



Geneviève Castrée
complete works
1981–2016













front endpapers
California
April 19, 2013

previous spreads
Roulathèque
Roulathèque Nicolore,
pages 42–44, 2001

previous page
drawing desk circa 1986

Geneviève Castrée

complete works 1981–2016

Drawn & Quarterly

2022





introduction

Phil Elverum

A simple metaphor would be so nice right now. “Geneviève was a bonfire in spring” or something like that, some easy way to explain who this person was.

But no, it’s impossible. She was singular, unsummarizable. She was nothing less than her actual, unrepeatable self, on earth for just 35 years. Those who knew her resort to describing her dichotomies. She was so dark and such a goof, furiously angry and full of compassion, a messy slob who provided the best hospitality, an introverted party animal, confrontationally idealistic and sweetly romantic, sang so quiet and so loud. Radical. Extreme. So black and so white. Black hair, white face. Black ink on white paper. She *was* a bonfire in spring, and very much more.

She was born Geneviève Gosselin on April 9, 1981, in Québec City to a nineteen-year-old French-speaking mom and an English-speaking dad, almost like a baby embodiment of Canada’s tugging cultural duality. Her

parents were two young people who’d briefly partnered while working in the wilderness of Alberta. Their relationship was short-lived. Geneviève was raised around Québec City and later Montréal by her mom—her dad having disappeared to Vancouver Island and out of contact for many years. This upbringing is devastatingly accurately detailed in *Susceptible*.

Having young parents often means being raised by people still searching for themselves, still figuring out the basic parts of how to be in the world. In Geneviève’s case, the lack of instinctual protective nurturing provided by her parents is heartbreaking. She was literally left by her dad when he drove away to the West Coast; and more subtly emotionally abandoned by her mom, left at a young age to create her own structures of safety and stability. In her words, she was “expected to be more like a friend from an earlier age... all of a sudden a confidante... like a grownup.”

opposite
studio, M Avenue,
Anacortes
May 29, 2012

above
studio, W Avenue,
Anacortes
May 29, 2007



She was a kid among young adults, left to her own means to figure out what was going on and whether anyone was in charge. She often said “TV was my mom and cereal was my dad.” At the same time, rules would come down almost randomly, like being forbidden to touch the stereo or to have friends over ever. A kid with less of an internal fire would have withered to self-erasure. Fortunately, Geneviève burned brightly in spite of her circumstances. This young abandonment and lack of stability partly explains why she built the obsessive creative practice that would anchor the rest of her life, her carved out sanctuary.

In the few childhood pictures we have of her, she is drawing, smiling, singing, with paint on her face, telling

a joke, dressed up as something. She was an exuberant kid, never not talking, performing for whoever would watch, a real ham. There was an early grocery store drawing-contest award that switched on the lightbulb for her that this could be *her* thing. Her dad would mail real art supplies from the West Coast at holidays. At home, her natural artistic gifts were allowed enough space to grow into a real shelter for her flexing spirit. Though her work was rarely, if ever, hung on the walls of the house, at an age where most kids outgrew drawing, she went deeper into the refuge that drawing came to be.

Pursuing a creative idea is an act of making significance out of the formlessness we’re dealt. Working on an art project is like building a raft while floating



in the middle of the ocean. For Geneviève, this must have felt like an actual life-or-death pursuit: in her bedroom in the suburbs, teenaged and miserable, isolated, afraid to make too much noise, riding waves of scary huge dark emotions and early depression. “Refuge” is absolutely the right word to use. Adolescence is brutal everywhere, but for Geneviève, it was particularly dire. We are all lucky she made it through.

Punk imagery and fellowship rescues disaffected young people spread thin all over the world. It found Geneviève in the expanse of suburbs outside Montréal in the mid-nineties and connected her with new friends who could share in a disdain for “normal” culture and a love for Subhumans, Crass, Minor Threat, etc. Orthodox

classic punk, with crazy hair, safety pins, and a sneer. Most crucially though, beyond decoration, this punk ideology delivered the permission that she could be a participant in culture creation, not just a consumer of it. The quiet bedroom artistic experimentations were shown a liberating doorway out into the vast world.

During a visit to her dad at age fifteen, she found Julie Doucet’s *Dirty Plotte* for the first time at a comic store in Victoria, ironically discovering the major Québec artist (and later, a great friend) on the far west, very English-speaking coast. This was a crucial moment that steered her fatefully into the world of underground comics. Of course, comics were not a new discovery for her, having grown up loving *Tintin*, *Mafalda*, *Asterix*,

opposite
fifth birthday party
April 9, 1986

above
sad teen years
circa 1996



Les Schtroumpfs, etc., and pretty much any comics she could get her hands on. Raw and real autobiographical comics from outside the normal world were new though, especially by someone from her unique place.

Once back home, she followed this lifeline into a new community of artists doing things themselves in Montréal and quickly became involved in the world of self-published comics, zines, and poetry happening in the city. She got a job at a punk clothing store and took the train back and forth from the suburbs constantly, expanding independence, becoming herself.

She'd finally found her people and was enthusiastic and prolific. For those early mini-comics, she used the *nom de plume* Fidèle Castrée; a play on Fidel Castro, as well as with the meanings, "loyal" and "castrated."

(These early comics were nasty. She was a punk, seeking blood and reaction.) Names were fluid throughout her art life as she took comfort in obscurity. Music was made under many names; "Pipi Migou," similar short-lived ambiguities, and later "Wœlv" and "Ô Paon." Her own last name was Gosselin, and occasionally Elverum. But there at the beginning, Fidèle Castrée evolved into the artist name that stuck the longest: "Geneviève Castrée."

Underground publishing and punk music are obviously not just about drawings or songs. They are communities that span the globe, like-minded weirdos pursuing a path that barely makes sense. Geneviève thrived here where art, music, stamp collecting, curiosity, and dissent meet. She maintained



correspondence with people all over the world; fellow artists, publishers, tiny gallery owners, show bookers, writers, musicians, etc. As much as it was about satisfying a burning need to create, it was also about camaraderie. Geneviève was a bright and charismatic friend to many in this international underground.

I didn't know her until she was twenty-two, so I only know of these years secondhand, but it is clear that moving out of her mom's house at eighteen was a major liberation. She'd become her fully formed self, more or less. She was immersed in a world that she was passionate about and found that people there appreciated her, finally. Dragging the baggage of her past (what she called her "bag of hammers"), she moved to Victoria and committed even more deeply to life

as an artist. Working different subsistence jobs, living in various cheap shared houses, always drawing.

Her drawing table was a constant and necessary haven, even in the most transient of times. In new spaces, first thing she'd do was claim a small flat surface to work on and then crowd it in with totemic ink bottles, paper scraps, a few glasses of water, walkman and headphones, and most importantly the sacred ink mixing dish—a repurposed baby food lid. This is the moving temple where she practiced her lifelong devotions.

The years in Victoria were wild and jolly. Her work had grown from the barf and guts stories of her teen minis into beautiful and ambiguous swirls of faces, animals, giants, and darkness. These books are poetic and coded. For the major work from this time,

opposite
drawing zone, Victoria
circa 2002

above
drawing cabin at
her dad's house,
Shawnigan Lake, B.C.
August 2003





the book/record *Pamplémoussi*, she decided it needed accompanying music. Since she wouldn't want anyone else to make it (never), she taught herself to play and write music, and recorded her first album. This began another facet of life as a song maker that became braided through the rest of her work from then on.

I met her because she was setting up shows in Victoria. She wrote to me with an invitation to come play, but the truth is, I'd already heard all about this mythical Geneviève from multiple friends who'd met her and known we needed to meet. They were right. When we did meet in the summer of 2003, it was a lightning bolt of love and certainty. She moved across the water border and lived with me in Anacortes, Washington, for the rest of her life.

Those thirteen years of her life in Anacortes were dense with increasing productivity and brilliance. We were fortunate to have a good home to live in, good food to eat, abundant time and space to pursue whatever creative visions might arrive. As a true punk, her anti-

imperialist vehemence was well supplied with crude American brutality and hypocrisy to keep her burning. More albums, more books, more tours, more exhibitions. Her desk lamp would burn late into the night every night, hunched and aching to keep up with the torrent of ideas that would not relent.

And here is where the chronology breaks down. Life during these years was a blur of constant production with many simultaneous projects always underway. As her skills and vision grew and evolved, she pursued a lot of little ideas, quite a few huge ones, traveled widely for music tours and gallery exhibitions, moved from house to house, and slowly dismantled that bag of hammers. Her devotion to artistic discovery and deep understanding bore fruit as her increasingly unburdened adult-self enriched those around her with its intense example of a deeply felt, deeply examined life.

She filled notebooks with enough material for five lifetimes. She forged friend/mentor relationships

opposite
Aberdeen, Scotland
March 8, 2012

above
Oslo, Norway
May 14, 2006
(photo: Ingeborg Husbyn
Aarsand)



with older working artists like Joanne Kyger, Lori Goldston, Vanessa Renwick, and Sue Roberts. She began regularly taking the short ferry across to Guemes Island to work on ceramic sculptures in Sue's studio. She screenprinted and letterpressed show posters and record covers. She made five albums, three singles, an EP, and countless unreleased recordings. She found her audience opening for the band Earth on multiple tours (not to mention many tours of her own). She helped run a legendary music festival (What The Heck? fest) every July. She arranged small press book fairs. She wrote novels, poetry books, interview magazines, and more. She maintained a mind-blowing stamp collection. She made world-famous beds of stacked quilts for traveling friends. She refused to learn to

drive, and rode her yellow bike around town, singing loudly. She stayed up late, she snoozed with gusto.

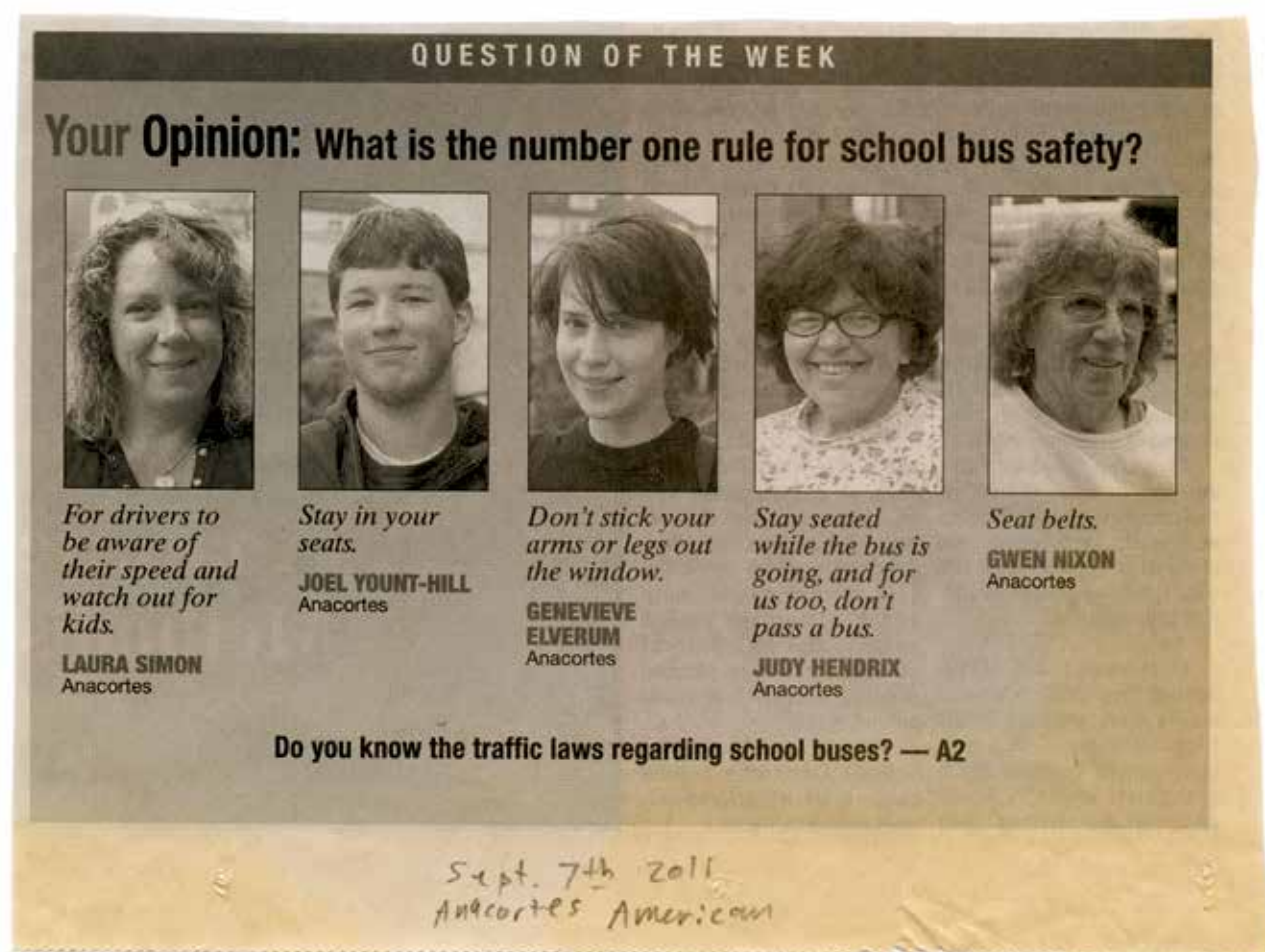
And after many years of both internal strife and actual drawing work, she finally completed her first book for Drawn & Quarterly, *Susceptible*, in 2012, though the invitation had been hanging for almost a decade. It was a giant, necessary step into blunt autobiography. The day she finished drawing, she rearranged all the debris on her usually insane mess of a desk into a shrine. To call her desk a temple is zero percent metaphorical.

She worked very slowly, but the ideas never stopped. This fundamental mismatch was central and frustrating for her. It was like witnessing an erupting volcano of inspiration, with her trying to catch all the magma raining down. Her desk was always covered

above
studio desk upon
completion of *Susceptible*
May 29, 2012

opposite
Neah Bay, Washington
July 29, 2010





with detailed notes and plans all ready for the next five projects, if only her tiny beautiful paintings could be made more quickly. But doing things an easier or uglier way was never an option—no shortcuts allowed. Her impassioned idea of integrity was inflexible and spared no one, least of all herself.

Most people holding this book will already know how it ends. She died unjustly young from pancreatic cancer on July 9, 2016. She was definitely in the middle of a lot of stuff, most obviously her new role as mother to our daughter, born in January of 2015. There is no poetry around this, it's just pointless wreckage. Her life should have been longer and it just wasn't.

The mounting ascent of her life, when seen now totally in this comprehensive collection of what she left behind, was clearly going somewhere even greater. The marked shift around May 2015 when cancer was discovered out of nowhere was more a fore-fronting of the magical elements that had always been present in her work. The search for meaning and the work of storytelling receded as the efforts to use her art for spell-casting became more overt. Faced with an

absurd, looming mortality, she threw herself entirely into survival at all costs, drawing and writing the future she hoped to inhabit. There was a tarot deck, a new newsletter (*Health Today*), multiple books of poetry, magical warrior self-portraits, ornate notebook encouragements, entreaties to angels, kings, gods, and at the very end, a book for our daughter, *Une Bulle/A Bubble*, that would be published posthumously.

But the spells could not keep her alive. When she died, it was a disorienting shock to the small, tender international community of her friends and appreciators. She left a void. She also left a ton of work, most of it unpublished and barely seen. Going through her studio, I found things stuffed inside stacks of hoarded scrap paper, folded in books and envelopes, buried in the correspondence piles; the middens of someone who couldn't stop producing long enough to sort through the makings. This book is an attempt at a complete collection. (But of course it is incomplete. There is also her music. There's the unknown amount of work she gave away or sold and kept no record of. There's her writing. There are the vast notebooks.

above
an appearance in the
hometown newspaper

opposite
backyard, home
May 24, 2014





There is the abstract work. And you should see my collection of her elaborately detailed grocery lists.)

So this was the trajectory of her life, 1981 to 2016. A punk from suburban Québec who blasted through the world for thirty-five years, touching many with her highly concentrated vision. But for the most part, this biographical account doesn't really add up to explaining who Geneviève was. How did this singular maniac actually come to be? Nature plus nurture don't really equal an answer. How did this weird plant grow from that particular soil? She often described herself as an alien. Sometimes it was with pride, sometimes with hopelessness. It's just the way it was. She knew she was from her own universe with

its own morals, spoke her own language, pursued her own necessities, often following an illogical set of rules, all normal and obvious to her. Being an alien is not easy; she spent a lot of her life processing interpersonal conflicts and misunderstandings, always working to learn to live among the rest of us.

Alien, but with the immovable conviction that the world should meet her on her terms, not vice versa. She stood her ground for half her life as a lone French speaker among her little communities in Victoria and Anacortes, finding a strange reverse comfort in the isolation of that guaranteed misunderstanding. A therapist once pointed out that she created these scenarios of frayed communication (singing in

above
tour alter ego "Juice"
Pisa, Italy
March 24, 2012

opposite
Manning Park, B.C.
January 29, 2014



French almost exclusively to non-French speaking audiences, obscuring her narratives in coded secret references, defaulting to a hopeless “you’ll never understand!” in arguments) probably because her young mom was not able to ingrain in her as a little kid the right kind of reassuring communicative feedback. A state of misunderstanding became a weird norm, a home, and so she built a life around alien-hood.

I keep saying it, but Geneviève really was defined by the conflicting forces she contained, the dark and the light, the hard and the soft. She glowed with friction as opposing ideas worked themselves out within her always, never quite resolved. Her dreamy generosity slammed against the brick wall of her rigid idealism. She’d spend

months laboring over a beautifully handmade series of paintings that would only be seen by like thirty people who’d managed to subscribe to her analog postal xerox newsletter. She’d sing her heart out in her native language to audiences that did not understand what she was saying (but were mesmerized anyway). She was devoted to obsolescence, purity, and her own intuition.

This book is what we have left of her lifelong, hardcore quest for meaning. This quest was at times cute, silly, dark, devastating, meticulous, obscure, universal, and always beautiful; a field where conflicting forces churn it out, eroding it all down to the simple love within. Geneviève chose the path of most resistance. *She believed in love, and she was right.*



volcano

Julie Doucet

I wish Geneviève had a P.O. box out there so I could keep on sending her letters, like we used to do, mail maniacs that we were...

That's how we met: I was living in Berlin at the time; she sent me one of her minicomics, *Mucus de Puce*. I loved it.

The drawings were very good. Unbelievably good considering her age at the time—eighteen years old. They were roundish and cute but the content, rather gloomy. All the characters had this look of perplexity, were not so neat, and were borderline suicidal or dead.

I was very excited to receive mail from such a talented young woman from my hometown. That never happened. I wrote back.

Shortly after, I moved back to Montreal and we met in person at this comic event at the Cheval Blanc tavern. She had this incredible look: she was an explosion of colors, beautiful, exuberant. She offered me candies. Me, being shy...as usual I didn't know what to say. It was awkward.

Anyhow, we became friends. She was a gift to me. At last an accomplice, a female cartoonist friend I could truly relate to, in so many ways. Like me, she didn't fit the standard of womanhood and she didn't care to.

She had an incredible art drive, she wasn't trying to please at all costs, was uncompromising...Something in her art, the contrast between its apparent innocence and its dark content—I could detect a conflict there that was very familiar to me.

It turned out that a couple of months later, Geneviève was going away to live with her dad in British Columbia. So we resumed our correspondence. She never came back to live in Montreal, so we never stopped writing letters to each other. I was sorry she was leaving, but then again, I could understand her move: after all, I myself had very often packed my suitcase.

She'd call me long-distance once in a while.

She'd come visit, eventually. She'd be staying over at my place or at our mutual friend and publisher's, Benoît Chaput (L'Oie de Cravan).

Sometimes to work on a book or to record songs at Hôtel2tango...later on just passing by, on her way back home from a tour.

The last postcard I received from Geneviève had a picture of an erupting volcano on it. It was so heart-breaking.

That image will stick with me forever...

Geneviève, the volcano.

above
years of correspondence
between Geneviève
and Julie

opposite
Geneviève and Julie
on Mount Esja above
Reykjavík, Iceland,
May 2005
(photo: Phil Elverum)







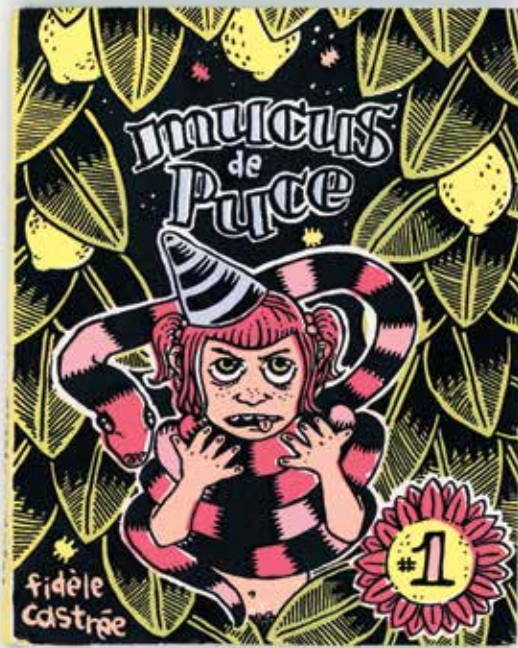
a selection from the many early zines and minicomics:

from top
Sundays Suck
minicomic
1" x 1"

Dead End
zine story
3.25" x 3.25"

El Señor Pene
screenprinted cover
7" x 8.5"

Fidèle Castrée
card
3" x 4"



Mucus de Puce #1
(cover and excerpt)

self-published mini-comic,
screenprinted cover,
English and French
editions, April 1998

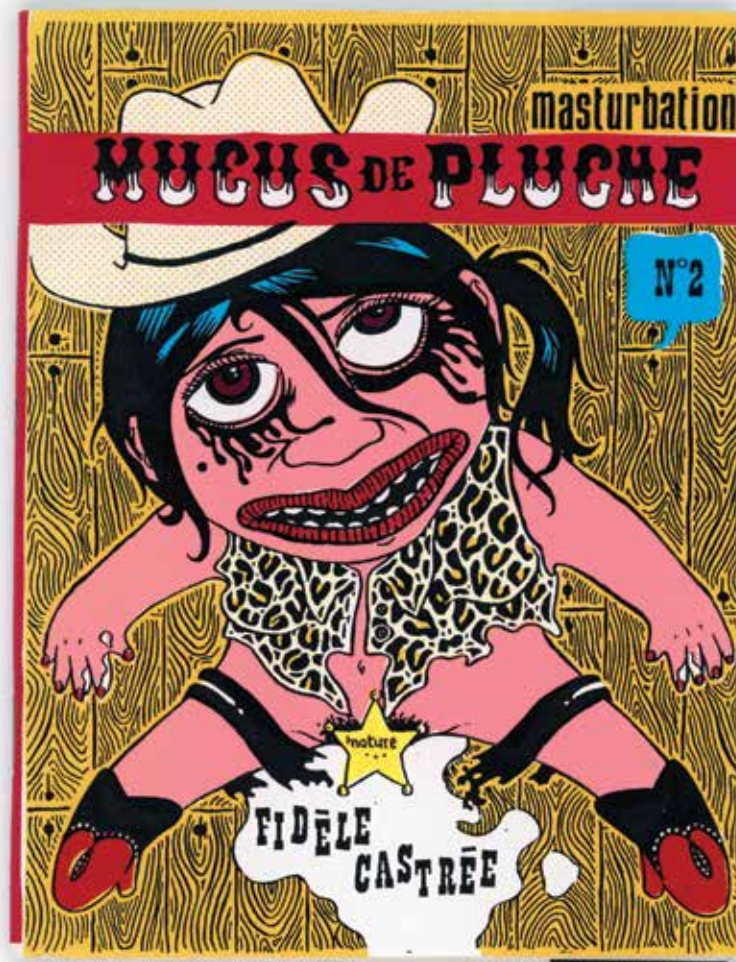
80 pages, 4.5" x 5.5"



Nausea

self-published mini
mini-comic, 2 colors,
June 1998

18 pages, 1.5" x 1.5"



I'm not super punctual.



Well, once, I was listening to the radio, they said I had died that afternoon.



And then, they played my favorite song...

ensuite, je me suis glissée sous les draps.



en attendant ma mort.

-fidèle castrée 99

And after, I slipped under the sheets, waiting for death to come.

Mucus de Puce #2
(cover and excerpt)

self-published mini-comic,
screenprinted cover,
December 1998

48 pages, 4.25" x 5.75"



Citron-Limette #1

self-published mini-comic,
May 1999

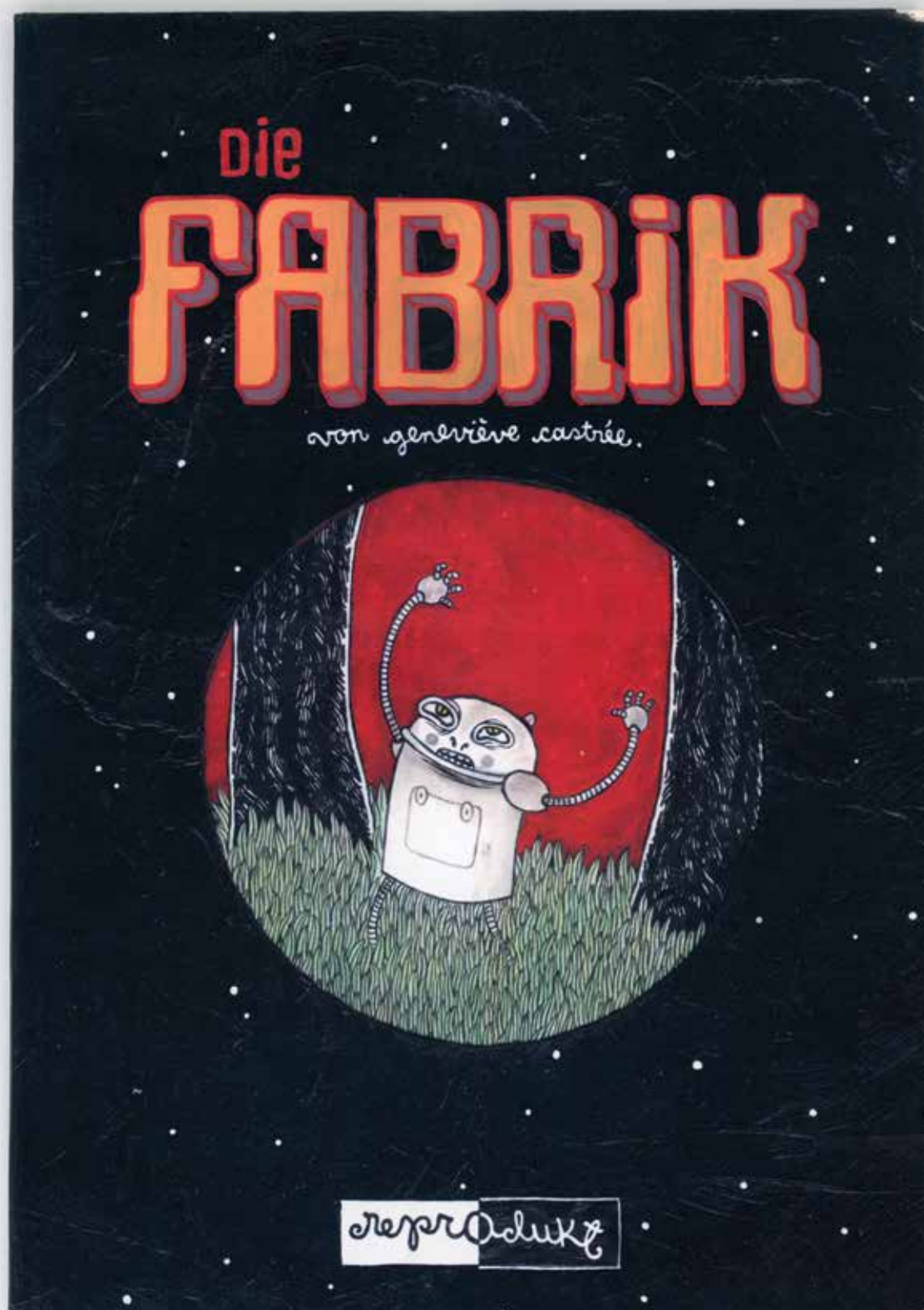
10 pages, 5" x 5.5"



Lait Frappé
(cover and excerpt)

published by L'Oie de
Cravan, January 2000

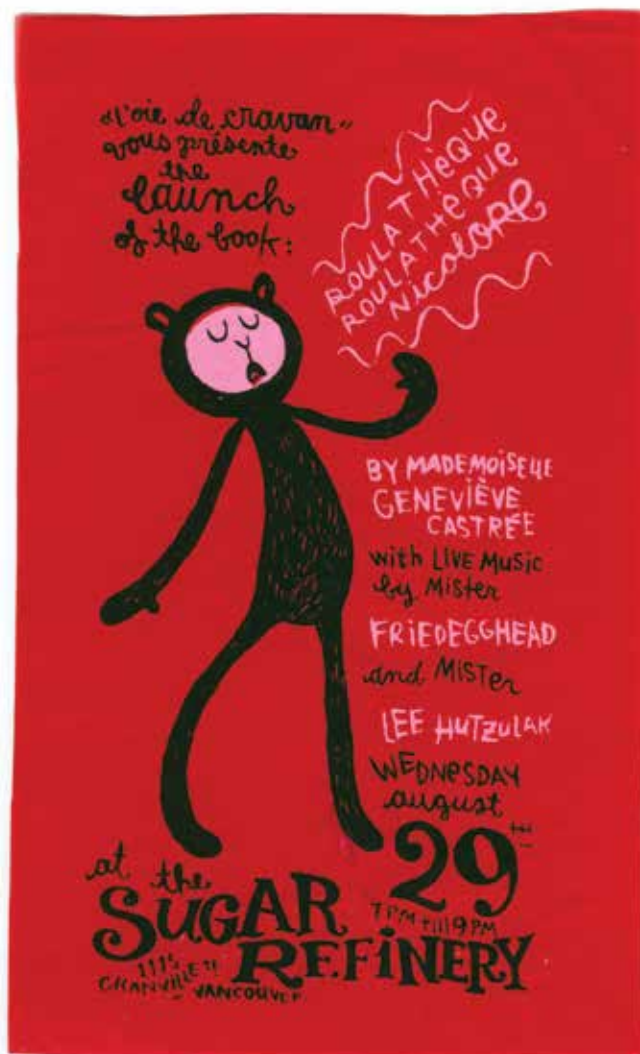
42 pages, 6.5" x 8.5"



Die Fabrik
(cover)

drawn in 2000,
published in June 2002
by Reprodukt, in
German only

40 pages, 6.5" x 9.25"





this spread

Roulathèque

Roulathèque Nicolore

(screenprinted book launch poster, cover, excerpts)

published by L'Oie de Cravan in June 2001

50 pages, 6.5" x 5.25"

from portland, oregon

THANKSGIVING

P.SNIFSNIF

WITH MATT and THOMAS too!
WEDNESDAY december FOURTH.



RUN CHICORUN



THE
ORGAN
FIFTYCENT SCARF
Friday, july 19th 2002.
@ THURSDAYS
1821 Cook St.

thanksgiving
the olden days
p:ano

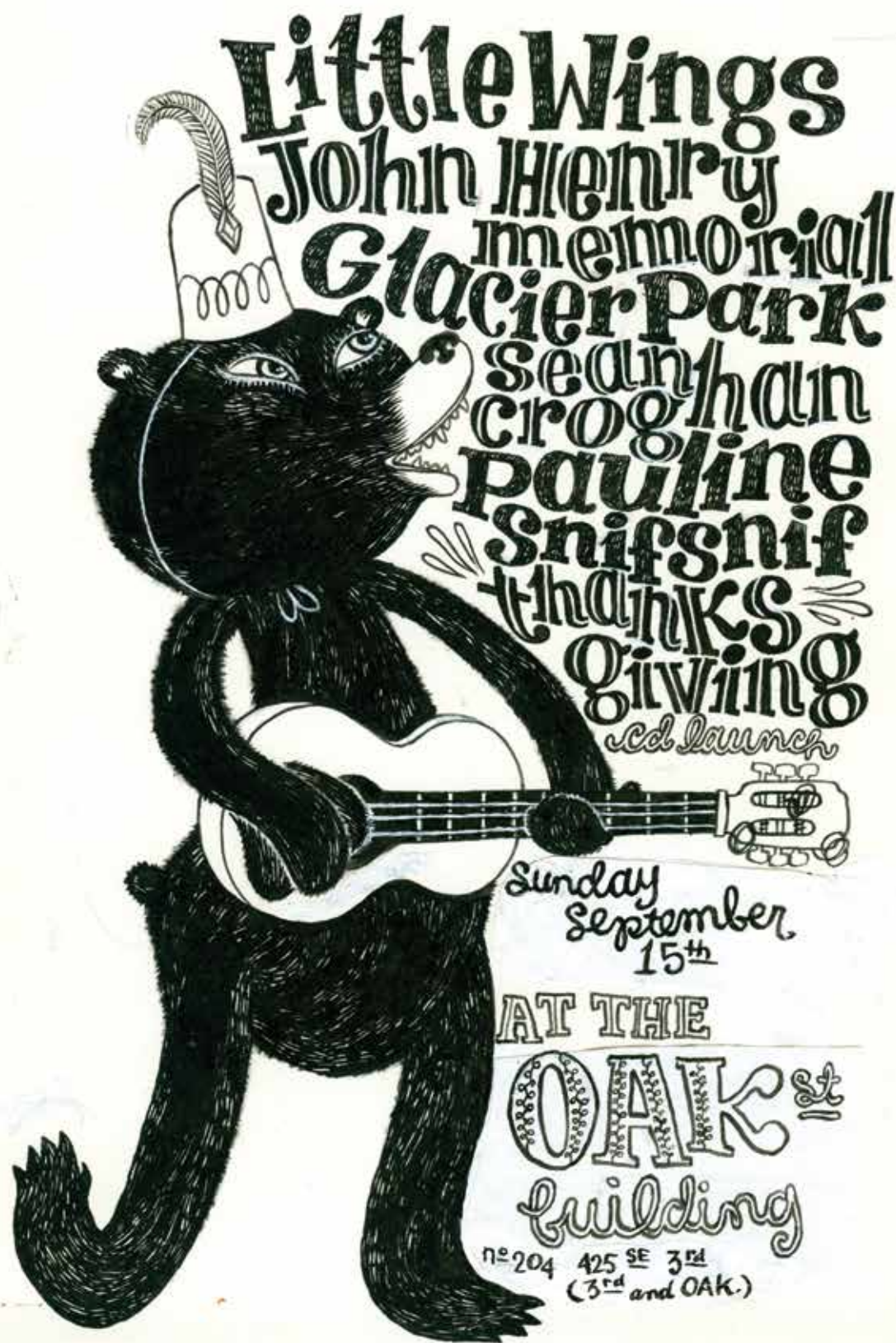
at! not! reading artist
from portland, oregon
from vancouver
from vancouver

sponsored
by CFUV
101.9 FM



Thursday
august 29th

at THURSDAYS
monkey bar of the damned - 1821 Cook St.



this spread
show posters
Victoria, B.C. and
Portland, 2002



I usually take a walk before breakfast...

Bambubjörn

story published in
Galago, Sweden, 2002

4 pages, 7" x 10.5"



fre.

Bamboo bear, come!

Bamboo bear??



fyra.

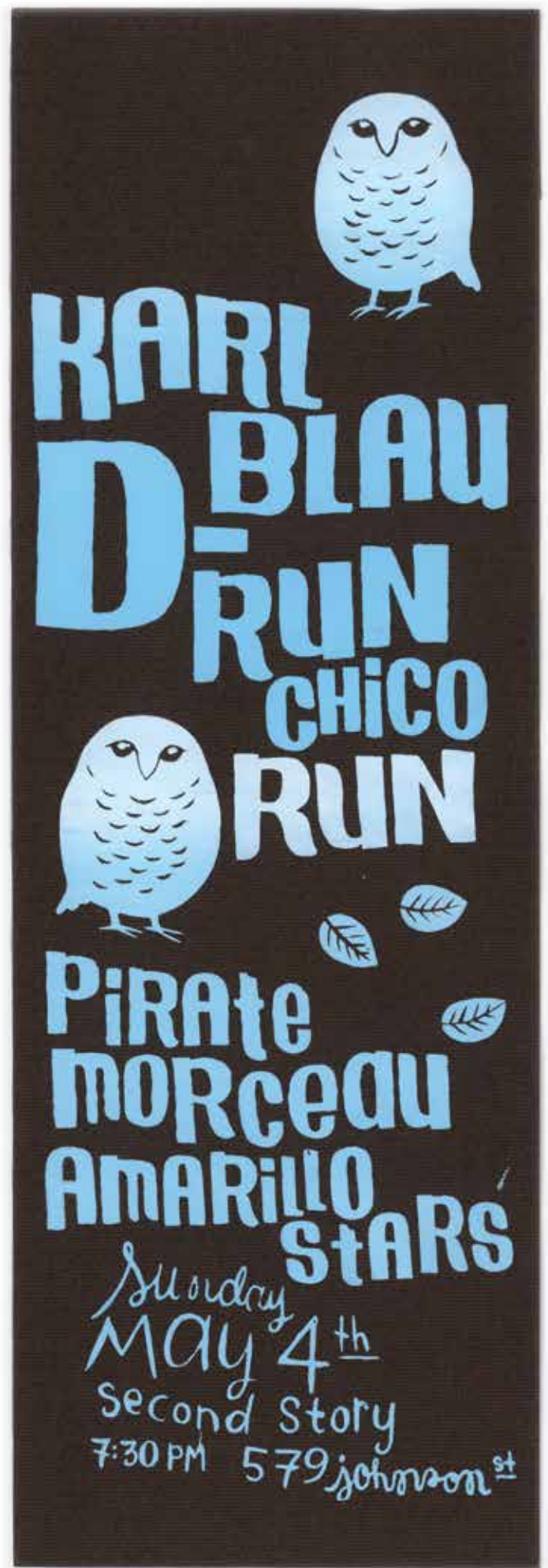
He is here!



this page
 papercut art and
 tracing paper drawings
 for use in burning
 silkscreens

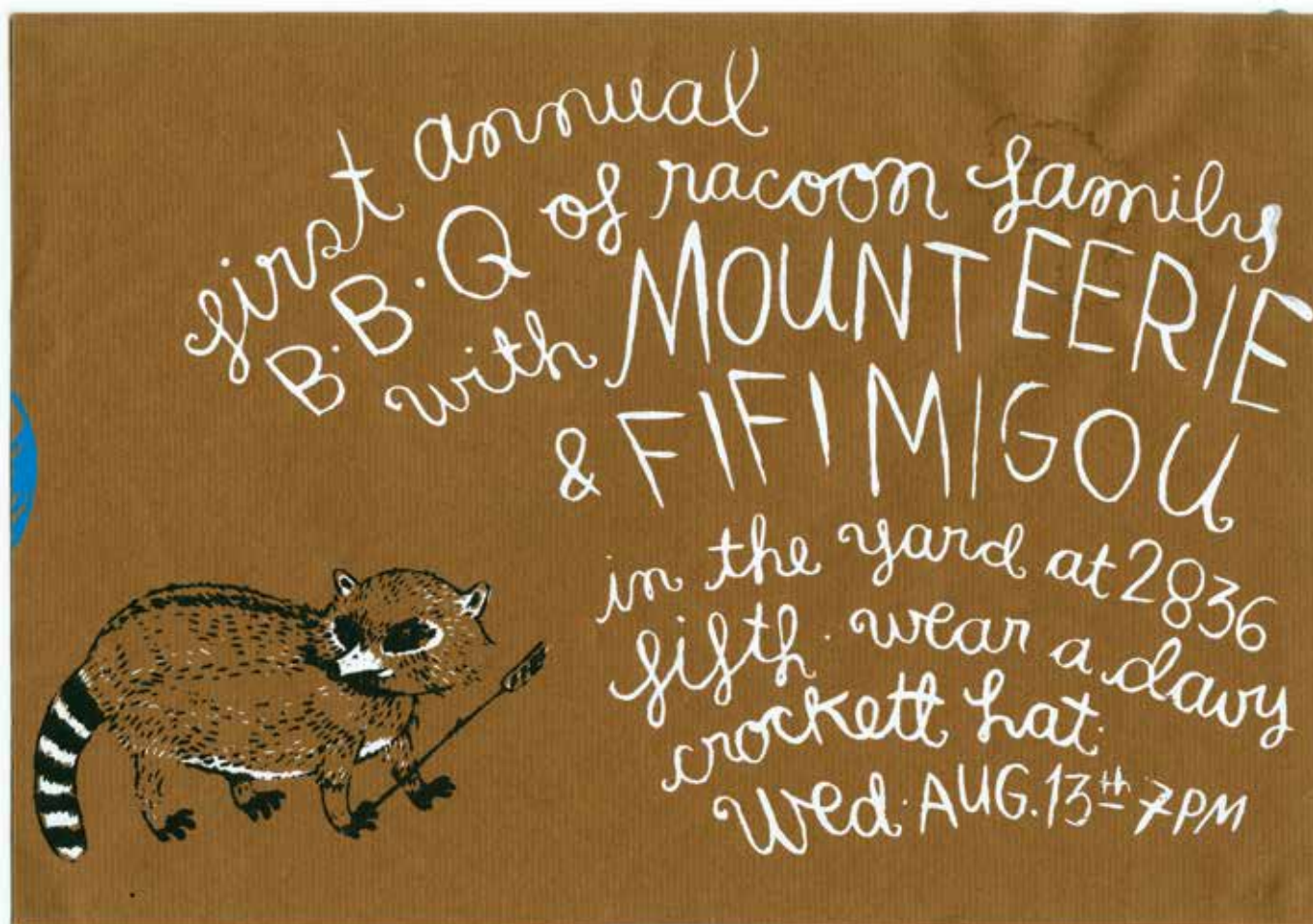
opposite
 screenprinted concert
 posters, Victoria, 2003







this page
various drawings,
2002-2003



above
screenprinted poster for a
yard show in Port Alberni,
B.C., August 2003
10" x 7"

below
sketch scraps:
a raccoon roasting
hotdogs, Geneviève's
grandmother's treasured
taxidermied anteater



La renarde et le garçon

The fox and the boy

three-drawing sequence
actual size







***Le canard dans
mes pantalons***

The duck in my pants

three-drawing sequence
actual size





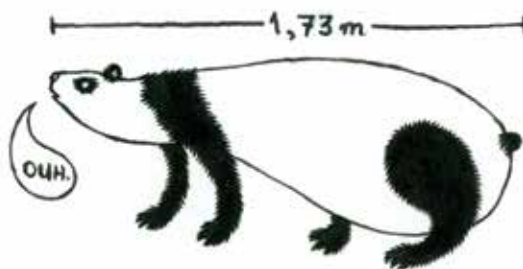


this page
various drawings, 2004

la femelle panda



mesurant
un mètre et soixante-treize
centimètres de long et ayant le
corps en forme de poire, la
femelle panda est
sans aucun doute l'un des
animaux les plus
solitaires du monde.



quand elle a besoin
de faire quelque chose
de sa peau, elle se met
à siffler.



*The female panda,
pear-shaped and
measuring one meter and
seventy-three centimeters
long, is without a doubt
one of the most solitary
animals in the world.*

*When she gets bored,
she whistles.*

*"Without love,
true love..."*

*"Laughs the devil,
the black devil"**

** The song Marieke
by Jacques Brel*

*this page and
following spread*

La femelle panda

The female panda

nine-panel
unpublished story
actual size



*The female panda
is just a little depressed...*

*Her coat is black and white but
when it is cold we can see her
wearing a red sweater.*







fertility:

He is so strong, so healthy that when he walks in a forest, all the eggs slip out of their bird nests and follow him slowly, trying not to be noticed. All of a sudden, he turns around and finds himself surrounded by hundreds of tiny white and blue eggs.

this page and opposite
Bigfoot phase:
notebook page where
the band name Woelv
first forms, papercut art
for burning silkscreens,
a screenprinted poster for
a show Geneviève put on



Bigfoot Celebration

mount eerie
poison dart
woe/v
thanksgiving



friday may 7th
SECOND STORY BOOKS
579 JOHNSON ST. VICTORIA
DOORS AT 8PM





← moitié nuit,
des nuages dans
le ciel (bleu électrique)

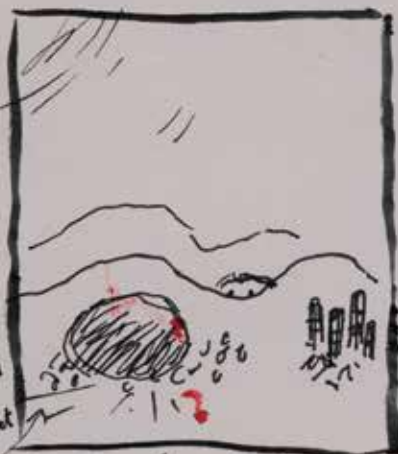
← dessiner
l'ombre
de la géante
sur la ville
(les lumières de
la ville sont éteintes)



← il fait plus
clair
elle attend qu'ils
se réveillent

what?

what
was that?



woah!
where did
this come
from?
oh yes, I bet
it was
aliens...

(encore plus clair)
rassemblement l'aube
de personnes,
les mains sur les
branches



(le jour, gris)
les gens vivent et font
rouler la pierre pour l'enlever

this spread
sketch and the only
remaining fragment of a
four-panel Giant story

