

FLORA FICTION

A LITERARY MAGAZINE
VOLUME 1 • ISSUE 2
SUMMER 2020



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Please visit our website for more information. florafiction.com/contribute

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Art expresses emotion and reality into a true, relatable format that cannot be otherwise shown. Art is a way for people to share the commonalities of both joy and strife. Art shows us that we're all humans who feel and want the same things, regardless of our inability to sometimes communicate it by conventional means.

What unites people, separating us from animals, is compassion. We're able to understand one another despite our differences. We can rationalize and empathize the position our fellow citizens come from, even if it's far removed from our own. That's our connection to one another, for no matter the language, background, or history, we are, at our core, the same.

When the world as we know it disappears and transform to something new, it will be the art of our past that tells the future what life was really like. What we create today will live on longer than our existence on this earth, and the only person whose able to tell your story is you, and you alone. Take everything inside you, and release it through your art. Share yourself with the world. You deserve to be known.

To those who submitted to the second issue of *Flora Fiction*, thank you. This body of work has taken a life of its own, and it's all yours.

xoxo
Flora Ashe



April 27

BY: GENNA EDWARDS

it's not rhetorical, i'm asking, when you look into my eyes, is anyone home? i can't tell if i'm an attic or a whole house anymore, if my kitchen floor is wood or laminate. i can't remember if i left the back door unlocked. it's not my fault that someone is in my living room turning the lights on and off again. i have headaches.

if i'm made of brick we're in Arizona and if i'm glass, Minneapolis. if i have three barred windows, we're in Chicago, and the air conditioning bill is insane, and i've grown my hair down past my knees. i shave my legs for the first time in years. if i have shutters, we're in California and the sun turns my skin pink. i am the bubblegum, candy drop princess and you kiss me like you're already inside of me. which, maybe you are. i can't tell anymore.

Genna Edwards is an undergraduate student studying fiction writing and film. You can find her work in *Three Rivers Review*, *Forbes and Fifth*, *Eve Poetry*, *Train River Publishing Anthology 2020*, and elsewhere.



Carolyn Martin is a lover of gardening and snorkeling, feral cats and backyard birds, writing, and photography. Her fourth poetry collection, *A Penchant for Masquerades*, was released by *Unsolicited Press* in 2019. Visit: carolynmartinpoet.com.



Yito & Isabelita

BY: ANNIE Y. SALDAÑA MATIAS



PHOTOGRAPHY

Annie Y. Saldaña Matias was born in Santurce, Puerto Rico. She has a bachelor's degree in Graphic Arts from the University of Puerto Rico in Carolina, and earned her Master's in fine art from Miami International University of Art and Design in 2012.

She worked as a curator of exhibitions and gallery coordinator at Vargas Gallery, Pembroke Pines, FL. There, she organized 19 exhibitions from 2012 to 2015 and taught photography as adjunct faculty at Vargas University.

Saldaña currently teaches photography at various universities in Puerto Rico. She founded PRISMA Art Projects in 2015, an artist-run organization focused on supporting contemporary emerging artists from Puerto Rico and abroad through curated exhibitions and cultural events. She has introduced two international art and photography movements to the Puerto Rico community: 24hourproject and Free Art Fridays.

Saldaña has participated in many solo and group exhibitions in Puerto Rico, United States, United Kingdom and Mexico, including Bienal SalaFAR at Museo de Arte de Puerto Rico, Bienal de Fotografía at Museo de Las Americas in San Juan, Miami Independent Thinkers in Miami and PINTA Art Fair in London.



Sweetness of Summer

BY: TATIA NIKVASHVILI

21-year-old freelance artist, currently a law student from Georgia.



Photography By: Aaron Ollero

Your Beauty

Your beauty is like the ocean at dusk,
when the skies bleed in vermillion hues,
gold, auburn. Thine eyes glitter, like clear dew
that sparkles in morning mist on the musk
rose. Yet, more! Thy clear light shrouds a nightshade
soul! You cast black spells in an alpine bower,
stirring strange potions to within your power.

Keep me entranced in amorous hex. Maid,
your beauty, like the sea when the sun sets,
ensnares my heart is burning, rapturous
fire. My soul sorely aches; all my desires
become focused on thee, my love. Ah, let
me swim serenely in thy fount of bliss,
and give me another luxurious kiss.



Jack Dempster is a folk poet, musician, and editor. He has published in journals including *Metro Toronto*, *Wunderlit Magazine*, *The Town Crier*, *Jam & Sand*, *Gnashing Teeth*, *Of Poets and Frenchmen*, and *Juniper*. Jack also produces *Cascadian Art*.

FRAYED

BY: ANINDITA SARKAR

I watch the tide of darkness seep in through the periwinkle curtain against the pane of my bedroom window. The birds have stopped chirping. There is no sound except the occasional vehicles that honks on the stray dogs. Nothing has changed. Only that I have retired and my arthritic limbs impede my movement.

I wait for my wife in the semi-dark room sipping on a cappuccino. The joyful screams of swallows arouse me from my trance. Out of the state, I see her leave with a big towel in her hand feeble like a starving animal. She barely talks nowadays. The body which once struck me as a seductive yells of womanhood.

Although I never inquire about her expansive network of events, I know she goes to the quarry lake every day, one of the several man-made reservoirs with a hydroelectric dam at its end. She goes there with her colleagues a troupe of literature lovers the former professors of Auden University. I hate it.

During summer months the lake overflows with raucous screams of unsupervised pleasure, children splash in the shallows and elders engage in multi-voiced drama. But after an accident in which a group of people was rammed over by a haul-truck, the place lost its glamour.

Now, only canopies of thatched straw and foliage shroud the loamy ground. It's definitely a quiet place, far from the urban echo. Occasionally, a cormorant's shrill cry masks the deafening silence. It's ideal for a philosopher in a state of sedate rumination.

She is back. My wife stands at the doorway and looks at me without a smile. We have progressively distant ourselves with time, without encroaching into each other's private lives. I regularly try to re-knit the frayed threads of our lives as a couple.

I ask her, "How's your day?"

She doesn't reply.

I take a deep breath and register the familiar smell of drying silt and salmon emanating from her body. I watch her. She's unimaginably blue. The apples of her cheeks have faded. She stretches herself on the bed and turns over.

I wonder what they discuss in their routinely meeting at the lake. She says the group is working on some "translation" project. One would think they've finished it by now.

I leave the window slightly ajar at night so that I can observe her leave for the quarry lake in the wee hours of the day. I wonder if she can see me from there.

In bed next to her, I bring my face closer to observe her alluring calm expression. Dutifully, I plant a kiss on her dead-cold cheek. She neither reacts nor reciprocates. It doesn't matter, we were doing things on her terms. She is a changed person after the accident, but she's my person.

Anindita Sarkar is pursuing a degree in Comparative Literature from Jadavpur University in India.



PHOTOGRAPHY

Photography By: Aaron Ollero. He's 32, from Maui, Hawaii. Aaron's an artist, designer, photographer, poet, dancer, martial artist, and free runner.

Nature is Everywhere

BY: KIERON P. BAIRD

Nature is everywhere if we just care to look.
 In the garden, see dunnoek, sparrow and starling.
 On the local playing field, flock the crow and rook.
 Under stones lurk insects both strange and dazzling.
 Within dense shrubs, the hedgehog sleeps away the day.
 The nearby trees hide many things behind green veils.
 By the pale moonlight, the barn owl hunts for its prey.
 Come the night, urban foxes prowl familiar trails.
 Then the diurnal return anew with sunrise.
 Like pages of knowledge contained inside a book,
 there are sights and mysteries right before our eyes.
 Nature is everywhere if we just care to look.

Protect Nature

Nature is
 something worth
 protecting.

Wildlife should
 always have
 safe shelter.

It's in our
 hands, now, for
 safekeeping.

Kieron P. Baird is an aspiring poet and writer, on a personal journey of self-discovery and improved mental well-being. Kieron studied Animal Biology at Edinburgh Napier University in 2012 and received a First-Class Honours Degree. He currently resides in Scotland.



Belinda Subraman is a mixed media artist. Her art has been recently featured in *Unlikely Stories*, *Alien Buhha Press*, *Eclectica*, *North of Oxford*, *El Paso News*, and *Red Fez*. She sells prints of her work in her Mystical House Etsy shop. [etsy.com/shop/MysticalHouse](https://www.etsy.com/shop/MysticalHouse)



Painting by: Belinda Subraman

Bowl of Oatmeal

30000 feet above the Sierra Nevada's I watch
Water carve like molten lava through the up-reached hills.
The slab of earth is merely a bowl of oatmeal
Sprinkled with granola, brown sugar
Cooked to coagulation
Lumpier than I prefer.

I am a speck.
My town is an oat.
I cling to what I know as God
With a spoon
Stirring

The sludge steams as I sit comfortably,
Salivating with the knowledge that all of us will be scooped up.
From the vast, plain bowl of grain
Devoured before we've even had time
To cool off.

Gentry is a 22-year-old writer originally from Salt Lake City, Utah. She studied at the University of Utah and now lives in San Diego, California. She spends her time surfing, writing, and living life to the fullest.



Photography By: Ana Jovanovska

Lightest Things

BY: INÊS LAMPREIA

Several objects can be light. We don't need more than to focus our sight on the particles of dust that hit the light and hover in the air to understand that the weight of many of the elements that make up our life has no definite weight.

Maybe, a year ago, I read in an article written by a physicist, that anything less than thirty grams is classified as the lightest material in the world. A little cotton, or a feather, for example, will weigh less than thirty grams. This measure depends on the quantity and value of the mass of each object and its relation to gravity, of course.

The feather is one of the lightest things in the world, one of the feminine nouns that have less density in nature. When released it is subject to the action of air, which creates resistance and allows it to float, uncertain until it falls to the ground. This movement, this erratic fluctuation, has no right course or predictability. Even so, the feathers always end up falling because gravity has this force of attraction that takes everything towards the ground, including our bodies.

There are, however, those elements that have their way, have their lightness, and take their time to tread a diverse, uncertain path to their destination, however, conditioned and predictable gravitational predestination is.

While I had in my hand countless bird feathers of hooded crows I thought of the weight of passion. If I was feeling a weight that made me drag my feet through the room of the hotel, how much density would I have, how much mass, how much gravitational pull?

And since it is not possible to weigh the feelings and emotions, who would be the specialist (because there are specialists in the world for everything) who would invent the equation for those elements such as passion which are light or heavy and has no physical mass?

Inês Lampreia is from Lisbon won the Alentejo House Award in short fiction with her story, *Five fingers of Cork* in 2012, published by Pasárgada Editions. Her writing crosses areas such as script, literary installations and visual writings, conceives and develops workshops, projects with alternative teaching methods in the areas of visual poetry, language codes and education for media. Over the last fifteen years, she's been involved in institutions such as the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. She is one of the writers of the project Young Writers Lab: an International Collaborative Laboratory for students and writers.

Untitled #19

We chopped off each other's hair during quarantine. And when we looked into the mirror, we felt like everything might be alright in the end.



Zach Murphy is a Hawaii-born writer with a background in film. His stories have appeared in *Peculiars Magazine*, *Ellipsis Zine*, *Emerge Literary Journal*, *The Bitchin' Kitsch*, *Ghost City Review*, *Lotus-eater*, *WINK*, *Drunk Monkeys*, and *Fat Cat Magazine*. He lives with his wonderful wife Kelly in St. Paul, Minnesota.





Marie Wuthier is an autodidact painter who likes to create by testing things without technical lessons. Her artwork speaks about emotions, freedom, and beauty, which depends on the look. She also works on subjects concerned with having an open mind to other cultures and to change. Instagram: @mwuithier_art



ENTREVUE

Néer ici

ENTREVUE

Par Geneviève Dumas, c'est une interview de la journaliste et écrivaine Geneviève Dumas, auteure de nombreux romans et essais, dont le dernier, "Le monde est à nous", paru chez Éditions Écos. Elle nous parle de son travail, de sa vie, de son amour de la lecture et de son engagement politique.

Geneviève Dumas est une journaliste et écrivaine québécoise. Elle a écrit de nombreux romans et essais, dont le dernier, "Le monde est à nous", paru chez Éditions Écos. Elle nous parle de son travail, de sa vie, de son amour de la lecture et de son engagement politique.

By: Geneviève Dumas is a Montreal based, collage and screen printing artist. Her style is feminine, sensitive and tender with texture. Visit: goldengen.ca

Crumbled Promises

BY: SHIELA SCOTT

I took out my journal,
And wrote about,
How life had its reasons,
And trust had its doubts,

I scribbled my purpose,
My aspirations and dreams,
Jotted down nightmares,
And what fears they bring.

I used another page,
To figure out what's wrong.
Realizing that it wasn't a few steps,
It was the path I placed myself on.

How could I deny life?
Its reality and choice.
To want fantasy,
To become what I rejoice.

I looked out the window,
Wrinkled sheets and broken dreams,
To wish upon a star,
And find crumbled promises
retrieved.

Shiela Scott is a graduate of Full Sail University's Creative Writing Bachelors of Fine Arts Program delved into the skill and defined herself as an artist. After being exposed to many different genres, she found poetry to connect to her emotional connection to life. After adding description and understanding to her soul she shines intentionally.



Ashley Chafin was born and bred in Virginia, with both Hatfield and McCoy blood running through her veins. She's been in LA over 15 years. Visit: ashleychafin.com



Beach



José Simões simply defines art through small things, creating with surroundings, people, and the curiosity found within.



by José Simões

The Beach Watcher

BY: COLE R. CHRISTIE



Oh, Mom, I had such a great day yesterday! You'd be amazed at the things that wash up on the beach. Like, in the morning I found this Garfield telephone in the sand, and his eyes open up when you pull his tail out. So cool. I wish there was a way to see if it still worked.

Anyway, I like finding stuff like that because sometimes the days are really slow. Don't get me wrong, ma. I love the job they gave me. I really, really do. But it can get boring just sitting there looking at all that brown water coming in and out in and out in and out in and out in and out.

My mask gets super itchy too, but they don't like to see me without the mask, which I get, it does smell very bad out here most of the time. So I'm sitting out there trying not to smell anything all day. And I get thirsty, too. I think I tried drinking the water once but boy was that a really really bad idea. Really.

But it has its good parts. I love love love it when I see a boat coming. If it's even a boat. Yesterday it was just wood and straw all put together, and they just floated around going everywhere, but the tide started getting them closer to me. I pulled the trigger and it was just so awesome ma. Awesome.

It tore that boat up, all the pieces flying around like confetti. When they got to the bottom of the wave I could look in and see them for a sec. This guy's face just fell off. It flopped in the air and fell right in the water. And their heads ma! Did you know they were like water balloons? They all just pop. Pop. Pop! All over the place. I think one of them said my name as they fell down. But no way. I hear a lot of things when the gun rattles. So loud I hear everything and nothin', ha!

Now the water is as red as the sky, but nothing cool has washed up on the beach yet. So I'm sitting here again and waiting. It's a nice job mom. But it would be awesome if you'd come by to see me. You can come over whenever you want. Really.

Blue Plastic Pool

My mother sat for hours in the front yard
She would pull a folding lawn chair
Up to the edge of the blue plastic pool
Positioning her sunglasses that she had saved
From her last jaunt to Hawaii in the late 60s
On top of her head
A tiara resting on her beautiful black short curly hair
She was generous with the sun oil
That always seemed to glisten on her arms

Once her feet entered that icy hose filled pool
My sister and I knew she should be left alone
Silence prevailed until she slowly removed her feet
Mom would towel dry one and then the other
She then stood next to the pool always studying the water
In the late 80s, I finally asked why she loved that pool

Her answer came slowly as she removed her dark lenses
"That pool is a refuge.
I remember an ocean that I will never see again.
I pretend that pool is water surrounding Hawaii.
No other land that I can see.
Even for a few moments, it is him and I on the beach."
The HIM was Norman Allen Kaluhiokalani
The man she thought she would one day marry

My mother didn't marry Norman
She returned to Minnesota and then married my father
Norman and my mother lost touch over the years
My mother spoke of the water and the waves
Of body surfing and eating fish on the beach
Of time spent in a sandy hut with the man of her dreams
More often in her final days, his name fell from her lips
Norman Allen Kaluhiokalani

Now when I swim in my large ever so blue pool
I often think of my mom and her refuge
Of her Hawaiian waters
Of sunglasses worn the last time she saw the man she dreamed of

Whether it is a pool or lake or the ocean in the gulf
I will always remember fondly a folding lawn chair
Pulled up to the edge of a blue plastic pool

Kelli J. Gavin of Carver, Minnesota is a writer, editor, blogger, and professional organizer. Her first two books were released in 2019. She has contributed to 15 anthology books and has over 350 published poems, short stories, articles, interviews and reviews. On all social sites: @KelliJGavin



Danny Rebb is a self-taught fine art photographer based in Detroit. His work seeks to portray beauty in the ordinary as well as unexpected or overlooked beauty in unconventional places and circumstances.



I love you, Dr. Jekyll

BY: RACHEL MILLER-SHAKED

I fell in love with a man who only owned a shadow,
he turned at night.
His fondness for vials exposed in every kiss,
acidic spit singeing dry on my tongue
telling the tale of the shift begun.

I fell in love with a man who only owned a shadow,
he lost himself at night.
He made a home of the streets of London and a family
out of rats. They taught him how to survive
the cold and never made him go to church.

I fell in love with a man who only owned a shadow,
he shared himself with the night.
I read of his betrayal in the black ink of newspapers—
black on the notes he marked where they went wrong
in messy pen, scribbled down with breakfast.

I fell in love with a man who only owned a shadow,
he could never stand straight at night.
That's where the need for me fell into his hipboned lap.
A pelvis that only knew posture when it grew
needed more girls to stand.

I fell in love with a man who only owned a shadow,
I thought I found him once in the light,
but it was only the sun blinding sight.



Maria Jose Casazza is a young Mexican artist, writer, and curator. She works to tell stories through scenes deeply grounded to colors and sentiments. Her pieces revolve around absence, loneliness, and what it means to be human and to hurt.

Revision of a Fairytale

BY: RACHEL MILLER-SHAKED

She can dye her hair every shade of the rainbow knowing it will still fall out each night/ warned by a witch she called GOD & Mother/ until the glass slipper cuts the bottom of her foot/ as it should have/ Before he followed her home/ where she sings in a lemon voice to rodents that slip on the bleach she pours on the floor/ where her fingers are ravaged and wrinkled as they had been since the day of her christening/ when they should have drowned her/ the priest was planning to/ break his bond with his own GOD & Mother/ to spare her/ for he had read the fairytale written once/ but he got lost in those ethereal eyes before she was snatched away/ by the coffee-bean growers of Colombia and raised to eat unripe fruit/ It was in this new life she lost her taste for sweetness/ It was there she made a promise to herself that if the lab-rat were ever to grow a human ear she'd marry it because she had learned the lesson of love by broken-in shoes: anything human enough could own her/ It was there years later where she learned to turn her head in 180° so she could look back on the world and take back on her promise and every promise she has ever made.

Rachel graduated from Florida Atlantic University. She writes poetry and short fiction on her blog: thelyable.com





Dog Days

BY: SAL QUICKLY

Snug—

in the capillary of a vein—

in the fingertip of an old city.

Bone weary and exquisite with heat;

rickety streets with lopsided tables

full of woodfired shrimp & moonshine raki.

The dog days have been set upon us and we are torn

limb from limb by laughter and cheap preparations

and we don't get so hung up on words as we usually do.

The air is sweet and thick with tobacco specters that

move as gracefully as veteran tom cats through the eve

and we shan't lend a second's thought to the palaverous

lip of the yester nor the wanting hand of the morrow

for Cronos bids us the leisure to ripen of our own accord

like Aristaeus tends to the fig tree with no haste

nor cravings for ambrosial seeds and nectar

and he on Mt Olympus smiles when after dessert

and Soex Bidis we fancy ourselves sincere poets

the way an honest mutt with raised hackles

howls like a wolf after he's been fed and scratched.

And was that you, Dion, pursuing the affections

of a black-haired kopela at the gelato stand?

Yamas, lad! and may all who've delighted in these streets

know that the gods were here and happy to attend us.

Sal is a 26-year-old, Aspiring playwright originally from the UK but currently studying a Masters Degree in Philosophy at the University of Oslo, Norway.

"Landscapes of Balochistan." By: Aqsa Nasar belongs to Quetta, Pakistan and wishes to open more ways for artists to come forward and share their talent. Graduated in 2018 with a distinction in thesis. Aqsa's art is based on political and geographical landscapes of Quetta. @Aqsa_khan_nasar

The Stories of the Women Before Me

BY: MUNEA WADUD

Mother's name is synonymous with the word 'fire.'
She is all woman. Wild hearted and resilient in her ways.
Her favourite tea is orange pekoe with too much milk and sugar



× My sister is a daffodil blooming in the middle of a field of weeds.

She is a creature of the night.
She is a thing they called, 'monster.'
For she loved too easily.

Grandmother likes her mornings cold and her nights warm.
She is the matriarch of the family.
Her vicious tongue knows no boundaries.
She doesn't take 'no' for an answer.



Auntie is a skilled cook and even more skilled swordswoman.
She knows all the ways to skin fish.
To cut cattle.
She has the hands of a butcher and the heart of a wild stallion.

The women in my family are a rare caliber, a different breed,
They are not to everyone's liking.
They are strong in taste like dark cocoa and sugarless coffee.
They are as vicious as the windless sea and as angry as Mother Nature herself.



To fall for the sun is a sin

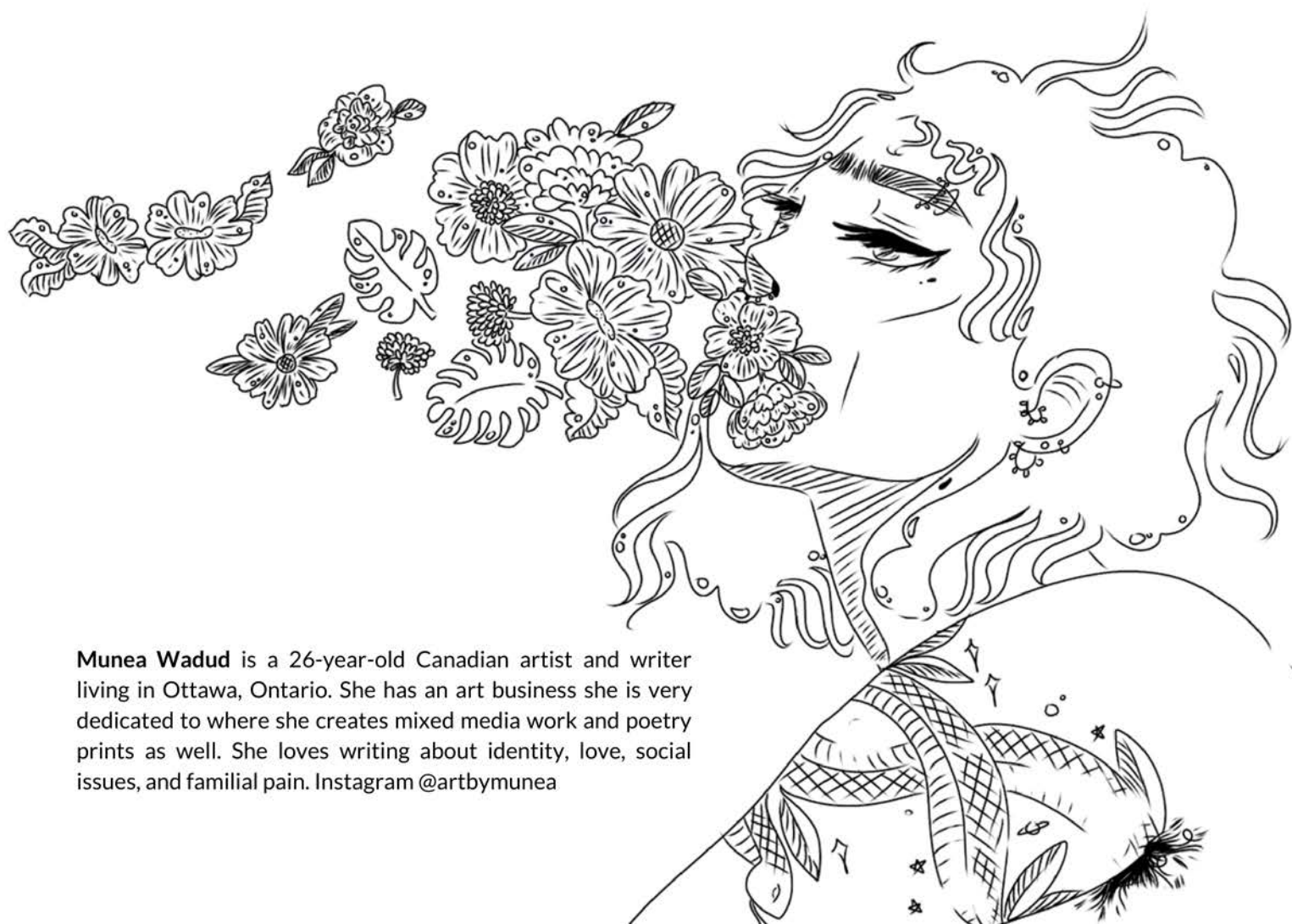
BY:MUNEA WADUD

Don't you dare think about tomorrow—
because the world is too quiet tonight,
filled with artists buzzing from house to house, high off their own acrylic paints, my God—
aren't they magnificent?

Colour-stained fingertips marking each other,
as if each passerby is a lover, a brand-new masterpiece—he tastes of summer rain,
of winter snow, of the only thing that burns and burns.

My grandfather warned me about men like you—filled with too many songs, too many
dreams, too many sonnets in their hearts.

And here I am, a girl, begging for the moon to teach me how to love.



Munea Wadud is a 26-year-old Canadian artist and writer living in Ottawa, Ontario. She has an art business she is very dedicated to where she creates mixed media work and poetry prints as well. She loves writing about identity, love, social issues, and familial pain. Instagram @artbymunea



Birth

BY: ABRA HERITAGE

An allusion of beauty in an open, bloody mess
raw, ripped, repulsing.

The pinnacle of the female experience -
sweat, screams, sex.

Don't tell the mother it is beautiful,
the intrusion,
shit, sick, scars.

Instead, tell her
that she is the embodiment of strength,
resilience, sacrifice.

I am tired of mothers being praised for their beauty,
as if they care.

Abra is an English Literature Undergraduate student living
and studying in London. Instagram: @abra.heritage Twitter:
@abraheritage

Tradition

BY: THU ANH NGUYEN

Almost all fathers are the same: they want flowers.
They tell their daughters to eat flowers
for breakfast, and put flowers in their hair.

Women become flower gatherers,
collect petals, but neglect the wholesome roots.
When it is time to love, men give them pressed flowers.

The name Trang means pinwheel flower;
you may take its honey sucking from the stem
if you are thirsty for something sweet.

Chrysanthemum tea is made of crushed yellow buds,
you can drink it while eating the flower cake
that follows the floating-flower soup.

Her father did not want a daughter or a flower.
She is allergic to blooms, their dust, the Spring.
Her name means: rare book, scholar, not a flower.

Thu Nguyen is a poet, essayist, and painter. Her poems have been featured in *The Crab Orchard Review*, *3Elements*, *Connections*, and *RapGenius*. Her essays were most recently published in *Literacy Today*.

PHOTO BY: DANNY REBB

Man of Her Dreams

BY: JENNIE NOONKESTER

The girl had dreams from the beginning. But, time made them fade into the recesses of her soul needing to be recovered. They slipped away when she thought she found the "Man of Her Dreams." This man, she was told, would help her dreams become realized. After all, he was the man of her dreams. He embodied her hopes and passions equally. But, really did he? To her awaking soul, he became just a man, and he cared nothing for her dreams. He did not even ask what they happened to be. He never felt that she had any more; after all, he was supposed to be the man of her dreams.

So, the only thing to do was to search within the constraints of her situation and find pieces of her dreams where she could. This frustrated her man because it threatened his dream-somewhat. His dream pictured her as June Cleaver, and that was all that she was, all she needed to be. If she wanted to be more, then she was ungrateful for sure.

Her dream deceived her because he made her think he loved an educated woman. Wrong. Her dream faded, and she was forced to put her eyes on the best things that surrounded her. She must survive.

The man of her dreams found passion in a new, easy home full of fake smiles, chocolate pies, flattery, and beguile. This new whim became an illusion to his soul. Such an illusion dripping with guilt that the dream became so sickening that denial was the only hope for sanity. She cried until the last drop fell from her cheek while she watched her dream fade into the illusion and disappear.

Interestingly, the man of her dream's departure woke her up from the nightmare. She now knows that there are no dreams that can contain all other hopes. That it's okay because she knows that her future rests with God and herself. Her dreams are determined by these.

Perhaps someone will come along (but maybe not) that she will want to tell her dreams to; however, she will expect him to be a dreamer too. She will walk hand and hand to forge a life full of aspirations, fantasies, nightmares, visions, and hallucinations to turn her mind and shape her soul. These dreams are what she should spend her life doing until she breathes her last breath. She now cleaves onto her dreams because if she does not, she will be unfaithful to herself.

Jennie Noonkester is a mother of two sons who recently earned her Master's of Education degree at William Carey University. She currently is a high school teacher at Hattiesburg High School.



Amar Saeed, 20, is a student of Medicine in SKIMS, India, and an amateur photographer. A coffee-, nature- and animal-lover, with an interest in writing, reading, and learning, where he lives is a major part of what inspires him. His photography appears in *Bold + Italic* e-magazine. Visit: amarspixels.wordpress.com

I'm in my happy
place

Li Actuallee is an interdisciplinary artist, interested in ecologies and intersectional identity. Li currently lives and works in Mumbai. @liactuallee



Something's Come Between Us

BY: KARIN BRUCKNER

Distance Dispatch

4/19

The Grief is real
In the dead of the night
The breaking morning light

Afloat in a pool of memories
Surrounded by the ghosts of touch
We daily die a thousand tiny deaths.

Warm bodies lost
To virtual shells
On screens.
Connections turning into distant echoes
Of embraces once felt.

Hopes dimming
For a return to what once was.
Remembrance is a blessing
Love is left
As sheets of glass emerge from
The depths of disease
Keeping us from one another
Our hands and noses pressed against
Their icy coldness.

I see you.
I hear you.
Don't touch me.

Karin Bruckner is an architect turned Artist.
Born in Switzerland, lives in New York. Lost
in this space. Visit: kbmatter.com

Illustration by: Li Actuallee





Yishuai Zhang is pursuing an MFA from Goldsmiths University of London. These are the watercolours from last summer. The title, "Melancholy under the Sun," coincidentally reflects current emotional states under this special quarantine time. Instagram: @daven_zhang



Thunder

BY: LORRAINE CAPUTO

That rumble we hear as dark clouds gather, we
Have been told through the ages it is Thor
Unsheathing his mountain-crushing hammer, Mjölñir, it is
Nan Sapwe, Xolotl, Thunderbird, Chaac, that rumble is Zeus, it is Jupiter,
Deafening drumming of Changó, deafening wing beats of Pillalau
Echoing through mountain valleys, it is a warning of torrential
Rains to flood our lives.

Lorraine Caputo is a documentary poet, translator and travel writer, whose works have appeared in over 180 journals on six continents; and 12 chapbooks of poetry, including *Caribbean Nights*, *Notes from the Patagonia*, and *On Galápagos Shores*. She also authors travel narratives, articles and guidebooks. She travels through Latin America, listening to the voices of the pueblos and Earth.



As an explorer of the mysterious universe of oil painting, Jerusalem based abstract-surrealist artist **Alexey Adonin**, has dedicated over one and a half-decade to convey his vision of hidden otherworldly realms that connect with a timeless source of inspiration. Alexey was born in Slutsk, Belarus, 1973; he graduated in 1993 from the State Art College named after A. K. Glebov, Minsk, Belarus. In the same year, he has immigrated to Israel. Since 2002, Alexey has exhibited locally and internationally.

Forest,
 smother light
 and nurture subtle shadows,
 keep the bull of Zeus back
 halted at your borders
 and swans imprisoned
 in the sky above your trees
 where a Dryad named Leuce rules,
 naked and leveled with the leaves,
 vicious, elegant, hidden, and readied,
 all these things at once,
 enabled by her mysticism
 to be them everywhere at once,
 wearing a deer skull crown
 to ground her
 in the constant violence of reality
 as she channels
 the white poplar tree
 of Hades.

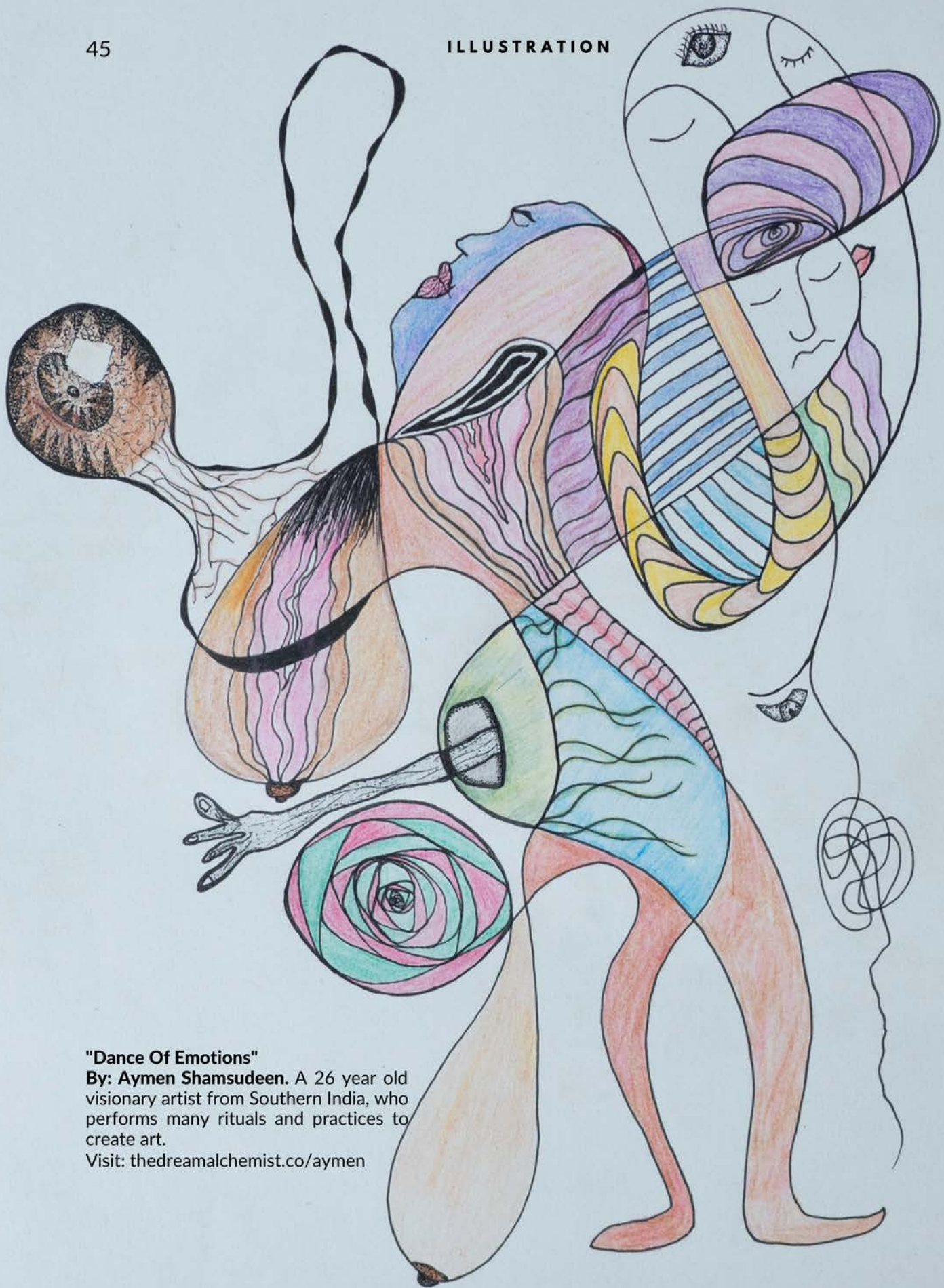
The Daughter of Oceanus

BY: PAUL EDWARD COSTA

Paul Edward Costa is a writer, teacher, spoken word artist, and 2019-2021 Poet Laureate for the city of Mississauga. He has published in many literary journals worldwide and his book of poetry *The Long Train of Chaos* is available from Kung Fu Treachery Press.

Prana by Alexey Adonin





"Dance Of Emotions"

By: Aymen Shamsudeen. A 26 year old visionary artist from Southern India, who performs many rituals and practices to create art.

Visit: thedreamalchemist.co/aymen

Aymen
19

Tide 24

For Victoria Madu

BY: IWUAGWU IKECHUKWU

Tethered to Dionysius homestead; acquaintance
You have surfed consistently this
aqueous dance; sweet-sour sand dunes
April broke our tryst
Culinary scented, gushing mirth -
No other bard can tell better...
Only but your surfboard; Basquiat's dirty classic
A collage of distinctly honed virtues, horn locked with ephemeral gains like untamed Ibexes on
heat
There is a smile on the lips of the rivers, luring windy dances, evident upon mother earth's
gyrating green follicle flames
Your essence is her joyful curving lips.
Only the ears that have groped curiosity,
eyes that cut faster than the scalpel of Amadioha's bolts
like the midnight curtain torn by pleasurable moans escaping untamed lips
shall applaud your imbued resilience
by churning few seconds of tete a tete; served honestly
Hercules is a molten diet in those veins
The lioness nursing after fight lacerations should cast a gaze at a smiling competitor
Our rinds mesh; perhaps sumptuously seasoned
a tale in the uterus of unmade morrows
The landfall of this tide, I dictate
a simultaneous extension of parallel dots -
Running aground bleak crows of vague hopeful dawns
Deluging those eyes with trickling joy.

Iwuagwu Ikechukwu is an African poet, Winner of the Poetry Nook Week, his works have been published in *The Shallow Tales Review*, *Black Boy Review* and *About Place Journal*.



I am new

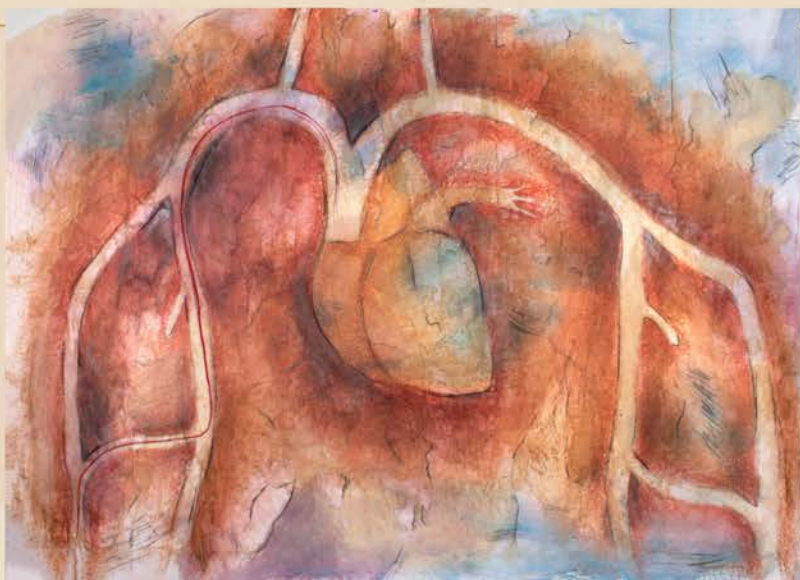
BY: TALI COHEN SHABTAI

They don't know
Where I came from
I must connect the—leg
With the waist
And the pelvis to the spine

That's the way when items
Are separated from bodies
And an artificial
Lens is implanted
In the—eye.

Who said it's possible to move
Organs
Away from their
Place?

Who said?



Andrea Herrera is a 20 year old illustrator and art student based in Miami, Florida. She creates art to tell stories and to express the great pains and joys of life. Her aspirations are to work in the industry and help create the great stories of today. Visit: andeaherrera.artstation.com

Tali Cohen Shabtai, is a poet, from Jerusalem, Israel. She's been writing since the age of six. She's been published in a literary magazine of Israel, *Moznayim*, and has three poetry books: *Purple Diluted in a Black's Thick*, *Protest*, and *Nine Years Away From You*.

Nice

BY: M. BRETT GAFFNEY

Your mom thinks my voice is nice on the phone.
 I give great customer service and Christmas presents. I hold the door open even if it means I get stuck holding the door open. I feed birds. I give water to bumblebees. I'm nice. The kind of nice that drives a strange couple she's never met across town because they asked her to in an empty parking lot. I'm so nice it's stupid. Goody-two-shoes with a heavy load of Catholic guilt and southern girl shame. I listen. Really well. Even when it hurts. Especially when it hurts because that means it's working. Like mouthwash. My smile feels like alcohol sometimes, and I don't mean the way a drink makes you feel some kind of way but how it burns, an open wound. My mouth is the wound. I haven't killed myself because I'm so nice. Say a word long enough and you'll forget what it means. My father was nice to me. They say most examples of animals doing nice things for each other are misunderstood. The cat doesn't kiss the fish, he tastes. The two dogs were trained to hug. The girl is not nice.

M. Brett Gaffney holds an MFA in Poetry from Southern Illinois University. Her chapbook *Feeding the Dead* (Porkbelly Press) was nominated for a 2019 Elgin Award from the *Science Fiction and Fantasy Poetry Association*. She works as co-editor of *Gingerbread House Literary Magazine* and writes about scary stuff on her blog at No Outlet Horror Reviews. Visit: mbrettgaffneyblog.wordpress.com



Shannon Elizabeth Gardner



The ethereal mood of Shannon's work reaches the extreme and addresses the taboo. Her use of watercolor, line and dot work assists the viewer to observe the Asian aesthetic Wabi-Sabi; appreciation of imperfections. Through her work she explores natural and organic techniques used to imitate nature. Instagram: @shannonelizabethsart

Znow

BY: WILLIAM DORESKI



"Oxyfil" By: Pawel Pacholec

William Doeski has published three critical studies and several collections of poetry. His work has appeared in many print and online journals. He has taught at Emerson College, Goddard College, Boston University, and Keene State College. His most recent books are *Water Music* and *Train to Providence*.

You think about the letter Z.
You wonder why it comes last,
why we pronounce it zee
while the British call it zed.

You like its aggressive angles,
and wish it occurred more often
in crossword puzzles where words
nest like your favorite songbirds,
which have nearly gone extinct.

You like the way it zings through
conversation, applying itself
to words like xylophone where
it has no legitimate business.

This wanton intercourse with X
is the kind of winsome habit
that attracts you to the crude men
who cruise the world for women
sculpted to fit their egos.

I should stay home reading books
devoid of the letters Z and X.
I should inform the police
that you're defacing libraries

by prowling for obscure verbs
and nouns that can't help themselves.
I'll find you tottery in a bar
surrounded by laughing fellows
too thick to hear me coming.

Like Odysseus in his rage,
I'll scatter every X and Z
and drag you home to atone
for your rude and vulgar consonance.

Then in the calm moonless night
snow will snow for a while,
then deep in your dream of it
change over to znow and settle.

A photograph of a light-colored wooden tray divided into several compartments. The compartments contain various blue, textured objects: a tube with a white cap filled with a blue, bubbly substance; a long, thin, woven blue mesh; a small, dense blue tuft; a glass bottle with a cork stopper filled with a blue, granular substance; and a smaller glass bottle with a cork stopper containing a blue, crystalline substance. The objects are arranged in a way that suggests a collection or a series of experiments.

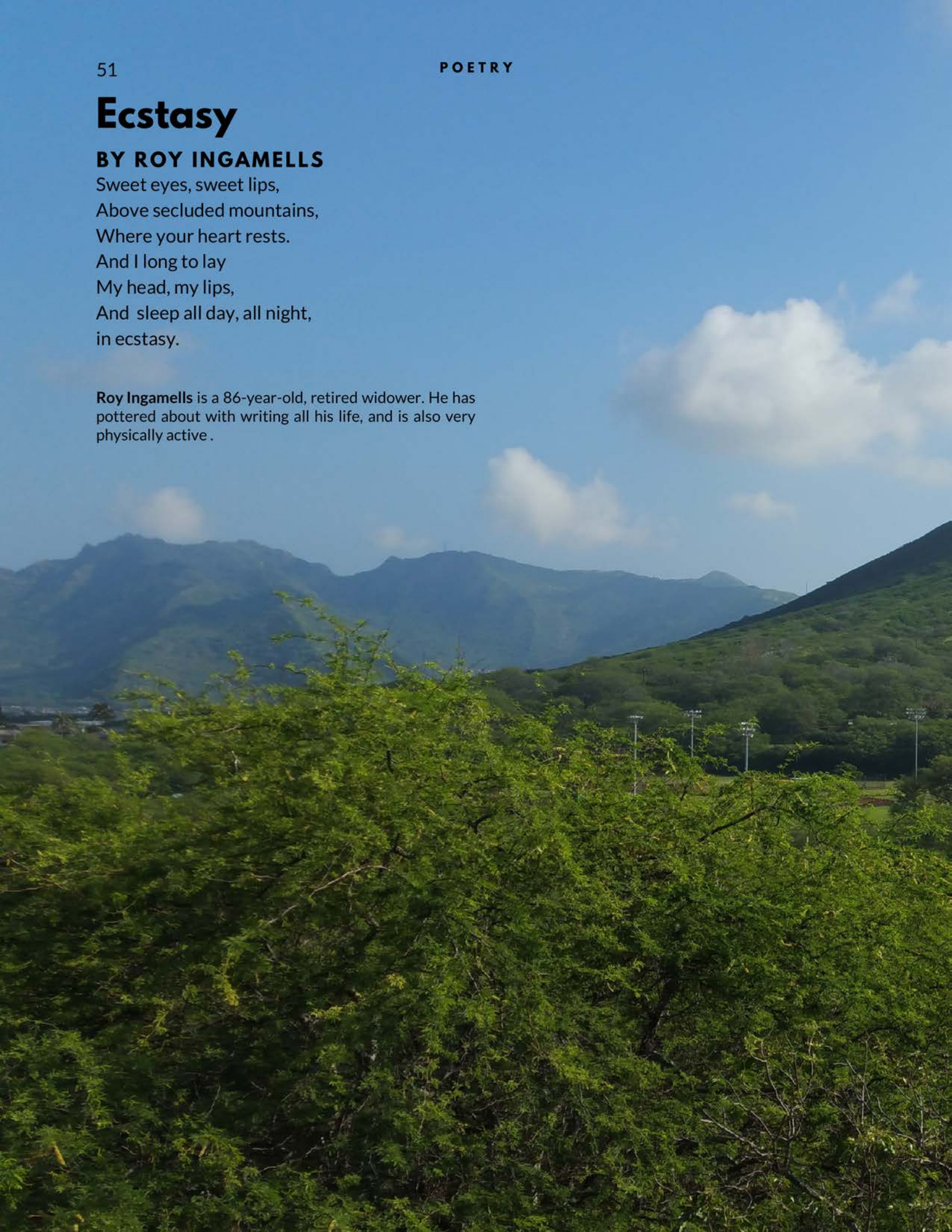
Pawel Pacholec often refers to classic, traditional techniques and ways of expression. He creates his works in a balanced and thoughtful way based on visible structures and forms. For inspiration, he looks in such trends as constructivism or industrialism. While creating, he tries to relate to geometry and mathematical proportions. He often puts photography into graphic activities (e.g. through collage or photo graphitization).
Visit: behance.net/pacholec-pawel

Ecstasy

BY ROY INGAMELLS

Sweet eyes, sweet lips,
Above secluded mountains,
Where your heart rests.
And I long to lay
My head, my lips,
And sleep all day, all night,
in ecstasy.

Roy Ingamells is a 86-year-old, retired widower. He has pottered about with writing all his life, and is also very physically active .





Jay Waters is a photographer and writer from McCalla, Alabama. Visit: noodlephotos.com

SOLACE



Frank Nunez is a 23-year-old Artist/Activist/Photographer based in San Francisco, California. Instagram: @Avividlife

holding on

BY: MELANIE HAN

54

in the house at
6°46'43.121"S
39°15'51.031"E i was
sexually assaulted for
the first time but i didn't
know how to tell my
parents so the boy
continued to come over
to play

and in the house at
6°43'42.651"S
39°14'13.59"E my mom
got cancer then got
depressed then tried to kill
herself but i didn't know
how to be there for her so i
disappeared to escape

and in the house at
6°44'50.505"S
39°16'41.829"E i heard
a splash at night but i didn't
know what to do so when i
found a body facedown in
the pool bloated and
purple i threw up and
sobbed

and in this house at
42°24'0.033"N
70°59'40.553"W i realized
that i never had a normal
childhood but i didn't want
to believe it so i lied to
myself to feel better for just
a little longer

Melanie Han is an avid traveler and a poet who was born in Korea, grew up in East Africa, and is currently pursuing an MFA in Creative Writing in Boston. She has won awards from Boston in 100 Words and Lyric, and her poetry has appeared in several magazines and online publications, such as Fathom, Ruminare, and Among Worlds. During her free time, she can be found eating different ethnic foods or visiting new countries.
Instagram: @melhan





"our home is becoming a labyrinth"

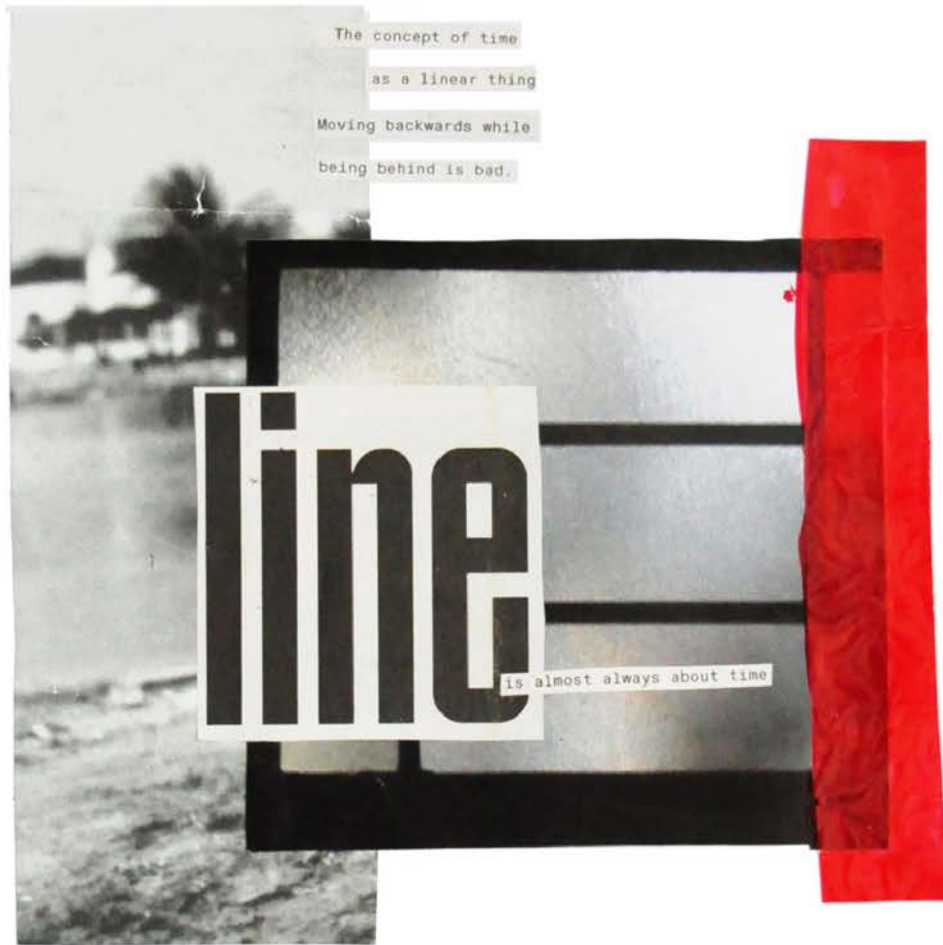
Farheen Fatima is a self taught photographer and visual artist based in India. Her work revolves around the female form and its connection with the nature. Visit: farheenay.myportfolio.com



BILINEAR



Esra Nesipoğulları, is an architect and elf-thought multidisciplinary artist. Born and raised in Turkey, 1991, currently living in Italy. After working two years in several architectural design studios, in London, Istanbul, and Mantua, she moved to the art and curatorial field. Her works often responds to personal stories in the cultural and political contexts. Visit: esranesipogullari.com



The artwork is a dense, vibrant collage of abstract shapes and colors. It features a dark, almost black background. Overlaid on this are various geometric and organic forms in bright primary colors: red, yellow, and blue. There are large, flowing white shapes that resemble liquid or smoke. Several five-pointed stars in bright blue are scattered throughout. A prominent red shape in the lower left contains a black circle with a white dot inside. Another red shape in the lower right has several horizontal white lines. The overall effect is one of dynamic energy and complex visual relationships.

Nina Nenadović was born in 1994 in Ljubljana, where she graduated in painting from the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in 2018. From 2019 on she is a member of ZDSLU-Union of Slovene Fine Artists Associations and has had one solo exhibition. She exhibits her artwork in various group exhibitions, projects and festivals at home, and abroad.

The Book

BY: MONTE-ANGEL RICHARDSON

You only set out to capture something of your experience existing on this planet. The book is a labor of love, bursting forth from you like a child emerging between your legs after nine months of gestation. But the novel takes even less time to manifest.

Once it comes into being, there was no stopping its spread. You're thrilled at the prospect of others connecting with your work, as if through the act of reading your pages, others may begin to truly know you. For the first time in your life, you are seen.

The feeling grows more intense as your book sells millions of copies around the world. It outsells the Bible, and everything changes. How are you to know that your book would bring about the apocalypse?

The ramifications of your words occur at breakneck speed. Your small dingy town reduces to rubble by an unexpected earthquake. Like everyone else who manages to survive, you no longer possess a place called home. You consider yourself lucky that the threat of the elements is not much of a concern in Southern California. Earthquakes are typical, yet there isn't much else.

You have concerns, still, namely: fire, disease, and the growing group of predators who identify you as the catalyst for the end of times. Frightened and anxious, you spend your days scavenging for food and hiding beneath collapsed buildings.

As you traverse the ruinous streets of your hometown, the sun blazes down mercilessly. The waves, gentle and soothing, lap the shoreline of the beachside town. The ocean and sky are completely unaware of the chaos breaking apart all humanity. The same as always.

You squint into the distance, trying to make out any incoming threat in the blinding sunlight. Foggily, you register a grey fleet of motorcycles storming straight towards you. You feel your heart plummet. It's them again, the predators.

There is no escape. Behind you lies only the ocean with no sign of life. The rubble to your left and right render any chance of running impossible. The gang barreling your way is sure to bring destruction. Frozen in place, you prepare for the onslaught.

Monte-Angel Richardson considers herself 50% data wizard and 50% magical girl. When she's not writing short stories based on her nightmares, Monte-Angel spends her time researching violence and trauma as a Doctoral student. She also enjoys eating noodles and watching birds. Visit: mtangele.wordpress.com



"Oh Huminodun" by Mae Bayu, a Malaysian (Sabah) born lyricism Artist and Artrepreneur. Painting is her passion and she loves exploring various creative techniques to reinforce her art that emphasizes on the visualization of impactful events and memories. @bungaogingart



Muhammad Amdad Hossain is a 21-year-old living in a village near Chittagong city, Bangladesh. He's studying Political Science at Chittagong College under the National University of Bangladesh. Since 2015, he's been involved with photography, especially in travel and documentary. His photos have been published in *Daily Observer*, *New Age*, *Daily sun*, *The Independent*, *The Guardian* (London), *Chiiz Magazine* (India), *121 .com* (India), *Insider*, *Wikipedia*, *Peta Pixel*, *Forbes*, *Ze.TT* (Germany), *Geographical*, *Life Gate*, *The Irish Sun*, *The National*, *PNA Hoboctn*, *National Geographic*, *Spider's Web*, *The Objective*, *Watson*(Switzerland), *RND*, *UP Magazine*, *TV 2*, *SPUTNIK News*, *P'UBLLCO* (Portugal), *Protagon GR*, and *Youthled*. He's also been awarded in the following countries: India, Greece, London, New York, South Africa, UK, Romania, and Ecuador.

Each Decade

BY: NYHLARA

It seems like each decade
we liberate from the reins of society
and recondition ourselves a little bit.
It seems like each decade
we find new ways to fulfill our needs
and lose touch with humanity a little bit.
It seems like each decade
we manage to kill industries with technology or outbreaks or inflation.
It seems like each decade
we manage to trigger extinction
of thousands of species.
It seems like each decade
we manage to damage our motherland
at our own accord.
It seems like each decade
we get better and better at our own unmaking.

Nhylara is 24 year old QPOC living in Toronto who writes about queer representation, living away from home, and anything that intrigues or enrages. Instagram: @shutupitdoesntmatter



Metamorphosis

Gloria Keh, 68 began painting since childhood, her father, Martin Fu, was her first teacher. In 2008, Gloria founded Circles of Love, a nonprofit charity outreach program using her art in the service of humanity. She paints 100% for charity and has exhibited in over 70 exhibitions both in Singapore as well as internationally. Gloria has won 12 international awards. Visit: gloriakeh.com



Los Caminos del Ser

BY: IRIS PÉREZ ROMERO

irisperez.com



PHOTOGRAPHY



"Coffee Flower" By: Joel Ibarra. Mexican, with a marketing degree.

All That Was Left

BY: LYNN WHITE

Drink me
the label said.
She drank it all,
then threw the bottle aside,
so all that was left were the words.
Eat me
was iced on the cake.
She ate it all,
every last crumb,
Then she licked off the icing
so nothing was left of the words.

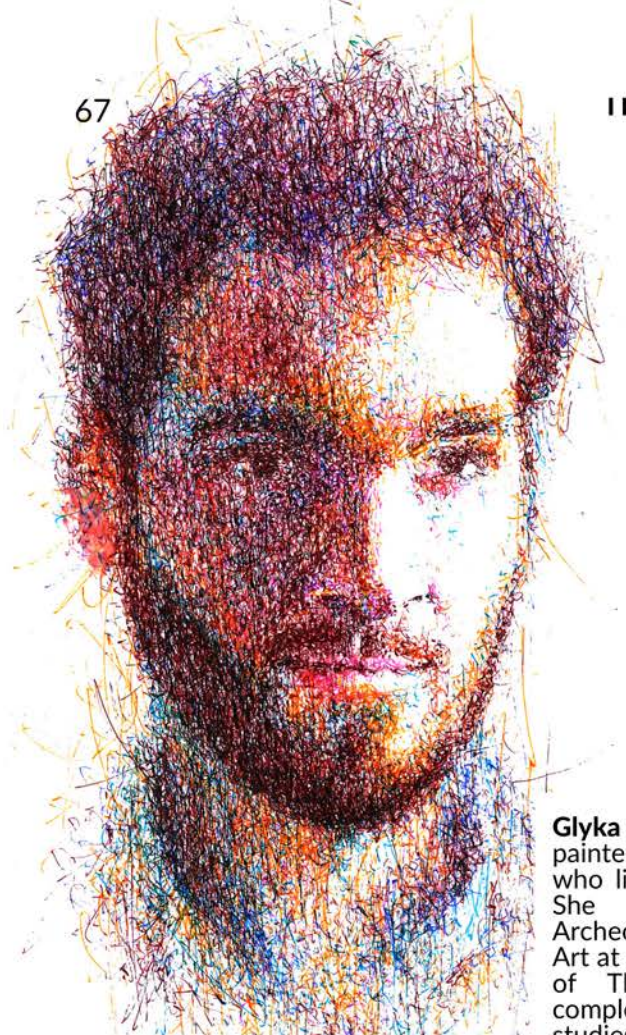
Lynn White lives in north Wales. Her work is influenced by issues of social justice and events, places and people she has known or imagined. She is especially interested in exploring the boundaries of dream, fantasy and reality. Visit: lynnwhitepoetry.blogspot.com



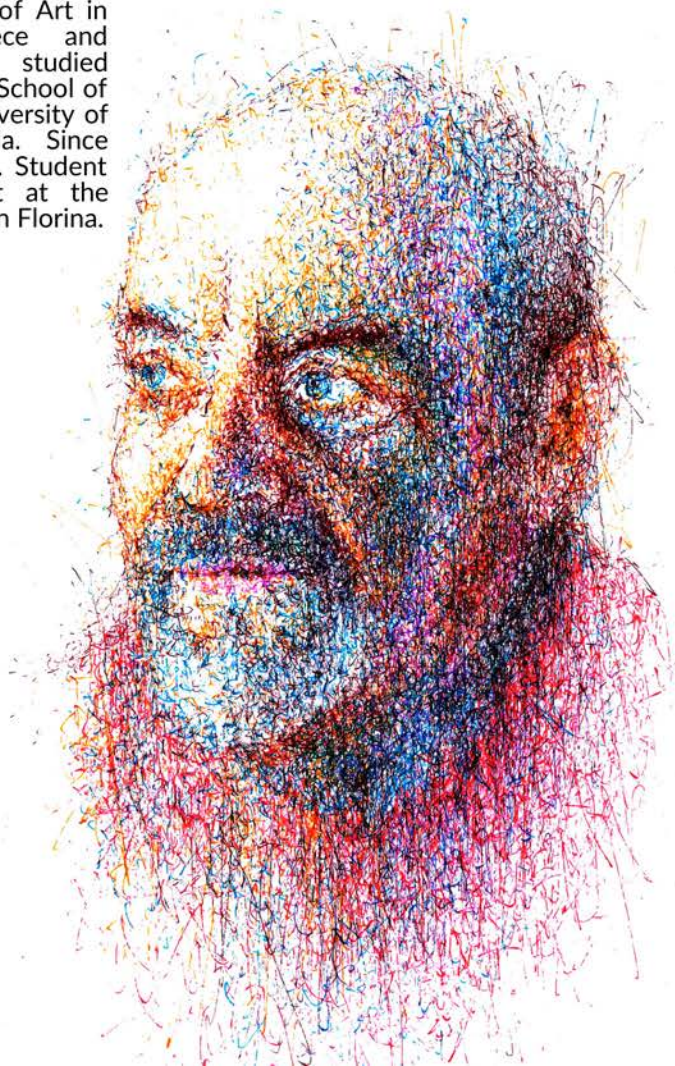
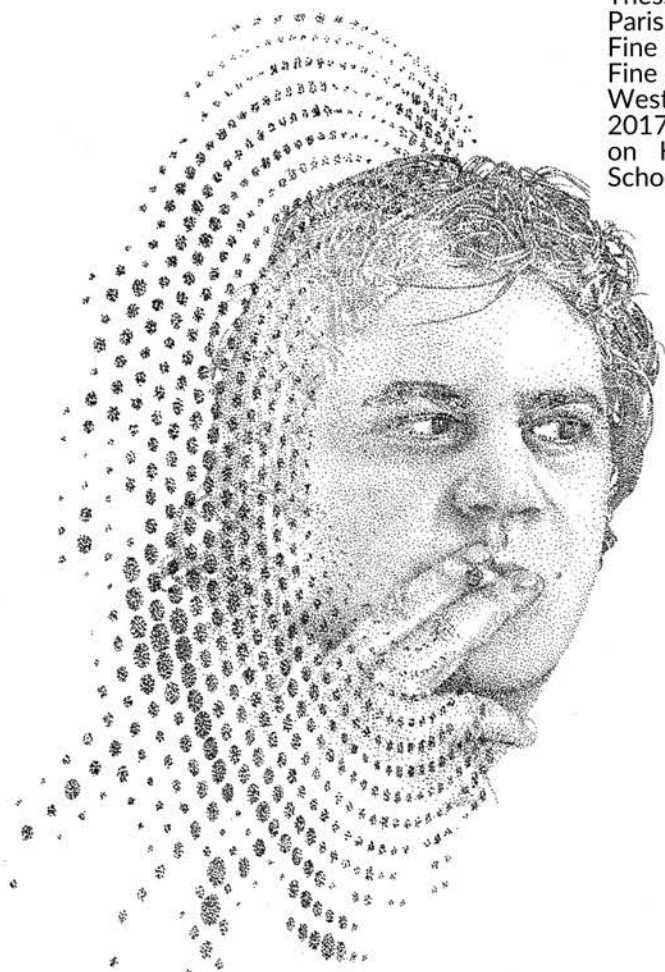
Yoo Choong Yeul, known for his painting, "The Sea Captain," from the book, *Famous Korean People*, is from South Korea, born July 23rd, 1960 in the Kyung-Gi Province Kwang Ju City. He entered art in 1981 and for 35 years he has been recognized as one of the top Korean painters. Visit: yoo-choong-yeul.pixels.com



Oleksiy Gudzovsky photographs professionally. Mostly landscapes like, "The World, the Same," series and cityscapes like, "City Love" series. Sometimes, he tries to love people, their figures and faces and make some script-based portraits in the "Short Shot" series. Visit: gudzovsky.com



Glyka Dionysopoulou is a painter and art performer who lives in Kozani, Greece. She initially studied Archeology and History of Art at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, and she completed her postgraduate studies on History of Art in Thessaloniki, Greece and Paris, France. She studied Fine Arts at Florina School of Fine Arts in the University of Western Macedonia. Since 2017 she is a Ph.D. Student on History of Art at the School of Fine Arts in Florina.



Haunted Lullabies

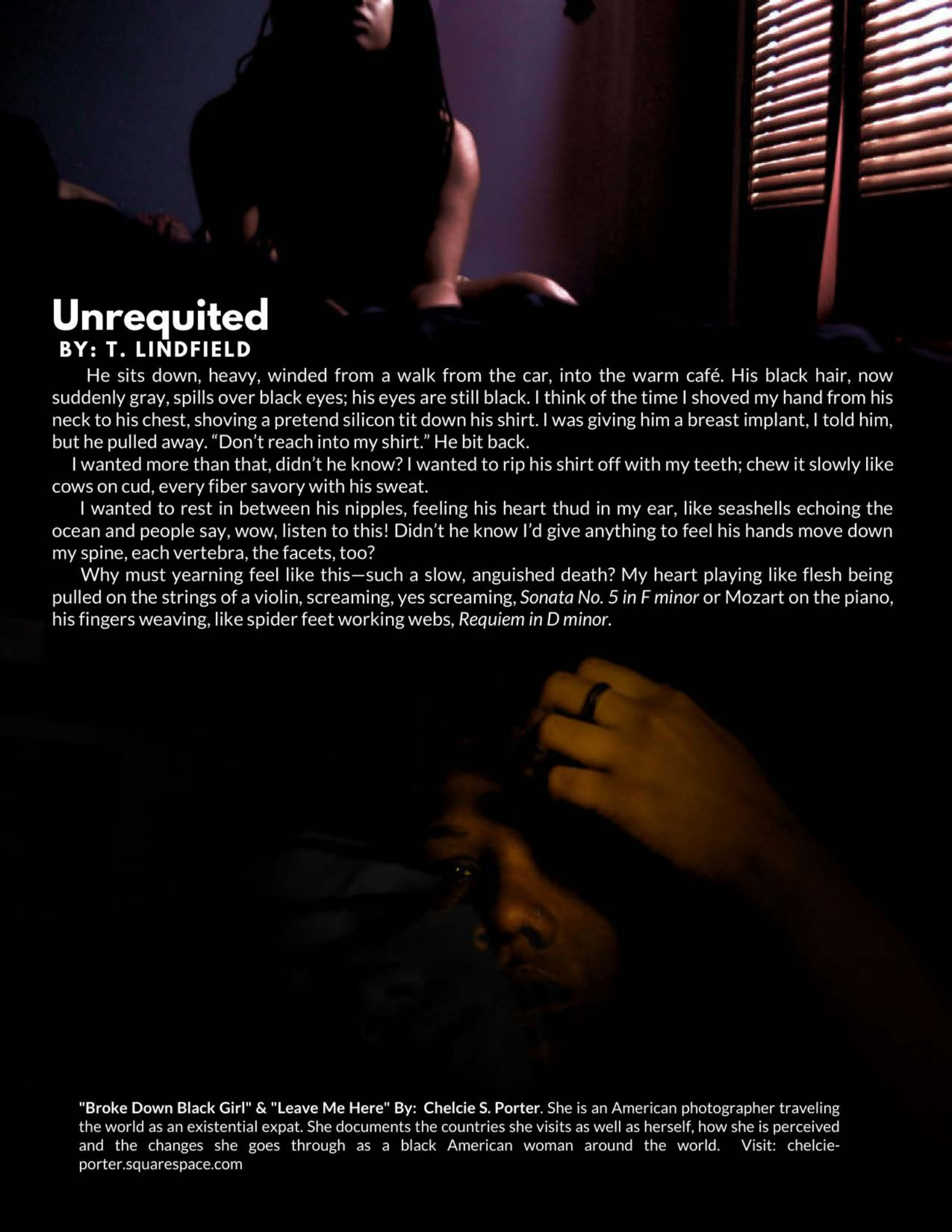
BY: YONG TAKAHASHI

Words carved onto my heart
Music playing in the back of my mind
As I attempt to make life's decisions
Doubting every road I take
Your words, stabbing and harsh
Never encouraging, never beautiful
Painful beats, pulsating through my veins
Drowning out lover's pledges of forever
Blocking every path to happiness
Words and music growing unbearable
Bouncing between my ears
Unable to shake your haunted lullabies

Yong Takahashi won the Chattahoochee Valley Writers National Short Story Contest and the Writer's Digest's Write It Your Way Contest. She was a finalist in *The Restless Books Prize for New Immigrant Writing*, *Southern Fried Karma Novel Contest*, *Gemini Magazine Short Story Contest*, and *Georgia Writers Association Flash Fiction Contest*. She was awarded "Best Pitch" at the Atlanta Writers Club Conference. @yctwriter

Jim Tran is a Canadian artist of Vietnamese origin, based in Montreal. He recently graduated from Concordia University in Studio Arts where he started painting, collage, textiles, and digital drawing. His interests are Asian identities and the Asian culture in which he generally integrates them into his works. Instagram: @jimtran.official





Unrequited

BY: T. LINDFIELD

He sits down, heavy, winded from a walk from the car, into the warm café. His black hair, now suddenly gray, spills over black eyes; his eyes are still black. I think of the time I shoved my hand from his neck to his chest, shoving a pretend silicon tit down his shirt. I was giving him a breast implant, I told him, but he pulled away. "Don't reach into my shirt." He bit back.

I wanted more than that, didn't he know? I wanted to rip his shirt off with my teeth; chew it slowly like cows on cud, every fiber savory with his sweat.

I wanted to rest in between his nipples, feeling his heart thud in my ear, like seashells echoing the ocean and people say, wow, listen to this! Didn't he know I'd give anything to feel his hands move down my spine, each vertebra, the facets, too?

Why must yearning feel like this—such a slow, anguished death? My heart playing like flesh being pulled on the strings of a violin, screaming, yes screaming, *Sonata No. 5 in F minor* or Mozart on the piano, his fingers weaving, like spider feet working webs, *Requiem in D minor*.

"Broke Down Black Girl" & "Leave Me Here" By: Chelcie S. Porter. She is an American photographer traveling the world as an existential expat. She documents the countries she visits as well as herself, how she is perceived and the changes she goes through as a black American woman around the world. Visit: chelcie-porter.squarespace.com

Lacquer

BY: T. LINDFIELD

I like the rain.

"It seems everything looks better after a nice rain," I say.

"It cleans the mess away, I guess," she says.

I say, "The mess is still there, but it's shiny now,

Like it has lacquer on it."

She laughs, and says,

"People like shiny things."

Tiffany Lindfield is a social worker by day, by trade and in heart working for climate justice and for the marginalized of society. By night and she is a prolific reader of anything decent and a writer.



Ana Jovanovska has an MFA in Graphic Art. Her practice is rooted in deep observation and reaction to the current times and spaces, affected by the moralizing of traditions and a sense of urgency in the discourse of contemporaneity. She is interested in research-based in rethinking, re-imagining and re-telling narratives, debating that the structure of society is in many ways conditioned by the structure of language itself.

Pigalle

BY: EDUARD SCHMIDT-ZORNER

People I knew
lived in the quarter
which is no longer existing.
Those streets between La Narcisse
and New Moon
where Steinbeck lived,
and Cézanne;
but also bums, hookers,
crooks, zany characters...

Harmless pleasures and
vicious desires
filled the streets
and a touch of adventure,
the loneliness of sleazy hotels.
Neon light on the wet asphalt,
as colour copy,
forming a mirror image.
At 3 o'clock in the night
you need a coffee,
or an illusion, a sweet lie.
Lonely wanderer, like a snail
without a house,
walking into the small hours.

Not where you have been born,
but where you came to life
is your home.

Eduard is a writer of haibun, short stories and poems in 4 languages. Lives in Ireland with German origin. Published worldwide.



Ihsan El Barmaki specializes in still life and abstraction. His art focus on creating space and distance, transferring into the environment, abstractly.



to the goslings left behind

BY: SYDNEY SCHOONE

Sydney, Gemini, is from Wisconsin and writes about what she thinks. Inspiration can come from the weirdest places.

I'm not sure how it happened--
it's possible
that visibility was reduced,
or tires drifted on the pavement
or perhaps the driver was impatient
to get out of the rain.

In any case,
there lays a mama goose
on the side of the road, slain,
its partner pacing back and forth
frantically searching for a sign of life
that won't be found.

Nothing to be heard but
distressing honks
flapping, rustling wings
and webbed feet slapping the wet earth
as the living goose
mourns its partner
lifeless in the road,
a lover lost in May
on their way back home.

And I'm sure there is a nest somewhere
with goslings-- fresh, new life--
awaiting the return of Mama
and her cozy, soft down
to shelter them from the storm.
But they do not know what's happened--
that won't come until later,
when Papa comes home
alone.

And as they get older,
perhaps the goslings will forget,
and the pain will fade,
and life will go on.
But I'm hoping that on a sunny day
when the clouds have cleared
and the light hits them just right,
a feeling-- maybe a memory--
envelops them in a rhapsody of warmth
just like Mama used to do
when it rained.



"River walk" By: Annalyn Miller

**"Writer. Photographer. Most
importantly—Mama."**

Michelle Dinh is a Cambodian American artist residing in SoCal. Her work is driven by color and all things whimsical. Due to COVID-19 her work has shifted to themes of empowerment, identity, and social commentary.

Instagram: @sunflowerhues



Women
are:

- strong
- smart
- independent
- motivated
- resilient



Ten

BY: RAE ROZMAN

There will be a beginning. There will be stars that form from explosions of the universe. There will be night and mornings and heartbreak and joy and coffee. There will certainly be coffee. Trees will fall and saplings will take root. Sunflowers will bloom. Light will shine through cracks in galaxies. There will be an ending.

Untitled

BY: RAE ROZMAN

If I saw a falling star
and you saw it too
I'd make a wish and wonder
if you'd want the same thing

And I know
you'd say something like
women like us don't make wishes
we make the fucking world
the way we want to see it

But there's a part of me
that still wants to believe in magic
in dreams and fairy tales and happy endings
a part of me that asks the cynics to try
just for this one dying ball of light
to pretend it's up to fate

Rae Rozman is a middle school counselor in Austin, Texas. Her poetry, which has been featured in several literary magazines and anthologies, often explores themes of queer love (romantic and platonic), loss, and education. You can find her sharing poems, book reviews, and pictures of her two adorable rescue bunnies on Instagram @mistress_of_mnemosyne.



Oksana Reznik's artwork explores human presence in the environment and the trail that remains, combining her own feelings, memories, and imagination with a certain place or situation. She graduated from Lviv National Academy of Art and lives in Lviv, Ukraine.

Chicken Shit

You call me chicken shit for not driving, so I grab the wheel. You think because I am careful, I am not brave, but I am. You are impulsive. I am thoughtful. But at this moment, I am impulsive. You try to take back control of the car. You are stronger than me, but I am faster. I turn the steering wheel all the way right. You slam on the brakes, but it is too late. We crash into a tree by the water. The airbags burst out at us. Your driving glasses crunch and fall off your face. My forehead is wet. I touch my cheeks, and my hands pull away red. Your mouth moves like you are barking. I do not catch the words. I cannot hear anything over the ringing in my ears. Your seatbelt is on, but you lunge at me. You grab for my neck. Spittle escapes your mouth as you speak.

You look like a rabid dog. I notice your arm bends at a weird angle. Part of your bone peeks out at your elbow. Windshield glass peppers your Pink Floyd t-shirt. It is your favorite shirt. You love Pink Floyd almost as much as your car. I giggle. My giggle rolls into a chuckle. Your complexion changes from tomato to beet. You look enraged. I laugh harder. I see flashing lights. I am in hysterics. The jaws of life pull me out of your green Saturn that now looks like a crushed can of peas. This image tickles me even more. Something wet slides down the sides of my face. I am not sure if it is tears or blood, but everything is so funny, I do not care anyway. I am on a stretcher. The paramedic leans over my face and talks to me. I do not see you anymore. He is too close. I am scared. I try to speak, but spit dribbles down my face. I look for you but cannot twist my head in your direction. There is a strange gurgling noise in my throat. The paramedic injects me with something that makes me happy again, even though everything is not as funny as it was before. I hope they do not give you the same happy needle.

I met you on a humid night in July. I saw you when I took my dog Cuddles outside to piss. I brought her to the bar. She sat by my feet while I drank a pitcher of Czech beer. I rescued her from a foster home that summer, and I did not want to leave her home alone. You were smoking outside of the bar. You wore your driving glasses and your hair long, slicked back, and parted to the side. You looked like Clark Kent. You asked to pet my dog. I said she is not good with strangers. Cuddles only had one eye, half-covered with a tuft of white fur. You let her sniff your hand. She dropped and rolled on the ground, and you patted her belly. You rubbed her the wrong way, and she snapped at you, baring her tiny teeth. You asked if I wanted to go for a ride. I pointed to my bicycle chained to a parking meter outside of the bar. We laughed. We walked to the park. I grew up near that park. I had been going to that park my whole life. That night, I got lost there with you.

Your name was Ben. I hated that name. I knew a boy named Ben in junior high. Everyone said he liked me. When he saw me in the hallway, he smacked my books onto the floor. When I bent down to pick them up, Ben tipped me over like a sleeping cow. I thought, it's just a name.

You drove me home. We sat outside of my apartment complex and talked for hours. I told you all of my fears and dreams. You listened and smiled compassionately. I got out of the car and thought, what a nice guy.

You are an hour late. I am heated. You say I always complain about something. I eye the door handle and wonder how much it would hurt to jump out of a car doing 50MPH. You tell me what a nice guy you are; otherwise, you would have punched me in the face already. I say nice guys do not say things like that. You tell me to shut up. You say that I am a baby, and I act like a victim. You yell. There is a ball of something forming in my stomach. I do not know what it is, but I know it is not good. You scream something else, and the ball gets bigger. It cannot fit in my stomach anymore and starts spreading to my ribcage, passes my heart, and jumps into my throat. I try to swallow it down. I say okay, I am a shitty person; I am a baby; I am a victim. You say I cannot do anything on my own; I do not do anything. You say I cannot even drive, and I am chicken shit. That is when I take the wheel.

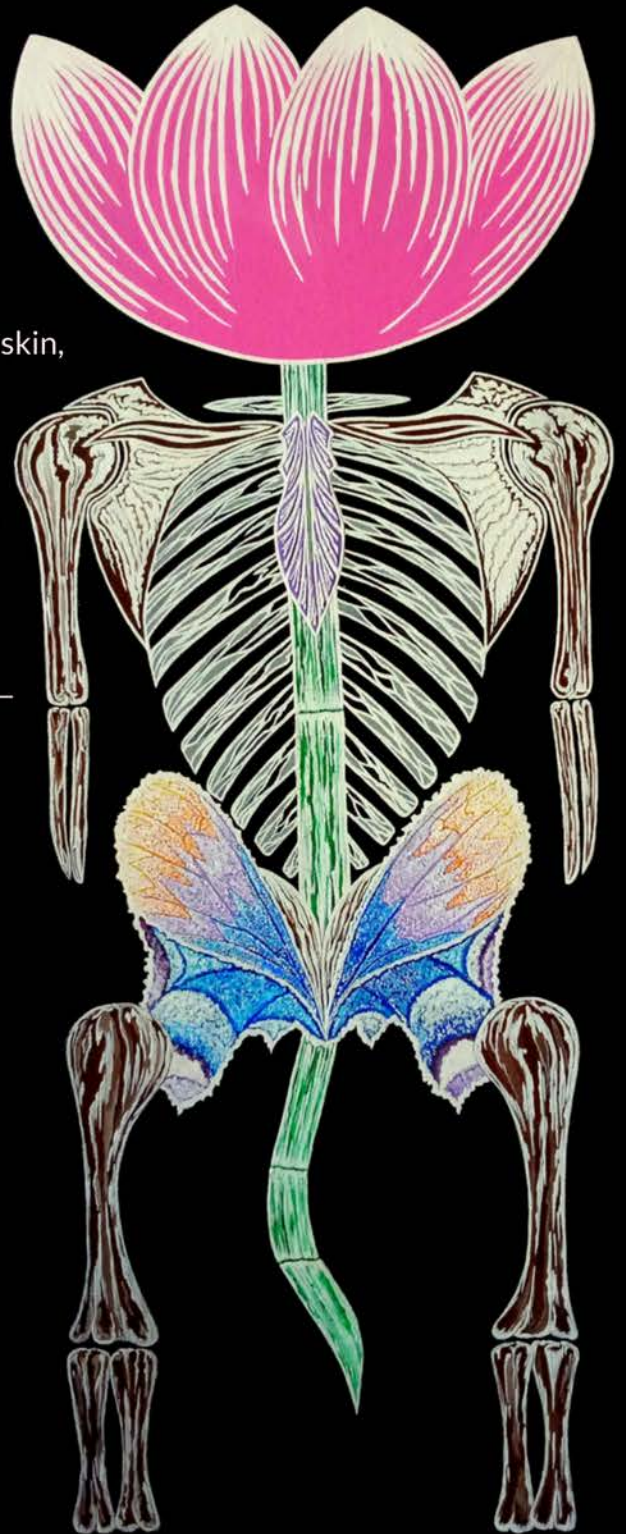
Christina Cintron is a freelance writer and MFA candidate in Creative Writing at The City College of New York. She lives with her husband and two children in Riverdale, New York. Her recent projects and writing samples can be viewed on Contently: Visit: christinaicintron.contently.com.

Spines

BY: LEELA DOHERTY

I am your skeleton, your backbone, your callused worker's skin,
 your exhausted, drained and aching limbs.
 I am the cans of beer after a long twelve-hour shift,
 I am your boiler on the blink.
 I am the electric, gas and water meters, over-due bills,
 and over the counter dealers.
 The pile of washing that seems to keep growing.
 Your nights of (un) rest.
 I am your tax and your rebate, your wins and your retakes—
 a set of tests you'll keep on taking.
 The bags under your eyes, the anxieties threaded through
 your mind, that sink deep into your flesh.
 And settle there like colonies of doubt. I am a language—
 written, in branches and veins
 the soil, the grassroots, old births, and new graves.
 I am the wool over blind eyes, the monochrome
 and the techni-colour.
 I am the local, the pint your friend asks if you fancy.
 I am the songs sung at karaoke night:
 the Bittersweet Symphony.

Leela Doherty is a 21-year-old poet and writer from Birmingham. She has a BA in Creative and Professional Writing, and is currently undertaking an MA in Creative Writing. Her work aims to explore the depth of human experience. Instagram: @itsallartanyway



"CatDog" By: Kateryna Repa was born in 1979 in Odessa, Ukraine.



ILLUSTRATION

"Flowers of Catcus" By: Moheb Yones Sallam. An international Egyptian Artist and a Textile Engineer. He was born in Shanshoor Menoufia, Egypt, and graduated from the Faculty of Applied Arts Helwan University in Giza, Egypt. He innovated and created a new style in art, " Combineism" with Artist L. Darvas from the USA in 2012.

Time to Leave

BY: THOMAS ELSON

"Okay, it's done."

A contract: offer, acceptance, consideration. Sign papers. Look each other in the eye. Man-to-man. Shake hands. Agreement finalized. Collect payment.

"Should we discuss the fine points?"

"Not now. I've gotta go. By the way, you'll be told when it's time to leave."

It was never like that. Merely assumptions, hopes, nesting doll dreams. "I want-" "If this happens, then-" "You will do-" "And, I will receive-"

Money stolen. Pennies at first. Literally pennies - three of them hidden under a divan cushion. Then quarters, followed by a learning period secreting cartons of cigarettes and cases beer out the back door. Then multiple items of clothing from an employer. Cash from the registers - surprisingly easy, keep the receipt, void the sale, extract the money, place in pockets.

On hiatus for three years. Years spent honing his alcoholism.

Then more cash. Make a sale. Save the receipt. Take the money. Void the sale. Place ticket in till. Keep the amount minimal. Do it every day at different times during the day. It accumulated. Worried about being discovered. Time to leave.

More schooling. Additional skills. Learn about kiting. Earn license. Gain experience. Study loopholes. Collect salary. Collect fees. Endorse on back. Deposit checks in an out-of-state account. Destroy client files and account cards. Cash on demand. His own printing press.

Automobiles: Porsche, Cadillac. Townhouses. Circle of friends. Women. More cash. A second Cadillac. Then a third. More women. More alcohol. Neglect marriage. Even more women. Stay late. Stay out. Stay over. Stay away.

Lose license. Lose Porsche. Lose Cadillac. Lose townhouse. Lose wife. Lose child. Time to leave.

Run. Escape. Hide. Flee the state. Flee many states. Attempt to the change name, Social Security number. Change life, change history. Then four different cells - tombs really - to be repeated twenty years later.

Revise resumé. Phony it up. Use remaining friends to serve as bogus references. New career. New persona. New location, new job. A position with credit card authorization, travel vouchers, payroll vouchers. Large company. Decentralized controls. "You approve mine; I'll approve yours." Easier than you think.

Repeat behaviors in many companies over many years. Larger checks from bigger companies. Create Shell company. Deposit checks, watch the account grow to six figures until time to leave.

Find stability in public service. Years later discover that the CEO is doing what he used to do. She tried to con a con. Attempt to expose. Forgot number one rule, and the Queen was wounded, but not killed, though he was. Her vengeance. His termination. Told to leave.

Seek peace. Join church. Serve on council, serve as pallbearer in friend's funeral. Moments before his burial looking down into an open grave.

"Not, mine."

"But it is."

Then, after a moment, "By the way, it's time to leave."

Our Baby Tiger

BY: THOMAS ELSON

He saw their baby three times.

The first time was with his nine-month-old grandson inside a massive enclosure – a world unto itself.

The Siberian tiger cub, his paws too big for his body, eyes within eyes with the disposition of a kitten and markings any cat would envy – honey echoed with white and black etchings. The baby crawled over his mother, stumbled, righted himself, tilted slightly, clomped toward an oversized water bowl, lost his focus, stepped on the side of the bowl. It tipped, water fell onto the cement floor, he turned, lapped the remaining water, then crawled under his mother, wiggled a little. Content and safe, he rested.

When they saw the tiger again, he had grown into his paws. This is the tiger his grandson would remember. Strong, assertive, beautiful, pacing, dominating the first raised platform, then the second, then the next, head down, eyes focused, ready for life outside the glass, the cement floors, the regular and regulated feeding times.

His final visit was not in person but a newspaper article with an accompanying photograph his grandson sent him. Granddad, this was difficult to read, but here's an article about our baby tiger. I love you and miss you. He lifted his trifocals to read through the bottom lens.

Their baby died alone on the cement.

Thomas Elson's short stories, poetry, and flash fiction have been published in numerous venues such as *Calliope*, *Pinyon*, *Lunaris*, *New Ulster*, *Lampeter*, *Selkie*, *Pennsylvania Literary Journal*, and *Adelaide Literary Magazine*. He divides his time between Northern California and Western Kansas.

Amanda Butler focuses her photography primarily on nature seen throughout the day. Through the photos she shares she hopes to promote greater observation of the beautiful details of our surroundings.



Under the Dog Star

BY: S.T. OTLOWSKI

We dream of each other,
The gray wolf and I,
As we run with one mind
'Neath the cold northern sky.

We've howled at the moon
In the dry crackling air,
Now we run for the run,
Without thought, goal, or care.

Full rime-circled moon paints
The passes pearlescent,
Starry Hunter hangs high,
Future past only present.

Wide frozen lake glows
With antique silver depth,
Silent pads throwing snow,
Trailing quick frozen breath.

Our pack trails behind,
Singing high in full chorus,
As we race with the wind,
No marked trail lies before us.

We run through the night,
Till bright dawn limns the crags,
Then we long for warm sleep
As our energy flags.

When we're done with our run,
We will be what we'll be,
For I dream the gray wolf,
And the gray wolf dreams me.

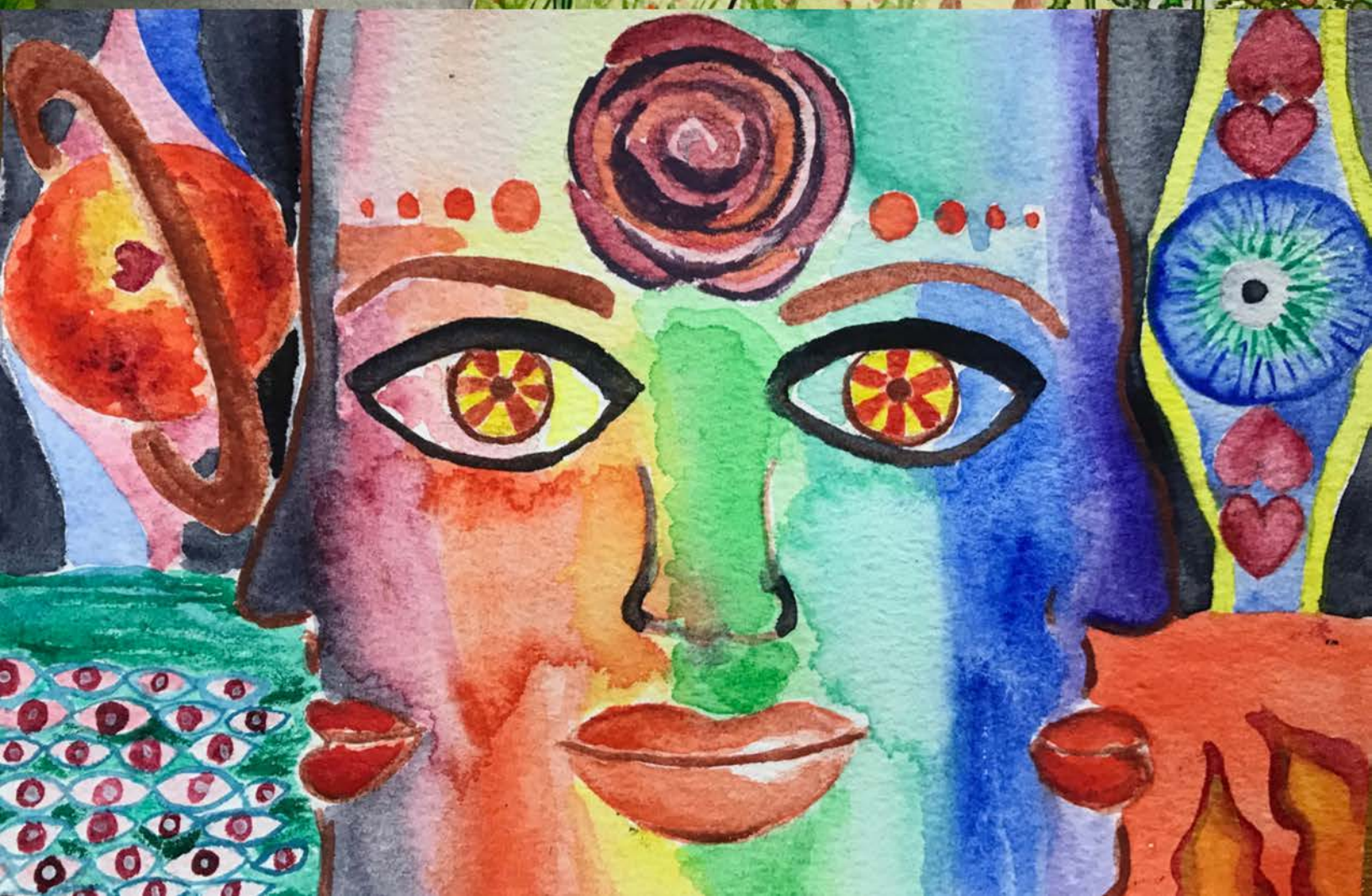
S.T. Otlowski is a retired banker who has been writing for about eighteen years. His poetry has appeared in *Chronogram Magazine* and *Angler's Journal*. He writes science fiction, fantasy horror in flash fiction to novel-length, introspective poetry, and poetry related to my experiences in field and stream.



Keith Buswell graduated with a BFA in art from the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. He works with various printmaking processes such as screen-printing, intaglio, and mono printing and dabbles in drawing and multimedia. Originally from Council Bluffs, Iowa, he currently lives in Lincoln with his husband, Brad, and his dog, Max. Visit: keithdbuswell.art

Chloe Xu is a mixed-media artist based in Amsterdam. With her education in film school and art school, her style is influenced a lot by street culture and contemporary art. She sees art as a great tool of protest, a strong connection with the people, and a creative way to explore human potential. Visit: chloexxu.com





1945

BY: DC DIAMONDPOLOUS

I first saw Teresa out my kitchen window back in 1928. Her father, a widower, had moved into our neighborhood. I was kneading dough when I looked up and watched the child glide her sled down a snowbank and slam into a tree. I ran across the street.

"Are you hurt?"

She scowled. "Mind your own beeswax."

I ignored her sass and asked if she would like a nice piece of hot homemade bread. She rubbed her bump with a snow-crusting mitten and shook her head. Teresa repeated the stunt and sailed free all the way to the sidewalk. I clapped my doughy hands.

The little one smiled. "Can my pop have one too?"

The next year the stock market crashed, and we plunged into the Depression.

I'd see Teresa walk home from school, alone, shoulders slumped, eyes downcast. We all wore threadbare clothes, but her charity hand-me-downs never fit her growing body.

One day, I invited her to see Shirley Temple in Bright Eyes. Coming out of the theatre, she reached for my hand, such sweetness in her grasp. From then on I became her cheerleader, my pompoms the crocheted scarves and sweaters I made for her.

From the end of the Depression to another War, changes occurred every minute—and right here, in Farmingdale, New York.

In the winter of '42, Teresa got a job at the Brooklyn Navy Yard. I'd be at my window at six o'clock making dinner as she arrived home in a car full of girls.

She ran with newfound joy up the steps to the front door, turn, wave to her friends, and then to me. Her smile brought riches not even Rockefeller could buy.

Teresa had every other Sunday off and we'd have lunch on my back porch.

"Oh Aunt Lena, I never knew working with my hands could be so much fun. There are a lot of us gals, cutting and soldering, doing everything the men did. But our paychecks are nothing compared to what they earned."

"Well, of course not. Men have families to care for." My comment hung in the air like a barrage balloon.

Why, I never questioned my pay working in the factory during the First World War. It would've been unpatriotic—but this, I kept to myself. Now we could vote. Women smoked. Teresa wore overalls at work—so much had changed.

On a spring day in '43, she told me about her promotion. "I work on submarines, welding." She put down her fork.

"What's wrong, dear?"

"They're cramped quarters. My boss rubs up against me. When I told him to stop, he put me out in the rain to weld, knowing I'd get electrical shocks."

"Can't you go to his boss?"

She shook her head. "It's always the girls' fault."

I worried that after the war, young women like Teresa, who built our ships, tanks, and planes would question traditions. Men wouldn't stand for it. If I went to work, Roy would raise Cain, though he did let me sell war bonds.

In '44, Teresa made management, and our lovely Sunday lunchtimes came to an end. Her new boss, a decent man, depended on her.

She worked twelve-hour days, seven days a week, and took care of her ailing father. I helped out by sitting with Pop. One night when she returned late I expressed concern for her coming home alone in the dark.

She laughed. "With the boys gone, we girls can walk anywhere day or night and feel safe. Even Central Park."

Her breezy comment gave me chills. I saw thunderclouds on the horizon. "You respect our boys who are fighting for our freedom, don't you?"

"Oh, Aunt Lena." She put her arm around my shoulder. "Of course, I do. But women are fighting for freedom too. Just not on battlefields."

The war in Europe ended May 8, 1945, but it dragged on in the Pacific.

Teresa's final promotion came in early June. She oversaw seventy-five women in the construction department. I couldn't have been prouder of her.

On August 15, the radio blared, "Official! Truman announces Japanese surrender."

"Aunt Lena, Uncle Roy!"

We all had tears in our eyes as I opened the door.

"I'm going to Times Square, then on to the shipyard. Can you look in on Pop?"

"Of course, dear." A car waited for her. The girls waved flags. I held up two fingers making a V for Victory. "Do tell me everything that happens."

Roy and I went back to the radio. We heard about the thousands of people who turned out in cities across America. I imagined the red, white and blue rippling and waving, confetti and ribbons, wet eyes, and cheering—if only our beloved FDR had lived to see it. That night we grew anxious as the hours passed and no word from Teresa.

The next morning I recall burning myself on the skillet. My mind filled with worry about our girl. Then from my kitchen window, I saw her come out the front door. She wore slacks and a blouse and marched down the walkway to the car. Rigid—with dark smudges beneath her eyes.

I ran across the street. "What's the matter?"

"We wouldn't quit, so they fired us."

A girl in the car said, "With the boys coming home, we got canned."

"Of course. They'll need their jobs back."

Teresa glared at me. "My boss told me to get married and have babies."

"What did you expect?"

Teresa opened the car door. "I expected more from my country."

Back then I didn't understand the full impact of the war and what its aftermath meant to our daughters.

Now with Roy gone and Teresa out west, I think about those days and the car full of girls who worked at the Brooklyn Navy Yard. I know now as I watched them drive off to gather and speak up for their rights that what I saw was the future.



Floating Garden

Leila Refahi is a painter, who lives and works in Montreal. She is focused on endangered animals in her works. She has held five solo exhibitions and has attended more than 40 group exhibitions and festivals around the world. @LeilaRefahi



The Guise of Sentiment

Photography By: Annalyn Miller

The admiration of men always came with a price. Her mother's bedroom door had temporarily shielded her from the self-loathing and unsavory men that were looking for a nice meal and a release.

They left quicker than they came. She remembered her mom's quiet desperation, permanently affixed in sadness. It only heightened after her father left when she was eleven.

He finally met someone else that made him happy after years of silent misery. They kept in touch until his new wife got pregnant, two years later. Her mother couldn't handle the idea of Sam continuing a relationship with the man who reduced her to bitterness, so she guilted her into staying away.

Sam retained the notion that getting a man to love her meant making herself smaller—she needed affection more than anything, and when he obliged it came with all the happiness - and the pain.

When they met in sophomore year, hell or high water couldn't spark a divide between them. After practice, she would wait around for stolen moments on the bleachers.

Dom would put his hands around her waist, wittingly flash whitened squares, then lean in to meet her perched lips. She loved to inhale the smell of his sweat- it made her feel close to him. Her hand often reached up to wipe the droplets that remained on his forehead as they talked; it was important for her to be helpful.

The weather was unseasonably warm the first time it happened. The sun hovered over them as it's rays pierced through her teal cotton shirt.

"Babe, can we go over to Rye Beach? It's so nice out," she asked.

"I already told you, I can't go anywhere until I study! My dad is really on my back!"

"But babe—"

Before she could finish her rebuttal, he exploded, his eyes widened to the size of two quarters.

The palms of his hands firmly gripped her neck and squeezed. The small black rings that normally encased his light brown eyes now covered them, his breathing quickened as he growled at her.

Thin films of saliva gathered in the corners of his mouth, spraying on her reddened face. She dug her nails into his arms, but the veins in his bulging muscles were immune to the slight inconvenience. He shook her back and forth on the metal structure until one knee under her buckled and the wisps of her brown hair swayed on his forearm.

Dom was weighed with expectations from the confirmation of his existence in the womb. His family operated like a coven, demanding excellence at every turn- and he provided it. The drive he maintained stemmed from a mixture of obligation and desire to be loved by his father.

The academic awards and football trophies he received were proudly displayed in his father's cave of adoration, where he spent many nights drinking aged scotch and marveling at his keen ability to monetize the demoralization of others.

Dom is much softer, though. The attention he receives stems from his natural ability to get people to like him, but the anger festering below the surface is just enough to raise eyebrows. His charisma is much more likable than his insolence.

The emptiness grew when her actions couldn't sync with his insistence. For two years, she stared into her bathroom mirror rubbing bristles over spots of pooled blood. The makeup never seemed to cover it all, deepened red and purple were illuminating undertones. Romantic gestures were sure to cushion her reluctance.

He excelled at making a public mockery of their relationship, failing to convey what he was never equipped to handle. Behind the praise, she sank further into a shell, burdened with problems she resented having to solve. The instincts she buried under her bleeding heart were sitting in wait for the right moment to liberate her from a trough of misguided desire.

Jessica Frelow is a storyteller. Her work has appeared in the New York Times Metropolitan Diary. She currently writes and lives in the New York metro area. Visit: Jessicafrelow.com

PHOTOGRAPHY



Sandra Zegarra Patow is a Peruvian artist currently graduated from IMD (Interactive Media Design) at the Royal Academy of Arts in The Hague. She has a deep connection with her Peruvian roots and composes images that are in poetic harmony with the odd. Through distorted bodies, dreamy patterns and out of nature colors she invites people to look into her mind.
Visit: sandrazegarrapatow.com



Tin Box

You were always laughing
when I collected boxes:
carved wooden ones
latticed soapstone wonders,
colorful enameled beauties--
I stored my jewels in some
and packed others with fantasies.

It has been a decade since you left.
My boxes gathered dust in the
absence of your laughter--
the echo of it is the only
memory I permit.
I save it in an old tin box
where a coin of comfort rattles.

Words

Which word of yours
ever died for me?
Some, I treasure till the fragrance
(like potpourri-dried flowers)
fills all the rooms of my pores.

Others, like thorns, cut my skin
and blood flows from within,
etching sores like ink on silk.

None of your words are dead;
and, like bread and butter, are
essential, if you will, to my very
amoral existence.

The first cut is the deepest, still.

Jagari Mukherjee lives in Kolkata, India. Her latest poetry collection, *The Elegant Nobody* (2020) was published by Hawakal Publishers, Kolkata. Visit: journalofthebluerose.wordpress.com

Photography By: Catalina Aranguren



Catalina Aranguren was born in Bogotá, Colombia but raised in Caracas, Venezuela. She moved to Chicago to study photography at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and received my BFA. Her husband and her are currently raising three bilingual, bicultural, biracial, and bustling boys in New Jersey. Visit: argia.photos

Nostalgia

BY: ASHLEY WILSON

I remember what it felt like
To laugh at our show,
But when I see it again,
I remember the things I forgot.

I remember what it felt like
To grow up afraid of you,
And when I hear what you say
I remember the things I forgot.

I remember what it felt like
To love you sincerely,
But when I love my self
I remember the things I forgot.

I remember what it felt like
To forgive you again,
And when you are a memory,
I remember I'm happy.

I hear you.

BY: ASHLEY WILSON

You comfort me with your presence.
When you hold me in your arms,
the fear, the trauma that
burns through my mind,
melts away with you
like cold butter on fresh toast.

I can't pretend to know your pain
Watching me fall down the dark
cycle of my past.
You can't pretend to know my pain,
and I can't tell you any other way
I don't know myself.

I'm getting better for you.
I'm getting better for me.

The Cure

Marcie's dark brown hair veils her face with protection, concealing the emotion written across it. She sits at the bottom of a bathroom stall, wasting time between classes by scrolling through reaffirmations online that what she's going through is normal. One article after another tells her how to manage her emotions, but none of it really works, and she's too afraid to seek a professional.

She's reading some advice on socialization when a popup advertisement for psycho-technology yells at her: "Do you need help? Try Negativity Removal. A quick procedure to happiness." Marcie's phone knows exactly how to market to her. She opens the message and reads about the innovative neurological process of rewiring brain waves to release happy chemicals like serotonin, dopamine, and Oxytocin.

Curiosity peaks Marcie's interest. She's got nothing to lose. Her family lives so far away, they'd never know. Her friends are nonexistent, and it isn't like she's romantically involved with anyone. She just wants to stop feeling this way, like she doesn't matter, and life isn't worth dealing with. She wants to stop thinking she'd be better off just being dead.

Marcie sits up from the bathroom floor. She brushes dirt off her dark jeans and straightens out her oversize shirt. She hoists a backpack filled of books and drawing utensils on her back. There's a Negativity Removal facility down the street, conveniently placed near the university. Following the GPS on her phone, she arrives at the address listed on their website.

The building itself is comedic. Large, yellow cartoon smiley faces are stuck on the window, revealing a similar childish interior. A neon sign reads, "Walk-In's Welcome." The door chimes with its opening like a convenient store. Bright colors, soft seats, and a sterile smell surrounds Marcie as she enters. The receptionist behind the desk is smiling attentively. She wears yellow scrubs with her yellow hair in a tight up-do.

"Welcome to Happiness. I'm Joy," says the receptionist, "And who might you be?" Marcie pinches her knuckles behind her back. "Marcie," she says, avoiding eye contact. Joy's smile grows larger, her white teeth look fake. She routinely says, "I'll be your psychological guide today. Are you ready, Marcie?"

"I guess."

Marcie follows Joy a short distance to a windowless room with a menacing, clawed machine hanging from the ceiling like a chandelier. Underneath it, there's an examination chair with straps on the armrests. To the right of it, is a metal cart with tools and a pair of plastic gloves that Joy puts on.

"Please," Joy says, "Take a seat." Marcie obeys. Joy straps in her arms and takes a wipe from the cart. She tucks back Marcie's hair to reveal her temples. "This will only take a second," Joy says, cleaning Marcie's face.

"What does this do, exactly?" Marcie asks. Her fingernails dig into the palms of her hands.

"It balances your brain, exposing your best self." Joy takes a step back and smiles a toothy smile.

"It'll be over before you know it."

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Thank you for reading.

FLORA FICTION

**A LITERARY MAGAZINE
VOLUME 1 • ISSUE 2
SUMMER 2020**

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