

# Artemis

## 2026

## Origins

Artists & Writers from the Blue Ridge Mountains & Beyond - Volume MMXXVI - 2026

# Artemis 2026

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

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# Foreword & Dedication

*Artemis Journal* has always been close to my heart. Each year, as we blend poetry and visual art, I am reminded of how deeply this region inspires us. Our mission is personal: to uplift the creative voices of Virginia’s Blue Ridge Mountains and beyond, nurturing artistic expression and a sense of belonging.

Founded in 1976 as a writing workshop for domestic violence survivors in Southwest Virginia, *Artemis Journal* began as a sanctuary for silenced voices. Transforming pain into art, it provided women with the means to write, heal, and reclaim their stories. Over time, *Artemis* has become one of the region’s most enduring literary and arts publications, reflecting resilience and creativity.

For 50 years, *Artemis* has published over 3,000 poems and artworks, featuring both emerging and acclaimed talents. Pulitzer winners, Poet Laureates, and new Appalachian voices appear side by side, making *Artemis* unique in its full integration of visual art and poetry.

Supporting the next generation is central to our mission. *Artemis* mentors young writers, offers internships to Hollins University students, and this year, partners with Roanoke City Public Schools, Roanoke Arts Commission and Roanoke Public Library to launch a regional Youth Poet Laureate program. These young voices will help shape our 50th Anniversary celebration, which will be joined by guest U.S. Poet Laureate Arthur Sze.

*Artemis* extends its reach with the podcast *Artemis Speaks*, hosted by Editor Jeri Rogers. Now in its fifth season and reaching 5,000 listeners, the show features in-depth conversations with artists and writers, exploring their creative journeys and celebrating the diversity of our community.

As a nonprofit, *Artemis* donates 10% of annual sales to a local women’s shelter, staying true to its mission of amplifying diverse creative voices from the Blue Ridge Mountains and beyond.

This 50th anniversary is deeply meaningful to my editors and me. On September 4, 2026, we will gather at Roanoke’s Taubman Museum of Art to celebrate *Artemis*’s journey. I look forward to sharing this milestone with our community, launching the new journal, and welcoming U.S. Poet Laureate Arthur Sze and acclaimed cover artist Michele Oka Doner.

To each of my editors, partners, writers and artists, thank you for weaving your vision into these pages. Your creativity colors the tapestry of *Artemis* and gives voice to our region’s creative soul.

Jeri Rogers, Editor

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*Deep South, Untitled (Fontainebleau)*

Sally Mann

Sally Mann  
*Deep South, Untitled (Fontainebleau)*, 1998  
Tea-toned gelatin silver print  
40 x 50 inches  
© **Sally Mann. Courtesy Gagosian.**

## At the Equinox

Arthur Sze

The tide ebbs and reveals orange and purple sea stars.  
I have no theory of radiance,

but after rain evaporates  
off pine needles, the needles glisten.

In the courtyard, we spot the rising shell of a moon,  
and, at the equinox, bathe in its gleam.

Using all the tides of starlight,  
we find  
vicissitude is our charm.

On the mud flats off Homer,  
I catch the tremor when waves start to slide back in;

and, from Roanoke, you carry  
the leafing jade smoke of willows.

Looping out into the world, we thread  
and return. The lapping waves

cover an expanse of mussels clustered on rocks;  
and, giving shape to what is unspoken,

forsythia buds and blooms in our arms.

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# 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



*Tulips*

Natalia Micheal



*Untitled*  
Dara Lipton

## Sometimes I Shape my Lips

D. R. Goodman

Sometimes I shape my lips to take a sip  
and feel them as my mother's lips, her face  
within my face; and I can see her tip  
the glass, bright arc of liquid meets a trace  
of smile, and something deeper: in her eye,  
a glint of self-awareness, that she knows  
I'm watching, is determined to deny  
self-consciousness with her insouciant pose—  
she glances off. And suddenly I fear  
she'll turn, meet eyes across the warp of years,  
and vanish like a myth, the past re-sealed,  
the lost surrendered—or the lost revealed  
as never lost, for how it has returned  
ingrained in what my face, my body, learned.



*Striding Woman I*

Betty Branch

## A Spark of Kindness

Jerrice J Baptiste

I listen to the wild wind outside my window. Maybe, it can teach me how to cope with the gusts of grief, sorrow knocking on the windowpane of my heart. Here in the dawn of my life, I inhale scent of rose geranium, and I call for wisdom from all of the four directions. Will the wind from the North bring me absolute peace for not having cradled my own newborns in my arms, to sing them a creole lullaby when they fuss at night? In the early morning, to wash tenderly the crown of their heads with a cloth blessed with holy water from the reservoir? In my fiftieth year, will the South wind bring me endless acceptance for not having greeted each person with love? Will it give me many chances to look into each pair of eyes and see two white onyx compassionate moons that beg to be acknowledge each time? To extend my heart in an embrace toward each soft beating heart, as a gesture of loving-kindness? Will the East wind find me at my altar lighting lavender incense with scent spiraling in air to honor god. Cutting pink carnations at an angle to place in a vase, and with each breath and each bow bring relief to a suffering soul curled up in a makeshift bed on the sidewalk? In my fiftieth year, will the West wind chime in my ears news of humanity getting along, the loud noise of war vanishing, and the drums of joy become the only lingering sound we can hear into the morning? Even after my fiftieth year, engaging more with a practice of keen observation of not harming any creatures, carrying back the sea urchins, pink jellyfish, olive & fern green turtle shells that washed up onto shore from a cobalt sea in this turbulent night.

# The Unlost Cause

Jane Blanchard

*“They name their children after themselves.”  
—accusation against certain American Southerners*

And so they do, some Tom and Anne,  
A loving couple looking to  
Perform their roles within the plan,  
And so they do.

Each child makes his or her debut  
To warmest welcome by the clan  
Who wait to see what will ensue.

Down to a woman or a man,  
Heirs try to honor old through new,  
Advancing life as best they can,  
And so they do.



*Lilium kramerianum.*

# Odyssey

Jessica Mardian

*The Odyssey* grows hot  
beneath the electric blanket, facedown  
against the sheets. A crease  
on the page where, when asked  
by the cyclops, the protagonist  
answers “Noman is my name”.  
The translation would be better  
for saying “I am Nobody”.

An unmade bed,  
an unmade mind. All year,  
I’ve been reading  
others’ adventures.  
I’ve traveled no farther  
than the cow pastures,  
out by the house  
my mother was raised in.

Ryegrass against  
bare knees. Time blurs  
and I am a child,  
alive, beneath blue  
mountains. These steeples  
have always known me.

The edge of the world  
was calling.  
And I said no.  
Odysseus only asked  
to go home.



*The Wellspring*

Karen Sewell

# Gee’s Bend Quilt

Laura Gunnells Miller

*I like making quilts by myself, that way  
I can talk to my quilts. – Stella M. Pettway*

Like spirit over waters of the deep  
the artisan folds fabric and stitches  
a path of thread, then breathes life over  
and into her art of cotton swatches.

She passes down her legacy borne  
from West Africa to a land rounded  
by a meander of the Alabama River.

Like her stitches, a narrow road gathers  
late summer sunflowers, golden rod, and  
foxglove to the Airing of the Quilts, where  
flapping proud is her heirloom piece that frames

a panel of her brother’s pants, her father’s tie  
he wore Sundays to church, and even her mother’s  
dress—the one that swished around her ankles.

# The hour I first believed

Susan Hankla

was not my finest, which is how prayer works  
through the diffident “asks”. That hour I ate black  
forest cake at the fancy place & all through peanut soup  
& Steak Diane, my faith steady as knife thrower’s hands,  
but then, as if suddenly struck dumb by a magnetic  
field of day lilies and violets and clover, your penciled  
note arrived on the blank, pre-stamped postcard. It said:  
“If you care at all, you’ll write back,” which an intercessor hid  
all summer in her patch pocket. I’d asked the Almighty for new love—  
yes, that same dream which others have, & for hope to return inside the honeycomb,  
and not the bear that eats all the honey there.



*whispering waters*

David Jensen



*Hidden Life II*  
Sherrye Lantz

## Inheritance

Ellen Roberts Young

Shy bookworm, eldest child,  
I did what I was told—mostly—  
dutiful daughter, going far afield  
in imagination, while my two brothers  
explored, experimented, once had to run  
for the hose when they piled all their trash  
in the living room fireplace.

My mother, a reader like me, sensible  
and cautious, did not fuss over  
the damage. She'd played the boy  
in youthful games and dances,  
solid and grave, the Hans of fairytale  
to her younger sister's wiry liveliness.

Of her mother I knew only a solid woman,  
seated, composed, in black and white.  
Elder daughter of a temperamental  
musician, she kept a calm household.

Her younger sister, flamboyant,  
adventurous, married twice, my mother's  
“Auntie” told stories that awed me, dutiful  
daughter of a dutiful daughter whose mother  
was also a dutiful daughter, the eldest  
each time the one who pays the dues.

## The Old Bike

John C. Mannone

The old bike rests against a mulberry tree,  
its kickstand crippled years earlier.

Tread-bare tires caked with mud hide  
the dried-out rubber. Broken brake shoes

buried in the grass. Snaking out, a pale  
skin-cracked cable, its artery; it once pumped

hydraulics clamping disc brakes; now blocked  
with sludge too viscid to flow. The heart

of the old bike, frozen with rust, a reminder  
of earlier years when the gears transferred

pedal power to make the tires turn. Re-tiring  
would not make the bicycle go. Instead

the world comes to it as it leans in, with cane  
grass all around. Despite flaked-off paint, its still-  
bright blue looks out

over the fresh creek with a light breeze  
and birdsong, its arms basketing memories.

# What Is Sown

Christina Linsin

Growing, I wanted to sing  
the earth's aching  
to sleep, the throbbing  
background heat,  
a pulsing heart, I sang  
lullabies to the earth  
nightly.  
“Lovely darling, / I will guard you /  
Keep you from all / Woe and harm”  
The whole world ached in me  
in ambient rumblings  
gray, dense as bones; the sacred begged  
seismically for tending.  
I began pulling weeds,  
sprinkling seed beneath—  
ticking breaths, new growth ripe  
with blood I daub  
until drenched through.  
I do not know how to feed  
what I have sown.  
Kneeling, I press my hand  
to the heart  
what's arisen, a thunder  
entreating  
Lying on the newly-tilled  
and cooling soil, humming  
in accord, sated suckling voices sing  
of owning  
choices made  
as I plant myself  
a garden where sharper teeth  
may grow in time.



*Spiral Goddess*

Donna Polseno



*Blue-white Nestle*

Malina Busch

## Objects To Treasure

Alessio Zanelli

Not framed pictures, not cherished memories.  
What binds me to dear ones no longer alive  
are simple objects, trivial and worthless.  
Do not discard anything that may be useful again  
or bring people from the past to mind.  
Some I got rid of over the years, without thinking,  
but most I treasure fiercely.  
The bronze-gold lock  
my mom cut from my hair when I was one;  
my very first report card,  
dip-pen written on watermarked paper;  
the small die-cast sports car  
my best friend gave me for my tenth birthday...  
I never handle nor check on them,  
I know where each and every one is stored.  
And that old token of time,  
the hourglass my childhood priest  
wanted me to keep, to thank me  
for my long service as an altar boy,  
catches my attention  
whenever I open the bookcase doors.  
I have been fearing to flip it for three decades,  
remembering what the pink sand  
falling through the neck means.  
I do look at it, amazed and grateful.

## Relocation

Roger Camp

He wasn't hard to see  
living the high  
life see-sawing on the silky  
strand stuck to the bristles  
of my toothbrush.

Suspended brush to faucet  
a spidery Golden Gate  
shrunk-to-fit my bathroom  
sink.

I too was suspended,  
my dental hygiene vacated  
giving us both the chance  
to reconsider our positions,  
to see which one might relocate  
the other.

## Origins

Anna Purves

My path is a river—or rather it's a path  
that the river overtakes, then abandons  
exposing its banks to the bone.

Long gone from home I know one thing—  
that a root is a lock  
to the core of the world.

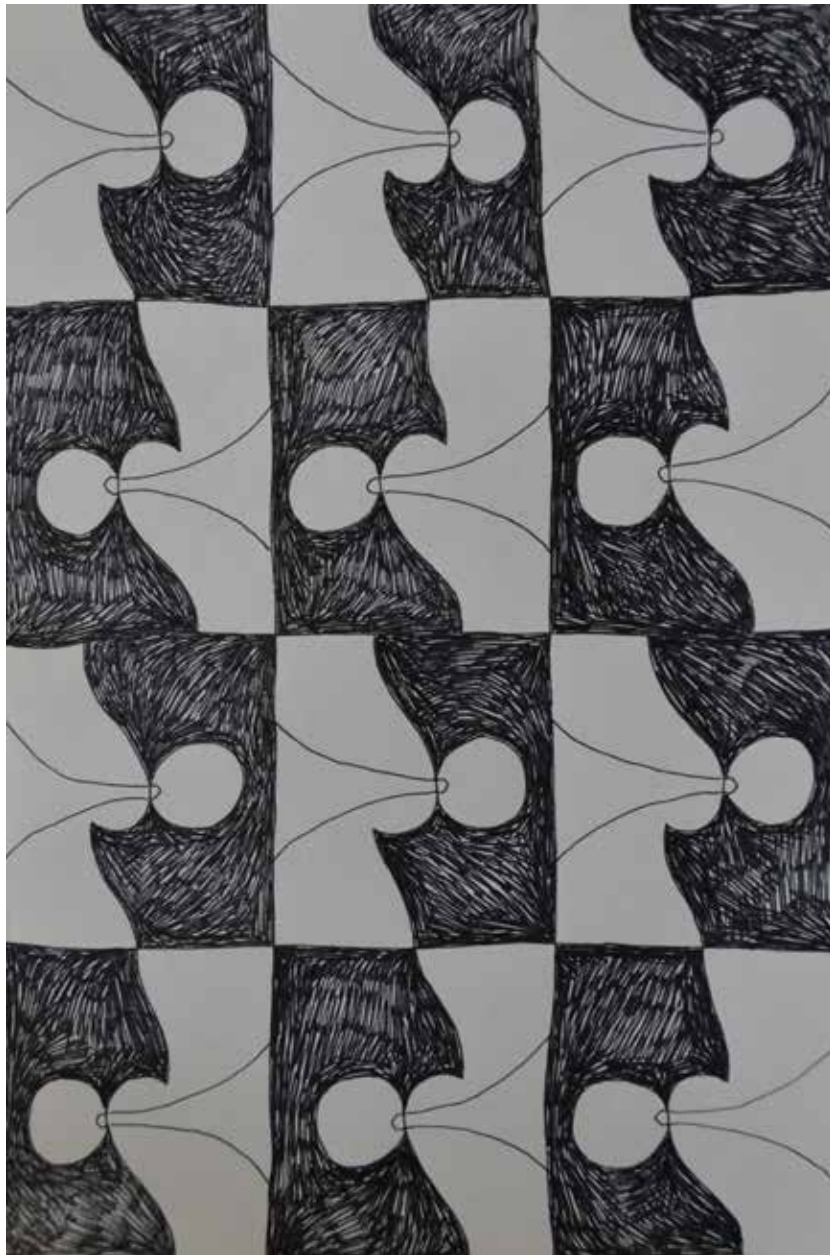
Springing branches and greening leaves  
distract from the true work of the tree,  
the true work of me.

I myself am trunk, leaf, my fingers the branching  
fingers of trees, cascading down  
towards what is waiting, deep in earth.



OPHELIA-REBORN

Stephanie Klein-Davis



*New Normal*

Ana Morales

## Intimacies with My Mother

Leonore Hildebrandt

My mother never took a shower. She never used the tub, either. Every morning, she'd be at the sink with two washcloths: upper and lower. She'd soap and and rub and dry every part of her body. To finish, she'd rinse in the sink one foot, then the other, balancing beautifully. She applied rose-hints of cremes and lotions, leaving the caps open.

I would watch her—enchanted, engulfed in chemical smells—when she painted her fingernails and toenails bright red. Every other week, she went to the hairdressers for a wash & curl. Hidden beneath a huge stand-up hairdryer, rollers wound, she'd be absorbed in the kind of magazine not to be found in our house—fashion and gossip. Then came styling and spraying until the air was thick with perfume.

When I visited her in the hospital—she was old then—her roommate complained: “Your mother got up at 4 a.m. and washed up at the sink, right there. She didn't miss anything—I saw it all!” I wondered, why 4 a.m.? My mother gave a little apologetic smile, but then she whispered—too loud, of course—that this lady would talk incessantly about things of no interest.

My mother didn't inhabit a world of hugs and sobs. We did not share our grief when my father faltered and died too early. But like me, she loved to swim in the ocean—cold surf off the North Sea, shallow inlets, even murky tidal bays smelling of heather and dead mussels. Treading lightly, she was tough in a wind, quick with her towel. Last, she'd wipe the sand

off her flashy feet, put on her sandals, and was off, back to her reading of theology, questions like why God was harsh and unfair, and how to imagine an afterlife. I did not dare talk with her about my loneliness, about atheism, premarital sex, and such. But how wonderful and joyous her preparations for my return home each time—warm soup and flowers.

# Cabin

Sean Prentiss

This cabin is as much of this hill  
as it is of itself  
just as this crumbling hill  
is as much the breath  
of morning river fog  
as it is itself—some ancient,  
withering hill.

And this boy is as much of  
this cabin and the sharp dirt  
of these hills and the sun  
kissing summer shoulders.  
This boy is the river's current,  
pulling him toward  
those nearby turbulent rapids.

How did this boy end up  
here, so far away?  
Standing at the cabin's railing  
in some middle-of-the-night,  
completely lost, as this cabin is  
completely lost to the darkness  
and the deep blanket of trees.



*Harbinger*

Steven Kenny

## mother tongue

Kathleen Hellen

the /w/ in rice, for instance.  
the /r/ okaasan never heard she never said  
chop-  
sticks (ha-  
shi) click-  
ing. digging  
into pickled syllables  
like ... gook. ooo-eh-i-eh  
-ooo ... meaning gooble-  
dy.

what happened to the fu-  
ton. before we had a bed. what happened to the silk-  
en lick of buddha's incense.

what shrieked inside her head —  
utterances. darting into non-  
sense. some stuck on wind  
wall. clawing at the sho-ji.  
some sealed in jars. in closets.  
some gnawing at the rug like hungry  
ghosts. sucking at the sleeves

of moth-  
ered o-bi. (obey) what? the emperor  
surrendered. hi-/wo/-shi-  
ma. o-kaa-  
san. o  
how to mother  
tongue.

## Brigid's Holy Well

Marjorie Hartley

Five circles sun-wise round damp limestone  
on a May's day, the eldest among us  
sit at your door to plea for good health  
and bounty

Old Celts, crones like us, wove reeds  
with a stretched radial centered by  
long arms to embrace  
whatever comes

Ancient lasses with babes in tow  
scratched hopes into rocks  
for Briganti, girls now paste jpegs  
at the veiled ivy portal to Brigid

Had I walked sun-wise 'round this holy well  
as you struggled inside my belly  
would you have thrived  
would you be alive?



*The Sea Is Calling*

Sarah P. Bolduc



*Life Journey to the Light*

Starroot

## If I Must Be Extraordinary Let Me Be Absolutely Extraordinary

Kristie L. Williams

*(After Leila Chatti)*

Detachment is expected of ordinary daughters—  
a thing of beauty, it is, to tuck  
madness behind your teeth;  
I grew out of my shadow'd forest,  
a gnarled tree,  
limbs whipping wind-blown rhetoric,  
my bark split loud and wide,  
exposing the fight in my roots.

## A Legend

Robbi Nester

Once, you could eat an onion out of hand as if it were an apple. The flesh was sweet, and when you took a bite, its juice never made you cry. Instead, it had power, made you so confident, you'd think that you could fly. Every animal with claws sharp enough to dig it from the ground consumed it. To avoid extinction, the onion had to take a lesson from the cactus, with its protective spines.

That's why to find the inside of an onion, it first needs to be unpacked, wrapped as it is in papery brown skin that sticks to everything. Beneath lie layer upon layer of acrid flesh, nested like matryoshkas. Even when an animal has managed to unpeel this enigmatic bulb, it might not recognize the onion as something edible, peeling layers till they're scattered on the ground, no center to be found, no heart. Only the most patient envision how this tuber will bloom with heat, turn limp, translucent, collapsing into sweetness that had been there all along.



*Beatle*

Lucy Bresa

## Grits

Felicia Mitchell

Grits cooked from scratch,  
from stone-ground corn,  
deserve exultation.  
Sometimes I dye them  
like a monk's robe,  
saffron blessing taste.  
Other times, I eat them plain,  
Gorham spoon to mouth,  
never one to get above  
her raising.



*Primal Thread*

Sarah EK Muse

## In event of emergency

KM Kramer

*Secure the elastic band behind your head, and breathe normally.*

Yes, it's always hard to breathe  
in emergencies.

*If you are travelling with a child or someone who requires assistance, secure your own mask first.*

Does anyone do this?  
I know, the analogy for self-care  
trotted out to tired mothers,  
burnt caregivers.

Prioritize my pain?  
I don't understand  
how to do this *and*  
*breathe normally.*

Normally, I don't breathe  
when someone I love  
struggles. A sympathetic reflex.  
Breath clenched, even in my sleep.

As a child, I learned my needs  
could always shrink in our family of nesting  
dolls, where one figure swallowed another  
even smaller. I was the tiniest of them all:

compressed piece  
of pulp—what's left  
after the others opened  
their wood bellies wide.

I don't want to swallow my own child.  
If I did, how could I breathe?

# Alive

Eileen Favorite

The second time it happened I was around four.  
I was in the Tyrell's foyer, staring at myself

in their mirrored coat closet. I pointed at myself,  
*I am you. You are me.* This knowledge made me

giddy. It was early June, full sun in the trees. I  
heard the whine of a lawn mower. The other kids

splashed in the pool, or banged Ping Pong balls  
around the basement, while I smiled shyly

at the girl in the mirror. This is my face.  
These are the eyes they see when they see me.

These cheeks, these teeth. I'd discovered  
a marvelous friend, and after introducing

myself to myself, I whispered,  
*Mommy's at home, but we're all here.*

Then I hushed myself, watched my finger press  
my own lips, when I heard Margie's footsteps.

*Dancers*  
Dorothy Gillespie  
Collection of: Radford University  
Art Museum, Radford, VA





## Canoeing in Moonlight

Jack Greer

A splash and the canoe feels its skin  
drifts the way fate carries everything:  
the old, the young, the unfulfilled  
all melting as a glacier melts, full  
of nothing more substantial than time

here the Algonquin floated in moonlight  
sparked by sharp cry of screech owl  
what questions did they ask the moon  
what favors did they seek for peace  
or war or power or desire?

tonight the drum beats slowly  
hidden in the chest, all peoples  
*discovered*, meaning nowhere  
left to hide

come down to the creek  
where we can begin again, the canoe  
waiting to take us in like something  
better than time, something that floats  
with the moon and does not, like all else  
fall through

## Miss Smith

Ed Meek

I've always counted myself lucky  
to have had Miss Smith.

My third-grade teacher knew  
the secret of numbers and shared it with us.  
In addition to adding and subtracting,  
we learned to multiply and divide.

We chanted the tables  
until columns of figures  
marched together in unison.  
We learned the value of math  
when Miss Smith passed  
her love of numbers on to us.  
Once we understood,

we understood how the world worked—  
how fortunes were made and lost.  
It has little, she taught us, to do with luck.



*Survival*

Tricia Peery

## Ode to a Pilgrim's Shoes

Phyllis Price

Here are my shoes:  
watermarked by pond and creek,  
soles embossed with stones and soil,  
stained with grass and animal scat,  
worn uneven plodding steep terrain,  
bottom land, peripheries of hills,  
a dusting of ragweed pollen,  
sticky with sap from trampling  
forest floors.

Here are my shoes:  
worn out from dancing and dawdling,  
standing on tiptoe, rocking on heels,  
shifting, stomping, pacing,  
twirling a toe in anxious anticipation,  
kicking obstructions  
I knew could not be coerced.

Thick leather and cumbersome soles  
hinder my journey now.  
El Caminos and country lanes, dead ends  
I thought would lead to crossroads,  
old itineraries,  
creased and faded maps—  
now obsolete.



*Hearthfire*

Meredith S Peverill

## Origins

Connie Jordan Green

*I have made myself a tribe  
out of my true affections ...”  
--Stanley Kunitz*

I come into my tribe unknowing,  
thrum of a soul unhoused—

they feed, clothe me,  
teach me to breathe,  
show me light—

I am the hum of hives, a vine  
spread over old home sites,  
ivy whose green late frost cannot dull.

They hand me words—  
first sounds a murmur, song shaped,  
vowels of longing, consonants of survival.

Sealed within the sacs of my lungs,  
cased in every brain cell, my tribe  
in my fingerprints on a windowpane—

at nightfall, one last fire to ward off chill,  
to brighten the darkening sky.

## All Horses Speak Polish

Adriana Rewald

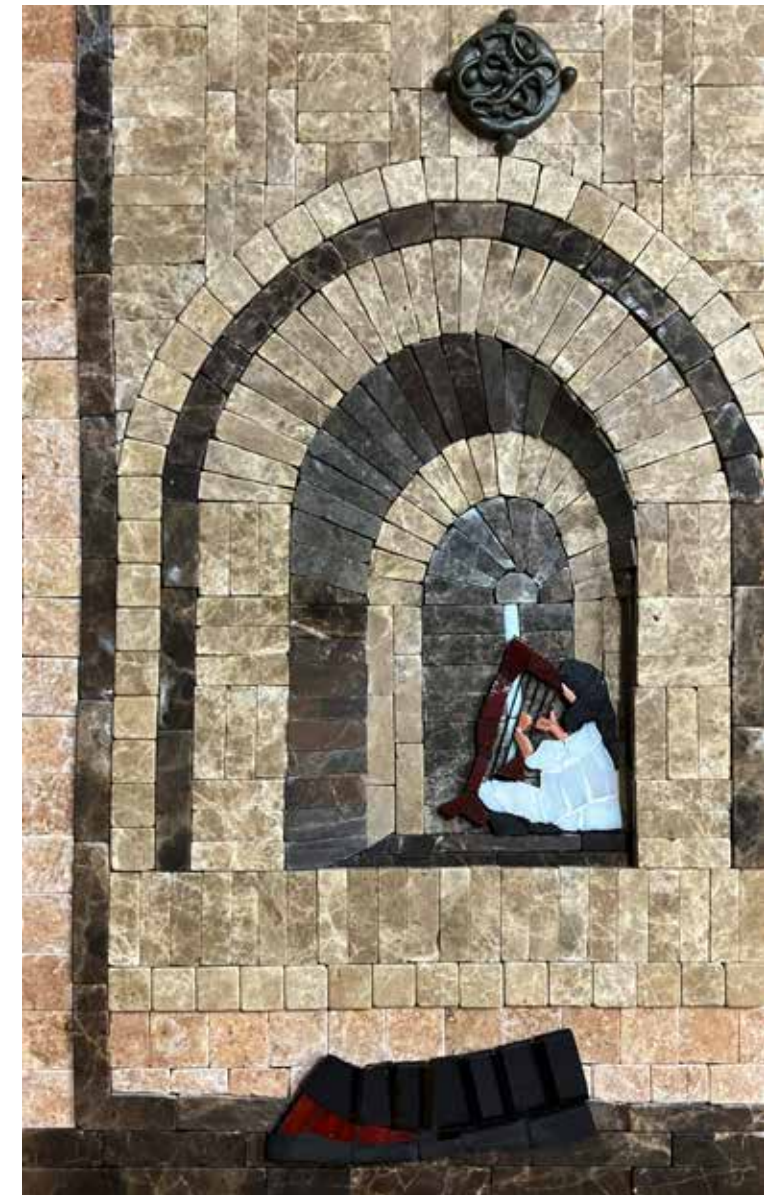
They know my misshapen  
grammar, mottled  
diction, slick silver screen  
lilt. Horses hear it all,  
swiveling ears with disapproval,  
expelling hot air into my shoulder.  
They know those earthen  
digraphs, vowels scooped  
from the back of the nose and throat  
where muscle memory curls  
around an ancient dialect,  
mud-pact: Slavs and equines  
migrating together out of Scythia and Sarmatia  
into forests, into worlds,  
while I squeeze out fat tears  
over the declension of *Belgrad*,  
*Seul*, *Wirginia*, *Kanton*, wherever I claim  
to have misplaced my tongue.  
Horses call bullshit, and rightfully  
amble around the ring at their own pace,  
my heels digging into their haunches  
no more menacing than  
my silly linguistic *szum*.

## Sometimes the Breeze

Katherine Chantal

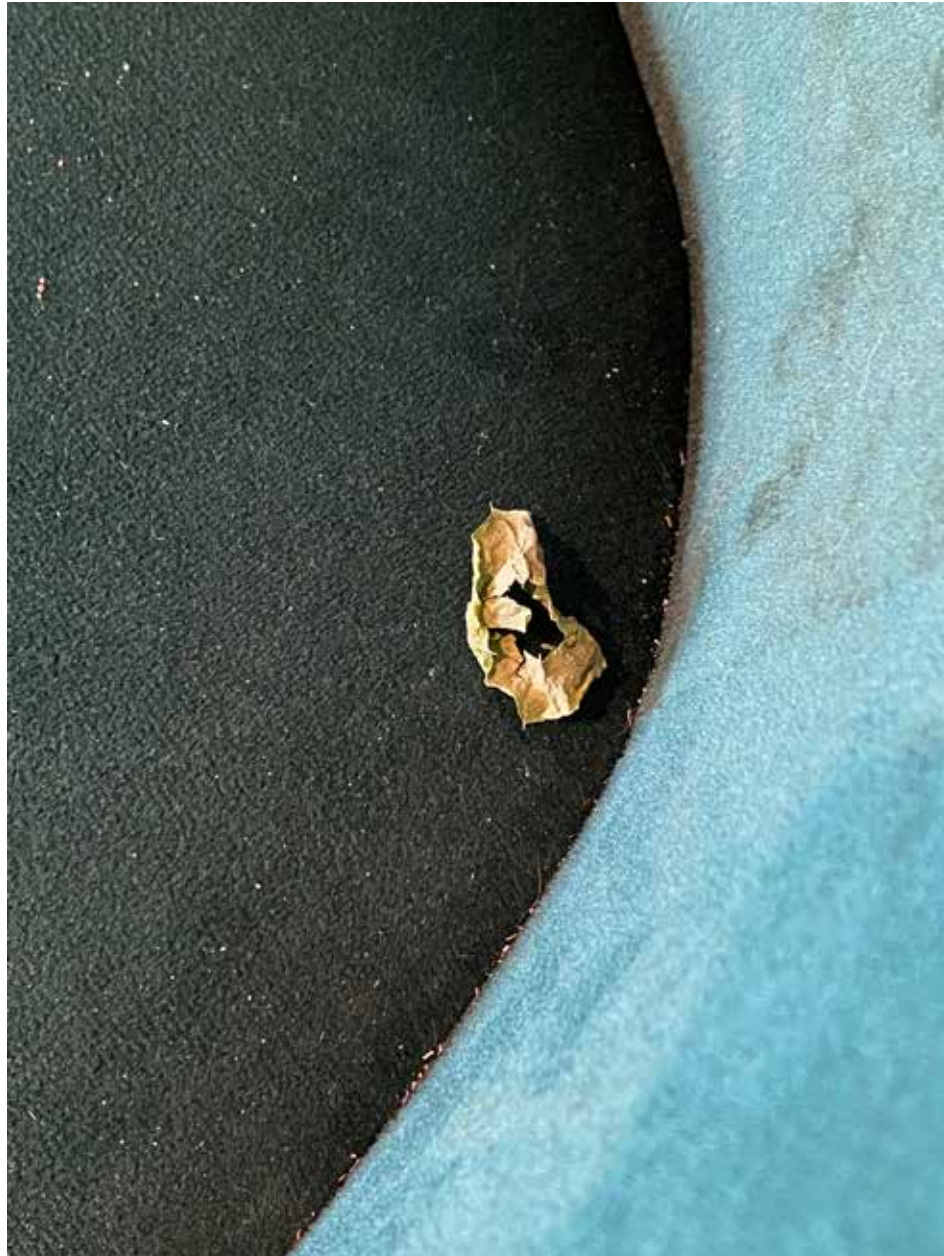
Sometimes the on  
The wind, the sun  
Streaming through trees  
The smallest flower bud,  
The bird song  
A child's laugh  
A spiders web  
An ocean wave  
A spring rain  
Are the soundings of  
Presence  
Without words

Sometimes, it is the  
Silence within that  
Bespokes the loudest  
Presence of all that  
Surrounds us is home  
The place I am NOW  
Is where I begin



*String Sounds from Jaffa  
Gate, Jerusalem*

Dotti Stone



*Crescent Drift*

Maja Bosen

## A New Beginning

Erika Joyner

Frustration contorts my face  
as I view my image in the mirror,  
a bra around my chest  
and a penis between my legs.  
My brow softens as I realize  
this is simply who I am today.

The vault's dial  
softly ticks its notches  
past the pointer until,  
almost imperceptibly,  
a pawl drops with a subtle click.

I have filled half my closet  
with dresses, skirts, blouses worn  
only in the presence of myself  
as the moans  
of my yearning to be free  
echo loudly around the room.

The dial reverses direction  
and continues to tick its marks  
just so far...  
until the second pawl  
drops quietly into place.

I am driving the final load of my  
earnestly packed, incomplete life to  
what will be my second birth place,  
the launch site where  
I will christen myself  
into my true identity.

The dial, moving clockwise again,  
ticks steadily around  
fate's chosen path and  
with a confirming click,  
the third pawl drops.

The vault door swings open . . .

Sunlight bathes my face  
as I walk out into the world,  
a woman.

## Road Trip

Sherry Poff

The engineers who designed America's  
highway system might have studied  
my grandmother's quilts,

adopted her vision of neat parallel lines  
running across a landscape  
dotted with flowers and rolling hills.

I wonder, did they labor as she did,  
backs aching, eyes squinting  
as they bent over their plans?

Did they measure each cut with care,  
imagining generations to come—  
people they might never know

who would find ease and comfort  
from their work? Did they pause  
to feel the sun on their faces

gazing into clear skies, as bright  
as their own blue eyes? Did they  
work in love? Did they  
think of me?





## Monument

Natasha Trethewey

Today the ants are busy  
     beside my front steps, weaving  
 in and out of the hill they're building.  
     I watch them emerge and—

like everything I've forgotten—disappear  
     into the subterranean—a world  
 made by displacement. In the cemetery  
     last June, I circled, lost—

weeds and grass grown up all around—  
     the landscape blurred and waving.  
 At my mother's grave, ants streamed in  
     and out like arteries, a tiny hill rising

above her untended plot. Bit by bit,  
     red dirt piled up, spread  
 like a rash on the grass; I watched a long time  
     the ants' determined work,

how they brought up soil  
     of which she will be part,  
 and piled it before me. Believe me when I say  
     I've tried not to begrudge them

their industry, this reminder of what  
     I haven't done. Even now,  
 the mound is a blister on my heart,  
     a red and humming swarm.

## Equinox, Fall 2025

Ron Smith

This year the sliver's slip of darkness  
brings me elemental dread. Never  
before have I felt this, that the tilt  
toward the shadow really might not  
right itself, rouse itself from winter's depths  
and turn us toward the light again.  
Down here, taking our cue from the celestial,  
we allow darkness its equal time, then more,  
negation to burgeon, to swell its lack  
until exhaustion, like a red giant swallowing  
the fleet inner planets and our own, finding  
its limit, before collapsing upon itself  
into the dwarfed whiteness of loss.

"My country is dying" I've heard twice this week.  
And nations arm themselves, bare their teeth.  
More than a country is dying, the Equinox  
whispers every year, but this year the lips  
are at my ear, a villainous hiss of malice  
that comes even in the gloom of dreams.

*"Equinox, Fall 2025" was first published in Style.*



*Music as Visual Form - the Chromatic Scale*

Carolyn Deck



*West Virginia Cotton*

Lisa Plummer

## Gunnar's Painting

Gunilla Theander Kester

I am still in the old house sans spiders and webs  
a house emptied twice but the fireplace still warm  
from burnt bills, letters and articles. I lift my eyes to watch  
the clouds run by and something troubles them, my eyes,

as I lower my head and see a river among trees floating by  
fast and deep, a horse bending his soft muzzle into the water  
every muscle shiny, defined, his coat vibrant and alive and I  
am happy because I know this place, this river, how the road

follows it and Grandpa Enok driving, my father and I in the back  
*Stop!* shouts my great uncle and points among the trees, grabs  
his worn kit of oils, his simple wooden easel, paints green  
and blue with broad brushstrokes brave and surprising.

We rest on some rocks with Enok's bottles of beer.  
It takes some time, but we allow our artist to be the seer.

## a little life

Katryn Broadoak

my ninth great grandparent  
was one of over two thousand  
all related to me

twelve generations  
spanning four hundred years  
produces just shy of five thousand ancestors  
whose existence was required  
in order for you to be born

you are the outcome of all those lives  
all those moments  
all those choices  
you are the thriving embodiment  
of their greatest hope

perhaps I digress but my thoughts turn  
to the late eaglets so many were obsessed with  
whose nest fell, after 22 years in a tree  
how many eagles live their whole lives  
out there in nature, as a bonded pair  
raising babies for decades of nesting seasons  
no wildlife camera, no witness,  
never once observed by human consciousness  
their trials and struggles, their triumphs unseen

there is a sadness, but also a kind of beauty  
in the interconnectedness,  
the anonymity  
of one small life



*A Great Cloud*

Therry Neilsen-Steinhardt

# The Handover

Ann Goethe

Heading North in the Memphis railroad station watching  
my baby bottle rolling, rolling over black and white tiles.  
Not yet two, I was slung over my thirteen year old aunt's  
shoulder seeing the roll that she did not see. That kid and  
me riding on the train they called "The City of New Orleans."  
Down home, my father looked for work, my mother was  
gestating, taking a break, innocent of attachment disorder.  
Carried into a house of strangers, their blood in my toddler  
body, passed around like an heirloom belonging to nobody  
in a strange land where summer lasted only three months.



*Origins*

Jesse Ehrenberg

# On leaving the church

Anne Simonetti Deaton

i heard rumbling in the distance  
storm clouds clawing at a dark horizon  
thunderbolts sparking doubts  
questions that stretched to breaking  
stirring up pain and anguish  
mine and yours  
your eyes narrowed in worry  
mine widened to sweep the landscape

well-trodden paths in mind and heart  
rapidly crumbled into unsure footing  
what might be lost if I ascended this mountain?  
who might be lost when I returned?  
still, I climbed, I climbed  
gulping the fresh air  
drawn to a new baptism  
grateful for a new dawning

is it not enough to be compared to lilies in the field  
why insist we alone are temples of the Holy Spirit  
is that not the domain shared by all creatures?  
for what "sins" beyond hurting one another  
or polluting this living planet and the air we breathe  
have we come to believe salvation is required?

who, save ourselves, is needed to repair human  
transgression?  
who, save ourselves, is called to forgive and heal?



*A Fragile Glimmer in the Darkness*

Stuart Gunter

## If Nothing Else

Eric Brown

The other side of a dash,  
the way the radio station  
the space in the cupboard  
was stored, the rocks and sea-  
from the shore, all this absence  
and missed, all these relics  
person you kissed, the one  
soft on your lips. If nothing  
the hard flint-chips of bliss.

every missing sock,  
blanks out after dark,  
where the bone china  
docks that disappear  
I've felt for, longed for,  
of love lost like the first  
who pulled away slowly,  
else they left you

# The Horse I Ride in On

Gyorgyi Voros

*Who* is the deep pool stone steps  
lead down into. Lacquered  
shimmer of a cold, cold dark,  
clear as tea, as tears.  
Face wavers  
on its rippling surface.

To dive is to drown. Not to  
is to be as the long-legged  
water strider,  
bullseye footprints  
vanishing as they go.

*Am* is the horse I ride. Its names  
are ample: Arrogance, Ardor.  
Its gait is insistence,  
insistence, insistence.

It comes between be  
and not-to-be.  
Astride, I'm in my tower fortress.  
It's my vote, my raised hand  
waving. Together,  
we race over time's  
pitted surface, leap the bush  
that wants to burn, ignite it with  
the torch I hold aloft.

*I* is identity theft. *Who, who?* it keens.  
Owl in the woods who won't  
let the questions be, who  
floats overhead silently, whose  
gargantuan gaze beams  
a cone of light into a wall  
of dark, as though  
the seen and unseen  
were not one but two.

*Now* is a knife-edge. It cuts the feet  
teetering between  
was and will-be.

And if the horse bolts?  
And if I fall?  
And if I were to drop the torch?



*Darkest Before the Dawn*

Nell Favret Boyle

# How We Learned to Speak

Deborah Buchanan

The birds were our teachers,  
clear notes shining in air.  
We heard sound and  
a shimmer of meaning.

We listened, wanting  
the same rise and fall,  
a murmur between one and another,  
the surprise of sharing.

A snake smooth in the reeds  
with whisper and breath,  
a rattling of dry weeds,  
the skin’s hiss on the ground.

The rain rushing, splattering  
against leaves and rock,  
the fall of voices rivering  
deep into our bones.

We pulled the earth’s music  
into our bodies, harmonies  
becoming syntax and grammar,  
a long root.

Our voices hang in the air,  
speaking to the birds,  
each syllable a song,  
a communion.



*Untitled*  
Dorothy Gillespie

Dorothy Gillespie, *Untitled*, 1962,  
Enamel paint on cut aluminum  
(multicolored), 96 x 30 in.  
Taubman Museum of Art Permanent  
Collection, Gift of the Dorothy M.  
Gillespie Foundation in Honor of the  
Museum’s 75th Anniversary, 2025.040

Image by Richard Boyd, Boyd Pearman  
Photography  
Image courtesy of the Dorothy M.  
Gillespie Foundation

*7 Stage Development*

Joni Pienkowski

Joni Pienkowski, 7 Stage Development, 2019, mixed media and woodburning on hollow core door, 80 x 24 x 2 in. Taubman Museum of Art Permanent Collection, Gift of The Secular Society, 2025.003

Image by Richard Boyd, Boyd Pearman Photography  
Image courtesy of the artist



*Chinensis X*

Hunt Slonem

Hunt Slonem, *Chinensis X*, 2025, oil on canvas, 28.5 x 33.5 in. (framed 36.5 x 41 in.)

Taubman Museum of Art Permanent Collection, Gift of the Artist in Honor of the Museum's 75th Anniversary, 2025.037

Image courtesy of the artist

# Last Advent in Space

Katherine Soniat

By her last journey in space, she feels buoyantly  
expansive,  
less worried with vines on the fences below.

\*  
Floating-word games. Yellowed pages of books  
signal  
little. Reading backwards could be the loft of the future.

\*  
Once she discovered her kingdom’s bluely  
webbed  
code, she saw clouds always have left space for dreaming.

\*  
Betting on everything at once counts as daring. How  
much  
do you have to know, anyway—at the beginning?

\*  
Increasing ownership is hard work on earth. Broken  
homes.  
Sleepless nights, while an owl dives down.

\*

Puzzles simply don’t fall back together. If nothing else, they  
hold  
room for what’s no longer evident.

\*  
Lots of tracks say hush Who in the world can name a  
fragrance  
beforehand? Fly-by-night gave birth to haphazard.

\*  
Sounds express best what owls like to hear. Creature-  
scurryin the dry leaves. Nothing ends a poem like trying.



*The Sun, The Moon, and Me*

Elaine Fleck

## Yes, You

Cynthia Lollar

Hey, you – pontificating at your telescope.  
And you, muttering over your scripture.  
Yes, *you*.  
Sit down and shut up.

We have something to serve you.

Take a seat on this genesis bench – we’re not sure  
If it’s expanding or contracting or created,  
But you have a special place there that’s all yours.

Tuck that spacetime-stitched napkin of awe  
Under your chin – there, where your voice hovers  
(Silent now) over the holy heart that stirs you.

Our geologist will bring you plates and cups  
Made of metamorphic rock formed six thousand  
Or four billion years ago to miraculous effect.  
Careful! That platter of sublime matter is hot.

Our martyr will light the candelabra with  
Her flaming hands made glorious by  
The Great Metaphor whose power to console  
Is matched only by its power to disquiet.

Over there in that starlit corner? That’s  
Our mathematician shouldering and tuning  
His violin to entertain and stun you with an infinite  
Harmonic sequence of steadily diminishing fractions.

Our muftis, our rabbis, our shamans, our nuns,  
Our gurus, our lamas, our pastors, our saints  
Are sous cheffing right now in robust humility  
So you may feast without choking or shame.

Our chemist will start you off with wonder bread –  
Spongy with enzymatic action performed  
On ancient microbes that fantastically multiply  
Until they die for the sake of oven spring.

Next the main course. We hope you like quarks  
sautéed in eureka butter with just a  
Soupçon of doubt – just enough to fill your bellies  
With curiosity and leave you panging for more.

It’s natural to crave something sweet, even when  
You’re deathly full. Try this slice of revered  
Reality, a microscopically layered marvel of truth.  
Don’t worry, it’s piety-free. No one will bloat.

Contrary to orthodoxy, only now is the time to rise  
For a toast. Open your throats, loosen your tongues.  
Let us all lift our glasses of mindlight and say:

“How divine, the great mysteries! How divine!”

## The View from 42

Emily Aruna Teitsworth

I've learned it's okay to accrue the right kind of enemies,  
that sometimes forgetting feels better than forgiveness.  
That dawn is my favorite time of day, even though I'm rarely awake  
early enough to watch the birds follow their hunger up into the fog.

I've learned I'd rather hike than climb rocks,  
that quiet people can still fear solitude and the silence of others.  
It's true that women are trivialized until they turn 35  
and ignored after. That Wayfarer sunglasses and Ella Fitzgerald  
will never go out of style, and that forgoing avocado toast  
isn't going to lift my generation out of debt.

Writing this in a suburban stripmall cafe, I can admit  
I've learned to keep my "never ever" list very short,  
and to give up judging the things I disdained when I was 24.  
I've learned that some hearts deserve to be broken,  
and if you're brave enough to live honestly, yours will be too.  
"Kindness is not weakness, and love wins the long game,"  
my friend wrote, while her mother was dying.  
I'm still learning to believe that too.

I've learned there's no god but our own divinity, that injustices  
chase our children while tyrants always live  
to see themselves grow old. That self-awareness ages us  
and letting go of self-consciousness keeps us young.  
I've learned I always need an animal in the house  
and a patch of grass where I can lie down and watch the clouds.  
I've learned I'll never be a musician and that my voice  
sounds best when I'm singing my son to sleep. That rest precedes  
and follows endurance, and tastes like honey on my tongue.

I've learned I have a weakness for tequila and rage  
for unfairness. That I will always strive to find the balance  
between me and you, between the world and us, between words  
and the blank page that disappears ahead of me as I write.



*Hope*

Martha A Olson



*Learning To Fly*

Gwen Cates

## Erato Succumbs to AI Slop

Bill Glose

She was there when Sappho wept tears  
of blood, when Homer sent Odysseus

on a decade-long voyage to reunite  
with his wife, when Mozart scored the first

of his symphonies at eight years old.  
Lost now is the joy from inspiring others,

her whispers ignored by ears plugged  
with air pods, by minds transfixed

by glowing screens clutched in palms.  
Occasionally, a poet will heed her song

and pen a flurry of lyrical stanzas,  
an artist will paint a mural portraying

the malaise emptying our streets.  
But mostly, her nudges go unnoticed

or are passed along to AI chatbots  
that churn out soulless solutions in seconds.

Frustrations multiply until she can barely think  
of an encouraging word. It's like, it's like—

oh, she knows this one. It's right there, tantalizing,  
taunting, hovering just out of reach.

## Child's Play

Shutta Crum

sitting crisscross applesauce  
in the star-fields of the Lord  
she rolls a planet one way, then another  
drops a moon to see if it bounces  
pulls the string on a spiral galaxy,  
to watch the suns shoot out as it unspools

all while humming a reed-thin song—  
a canticle vibrating in the heavens  
above this humble pile of toys

it's endlessly entertaining  
in the palm of a playful hand



*Emergence*

Teri Hoover

# In The Beginning

Ayn Cates Sullivan

In the beginning, there was a first dawn.  
The sunlight rippled across the vast seas  
And the red mouths of volcanoes  
Created land upon which we could walk.  
The Moon sent her cooling rays,  
And the planets sang to Gaia.  
She was born full of visions.  
I pause to listen to the birdsongs,  
To observe the play of the air spirits.  
Become the light, they whisper.  
How does soma become light,  
Unless we are light  
Dimmed by thoughts and words.  
Sunbeams spark their way to me.  
Who am I?  
The Sun seems suspended in the blue air  
Golden rays flow across my chair,  
Waves of yellow and gold play on my slippers.  
Everywhere, I am touched by the light.  
The world seems ablaze  
With flowers blossoming beneath the ice.  
Observing the eternal play of life  
I become a glimmer of light  
Seeing my first dawn.



*Back to the Beginning to Begin Again*

Suzanne V. Paddock



How to Heal from Family Trauma

Jane Gabrielle

# Autobiography

Mary Jo McLaughlin

I am from a notch in the bend of the river, from bottom land and whirlpools. I am from black walnuts and tribes of deer at twilight, from apple trees and the bees that suck their blemished fruit and sting the feet of children.

I am from vigorous July gardens and jars holding a thousand tastes of summer in the dark of December. I am from big snows and little churches. From hymns, memorized catechisms, and narrow-lipped warnings that Christians don't swear. From covered dishes offered after wakes and dark wreaths on front doors announcing the presence of the dead.

I am from wild flame azaleas in woods near home places, great-aunts in their practical cardigans and braids the color of steel clipping branches, bringing in blooms. I am from August morning fogs and spider webs wet with September. From crow feathers and hoot owls, from elderberries and ramps.

I am the story of my father's Royal typewriter, his fingers on its worn keys typing a master's thesis against all odds. From my mother's promises tucked in his desk, her red, red lipstick and infinite kiss caught in the crease of a blue-inked letter.

I am the remnant of the years before the fractured windshield, the crumpled Pontiac, the splintered heart of the parent who remained.

I am from beliefs and legends, sermons and lies.

I am from cemeteries on the side of a hill, the ravens forever swooping and calling, and where all the names on the stones are familiar.

# Forty Years after the War

Jane Goette

January 26, 2015

It is midnight in the old farm house  
the night the snow storm does not come.  
I blow out candles, turn off lights,  
tip-toe up the steps to where you lie  
beneath the eaves in a cloud of quilts,  
quiet as the whisper of snow  
on trees and frozen pond,  
light as the dust in the old barn,  
heavy as the patience of cows and history,  
sweet as dreams of summer's green.

I slip the forty-year letter of myself  
into the envelope of your body,  
seal it with a kiss, and mail us  
to the other side of the world and history.

*Dear Love, I whisper into your hair,  
See the rice fields, the shimmering water?  
The boats in the Mekong loaded with fruit?  
Look at the streets of Hanoi and Saigon.  
Hear the crowds of motorbikes beeping?  
Ninety million people hurrying, as if  
toward a history—too long delayed.*

It doesn't matter what the governments say  
today or forty years ago, here or there.  
In the end the only true thing is the sun.  
Everything ripens with time and patience,  
the pilot and the protester.



*Mycelium*

Leslie Porter Mathews



## purple deadnettle

Flossie Hedges

we have been here  
since the black earth opened  
her million scattered mouths.

it's just that sometimes  
we need rest, time to shed  
the stingers from our indecorous hairs

and to let the sun-spark of spring  
soak us through the scrim  
of living soil.

when we're ready,  
we'll join our verdant palms,  
build a home in our orchid image.

## Egg Test

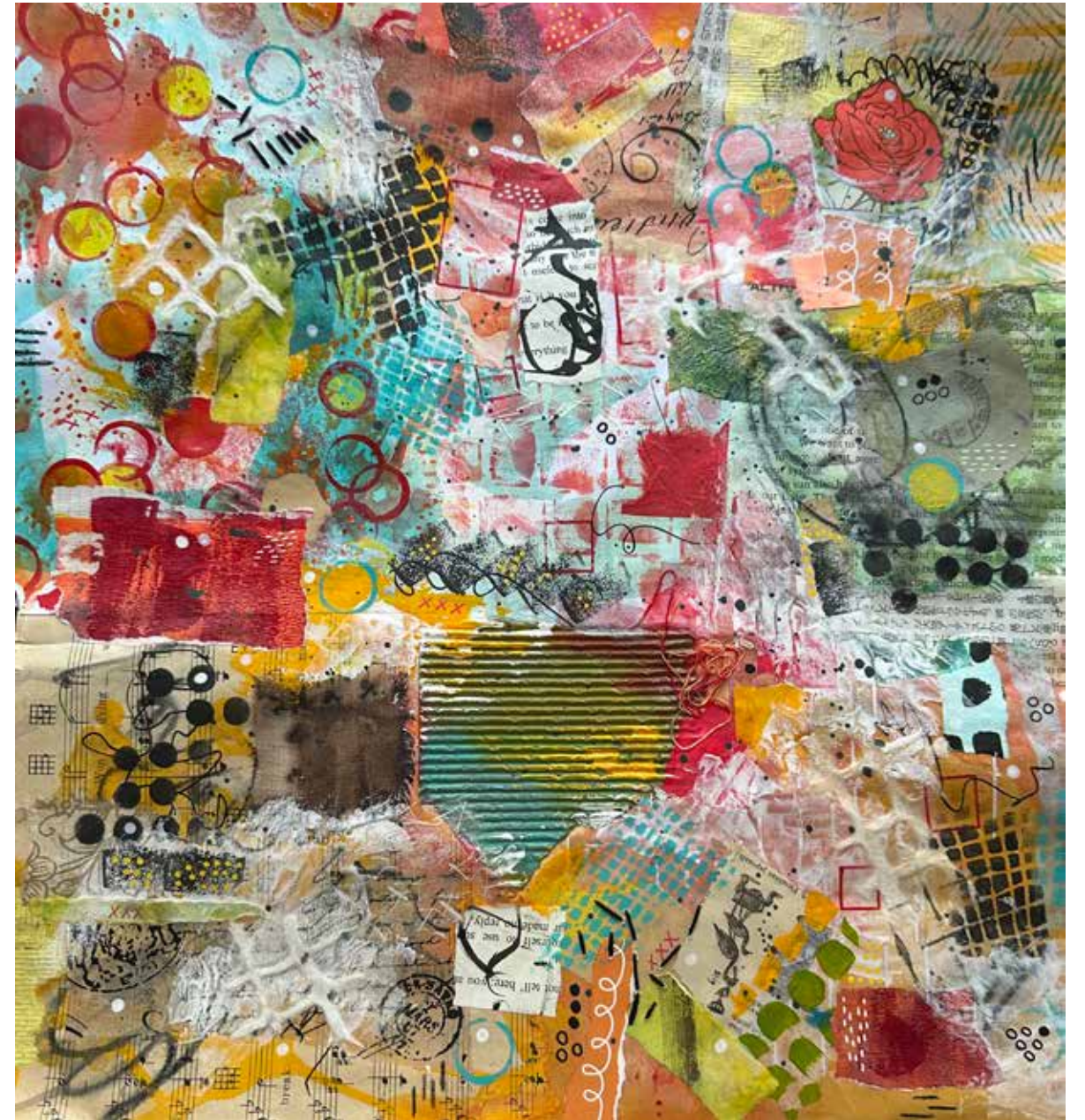
April J. Asbury

I press the cool shell against my forehead  
like the back of my mother's hand, then slide  
it over my cheekbones, let it rest  
in the hollow of my throat. Top of shoulders,  
curve of clavicles, as many knobs of spine  
as I can reach myself. There is no one to help me.

Does it matter if the egg is cold? If its protections  
were sprayed away, as Americans do? If the shell  
is white or brown, blue or stamped? Yolk freckled  
with blood, hints of a randy rooster—no. Flecks  
are a Sign of Powerful Malediction.

I roll the egg over my shoulders, elbows, wrists.  
Inner arms and upper arms, palms and fingers,  
stomach and thighs. Every bone Ezekial preached,  
down to my dirty arches. At last I crack

egg into water, let a swirl of albumen  
unfold, transparent as wet silk.  
Fine threads of chalazae unspool,  
and the soft yellow yolk  
falls to rest in the curve of glass.



*Pieces of my Heart*

Audrey Fish Pfeifer

# Cave

Robert H. Frost

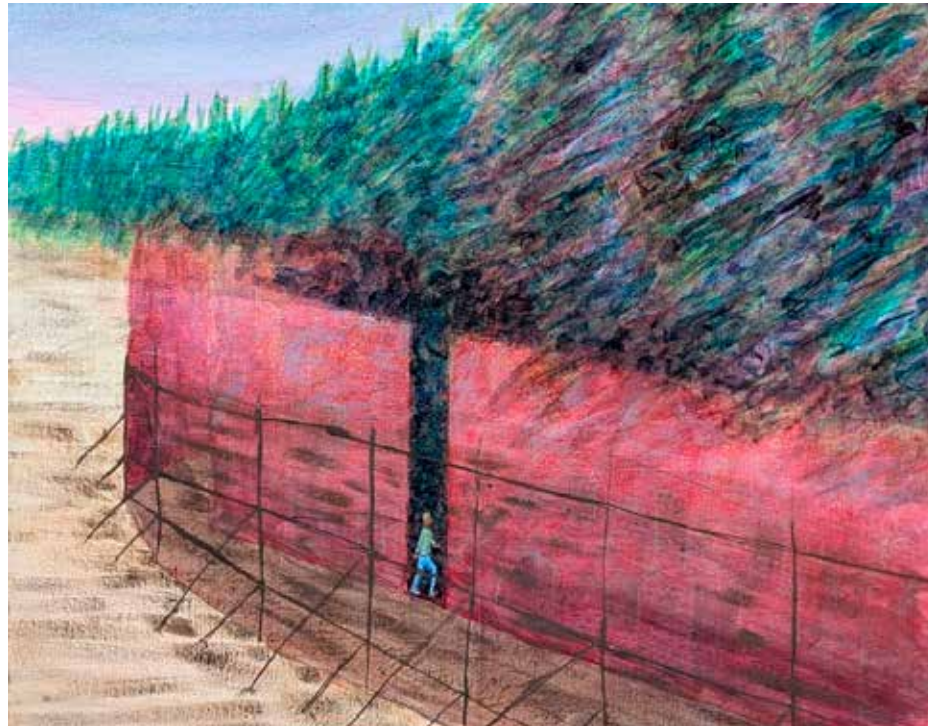
In my world  
are endless doors  
passages that stretch for  
miles with vaults for rooms  
in carved stone hid beneath.

I lie curled, chambered deep  
within its shell along with things  
I need while braced for thieves  
who come with slashing teeth.

I wake to wish it so; comfort to  
believe no one knows here real  
treasure lies where new seed  
grows and hope yet clings.

A place where I can be  
delivered safe for my  
release, not unlike  
the one from you  
whereupon once

I  
came.



*Moment of Leaving the Old Path*

Walter Neilsen

# Liturgical

Bruce P Spang

“Come on, that’s a boy,” I say,  
holding the harness for Timmy.  
He ducks his head. I slip it on,  
pull the strap under his chest,  
and snap the catch shut. Then

off we go down Willow Bend, him  
tugging the leash, down one hill, up  
another, past houses with lawns  
meticulously kept like green carpets.

He’ll lift his leg at mailboxes, shrubs,  
tuffs of grass. Each night the same  
walk, the same time to poop and pee,  
predictable as lines from a book of

common prayer. We walk, noting  
what calls us to this world, in cold,  
heat, rain, snow, down the paved  
road, up the other side, man and beast

keeping our appointed hours, honoring  
the pattern, the urgency to be on time,  
to traverse this common road with others,  
out to do the same, whom we greet, let

the noses sniff snout to snout, back end,  
underneath, then move on, waving at  
those on the porch who wave back  
as if we’re doing something holy.

## the green beans

Pam Campbell

tell me they grow best in full sun,  
pod full to bursting, doubled over,  
waiting for rough fingers to harvest them

tell me of yesteryears dew whilst I waltz  
pre-soaked seeds in the furrows I draw  
with Mammaw's hoe, now mine

tell me the clock is dripping time against  
the sunrise whilst I hand-close the dirt over  
Kentucky Wonders, the bean Mammaw grew

tell me Mammaw's palm ghosts mine on this burial  
ground, closed over the bones of all that came before me,  
swelled in conversation with water and sun.

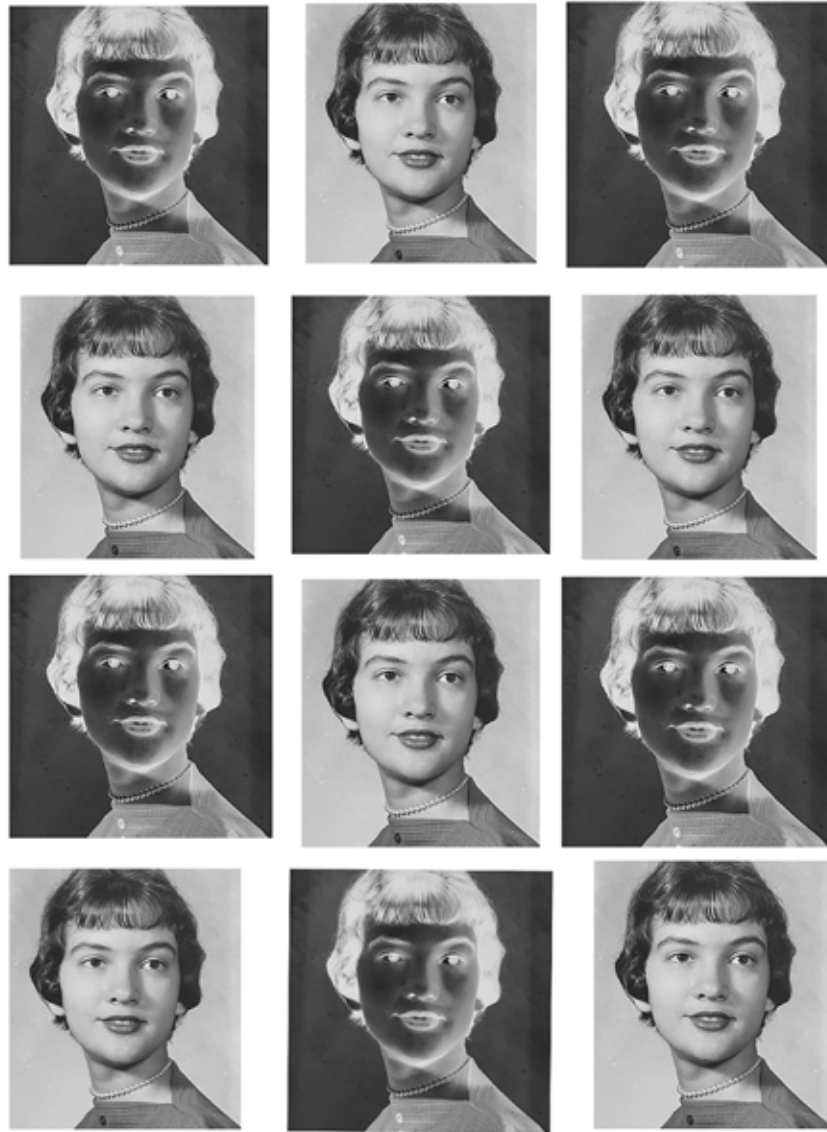
tell me promise abounds in slow-cooking until heaped  
high on Fiesta Ware plates topped with slivers of raw  
onion, chow-chow, and crumbled buttermilk corn bread

tell me the abundant flavor in family  
blood born and found



*Her Smile*

Carl John Castillo



*My Mom*

Kevin Rose Schultz

## Mother's Day

Carol Grametbauer

and the remnants of the clouds disperse  
 not long after breakfast, leaving the sky  
 a porcelain blue, just what she'd have liked.  
 All the ghosts of years past line up in my memory  
 as they always do on the second Sunday in May,  
 bearing their gifts, their soft eyes focused  
 not here but on other times and places.  
 They've brought with them all the flowers,  
 her daffodils of April, her peonies, the lilac bush  
 she planted as a twig. The bed along the front porch  
 that she dug herself and filled with hostas, coleus,  
 autumn ferns. They've brought food, her chicken  
 and rice, the chocolate meringues she always made  
 for Christmas. The lamb cake she baked one Easter,  
 whose head kept falling off and had to be shored up  
 with toothpicks. Their pale arms overflow  
 with hardback books, Broadway soundtracks on vinyl.  
 The butterfly Halloween costume she made for me  
 the year I was nine, its brilliant cheesecloth wings.

As always, the offerings overwhelm, an embarrassment  
 of riches. At dusk the wraiths begin to drift away  
 toward the setting sun, to their realm of faded images,  
 indistinct voices. Off into the gray distance  
 but never far away.

# Beware of Metaphors

Sylvia Ramos Cruz

On my recent return to Puerto Rico, island home I was plucked from at age 12, my husband and I stopped by la plaza de Isabela. Pueblo square laid out by conquistadores just as they did wherever they set their heavy boots on—Catholic church reaching to the heavens on one side, alcaldía and government buildings tending to the people on another, and a bevy of one and two-story homes and businesses lining the other two. Crews were setting up carnival rides for the upcoming fair in front of la iglesia San Antonio de Padua where I, a non-believer now, was baptized as a baby.

*I remember being taken at age 8 to have my straight hair electric-curled at the beauty shop above the pharmacy. My mother thought my hair too muerto, not at all the lively, curly (but not too curly) pelo Puertorriqueñas should have. (She did like that it was almost blonde.) I sat facing the church praying I would not be electrocuted—after all, at my tender age, I had not yet committed any mortal sins—while salón owner Doña Gloria and Mami lost themselves in gossip about Isabela’s saints and sinners.*

We stood on the square where circa 1940 the annual mating etiquette, rhythm and ritual of those times took place when la fiesta patronal descended on the town to honor San Antonio for his blessings. My future mother and her girlfriends, arms linked, two by two, walked to the right while my not-yet-father and amigos moved left. Each group rounding the plaza una y otra vez in opposite directions. Flashing neon lights and music from the Ferris wheel and stage adding other-worldly tones to their flushed cheeks, glint to their eyes, and sultry swing to their hips. As they crossed paths, girls in carefully starched and pressed cotton dresses would look demurely down (perhaps upturn the edges of their coreopsis-stained lips, slightly), while boys presented their brilliantined hair and scrubbed faces fully to their audience. Both sets of adolescents shy and insecure about their worth as potential mates. Yet males, as always, unable to back down from their frontal posturing.

Little did my yet-to-be mom and dad realize their hormone-fueled circling would lead many steps later to rings of bitterness, rancor, melancolía, dolor, divorce. Would leave a passel of hijas wondering if love was so fragile when, as Papi told us, it was a little plant that needed frequent watering, lest it die. Wondering, why neither of them had quenched its thirst.

Leave cuatro niñas wondering how they would learn to care for any plant when not even their parents—grown-ups—could keep one alive. And they were not yet old enough even to care for themselves.

Leave me wondering if, as I have often said, I garden because I inherited my father’s two green thumbs that tenderly turned one-by-five-foot city dirt plots encased in concrete into gandules, cilantro, avocados, amaryllis and myriad other delights for the senses. Or if that lesson in loss was the soil on which my love of gardening bloomed. Leave me wondering, still, if that gran desilusión was the beginning of the end of faith for me.

thin  
as seedlings—  
trust

## A Child of the Neolithic

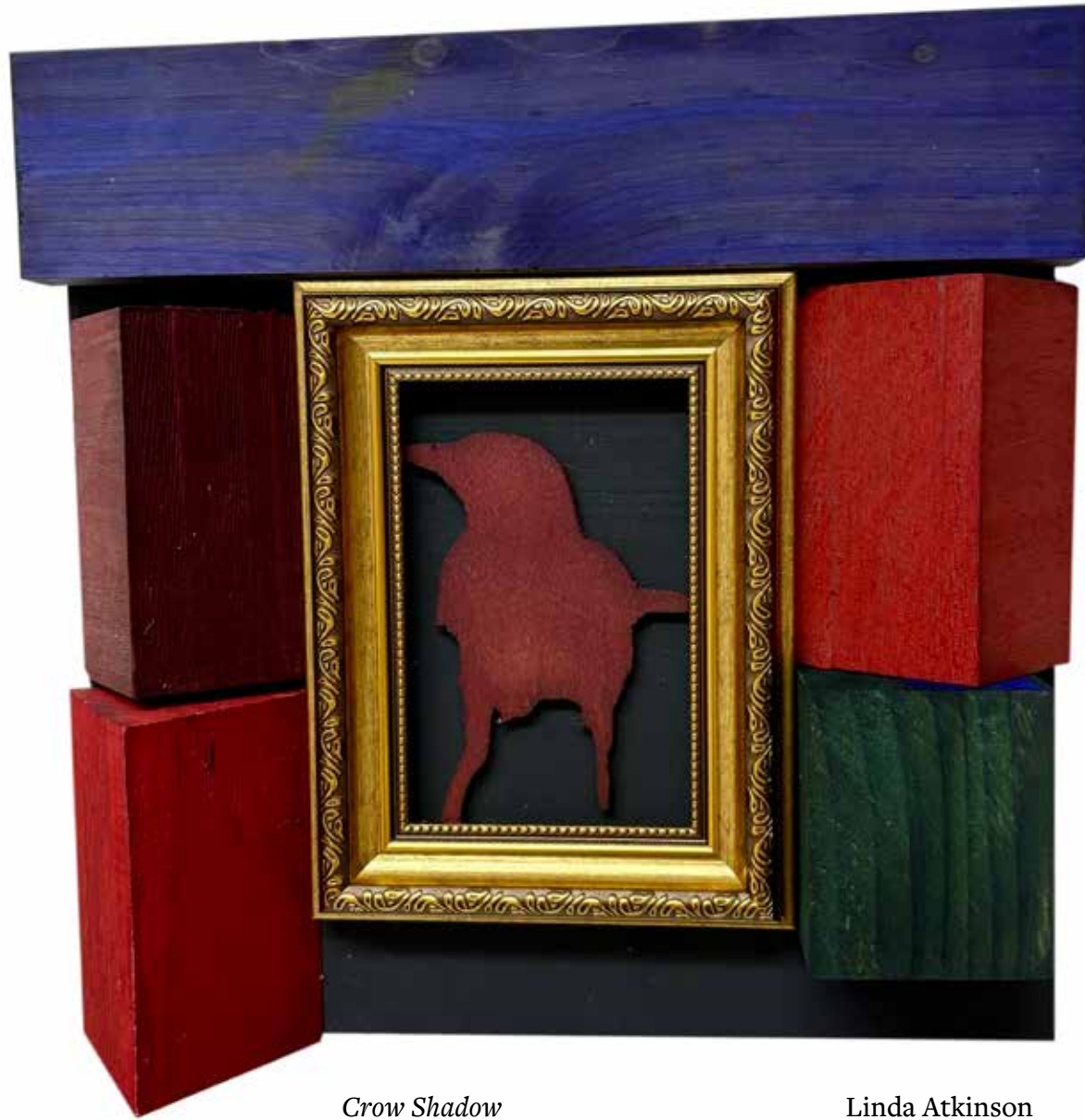
John Looker

Let us picture the child,  
this little apprentice human,  
naked but for a piece of hide.  
Old enough now  
to be assigned chores,  
she's meant to be gathering  
sticks for the fire.  
She's forgotten that:  
she's flat on her tummy  
humming, blocking the entrance  
of a low dwelling—here  
where the turf is trodden away.  
There's a dog nearby  
interrogating excrement.  
Goats, tethered. Hens.  
And figures bent, heads down,  
toiling in a vegetable garden.  
The child—  
lost in her own kindergarten—  
is scratching at the dirt  
with a bit of stick, the pink tip  
of her tongue thrust forward.  
She's ignoring calls;  
she is drawing on her page of earth.



*Sound of Waves like Freedom*

Paola Bidinelli



*Crow Shadow*

Linda Atkinson

## TURNING

Rachel Frazier

The garish green  
overabundance  
of summer's passion  
has spent itself  
in yellows and reds  
across the sidewalk.  
Now Autumn  
also passing away  
on the wings of geese.

Welcome winter  
season of starkness  
and clarity.  
Tree branches  
frame the negative spaces.  
It is quieter now  
The riotous chatter of birds  
gone.  
A lone mocking bird  
sings at dawn.  
Only the resilient remain.

Like  
the Great Blue Heron  
wintering on the banks of the river.  
Such a surprise to see him  
standing statuesque  
camouflaged in the  
dead limbs of trees.  
What miracle pulls my eye  
to that spot and allows me  
not to miss  
that moment?

## Now that you're gone, Patty Williford

there's a void I fall into as time idles  
aimlessly at the start of the day, unsure  
if I'm awake or still floating on fear laced dreams.  
I was a child in your arms not that long ago,  
or many lifetimes past, it's hard to say,  
when I cared not where I came from  
or how I would arrive here now, eyes wide  
open with questions, yours now sealed tight.

Did I inherit the fragility of your bones,  
the meekness of your tongue, your slanted view  
of the world, your conviction that we all  
should be separated into the haves and have nots?  
When I stand up for myself, do I dishonor  
the blind saint you wanted me to be?  
Regret is ripe on my tongue as I yearn to take back  
angry words uttered in rejection of who you were.

Now the seasons mark only sweat or chills,  
giving no credit to tears raining down  
my cheek or smiles remembering your face.  
The trees only gaze upward, ignoring me clinging  
to their roots, as I try to honor that which came  
before but cringe in the blemished soil that nurtures  
future buds, suddenly aware that I really don't know  
where I came from or where I go from here.



*Appalachian Circle*

Charlie Brouwer



*Red Sky at Night*

Susan Crave Rosen

## When You Left Us, We Became

Mary Redus

This was a hard thing, watching  
you die, as you wished, at home.  
Oh mom, we bundled you  
in your favorite quilt, rosary in your hand.  
We kept shifts in vigil  
always, always, two of us,  
one on either side, holding  
your hands. The rest of us  
trying to be quiet, so hard,  
when you raised us boisterous  
and full of laughter. In other rooms,  
stories flew, sibling to sibling,  
as you began your transformation  
into memory. Your body worked,  
cold and laboring, lingering,  
your letting go, so final. As your spirit flew,  
in that last breath, you became  
ancestor, and we found ourselves  
orphans, the eldest, matron.  
We faced each other, bereft  
a tsunami of grief sweeping over us,  
infants, only just learning to live  
lives without you.

## Among Trees & Rain in Southwest Virginia

Carolyn Kreiter-Foronda

Tonight beyond windowed walls  
I search the frescoed dark  
for checkered bark

barely visible in moon's jacklight.  
Lightning bugs blink once, again.  
Split-second later,

a downpour douses wisteria  
amid the twinkling glow.  
I leave this moment

for another: the 1950s and remember  
scaling a chestnut oak, its limbs  
like a ladder's rungs.

To the yodeling moon I climbed,  
piggish for a slice of time,  
for a freewheeling hour

or two alone in storied skies without  
the Great Appalachian Storm  
to complicate things.

Angel magic's what it's like to be here,  
choosing between a firefly's  
lucent flight to safety,

split second later, rain braiding limbs  
with a misty glow. I relive  
that carefree moment

in the old oak back when a child was safe  
alone on a lampblack branch.

I lift my face, the world's

conspiratorial voices silenced

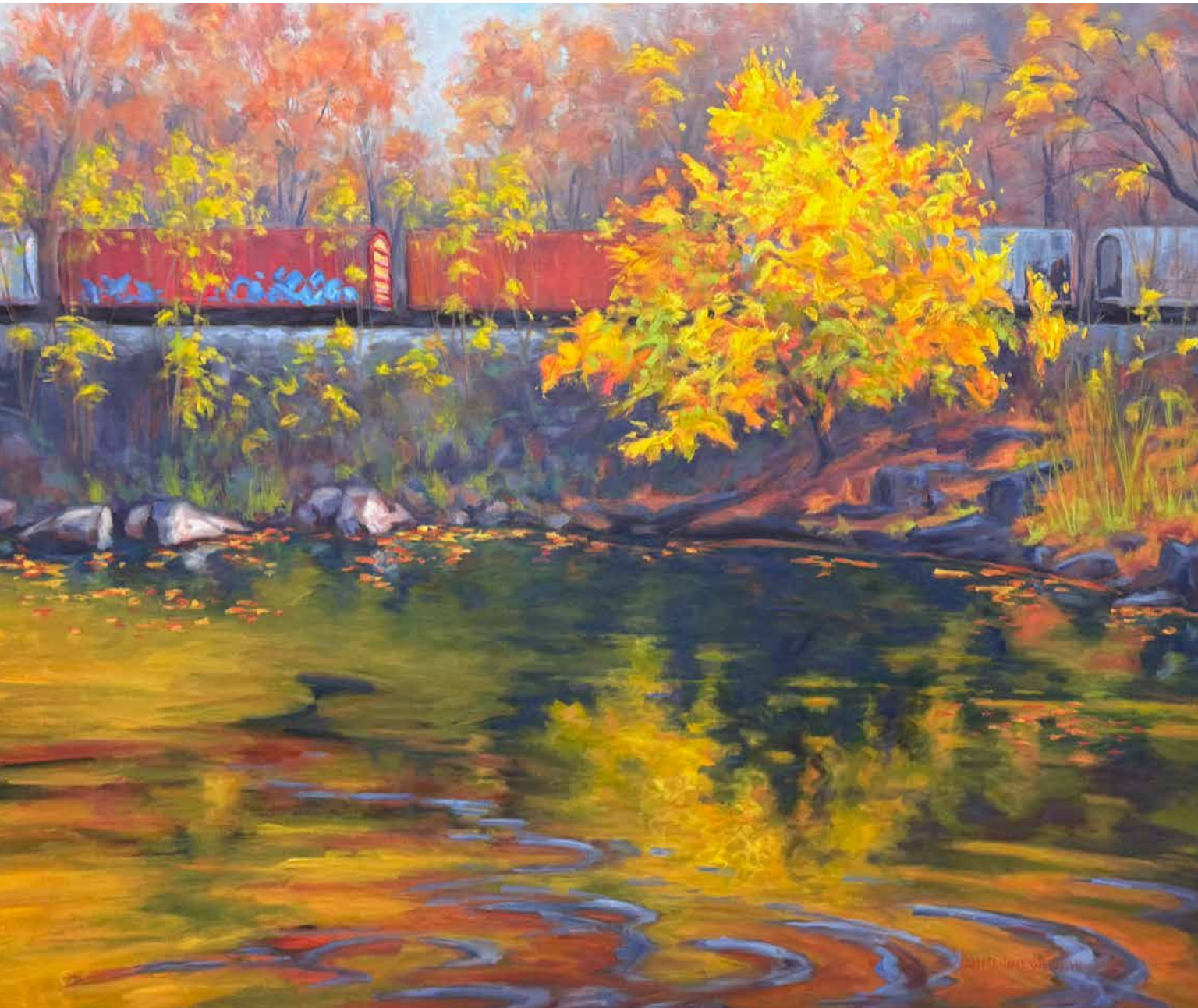
by a passing storm, rain

fragrant, soaking to the bone.



*Bent Mountain Rainforest*

Mary Boxley Bullington



## train song (after so many decades still)

Caren Stuart

*after reading Michael Hettich's  
"Dust Train" in The Halo Of Bees*

miles away from her by car (a 20 minute drive between her house and ours then) when I was me as a child in my childhood bed at the top of the stairs at the front of my parents' house every night with my sister asleep in the back of the house in her bedroom outside of my parents' bedroom, i *spoke* the incantation every night when i laid me down to sleep but i never *prayed* for any lord "my soul to take".... but i did SPEAK those prayerful words... for my daddy's sake so he could sleep... but that was me *reciting*... not *praying*, never *asking* any lord or any god for any *thing*. i did fine holding onto my soul by breathing into my being alive and always thinking every night about my grandmother who everyone always called Mom... who was never involved with any kind of prayer, who would surely be lying alone in her bed every night (maybe cussing about who knows what and then laughing and tossing her head way back, hunkered down under heavy mounds of chenille) waiting for the other-worldly grumbling of the train rumbling over the tracks a block from her house to settle down so that she could sleep. and still as i nightly nuzzle into my *not* heavy covers, even now - so many years since - i remember how the song of that surely the same train that sang that song to that "Mom" in *her* bed would waft through the window glass of my parents' home to comfort *me* in *my* bed and *release* me from any fears that might come creeping in and *release* me from any need for any nightly, rotely praying to any kind of "Spirit" (wholely holy or not) in order for me to be safe through the night. Even now, when i lay me down to sleep with my husband in our home miles away from any railroad, I can still hear the song of that train lullabying any feeling of darkness away... still hear that "Mom" still laughing and listening to that same train song even after her so many years of being "gone" and i know: wherever it is that she might have gone on *to*, she's still always here in my heart. too.

# birthmother x, 1933

S.L. Holm

*for B.B.*

To imagine her  
on some Nantucket foreshore  
autumn equinox tide round her ankles  
sandy furrows riven underfoot  
is to imagine that tide  
    *—that same tide she birthed you on—*  
the starry ebb of you.      The ebb of you  
in her sleep, her dreams, her drowning.

To imagine the cruelty she bore, buttoned-up,  
how it turned your translucent caul  
    *—the gall of its good luck—*  
incarnadine with shame,  
is to imagine how precarious  
    *—too precarious—*  
her life without you was.    How, as years went on

each wave's pulse  
    lullabied her distance from you  
    expunging who she was from you.

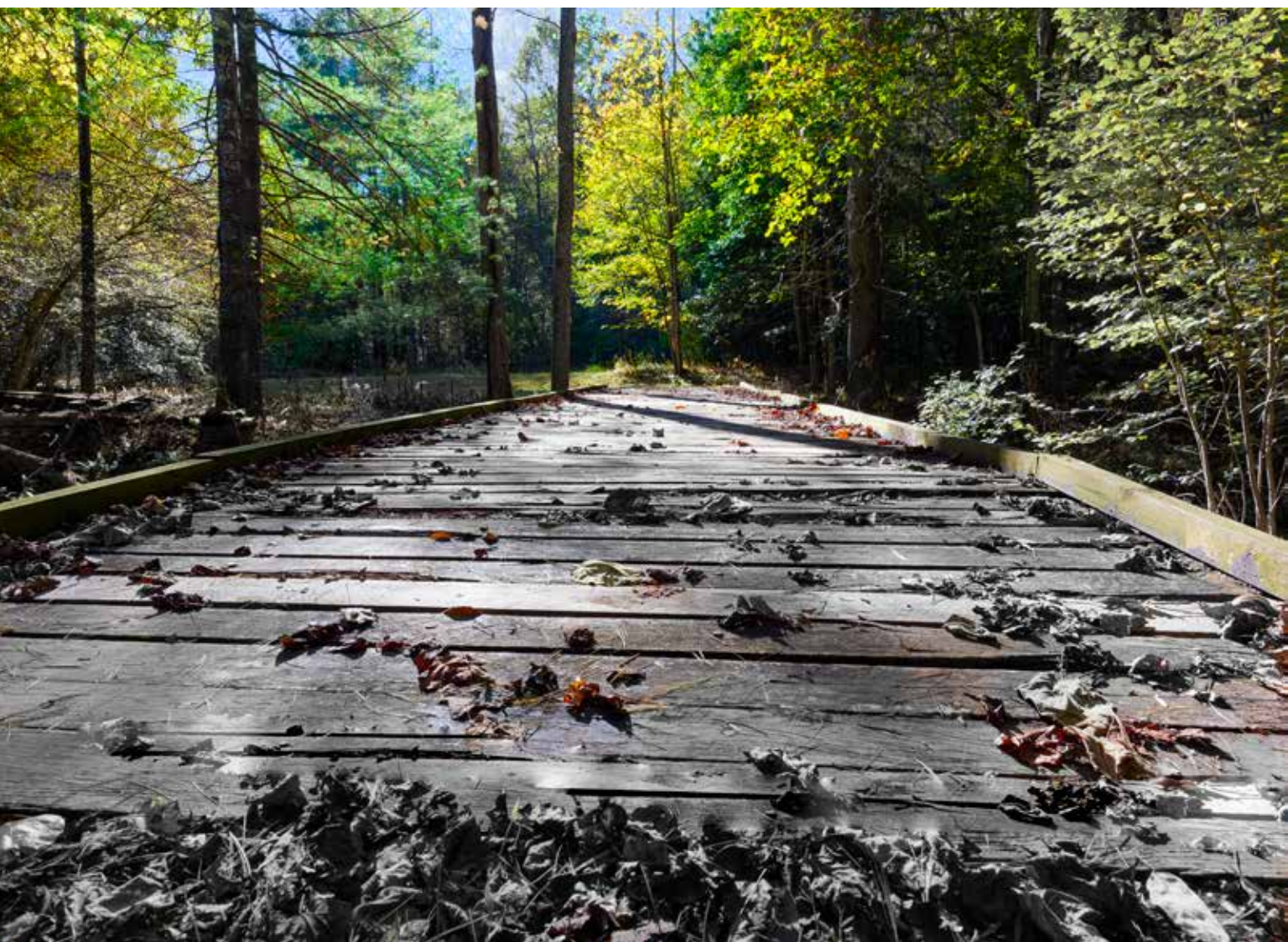
Where her feet cut by clamshells  
would walk the wrack line  
that marked your shared lineage, and no further.

Imagine  
that sluggish backwash of small minds.  
And the name she gave you  
never a day not on her lips.



*Origins*

Suzie Ross



*Bridge to Eden*

Bruce Mahin

## We Never Talked Past Weather

Cora McCann Liderbach

I didn't know the man next door was a poet.  
He'd scowl on the stoop, beer in hand,  
smoke wreathing him.

In those days I juggled copy deadlines  
and diapers, pushed a stroller past  
him, called *Sure is a hot one*.

Forty years on, I retire to poetry, learn  
the loner stewing over brews  
was a lion on the lit scene.

Launched a poetry workshop that flourishes  
in his name. Friends say he agonized  
over words, quit poetry 13 times.

Students recall the sting of his insights: *You  
call that a poem?* A memory surfaces—  
my father, after work, cursing my

mother, flees his fractious brood for the hush  
of library stacks, his stool at the corner  
bar. Long ago, I saw a cocoon sway

from the maple shading my bedroom. In that  
tightening gloom, did the pupa dream  
of flight—the pursuit of light?

# sorrows

Lindsey Smith Hull

explain to me about galaxies, cosmos, pulsating  
waterfalls, stars, clouds bursting.

daddy and I searched for orion’s belt every cold  
winter night, standing in our hayfield, outside our  
rented farm.

the house was so near to where I’m living now,  
but I understand even less.

we picked out the great and little dippers. your pa  
caught water with a metal one just like that. he left it  
hanging in his neat-as-a-pin kitchen when

the stars are like pa’s place — they shine in the night  
sky, like candlelight pierces pinhole patterns in tin  
lanterns from pa’s time. and still, I need you to tell  
me again.

I’m living now, but I understand even less.



*Chronotope*

Robert Walker

# Assigned Male at Thanksgiving

Jackson Benson

Gizzard, liver, and turkey hearts—  
the giblet heap soaks in the drippings,  
the dark bath sloshing in the pan

by the kamado grill, charcoal plumes  
billowing when Dad lifts the green lid.  
He prods the roasted bird. It didn’t take long—

sealed inside this furious chamber, cradled  
by a steel rack above the fire, trapped  
with the turbulence of smoke—for the skin

to turn crisp, as he wanted. It has been months,  
but I am here, hungry and wanted.  
He waves away a horse fly.

He plucks a kidney slick with grease,  
gripping it as if it were an oily plum.  
He offers it to me. He asks me,

“How long are you going to be staying with us,  
sonny boy?” I take it from him,  
weighing the organ in my hand,

dwelling on *son* and *boy*, each word  
a tough piece of meat the man has made,  
the man who fed me, clothed me, named me,

and loved me as best as any father could  
love his first and only son.  
“Only a few more days,”

I say before I chew the offal,  
this blood-fruit, its warm ooze  
pooling under my tongue.

## a lesson for galatea

Michele Evans

before i ever handled a block  
of burnt umber

i sketched him

thin    black    lines    traveling    across    pages

of my clasped journal, hidden  
between my canopy bed's mattress and boxspring

but his hands were always—the hardest for me

hands pushing double strollers  
electric mowers  
and his luck

hands pulling garden weeds  
loose teeth  
and bar room punches

hands pitching softballs  
pop-up tents  
and secret rendezvous

hands praying for  
strength  
safety

salvation

and serenity

oh, how i wish i knew then—what i know now:

hands are much easier to sculpt than

hearts.



*Generations*

Deidre Knight



*The Quiet Wild: Reflections Between*

Lauren Walke

## I Am Julia

Ping Yi Yee

Feral, unkempt, unschooled  
 tongueless hedge witch clawing at  
 gates shut, clawing at portals cold,  
 clawing at fences impossible walls  
 raking breaking keratin will against  
 the barrier, inner ring, Teflon veil,  
 virgin flesh thrusting against  
 the unattainable immutable impassable.  
 Fingers sliced nails ripped meat stripped  
 uninvited uninitiated unenlightened  
 newborn running a race already ending  
 day's lamb clambering onto foothills  
 embracing the inferno skinned, quartered  
 bartering with devils without cross or pentagram  
 blood oaths of denial, soul votives of despair  
 for I am Julia *Quentin*friend, iron maiden  
 and magician, thirty years a geas  
 three decades a sundering  
 everlasting.

Fingertips yearning  
 learning to touch  
 feel  
 for the first time  
 sparking.

## Portrait

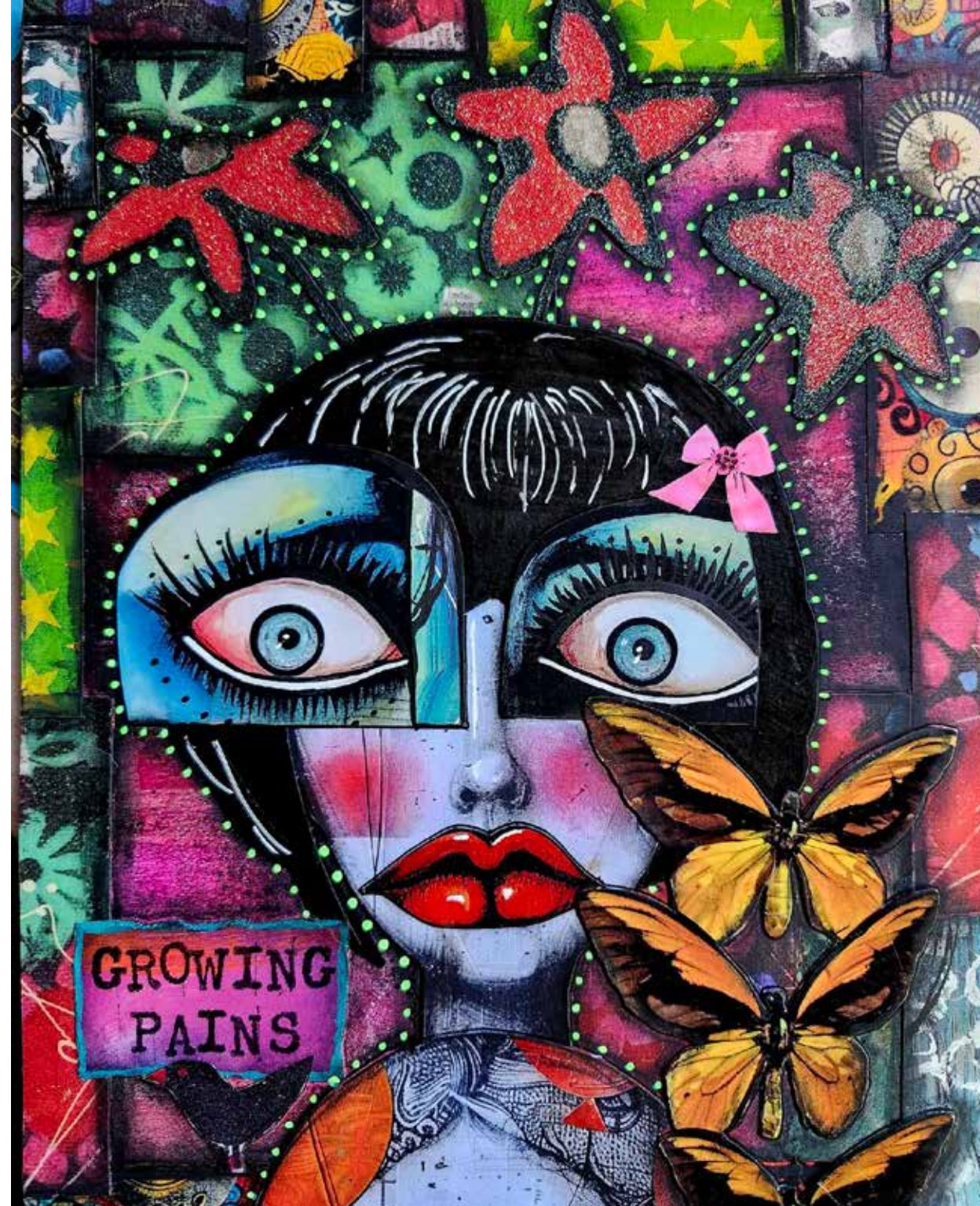
Marya Summers

At the center of a vortex of light,  
she will re-create herself –  
a windblown silhouette  
approaching centrifugal grace

A storm, a twister, a twisted sister –  
she once was the chaos of grief  
& fury painting out the light  
in a swirl of blood & night

Now, wading out of the darkness  
into the golden glow of a heroic sun, she is  
a woman alive in her shadow, beyond  
definition, a portal to her own dimension

*Growing Pains*  
Melissia Lynn Whetstone





*Echoes of Home*

Emily Darling

## It isn't a place you need

Sofie Justice

or some other mind  
some are benzoed Bezos  
some are shields  
Your love it never begrudges me  
my cherry trees—  
that one died isn't nothing  
but it also isn't everything  
now we have a French drain  
Is it a bayou?  
Some Louisiana autumn  
they don't talk about  
because there's really nothing better  
and they don't want to share

I'm always scrawling  
this dying art  
all over the walls  
alive with mom brains  
dead in the feed  
sold my own power  
ad after ad  
for an app that cures bed rot  
demystifies aging  
erases wrinkles  
mistakes  
maybe People magazine  
was a bad idea  
at the hairdresser  
trying not to small talk  
Future me, go back in my heart  
be the water in the well  
stop sharing so much space  
with intricate furniture  
little fantasies  
brass handles  
tiny drawers  
so many small graceful treasures  
to keep

## Practice

Andy Fogle

I carry the ash bucket outside,  
empty it in the back corner,  
between the pale-yellow shed,  
and the woodpile,

where what it was  
and what it is

co-exist. The ash hisses  
away, but I always take a little  
in my young fingers, rub my thumb  
over them, like tongue along teeth. I'm  
stilled, every time,

at its powder-softness.

Every time, all winterlong,  
I watch it pour into the corner  
you can't see from the house,

and I awe  
at how it billows up like steam.

I never miss

noticing this. My mind  
was slower then,

emptier, with more  
open space to practice watching burnt things  
pile at my feet and dissolve into air.

*Appalachian Homeplace*  
Lauren Cooper



# Older Women

Samanta Suchitra

A newly-minted grandmother, I,  
to whom he said, barely 40  
and a millionaire on Wall Street already  
*So, how's that working out?*

*Not So! You over the moon?*  
But words that seemed to suggest  
would I now feel old  
be seen by the world  
as headed for the exit,  
lesser than  
if I *weren't* a grandma?

It starts young--

When the five-year old declared  
that I could be a mommy  
but not a grandma  
I did not look like one.  
His friends had grandmas,  
he had seen for himself—  
I did not fit the bill.

So, which is it?  
We older women  
know the road we've traveled,  
how fraught our journeys.  
We have given of our hearts,  
our wisdom best we can,  
ourselves.  
And on that road  
been found, so often,  
wanting—  
but persevered  
prevailed, even,  
and morphed to diamonds—  
despite.

So, to Wall Street I said,  
*I feel blessed!*  
He did not know what to say.

My grandson pointed to his toy  
and proudly informed me,  
Stegosaurus!  
Smart! I said, and roared softly,  
making like one.  
*Didi!* He said crossly.

He knew that I was teasing.  
Then he ran off, declaring,  
*I have a gift for you!*  
He gave me a scrap of paper scrawled in red crayon,  
“DIDI IS SWIET.”  
His name followed.

Blessed indeed.

*What Once Was*  
Sarah Duran Ballen





*Untitled #856, 1996-97*

Petah Coyne

## Atlanta Gal

Jason Jones

*after Petah Coyne*

What beau could possibly know this belle from this debris?

All jagged eggshells, ivory tentacles, satin garters, flaxen agrestis.

She's as white as a lady's glove stretched along the contours of her ulna.

She's the weeping of candles at an altar. She dons a gown of alabaster.

She's a hatch of cotton—the labored flash of a camera obscura.

She's an equation solved in chalk.

She's the milk of a soldier's eye. She's the breaking of waves. She's umbilical.

She wasn't treated as though she would have come to expect.

She didn't burn out. She clotted. She was exposed, doused, snuffed—

deliberately, indefatigably, surely, I imagine—

tusk and epaulets, bromide and bowties and wild ribbons of halogen

spiralling from all what was heaved into suspension. As poised as a ballerina

*tours en l'air*, her wildering silhouette a deep still black

puddle on the polished fragile marble surface of the museum floor.

## Featured Artists & Writers



Michele Oka Doner, our cover artist is a renowned artist and author whose five-decade career draws inspiration from the natural world. Her work includes sculpture, public art, prints, drawings, functional objects, books, set and costume design, and video. She received an Honorary Doctor of Fine Arts from the University of Michigan, where she also earned her undergraduate and MFA degrees. Oka Doner has received grants from organizations including the Knight Foundation, New York State Council of the Arts, and Samuel H. Kress Foundation. Her best-known work is “A Walk on the Beach” (1995, 1999) and its extension at Miami International Airport, comprising over 9,000 bronzes in terrazzo with mother-of-pearl. At 1.25 miles, it ranks among the world’s largest artworks. Her work is in collections worldwide, including the Met, Whitney, Cooper-Hewitt, Louvre, Art Institute of Chicago, Yale Art Gallery, and Pérez Art Museum Miami.



Sally Mann (born in Lexington, Virginia, 1951) is one of America’s most renowned photographers. She has received numerous awards, including NEA, NEH, and Guggenheim Foundation grants, and her work is held by major institutions internationally. Her many books include *At Twelve* (1988), *Immediate Family* (1992), *Still Time* (1994), *What Remains* (2003), *Deep South* (2005), *Proud Flesh* (2009), *The Flesh and the Spirit* (2010), *Remembered Light* (2016) and *A Thousand Crossings* (2018). In 2001 Mann was named “America’s Best Photographer” by Time magazine. A 1994 documentary about her work, *Blood Ties*, was nominated for an Academy Award and the 2006 feature film *What Remains* was nominated for an Emmy Award in 2008. Her bestselling memoir, *Hold Still* (Little, Brown, 2015), received universal critical acclaim, was named a finalist for the National Book Award and won the Andrew Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Nonfiction. In March 2018, *Sally Mann: A Thousand Crossings*, opened at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC and traveled until 2020. This comprehensive exploration of Mann’s relationship with the South garnered overwhelmingly positive reviews and record-breaking attendance. In 2021 Mann received the Prix Pictet, the global award in photography and sustainability for her series *Blackwater* (2008-2012). Mann is represented by Gagosian Gallery, New York. She lives in Virginia.



Nikki Giovanni (1943-2025), Emeritus, was one of America’s most celebrated poets, illuminating her personal history as a Black woman in the United States. A writer, commentator, activist, and educator, her work encompasses poetry anthologies, poetry recordings, and nonfiction essays, covering topics ranging from race and social issues to children’s literature. She has won numerous awards, including the Langston Hughes Medal and the NAACP Image Award. She was nominated for a Grammy Award for her album *The Nikki Giovanni Poetry Collection*. In her book *A Good Cry*, she takes us into her confidence, describing the joy and peril of aging and recalling the violence that permeated her parents’ marriage and her early life. She looks inward in this powerful collection, meditating on her life and the people who have shaped her. Here at *Artemis*, we all are having a good cry as we say goodbye to our beloved friend.



Arthur Sze is a poet, translator, and editor, and in 2025 he was named the 25th Poet Laureate of the United States. He is the author of twelve books of poetry, including *Into the Hush* (2025) and *The White Orchard: Selected Interviews, Essays, and Poems* (2025); *The Glass Constellation: New and Collected Poems* (2021); *Sight Lines* (2019), for which he won the National Book Award; *Compass Rose* (2014); *The Ginkgo Light* (2009); *Quipu* (2005); *The Redshifting Web: Poems 1970–1998* (1998); and *Archipelago* (1995). He also authored *Transient Worlds: On Translating Poetry* (forthcoming from Copper Canyon Press, 2026), *The Silk Dragon II: Translations of Chinese Poetry* (2024), and edited *Chinese Writers on Writing* (2010). His poetry has been translated into fifteen languages, including Chinese, Dutch, German, Portuguese, and Spanish. Sze received the 2025 Bollingen Prize for lifetime achievement in American poetry, the 2024 Rebekah Johnson Bobbitt National Prize for Poetry, 2024 National Book Foundation Science + Literature award, the Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize, the Shelley Memorial Award, the Jackson Poetry Prize, a Lannan Literary Award, and a Guggenheim Fellowship, among others. A chancellor emeritus of the Academy of American Poets and a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, he was the 2023–2024 Mohr Visiting Poet at Stanford University. Professor emeritus at the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA), Sze was the first poet laureate of Santa Fe, where he lives with his wife, the poet Carol Moldaw.



Poet Natasha Trethewey (Enlightenment) 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); as well as three books of nonfiction, *Beyond Katrina: A Meditation on the Mississippi Gulf Coast* (2010); *Memorial Drive: A Daughter’s Memoir* (2020), an instant New York Times bestseller, and *The House of Being* (2024). She has received 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. Trethewey is a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and the American Philosophical Society. 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. In 2022, she was the William B. Hart Poet in Residence at the American Academy in Rome. Trethewey is a Board of Trustees Professor of English at Northwestern University. <https://www.blueridgejournal.com/poems/nt-storyville.htm>

## 2026 Editorial Staff



**Jeri Rogers, Editor and Founder** of *Artemis Journal*, to which she has dedicated 48 years of her life. In addition to her editorial work, she is a photographer and hosts the "*Artemis Speaks*" podcast, now in its 4th season, where she interviews artists and writers published in the journal. Jeri resides with her husband, Jonathan Rogers, a respected attorney and part-time judge, on their picturesque mountaintop farm. They share their lives with beloved dogs and majestic horses.



**Donnie Secreast, Literary Editor**, is a transplant from the Blue Ridge Mountains of Southwest Virginia who lives in Oklahoma with her husband and co-editor, Adam Gnuse. She works as a literature professor at Oklahoma City University, and her research and publications concern the intersections of ecocriticism, humor, and gender.



**Adam Gnuse, Literary Editor**, is the London Times bestselling author of *Girl in the Walls*. He lives in Oklahoma with his wife and co-literary editor, Donnie Secreast.



**Page Turner, Art Editor**, is an artist, and owner of Artform Signs. Since joining the *Artemis Journal* editorial staff, Page has brought a thoughtful eye to the relationship between image and word, pairing specific poems with visual art to create meaningful dialogue across the journal. With years of experience in art editing, film, television, and visual storytelling, she is dedicated to elevating both literary and visual voices. Page has served as Art Editor for *Artemis Journal* since 2020.



**Zephren Turner, Layout Editor** is a designer, fine artist, illustrator, and owner of Artform Signs LLC. He brings more than 30 years of experience in production art and illustration to his work, shaping the flow of *Artemis Journal* with a careful sense of rhythm, balance, and visual psychology. Through layout and design, Zephren weaves diverse themes into a cohesive reading experience that deepens the connection between art and literature. He has served as Layout Editor for *Artemis Journal* since 2020.



**Jonathan Rogers, Legal Advisor**, is a highly experienced trial lawyer with 40 years of practice. He currently serves as the president of the Floyd County Bar Association. He holds memberships in the Virginia State Bar Association, the Roanoke City Bar Association, and the Virgin Islands Bar Association. Jonathan resides with his wife, Jeri Rogers, on their mountain-top farm.



**Skip Brown, Audio Editor**, has been immersed in audio and music since he was 13 when he picked up a guitar; the rest is history. He recorded his first record at CBS Studios in NYC at age 15, performed hundreds of shows around the country, operated a large commercial recording studio, and produced festivals and civic center shows for the following years. While enjoying a successful career in finance, he never gave up his passion for music and sound. He continues to share his skills with the "*Artemis Speaks*" Podcast as the engineer and audio editor of the podcast, which is beginning its 4th year!



**Julia Fallon, Associate Editor**, is a writer, harper, and harpist. She is also a retired school librarian and traveler. She owns far too many books and loves the printed word, including newspapers, magazines, and the like!

# Acknowledgments

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