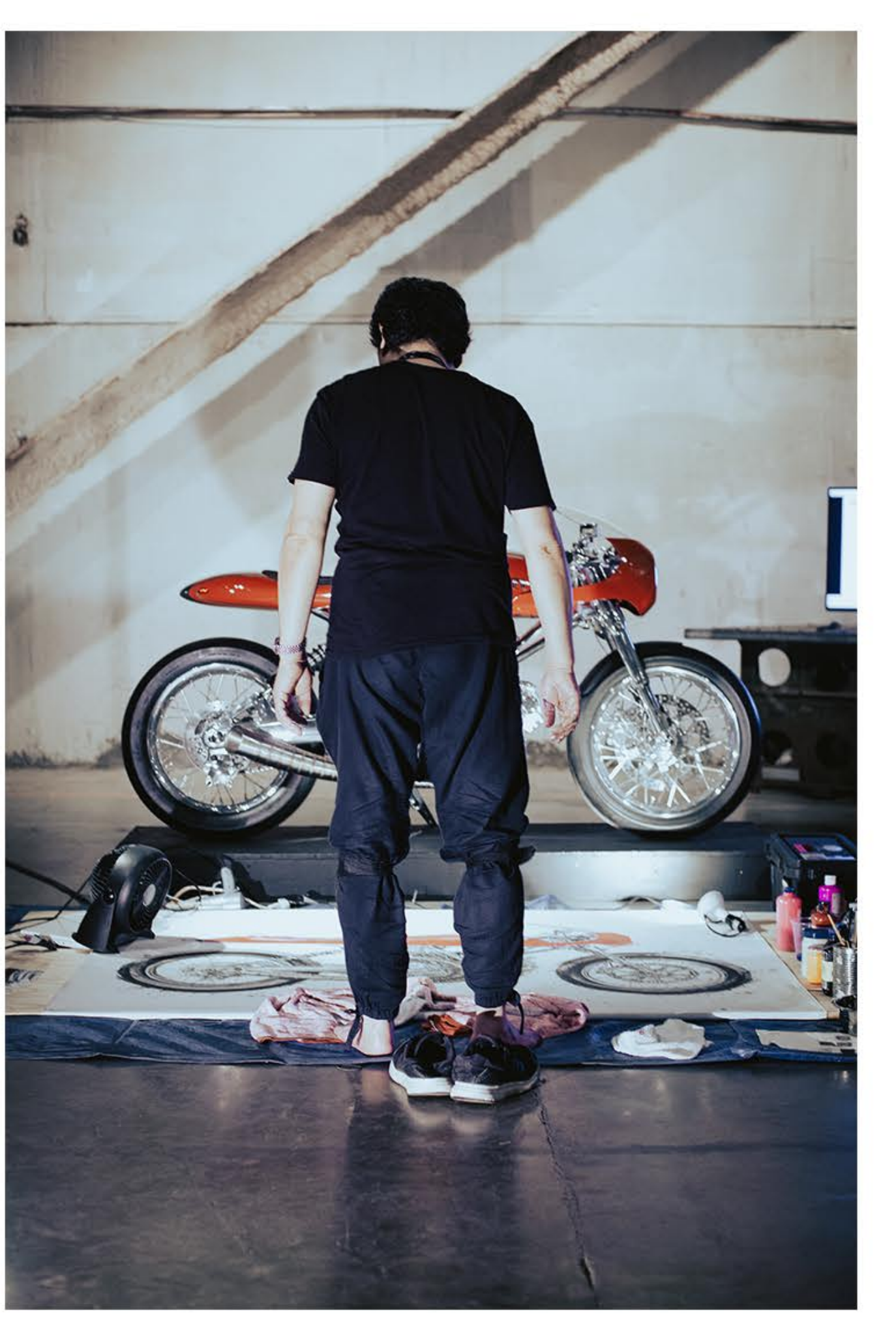
1mlost: in the studio of Makoto Endo

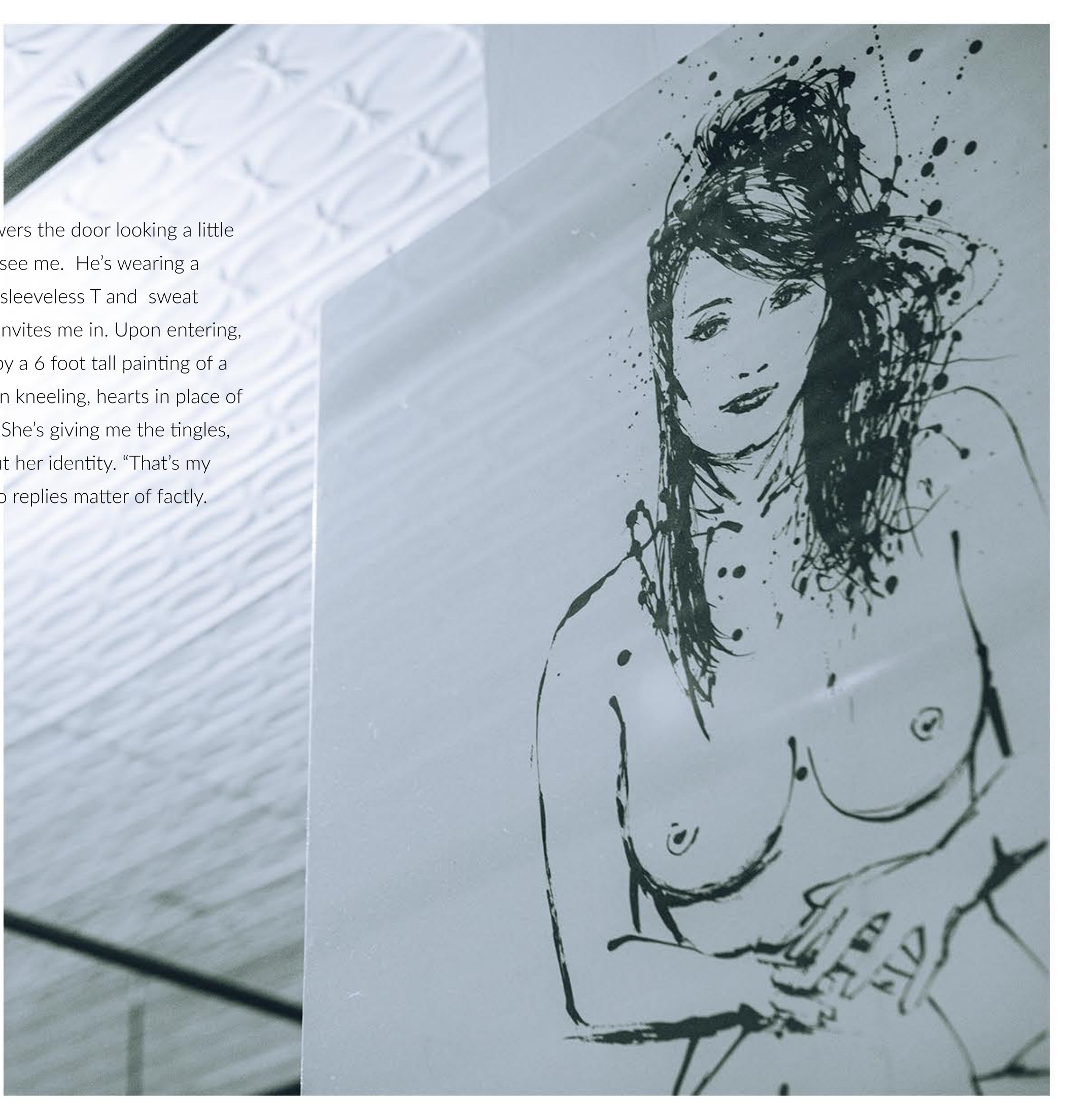
It's 11am when I arrive in the orthodox section of South Williamsburg. I park my bike between some fast food wrappers and a dead rat. I have an appointment with Makoto Endo. I met Makoto at The Handbuilt Show in Austin Texas. He was commissioned to create a painting of a high-end custom motorcycle live at the show. In a room full of people, it's easy to spot the crazy ones. One must just sit back and observe.

Makoto is in the middle of over a thousand convention goers. Every 30 minutes, he rises from his seat on the floor, walks over to his work, drips a few drops of paint on the canvas from a pair of a chopsticks, scans the painting, and sits back down. A large hole in his sweatpants exposes his choice of undergarments.

Two week later, back in New York I randomly spot him walking down Bedford Ave in Williamsburg Brooklyn. During the chance encounter, he invites me to come to his studio 'anytime.' I sense that he means it, so after a few emails, a date is set. In one correspondence, I offer to take him out to lunch, but he counters by inviting me for home-cooked Ramen. I am a junkie for ramen, so gladly take him up on the offer.

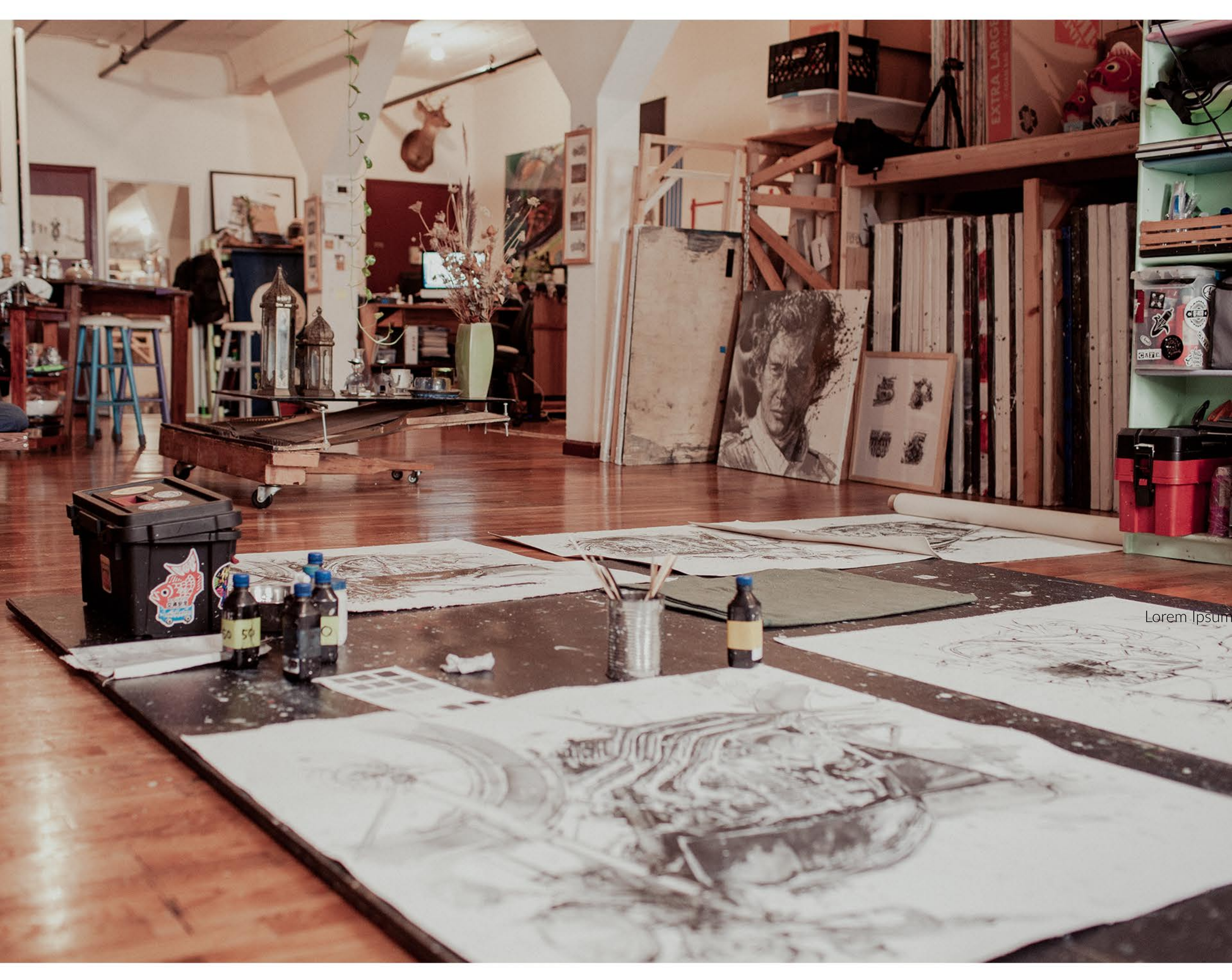


I have the building number. No apt. No telephone. Like a criminal, I squeeze into the closing door as another tenant exits. Without any hope, I ask the tenant if he knows where I can find Makoto. "The painter? 305."



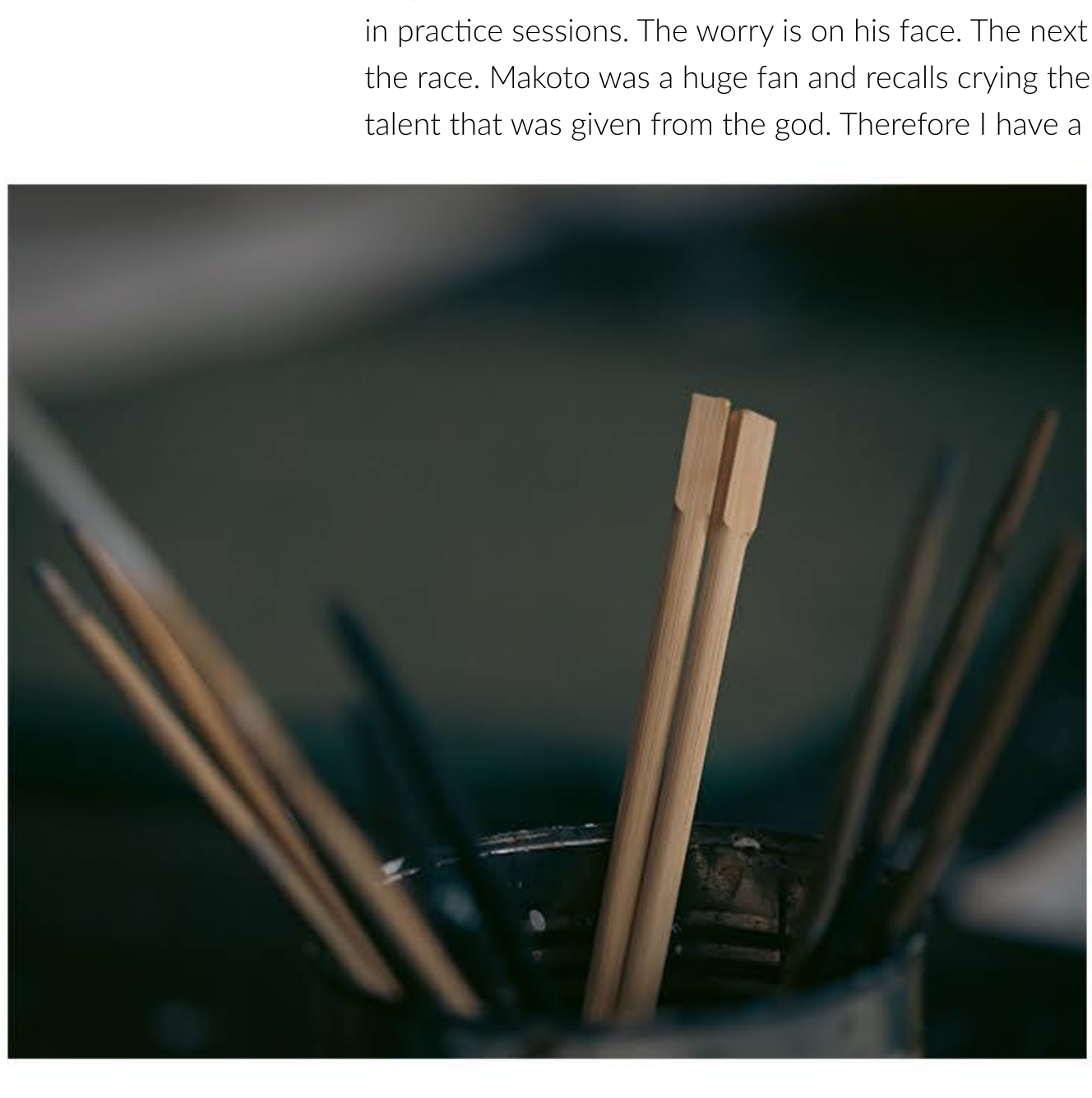
Makoto answers the door looking a little surprised to see me. He's wearing a comfortable sleeveless T and sweat shorts, and invites me in. Upon entering, I'm greeted by a 6 foot tall painting of a naked woman kneeling, hearts in place of her nipples. She's giving me the tingles, so I ask about her identity. "That's my wife," Makoto replies matter of factly.

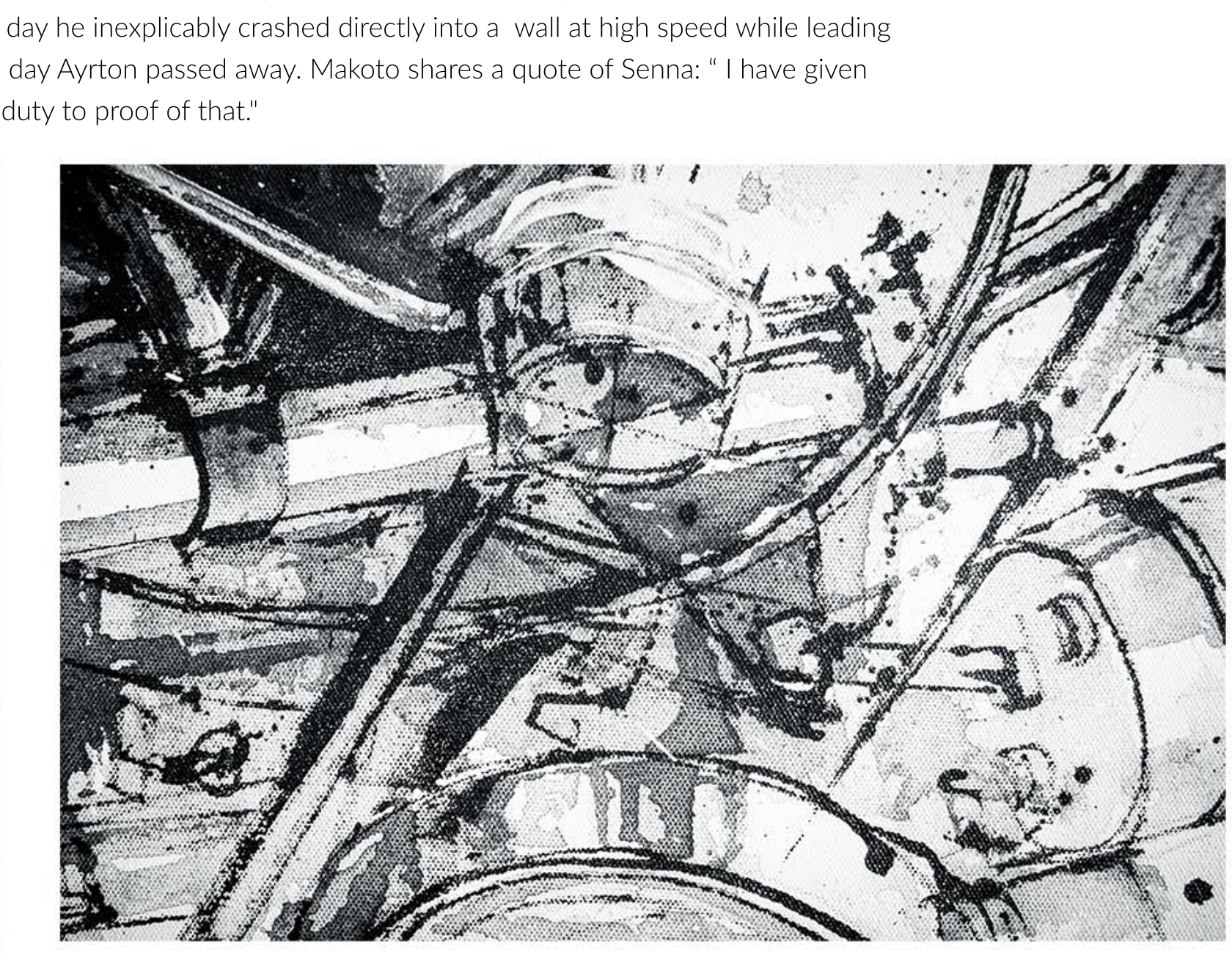
He lives in an open loft space and it confronts me all at once. The place is full of paintings: some finished and wrapped in plastic, some hanging on the walls, some in progress on the floor, some rolled up in tubes ready for purchase. I hand Makoto the beer I've promised to bring and he sets right in on them. "I have a hangover," he explains.



Makoto has been a full time working artist for about 10 years. He can paint a motorcycle on canvas, using only chopsticks and ink, in about 16 hours. His work is everywhere in the studio and its all a stunning feat of skill. There are 3 works in progress on the floor and he rolls out a few more of one of my favorite bikes. Walking around taking photos, I have to nimbly jump over these large canvasses costing 2-3k each.

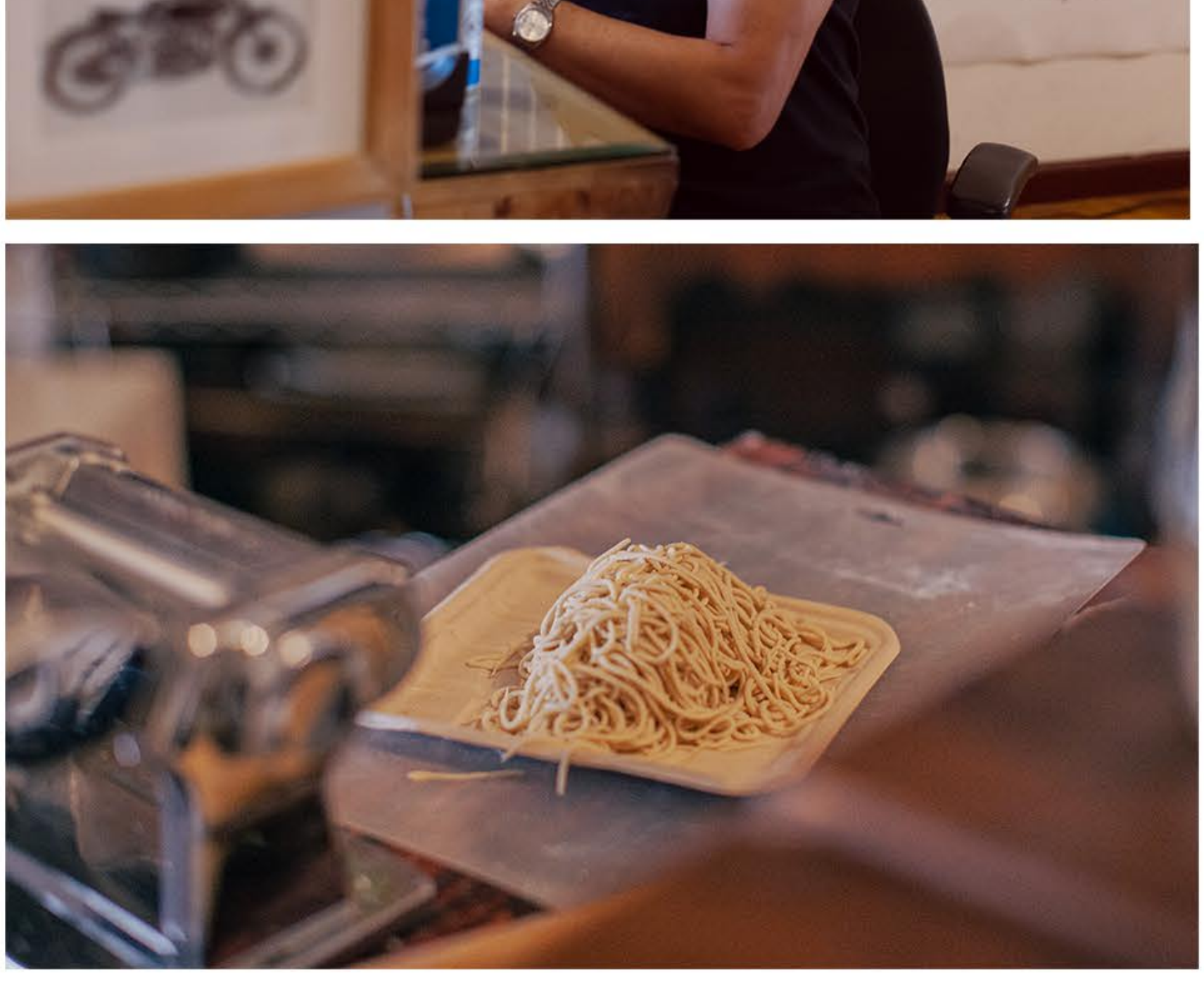
Looming over the center of the studio is a striking portrait of Ayrton Senna. The painting was made from a photo taken the day this 34 year old Brazilian F1 driver died in 1994. That weekend in San Marino, Ayrton saw his mentor hospitalized and fellow driver die in practice sessions. The worry is on his face. The next day he inexplicably crashed directly into a wall at high speed while leading the race. Makoto was a huge fan and recalls crying the day Ayrton passed away. Makoto shares a quote of Senna: " I have given talent that was given from the god. Therefore I have a duty to proof of that."





Makoto offers me a cup of coffee and I gladly accept. He sets to work grinding beans with a hand crank. He places the grounds in a glass percolator on the stove and explains how he roasts the beans when they are still green. Like all things in this world, it is a methodical process unlashed to time. I notice he's wearing a Rolex Day Date on his wrist. It's from 1982 and the crystal is scratched to the point of being almost unreadable. In 40 years, he's serviced it two times. "Sometimes it runs fast, sometimes it runs slow."

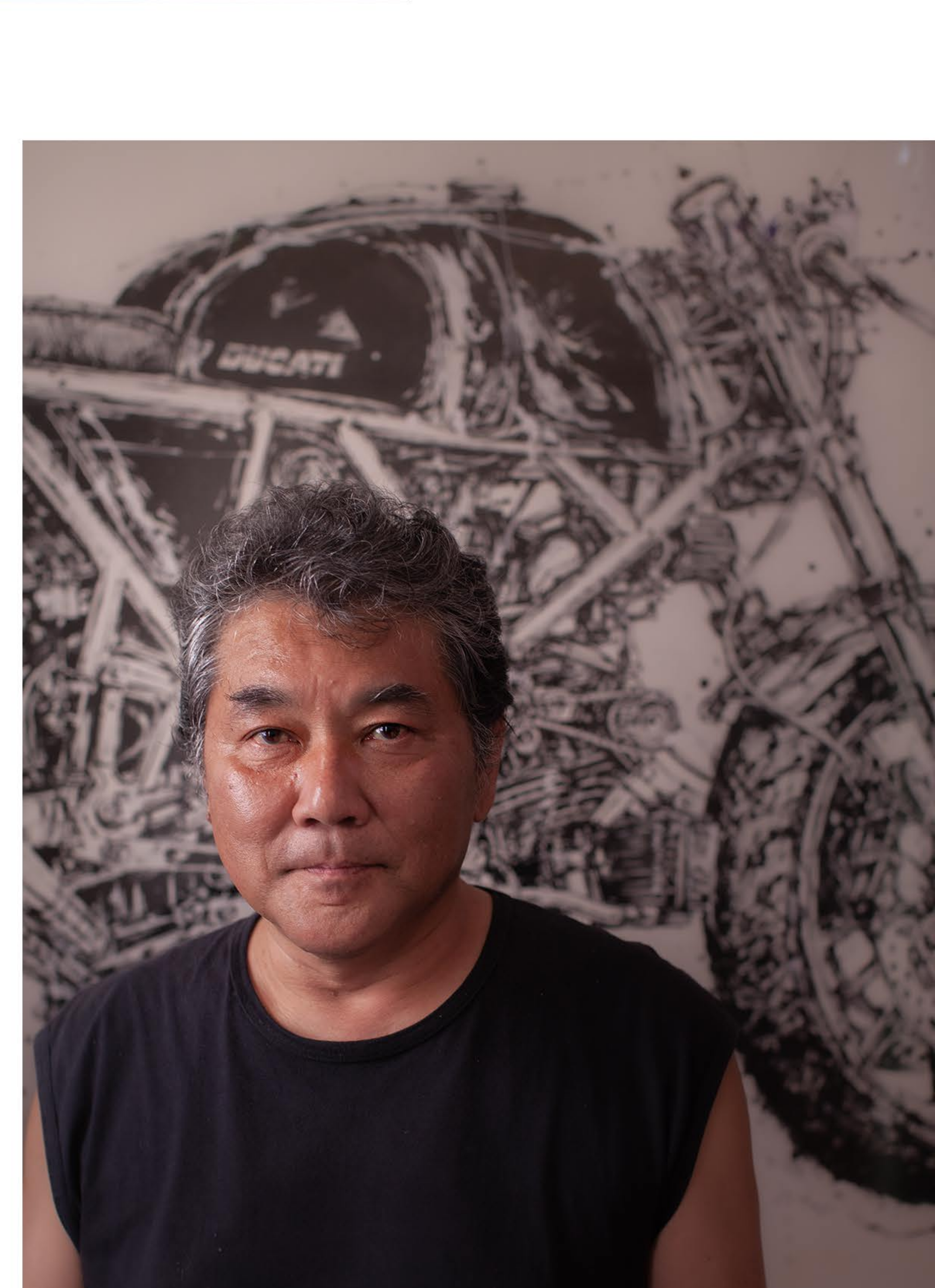
The coffee is strong and has got my hands shaking. It's odd to be in the presence of a stranger sipping coffee. Makoto speaks English but it's with some effort. My Japanese is non-existent. It's hard to tell how old he is. A sprinkle of gray hints older, but his smooth skin and easy laugh point younger. I resign and ask. He abruptly answers, "50 something." Realizing that this is insufficient, he looks up, rubs his eyes and sets in to figuring out the arithmetic. It takes him a minute. "57? Definitely born in 1965".



Makoto is into the beer so I join him to counter the strong coffee. The beer immediately makes me want to smoke and I ask to step outside. Makoto produces an ashtray and sheepishly asks if he can have a cigarette. After the smoke, he gets into making the ramen. We roll and cut the noodles together and he starts 4 pots on the oven. He nearly burns the gyoza he's hand rolled and I can tell he's upset. The whole time, he's cooking with just those same chopsticks he uses to create his art.

Makoto drops a woody block on counter along with a strange wooden box. The block is dried mackerel and the box is used to grind only dry mackerel. He explains that it's and essential ingredient as he grabs hold of the fish and starts grating away. 30 minutes later I'm sat in front of a perfect bowl of ramen. "This is junk food in Japan." The pork has been cooked 2 hours the day before to make the broth. The 6 and half minute soy egg is perfect. We chat about F1 legends, Arai helmets and motorcycle shows.

After grabbing a few images and smoking a few more cigarettes, we say our farewells and I step back into the hallway of an ordinary apartment building in New York City. I look down the hallway wondering what other magic is found behind all these doors. Time moves differently behind the door of Makoto. I get back on my bike and notice the dead rat has moved to a different spot.



Thank you Makoto

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