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arts and literary magazine



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Volume 33 | Issue 3

2014–15 Juried Selections

perspective
/pər'spektɪv/

noun: The choice of a single angle or point of view from which to sense, categorize, measure, present or codify experience.

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Editors' Note

A photograph is not a frozen moment. A memoir is not a transcript. Art is not a record of fact; it is *perspective* channeled through creative expression.

Perspective is the field of vision spanning from one side of the human experience to the other. It is expanded or restricted by issues such as race, color, national origin or ancestry, creed, religion, disability, veteran status, political view, sex, sexual orientation, gender expression, education, economic status, marital status and age.

Until this year, Metrosphere had been composed of 32 single-issue volumes. *Our* perspective insisted that we do more, show more and create more. This thought became our ambition, which yielded four print publications (Metrofear and Issues 1-3).

To us, the issues of Volume 33 are a row of windows through which the reader can peek inside the creative brains of our contributors; artistic voyeurism, if you will. What lies inside is the blend of raw authenticity and liberated imagination that is so often obscured by more mundane concerns.

A thousand thanks to our loyal readers, talented contributors and every single person who has supported and helped us throughout this journey.

—Metrosphere Editors

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Amanda Berg

Metrosphere,
Executive Editor

For Issue 3, we assembled a panel of judges who we felt best understood and appreciated the creative works of our many talented contributors. The compiled results of this deliberation are the polished content that now lies before you.

Content

2D Art

Scott Roper	8	Jeremy Langston	25
Anthony Bearzi	10	Matt McMullen	26
Jorge Pérez	12	Meagan Andersen	27
Kristen Morrison	13	Sadie Young	28
Tommy McLaughlin	14	Cedric Chambers	29
Tim Arndt	16	Kara Hucker	30
Patrick Cosner	18	Aaron Atencio	31
Sarah Beabout	19	Annette Tallo	32
Bryan Higgins	20	Edward Ayala	34
Ben Patterson	22	Pedro Bernal	35
Ryan Shafer	23	Alejandra Lujan	36
Robert Shea	24	Connie Mobley Johns	37

Poetry

R.N. Sheppard	40	David B. Clark	48
Chesney Oxenham	41	Meredith Wright	50
Brooke Hankins	42	Gillian Kümm	51
Micaela Haluko	44	Alexandra Palumbo	52
Kathy Doherty	45	Roman Sosa	53
Lindsay Lake	46	Carolyn Buechner	54
Jacob S. Garcia	47	Amber DeLay	55

3D Art

Alba L. Garcia	58	Kristen Morrison	63
Kristina Spargo	60	Kenzie Sitterud	64
Allison Copeland	62	Kira Wolfson	66

Prose

Larysa Stachowicz	70	Jack Taylor	91
Matthew Smith	74	Morgan Leshner	93
Sean Rhodes	76	Kathleen Crowley	94
D. Joseph	80	Kristin Macintyre	98
Jonathan Hotard-Resch	81	Paula Thomas	99
Paul Joda	84	Christopher Eckman	102
Sal Christ	87	Colleen Kellogg	103
David Ebel	88		

Design

Megan Duffy	110	Ben Perow	119
Alexandria Jimenez	112	Evonna Ramirez	120
Rayna Kunzman	114	Rosie Opp	121
Kevin Roysden	115		
Jack Tolmachoff	116		
Sierra Schwartz	117		
Edward Hill	118		

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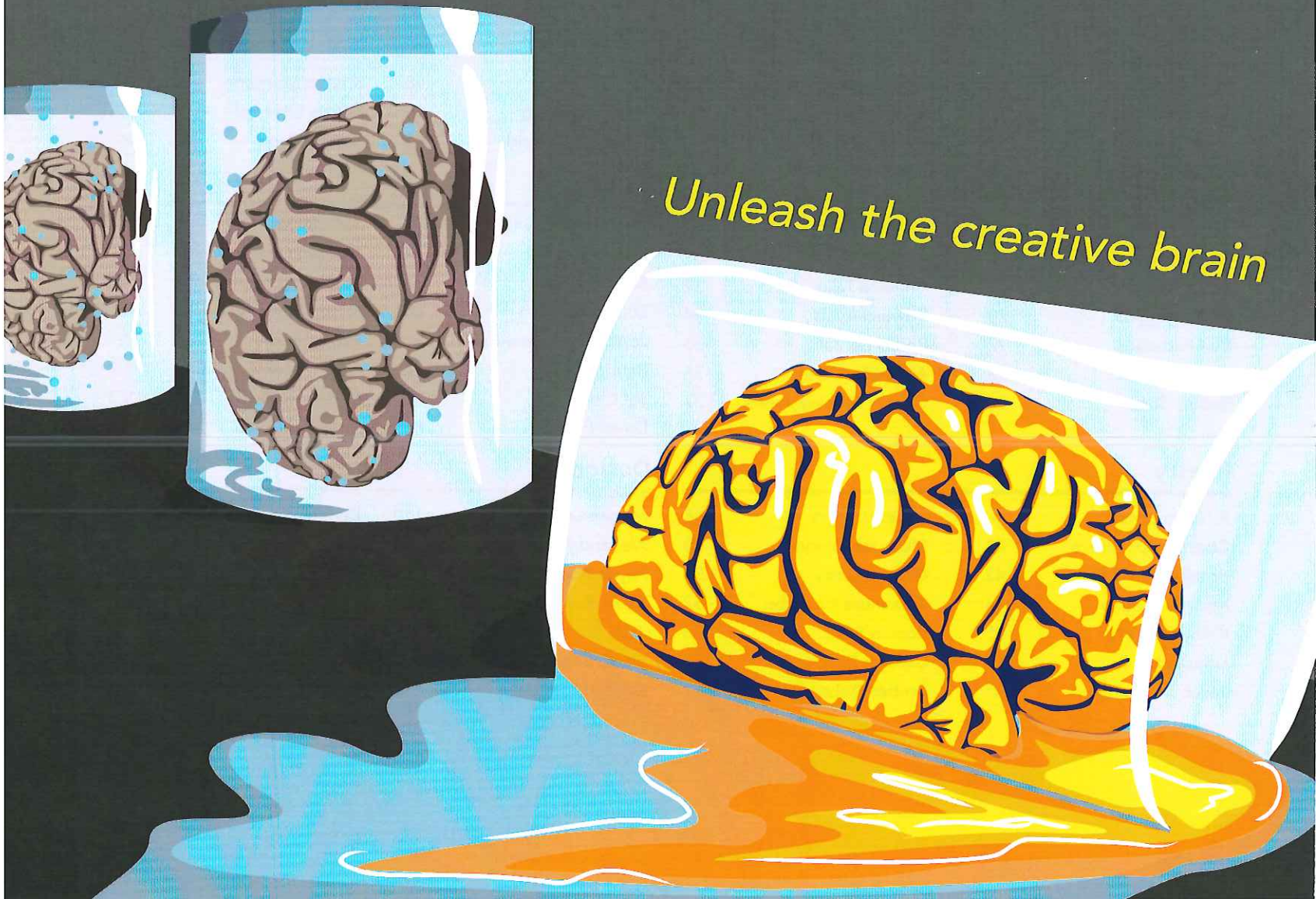
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Unleash the creative brain

2D Art



Scott Roper
Bite the Bullet. Oil on wood

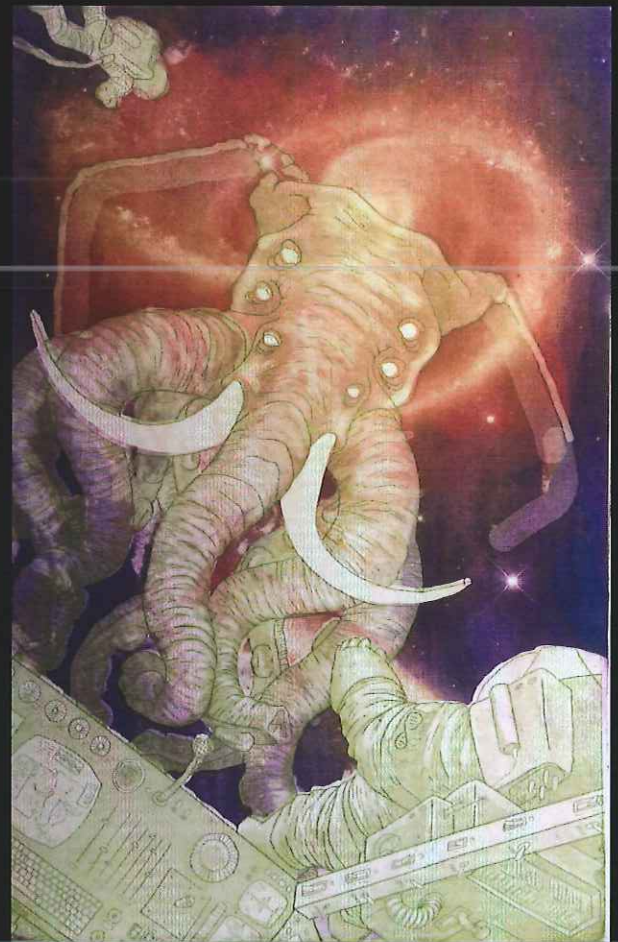


Scott Roper (Opposite)
See Food. Oil on wood





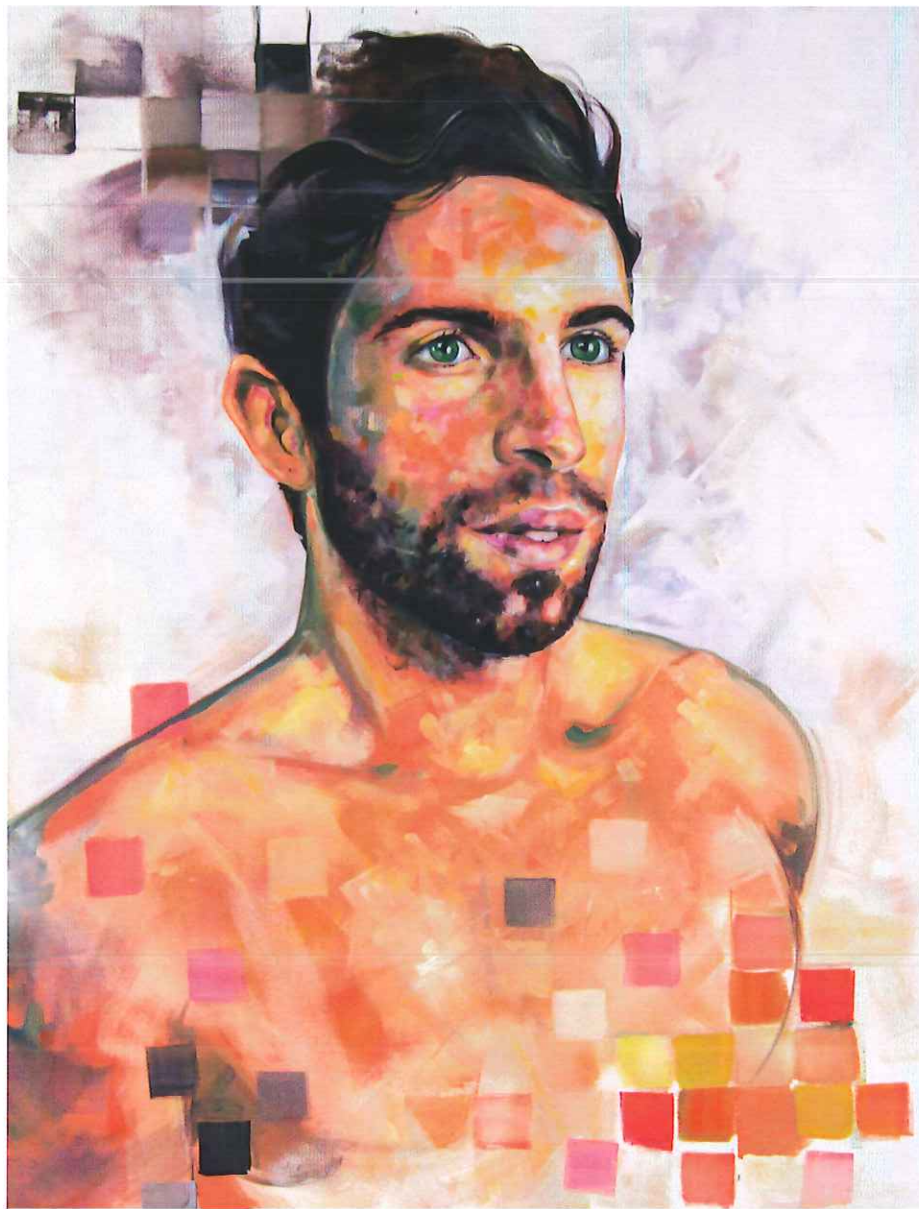
Anthony Bearzi
Freedom Exercised. Screen print



Anthony Bearzi
Infinite Cosmic Resources. Intaglio and photopolymer print



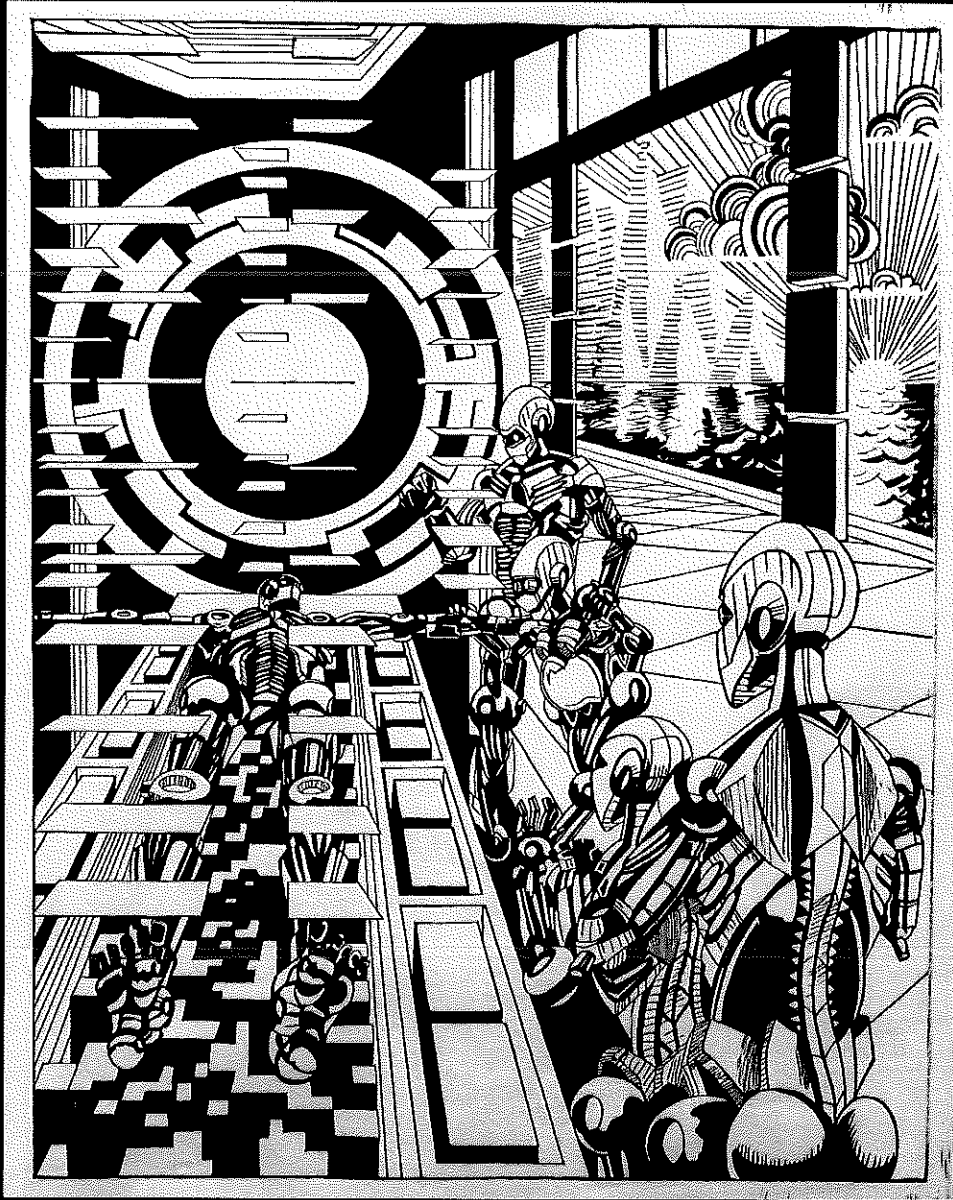
Anthony Bearzi
The Wrong and the Wrong. Pen ink and denatured alcohol



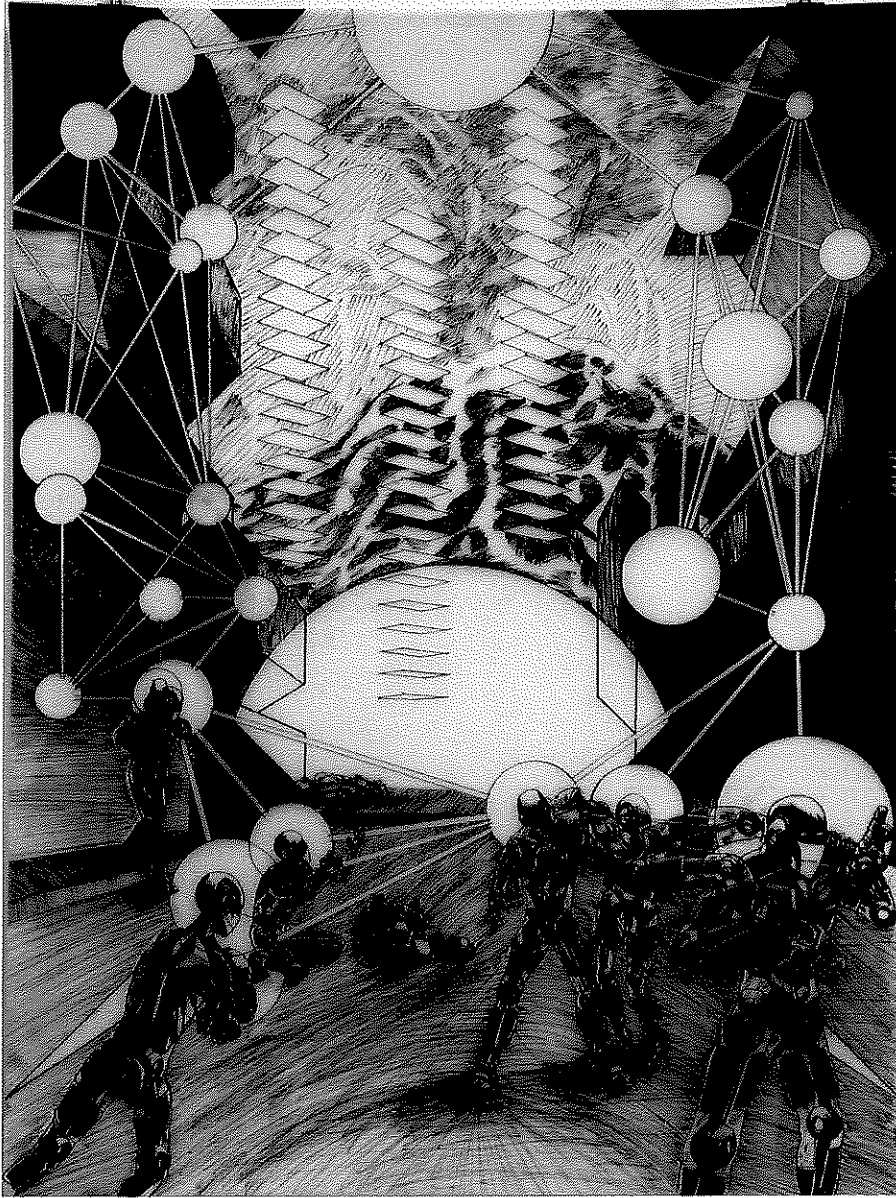
Jorge Pérez
Self Portrait. Oil on canvas



Kristen Morrison
Untitled. Paper collage



Tommy McLaughlin
Disaster, Micron pen on mylar

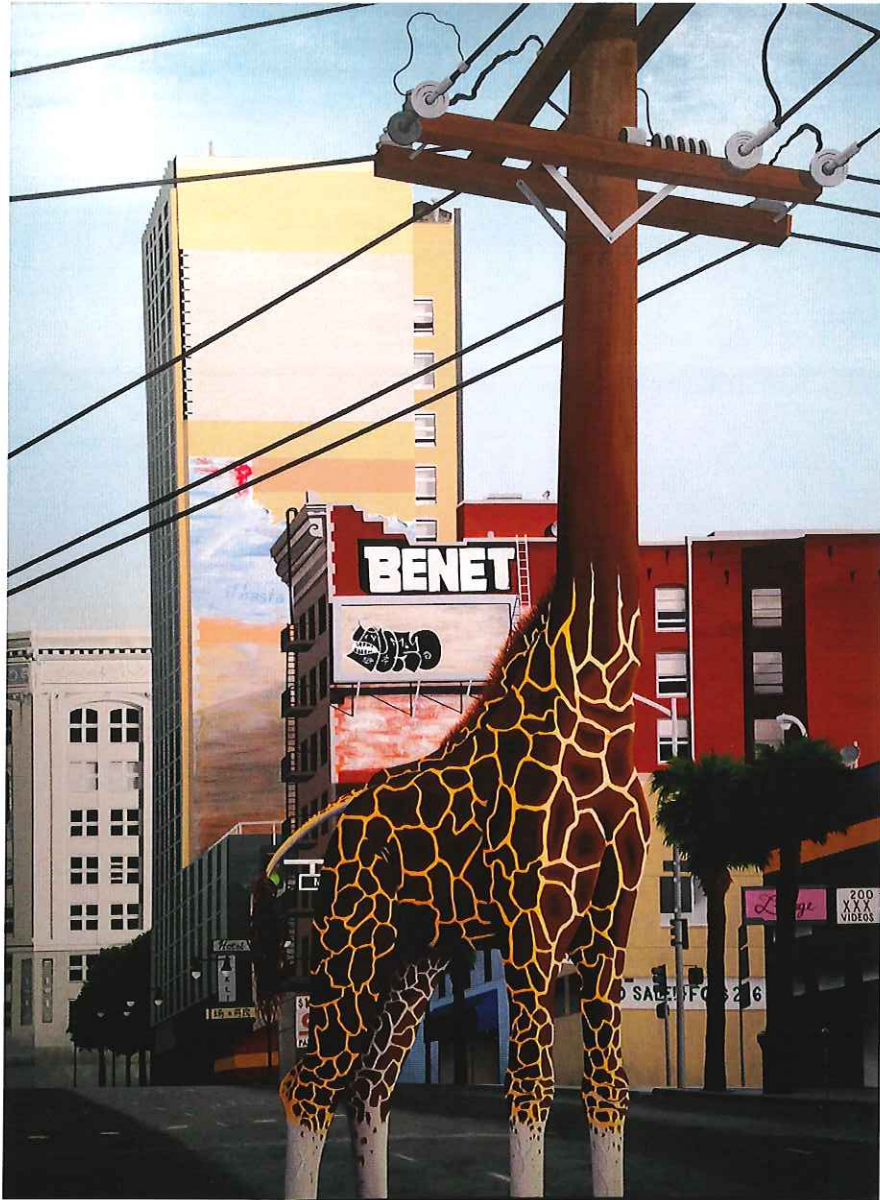


Tommy McLaughlin
transition:death. Linocut print



Tim Arndt

Chrysopylae Orcinus Orca. Acrylic on linen



Tim Arndt
Franciscopolis Giraffa Camelopardalis. Acrylic on linen



Patrick Cosner
Consanguinity. Acrylic on canvas



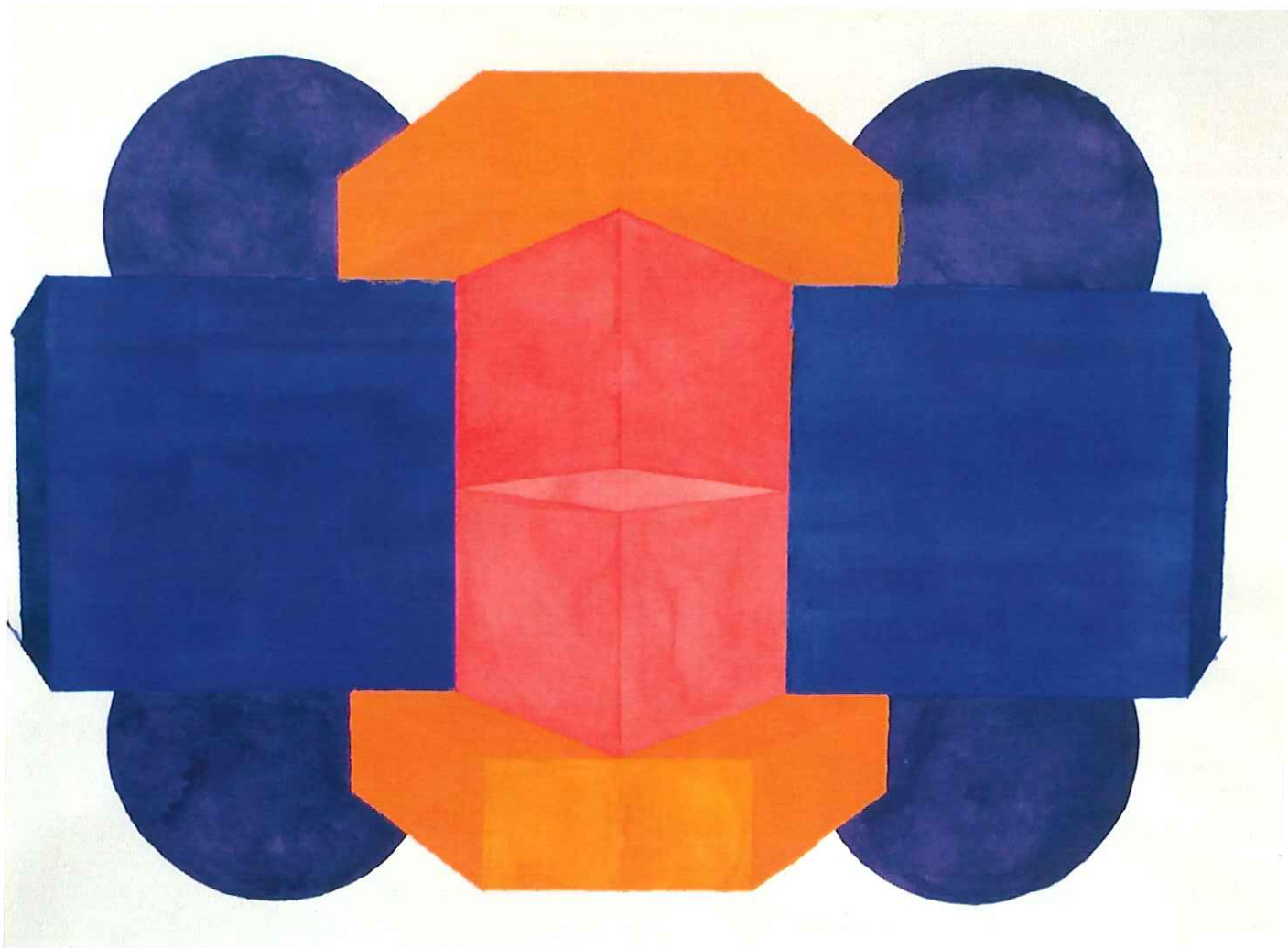
Sarah Beabout
I will do anything to be Happy. Oil on canvas



Bryan Higgins
Beauty is all Around. Digital photography



Bryan Higgins
Find Your Own Way. Digital photography



Ryan Shafer
Perspective. Watercolor



Robert Shea
Abstract Sunset. Acrylic on canvas



Jeremy Langston
Copper Pots. Acrylic on canvas



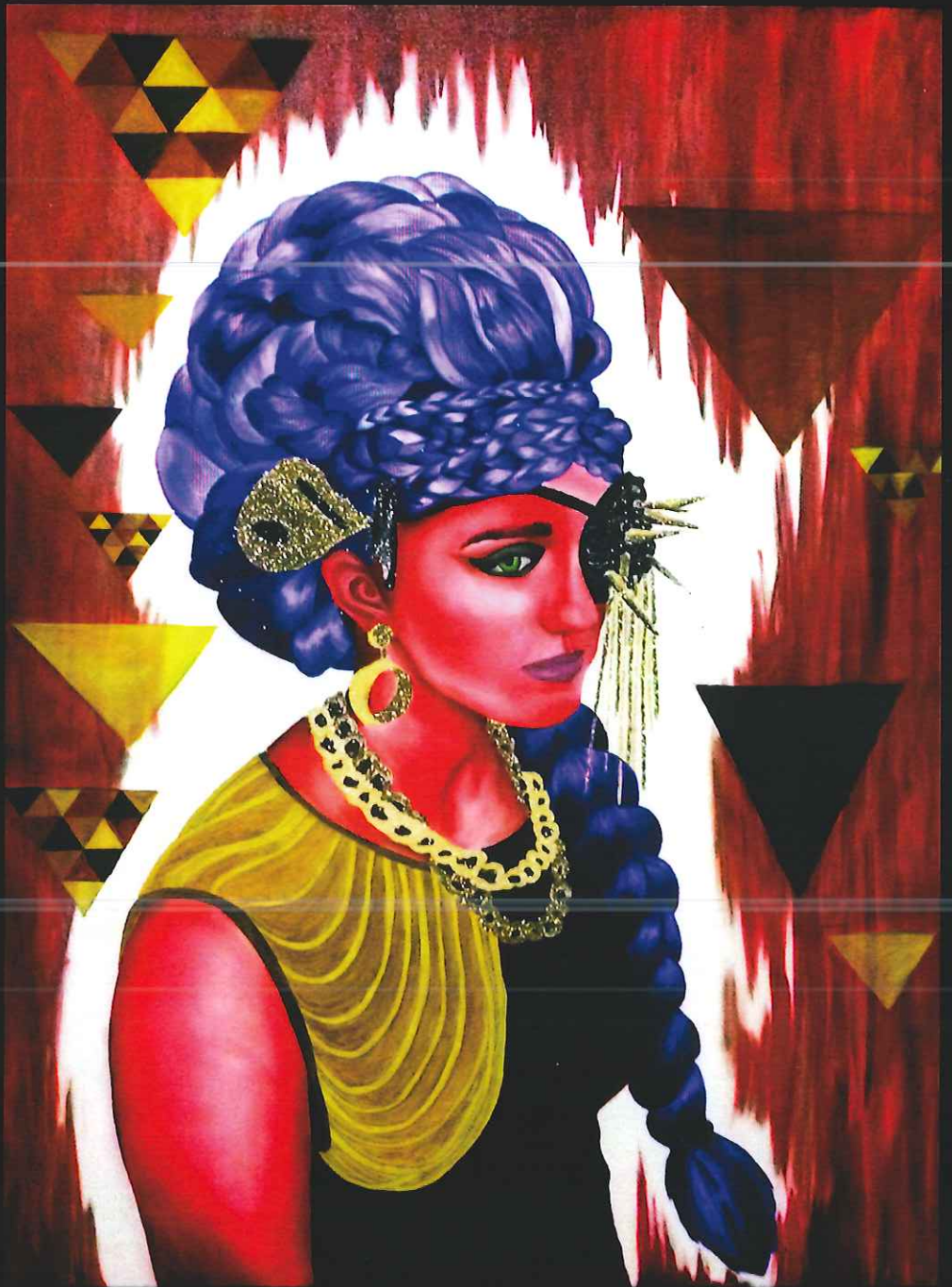
Matt McMullen
Moxa. Oil and spray paint on canvas



Matt McMullen
Brahman. Oil and spray paint on canvas



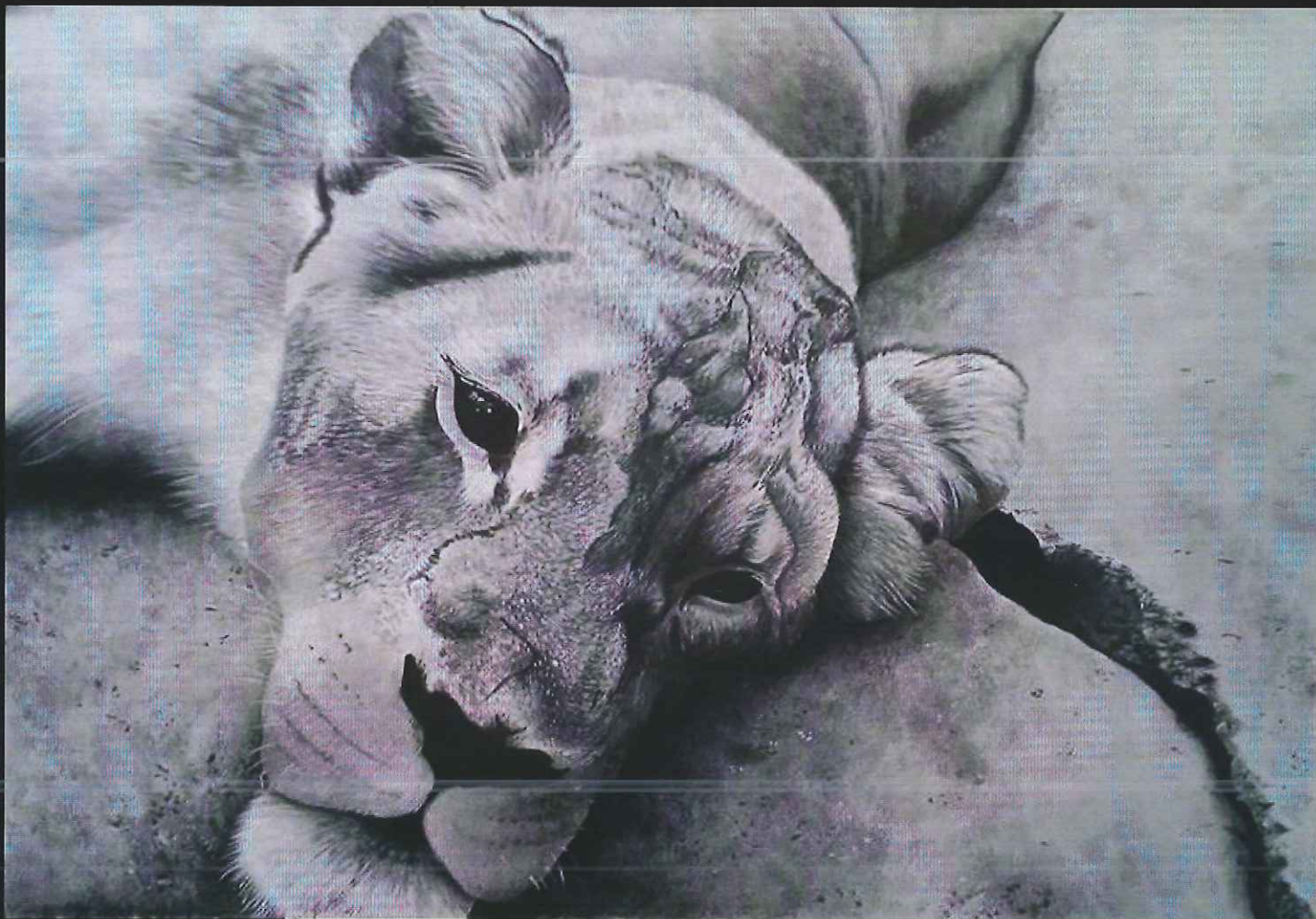
Meagan Andersen
Identity Crisis. Oil on canvas and digital collage



Sadie Young
Armor. Oil on canvas

Cedric Chambers (Opposite)
Self Portrait. Oil on canvas





Kara Hucker

Face to Face. Acrylic on canvas



Aaron Atencio
Refuge. Photography



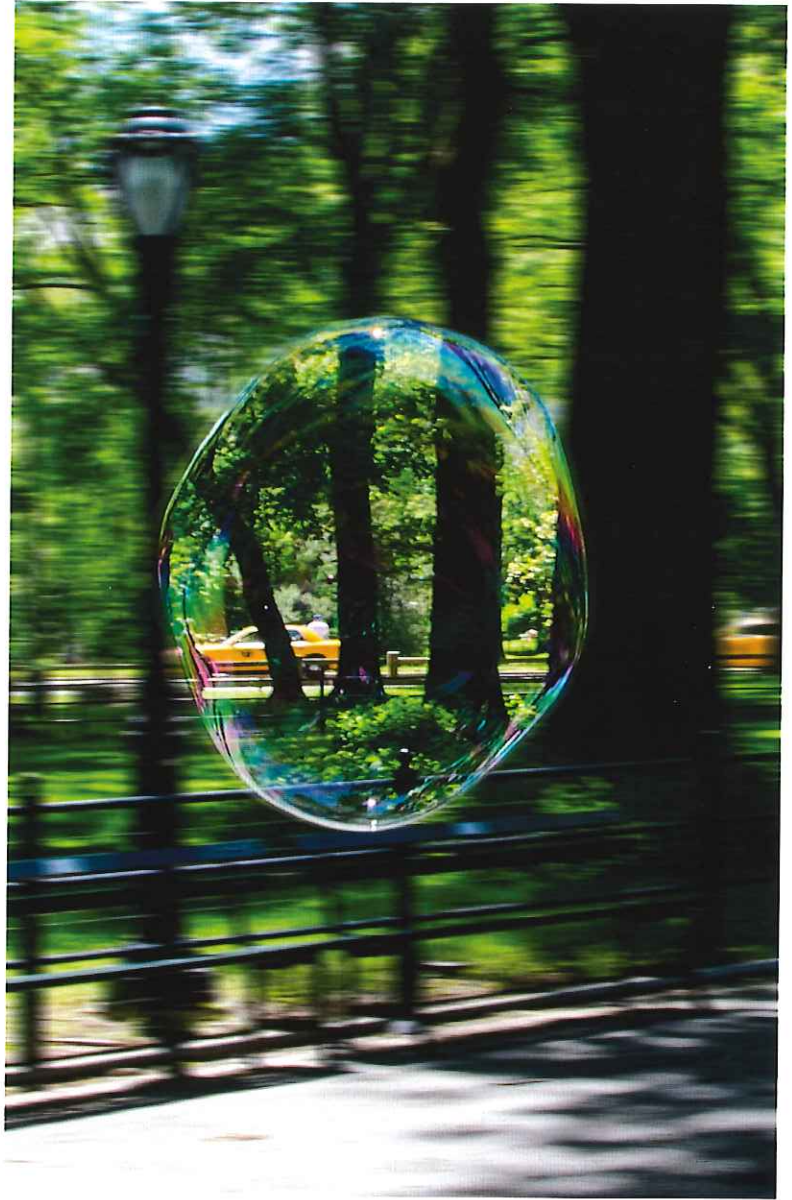
Annette Tallo

From *The Emotional Winter* collection. Digital photography

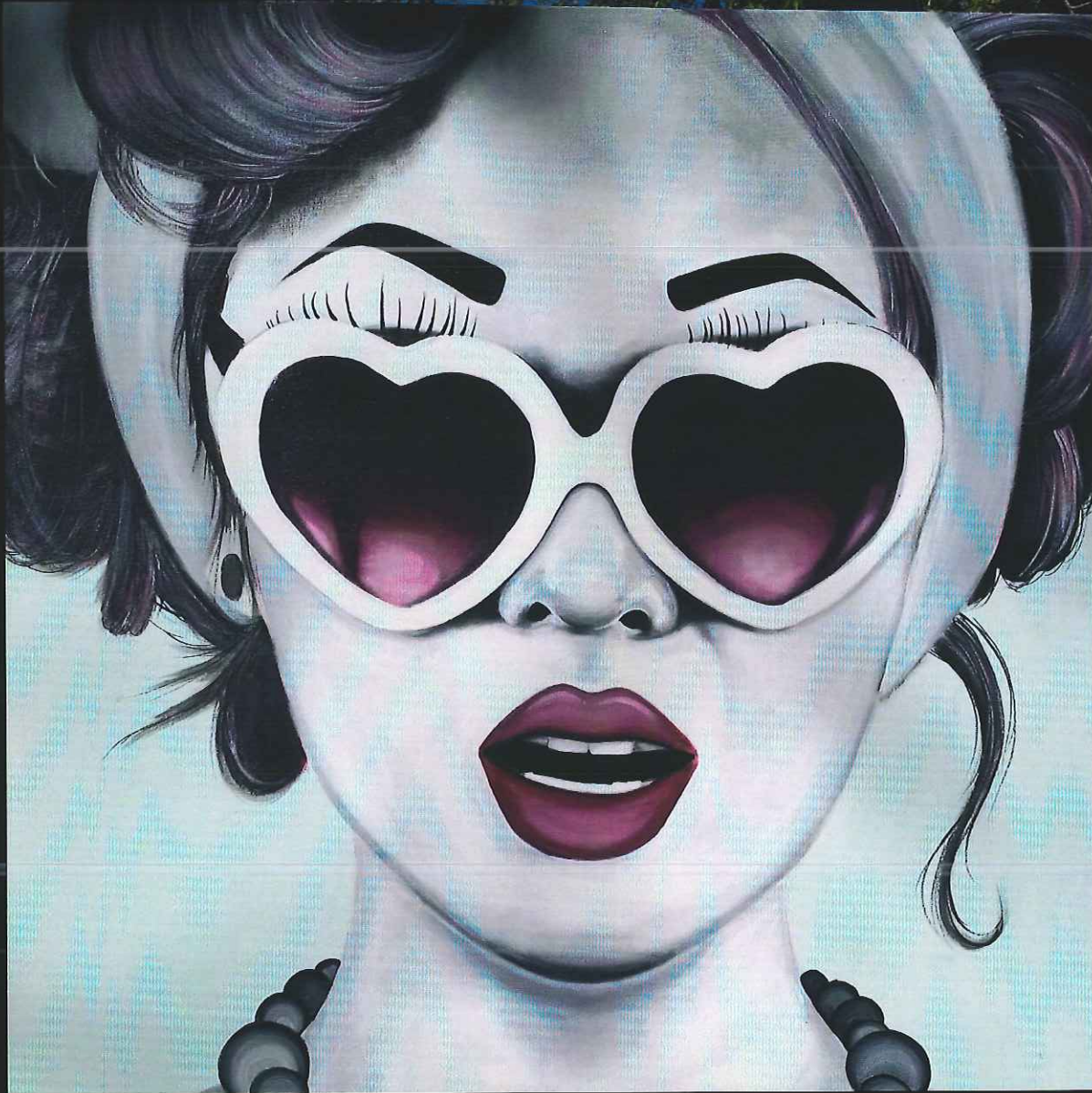




Edward Ayala
Golden Door. Digital print

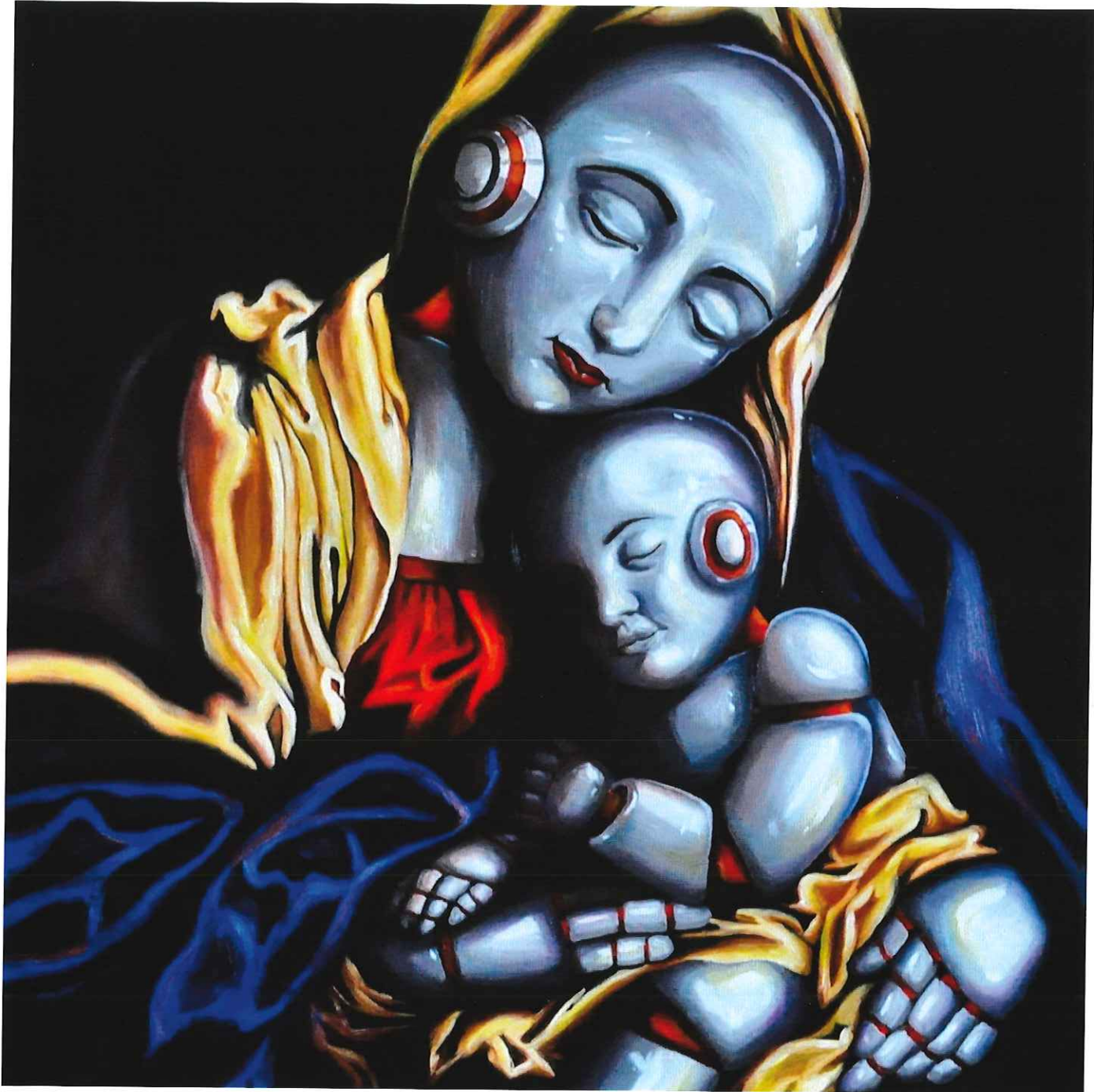


Pedro Bernal
Glenda's Arrival. Photography



Alejandra Lujan
Amelia. Acrylic on canvas

Connie Mobley Johns (Opposite)
Robodonna & Child. Oil on wood panel





CONGRATULATIONS,
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launch party
april 24
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Poetry

The silence smolders in the hall

by R.N. Sheppard



The silence smolders in the hall
Drawn to the light—
I watch them through a sliver in the door:
They stand with a pulsating universe in-between them,
 Tears puddle in her eyes
And in these pools I see the action:
 His fingers trail, hungry, down her leg,
Her mouth finds his, then neck, then chest, then arms.
The sound of labored breathing grows and crackles
 And friction turns to heat and sparks to smoke.
A fantastic flash of light, I tumble back
Recover and find nothing remains
 But stillness, ash, and silhouettes burned through the wall
Of horizontal bodies intertwined.
The luminescence of that room now gone—
I stand and follow further down the hall.

Susurrus

by Chesney Oxenham

*shwiiishhhh-shwip
zhhhuuuushh
shweeeeee-shwoop
zhhhh-oooothhh*

the muffled
comic-book
midnight sounds
of you turning
tumbling
rolling over
and sliding your arm
over my waist
pulling me back
into soft
homey
solid warmth
against the cold
silent air

Tree Climbing on the Corner of Glenroyal and Lehigh, in Pueblo, Colorado. 2000.

by Brooke Hankins

Hidden among the greens,
Like crab apple.
Expanse of small town scape,
Open park for kites,
And building block houses.
In an instant
A rushing blur,
like paint splatter,
All emerald turned to rust.

Bustling around the pokes.
Rough bark scratch.
Scraping my palms with white residue.
Slow *crack*.
Sudden *snap!*

A whirl of gasping breath,
with the taste of bare space.
Swallowing air like helium.
As if it could keep me afloat.
With the boughs.
For even an instant longer.

Not even my treble pitched call
Could keep me in the acute octave
Of the upper clef.
Like apple,
I clasp with claw to branch.
As quick pace speed
Slows to a steady sail.
I linger.
Leaves like feathers,
soften my fall; pillow-cast.

Who knew phosphorescent absorbing spans
could freeze time?

Black Onyx

by Brooke Hankins

This stone,
Smaller than a sea horse's inflated tummy,
But larger than any pearl,
Is as black as the depths,
Speckled with flecks like dust.
Granite cracks, webbed like lightning,
Form across its polished surface.
It is anything but glass.
Meant to provide me with protection.
I suck on the stone
In hope that I can get one last taste of the ocean.
I fear even the iodine has been sucked dry.
Tumbled over and cover coated,
The smoothed edges do not cut open my mouth.
It does not sting.
I wish for lacquers to ooze from the tongue tissue,
Like drops descendent from the moon.
I wish for wounds, that produce liquid silver,
Instead of iron; cooling.
In the round about.

(grace.)

by Micaela Haluko

The signs were simple:
the yellow ticket upon the glass,
an easy miss among the fallen autumn leaves,
*I wasn't sure at first
but you move every month like clockwork
when the sweeper comes.*

a waiting companion
unnoticed in her silent patience,
ever faithful that the bowl would be filled.
*She depended on you,
but never made demands
of your tired old bones.*

A missed encounter
caused little worry,
*They waited there by the third bench,
just like every other time.*
except in concert with a broken routine.
That day something was wrong.

Somehow you knew, even still,
you were afraid to intrude,
afraid to disturb the solitude.
*Alert piqued my instincts,
but I was sure
I was imagining things,*

You knew the fence I built.
so I waited.

Not link for link,
I never knew the things you loved,
not post for post,
or even if you had a family,
but somehow my history imprinted on you,
split through the wire diamonds between us.
*the neighborly pleasantries
revealed more than what you thought I could see.*

Not just this time,
but always,
and especially this time
you knew. Somehow you knew.

I heard you climb the crumbled concrete

not once, but three times,
each step echoing the rap against the hollow door.
*At first, it was a formality,
just to appease my conscience.
Silence triggered the alarm.*

I heard you call my name
from the red encrusted carpet,
*I announced my presence at first approach,
then again through the darkened window.*

I heard you call.
I repeated your name,

I had no voice,
but you didn't answer.
but I heard you call.
You didn't answer.

And then grace brought you through to me
to kneel by my side,
to speak the words through stagnant air.
*The back door, it was open,
and I saw you lying there.
My reaction was born from instinct.*

They floated easily,
like a script rehearsed,
soothing in predictability.
*We'll take care of this,
please don't worry.
Don't be afraid.*

To speak the words,
Everything's going to be okay.
the last I heard before the time expired.
I promise.

Advance Crew

by Kathy Doherty

Last night the rain came
stampeding to the earth
after the advance crew
of thunder and lightning
crowding remnants of nature
into the gaping mouths
of storm sewers.

I looked to the lone streetlight;
wisps of mist rose along its pole
abandoning the pavement.
Larger and heavier drops of rain
lit up by the light
like pinpricks of stars
continued their campaign downward.

Things to Do in a Coffee House

by Lindsay Lake

Order a ½ caff, eight-shot, one pump vanilla, 190 degree, extra extra dry cappuccino
in Pig Latin.
Pay for it in Swedish money
and then spill it.
Steal someone else's extra extra dry cappuccino.
Wait for the remake.
Steal it again.
Run away.
Come back.
Complain about the prices.
Steal from the tip jar.
Complain about the WiFi.
Take a nap
and finally catch up on all of that snoring you've been meaning to do.
Wake up.
Dump the entire amount of vanilla powder from the condiment bar in your cappuccino.
Repeat with chocolate and cinnamon.
Demand a new cappuccino.
Start a revolution--demand to make your own cappuccino.
Do cool barista tricks
like juggling pitchers of milk
with your toes
and crafting self portraits out of foam.
Hang up *all* of the artistic masterpieces you proudly completed in the 3rd grade.
Steal all of the black sharpies while backs are turned and
hide them in ambiguous places,
like the ceiling.
Practice your evil laugh sitting next to that one person who's actually trying to study.
Draw mustaches and unibrows on all of the faces pictured in the New York Times.
Ask to stay an extra 15 minutes after close.
Repeat.

LABYRINTH OF MIRRORS

by Jacob S. Garcia

Is time this labyrinth
of mirrors?
Is the past,
shown in a mirror
of a face with cuts,
drops of blood,
razor burn, warm wet
shaving blades?

Is the present clean,
free of defect,
cool waters splashed,
pores closing
after relief
from the genetic
protein product?

Is the future
seen by present eyes
that view a beard
already growing?

The labyrinth of quicksilver
mirrors are interspersed
with night,
it is a hall of
checkerboard relativity
and within it
I walk.

Butterscotch

by David B. Clark

You were owl piercing with milky butterscotch
of hard-candy.
Your kisses tasted real
like you tended to them
in the garden of your mouth and plucked
them in season to breathe into me.
I held you as I would carbon-dioxide if I were
something prettier and scared:

that citronella growing around Algernon's
deathbed,
majestic redwoods without bulldozer whistles,
a lilac stuck in the eye of a tornado;
those milky butterscotch tornados.

So your hesitance felt harshest.
You were chiefly footloose. It filled me
with chagrin. You couldn't mesh with my levity
and because our brevity you'll now spend time
trying to make sense
of everything
that was always so light-
hearted and heavy.

Treating me a tree; all truncated and hollow.
This forest felt our falling
but hadn't the branches to break
plunges so heavy.

Now stark white I sit here shaking in splinters.
You've left me wooden

like someone had to craft this heart,
like someone had to whittle this brain.

Then you figured to find me outlandish.
Yet my water blue eyes only measured to
droplets of the hazel oceans
that you did glare me.

It was as if the nepenthe we drank
had us each forget differently.
So now
I'm starting
to get self-protective
over our shadow
like I own this
casted bout of darkness; but

it's really the light
that throws us dismal
and paints us just
as black and flat as we always seem to act.
Realizing it was never either you or I, but us.

I just want
us lifted
so we can crash like
hushed thunder,
shaking, grounded, staring through
all your butterscotch, just thankful
for remembrance of how lofty
our feathers once floated.

Migrate

by David B. Clark

Pretty things don't last
pending on their prettiness.
Things seem to fade the same.
Have you ever pulled blue
out of faded black sky?
Like how we think good goose shit
looks like bad cigarette butts.

Filthy.

There are birds in the sky
and everyone would rather cover
the things they paid for.
Save face.

Watch as the birds go
to where they need
and have nothing but excrement
for everyone that was busy
trying to put their feet down
somewhere clean, spotless, perfect,
fake.

The Owl Collector

by Meredith Wright

She loved them ever since she was a lass.
Round-eyed, feathered breasts, and triangle
beaks full of magical superstition.
All of them friends. A lifetime of collecting
boasted hundreds of owls, perched and
perfectly placed in her home.

Paintings on canvas, hand-stitched
embroidered owls nestled on the branch of
an evergreen made by her daughter with
seven different shades of brown on the wing
feathers alone! Twelve owl
necklaces, a pair of wooden Elf Owls

hand carved by her dearest friend Doc,
twin Pigmy Owl salt-and-pepper shakers,
a wooden paint-by-number owl wall plaque
made by her granddaughter, a lumpy
ceramic yellow and purple owl shaped
lovingly by her grandson's small hands.

A white stone-carved owl paperweight,
a golden charm on her bracelet, pins and
pens, and gold leaf painted porcelain plates.
For sixty years they filled every nook and
cranny, every card to Grammy, every
curio cabinet inch of real estate,

every bookshelf, hallway wall, coffee table,
desktop, towel rack, and nightstand.
They were her companions at night while
her husband was away, in the Great War.
They watched over her newborn until he
returned. Snowy and Barn, Great Greys and

Burrowing, Eagle and Spectacled, all nested
in her small home, safe from predators,
weather, elements, and time.
The oldest and wisest of them sat
in a special place in her heart
and in the heart of her home.

On the kitchen counter,
with his orange moon eyes the
Great Horned Owl watched.
Tufts of feather neither horn nor ear,
the handles of his cookie jar lid.
Inside her home, inside her owl,

chocolate chip cookies with
pecans, a particular favorite.
Other times sweet wrapped candy treats,
or tattered and stained recipe cards.
The top of this great horned onlooker,
rarely dusty. Always cared for when

splashed by spaghetti sauce, wiped and
put back in his place of honor.
He watched the child grow, he
watched the grandchildren grow, and
he watched the great-grandchildren grow.
One grey day, he was moved from his perch.

With tender care and gentle trembling
hands, he was filled, lid replaced, and
sealed. Upon his great horns was placed her
hairnet and taped to his wing her picture,
smiling in front of her owl-filled home.

Moved now to the nightstand in the
bedroom he sits, holding within his great
strong wings and voluminous heart,
the owl collector.

Response to Sonnet XLII

After Black

by Gillian Kümm

How do I love thee?
Like Black, I don't –
I'm not even going to respect
your form since it has for so long
damned and defined my own.
How do I love thee?
I love me –
my form, my voice.
I can't love you if
it means not loving
myself.

Absurdly Long Titles Are a Harmless Form of Rebellion

by Alexandra Palumbo

from the moment we're born we have this conception
of what we should be, an ideal perfection;
it's nothing more than a viral infection
that plagues our emotions and thoughts with this form of correction

we're all individuals, and it's not okay to live that way
because to be on the outside? that means rejection

from a society that sends out this awful projection
deception
that humanity is safe, a wall of protection
but only if you belong to a section
that's just the same as you by name
a collection
of people who share your affection
and have nothing to say to cause interception

but you have to make sure you pass inspection

all good ideas have a point of inception;
they start as a seed that grows with reception
of a single thought as law and whatever you saw:

erection
of skyscrapers in every direction
glass on the walls, a concrete connection
disconnection
to what makes us human—and thus
there's no space for intersection

individuality's lost, but we must get it back, no matter the cost,
in order to fight off this lethal injection
the world belongs to us, not just a certain selection;
creativity has ways of avoiding detection...

LIGHT and **shadow** and *angles* and r e f l e c t i o n

these
are
the
things
that
change
our

perception

Love poem to S.L.U.T.

by Roman Sosa

We marvel at those free avian beauties
their world reflected
in the dazzling Walden below.
Why couldn't we be birds?

If we were
bright sapphire skies would invite us
to swoop beside their elevated shapes.
Our shadows would elope in silence
as we'd cheerfully dance, around, above, and below one another.
Our movements in rhythm with our soulful metronome.

Early starlight
brings a cooling wind
as we dip into the lake's rejuvenating water.
Purity would never seem so elevated
than in the moments when we were closest to the ground.

Later I, perched on a solitary branch,
watch you waltz with the moon
serenading the air with my song,

*What could it mean to be your mate?
To be without fleeting time
Or fearful sense of logic?
The privilege of an answer is mine.
Let the answer compliment you
Let it soar beyond our white wings to the heavens above
Let ring like thunder across the hills with a primitive yawp
Let it not breathe from any other lover's lips
For the answer, is mine.*

But instead we watch from below
sitting at the bank of this angelic lake
running our hands through its sunken emerald hair.
Splashing our feet against the water
while those birds in their illuminated elegance
Twirl in love.

Bleeding Roots

by Carolyn Buechner

My opening eyes blink away
the acidic pockets of space and time,
the vastness of bleach, the tectonic folds,
cracked in wealth through the mountainous ridges of soul.
I am laced in stillness through the moving air of night.

Until
Concrete meets the proxy earth.
His frame, his shadow,
fluorescence, lava.
My eyes, the stars.

A galaxy alarm confirms my suspicion.
Channeled magma chases my breath, my aspirations,
It leashes my freedom to infidelity.
My heart is erupting, anxious,
pounding against the hells that so presently enslave it.
It hounds and counters the bricks, the mortar, the cement,
the undulations of the door spring,
tables shaken to Sunday.

*oh for
the pulse that
my vulnerable
heart
is crawling
into silence*

Until
Light's beckoning hands, awakening me
Silenced, eliminated, the anti-moon
In my rude, emergent night
The heir of dawn
rises into my earth-swim,

I tread the dirt
As my cells, my blood
my heartbeat of twigs-
the bleeding earth, her bleeding roots.

The remains in my pool are filth,
filth, in this scar
the pistons churning and grinding for
my potent prison tattoo:
those shoes, that damn plastic mattress,
window paint, our dead tree,
all shrieking
proclaiming the sirens and echoes
into the conquered sky
the stars, a debutante of vagabonds and thieves.

The siren camps in the divots of my every sense-
And memory meets tattoos of agonies in unconsciousness:
nuance, fluency, stairs, tables,
blood, stars,
earth.

So I count the cracks on the sidewalk,
I count the tectonic folds of my soul.
And gape for my bleeding and slipping roots.

Magma blinds me again
and the stars are gone.

With blood on my hands
I understand so little.

Si Belle

by Amber DeLay

The streets of Paris
are full of regalement.
Down the hill of *Montmartre*, a girl
pedals in a green polka dot dress
Oh-bicycle girl.
Si belle. So beautiful.

Green polka dots sweep, to and fro
passing spinning spokes.
She pedals as she smokes.
She pedals with the phone
to her ear-Oh French words.
Si belle. Si belle.

She pedals near,
and on down the road,
I watch her go.

To the crêpe vendor I confess
Je ne parle pas français.
I don't speak French.
He smiles,
-Parle l'anglais.

I am lost, I say. *Je suis perdu.*
He laughs and says, "me too"
Oh-to be lost in the streets of
Paris, *si belle, si belle.*

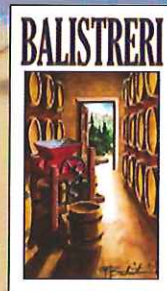
*Sit down with a
Balistreri Red*



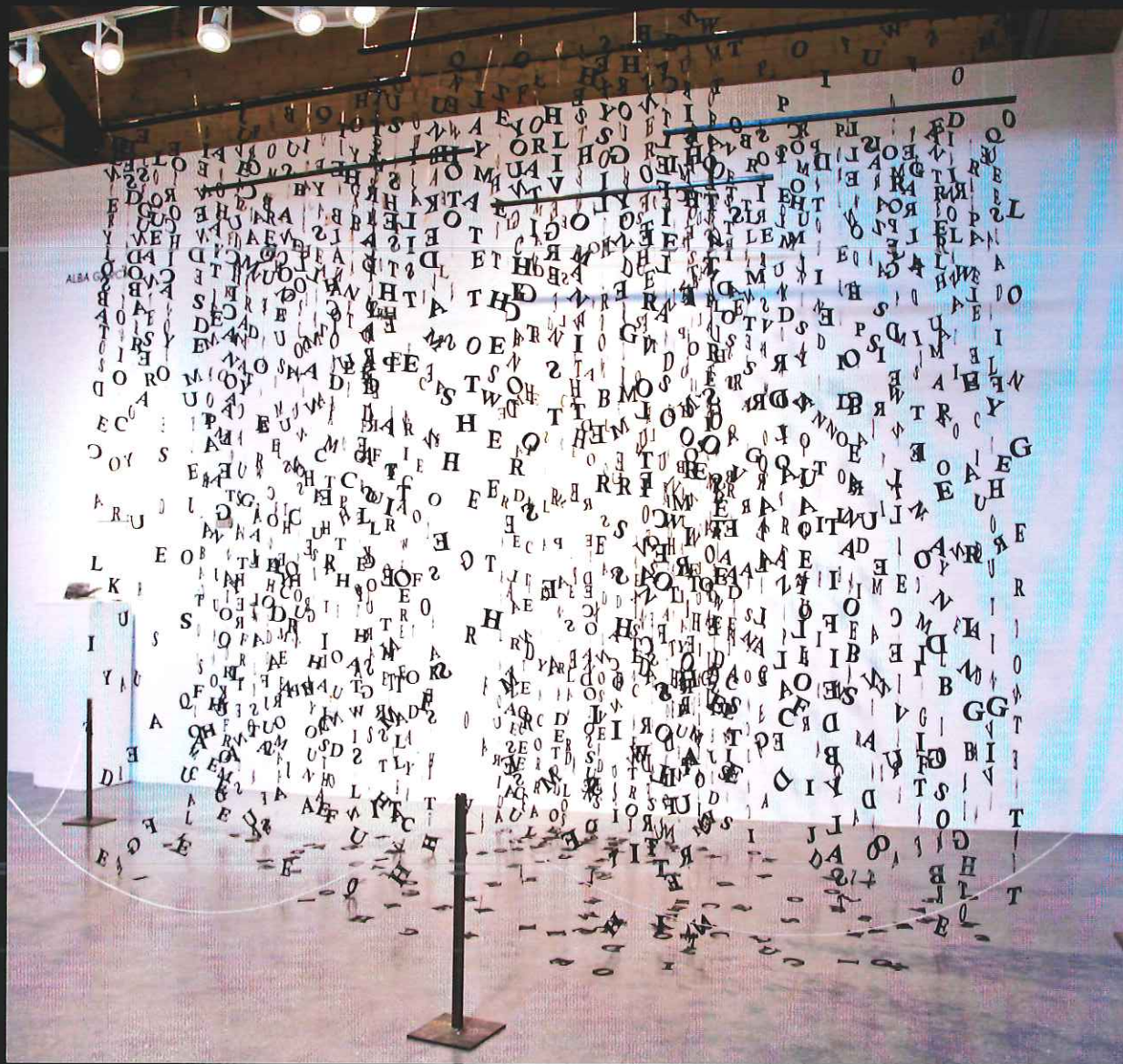
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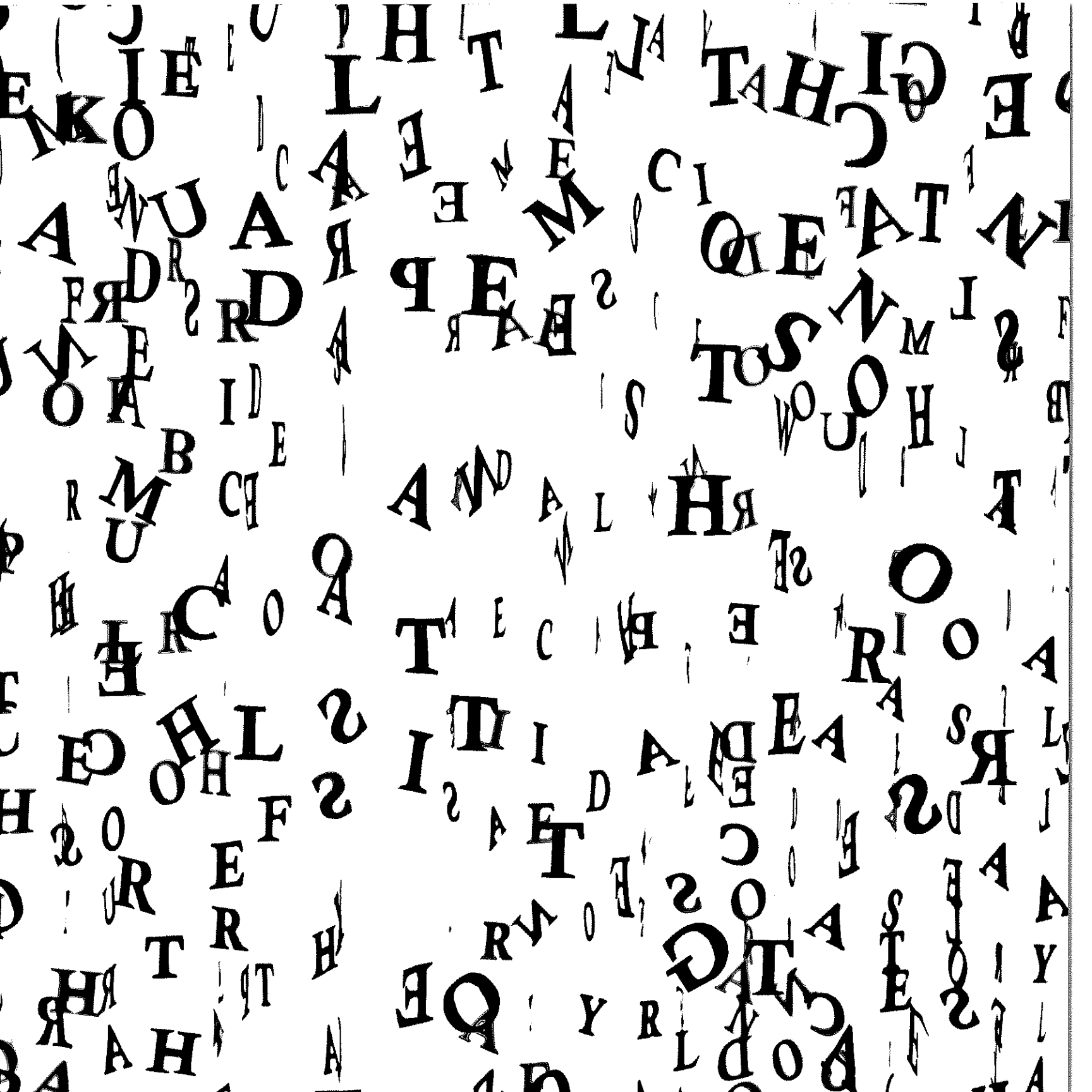


3D Art



Alba L. Garcia
Voces. Cut paper and thread



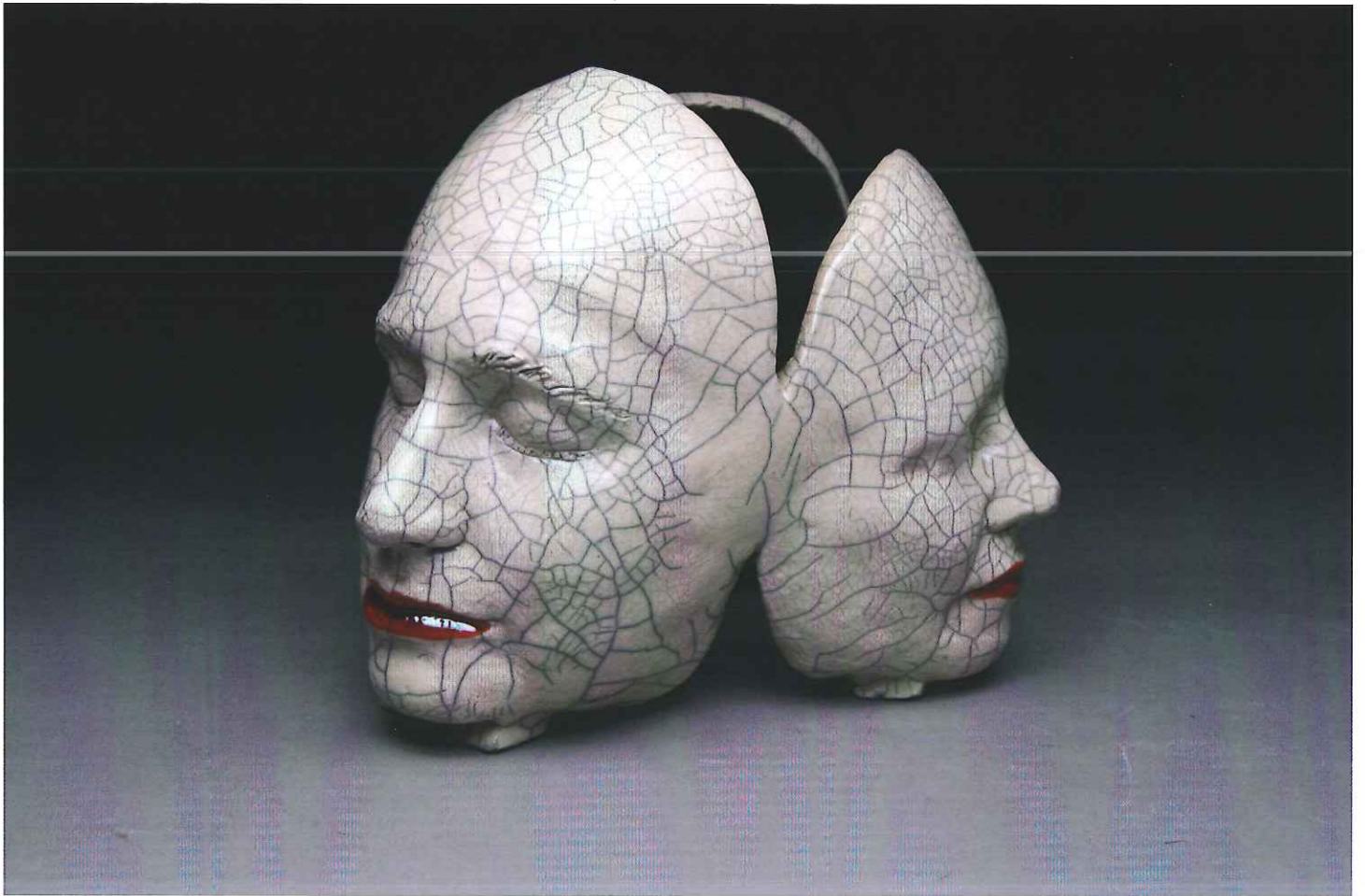




Kristina Spargo
Assistant's Revenge. Fibers

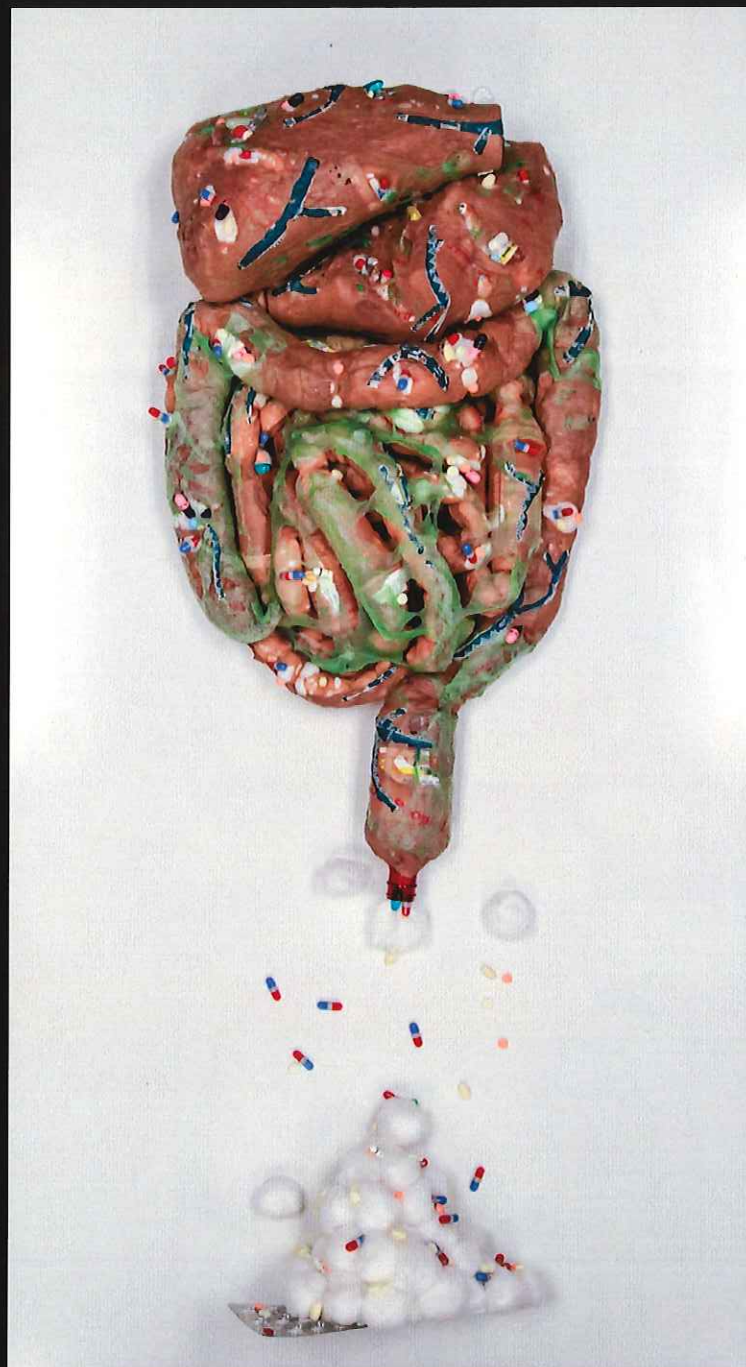


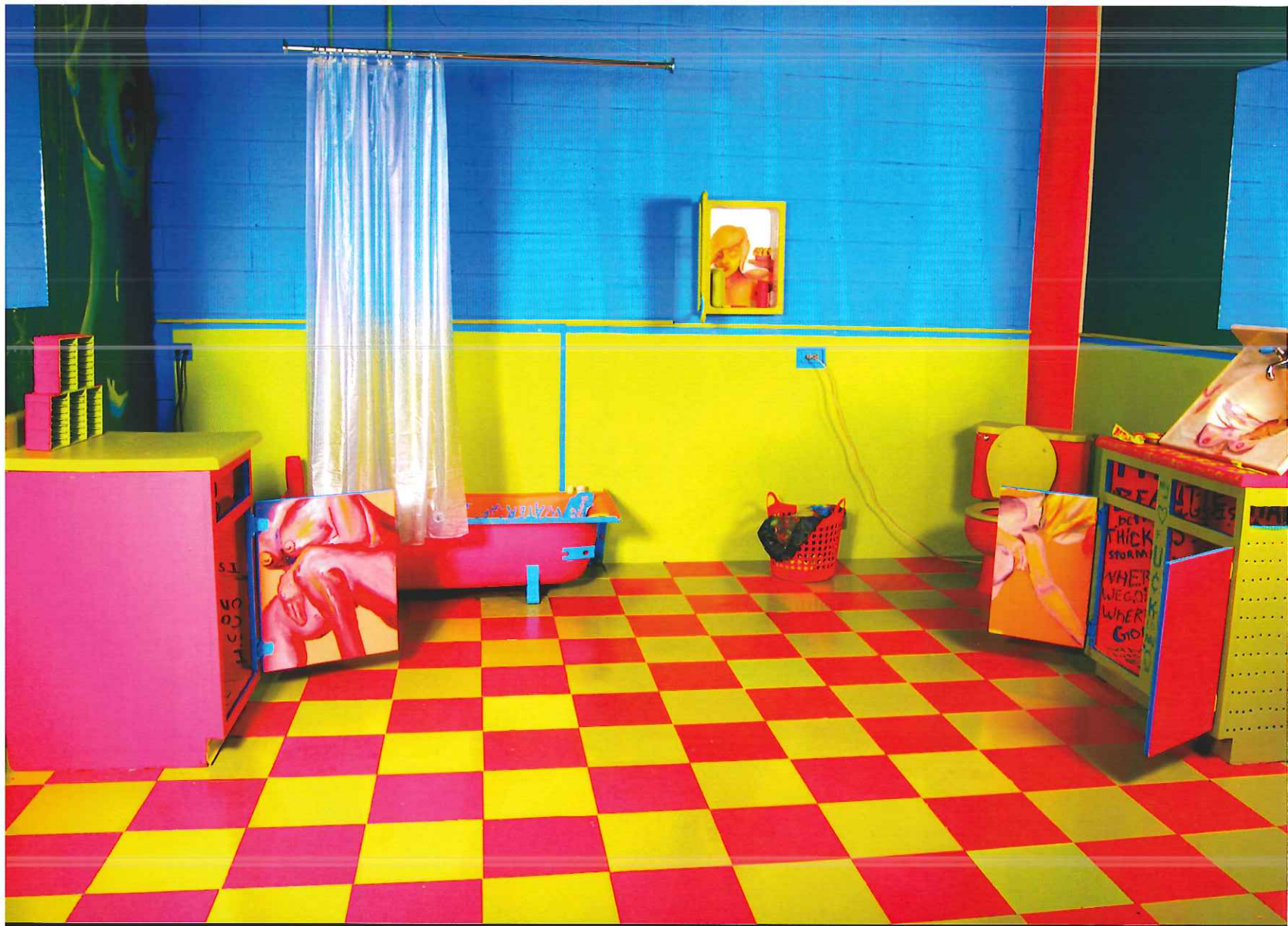
Kristina Spargo
Woven Structures. Fabric



Allison Copeland
Faces of Change. Stoneware ceramic

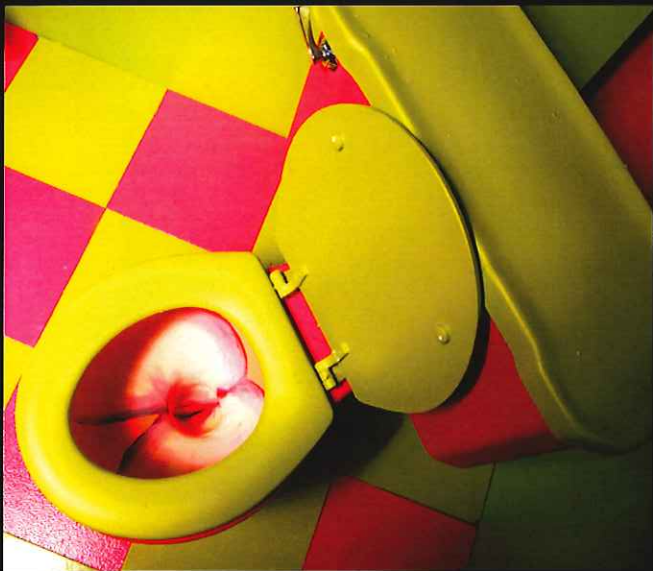
Kristen Morrison (Opposite)
Pill Popper. Mixed media

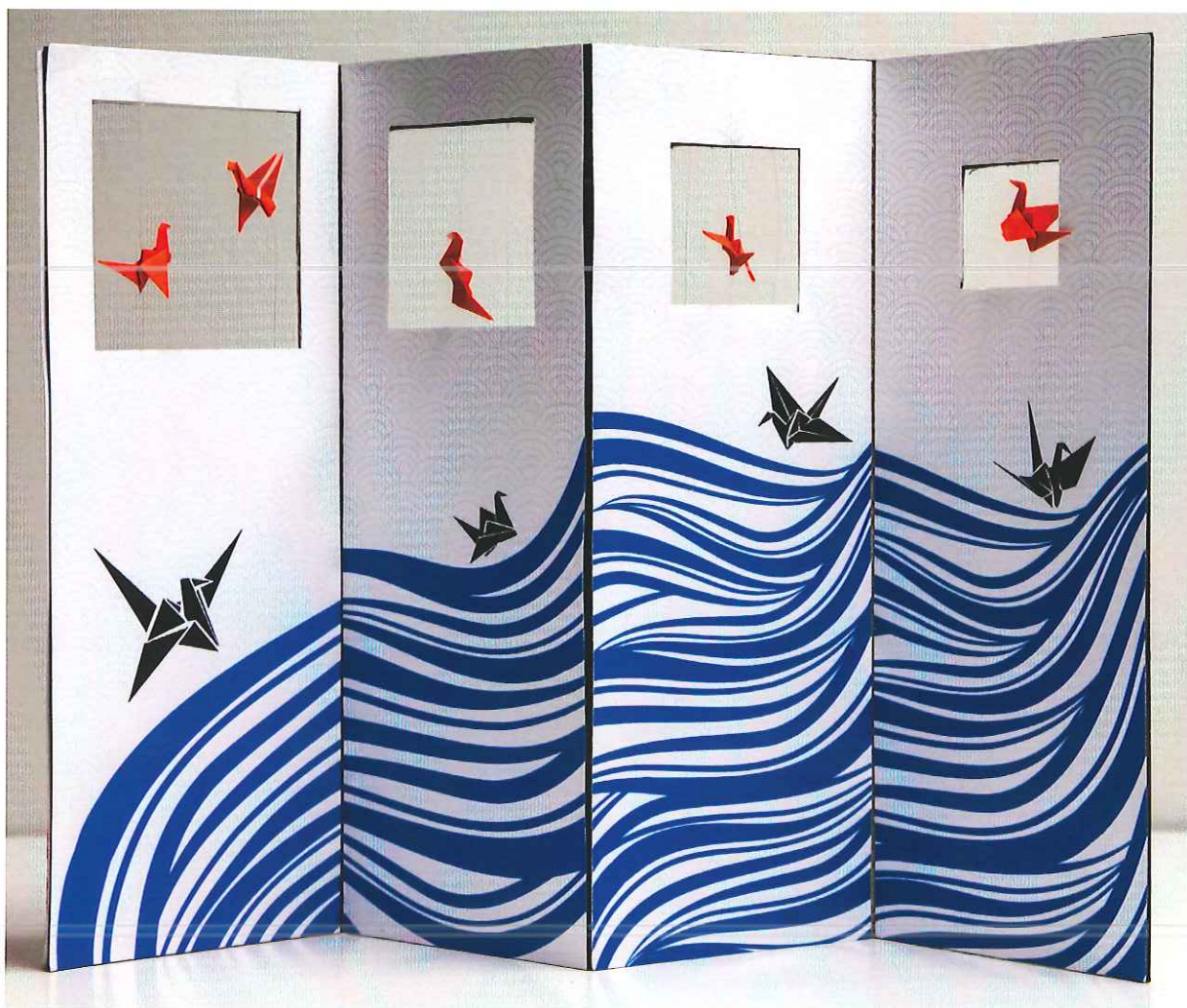




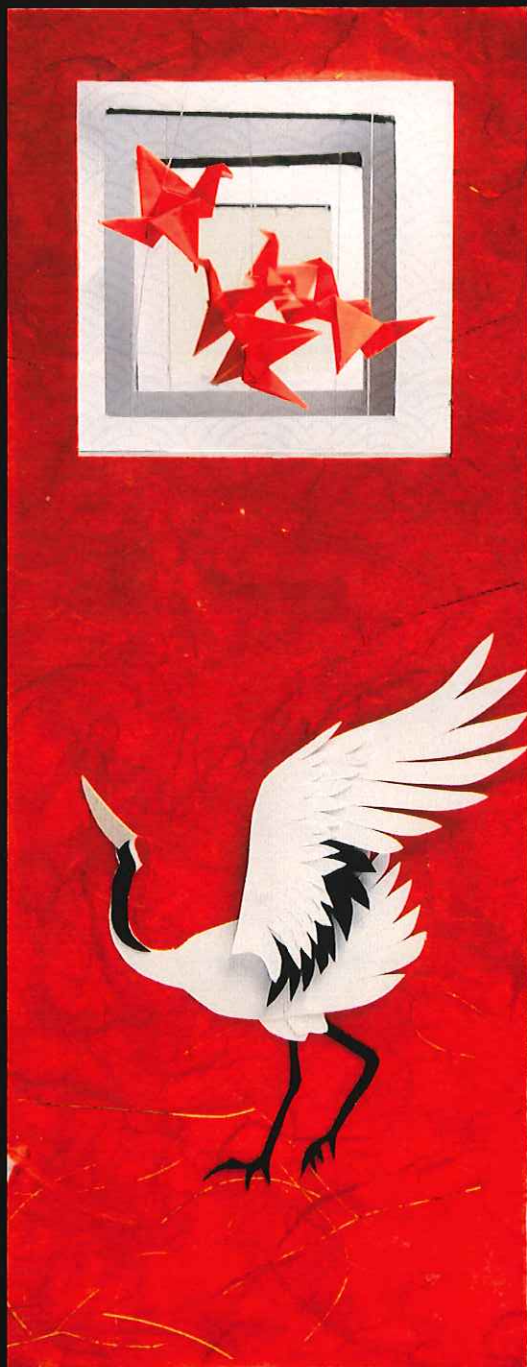
Kenzie Sitterud

The Bathroom (Respect the Cunt). Large-scale installation on bathroom fixtures





Kira Wolfson
Crane. Cut paper





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Prose

Compass

by Larysa Stachowicz



We sat on the paddle boat until the sun was long gone, replaced by a golden moon. How frustrating it must be, I thought, that they were endlessly chasing each other across the sky. But I guess that's just how life goes. I was perfectly content on that river, though. Nothing else existed at that moment other than the water and the vast city landscape that was welcoming me with open arms.

We were in Prague. It was the end of July in 2010, and the air was feverishly hot. There were crowds everywhere which is to be expected when you go to Europe during the summer. It didn't bother me much, but I guess I didn't even realize how crowded it was until we were alone on the water. Silence. I had almost forgotten what that was. Joe and I had just graduated high school, so this was the first time we were on our own. We looked young even in our attempts to appear mature, something that most 18 year olds struggle with.

I found us a great hotel right in the city centre. We weren't there much, staying out late and waking up early, as if our bodies knew that time was limited and we had to make the best of it. The afternoons were full of endless possibilities and the nights were spent on pub crawls. We paid for the first one, but after figuring out we could just tag along for free, we became masters of blending into the group. Everything was cheap. The Czech koruna went a long way with US dollars.

But my favorite part of the city was that river. The Vlatva river cut right through the middle of town, intercepted by 107 bridges from start to finish. The most famous being Charles Bridge. It

was almost impossible to walk across this time of year with all of the tourists. The craftsmen and artists had stands set up and down the entire stretch of the bridge, making the space even more claustrophobic. But like I said, we didn't care. So on our last night we decided to rent a paddle boat for an hour and go out on the river.

It was late in the evening, around 8:30, when we finally arrived at the dock and picked out our boat. A blue one, with a small area in the back that had a lantern attached. In the front were two seats with pedals and a bin where we stored food and wine. We paid the man behind the counter and he came out to assist us into our boat. Moments later we were on our way down the river, wide eyed and satisfied.

To our left was the Prague Castle. It sat perched on top of a hill with the St. Vitus Cathedral poking its head from behind. The architecture was stunning. It looked like something out of a fairytale, with medieval influences and intricate details that you could see from a mile away. To our right was the city centre. Old buildings stood next to the new, giving off a contradictory modern-antique vibe. Beer gardens lined the river, providing a great view for a cheap beer. We paddled under one bridge, then another, all of them different in some way. Everything was so beautiful, and as the world went on its busy way, we managed to hit pause on our chaotic lives. We stopped paddling to watch the sun set. The colors were so vivid, and almost instantly, the city took on an orange hue. The sky was a deep blue. A shade of blue that only exists in the moments before the sun sets. "Prague, you're such a showoff," Joe proclaimed, sarcastically. Still, he was

impressed and I knew that neither of us had experienced anything quite like this before.

We opened our bottle of wine and passed it back and forth, getting a little more drunk each time. I left my seat and decided to turn on the lantern. It gave off a mesmerizing glow that enchanted both me and the hundreds of mosquitoes that were flying around. Joe left his paddling station as well, and joined me in the back as we sat in silence. His black hair blended into our surroundings, and all I could clearly make out was the smile on his face. He took off his grey hoodie and wrapped it around me so that I could be safe from the mosquitoes. We were both awkwardly tall, almost too tall to stretch out on the boat, so we took off our shoes and dipped our toes into the river. The compass tattoo on my foot looked brighter in the water. The sun had completely set now, but the city lights kept the sky dimly lit. We didn't talk much while we were on the water, but we didn't need to. The city was telling us a story all on its own, and we were happy to listen.

Since we were in Europe, Facebook and email were our means of communication with family and friends. I checked them regularly for updates, but I often forgot since we were busy with our travels. I searched for my phone, wanting to take pictures, and I noticed I had a Facebook message and some new emails. I looked at the Facebook notification first, it was from my mom. She said to call her immediately from our hotel. *Well that's weird.* Not really thinking much of it, I began opening the emails that I had received. Again, two from my mom and two from my uncle Piotr. My uncle's were brief and just said that I should get in contact with them when I can. My mom's on the other hand, sounded more urgent and she said that an "accident" had happened. I continued reading. *Your grandpa was on the other side of the house working on fixing the sink. He was gone for a long time, so your grandma went to go check on him. She found him on the ground motionless. He's had a stroke.* My heart immediately sank, my back stiffened.

"What's wrong?" Joe looked at me noticing my reaction.

"My grandpa had a stroke...I...I don't know if he's okay," I managed to mumble back, still looking down at the words, thinking that I must have misread what she had written. We were out in the middle of a river, far from the boat dock, far from our hotel, far from a phone. I felt completely paralyzed. All of a sudden the city lights became blurry, and everything turned black. The water was cold, and it stung as droplets landed on my leg once I began rapidly paddling back. As we got closer to land, the sounds of the city grew louder. Thousands of people talking all at once. I could hear laughter and shouting coming from all of the beer gardens. People just going about their night, oblivious to how delicate life could really be.

After what seemed like an eternity, we finally managed to reach the dock. I jumped out of the boat and made way for the bridge that would take us back to the hotel. I felt nauseous and had to breathe deeply to keep myself from throwing up. My grandpa was my favorite person. My best friend. When my dad was too busy drinking or arguing with my mom, my grandpa would take me away and reassure me that everything would be alright.

When I was four, he built me a rocking horse. A brown stallion with a red saddle that I refused to share with anyone. I could never get rid of it, even after I outgrew it. When I was five he bought me a bike. I never had training wheels, because he believed they were for sissies and didn't see the point in having them. My legs and hands were cut up and bloody after that first day on my bike, but I learned how to ride it and felt tough when I was the only kid on my block without those damn training wheels.

Now I was running down the streets of Prague, thinking of these moments and pushing past crowds of tourists trying to remember the way back to our hotel. I couldn't stop the tears. My green eyes always took on a darker shade when I cried. My thin brown hair kept sticking to my face, but I was too focused on running to do anything about it. I was grateful to be wearing pants and a sweater, as the air became more crisp the later it got.

It was cold, and I began remembering my grandpa's hot and

delicious pierogies. He would patiently sit with me while I tried to learn how to shape the little dumplings. I loved the filling, and would constantly steal spoonfuls of it when my family wasn't looking. My grandma would yell at me if she saw me doing this, but my grandpa knew and always kept quiet, sometimes even sneaking a spoonful himself.

We finally found our hotel, ran inside and up the stairs to our room. I opened the door and started looking for the piece of paper with all of the important phone numbers. I started dialing. The phone kept ringing. *Pick up, pick up.*

"Hello?"

"Mom! I just got your messages! What's happening? Is he okay? Where are you? Is he at the hospital? Is he going to be alright?"

I couldn't stop talking. I was afraid to hear my mom's answers to my questions.

"He's in a stable condition. At the hospital in Krosno. Your grandma and uncle are there with him, and for now, they're just waiting."

My mom was back in America, but said she was planning on flying to Poland the next day just in case his condition worsened. She said Joe and I should take a bus to Krosno, and meet up with her and the rest of my family. I hung up the phone and began looking up bus routes. Joe starting packing our belongings, and we got on the first bus out the next morning, since it was already late and none were available at the time.

I didn't sleep much that night. The clock in our hotel room ticked and tocked with the passing seconds. I tried to just focus on the sound, hoping I could somehow lullaby myself to sleep, but nothing worked. My mind kept returning to my grandpa and everything we used to do together.

I would go on walks into town with him, holding his hand as he told me stories about dragons and far away lands. He was the best storyteller, coming up with fantastic plots and never running out of ideas. We would go the bakery on the north side of the town square, and get lots of fresh ponczki, the polish version of a doughnut. We would laugh and eat as we sat at the park. It was a weekly ritual that I never outgrew. He even flew to America to visit us for a summer. It was in 2005 when my little sister Collet was born. It was the first time he had ever been on an airplane, and the first time he had left Europe in his 60 years of living. After picking him up at the airport, we came back to the house and my mom insisted that we leave him alone so he could catch up on sleep. But I snuck into his room anyway and he stayed up, showing me all the presents he had brought.

"I know your mom doesn't like you having too much candy, but I brought you all of your favorites anyway. Hide them in your room," he smiled at me as he passed over a rather large plastic bag full of chocolates and other goodies. I hugged him.

"But don't think I forgot to bring you something special."

My eyes grew larger as I tried to peer into his suitcase and figure out what my surprise would be. He pulled out a small red box. But before handing it to me, he looked into my eyes and said, "You need to take very good care of this. It's very old, and very fragile," my face became serious and I shook my head in agreement. He handed me the present. I slowly opened the box and took the lid off. Inside was a beautiful, golden compass. It seemed to be in pristine condition, even though I knew that my grandpa had had it all of his life. It was on a thick chain, and there were designs carved into the back. It glistened as I rotated it in my hand. I was 13, and it was the first time I was ever trusted with something so special. My grandpa was obsessed with compasses. He had them all over the house, and said their purpose went beyond just giving him directions, but that they reminded him that there was a whole unexplored world out there that should never be taken for granted. I knew the one he gave me was his favorite. He kept this one by his bedside, and only really

took it out for cleaning or to look at it every now and then. "Thank you, grandpa. I won't let anything happen to this," I responded, still in awe of what was in my hand.

Joe and I got up just as the sun was rising, and checked out of our hotel early. The bus ride was 12 hours, and then we would have to switch busses in Rzeszow and take another one into Krosno. I didn't care. I just wanted to be there for the one man who had always been there for me.

We finally made it by nightfall, and I immediately requested to go to the hospital where my grandpa was. My uncle suggested we wait until the next morning since it was already getting late, but I wouldn't take no for an answer. So he took me, reminding me to keep it together.

We walked into the hospital, and I'll never forget the feeling I had in the pit of my stomach. The hospitals in Poland are nothing like they are in America. There are usually at least three people in a small room, with no curtains for privacy. The walls are bare, and the beds look more like thin foam pads placed on box springs. There is no air conditioning, and the windows don't do much in terms of cooling off the place. But the worst part is the smell. It reeks of medicine, cleaning products, pee, and sweat.

As I walked down the long hallway to where my grandpa was, I peered into the passing rooms. Everyone appeared to be defeated, either sleeping or staring at the walls trying to pass the time. Young and old patients, either waiting to die or waiting to live. We finally made it to his room, and I walked in slowly, trying to hold back the tears. My grandpa was laying on his bed, hooked up to two different machines. There was sweat gathered on his forehead from the heat, and he only had a thin sheet covering part of his body. He was wearing what looked like a diaper, since he lost control of his bladder. His skin was pale and his face appeared older than I last remembered him. His once dark brown hair was mainly grey, and he looked thin. My grandma was at his side, rubbing his hand. He couldn't talk, or move the right side of his body since the stroke affected the left side of

his brain. Looking at him laying there made me feel so helpless. I could feel tears gather in my eyes, and I had to walk out before I completely broke down in front of my grandma.

For the rest of the night, I sat there with them, just looking at him breathing. He didn't wake up, and by morning I was completely exhausted. From the bus ride to staying up all night, I felt like I was in a delusional dream. *Oh how I wish that I was.* My uncle insisted that I go home and get some sleep, and then when my mom arrived we would come back. I hesitated, but eventually agreed, since Joe was by himself anyway.

The next couple of days were spent going in and out of the hospital. We all took shifts sleeping and being by his side. He didn't wake up much, but he did look at me a few times and I could have sworn a smile appeared on his face. I would read to him, or tell him stories like he did for me when I was little. I told him about my life and that I was still taking good care of the compass he had given me. I even told him about Prague, and how that boat ride on the river was the most wonderful moment of my life. I wasn't sure if he could hear me, or if he was listening, but it made me feel better to talk to him.

One morning before the hospital, I woke up to everyone gone. Joe and I sat at the dining room table, and I thought my uncle must have gone to pick up my mom so she could come home and sleep. I waited a little while, but eventually too much time had passed and I became anxious. I dialed the cell phone number I was given. My mom answered the phone, and her voice sounded quiet and different.

"Oh, you're up." she whimpered.

"Of course I'm up, I've been up for a while now. When are you guys coming to get me?"

"You should probably sit down."

I put the phone down and collapsed onto the floor.

East of Deception

by Matthew Smith

"Looks like a twister's about to spit out up north," one young field hand said to the other.

"Yeah, hate to be stuck in Deception right now," as if he would ever want to be stuck there. The original land owner had been led to believe the land would be far more fertile, and thus the name stuck. A land dispute led to Deception lying right on top of the border line; neither country could decide who owned it, so no one did. No roads, post office, or police.

"It's headed east pretty fast, maybe it'll pass over," he said as the rabid storm front pushed its way across the horizon.

The old man pushed east. He'd found the rock Jacob was hiding under, and would arrive within minutes. The old man slid the revolver into the seat next to him; the pedal kissed the floor.

The old man left his truck up the road a ways out of sight. He walked down the middle of the dusty road. Sweat filled the canyons on his face, flowing down his cheeks and falling to the dirt forming tiny globs. The wind picked up, swirling the dust. The old man pulled back the hammer of his Colt revolver and leveled it at the house. He emptied it into the front door and ejected the spent shells; they fell to the ground as he slammed the speed

loader into the cylinder.

"Jesus Christ! You could've just rung the doorbell," a voice yelled from inside. "What the fuck do you want out here, old man? Is there something you wanted to talk to me about?"

"What's there to talk about? She's dead, and I'm going to kill you," the old man kept his sight pinned on the doorway.

"You senile old bastard, I didn't kill your damn wife. Now fuck off before you get hurt."

"It don't make a damn difference what you say, I'm not going to listen to your lies. It's time for you to pay for what you've done." The winds whipped around him.

"And why would I do that? Because a crazy old man has a death wish? Because some worn-out vigilante wants to relive his glory days? This is Deception; anything goes in the borderlands." A shot rang out from the upstairs window. The small piece of lead shattered the old man's clavicle as it drove him into the dirt. He could hear Jacob laughing from inside.

A large man pushed through the splintered door and into the fading sunlight; two other men followed him. The old man looked up and saw a rifleman still in the window. "I told you, old man,

you aren't a sheriff anymore. Your vigilante days are over. Why don't you just fucking retire like a normal person?" Jacob walked over and kicked the revolver out of reach, then knelt beside the old man. "I'm sorry all your do-gooder bullshit got her killed, but it wasn't me. Go north or south, no one cares where you go, just leave the badlands; it's not a place for law, and it sure as hell ain't a place for a sad, old man."

He turned to walk away from the old man as a second shot rang out. The old man's shot had missed his mark by about ten inches and buried itself in the top of the brute's shoulder. Jacob spun to see a small, single-shot .22 pistol at the end of the old man's working arm. "You feisty old fucker," he growled as he moved to wrench the pistol from the old man's grasp.

"Why don't you just draw on me, you coward?" the old man hissed.

"Because I have no intention of killing an unarmed and injured old man," he laughed. "I can't think of any good that would do for me. Besides, all you've done is ruin a perfectly good door and give me a funny story to tell people."

"Then give me my damn gun back. I can still use my left arm." The sky was nauseous.

"You really do have a death wish, don't you? No, I'm not going to oblige you," he said as he turned to talk toward the house. "You found your way here, I assume you can find your way back. Get the fuck out of here."

Jacob watched as the old man struggled to his feet and hobbled toward where he had left his truck, about two-hundred yards away from the house. He cranked his beat-up truck and took a breath. His shoulder was shattered, making his right arm useless. "Maybe I do have a death wish," he said as he put the truck in drive and turned toward the old, run-down farm house. The truck gained speed, bouncing along the rough driveway. The rifleman in the window hammered the truck's engine. The old man could see Jacob on the porch raising his .357 magnum; the old man cried out as the shots passed through him. The truck rolled to a stop in front of the house as the sky came down.

"Damn, I think Deception is getting hammered," the young field hand said, marveling at the malicious cyclone that had just touched down. A lightning bolt burst through its heart.

"I don't know, looks like it might've landed just to the east."

In the Heart of Dixie

by Sean Rhodes

"We believe that the best of America is in these small towns that we get to visit, and in these wonderful little pockets of what I call the real America."

--Sarah Palin, 2008

In October of 2010 I was taking a break from college and unsure if I was going to go back. My finances weren't good enough for it, and I figured if I worked hard maybe I could work my way up at some company. My mother, concerned about my predicament, suggested I go to Selma, Alabama and visit my uncle George. "You might get some perspective," she remarked.

I have traveled to Alabama plenty of times, but I've never had an extended stay in Alabama. I was going to be there for the entire month of October. I've lived in Aurora, Colorado for the past twenty years. I've encountered bits and pieces of racism in Colorado, but it's seeded and rarely sprouts. I've been told I'm very articulate, but rarely noticed more beyond that. Racism doesn't always appear to be a big problem in Colorado.

Selma, Alabama has about twenty-thousand people. Despite being a "small town" (though I'm not sure what constitutes "small") there were plenty of things obvious about Selma almost from the moment I arrived. The first and most obvious is race means something. It means something everywhere, but here there was something *symbolic* about it. All the white people live on one side of town. All the black people live on the other. There are very few Hispanics to be found and Asian Americans might as well be an endangered species. Selma is literally black and white.

There are some integrated parts of Selma, but not many. There are good and bad parts of town in both neighborhoods. My father grew up in Selma and the first thing he told me when he found out I was going was I couldn't go out at night. "When the sun goes down, stay inside. You can take walks at night in Denver or Aurora and be okay, but in Selma it's a lot more dangerous." I'd always heard that small towns were fine. I'd always heard that small towns were relatively safe. This flew in my face when my father told me otherwise. I thought he was just being a bit harsh. Surely, I thought, Selma would've changed since my father was a child. After all, Dad had been away from Selma for over thirty years. I came to discover he was right. My uncle George told me the same thing. To make this point clear, Uncle George had an alarm system installed in his home because he was robbed once. Uncle George, by the way, lives on the "good" side of the black neighborhood (he's very close to the interracial part of Selma, which means he's in the "safe" part of town).

My uncle feels safe in Selma, but he makes no bones about how bad it can be at night. There are gangs that run the streets and people who would blow your head off for a pound of coke. They rarely go to the "good" side of town.

Selma was supposed to be safe and free of the problems of the big city. This was the America that I'd been told about by countless politicians (particularly on the political right).

After a week in Selma, when the shock settled down, my Uncle had an idea for me. It was time for a history lesson. I should say, it was time for several history lessons. My lesson began with the

Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma. This was the sight of Bloody Sunday. A march took place from Selma to Montgomery. The march started at this bridge on March 7, 1965. That was Bloody Sunday where several African Americans were injured and some killed. The march ended in Montgomery on March 25, 1965. Bloody Sunday was all about the right to vote. My uncle took part in this. "To a white man," my uncle told me, "the right to vote is just there. They can throw it away. It's not like that for us." The word *us* was astonishing. "Too many people died for your right to vote, Sean. It may not seem important to vote, but *someone* died so that you could." He was right. Someone did die for it. Excluding black people from the electoral process was so important that it was perfectly justifiable to kill people for it. When I think about how my white friends casually say voting doesn't matter, my first thought is always: *your ancestors didn't die fifty years ago trying to make sure you could*. The freedom to vote—a freedom I enjoy—is a freedom that my friends never realized they took for granted, because it's one that was always there. Mine had to be earned. I never realized I took it for granted, but when you learn about Bloody Sunday, and how blacks marched for the right to vote (and how many died for it) it suddenly becomes clear why I, as an African American, have to vote.

Since we began at this bridge, the next logical step was to travel to Montgomery. I was going to get a chance to go to the city. At least what Alabama refers to as the city. My uncle wanted to spend one day of my trip in Montgomery. Despite being a city, it still has a small town feel.

This is where history and the present collide. In Montgomery, the racial divide is less noticeable. The attitudes, however, are still quite present. People will smile at you and be polite, but even Montgomery is still segregated. All across the parks in Montgomery there are signs reminding people who pass by that someone marched here. Someone protested here. Someone fought for their rights here. I wonder how much tension Montgomery really has that the place needs a constant reminder of the struggle that happened here. When I was standing in Montgomery, I realized I knew only about as much as the white student who sat next to me in my high school American History

class. A mere textbook does not begin to do the civil rights movement justice.

My uncle is aware of this. Our most important stop in Montgomery was to visit the Civil Rights Memorial Center. This memorial is there for forty people who died fighting for equal rights. This memorial is not just for black people. There were plenty of white men and women who died too. When the liberties of one group are suppressed, it's everyone's problem.

The first thing you notice when you walk into this memorial center is that there is intense security everywhere. You have to check all your metal and you can't bring any guns. A security guard will then scan you with his wand and you get to walk inside. The tour always begins with your guide pointing at a clock on the wall.

In 1983, the center was bombed by the Ku Klux Klan. The clock shows what time the bomb went off. The center still receives bomb threats on a daily basis and has been the subject of protest.

There are many exhibits inside. The most astonishing is the one dedicated to Emmett Till. He was a young black teenager from Chicago who was in Mississippi. He was murdered for whistling at a white woman. Except he wasn't whistling at a white woman. His attackers only perceived that he was. Emmett Till was nervous. When Emmett Till was nervous he had been taught to whistle. This got him killed. He was beaten to death. Emmett Till was only fourteen years old. They had pictures of him before he was beaten, and pictures of him after. The beating was so brutal and horrifying that he is unrecognizable.

The Civil Rights Memorial has several stories and clippings that show racial violence. I even found one that was from Denver, Colorado. A black man was beaten to death because he was, apparently, not in the right country. I do not remember the date on the article, but it was in the early 2000s. I was alive when this happened. I was not only alive, but walking the streets of Denver when this happened.

Before leaving the Civil Rights Memorial they hand you a pamphlet. The Civil Rights Memorial is about much more than just rights for African Americans. They fight homophobia and gender discrimination, as well as discrimination against white people from minority hate groups. On this pamphlet they show you where you can find hate groups located in the United States. It is no surprise that the majority are located in the South. But the reality is that they are everywhere. Finally, there is a "Wall of Tolerance." On this wall, you can sign your name. It stays there. Forever. If you ever go to the Civil Rights Memorial in Montgomery, Alabama, look for the name Sean Rhodes. I have pledged to be tolerant of you.

As if Montgomery wasn't enough, a week later, Uncle George decided I needed to spend a day in Birmingham too. There is hardly a place that is a better representation of the civil rights movement than Birmingham. In the 1960's the city was referred to as Bombingham. I went to three places. The first was the very jail cell Martin Luther King Jr. sat in when he wrote his famous, "Letter From a Birmingham Jail." The second was visiting the 16th Street Baptist Church. This church was bombed on September 15, 1963. Four little girls were killed

The 16th Street Baptist Church was a meeting ground for Civil Rights activists where they planned marches and protests. It's no wonder it was bombed. The church was rebuilt and now stands tall, but what the church symbolizes is the horror of what the civil rights movement was. It was a war, and the 16th Street Baptist Church was another target.

Across the street from the church is the Civil Rights Museum. Of my entire stay in Alabama, nothing quite struck me like this museum. The sights of it were overwhelming to take in. We went to an exhibit that showed a dramatization of Rosa Parks refusing to move from her seat. We also saw film footage of black men, women and children getting sprayed by hoses. There was a whole portion about the Little Rock 9 and a video about the Freedom Riders. We also saw lunch counters where black people were once not allowed to sit. There were some fun things as well. We

got to see a brief history of black music. The most fascinating of all of these was seeing a historically black barber shop (according to Uncle George, the Barber Shop was no laughing matter. It was where the community really came together to gossip and truly be free). We even got to see an example of a "black" classroom. Instead of a picture of George Washington hanging up, however, it was Abraham Lincoln. Figures like Frederick Douglas and Booker T. Washington were meant to be idolized by African-Americans. Idolized by me. It was such a huge museum that I've made it a point to go back again. It's important.

Of all the things I saw at this museum, however, none was more important than going to the place that is meant to teach us all that racism still happens. I can only remember one thing about this exhibit.

I'd always seen the Ku Klux Klan in movies and in television shows. They are portrayed as something of a joke. Evil to the core, yes, but still a group that is meant to be mocked and laughed at. In films like *Bad Boys II* and *Django Unchained* they are portrayed as pathetic and ignorant. But when you stand there, seeing a robe in person you realize it is not a joke. There has been nothing scarier to me than looking at this Ku Klux Klan robe. Nothing. When I think about what a man in this robe does and that I'm hated, it's scary. When I think of this white robe, the first thought is a faceless man who wants me dead. Except I don't know this attacker's face. Behind the white robe could be anyone. It's as though the robe is meant to project my worst nightmares onto. It's faceless, but a powerful image nonetheless. In this museum it's lifeless, but still menacing.

There is a burned cross with the robe. Whoever wore this robe had ignited this cross. The robe itself was donated anonymously by the FBI. Knowing what the robe represents and to know that it is still worn by members to this day sends a shiver down my spine. Every time I think about that robe I am reminded that racism is a reality.

Of all the things about Birmingham, that is the most important. My uncle sympathized. I saw a robe. My uncle saw the actions.

When we returned to Selma, my uncle had one more thing to show me. We took a three mile drive out to the school house he once went to as a child. Here it stood tall, but my uncle told me it was once burned down by the Ku Klux Klan (no one was inside when they burned it down). In the past, simple things such as the right to vote, sit anywhere on a bus and even get an education were things I wasn't meant to have. Things I have taken for granted. When I saw my uncle's old school house, I decided to go back to school. My uncle's schoolhouse was much more than just a schoolhouse when I learned it had once burned down. In America, an African American *needs* an education. At one point in history, we were lucky to have one.

Alabama is in your face with this history. Everywhere you go there are monuments, museums, statues and cemeteries to remind you of the history.

When I flew back to Colorado, I was, in reality, flying back to a world that made sense to me, but with a new perspective.

My best friend of twenty years is white. But the way he sees the world and the way I do are different. His history is filled with privileges and rights his relatives did not have to fight for. My history is filled with people who didn't really have an idea of what the American Dream was because we were still fighting to be recognized as Americans instead of something "other."

When I returned to Colorado, the world made sense again. Having white friends is no big deal. Racial tensions are smaller (but never non-existent) and the constant reminder of a difficult history isn't everywhere you look. Ever since my time in Alabama I've often wondered if Colorado is better because we lack racial tension or worse because Alabama's terrible history remains primarily in Alabama. This moment in American history has passed. As is customary for America, we let it pass and only make a cursory glance at it every now and then; thinking that because it's passed it's over. As time goes by the country lets the past rest in the past. We then feel good because we let blacks and other minorities have their right to vote, their right to an education and

their right to be integrated. We then write history to celebrate the part where we did something good, while slowly letting the part where we did something bad dissolve like pulp in water. It gets mentioned, but the struggle and the horror are never emphasized. Not when we get to pat ourselves on the back at the end of the lesson by saying, "We eventually did the right thing." We then use this as an excuse to say, "Racism doesn't exist anymore," or remark that it's no longer a big deal anymore.

Alabama doesn't hide the terrible things that happened during this era, and isn't afraid to remind you that sometimes terrible things still happen. Colorado may not be overt in its racism, but Alabama doesn't try to pretend the issue of race has been solved or that it is non-existent. Alabama will never be able to escape this history. America shouldn't either.

Billy

by D. Joseph

Billy strolled down the hallway grinning, note in hand and smug in the fact that he had done good. Mrs. Dixon had given him the note and told him to take it immediately to the school office. As he passed the tiny statue of the Eiffel tower on his way out of the classroom, it occurred to him that he must be getting an award of some kind, perhaps a medal or something. At six and a half, Billy felt an overwhelming confidence as to his greatness over the entire first grade.

Billy's visit to the school office proved to be a different story. Miss Priss, the school secretary, became angry while reading the note. Billy could tell by her narrowing eyes and tight puckered lips. She seemed offended by his smile and promptly told him to wipe it off his face. When she asked him to explain himself, Billy got less than one word out before being told to be quiet and sit and wait for Dr. Stern, the principal.

Once Dr. Stern pulled Billy into his office he asked him to explain what he had done. Billy tried to speak, but Dr. Stern launched into a heated rant about the standards of his school. When Dr. Stern was done yelling, all red-faced and sweaty, Billy began to talk but was told that he had said enough already.

After Mother's arrival at Dr. Stern's office, Billy was asked to explain himself again. All Billy could get out were the words "social studies" before he became a blubbering incoherent ball of tears. He said, "France...and...and...words...and...um...Aunt Rose," but his mother didn't seem to understand. Dr. Stern finally told Billy to repeat what he had said in class. He did. Mother's

expression resembled Miss Priss complete with those puckered lips as she grabbed Billy's arm and dragged him to the car. The whole way home Mother berated Billy. She screamed threats about when Father comes home, but Billy was sure Father would listen.

When Father arrived home he was quickly intercepted by Mother. Billy had been blocked from explaining anything. In fact, Father got a lecture as well; somehow Mother had blamed him. Billy still wanted to talk, but Father didn't want to listen. Billy's punishment was quick, harsh and painful. He had no supper unless you count the soap. He was told to sit in his room and think about what he had said.

Sitting alone in his room, Billy wondered what Aunt Rose had meant. He could still see her at that party, standing there in her purple paisley muumuu, cigarette in one hand, cocktail in the other. She had expelled a new word, new at least to Billy. It was an odd word, a fantastic word, this "F" word. Billy remembered how Aunt Rose had smiled at him and waved her hand through the air as if to wipe the word away. Billy was sure she had said, "Pardon my French."

The Ovarian Mausoleum

by Jonathan Hotard-Resch

It certainly was not the first home of an infamous killer that Marian had toured.

She had endured the over-eager realtor, the musty odor of an aging shotgun house, its contents and its macabre history for three rooms so far. She had stared bravely into the kitchen, unaffected by the unusually life-like pearlescent plastic heads glued to every shelf in every cabinet. Her unusual constitution allowed her to ignore their anguished faces. Likewise, she easily s`tomached the basement filled with similarly plastic hands. The subterranean ocean of every gesture and manoeuver known just did not bother her that much. She was rather *gifted* at this kind of thing, to say the least.

It wasn't until the master bedroom that she began to feel any semblance of real spookiness from the place. The realtor unlocked the door and carefully pushed it open with a cautious touch, as though this room were something to be handled with a white gloves and stored beneath a glass dome for exhibition only. It was filled with plastic babies.

"Well, I liked the *décor* in the kitchen, but I'm not so sure about this room..." She was there to find something, but this was definitely not it.

Marcus, the realtor, acknowledged her sentiment with a knowing nod which seemed to also suggest some kind of misplaced amusement, the kind that somehow eroded Marian's trust in the ability of the rather vertically unimpressive man's bright green

blazer to confer upon him technical proficiency in real estate brokerage.

"Yes, this neotenous ornamentation is less cozy than one might expect..."

Marian barely noticed the remainder of the realtor's explanation. There was something she keenly disliked about the room and being stared at by all those tiny plastic faces. There must have been hundreds of the infant dolls in there, and their glossy, judging eyes were just a little too life-like to be relegated to status of children's toys. They were nothing at all like the empty-eyed heads in the Kitchen which could have passed for mall mannequins by comparison – or perhaps, at the very least, somewhat *upset-seeming* mall mannequins. The babies were positioned with their unusually realistic faces gazing toward her and their bodies stacked in alternating left-right, head-foot order, all the way to the ceiling on three sides of the room like an aging pile of magazines and expired coupon circulars blotting out the hideous wood panel wainscot of a hoarder's bedroom. One wrong move and one could very well find themselves buried in an avalanche of polystyrene infants.

"...Yes, it is quite the *collection*, isn't it?" Marc agreed, for he had no intention of hiding the infamy or bizarre pastimes of the home's previous occupant. And why would he? It was its primary selling point. "...The *infamous*, so-called *Repli-Killer* used her dwindling inheritance and vast, ill-gotten credit lines for more than just rendering the likeness of her victims in 3D-printed plastic," Marc proudly explained as though all of this was just

a circus for him – because it totally was. “*Since age seventeen, she practiced the peculiar habit of collecting the debris from her lunular blooms in mason jars, cryogenically stored so that she could have the likenesses of her unrequited children genetically extrapolated from them, and upon their biological cessation, they were ultimately realized into this magnificent monument of menopause, my dear Marian!*”

His explanation did nothing to quell her discomfort (nor was it intended to), but she had made it this far into the tour, and was determined to finish it. “...But then, wouldn’t these just represent clones?” Marian asked. “...and why dolls? I mean, if she had such extensive access to all those body parts and wanted a child so badly it seems to me that ... oh...ugh...” Marian paused as she became too nauseated at the thought.

“*Procured a pregnancy?*” Marc leaned awkwardly to the side as the grin on his face expanded, “...from the flash-frozen, fleshy loins of her vic...”

“Stop! Ok. Yes. *That.*” Marian’s outstretched hand cancelled the remainder of his description. “Why didn’t she just do that? She seems like the type...”

“Despite recent history recalling an *unusual* upsurge of human necrophilia around 2009, when much of her *activities* took place...” he said, much to Marian’s distaste, “the late *Repli-Killer* herself was not known to be a fan of Stephenie Meyer.”

“*Alright, I get it!*” Marian nearly shouted, hoping to curtail further

elaboration on that tangent. “But these dolls are based on clones. They represent children that would have been genetically identical to her. They’re all basically the same single doll... Why so many?”

Marc clasped his hands together. “Precisely! *Vanity*, my dear Marian, is a polystyrene parthenogenetic collage of *all* of one’s own unborn clones.”

“...my god.”

“Mmhmm, yes,” Marc inspected his fingernails. He always enjoyed how the guests would react *more* to the Baby Room than other portions of the property such as the Torso Garden, the Head Kitchen or even the Basement of Hands. The entire place had the appearance of a mannequin massacre despite the very real nature of the victims the printed plastic body bits represented. “*Do you still wish to continue, Ms. Marian?*”

“Of course!” Marian managed to say with less hesitation than she wanted.

“*Very well.* Next, you may have noticed that every door handle in the hall features a somewhat... *anatomical* shape...I suspect that you probably know why by now.”

Marian threw him an irritated glance. “Anything else?”

“*Of course!*” Marc continued down the hall. “Please watch your step, the rug becomes quite shaggy. It is the original.”

"I can hardly tell," Marian noted. "It's so clean..."

"... for a rug of this vintage? Why, yes. I suppose it is. Now, for our final feature of the tour, if you will notice in this closet, there are about a dozen bags of hair, all of it belonging to the late Repli-Killer herself, and surreptitiously collected by her since age seventeen, and I am both *obliged* and obligated by state law to inform you that it is precisely one-hundred percent *real*."

Marian's face lit up with excitement.

He sighed heavily and added, "I suppose the crafting possibilities here are *endless*."

"*Finally*. I could make a scarf... or ten!" she added while cheerfully wringing her hands.

"*I was kidding...*"

"...So was I."

"Yes...*of course, Madam*."

"Well, I must say that I appreciate your time!" Marian proclaimed.

"This has been almost everything I hoped it could be. But, I should discuss this with my sister before we make any decisions..."

Marc's face lit up with the possibility of moving one step closer to a sale while Marian made her call outside, just out of earshot. She kept the strange little man in the lime green blazer in sight

through the sliding glass door, for his self-satisfied smile actually managed to concern her more than anything she had seen in the tour.

"Miranda," she said into her phone, "I think I've found our mother..."

Notes from the Subway

by Paul Joda

It's Wednesday, my only day off. I'm basically broke, so today I will spend a nice chunk of my rare free time traveling from my apartment in Astoria to Williamsburg to pick up a paycheck my former boss refuses to mail to me. A failed painter turned Texas style smokehouse restaurant owner, his hobbies included berating his staff in public for minor mistakes (too much broth in the collard greens) and expecting, without thanks, that same staff to cover for his much larger mistakes (failure to order enough food for service). Yet he seemed shocked at the kitchen staff's mass exodus a few months ago. I stuck around as long as I could, attempting to bridge the gap between new and old cooks, but I ultimately inherited the ire meant for the already departed. Now I get to go and see this man again, whose last exchange with me included more cuss words than regular ones; a wonderful way to spend my one day off.

I descend a narrow cement staircase beneath the "Steinway Station" sign. Herds of commuters walk past on my left, heading toward their above ground destinations. Stacks of people move fluidly both in front of and behind me. At the bottom of the stairs, I reach for my wallet, pull out my MetroCard and swipe it at the turnstile. The small electronic display below the card-swipe tells me I have \$1.75 left after this trip. *Shit, not enough to get home.* There's no room here for me. I'm just another body pushing through the underground, back and forth from home to work and work to home, all just to pay rent. I used to think the subway had a romance to it. I had seen it in movies and TV shows. I had ridden it as a child on family visits to the city. It was like a teleportation device. You would go beneath the surface of the earth, enter into a metal tube, and be rushed to another location. Upon

your emergence back into the daylight, you would find yourself somewhere entirely new.

When I moved here I had more of a working class pride in the subway. We were the ones who couldn't afford cars, or cabs. We traveled through the tunnels winding below millions of footsteps. Those tunnels were the veins of this city, and we were the blood. That idealism has worn thin at this point, however. The poetic vision of my role in the NYC landscape took its first big hit when I found that if no one is sitting in one particular seat of an otherwise crowded subway car, it is not your lucky day. It means there is mystery fluid on that seat, a lesson I learned in the hardest of ways. Then there are the musicians; musician in the station equals good, musician in the train equals bad. There are few things as unpleasant as an accordion in your ear as you try to fight the hung-over urge to vomit while the car lists from side to side, passing through the tunnel from Queens to Manhattan. I am not the lifeblood of this city, just a traveler trying to survive it.

I walk onto the Manhattan-bound platform. The G train isn't running so I have to take the R to Lexington Av./59th St. From there I'll catch the 4 or the 5 to 14th St-Union Station. Then I'll switch to the L, which will take me to Bedford Av. in Williamsburg. I walk away from the dense cluster of humanity at the end of the platform. Most people crowd the front or back cars of the train in order to limit the walking distance from train to exit at their destination. I don't mind walking a few extra steps, so I'm usually able to find some room to breathe around the center of the platform. I get as far away as I can in the subway stations for two primary reasons. First, space is hard to come by in this city, and any moment

you have the freedom to pace and move without obstacles is a moment meant to be cherished. Second, there are crazy people down here, and I am terrified of some lunatic sneaking up behind me and pushing me onto the tracks below. Today my fellow commuters have left me ample room to roam on my own. I stroll past the tiled walls decorated with lazy Sharpie graffiti and movie posters. A train on the opposite tracks pulls in to deliver more souls on their routine journey, and to pick up fresh ones to carry deeper into Queens. The screech of its brakes fills the air, and it pushes a gust of wind past me, cooling the sweat on my forehead, which is ever-present in these summer months.

As the train pulls away, quiet returns to the station, but only for a moment. Then a faint squeak tickles the inside of my ear. At first I think nothing of it. There are plenty of random, nondescript noises one encounters on daily subway travels, but the squeak becomes louder. It sounds like it is being made with purpose, and it is coming closer to me. I look to my left, toward the empty end of the platform, and I see a rat, galloping towards me (NYC rats gallop). His big blonde/brown haired body bounds towards me, his cord of a tail waves behind him. My initial reaction is to freeze, a faulty defense mechanism. My shoulders pull backwards, lifting my elbows to the middle of my torso. My wrists bend forward and my fingers curl and lock creating unintentional claws out of my hands. When he is about ten feet away I find the courage to stomp my foot at him, but his charge continues with an unwavering courage I have only seen in the movie *Braveheart*. I pivot off my left foot, and sprint toward an empty bench. The rodent persists, scampering at my heels, as I jump onto the bench. I look through

the gaps between wood slats at the rat running in circles beneath me. A few of the travelers at the other end of the platform look at me with a grin. As I plan my escape, a Manhattan bound R train thuds into the station and the rat warrior retreats behind a trash can. As soon as the train doors open I leap from the bench and run inside...*rat attack averted.*

The quality of the train depends on which line you're riding. The R trains are some of the oldest. The lights flicker and the PA system used to announce stops is unrecognizable. There isn't much of a community down here. It's every man, woman or child for themselves. Eye contact is rare, and conversations are reserved for those lucky enough to have a travel companion. Some people read, others listen to music and most play video games on their cell phone (Sudoku books still make an occasional appearance). Everyone is busy here. We all have places to go and important errands to run during our irregular and fleeting "free time."

The train bobs and sways through the tunnel into Manhattan.

I transfer to the 5 at Lexington Av./59th St. I find a seat between two "Manhattan-looking" riders. The man to my left is wearing a well-tailored blue suit, with a crisp white oxford shirt and a blue knit tie. His shoes are clean, almond-colored wingtips. His hair looks expensively cut and styled. The man to my right is a clone of the man on my left, except his suit, tie and shoes are black. A young woman sits in the row of seats across from me. She wears suede high heeled half boots, a mint green chiffon summer dress and a faded blue denim jacket. Her skin is pale and unblemished.

Her light brown hair has a soft, natural curl and falls neatly over her shoulders. She reads a copy of *Slaughterhouse Five* and reminds me of a pleasant aspect of riding the rails. I often fall in love on the subway. I comb through my bag, looking for an interesting book so she might fall in love with me too, but all I've got are a couple notebooks and empty Hi-Chew wrappers. I decide to write, hoping she'll take notice.

The train pulls into Union Square and it's time for me to transfer again, and to leave my Vonnegut soul mate behind, but as I stand to exit, she does too. I walk quickly and with clear destination to make sure she doesn't think I'm a wandering tourist. She's behind me, and I cannot tell if she is going to L, but I suppose fate will decide. If she shows up on the Brooklyn bound L platform I will talk to her, about Kurt and WWII, and how good she looks in mint green. She'll give me the courage I need to face my fiery old boss and bold rats. We'll conquer a little piece of New York together, and I'll finally find some room here.

I arrive to the platform just as the L train pulls in. I look over my shoulder for her before I step into the railcar, but she's not there. The subway rattles and shakes through the tunnel into Brooklyn underneath a river I've already crossed under once today, and I'll have to do it two more times before I'm done.

I climb the stairs out of the Bedford station and walk six blocks to my former place of employment. I walk in to see several unfamiliar faces. I ask the guy behind the bar if I can talk to Jeff.

"Jeff's not in. Can I help you with something?"

"I just need to pick up my last check."

The guy gets my name, walks to the back room, and returns with an envelope with my name on it.

"Thanks."

All that and I don't even get one last battle with Jeff. He refused to mail my check and didn't even have the courage to confront me when I came to pick it up. I guess the rats have more courage than many of the people here. I'll just head to the bank and deposit the check so I can refill my MetroCard to get back onto the subway, where I will likely fall in love again, and say nothing.

Snuffed Magnolias

by Sal Christ

My wide, flat nose was what had attracted her most—she always said it cast me as a younger, paler version of some New Age guru. As far as I was concerned, though, a divorce was not an option. Of course, for divorce to serve as an option a marriage had to happen first.

Karin and I had lived together for three years at that point and she was the solution to my mother's blathering about a grandchild. *Your sister already has a child, Herb. Your mother needs to know your father won't be lost to his grave.* My mother thinks talking in third person with her thick Turkish accent somehow makes everything more serious. After my first divorce, I was aware it would continue until I married Karin.

You don't remember me, but I remember you. The redhead had thrust her hand into mine at the studio about a year before. Young. Twenty-three. Flattery, flirtation, oh, I remember that dizzying glance. Herb at twenty-three hadn't existed in fifteen years, but what did it matter? Did Karin matter? Does she matter?

But, yes, the redhead. Her nose was not so wide and flat in the beginning—a piece of ivory with its upward dipping tip set between the eyes. A complete contrast to the nose she liked.

But then her nose was wide and flat and not so white. I keep the garnet she wore on her right hand in my left pocket. An engagement ring for a wedding she'd never walked the aisle for. *He died. It's why I took time off.* Of course, I was never walking down the aisle for her—she must have known that.

Women and their expectations.

I passed her in the parking lot one dusky afternoon, sweat spotting her forehead like dew after a spring rain. She smelled like magnolias in the humid heat of Atlanta summers. I hadn't exactly thought to tell her I was moving back to Atlanta. That I was marrying. Half thinking I could and should ask her to come with me, the moment passed and then we were embracing goodbye. *See you soon, keep in touch.* Touch, I finally touched the hair that hooked the light and then I touched her lips to mine and that's where it started.

It was nothing more than a kiss or a conversation between glances or my hand on the small of her back and I knew it was too late three months later when we sat at the deli and Karin showed up. I knew that she knew who Karin was and it was enough.

But then, weeks later, a summer thunderstorm clouded low and twisted us together on a sidewalk near the studio and like rain, tears sweated down the sides of her face. *Let me drive you home.* It was a simple offer she took me up on and I can't tell you why I did it—smashed that nose all over the seats of my car, smashed that face until it was shades darker than her hair.

Getting rid of the car was easier than getting a divorce. Almost cheaper, too.

Why I'm thinking about that now, I don't know. Her ring is still in my pocket and Karin's waiting at the church. Probably with magnolias.

The Smiler with the Knife

by David Ebel

Annabel Leaf stood next to the craft services table in her kimono, tapping a varicolored roll of script pages against her thigh and wondering how they were going to kill her. Not her, of course. Her character: Jessica. Jessica Virago, a dame in the Joan Crawford mold, in this picture mostly to drag hardboiled private eye Brick Thompson down into the film's tangled intrigue. She (Annabel) didn't know how the thing ended: the set in front of her was Jessica's last stop. The whole show was now waiting for writer Tim England to churn out Jessica's death scene.

Melody Uckwelt, dumpy but cheerful makeup girl, walked by the table and waved. Annabel smiled her thousand-watt movie star smile back.

Four months previous, MGM had made her a "featured player" in their stable of actors. They paid her \$400 a week to appear exclusively in MGM productions. She had already been in two pictures, and though she had yet to smooch Clark Gable onscreen, she could sense bigger and better things coming her way. Even rumors about the year the studio had just gone through (and some big deal Supreme Court case) couldn't knock her optimism. She would just give every scene her level best, and the studio couldn't help but keep her around.

The Director Reinhard Kershwitz had cast her in his latest detective-melodrama, *A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing*. He was sitting, facing the set in his canvas director's chair, within a cane's reach of aggrieved production assistant Nico Falzatoli. Annabel never saw The Director standing; he was always perched in his chair like a one-eyed vulture, boots and eyepatch shining obsidian. Nor had

Annabel ever seen The Director speak. Actually, she had seen him speak, just never heard. Every directorial dictate was channeled through Nico's mouth. When The Director wanted anything done, "Action!" called or notes given to actresses or orders given to the master carpenter, he would crook his ever-present cane's handle around Nico's neck and tug the boy to him, whisper a terse command into his ear, and the tiny Italian would parrot his words. Annabel had heard that The Director actually spoke out loud to the Head of the Studio, and, when the spirit moved him, would yell "Cut!" to end a scene - but part of her refused to believe it.

The set was a room with three walls and two doors, made up in the studio's cheap approximation of "New York City stylish" and drenched in light, looking oddly tiny in the hangar-like space of the otherwise pitch-black and empty sound stage. It reminded Annabel of a doll's house, left open on the floor of a dark attic. The image unnerved her.

Boom Operator Mike passed Annabel by. She smiled at him too, but the kind look was not returned; the tall man merely grabbed a donut off the craft's table and walked away.

"It was you! You've been behind this whole thing! You were the one who had me hire Brick. You sent him on that wild goose chase after Harry!"

Turnsley held up his hands in mock surrender. "You got me."

The Director still sat, his canvas chair just outside the glow of the

klieg lights, his one eye darting between the two actors, making sure his machine was running smoothly.

"You animal, when Brick finds out what you've been up to, he's gonna. . ."

"Gonna what, Ms. Virago?" Turnsley grinned maliciously. "Oh, I see. You're still under the delusion that our detective friend is about to burst through the door and save you, aren't you? I hate to disappoint a woman so beautiful, but Brick Thompson has . . . another engagement this evening. I've made sure of it."

Actually, Brick Thompson was there, standing on the other side of the camera from The Director. Not Brick, but the actor playing him, Stanley Turtledove. Annabel was surprised to see Stanley there; it was unusual for an actor so self-centered to be on set when he wasn't needed. Yet there he was, part of the line of crewmembers watching the action. Annabel noticed there were more spectators for this scene than usual, but she hadn't time to dwell on it.

"Fiend!" she said. "You almost had me fooled, but I can see you clearly now. You're just a pimp, a user. You play with people like they were toys and you don't care if some of those toys break. Heck, you break 'em yourself, just because, just to get your sick thrills, you. . ."

"Cut!" Nico yelled offstage.

There was a flurry of activity. Make-up Melody had to retouch Annabel and Iain (Bennings, playing villain Arthur Turnsley), who, between the blinding kliegs and the fire roaring in the set's hearth, had both done some serious sweating during the scene. The fire was relit. Nico came onstage to guide the actors to their marks for the next shot. The props master brought Iain a golden fire poker.

"Nico, what does The Director want me to do after I get stabbed?" Annabel asked.

"I dunno, Ms. Leaf," the PA replied without looking. He retook his spot next to The Director. The cane handle grappled him, and Nico squeaked, "Roll camera!"

Annabel was not ready for this. "Um, Mr. Kershwitz? What do I do after I get stabbed?"

The cane whapped Nico's elbow, and he said, "Roll sound!"

"Mr. Kershwitz?" she asked again.

Cane. "Action!"

Iain stared at the poker pointing down at the floor. "Did you know I used to be a fencer? Internationally ranked. Foils, mostly, but I can make do."

Annabel took a beat, putting on a face that would read as "terror." It helped to imagine that she really was in her character's place, with no film crew around. The scene was for real; she closed the "fourth wall" and believed she was in mortal peril. "You. . . you wouldn't. . ."

Iain shot a short look at The Director, who inclined his head slightly. With a tight grip on the fire poker, Iain lunged at Annabel, jamming the poker's point into her abdomen. She emitted a shocked cry. He took the point out.

Annabel clutched her stomach, her hand feeling damp, insides burning with pain.

"Cut!" Nico called.

The line of spectators shifted as two grips moved the camera onstage. Annabel, doubled over, took a few labored steps away from her mark, searching the line of shadowed faces for help, any acknowledgment that something was wrong, but no one was moved. Nico came over and gently led her back to her place by the wall. Iain stood with the camera over his shoulder, examining

the bloody point of the fire poker. Nico told sound and picture to roll. "Action!"

Iain stabbed her again. The second time hurt worse than the first. "Stop!" she screamed. "Fucking stop, I'm hurt!" No one paid her any attention.

They did another camera set-up, this time shooting Iain head-on. Nico held a struggling Annabel in place while they set up the camera, then darted out of frame to call "action." There was a third thrust to the gut. Annabel choked. Tears anointed her cheeks. "Why? Why are you doing this? You fucking . . . bastards. . ." A fit of coughing cut her off, and she fell to her knees.

Finally, there was some movement from the spectators. The line broke in two and a short man in a white suit approached the set. "Please, keep the gutter-talk off my stage," he said. He walked over and knelt next to Annabel's crumpled form.

"Do you know me? Do you know who I am?" he asked her. She made a sound. "Well, just in case you don't, I'm Louis B. Mayer. That last 'M' in 'MGM'? That stands for 'Mayer.'" He jabbed his finger at every 'M' sound. "I run this company, I run this shoot, and I'm sorry to be the one to tell you, dollface, but we're letting you go."

"Wha . . . what?"

"We're cancelling your contract. Now, now, don't feel poorly; you've done some fine work here. But, see, 1948 was a terrible year for the company. The people out there, they don't love the movies like they used to. Like we do. What with television, the fucking Supreme Court trying to divest our theatres; you understand, right? Last hired, first fired?"

She shot him an outraged look. "You could have just . . . let me leave. . ."

"And watch someone else snap you up? Sorry, sweetheart, but

that's not how we do business." He looked to The Director. "Reinhard, baby, are you gonna get a close-up of this?"

The begrudging Director clambered off his chair and moved the camera to shoot at a spot on the wall, then propped Annabel into frame. The man in the white suit produced a long, slender dagger from his breast pocket and faced the crew. "Now. Who wants to do the honors?"

There was no immediate movement from the crowd. They looked left, right, down at their shoes, anywhere but the stage or Annabel or the knife.

Until Melody Uckwelt stepped forward.

The man in the white suit looked pleased. "Good girl! Reinhard, somebody, give that young lady a thousand dollars."

Melody strode onstage and accepted the knife. She knelt down by Annabel. "Sorry, hon. Business is business. But look on the bright side: this one's gonna knock 'em dead out there in Movieland." She put the blade under Annabel's chin, then looked to The Director for approval. He motioned for her to move it out of the shot, which was a close-up of Annabel's face.

"Don't, don't, please don't," the actress implored.

"Quiet on the set!" Nico called. "Roll picture! Roll sound! Action!"

Film clicked away inside the camera, capturing Annabel Leaf's last moments at 24 frames per second. Her eyes were huge with terrible anticipation. Melody grinned, waiting for a sign from The Director. He cleared his throat, preparing to speak the only words Annabel would ever hear from his mouth.

"Und . . . Cut!"

Dog Eat Dog

by Jack Taylor

I don't want to hurt anyone. The thought echoed in my mind as I sat in my car across the street from Slick's house. I did not consider myself an inherently violent person. When I was little, my father took me snowshoe hair hunting. I remember after hours of tramping uphill through several feet of snow I managed to spot one. It was curled up in a little ball roughly twenty yards away, using the snow against its white fur as natural camouflage, rendering the little creature nearly invisible. I remember trembling with fear and excitement as I peered through the sight on my rifle. I pulled the trigger and the little hair took off. I had nicked it with my bullet and it was wounded. It left a little trail of blood from where it had been, so my father and I proceeded to track it across the mountain. When we came upon it again I was more relaxed and precise with my shot, but again I hit it in a non fatal area and the tears began streaming down my face as I continued to shoot the suffering animal until finally, after about four bullets, it finally stopped twitching. All the blood on the snow made me nauseated. I remember being angry with myself for letting the creature suffer so badly.

Now here I was outside Slick's house struggling once again with the decision to cause pain. I pulled a cigarette out, lit it, and rolled down my window. I knew it was a disgusting habit but the nicotine relaxed me and allowed me to think clearly. As I pulled the smoke into my lungs I thought about poor Slick. He was a

family man like me: a loving father as well as a husband. Slick's troubles began about a year ago when the market crashed and he lost his job at a well-known consulting firm. Like most people who lost their jobs in the market crash, including myself, Slick assumed he would find work elsewhere and so he continued to live his upper-middle class lifestyle, burning through his savings so rapidly that by his fourth month of unemployment he had nearly lost everything.

In desperation, Slick began placing bets on sporting events to earn some quick cash and in the beginning he had some success, winning over fifty thousand dollars within his first couple bets. The thrill of winning began to consume him, however, and an addiction to gambling quickly followed his short-lived success. In a last-ditch effort to keep his head above water, Slick placed a two hundred thousand dollar bet with a vicious bookie named Teddy; my employer. Teddy's business philosophy was simple: you pay him what you owe or you die. Now this seemed harsh and surely Teddy wouldn't authorize a hit on someone over a trivial sum, but two hundred thousand dollars was a lot of money.

I tossed the butt of my cigarette out the window and picked up my binoculars. Slick was sitting behind his desk at his study doing something on his computer. I'd never met the man. I knew

what I knew about him because of what Teddy had told me. *Poor bastard*, I thought to myself. As I continued to observe Slick from across the street, my mind began to piece together the similarities between him and myself. Both fathers, both having lost jobs in the market crash, both struggling to survive in a world where money seemed to be harder and harder to come by, and both doing things we didn't want to do in an attempt to survive. Indeed it seemed that our roles could easily have been reversed and I could be sitting at the desk right now with Slick peering at me from across the street with deadly intention.

I was about to lower my binoculars when one of Slick's kids came charging into the room, leaping up onto his lap and screaming with delight as Slick's wife quickly entered the study as well in pursuit of the little one. A feeling of horror and guilt swept through my body. My blood felt like it was boiling and I could feel my heart pounding like it was beating in slow motion within my chest. What if that were my child and my wife? What if someone entered my house in the middle of the night and gunned me down while my wife and children were there? How would they fare without me in an unforgiving world? I took a deep breath to calm myself. There was nothing that could be done for it. Slick had made his choice when he placed a bet with Teddy that he couldn't possibly pay back. What of my choice though? I was on the verge of killing someone who, in my eyes, did not deserve to die. How was I going to live with myself after taking someone's life?

When the market crashed I lost everything; my business, my stock, my retirement, everything. When I met Teddy I was at rock bottom. I could barely afford to feed my own children. Teddy offered to pay me handsomely to go about collecting bets for him and so for the past few months I had been doing just that. Occasionally I had to intimidate reluctant clients with threats of violence but until now I'd never been forced to cause anyone physical harm. But now here I was, faced with the hardest decision of my life. Teddy was not one to wait around. Time was money to him and he'd made it very clear that this had to happen tonight. I could run. Pack up my things and flee with

my family, leaving this cursed city behind for good. I thought about it for a second then shook my head. No, it was not an option. One does not simply walk away from someone like Teddy. He would find us eventually and then my fate would end up being the same as poor Slick's. There was nothing that could be done for it.

I peered through the binoculars again. Slick was alone in his study once again and it appeared now that he was crying, sobbing in fact, for I could see his shoulders shuddering in the way that most people's do when they are crying. I quickly lowered the binoculars once again. I couldn't bear to watch the poor man at his lowest point. I sighed deeply as I pulled my gun out of the glove compartment. Teddy had given it to me at the beginning of my employment. I'd only ever used it at a shooting range where my targets were made of paper. Now I was about to use it on a real person. My mind once again wandered back to that day when I was a child hunting with my father; the little rabbit writhing about in its own blood on the snow while I cried and cried. I shuddered and put the image out of my mind as I twisted a silencer onto the end of my gun. *I had no choice*, I repeated the phrase over and over again in my mind as I pulled gloves and a mask over my hands and face.

Slick had sealed his own fate, not me. This was a dog eat dog world and in order to survive sometimes you had to do things that disagreed with your conscience. I had to look out for my own family and my own wellbeing. Slick's death was necessary in order for me to continue living my own life. I took a deep breath to steady my nerves and then opened the car door and stepped out. As I walked toward the window of Slick's study, one thought rang overwhelmingly in my mind: *I don't want to hurt anyone*. Now I was standing just outside the window. Slick sat in his chair, with his back to me, head bent low over his desk. He was still sobbing. I felt a tear running down my own cheek as I raised my trembling arm up so that my gun was in line with the back of his head.

"Forgive me," I said quietly before pulling the trigger.

Forever Hold Your Peace

by Morgan Leshner

The church bells tolled, a bleak accompaniment to the organ that echoed between the cluttered pews. He stood at the altar, hands clasped tight together and looking out the window to find some escape from his torment. Pigeon shit splattered against the glass, leaving streaks of white running down the colored stains. He should have been offended, but he couldn't agree more. It was a shitty day. He wasn't prepared to face this. He could still run. He could make a break for the door and pretend none of this was happening. But he was already up in front of family and friends; his eyes were already turning toward her and she was beautiful.

However, the more he looked at her, the more he began to wonder if she truly was beautiful. He began to pick out little flaws, like how calm she was. He was a nervous wreck, shivering and jittery in front of her, while she was just there, smiling and peaceful. Her cheeks were pale, despite the makeup. She never wore it, but they insisted that she wear it today, and the caked layers of the fraudulent mask hid her natural beauty. And that dress; that dress was the most distasteful thing she wore. It made the curvy hips he loved to caress look swollen and yet squeezed at the same time. It pushed up her perfectly average breasts to an obnoxious distortion. The more he looked at

her, the more his distaste began to fester and swell into hate. He hated this facade, this distorted portrayal of the woman he grew to love. This was not her. The hatred began to wear at his will, and the man wobbled, unsteady until his hands clenched. His knuckles turned white as if to beg for surrender.

In that moment, he would have given anything to return to just a week ago, when she had been dressing herself in jeans and a tank top for the mall, blabbering about the next tattoo she wanted. When he sat watching her with the thought of saying, "nice ass" just to get a rise, and telling her how much he loved her was the last thing on his mind. Those days were gone, and they would never return.

Today was the end of a life, though some optimists would say the beginning of a new one. It was a new life he had never wanted nor dreamt, and one that he had prayed would never come. His strength reached its limit when he stepped forward to place the ring upon her finger. The metal slipped over her cold, limp digit with ease, and the man's resolve finally shattered. He fell to his knees beside her in a fit of hysterical sobs.

Crushed, Part 1

Kathleen Crowley

I'm drifting up and down the sour-smelling alley on a warm evening in late spring, my black broomstick skirt swishing about my ankles. I can't find the entryway to my old haunt. The mildly rancid air is pulsing with a gothic bassline, and I can see club-goers, including a few I used to know, through a lattice of iron. I'm trying to find reminders of my old life, from back before the decade I misplaced, so I'm retracing some very old steps. People are annoying, but it seems that I need some in my life to function. Happily, the goth scene never changes much, so going to the Crush – "Crushed Velvet Potions & Lies" is what's on their sign – on a Saturday is as obvious a choice for me now as it was ten years ago, before I poured myself into that psychiatric demon's bottle.

It's an old story. Girl meets boy, girl loses boy, girl buries her grief in dark magics. I won't go into the details, except to say that while society views medically prescribed demon-worship very differently than recreational possession, from the point of view of someone who did it under a doctor's orders, I didn't accomplish much more that was of use in that decade than anyone who buys their spells on the street. Since I've been back, I've been finding that no one ever wants to hear about doctors and demons in any detail, because it makes people uncomfortable. So, moving on from my profound and professionally assisted lapse in judgment, there came a time when I was no longer willing to be in thrall to my demonic therapist, and I extracted myself carefully from his bottle. Now I'm looking for clues of how I used to function in the real world.

The alley's odors bring me back to my mission. The people I'm looking for are on the other side of the iron bars lining the club's smoking patio, and I can see several individuals I recognize. Ben is obvious, being both tall and broad; his head is clean-shaven, and he's wearing a beige overcoat that stands out against the black garb of the other smokers. He doesn't fit in, but he never cares. His status with the Scientifick community ensures that he doesn't have to. Back behind him and his looming, black-robed brother, I'm pretty sure I can also see Nox, thin but pretty, with her electric-blue locks tumbled casually over her shoulders. She's the other end of the spectrum from Ben's Scientists, or is it the other side of the coin? She's a Philosopher, and she's apparently deep in conversation with a rose-gowned member of her group and several of the club's less Philosophically inclined regulars. I look one more time for some way into the club, then give up and embarrass myself by calling out. "Hey, Ben! How do I get in? Where's the door?"

Ben looks at me through the iron, clearly amused. "Just spin and you're in, remember?" I must still look blank, because he adds in an overly patient tone, "Step back from the grating, close your eyes, and turn around three times. When you smell the incense, you know you're there. Wow, Krista, it's been a while. Come talk to me after you cross over."

My face heats; I should know that. Stepping back, I follow Ben's instructions. Because I'm flustered, I stumble a little, scuffing my black combat boots against each other, but I manage to

spin until my nostrils trade rotting urine for cheap sandalwood smoke. I reach into my purse to pay the doorman and go to the bar in the club's industrial room for a potion – goths pour them cheap but strong. I'm tickled that the bartender both recognizes me and remembers my formula despite my long absence and the wear and tear the demon put on my appearance. He's familiar, and it's familiarity I want. I sip my plaid beverage quickly, eager for the buffer it provides between me and humanity but grimacing because it tastes like black pepper, and then find a dark corner of the eighties retro room to dance in.

The last decade has not been kind to my body. Not only did I miss my thirties, my weight more than doubled, and I have almost no endurance. Life with a demon may feel physical and even be exhausting, but your mortal coils don't benefit from your otherworldly exertions. I've repossessed my body, but it's no longer the strong, young shape I left. Still, I love moving to loud music, and dancing is a lot of why I've come to the Crush. I sway and shuffle my heavy boots, trying to ride the once-familiar beat, struggling to lose myself in the memories and melodies of Book of Love and The Cure. Within three songs, I'm a sweaty, purple mess, and it's more than time for me to head out to the smoking deck and find Ben.

I buy another plaid potion on my way to the deck, and I try to balance it in the crook of my left arm while I thread through the crowd of smokers. This becomes even more difficult when I pull my pipe from its pouch and start packing it. A trickle of sweat is inching over my forehead toward my left eye, but I have no way to wipe it. I'm carrying too many things. I awkwardly make my way to the dark corner Ben prefers, and when I get there, I'm grateful to find a bit of railing on which to place my possessions. When I arrive, Ben's brother fades back into the crowd, and I hope I haven't interrupted. People take social cues for granted, but I'm aware of how easily I miss them now. After I set my things down and draw deeply on my pipe as Ben lights it, I manage to compose myself and renew my acquaintance with my former friend.

This second plaid is stronger than the first, and the rich smoke from

my pipe mixes with plaid intoxicants to soften my surroundings. When plaid is cheap, it's sometimes a bit of a misnomer. This is definitely the case now, because what the world is softening into is much more paisley than grid-like. I tell Ben about my return to the world, and I ask him about other goth nights during the week. He seems excited to help me re-acclimate, and tells me he's also practicing something he calls "flirting," which is weird, because it doesn't seem like anyone else's version. He tells me about local events, including pairing with his brother to take over administration of the long-standing Parchment Group for Scientists. He knows I have some history and an abiding fascination with Science, the art of reprogramming the universe by means of the careful titration of specific ingredients and the judicious application of certain laws and rules, and he invites me to a tavern meeting later that week with his brother and a bunch of his Scientist friends.

"I don't know." Even relaxed as I am from plaid potion and pipe smoke, I know my limitations. "I've been gone a long time, and I was never very good with people. At a club like this, I can drift and drink and dance, but I don't really have to be social. And the venue's familiar. Sitting down at a table in a strange place to talk to a lot of new people... Maybe I'd better wait on that until I get used to being around non-demons again."

"It'll be fine. In fact, it'll be fun. Don't worry about the people. A lot of them are from the goth scene, and anyway, this particular group of people is really good with people who aren't good with people." He smiles at his own turn of phrase. "Really, you should come, have some fine fun with us."

As I finish my second plaid potion, I get more than relaxed, and the rest of the night is a little hazy. I dance some more, and it's easier than it had been, although the result is every bit as sweaty and unpleasant. I look for Nox and her rose-garbed Philosopher friend, but when I ask the industrial room DJ if she's seen them, she looks mysterious and nods toward an empty corner near the industrial dance floor. Still, I stay until club-close, even breaking from my long-standing tradition of drinking plaids to try a Time

Traveler in hopes of gaining contact with my former self. It might even be working, but I'm fairly drunk now, and anyway, who can tell what decade it is through all the crawling paisleys pretending to be plaid? I wonder if I'll even remember by the time I get home and sleep it off that I agreed to meet up with Ben, his brother, and his other Scientist friends at some tavern somewhere. Maybe it doesn't matter. If it's important to Ben, he can send me a missive, and...

"IT IS *THAT TIME*, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, LAST CALL! PAY UP, *TIP YOUR BARTENDER*, AND HEAD TO THE *DOOR!*"

I blink in the sudden brightness as the lights come up. I'm part of the crowd as we move toward the exit, and I try to remember what I used to do about finding a way home.

I'm at home two months later, half-buried in parchment. It's been established that Ben's brother was joking when he told me to join the Scientists' official Parchment Group, as opposed to their more casual in-person gatherings, to tender a birthday party invitation. Unfortunately, that information came too late in the ensuing chaos to forestall the mutual and many-sided angst and confusion that my naïve intrusion sparked. Apparently most new arrivals are forewarned of the ritual greeting - "Welcome. Who the fuck are you?" - and the subsequent hazing. Ben's brother had meant his suggestion that I issue my invitation to this group the way he might have suggested I cover my head in lamb's blood and insert it into a lion's den, but I had taken him seriously. His defense might have been tighter had he not followed it up with explicit instructions on how to reach the den of these particular lions, but pointing that out wouldn't help me now. I know because I tried.

The unexpected hazing was disorienting as I scrambled to understand the group's ritual hostility. I tried to change my behavior to conform to this group's desires, but they were all very different in what they seemed to want or expect, and because the

earliest wrath was about my not giving enough information, paired with a threat against my home, I kept replying and replying. Now two days have passed, and I'm sleepless and paranoid.

I'm getting messages written over so many different names that I can't keep track of them all. They just keep pouring in, the scraps of parchment. I could repaper my walls with them and still have enough left over for another layer. As I consider the scope of my disaster, a new missive comes in, addressed only to me and not to the group: "Don't be so honest with these guys! They'll turn the truth against you." I squint at the signature, trying to remember which other messages this member has sent. I feel like I'm being yelled at by a multi-headed monster with a different personality residing in each head. Probably if I cut one off, seven more will spring instantly from the beast's neck.

One member appreciates my apologies and wants me to send him a vial of my tears. Another makes off-color but good-natured sex jokes. A third appreciates the number of seldom seen members this parchment storm is bringing out of retirement. Apparently, we're setting records for group activity. A fourth and fifth want to debate arcane points of grammar, an activity in which I'm happy to take part. Six, seven and eight want us all to stop sending messages, immediately, if not sooner. Usually flippancy and sarcasm are the humor Scientists like, but this time, there's no mode that will satisfy everyone.

I look closely, disbelievingly, at the next set of messages, because these bear a name I know well. It's mine, but I didn't send them. They're not nice messages, either. I quickly pen a denial of the new messages sent by me, but when I flick it toward the ceiling, it just flutters back down to the floor. I try again, but it still won't send. Then I notice all the other received messages are crinkling, shrinking, fading. I touch one, and it's so dry it becomes dust under my hand. In minutes, all the parchment is gone.

I'm still staring, aghast, at the carpet covering my floor where just minutes ago mounds of parchments had lain, when a new

missive sails in. The calligraphy is bold and formal, indicating that its source is Ben's brother.

"At the request of a number of our members, you have been removed from our society. We can't prevent your appearance in certain public venues, but know that if we see you, we will make you feel very unwelcome. I regret your inclusion is ending so abruptly, but I am outnumbered. Ultimately, the group feels that you are indiscreet and a victim, and that you don't fit in. Don't seek us out.

"--The Parchment Group"

I try a personal reply, protesting that I'm not a victim, that bad things rarely happen to me. I write that I do fit in, that I share many of their interests, right down to the fascination with arcane grammar rules. I write that I'm not indiscreet, and that the final messages written over my name aren't mine! My personal message sends, and I wait a long time for a reply. None comes.

I'm scared. Groups are frightening, and I don't know what they'll talk themselves into, conferring amongst themselves. They've already threatened my home and impersonated me. And because we have so much in common, we like the same places. I don't know if I can find a whole new set of interests and hangouts. Mine isn't that big a city. Should I move? And if I do, where will I find cues to evoke memories about how to cope with people?

I've never considered ending my life before, but it sounds right now like a viable option. Leaving the demon didn't return me to my old life. Besides trouble with this group, I'm fighting with my family over the misuse of a plumbing spell, and my hours have been cut back at work due to my failure to defer correctly to the proper coworkers. Without family, work, friends or interests, what else is there? I see angry members of the Parchment group cluttering my carpet where the scraps of paper had been. My family glares from behind furniture. My former coworkers look severely down at me from near my ceiling. My eyes seek out the house plant behind which I've hidden the demon's orange

prescription bottle, glowing with hellfire hue but no promises. When I think about ending myself, the angry people fade and the lights go out, leaving me in blackness.

Oddly, hitting a suicidal level of desperation is helpful. I find I'm less frightened of Ben's and his brother's group. Crush still holds the triggers for my memories. I will look for Nox at Crush and see what she says. And if Ben's Parchment Group wreaks vengeance on me for my intrusion, I can't see how I will be worse off than I am now.

This last thought coils around me along with the memory of a book on military strategy. "It is unwise to leave your enemy alive and with nothing to lose. If he attacks you, all risk will be yours." I consider attacking, but I realize that no matter what happened, I like these people. I don't want revenge. I just want my life back. Resolution turns the lamp by my bed back on, and I'm no longer sitting in darkness. I will return to Crush.

Fisheye

by Kristin Macintyre

I'm sitting in the passenger seat of my own car. My boyfriend is driving with a cigarette stuck to his lip, puffing compulsively on it. His lips are dry and cracked and white. Miserable, metallic cold sweats glisten on his pale skin. When I met him he had a beautiful olive complexion. He doesn't anymore. He's wearing a white undershirt that clings to his skin like wet paper. It's soaked and stained and nearly worn through. He has one hand on the shifter and one hand on the wheel and he keeps checking the rearview. His unblinking eyes dart in all directions, unaffected by the smoke lingering around them. Paranoid. We weave in and out of traffic on the Belt Parkway. I have one hand dangling lifeless out of the open window. My head is lolling back and forth, limp at the neck like a scarecrow without enough straw to keep him upright. I am wearing an old gray sweatshirt with dirty, frayed drawstrings from my panicked chewing. It's warm outside, but I layer up anyway. I don't like to show my track marks. Adam does. They parade up and down his arms like rotten mushroom-bruises. They are his badge of honor. But they are my scarlet letter. My hair is oily and hangs in thin strings around my wide, myopic eyes. I reach for sunglasses to drown the morning. Sunlight is too harsh. It's too happy. There's nothing happy about my life. Just get me to my medicine. Please.

The Guy gives us two bundles on loan since we are reliable white kids that come from decent families. He wants our business. I don't even speak. Why try to be friendly? This is cold-blooded misery. We use The Guy and The Guy uses us and we all know it. We hop back into the car and get out of Bushwick. We don't belong there and will be arrested like last time if we stay. So we speed into a neighboring residential area. While my beloved is expertly maneuvering the car through city blocks, I am already on task. We have a rhythmic system. He looks out for police while I balance an old CD book on my lap and concoct our poison. So many ingredients. I have them all down to a bubbling science.

We pull over and I have the shots all ready to go. He grabs his. We both feel like we are about to go raving mad. Insanity is blooming. I need this. He, of course, boosts his right away. The advantage of being a six-foot-two ex-Marine is that your veins are enormous. I struggle and struggle and I can't hit a mark. My needle is cloudy with spots of blood and muddy brown heroin mixture. I want to scream. I can't get it right. I spit and cry and sweat and open the door to vomit. I am losing control. I can't focus. I try everywhere. Wrists, arms, hands, feet. Adam has entered The Deep Beyond. He sits back in his seat, eyes closed, mouth open. He has reached salvation and he has left me behind. I shake him awake and yell and curse and beg him to help me. He tries to look at me straight, but I know he is far away. His eyes are ice-blue with microscopic pupils. I stare into those terrible fish eyes. I am jealous. He tells me, *Don't worry, baby. Come here, I'll do it for you.* I knew I loved him. My savior that will administer my savior. I hand him my left forearm and wait for him to harpoon my insides. I start shivering with sweats and I'm hot and cold and tired and anxious all at one time. I will only relax when I see the blood fill the register. He hits. I exhale.

Pulse. Ecstasy. Requiem. Paralyzing Greatness. Radiating Joy. Stars.

We hold hands and hook our ring fingers together. We recline our seats. There it is. I can cry, I am so happy. We sit in that car, smoking cigarettes, staring out opposite windows, delivered from the madness. Normal again. We sit together. Each floating in a world of our own.

Roadside Stand

by Paula Thomas

I remember the first time my husband ate a mango. We stopped at a grocery store where we purchased water, gum, one apple and two mangos. We walked around the store noticing the odd prices of food, Chef Boyardee's spaghetti and meatball 15 oz. can for \$0.98, peaches \$2 per lb, it made no sense. We went to a park to enjoy our findings, as I couldn't wait a minute longer to dig my teeth into the mango. My husband asked "How do you eat that? What does it taste like? Are you supposed to eat the peel? What is the texture like?" "Well, it is hard to explain," I said, "Want to try it?" He stared at the mango as if he were afraid of it, turning it around and sniffing it like a dog playing with a bug. Finally, he gathered enough courage and took a bite to the unpeeled mystery. "Taste like a ... ummm, I don't know, a peach? Maybe? Yes, like a tropical peach." He marveled at the sweet, juicy fruit dripping from his arms.

In Colombia, fruits are an intricate part of life. Growing up, our snacks consisted of chopped fruit with grated fresh cheese, or strawberries topped with yogurt. In my college years, I stopped every morning at the bus terminal for a fresh pineapple, mango and papaya juice on my way to work. By lunch time, the fruit stands were in place all over downtown and after a heavy meal of beans and *chicharron*, I usually bought a slice of watermelon or pineapple for dessert. In the evening, the fruit stand outside the University had the best *mango biche con sal*, slightly sour with hints of pineapple sprinkled with sea salt. I just loved it. Colombia has 8.3 million acres for agricultural cultivation, 10 percent of it attributed to fruit only. A popular favorite is *lulo*, a highly acidic fruit used for juice, and to make a type of syrup for desserts. Most of its production is consumed locally, leaving

only 2 percent for export. Colombia exports more than 70 varieties of fruits.

Last time my husband and I visited Colombia my mother got up early every day and walked a couple of blocks to *la fruteria* to buy four mangos, one small papaya, a couple of bananas and half of a pineapple. On her way, she also stopped at the bakery for other breakfast items. It became a ritual for the short time we were there, especially since half the mangos were chopped for my husband's enjoyment. "Breakfast without mangos is like kissing without tongue," he said. He had some prejudice against some of the fruit in Colombia, he claimed that being a Massachusetts boy didn't offer him much exposure to strange fruits. However, he enjoyed the fact that fruits, and vegetables, were easily available and affordable.

We took a trip with my brother, his wife and their kids, to the mountains where coffee is grown. The roads were narrow and packed with view-restricting eighteen-wheelers, making the 130 mile trip a painful four hours. The kids made my brother stop every couple of hours at a fruit stand. They are fruit worms. Oranges, apples, bananas and *granadillas* were the easiest fruits to eat while traveling. My husband didn't like *granadillas*, he has filed them in the Colombian alien fruits cabinet, together with *guanabana*, *pitaya*, *uchuvas* and more. I don't like *granadillas* either. They are the size of a baseball with a muted orange thick, hard shell. The kids meticulously cracked the shell on the top and took it apart in small piece. Beneath it, there was a white membrane like that of an orange. They punctured a hole and began to scoop with their fingers gulps of booger-like clear fruit

studded with black seeds. I can't handle seeds, my husband couldn't handle the scene, his stomach turned and he needed a paper bag.

The trip was a great way to reconnect with my roots and rejoice at the wide availability of fruits, regardless of how remotely we traveled. Why can it be this way in the United States? I wondered. I remembered our trip to Taos, New Mexico. A different type of beautiful, in a desolate kind of way. I had packed fruits among other traveling snacks, because I knew it was a long trip and I wasn't sure where the first fruit stand would appear. Hours passed. No more snacks. The heat of summer hanged on our skin and water became insufficient. We passed small towns and stopped at every convenience store where the endless choices of packaged "food" made the towns feel more desolate. There were no road-side fruit stands. For miles we drove on the flat valley, flooded with tumble weeds. I was growing impatient, my fruit addiction was kicking in – it was messing with my ability to behave nicely. Why were there no fruit stands? Did people in this area refrain from eating anything other than Doritos? Where are the farmers? Where are the summer fruits? I wished I had one of those summer peaches we buy at the farmers market. Especially Steve Ela's peaches, I kept dreaming of a sweet, juicy fruit.

Steve Ela owns a fruit orchard in the western slopes of Colorado. For years, I have listened to his stories about missing his family's fruit while in college, or the daily struggles to keep an organic farm and gain support from the community because subsidies from the government goes mostly to factory farms. Every week, from end of May to end of October, like many other committed farmers, Steve packs up an eighteen wheeler full of fruit. Leaving Peonia on Friday afternoon and arriving in Denver five hours later. He sells the fruit at local farmer's markets in the Front Range. They grow peaches, apples, pears, and depending on the bird population, cherries and berries. The fruit is unlike any in the supermarket. Locally grown and picked ripe, packed with sweetness and the right levels of acidity, is like being back home. But Steve's orchard is part of the 1.5 percent of

fruit growing acres in the United States, only 1.5 percent of the total planted acres is for fruit growing for a population of 314 million, while Colombia has 10 percent of the total growing acres dedicated to fruit for a population of 48 million. I didn't know what a factory farm was, what I knew is that those factories were not producing enough peaches for me to find them on our trip to Taos. How inefficient are these factories?

After we got back from Taos, dehydrated and most likely malnourished, I stumbled upon a documentary called "A Place at the Table," where the concept of food deserts was introduced. Small communities in rural areas, as well as low-income communities in big cities, in this case Chicago, where the consumer has to travel miles to find fresh produce. I suddenly realized we drove through a food desert. I felt horrible about my silly tantrums for a few days of fresh fruit deprivation when in reality I am one of the lucky ones. Grocery stores are at my disposal, some even 24 hours. No strict budget to follow, I buy fish only at Whole Foods, and fruits when in season at the farmer's market at \$4 a pound. I got sick to my stomach thinking about the little girl and her family in rural Colorado, who struggles in school for the lack of nutritious food in her diet. To see how grateful they were for the help from the Food Bank, even if it was boxes of potato chips, cookies, canned and frozen meals. I had to keep the knot in my throat from spilling through my eyes when the young, single-mother in Chicago, who works for a minimum wage, sat at the kitchen table after her two kids had gone to bed and with tears in her eyes wondered what she was going to feed them the next day. I was angry, where are these factory farms? What are they producing?

To my surprise factory farms don't produce real food, they produce crops used in packaged foods, and to feed overcrowded, sick animals. The total of acres planted in the United States in 2014 is 325 million, with 92 million growing corn and 82 million growing soy, and *only* of 4.7 million growing fruits. We find corn and soy as fillers, sweeteners, hydrogenated oils, or preservatives. Which means, millions and millions of acres are being planted with the future hydrogenated oil most

likely to increase the problems of obesity and diabetes, while offering no nutritional value. And the rich soils of the Midwest, where corn and soy have become industrialized monocrops, which were once the home of small farmers producing a great variety of fruits and vegetables are being depleted in the search for a cheap way to get people on heart medications or insulin shots. In the 1950s, there were 4.2 million farms in the United States, the census of 2010 showed a 50 percent decrease. The land changed from small, family farms to big farm factories in a single generation.

Back from our coffee trip in Colombia, I sat for coffee break with my aunt – can't shake the habit – to chat about food on a budget. The minimum wage in Colombia in dollars is roughly \$325 a month. She is a single mother of two and knows where to spend her money, and I decided it was a great way to experience the way she shops if I went with her. The farmer's market stopped by her neighborhood on Wednesday. It covered two large parking lots, one side is for meats, fish, eggs and milk.

The beef and pork were cut in big slabs that hung from metal hooks with tags explaining each part of the animal. The men at the stands were shouting the deals of the day and trying to veer costumers their way. The fish piled up in big, metal bowls where the women were cleaning the scales and the guts. It smelled like chicken coop mixed with fish oil. Nothing was pre-packaged, "all must sell today," my aunt told me. The other side of the lot was for fruits and vegetables. Dozens and dozens of small tents packed with produce. My aunt had the equivalent of \$15 dollars for produce and \$20 dollars for meat, chicken and eggs. She managed to fill her shopping wheeled-basket with two pineapples, eight mangoes, bananas, apples, onions, tomatoes, potatoes, chard, beets, carrots, avocados, which are double the size of Hass avocados, and more, much more!

Between the shouting men and the pineapples, I thought about the little girl in rural Colorado and her limited choices. I thought about the single mom and her worries about not having food for her children. And I asked myself, how could it possibly be?

Heiwa

by Christopher Eckman

There is an image somewhere, on some hard drive, or in some forgotten pile of photographs, that I have never seen. It depicts me, two years ago, standing in front of the Genbaku Dome in Hiroshima making the peace sign with a stranger, his arm around my shoulder.

There is no obvious evidence in this picture that identifies the building behind us. It just looks like an old building that is in the process of being decommissioned. There is only rough wire where the dome should be, atop a cylinder surrounded by a rectangular structure. Chunks of broken building adorn the ground and we stand in front of a black gate, my eyes teary in the warm afternoon sunlight.

Before this picture was taken, I knew that on August 6th, 1945 the city was hit by the first atomic bomb. I did not know that there was a structure (and only one structure) left standing in the area where the first nuclear attack in human history had occurred. I knew that the city would be filled with memorials and there would be mourners remembering and paying their respects to the people who died there. I did not know that these people saw the city and the attack as a call for world peace. I knew that the Japanese stranger who came up to me was about my age and he was asking me something about taking a picture. I did not know he was asking if he could take a picture with me, and I did not understand what was happening until afterwards.

I had been staring at the dome behind us, reading the plaque on the ground with a heavy heart. *As a historical witness that conveys the tragedy of suffering the first atomic bomb in human history and as a symbol that vows to faithfully seek the abolition*

of nuclear weapons and everlasting world peace... "I'm sorry we did this," was all I could think. I looked about paranoiacally for scornful glances in my direction from locals or surviving granddaughters or sons, but found none. The looks I got were friendly, even warm.

So when the stranger approached me and asked something about taking a picture, I enthusiastically said, "Yes." I was confused when he then gave his camera to his friend, put his arm around my shoulder, and held up the peace sign. "Heiwa!" he cried out. That must mean 'smile.' I smiled and automatically made the sign too – as if in some strange dream where I had been mistaken for someone else. The picture snapped, he turned to me and said, "We are like brothers. We have peace now," and left.

As I turned around and looked down again at the plaque, the tears overpowered me. All of the guilt I had been feeling, thinking I had been a part of something that was unforgivable, had blinded me from seeing that this place wasn't about pinning atrocities of World War II on the US; it was about peace and the decommission of nuclear weapons for everyone, everywhere.

Later, I read that "heiwa" was the Japanese word for peace, but when I hear it, I will be reminded of an image somewhere, on some hard drive, or in some forgotten pile of photographs, that I have never seen, but carry with me everyday.

Coming to Being

by Colleen Kellogg

Irish Pub.

Israel, female, 30, nervous and on edge, walks into the bar, wringing her hands. She approaches the bar. Angela, 24, tends bar and hosts, briefly appearing on and off stage. Vincent, male, mid 30s, cool and assertive sits at the bar with his drink.

ISRAEL (to Angela): I'm picking up an order. For Israel. Israel West.

ANGELA: Sure thing. Let me check on that.

Angela walks off-stage. Israel sits at the bar.

VINCENT: Israel?

ISRAEL: Vincent.

VINCENT: We meet, again.

ISRAEL: Nothing like a bar to stir up old trouble.

VINCENT: You drinking?

ISRAEL: Still sober.

VINCENT: Me too.

ISRAEL (*pointing to drink*): And that?

VINCENT: Cranberry-soda, nothing more. Interesting how we always come back here.

ISRAEL: Quite.

VINCENT: What happened with that guy you liked? B, something.

ISRAEL: Briana.

VINCENT: That's a funny name for a guy.

ISRAEL: She's a woman, and you know this. Afraid of what that might mean? How that might reflect on you?

Angela appears from behind the bar. Sounds of a crowded room in the background.

ANGELA: Fifteen more minutes. Sorry. Getting crowded. We've had a few orders ahead of you.

ISRAEL: No worries. Thank you. What's your name?

ANGELA: Angela.

Angela smiles and walks off. Israel's eyes follow.

VINCENT (to Israel): I spoiled you.

ISRAEL: Spoiled me? More like ruined me.

VINCENT: Me?

ISRAEL: And all of your kind.

VINCENT: And what might that mean? Are we talking men, in general? Or, does this go back to the whole God thing?

ISRAEL: Men in general, yes. But the God thing, as you call it, is important, as well.

VINCENT: One book. We write one book, together, and suddenly I'm the devil.

ISRAEL: You're the anti-God.

VINCENT: I'm pro-human. Are we talking men or God?

ISRAEL: We were talking men, boys, the male species.

VINCENT: And Briana. Does she make love to you like I did? Can a woman ever make love to another woman the way a man can?

ISRAEL: You call that love? I call that being screwed over. And no, we didn't get that far. We took our time.

VINCENT: And now?

ISRAEL: And now it's over.

VINCENT: What did you do?

ISRAEL: Me?

VINCENT: Who else, but you?

ISRAEL: I told her I thought she was my soul mate.

VINCENT: And she ran violently away, kicking and screaming...

ISRAEL: No. She said she loved me.

VINCENT: So, what's the problem?

ISRAEL: I don't love her.

VINCENT: She's your soul mate, but you don't love her?

ISRAEL: She doesn't think like me.

VINCENT: That's the problem with you Christians, everybody has to think the way you do, or else they're inferior in some way, or another.

ISRAEL: Do you really think that way about me?

VINCENT: Well, you're a lesbian, so -

ISRAEL: So, how's that bad?

VINCENT: No, it works in your favor. You didn't let me finish. You, openly accepting that you are a lesbian and are in love with another woman -

ISRAEL: I'm not in love with her.

VINCENT: But you could be. You could love some woman. You think your soul mate could be another woman. That's a bit more open minded than some God-fearing people. But you, 1openly accepting who you are makes you more open minded and tolerant of other's view points, just perhaps not mine.

Angela approaches the two with a smile. Sounds of a wild crowd cheering on a sports game.

ANGELA (*to Israel*): I am so sorry. I didn't even ask if you wanted a drink. Pretty busy, tonight.

ISRAEL: Can I have a water?

ANGELA: You don't drink, either?

VINCENT: It's the hip new thing.

Angela hands Israel a water.

VINCENT (cont.): You'll get your tip.

ISRAEL: Vincent.

VINCENT: What? Angela is my favorite bar tender of all time. Right, Angela?

ANGELA: I'm not worried about that. I'm worried about...

Sounds of breaking glass.

ANGELA: Hey!

Angela rushes away.

ISRAEL: You're insensitive.

VINCENT: You said you were God, once. You said I was Lucifer. You said we were one. Do you remember that? How can Lucifer be God?

ISRAEL: One book. We write one book, together, and suddenly you think I said I'm God.

VINCENT: Aren't you? Aren't we all?

ISRAEL: You drive me insane, Vincent.

VINCENT: You told me you loved me, once. Do you remember that?

ISRAEL: Once. A long time ago.

VINCENT: You don't love me, anymore?

ISRAEL: You're not the one.

VINCENT: You are. The one. The chosen one.

ISRAEL (*flicking Vincent*): Knock it off. We were drunk. We were writing... I AM/I WILL.

VINCENT: And you are, and I Will. You shouldn't confuse affection with love.

ISRAEL: With us?

VINCENT: With Briana.

ISRAEL: You have it backwards. You and I were affection, not love. Briana is more than love. She's more than I could possibly love. My heart is cold. You made my heart grow cold. How can I love someone if I don't even believe they exist?

VINCENT: Do you believe I exist?

Israel stands up and looks around.

ISRAEL: Where are we? Some crowded bar? People all around us. Music playing. A game on in the background. Wherever I go, I can't escape you. When I look to some-

one else, they become you. I become you. I AM you.

VINCENT: And I Am you. And I Willed us into being. I AM I AM. I Am you. I Am Briana, too.

ISRAEL: And I hate you, because you got me thinking this way. This room doesn't even exist.

The sound of the crowd reaches a high screech, then silence.

Vincent rises to his feet.

Angela comes into view and rolls the bar away.

ISRAEL (cont.): My angel. Angela. My angel. Don't go.

Israel and Vincent remain standing.

Vincent pulls a book from his coat pocket.

Israel reaches in her purse and picks out the same book, I Am/I Will. She flips through the pages.

ISRAEL: Vincent Marcus. Why do you do this to me? You fierce warrior. You conqueror. You victor.

VINCENT: You do it to yourself. You are me. You always come back to me. Think by running to another woman, you'll make your escape? Think you could love someone who doesn't exist? Do I exist?

ISRAEL (*reading book*): 'I Will: I Will rise to the top. I Will gain the powers of the Oneness of God. I Will seek the thrown of the one named I AM, for I Am I Am. My life is in

my own hands. The power of being becomes the power of me. Any glory claimed in my becoming of me is my glory alone. When I speak, all will listen. When I lead all will follow. I am the creator of my own destiny. I am the creator of my world. I Will trust in myself, for myself is the word. I Am I Am, I Will what I Will into being. I am the creator and the creation. My Will becomes truth, becomes life, becomes gold. All will bow, even the creator himself, for I am the keeper of life.'

VINCENT: I agree. Of course, I was the one who wrote that.

ISRAEL: Why did you write that? Why did you do this to me?

Vincent flips the pages of his book.

VINCENT: You still believe. You believe in God. Not just in me. Here, look, page twenty-four. 'Life is ours to live, but give thanks to the Almighty I Am for he has carefully planned out all our days, and placed us on the path that we must take steps on every day. He is the creator of our worlds. Praise Him and give thanks for the Lord God blesses us each day. If anything becomes too troublesome, or hard to bear, pray to the Lord that he might resolve and relinquish all burdens placed before. But recall that the Lord has given this life to be lived, pain and joy, our lessons to be learned. Praise the Lord. Give thanks for all creatures above and below. Give thanks for all life, which he bestows.'

ISRAEL: I could love her, Vincent. I could love, Briana. She's the one. She's my love. Not you. You're a demon. You're the past. You're a monster in my closet. A skeleton. You don't exist.

VINCENT: No. You don't exist. Not the way you are. You're a fragment of a woman I once loved.

ISRAEL: Don't mistake affection for love, right? Right, Vincent?

VINCENT: Don't mistake fantasy for reality. You're neither man, nor woman. Neither demon, nor God. Just a dream. A stream of consciousness, trapped in space and time. You are all that exists. You are the universe. And you are nothing, at all.

ISRAEL: I love her.

VINCENT: No. No you don't. She's not real.

ISRAEL: I could love her. I Will love her. I WILL. I WILL.

VINCENT: You are her.

ISRAEL: No. She's real. She's more – more real – more real than you. More real than you'll ever be.

VINCENT: I Am her. I AM. I AM. I Am her. I Am you. You won't escape me.

ISRAEL: But I Will. I WILL. I WILL. I WILL!!! I WILL!!! I WILL!!! I AM I AM. I WILL it into being! I willed you. And now I will you away. You are gone!!! GONE!!! Drop dead, Vincent! Leave me be. Let me know love, so that I might live. You are GONE!! AWAY! Away from me... So, that I might come into being. So, that love will come to me.

Vincent drops the book and walks off stage.

Angela walks back on stage with new hair, a different

color, and a new outfit. She is Briana.

ISRAEL: Briana, my angel. I missed you.

BRIANA: I missed you, too. Where were you?

Vincent appears with a take-out bag. He hands it to Israel, and walks off stage.

ISRAEL: I got take-out, from the pub. Your favorite.

BRIANA: Great minds think alike.

ISRAEL: Yes, they do.

BRIANA: I love you, you know?

ISRAEL: Yeah. Yeah, me too. I love you, too.

Briana and Israel kiss.

ISRAEL (cont.): Let's go home.

Israel wraps her arms around Briana. They walk off stage.

All goes black.

Fine.

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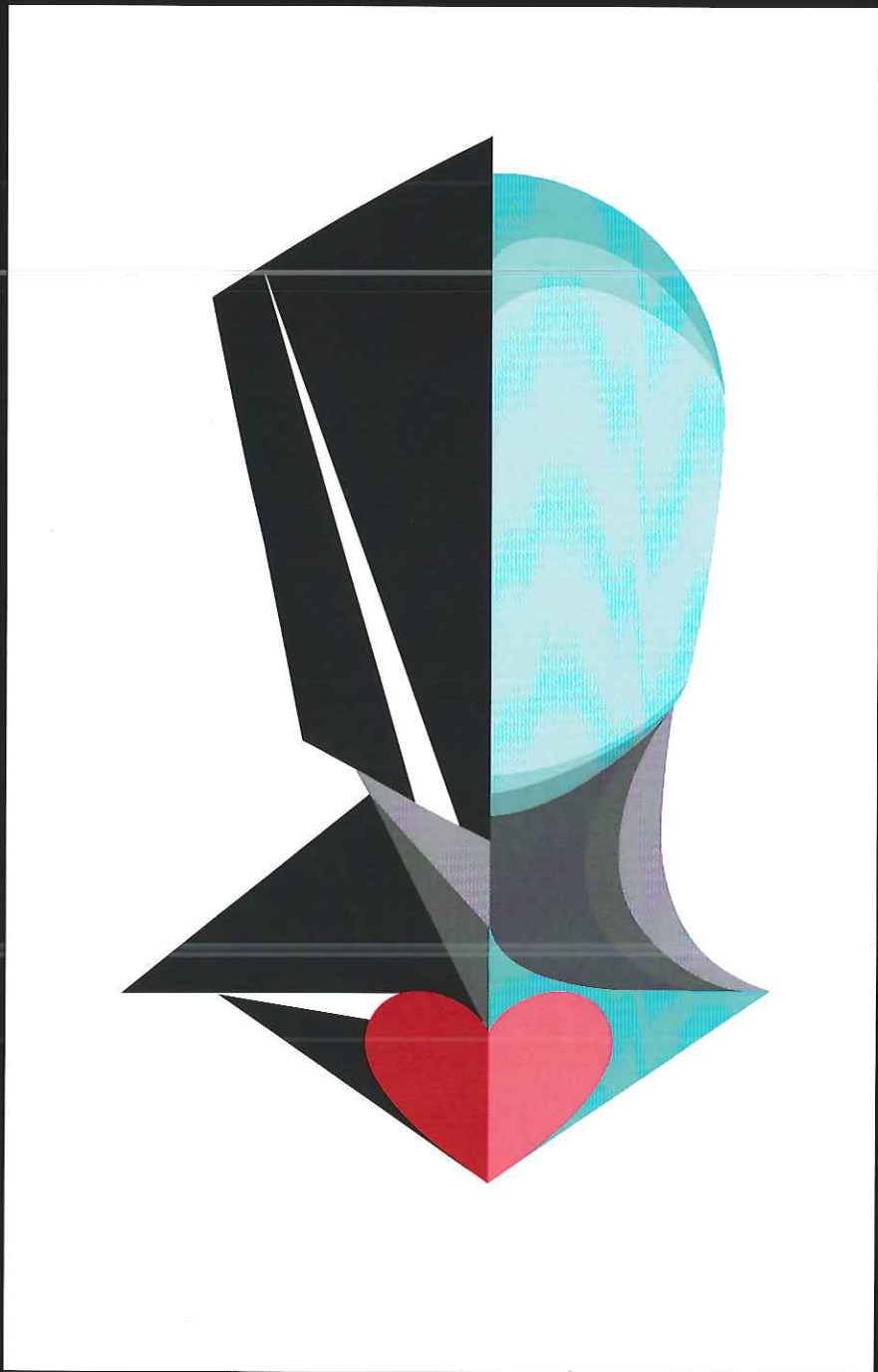


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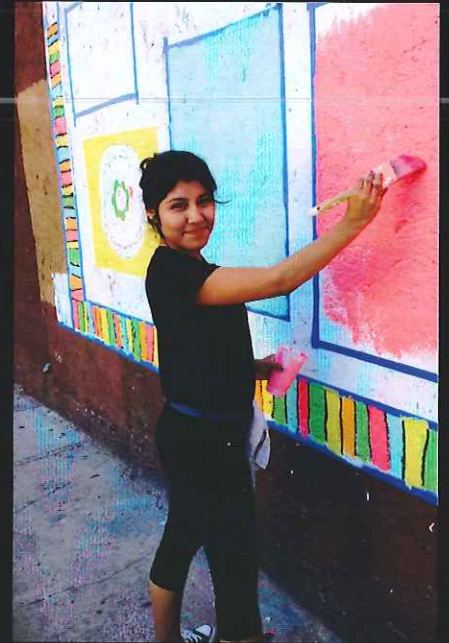
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Megan Duffy
Android. Vector illustration

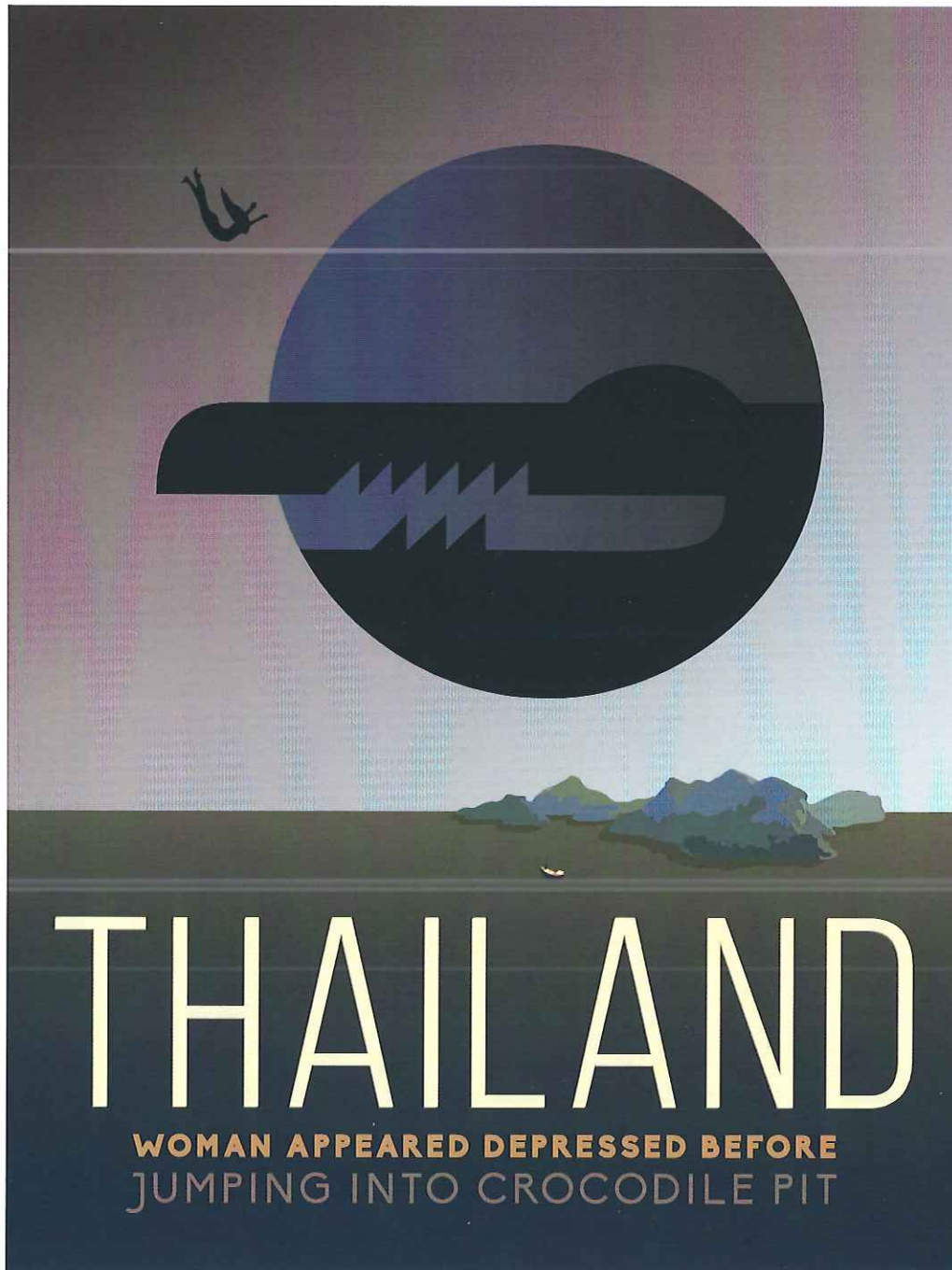


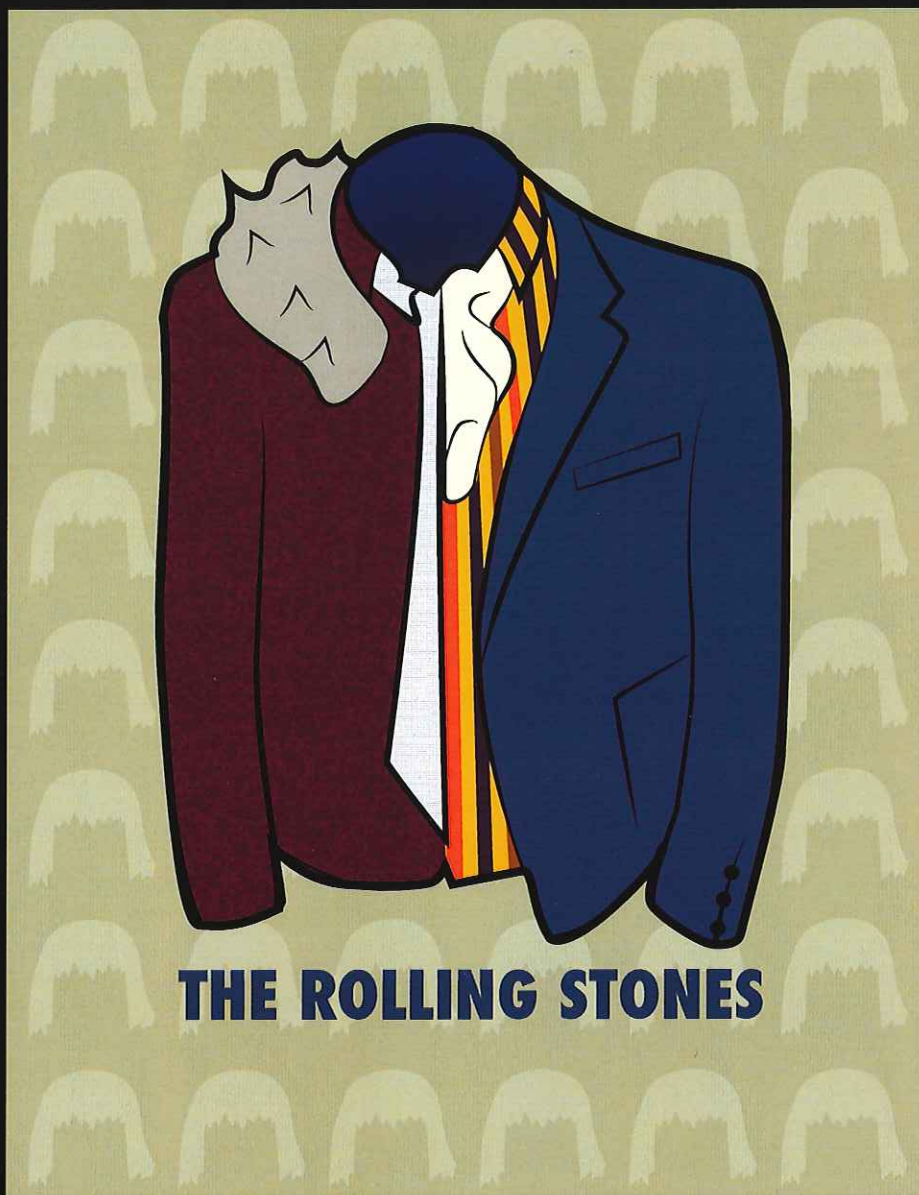




Alexandria Jimenez
Como Sabor. Community-based design







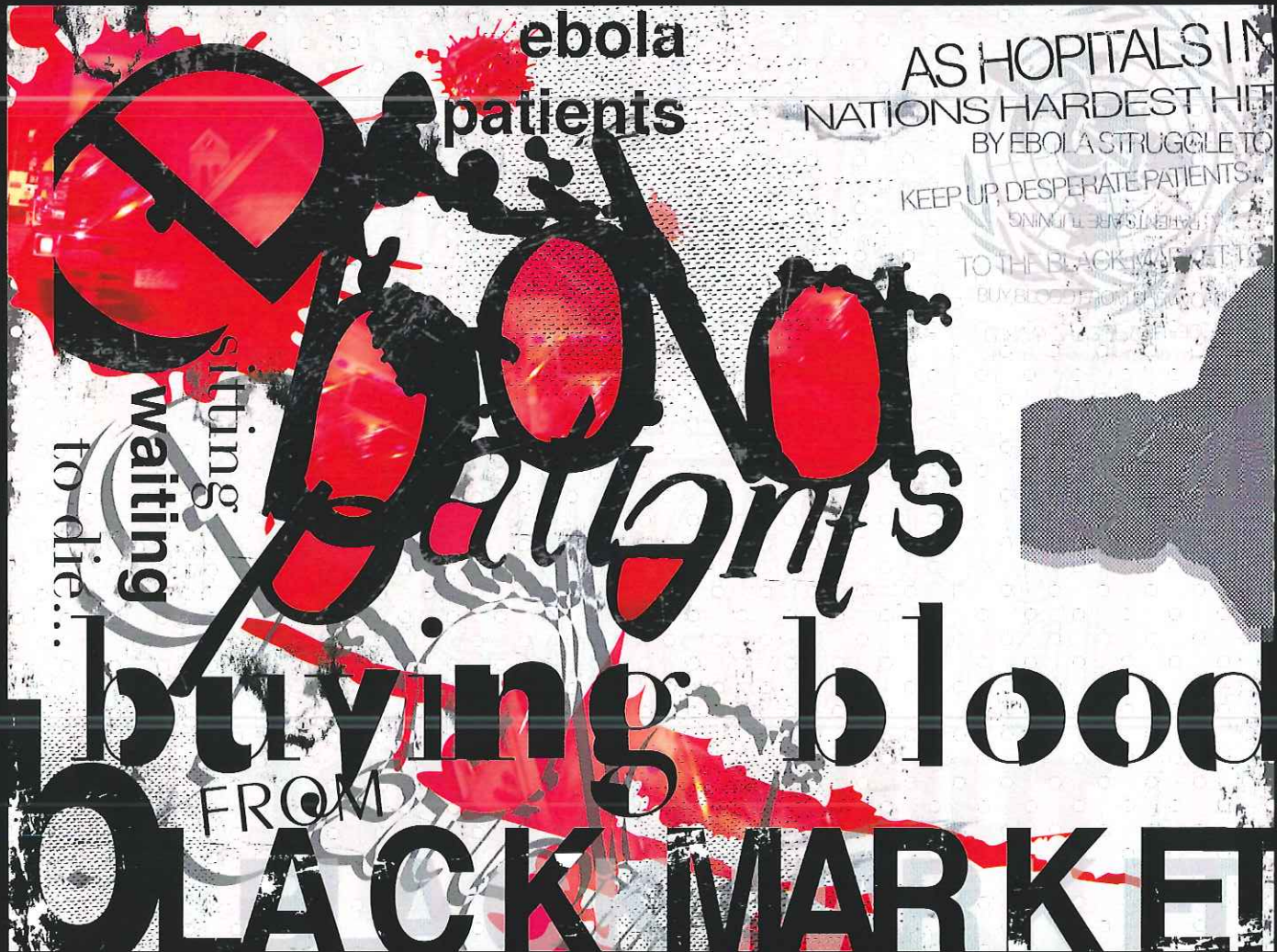
Rayna Kunzman (Opposite)
*Thailand Woman Appears Depressed before Jumping
into Crocodile Pit.* Graphic design

Kevin Roysden
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Donglover for Spiderman. Vector illustration

Sierra Schwartz (Opposite)
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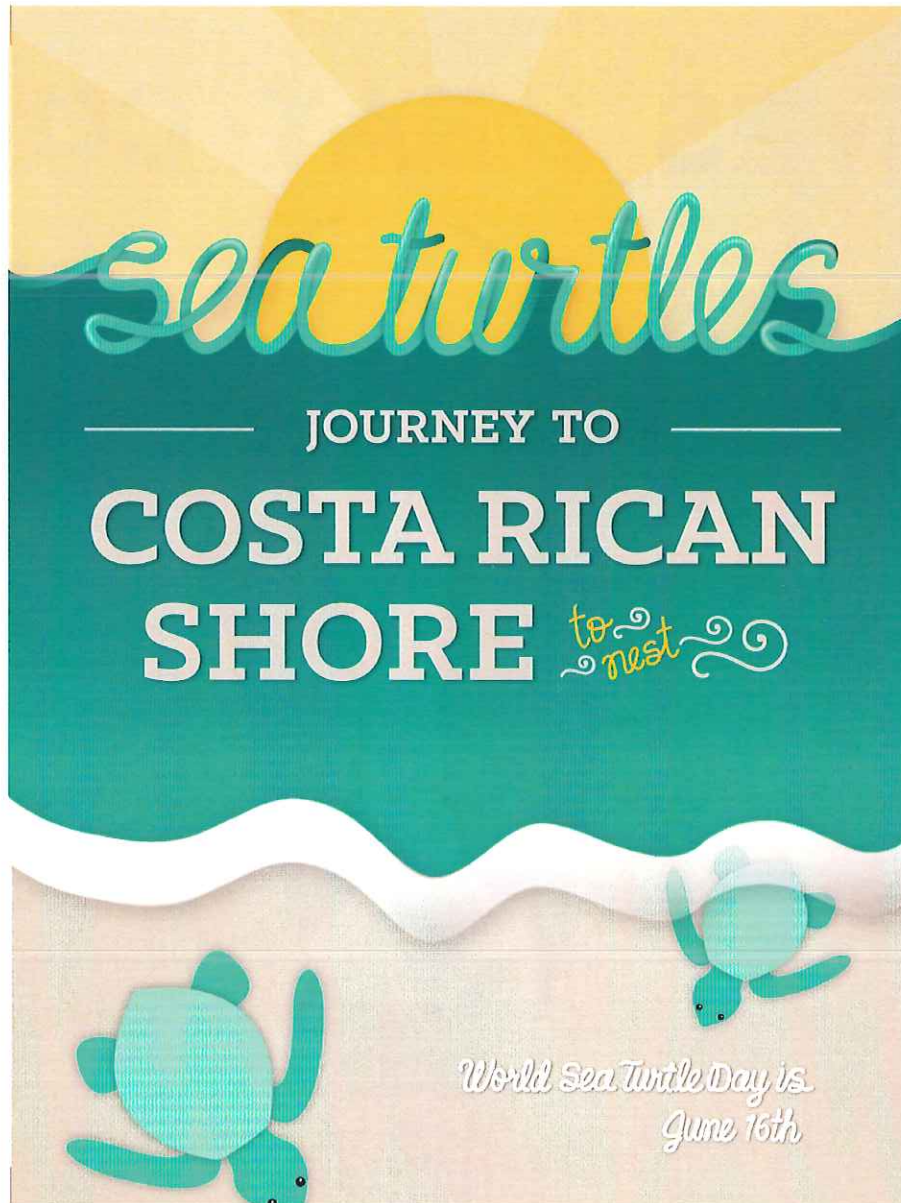
Edward Hill
Infected with Carson. Graphic design

Ben Perow (Opposite)
Yes I Eat Cow. Screen print

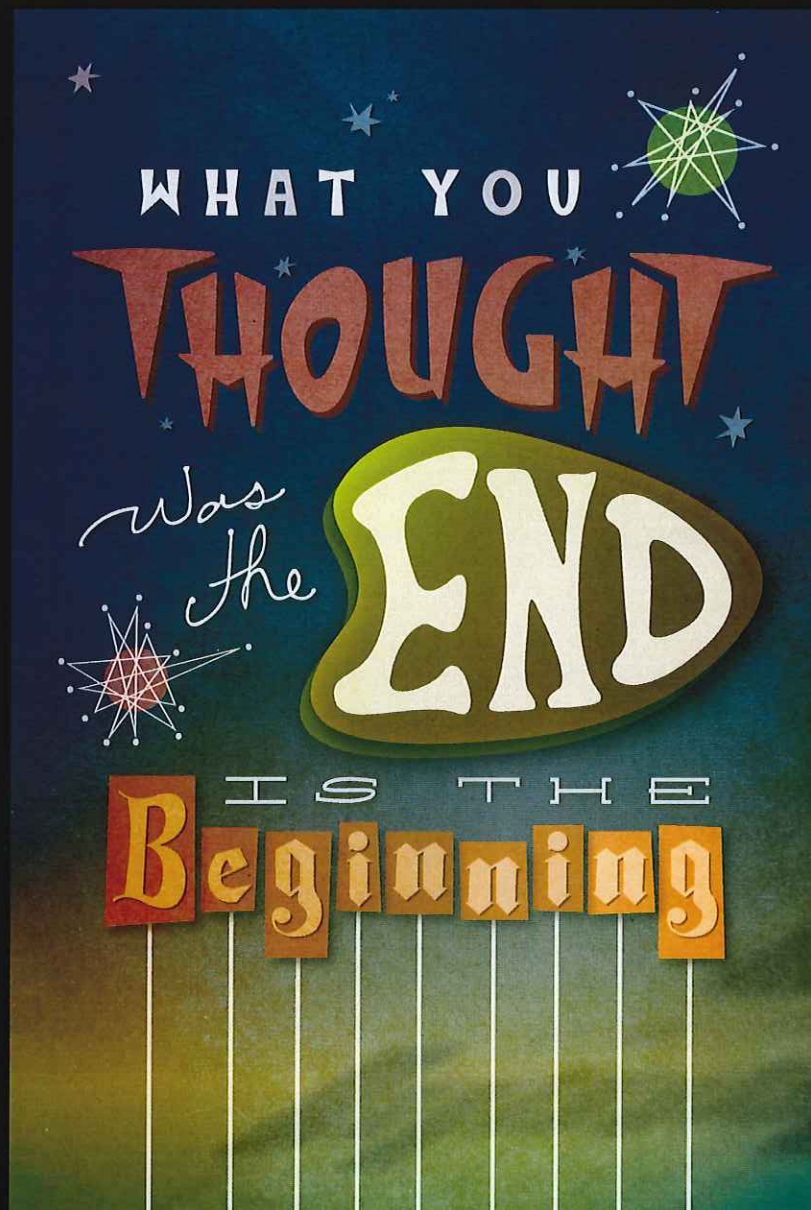
YES I EAT COW



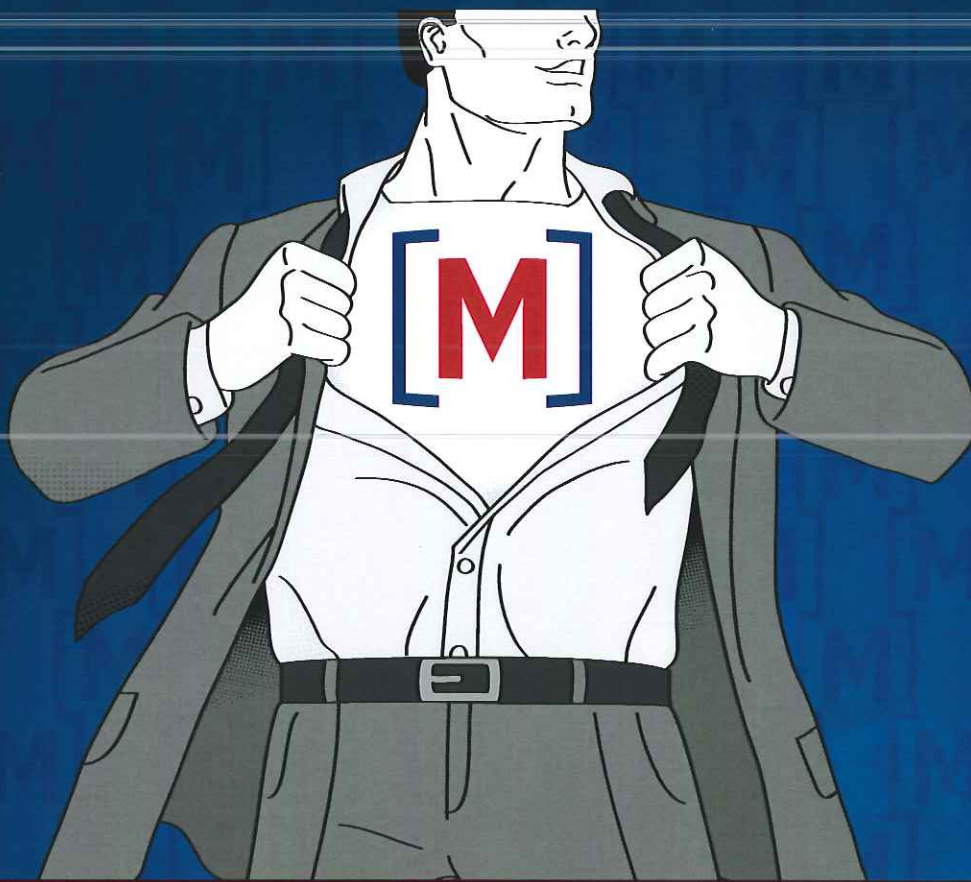
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Mr. Death. Hand-lettered illustration



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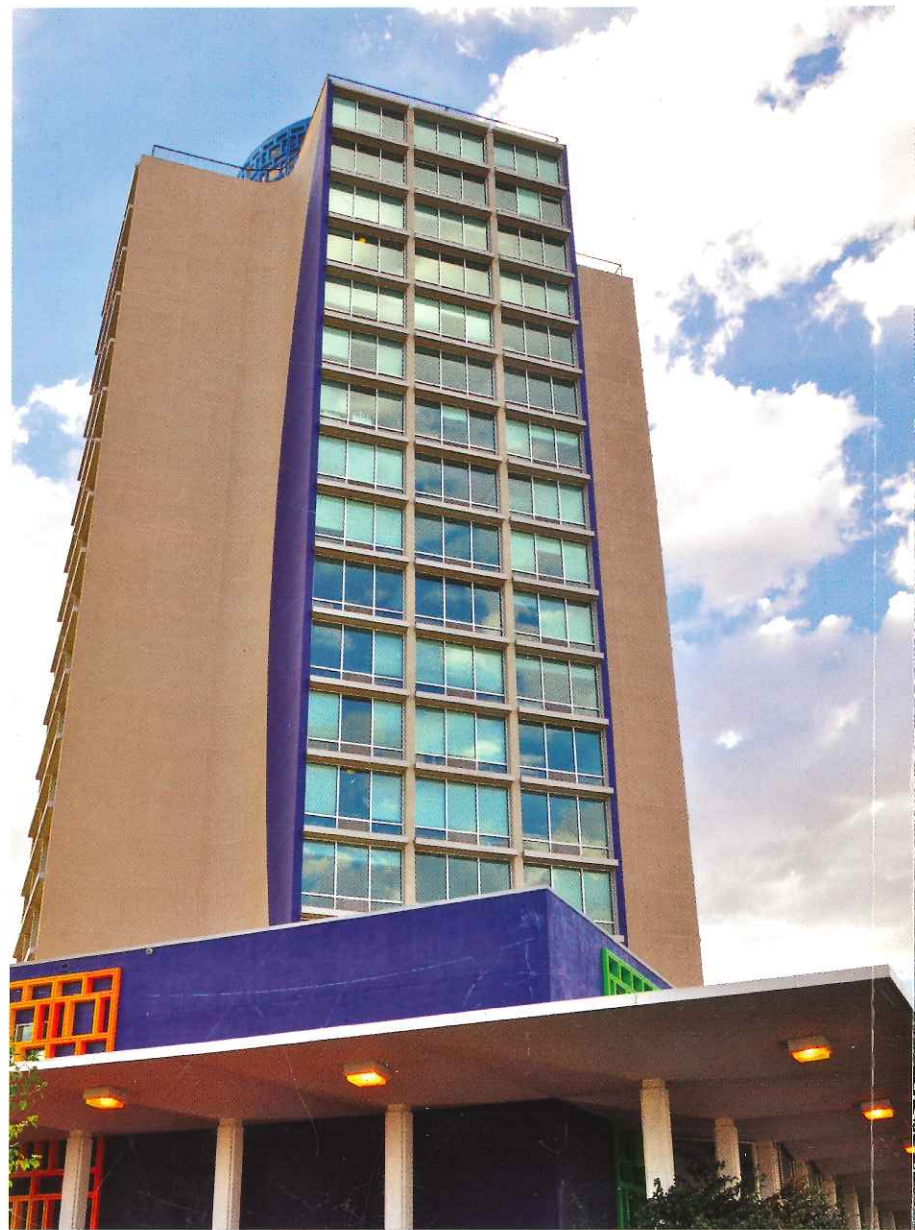
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