

SIDNEY LAZARUS

1912 - 1973

FANTASTICAL AND VISIONARY WORKS

October 29th through December 19th 2015

Exhibition organized by
Robert Kashey, David Wojciechowski

Catalog by Stephanie Hackett

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COVER ILLUSTRATIONS: *At the Bottom*, 1953, cat. no. 18

BACK COVER ILLUSTRATION: *Sanctuary* (detail), 1938, cat. no. 5

GRAPHIC DESIGN: Keith Stout

TECHNICAL NOTES: All measurements are in inches and in centimeters;
height precedes width. All drawings and paintings are framed. Prices on request.
All works subject to prior sale.

SIDNEY LAZARUS

A mid-twentieth century artist who matched technical virtuosity with a boundless imagination, Sidney Lazarus’ current obscurity is only understandable by examining his viewpoint and motivations.

The inspiration for his art came from his high regard for the “impromptu impulse.” All impulses were viewed by him as creative directives, no matter how playful or serious, mischievous or dark. Such irreverent spontaneity gave shape to both his daily life and his art. One day he would do a meticulous drawing of a doorknob, the next it was some hauntingly surreal image of demons.

Manhattan Hospital claimed he was born on March 13, 1912. However, his mother claimed it was March 15th. He split the difference, opting for March 14th, and celebrated all three days. Lazarus grew up in the Bronx, New York, in a Jewish family with two brothers, Harry and Leon, and parents who owned a small dressmaking shop. His parents came to recognize him as gifted from an early age because of his precocious skill at drawing. Though his mother painted watercolors and his father did pencil drawings (in a faint line), they had no idea how to parent an artistic prodigy. So, they took the path of least resistance and spoiled him.

Indulged by his parents at home, he resented the routines of public school and the tedium of learning by rote. He would regularly drift out of the classroom from boredom. In response to his truancy, the guidance department at Morris High School assigned him to a renowned British child psychologist, Dr. Margaret Posthuma. She realized his talent at once and assisted him in entering and winning citywide art competitions. In 1931, he won a scholarship to attend the Art Students League, where he studied under Kimon Nicolaides and Jean Charlot. Charlot took him under his wing

In the mid 1950s, my father became idealistic about creativity as a power that everyone can access. He collected empty cigar boxes and filled them each with a harmonica, a sketchpad with colored pencils, and a writing tablet with a pen. He then piled these kits by his front door and gave them out to anyone who came by.

His ultimate dream was to live in a world where his artistic talent did not set him apart, but gave him commonality with a human race all working to its full creative potential.

“How would you define a person that is not creative?” “I once asked him. “They have abdicated,” he replied.

—Douglas Lazarus (son)

as a protégé, and when Lazarus married, a few years later, Charlot paid for all the furnishings in the newlyweds' apartment.

In 1932, at the age of 20, he became the youngest contributor to Alexander King's Americana magazine, a short-lived satiric publication that had as contributors: George Grosz, John Sloan, S.J. Perlman, William Steig, Peggy Bacon, ee Cummings, Al Hirschfeld and Miguel Covarrubias. He did numerous drawings for the magazine and became a lifelong friend of King and Hirschfeld. That same year, Charlot arranged for a one-man exhibition of Lazarus' drawings at the Julien Levy Gallery.

During the Depression, from 1932 to 1938, Lazarus participated in group shows at the Ferrargil, J.B. Newman, Weyhe, and Arista Galleries. The World described his drawings as "extraordinary for both their extraordinary artistic quality and their strange truculence." And The Herald Tribune commented, "His pen statement is rich in its variety of effects."

In 1935 he was appointed by the College Art Association as an art supervisor for three grade schools in Far Rockaway, as part of the WPA's mandate to employ artists. He also served as an art teacher for children in New York City settlement houses until 1940. When, in 1942, the Museum of Modern Art formed a committee under Victor D'Amico to analyze art in education, Lazarus was one of a handful of artists appointed to the committee.

With America's entry into World War II, Lazarus, through the United States Office of Education, enrolled in Manhattan College for coursework in advanced engineering drawing. At the same time, he was also working as an illustrator for Parents Institute. In 1942, The Metropolitan Museum employed him to do decorative maps, chalk talks, and demonstrations in its Junior Museum.

My father pointed out that everything Franz Kline was accomplishing could be found by enlarging a Rembrandt drawing of a lion. He observed that the last pen lines in the tail were exactly what Kline was looking to replicate, and that color and paint had been celebrated by Turner, for their own sake, a hundred years earlier

—Douglas Lazarus (son)

When the Depression ended, along with government work projects, Lazarus was approached by Robin King, Alex King's son, to enter a joint business venture drawing comics. For the next ten years, he drew comic book art for DC, Dell, Parents Institute and Quality Comics, which made it possible for him to earn a living working part time and still be able to find time to paint and draw. It enabled him to support his wife, Sylvia, and two sons, Lawrence and Douglas. During this period, he also illustrated books for Charles Scribner & Sons, Harper & Brothers, Julien Messner, and Whitman Brothers, as well as drawing for the PM newspaper.

In the 1940s, America's art world was dominated by Social Realism and Regionalism. Lazarus didn't commit himself to either of those movements, but they appealed to him. Of all the modern art movements, he identified most with Surrealism and Dadaism.

As Abstract Expressionism came to define New York's art world, Lazarus pulled back from the gallery scene as he was much more interested in the role of Surrealism and DaDa in art.

In 1947, Lazarus left New York City and purchased a home upstate, near Newburgh, N.Y., that overlooked the Hudson River Valley. There, he was inspired to draw and paint both from life and his imagination.

During this period, he became good friends with the artist and sculptor Harry Wickey, who lived nearby in Cornwall. Wickey tried to help Lazarus' career by bringing curators and collectors to his studio. Throughout his life, Lazarus had met individuals who wanted to help him gain recognition for his work. He took particular delight in sabotaging those opportunities. When Wickey brought a prominent art collector to see him, promising that Lazarus was a truly wonderful artist, Lazarus perversely presented a grotesque spoof on Ingres' Odalisque, a

The collector left in disgust, Wickey said, "Okay Sid, this is the last time." My father liked to say, "My luxury in life is wasting opportunities. It's an expensive luxury, and not many people can afford it." It's tempting to consider my father a professional non-conformist, a malcontent, a contrarian, but the man and his work refuse such easy categorizations. He was a man who created art effortlessly but had, from a fear of being controlled by worldly success, derailed his own career many times.

—Douglas Lazarus (Son)

painting of a sleeping concubine, her mouth open, toothless, her false teeth in a glass of water on a nearby end table.

By the early 1950s, the boom in comics had faded, and Lazarus turned to earning a living through portrait painting, creating thirty-five locally commissioned portraits in the Newburgh area.

From that time forward, he housed the bulk of his work in a new format: small pictures, which he organized and mounted on 11” x 14” sheets, arranged by theme, and stored in black cardboard portfolios. All of them were finished images rendered in pencil, pen and ink, and colored wax pencils, these were highly personalized pictures, never intended for exhibition.

He called these drawings “Primagraphs,” signifying “first image,” meaning that they flowed directly from the mind onto paper without attention to purpose or audience.

In 1957, Lazarus felt it was time to return to New York City.

Before the move, he organized a large exhibit of his artwork at the Crawford House in Newburgh, the headquarters of the Newburgh Historical Society. The majority of the works sold on opening night and several were acquired for permanent collection by Middletown College. The money from that sale enabled Lazarus to relocate his family to a large, three-bedroom apartment on the Grand Concourse in the Bronx.

Lazarus had left a New York of brownstones, bohemians, and neighborhoods filled with European immigrants. He returned to a changed New York that celebrated a new corporate mindset reliant on marketing.

In 1958, his artwork was exhibited at the Hewitt Gallery. The last exhibition of his artwork during his lifetime would come six years later in 1964, when Harry Wickey included two of his drawings in an exhibit entitled “Animals in Art” at The Storm King Art Center, where Wickey had become director.

From 1960 to the end of his life, my father remained productive. His drawings became without restraint or inhibition as he became more and more liberated by what seemed to be a lack of any role for himself in the world. When the Hippie movement arrived in the 1960s, he embraced it with enthusiasm as an embodiment of self-reliance and individualism that defied conformity. Hippie subculture appeared to him as a sharing of his own personal belief in American and Emersonian ideals that urged people to explore themselves, find their own identity, and validate personal freedom. He grew disillusioned when the Hippie movement imploded. Deeply saddened by the immobility of the world's priorities, his work became more and more edged with a sardonic humor.

—Douglas Lazarus (son)

In New York, Lazarus earned a living doing line drawings of TV stars for ABC, CBS and NBC. His drawings were supplied for publication to newspaper editors across the country by these major networks as a way to promote their new television shows.

As a counterpoint to commercial assignments that kept his family financially afloat, Lazarus felt the need to connect to the world in the role of an artist/philosopher. The impetus that led him to urge friends in Newburgh to explore their creativity, now broadened into a full-fledged philosophy based on insights from his study of Buddhism. He felt that he was onto something unique in proposing that people formed reality through the power of their own beliefs. Lazarus’ hope was that, if this thought were made generally known, it would release a flood of human creativity. He witnessed that his belief was already gaining popular awareness through Existential writers and thinkers in the academic community.

Sid Lazarus died of a stroke in 1973 after being ill for a number of years. He was buried at the Kensico Cemetery in Valhalla, New York. His wife Sylvia joined him there in 1996. At his funeral, 300 people attended, many of whom spoke of life choices they had made that were influenced by knowing him.

In 1980 a posthumous exhibit of his work, organized by a young writer and admirer, Edward Williams, was held at The National Arts Club in New York.

Lazarus was considered singularly eccentric by contemporaries for his idiosyncratic views, but acknowledged for his powerful imagination, highly skilled talents, and the mystical undertones within his work. He admired and identified with outsider artists like William Blake and Henri Rousseau, obscure in their lives, opposing the ruling artistic attitude of their periods.

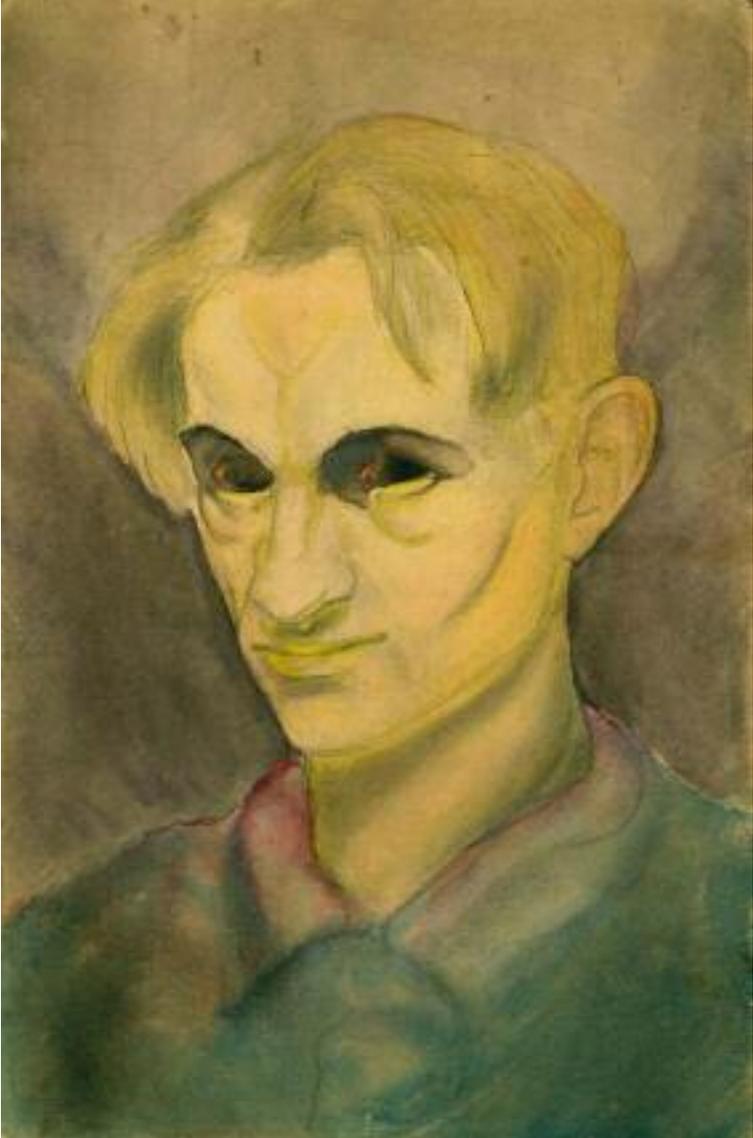
Interestingly, he rarely did preliminary sketches or designs for a painting or drawing. He just let them unfold, and very often started his pictures in one corner. The image flowed outward until it had filled the entire page with perfect form and balance. He apparently had a strong sense of what he wanted each complete picture to look like, envisioning the whole and holding all of its elements in his mind. He referred to his art as “hand fruit” since he felt that he could simply reach up and pluck pictures out of the air.

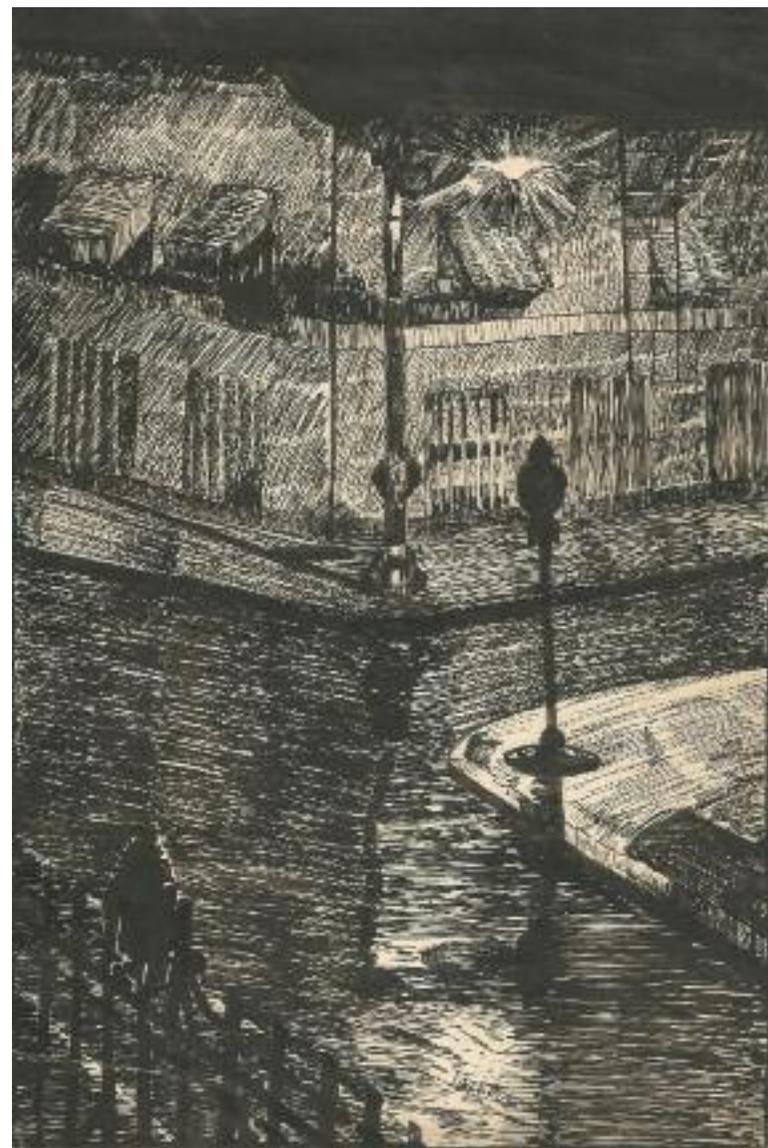
Whenever he finished a picture, he told me he would recite a prayer: “May God preserve me from having to produce more pictures.” He would invariably be surprised and excited to discover himself doing yet another one, validating his belief that creativity originates in spontaneous acts of personal adventure.

—Douglas Lazarus (son)

CATALOG

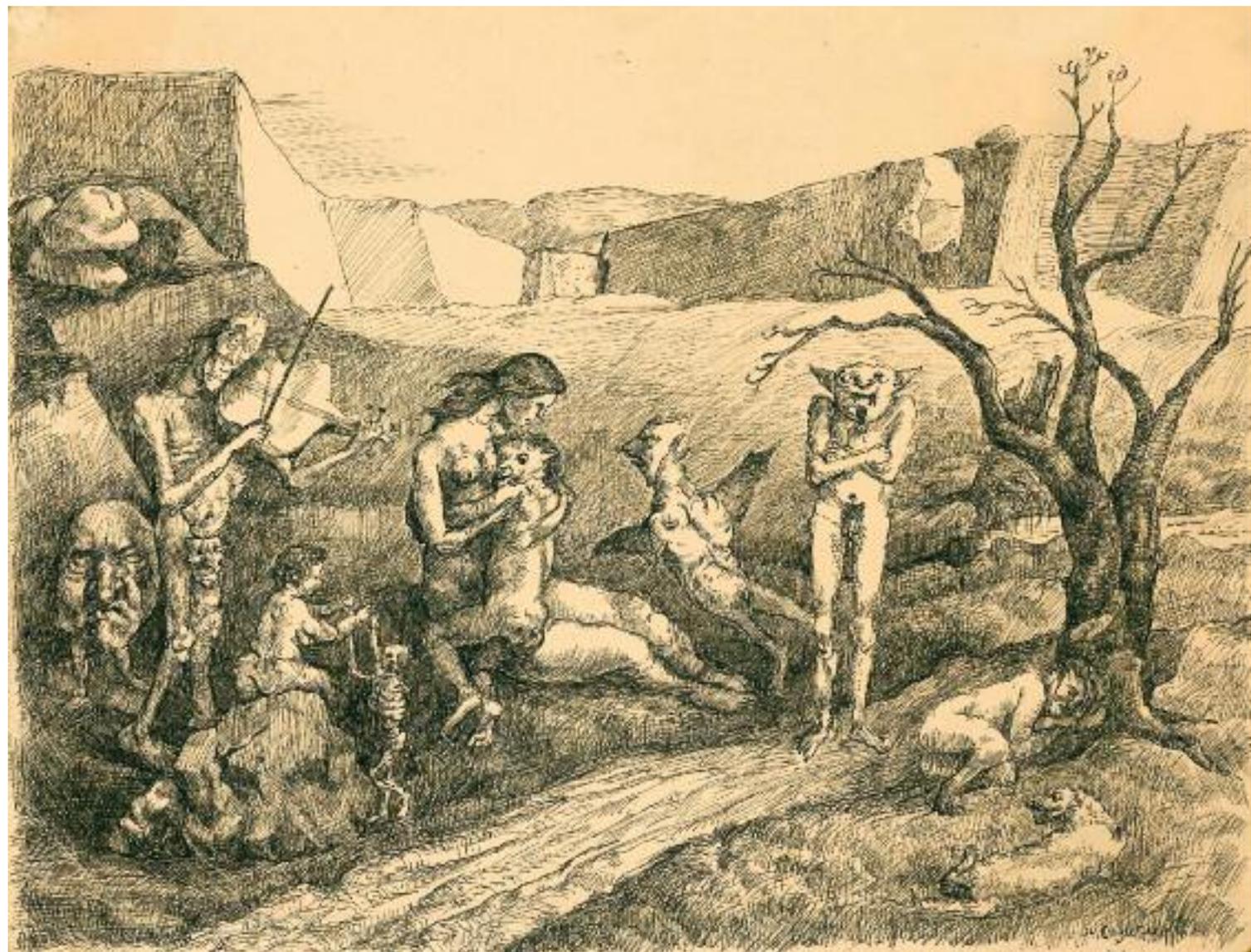
1. *Self Portrait at Age Seventeen*, 1929. Watercolor and graphite on artist's board, 15" x 9 3/4" (38.1 x 24.8 cm). On verso: incomplete graphite and watercolor study of male nude resting on his arms
2. *Dream*, 1929. Ink and ink wash on medium weight, cream card, no watermark, 11 13/16" x 6 3/16" (29.9 x 15.7 cm). Signed in black ink lower left: LAZARUS; dated in black ink lower right: 10/29. On verso: graphite studies of nude male figures
3. *Rainy Streets*, 1929. Ink and ink wash on light weight, cream card, no watermark. 11" x 7 1/4" (27.9 x 18.4 cm). Signed in black ink lower center: LAZARUS. On verso: inscribed in graphite: *Rainy Streets/ 5R*
4. *Habitation*, 1938. Ink on cream wove paper, partial watermark: [M, in shield]/ SCOUNT LEDGER/ RAG CONTENT/ U.S.A, sheet dimensions: 11 3/16" x 8" (28.4 x 20.3 cm); image dimensions: 10" x 6 7/8" (25.4 x 17.5 cm). Signed in black ink lower right: *S Lazarus*. On verso: inscribed in graphite: *habitation*
5. *Sanctuary*, 1938. Ink on light weight, beige card, no watermark, 11" x 13" (27.9 x 35.3 cm). Signed in black ink lower right: *S. Lazarus*. On verso: inscribed in graphite: *sanctuary*
6. *Ivy Plant*, 1939. Ink on heavy weight, cream wove paper, no watermark, 10 7/8" x 13 7/8" (27.7 x 35.3 cm)
7. *The Summons*, 1946. Ink on cream wove paper, no watermark, 7 1/8" x 9 5/8" (19.3 x 24.4 cm). Signed in black ink lower left: *S. LAZARUS*
8. *Limbo*, 1946. Oil on stretched canvas, 16" x 11 7/8" (40. 6 x 30.2 cm)
9. *Corruption*, 1951. Ink, ink wash, and scratch technique on heavy weight, cream card, no watermark, sheet dimensions: 14 11/16" x 13" (37.3 x 33 cm); image dimensions: 11 1/2" x 10" (29.2 x 25.4 cm). On verso: partial, incomplete graphite study for *Corruption*
10. *Bach's Chaconne*, 1951. Ink on light weight, cream card, no watermark; embossed at lower right: [circular design with oak leaf motif surrounded by the wording: STRATHMORE/ USE EITHER SIDE], 6 3/4" x 9 1/2" (17.1 x 24.1 cm). Scratch signature lower right: *S. LAZARUS*
11. *Light and Shade*, 1951. Ink on heavy weight, cream, wove paper, no watermark, 5" x 5 1/4" (12.7 x 13.3 cm). Signed in black ink lower right: *S. LAZARUS*. On verso: inscribed in graphite: *light and shade*
12. *Winged Creatures*, 1951. Ink, scratch technique, and airbrush on heavy weight, cream card, no watermark, sheet dimensions: 15 5/8" x 19" (39.6 x 48.3 cm); image dimensions: 12 3/8" x 16" (31.5 x 40.6 cm). Scratch signature and date lower right: *S. LAZARUS '51*
13. *Tea for Her Son*, 1951. Pen and ink on medium weight, cream card, no watermark, sheet dimensions: 12 7/8" x 17 7/8" (35.3 x 45.5 cm); image dimensions: 12 1/2" x 16 1/4" (31.8 x 41.3 cm). Signed in black ink lower right: *S. LAZARUS*; inscribed in graphite in upper right of right margin: *a cup of tea*. On verso: partial ink and graphite drawing of snake and animals in a temple; inscribed in graphite in upper margin: *tea for her son*
14. *Swamp*, 1952. Ink wash on beige wove paper, no watermark, sheet dimensions: 7 1/2" x 8 1/2" (19 x 21.6 cm); image dimensions: 6 11/16" x 7 3/4" (17 x 19.7 cm). Signed in gray ink lower right: *S. Lazarus*. On verso: inscribed in graphite: [Nevermore?]
15. *Abstraction*, 1952. Ink, ink wash, watercolor, gouache, and scratch technique on heavy weight, cream wove paper, no watermark, sheet dimensions: 12 1/16" x 11 1/2" (30.7 x 29.2 cm); image dimensions: 10" x 8 3/4" (25.4 x 22.2 cm). On verso: partial, loose graphite study of reclining nude woman
16. *The Dying Man*, 1953. Watercolor, gouache, and scratch technique on heavy weight, cream card, no watermark, sheet dimensions: 8 3/4" x 11 9/16" (22.2 x 29.5 cm); image dimensions: 7 1/8" x 10 1/4" (18 x 26 cm). On verso: partial ink wash study of two figures in a landscape
17. *Nothing Is*, 1953. Ink on medium weight, cream card, no watermark, 8" x 5" (20. 3 x 12.7 cm). Inscribed in ink in body of drawing at upper right: NOTHING/ IS; signed in black ink lower right: *S Lazarus*
18. *At the Bottom*, 1953. Ink on light weight, cream card, no watermark, sheet dimensions: 6 1/4" x 9 1/4" (15.9 x 23.5 cm); image dimensions: 5 3/8" x 8 3/8" (13.7 x 21.3 cm). Signed in black ink lower center: *S Lazarus*. On verso: inscribed in graphite: *at the bottom*; lithographic crayon study of a creature
19. *New Born*, 1953. Ink, ink wash, and gouache on heavy weight, cream card, no watermark, sheet dimensions: 7 1/2" x 9 5/8" (19 x 24.4 cm); image dimensions: 6" x 7 1/8" (15.2 x 18 cm). On verso: abstract ink wash study
20. *Self Portrait with Flower Arrangement*, 1953. Ink on light weight, cream card, no watermark, 5 1/2" x 5 3/16" (13.9 x 13.2 cm). Signed in black ink lower right: *S. Lazarus*
21. *Still Life*, 1954. Ink and watercolor on heavy weight, cream, wove paper, no watermark, 3 3/4" x 5 3/8" (9.5 x 13.7 cm). Dated and signed in white gouache lower right: '54 S. LAZARUS
22. *Porno-graphs*, 1956. Two ink drawings [A and C] and one colored pencil drawing [B] on heavy weight, cream wove paper, no watermark, hinged by artist to heavy weight, white wove paper, no watermark, sheet dimensions: 15" x 11 3/4" (38.1 x 29.8 cm); dimensions of cut-outs: [A] 8" x 8 1/4" (20.3 x 20.9 cm); [B] 4 7/8" x 3 7/8" (12.4 x 9.9 cm); [C] 5 3/16" x 4 1/8" (13.2 x 10.4 cm). On [C] signed in black ink lower right: *S. Lazarus*. Inscribed and dated in black ink on sheet upper left: PLATE VII 2-56/ "Porno-graphs"
23. *Creature*, 1957. Ink, gouache, and crayon on beige wove paper, no watermark, 6 3/4" x 4 1/4" (17.1 x 10.8 cm). Signed in black ink lower right: *S. Lazarus*
24. *River Creature*, 1957. Graphite on medium weight, coated, cream card, no watermark, 24 1/8" x 18 3/16" (61.2 x 46.2 cm). Signed and dated in graphite lower right: *S. Lazarus 57*. On verso: ink wash drawing of nude woman and creatures in forest
25. *Dragon*, 1958. Ink, ink wash, and graphite on heavy weight, cream wove paper, no watermark, 12 3/16" x 12 1/8" (30.9 x 30.7 cm)
26. *Beauty and the Beast*, 1958. Ink wash and lithographic crayon on heavy weight, cream wove paper, no watermark, 11" x 15" (27.9 x 38.1 cm). Signed and dated in black ink lower right: *S. Lazarus '58*
27. *Night Park Romance*, 1961. Ink, ink wash, and crayon on heavy weight, cream wove paper, no watermark, sheet dimensions: 16 7/8" x 12 1/4" (42.9 x 31.1 cm); image dimensions: 12 1/2" x 10 3/8" (31.8 x 26.4 cm)
28. *Frightened Demons*, 1961. Ink and graphite on heavy weight, cream paper, no watermark, 13 13/16" x 16 7/8" (35.1 x 42.9 cm)
29. *Alligators*, 1964. Ink and ink wash on light weight, cream card, no watermark, sheet dimensions: 11" x 13 7/8" (27.9 x 35.3 cm); image dimensions: 8 1/2" x 11 5/8" (21.6 x 29.5 cm). On verso: slight pencil study for *Alligators*; inscribed in gray ink: *Take Judy/ Home/ where/ movie/ MOVIES*
30. *Elephant Tapestry*, 1965. Ink and crayon on medium weight, cream wove paper, no watermark, 9" x 11 7/8" (22.9 x 30.2 cm)
31. *Bug on Hat*, 1970. Ink on light weight, cream card, no watermark, 6" x 8" (15.2 x 20.3 cm)
32. *Spider's Lair*, 1970. Ink and graphite on cream wove paper, no watermark, 10 1/2" x 13 1/2" (26.9 x 34.2 cm)
33. *Climbing Lizard*, 1970. Graphite on light weight, coated, cream card, no watermark, 8 1/2" x 7 3/4" (21.6 x 19.7 cm)
34. *Rabbit in the Brush*, 1971. Graphite on light weight, cream, coated card, no watermark, sheet dimensions: 13 3/4" x 11" (34.9 x 27.9 cm); image dimensions: 11 3/8" x 7 7/8" (28.9 x 20.1 cm)
35. *Forest Swamp*, 1972. Ink on light weight, coated, cream card, no watermark, sheet dimensions: 11" x 13 3/4" (27.9 x 34.9 cm); image dimensions: 9 1/4" x 12" (23.5 x 30.4 cm)
36. *Python*, 1972. Graphite on medium weight, cream card, no watermark; sheet dimensions: 9 1/8" x 13 3/8" (23.1 x 34 cm); image dimensions: 6 13/16" x 11 3/4" (17.3 x 29.8 cm)
37. *Sisyphus*, 1972. Ink on white wove paper, no watermark, 9" x 6" (22.9 x 15.2 cm)
38. *Witch and Study of Bird Forms Within an Oval*, 1973. Graphite on heavy weight, cream wove paper, no watermark, 16 7/8" x 11 5/16" (42.9 x 28.7 cm)
39. *Vegetable Face*, 1973. Ink on light weight, coated, cream card, no watermark, 8 1/16" x 11 1/2" (20.5 x 29.2 cm). On verso: ink study of hand with cigarette
40. *Figures and Birds*, 1973. Ink and graphite on light weight, cream card, no watermark, sheet dimensions: 7 3/16" x 11 6/16" (18.3 x 29.2 cm); image dimensions: 5 7/8" x 7 7/8" (14.9 x 20.1 cm)
41. *Whimsies* (Top left to lower right: A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H), 1973. Eight ink drawings on heavy weight cream wove paper, no watermark, hinged by artist to medium weight, coated, white card, no watermark, card dimensions: 15 1/8" x 17 3/4" (38.4 x 45.1 cm); dimensions of cut-outs: [A] 2 5/8" x 2 1/2" (6.6 x 6.4 cm); [B] 2 3/16" x 3 3/16" (5.6 x 3.2 cm); [C] 3" x 2 1/4" (7.6 x 5.7 cm); [D] 2 1/4" x 3 3/16" (5.7 x 3.2 cm); [E] 2 1/4" x 3" (5.7 x 7.6 cm); [F] 2 5/8" x 2 1/2" (6.6 x 6.4 cm); [G] 3 1/8" x 4" (7.9 x 10.2 cm); [H] 3 1/8" x 4 5/16" (7.9 x 12.4 cm). On [H] signed in black ink lower right: *S. Lazarus*



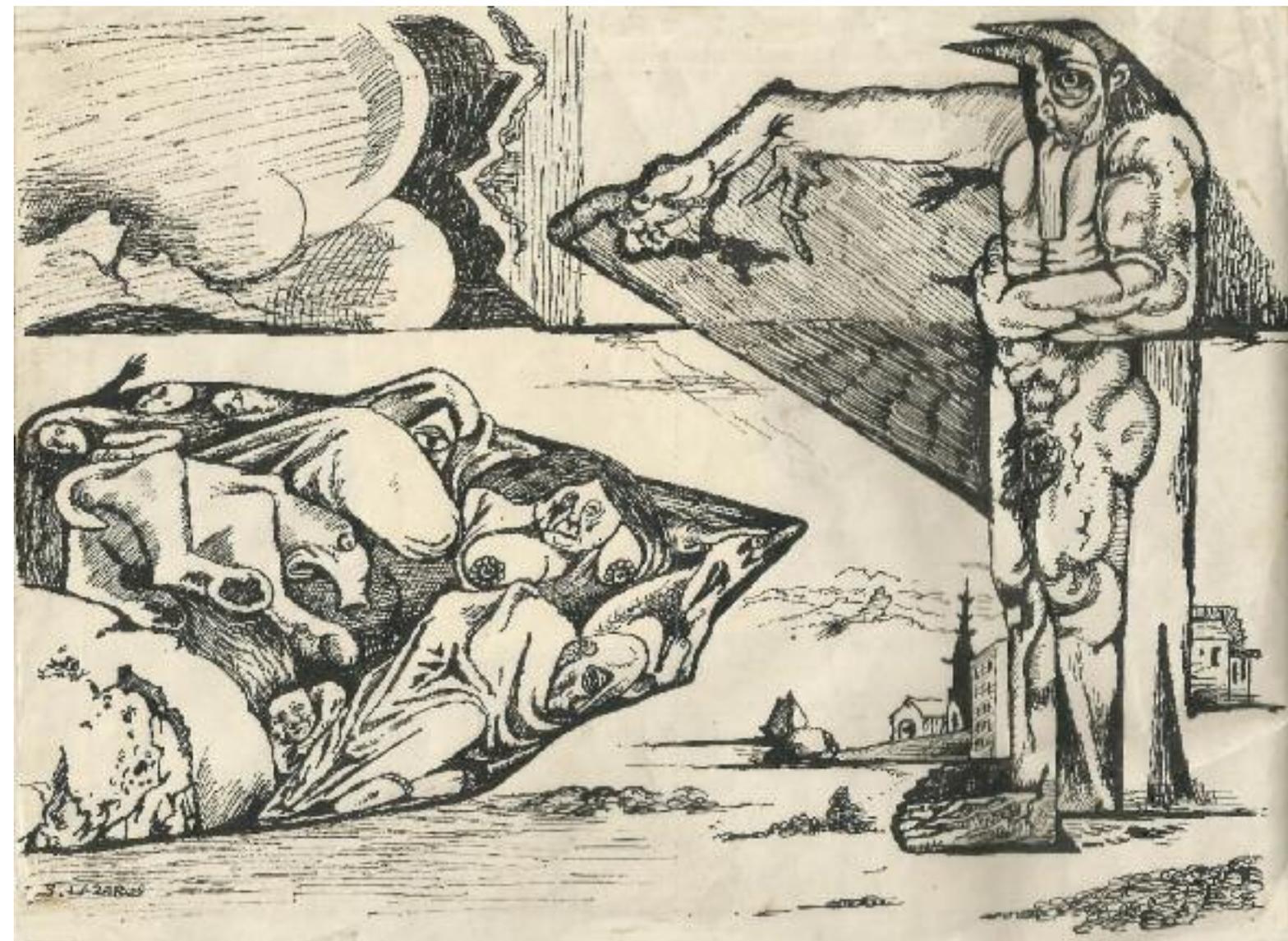
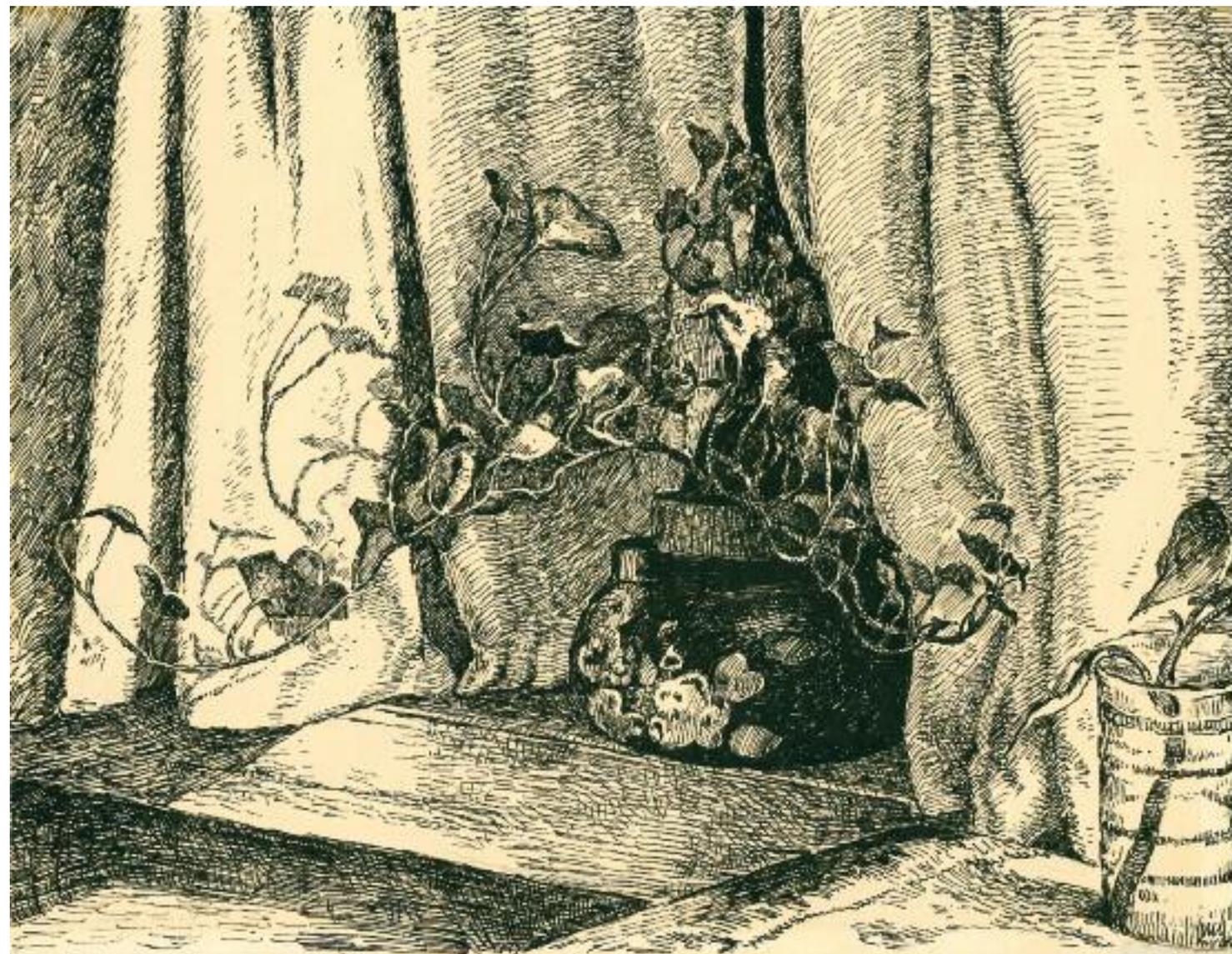




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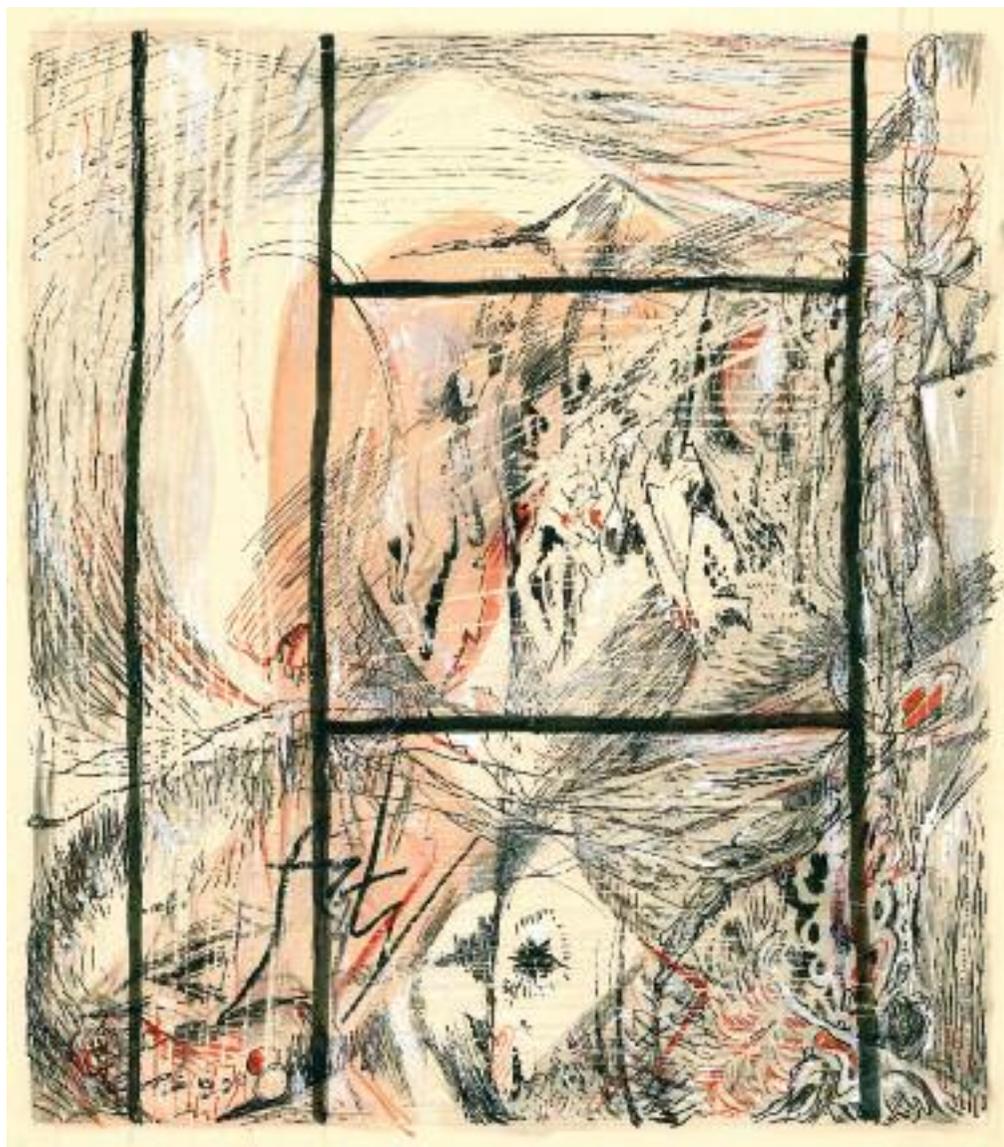
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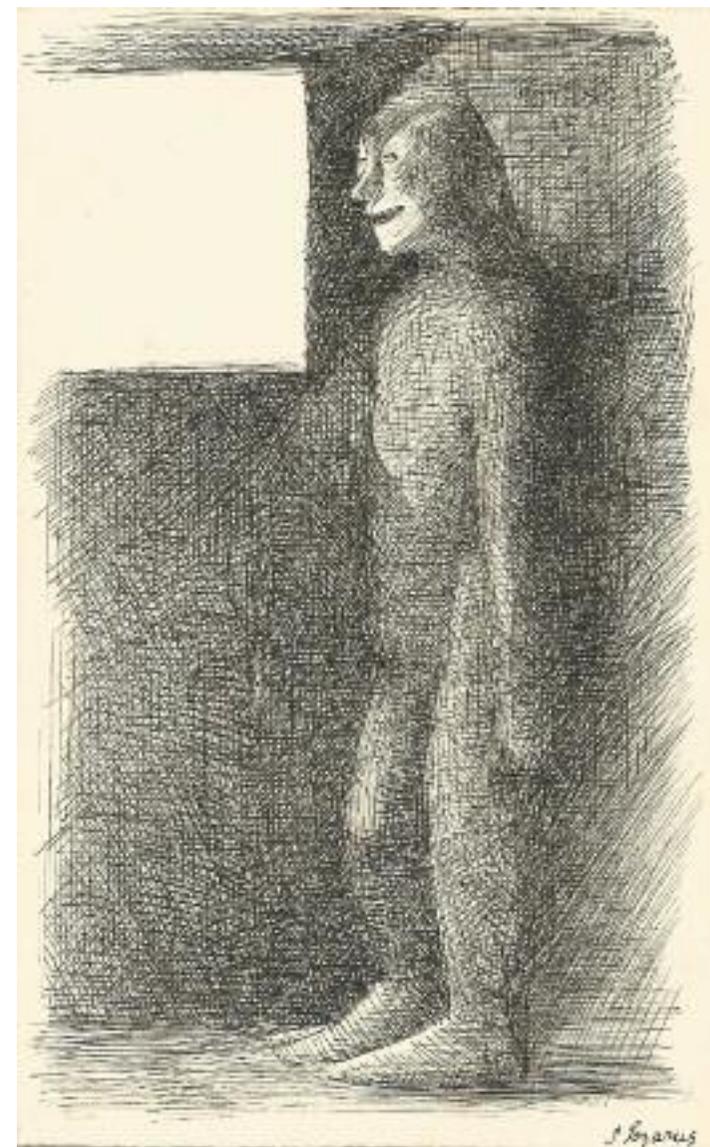
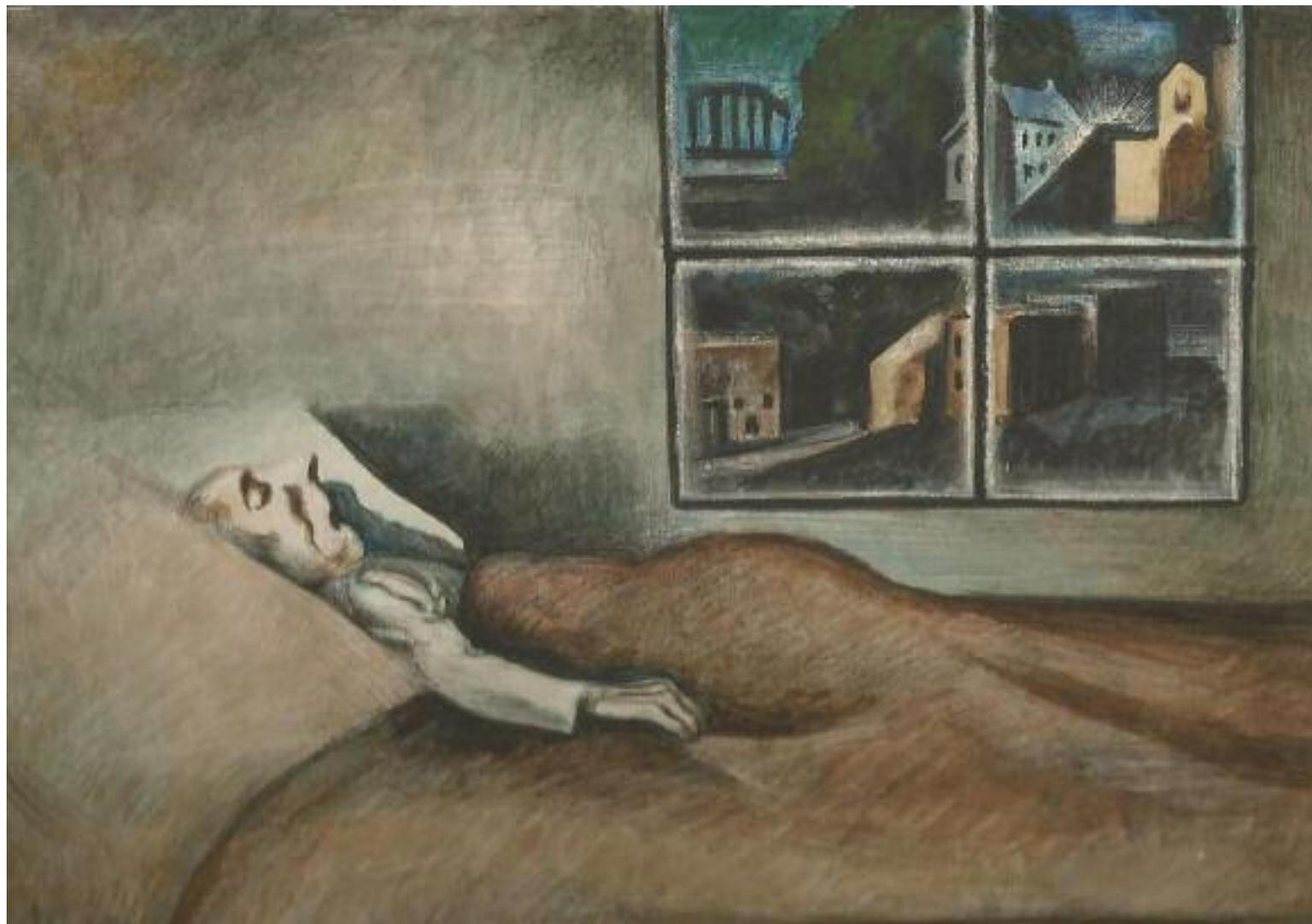














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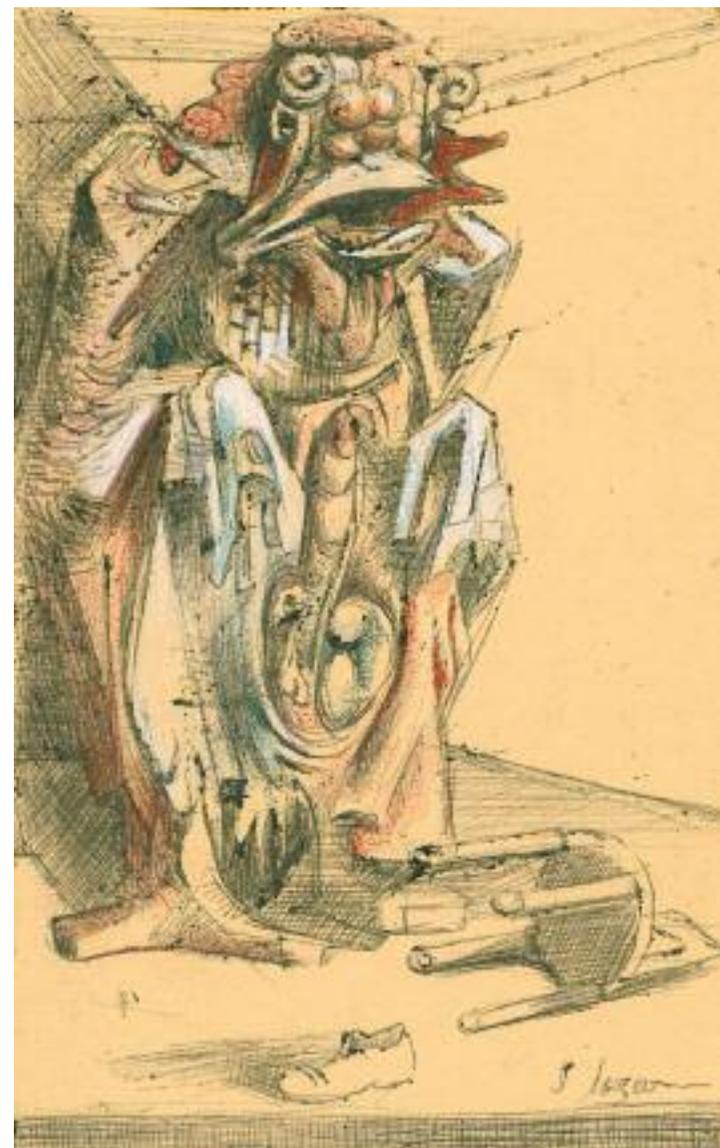
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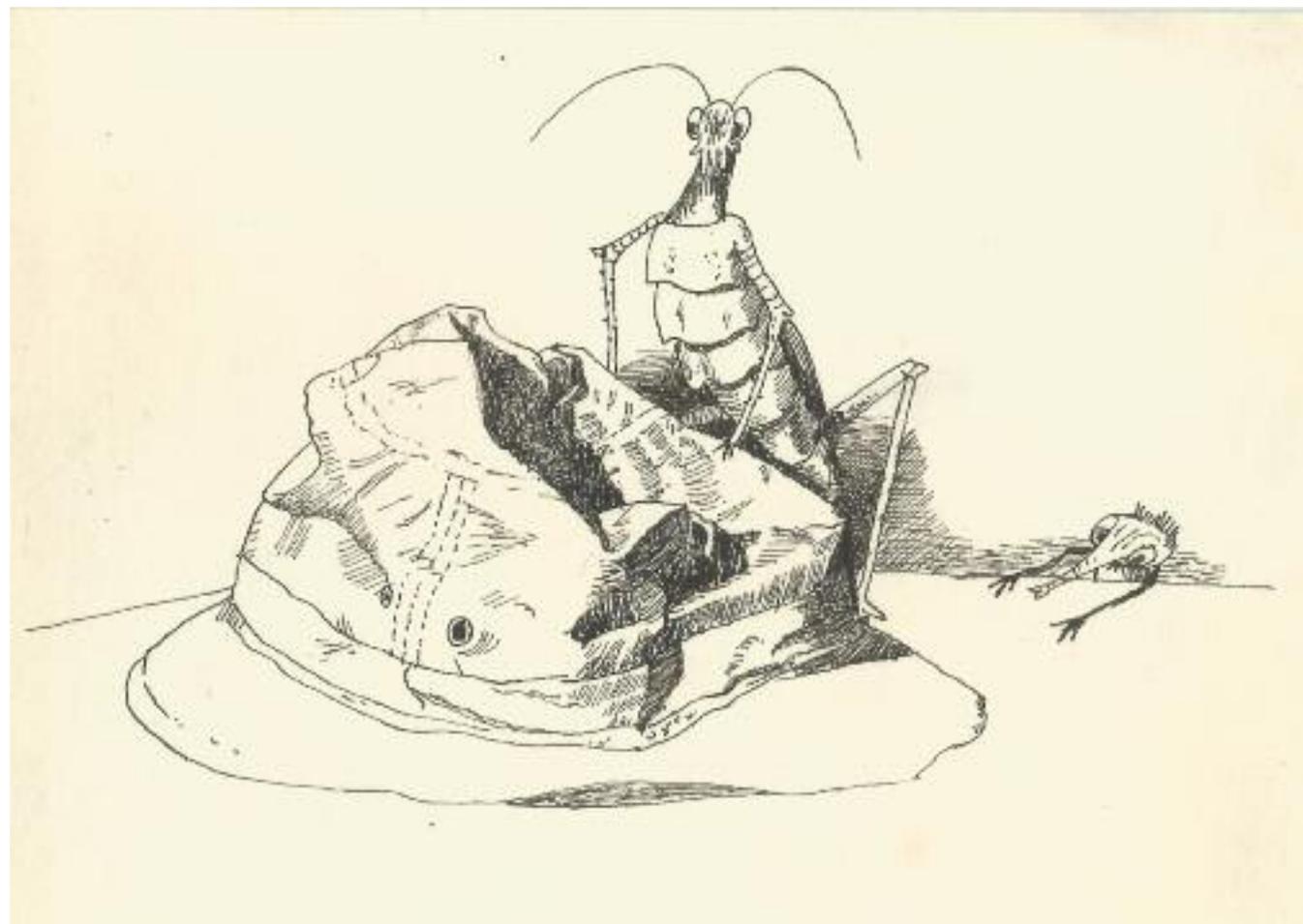
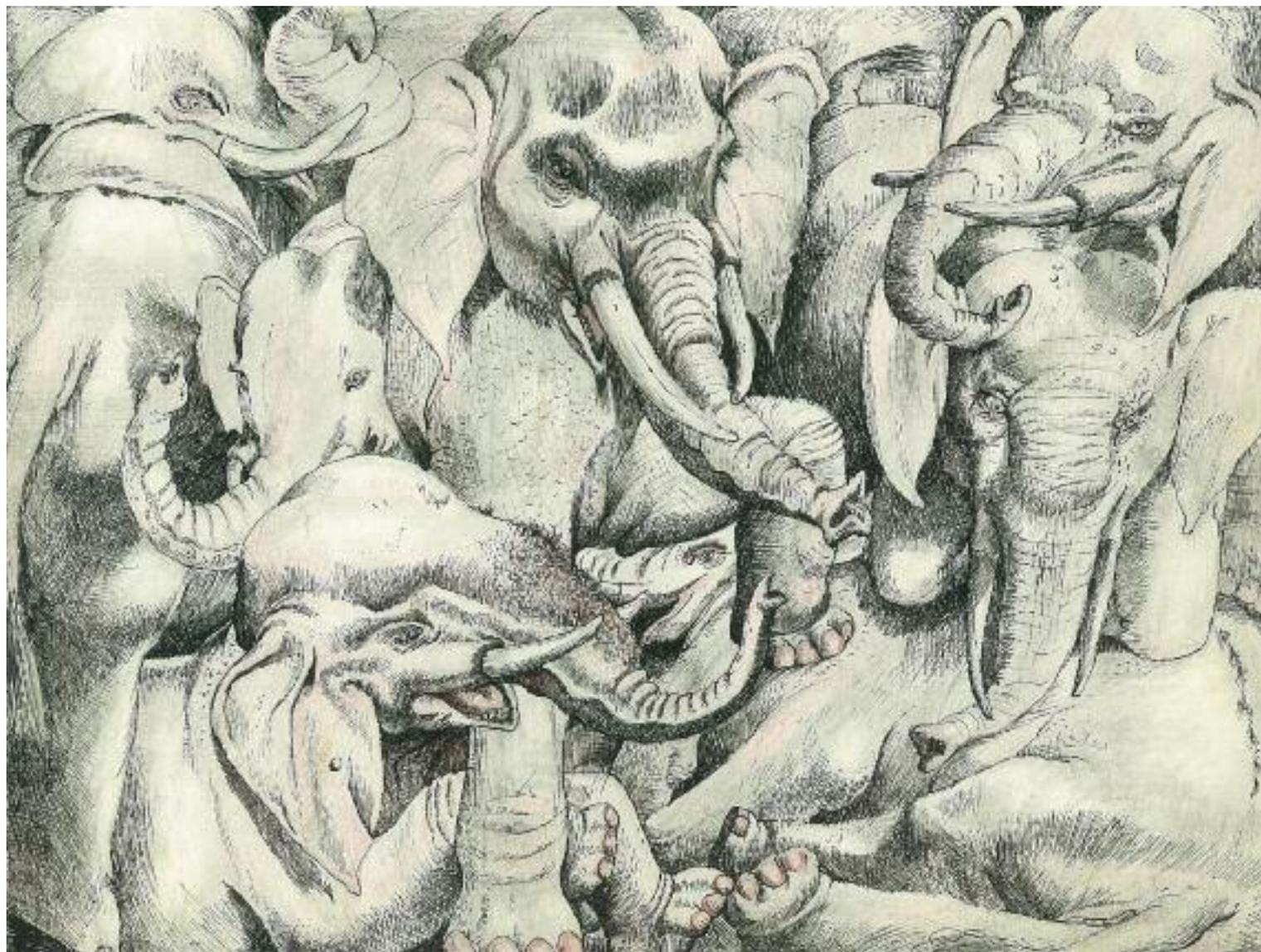
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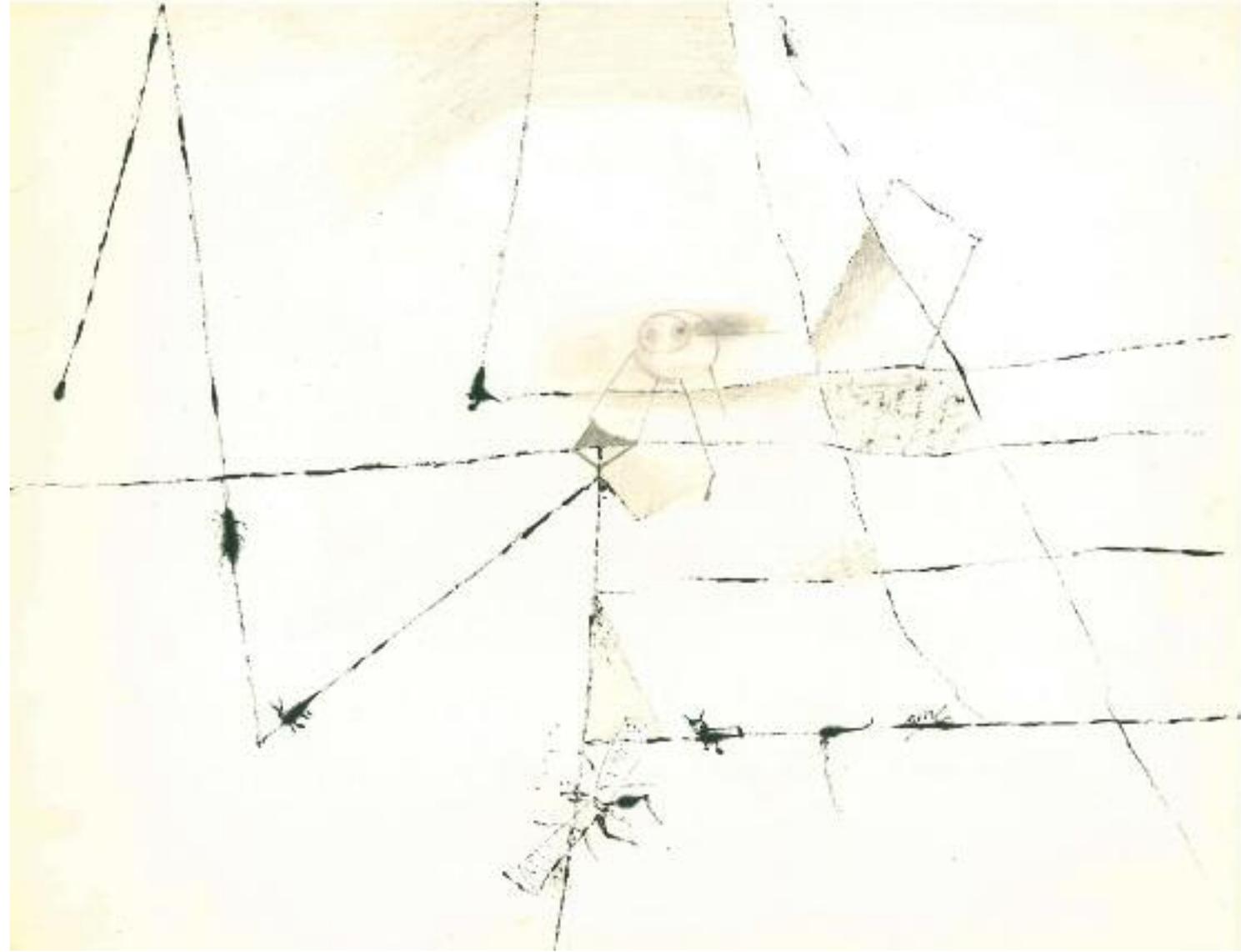


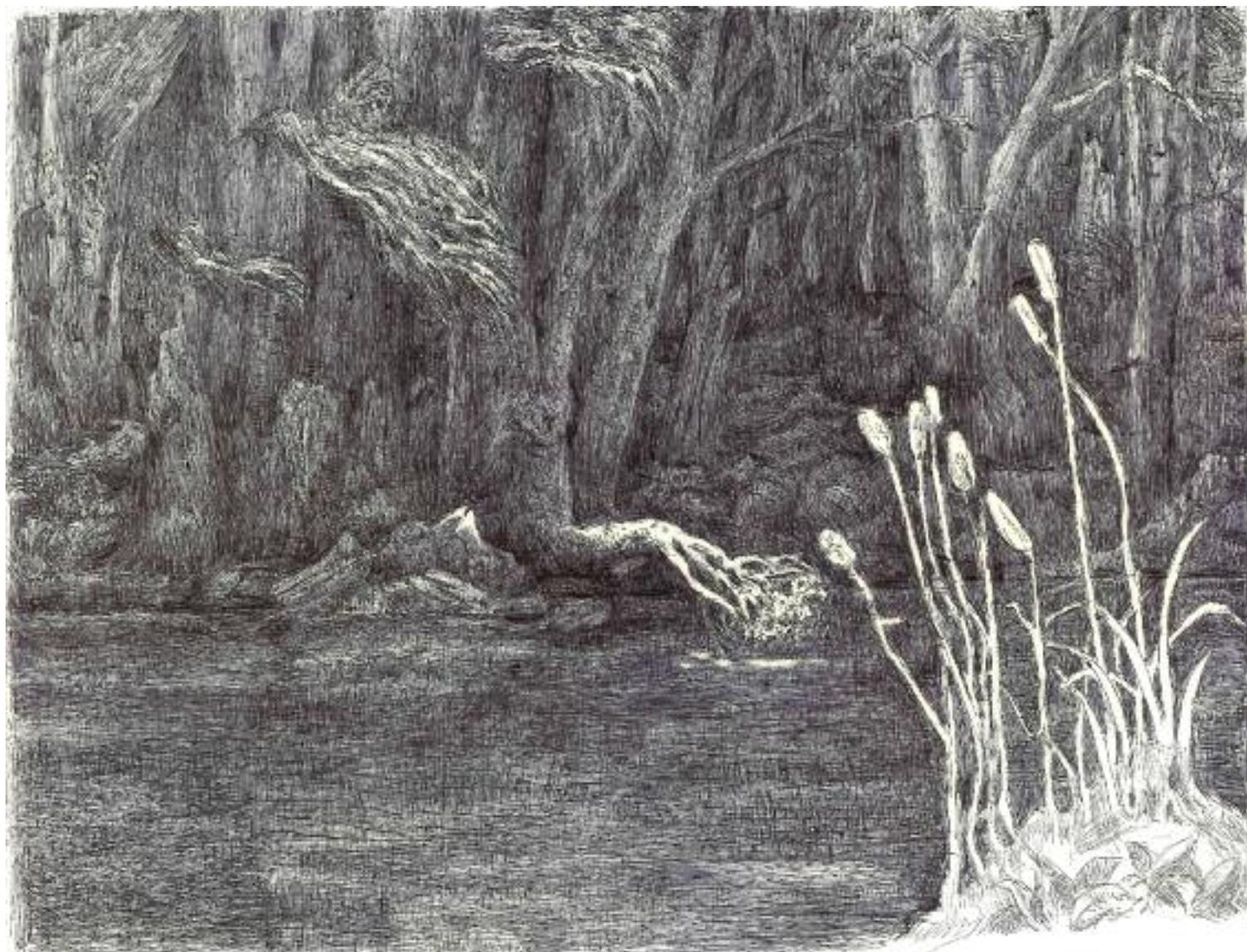


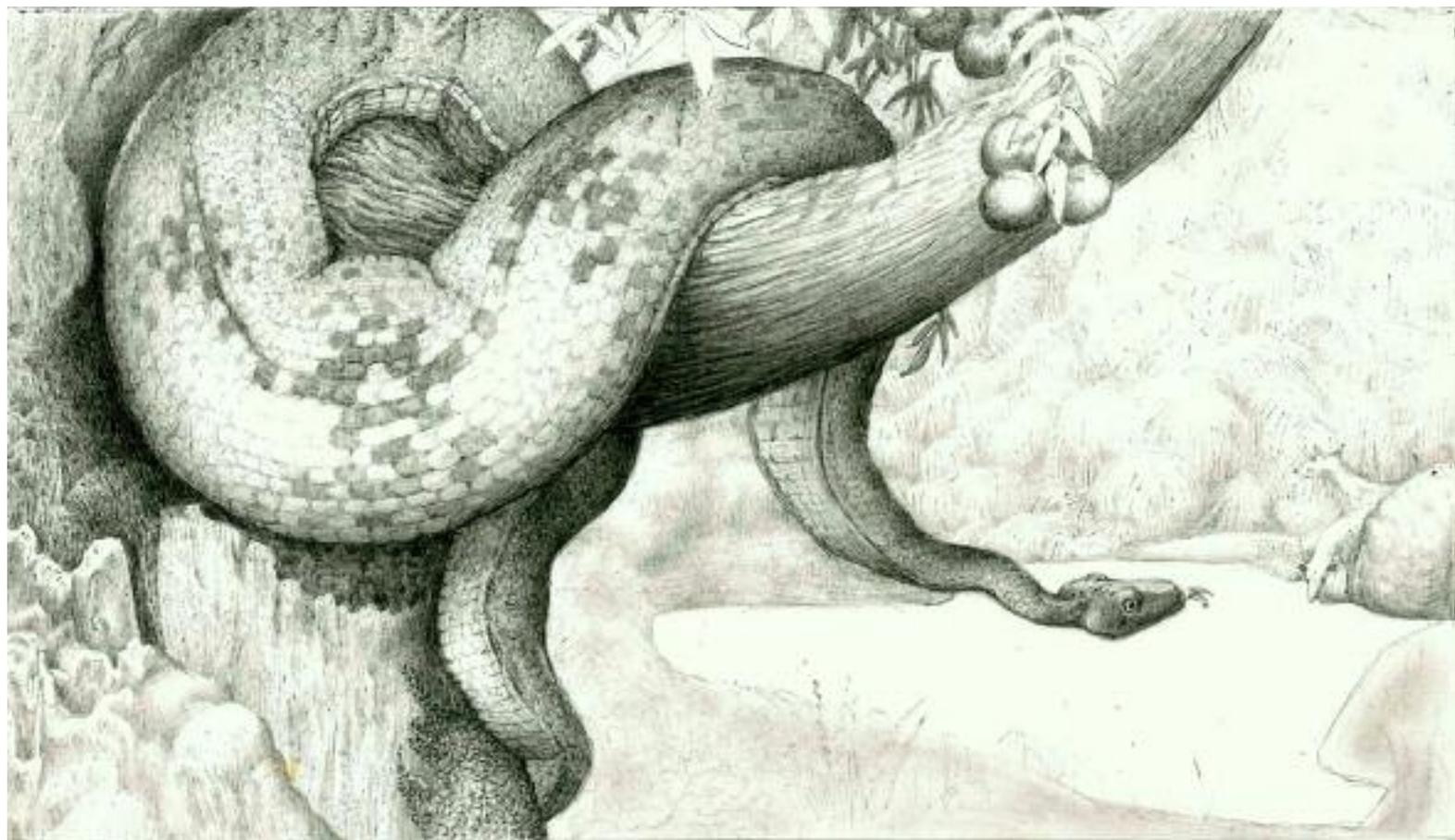
















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