

## SHARON HORVATH

*Dark Matter, For My Father*, 2010–2014  
pigment, ink, and polymer on  
paper on canvas, 60 x 84 in.



COURTESY LORI BOOKSTEIN FINE ART

## CHANEY KWAK Admission

**T**he stench of the boat was like nothing I'd ever experienced, goes Adam's admission essay. The two-hour sail from the rundown port of Pohang to my ancestral village made me wish I had never embarked on the journey.

Ancestral village? Who talks like that? Not my brother.

The crew of the dilapidated fishing boat cursed in their harsh southern dialect of Korean. I held on to the railing, trying to steady myself against the forceful upsurge of the sea, while my father, Seung-Jo, gazed at the island.

Seung-Jo? We've never called our father that. "His name is Joe, you jackass," I mutter as I put away Adam's essay.

A few weeks ago, Adam sent me his graduate school application. We haven't seen each other since Christmas although our workplaces share the same zip code. From my window I can see his building tower over mine. To appease our nagging father we call each other every few weeks and leave short messages. Neither of us ever picks up.

I couldn't remember the last time Adam had asked anything of me. His unexpected e-mail was nauseating, with gems like "I'm crowdsourcing for input."

When we were kids, Adam used to call me Ostrich Boy, which was a rib at my unusually long neck. The nickname haunted me all through middle school until the rest of my torso grew into proportion. But lately I wonder if Adam's pet name for me had less to do with appearance than personality. Isn't procrastination just another word for burying your head in the sand? I printed his essay. I just can't get through it.

A week passes; I must be off the hook. My roommates have all gone to bed. Slouched over the dining table, I'm staring at the tropical fish swimming in my laptop screen saver. My stomach gurgles with cheap wine. I spin the wine's metal cap, bite my fingernails, spin it again.

I've been working on a novel whose plot I've purged of even the faintest resemblance to my own history. The world's suffered enough memoirs thinly veiled as fiction. On the flip side, after twelve years since freshman year, I'm still pissed that Professor Colonel-Sanders-Lookalike from Intro to Anthropology taught *The Joy Luck Club* as "the Asian-American experience." I'd sooner grow a Fu Manchu and pull a tourist rickshaw down Broadway before having my novel stand in for ethnography. When I day-dream about publishing my first book, that sweet fantasy