ILLUSTRATION 1

ASSIGNMENT 1

SPOT ILLUSTRATION

Client: The New Yorker Magazine:

Assignment 1: Create a set of spot illustrations for the magazine.

- Each week an illustrator creates a set of spots based on a theme or narrative.
- Typically there are 7-10 spots and they are sprinkled throughout the magazine.
- Illustrators are not assigned the work but rather send pitches into the magazine.

Q: What is a **spot illustration**?

A: A small illustration used to accompany the text of a story, news article, website posting, magazine article, book interior, packaging, etc.

- helps break up text
- small in size, an inch or two
- typically black and white or greyscale
  but can be in color
- could be considered a cartoon:
  a drawing intended as satire, caricature, or humor

Alexandra Pichard

spot splits column

1” x 1.36”

things that really matter.” In addition to calling for emissions standards, a Green New Deal would include a federal jobs guarantee and universal health care. Sunrise argues that a climate transition without a social safety net would occasion a broad backlash, the way fuel taxes in France led to the *gilets jaunes* protests. Yglesias and others contend that this is a Trojan-horse maneuver that makes climate legislation harder to pass. “Sunrise talks the talk of a big grassroots movement, but Democratic politicians actually prioritize climate change more than their base is demanding, not less,” Yglesias continued. “If they’re a mass movement, who are the masses they’re speaking on behalf of?” He conceded that Sunrise has been around for only five years, and is still growing: “It’s totally possible that twenty years from now they’ll be a super-powerful movement and I’ll look like an idiot. So far, though, I don’t see it.”

In 1977, more than fourteen hundred activists broke into a construction site in Seabrook, New Hampshire, where a nuclear-power plant was being built. They wanted to draw attention to the national anti-nuclear-energy movement, which was then considered either marginal or risible, among people who were aware of it at all. (This was two years before Three Mile Island, and nine years before Chernobyl; the Nixon Administration had launched Project Independence—a plan that called for, among other things, the construction of a thousand nuclear-power plants—to little resistance.) The protesters were arrested, and they spent the next two weeks in jail. “During those two weeks, nuclear energy became a worldwide public issue as the mass-media spotlight focused on the activists,” a movement strategist named Bill Moyer later wrote. “We wondered how on Earth they did it.”

When Moyer went to meet with some of the protesters, though, they “arrived with heads bowed, dispirited, and depressed, saying their efforts had been in vain.” After a year of activism, they hadn’t even blocked the construction of the Seabrook plant, much less all of Project Independence. Moyer thought that they had it all wrong. Their first year wasn’t a waste; it was an unusually effective start to a multi-decade project. He came to think of this as a universal law of social movements: When you set out to achieve the impossible and merely achieve the improbable, you feel like a failure.

He wrote what he called a Movement Action Plan, laying out “the eight stages of successful social movements.” The anti-nuclear activists, he argued, had rushed from Stage One, “Normal Times,” to Stage Four, “Social Movement Take-Off.” This was the good news. The bad news was that they were now entering Stage Five, “Identity Crisis of Powerlessness.” “After a year or two, the high hopes of movement take-off seem inevitably to turn into despair,” Moyer wrote. “Most activists lose their faith that success is just around the corner and come to believe that it is never going to happen.”

“I keep trying to tell everyone: Sunrise is in Stage Five,” Mejia said to Nikayla Jefferson. He delivered this news as if it were a cancer diagnosis, but he meant it to be reassuring. “You read Moyer and you’re, like, ‘Oh, yeah, it sucks right now because it has to suck.’” They were in downtown Chicago, in an old union hall with W.P.A.-style murals on the walls, meeting with hub leaders from around the country.

An organizer named Stevie O’Hanlon gave a PowerPoint, previewing some of what the front-loading team had come up with, and then led an informal poll of the room. “I’m going to list three things that Sunrise 1.0 set out to do, in 2017, and you respond with how well you think we did,” they said. “The first is ‘Get the public to agree that there’s a crisis.’” Most of the thumbs went up.

“Cool,” O’Hanlon continued. “No. 2: ‘Get the public to agree on our solution.’”

Some thumbs up, some thumbs sideways.

“Fair enough,” they said. “Last one: ‘Get the government to enact our solution.’”

A near-unanimous vote of thumbs-down. Mejia leaned over and whispered to me, “See? Stage Five!”

The Build Back Better Act is dead, but Joe Manchin indicated last month that he’s willing to “come to agreement” on “the climate thing.” If this doesn’t happen—if Congress falls one vote short of passing the largest climate-change bill in history, and then Republicans gain control of the House or the Senate in 2022, or the White House in 2024—it’s hard to imagine the identity crisis of powerlessness that could result. When I asked John Kerry about this scenario, he said, “I’m only going to think positively, because the worst outcomes are so problematic.” When I asked the Sunrise 2.0 organizers about it, they shared with me a Google Doc outlining a “Twilight Zone” strategy, to be implemented if the Democrats lose their trifecta in Washington. At that point, would it make more sense to focus on corporate boycotts? Could pieces of the Green New Deal be won at the state or city level, building momentum from there? The short-term outlook might be dispiriting, but the over-all strategy and the long-term goal remain the same. “We fight for massive federal intervention no matter what,” the document reads.

In Chicago, when their work was done, a group of organizers went to an all-ages bar and arcade. Some, who were older than twenty-one, ordered drinks; others, who weren’t, ordered French fries and played shuffleboard. Mejia and Jefferson squeezed into a banquette, musing about the threat of societal breakdown and the possibility of revolution. At some point, somehow, Jefferson ended up acquiring a stranger’s half-eaten birthday cake. “There are still beautiful things in this world,” she said.

Stage Seven of Bill Moyer’s Movement Action Plan is “Success,” but, of course, not every movement gets there. There is now an operational nuclear plant in Seabrook, New Hampshire, but it’s one of fifty-five nuclear plants in the country, not one of a thousand. It’s debatable whether this is a good thing, but it’s proof of what movements can achieve against long odds. Today’s climate activists face even longer odds, and they have less time. According to Moyer’s model, they may not win major concessions for several years. The question, at that point, will be whether it’s too late. ♦

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spot in column

which is just down the road from J.C.V.I., he had long hair, a full beard, and a funky face mask. A painter since the age of ten, he illustrated his first *E. coli* during his postdoc, in 1991; the article that resulted, “Inside a Living Cell,” became a sensation, and his cellular watercolors have since become ubiquitous in textbooks and databases and appeared on the covers of *Cell*, *Nature*, and other journals. Goodsell’s work is partially funded by the Protein Data Bank—a project of the Research Collaboratory for Structural Bioinformatics—and while painting he frequently consults the P.D.B., which maps large biological molecules, including protein shapes, in atomic detail. He scours the literature for information about relative concentrations, metabolic rates, and the dynamics of protein interactions.

In his office, Goodsell was working on a new painting. A pencil sketch on an easel was to be a molecular-level depiction of milk. “We think of milk as just being this white, opaque, you know, nothing,” he said. “This is going to help put some structure to it, showing all the bits and pieces that are inside.” The sketch contained a few dots of color. Using a brush, he applied wash below a tangle of hourglass blobs representing casein proteins, which are abundant in milk. He started painting an antibody. In all, there were more than a thousand molecules to fill in.

Goodsell showed me some recent paintings: a particle of the coronavirus trapped in a respiratory droplet; a closeup of the flagellar motor of *E. coli*. One of his favorites was a portrait of JCVI-syn3A, the minimal cell. In order to capture it whole, he had made a painting nearly three feet across. A cleave was pinching the cell in half. Cells divide by splitting in two; it is believed that every cell in existence is a direct descendant of a single original—a split of a split of a split, through the generations. The membrane was light green, and the ribosomes—molecular machines that assemble proteins—were pink. Shaded coils and blobs of various sizes and orientations hung off one another, layered in a trippy cartoon.

The image communicated a sense of crowdedness. Diagrams often show a cell’s “organelles,” or specialized, factory-like structures, as islands in a sea of empty cytoplasm. But the cytoplasm is actually jammed with proteins, RNA, and other small molecules, all commingling at incredible speeds. It’s sometimes tempting for biologists to think of proteins mainly in terms of their individual structures, or as nodes in an abstract biochemical flowchart. Goodsell’s art makes vivid the messy reality in between.

As Goodsell painted, Arthur Olson, one of his colleagues, stopped by. Olson is a pioneer of 3-D computer modelling; among other things, his research group is working on CellPaint-VR, virtual-reality software that takes users into the cellscape. “It’s a totally different world,” he said.

Later, Olson showed me around the virtual cell. He put on a V.R. headset; I watched on a monitor, sharing his point of view. We began in a void. Then, using a glove controller, he conjured some polio viruses—purple planetoids with bumpy, almost fuzzy surfaces. He added some antibodies—a host of pink, pockmarked shapes, which swarmed the invaders. “These are atomic representations that you can also interact with,” Olson said, fiddling with a menu. He used his controller to select a ribosome, and attached it to a strand of RNA. It looked like a head of cauliflower.

Olson dragged the slider that controlled scale, so that the ribosome seemed to fill the world. There was nothing in view but individual atoms. He laughed, then reversed course, until the smoother contours on the ribosome’s surface emerged. He tugged at the ribosome, trying to orient himself.

“That’s the other thing,” he said. “You can get lost.”

Olson told me about an experience he’d had while building a virtual scene inside a red blood cell. The environment was so crowded that he had to make himself small. “I had this feeling that I was in a small plot of land in a huge valley that rose all around me,” he said. “It gave me a totally different sense of the scale.” He had been planting individual membrane proteins in the cell. “I mean, you can read in the literature that there are five hundred thousand of these in the red blood cell. But to actually experience it, in the sense of being in the landscape . . .” He trailed off. I thought of the ribosome extending all around us. It seemed like an environment you could get to know, like a park near your house.

The cellscapes created by Goodsell and Olson are best guesses—like an architect’s 3-D renderings of an unbuilt house. The other side of the equation is microscope imaging, which, Goodsell told me, has made a “quantum leap” in recent years. A technology called cryo-electron microscopy, or cryo-EM, had developed to the point where it could help reveal the cellscape as it actually is, in startling detail. “They’re getting really close to seeing cells at the level of the paintings I do,” he said. “It’s going to put me out of business.”

Nearby, Elizabeth Villa, a physicist turned biologist, runs the cryo-EM lab at the University of California, San Diego. When I visited, Villa, who is originally from Mexico City, had whirlwind energy: in the past few months, she had become a U.S. citizen, received tenure and been named a Howard Hughes Medical Investigator. The title comes with a grant that provides her lab with millions of dollars for at least the next seven years. “It’s been a big summer,” she told me. “I fell in love with cryo-EM. Now it’s on the cover of every journal.”

Light microscopes, like those you’d find on a high-school lab bench, have a fundamental limitation: light’s wavelength is a quarter of a micron, about the size of three minimal cells laid end to end. Such microscopes have difficulty resolving anything smaller. In the nineteen-thirties, scientists experimented with electrons, which can resolve individual atoms. But electron beams risk damaging the biological material at which they’re fired. “Imagine if you took a picture with a camera and your subject melted,” Villa said. By the eighties, a team led by a biophysicist named Jacques Dubochet discovered that samples could be better preserved by flash-freezing them: this was cryo-electron microscopy. The technique, which later won Dubochet and his collaborators a Nobel Prize, transforms water molecules into glass-like ice, in effect stopping life in mid-res. By the twenty-tens, further advances

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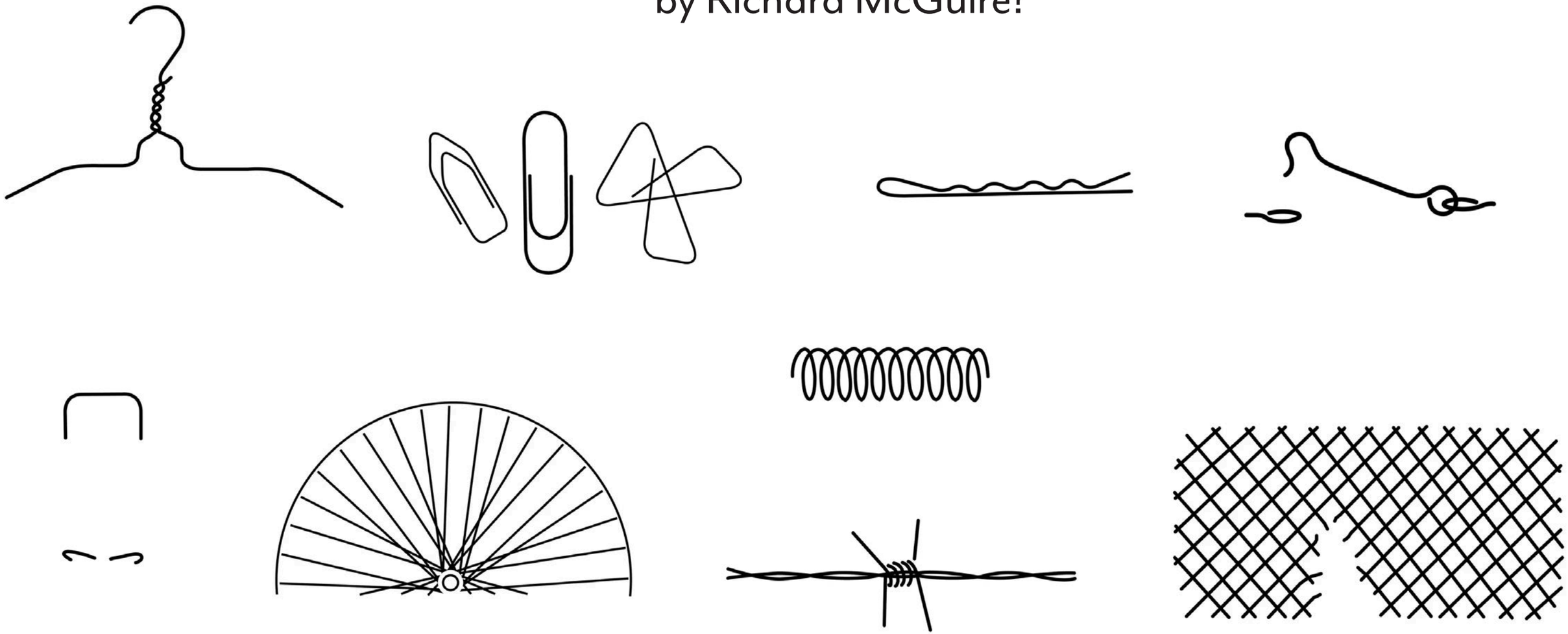
1” x 1.45”

“Also, I think if they were ganged up on a page, they would seem more like comics, and they’re not comics. They’re very loose narratives.”
—Richard McGuire

Read article

Richard McGuire: The Art of the New Yorker Spot Illustration

What is the concept or theme for these spot illustrations by Richard McGuire?



Your spots should have a

Theme or concrete **concept**

concept: an abstract idea or general notion

and they may also

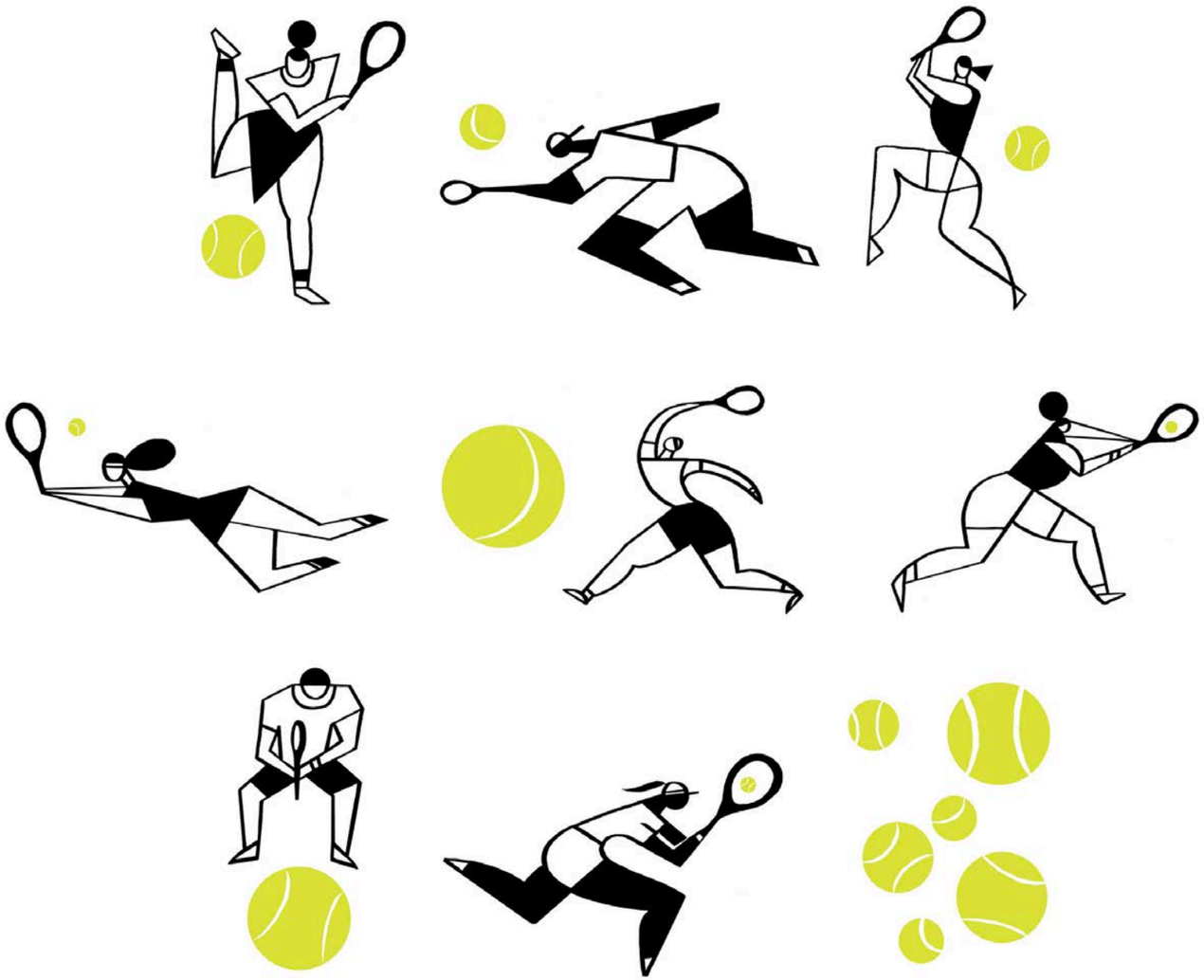
Create a sequentional narrative/ tell a story

or

Show a process of events

Your concept may

- be based one one object
- be holiday, seasonal, or news focused
- be based on a joke, pun, or word play
- be summed up in one sentence



Hannah Barcyzk

Let’s look at some spots!









The New Yorker

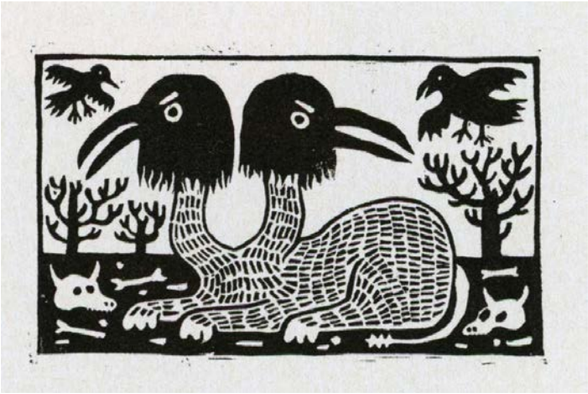
August 15, 2022

Spots by artist Christoph Abbrederis

Concept: Fire Hydrant narrative

Loose comic style, black line work, grey tone, and single pop of red





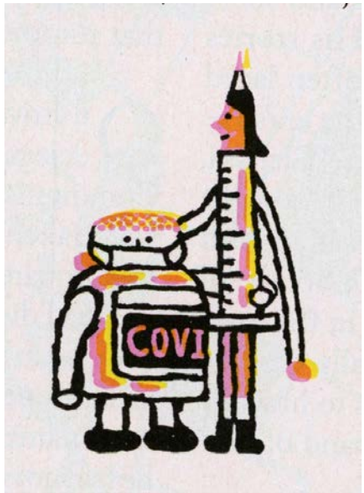
The New Yorker

July 5, 2021

Spots by artist Edward Steed

Concept: Monsters

Style: Appears to resemble woodcut or blockprint



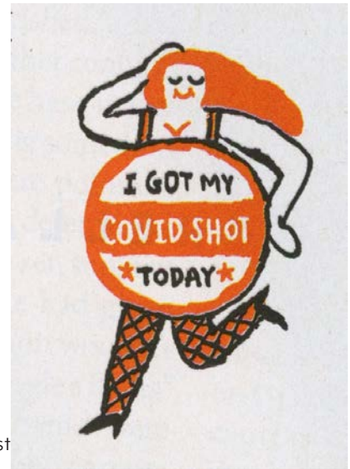
The New Yorker

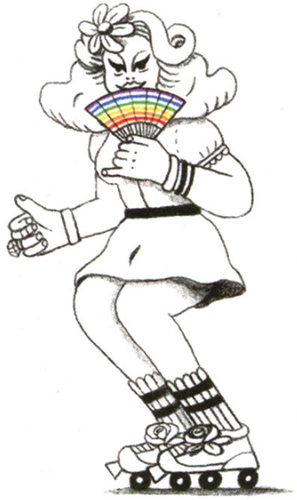
October 25, 2021

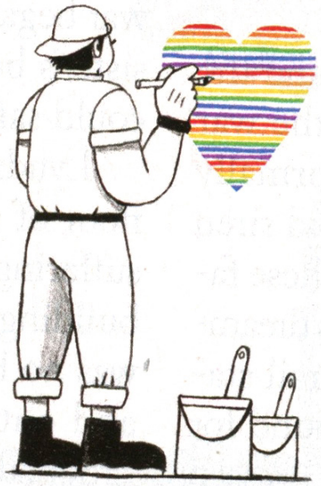
Spots by artist JooHee Yoon

Concept: Covid Halloween

Style: Line art with orange







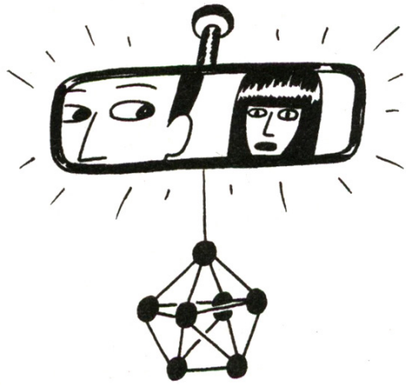
The New Yorker

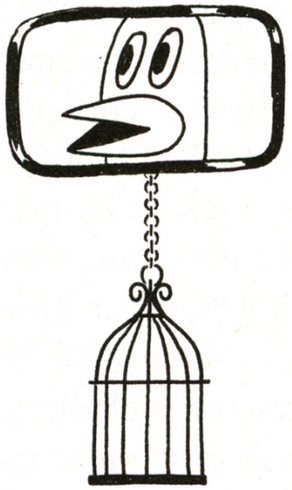
June, 27, 2022

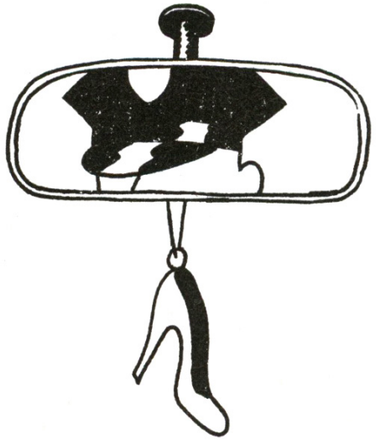
Spots by artist Doris Liou

Concept: Pride Month

Style: Fine Line with rainbow pattern







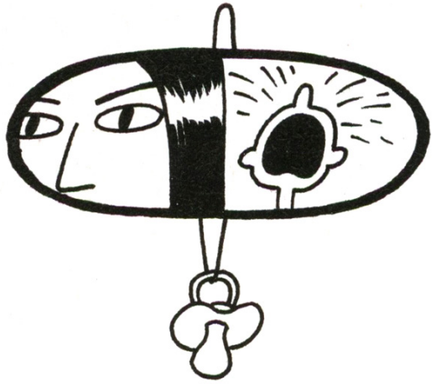
The New Yorker

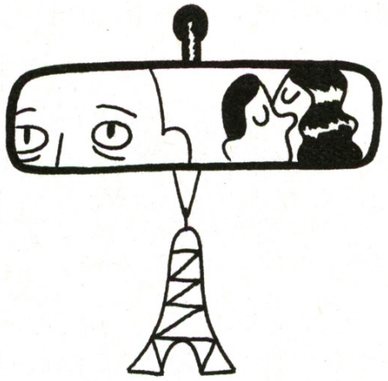
August 9, 2021

Spots by artist Antony Huchette

Concept: Rearview mirror

Style: B&W Line/ high contrast





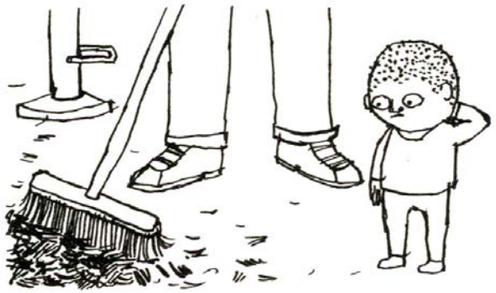
The New Yorker

March 7, 2022

Spots by artist Edward Steed

Concept: Kid's Haircut

Style: B&W Line

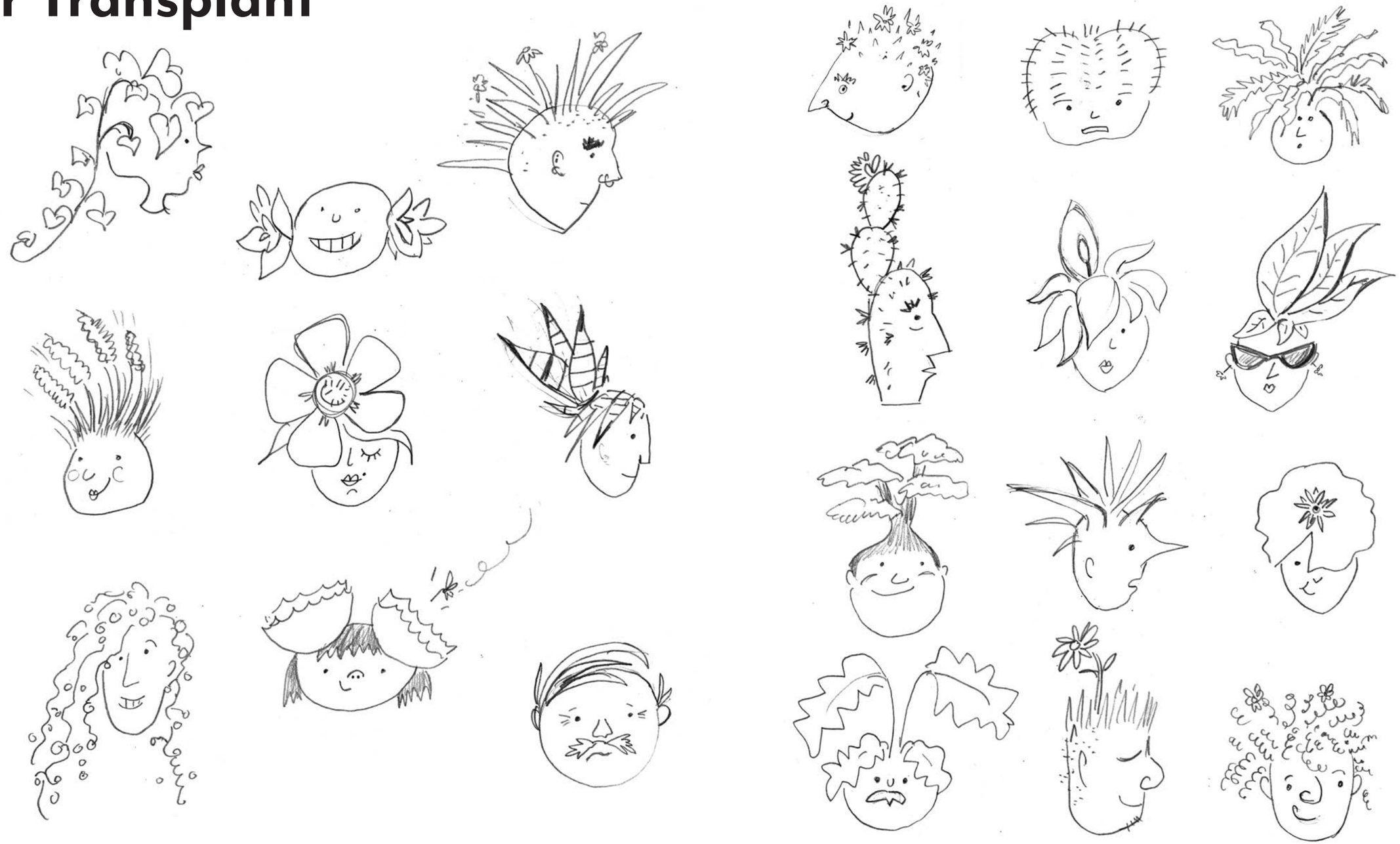


Here a a few pitches I submitted as sketches.

(They were all rejected. Well I never heard back.)

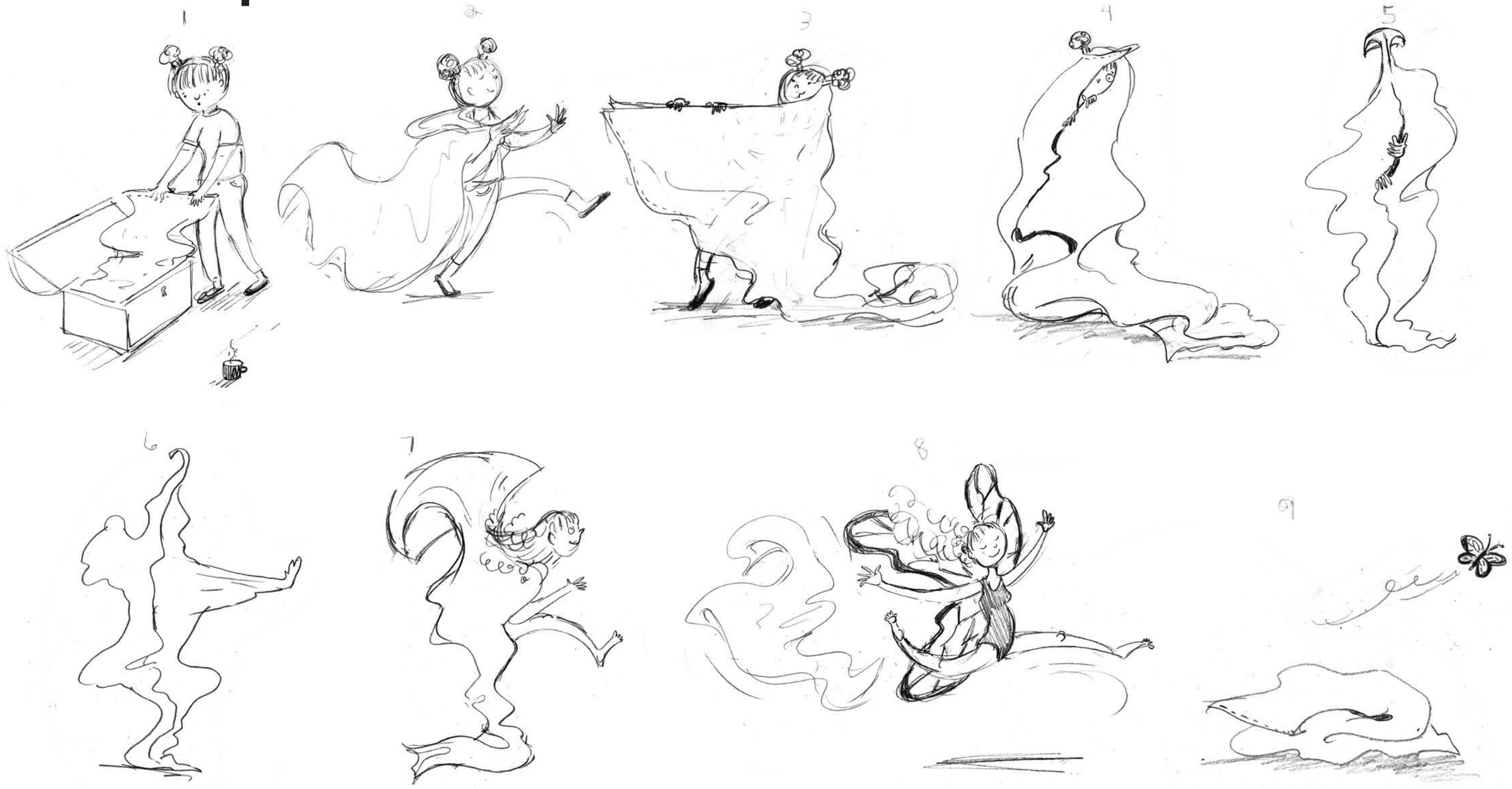
Ice Cream Cones

Hair Transplant



COMD

Metamorphosis



FINAL ART

- You will create 6-10 finished spots.(You will have a few weeks to work so don't panic)
- Spots can be black and white, Black line with greyscale, or have minimal color.
- Spots can be done traditionally or digitally.
- Final spots will be viewed digitally as well as printed.
- 2 spots should be placed and printed in sample text that is printed.
- Spots are small so remember quality and concept are important.
- Style should be consistent.

ASSIGNMENT, PART 1

1. BRAINSTORM: Start with writing, make a list, create a word web

2. Come up with at least 2 solid ideas to present/pitch, you can present more if you like. Write out each concept in a sentence. We will critique in class and help decide which direction to go in.

3. Have at least three “thumbnail” sketches for each concept.

6 small sketches in total.

4. Sketch in your sketchbook or on paper

5. **Post your word web, written concept, and sketches to Openlab.**

REMEMBER

Have fun! Put yourself into it. Ask yourself, what do I want to draw, what do I like to draw and see if you can find a theme or concept from that.

Stuck for ideas? I get my best ideas when taking a walk, daydreaming, going on a run, or taking a shower. Put your phone away.