

# FLORA FICTION

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# EDITORIAL STAFF

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## 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

Winter is a time of wonder. Filled with magic and love, winter is a time of rest, relaxation, and coming together. As the natural environment slumbers, cooling the outside, and inside humans congregate and share warmth. Even if it is just you, there is still something to be said about the wonder of being alive today, for we are not as alone as we think.

Wonder is the theme of this Winter Issue, completing the third volume of our online literary magazine. It is a wonder that each of these collections of art produced by the Flora Fiction team are uniquely beautiful each season. Artists coming together to create art is the greatest wonder. What does that mean to you?

Spend this season for you. Entering the New Year, focus on yourself. Fulfill your wondrous desires, whatever they may be. Thank you for reading, and we hope you continue to revisit us in the future.

*xoxo*  
*Flora Ashe*





"A Snowy Cottage" 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, Brunei and Burkino Faso.

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# Anti-Vacillation

BY: ALLAN LAKE

After the long, hard lockdown  
we wondered how to begin then  
slipped into nearby Botanical Eden  
and kissed morning away. Back home  
it was a home-made lemon cake as  
I played a sultry Something on ukulele.

We waltzed around the kitchen,  
then into our bedroom for a 'siesta.'  
Her breath all lemony, me atuned  
to a softer lockdown. Unsure how  
we'll get through such change but  
we made a tasty, promising start.

**Allan Lake** is a poet, originally from Allover, Canada, who now writes in Allover, Australia. Check out his latest poetry collection, *My Photos of Sicily*.





# Lovers

BY: PHIL ROWAN

Walking through an open field,  
moonbeams lit the way  
Dewed grass washed their steps  
strolling to the rhythm of their words  
Dank air from the ocean  
scented of salt spray  
The cool breeze mingled  
their hair and breath  
In perfect hypnotic harmony  
they leaned into each other  
His weakness was her caressing hand  
not having willpower to refuse it  
Her touch was a flame that lit the wick  
and the wick wanted to burn  
Massaging the beach, summer waves  
broke gently, rushing over the sand  
The lovers walked to the edge of the cliff,  
stopping, they embraced one another  
He tasted the salt on her lips,  
her hand caressed his face  
Gentle hands gliding down  
found his shoulders  
Her eyes sparkled in the night,  
her lips softly embraced his  
The sea breeze refreshed his soul  
a comfort of peace not felt often  
She stealthily moved into him,  
from his depth's breath rushing  
  
...she pushed him over the edge.

**Phil Rowan** is a published artist and poet. He graduated from Western Kentucky University, a degree in Psychology. His paintings have been featured in Cardinal Sins and Better Than Starbucks magazines and others.

## PHOTOGRAPHY

"Lovers on the Beach" By: Elaine Forrest

**Elaine Forrest** is an interdisciplinary artist inspired by commonplace objects, materials and distinctive moments that are part of everyday life.



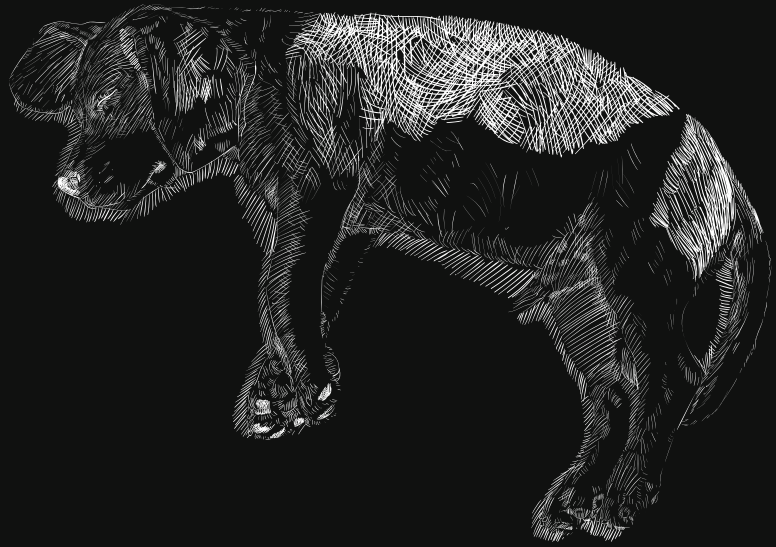


# Doing Nothing

BY: EDWARD AHERN

My vegetative moments steal from a scripted existence, but do provide the guilty manure for the growth of future strivings, none of which seem to be worth this loss of indolence.

**Ed Ahern** resumed writing after forty odd years in foreign intelligence and international sales. He's had four hundred fifty stories and poems published so far, and six books so far.



"Guardian of the Night 2015 - Lara Özlen





**Lara Özlen** studied Film and TV a decade ago, imagining being part of great arty movies, ending up hating the whole industry. She adores photo journalism and it's spontaneous weird moments.

"Sistanbul Couple 2014" By: Lara Özlen







"Winter Voyeur 2012" By: Lara Özlen





# Starburst

BY: ANGELICA WHITEHORNE

I found a yellow Starburst in the pocket of my winter coat  
and remembered my little brother had given it to me,  
his innocent offering a square of sunlight in November.  
The jeans I bought for 99 cents  
are fitting me like love,  
stretching good around my thighs,  
rolling above my ankles like a purr.  
My favorite cake turned up on a plate today,  
the snow has melted, and for now we can forget  
how it once seeped through our toughest boots.  
The day is calm and trivial and organic,  
paperclips line themselves into a smile along my desk.  
I turn my face towards the bright of my office window,  
I tell the world, "I really like when you remember my name."  
I say, "You don't have to tell me I'm special,  
you just have to remind me that I am here."







"Gimme Some Sugar" By: Amy Nedler

Amy Nedler



# On Cloud 99

BY: JON MORAY

**S**he was at Orchard Beach in the Bronx, running low on self-esteem and self-worth. Her life spiraled down with a loss of vocation and the loss of her significant other. She climbed onto the rocks at Section 13 and reclined, her back combating the jagged edges of the stone.

She stared at the overcast sky, birds flying aimlessly in her line of vision. Her stare transitioned into a trance, the clouds forming abstract shapes. Her eyes slowly closed as she succumbed to the subconscious.

"Welcome to Cloud 99," voiced a male sitting on a cloud-shaped sofa beside her.

"What? How did I get here," she gasped, noticing the man and the Long Island Sound below her.

"You let yourself go. You got caught up with the wonder of the clouds, and voila, you are here Cloud 99. I named this cloud," he answered, with a hand gesture as if he'd performed a magic trick.

"But I was down below on the beach. I must be dreaming," she reasoned.

"Perhaps, or an escape from your troubles, if only for a short while," he answered. He explained that what happened could be likened to a song one gets lost in, or to driving while lost in thought and not recalling how you got to that point in your travels.

"How long does this escape last?"

"Not long, but if you get here once, you can get here again," the man said with raised eyebrows. He scooped his hand across the top of the cloud.

"Looks like we are about to get a little rain," he commented, shaping a ball of cloud into a cup. Rain filled the cup, and he handed it to her.

"So good," she commented between sips. Suddenly she was fading, fading until she was back on the shore rock way below. For several moments she just breathed, deep in, deep out, trying to process her atmospheric experience. Her thoughts were a pleasant memory of the skies and the man that greeted her.



Her after-dream reflection party ended, and realization crept back in. She needed to address her issues and change for the better. Still, there was one lingering thought. The man was there when she arrived on the cloud with no signs he was going anywhere when she left. Why?

She took a bus back to her tiny efficiency apartment, in need of maid service. Her recent job quests came up empty. Her nurse's aide experience did little to net her employment. Job applications at marketplaces throughout town didn't pan out. She was back at zero.

A week later, another bus ride brought her back to the beach. Her mental condition was tanking, but she had to try to get back to Cloud 99. She took her place on the rock and stared at the sky until her eyes burned into tears. Her gaze turned to dry blinking, and then her eyes closed.

"Welcome back to Cloud 99."

Her eyes opened, and she found herself on a seat beside him. She instinctively cupped some water vapor and formed a cup, although it didn't look like rain.

"Who are you, and why are you here when I arrive and still here when I leave?"

The man raised his head, revealing a glum outlook. "I have been here a long time, but this might be the last time you see me," the man stammered, his voice cracking. Before she could respond, he explained that he had been in a coma for seven years and his family ultimately decided to pull the plug.

"Is there anything I can do?" she pleaded.

The man's brows wrinkled in deep thought. "Perhaps you can tell them to hold on a while longer."

"What can I say? How can I find them? I don't even know your name."

"Larry Logan. I am at the General Hospital not far from the beach."

The woman nodded in assent to the location. "I am Mary Martini."

Larry gave Mary explicit instructions when she got to the hospital about what to say to his family if they would not allow her to see him.

"Just say, 'Larry is sorry he didn't want the fire truck.' That should trigger a response from them and hopefully get them to reconsider." Larry explained that he hurt his mother with his emphatic, whiny rejection of the truck given to him at Christmas that everyone thought he would love.

"I hope I see you again, Larry," she said as she slowly began to de-materialize.

She awoke on the rock and shuffled to catch the first bus to the hospital. She checked in at reception and took the elevator to the fourth floor, hung a right, and knocked on the door to room 423. A sophisticated woman opened it and wedged herself between Mary and the room.

"I am here to see Larry Logan."

"I am his mother. I have never seen you before, and I am here every day," she huffed and began to close the door.

"Wait. Larry is sorry he didn't want the fire truck," Mary blurted out as the door closed. She waited outside the door a few moments before making her exit via the stairs. Outside welcomed her with steady rain. Unsheltered from the elements, she surrendered to the pelts of precipitation as she trudged to the bus stop. A voice yelled behind her, and she spun around to see Larry's mom motioning at her.

"I will let you see Larry for a moment," his mom called through the storm. Mary rushed toward her when a sudden inspiration hit her. She pulled her coffee mug from her purse and let the rain fill it.

They entered the room, and Mary inched toward Larry, sitting up comatose. Mary brought the mug to his lips and wet them, moisture seeping from the edges. She lightly touched his forehead and exited the room, thanking his family for her intrusion.

She stopped going to the beach when she got a job at the local supermarket, but a month later, she awoke from an evening of slumber with the inspiration to get back to the rock.

She rode the bus over without a plan but felt a nudge to go. She snaked around the wooded path and met the sands toward the rock. As she neared, she saw a figure lying in the same spot she usually occupied.

"Larry," she called out as she scaled the rock to meet him.

"Yes, Mary, it is me. I was hoping you would come back here," he exclaimed, and she dove into his arms. They wet each other's shoulders with tears, locked in an embrace.

"I have six months of home recovery, and I need someone to look after me. It doesn't pay that well, but it is a job. Interested?" he whispered in her ear.

Mary lifted her head, and her welled eyes met his. She nodded and returned comfort on his shoulder.



"Mommy-Daughter Day" By: Amy Nelder

**Amy Nelder's** trompe l'oeil paintings are infused with au courant imagery. She has select exhibitions at Chianciano Biennale, Cape Cod Museum of Art; Haggin Museum; Coos Art Museum; de Young Museum; Walt Disney Museum; Garzoni Challenge; Chloe Gallery. Media coverage: film/press interviews.

AMY NELDER



# Cabernet

BY LOUIS FABER

**Louis Faber** is a poet, photographer and blogger in Port Saint Lucie, Florida. His work has been widely published in the United States, United Kingdom, Australia and India. His cat is his constant critic and editor.

I should pause for a moment  
and mourn the plump orbs  
vinaceous in the morning sun,  
torn free, placed in baskets  
and carried off to be crushed.  
But the cabernet beckons,  
its first sip telling the tale  
of the California summer,  
the oak having long forgotten  
the tree from which it was cut,  
and I watch as the sun  
reluctantly retreats,  
a flaming farewell, the promise  
of a return, the moon casting  
its purple glare on the wine glass.



"Make a Wish" By: Amy Nedler

AMY NEDLER



"The Great Moon " By: Anirban Mishra



# I am Afraid of the Dark

BY: PHIL ROWAN



Someone is  
cleaning the mess  
I left behind.  
They handle  
and caress my body  
carefully  
which is what I  
longed for most of all.

Talking about families  
and news events,  
ignoring the body  
sounds and twitches  
that are familiar,  
I hope they don't smoke  
while doing their work  
I'm allergic to tobacco  
it makes me cough  
uncontrollably.

Their work done,  
calling it a day,  
flip the switch,  
leave the room.

I am afraid  
of the dark.

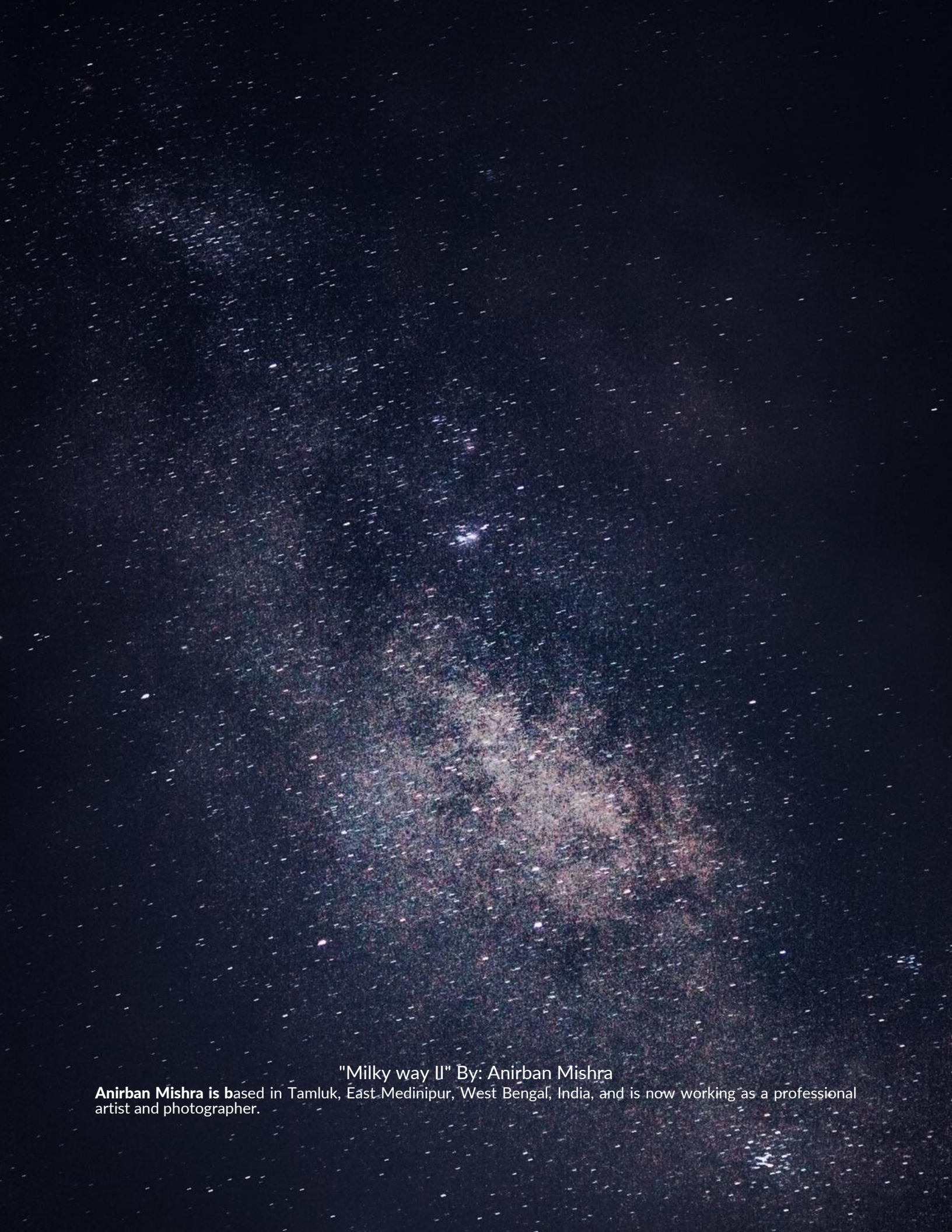
I naturally want  
to curl like a babe  
but I can't move,  
the slab is  
uncomfortably cold  
even for the dead.

Pops and creaks  
interrupt the deafening  
silence.  
Desperate to call out,  
hoping I'm not alone,  
my tongue,  
a leathery flap,  
lies still.

I am afraid  
of the dark.

I sense a strangeness,  
a void,  
no rhythmic breathing,  
no pulsing sensation,  
emptiness.  
No activity to gauge my  
existence, except...  
a mental awareness.  
Awareness of no one there  
to comfort me in the darkness.

I am afraid  
of the dark.



"Milky way II" By: Anirban Mishra

**Anirban Mishra** is based in Tamluk, East Medinipur, West Bengal, India, and is now working as a professional artist and photographer.



# Dust to Dust

BY LORRAINE CAPUTO

I.  
 Clouds rise &  
     fall, revealing  
         swatches of the Sierra

II.  
 When not one slope  
     is visible – just a  
         thick bank of vapor

The rains will fall  
     ~   ~   ~  
 One morning those  
 clouds lifted into  
 grey sky. The upper  
 peaks were dusted with  
 fresh snow.

We talked of Santa Bárbara  
 her image in a child's  
 card secreted in a box.  
 I sang to her Changó.

& all early afternoon  
 it rumbled,

& that night, thunder so  
 close, so loud, booming.  
 ~   ~   ~

III.  
 Again before this evening past  
     clouds settled, obscuring  
         the mountains

IV.  
 & still at this elfin hour  
     in my German dreams  
         rain drops, pings upon  
 distant roof  
     streaming, pooling  
         washing in waves

V.  
 & invisibly  
     snow falls deeper  
         upon those peaks

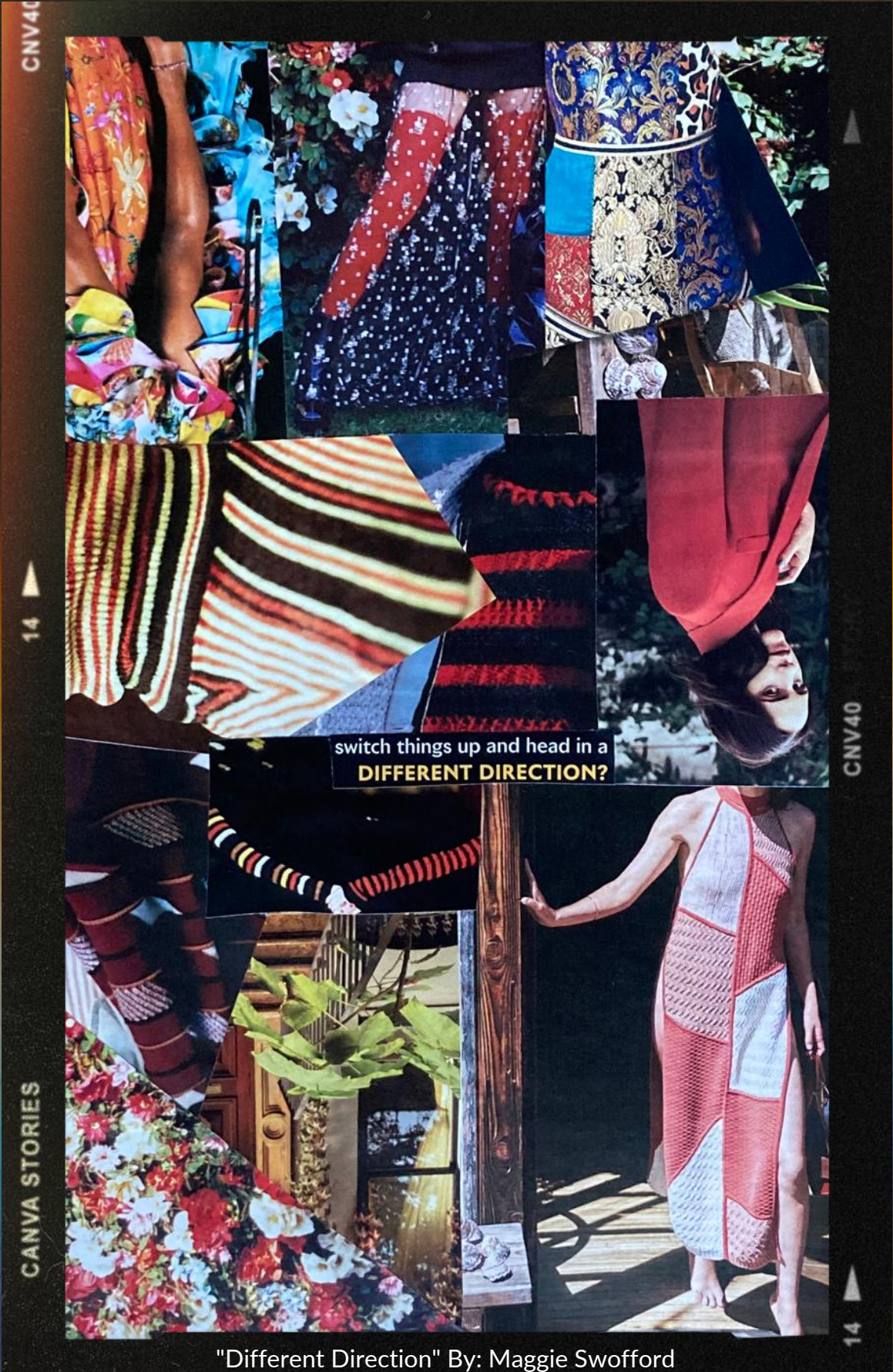
Lorraine Caputo's works appear in over 400 journals on six continents and 23 chapbooks of poetry. She travels through Latin America, listening to the voices of the pueblos and Earth.





"Transition" By: Maggie Swofford





"Different Direction" By: Maggie Swofford

**Maggie Swofford** is a quirky poet-artist, passionate about creating new perspectives on faith and queerness through her work across mediums. She strives to explore the beauty and fluidity of the modern self via imagistic language and metaphors. She draws from her adoration of outer space, fashion, and color to create dynamic images that illustrate the collisions of self-actualization.









find your color

"Find Your Color" By: Maggie Swofford





"The Perfect Rose" By: Elaine Forrest





"Ukrainian Heart" By: Elaine Forrest

**Elaine Forrest** is an interdisciplinary artist inspired by commonplace objects, materials and distinctive moments that are part of everyday life.





"Amanecer" By: Smith Sonthalia







"La Maripoza Azul" By: Smith Sonthalia

"My art seeks to share the beauty of nature using bold and bright colors. My inspirations from nature are butterflies, birds, and flowers as they reflect beauty along with the freedom to inspire. Women are butterflies sometimes and they become birds. Women are attractive like flowers, immensely delicate and charming. Women desire to fly high like a bird; the freedom to fly high and high."



# With All Her Might

BY: KATIE JOY BLAKE

I was close to falling asleep when she came to me. She laid her body next to mine and, with all her might, searched for an opening. Like a fisher to the underbelly, she found the weak spots in my flesh. The crook of my neck, the tender spot behind my ear, the folds of my armpit. Her hands journeyed instinctively, creeping to find the warmth and hide in the safety. She was pushing, holding, forging an existence from memory.

I flinched. Moved over.

She is three years old and still seeking opportunities to reattach herself to me, to fashion the world into a womb and suction her body to mine. Her eyes closed gently with contentment after her fingertips and palms secured to my skin. This is how she slept.

Take it all in, they say. You won't have this much longer.

It was suffocating. Her warm breath rippled across my cheeks, poured into my mouth. Her tiny sheltered lungs expelled the most tender mist of carbon dioxide, a placid exhale from infantile lips. Yet my worldly lungs became desperate for the full swig of oxygen and space.

I moved my head and torso back. Just an inch or two. My hands still wrapped around her waist, her body leaning in the bend of my elbow, my knee grazing her twirling feet.

"Ma-ma" she groaned, her voice vibrating across a dream and anxiously teetering on reality. I moved back.

Her birth was no easy chore. It was a labor of life, not love, yet. I didn't know how to love her, yet. But I knew to labor like her life depended on it. My insides were sliding into a dark hole of pain and I held on to someone's hand, screaming with teeth clenched, worried that if I stopped fighting I would slide down into the black and die. But the labor was most burdensome on my mind. Having never been fond of the subject of anatomy, I grew up under an impenetrable understanding that my body was not made of organs or veins or guts; my self-respecting imagination told me I was stuffed simply with cotton, like a doll. So when she careened out of my body, pushing against and through my uterus, against and through my vagina, she ripped my self-image (and my body, which was not made of cotton) to shreds. I felt human. Who was I?

I watched her eyelids gently flutter into a dreamscape.

After labor, I felt love and nothing else. Then came the pain, not stretching out of a black hole, but rather pains that were approachable. Conquerable. Anything was conquerable now. My body grew stronger.

Her hands began crawling again. Warm fingers blindly navigated the terrain to the next spot, the map so boldly memorized, memorialized, that the hurdle of sleep could not keep her from using it. My body shriveled up as it cringed from their plight, avoiding the



unpleasant tickle.

Healthy sleep is the most important thing, they say.

There are other chores in motherhood, labors of love, by now. Decisions both minuscule and grand presenting themselves every minute of every day. I became skilled in making decisions despite the worries, ideas, and judgments that usually plagued my mind. Deciding what to blend in her puree. Deciding when to do bath time. Deciding when to become stern. I believe others call this confidence, but I never found mine until I had to.

My right arm was losing blood and the accompanying prickling, tens of thousands of pins and needles, had an immediate full body impact, even my toes curled, stinging from the variation. It cued the pain in my upper spine, discomfort from the awkward angle at which my neck accessed my pillow, and in my shoulder, having already worked overtime carrying her home from the park that morning.

She radiated calm; cheeks so pure and unblemished, mouth relaxed, eyelids soft.

I knew of a space just beside myself where oxygen flowed freely and I could unfold. My new identity, strength, and confidence could guide me. But combined, they held me captive to my sun from which they all grew. I was a new being and yet nothing without her.

I would fall asleep in time. As I settled into the usual push and pull.

**Katie Joy Blake** writes fiction that explores the thin line between the mundane and the extraordinary. While on hiatus from her career working on behalf of at-risk youth, she is raising her children and finding inspiration equally in the absurdity and richness of life.



"Felines and Flowers" By: Hanniel Levenson





"Dreams of a Wandering Sailor"

By: Haniel Levenson

**Haniel** is a Rabbi, artist and designer living in New York City.





# The Bamboo Club

BY MIA AMORE DEL BANDO

Tail end of summer  
Heat kissing my thighs on leather bar booths  
Spanish dancing, flashes of crimson  
And the clink of tequila shots  
Bar conversations buzz  
Coveted by the sporadic base  
I cradle a watery gin cocktail  
He's absorbing my beauty  
Hand painting my cheek  
With the chaos swirling around  
Peace resides in his presence  
He's still learning about me  
New fascination with welcoming eyes  
And ambitious dreams  
List of future dates scribbled in his phone  
Our conversation rolled into a sweet cocoon  
Dark pasts and ridiculous events  
Laughing loud for the first time  
We out live the bartender's night  
People bleeding out the doors  
Cigarettes pinched between fingers  
I stumble out in chunky heels  
He holds me like a warrior  
Swinging along the street  
Summer sticking to his lips





"Generous Spring" By: Dahlia Hosny  
Dahlia Hosny creates visual art to invoke positive emotions, breaking through boundaries of imagination, inspired by nature, its colors, forms, and textures.





"Red" By: Jonathan Brooks



# The Tapir and the Way of the Vending Machine

BY: ELIANE BOEY

The Tippy Tapir vending machine, standing flush to the mosaic-tiled wall, is the only source of light in the building's lobby, itself a seed coat of shades of brown popular in the 1970s, and inviting as the inside of a cupboard. Milk tea brown tiles on the wall, brown hardwood skirting running above the floor, and large square terracotta tiles like the mud dragged in by the tenants who bike to work through the park connector.

The light from the machine is pink, white, and blue. All under the large eyes of a back-lit meter tall cut-out of a rotund tapir. The tapir waves a dainty hoof every 18 seconds.

Before tonight, I never thought to ask what the tapir did, in those 18 seconds.

## Selection

The lift doors groaned and parted, and I stepped out into lobby. It was 9PM on a Saturday – which, five years ago, would've been when I began make plans to go out. But with Hammie finally in bed after a two-hour-long bedtime routine, 9PM was as good as the witching hour. I shuffled to the vending machine, taking care that my flip-flops didn't make a slapping sound as I walked.

Standing in the light of the vending machine, I punched the numbers for my selection. 017: Trocky. Chocolate-coated biscuit sticks. It's also available in allocations 018 and 019, but I've lost two Trocky boxes stuck on the outer rings of the metal spiral holder of 018, and I don't remember not losing any to 019. So, 017 it was.

## Tilt

The metal spiral turned, and the box of biscuits vibrated with the movement of the coil, and tittered closer to the glass. The box tipped over and followed the curl of the spiral. It tipped until it stood on just one corner, and my head tilted along with it.

Then, the metal spiral stopped. And the box, forestalled from its drop down the front of the machine and into the collection tray below, hung suspended in time.

I beat a palm on the glass. "No way."

I hit the glass again. This time, I couldn't stop before I saw myself in it. Damp, outgrown bob, tired eyes behind plastic "flexy" glasses with the UV-coating completely scratched off; and my 17-year-old shirt from uni with an overstretched neckline.

A box of Trocky costs 87 cents. If money is only money—my father used to say, "Problems that can be solved with money are not real problems"—I can afford another 87 cents to try my luck at 019. But it isn't only money. And my father never had as much as he thought he did.

I kicked the machine. The machine did not move. I levelled my shoulder at the machine, took a step back, and threw myself at it. My shoulder ached, but the glass trembled, and this gave me hope. I stepped back again. Three steps this time. And ran at the machine.



The funny thing was, I never felt the glass give.

"Push some more, you'll reach the other side," the voice said.

It was a low a dry voice, but pitched, as though piped through a small speaker. But there was no speaker, nor electric speakers for that matter. Only a rotund tapir, reclining on the slanting edge of the Trocky box.

"The other side of what?" I said, suspending belief in the tapir. Because, really, what other side?

"That where were you want to be?" said the tapir.

"No, no. And as a matter of fact, I don't want to be here either."

Now, it was easy enough for me to have a conversation with a pre-packaged confectionary mascot tapir, as soon as I'd convinced myself that none of it could possibly be real.

"What you want, then?"

"For a start, I want what's mine." I pointed, at the box underneath the tapir.

"This yours?" The tapir wrinkled its snout. "How come it's still with me?"

"Because it's stuck, that's why."

"Stuck for you; feels comfortable for me." The tapir carved a dent in the box with a narrow hoof, and nestled into it. I did not imagine the sound of biscuits snapping under its weight.

"Careful, those are my biscuits."

"How you don't have it, then?"

How does a talking mascot tapir, which cannot exist, have mass and weight? Suspended belief or no, I'd had enough. My brain, previously on autopilot, creaked into activation.

"Having it is only a physical state. If you'd only be quiet, I can think about what I need to do, to... possess it."

"Ah hah," said the tapir. "We're thinking, now. See where that landed you,"

The tapir took its weight off the box. A hoof pointed at me. Now I could see that it had four toes.

"You do this, alright. Get your head back outside, and lift the collection flap. Let it fall, fast. No more kicking, no pushing. The air will do it. The air had the strongest force."

"But how do I get outside?"

"You're already outside," the four-toed hoof waved me away. "Don't forget what I said about the air."

Just like I never felt the glass give, I didn't feel it come together again, with myself outside of it, looking in on the box of Trocky poised just over the drop to the collection tray. And no tapir.

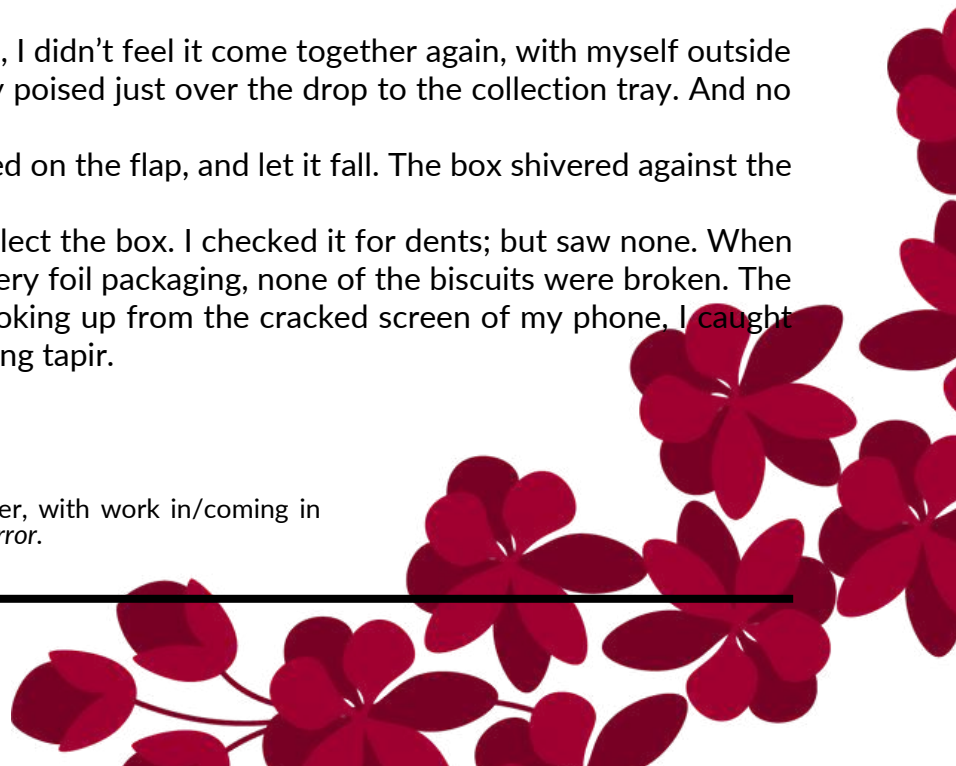
But I did what I was told. I pushed on the flap, and let it fall. The box shivered against the pressure of the air. And fell.

I pushed on the flap again, to collect the box. I checked it for dents; but saw none. When I tore open the box, and then its silvery foil packaging, none of the biscuits were broken. The time on my phone still said 9pm. Looking up from the cracked screen of my phone, I caught an 18th second wave from the glowing tapir.

Next time, I'm trying 019.

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**Eliane Boey** is a Chinese Singaporean writer, with work in/coming in *Clarkesworld*, *the Penn Review*, and *Weird Horror*.







"In Bloom" By: Jonathan Brooks





"Double Wild Green" By: Jonathan Brooks

**Jonathan Brooks'** photographs have been published in numerous periodicals, featured in movies and television, and exhibited in Miami, NYC, Amsterdam, France, Germany, Greece, Scotland, and the UK. Including Art Basel, the Louvre, and Times Square.



# To Begonia Rex

BY: LOIS PERCH VILLEMAIRE

My painted-leaf begonia  
with dramatic color combinations  
on display, so beautiful and vibrant,  
lover of indirect sun.

If you were to remain outdoors  
as temperatures drop,  
how long would your luscious pink flowers  
and pointy leaves survive?

I long to rescue you,  
my faithful plant,  
giver of joy these many months.

With leaves spread wide,  
space will be found inside  
to protect you through the winter.

**Lois Perch Villemaire** lives in Annapolis, MD and spends a great deal of time appreciating plants and trees. She writes poetry, creative nonfiction, and flash. Her work has appeared in magazines, journals, and anthologies.



# TWO-HEADED GAL

BY: JASPER CASTRO

Inspired by Laura Giplin's *Two Headed Calf*

Tomorrow

I will sink into a depression that will imprison me in a dark room and ravage years off my life,  
Chain me and age me to a bed until my peers become children,  
Ruin my face, enlarge my body and hold back every progress I've ever made.

But tonight,

I am manic

And in love

With a boy

And a movie I am writing

That is part a dream and part my life,

With supple smooth cheeks pinker than pink as I look to the bluer than blue sky,  
Stars twinkling whiter than white and yellower than yellow.

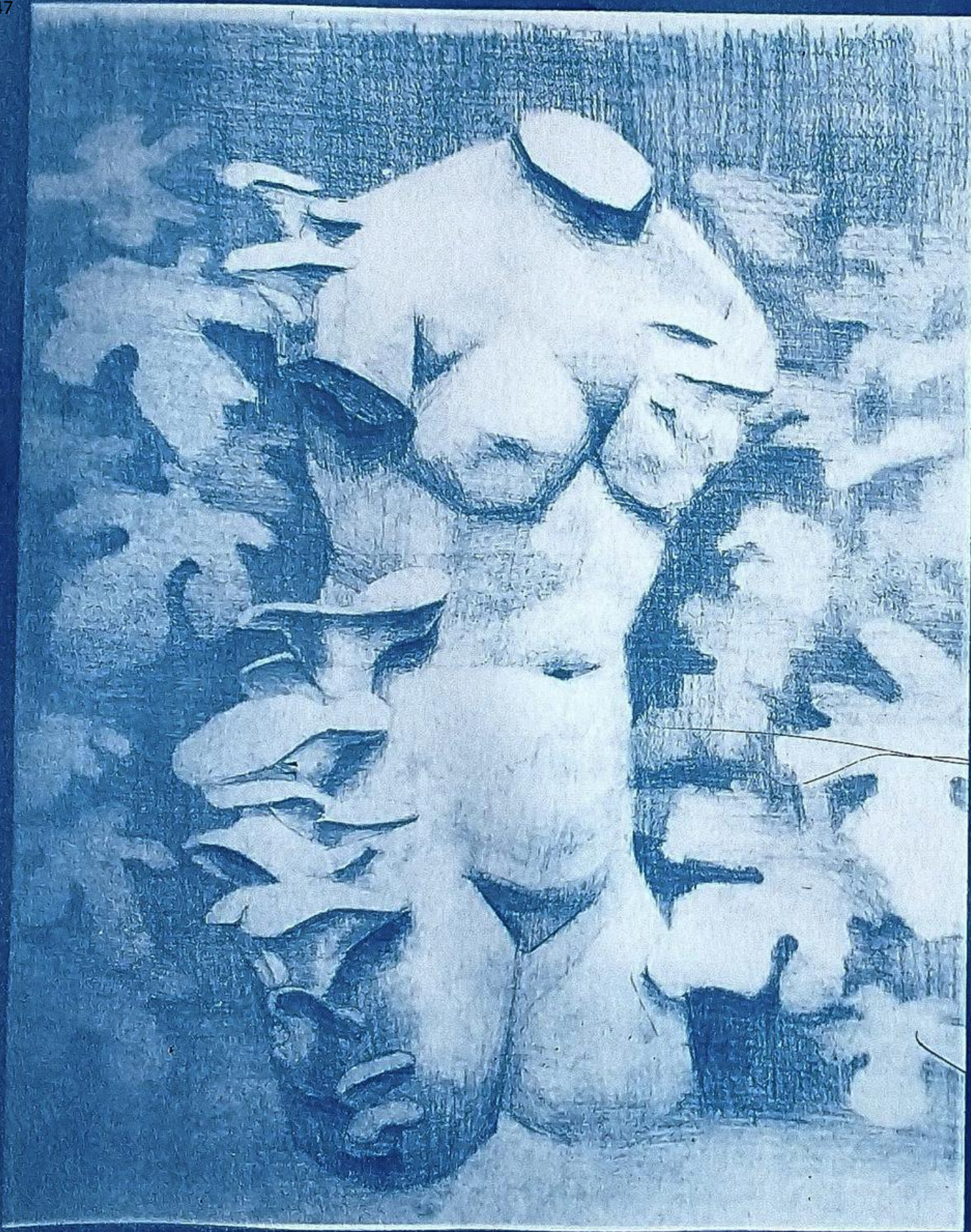
**Jasper Castro** is a transdisciplinary artist, feminist, and mental health advocate Jasper is always hungry to love and connect with life through her art. To communicate nuanced truths she uses acrylic paint, clay, ink, oil pastels, found objects, watercolor, and recorded poetry to create multidimensional surreal and vibrant art experiences.





Jasper  
2022





"Double Venus" By: Anne Wedler







# Waiting

BY: BART EDELMAN

Tom Petty tells me each night,  
*The waiting is the hardest part,*  
Yet while I must agree,  
Wholeheartedly, by day's end,  
I'm drained with the process—  
A runaway dream my reward.

I try to come to grips,  
Place everything in perspective,  
Evaluate life at the present point,  
But there's always loose threads  
Demanding a knot somewhere,  
And I feel obligated to serve  
The next client in line.

If I could only find time  
To spring into action mode,  
Without a moment's delay,  
I may short-circuit hesitation,  
Plaguing what dictates fate.

However, when it matters,  
I hang fire, I'm afraid—  
Let nature take its course,  
And there I stand, petrified,  
Holding a hat in my hand,  
Unwilling to place it on my head.

**Bart Edelman's** poetry collections include *Crossing the Hackensack*, *Under Damaris' Dress*, *The Alphabet of Love*, *The Gentle Man*, *The Last Mojito*, *The Geographer's Wife*, and *Whistling to Trick the Wind*.







"The Longest Winter"

**Anne Wedler** is an artist educator living and working in Minnesota.

"Sleeper"





# The Snow as a Woman

BY: ANGELICA WHITEHORNE

Of course, the Snow is a woman,  
see how she blankets us? How she makes us  
stop in our tracks and look up at her? Her wet smell,  
her falling wisdom as she weeps over the crowns of our heads.  
And how we are continually captivated by her ruthless beauty,  
as she kills everything green, and slaps wind against our cheeks,  
we cannot help but slide into her, climbing out from our heated hidings,  
unable to resist; not knowing if we can melt her off this time,  
or if this time, she will stick to us and bury.

**Angelica Whitehorne** is a writer from Buffalo, New York with published work in Westwind Poetry, Mantis, Air/Light Magazine, and the Laurel Review, among others. She is the author of the chapbook, *The World Is Ending, Say Something That Will Last* (Bottle Cap Press, 2022). She is also a Program Assistant for the Just Buffalo Literary Center, and a Marketing Content Writer for a green energy loan company, and a volunteer reader for Autumn House Press.





"Winter Road  
Reimagining"

**Ana Stjelja** is a  
writer, translator,  
journalist, digital  
artist and graphic  
designer from  
Serbia.









"X-Rays" By: Maria Preussmann



"Intestinal Flora " By: Maria Preussmann

## Coleridge on the New Jersey Turnpike

BY: MICHAEL MINGO

Awoken from the morning haze  
of diesel fumes like opium  
as the bus stumbles through a line  
of rumble strips, his eyes outshine  
the Hackensack River numb

with sunlight and surfactant glaze.  
Here stand the fragments of a dream  
even the muses leave unfinished:  
four-story parking structures varnished  
with rust and mildew streaks,

the cavernous indoor alpine slope  
whose roof was damaged by the weight  
of real ice. No holy dread  
has overwhelmed the traveler's head,  
and still the briefest sight

of Xanadu in disrepair  
is haunting him. Twenty-five years  
have passed since plans were first unveiled,  
and, slowly, everything has failed.

The driver switches gears

as traffic starts to loosen up.  
The wetlands left untouched, though sparse,  
are lush with salt hay stalks. How deep  
can one's imagination slip  
beneath this mental marsh?

**Michael Mingo** is a poet and medical editor from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Spillway*, *RHINO*, *Third Coast*, and *The McNeese Review*, among others.







"Lungs" By: Maria Preussmann

**Maria Preussmann (Merry)** is a Berlin-based mixed-media artist and web content specialist. She evolves her art in a process of self-reflection and combines poetry, photography, and comics to make inner images visible and deal with the unspoken.

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"Nervous System" By: Maria Preussmann



# Winter

BY: TINA CATHLEEN MACNAUGHTON

**T**he cycle of seasons nears its end and we are aware that the stark months of Winter are approaching. We feel a chill in the air and perceive Winter's cloak of darkness, drawing in the night, as evenings come to an early, abrupt close.

Back home, the house is cold and dark, the sitting room lit only by a couple of candles. Another power cut enforced by those who supposedly govern us. It will be a few hours until the lights and heating are back on and a feeling of warmth seeps into our bones. I pick up the hall torch and go into the kitchen to fetch one of the flasks of hot tea we sensibly prepared earlier. The winter will be long, but we have learnt how to survive the darkness.

I open the curtains and peer outwards and up towards the full moon. I see a celestial, magical orb of blood orange. My breath catches – you are beautiful. A big, bold, incandescent sphere shimmering against an ink black sky and wispy, passing clouds.

The Blood Moon, of course. I had forgotten to look out for you. A symbol of chaos, disruption, change. Well, we know all about that.

I go outside and reach towards you, drawing in your energy, your light, your magic. Breathe it in for later. The next few months will be cold, harsh, difficult. The world feels like a dark place just now. They say the brilliance of the Blood Moon invites us to explore our darker, shadow side and hints of the power of transformation. It tells us we may be both in and out of darkness. But we do not have to stay.

**Tina Cathleen MacNaughton** is a poet, and writer who divides her time between Berkshire and Portsmouth. She has published several books including the poetry collection, *On the Shoulders of Lions*, and her novel *Delphy Rose*, to be published in Spring 2023.





"Epiderma" By: Maria Preussmann



# Wonder-full

BY: RUSSELL WILLIS

Have you ever wondered  
If “wonderful”  
Ever really means  
“Full of wonder”?  
being wonder-filled  
full of questions  
curiosity  
childlike in the discovery  
of whatever was just learned  
perplexed by the whole universe  
or any part of it  
then rewarded by an insight or glimpse of Real or True or Beauty  
confused, unsettled, in a moment of splendor  
awed  
then wondering if “awful” ever should be understood  
as “filled-with-awe”  
itself a wonderful wonder

**Russell Willis** won the Sapphire Prize in Poetry in the 2022 Jewels in the Queen’s Crown Contest (Sweetycat Press) and has published poetry in over thirty online and print journals and twenty print anthologies.















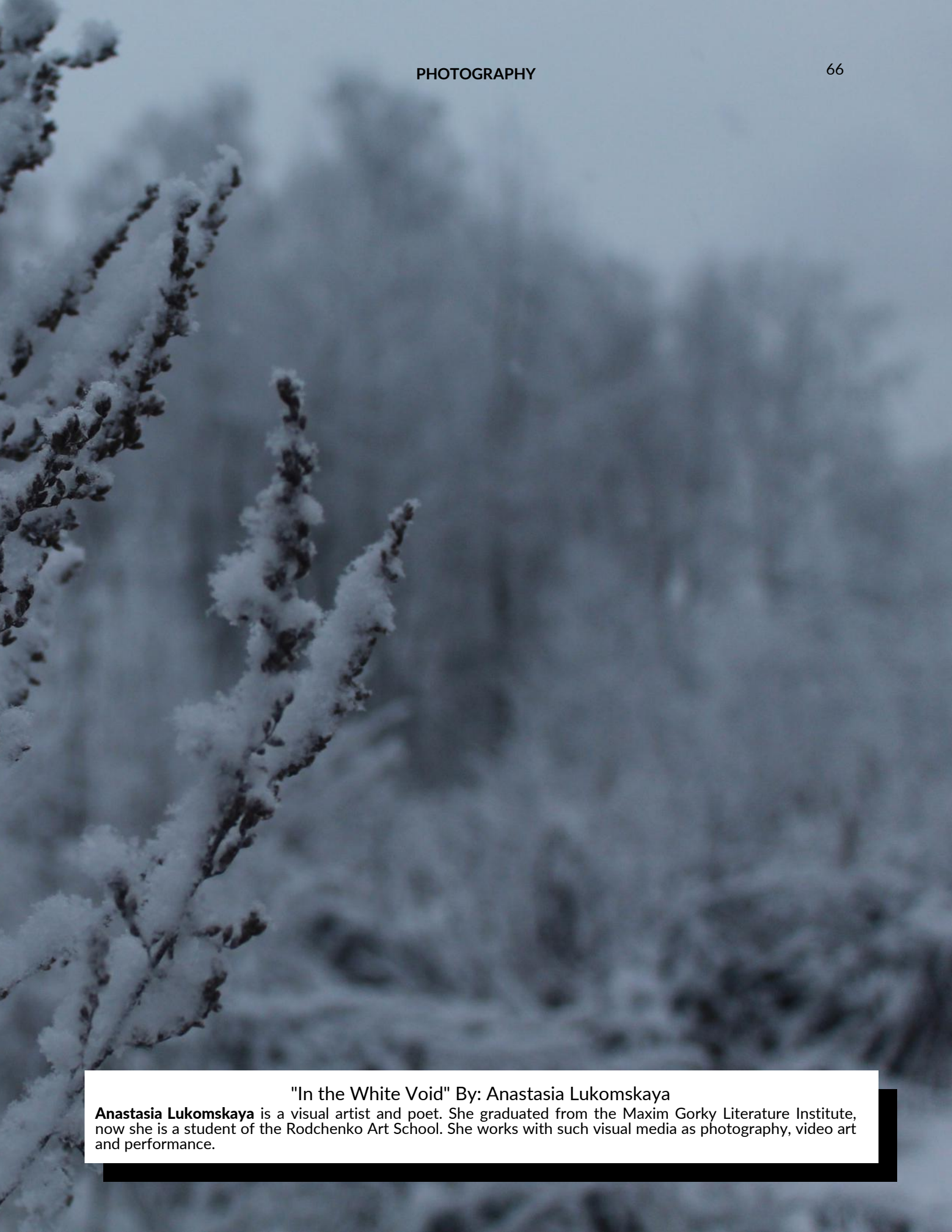


"Lost in Winter" By: Anastasia Lukomskaya









"In the White Void" By: Anastasia Lukomsкая

**Anastasia Lukomsкая** is a visual artist and poet. She graduated from the Maxim Gorky Literature Institute, now she is a student of the Rodchenko Art School. She works with such visual media as photography, video art and performance.



# Winter Run

BY: RUSSELL WILLIS

The scratch of hangers on rods  
conjures cold and fireplaces  
laughter and worn sherpa throws  
the buzz of conversation  
among those who have shared  
enough life to never have  
to speak again to each other  
except for the warmth of the buzz  
and the comfort of knowing  
that age is not a death sentence,  
but a limited engagement  
with room for a new audience  
and even additions to the cast, replete with travel totes  
and baby bags for costume storage and makeup





# AT THE CAFE

BY: LOUIS FABER

We sit across  
from each other  
separated by  
the small table  
that teeters,  
her cappuccino  
licking at the rim.  
My toes dance  
against hers  
and she looks up  
quizzically.  
I smile and reach  
for her hand  
touching her fingers  
feeling the fine silver  
of the rings on each.  
She pulls her hand  
back and looks  
into the rich  
brown sheen.  
I stare out the window  
at the odd car  
looking  
for a space  
in the overfull lot,  
then pulling  
back onto  
the road.  
As my mocha latte  
slowly cools  
I feel her ankle  
slide along  
my calf.  
She stares  
at the ceiling fan  
just stretching  
she says  
and I smile.







"Inmensa" By: Marlene Jorge





"Fabula" By: Marlene Jorge



Marlene Jorge is a neuro-divergent, autodidact, pop surrealist artist who addresses unconsciousness in its true nature. Jorge offers a unique version of liberated unconsciousness. Her style is best known for its liberation from the common perspective, providing a subtle yet unique composition from an elevated place, inviting the spectators to break free from preconceptions or society's blueprints. Challenging the spectators to sympathize with their inner selves; untouched by preconceived social, cultural and background fostering. Jorge's style invites us to understand and embrace who we truly are without the life-giving preconceptions we ceaselessly experience.



"Esporadica" By: Marlene Jorge





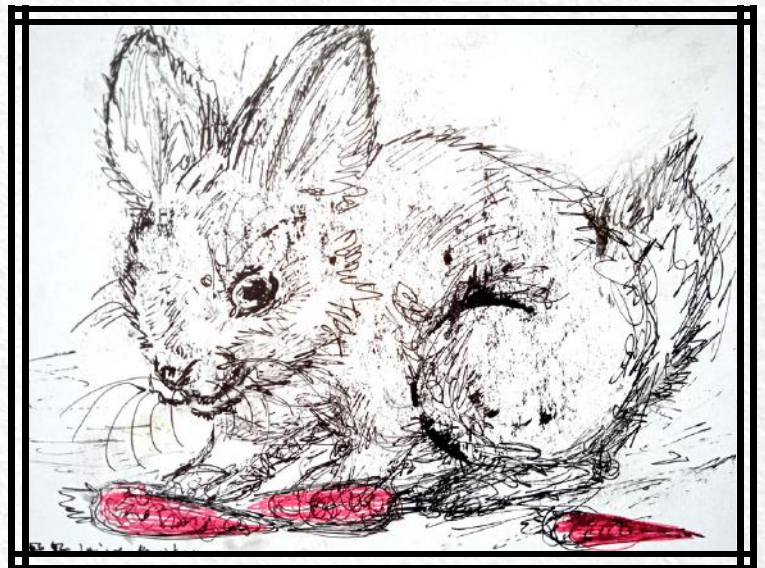
Illustration By: Irina Novikova

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**Irina Novikova** is an artist, graphic artist, and illustrator. She graduated from the State Academy of Slavic Cultures with a degree in art and also has a bachelor's degree in design. The first personal exhibition, *My soul is like a wild hawk* (2002) was held in the museum of Maxim Bagdanovich.





# YEARNING

BY: DANIEL SCHULZ

I long for dreams.  
I long for revolution.  
I long for liberation.  
I long for a life  
not tied up in threads  
and suited.

Clothed in cuts  
fit to our bodies,  
paper patterns  
adhering to identity  
like blueprints  
sewing us into form,  
turning our lives  
into catwalks,  
the price of admission  
hanging from our sleeves.

We are mannequins  
living other people's lies  
of having a reflection.

What do you want to do  
with your life?  
Rip the tag off.  
Identity still has a price.

Ask the label,  
a preordained cliché,  
a curriculum vitae  
a way of life,

that dead end  
we feel imprisoned by.

What lies behind those walls  
and closed doors  
that no one else can see, but you?  
I once dreamt a dream.  
Behind those walls was something else.  
Behind those walls was you.

**Daniel Schulz** is a U.S.-German writer and pushcart nominee, known for his work on *Kathy Acker* and his publications in *Fragmented Voices*, *Versification*, *Outcast Press*, *Word Vomit*, and the *Wild Word*.





"Abandoned three-wheeler"

**Francesco Puliga** is an artist specializing in creating graphic novels, illustrations and character design. Francesco published comic books, created illustrations, sequential art and character design, working traditionally and digitally.

"Global Warming"







"Argentierar" By: Francesco Puliga







ILLUSTRATION  
"Energia Ziemi-Ogien" By: Magdalena Lenartowicz





# THE SUN IS TALKING

BY: MIA AMORE DEL BANDO

I watch you as you sleep  
Wondering if I come across the same  
In your visions  
Am I better  
Than this reality?  
When you wake am I different?  
Do I look and sound the same?  
Who am I to you?  
You answer with a subtle snore  
Pull me closer like a wool blanket  
The sunlight nudging my temple  
Asking me to quit fantasizing  
Of how our relationship can suffer  
Through overthinking  
The anxiety melts for a second  
Maybe my brain can shut up and listen  
To your breathing  
And the sun can rise in peace

**Mia Amore Del Bando** was born and raised in Long Beach, California. She is a Los Angeles based flight attendant. She is a faithful friend, difficult daughter, and selfish lover.



ILLUSTRATION

"Delikatnosc Poranka" By: Magdalena Lenartowicz





# Anniversary

BY: WILLIAM CASS

**C**arl pulled on his brown cardigan, gripped his cane, and left the house. It was just after 6 a.m., the charcoal sky ink-washed over rooftops to the east. At the end of the driveway, the old man paused. He looked to the left at the streets he'd grown accustomed to taking on his morning walks, then pressed his lips into a thin, tight line, blew out a breath, and turned right.

At that hour, he had the neighborhood of small, silent houses to himself. Every now and then, a dog barked, and sometimes another answered. Otherwise, it was silent. At the bottom of the hill, Carl entered the town's central park. He had that to himself, too.

With fall's early advance, some leaves on the trees had begun to turn. He passed the fountain and the playground before he came to the pond. Carl stopped and stared off across the gray water with its scattering of ducks dotting the surface. At the pond's edge, their old bench stood empty. He blew out another breath, then used his cane to lower himself down onto it.

A couple of ducks swam over his way and regarded him.

"Nope," Carl whispered to them. "Not today."

He gazed off across the pond at the trees on the far shore, smatterings of color against the lightning sky, and sat very still thinking, remembering. At one point, he reached over and ran his hand across the vacant spot next to him.

Perhaps twenty minutes later, the sound of footsteps approached on the cinder path and a man with a small boy emerged at the pond's lip several feet away. The boy gave a squeal of delight as a flotilla of ducks made a sudden migration their way; Carl supposed he was probably about four years old. The man opened a plastic bag that held hunks of stale bread, handed it to the boy, and chuckled watching him toss bread to the ducks that swarmed in the shallows in front of him.

Several moments passed before the man turned to Carl with a sheepish grin and said, "Sorry to disturb your reverie." He gestured with his chin towards the boy. "My son's an early riser. We discovered this place a few months ago. Started coming here so his mom could sleep a little longer before work."

"No problem." Carl swallowed. "I understand. My wife and I used to come to feed those ducks ourselves for many years." He paused. "Until she died."

"I'm sorry," the man said. "How long ago?"

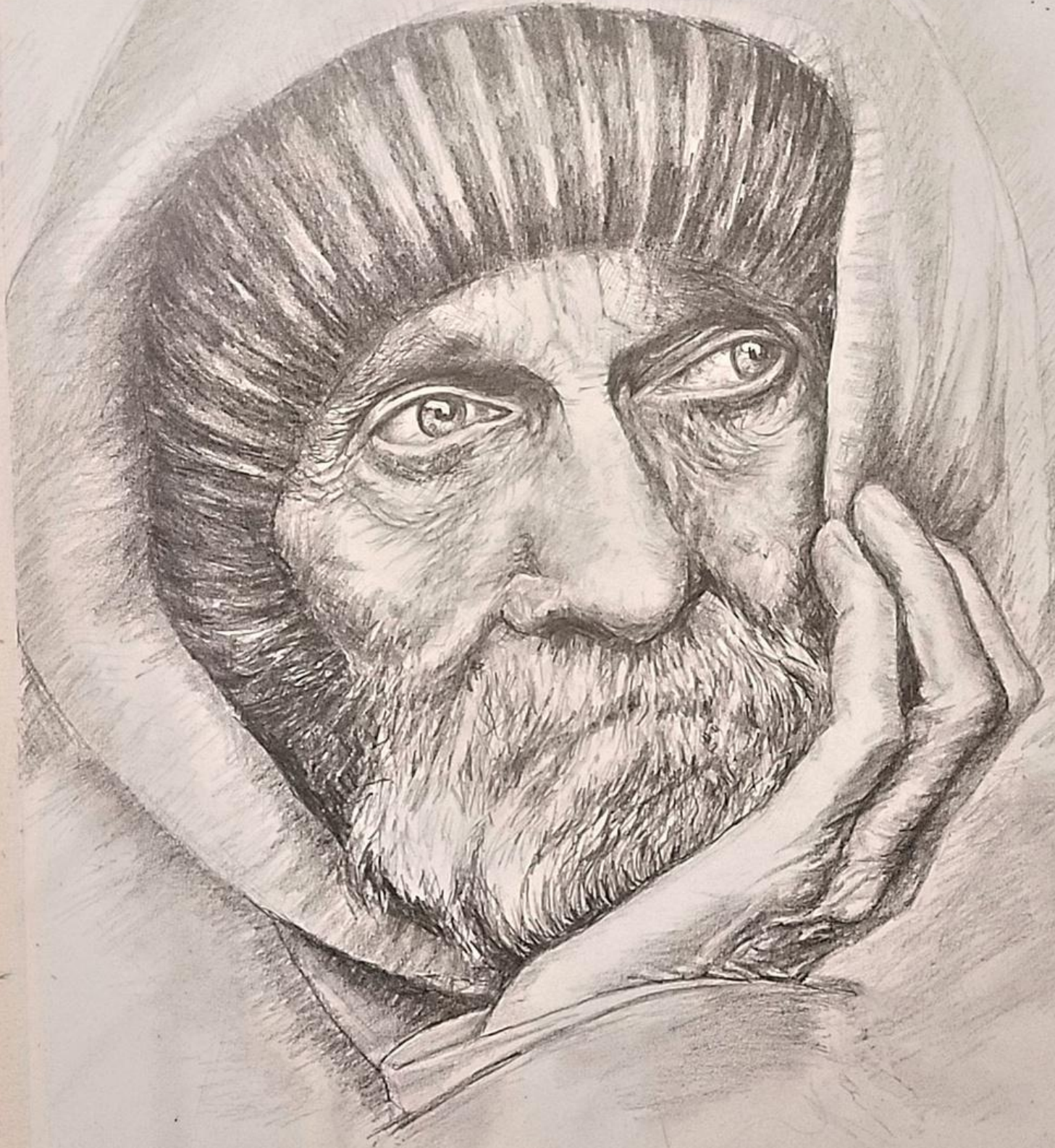
"A year. A year ago today."

The boy had turned around to listen. He stared at Carl with solemn eyes, then walked up to him and extended his open bag of bread. They looked at each other, the boy nodded until Carl took a few hunks of bread from inside it. The boy pulled some from inside, too. First, the boy tossed a hunk, then after a moment, a small smile creased Carl's lips, and he did the same.

**William Cass** has had over 285 short stories accepted for publication in literary magazines and anthologies. He's been nominated for Best of the Net, Best Short Fictions, and four times for the Pushcart Prize. His second short story collection, *Uncommon & Other Stories*, is forthcoming from Wising Up Press.



"Once Upon a Time" By: Marina Brown



**Marina Brown** is a writer of four Gold Medal-winning novels and volume of short stories, as well as a Silver-medalist poetry volume. She is also a painter, a cellist, a blue-water sailor, and traveler.



# Obscurities of Time

BY: SARIA ABEDIN

And again I am falling,  
perhaps into a dream where the skies cannot be farther,  
into the depths of thoughts that usher away a silent mind,  
onto the steps of an old rusting staircase, once so enormous and now so small  
the inklings of memories from when the spiraling railings were beyond my reach,  
like a hummingbird in search of the sweetness of life, left bitter.  
For now, I stand gazing above the faded painted walls,  
among the seemingly distant moments once bright left a shadow  
and I cannot help but wonder who I once was here.  
Someday perhaps I will be left the in the wake of indefinite dreams,  
as everything else will pass like autumn's descent to snow,  
for as soft as spring will soon follow  
the bitter chill will melt away  
and in the essence of time, I will grow and bend,  
obscurely pining after a new lure to conquer  
in wonder of where tomorrow will bring.  
But it seems I am still as small as a hummingbird  
so minuscule yet magnificent,  
fluttering to grace a flight,  
forever humming along to the words I hear echoing at once,  
as if every living breath could never hold together all the pieces I have left in me.

**Saria Abedin** is a young writer from Arizona. Writing poetry is one of her most valued passions. She has previously had her work published in *Elan International Literary Magazine* and *Imposter: A Poetry Journal*.



**Magdalena Lenartowicz's** every painting is a story of a man's journey to freedom, inner acceptance and harmony with the place they have chosen. The elements of the world inspire her to create images-journeys. For her travel companions, she chooses deep colors that come from nature. The final destination of every journey is a painting that calms emotions and brings solace to one's senses.



"Energia Ziemi I" By: Magdalena Lenartowicz





"2 Red Fox" By: William Faló



# Wild Mercy

BY: WILLIAM FALO

The red fox looked up at the sky and let out a yelp. Snow fell into his eyes, concealing the shadow moving through the trees. A blast made him jump, and a shower of pine needles on him when the bullet slashed through the trees. He darted into the thicker woods with his tail down so he wouldn't be spotted.

When he stopped, he sniffed the wind and sensed the human getting closer. The fox took a chance and bolted uphill to the deeper snow. He could walk across the snow without sinking, but the human would have to trudge through it. It would be an easy escape for the fox.

Crows in a tree farther down the slope cawed a warning.

The sound of crunching snow made him focus his one good eye on the distance, and he saw the human climb up a pile of boulders. The human pointed a long stick in his direction and looked through a tube on top of the stick. Before he realized that his red tail was sticking out into the pure white snow, a spark came from the stick, and searing pain instantly spread from his leg to his head. He tumbled over and saw red spots on the snow where he previously stood.

"Yes!" The human yelled. The fox limped to cover behind some trees. He feared the next spark from the long stick, but suddenly the human cried out. The stick fell from his hands, and he fell off the rocks, rolling down the hill until his body hit a tree. The human remained still, his long stick gone, and a trail of gloves and supplies littered the snow.

The fox licked his wound, but the pain didn't stop. The woods took on a haunting silence until he heard crying. He wanted to get closer to the human. He took a long time with his leg dragging behind him, but he made it close enough to see that the human's bare fingers were shaking while frozen water streaks lined his cheeks.

The fox moved closer.

The human saw him and reached for something that wasn't there.

"I'm sorry I shot you, but you killed my dog and chickens."

The fox tilted his head.

"Didn't you?"

The human sobbed. His hands turned a dark color. The night was coming, and the human probably wouldn't survive it.

"Maybe, I was wrong. The dog was my best friend, and I was so mad. My neighbor said a fox did it."

His mate died in a trap. Should he help this human?



A yipping sound came from the pile of boulders. Two coyotes looked down upon them.

"I recognize that sound. That's what killed my dog and chickens."

The fox watched as the coyotes disappeared behind the rocks.

"I'm sorry. Revenge got the best of me." The fox looked into the human's eyes for a long time. He slowly moved closer while keeping watch for the coyotes. The man fell asleep, and the fox stood guard as long as possible. In the darkness, the fox curled up next to the man and put his tail over him. He saw a meadow and a den, his mate, was there. He was home.

•••

Two park rangers stopped their snow machines and looked down the hill.

One of them pointed down the hill. "Jenna, look down there."

"There's someone down there."

She picked up her radio. "This is Madison. We need medical right away. I'll send you the GPS."

"Look," Jenna pointed at coyote tracks. "There were a lot of coyotes here."

They followed a path of gloves and other items until they got to the man.

Next to the man was a fox, its bushy tail covered the man, but the man's hands looked frostbitten.

Madison pressed her fingers to his wrists and got a pulse while Jenna covered him with an emergency blanket from her pack. She covered the fox with one but knew it was too late. She petted its side.

"I'm sorry. I love foxes."

"It's okay, Jenna. I do too."

Madison spoke into her radio again, "Make that a medical evacuation by helicopter. The hunter may make it but could lose his hands." She put the radio down and heard the man trying to speak.

"The fox?" He mumbled.

"It saved your life," Jenna said.

He mumbled one word. "Mercy," then his frostbitten hands shook. He opened his mouth but couldn't speak anymore. A tear fell down his frozen cheek and made it to the ground.

**William Faló** lives with his family, including a papillon named Dax. His stories have been published or are forthcoming in various literary journals.







"Color of Change" By: Barbara Hurwitz

**Barbara Schilling Hurwitz** enjoys viewing the world through a creative lens. Her works have been published by *Flora Fiction*, *Jewish Literary Journal*, *Washington Writers' Publishing House Writes*, *Trouville Review*, *Pure Slush*, and several other publications.







"Vision Through the Woods" By: Ellen Pliskin



PHOTOGRAPHY



"Looking Up" By: Sara Caporaletti

**Sara Caporaletti** is a multi-media visual artist living in Maryland. Caporaletti received her BA in studio art from McDaniel College and her MFA in interdisciplinary fine art from American University



# The Lawrence Tree

BY: BARBARA SWANSON SHERMAN

I have long adored Georgia O’Keeffe. During my first year in art school, the Whitney Museum held a retrospective of her work; I haunted that show and bought the catalog and a ton of postcards. She said, “Fill a space in a beautiful way,” and I thought I could do that. I painted many imitation O’Keeffe’s and read everything I could find about her. I kept her in my head; sometimes speaking to her, sometimes asking myself, “What would Georgia do?”

“The Lawrence Tree” is one of my favorites. It’s painted as if we’re lying at the foot of a great tree, gazing up through her branches at the starry night sky. I’ve lain like that but never thought to paint it. That’s why she’s Georgia O’Keeffe.

So, as Arthur and I drove through Tao’s past a sign that said

**Lawrence Ranch  
NO TRESPASSING**

I spoke up. I knew O’Keeffe had been part of a loose and fractious community that included the art patron Dorothy Brett. Brett gave the ranch to D.H. Lawrence and his wife. They lived there for a short time while he recovered his health and wrote, *The Plumed Serpent*.

“Oh, the Lawrence Ranch,” I said. “My favorite O’Keeffe is the Lawrence Tree. I wonder if it’s there.” Arthur slammed on the brakes and turned in.

“It says no trespassing!”

“You have to see this.”

“But Arthur—” I longed to see it, but I hated breaking rules.

“We’re going.”

“What if somebody stops us?”

“You’re an artist and you have to see that tree.”

“That’s our defense?”



"I'll tell them it's your favorite painting."

I pictured myself behind bars saying, "I'm not a criminal, I'm an artist."

But what did Lawrence himself say? "A woman has to live her life or live to repent not having lived it."

Arthur drove on. It was a very long, rocky dirt road and we raised dust clouds as we drove. Around every turn was another NO TRESPASSING sign. I expected to hear sirens.

We pulled in at a sign that said, Lawrence Chapel. There was a ranch house, and there was a tree. The Lawrence Tree in person. As Lawrence himself wrote, "The big pine tree in front of the house, standing still and unconcerned and alive... like a guardian angel."

I walked to the tree, wanting to lie down beneath it and look up, but a large raccoon sat in its branches like a sentinel. A NO TRESPASSING sign is one thing, a vigilant raccoon is quite another. I had to be content with imagining I could lie down and see the stars through the branches, just as O'Keeffe had done. And that was enough.

I thank Georgia O'Keeffe for the painting I've loved for fifty years. I thank D.H. Lawrence for the words that encouraged and dared me. And I thank Arthur for driving past the forbidding sign.

The ranch now belongs to the University of New Mexico and they conduct tours on Tuesdays and Thursdays. I went there alone instead of behind a well-meaning docent and a bunch of chatty tourists. I saw the Lawrence Tree as I needed to see it.

I trespassed and I do not repent.

**Barbara Swanson Sherman** works in Greenwich Village making detailed pen and ink fantasies populated with angels, animals and baseball players. She writes a weekly blog titled, *Seeking the sublime in the Everyday*.





"The Paths of Glaciers" By: Rebby Onken

**Rebby Onken** (she/they) is an aspiring historian, amateur photographer, and avid writer. Their work has been most recently featured in *Snarl*, a Journal of Literature and Art.

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# I Wonder

By: Sally Quon

Who will sing my song  
when I am gone?  
Not the birds--they have their own songs to sing.  
Not the wind. Its song is too haughty  
and immense to be bothered with mine.  
Not the mountains, whose low  
song hums along the bones of the  
earth, stirring the life that slumbers there.  
Not my children, for as much as we share love,  
they know less of my  
heart  
than the birds and the  
wind and the mountains.  
Who will sing my song?

**Sally Quon** is an associate member with League of Canadian Poets, whose work has appeared in various anthologies including "Voicing Suicide," Ekstasis Editions and "Better Left Standing," Caitlin Press.





# Why Can't Summer Be Once More?

BY: RYDER LUNO DUMONT

Enclosed, and bare in a tight frozen cube of  
just ice.  
I miss that beautiful ball.  
It's blazing flame lukewarm  
just right against my cheek.  
But I'm chilled to my core,  
my vision is blurred  
and my fingers  
frigid as can be.  
My grin is still here.  
Will always stay  
and remain on my face,  
no matter if yours presents itself  
with a frown of worryment.  
You're across from me;  
your chest ascending  
and descending in even breaths,  
your masculine character  
I need it and you.  
We're both  
the same  
but I'm me  
and you're you.  
It seems to me  
you aren't taking the hints  
that your emerald green eyes  
continue  
to just stare at me.  
As if I'm a piece of art in those galleries you go to,  
with the sculptures and the paintings  
the ones you go to all of the time  
without me.





All I need you to do  
is to give me a simple hug.  
Embrace me long enough  
that your breath turns chilly  
and fogs up against the ice.  
Long enough so that your pale skin transforms  
into a deep bellflower purple color  
before my very eyes.  
Till your fingertips freeze forever  
around my stiff figure.  
But you'll never be completely hugging me.  
I want to feel your warm,  
pumping,  
live  
heart;  
the beating drum hidden away safely in that body of yours  
to have it  
right against mine  
under comfy white sheets,  
even if our bodies  
were created with mirroring parts.  
But as the snow continues to dance  
with the soft whistles of gale  
And the more the green grass ground  
begins to drown in thick white flakes  
The sun will coat itself  
in a dark blanket of holes that shimmer right through  
And it'll all be too late to say,  
"I've loved you."  
But not in that brotherly friends way.

**Ryder Luno Dumont**, is a LGBTQ+ fiction writer who lives within the United States. Ryder's orange tabby cat, Nugget, who drives Ryder ballistic, always succeeds at motivating him to create unique stories/poems.









"Charmed in the Forest " By: Anastasia Lukomskaya



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