

Superpresent



Fall 2023



SUPERPRESENT

Superpresent

A Magazine of the Arts

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Front Cover
Cacti at Bad Saarow
Diane Lavoie



Back Cover
Green Doors
Giulia Berra



Endpaper
untitled
Kurt Mendel

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CONTRIBUTORS

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Donors for Volume 3

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Editors' Note

We chose the theme for this, our eleventh, issue, as "Naturally" very quickly. Sometimes we agonize and make long lists and fret and hem and haw. "Naturally" took three minutes to evolve from "Nature" to "Natural" to "Naturally." With that adverbial work done, we naturally had to head to a restaurant to have a celebratory drink.

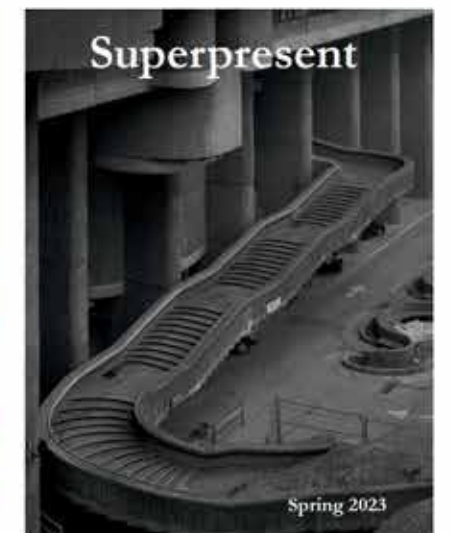
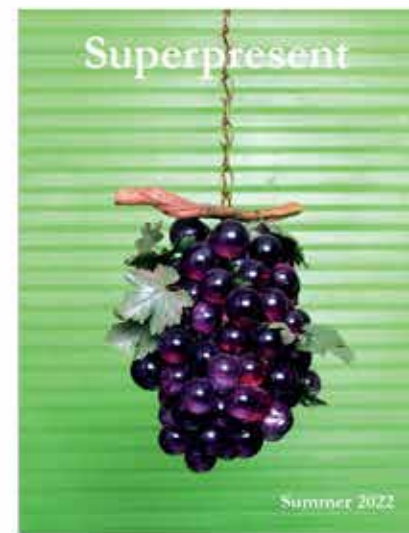
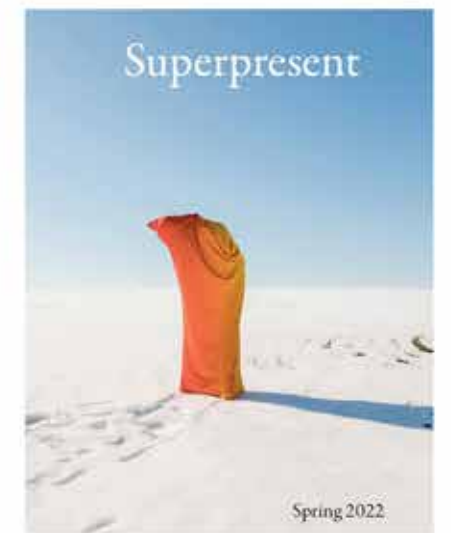
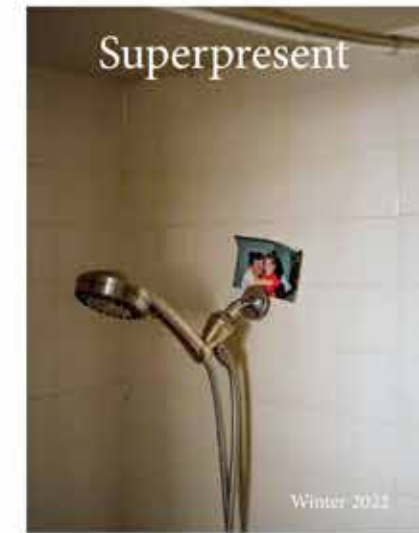
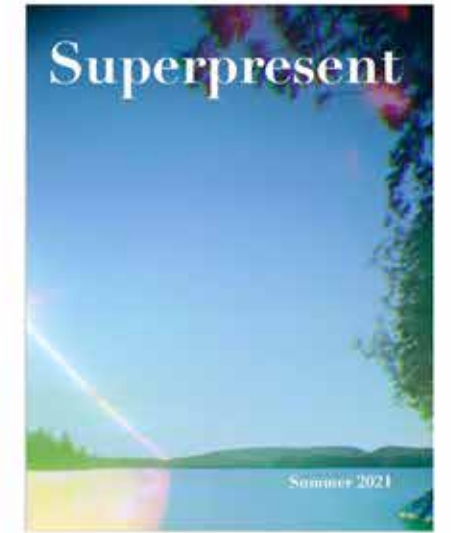
As we put this issue together we tried to juxtapose the prose and poetry with the art in natural and unnatural combinations. We are also glad to again publish a few asemic works and publish work from a diverse set of talented writers, artists, and film-makers from all over the world. We want to thank all who submitted.

The theme for our next issue of *Superpresent* is "Provocations/Instigations." Without disclosing how long it took us to decide this weighty matter, we will trust our contributors to submit work that would fit some of the meanings of these words so provocatively connected with that instigator forward slash. Please do look at the submission guidelines for specifics. We had to reject some fine work that exceeded our word limit and other criteria.

Without provocation, *Superpresent* wants to thank the wonderful independent bookstores that are now carrying *Superpresent* for retail purchase: Quimby's in Chicago AND New York as well as Basket Books and Art in Houston. If *Superpresent* isn't in your local bookstore, it should be! Ask them to carry it, please!

Finally, we still plan a longer version of a Aimée Beaubien interview from our last issue to be published in monograph form later this year. Details to be forthcoming.

-the Editors



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Human Animals

People are bloody ignorant apes. Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*

One wonders what the world would be like without humanity and what human nature would be without human nurture. And one also wonders what the world would be without god or gods. It took the human animal, the self-named *homo sapiens*, a remarkably long time in its evolution for Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace to come up independently with the theory of evolution and to argue that we were descended from the apes.

This once-novel idea ran and indeed still runs counter to various religious doctrines and creation myths, as in *Genesis*, for example, where man is said to be made in God's image. But, as Montaigne declared back in 1580, 'Man is certainly stark mad; he cannot make a worm, and yet he will be making gods by dozens.' And Zora Neale Hurston remarked in *Tell My Horse* (1938) that 'Gods always behave like the people who make them.'

The scientific idea is that human beings have evolved and that our nearest living relatives are the great apes, the gorilla, chimpanzee and orangutan. Each of these species is now to a different degree endangered, primarily by that apex predator or butcher, *homo sapiens*, the endangering species. Our social development has in many ways served to remove us from the natural animaline state and has isolated us from the very nature upon which we depend for our survival. Indeed, according to Sigmund Freud (in *The Future of an Illusion*, 1927), 'The principal task of civilization, its actual *raison d'être*, is to defend us against nature.'

What then in essence is the poor forked animal, this quintessence of dust? When the zoologist Desmond Morris turned his observant attention from snakes, apes and pandas to a study of 'an unusual, naked-skinned primate', he produced in 1967 a book called *The Naked Ape* and, in his words, 'everything changed' for him. In the book, he argued among other things that 'it is the biological nature of the beast [humankind] that has moulded the social structure of civilization, rather than the other way round.'

Various authors and particularly those writing dystopian novels have presented human beings in an unflattering if realistic light. In *Lord of the Flies* (1954), savagery threatens civilisation, and democracy is almost overwhelmed by tyrannical fascism. Golding rewrites the Victorian adventure story of *The Coral Island* with Jack, Ralph and Peterkin into a post-war parable of grim survival as his British prep school boys struggle to co-exist when stranded on a deserted island 'paradise' which they almost destroy by fire.

In *Brave New World* (1932), Huxley envisages a future society where humans are selectively bred and genetically modified for their roles in a futuristic caste system from an alpha elite to epsilon drudges. Other writers have presented human qualities in binary terms as in Book IV of *Gulliver's Travels* with Swift's grossly simian Yahoos and his sophisticated horses, the intelligent Houyhnhnms endowed with language. Swift's enlightening comment on the human being was that it was not a rational animal (*animal rationale*) so much as capable of reason (*rationis capax*) (Swift to Pope, 29 September 1725).

Of course, each dystopia comments on its own time and contexts and its so-called 'predictions' are more or less fictive warnings. Time-travelling into the future, H.G.Wells in *The Time Machine* (1895) foresaw class divisions evolving into the effete Eloi and the boorish subterranean Morlocks. In his prescient novella of 1909, *The Machine Stops*, E.M.Forster foreshadowed an overdeveloped technological world where humans live isolated in cells or pods.

Compelling though these visions are, they are all fictional and to some extent therefore factitious. 'True life' survival stories can give us empirical glimpses of humanity in extreme

situations when the trappings and safety-nets of civilisation are stripped away. In *Alive* (1974), for instance, the victims of an air-crash high in the snowy Andes were reduced by extreme hunger and cold to cannibalism of dead friends and relatives, thus breaking one of the strongest current taboos of our species. The story is brilliantly told by Piers Paul Read and his account was amplified many years later in *Miracle in the Andes* (2006) by Nando Parrado, one of the two resilient survivors, who with his friend Roberto Canessa managed somehow to cross to Chile to gain help. Their long trek and heroic feats of endurance led to fourteen other survivors being rescued.

In *Survive the Savage Sea* (1973), Dougal Robertson and his family endured life on a raft and dinghy in the Pacific Ocean for 37 days after their schooner was holed by killer whales. Mexican fisherman, Salvador Alvarenga, drifted across the Pacific and survived an astonishing *438 Days*, the title of his story as told by Jonathan Franklin. In each of these two true-life narratives, humans are plunged into a fiercely hostile environment, surviving on rainwater, raw fish and turtles' blood.

As our civilised world has become more industrial and mechanised, various writers such as Walt Whitman and his British disciple D.H. Lawrence have in their different ways focussed upon nature and its importance to us. Whitman found much solace in the natural world and in section 16 of 'Song of Myself', for example, he espouses a rhapsodic credo of pantheistic transcendentalism:

*I believe a leaf of grass is no less than a journeywork of the stars,
And the pismire is equally perfect, and a grain of sand, and the egg of the wren,
And the tree-toad is the chef-d'oeuvre for the highest,
And the running blackberry would adorn the parlors of heaven,
And the narrowest hinge in my hand puts to scorn all machinery,
And the cow crunching with depressed head surpasses any statue,
And a mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions of infidels,
And I could come every afternoon of my life to look at the farmer's girl
boiling her tea-kettle and baking shortcake.'*

In other words, the world of nature transcends the built environment and humanity's variously vaunted cultural achievements. Humble life and simple sustenance here take on almost sacramental virtues and are or should be enough to help us contemplate the everyday wonders around us.

By way of contrast, there are the ill-documented accounts of those who have been deprived of human nurture in their upbringing. See the detailed entry for 'feral child' on Wikipedia. I used to think that the most interesting account I had yet read on such a subject was *The Wolf Children of Midnapore* (1926) by the Reverend J.A.L. Singh and yet the authenticity of the whole story of Amala and Kamala has been called into question and is now regarded by some as a hoax. Nevertheless, such narratives as those of Kaspar Hauser and others raise the crucial issue of what a human being can be if not initially nurtured in some way by other humans.

It is a subject also touched upon by Seamus Heaney in his poem 'Bye-Child' where the epigraph informs us: 'He was discovered in the henhouse where she had confined him. He was incapable of saying anything.' Apparently based on an incident reported in 1957, the poem imagines the boy's benighted and lonely existence of 'vigils, solitudes, fasts' and ends with these poignant lines expressing his remote existence beyond any words:

*But now you speak at last
With a remote mime*

*Of something beyond patience,
Your gaping wordless proof
Of lunar distances
Travelled beyond love.*

Without language in which to register, construct or comprehend our inner and outer lives, this moving poem seems to saying, what kind of human creature are we and what do we become?

However, such now are the conspicuous traces and transformative effects of human activity all over the globe, from mining and detritus to pollution, for instance, that some scientists have argued that the current epoch needs a new designation. Instead of the Holocene era, it has been cogently suggested that we have produced or provoked a new epoch which should be called the Anthropocene. As a species, we seem to have moved from anthropomorphic gods towards a globe increasingly morphed by ever-growing human populations with their exploitations and explosions. As the current film *Oppenheimer* may remind us, humanity can visit large-scale destruction upon itself and the fragile surfaces of the planet or biosphere.

Nevertheless, there is also in the human animal an extraordinary ability to create, inquire, investigate, solve and educate. As the US anthropologist Margaret Mead once said, 'Man's most human characteristic is not his ability to learn, which he shares with many other species, but his ability to teach and store what others have developed and taught him.' (*Culture and Commitment*, 1970).

Similarly, on the development of language in the 'naked ape', Desmond Morris says that 'Writing, a formalized offshoot of picture-making, and verbalized vocal communication have, of course, been developed as our major means of transmitting and recording information, but they have also been utilized as vehicles for aesthetic exploration on an enormous scale.' He goes on to argue that 'The intricate elaboration of our ancestral grunts and squeaks into complex symbolic speech has enabled us to sit and 'play' with thoughts in our heads, and to manipulate our (primarily instructional) word sequences to new ends as aesthetic, experimental playthings.' In a very different context in 1623, John Donne said, 'It is an astonishment to be alive, and it behoves you to be astonished.'

I used that quotation recently in an article about garden flowers. Here, in a house with a garden, I live in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, the town where it is no offence to reveal that the British GCHQ (Government Communications Headquarters) are primarily situated, or so we are led to believe. Those who work there have signed the Official Secrets Act and so one learns not to ask what they do. 'Deal with noughts and ones' or 'Keep you safe at night'. But the co-ordinates of the relevant buildings are presumably well known both inside and outside NATO. Perhaps echoing Orwell, one of John Le Carré's characters ('Control') says: 'We do disagreeable things so that ordinary people here and elsewhere can sleep safely in their beds at night.'

And so here I am typing these words and listening to Spanish guitar music on a Compact Disc with the aroma of a cup of freeze-dried instant coffee which awaits me. I can hear the church clock chime at noon but it is muted through the double-glazing. No wonder this naked ape in comfortable cotton clothes enjoys the human zoo so much. I don't even have to go out gathering and hunting for lunch. There is bread in the bread bin, butter in a dish, salad leaves in the fridge and a cardboard box contains six clean fresh eggs laid by local hens called Burford Browns. No wonder we value what we like to think of as civilized values. Naturally. But by what right?

-Duncan Forbes

RIGHT
Vulnerability #2 stones
Olga Grenchanova



Nest-Building

From close-to, I watched it,
or rather her, the female blackbird.
Dun-coloured, she eyed me
to check whether I was attacker or threat,
though I stayed as still as I could,
onlooker only, watering-can in hand.

She was collecting mud, watercress
and bits for her nest.
I know where it is but I try
not to look in case she is disturbed
or her mate distressed.

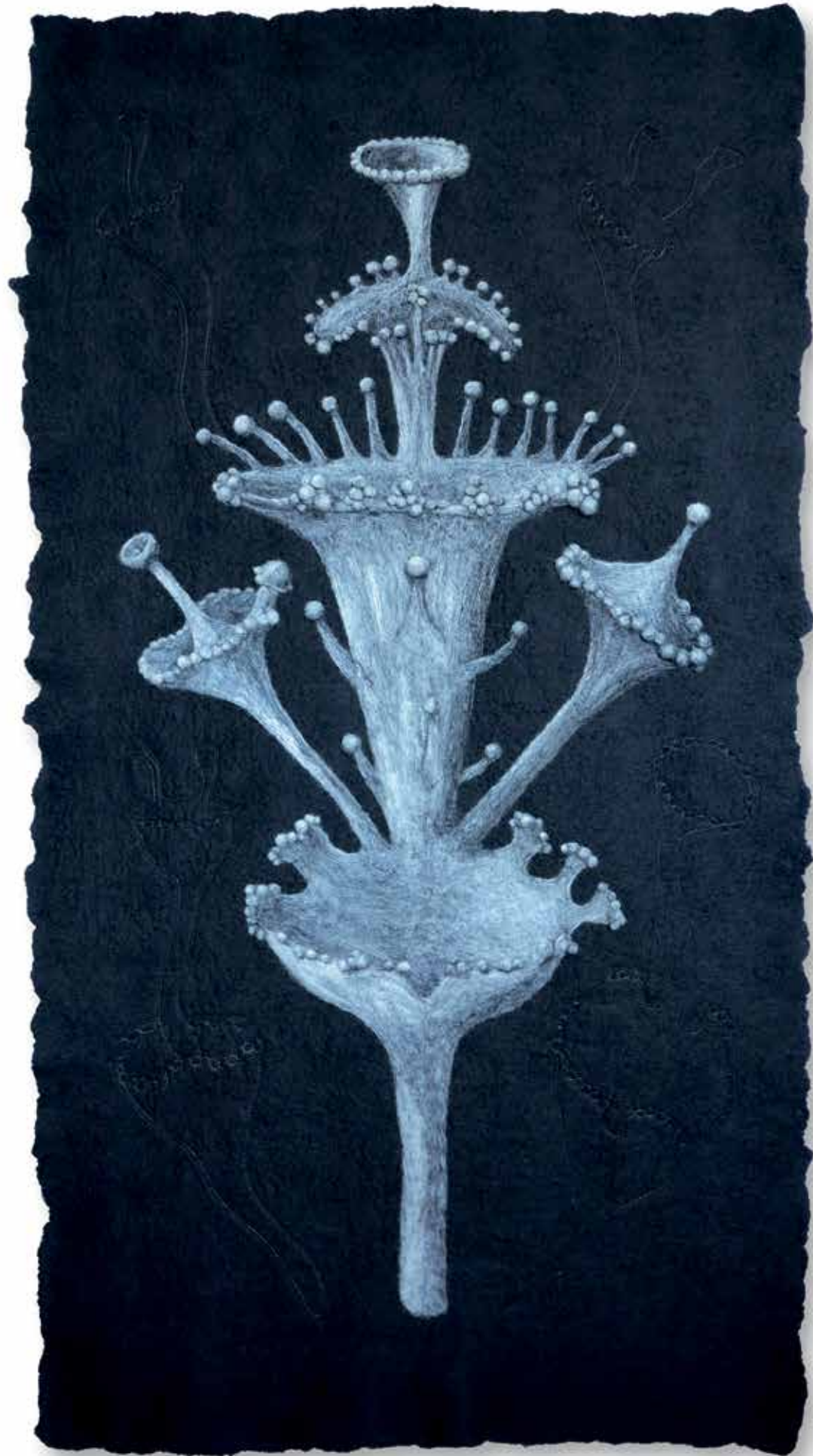
She pecked and seemed to swallow.
She gathered mud, weed and tendrils
of plants in her gullet
and gleaming beak, or so it appeared.
Others will know how they make
the fragile-beautiful nest
with its filigree cradle
and produce the calcium shells
of speckled sky-blue eggs.

All I know is that I want
the natural world of blackbirds, blackbirds,
to go on singing
long after we die.

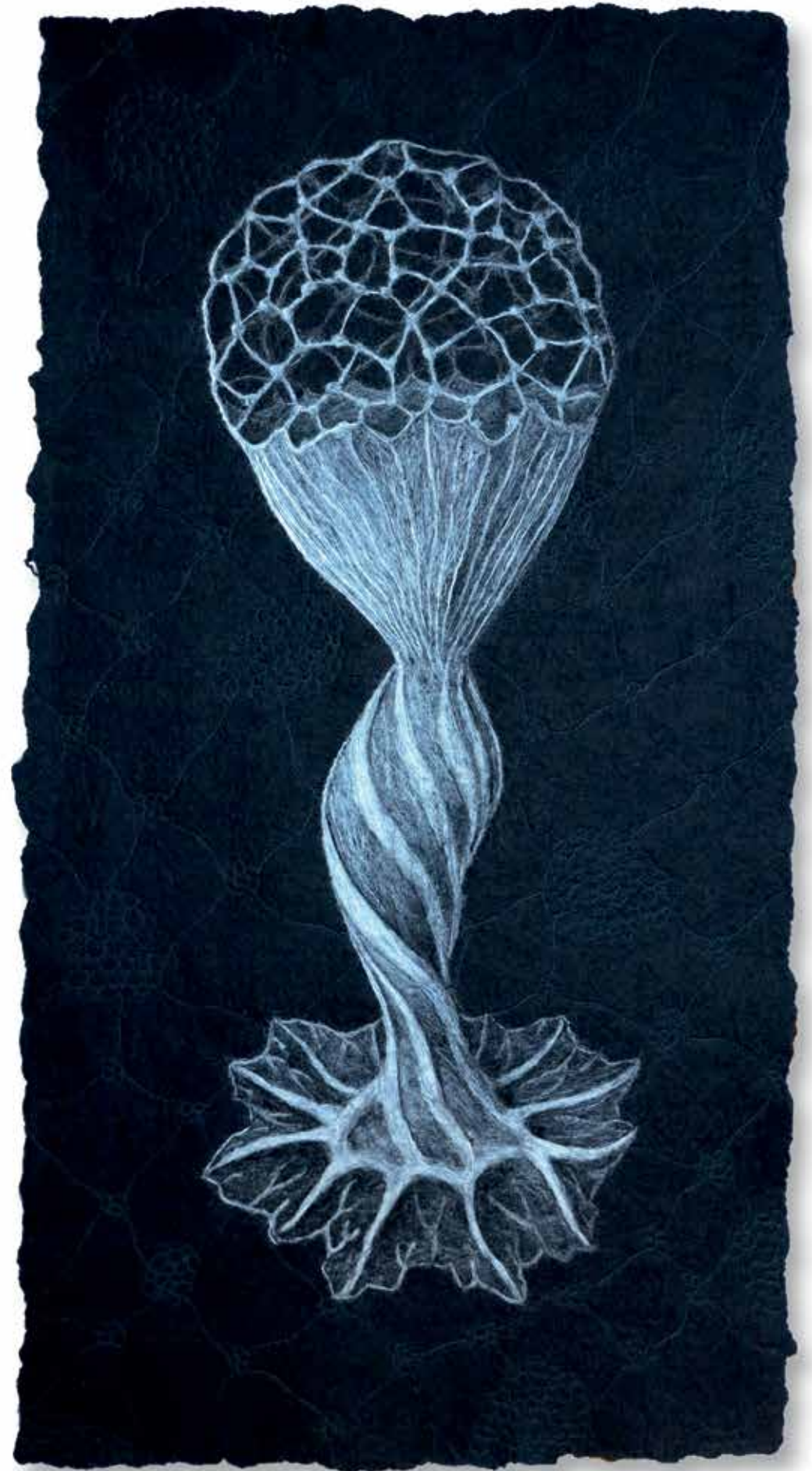
-Duncan Forbes



Globergina
Shea Wilkinson



Mycetozoa
LEFT
Caldonia
Shea Wilkinson





Encounter
Ann-Marie Brown

The Bear

The last thing I remember was tracking the bears. Alone, I hiked through a remote area of the Canadian Rockies, far removed from the tourist traps of Banff and Jasper. Climbing unforgiving terrain with a pack that was half my body weight, there were signs that one of the Grizzlies wasn't far off. I smelled the stench of her earthy wildness, her scat cut across my trail, and there were prints marking her trek through these forests.

I don't recall ever seeing her, or the cubs that I suspected were with her. Honestly, I don't remember what happened, how I ended up on my back beneath a canopy of Spruce, ravaged with hunger and thirst. Slowly I sat up, alert and anxious that she could be around, ready to swipe with razor sharp claws or toss me around like a rag doll. My eyes and ears searched what surrounded me – forest floor crowded with ferns and shrubs, towering trees that blocked the intensity of the sunlight, and the roar of the nearby river.

I tried to maneuver myself, but every movement was awkward and lumbered. Somehow, the mass of my body was more than it had ever been, an obstacle to the agile movements I thought I was capable of. I rolled to one side and hoisted myself to my feet, so unsteady as I stood tall that I immediately dropped to my hands and knees. This position felt more natural.

Like being hit by a massive wave, smells overwhelmed me. Something told me they were far away, and yet I could take in these scents as if they were right under my nose. There was a sweet and delicious aroma in the air, that made me salivate and yearn for whatever it was. Within a second, that was taken over by a repugnant odor that warned me of something terrible that could be in this forest.

I shook my head trying to get a grip. Far off, I heard a noise, the cracking of a branch, followed by the shrill call of a Magpie. Why did everything sound so loud? I balanced this disorientation that left me confused with a pull to plow ahead toward the sweet smell that still lingered and the sound of the river lapping over rocks. Giving into the urge to head towards the water, my movements were fast, even though I had no intention of speed. Somehow I was covering terrain with a skill and intensity I had never known before.

There was no trail leading me, just my nose and an instinct that intensified with every passing moment. The forest was a whirl of green, a backdrop of trees and rocky terrain that was no obstacle for my strength and power. Never before had my brain surrendered to my senses and this intrinsic wisdom that guided me where to go – it was exhilarating. The river was close and my body ached for some satiation that I couldn't quite understand. Vaguely, I remembered the lunch I had earlier, the granola bars I carried in my pack. Where was my pack? It wasn't on me, I was too free to be burdened with it, and I was certain that I no longer needed the water bottle, snacks, and rain gear I had carried this morning.

I broke through the boundary of trees and slowed my pace as I approached the riverbank. An urge to jump in and immerse myself guided me towards the rushing water. But something inside of me told me to slow down, be careful. My eyes darted from north to south, across the river, and even up to the treetops. The only movement I detected was the cool summer breeze, the rustling of poplar branches. Cautiously, I moved towards the water, that sweet smell so strong now that I practically ached for whatever it was.

Still on all fours, I plunged into the water. For a brief moment, I wondered what I was doing, had I lost my mind? After all this was a mountain river with a forceful current and a frigid temperature even on the hottest days. Yet, the fear that I thought should be there never manifested. Into the water I dove, the cold sting of the river soothing to the summer warmth. The current pushed into my side body, nudging me downstream slightly, but it was no match

for my force. I paddled my legs and arms, certain that my abilities could challenge this river.

Underneath the water's surface, I reached forward, swiping and grabbing without even really knowing what I was going for. A rush of fish odor filled my nostrils, along with the smell of the river's minerals, and I eagerly opened my mouth wide. I felt the scales on my tongue, the swift movement inside my mouth, and as my jaw closed, I heard bones break as the salty rush of blood filled me. Chewing quickly, I fought the last bit of life, and swallowed with a desire for more.

I'm not sure how much time I spent in that river diving, dunking, swimming, and eating. Minutes and hours did not exist as I lost myself in the gratification of my hunger and thirst. There was freedom that I connected to in that water and part of me wanted to stay there forever. But again, that sweet aroma filled the air, offering something better than fish. It led me to swim across the river, never once taken off course by the current.

My nose pulled me forward into the forests where a cluster of Saskatoon bushes grew. Their berries ripe and purple, sweet little explosions in my mouth, brought me utter joy. As I tried to consume as many berries as possible, desperate to fill myself with them, I realized my dexterity failed me. My fingers no longer had the ability to manipulate the branches and pinch off the pea-size berries. I found it easier to just open my mouth and separate the berries from their branches with my lips and tongue. At times, the branches were too cumbersome so I just chewed through them, barely even discomfited as bark and twigs slipped down my throat.

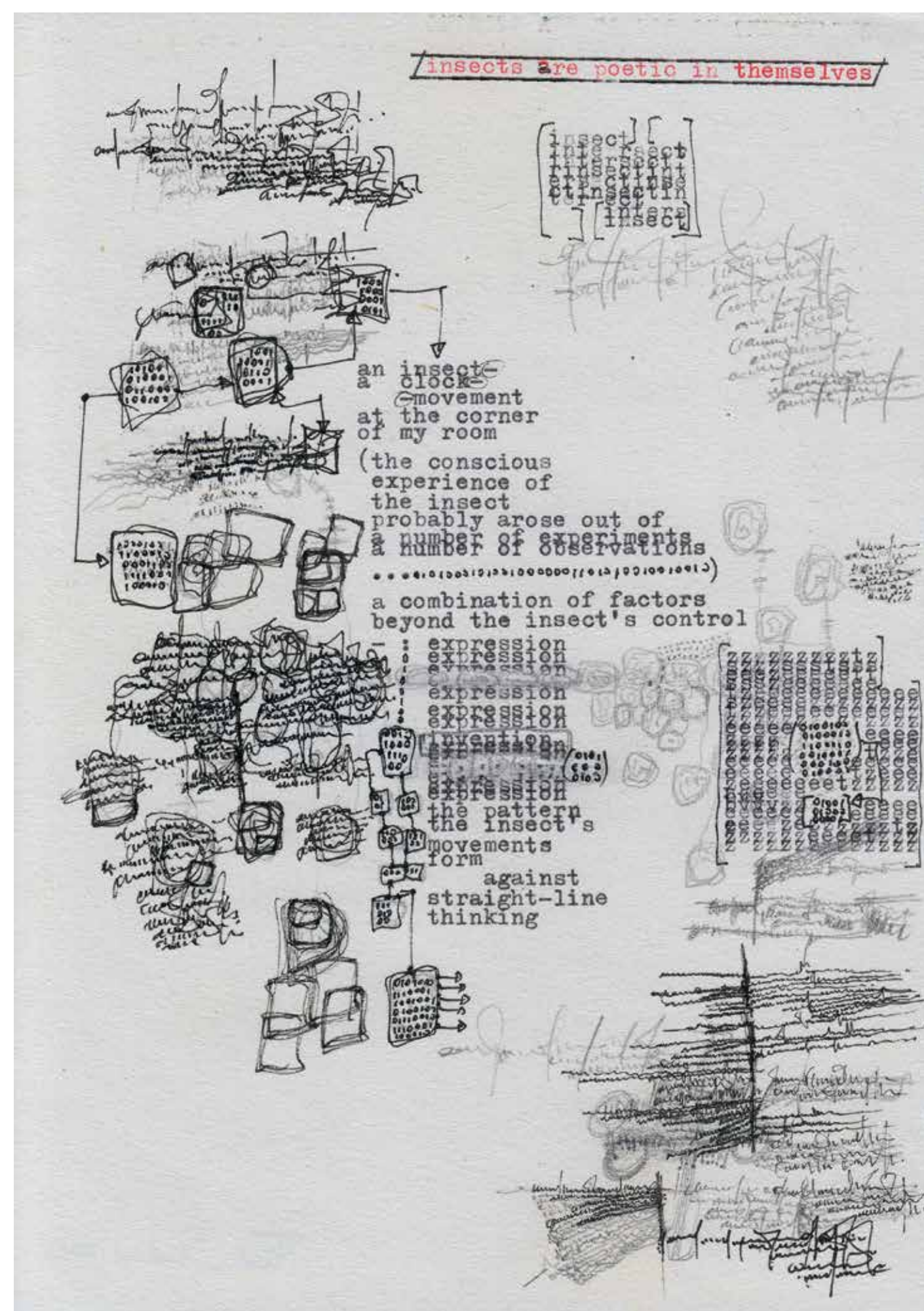
The rustling of grass and stirring of far-off bushes caused me to stop. I tilted my head back and twitched my nose, taking in a scent that carried stories of the forest, the river, berries, and blood – a recent kill that made my mouth water. I was not alone, and as my eyes scanned the shrubs and ferns that I hoped hid me from whatever was out there, I saw her. I knew she was female and alone, my nose told me. I also knew she didn't want a fight. Our eyes locked and with a quarter mile between us, our noses worked rapidly, assessing one another, communicating that we both wanted to avoid trouble.

Her fur was a sandy brown, her eyes dark and appraising. Although there was distance between us, I realized that I had never felt so close to a Grizzly. There was something knowing about her, she understood me. Eventually she turned away, her round backside disappearing into the forest brush as she searched for more of whatever she was after. Relieved that I was alone again, I returned to the river for one final drink before I searched for a place to rest.

My movements were slow, almost laborious as my full stomach left me ready to succumb to sleep. This riverbank seemed calmer as the sun dipped into the western sky, a soft evening glow left the water calm and reflective. I ambled up to the river and saw staring back at me a bear – a beautiful, Grizzly with golden fur, round ears, and curious eyes. Her paws were massive and the claws lethal. She had the signature hump between her shoulder blades and a broad snout that distinguished her from Black Bears. I wondered if the bear I had seen in the Saskatoon bushes had returned. I looked over my shoulder, but I was alone, my nose confirmed it. I turned back to the bear's face displayed in the river water, and I saw myself for the first time.

There was no need to question, analyze, or wonder. Instead, I just dipped my snout into the cold refreshment and drank until my thirst was satisfied.

-Emily Ebrhart



RIGHT
Insects are poetic in themselves
Federico Federici

A Coconut Tree's Cause and Effect

How extreme, David Hume,
To say that cause and effect
Is only a human illusion—even
Your startling statement: the sun
May not rise tomorrow, as most
Of us assume tonight, nor to think
The moon may not evolve 'round
Its' changing shape, as we expect.

I said, of course, cause and effect
Exists. Do we not experience it
Every waking day? How can you,
Hume, believe that little can be
Learned from experience or from
Inductive scientific observation?
But you insist on pointing out:
The reliability of induction lies
In the naive belief that the future will
Always resemble the past.

But listen, I insist—wait, just wait,
I have my proofs. Like...when
Twilight grows dark, do not the stars
Light their candles up bright? And after
A heavy rain, does not the grass
Spring up here in Key Largo? And
In June, when coconut trees blossom,
Do cosmic circles not spin and churn
The cream of next year's moon?

-Reed Venrick

The Way a Coconut Tree Grows

The way a coconut tree grows,
Standing solitary on a sandy beach,
Not at all the way a coconut grows
When struggling inside an island grove.

A coconut tree, with space all its own
Will grow upright and straight
With branches not held aside or pushed
Down—the branches spread out
Creating a crown of spilling evergreen.

But the coconut tree in the congested
Grove, crammed inside the grove's
Rough and tumble fronds, finds the shape
Of its trunk and limbs not determined

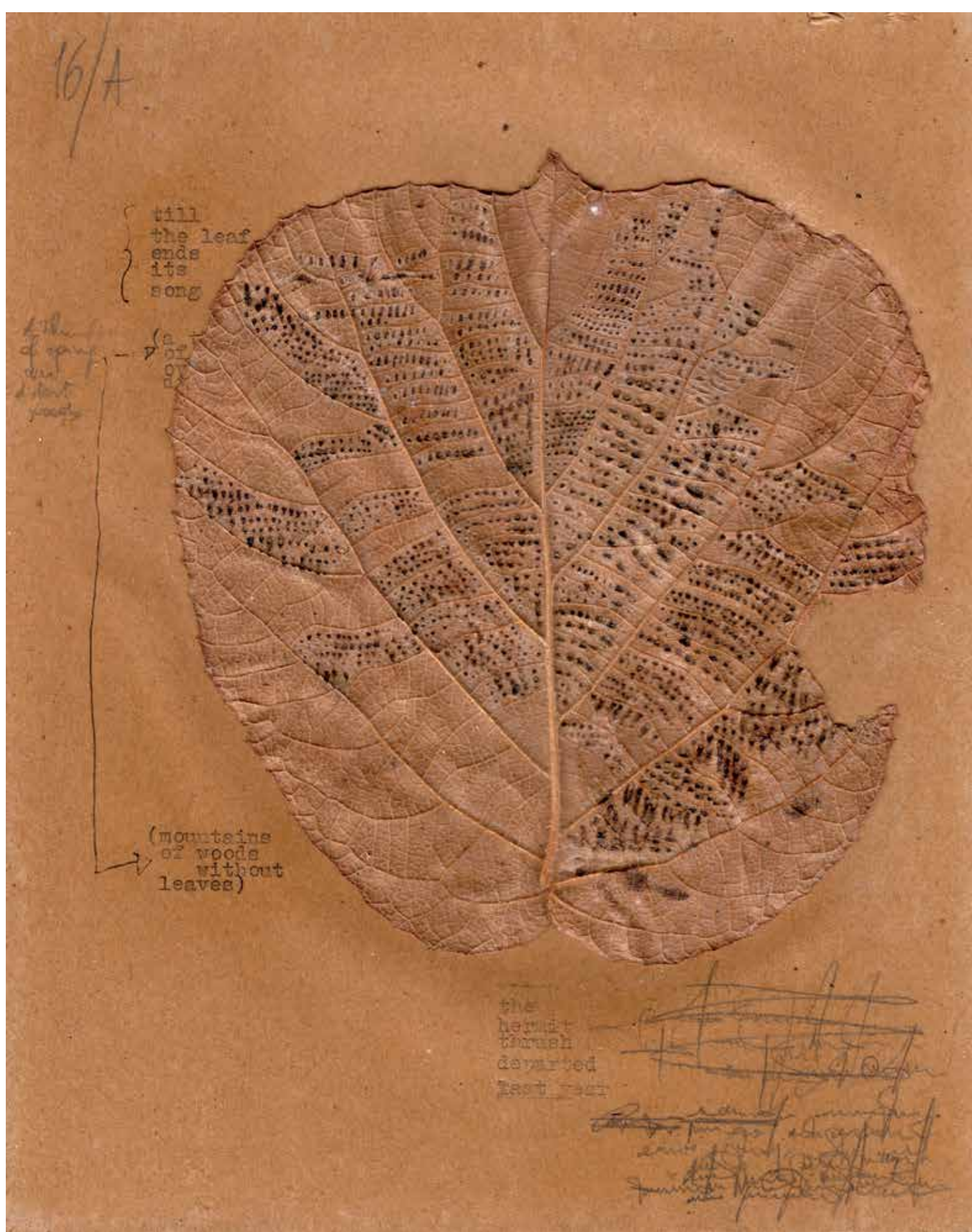
By the memory of its own aesthetic frame,
Where down inside the cluttered grove,
A struggling tree, forced to seek
Snatches of skylight from a crowded tight,
Constricted space with barely a glimpse

Of precious star light, while the closeted
Trunk is pushed around, even bonsai-
Bound surrounding trees pushing and
shoving violently in storms or hurricanes.

Despite how my dictionary defines
A coconut tree, i.e: how tall it grows,
What perimeter of trunk, what texture
Of bark, what design of leaves, what
Defining marks, it fails to note the possibility

Of what a coconut tree may aspire
To become when it grows on a sandy
Strand of beach in its own solitary space.

-Reed Venrick



Insects are poetic in themselves
Federico Federici



Les amoureux se lèvent - Lovers Rising
J.C. Alfier

Baking Bread

it's something, to mix five kinds of flour
add a teaspoon of salt, no more
to warm a cup of water, add a drop of honey
mix in that special yeast from France
and let it bubble, and breathe

it's something, to stir it all together
into a big claggy mess, then cover it
and let it sit. Leave it alone. No peeking
stir in four hours with a big spoon, leave alone again
for another four hours, stir, then leave it overnight

in a cool room—that's the part I was getting wrong
this dough wants it slow, wants it difficult
but by morning it will have risen to fill the bowl
one final shaping, one final waiting
then into a very hot oven for an hour

it's something, to make a loaf of crusty bread
out of ordinary ingredients, bare essentials
to be sliced for morning toast, lunchtime sandwiches
something good—the recipe is second nature to me now
and the twenty-four hours of waiting easy, expected

-Lawrence Wilson

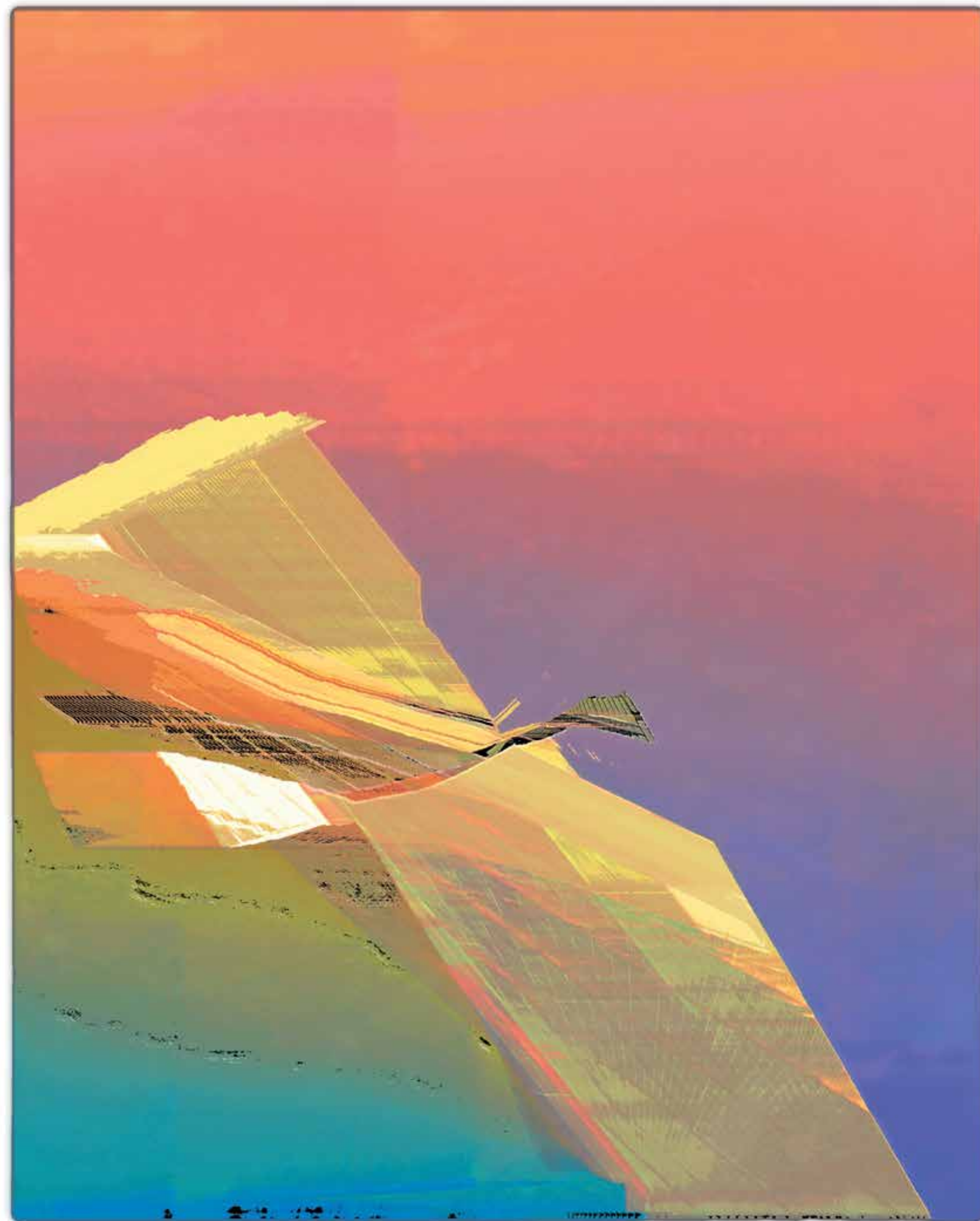
Sonnet on a Hot Day

A double rarity: the sky a dome
of flawless blue, like Santa Fe; and hot,
a lovely temperature for shorts and skin.
I'll entertain no whinging, no complaints!
This almost never happens here, this heat,
this breezy ease (and no mosquitoes, too).

A day to laze... When you, my love, get home,
a chilled rosé awaits, or Pimm's. I've not
decided what to grill for dinner—thin
filet de boeuf, or tuna?—but don't faint
if I insist that we go out to eat
and find a courtyard, candle-lit—sky blue

and cloudless, cooling (but still warm!) and calm,
December distant, soothed by summer's balm.

-Lawrence Wilson



a Nature

My biology teacher, Dad's first student Clyde, introduced me to nature through tasting and tonguing: treebark, leaves, dirt, small stones, even shed snakeskins and live bugs.

in the late afternoon
I tasted Antonella—
delicious

-Alan Bern



LEFT
Glitch Mountain
Paul Lastovica
ABOVE
Untitled/Pigeon (from the series *finds*)
Hannah Winkelbauer

Shores

Up and down the beach the shoreline is dotted with the dark, shimmering forms of adults and children clustered like adepts before a shrine. Under the full glare of the sun they converse; they sip beers and wines half-hidden in gelatinous koozies; dig their toes into the sand while furtively glancing out over the water, the churning surf, the blue glass surface beyond stretching from eye to eye like the very finish line of the world. Only a few wade out amongst the waves.

As S_ approaches the swash she has to pass an obstacle course of pools formed by runnels and the outgoing tide; a cherished place of toddlers and their partially attentive mothers/fathers. The little ones giggle as they squat and try to catch minnows in purple plastic buckets; that they never succeed doesn't seem to matter. A girl in a daisy-embroidered sun hat smiles and waves. S_ returns the smile with a quick gesture—a one clutch wave of her hand as if she were trying to trap a bothersome fly.

A sight-seeing boat, yellow and large, idles in the water about a hundred yards out. She watches the passengers looking out over the railing.

The water that hits her ankles as she enters the ocean is warm, much warmer than she has ever experienced before. She might be alarmed—policies and agendas winding thru her mind like thorny vines—if it didn't feel so damn good. On past vacations she has had to brace and clench her teeth as the waves strike higher and higher up her body, but today it is like descending into room temperature champagne. She dissolves. Her body's pleasure overrules her intellect's concern.

This is perfect, she admits, and just what she needs.

After she reaches a spot just past the breakers where the water slaps cozily at her chest, she rises and falls with the gentle waves, dissipating, expanding, feeling so good and relaxed. This one blissful moment immediately validates her decision not to cancel the trip when Joel unceremoniously dumped her after seven comfortable if conventional years.

I feel like this is my last chance to, you know, get it right, he had informed her thru a mouthful of linguini and clams.

He entreated her to stay for the tiramisu she had ordered and she debated it for a few agonizing moments before rising from the table and walking away—rather unsteadily she is sorry to recall—leaving her napkin to fall from her lap to the thinly carpeted floor.

We both deserve to be happy, he had intoned.

She didn't have the courage to halt her exodus and pick it up.

The water is soothing, buoyant; it pushes past her, tugging at her with charming patience. The waves are sneaky though. They lull with long minutes of tranquility and S_ can even begin to consider notions of paradise and then one will suddenly rise above her head erasing the sky and she has to make the split second decision whether to try to jump it or dive beneath as it roars down upon her. They seem to come in rhythms of three: two large if manageable one before a climatic behemoth, dark and foamy and just beginning to curl its contentious lip. A violent swirl, kinetic and unavoidable and—she must admit even as it submerges her, tossing and twirling her without regard—awesome and inevitable.

Warm saline in her sinuses, fishy salt taste on her tongue. A thudding bass in her ears. She comes up gasping, smiling.

The sun is brilliant, the ocean is green. The sea is a flat, glimmering surface that blends with the sky at the edge of her vision.

People come and people go. Three well-muscled teenagers tossing a small football while ranking the hottest girls. A goateed man holding his tattooed girl as she floats on her back. An old man with swimmer goggles stuck to his forehead. Girls on rafts screaming about sharks and TikToks. They stay near her for awhile, rising and falling as she does, and S_ nods at them, exchanges grins, says hello and agrees about the beauty or the heat or the crowded but delicious restaurants. But when she looks again they are gone, retreated to the beach or carried off by the current.

Every so often S_ looks back to shore to find her landmark—a pink cabana—and if she has drifted away from it she swims back against the current until she is safely returned.

A trio of pelicans glide in a triangular formation inches above the water. If she reaches out a hand she could touch one as they fly by.

“Get my gun!” shouts a man wading in a group of homogenous, middle-aged people in baseball caps and Oakley sunglasses.

It is the very last thing she would ever have imagined to say.

The pelicans splash down not far away, floating stoically like British sentries. The gun aficionado flashes his biggest shit-eating grin and says he is going to catch one. A few lackluster cheers from his friends and family accompany him as he starts to swim. But his thrashing is ponderous and the pelicans drift further away. As the man continues deeper some in his group encourage him to return. He stops and stares at the birds, sees they are farther from him than when he had started.

When she had planned this vacation with Joel—a private beachfront property, sunrise bike rides, oysters and Muscadet with live music from oceanfront patios—she had let herself ruminate about the possibility of conception. Perhaps it was finally...the right time. She had put it on the back burner for so long until now it seemed perilously close to being too late. The impulse quickly took on a desperate air. She felt as if she held a winning lottery ticket but could not find a place to redeem it, had in fact been shackled in chains by an unknown assailant and soon the lottery would continue as if she had never existed, her winning numbers void. There were unpredictable, inexplicable moments when anxiety would seize her, nausea overwhelm her. She had bouts of mysterious tremors. The more she thought about it the more convinced she became. Of course certain realities gave her pause...She and Joel were not married for one, but they *were* proud progressives weren't they? Joel had never outright said he didn't want children; in fact, he seemed right at home with little nephew and nieces and cousins at various reunions. And if not now, when, exactly? So a month ago she had stopped taking her pill. She even downloaded an app to track her cycle. Then a week later came the dinner at Carrabba's.

She bobs with the waves, her feet lifting from and meeting an ever-changing bottom. Seaweed, shells. And then her foot lands on something soft and strange that moves.

S_ startles. She backs away. She looks around and sees that she is quite alone. The dots of people like marbles on the shoreline.

An untethered kite flaps in the sky above her. A rather ambiguous face is painted on the canopy. Slanted eyebrows above wide eyes and a straight mouth denote a sense of aggressive horror. *What a fucking fate,* it seems to express, *look away!* It dips and dives, its tail

undulating like an panicked snake. Further it's blown, helpless, free. At one point she thinks it might fall into the sea snatched by a spirited wave but it maintains its height and climbs again, its face still quite aggrieved. It flies further and further out over the sea, dwindling, diminishing, until she realizes she can no longer see it.

The water holds her like a womb. She feels blessed despite everything.

She is forty-one. She does not know what to do with that, she just knows there's no avoiding it. But she wonders, in this moment, objectively, if life can be any better. How can she hold onto this feeling? Especially when she knows that bliss is ephemeral and loss is forever.

A seagull flies above her, a silver fish trapped in its mouth.

She thinks about the owner of the lost kite. An embarrassed father, a crying child. How do you explain as it drifts irretrievably away?

She is startled by a teenage boy, probably seventeen or eighteen, with a fishing pole. His face is turned away as he passes her. He holds the fishing pole high above his head, its line extending impossibly far out. His skin is pale, his hair curly. He keeps going deeper, so far S_ becomes nervous. He can't be touching the bottom anymore. She can't fathom what he is doing. She looks back to the beach and sees two other boys with chairs and fishing poles, watching. He goes so deep his dark head keeps disappearing beneath the regular rhythm of the waves. Only his fishing pole remains piercing the sky like a trident.

She wants to yell, she doesn't understand. But when she looks back, his friends are not even looking anymore. They just loiter on the beach, unconcerned.

She rides up and down with the waves, locked onto that pole stuck to the sky.

Eventually, to her relief, she sees him start treading back. When he passes her this time he is facing her and he flashes a smile beneath the wet flop of his hair.

Weightless, cradled by the ever-rocking sea. The mother of everything, right? And although the water is murky and she has no idea of what may be beneath her, she feels like everything is all right. Somehow she feels connected. To the water, the sun, the sand, the unknown. Fuck, give her a winnowing basket and finger cymbals. She can still join the parade.

How can she feel such an affinity when she knows such emptiness?

It is in a dip between the waves when she sees it just a few feet from her. The tip of a dorsal fin and then the larger thrash of a tail. Eyes upturned, the flash of a mouth, teeth. Then it disappears as another wave rises.

She freezes. She thinks something rough brushes her leg.

She kicks, her throat constricts. She moves back quickly, her eyes glued to the water's surface, her head swiveling. Her chest so tight it feels like her heart has been squeezed to a stop but she can still hear it pounding in her ears.

She hits something. She twitches, screams. She looks down beside her and sees the taut white string of a fishing line. It rises and falls with her, penetrates the murky water. She doesn't know how far it goes or what is at the other end. She is gripped by the terror of being trapped in the open.

The feeling stays with her even as she splashes thru the calf-deep water, up the beach

past the boys and their fishing poles stuck in the sand like impressive erections, past the bocce courts, past the tents and sunshades flapping with the wind. Then she shakes it off like a dog does a fight.

She plops her ass down against a dune, clutching her towel. When she has caught her breath she lowers the towel from her face. The shoreline is even more crowded than before. They feed the seagulls. They play volleyball. A father chases after a chubby-legged daughter with a shovel in one hand and a sandwich in the other. They sit in their low-to-the-ground chairs and feel the end of every wave as their feet are submerged in the sand. They, like S_, squint out at the ocean, the sparkling, endless, green expanse, its waters rushing and retreating, rippling.

What do they want? What do they accept?

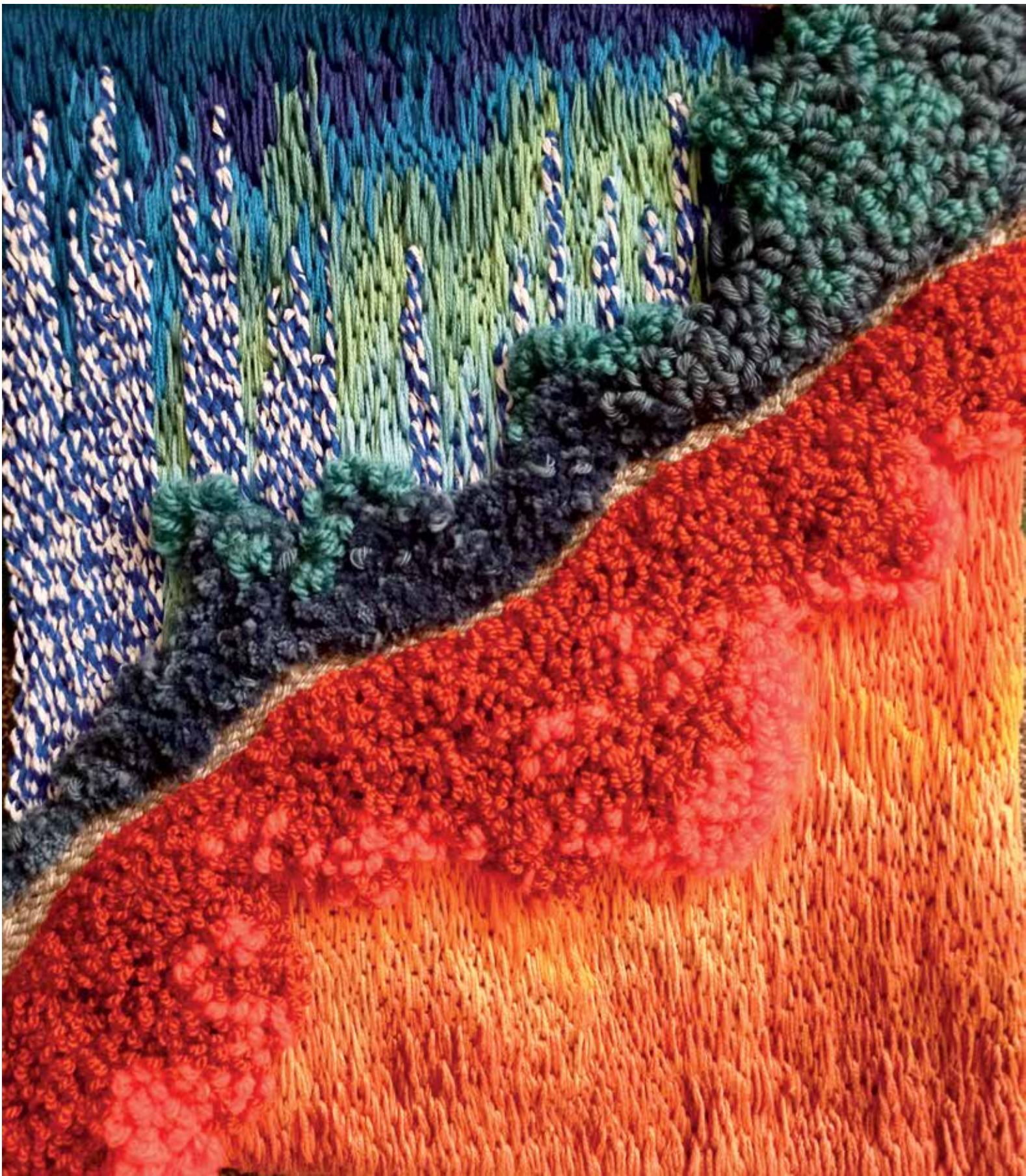
Soon, she is as dry as if she had never been wet. Sand digs into her thighs, the sun bares down.

She wants to go back in.

-M. Palmer



Untitled/ Fish (from the series *finds*)
Hannah Winkelbauer



LEFT
Acceptance
ABOVE
Spring Wave
Tina Striuk

Skipping

My feet in fast-paced waters
of the cool Arkansas
river rocks trying
to guide
the forceful floods
on their way
to where-ever they need to go
urgently, impatiently
Better Being, Being Better
calls each droplet
downstream.

Peddlers
in kayaks
attempt to
outpace them,
LiquidLogic
as their agile brand.

I walk and boulder
balance, dance
stay in motion
to hold firm,
be close to the boob-like
sculptures, directors
of the river's orchestra
the higher splashing accents
the continuous bass of
the main stream.
somewhere in between
the song, just above the waterline,
skipping up and down
meeting stone, sand
jumping trout, humming bird
and the urgent mission of
the tribe to keep up,
unstoppable.

Who is setting
the numbers on my clock?
Chronos lost control
got robbed of the three, seven
and nine
skipping faster and faster
around the circle
Kairos used to hold the center

of perfect rhythm, natural time
now, our hearts beat
at the speed
of email, instant messaging
and on-demand sprints.
the fast food clock
rules Cuckoo, Cuckoo
Cuckoo.

Out of sync
I lose my hair
bold spots
of skipped time
outpacing
each moment it takes
for one tiny hair
to sprout, to open its eyes,
to root down
in courage to Be
tap into nourishment
to grow strong,
long, and shiny.
a braid of healing time
let's call her Synchronos.

Tell me, Synchronos,
you have seen racing rivers,
volume and gravity
shaping static blocks
from ancient pasts
and remote places
flowing from nowhere
to somewhere.
do you embark on
Clock Time,
or Rock Time
or No Time at all?

Dear skipper, she whispers:
To Time or Not to Time
that is the question.

-Susanne van der Meer

Prospects

Here now we're busiest
with our acquisitions,
our friends and relations,
appetites, passions.

And afterwards what else
effaces ourselves
but space, time, silence
and other assailants?

And then we become
what everyone becomes,
part of the total sum
of indefatigable atoms.

-Duncan Forbes



Genial Logical Tree
Carolina Borja

old man, *quick!*
[poem in the manner of Hồ Xuân Hương]

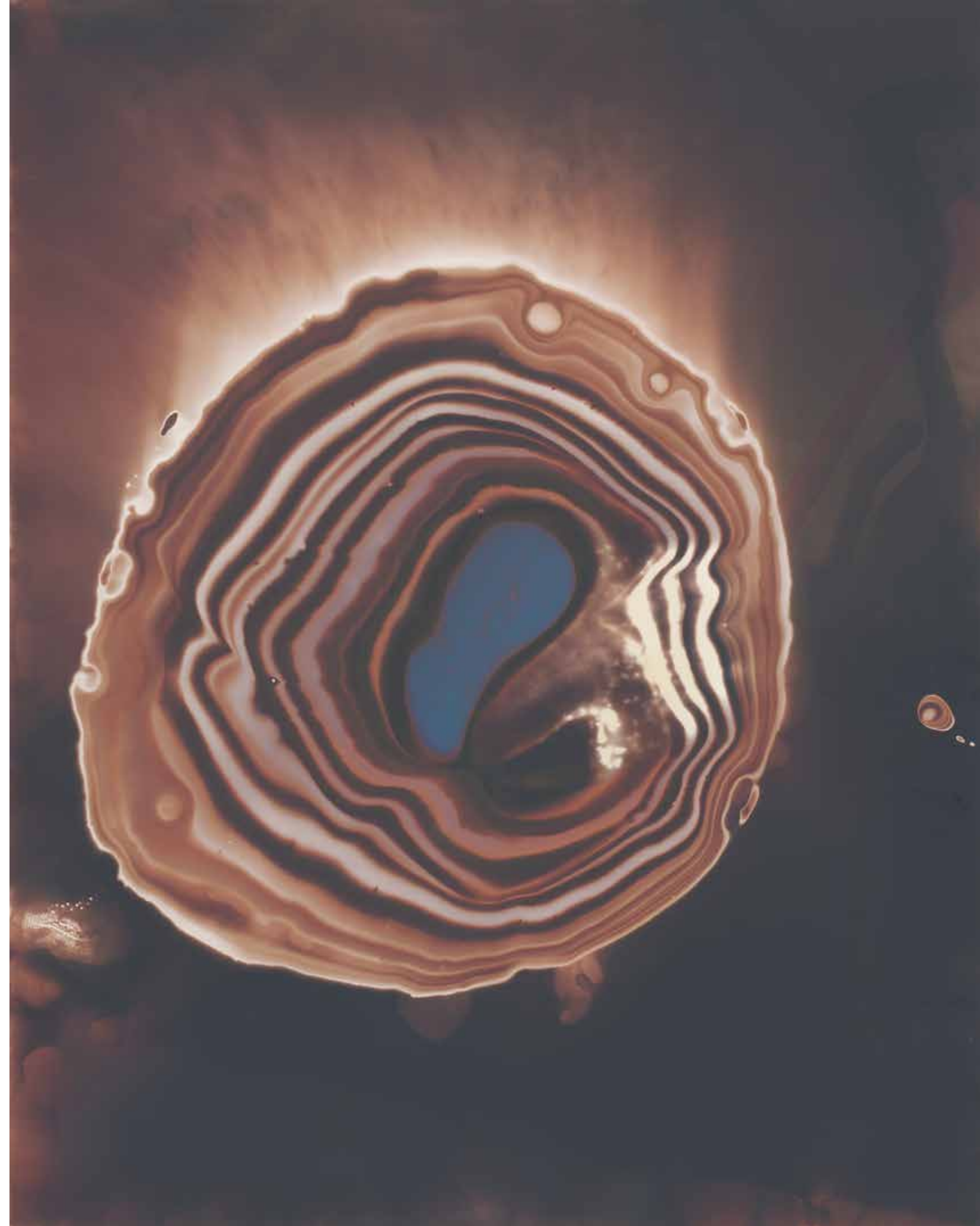
old stick—
nothing's brittle

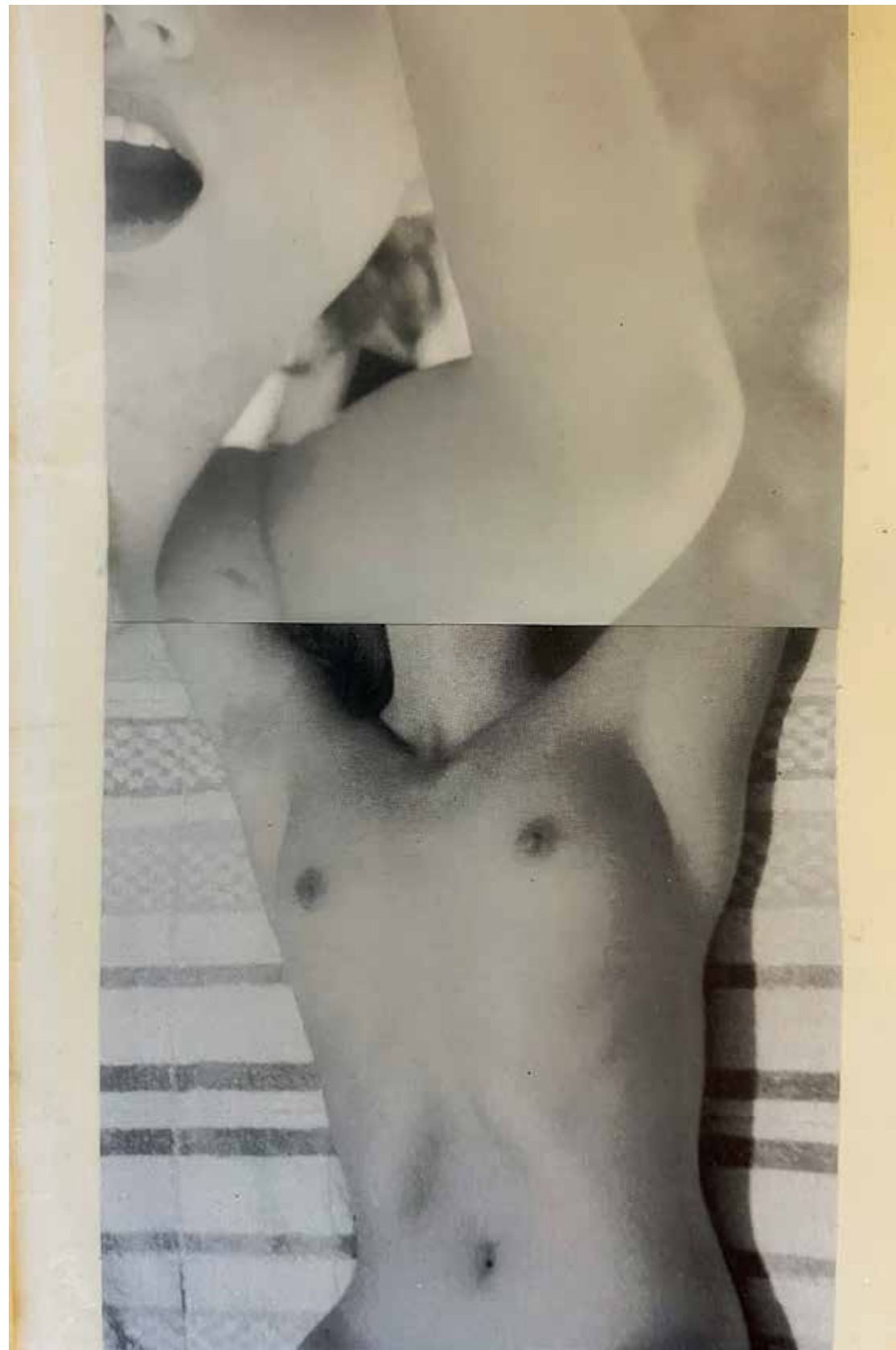
(I think) broken—ah!

old crotch
moss-fangled

-Kathleen Hellen

RIGHT
Agate #1
Caroline Roberts





Summerlight
J.C. Alfier



Rock Layer #4
Caroline Roberts

Summer Day, Oregon Coast
Variation on a theme by Mary Oliver

Gods and monsters merge at this edge of the world
in folds of terrible velvet, and verdant vegetation yawns
with yarrows and blueblossoms, Pacific-bleeding-heart
plants a slash of crimson in a sea of green. Bigfoot brinks

the border between man and animal, a megafauna
urging us into the wild. Whales slither like giant sea
serpents, barnacles speckling their slick mammalian
skin. We gasp to see Scarback surface, a resident gray

with a manmade gash fishtailing her silver middle. I'm lost
in folklore. Douglas firs and Western hemlocks weep green
lava rivers, the forest floor all felt and fallow, Her under-
story lush with moss. But human mutations drag me back

to my small, flawed body, my scar salmon and jagged
like the wounded whale's, a cocktail of meds every twelve
hours to keep my immune system from striking
the strange liver alive in my abdomen.

The Chinook peoples call this place and its creatures
skookum: survivor, leviathan, behemoth. Waves
decapitate trees in the phantom forest, relics of towering
Sitka spruces arranged in a pagan ring cairn, Satan's

cauldron an ancient siltstone sea cave, a swirling
churn as waves fill the rocky bowl like a witch's brew.
I'm a monster too, a chimera, DNA doubling in my blood,
lion-hearted and bull-headed, the body of a snake.

But in this sorcerous landscape I'm neither goddess
nor beast. I dangle my feet off the lip of the crag, whales
blow and waves lap and loom, foam-white. For the first time
I know in my bones myself on a map, a speck of pink

pinned on the border between giant swathes of emerald
and azure, aware my erasure would be effortless,
still I'm hanging on tight, a skookum fighting like hell's
phoenix for my one wild and precious life.

-LeeAnn Olivier

Malachite

Your love affair with the sun will end
are the last words the transplant
nurse utters like a sorceress,
her warning the color of a gangrene
sky just before a tornado winnows

into spirals. What about the green,
I think, though I haven't seen
it in weeks, sleet gnashing at the ICU
window's gray sliver. But the green
finds me in six months' time, slipping

from stillness to the Pineywoods,
all the greens of June hum-strumming
my summer skin, sleek as shot silk,
a mackerel sky stippled calico
kaleidoscoping, a chrysalis glinting

in the glancing light where envy
zinnias and wildcap wildflowers ribbon
the rose-mallow grass, jeweled geckos
gild the blackjack oaks and violet-green
swallows swagger along the broomsedge.

And yes, my new flesh pinks
and mottles, my inner coil a kettle
bubbling over, but I am green
again, a chimera with luna-moth wings,
my donor's bluestem wild-boy cells

slicking the rivers in my bloodmap
like a mossgod. What the nurse forgot:
young galaxies glow green before they spill
stars and sugar scarabs scuttle over the hearts
of pharaohs, green as longing unveiled.

-LeeAnn Olivier



Untitled/Hare
(From the series *finds*)
Hannah Winkelbauer

Csigák

In Budapest, if you wake up in the middle of the night by a flash of lightning and a burst of thunder when you go out in the morning to the rain-washed sidewalks of the city you will find snails. After every rain the byways of this grand city must be shared with the soft creatures. The pavements inhale the scent of the rain and snails begin their journeys back and forth, as though reborn from the downpour.

The Hungarian snail, or *csiga*, is renowned by the Magyar people as a harbinger of good things. The Hungarian language announces this quality of the invertebrate creatures by gently referring to them as *pubatestuek* or *the soft-bodied ones*. There are enough species of Hungarian snails that the language reaches into poetics in order to properly designate them with names like the pretty door one, the water-through-crawler, the bright spindle dweller, and the towering zebra.

You will notice the snails on the sidewalks because they often bring with themselves a crowd of admirers. It is not uncommon for young mothers and fathers to bring their children snail-watching and occasionally snail-feeding. A few fragments of fresh lettuce are enough to provide the snails with a feast as they are creatures accustomed to dwelling in green places and will eat all organic matter, proving themselves to be true good citizens, always recycling after themselves, cleaning their concrete plates.

Various Hungarian folktales and legends tell of the wandering snail, intent on embarking on a long journey, patient as the countryside slowly...slowly goes by. A fast pedestrian may occasionally stop, transfixed, in awe that the small pavement creatures could possibly be willing to take that much time to cross from one side to the other.

The appearance of the after-rain snails offers passersby a chance to modulate their own pattern of life, in that, it will be necessary to slow down to avoid stepping on them. Leaving behind a glistening trail, they create parliaments of congregation across every inch of the city, wandering up to one another with their questioning antenna, oblivious to us, entirely unworried that they could, at any moment, be crushed. In this burst of social activity, the snails extend to us an invitation. If we choose, we too could walk up to one another, baring our souls to the possibility of being stepped on, with a gentle willingness to share a chat with anyone who also might walk by on the newly washed sidewalks.

-Zary Fekete



LEFT
*Mesquite Tree at Oak Creek
Palmengarten in Velsalm*
Diane Lavroic



Singularities

—for Yuval Noah Harari

A singularity occurs but once in time
and space: the Big Bang, for instance;

or at a point of infinite mass density
where gravity distorts such time and space
into the final state of matter when it's
black hole bound;

or when the derivative of a given function
of a complex variable does not exist, but
every neighborhood of which contains points
for which the variable does exist

Now *Sapiens* announces a new singularity:
the point at which all concepts that give life
meaning become irrelevant. After which
everything is meaningless.

-Claude Clayton Smith

Old Dog

runs into the street
thinking

it has to save you
from the street

you never entered.
You loved it

and gave it many
coos and pets

according to the mystery
of love and

the mystery of dog.
Good dog. Good dog.

-Stan Rubin



Sighting

An hour before November dusk
Above the torrent of the Esk,
I saw a deer browse on a slope.
It raised its head for quick escape
And eyed me through a bracken frond,
Stopped chewing and then nose to ground
It went on foraging for more.
At every noise she thought she saw,
She raised her head in mild alarm,
Decided I could mean no harm
And went on browsing as before,
A hungry timid herbivore.
Her ears were fringed a darker brown,
Her tail was white or lightest fawn.
What kind of deer was it I saw?
A fallow deer, I think. To me
It doesn't matter any more:
I'm blessed with an epiphany
Above the torrent of the Esk
An hour before November dusk.

-Duncan Forbes

LEFT
Argo
Giulia Berra



Crystal Coastline
RIGHT
From shoreline to shoreline
Larry Wolf



FILM

Bar'bees

Jean-Michel Rolland

Bar'bees is a photovideography that plays with the shapes and colors of a bunch of roses. The video passes several times from the figurative to the abstract, revealing vestiges of the past and promises of the future. Transitory images (multiplications of the original image) gradually lose their meaning to acquire a new aesthetic. The initial photograph was taken in Parc Borély in Marseille and the sound comes from a recording of bees in its rose garden.

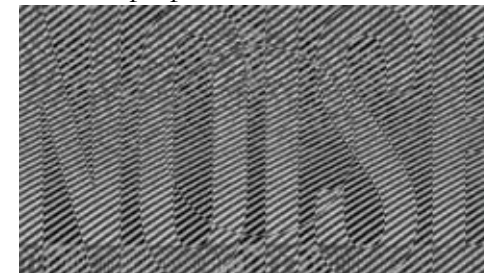


<https://youtu.be/29nr-W2gRfY>

Noise

PRRMB!

The very nature which defines and builds up our lives nowadays is noise. Whoever modulates noise, models the real and controls reality. "Noise" belongs to the "Visual Drafts" series, a work in progress made with the most interesting fragments that I accidentally come across in my audiovisual creative process, in which I play with video, motion graphics and shadows to prepare visuals for live music shows and audiovisual installations.



<https://youtu.be/7HQ7gGkh0r4>

Fuck Me

PRRMB!

The act among acts: creation, destruction, possession, abandonment, pleasure, pain, death and life, altogether. "Fuck Me" is a static and motion illustration belonging to the "Fuck [...]" series, a collection of original artworks build upon the many situations that can be summed up by the "F word": from the clock that forces you to get up early in the morning or the Tinder flirt that decides to ditch you (negative contexts), to the things you want to do and the people with whom you would like to get it on (positive contexts).



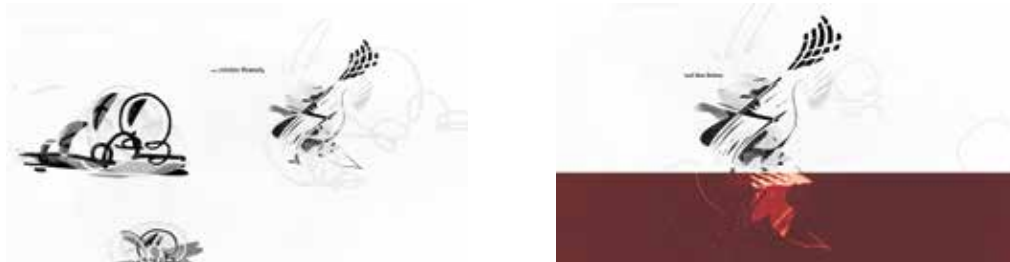
<https://youtu.be/ZgeiBD66IHs>



Alle schöne Vögel

PRRMB!

Everything that rises up falls down, crashes and rots away - just to be reborn again, this time as an experimental online tale on heartbreak. "Alle schöne Vögel" is the first original story from an ongoing series called "Scrollstories", a collection of online short tales about love, work, loss, memory and pleasure: first-person stories that talk about life experiences we all share.



<https://prmb.com/scrollstory/alle-vogel/>



Drive Home

Eabha Cleary

In this video and sound-piece, a girl uses the space inside of a car to examine her personal relationships with old and precious memories. This piece reflects on moments where time appears to shift and changes its form, calling out to the past and the present, the real and the unreal.



https://youtu.be/f-WI_EQmj0c



Shadow's Film

Leilie Xia

A shadow tries to help a pot of aloe on the stage, but in a misunders what he really is.



https://youtu.be/UDS_kLPSywg



Lessons from the Life and Death of Clifford

Julia Rue and Samuel Taylor

Two caregivers of a beloved dog share their experiences and inner questions about death when they have to put down Clifford.



<https://youtu.be/FhqC-defNAs>



Rifting

Chang-Ching Su

Why is it named that? Why are there only 24 colors? What is my color? What is "Golden"? What is the difference between "Very Deep" and "Extra Deep"? What is the relationship between language and the object being referred to? Why do they all smell the same? What colors will/should/must/cannot the world be?



<https://vimeo.com/822585917>



Skipper

Olive Couri

Skipper is a skip & a jump through time and space. It's a collage of disparate vignettes that takes the viewer into the hidden cupboard. Where did all these swans come from? Is that grandma speaking?



<https://vimeo.com/830127212>







Don't Be Merle

“Did you get my gift?” Peter’s text message flashed on my screen as zombies attacked survivors in a post-apocalyptic Washington D.C. metro tunnel. My seventeen-year-old daughter Una and I were watching the last season of *The Walking Dead* on my laptop, which was connected to my phone.

Peter had enabled signature tracking, so he knew damned well I’d received the gift. It was a book I told him I did not want, accompanied by a cringey, sentimental note on thick, creamy paper—the expensive kind with frayed edges.

After 30 minutes, another text. “Hey. Everything okay?”

We didn’t have plans. I hadn’t told him I would call him. I hadn’t responded to his messages from the night before. I don’t have any major medical or mental health issues that would prompt a sensible person to be concerned about me.

Twenty minutes later, a third text: “Can I call you?”

“Mom,” Una said. “You have to be more direct. He’s not getting the message.”

In my experience, being direct with men when you disagree with them, especially the domineering ones, carries potentially violent consequences. As Courtney Barnett sings, “Men are worried that women will laugh at them / women are worried that men will kill them.”

Peter had been unmarried for about a year when one of our mutual friends told him I was also recently single. When he asked me out, he said it was just for companionship. It took me a while to realize that it was a date.

“I’m not looking for a relationship. At all,” I said, once I realized we weren’t having dinner as acquaintances but as potential lovers.

“Oh, believe me, I’m not either.” When someone says, “believe me,” what follows next is usually a lie.

Case in point: He began messaging me several times a day—long texts with misspellings and grammatical errors. He asked to see me during impossible times that were far too frequent: midweek, Sunday.

“I’ll come out to Bayside. Just for an hour.”

“I can’t. I’m prepping meals and getting ready for the week.”

“Well, if something changes, call me.”

“It won’t.”

“Well, just in case. I’m around.”

A few days later: “Are you going to Rachel and Vinny’s party?”

PREVIOUS PAGE RIGHT

Natural Forms 3

PREVIOUS PAGE LEFT

Natural Forms 2

LEFT

Natural Forms 1

Mohammad Amin Shafiei

“Oh God no, it’s a Tuesday. I don’t get home from work until 7, then I’m up again at 5 the next morning.”

Then, from the party: “I wish you were here. You would really elevate this gathering. Sure you can’t come?”

I thought he was a decent enough guy. I didn’t want to hurt him or alienate our mutual friends. But at this point in my life, I could never fall for someone with such terrible listening skills and glaring control issues. Meanwhile, he told Rachel he was smitten with me. He confided in Vinny that he could see himself falling in love with me.

When I first started writing this, my idea was that Peter, who had married his high school sweetheart and thus not dated since the 1990s, was trapped in an outdated dating schema. Going out with him was like stepping into a time capsule.

In the 1990s, as a woman, if a man decided that he wanted you and you didn’t feel the same, it was up to you to fend him off. His feelings took precedence over yours: his decision to pursue you became your problem. You were responsible for his bruised ego. His delicate, tender feelings were entirely in your hands. And if you initially said yes—or maybe—and then changed your mind? What a tease. How cruel. You fickle heartbreaker you.

I planned to write about how glad I was that such double standards had been swept away by changes wrought by various waves of feminism, increased LGBTQ+ and trans visibility, and the #MeToo movement. But then Úna had an eerily similar experience. A boy she had been talking to—I think his name was Wyatt—began messaging her several times a day, bombarding her with invitations and requests to hang out. When she told him to give her some space, he sent her paragraph-length texts demanding an explanation and DMed her friends asking what her problem was. Then, when she told him she didn’t want to see him at all anymore, he argued with her, as if he could convince her to like him by undermining her expressed wishes.

When I was around Úna’s age, I dated a 22-year-old who was in a local band signed to an indie label. He could buy beer and get my friends and me into 21+ shows. He was on tour for weeks at a time, and I was pretty sure he was seeing other girls. But when someone told him that I’d hooked up with someone—a boy my own age—at a party one night, he unleashed his fury in a late-night phone call, hurling every insult an adult man could summon at a teenage girl. For years afterwards he referred to me as “Cunt Kinney.”

Úna was exasperated by Wyatt’s insistence, but I found his refusal to accept her rejection worrisome.

“You never know when someone is going to snap, Úna,” I warned her one night over zombies and salty snacks. “Stay out of his orbit, if you can.”

“Please Mom, this kid is an idiot. It’s fine.”

“Well, Daryl Dixon wouldn’t text a woman a million times if she didn’t respond.”

“Oh my God, you and Daryl! All the moms love him.”

In *The Walking Dead*, Daryl is tough and fearless. He’s a superb hunter and tracker with a perfect sense of timing. But he is also vulnerable, loyal, and sensitive; he uses his emotional

experiences to rise above his prejudices. He’s a neo-classical hero updated for the 21st century. He resembles Achilles in his near-immortality, Agamemnon in his bravery, and Odysseus in his cleverness. He embodies the Romanticism of Rousseau: he is raw and alive, in synch with the wilderness and its natural order. In contrast, the supernatural undead pervert the life cycle. He’s cool under pressure like James Bond, but without 007’s penchant for objectifying women.

There is also something deeply satisfying about a redeemed rake, a born-again bad boy. Daryl embodies the most noble elements of traditional masculinity (except that one time he murdered his ex-girlfriend) with most of the toxicity leached out. His best friend is a woman in her 50s. He questions his decisions. He admits his mistakes. He is introspective. He acts as a father to orphaned and abandoned children. He recognizes that the rules in the old world only helped those who had power.

Moreover, Daryl’s character demonstrates the ability we all possess to improve. Initially, he was a sidekick to his white supremacist, misogynistic brother, Merle. Together, they planned to pillage from vulnerable people in the post-apocalyptic Georgia woods. However, ultimately, Daryl evolves into a valued member of the core group of survivors. He observes the world around him and makes decisions based on fellowship and humanity. Meanwhile, Merle remains a selfish prick, albeit not without his moments of glory, and dies in Season Three.

I often come across articles that bemoan women’s “confidence gap.” But questioning oneself is a sign of intelligence and thoughtfulness. Perhaps women have been better trained than men to realize the limits and fallacy of empirical evidence. Different people interpret the same event in various ways given their past experiences and distinct identities. Recognizing the limits of our own observational abilities and admitting that others have equally compelling and valid responses indicates respect for the myriad variants of perception and the vastly different conclusions individuals draw about given stimuli. It challenges the (usually horrible) idea of “going with your gut.” Those who cite their own experience as valid evidence to prove their interpretation—without questioning the validity of that experience—stride confidently yet ignorantly through this world.

Women’s unassertiveness is also widely seen as a deficit, but neither is this learned trait necessarily a weakness. Rather, it is often a crucial survival skill. I know how to make myself small and disappear in a crowded place to avoid detection, rage, and enmity. *The Walking Dead* television series recognizes this ability as a strength. Carol, Daryl’s best friend, consistently uses others’ preconceptions about older women to deadly advantage. When Daryl is captured by a rival gang in Season Seven, he utilizes Carol’s tactics of patient subterfuge to engineer a successful escape.

While I still maintain that ghosting is a perfectly acceptable, even compassionate, response to an unwanted advance—after all, as Derrida taught us, meaning also derives from what is not said—I eventually took Úna’s advice and told Peter I wasn’t interested. A few weeks later, I ran into him at an outdoor concert with our mutual friends. At first, he stood behind me glowering. However, like Carol, I have a large toolbox of techniques to draw upon that deflect and deescalate. Being nauseatingly pleasant is one of those tools. I turned around and asked him where his son had decided to attend college. He looked surprised and disarmed.

“University of -----,” he said. “Not his first choice, but...”

“You must be very proud—it’s hard to get in there. Good for him.”

He nodded, then paused. “I’m dating someone, you know. She was going to come today but something came up.”

“Oh,” I said, “That’s great. Just don’t be so pushy with her. You know, chill out a bit.”

The pleasantness evaporated. He glared at me. “Well, to be fair,” he said, “You led me on.”

I left shortly after, angry yet amused. I hadn’t heard that phrase, at least applied to my actions, in decades. On the subway ride home, I messaged a friend, “Peter says I led him on. Cunt Kinney strikes again, 30 years later. Lol.”

One of my prized possessions is a soap-on-a-rope rendition of Daryl’s zombie ear necklace from Season Two that Una bought me with her own money. The ear necklace episode was a turning point for Daryl: he had to decide whether to rejoin the fellowship of survivors or become mired in savagery by enacting vengeance in the wilderness.

This is the difficulty: the characters are constantly being betrayed, constantly finding shelter and community only to have it destroyed. But they must trust again to live—surviving in the wasteland requires other people. In a paradoxical turn, Daryl even finds his only romantic love interest in the show because of his Thoreauvian retreat into the forest.

While the human instinct to form bonds is often exploited by rivals, it is ultimately destructive to resist the fellowship of others, however singularly dangerous such unions have been in the past. Society, civilization, is founded on trust. Trust can only truly exist when we understand each other in our differences. To comprehend someone’s differences, we must divorce ourselves from what we think we know and really listen to others. We must relearn a skill most of us lost in childhood and observe through eyes untainted by prejudice and preconception: a challenging task, indeed.

Endings in writing are difficult because they are inherently false. Endings pretend that everything is all wrapped up and neat, which is rarely accurate. Most endings are more like transitions from one mess to another. Some humans live to fight another day; others turn into monsters; still others teeter somewhere on the brink between spitefulness and solidarity. Almost all of us stumble blindly into the wilderness, fleeing one danger only to find another hazard. We are helplessly married to flawed perceptions based on the faulty evidence of our past experiences. The only surety is that there will be a zombie influx to disrupt any refuge we might find. Their mindless persistence, their unthinking pursuit of flesh, their single-minded focus on what they desire mirrors the tenacity of the Wyatts and Peters of our worlds, to whom I offer this advice: Dude, be like Daryl. Evolve. Don’t die in Season Three.

-Kate Kinney O’Donoghue



Enduring Decision 14
Natalie Christensen

The Raspberry

In my breakfast bowl or on my
dinner plate, I don't remember
which,
In those crazy-fogged days
of grief, It was perfect:
color, texture, flavor.

I paused -- to be with it -- to savor.
Remembering now that I knew
I could or would again,
It has carried me these past two years.

It was a pin-point of light
In the chasm of darkness, the gasp
Of first air after rising from
the ocean floor. The sustaining
moment, a grace.

-Carol Wyatt

RIGHT
What is the story?
Elena Demyanenko



reddest robin

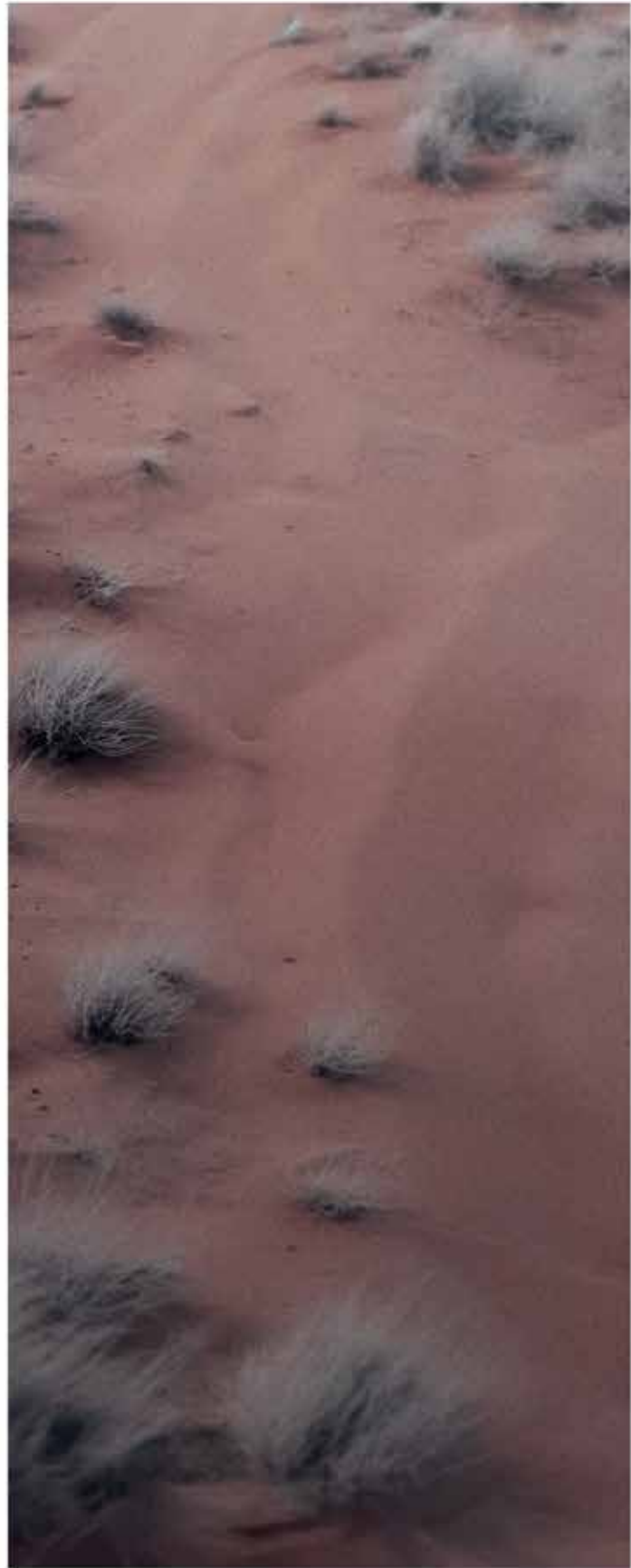
today I saw the reddest robin
and the bird stood there
like it knew it was the most beautiful
of its species

I stared at it from the stairs
I wondered at it through the window
it modeled before me
content, well fed
eager for afternoon and scraps of spring
that will arrive someday

-Mary E. Croy

RIGHT
A6122
Richard Hanus





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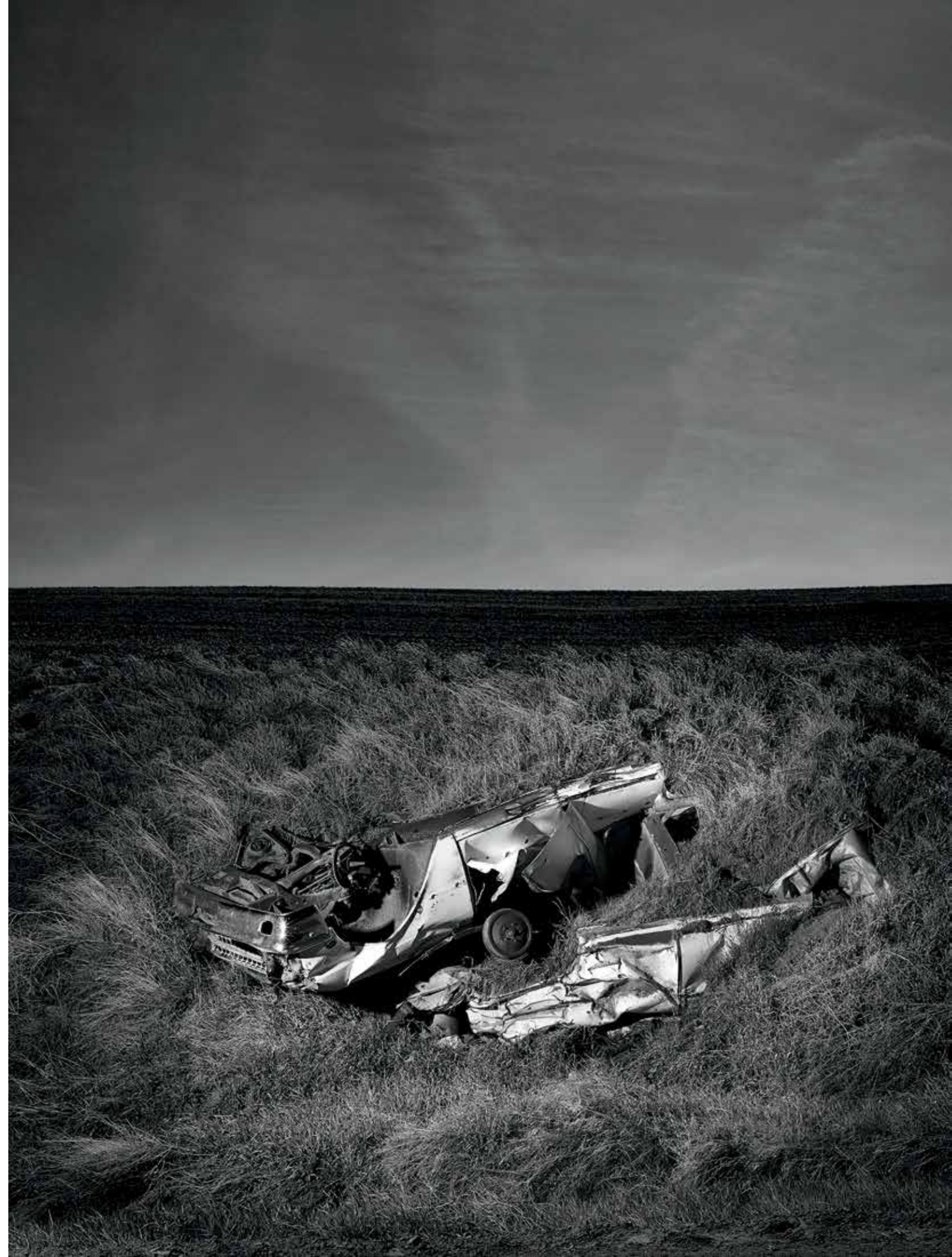
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Night Raft: Seven Thousand Miles and Seventy-Three Days

On a night with no moon
It is the cathedral of stars
That gives me hope
Familiar constellations foregrounded in the crowd
Milky Way a cloudy streak
On this cloudless night
Standing at the end of a wooden dock
Out over Lake Christopher

-Tom Laughlin

RIGHT
Starbuck
Jeff Corwin



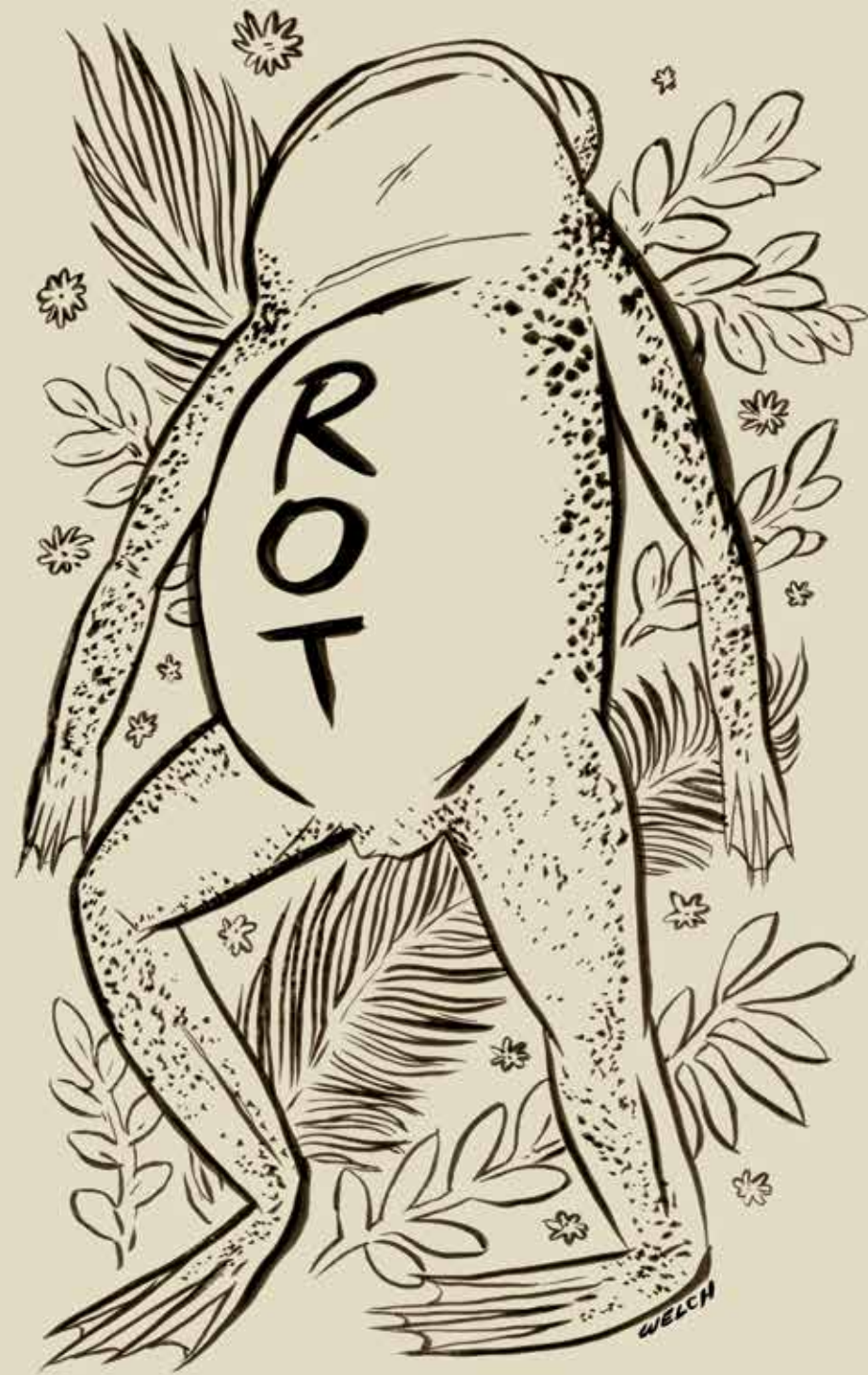


I Want To Move Like Rain

I would like to become uncontrollable, to be marveled, and questioned, but unopposed. I'd like to fall but not drown or crash, but dissipate. To be a vision of collective solitude. I should like to fall slow and watch myself in the act, and fall fast, and sharp, and hard, and blur my own sight. I want to move like rain. I want to beat and beat. I want to be music on my own. I want to be music with tin and tap and shingles and singles. I want to be consumed by many creatures, especially the scary ones, because someday I will consume everything. I will rise; sometimes red, sometimes a little green, even with a teensy bit of yellow, oops, but mostly crystal blue. Then I will engulf every creature that before drank me and I will drown them all and some may smile and some may scream but it won't matter to me; with no face, with no ears, I will swallow. It will not be violent, I want you to know. It will be slow, like evolution; but far more quiet and far more welcoming. I will not shout when I eat you, I will not try to comfort you with words, I will not be angry; you should know that too. It will only be power, one like you may have never known, but I will be like a fairy, or an angel, or a sparrow, or speak of dust. When I rise, I will not rise like a wave, I will instead be dew you all wake up to, silently, in the morning.

-Ava Kathryn

Un purifying blood
Yaiza/Sally Hernandez



Rot
Sarah Welch



Fire Flor
Sarah Welch

A Visitation

Not long after dark, while waiting alone in our tiny backyard for the charcoal to cool enough not to scorch the salmon steaks ready for the grill, a very young possum creeps close. To warm itself, I suppose, as this is a cider-crisp night in Philadelphia in October. Halloween is only a few days away, and you can smell its spice in the air. For the first time of the season, I'm wearing my favorite flannel-lined shirt-jacket, the one my eighteen-year-old daughter told me last fall to throw away because its blown-out elbows and stringy cuffs embarrassed her whenever I wore it in public, even when she wasn't with me. I tell myself to remember to send her a selfie of me proudly donning it yet again. She'll reply with a laughing-so-hard-I'm-crying emoji because suddenly, almost everything she used to find annoying about me she now seems to find amusing, sometimes even charming. She went off to college only two months ago, but already she's changed.

I rise slowly from my chair, gauging the creature's reaction all the while. There is none. It stays in its place, crouched between two fist-sized rocks—part of what is meant to serve as a border between our flowerbeds and the bricked area where I like to grill meat and drink beer while the autumnal night cools and thickens around me. Very carefully, I walk backwards up the steps to the back door, which opens into a cramped pantry where we keep our indoor cat's dry food. I scoop a generous bowl of it and return outside, moving as gently as I can down the steps and toward my visitor. To my surprise, it allows me to set the bowl only a few inches from its whiskers. I then retreat to my lawn chair to watch.

While I wait, I gently ease my phone from my pocket to do some quick research on young possums. I read that if they're seven inches or longer, you should leave them alone. Smaller than that, take them to a wildlife shelter. I stare at it crouched there between the rocks, but I can't gauge its length. *Maybe* it's seven inches, but maybe not. If not, maybe its mother is nearby. Maybe they got only briefly separated. Maybe she'll come back soon for her little one.

I learn that, like baby kangaroos, baby possums are called joeys. Also like kangaroos, possums are marsupials, which means they carry their young in pouches. They're the only marsupials in North America. Meanwhile, my joey continues to refuse to move an inch. Could it be, as they say, playing possum? I read further, surprised at how little I've known about possums my whole life. For instance, possums don't actually *play possum*. Instead, the stress brought on by an encounter causes them to lapse into a state of shock that can last as long as four hours. What's been interpreted as acting is, in truth, frozen fear.

Distracted, I realize too late that the coals have now cooled too much. The salmon will, alas, remain ungrilled. How much longer will this poor little guy stay locked in place? How long will it take him to see that I'm no threat? And how long will I stay here to watch? The cat food remains untouched. In the meantime, the darkness has deepened, and the heat that drew my buddy close has faded considerably. Neither of us moves. The chilly night is settling in, getting comfortable. I settle in, too, stubborn, determined to convince my visitor that I mean no harm. I zip my jacket to my chin and then text my wife that there'd be no grilling tonight.

Nine months later, very late on a very still and sticky night in July, I've finally come back to this piece of writing, which was, because of life's perpetual interruptions, abandoned and forgotten uabot even before the jack o' lantern on our porch began to rot and collapse. The grill beside me is cold. The neighborhood is asleep. The leaves falling red and orange into great piles back then are now deep green and firmly fused to their branches, oblivious of what's coming again in just a few months. Meanwhile, just as before, I'm drinking a beer by myself in the dark with a laptop on my lap. Not even a full year has passed since that night my little friend came to visit, but so much can happen in that amount of time, especially for a

possum, as I learned that night. It's either a fully grown adult now, one that's possibly delivered a litter or two of her own already, or its carcass is in the process of returning to the soil. In fact, that process might have begun as soon as that evening in October, seeing as how it was on its own and clearly not fully grown. I had stayed out as long as I could that night, but by the time I finally gave up and went inside, it still hadn't moved, much less eaten any of our cat's food. Lying in bed that night, I fell asleep to thoughts of it running for its life through the ivy between our house and the neighbor's. In the morning, even before coffee, I checked the backyard. I hated to see the food still there, but I was relieved not to find any blood or tufts of fur.

The most common predators of possums, especially young ones, are dogs, foxes, feral cats, raccoons, hawks, and owls. And then, of course, we humans and the tires of our speeding cars. Possums are so commonly preyed upon or indiscriminately killed that their average lifespan is less than two years, which means that, if my little visitor isn't already dead, it likely will be fairly soon. And it can almost be guaranteed that its last moments were, or soon will be, filled with terror. Natural causes rarely get a chance with its kind. Death almost always enters their bodies through some sort of violence.

Here in the summer's dark, I think about the continuous drama that plays itself out daily and nightly, even here in the middle of my neighborhood of mostly concrete and stone. All around me, unceasingly and mostly beyond my limited perception, death pays regular visits to all sorts of creatures. It darts between trees, digs through dirt, glides above blades of grass. And it always finds its target. Meanwhile, oblivious, I go about my days doing nothing but driving to and from work, eating, writing, reading, sleeping, drinking beer, and sitting outside staring into the quiet animal darkness around me, wondering about all that I'm missing.

On that night back in October, I took a photo with my outmoded phone, a very blurry and dim one. Because of its red eyeshine, my little visitor looks creepy, which, stupidly, makes me feel a bit sad or embarrassed for it because it didn't look creepy to me that night, not at all. Instead, it just looked lost and desperate, though I realize it was probably neither of these things, at least not in any way I would recognize. I was merely imagining myself in its place: young, cold, alone, and lost, seeking warmth. Maybe, in truth, it was doing just fine. Maybe it was just curious about the incongruous light in the darkness. Probably, though, it was merely waiting for me to leave so that it could move closer to the warmth. When I finally did, maybe it stretched out beside the grill to warm its cold belly.

That photo, which I've shown no one, lives digitally on my phone between a photo of our cat, Penn (an adorable rescue), who's food I tried to give to my visitor, and a photo of a rug that I gave away to a stranger after posting about it in a Facebook neighborhood group. According to my phone, I took the possum's photo on October 11, at 6:42 in the evening, fifteen minutes after sundown. My memory, however, tells me my visitor came later than this, but 6:42 does make sense in terms of preparing dinner during the school year after having picked my son up from soccer practice. What did we end up eating that night? Did my wife end up cooking the fish in the oven instead? Maybe we just decided to get takeout. I don't remember. Twenty days before Halloween, had we already bought candy to give to the neighborhood trick-or-treaters? Probably not, knowing how we always tried not to eat too much of it ourselves. I also see that the night of my visitation was on a Monday. What had I done that weekend? Watched football with my son? Probably, but I can't be sure. It wasn't even a year ago, and I have no clue. Even with a knife to my throat, I wouldn't be able to call up any details. They're long gone, as are so many others. This is always such a horrifying realization to have, which is why we rarely reflect upon it, I guess. So much of our lives is lost to us forever, no matter how hard we try to hold on to as much as we can.

A rectangle of light brightens a patch of the yard. I look back at the house, at the second floor. Someone is up, unable to sleep. Probably my daughter, who's home for the summer after her first year away at college. Her body's clock still hasn't adjusted. It comes to me then, fully formed and true: back in October, still feeling sensitive from her departure, maybe I was concerned about the possum because of her. Watching such a young and tiny thing, maybe I was really thinking about my daughter being on her own for the first time in the big bad world. My fear for its safety was my fear for my daughter's. Part of me wants to confess this to her in the morning, but a smarter part of me knows that I should keep it to myself. She's already grown up so much since last summer; she wouldn't want to hear about her father's silly worries.

I finish my beer. I'd like another one, but I don't want to have to go inside to get it. In fact, I don't want to move at all. All I want is for the light on the second floor to go out and return me to the dark. All I want is my daughter to be happy and independent, but not so much that she never needs me anymore. All I want is my little possum friend to come see me again sometime and let me know that it's doing okay. All I want is to remember again every moment with my children that I've ever forgotten. All I want is all of my youth back but without losing whatever wisdom I've managed to gain over the years. All I want is for the world not to end during my children's lifetimes. All I want is for all of my fears to be assuaged. All I want, I suppose, is everything, but when the light goes out, I find that I'm contented enough in the darkness that I forget about everything except for my daughter, whom I hope has returned to her bed and fallen asleep. The night seems even thicker now than before, like the comforter on a bed, which makes me think that maybe I'll just sleep through the night out here. And in the morning, I'll step inside and surprise my family eating breakfast at the kitchen table. And like the possum, I'll want nothing more than whatever it is that will grant me a little more comfort, safety, and time to appreciate what I have right now.

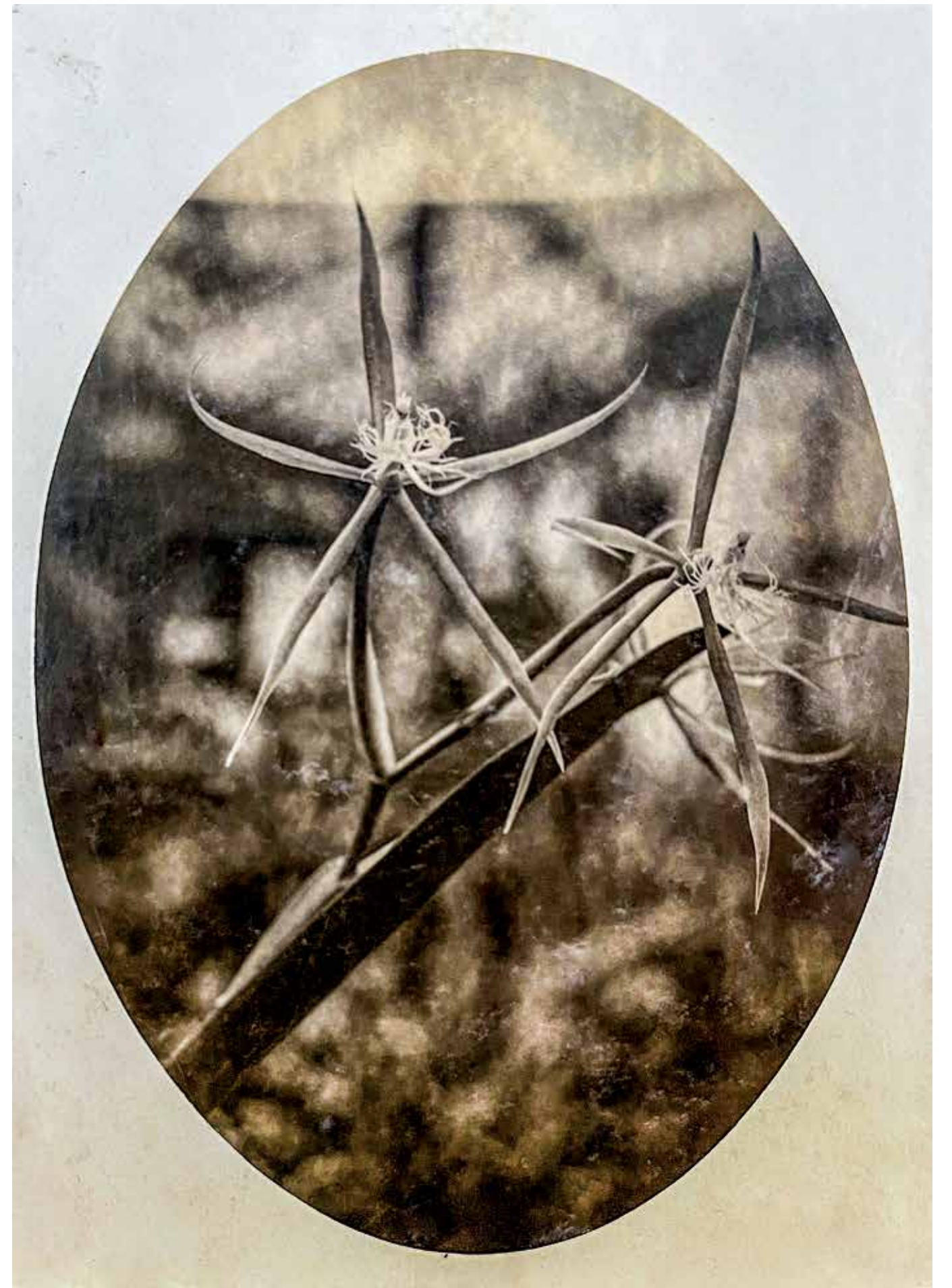
-Kevin Granke



One Grapefruit
Peter McCoogin



Untitled
Kurt Mendel





Sage, Cedar and Sweetgrass: Sacred Healing Smoke

not in noisy nightclubs
filled with chain smokers
who crack open another pack
of once sacred tobacco.

but outdoors, where smoke
spirals, native rituals begin,
cedar, sage, sweetgrass
wait turns

or together deliver
cleansing swirls
from abalone shell
via turkey feather.

leaders face each
of four directions,
acknowledge four nations,
purify all present of the four colors,

before prayer or sweat lodge,
cup dusty sagebrush smoke
to wash each heart,
thought, flesh,

just as holy water's used
in making the sign of the cross,
excusing ravaged energies
that don't belong.

families who move into houses,
freshly hewn or old-fashioned,
sweep and smudge rooms
with aromatic red cedar smoke.

from kitchens to kids' rooms,
beg cedar's blessings, draw sap-soaked
woods indoors, push what's lingered too long
out yonder.

lastly, sweetgrass,
the first plant to cover native lands?
ember an end of its thick braid
of fragrant plaited hair

form a thin line of light scent,
using its pale, gentle touch
to lift moods, usher positives,
replace negatives

earlier purged by cedar and sage,
to prepare us now for thanks, prayers,
our ultimate connections,
Ho, Mitakuye Oyasin – all my relations.

-Cynthia Gallaber



Mystic Milk
Taylor Pate

Music for Cattle

Upon a pastureland of viridescence, arrives everyday;
a greybeard holding high brio, although his jowls do sag,
in suit outmoded with suspenders and a duffel bag;
which carries an accordion whose music he does play.

He represents his magnum opus at the centre of the land;
a drove of Herefords hear this that is grazing by the fence
and quandering, 'what sound this is', they begin trotting thence,
with tinkling cowbells, lightly hoof, come near to him and stand.

So consummately, competently, fingertips he through the keys,
to this, the kine waver their heads and give a spellbound stare
as if a brinded, mottled, dappled listenership is there,
of this euphonous melody which does their earlaps please.

The other bovine, pootling, loafing, on the nearby pasturage;
the cowman in his shieling and the horses in paddock;
well ming the hills with wind and branches of Pear and Shaddock;
the piglets oink, soft birds bobble— all think it is a stage.

This ranch turns into an odeon for the livestock and prairie;
the pizzazz of this old maestro appeals to this plot;
this cattle will be seen or not seen one day, he knows not;
but now that they enjoy his excellent tunesmithery.

-Shamik Banerjee

RIGHT
crab creek
Jeff Corwin

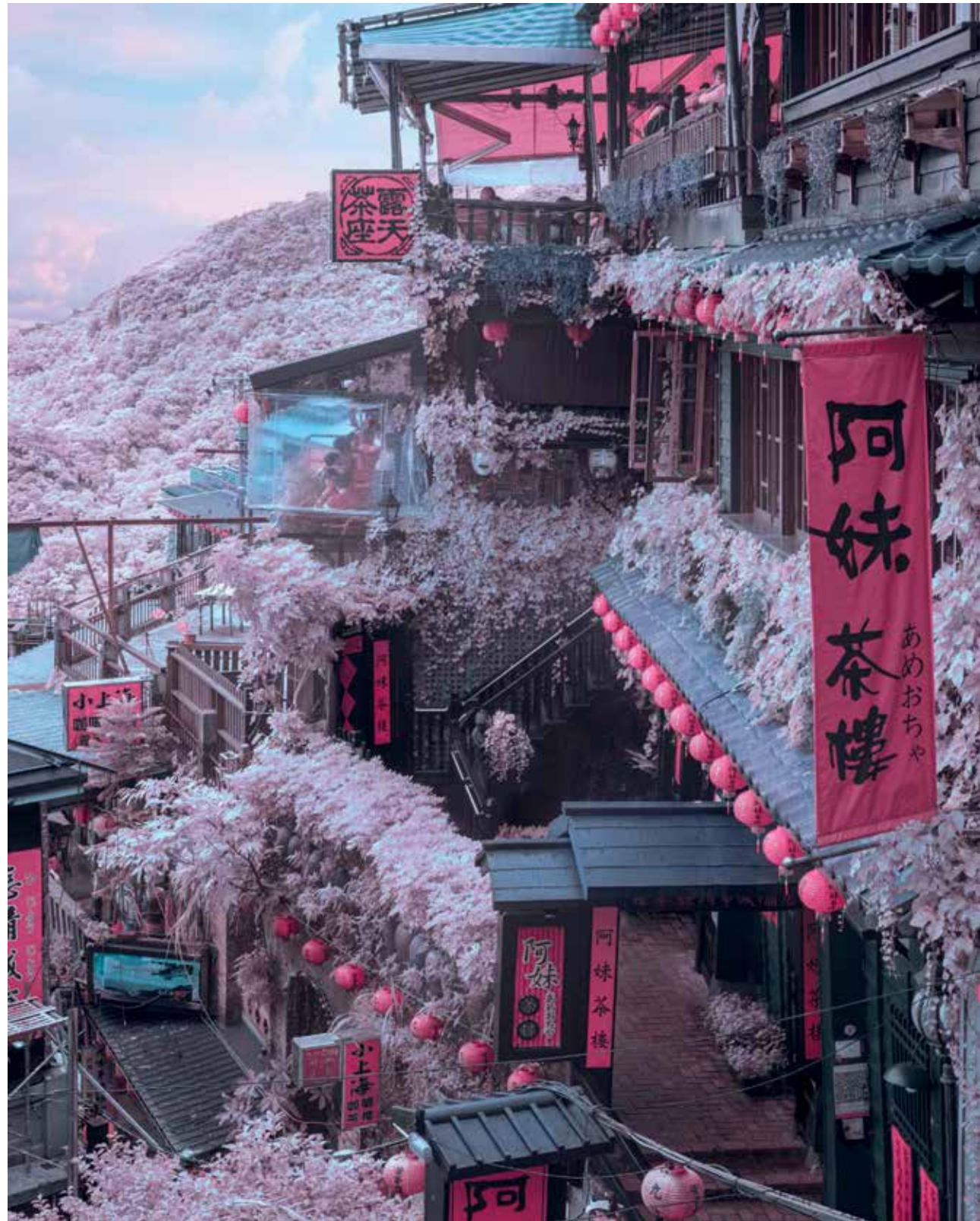






PREVIOUS PAGE
ranunculus sugarcane
LEFT
amaranthus cymbidium
RIGHT
tulip lily
Claire Chauvin





Spirited away bathhouse
w.vv.vv

Anting

Birds rub ants into their wings
For medicine or to make them edible.
It's called anting. Typically it's active.
Birds target and attack insects, not just ants,
But often millipedes, grinding the small
Insect bodies into their feathers and
The skin beneath. The practice can
Be passive too, as in dust bathing
When animals roll in dirt where bugs live.

Loving my trans self feels like

Wearing a scorpion for a barrette

Scientists believe anting similar to a male
Goat urinating in his own face and mouth,
A behavior central to its mating process
Known as anointing or self-anointing.

-Stephanie Smith

Numerous
 as the tabla beats of the raindrops
 the legions of ants delighting in an open jar of honey
 gold bubbles necklaced in a glass of champagne
 a marathon of poppies racing over a hillside
 the crackles of light on the bay
 the integers lining up to catch a glimpse of infinity
 stars powdering the night
 the galaxies that form like embryos
 the times I've given thanks that you and I are one couple

-Zack Rogow



Contributors

JC Alfier's (they/them) most recent book of poetry, *The Shadow Field*, was published by Louisiana Literature Press (2020). Journal credits include *The Emerson Review*, *Faultline*, *New York Quarterly*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Penn Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, and *Vassar Review*.

Shamik Banerjee is a poet and poetry reviewer from the North-Eastern belt of India. He loves taking long strolls and spending time with his family. His deep affection with Solitude and Poetry provides him happiness.

Alan Bern is a retired children's librarian Alan Bern has published three books of poetry and has a hybrid fictionalized memoir, *IN THE PACE OF THE PATH*, forthcoming from *UnCollected Press*. Recent awards include: Winner, Saw Palm Poetry Contest (2022); Honorable Mention, Littoral Press Poetry Prize (2021). Recent and upcoming writing and photo work include: *CERASUS*, *Thanatos*, *The Hyacinth Review*, *DarkWinter*, and *Mercurius*. Alan is a published/exhibited photographer, and he performs with dancer/choreographer Lucinda Weaver as *PACES: dance & poetry fit the space* and with musicians from Composing Together. *Lines & Faces*, his press with artist/printer Robert Woods: linesandfaces.com.

Giulia Berra's artistic research focuses on the relationships between humanity and environment, cultural heritage and contemporary, urban and natural landscape, trying to develop new visions and to investigate the spaces from a psychophysical point of view, according to empathic dynamics. My projects usually deal mainly with old collections and/or little, fragile, residual elements, found abandoned on the ground and patiently collected over several months, so the development of my works is determined by my capability of reading various territories, by chance and by the availability of materials. As consequence, there are no resources, waste and refuse.

Carolina Borja was born in San Diego, California, and raised in Mexico City. She synthesizes her Industrial Design and Mexican Folk Art background to craft sculptural installations and public art projects. Her creations delve into themes of urban growth, mobility, and cross-cultural dynamics, often incorporating found materials such as paper, concrete, and wood. Borja has been a recipient of several accolades, such as the ArtPrize Pitch Night award and grants from the City of Houston and Forecast Public Art. Her recent public art projects have been commissioned by prominent institutions, including the Museum of Fine Arts Houston, The City of Sugarland, and The Alley Theatre. In addition to her studio work, Borja has contributed to cultural institutions like Ruta de la Amistad and Art Shanty Projects, further enriching her artistic practice. Borja lives and works in Houston, Texas.

Ann-Marie Brown is a Canadian painter working in encaustic & oil. Her studio is on the west coast of British Columbia between the forest and the ocean. To see more of her work go to <https://www.instagram.com/annmariebrown.art/>

Claire Chauvin is a Houston-based photographer currently working with still life imagery incorporating flowers and other organic materials. Flower motifs have historically been used not only as a standard of beauty, but as a way to visually code symbolic messages in art. The flowers in Chauvin's work are given a more contemporary treatment- depicted in a fantasy hybrid of the natural and digital in order to draw attention to the gaps in our understanding of the natural world as well as the new symbolic meanings we construct around it.

Natalie Christensen is an award-winning photographer. Her focus is ordinary settings, seeking the sublime. She deconstructs to color fields, geometry and shadow. Christensen has exhibited in U.S. and international venues; was a UAE Embassy culture tour delegate; recently was invited as Artist-in-Residence Chateau d'Orquevaux, France; and Setanta Books, London published "007 – Natalie Christensen." She has work in permanent collections and her photography has been featured in many noted fine art publications.

Eabha Cleary is a visual artist practicing in Bray, Co. Wicklow. Eabha graduated with honours from Limerick School of Art & Design, where she studied Printmaking and Contemporary Practice. Eabha's practice investigates the effects of post-capitalism and globalist commodification, considering the

environmental, cultural, political and personal impacts. Employing a combination of printmaking, lens-based media and moving image mediums, Eabha's work aims to identify the known and unknown shifts caused by these forces, allowing speculative research processes to lead her work.

Jeff Corwin after 40+ years as an award-winning commercial photographer, now focuses on fine art photography. Simplicity, graphic forms and repeating configurations personally resonate. Recent career highlights include: numerous museum exhibitions; gallery shows; work in permanent collections; features in numerous fine art publications; and representation by several contemporary galleries.

Olive Couri is an artist from Ohio, based in California. She mostly spends her time walking super far.

Mary E. Croy lives in Madison, Wisconsin where she works as an administrative assistant. She spent nine years teaching English Language Learners in Ha Noi, Viet Nam. During her free time, Mary likes reading poetry and hanging out with her cats, Buster and Gabby. Her work has appeared in *Better than Starbucks*, *Woven Tale Press*, and *Valley Voices*, among others.

Elena Demyanenko is a self-taught artist currently based in Moscow. Being an engineer by profession, she is in love with drawing architecture, yet her interests lie far beyond that, and any unremarkable, at first glance, object can unexpectedly become the main character of a new piece. While she works primarily with watercolors, some sketches and paintings find reflection in ceramics, which seems very attractive to her as it makes it possible to work impressions out deeper and express them in a three-dimensional, easy to be touched and experienced form.

Emily Ehrhart writes creative nonfiction and literary fiction. She has been published in *Vegan Life Magazine*, *VoiceCatcher*, *Honeyguide Literary Magazine*, *Portrait of New England*, *Typehouse*, and *Borrowed Solace* (forthcoming). Outside of writing, Emily enjoys a nature-oriented life in western Canada with her partner and family of pets. She hails from St. Louis, Missouri and lived in Washington State for several years. These diverse settings of her life are often inspirations for her writing.

Zary Fekete grew up in Hungary, has a debut chapbook of short stories out from Alien Buddha Press and a novelette (*In the Beginning*) coming out from ELJ Publications. He enjoys books, podcasts, and many many many films. Twitter: @ZaryFekete

Federico Federici is a conceptual artist working in the fields of writing, video art, installations and physics. His works have appeared in international journals and anthologies. Among his books: *A private notebook of winds* (Academy of Fine Arts in Palermo 2019), *Transcripts from demagnetized tapes* (LN 2021) *Biophysique Asémique* (LN 2021); *Profilo Minore* curated by Andrea Cortellessa (Aragno 2021); *Maß des Schlafes* (und andere verbobisuelle Forschungen) (Anterem 2021); *EIS* with a critical note by Peter Schwenger (LN 2022).

Duncan Forbes. British poet. Duncan's poems have been published by Faber, Secker and Enitharmon, who brought out a Selected Poems in 2009, drawn from five previous collections. For his most recent collection of poems, *Human Time* (2020), see www.duncanforbes.com. He read English at Oxford and has taught for many years.

Cynthia Gallaher, a Chicago-based poet, is author of four poetry collections, including *Epicurean Ecstasy: More Poems About Food, Drink, Herbs and Spices*, and three chapbooks, including *Drenched*. Her award-winning nonfiction/memoir/creativity guide is *Frugal Poets' Guide to Life: How to Live a Poetic Life, Even If You Aren't a Poet*. Gallaher was the judge for the 2022 Prairie State Poetry Contest, and one of her poems will be sent on NASA's flight to the south pole of the moon later this decade.

Scott "Aphotoshot" Gilbert, Houston artist and cartoonist born 1961.

Kevin Grauke has published work in such places as *The Threepenny Review*, *The Southern Review*, *StoryQuarterly*, *Fiction*, and *Quarterly West*. He is also the author of *Shadows of Men* (Queen's Ferry), winner of the Steven Turner Award from the Texas Institute of Letters. He's a Contributing Editor at *Story*, and he teaches at La Salle University in Philadelphia.

Olga Grechanova is a Russian artist currently living in Tbilisi, Georgia. She graduated from Penza

Art College. She has also studied animation and worked as an artist animator at Lighthouse Studio in Ireland.

Richard Hanus had four kids but now just three.

Kathleen Hellen is inspired by mostly everything, including the morning rain.

Yaiza / Sally Hernandez is an MA student at Goldsmiths College, University of London. After developing an artistic residency with competitive funding at the University of Madrid, being selected to take part in the Royal college of art curating short course and having several exhibitions, performances and curatorial projects in Finland, Madrid and Barcelona, she has been awarded with a postgraduate scholarship from the prestigious "La Caixa Foundation". Her theoretical and creative line is based on research through processes and experimentations related to the deconstruction of psychological violence, specifically gender violence, and the various hidden mechanisms that characterize it.

Ava Kathryn is a bagel-lover and tree-hugger. She hates driving but enjoys the opportunity to sing fucking loud with the windows down. Her artistic practice includes watercolor, ceramics, and poetry, and is constantly expanding. She is taking yarn spinning lessons and is hoping to start teaching herself about papermaking. Ava is working towards her BFA from MIAD. And hopes to work in the arts and non-profits once she becomes an adult-adult. Ava is also an avid environmentalist and hopes that both her art practice and life practice can encourage a more loving world for all people, plants, plankton, and platypus.

Tom Laughlin is a professor and Coordinator of the Creative Writing Program at Middlesex Community College. He was a founding editor of *Vortex*, a literary journal of Massasoit Community College, a volunteer staff reader for many years for *Ploughshares*, and he has taught literature classes in two Massachusetts prisons. His poetry has appeared in *Green Mountains Review*, *Ibbetson Street*, *Drunk Monkeys*, *Sand Hills Literary Magazine*, *Blue Mountain Review*, *Molecule*, *Superpresent Magazine*, and elsewhere. His poetry chapbook, *The Rest of the Way*, was released by Finishing Line Press in August 2022. His website is www.TomLaughlinPoet.com

Paul R. Lastovica is a self-taught photo-based digital abstract artist who resides in the Industrial suburbs of Houston, Texas. His work explores color, form, and texture using digital editing tools such as Photoshop, Onelab, MS Paint, and Databending techniques through Audacity. In addition to visual art, Mr. Lastovica also dabbles in music & poetry; To follow his work you can find Paul on Instagram & Threads as *plastovarts*.

Diane Lavoie is a North American visual artist based in Berlin. She holds an MFA in painting from California State University Long Beach. Her art is a dialogue between the natural and the artificial, and explores the boundaries between reality and perception. Lavoie uses textile representations of natural environments to create a contrast and a connection with the actual nature where she hangs them. Lavoie then photographs the result, capturing the interplay of light, shadow, color and texture. The photo is the final manifestation of the work, a visual record of her intervention and interaction with nature.

Peter McCoogin is a wanted man. It was a miracle he survived his birth, but he did. McCoogin collects words. He is a luddite except when he's in a foxhole.

Kurt Mendel (1903-1997) was born in Hamburg, Germany and died in Israel. He was a citriculturist who was instrumental in the development of citrus in Israel.

Kate Kinney O'Donoghue (<https://kodonoghue.com>) is Academic Chair and Associate Professor of English at Suffolk County Community College in Brentwood, New York. She also serves as an editor for *The Capra Review* (<https://www.thecaprareview.com>), an online literary journal. She earned her Ph.D. in English from the CUNY Graduate Center in Manhattan. Kate has published creative work in *The New York Times Metropolitan Diary*, *Crossed Out Magazine*, Bard's *Institute for Writing and Thinking Journal*, Queens College's *Revisions*, and *NomadArtX*, and academic work through *Palgrave*

Macmillan and Gale Researcher's Guide.

LeeAnn Olivier, MFA, is the author of two chapbooks: *Doom Loop Wonderland* (The Hunger Press, 2021) and *Spindle, My Spindle* (Hermeneutic Chaos Press, 2016). Her poetry is forthcoming in *Ink and Marrow* and *Willimav Journal* and has appeared in *The Missouri Review*, *Rockvale Review*, *Driftwood Press*, and elsewhere. Originally from Louisiana, Olivier now lives in Texas where she teaches English at a community college and lives with her partner and three rescued pets. She is a survivor of domestic violence and breast cancer, and she received an emergency liver transplant last year due to a medication injury. Her recent work explores this experience.

Oxd172 has a background in design and programming and recently started creating digital art. He lives in Antwerp, Belgium. In his work nothing is what it seems: the visually captivating and isolated landscapes, upon closer examination, unveil their synthetic origins, replete with digital anomalies. Similarly, the apparent allure of the blurred figures of women is, in fact, a subjective construct generated within our minds by the phenomenon of pareidolia. All of his creations incorporate imagery generated with AI in some capacity. He further adds additional layers and distortions through coding, and/or utilizing traditional digital photo manipulation techniques.

M Palmer is a graduate of the Miami University writing program. His work has appeared in such places as *Fantasy Magazine*, *Crossed Genres*, the anthology *Tattered Souls*, and most recently in *God's Cruel Joke*. He relishes his yearly retreat to the coast.

Taylor Pate is an Appalachian native, whose work is influenced by this ancient chain of forest. She finds magic in the scent of firewood, the soft hoot of barn owls at dawn, and fields of wildflowers. She graduated from West Virginia University in 2020, studying both painting and history. In 2023 she graduated with her MFA from the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Pate currently works at the Curtis Institute of Music and recently was awarded the Murray Dessner Travel Grant. Through this grant she will travel to Ireland to study ancient Celtic art and create a body of work reflecting on and mixing distant ancestors with contemporary experiences.

PRRMB! designs caustic and ironic phygital illustrations, short series of cheeky yet thoughtful artworks conceived to unleash a visual orgasm and a boost of self-esteem in the spectator. He creates, as well, online short scrolling stories about love, work, loss, memory and pleasure, first-person tales that talkabout life experiences we all share.

Caroline Roberts explores the uneasy relationship between humans and the natural world. Her highly experimental practice mirrors our attempts to understand and control nature. She disrupts and pushes the boundaries of her processes, highlighting the fragmentary nature of knowing and discovery.

Zack Rogow is the author, editor, or translator of more than twenty books or plays. His memoir, *Hugging My Father's Ghost*, will be released by Spuyten Duyvil Publishing in 2024. Rogow's ninth book of poems, *Irreverent Litanies*, was published by Regal House. His play, *Colette Uncensored*, had its first staged reading at the Kennedy Center in Washington DC, and ran in London, Indonesia, Catalonia, San Francisco, and Portland. His blog, *Advice for Writers*, features more than 250 posts on topics of interest to writers. www.zackrogow.com

Jean-Michel Rolland is a French artist born in 1972. A long time musician and painter, he brings together his two passions - the sound and the image - in digital arts since 2010. Through video artworks, he questions the temporality, a genuine fourth dimension inherent to moving image, as well as the duality between his two favorite mediums, the sound and the visual. His formal research is guided by the desire to reveal the intrinsic nature of our perceptual environment and to twist it to better give new realities to the world around us.

Stan Sanvel Rubin's poems have been in numerous US journals well as in Canada, Ireland, and China. Four full-length collections include *There. Here.* (Lost Horse Press) and *Hidden Sequel* (Barrow Street Poetry Book Prize). Recent or forthcoming work in *Decadent Review*, *La Picciotta Barca*, *Lumina*, *Whimsical Poet*, *Sheila-na-gig* and *Prelude*. Born in Philadelphia, he has lived on the north Olympic

Peninsula of Washington for two decades.

Julia Rue is an interdisciplinary Korean American visual artist. Although she primarily creates 2D abstract paintings, her work runs the range from interactive spatial projections to movement art. Julia has been recognized as an emerging artist from top institutions including the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Boston Globe. Her work is represented in private and public spaces all across the USA, Brazil, and Hungary.

Mohammad Amin Shafiei has been enthusiastically taking pictures and can record his feelings with a camera. His approach in photography is experimental, emotional and formalistic.

Claude Clayton Smith, Professor Emeritus of English, Ohio Northern University is the author of eight books and co-editor/translator of four. His own work has been translated into five languages, including Russian and Chinese. His first adventure as a solo editor—*GAUNTLET IN THE GULF: The 1925 Marine Log & Mexican Prison Journal of William F. Lorenz, MD*—was published in March of 2023. He holds a DA from Carnegie-Mellon, an MFA in fiction from the Writers' Workshop at the University of Iowa, an MAT from Yale, and a BA from Wesleyan. He lives with his wife in Madison, Wisconsin. For details on his teaching and writing career, visit his website: claudeclaytonsmith.wordpress.com.

Stephanie Smith is a trans/nonbinary writer living in North Carolina. Their work has been published in Pile Press, Angel Rust, and elsewhere. Currently, they are working on a semi-autobiographical novel: *To Catch A Predator: The Novelization*. Follow them on Instagram: [@bodywithoutmeat](https://www.instagram.com/bodywithoutmeat).

Tina Striuk, a fiber artist was born in Kryvyi Rih, Ukraine. Through hand-tufted soft textures and vibrant colors, she addresses such themes as self-awareness, discovery of inner strength, admiration of nature and exploring questions of existentialism. Being a self-taught artist, she creates intricate pieces combining various techniques, including punch needle embroidery, classic embroidery and knitting.

Chang-Ching Su is a political research-based artist who utilizes photography as his primary medium of expression, shaping his perception and interpretation of the world. He is particularly intrigued by exploring the “infrathins,” the subtle nuances that defy easy definition. Through his photography, moving image, languages, and found objects, he endeavors to capture the vastness of the documentary genre, delving into established power dynamics from a political standpoint that permeates our daily lives. Su holds a BA in Political Science from National Taiwan University and earned his MFA degree from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Samuel Taylor is a storyteller and has published fiction and nonfiction written and oral works.

Susanne van der Meer is a WordWeaver in Trinidad, Colorado. She started to share her poetry a year ago at local open mics, reading in her Dutch accent. English is her second language. Susanne's background in law and continental philosophy show up in the abstract brevity of her writing, while her creative wonder as a fiber artist ways layer in playful sensory tones and imagery. See more TryPhilosophy.com

Reed Venrick is a Florida-based writer, usually publishing poems with themes of nature and aesthetics.

Sarah Welch is a Houston-based artist fixated on the intersections between the built environment and nature. She and partner, James Beard publish comic books on the speculative future of the US Gulf Coast under the imprint, Mystic Multiples. More at: sarahwelch.info and mysticmultiples.com

Shea Wilkinson has been sewing since childhood. Wilkinson worked for several years in the medium of art quilts, but after moving to Russia, she pivoted to working with felted textiles. She is currently living in Russia and earning a degree in fashion and textile design. Wilkinson's work has been exhibited widely in national juried exhibitions, received numerous awards, and been published in books and magazines around the world

Lawrence Wilson's fiction, poetry and essays have appeared in *Albedo One*, *Cerasus*, *Agenda*, *Gramarye*, *One Hand Clapping*, *Lothlorien*, *Dreich*, *Best of British*, *The Darker Side of Love*, on *Salon.com* and in other journals and collections. His collections, *The April Poems*, *Another April*, *An Illustrated April*, and *Brick:*

Poems from the First Year of a Lockdown, are available on Amazon, as is his children's novel, *Mina*, Etc. He is currently Facilitating Poet for the UK's Rare Dementia Support Research Project.

Hannah Winkelbauer studied painting and cultural studies at the Art University Linz, Austria, and at the Accademia di Belle Arti Bologna, Italy. In her work, she references what is often invisible or ignored while documenting reality. Her paintings and drawings have been regularly exhibited at home and abroad since 2006. Her largest solo show was in 2020 at Angerlehner Museum in Thalheim, Austria. The Museum acquired two of her paintings. Her work is also in the possession of the Vienna Imperial Palace and the collection of the province of Upper Austria. Winkelbauer lives and works in Vienna.

Larry Wolf has spent more than 40 years as a criminal defense attorney. Over the past decade and a half, he has slowly and methodically transitioned his hobby, painting, into a successful second career as an abstract artist. His award-winning vibrant, colorful, and textured artwork is collected under the umbrella “A Brush with the Law.” Larry Wolf's pieces have been featured in countless magazines and displayed all over California, in galleries across the United States, and as far away as Germany and China.

Carol Wyatt is a graduate of the University of Houston Creative Writing Program. After slogging years through corporate America, she is now retired and living in Costa Rica with her husband and their rescue dogs and cats (current count is 4 & 3 respectively).

w.v.v.v is an anonymous artist, photographer, and AR designer best known for their pastel pink photography and Instagram filters. Art creation is a way to satisfy their lust for customizing the world with their aesthetics. In 2017, they started posting a series of infrared and full spectrum photos with nuanced image manipulation. The photos have gained attention on the internet due to their unique and controversial colors. w.v.v.v transcends ordinary scenes into a fantastical landscape that offers the audience an imaginative escape. The objective of their work is to start a revolution, using art to build the sort of society they envisioned, and make viewers re-evaluate our world and our existence.

Leilei Xia was born in Guangzhou, China. She is a multimedia artist who works in tactile art, experimental animations, video art, and participatory collective art. As one of the editors of independent science zine *Icosa Magazine* and the founder of tactile art collective *Tactileye*, Leilei explores how tactility and bodily feelings are manifested in different medium, and is interested in combining the process and the result of art together to amke art not as a noun but as a verb.



