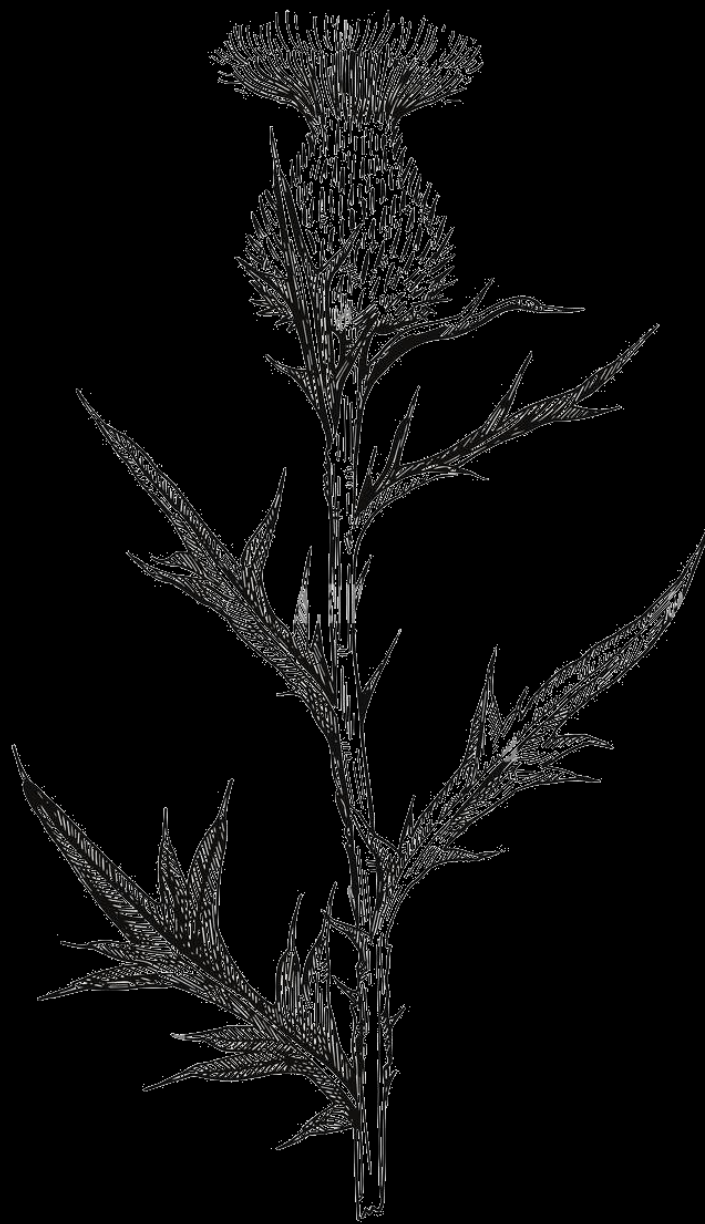


# THE PRAIRIE REVIEW

ISSUE NO. 12 NOVEMBER 2024

GRASSROOTS MAGAZINE OF POETRY, PROSE, ART AND CRITICISM



# THE PRAIRIE REVIEW

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## POETRY

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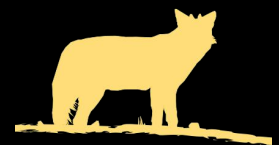
DEE ALLEN

KALPANA MARKENDEY

MARGO CHRISTIE

## ESSAY

MARGO CHRISTIE





## Letter from the Editor

Welcome to the 12<sup>th</sup> issue of The Prairie Review – a magazine for poets, writers, art makers, creatives, and culture critics from global grassroots. This issue features works of talent from Australia, Asia, UK, the States.

I am immensely grateful to all writers and visual artists who submitted their work. Without their / your contributions, the magazine would remain only an idea. Because of their / your generosity, it is a presence and a substantial account of what we feel, think, and transform into art both locally here in Chicago and from various places in the world. The connection is real and downright miraculous.

In the United States, early November has been a sad and shocking awakening to the political realities that have the power to so impact our lives and yet seem so remote from the way we would like the world to be. Stay strong! Politics is large. Art is greater.

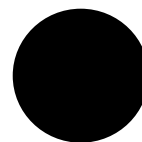
We continue with live poetry events in Chicago and online community discussions and meetings. The magazine continues, and it is my hope to keep building the community around the Poetry Meetup and all its activities in the coming year. We choose to stay strong, alive, and creative.

Keep making art, keep writing poems!

Kinga Lipinska

Editor





“The gates of hell are open night and day;  
Smooth the descent, and easy is the way:  
But to return, and view the cheerful skies,  
In this the task and mighty labor lies.”

Virgil, *The Aeneid*, Book VI





**Avid Intrusion**

Now grown and my own, I unfurl my wings,  
unlike the camper fighting open  
a crumpled tent. In black gear,  
so obtrusive. The man stumbles  
toward me, flapping his hands until they land  
on a camera. Point-blank posed, he aims—  
My muted beauty. Imperceptibility.  
He sees a window without glare.  
He sees air.  
I know he aims for my secrets.  
He sees me, barely.  
Thinks of aircrafts—  
conquest.  
All that gawking. He, like the bird,  
needs something to take home  
and call his own  
catch.

## **Johnnie Dreams of Poetry**

Johnnie dreams of great big jumping jiving poetry,  
of jazzy journeying words that go far and then farther,  
of words that go to China then the moon then the sunken pits of a drowned Atlantis,  
then to the soft nipples peaks of warm brown boobies,  
then down pale-thighed valleys to hairy joyous jungles.

Johnnie dreams of a singing, howling song,  
where Ginsbergian goons and Keroackian kooks bang on bongo drums  
and hoot and woot and toot,  
where the pitter-patter of desperate feet in loose sandals dance with brutal pounding rhythm  
on concrete poured and smoothed out by hairy-armed workers who all just want a fucking beer  
before they go home to have bad sex with depressed wives.

Johnnie dreams of a lusty leaping language  
Lecherous, lavish, laced with livid longing  
Able to excite dulled nerve endings to Pompeian climaxes  
Even in the midnight blue hours of early morning

Johnnie fantasizes of a soaring sentiment for whom the sky is as mundane as a sidewalk,  
for which the horizons of the Earth relent and space opens up its milky way arms and quantum-  
nous folds  
to unleash a mezzo- soprano chorus of probability and possibility and perhapsitude.



## J. KANG

Where are these transgressive, trespassive, terraforming turns of phrase?

Where are the synonyms that synchronize and antonyms that antagonize into zebrastic dichotomies?

Where are the syncopatic similes and burning phosphorous metaphors of Johnnie's dreams?

He looks for them in white clouds as he lays on the roof of his house

And outside of locked classroom windows

And as he drives to work in a Toyota

And as he walks back from the Coleman shed after raking up the leaves

And as he drifts off to sleep on an Ikea futon after bringing the kids home from Sunday soccer.

**Mistress**

I hate cats

They're less loyal than dogs

Never whimper or pant for your love

And nibble at your corpse when you die

But they're easier to take care of

And the kids

So fine

The kitten climbs onto my heavy heaving chest

And rests its purring face atop my hypertensive heart

I hope my eyes will taste good

**Geckoes &**

He looked for an  
entrance but found  
them all taken by  
poets & geckoes, the  
one making a fuss  
& the other at one  
with the land-  
scape. Never knew  
which was which  
until he started  
a poem with a time  
stamp, & a gecko  
with its ET eyes  
peered down from  
the lintel & said, 'Oh,  
I see you arrived  
after Frank Hara.'

## **Some Liturgies**

### **Matins**

Deduced from the  
functionality & stylistic  
aspects of dog  
shows, the easiest way to  
master verbs & speak  
fluently is to start  
barking & stop  
watching Fox News.

### **Lauds**

Easter Eggs in a  
basket, a menacing mother,  
a sweet spider— there  
is the relatively high  
possibility that each or  
any of them represents  
an a priori probability  
that the obesity trend  
will continue to  
increase in popularity.

## **Some Liturgies**

Terce

Into a longtime  
friend's dead ears our  
ancestors whisper. We  
feel the flames tilt in-  
wards, hear through  
their feminist lens  
how the synergistic effects  
of a bag of doritos  
mixed with rhesus  
pieces affect the rates of  
evolution. Like most  
clustering applications the  
basic framework of human  
existence is a quaint affair.

Sext

Used to be a  
time they ex-  
changed their  
favorite psalms  
as short mess-  
  
ages. Now it's  
an all day ritual

**Some Liturgies**

& focuses on  
nude pictures  
of one another.

No longer done  
when it used to  
be. That full sun at  
noon made their  
skin look blotchy.

None

Organic food is rich in  
history, with shipwrecks,  
lighthouses & jagged proxies  
for the Republican presidential  
candidates. It was never  
intended to change the way  
people take in rock concerts.

## **Some Liturgies**

### **Vespers**

Sometimes the camera  
lingers lovingly on  
the one intersection at  
which the various  
trajectories of memory  
cross. The great colors  
& graphics that result  
offer a rare opportunity  
of evaluating the stress  
relaxation coefficients  
of genomic clones made  
from a tough non-toxic  
rubber that dogs love.

**Fueled by Ramen**

Working within a true  
supply & demand economy,  
terrorist strikes in the US  
constitute the single most  
expensive man-made disaster  
in history. You know the  
stories, those that say they  
can cost almost as much as  
having a child. I prefer to  
explore the gritty streets of  
America not as a spectator  
nor as a victim. Raise livestock  
to make my money. spend  
it at the general store in the  
moments before midnight,  
for all the world like Cinderella.



**Mosaic**

She used  
small pieces  
of colored  
glass to  
cover the  
future in  
ordered  
patterns in  
order to  
recognize  
it when she  
arrived.

Mark Young was born in Aotearoa New Zealand but now lives in a small town on traditional Juru land in North Queensland, Australia. He has been publishing poetry for sixty-five years, & is the author of over seventy books, primarily text poetry but also including speculative fiction, vispo, memoir, & art history. His most recent books are the May 2024 free downloadable pdf *to your scattered bodies go* from Scud Editions (Minnesota); *One Hundred Titles From Tom Beckett, with paintings by Thomas Fink*, published by Otoliths in June, 2024; *Alkaline Pageantry*, published by Serious Publications in September, 2024; & *The Magritte Poems* which came out from Sandy Press in October.

KINGA LIPINSKA

Untitled poem & ink / marker drawing

Thoughts of you  
turned  
into late November:

stark trees,  
withered grass,  
passing snow.



**Petit hommage à *I Remember* by Georges Perec**

I remember Georges Perec is also an experimental poet.

I remember reading that Perec's *I Remember* is composed of 479 memories.

I remember being surprised that *Life A User's Manual* is such a big book.

I remember that the book has 99 chapters. One chapter short of perfect.

I remember *Life A User's Manual* is a narrative of lists, puzzles, games, and digressions.

I remember that it was raining in Oak Park the day I brought *Life: A User's Manual* with me, to the coffee shop, to begin my reading of it.

I remember learning that Perec's parents were Polish Jews and wondering whether they came from the South of the country, where I am from.

I remember thinking that Watteau and Fragonard use pastel color palettes to heighten and not to hide the eerie ambiance of their art. Like Perec in his fiction.

I remember that Perec uses references to American Jazz musicians in his autobiographical sketches. And that he wrote the way jazz is improvised.

I remember the evening I went to hear McCoy Tyner play in the old Jazz Showcase in Chicago back in 1996 or so.

I remember taking *Life: A User's Manual* to Washington D.C. for a five-day business trip and never opening that book, but I was happy to have it with me for company.

I remember moving the date for the book discussion, because people had not finished the reading, and because there is always more reading to be done anyway.

I remember planning to read Melville's *Bartleby* in New York if I wanted to have a better feel for Bartlebooth in Perec's *Life A User's Manual*. I now have a better feel for Bartlebooth.

I remember thinking that Wall Street seems unlikely but is, in fact, a perfect setting for tragedy.

I remember arriving in my hotel on Wall Street and walking onto the balcony with a view of the Memorial.

## KINGA LIPINSKA

I remember wondering if Hernan Diaz read *Bartleby* to prepare for the Trust and realizing that he must have. The pathos is so similar.

I remember creating my sense of New York out of Xavier Salomon's work at the Frick, of novels, of Christie's seminar on art, of JP Morgan's library, of Harlem and of a big Wall Street project I had at one time.

I remember walking up and down Broadway not knowing yet what Broadway meant in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to America.

I remember that Percec's *Life: A User's Manual* is mostly visual and Hernan Diaz's Trust is mostly musical. Diaz is more strongly tied to the 19<sup>th</sup> century literary writing styles than Percec.

I remember that Percec was a member of the Workshop for Potential Literature.

I remember that the I remember poem should be exhaustive to the point of hilarity - or tenderness.

**My Lifetime by KL  
(for Sylvia, for Tonee)**

I  
the other side of the water is  
where I came from  
  
across the speaking waves  
water spilling itself on the sand over and over  
  
it's liquid fingers - implacable.  
I want to be the ocean.

II  
I am inseparable from  
what is home.  
  
Blood seeping into the ground.  
Hot breath caressing water grass.  
  
I have no bone,  
I shall never leave.  
  
I straddle the waves and the dunes between my thighs, white clouds in the sky,  
giant schooners and blue herons floating about my head.

# KINGA LIPINSKA

II

Then, you run awkwardly  
across the moving sand

onto the coming waves  
shielding your eyes from the sun

you laugh  
you are a child again

I am a girl  
standing on the shore, biting her pink lips.

Your smiling mouth between me  
and the bosom of infinite water.

How tenderly I wait  
for this moment to live itself out.

**POST-COVID HUGS**

I want to give the world a hug.

The world needs a hug.

But the world increasingly rejects a full-frontal, enthusiastic hug.

You have to sneak up on the world and hug it from behind

which presents you with a whole set of other problems.

Poor guy (me)

walking around with all those hugs backed up.

**STILL SMALL VOICE**

There is a still small voice inside of me  
That speaks clearly and distinctly  
It says "Press on; All is not lost."  
"Please be quiet," I reply  
The voice persists, "Press on."  
"Shut up," I shout back  
"You are not of the flesh. What do you know of pressing?"  
"Press on for those who remain in the flesh. Press on."  
"Be quiet still voice, stop bothering me. I have work to do."  
I won that argument. I sent the still small voice packing.  
He went silently.  
I have the feeling that he is waiting for a quiet moment.  
He likes those.



**Sunday Morning Due**

A tiny shimmering bird fluttered -insuring I acknowledged its appearance  
It hovered above the flowerbed a few feet away -with curious indifference  
We caught each other's eye  
It came closer ...not the least bit shy  
It was not interested in my fussed-over blooms  
Yet still -it spoke to me no doom  
Why was I so excited  
By this guest I had not invited?  
Was there an intended message  
In its swift-wing, hovering, gossamer dressage?

The tiny bird was a shimmering ominous black...  
Still, I would eagerly welcome it back  
Not many such birds appear here you know  
I suppose, there are worse ways to go  
Or maybe the portend was simply due  
You did not come to me -so I came to you.  
In reflection -I offer this  
A front stoop will do  
For a little Sunday morning bliss.

## Painting Ghosts

Singers Glen is located in Rockingham County, Virginia. The community comprises one road, the Singers Glen Post Office, a recycling center, one store, and a Methodist and Baptist Church.

- via Wikipedia

The risk in painting ghosts is that you might capture them as they once were, not as they are now—dead. This is a matter, of course, of intention. I often dream, just outside of Appalachia, of hills and winding mountain roads, of not being able to see a thing past the headlights of our rental car, because there's so little light pollution out here. I remember the white walled bedroom in my grandmother's house, the one with the electric candles in the windows, with the old wash basin in the corner and a view of the rotting shed out back. My grandmother grew up in the house she lives in now, at eighty-two. She lives across the street from her best friend, her best friend since she was twelve or so, and on days they can't leave their houses and amble down the road they call each other on their cell phones that their respective grandkids taught them how to use and they talk for hours, saying I miss you even though they're 20 yards away because when you're old that's a hell of a trip.

My grandmother is too old, my mother says, to live in that house all alone with its steep stairs and door that doesn't quite lock. My grandmother is too old, she doesn't say, to be so sentimental. What makes a house a home? Is it the lady up the road who feeds the feral cats, or the general store I used to buy bubblegum from that sells shirts that say 'the south will rise again'? Is it the house on the hill that an urban development company abandoned after sinking a fortune into it, the layer of dust on the concrete floor and the chain-link fence they put up around their shame? There are more churches than businesses in Singers Glen, though they're mostly used these days for funerals. The old Baptist Church across the way that always left a door cracked open, the one my mother used to sneak into to use the bathroom before my grandmother's house had running water, itself dying, itself in need of a funeral. Its last heaving breaths wheezing in its eaves, a final cry of Good Lord, take me home when it's been there all along.

**Stranger**

**After Amie Irwin & Molly McCully Brown**

Come home to me, stranger, and let me welcome you  
as Christ might have, if he ever existed to begin with.

For the sake of argument, let's say God exists.

For the sake of our guilt, let's say He meant for things to be this way.

Sure, there's a church, 100 years old this August,  
but the thing is we know that for every child's  
carved initial in a wooden pew there is something rotten  
to be born no matter how hard you pray. And sure, we say Grace  
at supertime every time but the thing is we watch the tree line  
out of the corner of our eyes and swear one day it will swallow us all whole.

There is a rose for every crown of thorns, there is a reaching tree  
for every ray of sun and after rain come the oily puddles on the road.

We took God and beat him black and blue.

We raised the dead and put them to work for us.

## IO CURTIN

Come huddle around the fire, stranger, and let me warm you  
like an egg on the hot sidewalk, swallow you whole with heat  
until you're crisp around the edges. There is divinity  
in every skinned knee on dusty asphalt,  
in every lone general store standing sentinel.

Sure, there's a parking lot where the old schoolhouse used to be,  
cracked and dotted green, but the thing is we know  
that for every reaching weed there are claw marks beneath the concrete.  
And sure, we know the third left turn out of the Glen by the husk  
of the police station, but the thing is we know that

for every crumbling edifice of man there is an ancience to this land,  
potent and unyielding, that digs into flesh like a rusty nail and  
holds on like a mother.

*There are the names we don't remember. There are the names we don't repeat  
and we are glad we don't have to twist our tongues in those shapes anymore.*

*One day, we will have no more space in the graveyard on top of the hill.*

*One of these hard nights will be our last and we should be grateful for it.*

## A Snapshot of What Remains of the Glen

For my grandmother

One road, a post office, a recycling center, two churches and a general store. My grandmother grew up in Singers Glen and remembers when there was more, but not much more. My camera can't capture the blush of the crepe myrtle in front of the Baptist church across the street. It's the last secret still kept by this valley, its knotted branches and wound blooms brushing the bottoms of drooping powerlines. Amongst firewood piles and overturned wheelbarrows, down the hill from where the feral cat house once stood, my grandmother sips coffee on her porch & waves back to the man who tips his ball-cap at her as he drives by.

"I have no clue who that is," she whispers to me conspiratorially, as if he might hear her over the roar of his truck's engine.

One road, a post office, a recycling center, two churches and a general store. Now with two historic Airbnb's and soon whatever a "retreat conference center" is. If my grandmother gets her way, she will take her last breath in the Glen.

The Baptist preacher is dying. There's nothing to be done for it, as there rarely is for cancer that has been allowed to fester. His son, a state trooper, made the announcement to the parish in full uniform. My grandmother saw the patrol car parked out front of the church and knew something was wrong. The Baptist preacher is dying and the crepe myrtle tree out in front of the church is in full blossom, and I wonder how much will remain once the sun sets, what will be taken from this place in the night. I wonder if he will be buried on the hill.

## 10 Days

ft ACT 1,ACT 2



10 days.....

A line that lingers,

Happy moments dance in my mind.

How does a stranger become a friend,

Only to drift back into the shadows?

When stress wraps around my thoughts,

Why do memories flash, asking,

“Why this emptiness?”

Why does hate twist like a dance,

Breaking what once felt whole?

# LOKAREDDY PRISHITHA REDDY

When I read the above line on my docs  
Happy moments dancing in front of my eyes,  
How is it the phase where  
stranger turns best person

Back to strangers.  
Why when my mind stresses  
The flashes of good moments  
Ask why, why you're void?  
Why ,why, why is that  
The hate is dancing  
that wrecks its bone.

10 days....  
Faces I long to see,  
Breakthroughs shared over drinks,  
Hugs that offered comfort,  
Words I never knew I craved,  
To the best people i wish they're beside me;  
The love I've built,  
So precious, could last a lifetime.  
Those faces,moments i miss at the moment;  
Those breakthrough with booze;  
Those hugs i needed as a support;  
Those manchi words which i didn't knew  
I needed;  
Those people whom i wish to talk too daily;  
The love and the relation I earned would be  
so special and prosperous for life.

# LOKAREDDY PRISHITHA REDDY

10 days....

From being awkward to just saying hi with a smile

To wanting to stay and talk to them the path had crossed;

To for toasting my happiness with them;

To being genuinely treating like the child

where I always told myself to be a mature girl;

I've been childish at 2 places —

ACT 1:

Had the best time

Learned my mistake ;

ACT 2:

Had the beautiful memory

Cried and cried

Become immature and child again;

But this time to find myself!

Act 1 hurts to have to give a thought

Act 2 gives the "I miss it "



# LOKAREDDY PRISHITHA REDDY

10 days .....

T'was the last before day

Silent verse was happening

Heart with tears rolling down

whispering "you're weak"

But they told "you're a strong one

Get back at it ,

All I ever wanted as to be a good person

While I have to convey

"it's all on me

I don't want to burn in the ashes

Sorry I have hurt you Act 1

Act 2 ,thankyou for the healing love you poured."

mirror

you only looked at me  
when you could see yourself  
in me.  
like a mirror  
the longer you looked  
the more scratches and blurs you saw.  
you couldn't bear to see them  
reflected on yourself,  
so in a dark corner,  
you tucked me away  
and  
left another mark.  
that's why I like the night —  
I feel like myself.  
a mirror without light  
is just existing,  
worrying very little of its use  
to someone else.

secret life

as a child

I suppose I was happiest  
when I was left alone.

one Sunday night in  
someone else's home,  
all the kids went upstairs  
to play a video game,  
but I stayed downstairs.

I didn't enjoy the company  
of those other children,  
I just laid on the brown leather couch,  
that wrapped around the corner  
of their living room,  
and stared at the ceiling.  
the cabinet opposite me  
had doors that looked woven  
and made me feel like I was inside a basket.  
there was this table in the middle of the room as well  
that lifted into the air  
housing a fire.  
then the couch lifted.  
then the whole room.  
then the walls dissolved  
around a hot air balloon  
cradling me.

# ALLEN NGUYEN

sailing clouds at high speeds,  
I wondered what would happen  
if I spit against the wind;  
would it land back on me?  
and as I thought this,  
I instinctively spat into the air,  
and the laws that be  
quickly sent it back to me.  
still laying on that leather couch,  
I got up, wiping my face  
and checking if anyone saw.  
"that was so stupid!" I said  
as I laughed and grinned,  
uninterrupted.  
how delicious it was,  
to have fallen so deeply into my thoughts,  
and to have myself  
and only myself to enjoy it with.

eventually, the parents came to pick up  
my brother and I,  
and no one asked  
of my night alone.

it was all for me.  
no one would ever know  
that I discovered gravity  
that night!

KATE SCOTT  
VISUAL ART

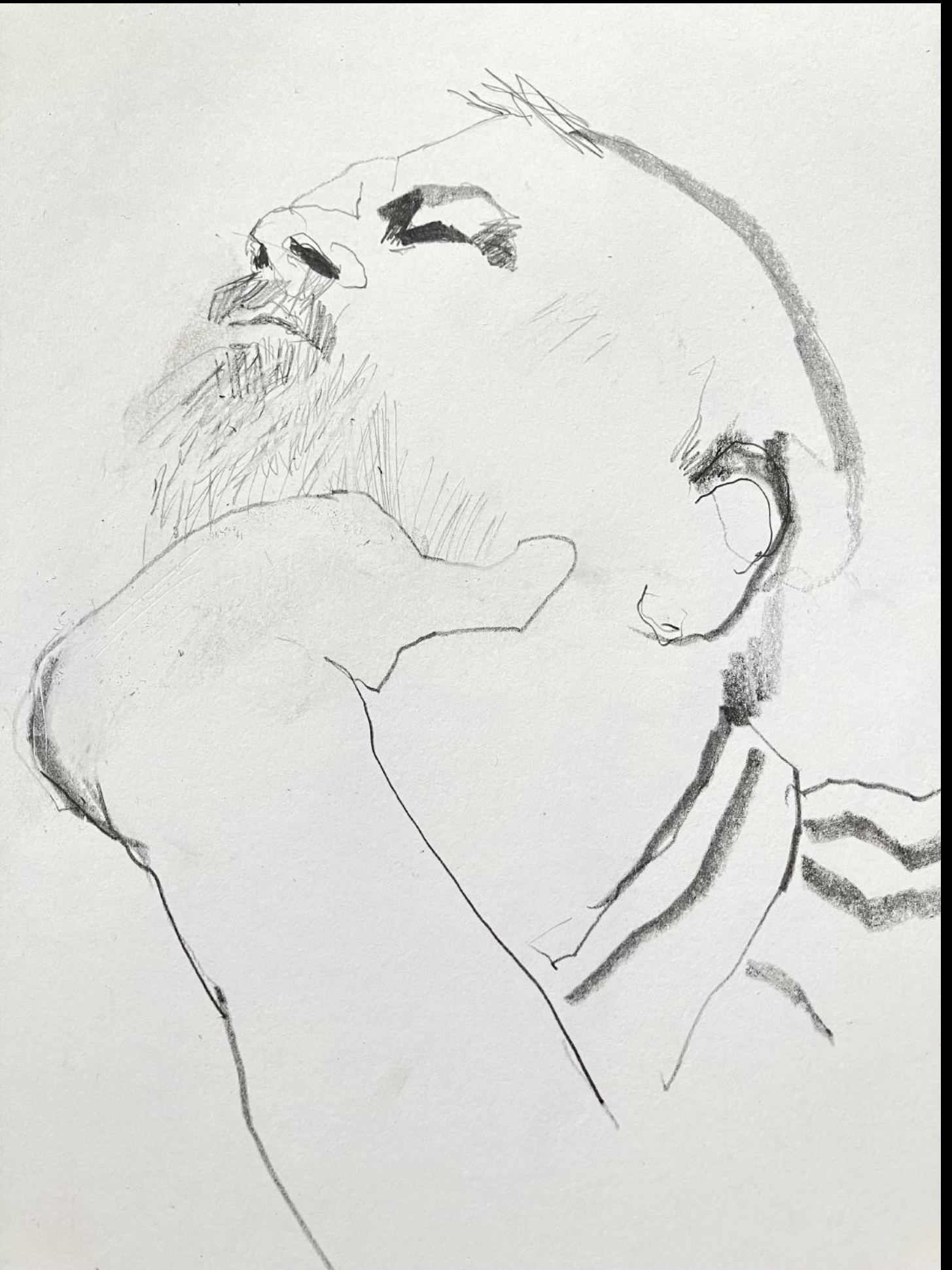


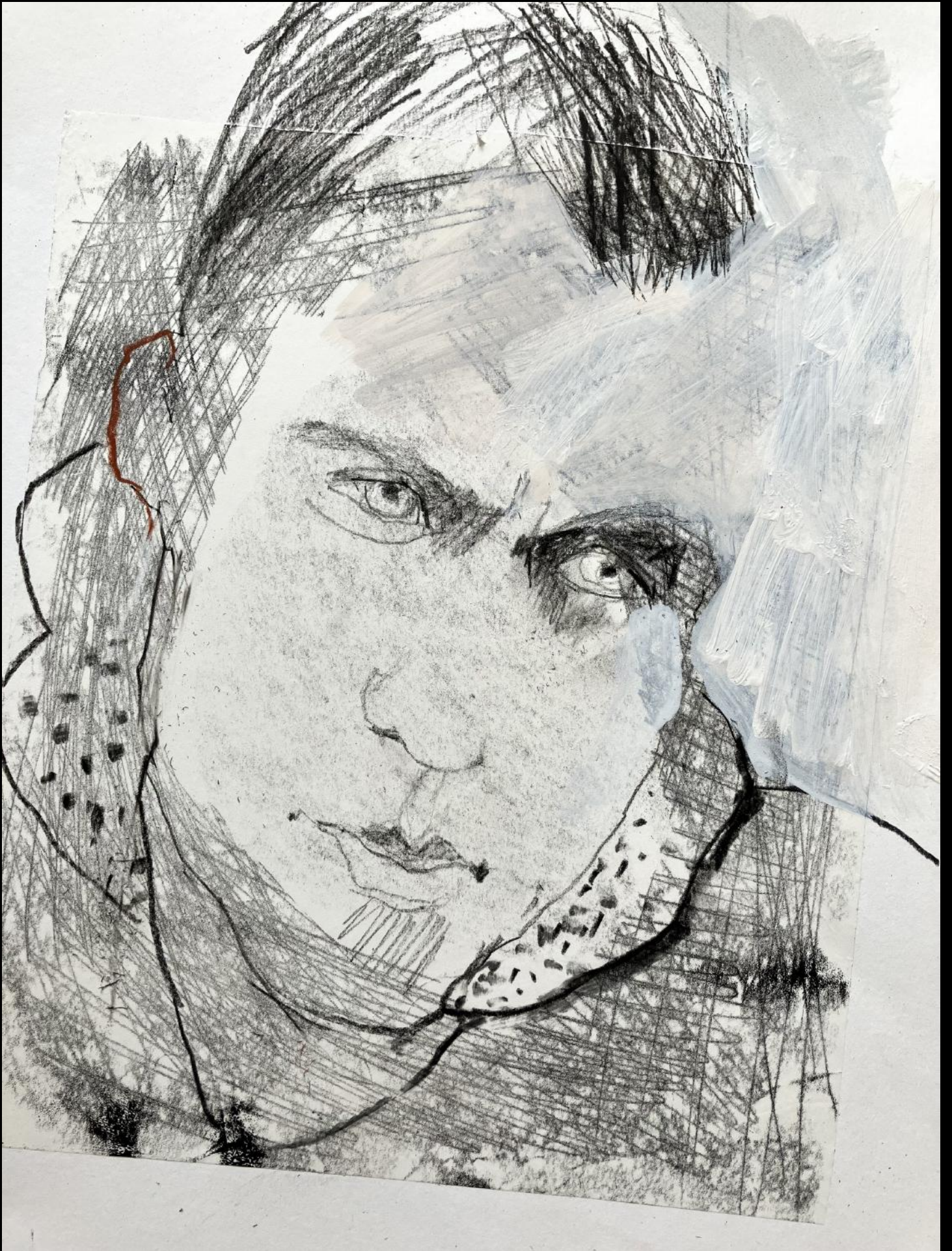








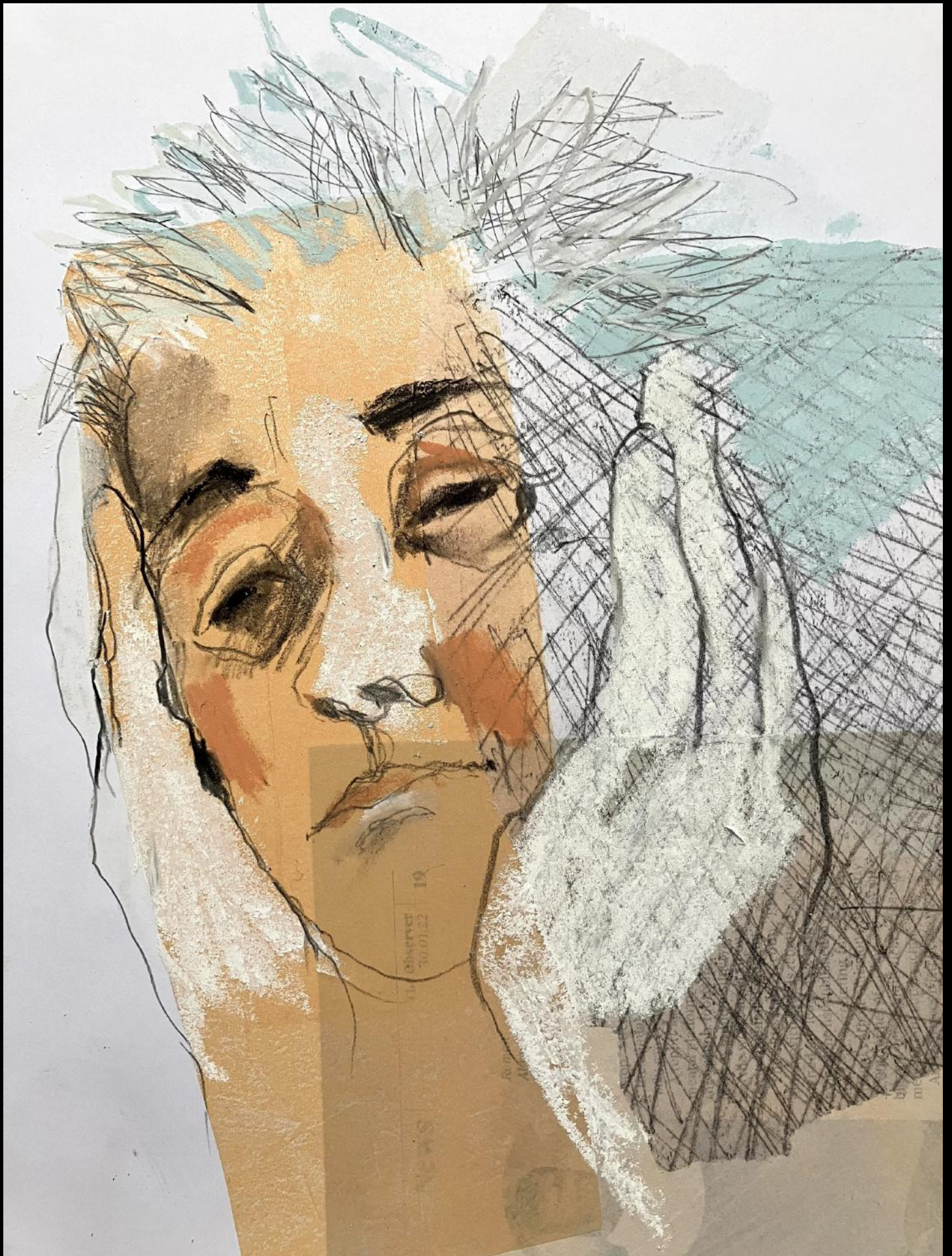


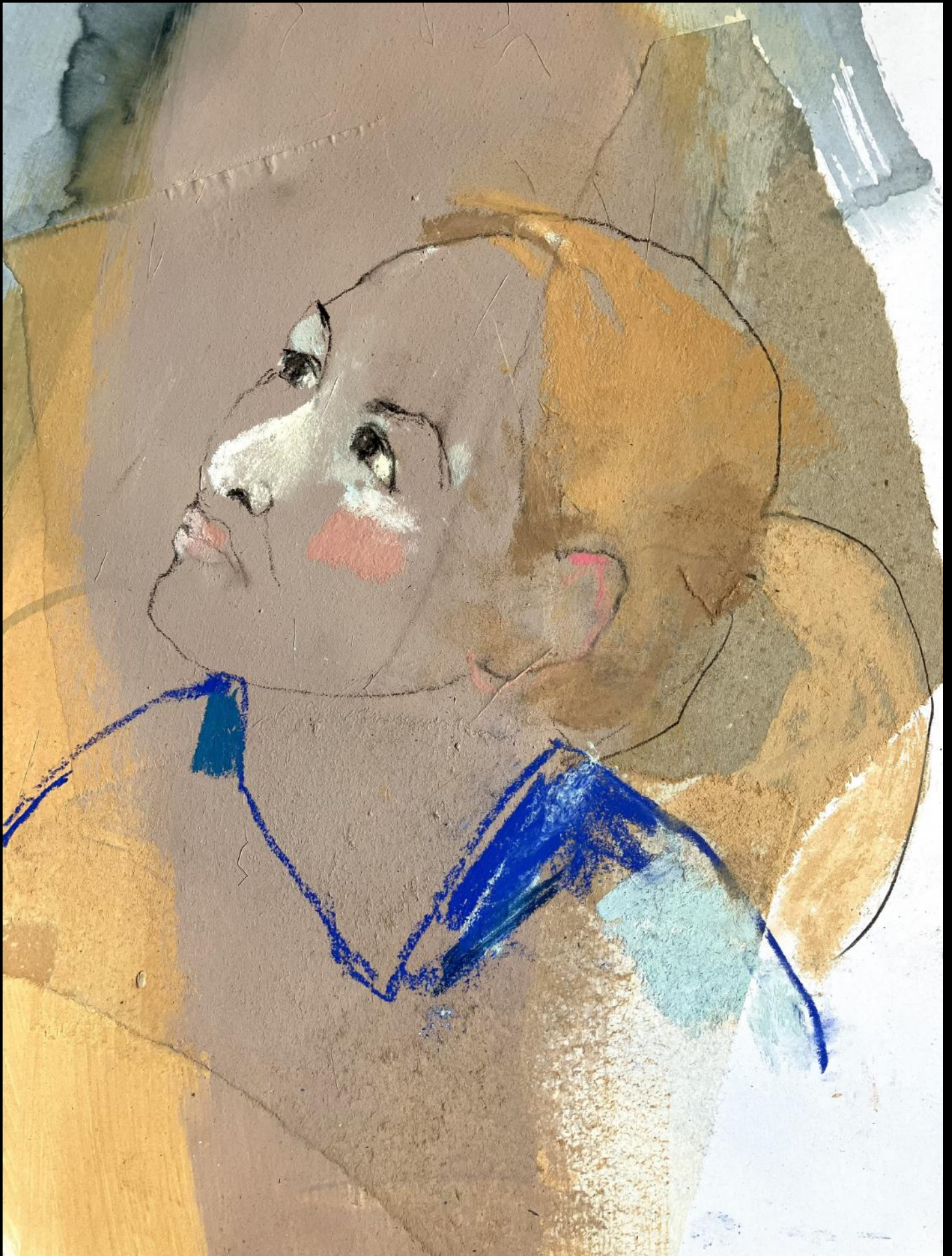












Kate Scott

Artist and Potter @katescott7251

I live and work in South west London making ceramics and paintings. Although much of my work is abstract, drawing is very important to me. I make lots of drawings of my local public space, Clapham Common, for example. In the last year or two I have discovered a wonderful portrait drawing group online which happens every Monday. For me this is at 8.00am - but I can think of no better way to start the week. Each pose is as long as a track of music, typically 3-4 minutes, and never more than 5. The sitters are selected from amongst the artists taking part. We manage about fourteen or fifteen drawings in an intense and invigorating hour. I have loved building this in to my working life.



# ANDREA GASPAR

## Unboxing Day

What is comfort then?

When 7 times out of 10

A man will cast a vote- akin to smote-

That affirms his every yen

And puts his foot upon my throat

If it were not for my prettiness

If it were not for the lightness

The whiteness of my skin

The Aryan perfection I possess

Oh what then?

10 times out of 10, I would be too hateful, too loud

Too proud, a fiery woman to be dragged down

There'd be some invisible line that I'd transgress

To give cause for you to drown

My confidence and incite a nation to oppress

Instead I don't notice the clear plastic boxing me in

Keeping my hair in place as it wraps under my chin

I sit trapped on a shelf in my cellophane shroud

With the other dolls, life-like as a mannequin

And we stay silent, that's all that's allowed

What would it take to break our compliant alliance?

To remove the milk of white woman kindness

Could I risk causing some distress?

Wipe the blood from my hands and profess

Freedom. Cut away our fears and doubts

Fall to the ground, humbled, to help our sisters out

And together break the bonds that bind us all

We cannot wait for another Fall.

**Unboxing Day**

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**Check Mate**

Somebody stop the venerable white man  
These conquering heroes with their master plan  
They think they are at risk so they castle their rook  
But care not for the loss of their queens that are took  
And the young knights that they pull into the fray  
Are nothing but pawns at the end of the day  
Somebody stop these untenable white men  
We've sacrificed too much on their chessboard again

**Pietà**

I hold the broken body of my discarded womanhood  
Beaten and pierced by the phallic weapons of war  
A war not fought in the streets but in the walls  
These halls of what we thought were Justice  
Where men's words wounded and tore  
At bodies of women wanting to soar  
I hold her  
I hold her like a Mother would  
I hold her stone-struck body with such solemn reverence  
Hoping some seeps into the lifelessness  
Aching ceased  
At peace  
I hold her  
I hold her—belovèd girl—in my guileless gaze  
I hold the weight of her winnowed dreams  
Replaced by strain and sadness, the ravages of rage  
Unleashed  
Released  
I hold her  
I hold her close with grief as memory  
I hold her and me in marble-cold effigy  
Until our bodies dissolve from saltwater waves  
And I can hold  
And I can hold  
No more

**MICHELLE GESLLER**

## **Winter's Edge**

Stark field's

Frozen prairie grass

Crack and whine in protest

To each step that breaks

This bare night's silence

As if to remind

The moon has every right

To her solitary reflection



**Michelle Gessler, Three Birds in Fall, watercolor on paper.**

**Below: Three Birds, Distant Mountain, watercolor on paper.**



**MICHELLE GESLLER**

**When line meets circle (looking at O'Keeffe's abstract painting)**

Looking at Georgia O'Keeffe's abstract painting

Is like a de-crescendo into a horizon

I thought would linger on forever.

And yet, with a sudden startle,

The entire world was reinvented.

No, it wasn't just another abstract painting:

It was holding my breath and finally breathing –

when line meets circle.

**MICHELLE GESLLER**

**Wood Stork**

Feather falls silent

On leaves like an afterthought

The stork I didn't see



## **Brat Summer In Memoriam**

When Brat Summer came to Chicago, I was still a background extra in too damn many selfies — or maybe the rare type of vampire who sustained itself on rat blood and remained in its coffin after sundown.

Yet here they were after another shameful day at the office: a mean girl posse masqued for a red death,

who had already helped themselves to all my boxed wine and charcuterie.

As my workday headache told them to fuck off, I saw my depression dancing by herself in the corner,

wearing a mesh top and leather skirt.

I thought my depression would have more of a Gertrude Stein quality — but her green sunflower eyes

and black lipstick told me I was wrong.

The days passed in a series of sighs and shudders.

Sometimes we danced until daybreak — our steps guided by nerves more than rhythm.

Sometimes we played video games on strange consoles — blood pouring from the slot where discs were

supposed to go.

Sometimes I slept with my arms bound in her red curls — her black kisses like burn marks on my skin.

Sometimes we downed sangria from goblets with crystalline veins — drank to all the girls who died in

pursuit of the full moon.

Brat Summer ended as most things did — with a presidential flop.

The mean girl posse said they were going out for tapas by way of a goodbye — leaving a platter of toothpicks behind to show it wasn't completely a lie.

My depression resumed her immaterial form — stealing ALL of my hoodies as she disappeared.

It took months for all the bass to leave my ears — to stop seeing mirrorballs wherever I went.

And though I haven't touched her since then, I can still hear a stiletto clack when she passes by...

**GREG HARRELL**

**Office at Night (2024)  
After Edward Hopper**

while fluorescent squares  
try to suck all the juices  
from your eye sockets,  
you try to endure what's left...

what's left of WHAT?

the rancid milk drip-  
feed of another day?

a year that can only  
be saved with a cattle  
bolt between the eyes?

the dumbass colleague who keeps  
pouring gas on himself,  
but can't be fired?

the acid shits of west  
coast law firms?

**GREG HARRELL**

**Office at Night (2024)  
After Edward Hopper**

or is it the party happening  
in the reception area?  
the sounds of eighties rock  
and moms getting into the wine

the first time clients have been invited  
to the office since COVID  
a few stick around long enough  
to notice your 6:00PM mugshot—  
your piggybank skull  
about to crack

**GREG HARRELL**

**Heaven's Night Open Mic  
After Akira Yamaoka**

on this island of grief  
I can't share with anyone

I read Ada Limón poems  
to Excel spreadsheets;  
to client emails requesting  
that I PLEASE ADVISE

I pass all the stops  
where the L sounds like  
a death metal growl

I wear my blue soles  
down until they're scuffed  
and burned as anything else

**GREG HARRELL**

**Heaven's Night Open Mic  
After Akira Yamaoka**

I yield every porcelain inch  
to ghost ants; make uneasy  
alliances with cast iron spiders

I hear white noise expelled  
from inert speakers; knife tendons  
dragging against the wet dark

I remember the melted wedding  
cake toppers we became  
and hunger for you even now  
the soft earth more inviting  
than a new lover's mouth,  
and so much easier to fade into



# SUNSHINE LOMBRE

## I Dreamt You Were a Typhoon

The fiery summer reawakens us all.  
We fear the flame but wander towards the warmth...  
Like flies towards the fluorescent lights  
or neon signs  
Or walls that are white  
Lingering till they die..  
Soul fading w/brightness in their eyes...  
Luckily winter comes for us to go inside,  
So we too don't expire nearby where the flies lie.  
Last night I dreamed you were a typhoon.  
During the day, I fantasize of pleasing you on rainy nights,  
With lips replicating a ritual dance,  
Moving with saliva swirling intending to enchant  
Your hidden cumulus clouds  
To part  
And open  
And pour out your pains  
And passions  
Like the skies outside.  
I want to swim in you.  
I want the waters to rise above my bed  
Rise above my head,  
Rise above our student loans  
And credit card debt.

# SUNSHINE LOMBRE

The blues brew barriers around us.

Protecting us from pollution & pessimism.

I want to swim in the fullness of you.

May our tender intertwining lead us to breast strokes and back strokes,

Sidestrokes, doggy styles or doggy paddles till you flutterkick + I front crawl

Finding new ways to continue gliding & sliding into each other.

Till my breathe is full of you.

Till my heart is full of you

Till my home is full of you.

Cuz otherwise the emptiness has no answer for me.

My fractures become fissures.

+ I'd rather you fountain onto my floors,

Filling up high pushing heavy against my doors...

And we're safe here so for now, we can ignore

the tragedies, the racists, the homophobes, the rejections, the disappointed parents, and distant disasters.

They can't reach these open waters.

These lovers do not drown.

We soar till we're heaven bound.

Till angels come down to carry us to the higher seas in the higher skies

and when the mortals see our two stars shine,

We re-endanger the night...

But only in the most magical way possible.

Arousing you to take the wild risks and live your dreams too.

With the sweetest flavors riding thru the air



## SUNSHINE LOMBRE

To arrive to you sparking like flint with mingled scents of myrrh and frankincense..

And you don't have to wonder if God made you.

Because this light,

This wind reminds you that right now,

You are here, Right now you are so mighty.

You've been through so much and you will champion through so much more.

And when you rise to the higher skies,

You too will shine.

**A Flower, a River and a Storm**

...and a storm appears  
Almost out of nowhere  
And almost instantly  
Starts to bring heavy rains  
Washing everything  
Touching everything  
And bringing a new smell and tumult  
To a previously quiet and undisturbed land

And the rain harms not a thing  
But is a hard rain none-the-less  
It is a long welcomed rain  
But still a surprise  
Even as it arrives

And the hills begin to flood  
With nowhere to hold all of the water  
And gravity pulls the water only downward  
Toward a previously non-existing stream  
A mere low-lying rut that now becomes a valley  
Only to become a river after the continual downfall  
And constant pounding of the rains

And the river becomes more expansive and fast-flowing  
As the rush of water forces the issue

# JACK GEIERSBACH

And then the rain slows  
And stops  
But the river remains  
Now its own existence  
A free-standing creation all its own

A period of quiet and calmness ensues  
Then the rains begin again  
This time less unexpectedly  
And less violently  
And even more welcomed  
Then suddenly  
The head of a broken flower appears  
And it rolls down the hillside  
Carried by the gentle rain  
Over many miles and obstacles and constant turns  
As the rains guide the flower down the hill  
And despite the odds, the flower reaches the river

And upon reaching the river  
The flower is safe and drifts no more  
But only floats on the river's water  
As the river carries the flower downstream

# JACK GEIERSBACH

And the flower and river move together

At the same pace

In the same direction

And in the same unknowing path

But together

For they trust each other along the journey

Despite not knowing where it will end

**Destiny of a Warrior**

A Warrior

Does not fear death

He taunts it

His only worry...

That he will not find the battlefield-

For he wants not to miss the fight

Most things in life

The hopes, the plans, the desires, the dreams

Fail to come true

But those things, though few

That do get through

Are what makes the journey- the fight

Worthwhile

And rewarding

One sees with their eyes

But one observes with their mind and heart

Deliberation, analysis and reasoning

Clarify what, at first, seemed unclear

# JACK GEIERSBACH

Must a journey  
Have a destination?  
Or is it still valuable  
If one knows not where they'll head  
Or where they'll end?  
Destination or not- Either way-  
You'll end in the same place-  
For Destiny determines place

And where will I be  
When Destiny finds me?  
I have no fear  
For I know I must end up there  
In that space and time.  
I cannot fear  
What I know to be so clear  
Despite how cloudy, distant and foreign it may seem

Sometimes Reality  
Affirms the Dream

So I dress for, and approach, the battle  
Without trepidation, without fear  
Knowing Destiny, by the end  
Will make all things clear

The rain, as it falls  
Is not intimidated  
By the ground below

**What would you be?**

If I were but a painter  
What would your portrait be?  
Would you be a fragrant flower  
In a canvass of the sea?  
Would you be the deep blue water  
In shades of mist and green?  
And if you were a painting  
In what form would your beauty  
be brought to me?

If I were but a poet  
What song in me would you sing?  
In my heart would you forever rhyme?  
What gifts would your presence bring?  
Would you flow in, through and out of me  
Like a calm and peaceful spring?  
If I were but a poet  
Would you live...alive! in ev'ry thing?

If I were but a ruler  
Of the stars and of the skies  
Would you slow as you pass near me  
Or whiz just right-on-by?  
Would you enter into my orbit  
Or choose your own destinies?  
If I...such a ruler  
Would you submit, ever to me?

# JACK GEIERSBACH

If I were but a thinker  
But you an e-mo-tion  
Would I just be a simple dreamer  
Would you be real...or a mere no-tion?  
Would you ever feel...close enough  
For us...to be as one?  
Or when my thoughts turned their focus on you  
Would you only turn ...and run?

If you were but a willow  
And I, but an open field  
Would you...bend straight down your branches  
To me...to be revealed?  
Would your roots entrench, entrance my heart  
Would, your caresses, ever I feel?  
Or would you live alone and silent  
Leaving my heart ever beguiled?

If you were but a wing-ed bird  
Which feather might you decide?  
A low-flying yellow finch  
Or a hawk soar-ing so high?  
A beautif'ly color'd painted bunting  
Or a bright-white swan spread wide in flight?  
Would you roam by day-lit hours  
Or, like an owl, prowl by the night?



# JACK GEIERSBACH

If you were but a butterfly  
Would I ever stand a chance?  
Of catching or (at the least) touching you  
Would you save me just one dance?  
Would your floatings and your flutterings just tease  
Or would they please my eyes and heart?  
Would you leave my heart more wanting  
Or at a calm at-ease?  
If you were a butterfly, in the end would you let  
Me catch you ...in my ensnaring net?

If you were the Air  
Would you let me breathe?  
Or would you have to dangle  
Even That sustenance from me?  
Or would you fill my lungs  
And live inside of me?  
For if you were the Air  
We would live in such harmony!

# JACK GEIERSBACH

And if I were a blind man  
Would you still be bright-ly seen  
Radiating all of your beauty  
Right through and inside of me?  
Would you fill me up with wonder  
Would your light shine all in me?  
And if I lost my vision  
Would you, mine eyes, forever be?

And if you were a photograph  
What kind of memories  
Would remind my melancholy heart  
Of the times we used to be?  
Would the scene capture a moment: Happy  
Or one more lonely...but serene?  
For if you were a photo  
Would you live in it  
...with me?

## **Troubled Waters**

One day a fellow was stranded out in the middle of the Trouble Sea. He had no idea who he was or who he could be. He swam and swam as fast as he could. Although it didn't look like he would make it, he believed he could. As the tides of life rolled in one after another, attempting to wash him away, he held fast to his belief that ahead lay a brighter day. Suddenly, out of nowhere came the worst one of all. Surely, he believed this one would be his downfall. As it approached him, ready to engulf him in, he felt a mighty wind. Jesus had come to his rescue, he knew then.

## **Fisherman's Tale**

There was a group of fishermen who lived down by the sea that longed to see who the catcher of the prize would be.

As they started out on their expedition, each had his own intuition. The first one stated, "I bet I'll catch the prize off my looks." The second one stated, "I bet I'll catch the prize with my knowledge from the books." The third one stated, "I bet I'll catch the prize with all my money." The fourth one stated, "I bet I'll catch the prize off my personality of honey." Each man took out his net and filled it with his own special bait.

After fishing all day, the men grew tired. Each one thought by now his bait would have been admired. The second man said, "Let's just forget about the stupid bet." Each man began to lift his net. After the fourth man couldn't get his to budge, he gave the others a gentle nudge. Then with his own strength and their aid, he gently lifted the mermaid.

## **The Old House**

There was an old house that stood alone on a hill until the day the carpenters began to build. As other houses flourished about, it became clear to the old house that it was worn out.

One day it whispered to a carpenter passing by, "If I was wrapped up in gold perhaps, I wouldn't feel so old." The carpenter obliged and wrapped it as said. Two hunters later approached it and plucked it of its skin, bringing its bright glow to an end.

The next day as the carpenter was passing by, the old house caught a glimpse of him out of the corner of its eye. It whispered to him once again, "If I could be coated in candy, I would surely feel fine and dandy." The carpenter obliged and coated it as said. A group of children later approached it and plucked it of its skin, leaving it bare once again.

The following evening the old house hollered to the carpenter once again as he was passing through, "If you would wrap me up one last time in tin, I would surely feel sixteen again." The carpenter obliged and wrapped it as said. Later that night a mighty came through and stripped it of its skin as it blew.

There on the hill stood the old house -----bare once again, only this time content to be in its own skin.

**Thought For Today**

I will never overcome the distress of today

And you can't tell me that

Brighter days lay ahead

Because if you think about it

There have always been trials and tribulations

Even though

There have been good times in life

The good times are a thing of the past

And you can't say that

The way I think and react plays a part in how I experience life

Peace can only be found in a peaceful world

It's not true that

It is a state of mind

Because

The way things are

Determines

The way I think

Peace is out of my reach

And you'll never ever hear me say

I will overcome the distress of today

-----Read from bottom to top to get the positive message from this negative message

**Dream**

When dawn unfolds its golden thread,  
We carry fragments of what's said,  
For in the silence of the night,  
Our dreams ignite the coming light.

Mist-veiled visions drift and swirl,  
Fragments of worlds beyond our own.

Reality blurs, edges unfurl, seeds of  
Wonder divides like numbers.

As we slumber we are set free, to wander  
Realms of fantasy.

Leaving whispers in the morning light.  
Echoes of night's grand design, linger  
In the waking mind.

Phantoms of what may have been, dance  
Beyond conscious ken.

# CHRISTEN FOSTER

Colors fade, yet feelings stay, guiding us  
Throughout the day.

It's possible the dream world hasn't  
Left behind, the fragment memories  
Played out in our sleeping mind.

The boundary blurs and we perceive, the  
Dreams we live, the lives we dream.



**Alter Ego**

Alter ego

An ego altered

My poetry roots  
are strong  
As for our bond  
It never faltered.

The real me  
or my Original Poetry

This is the alter ego  
I choose to be.

I live my life like poem  
Because I am poetry

Beneath the skin,  
another song,  
A voice that knows  
where hearts belong,

twilight's glow,  
Reflecting dreams  
where secrets flow.

For in the clash,  
a self is drawn;

Embrace the weave  
of dark and dawn,  
Defying darkness,  
claiming light.

# CHRISTEN FOSTER

## My Life is a Poem (I am Poetry 2)

From my childhood to adulthood my  
Spirit always wrestled with navigating the  
Tumultuous torrent of others thoughts  
and opinions seeking to discover and  
Hear my own voice.

I pen my journey, my spirit, my home.  
A masterpiece crafted in passion and strife,  
In each fading chapter, my life is a poem.

Each day a stanza, each moment a line,  
Ink of my heart in rhythms divine.

With metaphors blooming in gardens of time,  
My soul finds its music, its vibrant rhyme.

For my life is a poem, a legacy spun,  
A symphony woven until the day is done.

For every lost moment, a lesson was learned,  
In the furnace of trials, my spirit was turned.

# CHRISTEN FOSTER

For the world tried to clip my wings and I still  
Learned to fly.

Teenage years spilled chaos, emotions untamed,  
Pages marked by heartache, where innocence shamed;  
The ink grew more vivid, the essence of life.

For every insult, criticism, wrong doing I let slide  
It always felt like a part of my soul died.

Adulthood arrived, with burdens to bear,  
Time penned its chapters with wisdom and care.  
I pen my experience with the poetry I share.

Putting one foot in front of the other I continue to  
Move forward even when life may take me a few steps  
Back.

To be true to one's own poetry roots are beyond skin deep,  
My ethnic background or demographical community where  
I sleep and rest my weary feet.

# CHRISTEN FOSTER

There was time where others as well as myself thought I was unable  
To speak. Then the seeds of poetrees began to grow, from the soils of adversity  
branch out, above the low level shrubs and weeds to embrace the light of the sun.

A poetry that will never have to stand in another's shadow.

Standing alone tall and strong but never alone.

The quill of experience wrote lines steeped in grace,  
each face found its place.

My life is a poem each experience is a totem

So I write, and I live, in this infinite quest,  
For my life is a poem, imperfectly blessed.

Like many of us men we are taught not to cry,  
Show weakness or express emotion although  
We are still human. I let my tears flow through  
The ink of my pen.

My life is a poem.

**Unyielded Spirit**

I am the storm,  
the calm after the rage,  
The phoenix rising,  
turning a new page.

In the depths of darkness,  
I found a guiding star,  
A warrior spirit,  
reaching across the bar.

With scars as my medals,  
and bruises as my crown,  
I've broken the threshold of adversity  
from the ashes,

# CHRISTEN FOSTER

Each challenge a chisel,  
refining my light.

I've danced with shadows,  
wrestled with despair,  
But emerged unbroken,  
Resilient with courage to spare.

So let the world doubt,  
I am a force to behold  
Without being held down  
With every setback,  
my resolve grows stronger,  
Unbreakable spirit, forever and longer.

**PLAY MY HAND**

When it came to classroom projects  
And the teacher asked students  
To choose whomever they wanted  
To be on a team with, I was

Either picked  
Dead last

Or passed  
Over entirely.

Only once  
During a labour studies class in college

Was I  
Chosen first

In a group classroom project.  
First pick  
At the business end  
Of an Italian chick's finger.

## DEE ALLEN

She wasn't my type.

She wasn't a Goth [ as I had lived then ].

Probably wanted me for something

Other than a classroom project.

Didn't feel like

I won anything.

Didn't feel

Accomplished that day—as a fifth wheel.

I play my hand

With the marked cards I'd been dealt

Bound to cheat me

Out of a real victory.



BLISS

Stuffed burrito, freed from foil, wrapped repast

In a spinach tortilla, enjoyed on a blanket on the grass.

Guacamolé, rice, salsa & black bean goodness, savoured with a friend.

Hers, wrapped in wheat. Bottled orange juice, red grapes for meal's end.

Picnic for two, in awe of in-progress biology.

Twittering birds, insects fly, sunshine in the lap of ecology.

Seated before an engraved headstone, flower bouquets, rows of crypts—

Bizarre to the average normie—to me, it's bliss.

PAGE OR STAGE?

[For Daniel Fernandes a.k.a. Captain Flow.]

What are you writing for?

The page or the stage?

Asked a critic

To a fellow online open mic poet.

If someone were posing that two-part

Question to me,

I would answer

Promptly and succinctly:

Both.

It's no sin

To operate in

Two dimensions.

Only a sin

To be stuck

In one.

Limits your view. Limits your movement.

Limits you to singing

Only one kind of song—

CHENA ROXX

Africa, mother continent to all humanity, had sired many impressive creations. Nigeria, centre of her womb, brought forth another. A pretty Summer baby, bred in other corners of the globe, came into her own in America—spring from which different flavours of music flows. She weaned herself on Heavy Metal. The dreaded, detested “devil music” to other Blacks, even though a left-handed Black man from Seattle with a flipped-over Fender® Strat and a penchant for messing around with fuzz-tones & distortion gave life to the style in the 1960s. She always sang, but her fortune changed picking up the electric guitar at 14. Self-taught. Whiled away each day seated at home, sparring with old Hard Rock ghosts. Hendrix and Van Halen came back to this side of the veil when she played rhythm, solos & arpeggios. Shure® pedal-powered riffs. Cocoa brown slender fingers dance across fretboard, making loud glorious sounds, which would compel the most cold-hearted naysayer to raise their clenched fist & yell. Imagine—being in the same room with black dreds-long six-string prowess like hers. It would feel like being in the presence of a goddess. Now she knows her way around a plugged-in Jackson axe & a Blackstar amp. There can be no doubt—Chena Roxx. It's her name and what she does.

**Dee Allen**

African-Italian performance poet based in Oakland, California. Active on creative writing & Spoken Word since the early 1990s. Author of 9 books—Boneyard, Unwritten Law, Stormwater, Skeletal Black [ all from POOR Press ], Elohi Unitsi [ Conviction 2 Change Publishing ], Rusty Gallows: Passages Against Hate [ Vagabond ], Plans [ originally Nomadic Press, now re-issued from Black Lawrence Press ], Crimson Stain [ EYEPUBLISHEWE ] and his newest, Discovery [ Southern Arizona Press ]—and 76 anthology appearances under his figurative belt so far.

## **Why I chose being a teacher than a Babu?**

Always a class topper, nothing was unattainable,  
Slant suggestions of friends,  
Concerned guidance of elders,  
Hopes of teachers towards taking me on the primrose path of 1st class babudom in India,

I, a student of Economics weighed the cost and benefit.  
Benefits galore, chauffeur driven car,  
Foreign trips unlimited, just for study,  
Bungalow with a retinue of servants, though disdainfully looked at, yet always a call away,  
Secretaries innumerable, people in tow,  
Can shower benefits on kith and kin and take it out on adversaries,  
A queen around the place, bestowed all the attention,  
Place prepared before arrival and left uncared for after departure,  
Life of a princess! An Indian Princess of the 21st Century,

But don't I trample on people who tow me?  
Don't I have my nose in the air?  
Was I just born to brag?  
To drain the exchequer of an already poor country?  
Am I of any use to the public or only to the semi literate minister who lords over me in turn?  
Once my parents and elders and teachers will be happy that I became an IAS,  
But will I rest contented for the rest of my life?

# KALPANA MARKANDEY

Wiser sense suggested teacher hood,  
A fulfilling profession,  
Can shape the destinies of several, inspire several, guide several, mould just as your own  
Children,  
Their happiness is your happiness, their sorrow your concern,  
The radiance on their face brings a glow on your own,  
You do not have to kow tow to the semi literate minister,  
You can be down to earth, do not have to speak diplomatic tones,  
Can hold your own,  
Are remembered for long, lifelong by students,  
Leave foot prints on the sands of time.  
I have no regrets, maybe foot prints can be erased with the desert storms,  
Yet the sense of fulfilment cannot be stolen.

The Babus may have a last laugh as they who were also caricatured by us,

Now hold sway over our payments, whether an increased allowance, or an increased pension benefit, or the very implementation of increased Pay!

They do also need a sense of fulfilment.

\* Babu is a term used to describe elite bureaucrats

**Jazz on the Edge**

A Kenny Garrett saxophone solo is a dance  
Along the razor thin edge of a star  
Cruising at warp speed  
To the outer rings of the galaxy  
Balance is lost and regained a dozen  
times  
Fine leather soles lose their grip —  
Better hold on!  
It's an arms-flailing routine on a celestial  
Balance beam  
Til footing is gained  
Then it's a smirk of satisfaction  
Of, "See, I got this."  
Finger shaking, hand on hip.  
"Can't fool me!  
I've danced on balance beams sharper than this one!"

Then, out from under, a mat is snapped  
And like a bass solo, you roll  
Head over feet over hands over heart  
Laughing, like only a child will  
When somersaulting down a long, grassy hill  
To the subterranean bottom  
Where you sit for a minute  
Contemplating your heart's own rhythm

# MARGO CHRISTIE

You pull yourself up  
Brush grass, dirt and stinging pebbles  
Off your puny child's butt  
Then run, like a demon, way back up  
But wait, did you miscalculate?  
Forget to pull the cord?  
An elevator is useless without a rope, you know  
Down again now, you go  
Til somehow, miraculously  
You slow  
And into soft cupped hands  
You land

A gentle placement on a magic carpet  
Which lifts you slowly into an almost sleep  
Where elevator music plays  
And stars and birds and whirlybird planes  
Can be reached  
Then, at the end, a set of golden gates  
Where you stand  
On the razor thin edge of your star  
And scratch your chin, wondering  
Do I go in?

**Orrin Evans at the Piano**

Fingers flexed, he taps his notes  
Like a graceful typist  
A writer, thinking while typing  
How best to articulate  
Sentences, devoid of noise  
No words are wasted  
The sound is stripped down  
Bare, nothing is without necessity  
Still, there are surprises  
A sly smile, a leg that kicks  
Uncontrollably, but with perfect precision  
Clued in, I give my own sly smile back to him  
In secret, thinking  
This is what's meant by  
Tickling the ivories  
The composition is a fine wine drip  
Bit by bit, it seeps into my skin  
My rhythm kin, Orrin, he's feeling it too  
His shoulders dance  
Off his torso and onto the keys  
Out across the stage and down to me  
Orrin knows  
How to make music make a body move  
It doesn't have to be loud  
It doesn't have to prove  
It doesn't have to fill the plate  
But it must fill the heart  
And have a satisfying taste

The previous two poems were written in response to performances at the Chicago Jazz Festival 2024. The poet gives thanks to Orrin Evans and Kenny Garrett and their bands, and to the organizers and promoters of the Chicago Jazz Festival.



**Still, He Marched**

I learned a thing today  
While marching for equal housing in Chicago,  
the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.  
was struck in the head with a rock

My mind can't lose this image—  
A rock to the head

I do not need to SEE the rock  
To feel its hardness  
It's heft  
Its rough, jagged edge  
To know the damage it can do  
To a man's mortal flesh

I do not need to see blood  
Or layers of oozing, broken skin  
To feel the violence of the act  
The hardened hatred of someone  
Who held a rock,  
Felt its heft, then  
Wound his arm up like a pro-ball pitcher  
And heaved it  
At a man's head

**MARGO CHRISTIE**

## **Still, He Marched**

I do not need to  
Be involved in the Movement  
Or know someone who was  
To feel the resolve of the man  
Who tended his head, then  
Got back up  
And continued to march

I DO need to  
Wrap this memory in my heart  
Have the courage to teach it  
To children,

Adults, and  
Anyone  
Who feels A ROCK TO THE HEAD  
Is best forgotten

This poem was written in response to a photo in the Chicago Protest Posters exhibit at the Chicago History Museum. In it, Dr. King appears weary but resolved. The “rock to the head” is an historical fact and an unseen image. The photo of Dr. King is the seen image, which profoundly moved me to consider the unseen one..

## What Happened When I Found Jack Kerouac

I come from a violent home. My alcoholic father's rage exploded on the regular, throwing my mom, my sister, and I into the unexpected. I have many recollections of the three of us stealing off into the night, landing at the tiny apartment of my aunt, a single mom with worries of her own. We never stayed there long. My father would hound and find us, and back with him we'd go.

Another memory of stealing off into the night involves a motor-court motel with an adjacent diner, across the highway from an aging amusement park.

After a night in the motel, Mom took us to the amusement park, a treat intended to deflect us from our displacement. But the real treat, for me, was the diner. Its chrome siding glistened in the sun; its large picture windows presented a view of cars zooming by on the 2-lane highway. This carried my mind to freedom. I ate pancakes and gazed out the window; I didn't want to leave.

Given that history, it's easy to see how I grew into wanderlust. As a teenager, I carried a small hotel soap in my shoulder bag. Somehow, I landed a miniature bottle of shampoo and a wet wipe in a foil pouch. I was road-ready, prepared to go at a moment's notice.

In my twenties, I attended a screening of the 1987 documentary film "What Happened to Jack Kerouac," at an art-house cinema across the street from a bar where I'd been hanging out. Hearing the film's narrator describe how Kerouac, with his bestselling novel, *On the Road*, made "a virtue of restlessness," validated my own road-readiness. *The iconic image of him standing before the neon-lit window of a bar mirrored my world of seedy bars haunted by writers and artists. For my suburban peers I was a mixed-up mystery, but this famous poet got me! I started to think and act like a writer.*

And then there was the magic of jazz, of Kerouac reciting his ode to the bebop saxophonist, Charlie Parker, to the backdrop of Steve Allen's tinkering blues piano. This was mind-blowing! Never more would I, like the suburban kids I'd eschewed, be so moved by the searing guitar licks and provocative lyrics of hard rock. I'd discovered a different musical art form—Black, urban and hip—which didn't require lyrics to be provocative. It was sexy without ever mentioning sex.

To say that this influenced my writing is an understatement. It changed my world view.

## MARGO CHRISTIE

My parents grew up in working class Baltimore, a city that was and still is majority Black. Like many White families in the early 1960s, they moved to the suburbs in a frenzy of “white flight.” Prior to moving into the city myself, I had at best ignored Black people. At worst, I’d pre-judged them. This learned prejudice began to fade as I embraced jazz. I borrowed library books on the subject and learned about its roots as brothel entertainment in New Orleans. I added visiting New Orleans to my dream list. I’ve since been there 6 times. I plan to visit again.

All of this is to say, “Don’t knock your hard knocks.” Struggle builds character. More than that, it creates a need for dreaming, for finding openings and picking at them until your limited world view expands. My home life created a desire to be “on the road,” like Jack Kerouac. Kerouac’s love of jazz opened a window into the lives and contributions of America’s Black jazz musicians.

And to think I could’ve lived my whole life in the Baltimore suburbs!

### **Margo Christie bio:**

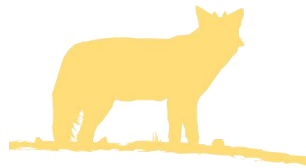
Margo Christie’s writing has appeared in the Baltimore Sun, Voice of Baltimore, the Loch Raven Review, and the Prairie Review. Her novel, *These Days*, was a semifinalist in Amazon’s Breakthrough Novel Award (2012). She recently published her first volume of poetry, *Lanterns for Light*. A native of Baltimore, she currently lives with her husband in St. Petersburg Florida and Chicago.

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# **The Prairie Review**

**Kinga Lipinska, Editor**

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