



THREE
RIVERS
GALLERY

I Am The Problem

Edward A. Burke

Acknowledgments

*The artist gratefully acknowledges Three Rivers Gallery at CT State Community College and Sandra Jeknavorian, Curator and Professor of Art, for their support, guidance, and presentation of this exhibition. **I Am The Problem.***

I Am The Problem

This exhibition brings together paintings, drawings, and installations created over the past decade exploring humanity's evolving relationship with the natural world.

The title is neither an accusation nor an expression of guilt. It is an acknowledgment that I, like everyone else, participate in the systems that shape the world around us. The work asks not who is to blame, but how our everyday choices—often invisible and seemingly insignificant—accumulate into lasting consequences.

The images move between observation, memory, dreams, science, and metaphor. They explore climate change, pollinators, plastics, oceans, water, and the fragile balance of the biosphere while inviting viewers to discover their own meanings within the work.

Art cannot solve these problems. It can, however, encourage us to look more carefully, ask better questions, and begin conversations that extend beyond the gallery walls.

Three Rivers Gallery | CT State Community College Three Rivers | August 27 – October 2, 2026 | Curated by Sandra Jeknavorian

The Dream Black Sun - 2024
Acrylic Paint on Canvas
36" x 72" (Diptych Panels 36" x 36")

The Dream Black Sun draws inspiration from the extraordinary migrations of European Starlings and the breathtaking aerial formations known as murmurations. Thousands of birds move as a single, fluid organism, creating shifting patterns that transform the evening sky. At times, their dense formations appear to eclipse the sun, giving rise to the image of a black sun.

Rather than illustrating a specific dream, the painting is an interpretation of memory's fleeting nature. Like dreams themselves, the imagery shifts between recognition and abstraction, revealing fragments that dissolve almost as quickly as they appear. The diptych echoes this continual movement, inviting the eye to travel between the two panels as if following the flight of the flock.

The Dream Black Sun reflects on the mystery of the natural world and our enduring fascination with phenomena that remain both scientifically explainable and emotionally profound.



Earth VS. Alien Invaders - 2021
Graphite Pencil on Paper
14" x 19.5"

Earth VS. Alien Invaders draws on the visual language of 1950s science fiction, where giant insects, radiation, and alien visitors embodied society's deepest fears. Here, the invading force is neither extraterrestrial nor imaginary. Floating above a quiet neighborhood, oversized plastic bottles become the new menace, transforming an everyday object into an unsettling symbol of environmental threat.

The drawing suggests that humanity's greatest danger is not an attack from another world, but the unintended consequences of our own inventions. Plastic, once celebrated as a symbol of progress and convenience, has become one of the most persistent pollutants on Earth, accumulating in landscapes, rivers, and oceans for generations.

By replacing fictional monsters with familiar consumer products, **Earth VS. Alien Invaders** asks viewers to reconsider what truly threatens our future—and whether the greatest invasion has already begun.

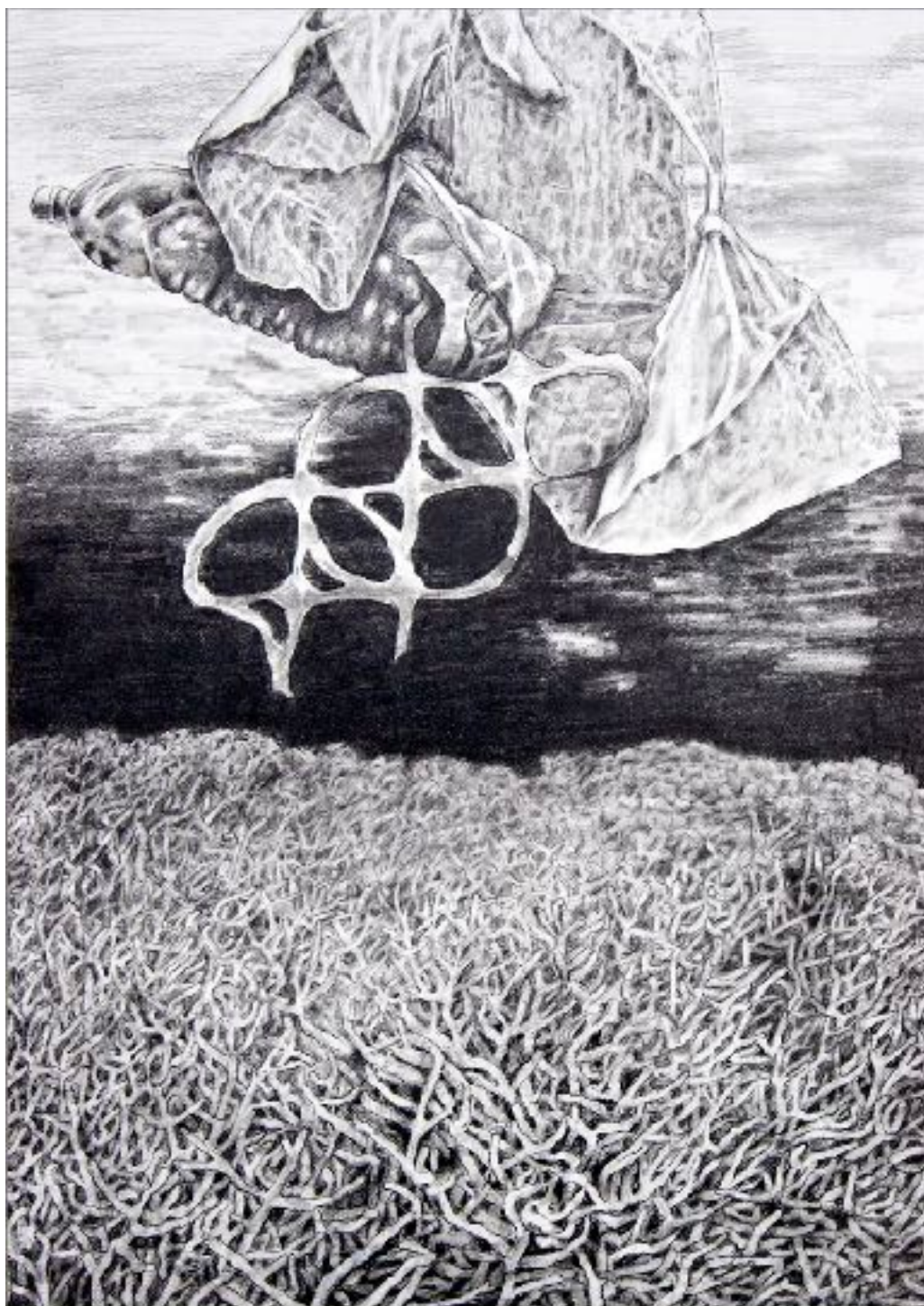


Somewhere Beneath the Sea - 2019
Graphite Pencil on Paper
15" x 21"

Somewhere Beneath the Sea explores the quiet, often unseen consequences of plastic pollution beneath the ocean's surface. A discarded bottle and plastic bag drift through the water, their forms echoing the marine life they threaten. Below, a fragile coral reef stretches across the seabed, suggesting an ecosystem increasingly overshadowed by human waste.

Plastic debris can persist in the ocean for centuries, where it damages coral reefs, entangles marine animals, and gradually breaks down into microplastics that enter the food web. What appears to disappear from our daily lives often remains in the environment long after it has been discarded.

Rather than depicting a dramatic catastrophe, *Somewhere Beneath the Sea* reveals a slower, quieter transformation—one taking place beyond our view. The drawing invites us to consider how everyday choices accumulate over time, altering the health and resilience of the oceans upon which all life depends.

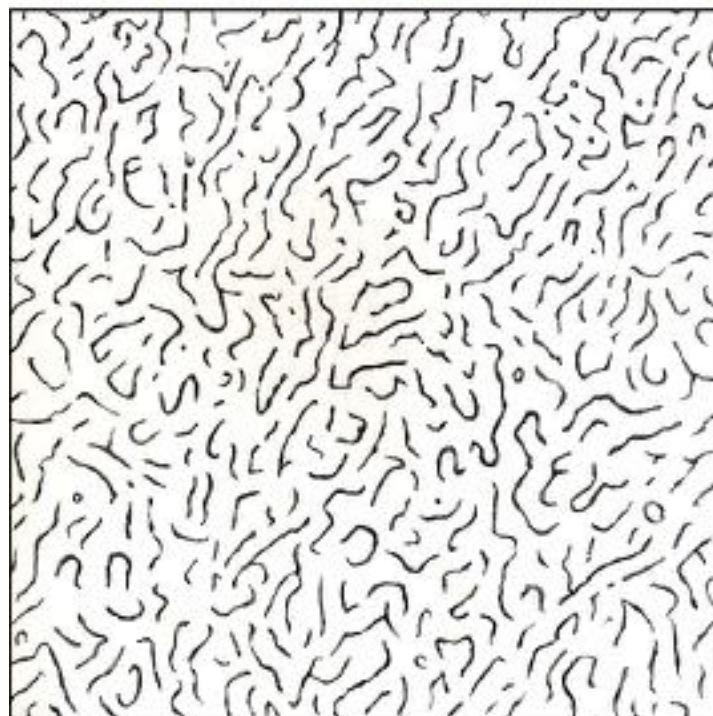


Broken Water - 2020
Acrylic on Canvas
36" x 36" (Diptych 36" x 72")

Broken Water was inspired by observing the ever-changing patterns of a waterfall. As the water descended, its continuous flow dissolved into countless shifting forms, revealing rhythms and structures that seemed to exist somewhere between abstraction and nature. The painting transforms this experience into an exploration of movement, perception, and meaning.

The flowing network of forms invites viewers to discover their own imagery within the composition. This tendency to recognize familiar shapes in ambiguous patterns is known as pareidolia—the human impulse to find meaning within complexity. Just as we interpret the painting through our own experiences, we also interpret the natural world through the lenses of science, memory, culture, and faith.

Water is both a sacred symbol of renewal and the foundation of all life. Broken Water reflects on the fragility of this essential resource, asking us to consider how our perceptions—and our actions—shape its future.



Storm Warning Chaos - 2021
Acrylic on Birch Panel
18" x 24"

Storm Warning Chaos explores the growing instability of a world shaped by a changing climate. Fragments of a house, a window, a skeleton, a bee, and a windswept leaf are suspended within an unfolding storm, suggesting the disorientation that follows when familiar structures begin to fail. The composition shifts between abstraction and representation, echoing the unpredictable forces of extreme weather.

Created as a companion to *Storm Warning*, the painting reflects the increasing frequency and intensity of storms associated with a warming planet. Rather than depicting a specific disaster, it brings together symbols of home, life, and the natural world to suggest the interconnected consequences of environmental change.

Storm Warning Chaos invites viewers to consider not only the destructive power of storms, but also the human choices that continue to reshape our climate and the fragile systems upon which we all depend.



"Colorless & Odorless" - 2018

Acrylic Paint on Wood

14" x 22" x 19"

Stand: 14" x 22" x 34"

Colorless & Odorless is an installation exploring the unseen consequences of human activity. The suspended sculpture and its companion drawings reflect on carbon dioxide—an invisible gas essential to life that has become one of the primary drivers of climate change through the burning of fossil fuels and the production of disposable products.

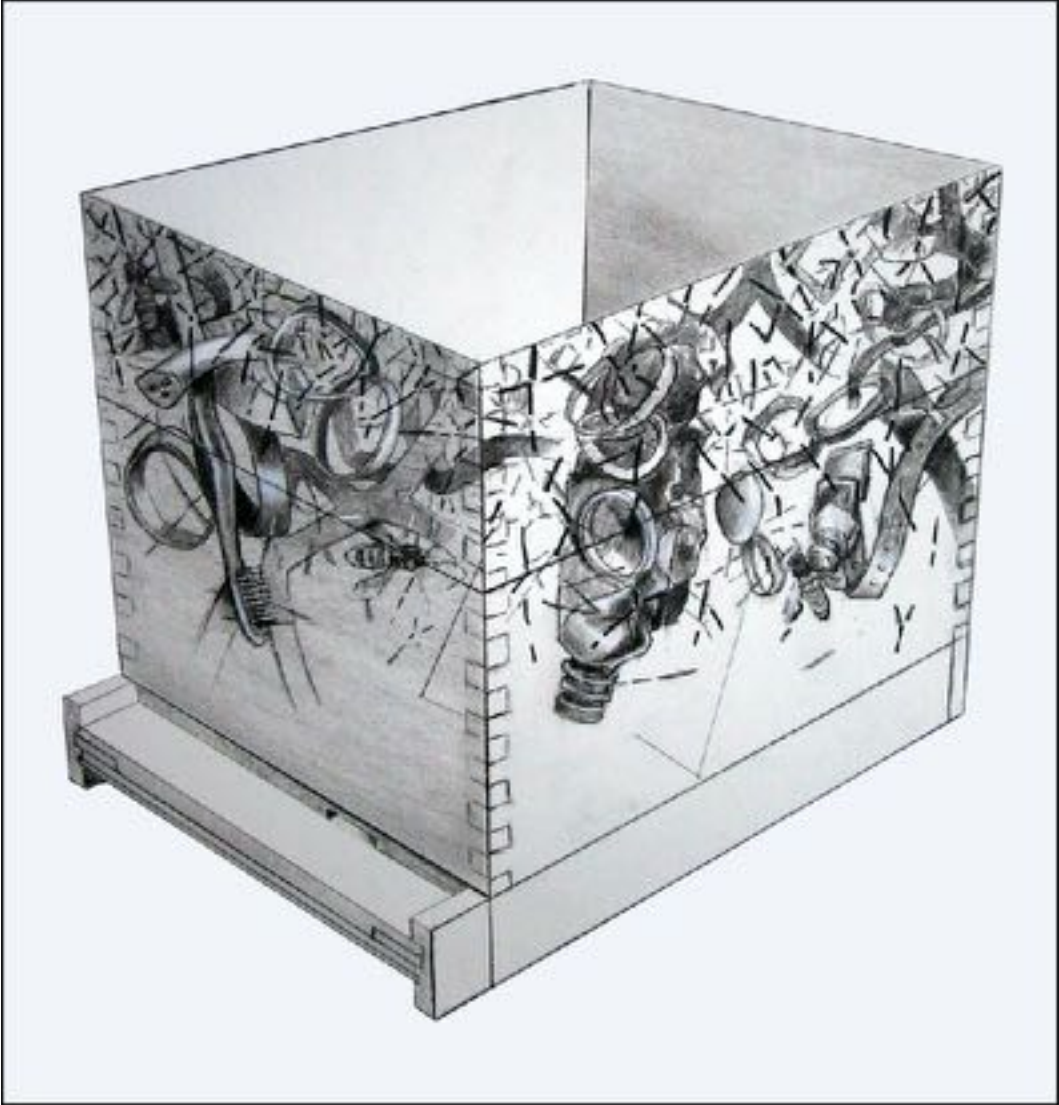
The work was inspired by research suggesting that rising atmospheric CO₂ reduces the protein content of pollen, diminishing a vital food source for bees and contributing to the multiple factors associated with Colony Collapse Disorder. The decline of pollinators threatens ecosystems that depend on them and the food systems upon which humanity relies.

The transparent form symbolizes what cannot be seen, while the surrounding imagery traces the relationship between consumption, industry, and the natural world. **Colorless & Odorless** asks viewers to consider how invisible actions can produce visible consequences—and to recognize that environmental responsibility begins with each of us.



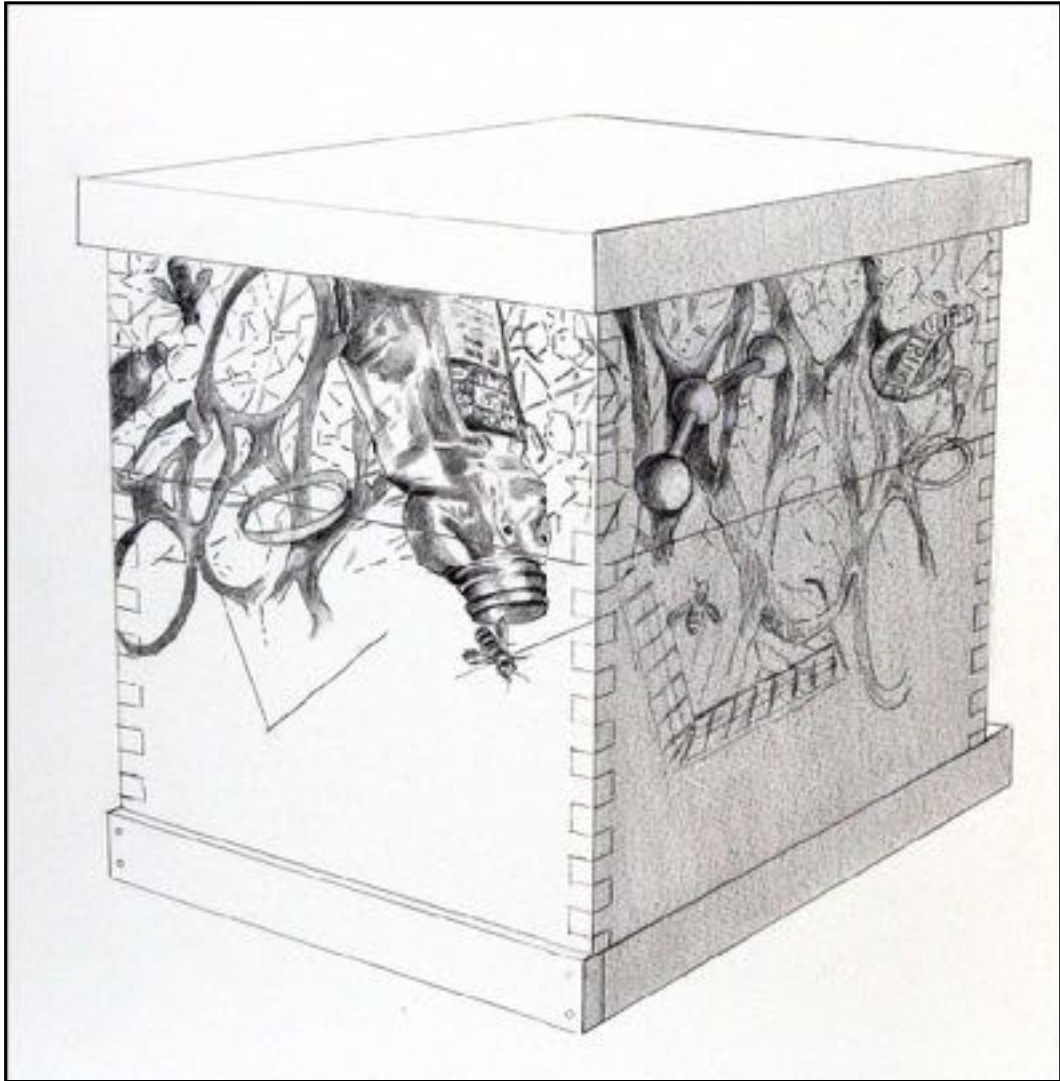
Colorless & Odorless No. 1 – 2018
Graphite On Paper
18" x 24"

This drawing marks an early stage in the evolution of the installation *Colorless & Odorless*. While complete as an independent work, it established many of the visual ideas that later developed into the three-dimensional sculpture.



Colorless & Odorless No. 2 – 2018
Graphite On Paper
18" x 24"

This is the second drawing in the development of the installation *Colorless & Odorless*. It further refines the visual vocabulary used to explore the relationship between human activity, carbon emissions, and the health of the biosphere.

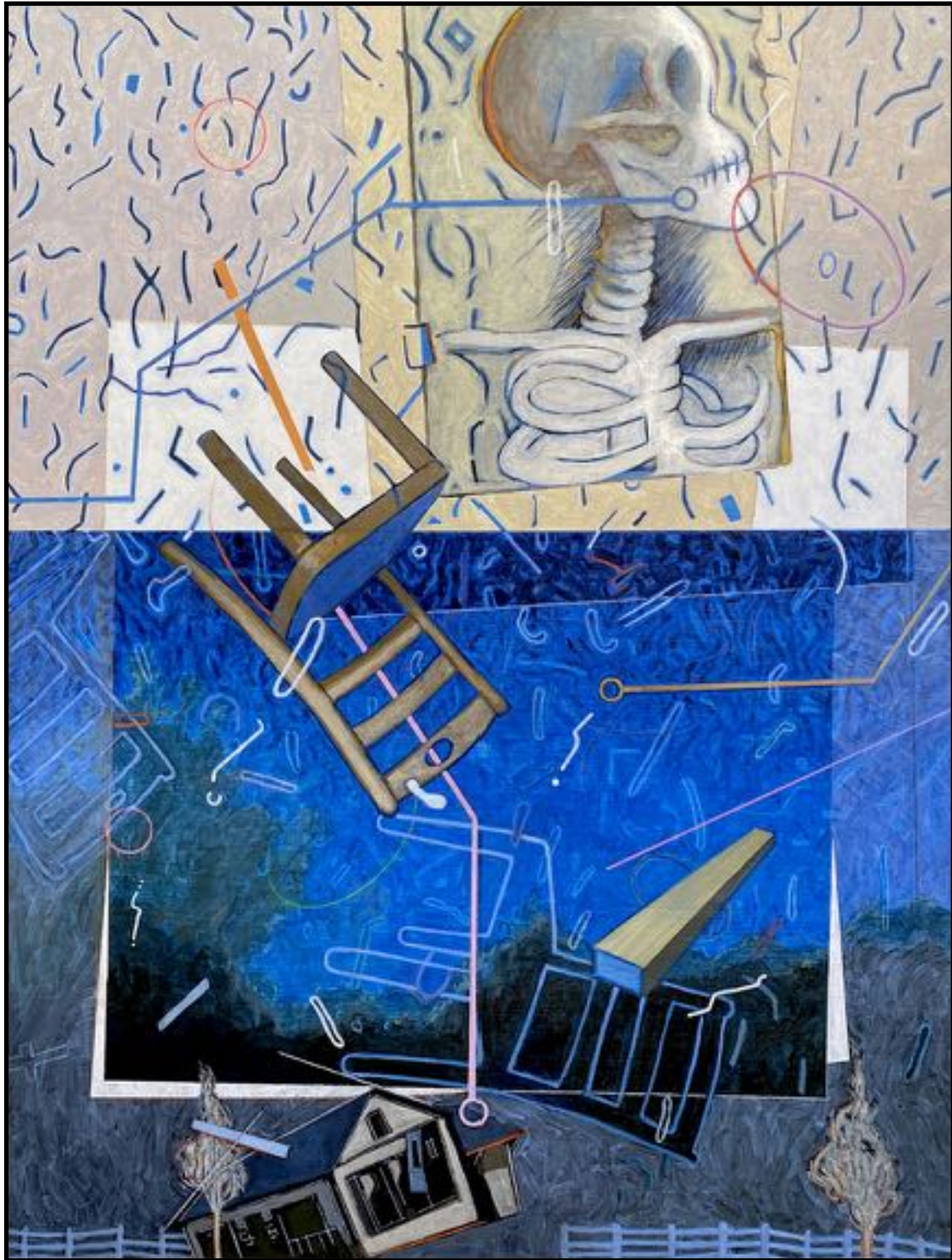


Storm Warning - 2021
Acrylic on Birch Panel
18" x 24"

Storm Warning explores the growing instability of a world shaped by a changing climate. Suspended between abstraction and representation, the painting brings together a skeletal form, an overturned chair, a collapsing house, and a turbulent landscape. These fragmented images suggest a world where the familiar has become increasingly fragile.

The work was inspired by the escalating frequency and intensity of storms occurring around the globe. While no single weather event can be attributed to climate change alone, the broader pattern is unmistakable. As atmospheric carbon levels continue to rise through the burning of fossil fuels, industrial processes, and the consumption of disposable goods, extreme weather has become one of the most visible consequences.

Rather than illustrating a specific disaster, **Storm Warning** asks viewers to consider the cumulative effects of human activity and our shared responsibility for the future. It is both a warning and an invitation to reflect on the choices that shape the world we leave behind.

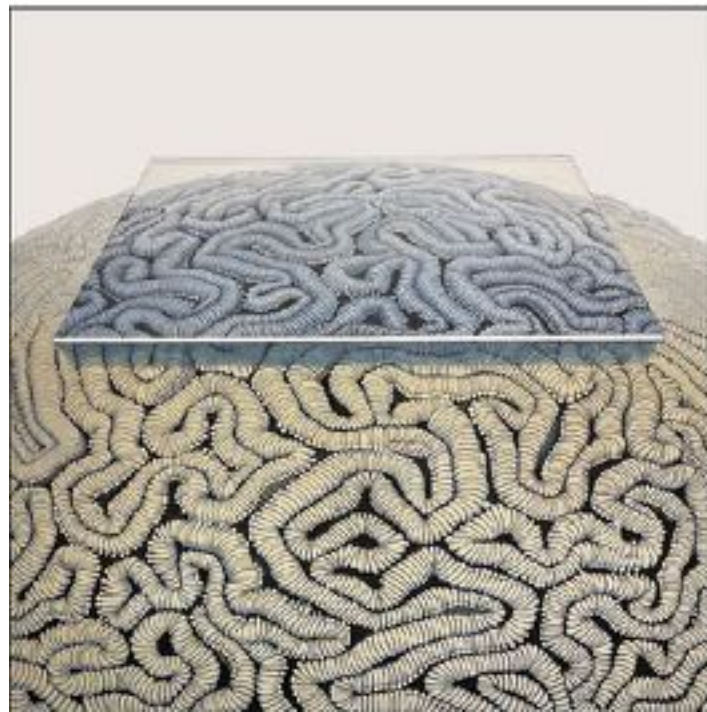


Sun Block - 2022
Acrylic on Canvas
36" x 36" (Diptych 36" x 72")

Sun Block reflects the growing fragility of coral reef ecosystems and the unseen consequences of human activity. Divided into two simple fields, the upper panel suggests the sky and the life-giving sun, while the lower panel represents the ocean. Between them, a geometric form—symbolizing manufactured waste—interrupts the essential relationship between light and life.

The intricate organic pattern below is inspired by brain coral, one of the ocean's oldest living architects. Though often mistaken for stone, brain corals are colonies of living animals that create habitats for nearly a quarter of all marine species. Today, many reefs are disappearing because of warming oceans, pollution, disease, and plastic debris that can block sunlight and damage fragile coral ecosystems.

Sun Block asks viewers to consider how ordinary, disposable objects can disrupt complex natural systems. It is a meditation on the delicate balance that sustains life beneath the ocean's surface—and our responsibility to protect it before that balance is permanently lost.



The Pod Garden - 2022
Graphite Pencil on Paper
18" x 24"

The Pod Garden explores the environmental cost of everyday convenience. Inspired by the disposable coffee pod, the drawing imagines a landscape where discarded objects have become part of nature itself. Coffee pods appear to grow among the trees like seeds in an invented ecosystem, blurring the boundary between the manufactured and the natural world.

The composition echoes the vertical landscapes of Chinese Ming Dynasty painting, where forests invite quiet contemplation. Here, however, the serenity is interrupted by familiar symbols of modern consumption. The pods become reminders that even the smallest conveniences can leave lasting ecological footprints.

Billions of single-use coffee pods have been discarded since their introduction, contributing to plastic waste that can persist for centuries. K-Cup inventor John Sylvan later expressed regret over the environmental consequences of his creation.

Rather than offering condemnation, The Pod Garden asks viewers to reflect on the cumulative impact of everyday choices and to imagine a future where innovation and environmental responsibility grow together.

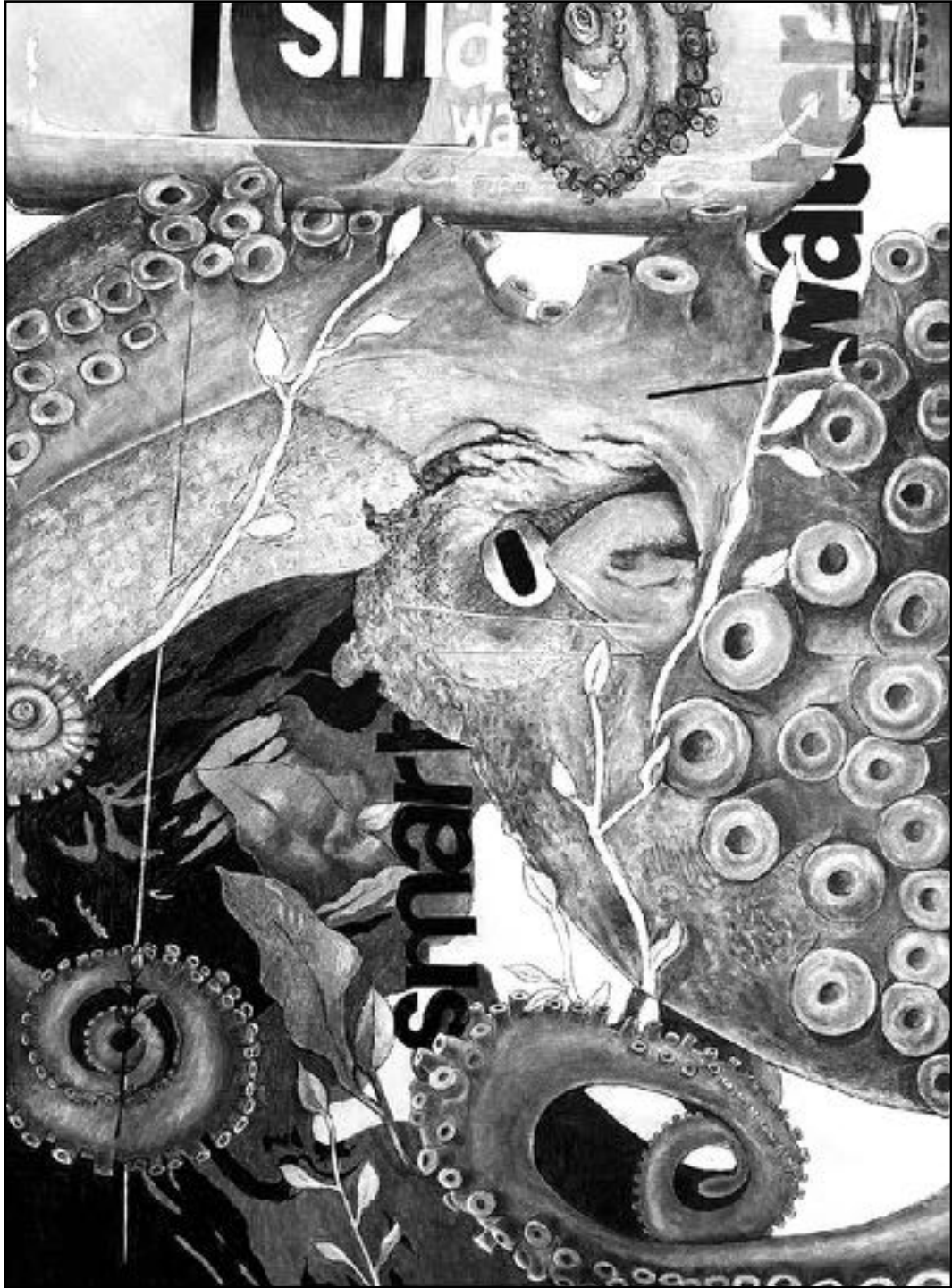


Kraken Smart Water - 2025
Graphite Pencil on Paper
14" x 19"

Kraken Smart Water explores the contradiction between human ideas of progress and the intelligence already present in the natural world. Dominating the composition is a discarded SmartWater bottle, its familiar branding contrasted with the octopus—one of the planet's most intelligent animals. The pairing invites viewers to question what we truly mean by smart.

With a distributed nervous system, remarkable problem-solving abilities, and an extraordinary capacity to adapt, octopuses have survived for millions of years. Today, however, they inhabit oceans increasingly burdened by plastic pollution and other human-made environmental pressures.

Rather than portraying the mythical sea monster, Kraken Smart Water reimagines the Kraken as a symbol of resilience and intelligence. The drawing asks whether our technological ingenuity will be matched by the wisdom to protect the oceans and the life they sustain.



Colony Collapse - 2021

Acrylic on Canvas

30" x 40"

Colony Collapse explores the fragile relationship between human activity and one of nature's most essential pollinators. A solitary honey bee hovers beneath a cascade of discarded plastic, while flowers, pollen, and manufactured objects become part of a single interconnected system. The composition suggests that even the smallest acts of consumption can ripple through the natural world.

The painting was inspired by research examining how rising atmospheric carbon dioxide may reduce the nutritional value of pollen, affecting the health and reproduction of honey bees. Combined with habitat loss, pesticides, disease, and climate change, these pressures threaten pollinators, which are vital to both natural ecosystems and global food production.

Rather than illustrating a single cause, Colony Collapse reflects the complexity of an environmental crisis shaped by many human actions. It asks viewers to consider how the choices we make each day may ultimately determine the survival of species upon which we also depend.



The title of this exhibition is not an accusation. It is an invitation.