

E L L A B A R O N

Portfolio for *The National Arts Council*

The following images are double-spreads
from my debut graphic novel, *Interface*.

All my previously published work,
(political cartoons, book illustrations, graphic reportage),
is available to view at my website: www.ellabaron.com



CHAPTER
ONE





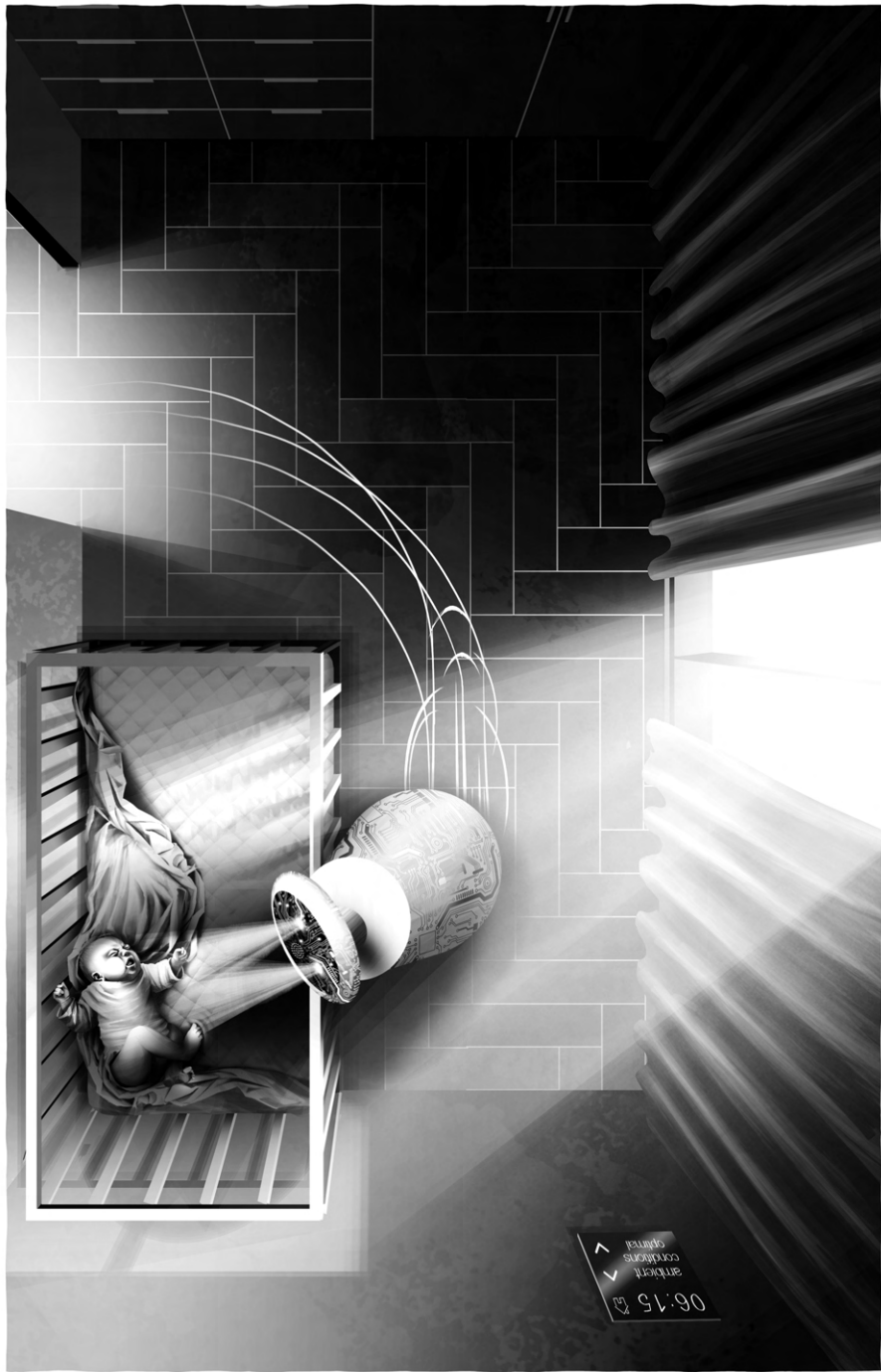


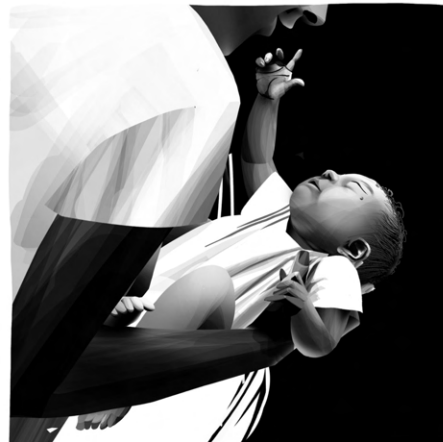
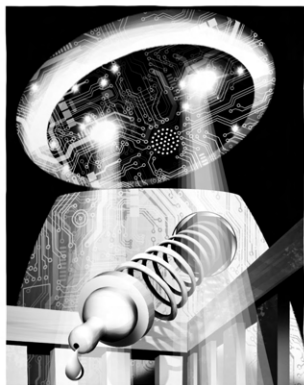
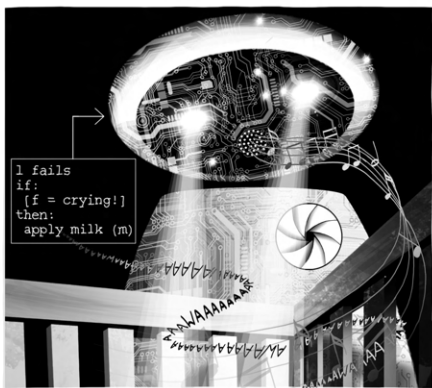
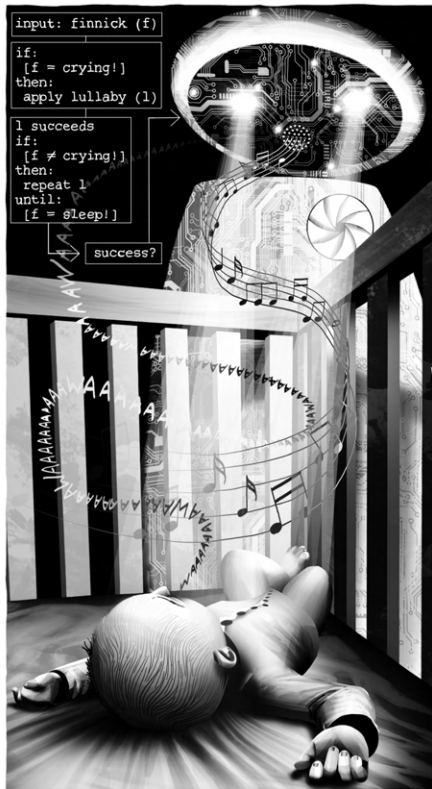


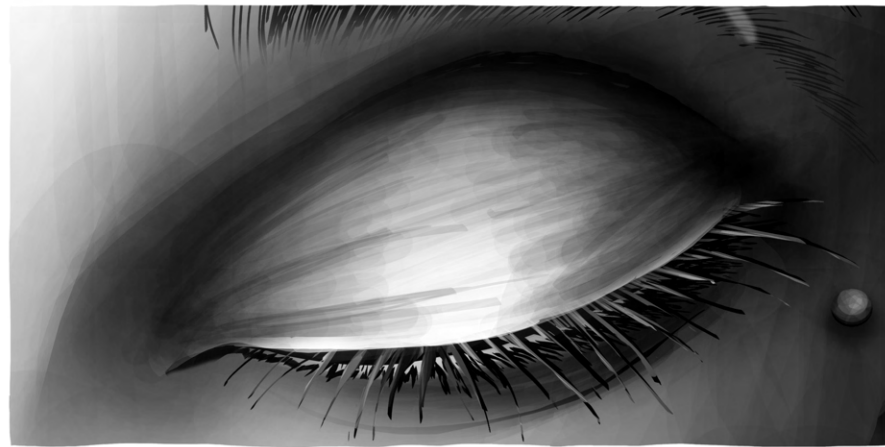
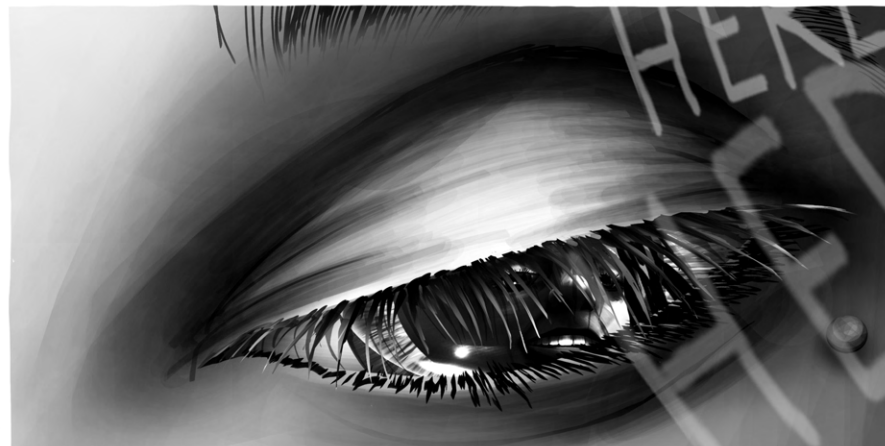
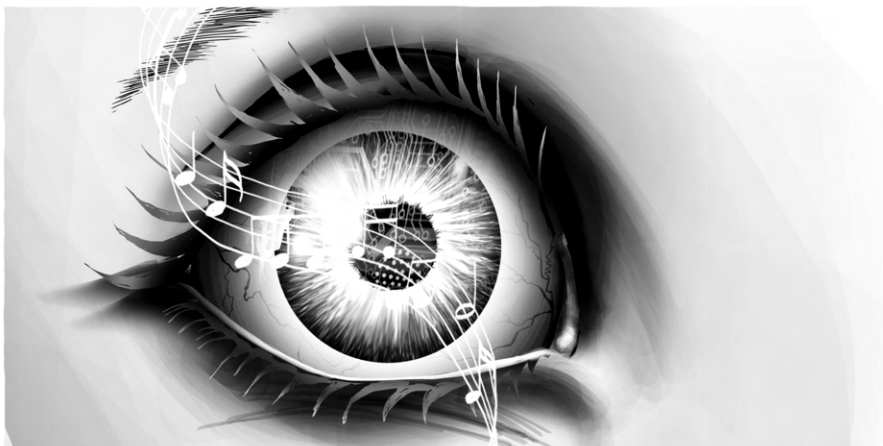
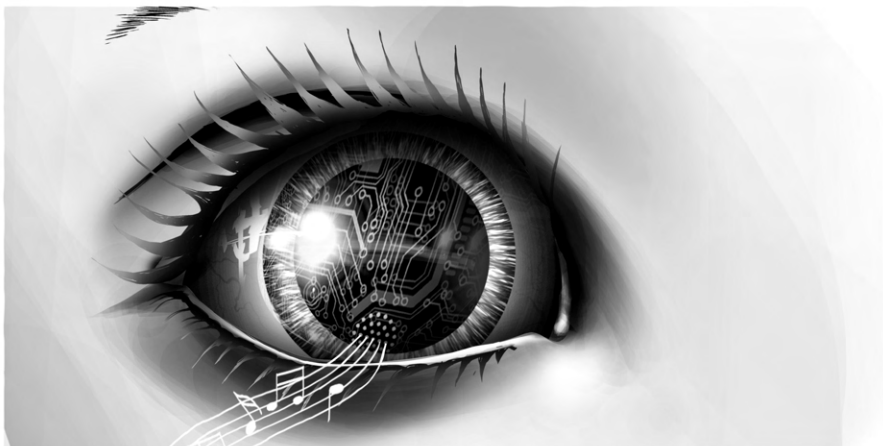


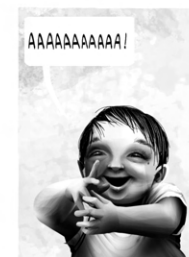


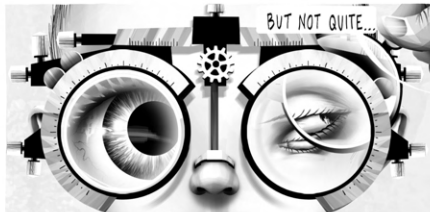
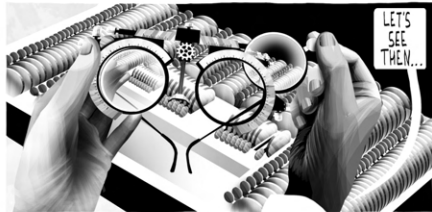


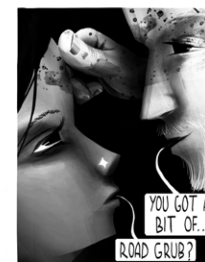
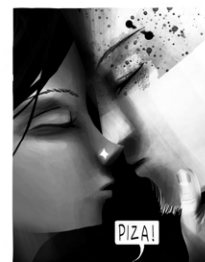
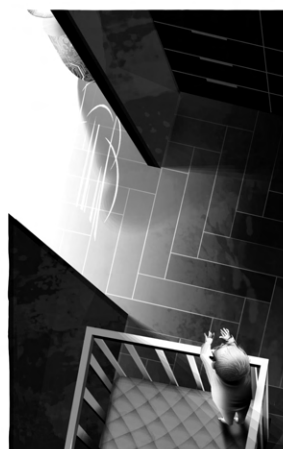
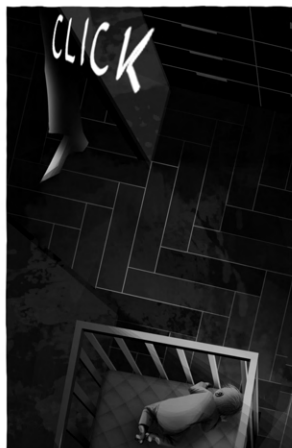
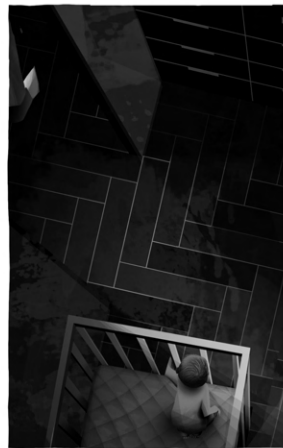


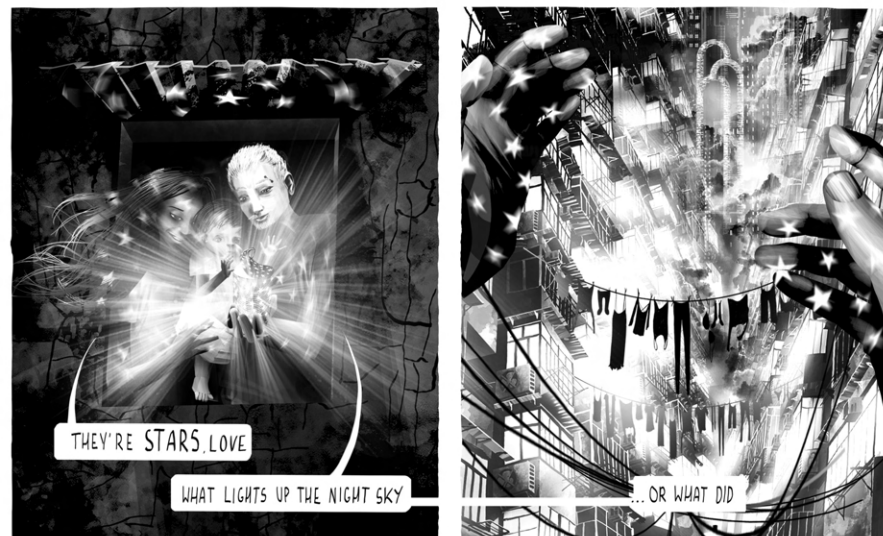
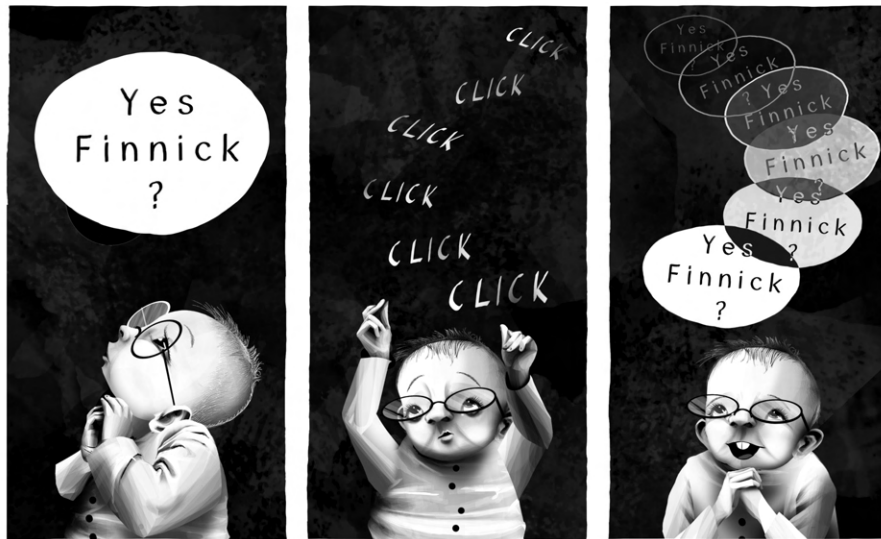
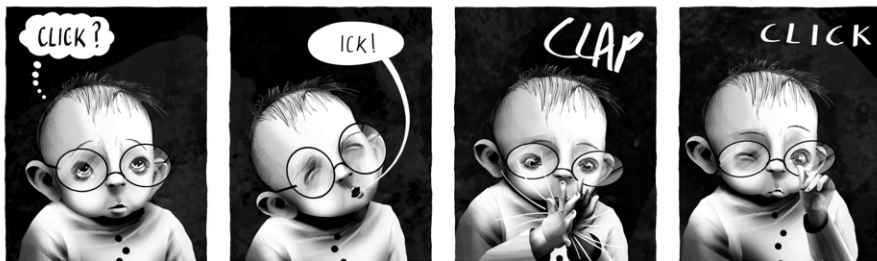


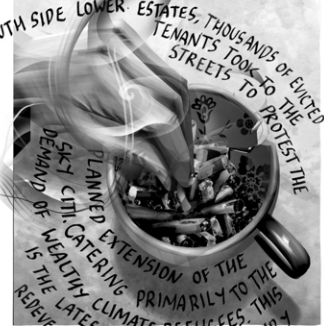
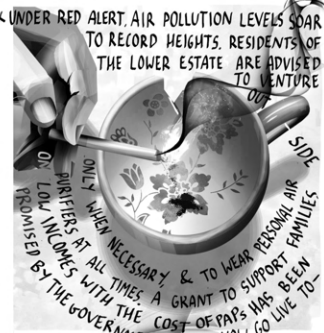
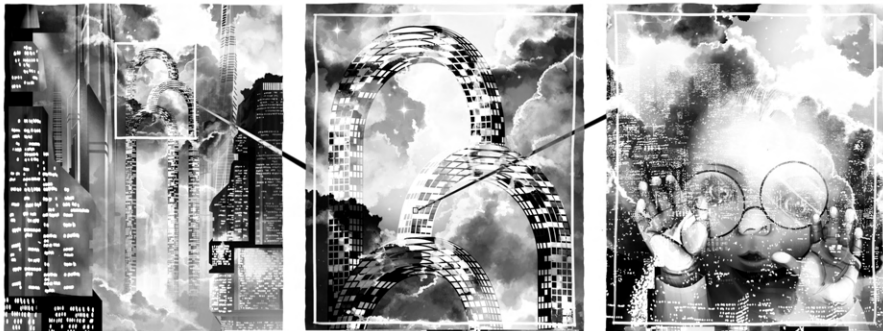




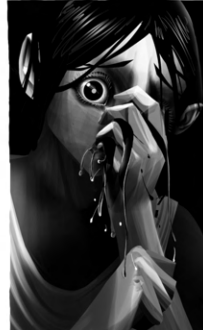
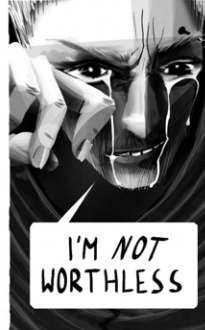
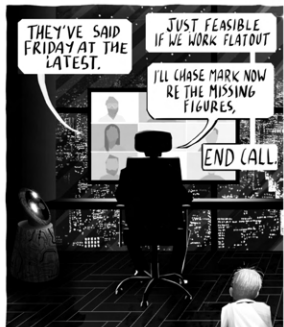




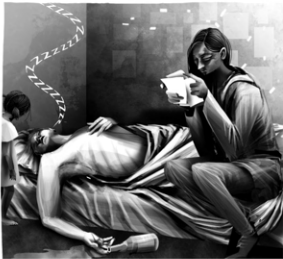






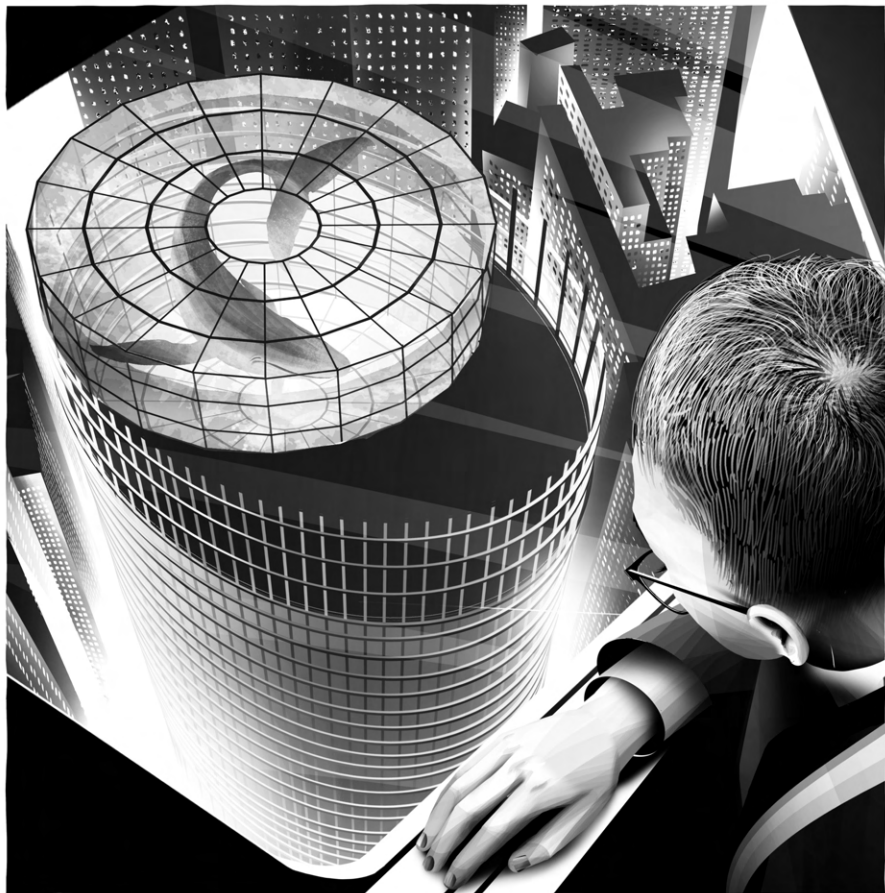


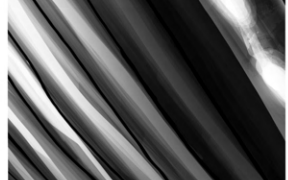
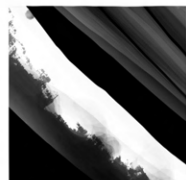
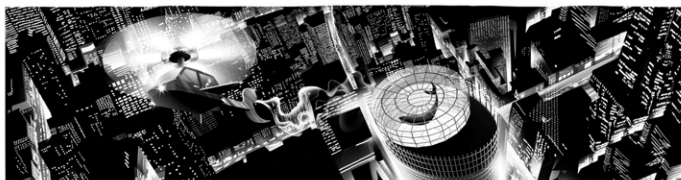
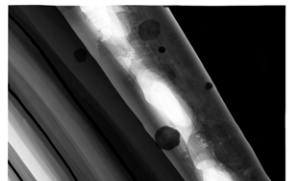
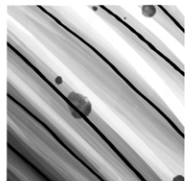
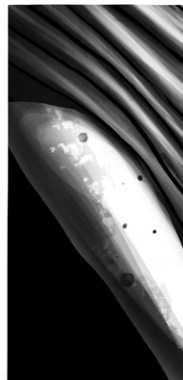
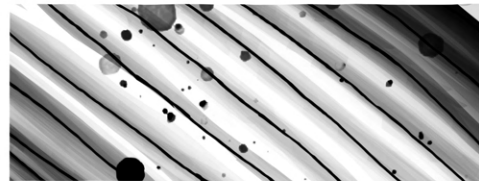
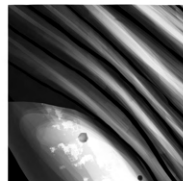
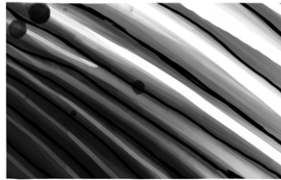
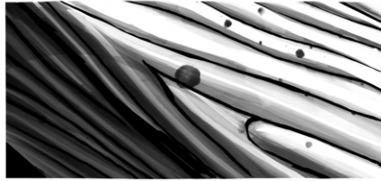
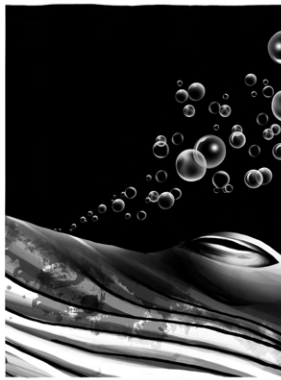
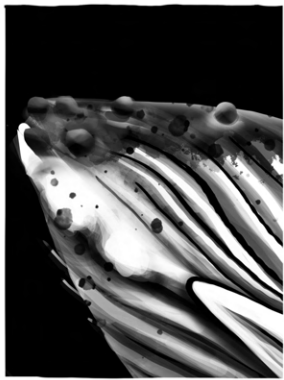
Point of View A1g0- we see his reflection in Finn's window as he leads him into his bedroom	Zoom out- we see that image of Finn being put to bed is on Mother's screen - a feed from the camera in A1g0's eyes	
A1g0 pulls off Finn's shirt	<p><i>NB. The remaining 332 pages of the manuscript- are blocked out in this way. 133 weeks of work are needed to convert it from panel blocking (as seen on the left) to the final drawn graphic novel (as seen on the right).</i></p>	
And 'tenderly' tucks him into bed		
Mother's hand redirects and yanking open the drawer of the desk. She rifles through it	The hand reappears holding a photo frame- the sort of thing that should have stood on a desk	Closeup- the photo Shows a family – a sunny park, summer-clothes, Mother looks carefree, a man (the spitting image of Finn- even down to the round glasses) holding a peacefully slumbering baby
Mother looks up to see that on the screen- Finn is still crying	On the keyboard, she presses esc	<p>The screen floods with the monitoring graphs again</p> <p>She slams the drawer shut.</p>



The following pages are from Part 2 of *Interface*, after the protagonists have met. Early in their acquaintance, Finn & Wren discover that they both go to the same shopping centre with a whale in the atrium roof. When they visit it again (Finn on his Heli commute back from work and Wren the following morning with her brother Oz) – it reminds them each of the other.

Once the fundamental link between facing pages has been established, we can start to play with it. Here, we/they see the same things- but cut through by their different perspective/ circumstances. We see that the only thing to truly cross these pages is their thoughts- encapsulated in the thought bubbles of the whale.





When Wren and Finn touch, the central margin bends but it cannot break. It comes to symbolise their relationship- thin and fluid when they're intimate, thickening when they argue to force the couple apart.

In this double spread from Part 2, Chapter 2, we see Finn & Wren lying on the roof, sharing Wren's headphones. Music is a non- material way for them to inhabit the same space.



SYNOPSIS

In a not-too-distant future, where kids cut wings from Amazon Prime boxes and the lucky few rarely venture Outside, and certainly never without Filtration Visors; Wren and Finnick are both born in The Citi. We see them grow up concurrently; Finn's life always drawn on the left-hand page and Wren's on the right. Wren is born into the shadowed underbelly of the elite sky-city where Finn lives. Yet left to wander their 'perfectly' optimized penthouse with only the AI home-help robot as a companion, Finn feels less lucky than lonely and bored. Meanwhile across the facing page on the other side of The Citi, Wren's Ma can give her nothing but all the love in the world. Like two faces of the same coin, Wren & Finn's parallel narratives expose deep social disparity- and human parallels. At times the two halves of each character drawn on facing pages coalesce to form a single body; an asymmetrical whole.

One night Finn and Wren's narratives converge quite by chance; he's working as the sole technician on a remotely operated factory floor when she drops off his Deliveroo coffee. Finally, the background aligns across the double spread showing the pair in the same place and time. Yet still tied by their diverse perspectives to the side of the book where they grew up, Wren and Finn remain trapped on their respective pages. After many coffees ordered over many lonely nights, the protagonists progress from terse greetings to an awkward friendship. But when they touch, the central gutter only bends around their clasped hands- it cannot break. Only their speech bubbles can bridge the gap, as it is the stories, they share that lace the book and their lives together.. As Wren draws Finn out of the clean dead light of perfectly 3D printed solo dinners & into a gritty world that is so much more alive, he's also drawing her.

Finn's always loved drawing; he loves drawing Wren; maybe he just he loves Wren. As Finn sketches Wren's stories in a hand in a hand identical to that which penned *Interface*, we recognise him as author of the book we're reading. What we'd thought were two distinct perspectives were always only Finn's, and Finn's perspective on Wren. So the authenticity of Wren's narrative – indeed of Wren herself – starts to unravel & we're left to wonder if he *really* knew her at all ...

In this visual narrative where meaning is implied but cannot be explicit, *Interface* poses questions and leaves the reader to piece together answers. How do we empathise? With who and to what extent? If we look into other eyes, will it always be only to find a reflection of our own? Can we ever truly grasp another's perspective? Are we all just trapped in our separate boxes? Finn's struggle to represent this girl from The Other Side is symptomatic of a polarised society where social media filters and delivery drones keep the privileged safe and sound in their shiny bubbles. They say 'history is written by the victors' - here we see it rendered imperfectly by the privileged.

Set in a near future that is the distillation of our zeitgeist, *Interface* is drawn from the topical themes that I've pitched to news- platforms over the past four years I've worked as a political cartoonist. It is a work of futuristic romance defined by the questions that occupy the current cultural and political conversation. Hybridizing the prescient argument of a political cartoon with the graphic novel form, it is inspired as much by Scarfe's pointed satire and Gustave Doré's *London: A Pilgrimage* as by the poignant narrative development of Shaun Tan's *The Arrival* and Chris Ware's *Rusty Brown*.

Exploiting qualities unique to the comics form, this story could not be told in another medium. In comics theory, closure refers to "Observing the parts, but perceiving the whole." Even as the panels of a graphic novel breakdown the narrative- the visual composition forces its component parts to interact. *Interface* takes the dichotomy of dissection and closure innate to the comics form and formalises it across the divide that exists in all books; between facing pages. As Wren and Finn struggle to breach the borders of their distinct pages we see what sets them apart and how they bridge the gap. In a world that seems ever more divided, this is a vital story about how we connect.

REFERENCES

Stig Abell (former editor of *The TLS*, chair of the Baillie Gifford Prize 2019)

We wanted cartoons that embodied some of the values of *The Times Literary Supplement*: commitment to ideas; celebration of literature; valuing of beauty. I don't think anyone in the country could do a better job of providing thoughtful, textured and aesthetically arresting images than Ella does. She tells complex stories with pictures that linger in the mind, and she has a beautiful style that's hers alone. It has been a naggingly difficult brief, and she always delivered.

Guillaume Cerutti (Chief Executive Officer of Christie's)

I first discovered Ella Baron through her cartoons for *The Times Literary Supplement* some three years ago. I was immediately struck by the graphic beauty of her drawings, their intelligence and by the political and social awareness they revealed and this afforded myself and the Christie's curatorial team the opportunity to find out more about Ella and invite her to host an exhibition and lecture at Christie's headquarters in London in 2019. These events were a great success and Ella was subsequently invited by the French Embassy to present another exhibition and lecture a few months later. It is very rare to meet a young person with such talent and maturity and I have absolutely no doubt she has an illustrious career and exciting future as a graphic novelist ahead of her.

Helen Lewis (Journalist & Staff Writer at *The Atlantic*, author of *Difficult Women*)

I've followed Ella Baron's career since she was a student: we had never awarded the Geddes Prize to a cartoonist before (or dreamed that the possibility would ever arise), but we were bowled over by talent and she had to win. With *Interface*, she is taking another huge step forward, pushing the form of the graphic novel into new territory. Her delicate yet fierce drawing style creates images you want to linger over, making sure you absorb every single detail. Ella is a bold new voice with a unique artistic talent.

Lucie Campos (Panel for the Booker International Prize 2020, Director of Villa Gillet)

I had the occasion to work with Ella Baron when we exhibited her work during the Beyond Words festival in London. In the context of an international literary festival, the visual quality of her work and its fine, thought-provoking connections with words and concepts stood out. She is a gifted artist whose work speaks both to the mind and to the eye.

Martin Rowson (Staff Political Cartoonist at The Guardian, award winning graphic novelist)

I first met Ella Baron when she attended a talk I gave in Oxford. The next time was when I presented her with the Young Cartoonist of the Year Award, it seemed like practically immediately afterwards. I also had the pleasure and privilege of attending the One-Woman Show she had courtesy of Christie's where I introduced her Q & A by saying she was the perfect cartoonist, as she had the most extraordinarily weird shit going on inside her head married to the ability to get it out onto a piece of paper. In short, her ideas - her visions - are breathtaking; but so is her technique. The accountants at the *TLS* were insane to let her go.

Wes Williams (Director of The Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities (TORCH))

I first got to know Ella Baron when, as a student, she became the first ever cartoonist to be awarded the prestigious Ronnie Payne Prize for Foreign Reporting with an extraordinary, path-breaking portfolio of at once politically engaged and technically exquisite work. Even as a regular reader of the *TLS*, I later found myself turning to her images on first opening the paper -- for hers is a singular, disturbing, and inventive voice, every bit as powerful and original as that of the best contemporary poets. *Interface* pushes once again at the boundaries of form and of affect; the combination of detail and sustained narrative, the forensic emotional analysis set within the larger sweep of social and political history, both takes your breath away and quickens your heart. This is work that knows the force of despair, but which -- through both its compassion and its craft -- offers adventures of insight and hope.

Toby Lichtig (Fiction & Politics Editor at the TLS, regular reviewer of graphic novels)

In the three years we worked together at the TLS, Ella's work was consistently arresting, surprising, beautiful and brilliant. She has an uncanny knack of capturing complex narratives - in the case of her drawings for us this meant responding to news stories, with a literary twist, in a single panel. And, having seen her work for MSF South Sudan (as well as her new graphic novel proposal), I have every faith that she'll develop into a superb graphic novelist. Ella is a great talent and I look forward to watching her career flourish.

Katherine Rundell (award-winning children's author)

I absolutely love Ella Baron's work - its rich originality, its willingness to confront darkness, its beauty. I fully expect her to become world-renowned; there's nobody who does exactly what she does.

PUBLIC REVIEWS

“Your work is the first thing I look at in the TLS. I must congratulate you on your originality, erudition and vision. You stimulate, challenge, amuse and give access to fresh insights and I am grateful to you. It is my birthday soon and I am to be given one of your cartoons for my study. The impossible task is deciding which one. Thank you for all the degrees of pleasure your work provides.”

Nick Stanley 27/04/19

“I am a biology professor at The California Institute of Technology, subscribing to the TLS. I really love your art and your incredibly rich conception of the world, the connections you make, all within the lyricism of so many of your composition. We are so lucky that the TLS is publicizing your work so that those of us halfway around the world can get to see it. Your often-haunting, often-beautiful, always thought-provoking artworks are turning me into one of those ladies who clip stuff out of the paper to keep indefinitely. It will be fascinating to see what you will be doing five and ten years from now, as well.” Ellen Rothenberg 25/08/20

“I thought you might not mind if I wrote to say how much I enjoy your drawings. I am telling you nothing you don’t already know if I say that they have a distinctive and highly appealing character: angular, precise and immensely skilful. In short, I am a huge fan; and hope to see many more and very soon.” Peregrine Simon (01/01/21)

“I’m a long time subscriber to the TLS and wanted to let you know how much I feel you’ve added to the magazine. You bring a sensitive, unsparing intelligence to social problems with your startling images and make me think, make me a little more empathetic.” DC Fruch 22/02/19

“Your work is extraordinary. I’ve only recently picked up the TLS again after a gap of a few years, and I was immediately struck by your illustrations. I think you’ve captured COVID better than anyone I’ve seen - and as someone who was on paternity leave with my new daughter for most of the lockdown period, ‘Brave New World’ particularly resonated with me.” Robert Hayward 24/08 /20t

“I’m such a fan of your work. Your style is so unique, I think it often has a darkness to it that other cartoonist lack making it more poignant and impactful. I’m very much in awe of your talent. I can’t wait to see what you do next.” Alexandra James 11/04/20

I just wanted to tell you that as a TLS reader I find your illustrations alone are worth the subscription, irrespective of the quality of the reviews & articles. Sometimes I'm in tears at how wonderful they are. I've spent a long time gazing in wonder at your recent iceberg one - so complex, so moving, so thought-provoking. Keep up the good work! No need to reply!"

Peter Mackridge 02/10/19

"I get the TLS weekly, - and weekly am amazed at how you translate an idea in popular currency, or a saying, or a meme, into an astonishingly striking image. How very clever you are. Keep Going. Wonderful work." Rowland Molony 13/10/19

"I just wanted to say how incredible and moving your work is. I have never come across it before today, but I will certainly seek it out now. Do you have any plans to produce a 'coffee table book' with some of your work in it?

If I can decide on a favourite I will buy a print!" Gary 12/05/18

"I just wanted to send you a quick message to tell you how much I admire your work. You have such an eye on this world! Your drawings really move me and I'd like to thank you for that. " Laurence Halbert-Royer 09/04/19

"I was just introduced to your work and I think it is fantastic. I'm going to share it with my son who is in college. It should help him through hard times. Thank you so much for all that you do." Kendraw Shambley 27/08/18

"I have just discovered your work through the article that was published in the Guardian today. I wanted to tell you how much I love the sensitivity and creativity that shine out of your drawings." Christine 10/07/18

"I saw your sketches depicting depression in this article more than a year ago... I just revisited those images again today, and wanted to send this email to compliment you on your talent, and also to say thank you for creating images that capture feelings that are so hard to translate in spoken or written word. I had gone through 22 years of cyclical depressions - and have been freed of that pattern for 14 years now - but the way those depressions felt - is depicted well in what you have sketched...and with compassion, truth and in doing so - offering hope. I went to your website, and viewed your other work, and I appreciate your gift deeply. Whatever it takes for you to get up, to show up and do what you - I am grateful." Erika Weber 09/09/19