



### Shattered (2/16/24)

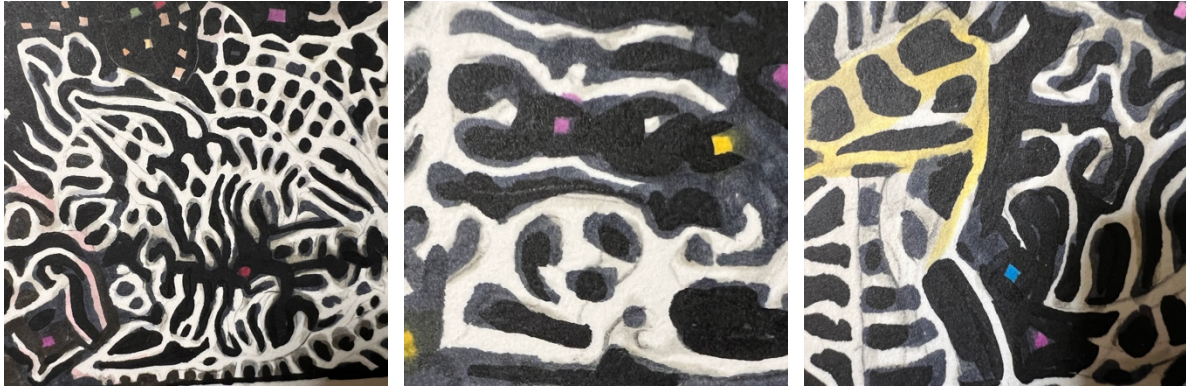
I was cleaning up a drawing. It had started out with multiple figures-- some line drawings, others more fully realized-- but they had gotten dissected into networks of sinews and ribbons as the drawing progressed, and some of these had broken up further into multi-colored flakes. Most of the cleaning up consisted of refining the lines, making them crisper, and making the lumpier flakes into better squares, circles, and triangles. It was likely that the drawing had already passed through its most convulsive changes, the ones where you have to let go of forms that you love or had high hopes for, or of a future you had imagined for the drawing, and instead to follow where it leads. All of this requires bravery, faith, endurance, and staying in the moment-- though, admittedly, in a way that is limited to the demarcated ritual space and time of the drawing-- *more or less*.

Maybe the drawing had already passed through most of its convulsive changes, but *what are the chances?* Things happen, or you feel dissatisfied and find yourself still going forward, *damn the torpedos*, and after all, everything could still shatter or be swallowed up by darkness.

Even when I'm operating with the sense that the clean-up isn't creative or expressive but just mindless and meticulous tidying up, I still feel like I'm doing something I was put on earth to do. When a prince asked a Daoist disciple what wisdom he had gained from the master, the disciple replied, "I swept at the master's gate with a broom." Every drawing and painting, every text being swept back and forth by your eyes, every square inch of the visual world, of the world, is *the master's gate*.

Even in the clean-up mode, things happen. In this drawing, some of the forms had been cut off by the edges of the drawing, as if it were a window onto a larger scene beyond, but in the clean-up, all the forms shrunk back a little from the edges. This change was so small you might have noticed it only subliminally, but it transformed the drawing from a window onto a world to a world unto itself: an ecosystem in a bubble of its own making. And here and there, where bits of the sinewy networks began to be pruned back and squared or tapered off or curved a little at the ends, little sprites emerged-- wispy dancing figures-- and a few more ambiguous figures, still mostly camouflaged by the network. Believe it or not, I had forgotten that this sometimes happens in my drawings, so even more than usual, I hadn't intended it, but when I noticed them, I knew it meant I could stop drawing. The original figures had been disarticulated, shattered, or sunk back into their matrix, but now these whimsical creatures-- subtle enough that it's easy to miss them altogether-- had emerged on their own, as if to save what was left from sinking into darkness.

So much loss. It isn't what I wanted the drawing to be about, but that's what happened. And subtle bits of magical transfiguration.



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"I swept at my master's gate with a broom": Francois Jullien, *Vital Nourishment: Departing from Happiness* (New York: Zone Books, 2007), p. 28.