

HYPERCUTS HORROR

Issue 001 / / / Winter 2026



LIT, ART, & INTERVIEW COMPZINE
BY NEURODIVERGENT, DISABLED,
& CHRONICALLY ILL CREATIVES

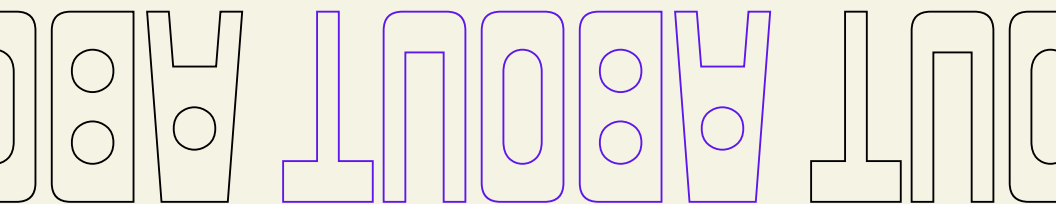
OUT ABOUT ABOUT

HYPERFOCUS HORROR IS AN IMPRINT OF HNDL MAG [HIGHLIGHTED NEURODIVERGENT & DISABLED MAGAZINE], WHICH WAS FOUNDED IN 2023. HNDL HAS PUBLISHED FOUR HORROR ISSUES OVER THE YEARS, AMONG TWENTY OTHER ISSUES. OUR HORROR ISSUES RECEIVED GREAT FEEDBACK AND CREATED A COMMUNITY OF FELLOW DISABLED, NEURODIVERGENT, AND MENTALLY AND CHRONICALLY ILL HORROR LOVERS. HENCE, THE BRANCHING OFF OF THIS PUBLICATION TO DEDICATE AND HYPERFOCUS ON HORROR. THE TITLE OF THIS PUBLICATION COMES FROM FOUNDER, EDITOR, AND DESIGNER IZZY AMBER'S OWN EXPERIENCE WITH SPECIAL INTERESTS AS AN AUDHDER AND MAY NOT BE A TERM EVERYONE USES.

PLEASE FOLLOW US ON INSTAGRAM @HYPERFOCUS HORROR, WHERE YOU CAN STAY CONNECTED AND SUBMIT YOUR WORK TO OUR ALWAYS-OPEN SUBMISSION FORM WITH WINDOWS FOR SEASONAL-THEMED WORK.

THIS IS AN ADULT PUBLICATION AND IS NOT SUITABLE FOR AUDIENCES UNDER 18.

DESIGN ASSET CREDIT- LICENSES FOR "CONTACT" IMAGES [PURPLE], VOLUME FONT, [TOM CHALKY], MASONEC FONT [403 TYPE FOUNDRY], MONTECRA MIXED [BRAINWAVES STUDIO], CIRCLE LETTER BEADS [DYNAMO ULTIMA], LICENSES PURCHASED THROUGH CREATIVE MARKET, OFL FONTS LINEA [MARIE LESCALIER, MARINE SANCHEZ] AND BARLOWFOLD [VICTOR DUBIEN, ANDREA BONETTO] SOURCED THROUGH TYPOTHEQUE ROYALTY FREE IMAGES SOURCED FROM PUBLIC WORK; COSMOS, BIG BIRD FONT-TAYLOR PENTON, SOME ROYALTY FREE IMAGES SOURCED FROM CANVA.



LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



Dear Readers,

I cannot thank you enough for opening the pages of this 'zine. I have such an undying [or undead] passion for horror media, and have since I was a small child. I can think of no other genre that allows such creative freedom, risks, and exploration. As an autistic person, the purposeful intensity of the stories and images within the genre provide a form of catharsis for me that is indescribable; almost transcendental. The connections I've formed through the launch of this publication and the HNDL community over the years have shown me that I am certainly not the only one who is so extremely nerdy and hyperfocused on horror.

My goal with curating these issues is to publish delicious deviousness, but also to showcase how horror can be such a powerful tool to process trauma, grief, and complex mental landscapes. In this issue, we reflect on the body, our relationship with death, pain, memory, and our roles and relationships in this strange life we live. We feel the chill of winter in our bones; we burrow; we emerge. This issue is like that feeling when you come in from a walk in the snow and take a hot shower and it burns in such a specific, strange, needy way. It's like when you are walking outside at night in a blizzard and think you see a figure behind you, but the snow is whipping at your eyeballs, and you just can't tell for sure.

I hope you enjoy, and I thank you endlessly for your support,

-KRIZIA "IZZY" AMBER W.

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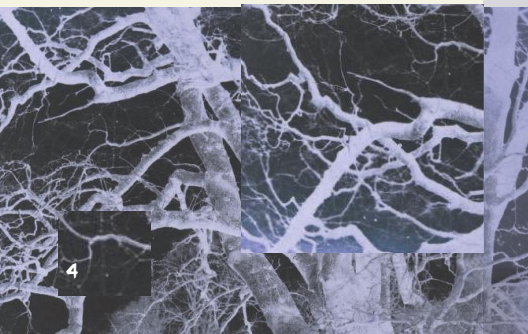
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CW THROUGHOUT ISSUE FOR
DEATH, GORE, MEDICAL TRAUMA,
GRIEF, CHILD LOSS, SUICIDALITY,
STRONG LANGUAGE, SURREALLY
DEPICTED ANIMAL HARM, AND
SEXUALITY

“DARCYS JOURNEY” BY JENNY FEAR



*I live in Brighton and regularly exhibit here. I am a painter and sculptor, using recycling to make eggs with stories inside. I am autistic and have Chronic fatigue syndrome. In my work I am interested in telling stories, creating communication between the art and the viewer, and exploring the relationships between humans, animals and the natural world- I am fascinated by how we are connected with the natural environment. I am influenced by surrealism, folklore, natural world and fairytales. I think of myself as an outsider artist and am a strong advocate for inclusion within the art world, challenging elitism and inaccessibility.
IG: @pandora_pumpkinhead*

PRESENCES

BY
CHIARA
MORGANTI

It has the smell of wet stones
and sleeps beneath my voice.

At dusk, it climbs the curtains.
At dawn, it hums in my spoons.

When I pour milk,
it turns blue.
I've tried to feed it
peach pits and
the names of old lovers
but it wants the quiet
between my ribs.
I open a window
to hear less.

The furniture rearranges itself
by instinct
the mirror tilts slightly,
as if to avoid me
politely.
The skin hears things
it shouldn't.

The walls blink.

poetess, lover of mysteries, lover of truths, made of freezing water.

RATE AND REVIEW

BY
OLGA
PONJEE

There's a box at the front door. It wasn't Nicky, according to Nicky, but I haven't ordered anything online.

Here we go again - internet safety, screen time, sneaking onto sites I've forbidden her to visit - I slice the box open. But there's no invoice. No order number. Just a mummy encased in bubble wrap and under all those layers, a body made of blinking lights.

Toy of the Year! shouts the packaging. RoBeat sings, dances and talks!

'Mom...' says Nicky, but I'm too tired to see anything but an admission of guilt. I send her to her room.

'We're not done yet, young lady!' sings the RoBeat. I've accidentally pressed his right foot, the recording button that's meant to 'stimulate the young enquiring mind'. My voice echoes from its abdomen. Mechanical joints creak back and forth.

There's nothing in the system, says Chloe from Customer Service, just a list of my previous orders: energy drinks, Dreamzzz tablets, instant noodles on a holiday discount. One child, two sick parents and three part-time jobs, that's how I manage.

Chloe asks if I want to rate the call for internal assessment purposes, but all of a sudden I'm tired again, too much weight for my bones.

I key in a random number. Sorry Chloe.

'We can keep him,' I say to Nicky's door. 'He can play 25 tunes for your fine motor development.' I press the right foot. 'Please?'

'Please?' parrots the RoBeat.

But Nicky is like me, she won't let me get away.

'That's not your voice,' she says.

It's two o'clock, three o'clock, the no man's land between Dreamzzz and reality. I can't place the sound, which side is calling. I drink water in the bathroom. My head feels encased in bubble wrap.

I kick something over on my way back to bed.

'Nicky?' I say.

'Nicky?' says my own voice, the voice that isn't mine.

I hadn't left him there, in the middle of the room. And yet he's staring at me, blue sparks for eyes.

'One, two, three, rainbow dance with me!' sings the RoBeat.

The next night he's on the cupboard, then in Nicky's room. Her screams hammer me awake. I yank out the batteries.

'We're not done yet!' shrieks the robot. Rollercoaster colors, plastic limbs convulsing, its voice unraveling in electric shreds. And yet I feel something human, something clutching at me for help, something stuck in a plastic skin.

'Efficiency! Speed! Customer-friendliness!'

Batteries. Pills. I must be hearing dreams.

I ask for Chloe at Customer Service, but no one seems to know her. There are a lot of internal transfers, says a boy called Frank. Better matches between talent and department.

'Anything else?' he asks.

'Anything else?' echoes the line and suddenly I'm there again, trapped in colors, light, too little skin. Electricity in my veins until I'm too tired to dance.

'Ma'am?' says a voice, a faraway voice, a voice asking if I'll rate his service for internal assessment purposes, please.

Olga Ponjee is a screenwriter, tailor, carpenter and drag king from the Netherlands, where they live with their wife, husband, three kids and an ever expanding collection of historical costumes. The translation of this story was done by their wife, Camilla Malta.

IG: @olgaponjee

“BABY FOREVER” BY AXENIA RAULET



*Axe - an experimental artist delving into the raw essence of identity.
In love with the layered depths of existential experience. Fascinated by the invisible forces
and the beauty of absurdity. Expressing these through sound, collage, and movement.
@octopus_odyssey*

28 LUNCHES

BY
AL
KRAMER



it never snows here
never cools
ice only
in dark sugar tea
it never snows
where
there are gators
chomping steel wool
picking their teeth with
dodo beaks,
washing their mouths with
mercury and caviar
they don't drink black tea
but something more **honest**
for cold throats and hot breath

there is never a break
a freeze
a holiday
unless the alligators say so

drink some sap
and tell me about it—
tell your dad
tell your sleeping dodo bird
tell your alligator in the deep freeze
about itself
about its *bleached skin*

drink some sugar water
eat your belly button from the inside out
eat your alligator
eat your sap-soaked tongue
from the outside in
and proclaim it **brunch**.

*al kramer is a nonbinary, bipolar writer, poet, artist, and journalist reliving queer traditions and follies. A graduate from the University of Iowa, they bankroll their creative habits working in the service industry.
Instagrams: @x_kramer_ or @milkmoneyzine*

“ LIQUIFERA ”



SALIVA, EPOXY, CLEAR NAIL POLISH, AND SILVER

“ MEA ARMILLA ”



BLOOD, EPOXY AND SILVER

“ THE MAGNIFICENCE OF THE GROSS ” BY MAUD SCHEERS

“Hair, nails, skin and teeth play a significant role in our ideas of beauty and how we express ourselves. We appreciate them as long as they are part of our body, but as soon as they detach and appear somewhere else, in a shower drain, on the floor, ... they often evoke a feeling of discomfort or disgust. That exact shifting feeling forms an important point of contact with the horror genre. The use of human material is often prominent there: the body becomes a source of fear, something unsettling. When these materials lose their familiar context, they become strange, recognizable yet unsettling.

In my work, I explore that tension, I want to make the viewer think: what are you seeing? And is that really what you think you're seeing? Meanwhile I'm also looking for beauty in what we normally consider dirty, disgusting or inappropriate. By incorporating these human materials into jewellery, I invite the viewer to reconsider their fragile, intimate and sometimes uncomfortable feeling, not only with aversion but perhaps also with wonder.

This is how I hope to soften the taboo surrounding the use of human remains in art and make the conversation more accessible while consciously playing with that thin, intriguing line between fascination and revulsion that is so characteristic of horror.”

I explore the delicate balance between softness and boldness, intuition and control. Inspired by people, nature, and animals, I seek beauty in what is pure, real and quietly overlooked.

ig: schrr.archive website: <https://maudschr.myportfolio.com/work>



“ VENA AMORIS ”



NAILS AND SILVER

interview with multi-disciplinary artist
JULIANNA ROMANYK

JULIANNA ROMANYK IS A WRITER AND SOUND DESIGNER BASED IN TORONTO. SHE IS A RADIO PRODUCER BY DAY, AND A HORROR WRITER AND EDITOR BY NIGHT. SHE IS FASCINATED BY THE COMPLEXITY OF HOW THE MEDICAL INDUSTRY BOTH FIXES AND FORCES ITS PATIENTS AS THEY "HEAL". THIS OBSESSION STEMS FROM HER OWN MEDICAL EXPERIENCES, AS WELL AS HER INTEREST IN DISABILITY STUDIES AND HISTORY. JULIANNA IS A DISABLED WOMAN WHO WAS BORN WITH MISSING FINGERS AND TOES, AND THEN HAD UNRELATED INVASIVE ORGAN SURGERY IN HER MID TWENTIES. SCARRED IS HER FIRST MAJOR PROJECT. IT HAS SCREENED AT SEVERAL FILM FESTIVALS IN CANADA AND THE US, AS WELL AS ON SHUDDER AS PART OF THE ACCESS: HORROR SHORTS SHOWCASE.



JOSEPH FUDA - @FUDAGRAPHY



IG: @HEYROMANYK

[HYPERFOCUS HORROR, EDITOR IZZY ASKS] Thank you so much for agreeing to talk to us! Please introduce yourself!

[JULIANNA ANSWERS]

I'm Julianna Romanyk. I am the writer, editor, sound designer and main actor for *Scarred!* It's a horror short film based on my experiences as a disabled woman in the medical system — especially the surgeries I've had throughout my life. I was born with limb differences, and I acquired an unrelated chronic illness as an adult. I'm based in Toronto, and I work as an audio technician and writer for a living.

[HH] Why are you drawn to horror as a genre to tell your most vulnerable stories?

[JULIANNA] I like horror because it allows you to get into territory that other genres don't. Like, I would never want to tell my stories about medical trauma or ableism in a drama. I don't want my medical history to be inspiring or pitiful, or serve as some sort of a lesson. Sometimes trauma just feels meaninglessly awful, and I want the space to acknowledge that. Horror allows me to explore dread and violence in a way where I don't have to pull back as much, or make the audience feel good about it at the end.

In general, I love that horror walks the line between vulnerability and shock. I've always been drawn to that dynamic of extremes meeting in the middle to find something honest.

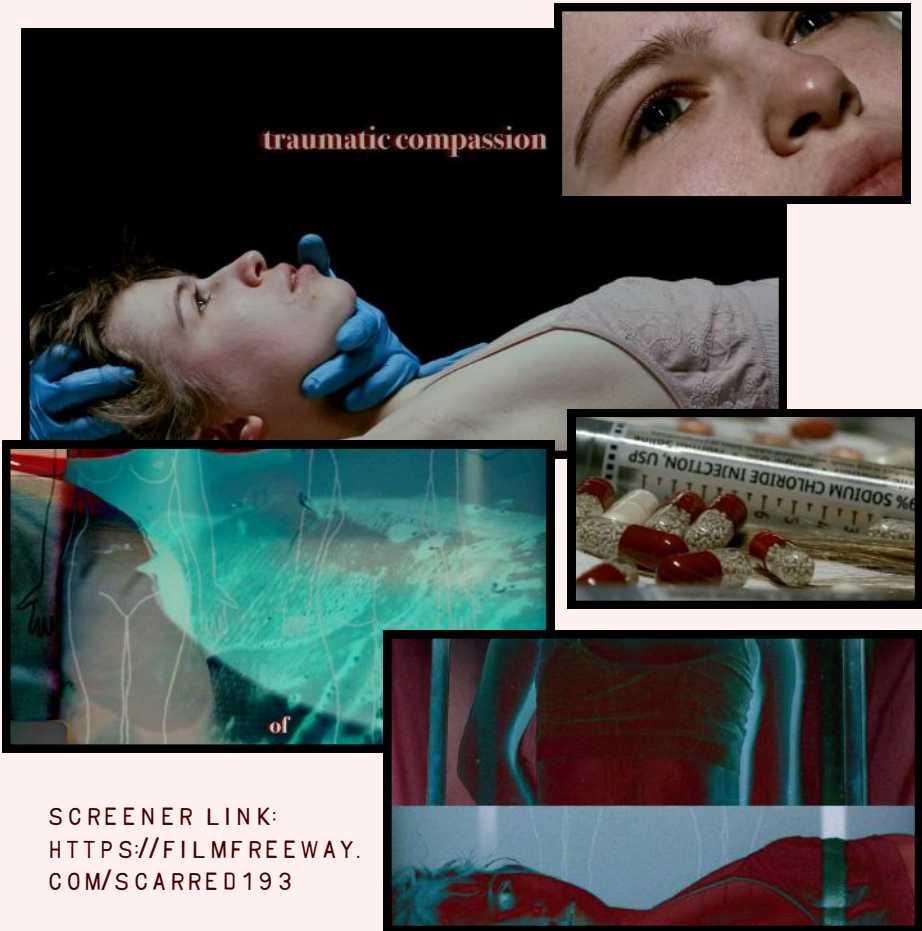
/HH/ Who are your artistic influences film-wise and other mediums?

/JULIANNA/ Scarred is really just the body horror version of Lemonade by Beyoncé. Specifically, the beginning of the music video for “Hold Up”. Just like that scene, Scarred is an expression of grief through slow poetry and eerie visuals. And just like that section from Lemonade, Scarred is basically an experimental music video: I designed it as a full soundscape first, and then edited the visuals to fit the soundscape.

I also have to say, I wouldn't have done this project if I hadn't seen The Sound of Summer and Fitting In! I watched The Sound of Summer a month before my biggest surgery, and Fitting In less than a year after it. The director of Scarred took me to see both of them, and they broke the taboo of discussing chronic illness in film for me. Sound of Summer is a Japanese movie about a girl whose body is infested with cicadas, and the doctors keep dismissing and underplaying her condition. It's free on Tubi. Fitting In is a Canadian movie about a young woman navigating her medical trauma and sexuality, while also trying to keep up her “normal” life in high school. It's on Crave, or you can rent it. Both are severely underrated.

Overall, I want my filmmaking to be characterized by simple visuals, and being obsessive about the sound design and score. It plays to my strengths, and it works well with horror. The Babadook and Black Christmas are two of my favourite horror films.





SCREENER LINK:
[HTTPS://FILMFREEWAY.COM/SCARRED193](https://filmfreeway.com/scarred193)

/HH/ What's next for you project-wise?

/JULIANNA/ I just hosted and produced a radio special called "Can You Joke About That?"! It's a documentary about controversial comedy, and how we decide what comedians can or can't say. You can listen to it on CBC Radio 1 on February 16 at 3 pm! Or you can listen to it online after it airs, from anywhere in the world... just search "Can you joke about that Julianna".

In terms of horror, Femur Dreams Film Collective is my filmmaking community. I could not have made Scarred without them. Follow @femur.dreams for updates on horror films made by me and my collaborators! Right now a bunch of us are working on Mayday, which is part of a found footage horror anthology series called Final Transmissions. That's coming out next year. In 2026, I'm also going to finish writing my first feature film script, which is a more surreal exploration of chronic illness horror.

**“ CUT THE TIES THAT BIND YOU ”
BY SOFIA R.C. MELENDEZ**



8x10, *PRINTER PAPER AND ACRYLIC PAINT ON SKETCHBOOK PAPER, NOVEMBER 2025.*

Sofia R.C. Melendez (any pronouns) is a queer, neurodivergent artist, art historian, and independent curator born & raised in New York City. She works primarily in acrylic paint, collage, and crafts, with the occasional foray into sculpture and drawing. Their work is extremely personal, leaning towards the emotional and the grotesque. Melendez is currently obtaining their MA in Museum Studies from New York University's Graduate School of Arts & Sciences. @sofirella / @petiteapollo on Instagram / sofiarcmelendez.com

“ R I B S ”



IN THE LOOKING

BY
CLEMENTINE
MENDELSON

My childhood comes rushing out in a nosebleed,
the kind that comes on the moment you climb into bed.

I tell you I was a difficult child.

One who saw eyes in door frames and bearded men in my cupboard;
snores turning beast from the room across the hall.

I tell you that I was sensitive.

Crying in the wind, in the snow, in the night.

You tell me I am porous, a dial
finely tuned to the frequencies they don't register.

My fear comes rushing out in a nosebleed.

I tell you the truth,

that the turn from fun to frightening is as thin and clinging
as the skin on a too-soft apple

that holds the scar of my bite perfectly —
the gap between my two front teeth.

I'm told that I was always afraid, but children can be afraid for a reason.

There are stories: kids reporting monsters under the bed.

Months of pleading until they finally look to find snakes nesting.

But sometimes it's not so clear.

There's no writhing nest, no forked tongues. Just a certainty that when
you close your eyes, you see scales on your eyelids. In the quiet, you hear
the rattle and hiss.

In the looking, the question marks curl clues into tails

the clutching hands at tearful bedtimes,

child turned ghoul — afraid of their own screams, of their own terror.

I tell you that, given nowhere to go, fear turns

nail down bone

peppermint-heat

needle in wound

staple through liver

cupped hand full of blood and viscera.

My anger comes rushing out in a nosebleed.
On the street scowl and stamp,
swill strangers in my mouth like rot in the drain.
Find my stopper and seal it flat,
let it bulge,
let it crack.
Keep it out,
cram it in.

You tell me that's no way to live,
that's no way to walk around, to live a life, to be a self, to live your life.
I make a joke and you don't laugh.
I tell you that I was afraid of loud laughter, of chairs piled high in the
corridor.
How I would climb out of bed, toes cold and hard
like antlers.
I tell you when morning came,
it was like the rush out of a jugular.



*Clementine Mendelson (she/her) is a poet from London whose work explores memory, trauma, and the body — specifically teeth and bones. She has a BA in English Literature from the University of Birmingham, and uses her lived experience of autism and mental health issues to work with other autistic people. She has competed at Uni-Slam on her university's team twice — placing second in 2024, headlined at poetry nights in Birmingham, and been published in Antlers zine. You can find her on Instagram @clementineiswriting or at home, knitting and watching Buffy the Vampire Slayer with her cats.
IG: @clementineiswriting*

WHEN TERROR FINDS LOVE :



BY SONNI

IG: @REDVIEW
FILMS

REVIEWS &
RAMBLES /
FILM NERD &
BOOK WORM /
NEW YORK
SCRIPT AWARD
SHORT SCRIPT
WINNER
'24 FILMS

MY TOP 5 HORROR/ ROMANCE FILMS

When growing up it was basically unheard of to find a horror romantic or even beautiful but as cinema has grown and become less afraid to stem off extra genres within its main one; there is now a large catalog of slashers and ghost stories that have you falling in love. These are my top of the top when it comes to movies that put the kissing between the killing, the moments between the monsters, the swooning between the scary-



Only Lovers Left Alive (2013) is one of the most beautiful films ever made; whether you like vampires or romance, gore or philosophy it has all of that eloquently portrayed by the well known talents of Tilda Swinton and Tom Hiddleston. It is hard to describe this movie in a few short sentences, but I can say that I am yet to find a vampire movie more original than this. It's storytelling about life at its best and I am drawn in every time I watch this by the love and the depression of the few moments of living that we get with these beautiful dead.

Byzantium (2012), since we are on the topic of vampires, I have to mention this one - a very indie feeling movie with heart, grit and of course, blood. This one will forever be in my top 5 of this mix of genres because the growing intimacy between our vampire lead and the human boy she meets is so stunning, even kind of relatable be it a little obscure. It's that fantasy worthy kind of romance where the fight for loss of souls is won out by gain of eternity lasting love.

Crimson Peak (2015) is the epitome of gothic romance; while its main plot of ghosts and death can set an eerie and haunting tone, the love that follows alongside it really makes the heart of this movie whole. Set upon some of the most gorgeous landscapes and architecture, you have this classic Del Toro mystery where multiple worlds collide and as an audience member you fluctuate between panic and pleasure. A classic story that as a movie makes sure everything visual is alive and aids in telling it making this an unforgettable victorian tale of love and horror.



Bones and All (2022) did something I never knew I needed someone to do until I saw it; it mixed young, profound love with cannibalism. With almost vampiric undertones, *Bones and All* is a story of two people who end up needing each other as much as they need to eat (human flesh, that is!). This story is deeply about survival, trust and love while trying to understand yourself when living with addiction and compulsion. While the love story in this is beautiful and heart wrenching; the horror aspect is incredibly gory, unsettling and with a phenomenally eerie performance by Mark Rylance, you'll find it's the people themselves that make you uncomfortable more than the eating of them. I warn you, dear viewer, though it is unlikely with horror, this movie will break your heart into several million pieces.

Lisa Frankenstein (2024) is undoubtedly camp horror fun, turning the Frankenstein story in a unique way, it is one that comes with the guarantee of out loud laughing and a feeling of nostalgia. The whole movie is dressed in neon pink and big hair, paying homage to both the 80's as an era and the type of horrors that came out in that decade. Cole Sprouse is brilliant as the rotting reanimated corpse who is brought back into this world of a teenage girl's; it's so ridiculous, sweet and very gross in a way that just oozes confidence that this film is exactly what it's meant to be. Although I am repeating myself, it is just pure fun and I think it is a strong film within its mix of horror, romance and comedy. *Lisa Frankenstein* is one I can watch anytime, any mood as it's impossible not to enjoy yourself while watching this wacky, silly and undoubtedly romantic monster movie.

While we also cannot forget the likes of *Sleepy Hollow*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, *The Shape of Water* and the relationship that turns into the topic of selling human flesh in 2022's *Fresh*; the above mentioned 5 are just those movies that have my heart racing with romance as much as fear, finding exceptional ways to make beauty blossom within the grotesque.

**“ CONSUMPTION OF THE HARE ”
BY BELLA LUNEL ALAMO**



24x48 IN.,
OIL ON
CANVAS

Bella Lunel is a Latin-American multi-media artist focusing on oil painting and sculpture. Her work revolves around themes of mysticism, feminism, psychology, horror, and the surreal. Her practice merges literary theory, cinematic composition, and lived experience to create scenes that are both sacred and unsettling.
[@bella.lunel.art / https://bellalunelportfolio.xyz/11/](https://bellalunelportfolio.xyz/11/)

BLACK MOLD

BY
LOURDES
LEINER

For too long, it festered from the base of the mattress. It grew from the bottom upwards. In specks like black mold. Over time the specks grew larger until they created large puddles like potholes in an asphalt road. They spread and connected until they moved upwards, chasing the warmth of the host that rested atop the bed. Thin black needles pierced through the memory foam. It was unnoticeable at first. As the host tossed and turned in the bed, they felt random pains, but they attributed it to restlessness. The exhaustion of the host only served to further feed this growing black mold from under the bed.

It craved the host's warmth and comfort. These needles expanded to thick, pointed rods. Then the host felt a puncture through their left shoulder. It shot out with great force enough to completely pin them to the bed. They tried to tug their way out of it, then another spike thrust its way through their hip bone. The host was shrieking in pain and writhing. This catalyzed the growth of the black mold.

Until there was a display of nine thick bamboo trees growing from the host. The most dreaded one was through the vocal cords of the host. The shrieking had turned to gagging and gurgling. The writhing had reduced to slight twitches. Once rapid eye movement idled to a dissociated gaze. The host lay there as the black mold held it in pain. The mold washed over thick, quickly cooling skin as if to insulate its final moments of warmth.

The black mold wanted this host alive enough to provide it energy, but not alive enough to fight its embrace. The host lay there in the space of pain, not enough to die and far too much to live. Pinned to the bed, feeling its warmth stolen. Feeling its life dulled.

The spikes soon softened to thick cables that lazily draped themselves over the host. Then they weaved around the host's ribs, arms, and legs. The black mold filled the puncture wounds of the host. The host felt slightly comforted by this as they would feel warmth and pressure in each place that was punctured. This felt soothing. The host remained in bed without being forced to by the creature at this point.

The host had been fed to a point where the slight absence of pain felt like comfort. On the bed, the host remained. The host could not muster up the energy to face anything besides the sensation of the bed beneath them. Warmth remained, and the slight pressure of gravity on their body. The black mold slowly grew over the host's arms and legs. It connected and softened to weave a thick, black, fuzzy blanket.

The host felt a great degree of comfort in this, surrendering completely to the abyss. The black mold was prepared to make the ending as slow and enjoyable as possible. It wrapped itself all around the uncovered flesh and began to seep a small amount of warm, thick mucus on the host. This mucus seeped into the pores of the host. It kept them comfortable, safe, and warm. This dulled sensation washed over the host in a sweet static. They felt utterly cared for in these last few moments.

They even asked the black mold to take away their last breath as the host felt the black mold make its way to their neck. The thick, warm blanket coated the hair of the host. Then almost sensually covered their eyes. Then these thin threads connected over the host's forehead. Then the ears, then over the lips, and around the nose. Then slowly over the neck. The black mold began to tighten its grip on the host. The black mold could sense the host's heart rate increase. The black mold could sense the host craved this ending. It tightened its grip until there was no movement from the host.

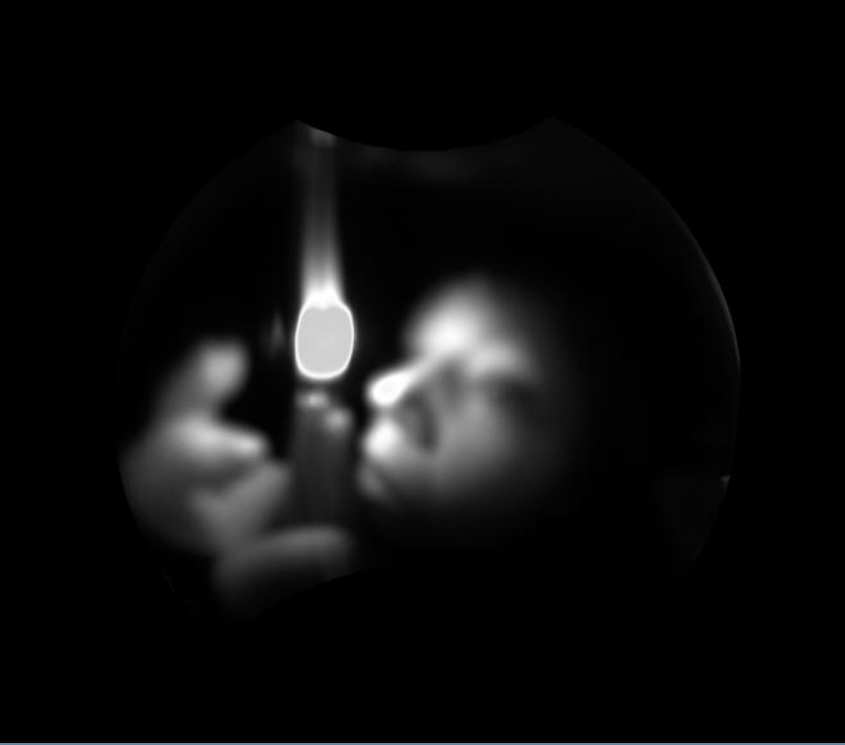
It fed off of these final moments of submission. Then the black mold unveiled itself from the host. Drained from their arms and legs. It pulled back under the bed. It spilled out from the initial nine paths of the host. Then through the rips in the sheets. It returned to hibernate at the base of the mattress. The giant pool of darkness returned to specks. Then it was no longer visible. The host lay decomposed with no puncture wounds or obvious signs of death. Upon a great deal of inspection, the host was ruled to have died peacefully in their sleep.

Lourdes Leiner is a best-selling author in the Southwest. She specializes in poetry and radical self-expression, for the sake of cultivating community engagement with the literary arts. From education, to anthology publishing, events and readings. To find out more visit www.feralghoulfriend.com // IG: @feralghoulfriend

interview with interdisciplinary artist

JEANNINE SWALLOW

FOLLOW JEANNINE ON IG: @JEANNINESWALLOW



[HYPERFOCUS HORROR, EDITOR IZZY ASKS] Thank you so much for agreeing to this interview! Please introduce yourself!

[JEANNINE ANSWERS]

Hello, HNDL Mag Community! Thank you so much for the opportunity to share my process. My name is Jeanine Swallow and I am an Interdisciplinary artist based in New York State. I am working primarily in filmmaking, photography and printmaking. My art practice is reliant on analog experimentation and layered imagery. My work often examines themes of identity, longing,

memory, and impermanence. As a neurodivergent artist, I embrace purposeful chaos and layering as both aesthetic strategy and metaphor, challenging stigma around mental health and reframing vulnerability as strength. Influenced by ecofeminism and the cyclical processes found in nature, I use art as an act of agency—rewriting past narratives, fostering regeneration, and making visible the often-unseen emotional landscapes of lived experience. Through my practice, I seek to create spaces for dialogue, reflection, and collective healing.

[HH] You play with light in such a spellbinding way in all your work. It is simultaneously peaceful, unsettling, mysterious, sorrowful, and playful somehow. Tell us about your approach!

[JEANNINE] Thank you for that thoughtful question. Light is central to my practice and often forms the very foundation of my work. As a lens-based artist, I see myself as someone who quite literally “writes with light.” I’m naturally drawn to working with sunlight and outdoor environments, perhaps this stems from my deep love of nature and being in open, ever-changing spaces.

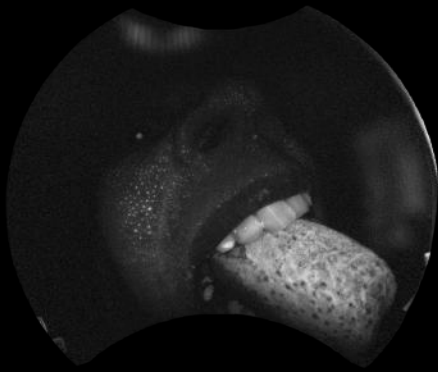
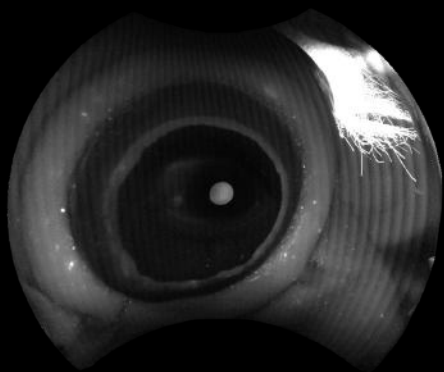
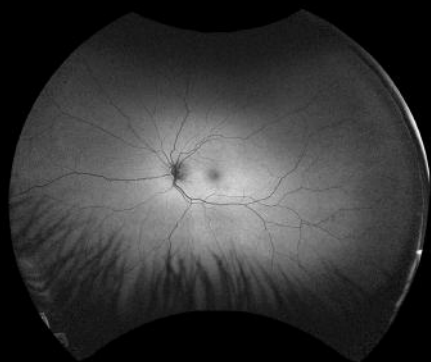
For me, it’s essential to be fully present and to witness light as it unfolds in real time. I’m constantly searching for those ephemeral, magical shimmers that seem to open portals into another dimension of being and thinking. While I appreciate the creative possibilities of studio lighting and find it fun to experiment with, it rarely inspires me in the same way that natural light does.

[HH] (*Referencing “Stages of Becoming”*) Visually, the work is both creepy and beautiful, my absolute favorite balance of visuals, I must say. Tell us why you chose to make something simultaneously haunting and gorgeous.

[JEANNINE] I’m also really moved by this tension between the grotesque and the beautiful. I’m really inspired by Nature and the cyclical processes of the seasons as they change. Witnessing nature helps me to come to terms with complex emotions and situations in life that otherwise feel too overwhelming. Perhaps it is this dichotomy between my journey to depict a visceral and complex emotion, paired with the sublime found in nature. I also feel subconsciously drawn to these spaces that hold a multitude of meaning simultaneously.

Stages of Becoming consists of 297 still photographs compiled into a 25-second time-lapse video using an ophthalmic camera originally designed to document and diagnose eye health. The work documents my transition into the character of the Troll, a figure created to process difficult emotions and past memories that would otherwise feel too triggering. Additional objects appear throughout the video as recurring signifiers, including a childhood journal and the element of fire.

The video was concealed inside a box and viewed through a peephole. This looping time-lapse formed part of a larger film, *878-1820*, an immersive installation incorporating a 14 min Super 8mm projection, original sound recordings, and ritualistic elements for visitors to interact with.



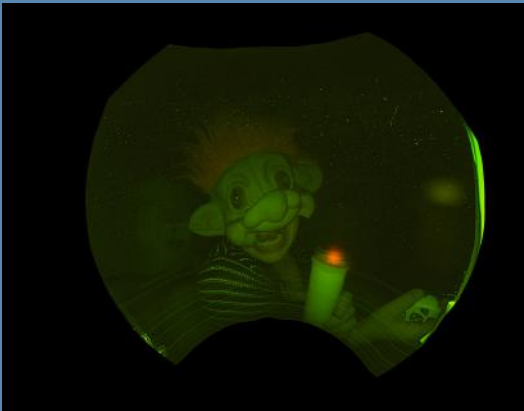
/HH/ In your post about “Stages of Becoming”, you mention the project provided catharsis, purification, and healing. Can you tell us more about the project and the emotional journey?

/JEANNINE/ This entire body of work has been a profound source of catharsis. It continues to amaze me how we all carry wounds and hidden identities that shape who we are, yet

remain concealed. I believe a healthy life exists when there is less separation between our inner and outer worlds. By holding space for one another, we can begin to counteract deeper feelings of loneliness and depression. This work allowed me to reclaim agency over a narrative I once kept hidden, something that felt too shameful and personal to share with my family, let alone use as the foundation for art. Through this process, I have come to understand the power of stepping into fear. When we embrace uncertainty and doubt, we begin the path toward healing.

The project began as an exercise in accessing vulnerability and exploring visual strategies for addressing deeply personal topics without triggering others. The installation creates a space for confronting trauma, grief, and mental health. Within it, I revisit teenage journal entries from 1999 that document my hospitalization following a failed suicide attempt. As I read these entries, small burning rituals are performed. Fire becomes a symbol

of both destruction and renewal. Burning the words becomes an act of release; filming the act becomes a form of witnessing. The ashes are then met with water, completing a cycle of purification, transforming what was once painful into something altered, released, and renewed. These gestures function as visual spells—



“My work becomes a tool for exploring mental health and personal identity, even in the face of criticism that it is “too personal” or that art should not function as therapy.”

[continued] ways of giving form to memory, grief, and dissociation. Like many artists I admire, I am not seeking clarity so much as connection. The work becomes a dialogue between past and present selves— between who I was, who I believe I am, and who I hope to become.

[HH] Do you have a clear idea of a project going into it or does your intuition guide you? Often, when I begin a project, it emerges from a place of intuition and play.

[JEANNINE] Experimentation and process are central to my art practice. Much of my work arises from a desire to process and understand complex emotions—it’s a somatic exploration of how I feel within my own body. From there, a process of discovery unfolds as I translate those sensations into tangible, visual form.

[HH] Tell us about how neurodivergence and medical experiences affect your perspective as an artist.

[JEANNINE] Neurodivergence has profoundly shaped my perspective as an artist, influencing both how I see the world and how I translate that experience into my work. Living with neurodiversity and mental health challenges creates a constant sense of duality— between what is felt internally and what is expected externally. In a society that often encourages us to “suck it up” and keep moving, we learn to placate ourselves to maintain the comfort of others. My work grows from this tension. I am drawn to creating connections between inner and outer worlds, using art to make the unseen visible and to give form to experiences that are often overlooked or misunderstood.

I view neurodivergence as a kind of superpower, one that allows me to perceive and process the world in magical, unexpected ways. While this way of seeing can exist in tension with what is considered “normal,” often creating a sense of otherness, I have learned to embrace it. My work becomes a tool for exploring mental health and personal identity, even in the face of criticism that it is “too personal” or that art should not function as therapy. I believe that creating from a place of vulnerability is not therapy, but a lifeline— one that transforms personal experience into a shared space where others can feel seen, understood, and empowered to accept themselves.

NIGHT LIGHTS

BY
KRISTA
SAWYER

Clouds swirling atop blue liquid
Far too shiny teeth

Cheers!

Laughter, far too forced
Graininess sliding across the tongue

Don't notice noticeably

Cursed curaçao

*Electric substance
Gently caressing my esophagus*

Nails scraping against the counter

They're mine

High pitched sizzling stems from the speakers and

I can still hear you laughing

Shadows, dancing shadows

Suspense floating to the floor in colorful waves

Please don't pop

*Peoplewatchers and empty people watching
Blue tongues, our own evil Isee party*

*This song tastes sweet
Lyrics roll in circles upon my tongue*

Static from every bumped body

*Poltergeist kisses sizzling
Touching light's twisted tendrils
Your steps leaving ectoplasmic prints*

The brace of a plush red leather crutch
Hand. Shoulder. Bad.

Shoulder shoulder shoulder shoulder shoulder...

Shots rain down

The
Angels

*Are
Here*

*Krista Sawyer (she/her) is an experimental fiction writer with an interest in magical realism, romance, and horror. She has experience with both poetry and prose writing and seeks to share tales of terror through a whimsical lens. She attends the University of Washington, Bothell as an MFA candidate in the field of Creative Writing and Poetics.
IG: @krista_corinne*

WE ASKED YOU

"WHAT IS A MEMORABLE IMAGE OR SCENE FROM A NON-HORROR MOVIE OR TV SHOW YOU SAW AS A KID THAT YOU WERE ODDLY DRAWN TO? ONE THAT MADE YOU REALIZE LATER AS AN ADULT THAT YOU WERE BORN TO BE A HORROR FAN?"

FOLLOW US ON IG @HYPERFOCUS HORROR TO PARTICIPATE IN FUTURE COMMUNITY SURVEYS

"...absolutely
haunted me
and is probably
a big reason
I am the
way I am"

ASH KEMP SAYS: THE BRAVE LITTLE
TOASTER- THE CLOWN ABSOLUTELY
TERRIFIED ME BUT SO DID THE VACUUM
CLEANER. I WAS A NERVOUS CHILD AND
SENSITIVE SO I NEVER WATCHED THINGS
THAT WERE OBVIOUSLY SCARY. I WAS SO
SHOCKED THAT THIS CARTOON HORRIFIED
ME. I DIDNT KNOW THAT COULD HAPPEN!
IG: OCCASIONALLY_EDUCATIONAL

LAIN MCNEAL SAYS: URSULA USING HER
POWERS IN LITTLE MERMAID! I FEEL
LIKE THAT'S HORROR CODED.
IG: ARTFULLYALAINA

CHLOE CRAWFORD LA VADA SAYS: THE OPENING OF LITTLE
NEMO ADVENTURES IN SLUMBERLAND, AND GOBLIN SCENE
IN THE RANKIN/BASS HOBBIT ANIMATED FILM
IG: CHLOE.LAVADA

RIN SAYS: THE MOVIE THE LAST UNICORN FELT VERY
SPOOKY TO ME AS A KID, AND I LOOOOOVED IT
IG: RINOFTHWOODS

STEVE NEAL SAYS: AS A CHILD,
THE SCENE IN LION KING WHERE
SCAR KILLS MUFASA ABSOLUTELY
HAUNTED ME AND IS PROBABLY A
BIG REASON I AM THE WAY I AM
IG: STEVENEALWRITES

JANELL SAYS: THE
DANCING AND
SINGING COCKROACH
SCENES IN THE
MOVIE JOE'S
APARTMENT!!!
IG: JANELL.DRAWS

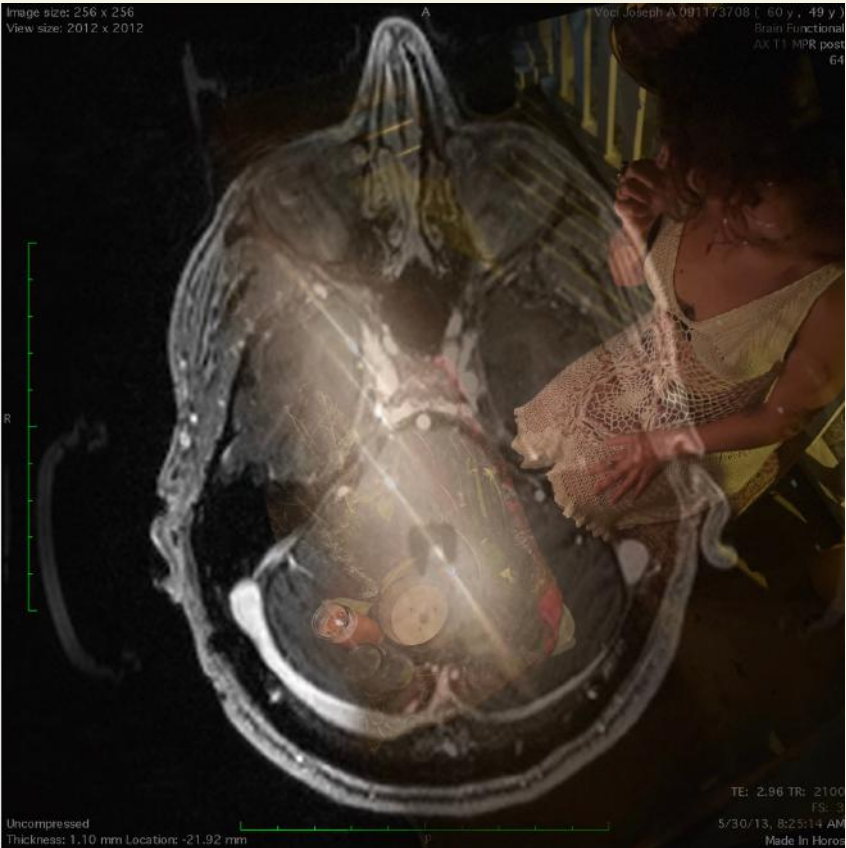
KRIZIA SAYS: SID'S TOY CREATIONS IN TOY
STORY 1. I WANTED TO BE FRIENDS WITH
THEM ESPECIALLY THE DOLL SPIDER!
IG: CARDBOARDCARTILAGE

ALEX KRAMER SAYS: MAYBE NOT MEDIA.
BUT A FARMER ONCE BROUGHT A DEAD
TWO HEADED CALF TO SHOW OUR
KINDERGARTEN CLASS. LIKE??? WHAT???
IG: X_KRAMER_

MARIA HULS SAYS: TYPICAL
90S KID, BUT HALLOWEEN
TOWN. ALWAYS WANTED TO
LIVE THERE AND SOUGHT
HALLOWEEN IN THE EVERYDAY
OUT EVER SINCE.
IG: STRANGE_GHOSTS

“...it was
sooooo spooky
and I LOVED it”

“ALTAR” BY VICTORIA FROBERG



Victoria is an emerging curator, writer, artist, and community organizer, with a background in reproductive and disability justice centered work. She specializes in collaborative public projects, focusing primarily on contemporary art, performance, sound, earthwork, multimedia, queer and disability art practices. Victoria explores themes of transitioning through deep spaces of grief, drawing heavily upon fantasy, monstrosity, world building, voids, anthropomorphism, and examining repair. IG: @_victhoria_ / victoriafroberg.com

“ TO ROOT // TO CHANGE ”



AS A BOY

BY
MARIA
JONAS
PAEZ

here i am; twelve or eleven, hot mix of our breath
hidden behind the shelves at school while i fist the cavity in your chest.
years later, i think it caused you health complications and you died,
but i like to fondly think of it as the thing you could eat cereal out of
while i stole traces of your ribs, slotting my fingers into their awkward
dimensions.

my pinkie had touched a wide-set nipple and i blushed while you cackled
and spilled the milk streaming down the side of your chest, into your armpit,
white like the blood from alien, and then you, still quaking, had asked:
“what are you? gay, or something?” i want to say i like boys
just as much as i like girls, and maybe how it’s not really romance that i want,
but to try and eclipse you. to achieve a certain oneness outside of
“boyfriends”.

yet i still don’t know what to make of it, this guilty middle school passion,
with your shirt lifted and both our eyes veiled by shitty emo bangs,
the clicking of stuck together hot topic jewelry which gives me a rash.
you pull on my hair and laughing you tell me “you’re such a fucking faggot.”
you stop me in the hall and say, “why the fuck are you smiling?
what do you have to be happy about?” i don’t know. i just am.
maybe it’s when we cut our hands on your dad’s switchblade and made a
blood pact
that if one of us dies the other must, too (i failed, i’m sorry).
or that you are the first one who insists to me that god isn’t real
and that i should only feel guilty for what i’ve done. not what i am.
or that after you’re done shoving other kids off of me, you take me between
the portables
and bite me as hard as you can. i wish you left scars, man, i really do.
all of your niceness for me a shotgun recoil of masturbatory cruelty.

so stop asking, because it makes me feel shitty, a decade and change later,
knowing that our pact is betrayed and my blood has fouled,
unpiecing my DNA after you died. you're inside of me, like i was inside of
you,
reaching to clutch the ventricle of your heart or to wring your esophagus,
to steal a kidney or spit right into your lungs. to take a piece of your rib for
my own.
i never kissed you. someone said desire is strongest when left unfulfilled.
i wonder which of us is johnny and which of us is ponyboy,
but i guess i'll stay golden for the two of us. don't say "aw",
that story wasn't sweet; it was tragic, all lost hope and shit.

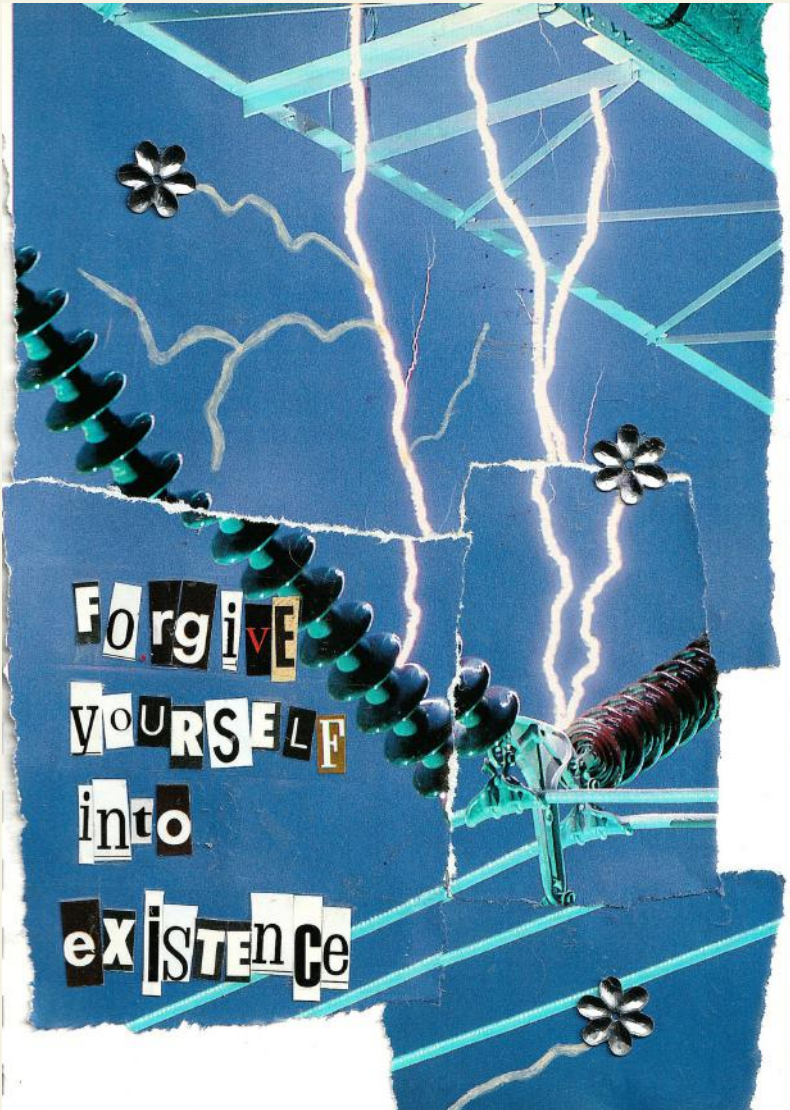
we weren't no bulletproof hearts, and hell, i think we hated each other.
but it was the kind of hate, the kind of game, that only we knew how to
play.
nobody else. it makes me think, while i sweat on you,
while we're stuck in this hot press, while your nails scrape skin off my
scalp,
that we were made to hurt and to like the hurting, that god
(yeah, i get it, i should ditch him) shaped us like poison light
bending around each other and unmaking ourselves, angels of forbidden
sensation.

or maybe we were just cruel pre-teens, all idiotic grandeur,
and that really, in the end, i just wanted to see how far i could go,
how far i could push. until i could break you.

Maria Jonas Paez writes themes about loneliness, messy knots of relationships with faith, queer eccentrics, and essential transformations after trauma. They weave horror, the unreal, and the body at it's rawest wherever they can. They consider themselves something of an imposter poet, but have always adored long-form writing, photography, and are just finally trusting themselves to write verse.

IG: @marmarmimir

**"FORGIVE YOURSELF INTO
EXISTENCE" BY TJ CASTRATARO**



QUOTE FROM DEL TORO'S FRANKENSTEIN

flintyfae is the alias for collage/mixed media artist tj castrataro. they use whatever they can get their hands on to create soft things about hard times. much of their work centers around feelings of grief and resilience, using bold visuals and biting prose to resonate with their audience.

IG: @flintyfae

**“DECAYING PHOTO” BY KIRA
GONDECK-SILVIA**



Born and raised in the subtropics, Kira Gondeck-Silvia might've ended up at Salpêtrière in another era. Today, she channels visual energy into human-centered design, chats with the dead, and carries a mountain of student debt. She lives in Central Florida with her writer husband, four cats she puts bandanas on, and a neurotic dog.

<https://www.instagram.com/kiragondecksilvia/>

interview with artist & death doula

ROSHELLE PATTERSON

ROSHELLE
(SHE/HER)
IS A GAMES UX
RESEARCHER,
WRITER, AND
DEATH DOULA
EXPLORING GRIEF
THROUGH GAMES,
STORYTELLING
WITHIN
SOLARPUNK/
SPECULATIVE
FICTION, AND
EDUCATING
PLAYERS ABOUT
ENVIRONMENTAL
JUSTICE THROUGH
CLIMATE GAMES.



[HYPERFOCUS HORROR, EDITOR IZZY ASKS] Please tell those who might not know what a death doula is, in your words. I could paste a definition here but I assume it's highly personal to each person. How did you decide to become a death doula?

[ROSHELLE ANSWERS] A Death Doula (sometimes called an end-of-life doula) is a non-medical, non-clinical support person who accompanies individuals, families, and communities through the dying process with care, presence, and intention. Sometimes people who

are Death Doulas are clinical, medical professionals as well, or are appropriately trained / licensed / certified to provide that kind of care and there can be an overlap in the services they are uniquely able to provide. For the most part, Death Doulas provide emotional, logistical, spiritual, and practical support before, during, and after death.

I decided to become a death doula in a really subtle way. I grew up with a lot of loss in my family, from beloved pets to elders, so death was something I was familiar with early on. But it wasn't until I was much older

“WHY WAS I, AS A GRIEVING PERSON,
FEELING SHAME FOR GRIEVING
BEYOND SOME “TIDY” TIME WINDOW,
LIKE GRIEF HAS TO STAY INSIDE A
WRAPPER OR IT’S ABNORMAL.”

and experienced a child loss that something truly shifted. I had a very beautiful, sacred dream about the loss before it was medically confirmed. That death touched me in a dimension I'd never felt before, and the dream left me with such a sense of gratitude and immense love that I felt profoundly changed.

The dream sustained me afterward, but it didn't mean I was immune to the pain of grief. There were tears, sleepless nights, full-body sobbing, all of it. But underneath that, a kind of curiosity started flowing. I was grieving the loss of a little life I was growing inside me while also trying to navigate corporate work, figuring out how to request bereavement leave, trying to phrase it in a way that felt “valid,” wondering if my loss even qualified because it wasn't a full term or near term baby.

I started questioning why we grieve the way we do. Why did I have to ask myself if my pain was enough. Why did I have to justify my loss in corporate glossy words. Where were the support groups or conversations about this kind of loss. Why did it feel so cold in the doctor's office as they confirmed the worst, with only one person showing me any empathy.

That was my radicalizing moment about death. I started realizing how sterile, cold, and stigmatized everything around death had become. Why was I, as a grieving person, feeling shame for grieving beyond some “tidy” time window, like grief has to stay inside a wrapper or it's abnormal. Why did I feel I had to justify my loss even though it was early. And why is it called a “chemical pregnancy.” That term feels so cold and heartless when my heart and mind were already shifting, already preparing and imagining.

All of that made me want to be the person I wish I had beside me. Someone who could help people through their untidy grief and offer real support.

[HH] What advice do you give to people to begin to have a more nuanced perspective of death other than just fear? Also, you say you use games in your work- please tell us more!

[ROSHELLE] The first thing I invite people to do is just start talking about it. Not randomly or uninvited, but in consensual conversations that lead with empathy, openness, and curiosity. Talking about death is the first step in making it normal again, making it human height instead of this skyscraper of fear right behind you.

Start by talking to yourself if you need to. Explore your earliest memories of death. Ask yourself some questions. Who or what died? How did it make you feel? Did you grieve it? Are you still grieving it? How do you grieve? List every way you know of!

Then look at your assumptions about death, dying, and grief. What does your culture teach you about them? How do your parents or family handle grief? Did they ever talk about death, and if they did, what did they say? What have you read, watched or seen from childhood to now that sticks in your mind about death & grief? Even a few of these questions help us start unpacking the spaghetti clump of thoughts and associations we've picked up over time. We can unravel it and notice, with kindness, the cultural taboos and assumptions we've absorbed about death and grief. It reveals a lot about how emotionally intelligent or not the adults around us were and how we copied that.

A lot of our fear around death isn't even ours. It's passed down and we wear it without question. Once you start picking those fears apart, you realize oh, it's not actually what I thought. It's not as huge or monstrous as the fear made it seem.

And when you talk to others, especially professionals or people in the space, or you read or watch content about death, you start adding new, informed thoughts into that spaghetti pile. You slowly form your own nuances and perspectives that fit your lived experiences. There's no one right perspective about death. It can be scary. Even for me, no matter how much I learn, I still struggle thinking about my loved ones missing me someday. Their future pain hurts my heart. But I don't have to live in fear of death because of that.

Embracing how I feel empowers me to live my life fully and to plan for my own end of life so my family doesn't have to handle all the logistics while they're grieving. It's like a final love letter to them.

I also use games to help people get into these conversations. I'm the founder of an award-winning project called Playfully Mortal. It's all about using games to break the ice around death by playing through powerful, thoughtful depictions of loss and grief. The game becomes the

anchor that lets players talk about death and their own internal ecosystem of emotions around it. I have a gaming group that plays these games together, and we have conversations together, so people start building peer support too.

Games are special because they let people co-create meaning. They're universal, accessible, and perfect for facilitating these conversations. Playfully Mortal is all about death education and grief literacy through play.

[HH] I am fascinated by people in professions that are clearly profoundly empathetic people but that are also able to handle the intensity and gravity of their work. Can you tell us more about your experience with this duality?

[ROSHELLE] I think empathy, compassion, open mindedness, and curiosity are the core pillars of this work. You can cry and be very sensitive to someone's pain or you can be more stoic. Both are fine. What matters is that you treat people and their beliefs with dignity and respect, and that you're confident enough to honor the role you're being trusted with in someone's life.

You're not there to tell them they're wrong or to judge or to control anything. You're there to offer a steady hand and to be willing to talk directly about the thing everyone's tiptoeing around - the elephant in the room. Someone is dying or someone's loved one is dying. You have to be grounded enough to hold that truth and respect everyone's unique way of processing it. And you have to honor your own limits and protect your energy too.

[HH] Does spirituality and/or religion come into your work? Also, does your own perspective of your own mortality come into your work?

[ROSHELLE] Yes, of course. I'm who I am no matter what I do. Being a death doula isn't a role where I detach or put on a mask, it's one of the most human and real things I've ever done, aside from being a mom (that's a raw one too).

My version of doulaing is mine, and just like with therapy and finding the right therapist, I always tell people to choose the right doula for them. We all bring different flavors to this work and not every style fits every person.

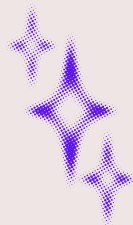
For me, I'm a Black and Korean woman, I'm queer, I'm married, I'm a mom, a veteran, a fur mama, a Southern girl, I'm spiritual, I grew up around Christianity (Baptist and Pentecostal), I'm familiar with Buddhism, I play and make video games, I read a lot. All of that shapes

how I connect with people, what we can talk about, and how I understand their fears about what they'll leave behind and what they want cared for.

Being a daughter of two diasporas and a person of color shapes how I talk about death too. I draw from American South traditions, African American and African Diasporic traditions, and Korean traditions. I can honor folk practices from African American folk religions like hoodoo, as well as shamanic and Buddhist traditions. It adds a unique layer to how I work.

I'm also honest with the people I support. I tell them that sometimes I get scared of death again. I just have better language now for why. I don't pretend I'm totally fearless. I'm human. I'm open about that because it humanizes the role and helps people feel comfortable with me right away. They get to see who I am and they appreciate that candor. I like being open and candid about my own relationship with Death too, as it helps to model openness to those I work with.

“I’M ALSO HONEST WITH THE PEOPLE I SUPPORT. I TELL THEM THAT SOMETIMES I GET SCARED OF DEATH AGAIN. I JUST HAVE BETTER LANGUAGE NOW FOR WHY.”



“MULTIPLICITY” BY JANELL TURLEY



ARTIST NOTE - MEDIUM: DOLL EYES, WED CLAY, FOAM AND WIRE ARMATURE. INSPIRED BY JOHN CARPENTER'S *THE THING*, I WANTED TO CREATE A BEING WHO WOULD FIT IN THAT UNIVERSE, WHILE ALSO BEING A REFLECTION OF MYSELF.

Janell Turley (she/her) is a lesbian artist and creature maker in Los Angeles who loves sculpture, toy camera photography, figure drawing, painting, and printmaking. Insta: @janell.draws

SHUT UP OR DIE.



BY ASH KEMP

IG: @OCCASIONALLY_
EDUCATIONAL

WRITING, READING,
HOMESCHOOLING,
NEURODIVERGENT,
CHRONICALLY ILL,
MULTI-DRINK GOBLIN

*A BLURB ABOUT THE FILM PONTYPOOL-
[2008 IFC films
Directed by Bruce McDonald.
With Stephen McHattie, Lisa Houle,
Georgina Reilly]*

Pontypool. Shut up or die. This is the movie your husband brings home after a shift at Blockbuster. You begin, skeptical-what in the low budget zombie flick is this? A bunch of increasingly weird shit is happening. You end, stunned, staring at the wall as you listen to the voice over during the credits, and one of the most bizarre post credits ever. A quiet film, Pontypool is philosophical, darkly comedic, and gory, my favorite type of zombie media. A cold-weather front brings in a radio host who's seen better days, and we're just along for the ride. "Please do not translate this message."

"NO MORE GODS" BY AXENIA RAULET



/ Bio can be found in first appearing work by artist. /

MY SWEET LOVE

BY
LEANNE
MACHADO

My sweet, decadent, delicious horror.

How I yearn for your icy edges,
for the shadows that you crawl
creak crack yourself through.

How I yearn for the chill you bring without cold,
the tremor you bring without a quake
the rattling of my bones while you sink your
subtle hands to clasp on my ribs and give a ring
like a happy bell.

Sweet horror,
you are such a commodity, hung up by strings.
Your presence is dominating,
a force that carries the waves that destroy
the winds that rip through skin
the red magma that cries down unexpected earth
the bullet(s) that kill angels
the eight-legged organism that tip toes to seek shelter in my throat
the knife that kisses organs.

You are everywhere and nowhere,
the cat (un)poisoned inside a box
I (we) gave you your powers
Your inhumane, profoundly and mind-crashingly extraordinary powers.
You crush me, my dear sweet horror. Suffocate me
with all of your un-ordinance,
Blind me with the darkness (or sunlight) you stalk in
You just really like me, huh?

Sweet, sweet horror.
How I yearn for all of your quenching juices,
the blood you accumulate
a forever unfixable faucet.
That delicious, thick taste
metallic and warm,
a red cider
You know I need more.

My dear horror,
send me the piles and piles of flesh you've collected
just for me
I want legs, arms, feet, fingers
I want mush, pink mist, tongues, and bones
I want to crunch on the cornea of your victims
I want to floss my pink teeth with splintered knuckles
I want to suck out organs like the salty marrow of chicken bones
I want you to show me what I haven't seen,
give me something new to gnaw on.

What else can you give me, my sweet?

I am a cosmic and speculative horror fiction writer who loves creating horror out of the mundane world! I love to express myself throughout vivid descriptions that are usually within horror. I am constantly inspired by video games (particularly indie), horror novels, my dreams, and mundane objects of my everyday life.
IG: @leanne_machado

**“WATCHING WALLPAPER” BY
BECKY MUNICH**



Becky Munich is a New York based artist and graphic designer. Inspired by the occult, Hammer films and Edward Gorey, I explore themes of the fantastic, surreal, and weird.

IG: @MunichArtStudio

interview with photographer
THE LONELY WENDIGO



#CRYPTID

PORTRAITS AND DAD JOKES

IG: @THELONELYWENDIGO

@CAYDEUS E
@REDS CARFSTAR



[HYPERFOCUS HORROR, EDITOR IZZY ASKS] Thank you so much for agreeing to this interview! Please introduce yourself!

[THE LONELY WENDIGO ANSWERS] Howdy! Thank you for the opportunity, and for creating this awesome place!

Sometimes I feel like I barely qualify as a person, and creating is one of the only ways I get to feel truly alive. Often I get stuck in my own head but art helps me leave that cave for a bit.

All this to say, I'm just a little guy doing his best :)

[HH] How does mental health affect, inform, enrich, or change the way you approach your photography?

[TLW] I often hyper fixate on a lot of social stuff, especially recently. I'll dwell on interactions I've had at work and my anxiety about what could happen because of them keeps me up late into the night.

Creating helps me redirect that hyper focus, and seeing a project click during the shoot itself or through editing really calms me and gives me focus. It helps me put things into perspective, and allows me to cut through the toxic BS

“HORROR, WHEN DONE WELL, IT TOUCHES PARTS OF OUR SOUL.”



@AMINABAHY

[HH] Tell us why you are drawn to the horror genre- and more specifically- why you enjoy having fun with it?

[TLW] I'm a big fraidy cat! I didn't appreciate horror until later in life, probably until I was around 17. Even now I watch certain things with my eyes covered during jump scares.

Horror, when done well, it touches parts of our soul. Parts that don't get a lot of love sometimes.

I love taking inspiration from mythology, religions, stories that we've used to put what we don't understand together.

Horror often explores those themes, and it's so fun to juxtapose that stuff with silly and mundane ideas!

[HH] Your photography in general captures people in bold, confident, energetic ways. Tell us about your process of connecting with subjects/clients and bringing out those “wow” moments.

[TLW] I'm very lucky that all my subjects have brought passion and vibes to these shoots!

It's been my dream to capture the energy people have, and I'm fortunate to have met the coolest people with the coolest energy. Maybe sometimes we'll start with a bit of awkwardness, but by the end, my subjects and I seem to connect through vibes and the vision. A jo mama joke typically helps break the ice too.

[HH] Who are your artistic influences? (Can be across all mediums)

[TLW] So in no particular order; Betty Goh and her crazy shots are pure magic!! The shadows, reflections, and angles create a new world. She's amazing and her take on street photography is beyond words, Please go check her out!!

Daniel Arnold captures stories in his work. A lot of candid celebrity shots, a lot of work that makes you feel in the middle of some crazy social interaction! Definitely a master of his craft.

Apart from photography, Seb McKinnon brings this idealized and perfect view of dark fantasy. Blends darkness and beauty seamlessly. Amazing artist.

On the same coin, The Wizard of Barge brings whimsy to dark fantasy and it's perfect. Honestly, sometimes he makes me want to be one of the goblins he's created.

[HH] What's a project on the horizon for you? And/or a dream project?

[TLW] I really want to expand on my horror icons yearbook concept. With plans for Carrie, Patrick Bateman, and maybe a few others on the horizon!

I also got a new fisheye lens and can't wait to do more 90s inspired fashion stuff!

A dream project would be this big shoot I had planned with one of my models.

The scope of it kinda overwhelmed me and we've both taken a step back from it, but the lighting test went well.

Getting a set for it was a challenge, and coordinating extras and makeup was probably my least favorite part. I'm hoping to overcome all this and eventually see the vision through.



@EELLIEMARIE

GLOSSECTOMY

BY
ARDEN
FOX

I want it back—those days in the photographs, where we’re rolling the beginnings of snowmen in our matching hats and mitts. Not this, with your body in the attic, glassy-eyed doll frost-covered like icing sugar. (I tried to lick you pearly-polish clean but they cut off my tongue before I could finish.) It was three turns of a limp moon ago when they finally found you, the season’s first cold snap tucking you in with a blanket of freeze through the hardly-there roof, draped over you sleeping in the corner like you did when we were kids, slumped in on yourself where the wall and ceiling meet. (Where the stains of our perfumes are untouched by the light.) In every life, there’s a you that stays and a you that goes, a me that lives and a you that dies. It’s cosmic fate at this point, the snow an eldritch harbinger of misfortune, an ice-cleaver surgically excising the destined twin fusion of our purple hearts, eternally conjoined in the next and last but never this one. (I leave offerings at our altar every day but it all still melts.) You’re leaking cardinal red onto splintered wood and I’m lying in your puddle on the floor with your broken fingers in my mouth, hoping we can stay like this a little longer. (I’ll yank out ice-teeth to make room for your other hand if it means we can.) Hey, did you know he still has your polaroid? Violet-Girl, his Violet-Girl, he says, never a violent girl, he says, and he shows you off like you’re still first place and not dead last, tells them all half-lies about how he was gonna marry ya, really, really, and ain’t it just a shame, he says, ain’t it just a cryin’ shame? And of course they all cry too, boohoooin’ all night long ‘til the sun comes ‘round and ‘round again ‘cause ain’t it just a shame? And ain’t it the real shame, my Violet-Girl, how none of them remember? But it’s ok, because I do. (And he might like blood, but not like I do.)

Arden Fox is a transandrogynous lesbian vampire roosting in Ontario. An author with a fondness for the queer, sensual, and macabre, his work frequently explores these themes through stories of complex relationships to ourselves, others, and existence at large, meditating on the contradictions of the human condition. He smells like vanilla and patchouli and really loves both watching and writing about a good movie.

**“THE GUTTY REMAINS OF CHARRED
LACE” BY EM INSERRA**



Em Inserra (she/any) is a Minneapolis-based artist and writer exploring the (sub)conscious through memory, dreams, instinct, and the body. Working in ink on paper, her work merges stark contrast with visceral language. She also experiments with film, sound, image, light, and other materials. You can find Em on Instagram: @placidpeanut

Every issue, someone writes a letter to editor Izzy, describing a house. The house in question may be one from their childhood; harboring a memory or an uncanny feeling they just can't shake. It may be a house they are considering moving into but worry they may not be the only residents. The dwelling might be something they have seen in their dreams, vivid in detail even though they swear they've never set foot inside. Whatever the case may be, these correspondents ask Izzy to use the gifts she has had since childhood and venture into the in-between plane and explore this house on their behalf and report back. In this issue, we take you to:

3151

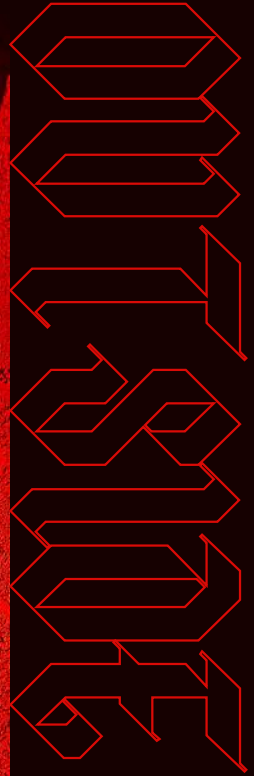
Mystic

Street

Warning: If you begin to feel light-headed while looking at these images, take three deep breaths and flip forward.

KIRA GONDECK-SILVIA

[Bio can be found in first appearing work by artist.]

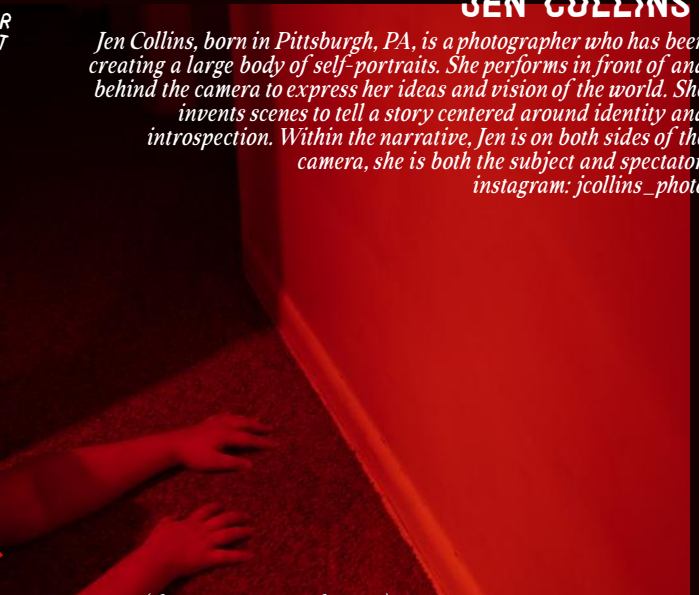


YOU CAN ONLY ENTER
WHEN THE RED LIGHT
IS ON. RUN!



JEN COLLINS

Jen Collins, born in Pittsburgh, PA, is a photographer who has been creating a large body of self-portraits. She performs in front of and behind the camera to express her ideas and vision of the world. She invents scenes to tell a story centered around identity and introspection. Within the narrative, Jen is on both sides of the camera, she is both the subject and spectator.
instagram: jcollins_photo



Rabbit Hole, 2021, Digital Image (from series, Wakefulness)

BEFOREROOM



AMY COYNE

Amy Coyne is a felt artist and filmmaker whose work explores the tropes and controversies within horror and crime cinema. Her creations deal with the realities of the issues within horror such as the depiction of women, religion and media exploitation.
IG: @myimaginaryfriends

interview with artist & 'zine maker

SALLY TOWNSEND

FOLLOW SALLY ON IG: @SALLY_TOWNSEND



LINKS FOR ZINES: WWW.SALLYTOWNSENDART.COM
[HTTPS://KO-FI.COM/SALLYTOWNSEND](https://ko-fi.com/sallytownsend)

[HYPERFOCUS HORROR, EDITOR IZZY ASKS] Is 'zine making as an art form therapeutically beneficial for you? Does it regulate you, help you process things, or give a dopamine rush, etc?

[SALLY ANSWERS] Zine making has been crucial to keeping connected with community after being disabled with long covid. I am Gen X and grew up with zines in the 90s, it was a way I heard about lots happening in the music scene in particular and I've always wanted to make my own. My zine Stung is now in its second year, I publish monthly and it keeps me on a nice schedule when

sometimes the days have much less structure than they used to. It's been a great outlet to share my art, photography and write about not only my disability, but all the things that inspire me to keep pushing forward.

[HH] You create minis and larger 'zines. Tell us how your process differs across this range.

[SALLY] I create the main zine (A6 size because it's cheap to post worldwide as a small letter) and then a mini zine which is related to the theme of the main zine each month and I don't sell that separately, that's for my Ko-Fi members exclusively. The main



zine is distributed to some local record stores and my website after members get it. With that in mind, I do put a lot more effort into the main zine, because I know it has a life outside of it's initial publication. I find the minis really fun to make and love coming up with something that relates to the main zine in some way. For example, for issue #19 which was all about the movie Mandy, my mini zine was all about cults in movies. For a back issue that was my live music photography (issue #8) the mini was a big playlist of all the bands featured.

/HH/ When creating 'zines, do you consider the audience or does the process stay internal? If both, tell us how this balance works! (Appealing to audience while staying creatively authentic and enjoyable)

/SALLY/ When I'm making the main zine specifically, I do consider the audience because I know it's going to have more readers, but that really informs the quality and layout more than anything. My themes are different each month but they're all things that I am passionate about, whether it's my favourite movies (I've made zines about Mandy and Showgirls) film directors (I've made 2 David Lynch zines) actor (my River Phoenix zine) or my responses to the world, I stay authentic to my creative voice and just hope that it resonates with the reader in some way or makes them curious to learn more about that particular subject.



YULETIDE FEAR

BY
SIDNEE
CROSBY

Frostbitten hands seizing my throat, paralyzing my bones and muscles. All I did was reach out for warmth.

Your strokes burned in your icy grip, leaving vulgar imprints on my body. I beg for more as I wrench and pry at your hair.

I'm coalesced by the dark, lulled to sleep by it. It captures me in a place where the moments between sanity and clarity warp and weave.

I'm dissected by the strength of your fingers around my nape. The proof of our depravity, or the consequence, drains out of me, flowing red down my legs.

I'm abraded by the force of our bodies, forever ruined by my privation for your shape to shield mine from the creeping frost forming over bedroom windows.

Your lasciviousness makes me moan. Your benevolence turns my stomach.

Leave me here to wallow in it. I want to be agonized, to wail, to rot. I can hear my mother calling to me in my dreams. The silent screaming of the dead pierce my ears only during the vulnerability of my subconscious.

The apathetic emptiness bellows a sound only I can hear. It drones and drowns out jubilation and cheer.

Everything quiets when you hold me, your touch suddenly feels like flames against my skin.

Everything quiets when my nails pierce your flesh, the sounds of your aroused screams interpolated with the howls of the freezing wind.

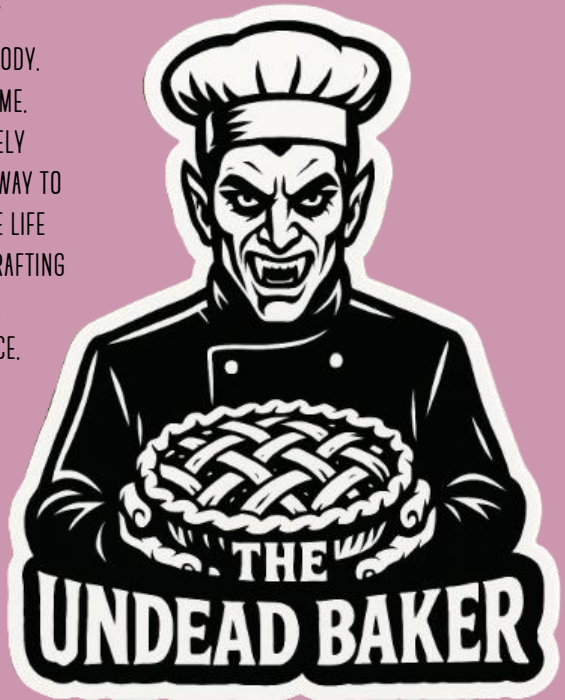
Everything quiets when you let me sink my teeth in, the proof of our depravity, or the consequence, drains out of you, flowing red down your neck.

My name is Sidnee Crosby (30, she/they) and I am from Richmond, Virginia. I have struggled with Mental Health and Acquired Neurodiversity for most of my life. Reading, writing, and film has always been a precious outlet for me and my fiction saturated brain. Halloween, in my opinion, is the top tier holiday while also being the queerest. I am forever drawn to the sound of crunchy leaves, the feel of a brisk breeze, and the peace of eating popcorn while John Carpenter's The Thing begins to play. IG: @sidnee.leigh

interview with artisan

THE UNDEAD BAKER

LOVER'S LAST BITE WAS BORN FROM MY KITCHEN DURING A SEASON WHEN MY BODY, AFFECTED BY EHLERS-DANLOS SYNDROME, MADE TRADITIONAL WORK FEEL EXTREMELY UNSAFE LONGTERM. WHAT BEGAN AS A WAY TO FIND STABILITY OUTSIDE OF CORPORATE LIFE BECAME A PASSION PROJECT – HANDCRAFTING HORROR-THEMED PIES THAT TURN PAIN INTO ART. EACH PIE REFLECTS RESILIENCE, BEAUTY, AND DARK HUMOR IN THE FACE OF SOMETHING CONSTANTLY DISINTEGRATING. THROUGH BAKING, I'VE FOUND A WAY TO RECLAIM BOTH MY LIVELIHOOD AND MY LOVE FOR CREATING MEANING OUT OF CHAOS.



[*HYPERFOCUS HORROR, EDITOR IZZY ASKS*] Tell us about your creative process— from concept to finished product and how you accommodate yourself along the way!

[*THE UNDEAD BAKER ANSWERS*] When I'm working with horror groups or themed events, I love to custom-design pies that spoof the movie or story we're celebrating. For my regular menu, I'm always pushing to take pies out of the box. Extravagant decorating is common in cakes and donuts, but rarely in pies — I want to make them whimsical and cinematic.

Because I live with Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome, I accommodate myself throughout the process. I use compression gloves and socks to protect my joints, and I'm very intentional about building timelines that respect my chronic fatigue. I constantly check in with my body to pace myself. Interestingly, this creative work gives me energy — it's something that lifts me out of the depression that can come with being a disabled person in a demanding workforce. Making money doing something I love has genuinely eased a lot of that emotional turmoil.

[HH] Why do you love the horror genre? And- do you think your perspective of it is different being someone with chronic illness?

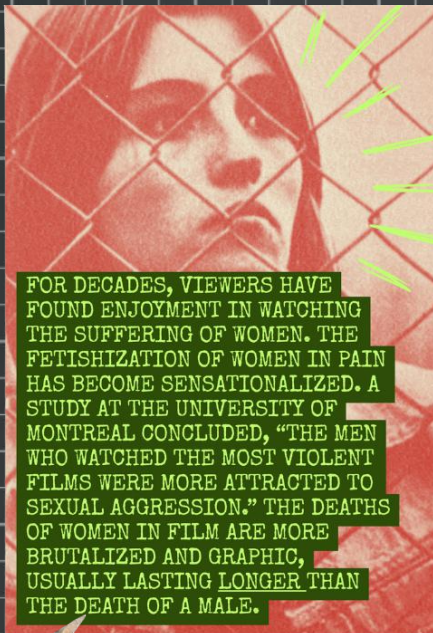
[THE UNDEAD BAKER] I love the honesty in horror. The people drawn to it tend to accept the chaos of life without needing to sugarcoat it. There's catharsis in confronting darkness instead of pretending it's not there. For someone with a chronic illness, that hits differently — real life can feel like a horror movie sometimes. Living with constant pain or being treated dismissively because of disability can be harsh. But when you face that every day, you develop a strange kind of endurance — a muscle of forbearance. The horror community, in its own way, reflects that resilience and honesty back to me.



"Witches
Brew"



WOMEN IN HORROR BY ALEAH C



FOR DECADES, VIEWERS HAVE FOUND ENJOYMENT IN WATCHING THE SUFFERING OF WOMEN. THE FETISHIZATION OF WOMEN IN PAIN HAS BECOME SENSATIONALIZED. A STUDY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTREAL CONCLUDED, "THE MEN WHO WATCHED THE MOST VIOLENT FILMS WERE MORE ATTRACTED TO SEXUAL AGGRESSION." THE DEATHS OF WOMEN IN FILM ARE MORE BRUTALIZED AND GRAPHIC, USUALLY LASTING LONGER THAN THE DEATH OF A MALE.



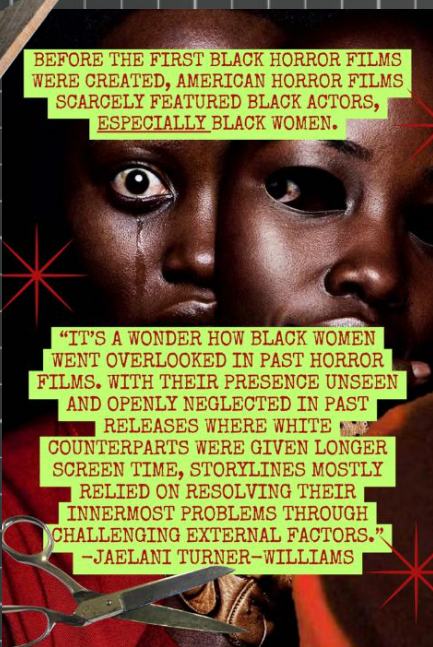
FROM THE MINIMAL REPRESENTATION OF BLACK WOMEN TO THE POLARIZING "FINAL GIRL" TROPE, THE AMERICAN HORROR FILM INDUSTRY HAS BEEN VICIOUS TOWARDS WOMEN. WOMEN ARE DEPICTED AS VICTIMS OF GRAPHIC BRUTAL VIOLENCE, HATE, MURDER, AND OTHER VIOLENT ACTS, WITH MUCH MORE SEVERITY COMPARED TO MEN.

QUICK FACTS

WOMEN EXPOSED TO MEDIATED-AGGRESSION TOWARD WOMEN HAVE HEIGHTENED FEELINGS OF DISEMPOWERMENT.

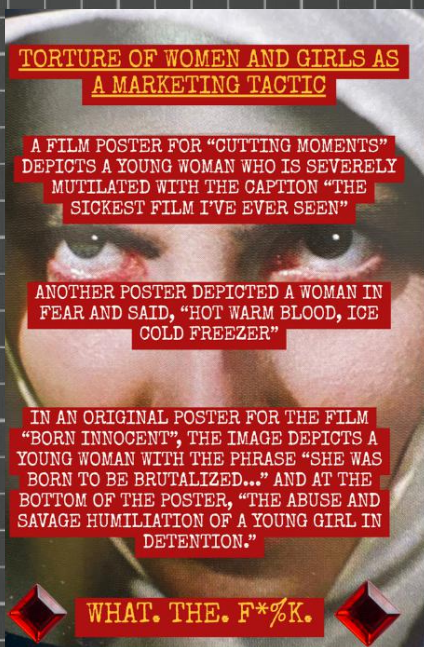
WOMEN MAKE UP ONLY 5.9% OF HORROR DIRECTORS FROM THE YEARS 1988-2017.

WOMEN CONSTITUTE APPROXIMATELY 65% OF HORROR FILM AUDIENCES.



BEFORE THE FIRST BLACK HORROR FILMS WERE CREATED, AMERICAN HORROR FILMS SCARCELY FEATURED BLACK ACTORS, ESPECIALLY BLACK WOMEN.

"IT'S A WONDER HOW BLACK WOMEN WENT OVERLOOKED IN PAST HORROR FILMS. WITH THEIR PRESENCE UNSEEN AND OPENLY NEGLECTED IN PAST RELEASES WHERE WHITE COUNTERPARTS WERE GIVEN LONGER SCREEN TIME, STORYLINES MOSTLY RELIED ON RESOLVING THEIR INNERMOST PROBLEMS THROUGH CHALLENGING EXTERNAL FACTORS."
-JAELENI TURNER-WILLIAMS



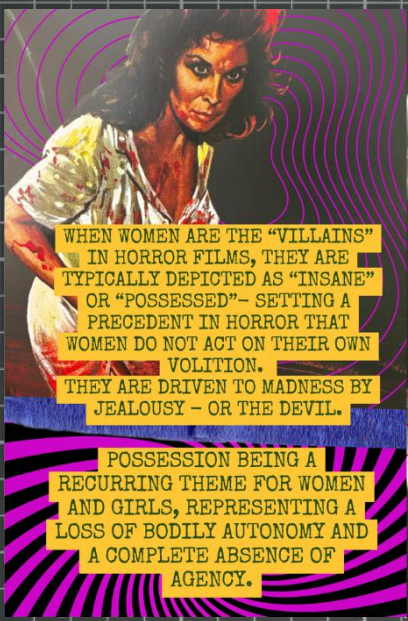
TORTURE OF WOMEN AND GIRLS AS A MARKETING TACTIC

A FILM POSTER FOR "CUTTING MOMENTS" DEPICTS A YOUNG WOMAN WHO IS SEVERELY MUTILATED WITH THE CAPTION "THE SICKEST FILM I'VE EVER SEEN"

ANOTHER POSTER DEPICTED A WOMAN IN FEAR AND SAID, "HOT WARM BLOOD, ICE COLD FREEZER"

IN AN ORIGINAL POSTER FOR THE FILM "BORN INNOCENT", THE IMAGE DEPICTS A YOUNG WOMAN WITH THE PHRASE "SHE WAS BORN TO BE BRUTALIZED..." AND AT THE BOTTOM OF THE POSTER, "THE ABUSE AND SAVAGE HUMILIATION OF A YOUNG GIRL IN DETENTION."

WHAT. THE. F*%K.



WHEN WOMEN ARE THE "VILLAINS" IN HORROR FILMS, THEY ARE TYPICALLY DEPICTED AS "INSANE" OR "POSSESSED"— SETTING A PRECEDENT IN HORROR THAT WOMEN DO NOT ACT ON THEIR OWN VOLUTION. THEY ARE DRIVEN TO MADNESS BY JEALOUSY – OR THE DEVIL.

POSSESSION BEING A RECURRING THEME FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS, REPRESENTING A LOSS OF BODILY AUTONOMY AND A COMPLETE ABSENCE OF AGENCY.



LAURA PALMER: THE ANTI-THESIS OF THE FINAL GIRL

LAURA PALMER IS A GOOD EXAMPLE OF WHAT THE FINAL GIRL IS NOT, AN "IMPERFECT" VICTIM DOOMED FROM THE BEGINNING.

RIP LAURA PALMER

ENFORCING PURITY CULTURE AND MISOGYNY, "THE 'FINAL GIRL,' IS MASCULINIZED AND DESEXUALIZED, AND THIS ALLOWS HER TO SURVIVE, OFTEN ONLY WITH THE HELP OF A STRONGER MAN."
—GRACE LEMON

THE FINAL GIRL USUALLY STANDS OUT AS 'NOT LIKE OTHER GIRLS,' THUS REWARDED FOR HER MORAL SUPERIORITY AND CHASTITY. EXAMPLES INCLUDE: FRIDAY THE 13TH, NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET, HALLOWEEN, AND TEXAS CHAIN SAW MASSACRE.

I AM A SAN DIEGO LOCAL WHO MOSTLY WORKS WITH CERAMICS, DIGITAL MEDIA, AND WRITING. ONE OF MY FAVORITE FIXATIONS IS FRIVOLOUS LAWSUITS AND FEMINISM. I AM A QUEER DISABLED WOMAN AND I PRACTICALLY LIVE AT MY LOCAL LIBRARY! @OATMEALBANDIT_

REFERENCES:

TORTURE THE WOMEN: A GAZE AT THE MISOGYNISTIC MACHINERY OF SCARY CINEMA
—SARAH HANKINS

FEMALE VICTIMIZATION IN THE HORROR GENRE
—GRACE LEMON

HORROR MOVIE STATISTICS
—GINTUX

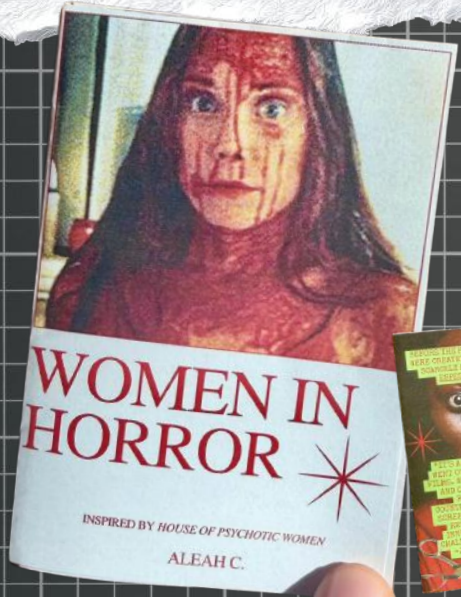
MISOGYNY AND MURDER: PORTRAYALS OF WOMEN IN HORROR FILMS
—THE GAVEL

TERRIFYING TRUTHS: THE RISE OF BLACK FEMALE TRAUMA IN HORROR CINEMA AS THE HORROR GENRE EVOLVES
—JAELENI TURNER-WILLIAMS

HOUSE OF PSYCHOTIC WOMEN BY KIER-LA JANISSE

A ZINE FOR PSYCHOTIC WOMEN
BY ALEAH C.

@oatmealbandit



WHAT IS HYPERFOCUS HORROR?

Hyperfocushorror is a 'zine featuring poetry, flash fiction, art [illustration, photography, paintings, sculpture, 'zines, etc], media reviews, and interviews from disabled, neurodivergent, and chronically ill creatives. It is an imprint of HNDL Mag [Highlighted Neurodivergent & Disabled Life]. HNDL was founded in 2023 and has published twenty issues thus far, including four horror issues. Due to an overwhelmingly positive and enthusiastic reaction and expression of love for the horror genre, Hyperfocushorror emerged out of a cold, slimy grave under the moonlight and wailed in devious elation!

We believe that our community has a unique perspective and love for horror. Horror media is a powerful tool to explore and express stories of trauma and grief as well as empowerment and catharsis. Our community are already out-of-the-box thinkers, and the horror genre amplifies that; resulting in truly groundbreaking work.

Thank you for supporting us & sweet nightmares,

-Founder Krizia "Izzy" Amber W.

JOIN OUR COMMUNITY ON IG

SUBMIT YOUR WORK

KEEP UP WITH ISSUE RELEASES

