

ROBERT BHARDA

The Argument in Your Face, 2018
Digital image from organic collage, 36 x 18 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST

THERESA DUVE MORALES

The Sewing Lessons

When Rosemary Bramble was in the sixth grade, her mother enrolled her in sewing lessons. Rosemary was already taking ballet lessons to remedy her tendency to slouch at the dinner table. Her math ability, her mother hoped, would correct itself in time.

“Not to worry,” her mother said as she ironed her husband’s white dress shirts. “The boys will be better at math by the time you’re old enough to date.”

Rosemary remained slumped over her homework at the kitchen table and pretended not to hear.

Mrs. Bramble set down her iron and bent over her daughter to get a peek at her work. She brushed back her daughter’s wispy brown hair with her fingertips and tucked it behind her ears. “They get smarter than the girls by the time they reach high school, dear.” She smiled and gave Rosemary’s back a gentle push upward. “In the meantime, let them win at board games. You’re such a pretty girl, Rosemary.”

But Rosemary did not feel herself to be a pretty girl. As she walked to her first sewing lesson at the convent across from Saint Therese the Little Flower of Jesus Parochial School, she lagged behind the other girls, clutching at her book bag and trying not to slip on the ice. She was clumsy by nature and her new snow boots—bought slightly over-size by her father in the hope that they would last two winters instead of one—added to her lack of confidence. She slid and shuffled, reaching out for the support of a wall or a hand that was not there.

Rosemary followed her classmates through the side gate and around to the small concrete patio at the back of the convent. The girls stepped over plastic Cool Whip tubs holding kibble and icy water. Cats, overstuffed and fluffy from sheltering outdoors in the Iowa winter, jumped off electric heating pads set atop rusty, overturned garbage cans or the shredded, broken webbing of old lawn chairs. They rubbed up against the pant legs that the girls wore under their uniform skirts and brushed over their vinyl boots.

As the girls each in turn read the sign, “Cats Not Allowed Inside the Convent,” they kicked the cats off of their legs, pushed through the back door, and sat on the basement stairs to pull off snow-covered boots and replace them with shoes from their plastic book bags.