

THIEF OF FIRE

ISSUE III

“HOW TO GROW A DANDELION”



GOOSE FEATHERS

I have been thinking a lot about how I consume art - how all of us consume it. I have been consumed by thoughts of consumption! In my consumed state, when I'm being digested in the stomach of culture, two main worries play on my mind. I worry that:

(i) I am behind - that I don't know enough, haven't seen enough, haven't read enough to create great art.

ii) I have seen too much, read too much and haven't repeatedly engaged with individual works enough to create great art.

As you can see, this stomach is full of contradictory acid that keeps getting in my eyes.

As an artist, I feel pressure (self-imposed) to have listened to everything, read everything, know which painters belong to which school, know a film director's earliest indie project as well as their award-winning feature. I have lists and lists in my journal, on my phone and on my wall, of the art I haven't seen. Of big references that might fly passed me unnoticed at the dinner table. I do think, to create great art, you need to have seen a good bit of it first. The art you see shapes the art you make, the more art you engage with, the more likely you are to come across good art thus, the better your own art will become.

But what is meant by engaging with art? If I compulsively consume art just to be able to recognise it, is that engagement? Is engaging with art just comparison? Is it just the cataloguing of a work, situating it around other works you know, delighting in how they interact with each other? Mentally, to engage with art that way is easy. To hear a song and notice the album art is a reference to another album, that the opening line refers to a poem you have also read which actually was already a reference to a Shakespeare play. You delight in being in the know. Of course, the being-in-the-know of it all is addicting, you want to know more so you can see how it all connects. I am not saying that to notice references in art is a bad or unproductive thing, they have been put there on purpose. The artist

is using them to express something, but I suppose I want to say that even if you were to engage with art in a vacuum, where no other piece of art has ever existed (like a gallery of Ikea paintings), a piece of great art will still move you, it will still grab your subconscious and you must then decide to do the work to interrogate what about the piece stirred something in you and indeed, what was in you that was waiting to be stirred.



First conclusion: I *think* I have come to understand that art is not something you walk passed down a sterile corridor, categorically checking off items as you see them, even if it is tempting to want to know everything (an impossibility). Art is chance. You happen to walk into a museum on a certain day and something catches your eye. You happen to hear a song at a moment when you're present enough that it catches you between the ribs. If, to live life, is to drunkenly stumble down an alleyway that feels like it is twisting and turning with you at the centre, art is the clumsy combinations of fences, cardboard boxes and waist-high walls you fall on and lean against as you try and get to somewhere you hope you recognise. You touch it, cling to it, and cut yourself on its edges. You see the dirt it leaves on your clothes, the oil it leaves on your fingers, the smell it leaves in your hair. The world of art, like the twisting turning corridor is ever expanding, at some point you must recognise that you will not ever reach the end of either, you will not complete either before your consciousness ceases to exist. To accept that you simply cannot ever know everything perhaps gives you the freedom to enjoy more thoroughly the work that has come to you, it diffuses the pressure you might have once felt to politely excuse yourself from the feast laid out in front of you by one artist to catch afternoon tea with the work of another.



Sometimes I think the world has enough art now - that we are full up! That we would get more out of re-reading the books we have already read, listening to the albums we have already heard and rewatching the same movies. Culturally now, art feels slightly more single-use and knowing how many times I have had to sit with and ruminate over a piece of art to unlock its greatness, it truly terrifies me to consider all of the beauty and profound expression I may have missed along the way. Art is not to be used once and discarded, art is to be pulled apart and poked and prodded and thought about, set aside and returned to. When I was younger and more reliant on an iPod and CDs, I listened to the same songs over and over again. Slightly because I had no alternative choice but also because, through repetition and familiarity, I loved them. Although they might not have been the coolest choices (I did not grow up listening to Tom Waits and The Magnetic Fields like the rest of my friends seem to have) I KNEW them. Knew the words, knew the stories behind their recordings, knew that my father loved the songs too. The songs were so ALIVE to me.

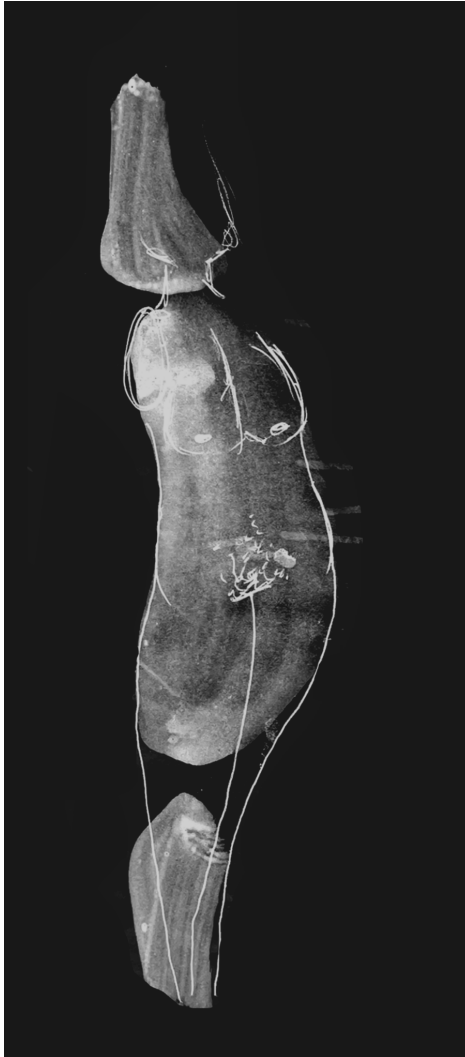
Second conclusion: I think sometimes I wish we could just limit the art available to us so that all of it becomes alive to us in the

same way it did to the child clutching her big sister's iPod. I suppose as I have grown older, certain works still do become alive to me in that way. To build on my earlier point, the pieces of art that find you are chance and the pieces of art within that first category that become part of your soul are chance again.

I think the key idea to maintain when engaging with any piece of art whether you have seen it a thousand times before or you are seeing it for the first time is to honour the artist and honour the piece itself with your full attention and to actively put in work to engage with the piece. Afterall, if art is an expression of the human condition, of life itself, then to actively engage with art, is to actively engage with the world around you in a heightened way. I have noticed, I think as a result of always having a phone and a distraction at hand, I find my consciousness and active mind can sometimes shrink away very far inside my skull. I feel like there is a layer of cotton wool or a goose with big white feathers sitting between my senses and my brain. Cushioning my thought, keeping my consciousness slightly anaesthetised always. I am desperate to RECLAIM my consciousness and I am certain the consumption of art is the mechanism through which I will do it.

To engage actively with art is to focus your eyes and put the work in to see leaves and budding flowers, moss and the sky between the branches, old fruit and the worms that consume it, where on another day, you might have just seen a tree, defying winter and pushing the world into spring.





A DAY AT THE MUSEUM

Releasing music is like standing naked in the centre of a room in a big art museum. People are walking around the entire museum and you must stand in your place, slightly relieved when they walk past the door- that they won't see your naval and unshaven ankles, slightly disappointed because maybe they would have been amazed by what they saw. You watch them find the room, read the sign on the door saying

'Woman Stands Naked on Podium' **please do not touch the art**

and make the decision on whether or not they should enter and engage with the piece. A handful, curiosity piqued, enter the room and you steel yourself to be surveyed by strange eyes.

Even worse than the strange eyes, however, are the people who have come to the museum specifically to see you naked. They actually scheduled the museum visit into their day - they popped in on their lunch break. You are already known to them. With them, there is a pressure to live up to whatever pre-conceived standards they may have. Maybe they saw you naked once before, maybe they have heard other people talk about seeing you naked and have extremely high expectations.

The room is full of people. Regardless of how they have found your exhibition, they are now here. Standing in front of you, staring at you, circling around. You are powerless. You cannot move. You have to fake strength and conviction in your own body because in the end it is literally all you have and you cannot change it. And after all, aren't you proud of it? You weren't kidnapped, forced to come to the museum and strip off - you organised it. You booked the space, designed the poster, advertised it. You conceived the idea and followed through. But now, at the crucial moment, you forget all that, you feel like you were brought here against your will. And you **CANNOT FLINCH!** Even when they stare at your toes, or they hold your gaze, or when you feel their eyes behind you staring at your ass. You cannot move, you cannot react, you cannot sway their opinion and say you're planning on getting into better shape, or that you're more bloated than usual after eating a big dinner to fortify yourself for the day at the museum. After a while they leave and more arrive - a couple visiting the city for a holiday, a man with a sketchbook, your sister, the neighbour. They are all allowed in, that is the rule, the concept YOU came up with. It is silent, it is isolating, it is exhilarating and in accepting you **cannot control** the opinion the viewers will form, you have no choice but to turn your gaze inward and be warmed by the quiet self-assurance radiating from your core.

HOW TO GROW A DANDELION

Hello! Jesus it has taken me SO long to get around to writing out the process of recording Dandelion but am happy to have gotten it done right before the one-month mark! Well, I am assuming I am going to get it done, I have just started writing so really there's no way of knowing if I'll get to the end of this little letter. Let's hope for the best. If you're reading this then HELLO META-FICTION if you're not reading this then you're lying to yourself and to me.

Ok. DANDELION!

I wrote Dandelion in 2022 and it is a very important song to me because it was the first song I felt indicated I was beginning to develop my own style. Before, when writing a song I would have an idea for a melody and from that think: *'ok what is a good chorus for that?'* or *'how will I write a bridge for this song?'* My approach to songwriting was somewhat formulaic - there was a set of points I had to hit to make it a finished song :

$$\left(\begin{array}{l} \text{VERSE} + \text{CHORUS} \text{ VERSE} \\ + \text{CHORUS} + \text{BRIDGE} + \\ \text{CHORUS} + \text{CHORUS} \end{array} \right) = \text{FINISHED SONG}$$

Dandelion broke me out of that formulaic tendency as it arrived to me already written. I was processing some stuff I had dealt with when I was younger at the time, picked up a guitar¹ and just played through the song immediately.

I could hear the song before I was able to play it which means in the first little voice memo I took of it, you can hear me struggling to play in time as I can't even work out if the song is in 6/8 or 4/4 - it was just already there in my head. I nearly find it jarring seeing how little

the lyrics have changed since the first time I rushed to write them out.

Once I had gotten a rough idea of the song I brought it to the band and it was EXTREMELY exciting playing it for the first time - I had never written a song that loud before (but have written many since). We played the song live for about a year and a half before eventually, we mostly retired it from the live set. The song never felt fully finished and by that point, I had written a lot of other music that scratched the same loud itch that song once did in the set.

When my management politely insisted I needed to start releasing music again (I have extreme paralysis about releasing music these days), they asked if there was any song I felt would be a good one to release as a stand-alone single (removed from the longer form project brewing as we speak). I came to the decision to record Dandelion quite naturally, it was a song that really marked out the way I wanted to write music in the future and although I feel I have developed a lot as a songwriter since writing it, it still held up in my head as a song I was proud of.

I sat at the piano, rearranged the track slightly and wrote a new ending for the song (before it kind of just fizzled out OR it went into 'High' which is unfortunately a song I fear may never see the light of Spotify). I like that, although the track started off in 2022, the new ending means there is still more of a 2024 Last Apollo feel to the song.

When beginning pre-production, I went back and listened to a lot of live recordings of the track, both with the live band and with just cello and piano. This song used to always stand out to me as the cool, loud one in the set but actually, the quieter, cello version was the one that now felt more effective to me.

I decided to base the studio version off a recording of me playing the track in Paris but with a more ambient flare (I was extremely into my accordion/lover 'Stella' when arranging the studio version). The track was recorded in an entirely new way to anything I have done before! Naoise and I mapped out the track, put down a scratch base for me to record the vocals over and then me, Naoise

¹ I know I wrote the song on the guitar as the only chords I could play on the guitar were Em, G, C and D.

and Sam all recorded new parts remotely across our various countries and apartments using zoom mics. The piano on the track is my CHILDHOOD PIANO - which I firmly believe is the best-sounding piano in the world and one I have always hoped to record with. The drums were recorded in Sam's New York apartment and everything else was recorded in Naoise's London flat.

This process was eye-opening to me and is definitely the way I want to record everything in future - the lack of time pressure I usually feel when renting a studio meant there was so much more time to experiment and have fun recording the track.

One negative side effect to this new infinite recording time was not knowing when to finish. That was something I was VERY BAD at calling. It is unfortunate that Cameron Winter's *Heavy Metal* (ye ye ye everyone's talking about it whatever) came out at the same time as we were just finishing up recording. Hearing such incredibly tasteful yet creative production made me want to take a slice out of that cake and keep messing with the track even after I agreed to send it off to be mixed. In a very feverish late-night session, I overhauled the entire track and sent it into the band, panicking, waiting for them to agree that we needed to start the whole song again heading in this new direction. That was not the rapturous response I received.

After some tough love from my band where they told me it was time for 'pens down, close the exam papers' I agreed that the final version I sent in might not in fact have been the best one and that the song was really finished a week earlier when I added the recorded piano to the track.

I am so excited to have gotten the track out and am even more excited to just keep going now and refine this extremely fun way of recording more music for your lovely ears. I have realised releasing music is not exactly as high stakes as I was beginning to feel - there is no pressure and in fact it is just amazing to be in a position to get to create art!

Right at the beginning of the process when I was stressing about how my style had

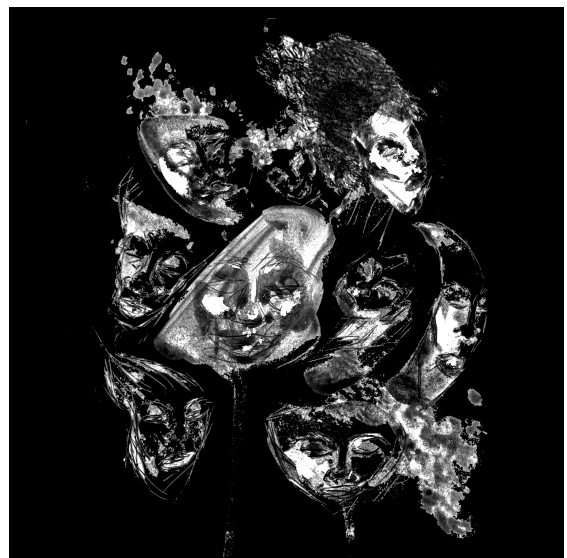
changed since writing the track and how it would probably have changed again by the time the track was actually released, Naoise made a very well-timed, well-placed quote. It's the third verse from Mount Eerie's 'I Spoke with a Fish'.

*Recorded music is a statue of a waterfall
The flashing glint on the marble where the eye
once was
on a taxidermied marlin's frozen leap
With our without me there to see
rain begins to fall
back into the creek*

I guess it means that, because music by nature is so transient, to record it 'accurately' is actually kind of an impossibility, and thus you can disregard that as a goal entirely and instead view the process as just capturing one one moment in the song's ever-developing life. That freedom completely took away an element of pressure I was feeling paralysed by and allowed me to finally get to work on recording Dandelion.

I am very lucky to have many wise fish to speak to all of the time. Thank you to those fish and thank YOU for listening, reading and hanging out with me for a while! I am extremely excited to show you everything I am working on,

LUCY.

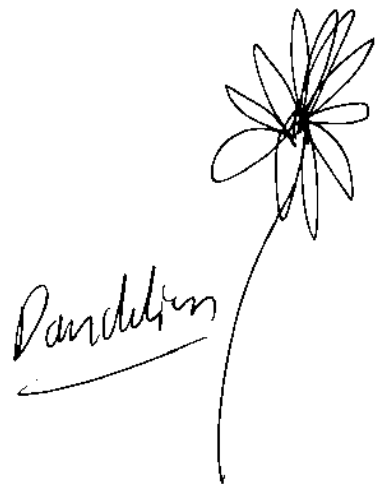


Child why are you going
You need too but let me carry you
Child you are dying
But you exist as you are and you
be there till the very end

Child why are you trying
to do it all on your own let me
lend a hand

~~Child~~ Red hair dandelion

You're so mean to yourself you so hard on yourself so just let
me be kind



Dandelion