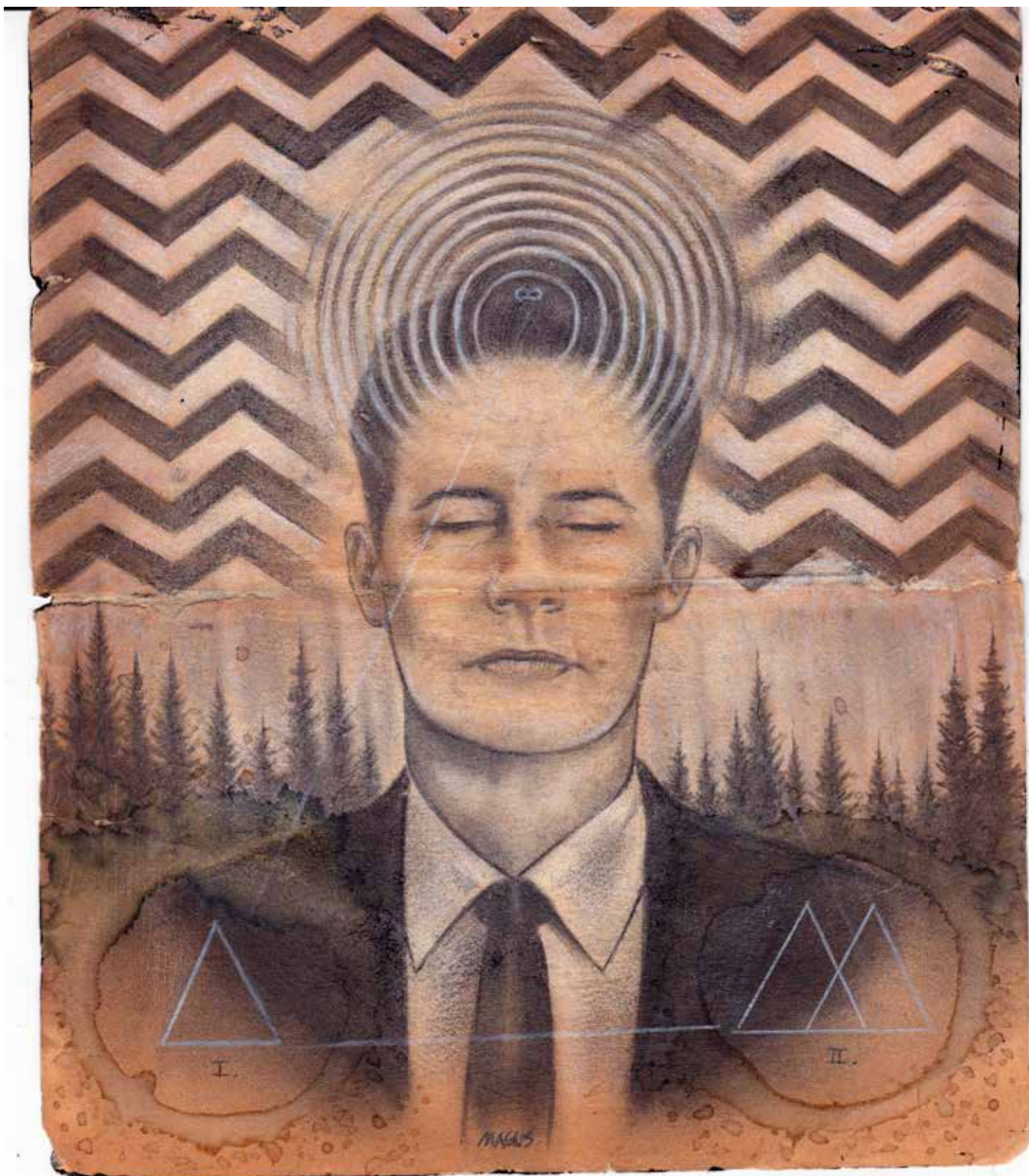
Josh Stebbins "Oracle" Pencil on paper 2019



Josh Stebbins "Plastic and Premonition" Pencil on paper 2019



Excerpted from "Magia Naturalis" 1849 by Johan Faust sigil of Saint Samaels. St. Samaels Sigillum.; [around the circle] Samuel, Satael, Amabiel. Samax Rex Ministri Carmax, Ismoli, Paffran.



Josh Stebbins "The Magician Longs To See" Pencil on paper 2019



Barry William Hale "Dwellers on the Threshold" 2019 gouache on paper, digital.





Matthew Dutton "The horse is the white of the eyes, and dark within" Mixed media 2019



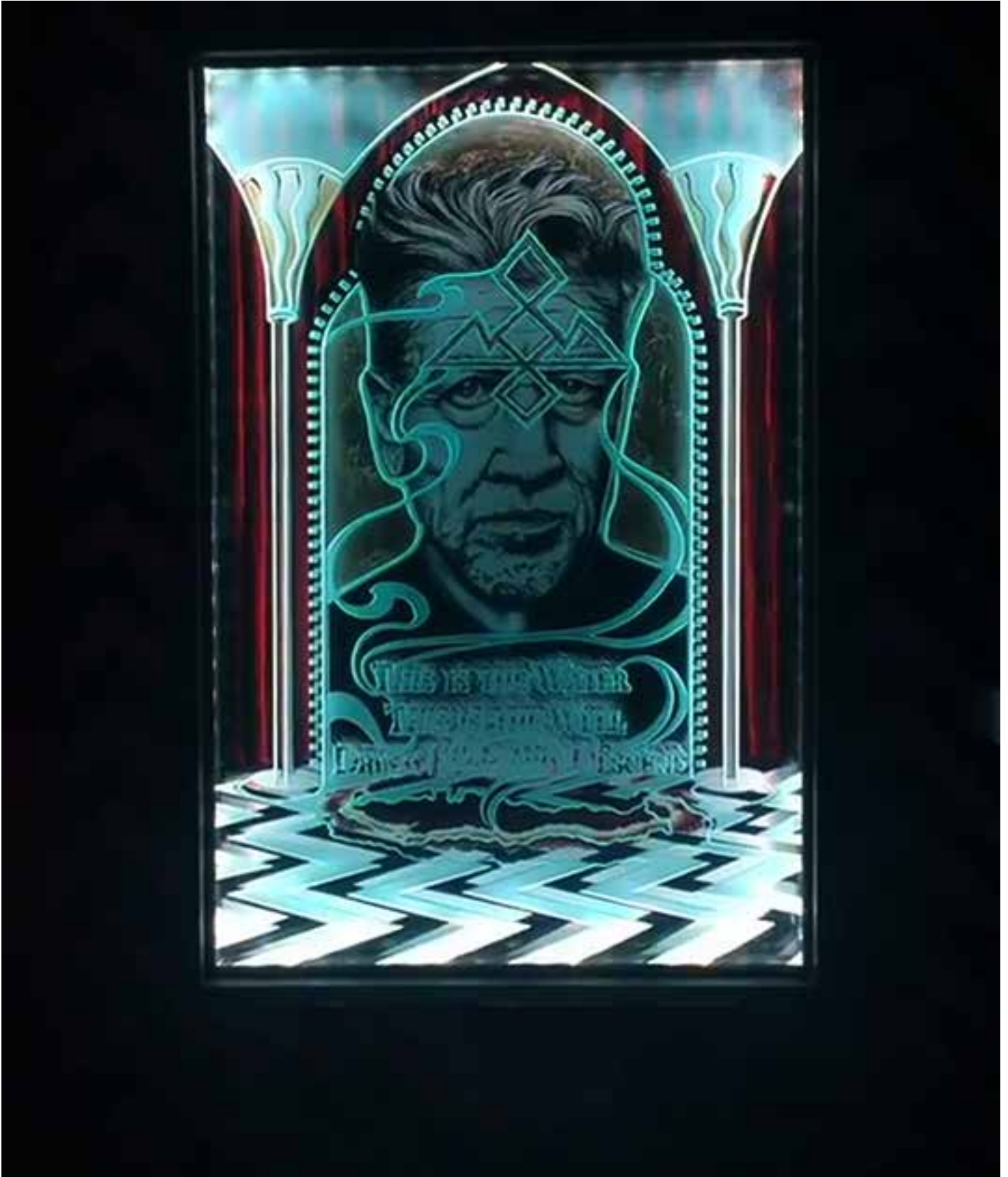
Josh Stebbins "Garmonbozia" mixed media 2019



Josh Stebbins "2:53" mixed media 2019



Installation view "NO STARS" October 2019.



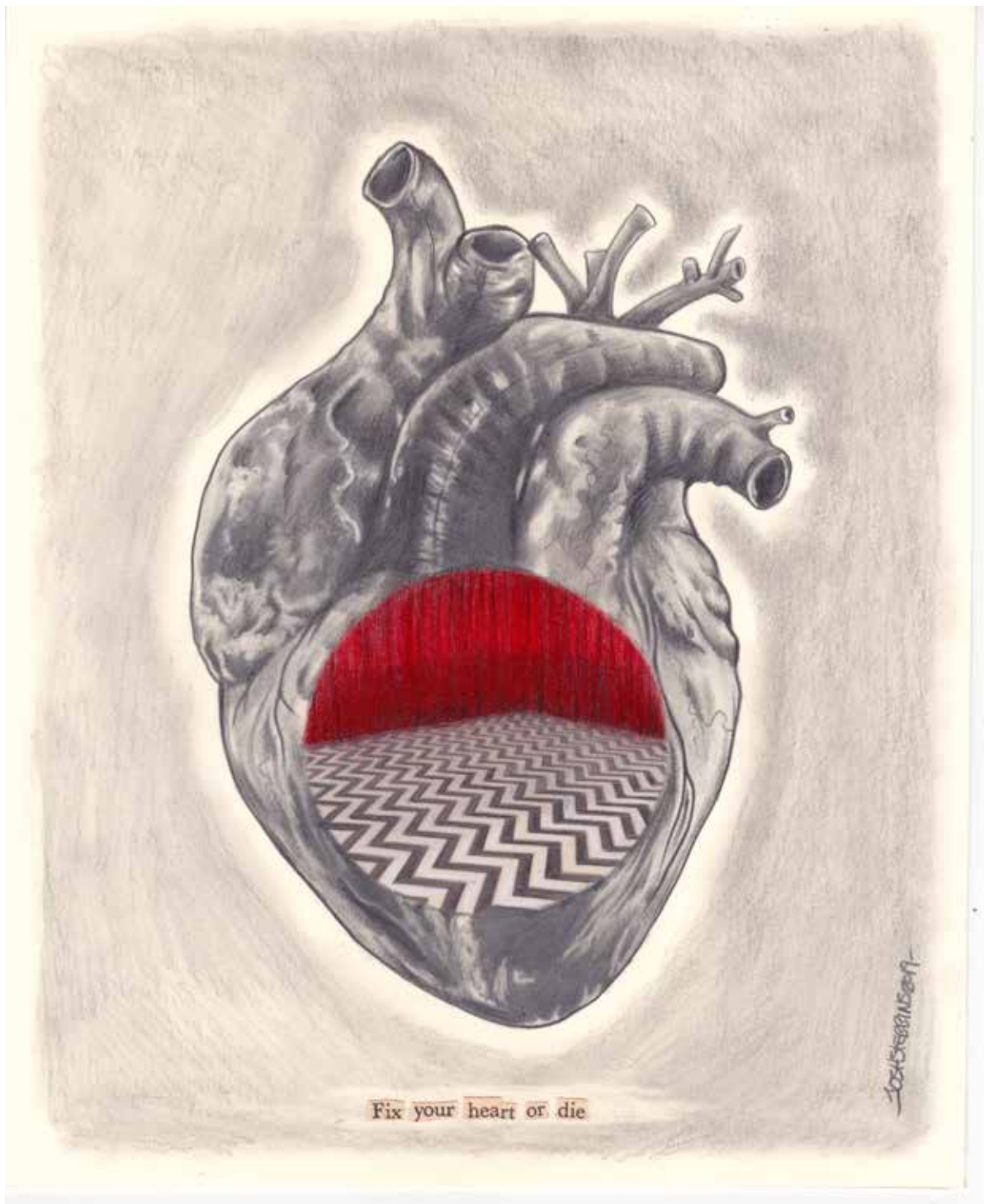
Natan Alexander "Drink Full And Descend" illuminated light work 2019



Jill Watson "Las Lloronas" Mixed media with branches from The Snoqualmie Falls 2019



Installation view "NO STARS" October 2019.

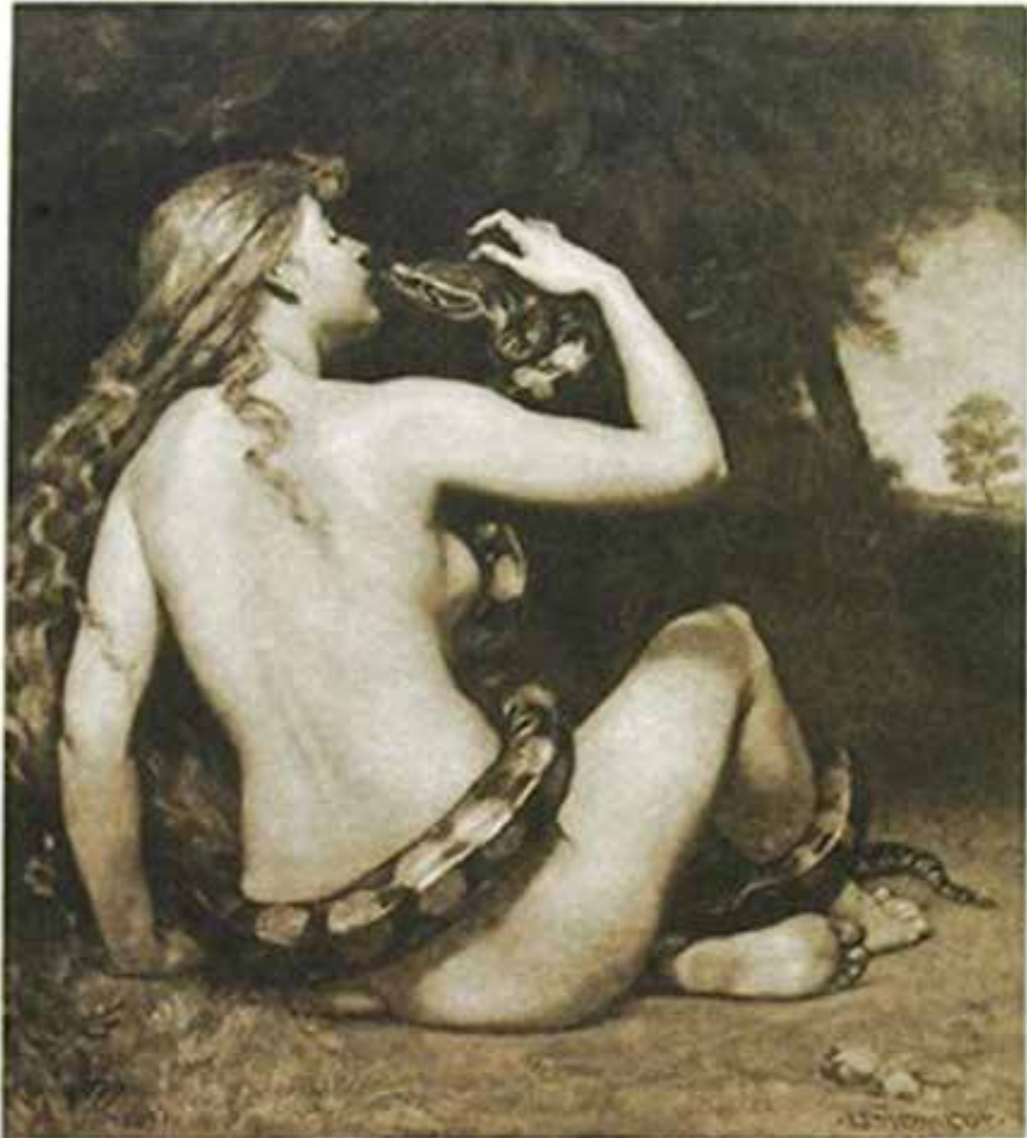


Josh Stebbins "Fix Your Heart Or Die" Pencil on paper 2019



Installation views "NO STARS" October 2019.

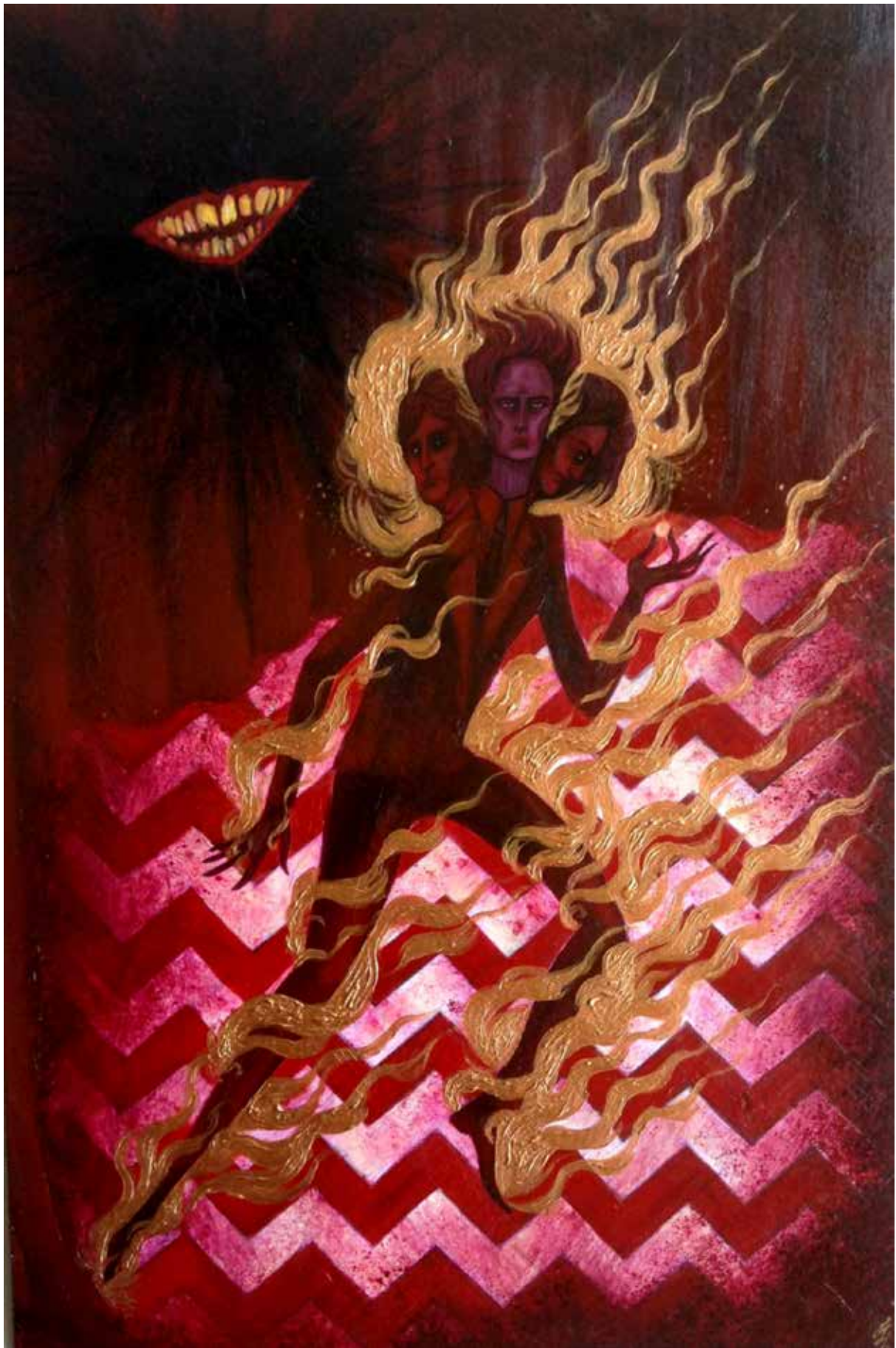




LILITH



Kenyon Cox "Lilith" albertype 1894



Luciana Lupe Vasconcelos "Fire Walk With Me" Mixed media on board 2019



Installation view "NO STARS" October 2019.



Installation view "NO STARS" October 2019.

Acknowledgements

Stephen Romano would like to thank Josh Stebbins for executing the sublime and inspiring suite of drawings for the NO STARS exhibition, a beautifully crafted and passionately executed group of works that manifest the love the artist has for the subjects. It has also become the privilege of a lifetime to get to know Josh, you have affirmed for me that no matter how late in life, new true friends may be found if we look hard enough.

Stephen Romano would like to also thank the participating artists who created works specifically for this exhibition, Natan Alexander, Alexis Karl, Jen Bandini, Luciana Lupe Vasconcelos, Daniel Gonçalves, Matthew Dutton, Barry William Hale, Blake Morrow, and Jill Watson.

Stephen Romano would also like to thank and express due respect to Rebecca Del Rio for her support and her performance in NO STARS. Thank you for being not only one of the driving forces for this exhibition, but for inspiring multitudes in the world through your voice which gives us chills and brings us to tears. Your ability to manifest awe gives you a place in the pantheon of great artists.

Thank you to Brian Chidester for your eloquent catalog introduction.

Thank you to Jen Bandini and Josh Stebbins for their guidance and assistance in the exhibition design.

Thank you also to Mike Zohn, Kevin J. O'Rourke, Mary Reber, Amie Romano.

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Thank you to Alexis Karl and Ken Weaver for your generosity of resources and spirit.

Thank you to Joseph Meloy and Alexandria Hodgkins for your devotion to perpetuating the art of the under served for the past few years at The Living Gallery.

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Portrait of Josh Stebbins by Stephen Romano 2019



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