

# Illmarks.com at Yale Disability and Accessibility Symposium

Script Access Copy with alt text for images

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Hi everyone, This is illmarks: Symptom Mapping Art

How body mapping for disability affirms our lived experiences,  
and unites us in creating hopeful,  
transformative futures

For a copy of the deck, please go to [illmarks.com/yale-deck](https://illmarks.com/yale-deck) or scan the QR code.

[image of QR code for [illmarks.com/yale-deck](https://illmarks.com/yale-deck) with no tracking]

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I'm Nyx Mir. I use fae/faer and they/them pronouns.

My visual description is I'm a non-binary white person with dramatic square glasses and fauxhawk haircut.

I make art where I visualize chronic illness symptoms, as part of my advocacy project, illmarks, which is what I'll be sharing today.

This includes some abstract body horror and art nudity drawings. If that isn't for you, please just listen, or come back in 5 minutes.

I had a mobility disability before moderate-to-severe chronic illnesses, and I'm neurodivergent. My symptom mapping art helps me navigate these disabilities.

Also, I'm nervous speaking in front of groups,  
so thank you for your kindness with me.

[Slide with text:  
Multiply Disabled

Health&Care Activism Artist  
Visualize Long Covid Symptoms  
[illmarks.com](http://illmarks.com)

Pre-Chronic Illness:  
Creative Director & Multi-Disciplinary Designer  
Walt Disney Imagineering  
BlizzCon  
Magic Patio]

[High level alt, detailed alt next: Images of  
Nyx's diverse portfolio of work including  
diverse events which feel like they come from  
other worlds, portrait photography with

detailed and evocative creative direction with countless surreal angled candles or iridescent veils, lighting sculptures including a neon terrarium, and an image of the Enchanted Tale of the Beauty and the Beast dark ride from the Tokyo Disneyland expansion.]

[detailed alt:

1. Selfie of Nyx in a black KN95, with silvery periwinkle blue short hair, making eye contact with dark blue eyes outside a contemporary health sciences building

2. Sign for “and still it remains: a long covid exhibition”

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UCHleath

Erion Family Foundation

Sally Hartshorn

3. Images of Nyx's diverse portfolio of work

including diverse events which feel like they come from other worlds, this is BlizzCon  
Darkmoon Faire

4. Image of The Magic Patio, Naomi levitates sideways, with an arm over head while Andrew Evans takes a picture frame off the back wall and slides it over her body to show there aren't wires.

5. portrait photography with detailed and evocative creative direction with countless surreal angled candles

6. Nye with neon (well, xenon technically)  
terrarium sculpture

7. the Enchanted Tale of the Beauty and the Beast dark ride from the Tokyo Disneyland expansion, this is the ballroom scene with trackless tea cups dancing around the

eponymous couple

8. Portrait photography of a woman with tan skin and dark hair in an iridescent veil lit in magenta and turquoise looking over her shoulder

9. Projection mapped step-pyramid with a DJ at the top and dance lighting bounding off of rotating mirrors ]

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My art stems in part from a genre of work called body mapping.

It evolved in from the work of women with HIV in Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin Indigenous Ecofeminism, and labor rights movements.

At its most basic you take what you are feeling and mark it on a representation of your body.

I strongly encourage you to learn more about body mapping.

[alt: Body mapping art by Ncdeka, showing two layers of human and a baby. There are hand and foot prints, it is very large. A lot of text is written on it. Her chest has a heart that's cut open.]

[alt: slide says Body Mapping's Roots, then follows Please learn more about body mapping art from Women with HIV in Subsaharan Africa, Latin Indigenous Ecofeminists, and Labor Rights Organizers!

“When I see [my body map] I feel much happier just because when I look at it, I see what I can't

see when I look at myself in the mirror. My picture is like an X-ray.”

Ncedeka (art on right)

CW: child/infant death, HIV, medical trauma:  
<https://msfaccess.org/body-maps-art-and-memory> ]

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Let's get to it!

[transition slide: About> illmarks project ]

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After Long Covid made it clear I had to leave work, probably like many of you, I had been trying different ways of symptom tracking.

I picked up some bookmarks with printed body outlines, and I started drawing on them.

To visually describe my work: I use a manila-hued anatomical bookmark to constrain & set a clinical aesthetic, and vibrant inks with light-interactive properties to subvert that structure.

[this slide and the next few slides have 3 bookmarks on them, including

1. A shape of a human outline printed on a bookmark, adorned with thin dark purple ink. The Entire figure is covered in hatches, scribbles, dashes, and surrounded with areas of shaking lines. The limbs are especially covered in hatches, including the tops of

thighs, forearms, hands, and feet. The ankles are marked with dark scribbles, as are the shoulders and hands. The face looks alert yet exhausted. dashed lines follow the esoughagus, down into a tangled, sharp looking gut. It is titled at the top in a “memo” section of the bookmark: “2023-1-1, Tried grocery shopping. Overexerted. Pain, swelling, itching all over.” ]

[image alt 2: Outline of a person colored in hot pink-red, cool blue, and purple. The purple is a large shape covering their eyes and head, the shape of a "ice cap" anti-migraine chiled hat. The body's red-pink marks are in the areas of a too-small warm bath with the legs bent, the stomach, knees, breasts, and shoulders in crackely icy cold blue.]

[image alt 3: Neon green and dark purple clash on this manila marked-up figure. The inside of

the torso is angular, sharp squiggly shapes in lime green, with a purple shadow that becomes larger as they go down, denoting severe weight and gravity feelings. The hair seems almost fire-like, and the eyes are almost like fruit-slice radially concentric unsettling shapes. The nose is colored in dark purple. Small angular pricks jump off of the shoulder areas, and the hands are asymmetrically colored. The legs gradually fill with lime green. There's a sort of nausea and toxicness to these feelings. ]

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This art wasn't a perfect symptom tracking solution for me, and I do use apps.

But the art helped me relate to my disabilities in new ways, then build hope for myself, my

communities, and our planet, which are the themes of this talk.

[ 3 bookmarks.

Image 1 alt: The figure on the manila bookmark is split down the middle in two sections. The left side, showing the back of a human with back rolls. long, wavy, small arrows wrap them, running upward, along the sides of their arm and body, and continuing off the head. On the right half is the figure's skeleton, drawn in green. small arrow heads are seen pinching in on their joints

Image 2 alt: curling squiggly blue lines, then a head of jagged dark angular lines making a sharp square. in real life these dark inks make metallic reflections in dark gold and green.

Image 3 alt: a dark big hook is pierced through a body's left shoulder/trapezius. the body

hangs from the hook as at an angle, asymmetrically with their left shoulder on the hook, head and right shoulder falling down and to the side. the legs also are somewhat asymmetrical. the body is nude and has hair. the art style is angular in dark teal with jagged and visible joints. ]

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I also expanded the types of experiences I drew.

I went from depicting purely physical symptoms, to adding the emotional experiences of illness, then the systemic impacts, and the interpersonal.

[image 1 alt: This drawing completely ignores the outline of the human printed on the bookmark. Instead, a person lies in the fetal position at the bottom of the page. They hug their knees to their chest in purple outline and dark lime green shading.

Image 2 alt: figure is covered in a sheet with eyes like a sheet ghost. They also wear a respirator face mask. Surrounding them are dozens of laughing & happy people, all with their mouths open in almost grotesque smiles. They're drinking, waving flags, hiking, exercising, talking with each other, eating popcorn, waving. there are small drawings of viruses peppered in amongst the people & objects, which include airplanes, xmas stockings. Hidden amongst this jumble under the feet of the figure is the phrase in quotes "Post-Covid".

Image 3 alt: Human is rendered abstractly from a bunch of slightly slanted vertical lines. So many lines, of varying lengths, bearing down on the figure. Or rising up from the figure. Within those lines, starting at the rough mouth-area, & continuing downward are 5 triangular shapes, outlined in a teal ink with gold shimmer, marked with an "s" in reflective ink. ]

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This series of autobiographical bookmarks became the ongoing “illmarks” project.

[image 1 alt: the human in the center of the bookmark has a scratchy black & red shimmer ink etched brain, mouth (frown) esophagus and GI system. Their head is darkness resembling a brain, poking into it are thin spikes of red.

diagonally behind them, and wrapping around parts of their limbs are water textures which almost look like smoke, or tendrils, or tangles of something impossible to escape. they're beautifully colored but there's just a certain something in how they wrap around so very much of the body so deftly and... dangerously?

Image 2 alt: There's a human whose anatomical heart & brain turn into twisting, undulating, VIBRANT textures, magenta turning sickly green at the limbs, gold shimmer, w/ liquid, blood-pooling details like water and bubbles. They're on a manila bookmark, and their body is a blend of so many colors, that magenta-green metallice stagnating blood, but also red-orange blood burning bright in the heart and rain, greens and dark blues. Around the edge of the figure are jagged lines which flow downward in blended colors. they have some spikes coming out of their head. the

memo section at the top of the bookmark has the text "2026-1-7 Worst POTS day ever" written in it.

Image 3 alt: a figure made entirely of scratch marks from their itchiness, curving around their body and implying the shape of their form, labeled "Symptom: Mast Cell Itching" ]

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Here are some of the major themes I've identified in my work in case you want to try it at home!

These aren't the only ways:

There's no right or wrong way to do subjective, perceptual work.

[6 image examples across the slide. The next few slides highlight one image at a time:

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1. Visual depiction: for “symptom: nausea and reflux”, I use swirling, bubbling acidic colors, which rise up, against the typical flow of the GI tract.

[ highlighted image alt: the figure is vibrant in lime green, yellow-green, and peachy orange. The body is a bunch of swirls of these colors, including a large one which bubbles up the esophagus into the mouth. The figure stands on bubbly, bouyant churning patterns of the same colors, and is framed by art deco-like large angular diagonals behind them.]

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## 2. Writing and description:

This bookmark is a poem about blood & queerness over a drawn circulatory system.

Some other people write single adjectives across different body areas, and others do abstract stream-of-consciousness writing.

[highlighted image alt: the cardiovascular system drawn onto the fashion coordination bookmark body. over top of it, handwritten in purple ink is the poem. underneath that, upside down, is the additional note.]

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3. Comparison and metaphor: In this piece I depict a long, heavy metal brick in my leg.

Some other visual metaphors I've done include being drilled into, drowning, or butterfly chrysalises.

[highlighted image alt: figure wearing a nightdress and slippers lifts the back of the nightdress to reveal a large red metal rod running down most of the length of their leg. A moon frames the figure, who looks over their shoulder with a displeased expression and oversized, sketchy, empty eyes. It's so late. I'm so tired. I just want to sleep.]

#### 4. Abstract Shape and Color:

Here I use neon green and purple, with tangled zig-zagging in the belly, and short energetic lines in the face and shoulders.

Abstract shape & color is one of the most common styles I see in body mapping.

I love this because there's especially no wrong answers and people get less stressed about their perceived artistic skill levels.

[highlighted image alt: repeat image as before I just realized, oh well, Neon green and dark purple clash on this manila marked-up figure. The inside of the torso is angular, sharp squiggly shapes in lime green, with a purple

shadow that becomes larger as they go down, denoting severe weight and gravity feelings. The hair seems almost fire-like, and the eyes are almost like fruit-slice radially concentric unsettling shapes. The nose is colored in dark purple. Small angular pricks jump off of the shoulder areas, and the hands are asymmetrically colored. The legs gradually fill with lime green. There's a sort of nausea and toxicness to these feelings.]

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- 5. Representative Shapes: I use a head & shoulder shape and a lightning shape, two symbols which when combined can convey

meaning.

[highlighted image alt: the figure is shattered with blue ink, fragmenting from the top of their head and down through the body. Layered like a double exposure over the body is the silhouette of a head and shoulders, also connecting to the same fragmenting crack, but in a close up perspective.]

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- 6, Size and scale: For blood pooling in extremities, I used oversized feet and an oversized anatomical heart filling the body.

And any of these can be combined too. If you explore this & want to share what you made, I'd love to see it. My email is on the last slide.

[highlighted image alt: the figure's chest, arms, and thighs are filled with an oversized anatomical human heart. The figure has giant oversized swollen feet, marks on their cheeks, around their eyes, and the center of their forehead. the background is jagged spikes, like a heart monitor visual going wild, or electrical sparks. The artwork is done in dark red ink with dark blue and peach.]

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These art practices are so helpful, they sort of became my thing.

[Zoomed out, 4x9 grid of bookmarks]

17

I've published over 250 bookmarks and counting on my advocacy project website, [illmarks.com](http://illmarks.com)

[Zoomed out further, view of 250+ bookmarks ]

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Most importantly, I really wanted this work to try to help our communities. I've been astounded by the reception and reach.

With University of Washington's School of Nursing, I taught fellow disabled and sick folks symptom mapping, and it was so rewarding.

I'm looking for partners to help me continue hosting disability body mapping workshops, so please email me if you're interested!

[alt: Slide with the text:

illmarks activism!

Selected Impacts:

Homiens Art Prize Summer 2024: Illmarks -  
grief

HERALBONY Art Prize Finalist 2025: interactive  
"medical chArt"

3 IRL Exhibits & 2 Virtual Exhibits

5 Publications

2 Workshops

images include photos from exhibits, including the interactive medical chart on display in Tokyo at the HERALBONY international art prize, 21 views of long covid on display in two different galleries and Nyx giving a workshop with 3 other N95-wearing participants holding

up symptom mapping art, and a visual showing a bookmark of a black figure in waves, with the header Laminator Vol 2 in which it will be published]

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Now that you understand the project, here's some of the most important things it's taught me so far.

[transition slide: Key learnings from illmarks. Caption on image: "Symptom: Grief" winner of the Homiens Art Prize, Summer 2024]

[image alt: Cyan shows closed eyes w/ a tear. The figure's side of face, shoulders, & running

down one arm are swirling, dripping liquid patterns, turning into droplets falling from the hand. On the other side of the body, & up the legs are more water patterns, turning into a pool of ooze that covers the lower legs & feet. There is a dotted outline of a human figure printed on the manila bookmark, the ooze and eyes with tear are the only rendered pieces of the artwork. In the memo section at the top of the bookmark is "Symptom: grief" ]

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We know our bodies better than anyone else.

There might be people who know more about how different antibodies relate to a specific autoimmune arthritis condition, but no one else knows you specifically better than you.

Even when being ourselves is really confusing or going through a period of great change, we are still our bodies' best allies and advocates.

[slide says "We know our bodies better than anyone else. And has 2 bookmarks:

[Alt 1: For the first, the human figure in the center of the bookmark has a scratchy black and red shimmer ink etched brain, mouth (frown) esophagus and GI system. Their head is full of variegated darkness resembling a brain, and poking into it are thin spikes of red. diagonally behind them, and wrapping around parts of their limbs are water textures which almost look like smoke, or tendrils, or tangles of something impossible to escape. they're beautifully colored and a smooth contrast to the sharp of the stabby halo of red or the etchy

thick GI tract but there's just a certain something in how they wrap around so very much of the body so deftly and ... dangerously ?

Alt 2: Large dark marks cover the head and lower abdomen of a silhouette of a person printed on a beige bookmark. The dark marks are deep purple, with bright yellow edges and blue particulate. Many dagger-like triangles point in at the gut mark, like giant stabbing feelings. The top of the head is slightly aflame, and the lower right ankle has a small pulse mark with a question mark. The outline of the figure is shaky.]

21

By externalizing our internal experiences we

are able to:

[4 bookmarks across the screen, highlighted one at a time. Each is captioned with the first line of each following slide]

22

- make them real / tangible:
- this can be deeply important if we have less visible disabilities or for any experiences where we lack support for our reality and perceptions.

[highlighted image alt: the figure is adorned in bright pink baby blue, and white. A squiggle of blue in their head like a brain turns into a series

of cascading blue lines which writhe and wiggle and fall down the figure's side and tangle around their feet. Large diagonal rectangles make an arrow head pointing into the figure's crotch. abstract shapes resembling a uterus and melting drips, in the trans pride flag colors, fall down the figure's leg. There are other details, including sharp triangle-like tears under closed eyes, and arrows pointing in at the heart. Some areas of other pain are marked, the throat, outer arms, armpits, and elbow interiors. The figure is shirtless and has some body fat lines, and wears long shorts like boxer-briefs.]

- process them:
- this has been important for me, as a neurodivergent person with a fair bit of alexithymia, aka difficulty recognizing/feeling emotions

[highlighted image alt: the bookmark is full of waterry shoreline art. Grey-blue with periwinkle and green shapes and white seafoam cover the human and background, washing ashore at the bottom of the bookmark. The white foam makes the shape of a human with an oversized graphic hear shape. The heart has no waves or currents, it is still.]

- track how they change & how we change:
- I was really moved in my workshops to hear multiple people realize symptoms they were used to avoiding thinking about had actually recently improved.
- I get that — there are certain symptoms I avoid thinking about too.

[highlighted image alt: The figure is in the cup of water, but this time it's different. The water fills the cup entirely, and doesn't look realistic. It has choppy, undulating sharp patterns, including swirling lines, some of which are darker and greener and maybe reminiscent of kelp. they somewhat frame the figure, on two sides of the cup going up. the figure has red choppy angular insides, and scribbly dark purple/green limbs. the head is skull like but

distorted black and red shimmer, as has been the migraines and anaphylaxis recently. the bode is less realistically rendered. the throat and armpits are also darkly scribbled. the water fills the entire top of the cup, and doesn't have a realistic waterline. teal dark swirls come to a point at the top of the cup and around them are many more light sharp swirls and sharp white negative spaces in the water. the water is still in the color scheme but the textures are jagged and the shapes are different. there's almost a horizontal line cutting across under the figure's knees in the water too ]

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- Communicate them to others:
- this takes a lot of vulnerability, but it can be

immensely meaningful and connective to feel less alone in some of our most difficult feelings.

- This was unexpected for me, so, thank you for being here. I can't believe I'm talking to a bunch of people about this. (I'm terrified but thankful)

[highlighted image alt: a mostly dark blue person holding a turquoise flame in their hands , and looking down at it. it shines and their hair blows magically. ]

26

Body mapping for disability & chronic illness is a way of solidifying our internal truths.

Through our symptom maps, we create our own biomarkers, and substantiate what others cannot see.

We also connect to community. By affirming each other's internal knowledge we destabilize epistemic injustices.

[slide text: We affirm our & each others' bodily experiences, internal knowledge, and subjective truths.]

[2 bookmarks

Alt 1 human is composed of dripping dark green ooze & negative space. they have a bit of ooze for head, a face of concern/pain, & an emptiness where their heart should be. the ooze continues down their body asymmetrically. the background of is smudged

horizontal stripes of green yellow brown like the world is moving past the figure much faster in an unfathomable blur, while they are taking one tiny, ever so slow step we can barely perceive -- if we squeeze our eyes, perhaps their left foot is lifted slightly and their left arm is bent, right arm is back further?

Alt 2 the figure on the manila anatomical bookmark is against a dark ink background. their body is colored in dark green-blue, with vibrant trans pride flag colors across their body diagonally, the white at their lower abdomen. Their face is drawn in extreme concern. A speech bubble shows them asking, "is there a less invasive option?" a drawing of a disembodied white coat, with jagged edges and allmost glitch-like shaking lines is before them. The white coat also has a speech bubble, and replies, "this is the less invasive option." ]

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27

To close, let me share how I see this work helping us moving forward:

There's a great quote from Sonya Renee Taylor, the author of *The Body is Not an Apology*, where she says (summarized) that as varied and divergent humans are, we all have bodies.

[Slide says "Closing> I hope]

[2 bookmarks

Alt 1 A manila bookmark with a memo section at the top, contains the text from the caption.

Below it is a dotted outline of a human figure, drawn over with purple ink to be holding a phone, wearing a party hat, and an N95 respirator. Confetti and streamers fall around them. They have happy eyes.

Alt 2: The body is light, surrounded by blue denim-colored ink. Around the body in pulsing layers are golden lines. Golden stars of different numbers of points and sizes adorn the background. The body is written in dark blue ink, starting in the head and filling the torso: ";my mind and my body are not different. I will attempt a gentle truce"

in the right arm: "may i hear the body's wisdom."

in the left arm: "may I be gentle with myself."

in the legs: "may we be allies in healing." ]

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Because we all have bodies, I believe healthcare is uniquely situated as an issue that can unite people across political spectrums to create systemic change.

We will all at some point in our lives experience illness, and death.

Any of us fortunate enough to not have had to fight for critical care during already difficult times in our lives probably know someone who has.

[alt 1: The figure is aflame in purple. their

stomach contains a large flame, that licks up their chest. Their fists and eyebrows are also aflame, edged in dark boysenberry purple. Other areas of the body are shaded in lavender. Large text written on its side reads DENY DEFEND DEPOSE

Alt 2: A skeleton with a heart fills the outline of the human. The skeleton's heart is being pierced between the ribs by 3 long sharp blade-like triangles. The skeleton has a face over the skull, with furrowed brows. The text at the top in the memo section has the caption, then the rest of the post handwritten underneath along the side of the skeleton. ]

29

Increasing attacks on public health and

government care systems, are harms against every being, not just humans in public-payer health or disability support systems.

Pandemic denial is causing lasting damage we're only beginning to fathom the effects of.

In order to survive, I believe it's critical we envision different, hopeful systems of health&care.

[alt 1: "The ER's Embrace" the creme bookmark with an outline of a person has the figure drawn in dark teal ink, with varying line widths. Attached to the figure are light blue iridescent medical equipment: a blood pressure cuff, finger pulse oximeter, and five electrodes placed on the figure's chest. From each of these pieces of equipment flow dark purple cables, which wrap around the figure's limbs in flowing loops and curls. Each piece has two

cables, a thick cable and a thin cable, which sometimes loop over each other. There's a sort of hyper-stylized aesthetic to the cables, where they feel more like comforting embracing ribbons rather than restrictive or claustrophobic.

Alt 2: Health Insurance Card: "Emergency Visit: \$50 Copay" Bill: \$1269.60

A messy bookmark of blurred wet ink, and lots of angular red anger. Looking closely, one will notice it started as extremely similar to "The ER's Embrace" — a figure with EKG connections, blood pressure cuff, pulse ox, that has been wetted and smudged before attacked with vibrant red ink.

Thank you.

[Final slide. "Thank you! illmarks:

Reach out anytime: [illmarks@nyxmir.com](mailto:illmarks@nyxmir.com)

Art: [illmarks.com](http://illmarks.com)

Presentation Materials: [illmarks.com/yale-deck](http://illmarks.com/yale-deck) ]

[alt for final image: the figure is split by diagonal lines in to a dozen sections. each section is colored a different combination of pink &/or purple in different darkneses. The coloring is done vertically, so the sections look like dripping dye. In the memo section, it says "Don't be afraid (to) Begin Again. Again." on the line of each diagonal the word "again" is written in the same hand and ink as the top

memo section. There are 12 lines which each have an again. for good measure, at the very bottom right on a printed line, there's one more "again" . ]