

# FLORA FICTION

A LITERARY MAGAZINE  
VOLUME 2 • ISSUE 4  
WINTER 2021



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# EDITORIAL STAFF

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Melanie Han  
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Veronica Valerakis

## **WANT TO JOIN THE TEAM?**

Please visit our website for more information. [florafiction.com/contribute](http://florafiction.com/contribute)

## **INTERESTED IN SUBMITTING?**

Flash fiction, poetry, illustration, and review submissions for website content are accepted on a rolling basis.

Entries for the seasonal Literary Magazine are done quarterly. Please visit [florafiction.com/submit](http://florafiction.com/submit)

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# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

The gift of fire to humans came with the responsibilities of the flame. Fire can light the heart and home, but get too close and it will burn you. Flame has sparked innovation across centuries and cultures as the foundation of mankind's survival.

Ice, the natural opposite to heat, brings about a soothing numbness to injuries while also being a pleasure to enjoy in drinks and treats. Frozen and translucent, ice is artistic through its sculpture-like formation.

Balance is the answer to all that surrounds us. These two elements present a necessary dichotomy in reality. As we move through the holidays and into the New Year, we must look to ourselves, fuel productive flames, put out unnecessary fires, let the coldness kill off the unwanted, and start again.

Together, *Fire and Ice* compares, contrasts, and compliments. As the theme for this Winter issue, we hope you enjoy what these artists have to offer.

xoxo  
Flora Ashe





"In the Midst of Fire" By: Yi-Yan Lee

KODAK PORTRA 400

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"In the Midst of Fire" By: Yi-Yan Lee

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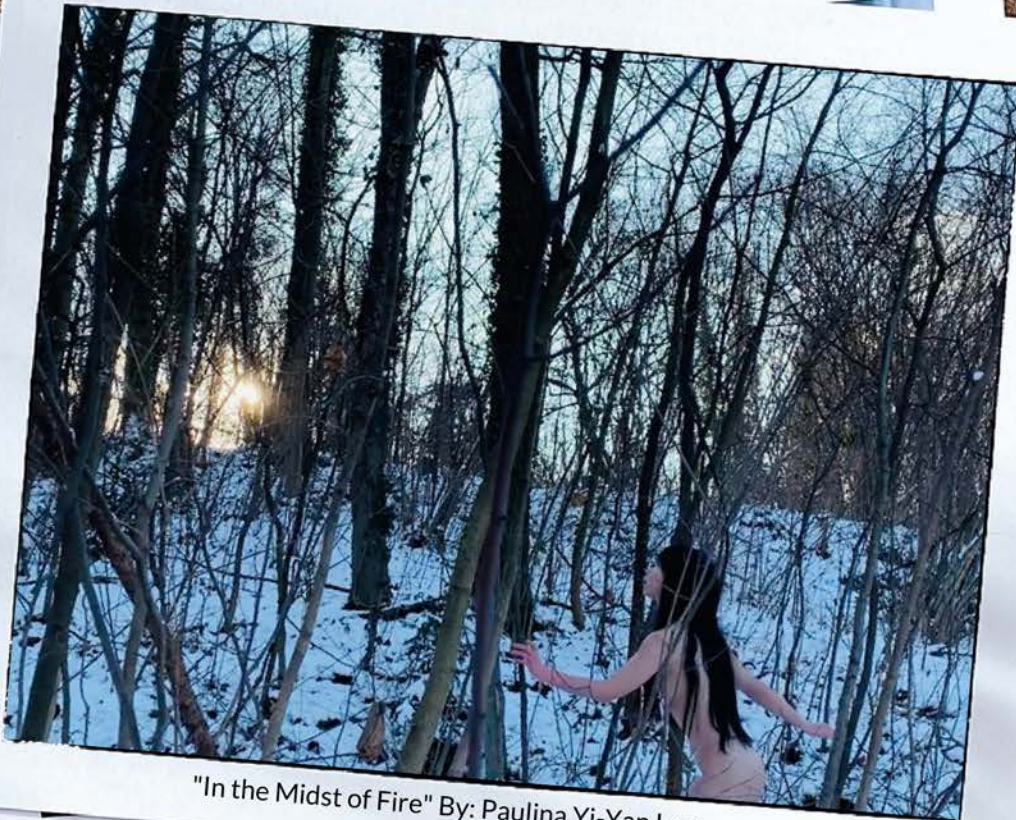
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**Yi-Yan Lee** received an MA in Literary and Cultural Studies from the University of Hong Kong and a BA in English Language and Literature from the Hong Kong Baptist University. In 2021, she graduated from SEAD, Salzburg Experimental Academy of Dance, as a dance artist.



"In the Midst of Fire" By: Paulina Yi-Yan Lee



# From Here to There

BY: LISA VANGALEN

**H**ere is the worst possible place to be. If there was any way to be somewhere else, we would have been there. Instead, here we stand, staring at the taillights approaching the highway below us, winking through the drifting snow.

At this distance, they looked like sparks from a bonfire, barely discernible. As they pass, the headlights light up the wall of the storm, for a brief instant, as it settles at the base of the mountain before all markings of civilization were enveloped by the clouds.

David and I turned back to the shadowed front of the hotel, our luggage heaped on the step. Glittery flakes decorated the tips of my eyelashes, frosting the scene as if it were a Christmas store window. Stomping our feet to dislodge the gathering snow, we searched for signs of our host or other guests. Even a guard dog would be welcomed.

Nestled in a pocket of firs high up the side of Mount Fortvilelse, the resort had been recommended by a stranger David met in a small town three days ago. Established in the early 1800s, the Fremmed House had a long history of secret meetings and clandestine retreats. David had been searching for a new story. Seems like he may have dragged me into one. When he told me about the mountainside hotel, I had pictured hot springs and long walks under tall trees. I got the tall tree part right. From the outside, I held little faith that hot water ran within, let alone that it would be a good place to lounge in the dark, brooding forest that surrounded the rear of the building.

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From where we stood, the hotel appeared to grow out of the land itself, the trees tucked in like a straitjacket. Their only benefit at the moment was a buffer before the storm. A freak outcropping pushed each creeping cloud beyond our tiny sliver of sanctuary. In the light of day, it might have been exciting to feel like you could walk out on the tops of the clouds. Now, in the gloom of twilight, the blanket of vapor and swirling snow isolated us from the rest of the world. Our sensory barrier became complete when the mass of moisture rose from the valley to encase us in a bubble of subtly warmer air.

An overwhelming urge to scream clawed at my throat and lungs. Never one to hide from danger, the disconnection from all things earth-like shattered my normal calm interior and fear filled my mind. I could no longer think logically. All rational function ceased and I began to spin, my vision scanning for any movement, my ears burning from the strain of seeking an indication of life. I begged for any sound to reach me.

Then, it started.

The cold wind slunk between the trees, coiling around the trunks as it froze the very air as it moved. Crystals formed at eye level before falling to shatter into millions of shards of ice, littering the ground just behind the advancing front. My frantic turning slowed my chest heaving in anticipation of the freezing onslaught. Icy breath curled into my hair, clinging to strands escaping from my tuque. As the clouds drew tighter, David grabbed my hand and one bag from the stack before propelling us to the front door.

Pounding on the heavy oak planks that barred our entry, David tried desperately to raise the attention of the inhabitants. This was supposed to be a well-traveled spot, a destination for curious travelers, welcoming at all times of the year.

Except for today.

Today, no one answered our pleas.

No one opened the door.

No one heard us.

No one, but the wind.

**Lisa VanGalen's** journey is ever-widening as she embraces flash fiction, short stories, and novels.







# Driving North to See Snow

BY: CLAIRE MATTURRO

Sharp bright crystals of ice  
dripped off eaves of the rented cabin  
into puddles on the porch.  
Two Gulf-coast flatlanders, we  
slipped through slush, tripping  
over thawing shards, shivering  
after our long drive north to see snow  
until we climbed into our borrowed bed.

Under the weight of the quilt, pulled tight  
and tucked like some unraveling shroud barely  
covering us against the dwelling chill,  
you asked me what I wanted.

Then I wanted little beyond the moment.  
Thigh against stomach,  
your warming fingers up my leg,  
mine tracing your spine, we took  
our skin greedy and careless  
while snow and ice  
laid waste to the rocky driveway  
and trapped us at cross purposes  
until we melted into stains on the quilt.

Now, decades later, I want  
you to wake and pace wooden floors,  
touching with stiff fingers  
those small glass crystals  
I left behind which gleam like ice  
and sharpen into small cuts  
on skin cold as snowpack while  
on the window icicles harden into curtains.

Breaking through your waking fugue,  
I want you to remember  
the blizzard where we ended,  
the time we drove north to see snow.

**Claire Matturro** has been a journalist, a lawyer, and taught at two state universities. An author of four traditionally and four indie-published novels, she and her husband live on the Gulf Coast of Florida.



Emel Gevikart  
18. Okt. 2021







"Crystal Clear" By Fabrice Poussin

# The Wildness of Strays

BY: LEAH STETSON

When I wear an old coat of my mother's, long white boiled-wool with dark trim,  
Against a snowdrift, tinged yellow at the hem, I think of the ermine—

Both the stuffed toy she treasured and the padded dress hanger that skirted Across the  
causeway to the island in front of my car, the only ermine I saw alive in the wild.

I am drawn to the wildness of strays.

Had I never pulled my mother's velvet one from a basket of paisley shawls,  
Asked to leave the bean-filled stoak alone, I might not have recognized the real animal.

Its flexible spine arches and extends Bonaparte lurches in short bounds  
Attached to a triangular head, bizarrely resembling a hook for neck made for mousing

My cat looks part-ermine—Narnia: she's all white except for a black tipped tail  
Almost calico with dark marks, as if in permanent molting phase between March and May

To camouflage her bright white coat, she rolls in the dirt drive and hides from hawks  
An inborn fear when they fly and swoop into the yard. My little ermine-cat stands on hind legs

Alert and bold, sneaks into the woods, returns with a kill and licks the warm blood  
Of birds, of mice, sun-baked snakes and frogs, dragonflies... I'm squeamish about the garter snakes

I have stood on one foot, as she caught a snake in her tiny, sharp teeth and dragged it,  
Popping up in the air when it writhed and tickled her underbelly.

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During the pandemic, I make several dens throughout the house, especially in winter  
One for writing by the woodstove, one for sleeping, another for reading and eating

I cache the excess, prepared for storms and power outages, I amass the psychic and material clutter,  
Often more food than we can readily eat though I share with the dog and cat each meal

Like the ermine, I learned these skills from my mother. Like my mother, I prefer the salt air.  
Osprey cries and circles her territory; my brother and I look for the nest we drive by.

I miss the saltmarsh but it is obvious that you still dream of the forest, stream-fed tales  
You told yourself making do of harsh living conditions to which you're well adapted


Changing colors and lagomorphic like a hare, or mutable fae trickster tergiversator  
We are both solitary and territorial predators—but you are a knee-jerk equivocator

I will ferret out your beliefs, your betrayals, teach you to hunt in tunnels, as I would my kits,  
Or else I will feel skunked by you: a weasel like any other polygynous-promiscuous male

It is nature that makes you personify the word *opportunistic*, take-it-whenever-you-can-get-it  
And curious enough to be trapped in a cupboard.

**Leah C. Stetson** writes poetry and creative nonfiction beside a pond, a black-ash seep, and a vortex in a woods that resemble Narnia. She's a graduate student studying literary ecology at the University of Maine, in the Interdisciplinary Ph.D. program. Leah is an ecoheroine, having worked in the fields of conservation and environmental science & policy, but deep down, a spiritual mermaid, perpetually chasing the Will-O'the-Wisp.

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**Steve Patterson's** photographs are published in *The Sun Magazine*, *the Portland Oregonian*, *On the Coast Magazine*, *the San Pedro Review*, *the Willamette Week*, and other regional Pacific Northwest publications. His work is exhibited in CoHo Theatre, Common Grounds Coffeehouse, and other independent venues in Portland, Oregon. He works as a playwright and as an editor.



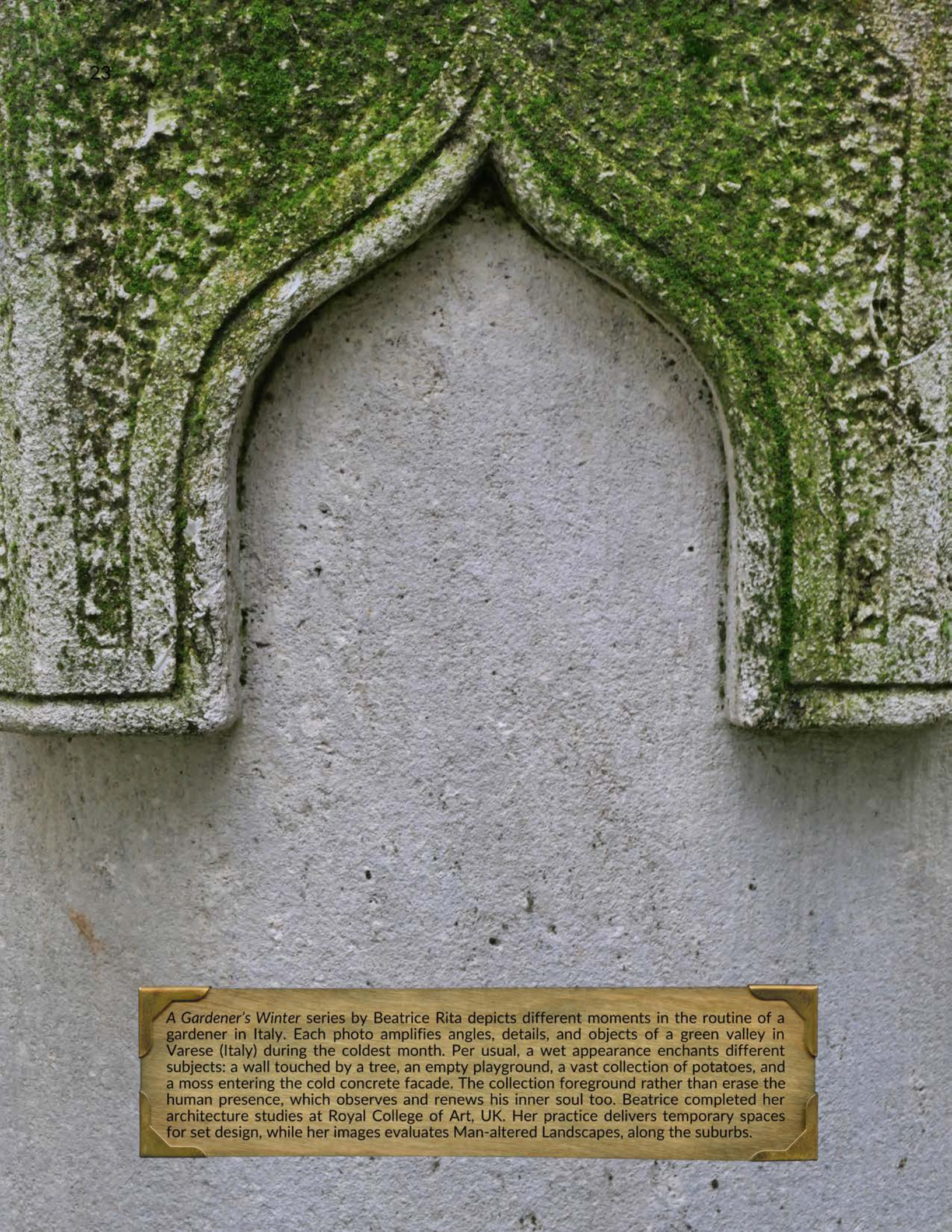
"Green Bonfire" by Steve Patterson



"Snow Trees" By: Belinda Subraman

**Belinda Subraman** is a mixed media artist, poet, and publisher of *GAS: Poetry, Art & Music video show* and blog. Her art has been featured in *Epoch* (Scotland), *ZVONA i NARI* (Croatia) *Kaduna, Fugitives and Futurists, Red Fez.* & many others. She sells prints of her work in her *Mystical House* Etsy shop.





A *Gardener's Winter* series by Beatrice Rita depicts different moments in the routine of a gardener in Italy. Each photo amplifies angles, details, and objects of a green valley in Varese (Italy) during the coldest month. Per usual, a wet appearance enchants different subjects: a wall touched by a tree, an empty playground, a vast collection of potatoes, and a moss entering the cold concrete facade. The collection foreground rather than erase the human presence, which observes and renews his inner soul too. Beatrice completed her architecture studies at Royal College of Art, UK. Her practice delivers temporary spaces for set design, while her images evaluates Man-altered Landscapes, along the suburbs.





"A Gardener's Winter" By: Beatrice Rita



POETRY

# Sult

BY: SAL QUICKLY

Money was tight.

No tighter than usual, but it was winter  
and hunger called and I could not fund it.

I wondered how many other people in the city were blue with the same predicament. I walked past countless bakeries with rows of staling pastries in the windows and fruitflies in delicate orgy on and around them, occasionally inconvenienced by the obligatory wave of a hand by some bored barista. I went into one of the cafes shortly before closing time and asked what they were going to do with the ten or so croissants that were left over; the day's neglected. I told her I would love and care for them in the pit of my belly, for the small price of nothing, but she told me STORE POLICY: they're destined for a sleek trash bag, overly spacey, cosy and final. My hunger was just too temporary, she said, they deserved the long term commitment only an unmoving landfill could give. I apologised and left for home, to starve delicately for another cool evening, jealous of rats and flies.

**Sal Quickly** is a writer based in Oslo, Norway.



*"Sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night from the sound of somebody crying,  
and then I realize, that I'm crying myself."*

**Olena Kayinska** is an artist based in Lviv, Ukraine, who works with naïve art techniques, paired together with deep philosophical senses. Her fields of research are post-trauma recovery and human inborn kindness.



"Winter Hope" By: Mitra Tashakori

**Mitra Tashakori** was born in 1975 in Mashhad, after graduating in graphics, she taught art in art schools in Mashhad for 20 years. She seeks ways to show that only love, peace, and solidarity between the people of the world can save the world from poverty, misery, pollution of water, earth, sky, war and bloodshed.





**B.A. Brittingham** is Formerly of New York City and South Florida, and currently a resident of Southwestern Michigan, and has published essays in the Hartford Courant. Also a photographer, she believes in evaluating the differences/ similarities between words and images to understand how they convey their stories. Photos have appeared in *The Critical Pass Review*, *the Center For Bioethics & Humanities Journal*, *Feral: A Journal of Poetry and Art*.

*Brittingham*  
©

# The Clearing House

BY: DOUG DAWSON

I'm a guy who likes his privacy, OK? Don't like people coming to the front door, knocking loudly and telling me I've got to have a new roof, new siding, or that I've got to change my gas and electric service. The ubiquitous telemarketers are even worse because there are more of them and I protect myself with my answering machine, except for this one time when I forgot my usual caution and reached for the phone when it rang.

"Hello," said I, naively.

A pleasant, yet subtly aggressive voice asked "Is this Mr. Anderson?"

"Yes, it is."

"How are you today, Mr. Anderson?"

I didn't say anything, as I knew that the second somebody asks "How are you?" on the phone you know it's a telemarketer. This was my opportunity to hang up, and confound me, I didn't take that opportunity.

"Mr. Anderson? Are you still there? (pause) How are you today?"

Once again, I didn't answer, knowing I should have hung up to spare myself what was coming, only this time I really didn't see what was coming.

"Mr. Anderson, this is the Social Security Admiration." Now she was arousing my curiosity.

"Yes, is there a problem?" I asked.

"You are in danger of losing your benefits, sir."

"What? They don't tell you that over the phone, they notify you in writing. Say, who is this?"

"It's special operator 672, sir, and I assure you your benefits may be cut off, that's why I'm calling you today."

"And how do I keep from losing my benefits?"

"We have a special program ..."

"Wait a minute, is this another scam? Not so long ago, people called me and told me they were from the I.R.S. and that I was in trouble with them, but for a very reasonable fee I could take care of ..."

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"This is not a scam, sir, and I really am from the Social Security Administration."

"And another time they called me and said I was in trouble with the law – locally, that is. And once again, for a very reasonable fee I could ..."

"Sir, I'm looking up your records as we speak and I do see that you've been contacted by various agencies and you haven't responded to them in a timely fashion. That means there could be outstanding warrants against you, plus the fact that the Social Security Administration is adjudicating your case as we speak. Sir, you are in real danger of ..."

"What the hell is this? Are you threatening me? I've got half a notion to call my lawyer then call the police and then the F.B.I. and whomever else you call to get threatening pests like you off my back. I'll get the law after you ... I'll ... I'll ..."

"No, sir, we are the law, in a manner of speaking. You see, we represent all these agencies and a few more, I'll have you know."

"What do you mean? Who the hell are you people?"

"You might think of us as a sort of clearing house, sir. We help people when they are in trouble, that is, we intermediate between customers like yourself and government agencies. For a fee we broker for you, we handle your case and alleviate the problems. Just let us work for you and ..."

"Clearing house, eh? I'm speaking to you on my house phone, my land-line that is, but I have my cell phone in my other hand and I'm calling my lawyer while I still have you on the phone. I'm going to get to the bottom of this ... just give me a second, will you?"

"Sir, that's not going to do you any good. All the government agencies we just mentioned and the local law establishment have a problem with you and you are going to be in big trouble if you don't cooperate. As we like to say, 'let our family help your family.'"

"Ok, his phone is ringing now. We'll figure out just who you people are, report you to the proper authorities, and let them deal with you. Calling people at home, pestering them, scaring them ... I'll fix your little red wagon!"

"Fix my little red what, sir? Why don't you just let us help you? We don't cost that much and we will handle all these problems for you."

"Hello, Fred? I've got these creeps on the line. They're threatening to cut off my Social Security, get me in Dutch with the I.R.S."

"What's that? Just hang up on them? I never thought of that!" Before I could do that, she beat me to the punch. The next thing I heard on the landline was, **CLICK!**

"The Wintering No. 1" By: Vera Saltzman



"hockey eh!" By: Vera Saltzman

**Vera Saltzman** is a Canadian photographer based in Saskatchewan's Qu'Appelle Valley. Her work primarily explores themes of identity, place and memory.

## Winter in Calgary

BY: D. LARISSA PETERS

Biting wind sweeps  
my gaze  
to my feet, shoulders  
hunched. Intimidated,  
frightened—I know I'll turn to a frozen  
wife of Lot, covered in white, found  
mid-stride, much later,  
around July.





"The Deeper Layer" By: Sona Sahakian

**Sona Sahakian** is a visual artist based in the Hague, the Netherlands. She graduated from the department of fine arts at the Royal Academy of the Arts. Her works consist of paintings, collages, photographs and films.



"Stream" By: Susan McClellan



# Pigeons on the AC

MEGHANA AT

**T**he room is eerily silent, like every other room in this city. There is no air conditioner to steadily hum and drip water at a continuous, unhurried pace. There is no gentle lullaby from a whirring ceiling fan. There is no constant buzz of tires on a busy street outside, much less the burst of an occasional tire, or the loud and jubilant pump of a horn.

The silence is oppressive twice over. Once, because it leaves blank this entire section of my brain, that is usually devoted to canceling out the noise. This freshly-unemployed section gets restless. It Christopher Columbus its way through topics that should never be explored. Activity levels that are not intended for this time of day. The second oppressive act of the silence is its breaking. A small grunt from my companion, a gentle snore, a tapping sound from the heater at our feet are all amplified. An act of violence, that's what silence is.

The tapping from the heater is comforting, though. The old non-inverter air-conditioners where I come from have only their fronts inside the house. Most of the body of the air conditioner pokes out of the building. The warm metal casing is a beloved runway for the pigeons outside. Their sharp claws scratch the metal and the sound resonates through the room, punctuating the gentle hum of the air conditioner. Every 15 minutes or so, the hum of the air conditioner changes. It seems to doze off, getting softer and softer, and then suddenly jumps awake to blow out a fresh burst of icy air.

In this city, though, there are no air conditioners. And the heaters live entirely inside the houses. No nook or cranny must be left open, after all. The outside has to be kept outside. Here, if the outside air mixes un-controlled with the inside air, it can be life-threatening, not merely uncomfortable.

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In this city, in this oppressively silent room, the aging heater goes *tap tap tap*. I wish I was asleep but I am not. I think to myself, “ah, poor pigeons”. I catch myself—I must have been closer to sleep than I previously thought. Only a weak, half-asleep mind could have sympathy for that hated city pest. Perhaps that’s too cruel. Even city pests get cold. And every cold creature deserves the warmth of the metal casing of the device that changes the temperature for unadaptable humans.

“I’m sorry for the noise of my heater.”

Ah. So it isn’t pigeons. They can’t sit on your heater after all. After all, it lives inside your house. It is the internal workings of the heater.

Sometimes, the truth is irrelevant. Sometimes, it’s best to agree with Kellyanne Conway and buy into alternative facts. Today’s alternative fact: there are pigeons walking on your heater that pokes out of the side of your building.

See? Our cities aren’t so different after all.

**Meghana AT** is a theatre artist and writer from Mumbai, India. She has a Bachelor’s in Sociology and Anthropology, and Masters in Authorial Acting and Pedagogy. She creates original, political theatre through her group 'tafreehwale'.





Susan McClellan lives in Pittsburgh, PA. Her work has been published in The Atherton Review, Highland Park Poetry anthology, Knack Magazine, and the Trouville Review.



# Dinner Party

BY: SAL QUICKLY

You sit two spaces to the right and amicable voices patter back and forth over a table lavish with doomy looking canapés. The ambience is less of an ambience and more of a mood particularly when the host pronounces the French red wine we're sipping a little too well. Somebody else comments on the pronunciation, but pronounces pronunciation weirdly and in my head I'm stuck between the words twee and trite and somehow end up squarely on twat. Somebody says something about Palestine and somebody else says something about philistines and somebody else misquotes Wittgenstein, and all the while you have the audacity to sit there tacitly on the curve of my quivering periph like the last sentence of a book I'm currently two paragraphs shy of; I ever so much want to glance but I'm afraid of ruining everything.



## Messages

BY: KELSEY MCCARRIE

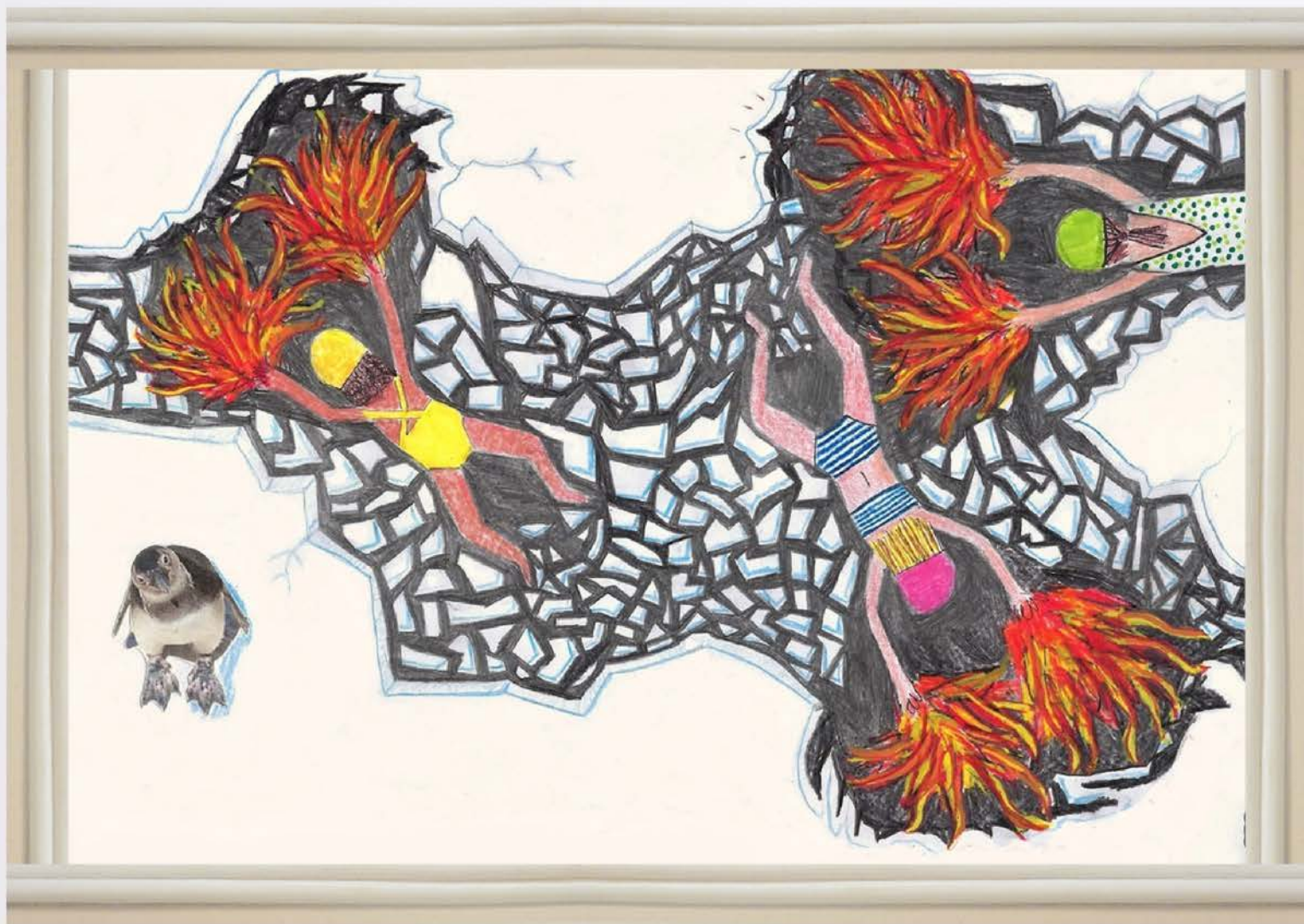
I feel the click as my nail  
Fits into the fine crack in my phone screen,  
I rub the faded stickers on the back  
Of my smooth maroon case  
Both behaviors as a nervous habit  
And I feel the hurt and confusion  
Of touchable hurt,  
A tactile betrayal

**Kelsey McCarrie** is a high school freshman living in Pennsylvania. She currently writes poetry and fantasy stories in hopes that one day they will see the light of day.



"T1" By: Marisol Maza

Visual artist born and living in Mexico City. She has participate in exhibitions in different countries: Argentina, Spain, Portugal, Cuba, Ecuador, Venezuela, etc. She works with different media: photography, video, site specific instalation, etc.



"Female Icebreakers" By: Chrizzi Heinen

**Chrizzi Heinen** is an author, artist, and anthropologist. She runs an imaginary publishing house called Vakant Verlag in Berlin and likes music and good books.



"Frozen" By Catalina Aranguren

**Catalina Aranguren** is a latinx woman, immigrant, artist, curator, and community organizer based in Jersey City, NJ for the past 20 years. She is currently raising three bicultural boys with her husband and their giant dog.



"Golden Eye" By Fabrice Poussin

**Fabrice Poussin** teaches French and English at Shorter University. His work in poetry and photography has appeared in hundreds of magazines in the United States and abroad.



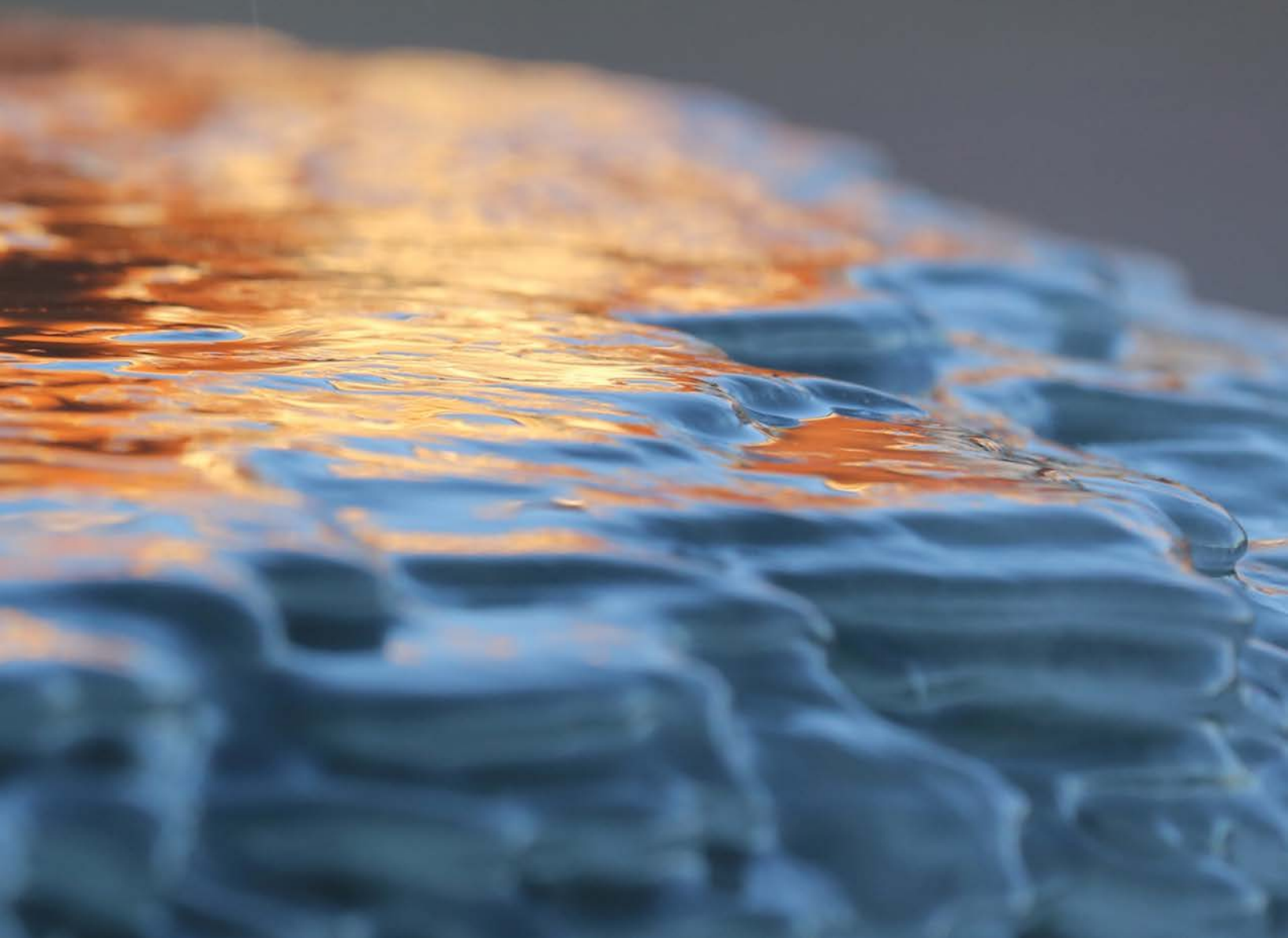
# Midwinter Sun

BY: SARA COLLIE

On the last day of a long, cruel year,  
a faceful of blinding sunlight  
warmed me, stroked my cheek,  
whispered softly in my ear  
the simple refrain that I needed to hear:  
I exist.

I        I exist.

I exist.





"Ecstasy" By Datis Golmakani

Datis Golmakani was born in 1985 in Iran, living in Germany, and is a cartoonist who participates in many world festivals and numerous group and solo exhibitions.





"Forest Fire" By Elaine Forrest

**Elaine Forrest** is a multidisciplinary artist working in oil, acrylic, collage and photography. Forrest lives and works in the Financial District on New York and is a member of NohoM55 Gallery.

"Keep the Small Fire Burning" By Judith Rayl

**Judith Rayl** realized Nature's inherent capacity for healing sparked an appreciation of art as a force for wellbeing for her in 2017. Her present photographs are of the harmony seen at the convergence of nature and the human-made.



# Crocuses

BY: SARA COLLIE

There comes a day  
every winter  
when the crocuses return,  
poking their silvery nibs  
up through the melting snow,  
to test the air. Barely there  
at first until the sun  
prises them open,  
revealing what their pale  
sepals protect: a blush  
of pink, a streak  
of purple, a clutch  
of golden stamens  
glowing like tiny flames.  
Fire to melt the ice.  
I visit them every  
day as the afternoons  
slowly lengthen.  
A small reason to leave  
the house before the  
sun sinks down. A reminder  
that I, too, am alive  
and bright and warm  
on the inside  
and that all things are  
possible.

**Sara Collie** is a writer and language tutor living in Cambridge, England. Her writing explores the wild, uncertain spaces of nature, the ups and downs of mental health, and the mysteries of the creative process.

"Untitled" By: Natasha Papika

**Natasha Papika** is a visual artist from Greece. Currently, she's a graduate student at the VU University in Amsterdam with the department of Comparative Arts and Media Studies.









"Evacuate Eva!" By: Vilma Leino

**Vilma Leino** is a Finnish born, Berlin based photographer. Her work focuses on self-portraiture, which she uses as a tool to tell stories about her inner emotions, fears and personal experiences.

# The Magic of My Mind

BY: MARSHA WARREN MITTMAN

the blizzard raged for two full days /  
plows having nowhere to stash snow  
when clearing streets used our cul-de-sac  
as a dumpsite, creating a seven-foot-tall  
mountain / as neighborhood children  
watched, dads hatched a plan / armed  
with shovels and water hoses they  
hollowed out a five-foot-tall icehouse  
for us complete with doorway, tiny  
window, an ice bench, and ice table

after initial interest, my friends left, but i was  
enchanted / it didn't feel cold inside / the air  
and light seemed different / even i was  
different within: cut off from everyone i could  
become anyone / first a princess in a white  
castle / then a waitress in a restaurant /  
sometimes i played "house" or "store," or  
became a nurse in a hospital / and of course  
i transformed into an eskimo in an igloo /  
i found my imagination, painting one scenario  
after another, more stimulating than playing  
with my friends / i was happy being alone:  
i'd discovered the magic of my mind

three weeks later i was devastated: the  
weather warmed and the snow house began  
to melt / it collapsed into itself and i collapsed  
on my bed in tears / a few days later, however,  
i started drawing pictures of my haven and my  
experiences / i realize now, after all these years,  
to preserve the intense sense of joy i'd felt

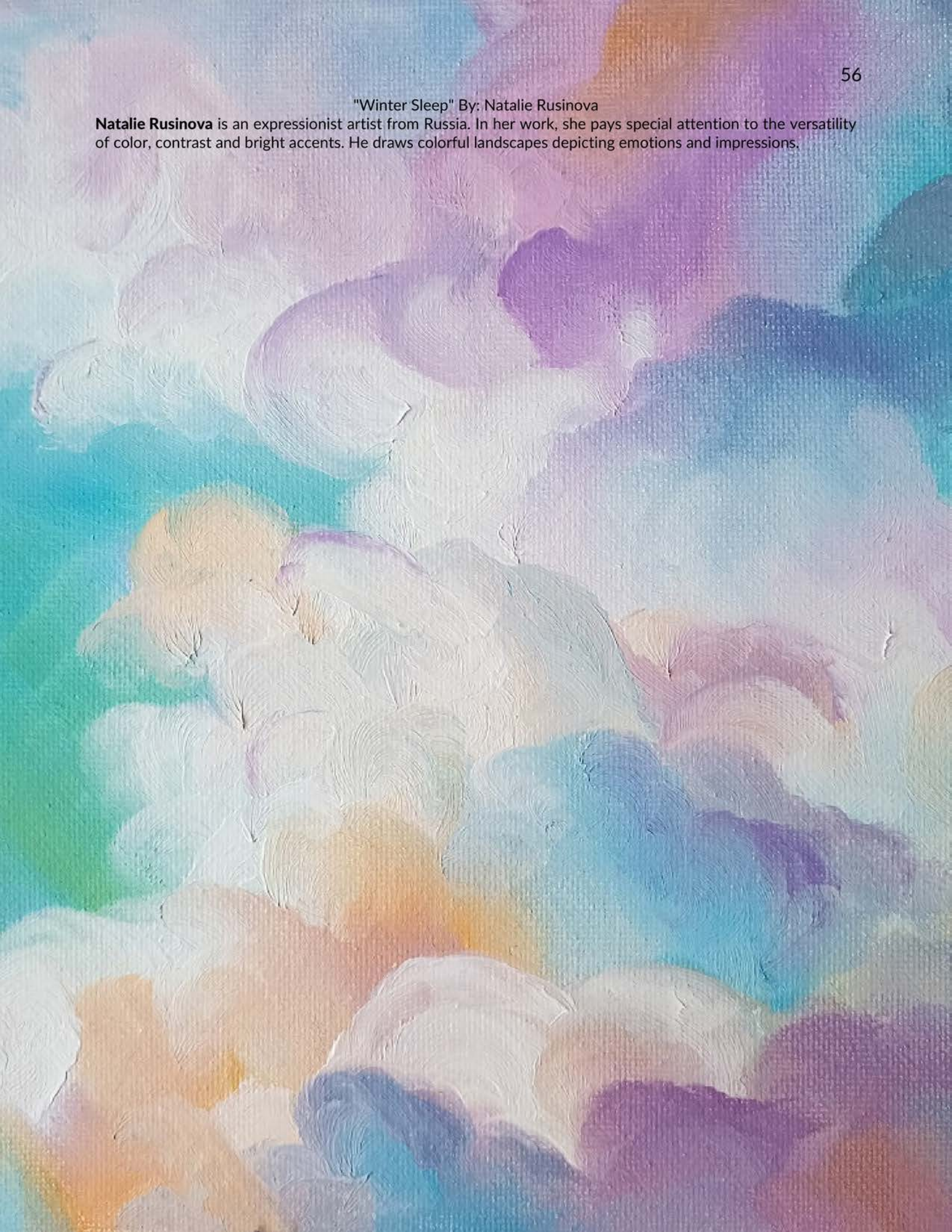
after my mother died i found the faded crayoned  
sketches hidden away in one of her dresser  
drawers / she must have sensed the magic /  
to this day i still feel the magic after each storm...

**Marsha Warren Mittman's** memoir, *"You Know You Moved to South Dakota from New York City WHEN..."* (Scurfpea Publishing), received a Western Horizons award. Poetry and prose have appeared in the U.S., England, Germany, Australia, India.



"Winter Sleep" By: Natalie Rusinova

**Natalie Rusinova** is an expressionist artist from Russia. In her work, she pays special attention to the versatility of color, contrast and bright accents. He draws colorful landscapes depicting emotions and impressions.



# The Magician

BY: MARSHA WARREN MITTMAN

It's always been said that the streets of New York  
Are paved with gold. But here in the west in  
Mountain country gold falls from the heavens.  
I always wondered why holiday cards pictured  
Snow shining and golden, twinkling here and there,  
Used as I was to grey east coast storms. But  
Incredibly it snows here in the mountains while  
The sun shines making everything seem magical  
As if golden fairy dust is being blown by some  
Unseen magician to joyfully brighten a winter's day.  
Reflected in the sun each flake sparkles and prances  
So you're enveloped in the beauty of thousands of  
Icy golden dancing droplets and your surroundings  
Come to resemble a lighted snow globe that's been  
Shaken especially for you, for your personal delight.  
Night falls and as the golden snow slowly turns white  
The magician smiles and respectfully nods to the sun.

**Marsha Warren Mittman** is a writer based in Oslove, Norway.



"Fire Flowers" By Lois Bender

**Lois Bender**, a longtime New Yorker, combines her background in art direction and graphic design with personal expression in drawing, watercolor, photography, and printmaking creating a fresh synthesis of styles inspired by poetry and nature.









"Gone" By Diana Rogagels

"Deep" By Diana Rogagels  
Diana Rogagels was born in Lisbon, Portugal, in 1993.









# Bargaining

BY: ROBYN PETRIK

The stars in the sky  
always reminded me of you  
and all the nights we shared.

It was too much for me  
to see the stars and think of you,  
too much to relive the pain  
again and again.

So I bargained with the night sky,  
begging her to put away the stars  
and give me a black sky instead.

It was bleak, grim, dark,  
but it was still better than  
seeing millions of little ways  
you broke my heart.

**Robyn Petrik** is a poet from Vancouver, Canada. Her poems have been shortlisted for several collections, and placed third for *Patterns*. Robyn loves hiking and traveling, and does her best writing when exploring new places.





"Hope" By Diana Rogagels

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# Among the License Plates

THOMAS ELSON

It's always the same—sitting among men, feeling that confluence of senses as energy accelerates from long-taut repression, followed by a collective breath, an unexpected silence, then they rise...

I'm in a large room—no air-conditioning, no windows, no wall hangings, no tablecloths covering the square tables with four chairs in that peculiar configuration of places like this. They don't even bother to post the rules—everyone knows to stand in a line against the south wall of the unmarked floor in a lane not much wider than a window where men shuffle to receive sparsely set metal trays. "Take the tray they hand you, ask no questions, walk to a table. Just look around, you'll know where to sit."

I have been here before.

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Fourteen years ago, I was in my office at the state capitol building with its marble walls and gleaming columns reflecting shadows onto pristinely maintained floors. Its halls abound with those on the rise, confident in their future. The subtlety-cologned, pin-striped, white-shirted, silk-tied—as uniform as teenage boys inside their group's protective enclosure—interchangeable young legislative assistants, assistant attorneys-general, state supreme court law clerks all fulfilling their mothers' greatest expectations.

My phone rang in that singular piercing of heavy black phones with dials. I picked up the receiver. My old law school friend, Larry, was at the state Attorney General's office. "Remember what we talked about last night? Just got the message. Johnny Cash is going to be there this afternoon. Wanna go?" Before I answered, he added. "He's bringing the Carter Family, the Statler Brothers, Carl Perkins, June, his entire band."

Silence.

"Well, whaddya think?"

I was a law clerk working with the newest state Supreme Court justice who was never much interested in my research. I rested the phone on my desk, walked into his high-ceilinged, six-windowed corner office. "I just got a call. There's an opening at the dentist's this afternoon. My wisdom teeth. I'd like to leave now to eat lunch before I go in." The justice nodded. Which was about as much communication as we had.

From the third floor to the second, then inside the attorney general's lobby where I saw Larry fidgeting near the door. "Are we dressed for this?" I asked, fingering my silk tie then smoothing the lapels of my gray pin-stripe suit.

"We are, and we'll take my car," he said.

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Before the show, out of curiosity and as

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a resume builder, Larry and I walked with guards winding through the pathways of work areas. Watching men dressed in denim with frayed collars, the blue turned a piebald of gray and dull white. A grizzled inmate strutted up to me. His whiskered jowls and unkept hair emphasized the angry glare of a man long-deprived.

"How do you spell *habeas corpus*?" He asked, laughed, and retreated inside his group near the automobile license plates machines. I was left listening to the roll and clang of metal sheets pressed into rectangles—all the same color and design surrounded by the same border, identical except for the number on the front—stamped and dumped into boxes.

With an attorney general's escort, a Supreme Court nametag, and access behind the curtains, I was introduced to the Statler Brothers as they dozed on chairs near the edge of the stage. Each one rose and shook my hand. A few steps later, Carl Perkins, standing tall and gaunt wearing blue suede boots, nodded. Then quickly over to Johnny Cash who called me "sir." Mother Maybelle and her daughters smiled including the effervescent June as she was lifted onto a chair by a dungareed man with a shaved head. She balanced herself with her right hand on his shoulder.

The show was classic. Darkened stage, sudden lighting, then a turn. "Hello, I'm Johnny Cash." Followed by "Ring of Fire" and "I Walk the Line." The Statler Brothers' "Flowers on the Wall". Carl Perkins' "Blue Suede Shoes." Boisterous laughter at asides about guards. "Folsom Prison Blues" – with Lansing inserted into the lyrics. Cheers. The Carter Family's "May the Circle Be Unbroken". Applause followed, with whistles and cheers.

Then shouts of "Where's the baby?"

"At the other place. I'll have to feed him soon," June grinned and looked down at her blouse.

More whistles and cheers.

Curtains closed, fluttered, then parted. An encore. Johnny Cash in front. The electric guitar's thrumming introduction to "Jackson." June twirled onto the stage in high heels, her full skirt rising to expose her thighs. The scent from the audience was unmistakable. The men rose and continued to applaud while the couple sang.

After the show, Larry rushed toward me.

"I'll meet you outside. We're driving her, so she can feed her baby."

"No shit?"

"Yep. June herself going feed little John Carter Cash," he said with a smile as wide as his face. "The baby's with the women's warden in her office."

Within moments, June was in the front seat with Larry behind the wheel of his four-door 1968 Oldsmobile. I'm in the back absorbing her profile and voice as she talked about their tour, their bus, and their home outside Nashville. No documentary. No appearance. No television show. No tales of meeting other famous people ever rivaled that heady twenty minutes. Especially today, as I sit with shoes notched for easy tracking—in case I try to escape—among others of my kind at a table on the south side of the invisible line in the mess hall near a boarded-up stage entrance.

I watch a woman carrying a briefcase, her skirt rising above her knees, walking with lowered head escorted by guards within that narrow path near the wall, And again I feel that confluence of senses as energy accelerates from long-taut repression, followed by a collective breath, an unexpected silence, and then, we rise.

**Thomas Elson** is published in many publications: *Ellipsis*, *Better Than Starbucks*, *The Cabinet of Heed*, *Flash Frontier*, *Short Édition*, *Litro*, *Journal of Expressive Writing*, *Dead Mule School*, *The Selkie*, *The New Ulster*, *The Lampeter*, and *Adelaide*. He splits his time between Northern California and Western Kansas.



"Winter from Odemiş İzmir" By: Emel Çevikcan  
Emel Çevikcan is a watercolor artist from Turkey.





"Struggle" By: Datis Golmakani

Datis Golmakani 2019



**"In the Fire" By: Belinda Subraman**

Belinda is a mixed media artist as well as a poet and publisher of GAS: Poetry, Art & Music video show and blog. Her art has been featured in Epoch (Scotland), ZVONA i NARI Croatia) aaduna, Fugitives and Futurists, Red Fez. & many others. She sells prints of her work in her Mystical House Etsy shop.



# Illumination

BY: ROBYN PETRIK

Walking a stretch of beach  
in the dark, ankles in the water.  
Our night was illuminated  
by three kinds of magic:

bioluminescent plankton  
leading the way in the water,

fireflies glittering  
through the trees on shore,

and lightning strikes  
across the sky.

A reminder that the world  
is never completely dark.

**Robyn Petrik** is a poet from Vancouver, Canada. Her poems have been shortlisted for several collections and placed third for Patterns. Robyn loves hiking and traveling, and does her best writing when exploring new places.















# Tears of the Heart

By: Ashley Wilson

My dad was right about one thing:  
there is something about me  
that attracts the light and others  
to me. But he used it and burned out  
what made me glow. Then  
I met someone who knows  
how to love me.

You pulled me up and out  
of the toxic slug that suffocated  
my soul. You saw beyond the damage,  
You saw the light—my light—and sparked it.  
You watered my roots while teaching me  
how to take care of them on my own.

And now that I've bloomed, I'm able  
to be the person you need to touch the sky.







# Passing Seasons

BY: MIA AMORE DEL BANDO

The sky is silver  
Like I'm living under my grandmother's thimble  
October is coming to a close  
I still forgot to order a hot pumpkin beverage  
My car cup holders reserved for old water bottles  
The clouds carry my sadness  
Sprinkling it like seeds to fresh soil  
I didn't want these to grow  
Into a dark lifestyle  
But I kept feeding it water  
My music, my lifestyle, my thoughts  
Altering to fit into a hole  
That is too small for my vacancy  
Cramming every emotion  
To filter into the new season  
Most of my friends don't know  
I know how to tie a noose  
Or I packaged the courage to dive off a roof  
No one needs to know  
Winter is my least favorite season  
I have to fight the weather every time  
Counting the days until the sun decides  
To poke her head out and save my livelihood  
The rain is taunting me  
Encouraging the urge  
Just tell my mother I'm sorry  
And I tried  
Maybe you'll see me next season  
Before March  
If you're lucky

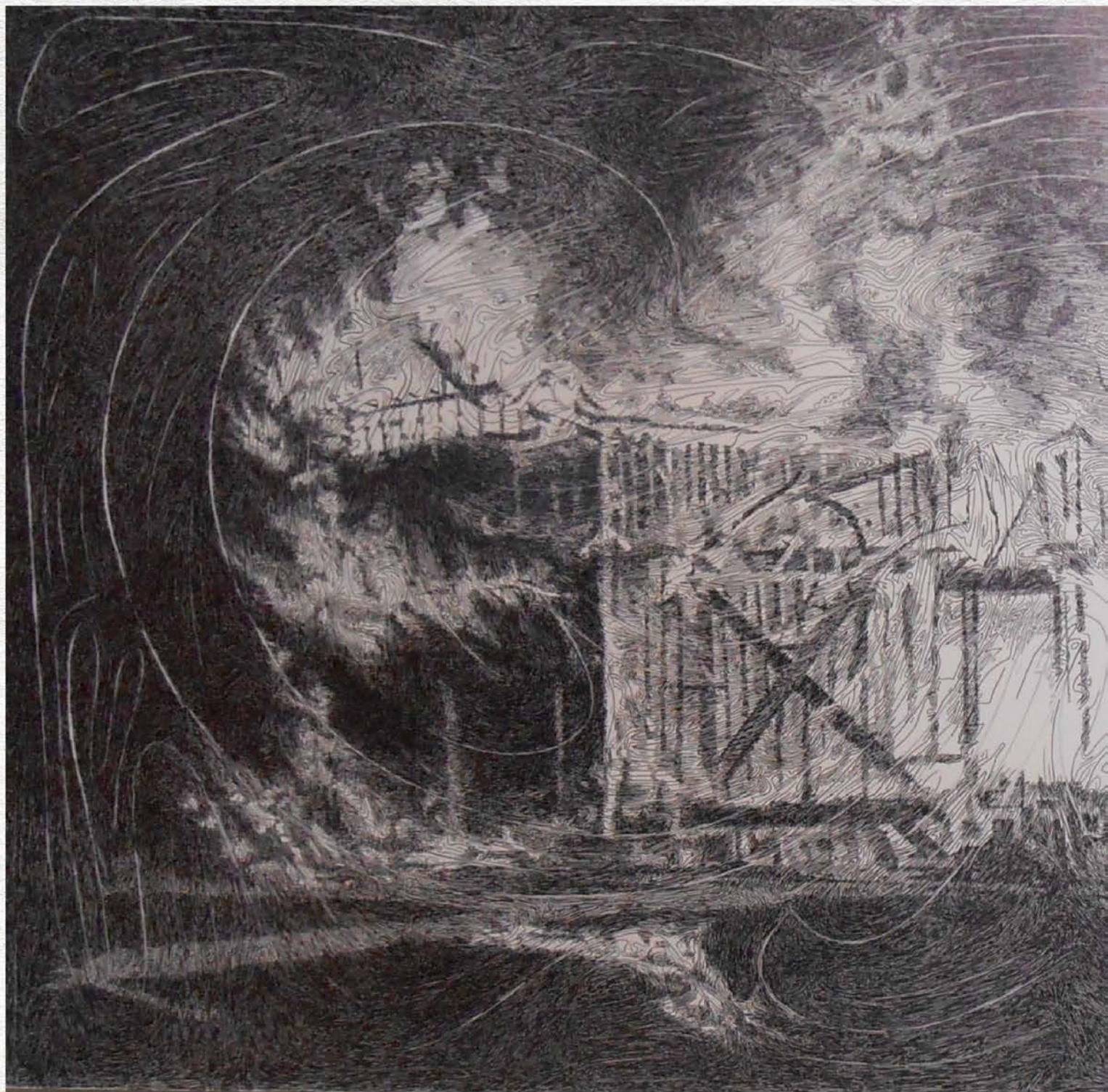
**Mia Amore Del Bando** is a Los Angeles based flight attendant. She has featured in *The Art of Everyone*, *You Might Need To Hear This*, *Flora Fiction*, *Wingless Dreamer*, and *Poets Choice*. She is a faithful friend, difficult daughter, and selfish lover.





"Tracing" by Jing Qiu

**Jing Qiu** (1998, China) is an independent artist living and working in Shenzhen, Guangdong. His artistic work includes painting, photography, video, installation art, sculpture, and experimental art. His works have been exhibited in China, London, the UK, USA, Canada, Milan, Italy, Spain, Ukraine, and other countries and regions.



"Labyrinth 657" By: John Hampshire





**John Hampshire** lives in Troy NY and is a Professor of Fine Art at SUNY Adirondack.

## A lesson learned long ago

BY: ANONYMOUS

**L**eah sees holidays through movies and nothing else. Her family never does the whole “celebration” thing together no matter how much she tries to get everyone involved. Throughout her nine years of existence, she never had a tree because her father (aka “Abba” in Hebrew) is from Israel and Jewish. To her, that’s normal. But when her third-grade teacher teaches the class about Hannukah with the rest of the holidays, she realizes she doesn’t celebrate that either, and she really wants to.

Leah is a strange girl. She does weird things and comes from an unusual background, yet like every other child trying to fit in, she convinces herself that her situation is normal. Thus, while her classmates talk about Santa’s presents, she takes the absence of her parents’ involvement as an indicator for her own. So, in art class, Leah makes a menorah out of clay. Excited to share something with her parents, Abba especially, she brings it home on the bus to perform the ceremony.

At home, there are no decorations to indicate the time of year other than the piling snow falling on the porch. Leah hears her name called from the living room. Her menorah is wrapped close to her chest to shield it from the snow. She takes off her shoes and rushes to the sound of her name. She passes her mom in the kitchen whose sweeping with her head down. Abba, hunched over the coffee table, looks up to see her.

“You didn’t clean your room before you left this morning,” he says with a thick, Hebrew accent.

“I’m sorry,” Leah says. Her face turns red and she averts her eyes.

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“Look at me when I’m talking to you.” Abba continues, “How many times do I have to tell you? Are you stupid?”

“I—I don’t know,” Leah says. She looks back to the kitchen for help, but her mom is pretending she’s not there.

“I don’t know,” he mocks. “The next time you don’t clean your room, you’ll be sorry.”

Leah nods and moves past him, afraid of what he really means.

In her room, Leah unwraps her handmade menorah and places it on her dresser. It’s lopsided and uneven but the excitement of performing this ceremony fuels her most.

She takes a candle from her pocket and attempts to force it into the middle holder. The candle holder part is too thin, it doesn’t fit. She ends up scraping the sides of the candle down with her nail to wedge it in place. Unlucky for her, Abba walks in.

“What are you doing? I told you to clean your room.” He shouts.

Leah looks up to respond and starts to mutter the same words of, “I don’t know” when a hard smack hits the side of her face. She feels her left cheek. Its burning hot to the touch. Tears indicate a fit of surmounting anger rising.

“Look what you made me do. When I tell you to do something, you do it. I’m sick and tired of you not listening to me. You should be embarrassed that I have to spank you. Now, clean up your room.”

Leah stares blankly at Abba until he leaves. She can’t muster the words to speak. She looks at her stupid menorah and thinks how stupid she is for making it. She throws it in the trash. Never again will she try to celebrate Hannukah.

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"Temple of Snow" By: Dr. Helge Paulsen  
Dr. Paulsen is currently working as a freelance journalist, author and art photographer



## The Moon & Other Metaphors

BY: DOUG TANOURY

The moon is a woman I use to sleep with,  
Always white, and an icy light would  
Fall full on the birch forest that is  
A chalk stroke tally of our nights together.  
I recall those nights like leaves in October  
Remember the moonlight that shines on  
The everlasting monotony of sepia and sienna.

Mercury light, quicksilver shimmer washing over  
Black ice memories and a shadowy minimalism:  
A black and white noir world of jagged lunar peaks  
And dusty desert seas, bleached white  
And bone dead, and every night  
I slept next to her, I was a tree  
In a birch forest shedding leaves in October.

**Doug Tanoury** has been writing poetry all of his adult life,  
and have published in print and online for many years.

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"Icy Willow" By: Antoaneta Tica

**Antoaneta Tica** is interested in climate change and environmental awareness, and is a visual artist who uses the costumed body to express her ideas. She works mainly with recycled materials: plastic, paper or other found objects, which she transforms into 3D textures.



"A Fresh Path" By: Ellen Pliskin

**Ellen Pliskin** is a painter, printmaker, and photographer. Her works are currently on view at the United States Embassies in Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei and Ouagadougou, Burkina- Faso.



"Icy Pathway" By: Ellen Pliskin





"Ice II" By: **Lavoslava Benčič**

**Lavoslava Benčič** is from Slovenia, an intermedia artist, curator and educator. She is a multimedia engineer and a master of media arts and practices. Her works have been shown in twentytwo countries and awarded fourteen times.



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