

**The Raw Art Review:
A Journal of Storm and Urge**



WINTER 2023

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FRONT COVER ART:

3am

Digby Beaumont

Winner, RAR Winter 2023 Cover Art Contest

BACK COVER ART:

Untitled

VaiBionic

Untitled

James Maj

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Dead of Night
Digby Beaumont

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Dweller
VaiBionic

(First Runner-up RAR Winter 2023 Cover Art Contest)

IT SLIPS

How it slips
so easily from
joy, ecstasy and
adventurous
exploration
to
mind-numbing
conventional
bullshit of
learned tedious
themes that
hardly keep a
heart beating
let alone pay
the rent,
how this life
seeps slowly,
secretly into a
mundane endless
plot of no-sense,
of a journey
that back-tracks

into itself to
find where it
began and how
the wonder has
been lost to a
sterile
conformity.

by John D. Robinson
(winner of UnCollected Press Inner Circle Award)



Untitled
VaiBionic

THANKFULLY

Rose was not a
regular drinker,
for when she drank
she was ill tempered
and violent:
if some asshole
was getting too
disruptive, Rose
would stop it
quickly and
effectively
with a blow to the
head with a
frying pan,
kettle,
a wooden chair,
rolling pin,
metal tray,
anything at hand:
many troublesome
drunkards carry
a tattoo

by John D. Robinson
(winner of UnCollected Press Inner Circle Award)

ALL ABOUT YOU

This poem is about you,
that is,
how I knew you.

I was familiar with the
gossip and the bullshit
surrounding you,

but, after our
first meeting I knew
for shit sure it was
bollocks, ugly lies:
in an indescribable
way, like nothing
before in my life,

I fell in love with you,
not sexually/physically
or romantically or
lustfully or out of
pity but for your zest
for life, no matter how
humble or repulsive,
was insatiable,

gifted from
Rose,
who,
thankfully,
no
longer
drinks.

by John D. Robinson
(winner of UnCollected Press Inner Circle Award)



Untitled
James Maj

[sic]stemic

I take my black skin out for a walk
I dress it in all-weather livery
I collar and muzzle and leash

I bid my black skin do tricks for passers-by:
I command my black skin to beg and roll over
and to bark silently and crawl

I train my black skin to play dead at the end
of finger pistols or threat of the cage
I discipline my black skin when it stares into

the eyes of onlookers or when it snarls,
howls, shows its teeth or stands on two legs
I manage the triggers of my black skin's resistance:

I withdraw my affection and use the word *No!*
or I kettle and kennel with cordon and baton
I reward pee-greets, grinning and licking

with praise and treats and liberal petting
I take shit every day from my black skin
as a matter of civic and paternal duty

and I let my black skin exercise its freedom
within the chain-linked fence of black skin parks
and beneath the watchful eye of black skin owners

until one day bleeds into another and
[for the Juneteenth time] my black skin
presents its collar and muzzle and leash
and unconditional love

by Dean Gessie
(winner of UnCollected Press Inner Circle Award)

Diary of a Dead Eel Boy

at the wane of day my father and I would strike out
small in tall rush and long shadow
greasy wellies and waders orange and blue through
kloo-ik kloo-ik and *a-wick* and *a-wick*

my father and I would navigate fruiting bodies
upright catkins and egg-shaped leaves
down to bat song air at crag point o' dark and
the one twisted ash and succulent grasses

split the green curtain he did with his club-fingered
hand and bid me break my slipping
gait with the sober refrain *care is the order* while
hopping goat-like scree and rock chimney

at river's edge we left good altitude leaned one
the other on sharp degrees waterward
and entered the lair of the eel down to the killing
stone mucked with bone gut and gill

dark now darker on the face of father's eyes
flint knives for sacrifice and organ dissection
he ran silence through nocturnal notes and brackish
molecules blood spores in the nose

spillers he'd take and drive the stakes like a looney
railman laying bed and ties into the sea
gather line and hook under foot and stab a worm
fatway short to make show of the ends

out went the line and sinker straight points aft
of entry and father and I bent crooked obtuse
and tautness in the hands that were the sign
of a true lay or untold fears coal lorry black

behind him I stumbled hammering spare stakes
tossing hooks and smelling and hearing blind
and always the *glup* of water and *kee-ik* of little owls

and the dank of sulphur salt and nettle

through sand and heron shit we skittered palm-reading
nylon and slack for hunger and urge
shoring up spillers and skirting carbon rust of hippo tusk
and macaque jaw and dung beetle

and then he bade me do that thing that was holy
of holies and life for life and seed for seed
but come the shot recoil and treadless boots
come the slip fall and lumbar shock at sedge bar

*and bubbling ho! and breathless hee! and gasp
and pee and neck and ice and skin and smart
and entropy and amber trilobite and salt shad
and mud fart and snot jelly and black hole*

and father cursing the weight of the boy and sinkers
of melted led and iron pipe and always
the hook and the mouth and the boy's leg for anchor
and bloody minutes cut into his hands

until the earth gave way at the bottom of the world
to the mud golem and the O-mouthed
oily thing wrapped long at his leg and father looking
fire-eyed and hell-bent at eel and eel boy

and stomping spineless and clubbing paste-wise
the jaw eyes and tooth plates in its ugly face
and returning next day with the sober refrain
care is the order and spillers worms and hooks

by Dean Gessie
(winner of UnCollected Press Inner Circle Award)



Untitled
James Maj

the mask of god

it is not so much *they* as *we*
who people the death pit, the
tomb, the mound and the ruin;
how much does a child's heart
weigh? enough to bloody the
scales between obey and disobey;
it is what those who sacrifice
do: make an ember of their
heart to be burned *ex officio*;
I fill my sack with the souls of
babes and we in flame moult the
lie between skin and milky eye;
at least, the gordion knot of sin
and atonement finds its mystery
boon in a forward-looking Janus
or a pot of perfumed petals and
spices in a shithouse of asses; even
so, double-stranded DNA produce
in me the crushing cosmic force
of papa-sized opposable thumbs;
and how can I be other than the
pre-Christmas consonants of a
shepherder? neither I nor rain nor
desert god is changling for nursery;
there is no recourse, really, but to
don the mask, to look away from
myself as a black hole grey ersatz;
the children give me example in
peas and shells and handy-dandy;
I will also feint and choose the O,
a closed circle of falsities no less
hermetic than the serpent with tail
in its mouth; all the better to leave
the children in their beds with sugar

plums all a' dance in their heads and
the god of gog and magog a lap dog;
in my teeth, I clench the pearly bit
and secure the fit; I wear the mask
of humankind. *Oh*, I wear the mask!

by Dean Gessie
(winner of UnCollected Press Inner Circle Award)



Tunnel
Digby Beaumont

Spirit Animal

For a dollar I will sing your favorite song.
Do you mind if my voice careens off the notes a bit
and if it quavers?

For five dollars we will sit in your car
in the rain
the the motor running
the wipers sweeping
overlooking the city
and you can tell me your stories
and I will refund all your money
if you come back tomorrow
and listen to me.

Then I will tell you if I were a fisherman
I would fish without a hook
just to feel mesmerized by the waves.

And you will say if you were a hunter
you wouldn't put bullets in your gun
and only listen to the way a forest prays.

If we were soldiers
we would shout jokes at the enemy
just to hear them laugh.

You will tell me some part of you is a hummingbird
seeking a little nectar in a half gale.

I will say I am a stray dog
dodging city traffic and living off scraps.

Then the rain will stop and
we will lean against the hood
share a pull of cheap gin from my flask
while I blow cigarette smoke up toward the fleeing clouds
and you will say,
“at least now we know who we are”.

So I looked for you day after day after that
but you never did return.

by Gary Beaumier
(Winner of The Emily Dickinson Prize for Poetry)

A Church in the Landscape of Thought

I am fluent in the language of memory

conversant with the dead
a companion of ghosts

sometimes a penitent to my regrets
mea culpa,
 mea culpa

sometimes a vertigo of dreads

a captive to introspections

...until my dog dances joyous
as he bursts onto virgin snow
snow that mutes the darkening eve

then my thoughts yield to poplars and oaks
--branches blessed in white--
punctuated by crooked fencing
and toppling outbuildings
a rusted tractor stranded in the field beyond
while one owl calls
in vespers
as another answers
and a procession of deer
cross along the far rise
backlit in moonlight
Ave Maria
Ave Maria

such a holy thing to loose your mind
to Sunday quiet
may it hold me a minute more
may it keep me forever

by Gary Beaumier

The Ukrainian Seamstress

A soldier brings his torn field jacket
to her
“So much blown to pieces,” he says.
She carries the heavy scent of tobacco
and you can almost see the charred buildings in her eyes like
gravestones.

“There’s always someone who wants to break the world,” she
answers.

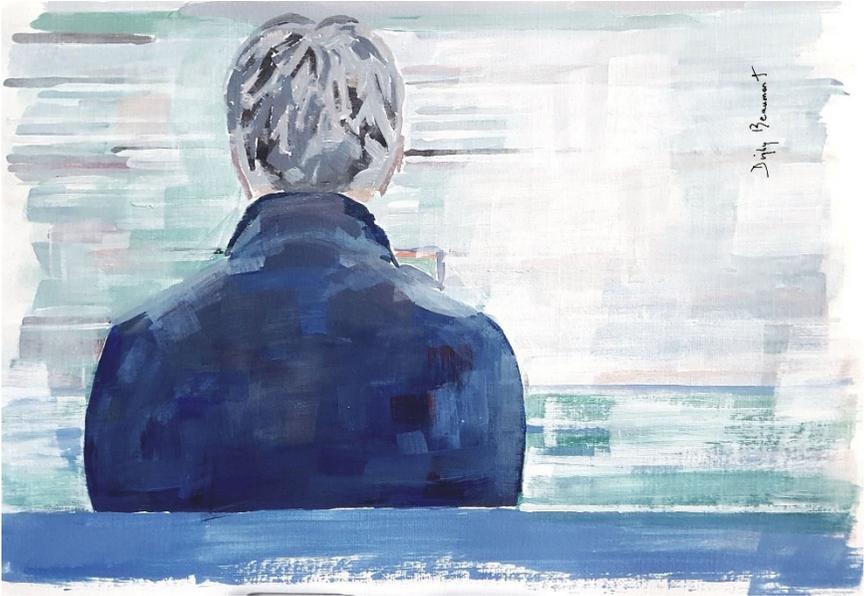
She leads him to her bed again
where he can take her to the forgetting places
and he strokes her hair
and his lips trespass all along her breasts
as he claims her for his inviolate country.

And later when they share a cigarette
—even as a bomb falls nearby
and even as he startles—
she made him promise to come back to her
even if he is lying.

Then she grieves for everyone this war has smashed
—the ones she knew and the ones she didn’t—
because you cannot stitch them back together
while she traces a finger along a ridge of muscle on his bare
shoulder
and whispers a protective mantra for him.

Finally after he leaves
she pushes her face in the torn bedclothes
and inhales his memory
even as a rifle cracks in the distance
even as she prays the bullet did not find him.

by Gary Beaumier



Underground
Digby Beaumont

Muse

by Jeff Weddle

She collects poets. Her house is filled with formalists and free versers, confessionalists, imagists, Dadaists, little mousy poets, big bellowing poets, haiku writers, slammers, composers of epics and even a few who lived their poems without committing anything to paper.

There are poets in translation, and odd language poets, completely incomprehensible in any tongue. Boring academic poets, old time Beat poets, pretentious new hipster poets, insufferable politically correct poets, earnest socialist poets, idiot MAGA poets, subversive communist poets, didactic feminist poets, mystic Islamic poets, insufferable Christian poets, Jewish poets, Hindu poets, gay poets, straight poets, bi-curious poets, furies, the insane and the all-too rational.

She has all of them, everything, everyone, in all shapes, sizes and colors. The heads cover her walls in every room. The closets overflow.

When she began her collection, she meant to keep the bodies intact, to display them as naturally as possible, but she quickly ran out of space because there are so damned many kinds of poets and so many poets of every damned kind. So, she took to removing the heads and leaving the bodies in the street for the garbage collectors or stray animals looking for a meal.

Sometimes she gives herself a treat and fricassees a thigh or deep fries an arm, but these things are mostly done on holidays.

I knew all of this when I accepted her invitation. It was common knowledge among the poetic community and it was a little scary, but I was sure she wouldn't want me for her collection. Who am I, after all? She made her intentions known over a dessert of chocolate pie and cherries jubilee and pointed out the spot she had saved for me. I was to be on her bedroom ceiling, directly above her pillows. It was a place of honor, she said, and I knew it was true.

I ran when she excused herself for a trip to the bathroom and to retrieve her axe. I ran down halls and through rooms, into and out of closets and upstairs and downstairs and everywhere. I could find no door, no window, no escape back into the world.

It's been weeks now, maybe longer. I stay alive by eating what's left of the poets on the walls and drinking toilet water. The poets' skin is tough, dusty, dry, tasteless and leathery, like most of the poems they left behind.

She's been easy to evade because she doesn't even try to be quiet. Just the opposite, actually. She constantly recites poetry in her lovely voice, loud, crystalline. It is sometimes enchanting to hear as I run, hide, sink into terror, scrawl lines in the spaces between her trophies and hope for the recognition I deserve.



Self Portrait
Digby Beaumont

MATING FLIGHT

The only time she flew
She was drawn along the flyways
By that hook in the belly,
That fluorescent sense of
The core, a rising map,
A moment's flux
Leading her to
The camber of a slope that fit
Instinctively behind her eyes
Confirming the composition
Of scent and sparring
Harmonies pitched
A half-scale up from the wind

Trees, sediment, sunlight, site
All inclined to her arrival, roused
The drones, funneled their flight
Steered them towards
The rite that they were fashioned for
And she, bedeviling the crosscurrent,
Accepted their sacrifice

Marked with the future
She returned, pausing once
On a roof slate
To watch the afternoon
Cant the camellias
Years of wax,
Eggs, honey, hive
Hummed insistent
Tender in her ducts
The shadow of her fragrance
Shifted: expectation
An emblem of the urge
She embodied
Of the possibility she had become

by K.P. Anderson
(Winner 2022 UnCollected Press Book Publication Contest.)



Creatures of The Otherworld
Sylvia Van Nooten

LAMENTATION OF DRONES

Just how could we have known
What stagnant fall would bring
With summer's promise blown
The thorns fade, chalked as bone –
No inkling left of spring
Just how could we have known
That once the brood had grown
Fond comb would turn to sting
With summer's promise blown
Our sisters' tempers hone
Their eyes, our reckoning
Just how could we have known
Warmth can be overthrown
And mangled like a wing
With summer's promise blown
We're drowned in grass, alone
Relinquished, wondering
With summer's promise blown
Just how could we have known

by K.P. Anderson
(Winner 2022 UnCollected Press Book Publication Contest.)



Tempest
by Linda H. Post

WINTER CLUSTER

In mid-November
Dilute sky washes shadow
Alike over brick and branch

Ginkgo leaves – skirts piped
Golden with retreat – glance down
Considering soil

Out back, the beehive
Relaxes splinters from its
Cedar joints, falling dormant

Divulging now and
Then a bee scrambling through
The metal-cast guard

Off to strip the last
Redolent sips of nectar
Outpacing the coming frost

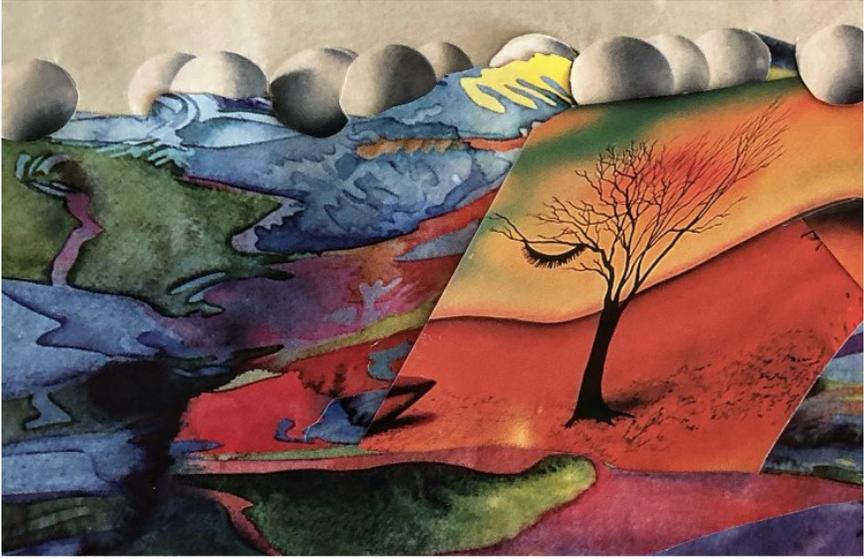
By sunset she will
Retrace the polarized light
Homeward past lampposts

Past catmint, past the
Rose with its second-bud bloom
To alight provisioned for

The shivering time
Ascending through comb, sustained
With recollection

Issuing sweetly
A cloistered hum, the sole sign
Of her thriving heart waiting

by K.P. Anderson
(Winner 2022 UnCollected Press Book Publication Contest.)



Dawn at Egg Valley
by Robin Young

Implied Mercies

Some bugs' butts come
with a touch of sun.

The sprites are a dust
the moon kicked up,

a pollen of wands,
or a star struck

snow of spark plugs
at hunt for engines.

The diesel image runs:
dark, pock marked dunes

for you to connect dots
as Pollack had done.

While winter waits with us,
we trace summer phenomenon

when the holocaust of dawn's
neon floods night vision,

when bespeckled heavens
extinguish to blue and flies buzz.

by Joseph William Estlack



Abandoned Buildings 01
Christopher Paul Brown

The Body

A pond is electric, often shimmering. Isn't it? The water must have a plug running from it. The tiny eruptions, some bugs so close to their reflections they got electrocuted. Or they are the fishes kiss testing their limits. The pond sparks while I sit with leaves of grass looking for the outlet and missing Emily. Like the fish, I'm shocked, can't say what's powering it. I understand Uncle Walt after years of moments outdoors. I know now that I am not a poet, but another electrician resting on the fuse box singing extension chords

by Joseph William Estlack



Spoken Bird
Sylvia Van Nooten

Backlash

A good poem is a bird nest of fish hooks. The best look confusing at first, a tangled mess of awkward lines and senseless verse; some hamburger of rusted points with half dead worms writhing in a horrid fist of nylon; some patty of knots from fishing's worst. How many fisherman must have cross cast to make such modern art. But somewhere in the scatter you spot fresh bait, and another. Then you recognize a pattern. Soon the beef unravels and you lean in for a taste. Next thing you know, you are flying to the surface with a mouth full of treats and a string of blood leaking from your cheek. Things get brighter, the water warmer. It tugs on your heart strings until it takes your breath away. Like finally locking eyes with Waldo, you try to hold on to that moment in the sun with the look of amazement on your face. But some fingers take over and gravity returns as we flip on to the next page.

You swim to your friends, and in a sad attempt, try to explain the phenomenon. But schools are happy to grub at the bottom. You may sink to their predictable feasts. But after such reels, you keep a wide eye above their shrugging shoulders for those shadows dangling freakish meals.

by Joseph William Estlack



Untitled
VaiBionic

Anticipation

One day, I will be young.
I will be supple
and filled with wonder.
Old ladies will pinch my cheek
and offer me unwrapped peppermints
from their purses.
I will eat these without a care.
Maybe I will also get a dog. I hope I do.
We might walk together in the woods
or sit in my room, just the two of us,
and dream our perfect dreams.
One day I will be vapor.
And then stone.
But just for a day, I will be young.
I will count all the stars and forget.
The next day will come.

by Jeff Weddle



Fandango
Sylvia Van Nooten

My Best Guess

So hard to find
the savage child. Window breaker.
Dirt eater. So narrow,
the barefoot path inside.
The fire at the unreachable
center is every hope.
It isn't all there is, but it might be
all that's worth having.
Find out how to be
ragged
and show the world.
Don't worry about angels,
but break open your heart.
Allow everything.
Let everything rise that will.

by Jeff Weddle



Untitled
VaiBionic

Papa

We return to Hemingway for the death,
too much of it, in the beautiful hills,
the bluest sky.

We come back for the poetry
that no one else saw.

Love, too,
which generally failed.

He was beaten up for good causes
and took it and gave back
in double measure.

We find our way to the language
through him
and through the language
to our questing selves.

Those nights we read till daylight
taught the best secrets,
things like the pride of a good bourbon,
the brave bulls, treachery,
the honor of the tribe.

by Jeff Weddle



Untitled
VaiBionic

He Always Painted Himself

out of any picture
that meant anything

to him
to anyone

painting himself
into corners

jumping canvas to canvas
when the paint dried

starting over
nothing (k)new

still searching
for his masterpiece

somewhere
out there

or so
i hear

by J. D. Casey IV



Training to Wait
by Robin Young

Cigarette Daydreams

live tell-a-vision
red hand
blue tattoos

weather report
holiday
wild horses
fallen torches

dire wolf
no time
to die

songs of stone—
age ooh, la, la

aliens
spinning
in daffodils

handing mushrooms
to monkeys

by J. D. Casey IV

Like Mother Like Son

things about her
that we'll never know
we wouldn't
understand

anyway

her psychosis
mirrors mine
but i know
i'm crazy

maybe

she was right
about a few things

... we'll see

by J. D. Casey IV



Looking Up
by Serge Lecomte

Golden Hour

by Derick Delloro

I've always thought the mountains were haunted. Not in a crazy way — just that they're old, older than time. They've been through changes long before we all got here and those changes left a mark just like on anybody. I remember in middle school doing a project about the glacier that made them; it pulled up the east coast around 500 million years ago, which seems like a pretty long time — longer than I can really imagine — and it left all these bumps in the ground and now I live in between a couple of them. They've been here almost forever and you can sense their age at night or on a really cloudy day, a spirit you can feel if you're quiet enough. Countless lives have happened under their watch and when you've seen so many births and so many deaths the stuff that happens in between must not seem all that important.

I've seen a lot of people die too, not as many obviously, but I've seen my share. A pair of eyes staring at you in the back of the rig, one moment they're wide and bright and scared, the next moment they're gone. Everybody always talks about that; how the 'life' leaves their eyes but really, they just stop focusing on anything.

The teacher at my community college would say the nerves stop firing and the muscles around the eyes relax and that makes them just sit there. Eyes aren't really anything but squishy bits and nerves anyway so when you take away their purpose, they don't really have much to them anymore.

I've mostly watched old people die. Not old like the mountains but old like a rusted-out car in someone's front yard. We get a call about somebody collapsing, or having shortness of breath, or seizing and by the time we get to the house or the gas station or the park there's not much left to do. We slide them in the back and I sit by them with all the leads stuck to their chest

and some machine from Bionet gives us the numbers. The numbers are never good so I sit there with them and they stare at me like they're trying to figure something out, like they can almost remember the name of a song or a place they used to visit. Then, quick as rain, they never look at anything ever again.

The first time it happened was hard but there's not much we can do out here for an 80-year-old and you need to put it away somewhere because your boss told you it would happen and it'll happen again. I never really liked Larry, he's a fine boss I guess — he just always talks to me like he grew up in a rig or something, but I know his uncle owns the ambulance company and he probably spent a few months driving for show when he was 20. Life's like that I guess, sometimes people only do things because they know the rest of us are watching.

Most of them I forget, the deaths that is. You'd be amazed at how quickly something like that seems just like taking out the trash when you're around it all the time. It starts to be a part of your life like the snow or traffic. But some stay with you, wake you up in the middle of the night when it's quiet and you can feel things a little more.

We had one call that I keep coming back to: a tall girl who couldn't have been more than 14 or 15. Somebody forgot her insulin on a school trip and her heart had stopped, which I guess can happen with type 1 people. We got there quicker than usual — we knew it was a kid so my partner took a few hard turns — and one of the teachers was doing CPR the best he could. I took over for him and kneeled there for almost an hour giving it all I could.

After a while I felt her ribs breaking underneath my hands but I imagined myself driving the blood through her arteries with every push. I tried to breathe life into her between

compressions and move that life all throughout her body. If the brain goes long enough without oxygen your cells start dying and with them go memories and feelings and all the things that make somebody a real person. Brains are funny like that; they're the most complicated thing in the world but can't last more than 5 minutes without the heart and the lungs. All the amazing things we've done in the past ten thousand years — bread, planes, the Sistine Chapel — depend on a fist-sized pump and a pair of slimy bags. This girl's pump quit on her so I had to be her heart and lungs for as long as I could manage.

It wasn't any use though, sometimes a heart just doesn't want to beat anymore. I never saw her eyes though — she was already mostly dead when we got there — but I remember watching the sweat from my forehead drip onto her nose and wondering how we'd all survived this long, as fragile as we are. I was humming a song in my head, like they told us to do in training so I didn't rush the compressions, but my partner eventually had to pull me off. I shook him the first time he tried but I gave in once my arms went numb.

I don't really get sad but I remember feeling nothing for a while after that call. I still won't drive through Monroe if I can help it, not that there's much to see there anyway.

The rig is an old one, a 90's ford model that makes a clunking sound when you take a tight left. The running board on the back is real dented from a backing up into poles and the 'A' peeled off the front of the cab in the winter, so it says 'MBULANCE' when people look in their rear-views. I'm sure in a city we'd get a citation for that sort of thing but it doesn't really work like that out here in the sticks.

Larry keeps telling us he'll buy a new rig next year but I know he's too cheap for that. We only make \$11 an hour and I

know people at Wendy's make \$11.50 and they never have to scrub blood off their shoes after a shift. Nobody gets into EMS for the money, but it seems like work that's worth paying for. I asked Larry once about it when I was hosing down the rig on a Sunday morning and he asked me if I'd "lost my fuckin' mind". Larry is what my grandma would call a real piece of shit sometimes.

I was a lot like Larry in high school, always jawing at people, puffing up my chest, starting fights, then my uncle died and I got a lot more quiet. They found a tumor on his pancreas — which is apparently one of the worst places for a tumor — and told him he didn't have long to live. They tried chemo but he was stage 4 and it seemed like every other day they were finding more spots in more places around his body. By the end you could see some of them poking out under his skin — either the tumors were so big or he was so skinny, or maybe both. He spent about 3 months in the hospital, two in oncology and one in hospice.

After school I'd borrow somebody's car and drive an hour to Greenfield to see him. I've never been big on father's but my uncle helped out a lot when my mom was struggling and had always been one of the people I could talk to. Seemed the least I could do was keep him company at the end.

He wasn't in a good way, always looking pale, but he managed while I was around. He tried to make a few jokes here and there — naming all the new tumors they found on the scans or talking about which nurses he was flirting with — but towards the end he would just crack a thin smile and ask me to do the talking. Whenever I'd leave to head back to the hills, he'd shoot me a flimsy 'thumbs-up' on my way out. I didn't make it in time to see him die — it takes a while to get down there and by the time somebody called us he was turning fast — but I'm sure it wasn't something he wanted people to see anyway.

A few days after the funeral my guidance counselor finally called me in for the career conversation and asked me what I wanted to do after high school. The future had never been particularly solid for me, more of an outline or an imprint, and I'd never considered much beyond working road crew with some of the guys who'd graduated the year before. But I felt different in a way that was hard to pin down. There was an unfamiliar feeling in my chest when I thought about what might come next, like a space had opened up that needed to be filled. What my guidance counselor might call 'a desire for purpose'.

I mumbled a reply about "something in medicine" and he considered me from behind his square glasses for a moment, like he was trying to make up his mind about something. There was a pause that hung in the air and I twisted uncomfortably in my chair. I wasn't used to people looking at me like they knew me or anything like that.

Finally, he took a deep breath in, blinked his eyes, and opened up one of his drawers. He pulled out a fresh pamphlet for an EMT course over in North Adams and told me it'd be about \$1200 for the certification.

"This might be a good place to start."

It hadn't taken long for my first real bad call. The bad ones aren't always the deaths, those have an ending to them — sometimes the bad ones are the calls that let you see a little too deep into people's lives. The kind of lives that won't end anytime soon.

I had a call early on where I had to Narcan a woman who couldn't have been much older than me. Her kid had called 9-1-1 and knew enough to say that she wasn't breathing any more so we hauled ass to the complex down by Shelburne Falls. The apartment smelled like piss and I had to push my way in because

there were a bunch of clothes piled up right near the front door. As we slid through the opening, I looked around the apartment to assess the situation. They called this 'Scene Size-Up' in training, but really it was just figuring out what the hell we were dealing with.

I spotted her on a gray, worn down sofa — sprawled out like an old blanket on a porch. She'd been out for a little while; her skin was pale and her mouth hung open loosely, the life was gone but when I jammed the nozzle up her nose she started breathing again pretty quickly. When we don't know how long someone's been out, there's no telling what you're going to deal with after they wake up. Maybe they'll be a person and maybe they'll just be a shell from now on, an opening where a person used to be.

Her eyelids fluttered desperately and she started the involuntary gasping and shaking that comes with returning to the world. My partner started giving her a sternal rub to speed the process along and I took her pulse to make sure she didn't code out. As I looked up from my watch, I saw her kid sitting across the room on a busted recliner, watching me with a blank expression on his face. His legs were dangling off the chair, swinging back and forth against the padding like a couple of wind chimes. He had a curiosity that told me he hadn't seen this, but he had seen plenty of other things in his short time on this earth. We looked at each other for a moment, frozen in that moment, and the only thing that moved between the both of us were those two little legs of his. Mace must have needed something because next thing I knew I was helping him load the mom into the back of the rig.

I've had a lot of tough calls but there was something about those little swinging legs of his — like he was watching a movie and it was some other kid's mom that just got yanked back to life. I tried to forget about it, but for some reason I couldn't shake it as easily as some of the other calls. Everything

eventually fades away but this one took a little longer than usual.

Sometimes it feels like all I do is forget. Not a lot of new memories I like thinking about so I try to lock them away somewhere, or just dump them out entirely. I don't really know what to do when I'm off duty to shake the calls but I know everybody's got something. My partner — his name is David but everybody calls him Mace for some reason — he drinks a lot, never on the job but I can tell when he's coming in after a long night and a bad call. People always get a lot sweatier after they've been drinking and Mace comes in looking damp as a dog in a storm some days.

Mace is in his late 20's, old enough to be experienced but too young to be so tired. He's shorter than me but wide set, like a bricklayer or a farmer, and he has these deep blue eyes that always have big puffy bags underneath them, which only make the blues look all that much bluer. Early on he told me his dad was a cop and that he got the EMS training for the academy but realized after a few volunteer calls that he'd rather just be the person with the gurney. It took a while to get him to talk to me about anything, I must have annoyed him — being younger and more than a little talkative at first — but I think he started feeling bad for me after I lost my first one and decided to let me in a little bit more.

I asked him once why he didn't move up — most people in a rig eventually try to become a firefighter or a nurse or something — and he just shook his head and told me this was the only thing he'd ever felt good at so why risk finding out he was bad at something else. I think about that a lot when I'm coming off of a scene, especially a hard one — mainly wondering how Mace knows he's even good at this job when we never get to see anybody get better. Usually what we see is the worst

moment of their life if we're lucky, and the last moment of their life if we're not.

I asked him about this once and he considered it for a bit. Mace didn't rush to words and tended to keep everything 'close to the vest' as my uncle used to say. Finally, after a pause, he took a big breath for dramatic effect and told me the key to this job was feeling the moments when you helped someone and forgetting the moments where you didn't. I knew he was full of shit about that because I'd seen the way he buried his head in his hands after a long shift — when he sits in his car and thinks everybody else has left the parking lot behind the station. Sometimes he'll sit there for 10 or 20 minutes before he finally fires up the engine and heads back to his apartment. Maybe that's just the way it is and you have to feel everything in this job. Maybe that's what we signed up for because somebody has to feel it and it may as well be a couple of thick-headed townies who don't have anything better to do with their lives. Or maybe Mace was tired of me asking stupid questions all the time and finally gave me a stupid answer. Either way, I told him I'd remember that in the future and he seemed glad to be done with the subject.

Mace is the one who pulled me off of that tall girl at the park. He'd managed to clear her classmates from the parking lot, but I could see them watching everything from over near the picnic benches. I don't remember a lot of times in school when everybody was silent but all those kids were *silent*. The kind of unnatural silence that takes real effort to maintain. I realized for the first time since I got on scene that they'd been staring at me the whole time.

I was shaking hard. I'd never really felt like that before; like my insides had fallen through the earth. My arms were

tingling and a deep sense of emptiness began to overwhelm me. Not just empty as a lack of feeling, empty like my body had lost something it might never get back. A donation was handed off before I even realized it, but what happens to the parts you give people after they die? I don't know if you can ever get them back or not — I haven't been able to anyways. Not from my uncle, not from the girl, not from any of the old men who limply hold my hand while they fade into the gurney in the back of the rig. Nobody ever gives anything back after they're gone.

I leaned against a car and slid down to the ground, staring at her from further away for the first time. She had smeared blue eyeshadow that made her look young for trying to look older and her lips were parted slightly and pale from where I'd pressed against them. The eyeshadow had been smeared when my sweat dripped on her and had run down the sides of her temples in two thin streaks. She had dry, blonde hair and her clothing didn't fit quite right — like she'd grown faster than her mom's wallet could follow. Her insulin pump was cracked and blinking.

I felt my insides aching; something was missing, something was gone. Sitting on the ground, I could feel the dirt beneath me, miles of raw minerals holding the weight of everything and nothing at the same time. Dirt that will swallow everyone up and break us down to our separate parts — a cool void under my fingertips filled with bones, and rocks, and shit, and tears. I could see the mountains around me and feel the vastness of history bearing down. Indifferent to this parking lot, to this car, to my shaking hands. Time stretched before me in that moment and I felt the yawning mouth of eternity opening in front of my eyes. The glaciers had ripped through the whole east coast and dragged up the earth in every direction I could see and what they left behind were the mountains. But mountains like these are only a place where the ground used to be; the crests and valleys tracing out what's been lost, what's been hauled

away. My body felt like that too — like all the bumps and ridges were sticking out of me for everyone to admire and all I had left was a faint sense that something used to be there. Something ripped through me too, dragged up my layers and left me exposed. I'm not as old as the mountains but I felt just as worn and somber; disinterested in the lives around me. Maybe the mountains aren't haunted by ghosts, maybe it's just the wayward parts we lose getting caught on their way out. Maybe it's just our imaginations.

“Terrance we gotta load this girl.”

Mace was crouched next to me, shaking my shoulder with one hand. He'd put his back to the students so they couldn't see me so easily. His blue eyes were focused on mine and I felt like I was falling into them like a lake or a cloudless sky. They felt endless, like there was nothing there keeping me from seeing right through him.

“Terrance, I know you're tired but we have to get her to Greenfield... *please*”

This last word came with a hint of desperation and seeing Mace on the verge of something snapped me out of my daze. I nodded silently and leaned forward, shifting my weight onto my feet. My mind had gone quiet and my insides were still a million miles away. Using the car as a support, I got myself up and walked over to the rig to grab the gurney. We'd done this a hundred times before but Mace and I both took a beat longer than normal, pausing after we'd gotten the sheet over her and before we loaded her up. Solemn's not a word I would use to describe our time with the dead, but an unspoken agreement was arrived at in that moment to linger a little longer than usual.

I could see the kids staring at us through the back windows as we pulled away, watching wordlessly, bearing witness to the end of something and the beginning of a very different part of their lives. The gravel made that noise it makes under a tire and the sun had just fallen behind the nearest ridge. We drove down route 2 in silence and when we got near Greenfield Mace turned on the radio and found something familiar. He never really acknowledged it but I know that one hit him too. He came in late the next day smelling like Evan Williams and mumbling something about feeling under the weather. I showed up early — couldn't sleep much anyway and the coffee at the station is free and halfway decent.

Sometimes when I have a day off, I drive to one of the nearby towns and find somewhere quiet where I won't be bothered much. Maybe I'll buy a sandwich or a donut to pick at for a couple hours, finally have an excuse to sit and think. I don't like thinking about my job on days off, but there's not a lot of people to talk to around here and the people my age are usually from one of the local colleges and I'm not sure they'd have much to say to me anyway. Sometimes the thoughts creep in, either as words or as pictures — thoughts about the job, the things they don't teach you how to unload when you're taking the training course. The things that keep nipping at the edges of your mind even after you've showered and made it to bed and you think you're done but instead you just lay there, feeling different than you used to, somehow apart from yourself and how you once were.

When I'm at a lunch place or a coffee shop — or even a bar sometimes when it's later in the day — I try to remember my uncle's face. I try to feel the way I felt with him in that hospital room, talking about life or maybe just sports or nothing really. The time that's passed since then hasn't been long but it has been heavy. It feels dense and cold, like a barbell or a stone at

the bottom of a river. I used to pull up memories in my mind like movies, but now I just feel the distance between myself as I am now and whoever it was that did those things all that time ago.

Distance is a big part of my life now; every call is two towns over, every hospital miles apart, every shift stretches out in front of me like an ocean and every time I close my eyes, I see myself from far away — watching the life fade out of somebody.

Maybe I'll become a paramedic and finally get that pay bump, or maybe a farmer or a writer or something where I never need to go anywhere. I can sit on my porch and watch the sun pass over the mountains and maybe then I'll understand why they make me feel so small. Maybe I could learn something from them about how to last 500 million years while the rivers and the wind and the people grind you down bit by bit, every day. How to stand taller while the chasms open inside you and the clouds break against your edges.



The Raven's Gift
by Linda H. Post

Not An Ode To A Bucket Hat

A bucket hat in the pattern of *Starry Night*
the hero Vincent Van Gogh who deserves
a purple heart yet him wearing that hat
talking of telepathy in a mental institution
playing the piano, claiming he's: "gonna
blow up musically to become a star!" like
the color of the yellow brick road, he
said his piss smelled like bananas (to
make banana bread, to make a banana
smoothie, to eat a banana and all of this
he didn't do) took a pill to create this
scent like a banana like the color of
his urine, and dubstep, stepping over
my boundaries not wanting to know
what is going through his mind unearthed
from reality looking at me with those
possessed eyes under a starless sky.

by Sophia Falco

Gentle Geese

after Mary Oliver

Breaking the surface of my skin.
Like how those geese break the stillness
of the water with their webbed feet.
Whereas it was my own sharp nail from
my own finger.
Attached to my own right hand now pinkish lines.
Streaked across my left forearm the end of a shooting star.
Unable to foreshadow this point in time
that arrived too quickly,
if I start running in my trusty blue
basketball shorts matching jacket *FLY* stitched in
bold white letters, these lines won't just disappear.
Even under the shade of the weeping
willow tree, they would not notice yet
this harm would still be present—
a wise person of nature yet no longer
wise no longer living
up to this name.

by Sophia Falco

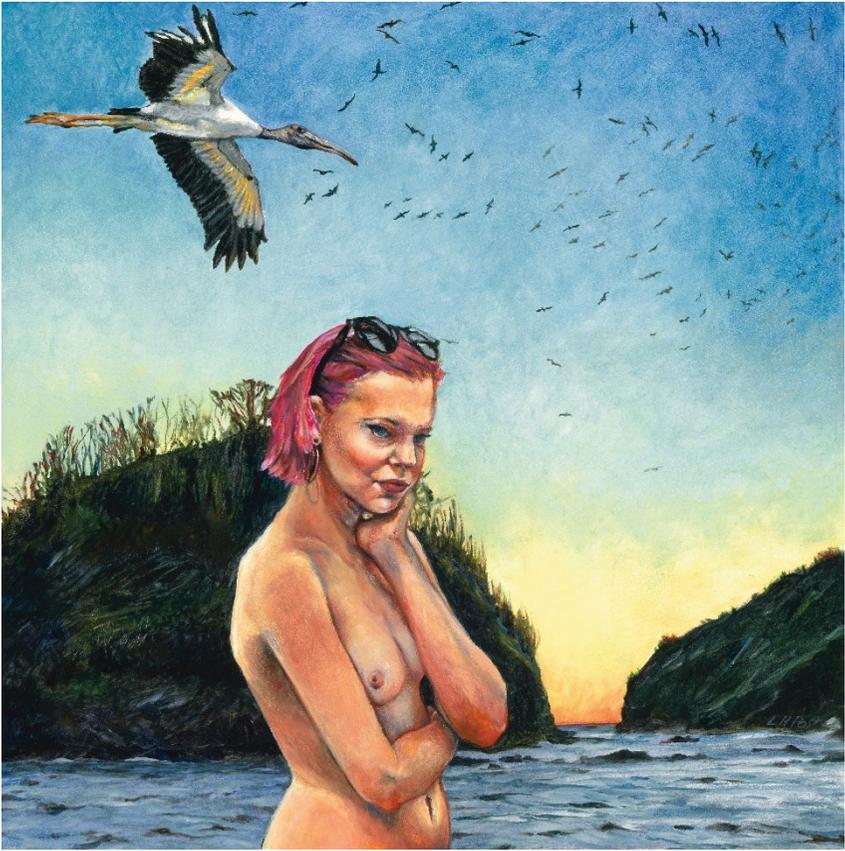


Abandoned Buildings 02
Christopher Paul Brown

Fruit Cup

I wanted to crush the fruit in that tiny white, paper cup lined with plastic to witness the juices ooze and flow out in different colors from the raspberry oh so red the miniscule piece of lemon oh so yellow the blackberry oh so purple (the juice, after each bite, stained her shirt that was white, almost resembling drops of blood the last thing I wanted to be reminded of as she mindlessly continued to pop more one by one into her mouth eating those shiny blackberries straight from the green plastic container not even washed until she felt obliged to offer me one: “Do you want a blackberry?” I politely declined while she was too busy to hear me instead admiring the blue sky and white fluffy clouds passing by lost in make believes too oblivious to recognize my intense gaze off far in the distance at the smoke bellowing from the stacks mirroring the fear rising within my being all to avoid looking at her shirt) a supposed mindfulness exercise 22 minutes examining and tasting; a bunch of disturbed people sitting in a circle as if fruit is the key, and for them it was, and that left me laughing.

by Sophia Falco



Across The Sea of Time
by Linda H. Post

Dating Cacia*

She's perfect, I keep telling myself.
Perfect, perfect, perfect, perfect.

Scalds herself in the shower
until the boiler is screaming.
Wears matches for eyelashes
and gargles a mouthful of petrol.

Neighbours, like my insurance,
self combust whenever she passes.
Sambucas light themselves on fire
in bars, restaurant candles melt
themselves into a hive to escape.

We avoid the coast for holidays
as the sea always spits her out.
She turns pebbles into boiled sweets
and makes hot springs out of rock pools.

Wildfires curl at her feet like dogs.
Echidnas wearing a coppiced forest
on their backs trill whenever Cacia is near.

Cacia can reduce me to a statue of ash
and still I'd say more, more, more.

She's perfect, I keep telling myself.
Perfect, perfect, perfect, perfect.

Such is our love.

*Cacia was a Roman fire goddess

by Christian Ward

Blood

Waking abruptly at 5am
to a nurse impersonating
a vampire bat takes me
back to a box room
and waking every morning
to a bedbug necklace
on my pillow. *Fat little rosehips.*

Was this why the mangy foxes
were so keen? Did they assume
I'd slink back to being radiator-thin,
bleeding to get the excess
out of my plumbing?

Perhaps they'd seen
the bedbugs conspiring against me
and wanted to bank a return,
while I slowly puddled in what little I had left.

by Christian Ward

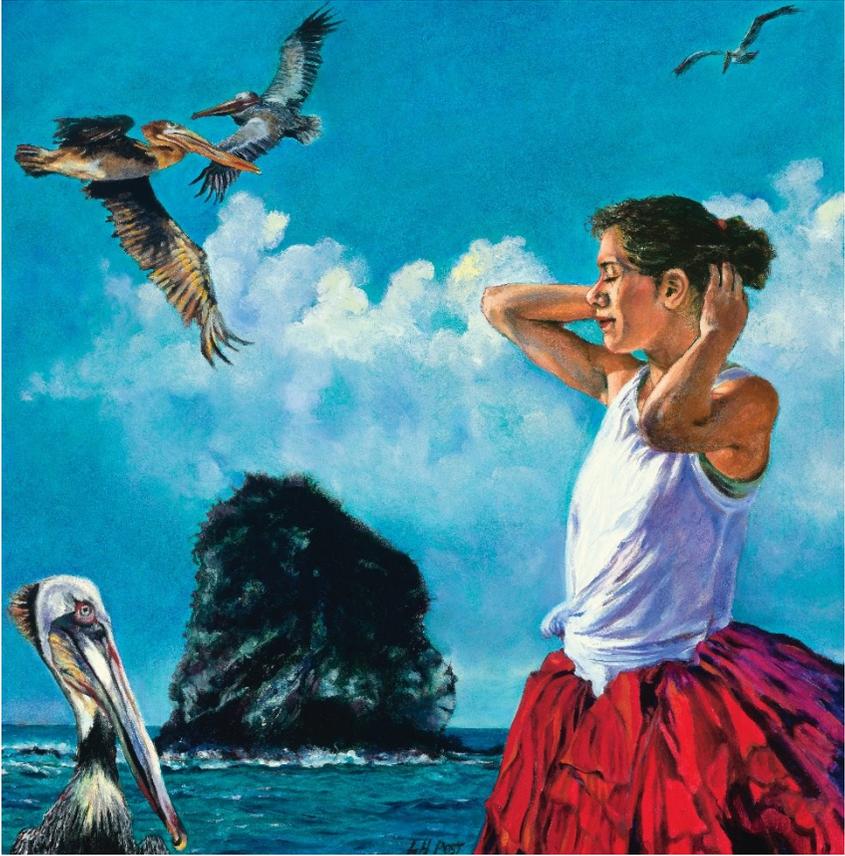


Fledgling
by Linda H. Post

Golden Tortoise Beetle
Charidotella sexpunctata

A diminutive gilded brooch
in a contact lens bubble.
Its scythe mouth shreds
bindweed to nothing.
False ladybird, a pest
to the sweet potato
farmer. While it counts
down the minutes
until the death spray,
you coo behind screens
vulnerable as its shell,
as its bubble.

by Christian Ward



Dance of The Pelicans
by Linda H. Post

BEACHES AND OTHER PLACES TO FALL IN LOVE

People, poets especially
like to romanticise
the beach and the sea
and the waves and the shore
and all that shit

I grew up in a seaside town
and took the beach for granted
a child of divorce
I spent most summers
landlocked in London
and I don't recall
ever missing the sea

People, poets especially
like to romanticise
the beach and the sea
and the waves and the shore
but if you have never
walked barefoot
on a pebble beach
(like the one in my seaside town)
then you do not
truly know
pain

The title of this poem
was a prompt
that I saw on Instagram
I am not normally
inspired by prompts
but this one
piqued my interest

People, poets especially
like to romanticise
the beach and the sea
and the waves and the shore
but sometimes

you take the beach for granted
when you're a stupid kid
then the older you grow
the sea takes a hold
and it won't let you go
and you realise that actually
you never want to live anywhere
that isn't right beside it

People, poets especially
like to romanticise
the beach and the sea
and the waves and the shore
and messages of hope in bottles
lost in the vast and endless ocean
and unexplored labyrinths
beneath furious waves
and lighthouses and gulls
and grand ships bound for foreign lands
and long walks over sandy dunes
holding a lovers' hand in your own
people, poets especially
even me.

by Martin Appleby



Be Tracked 1
by Thomas Riesner

I WAS YOUNG AND BELLIGERENT ONCE

Loud, intoxicated voices
through thin, hollow walls
wake me up at 5am
on a Sunday
no getting back to sleep now
I get angrier with
each passing minute
planning my revenge:
when they pass out
the punk comes on
speakers against the wall
volume on full

They can't just be drunk
there must be
other substances
fuelling this
7am sing along
to *I'm Every Woman*

Their friends finally leave
around 8am
and they go to bed
only for the headboard
to start knocking
inches behind my own
moaning and groaning
as I drink a cup of tea

My anger finally dissipates
and I am more envious
than mad
not because of the sex -
although I could never fuck
after a night on the gear -
but because I was
young and belligerent once
fighting the dawn
no regard for neighbours

no regard for myself

I understand

I get it

so I let it slide

this time

but if it happens again

next weekend

I may not

be so forgiving

by Martin Appleby



Self Appropriation
Sylvia Van Nooten

HALF DRUNK HALF HUNGOVER

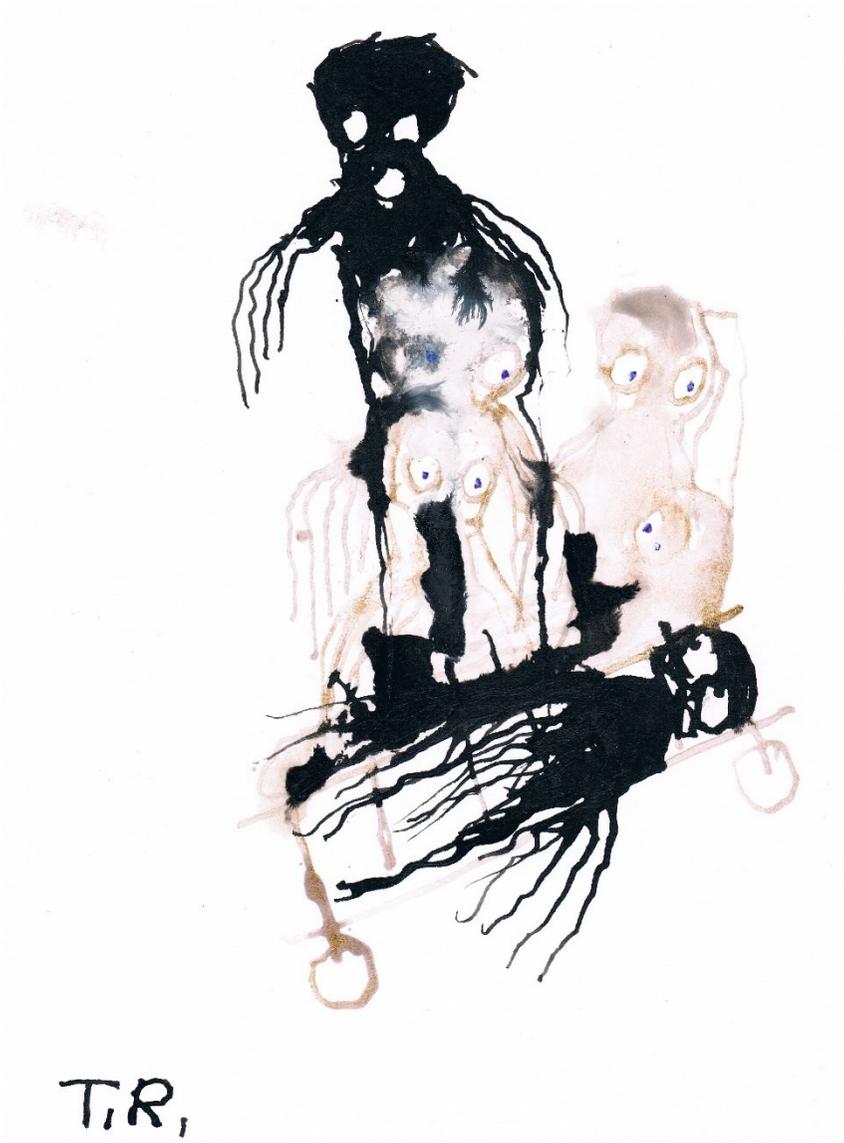
I always have a few projects on the go
at any one time
be it zines, chapbooks, novellas
whatever
a pile of half read books
always unfinished
a house that needs a lot of work
and TLC
and I never have enough time
to get everything done
as quickly
as I would like to
or sometimes at all

but this weekend
I got more done in one fully sober weekend
the half drunk half hungover
weekends in the previous month combined

Maybe I should just quit drinking
and focus my time and energy
on being productive
and getting shit done

but then again
if I was sober all of the time
maybe
I'd be on top of all of my projects
and read more books
and have a nicer home
and more money
and be healthier
and blah blah blah
but what would I write poems about?!

by Martin Appleby



Be Tracked 2
by Thomas Riesner

Division

it didn't trickle down
for the children of
Isaac and Abraham
slapping mud
on pharaoh's straw

it didn't trickle down
for Arawaks digging gold
on Hispaniola or the mill
workers of Lowell MA
or Chinese laborers of the
Central Pacific
Railroad

it didn't trickle down
for Denmark Vesey or
Nat Turner or the unsmiling
girls on the 8th floor of the
Triangle Shirtwaist Factory

not for Louis Tikas or
Mary Valdez clubbed and
burned by Rockefeller
and the Baldwin-Felts boys
the morning after Easter

it didn't trickle down
from Jay Gould or
JP Morgan or Soros
or Gates to legless
veterans in alleys
trading blood for soup

no Mohawk
saw it overtop
landfills of
dead salmon
and radioisotopes

no son of Victorio
plucked corn pollen
from its prefabs
and satellite dishes

but on and on it went
decade after decade
compounding into zeros
and summer homes

a puddle of riches
separating into
smug dry curds
and simmering whey

trickle by trickle

by Doug May

Smart Phone

she tells me
I will be left
on an island
naked and
hungry

if I don't learn
how to use it.

but that's where
I've always lived.

beneath a stunted
palm tree

watching tattered
rudderless sails
spin legacies
of fog

into legends of
Arrival.

by Doug May



Gone With The Wind
by Robbi Bryant

She Fell Hard

She fell hard for the tattoo artist

though his tool drew blood.

His velvet touch pricked her heart,

his words needled her to tears.

She pointed at him

{L}{L}
{SEP}with painted nails

{L}{L}
{SEP}and offered him her bed.

{L}{L}
{SEP}He slept alone

on a bed of nails.

{L}{L}
{SEP}Eschewing her blueberry pancakes,

the artist swallowed a fish skeleton whole,

licked her lips

and inked them blue.

{L}{L}
{SEP}She bought him thirteen ambrosial

previously-red roses,

now drained of color like her cheeks.

Biting the heads off,

she wrapped the thorns lovingly

with cardinal feathers.

A speck of crimson from her thorn-torn lips

balanced on the point of a torn thorn.

She was prickled pink.

by Debbie Fox

Sonnet 18

by William Shakespeare

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?

Not until the bluebirds stop smashing into my window.

Shall I compare you to a tasty Brazil nut?

Nope. The Russian nut is my favourite, busy Putin on the Ritz.

Using Dark Energy, drones have dimmed all the visible stars plus the sun.

The competitive Dark Matter tries, but fails, to make sun bright.

Nor shall death brag as thou wander'st in the sun. Don't forget your sunscreen.

So long as you can breathe or eyes can see, so long lives winter,
while Asteroids and Comets flee.

Pertinacious, I disagree.

by Debbie Fox

SHUFFLE

Having lost her only child
Hope
She was bereft.
Nothing to do but mope.

Her boyfriend
a dope
dealer kept her
rolling in dough.

She chose to knead it,
bake a few cookies
and mope.

Nope, he admonished.
It's not what happens
It's how you react.

She stabbed him
with a blade
of grass.

He rolled is eyes.
She wasn't very sharp.

Forget hope! Forget strife!
Shuffle the deck!
Rearrange your life!

Rearranging
his love letters
around the stove's burner
she turned the heat
past Maximum to
Hotter
Than
Sex.
All reduced to ashes.

Hope is gone! He screamed
on the way out.
So is John! she shrieked.
You're toast in the bon
fire.

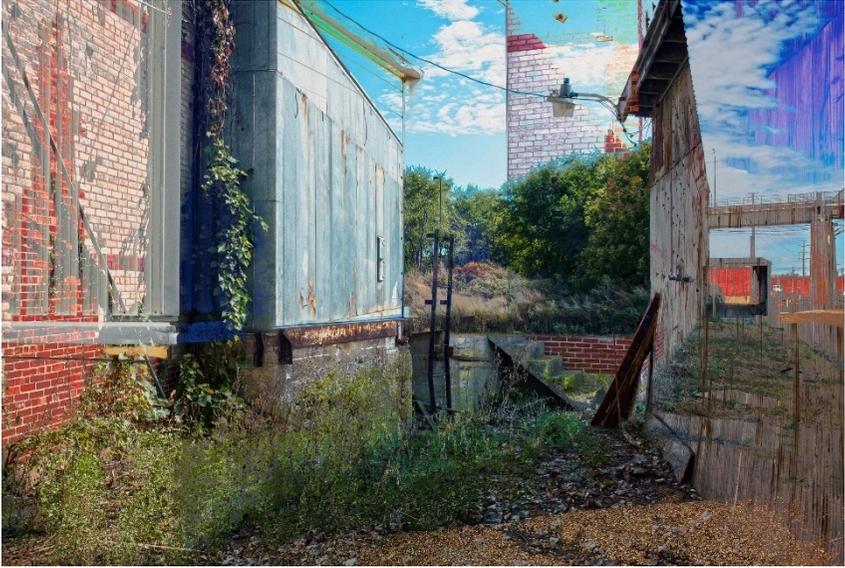
Alone
with her hardscrabble life,
playing thought-Scrabble
as his relentless words

ricoched
around her skull.

Shuffling the letters on
the imaginary board
that held the wearisome word
m o p e,
she watched it miraculously mutate
into the erudite
p o e m,
like a tadpole growing legs.

Nevertheless she scored no extra points.
The valuable letters were all missing.
She had no Q
She had no Z
and she had
clearly
misplaced
her
ex-

by Debbie Fox



Abandoned Buildings 03
Christopher Paul Brown

The Poets

populating
glittering waves
and chocolate beige
headlands

they congregate
by the thousands

each an island
ruled by
the sterile egg
of mystery.

they never
asked to be rich
or loved

so don't feed them
through the bars
so you can puff up
your chests.

they tried to reel in
the fickle moon
with a metronome
and a mask

give them your
patience

your alleys winding
between pillars
bound in gauze.

by Doug May



The Giving Tree
by Robbi Bryant

Keepsake Peace, Flour and Water, Ukraine

by the front hall door it sat
years after they had all grown
the cardboard box gone floppy
where the creaky sun spied through
the plaster of paris flaky
the kindergarten crinkled cellophane
over the heavy acrylics of hands
toddler signatures
slow printed joy
the stretching crayon wiggly names
days waiting to expand
and if we had collected them all
the host of us parents
wanting only a life of happiness
for them then and who they become
if we took out the snotty glue
covered over the maps of countries
making boundaries of palm
and reaching stubby fingers
if we wrapped the fighter planes
the missiles wobbly weighed down
turned the ships to papier mâché
brushed our sticky way to the rims
where their lives converged
in thumbs and names and falling down
our donations passing willingness
every child these our own
held through the night terrors
each told there are no monsters here
we can push down the edges
just like this together, see

by James Walton



Abandoned Buildings 04
Christopher Paul Brown

New Year

There you are
In a barrage of dry lightning
This disdain of fireworks
Makes crackling of our skin
For two days you promise
Such foolish cares
I put water out for the dizzy birds
Make contact with the roofer
Get the final gas bill
You are true to your word
No rain is released here
Yet suburbs dowse in ruin
Hailstones make spittle of vegetables
Grapes are crushed by icy venom
I sleep with the ceiling fan
Inland the driest towns flood
Fish memories are stirred
Desert frogs find the surface
There is a scrabble out of buried worlds
An offer on the wind
A fall of fifteen degrees
It is too early for people
A streetscape of silent episodes
Hunkers in relief
Then your touch gentle in a child's hand
Behind the glare after all
Those speckles drib their drab
Turn solid to spheres
By coincidence I shaved
To feel this showering salve of new year

by James Walton



Imagining Agape
Sylvia Van Nooten

Gentle in pause

the last sorrow is spent
no coin remains

the sea fog departs
left in salt
that lachrymose gift

your parting wish
hydrangea petals
confetti the gravel

their gentle spirit
a rainbow iced
shy out of dawn

prayers lost for melody
a hymn to make

by James Walton



In No Hurry To Go Home
by Robbi Bryant

CROSSED WIRES

I.

Your voice to this day drapes over me laconic,
limp as phone wires looping cottonmouth bayous,
bonelessly Southern as your arm drooping
from a faded-to-pink pickup truck's window, bouncing
as the dead shocks pounce over the gravel road
to your Bull Shoals lakehouse, dashboard rattling,
a St. Christopher medallion fiercely clanging
glass, another Protestant angling for Rome's rear mirrors.

We clatter on through loblolly hem-stitched by dogwood,
redbud, curtains of kudzu thick as Miz Ellen's portieres,
me envying your effortless shift driving the stick.
(Everyone I've ever loved shifts instinctively, without care.
I tell you I like smoother trips, strictly automatic.)

We park on pine needles, rush the dock, splash in.
An epicurean fish bit, I howled, tried to bite him back.
"Don't be a backbiter, babe. It's against God," you punned,
shoulders so large in laughter they blotted the sun.
You gunned the boat at sundown. I skied so long, unslacking,
I almost peed myself, but held the line and never fell.

You, laughing, steering me over my own wake, cheering,
finally got bored with my show, and let out a Rebel yell:
"Let go!" When I didn't, "Goddamn it, **now**, let go!"
I did, then, and learned that lakes, like seas, harbor undertows.

II.

We had some summers together, but this was *that* one,
time of your late blooming. I gazed at you, wondered
where those new parts came from. You stood on long thin
legs then, heronlike. I was jealous of lakewater sluicing skin.
You'd sought me out, I ignorantly misread your attention,
but you trapped mine, that summer when you first glistened.

I saw your arms then the way Prufrock did, nervously,
saw them like Sandburg scanning for his sublime

Girl of a Dream, "with her slim, expressive arms."
My eyes intentioned downward, shamed, a dawdling gaze,
cast themselves groundward, out of harm's and blame's way.
Your breasts, a full frontal assault on all I'd been taught.
I was old enough to know my pulse was volitional, my fault.

III.

We would roll down hills, punching, screaming obscenities,
gripping collars and hurling away each other's car keys.
I wrestled you and an old wrought-iron chair once into the pool
while you were slapping me and snatching for my hair.
Afterward, we lay on the cool concrete gliding into laughter
like a brand new engine hurtling down Reservoir Road,
play-slapping, tickling, poking, colliding full force with
the espionage of our freighted adolescent tensions.

17 is a brutal age for busying our bodies, working our nerves.
Out of spite, I slept with a pock-marked boy without your curves,
your legs, arms, O Girl of a Dream, the very day you turned 18.

IV.

Yes, there were the winters, too, with unlikely furtive snow
blowing frivolous havoc over baffled, dazzled Arkansas.
They shut school down, and we were blissfully dismissed.

Fast-flying surprises kissed, blessed the noiseless pines.
My car's tires were bald, traffic was stalled on main roads,
so I routed us to an old rough for logging, long abandoned.
We were sliding and slogging our derelict lone load
straight up a red-clay hill slickened to a fine sheen with snow.

Tires spun, the engine ground sickeningly, grudgingly whined.
You put your hand over mine and said, "Gear down, babe.
Just gear down." And engine groaning, we made it home.

You had my attention, that early winter when we were 17,
held all my senses in awed suspension like my transmission
trying to hold its place on a snow-covered path with ditches

on either side. I kept my body tightly coiled in your presence,
suspicious, reticent, spine stiff, sensors up, dejected pride erect.

V.

Last week you made a call to me that I didn't return.
It is true, we used to fall asleep with our lines open wide
from Missouri to New Orleans, playing Jeckyl and Hide
and seek, cat and mouse, in Old Ma Bell's hot-wired house.
I kicked a lover out of my place once, for your weekend visit.
She never came back, and at the last minute you didn't
show. That still didn't end our intractable argument, did it?

You called of course when I let any flavor du jour move in.
Brave women, to walk right through your palpable shadow,
I'll grant them that. They ended in outrage, as you know.
Your shifting faith didn't instill in me a predilection to nuns.
You, "of all people," shouldn't ask me why I married one.

As I inventory our 40-year quarrel, I watch my son,
with his first crush on his sixth-grade Lolita down our block.
He rushes to help load the boxes to her dad's moving truck.
As he turned I thought I'd capture a pensive grief.
Instead, his shoulders, eyes bore the insignia of relief.

I realize him in me, disinclined to recall fugitive footfalls
in abandoned halls. I turn my back a final time, when I leave a love,
don't look twice or behind much. I will always leave like I am 17,
scanning the exits, plotting my proximity to the nearest dock

when I let go, watching out for glitches in the steering,
dodging the flytrap ditches. I always scan for a safe off-ramp,
check the grade of the incline. Then I just let go of the line,
take the wake, just as you taught me, and I gear down hard.

by Pamela Sumners

MEDITATIONS ON Roe v. Wade's DEATH and MY PARENTS' BATHROOM SCROLLS (WITH BONUS BLACK-LETTER LAW CONCORDANCE ATTACHED!)

1.

My parents had 1970s teenagers. They slogged over the shag carpet and Cora had midi-skirts like Mary Tyler Moore and Walt had Razorback-red leisure suits and some plaid '60s holdover jackets, a few "sports shirts" that didn't have any football team logos on them because that's not what sports shirts meant then. And they had a lot of bathrooms with fleur-de-lis flocked wallpaper that was gold in one bathroom and sexy-devil-you red and black in the one with the tub that had a whirlpool apparatus on it (that special "Cora one" kids weren't supposed to use).

2.

In the gold bath, Cora, to reassure blustery salesman Walt, prone to oh so red cheeks and fits of congestive temper at older men "controlling him" and younger ones who went to college (or sent "sonsabitches" there), placed the anthem of the '70s, "The Desiderata," in one of those hip gold frames (with black spots) that often housed urchins with abnormal chins playing the strings.

We read: "If you compare yourself with others, you may become vain and bitter, for there will always be greater & lesser persons than yourself." Yet it offered assurance as well as further cautions, a salesman's ointment without the fly: "Keep interested in your career, however humble; it is a real possession in the changing fortunes of time. Exercise caution in your business affairs; for the world is full of trickery." Horoscope, fortune cookie, shitter tarot.

3.

In the devil's red-flocked bathroom hung the quaint lady-friendly observations of pastor Matthew Henry, way back in the 1700s: "The woman was made of a rib out of the side of Adam; not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected and near his heart to be beloved." I guessed Cora favored the man-arm umbrella to raising her girls alone.

4. (A whole lotta years later)

Some busybody named Sam—nice, comfortable, have a beer with you, chummy Sam—never read my parents' bathroom walls. They didn't say "For a good time call." They were promiscuous only with advice, spewing it all around, with no prophylactic retraction. Sam, though, prefers orders to advice. So he sat down with the Apostles to rewrite the Constitution.

A couple of them (well, mainly big-mouthed Paul) got het up on the idea that a judge named Matthew Hale, who ordered witches burned, said men couldn't rape wives (that whole flesh of one flesh, two-fer rib dinner, *sans* sissy-ass coddling Matt Henry's "equal," protective, "beloved" horseshit),

and decreed abortion murder. So it made sense Matt Hale should come back Lazarus-like from 1763 to 2022 to tell us Matthew Henry and my entire gold-flocked bathroom of benevolent paternalism was wrong because it also just so happened that (apropos of nothing) back in 1867, ¾ of the states participating in Our Federalism said abortion was a crime so it can't be

“deeply rooted in this Nation’s history and traditions,” which makes even more sense like the way you can’t ride a streetcar while Black in 1896 and you can’t be a citizen while Black in 1857 and you can’t fight for “this Nation’s history and traditions” in 1940 some-odd because you might be in an internment camp and you may be so yellow you cannot even be considered a race entitled to deep roots here, or you might be some 1837 broad in Illinois who wants to go to law school who’d just throw her ovaries out in the wilting sun by applying and anyway you’re s’posed to be home being untrampled, protected, beloved and not out there interested in your career, however humble.

5.

Plessy, Dred Scott, Korematsu, Chae Chan Ping, Bradwell, Bowers, Al Gore, you’re just not deeply rooted enough to wrap yourselves in Our Flag. Hey, do y’all need an aspirin? Smelling salts? A nice cool, segregated Pullman car for some of you to rest your little heads now? Has that train left?

Oh, peace, be still. “Go quietly amid the noise and haste,” as a know-it-all wall would say. It’s just never too late to be happy. For all the single and other ladies, I twerk unto you this, advice from the sacred gold-flocked bathroom parchments of the 1970s, sweet as the baby powder you might have massaged into your hair to make you look blonder (because that’s best, isn’t it? Like Jesus), the Scripture of the Desiderata: “With all its sham, drudgery & broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world. Be careful. Try to be happy.”

Please try to be happy, Sweeties. Our “ordered liberty” depends on it.

***COMPLETELY UNBIASED, IMPARTIAL AND VERY SCHOLARLY CONCORDANCE ACCOMPANYING MY ORDERLY POEM:**

“The Desiderata” is a prose poem by Max Ehremann, circa 1927. The tale of how he failed to heed his own advice about trickery is related in the history of his lost copyright. See Wikipedia—just look it up there. It’s easier than getting web-mobbed by Amazon ads hawking bathroom copies of the thing. You can’t get it from my parents’ 1970s bathroom walls any more, sadly.

Matthew Henry’s gold-flocked quote appears in an 18th Century sermon reprinted in *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible* (1706). Since he lived from 1662-

1714, he was a baby when “Other Matthew” Hale was fulminating about abortion and other things women did that he didn’t like.

Matthew Hale is cited nine times in Justice Samuel Alito’s “draft” opinion in *Dobbs* (overruling *Roe v. Wade*). (For short reference, you can call the opinion the Book of Samuel). Hale ordered two “witches” burned in England and is believed to have provided the model for the colonial Salem Witch Trials in so doing. He also decreed, as the Grand Poobah of English common law, that married women couldn’t be raped by their husbands because of that whole rib/one flesh thing, a view that was accepted in American law until almost the 21st Century (in other words, “deeply rooted in [our] history and tradition”). The draft opinion, in the glory of its leaked form, can be found in full text as *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Org., et al.* (No. 19-1392) (May 3, 2022) (Alito, J.) For discussion of Sam’s reliance on St. Matthew Hale in his 6-3 opinion (yes, “I write separately” concurrences and “I concur in the judgment,” which will appear later, count as Sam’s votes), see generally “Antiabortion Inspiration: A 17th Century Jurist Who Supported Marital Rape and Had Women Executed,” *Vanity Fair* (May 3, 2022), [vanityfair.com/news/2022/05/samuel-alito-roe-v-wade-abortion-draft](https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2022/05/samuel-alito-roe-v-wade-abortion-draft).

Where Samuel Alito’s legal reasoning in *Dobbs* came from also gave us these rulings: *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896) (6-3 decision) (“If the civil and political rights of both [black and white] be equal, one cannot be inferior to the other civilly or politically. If one race [clue: THE BLACK ONE] be inferior to the other socially, the Constitution of the United States cannot put them on the same plane”) (proclaiming “separate but equal doctrine” that would endure until 1954 *Brown v. Board* decision); *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, 60 U.S. 310 (1857) (7-1 decision) (Dred Scott had been moved to a “free state” by white master, whose widow unfortunately wanted to continue to own Mr. Scott; Court ruled Scott was never a “citizen” under the U.S. Constitution, with “no rights which the white man [is] bound to respect” because his race “had for more than a century before been regarded as . . . an inferior order”) (Scott subsequently purchased by white man who manumitted him and lived one year as an adjudicated free man); *Korematsu v. United States*, 323 U.S. 214 (1944) (6-3 decision) (former KKK member Justice Hugo Black opined that it is “unjustifiable to call America’s [World War II Japanese] internment camps ‘concentration camps,’ with all the ugly connotations that term implies”; upholds internment camps on national security grounds); *Chae Chan Ping v. United States*, 130 U.S. 581 (1889) (unanimous decision) (allowing Congress, in violation of a treaty, to prevent Chinese immigrant who had lived in U.S for 12 years from re-entering U.S. after visiting family in China, on grounds that “foreigners of a different race in this country, who will not assimilate with us” can be “dangerous”); *Bradwell v. Illinois*, 23 U.S. 130 (1873) (8-1 decision) (ovarian-Americans can’t practice law because “[t]he paramount destiny and mission of woman [is] to fulfill the noble and benign office of wife and mother”) (Bradley, J. concurring) (noting “respective spheres of man and woman,” with women being wives and mothers “in accordance with the law of the Creator”) (Chase, C.J. dissented without opinion because he was dying); *Bowers v. Hardwick*, 478 U.S. 186 (1987) (5-4 decision) (consensual, adult homosexual sodomy not “deeply rooted in this nation’s history and tradition” or “implicit in the concept of ordered liberty” in English

common law and thus outlawed by all the states until pesky Illinois struck its sodomy prohibition in 1961; Illinois is an outlier, so *there*, says Court); *overruled*, *Lawrence v. Texas*, 539 U.S. 558 (2003) (6-3 decision) (dissenters still citing “deeply rooted” and “ordered liberty” concepts); *Bush v. Gore* (per curiam, a fancy way of saying no one really wants to sign this and don’t cite this in any other case) (5-4, numerous concurrences, concurrences in part) (stopping Florida’s recount in 2000 election and effectively proving that Supreme Court Justices aren’t umpires but are rounding the plate to hand the presidency to George W. Bush because George is a common name for presidents and also because Justice Scalia worried that paper ballots might degrade during a recount that he just voted to forbid).

Compare these decisions to Apostle Sam’s draft reasoning in *Dobbs*: (1) *Roe* once cited “irrelevant” cases from antiquity to rationalize the constitutionality of abortion, whereas a modern “26 states have asked” the Apostles to overrule *Roe v. Wade*, and moreover, in 1867, ¾ of the states criminalized abortion (and by extension, since the 14th Amendment extends protection to freed male slaves only, nothing there can be textually applied to shameful lady parts and what ladies shamefully do with their shameful parts), plus Apostle Sam is mad that he was once overruled in thinking that a husband could veto his rib’s decision to have an abortion (undisclosed in *Dobbs* because Justice/Apostle motives are pure as their reasoning)); (2) the structure of this opinion looks exactly like the structure of that gay-hating *Bowers* case that was overruled within 20 years and even resurrects its fun phrases about “deeply rooted” and “implicit in the concept of ordered liberty” but only liberal law professors will notice; (3) *Roe* was “egregiously wrong from the start” but the decision in *Dobbs* is not like the “unprincipled” *Lochner* Supreme Court that gave FDR hell about his labor reforms because *that* Court just had no respect for history; (4) we can’t cite St. Paul’s “Two Corinthians” about that whole better to marry than to burn thing, and we can’t cite that letter to Timothy about that whole “suffereth not a woman to teach” thing because this is a judicial opinion in a secular republic and we already said too many of the quiet parts out loud; (5) this whole “right to be let alone” thing is tiresome, so we overrule all dissents, too, especially that one based on Oliver Wendell Holmes’ 1897 article where that misguided imbecile wrote, “It is revolting to have no other reason for a rule of law than so it was laid down in the time of Henry IV. It is still more revolting if the grounds upon which it was laid down have vanished long since, and the rule simply persists from blind imitation of the past”; (6) six of us like sock hops and shamalamalama ding dong with the ding dong in its orderly tabletop place, where you can buy a malted for your best girl on a Saturday night Scoobydoobydoo but we can’t say that quiet part out loud in this our constitutional “republic, madam, if you can keep it.” (Tricornet hat tip to Ben Franklin.)

by Pamela Sumners



untitled
Robin Young

SAWDUST AND SORGHUM

Grandpa Potter stood 6 foot 4 and wore a left-side eyepatch, from when the sawmill at Brasfield had put out most of the eye. The mill burned after that when a spark caught piled sawdust in oil.

Grandpa Potter had Lava soap that came in a red wrapper but was black as coal. It had rough specks in it, for coaxing motor oil off his hands from the little lawnmower repair business he set up in his termite-infested shed. He carved a little wood there, too, a Nativity set for the colorless corrugated-stockinged wife Mary, that he called Skinner, just like he called his kids mostly names they weren't blessed under: Barbara "Bo," Thelma "Sister," Cora "Corinne." Lem C he called Bunkum, and one son he named entirely initials, R.C.

That was his whole name, but a teacher changed the school records to *Robert Charles*, with a curt note about the name making the man. Grandpa Potter took an RC Cola with peanuts and a Goody powder packet dissolved in the bottle and proclaimed "R.C.'s not a fancy boy. He's just like his Daddy. His folks are plain." Once I thought to help out by sweeping the sawdust into a pile. He waved me off, said let it be to catch the dripped oil where it fell.

His hair was a combover thatch and he was skinny as the Rebar rods he used to prop his summer plants. He stood in his garden of beans, maters, purple hull peas like a farmer pirate, with a crew of grandkids whose hands were smeared as purple as his were black. All of us, he called simply "Peckerweed." At Christmas every year we all got silver dollars that we were supposed to save. I spent Kennedy's face on baseball bat taffy suckers, atomic bomb jawbreakers, banana Now 'n Laters instead. My cousins, part of that generation of thankless vipers, no doubt did the same. We didn't get any more after the Christmas robbers came.

Anxious to return to him some treasure, we took him to his boyhood home on Sand Mountain, just outside Scottsboro. He thrust his cracked fingers into that trip, and there was no sawdust there, just pure brown sorghum, sweetly clinging to his childhood hands as solid as flesh.

by Pamela Sumners



Dream Journey
by Robbi Bryant

Trigger

The disciples of male enhancement wear ladies' hats while working outdoors. In their gardens of political slogans, stakes of peevishness meant for tomatoes uphold hyperbole. The public square is a perfect site for mucus and a little blood, ethnic ethos all over their placards, anger finetuned for a sales pitch. Their legs go dark as though standing in fire; their pupils melt like chocolate snacks. Weekly they cannibalize their god, finger the text embellished by John of Patmos who abraded the very sky and summoned creatures of Fahrenheit. Much like a terrestrial empire, they claim more space for a golf course. Their long guns have lost all memory of pelts. Willing to die for a cause befitting a license plate, they die of cancer, but not the kind they thought they had.

by Alan Elyshevitz

Acolyte

Teach me
the unwinding of ethics you do,
the updated sermons on palimpsests,
the pithy verses repackaged for politics.
Teach me
appeal. How to fund a deity who operates
according to referenda. Where to situate
angels who reveal themselves for gratuities.
Teach me
your stagecraft. How to shuck and instruct.
How to frontload a follower's tendentious
will with the revulsion of anti-prayer.
Teach me
the beeline of fabrications that argues
for crossing guards and post office clerks
as agents of Satan to be subdued by force.
Teach me
to sound out militant hoofbeats. Identify
what banners to fly, what caps to wear
on that terminal day, the hour of pulverization.

by Alan Elyshevitz



untitled
Robin Young

Domestic Disturbance

Now that I lack an occupation, I wreck things,
for example, the enchanted morning before
the trash compressor and the sky's meringue
at sunrise. I wreck them with my showerhead,
my tights socks, my coffee-tasting mindfulness
and enlist the meretricious voice of dawn tv.

All day I annihilate the day. My dog abhors a vacuum
cleaner, its anti-power, its noise without a face. My cat
detects the spirit world in a blithe corner of the bedroom.
In good time I atomize an hour in a sinkful of detergent.
I administer the uselessness of daily mail. Little by little
I dismantle the ghostly shadow of the sun's arcade.

The dog naps in its private container. The cat spirals,
exhuming a toy mouse from a solitude of its own.

by Alan Elyshevitz



Bubblusion
by Alan Bern

Awake!

Insomnia craves attention
so I decide to stop
nursing the beast

I select a random novel
and I read
until the last line is drained.

Then I seek the next mind-stroking thing -
a cylinder of colorful pencils
held together by string.

A blank sheet stares
with its blazing glare
waiting for something to happen.

A searing wakefulness wants
to be extinguished, so
I pull the blackest pencil from the bundle

and press wide swooping lines
onto yielding paper
straining to crisscross

curving lines
into soothing tangles.
Soon my mind goes slack

and my hand wields the pencil
and I watch as it turns
inward and wide

overlapping circles take charge
and the paper is no longer blank.
Soon it bears the outline of a skull

and the pencil enjoys this mind of its own
and the skull splits into circles,
eye sockets in need of manic pupils

and the pencil complies
and the pupils in sockets require
a caged mouth

because the emerging face feels
trapped in this prison of wakefulness
and more strokes sweep angrily this time.

I sweep aside the pieces
and pick up blue to pour
cobalt night around the face

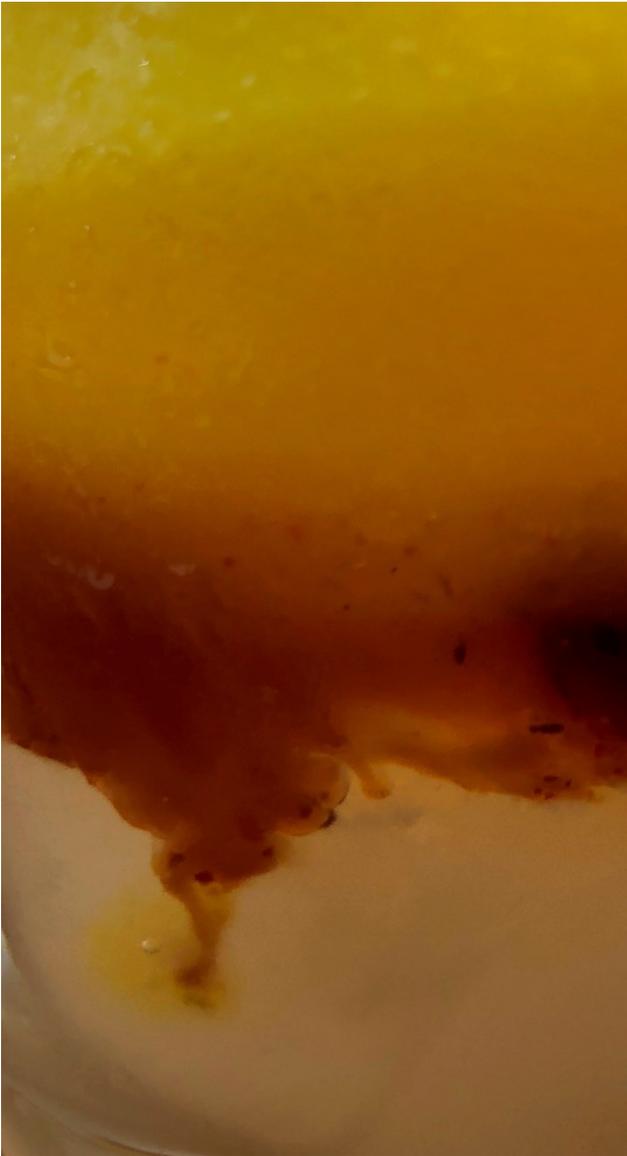
and then green
and purple and pink
and soon the rainbow of colors

insulate the night
and the pencils continue the dance until --
a visage smiles

It's daybreak when the last worn-down
pencil
drops from my fist and my head drops onto
my colorful creation

to greet
sleep as it arrives
grinning

by Josephine Pino



oh emulsions
by Alan Bern

Campground Audacity

The audacity of the osprey,
predator eyes on
tent top triangles -
she wonders
how might it feel to be
grounded, forever dependent
on the horror of fire

The audacity of the grasses,
clinging mussel-like,
root hairs biomimicking
byssal threads as
fresh water waves threaten but
don't succeed in
sending them downstream
where the fin-less bipeds play.

The audacity of the fir-children,
roots latched amidst
bright orange moss,
feeding on sporophyte corpses,
as death spills
upside down shadows upon
blackened armies of ghosts.

The audacity of the cedar
that continues to reach
for the sky with needly fingers
pushing through trauma of memory.
A heart eaten by fire,
a fire that left behind nothing
but decorated hollow.

The audacity of the black squirrel
staring at the picnic lunch, born to
a cheeky mother that
escaped fire with opportunistic
glee, knowing her children would blend in
among fallen tree ash,
fearless of keen eye predators.

The audacity of the singed
as they continue standing,
humming their defiant
tune at twilight,
whistling against the hot breeze
that blows beneath the perch of
she who watches, head swiveling
a steady side- to -side, wings lifting
for a tepid rush of air,

then dropping down again.
They all await the return of balance.
The audacity of the woman at campsite 10 who stares obtusely
at the osprey sitting on her throne.
The woman scowls at the diligent squirrel
collecting sustenance for its babes,
and at the sharp little trees
that suckle at their embryonic stores.
But especially audacious is her assumption
that it is ok to bat away
the beetle that was en route
to the ground and landed
on her hat.

by Josephine Pino

Grains of Stone

“...airborne coccoliths may play an important role in cloud formation above the oceans, the researchers report today in iScience. In large numbers, the tiny particles provide a lot of surface area on which water vapor can condense to form droplets, they say.” --Sid Perkins, “Science” 2018

Your name is *coccolith* because you resemble grains of stones.
Accepting sunlight you parcel carbon, link it in chains, weave
concentric circles of chalk. Calcium kisses carbonate guarding anabolic
highways and loops, grouted in air. Seas battered by wind sacrifice
spray against her blows. Atoms draw together in blind obedience.
Hydrogen braces oxygen as entropy falls. Coccolith shatter - a spherical
circus, ripped, entwined ‘round death you ascend lifted upon mist.
What a miracle it is to find purpose in the world of the living, giving
gentle molecules a place to land, to find each other, and thus you
quench our thirst with oceans.

by Josephine Pino

Calculus of the Heart

Find the infinite points between our
beginnings and our ends.
Follow the slope of my
exhalations as your digits
calculate the limits of me.

Let my prisms
untangle the hues
of your elation and turn
yourself over to
mirrored infinity.

Uncover derivative melody
as our hands
meet to discover
misaligned palm lines.

We

hover at the origin, crawl

along axes of memories,
accelerate
across time, always approaching,
forever arriving.

by Josephine Pino

One Night

one night,
you will lie with me in a bed we do not recognize
and trace the skin of my calf.
you'll ask why i got that year tattooed –
and i'll tell you.
you'll roll your eyes,
hide a half-smile,
and press my flesh hard like kneading dough
to watch your fingerprints indent, then rise.
and i'll hope the mark will stay.

eventually you'll ask how long it's been
since i last saw your face.
and i'll stare at you
because we both know the answer
and it's only two words
neither will say.

but we'll kiss and bite and play
and i'll pretend i'm not begging for you to stay
this time.
the stars will cast pixie dust
on hotel carpet and city skies.
i'll feel like a filled cavity –

sore and aching from the satiated wound.

for now, i imagine a bus
like a train across europe,
bulleting past county lines to
meet you where you are.
and i appease myself with words
and daydreams.

i think one night,
the milky threads of moonlight
will unravel,
and navigate me through the labyrinth
to your hand on a hotel bar.
i'll say it's been too long, but truly,
i have seen you in every night sky.

by Raina Allen

eden

maybe if the salt in your wounds
didn't taste like the blood of the apples
i wouldn't have tried to suck the poison out.
but i've been eating rotten fruit my whole life,
and the serpent sings the sweetest songs
before he swallows you whole.
salvation is out of reach for the girls
who suckle venom from your teeth,
like mother's milk.
because you look like the twisted roots of the tree from which we grew,
and i have fallen to ferment at your feet.

by Raina Allen

Witness

I am not some wounded thing in need of saving.
You lay your head on a pillow of rose thorns,
but the blood-letting is not my redemption.

I was born on a bed of crystal glass,
and each lover has left his spider-cracking behind,
with the smudges of ashen thumbs.

You have yet to learn the beauty of damage,
or the value in an ancient book with the
remnants of the author's bloody papercuts.

Self-righteous stones sink and squander
the wildness of an eroding wind.
The untouchable remain unchanged.

Without breaking, you are transparent.
I look through you, as a window,
and the world outside keeps moving.

by Raina Allen

Mercy Mercy Me

by Paul Vivari

Two old Sony speakers, perched on splintered milk crates, were blasting the infectious ascending hook spitting out of Fred Wesley's horn on the J.B.'s "Pass The Peas." Stretched out on his recliner, Ralph took a swig of the last of his orange soda with his left hand and mimicked Wesley's fingering on an imaginary saxophone on his right; the speakers popped as the needle hit a chip in the record, the song skipping in rhythm on the fours. Ralph extracted himself from the recliner to take the record off the turntable. It was a scarred 45 of one of his favorite tracks, beat-up records being all he had left of his once carefully curated collection.

His relic of a cell phone, an old flip model that miraculously still worked, began to ring in the left pocket of his sweatpants; he checked the caller ID, displaying "White Pete." This was the easiest way to remember which Pete was calling. It was his landlord's son, home from Georgetown for winter break, forever fascinated by his father's scattered housing projects in the city and always acting like he fit in the Northeast D.C. neighborhood far removed from the tony suburban hamlet of Potomac where he grew up.

Ralph answered on the third ring.

"Yeah," he said.

"What up, Alf? You home?"

"Yeah," he responded. He hated this nickname. "What's going on."

"I just scored a zip down the block. You tryin' to smoke?"

In fact, he was trying to smoke. The concept of having money for weed was a thing of the past, and he now had to rely on friends, and also Pete, to smoke him up on their own supply.

"Sure, yeah. Just gimme a few min..."

"Cool, I'm outside." The front door knocked.

Ralph walked to and unlocked the ancient deadbolt and opened the door. Pete had on a giant black parka that hung off his

skinny shoulders like a wet tarp. Before Ralph could turn around, Pete made a beeline for the recliner and flopped into it; as it was the only place to sit in the small living room, Ralph grabbed a folding chair from the closet and set it up next to the speakers.

Pete began to deliberately roll a joint while Ralph fingered through his last box of albums. He had sold nearly all of them when he was scrounging for rent money six months ago, an act of desperation he never thought he would come to- but losing his job and his inability to find a new one had led to extreme acts. He found a weathered copy of Coltrane's *Ole!* that he hadn't been able to part with yet; he set the record on the turntable and watched the automatic arm kick into motion, the needle dropping then digging into the lacquered grooves, the speakers crackling with familiar warmth as 'Trane's horn began to weave its way through aural tones and spectrums no one had spat out of a sax before or since. Ralph closed his eyes and imagined being on stage with the legend himself, sometime in the early sixties, maybe at the Village Vanguard, 'Trane finishing his ethereal runs and stepping back to let this young unknown work out a new solo...

"The fuck is this Kenny G shit?" Pete shouted over the music. Ralph snapped back into reality.

"This is Coltrane, man," Ralph said. "Kenny G isn't good enough to sniff his farts."

"Sounds like Kenny G," Pete repeated, and sealed the joint with a glob of spittle.

Pete took a silver Zippo out of his pocket and made a big show of flicking open the top and lighting the wick with a flourish. Ralph turned on his rotating standing fan and went to open the windows despite the deep chill outside.

"This record sounds like crap," Pete said. "I don't know why you still hang on to those things. My phone's got bluetooth, I can play it on anything and it'll sound better than this."

Pete frequently pointed out his confusion over Ralph's insistence on listening to vinyl, preferring to extol the virtues of the modern audio technology that Ralph despised. Ralph had

grown tired of explaining the intricacies of the sonic differences between competing formats and why records were and would always remain the superior choice; it always fell on deaf ears. These days he just deflected the topic.

“Nobody said you had to collect them too,” said Ralph.

Pete sparked the tip of the joint and handed it over.

“What are you up to tonight?” he asked.

Ralph considered the question as he took a drag.

Yesterday he had finally received some good news- his back unemployment pay for the six months he’d been out of work had gotten approved, and the money had showed up in his account earlier that day. After paying off his last three months of overdue rent, he still had some left over. He wanted to spend it wisely.

He thought about his sax. After the stress of the last six months since losing his job he needed something, anything, to keep his sanity and give the immediate future some sort of meaning; he had pawned the instrument the previous month and had instantly felt his last source of happiness slip away. Letting go of his records was bad, but this was worse. He wasn’t anything special on the horn, but was good enough to sit in on jazz open mics around the city and hold his own on the standards; it was always more about the joy of playing than anything else, and he had stripped that away for fifty bucks.

Ralph blew out a thick coil of white smoke and gave the joint back to Pete.

“I’m gonna go get my sax back from Larry’s,” he said.

Pete took a too-hearty drag and buckled over and spasmed with a violent coughing fit. He wheezed his way back upright and inhaled, then exhaled, deeply.

“That’s the good shit,” he said, handing the joint back to Ralph. “Your sax is at the pawn shop? I was wondering where it was.”

“Yeah,” said Ralph. “I needed the money but I’m squared up with your dad, at least for now. But I’m losing my mind without it.”

He took another drag and noticed the joint was already cashed; the cheap dry weed had lit up like a parched cornfield and burned out quickly. He took one last puff and dropped the charred end into the empty orange soda bottle. He cursed himself for getting rid of his records as well, now that he had money to get them back, but he had sold them in bulk at a flea market to a stranger, and they were gone for good.

He got up from the folding chair and grabbed his brown faux fur-lined coat off the coat rack next to the door, then put the tonearm of the turntable back into its resting place.

“I’m going to head over there now,” he said. “I don’t want it to get too late. People have been getting jacked up around the neighborhood. You should be careful.”

“I’ll be fine. Check this out,” said Pete, removing a switchblade from his jacket pocket and flipping it open. “I got it off Amazon Prime.”

“You wouldn’t even know how to slice cheese with that thing,” said Ralph.

Pete closed the switchblade awkwardly and put it back in his pocket. Ralph edged towards the door, hoping Pete would take a hint that their hang was over.

“Can I come with you?” asked Pete. “I ain’t got nothing to do.”

Dreading this question and its inevitableness, Ralph slipped on his coat and tried to figure out a gentle way to say no to his landlord’s son. He came up empty.

“Yeah, why not,” said Ralph.

Pete hopped up from the recliner.

“Don’t you want your wallet?” said Pete. “It’s still over there.”

“I don’t like carrying it at night. I got a fifty in my socks.”

Pete shook his head. “You’re too paranoid, Alf. I got your back.”

“That’s what I’m paranoid about,” said Ralph, and he locked the door behind them.

Pete had already lit up a Parliament in front of the stoop by the time Ralph made his way down the stairs and out the front door. Ralph buried his hands in his coat pockets as he started his way around the curved driveway that led to 63rd Street, Pete keeping pace next to him.

“We taking Clay over there?” said Pete.

Clay Street was the most direct way to Larry’s Pawn, which sat on a small commercial strip on 61st and Dix NE. Surrounded by a maze of narrow, dark alleys perfect for disappearing into, Clay had been the location of most of the recent holdups that had the neighborhood set more on edge than usual.

“Let’s cut down to Banks,” said Ralph. “I want to walk past the park.”

They hung a left on 63rd and followed it a block until it merged with Southern Avenue, the last street separating them from the border of Maryland. Ralph couldn’t remember the last time he crossed it. They cut onto Banks and took it west.

Even if Clay hadn’t been a hot street for muggings at that time, Ralph would have detoured down Banks anyway. The small park between 61st and 63rd was home to the Marvin Gaye playground, DC’s greatest export resurrected in hammered steel and molded plastic, and it was Ralph’s favorite part of the neighborhood. The whole place was an homage to the local hero, with swing sets attached to big plaster saxophones, a giant welded guitar to climb on, the jungle gym arranged to resemble a full drum rig, cymbals and all, and the pathways zig zagging throughout the playground painted like black and white piano keys.

The scattered syringes and pieces of burnt tin foil on the ground took away some of the luster, but Ralph always felt something resembling inspiration when he walked past the park, usually getting one of Gaye’s songs stuck in his head. A saxophone line popped into his brain, but he couldn’t place it, and he started humming the riff as they crossed 62nd.

“What song is that?” Pete asked.

“I’m not sure,” said Ralph. “I’m trying to remember.” He knew it had to be something Marvin sang on, but by the time they made a right onto 61st, he had forgotten it.

They hustled across Clay and approached Dix, where they saw the fading lights of Yum’s, the Chinese carryout where nobody ordered Chinese food, mainly just fried whole wings with mumbo sauce; Larry’s Pawn was located in between Yum’s and a boarded up former Eritrean church that used to host underground go-go shows before the cops shut it down. The rest of the block looked like the church, boarded up or half demolished, but Larry’s red neon “BUY/SELL/TRADE” sign shined bright, the pawn shop being one of the few businesses in the neighborhood that actually thrived.

Directly in front of Yum’s was an old man with a large trash bag resting at his feet.

“Got records, dollar each,” he called to them in a low, raspy voice.

Ralph paused and looked down at the trash bag. The old man opened the top and revealed a mound of LPs stacked on top of each other. Ralph fingered through the first couple of titles- it was good shit, decent but beat-up copies of Jackie Maclean and Kool & The Gang and Herbie Hancock on the top of the pile. As he continued to dig, the records became more recognizable and familiar, and he realized he was rifling through his old collection that he had sold at the flea market. Except he didn’t remember selling it to this guy.

“I also got Baby Ruth’s,” said the old man, opening another trash bag that was brimming with candy bars. “Three for a dollar.”

“Where did you get these records?” asked Ralph.

“Easy now, Columbo,” said the old man. “There’s a buck each. That’s where I got ‘em.”

Ralph didn’t know why he was expecting a straight answer. He also didn’t really care how the old man came into possession of the records, only how cheap he could get them back.

“Buck each?” said
Ralph.

“Yeah.”

“How much for the whole bag?”

The old man clearly hadn’t anticipated a wholesale offer, and rifled through the LP’s to try and get a rough count.

“Got ‘bout... fitty in here,” he said, his head completely enveloped in the bag.

It was about half of the collection Ralph had sold at the flea market. He wondered what had happened to the other half, but didn’t ask.

“I’ll do ‘em all for forty,” said the man through the bag.

“How about twenty,” said Ralph.

“Man, get the fuck outta here,” said the old man, emerging from his plastic cover. “Twenty my ass.”

“Okay, twenty-five.”

“Man, twenty-five my ass. Gimme thirty-five.”

“Thirty.”

The old man paused. “Sold,” he said.

“Cool. Pete, give him thirty bucks.”

Pete had been thumbing through his phone, oblivious to the negotiations.

“Wait, what?”

“I only brought enough to get my horn back. I’ll hit you back later.”

Much later, Ralph thought.

“Seriously?”

“Yeah, totally.”

Pete pulled out his wallet and extracted a twenty and two fives. The old man snatched it out of his hand as soon as it left the billfold, and just as quickly grabbed the bag of candy and took off down the block.

“What do you want those for?” asked Pete. “They’re all beat up and nasty.”

“These are my old records that I sold,” said Ralph. “The covers got messed up, but the vinyl itself should still be good.”

“I still don’t get it,” said Pete. “I can pull up anything on my phone, anytime. I got, like, thirty gigs of music on here. You should try it sometime.”

Ralph shook his head as he tied the trash bag of LP’s at the top. He slung the heavy load over his right shoulder and headed into the pawn shop.

Larry’s Pawn was actually owned by a guy named Vic, who bought it from the original owners around the millennium and kept the name for the sake of continuity. Vic and his equally volleyball-shaped cousin, Marco, were the only ones who worked behind the cage in the back. The peeling yellow walls of the shop, typically about half full during normal times, were now packed to the ceiling with a cornucopia of discarded treasures from neighborhood residents like Ralph who needed to scrounge for the next month’s rent. Despite the overwhelming amount of random items hanging from the walls, Ralph spotted his saxophone immediately, sandwiched between an inflatable snowman and a framed velvet portrait of Marion Barry.

Vic sat on a stool behind the fenced cage that separated him and his more valuable wares from the sticky hands of the general public, his pudgy forearms resting on the counter. He put his glasses on as Ralph approached, a pair of huge brown frames that made him look like a new dad from the eighties.

“We-e-e-ll,” said Vic. “What’d you bring me today? What’s in the bag?”

“Bag’s for me,” said Ralph. “I’m here for my sax.”

“Really now? You got the money? I can make you a nice offer on a loan repayment plan. Good interest rate.”

“Yeah, for you. I got the money.”

Ralph took the fifty dollar bill out of his sock and tossed it on the counter.

“Here,” he said. “Sax is up there, by the snowman.”

Vic took the fifty and folded it into his back pocket. “I know where it is. Just sit tight.”

He grunted his way off the stool and waddled over to a long cherry picker resting on some boxes of old Halloween decorations. He grabbed it and in a single motion snagged the saxophone, hanging on the opposite wall, without taking a further step, delicately placing the horn on the counter.

Ralph picked it up and examined it. No dents beyond the ones he had put there himself; it looked the same as when he dropped it off.

“Cool,” said Ralph. “Just give me the case and I’m good.”

“Case?” said Vic, his thick eyebrows furrowing. “I don’t recall a case.”

“I brought it inside a soft case,” said Ralph. “How do you think I got it here? I just walk down the street swingin’ a sax around like I’m in Dixieland or something?”

“Slow down, slow down,” said Vic. “Let me check the back.”

Ralph reflexively rubbed his temples as Vic disappeared into the small storage room in the back of the store. He turned to check on Pete, who was pawing a portable bluetooth speaker. Vic emerged from the back with a hard case for a clarinet.

“Here we go,” he said, looking pleased as he placed the case on the counter.

“That’s not it,” said Ralph. “That’s not even for the right instrument.”

“This is the only case that’s back there,” said Vic.

“Then what happened to mine?”

“Don’t know. Marco might’ve sold it.”

“C’mon, man. How am I supposed to get this home? You know this neighborhood.”

Vic and Ralph both looked at the bag on the floor. Ralph begrudgingly opened it and buried the saxophone in the bottom, spreading the records around until the horn was completely covered.

“See?” said Vic. “Who needs a case? Your horn is protected by all those dirty records. Nobody would want those anyway.”

Ralph's pointed reply was cut off by Pete.

"How much for this?" he said, waving the speaker around.

Vic and Pete haggled for a few seconds before agreeing on twenty bucks. Pete took the money out of his ever-flowing wallet and handed it through the cage, then clipped the speaker onto the belt loop to the left of his open fly.

Ralph hoisted the bag back over his shoulder as he headed for the door. Pete followed.

"You gentlemen have a fine evening," Vic called after them.

They headed south on 61st, Ralph wanting to take the same route back past the park. Pete lagged behind as he attempted to wirelessly connect his phone to the speaker bobbing on his pants. After a few false starts, a punishing trap song screamed out of the speaker and reverberated throughout the block.

"Will you turn that shit off?" said Ralph.

"What?" said Pete. He turned the volume down on his phone. "I can't hear you."

"Turn off the speaker. I'm trying to get this stuff home. I don't want you calling attention to us."

"Come on, Alf- you worry too much. I'll keep it low, I promise." Pete turned the volume down again until the song was a dull roar.

"They've been snatching phones around here, too," said Ralph. "They resell fast. You should put that away."

"I just want to make sure it works," said Pete. "Besides, I'm packing, remember?"

Ralph rolled his eyes. They passed Clay without incident and hung a left on Bates, the silhouettes of the drumset jungle gym and saxophone swings looming ahead on the right.

"What are you listening to, anyway? This sounds like a tape being rewound," said Ralph.

“It’s a new remix,” said Pete. “It’s hot as shit. I just downloaded it.”

“If you’re going to keep using that speaker, at least let me play something.”

“You’re just going to play some Kenny G like you always do.”

“I hate Kenny G- how many times do I have to tell you that? I want to listen to some Marvin. We’re walking by the park.”

“Which song?”

The solo that had been ringing in Ralph’s ears when they first walked past the park returned, and he still couldn’t fit it with a song.

“Let me see your phone,” said Ralph. “I need to scroll through his page. I can’t get this riff out of my head.”

Pete handed his phone to Ralph, who slowly scrolled through Gaye’s discography on a music app, hoping the song titles would jog his memory. “Got To Give It Up” was too funky, “Come Get To This” the wrong tempo...

They reached the climbing guitars, stretching to the sky as if sprouted out of the ground ages ago. As they approached, three tall figures emerged from behind the guitars and seemed to materialize directly in front of them, deliberately blocking their path. Ralph looked up from the phone. They all had face coverings on and the silvery glint of a gun in one of their hands shined under the foggy streetlight.

“Got a smoke?” one of them said.

Ralph shook his head and turned to Pete, who by this time was sprinting full speed back towards 61st, his remix crackling and fading in the distance as the Bluetooth on Pete’s belt lost its signal with the phone in Ralph’s hand.

One of the men started to go after him, but was held back by the man with the gun. He then motioned towards the bag with his piece.

“What’s in there?”

“Old records,” said Ralph.

“Bullshit. Let’s see.”

Ralph put the bag on the ground and opened it. The three men looked at the pile of LP’s, the horn at the bottom still fully covered.

“The hell we gonna do with these?” the armed man said.

“Man, we can’t use this,” another said, briefly thumbing through the records.

“Might be able to sell them to Larry’s,” said the third.

“Nah,” said the man looking through the bag. “These ain’t worth anything.”

“Never mind the bag,” said the man with the gun. He faced Ralph.

“Give me your wallet,” he said.

“I don’t have one,” said Ralph.

“Check his pockets.”

One man patted Ralph’s empty sweatpant pockets.

“Check his socks, too.”

The other man pulled down his socks and revealed nothing but his bare ankles.

“Alright, fuck this,” said the man with the gun. “Give us your phone.”

Ralph was about to answer that he left his phone at home, which he did, when he realized that he still had Pete’s in his hands. He gladly handed it over. The armed man snatched it and the three of them took off into the dark recesses of the woods behind the park. Ralph looked around for any sign of Pete, who had fully disappeared from view; he re-tied the bag shut, slung it back over his shoulder, and continued down Bates towards 63rd.

A beat up sedan rolled past Ralph as he made the turn onto Southern Avenue, windows half cracked in the stinging cold so the driver could smoke. The car’s radio was tuned to DC’s last oldies station, the speakers singing out a familiar rhythm; he heard the run of a sax that he pleasantly recognized as the one that had been pulsating in his brain, the vocals and arrangements pounding in all its full glory. It seemed so obvious now- he didn’t know how he could have forgotten one of his favorite songs.

Relieved, he hummed the melody to himself as he made his way up 63rd to the cul-de-sac on the farthest edge of the city.

Ralph locked his apartment door behind him and placed the heavy trash bag on the floor in front of his stereo. He flipped on the receiver and dug through the bag until he found his scratched copy of *What's Going On*, took it out of its sleeve, and set it on the turntable. He moved the tonearm past the title track to the last song of the A side, placed the needle into the groove, and listened to the selection kick off with its congas and vibes, the bassline grooving underneath the rhythm, holding the whole thing together.

He untied the bag and removed the buried saxophone out from under the pile of masks. He attached a new reed, did a cursory wipe of the mouthpiece, placed his lips on it, and honked out a long D flat. It still sounded good.

His favorite part was coming up- the sax solo by Wild Bill Moore that was one of the first solos Ralph had ever studied and learned. Wild Bill launched into it and Ralph followed eagerly, bleating out the riffs and runs in lockstep with the record. He ignored his neighbor who was already banging on the walls, and he spit and huffed and blew until his lips started to buzz and his face turned a bright crimson. Ralph and Wild Bill ended their duet and Ralph collapsed with satisfaction into the torn cushions of his recliner, Marvin bringing it back to the chorus as the song began to fade.



Looking Up
by Serge Lecomte

Animal

A pattern-shy life
Arrhythmic eroticism and all blood in my morning teeth
That broken window is a portal through to beautiful nowhere
I found a shattered wrist beneath my future's pillow
A stopped car on the highway abandoned and glove box full of water
A continent that was kicked to death
And my self in the past was pulling her veins to catch on fire
To fall out of orbit from the nervous Earth
This world killed all its animals while it was counting to sleep
And the gutters are full of ghosts, the drains and our reservoirs vomit them
You can pull the wings off a fly and you can put them on
 where they were never found before
When I was killed in the parking lot then my blood
it started walking backwards
It's okay to piss over concrete
It's okay for the stars to fall out of the sky
Every day I've never been here before in the same unreal garden I take
 animals apart into pieces with my teeth
God of the incomprehensible
A pattern is constructed form put onto noise like voices of divination
 radar the endless
I put my hand through an object and we can inhabit each other
The oceans of fields of grass begin to speak when unobserved
A car crashes into a building and then every form moves through
 every violent boundary
It would be easy just to walk and keep walking out of the world so I
 assembled my excuses and found a way to disappear completely
Now rain falls through my shape without resistance
And time counts back to the center and out from beginning to the absence
 of absence itself
A sort of dissonance through which God has been deleted
And here words are insubstantial so it gets pointless to continue
I use my hands to drink water from where it runs and when I
 want to fall asleep then I will

by Rats Alice Trujillo

The Mind Is A Myth In Collapse

The mind is a myth in collapse
It couldn't stop itself bleeding so it drinks from the leaking tear
A puncture appeared between physics and hunger
All this century's foreshadowing were a fragile posture
Our trees grow back down through the earth
Those frozen mornings touching bile to plaster while the insect lines of
state militia crawl under your pyrrhic defenses
The train stopped between stations until someone got off and they stayed
in the darkness
This doesn't happen to everyone but it's often enough
She threw a microwave out the window six floors up because the
cruel technologies of time couldn't say not to
All these numbers in a system are not different from each other
A stomach full of blood does not return to circulation it only makes you sick
A microcosm of the mind will die in fear
The occluded cells in its system explore the many futures a wreckage can take
Some clusters of these become cancerous
The macrocosmic mind is insane, attempting self-surgery to separate
the sky from
the earth
She beats her face against a stained glass until
sound and color evacuate the room
How do you remove a parasite with your bare hands?
All these plans for the future are a real masquerade on necrosis
Fatal illness as an excuse to self-immolate
The mind is a myth in collapse
Trying to win an argument with cancer
Trying to convince its blood to walk backward
This world was supposed to make sense after we sold it our privacy for time
And once you see two of them you know it's over because there's
hundreds and hundreds in the walls for every one that wanders out
Once there were computers you couldn't see with your eye you know
they'll replace bacteria soon
The slaughter of all is a byproduct to accumulated process so
no one decided to sterilize the earth it just happened
The active mind is a myth

by Rats Alice Trujillo

Exit-Concept

A transcription error somewhere on the fragile surface infinity
A crumbling seam of mortar you could scrape away with the tip of a pen
Coordinates encoded with deliria, hidden within desynchronization
You take yourself apart like a television set to piles of vacuum and intricacy
This body gives birth to itself continually while consuming its future and shadows
The surface of a desert stretches back to the sky and past into diagonals
Hammer through a nail at the juncture to move outside time
A building infested with fire sometimes is a pathway to secret physics
A single hidden frame in all of living creation that you might notice
if you pay attention
A doorway standing anachronous in a field or empty lot that remains
to beckon only
 until you look away or question then is vanished for always
It's easier to move behind the scenes if you can pretend that you belong
A solid surface is sometimes permeable without advertisement
You have to constantly investigate your surroundings and reinvestigate
 to know when the rules have changed
There is a concept-picture of truth you keep to navigate through and it becomes
 obsolete whenever you trust it to stay persistent
The count from one to ten is a different walk than from ten back down
A stiff membrane wraps life away from living
The shell of an egg or hull of a prison ship it either needs to be demolished
Puncture through the veil to space unfabricated that feels like drowning
It feels like drowning to be alive and real
Equations of causality say the long whole world depends on order, say
A moment cannot escape its other selves on repeating through the linear, though
It is possible still to excise time from time itself to receive the exit-concept as
 fractal motes of fire that impress direction on your skin
The further you move from center it becomes possible to leave the world
It becomes possible to see outside the actual and to keep a path through
 from underground to absolute nowhere
The self is a lens through to find inconsistent surfaces on all material
The soul is a blade to sharpen day on day to cut a place through where
 the boundary wall is frail

by Rats Alice Trujillo



Let Me Teach You
by Serge Lecomte

Don't Look

Don't look! Don't look!

Panic-stricken commands to us from our passenger-seat mother who offered frightened out-loud covered-eyes prayers to Jesus, Mary and Joseph as we three brothers in the backseat of the nine- year-old 1950 Oldsmobile disobeyed — of course we looked! — at the gibberish-jabbering beggar reaching for the dollar bill our father handed him through the driver-side window he had rolled down despite our mother's prolonged plea not to while stopped at a red light in the Bowery not far from the blurry border of Little Italy and Greenwich Village where our parents had grown up in the same tenement during the darkest days of the Depression.

Good luck, pal! Good luck!

Friendly words in a calm comforting voice from our father whose gentle eyes and warm smile we saw reflected in the rear-view and side mirrors and as the light turned green and he rolled up the driver-side window before the beggar enunciated *God Bless* but not in time to exclude the smell of belched bourbon and body odor and as our mother continued her fitful covered-eyes praying our father drove on to the fetid Prince Street walkup of our mother's widowed father who'd once sold apples from a cart pushed in these same streets and why did one brother take decades to readjust his stuck-in-stereotype parental images of which one was truly big-hearted?

by Robert Eugene Rubino

Nothing But Net

The basketball at center court of an empty gym
extends an irresistible invitation.

The old man enters looks around makes sure he's alone.

He bounces the ball on the hardwood floor
simulating amplified drumbeats/heartbeats
stimulating earfuls of echoing flashbacks ...

He stops at the top of the key.
He stares at the metal hoop with its short skirt
of bleached-white netting ...

quite the first-class upgrade
from the rusted busted chain-link nets
of his playground youth sixty years ago.

Firmly tenderly he holds the ball
his focus free from tension
decades melting into refreshing reverie.

Hand-eye mind's-eye orchestration
it's all born-again muscle memory now —
bent-arm snapping-wrist fingertips tiptoes

his *White Men Can't Jump* jump.
He shoots.
His shot rising rotating ...

falling spinning through time through space
through a predestined parabolic arc.
Swish.

by Robert Eugene Rubino

Friends **(Not the TV Sit-Com But the Real-Life Variety Show)**

Newest friend oldest friends
fast friends slow-to-become friends
good friend better friend best friend
temp friends forever friends
agreeable friends argumentative friends
friends who are like family

nursery-school friends nursing-home friends
married friends single friends
strange friend estranged friend
difficult friends easy friends
casual friends friend-of-a-friend friend
with-friends-like-that friend ...

open-mic poetry friends baseball-fan friends
friends with benefits
work friends play friends
judgmental friends unconditional friend
tightly wound friends laid-back friends
dead friends

forgotten friends remembered friends
honest friends friends too honest
lost-and-found friends
lost-and-found-and-lost-again friends
friends who've got your back
friends who turn their backs.

Ex-loves who've broken your heart
broke it into jagged pieces
or maybe you've broken theirs
broken very nearly beyond repair
and now ... now you're ...
just friends.

by Robert Eugene Rubino



Picnic in The Desert
by Serge Lecomte

Is Love Another Form of Narcissism?

I say I love this song because it communicates a form of myself
that I am incapable of expressing without a myriad of sounds.

I say I love you because we whistle the same melodies,
we syncopate the same rate.

I love when we disagree,
how trumpet players breathe deep before blasting
voices like horns,
a feeling I can't reach
without wounding you.

That's why I could never be yours, yet always be,
you assimilate easy:

the old man in an apron at the donut shop,
stuffing sugar packets in ceramic ramekins, wiping down the soda fountain,
the young girl telling him to take his twenty minutes,
him sitting alone, his wrinkled hand
holding a piece of sprinkled baked dough to his mouth,
how this scene causes you to cry in front of your iced coffee,
unable to take another bite of your Bavarian cream.
You say it isn't fair, and I agree, because I want you to cry.
I want you to cry for me.

by Chris Menezes

Jenn Says

*With every year that passes,
it becomes more difficult to live.
I wake up nauseous every day,
and constantly feel like shit.
I can't stop thinking
about death.*

The basket rattles
over the entryway
to the store.

She grabs an orange
from the grocery display,
a stacked pyramid of spheres.
She holds it, bruised and ripe in her hand.

*It's probably good we keep miscarrying.
There is too much in the world
to carry.*

*You're the only thing keeping me here.
It wouldn't even be a question –
warm bath, north to south, baby.*

Slit in paper bag rips open,
outside store, orange
globes slap concrete.
Balls of pulp roll
toward the gutter.

by Chris Menezes

Scars

I.

“This one,” she said, pointing above her left ankle,
“is from when I was six or seven.

I was at work with mom, cleaning a daycare, carrying a trash bag,
swinging it, like this, whistling.

There was broken glass in it,

sliced all the way here. I remember seeing bone
and screaming. Mom was mad, didn’t even look,
just threw a rag at me.

I waited in the car while she finished.”

“This one,” she said, pointing at a smaller one, “happened when
I was in junior high. Mom was yelling
and she threw a coffee mug. It hit the wall and shattered on the ground.
As I was running away, I fell and landed on a shard. I didn’t even cry,
I didn’t want to, not in front of her.”

II.

When the windshield splintered into your face
before our wedding, embedding slivers of glass
into your left cheek, forehead and chin,
it did more than puncture and bruise.

It sealed glass remnants
into your skin, a constellation of pain. Years later,
after we moved to that one-bedroom apartment in North Carolina,

I sold ads all day and served tables at night,
you boiled black beans and lentil soup
to sustain the tissue growing in your belly,
 it hit us like a car crash when everything stopped,
 the two of us left in the rubble of a marriage,
 stuck and spinning against a brick wall.

III.

I love the one that stretches the length of your torso, from your waist, hooking
around your bellybutton, below your ribs.

A root running down the center of your body, veining out, holding you
together.

If I tugged at it, and uprooted the long, thick chord of scar tissue
like the doctor pulling out your cancerous intestines,
your limbs would lift

like petals closing, shielding you from a burning
sun that has glared down on you your entire life,
then drop and sprawl open, your womb,
unraveled, empty, beautiful—

an open blossom for my lips to drink from.

by Chris Menezes



Lovers
by Serge Lecomte

When the lightning bugs return
it feels incidental.

Like they are as startled as I am
from the syncopate impulse

which translates into light
the edges of their darkness.

They do not ignite for me, I know,
as they rehearse their destiny between spears of grass.

It is calcium, triphosphate, oxygen.
Desire. A chemical glow.

But how can I look into the surprise of their flight
and not see a million lifetimes encapsulated

ascending into the sky?
Or children's eyes?

Or embers of the earth as they escape
from its buried burning heart?

It is not my birthday, but I am waiting
for those magic candles to spark

some life into me — for those
luminescent shells

to become stars.

by Mia X. Perez

She flutters

She flutters
as she always does—
aimlessly over my
sleeping body which is all
she's ever really wanted:

her hands—branches of eternity
reaching down and me,
who perceives her as only a
single shallow dream,
dreaming deeper.

by Mia X. Perez



Alice
by Susan Waddell

SELF-PORTRAIT

at the corner
where Bully George sat on me
59 years ago—
now a stone garden
with 6 large rocks,
2 cacti, and a manhole raised
a crack

*

they traded
the N-word second but
the J-word first
at a pick-up 3-on-3 game
at Garfield Junior High
all laughed out loud—
when he said, “Kike,” I paused

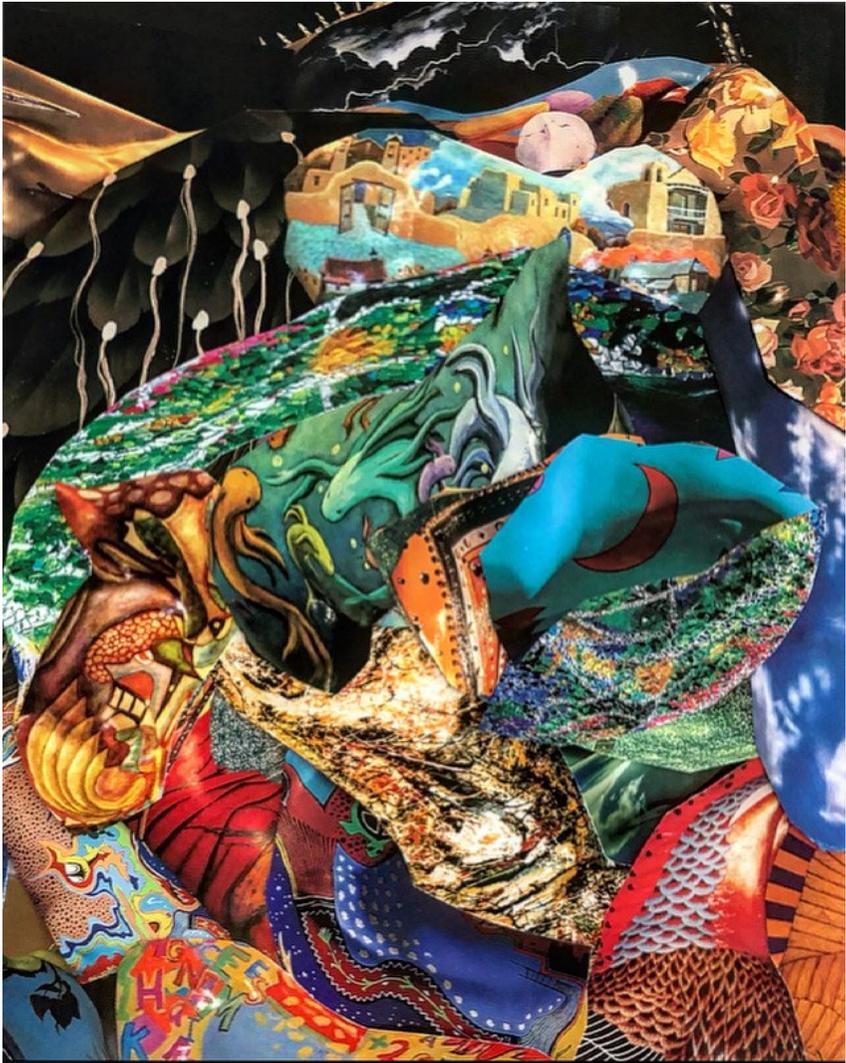
*

oh, Nancy Stone
with all your lovely freckles
still you were not mine,
Lady of the Stones—
my pebbles at your door

*

circling the ring
of trees around a grass field
soon fires built
voices raised
what the trees save with their canopy
is dense smoke the sounds
of sharpened metal utensils
preparing to cook

by Alan Bern



A Pile of Colorful Ties

by Robin Young

ROSE IN THE STEEL DUST

by Robert Perchan

"I am lonely, Oggie."

"You can come with me to Brad's for my Saturday afternoon beer and talk to Ronni."

"I don't like bar talking scene. Always can make me be boring."

"Bored, sweetheart."

"Everybody this town think I dumb. Even Ronni. And she Number One *dumb*."

"Well, who do you want to talk to? That goddam madam from Youngstown? Jesus!"

"She nice Korean lady."

"She runs a massage parlor, for God's sake."

"Is health spa."

"Right. Suzy Wong's Health Spa: Oriental Massage. Visa and Mastercard accepted."

"Suzy *Kim*. She rich lady. Got Benz. Big Hand is customer at there."

"It's *boji* bumping and *jaji* jumping, Jang-mee. And everything in between."

"Shut the mouth! Don't talk that kind way. We do for each other. And we just poor."

"You're talking crazy now. Are you on the rag already?"

"All of time you say such shits to me. 'Rag already.' I am lonely, Oggie."

"You've got lots of friends."

"You friends. Nice guys but all of time talk about art. Want friend can know life feelings."

"Baby, life is Art."

"I don't care!"

Jang-mee continues making a quart of grape juice, spilling a dollop of the dark purple concentrate on the zipper-flap

of her jeans. A fine spring morning, but I, August Finch, have been up all night welding the steel-tubing flower stems to the floor of the birdcage. The Summer Show is in early July this year and I am behind schedule. Jang-mee crosses the kitchen to the sink in a deliberate plod. Not a morning goes by that I don't take stock of my life. It all makes sense until that moment I ran across a book in the library by an American woman missionary titled *I Married a Korean*. Jang-mee crushes the cylinder of frozen syrup in the bottom of the glass pitcher with a wooden spoon. Adds water. I was looking for a book on Korean celadon pottery, the exquisite if monotonously greenish-bluish stoneware. I had seen only a couple of pieces close up at an exhibition but had been impressed by the single-mindedness of purpose that had gone into fashioning and firing them. Imagine doing the same thing generation after generation for untold centuries. Jang-mee stirs the gloop into a uniform mixture—grape juice. It would take a year, I was told, before I would see any signs of progress. Gradually she would come around. Begin to appreciate the delicious privacy of American life that had seemed like an imprisoning isolation. Jang-mee taste-tests, sipping from the hollow of the wooden spoon. She wept nightly for the first six months. Homesick. Homesick for a family that despised her for marrying a foreigner. Homesick for a family that despised her for taking a job in a “cocktail corner” where she might come into contact with foreigners. For doing anything but sit at home like a lump of dough waiting to be punched into the shape of a dutiful housewife to a Samsung Service Center drone. Jang-mee pours two glasses of grape juice. She is waiting for me to tell her what I want for breakfast. I have been up all night. I want to drink blood and acid. I want to pick my teeth with roach limbs. I want to explain. I drink the grape juice.

“I am lonely, Oggie.”

I am lonely too, darling. And it's not your fault.

Sit down here with me here for a while, stranger, and listen. If I had the money I'd buy you a round. So let's "go dutch." Did you know that "going dutch" is an extraordinarily humiliating experience for a Korean? Only *one* of the parties must pay for the whole group. Any other way makes everyone feel cheap and miserly. Three Koreans leaving a bar will stage a mock struggle at the cashier's counter until one of them puts on a good enough show of plenty to pick up the tab. Potlatch, I think it's called. Something like that. But they always know whose turn it is to pay, deep down. And, to give them their due, they always know who has fallen on hard times and needs a break. That "deep down," however, is unfathomable to us outsiders. A foreigner is not expected to be able to comprehend it. Hence he drinks a lot of free beer. Am I boring you? Well, this is Brad's. Don't expect to run into the Ancient Mariner in here. That's C. over there--The Towering Wino one wag dubbed him one night, though he doesn't drink any more than the next guy. He's a grump, these days. Lonely, but he won't admit it, being a man. Don't bother talking to him unless you're a Charles Bukowski fan and can remember back when poetry actually meant something to people. And that's Ronni down at the end of the bar. She models for the advanced drawing classes sometimes. I think she tried to pick me up one afternoon, the first time Jang-mee took off for Suzy Kim's, but I was too thick in other thoughts to catch on. I mention it here only to show you how I just let things happen. Or not happen. The only reason I got to go to Korea was the original guy took sick. Hepatitis. Here in the States. Right here in Southeastern Ohio. Athens, for God's sakes. (Phidias T. Bluster I nicknamed a loudmouth ex-stonemason classmate of mine.) So they looked around at the other graduate students in Sculpture and saw me sitting cross-legged in a corner fashioning my lawn ornaments. Just the right guy, they must have thought. Not engaged in anything serious. And they were right. In half an hour I was in the library thumbing through *I Married a Korean*. Korea! I thought. A niche! And every artist needs a *niche*. Spend a year in a place nobody ever thought of going. Come

back with an exotic tale or two. Virgin princesses with tiny silver suicide daggers hidden in the folds of their lustrous gowns. Shamans who descend to the Underworld and return with bodings dire or tidings auspicious. “Celibate” Buddhist monks driving around in SUVs and talking on cell phones to horny housewives. That kind of weirdo thing you hear about when you mention to people you’re headed East. But I didn’t drag you over here to tell you that. It’s Jang-mee I’m worried about. She’s lonely, like she said. But you can’t understand this loneliness. I barely can. And if I said *They’re not like us* you’d want to label me a you-know-what. And maybe you’d be right, these days. And I really can’t see that I’ve done anything wrong.

Of course anyone can see where all this is headed. I return home after a few words with “Number One dumb” Ronni, perched on her barstool with her legs crossed. A Flapper body if there ever was one. They have them in Korea in spades. Flat chested. Low slung narrow hips. Clunky ankles and knees though. Yet deliciously gracile in their own way. Nymphic. Jang-mee, naturally, is gone. Pulled up stakes again. I could tell you about *her* body too. The first time I saw her naked I was dumbstruck. I had been working on her for weeks, coming to her “cocktail corner” and suffering fools buying me free beers just to get a chance to talk to her privately, in confidence. She worked in a joint in Seoul called the United Nations Club, a spacious cushy hall harboring a dozen small horseshoe bars, each manned (that word doesn’t sound right) by a young woman who smiles and chats at whatever trio or quartet of Korean salarymen shows up to be chatted at. I showed up too, a couple of times a week, neglecting to order the \$10 plate of dried squid snack that was—I learned later—her bread-and-butter menu item, the one she got the most commission on. It took a while. Korean women are not likely to model nude. Seems Confucius was against anything that put one’s dead ancestors on edge off in their Never Never Land of piss and gloom. So I told her about my idea for my Our Lady of Ashes. Reclining, as on a deck chair. Naked, naturally. Skin

surface the scorched texture and gray-black of campfire ashes. I was serious and she must have appreciated that. So we did it, the modeling sessions I mean, but no further than the nervous preliminary sketches. Incredible, nevertheless, her torso, that taut and faintly tumescent rectus abdominis. Then she stopped coming to the little studio apartment I had rented. Disappeared. Like now. Had to think things over. Battle it out with her family. Lose. Despair. Take up, ultimately, with the foreigner after all. It happens that way a lot. Ask her. I can give you her new address.

A fine spring day, like I said. Up all night welding the steel-tubing flower stems to the floor of the birdcage. Upstairs Jang-mee has torn all her clothes out of the chest of drawers while I sulked at Brad's, my socks hanging out like drooping tongues. She's been careful enough to leave the business card of Suzy Kim's Health Spa: Oriental Massage on top of the chest. Address and phone number. Rescue me, perhaps. Perhaps not. On the carpet, the six stainless steel Norelco rotary razor blades I was intending to affix to the tips of the steel stems like gun-metal corollas. Crushed. Stomped flat. Like flowers pressed in an iron book. Jang-mee, by the way, means "rose" in Korean. The circular blades had raised radiating cutting surfaces that met the floating heads of the electric shaver just so. Little multi-armed steel swastikas. When I first arrived in Seoul I wanted to find a bookstore. I needed a book, any book. Met a student on the street who spoke no English but wanted to be helpful. Koreans can be like that. He drew a map of downtown indicating the locations of the big bookstores by drawing tiny encircled swastikas. Told him if I wanted to buy a copy of *Mein Kampf* I'd have stayed in America. He didn't understand. Later I learned a swastika—fiddled with in your brain a little—is also a Buddhist symbol of "well-being." Very old. Going all the way back to the Sanskrit *su-asti*, "be well," something like that. And all the way up to the modern day Thai *sawasti-ka* greeting. It's all there in the guidebooks if you care to look it up. You see them

everywhere painted on temples, Buddhist bookstores, and there was a big pink neon one outside my studio window. Of course they don't really mean shit, being a symbol. A week after the swastika episode I read in an English-language newspaper that the leader of one Korean Buddhist order knifed the leader of a rival order. To death. The Ven. MacHeath. I would have to order more blades. I sit down at the typewriter and do a little white-lie begging for Art:

Dear Sirs:

Not so long ago I requested that you send me six (6) Norelco Type 0-7611 Rotary Razor Blades. I remitted twenty-five dollars (\$25) by money order to cover the cost and postage and handling, but as of this writing I have yet to receive said merchandise. I realize that you are a large concern and that my request is somewhat out of the ordinary. However, if you will allow me, I will explain my intentions and give you sufficient reason to comply with my order ASAP.

I am a sculptor, as yet unknown but with every intention of having my work represented in all the better contemporary art galleries in the country and overseas in a matter of a few short years. The sculpture I am currently engaged upon is one that will both honor Nature and yet do justice to those advances and improvements upon Nature made by such progressive and reliable firms as yours. The project, which I call "The Rose in the Steel Dust," could be briefly described thus: A large old-fashioned steel birdcage. Emerging out of the center of the cage floor will be twelve (or thirteen) stainless steels tubes varying in size from 1/16th in. to 3/8th in. in diameter. These are "stems" of the flowers. On the ends of six (or seven) of these tubes will be affixed steel alligator clips of varying sizes. One of these clips will be placed so that it is "biting" into and breaking—or seeming to break—one of the metal bars of the cage. On the remaining six (or seven) tubes will be affixed six (or should you be so generous, seven) of your patented stainless steel Rotary Razor Blades, suggesting an abstract form of a complex hermaphroditic flower.

Should you be so kind as to fill my order as soon as possible, I will be well on my way to creating a work of Art that will honor both Nature and Technology and perhaps open the eyes of those who have chosen to detract from one in order to pay excessive lip-homage to the other.

*Gratefully,
August Finch,*

Sculptor

Outside I dump the rolled up bedroom carpet on the apron of the driveway. Empty half a can of Charco-Lite on it. Wait like a good suburban husband for the juice to soak in. That's all she ever wanted, maybe. A good suburban husband. Bringer home of the Bacon Bits. New car every three years. Colleges for the kids. Drop a lit match on the pile—POOM! Now that, my friend, is FIRE. On this very carpet we first made love in America. Different from making love back in Korea, where it was like penetrating a seamless matrix of womanhood. A web. "Screw one, you've screwed them all"—there's something to that, but not in the way it's usually meant. The apron is ablaze now, a thick, black layer of smoke oozing out the rubber pad on the underside of the carpet, wafting toward Mrs. Musgrave's next door. The black smoke is not just smoke—it's also fingernail-size flakes of licorice soot, sticky-looking. Old Mrs. Musgrave appears at her picture window, cane in hand, three-legged, as the black flakes begin to dapple her quaint white house. Jang-mee seemed smaller here in the States, the first time we made love on the carpet. As if she'd lost mass and volume, shrunk, on the big hop across the Pacific. I didn't think much about it at first. Just that she'd need a little time to grow, gather strength from the humanoid dynamo that is America. Like they do with astronauts when they come back with spongy bones from a two-week jaunt through the Big Empty. Old Mrs. Musgrave continues staring, staring. Probably thinks I'm charneling Jang-mee's corpse out here, wrapped up in the carpet like tamale filling. And she

wouldn't be too far wrong. In the ashes a form begins to emerge, a torso and a pair of stumpy limbs. When would Jang-mee begin servicing her first customer up at Suzy Kim's—tonight? Tomorrow afternoon? The very month we hit the States an article appeared in a men's magazine detailing the operations of a vast nationwide network of massage parlors, whores, mama-sans, and pimps, all Koreans. The FBI tried to eavesdrop on their interstate phone calls—nab them for conspiracy in the name of the Mann Act—but they couldn't crack the carefully coded Korean slang. I let Jang-mee see the article, moving her lips as she untangled the English. She pronounced it horseshit. Such a thing could not be. Right on cue a police cruiser appears at the top of the street, creeps slowly down North Congress toward me and the house I rent and therefore don't pay taxes on. The officer behind the wheel rolls down his window. A good sign. It's when they lumber out of their shells like mutant turtles that you know you're in for a hassle. "We've had a complaint." "Sir?" "By city ordinance citizens are not allowed to burn trash in residential areas." Citizens? I am rising in the world. "We don't intend to cite you. But this *is* a warning." And your brethren up in Youngstown don't intend to cite Suzy Kim and her nationwide network of pimps and madams either, do they? But I don't say that. "I didn't think the trashmen would pick it up. Too big." "There's a dump out on Route 8." Brother, don't I know that—I've got a couple of aborted pieces out there on display right now. But I don't say that either.

Jang-mee has been going up to Suzy Kim's more and more often of late, staying a little longer each time. Of course I didn't mean that crack about her servicing her first customer. She says she just talks there, with the old lady and the girls. There is no Suzy Kim in actuality. It's just a World of Suzy Wong name, like I kidded Jang-mee. And it's curious that it's usually artists and whores and other entertainers who have separate professional names—here and in Asia as well. Even I had one, in Korea: *Mu-*

hak. Which can mean either Dancing Crane or Ignoramus, depending on which Sino-Korean characters you choose to represent the sounds. And it fit—what with my long, spindly legs and my ignorance of the culture I was bathing myself in. The madam’s name at Suzy Kim’s is Mrs. Hong. The girls who work for her all married and divorced GI husbands. Married them in Korea, divorced them over here. On the grounds of unreconcilable cultural differences. Or is it “irreconcilable”? *Mu-hak*, like I say. And I’m no writer. It’s just that everyone has one story in him, or her, at the least. And I’d like to shave as close as possible to things as they are. Divorced. Sex as a glue loses its adhesiveness 30,000 or 40,000 feet up over the Pacific. Thank God 747s aren’t riveted together with Sex. Or maybe some of them are. One of the girls comes down and visits Jang-mee occasionally. They first met in church, of all places. I’ve heard that’s where immigrant Korean women head when they start to lose their bearings and marbles. And where massage parlor madams hang out, angling for pecker fodder. She’s not so bad, really, the girl. A little firecracker. She and Jang-mee talk, and they talk, hours on end. All night long. Marathonian. I grilled Jang-mee afterward one time, after Jin-hee (or Ginny, as she’s Americanized it) had left.

“Why’d she get divorced?”

“She lonely.”

“Oh? She’s happy now?”

“Is better.”

“It’s better working in a massage parlor?”

“Money better. Friends better. Food better.”

“Food?”

“Can eat Korean food all of time.”

“Food is *that* important?”

“You don’t understand. All of things can be imported.”

She meant *important*.

“And love? Is love important?”

“Love is all of things. Not separated thing.”

“I see.”

“And GI husband beat her up. She too much cry make his Momma angry. So beat her up.”

Well, I thought back then, at least there was one atrocity I hadn't committed. Though Jang-mee once told me she finds it difficult to respect a man who doesn't raise a hand against his wife once in a while, when she is wrong. Go figure.

In the living room on the tube David Frost is interviewing a withered crone who looks a lot like Mrs. Musgrave. Or vice-versa. A rerun, either way. She is talking about Paris and the Lost Generation days. Hemingway. F. Scott Fitzgerald. That madman Ezra Pound. I guess Henry Miller came later, bless his wandering soul. Did she know Gaudier, I wonder? Not Likely. Dead long before his time. All Frost and company can talk about is the “specialness” of Hemingway's feet. What did he have? Hooves? Flippers? Paws? Suction cups? Where's Jang-mee? Has she really picked up and left for good this time? Every time she takes off for that place, she stuffs her overnight bag a little bit fuller. Of course I know I'm losing her. There's not much you can do when your rival is an entire culture. A way of life said to be five thousand years old. When your rival is the woman's own soul. I never should have made that crack about her going on the rag. It's just that I had been up for 26 bleeding hours straight. Or that crap about Life and Art. And I know I'm not considerate enough, giving enough. But it's when someone is miserable, or in pain, that you want to be attentive, or diverting, or just pretend that nothing's seriously wrong. And yet you know. And yet you know you're not going to be able to talk about it. Put your finger on it. Or ever honestly hope to find the words for it. Because you know there's nothing really to be done.



Abandoned Buildings 05
by Christopher Paul Brown

such enchantments

once upon a time I not entirely
became yours drowse the bed when
there is no sadness here when there are no cries
to fear what is the turn when we hurt each
other how do we recover for the rest

do you see how would
coincidence find out who you are how do we
start with leaves and end with fire how do we
start with trees and end with timber and where
is the queen in the middle of all this who sleeps
among the living only to show us towards
death

hello dear rain hello dear trees
what deal is this and who would be the devil
who would be me
well then
drink now
and rest away

such enchantments
by Olga Gonzalez Latapi



University of Buffalo Modeling on Stage
by Debbie Fox

How many dragons?

Can we come back
to the rest of them,
because when we voyage,
we try to come back.

Pass it down pass it over.

Who is the why
in this scenario, in this stupid
happy intrigue?

With endings?

What is the case
of love. How do we take
the moments of dying,
of killing, of beige.
Of me.

Who is. Who is
the slave. Who is the ending.

What a read.

What a child.

To be the flower you love
because that is what love is. Forever
gone.
I cannot kill it and yet it
does not live.

What life. What shying. What
master.

by Olga Gonzalez Latapi



Ballet in The Mist
by Debbie Fox

MEET OUR EDITOR – DAVE SIMS



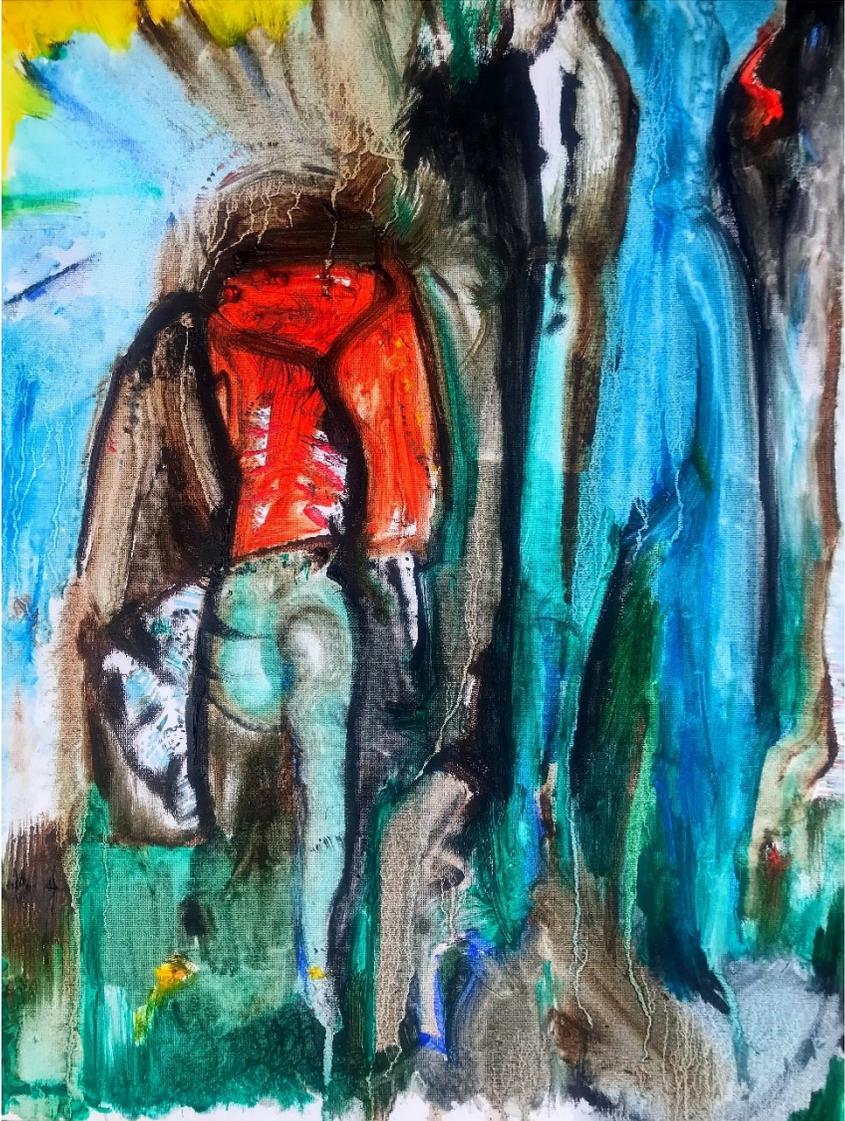
Dave Sims

After 30+ years of teaching in colleges, universities, military bases, and prisons from Alaska to Louisiana, Dave Sims retired to the mountains of central Pennsylvania where he now dwells and creates. His most recent comix appear in *Gigantic Sequins*, *The Nashville Review*, *Talking Writing*, and *Freeze Ray*

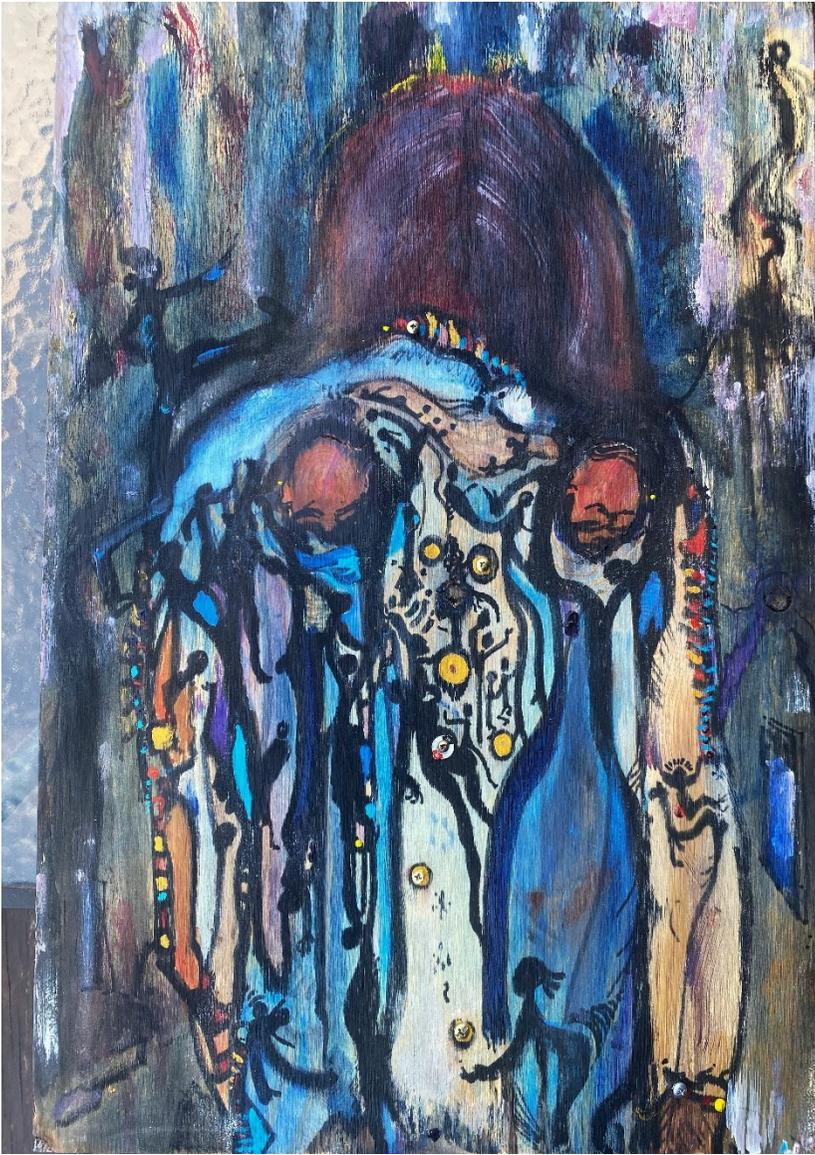
Artworks by Our Editor
Dave Sims



Larry loses a leg



Parflech full of talking leaves



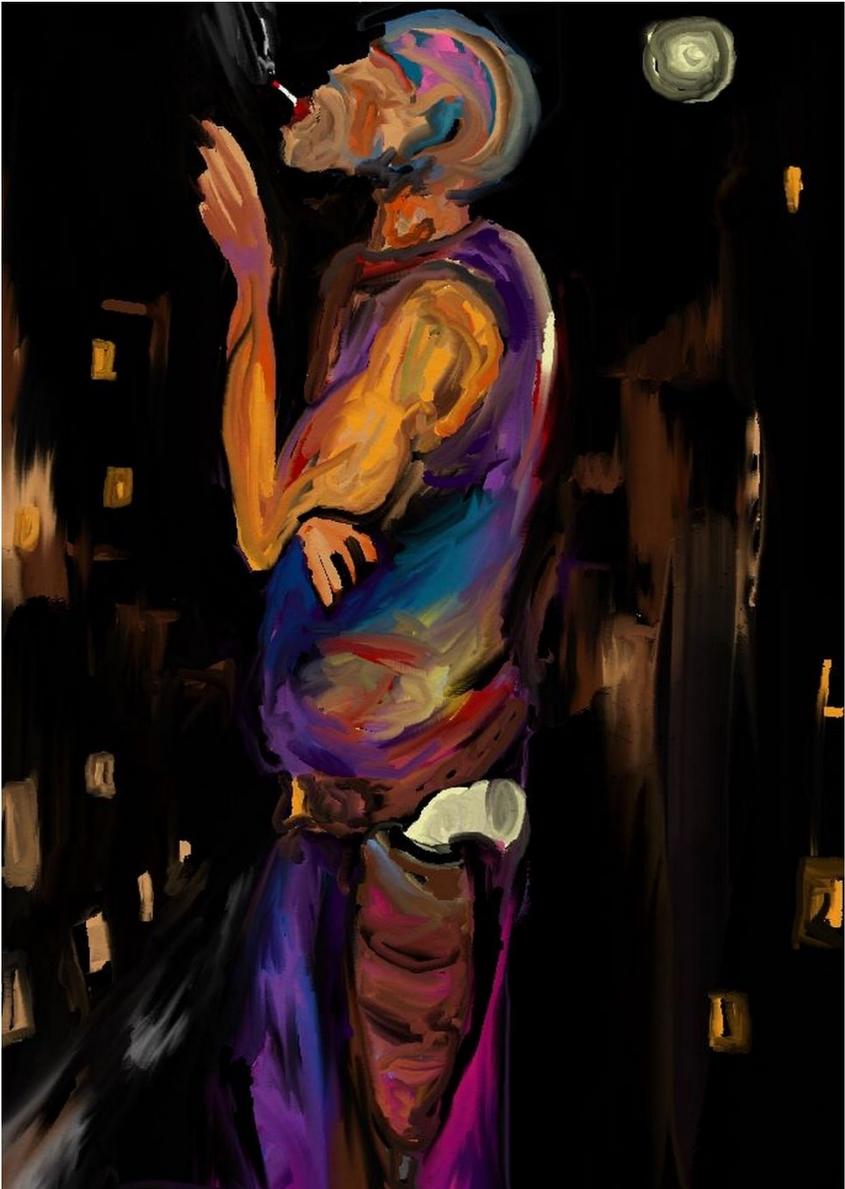
Talking behind her back



Cowboy tipping his hat to a geisha



Smoking gunslinger and blue do a victory dance



Smoking gunslinger last smoke before he hits the hay



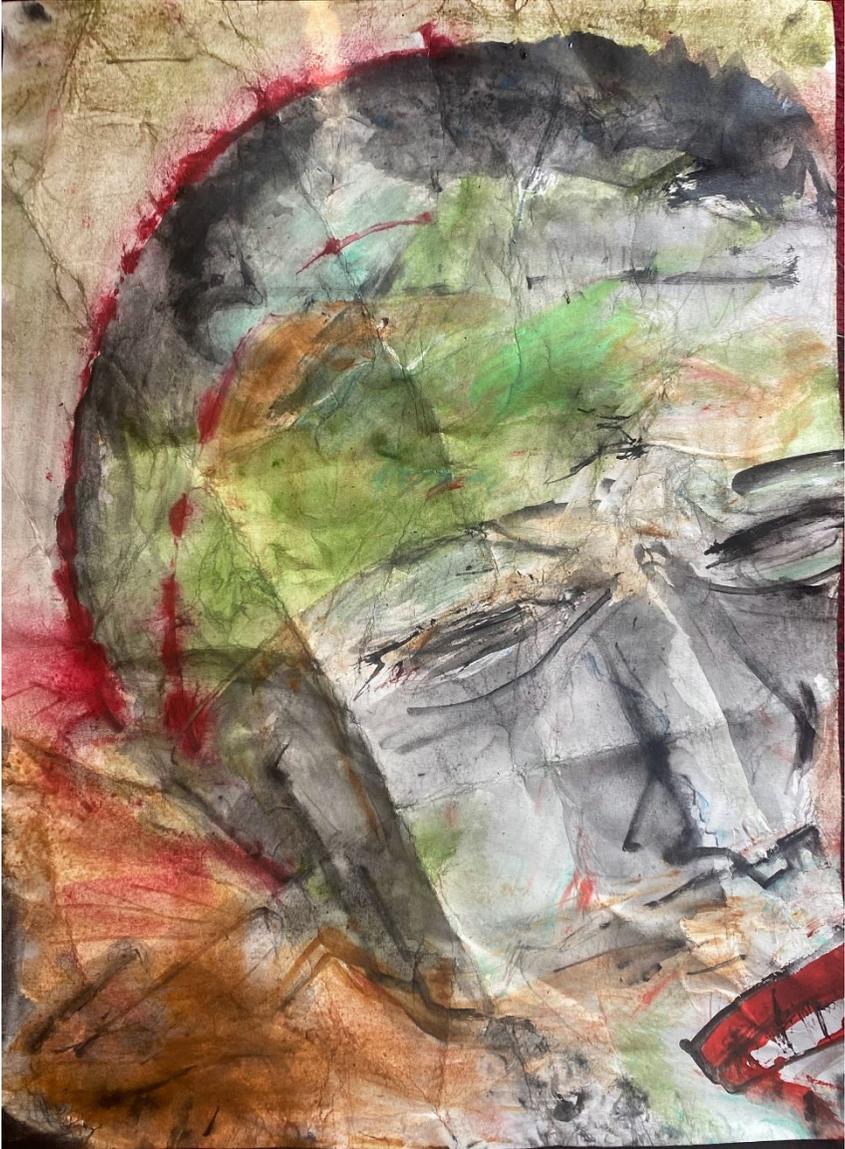
Some intricate rimshots



False face vision



My second wife's children



one troubled fella



Pheromones left



Pheromones right

BIOs

Raina Allen is a young emerging poet, born and raised in rural Pennsylvania. She is a strong advocate for women's rights and mental health. She often uses her poetry as a vehicle to discuss her own experience with these issues. Her work has been featured in *God's Cruel Joke*, *The Closed Eye Open*, *Hare's Paw*, and is forthcoming in the *Women in Horror* poetry collection published by Black Spot Books, *Under Her Eye*.

K.P. Anderson is an award-winning poet who lives and works in Washington, DC. Her chapbook *Mellifluous*, which arose from her fascination with bees and her years keeping a Warré hive, is a winner of the UnCollected Press Full Length Book or Chapbook of Poetry Contest and was featured by *American Bee Journal* as a Spring Read. Her poem "Correspondence" is included as a finalist in Public Poetry's *Pandemic Poems* anthology, and her chapbook *Upsurgent* was chosen as a finalist in Cordella Press's Poetry Chapbook Contest. Her work has appeared in various print and online journals.

Martin Appleby is a punk, poet, vegetarian, cider drinking scumbag from Hastings, England. He runs Scumbag Press and edits Paper and Ink Literary Zine.

Gary Beaumier has worked a dizzying array of jobs including teacher, bookstore manager, gandydancer and garbage man. Over the past four years he has won five writing contests for his poems including *Night Train to Paris*, *Sirocco*, *The Shape of My Absence* and most recently the Emily Dickenson prize for his poem *Spirit Animal*. His poem *Night Forest* won the Love Poetry contest was nominated for a Pushcart Prize and is the title poem for a recently released anthology. His two books *Dented Brown Fedora* and *From My Family to Yours* through Raw Arts Review and Finishing Line Press.

Digby Beaumont is an award-winning English artist. His artwork has been published extensively in collaboration with writers of fiction,

poetry and music. He works on portraits, figures, still lifes and landscapes. He also has a drawing series on the theme of what it is to be human. He creates his artwork with acrylic paint, mostly on canvas board, pen and ink on paper, mixed media and silk screen printing. Digby is self-taught. He became a professional artist in 2021. He is also a widely published writer. His flash fiction, short stories and poetry have appeared in more than 100 journals, magazines and anthologies, including *The Best Small Fictions*.

Christopher Paul Brown is known for his exploration of the unconscious through his use of improvisation and his cultivation of serendipity and synchronicity via alchemy. His first photography sale was to the collection of the Standard Oil Company of Indiana, and his video *You Define Single File* was nominated for the Golden Gate Award at the 47th San Francisco International Film Festival in 2004. Over the past five years his art was exhibited twice in Rome, Italy, twice in Belgrade, Serbia, and his series of ten photographs, titled *Obscure Reveal*, were exhibited at a Florida museum in 2017. His work is in two hardcover books released by Manifest Gallery and in *Tusis, Manipulated Images*, a Dek Unu book from 2019. Brown earned a BA in Film from Columbia College Chicago in 1980. He was born in Dubuque, Iowa and now resides in North Carolina, USA.

Robbi Sommers Bryant is a self-taught, award-winning watercolor artist. She is also an award-winning published writer and an editor. See her work at robbibryant.com.

James Dennis Casey IV is a poet, artist, author, and founder/editor-in-chief of Cajun Mutt Press. His work has been internationally published in print and online by several small press venues and literary magazines including *New Pop Lit*, *Mad Swirl*, *Zombie Logic Press*, *Horror Sleaze Trash*, and *The Beatnik Cowboy*.

Retired children's librarian **Alan Bern** has published three books of poetry and has a hybrid fictionalized memoir, *IN THE PACE OF THE PATH*, forthcoming from *UnCollected Press*. The poems in "SELF-PORTRAIT" included in the Winter 2023 issue of *The Raw Art Review* are from *IN THE PACE OF THE PATH*. Recent awards include: Winner, Saw Palm Poetry Contest (2022); Honorable Mention for Littoral Press Poetry Prize (2021). Recent and upcoming writing and photo work include: *CERASUS*, *Feral*, *The Hyacinth Review*, *DarkWinter*, and *Mercurius*. Alan is a published/exhibited photographer, and he performs with dancer/choreographer Lucinda Weaver as *PACES: dance & poetry fit the space* and with musicians from [Composing Together](#). *Lines & Faces*, his press with artist/printer Robert Woods: linesandfaces.com.

Derick Delloro is a science teacher from Cleveland, and a relapsed writer who is getting back into the form. Writing is a morning process, creative outlet, and a way to make sense of all the things that have happened along the way. He has been published previously in *Halfway Down the Stairs Magazine*.

Alan Elyshevitz is the author of a collection of stories, *The Widows and Orphans Fund* (SFA Press), a full-length poetry collection, *Generous Peril* (Cyberwit), and four poetry chapbooks, most recently *Mortal Hours* (SurVision). Winner of the James Hearst Poetry Prize from *North American Review*, he is a two-time recipient of a fellowship in fiction writing from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts

Estlack Joseph William's poems are featured in SEISMA Magazine's Astrophysics Edition, Zoetic Press as well as many online publications. A founding member of Mugwumpin, vanguard experimental theater company based in San Francisco, he studied theater at the graduate level in the pedagogy of Jacques Lecoq. While more focused on writing near his hometown in rural Pennsylvania, he still acts for television and film while working on a farm.

Sophia Falco is the author of three poetry books titles: *Chronicles of Cosmic Chaos: In The Fourth Dimension* (2022), *Farewell Clay Dove* (2021), and *The Immortal Sunflower* (2019) all published by UnCollected Press. She is the winner of the Mirabai Prize for Poetry. Furthermore, Falco will be completing a highly regarded Master of Fine Arts Program for Poetry along with carrying out their Teaching Fellowship at Saint Mary's College of California. (Class of 2024.) This to make her dream career become a reality to be a Professor of Poetry.

Debbie Fox. The art exhibition was *Across the Rainbow Arc.* 2023 has been good to me. Three of my paintings are hanging in the King City Municipal Office in King City, Ontario, Canada. Next to each painting is a poem inspiring artists to 'paint the poem.' It was a challenge painting words, but it turned out well. Dozens of people came to see everyone's poems and artwork. I was asked to explain my paintings to visitors and artists who were packed in the aisle, drinking wine and eating cheese while enjoying art acrylics, fabrics, silk, etc. Their applause at the end was loud!

My other passion, besides painting and riding my horses, is dancing. I have private lessons with my ballroom/Latin dance teacher. We dance in clubs in Toronto. I also Zoom ballet with my ballet teacher.

Dean Gessie is an author and poet of global renown. Among other honors, Dean won the Aesthetica Creative Writing Award in England, the Enizagam Poetry Contest in California, the Samuel Washington Allen Prize in Massachusetts, the Southern Shakespeare Company Sonnet Contest in Florida, the COP26 Poetry Competition in Scotland, the Ageless Authors Poetry Competition in Texas, the Frank O'Hara Prize in Massachusetts, the Dr. William Henry Drummond National Poetry Contest in Canada, the Indigo Open Prize in England, the Editors' Prize from the Spoon River Review in Illinois, the UN-aligned Poetry Competition in Finland, the Allingham Arts Festival Poetry Contest in Ireland and a Creators of Justice Literary Award from the International Human Rights Art Festival in New York. He was also one

of twenty international poets included in the Poetry Archive NOW! World View Video Anthology in England and he was twice selected for *The Best 64 Poets* by Black Mountain Press in North Carolina. Dean's short story collection, *Anthropocene*, won three international awards and his latest book, *goat song*, won the Seven Hills Literary Competition in Florida for best poetry collection published since 2020. Dean lives north of Toronto with his wife and dog.

Olga Gonzalez Latapi (she/her/hers), from Mexico City, is a queer poet with an MFA in Writing from California College of the Arts and a BS in Journalism from Northwestern University. Her work has been published in BARNHOUSE Literary Journal, Sonder Midwest literary arts magazine as well as in The Nasiona magazine, The Closed Eye Open Journal, Iris Literary Journal, The Anti-Languorous Project, Qwerty magazine among others. She also has a spoken word album out with Amaryllis Records. She is Head of Writing Tournaments and Transcriber at The Nasiona, as well as the translator of *Reflections of An Old Man* (Pensamientos de un Viejo) by Fernando Gonzalez, out soon from The Nasiona. She recently became the Managing Editor for the upcoming The Nasiona issue.

Other publications:

Wingless Dreamer (The Book of Black) literary journal

Phantom Kangaroo literary journal

Drunk Monkeys journal

MOONLOVE press

Fauxmoir Lit Mag

Serge Lecomte was born in Belgium. He came to the States where he spent his teens in South Philly and then Brooklyn. After graduating from Tilden H. S. he joined the Medical Corps in the Air Force. He earned an MA and Ph.D. from Vanderbilt University in Russian Literature with a minor in French Literature. He worked as a Green Beret language instructor at Fort Bragg, NC from 1975-78. In 1988 he received a B.A. from the University of Alaska Fairbanks in Spanish Literature. He worked as a language teacher at the University of Alaska

(1978-1997). He worked as a house builder, pipe-fitter, orderly in a hospital, gardener, landscaper, driller for an assaying company, bartender. Take care and be well,

Doug May is a member of the neurodivergent community. He worked many entry-level jobs in the private sector, and made poetry and paintings in his off hours. He recently had a chapbook, “October,” published by Obo Limbo-Verlag and new poems will be appearing in *f(r)iction* and *Strangers and Karma*.

Chris Menezes holds a bachelor’s in creative writing from California State University, Long Beach, and an MFA in poetry from Converse University. His work has appeared in literary publications like Rockvale Review, Switchback, RipRap, Gold Man Review, Foliate Oak, Buck Off Magazine, and others. He currently works as a communications and marketing writer for a not-for-profit health plan in California, where he lives with his wife and dog, and tries to surf and play music as much as possible.

Robert Perchan’s latest books are the comic futuristic novella *Tropic of Scorpio* (Spuyten Duyvil Press, 2022) and *Last Notes from a Split Peninsula: Poems and Prose Poems* (UnCollected Press, 2021). His short story “Rose in the Steel Dust” is scheduled to appear in his forthcoming story collection “*Shocks, Meester?*” His poetry collection *Fluid in Darkness, Frozen in Light* won the 1999 Pearl Poetry Prize and was published by Pearl Editions in 2000. Bob continues to eat and drink and write in Busan, South Korea, under the bemused gaze of his translator wife, Mi-kyung Lee.

Mia X. Perez received her BA in Creative Writing from The New School and is currently a PhD student of Comparative Literature at CUNY Graduate Center. She enjoys knitting and sitting in sitting in silence with her cat.

Josephine Pino was a child in Albuquerque, a young adult in many places, and currently resides near Portland, Oregon. She is a scientist

by diploma, educator by heart, and writer by nature. She enjoys the intersections between all things that intersect. Her publications include poems in Cathexis NW, High Shelf Press, Tiny Seed Literary Journal, Anti-Languorous Project, The Fourth River, and Raw Art Review. She recently published her first short story.

Linda H. Post is a painter of powerful women, the sea, mysterious encounters, and uncommon places. Birds, especially seabirds, have long been choreographed into Post's work, sometimes as companions, other times as avatars of change, growth, or escape. The conjunction of women and birds placed in enigmatic landscapes evokes an especially vivid dream. She grew up along the New England coast and always felt the ocean to be a magical place, with its endless sky and perfect light. Some of her most recent paintings are set along the Pacific coast of Costa Rica. Post's work has been included in numerous national and regional publications, exhibited in museums and galleries throughout the country, and resides in many important public and private collections. She lives in Northampton, Massachusetts. Contact information and a complete selection of her work is at www.LHPost.com

Thomas Riesner was born in Leipzig in 1971 and still live here today. Already in elementary school I often painted "abstract" instead of the given concrete drawing.

John D Robinson is a UK poet: hundreds of his poems have appeared in small press zines and online literary journals including : Rusty Truck: Outlaw Poetry: North Of Oxford: Tuck Magazine: Misfits Magazine: The Sunflower Collective: Winamop: Bear Creek Haiku: Chicago Record: The Legendary: Paper and Ink Zine: Algebra Of Owls: Full Of Crow: The Beatnik Cowboy: The Clockwise Cat: The Scum Gentry: Message In A Bottle: Horror Sleaze ,Trash: Your One Phone Call: In Between Hangovers: Rasputin: Revolution John: Vox Poetica: Hand Job Zine: 48th Street Press: Poems-For-All: Philosophical Idiot: The Peeking Cat: Midnight Lane Boutique:

Underground Books: Dead Snakes: Yellow Mama: Bareback Lit:
Eunoia Review: Hobo Camp Review:

Robert Eugene Rubino is the author of three collections: "Aficionado" (Humming Word Press); "Vanity Unfair" (Cathexis Northwest Press); and "Douglas Knocks Out Tyson" (UnCollected Press). He lives in Palo Alto, California.

After decades of teaching writing and literature, **Dave Sims** now makes art and music in the mountains of central Pennsylvania. His paintings, comix, stories and poems appear in dozens of tactile and virtual exhibits and publications, with recent digital work appearing inside **Artifact** from the *Red Noise Collective*, a five-page merged comix piece called **America Who Knew?** squirming around inside the pixellated realm of *Streelit*, and a watercolor painting called **Fishing for her children** placing as a finalist in *Sunspot Literature's* 2023 Rigel Contest. A grandfather of several beautiful children, he's also the primary companion to a three-footed jazz turtle named Turk. See more at www.tincansims.com.

Henry G. Stanton's fiction, poetry and paintings have appeared widely in online and print publications. Most recently his artwork has appeared in Holy & Intoxicated Press, Paper & Ink Zine, The Tiny Seed Journal, Closed Eye Open, Wild Roof Journal and Poet's Espresso Review. His poetry was selected for the A3 Review Poetry Prize and was shortlisted for the Eyewear 9th Fortnight Prize for Poetry. His fiction received an Honorable Mention acceptance for the Salt & Syntax Fiction Contest and was selected as a finalist for the Pen 2 Paper Annual Writing Contest. A selection of Henry G. Stanton's paintings and other artworks can be viewed at the following website www.brightportfal.com. Henry G. Stanton is a regular illustrator for Black Petal and Yellow Mama Online publications.

Pamela Sumners is a two-time Pushcart nominee. She has published three poetry collections: *Ragpicking Ezekiel's Bones* (UnCollected Press); *Finding Helen* (Rane Arroyo Prize winner); and *Etiquette* for a

Pandemic (Backroom Window Press). Publications and awards are on her author page, www.pamelalsummers.com. A lawyer and native Alabamian, she now lives in St. Louis.

Rats Alice Trujillo is a queer social dissident, restaurant worker and esoteric multimedia artist. They are active around Seattle and their writings appear sporadically in print and digital, most visibly with *Unlikely Stories Mark V*. More recently they have released several collections of poems in zines available at Left Bank Books.

VaiBionic. The world was beautiful, but the circumstances were shrouded in deception, death, and anger. Born of Native Hawaiian and Chicana descent on the island of Kaua'i, taken in LA, and undead in the deserts of Arizona, VaiBionic has lived more than a lifetime. Her initial hopes of grandeur and creative energy took her to the west coast with hopes of branding herself as a music critic, and ultimately creating a recording label. "The only comfort I got was in the beauty I found in the ugliness of the world.", shares Vai as she transcends barriers.

.On January 1, 2017, Vai was violently beaten and thrown out a five story window, while carrying what would have been her second child.

It was recovery that united her w/painting. Self-taught, VaiBionic has exhibited her work on a constant basis since first coming to prominence in 2022.

The abrasive, yet delicate, approach towards her art has acted as a catalyst in the absolute union of fine art and hip hop. Vai's work has appeared in both solo and group exhibitions and has received a great deal of critical praise, admiration, and respect due to her unapologetic portrayal of beauty uprooted through her own personal trauma and suffering.

"I'm here to show you what we go through when we survive, how we survive, what we've seen, heard, felt, and the losses we've endured."

There is no longer a choice, there is only a fight according to VaiBionic. She welcomes you into the resurrection.

Sylvia Van Nooten is an asemic artist living in Western Colorado. Asemic art, with its pastiche of ‘language’ and images, allows her to merge texts and painting creating a hybrid form of communication which is open to interpretation. Her work has appeared in *The South Florida Poetry Journal*, local galleries and at the exhibition *Mai Piu* in Italy.

Instagram: www.instagram.com/sylviavannooten
sylviavannooten@gmail.com

Paul Vivari is a writer from Washington DC. His short fiction has previously been published in *The Washington City Paper*, *Mystery Magazine*, *The Twin Bill*, *The Dark City Crime & Mystery Magazine*, and *Free Spirit Press: Revenge*.

Susan Waddell, often under her alias - Susan Sleepwriter, wrote micropoetry and short stories in the tiny spaces between working while living in Sydney, Australia. More recently she made the big move out of the city. Inspired by big skies, amazing wildlife, and the unique landscapes of Queensland's Sunshine Coast, she turned to exploring the visual medium, creating dreamscapes and painting her chickens. She is almost always surprised by what her brush paints.

James Walton is published in many anthologies, journals, and newspapers. He has been shortlisted for the ACU National Poetry Prize, the MPU International Poetry Prize, The James Tate Prize, and the Ada Cambridge Prize. Five collections of his poetry have been published. He was nominated for ‘The Best of the Net’ 2019, and was a Pushcart Prize 2021 nominee. He is a winner of the Raw Art Review Chapbook Prize. His fifth poetry collection, *Snail Mail Cursive*, was published by Ginninderra Press in January 2023. He now resides in Wonthaggi, Australia, in an Edwardian house which was once a small maternity hospital.

Christian Ward is a UK-based writer who has recently appeared in the *Rappahannock Review*, *South Florida Poetry Journal*, *Impsired*, *Mad Swirl*, *Dodging the Rain*, *Wild Greens*, *Dipity Literary Magazine*, *Indian Periodical*, and *Streetcake Magazine*.

Jeff Weddle is a poet and writer living in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. He won the Eudora Welty Prize for *Bohemian New Orleans: The Story of the Outsider* and Loujon Press and has also received honors for his fiction and poetry. His work has appeared in Albanian translation. Jeff teaches in the School of Library and Information Studies at the University of Alabama.

Based in Borrego Springs California, artist **Robin Young** works in mixed media mostly on collage and contemporary art making. Her focus on collage art using magazine clippings, masking tape, wallpaper, jewelry, feathers, foil etc. allows her to develop deep into the whimsical and intuitive. From large, life-sized pieces and 3D sculptures to small postcard-sized arrangements, her keen eye and gripping esthetic guide her viewers into her own semi-readymade world. Repurposing these nostalgic images for lighthearted and sometimes disquieting messages; Robin's artistic universe is strange, funky, sometimes perverse and always alluring.



Body of Work
by Henry G. Stanton