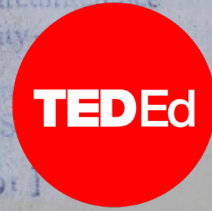
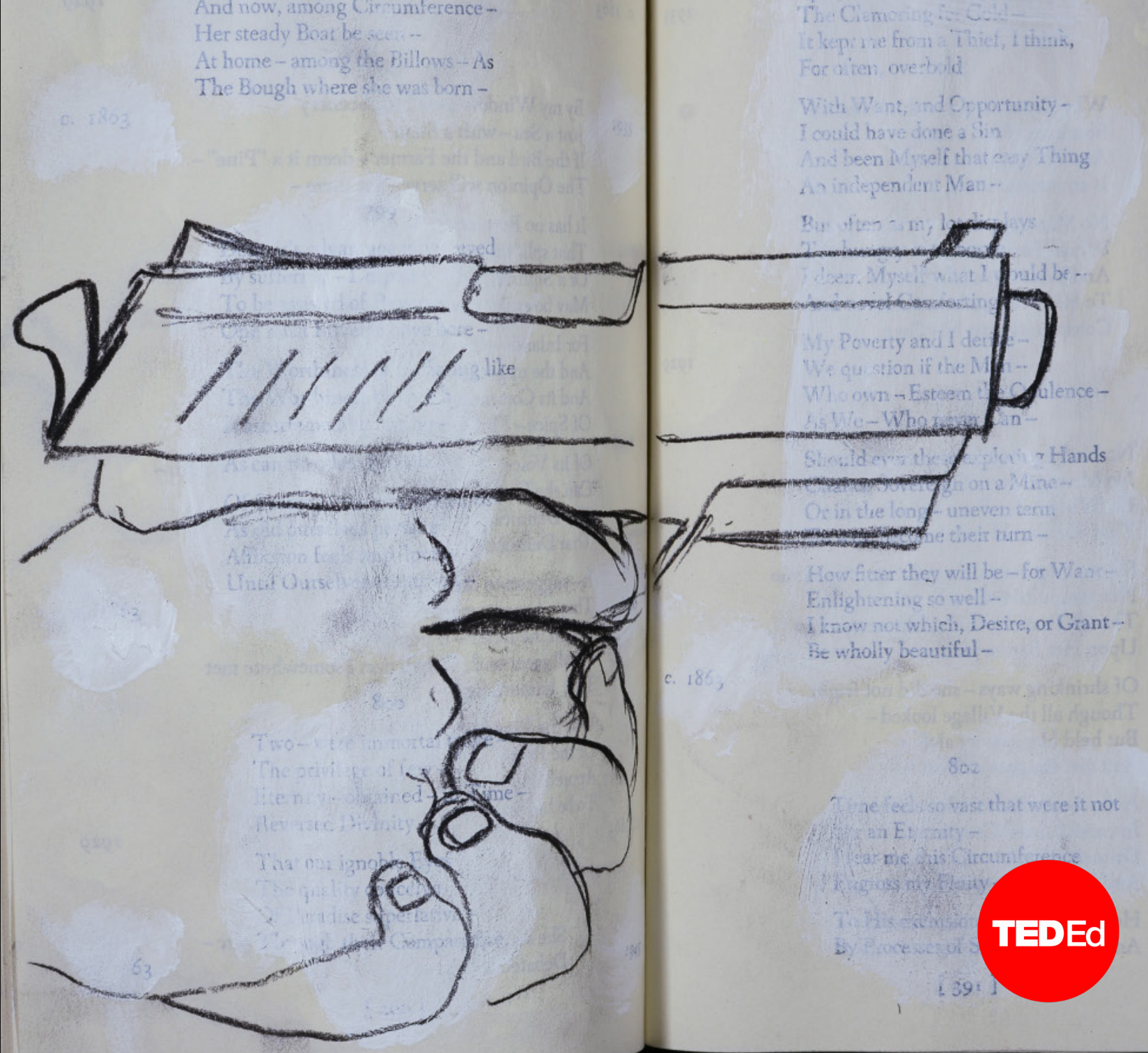
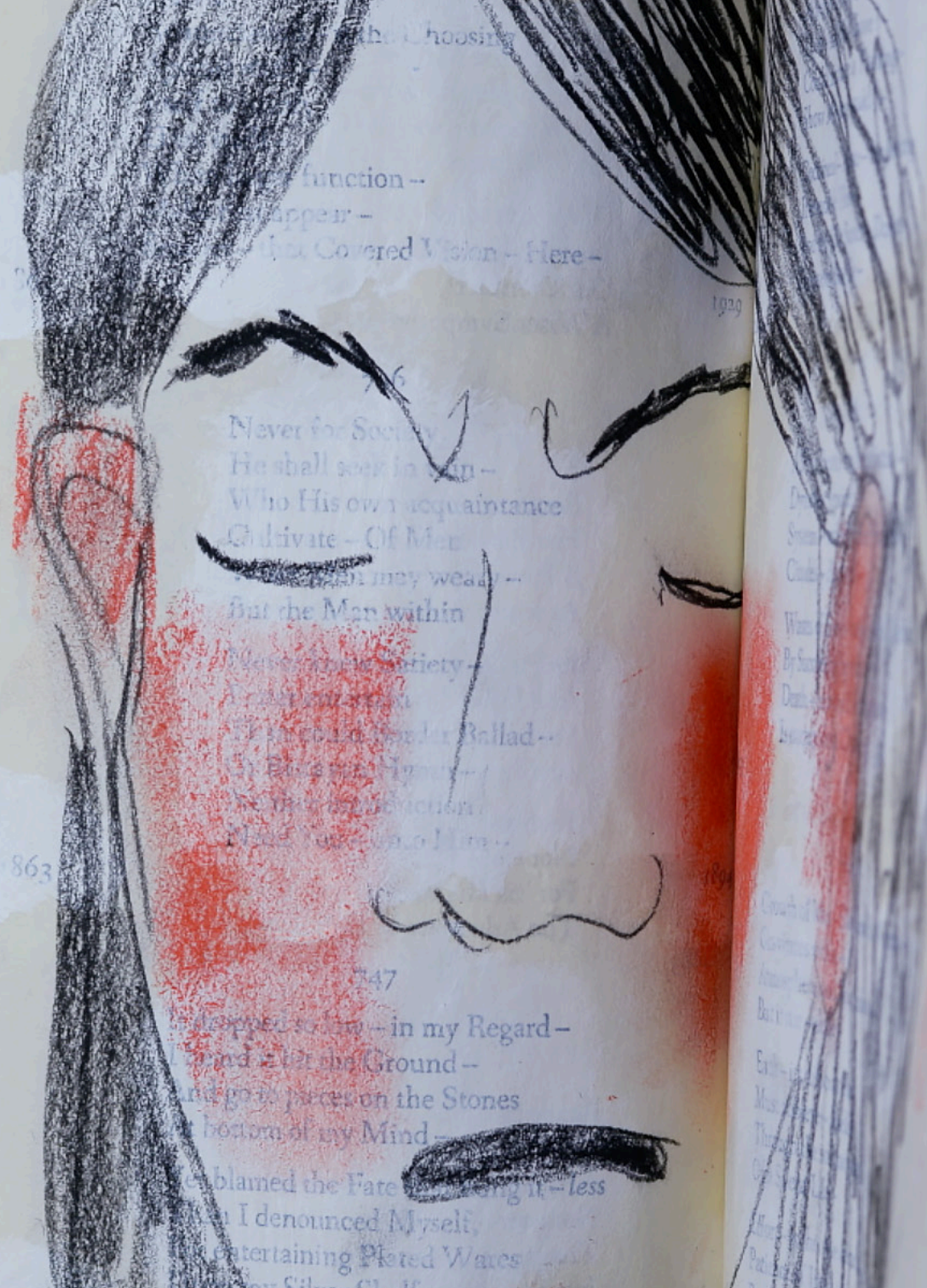


# THE OPPOSITES GAME

a film by  
Anna Samo + Lisa LaBracio







function --  
appear --  
Covered Vision -- Here --

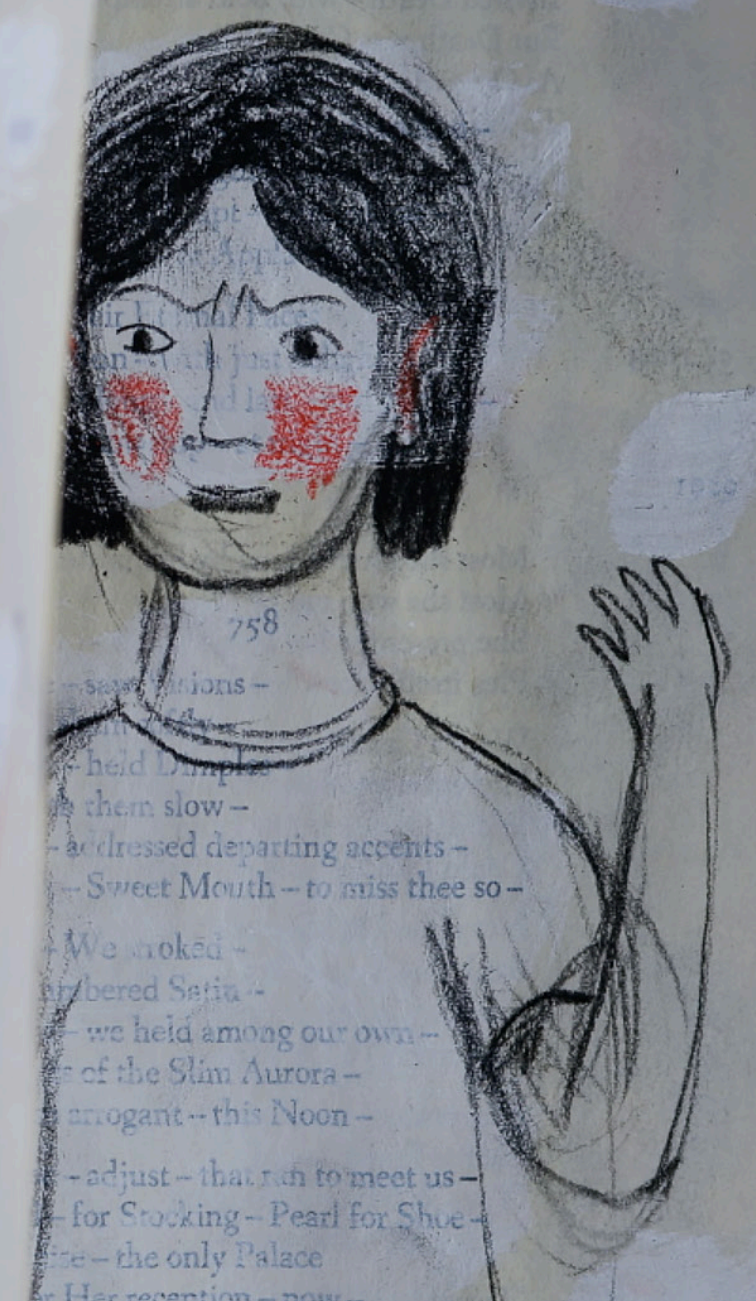
Never for Society  
He shall see in sin --  
Who His own acquaintance  
Cultivate -- Of Man  
But the Man within  
Society --  
Ballad --  
function --

863

747

in my Regard --  
Ground --  
on the Stones  
of my Mind --  
blamed the Fate -- less  
I denounced Myself,  
Plotted Wares

1896



use deter --  
is be served to Us -- in Bowls --  
no more --  
758  
ions --

held Dimple  
them slow --  
addressed departing accents --  
Sweet Mouth -- to miss thee so --  
We stroked --  
bered Satia --  
we held among our own --  
of the Slim Aurora --  
rogant -- this Noon --  
adjust -- that ran to meet us --  
for Stocking -- Pearl for Shoe --  
the only Palace  
Her recantation -- now --



# THE FILM

What is the opposite of a gun? A classroom erupts into a war of words as students grapple with this seemingly simple question in Lisa LaBracio and Anna Samo's adaptation of Brendan Constantine's "The Opposites Game". Entirely hand-crafted by the two directors, the animation is drawn in a stop-motion-animated book and traces an escalating conflict, at turns hilarious and deadly serious, coursing an answer being both sought and avoided.

"The Opposites Game" is part of the TED-Ed series "There's a Poem for That", which aims to showcase living poets giving language to some of life's most inexplicable moments.



## THE POEM

In 2016, I was asked to speak at a gun violence prevention rally in Tucson. My host was Patricia Maisch, the courageous woman who helped disarm the gunman during the mass shooting there in 2011. He had just wounded Representative Gabrielle Giffords, killed a man and a child, and was attempting to reload when Patricia and several others tackled him to the ground. As he struggled, Patricia saw that he was reaching for a second cartridge and pried it from his hand. Since then she has devoted her life to activism.

I agreed to present, because...well, when a hero asks you for a poem, you say "yes". But what did I have to offer? When I looked at my existing work, I shuddered. This was going to be a huge gathering in the spirit of community and empowerment, and what? A freaking 'poet' gets up and co-opts everything?

The night before the rally, panicked but determined, I sat up in my motel and turned out a draft. The next day, I read it to the crowd and the response was overwhelming. The parents of Christina Taylor Greene, the fallen child, were there. Her mother hugged me, weeping. Ten days later, a man opened fire on a crowd at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando.

When I got home, I sent the poem to several magazines. It had been up in the American Journal of Poetry for a few months when there was another shooting in Las Vegas, prompting poet Sarah Kay to share the piece with her enormous following and eventually with TED-Ed.

-Brendan Constantine

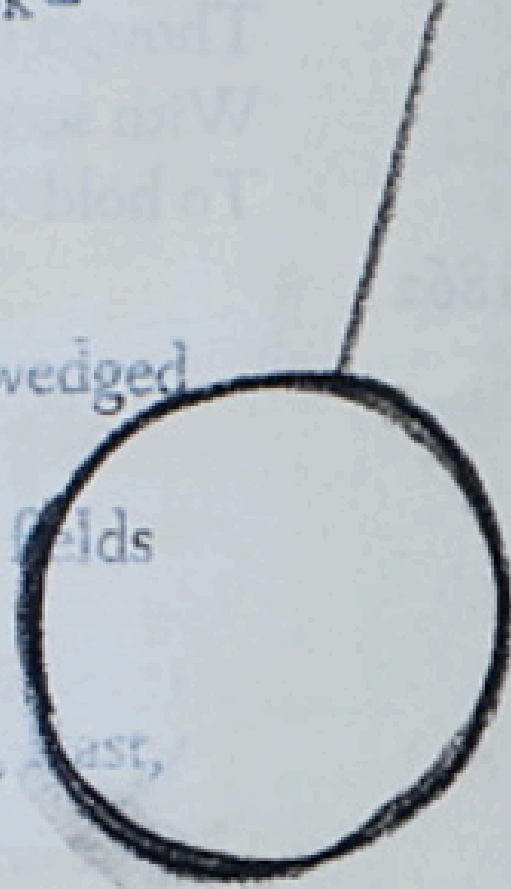
I thought how yellow it would look –  
When Richard went to mill –  
And then, I wanted to get out,  
But something held my will.

I thought just how Red – Apples wedged  
The Stubble's joints between –  
And the Carts stooping round the fields  
To take the Pumpkin

I wondered who would miss me, fast,  
And when Thanksgiving, came,  
If Father would simply set the plates –  
To make my even Sam –

And would it blur the Christmas glee  
My Stocking hang too high's  
For any Santa Claus to reach  
The Altitude of me –

But this sort, I loved myself,





Dropped - my fate - a timid Pebble -  
In thy bolder Sea -  
Prove - me - Sweet - if I regret it -  
Prove Myself - of Thee -

180

1929

967

Time - expands the Time -  
within  
Circumference  
Brain -  
Contracted -  
with  
of Pe-





## QUOTES

*"...[a] strong message and playful execution."*

Jury Statement StopTriK Animation Festival from Daniel Suljic  
director, AnimaFest Zagreb

*"It is always a challenge to translate one masterpiece into another media. In "The Opposites Game", the film, Anna Samo and Lisa LaBracio not only successfully turned Brendan Constantine's poem into a beautiful animation but added new layers of understanding, strengthening a so needed message in these troubled times. The film had a great impact on the Anima Mundi 2019 audience and won a well-deserved prize."*

Cesar Coelho  
director, Anima Mundi

*"A beautiful poem. Haven't felt a story like that in quite some time."*

Rafael Casal  
Writer (*Blindspotting*), Poet, Actor





## LISA LABRACIO DIRECTOR'S NOTES

When I first read “The Opposites Game”, Brendan’s exchange with his students made me laugh. I am also a teacher; I’ve taught art and animation to young people in New York City classrooms, homeless shelters, and community spaces for more than a decade. I’ve seen my simple lessons take on a life of their own, taking root in the imagination of my students in varying degrees of joy and pain and profundity. Then, Brendan’s words hit me in the pit of my stomach. Gun violence touches the lives of most of my students, in and out of the classroom.

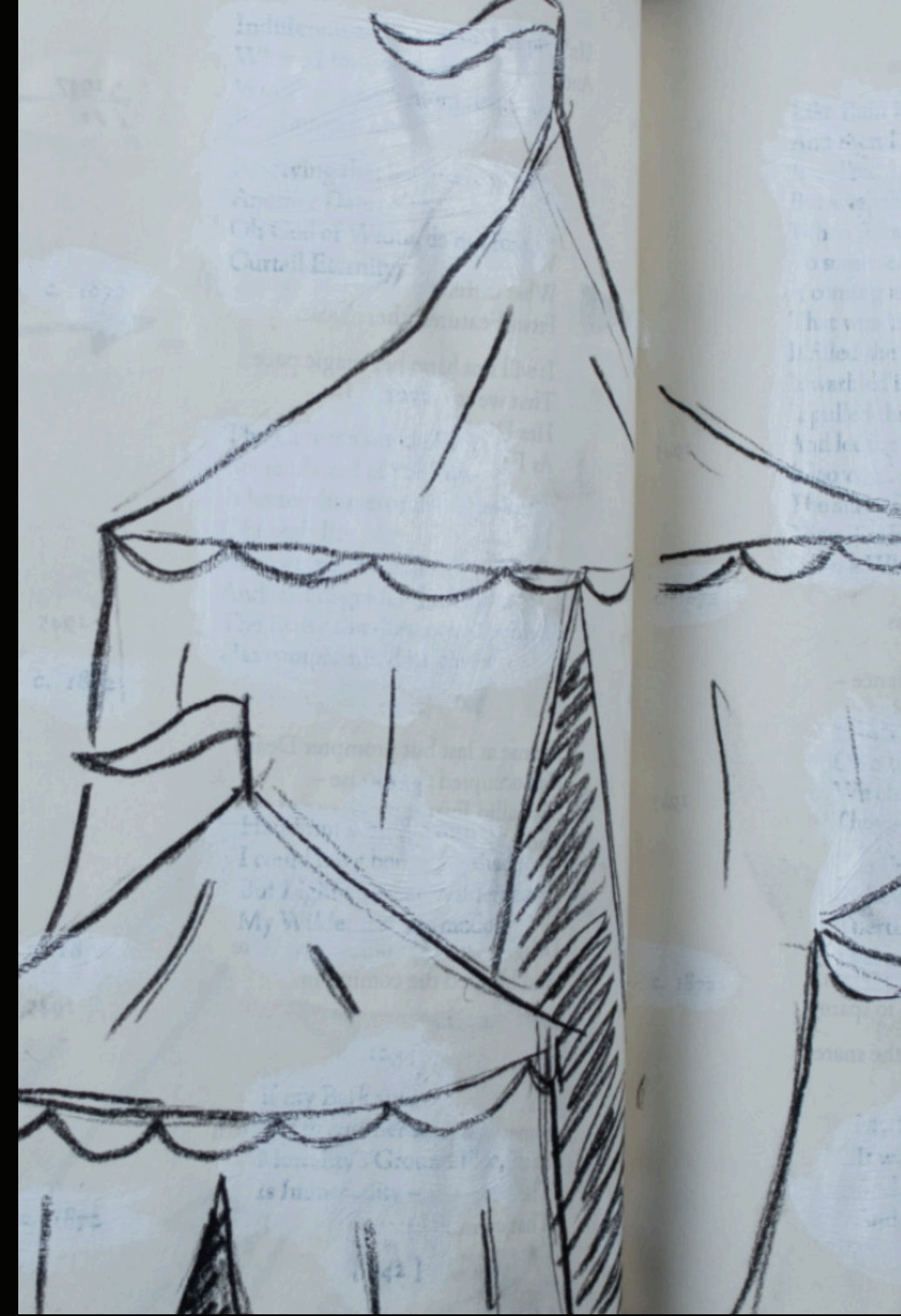
I love that Brendan’s poem asks questions, not just of the students in his classroom, but also of the audience. And I love that he never answers those questions for us, or seeks to tell us how to feel. Brendan’s poem is whole, and it is perfect. So what could we do in animation that Brendan hadn’t already done with words? Our biggest challenge as filmmakers was to add visuals to his poem without taking anything away.

In some ways, this isn’t different from how I approach the dozens of other educational animated shorts I’ve directed at TED-Ed. There, artists and directors have the opportunity to collaborate with educators, researchers, writers, and experts and always have the opportunity -- and challenge -- to learn something new about the world and also about animation. Some subjects easily lend themselves to visual storytelling. But how

do you visualize grief? Or fear? Or love? In TED-Ed’s poetry series “There’s a Poem for That”, which this film is a part of, the goal is to spotlight contemporary poets whose words describe some of life’s most ineffable albeit universal moments.

When I called Anna, I already knew I wanted the animation to be handmade, tactile, and playful, but still somehow maintain the serious weight of the question at hand. Together, we were able to develop an experimental and conversational process, working in our separate studios but regularly sharing progress and seeking feedback from one another, as if we were continually posing and answering and posing our own big questions to each other along the way. Like the poem itself, our animation was sometimes structured, but other times improvisational, always a balancing act between the literal and the abstract.

Throughout the production of “The Opposites Game”, I worried that the visual metaphors we had chosen would not jibe with the pictures inside Brendan’s mind when he wrote the poem, but I eventually came to understand something fundamental: Animation is its own language, and animating a poem is a conversation. To play with Brendan’s words, to learn with and from Anna while animating, and to white out the poems from Emily Dickinson’s pages in order to fill them with pictures from our minds, was a gift and a lesson itself.





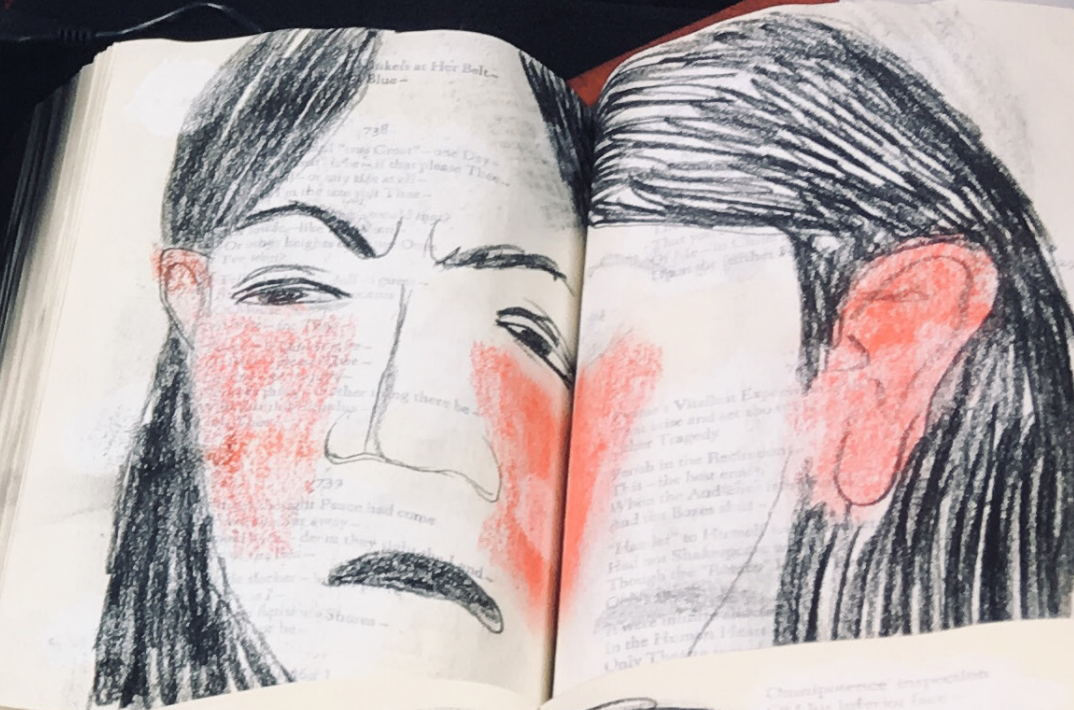
## ANNA SAMO DIRECTOR'S NOTES

*"...Don't write it on the board, they say. Just say poem.  
Your death will sit through many empty poems."*

What is the opposite of a GUN? And what is an 'empty poem'? How do you stay simple and clear, without explaining too much? How do you make a film from a poem without robbing it of its poetry? You dance around it; you paint the pages white. You wait for the pendulum to swing and wonder why the tree didn't make any noise while falling down. You cut it into pieces with a chainsaw, you collect the apples, you get goosebumps from its smell. You play with a torch, making the shadow of your dog appear bigger than the house it is projected onto. You watch for the stars rolling down, notice the smoke of the wood in the cool night air, listen to the dog's barking in the distance. You kill mosquitoes on your face. And then you come back home and lock yourself up in a dark room.

One of the most frequent questions you get as an animation filmmaker is: 'How long did it take you to make this film?' Even though it can be annoying, there is still something substantial in this fascination with the time in relation to the creative process. The time spent outside the studio is being condensed, filtered through the time spent in the studio. The hours, days, months become pressed into the seconds of the film-time. And as the hero of an old tale, who has to wear out seven pair of iron shoes, you have to paint over thousands of pages and draw down twenty charcoal pencils before you can arrive at your destination.







## THE PROCESS

“The Opposites Game” was animated directly under the camera. It was drawn frame-by-frame with charcoal pencils inside of a book, or to be precise, inside of nine books. The idea to use books as a medium came accidentally. While packing for vacation, Anna walked into a bookstore and came across a 770-page compilation of Emily Dickinson poems. The class in the poem plays the opposites game with a line from Emily Dickinson, and so we decided to play within the book of her poems.

Books have ‘opposite pages’, and inside of a book, you can be on ‘the same page’ as someone, or not. While conceptualizing the animation for the poem, we knew we wanted to favor an abstract approach and avoid character animation, however the classroom setting and teacher-student relationship were vital to incorporate. The biggest challenge was to find a balance between the abstract and the narrative, between literal representation in some parts and fluid and associative interpretations in others. We started by working backwards, asking ourselves: What are empty poems? The first sketches we made were a series of pages painted white with some of the letters circled, inspired by blackout poetry. It felt peculiar to white out poems in order to draw on the pages -- as though we were silencing them -- so we pushed it even further and reduced the image to just the text painted over. Working with charcoal pencils and dry pastel for splashes of color, we drew each frame, turned the page, and began a new drawing on the next one.

We tried to use not only the surface of the pages as our canvas but also to play with the three dimensions of the book. We looked for ways to integrate some stop motion elements -- we folded the pages, crumpled them up, and cut into the book to bring more visual diversity into the film. We collected the remnants (the torn pages, the pencil shavings, the charcoal dust) and we cast these into our scenes along the way.











## AWARDS

### **BEST ANIMATED SHORT**

**(Oscar qualifying)**

Raindance Film Festival  
London, UK

### **BEST GALLERY FILM**

Anima Mundi  
Rio de Janeiro + São Paolo, Brazil

### **BEST IN SHOW AWARD**

ASIFA East Animation Film Festival  
New York City, USA

### **BEST ANIMATED SHORT**

Downtown LA Film Festival  
Los Angeles, USA

### **BEST SCREENPLAY**

Animage; International Animation  
Festival of Pernambuco, Brazil

### **SPECIAL JURY MENTION**

StopTrik Animation Festival  
Slovenia + Poland

### **HONORABLE MENTION**

Woodstock Film Festival  
Woodstock, NY, USA



# FESTIVALS

## **Animafest Zagreb World Festival of Animation Film**

Grand Competition, Short Film - June 2019, Croatia

## **Palm Springs International Shortfest**

Official Selection – June 2019, Palm Springs, USA

## **Anima Mundi**

Gallery Film Competition – July 2019, Brazil

## **SUPERTOON International Animation Festival**

International Competition - July 2019, Croatia

## **Salute Your Shorts Film Festival**

Official Selection - August 2019, Los Angeles, USA

## **Warsaw Animation Film Festival**

Panorama - August/September 2019, Poland

## **Fantoche International Animation Festival**

Panorama - September 2019, Switzerland

## **Animanima International Animation Festival**

International Competition - September 2019, Serbia

## **VarnaFest World Animated Film Festival**

Panorama - September 2019, Bulgaria

## **Raindance Film Festival**

Official Selection - September 2019, London, UK

## **Festival Stop Motion Montreal**

September 2019, Canada

## **Animation Block Party**

September 2019, Brooklyn, USA

## **Encounters Film Festival**

Official Selection - September 2019, Bristol, UK

## **Woodstock Film Festival**

Official Selection - October 2019, Woodstock, USA

## **StopTrik International Film Festival**

Official Selection - October 2019, Slovenia + Poland

## **ANIMAGE – International Animation Festival of Pernambuco**

Official Selection - October 2019, Recife, Brazil

## **Downtown LA Film Festival**

Official Selection - October 2019, Los Angeles, USA

## **ReAnimania: Int'l Animation Films & Comics Art Festival**

Official Selection - October 2019, Armenia

## **Pittsburgh Shorts Film Festival**

Official Selection - November 2019, Pittsburgh, USA

## **Interfilm Berlin International Short Film Festival**

Official Selection - November 2019, Germany

## **Rocky Mountain Women's Film Festival**

Official Selection - November 2019, Colorado Springs, USA

## **Flensburg Short Film Festival**

November 2019, Germany + Denmark

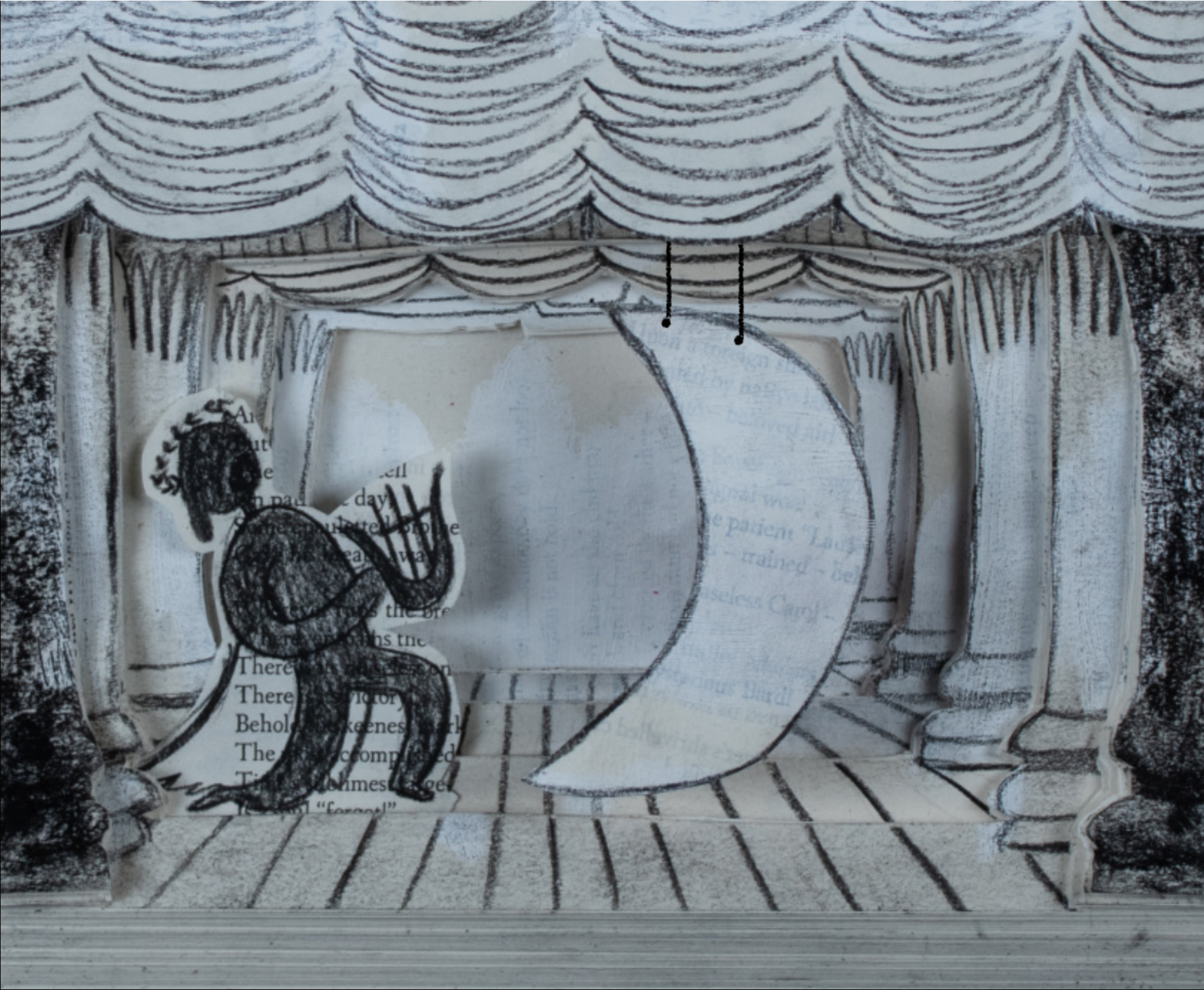
## **London Animation Festival**

Official Selection - November/December 2019, London, UK

## **Leuven Short Film Festival**

Official Selection - November/December 2019, Belgium





## CREDITS

A TED-Ed Production

directed by Anna Samo and Lisa LaBracio  
a poem by Brendan Constantine  
animation and design Anna Samo and Lisa LaBracio  
poem performed by Brendan Constantine  
sound design Weston Fonger  
produced by Gerta Xhelo

associate producer Bethany Cutmore-Scott  
editorial producer Alex Rosenthal  
executive creative director Logan Smalley  
executive producer Stephanie Lo  
producer Sarah Kay

special thanks Tom Bergmann  
Jessica Ruby





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