



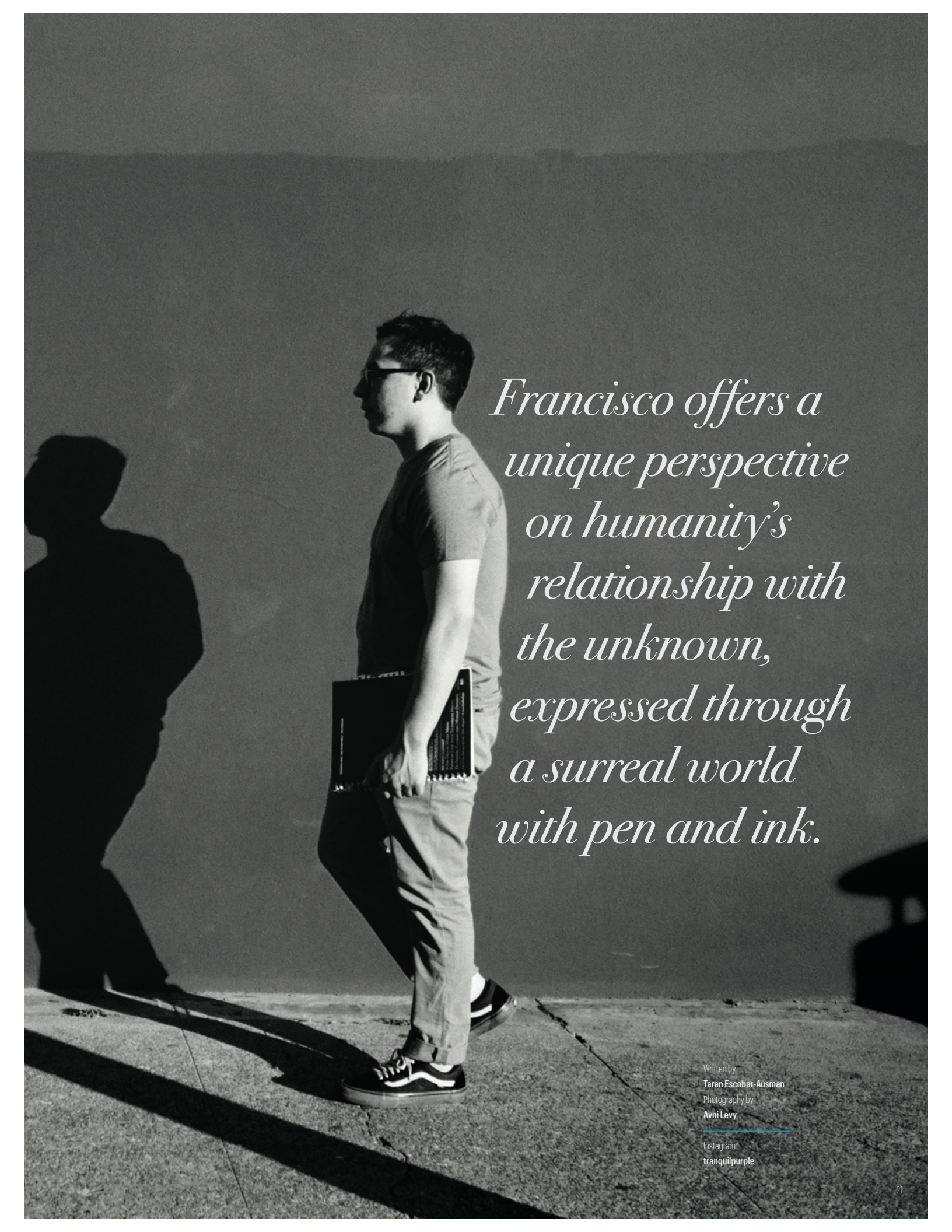
Z FRANCISCO

For artist Francisco Zarate, art is about making the most of the present moment. While one may believe the present moment to be apparent and discernible, Francisco's art inhabits an esoteric in-between world, where what is being communicated may only be perceptible by those who share the same dream or hallucination. However, upon further meditation, his fantastical and disembodied visions speak more to reality and our relationship to the unknown than may appear at first glance. When he speaks about his art, it is apparent he views each piece as its own living and breathing entity. Once a piece is complete, his characters, and the subconscious world they inhabit, become something separate from their creator.

Francisco creates surreal, dream-like worlds, where pudgy, naked men and women take naps on insects, ride atop fish and chickens or upon large snails with human faces. In many drawings, these same characters are worshipping and stacking giant heads of men or holding onto large snakes with human heads. Though Francisco says these visual worlds are still being fine-tuned in order to make his visions relatable, they already communicate a rich and vibrant allegorical narrative that navigates our inner struggle between our ego's desires and the reality of our impermanent reality.

Francisco, 31, is an East Side San Jose native who received a bachelor of fine arts from San Jose State University. By day he works in the optical field and explores his craft during his free time. As a child he was always doodling and his mother allowed him to draw during church, as long as it was portraits of those at the lectern. By college, he had started to develop his characters and visual motifs in the margins of his notes, slowly bringing them to life with different poses learned from his life-drawing class. These characters have now come to form the crux of his artistic vision.

As Francisco's dream worlds came to life, his characters became consistently nude and identical in features, which made them timeless and familiar across different pieces. As Francisco relates, "I wanted the characters to... not have a distinct wardrobe to date them or attach them to any cultural reference. I like how that detaches them from our world while simultaneously giving a feeling of familiarity, foreign but familiar." You can see Robert Crumb as a strong influence in the pen and ink styling of facial features and exaggerated body parts. Francisco's characters, however, take part in their activities with an aloofness that actually makes the surrounding scenarios all that more surreal and otherworldly. Francisco's deep connection to his characters is rooted in "their



*Francisco offers a
unique perspective
on humanity's
relationship with
the unknown,
expressed through
a surreal world
with pen and ink.*

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Invincible

“Ultimately these symbols are a representation of mortality and what lies beyond that, accepting and understanding our finite life and our inability to grasp, or comprehend, the concept of infinity.”

—Francisco Zarate



Mantodea



The Frog



blasé and accepting attitude towards what is occurring around them. I think it's their lack of anxiety and worry that I find appealing, especially when contrasted with my own high-anxiety existence."

Other recurring cast members in Francisco's work are bulbous-like objects that can take on different shapes and become companions to the humans who often carry them around, mutilate them, or take them apart. In Francisco's view, these symbiotic objects represent the ego and his characters' attachment to these objects mirrors humanity's attachment to an eternal soul. "The bulbous objects are a physical manifestation of that constant struggle between the ego and nothingness."

The question of mortality and our relationship to the infinite plays a central role in Francisco's visual conversation, where he incorporates religious iconography from Catholicism, Buddhism, and various sects of Hinduism in order to meditate on the fear of the unknown. Francisco recognizes the stillness of religious relief sculptures and their meaningful potency: "There is symbolism in just frozen stances and motions that have meaning on their own. My characters are occupying the space in a similar way to those reliefs." In one of his pen and ink pieces, a three-headed snake poses with three identi-

cal human heads, which alludes to the Hydra of Lerna who guarded the gates to the underworld and would grow two heads for every head cut off. Each of the heads in the drawing are also adorned with piercings and their own amulets. The middle head, however, possesses a third-eye of clairvoyance and also wears a skull necklace, a link to the Hindu goddess Kali, worshipped by the Kula, a sect of Tantric Saivism, as the "mother of the universe" and the destroyer of all evil. It is a strong piece with intricate and dense line work. It immediately engages the viewer on a personal and spiritual level because of the mixed symbolism. As Francisco explains, "Ultimately these symbols are a representation of mortality and what lies beyond that, accepting and understanding our finite life and our inability to grasp, or comprehend, the concept of infinity."

Francisco's artwork is a prime example of how art can mirror and give meaning to the internal narratives of the human condition. His work is all that more exciting as it communicates these narratives in a unique and profound style, which is just at the point of rising to the next level where his technique matches his vision. "The latest works are exposition for what I can do, and hopefully, now I can present my vision in a relatable way that demonstrates my ideas concisely." 