



Churchmouse

Cats have nine lives. That's nine times to grow. Nine times to love and be loved. Nine times to find faith and nine times to lose it. Nine times to die. The promise kept by recurrence, a generational selfhood. Rebirth, regrow, relearn, the plight of a perpetual being. These lives are only worth the weight of their memories. How easy is it to keep track of lives lived and passed? Maybe try scratch-marks on a wall. Slow drags of a sharp claw against soft stone. One, two, three, four...After the multitude of minutia, the endless routines and rituals, losing sight of your tally would be all but inevitable. Can you even remember how to count?

Does experience permeate the membrane between lives? Does the remainder carry over? Those words unspoken, those deeds undone. Under enough pressure, some things could be shared between timelines, extruding through corporeal bodies. But what about your shell? Would you keep your stripes? Your spots? Your scars? None of it matters if the liminal film between worlds is rigid, concrete, impassable. A closed door in a dead-end alley. Starting from scratch. Each beginning, a blank stare, as you methodically claw your way up from the bottom. Again and again and again. Slowly the novelty of a reset recedes into the hum of a purr until the idea becomes distant and tired, just like you were the last time around. While drifting into a sunbaked daydream you realize this purr is different than others before it. Its resonance, louder and deeper, vibrates much more strongly against the inside of your ribs.

You loved having green eyes. You only had them once. Green eyes and strong tabby paws. Paws you used to lose yourself in the forest climbing trees. At the top you would survey the landscape for prey. But you never forgot to run home just in time for dinner. After eating there was always a place for you, curled up and cozy on the couch. As you aged your ability to hunt dwindled as your senses dulled. You came to prefer the unique warmth only found in the crook of an arm, learned to covet the numbing comfort of having your cheeks rubbed. A realization arose; the world was safer from behind a window. Fresh meat, soft and warm in your clenched jaws, was traded for the crunch of dirt-colored pellets. Ease, stability, luxury. With the right mindset happiness can be found in anything, no matter how banal. But that was your past life. Now, behind yellow eyes, a fear loomed. You had lost count. This is your last chance, isn't it? There's only one more chance to believe.

Caught by your distorted reflection in a streetside puddle, it's hard not to wonder what the culmination of all these lifetimes will be. What can be salvaged from the leftovers of so many experiences cut short by the abruptness of disease, the ambush of a rival, the acceleration of a car. In that moment a memory arises. It's foggy, but you are almost certain you had been working towards something. Yes, something important; a monument to all your selves. Now you found it. A temple? This is anything but. In front of you is a half-built cathedral, a constitution of clumsily assembled cardboard. A few lives had been spent ignoring construction. Agendas were different back then. Whole mornings were spent waiting for that one sunspot in the kitchen that only shows up in



the early afternoon on an Autumn day. That was the best place to dream of catching birds and killing mice.

When you remembered to start building again you discovered your skills had been shed as quickly as your fur. The church's foundation is sturdy, but the buttresses and archways need work. Eventually the supports will erode and collapse unless you make urgent changes. Now. But you also feel like a nap. It's been hours since your last nap. When you stand on your legs too long, you can feel the fluid pooling around your tender joints. Each pounce elicits a wince, and your once robust gallop has slowed to a brisk walk. That black gunk in your nail beds won't go away no matter how much you expertly preen at it with your precise teeth. Maybe it's too late. Lie down one last time, remember that faith is best saved for later. The promise of an altar is now a ruin. The remnants, an unclaimed heap of half measures and partial truths, becomes myth, a cautionary tale for those with lives yet to come.

Nine lives and only eight chances to do better next time.

- Philip Hinge

Philip Hinge (b. Seattle WA, 1988) is an artist, curator and project space operator based in Ridgewood, NY. Hinge holds an MFA in painting from the Virginia Commonwealth University. His work has been exhibited at a variety of venues, including International Waters (Brooklyn, NY), Martos Gallery (NY,NY) Brennan & Griffin (NY, NY), 427 (Riga, Latvia), Final Hot Desert (Utah), Mélange (Cologne, DE), mcg21xoxo (Chiba, Japan), 106 Green (NY, NY), Quarters Gallery (Los Angeles, CA), Freddy (Harrison, NY), & Lower Cavity (Holyoke, MA).

In addition to his studio work, Hinge has founded and curated two separate projects, [Catbox Contemporary](#) (Ridgewood, NY), and [darkzone](#) (NJ).