

for the
Love
of a
Book

Artemis 2022

Artemis design and layout is based on Sacred Geometry proportions of Phi, 1.618. This number is considered to be the fundamental building block of nature, recurring throughout art, architecture, botany, astronomy, biology, and music. Named by the Greeks as the “Golden Mean,” this number was also referred to as the Divine Proportion. The primary font used in *Artemis* is *Berkeley Brand*, from the Berkeley family, modernized version of a classic Goudy old-style font, originally designed for the University of California Press at Berkeley in the late 1930s.

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Kim Lashley Sutliff, *Flower Pods* (detail)

Foreword

For the better part of four decades, *Artemis Journal*, published annually, has showcased compelling new voices with notable authors ranging from poet laureates to Pulitzer Prize and other major award winners and nominees. *Artemis* has served the Appalachian Region of the Blue Ridge Mountains and beyond for 45 years, with 28 publications as a Literary and Art Journal. The rich history of creativity of *Artemis* has played an integral role in the success and perseverance of *Artemis*. Through the years, over 1000 writers and artists have been featured contributors or have donated their time and expertise as board members for the all-volunteer operation.

The theme of this year’s journal, “For the Love of a Book,” was inspired by Distinguished Poet Nikki Giovanni’s poem, “Fall in Love (For Artemis).” This theme expresses a core belief that implicitly drove the inception of our journal, and it can account for our compendium’s continuance into the present. According to Gustav Flaubert, “The art of writing is the art of discovering what you believe.” We believe in the importance of art and literature in our lives and acknowledge its potential as a coping mechanism and its utility in helping us understand the realities of the world around us. Adopting this theme recognizes a community of people who feel the same and celebrate our journal.

This year, along with Nikki Giovanni, we are honored to include the work of former US Poet laureate Natasha Trethewey, Virginia Poet Laureates Ron Smith, Carolyn Kreiter-Foronda, and current Poet Laureate of the Commonwealth of Virginia Luisa Igloria, and many other remarkable poets and artists from around the world.

The *Artemis* mission has not changed from its conception. Borne out of the writing workshops held for the victims of domestic violence in Southwest Virginia, *Artemis Journal* has been an advocate for social justice since 1977. *Artemis* has been a bright star that began in a basement at the Roanoke, Virginia YWCA. *Artemis* supports fair trade policies, artists, and women-based businesses. 10% of earnings are donated to a women’s shelter for abused women in Southwest Virginia.

Besides creating literary events, *Artemis* hosts a monthly podcast, *Artemis Speaks*, with *Artemis* Editor Jeri Rogers interviewing artists and writers published in the journal. Now entering its three seasons, interviews include notable poets Nikki Giovanni, Virginia Poet Laureates, Ron Smith, Luisa Igloria, Carolyn Kreiter-Foronda, artists Bill White, Betty Branch, Dona Polseno, Sharon Mirtaheri, and Steven Kenny.

This year’s cover “The Flock” is by artist Steven Kenny, a renowned painter who recently moved to the Blue Ridge Mountains, Virginia. Steven Kenny was born in Peekskill, New York in 1962 and now resides in Check, VA. He attended the Rhode Island School of Design, receiving a BFA in 1984. After studying independently in Rome he gained notoriety as a freelance commercial illustrator, later devoting his full attention to fine art. His award-winning paintings are exhibited in galleries and museums across the United States and Europe.

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Once upon a time
Betty Branch

Fall In Love

Nikki Giovanni

(For Artemis)

If you have to fall
In love

And you do

It should be with a book

Not a novel
Nor a mystery
Certainly nothing scary
And always remember other life forms
Aren't aliens but other life forms
Just as we are earthlings
Not people to be feared and killed
But life forms inhabiting the same planet

Maybe ideally a recipe anthology
With great ideas of things to do with garlic
Or especially a mixology book to tell us how to relax
If we are careful
We all need to know how to taste beer
And how to judge wine
(the same way we do people--carefully)

And we definitely need a book that lets us
Laugh
And every now and then one
That let's us cry

We need a book and a dog
And a quilt
To tuck into
And love
And that will be faithful
And true

That's what love is
A good book

October's Mortal Joy

Ron Smith

We've got gold finches this year,
who hang on the feeder upside down, and today
the sky's been full of sailing ships and icebergs
floating in the deepest blue. No wonder the air
has an edge and the greenest leaves are looking
a little let's say silver. Chipmunks—five of them!—
were hard at play after our breakfast, right here
on the still rich grass. Where'd this new baseball
on the patio come from? This gust of sadness?

Cricket, finch, squirrel, next-door dog
barks, chatters, cheeps, chirps. Those silver linings
in the southwest could blind you, there in the tree gap
where the sun wears a tattered bank of dark cloud
like Zeus robing himself in mortality for yet another
divine seduction. The dogwood in the corner is
all over red, shivering with anticipation
of throwing down her clothes of flame to become
Semele's blackened bones.



Harvest Sunset

Tonya Rieley Hengerer

Known

Michael Lyle

Nights when the blanket
fails the wind
raking oak and eave

an undercroft of quiet hangs
like vestments in a sacristy.

The creaking sash relentless
porous as a threadbare glove

and still I hear
the chipmunk breathe
all curled around with root,

the vixen's kits
beneath the shed
awaiting mother's hunt.

Our rising chests
a compline prayer
of hope to keep us warm.

Poem 025: Domestic Work, 1937

Natasha Trethewey

All week she's cleaned
someone else's house,
stared down her own face
in the shine of copper—
bottomed pots, polished
wood, toilets she'd pull
the lid to—that look saying

Let's make a change, girl.

But Sunday mornings are hers—
church clothes starched
and hanging, a record spinning
on the console, the whole house
dancing. She raises the shades,
washes the rooms in light,
buckets of water, Octagon soap.

Cleanliness is next to godliness ...

Windows and doors flung wide,
curtains two-stepping
forward and back, neck bones
bumping in the pot, a choir
of clothes clapping on the line.

Nearer my God to Thee ...

She beats time on the rugs,
blows dust from the broom
like dandelion spores, each one
a wish for something better.



A Painting for Dinner

Paulina Swietliczko



Broken Sky

Robert Hazen Walker

At The Seaside

Alessio Zanelli

Her hand holds his, clenches it at times,
readily pulls his arm upward
to keep him safe from the breaking wavelets.
His little body is almost lifted off the sand.
The early-morning swash is too cold for his bare feet,
even at the height of summer.
He is a sickly child, born with a malformation,
mostly wears a shirt and a hat
even when the sky is veiled, or sunrays strike next to level.
He moans and whines, digs in his heels or wiggles around,
puts on a pouty face. Why, he doesn't really know.
Maybe he wants to be let go,
free to splash along the water's edge,
or else to collect shells and pebbles.
But mom can see, sees well beyond the horizon.
One day, not before quite some time has forced them apart,
alone on the beach at the crack of dawn,
memories hardly emerging from the glitter,
he'll be allowed a glimpse of what alarmed her bosom's eyes.
Then all will be crystal clear:
the yanks, the rants, the harmless punishments.
He'll want to be able to go back in time,
through every single moment.
Inseparably. Hand in hand.
A child again. And everything.

In Search of Why

Al Hagy Sr

I am uncertain why my mind
Drives me to the keyboard
To bend words into meaningful shape,
But like an addict I am drawn.

I search for meaning of thoughts
Express them with caution,
Run through a literary compendium
And learn my notions have been said.

I know when I speak, my tongue,
A map of Virginia, paints idioms
Of colloquial color and betray
The depth of culture's undergrowth.

From this deepness comes the words
Gently filtered as from a stream,
Heard and read by others, tasting fresh
Or rejected and erased for all time.

The back of my hand, a map of my past,
The palm a reflection of today,
While finger prints search and dance
In varying rhythms on the keyboard.

Orison

Brandon Kilbourne

She braids a rope from her fresh wound,
she braids three strands, she speaks three words.
Lord have mercy. Lord have mercy.
Long skeins are prayed from her soul's heart
for ropewalks stretching from a wound
to her tongue's tip. Within her words
creaks a taut rope tethered to shade
and solace beneath His aegis.

Lord have mercy. Lord have mercy.

Bloodied by fall onto cobbles,
my mother's mouth weaves a three-strand rope
as she sits under fluorescents –
Lord have mercy. Lord have mercy.
An unfaltering tongue pulls taut
a deliverance graspable,
her creaking orisons sounding
sure salvation under His shield.

Lord have mercy. Lord have mercy.

From her fresh wound she braids three strands,
she speaks three words, she braids a rope.
Lord have mercy. Lord have mercy.
Long skeins plaited in a ropewalk,
her orisons strain bolts in locks
of empyreal gates, her words
imploring after the promise
of succor beneath His aegis.

Lord have mercy. Lord have mercy.

She braids three words from her fresh wound
under emergency room lights,
draws taut a lifeline of three strands.
Lord have mercy. Lord have mercy.
Awaiting the doctor's return
with her jaw's x-ray, she nurses
her gash with talisman-tone words,
tending herself under His shield.

Mercy, may her Lord have mercy.

Weight belied by weightless plaitings
sounds solid a rope from her soul's
heart in revelation aural:
three words straining heaven's gates.



A Healing Prayer
Lennie Duensing

Afternoon in the woods,

B. Chelsea Adams

a slow walk,
a twig breaks
and I wonder how
I did not know
the woman with hair
the grey-brown color of winter trees—
her hair tangled in an untidy nest
of dead flowers,
spider webs, and leaves—
is only three feet away.

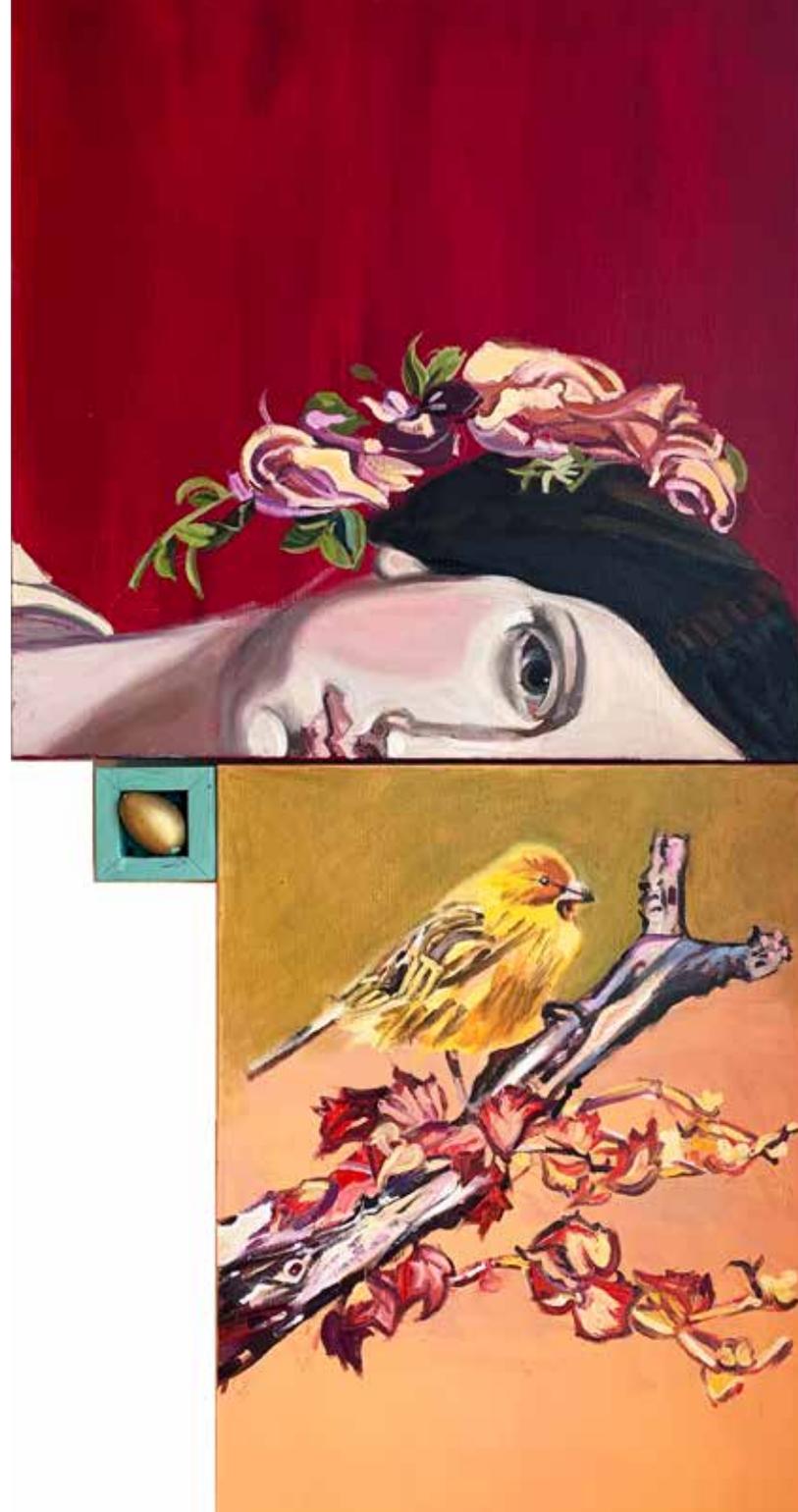
She takes my hand.
as if she is inviting me to dance.
We sway up the path,
bend before the oak,
step high over roots
and rocks.

I am not sure
where she is leading me
or why I go so willingly.

She guides me
without speaking.

And as she shimmers down these paths
between the trees, she draws me
to a bed of moss.
We rest.

I wonder
if we will pause long enough
for a spider, a bird, or a leaf
to build a nest
in my hair?



Appalachian Golden Girls

Angie V. Clevinger

them Golden Girls weren't the first women
to sit around a table and bitch about their lives

they had cheesecake
Momma and her sisters had out of date Ding-Dongs
Aunt Sandy got free down a the Merita Bred store where she worked
what Momma and company were missing was a matriarch
there was no Sophia among them
these women lived too fast and hard

there were no Roses at their table
naivety was lost somewhere between the shedding of first blood and the breaking of the
caul

Momma's coven of sisters understood all too well the cyclical nature of life
They chanted the raw verses of childbirth Spells of bitchery whispered about jessabelles
real and imagined

They damn sure weren't no Golden Girls
but them were the golden years
when their bouffant heads would bob in rhythm with each woman's fleeting thoughts
their cigarettes flitting like lightning bugs to the cadence of their talk
ashtray cauldrons scattered on burnt tablecloths
held the ashes of their memories and when the scent Jean Nate and nicotine
smoke filled the room and floated out the rusty screened window into the summer night

Song for Fibonacci Flower Girl

Annie Waldrop

I Ask the Mountain to Heal My Heart

Beth Copeland

But the mountain hides behind a screen of white chiffon and doesn't respond.

I ask the fog but it lifts and is gone—a ghost.

I ask the ghost but it was never here. Maybe it was a deer?

I ask a deer eating muscadines from the vine but it disappears.

I ask the muscadines but the grapes aren't wine yet and won't help me forget.

I ask the seed inside the grape, but it's hard, like a tiny stone, a grit.

I ask a gray stone but it has no mouth and cannot speak.

Like Niobe, it weeps and weeps.

I ask the tears but they taste of salt from the ocean.

I ask the ocean but it's far away and can't hear me over the crashing waves.

I ask the waves but they speak in a rolling tongue I can't translate.

I ask the tongue but it's twisted and tied.

I look up to the sky as a muscular cloud rumbles by.

I ask the thunder but all I hear is a drumroll on the day Charlie Watts died.

I ask the cloud but it shifts from a feather into a fist.

I ask the feather but it drifts away.

I ask the fist but it won't loosen its grip.

I ask the rain, but how can it heal my heart when it's grieving, too?

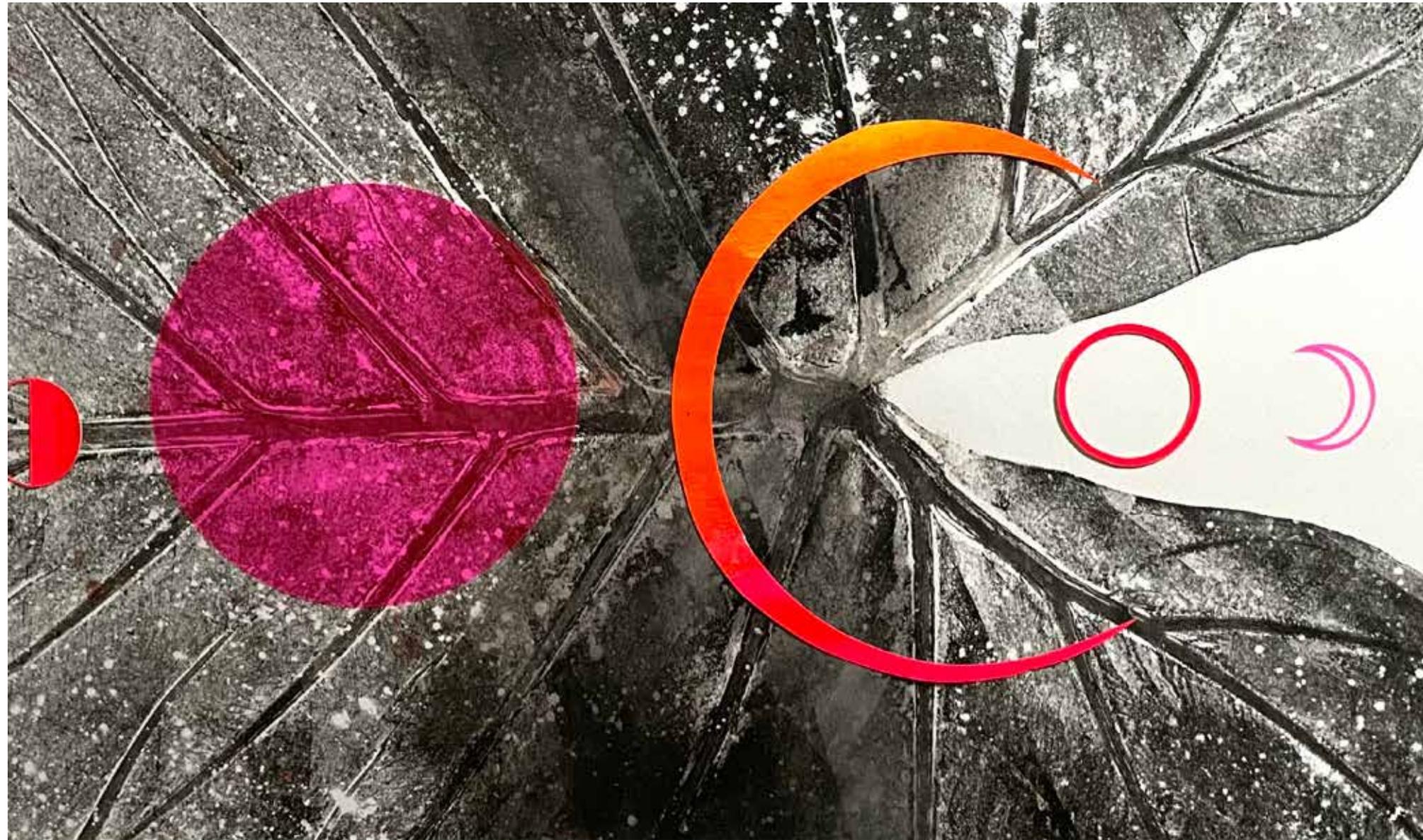
I ask my heart why it's hurting and it says, *Why ask? You know what to do.*

I open the door to my heart and step into rooms wallpapered with bloody roses.

I ask the roses to heal my heart and they say, *Go ask the moon.*

But the moon's sunlit face only smiles. So, I ask the shadow side

and it whispers, *Stop asking. Let it bloom.*



Phases

Piper Groves

Prayer flags

Megan Zalecki

Our wrung out washcloths are hanging
on the shower rod like forgotten prayer flags.
These prayers are wrinkled and wet.

I try to pray sometimes, to whisper into the dark, or silently hope.
They say worry is a prayer, I add it to the pile, too.

Worry, song, laughter, silence, sleep.
Our baskets are full of these, piles of them,
a long thread of our own flags, repeating.

What does it mean for me to pray
when I don't know who might be listening?
Does the wind carry my prayers
or do I?

Maybe prayer is a spell
Words must be said, with implements,
at the right time, and under the right moon.

Maybe prayer is a wish list
for Santa, for God, for Buddha.
I've believed in them all. I try to be good.

Bodies and jewels
Fire and horses
Blessings and curses
They all fade under the sun
All have come and gone

and the cycle continues

The laundry continues
The soap and water and spinning.
And hot air. And folding.
The wearing. The wrinkling. The fading.

I fold our clothes and cloths
and pray we wear them
in health and healing and light
And wonder who out there might be gracious enough
To grant us this.



In the Mind's Eye of Tree Sitters

Anne Lusby-Denham

To Wren and Acre, and to all Tree Sitters and Water Protectors

The reporters on the radio
say it's over, the fight to save
our mountains, our water, our land.
The tree sitters have been taken down
by force from their home in the trees
sheltered there for 932 days,
a long enough time that the rhythm of life
from the trees, the sunlight, the wind
has become part of them.

It is far from over!

Men on machines may cut down
the White Pine and the Chestnut Oak
they lived in but the resistance
to this assault on nature
and to life in connection with nature
gains momentum as the chainsaws hum.
The perpetrators of this violence
believe there is no price to be paid
for leveling those trees
but Mother Nature suffers no fools!
Humanity has only lived on Earth
in the blink of an eye,
machines and corporate rule
have only been here a millionth of a blink.
The Earth knows how to renew herself
and those who love her will survive these assaults.
In the mind's eye of the tree sitters
hundreds of trees are already growing
stretching to the horizon.

Solar Power
Robi Sallee

Do Past Futures Have Dead Ends

Claire Scott

My wardrobe all greys and blacks
easier to mix and match I tell my friends
no worries about clashing colors
totally efficient, highly cost effective
but really the colors keep me safe

Don't stand out
don't be the center of attention
fit in or fade into the wallpaper
or a half-human mother will whip you
with a leather belt or a freshly cut willow branch

Do our clothes shape our future
the way they reflect our past
could I risk the bright colors of my sister
who stood out against the bleak background
and was beaten more

Yet still I dress in somber,
my mother's long arm reaching,
her manic laugh echoing through time
's bleak labyrinth, ice clinking the gin in her glass
although she died over thirteen years ago

Maybe I will buy a nubby orange sweater
to see if dawn rises with rosier fingers
to see if hot pinks, bright blues and turquoise greens
no longer cringe in corners
and muted colors dim and disappear

But what will I have without memories
that tell me how to be
I am no Ariadne risking her life for love
no Theseus with a sword and a ball of red string
the Minotaur biding his time, bloody fangs drooling
I slip on a dark sweater
and wait at the window



Carrots, Beets, and Bok Choy
Jan Knipe

Summons

Dianna Henning

1

This is my cutting board. These
are my hands adept at cutting. This
is my chicken whose neck I'll sever.

My cutting board floods with new
geographies. I pluck my fingers of blood. Who

knows a woman's aim when she swings?
The word-hands of the world lay wreaths

at the serifs of despair. Who says
it can't be done? The potted

chicken boils and bubbles. My poem
writes itself.

This is my cutting board.
These are my hands. What happens

2

when it's over remains,

this indenture to memory. Today, taste of your skin
suffices. How salt enters the bloodstream,

flows straight for the heart. Don't take me
for a mad woman or shrew. All day

I've stirred. The river over-flowed
as we reclined on the ground.

May I? May I, you'd asked. The river answered.

Already, I swoon in recall
of the Yuba, its fluctuance, its greed. He almost

3

almost swallowed me with his fame,
but I'm a sound woman and kept in mind:
I will, by sheer will, one day equal or surpass you.

Such belief is how a woman survives the Dominate.

That's why my rock finally threw its punch.
You only lack character if you want to, said the priest.
Just ask the rock at the foot of Mt. Fuji.

I've since learned to enter rock with my breath.
I've always been fond of the hard.

Post-

Luisa A. Igloria, Ph.D.

As in not only the aftermath but some aftertime.
Meaning what we survive, or what survives us.
The mail, finally delivered beyond the end of the world.
Little squares of sticky-backed neon paper, untouched.
The electric car whispering your driving score.
The as yet unimagined successors of the manila envelope,
the horse-drawn carriage, the pneumatic tube,
end-to-end encrypted email.
Are we there yet, asks the speaking donkey.
Evidently not, if animation extends only to a 3D screen.
Meaning after the statues have come down
there are still caverns of dark, haunted histories.
Meaning we are in the throat of a moment
that hasn't completely spat us out yet.
We're working as hard as we can.
We can be as rust-colored fishbones,
as calcium stones; a mouthful of marbles
refusing to give away their brilliance.



Substrata guardian

Pippi Miller

Elegy for Grief

Melanie Almeder

It is the come home to roost, grief,
which, unattended, settles in,
mundane as furniture.
What, after all, are we to do with it?
This sweet old world cannot bear grief
along for long, either:
like industry, like lapse,
like light gone slack into the edge of dusk
before the black oblivion of night,
the world lingers on its objects and insists,
in any loss, on some loveliness.

Who were we to imagine immortality?
The death of aesthetics?
Napoleon himself needed a nap.
Our best theatrics, the gods, our losses,
refuse to punish us,
but loll among us, abstracted
into other mild states resembling the play of light.
And in this, loved one,
the one I once thought the trees lay their leaves down for,

you are no more than the abandoned instrument
in the forgotten ballroom of the gods.
You are no more than the window there
open to endless kudzu. You are no more
than the crumbling limb of a marble statue, than the pink light
against which swallows stitch untranslatable erratics.



Burnt Offering
Dotti Stone

Feedings

Elizabeth Garcia

“Her milk tells the baby about the world its mother has lived in.”
—Katie Hinde, *Center for Evolution and Medicine*

—for A.

Taste, daughter,
my story, before

language before
the tongue acquires

its own volition, translate
my life to lipids,

my pain to fleshy thighs.
Tell me: what is the flavor

of endurance, the milk
of muscled will,

of backbending to your father?
Is the wine of compliance

red or white? How dry
is the vintage of these lean years?

Is there any fruit
of letting go, something

ambrosial, something
close to hope?

You will need something
let there be something

to fine the bouquet,
to fill in the hole

of my own father’s skull,
press back the flap of flesh,

his brain re-sponged--
let the tannins of that death

die off let this decanting take away
that blue swirl of ache,

the aftertaste of those years
I couldn’t talk to God,

that vortex of buzzards
above the forest.

Prepare yourself
for what is not acquirable—

the briary, the thorn in the taste
of fatherlessness.

The Right to Privacy

Elizabeth Poliner

*“We have had many controversies over these penumbral rights of ‘privacy and repose.’”
Justice Douglas, Griswold v. Connecticut, 381 U.S. 479 (1965)*

Winter, years ago, at a Washington D.C. gala—
a celebration for a friend—and who else is there
but Sandra Day O’Connor, swinging

with her husband on the dance floor.
Her dress, black and belted, is knee-length,
her hair, that bob we’ve come to know,

vestige of the fifties, when she was new to the law,
among the first women graduates of Stanford.
No one would hire her then. So forbidding

was her sex, so mysterious, we might liken her
to Eve, who’s had the book thrown at her
for bearing all that feminine baggage. But tonight

she wears her history lightly, yes,
she is light on her feet, her arms wrapped gently
around a man she loves, she is slim

in that black dress, a shorter more shapely version
of that familiar black robe. Tonight she shows
leg, supple and strong, she shows, albeit judiciously,

sex appeal as he twirls her and she smiles,
supremely happy. Though she’s maintained
a woman’s right to privacy, it’s hard not to conceive

how later, home, she might very well disrobe,
make love, her mind free of the day’s
weighty decisions, her body safe

in the arms of her love, her head turned briefly
to the window beside her, to the moon’s penumbra,
illuminating this intimate domain with its spare glow.



Fierce
Lisa D’Amico

To You, Mary Shelley

Eric Forsbergh

*“The gift offered is different for each,
but all are equal in their grandeur.”*

Lyanda Lynn Haupt

Mary Shelley?
About your Frankenstein.
A monster?
Cursed. Gawp-mouthed.
In pain. From parts.

The book itself is the mutation.
Who else’s hand could leave
these cursive fingerprints?

Your brain at driven play:
gestalt encompassing gestalt,
electricity in chains.
Sudden? Often.
Normal? Never.
Always, always
toward mutation.

Do you conceive it
as Saint Elmo’s Fire
on the fingertips?

Or do you stitch, unstitch, re-stitch
into a softened stop,
half-asleep by candlelight.

Mary, do you startle
from a nightly grave
when a lightning strike
sets fire to a line?

How often does a page
breathe without a warning
in the dark?



What Attracted the Ghost

Emily Hockaday

Though my daughter was born the same year
my father died, it doesn’t occur to me
this is what attracted the ghost. Instead
I think of shiny objects like a rook might bring
to its nest: mother of pearl buttons, hairpins,
a lost charm, polished rocks or marbles.
My life has been strung together,
collected moments of pain and pleasure
and peace. The ghost holds these baubles
and weighs them. One the mass of a kidney
or liver. Another the weight of a toe.
My life is open for autopsy. *It isn’t over yet*
I want to say. Am I convincing anyone?

Spinning the Wheels
Page Turner

Showy Orchid on the Virginia Creeper Trail

Felicia Mitchell

There was just the one,
so I sat with it by the creek.
We knew each other then,
the way old friends do
or relatives, when young
and not yet estranged
or old and ready to reconcile.
Above us, a Vireo sang.
Near the creek, on a rock,
a snake rested in the sun.
It was entirely peaceful,
my time with the Showy Orchid.
The violet-pink of this flower
reflected an amethyst in my ring,
the amethyst wishing it was wild.
A Swallowtail Butterfly, sensing that,
lit in my finger for a moment.
I buried the ring by the orchid.
Maybe I wished I was as wild,
or maybe I wished I were tamer,
but I knew I needed a ring
no more than the Showy Orchid
needs a crystal vase.
And we sat, a breeze blowing,
and I drank some water
that I shared with the orchid
before I set back up the trail.





Animal Healing Hunt

Florinda Ruiz

On the prowl for a bite of life,
she's a bruised nocturnal animal
soaked in a dreaminess of being,
eyes only fixed on survival.

She has dried all sorrow and salt
out of her jabbing dire tears,
muster a stricken smile,
not a trace of gloom or fear.

A chilling veil of deep gray haze,
can't shield her good cheer,
nor transform fright into fate
at each daunting new frontier.

Pushing along at a brisk trot,
she knows to keep an even pace
to hunt the forces of healing,
to hoard serenity in her life's mace.

Helen
Lauren Walke

Just Shy of the Lyric Danger

Frederick Wilbur

Before knocking, I hesitate;
oboe notes ghost through the door
and, disguised by autumn's
falling reds and yellows, drift away.
Reticent, I will not puncture her
concentration as passion desires;
music is the grace of promise,
the flowing toward loss.
Can what I have to say compete?

*

She enjoys my small news,
my pocket poems,
over kitchen coffee and her
lavender-sweet scones.
Our lives touch, but not enough.
She plays a sunny sonata
to cheer my natural deafness.
*You have self-deprecated your talents
to an understanding*, she tells me.

*

I hear humble gods holding
love in blameless consequence
and turn, descend the few stairs to the sidewalk.
The trees still giving themselves away.

Interruptions

Gabriele Glang & Carolyn Kreiter-Foronda

Dedicated to the memory of Rudi Ebert (1954-2021)

*We must be prepared to let God interrupt us.
– Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

I

I want to know: are you there?
Are your particles flickering notes
in shafts of sun- or moonlight?

Are you there? What lacunae
separate my flesh and blood
from your sidereal plane?

And yet: we go on, don't we,
suspended between dank earth
and celestial tapestries.

We carry on deciphering
imagined lines connecting stars –
fettered to our metaphors.

II

Because of the strength we've acquired
over the years, because of the will
to overcome obstacles,

we carry on like brave soldiers at war.
We persevere by writing about life's
woes: an abusive husband

unlike the current one who cuddles up
next to you with a twinkle in his eyes –
while beyond, a government fights

to halt an influx of immigrants, a debt ceiling
on the rise, and you far away reclaiming
your power by staying on track.

III

A dismal fog shrouds the cold house.
Time to light a fire. I dither –
clumsy, unsure of the moves.

Tending the hearth was your job
in this house we built together.
Now I want to cocoon myself

in my mourning, wrapping it
around me like a bandage
to keep from falling apart.

My habit of tears is a cat
curled on my lap, or an armchair
in front of a blazing fireplace.

IV

I yearn for a breather, an interlude
from appeasing others with book
blurbs, reviews, critiques –

tasks that interpose on my own writing,
on the freedom to lose myself
in the moment.

I crave solace, comfort from the loss
of friends to a demonic outbreak.
Beneath a towering oak,

my husband and I fill flower pots
with botanical gems – Golden Asters –
and pray for those we lost.



Untitled

Tom Patterson

V

Setting the table for guests,
I set a place for you. It's hours
before I notice my mistake.

Some days my lungs breathe liquid sorrow.
I can get no air, drowning, spent
from the heavy work of grieving.

We're never done with our travails.
Beneath the closed parenthesis
of moon, night's hiatus offers peace.

The woods I walk in are a grace.
How little I have to offer –
only faltering reverence.

VI

I display photos of the deceased
on counters, book shelves, an upright
easel, a bedroom armoire

in hopes of receiving a message
from above: a fluttering butterfly,
a cardinal's crisp *cheer*,

cheer, ending in a calming trill as a mild
breeze caresses a cloudless sky.
Why not take a break,

collect one's thoughts, gather parcels
of optimism for the future?
Why not aspire for all?

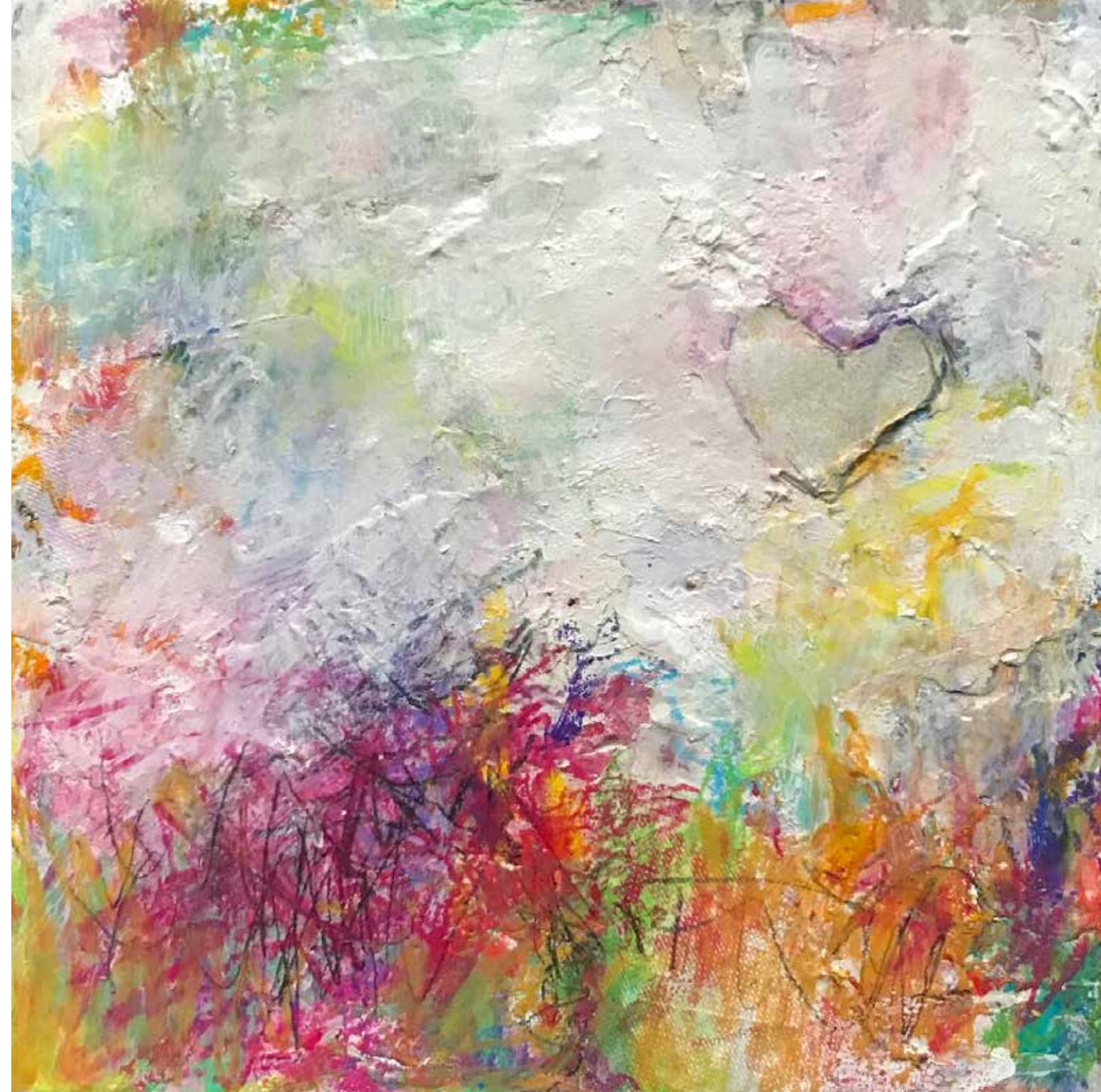
* *"Interruptions" is an excerpt of a longer poem by the collaborative authors.*

A Blue Whale's Heart

Epiphany Ferrell

The heart of a blue whale would swallow you, wrap you head to toe. A blue whale's heart would beat all around you, moving whole rivers of blood. The pulse would be steady, a lullaby to curl into. You could drift off to sleep in it, secure, using a red blood cell as a float, dipping your toes in the plasma. You would be surrounded by walls of pink heart, always warm, always safe, cradled. The heart of a blue whale would never turn cold or grow distant. You would never be left all alone. You would never be lost.

Accepting the Slow Passing of the Dark Night
John Wiercioch



complacient

self-satisfied; smug; aa. a *complacient* look or smile.

2. kindly; complaisant.

com-pla-cen'tial (-shl), a. marked by complacence.

com-pla-cent-ly, *adv.* in a complacently manner.

com-plain', *v.i.* complained, *pt.*; *pp.* complaining; *ppr.* [ME. *complainen*, OF. *complaindre*, to complain; L. *com-* with *plangere*, to strike.]

1. to utter expressions of grief, sorrow, dissatisfaction, etc.; to lament; as, he *complained* tearfully of his condition.

2. to utter expressions of annoyance or resentment; to find fault; as, he *complained* bitterly of his treatment.

3. to accuse formally of an offense; to present an accusation.

Syn.—bemoan, deplore, murmur, grumble, grieve, grieve.

com-plain'a-ble, a. that may be complained of.

com-plain'er, *n.* 1. one who makes a complaint; a complainer.

2. in law, a person who files a charge or makes the complaint in court; a plaintiff.

com-plain'er, *n.* one who complains.

com-plain'ful, a. full of complaint; [Rare.]

com-plain'ing, *n.* complaint.

com-plaint', *n.* 1. expression of grief, sorrow, discomfort, dissatisfaction, pain, annoyance, or resentment; a finding fault.

2. the cause or subject of complaint; a grievance.

The poverty of the clergy hath been the *complaint* of all who wish well to the church. —Swift.

3. an illness; an ailment; a disease; as, his physical *complaints* were aggravated by his mental troubles.

4. in law, a formal charge or accusation.

com-plain'ing, *adj.* prone to complain; complaining; [Rare.]

com-plai-sance, *n.* [Fr. *complaisance*, *complaisance*, from *complaire*; L. *complacere*, to please.]

1. willingness to please; disposition to be obliging; agreeable; courtesy; politeness; as, the gentleman received us with *complaisance*.

2. an agreeable instance of this.

com-plai-sant, *adj.* [Fr. *complaisant*, pleasing; *ppr.* of *complaire*; L. *complacere*, to please.] pleasing; agreeable; courteous; obliging; desirous to please; as, a *complaisant* gentleman.

Syn.—gracious, benign, condescending, obligant, urbane, courteous.

com-plai-sant-ly, *adv.* in a complaisant manner.

com-plai-sant-ness, *n.* civility; complaisance. [Rare.]

com-plai-nate, *adj.* leveled; reduced to an even surface.

2. in botany, lying in the same plane, as the leaves of certain plants.

com-plai-nate, *n.* [Fr. *complanatus*, *pp.* of *complanare*, to make smooth; *com-*, together, and *planus*, a plain, to make level; to reduce to an even surface.]

com-plect', *v.t.* to twine the arms around; to embrace. [Obs.]

2. to twine together; to interweave.

com-plect'ed, *adj.* brought to the complexion; of a specified color; as, a light-*complect-ed* man. [Dialect.]

com-ple-men-tum, *n.* [L. *complementum*, that which fills up or completes; *com-*, together, and *plere*, to fill.]

1. full quantity or amount; full amount; an entirety; a complement; as, a company has its *complement* of men; a shop has its *complement* of stores.

2. perfect state; fullness; completeness. [Obs.]

3. (a) what is needed to complete or fill up something; (b) that which completes or brings to perfection; (c) something added to complete a whole; either of two parts that complete each other.

4. in grammar, a word or group of words completing a predication. Examples: *president* in *elect him president* (*objective complement*); *pretty* in *she was pretty* (*predicate complement*).

5. in immunology, a protein in the blood or lymph acting with immune bodies to destroy

complicity

of two or more related parts; simple; as, a *complex* being; perplexing; difficult; complicated; composite.

Syn.—entangled, heterogeneous, involved.

com-plex', *n.* less complicated color; mixed things or parts; (a) a group of emotions or feelings, with a particular one remaining partly unexpressed, enhancing the individuality of the other; an exaggerated emotion or passion.

com-plex'ed, *adj.* intricate. [Obs.]

com-plex'ed-ness, *n.* intricacy; the state or quality of being intricate; the *complex-ed-ness* of a subject.

com-plex'ion (kəm'plē-shən), *n.* [ME. *complexio*; OF. *complexion*, complexion, constitution; L. *complexio*, a combination, connection, from *complexus*, *pp.* of *complexus*, to embrace.]

1. the color, texture, and general appearance of the skin, particularly the face.

2. the temperamental constitution.

3. the color, texture, and general appearance of the skin, particularly the face.

4. the general appearance of anything, as judged by the complexion of the sky, the sun, and inclination of the earth.

5. the state of being complex or intricate. [Obs.]

com-plex'ion-ál, *a.* depending upon complexion; constitutional; *complex-ion-al* complexion produces.

com-plex'ion-ál-ly, *adv.* by complexion; constitutionally. [Rare.]

com-plex'ion-á-ry, *a.* pertaining to the complexion, or to the care of it. [Rare.]

com-plex'ioned (-shund), *a.* having a certain temperament or state. [Rare.]

2. having a (specified) complexion of the skin; used in hyphenated compounds, as, a *dark-complexioned* man.

com-plex'ity, *n.* 1. the state or quality of being complex; complexity.

2. *pl.* **com-plex'ities**, that which is involved; complexly; as, the palace was a network of *complexities*.

com-plex-ly, *adv.* in a complex manner; not simply.

com-plex-ness, *n.* the state of being complex.

com-plex-sen'tence, *a* sentence consisting of a main clause and one or more subordinate clauses (e.g., I would go home if I didn't have to work).

com-plex'us, *n.* [L. *complexus*, embraced and surrounded, from *com-* plus *plecti*, to encircle.]

1. a complex or complicated structure.

2. in anatomy, the large muscle connecting the upper vertebrae with the lower, voluntary governing its motions.

com-pli'a-ble, *a.* capable of being yielded; compliant.

com-pli'a-bly, *adv.* in a compliant manner; in compliance.

com-pli'ance, *n.* [Fr. *compliance*, to fill up.]

1. the act of complying; yielding, as to a request, wish, desire, or demand; or concession, submission, or acquiescence.

Let the king meet me, and show your looks. A free and ready compliance with his wishes. —Rowe.

2. a disposition to comply; yielding; complaisance.

He was a man of great wit and great compliance. —Clarendon.

Syn.—acquiescence, concession, consent, execution, obedience, performance, submission.

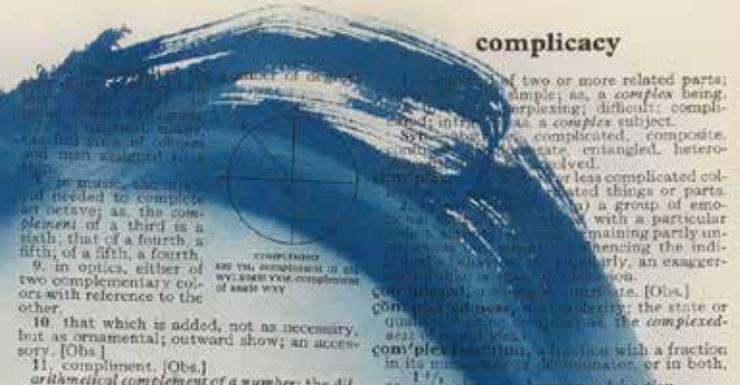
com-pli'an-cy, *n.* same as compliance.

com-pli'ant, *a.* complying or tending to comply; yielding; pliant; bending; as, the *compliant* bough.

com-pli'ant-ly, *adv.* in a yielding manner.

com-pli-ca-cy, *n.* 1. a state of being complex or complicated.

2. *pl.* **com-pli-ca-cies**, anything complicated; a complication.



Apparent Death

James Cole

You know

even with this chair's lever action, its need for meeting every curve halfway at least, even after I've told you Christmas won't be the same this year without our usual cold compress against the neck, even though comfort sometimes gets between your teeth

and shaking hands are just a transitive of tremor, even though you come to me expecting judgement and some parable about a crow or a fox or some bullshit excuse for exclusion, even though sitting here before a white television set makes

us feel immobile, even if its tonic, even if it keeps the mosquitoes off our pink muffin bits bulging out from shirts and covers, even though I heard it's cool to not be like your parents, even if its too apparent, even though life sometimes

feels like the hardening of slime, until all fixatives, save formaldehyde, lose themselves and we run back into types of ooze, even though the classification stings the eyes, even though rabbits actually hate what they appear to enjoy.

even though lists cheat, even though poetry doesn't always negate or specify whatever feelings should be felt, even though fear doesn't look so different from sitting in this chair, and we talk about feigning death but rarely feigning

life, like a rattle in brown leaves, even I can't keep it up much longer, even though I never settled on an alternative, and we talked about finding someplace where the air occasionally talks back, and everyone is buried sitting upright, and I don't think you can kill me in a way that matters.

Complete
Kevin Rose Schultz

Summer Lake

Ayn Cates Sullivan

From the dry branch of a dead tree
A bald eagle looked down at me,
Then leapt into a gust of air
Opened his great wings and flew north.

In the heat, I felt like ripe corn
Begging to be shucked and planted,
Naturally metamorphosed.
I slipped off my shoes and clothing,

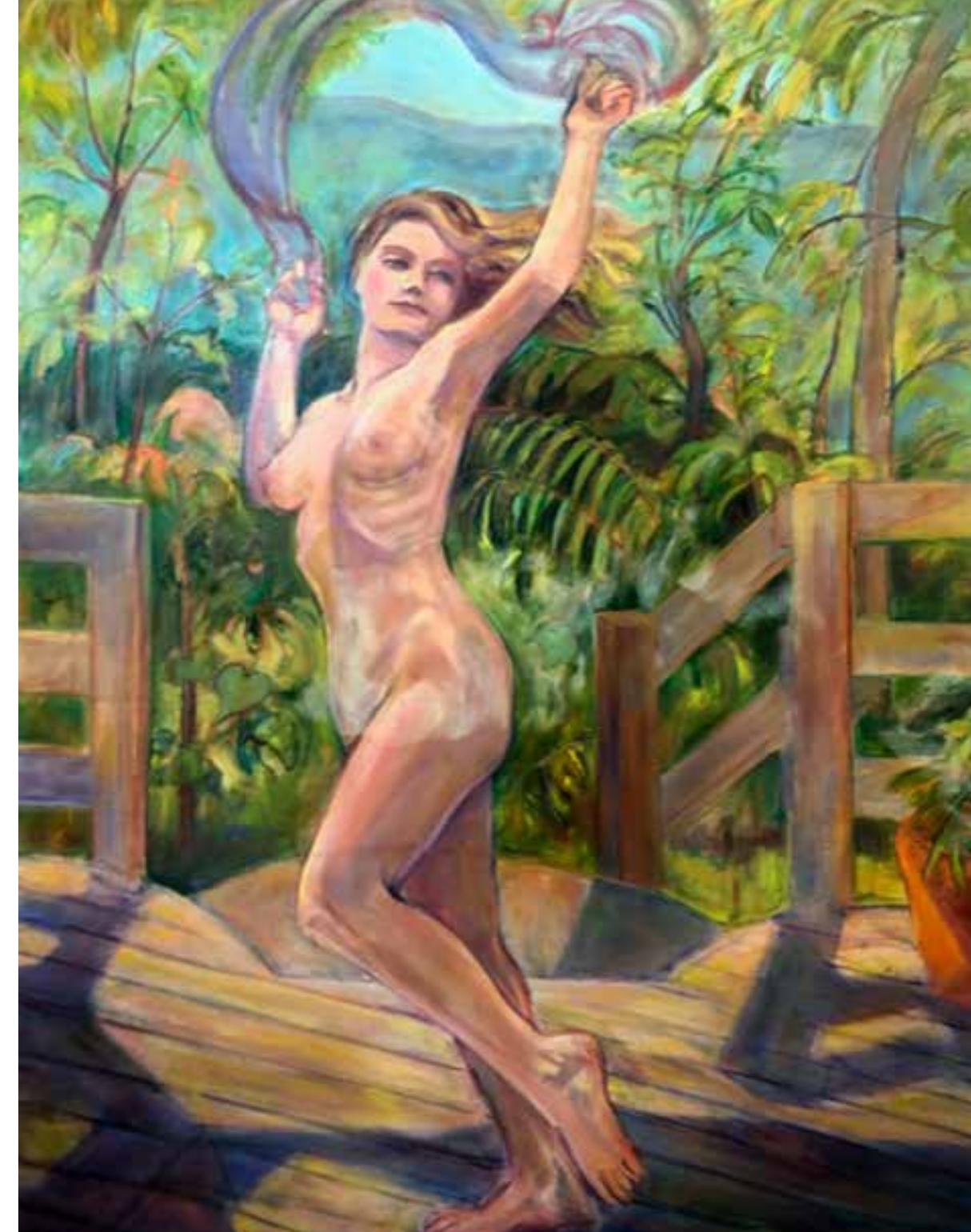
Descending into the dark lake
I dove deeper into the blue,
The lake dissolving confusion.
I opened my arms wide and swam.

At first, I felt too slight and small,
Demanded to be more important
Than the fish and birds that lived there.
An altered wisdom in the waves,

And water invited coherence.
We merged,
 all wildlife elements —
One ripple beyond time and space.

All at once I was the water,
The air, the fire, the earth, the eagle,
The intelligent soil sprinkled with star dust.
Then I felt my small form again

Floating in the aware water,
A child enfolded in the sage lake,
I relaxed and grew easy
Simply trusting the moment.



Scarf Dance
Gwen Cates

Rachel Weeping

Jane Goette

According to Man
God is sword and shield,
rolling thunder,
shock and awe,
security and salvation,
commandments,
domination or damnation.

Oppenheimer's Trinity revelation:
*Now I am become Death,
destroyer of worlds*
Iron domes, drones,
outcasts at sea
huddled masses wailing
beneath deaf walls.

Godless or godfull,
beyond dreams and schemes
Life is its own commandment.
All ye mighty carvers of land,
remember Ozymandias and
worship not your sandcastles.
Time will swallow them all.

Teri Hoover
Relevance 0939





Aluminum Balloons

Louis Gallo

for the late Rita Riddle

On one of her last days after retiring
she called me and said, “Lou, let’s go
have coffee together before we both expire.”
I picked her up at her home and was aghast
to see how much weight she had lost;
she looked ghostly radiant though, smiling
the entire trip to the sidewalk cafe.
I told her that Cat and I had recently
gone to my high school reunion
and one of my old friends took one look
at much younger Cat and laughed,
“You screwed yourself.”
Rita guffawed and spat out coffee
onto the street.
I had met her ages ago when I came
to interview for the job.
She treated me to supper at BT’s
and we hit it off instantly.
Sometimes you know when you click
with someone you just met—and we clicked.
She had recently emerged from a sloppy divorce

and of course talked about it. That’s what you do.
I think we both got a little drunk.
Because I recall a lot of laughing.
Soon after we drank coffee that day
I received the dread phone call . . .
she had indeed expired in the hospital
after eating a meal, something about choking.
Someone informed me that she wanted me
to speak at her funeral service.
I had already grown hesitant about
public speaking but I would not let her down.
I stepped up to the podium and related
a few memories and read some of her poems
and one or two I had written about or for her.
I refused to view the body in the next room.
I never view bodies, never.
Bodies are remnants, not essences.
I left that solemn gathering shortly thereafter,
panting, distressed, my mind churning.
It took me years to jot this down, Rita,
and I wish I hadn’t—it’s not the essence.

For the Fools of April

Derek Kannemeyer

“The first of April is the day we remember what we are the other 364.”
-Mark Twain

We are gathered in the comfort of this truth: that we are blunderers together. If there’s an art to the pie in the face, let’s master it. So you’re the weird spawn of weird people? Sometimes you screw up royally? Well, hey, me too, today’s our day! For today we are given license, we are the Fools of April, flocking to the clown car roll call—

Idiot! Blockhead! Imbecile! Ass! Cretin! Dunderhead! Dingbat! Dolt! Simpleton! Dimwit! Dipstick! Dunce! Goober! Goon! Doofus! Dope! Dumbo, Dum dum, Peabrain, Clod! Fathead, Airhead, Moron, Flake! Halfwit, Twit, Ditz, Putz! Lamebrain! Chowderhead! Sucker, Sap! Ninny, Turkey, Numbskull, Chump! Twerp! Dork! Bozo! Coot! Present! You bet! Howdy! Here!—nincompoops all,

hooting and clouting each other about with our names’ noise like a cinema of stooges, until the jeer is knocked from them—until the spite, with a whoopee cushion squawk, cries uncle—chuckles, *Cousin, Sister, Human, Friend, Amen! Alleluia!*

within





Papua Paradise
Terry Cox-Joseph

The Wholeness of the Moon

Katherine Chantal

I look at the moon this evening
Through pre-budding trees
Splayed in their skyward beauty
Reminding me, that I only see
part of the whole
Obscured, but present
I ponder how to perceive the
Wholly holy when elements
are unseen
Do I trust blindly
Or look deeper through limbs
containing growth, even as they
hide the full view

Tonight, I am missing something
Or is it someone?
Fragments appear
Spearing through my heart
It may be that my attachments
are bleeding through
Though it seems the loss is more
than mine alone
Somehow, I do know
The moon is always full
whether I see her
luminous whole or not

Perhaps, "I" am in the shadow
For tonight, she eludes me

Denial

Laura J. Bobrow

The light in her eyes is too bright.
Tears tremble under her lids.
She relives the scenes of last night,
but smiles as she cuddles the kids.

*Oh no, dears This isn't the end.
Any moment he's going to call.
For now we'll just have to pretend
that Daddy's not gone after all.*

*Maybe he's out for a walk
and soon he will come through the door.
We'll all laugh together and talk,
and we'll be the same as before.*

She touches the bruise on her face.
The real wound is some other place.

Poky people

Jillian Everly

The only lots with the nice lawns belong to the
Church of God
They turned the leftover wine back into water
And left the rest of the west to martyr
Moving furniture with a cigarette in the
Hand he holds the chair leg with
Floating there without pressure
As if he knows it'll stay attached to his
Finger
Out his one-story house
Yard large enough for his Pitbull to stand
And bark
But not run
The man yells at his bored dog when he
Bites passersby
But never asks if they're alright
And he refuses to smile at me because I
Look different
Than the folk he's used to
And that's okay because I love the torture of
Not being loved
So does the rest of the town
An older couple
Now walks down the sidewalk
Mouth wrinkled around the edges
Grey hair flushed back against the head

Seems as though it's been pulled tight
Their whole lives
The man wears a wife beater
Tucked in to allow the belly fat to protrude
Over his low belt buckle
And beats his wife most every Monday
When the beers wear off and the job
Edges him back in
But she also wears a white wife beater
Throwing punches back to his back
Marlboro light in her mouth
Screaming with her lips taut
(So as to save the cigarette)
As he carries her down the midnight street
Under the above ground telephone wires
The swaying aspens
The unfixed house cats fucking in the
Street
The sprinkler systems lighting up the church lawn
And the Pitbulls left out all night to pace in
Their 12X12 foot yard
All there is to do in this tired town
They tell themselves
Is to bark, bark
Bark

Kitchen Matters

Linda Dove

Body moving to and fro in tight space,
feet slopping in wet socks from sink splashes,
finger seared by the red hot stove,
eye splinters when the wine-glass shatters,
head colliding with the fridge door in all the bustle,
voice crying ouch as the bruise purples,
swearing when the cream whips onto the wall.
Oohing when the bread rises
out of the oven,
just perfect.

All this body experience feels like the essence of daily living—
at least for this human not accustomed to baking.

But this ditty arose from a question.

What if matter—our bodies,
the wet feet, the splinters, the bruises, the smell of the perfect loaf—
what if our bodies are not the essence of daily living,
what if the kitchen is distraction?

What if one spirit lives in us all and our matter is merely contingent?
What if the one spirit inhabits our bodies until matter dissolves?

But, you may argue, (and you have a point), the loaf is important.
Without it, the body dies. Without bodies that can sit at the table
together and hug one another, the one spirit dies.
Or does it?

Homeplace
JC Stallings





Dog Curious
Taylor Dribben

Clean Sheets

Lindsey Royce

Mortality today smells fresh: seep of snowmelt, meandering sun. A day to clip sheets to the line, spring-slack and thin as your death smile.

I feel you as near as my shadow on this sun-struck sheet. When I push the cotton, it lifts like a curtain—no dead, no living, just you and me, face to face.

Sparrows sing your whereabouts,
Our dogs, too, know where you are.
They nap, each in her own scrap of light
intuiting trust in a way I can't.

Where are you? *Please.*

In childhood dreams I'd raise my hands
to the bleached sheet, cross into the realm of the dead.
How I wish seeing you fleshed was that simple.

I watch sheets drying in sun and wonder how long
it would take to get outdoors, clip wooden pins
on my fingers to make witch nails, to run

headlong into sheets to reach the secret place
where the dead smoke cigars and play
cards over a cable-spool table.

If I threw back our bedcovers, would you appear,
grinning, as if cancer had never sealed your sleep?

What magic can bring you to my side of the sheet,
where we could visit over coffee: mine latte, yours,
espresso? Teach me the voodoo to summon you.

I Want to Ride through this Life

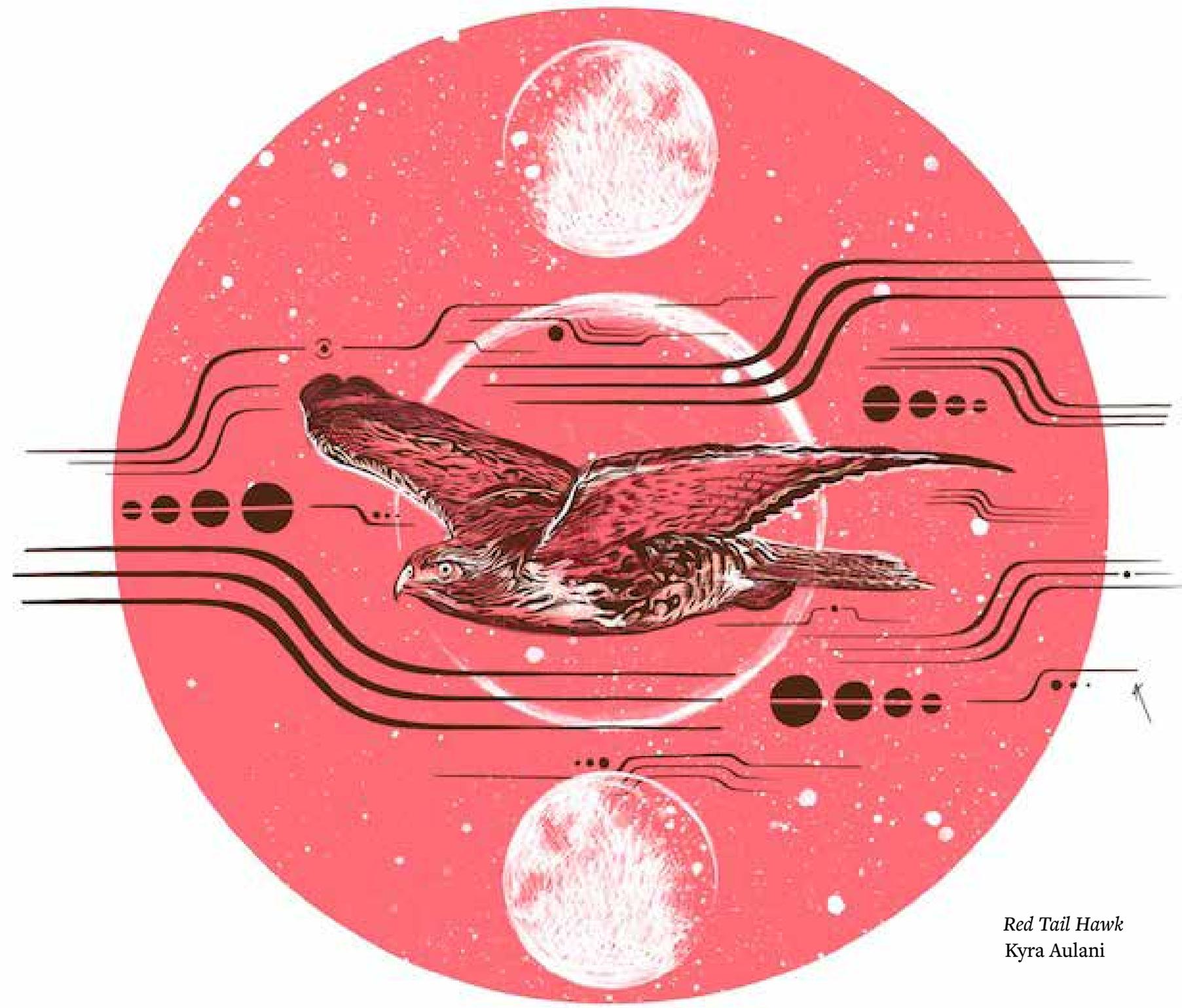
Kim Ports Parsons

like a child standing on the hump
of an old sedan, leaning over
the front bench seat,
not knowing what's beyond
but full of eager anticipation,
gleaming windshield of possibility,
sun breaking through greening trees.
You drive, beloved.

I know you'll go gently,
assuring it's not too far
or too long or too hard,
that wonderful things are waiting.

Along the way, songs we know
and sing along, and new songs,
and special things to eat and drink,
and games with words, and laughter.
And space for silence, too,
for sleeping, and even dreams.

You'll go just fast enough
on a country lane, mountains
in the blue distance, that
if I jump as we climb a cresting hill,
and if I catch the moment just right,
my jump will become
weightlessness—
a suspension, a floating in joy,
a kind of flying,
a hawk testing its wings
on its first miraculous glide.



Red Tail Hawk
Kyra Aulani

Here's the Situation

Llewellyn McKernan

Midnight poetry is called for
Dawn poetry and noon
Poetry of the cat and dog
Frog and loon

Poems you can write on the brim
of a newsboy's hat
A poem that's nothing but the chat
Rain has with a roof

There's music in the opening of a door
especially if it's old
and the hinges aren't oiled,
There's music in the goldfish bowl
that swims around and around
up and down

And then there's the poem
that's only
bound by its own
unearthly
unrehearsed howl, plus
everything
else
inbetween—
including a clue (or two)
to
what
cannot be
seen.

Emily

LuAnn Keener-Mikenas

The way she kept them in order: white rectangles
folded like origami, the invisible snake
of the Infinite, autumn maples that could lift
the scalp, the swashbuckling hummingbird--
captured, bound at their luminous zenith,
parties to the contract. Art

can save us. The perfect wine, it survives
outside time. Alive in the Egyptian tomb
the locked trunk, the brain's drawing room,
kindling to the spark we offer--we, stumbling

in shadow, falling into grace. Which is
an ordered simplicity, a *White Sustenance*, yes
despair and its concomitant insight:
Beloved, thou art a fragment of the light.

cf. Dickinson's #706

Braids

Mary Crockett Hill

Of course, the girls suffered then
as they do now, but
then I didn't have a mouth
for anything but tart green apples,
corn raw from the stalk, ears
morning-cold and wet — I did not speak
the language of cause/effect,
so when my belly churned with gravel,
it was the curse of fairies, a wicked queen
who sought to put my tangled hair
to sleep.

The girls
were hungry, sick, dirty, but they
served — orifice for all the urge
that must enter to explode —
I could not hear, so long ago,
how could I then — but
how can I not
now

and now
this solitary self,
who seems so tethered
to the pulse of an empty field —
who steeps her own children
in tales of the good
father, food for the
hungry, medicine
for the ill —

can she now break
it to the clouded sky
that yes, no wall exists
between herself and
others, but
no cord either, nothing
tying, nothing separating: I do not
speak for them —

Forty years later
on the back stoop of morning
(warm cup / branches
shadowing the ground)
is it wrong to tell the child I was
to come, sit on my lap
— to comb and braid
her hair?



Inner Child Work
Kirsten Holt Beitler

slug slime shame

Sarah Iler

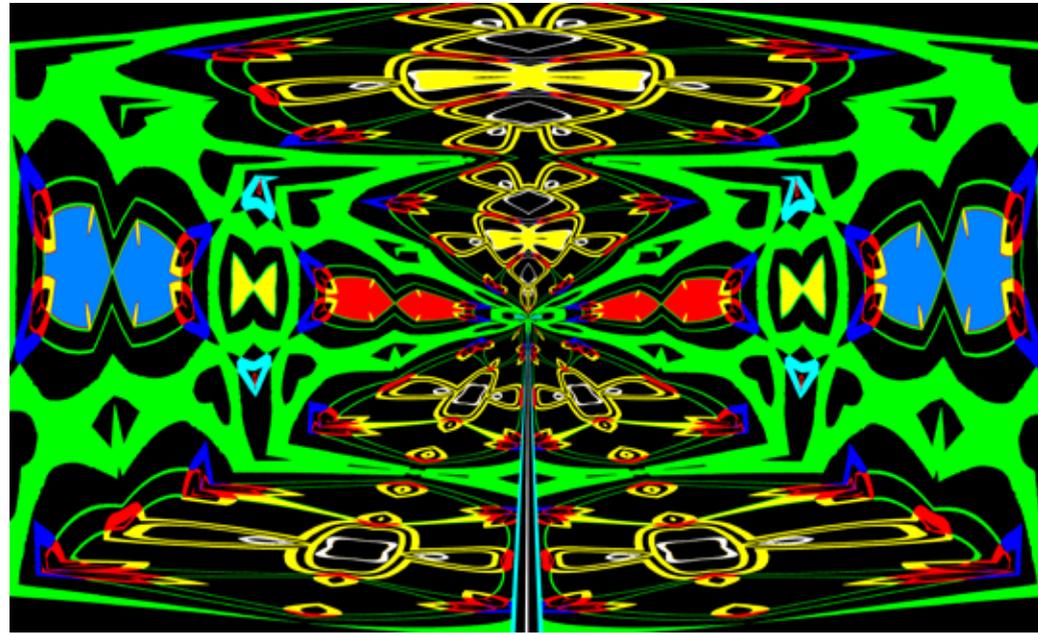
what happens when you are sorry
you have done it all wrong

left behind scars and bitter taste
what happens when you are grateful

for the direction of your missteps
you are lucent with happiness

and ashamed at the same time
for the slug slime trail of pain

you leaked along the way



Crazytimes 3
Edward Supranowicz

After

Robbi Nester

I'm told the world to come will be the world
that we inhabit now, but without loss.
Yet lacking the certainty of ending,
it wouldn't be the world we know.
Like everyone, I've lost so much—
the fireflies of childhood, snow,
hermit crabs and tiny sea anemones
in tide pools emptied out by climate
change. I've lost my parents, all
my aunts and uncles. I still have
those tiny purple flowers I can't
put a name to, and somewhere,
bright dragonflies still skim a pond.
I'm afraid of losing everything. But life's
a forest where seeds keep falling onto patient
earth, keep rising, against all expectations.

Song of Whitman

Richard Elliott Martin

I celebrate you, Walt Whitman,
reading *Leaves of Grass* and *Drum Taps*, seeing as you did.
I hear your voice as a melancholy, lyrical drawl
while I read your words,
as real, breathing and alive today as when they were written.

From a hundred-fifty years you reached across the ages and found my heart.
Your word has shown me parts of myself,
as boundless as earth, effortless, free, timeless.
You bade me not to read, but to listen, and thus to hear.

You wrote with a new form and structure,
and so you gave freedom to the world,
as sure as the workingmen you exalted.

The sawman draws his saw, back, forth, back forth.
The typist sets his words, click clack, click clack.
The fisherman casts his line; the Christian fisherman brings in men.

Inside my mind is a red-fanged, growling demon,
and a winged angel ready to do him battle and destroy him
I know that good will prevail.

I have seen the men at work,
in warehouses, power lines, salesmen hawking wares.
My hands are calloused over.

I have been them, washing floors, dishes, cooking food
salt-of-the-earth, and still rising,
intellectual discovery on the horizon.

It shines, bright as sunlight upon the library on the hill,
where I found books, where I found god, where I found you.

Hang On
Melissa Stephens





Ephemeral Love

Heather Reynolds

Morning Hearts Glory

Neysa Rogers

the morning wakes with you,
sinking into larval afterglow.

orange-tinted heart below the skin
of my rocking body you hold.

sun overwashing our bed.
yellow recreating us, new.

morning hearts hang brightly
from the windowsill,

sipping stale cups of water
that glowed in light of the passing moon.

the morning wakes with you
a disbelieving glory bloom.

Zoetrope

Jack Greer

Tonight the quarter moon
spins on our dirt road
a zoetrope of black leaves

I think death will be like this
quiet, no car horns or exhaust
the light soft, no glare of streetlamps

the night's essentials are sweet:
rock insisting on mountain
moonlight intent on shadow
here
beyond myth's coy seductions
is where our truth lives

and you, on the far side
of our divided continent
would take this walk
with me
would understand the soft dark
our new lease on death

whippoorwills chant the night's
only prayer
these silhouettes of leaves
the single sacred alphabet

Why do two colours, put one next to the other, sing? Picasso

Piper Durrell

Poets place their words
one after the other still
they become a song
each expression waltzing
off the page into our dreams.

Somehow from somewhere
a word melts into a phrase
then, this creation
of rhythm and reflection
emerges into the world.

Crevice crack cranny
each empty space on the page
filled, reviewed, revised,
until the images dance
off the page into our hearts.

An incantation
twenty-six letters fly high
capture a vision
that elusive melody
of a poem, a song, a life.

Picasso's Sister
Darcy Meeker



Poems from the Dark Room

Colleen Redman

It takes time in the dark room to bring into focus and develop the meaning we've made of our lives.

Imprinted stills
Proof of life
Picked up at the corners
and held to the light

A body of work
made of muscle and flesh
A lost art developed
from a landmarked distance

We hid them to protect them
then forgot where they were
We saw their reflections
and cast them in dreams

Now dredged and named
and hung one by one
We signed their originals
while still recognizable

We captured their honesty
before letting them fade
and saw how they shaped us
frame by frame



Time
Wesley Brown

Avatar

Diane Porter Goff

A wolf has come to stay by invitation
or choice
the dream is unclear
only she settles her sleek limbs
with entitlement
onto the end of my sad
bed she watches me with keen eyes
silver ruff springing from her neck
haunches coiled
inky toenails dark and wet
ruby tongue glistening
the smell of wild
coming off her like smoke

she is how I will devour
the summer days as I once did loping
through tall grasses
plush seed heads brushing against my skin
entering the river again and again
to tumble in the currents
swimming to the far bank
pulling myself up to sun
on the flat hot rocks

I will lavish
myself with the sweet sharp sandy
smells that heat pulls from earth
dozing the night in my cool dirt wallow
call of the owl mummer of insects pleasures
rocked in the cradle of the moon

I will follow the tracks of animals
deep into the brush
where Nature keeps her mysteries the berry
the blossom the springs
I will push my muzzle into cold
and drink like I am famished

I am famished
for The Mother's feast.

Fog Rises

Anne Deaton

We twice met in Prague
the first time when curls of gray smoke
rose from cottage chimneys
circling the palace dark and silent
a time when ashen, worried people
hurried through the misty fog
scurrying over St. Stephen's bridge
where saints prayed over the meandering Vitava
carrying away all romance that might have been

the second time years later
in Wenceslas Square where bright lights
revealed freshly painted medieval walls
that guided spirited, laughing people to
cafes where lovers leaned into seductive charms
was it then you said that you were saddened
that it all seemed a bit too dolled up
rather like Disney World for the tourists
and did you mean for me to wonder whether we too
weren't making a bit too much of the second time around



The Cocoa Stallion of Wilburn Ridge Michele Sons

Dream of Winter

James Broschart

During the lingering stub of a winter night
we sense the faint chime of glass bottles
slipped side-by-side into the zinc milk box
on a front porch already slick with snow.

We stir only slightly in our sleep, assured
by the metallic tic of the box lid closing,
and when we rise and crack open the door
the milkman's footprints have already filled.

The milk is halfway frozen in bottles so cold
they seem to burn bare hands. We tender them
into the kitchen, careful not to jar twin plugs
of rich yellow cream, winter's bounty thrust

aloft past frosted glass lips, glistening posts
of butterfat still wearing jaunty paper bottle caps.
We'll spoon it off to whip for waffles, use it
to glorify the coffee just burbling on the stove.



Domestic Abuse

Lisa Ress

I was in the car,
driving through the fantastical,
the grotesque, the magical and
majestic stone configurations of
our ancient New Mexican land.

I was driving and I
had the radio on.
The stations kept
switching as I traveled.

I was driving through that
worn and bright-burning landscape
and over the radio, a voice on the radio,
a voice began intoning:

*The earth is our mother.
The earth is our mother.*

Chanting this as I moved among
the towers, the arches, cathedrals,
all of them striped and stippled
in reds, in orange and ochre and green.

Our mother.

Now her forests are burning,
her veins going dry.
We thought we were lords of it all,
not anyone's children.
I don't know why.

Energy Mother, The Abundance
Paola Bidinelli

Rumi on the Beach

Curt Alderson

What better place for bringing him along?
As fine a spot for fellowship
as can be found.

Here, where
salt and wind
and skin collide
in a string of stinging kisses.
Where innumerable grains of sand—
like time itself—soften the soles
of the weary, the hardened.

Wade into this verse.
Slip inside this water
here before you.

The waves, the words—
they wish to have their way with you.

Let them.

The words, the waves—
each holds a magic
no hand can grasp,
no mind fully comprehend.

But there's joy in that. Deep joy.
This thing beyond all naming.
This speechless truth.
This comfort.

What better place
to linger with the master
than here,
bearing witness
to the union
of the sensual
and the sacred?

More than what the moon can do

Barry M. Koplen

Lurking in shadows, a siren sings. I try not to listen,
try not to hear its warning, not to stare as I locate
its plaintive call. I wonder whether its direction,
its ambulance of remedies, follows mine, my
heartbreak I thought was ordinary, routine,
a malady a soft lunar balm might soothe.



A Touch of Blues
Karen Sewell

All That Remains

Sandra de Helen

All that remains after seven
decades is a human body,
a shambles, not its former self.

Wrinkled skin, sagging parts, battered joints,
clogged arteries, a broken and much repaired
heart still bursting its seams with love.

A human who sought love and freedom from
battery and pain. A woman who loved and lost
and gave her love to the wrong people

until she didn't. A mother who abandoned her first-born
to save them both. Who failed and succeeded and tried again.
A grandmother who cherished her chance to do better,
be better, to love again .

All that remains is to live the next decades
with gratitude and grace.

Reflection
Susan Crave Rosen



Gordian Knot

Richard Rose

The way from out,
inside, around
between, up through,
within, then back,
is tracked by hands
made tough tugging
thread, finding ends
to work the path
the needle took
before the heart's
missteps, and not
by hands kept smooth—
unknowing, blind,
imperative,
imperial.



Sewn to the Skin

Katherine Soniat

Who's to soften this boy's fury?

History such as his is the story of
a twilight mother who extinguishes time

or is put out by another.

children know who left for another.

Who wants to sleep beside a father
or mother anyway?

Bedtime the old construct for missing each other—
late at night when the thoughts come flying,
and the mind won't sleep,
and the sheep don't work.

Lament of two who once shared a bed.
Love is made of lamb-side softness
felt one to the next.

is a child's longing. Touch sewn to the skin
Dream of one's kind. Belonging.
child-father. Boy-man
The mother-daughter pairs.

They're family to the living

Wear
Ana Maria Morales

Things that have died this month

Kindra McDonald

An American Bullfrog caught in a net in Acris pond, limp in my hands and laid on the shore near a cypress tree. Food for a heron.

At least six turtles. The remnants of their eggs scattered near a shallow hole surrounded by tracks of coyotes and claw marks.

I once read Mary Oliver fried up turtle eggs for breakfast, having dug them from the nest near her favorite pond where she'd watched their mother emerge.

Three rainbow snakes, rotten and decomposing from a disease we try to find the source of. Their faces so disfigured, they'd become unable to feed.

Michael's father in a nursing home where no one could visit him.

A northern water snake with a belly bulge hard from catfish.

The catfish.

The 100 foot pine tree crowded by the canopy of oaks, leaning to the left and dead on the right side. Soon to be ground into woodchips.

A fishing spider still clutching a tadpole.

Michael's mother in a nursing home where no one could visit her.

On Mother's day I wave to my mom at a distance. Slip cucumber sandwiches through her mail slot.

My neighbor, Jean, I talked to only once, handing her a misdirected postcard that I didn't even read.

977 Virginians.



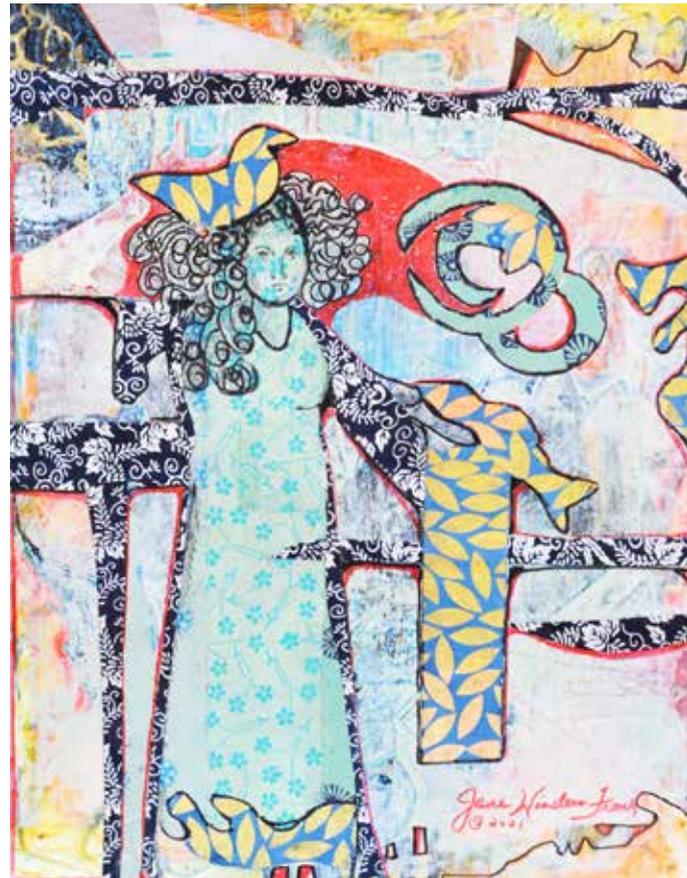
Second Wave

Patti Kapral

Pythian Song of Rebirth

Cassandra Whitaker

In the throat, all buttoned up, I swallowed him up. I did. From the tip of his top to the bottom of his cock I swallowed him up. I swallowed him up and turned him into me, a me without the anger. I swallowed him up and turned him out and made all that rage work for me. Up in the belly of me, I will float and be eaten up by my hunger, my hunger is enough to give up all that is my own and give it to myself. My heart is a hearth and a home, my body my widest spoon. I swallowed him up, I swallowed him up, I swallowed him up.



Oracle
Jane Winders Frank

The Gleaners

Jean Wollam

Three of us: maiden, blue cap's neck flap,
Protecting her from sunburn. Clueless Youth,
Cultivating that curve for kisses.
Thick-handed, middle-aged matron
Jabs for one more leaf of wheat for one more
Tiny loaf. I (too old to be silenced), speak of hands:
Rubbed the morning's cold white lamb to life;
Prised many a baby from gaping wombs,
Pain for Eden's exit.
(How much red spreads on rough white wool).
I've reamed out warm innards of rabbit,
Slicked the stump with chicken's blood,
Cracked the heads of trout on ragged rocks.
I myself birthed child upon child to try to love—
When all were born and none had left.
Sheaves of children ready for life's scything.
I have followed the sun's arc, the whirl of wheat in wind,
Absorbed the meaning of work:
So much sweat, stink, dirt and disapproval,
I'm no longer awed by
The curve of a dove's head.
All heat and dust and grave musings.
Are you afraid yet?

Jean-Francois Millet painted this work in 1857. The French upper classes were disturbed that such a large canvas depicted laborers at work.

The Wolf, or Baba Yaga

Anna L Tulou

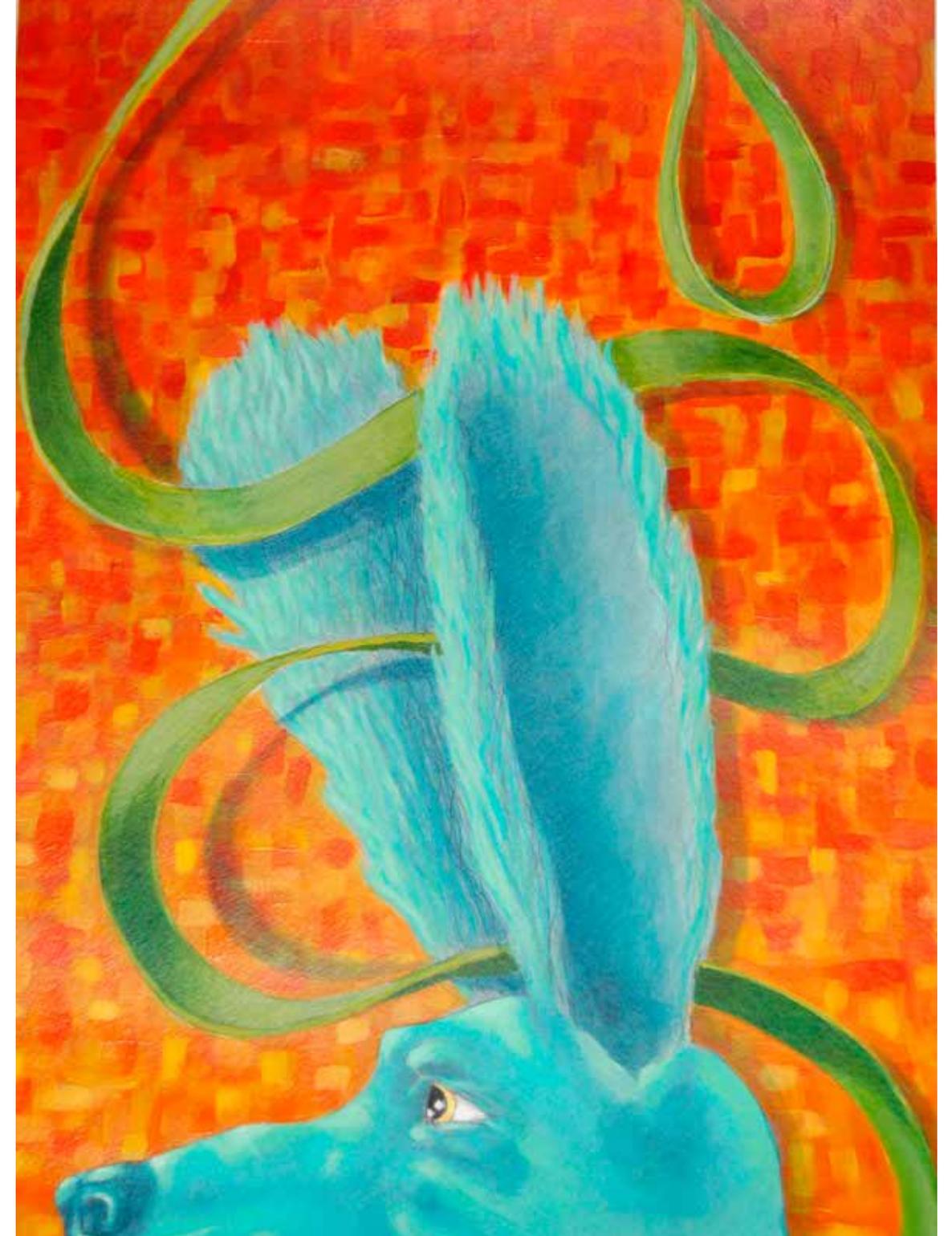
how often in my youth
did i alter flesh and supple bones
for praise

bend would i, twist, contort
reshape myself to please another
mother father friend lover
till my chimera bones became confused
tender muscles bruised
and i hardly knew my native form

in their second age
these bones have hardened
and i have learned to be leery
to give cautious berth to that cauldron
which in the making might unmake me
render marrow into gel
slippery and pliable
eager to fit any form but my own

wary of my own dogged appetite for approval
this i have learned:
to carry a wolf in my purse
for when such vanity strikes

Caninus Spiritus
Zephren Turner





Flower Pods
Kim Lashley Sutliff

Sacred Soil

Ann Thornfield-Long

Remember that you are dirt
and to dirt you will return,
time after time the desire
for the loam of flesh will
allow you to think of nothing
else but satisfaction. Arms
that hold you with desperation, pull
you in, drink you up. Even the baby
that suckles the breast.

Remember how you love
the soil from which you were formed.
A jigsaw puzzle longing to be solved,
pieces locked. You are half
a physics problem, the fulcrum,
inertia, gravity. Every solution
comes to bring you to ground,
reality, safety. The place
from which you came
and will begin again. A speck
of dirt that makes a garden
of your belly.

Sunday afternoon in the Villa Borghese,

Esther Whitman Johnson

runners streak by on cobbled paths,
dogs bark, off-leash, racing through pines,
lapping from fountains old as emperors
whose broken busts line the boulevard.

Music from the carousel celebrates
a cloudless day as parents push
babies in strollers, and old men
rest on benches in stippled sun.

From the shore, a violinist serenades
lovers on the lake rowing a shaky boat.
The man in tux props up the oars,
pours champagne and fills two flutes.

The girl, demure in little black dress,
drinks a sip, looks deep into his eyes.
He directs the show, hand signals to the shore
where a photographer captures the scene.

Inside the Borghese, former palace of popes,
Bernini's statue dominates the gallery,
lit by spotlight, focal point of every eye—
The Rape of Proserpina

Pluto's fingers push deep into the thigh
of the girl he's stolen away,
her marble flesh pulsing beneath
the violent, grasping hand.

Proserpina's face contorts into a howl
for help that does not come.
She is dragged into the Underworld,
damned to wed the god of darkness,

thrown into a never-ending cycle—
rising to sunlight once a year,
falling again back to the pit,
doomed for eternity.

Outside on the lake, the man presses
a ring onto the finger of the girl.
Music dies, and the blood-red sun
drops low behind the Roman ruins.



Dinah Visits Leonard Cohen's House on Hydra

Stuart Gunter

For Dinah Gray

*Like a bird on a wire
like a drunk in a midnight choir
I have tried in my way to be free.
—Leonard Cohen*

She did not cry when she picked up a tiny lime
in the road outside of his front door. It dropped
from one of the limbs overhanging the back wall.
She wondered why, and put it in her pocket.
A strange event, a code between listener
and disembodied voice. If only she could sit
with him at a table in the yard, drinking strong
black coffee or mountain tea. What would they
discuss? She guessed they would steer away
from music or poetry: that would be too obvious.
But just to sit and dream with him. Talking of clouds
and sand, wearing linen shirts, eating mussels in wine.
Later, she would put the blackened lime, a talisman
of a love, along with a rock from his step, under glass.

Nymph Maiden and Crone
Therry Neilsen-Steinhardt

Alice, the Details

J. Scott Wilson

Alice, Alice
Cat of Malice;
Eats not from platter
Nor drinks from chalice

Lives in the bathroom closet
Comes out only late at night
To guard over sleeping humans
Perched on the bed – off to the right

Was ever a beast so hurtful-sad
As Alice in her youth
But when the other cats come along
She'll greet them with the tooth

Not quite savage – never tame
Only in her heart she's lame
Favors humans, yet knows she's not
And other felines dread her name

To my girlfriend's other cats
I never seem to warm-up
Alice is the only of the multitude
Who doesn't lick my plate or cup

Alice, Alice
Cat much maligned
Knows her place, knows her mind
And with me alone aligned.



Festival of Cats
Luana Stebule



Dragon Pup Fire Lesson
Miki Overcast-Kallan

The Coat Rack Reflects

Susan Bennett

The coat rack, tired of bearing the weight of damp raincoats and ill-fitting overcoats belonging to random strangers, shakes off the protection of garments never tailored for him. He leaves the cozy warmth of the neighborhood bar to strike out on his own, yearning to find his own unique clothing style, something well-suited to his spindly frame. Unaccustomed to the feel of a cool breeze on his limbs, he wonders if he has made a grave error in his escape. The door to the bar has shut firmly behind him and so he gathers his gumption and strides down the street, invigorated by his new-found mobility. Halfway down the street his attention is attracted by the window display of a bridal shop. He has never seen so much satin, lace and chiffon. The dreamy arrangement of these sensuous fabrics enchants him. He imagines himself wearing these glorious garments and for a moment is transported into a kind of heaven. He sees himself on a marble terrace overlooking the sea, dancing and twirling, lace flying around him as a crowd of elegant people admire him. He is brought out of his reverie by the realization that the mannequins in the window are reminiscent of females and his dream is dashed. Slowly he begins to wonder, how did I come to believe I was male in the first place?

D. H. Lawrence

Susie Gharib

[A reading of his poems]

He wanted to live as a flower,
to die blooming like a dark pansy
in the *after-gladness of death*
among its darksome sunrays.

He who boarded the Ship of Death
was not intimidated by the Styx.
With a Bavarian gentian in hand,
he yearned for the inevitable descent
into the kingdom of Dis,
where Persephone reigned and lived,
a fertility without end.

He had spurned the deadly Victorians
who castrated the *body politic*,
and though the dark satanic mills
of Blake had grown darker to him,
he predicted the defeat of the machine
for mechanical men are driven mad from themselves.
Like the phoenix,
the cowed swans, larks, and lambs
will rise to triumph over iron.

The Royal We

Pamela Wax

*The queen bee lays between 1,000 and 2,000 eggs a day...
If the queen bee fertilizes the egg, that egg will become female.
—sciencing.com*

Your lot may want to stay clear of the nest,
but mine clamor for closeness, can't do
enough to wait on me—by wing and corbiculae—
all 60,000 plus of them. They flutter and flap
if it's hot, flap and flutter when it's cold.
Their lifting off and landing is a constant buzzsaw
gnawing at that oak outside. I'm deadly sick
of this throne existence—pampered and plumped—
not even in charge of my own waste. Oh, here
she comes, my jack-of-all-trades, one of my many,
disposing of my crap with a rear leg while feeding
me royal jelly with a front. Repulsive, really. Most days,
I revel in reliving my maiden flight. They would die for me,
those boys, so mad to mate. I strung them
along for their millions, sperm stored now
for a lifetime. I dole it out bit by bit for my girls,
who grow up to think me just a handmaid, born
to breed more of them in my image. But to be
or not be female, I choose for them with a flick
of my spermatheca. A scant privilege of royalty,
sweet and sticky like revenge.

To Bee or Not
Bob Rotche



Sequel

Laura Younger

The Ministry of Vice & Virtue will now resume
the removal of hands for state security.

The sports stadium executions
are henceforth reinstated.

The one-eyed minister has spoken.

You girls, now encased
in black-fabric coffins, you
cover your face, you
stay in the house, you
cook family meals, you
close your books and you wait
for a man to take you to shop.

The one-eyed minister has spoken.



It's All About the Hair
Gerri Young

Roanoke was Once a Big Salt Lick

Annie Woodford

The wind is full of doors.

Daffodils clap, pale cups
not long emerged from dirt.
The bottle-blue sky shuffles,
April beckons,

the moon
unrisen.

The yellow
brick of the Catholic church,
glazed by hands that crumble
even as they are conjured,
gleams in spotlights angled
from below.

In the roadside altar,
a statue of a supplicant kneels
in unnatural shadows,
bouquet of nylon flowers
clutched in her concrete fist.
Mary, however, stares up
at the stars,

painted eyes
circles with no center,
arms bared by flowing robes.
A freight train

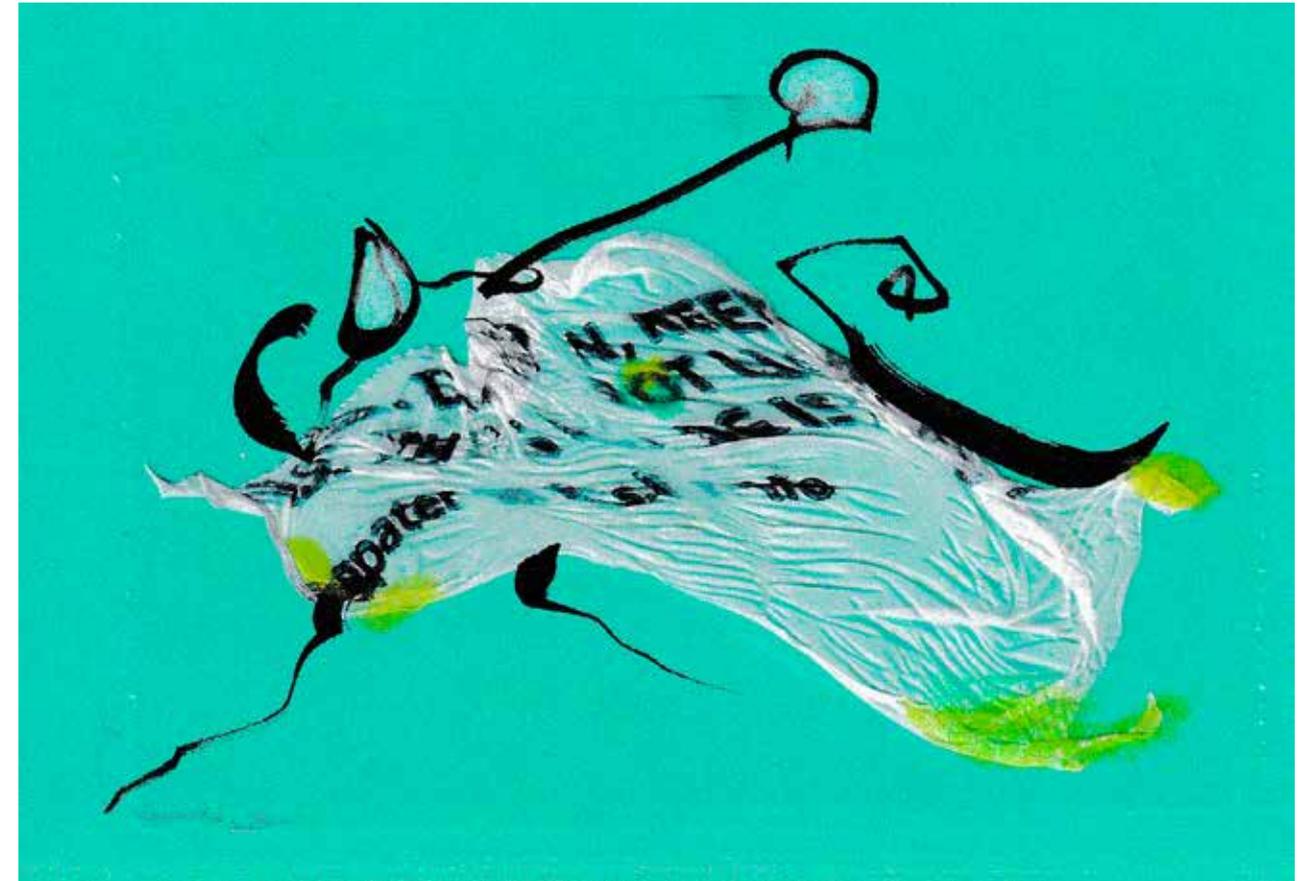
emptied of coal
in Norfolk hurtles through
the heart of town, rattling
back to the absence of mountains.

What a Trophy, or My Deer Poem

Stephanie Stallings

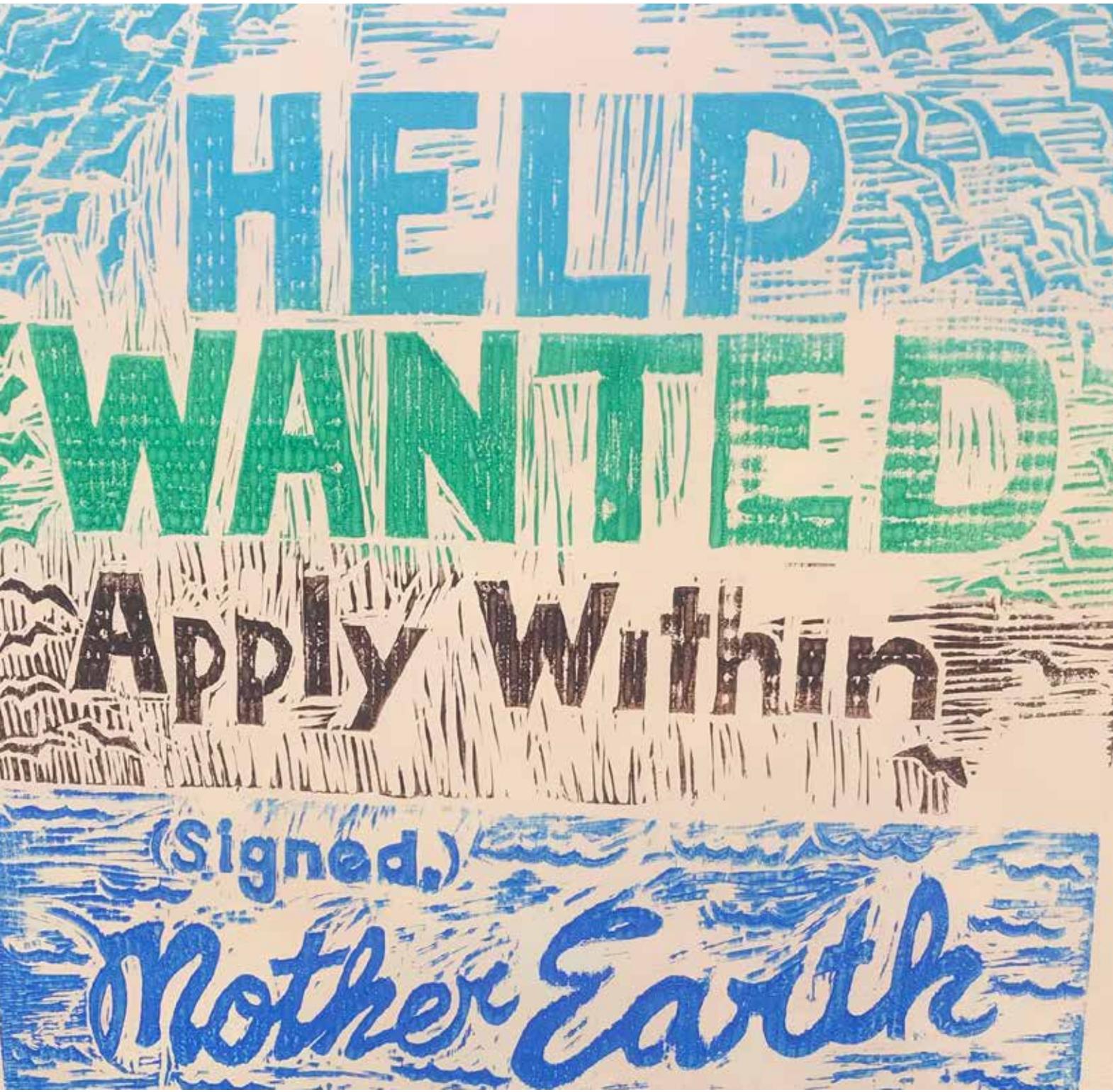
I write some words in the glistening morning,
“There’s a dead buck in my yard,
And I’m tired of Art.”
I pick up the guitar in the corner, covered in cobwebs.
Lousie Hay, with her positive thoughts and affirmations, is right.
You have to stop with the excuses, and create.
I pluck the strings,
begin to tune them.
As the sun comes up,
shining over the mountains,
illuminating an opalescent veil of lacy cirrus clouds,
on a late October morning, with a crisp blue sky,
the buck lifts his head (he is not dead after all).
He is facing east, away from me,
towards mountains that are patchworked in autumnal colors.
He tries a couple of times, but cannot get up, swaying unsteadily from his seat.
I get close enough so that he can see me from one eye.
The deer agrees that a mercy killing is in order,
As, he points out, he can only raise his head, and he is in great pain.
When the sheriff comes,
The deer still has his head up. He has been patiently watching the mountains and waiting to die.
The sheriff says it is the widest spread on a buck that young that he has ever seen.
“It’s a shame,” he says,
And shakes his head.
“Somebody would have mounted that one day...I’d have shot him myself,” he says, speaking of hunting,
of which I know nothing, and meaning, if the deer had not been hit by a car, and had lived and had
loved. He’d have grown an even bigger rack, and had a harem of beautiful does, and made little deer,
and lived its happy deer life.
He goes back to his vehicle, gets his shotgun and noise headphones.
When he shoots him, the buck curls his remarkable rack in, one last time, as if to go to sleep, then flops
back against the ground he is already on, neck straight.

The sheriff and I stand together in silence,
wait the requisite time for the blood to escape,
the spirit to ascend,
the muscles to twitch and settle.
We hold a moment of peace,
respect for the spirit of the deer.
Then, the sheriff takes his headphones off, and the moment is over.
Do I have to call for VDOT to come pick it up, I ask him?
“Oh no, I’ll make the call for you,” he says.
So I go inside, and write a poem,
Reading and revising it until it glistens with the promise of morning.
And when I leave later, to go buy meat at the store for dinner,
The body is already gone from the side of the road.



Cage

John M. Bennett & Jim Leftwich



The Sound of Water

John C. Mannone

I wake up to the sound of rain, that swish of water pelting a metal roof, I don't fear the angst of storms, but rather revel in the percussion of the deluge, a rising snare that washes me in an ocean of wide-awake dreams in the city of my birth: the rash of waves, the cavitation of pearly bubbles, foamy spray on the beach of my childhood; the swoosh of salty air through eucalyptus leaves, the harmony of my stroller wheels making music with the earth, the soft flutter of my sister's dress as she guides me through the park.

That sound of drops splashing open, their hearts flooding with mine through the churn of water by the ocean liner steaming through the Atlantic from Uruguay to America to New York; that sound of spume sliding down the dark green crests of waves all the way into the harbor.

That sound awakens my youth. The ebb and flow rinsing me clean of today's tumult. I want to swim in the past, sleep in the sound of water as rain, ocean, river, waterfalls. Water falling over boulders my father took me to by the Potomac. There were rainbows there in the mist. The hope of a future still secret to me.

Today, I walk by a stream in the mountains, listen to the gurgle of water over rocks, its language... and that of rain.

Help Wanted (signed,) Mother Earth
Jane Gabrielle

Forktail Needlefish

Diana Woodcock

When I saw it—so exquisite—
three feet long, thin and shimmering,
I heard myself say,
That's all I need to see today.

Then I caught and chided myself.
Still, it was indeed enough to fill up
the rest of the day. Jaws prolonged
into a pointed beak. No leap

out of water to sweep me off my feet,
but perhaps if I had lingered longer . . .
A fast swimmer, slender-
bodied, feeding near the surface

in the shoal. Silver-sided, blue
green-backed, it glowed like a satin
ribbon around a flowing blue gown,
and I slowed my pace, felt myself

bowing ever so slightly to it,
applauding how it lives sublimely
in these saline waters, how it's come
to terms with a warm, shallow sea.

As for me, all these years trying to fathom
this desert land jutting into the Arabian Gulf,
to feel less cut off from its opposite,
an arctic oasis. I have been many places

more exotic, but this limestone dolomite
peninsula with its marine terraces, salt flats,
pedestal rocks, shifting sands and singing dunes
so hypnotic, edging up to a shallow tropical sea.

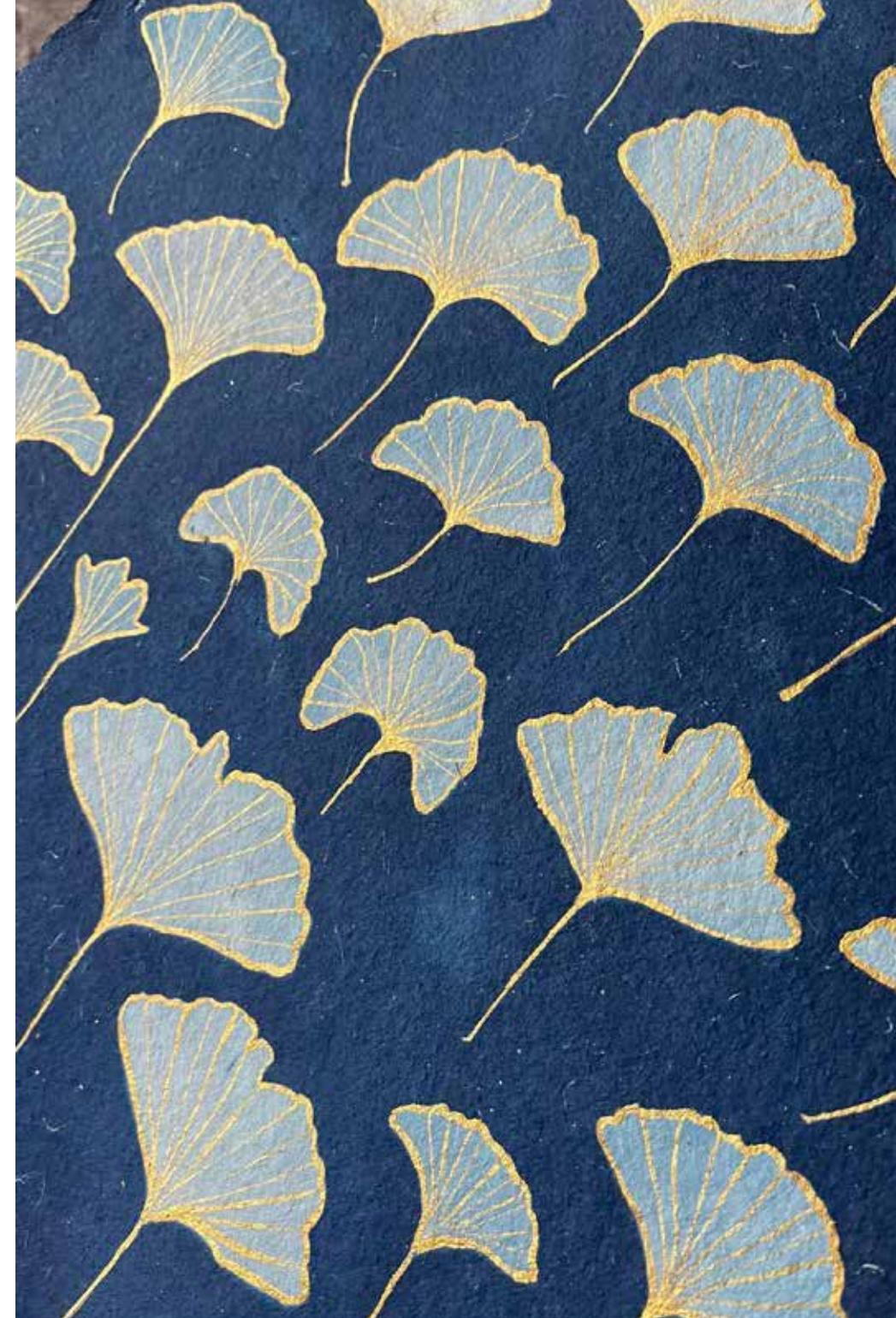
It has captivated me—sparse and austere,
barren and yet opening suddenly
into such richness (mangroves and gypsum
crystals) once one opens herself to it.

No godforsaken place, here
is evidence of life wherever one stops
to be still and silent. Like here,
now, with this exquisite needlefish—

one swish of it, and I'm transfixed,
forgetting all about my varicose shins
and greying hair. I swear I feel fit enough
to jump in and join him in his watery kingdom.

Forget the splendor of Wandering albatrosses.
I'll stay engrossed in my Forktail needlefish.
Thank God the Caterpillar's yet to reach
into his little shoal. Let the salty breeze

rust the Cat away. The needlefish sees me.
Oh I do wish. I wish it would leap out
of the sea just to catch a glimpse of me,
and not in the least feel threatened.



Meditation

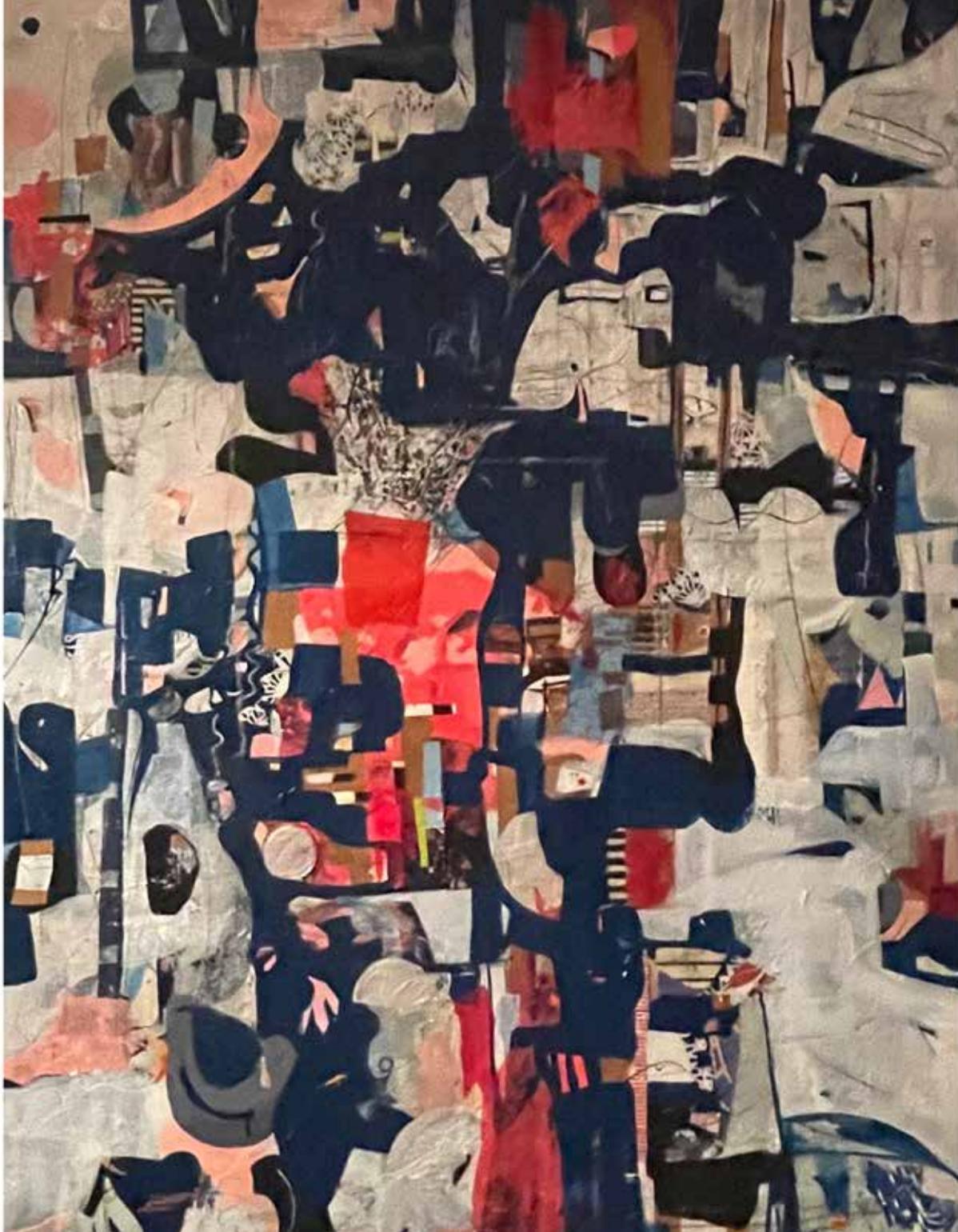
Leslie E. Porter

Cicada sound
Spirals up
Hands pressed, heating a prayer
That towers into clouds
Angkor Wat-like
Aquamarine

Let it go

If you need it,
It
Will come
Back
For you
In an envelope of
Rivers
You don't have to name

Golden Ginkgo
Tricia Scott



Puma

Cathryn Hankla

At the family farm you heard it shriek in the night. Numinous by definition, it slunk the underbrush of unscythed hay fields, the feral perimeters of an unfenced boundary. Limestone caves cored the land beneath our view, and occasionally you'd come upon some scat, check your guidebook, given pause. Your mother sprang things on you from the vault of inappropriate family history. Off-handedly, she thrust upon you a vat of scalding water you had to balance just so. Then there was that time some hunters claimed they laid sights on the black velvet face of a creature (*Puma concolor cougar*) whose tail unburdened them of doubt, yet their shots missed. For me, the high rim of a ravine above a creek was where it stalked, above the road, above my car as headlights illumined a darkness not of the tawny lion, an absence pointing to the thing.

Wherever You Look

Sarah Bolduc

In the Throat

Angela Dribben

Another life. Lungs of the forest. Roots pulse comforts to one another.
The first one to die bequeaths all they once lived for. Were we once

trees? We clamber to find one another. Is it our palms listening, held hot to bark—
one risen rough and rigid, one smooth as the Earth's tilt. Before we ever

pressed together flesh, mine to yours, i chased you down this country
like chaos in pursuit of a familiar stranger. You a ghost and

i your body. You're the only one i've never known how to leave.

The only one i ever rooted into. My anchor. My source. Your Magnolia
bark the antidote to my anxiety. Your seed my pain

killer, fever reducer. Grandiflora. Salve for soft-bellies.
i, your Oak. My medicine your astringent. Your remedy.

My canopy your shelter, in Autumn a mantle of auburn and gold
to hang your worries on. Your strong, hard wood

with tight close grain—i am your barn, your barrel, your ship, your bed.
This pulsing through the earth. This way we ache

for one another. Otherworld, Underworld, in another life.
Our ancestors Hickory, Poplar, Dogwood, Redbud, medicines
of the earth, muladhara of the earth. Hyphae calling us home.

Something Beautiful Calls and We Rise
Charlie Brouwer





Nasty Woman
Sylvia Ramos Cruz

The Two Fridas

Lori Rottenberg

You buy me a small box lacquered
with this painting: What can I hide here?

The work a self-portrait, yet there are so few
with women this way: in solidarity.

Seated, joined by hand and artery,
cardiac machinery painfully exposed,

they endure, bleeding and holding
both sharpness and memory, fused.

Maybe the question really should be:
What is it you have hidden?

Like them, we sat together for so long, so close.
You bore me, but it was never clear

who raised who. You were a girl
who birthed a girl who grew to your tangled light

and exposed passions, your heart visible
as you tried to write and paint your story, suturer in hand.

We are mirror images: one intact, one
savaged, ripped open, busy with triage.

Despite your hemorrhaging, still I got up,
saved myself: Is this your reminder?

Pandora also received a box meant to teach
not to anger the gods with excessive wanting.

I look deeper inside your gift, but there is nothing.
As always, this emptiness will be what I make of it.

Josephina

Jerrice J. Baptiste

Hearing the border bird's song
My aunt Josephina escaped in the night
Her babies left behind, tucked in burlap.

She begged the Silverlight of the moon
to console her babies forever
Hearing the border bird's song.

Her husband had sworn he would kill her
He slept with a gun under his head
Her babies left behind, tucked in burlap.

Her legs slashed like a bushwacking woman's
In the light of the border's dawn
Hearing the border bird's song

The light of dawn, should she have gone?
Her husband had sworn he would kill her
Her babies left behind, tucked in burlap

While he slept with a gun under his head
She wept
Hearing the border bird's song
Her babies left behind, tucked in burlap.



War & Peace

Starroot

Hirundo

Marjorie Gowdy

Our sun is midway through the northern sky.
Frost teases wild roses winding along lines of an aching fence.
A waking blue sweat bee seeks tattered pollen larders.
Violet-bright blooms inch along the redbud's branch.

An anxious time.
Flattened timothy, quartz luminous in the half-frozen creek.
Misted lens on early morning trysts of the cardinal, the bluebird, the wren.
We can yet see straight down the valley of poplars to an empty road.

They give us four months, the passerines.
A scout arrives first, blustery after its vernal journey.
I'm feeding the horses, surrounded suddenly in a blur of orange and blue.
Fearless straw thieves, they burrow and squawk.

I wait for them, their altricial promise in song.
They swoop diffidently, differently than the mocker,
more "hey" than "get out."
Didactics for weeks as downy young fly from stable to high wire.

Then, as they finish off gnats and green horse flies,
a final sitting. Blistering tar, gravel, and rest. Swallows disappeared in dry heat.
Passed by. Passed on. I could jump to catch them as they leave.
But it is *Hirundo's* burden to keep the barn raised.

Valery

Susan Hankla

*For Valery Nash, in memory of all her good works for Artemis Journal,
and as poetry teacher at North Cross School, Roanoke, VA.*

Because it is Valery's, the flower is blue.
Always my teacher, each lesson is blue.

Blue poems, like Galoises packs—foreign, unfiltered.
I never smoke, but that does not seal virtue.

Yet I think *Valery* when I breathe;
Single iris in the vase in France.



Yellow Tee
Brian Counihan

The Price of Dancing Lessons

Melinda Thomsen

My brother says just 20%
of what my mother says
is nonsense, thanks to
new her meds mix.

For me, it's still too much.

*Remember how much
I spent on dancing lessons for you?*

*No, the weather is fine here
how about there?*

Those humiliating dancing lessons,
where boys with outstretched
hands asked the pretty girls
to fox trot. I danced alone.
Apparently, my mother keeps
my hurt in the arsenal
of her mind, ready to shoot.

After I hang up the phone,
I cradle into myself
and walk outside to watch
chickens scratch for worms
until dusk darkens the earth.

The Loneliness of the Harem

Sherry Poff

Even when resting, incumbent
on the wind-bitten grass,
long tails languidly switching,
they avoid one another's gaze.

Accustomed to walking a narrow path,
nose to flank, they blush to notice
their own slow awkwardness
and years of keeping their heads down,
submitting to groping hands
for what is theirs to offer.

Their very voice a sad complaint,
they cannot bear to see
the beginning of compassion,
glint of their own sorrow
in another's eyes.

Facebook Friends

James W. Reynolds

If a waning moon
is still a moon
then we were children.

We were also wet
and nearly naked,
half-hidden in the dark,
hoping our drunk parents
would remain dumb.

Our probing tongues
made easy promises
that tasted like truth
with a dash of delusion.

But now the moon is new
and we are Facebook friends.
We share our virtual lives;
celebrate our virtual victories
while still hiding in the dark.



Library 2.0

Walter Neilsen

Grasping after an Election

Jane Blanchard

Who holds whose hand on such strange days
is worth observing. Why she stays
with him is easy: much to lose,
though most has long been lost. The news
moves on to any yeas or nays
which matter, never mind delays
by leaders parsing every phrase
for followers supposed to choose
who holds whose hand.

This is another awkward phase
of democratic means and ways
as Reds concede (or not) to Blues
while chaos, later calm, ensues.
Some go for grandiose displays:
who holds whose hand?

Still

Suchitra Samanta

(To my daughter, at three, on a beach in India)

Small, shining beach creature,
busy shell hoarder—I watch
her laugh in the tropic sun,
thrill to the feel of velvet froth.
Only she is there.

At three, Time
holds no sway.
No future beckons in hope
or fear, no past opens
to imagine,
no repertoire of remembered
wonder, or grief, or love
No stories of oneself.

No need. At three
a god who rolls across
the universe.
Now is all.
A ball bouncing off
its worlds, knowing
only instances, endlessly.

But Time moves me differently.
I must seize the moment,
hoard, hold still what may be lost,
clasp to me what is mine.

So in words I freeze
this instant.
In mind's caves
where no years gloss
A child in sand-sift
Laugh-limbed
by a gold-flecked sea.

(detail) Photo: John M Bennett



F-Bomb
Ralph Eaton



A Grandmother's Psalm

Lisal Kayati

Today, I thread a needle of hope,
for you, little one. Child of my child.

I sew your earliest smile into my heart.
The fabric of recognition.
It lifts the veil and your light rains pure-
pure, upon my wrinkled brow.

I hem our connection, thread by thread.
It fastens us, pulling me back
into the timeless infant space
of liminal imagination.

From this needle of hope,
each stitch is an invocation.
An exquisite breath-blemished promise-
of a world made perfect – by you.

From this poor needle, this humble seam,
Spirit pours from every eye.
In this moment and every moment –
It lives, as we live. In us. Through us.

Pigment
Susan Saandholland

The Road to Ballingearry

Don Hogle

Yesterday, I was headed to the pharmacy on 14th Street. As usual, the hot dog man sat on a pail next to his cart, listening to Egyptian pop music on the radio. As I turned the corner, the buildings suddenly seemed unusually solid—as though their red and brown façades had been thrust up from the bedrock below. A triangle of clear sky cleaved them where the avenue cut through, and its blueness ached like a throbbing heart. *This is it*, I thought, *there's nothing more to life than this sky, these buildings, and this moment.*

Don't ask me why, but then I recalled being on the road to Ballingearry the year we went to Ireland. I assured you the sign I followed at the fork was Gaelic for the name of the town. You thought otherwise, and later it was clear you were right, but you never said *I told you so*. And suddenly on 14th Street, I felt something like love—for you and me, for Ballingearry, and for the hot dog man sitting on a pail next to his cart, listening to the radio.

The End
Sally Mook

Finale

Anita Firebaugh

Autumn.
Close skies. Tinged leaves.
Did she smell rain? Eyes shut.
The crisp, clear morning caresses.
Breath ends.





Soul Searching
Bruce Slater

Walking Home at Night

George Freek

(After Mai Yao Chen)

Tonight, the stars are bright.
Unsteadily, I walk home
from the tavern.
The night overwhelms me
like a gigantic cavern.
I see the moon, reflected
in the dark water.
If I were drunker, I might
reach out to grab her.
They say that is the way
Li Po died. I doubt it.
He had too many
poems yet to write.
I stumble over dead leaves.
Such is my inexcusable life.
I slowly stagger home
to my empty bed.
It's now been a month,
that my wife has been dead.

Uncharted Topography

Kristie L. Williams

Loose skin exhales
a time when her breasts
were still round

Pulped scars whisper
just below the surface

Each breath
no longer tethers
what is missing

A soul imbues
today's terrain



Winter Light

Gina Louthian-Stanley

My Uncle's Matinee

April Asbury

Saturdays he left behind the grit, broken mirrors,
and pitted concrete floors of the glass shop.
An early day. Time for lunch, time to count change,
Time to watch the old cowboys on TV. The room
filled with gunfire, war whoops, fallen
horses, the long drawl of the Duke,
thick as clouds of pipe smoke,
sweetness of cherry tobacco,
brown bits drifting
from stained hands
to mottled carpet.

Sun cracked
the edge of drawn curtains, hit
the white haze, stopped
before it reached the blazing screen.

The television never stopped. Even the floor
vibrated with long-gone explosions. He tapped
the packed ash to the knobby green ashtray,
glass heavy as the hand iron on the hearth. He smiled
at the shootouts, the screaming horses, the hero
who rode the swell of violins
into a painted open sky.

Anniversary

Kevin J. McDaniel

Like you, after Grandpa Albert's
stroke at breakfast, I refuse to cry
on the date marking your demise.

First time I heard you cry reminded me
of Ali feeling Foreman's body blows.
Pegasus airlifted baby brother
born with green mucus in his lungs.
Doctors put him on the ECMO machine
in D.C. You got depressed, no room
at the Ronald McDonald House
promoted in those TV infomercials.

*A man tucks in his upper lip instead
of bawling his ass off in public, you'd say.*

I study Polaroids I posted
on social media, 10 years today,
the one of you in army ripstop sateen
giving a peace sign in Cambodia,
and my throwback: you in traditional
trucker wardrobe, white t-shirt,
blue jeans, Red Man bag, holding me
in the middle of an aisle at Drug Fair.

On my porch, I eat cottage cheese
and maple syrup, your nighttime treat,
under a raven's sky shorn of the North Star.

Rise

Mary Redus

She lingers in the kitchen,
apron tied around her waist
pushing a loose strand of hair
behind her ear. Leaning
against the sink, she gazes
out the window.
Bone weary, family to feed,
blue —
blue as chicory.

Thinks how she never expected this —
cooking to live,
not living to cook.
Not loving the man she married
for that matter either,
though she's stayed with him
year after year.

But the smell of homemade bread,
rising —
this she loves.
She considers her floured hands
pushing the dough
kneading it against the table,
molding something beautiful
out of what little she had.

And she remembers how
he leaves her alone
in the kitchen,
and all the kids, too,
with their everlasting hunger.

Here, free of them all,
she can pound the bread
twist in her frustration and loss
shove it into the oven,
pause, breathe in the aroma,
and feel her spirit rise—
even as the dough does.

Still I Rise
Andi Pitcher Davis



On the Walk Home from Apple Tree City's Tree Stand

Sean Prentiss

The world is ten thousand stars and one
black blanket as I climb from the tree.

Hunters, like me, leave stands for home,
bows in hand, our hunts unsuccessful.

The world is quiet and empty as I step
over fallen pines, duck under low hanging

branches until, while walking into a night
field, I stumble—only to hear the clatter of

deer hooves trotting through brittle leaves.
Regret washes over me until I realize—who

needs anything more than a chance to pull
the bowstrings, the almost of the hunt.



Nocturne IV

Yun Wang

When night flowers
into stars
I anchor my boat
in your dream
The lake mirrors
a field of cold flames

Darkness will disperse
at dawn
as a flock of ravens
You will wake
with tears in your eyes
never having met me

On the Pond
Jeri Rogers

Mary

Kari D. Ross

I am Mary the Mother in this moment with you.
I hold you I cradle your heart it beats in your miraculous body, it beats in mine.
My lips on your cheek soft and sticky and a perfect love I want to eat.
My body I give for you in exquisite pain of birth.
Perfect love I am yours as I am mother quickened with that sublime awe.

I am Mary from Magdala now in this present time.
Here now we are friends you and I, face to face side by side, we talk with brains of flesh.
Words that live so I may hear my life with you in dialogue.
You tell me I tell you my friend, our words waltz together.
You watch me I watch you my friend, you lead our dance you've extracted into being.

Now in this measured moment of effort with you, I am the woman born Mary F. O'Connor.
Baker of words, spiller of beans, co-creator of truth in beauty sincere.
My faith is stretched and tested here, you disappear then reenter.
Plant the seed and watch it grow the Kingdom is within.
Gravid worlds are only born of that perfect love and pain sublime.

Love and awe and friends divine, gardens of creation.
We seek that moment of understanding the mystery of relation.
Mother, friend, and co-creator point me where I follow.
I follow you, steps within to glorious faith revealed.
We lift the veil to goodness of truth where I carry your cross of beauty.



Aura of Peace
Audrey Fish Pfeifer

In Memoriam

Rod Adams

Rod Adams enjoyed people as well as entertaining them. He played the curmudgeon and the flirt; he told tall tales and embellished true ones. He was also generous and kind, and he loved teaching watercolor. He donated workshops to regional art groups and taught classes in Bedford, where he became a mentor to many. In contrast, he could slump over a painting with a 00 brush in hand and ignore the world.

Before the days of computer graphics, he illustrated Yellow Pages for 15 years and those skills show up in his painting. He was one of the studio artists in Roanoke's Butterflies & Unicorns Gallery and later a member of The Market Gallery.

He is known for his intricately detailed watercolor paintings; his favored palette of browns, deep oranges and reds and his favorite subjects--rusty trucks, red rock, and aging buildings. With his typical humor he claimed to paint what he was: "rusty, crusty, and falling apart."

He was both proud of his art and harshly critical of it. Although he favored photography and watercolor, in recent years he experimented with oil painting and also has considerable work on a novel saved on his computer.

-Edrie Bays

Illegal Alien
Rod Adams



Salt Water

Jane Smith

Everything was grey, yet nothing was really grey, thought Imke. The seawater holding her body seemed dark grey, but she knew it also to be blue, and sometimes green, or black. The low horizon looked pale grey, but she'd also seen it green, and orange. The huge sky, empty but for a few kittiwakes here and there, was a washed-out grey, but she'd also gazed up at yellow and red skies. Thinking about colours helped pass the time while she was swimming, especially when she tried to remember the old words for them.

The swim back to Frowland would normally take less than an hour, but Imke's cargo slowed her. The rough twine chafed her shoulders, and the weight of the makeshift raft was adding laborious minutes to her usual stroke. The rhythm of swimming, the pull and the draw, usually calmed Imke's thoughts, but today her mind rolled like the rougher waters she'd swum from.

A confident swimmer even in these northern seas, Imke had been put into the water as a baby by the mother she couldn't really remember. She knew her mother had been executed, presumably for the crime of having had a child, in the days when there was still an Erdpolizei, before the Manplaig had wiped most of them out.

Raised after that by a band of women in a derelict village at the edge of the New Mainland, Imke had swum in sea lochs as a child. She cherished the freedom of swimming. In the water no one could hunt her, arrest her, rob her, or rape her. And it was a release from the everyday work of foraging, cooking up scraps, making, repairing, and scanning the hills in the distance for raiders..

When the village had been raided one day, half a dozen women died in its defence while Imke and an older girl ran, then swam, then swam again. The other girl perished in the dark water but Imke got to the other side of the river and made her way out to the coast, where she found Gan and Azra.

Gan was an older woman with hollow cheeks, few teeth, and part of an earlobe missing, bitten off by a raider. Azra seemed younger, with most of her teeth and fleshy brown breasts. Azra had made her way as far west as possible during the Great Migrations, whereas Gan's origins were unknown to all but her. Imke, young and alone, posed no threat to them, and she was taken in as an extra pair of hands and as the group's only swimmer and sea-forager. The mutual benefit was understood, but Imke knew she couldn't trust them.

A gannet plunged headlong into the sea just ahead of Imke. Fish in the water! Healthy fish, and gannets diving for them, meant a food chain; the sea around them had not died just yet.

Glancing up at the gannet as she took a breath of air, Imke caught sight of Frowland in the distance. She'd be ashore within a half hour, she calculated, picturing herself on the steep pebble beach, dragging the raft, and explaining herself to Gan and Azra.

You were supposed to get rid of it, Imke.

We'll do it ourselves if you cannot.

There had been so much death already.

Their Frowland project had meant defending the boat they were building and keeping unwanted New Mainlanders from joining them. Gan was smart and Azra was strong, and together they made a formidable pair. Knowledge of the boat had cost several people their lives – people who wanted to join the expedition to the new islands, or who might have informed on them or stolen the boat for themselves.

Imke herself had often worried that she brought neither cunning nor strength to the group; she couldn't plot like Gan, or bludgeon raiders like Azra could. But she had currency, being young and vital - a valuable connection with a Manplaig survivor who knew how to make boats. Boat Man knew how to get wood, bring it to a place, join things together, and build a sea boat. More than that, he was able to keep their Frowland project secret in an unspoken exchange for the reluctant favours Imke had granted him, rushed episodes that took place up against trees and in frozen ditches and even under the half-built boat.

Gan had insisted they call him Boat Man to avoid attachment issues once he'd served his purpose, although he'd told Imke his old world name. In any case, said Gan, he had the signs of Manplaig - the pustules and the cough and the sunken look in his eyes - and he surely wasn't long for life in the new islands.

Imke's moments of secret exchange with Boat Man had exacted a sobering price of her. Soon enough, as they were preparing to sail to the tiny uninhabited island they'd named Frowland, Imke noticed her belly swelling and felt her blood tightening. Those first weeks she lay awake at night worrying that she wouldn't be able to sustain a child on her meagre diet. Babies were of course illegal without a permit, but without Erdpolizei around it was less of a concern. Once Imke's condition became evident, though, Gan and Azra insisted that she drown her child once it was born, as so many women had done before her.

It's the only kind thing, Imke.

Males cannot survive; new females will be a burden we cannot suffer.

Boat Man had asked Imke to come and live on his island with him, where there were some trees and the feral dogs, Canis and Wulfrun, and better resources than Frowland, which only really boasted a hidden cave on a treeless mound. But the relationship had been contractual for Imke, a way to escape the New Mainland and its raiders, and she dismissed the offer straight away.

One warm night, when Imke's belly was as round as the sun setting over the sea, she swam slowly over the water to see Boat Man. Imke wanted to ask him how to go about drowning the child. How could she make it quick? Would he do it instead of her?

Yes, I will do it for you, Imke. I will make it quick. I do not want to, it is my child after all, but better I do it than those two hags.

In late Spring, huge in the belly and feeling that the child was imminent, Imke slipped herself into the sea when Gan and Azra were out collecting black seaweed. Every stroke felt like a terrible misdeed, the sky felt heavy even though it was clear, and Imke felt that the pale sun itself was looking down in cold judgement at what they were about to do.

But when Imke arrived on Boat Man's island she immediately smelled something unusual in the air. His cave empty, she followed the strangely subdued dogs a short way and found Boat Man's body at the top of a shingle beach, his eyes pecked out by birds, his hands reaching outwards and his body contorted. Manplaig had finished him sooner than he expected, thought Imke. She didn't cry but she sat beside his body as best she could in her swollen state and said his secret old world name out loud to the sky as Canis and Wulfrun stared at her.

That very night, Imke gave birth in some soft ferns away from the shore, Canis keeping watch and Wulfrun frantically licking the baby's head almost as soon as it emerged. Imke rested there till dawn, not really thinking about anything but looking up at the night sky. The first faltering words she said to her baby were the old world names for all the colours she saw in the galaxies.

As Imke swam now with Frowland in sight, with gannets overhead and the sleeping baby strapped onto the raft behind her, she cleared her mind of all other thoughts. She shivered, then turned in the water, glancing at the sky turning from grey to pink.

A steady hour later, the horizon was burning a deep red as Imke, exhausted and almost delirious, reached the shore of Boat Man's island. Canis and Wulfrun greeted her as she pulled the little raft onto the shingle beach, lifted the baby, and kissed her.

Imke spoke aloud to the dogs and to her tiny daughter.

I'm sorry we're alone here, but that's safer.

An uncertain future is better than none at all.

As night fell, woman, infant and dogs slept together on the flattened ferns where the baby had been born. Imke cried softly without knowing why. As the tears touched her lips she tasted the salt, the taste of tears and the taste of the sea.

She watched a shooting star heading west and felt the quiet joy of being alive in the world, tired but alive, in an old-new world of stars, water, land, and salt.

Dusk at Mono Lake

Gordon Davis





The Flock Steven Kenny

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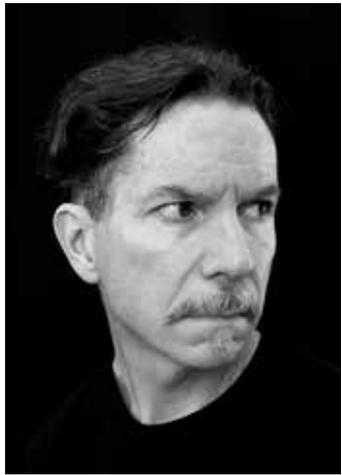


Nikki Giovanni, poet, is one of America's foremost poets. Over the course of a long career, Giovanni has published numerous collections of poetry—from her first self-published volume *Black Feeling Black Talk* (1968) to New York Times best-seller *Bicycles: Love Poems* (2009)—several works of nonfiction and children's literature, and multiple recordings, including the Emmy-award nominated *The Nikki Giovanni Poetry Collection* (2004). Her most recent publications include *Make Me Rain: Poems and Prose* (2020), *Chasing Utopia: A Hybrid* (2013) and, as editor, *The 100 Best African American Poems* (2010). A frequent lecturer and reader, Giovanni has taught at Rutgers University, Ohio State University, and Virginia Tech, where she is a University Distinguished Professor.
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Natasha Trethewey, poet served two terms as the 19th Poet Laureate of the United States (2012-2014). She is the author of five collections of poetry, including *Native Guard* (2006)—for which she was awarded the 2007 Pulitzer Prize—and, most recently, *Monument: Poems New and Selected* (2018); a book of non-fiction, *Beyond Katrina: A Meditation on the Mississippi Gulf Coast* (2010); and a memoir, *Memorial Drive* (2020) an instant New York Times Bestseller. She is the recipient of fellowships from the Academy of American Poets, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Guggenheim Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Beinecke Library at Yale, and the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard. She is a fellow of both the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the American Academy of Arts and Letters. In 2017 she received the Heinz Award for Arts and Humanities. A Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets since 2019, Trethewey was awarded the 2020 Rebekah Johnson Bobbitt Prize in Poetry for Lifetime Achievement from the Library of Congress. Currently, she is Board of Trustees Professor of English at Northwestern University.
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Photo by Nancy Crampton

Steven Kenny, an artist was born in Peekskill, New York in 1962 and now resides in Check, VA. He attended the Rhode Island School of Design, receiving a BFA in 1984. After studying independently in Rome he gained notoriety as a freelance commercial illustrator. Clients included Sony Music, Time Magazine, AT&T, United Airlines, Celestial Seasonings, Microsoft and many others. His illustrations repeatedly received awards from the Society of Illustrators, Communication Arts Magazine and the Art Directors' Club of New York. In 1997 Steven turned away from illustration in order to devote his full attention to the fine arts. His award-winning paintings are exhibited in galleries across the United States and Europe. Honors include grants from the Virginia and Franz Bader Fund, the Joyce Dutka Arts Foundation, and fellowships from the Virginia Commission for the Arts, Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, and Creative Pinellas. His paintings can be found in the permanent collections of the Polk Museum of Art, Leepa-Rattner Museum of Art, Museo Arte Contemporanea Sicilia, State College of Florida, and many private collections around the world. <http://www.stevenkenny.com/>



Betty Branch, artist, maintains a studio and gallery in Roanoke, VA. For the first thirty years of her career, Branch focused on the female form and defined female rites of passage in both traditional and unorthodox media. In recent decades she has produced numerous public monuments and commissioned sculptures of varying subjects. She spent a portion of many years working at Nicoli Studios in Carrara, Italy and notably, she was the only American exhibitor invited to the first Salon International de la Sculpture Contemporaine in Paris. Branch's award-winning art has been widely exhibited in the US and abroad, with works from small to monumental in private, corporate, university, and museum collections.
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Jane Smith lives in Cheshire, England with her family of humans and dogs. She writes both fiction and non-fiction and campaigns on wildlife and environmental issues. She is a contributor to the journal *Dark Mountain* and in 2021 her essay 'Crossings' was short-listed for the inaugural Future Places Prize for Environmental Literature (UK). She is mainly interested in inter-species understanding and in human responses to climate emergency. Twitter: @Jane_C_Smith; website: www.janecsmith.com



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