

**NWEAR**

**MISSES**





*A short walk that affects those  
that you pass. Some call it a  
near miss. Hair's breadth. The  
hands hold their own weight.  
Reflections create ripples.*

**BY KATJA FARIN**  
**TEXT BY ASHTON COOPER**  
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# Near Miss

Ashton Cooper

In Katja Farin's 2021 painting *Kindling*, two figures extend their arms across the void between them, thrusting their hands into space only to find that a small gap separates the final press of their fingers. In the background of this near-connection looms a smoking scrim of mountains ablaze, lending a dramatically apocalyptic feeling to the central characters' reach for intimacy. The setting intensifies the stakes of the touch, making the work one of the more heightened examples of the pervasive themes in Farin's practice: affective attachments, the growing pains of self-formation, and queer modes of being. In Farin's paintings, depictions of physical contact (or the absence thereof) are often the sites of explorations of their relationships to people, the environment, and other beings. Hands in particular are used to visualize care and attempts at forging bonds



*Kindling*, 2021

with others or one's self. They are also emblematic of emotional states, enacting bodily languages of togetherness, alienation, and everything in between.

Images of interpersonal and interspecies dynamics are the anchor of Farin's practice. Past series depict bodies entangled in both affective and physical jumbles. A suite of paintings from 2018 proposed imaginative interpretations of the fireman's carry, a method of holding in which rescuers hoist another person across their shoulders. While the fireman's carry was created for an explicitly utilitarian purpose, Farin's figures often come together in inexplicable arrangements, assuming poses that exceed the bounds of functional action. Farin describes this approach as illustrating "emotional weight through physical posture."

In *Mimicking Passion*, 2021, for instance, two people are seated at a table covered in a gingham tablecloth, their tongues and hands extended toward one another, but not quite touching. As in *Kindling*, the figures are suspended on the threshold of physical contact, but here they appear in a more humdrum setting—what looks like an outdoor cafe replete with a passionflower-covered trellis behind them. Even without *Kindling's* burning backdrop, there is still a theatricality to the strange moment of their interaction.



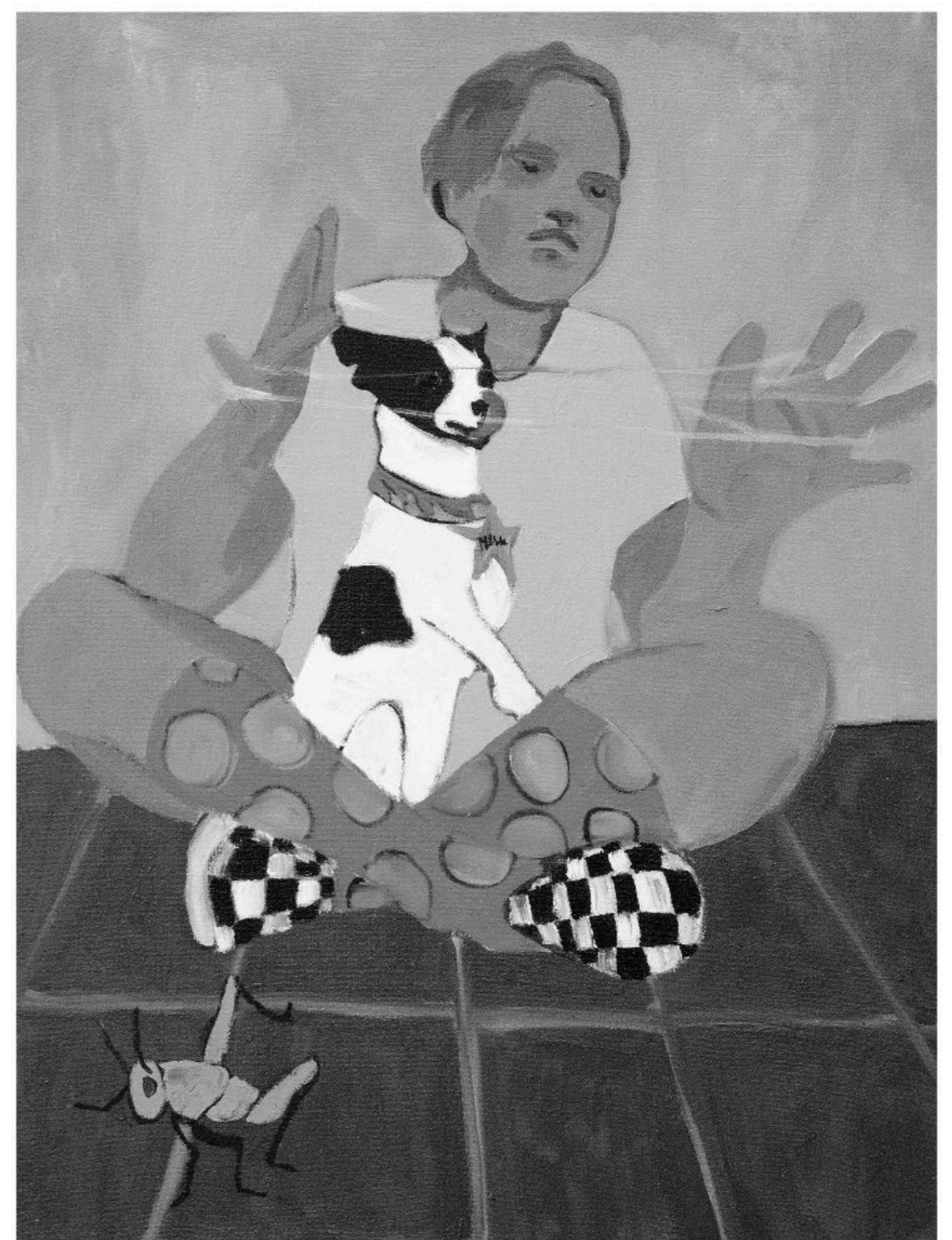
Mimicking Passion, 2021

The individual on the left holds a larger-than-life-size hand awkwardly in front of their chest while their companion rests their equally giant digits palm down on the table in front of them. Their hands are nearly the same size as their heads, taking on the quality of a second set of characters in the bottom half of the composition. With mouths and hands open, both parties seem to be signaling a desire to forge connection, but through gestures that are exaggerated versions of real-life methods of communication. This amplified gestural exchange speaks to the performativity of interrelation.

In addition to investigating interpersonal dynamics, Farin also explores the performativity of self-formation both as a person and an artist. In *Old Games, 2021*, a person sits cross legged on the floor, stretching the string of a cat's cradle between their oversized hands. Cat's cradle is a game of one, a mode of isolated play enacted by creating shapes with a loop of string. Rendered in shades of blue, Farin's player could be a metaphor for the isolated artist at work, creating images with their hands that are existentially impermanent. Yet, in Farin's paintings, there is never a resolution to the tension between separation and junction. When bodies are together, they often don't make contact, separated by an invisible boundary. When they are isolated, they still seek out modes of connecting to their environment through touch.

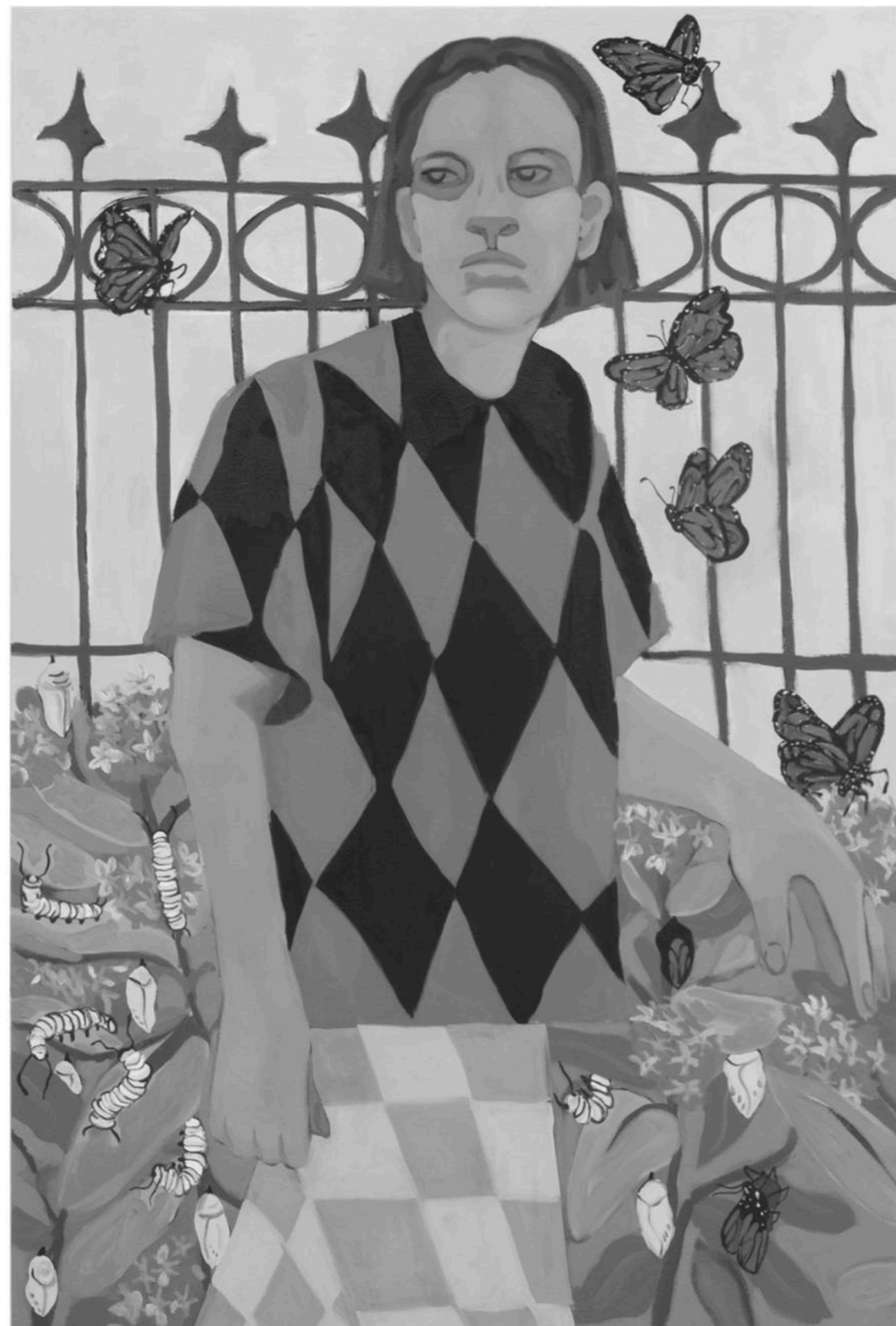
Amid the melancholic, *Old Games* also points to interspecies bonds—a small dog is perched in the figure’s lap (based on Farin’s own chihuahua, Munch) while a prim grasshopper poses on the floor in front of them. *Kindling* too includes a swarm of 17-year cicadas and another piece titled *Evolving Forward, 2021*, features a less threatening coterie of caterpillars and butterflies surrounding its central character. Farin’s frequent inclusions of flora and fauna get at the kind of multispecies relations that have recently become the subject of theoretical inquiry by Donna Haraway and others, who call for the consideration and care of non-humans. Haraway has drawn on the work of biologist Lynn Margulis whose 1998 book *The Symbiotic Planet* proposed an alternative to Darwin’s theory of competitive evolution by proposing that symbiosis played an equally important role in the evolution of species. Margulis writes:

“Not only are our guts and eyelashes festooned with bacterial and animal symbionts, but if you look at your backyard or community park, symbionts are not obvious but they are omnipresent. ... Physical contact is a nonnegotiable requisite for many differing kinds of life.” In their repeated emphasis on scenarios wherein touch and physical intimacy are key, Farin is a chronicler of both human and interspecies relations, using their works to imagine and work through scenarios of attachments made or missed.



Old Games, 2021

Recently they've probed circumstances of a "near miss," what happens when the possibility of connection is there, but it doesn't quite materialize, like a shot that barely misses its target. In *Near Miss*, 2022, two figures pass on a house-lined street—one turns back toward the other as they walk toward the edge of the frame, a final separation imminent. Farin's works speak to the complexity of social interaction, the improvised performance of self, the minutiae of observing others and the self, and the difficulties of observing the self through others. In this sense, the paintings are deeply autobiographical but also obscured. They don't legibly replicate memories or real scenarios but draw from the artist's emotional life.



Evolving Forward, 2021

In new works, Farin moves from what they have described as “relationships and their complexities” to the complexity of one’s relationship with one’s self. Six paintings, all 2022 and measuring 4 x 6 inches, isolate the hands in individual vignettes. In each, a single hand or pair of hands engages in an action—extinguishing a candle, clutching a set of playing cards, twisting a tendril of hair, putting flowers in a vase, making a shadow puppet, or wielding scissors. Each is an everyday occurrence infused with theatricality and many are suspended moments of transition, saturated with the frisson of anticipation: a flame about to be extinguished, a poker hand lost or won, a string severed. Others foreground the haptic: the feeling of hair strands between fingers, flowers’ supple petals and hairy stems, or the heat of a flame. The various activities of the hands are presented in scenes that allow us to consider the actions, inactions, gestures, and signals that compose our physical and emotional existence in the world. Farin’s work, at its core, investigates the formation of the self, but underpinned by the principle that change is constant and the “I” never arrives fully formed. Often, understanding yourself feels like a near miss.









