

THIEF OF FIRE

ISSUE I

“A HOUSE OF A HEART”



With special thanks to the contributors of this issue.

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Dear Nick,

OK yeah, there is a 99.9% chance that that is not your name. But it felt really weird addressing a letter to everyone and no one in particular all at once so, from now on, all letters will be written to Nick Cave. That's right! You thought you were subscribing to a standard newsletter but really, you have just tapped into an admittedly one-sided conversation between myself, Lucy Rice (Last Apollo), and Nick Cave (Nick Cave).

I have picked Nick because, as you might have guessed, I love the Red Hand Files. If you want to read the opinions and gritty stories of a successful musical icon click [here](#). If however, you prefer the opinions and sort-of gritty stories of a real-life struggling artist, just STAY HERE.

I have wanted to write a newsletter for a long time, since before Last Apollo even existed. I have always had a bit of an unhealthy compulsion regarding the exhibition of my creative ventures to the world. When I was younger, I was a fiend for setting up Instagram accounts for various 'visual art projects'. While pushing the limits of visual art and the limits of my mother's iPad camera, I was also writing a lot of poetry (that I was convinced was exceptional due to the fact it didn't rhyme) and I was playing A LOT of music (classical, trad, choral, you name it - this unfortunate swot was probably a member of the club).

As much as I like to make fun of how precocious (and possibly insufferable) I was as a teenager, I admire and almost envy that version of myself now. I created with a huge sense of freedom and conviction that I lost as I grew older and more self-conscious. I lost so much confidence in my creative abilities and the once limitless universe I used to plunge myself into shrank away, becoming smaller and smaller until I could barely grasp it at all.

It was so gradual that it was almost imperceivable but, by the time I had reached college (or 'uni' depending on your persuasion), I had grown colourless and my brain was left dulled and derelict. In 2020, as my personal reality continued to morph into something unrecognisable, so too did the world around me.

Although the pandemic was a terrifying and difficult time, I am, in one way, grateful for it. Without two years away from 'regularly scheduled programming', I would never have had the confidence to start writing music again and to begin thawing the thick frost that had formed over my creative identity.

A particular moment of catalysis was receiving the book 'Devotion' by Patti Smith from a friend for my birthday. Throughout lockdown, there were signs of the icy shell cracking and splintering, but upon reading Devotion, that shell exploded. Until this point, musicians, writers and artists had all existed in immensely separate planes of creativity. Suddenly, I saw how fluid the definition of an artist could be. Even more importantly, I realised that you did not need to be a master of your craft for it to still be a truly compelling and evocative piece of art. This is something I seem to have subconsciously known as a child and am grateful to be learning again as an adult.

Thanks to the beautiful friendships I have made through art as well as the opportunities I have had to spend so much time immersed in the creative world, I have felt the universe of art return to the colourful, playful expanse it had been when I was younger. I no longer feel tethered to the idea of defining myself as only a musician as opposed to an artist of general description.

I am excited to be pursuing a newsletter and creating a space where my collaborators, my friends and I can explore this definition of ‘the artist’ together. This newsletter is a huge celebration of a creative liberation! Art now, to me, feels like a big, warm, powerful heart. It might consist of different chambers but the same vivid blood flows through them all. It is such a privilege to get to explore this ‘house of a heart’¹ with you. Thank you so much for subscribing, truly.

Lucy.



Self Portrait 2016

¹ <https://theamericanscholar.org/joyas-volardores/>

GETTING A FILLING

Mossy Ryans

I'm not afraid of the dentist
But I hate going to the dentist
It's a waste of time on my day off
I'd even go so far to say
It's a scam, a racket;
Create the problem and charge you to fix it
Another surgically blue and white arm of the rotten
little baby that the intercourse of capitalism and
medicine gave birth to

I mean

There's tribes in Africa with perfect teeth
And all they do is chew on liquorice root!

However, I can't explain this to my ma
As she rushes me out the door
"You are going to be late for your filling"
"My tooth's not even sore"
"It's proactive, protective, preemptive"
- it's procedural bollix that's a bit _____ing
expensive
But I'm not afraid of the dentist

So I check in and get into the chair
I chat the chat with my dentist
A lovely English man by the name of Ted
With very little warning
He then proceeds to shove two fingers upside my
head
"That'll be the anisthehick, we'll giv' at a minute to
seh"

Lying down with the goggles on, waiting for my
mouth to numb
He asks me about my work in the bakery;
If I do much sampling of the goods I do be making
I SEE YOUR FUCKING GAME TED
Trying to get a gauge on my sugar intake
IS IT TED ?
In that instant I am a fenian prisoner
Determined and resolute
Not to give one goddamned word to my English
interrogator...

"Yeah no I have the odd croissant from time to
time" - leaving out the salacious cinnamon roll, hot
chocolate knot, a colourfully decorated cookie, and
sweeter than springtime Bakewell tart with
raspberry jam filling
all of which taste the better having on the sly
"Righ well thah seems like enuff time
lesgehonwih'itso"
My legs stiffen up and I clench
Onto a piece of tissue in my hands
As my poor little Irish mouth
is invaded by An Englishman
I'm not afraid of the dentist
It's just a bit invasive

I'm not afraid of the dentist
But getting a filling is probably the closest
experience to being abducted by aliens;
Lying paralysed on the chair,
Conscious of the two masked figures
Coming at me with their power tools
I close my eyes and I hear the sounds
Ringing through the air
The whirrrriiggggsss and brrrrrijngs
The shlouupping and bzzzzzzing

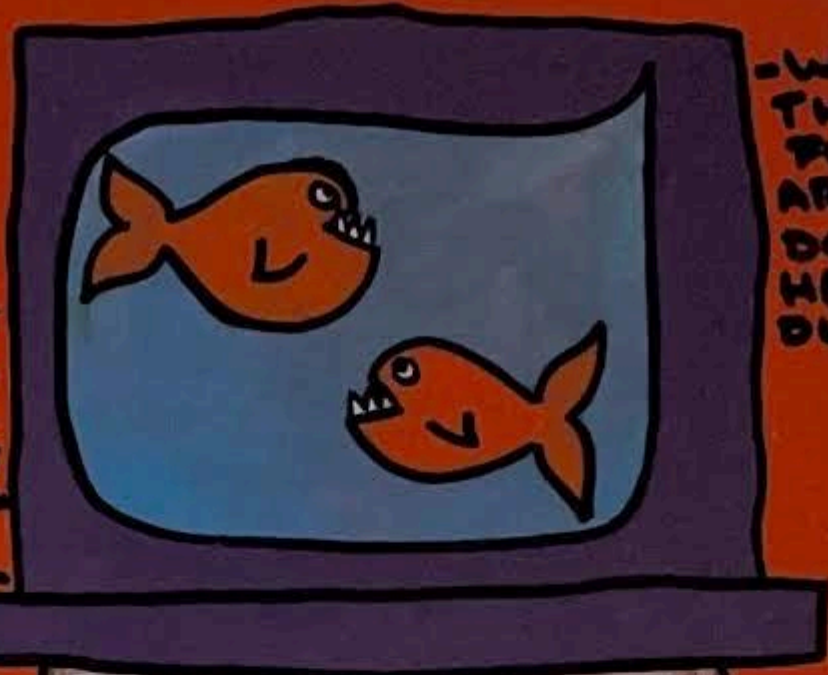
Now they're inside my mouth

Theyre sanding and scraping
What the fuck is that sound?!
Like a fork pulled over a ceramic plate
Is that smoke?! Why do I smell smoke?
WHY DO I SMELL SMOKE?
The bastard has started a fire inside my mouth
The friction of the power tools against my tooth
Has started a fire inside my mouth
Oh my face, my face
It's going to be irrevocably scarred,
Burned and ruined!
I'll get you for this Ted I swear I'm going to -

"Righ, we'll that should be everthinkg"
Says Ted as he slowly moves the chair
Back upright

"Ah cheers Ted", as I said;
I'm not afraid of the dentist

I DONT
THINK
WE'RE
MEANT
TO KNOW
YET
MAN -



-WHAT
THE
FUCK
ARE WE
DOING
HERE
DUDE?



JB 21

MAN WITH A FISH HAT

Jessica Bradshaw

I was inspired to create this series on a four-day long mushroom-taking, chakra-opening, trip in Amsterdam, when divine light shone upon me and I had a vision.

Just kidding, I am, in fact, a loser who works 6 days a week as an averagely good bartender and very mediocre childminder. Somehow I have been entrusted with the younger generation's youth and your generation's Guinness. Until recently I've tended to put a lot of pressure on any art that I create to look a certain way for the audience's perception, as opposed to just making something for the fun of making it. This comes as no surprise as, for the past 4 years, almost everything that I did creatively was to be offered up for assessment and critiques from my lecturers. Since my graduation, this has been the first time in a long time that I've been able to make art just for the fun of it again.

'Man with a Fish Hat 1' was made in collaboration with Thea, aged 3, while we sat on my couch eating beans and watching Peter Rabbit. I caught myself trying to 'fix' the painting as we were working on it but eventually, was too amused by her wonderful willingness to add fish to the man's hat and hairs to the middle of my meticulously painted eyebrows.

It has been so wonderful allowing myself to take on my old childhood creativity and make silly paintings just for fun. It has allowed me to sink into the old meditative state of creating without the pangs of pressure - even if my proportions are a little bit off (which they generally are).

I was so inspired by her boundless creativity that I decided to re-create it in my own funky style that evening. And so with absolutely no expectations, or at least, far less than I usually have when I start a piece, 'Man with a Fish Hat 2' was created.



JONI UNFINISHED

Alex Durac

What, do you think, is it like to publicly talk about an art-form you have never tried before, or one that people do not know you for? Joni Mitchell, half-pictured there, is recognised almost universally as one of the greatest song-writers of all time. Yet over the course of her long career, she has repeatedly foregrounded the fact that she should be considered an artist first, specifically a painter. It seems an almost ludicrous thing for someone whom we know almost entirely as a result of her musical output to say. And yet how would we know?

To move selfishly inward for a moment, I used to draw a lot when I was younger, all time from a very young age up until maybe my Junior Cert art portfolio was due. I then stopped for six years or (I have no idea why), and started back when stuck in the bowels of the pandemic. Oddly this was a good time for me creatively speaking, and I began to draw religiously, every day, for maybe five or six months, always for about two hours at a time, and always in the evenings. My progress was slow, but over time I got better, and by the end, what I was making was often exactly what I wanted. But then I stopped.

Then three years went by and I arrived in Melbourne just as Joni Mitchell's music came back on Spotify. I hadn't listened to her at all since her albums went off streaming services, but when they were back, I decided to listen to each one in order as if they were in danger of being taken down again. And the same thing happened - I started randomly to draw again - this time, realising how bad I'd gotten.

Joni Mitchell's music had been a fixture in my life growing up as much as anything else. She was on all the time in the car, in the kitchen; my mum would sing "Free Man In Paris" all the time, and my sister would pluck 'Cactus Tree' and 'Both Sides Now' in the evenings. I figured drawing a portrait of her as I listened would be a nice thing, something to remind me of home. And it was in a lot of ways, nostalgic, therapeutic. I had forgotten how much drawing had been a way for me to relax. I used to listen to whole albums while drawing, through and repeated, and I feel now that I swallow

albums more wholly, if that makes sense, when I am drawing, than when I am doing anything else.

But I also, when starting again, noticed how very tricky drawing had become, as it had been initially during those early pandemic stages. And as such, I've realised that what I've ended up creating isn't bad, but it is also not, ostensibly, all that good either.

Now, having said that, it's mostly OK - you'll recognise who it is if you're familiar with the cover for Both Sides Now. And the proportions are good; the left eye and mouth are fairly realistic. But if you look at the pupil of the right eye - oh wait, you can't, I rubbed it out so many times that I damaged the fibres of the paper and was left with no other choice than to colour it in. Or the hand - I rushed it so much from a shading and outline point of view that I'm not even sure how to begin fixing it. The hair, as a whole, is blocky and unblended, and to top it off, the picture is unfinished. Sketch marks remain in place. White patches dominate.

I hadn't touched this drawing at all since I started it, but when Lucy described the theme of this first newsletter to me, I realised it could, in its mistaken-riddled, unfinished state, be quite apt. What is risked from putting something out there that is different from what you're 'meant' to be doing? Is anything? Drawing is something I love, but it's never been what I have meant to be 'principally' working on, as silly as that sounds. I am doing a writing degree, and before then I did an English literature and music degree, and for some reason, the idea of participating in an artform unrelated to the one I was meant to be practicing felt strange and unfamiliar, or oddly, one not to be taken seriously.

I now think this ridiculous and bizarre, thankfully. As opposed to writing, which I struggle against daily, drawing has always left me re-energised, awake, and as tired and burned-out as I have made Joni out to look (she looks far more suave and composed in the original painting, I promise), I did not feel that way when sitting there, listening to those songs for the first time in a very long while, almost as if for the first time. The drawing is not perfect at all, but it doesn't have to be. It exists, and there are good, interesting elements in it. For that alone, the practice of working on it is worth continuing.

THE COMMUTER

Mossy Ryans

I arrive at the old station
The dart is terminating
It's half past six
The last of the rush hour
Dribbling out in droves
Double file
Marching home

I see a lady hurriedly mistake this train
For one that goes on
This train is out of service
Some of us watch
Others don't even notice
No one tells her this is out of service

"Gobshite"



CHERRY BLOSSOMS

Peter McMahon

We're sitting in a café, having managed to grab a seat near the front window. Above our heads is a canopy made up of many pink, paper flowers that belong to a fake cherry blossom tree. It must have been put up for an easter window display, as evidenced by the surrounding wide array of cute felt baby animals and fairy lights. After a week or two of unaligned schedules, unexpected calls into our respective minimum wage jobs and surprise March snowstorms, Keilan and I are finally getting to catch up again.

He sits sipping on the other side of the small circular wooden table, cross-legged and wearing his usual garb made up of a colourful (yet muted) woolen jumper, his iconic thick coat, and the prized leather satchel that accompanies him almost everywhere he ventures. I can never really know the full extent of what's in that bag every time I see it, but the one item that I can always count on being in there is a new notebook, full of poems in all stages of creation. He goes through notebooks more often than haircuts, and I can confirm that Keilan really hates having long hair.

We are meeting in the coffee shop to discuss the state of an album we've written together over the last few months, a project entitled 'Always Islands' that we'd dreamed of doing since we first met. The project's name is in reference to a boat we spotted once called the Erne Islander which was used to transport livestock across the many tiny islands that populate Lough Erne. The songs have been created from an eclectic mix of sources drawing from our recent experiences being back home while trying to avoid being too nostalgic for those pre-university years. As the project nears completion, it has been fascinating watching our different songwriting styles both merge and fight with each other.

I remember very little about the specifics of what we actually talked about when we first met many years ago, but I know it was likely the same mix of puns, art, internet subculture and the Beatles that we talk about today. The one key memory I still hold onto though, is being in absolute awe of his skill on the electric guitar as he performed something Hendrix-inspired for our mock GCSE music performances, nearly a decade ago at this point. Now he remains one of my oldest and closest friends.

We talk for a while, as we always do, discussing thoughts on our work, recent films we've seen and our thoughts on relationships (both our own and other people's). Eventually though, his face changes to that strained expression one puts on to deliver ship-rocking news. A few months ago, he tells me, he went down to Dublin to interview for an opportunity that would fly him over to Japan for a year, to teach English to Japanese students. According to him, it was one of the worst interviews of his life, however, the interviewers mustn't have seen it that way, as he'd just gotten word the day before that he'd been accepted for it. After he finished his tale, we both just turned to the fake cherry blossom tree behind us and laughed at the cosmic comedy of it all.

It's been strange the past year, post-university, trying to scope out how to live the rest of my life while trying and understand what I truly value and care about. Working through that with Keilan has created work that we are collectively incredibly proud of, so hopefully we can collect it all together in the remaining few months we'll have before he hops on a 14-hour flight away from Enniskillen. Perhaps we'll get to catch up under a real cherry blossom in a years time, who knows.

