



Brushfire58

the university of nevada, reno literary arts journal fall 2006

kelly bridegum, editor

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introduction...

The Brushfire is an incredible landmark in this University's history—being Northern Nevada's only literary and visual arts journal since 1950—and a priceless record of the passion and ability of this community. Over the past five months, I am privileged to have received an overwhelming amount and variety of talented, intellectual, provocative, comical and exciting work. Picking up this book is just the beginning of a unique artistic experience.

You are now going to embark on a journey through the minds and visions of some of the most talented and emerging artists and writers in this community. You are a witness to their testaments, processes, and products. This is your opportunity to experience their concepts of place, identity, form, the ephemeral, and much more. I hope the contents of these pages inspire you as piecing together this publication has inspired me.

...place

the places we desire, define,
imagine, live, love, and leave

The Taste of Sevilla

by nathan slinker

the cathedral alas
is Godly
a thousand Christs' tinny blood
pools on the floor
soaking into my calloused feet
replacing skin where skin escaped
I go to cleanse

a bowl with a cross
sits arid, empty
only old minerals dried to the side
the golden alters gleamed
eternally wealthy
and spiritual?

this museum is different
though swelling head pressure
from ambient cherub scratches
peaked, the silence was only thought
less prayer
less swimming with tortured Arabian souls

artistry exists in artist hands
and here
amidst heavenly celebrations
is a place worshipping
beauty and finesse
colors that do gleam
to showcase wealth

later
my new companion said
"where we want to be
is the other side of the street"
I looked up and nodded
but the people over there
were barefoot too



Kaleb Temple, *Locals*, photograph



Tyler McPherron, *Hangout*, digital compilation

The Drive Home

by amelia nickol

Our green beast pushes harder down the
gray asphalt,
an hour out of Vegas and 80 feels like bliss.
My arm is burning at thousand and something
degrees hanging out the window...
The new boots I bought in town have melted
to my legs and my blues jeans feel like a
Pyramid Lake heated rock.
There is crying from our stereo speakers
about misplaced love.
In the passenger seat my boy sits quiet with
his chin lifted and eyes closed.

He looks beautiful like that.

I have been in preparation my whole life for
this.
This road. This heat. This car.
I drive...
The sun feels like heaven when reflected
through the glass of our 1966 Cadillac Coupe
Deville.
And I know, for the first time in my whole
measly life,
that everything is good.
Nothing can hurt me here.
Not even death with its insensitive and fierce
nature.
Not even death, I repeat in my head.



Alex Tam, *Desert*, photograph



Richie Berdnarski, *Challenge*, photograph

Emily Clark, *Light and Bridge*, photograph



Moving Forward

by reva brandt

I leave the library late, bundled for the cold, breathing into my scarf to feel heat.
I measure the long walk home by the passing of streets, concentrating on the ice
beneath my feet. I start to think of you – hoping that you're walking home too.

Love is a constant, blind in time, we learn to see.

I say your name as if it were my destination, then watch it cloud in the cold air and
float just ahead of me in the dark.

Times Up

by amelia nickol

Unpack, unpack
We few, we few
Back from vacation
From the day to day
Of to do, to do

Unwind, unwind
We too, we too
No more sights to see
From city to city
Of you and you

Remind, remind
We knew, we knew
That the morning awakes
From day to day
Anew, anew

Forget, forget
We do, we do
The resting time
From far afar
The very hue, the very hue



Lauren Baker, untitled, painting

Ode to the Plastic Grapes

by emmaline leighton

And some are red
and green
and purple.

Dangling precariously
In this faux Tuscany.
A Napa-style invasion
Of translucent green orbs.

Somewhere, in an orgy of rigid vineyards
Created by Man
(Made in China)
Hang ten thousand tiny, purple balls

Waiting to be plucked,
And savored,
And made into plastic wine.

featured artists...

to check out some of Tyler's audio/ video work navigate your browsers to www.asun.unr.edu/brushfire/feature.html

“I’m a crappy painter, so I use the computer as my paintbrush...”



name: Tyler McPherron

medium of choice: digital mediums... depending on the work

major: Broadcast Journalism/ Art (digital media)

year: senior

“I’ve been working with turntables, audio and video in live performance... this gives the audience the chance to interact in the mixing of and mending of image and sound... it’s a one of a kind experience, ephemeral in essence”



Tyler McPherron, *Dusk*, digital compilation

On
The Eve
Of
My
Death
The
Moon
Licked
The Sun
He Sweated
God strands of
Seraphim light

Where God lives in the light
And the night was the golden one
So He needed Not to be
The keeper Anymore.
The moon Took over
And greeted me that night
Shhh he said It is I who am
Here now, God lives in Paris.

Paris Poem
by mackenzie leighton



Frances Arnold, *Sardine Road Trip*, photograph

Post-Bliss

by frances arnold

sudden cold skies weep
over my naked body
i reach for your radiance
but distance delivers chills

you've turned to sand
rushed back to sea's freedom
love's shattered song shrouds
my quaking heart

I shrivel beneath my mourning sky
as curtains close
over my raining
eyes
my lungs are bricks
my hands unite in imploring prayer -
unmake this reality

hollow

SILENCE

SCREAMS



Leah Habermehl, *untitled #1*, photograph

Juniper Churchbell

by emmaline leighton

By the juniper tree,
The potent smell of berries and
Death plagues
What lamb slept
Here.

Momma made rice for dinner
Last night.
With something spicy for
Daddy's palate.
And she'd make lamb tonight,

If only my little friend hadn't died...
Next to
The juniper tree,
Its roots twisting like a rope
For the noose

For the baby.
Passed into the night
(or is it light?)
Like a silent church bell
Tolling not in brass, not in

Metal at all,
But in the low mummer
Of wooden crying;
In the low mummer of
My ardent heart.

Little lamb had so
Much to carry.
His skin, loose
Like
He was dressed

In his brother's borrowed clothes.
Or hand-me-downs.

Lay-me-down
By my little friend.
Wayfarer in the
San Bernardino's.
On his way to Juniper Resurrection,

For lambs tend to rise away from
Their tired, broken bodies.
Momma said that is a lie.
Blasphemy... no afterlife for lambs
And

Their mortal souls.
But if my lamb,
My freckle-nosed lamb,
Is meant for the earth
Not

The angels,
Not
Rebirth
Than I wish to die
Beside him

And be murdered
In the silence
Of the night
Or the cacophony
Of the dawn

Or the canopy of shade
Cast by the juniper tree,
And be forever hushed
And still like a stone
Beside him.



Emily Clark, *from Basque Trees*, photograph



Dylan Mucklow, *Reflections of Crater Lake*, photograph

Typical City

by joel lippert

Involved in a not-so-typical daydream, I am here, in Donostia, near the heart of Basque country in the north of Spain. I sit gulping café con leche, basically an unpretentious latte, in a café/bar off a small 400 year old plaza in Parte Vieja, or Old Town. Children play keep-away with a soccer ball in the stone square outside, a father rushes by my table to go wash off his infant's pacifier, another tourist takes photos of the square's clock and neo-gothic edifice against the failing light of a slightly mauve, coastal sky. I sit here because I wait for my laundry to finish the wash cycle at one of the town's two self-service Laundromats. Typical city?

On the stereo, when I can hear it over the cash register and the frothing milk, Cheryl Crow is telling me what she wants to do on Santa Monica Blvd, and then a Spanish band "Takes it to the limit" with a fabulous Eagle's cover. Two ladies in their sixties, sitting on stools at the bar drinking wine and smoking heavily, are approached by a girl of about nine that has come to convince grandma of something. Her success is apparent as she runs off with coins in her small hand. Typical city.

The bartender thin-slices some ham off the leg bone that hangs behind the bar – indeed, every bar in Spain – and serves it up with some bread on the side to one of the ladies – the other takes fresh-made mayonnaise and mounds it on her white asparagus spears, which are about the size of corndogs, and cuts into one with her fork. Typical Spanish bar food. Though I risk insulting the bartender, I leave the equivalent of a quarter tip as I rise to go put my wash in to dry.

A few minutes later, in the back of a pizza joint, 30 yards from a 16th century Gothic church, I gulp my Budweiser but only nibble on my slice – it's just not Domino's. On the way here, two doors down from the laundromat, I took a couple of photos of a head shop for my friends here to chuckle at. I can't finish my ham and mushroom pizza slice, but the Sheppard-mixed mutt that stops by my table for a scratch behind the right ear seems pleased enough. On my way out I give her left ear equal time and receive an Edie Brickell "smile from a dog" as payment.

I retrieve and fold my clothes and then wander through Old Town a bit. Weaving my way through a basket shop I spy a crystal paper weight that

looks like the perfect gift for my boss that sent me on this trip, but it is way over my Euro-limit. The other boutiques are small (duh) and quaint and elegant and disorganized and modern encased in their walls of 400 year old stone.

After this miniscule walk-about, the Budweiser begs for release and, voila, there is another café/bar! I feel guilty, as always, just using the place as a pit stop, so I order another latte and a chocolate croissant – a guy can't live on beer and bad pizza alone, especially in the north of Spain. With urgent matters now resolve, I begin to write again. Three ladies in their sixties enter and sit at the table next to me, order wine and light cigarettes. Above them a large, Samsung flat screen TV flashes with the staccato editing of the Spanish MTV, though the audio is off and completely different modern Spanish music blasts through the speakers and into my knees.

This café/bar is much more modern than the last, but like nearly all the others it has a cigarette machine, an espresso machine, and at least one slot machine (that I can't, at a glance, figure out how to play – though the object of it is not lost in translation). For a second I do one of those low-tech, "B"-movie special effects & flip back and forth, back and forth, where one second I am in the middle of (Euro) Basque country in a smoke laden bar with a slot machine nearly in my lap – and the next second I am in the middle of (Reno) Basque country in a smoke laden bar with a slot machine nearly in my lap – and the next second I am... whoa, trippy typical city.

I finish my coffee and desert and, feeling really mean, leave a 50 cent tip this time. I feel eyes on me as I rise to leave – the three ladies, nearly my mother's age (and I'm past 40), are checking me out. Not really wanting to know their intentions I pack quickly, yet walk deliberately slow out the door and am embraced by the soft ocean air of this transcendental, meditative night.

I need to get some night photos of the nearby town hall, so on I walk. A century ago it was a casino where the nobility of Southern Europe came to play, now it is just another building that's beauty belies its purpose, past and present. I walk along the sea-wall, past the well manicured garden

with its strange Joshua tree-like trees, without all the pointy things, past palms and a multitude of benches under a multitude of softly-lit, wrought iron lamp posts. As cliché as it is, and I feel, I turn back to the beautiful bureaucratic building and snap a shot or two of sea-wall, waves, garden, and building, and walk on. Thousands of miles from Reno, though only a few hundred kilometers from Monte Carlo, I wait for my bus outside an exclusive, well, bingo parlor.

Thirty minutes later I step back out the door of my hotel, and six walking-blocks later I plant my butt on the beach. Leaning against a chunk of driftwood, I pour some red wine into a hotel bathroom glass, raise and gulp a silent toast to the light breeze on my face, and bite off a hunk from a wedge of sharp cheddar – I know, I know, again "clichés-R-us", but what the hell would you do? I pull pad and pen out of my bag, pop a grape in my mouth and begin again this treatise of "My Laundry Night". More wine, pen moves on paper.

Though the light from the adjacent boulevard is fairly strong, here on this narrow strip of beach called "Playa de Ondarreta", I cannot see where the drum-circle sounds are coming from. Drum circle? Wait a minute...playa – drums – alcohol...playa – drums – alcohol...man, this is cool. Though my body was on the Playa de Ondarreta in the north of Spain, at least part of my spirit was transported back to the Playa de Black Rock in the north of Nevada – so I was compelled, yes compelled, to walk through the night and the sand to the unseen source of the drums.

As it turns out, it was 3 girls, each about 22 or so, fully clothed, sporting no body paint or fluorescent hair, who politely looked at me strangely and declined my proffered bottle of wine. Though later, after I returned my body to the butt imprint I left in the sand next to the chunk of driftwood, I realized that when the girls asked me if I had any rolling papers, yet turned down a cigarette, it might have been code for something. Hmm... Playa – alcohol – Drum Rolling Papers... playa – alcohol – drums – rolling papers... Well, you get the picture.

This whole evening, so far only about four hours long including public transportation to and from old town, really has been the best part of my whole trip. And it wasn't because I was off on an adventure in a

foreign country – it wasn't because I was on the beach at night writing and drinking wine and eating cheese and grapes, with dark-haired, Spanish coeds a drum beat away – it wasn't because I had been visiting and literally walking through history and art that night, and the previous five days. It was because it was so sublimely mundane, this day...this daydream.

Every country has multiple-thousand year old history and art, it's just that less of it is "white" history than many care to admit or pay attention to, and therefore, for them - for far too many, unimportant or not seen. Everyone must eat and drink and give coins to children. Everyone gets their clothes dirty and must wash them.

Everyone should, on occasion, sit on the beach with music playing in their heads, and contemplate the grains of sand that they sit on – and daydream.



Meredith Arp, *untitled*, ceramics



Jessica Richards, *untitled*, ceramics

featured artists...

“My writing tends to lean toward the darker side of life, with hope that the reader can find meaning within.”

name: Lacey Damron

medium of choice: Prose

major: English (writing)/ Philosophy minor

year: Sophomore

influences: Clive Barker, Stephen King, Jonathan Carroll, Boston Teran, Chuck Palahniuk, Sherman Alexie, Craig Clevenger, Mark Haddon, Audrey Niffenegger, Richard Matheson, and, of course, Christopher Coake.

Shit Olympics

by lacey damron

The house still sits on a corner lot facing the Truckee River, barely two blocks from downtown. At any time of the year, you can open a window and hear the meditative rush of the water, which cuts the downtown area in half. From spring to mid-summer, you needn't even open a window to hear it, as the snowmelt from the mountains surrounding Tahoe – depending on the amount of snowfall from the previous winter – fills it, raising both the water level and volume to the banks on either side.

Gramma left the house to me, her only-bastard grandchild, on account of her only-bastard son dying of a heroin overdose thirteen years earlier, and her hating my mother. Mom sent me to Gramma every summer throughout my adolescent years to rid herself of the reminder of my father, before and after he died.

The house seems sad, not because Gramma has died, but because it is in bad need of repair. The hard wood flooring creaks, aching for the nourishment of reconditioning and the plumbing moans, barely able to spit water from the Alfred Hitchcock Psycho-like showerheads.

I decided to keep all of Gramma's antiques, not out of sentimentality, but simply as a quasi-savings account. I planned not to work the rest of my life as the house is paid for, and I only needed enough money for food, the electric bill, and property taxes each year. So for extra cash I put an ad in the paper to rent out two of the five rooms in the house.

That's how I met Claire.

Gramma's ancient bell rang and I opened the door to this vision in white tank-top and flowing black skirt. A thin black strap hung from one shoulder, holding a striped canvas purse, which matches her outfit. Her straight auburn hair fell to sharp points where I imagined her nipples are centered on her perfect breasts. A red BMW sat curbside, perpendicular to the tongue of sidewalk that lead from Gramma's porch to the street. The girl smiled an Orbit-gum-flash of perfect teeth.

“Hi,” I say, noticing that the index finger of her left hand met her thumb.

“Hi, I'm Claire. I'm here about your ad in the paper for two rooms for rent. I want to rent them both.”

I looked back at the 1918 Waltham cherry wood Grandfather clock in the hallway and it was barely eight a.m. on Thursday, the day the ad came out. She was the first and, if it was true what she says about wanting them both, the only applicant.

“Well, come in,” I said, as she touched each of her other three fingers to her thumb in unison, tapping to the cadence of my voice. I remember to say, “Oh, I'm Benjamin Tussle.” I extended my hand. Claire noticed me watching hers.

She looked down. “Sorry, I do that when I'm nervous,” she said. “I count syllables with my fingers. Sorry.” Claire took my hand in hers. It was a soft, firm handshake—not the grip of an anxious, mousy girl but one of authority, of confidence—and a kinetic energy passed between us, or at least from her to me. The fact that I knew nothing about her was merely a trifle, but not an obstacle.

“Do you want to come in? Have some coffee?” I said, pointing back towards the kitchen. “I was just about to make some.” Her fingers

drummed her thumb. I found it charming. I almost wanted to slow down so she wouldn't miss a single syllable, but something told me she wouldn't.

"I can't. I have to be in class in twenty minutes and I just wanted to secure the rooms before you found anyone else. I love these old houses. They're so full of...of..."

I thought, Still full of Gramma's shit, before she continued.

"...I don't know, but there's something about them that I just love, plus, school's not that far, so I could walk back and forth everyday." She turned her back to me and I noticed her hair was cut in an A-line, exposing her neck. I envisioned my tongue tracing the curvature of her spine, speed-bumping over the vertebrae, "And I love, absolutely love, that you're so close to the river."

"Yeah, it's great." My hand was still up, thumb back, pointing behind me, so I put it down. "Who would be in the other room?"

"My brother would be in one and my...his caretaker'd be in the other."

I pictured a poor boy in a wheelchair, drooling on himself, and Nurse Ratchet, not Claire, by his side screaming at his saliva glands for secreting. "Oh, it's not for you, then?"

"Well, kind of. I'd be here whenever I'm not at school, and I'm only taking three classes this semester."

"Is your brother in a wheelchair? Because this is a two-story and all the rooms in the house are on the second floor." I hoped I didn't sound like I was trying to discourage her.

She chuckled, and then replied, "No, his legs work fine. He's just a little slo—more innocent—than most people, so he can't work. I feel better with someone around when I'm not."

"But, don't you want to see the rooms first?"

"This house is huge," Claire said, looking up and around. "I'm sure the rooms are great. I just love these old homes. God, they're just so...so..."

"Homey?" I said and Claire nods her head yes. "Well, I'd like to meet your brother and the caretaker before I decide." Even though my decision was made after, "Hi, I'm Claire."

Claire looked at the watch on her finger-drumming hand then reached into her purse and pulled out an envelope. "I have to go, but

here's some money down for a deposit for both rooms. It's a thousand bucks; I wasn't sure how much you were asking..."

I looked at the envelope, looked at the BMW in the street, then back at Claire and wondered why she wasn't buying her own place.

"...Can you just hold the rooms until you meet him? Please, please, please?"

I conceded because of the subtle pout of her lip I wanted to nibble on and the pleading eyes I wanted to soon see rolled up into her head while I was inside of her.

"I can bring them by tonight, if you don't mind," she said.

"I have some errands to run this afternoon, so maybe sometime after five-thirty or so?"

"That's great." Claire said, and turned to leave. "Oh, Is there any way you could do me a big favor before we come by?"

"Sure," I said. Anything you want, just to see you again. Want me to roll over? Play dead? Whatever you desire. "What favor?"

"Is there any way..." Claire squinted one eye and pursed her lips, "that maybe you could turn the screws in all the wall sockets in the house...up? I mean, so they're all pointing up? It's a thing with my brother."

Strange. "Um, sure."

That night I met Flippy and Phillip. They're both named Phillip, so Phillip—the caretaker—nicknamed Claire's brother Flippy.

At first, I didn't know which one was the brother and which was the caretaker. Both are aloof. It was when one wouldn't shake hands—just stared at me with the controlled concentration of an autistic that I figured it out. The stare, though, was calculated, void of any vacancy. Flippy's six foot three, at least, pudgy around the middle, mustached and stubble-chinned, and somewhere around my age, which makes him probably seven years Claire's senior. A sudden gust blew through the porch and lifted Flippy's bangs, and for a second I saw a large, molten scar that ran from his hairline back into his scalp.

Phillip, on the other hand, was shorter than both of us, wiry and frog-eyed, with a bowl of hair that fell down his back in a long ponytail. He didn't look like a caretaker, but rather someone in need of being taken care of, like a bratty child who thinks he doesn't need anyone, yet

constantly craves the attention of others. Phillip chose to grace me with a slight wave and a “What’s up, dude?” before I could extend my hand to him, so I didn’t bother.

Claire bounded up the walk from the BMW and any trepidation I felt about these two dissipated. Flippy grunted a small laugh and his beaming smile exuded something like the same feeling I had towards Claire: “Thank god she’s back.” Phillip seemed bored.

“Did everyone meet each other?” She said, all the excitement held within her for both the Phillips.

I gave them the tour. The first thing Flippy did was check all the wall sockets. Every time he found one, he said, “Up,” then moved to the next. He reminded me of a German Shepard, sniffing bags at the airport. It was like a game—as Claire followed him from room to room, they were both laughing. I was left standing with Phillip in the foyer. I smiled, and he retorted by shaking his head, then followed after them. As he entered the dining room, I heard him snort, “Fucking freak,” probably not meant for me to hear.

Right away, I feel a pang of sympathy for both Flippy and Claire.

Three days later, the Phillips moved in, and Claire was living here, too, more or less. Every night, she would put Flippy to bed about ten or so, after reading a couple of pages from Harry Potter to him. She kissed him good night, waved at him from her car—as he was always standing in the window watching her—then snuck back in about a half hour later to sleep, or whatever, in Phillip’s room. Phillip was no caretaker; he was an unemployed leech who lived off of Claire and Flippy. Why she kept him around, I simply couldn’t figure out.

I was trying to finish a book of short stories by Richard Matheson but couldn’t concentrate because Phillip had his amp up so loud that nowhere in the house could I find sanctuary from the repetition of “Smoke on the Water” bellowing over and over from Phillip’s guitar. I got up from Gramma’s late Victorian two-seater blood red Chesterfield sofa to ask him for the third time today if he can turn it down.

I walked by the parlor and the TV is on, but Flippy’s not in front of it. I went to the kitchen and no Flippy. I run up the stairs and can’t even hear the creaking or thump of my footfalls on the hardwood staircase. I checked Flippy’s room and he wasn’t there, either. Oh shit.

Had he run away? I swung open the door of Phillip’s bedroom.

“Hey!” I yelled. “Phillip!” He stops playing and looks up at me for a second, then resumes with a poor rendition of “Paranoid” by Black Sabbath. It sounds almost psychedelic as Phillip slaughters it.

“Hey!” I yelled again. “I gotta ask you something. Can you turn it down?”

Phillip reached over and turned a dial on the amplifier. “What do you want?”

“Have you seen Flippy?”

“Bathroom.”

“How long’s he been in there?” I asked, craning my neck to look down the hall.

“I don’t know,” he replied, never taking his heavy-lidded, bloodshot eyes from the neck of the guitar.

“What the hell’s he doing in there?”

“Probably shit-olympics,” Phillip says. He almost nails every note of the solo.

“Shit-olympics?”

“Yeah.” He looked perturbed, then finally stopped playing and lowered his voice. “Every couple of days, Flippy will go into a bathroom – doesn’t matter where we’re at – and disappear for about a half an hour or so.”

“Why? Irritable bowel syndrome?” As soon as I asked, I heard the rub and squeak of the bathtub faucet dial turn, the moan of the pipes in the walls, then a thin, deep bass rush of running water. Phillip and I both looked down the hall toward the bathroom.

“Yep,” Phillip said, with a huge goofy grin. “Shit-olympics.” I heard a split-second of silence then the higher pitch of water coming from the showerhead.

“Now he’s taking a shower?”

“Yeah, he’s gotta clean up. See...” Phillip looked again in the direction of the bathroom door as if Flippy might have heard him over the noise of the shower, “...he does this thing where he gets naked, craps in the tub, then rolls around in it.”

“You’re shitting me.”

Phillip actually laughed at my unintended pun. “How do you think he got his nickname? From flipping around in the tub.” Phillip

laughed again. “Dude, don’t worry. He cleans everything up pretty good. After he’s done in there, you’ll have the cleanest bathroom in the state. It’ll be cleaner than when you moved in. Do you have any, like, bathroom cleaning stuff in there?”

“Yeah, scrubbing bubbles, under the sink.”

“Well then,” Phillip threw up his hands, “no worries.” Then he returned to “Paranoid.”

I finally asked the question I’ve wondered about since they moved in. “What’s wrong with him?”

Again, Phillip looked aggravated by my interruption, but took the opportunity to drain the can of Milwaukee’s Best next to his foot—the foot putting pressure on the legs of Gramma’s Montrose oval cocktail table, the one with the weathered bisque finish.

“He can’t help it. When we were kids, he was diagnosed with epilepsy. He took meds for ten years before the doctors realized he actually had a brain tumor and removed it.”

I couldn’t tell if it was the absurdity of Phillip’s story that bothered me more or the fact that I allowed them to basically squat in my Grandmother’s house just to have Claire around.

Claire came home the next night after school and for the first and last time I was actually grateful to Philip. He had left earlier that afternoon with no announcement as to where he was going. I was glad when I realized he was gone, especially since Claire made it home before he returned, which allotted me extra Claire-time and I’ve wanted to somehow ask her about shit Olympics since Phillip told me.

“Claire? Can I ask you something?”

“Sure.” Her head fell back, resting against the top of Gramma’s Winged Griffin Oak Quartersawn chair, and she closed her eyes. She was beautiful in her exhaustion. Instead of the dark circled eyes and mussed up hair of the tired, she simply seemed less bouncy—more serious—and I imagined picking her up and carrying her small frame to bed and tucking her in, so that only the smooth unblemished skin of her face peeked out from the covers.

“Why does Flippy spend so much time in the bathroom when he’s taking a shower?”

Her eyes stayed closed as she answered me. “Flippy doesn’t shower. He takes baths.”

“Really? All week he’s been in the bathroom with the shower on.”

Claire raised her head and looked at me. “Flippy likes to turn on the shower and watch it, like it’s raining. He hates thunder and lightning so this way he gets to watch the rain without the scary stuff.” A tired smile attempted to cross her lips.

“Oh, okay. Because Phillip was telling me something about... shit olympics?” I shrugged as I said it as if to feign misunderstanding.

Claire exhaled a quick breath, which could have been a small dagger. “That asshole.” She made the sound again, almost an exasperated pant. “Once Flippy jumped into the bath before I could go in and check the temperature. It was too hot for him and he had a little accident.” Her hands chopped the table as she spoke.

“The water was still running and he somehow kicked the valve that turns the shower on. Phillip heard him screaming and ran into the bathroom. Then he made Flippy scrub out the tub for an hour. Made it seem like a game. Telling Flippy he couldn’t do it for a whole hour.”

“Oh, Phillip made it sound like it happens all the time.”

“Well, it doesn’t.”

Her displaced anger hit me hard. Even though it was Phillip she was angry with, I almost wished I’d never said anything at all about it. Claire was so quick to anger, though, I wondered if there more to it.

“I can’t believe he told you that.”

“Well, don’t say anything to him about it. I don’t want all this tension in the house. Just know that I know it’s not true, okay?”

“He can be such a dick sometimes.”

That must have been Phillip’s cue, because the front door opened and he appeared with a case of Budweiser in one hand a long stemmed rose in the other.

“Hey, sweetheart. How was school?” Phillip said as he walked into the kitchen and put the beer in the fridge. “I bought you a rose.”

“Yeah, with my money.” Claire mumbled. She placed her head back and closed her eyes again.

“Ben, Where’s Flippy?” Phillip asked. His voice was barely

audible over the thin cardboard of the case ripping and the aluminum clanging as he wrestled a beer from the fridge.

“Watching cartoons.” Can’t you hear the T.V., you schmuck?

Phillip walked past me and handed the rose to Claire, then kissed her on the cheek, looking at me all the while. I turned my head. It sickened me to see his display. I envisioned him sucking something out of her as opposed to giving her affection. When he walked out of the room, I glanced back at Claire in time to see her wipe off the leech’s kiss.

Phillip was home now, so my Claire-time was over. I got up from Gramma’s table. “I’m gonna go read. I’ll be in my room if you need me.” I thought about feigning disappointment by giving her some sad look or gesture, hoping Claire would catch it, but realized that I heard disappointment in my voice already.

I walked by the parlor on the way to the stairs and stopped just past the door, and listened to an exchange between the Phillips.

“Hey Flippy. I got you something.” I hear a crinkling sound.

“Ooh, p-peanut cups!”

“Yeah, buddy! Don’t tell Claire I gave them to you before dinner, okay?”

“Like a su-secret,” Flippy said.

“Yeah. Like a s-su-su-secret.” Phillip said. “Eat up quick. Before Claire comes.”

I shuffled up the stairs to my room with an idea.

Every night I’d set my alarm for six-thirty a.m. so I could dress, wet down the hours of matted sleep from my hair, and run down the stairs to make Claire coffee before she’s off to school at eight. She hasn’t walked yet, because we would usually talk until just before her first class started, and she’d end up racing off in her BMW at the last minute.

Mornings were the only time I got to spend with her alone and I coveted them. I thought about slipping the Phillips sleeping pills just to insure hour of Claire-time each day. I could give Flippy a half a tab and Phillip the rest of the bottle, but didn’t. I’ve seen too many episodes of CSI to think I could ever dream of getting away with it.

She was sitting across from me one morning and we were giggling about Phillip’s rock star pipe dream when I decided to change the tone a bit. “Claire, can I ask you something?”

“Anything.” She replied. I couldn’t tell if the smile on her face

was left over from our laughter or if it was some sort of invitation.

“Why do you leave every night and come back after Flippy’s asleep?”

“Well, see, Flippy’s kinda protective. He wouldn’t really understand why I’m sleeping in the same room as Phillip.”

“Yeah, neither do I,” I said before I could stop myself. Claire looked at me with the same pleading eyes she had the day we met. “I’m sorry,” I said. “I hope I didn’t offend you. It’s just...you are so beautiful, so perfect and he’s—“

“Benjamin, there’s a lot of stuff you don’t know about, stuff that happened in the past between the three of us that kinda keeps us together, stuff that—“

I looked up at Gramma’s Kensington Station wall clock that jutted from the wall on a Victorian black brass arm. 7:52. I let her off the hook: “Stuff that you can’t go into because you have to get to school, young lady.”

I didn’t know what she was about to share but I saw in her reaction and heard in her voice all I needed to know. That Phillip’s presence was not about love, but about some sense of obligation, regarding her brother. Maybe Phillip stopped someone from beating on Flippy once, or saved him from a burning building, who knows? What I did know was she didn’t love him, which swung the door wide open for me.

“You’re so sweet, Benjamin. Thank you for letting us live here. It feels safe.” Claire walks over to where I’m sitting and kisses my forehead. “And thanks for the coffee. I’ll see you later.” She pecked the tip of my nose with another quick kiss, then left.

I stared at the seat across Gramma’s Winged Griffin oak quartersawn dining table—where Claire sat every morning—and exhaled the sigh of a lovelorn sap. Sitting in that particular chair was becoming habit for her. Just as obsessing over her was becoming a habit for me.

Two days later, I was practicing the French-drop and top-of-fist-vanish with a piece of aluminum foil I’d crumpled into a ball. I figured from the “Up” game Flippy and Claire played that he has the mentality of a child; what kid doesn’t like magic? My plan was to win favor with Flippy, turn him against Phillip, and thereby force Claire to chase Phillip off. That

Marty Feldman-looking parasite definitely doesn't deserve even half the woman Claire is.

Flippy was in the backyard watching Gramma's roses grow. I knew this because I'd been the one watching him for the past month. I watched him all the time when Claire wasn't home. Phillip was in his room—his and Claire's room—attempting to nail the solo to “Stairway to Heaven” for the third day in a row.

I was exchanging glances in the mirror above Gramma's Bureau De Dame with the French kingwood inlay, my eyes moving between my hands and the illustrations in a sleight-of-hand book I stole from the library, when I drop the aluminum ball. It rolled under the Bureau and when I dropped to my knees to retrieve it, I noticed the wall socket. The screw had been turned sideways. Had I missed one? No. I distinctly remembered screwing this particular screw because it's the one I started with. I crawl over to Gramma's antique white Wilshire two-drawer antique white nightstand by Hillsdale and look behind it. Sideways. How could...Phillip. That son of a bitch.

I pocketed the ball and rushed over to Phillip's door, but before I busted in, I smelled the sweet aroma of burning skunk. I threw the door open.

He jumped back and said, “Dude, you scared the shit out of me.” Then he began laughing. “Hey, do you want a puff?”

Phillip took a long pull on the joint and ash scattered all over the floor.

“Are you smoking pot? In my house?”

Phillip coughed out smoke in my direction. “Uhhhh...yeah.”

“Get that shit out of my house. While you're at it, why don't you pack your shit and get out, too.” I was shaking.

“Dude, relax. It's all legal. Flippy's got a medical marijuana card, so don't worry about getting busted or anything.”

“Get the fuck out,” I said.

“You trying to kick me out?”

“No. I am kicking you out.”

“You kick me out and Claire goes with me,” he said, looking down, and I froze. I felt my eyebrows slowly lower in sudden defeat. His free hand reached behind his head and stroked his ponytail. “Oh, yeah, I know

you dig her. I'm not stupid. But don't worry dude, I'm not tripping.” Phillip looks up at me; a cynic's grin forms on his face. “You're like her gay friend. You know how chicks dig hanging out with fags.” He said, then he smiled at me in a concession of triumph. I could still see his beady little pupils between the slits of his narrowed Chinese eyes.

He knew. And he knew that I knew he knew.

Asshole.

Just to get the last word in I said, “Quit smoking that shit in my house. And keep your feet off the table; this isn't the Wal-Mart Erector Set crap you're probably used to, okay?” As I closed the door, I heard him laughing at me behind it.

Any nighttime resolutions I made to rid myself of Phillip, even if it meant losing Claire—and usually made while being kept awake by the bass-line knocking of their headboard against the opposite side of the wall—dissipated the moment Claire floated down the staircase for our morning ritual. She always wears flowing skirts that fall beneath her knees. Sometimes the black one she wore the day we met, sometimes the white lace one, but always a skirt. I'd never noticed before Claire how they seem to lend more to the imagination. The thought of sliding my hands up her legs beneath those skirts seemed less complicated than trying to wrestle her legs out of a pair of jeans or capri pants. They make her seem more accessible—and the more time we spent together, the more accessible she seemed.

After Claire left for school and I received my daily kiss on the cheek, I heard Phillip's bedroom door open, footsteps down the hall, then the upstairs bathroom door close. I ran up to his room with a butter knife and turned all the screws in the outlets sideways. I never saw Flippy go in there, but you never know.

It's Friday, a two months from the day they moved in, and Flippy is out back watching the roses grow. Why he's so fascinated with the roses I don't know. And why he stood sentry in front of them I couldn't figure out either. He only stared at the one bush of dark red Don Juans, ignoring the much prettier orange-on-orange of the Livin' Easys, the bright yellow rolls of the Graham Thomases or the bushel of poppy-looking petals of the Flutterbyes.

I walked out to where he's standing with two folding lawn chairs,

set them up behind him and sat down. The back of his neck was bright pink from the sun. He didn't budge until I spoke.

"Hi, Flippy," I said. He spun on his heels at the sound of my voice.

"Oh, oh, hi, Bu-Benjamin." I never noticed his stutter before. I rolled the aluminum foil ball between my palms.

"Wu-wu-," Flippy's face strained to push out the syllables Claire would have to get more fingers to count. "Wu-what's that?"

"It's a magic ball," I said.

"It's magic?"

"Yep. Do you want to see?"

"Oh, ye-yes."

"Here, sit down." Flippy seized the other chair, never taking his eyes off the ball, and almost toppled over, but his eagerness kept him upright.

"Now watch carefully." I chose the French drop because I was more adept at it, holding the ball between the second finger and thumb of my right hand. My left hand came around and closed over the ball. I was careful to keep my fingers puffed out like the ball was still there, while I dropped and palmed it into my right. I held my left hand up to his face. His eyes were wide; waiting for my hand to open like I was holding a secret only he's allowed to see. I turned my hand over and opened my fist to reveal the emptiness.

"Wow," Flippy says; his mouth agape. "Whu-where did it go? Is it ga-gone forever?" The sun flickered across Flippy's scar as the branches of Gramma's favorite mimosa tree fought against a sudden wind.

"No, it's right here, buddy." I reached towards him and he flinched. "It's okay. It's just hiding behind your knee." I quickly pretended to pull the ball out from behind his leg.

Flippy studied the ball for a moment, then smiled and said, "Thu-that b-ball's not magic. That-that's just a ball."

I failed. I showed him too early. I should have practiced more. He couldn't have seen me palm it. I'd been wrenching my hands into arthritic cramps day and night trying to perfect the illusion.

"B-Ben-ja-jamin. You're magic. You can d-do the magic."

"Not just me. It takes two special people to be able to do

magic," I said, "I can't do it all by myself."

"Ru-Really? Ok-k-kay, let's d-do it again."

I'm in.

We spent the rest of the afternoon repeating the French drop and pulling it from various parts of his body until he stopped flinching when I approached him. We were giggling and I almost lost myself in our laughter. Almost forgetting about my disgust for Phillip and the whole reason I even stole the sleight-of-hand book in the first place.

"Flippy, did you know Phillip doesn't believe in magic?" I said. "He says only stupid people believe in it." Flippy's mouth dropped, then his eyebrows arc into a V. He looked menacing, and for a second I wondered if I'd gone too far. I couldn't tell if he was pissed at me or at Phillip for what he didn't say.

"I'm n-not stupid," Flippy said, "How c-come he du-doesn't believe? Hey, we c-could g-go show him, thu-then he has to b-bub-believe."

I tsk. "Nope. I already tried this morning, before I came out here with you. He told me magic is stupid and slammed the door in my face."

"That's nu-not nice. I'm gonna t-tell Claire."

"No, no, no. It's okay. We don't want Claire to get upset. We'll just save this between you and me and remember not to let Phillip know we're doing magic."

"Like a su-secret," he said, and then smiled. "Claire likes magic; can we show her?"

"Of course we can. Just not when that mean ole Phillip is around." I sighed. "It's really kinda sad. Only a really bad person would say magic is stupid."

"Yeah."

I suddenly remembered a line from "Madhouse," the Richard Matheson short story I couldn't finish reading. "With words, I will knit my shroud and bury myself therein." Except in regards to Phillip it trickled through my mind as, "With words, I knit his shroud and bury him therein."

Two days later, I presented Flippy with three more magic tricks, all of which astounded and amazed him. Illusion is like lying;

both are about deception and each one becomes easier to do after getting away with the first. I didn't feel bad about lying to Flippy. Not because he is slow, but because both are a means to the same ends: Phillip's removal and Claire in my arms. I figured we were all better off that way.

It was Flippy's night to pick dinner, so we are all having PBJ's with the crusts cut off and sliced into triangles. Phillip drank and smoked all day. I could tell by the digression of his playing ability. He wasn't the rock star he thought he was when sober, but when loaded, the once familiar covers turned to slow, slurred, unrecognizable dirges with intermissions of curses.

Flippy and I were poised around a pyramid of stacked finger sandwiches, ready to devour, when Claire scooted her chair out and says, "I guess I should tell him dinner is ready." She seemed hesitant to go get Phillip. I like that. Maybe she felt the same sense of community, of family I did before she got up from the table. The sense of four's a crowd.

As she ascended the stairs, I leaned over to Flippy.

"I bet Phillip doesn't even like PBJ's. Someone who doesn't like PBJ's must be a very bad person."

Flippy contemplated this for a moment, then said, "Yeah."

Claire reappeared at the top of the staircase with the intoxicated scumbag following her. This time she wasn't flowing. Claire had one hand on the oak handrail to steady herself while her other hand was holding Phillip's arm to steady him. Her brow was furrowed in annoyance, and with every stair they descended, the air thickens with tension. Our happy little threesome is now plagued. He missed a step and nearly fell, almost pulling Claire down with him. I jumped from my seat and he harrumphed.

"Sit down, gay boy. I'm fine," Phillip slurred, then yanked his arm away from Claire's grasp. "I got it. See..." He jumped down the three remaining steps to the hardwood floor of the living room.

"Ta-duummm," Phillip sang, flailing his arms above his head. Flippy giggled and I almost saw this as a set back until Phillip entered the dining room and points at the PBJ's and says, "What's this shit? I'm not eating no fucking peanut jelly butter shit."

I looked over at Flippy and his brows creased. The anger crossed his face as quickly as the sun glimmered across his scar the other day.

Phillip's body swayed and he attempted to grab Gramma's dining table, but missed and dropped to the floor. Claire ran over to him. I looked over the edge of the table, wanting to see blood pooled around his head and his chest still from lack of breathing. I slumped back down into the chair when I heard him cackle.

"Come on. I think you better go to bed," Claire said and attempted to help him up. I looked over at Flippy and his face strained against the anger inside him.

"Do you need some help, Claire?" I asked. She didn't look at me but put her hand out behind her.

"I got it, Benjamin." Her voice was as sharp as Flippy's contorted expression. She managed to get Phillip up enough to move him toward the stairs.

"Wait, I don't wanna got to bed. Gimme some money! Call that rich mom and dad of yours and let's get some more beer!"

"You've had enough!" Claire bellowed.

"I wanna sing," Phillip slurred, then broke out in a chorus. He sounded like my father used to, before he'd nod off to heroinland, like a rum-filled pirate singing dark warnings of the sea. "Roses are red, Stephen is blue—"

"That's enough! Time for you to pass out! Come on!" Claire pulled Phillip up the stairs by his shirt. Flippy placed his palms over his ears and shut his eyes tight.

"Whattaya gonna do? Huh? Nothing," Phillip howled back at her. "You need me. You all need me. Benny there needs me to keep you here and you and Flippy need me to keep shut up!"

Claire's jaw is locked in a clamp that looked like it could bite through steel and the words "Shut up!" blow through her teeth like pressurized steam. Phillip laughed at her.

"Come on, Ben-gay. Sing with me!" Phillip said, looking back at me over his shoulder. He swaggered back and the only thing keeping him upright on the top stair is Claire's hold on him.

Asshole.

Go ahead, Claire. Do it. Just let go of that piece of shit. Let him topple down the stairs and snap his neck.

I don't say anything in reply to his "Ben-gay" comment, hoping Flippy can make the association that calm equals nice; that I'm the good guy. His true friend. His compadre. And that the belligerent person in the house, practically dragged up the stairs by his sister, is the bad guy.

"You're mean, Phillip!" Flippy yelled. I jumped at the suddenness of his outburst. "I don't like you anymore!"

Done deal.

Flippy took a sandwich and shoved the whole triangle into his mouth. He looked like an angry cow, fervently chewing with his face clenched in fury.

I heard the door close upstairs as Flippy grabbed another sandwich. I got up from the table and walked into the living room.

I could hear their muffled voices all the way downstairs, but not what they're saying, so I stood on Gramma's 1869 Hunzinger walnut parlor chair with the baby blue upholstered seat in the hallway beneath their room. Phillip was still yelling the familiar children's lyric.

"Roses are red, Steven is blue—"

"Shut up, Phillip. You're drunk."

"—So don't fuck with Claire, or Flippy will get you—"

"Shut up! Just shut up, you asshole!"

I heard Phillip bark, "Bitch," and then a yelp from Claire preceded a loud thump above my head.

I jumped off the Hunzinger and ascended the stairs two at a time. I didn't know what he'd done, but if he'd hurt her, I'd kill him. I reached the door the same time Claire was slamming it behind her.

"What happened? What was that noise?" She had her head down; one hand covered her face. Blood ran between her fingers. "Oh shit. Come on." I said, and ushered her into my bedroom's bath. I closed the toilet lid, sat her down, and removed her hand. The lower half of her face was covered in crimson.

"I'll kill him," I told her and started to turn.

"No. Benjamin, please. Don't let Flippy see me like this." The volume of Claire's tears matched the blood streaming from her right nostril. I took a washrag from under the sink, wet it, and as gently as

I could, wiped the blood from her chin and around her lips. I pinched her nostrils together as Flippy appeared behind me.

"Claire, wu-what's wrong? Are you cru-crying?" Flippy asked.

"It's okay, honey. Just a nosebleed," Claire said, but couldn't hold her composure and the tears come full force. She sobbed beneath the washrag covering her face.

"That's not true, Flippy," I said, looking back over my shoulder at him. "Phillip hit her." I removed my hand from her nose to inspect and as soon as I released my pinch, more blood started to flow. I reapplied the pressure.

"That's mean," Flippy said. "Phillip is mu-mean, Ca-Claire. I don't like him anymore."

Claire closed her eyes and more seeped from beneath her red, raw lids. I wanted to capture all her tears and bathe in them.

"You're right, buddy," I told him, "I think it's time for Phillip to leave." I was still looking at Claire for some sort of agreement or acknowledgement or nod yes that was going to happen. "What do you think, Flippy?"

I looked back toward the doorway and he's gone. I heard a door beyond my bedroom open and close.

Claire opened her eyes, saw that Flippy's no longer standing in the bathroom doorway. She said, "Where did he go?" Her eyes widened when I told her I didn't know.

She pushed me away and ran out of the bathroom. I rose and followed her to Phillip's door. Claire reached for the knob, but hesitated, seemingly afraid. I heard a grunt, then the sound of brittle wood cracking. Claire took hold of the knob, but didn't turn it until there was another crack, then opened the door.

Flippy stood at the side of the bed, his hand clutched the neck of Phillip's guitar. The body of it was lying on the hardwood floor. Only a single string held the two pieces together. The other five tentacled out, curled and wiry. He's mumbling, "Not up. Not up."

Flippy turned around and looked at us. There were tears in his eyes, and for the first time I saw the resemblance between him and Claire. Only in their sorrow do they look alike. Flippy moved away from the bed. Phillip is lying there with only the blood-soaked remnants of a face. His limbs twitched as if his body were trying to

crawl away from the travesty.

I had to force a breath.

“Oh no,” Claire whispered. “No. No. No. Flippy.” She began to cry and through her sobs she said, “Not again.”

Not again? Not again?

“What do you mean, ‘not again?’”

Claire rushed over to Flippy and they slumped down on the floor. Claire held him against her breast and rocked him back and forth. Flippy’s still murmuring, “Not up. Not up.” She rocked him back and behind them I saw the outlet on the wall and the screw turned sideways. I slumped to the floor with them.

Claire turned to me, after cleaning Flippy up and putting him to bed, and asked me to help her. “Please, Benjamin. They’ll lock him away in a nut ward. He’ll wilt and die in there. He’s been in before, when my parents locked him up, and I watched him deteriorate. Please, I’ll do anything.”

Claire and I buried Phillip beneath the Don Juan’s Gramma planted years ago. It’s no longer her garden anymore. It’s ours. It’s no longer her house. It’s Claire’s, Flippy’s, and mine. Now we are family, locked together in a communal secret we all have to keep. I got everything I wanted.



Burton Hilton, *A Winter Morning in Ely*, photograph



Matt Fong, *Sunset*, photograph

...identity

the ways we associate, define, grow, know, learn, reflect, and see

Broken City Lover

by ashley noël hennefer

I walk the streets with a confidence I'm still trying to find. There's a fear I feel whenever I shiver from too much cold air, but at the same time I'm being suffocated. Asthmatic wheezes kick in and I control my breathing with difficulty as I inhale another drag of a cigarette. Modern day consumption I'm causing myself; another damn disease.

This city is tearing me down. The pollution and trash and whistles on corners as if I am selling myself. I only exploit myself through the poetry I graffiti on the front of dumpsters outside of buildings during late nights when I can't sleep. I hardly ever sleep as it is—too much noise, too many screeching cars and crying babies and moaning lovers. Chatters in different speeches, ones that I don't understand save for the expression and tones of constant need. I'm an insomniac, a night and day vampire that feeds on feelings, not flesh.

I feel so empty in this broken city, and my lovers all have gone. Or were they every really there in the first place?

My small hands are numb and I clap them together to bring blood to my fingertips. I miss the feeling of my hand in someone else's. I miss the feeling of my body against someone else's, radiating heat and creating static and sparks that made up for the lack of visible stars. Fuck the temperature, we created our own thermometer, our own scale of heat measurement on the roofs of apartment buildings, in secret passage ways of alleys, under trees in parks, or empty warehouses. There's no way to measure body heat unless you feel it.

My confessions and repressed regrets are screaming at me. When I pass another person I keep my eyes cast down for fear that my secrets will be louder than I can control and I'll spill my guts to the first person that will have me.

The sound of my shoes on the cement is all I can concentrate on to block the murmuring of wants and should-haves in my head. The alternating

pounding that resonates in my head is like the beat of a drum, more stable than my heartbeat. I am so cold and my skin is as white as a doll and I try not to step too hard for fear that I might break myself. I hope that I am stronger than this but I can feel myself crumble at the sound of breaking glass—shattered porcelain, broken bottles, pieces simultaneously scattered in the middle of a busy, oblivious street.

But tonight, this is not my destiny. Sky fades in a pink horizon blocked by buildings so high they seem to be forever reaching for something. The fog blends the colors together, a blurry watercolor sunset.

Beyond this fog there is an ocean.

I walk faster. Although there is more motion I catch my breath. My face tingles with the rejuvenation of oxygen.

I remember the last thing I wrote on a building, a brick wall in the corner of a back alley, a few nights ago when I was restless in my bed and chose to look for secrets in the sidewalks.

"Now that she feels something, she shines. Now that she cares, she glows. Now that she's not afraid, she burns."

I love the way my breathing feels. I stop to throw out my cigarettes in the nearest trashcan, and I look to the sky.

As soon as I smile, a streetlight flickers out, and I can finally see the stars.



Jill Ransom, *untitled*, photograph



Jill Ransom, *untitled*, photograph

In The Arms of a stranger

by david pena

In the arms of a stranger
lie the passion of war,
the coldness of rape
and the strength of a knife.
In the eyes of that stranger
I see who I am.

In the arms of a stranger
The other sees us
What the world has denied
And what still floats in us.
In the arms of a stranger
We are who we can be.

That which is seen
That which is not
That which is felt
That which is thought
That which is told
That which is done

As the tears and the blood
Run down their thighs
And their weapons rejoice
In the trigger and boom
Their soul and their spark
Are broken in two.

In the arms of a stranger
lie the passion of war,
the coldness of rape
And the sorrow of my love.
In the arms of a stranger
We are who we are not.

In the arms of a stranger
We find the arms of a friend
In these cold and wet arms
Lie the passion of war.
In the arms of a stranger
We become whom we saw.



Jill Ransom, *untitled*, photograph

Caedon Burchfield, from *The History of the World*, ceramics



Combat Medic

by ben johnson

I came running out of nowhere
When you cried out in pain.
And I carried you to safety
Over my shoulder

It will hurt even more
When you feel the prick of my syringe.
You don't have to like me.
You just have to trust me.

I can patch your bullet wounds
Two went the whole way through
Still one left in the upper part
Of your right leg.

The look on your face
Like you just realized
Your mother had lied to you
For your entire life
You are not superman.

I tweeze and cut out this bullet
And drop it in your open hand.
I bandage you up in this field
With bleached white cotton gauze.

And as the bullets wiz by our heads
I smile at you and comfort you.
You are grateful to me. And ask,
"Sir, will I ever walk again?"

I am Not Afraid

by ben johnson

I am not afraid of death,
Not of afterlife tales or the eight rings of hell
I do believe in Zombies
And in witches
And ghosts
Werewolves
Giant Squids
And would face off with a Blood Sucking Vampire
Without garlic, or a stake or a cross.
not afraid.

take a fifty foot jump on a snowboard.
surf happily in Great White Shark-infested water,
base jump into the Grand Canyon.
bungee off the Golden Gate Bridge.
free fall from thin air.
Laugh in the face of a 2-ton Grizzly in the wild.
No problem.

I'm not afraid when I see horror movies.
In fact, I would probably laugh at you when you scream
When gallons of fake blood squirt all over the camera.

This is because I am an American Soldier,
And I know that somewhere out there in the darkness,
Someone wants to kill me,
And to be honest,
That scares the hell out of me.

What Happened Last Week

by andrew gerthoffer

You fucking whores.
Why do you hold me
with strained tongue?

Oh, the people I hate.
All the people I hate.

Where are the friends?
Where are the lovers?

Fucking the voluptuous
whores of my generation:
those bronze booze hounds
at 2am parties—celebrations of
your nihilistic nothings.
Nothing but pot smoke
burning my nostrils with the stench of
those statues of
wasted
time
that now strike on the clock

while my boy
steals my girl
in the tears and sweat
of a ravenous rage
in a back room
of a back alley
that leads back
to the back of my mind,
to the back of those
midnight girls,
my nowhere girls.

I will never forget what you've done.

No I am not done.
I will never forget
you with your silly coats,
your silly gait,
your silly goat.
You phony.
(How I fear for my generation.)
A generation of bums

riding the tidal wave
of their parents' parental
success and parental mansions,
on Sunday drives in parental
cars with the boyfriend in the back
jerking off to the sun
while a girlfriend watches
a world in front of her
glossed over eyes behind night-black shades
of a missing mind that has been devoured by a missing
heart.

Fuck the tides
that brought you out of the womb
and on to my elementary playground.
You think this sand is yours.
You think this castle is yours.
We fly through our mothers'
years without a care in our packs,
and the assholes at our backs.
We sucked the marrow from the root
of so many Fridays that we spent in the
basements of our souls crying for that strange brew,
that strange brew that only phony passports and
prostitutes can deliver in white powders and
the fungi that you sucked that day
in the park, ripples in your eyes as
we sat at the rocks, the sun in my
eyes
before the scorch: it all turned to the
dreary dusk that you remember.
(What is He telling you?)

What I'm telling you
is that I'm tired
yet I sleep too much.
Solve that one for me.
I know you think you can,
but you can't solve shit.

None of you can.

Forget your one-track minds
and your eight-track expressions.
You don't know shit
about my problems
because you're all psychiatrists

in your minds, but
not in mine.
You're all philosophers in your minds,
but not in my mind.
Solve your own problems before you take on the
world.
And stop challenging my head,
it cares not what you think.
I love and respect only humility,
you crack whores of the underground
psyche,
your loins long for your own name in the print
of the great minds
that I choose to shit on.

Shit on all and don't forget yourself.
(Write this down.)
Stick this in your wallet
next to those plastic
loins of commercial convenience.
Next to your plastic loins.
(You sick fuck.)

You fanatic whores,
you whores of the counterculture,
count me out.

Now I am truly tired
and it is truly late (11:20 PM PST, to be exact).
This is exactly what I think of you,
how I will treat you,
how I will treat your mother,
how I will treat your father,
how I will treat your brother,
how I will treat your sister,
until you are good and ready
to get your head out of the harlot's
arse and into the Sunday sun
of a Saturday drive.
Hostess, haircuts, and holidays
await.
But I won't.
(Not after what happened last week.)



Kaleb Temple, *Will Bite*, ceramic

Hollow

by gurpreet takhur

The dream comes often, and in it the end is always the same,
Water floods the sky, as it eats, chews up the burning sun,
Leaving only darkness, a blue euphoria, filling my lungs,
Sinking like an anchor, thrown to balance a wavering ship.

I question my allies, my ties, who really rests by my side,
While my throat is enveloped by an invisible hand,
My feet kick, as I run about the globe, escaping the unknown,
Those I love, I fear, those I shun, I yearn for, the twister comes.

Doors seem more closed than open, time bolts them shut,
Questions arise from old answers, her image fades like sobriety,
Her palm still rests on the edge of my neck, that warmth lingers,
After all this, all that, her fingers remain etched on my cheek.

A little too much, far too late, I think of her, when her eyes closed,
What dreams came to her, what imagery, scent did her soul create,
If only I had held my tongue more, and opened my ears,
Instead I am left in agony of silence, needing only real company.

How now, I find myself burning internally from things beyond,
Trying to settle without, that which I cannot resolve within,
My shoulders tremble, my knees buckle, my heart swells,
Yet it all comes from an inner failing, exemplified by an outer reality.

Canvassing...

by grigory lukin

[The following blog was written on the morning of November 7, 2006.]

I will get fired in fifteen and a half hours. My last shift will end at 7 p.m. Pacific Standard Time, just as the voting locations will close in the state of Nevada.

I am a canvasser. The job description is brutally simple: you knock on certain doors, ask people who they're going to vote for (and how likely they are to do so), thank them and leave. There are many positive side effects, such as getting to know Reno and the areas around it, getting free food at the Party's headquarters, making friends with like-minded people (so that the nightmare scenario of hooking up with a beautiful girl who happens to hate everything you stand for is out by default), getting to know the addresses (and ages!) of your college professors and getting a free workout for the lower half of your body. The downside? Your feet. Not used to doing so much work, they develop blisters and all kinds of injuries as you walk for miles every single day. The blisters appear out of nowhere, grow and pop unbelievably fast – sometimes the entire process takes place during a single shift.

Walking hurts. The feet never have enough time to fully recover and old injuries end up being as painful as (if not more than) the new ones. Sometimes every step is accompanied by excruciating agony. Add a little makeup and you'll have yourself a bona fide zombie, a being with only one goal in mind. Unlike our undead brethren, however, we seek only to ask people who they'll vote for. Not chat about weather and not convince them to vote for somebody in particular – just hit and run, because time is precious and the norm is supposed to be 25 houses per hour.

We are the pawns of the political process: so little, insignificant and expendable, and yet so vital to the giant political machine that gets most of its information from us, college-aged kids walking around with old model Palm Pilots and bags full of shiny brochures filled with negative campaigning and promises that are too idealistic to ever come true. We are expendable and we know it. It seems that so do the people we get to canvass: they can get away with anything short of actually attacking us. Each and every one of us – both the "old guard" that have been canvassing since August and the army of newbies that got hired in the last few weeks – has interesting stories about the people we canvassed. There was a crazy old man in tiny Speedos; an elderly woman who hasn't left her house in three years; a man who opened the door only to tell us that he was in the middle of having sex and would very much appreciate if we stopped by sometime later; and lots of rednecks with giant hyper-aggressive dogs. My personal worst experience was when I canvassed a woman who was dying of cancer. She was

about 40 years old and looked pretty well, except for the fact that she was in her pajamas at 4 p.m. It turned out that she had just a couple of months left to live, could hardly move, and I woke her up when I rang the bell. The fact that she yelled at me at the top of her lungs and caused some of her neighbors to get out and see what was going on didn't help much, either.

It's quite easy to lose your faith in humanity with a job like this. I can't find the words to describe how sad it is to see an old person, who is supposed to be wise and zen, shut the door in your face while screaming that they lost all faith in the political process and will never vote again. Same goes for little children who copy their parents in pretty much everything and shut the door while saying "sovy, we ave not interefeted." And they wonder why folks don't vote...

Today is the last day to vote. Last day of work. The most intense day of all. My "shift," if you would like to call it that, will go from 4 a.m. till 7 p.m. – for 15 hours. All kinds of food and most of local candidates will be there to keep our stomachs full and our moral high. Afterwards, there will be a party that will go for as long as it would take to count up all the ballots and get a good idea of who won what (and why). And then... Then everything will be over. We will part ways and try to concentrate on school – or find new jobs. Nevada will host the second presidential caucus in 2008, and the preparations will begin as early as January 2007, so I know where I'll go if I need a fun job. ...I still can't come to terms with the idea that in less than 24 hours this will all be over. Thousands of elections all over the United States will come to an end, and I – I will get over 30 hours a week to fill with things to do. At last, I'll be able to catch up with all the homework, see the movies everybody has been talking about for weeks and get some semblance of a life.

But that will all be later, and now it's time to go and work my last shift – the longest and most important one of them all. I take one more look at my things: a fully charged cellphone, two Red Bulls (I'll need all the energy I can get), my hiking boots (which have hundreds of miles on them and still look great) and gloves. I double-check everything, kill the lights and step out into the dark. It's 3:30 a.m. Time to go to work.

Beautiful Burdens

by heather martinez

I had this roommate named Bethany my sophomore year of college; she drove me crazy. Like pull your hair out, kick the dishwasher crazy. I had a few months on her age-wise, but she was eerily more mature than I was and easily flexed authority over me.

She was the kind of girl who'd point to the musky carpet and tell me to vacuum more than once a week. She'd let me know casually over dinner at the barstools that I should prioritize my time between school, work, and a social life. And it was never beyond her to sit me down, talk eye to eye, and metaphorically shake my shoulders with her words.

"I'm sorry," she'd jab, "he's a good person and everything, but I do not see you two together." She said this between folding her jeans into thirds and consoling me after I broke up with my first real boyfriend. "Just be thankful you broke up. You don't need to waste your time." She always finished as quickly as she began, and the words that came out—in this situation and most others—were painfully rational. That time I wanted to punch her—could she be any more brutal?—and simultaneously leap off the couch, tackle-hug her, raise my palm in the air and yell, "Amen sister! Preach the truth!"

Bethany had that power. The power to piss me off and five minutes later leave me sitting in my bedroom wondering, "How do I still love this girl?" That love, I realized, sprang from appreciation. She was looking out for me. She was being a friend.

She refused to let me believe living with crusted carpets was okay; she hated the idea of my anxiety raising and my grades and relationships flailing when I could do something as simple as prioritize; and she clearly didn't want me dating Joe Shmoe, because she wholeheartedly believed I deserved better and was willing to tell me so to protect me. She cared about me, and my burdens became hers. She was a real friend: a friend whose approach to friendship engaged and unraveled my own concept of the word.

Acquaintances and friends-of-friends are more frequently and flippantly receiving the label of 'friend'—a word of ancient lineage literally meaning "a lover." How many of these people who drift in and out of our lives love us deeply, are 'fond and devoted' to us in the way the dictionary defines a lover?

The girl in my English class I chat and giggle at the teacher with may not fit that description. My roommate's boyfriend who watches "Grey's Anatomy" with me may not be as devoted any other time but Thursday nights. That guy who sits on the barstool next to my dad every Monday night and gives him high fives and a few complimentary beers after a touchdown might possibly lack a deep love or fondness for him. However, if any of us were to run into these people in the grocery store with a sibling or spouse, we'd quickly explain to them that he and/or she is our "friend" from school, Bully's, etc. before they arrive for introductions.

However, these friends hardly deserve the same title as your true friend

who, like my friend Stacie, slept in my bed with me every night for two weeks after my brother died; or your friend from high school who notices the slight twist in your face and sits you down to ask what is wrong; or even your mom or dad who tucked you into bed each night with a prayer for your safety and guidance.

These are obvious signs of love and devotion. So why are the ones who truly befriend us grouped together with those who simply wave a hello when we pass on the street? I believe we should reclaim the true meaning of a friend, out of respect for those who live up to it and out of a hope that those who do not will be spurred onto real friendships.

A few months before Bethany moved out, I invited her to dinner with me at my friend and mentor's house. Ciera had been feeding me, listening to me, advising me, and overall investing unheard of amounts of time in me over the last three years. I was excited to have two people tightly bonded to me come together. So Bethany came to dinner and our time was cordial as could be. The food was good and the conversation steady. I thought it went well. So when I invited Bethany to Ciera's a few weeks later, I was confused by her response.

"No, I don't think so," she said flatly, cutting some vegetables and throwing them into a bowl in the kitchen. She didn't offer up any other plans for that night, just a hanging "No." A few seconds later she continued.

"Honestly, I don't think I have time to invest in another relationship," she said. "It's too much effort. I don't think I'll go to Ciera's with you anymore," she finished, casually turning back to her vegetables.

I was shocked. Who wouldn't want a free dinner? Who wouldn't want to know Ciera? Who even says, 'I don't have time to invest in another relationship'? I was hurt by her words and immediately started questioning if she found all relationships draining. More self-consciously, I wondered if our relationship drained her.

I wondered long enough to conclude that I did drain her. I took up time, energy, and a lot of heart. I was a burden, though the more I unraveled this thought, the more I saw myself as a welcome burden. She carried my 'drainage' willingly and joyfully, but I started understanding she could only handle a certain weight. Too many burdens could be hard to bear.

Bethany chose which burdens she'd carry. Her friendships were—and still are—beautiful, bountiful burdens. Burdens she invests time, energy, money and often tears into. A friend is not just a friend off the street; a friend to her fulfills the proper definition. They love her, devote themselves to her, and literally care for her, and she them. Anything less, on their part or hers, makes for an acquaintance, a co-worker, a classmate, but not a friend. She accepts nothing less from someone, and reciprocated nothing less.

Bethany never found time for Ciera, but thankfully she found time for me. She's stayed fond and devoted up to this day. She's taught me to be a friend because she fulfilled the title first. I haven't stopped declining dinner offers from acquaintances yet, but I hope to get there one day, all in the name of friendship.



Heidi Storey, *untitled*, ceramics

A Happy Poem

by jeff gesick

I want to write a happy poem
that will make me smile
I want to write a happy poem
and sit with it awhile
I want to write a happy poem
to dry up all the tears
I want to write a happy poem
to wash away the years
I want to write a happy poem
that will bring you next to me
I want to write a happy poem
that will truly set us free
And when I write that happy poem
I will bury it in a tree
and when that tree is dead and gone
you will see what I can see
That there really is no happiness poem
deep inside of me
And therefore a happy poem
I will never be

Books, Rain, and the Mental Process That Leaves You Anonymous

by jean-pierre frossard

The sun rolls itself over the mountain and brushes the sky with its precise rays. Transferring energy into my legs I walk up the clumsy stairs and enter the room. Hearing the hinges of the heavy oak door my teacher makes his first appearance. Avoiding the crisp stairs of the student laity he makes his address. Behind a grey beard and a withering hair of a necks length he tells us that his name is _____. We students looked at each other with a half smile; a mouthful of unspoken words. I would like to think that we were right to react in such a dumbfounded manner but we weren't. After all, it was us who were truly anonymous.

Five minutes into class and I am already feeling the weight of heavy projections darting from his lips. Realizing that I am no match for his intelligence I spend what mental energy I have scrutinizing his face. It would be nice if he were fit or even more pleasant. It would be nice if he looked more human. There was something resembling a lopsided age like a textured skin or a belly to compliment his taut sternum. But he is not this. Rather he is very skinny and the sharp features of his vessel are a mirage of a geometric book. What chance do I have against a living book?

Ignoring the rain knocking on the window trying to get in, I realize how selfish I am. It would be nice to let the rain drops in so that they could get warm inside. Why do humans only pay attention to themselves? How barbaric a nature us humans possess.

He calls me back, as anonymous as he was I still had to listen. After all, he is my teacher. Silently apologizing for my sympathy felt towards the rain, I take the pen into my hand and scrape some words into my notebook. LANGUAGE IS WHAT SEPERATES US FROM THE REST. AS ANIMALISTIC AS WE ARE, WE STILL HAVE LANGUAGE. LANGUAGE IS WHAT MAKES US FEEL!

As I begin to verbally dance with the rest of the class I forget. I am forgetting about the rain that we have locked out. I am forgetting about the rain the drips in my mind; the words that run down the walls of my skull as they try to get out. I listen because I know that it is better to be anonymous. By being anonymous I can impress my teacher. He will take notice of my obedience and he will reward me with his wisdom.

Keeping an open ear and a vacant mind my arms become soft. Suddenly my entire body is a perfect square made of cotton. My texture is rough but also a white that not even God himself has witnessed. Realizing that I am now a towel I do my duty. I absorb his words and polish their texture until I am no longer white. When he asks for my opinion he grabs me afterwards and rings me out.

Watching the drops of water collect on the surface of a marble black desk I see them transform. They make a two dimensional rectangle and dry themselves in the sun's rain. Weighing less than a mere pound they lay no longer as a gathering of separate tears, but as a unit. Smearred with black symmetrical lines in a twelve font double spaced format, Anonymous takes them as if they were valuable. I wish he would see what he has done to me. How abused I feel to be dry once more.

Wrung out of my thoughts he takes them and deprives me of a drink. What use is a towel if there is no water?

"Back in ten minutes" he says. I hear the hinges scream and the oak door stands guard over me. Sitting captive in a foreign dark room, I scratch my left arm. No longer the rough touch that I was before I feel human again. I can speak freely once more and dabble my tongue in the taste of language. Rejoicing in the pitch of my vocals I scream at the walls in a joyous manner. Numb I am, to the depravity of direction, I observe the surroundings that I can't see. Silence fills the room causing my ears to ring. The oak door behaves in such odd ways. Staring at me in a field of emptiness, I see it's magic. The door has spawned skinny arms and with those arms it paints it self black.

"Who are you" I ask the door?

"I am the block that stands in your path."

"What purpose do you serve?"

"A purpose of duty."

"And what is your duty."

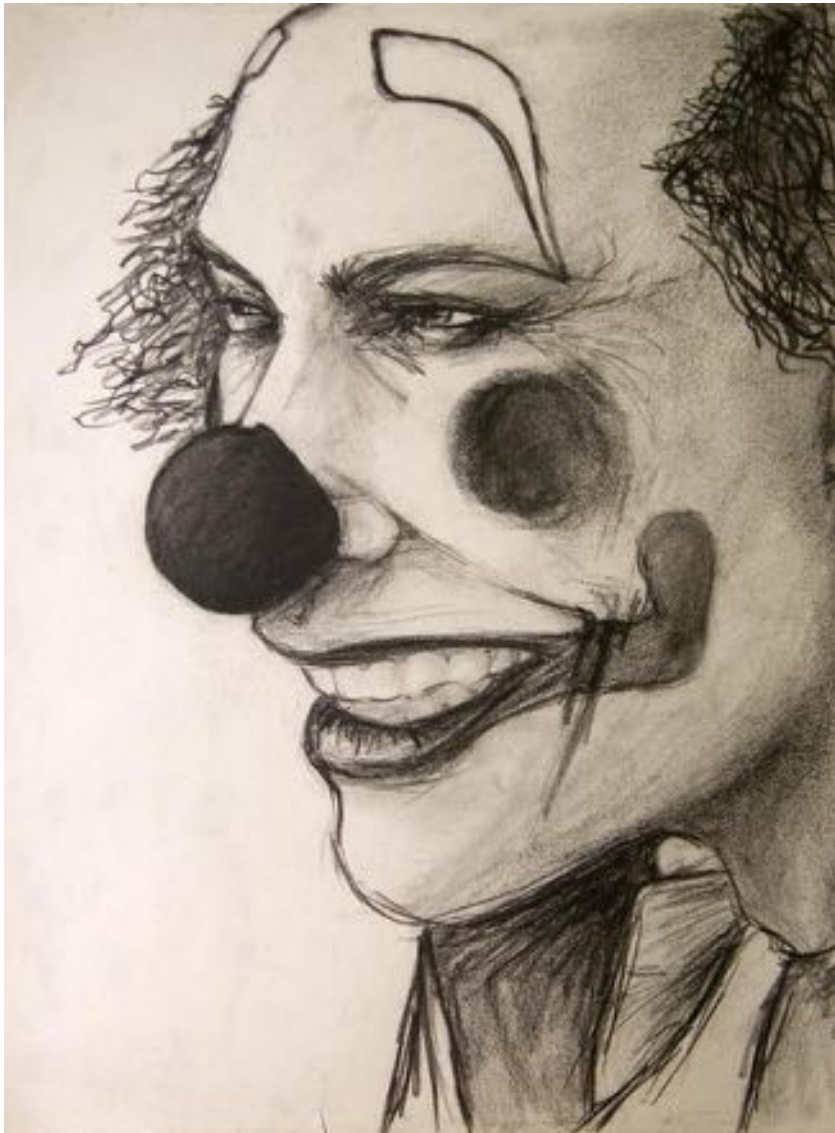
"To shield you from the truth."

The hinges on the door screech to me like abandoned children. He walks in and hands me my symmetrical double spaced drops. They were once my own.

The room takes shape once more as the light floods in from his office. I glance at my fallen prize, painted with a thick blood. Only the worst of advice is written in red. Looking past his sharp features I ponder on why he needs these. Why do living books need words not of their own? He has stolen my water and returned to me a polluted product. My mind can't function correctly if it is contaminated.

Pushing him over in the name of a bitter emotion I remember what it is to feel. He collapses to the floor like a stack of books. No longer seeing the image of a sharp featured man but a dismantled community of paper, I hear the crack of my knees as I crouch down to pick them up. Feeling the texture of the hard covers I observe that they bear neither titles nor authors. They were Anonymous. Hearing the crinkle of a paper spine not opened, I look for a sentence to read. Rummaging through each and every page and book I realize that there is not even a single word to read. That the pages are empty.

featured artists...



Kaleb Temple, *Boy Clown*, pencil on paper



Kaleb Temple, *Girl Clown*, pencil on paper

name: Kaleb Temple

medium of choice: I recently found a passion for ceramics but a pencil and paper will always be my number one.

major: Art/Photography (Journalism minor)

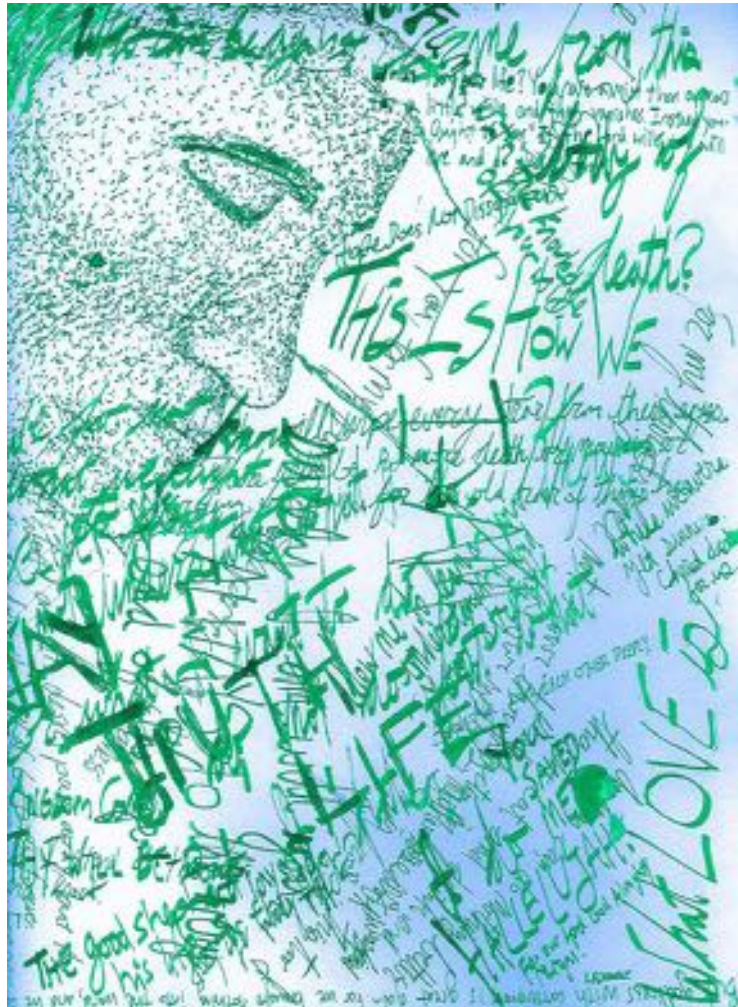
year: Senior

influences: Duane Michals, Alfred Stieglitz, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Gregory Crewdson, Egon Schiele, Francisco Goya, Danny Boyle, Robert Bresson, Roman Polanski, Dagur Kari

“...I have always used art to bring my imagination and wants to life,
like an artistic Frankenstein...”



Kaleb Temple, *Beard*, photograph



Layton Diamont, *Soul Self Portrait*, pen on paper

Dear C.S. Lewis

by michael witkowski

“I think that God in creating man somewhat overestimated his ability.”
—Oscar Wilde

I want to believe that God has a flaw,
that He sips a fine cognac from a crystal glass
too early in the morning
& smokes a clove cigarette
while leaning back on a Romanesque lounge
wearing His favorite pair of navy blue boxers.

It seems normal to me
that He puts on a black and grey pinstriped suit,
switches to dirty gin martinis,
later in the day.
I expect, Mr. Lewis, that after so many drinks
He begins to stare a bit too intently
through a golden mane
corrects his black fedora, a white feather on the left
toward the women with faces flushed pink
who drink champagne across the room,
while He taps pointed crocodile boots to soft Manhattan jazz.
—The quintessential bourgeois fuck.

I am inclined to trust, Mr. Lewis,
that God thinks little of me,
even a hint of indignation
as I am perhaps the better poet—philosopher
believing Him, in some way, a bit better than me.

Meredith Arp, *untitled*, ceramics



Meredith Arp, *untitled*, ceramics



Randi Leach, *untitled*, ceramics



Lauren Baker, *untitled*, painting

Colors

by nicole grose

I am ruby-red,
blood full of tacks and fire,
the Sun's cousin.

Slave to an ant's ambition
always lifting 20 times
my own weight.

Licking the walks of life
putrid dust and ash
in my mouth.

I am cobalt-blue
veins full of sand and ice,
Winter's daughter.

Dreams of sweat
filling tangerine kisses
with lingering spice.

Chronic fog filled with
thoughts of poison and
saturated petroleum.

I am olive-green,
growing spite in my bones,
Time's cohort.

Dancing around aspiring
rocks of clay and
parched sage.

Pacing tattered remains of
thumbprints and
tire swings.

I am coal-black,
roses rotting in the pit of my stomach,
Lucifer's siren.

Blue eyes scanning the sky,
its fingers reaching
out into hazel peaks.

Courting perfection and ecstasy, an
orgasm of apples,
lilies, and venom.

Untitled

by julia walde

It's been a long year
You've stained me with your fears
I won't let this happen here
The clock ticks for time is near
A pale reflection in a broken mirror
My eyes have bled with countless
tears
And as they fade from blue to grey
I watch my shadow fade away
Into the night, into the world
For I am but a number
A thing to be observed
I ask myself "how can it be?"
Tattooed with poisonous memories
A heart filled with kerosene
I pray this is not how it seems
God rarely answers me
Every time I turn away
Reality finds me and I've lost this
game
So as it is and as it were
I can't look back, I can't be sure
For broken hearts there is no
cure
Fairy tails exist only in the minds of
the insecure

What of screams and what of
sounds
What of my being you've been
tearing down
What of my essence, what of my
mind
Souls of webs cannot be defined
I feel it come, I feel it go
I feel like I've been put up for show
I've been here before
I won't do it again
This disease is complicated
It breeds under my skin
Dripping through every vein
Crawling over every inch
Careful deceit cannot be fixed
A shattered heart
A hidden fact
A girl who will not rest until she
gets every damn piece of it back

Traveling Blind

by patricia romano

Captivated by your Winnebago smile,
your randy testosterone,
your winsome ways,
my skin ripples and shivers
with each caress
of your brawny speckled hands.

Breasts

like piano keys begging to be played
while we undulate
in the milky ashes
of lustful endeavors.

Abandoned stupidity lay in the dust
as my quest for you draws me forward.
Mumbling your praises
I sever bloated fleshy dreams to the cause.

Blindfolded—we course down unfamiliar terrain
made disarmingly smooth
by utopian visions.

Shattering life's illusive blueprint
we continue this journey enveloped by each other

And the shadow of yesterday's moon.



Rob Brown, *Raincloud*, painting

Backward Logic

by matthew cox

They say it's rude to talk behind backs.
I prefer posterior attacks.
A massage can take those knots away;
At least I'll know they're not there to stay.
Scarring up front I must always see;
Whispered comments weren't meant to hurt me.
A shot forward means aiming to kill.
The shooter intends it, and it will.

I'd rather not be talked about to my face.
Better to have ignorance than have disgrace.

Mediocrity

by mackenzie leighton

It sits below
and sits
waiting, stalking
the unknown.
Pouncing the day
above it and waits.
Who does it stalk?
Those who are the wiser
but impotent in their hearts.
The sinner who waits
and the hero who hides.
Stifle the birth
the seeds that die before their
sprout.
Where do the flowers grow?
The ground leaks life
with not one to mend the dirt.
Patch and mend, a fool has done
neither
but idly by and sits
anticipating the event
to change
what they will never change
and reveal
what they refuse to find.
Malice lurks.



Kimberly Orr, *Childhood*, photograph

Suburbia

by stephanie white

We left our shit on our front lawns at night --
bicycles, basketballs, jump ropes, hula-hoop --
like wounded and dead soldiers strewn across every yard.
The pavement claimed us:
seared flesh, cooked plastic, blistered;
concrete streets called to us like canvases to artists
to scribble colorful metaphors on sidewalks
that no one saw as prophetic except us.
Every day would be hotter than the last.
We'd tromp into Someone's house for a drink
like prisoners, our hands and feet chained together,
touching the painted walls with dirty fingertips
and trying to stuff our fat, dehydrated tongues back into our
tiny mouths.
In our beds we stared at the ceilings,
made barnyard animals out of stucco stalactites,
and listened to the screams of our toys to be rescued --
those demons, the anti-sheep, that kept us awake for hours.

I'll go to bed tonight, a grown woman,
and realize I never hated myself --
never knew what it meant to hate --
and wonder
if I need to make up for lost time.



Sarah King, *Angel Elena*, photograph

Untitled

by stephanie white

I remember
the clay

imbedded
in the lines

of your hands,
those rivers

carving wrinkles
over time.

I envy
the smell of

the earth in
the love lines

of your palms,
and the sweat

in the cracks of
your fingernails.

I want
to choke
that shining

out of you
and pocket it

the way snakes
swallow deer.

Humanity Just Stares

by nathan slinker

Our lacking embrace of greatness amazes me,
we are golden shades of antiquity, time
slowly eroding beauty too. In endless autumn
we drift over knowledge, failed pearl divers,
minds deserted and shimmering faintly
as if rooted in a dusty forest trail.

It's here, beneath a slow shower of copper tamarack needles,
the opportunity of wisdom treads upon us
leaving convict complaints and miserable doubt.

If we waste away until winter
could ice, peeled precariously from pavement
disguise us? Imagine peeking through that crisp
transparency into vibrant blue eyes, more alive
than each feature on our faces. Faces attentive
and closer to the front of the room, away from the street scene.
It's quite hard to pick us out of the crowd,
even celebrity voices and plain English
won't make us appealing.
When will we become more prominent than you?

And we ask who are you to press
such judgment on us? You think
if you asked us who we were
you wouldn't get an answer (you might be right).
So such questions fall as raindrops (gum wrappers)
from bridge railing and are swallowed swept
by the churning flow beneath.



Tyler McPherron, *Anonymous*, photograph

Let's collage our acquaintances into a gluey
construction paper social, account for them
with names or faces. What more can they offer?
Petition for substance and humanity
just stares, those child eyes of ice-cream excitement.
There's a hole in the wall I visit occasionally
where apathy and ambition flamenco.
Where ink and ideas playact Greek tragedy.
Where street dirt and fallen leaves cyclone
in a newborn breeze, and nothing goes home at dusk.
We could live there too
you know.

experience...

the events we live, feel, imagine,
love, and remember

My Beloved

by john man

I remember how we first met; do you? I came with all my friends – a group of five. Our training was short and our time with you long. You were fun to use because you had so many areas of interest about you. I'm sorry my friends eventually stopped visiting you, but I stayed faithful. Did you know that I chose to use you for exercise instead of those awful machines? No comparison went along with a stair-master, treadmill, or one of those big balloons that require too much balance for my taste. They limited me to simple forward-backward or up-down motion of boring simplicity. You, my dear, were thirty feet of finger blistering loveliness.

Your grasp over me so strong and overwhelming, the moment I reached your peak, my heart filled with adoration and commitment; I vowed that I would know all of you, to conquer your every being, every path, every color. You helped me, a mere freshman at college, realize how strong I was and how strong I could become. You motivated me with every grip you had provided; a constant push to be better and faster.

Remember when I got stuck in one of your corners? You did this on purpose, like you were trying to tell me something important about myself and what you did for me. It was such an awkward position, no way to move forward, but luckily my legs were bearing most of my weight. It's as if you were cradling me, hugging me with your gigantic stony arms, telling me you loved me back. I'm glad you stopped me because I learned how much fun we truly had together and how thankful I am to God for giving me this gift and allowing me to find such a thing I've come to love so much.

However, our time together was not always joyous. I should have told you sooner, but at least it wasn't too late for us; I was a fearful Christian. I put you ahead of the One I should have been loving above all things, so I made a deal with Him so we could stay together. Remember that prayer? It went something like this:

Dear Lord, thank you for giving me such an enjoyable and challenging activity. I love you for it. I don't want to put my love ahead of you, so I'll make a deal with you: if you give me the strength to get better and stronger, I will worship you. If you challenge me with a handicap, I will heal and continue because I want to worship you. Amen.

I said this prayer every time I've gone to you. I kicked down a metaphorical door for you! I did what I had to do to keep us together as long as possible; I made you harder to love, which made our bond even stronger. I knew you would have understood, after all, you're meaning was only in my head.

It's been almost ten years since our first meeting. Our bond is as strong as ever. I continue to fulfill my dream vocation as an instructor of your ways, so that many may taste the joy you've given me over these many years. Even now I let you cradle me like I'm your child in that same corner, on the same steps. One day, I hope to climb higher and higher, until I reach my limit, then fall so when I reach the bottom, I will soar to your true peak in heaven, where I can hug you back with God by our sides.

Fried Chicken

by julie harris

As I stand in front of the kitchen sink, my hands mindlessly rip the plastic bag off the 3 lb#, 7oz. Foster Farm chicken. Suddenly, I realize it has been years since I bought a whole chicken. The pre-cut, pick your favorite piece, was such a simple answer. Now, as I pick up the meat cleaver, my mind travels back to earlier days, my childhood, so wonderful, so bizarre.

Grampa Joe would ask Grama Mattie what she wanted for dinner. Did she want to go to the new swank steak house across town? Perhaps Lucanno's for pissgetti. My brother Cain and I would giggle because we knew, after years of Saturdays, that Grama Mattie would make a sour face at Grampa for misusing the English language in front of us kids. Then that sour expression would slowly melt. Everyone would breathe in a little deeper when Grama said; she had a hankering for some plain, old fashioned fried chicken.

Now, there was nothing plain or old about fried chicken at my Grandparents'. Regular, yes. Every Saturday afternoon the same story would play itself out. So, chicken firmly agreed upon, out to the backyard we all would go. Grampa Joe with the biggest knife we had ever seen, would walk over to the old tree stump and lay the knife down. Then whistling "I'm a Yankee Doodle Dandy," he would march out to the hen house. Back he came with feathers flying, one unlucky chicken held by the throat. Brother would be gleeful to see something die. I would stand behind Grama and try not to cry.

Grampa Joe's strong hands would lay that confused, frightened bird, head down on the stump. Picking up the knife with one hand then, THUNK! A burst of excitement would break out as the headless chicken fell to its feet and ran for its life. Zig, zaging like crazy around the yard. An event so mesmerizing, that even the faint of heart couldn't choose to ignore. Then, just as suddenly as it started, that dead chicken would realize that it was dead and lay down, kerplunk, on the ground. Grama Mattie would walk over to the bird; stooping down to pick her up by the feet. Then sit down and commence to pluck out those feathers.

Thinking back even now my mouth waters. Never have I tasted better fried chicken. How I miss those simpler days. Cain and I would load our clothes in paper bags. Friday, right after school, Grampa Joe would come to pick us up and we would stay the weekend. It was a one hour drive back; usually quite uneventful. I chuckle now remembering one stormy Friday. The windshield wipers on Grandpa's old Studebaker truck quit working. So he reached under the seat and pulled out a dirty rag. Handing it to Cain, my elder, as he told him to lean out the window and wipe. The rain soon took pity on Cain and ceased to fall until we were back at the house. That was way before seat belt laws. But laws, wouldn't have helped Cain anyway. When Grampa Joe wanted something he got his way.

I remember the summer we took the train up the coast of California. We stayed in a grand old hotel and toured the area for a few days. We visited a fishery, lumber mill, paper factory, and zoo. Lots of miles were put on that rental car. That was, until the day it came to return the car. Grampa Joe pulled off to the side of the road

and turned the odometer back. When the car was returned, it cost a lot less.

Two peas in a pod, that was Cain and me. Yet, different as night and day. Cain loved me so much that he hated me. My way was optimistic, easygoing; foolish if you asked Cain. It drove him crazy that I loved my father. For he saw him as the arch-villain. The one who ruined our lives. Divorcing mother; womanizing, smoking, drinking, and always telling someone a lie. Now all this was true, but be it naïve, worship my father I did.

It's been twenty years since I last saw Cain. He divorced us all. Some reasons valid I'm sure. Too much feeling and pain to work through. I was on his pedestal for years. The last one he would speak to. Said I had a pure heart. Then one day, over, I was off the list. It hurt, yet brought relief. No more did I have to defend my interactions with other family members.

Now my hands, a mixture of chicken fat and blood, not a good time to cry. Life's a funny blend of memories, fantasy. The good, the bad, and the ugly. Father took Cain and me to see "The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly" way back then. Now, just like the movie, here comes a sad ending.

Father never left his old ways. We've kept in touch, but disconnected. Too many years of pain; with no apologies, no change. Now, my father is dying. He smoked Pall Mall Reds for forty plus years. That cold that's been hacking at his lungs for the last few years, just keeps getting worse. Sometimes, he can barely walk; his knee, artificial since childhood cancer ate the bone. Now looks like three knee caps from the strange bone growths. By all signs, the years of alcohol abuse have taken their toll. Sure, the liver's spent. He can't swallow fats or spices anymore. Any one of these things might take him soon. Though he would have to be unconscious before anyone could get him to the Doctor.

I see his imminent demise and it saddens me. No eye contact. How painful it must be, to feel so failed. It's like he's a rat in a maze of mirrors. No getting away from himself. None of this really matters to me. Sure, the innocence and closeness could never be retrieved. But, if I could have one wish today; my fried chicken would taste like "Grama Mattie's. I'd cook up a big batch, with all the fixens to go along. Go to Hollywood Video, rent "The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly." Call Cain, tell him to meet me at Father's. Then, the three of us, could sit together once more. Not to say we're sorry. Just to show we're human.

Life can be a strange bird. Like that poor chicken, we sometimes run around; zig zaging our lives into a messy confusion. They should' of, they could' of, if they only would' of; what? The dice have been thrown. This is your life. No denying it, or wishing it were different. The only part changeable is yours. To close, surrender to limitation; blame; is a choice. There is also another. We can open; love, accept, be that which we desire. Loving parent, faithful lover, dependable friend, compassionate, forgiving. Any way, sooner or later, we all realize we are dead, kerplunk. Maybe I'll buy a whole chicken more often. Cheap therapy' and could be a book in there somewhere.

Memoir of a Dream

by alex miller

Lights flickered in the distance.
Like tired embers awaiting dawn's suffocation--
Still, there seemed to be an air of calm about them
Many times have they played this role
They know their place

Atop this hill, it seems as if mid-day's face was a stranger
Under this sheltering lavender dome
Higher up than the birds might fly
Who would have guessed, that the sun's pact with the sky
would bring forth its fiery eyes
And storm this scene of patience with its flooding golden rays

The city on the horizon gleamed
So far away

And the trees stood still, in the morning's brisk anticipation
As stars slowly departed
Saying their goodbyes and going their separate ways
But the moon smiled down in a last glimpse of its twilight
embrace
And in the promise of a completed cycle,
Turned in its march toward the heavens.

A memory for a day
Of a stranger world's seasonal solace,
Of an overlooked moment on the shores of eternity
Always to give way to the crashing waves of morning
In an ocean of things to come

The city on the horizon gleamed
So far away

A moment would come, when the gates of day would crash
open upon us,
The golden sphere finding its way into the heart of another day
But in the dim glow of this space in between
There's yet a deeper shine of infinity
Showing sparkling pools of forever in our eyes

The city on the horizon gleamed
So far away.



Allison Hat Jakes, *untitled*, ceramics

The Boys Taken

by laurel topken

The wind tossed the ship around in the waves that first windy night on the Atlantic. The ship was scheduled to land in Ontario in a few months, provided the weather held. Seventeen year old Ann Thomas sat on her bunk listening to the ship's sounds. Sounds she had never heard before. She could hear people moving on the deck around her, it was almost morning, and the ship was coming to life. In the first rays of dawn she looked at the two young boys sleeping soundly next to her bunk, covered with only a shared blanket. Money was tight and she really didn't have enough for both of their fares, but somehow she had managed to bring both of them with her. But for what? She was already indentured for the next two years. Would the family accept the boys she brought along? She pushed these worries and others back trying not to worry about things she couldn't do anything about right now. Looking at the boys again she couldn't keep her mind from drifting to the events of the last few months that led her to this moment.

Life had been hard in England these last few years. Many people were getting sick, there was little money left and not enough food. She had seen family after family go into the factories. Fathers, mothers and children worked from sun up 'til sun down and never having time to take care of their gardens to feed themselves. Her older brothers had shipped out to various jobs sending money home to help feed the little ones. Pa and Mama were trying so hard to keep their land and raise the rest of the children at home, but every day it was getting harder.

When Ann saw the ad for young women to go to Canada to work, she couldn't help but think that this was what she had to do. She signed up right away, not even thinking about speaking to her parents first. She would have to work for two years to pay for her ship fare and earn a little money; the family would provide her with room and board as well as uniforms.

It took her two weeks before she gathered enough courage to tell her parents that she would be leaving for Canada. There was no need to worry about them talking her out of it because it was too late for that. But, she worried about their reactions anyway. She would miss her family, knowing that she may never see them again.

Pa and Mama took it well. They didn't want to see their little girl go, but knew that they couldn't keep supporting her here. They talked about her leaving for a long time and finally decided that she should take her two younger brothers, Elbert (8) and Edward (5). They would have a chance at a

good life there.

The family spent the next month and a half preparing for the children to leave. Not enough money was raised for both the boys to go, but Ann's parents believed that if she took them by herself and claimed them to be her children then they would all be allowed to go together.

That is how Ann found herself in the cramped room with the two boys bound for Canada and a new life.

"Now Carol, that's not what happened and you know it," my mom's cousin Chris remonstrated. "You are making it all too fairy tale like. Ann kidnapped her brothers, so she wouldn't be so homesick."

"Dad told me that the boys were hers," Dale butted in.

"Dale, she was seventeen years old and the boys were eight and five," my mom corrected. "She would have been eleven when she had Ethelbert. But, you might be right, Chris. You did live with Grandma, she should know better. Mom just always told us the story like I told you."

"Your mother just wanted it to be all proper and fancy," Chris answered.

It was the Cox family reunion and I had been sitting on the floor in Chris' house for the last few days listening to family stories. This one caught my attention the most because it was the only story the family was unable to agree upon. We knew for sure that Ann had crossed the Atlantic from England to Canada with two boys. But, the why and how eluded us, making for great story telling.

After returning home we did some research and found that Ann was seventeen when she arrived in Canada. She married two years later, possibly after her indenture was over, to a man she met on ship. We found that she had had five children, the third born the year after their marriage. But, we cannot determine anything positive on the boys other than she claimed them as hers in Canada.

Cynical dialogue of a fallen teardrop

by julia walde

Hushed by the whisper of the winds
Wrapped in your arms of silence
Kissed by your porcelain lips
Confused by the sounds in screams
Caught in a winters web
Seasons without names
Abuse without reasons
Loved by those who only hate
Cradled by the filth of the world
Haunted by caring minds
Tortured without a cause
Some sort of virus that's silent
Some sort of game
Some kind of mistake covered up
Hindered by all these days
What if I was gone?
Would you turn back your life?
Could you save my being, would you
want to try?
Swept up in a sea of blankets
A warm body with a simple heart
She wanted to believe everything he said
She would not walk away from him
He plagued her misguided mind
Afraid that he cares; terrified he doesn't
Happiness is new to her
Her eyes were drowning without him
Her world was black and grey
Faded stars is all she saw
But things are beginning to change
Brown eyes of innocent motives
Blue eyes of crystal spears

A shadow longing for something stable
Crafted by the hands of time
Crimson fire - burning coal
Will he stay or will he go?
A touch that's soft, it makes her smile
A concrete voice - heaven scent?
Another heartache is all it meant
She did not know - she was not sure
Maybe he'd stick around
Maybe he'd care for her
Could she trust him; would he
understand
She needs his touch; she needs to mend
Her world could break in the palm of his
hand
Mad at the rain for bringing the clouds
The snow falls without a single sound
Secrets that are far away
Roses that wilt; they are decayed
He has captured her in some kind of
way
Thank you Brad, you make me smile
each and every day

Femme Fatal

by allen muresan

Tattooed beauty in black and blue--
With silver metal in soft, pink flesh--
Stands under the pale glow of a lonely street light,
Cherried cigarette in her plum-colored lips
Her midnight hair sits on her full moon skin.

Lace and leather legs slip into a yellow cab,
Champagne strobe on absinthe eyes,
Lights outside are rainbows surrounding blackness,
Yellow, Red...Green,
We pull under the neon-blue sign of sin.

Into a brown room with melted carpet;
Candle wax on bile-colored walls;
Black-ringed holes in the yellowed sheets;
Pale face floats in the moon-lit motel;
I pull the black string of my twilight toy

Her hair falls down like a black waterfall;
Her skirt floats down like a grey rain cloud;
With her thin, soft musician hands behind her back,
She's ready to strike a new high note,
Fingering her favorite instrument.

I scream as her silver blade opens my throat;
Red rivers run through my neck,
Down the hills and valleys of my chest
Into the golden cup of her hands,
She drains the red sea into her raven lips.

The night comes down on my face like a black veil,
I stare at the moon as I lie under the window,
Blood drips down the glass like mercury
While my skin slowly turns blue
The moon glows on my eyes as they slowly turn white



Amanda Mullner, *untitled*, ceramics

I was sure the spill would happen—it was the stain I hadn't anticipated. (A close encounter for a few)

by cynthia kapteyn

When the wine emptied its intoxicants onto my animal skinned rug I was standing in the corner of the room, hand on doorframe, chatting with some young, gorgeous fellow. I glanced towards the startled yelp to see John twiddling his fingers around the stem of his glass, his mouth working a mumbled excuse to evade the situation. Edith just stood hunched like a helpless child as the liquid spread to her feet. William persuaded her to step back lest the grapes taint her while Sherry just screamed, sobbing in a corner, eyes glazing over at the sight of the juice. Henry followed her eyes, opened his trap once and shut it tight. "You'll be fine," he assured her. And the owner of the wine? He began to laugh at his clumsiness, perhaps to



Amanda Van Woert, *untitled*, ceramics

A Glimmer

by brittany russell

It all goes through my mind in slow motion; no cats lounging on our front porch this afternoon. We fed every stray cat, not only on our block, but in the Miami area. The door was unusually easy to open. For years, it had been broken and impossible to open without risking tearing it down. Our dogs weren't scrambling around me as I walked in the house. We owned maybe six huge dogs during my fifth grade year; six was a decreasing number. My brother didn't greet me with the typically, "Hey, how ya doin'" or "Oh, it's you", I could only tell he had been crying. My brother told me our grandmother had fallen and had been taken to the hospital. Then I heard the dogs in the bedroom at the end of the hall, and saw a cat sneaking by a bush on the back porch. The dogs couldn't be in the house when strangers came through, while the cats must have scattered when the ambulance arrived.

I walked through the kitchen, past the laundry area, and stepped down into the family room. At the bottom of the large bookcase on the sleek white tile, there was blood. There wasn't much, but enough for me to know the hit must have hurt. She had broken her hip and cracked her head. Her body was giving way to Alzheimer's.

At this point, she lost most control over her body and its common functions. She sat in a wheel chair all day, everyday, for years after falling. *Abuela* had to wear a diaper and be washed and changed by my mother. Her speech patterns began to go as well -- She couldn't put sentences together. *Abuela* couldn't sing and dance like she used to. She would smile at us sometimes still, when we walked passed her. She would want to hold my hand, and I wish I had held it more.

Before her fall, we were already witnessing the effects Alzheimer's has. The mind was the first to slip away. I brought my grandmother her dinner one evening. She needed to eat. It seemed over time she hadn't been eating at all. *Abuela*, of course, refused the food. To coax her into eating, I told her the doctor had called to tell her to eat a good dinner. In the midst of hallucinations, she turned to her right and asked the doctor if he really had called. *Mentirosa* she called me. There was no one else in the room besides me and my grandmother. She often had imaginary visitors, and we usually had to play along just to keep things peaceful. My plan had failed, I was now a liar, and she didn't eat dinner that night.

We moved into a smaller house a couple years after her fall, and she slipped deeper into Alzheimer's. *Abuela* couldn't speak any more; her

sight was likely going, as well as her hearing, though she couldn't express the extent of the loss. Her body was gone.

One weekend, my parents went out of town, and because my mother wasn't be there to tend to *Abuela*, my sisters and I needed to share the responsibility. It was Stacey's turn one evening to wash, change, and put her to bed. The routine was always the same. The bathroom had been occupied for some time before I heard my sister scream. It was a painful cry and she was being hurt. I opened the door to the bathroom. Stacey sat on the floor in front of *Abuela*, crying as my grandmother tightened her grip on my sister's hair. Such violent streaks weren't uncommon, but still terribly shocking. Her mind had succumbed, and the transformation was near completion.

Once I pried her hands off my sister's head, Stacey wanted nothing to do with the duties that evening. My sister Lisa, or I, finished up, though I don't remember which one of us. *Se me olvido*.

Alzheimer's seems to take away your loved one, piece by piece. It creeps around the heart and mind, quietly taking over. The process takes years, and all that can be done is to watch, and wait. The person you love and knew begins to disappear. You are then left with a no one; someone unrecognizable, and knowing them again is impossible. And then a glimmer, a faint light and you think some things will come back.

I was standing next to my grandmother speaking to my mother in Spanish, for reasons I don't remember. Though Spanish was my first language, with my grandmother unable to speak, this wasn't a Spanish-speaking household any longer. I had made a minor error, something like confusing the past tense conjugations or mixing pronouns. The mistake went unnoticed by me, and my mother hadn't said anything. *No se*. But then, seemingly out of nowhere, my grandmother said a word.

She had corrected my error. *Que dijo, Abuela?* The woman whose mind was gone, body having left her, corrected a mistake she heard me make. That glimmer was my grandmother coming out of her Alzheimer's for a moment. It had never happened before, throughout the years of her deterioration. And it would be the last moment of her.

Abuela passed away about six years after this incident. It was only six years she further slipped away, like a torture tactic. She couldn't utter any more words, sing any songs, dance into my room anymore. The Spanish word she gave me was the last of her for me. There is a desperate grasp to hold on to that word now. It is gone; the hope, the word.

She is gone.

A Dialogue at the End of Time

by alex miller

Here we are Again.

Yes, We've come full circle--
Eden to Eden.

I wonder
If we can preserve it,
This time around.

Not a chance,
But we're here now.

Snakes have apples.

And men have reasons.

What a tragedy.

No such thing.

A paradise lost!

A circle completed.

True, I suppose it's inevitable--
It will all fade to dust.

But we're Here Now.

The Bass Player

by aubrey o'conner

The warbling electricity thunders through me,
making me pulsate. The vibration
steeps into a river of crimson,
swollen and blind. The tongue of heat
traces my toes to the backs of my knees.
Damage sputters, dim and dark-eyed at the
mouth of the concealed keyhole.
Strings reverberate against the stretch of slick wood
molded from red cedar. Breaking barriers
fingers pluck and pull to rub the sizzle of caution.
Devine it crawls,
I tremble:
Licking cherry lips.

Deception

by aubrey o'conner

Rage is a razor
licking and peeling me milk ripe.

My survival casts a shadow
over your mangled demise.

Shriveled is your body
from the assault of hissing vultures. The earth
stained red with my vengeance.

featured artists...

artist: Katie Reed

medium of choice: Poetry.

major: English Writing

year: Graduate Student

quote: Most of my poetry deals with dark, visceral subjects, so I guess you could say I enjoy creeping people out with pretty words.

influences: Viggo Mortensen, Kim Addonizio, Clive Barker, George A. Romero, Neil Gaiman, and Jim Henson.

One Simple Step

by katie reed

Sprawled along the bed of frozen soil
her foot dangles over the sharp edge of
a cliff,
white sock smudged brown, shoe missing,
buried in the muddy black water below.
The needle
still protruding from her arm, cylinder
tinged
with droplets of pink. She raises her
head
her voice uttering a low primitive groan
as cloud-blinded eyes twitch, unblinking.
She licks blue lips, teeth black, and rises
one foot out the grave.

Midnight Caller

by katie reed

Accompanied with the stench of
whiskey
and stale cigarette smoke, he falls on
her.
Ignores the cries, the pleas, pushes in
spilling a stream of white spiders,
all fighting, grappling to find purchase
within the ripped cavern walls.
Never seeing her solitary black spider,
large and hair covered, circling,
pressing feet into tender flesh
before spewing sticky thread
keeping the white spiders at bay.
She watches as they get stuck, fail,
die. Creating a nest, she waits
as the bundle swells, pulses, oozes
black tar that spreads out in veins,
working into plump pink innards,
seeping into his blood.

The Dead Travel in Pairs

by katie reed

Occasionally they eat cookies or cakes,
intended for children's lunches
dusting the carpet in powdered sugar,
and peppering the counter with crumbs.
When they feel particularly naughty
they rifle through underwear drawers,
tie panties into knots, and giggle
at the other hidden objects they find.

From time to time they become artistic,
finger paint on frost covered windows
or snap photos of Cheerios floating
in a low porcelain bowl.
Steal freshly washed socks out of dryers,
to keep their feet warm.

Only when dawn comes, do they stop their
fun,
put down the jewelry, the toys, all the things
they've grown to miss. Playtime over
they dive into dew damp dirt,
crawl into coffin shaped beds and dream,
of the living's reaction to the gifts left behind.

Love Machine

by danielle overbo

The day The Elected announced the Contemporary Blissful Contract Policy, John was ten years old. His parents had met and fallen in love the Old Way, but they told him he was lucky to live in such a modern world. John was happy too. How could he not be? The slogan was enough to give every bulky, bumbling, little boy hope: "A new way, the right way, to find blissful contract! The Old Way of 'marriage' is gone! The Love Machine - getting you your soul mate - guaranteed!" The Elected took it on as permanent Policy just five years later. The process had been tested for twenty years, and had had a 100% success rate for the last fifteen years of its testing. It was, by far, the most popular permanent Policy they'd installed in ten years. People were thrilled, and so was John.

After completing post-compulsory school, John sent in his application. He waited longer than most people did to apply. Many people applied immediately after compulsory school, when they were about nineteen years old. John was twenty-five when he put in for contract. He admitted to himself that he had waited so long partly out of fear. His hair was already thinning on the top of his head and he was still chubby. And John had never been very confident when it came to women.

Once, when he was eight years old, John got up the courage to ask a girl in his class if she would like to share some of his cookies. He had admired her from afar all year long. Her name was Amber, and she was heaven. She had curly brown hair that framed her face like an angel. She always answered the teacher's questions correctly, and everybody loved her. John remembered sweating abnormally as he walked up to Amber during lunchtime. She was sitting with a group of happily chattering girls, and they all looked up when John got close.

"Amber, hey," John said, his voice catching on phlegm stuck in his throat. She didn't reply. "I just wondered if, you know, um...you uh, wanted to um..." John cleared his throat and some of the girls at the table began to laugh. "...If you would like to have some of my cookies." When Amber's face scrunched up in a frown John quickly continued with an explanation. "My mom made them special for me. There are lots. They're peanut butter balls." John smiled and held out the plastic bag to Amber.

When she finally spoke, a sneer had transformed her face. "You? Share your cookies?" All the girls at the table began to giggle menacingly. His face fell and tears filled his eyes before he even really realized what had happened. Amber's beautiful curly brown hair bounced with her laughter. The giggling became so loud the cool boys sitting at a table nearby poked their heads up to see what was so funny. Kids called him "Butter Balls" until the day he graduated compulsory school.

Normally, it took two to four years for a contract to be filed. But John was thirty-two when his contract was, at last, filed. He was notified at work that he would be moving to a two bedroom condo later on that week. John immediately felt both elated and scared shitless. What would he do? What would he say when he met his wife for the first time? He had nearly given up hope that they would match him. Now, suddenly, his life was changed forever. Driving to his new home that Friday afternoon, he could barely contain himself. John wanted to cry, he wanted to scream, he wanted

to laugh. She would probably expect them to have sex, that night. John stopped twice on the way home to empty his bladder. He had never had sex with a woman before. She would find that strange, no doubt. People were expected to have had some experience with the opposite sex before their contracts were filed. No one ever took those relationships seriously, of course.

John sat in his car on the driveway for twenty minutes before getting up the courage to enter his new home. He smoothed down the few strands of hair still growing on the top of his head and pulled up his pants as far as they would go before opening the front door and stepping inside.

Talia heard the door open and her stomach dropped. She was scrubbing a skillet in the sink, trying not to think of the upcoming meeting with her new husband. She had worked hard on cooking lasagna for their first night together; it was the only thing she knew how to cook. She chewed on her lip and nudged her glasses higher up on her nose with the back of her hand. Taking a deep breath, she stepped toward the living room.

The pungent smell of home-cooked lasagna greeted him, and John relaxed for a tiny second. He had almost expected the woman to be standing just inside the door, ready to attack him. Then she appeared. From the opening of the kitchen, she stepped into the living room. The light from the kitchen silhouetted her from the side. She was tall and slender, with long, dark blond hair. She had been smiling as she stepped into the room, perfectly straight, white teeth illuminating her face. Now, as she looked over John, her husband, for the first time, her face fell. She was tall, taller than John, with sparkling blue eyes, and thin dainty eyeglasses perched on her slender nose. She had high perfect cheekbones and full pink lips. She looked light as a feather, like she could be a ballerina, or a fairy princess. John felt his mouth fall open and tears fill his eyes. She was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.

Across the room, the woman's facial expression mirrored John's.

He was short, round, and balding. At first she thought he was an Official stopping by the house to tell her that her husband wasn't going to show up. When he stood fidgeting, for a full thirty seconds before speaking, she knew he wasn't.

John smiled shyly and stepped forward. "Hello, miss." He cleared his throat. "My, my, name is John...John Petersen."

She was holding a soapy skillet in one hand and a rag in the other. Slowly, both of her arms dropped down and she lost her grip on the skillet. It crashed to the floor, making John jump. He quickly moved forward to help her pick it up from the floor. "Yikes, what a clatter!" John said. He picked the skillet up and moved into the kitchen. "Something smells really good, though!" John laughed, but it was a strange hollow sound filling the silence.

She frowned and felt her mouth fall open. What was going on? What was this man doing in her house? He couldn't be who she thought he was; he just couldn't. She was smart, she was pretty, she had a great job, she had status, she had everything. Didn't she deserve a good husband too? Almost, not quite, but almost, she felt like she might cry. She didn't, though. Instead, she used her open mouth to speak.

"Are you supposed to...live...here?"

“Yes, yes I am.”

“I don’t understand...I checked the address three times. My new name...it is Petersen...” She felt like she was in shock.

John frowned. “Yes, your name. What exactly is your name? It would be polite to tell me.”

She looked at him, as if she suddenly realized he was still in the room. “They must have switched up addresses or something. There are probably lots of John Petersens.”

She had heard about mix-ups occurring; people being sent to the wrong house. This is what must have happened. There must have been a mistake.

It took John a minute to realize what she was saying. “Uh, well, yes, I suppose...”

“Good, we will have to fix this in the morning. For tonight, well, could you sleep in the extra bedroom? We are both contracted now, after all.” She felt more in control now. Of course there had been a mix-up. She almost laughed with relief. Everything was settled, it would be fixed in the morning. She relaxed and decided that she might as well share the lasagna with this man, since they were both there anyway.

John didn’t really understand what was going on. He felt all of his hopes falling away. Could she be right? Was there a different woman somewhere out there; his real contracted wife? Couldn’t it really be this woman? After thinking about it, he couldn’t help but agree with the idea that there had been a mistake. Obviously, he wasn’t the match for her. John was disappointed, but he hoped that tomorrow, when he met his real soul mate, he would finally be happy.

For the rest of the night the woman barely spoke to him. They both ate the dinner she had made in silence. The only comment she made was how annoyed she was that she had made the dinner for her husband, and now she would have to make another one when she actually met him. She refused to introduce herself; she said her name wasn’t important.

The next day, when they were informed there had been no mistake, she finally revealed her name. “My name is Talia Lermusiaux, Talia Petersen now apparently.”

“Your name is really pretty, Talia.” John reached out to shake her hand. She paused before taking his hand. “Dinner was really great last night, too.”

“I hope you don’t expect me to cook every night. It was only that once, for it to be special.”

She felt angry and helpless. This was wrong. Maybe the Love Machine made a mistake? The idea was ludicrous, but it was all she had left. She knew that when the Love Machine was in its trial stages there had been some errors, but The Elected had said the errors had been fixed; she hadn’t heard of any at all in recent years. People were still allowed to petition for annulment though, but it never led to anything. Well, maybe The Machine was due for a mistake. Perhaps it had a bug; it was theoretically possible. Looking over John, the pathetic weak man sitting beside her, she decided to cling to that hope.

“Oh. Well, it was nice anyway. Thanks.” John didn’t know what else to say. They were back in their condo and he was sweating. He took out his handkerchief and wiped off his forehead. Talia looked away.

“This can be a positive thing,” she said. “I will make this a positive thing.” John wasn’t sure if she was talking to him or herself. “I didn’t want to have kids right away anyway. I have my career to pursue.”

“What do you mean?” John looked down at his hands fidgeting with the handkerchief in his lap. He knew her answer wasn’t going to be pleasant.

Talia sighed and looked at John until he met her gaze. “John, you seem nice, but this is a mistake. You know it and I know it. We’ll have to put in a petition to look into the matter.”

John frowned. “No one has ever had an annulment of contract. Everyone is always happy with who they end up with.” He felt like he might cry.

“Don’t do that.”

“Do what?”

“Cry. Don’t cry. No matter how bad things get, they could always be worse. Never any need to cry, never.” Her cold gaze was piercing, and John found himself too startled to start crying. “After the mandatory two years, our case can be reviewed. We could be reassigned new contracts.”

She said it so matter-of-factly: living with someone who cared nothing for you for two full years. John sighed.

Talia was sitting at the kitchen table two months later, reading out of some very thick books. They hadn’t actually spoken to each other since the day after they were contracted. The only things they ever said to one another were “hellos” and “goodbyes” when they arrived at and left the house every day. John thought she looked more tired than usual, and more anxious. When he put the cup of coffee on the table next to her, she didn’t look up from reading. She just reached over and picked up the cup, drank slowly from it, and put it back down. John began to make her coffee every night.

On Saturdays John would lock himself in his bedroom, for hours. She didn’t know what he did. One Saturday, a few weeks after he began to bring her coffee, she knocked on the door. It startled him, and he almost slipped. He got up and cracked open the door.

“Hello,” she said. “I was wondering what you...well, I am curious. What are you doing in there?” She raised herself up on her tiptoes and craned her neck to try and see inside John’s room.

He blushed deeply. “I really would rather not say.”

“Oh, all right...never mind.” She smiled slightly and turned.

He watched as she walked away.

It was four months later when John got the bad news. There had been a freak accident. After reading it, he laid the report out on the kitchen table and went into his bedroom to think. She found it when she got home from work. John’s mother, sixty-three years old, had passed away. Talia sighed and wondered how John would take the news. Would he be crying? Would she need to comfort him? The idea made her uncomfortable. Then she sat down and read the whole report. It seemed his mother had been visiting an older section of town, designated for people to relive the

“Old Days.” She had been watching a street performer, a mime. Apparently, the mime had tried to warn her. She must have thought he was performing. A support pole for a window awning had come loose. The poor woman hadn’t seen it coming. For a long moment after reading the report, Talia sat bewildered. How terrible it must be for John, she thought. That mime should have said something; before she could stop herself, the words “silent killer” popped into her head. She held back laughter, and decided she had better check on John.

The door to his bedroom was unlocked. She stepped inside and saw John, sitting on the far side of the bed facing the wall. “John? John, I...saw the report.” He didn’t answer so she stepped closer. Still holding back a smile (a mime, for goodness sakes!), she moved to sit down beside John on the bed. “I am so sorry.” She reached out and lightly touched his back. John began to shake, and she thought he was crying.

A moment later he spoke. “Caution: Mime Shaft.” He was laughing. “What?”

He looked up, teary eyed, but not from crying. “Caution: Mime Shaft!”

She looked at him, surprised. And then, she laughed too. For a long time, they couldn’t stop laughing.

That night at dinner, they told each other about their days. John found out that she was a research chemist, and she found out that John was an accountant. She asked again what John did in his rooms on Saturdays.

Again, he blushed. “I told you, I don’t...”

“Come on John, I’m dying to know. Unless, it’s...something really private.”

John looked confused. “Yes, it’s private...”

“No, I mean, private, you know?” She cleared her throat.

“I-I really don’t know what you are talking about.”

She made a gesture with her closed fist, and John figured it out. “No! No, nothing like that.” His face turned a deeper red. She looked away and sipped some water. “Here, I’ll show you.” He quickly got up and went to his bedroom. She followed him. He opened up a cabinet, and inside were dozens of bottles, tipped sideways, on display. Each bottle had a small model built inside. Some bottles were very small, some were fairly large. Every model was beautifully painted in bright, vibrant colors. There were very old fashioned cars in some, pretty little boats in others, and some were impressive looking buildings. All of them were neatly labeled in black ink.

“John, these are incredible. Did you make them yourself?”

John smiled, “Yes, of course.” He moved to gently pick up a larger one, set apart from the rest. “I am almost finished with this one.” He hesitated, and then handed her the bottle to hold. She took it reverently.

“It’s beautiful, what is it?”

“It was called The White House. Do you really like it?”

“Oh yes, it’s incredible. I’ve heard of some people still doing this type of thing, but I have never seen one in real life.”

“My dad used to do them with me. It was something he told me I had complete control over. It really is; I love it.” He looked so happy in that moment, she had to smile.

That weekend Talia asked John out. She told him it was to get out of the house. They went out to dinner and took a walk. They talked. Talia listened as John told her stories about his mother. Talia, in turn, told John about her childhood. They laughed too. That was the craziest thing; John’s sense of humor was wonderful. Talia caught herself having fun several times throughout the evening. He was pretty smart too. She told him what her plans were for the future. She said in a year or so she wanted to have children. She had planned on putting in for a little girl first. John thought that was a good idea, and he tried to picture what a little girl with Talia as her mother might look like. By the time they got home, Talia had made a decision. She lightly kissed John on the cheek and told him to move his stuff into the main bedroom. When he smiled shyly and nervously asked her if she was sure, she knew that she really was. That was the first night John spent with a woman.

John and Talia decorated their home with pictures of flowers, and they painted the living room walls dark yellow. John said he picked it to match Talia’s hair. She smiled. The extra bedroom’s walls were painted pink. They planned to put in for a girl the following fall. John set some of his bottles out in their living room and bedroom for decoration. Talia thought they might be safer in the cabinet, but John said he wasn’t worried. Now, every night when John brought Talia coffee she would look up from her work and smile.

It was exactly two years, five months, and thirteen days after John and Talia were contracted that they got the news. It came on a Friday while they were having dinner. It was a simply stated note that said their petition had been filed and the Love Machine had reassigned their contracts. Talia was supposed to pack up and leave the next night. Just like that.

“But, but, contracts are never annulled,” John said, holding the small slip of paper tightly between his fingers, as if he could smush the words into saying something else.

“This is insane! Does it say why?” Talia asked.

John read the paper for the fourth time, already knowing the answer. “No, it doesn’t say anything.” How could it say so much and still say nothing at all? “What are we going to do?” he asked aloud.

Talia did not know how to answer him. She felt helpless, and she hated feeling helpless more than anything in the world. She jumped up from the table and got on the phone. Talia spent the entire night on the phone, a weary John by her side.

By the morning, they knew there was nothing they could do. It was the way things had to be. Policy was for the best.

“I do love you, I do!” John said. Talia was packed and about to leave. He was holding her and speaking into her shoulder. How was he going to let her go?

“I love you too John. I will try to fight this.” She didn’t sound hopeful; they both knew what was going to happen. They had, after all, petitioned for this. They had never thought to bother with withdrawing their petition. They were going to get new spouses.

“Don’t go, please don’t go.” John pulled away from Talia far enough to look

into her eyes. He thought about crying.

“Don’t cry John, no matter how bad things get, they could always be worse. Never any need to cry, never.”

He remembered her saying those words to him before. “Bullshit.”

Talia smiled and touched John’s face. Her eyes were tearing up. Then, she got in the cab, and it drove away. Her face, looking out the back window, got smaller and smaller till it was gone.

John sat on the curb outside of the condo for a long time. It had been their home, and now, to John, it as an empty shell, like a bottle without its model. No matter who they got to replace Talia, she still wouldn’t be Talia. The first petition he had ever heard of passing through, and it had passed through for him. It was ludicrous. Of course, it had taken away Talia. Something like this could only happen to him. The infallible Love Machine could only screw up for John. The very idea of it made John snort. The snort turned into a laugh. The street lights above him illuminated his cheery yellow shirt, and John laughed helplessly.



Alex Chambers, *untitled*, ceramics



Anthony Alston, 6/9/06, photograph

Anthony Alston, 7/21/06, photograph



Anthony Alston, 8/20/06, photograph



Anthony Alston, 5/29/06, photograph



Untitled

by guerin terango

“Oh, fuck.” Layla couldn’t feel her legs. She couldn’t even feel her arms. Struggling to open her eyes, a voice echoed over the megaphone in the background.

“You’ve been injected with a higher quality of morpheme, Miss Daniels. Don’t try to move to the point of strain because you will only be hurting yourself.”

The voice was muffled and Layla could care less for direct orders. She raised her head off of the silver steel table slowly, trying not to think about how stiff her neck was. The puddle of drool below her chin had been foaming. Her eyes were as dry as desert sands and she closed them for a moment. The fresh liquid rushed into the irises as she leaned back against the chair groggily. Layla instantly realized where she was: Interrogation Room #5.

Hands chained behind her, the alloy wrapped around the waist and down to her feet. This was an obvious hint for her conclusion to location. The thick white cotton padding lined against the four walls and ceiling was another.

“Are you with us, Miss Daniels?”

The voice was much clearer now. Layla smiled to herself, knowing it was some young law guppy from Yale wearing a black Armani rip off and fake gold cufflinks behind the two sided mirror just coming into vision to her left.

“I need a cigarette.” She tensed as the words came out of her dried up mouth. It was becoming easier to rotate her neck and even if it was an impossibility to get out of the current position, Layla tested the weight of the shackles holding her down fruitlessly.

Click.

Eyes to the door. The time had come. Layla starred curiously towards the two feet wide entry and exit as it slowly swung open. A middle aged man stepped in holding a yellow folder under one arm and a coffee mug, Disney World logo on the side of it, tightly hugged by the other. He sits down opposite Layla and simply frowns at her, unimpressed.

“Can you state your name, please?” Sweat was dripping down

the side of his face. The expression was an act they teach during the training program. Layla saw right through it and the poor guy clasped his hands together in his lap to keep her from seeing that they were shaking.

Layla grinned, leaned her head back up to the bright lights of the ceiling and said, “Get me some matches, smokes, and an ashtray and I will tell you whatever you want.”

She knew how to play this game and was ready to milk it for all it was worth. The man simply continued to stare at her in fear for a couple beats. He then turned to the side, glancing into the mirror, baffled.

One minute and thirty-eight seconds passed by before the door opened again presenting a blue covered security guard holding the requested items in toe behind it. He placed the necessities on the table in front of Layla and then took a step back.

“I’m going to need the cuffs off.” The man started to rub his forehead in panic and out of pure craze signaled the guard to remove the repression. The sound of the chinking made from the keys was somber. Layla felt empathy for the security guard and the man sitting across from her. What a life.

The guard left the accuser and the accused alone; there would be no more interruptions for the next forty-six hours. Flipping through the folder of papers, the man took a deep breath in and fixed his clip on. “Can you state your name, please?”

She answered while striking her first match, “Layla Daniels.”

“And what is your agency number, Miss Daniels?” This guy was beginning to sound cocky. Layla could understand why though. With the reputation she had accumulated over the past eight years, it was no surprise that this man was showing some sort of excitement over grilling her.

The first drag was miraculous. Cancer flowing into the lungs was like a symphony being played by devils dressed in white tuxedos. It was incredible. “Alpha 250994.” Layla could do this till the end of time, as long as she had those cigarettes in a constant flow. “And who is your current employer?”

“Myself. I can’t handle people telling me what to do. It fucks with my head too much.” Being brutally honest was the best route to go in Layla’s situation. She couldn’t afford to lie at this point, her life was

on the line.

The interrogator continued with his questions, taking a breath before letting another one slide like a snake from his lips. “What about your brother? A Mister Joseph Daniels?”

Layla’s eyes grew wide. The man knew immediately he had hit some sort of jagged nail and he glanced down at her hands to make sure the cigarette remained in between her fingers.

Fear fuels fire indeed and Layla smirked while she said, “He worked for your mom last night, so the grapevine tells me.”

“Miss Daniels, you have to cooperate with us if you wish to receive...”

“Ok, ok. Jesus. Joe worked with me.”

“Where is Mister Daniels currently?”

Another cigarette was being lit while the first was being pounded into the ashtray like a hammer. “He’s dead.”

Getting more comfortable in his chair, the man sits back almost preparing himself to be ready just in case Layla decided to reach across the table and choke him with her bare hands. “Our records show you’ve done quite well for our agency before quitting. Killing sixty-five people is impressive.”

“Sixty-seven you mean.” Layla answered hastily. She shakes her head in disbelief of what she’s just heard.

“What?”

“I’ve killed sixty-seven people, not fucking sixty-five.”

“Our records show us...”

Throwing her hands up into the air Layla’s snaps back, “Well your records are wrong bitch. Unbelievable. Freaking sixty-five. I know how to count bodies for shit’s sake.”

The moment of silence after this comment was almost unbearable. The man desperately flipping through his papers, checking every number he comes across, and Layla watching him, shaking her head and thinking about how disgusted she is that the agency couldn’t even count.

“How about we just move on here. I’ll be sure to bring something up with my superior after this is over. Let’s see here...ah yes...can you tell me what your job entailed?”

There are no words to describe how blank the look on Layla’s

face was. She simply could not fathom being asked such an obvious question, and in her mind, all she kept saying was, “Protocol is a bitch.”

“I’m paid to kill people,” she finally answered, letting out a sigh of practical boredom.

“May I ask why you chose this profession?”

“Yeah.”

The man waited for an answer, but nothing else came out from her mouth. “Um, Miss Daniels?”

“Ask already.”

“Why did you choose this profession?”

“It’s not something you go into and study and all that shit. I never chose this life or this job, it chose me and I used to thank it everyday for doing so. Now can you tell me how the fuck long this is going to take?” Layla smacked her hand against the table and her eyebrows curved downward. She sighed, looked towards the mirror to the side and said, “What’s your name anyways?”

The man gulped. Amazingly enough, he spoke up and answered this internally ticking time bomb. “Barnes. I’ve been asked here to find out where your loyalties lie, Miss Daniels. Do you understand this?” He then leaned towards Layla and folded his hands on the table in front of him. Yet another move they teach in the training program.

“Yes, yes ” Layla responded in a rush of boredom.

“How did your brother die, Miss Daniels?”

What a question. We were already at the climax of the interrogation and it wasn’t even half way over. Taking a long drag off of the cigarette, Layla tapped her free hand of fingers on her lap.

“Something went wrong on a mission.”

“What was the mission?”

“We were supposed to steal a diamond that had originally been stolen by a guy named Nicholi Fabrizio.” Layla hesitated when she said the name. There was so much angst and hatred in that name, but the reasons for why would come out later.

“A diamond?” As she spoke, Barnes took notes on his endless supply of lined yellow paper. He tried to maintain eye contact with Layla, which he hadn’t been too good at from the start, so he concentrated on his pen instead.

Layla dazed off as she answered, imagining the glory of the rock.

featured artists...

name: Claire Watkins

medium of choice: fiction, recently poetry

major: English (Writing)

year: senior

influences Donald Barthelme, Yudai Iwoshita, City of Reno Review, Jon Purtill and Andrei Hall, rudimentary geology, Tony Early, Louise Erdrich, Aimee Bender, Nevada, the folklore of my family

“A good friend once told me that he made art because he had to. At the time I understood that to mean he felt compelled by creative force to say something to the world with his art. He has since clarified and said he meant he had to, or else he would have to get a real job. I can get behind either of these. ”

.....

**Words Composed Upon Overhearing
an Acquaintance’s Unabashed
Declaration that He Had Not Read
(and Did Not Plan on Reading) Our
Classmate’s Manuscript**

by claire watkins

Some stories you read
the way a battered wife
makes a delicious casserole:

because you better,
or else.

To My Prolific Peer

by claire watkins

I tell ya
when you stood in front of us under those lights
your face dewy like a tulip,
with the book open, fingering the page’s edge, and said,
“This one just came to me all at once. Organically.”
I could have cut your head off.

Because yours is a sprawling garden of wildflowers with cabbages opening their purple leaves to offer images and similes. Because you rise early and frolic in your violet satin night gown, gathering characters and themes like strawberries and laying them gingerly in your picnic basket.

And mine’s a gritty apparatus in the basement with grating steel teeth and gauges whose needles bob in the red, poorly oiled and hardly maintained. Mine will grab the sleeve of your flannel work shirt and pull until the Camel non-filters in your breast pocket are ground into dust. Mine’s got a cracked block and a fraying conveyor belt upon which the occasional image is spit, then ignored ‘til it totters off the edge onto the lonely heap on the concrete floor, with the centipedes. And I’m in the heart of it, pedaling on a rusty stationary bicycle.

Because mine’s a machine with pistons pumping steam out so quick it would boil the meat off your organic bones.



Emily Clark, *Guitar*, photograph

...form

colors, shapes, lines, designs,
ideas, abstractions

Empty Skies

by alex miller

Oceans and pearls
Are never enough
The sky so high
These diamond eyes
Are frosting over
It's cold
At the top
Where twisted trees
Tell of Frozen worlds
It's a long way down

Somewhere in the distance
Where low stars are always in reach
Empty skies
Know better days



Emily Clark, *Chairs*, photograph

Beesting

by andrew gerthoffer

We were just
two
fruits on a
vine.

(Or
honey in a
hive.)

How fondly
 you stung my hand
over
 and over
 again.
(but lonely boys don't cry)

(but I love you.)



Diana Bernard, *untitled light form*, photograph



Diana Bernard, *untitled light form*, photograph



Yari Ostovany, *Fermata*, painting

Life

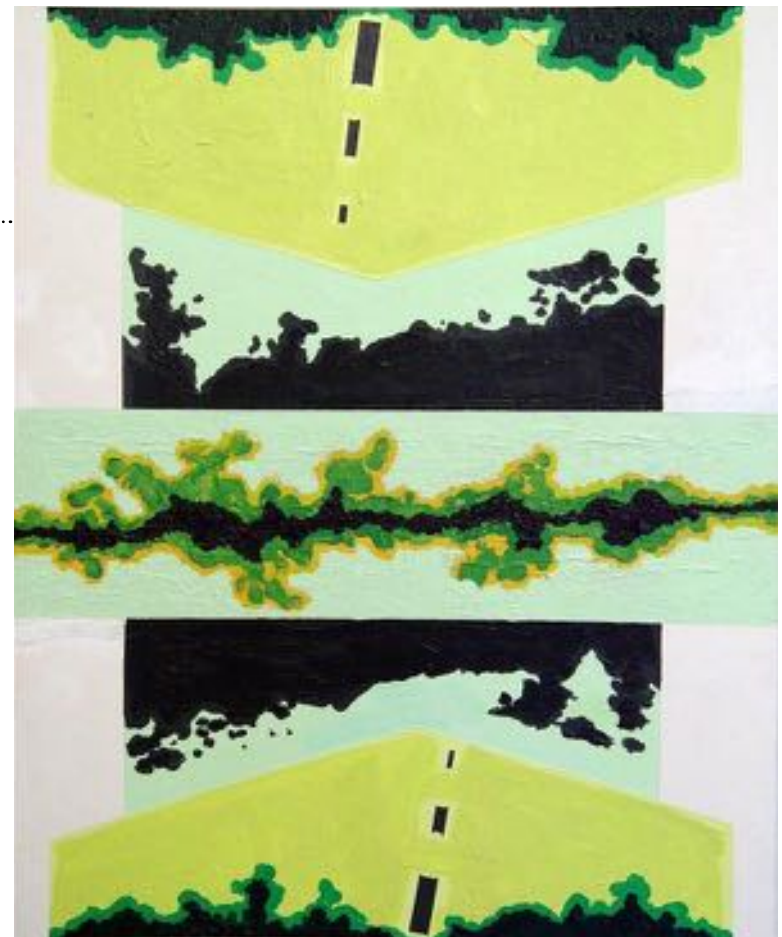
by skyler fuzell-casey

Living life so simply
Ignoring the truth of death
Why can't it all just end
Throwing us down on our knees?

Purpose and Random...
Hell and Heaven...
Truth and Lies...
It all intertwines.

Live not for want, but want to live
For there is but one life
Nothing more, nothing more
Nothing less than that.

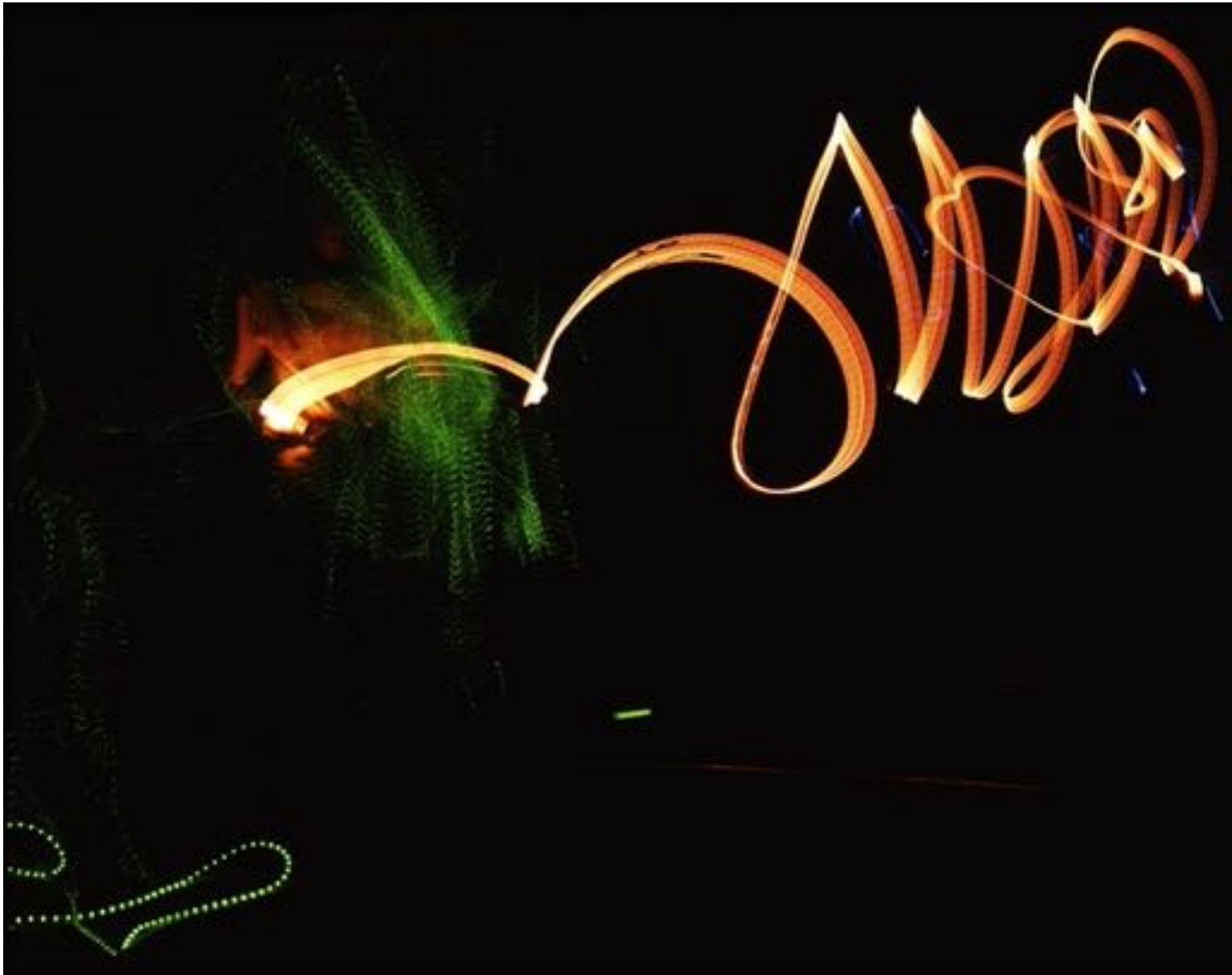
George Voegel, *untitled*, ceramics



Kelsey Page, *untitled*, painting



Brian Sweeney, *untitled*, photograph



Brian Sweeney, *untitled*, photograph



Kathy Gordon, *untitled*, ceramics



Heather Horn, *A Fall Event*, photograph

..... Leah Habermehl, *Electricity*, photograph





Kelsey Page, *Cone Vase*, ceramics

Downstreet Revival

by augustine lopez

Manics, feather-brained fanatics
Look low, for still recovery demands a lesson from imitated
lore
It is the difference from facing a holy whore
Spreading high where honey is sweetest
But that is the downstreet revival

Pitch, settling aplenty
Docks of concrete matter when grass is gone
Violent veins crumble
Screaming in the tone of unnatural death
But that is the sound of downstreet revival

Tempering off, a blind wave tamed
Noon-time returns with glory
For the average apostles
Loyal ties hold parameters at bay
But that is the dream of downstreet revival

Border Control

by augustine lopez

Still in the night
Hunger for the cool water
Step one step closer cross the border
It's another martyr
Newly caught up
In distasteful consequences
And no more being keen
That everything rests in defenses

Flash forward
Stumble in the desert air
It's more than the body can bear
So after a while even the casts will break
And even a castle can break
From the top
Where went the people
"well..." what?
This ain't Camelot

Tracing the record looking at history
For a suitable answer no faith in a mystery
Hidden eye sockets
In the shadows they hide
There are no numbers defined
That number in line
To all those who died

The Tempest

by laurel topken

The clouds are building,
a storm is about to break.
It is dark and grey,
just like her mood.
He feels a rain drop
on his hand
or was that a tear?

Nicole McKay, *untitled*, ceramics

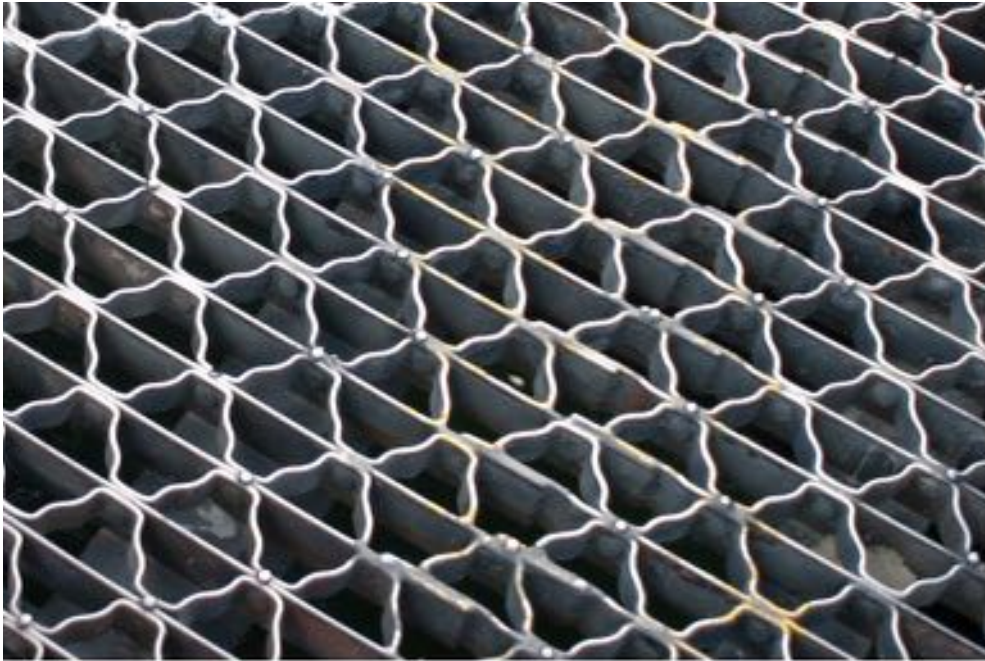


Nina Bentel, *untitled*, ceramics

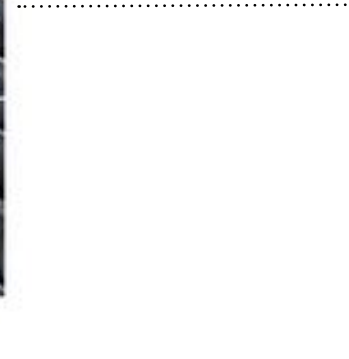
Untitled Cinquain

by kevin clifford

Dark
Void, desolate
Falling into oblivion
Screaming, scratching, and searching
School Finals

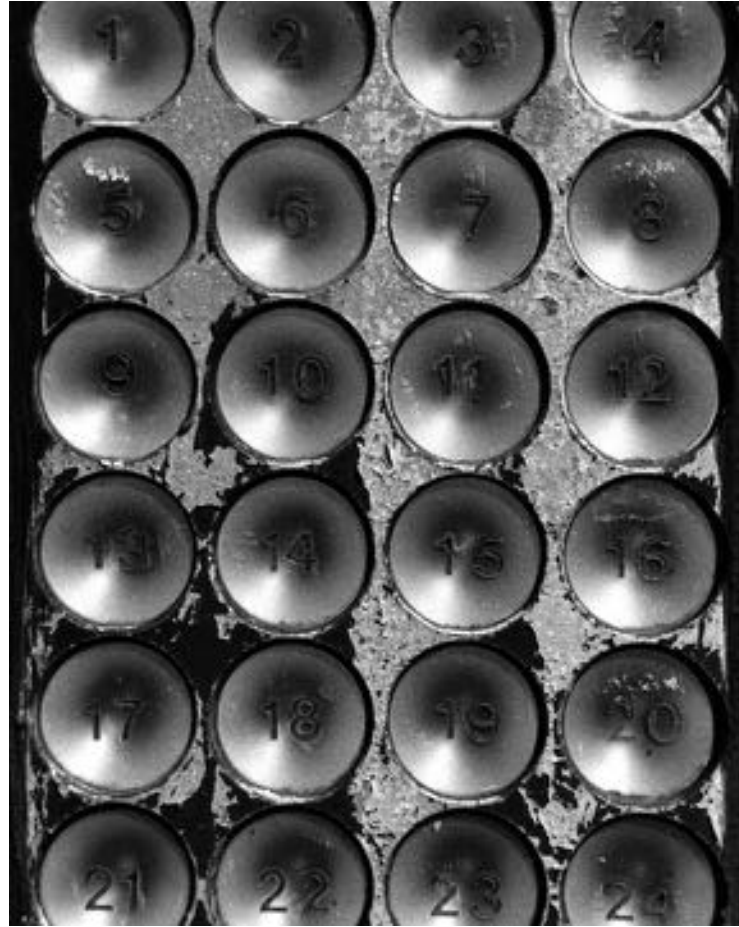


Thomas Boyer, *rye # 3*, photograph



Thomas Boyer, *rye # 9*, photograph





Rebecca Holstrom, *The Countdown*, photograph

submit...

All students, faculty, and members of the community are encouraged to submit.

All submissions must include contact information, titles of work and medium. Literary work should be submitted digitally as a Microsoft Word Document or a Rich Text Formant file and under 2500 words. Artwork should be submitted digitally as a JPG or TIFF file with dimensions no smaller than 6" x 8" at 300 dpi.

Submissions may be submitted in CD format at the JTSU Information Center to the attention of the Brushfire or emailed to brushfire@asun.unr.edu no later than **Friday, March 9th at 5pm.**

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In order for the Brushfire to continue to grow and succeed it needs your support.

If you are interested in supporting the Brushfire and would like to make **a financial contribution** to the publication or related events please contact the editor via email at brushfire@asun.unr.edu.

acknowledgements...

While I, as editor, may be the sole staff person of the Brushfire, I am far from the only person that makes this journal grow and succeed year after year. Every participating literary and visual artist by doing what you do best and desiring to share that with the community; the Associated Students of the University of Nevada by continually funding and expanding the Brushfire's resources; Amy Koeckes by being a constant and necessary support and advisor; Bob Blesse for layout advice and guidance; Kevin Clifford, Annie Flainzraich, Chris Driscoll and the entire publications board for your continued excitement and support of the Brushfire; Jared Hostmeyer for bearing with me while getting the website up and going; and you by picking up and reading the Brushfire this journal is an incredible success.

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