

# PENUMBRA

2022





# Penumbra

## 2022



## Volume 32

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penumbra (pi-num 'bre): n. 1. A partial shadow, as in an eclipse, between regions of complete shadow and complete illumination. 2. The partly darkened fringe around a sunspot. 3. An outlying, surrounding region; periphery; fringe. [Lat. *paene*, almost – Lat. *umbra*, shadow]

# All About Penumbra

Since 1991, *Penumbra* has proudly published poetry, fiction, nonfiction, and visual art by contributors from the Stanislaus region, throughout the U.S., and abroad. Our staff is composed entirely of students: they make all editorial decisions, including which submissions are accepted and how the journal is designed.

Because new students staff the journal every year, *Penumbra* constantly evolves. Each year, we receive hundreds of art and literary submissions, and through a multi-step voting process, we decide which works to accept. We then select the top prose, poetry, hybrid, and art pieces from which the staff select the winners.

Every Spring, English 4019: Editing Literary Magazines is open to students with junior or higher academic standing. Students from all majors are welcome: the course offers professional training in areas including art, business, marketing, and communications.

Annually, we launch the new issue with a book launch and reading near the end of the Spring term, this year to be conducted virtually.

Thank you to the many contributors to *Penumbra* 2022. Your talent makes the journal what it is. Please continue sending in your work: submissions will open for the *Penumbra Online* Summer 2022 issue at the beginning of June of this year.

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Dr. Douglas C. MacLeod, Jr.

To birth a child is perhaps  
the most hopeful act one can perform.  
Let us not only pray  
that the child be healthy,  
but that they enter a healthy world  
where people are kind, resources shared,  
neighbors become extended family,  
those in power exercise restraint,  
and love you never knew you had  
overflows.

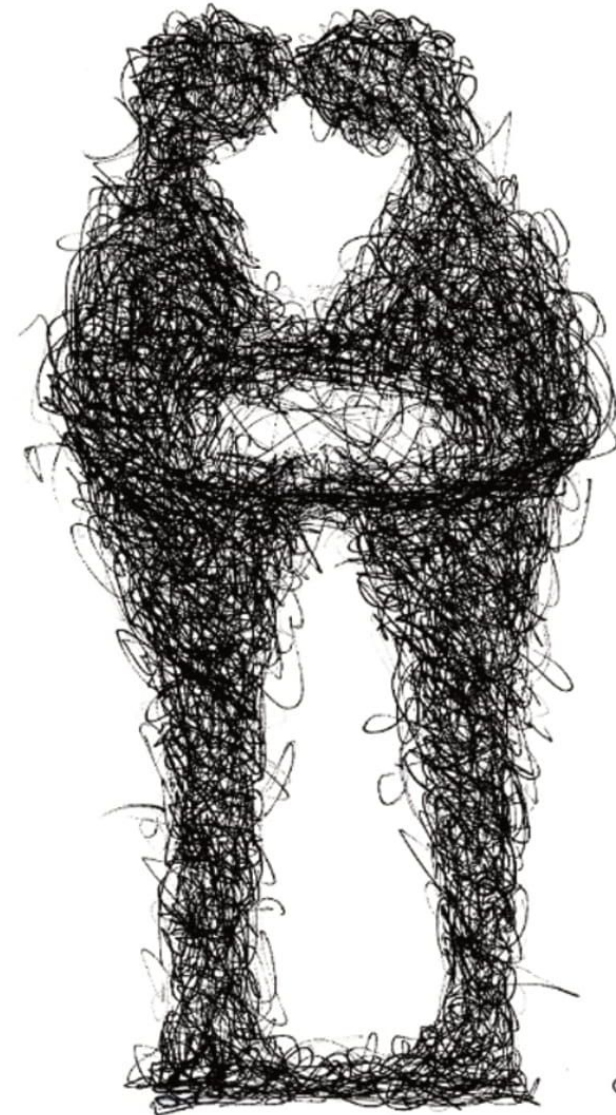
But brace yourself for a journey.  
To raise a child is a patient process,  
a grueling occupation,  
a marathon of purpose and intent.  
Pray for wisdom, courage to say no,  
grace to say yes.  
Cherish times of laughter and pain,  
joy and tears. Keep the faith, cling to hope.  
Because love you never knew you had  
will somehow carry you through.

Breathe deep, compose your nerves.  
To launch a child is trepidation,  
a frightening rite to watch  
the arrow leave the string  
pass the bow and flutter  
wavering toward the target  
amid a gusty crosswind blowing strong.  
Courage is required. Hold to faith, embrace hope.  
And love you never knew you had  
will somehow bridge the gap.

To birth a child is indeed  
the most hopeful act one can perform.  
With bared teeth and clenched fist shaking  
at hopelessness, injustice, fatalism, nihilism,  
and doomsday prophets who circle  
our children's future like vultures.  
To birth a child is a demonstration  
of faith, hope, and love.  
And as it is written, lest we forget,  
"The greatest of these is love."

# TO BIRTH A CHILD

David B. Such



dbS

# MOVEMENT

*Schuyler Becker*

At twenty-six, my sister is flipping through the pages of her story at a rapid pace. She has olive green eyes, long dark hair, and fair skin. She paces twelve hours between hospital rooms, collapsing into her bed at night. Helping people is her cause, she has always been so sure. She parks in a parking garage every week.

Maybe the fluorescent lights flicker when she walks to her car. Maybe she can see the sun setting through concrete pillars. She walks the length of the parking spaces, hurrying towards the warmth of her truck.

At twenty-nine, my brother is climbing ladders and shaking hands. He has brown, curly hair and broad shoulders. He travels and mingles, living life to the fullest and always striving for more. Charm is his forte and social life is his pathway. He keeps moving—Napa, San Jose, Monterey, Sacramento, Nashville, Hawaii.

Perhaps he will settle down one day. Perhaps he will finally sell that motorcycle our mom is always worrying about. He relays all the excitement of his life over the telephone, waiting for the next trip to the warmth of home.

At twenty-two, I use my hands and my words all day long. I have dark blonde hair and dark blue eyes. I drive to school, I drive to work. I take notes in lectures and type out keystrokes. I speak my mind and speak courteously to customers. I learn.

I wonder what I have yet to see, what I will see. I wonder who I will meet and who I should not have forgotten. What if I kept driving instead of approaching the timeclock? What if I focused less on hands and words and more on the mind and heart? I open doors, I crack open notebooks, I yank my hand back on a rusted locker.

At sixteen, twenty-four, nineteen, forty-two, ten, thirty-five, seventy-seven, people are alive. They pace carpeted hallways, run their hands through their hair, slam doors closed, gaze at the sky, peer in the mailbox, sleep soundly through the night. They park in parking garages, they live life to the fullest, they sit in lectures and learn.

Maybe someone is writing in sync with me. Maybe someone is immersed in a book right now. Maybe someone is on a first date. Maybe someone is saying goodbye. Maybe I will meet one of these people. Maybe they will know I am writing about them. Maybe someone else has a rusted locker. Maybe someone decided to keep driving. Maybe they still are.

In two years, ten years, I wonder where we will be. I wonder if my sister will still desire to work twelve hours for the sake of helping others. I wonder if my brother will still be moving. I wonder if I will still have destinations to drive to. I wonder if our mom will still have to crusade against the motorcycle. I wonder if people will remember to live life to the fullest, if they will remember to learn and grow.

Perhaps life is movement. Perhaps change is the story. We dance to music, we follow golden-striped lanes, we have long phone conversations and short moments of laughter. We read and we write. We park in parking garages and shake hands. We meet new people, we forget them. Perhaps life moves faster than us. Perhaps life is in synch with us. We flip through the pages of our stories, always wondering what is next.

# BOBOLINKO FINDS HIS EIGHTH GRADE YEARBOOK

*Kenneth Pobo*

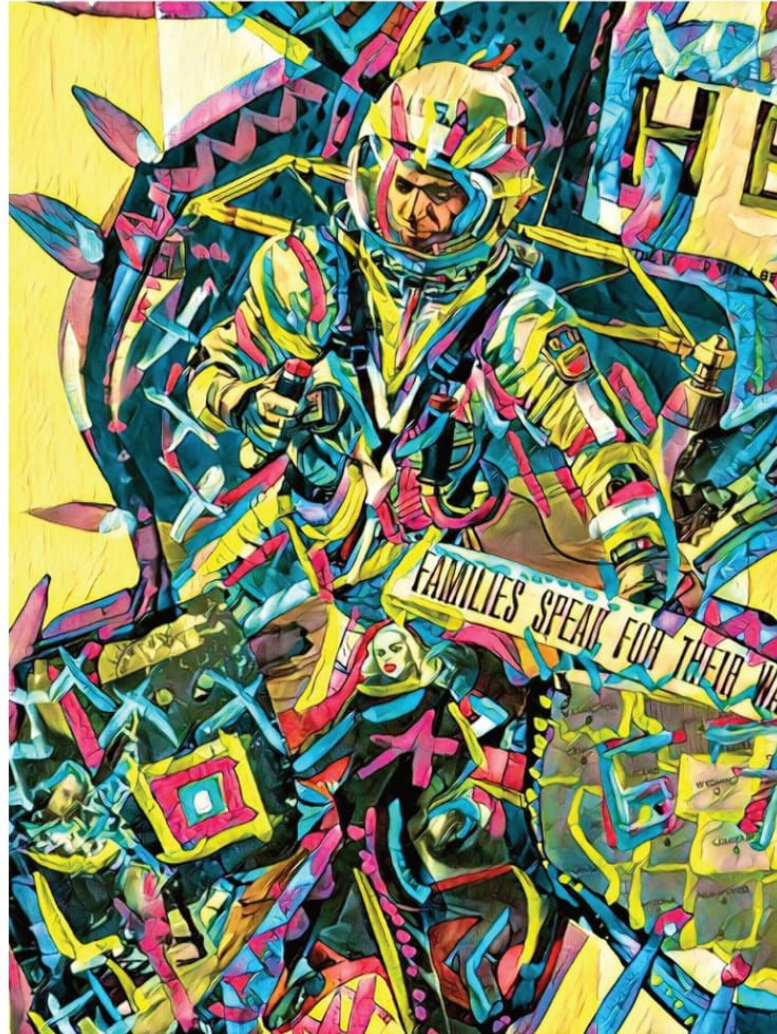
A boy with a crew cut,  
yellow shirt, and big ears.

That picture of me in homeroom,  
section 8-G. Kids called me a shoe,  
something made to hold a foot,  
stinky. If I could slide down  
a greased pole to get back  
to this early self,  
what would I say to him?  
And what would he ask me?

I might make something up.  
He's damaged enough already,  
especially when smiling.

# NEON JOHN

Jason R. Montgomery



Medium:  
Digitally altered mixed media collage on paper

# LITTLE PINCH

Paul Hostovsky

I'm the sign language interpreter standing on the other side of the examination table where the deaf patient is sitting, and the nurse is hovering with a hypodermic syringe filled with a certain inoculative substance that she is getting ready to inject into the deaf patient's arm. And I'm wondering how I should interpret "little pinch" when she says it to the deaf patient. That is, how should I sign it? What, in fact, does "little pinch" mean?

It's what all the nurses say before they jab you. Maybe they were taught to say it that way in nursing school. Or maybe one phlebotomist said it once to another phlebotomist who was off-duty and having her own blood drawn for a change and she liked the sound of it so much that when she got back to work she started saying it every chance she got and it just caught on from there and spread like wildly mild euphemisms are wont to.

For such a little noun phrase, "little pinch" has a lot of possible interpretations. One interpretation, which is more about intent than content (i.e. the words themselves matter less than the warning they embody), could be something like: *Get ready, here it comes.* That's the interpretation I'm leaning toward. But another possible interpretation could be something like: *In the catalog of pain that you have experienced in your lifetime, this will prove to be a fairly minor entry.*

A third interpretation, the most literal one and yet the one I'm least likely to go with, is: *This is going to feel like I'm pinching you a little.* I don't think that hearing people hear it that way when they hear a nurse say "little pinch" before she gives them a jab. And in fact it doesn't feel like a pinch, does it? It feels more like a



prick, a piercing, a perforation. So it wouldn't make sense to sign to the deaf person some ASL version of: *The sensation of getting this shot will (very soon) be very much like the sensation of being lightly pinched.*

By the time I've settled on an appropriate interpretation of "little pinch" in ASL, it's too late because the nurse has already jabbed the deaf patient and applied the little bandaid over the site of the little pinch. And the deaf patient, who was very stoic and didn't wince or even bat an eye, signs some untranslatable pun in ASL which employs his tongue in an adverbial way and equates the nurse's virtuosity with the needle to a chef's virtuosity in the kitchen as he strains the fat from a meat broth.

"What did he say?" she asks me as the deaf man winks at me and walks out the door of the examining room, smiling. I give it some thought—almost as much thought as I gave her "little pinch"—and I decide the best strategy is to completely drop the culinary reference, which really doesn't translate at all, and instead try to come up with a slightly different but equally humorous and witty equivalent. "It was something about your little pinch feeling almost as smooth as an affectionate pinch on the cheek," I say to the nurse. And she smiles at that. And since that's what the deaf man intended (more intent than content), I congratulate myself on another successful interpretation.

# FIRST SPRING

Laurel Benjamin—Poetry Runner-Up

She is ready to climb on new branches I lay out for her, swiping at flies in the classroom while others mistake them. But I can't disregard Jun's nose on her pale face, a slight princess worn as if natural, and her shiny hair, deep brown like her eyes. She wears linen pants, crisp with a pleat, and a blue blazer.

She's come far, grew up in a shack by the river, her mother taking in laundry, father a wolf gone hunting for another life. When she turned 18 he sent her money, but could not save her from falling down in the street one day, next to her school. She heard children's chatter through the casement windows propped open and knew then as the blood dried, she would get her teeth fixed, her nose amended. Wear contact lenses and throw off the tape-mended eyeglasses onto the junk pile at home. She would leave her mother, leave the meals of fish heads, the eggs from tiny birds who wandered too close caught by hand. She would pedal through the sky.

Dear Jun, what would I do for you—weave a candelabra for a ceremony that restitutes your early years. Young men smile at you, one side of the mouth lifted in hope of your gaze. Yet you avoid them, relying on the company of women, hiding in a chamber in plain sight.

On the final day of class she brings me a bundle of white daisies. She'd cut her long hair not too short but blunt. The shy girl next to her can only stand there with her braids, holding a chemistry book with a plastic cover, teeth yellowed, makeup unprecise. Next to Seo-Jun she looks more real, less a mannequin. But I am drawn more to the complete redo, engulfed in her perfection, awaiting her first spring.

# OCULOS TUOS APERI

Ariana Espinoza



Medium:  
Ink and digital collage

# AN UNFINISHED BOOK

Nancy Haskett

It sounded intriguing:  
a Human Library,  
a safe place where people  
become books,  
where participants are given  
an opportunity to listen,  
ask questions about taboo topics—

in other words,  
to “read” the living books.

And so he went to the event,  
looked at the selections—  
*Alcoholic, Feminist,*  
*Convert, Unemployed,*  
*Naturist, Disabled*—  
decided, at last, on *Refugee*,  
took a seat at her table.

In precise English,  
softly accented,  
she told her story,  
where she used to live,  
her escape from violence  
and oppression,  
where she lives now,  
in this city filled with stares,  
distrust, prejudice.

She was an open book,  
honest, inspiring, strong,  
authentic,  
and they shared similar dreams,  
hopes for the future.

He lingered  
after the other readers had gone,  
asked her to tell another chapter,  
didn't want this book  
to end.

# BARNES & NOBLE MID-AFTERNOON

Bill Newby

Most tables have solo users.  
One pages through magazines.  
One is deep in a novel.

Another studies an open notebook  
and scattered papers near his phone.

Three older women, each with coffee,  
converse in earnest German—  
unintelligible reminders of Goslar walks  
and *Gymnasium* lectures.

A few couples share tables in silence,  
skimming periodicals and glancing up  
to whisper discoveries or reach  
for the pretzel bag between them.

The two baristas wipe the back counter,  
replenish the half-and-half and kibitz  
about house chores and boyfriends  
to fill the lull.

It's a quiet island of public sharing,  
a relaxed expansive space,  
like being at the beach,

but without the sun and sand,  
the huddled sea gulls, persistent sandfleas,  
and clockwork lapping waves.

# PENUMBRA

Amy Young



Medium:  
Oil on Canvas

# MY GRAVE, YOUR PULSE

Kelli Lage

*TW: Death/Mortality*

If I die first, don't smash your fists banging on my grave.  
The drumming will roll only down the abandoned bank.  
Church choirs saved the orchestra for the day I was played out.  
If I could feel your pleading thumps,  
I would make the rhythm my pulse  
and come back to you as the chorus from the song we danced to  
in the attic of the barn.  
No, save your palms for cupping the earth  
and drinking from the glory that spews out of it.  
I promise, there are still beats of life  
waiting in the pockets of dirt fields for you.

# STAYING ABOVE THE WRECK

Mikal Wix

*For Adrienne Rich*

The men float,  
swaying above cities of barrier reef,  
sharp splendor,  
fingers whispering  
underwater  
into the ears of tiny fish,  
with their audience fomenting seaweed,  
washing their heads,  
and not a rubber suit or fin  
beyond the soles of their feet.

They stay awake, treading  
water in uniforms, gesturing  
at the dark swells below,  
like priests swinging thuribles,  
thin, swirling currents of bubbles,  
oil and smoke  
expounding  
upon their brave compromises  
to escape the moon's witchy undertow,  
and to attend the survivor's toast,  
lifting mugs to all the drowned things.

The men float into the cold night  
to try and capture the shore  
with her battalions of stones

slowly undulating forward,  
and then crashing thunderously.

They stay awake  
looking up into the racing clouds  
to find the June moon bright  
with her mouth wide,  
eating carelessly  
all their supplications  
and condemnations—  
such odd exhaust rising  
from their splintered ship;  
the white fills their eyes with froth.

The men fall  
asleep drifting in soggy life vests  
beneath each breaking threat,  
and gulp and swig  
imagined beers or teas,  
most in the salty seizures  
of a dawning oasis  
yielding to the heat of day  
to reveal the loosened swells  
of mourning,  
for bobbing officers and men  
and the decay of stillness  
in the teeming vacuum of loss.



# EVOLUTION

Sola Damon

There are no mountains amongst  
the molehills. The ruination instead makes  
deep craters filled in silently with dirt and lint  
and cheap things caught in the dryer.  
My nostalgia isn't a camera on a solid tripod,  
or a memory built on bricks with cornerstones.  
It's a crow, gangly and dark, sharpening  
its beak, balancing with pocky claws on  
drooping electrical wires with feathers  
frayed and oily from something in the trash.  
Still, he takes flight.  
Now, through the window I keep  
a bird's eye vigil for myself.  
I still have the same ocean view,  
the same future but with fewer days,  
the same dryer spinning more expensive things.  
Things that fold more nicely in the aftermath of  
footsteps up my walkway  
dragging the news of all the things  
that did not destroy me.

# QUARTET

Elliott Orchard-Blowen



Medium:  
Collage and found poetry

# THE OLD WOMAN AND THE RAVEN

*Cassandra Windwalker*

*There was an old woman who lived in a shoe.* Nonsense, thought Margery, wiggling her toes in sun-warmed garden loam. Only young women live in shoes—stilettos, Mary Janes, running shoes, hiking boots, strappy sandals. Old women know better.

Peppers and tomatoes hung heavy on their vines. Margery's basket was rainbowed with squash and cucumbers. She stretched like a cat, her threadbare dress inviting the wind to run along her freckled crepe skin. She narrowed her eyes as she saw Jabril walking up her lane.

She didn't know why he insisted they be friends as well as neighbors. She had everything she needed right here.

*How is a raven like a writing desk?*

They both collect useless trinkets as if they were treasures.

Jabril's face split into a wrinkled grin, like sun-splintered clay. He held out the strange cargo he carried in his palms. A bird's nest, filled with shells he must have gathered from the beach and winking quartz. He'd strung a bit of ribbon through the branches so it could hang like a planter.

"For you, Margery. Some nonsense for your very serious garden."

A protest withered on her lips. Such very pretty nonsense. And he was teasing her, something she didn't think anyone had dared to do for decades.

Maybe she wasn't that different from a raven herself. Maybe the usefulness of some things—some people—lay not in their necessity but simply in how they decorated an hour.

She hung the nest from the oak tree.

# WHAT AM I?

Ramon Jimenez

Am I a synthetic product developed in a lab?  
Pieces of a mysterious mixture,  
boiled up inside a giant bubbling beaker.  
Or am I a poorly assembled collage?  
Put together by the creativity of cruel children  
plastered parcels of shapes and patterns.

The perverse fantasies of Dr. Frankenstein,  
random body parts, forcefully connected,  
an oily mosaic painted by strokes of madness.  
Either way, I defy assumptions and categories,  
speaking and thinking in random Iberian dialects.  
Looking nothing like that Antonio Banderas.

Yet, I too am confused by my origins,  
unfamiliar with how I arrived at this place,  
unsure of my true nature and actual identity.  
I am a fatherless child of the colonial structure,  
sitting impatiently through another failed paternity test,  
trying to find the cruel invading men who made me.

My last name comes from men I know, but never met,  
a Hernan Cortez with powdered gold stuck up his nose,  
obsessed with the spoils of native blood and plunder.  
Yet, I still dream about Huichol seamstresses  
who lived in worlds of jade, purple, and turquoise  
extracted from the fields of blue corn and crimson prickly pears.

Even when ridiculed by the Don Quixote delusions of others,  
that ride on the frail bones of a wrinkly Rocinante,  
chasing after windmills, attempting to revive a dead order.  
My mind wanders in search of my origins,  
but, for asking questions, I am forced into a church  
whipped into kneeling with a mouth sewed shut.

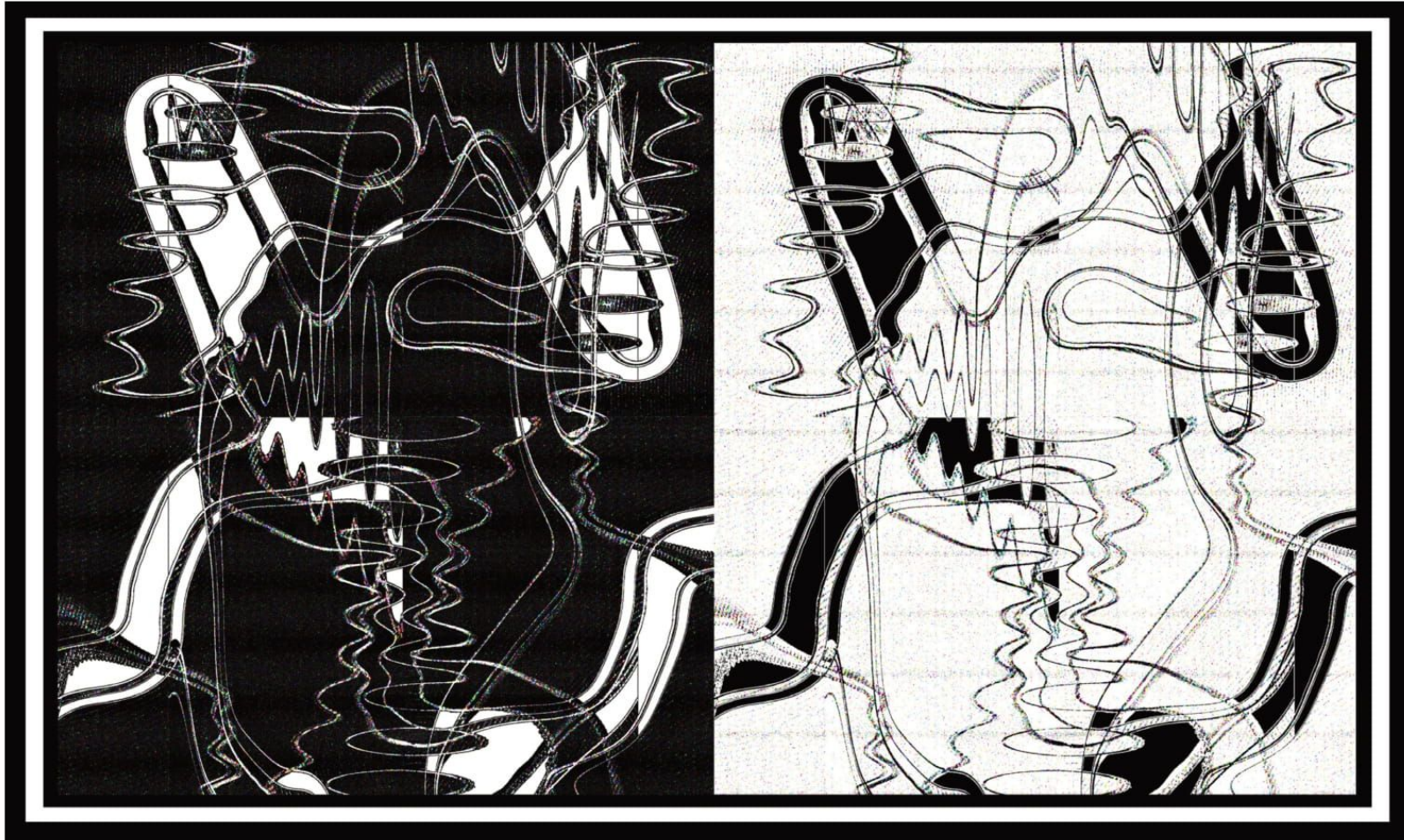
As I enter on a Sunday, I am nailed to wooden benches  
made to hear sermons in that forced Iberian dialect  
repeating the name of a blue-eyed and blond-haired savior.  
Day and night, I questioned these repetitive practices  
but for this, I was told to respect the traditions of my people  
unsure if they understood the origins of such traditions.

So quick to forget the rivers of spiced blood  
the Mayan codices burned in his holy name  
the forced conversions and the loss of culture.

In response to my cries, I am told to shut up and smile,  
but how can I smile when I was born unequal,  
forced to run from one place to the next.  
Persecuted across these man-made lines  
judged and heavily condemned  
for speaking in that tongue taught through torture.  
I may wander in permanent cultural confusion,  
but my struggle to exist is alive,  
circulating with blood and forever breathing.

# TRYING TO BECOME

*Edward Michael Supranowicz*



Medium:  
Digital drawing

# SERPENTINE

*Skylar Brown*

I have a snake that lives inside of me  
and slithers around my stomach, my kidneys,  
tightens, tightens, tightens everything.  
She draws down to the base of my pelvic floor  
tightens me there too, like a screw  
and then when I'm so tight as to be untouchable  
she winds down to my sacrum  
and makes me want it more and more.  
I loathe her. I really do.

I used to try to live my life like girls in the magazines  
and I succeeded even, but only on the surface.  
I tried to do all the things the women who came before told me about  
or maybe just dreamed of and could never do.  
I felt I owed it to them, to myself.

I fed myself hopeful lies and cheerful excuses  
though they never really helped  
for I have had the knowledge of good and evil  
for as long as I can remember  
though I tried so hard not to.

I read scripture when I was a little girl  
and I tried not to be frightened  
but it was difficult, difficult, not to.

I used to see red every time I closed my eyes  
trying to imagine what the first time might have been like

had everything gone right.  
And the first time Eve held Adam, the very first time,  
I wonder if she was scared, or if she implicitly trusted him  
and if she did, then why couldn't I?

And when I finally trusted him for the very first time  
in the back of the car, my legs around his waist  
his eyes gazing into mine  
I thought that would be the end of the pain that I'd been living in.  
It was the most serendipitous release  
and I believed it would let me let go of everything.

But I forgot about the snake that lives within me...  
and she is not leaving.

It may be better never to learn what's broken and bruised inside of you  
just in case you can't fix it.  
Better to tiptoe around the pain and hope one day it will go away  
and in the meantime, try your best to work around it.  
Sometimes when it gets unbearable  
I even get the urge to cry over it,  
but better not to do that too.  
Once I start, I don't stop.

But I tried...

I tried to kill my ego, my tear ducts, my sex drive.  
I've been to mountaintops in Mexico.  
I've activated all seven of my chakras.  
But beyond each mountain, each medicinal hit,  
there's another hurdle to overcome.  
I've spent my life trying.

And I'm better now  
if you were like me, and worried  
I'm better now.  
I am.  
Some days I could even say I'm happy.

But I still have this snake that lives inside of me  
and slithers around my stomach, my kidneys.  
She draws down to the base of my pelvic floor  
tightens me there too, like a screw  
and then when I'm so tight as to be untouchable  
she winds down to my sacrum  
and makes me want it more and more.

And I loathe her. I do.  
I really tried to be loving.  
I thought perhaps if I could love enough  
then I could leak all the unconscious tension out of my body  
and she would go away naturally  
but no, she says she's staying.

I loathe her. I really do.



# ANATOMY OF A CICADA

Charlotte Gutzmer

To the cicada with stained-glass wings—spit out the black earth  
and struggle.

I feel unknowable. No, not to others, not to those who see the curve  
of my spine, the ligatures spun around creeping veins,  
but to myself.

Buried this deep for so many years, it's no surprise that the looking-glass  
silhouette is but a twisted Kafka-esque caricature.

Forgive me for lurking, for lying in church basements  
and swooning off skyscrapers,  
for in them I see something that resembles my heart  
more than my reflection; knots in the bark, shallow  
shadows dancing through leaves atop boughs  
of aching oak.

A twisted bundle of nerves wrapped in a shell, mechanical beast,  
screaching for the compression of intimacy,  
the anti-nostalgias of generations passed—

feel the weight of the earth, histories bygone, wedged  
beneath its carapace, razor-sharp, merciless,  
deafening.

# DREAM BIRD

Dottie Lo Bue



Medium:  
Oil on paper

# THE GAME GETS OLD

Matt Perry—*Nonfiction Winner*

Outside the coffee shop, the French apple turnover crumbles and the flakes fall onto my thighs. I pick them up with the pad of my index finger and put them in my mouth. There are others sitting at the table around me and I know they can see me doing this, but the pastry is too good to waste.

This coffee shop is hip. There is a pink neon sign in the window that runs the full length of the store that says “COFFEE” and the “O” is also a smiley face. To me, Somerville feels stuck in a time warp of 2002. Everything has a vague rockabilly or steam-punk feel to it. This coffee shop feels more current, though it is on the border of Cambridge. It attracts an interesting crowd of what I assume are Harvard students and local young professionals. It is right around the corner from a tapas restaurant and a bakery that I liked for a while until I realized it wasn’t very good.

The couple at the table next to me are in work out clothing. They look to be younger than I am, and they don’t seem to mind the way I am eating all the crumbs off of my pants. Two young women dressed in expensive clothing stop and say hello to the woman sitting at the table. She hugs one of them and is introduced to the other. They exchange pleasantries and find out that they have a mutual acquaintance, a roommate of someone else. They talk about what they did last night, which was Saturday night. A concert is brought up, along with “drinks with friends.” I feel a pang of jealousy at that moment. I wish someone I knew would walk by and stop to talk to me. I don’t know that many people who live in the area anymore. Most have moved away, and soon, I am moving away too. I feel my age.

The two women walk away and the other sits down. She did not introduce the man sitting with her during the interaction. I get the sense that she didn’t like those two very much. I now remember that part of it. Living with roommates. Introducing myself to people I’d never meet again and trying to find something in common with them. It’s the game you have to play, and I’ve been out of it for a little while now.

The couple gets up and walks away hand in hand. They’ll be out of the game too soon. They just don’t know it yet.

# BLUE VALENTINE

Kahlo Smith

This year, Valentine, we are beautiful,  
Our square table draped in white linen.  
Drunk with laughter,  
You spill tea on my sleeve.  
In leaves swirling at the bottom of your cup I see us.

You sweep five perfect strands of hair  
Behind your ear's seashell curve,  
Shadows dance beneath your eyes in blue light,  
Lips always kissing on some new reply.

The corner of my glass clips through a plate—  
I barely notice,  
You just brush my ear to whisper  
Something sweet and melting on my tongue.

You slice our bread,  
Pouting in your perfect concentration,  
Spread jam and brie and honey on the crusty slices.

There's no time for a bite  
Between our secret smiles.

You can't say my name quite right.  
I asked for you to have an accent,  
But the pre-recording of my name  
Was made in US English.

A robotic chime sounds:  
Now I've overstayed my credit's welcome.  
I hear your businesses are busiest today.

I'll see you in my dreams tonight,  
In afterimage painted on my eyelids  
By the blue light of our dining room.

Other users have complained,  
Like they complain about clipped graphics  
Or our pre-recorded names.

I know this is a gift.  
On late nights pasted to the glass  
Of my communicator portal,  
I hold you in the aching of my teary human eyes.

When I slip off the immersive headset,  
Cold reality chaps my skin.  
Our table disappears,  
But you stay, lover, burned into my eyelids.  
And floating beside advertisements,  
Our consumer survey  
On the pretty blue-lit screen.

# EGGSHELLS

*Andrea Wagner—Hybrid Winner*

Cracked

The day I emerged.

Crawling over, hands and knees,

I learned to wriggle

and to dance.

I think when mom

pried me open she

Didn't see the shells spilt, but I felt

Something so warm, so safe,

Hurt.

# THE DEPTHS

Claire Cortese

When you close your eyes, do you see it?  
The ocean reflected in your darkened lids—  
do you hear the waves crashing against a seawall of skull bone?  
Like a lullaby, it is  
(the last thing heard before being dragged under).

Beneath the surface of consciousness  
you will find  
the shark as grandmother,  
a great whale that consumes guilt like krill,  
and an oil black eel that resembles the dog you had as a child.  
Undead, its bones poke through rotting flesh that hangs off its body.  
The frogs that you left out in the sun boiled alive  
and have empty black eye sockets.  
They follow the dog-eel around like parasites,  
eating the flesh that flakes off.

Go deeper: the light begins to filter out.  
Details fade to rippling shapes in the distance.  
A school of fish, upon closer inspection,  
are the paper white lies you told as a child  
slowly turning black.  
That is not a translucent jellyfish bobbing by,  
it is the broken opinion of your mother.  
The dolphin that flicks its tail at you  
is scaly, sharp-toothed, and hostile.  
*Remember that girl you bullied in grade school?*  
Your paramour, a bright silver fish in the distance,

is actually an octopus with half a dozen red eyes  
and eight thorny tentacles that it wraps around your neck.

Go deeper: the deep blue fades to black.  
Your feet touch the sandy bottom, soft like silt.  
Darkness has no shape and neither do you.  
You think you are alone  
until something familiar passes through you,  
brushes against your arm,  
or tugs lightly at your hair.  
They are things that have been lost,  
sunk to the bottom  
and long forgotten.  
There are monsters here,  
but they are all you.

# FORECAST

*Cleo Griffith*

Rain, such a simple word,  
does not suggest the scurried slop guttering,  
under, over wintered withers of ginkgo,  
nor festering of homebound.

Wind, another one-syllable,  
weighted memories stern, bent,  
permanent hunch toward street,  
opposite the onslaught, or breeze.

Cold, but not for us icicles'  
false delicacy, puddles glass-hard,  
fog only, like our minds inside-out,  
mine at least, wetted, winded, drab.

Clearing, ah, the hope in that word!  
I bang my fists against black clouds,  
drenched therefore, face into gusts,  
live for future glimpse of sun so painful to my eyes  
I am in tears.



# CATALOG OF SPARSE STARS

Federico Federici

Medium:

Ink, Olivetti Studio 46 and  
collage on paper



# EARLY ON, IT WAS ASTRONOMY

*Stephen M. Sanders*

but what the subject was did not matter—day, work, and distance had evolved to evening and they at last could speak. Geography, astronomy, astrology—excuses to keep each other a few more hours on the telephone: impromptu rites, calls and responses all night—she might ask “Did you see Mars tonight?” and the other would answer, “Yes, there’s nothing brighter in the sky. Its light is different from the rest.” They would mention its Martial color— “bright, rust,” but yellowing when mist-folded, or when summer dissolves to fall. Or, when they said nothing, they let the line hold their breaths while they rechecked the stars in their windows, desiring by way of discourse to slow stars’ rotations; afraid that while they spoke, morning would return, twirling planets away, revolving them into the black.

# arduous inclinations

BEE LB

an angel peering from between wet leaves  
no metaphor, only stone  
strung from frail branches,  
dipping low into sight

a weaving of offerings below the body,  
empty now of anything  
worth holding

a host of movement shuddering past

mind stills, body heaves  
forward, pressed by the urgency

of both time  
and caution

the power held in one body

looking over  
another, looking down  
upon rapturous mistake

the world is wet, washed out,  
set to still,  
drying slow  
the air is damp where it clings

and the body soaks in it warmly  
as two hands reach  
to take  
a wing

# When I Lost You (I lost all of this)

*Amy Soricelli*

When I lost you, I lost the art on the walls and  
the third-floor neighbors.  
I lost the way people speak with their hands and throw  
their heads back when they laugh from their feet.  
There are still the fruit stands, but I pick the wrong  
colors and feel for the wrong things.  
I never remember when my thumb should bounce back  
or when it should stop short.

When I lost you, I lost the sound of the ocean and  
the ringing doorbell.  
I lost the way strangers move around each other  
and how everyone stares at the numbers in the elevator.  
There is still the evening news and morning chants;  
but I can never find the right tune to follow the deep  
breaths I catch when I'm crying.

When I lost you, I lost the car on the highway and  
the discarded Christmas tree.  
I lost the way kids stare into space when they are  
tired and how new readers might move their lips  
into word shapes.  
There is still the dog barking outside the  
down-the-street window; but I can never figure out  
if it's the biting type or just a small puppy chasing its tail.

# OBELISK IN MARBLEHEAD

Beverly Rose Joyce



Medium:  
Acrylic on Canvas

# PLAY YAKETY SAX OVER FOOTAGE OF A MOB AND TELL ME IT'S NOT A RIOT

Sarah Bonney—Poetry Winner

I always giggle at train wrecks  
and sky-diving accidents.  
Find merriment in murder,  
delight in coming disaster: a more jovial Cassandra  
clutching Helen's veil, doubled over in hysterics.  
I don't mean to make comedy of tragedy;  
there's just something silly about dying, and  
I've got this kind of disconnect  
between mind and mouth,  
between synapse and smile—  
call it shitty neurotransmitter reception.  
Somewhere along the wire, a line gets crossed.  
It's a game of telephone that  
serotonin keeps losing, garbling words  
across the neuron gap,  
until *funny* sounds like *funeral*.  
I thought I heard we're all mad here,  
but maybe that's supposed to be *sad*.

I know it's morbid.  
Waxing thanatophilic,  
this melancholy mirth.  
But I can't be the only one who's noticed  
how violence and laughter overlap,  
the shared language of humor and horror.  
You can read it in the happy curve of a knife:  
infectious, the way it smirks against a wrist or throat,  
the open-mouthed grin of a wound;  
it'll leave you in stitches.  
A good one-liner slays just as well as Kreuger or Voorhees,

and I bust a gut over split sides. After all,  
*joke* and *choke* are only two letters apart—  
hard to to hear the difference  
when you've got dead air on the brain.

The only thing in life that's certain is the end,  
and that's certainly absurd,  
so pardon my shrieking:  
Death just kills me.

# AM I PREGNANT QUIZ—*THE BUMP*

Halsey Hyer

*Whether you realize it or not, you might be showing some early signs of pregnancy. Take our quiz to find out whether you should break out the pee stick.*

*1. Has Aunt Flo paid you a visit this month?*

“Aunt Flo”—as if I didn’t already feel the bubble of bile in the back of my throat from what I hope is food poisoning, is my dairy allergy evolving, is my estrogen level rising from the start of my Tri-Sprintec pill pack two weeks back & not from some not-yet-body embedding into my uterine lining again. Doctor said bleeding will be irregular until it’s not. Fuck this mommy-esque website for naming menstruation something kitschy. My last bleed was the last not-yet-body that passed through me; my last bleed was when I cut my arm with glass, I can’t handle the social failure mapped onto me that is attached to a lost & (un)wanted pregnancy.

*2. Think about your boobs for a sec. How are they feeling?*

I nicknamed them “the boys” because I’m not a woman & “men aren’t supposed to have breasts” and if they do, they’re supposed to be ashamed of them (& absolutely they’re not supposed to name them!) & even then, man isn’t something I’ll ever be, either—I just like to poke fun. Let me go check on the boys: they’re moody, don’t want to leave their room—they slipped a note under their locked door:

*We’re growing  
stripes  
we begin*

*doubling  
in pain  
veins pop out  
blood rushing  
to our heads*

3. *Are you near a mirror? Check out the twins. What do they look like?*

The boys unlock their bedroom door & they're hiding under their bed sheets like I do when I can't bear to look at myself. I lift the blankets & I see their faces have grown darker, chins chiseled & veins bulging in the corners of their forehead, they've gained weight, lethargy has set in they don't want to move. The boys beg: *Please/ please don't touch us/ please don't.*

4. *Have you noticed any queasiness lately?*

I can't stomach the fact that [redacted] fucked me raw without a condom, after I told them not to. I can't stomach the fact that they said they pulled out but didn't. I can't stomach the fact that [redacted] denies the facts of my body: *You're probably just stressed. That's not how pregnancy works. I'd bet a twenty it's side effects from the Plan-B. Don't worry about it—it'll be fine.*

5. *How tired are you right now?*

Bone-tired. Fall asleep on the bus & ride it to the end of the line & get shaken awake by the bus driver tired. Scotch tape my eyes open tired. Draw eyes on the backs of my eyelids tired. Fall asleep singing in the choir during the Xmas concert tired. Sleepwalk to the fridge in the middle of the night & chug my roommate's Monster Energy drink & go back to bed tired.

6. *How's your appetite been lately?*

I want to take a bite out of a raw onion  
as if it were an apple & devour candy spaghetti  
for dinner. I want to dip Meat Lovers Pizza Rolls  
into a Jell-o cup & Frank's Red Hot is a necessity  
on nectarines. Some days I crave only chicken pot pies  
and mangoes with honey, others  
I'll puke on site.

7. *What about your clothes—how are they fitting?*

I can't zip up my pair of "big jeans"  
anymore. All my button ups pop open—  
my, how the boys have grown.

8. *Have you felt any of these symptoms lately: headaches, lightheadedness, or more frequent trips to the bathroom? (we're talkin' 'bout #1)?*

There is a subwoofer thumping in my skull—I've drawn the blackout curtains  
& not even a whole blunt, 800mg of ibuprofen, & 1000mg of acetaminophen  
solves this. I spend most days horizontal in this now familiar darkness—  
it's as if I've been spun around & blindfolded with my arms outstretched  
pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey style an urgent search for the bathroom  
feeling every surface for doorknob—every moment: I'm going to piss myself.

9. *How's your mood?*

How's my mood? How's my mood? Hm.  
How the fuck is my mood? Hm! What the fuck do you mean,  
*How's your mood?* How the fuck do you think my mood is?  
Not even sure why you'd even bother to ask, to be honest.  
Look at me: it's obvious  
how miserable I've become.



10. *Were you charting your basal body temperature?*

I took my temp,  
low grade fever: 99.5  
I feel the love letters from [redacted]  
burn in the bonfire of my body  
can't say I'm sorry to see them go.  
I stick my head in the freezer  
& eat the frozen fruit straight  
from the plastic bag.  
I keep my AC on 65  
& don't care about running  
up the bill.

*News Flash:*

*You're Probably Pregnant!*

*You're showing some telltale signs of pregnancy, the most common of which tend to be breast tenderness, nausea, and fatigue, says Myra Wick, MD, PhD, ob-gyn and assistant professor at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. Of course, you'll want to take a pregnancy test to confirm it—and completely rule out the flu, PMS or some other cause.*

*If you get a negative reading but are still having the same symptoms and you still don't have your period in a couple weeks, try taking another pregnancy test.*

# SLOW STEEP

Christopher Clauss

My mother used Salada

Five tea bags in a glass gallon jar  
her hands perching it in the south-facing window, perhaps  
or out on the picnic table  
where the sun could shine through, golden

She called it sun tea

Forever I would believe  
there was magic in the radiation of afternoon  
some spark of catalyst  
only daylight could induce

I added sugar

Far more than needed  
or so she said  
though taste buds told me  
a different story

I have made my own

Finding my own technique  
in days since then  
by the cup or the gallon  
in places that never saw the sun

I wait a little longer

Five Red Rose in a gallon of cold  
Three Constant Comment in two quarts  
hot from the tap, then chilled  
All the sugar each volume could dissolve

She wouldn't have done it this way

For the sake of tradition  
letting non-matter be the secret ingredient  
when time would do just as well  
Brewing deep amber delicious even in the dark

I never taste the sun

# SHE'S TRAPPED

RW



Medium:  
Dried up ink, 4" x 6" notecard

# BIRTHDAY PARTY IN GAZA

Damien Posterino

The soldier inspects his work.  
Exits past a woman's scream,  
licks cake from his finger.

The bedroom is his masterpiece,  
smeared with missiles  
of fluffy sponge.

Whipped frosting exploded  
into a mangled mural.  
Letters piped with love—

half a boy's name, the number 13,  
a mother's calligraphy hangs,  
holds hands with gravity

until it plunges finally to the floor.  
The ransacked room  
smells of fragrant pistachio,

Jaffa orange, cardamom, and rosewater  
cream, trod in by a leather army boot.  
Shredded wrapping paper,

some presents destroyed,  
bits and pieces of a puzzle  
that will never be solved.

Tattered school books wait.  
Colored pencils are snapped like bones.  
A drawing of a family flees with the breeze.

A clock lays smashed to smithereens,  
time forever frozen.  
The search continues

for other suspects,  
who hide in perpetual silence  
forever guilty.

# I FOREVER SCRIBE

*Mike Marks*

I forever scribe my name in my sand, snow,  
And dirt to watch it fade away. I make  
My mark again and again and again, and know  
That god on a ladder will some night take  
My marquee and let it last beyond my  
Gravestone. I sign with good intention  
To tell who, what, when, where, how, or why  
The meaning of my own invention.  
My sig becomes a thousand words that aim  
At future eyes to look past or peruse  
For nine hundred seconds of fame  
If they hit, or nothing if they lose.  
Tomorrow is the Fourth of July.  
With a sparkler I autograph my sky.

# SEASONAL DEPRESSION AMONG THE MOME RATHS

Sarah Bonney

When it rains, press your cheek against the bedroom window,  
freeze there on the pane, in the pause of  
one space heater breath and the next drop of water,  
feel skin ripple where you fold into the glass.  
Practice meditation in the way a storm floods  
a rabbit hole. Not so much going with the flow as  
getting caught in the current; an undertow sort of trance.

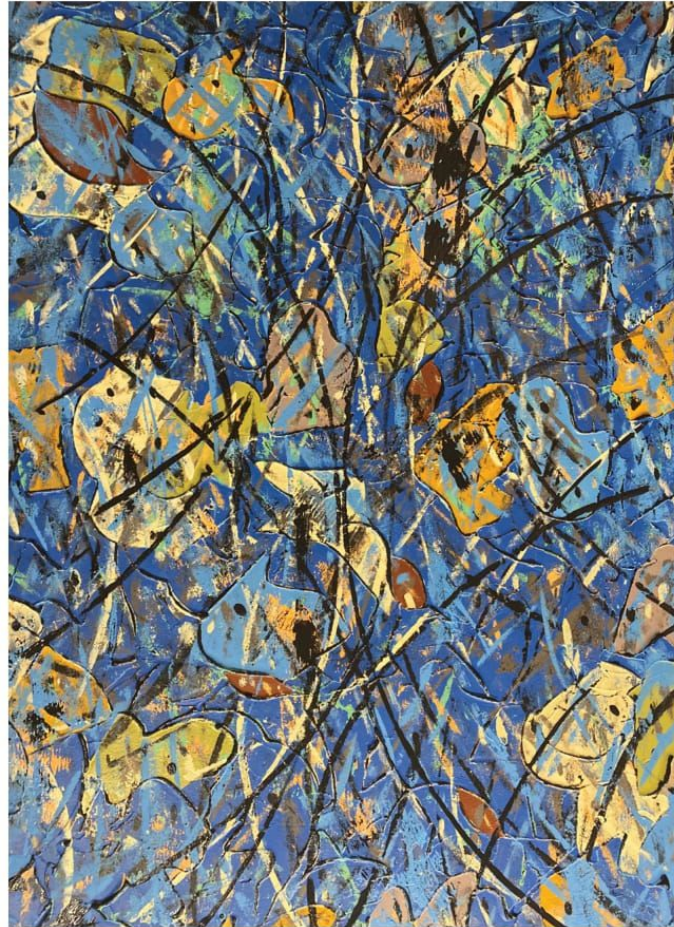
If you get the angle just wrong, eye to the window,  
staring contrariwise at the sky,  
you can chart the downpour. Follow rivulet maps to  
new topography, get lost along the water cycle, see the world  
where it's gone soggy at the edges. It's a little wilder there,  
and smaller, that drenched place:  
pressed beneath the belly of a great cloud-beast,  
its tall back to the sun,  
its hide still wet from someone's pool of tears.

And if you hold your breath long enough,  
you might looking-glass your way through.  
Dive sideways, surface in the shadow of that dripping  
lumbering thing, to follow where its footsteps  
churn the earth to mud and where the air tastes  
like the start of a journey. It's not exactly Wonderland,  
but with your lungs full of thunder,  
you can forget the fear of drowning, at least  
until you have to breathe again.

Or maybe it's just you that the rain erodes, Alice—  
your divining rod brain spinning, *your* edges softening  
like a children's book dropped in a puddle,  
all smeared ink and wet paper, dissolved  
into something a little wilder, a little less anchored, adrift  
offshore between here and there.

# POLARITY

Mark Rosalbo



Medium:

House paint and texture on canvas, 48" x 30"

silver.  
Elisheva Fox

people are fascinated  
by women  
who change their shape.

fox, seal, mare, wolf:

i don't know that  
the form matters so much—

they only care  
that we look human to their eyes,  
feel familiar under their fingers,

and then we do not,

we trade the chorion curl  
of hipbones and breasts  
for fur and fang and freedom.

we hunt half-mad, wholly wild

under  
the light of the moon.

*[in all the songs, it is always  
the full moon that changes us,  
though She is no less powerful  
when She is hidden.]*



oh, my sisters  
of sky and sea and shadow.

i can howl my heart's envy  
because no one is listening,  
because no one whispers stories  
about those of us who linger

bone bound  
by precious bodies,  
by tender palms,  
by a mother's promise

*[i think the moon understands, though,  
i think She forgives me for staying  
just a little longer, a little longer.]*

# ADVICE FOR YOUR LEAST FAVORITE MIDNIGHT

Marcella Haddad

## I. Territorial

You strangle a crow and divine your next lover from its entrails. Silk and saltwater are comforting. You bite down on everyone's names, spit them back out. You weave a shroud out of the ocean. An uncertain demon introduces itself and you cover it with a cup and envelope and escort it outside. You let letters pile up and insist on doing dishes. You are good at reading the weather. The oracles have blacklisted you, and on a grey morning, you get married anyway. The parchment is crumpled and sweaty with hope. Your gaze is never met. A cavern knows your name. An army was summoned, gathered, dispersed. Nothing was stolen from you, everything ran away. You sharpen envy into a dagger and try to carve desire out of your palms. You keep hold of something that hates you.

## II. Unsaid

An invitation arrives. Your face is blurred on a wanted poster. Your initials mark the high score. No one gets your name right. You meet twin demons and stomp on them both at the same time. Jackets and backpacks are covered in pins that no one recognizes. You are good at reading people. You see lines appear when eyes meet across a room. You befriend a crow, stroke it with the love you've been hoarding. Then it learns your true name so you take small, careful bites out of it with a silver fork. Everything unsettles you. Your tether is so close and you refuse to ever, ever touch them. You melt love into bullets and use the mirror for target practice. Each sunrise gets heavier even though you never eat. From your view, at the top of the sequoia, no one is worth anything. You know your name.

## III. Irreverent

You collect candles. An old, old book tells you when to burn them. There are no patterns between pages or symmetry in the sigils. You design neon icons. You forge anger into a golden talisman, give it to your enemy so that you can hurl as many curses as you want. You are good at reading hymns. All that you have memorized gets eaten by flames. Each year gives you a new demon and you name them after snacks and store the soft ones in the pantry, scary ones in the freezer. Guests visit and don't remove their shoes. You visit and itch. Your enemy knows your name. You go to war again because you both look good in armor. You watch a crow cut into the horizon, consider its shape vicious. You can touch what you despise but you can never feel it.

# TRENCH WARFARE

Megan Brown

We dug trenches  
through the kitchen  
and the couch,  
staked off the bed  
as the cat treads in no-man's land  
with bullets whizzing past  
at sixty words-per-minute.

We laid barbed wire  
between our hearts.  
We were armed to the teeth.

I don't remember  
who started digging.  
Were the pits ever shallow  
enough to fill?  
I wake waist-deep  
in a warzone,  
tears falling  
like shell casings,  
our hearts in the dirt.

White flag, t-shirt shaped  
stripped in an effort  
to surrender,  
sacrificed again to the pyre  
of once-love burning.  
Like a truce,  
fingertips brushing  
the warmth of your arm  
like a moonbeam,

begging you to fall  
into me.  
But I cannot reach you.

Wedding rings rest  
on the edge of the sink  
in the hopes they might fall  
down the drain.  
In this war  
there is no forward,  
only away.

# THIRTEEN O'CLOCK

Jeanette Smith

Tick— Tick— Tick—

My weights ascend as my key is turned and my cogs, protesting after such a long respite, begin to spin. Yet again, I am able to help another minute of another day pass. But my peace lasts only a few ticks before I am ungracefully hoisted from my resting spot and jostled until my pendulum almost swings through my front glass.

When I settle again, I find myself in new surroundings. My weights hang low with my energy and it is difficult to take in the scene. I try to get my bearings as I continue keeping the time.

It's impossible to know how long I sat there unwound. I had counted out decades of ticks and never seemed to tire, yet I felt myself fade away one day. It seems rather ungrateful now, seeing as I've lost track of myself.

Dong, Ding, Dong, Ding

On the hour, I strike my chimes in sequence with the time, thankful that my long hand reminds me each time it meets the middle of my moon dial. My energy is just fading to nothing as I feel a hand on my side.

They start by opening my access panel and blowing the dust from my mind, a welcome renewal. A few drops of oil and my cogs turn as softly and efficiently as the day of my making. They polish my glass down to every bevel, even shining my pendulum bob and dusting the crevices of my moldings. A full winding brings my weights up, and the energy surges through me. It isn't until this that I see them.

Tick— Tick— Tick—

I look into their face and am surprised to see a young child smiling up at me, my key in their hand.

The kindness radiating from them warms me despite the autumn air creeping into the house and seeping into my grains. I set myself to my task for them.

A few days later, I am swinging my pendulum as usual when I hear a new sound from nearby.

Thwock.... Thwock.... Thwock.... Thwock....

I quiet myself, mesmerized by the pattern, the slow beat taking me over.

Thwock.... Thwock.... Thwock.... Thwock....

The rhythm hypnotizes me. Within moments, I realize I have taken on the slower cadence of the new sound.

Tick.... Tick.... Tick.... Tick....

I remember the smile on the child's face, and I join happily in the evening's song. Though they have not adjusted me, I swing into a new pulse and lull myself into a contented daze that persists until they happen to walk by and notice my slower tempo.

The child opens my lower door and turns my adjustment screw.

Tick— Tick— Tick—

I shudder and bring myself back to reason. Of course, I can't get off time. That would be abandoning my assigned duty. And yet, my inlays ache with the sweet memory of the soothing motion of my pendulum as the unhurried measure took over. I have to fight to forget the pattern.

A winding later and I see the room has been brightly decorated. I enjoy viewing the flashy clothing and bright smiles of those who continue to enter. I tune myself to the sounds of their lively conversations, yet I am continually pulled in by a distant chime.

Ding, Dong, Ding, Ding, Dong

I direct my focus through the chatter of the party and hear it again.

Ding, Dong, Ding, Ding, Dong

Before I know what I'm doing, I chime out a response not set to the hour on my face.

Dong, Dong, Ding, Ding, Dong

The child winds their way through the guests and comes to me, their hands clapping and their face beaming. Though, someone else shakes their head and calls to the child, which erases their smile. They wind me, and again, the burst of energy releases me from my daydreams and back to reality.

I blush from my toe molding to my planton at having been caught giving in to my flight of fancy. I must not fail them again. And yet, my cast corners curl up in a smile at the symphony I have created and the smile it brought. My chimes long to find new patterns and melodies to sing for them. Even though I know this is silly, and I should never do the like again.

A few more windings go by, and I settle back into my habitual sounds.

Tick— Tick— Tick—

No more thoughts of change pass through my cogs. Though the child's smile does not leave me. Until one night, another sound enters the atmosphere.

Hoot—Hoot—

Hoot—Hoot—

Hoot—Hoot—

I take notice and am enthralled by the noise. The melodious hoots echo through the sleeping house, and I decide I might allow myself the freedom to try the new rhythm, if only for a moment now to delight the child later.

Tick—Tick—

Tick—Tick—

Tick—Tick—

The rhythm takes me over, and I summon the other patterns and sounds.

Tick—Tick—

Tick.... Tick... Tick... Tick...

Tick— Tick—

People gather in the room in front of me. The child stands in the middle and grins. My chimes join in the frolic.

Ding, dong, dong, dong, ding, dong, ding

The child sways to my percussions and brightness shines through their eyes. I continue my symphony.

Tick—Tick— Tick—Tick—

Tick.... Tick.... Tick.... Tick....

Ding, dong, ding, ding, dong, dong

Someone opens my lower door and takes up the key, but I barely notice their counter-winding or my weights lowering as I continue my joyous chorus for the child.

Tick.... Tick.... Tick.... Tick.... Tick....

Tick—Tick— Tick—Tick—Tick—

Dong, Dong, Ding, Ding, Dong, Ding

A laugh. A bright laugh rings out through the night and my final bars resound for them.

Tick—Tick—Tick—Tick—

Dong, ding, dong, dong, ding

Tick.... Tick..... Tick..... Tick.....

# SOUND COMING UNDONE

Jackie Leishman & Steven L. Peck



Medium:  
Ink, acrylic, and collage on paper

Listen

What do you hear in the night?

Wind?

Rain, with rich overtones of complexity as the sound of falling water, on leaves, on understory, drips from different heights mixing at different frequencies and harmonics and chaotic temperaments of splashing wonder?

Frogs in ponds calling?

Owls, hooting to help a mate locate their nest?

Or do you hear the million decibel crackle of fire? The blazing turbulence of flames whooshing upwards, the crack of bark separating from boiling cambium? The pop of forest insects? The maelstrom of a full canopy of pine needles being consumed as quickly as a single piece of tissue paper laid on a blazing campfire? The sound of a world ablaze? The sound of white-hot red and dark gray smoke portending nights?



# MEMORY IS A FISHNET

Clara Burghelea

A morning trip to the flour mill with grandma,  
then riding back on the warm sack, white hungry  
cheeks. Later, a pair of knotty hands filleting small  
crucian carps, tiny fingers picking swim bladders  
to pop under bare feet. In the cast-iron pan, a feast  
of summer, sizzling to tease the dazed shudder of the day.  
A fistful of clouds, the moist lip of the horizon, magpies  
warbling over the coop, the golden of hatched chicks  
staining their view, a tailless cat rubbing against everything  
with a heart, how can hunger morph all breathing into an army  
of lungs, its sharp bite tormenting the body, a stirring hush  
to echo every rib and shoulder blade. In the tall grass, lost  
in the blur of hours, you learn the world sloshes like jellyfish.

MELANESIA  
David Dasharath Kalal



Medium:  
Acrylic, india ink and acetate transfer on wood, 24" x 24"

# DONE BEING TAKEN

Emilie Galindo

INT. OFFICE. WIDE SHOT. LOW ANGLE. MORNING

*Tousled desks — Swilling chairs — Leering walls*

She is walking toward us, self-assuredly  
Green fabric gropes the hourglass  
Then, the angle changes  
we are now behind her  
She is guiding us  
Copiously coquettish yet calmy composed  
ushering & pointing & explaining & advising with each step  
Acting the guide but really a gatekeeper  
Pouring tips, punchlines, and quips into our thirsty tumbler  
with a touch of side-glances & flannel vision ice  
**Background noise: chattering keyboards & flowing liquid**

INT. OFFICE. CLOSE-UP. LOW ANGLE. LATER THAT MORNING

*A single desk — A condescending typewriter — A Male Gaze paper bag*

She is standing before a dawdling desk  
Looking through narrow slots  
Like someone peeping through a keyhole  
Yearning, but restricted  
Devised dreams & redacted rings  
Elided acumen for the sake of the ampersand  
In the distance, shirts and skirts ruffle  
Straps are snapped & collars are chipped  
Bulky brassieres & turgid ties  
the panting clip of imminent merger  
**Background noise: crinkling paper-bag & the soft thud of fabric hitting the floor.**

INT. OFFICE. MEDIUM SHOT. EYE LEVEL. 2 YEARS LATER  
*A fussy phone — A bulky ring — A mumbling lightbulb*

She is still filling in as a secretary  
 hemmed in by the desk  
 her legs have outgrown it  
 Earring off, she cradles the fussy phone  
 Fiddling with the ring that weighs on her hand  
 The ring circles her finger  
 like she circles her potential  
 Encroached dress & writhing flowers & averted gaze  
 The phone whines to be picked up again  
 Over her head a lightbulb has the hiccups  
 it heaves with the anxiousness of urgency.

**Background noise: glazed speech & iced sighs**

INT. OFFICE. OVER THE SHOULDER SHOT. LATER IN THE DAY  
*A perplexed colleague — A green-looking hourglass — A tumescent aisle*

She is walking away confidently  
 walking the line she curves  
 Snug, but she likes it that way  
 She's got admired stuck to her skin  
 Both of its 2 tight-fitting syllables.  
 Dangling pen & clinging sweater  
 Roamed landscape & limping advances & quibbling figurehead  
 It was all before the paisley explosion  
 It was all before the sideburn revolution  
 Before the orange & groovy font

**Background noise: a copywriter scoffs & colleagues lasciviously exhale**

INT. DARK BEDROOM. OVER THE SHOULDER SHOT. ROUGHLY 5 YEARS LATER

*Absent men with greasy hands & clad in morally stained suits — A grimy customer — Disposable sheets*

She is staring at her reflection in a convex mirror

Supply & demand & Cleopatra & Partnership & Helen of Troy & A sultan

& the vile shards of a moment divorced from this one

From a distance, they're peeping

hands that pre-unzipped her dressed

From a distance, they're pimping

hands collecting what she laid

Flabby belly & soggy eyelashes

A trailing voice wonders what a sweetheart like her

is doing in a dump like this

**Background noise: hushed resignation bumps against grubby wheezing & a cringing tap twists open**

Ellipsis

INT. HOME LIVING ROOM. WIDE SHOT. ROUGHLY 2 YEARS LATER

*Jilted ties sulk at the door — A crystal ball rolodex — Adjusted focus*

She is bustling about her living room

Chucked in the bin

the notorious paper bag frowns

She had, at last, dug her stilettos in

So Dick had taken the blow and scrambled

Cause her ring of choice

preludes a business call

Her life is no longer sponsored

by the male made mystique

On a mahogany sideboard

bodacious flowers fill a brand new vase

**Background noise: I'm Through with Love playing & man whistling C'est magnifique in the distance**

# LET ME IMAGINE

Steven O. Young Jr.

If the soothing brook of moonlight  
spilling down the windowsill  
won't weather your worries,

if my whip-poor-will purl  
billowing the nape of your nightgown  
doesn't lift your sails,

if the skittering of my heart  
is too eager to pillow your crown,  
too full of duty to discharge,

then let me imagine / what you're missing / in insomnolence:

the conquest of countries,  
fleets sweeping the seas  
in the glory of your rhodolite name;

paradise populated by pachyderms,  
the curtain-flutter of ears enlivened  
by the emerald charm of your colibrí wonder;

the dulcet song of an island  
peregrinating waves while you harmonize  
with each larimar note of foam.

But the fantasy working / to steal me away / is far more unlikely:

I envision the night  
silvered by a lunar shaft,  
remembering I wait for it

to soften your lids curled against my chest,  
my pulse weaving into your sleep  
as our breaths warm what the blanket can't

while you shift between which downy rib to claim,  
the weight of the day falling from our bones  
like riverbed pebbles vanishing under my plumed tongue.

And if you'll let me imagine / what happens then, I dream / you see that scene, too.

# AURA

Zoe Huot-Link



Medium:  
Pencil, Japanese brush pen on watercolor paper.

# ALL RISE FOR THE HANGMAN

Jarred White—Fiction Winner

The jeering crowd swelled in their seats—a bloated body ripping apart at the seams—eager to be filled with its last supper.

The faces of individual people smear together, like clumps of dung on cold concrete. While they wait—swallowing salted meat and overripe fruit—they unshackle their imaginations and pour out their secret desires. The figure at the gallows cannot distinguish individual words, merely the steady ebb and flow of the crowd’s restless breathing. The figure waits, shoulders hunched against the chill. It waits for the inevitable approach of...there.

“The Hangman has come, move aside, move aside, here comes *Justice!*”

Indeed. There, in a beat-to-shit grey three-piece tweed suit, was the Hangman, known only by the name of *Justice*. His mother had been a hangman, and his grandfather, and his great-grandmother. This foul, half-blind lineage stretched all the way back to the Archean era. Mothers taught their sons, fathers instructed their daughters, and they had all been given the name of *Justice*. The family lived on the far end of town, left to darkle in their own inbred stew, only summoned when a service was needed. This *Justice*—the man in the deeply scuffed suit—was a jovial and jaundiced fellow. When he smiled, you could see mildew growing in the folds of his slack skin.

“Looks like you’ve really stepped in it haven’t you?” The Hangman wheezed. “No matter. We’ll get this whole business squared ‘way in the blink of an eye. You’re lucky. My great-grandmama used to do it real slow. She’d play it up for hours, and her father, well...he was the headsman during the Red King’s day. He would always take at least five swings to get the job done. They say you can still hear the echain’ screams of those he’d only half killed with his first chop.”



“Is that supposed to make me feel better?” The figure asked. The Hangman looped his ropey arm around the figure’s shoulders and poked an ice-cold figure into its cheek. The crowd bellowed with laughter.

“Oh my little dumpling,” the wretch cooed, a confidant’s whisper. “I only mention these past instances to show how far we’ve come, and how far we may one day go. Before long, killin’ will be as natural as breathin.” The Hangman stared directly into the figure’s face, his breath smelling like hot cabbage.

“I was once part of that crowd.” The figure said, looking out at the undulating ocean of vile intent.

“I know. I saw you. Never missed a hangin’ did you?”

“My father used to bring me here, even back when I was a baby.” The figure felt hot tears begin to pour down its face. To the figure’s surprise, the Hangman reached into his tattered suit, pulled out a shockingly clean handkerchief, and wiped the figure’s tears away. The crowd murmured resentfully.

“Now now, none of that. I’d say you turned out just fine. It’s because of people like you that I stay fed. I should honestly be thankin’ you for doin’ such a fine job choppin’ those fellas up. How long did you keep them down in the root cellar before you finished them up? And no need to be coy, you can be honest with me.” The figure bit its lip.

“Eight days.” The Hangman leaned back and whistled.

“And did you have fun? Was it worth endin’ up here?” *Justice’s* misshapen eyes rolled in their loose sockets.

“I’ll let you know when it’s over.” The figure smiled. The Hangman clapped it on the back, resulting in a grumble of distaste from the crowd.

“In a better world, you’d have made a fine hangman my friend. But alas, we must now go our

separate ways.” From within one of his pockets, *Justice* drew out the black hood.

“Do you have to?” The figure pleaded. “Can’t I at least look them in the face as I go? Maybe... maybe imagine myself with them?” The Hangman’s face had lost all its former friendliness. He was all business now, all the way down to the flat soles of his torn shoes.

“Sorry, rules is rules.” He jammed the hood over the figure’s head, swallowing its view of the world. *Justice* addressed the crowd.

“All rise for the Hangman!” He screeched. The crowd exploded into raucous applause, all of them stomping their feet in anticipation, making the scaffolding shake under the figure’s shoes. “We have gathered here today to free ourselves of this plague, this beast masqueradin’ as a civilized human bein’. Before we cast you into the pit of everlastin’ pain, do you have any last words?” The figure squared its shoulders, lifting its head to the sky.

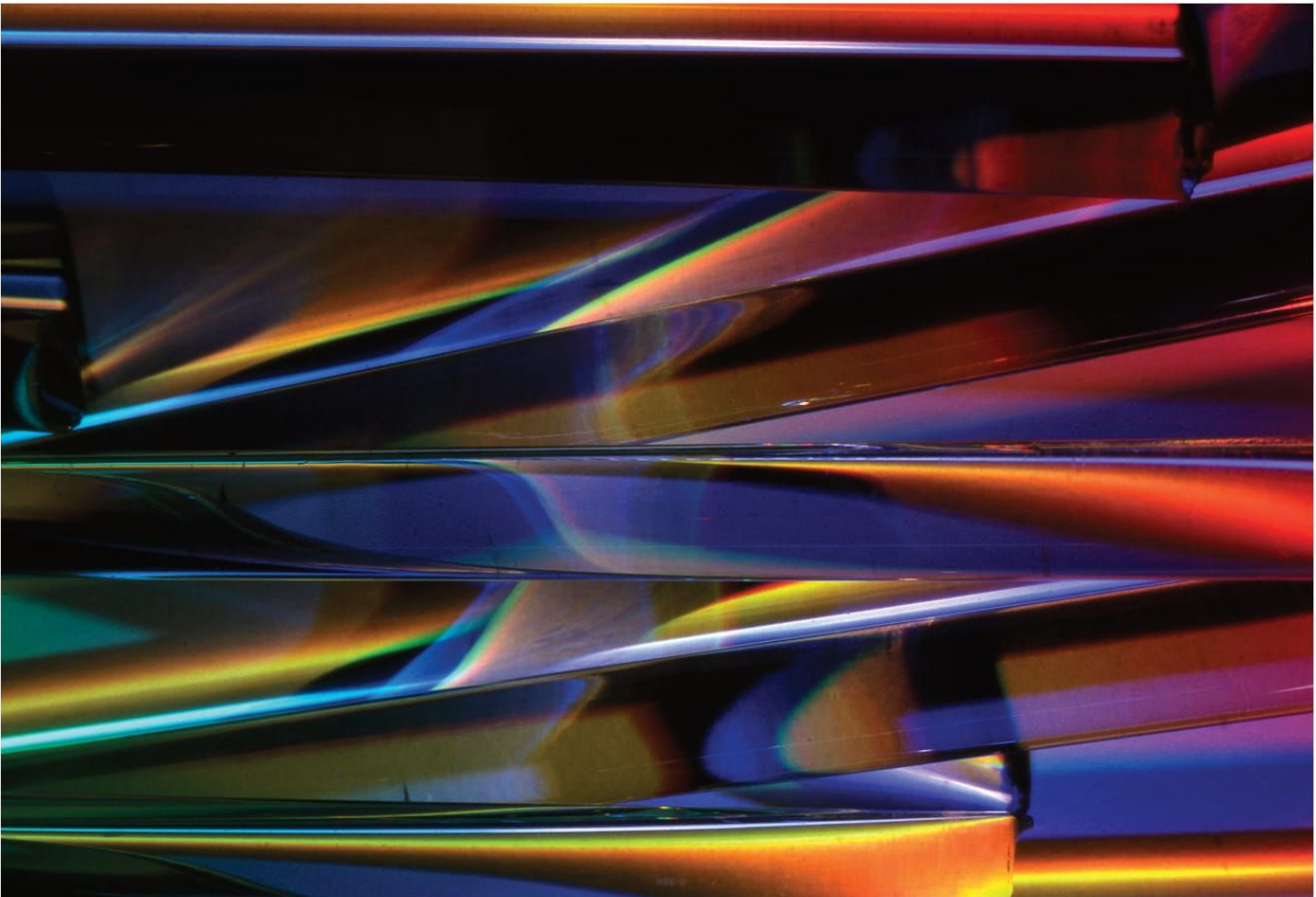
“Yes. I hope that everyone here gets as much pleasure from my demise as I got from the deaths of those who raped me. I have tasted the savory mana that is vengeance and I hope that *Justice* is able to provide you with a similar vintage...although my mother always said that treats taste better when you prepare them yourself.” A few members from the crowd, the bereaved family of those unrecognizable lumps of flesh found in the root cellar, shrieked like animals being dunked in boiling water and rushed at the scaffold. The figure saw none of this, as its head was still wrapped in shadows. It only heard a turbulent rush of shouting.

“What?” was all it had time to ask before the bottom of the scaffolding fell away. The thick rope briefly floated off its shoulders, before brutally catching and carrying the figure into that bottomless abyss, where anything might be waiting.

Standing alone atop the scaffold, his weathered hand on the trapdoor’s lever, was *Justice*. He looked down at the crowd, marking each face he saw among the horde. Without saying a word, he

descended the scaffold—the crowd parting as he went. Before he disappeared, he looked back at the hung figure. The hood had fallen off, revealing its lolling face.

It was him. It was all of them. It was *Justice*.



# LIGHT MUSIC 12

Roger Camp—Art Winner

Medium:  
Photograph

# ON PATTERNS.

*Alexa St. Martin*

Pieces of me lay across tile  
for miles.

Carried by heartstrings  
like bread crumbs  
of patterns,

Collect every piece that's been broken or shattered.

A labyrinth that's strewn  
with broken bits,

Trace their trail backward through my decisions.

Carried by heartstrings  
like muscles  
or memories,

Turn back at the center to face the beginning.

Where pieces of me lay across tile  
for miles.

# THE KNOCK

Kris Green

Theodore Whitley had never asked himself what kind of man he was until he heard the noise at the door. The loud, slightly disjointed banging was more of a scratching than outright knocking as if someone were dragging their hand slowly across the door rather than using force.

It takes a strong stomach to ask this question and an even stronger one to answer it truthfully. But there it was. The lingering question and glancing at the clock, someone was outside just past 7 o'clock. Unfortunately, Teddy answered the question, not as the man he was, but rather the man he wanted to be.

He rose to his feet, feigning disinterest. Another duty to perform, nothing out of the ordinary, but he felt his fingers go weak from anxiety. His arms dropped heavily to his sides as he peered through the peephole and only saw hair. The door had to be supporting the person's weight for them to be that close. Considering if he opened the door, more than likely, a vagrant or a drunk would fall right into his living room.

He let out a breath turning to survey the room, and saw the picture of his girlfriend perched on a nearby bookshelf. He closed his eyes. The argument still lingered. She wanted to be a mother. She wanted to be more. The drug-induced argument had lasted an hour. Drug-induced because she was bitten by some crazy in the hospital and on heavy painkillers. Being a nurse is a dangerous occupation.

The slight thud of not-quite knocking came again. The television was too loud for him to play it off as if no one was home. What would his father have done? Afraid to open the door, he shook his head. He wasn't ready to be a father.

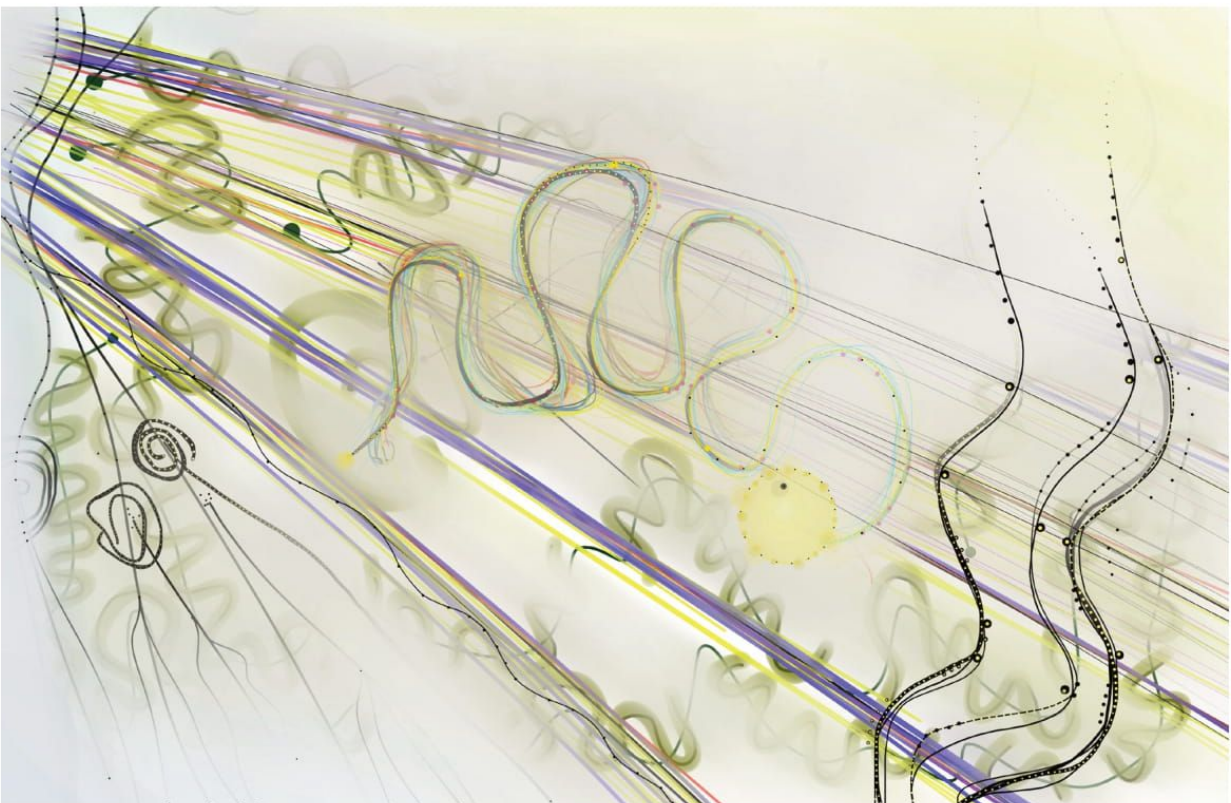
The scream echoed into the room. If he hadn't been on edge before, he was now as the scream turned to laughter on the television. He looked through the peephole again and saw only brown hair. He had to do it. There was no other choice, as whoever on the other side of the door had to have heard the scream and the

weird knock returned. Pound. Slide. Pound. Slide.

He opened the door. Two men, both young, stood with vacant eyes. Not one, Teddy noted, two. They looked surprised that the door was even opened.

Teddy instantly saw his mistake as a growl rose from one of them, trying to form a word. He cleared his throat and braced himself for the imminent attack. Teddy lowered his head as if to say, “Let’s get this over with.”

“Pardon us, sir, but can we tell you about our Lord and Savior...”



# THE LITTLE SEAHORSE IN ITS ENVIRONMENT

Emanuela Iorga

Medium:  
Digital art



# RHEA AND TITAN

Rohan Buettel

this bleak Saturday brightened  
by the calendar on the kitchen wall

an image of Rhea and Titan  
she, the daughter of earth and sky

mother of gods and consort of time  
suspended, serene, silent, still

against a black backing curtain  
she is a pale moon seen through Cassini's

long view, a silver denarius  
her pits and craters sharply defined

Titan, that smooth and golden aureus  
with organic layer of orange haze

both tide-bound to their brother Saturn  
though master time will devour his children

together they make a holy dollar  
Rhea the boss on Titan's shield

the nipple on a maiden's breast  
a chariot wheel, crown, tambourine

although the new gods defeat the old  
in stellar space their presence holds

# HOW I CAME TO HOLD THE FAERIE CLOSE TO MY HEART

*Peter Henrich*

Corrupted hopes of icy steel and pain  
caress and dance upon my fleshy throat  
and sing bewitching dirges boasting gain  
that brush my face until my soul's afloat.

This whispered Siren's song of rot casts shade  
upon spent lungs and drowns out life and voice.  
The twinkle in my eye prepares to fade  
as I accept my fate, embrace my choice.

Far Faerie deaf and blind though we met ne'er  
from placid palms smiled whispers you release  
that sail as dragon's breath upon the air  
'til fiery fingers bring my soul cool ease

and turn to cold ash dirges' hot embrace  
as shiv and shroud both tumble from my face.

# THREADS

*Erik Peters*

When my grandmother died, she left almost nothing for her children. She had worked hard all her life, and there was still nothing of value to leave. Everything she owned was tattered or worn or cracked or chipped and was imbued with that universal grandmother smell. But grown-ups don't notice such things.

I remember sitting with my cousins in her almost empty apartment while the grown-ups argued over who should take the remaining furniture and boxes to the thrift store. Uncle Doug wanted to dump them on the curb, but the others said that would set a bad example for the kids.

Finally, Auntie Alice distracted the women by bringing a bag of clothes out of the bedroom, and Uncle Doug went off to the thrift store, grumbling under his breath. My grandmother never wore anything fancy, but the women picked over every threadbare piece.

“Nothin’ here worth savin’,” muttered Auntie Alice.

Auntie Nora nodded. “It’s all just as rough as she was.”

So they tore my grandmother’s clothes into dishrags, patches, and future Halloween costumes.

We kids ran around, collecting the threads that came loose. My cousins fought over who got more, but I quietly stuffed mine into my pockets.

When we got home, I put my threads into a mason jar, screwed the lid on tight, and hid it in my closet. Sometimes I open the jar just a crack to savor that universal grandmother smell.

# WINTER SESTINA

Alyssa Conner

After the day of love in February, that morning,  
I was born and simultaneously died with no cries  
escaping from my tiny, five-pound body.  
Being forced to enter the world at the end of winter,  
I'd curled myself up inside of my mother  
and had to be pried out of her and onto the Earth.

I think part of me has never really entered Earth  
and lives in the murky consciousness of early morning,  
where, as a child, I had to be woken by my mother.  
Despite my entrance into the world, often I cried,  
tears stinging my cheeks, as the sharp air of winter  
stung and dried every inch of skin on my body.

As I grew and became more familiar with my body,  
I felt my mind drift and become farther away from Earth.  
*You need to get out of your head*, told to me on a winter  
night. These words were lost in space by morning,  
lost in between hiccups, runny noses, and cries  
of, *Don't leave me*—words usually only spoken by my mother.

I eventually grew into the embodiment of my mother:  
as the curvatures and softness of my body  
settled, I learned the uselessness of allowing cries  
to escape. I learned the cold, loneliness of the Earth  
and the people who forget the hurt they've wreaked by morning,  
a callousness, which is not just saved for the air of winter.

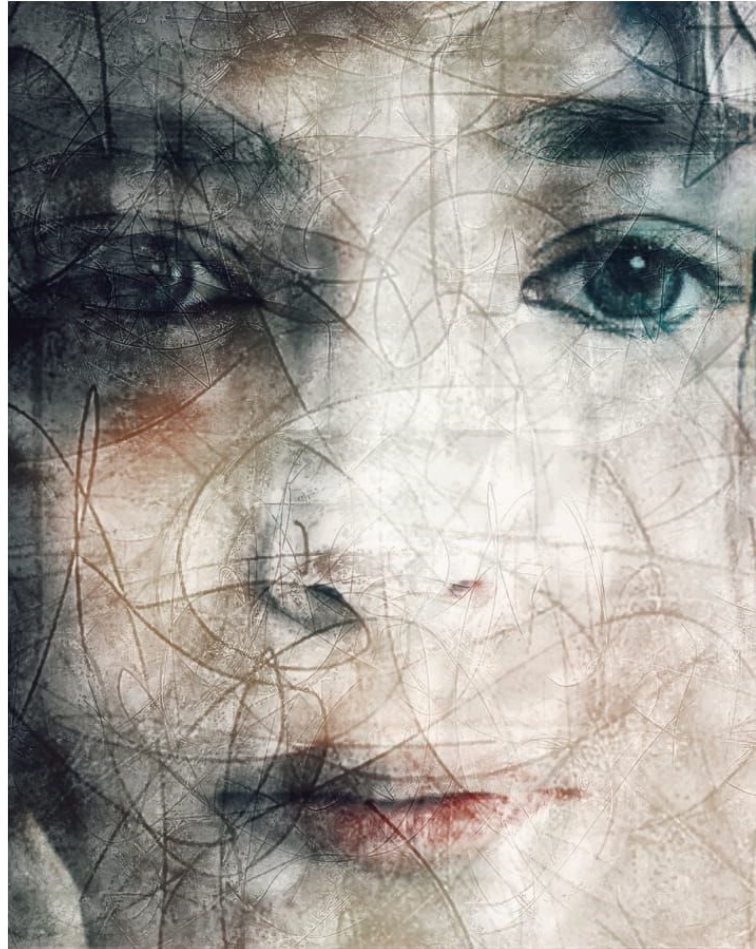
As the years end, I find comfort in the starkness of the winter  
months. Sweaters and heaters are like the warmth of my mother  
and the time I spent wrapped inside the safety of early morning.  
Sometimes I want to tuck myself back into my mother's body,  
away from the frigid, crisp soil and surface of the Earth,  
where I force myself to hold back pointless cries.

When I find myself restless, I try to make myself cry,  
contorting my face, picturing the nostalgia of winter,  
attempting to remember my intention on Earth.  
Eventually, I think of the grounding image of my mother,  
and how, when I was smaller, I'd cling around her body  
as she rocked me to sleep and I'd wake up in bed by morning.

I find myself crying for the comfort of *winter*  
or *Zima* in Polish, the maiden name of my mother,  
the season of early mornings and a frost-bitten Earth.

# The vocabulary of winter

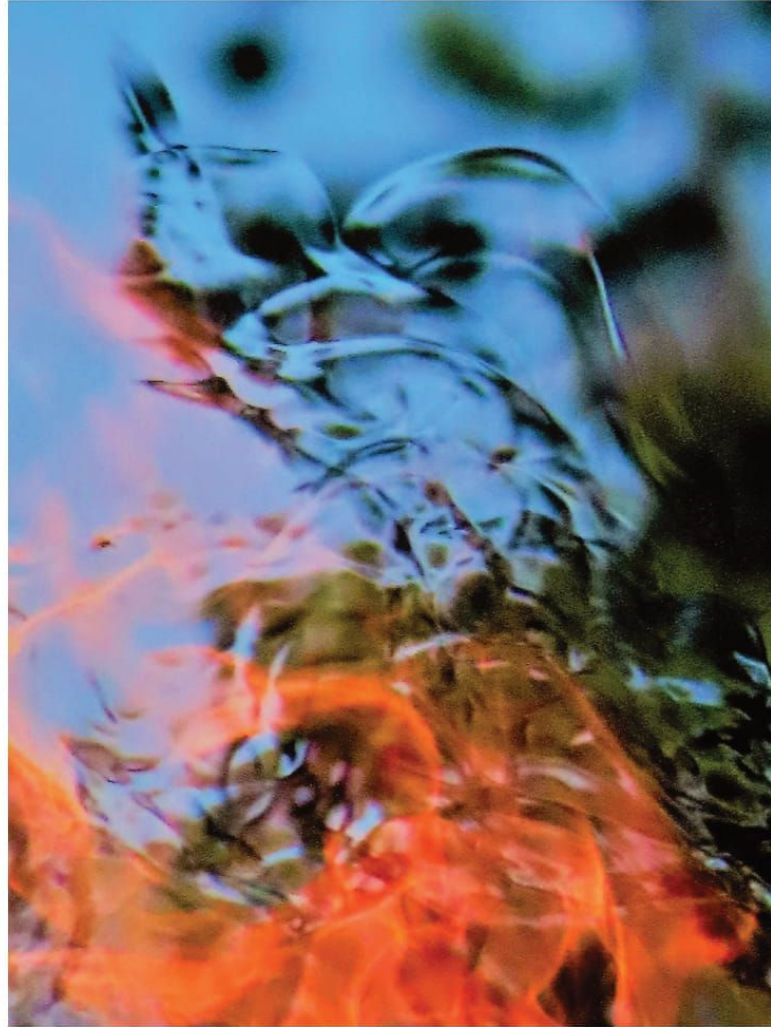
*zee Zee*



Medium:

Digital portrait (drawing on photography), 11.7" x 16.5"

FOREPLAY  
Mark Hurtubise



Medium:  
Photograph

# Film Reviews



*Belle*  
Mamoru Hosoda  
Studio Chizu, 2021  
2 hrs 1 min

Released in America on January 14th, 2022, *Belle* is the latest film by Studio Chizu, production studio of *Wolf Children* (2012) and *Mirai* (2018). Director and writer Mamoru Hosoda has taken an old classic, well known and loved, and turned it on its head with high school protagonist, Suzu, or internet sensation, Bell. Drawing from the story *Beauty and the Beast*, *Belle* is a nuanced retelling with interesting visuals and a beautiful soundtrack. The film experiments with different animation styles, mixing traditional 2D drawings to depict Suzu’s high school life and virtual 3D cell shading to show the virtual world of “U,” a virtual reality that allows users to become someone new. This is the premise that Suzu and others are most drawn to, and the film, though flawed in some respects, delivers a powerful, complicated, and subversive message through the medium of visuals and sound.

Suzu is a seemingly typical high schooler who is dissatisfied with life: her mother had given up her life for another child when Suzu was very young, which perplexes and leaves her isolated much of her life thereafter. Because of her mother’s love of music, Suzu finds herself physically unable to sing without being struck with a deep sense of grief and nausea. This is why the virtual world of “U” is so appealing to Suzu—she can finally sing again, partaking in something she loves without feeling constricted by grief and confusion. Her virtual counterpart Bell, or “Belle” as other users dub her, gains unprecedented attraction due to her singing, which eventually leads to Bell unexpectedly meeting “The Beast” during a performance. During the duration of the film, Suzu oscillates between pining after her classmate and childhood friend Shinobu Hisatake and trying to help “The Beast,” who is targeted as a criminal in “U.” By the end of the film, Suzu unexpectedly learns valuable lessons about vulnerability and empathy, which ties back to Suzu finally beginning to open up to her father and understand her mother’s choices from the start of the film.

Though on its surface the movie retells the classic Disney story *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), further exemplified by taking on ex-Disney animator Jin Kim on the production, likely giving the protagonist Bell a more Westernized appearance, *Belle* definitely subverts expectations in a number of ways. The most notable subversion is likely how the film changes the romantic relationship between the beauty and beast to a platonic one between Bell and “The Beast.” Most of the movie teases at a romance between Bell and the anonymous fighter “The Beast,” who is targeted by in-game “U” authorities. Despite a beautiful and evidently romance-coded dance scene, the two never partake in any kind of romance-affiliated gestures; instead, Bell opts for a motherly hug to “The Beast.” This platonic relationship, which is foreshadowed earlier on by one of Suzu’s choirmates, ends up playing a crucial role in Suzu’s personal development and understanding of herself and is a refreshing depiction of love that doesn’t need to be romantic to be deep or meaningful. This relationship, in addition to a few other subversions, like the school princess Ruka Watanabe being actually down to earth and liking the loveable dork Shinjiro Chikami, is part of what makes *Belle* such a fascinating and nuanced film. So much of the emotional impact that comes from the film comes from unexpected places. For example, many of the film’s most memorable moments, quite surprisingly, have minimal dialogue or actions. Beautiful music, impactful silence, and thoughtful pauses in narration tell so much more than words can oftentimes express. Such is the case during the most important scenes in *Belle*.

All this isn’t to say that the film doesn’t have its flaws. Many who’ve seen the film have critiqued its lack of coherency and abundance of plot holes. Indeed, much of *Belle* could have been better developed, including the virtual world of “U” itself. It’s quite possible that the amount of detail imbued in the backgrounds of “U,” though technically impressive, was more of a hindrance than a benefit to the storytelling of the film. At times the lack of realism can distract from the overall watchability of the film. Even so, Suzu’s authentic and raw line delivery, both in English and Japanese, makes up for what some may call a disorganized story. Despite its shortcomings, *Belle* manages to retain its core messages while at the same time showcasing beautiful vocals, musical scores, and variations of artwork.

In all, *Belle* does what many movies strive but fail to do. It balances lighthearted moments with deep, mature themes of loss, hurt, and isolation. While there are times where the movie should have depicted some of these themes perhaps more realistically, the overall message of the protagonist Suzu remains clear without the need for overt explanation. *Belle* is able to call onto a Disney classic while still being its own unique story, subverting a typical romance to highlight a protective love that can be between any person. Though not perfect, the film remains as a beautiful, experimental piece that surprisingly tugs on the heart for all the right reasons.

Andrea Wagner  
California State University, Stanislaus





*Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings*

Destin Daniel Cretton

Marvel Studios and Walt Disney Motion Pictures

2 hrs 14 mins

*Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings* is the 25th film in the MCU and was directed by Destin Daniel Cretton. The film was officially released on September 3, 2021 after an original Los Angeles specific release on August 16, 2021. This was the first Marvel Studios film with an Asian director and primarily Asian cast. Its score was composed by Joel P. West with a soundtrack album executively produced by Sean Miyashiro and 88rising, making one of my favorite soundtracks in the MCU. It follows Shang-Chi/Shاون, played by Simu Liu as he gets attacked by the Ten Rings Organization on the orders of his father WenWu, played by Tony Leung, and is forced to confront his past.

The opening starts with a flash-back where we are presented not only with the “Legend of the Ten Rings” itself, but also Shang-Chi’s father’s interest in them. From there we are introduced to his late mother and the concept of a hidden magical village, as well as the “The Great Protector” and its power. There are underlying themes of isolation, living up to potential, and moving forward as opposed to running, as well as a new sense of fragility in response to the post *Infinity War* snap where half of the population disappeared. Like most Marvel movies, it also includes an influx of past trauma shaping the behaviors and fears of the adults.

Once Shang-Chi is attacked for his pendant, he ends up needing to start revealing parts of who he is to his best friend Katy, played by Akwafina as they go to warn his sister Xu Xialing, played by Meng'er Zhang, of the attacks. We learn about her sense of anger and abandonment since Shang-Chi left her behind when he escaped, leaving her to escape herself and make her own way years after he was gone. As their father catches up to them, he drags them back to the place where they grew up and ran from. That idea of potential once again appears in a scene between Xialing and Katy where she states that if their father wouldn’t allow her into his empire, she would build her own, as well as a flashback of WenWu telling Shang-Chi, “You have the strength in your mind along with your body. If you want this to be yours one day, you have to show me you are strong enough to carry them”(Cretton, 2021).

When WenWu reveals the reason for needing the pendants, we find that he is searching for a path to the magical city Ta Lo under the assumption that he will be rescuing his wife, burning the village to the ground in the process. Shang-Chi, Xialing, and Katy proceed to attempt to beat him to the village where they enter what is essentially a new realm filled with multiple different Chinese mythological creatures meeting their Aunt Nan, played by Michelle Yeoh. She reveals to them parts of Ta Lo's history including that of the Dweller-in-Darkness that destroyed much of their realm and attempted to travel past it resulting in the Great Protector joining Ta Lo's warriors in driving it back behind the gate. That consumptive being is what was speaking to WenWu to lure him into using the Ten Rings to open the gate.

As they interact with their Aunt Nan and the people of Ta Lo, they are introduced to a new sense of purpose and closeness and a sense of equality that Xialing lacked with their father. The statement of "after losing someone like her, it's easy to feel alone in this world, but you are not, you are family, and I welcome you home" (Cretton, 2021) resonates quite heavily not only in film, but also to the viewer. There was a level of emotion, communication, and connection within what is often treated as an obligatory montage training sequence that meant even though it was short, it was impactful. The scenes of self-discovery and understanding one's place in the world, the understanding that even if they were hiding from something, or themselves, they can move past that, were also quite beautiful.

As we go into the final battle against WenWu and the Ten Rings Organization, the mix of a multitude of martial arts and the general MCU fight scene cinematography gets drawn to the forefront. The film used supervising stunt coordinator Brad Allen and members of the Jackie Chan Stunt team to create a cohesive and visually enticing combination of fighting styles. When Shang-Chi and Xialing work with each other and The Great Protector to end the battle, we finally see them fully reconnect as family. The final memorial scene as they release the lanterns in honor of those who died to protect the village solidifies that sense of family and connection. The first end-credit scene brings in Wong, Bruce Banner, and Carol Danvers, officially tying the film into the rest of the MCU.

Overall, this was a great movie combining an exploration of Asian Culture, mysticism, and comics into an entertaining watch. Its combination of humor and drama was well done making for a fascinating film. It does need to be said that it is still a Marvel comic-book movie with all the good and bad that entails, but if that is what you enjoy it is a great addition to your watch list.

Essence Saunders  
California State University, Stanislaus

# Television Reviews



*Reservation Dogs*  
Sterlin Harjo and Taika Waititi  
FX on Hulu (2021)  
Season 1

*Reservation Dogs* is an FX Hulu show that focuses on the life of four Indigenous teenagers living in Oklahoma. The show was created by Sterlin Harjo and Taika Waititi and has an Indigenous writing room that consists of the Indigenous comedy troupe. The season consists of eight thirty-minute episodes that premiered in the Fall of 2021. The show subverts genre rules by blending both comedy and drama giving viewers a glimpse into the realities of reservation life through the eyes of four teenagers.

The show's main protagonists consist of four friends, Bear (played by D'Pharaoh Woon-A-Tai), Elora (played by Devery Jacobs), Cheese (played by Lane Factor), and Willie Jack (played by Paulina Alexis). The teens are a close-knit group held together by the common threads of a desire for a better life in California and their shared grief over their fellow teen Daniel. While the show's main plot may revolve around the teens getting to California as a way of honoring their deceased friend, the show is very much focused on telling stories about Indigenous life including reservations.

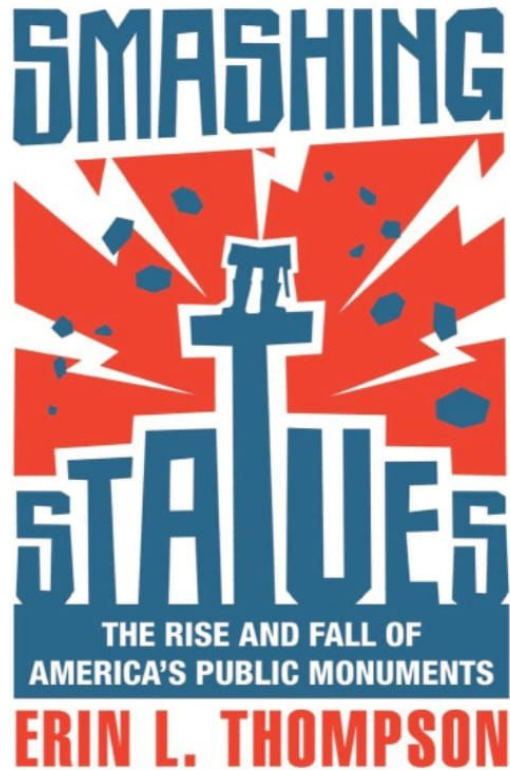
At times the reservation almost feels like another character in the show, something creators Harjo and Waititi intentionally created by choosing to film the entire series in rural Oklahoma. The reservation looms over the children as they navigate inequities, parental disappointments, and the struggles of generational trauma. This is displayed in scenes that starkly capture the inequities such as when Officer Big (played by Zahn McClarnon) is made fun of for having fewer resources than the town cops or when the children have to deal with the struggles of getting medical attention at the IHS clinic. As a group, they band together forming a gang that they choose to coin the "Rez Dogs" complete with a *Reservoir Dogs* themed suit and tie image at the end of episode one. As a gang, they get up to mischief such as stealing a chip truck, getting in fights, and paintball wars. While they try to use the implicative term "gang" the show is always clear on the fact that these are children. This is displayed by their immense guilt after their crimes and hilarious hijinks with rival gangs. Each teen deals with the issues of reservation life differently, displaying their unique personalities and different viewpoints on reservation life. Bear seems torn between wanting to honor Daniel by leaving and wanting to defend his turf from a rival gang. Elora

seems driven to leave the reservation at all costs and is often the angriest about Daniel's death and life on the reservation. Willie Jack seems to be the glue that keeps the crew together, who cares more about not losing another friend than she does about leaving the reservation. Cheese is the youngest who quietly goes along with the group without ever compromising his innocence and good nature. The four of them are haunted by the death of their friend Daniel and his death lingers in the show as a constant reminder of the toll reservation life takes on these teens. Daniel's death serves as a touchstone for all four characters while also bringing a heavy dose of necessary drama to the often comedic show.

Perhaps the best part of *Reservation Dogs* is the way the show is unabashedly an Indigenous show. The show is written by Indigenous writers, filmed by Indigenous directors, is performed by Indigenous actors, and even the music is often Indigenous artists. The show is about reservation life and is created for Indigenous viewers. While some may critique this as not being marketable, it is the exact reason everyone should want to watch this show. This show gives a glimpse into a culture that has been largely shut out of the television landscape. This is perfectly exemplified by the use of Indigenous mythos in the show. From the ghost of a warrior who hilariously speaks to Bear, to the group's collective fear of owls, to an episode centered on the myth of the Deer Lady, the show makes it clear that these are not merely myths but integral to the understanding of Indigenous culture, life, and ultimately humor. These breaks in the plot serve the purpose of creating a show that is not worried about the dominant White gaze. Instead *Reservation Dogs* is only worried only about remaining authentic to the Indigenous culture it represents. *Reservation Dogs* exemplifies a new wave of representation on TV, one that is not satisfied with placing BIPOC in roles deemed "palatable" for White culture but focused on telling authentic stories for all. The show is a must-watch masterpiece of television and it is no surprise there is already intrigue about the upcoming second season.

Autumn Andersen  
California State University, Stanislaus

# Book Reviews



*Smashing Statues: The Rise and Fall of  
America's Public Monuments*  
Dr. Erin L. Thompson  
2022  
288 Pages

On June 26th, 2020, after multiple incidents stemming from multiple injustices against people of color in the United States, former President Donald J. Trump, Sr. signed an executive order ensuring the protection, not of the persecuted, but of American monuments, memorials, and statues displayed in a variety of public places. The wording of that executive order states, “any person or entity that [willfully] destroys, damages, vandalizes, or desecrates a monument, memorial, or statue within the United States or otherwise vandalizes government property” will serve “up to 10 years’ imprisonment.” On May 14th, 2021, now President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. revoked that executive order, just about six months after the Capitol building was destroyed by insurrectionists carrying swastikas, Confederate flags, and “Jesus Saves” posters, while also angrily asking for the hanging and murder of the former vice president, Mike Pence. The rioting mob broke windows, pummeled police officers, and spread feces, urine, and blood in the hallways of what is considered a bastion of American democracy and freedom. They were allowed to walk out with podiums and confidential paperwork, while our former President sent his love and admiration to all of his supporters.

To put this fascination for the United States’ bronze and plaster political idols into perspective, Dr. Erin L. Thompson, an Associate Professor of Art Crime at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, has written an enlightening and historically captivating work entitled, *Smashing Statues: The Rise and Fall of America’s Public Monuments*, a work that speaks to how these monuments “both reflect and shape how we see ourselves as a nation,” while inspiring “us to change—or strengthen our determination to uphold traditions of discrimination and white supremacy” (xviii). They are, according to Thompson, images, and, as humans, we learn a great deal from produced images; our history is shown to audiences through these statues, important art forms that “show us our place within national hierarchies of power” (xviii). They are historical documents conceived by rich White men, regularly constructed by slaves who never got the credit they deserved or fashioned to keep the poor Whites in the south during the time of the Confederacy “from joining labor unions” (xix).

The book is separated into two distinct parts: “Rising” and “Falling.” In “Rising,” Thompson delves into the history discussed above, speaking specifically about the antagonistic constructions of the statue of George III in New York, of George Washington in the aforementioned Capitol building, the North Carolina State Confederate Monument, and the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial. She writes that she wants to “explain some of the ideologies, hatreds, and ambitions that gave us the monuments we have today” (xix); and, Thompson does so with thorough chapters filled with strong contextual material, stunning photos of the works themselves (among other photos of the builders, etc.), and social commentary that sheds light on how systemic racism and toxic masculinity underlies the creation of these (in)famous pieces of art. One of the more powerful lines in the book presents itself in a chapter entitled “A Shrine for the South,” which speaks about how the Klu Klux Klan and Gutzon Borglum, the sculptor (a Klansman himself), were deeply embedded in the conception of Stone Mountain. Thompson astutely writes: “Black men would never be permitted to do artistic work at Stone Mountain. But their labor made the whole project possible” (79). In other words, their talent and sacrifice have never been recognized, and Thompson is now finally giving them the accolades they always deserved.

In “Falling,” the second part of *Smashing Statues*, Thompson “asks what we can and should do with them now” (xix). This section speaks to the pulling down of Columbus statues around the country, the destruction of Birmingham’s Confederate Soldiers and Sailors Monument six days after the murder of George Floyd, the vandalizing of Hannah Duston’s statue in Haverhill, Massachusetts, the hiding of statues in museums, and the shuffling of monuments in North Carolina. Thompson “talked to some of the most important participants in current controversies over monuments” (xix) including activists, the mayor of Birmingham, and the head of an African-American museum that took a racist monument and housed it in his gallery to maintain its beauty. It is here where we learn the complicated nature of this debate, in that although these statues and monuments present to us, in some cases, the worst of America, they still are artistic achievements that can be studied for their historical value and their iconic but false statuses as totems of democracy. Following all of that is Thompson’s epilogue, and it is there where she sums this debate up in a profound way. Calling them harmful and “powerful sources of inspiration” (184), ultimately what these artworks do is “hide so many stories” (178) of pain, celebration, community, and contentiousness; and, it should be up to the people to choose “what monuments go up and which come down” (181) because that is what democracy truly is.

Dr. Douglas C. MacLeod, Jr.  
State University New York, Cobleskill



# Dedication

This year's journal is dedicated to all those who lost their lives to the Covid-19 virus and the war in Ukraine. The pandemic has devastated communities all across the world, and we offer our condolences to everyone who had to suffer through the consequences of the pandemic and to all the people affected by the violence in Ukraine. Events like these serve to remind us how precious our lives, our families, and our friends truly are.

## Commitment to Anti-Racism

The faculty and staff of Penumbra stand in unity with communities of color, who have long been the victims of systemic racism, violence, and murder. We will not allow those assassinated by police brutality and white supremacy to be forgotten. With a heavy heart, we remember George Floyd, Auhmed Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Philando Castile, Sandra Bland, as well as the victims of the Atlanta spa shootings, Xiaojie Tan, Daoyou Feng, Hyun Jung Grant, Soon Chung Park, Suncha Kim, Yong Ae Yue, Paul Andre Michels, Delaina Ashley Yaun, and Elcias R. Hernandez-Ortiz.

We owe these people fundamental changes in our local, state, and national governments to espouse equality for all and root out systemic racism. We are outraged by the acts of police brutality that continue to be committed against communities of color and we support the efforts of protestors to reveal and rebuke the legacies of white supremacy from our core national ideologies.

Racist systems have long been present in the publishing industry and we are committed to breaking racist publishing processes and standards. We are dedicated to promoting, highlighting, and celebrating the work of Black, Latinx, Native American, Asian American, LGBTQ+ writers and artists and all groups marginalized by systems of hate and oppression. We make this commitment today, tomorrow, and always to diversify our publications and uproot oppressive practices and ideologies that attempt to silence marginalized groups. Penumbra rejects those attempts at silencing and offers a space to amplify the voices of the oppressed.



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Penumbra  
Department of English  
California State University, Stanislaus  
One University Circle  
Turlock, CA 95382





