

ALL ART + WRITING BY KRISTYN BAT LOPEZ



*Someone asked me once whether
I was a closet Hare Krishna. I'm not.*

I am a typical white girl with new age parents and an art history degree. During college, my connection to the goddess Kali epically forged with a proclivity for working myself into the ground to avoid feelings. Junior year, it was the first time I'd knowingly sacrificed my own success and work for someone else's needs. I was doing OK where I was but he wasn't and so we went back home. I'm not a devotee nor a religious scholar and so I won't postulate on the many arms of Kali, Shiva, Nrsimhadev. But I needed more hands to succeed then, to be everything, everywhere and enough; not stumble, disappoint or achieve less than my potential. A humble guy in a robe never really cut it. Studying religious paintings and listening to kirtan, I could create armor for myself formed of gold, blood, motherhood, asceticism. So I drew Kali over and over again, and when I got married I started drawing Parvati, and when I lost several pregnancies, Ganesha. And now everyone knows all of my computer passwords.





I've tasked myself with touching and being in touch with other people: mother, tattooer, wife, teacher. I've used people - bands, boys, men, students, clients, my kids - to call me into myself, into identities. To give me permission and validation to exist in my own body. I'm eternally hypervigilant about the space I take up, the absences and advantages of people around me functioning as a system of demerits.

My kids are utterly perfect and wring every bit of life out of me. I have some peaceful days amid the noise and distraction. I don't work outside the home full time anymore, and I had to quit grad school half way through, but it's no matter. I find mountains of dishes, side hustles, laundry and attachment parenting to hide in. I like to work so hard that no one is able to find me, even me.

If I'm a really good art teacher it won't matter that I don't make any personal work. If I'm a really good mom it won't matter that I have no friends. If my house is really clean it won't matter that I touch all of its surfaces more than I'm able to touch my partner. If I look busy, there won't be too many questions about how I'm doing or what I really want.

Doing research in old journals reveals the patterns. It's not ONLY that I don't have enough time to do the things that I like, or to practice self care. I don't prioritize "myself" because where is the self to care for? Sometimes I'm so detached that I am oblivious to physical pain. In recent weeks I've found myself literally sitting on a nail in a chair, kneeling on a pinecone, only stopping to check in after minutes and minutes of discomfort.





If I were put on the spot to title this project less obtrusely, it might be something like "Remember What It Was Like When You Only Had to Please Yourself?" A few months ago, I watched a Foo Fighters concert on YouTube, totally out of the blue. I heard myself sleepily admitting to having a low key crush on Dave Grohl. Incredulous to have unearthed such a weird fucking revelation and forever the researcher, I've been reading back to back biographies, listening to recordings and interviews regarding my most intense childhood music obsessions and I've become like a ghost. Everything from these early years is crushing against the surface like flowers under a pane of glass: vivid, inaccessible, dying. I remember the posters on my wall, the books I hunched over in the backseat of our family's Caravan, the CD's I fell asleep to on repeat, the liner notes I would study.

It was never really Dave who I daydreamed, talked or drew about, but as an adult with more starts and stops and reworkings than I'd planned, it makes sense that I'm drawn to this story of a definitively "hot dad" who works hard, doesn't do drugs, and is so intensely devoted to his craft. That's what I'm into at this point in my life, I guess, mystery solved. But it also feels like part of a problematic association between power, productivity, and masculinity that has eroded elements of my life and personality. And what about Kurt, the real and dead dreamboat of my middle school rock fantasies, how does he factor into all of this self-indulgent nostalgia?

I feel like my own bored and lonely ex sending Facebook messages to an old flame to say "Hey! How have you been?!" and drop some vaguely relevant "back in the day" references, omg, feels like FOREVER ago, wow. And that self love self is being polite but also wondering where the fuck I've been and feeling sorry for my washed up, chia pudding making ass in these non-ironic mom jeans. I know that she is too cool to hang out with me now and I'm way too old and boring to be writing a zine, very much the arena rock Foo Fighters tour attendee rather than the SubPop era Nirvana fan. But I've made a rough little path back to who I was when I liked myself a lot, and I'm spending some time here - now that I have it - lying on the figurative floor and listening to music like we used to.

It's still hard when I have to go home - back to my present mind. No amount of adult privileges are softening this feeling of regretful, self-isolated nostalgia. Having to leave somewhere at the end of the night, back to a quiet house where everyone else is sleeping, or having to stay home while everyone else is going out, working while everyone else gets drunk, they're like different versions of the same song I've been playing all my life. This is where I've always been able to get my best work done, but I'm not alone in those spaces anymore. I can't be by myself with my loneliness, I have to share it as I make cereal and fold clothes and drive to music lessons with Mr. David (not the famous one) who happens to be in a Nirvana cover band. I realize that in most ways, this is a privileged position to be in, but being touched, talked and clung to by someone for most of every day and night when I feel otherwise so empty makes me feel like an old plastic jewel case with no CD inside.

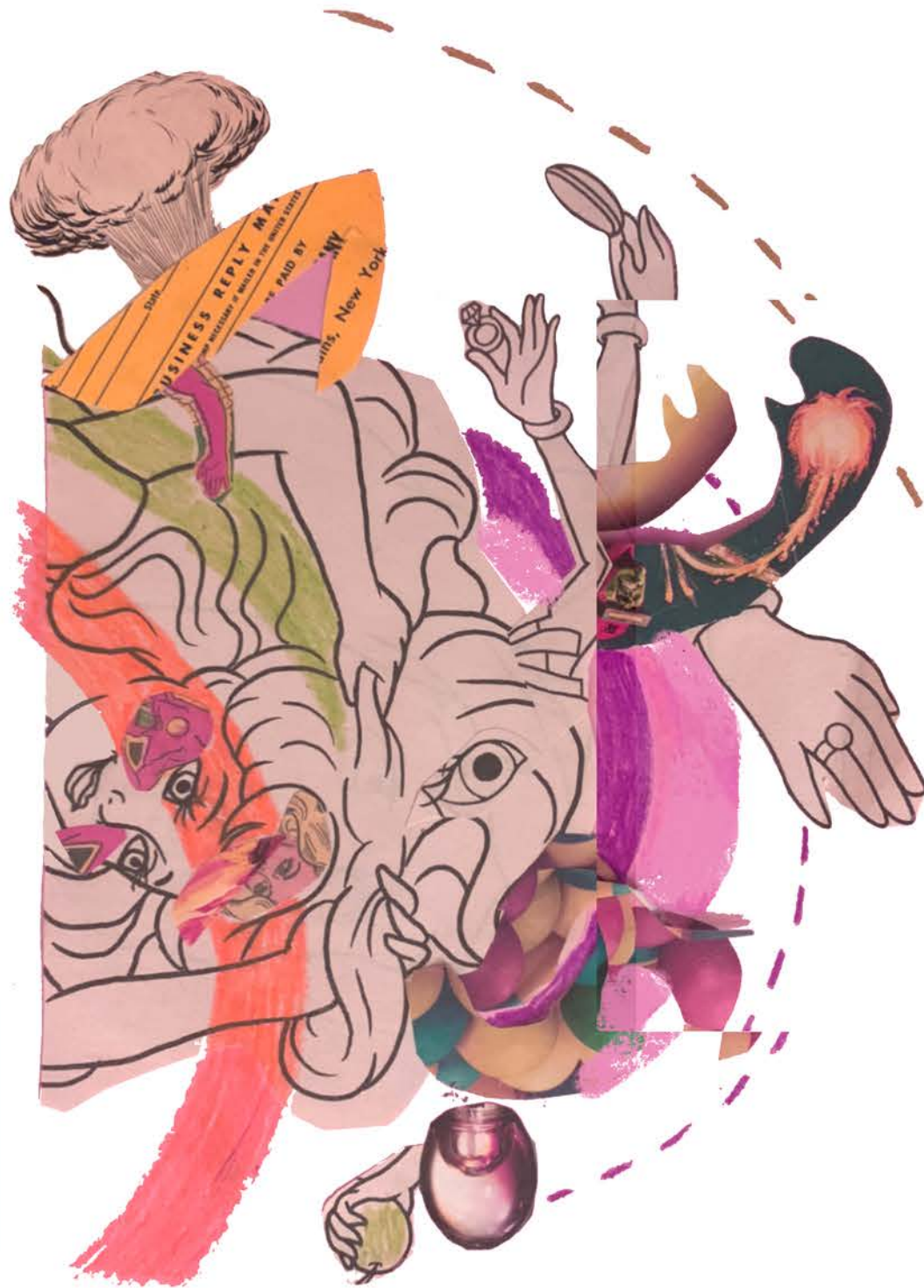




Will I ever walk around outside a city at night in dirty sneakers, throwing rocks at fancy hotels like I used to? Will I wake up in my best friends bed and order pizza for brunch after drinking too much flavored vodka? Will I have dinner at my grandparents house, sit at the kids table with my cousins? Will I sit on curbs with my headphones in, pen in hand, waiting for my mom to pick me up? Stay in my classroom, or studio, or at my desk until dark getting everything just the way I like it?

These are places I was asking my younger, cooler self to deliver me just as COVID hit. And now I'm asking the only weeks younger, cooler (or at least calmer) self the same type of questions. Will I ever? Will I even see them again? Will my kid get to do any of the things I was hoping to be able to relive through him? Did I miss my chance, again, at being content with my natural state of dissatisfaction? I'll never get to be an angry teen again, and I might never get to be a normal careworn working mom of toddlers again, the domestic Kali, balancing play dates and tattoo appointments, feeling like an asshole that I didn't brush my kids hair before going to sit in a circle with the other parents, the box of drooly instruments and Tony the Scarf monster. Gods are drawn with millions of hands because they're supposed to be demonstrating their divine power, not an example for me to follow to my demise. I'm grateful for the unplanned universal sabbatical in helping me sadly accept this.





As I dive deeper into 90's rock lore and my own personal history, the fallacy of having to be (or love) either a Kurt or a Dave is clearly, grossly unfounded. I don't have to pick a side, keep categorizing, rationalizing or killing myself with work, the pressure to identify publicly. I can dream quietly, drink beer before 5:00, change my mind, walk away in the middle of doing dishes because I have to write down an idea, live in all of the different times and places of my mind, make stupid paintings, keep the bathroom clean and make lunches for my kids that look like little beaches, scenes of Ancient Egypt, frogs sculpted out of green onion and cucumber slices. I can do one or two, all or none of those things each day and still be a good and faithful version of me.

I've been trying to scavenge my old lives for reconciliation to the present, and that present has shifted. I'm stuck in this mental space where no one knows the old me, the person that was inwardly comfortable in their own skin instead of just busy telling everyone they're okay. Existing as an old familiar stranger in my mind, someone all of the new people in my life don't remember or recognize, and unsure of who I will be after this long pause. There's no clear path forward, and no space to process it without hands and "hey, mama?" all day, these tiny sweet and pervasive weeds lingering at every turn.

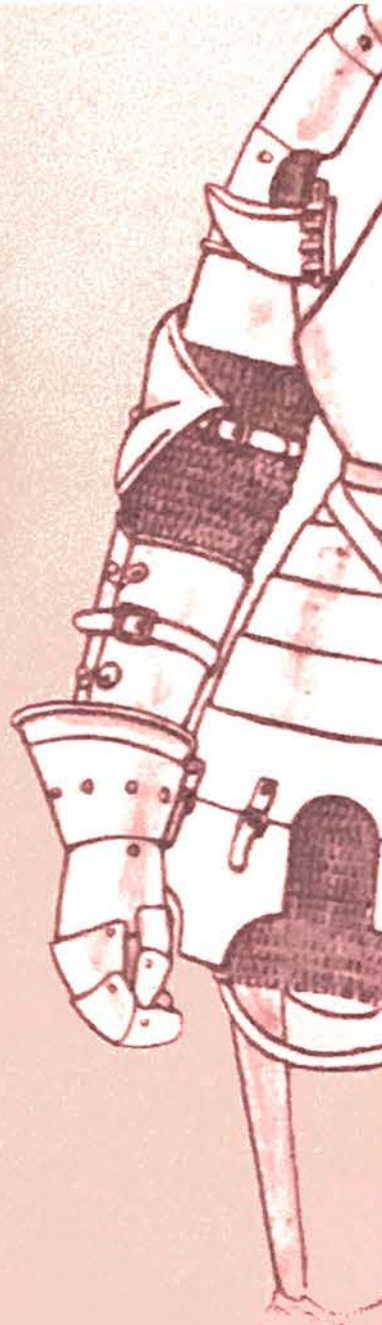




Chimera's

THANK

YOU



Armor for the Maid

The most valuable gift Charles VII gave the Maid was a suit of armor that was made to her measurements before she fled to Poitiers. Buckled into it (right), she wore a small version of the typical armor of the time. She wore a helmet for her head, a surcoat for her body, and leg pieces for her legs. Joan's armor was properly called a *salade*, but unlike the *salade* of the time, hers was not fitted with a visor. In fact, she may have worn a basinet, a type of helmet.



Thank you for this opportunity to disarm myself, readers and friends, and to work through some of the heaviness I'm feeling, into the lightness that is stewardship of the next generation of rock throwers. This is a really significant project for me, and just knowing how many of you in my life **will GET that** - because you know me or my kids, or you read my old zines, or you've been tattooed by me - is reason for me to feel proud, heard + supported.



If you like not very deep tracks of 90s alternative, check out this playlist I made of some old faves with new relevance.

<https://spoti.fi/2KGDco>

P.S. THERE IS ONE DRAWING IN HERE THAT ISN'T MINE, ON THE LAST PAGE OF THE WRITING. IT'S BY ANGELO FELIPE BAT LOPEZ and after i already added it in he explained that it's a dead elephant.