



Cover Art:
Different Worlds, Same Place by Maury Johnston

The Streetcar is published yearly by a student-run organization at
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The Streetcar is sponsored and funded by the Shackouls Honors College and the College of
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To have work considered in future volumes of *The Streetcar*, undergraduate and graduate
students enrolled at Mississippi State University may submit their work online at
<http://thestreetcarmsu.com/submit>.

The submission deadline for Volume 13 will be in Winter 2024.

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the twelfth volume of *The Streetcar* – an edition overflowing with vibrant
displays of student talent that express the skill and dedication of so many.

This journal that you now hold has been lovingly pieced together from each small bit of
humanity and self that our submitters entrusted us with, forming a tapestry of voices that
represents the diversity and depth of our student body. We hope you revel in the realization
that the people you sit next to in Monday morning classes, brush against on the sidewalk
past the Chapel, or connect with over late-night chemistry homework all have the capacity
for such emotion and expression that graces the pages of this journal – and that you have
the same depth within the wells of your identity.

In the pages to follow, you will find a spectrum of colorful and intriguing works which we
hope you will adore as much as we do. It's always so fascinating how, year after year, our
selected pieces seem to fit together perfectly, and those found within this volume are no
exception. A continued theme of vulnerability, human relationships, and a connection to the
natural cycle of our world permeates throughout this volume, expressed through vibrant –
and at times contrastingly muted – color palettes.

This year has been one of collaboration for *The Streetcar*. We had the pleasure of co-hosting
an event at the Starkville Area Arts Council, *Celebrate the Canvas*, with the incredibly
talented Rosemary Jones, a local artist and the creator of *Pink Plaid Collective*. We also
worked with MSU Center for Student Activities for *The Midnight Coffee Shop*, a Dawgs After
Dark event featuring zine making and an open mic. We hope to continue making such
wonderful connections for years to come.

We want to extend our immense thanks and gratitude to the Shackouls Honors College,
along with the College of Arts and Sciences and the Writing Center, whose continued
support makes what we do possible. Specifically, we would like to thank McKensie Hardin
and Corrinne Rodriguez at the Shackouls Honors College, both of which helped us
immensely throughout this year. We also want to thank our advisor, Dr. Eric Vivier, who
encouraged us to reach beyond our traditions and embrace change, as well as the people at
the Starkville Area Arts Council for providing us both with a space for multiple events and a
creative outlet. All of what we have been able to accomplish is because of you.

We would like to thank the people that submitted to this edition, both for their courage in
adding beauty to our world and for taking up space with their words, and our dedicated and
hardworking staff, for each and every effort put in to both this journal and our events. Here's
to Volume Twelve, and the many more to come.

Sincerely,

Isabella Thompson and Ada Fulgham
Co-Editors-in-Chief, 2023-2024

Emma Nisbet and Haylee Morman
Co-Editors-in-Chief, 2024-2025

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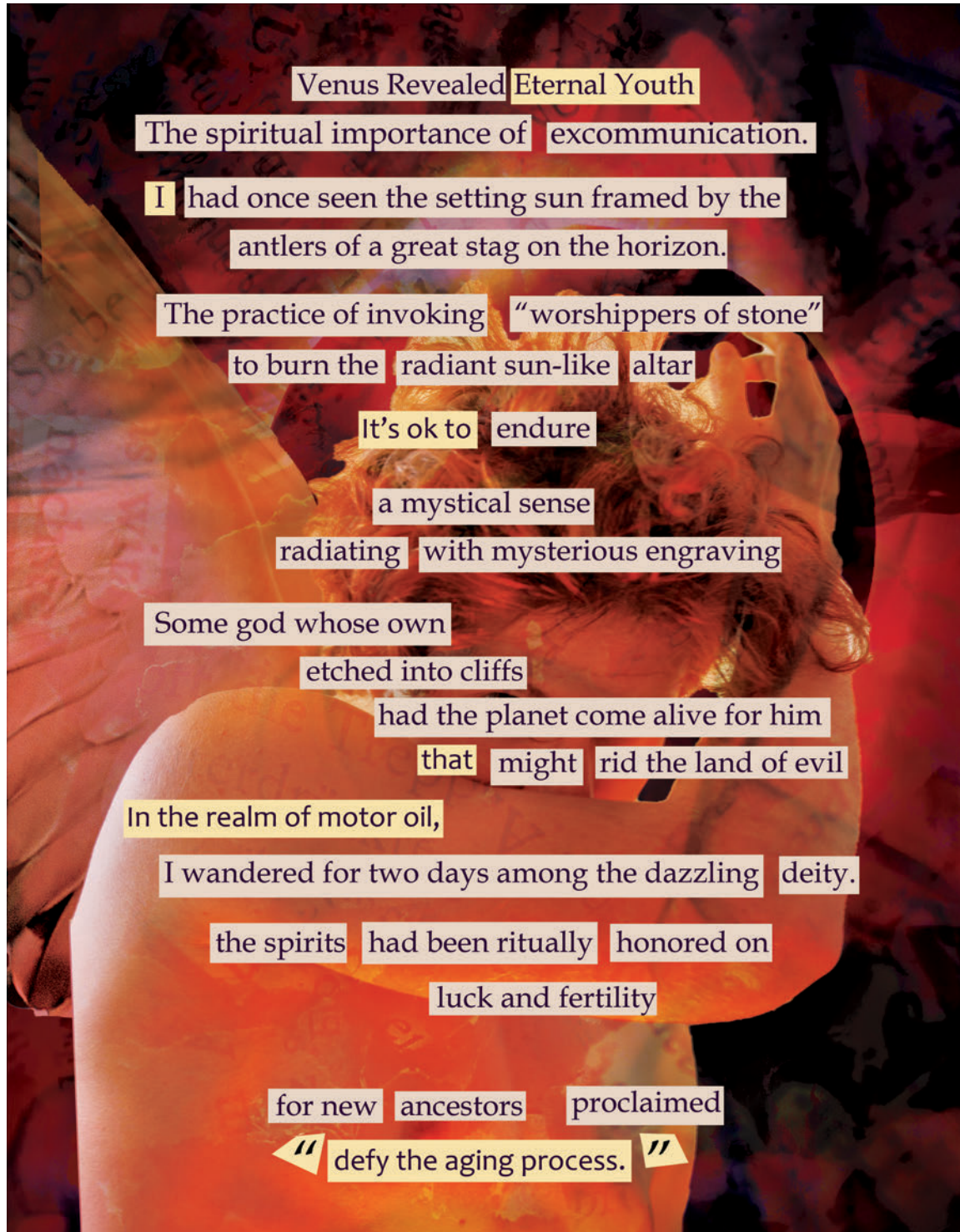
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The Streetcar

Mississippi State University's Creative Arts Journal



Rabia Siddiqui // Scrap poetry adapted to digital Photoshop collage

Prayer Fragments

Mary Evelyn McLemore

I am holding these little words for you I am letting this have its last
bated breath I am giving the space around the sun the space it needs-
leave the world in tatters leave it hanging from a few threads. I gave
you that sly grin I gave you that scab you pick at in the
little pumping arteries you keep in that chest I will leave this room and lick
happiness off the sidewalk I will meet you bent on the ground. Knock my
head into your knees knock some sense into this brainless scene. The
world is full of light I will make it bend around your frame I will give you a win-
dow you can keep in the back of your glimmering mind. Lift my face
past your ledge lift me away from the giggling sycophantic girlhood I
came from. I would fit perfectly in your pocket make a
space for me I beg beg beg. The sun never gave me this much grief.

Hidden Beauty

Leah Wisener // Scanography



purple orchids and coffee

Callie Matthews

we met in a kitchen for some pour-over
this face I see touch caress
eyes that melt in the sunlight—warmth—looking up at me
like coffee creamer blooming upwards

a trembling limb
a word that drips
a petal on a windowsill encrusted
in scattered sugar

purple orchids with fragile branches
like fingers
drawing bitter coffee from these lips

my caffeinated smile
stirred and torn apart

guitar on full volume going all souvlaki slowdive
you've taken root in my heart
in this place of wooden cabinetry

kiss me among the soapy knives and skillets

i want to be melted away
like sugar in hot coffee

Father's Day

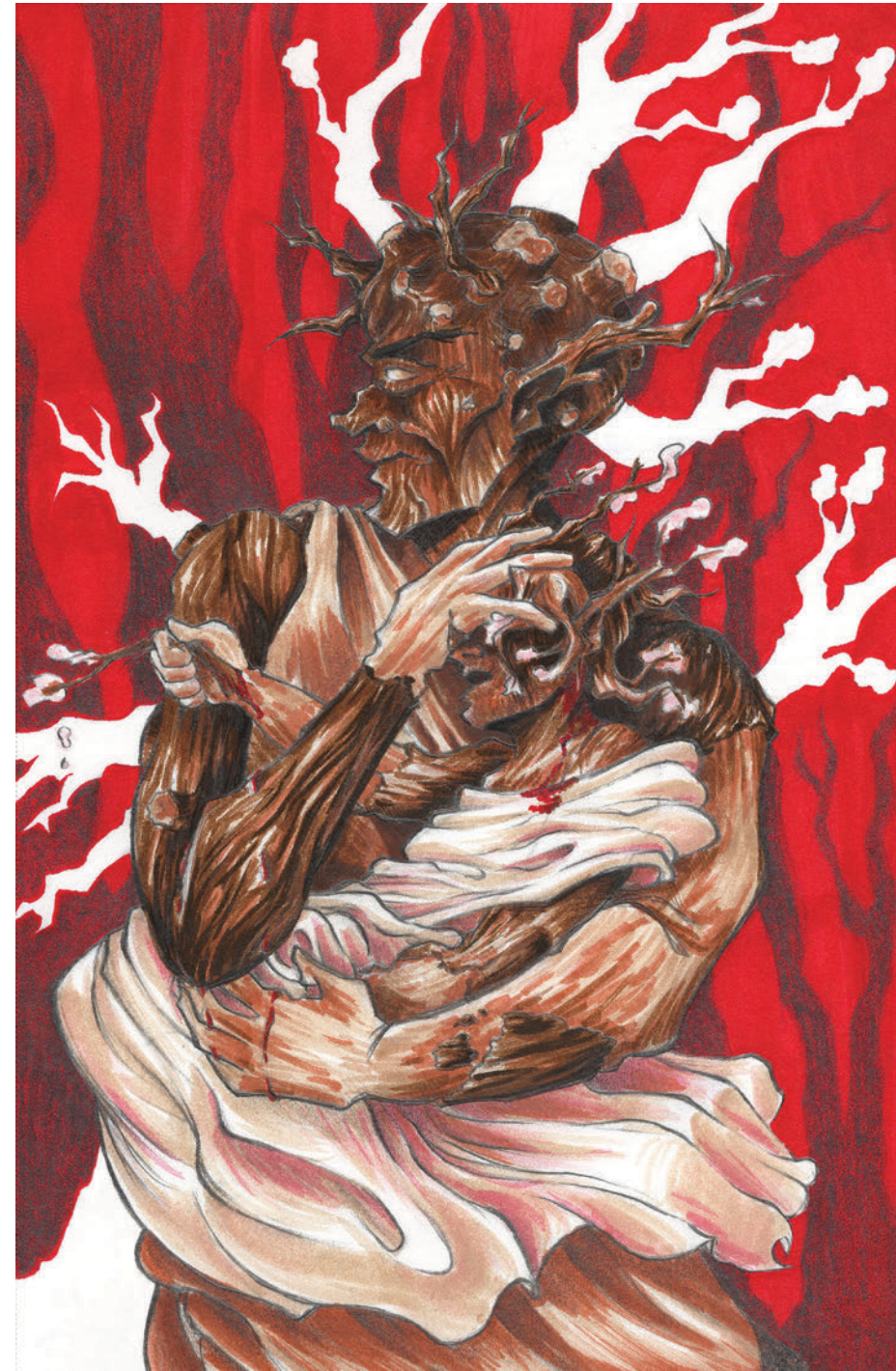
Rowan Feasel

The frost killed the hydrangeas.
No amount of fertilizer can save them.
Canned tomatoes cost \$0.78 more.
The town's looking worse than it ever has.
That mayor ought to be ashamed of himself.
When I was younger,
We had a movie theater and bowling alley,
A shirt factory and two car lots.
Now the buildings are boarded up and the roofs are falling in.
I can't hardly stand the way young people get all these tattoos.
They look plum scary.
So-and-so died.
So-and-so divorced.
So-and-so's house burned.
The hummingbirds are fighting.
The television's acting crazy.

Well, Mamaw...
No one has cable anymore.
What about Netflix?

Too many buttons.

Well, Mamaw...
I know it's not the television.
Or the buttons.
Or the birds.
Or the buildings.
I know it's that he's not here —
Having a little cup of ice cream,
Collecting golf balls,
Watching ball games.
And I want you to know
That I love you a bushel and a peck
And ninety-nine hugs around the neck.
Just like he did.



The Axe Forgets, But The Tree Remembers

Sapna Patlolla // Markers, ink, graphite

Cenotaph

Airy Valencia Galindo

I called out your name in all of men's tongues.

I became a ghost to look for you in every crevice,
Lined my hands in red to signify my mourning.

I have lost pretense of soul.

I have sculpted it and made it a shroud,
So I can hang my head in despair
And moan to the willow trees.

I drained my heart into a bowl for you to drink,
And counted the entirety of four hundred stars.

I asked the wind to let my limbs become leaves,
That my eyes smooth over into the downstream.

May I waste away.
May the cold never harm you.

Pearls float above water.

All of them stained in desire.

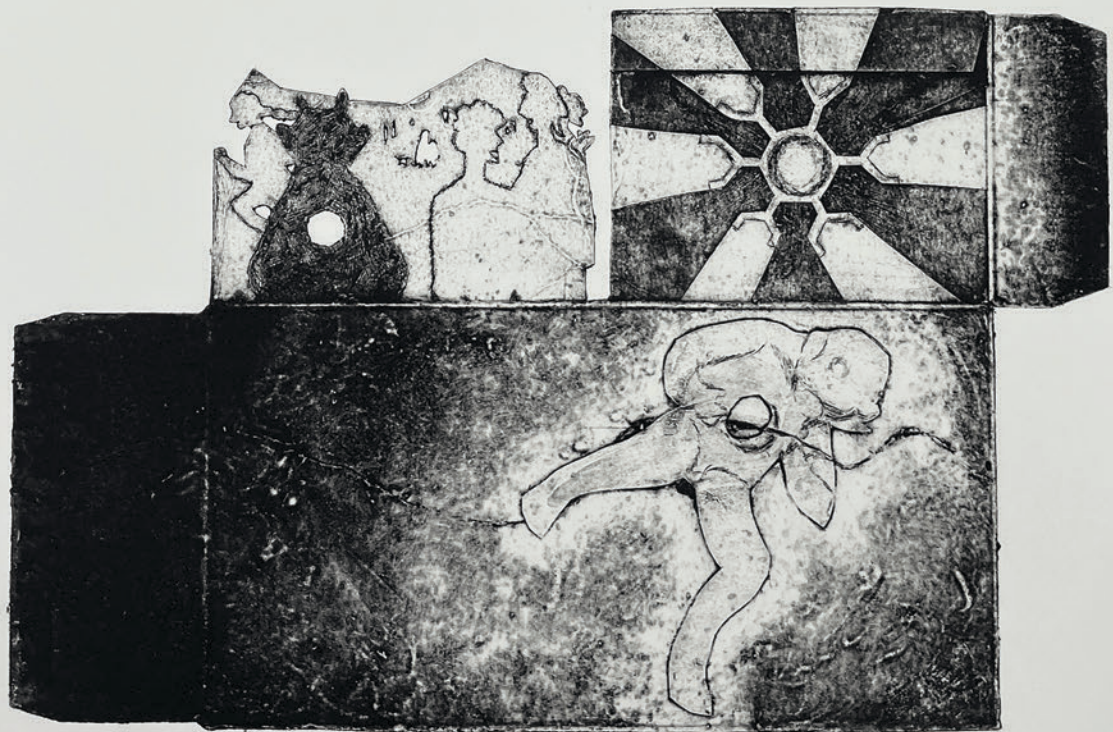


Eye for an eye, I wish my lover was blind

Sapna Patlolla // *Markers, ink*

Poverty of Self

Gabrielle Dunn // Collagraph print on Hahnemuhle Copperplate paper



Lucille Ball waltzes across the screen in her whimsical fashion to the screaming teapot: *Agh!*
Her friend prattles on, Ball makes a quirky remark, the canned laughs play, all is calm
And easy in the pretty gray world. Hanging upside down on the couch, texting friends “alright,”
Confirming our plans for tomorrow. Mom is listing the chores for today for Lan and I, “okay.”
Upon her request, I look up at her. “I’ll take care of it.” She’s satisfied, she leaves, I flop down.
“Unload the dishwasher,” I tell Lan. His eyes roll but he complies. I shift, watch my dog breathe.

Fighting gravity, I roll off the couch, open the door, lay my hand on him, feel him breathe.
Landon drops a fork, the clattering rings out, startling the dog. He wakes and yelps: *Agh!*
He picks up the fork, I pick up my phone, and leave the pair be; grab my bag, head down
The stairs, and seek refuge in my bed. The walls are bare. The room is new. I’m calm.
A notification dings. I have a new grade. Yeah, that one’s not great. I’m okay.
Ding! Ding! Ding! Oh goodie, more assignments. That’s fine. I’m alright.

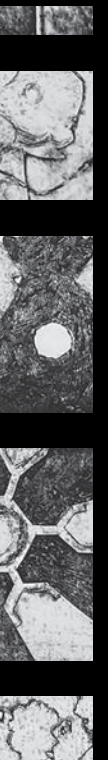
There’s a burrow of quilts on the bed, kind of like a rabbit’s, and it works alright
As a hideyhole, away from phones, away from light, only room to breathe.
Rabbits have it figured out. Hideyholes are nice. Escaping is okay,
Right? Ignoring it all, keeping warm, sleeping in a soft— *Agh!*
I hit my foot on the bedpost. It stings a little, but I’m fine, I’m calm.
I’m a rabbit, a gerbil, a snake, a fox, a mole. I burrow down.

It’s hot under here. The blankets have to go. Rabbits don’t lay down,
But I’m not a rabbit. A cat? Dad doesn’t like cats. Cats are alright,
I think, lazing in the sun. I could do this. They’re sort of calm
And I’m not really calm but I can learn to be. I can just lay and breathe
And exist and purr and love and— *Ding! Ding! Ding! Agh!*
More grades? More assignments? Is everything okay?

I’m sure it’s fine. Nothing bad. It’s all going to be okay.
I’ll just walk. Back and forth and back. Up and down
And down and up and— *Ding!* Another one? *Agh!*
Fine, I’ll look. Not bad, that’s decent, it’s alright,
It’s fine, I’m fine, I’ll be fine, breathe,
In and out, in and out, in and out, be calm.

It could be worse, but it’s not, so I’m calm,
Just shake it out, focus, you’ll be okay,
In and out, in and out, just breathe,
Back and forth, up and down,
This is fine, I’m alright,
It’ll work out. *Agh!*

Breathe— *Agh!*
Okay, alright,
Calm down



The Heat of the South

Jackson Weisskopf

On the back of my porch I sit and watch fireflies hover over the grass.
The air is thick as blood.
The night black and heavy.
Silent as death, barring the chatter of cicadas.

When winter comes the cicadas leave
and then is the only time I truly know silence;
left to my thoughts and prayers
and deficits.

But for now
I listen to their gossip
(They often speculate our ambitions,
for our tiredness and longsuffering amuses them)
and I sit there in the dark.
waiting for Her to take me.

With the curled gesture of Her finger,
she'll invite me to leave my body behind
and enter Her sultry dream,
in which I'll be obliged;
as if I wasn't halfway there by sunset.

When I was younger I would look
at the elderly sitting in their rocking chairs
thinking them so boring in their practice.
How trite.

I get it now.
Their rocking chairs: a catalyst of ascension.
A vehicle to escape the aches of their weary flesh.
Rocking to the rhythm of evening,
every sway in anticipation of that Her.

That Her that we're born to.
That Her which lingers
in the drawl of our tongues,
and the blood in our veins.
and the sins of our fathers.

As the August front washes over her children,
she comes back for us,
in that motherly, overbearing way,
that she always does.

In deep, tired sighs,
the little things about me are exhaled.
The wight of me trickles out like creek water,
till I am as light and careless
as the fireflies which float above the damp loam below me.

At night, on my back-porch,
I join the company of countless weary souls,
some of them,
their bodies long since buried
their names long since forgotten.
Together we drift through the thickness of the night.

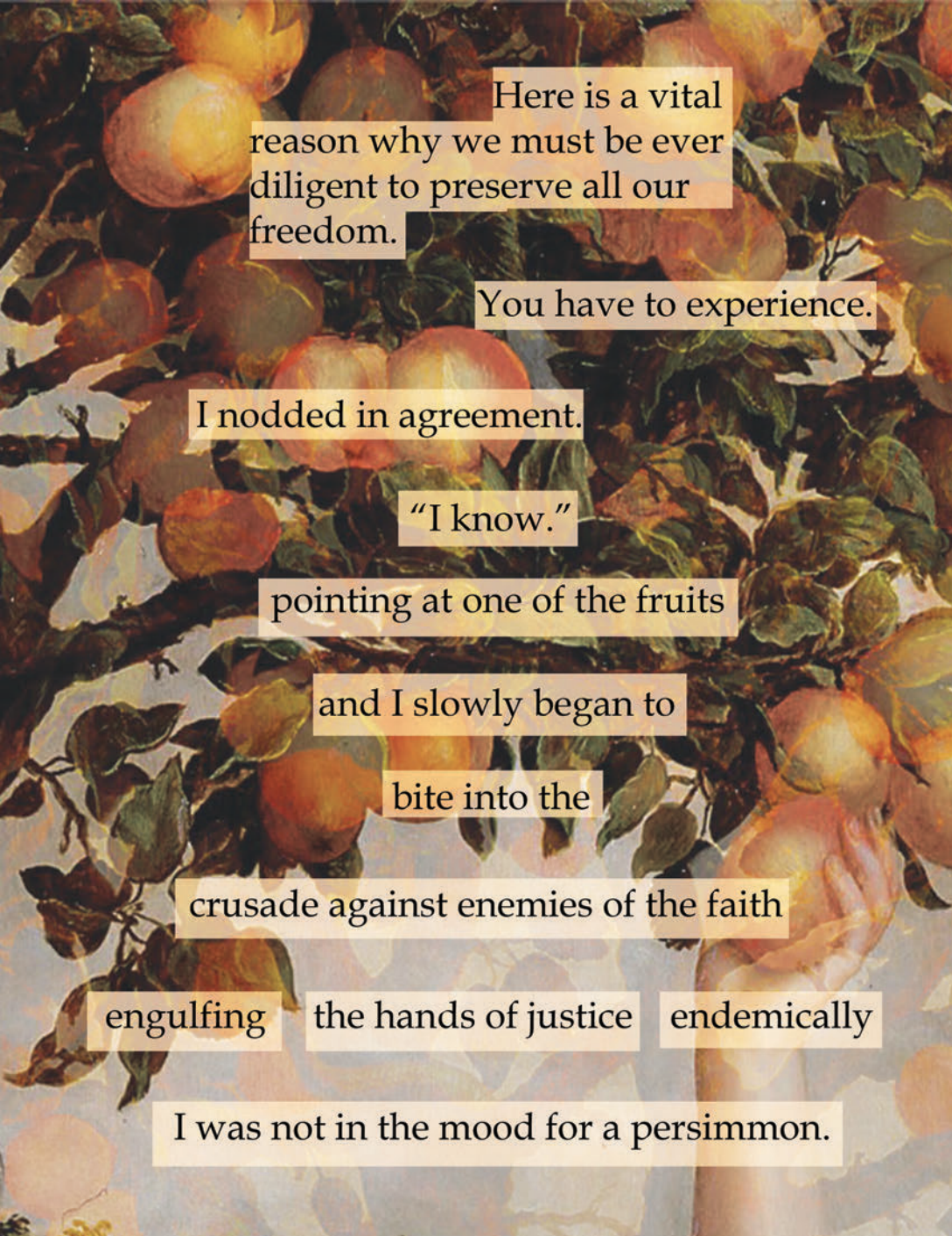
For a moment,
the ache in our bones and
the sweat on our skin;
we've forgotten.
Just for a moment.

We take a short break
Molting off the yolk of our substance,
and ease into that comfort
which we know in Her so well,

Cradled and undone, by the Heat of the South.

Persimmons

Rabia Siddiqui // Scrap poetry adapted to digital Photoshop collage



Here is a vital
reason why we must be ever
diligent to preserve all our
freedom.

You have to experience.

I nodded in agreement.

"I know."

pointing at one of the fruits

and I slowly began to

bite into the

crusade against enemies of the faith

engulfing the hands of justice endemically

I was not in the mood for a persimmon.

To Feel So Much

Anonymous

My performance is that of a god
My feminine rage so perfectly and cinematically executed
I am as capricious as the Mississippi weather
From high to low in a matter of what feels like seconds
Feminine expression is nearly always performative. It has to be. I am not
allowed to be seen sad if it is not some sort of beautiful. I am not allowed
to be seen rage full if it is not some sort of bewitching. I am not allowed to
be seen sallow and hungry if it is not some sort of haunting.

So.

I sit in the library, silently sobbing, aware of the eyes that would see me—
listening to the same song on repeat because repetition holds wedlock
with madness.

And I feel mad.

Do I look beautiful enough?

Do I look sad enough?

Do I look human enough?

Is the consciousness of my performance hindering my ability to be real?

If God and the Devil are enemies, they have most assuredly set their
differences aside solely to hold hands and watch me fall together

And

In an attempt to regain control of what feels like the beginning of my
downfall, I fall back onto self-sabotage to create my own scenario. If
nothing else I will control my own fallibilities. Lean into them knowing they
are consistent and constant.

What a paradox to be stuck in

Inviting familiar failure in for the sake of false security

Letting it scoop me up and coddle me like an old lover

I have not eaten; it encourages me

I have not slept; it strokes my hair and tells me to stay awake

I have not done enough work; it holds me to its chest and tells me I am a
failure in the most loving and familiar tone

My old friend, how you soothe me in the meanest of ways

Must I face this every day for the rest of my life

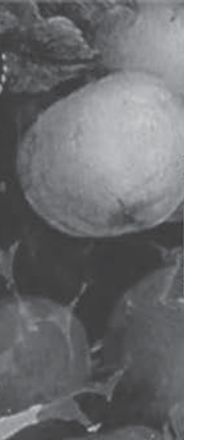
I am sick of it all

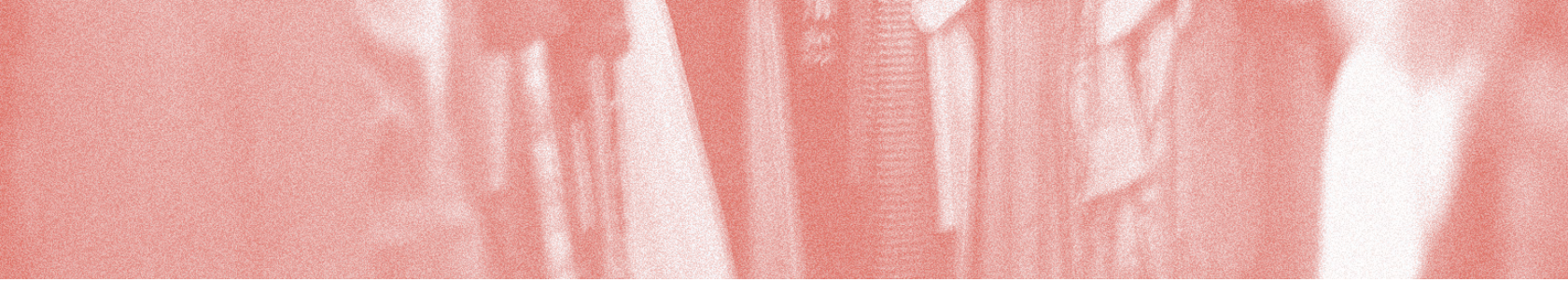
I am sick

In a few days' time I will read this and invalidate it

"How silly is she, to feel so much"

And the performance will continue





The prey of May

Daniel Adejombó

Ha! Here comes May:

Many a foe and friend I've put in the ground—

Nay—

I habitually cowered like a scoundrel
to the safety only solitude assured.

Yet now, I failed to see her talons emerge
and ingrain themselves firmly within my skin.

The edges of her smile:

heartily shaped arrowheads that instantly pierced through my heart.

I laid there as my eyes recounted the
Tale of a once bright sunny day turned blurry
for a gentleman—

As I searched endlessly for any final words

The only words my feeble mind could muster:

“How could one be so beautiful?”

Death of the American Woman

Jay Snodgrass // Film photography (Expired 35 mm film, Nikon FM10 camera)

Me to Person C

Anonymous

At rest, *avec mon coeur*,
Avec *mon* blushing wall of amber.
Night settles, my mind tussles
The deepest tempest appears,

“Is this what you want?
Neglect to spare?
Apathy tastes tender to those who fear,
How was such an appetite reared?”

I wake up, weeping,
Declaring to my ceiling,
“Cowardice is the servant
that knows me best.
Do not introduce its cousin,
Regret.”



Reminiscence

Jay Snodgrass // Film photography (Expired 35 mm film, Nikon FM10 camera)

My Head is Filled with Wonderful Moments Now

Callie Matthews

I promised I wouldn't cry,
but how could I not, surrounded by this much beauty?

The sunset is a burst of orange
above the blue light of the fish tank

Your hair is pulled back in a bun,
sunlight melting your eyes into a caramel macchiato

And my head is filled with ethereal music,
my lungs expanding with emotion I don't understand

We're tracing our steps back to the moment
our eyes first dipped into each other's hearts

The wind brushing its cool hand
against my wet face, hair caught in my mouth

Two spoons in an ice cream tub,
white clouds encircling us even in the darkness

And melted, sugary mess dripping onto our bare legs,
as we gush about the new year ahead of us

Suddenly we're back at basement shows
dancing to loud bands we don't know the names of

Local indie or hardcore acts
that give us a reason to go out at night

We're playing video games on a flower duvet,
petting a friend's cat named Frankie

Eating leftovers and baked potatoes
that taste better than filet mignon

Burying ourselves in each other's warmth
until I can almost feel my touch on your skin

And you're playing a song for me on piano, singing,
"Breathe in, 'you're my oxygen'"

While I realize that time is irrelevant in these places,
in these moments that I'm with you.

Navigating Through Nature

K.A. Wesley // Watercolor and ink on map





Holding Hands with the Sky

Callie Matthews

Your lips shape around the syllables of my name—
your eyes shimmering
as the pink clouds color your cheeks,
bringing a blush to your skin

The sunlight whispers across your face,
your irises catching fire—
the way you're watching me through the ripples,
this image: incandescent

I lean forward and touch my lips
to your wavering ones,
kissing the tender surface of this pool while
you unravel from my imagination

stay

I dip my fingers into the water,
cupping what is left of you
in my hands

Your eyes find me in the rising sun



I Can't Believe I Have To Do This For the Rest of My Life

Leah Wisener // Nikon D5300, Photoshop

The Serpent's Unhinged Jaw

Logan Whitehead

There's a cave system a short way away from my house, about a ten-minute drive. Great pillars of sandstone climb above, and a sprawling chasm digs below— we used to hold concerts above ground before the particulate dust kicked up inside would get people sick. The acoustics, of course, were on point for what little they cost. People would hang out and get drunk, get high, get *whatever* inside those caves, not knowing the full extent of what lay beneath their feet. I saw the entrance to something more, though, and since that moment, I knew that I had to continue to delve deeper.

I'm not an expert geologist. I'm not a spelunker, either, and certainly not someone who can contort their body enough to be one. The best experience I truly have is climbing from one bunk bed to another at camp, and even then, I've fallen and hit the ground enough times to justify the right side of my body being more bruised than my left. There is still an entire system beneath our very feet, though— something hungry for exploration. I'm hungry for exploration. It's inviting despite its danger, and I am not a thrill-seeker, but I need to explore this cave— I always have.

Each time I head out for the journey, I don't care to tell anyone. There's no need to. I pick a weekend, when I have nothing else to be doing, and I pack lightly. I need only enough food for a couple of days, and a couple of water bottles. I don't care to bring matches when I know the caverns so well, when the walls are so narrow that any move is an intimate one. I lace up the nicest pair of shoes I have, and I throw on a light hoodie, as it gets far too chilly down there to go comfortably in just a t-shirt.

Have you ever fallen beneath the ground? Have you ever slipped on slick stone, sliding down a tunnel you never thought you would be able to fit through? It's invigorating— it's terrifying in the way that the stalactites point at your chest like a dagger and you can feel your heartbeat against them. They know your body better than you do. Each stalagmite behind you, on the other hand, traces along your spine. They slot into the grooves in your back, bump, bump, bump... I've always wondered what would happen if my body was just a little too big for these tunnels, if the structures snagged on me and trapped me here. Like a giant stone jaw, these walls could crush me, and I walk into their inviting maws every time. I'm hungry to know what's down here. I'm hungry. I'm starving.

When I slip past the esophagus of the cave, I find myself in the central cavern; inside, there is no light but that which escapes from other parts of it. Old lanterns from concerts long past, surviving dimly on the charged air. Fungus faintly colored to stand out from the gray and black stone. Bioluminescent things deep beneath. I've never found those, of course, but I know they must exist— even if this is not some extremely humid climate, even if it's nowhere special at all, I know something else must exist. There's something to this cavern that makes it so interesting, and so compelling, because if there weren't, I would have no reason to keep coming back when it does this to me.

What does it do to me?

*

I like to wander the tracts, hugging close to the walls. They're slick— I always assume it's water condensing from the air, but I would know no better if it were blood or some other

sickly fluid coming from something down here. The cavern itself sounds empty, of course, and it smells of iron, but not to the point that human blood does. Human blood, the blood I've spilled on sharp rocks, smells sick with iron. It contaminates the dry air down here, and it's unnatural... I've always worn gloves to avoid cutting open my palms again. Even if I'm an intruder upon this place, I don't want to disturb it, I don't want to be a nuisance, I don't want to distract anyone else that lives here— I want to explore it and understand it but to disturb it would be to unsettle it, to fundamentally change its composition and thus the nature of what I'm exploring.

Sometimes my feet catch on the rocks, and I trip onto one of those sharp stalagmites. That's why I wear thicker clothes, so I'm cushioned enough not to get pierced open. I hate the smell of blood. It's not my favored way to end my trips here, anyways. I must go deeper to reach the end of this place.

Have you ever been in a cavern? They're foreign, alien, but so inviting that they might as well be someone's house— an old friend's house nestled in the woods, buried behind trees and rocks, but no less inviting inside. It's always pleasantly cool in the summertime, dark inside where the sun outside is far too bright and it begins to hurt your eyes, and they're always inviting you inside— it's away from all those irritating insects and worrying noises. What lives in a cave is far more subdued and would much rather keep to itself than bother you. At times you may see stray animals that have fallen down here, but they are sickly and not suited for the environment, much like you are not. But you have an advantage here— the cave knows you. The cave knows you're an old friend, and lets you pass without much trouble, so long as you respect it.

I watch my step for this tunnel. It's practically a top-down plunge with no water to cushion the fall, but I've fallen here before, and I've made it past this point before, so there's no reason I shouldn't be able to pass on this time. I sidle myself up against one of the thicker stalagmites and after a short breath, I pull myself forwards. I fall, of course. The ground is the first to greet me and the thud I make as I hit it resounds around me. It should hurt, but it stopped hurting a while ago— now it just startles me, disorients me, but I can still stand up in this wide-open cave. Here, no light escapes. Here, I can see nothing. Here, I am exploring.

Have you ever wondered what exists when you cannot see it? Outside of my arms, there could be enormous beasts watching my move, adapted far more than I ever have to this place. They are friends of the cavern, things that have known it for eons, or if not them, their friends and family have— and they are told by the cavern to quiet down, for this is a friend that's visiting them, this is a friend who has my permission to explore. They only want to explore and understand. We all just want to understand something, whether it's ourselves or the world or something as small or large as a cavern. I have not written down any of my observations directly, but I know the tunnels— I know where to place my hands to come away slick with liquid or where not to put my feet to avoid falling down beneath.

They're hungry. The beasts, and the caverns. I'm hungry, too, but not for what they are— they want meat and nutrients, but I need to understand, I'm hungry for knowledge of what this place is and how far it goes. I'm starving, not knowing what's happening even deeper— I could never bring a flashlight to understand this place, because it alters the environment I'm in and makes it more palatable to me. I'm not what this place is suited to,

though— I'm an intruder, a parasite, living despite the odds. I'm a parasite, clinging to the cavern walls, abandoning my backpack to slip further and further down. Knowing what this place is... would complete so many of my questions, give them an answer that I didn't know I needed. This cavern completes me, even if I'm just a small part of it, even if it succeeds in swallowing me whole. I've thought about it before, this cave devouring me, leaving nothing but bones behind. I would truly understand it then— being a part of it, rather than something witnessing it, would certainly be my preferred ending. I want to understand this cave, even if I can't explore all of it.

A cave wants to understand you just as much, though. This relationship isn't just give and take. Inevitably, it rises around your fragile little body, snarling though not starving in much the same way, and it spits you out, somehow. It wants you to keep coming back to it. It wants you to depend on it. The cave wants you to come back and explore it again and again, for it's something new, it's not a beast that lives here but one that lives outside of it, one that has a life above the surface and has actively begun sacrificing it to continue exploring. The cave could call you a fool, or it could call you a friend— someone with a different, yet shareable interest in the other— and invite you back again and again when the time is right, when the sun is going down, and when there's no light. The cave could warm itself up to you, even as it spits you out of its gaping maw, closing its mouth to you. Of course, it remains open, for a cave is a still being, something not awake or asleep but alive all the same, but you cannot go back in the cave— it's not right for me in there, when it has told me that it's had its fill of me, that I need to head back home.

*

I'm starving, you know, when I think about it. The hunger's gotten far more frequent. It lets me stay and then spits me right back out, and I need to go back inside, I need to stay there and catalog its walls inside my brain, I need it to understand my brain, I need it to look inside my brain, I need it to look inside the caverns of my body, I need it to fill the cavities in my chest, the hollow walls caged by stalactites and stalagmites, I need it to understand the calcium deposits in my body, I need it to understand me, I need it to see me for what I am, I need it to devour and consume me whole, I need to become part of it, I need to rest inside it, I need to eat inside it, I need to lie inside it, I need to sleep inside it, I need to exist within it, I need to exist within it, and I need it to exist within me. I need this cavern like I need to breathe. I need to stay. It's making me so, so hungry. I don't understand it yet.

Today it spat me back out again, and I found myself on the rocky ground outside. To my left is a quarry— they blasted out those massive surface-level caverns ages ago, but moved behind the cavern to blast out limestone rocks instead. To my right, a small business park, quiet and calm next to the highway on weekends like these. Everything here is so methodical that it's disgusting... every environment is an artifice of something I despise. The only thing that I understand is the cavern. The only thing you'll understand, if you follow me, is the cavern.

But I can't go back today. I have to keep pretending that I care for anything else with the same depth or honesty.

I walk home, now, invigorated but alone, and I lie there, thinking of nothing and dreaming of something I've already forgotten. Maybe next week, I'll stay.



Man, I Love Frogs!

Liza Ambriz // Woodcut reduction print using ink and paper



Different Worlds, Same Place

Maury Johnston // Oil on canvas

Teeth

Linda Arnoldus

I remember in elementary school
When we all had different teeth
Crooked teeth,
Snaggle teeth,
One-tooth-growing-in-front-of-the-other teeth,
Missing teeth,
Gap teeth

I smiled frequently in elementary school
I laughed, I giggled, my smile stretched a mile across my face

I remember when I first noticed that adults had straight white teeth
I remember when I first looked in the mirror
And observed one tooth in the top right of my mouth
Seated a little bit behind the others
Like a shy kindergartener during a presentation
And the way my four bottom front teeth
Folded in on each other like books in a display case,
Each one vying for the limelight

I didn't smile for a while after that

I remember when my classmates started getting braces, and so did I

It took varying lengths of time for everyone's teeth to conform
To what we had all collectively deemed beautiful
Now there was only one type of teeth
Straight and white

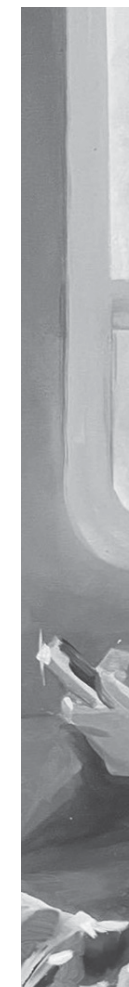
It took only nine months for my teeth to become straight
It took a spring, a power chain, many rubber bands, and lots of braces wax
For some people it took two years and some dental surgery
For others it took nothing but an Invisalign

It's a constant battle to keep them white
I only drink coffee or tea through a straw to avoid stains
I lay down white strips that make my teeth sore and my gums ache
I bleach my enamel and my tongue burns at the taste

We now wear retainers on the back of our teeth
Superglued security
A hidden instrument to help us solidify our smile
Concealed so the world never knows how our teeth once were

We pay hundreds of dollars to keep our teeth straight and white
Dental insurance
Whitening procedures
Clear retainers

Today I see people ridiculed for their crooked teeth
By people with straight white sneers
And I wonder if they remember
That we all had crooked teeth once.



Letter to the Barn Owl

Meg McDougal

At night, when I hear your wicked screeches
echo across the stars, I imagine how
your mother breathed life into you
and how your father sculpted you in his image.

Beak and bone, feather and claw.
A recipe passed down for generations.
He formed your heart-shaped face, his reflection
staring back at him through your glassy, unknowing eyes.

He brushed your budding feathers, rubbed his cheeks
against yours, and bid farewell as he flew
off into the night. Little owlet, were you scared
when you heard his cries? Did you think

you had lost him to that great, unpassable
void? Did you find your voice calling for him,
screeching and calling and hoping he heard?
Did your mother try to soothe you with her

lulling, purring coos? What did you think
when he returned, carrying a squirming shrew
in his claws, whose eyes were as scared
as yours just were? What about when your father

swallowed him whole, devouring the helpless creature,
demonstrating what you must do once your wings
could carry you? Little fledgling, how did you fare
when you finally left the nest? Did your mother

sing you away with a lullaby,
as she did when you were young?
Did your father fly you halfway
to ensure that you were safe?

And how did it feel to skewer a mouse
between the claws he carved for you?



Winter Vertigo

Gabrielle Dunn// Plexiglass monotype print on Hahnemuhle Copperplate paper

By their wings, we shall mourn them.

Daniel Adejombo

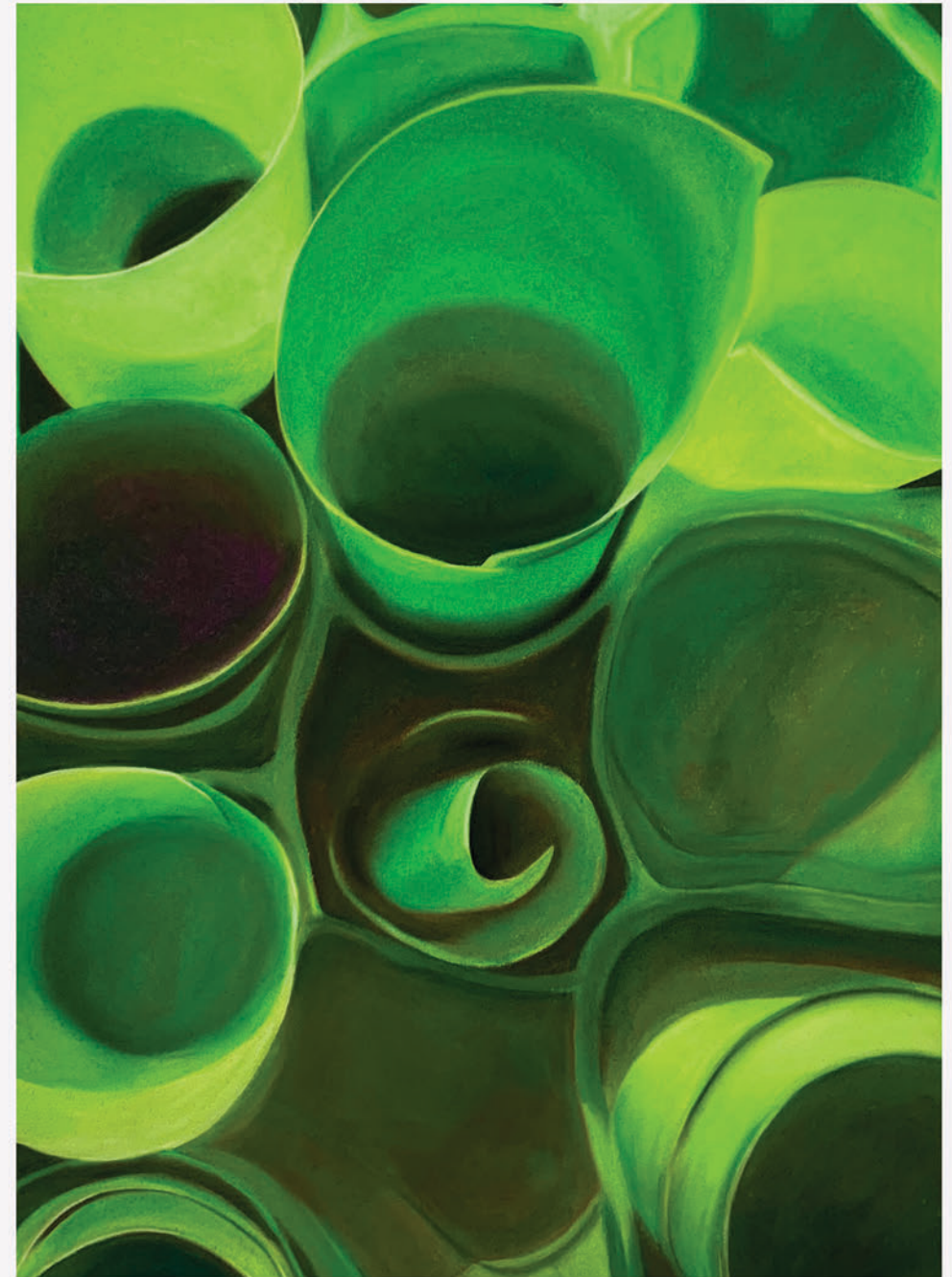
At the feet of a barren tree,
I watch fledglings sprawl across their
mother's nest, their bright beaks evocative of a novel enthusiasm
Yet to be checked by the turmoils the forest will bring,

And their wings,
Every second they wage war against
the barricade of twigs and dead leaves,
leaving battered, infant feathers in their wake.

Come dawn,
And these wings will carve the sunlight in their image,
paint the clouds in the colors of their blossoming feathers—

Tomorrow I'll rise again,
To see the sky weeping in mourning,
So, I'll trace my footprints in the wet mud,
Back to the feet of a barren tree:

They have stood all morning for me,
Furnishing their toes with the feathers of fallen birds,
wing shaped husks buried beneath the nest
that bore their futile dreams, and fittingly named it:
Life.



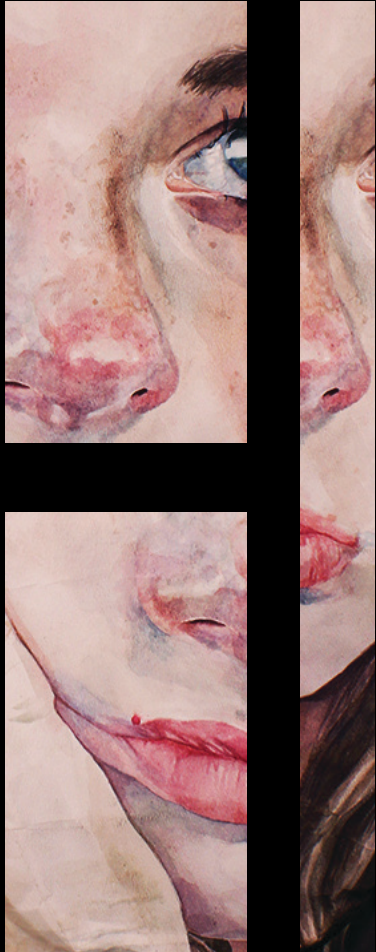
Shades of Green

Liza Ambriz // Chalk pastel on paper

Me to Person A

Anonymous

You are me
If I was open, not closed,
Composed, envy erodes
And goads me to you
To hate, because
You are me
And I have yet to carry myself
Softly.
I'm sorry,
What were you saying?



Starting Over

Maury Johnston // Watercolor on paper

Swimming Lessons in Sodom and Gomorrah

Mary Evelyn McLemore

These days I'm living are hard pressed, pressing their tide lines
onto my face, tracing the shape of your effect
into my looks, my outlook, the little moments filled with you

that etch their way onto my soul; I'm going to hand this
double-edged longing over to you in order to kill the ache, I'm going
to find a way to hold you well, a way for me to postpone this

inevitability a bit longer. This is a theme easily subverted, this a theme
I can't quite make sense of, the need and take,
the pull and give, the way that I could vanish into you completely,

the way that the hunger keeps its edge— a balancing act,
a weight on either side, and the threat of suddenly-free shoulders
always in the back of my mind. I keep grasping hungrily at the past,

at the land I know I could forgive if I had a little more time,
a little more grace; you've watched me make a tug of war
of the two tracks of my life, sometimes you pull so hard for something

you pull it out, sometimes the force of a feeling
can propel us into the deep. The face you're making contains a reckoning
for both halves of the rope, the look you're giving me

could drown us both. Reach over and admit to me all the ways
you've given up, all the prayers you've swum through before,
and maybe we can call this what it is— If love is an ocean

then cry me a river, send me upstream without a paddle,
you know how this is supposed to go. You know that something you reach for
won't always come into focus, you know the way

the rain is supposed to fall, how it's supposed to fall beautifully,
the currents below the surface and, of course, absolution, of course
I want to face forward, but then the pull, then the dark and pushy storms—

If I've been a bit heavy-handed toss me overboard, if I've leaned too far,
let me topple— I need this culmination to end suddenly,
I need this to lose its air quickly, I mean just violently bless me

and I'll send you on your way. The days are long and the shore is longer,
my footprints I leave behind in the sand are gone by the time
I turn around— the result of the choice I keep talking about is sinking

rather than swimming, the looking back is really just
looking around and stopping short of a riptide. Swept out to sea sounds
romantic, sounds better than this desperate lull in the story

where I don't know how to meet you, and my grip on either chapter
is easy to break. Give me an island, give me a place
where I can face you fully, give me a reason to look beyond the short horizon;

I swear I'll be able to look into the sun without crying, I swear I'll try.
The effect of all this looking away still means searching, the effect of all this
love could still keep us from reaching the surface— face me or face forward,

a look behind us means a pillar of salt, a look in front means tears in my eyes
and a directionless sea all around me. Can I keep this
hellish slice of heaven and still meet you, and you always, at the crossroads,

ready to lead me to a potential shore, ready to lead me into the follow through?
Leave me at the beach, both directions I could take stretching out to either side, and
let me instead walk on water, tripping only in the shallows, finally bathed with light.



Soul Anglers

Raineflower Phillips // Procreate

Paid Trial

Finch Bowman

More men than I can count have said to me
“You are made in the likeness of God” and yet I am standing before
a jury of

Their

Design

Waiting on a judgment reserved
For the divine to rain like hellfire
And hear them call it love.

They swear each other in with crossed fingers and forked tongues.
Right hand upon a book they wrote,
As always pressing words into Her mouth she
Never asked to have there,
And declare their actions embody His will.

Lady forgive them, though they know exactly what they do.
Lord rebuke them, for they revel in its doing.
May the pieces I fall into slice the soles of their boots
So the rot within might burn away in daylight.
May the tongues that lick the dust from their heels
Finally have their thirst slaked on my blood.
If I am to die for your sins,
Best you burn me hot and bury me deep,
So that those who use my pyre as a beacon
Can never learn what you have done.

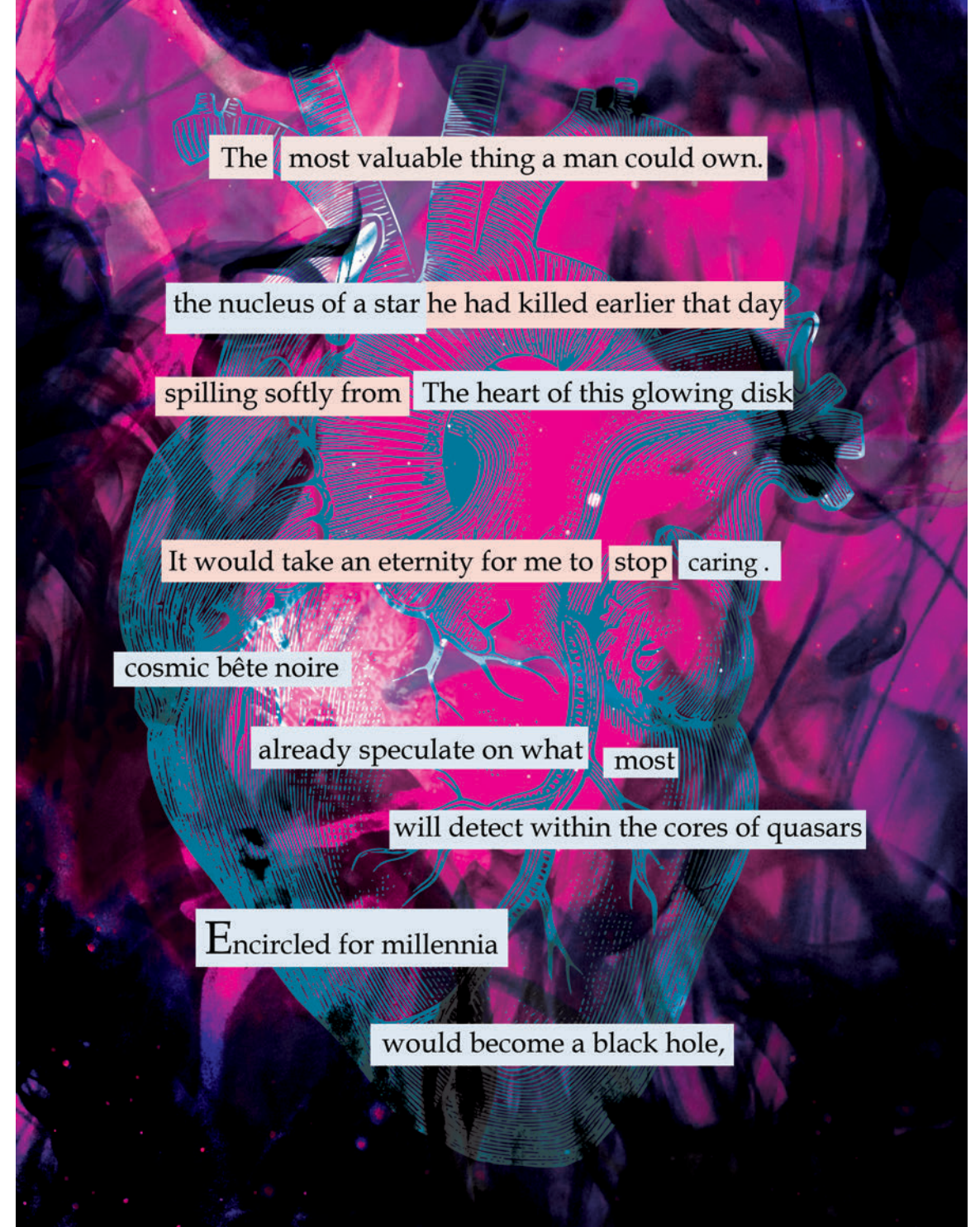
Foraging

Isabella (Izzie) Thompson

Momma once sat me down
and taught me
through birdsong and
rustling leaves
that loving someone
feels
the same way that a
gardenia blossom
smells,
and I still believe it.

God,
I still believe it,
so deeply that I keep
cradling acorns
ever so gently
and clawing for ways to
intensify our connection.

But
I'm growing sick
of sniffing the air around me,
silently begging it to flood with
the scent of buttery white petals
until my nose bleeds,
because no matter how hard I try,
I can't seem to make believe
that I ever will one day be
worthy
of so much as a
single
blade of grass
using my rancid,
rotting heart
as its fertilizer,
its garden plot,
its
home.



The most valuable thing a man could own.

the nucleus of a star he had killed earlier that day

spilling softly from The heart of this glowing disk

It would take an eternity for me to stop caring .

cosmic bête noire

already speculate on what most

will detect within the cores of quasars

Encircled for millennia

would become a black hole,

Light Bleeding

Rabia Siddiqui // Scrap poetry adapted to digital Photoshop collage

A Rotten Rose Homecoming

Rowan Feasel

Creak. Squeak. Creak. Squeak.
The porch swing protests the weight of the girl.

So she hollers to
the house,
the family inside,
the sky,
the universe

God created WD-40 for a reason.

But her shrill cry only aggravates the cantankerous swing.

Another series of violent scrapes
Creak. Squeak. Creak. Squeak.
force the girl to slow her rocking.

Robbed of peaceful contemplation, she sighs.
Half nostalgic, half bitter —
She remembers swinging away summer afternoons
With captivating reads and glasses of lemonade.

No racket. No expectations. No disappointments.

The world her oyster and the swing a silent vehicle,
Transporting her to a realm far from reality.

Now she sits disenchanting by those childish whims and
Bothered by the swing's betrayal.

But the porch swing is not the sole aggressor.

For the rosebush behind the swing emits the foulest odor.
Its deep crimson blooms rot in the blistering heat.

Burned to maturity — black around the edges —
The petals scatter like ashes when the girl tries to pick them.

Their stench reminds her of Sunday school.
The friend who whispered between the lesson and prayer.

Did you know that Henry quit the baseball team?

But the girl's not sure she knows Henry.
Or the friend.

She wants to scream.

*Did you know this podunk doesn't have raspberries?
I went to the Piggly Wiggly for raspberries. The store never has any!*

But the next second her cheeks flush rosy red.
Because she loves her little town,
And she loves the rosebush.

But the scent is suffocating,
And the swing is creaky squeaky.

All that book-learning must have scrambled her brain.

Since college abandoned her,
Left her to rage against the oppressor Free Time all alone,
Left her to reconcile the spoiled past and uncertain future,
She has lazed on the swing,
Contemplating its cacophonies and breathing in that pervasive perfume.

She has, in fact, stopped to smell the roses this summer.
She can tell her professors as much.



Barren

Isabella (Izzie) Thompson

*It's not gray for
the entire time
that you're there.*

Hot moonlight
burns your pale skin and
you feel it peeling, stinging,
air biting at the raw tissue
as you fall onto your knees
in the middle
of an endless plain of dirt,
the dry, dead soil
blowing in the wind,
filling your lungs;
you can't quit coughing,
bleeding, skin thinning,
and through it all
the fact that your mother
still knows your name
is meaningless,
empty,
not even a skeleton.



imposition

Anne Louise Phillips // Nikon D5000, Nikkor 55-200

Self Refraction

Maury Johnston // Watercolor on paper



Self-reflection in Pink Champagne

Mary Evelyn McLemore

Pink champagne giggling itself out of my lips, pouring out a litany for you;
Tap on the shoulder, tap on the heart, brush past with intent.
A paint brush would ruin this picture, show me instead the paint,
And the icing, the cake we made floating its way into a flotsam
I created, flotsam of my heart, flotsam in the messiest sense of the word
I put on an achy song for you baby, and
I keep forgetting that you don't owe me anything.
Yes, I know it's harsh, but the bluebird has to break a few eggs—
Sorry, wrong saying.
Sorry for saying sorry, this is not the face I want to meet you with.
Sorry, I can't remember the prayer.
Oh, you've heard that one before?
I keep looking around corners waiting
To avoid you,
Don't you think that's a terrible thing to do?
And it isn't the first time, you know.
Don't forget about the easy moments, sun shining into
A lazy, paint-filled room, silences stretching into dreams
And dreams turning into an oath.
I think I might owe you something, though,
A car, a smoke, a whatever
A chance to say
I see you and I'm sorry if you see me.
Forgiveness, again, trying to worm its way into Eve's apple
Don't you dare look at me like that, the kiss on the hand
Isn't supposed to exist. The party hasn't started,
And my dress hasn't arrived yet.
I can't stop the words from bouncing off you,
Tendrils of sound reaching in towards a heart,
Isn't this what we keep talking about?
Voyeuresque, all of it, with the mirror I keep in the corner of my vision
Going up in black smoke
Only to later form again in your eyes;
Baby, I'm tired of the polishing and the punishing,
And I want to forgive the sharp edges
Without having the fact of my being called into question.
I haven't heard from you in a while,
Baby, can we still call ourselves holy?
The world is taking off its rose-colored glasses and
Liquor becomes blood. Your lips are stained with it

And so are mine, stained with each other,
Taking a turn, my smiles are lined with the silver of your soul.
Forgiveness's other name is on my lips;
I call it back to me every time I hear you speak,
And easy grins are things I have to work for.
Remember the time we ate our sin for breakfast?
Remember the time I was falling and you grabbed me up?
Books I read to read in front of you, books you've read aloud to me,
Shelve themselves away in the dusty corners of my gut.
It's a dance we can't leave early from,
A dance around, beating around the bush
I'm sorry about the breath in your ear, baby. I'm sorry I can't keep it all in.
Watch my fingers splay and watch me let go;
Now fall, and fall with your back to the ground, eyes closed,
And your hands beseeching me,
Trying to hold my memory close to the vest;
Prayers are probably easier to remember without me, because
I'm not the one falling here baby, that was last year.
Sorry about the false starts;
I wish I could give you nights to howl at the moon.
I wish I could run into our friends without
The hatred and pit in the stomach, the flickering lights
In everyone's eyes that are usually reserved for an analogy about death
And the time I laid drunk on the floor and tried to kiss you silly
Still in the back of my mind.
A flash of another one of those smiles
Brings it all back, the sheen and everything else, wanting
Baggage without the weight and love without the bulk.
Realistically, though, there's a phantom of you
That keeps running its hand through my hair
And I haven't the heart to tell it I'd prefer to see you in person.
What is love without confession? I think I've asked you this before.
I think you forgot to answer and
I'm still waiting baby, I'm still waiting.
You can go on ahead, and I'll stay right here and keep waiting,
a mantra to repeat
And an ideal to never obtain.
Leave me alone, the dance is over
And I can feel the hangover setting in.
The door is there and the floor is there and the regret is here and here.

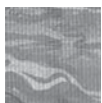
Don't tell me how to end it, you showed me how last time.

Then hold my gaze oh honey, oh baby,

Oh darling. Dangerous words to make an ending,

And I'll end it, arms up, hands raised,

And body broken from the fall.



When a glass is left empty

Katelyn Woodard // Alcohol ink and acrylic

That Certain Sound

Callie Matthews

You don't belong here

There's Alabama college boys
filming you from their car, laughing
while you hide your face

"Halloween's a month away!"

With every bite of a burger,
your white face paint flakes off
leaving ghostly smudges on a leather seat

You look like such a fool

It's 5 a.m., and there's been a wreck;
you're stuck in traffic—
why are you doing this to yourself?

But living in the South, you have no choice
but to drive hours away
just to feel like you belong

So you shut your eyes and remember
the night you've just had
and let that carry you through the drive

It's so lonely now

You were lacing yourself up in a corset
in the bathroom mirror
of a space-themed bar

Walking past girls with mohawks
and dramatic eyeliner,
hiding your joy when they complimented you

You endured a slew of hardcore bands:
watching the floor burst into shoving,
windmilling arms and crowd surfing bodies

And you watched a man on stage wearing sunglasses,
that played bass under a green light
enshrouded in fog

Is this where you belong?

Someone in a ripped, sweaty t-shirt
slipped on a spilled drink
and slid into you, hitting hard

Are you happy now?

But after this set would end,
it would finally be the band you came for:
your first live goth act

What to do when you find a home, though,
in a subculture that's been butchered,
mistaken, now, as a fashion statement?

You're an imposter

But it's the music we love, that binds us together—
this sound that speaks for us when we can not,
this tragic, elegant sound

Is this it?

You never imagined you'd get so emotional,
but after soundcheck your eyes
were stuck together with wet mascara

All at once, the floor was filled with the whispering
fabric of draped sleeves and skirts,
arms waving to a discordant beat

And there was a certain magic in the
wavering purple lights and black lipstick smiles,
on the faces that spun round and round

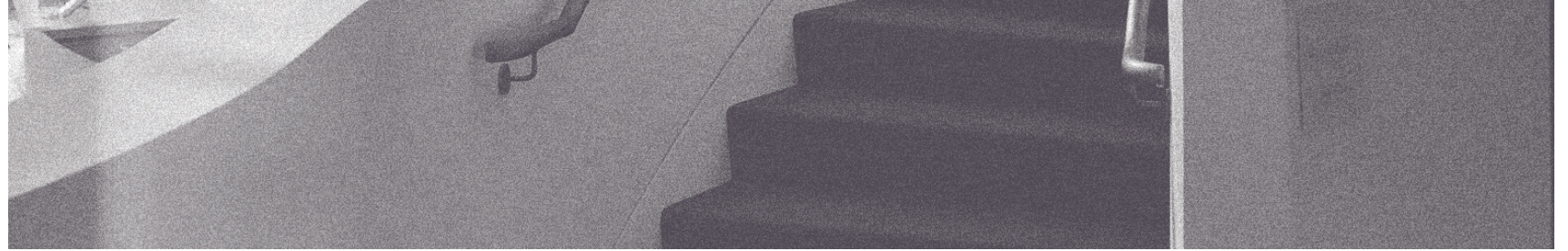
There was a kindred glow
in the singer's eyes
who wore large, fuzzy dice earrings

And there was a certain sound
that infiltrated your body
and made it sway

You know that this will all end soon

And when you open your eyes, you see a road
full of cars slowly creeping forward,
red tail lights blurred and blinking out of sight

Something's got to change



Glimpses of Luxury

Jay Snodgrass // Film photography (Expired 35 mm film, Nikon FM10 camera)

Why People Walk

Jackson Weisskopf

I like when it rains.

I like when water collects in small puddles
while reflecting the heavens above,
fluctuating with every drop like pools of rippling mercury.

I like walking in the rain.

Mostly I walk alone.

Sometimes I do not walk alone and I get to appreciate
the sweet silence of another.

I am grateful for those times.

But mostly I walk alone and the silence is only mine.

When I walk I try not to think

—but I usually do—

I think of my childhood playing in the rain,
stomping in puddles, diving in mud,
catching raindrops on the tip of my tongue.
Such a unique experience.

I do not play in the rain anymore.

Neither do people my age.

I wonder what is it about getting old
that makes people go on walks and stay inside
instead of play in the rain.

Sometimes —On the walks where I'm alone—

I'll tip back my head and stick out my tongue and
wonder if the rain did taste sweeter in those days

Sometimes I pretend —On the walks where I'm alone—
that I am once again a child.

Undaunted by the downpour.

Unsullied by time.

Maybe I'll skip through a puddle or two.

Maybe I'll sing a song that once filled me with gleeful joy.

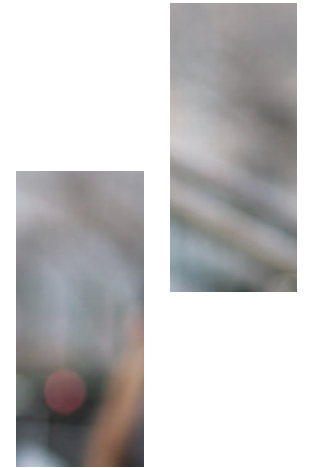
Maybe the rain for that moment,

just a moment, will taste a tad bit sweeter.

This ends when the flash of a passing car's headlights
sends a hot flush of self-conscious embarrassment
rushing past my temples, and suddenly I recall
why people walk instead of play, and
especially why people stay inside.

I go on walks in the rain sometimes. Mostly alone.

And dream of splashing through puddles of heavenly mercury,
skipping along through stars long since faded.



As Within, So Without



10. He placed therein (i.e. the earth) firm mountains from above it, and He blessed it, and measured therein its sustenance (for its dwellers) in four Days equal (i.e. all these four days were equal in the length of time) for all those who ask (about its creation).

11. Then He rose over (*Istawā*) towards the heaven when it was smoke, and said to it and to the earth: "Come both of you willingly or unwillingly." They both said: "We come willingly."

Rabia Siddiqui // Sculpture (Metal wire and foam armature, bedsheet, embroidery floss, embroidery needle)

Blue Intentions

Mary Evelyn McLemore

The bluebird sings its little dirge into the room outside,
its feathers sweet and petaled all over, its feathers like a touch

I'm still trying to name. It's been a few weeks and still I feel the lack
of your brush-by, still it's all half, still it's all in a toss up. I would fly into

the blue horizon, but the horizon means completion, horizon means
the end of the road. *I walk to you, I walk with you on this hazy path.* I mean

the end of this road should know its place. It's just the blues, honey,
it's just those damn tears. It's the way my feet blistered up the air

when I got to running, and it's the way I could look into those little
pits of promise and come out glitzy as a movie baby,

glitzy as the way I tromp around in the yard of your heart.
When will we have that prayer to toss about between the secrets of ourselves,

when will I remember to look into the road and stop just short of the turnpike?
Keep outrunning this love and I'll tell you how to meet me,

I'll tell you how to earn the blue stars back and keep them too. Honey, I would
give you a way out but it's just the path in front of us, it's just the veer off

that I could not bear. What if I told you about those rosaries of sonnets
I keep in the back of my mind, what if I told you that I would give you the melody

if I could only remember the tune? We're back to those baby blues
boring their way through every mask, boring their way into the center of the sky,

with the road running away from their punishing gaze. Angels above, baby, above
and all around us, I just wish I could put this longing down and let it rot

into something useful, something worth a turn around and a simple smile. I keep
those pearly whites in the backbone of my heart, something insubstantial to keep the

substantial from turning tail and going back into that blue past. Those birds
have to lay their head somewhere, they have to let nature get on with its

mournful psalm and let us all go home. Home is where I'll keep you, the path
prone and curved away into the glowing foggy future. I ran into the glow

to protect you, the fletching of my soul caught soundly in the deep blue sky.
If I could baby, I'd go that way again, I'd make sure we both saw the same path and let love,

always love, keep its distance from the scene and at last wander into
the sunset of our lives, whole and hale. Our footprints will be solidly within our sight,

Our blue smiles caught up in the breadth of each other.

CRUCIFIXION ON THE ATLANTIC

Daniel Adejumbo

The year I turned fifteen,
The carpet of our house finally fell to my father's foot.
Every night he stomped the floor in effervescent worship,
While his palms struck themselves and occasionally,
My sister's cheeks when the hymn wasn't draining her lungs
Of every sound her tiny vocal tracts could produce,
To praise the man our ancestors were told
Died and lived that we may be free
From our devil, black devil, dark-skinned devil—

Soon the devils were fettered to the boats
That had brought the messengers of this good news,
Exorcised by their own brothers
Who were also slaves—
Far from the ships sailing the Atlantic—
But slaves to the deception that had been sowed in their hearts.

Curse that sea!
Why should I be baptized in the sea
Where our fathers were thrown off like luggage—
Like?
They were luggage,
And at their owner's discretion, they were disposed.

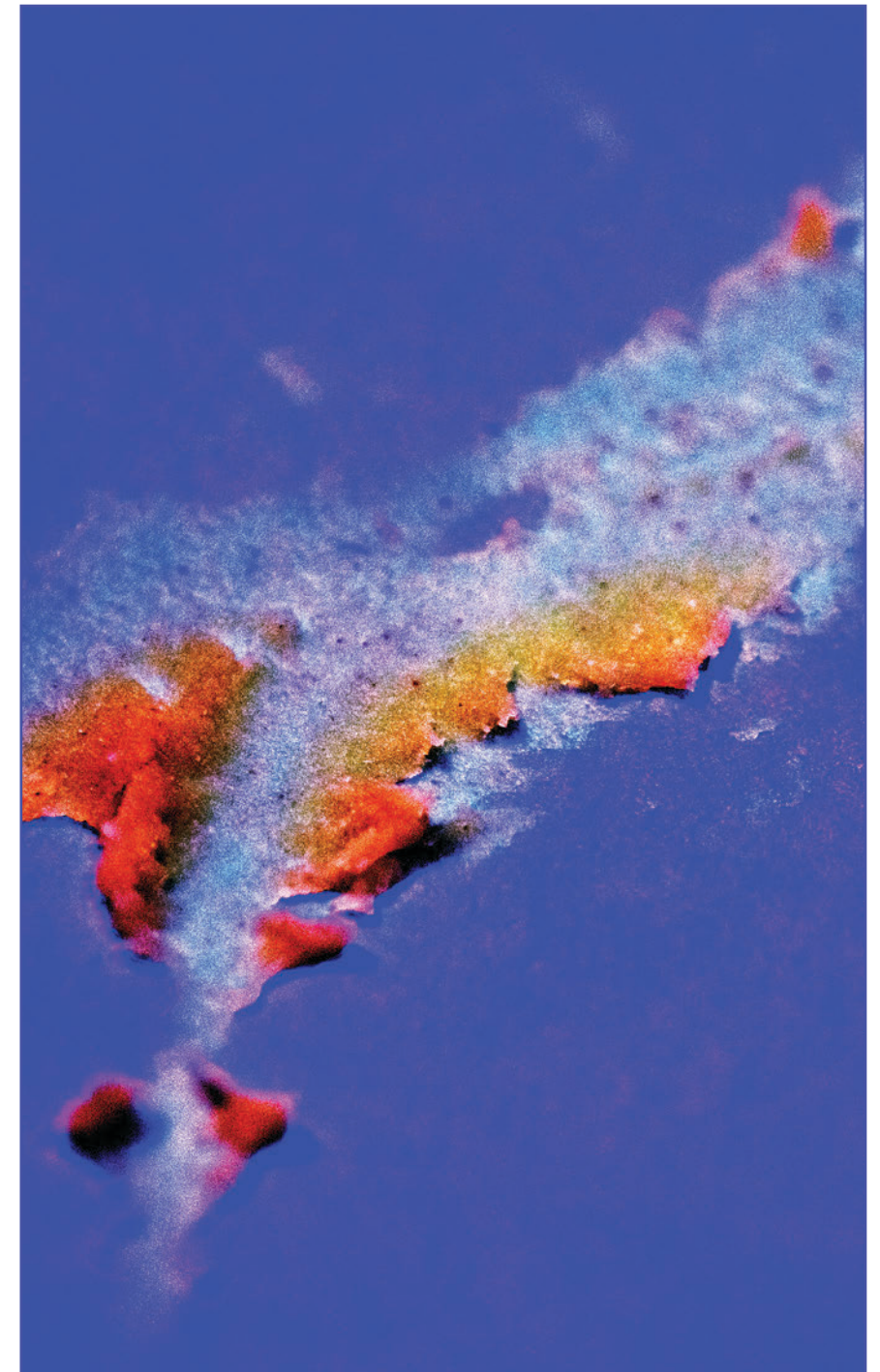
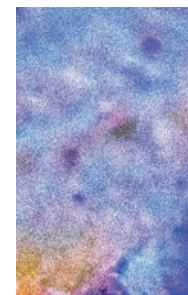
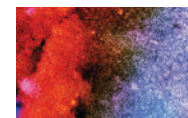
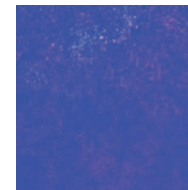
Curse that sea!
Why should I wash myself anew in the sea
Where our mothers' bodies transfigured into wild game
To be devoured by men with skin as bland as their hearts?

No! No! No! No! No! No! No! NO!
BLESS THAT SEA!

The Atlantic where our fathers and mothers
Committed their spirits
Maybe we should be washed in this sacred sea,
sanctified in their blood that remained in their veins as they drowned,
In their cries for mercy below worn-out decks,
In their plea for freedom at the hands of death
Granted by the endless depth of the sea.

Potential Energy

Leah Wisener // Nikon D5300, Photoshop





Gabrielle Dunn // *Soft pastels on BFK Rives paper*

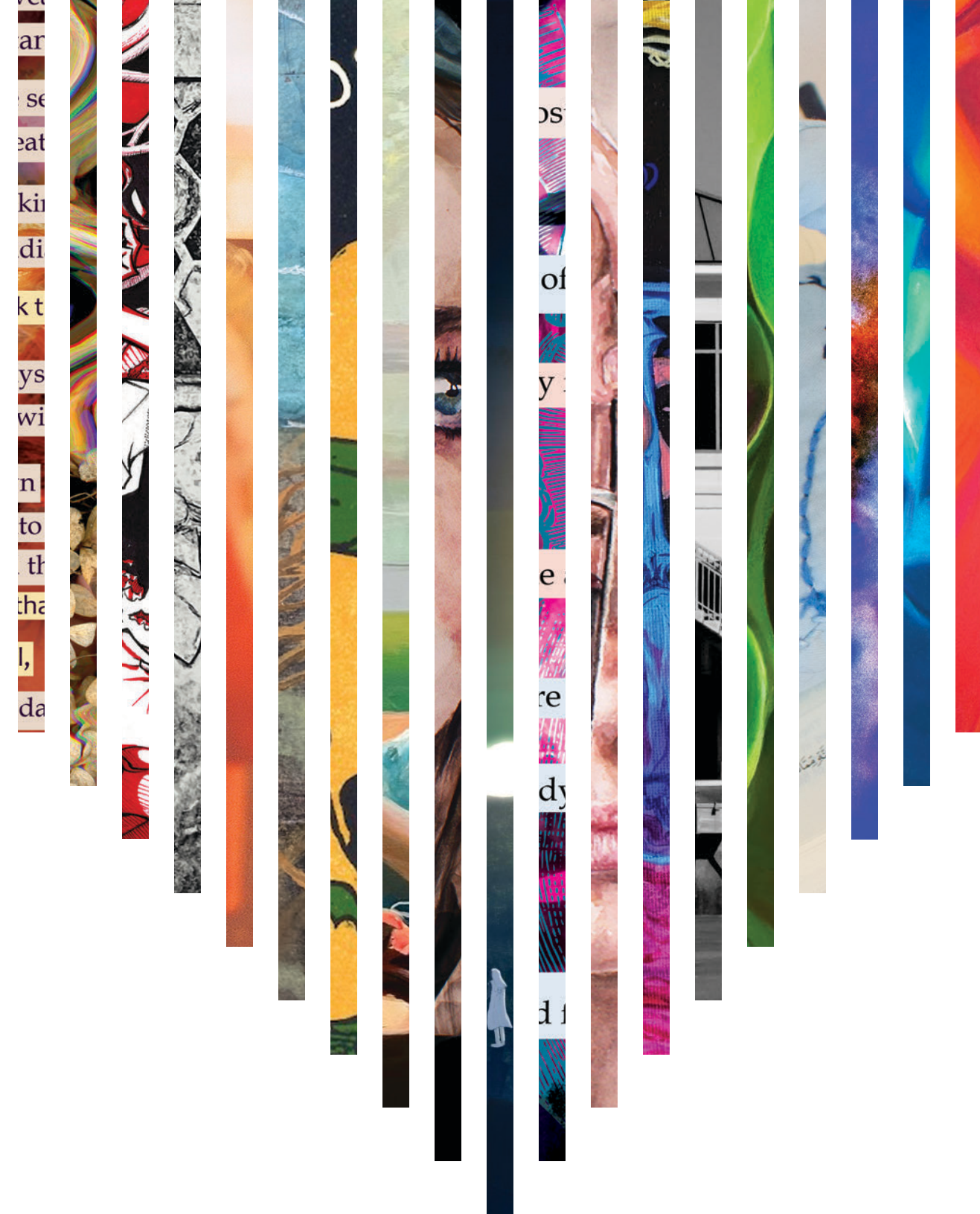
Going, Going, Gone

Isabella (Izzie) Thompson

You once danced with me in our living room and
on tiptoes I met certainty, holding the
universe by the waist
`till laughter drowned out the silent tempo;
remembering was kind then, with
endings book-bound and flower heads unscathed.

Letting go has left me flat-footed;
old habits bite at my ankles as I
step out of time to this unwelcome
interlude, lingering on a once-sworn
never in an unfamiliar, dark apartment and
growing into something I wasn't supposed to become.

*Maybe the song already ended,
even if I never heard the final note.*



— Best of The Streetcar

The best piece from each genre in Volume 12, as voted upon by staff. Staff pieces are not considered for best works.

Best Art Piece:

Starting Over // Maury Johnston (p. 34)

Honorable Mention in Art:

Poverty of Self // Gabrielle Dunn (p. 9)

Best Photography Piece:

The Local // Ivy Ball (p. 56)

Best Digital Media Piece:

Soul Anglers // Raineflower Phillips (p. 37)

Best Poem:

Teeth // Linda Arnoldus (p. 28)

Best Prose:

The Serpent's Unhinged Jaw // Logan Whitehead (p. 23-25)

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