

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

BATHROOMS DON'T LIE

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Visual Arts

By

Katrina Castillo

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The thesis of Katrina Castillo is approved:

Michelle Rozic

Date

Samantha Fields

Date

Laurel Long Chair

Date

Dedication

This is dedicated to my family who have always supported and encouraged me.

You keep me going and help me to believe in myself.

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ABSTRACT

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My work is inspired by personal observations and experience. I am interested in how people choose to express and present themselves to others, either through clothing, things they collect or how they choose to display their home.

Shelter culture also plays a large part in my work. My illustrations of interiors invite the viewer into other people's domestic environments. Populated by the essential and elective items life entails, these illustrations exclude the inhabitants, allowing each arrangement and item to "speak" on behalf of the dwellers. Each home's belongings and décor reflect the inhabitants' distinct personalities and lifestyles. My drawings are playful, affording viewers a glimpse into other people's lives.

Collections

My mom and I love going to yard sales and thrift stores looking to see what we might find. The oddest things tend to catch my eye. Sometimes when I buy an item like a knick-knack I do not know what to do with it, so it goes into storage. My mother is really creative and likes repurposing items or buying things she thinks she can use in a project later. This has created a lot of clutter, so in order to help reign in the unnecessary buying she came up with two questions we ask before we buy something: “Where are you going to put it?” and “What are you going to use it for?” Needless to say the questions help cut down on the number of random objects we have collected over the years.

This experience inspired my *Quirky Collections* series, illustrations of interesting and offbeat collections and portraits of the owners that collect them. *Terrarium Collection* shows an assorted variety of terrariums in containers ranging from light bulbs to cake holders (Figure 1). The paired illustration *Terrarium Collector* is the portrait of the man who made those terrariums in his workspace, which doubles as his kitchen (Figure 2). I wanted to show how people’s collections affect their daily lives and reflects on the person.

The illustrated collections are of items I am personally drawn to. In a way, I was projecting myself into these groupings and living vicariously through my subjects. In time, I realized that I was more interested in the items in the collections and what they say about their owner, than the owners themselves. This prompted me to start a new series of work based on homes and the items within them.

Cross-Sections

I grew up in a fixer-upper home on a quarter of an acre, so “do it yourself” (DIY) projects were always a part of my life. Projects ranged from painting rooms, to cutting down trees, putting up fences and re-shingling the roof. When it comes to decorating and renovating the interior of our house it was always a slow process, constantly lingering in the back of our collective familial mind. This is one of the reasons my family, specifically the women, were drawn to HGTV. Before websites, YouTube channels, and blogs started being dedicated to home design, one of the most accessible places to get ideas, tips and instructions was HGTV. The Home and Garden Television (HGTV) channel launched in 1994 by Kenneth Lowe. His idea was to have an all cable channel giving each room in the house its own show and having easily accessible sources of advice for home projects. (Palmer)

My family and I loved the shows where the hosts actually did some of the projects like Design on a Dime. It made the projects seem more “doable” for ourselves. I was specifically interested in the shows that would tailor specific rooms to the homeowner's tastes and personalities. As the years passed, I found myself drawn to the “before” rooms rather than the “made-over” rooms. I found that the originals had more character and were more inviting. Many of the shows have started focusing on the big transformation “reveal” of the room rather than how the work to make it so was accomplished. When I viewed these programs and saw the completed renovations I would question the practicality of the finished product. Why are there huge vases of random items filling up the counters? Where are the homeowners' items? These questions about staging versus

the reality and practicality of a person's home has sparked my interest in the everyday arrangement of homes.

I want to explore how different people live and what we can infer about people through their homes and the items within. I do this by illustrating cross-section houses and apartment buildings. A cross-section is a cutaway diagram through which you can see the interior of the home. Mine are similar to a dollhouse with the outer wall taken off and the front edge of the cutaway perpendicular to the viewer's line of vision, rather than depicting an angled view to show more perspective. I choose to depict these illustrations in a frontal manner because with the images so busy I feel like adding more perspective will complicate the illustration and take focus away from the details.

While looking up cross-sections by other artists Yelena Bryksenkova's illustrations caught my eye. Yelena was born in Saint Petersburg, Russia, and was raised in Cleveland. She went to school at the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore (Bryksenkova). Many of her illustrations are of people's everyday life in the home. The subject may be a woman playing cards, reading or taking a nap but her environments are just as important. She gives her rooms a real presence by including detailed items and numerous patterns. Yelena also collaborated with five other illustrators to create an illustrated house cross-section for an exhibition themed "Up My Street." Each artist contributed a room to the house, representing different kinds of families, comfort, happiness, and security (Bryksenkova). I fell in love with the idea of this piece, it has all of the different artists points of view put together and it created an interesting mismatched look.

There is an element of self-portraiture within my cross-sections, similar to the illustrated collections. I am living vicariously through the home owners. Elements from each house or room are based off of my own experiences. Mainly my home and those I have seen either in real life or through media. My illustrations show the type of houses I like, how I would arrange a room and items I have or wish I had. They are not based off of my fantasy dream home but aspects of how I would want live in the future. With the cross-sections I create a character and tell their story through their home and belongings. When creating characters I think about different aspects of their life from their age, occupation and family to hobbies and animals. Inspiration also comes from items and design elements and I think about the type of person that would have these in their home, building the character from there. The characters evolve as the illustration comes together and usually the by the end they are more complex than the original idea. Based off of individual experience each viewer can read a room differently creating variations on the story I am presenting.

There are no people included in these illustrations, the focus is the home itself. These dwellings impart information through the objects themselves or by the utilization of the space. Is the furniture from Ikea or does it represent years of trolling antique and thrift stores? Are the inhabitants organized and tidy? Do they have pets, collect vinyl records, or live on the Internet? In the house and apartment cross-sections I choose to work strictly in line and grey scale. This was to see how far I could push my line work and see if it could hold up without color. Usually color plays a large part in my work and this way I am able to focus and develop the quality of my lines.

Make It Work is a studio apartment cross-section and my largest illustration to date at 36 x 44.5 inches (Figure 3). The image shows six different apartments and the outside of the first floor of the building. The idea is to show how people deal with living in smaller spaces. Each apartment is the same size to easily compare them to each other. This illustration is made with brush and ink line work with no shading or coloring. I purposefully want no focal point, rather, I want the eye to move throughout. The illustration is meant to have a *Wheres Waldo?* quality to it, with the small dwellings packed with furniture, clothes, electronics, patterned items and other daily clutter. With each viewing, something new is seen and all of the pieces add up and provide insight about the apartment owner.

The houses while less complex have a different architecture and room separation than the apartments. My cross-section *Chandelier Love* is inspired by my mother's love for chandeliers (Figure 4). We once saw a show on HGTV where a couple was looking at houses they were considering buying. One of their options was a home that had a chandelier in every room, even the bathrooms. Our running joke since is that this could have been our house if we did not have any guys in our family. *Chandelier Love* has a settled in feel with comfortable furnishings, older bathroom and excessive light fixtures. With this cross-section I added grayscale coloring in addition to the line work. I wanted to experiment with tone before incorporating color. As opposed to the apartment buildings the house illustrations focus on one dwelling. The houses are less about comparing and more about taking in different aspects of one single home. After creating a series of these cross-sections I decided to concentrate on a single room of the home, the bathroom.

Bathrooms

Bathrooms are private spaces within the home where grooming and more intimate actions take place. When I started focusing specifically on bathrooms I made the decision to add to the realism of the images. To accomplish this my illustrations of individual bathrooms are drawn from photographs of actual spaces.

Acquaintances, friends, and strangers share photographs of their bathrooms with me informing the work beyond my own experience. I specifically ask for no people or staging in the photographs in order to see the room in its natural state. *Fernie* is referenced from bathroom photos emailed to me by someone I never met (Figure 5). Gradually I realized I was staging my previous illustrations the same way that the shows on HGTV stage their rooms. There was clutter but it was artfully placed clutter and the colors were reflective of my personal taste rather than realistic choices. The bathrooms from reference have more depth, instead of all of the rooms coming from my perspective they reflection their owners, each having their own story. This is what I was seeking all along.

Zines and Installations

Once the collaboration with the bathrooms began I started exploring different outputs for my illustrations. Besides printed illustrations I started experimenting with zines and three-dimensional illustrations. Both allow me to expand my practice within and beyond the gallery environment. Zines are small self-published magazines or booklets that can suit a variety of media including photo, poetry and illustration. Their purposes range from self-promotion, bringing awareness, art trades, etc. My zines allow viewers to look at different bathrooms simultaneously and to concentrate on specific details, including random debris on the floor and toilet paper holders.

T.P. Holders is like a small case study involving toilet paper holders (Figure 6). The zine is 2.5x4.25 inches with eight page and is made from one sheet of paper. It focuses on different types of holders and peoples habits involving them. Each scenario in the zine was gathered either from submitted bathrooms, my own bathroom or ones I have seen before. For example, several illustrations depict placing a roll on the tank of the toilet and leaving an empty roll in the holder. Leaving a roll of tissue on top of an empty holder is typical to my family. These illustrations show simple habits that viewers may not often think about but can easily relate to in their own lives.

The three-dimensional illustrations are based off of my own family's bathrooms. *Bathroom Clutter* shows the accumulation of shampoos, conditioners, and other soap containers, as well as the collection of tubes, bottles, and grooming instruments in one of our shared bathrooms (Figure 7). The illustration is life-size and created with brush and ink and acrylic paint on Bristol board. To make the image three-dimensional I folded the

Bristol board accordion style where the items adjoin each other so that the piece can stand up as if on a shelf or counter.

The medicine cabinet, *Untitled*, is inspired by my family's other bathroom (Figure 8). It is constructed out of foam board and has a hinged door so that the viewer can open and close it to reveal its contents. This is to give the feeling of peeking into someone's personal space. I replicated each item that was in my cabinet, drawing and painting them in the same way I did with *Bathroom Clutter*. By propping up the cut out pieces in the cabinet, similar to that of a pop-up book, there is a three-dimensional appearance with just the use of cut out paper and paint.

After creating the *Untitled* medicine cabinet I decided to expand on the idea and make an entire bathroom. The cabinet just gives a peek into someone's life. By creating an entire bathroom there more opportunity to try and piece together the bathrooms owner. The installation is inspired by my friend Samantha's own family bathroom just as my illustrated two-dimensional works were based off of real bathrooms. Unlike *Bathroom Clutter* and the *Untitled* medicine cabinet I chose to make the bathroom, *Samantha*, 3 dimension rather than propped up flat pieces of paper or board (Figure 9). I wanted to create an environment that was familiar but whimsical, as if you had walked into one of my illustrations. All the parts of a real bathroom such as the toilet, vanity, cabinets, toothbrushes, etc. are included and done in my own style (Figure 10). The life-size bathroom installation is made almost entirely of cardboard. I used a variety of paints to transform the cardboard: acrylic paints for glossier items, house paint for tiles and vanity and metallic spray paints for mirrors and metal objects. The only non-cardboard materials were used in the shower. It has a wooden base to help it stand and the clear vinyl to

represent the glass doors (Figure 11). Each piece is completed and detailed enough so the bathroom can be seen as a whole as well as individual pieces. I want people to walk into the space and be able to compare it to their own bathroom or ones they have seen before.

A large inspiration for *Samantha* was artist Ana Serrano. She is a Los Angeles based artist who graduated from Art Center College of Design. Her mediums vary from sculpture and collage to motion. “Much of her work bears references to those in low socioeconomic positions, with a particular interest in the customs, beliefs, informal economies, fashion, and architecture within these communities.”(Ana)

When I first decided to create the large scale environment I was unsure of what materials would be best to use or even how to go about making it. Before then the only thing I had built was my foam core cabinet. Ana’s work originally interested me based on her color and subject matter. When I found out many of her sculptures are made from cardboard she really caught my attention. Her sculptures of buildings are usually done in a smaller scale but for one of her shows, *Salon of Beauty*, at Rice University Art Gallery Houston Texas, she created an installation of large scale cardboard buildings. (Ana) These building were shops and homes inspired by those in the neighborhood she grew up in. While not life size they do end up towering over their viewers. Although her work is about the exteriors of buildings some of the ways she manipulated cardboard could translate to creating interiors. Before seeing her work I had not realized how versatile cardboard really is or how much paint it could hold up to. Ana’s work allowed me to see just how far I could go with my ideas and material.

Online Home Design

With the growth of the shelter culture industry and people seeking to improve their homes, sources of information on home design has gone beyond HGTV and now has a strong online presence. When making my illustrations I sought to represent diverse, realistic lived-in spaces. To this end, I started collecting a multitude of references. I was already looking at home magazines and watching HGTV, but quickly discovered that there are many dwelling blogs and websites online. Two of the sites that inspire my work are Apartment Therapy launched in April of 2004 and Design*Sponge which came along August of the same year. (Bonnet; Maxwell) Both sites have beautiful pictures documenting rooms and projects that really drew me in at the start.

Created by Grace Bonney, Design Sponge is a shelter design blog dedicated to home design and DIY information for transforming your living space. (Bonney) It was declared by the New York Times the “*Martha Stewart Living* for the Millennials”. (Picks) It has a hip feel to it, keeping up with trends and new and interesting DIY projects. The organization of this site is comprehensive and makes it easy for people to find the information they are looking for. Many of the homes featured on Design*Sponge belong to people with a creative background, textile designers, graphic artists, shop owners etc. As a fellow creative, it is interesting for me to take a peek inside those types of homes. All the homes featured, no matter who the owner is, are accompanied with a small description or mini interview from the owner to give extra insight to design.

I started to follow Apartment Therapy on Pinterest before I even knew it was a website. Pinterest is a website that allows its users to grab pictures from the internet and ‘pin’ them to one of their Pinterest boards as a way keep them all in one place, serving as

an on-line, public, scrapbook. Apartment Therapy was created by Maxwell Ryan and his brother Oliver. (Maxwell) It focuses not only on home design, but lifestyle as well. Their website includes sections dedicated to home keeping, technology, renovations and shopping. One of the core values of Apartment Therapy is that “A calm, healthy, beautiful home is a necessary foundation for happiness and success in the world. Creating this home doesn't require large amounts of money or space. It requires inspiration, connection to resources and motivation to do something about it.” (Maxwell)

One of my favorite things about the Apartment Therapy site is the Small Cool contest. People from around the world who live in small dwellings can enter the contest to see who has the best designed, re: “coolest” space. The categories are teeny -tiny (1-400 sq ft), tiny (401-600 sq ft), little (601-800 sq ft), small (801-1000 sq ft) and international (under 1000 sq ft). (Maxwell) The idea of utilizing the limited space you are given refers back to Apartment Therapy’s core belief that “creating this home doesn't require large amounts of money or space. It requires inspiration, connection to resources and motivation to do something about it”. (Maxwell) Many of these tiny rooms are cooler, and more well designed than many peoples larger homes. My cross-section illustrations of homes also focused on smaller dwellings so these homes were really particularly interesting to look at as reference.

Conclusion

With bright colors and playful lines, my work takes the mundane and brings it to the forefront. Everyday life is focused on and shown in various forms such as zines, illustrations and installations. One of the main aspects of my work is the home and the personality that people instill in their personal spaces. From clothing trends to domestic spaces and lifestyles it is the diversity of people's surroundings life that influences my work.

Works Cited

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Appendix



Figure 1: *Terrarium Collection*, digital, brush and ink, 9"x11"

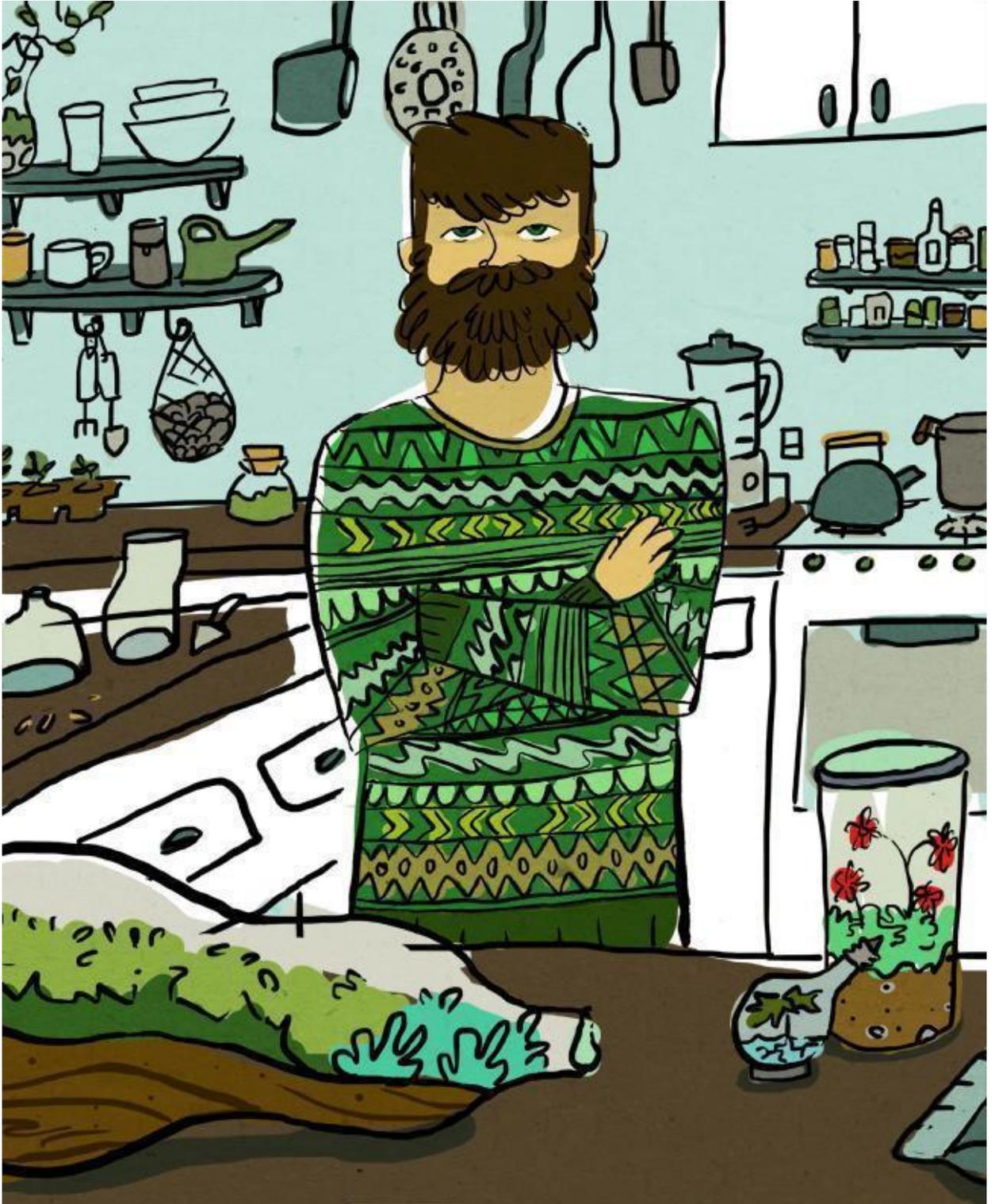


Figure 2: *Terrarium Collector*, digital, brush and ink, 9"x11"

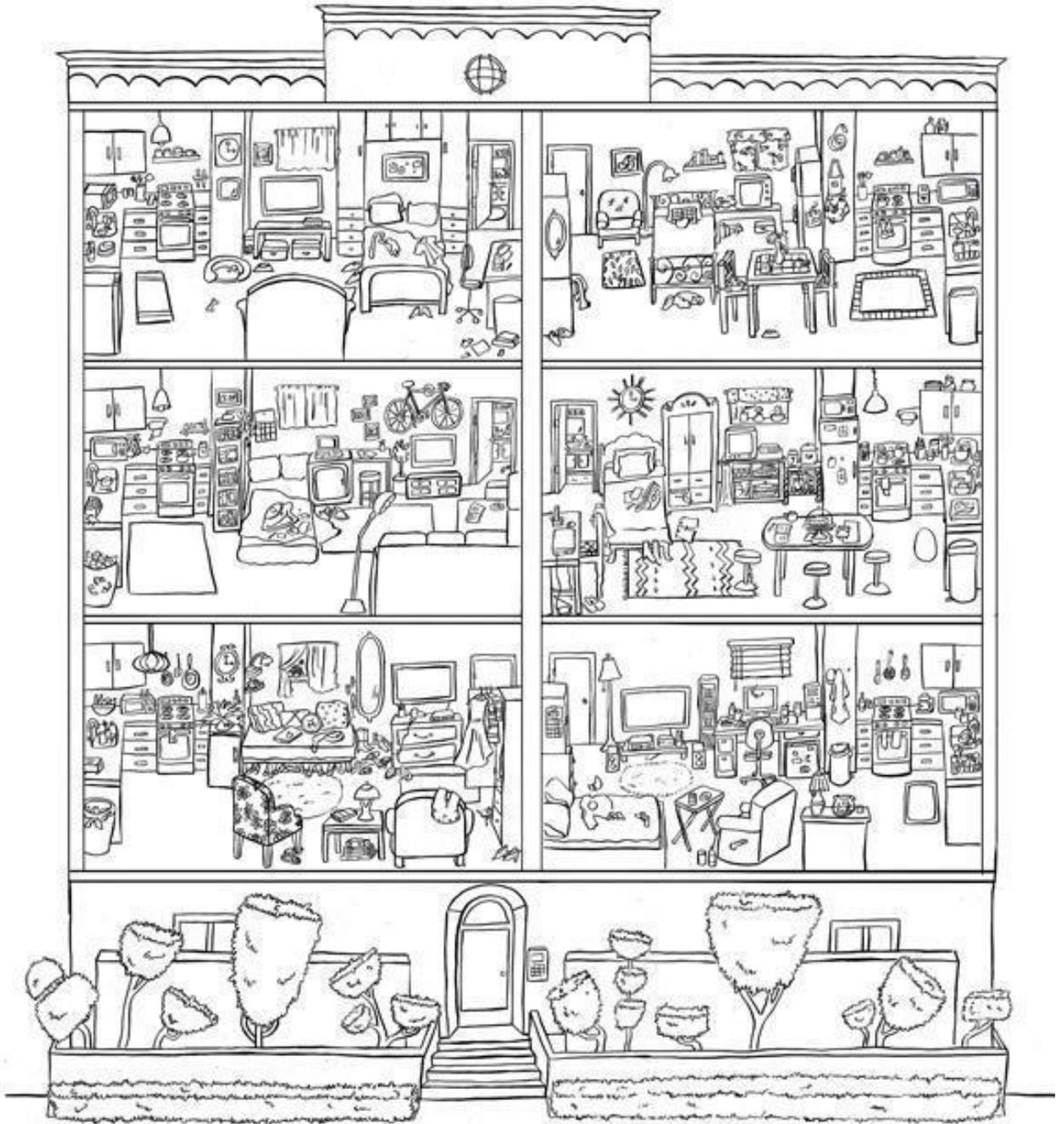


Figure 3: *Make It Work*, digital, brush and ink, 36" x 44.5"



Figure 4: *Chandelier Love*, digital, brush and ink,



Figure 5: *Fernie*, ink and brush, digital, 11"x14"

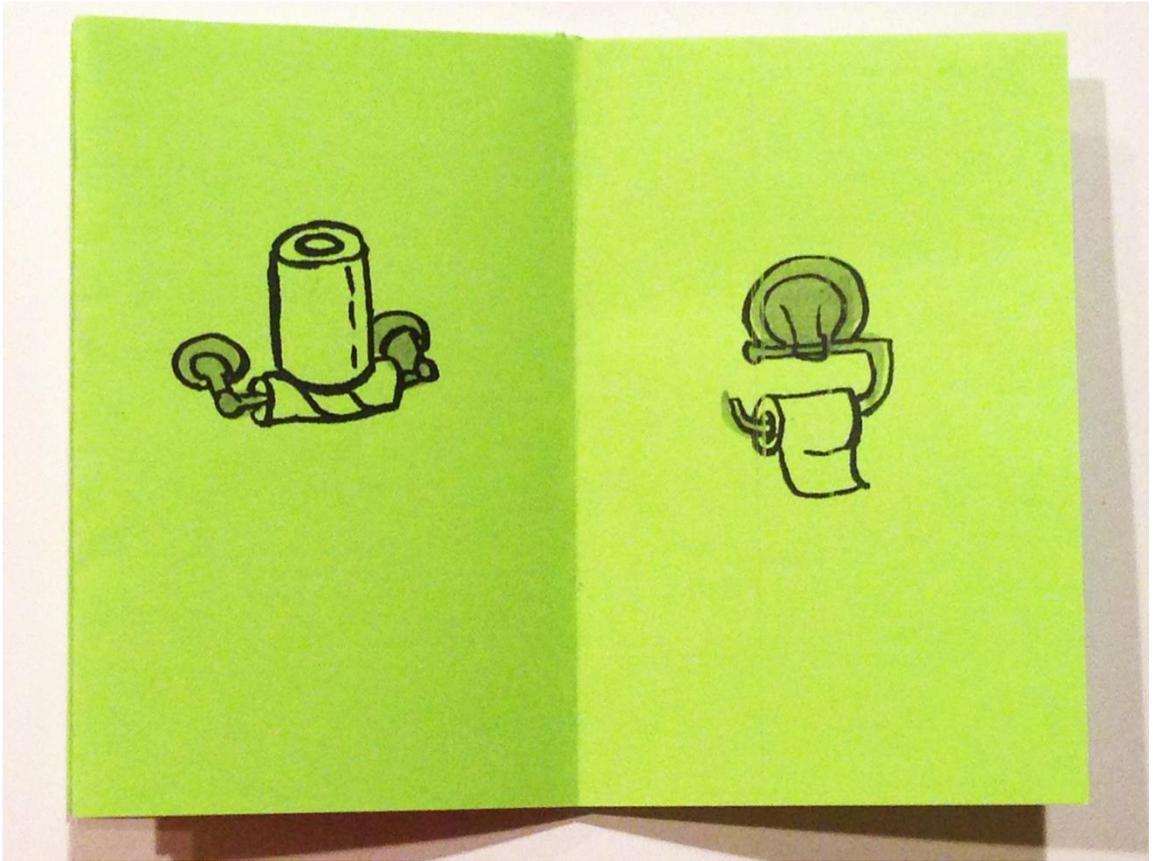


Figure 6: *T.P. Holders*, digital, brush and ink, 2.5"x4.25"



Figure 7: *Bathroom Clutter*, bristol board and acrylic paint, 45"x13"



Figure 8: *Untitled*, foamcore, bristol board and acrylic paint, 21"x25"



Figure 9: *Samantha*, cardboard, acrylic paint, ink, spray paint and vinyl



Figure 10: *Samantha*, cardboard, acrylic paint, ink, spray paint and vinyl



Figure 11: *Samantha*, cardboard, acrylic paint, ink, spray paint and vinyl