

VOLUME V

The resounding truth is that we are akin to Indra's Net, reflecting every aspect of each other within ourselves. Our very individuality is a beam of light refracted from the prism of our collective consciousness. No better service exists than to draw upon this rich soil and sow a history resonating this truth.



Kent State University Honors College
2018

BRAINCHILD

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A Literary & Arts Magazine



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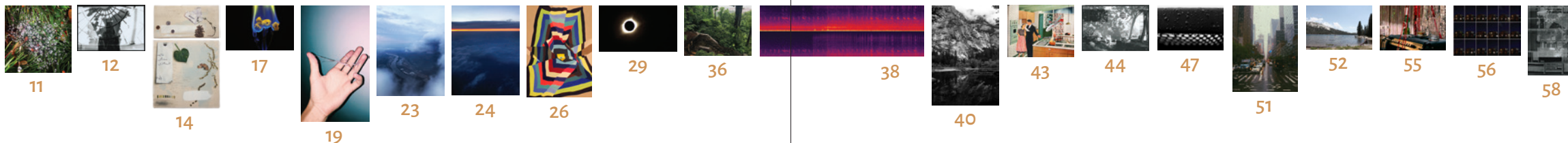
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FOREWORD

As a publication whose foundation rests upon a bedrock of honesty and authenticity, navigating a post-truth world is a perilous endeavor. Truth is a difficult notion to nail down when it no longer conforms to the propositions of reality. Forsaken without a compass for purpose, we're abandoned to our own devices, which may be our greatest blessings or our most emphatic curses.

Our era enunciates a truth that is ever-shifting and transient. We must remember that our worth is in our words. From prehistoric paintings in the Cave of El Castillo to Ginsberg's "Howl," humankind has left its legacy in words and imagery. What kind of legacy are we leaving?

The act of writing is inherently defiant. We scribble a piece of ourselves onto paper and the world judges it while it judges the world. In this collection, we chose to publish works that rekindled our connection with our roots. Each poem imprinted upon these pages is a seed planted to stretch across our collective memory. The photographic testaments to the majesty of nature in Christina Godfrey's "Morning Glory" or Grace Harms' "Mirror Lake" are as much an atavism as they are a form of activism.

The works contained herein are a radical reintegration with what we consider to be real. Real like the scent of morning coffee and the memory of how our mothers brewed it, as Olivia Swasey's "Pourover" compassionately captures. Real like the palpable anxiety when familial ties unwind, as illustrated by Brittany Cole's "The Blue Cat."

Every time we reread a poem or review a painting we reintegrate it into our experience, contextualizing it within our lives' continuum. This is a sacrament we seldom keep holy. However, if we let them, our limitations can sculpt us limitless.

As ever-changing beings articulating our autonomy through our ontology, we reserve the right to redefine our identities and to discover ourselves where we envision ourselves, as A.E. Kessler courageously proclaims in "Call It Home." Our perceptions segregate our intentions from our outcomes while outlining the barriers between the natural and the artificial. These concepts are cautiously examined in Seth Murray's "What is Given and What is Taken Away," a modern myth contrasting the mountains with Manhattan. This fine line between civilization and uncivilized wilderness is accented by Allison Thomas' "Stairs Up Red Mountain," which demonstrates how the two blur, how prose overlaps with photography, and how the sacred maxim stands that for every gain, there is reciprocal loss.

We crafted this issue to capture the playfulness that populates creative spontaneity. We believe these works enact a living, breathing art: a catalog of culture that fluctuates as much as we do. It is our sincerest intention that every reading is a renewed awareness, that as you traverse these landscapes of language and imagery, a part of you is embedded in this book, just as a piece of every generous contributor has nestled itself into our personal paradigms.

Our human operating system is words and imagery, and every thought we manifest is indebted to the countless generations who carved the path before us. Our virtues and values, our fears and fantasies, are the living evolution of a singular human conversation. We are suspended like luminous water droplets in a spiderweb, ensnared by the threads of our particular space in our particular time.

The resounding truth is that we are akin to Indra's Net, reflecting every aspect of each other within ourselves. Our very individuality is a beam of light refracted from the prism of our collective consciousness. No better service exists than to draw upon this rich soil and sow a history resonating this truth. This is why we write, why we paint, why we photograph the present. Regardless of the contexts we create and the culture that inundates us, we are here right now and we make a difference. When your voice merges with the human chorus, what legacy will you leave? What words do you want to embody you?

Joseph Langan
Editor in Chief



Living Room Realities

Brittany Cole

my dad sits in his leather recliner,
not reclined, staring straight ahead.
i sit on the floor and look at him carefully,
follow his gaze to the tv. it's not on.
my little sister gracie runs into
the room, holding her barbie and
g.i. joe dolls. "daddy will you play
dolls with me?" she falls into his
knees and feet. he doesn't move.
i'm ten, so i know more than
gracie about what dad's going through.
"go ask mom," i tell her, as she
begs at dad's feet. she begins to whine,
and i pick up her wriggling body and
plop her down in the next room.
she runs off like a wind-up toy.
i think my dad has created something
quiet in his head, because he doesn't
hear us anymore. i think my dad has
moved out of his head, or left his
words in another country.
"dad, could we play catch later?" i
wonder, asking lightly. he used to
toss the ball with me every evening
after dinner. "just tonight?"
he hasn't since he's come back.
he says nothing, and i sink.
i know where he went because he wore
camouflage and stood real straight,
looking just like gracie's g.i. joe doll,
but i don't know what he did there,
because he hasn't told me any stories.
i don't know if he hurt anyone
while he was away,
but looking at his face,
his eyes hollow like the plastic eyes
of mr. snuffins my teddy bear,
i think
he killed his heart.

"Living Room Realities" is highlighted as the winner of the 2017 Wick Honors Poetry Scholarship.

If My Home Were an Album, Would You Listen?

Regis Louis

Stamp Ohio into vinyl.
Set the needle on its hilly grooves
until music moves through the plains.
Let the record rust until the whole state
feels an itch beneath its dusty towns.
Spin, spin, skip, scratch.
Heroin in baby bottles.
That's the title track,
the radio single to which the nation
will sing along.

Run the anthem back.
Let them sing *Ohio, Ohio*
until the needle snaps,
or they lull themselves to sleep.
They dream of corn.
They dream of rust.
They spin, spin, dream, scratch
against the dirty needle
that traces along Ohio
like a turntable.

There are other tracks
on the B-side of this album.
Songs of rivers and soil
and the fertile crescent of the West,
and bicycles that flew like Icarus,
but the radio won't play those,
because the nation wants to spin
and skip and scratch the shared itch
that buried itself
beneath the country's skin
like the bodies
of the Hopewell people
that tucked themselves
beneath the Earth
in great mounds,
in the mouth of some serpent
that will swallow us all.



Morning Glory

Christina Godfrey

Medium: iPhone camera



Back on Planet Earth

Sam Dunn

It is natural to want to travel and experience a new world. The one we reside in is not fully mastered or understood, yet we're considering leaving in search of another sustainable planet. But for now, this is what we have, and all we need to do is start exploring. This is a form of in-camera manipulation.

Medium: Canon AE1 film camera

Pourover

Olivia Swasey

The yellow fingertips of light through my curtain
wake me up at nine, and first I think of coffee.

Silver kettle water heats while I, underslept,
put grounds in the unbleached filter, two scoops,
and perch the cone on the rim of my mug.

Coffee for one.

I catch the water before it meets a rolling boil
and pour it in circles over the bitter grit
just the way my mother taught me.

Sometimes I feel that, these days,
it has become unfashionable to love your mother.

My mother, with the sunspots and the smile lines
and the thin, graceful hands that show me in a memory
how to pour the water so it doesn't overflow,
who reminds me not to let it boil or I'll burn the beans.

In that phosphene afterimage in my mind's eye,
her floral hair like a forest floor falls over her shoulder,
and I ache for home for the first time all week.

My mother's mother, aged prematurely by grief unattended,
could not provide the kind of mothering
that her daughter someday would.

My mother, with kinder eyes than I've ever seen,
tells me that she does not love her mother,
but she does not hate her either.

You do not have to love your mother, but
I want it to be fashionable to love your mother.

This is what I think, in my hand-me-down bathrobe,
as I scald my tongue on too-hot coffee
and text my mother good morning.



Scraps, Bits, and Pieces

Sarah Kronz

Media: oil, acrylic, guache, and graphite on canvas

Call It Home

A.E. Kessler

Being back home comes with a new out-of-placeness. Maybe it's that I've gotten bigger and my room has gotten smaller. Could I have outgrown a room I didn't live in for nine months? Nine months is the amount of time in which an entirely new human can be formed. Am I an entirely new human? Do I no longer fit in the place where I've spent years building a home? The walls, pink with an orange stripe, are no longer a reflection of a mood I can sit comfortably in, not that I can sit comfortably at all in this room.

Maybe I haven't outgrown my room. Perhaps I've gotten smaller, and my room has gotten bigger.

Bigger in the way that when you take out all the furniture you can truly see how much room is in the room. How much space there is to live in. To cry in. To feel in. To exist in. To be in. If only the room were this big when all the furniture was settled in its place.

Without me to take up the space, my room is so much bigger. Unbearably big. I no longer feel like I have a right to take up space in this place that is supposed to be my safe space. A home that I spent years building to belong in is no longer mine. I sit on my bed in the corner, and it feels like I could walk miles before I reached the door in the other corner. The rest of my house is a world away, but more frighteningly, I'm a world away from the rest of my house.

It doesn't provide the same solace. In high school, I would sit at my desk for hours, jumping from assignment to assignment, while also getting distracted about every ten minutes because of the migraines that made my brain feel like it would implode if I focused for any longer than that. At least once a day, I would stick a neon Post-It note on the wall beside me, convinced that it was my next big idea, the one that would mean something when I looked at it more than a day, a week, a month, a year later. Now they're stale and barely hanging onto the wall. The worst of them are lists of young adult books that I will never read and quotes from a past obsession, like "soon I'll match them in renown." The best of them are such vague ideas that I'm not even sure I knew what they meant when I wrote them down, like "binary decision making" or "anti-essentialism." Instead of inspiring me, they only now make me wonder if I've lost some ardor for interests I used to have.

Now I spend the whole day in one room not because I'm so deep in some new philosophical theory that the world has melted away, but because I'm afraid of being looked at without being seen. The only other people who would see me are the family members who also reside in the house. They should be the people who know me the best (they have known me the longest), but they know me the least profoundly. To feel looked at by the people who are supposed to love you is alienating. Am I the one keeping these people from seeing me? Will they ever be able to see me? I have a different perspective—on the world, on politics, on time, on myself. Have I never been seen or have I been keeping secrets? I don't think I can handle comments like "I just don't get it" or "but you don't seem like you would be." Can I know myself better from this alienating viewpoint, or should I put more stock in the external if I am the only one who knows?

In a way, being back home is a regression. I remember what it felt like to see a queer person owning it, and it gave me a tacit permission to be myself. I remember what it felt like. Is it more than just a memory? None of those people exist here. Of course, I exist, but in a stifled, silent way. I'm sure they exist, too, and that I'm even friends with a few, but being here feels so much smaller and more oppressive. Am I putting myself back in a box that I didn't know I couldn't handle before I busted out, or have I changed? Learning of social constructions and institutional violence, I have outgrown the concept of boxes, but not the physicality of being trapped.

I'm trapped in this town. In this house. In this room. In my body. In my mind.

In a view of the world from a perspective that nobody knows I have. Is that even relevant? The dysphoria is only bad when I think about it. When I think about how I'm trapped in a body and a mind and a worldview that doesn't align with an inner sense of self, I disappear altogether. I cease to exist as a real person, and exist only as disparate versions of myself, selves that exist in the minds of the people who have known of me. I'm trapped in the minds of other people. How bad is the dysphoria for those versions? Is it even possible for them to have dysphoria? How can I be jealous of a self that doesn't exist anymore? Of versions of myself that don't belong to me? I belong to them and the dysphoria belongs to me, the realest version.

I don't know when "I" became synonymous with dysphoria, but I know there is a significant correlation with a geographical location. The longer I am home, the worse it gets. It's only a matter of time before I break the scale. With every "precious daughter" comment I grow a foot taller.

Pretty soon I'll be ten feet tall.

I'd never be comfortable with the alienation if I were a tall person. But being short is a prison in itself, as if it is something distinctly female. The irony of height dysphoria is particularly potent in this moment and is heightened with every foot I grow. I knew I was done growing in the sixth grade, but every gendered comment feels as othering as becoming a giant.

At school, there were no comments and no questions, only self-policing of a self that I am and a self that I want to be. I was at peace and at place in my room, my dorm, my home, but not in myself. Out-of-place acquires a whole new depth even in yourself; you can't find a home. I think part of growing up is the process of building a home within yourself. I wake up, and my house is my house. A house I no longer call a home. I wake up and my room is my room. A room I have outgrown and one that has outgrown me. I wake up and my body is my body. When will I call it home?



Blossom

Samantha McCray

It's such a fickle thing to witness:
A sprout, a bud, a flower, then gone;
A babe, a girl, a woman, then gone.



Still Life: Fire

Grace Beyer

Medium: DSLR camera

This image captures the moment in which a blue flame engulfs these flowers before they are scorched. The flowers were dipped in isopropyl alcohol to create the striking colors in the fire.

twenty-six

Ajdin Kulic

the dress is cotton
no, it's a sheet
yes, it's mine

hiding on a clothesline
always had green grass
under its dangling feet

tortured dangling feet
who is this sheet
it's flying six feet
into the air

six muddy feet

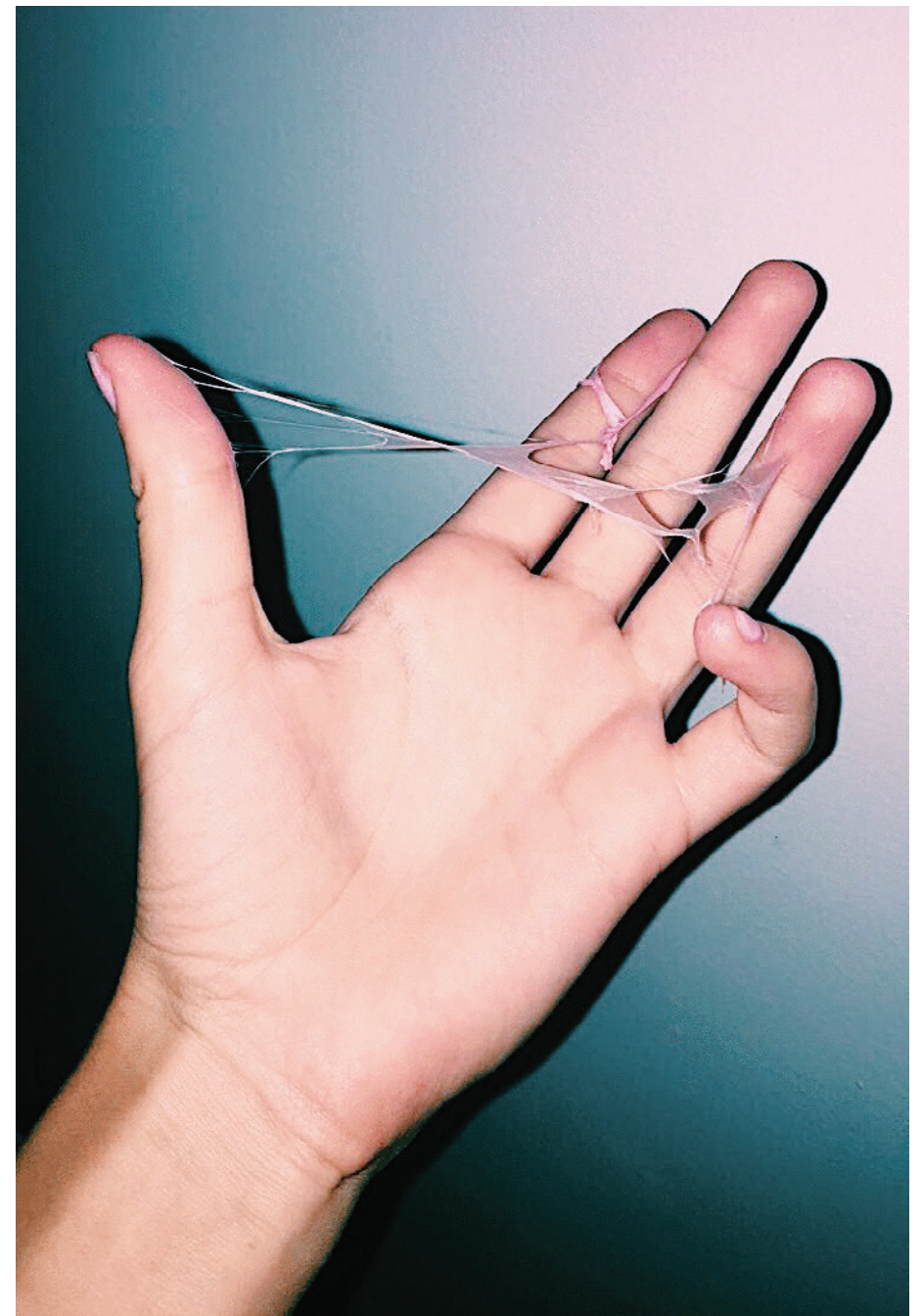
twenty-seven

Ajdin Kulic

bubbling hot coffee
burnt a hole in my pocket
where i keep my change

a penny doesn't mean anything
until you start collecting

but today i'll stay the same



A Situation

Allison Thomas

Medium: iPhone camera

The Blue Cat

Brittany Cole

My cat Jane looks like MC Hammer. She's a long-haired beaut, which means she's extra furry all over, including her hind legs, which are especially furry. My brother pointed out to me once that she looks like she's wearing baggy pants, and he remarked that he'd always wanted to get MC Hammer's autograph. Jane doesn't think this is very funny, but I do.

I'm sitting on my bed watching Jane clean herself on the floor. She's mostly gray—my brother refers to her as “the blue cat” because she can look a sort of bluish gray—with a white patch on her chest like a bib. When she goes in for a really hearty lick, her breath gets caught in her throat and she sounds like she's growling. She tries so hard to be thorough, but I just don't see how licking her paw and then rubbing it on her cheek makes anything cleaner. I've never understood that about cats.

Jane finishes and jumps up on the end of the bed, looking around with wide eyes. I call to her in encouragement, and she sets down the paw she had raised in mid-step, moving a few paces closer to me. I shift my legs underneath the blankets, which stops her as she surveys where the movement came from, but I keep calling to her.

“Come here baby, it's just my legs.” I stretch my hand out to her and speak in a high-pitched voice. She can be so timid. All I want to do is cuddle with her; I know that would distract me from my anxious thoughts.

Jane's eyes shift to me, and, after a moment of consideration, she continues to approach. When she is finally within reach, I stroke her head and back. She keeps walking toward me until she is standing on my thighs, purring.

I'm waiting for a phone call. My cell phone lies next to me. I usually have it set to vibrate, but right now I have it set to ring—as if I could possibly miss this call. My eyes keep darting back to the screen—still black.

“I'm waiting for my mom to call,” I explain to Jane. I like to keep my cat informed.

Jane lowers her butt to take a seat on my lap. I keep petting her. I think the movement of my hands is good for my nerves.

“I'm waiting on the news about my brother.” I glance at my phone; still no call. My hands are cold, yet my palms are sweaty; I feel bad petting Jane, because I'm basically wiping my dirty hands on her “clean” head, but her soft fur is so comforting.

I begin to think about the time my brother and I got sunglasses for Easter when I was maybe seven and he was maybe four. They were bright plastic sunglasses, mine green and my brother's orange. We wore them around the house pretending we were blind mice, using wooden croquet mallets without the heads as walking sticks. The heads of the croquet mallets were always untwisting from the sticks, and we used the sticks for things like canes and batons and toy guns. But that day, we were blind mice, walking around with our eyes closed, bumping into the wall or the couch and giggling until we collapsed into heaps on the floor. I think that was the day I almost fell down the basement stairs, but Parker yelled at me to open my eyes right before I set my foot down. It landed awkwardly on the first step, and I was able to throw my weight backward and fall on my butt. I've sometimes wondered if he was cheating and playing with his eyes open or if he had some mystical sense I was in danger, but he says he can't remember, and either way, Mom called the game off right then. From then on we only played it when Dad was home.

I groan. “I wish she would call soon.” I pet Jane with both hands now. The weightless feeling of the memory lingers with me, and I long to relive it. To laugh with my brother again, to have bright, hopeful eyes, unafraid of the future. I massage Jane's head with my thumbs. She closes her eyes and rocks with the movement of my hands. I long to be as clueless and content as Jane is.

I haven't moved my legs in several minutes, and they grow restless for a new position. I tuck them under me, disturbing Jane's foundation. She stands up and moves to a new spot on the bed beside me.

“She should have called by now.” I sigh. I stop petting Jane. Jane settles next to me, curls into a spiral and lays her head down.

I don't want to be using my phone when my mom calls, so that I don't accidentally hang up on her, but I need to review the symptoms again. A site called *blindness.org* was the last site open on my phone's browser, and I scan the information until I'm reading “yellow flecks in the retina... decrease in color perception... 20/200 vision by age 50...” I don't understand any of it specifically, but I know it translates to a dark outlook for Parker. I frown and set my phone aside. Mom said she'd call as soon as she found out the news. I'm trying to slow my heart, but its beat is too frantic; the nerves are more than just a head game, they're deep within me. No matter how I try to convince myself to be calm, my body won't settle down.

I start staring at the light switch next to my bedroom door, replaying in my head the last time I spoke to Parker. My brother has a way of making light of everything; before my family went in to the doctor's office for the consultation today, he had said to me on the phone, “Don't worry, sis. This might be the first test I pass.” I tried to laugh, but I cried. He heard me and said, “Just take deep breaths. I'm still alive, and you're still alive. We're okay.”

Suddenly I hear the notes of some wind instrument, and my heart knocks against the inside of my chest. I pick up my phone and hit the green button a couple times with my clammy thumb before my phone answers the call.

“How is he?” I blurt. “What did the tests say?”

“Oh, sweetie,” my mom says, voice catching, and my dad has to take the phone from her. A lump forms in my throat.

“Hey, Rachel,” Dad says.

“Is it bad?” I mumble, mouth full of saliva, which always happens when I'm about to cry.

“Well, it's not good, but it's not all bad,” he replies, drawing out what he's going to say.

I urge him on, chanting, “Okay, okay, okay.” I bounce and nod, which makes Jane jump off the bed.

“He does have Stargardt disease.”

I close my eyes hard, squeezing my lips between my teeth. I suck in a harsh breath.

“But they don't think he will completely lose his vision, at least not for a while.”

Dad recites some statistics to me and gives me a medical overview of the condition.

I have no idea how eyeballs operate. The impersonal terminology irritates me; “mascular degenerative disease” is just another way of saying “God has decided to drop my brother down a very dark hole.”

I ask Dad to hand me back to Mom. She only cries some more, though, which annoys me because I'm trying really hard not to cry. I ask if I could talk to Parker, but Mom says he's doing a few more tests in a different room.

“Well, I'm gonna get off the phone then,” I say, massaging my face with my palm. This exercise does not help my headache. “Call me if you find out anything else. And have Parker call me as soon as he's done. And tell him I love him.” My voice drops on those last two words; I feel like I'm going to heave. I hang up before they hear me cry.

I drop the phone to my side, feeling grossly powerless. I recall a time when we were younger—Parker was in middle school, I was in high school, and we still rode the same bus.

Some kid who was older than Parker but younger than me punched my brother in the face because Parker had accidentally elbowed him in the nose when he turned around. Blood from Parker's nose gushed into his gloves while the kid who punched him bellyached about his sore face. He was such a weasely-looking kid, this jerk who punched my brother. I only recall a silver flash of my vision before I had the kid by the jacket collar and was shouting in his face, slamming him up against the bus window repeatedly, threatening him with all the curses I knew. The weasel stood there, sobbing. "How fucking dare you! How fucking dare you touch him!" I shouted so close to his face that my spit joined with his tears. Some wrestler my age tore me away just as I had started punching the kid in the arm with every ounce of strength I could muster, and when I was finally separated from him I was so hysterical that I was shaking and crying, yelling at other kids on the bus to get some tissues for my brother, who was looking at me with giant, almost scared eyes. I got suspended for a week. I had never felt such an angry, instinctual reaction like that in my life. The moment was surreal. Parker was very quiet around me for the next week, and started doing favors at home, refilling my glass of water or offering to take out the trash for me.

I cry now because I don't have anyone to punch for him this time.

Jane jumps up on the bed again and marches right up to me, her yellow-green eyes demanding that I pet her. I sit with my arms at my sides. She sits next to me, her paw reaching out toward me, kneading in mid-air. I lamely put a hand on her head.

I wonder what my brother would have done that day on the bus if I hadn't stepped in and let loose on that kid. I know Parker wouldn't have punched him or cursed at him. He would have probably been better off if I had stayed out of it, probably would have said some kind, insightful remark to the kid, and they would have been best friends after that. Parker's like that.

I should be there with them today. I should be with my parents and my brother. They live three hours away, and I should have made the car ride, said "Screw it" to my midterms—organic chemistry won't make me feel better anyway—called off work for the first time this year. But Parker swore he'd be mad at me if I dropped all that just to hear a couple sentences in person, but now it feels like so much more than a couple sentences; it feels like I've abandoned them.

As I am sniffing, wiping my nose on my flannel sleeve, Jane lies down on my lap, folding up in what I refer to as "meatloaf" position, legs tucked beneath her. I halfheartedly pet her. She purrs nonetheless, and her eyes work shut. The beat of her purr rocks her tiny body gently back and forth. She looks so content. I close my eyes, a few remaining tears overflowing, and feel her soft fur.

My brother's eyes are pale blue, just like mine. I think about the beautiful way he sees the world, always finding the glint of humor, and I know that he is stronger than I am. He will endure. Perhaps I cry because I still don't know how to be his older sister. I feel unhinged, aimless, erratic.

The warmth from Jane's body radiates in my lap. Her purr is a steady beat for my heart to match. She turns her head up at me, eyes still closed, body softly lurching. She feels my hands petting her, purrs faster. Her warmth seeps further into me. Thinking of Parker, I reach for my car keys.



The Inside of a Dream

Natalie Brandt

Medium: iPhone camera

Ethereal skies over Pittsburgh. I awoke to this scene and, for a small moment, believed I must have been dreaming.



Sky is Burning

Natalie Brandt

Sunrise somewhere over the Midwest.

Medium: iPhone camera

Hydrogen

Noah Sitch

Standing shoulder to shoulder in that field,
I watched you silently float over the parallel
lines that spanned the clearing.

Who could have thought that a spark
would bring Beauty to bend at its knees?

Great Firestorm in the sky, no one
predicted you in their forecast. Highs
of 280 degrees and winds of 50 miles per hour.

That was too much—even for you,
wonderful, symmetrical ship. Your
bones charred and collapsed. And
your children fled from your mangled remains.



Folds

Sarah Kronz

Medium: oil on canvas

A flattened representation of another painting that was folded in this configuration.

Throat Beetles

Nathaniel Seres

Ever since that dismal, dilating day,
we knew there was a price to pay.

You said it, I said it, we all said it,
but the words never truly left.

It sits in the back of your throat, caressing syllables,
carefully practiced, notes on a silk violin—

they sit back and spew,
and the beetle remains.

A hulking, armored crawler sprawled so earnestly and enviously,
an executioner plying fresh necks to a rack.

The beetle sits and waits and bates its legs against your larynx,
then indulges in the flesh of the pharynx.

A soldier at his job, moiling in the languid sanguine darkness of words.

When we pass one another, I always wonder,
do the beetles communicate with each other?

Fresh clicks and rapid slicks of mucus-covered insects incentivizing,
how best to say what cannot be said:
vocalize what can't materialize.

I sometimes want to reach in and pry that beetle out,
but I know that after what words splayed,
what sins prayed and thorn-adorned remarks bade,
we may never go back to that time

when your words were yours and my words mine.

Counting Stars and Space

Regis Louis

“Do you think cavemen knew
what burned and what didn’t?”
The mouth of the campfire blows
white smoke from its lungs,
and logs collapse like blood
vessels beneath the skin.

“What?” she says.

“Like do you think they messed up
those early fires, learning
that mud and leaves and grass
don’t burn like wood does?”

“Hm.”

She isn’t interested.

“I really don’t know.”

She wants to be given space
so I count the stars above me
as they begin to emerge,
little flames buoyed
on a deepening sea
of purple turning black.
One, two, three,
more and more arrive.

The silence expands between us,
like the space between
those distant pinpoints of light,
and the night is filled
by the sound of falling water,
or rather, the sound of water striking stone.

Falling water
carries no sound of its own.

It descends

like a blessing, shifting
from stone to stream to soil,
each surface sings a different song.

I count stars and listen as the water
wears against the slab it is softening.

In time, the stone will forget to reject this blessing.

It will make room to hold the water,
and moss and bugs and fish will find life.

“Do you think cavemen had depression?”

Now she’s asking the important questions.

“Yeah, sure.”

“You think?”

“I do.”

Nothing. And then,
“I mean, did they have medical, clinical depression.
Undiagnosed, you know?”

There is no delicate way to answer this
without losing count of the stars above.
I speak words that mean nothing more
than the waves the sounds make
as they wash from me to her
through the growing sea of emptiness.

We both stare into the night.
In the distance, water pounds
against stubborn stone,
as softly as it can.
I am counting stars,
and she is counting spaces between them.



August's Corona

Laikyn Pavey

Taken on August 21st during the total eclipse of the sun in 2017 in Cerulean, Kentucky.

Medium: DSLR camera

A Different Shade of Green

Annie Livingston

I met a girl who collected habits,
 had a kink for quirk, and fallen leaves.
 She needed to see the rocks scattered on my desk
 before she could ever love me. Socks slid on first
 when I watched her dress, I kissed her
 feet the next day.
 They were the same size as cinnamon before it's in my mouth,
 a sweet that stays if I don't try
 and describe the taste. She never lied, just got too quiet, had a party trick
 for playing dead. Her walls were taped
 with postcards, places she'd been with the ex. She built her body
 in a smaller house than mine, so when she laid her head across my ribs,
 it moved in time to my breath. I would have cradled her toes forever
 just to keep them warm, would have left my arms as adhesive for pictures
 of New York. Except she didn't listen
 between nouns, always waiting for a part of me she could use
 in a poem, or take in her mouth. And it was sexy
 until I wanted steady, it was beautiful
 until the words ran out. I don't know how to write this
 without being a hypocrite, how to show I held her
 without providing measurements, but her favorite color
 was green, that's why she'd look me in the eye. She was happiest
 when it was snowing, when she could make angels, then leave them behind.

What is Given and What is Taken Away

Seth Murray

"I should have known [...] I am the rain. [...] I am the land [...] and I am the rain. The grass will grow out of me in a little while." —John Steinbeck, *To a God Unknown*

A man kneels in the creek, and the forest is still around him. The mountains loom, casting an expanding shadow. The late-autumn light begins its afternoon decline, streaming gold through the trees and intimating the day's quiet close. His head is down, his eyes scanning. The cold water runs over his hands as they sift through the murky bed, trying to sort through the muck of the creek, only to have the water ease it back together. He is searching for something, and he has been for a long time.

Mark sat on the pier watching the East River and knew it was time for a change. He was an investment banker for a firm on Wall Street, which basically meant it was his job to manage and grow obscene amounts of money for people who could not be bothered to pay attention to it themselves. He earned his living, which was not insignificant in itself, scraping shavings off that money. He had come from the Midwest—good grades in high school landed him at an elite East Coast university, which served as a gateway to Wall Street. He had no idea why he'd chosen finance as a major; it just seemed natural. One went to college to open doors to a better life, and a better life in this country meant making money. A lot of it.

His wife, Lisa, was not in finance. She worked from home as a programmer for a tech startup out West. They'd met at a coffee shop while he was interning with the firm that now employed him. She only lived in New York because she'd grown up there, unlike the large majority of New Yorkers. They'd gotten married exactly a year after he graduated, once he had begun working full-time for the firm. Things fell into place.

He'd enjoyed his first few years in New York. He was from a smaller town, so the motion of the place fascinated him. He liked to walk in the crowds, lost in the lights and the bustle. For him, riding the subway was like watching a movie with no coherent plot. This didn't bother him. He'd gone out clubbing with the other interns, snorting cocaine in the bathrooms and ordering bottle service they would hardly ever finish. They were already making more money than eighty percent of the general population. After he got serious with Lisa and began working full-time, however, this stopped. That seemed the appropriate course of action.

After about three years of working in New York, the clamorous motion of the city had begun to unsettle him. Rather than eating in the breakroom or going out to a nearby bar with some of his coworkers, as had been his habit, he started walking down to the East River for his lunch break. He liked to sit on a bench on Pier 16, eat his salami and cheese sandwich with mustard, and watch the water move. Even on a winter day like this one, with the wind cutting through the wool of his coat, he found a calm in the water's solemn drift. This life wasn't working anymore, he realized. He crumpled up and threw away the Saran wrap his sandwich had been wrapped in and walked to the railing. He spit into the water and watched the white glob of saliva be carried away. This made him feel better, the knowledge that a piece of him was being taken away from the city, somewhere else.

"Can you please tell me again why Colorado?" Lisa said. He had both hands on the wheel of the rental car as they cruised carefully around the turns.

"Look at this place," Mark said. "What could be more different from New York?"

"Los Angeles?"

“Smartass. You know what I mean. It’s not about the specific city itself so much as the need to get away from cities altogether. Anyway, keep your eyes open. The GPS says we should be there soon.” Lisa had agreed it was time to get out of New York, but she couldn’t understand why Colorado. She’d gone along with this scouting trip, though, out of curiosity.

He had always been interested in Colorado. He had taken a trip there with his mom when he was nine to visit a friend of hers from high school. They had stayed in Denver for much of it, seeing the mountains from a distance. On one of the final days, however, his mom’s friend had taken them up to explore. He could not remember much from that day trip into the wild, but he felt that it had been special. That feeling he’d had by the water in Manhattan almost seemed like it sprang from a source beyond memory; he didn’t know exactly what it was trying to tell him, but he would find it.

This trip with Lisa shook those memories loose. He understood, as they drove through the narrow mountain roads, why this place had stuck with him. There was a wildness here that he felt wouldn’t bother him in the same way that life in New York had. The mountains seemed to offer what the Manhattan skyscrapers couldn’t. Their stark enormity, paired with the silence of the forests, suggested a seriousness, a sense of meaning, much deeper than the superficiality of the city. He’d found a number of homes for sale online, scattered across the state, and this was the last one for them to visit.

The woman’s voice talking through the GPS directed them to turn, and they followed a gravel driveway almost a mile to a little brick ranch house. Mark and Lisa parked and walked up to the door, only to find a note tacked to it. It read:

“Had to run into town. Be back soon. Feel free to look around. Bridget.”

The backyard was huge. It had been cleared of trees, with only a few stumps remaining, but beyond that began the forest. “Listen,” Mark said. “Do you hear that?”

“What?” Lisa responded.

“Running water,” he said excitedly, and jogged toward it. At the very back end of the yard, just before the beginning of the forest and at the foot of the mountains, ran a creek. It was the kind that looked like it had just been carved out of the ground. The water ran gently over the stones, and the banks were at least five feet on each side.

“We had one of these in my backyard growing up!” he said.

“We definitely didn’t,” she said playfully, nudging his arm. “Not many brooks on the Upper West Side.”

“It’s a creek, yuppie. Not a ‘brook,’” Mark said. Lisa snorted and rolled her eyes.

Mark had indeed grown up playing in the creek behind his house, digging into the rocks for arrowheads and salamanders or splashing in the cool water on summer’s hot days. As he grew older and made friends, they began to play “capture the creek,” a game that was essentially capture the flag, but with the territories divided by the creek, which served as no man’s land. All bets were off in that shallow water. They would throw each other to the ground and lob handfuls of clay and mud at each other.

Mark sat on the creek bank’s edge and lowered himself down to it.

“What are you doing, you lunatic?” Lisa said, laughing.

“Look at this,” Mark said, reaching down to touch the water. “This feeds into a river down the way, which eventually connects to the Mississippi.”

“Very good.”

“And through that...” he said, trailing off.

“And through that?”

“The world. To have this would be to have it all.” He had talked himself into a state of wonder. Then he smiled, bent down, and splashed water up at her.

“What a gentleman!” she yelled, but she wasn’t upset. She could tell he was already set on the place, even though they had yet to look inside.



They arrived for good just over two months later. They landed in Denver and drove the several hours southwest to their new home. They had hired movers and loaded all their possessions onto a moving truck, which would arrive in a few days. They carried with them duffel bags of necessities. Mark saw the wild they drove through differently this time than he had before.

“We’re not visitors anymore,” he said.

“Uh-huh,” she said. “Regular hill-folk, that’s us.”

“Come on, we’ve got a place here now! These mountains belong to us.”

“Babe, I hate to break it to you, but there’s a town not thirty minutes’ drive from the house. We’re not exactly beyond the pale.”

“You know what I mean.”

Indeed, what had seemed so untameable before, so ferociously rugged, now looked as if it had room for them. He pulled off the road onto their long driveway.

It was hotter than usual that summer. Mark hated the heat, and one of the appeals of living out here was that he assumed it would be cooler, that the thin air would be less likely to retain the sun’s warmth.

But the escalating temperatures meant that the stillness of that thinned air only gave it a sense of fetidity.

It seemed as if the mosquitoes were able to soar and swoop more easily than they would have in the thickness of a lower altitude.

The keys had been left for them under the mat, the previous owner departed. For that symbolic entry into their new home, they were hit with a blast of heat. The air conditioning wasn’t running.

“Looks like she had the power shut off when she left,” Lisa said.

“Might just be a blown fuse or flipped breaker or something,” Mark said. They set off to find the breaker box, but even after flipping all of the switches several times nothing happened. Mark called the power company and they said they’d be able to get someone out there the next morning.

“Well,” Mark said, beaming, “I guess we’ll really be living over the edge tonight.”

“Wonderful.”

Thankfully, a spare mattress had been left behind, and they’d bought a couple sleeping bags and pillows at the airport to hold them over while their things were en route. Lisa, tired after the flight and drive, decided to take a nap. Mark said he’d join her later.

He walked across the backyard to the creek. In his pocket was a pair of fingernail clippers. He plopped down again by the creek’s edge and began clipping, flicking his white nails into the water and watching the current pull them away. Many would end up in the mud, or wedged between the rocks, thus planting a piece of himself in the riverbed. At least one he hoped would make its way to the Mississippi and be carried as an emissary to the world. Maybe—and he knew this was logically faulty, but didn’t care—it would somehow make its way back to New York. It could be a message from him, to let them know he’d gotten away. He sat thinking about this until he realized the light had begun to weaken, and he felt a hand on his shoulder.

“Hey,” she said gently. “Too hot to sleep. Want some company?”

He patted the grass to his right.

“I know that look, Mark. Lost in your own head. You’re gonna slip right out of this world one day if you aren’t careful.”



Peter arrived nine months later. They could tell from the start that he was a serious

baby. He did not cry unless he needed something, and even that was seldom. Lisa was unsure about raising a child this far past the edge of society. She'd been happy to humor Mark's project, and was even enjoying the quietness of life out here, but she feared a child was too much.

Mark was thrilled with the idea. Here was his chance to make something away from the mess of the world. His son would not flounder in the riptide of the city, or the inanity of the suburbs. Peter would belong to the wild. He would have a childhood marked by the stillness of the forest and the ordered chaos of the natural world. His body would be sculpted by the hardness of the earth and, through their love, Mark and Lisa would ensure the ranch house, set at the foot of the mountains, would be a counterweight against it. There would be a balance, the softness and the warmth of home against the harshness of the land. And from that a human would form.

Mark had not known, really, what exactly the feeling was that so violently took him out here, that caused him to uproot a stable, comfortable life. This was it. He was sure of it. The water that had driven him out of the city and deposited him half a continent away had now revealed that purpose: Peter.

When Peter was six, Mark took him down to the creek. He wanted to teach him about the water, to impart just how vital it is, and how it had brought them both here. He wanted to show him how to have fun in the water, too. Just as Mark had played in the creek behind his childhood home, he wanted Peter to learn the joy of the hunt for salamanders, to flip rocks over in search of fossils. More than that, though, he wanted to teach his son how to apply his imagination to the world. How the mind at play can bring this world to life and, in doing so, make room for oneself in nature.

"Your mom talks to you a lot about danger, huh?" They sat on the edge of the creek, their legs dangling over the water.

"I know, Dad," he said, reciting Lisa's litany of precautions: if he were ever to see a bear, or a wolf, or a bobcat, he would come inside immediately. He was to never go anywhere near the babies. He was to stay away from dead animals and always wear his coat when it was cold. "Mom tells me this stuff every day."

Mark laughed and looked over at his son. "But has she told you about the mountain men?" he asked.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you're probably not old enough yet. I don't wanna scare you." This hooked Peter, and Mark smiled to himself.

"Well," Mark began, "a long, long time ago, men came out here looking for stuff. Gold, mostly. And treasure. They climbed up into the mountains, and then down underneath them, searching. Most of them found nothing, and after a few years they left. But others went crazy, I mean absolutely nuts, looking for whatever it is that's up there. And those ones couldn't leave. They're still up there to this day, searching for something, even if they don't really know what it is. Their beards are long and white, their teeth have fallen out, and their clothes are all ripped. They've lost their families. They've lost the world. And sometimes, if you listen, you can hear them. Their hammers at work, cracking away at the mountains. But you have to watch out for them, because this creek springs out of their territory. The water comes from up there and rolls down to us. And sometimes they come down too, looking for new members. If you're not careful, they'll take you away."

Peter's eyes grew big, and he sat silently, taking all of this in. Part of him knew his dad was just telling a story, but the inexhaustible fountain that is a child's imagination would not allow him to dismiss it completely. Mark looked over at him and winked.

Peter began spending time in the creek. Sometimes Mark would join him, laughing and

splashing. But other times Peter took his dad's advice and went alone, inventing stories in his head, often building on the one Mark had told him about the old prospectors, lost in the mountains, searching.

He liked to imagine them as great treasure hunters, maybe even seekers of the Holy Grail, like he'd heard about in the stories his parents read him before bed.

He would often take the stories they started beside his bed the night before and finish them with his endlessly flowing imagination in the creek the next day.

One spring day, he went traipsing across the backyard down to the creek. It was much warmer than usual, so he only had on an orange long-sleeve shirt and no jacket. The water in the creek was a bit higher and stronger than it usually was, and this excited him. Frankly, he was starting to get bored with the creek's quiet stream. While he could make it fun, that was getting harder and harder to do alone. His dad, who had once been so excited to play with him, was spending more time working on his computer. Peter could tell he was unhappy about this too, but it seemed he had no choice. His parents were fighting a lot more.

He was so lost in the act of figuring these arguments out, as well as trying to imagine a game he could play to fill the day, that he did not notice the water level rising. It was gradual. So gradual that, like a lobster being boiled alive in a pot, he did not notice he was in danger until he was already being carried away.

The spring thaw had been warmer than expected, just as it had the year Mark and Lisa moved in. Heat climbed higher into the mountains than it had in a long time. So high that snow, began to loosen and run. The knots of snow and ice began to unravel, feeding dozens of different streams running down the mountain-face. The critical moment came when the waters of several of those streams flooded, breaking the natural dams and the tree line barriers, and converged on the creek. An avalanche of water barreled down, finally free of crystalline confinement, rushing toward Peter.

His body's voyage down creek was one of disintegration. He was knocked unconscious quickly, and drowned soon after that. Battered and dashed on the rocks, softened by the cold water, pieces of him began to break away; locks of hair, fingernails, eyelashes. Some fell to the bottom, settling into the sludge. Others were deposited on the way. And some were carried onward, just as Mark had hoped his fingernail shavings and his globs of spit would have been years ago, through the creek, into the river, another river, the sea.

Peter was left on the rocks some miles away as the water began to disperse and calm. And, seeing him not moving, the birds got to work. The insects too made their claim. They scurried down the bark of trees, down the banks, and up over the rocks. Peter, slowly, became less than Peter—but also much more. By the time humans found him, just a day later, honing in on his tattered orange shirt, much of Peter was no longer Peter. He became the land.

Lisa left not long after that. She tried to talk to Mark about it, but he had turned inward, drowning in his own watery mind, and showed no sign of surfacing. She went back to New York, leaving him alone.

Every day he makes the same morning walk across that backyard, just as Peter had, to the creek. He lowers himself down the bank and begins to search the water—which he had trusted. This was the water that had brought him here, and to which he had offered so much. His life had been shaped around deciphering its messages.

But there had been a miscommunication, and so he is here. On his knees every day. His hair grows long and his beard wild. His clothes are torn. He can't hear the water's music anymore, or feel its true touch. He searches, trying to crack open the bones of the creek and suck out its marrow. To press his ear against its now calm trickle. To tune in again to the hum of the water's frequency.



Stairs Up Red Mountain

Allison Thomas

Medium: iPhone camera

With iron ore running through its veins, Red Mountain gave prosperity and prominence to the people of Birmingham, Alabama.

Under the Covers

Samantha McCray

What beauty lies outside my back door—
the woods beyond bursting with color
as leaves obscure the forest floor.

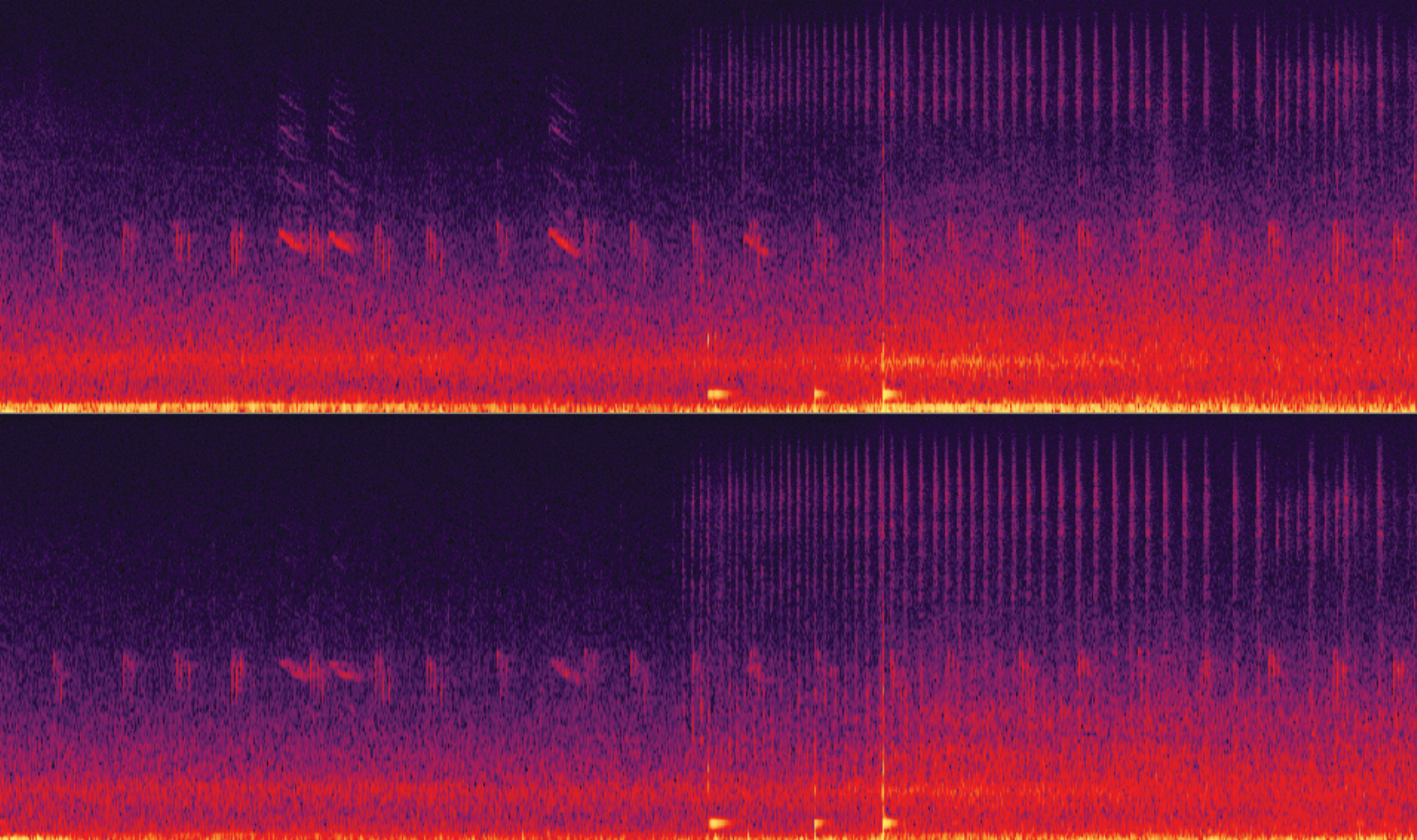
Some might wonder what is hiding
underneath those speckles of orange and brown.
Does a squirrel bury his treasure there?
Does a chipmunk hide beneath in sleep?

Only I know the truth.
Only I know what lies at the bottom
of that autumn ocean.

I placed her there yesterday.
The red tears she left behind melting into
leaves of similar hue.

There, in the woods, I tucked her in
like a child before bed.

By winter, she'll be bone,
nothing but calcium for the mice.
Her blanket of leaves
replaced by a blanket of snow.

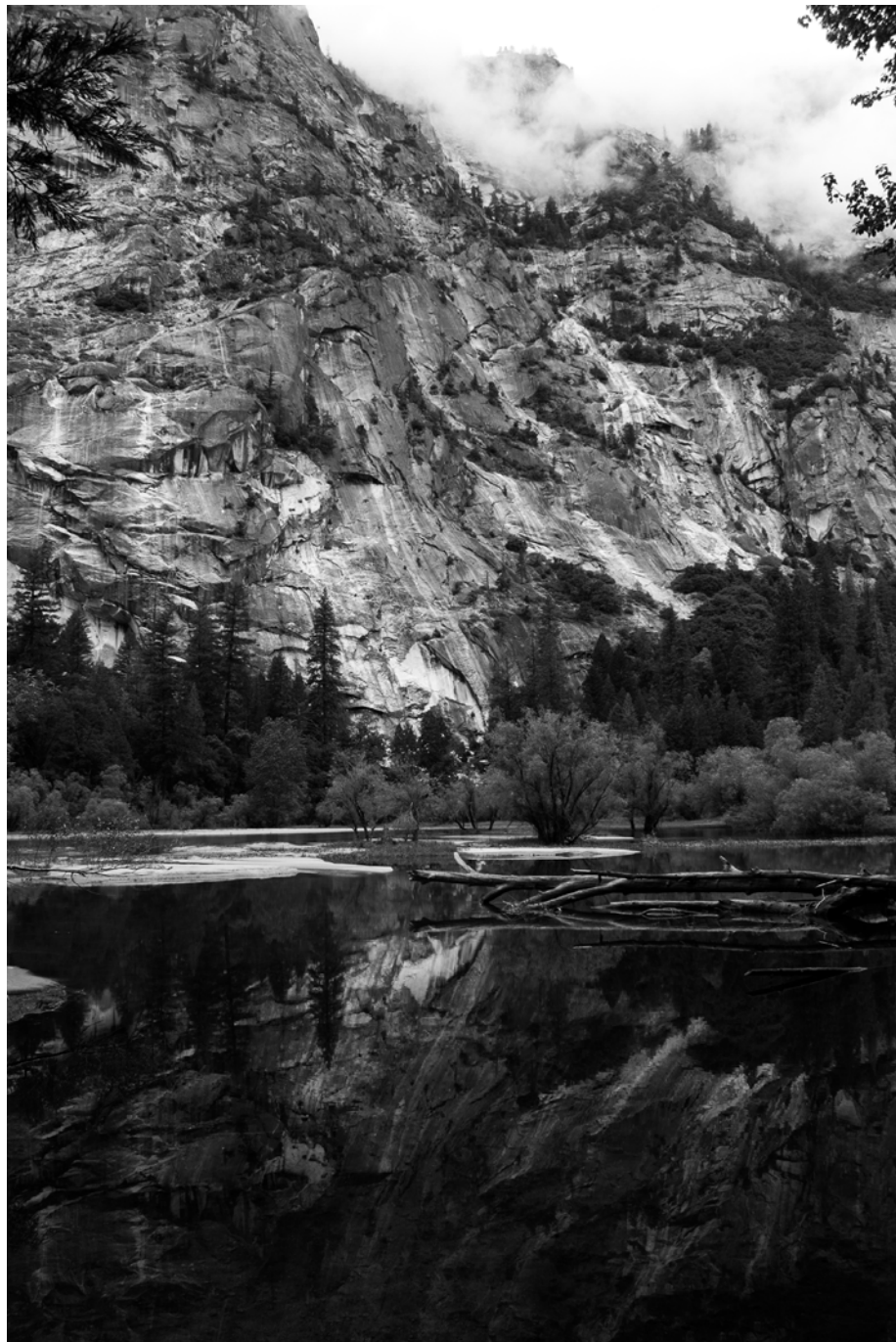


Soundscape: Winter Birds, Kent State Wetlands

Evan Harms

Medium: audio (spectrogram analysis)

A visual representation of the soundscape of the wetlands located southeast of Kent State's campus, featuring frequencies from the nearby road on the lower end and brief dashes and punctuation from the birds that inhabit the area.



Mirror Lake, Yosemite National Park

Grace Harms

Medium: DSLR camera

Hineini

Olivia Swasey

I would never have lasted long in their stories.
I am too soft. With my onion skin
and flower-petal hands and tender heart,
I'd be one of a hundred thousand nameless sheep
whose story would never be told.

There are men that I wish I could be like.
They are the patriarchs, compelled to step into
the tiger's mouth, their paths laid out before them.
"Here I am," they say, speaking when spoken to,
offering themselves, the ultimate leap of faith.

Responsibility was cast upon them like a cloak,
leaden and lined with the distillation of love.
Afraid for their lives and speaking in
shaking voices, they say, "Here I am,"
and accept the gifts they've been trusted with.

And here I am, begging that responsibility, that trust.
I want to walk down their path and
pluck from the road the gemstones embedded
in the hard earth, and carry them in the basket
of my crooked arm against my pounding chest.

Some of the stones in the road are stuck too fast
for me to dig out with my short nails,
and some are too heavy for me to carry.
But on this lifetime walk, I will grow stronger,
someday to carry every perfect gem in my arms.

The stars overhead feel so much bigger than they used to,
as I beat away the branches overgrown in the road
and pick up the small glittering stones that I can.
And from the glossy folds of my tender heart I hear
that rhythmic beat, begging, saying:

Here I am,
Here I am,
Here I am.

five

Ajdin Kulic

i want to be
more than i think
i want to be gold
rattled out of rocks

and i think this
about a lot of things.
don't tell me what it's made of
i like to be fooled.

wash me with water
wash me with soap,
but use what was left
from the showers before me.



Kitchen Wildfire

Melanie Sugalski

Media: collage using 1950s and 1960s magazines

This collage comments on the wildfires in the western United States using 1950s and 1960s magazines, emulating the style of collage artist Nadine Boughton. This is one in a series of works focusing on the effects of wildfires seeping into the homes and lives of the people affected.



Double Inspiration

Sam Dunn

Together for eternity. In person, this scene was full of color. In black and white, these isolated and lone partners just wait and watch as the world glides by.

Medium: Canon AE1 film camera

Falling Out of It

Dakayla Noble

The rain's falling and the coffee's pouring,
but you only tell me you love me when you're drunk
and that's not the kind of love I've been praying for—
at least not from you.

I keep washing out that old shirt,
praying if I can only make the stains disappear
your disdain might wash away too.

You always hated the taste of tobacco,
yet out here on this screened-in porch
the smoke from your cigar paints hazy pictures in the night air.
Our ideas of happy never seem to align.
Every word from our mouths is distant.

I have always heard that falling out of love hurts far more than losing it,
probably because of the way our own emotions betray us.
All of our hopes for tomorrow keep washing down the kitchen sink,
that and what's left of the dark brown gin.

Replenishment

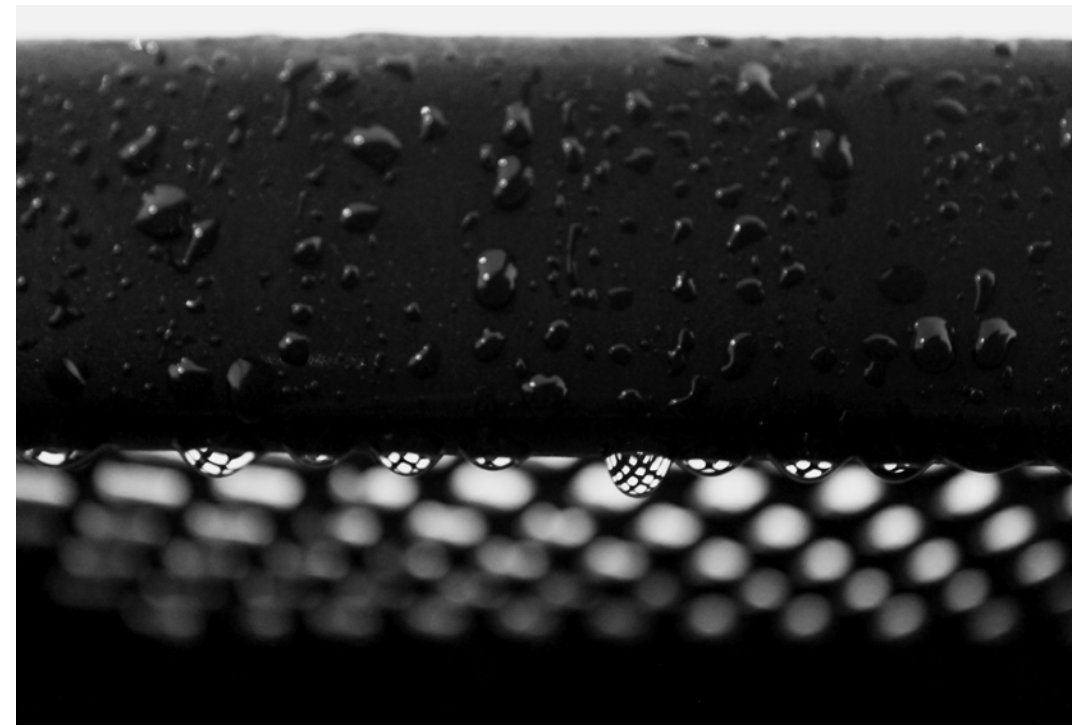
Shaheeda Haque

Afterwards, my rising sun
 stares me down so life might
 sprout again from superficial
 wounds. As crimson as fresh blood
 our passions may be, they are not exempt
 from the clock's cruel hands:
 pale, wringing.
 From rusted copper streams, my dreams trickle.
 I wish they vaporized: that way they may cycle back.

The motions to come, brushing teeth
 and pouring cereal and hiding knives,
 are just as redundant as "chai tea."
 Cardamom crushed beneath
 my fingers like dying stars.
 Once when we were younger, they
 splintered into my soul and left me
 breathless. Now, there exists only
 the phantom of a fragrance, invisible
 but sweetly, numbingly noticeable.

To this too have I become accustomed?
 What will it take to feel again?

No one has the answer, but
 what is faith, if not this?
 Blinded by the light, I will line
 up at the vanguard. Against all odds,
 this fleshy gear, one in many,
 is still, still, still
 beating in sync to a sun rising red.
 Time to wake, tired
 as we are, for it is
 in the mornings that we are tallest.



Dewdrops

Sarah Kronz

A close-up of condensation in the early morning light of a chilly spring day.

Medium: DSLR camera

A Distance in the Stomach

Seth Murray

My rolling fingers drum against the taut mattress, and as they land in succession they produce an echoing tap. Thumb to pinky, pinky to thumb. The pace of my fingers drumming increases and my heart begins to beat a little faster. I need to wake up at seven tomorrow morning, and it is already well past midnight. Do I, at this point, allow the energy welling up in me to force me out of bed and drag me across the room to my desk, or do I beat it back down and hope for sleep's arrival?

I felt it first in my stomach. I suspect it has always been there, because its arrival comes with the scent of familiarity. Like the way you recall a dream, sitting at your desk some afternoon, that you think would either have happened the night before or would have been a “real” memory. It is not uncommon for this mania—and it is manic—to come at night. Especially after a day spent working toward exhaustion.

But what is it exactly?

It's not so much the feeling of something in my stomach as it is the lack of something. An absence.

Julio Cortazar tells the story of a girl who believes she has been split in two. Her counterpart, she feels (not “believes” or even “knows,” she *feels*), resides in Budapest. She refers to these feelings, that of her Other in the world, as “the distances.” So I'll call this the distance in my stomach.

But what does that actually mean?

If there is a “distance” welling up in my stomach, where exactly does it lead?

That's what I'm trying to figure out.

I am pulled out of bed by it. I begin to walk across the room, feeling the energy that had been pooling in my stomach working its way up through my throat. It's the feeling of being led by a beautiful woman with a slanted, knowing smile, holding your hand gently as she guides you to her bed. Erotic desire is felt in the throat just as much as in the groin.

A friend asked me once, as we walked across the parking lot on a cold night, breath coming out of us in clouds and then fading, why it is that the desire to know, and to then love, is the only thing that makes him feel alive.

This was after a lecture by the visiting scholar on Dante. He tells me to read Anne Carson. I read Anne Carson.

She writes, in *Eros, the Bittersweet*, about our capacity to taste desire. That it is a taste first sweet, then alarmingly bitter. That Eros would be more accurately described as *sweetbitter*, but that our language won't allow for that. It wouldn't sound right.

Samuel Beckett had night terrors. Physical ones. He used to feel pain in the bones of his legs. He would sometimes spend sleepless nights writhing, agonizing over the failure of words. That he was unable to get behind them, or beneath them, and figure them out. Or find that there was nothing there to figure out. This sounds ridiculous, but everything was ridiculous to Beckett. This got much worse after his father's unexpected death.

Anne Carson's book is about the ancient Greek poet Sappho, who was from the island of Lesbos, and was one of the great writers of carnal desire in the history of human feeling. Carson explicates a famous poem wherein Sappho describes two people sitting in a room, facing each other, their mutual desire palpable. She takes note of a third figure in the room

as well. Some scholars have speculated that this indicates a kind of jealous love triangle, a competition between two women for the sexual attention of a man (you can be sure men wrote these critiques). Carson, however, indicates that the third party may be something else entirely. That it may be a presence created by the energies vibrating off the two lovers, coalescing and forming something else, an invisible presence—but still felt—to guide them through the confusions of their bodies in erotic motion.

This interlocutor whom Carson describes leads me across the room, its hand lodged in my throat, trying to pull out the distance in my stomach. Like a magician pulling the colored fabrics out of a hat.

For what?

To say something.

Grace Paley, in the preface to her collected stories, talks about her start in writing stories. She had always been a poet, casually plucking floating verses from the air and nailing them to paper. Then she began to feel, in her chest and then her throat, what she called the “storyteller's pain.” And out came stories.

There was a time when I considered myself a poet. I filled little pocketbooks with glittering lines. They ultimately led nowhere—and to here.

But what am I supposed to say? I feel myself filling, and nearly overflowing, with the urge to speak. I am being made to speak.

T. S. Eliot's essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent” is filled with problems—forays into modes of reading that were ultimately stultifying. At times, however, he veers toward the idea of what the poet is doing when he engages with “tradition.” What he calls tradition could more effectively be described as the unconscious mind and how a writer should deal with it. Eliot's concluding paragraphs suggest that the experienced emotions of the poet are not enough. That they are only what they are, which is not by itself poetry. The work of elevating them into poetry requires the act of writing and exploration into “tradition,” so that unfelt sensations—new feelings—may be wrought from them.

When I was in middle school, I read a lot of fantasy novels. I would go to my grandparents' after school and lie on their floor—belly down, chest on a pillow, arms crossed. The carpet was a scratchy mat, like the hair of a wild animal. I could only read for a half hour or so at a time before I would become frustrated with the limitations of these magical worlds and the boundaries of the stories. I always wanted to know things about the worlds that the writers refused to tell me. So I would go outside—no matter how cold or rainy it was—and play basketball alone. I used to shoot hoops, my grandmother occasionally bringing me a small plate with sliced green apples, and try to work through the worlds I had met on the page. I would shoot free throws and layups while placing myself into a character, or inventing one anew, and using it as a means of picking that world apart, of going where I wanted to go. I would dribble in circles, eyes glazed over and mind somewhere else. To return to the book after inventing my own stories on that court felt like both a reprieve and a retreat.

Many don't realize the precise way in which Jake Barnes, Hemingway's protagonist in *The Sun Also Rises*, was wounded. That he was mutilated, and that sex was an impossibility for him, is generally understood. However, it's more than that. The shaft of his penis was destroyed, while his testicles were left intact. This means erotic desire remained, but had nowhere to go. No outlet. Hemingway used Barnes as a way of describing a whole generation of people, so broken by war and modernity—and in this instance they were inseparable—that they were unable to follow the directions toward which their own bodies dragged them. The truths their bodies were trying to pull out of them were left bound up, abandoned but not forgotten, eventually becoming stillborn pregnancies in wombs that could not be evacuated. Decades later, after the words had stopped coming for Hemingway, he put a loaded shotgun in his mouth and pulled the trigger.

I feel myself sitting down at my desk.

No.

Being sat down at my desk.

Dangling above that desk is a little white piece of paper. I taped it there years ago. On it, in a teenager's scrawl, is a quote from Ernest Hemingway about the need to only write one good paragraph to really get a start. That no matter how damned hard of a time he may have been having, if he could get down one decent, passable paragraph it would all be okay. He could figure it out from there.

I've discovered that writing comes from the body. It does not come from a place of knowing. It comes, for me, from a physical desire to know. It is the very act of not knowing that kept me awake, shaking on the edge of something.

It is this curiosity that took me across the room, and it is what got the words on this page. Knowing what I needed to say, and exactly how to say it, gave me the confidence only to sleep. This gave me the uncertainty to go looking. To feel my way out of certain inexplicable sensations inside of me and to locate them in the world. That the distance I feel inside myself can only be traversed by the motion of my hand's movement across a page.

I'll be able to sleep by the time it is over. The distance will have been crossed, and I'll feel whole again—for a time.



Downtown Dripping; Skyline Slipping

Allison Thomas

Medium: DSLR camera



En Route to Tuolumne Meadows, Yosemite National Park

Grace Harms

Medium: DSLR camera

Immigrant's Nocturne

Annie Livingston

Belonging is a strange animal to tame
in this winged city. Every street is full
of windows; every window is full of frames
to fold the sky into. My daughter lives there,

between gridded lines we call distance, between
corkscrew cracks my fingers make when I pretend
to hold my own hand. Every season has its

sadness, except now all the suns shall rise to
find me alone, regardless of what wild things
will grow here. These words are heavy with a his-
story that sinks straight through me: if I ask them

to explain, they turn to smoke. When paper bends
the right way, it becomes a bird. When we build
enough iron wings, the earth will spin faster.

Where I am from, we tell riddles to pass time,
like how much of a life can you take in a
suitcase? How bright can a future be if you
have to leave a child behind? A riddle is

a boat, a backscratching fable to scrape the
sky with, a language like a newborn, a cry
to cradle and coo at when the world is cold.

After Shaun Tan's graphic novel The Arrival

Dandelion Walls

Sarah Osvath

The icy white windowpane
holds a winter eclipse.

I stare into the snowy fate of tomorrow,
where silver raindrops melt in a euphoric dreamland,
my hopes exalted to transparent skies.

The dandelion walls of my tender youth,
the burnt hue of the warming fireplace.

Frozen fingertips thaw,
clinging to a red velvet sweater,
and somehow, I am plunging.

Falling into the pit of nostalgia,
four dandelion walls surround me:

trapped in a limbo
of used-to-be and soon-to-come,
of anticipation and empathy.

There is no middle; there is no now.

Peace Be With You, and Also With Your Spirit

Morgan Duckett

it's good timing,
dying on a Sunday morning.
when the song birds and churchgoers
are nestled in the same house of worship,
and the day smells of lawns cut at leisure.
kitchens taste like cinnamon and lemon painted lavender,
and children's jaws gape while transfixed by colorful 'toons.
even the housedog, Jerry, doesn't mind
what comes and goes.



More Than Half Empty

Sarah Kronz

Medium: DSLR camera



All Hours of the Night

Stephanie Cuyubamba Kong

Light, a signifier of presence, moves about through all hours of the night.

Medium: DSLR camera

A Mother's Love

Shaheeda Haque

They're calling her dead now,
as if places could die. We shot across
my Midwest in a minivan too immense
for just us two,
narrowly missing car crashes when
the words left my caged mind.
"Would you love me even then?"
Forty-nine lives were stolen the night
before; Hell accepted the thief
as our vigil was interrupted
by the wind's silent roars.
"Would you love me even then?"

Understand, those weathered hands have always held me.
They swaddled me and swabbed me
after wrestling on the dining room floor.
"Would you love me even then?"
After a hole is blasted through the drywall of your heart,
and rings and necklaces hang off pipes
and litter the ground like dead
dreams, after I selfishly destroy everything beautiful
and hoard, hide the things that are not quite yet,
even then? You would love me even then?

If the forty-nine had turned to fifty,
and I into the moon,
the fabric around your neck tight, tighter than
a noose, so tight you would try and sob if God
had not reclaimed your breath—
"Would you love me even then?"
I am not yet an orphan, but
I have lost a friend.
As if places could die—
you live in me forever, as if you could die.

"A Mother's Love" is based on a life-long conversation I have shared with my mother: What would it take for her love for me to cease? Was there anything I could do, anything I could become, that would make me irredeemable in her eyes? The day after the Pulse shooting, she and I had just attended a vigil for the forty-nine victims when I revisited the question. That day, I learned that a mother's love is truly boundless.



In-Camera Manipulation

Sam Dunn

One exposure on top of another. Two experiences morphed into one to create a whole new, unique scene.

Medium: Canon AE1 film camera

Mediterranean Man

Aaron Robert

From a land of pearls and pomegranates,
of figs and palm branches,
a Mediterranean man of the Old World

Walk me to my olive-skinned origins,
to a place of your father's
and our greatest grandfather

Pass down your warm bread, your native tongue, your music
to your forgotten descendants
lost in the Michigan tundra

Take care of me,
a roaming nomad who can't interpret the stars

Please, tell me a story above the firelight
stretch out your callused hands
and pass the bottle of wine

Let our inebriation mold the stars into a tapestry,
telling us a story,
bringing me back home.

CONTRIBUTORS' BIOS

All of our talented contributors are artists and authors who reside in the Mid-East Honors region. Thank you for shaping edition v of Brainchild Magazine.

Grace Beyer Kent State University

Grace is currently a sophomore with a major in applied communications and a minor in photo-illustration. She has been interested in photography for years, but took her first photo class in high school. She is ecstatic to continue studying photography at Kent State University and is in the process of creating an online portfolio of her work. She shoots a wide range of subjects and is always trying to expand her horizons and learn new skills. She hopes to begin doing freelance work in the near future.

Natalie Brandt Kent State University

Natalie Brandt is a student at Kent State University. Originally from Pittsburgh, she is an amateur novelist and completed her first fiction novel in November. She believes that words give her power, and she will continue to write until she has nothing left to say, a day that will most likely never come. Words aren't the only medium of art she uses to express and share ideas. She believes art can be found everywhere, all around us, in moments that remind us we are alive, and she intends to spend her life seeking them out.

Brittany Cole Kent State University

Brittany Cole has two passions in life: to experience and to create. Although she is a native of Northeast Ohio, she dreams of traveling and engaging in as many opportunities as she can during her life. She uses what she learns to better herself and inspire her craft. At the moment, she waits tables and draws comics, but before long, she will be off on her next endeavor. You can read her novel *Nadia Montgomery* on OhioLink.

Morgan Duckett Kent State University

Morgan Duckett is a determined, hardworking individual whose life goal is to combine her love for knowledge with her creativity. Driven by a passion for travel and human connection, Duckett hopes to make a career for herself by traveling around the world and creating historical documentaries about the unique cultural histories she encounters. In doing so, she hopes to disseminate the importance of history and its lessons. Duckett writes poetry and short stories in the hopes of leaving a brushstroke of positivity on the portrait of life, and she also teaches poetry once a week at Jennings Middle School in Akron. She is a member of Kent State Independent Films, a published scriptwriter, and a member of Phi Beta Kappa.

Sam Dunn Elmhurst College

Sam Dunn is an international student studying as a senior at Elmhurst College. He is originally from the Mornington Peninsula near Melbourne, Australia. He will soon earn a bachelor's degree in exercise science, but ultimately wants to travel back to Australia to study medicine. Cardiology has been a huge passion of his and he would love to make a career out of it. In his spare time, he loves keeping in shape, playing soccer, and exploring with his camera. He loves traveling and experiencing new things, and he keeps his camera with him everywhere he goes so he can document every new experience that comes his way.

Christina Godfrey Kent State University

Christina Godfrey is a senior studying journalism and fashion media at Kent State. She has written for the *Kent Stater*, *A Magazine*, *Black Squirrel Radio*, and *Alternative Press Magazine*. In her spare time, she reads, writes, and can't wait to binge-watch the next season of *Stranger Things*.

Evan Harms Kent State University

Evan is an environmental studies major at Kent State, with minors in park management and digital media production. He and his partner spend most of their weekends outdoors, regularly volunteering with the Cleveland Metroparks. When not in class or outside, he works at the KSU School of Art Collection and Galleries and *Black Squirrel Radio*.

Grace Harms Kent State University

Grace Harms is a senior visual communication design student at Kent State University. Currently, she works as an art director for *A Magazine* and as an exhibition designer for the School of Art Collection and Galleries. When she is not designing, she can be found browsing a library, exploring a park, or wandering through an art museum.

Shaheeda Haque Kent State University

Shaheeda Haque is a sophomore studying history and economics. Aside from writing, she enjoys learning, drawing, and traveling. She prays she will always find joy in pursuing the things that challenge her.

A.E. Kessler Kent State University

A.E. Kessler is a second-year student at Kent State University. They are studying lots of things but primarily focus on public health, healthcare ethics, and queer studies. When they're not doing schoolwork, Kessler spends their time reading and writing. They would like to caution you against mistaking disenchantment for truth and they thank you for reading their words.

Stephanie Cuyubamba Kong University of Cincinnati

Stephanie Cuyubamba Kong is a second-year student of fine arts at the University of Cincinnati. Her current interests reside in ethno-musical studies and exploring the idea of cultural vernacular. As an artist, writer, and musician, she is fascinated by language and its most abstract forms. She believes in illuminating marginalized histories and promoting discourse about intersectionality within education, art, and performance.

Sarah Kronz Kent State University

Sarah Kronz is a senior fine arts major at Kent State University. For the past several years, she has been exhibiting her work at the local, state, and national levels. Some of her work has been published in the previous two issues of *Brainchild*. As she progresses through her academic and post-academic careers, she will strive to continue creating as much art as she can. Apart from her artistic pursuits, she spends her free time outdoors, where she works as a summer camp counselor and high adventure programming facilitator.

Ajdin Kulic Kent State University

Ajdin Kulic is a freshman studio art student at Kent State University. They have an interest in visual art and poetry. They look to create honest, personal work to spread empathy.

Annie Livingston Grand Valley State University

Annie Livingston is a senior graduating from West Michigan's Grand Valley State University with degrees in writing and English literature. She enjoys volunteering with middle school students at the Grand Rapids Creative Youth Center and visiting the Loch Ness Monster at the John Ball Zoo. She does not consider dandelions to be a weed.

Regis Louis

Kent State University

Regis Louis is a poet from Mentor, Ohio who is endlessly fascinated by the relationship between light and shadow in both life and art. His poetry tries to capture the space between the two while allowing sounds and images to bleed into each other like shadows on the sidewalk. He views poetry as a reflective and meditative activity and hopes to encourage more people to take part in the practice of writing poetry. After all, a world full of poets would be a world full of people unafraid to feel. If you enjoy his work, you can follow him on Instagram at @regis_poetry to see more.

Samantha McCray

Kent State University

Samantha McCray is an environmental conservation biology major and is minoring in American Sign Language. She works as an RA for Kent State University and is the president of Lumos Flashes, the Harry Potter Alliance chapter on campus. McCray spends most of her time working on research and expanding her photography skills.

Seth Murray

Kent State University

Seth Murray is a writer originally from Youngstown, Ohio. Although he does write fiction, and on his best days poetry, right now he is interested mainly in the creative and intellectual latitude offered by nonfiction writing. He is a former editor of *Brainchild*, but left in 2016 to move to Ireland. He returned to Kent to finish his degree, and he plans to move to Paris in September. He hopes to eventually enroll in a PhD program. The rest is unclear.

Dakayla Noble

Kent State University

Dakayla Noble is a freshman at Kent State University, where she is pursuing a degree in integrated social studies. Currently working on hiking the Appalachian Trail completely, she has a passion for nature and writes most of her pieces while in its midst.

Sarah Osvath

Kent State University

Sarah Osvath is a published novelist and painter. She enjoys anything creative, from painting to writing, and even to embroidery art. When she doesn't have her nose buried in a book, Osvath enjoys hiking, being out in nature, and traveling. She is currently studying to become an art therapist with the hope of spreading the therapeutic elements of creativity that have so touched her own life.

Laikyn Pavey

Indiana University

Laikyn Pavey is a senior at Indiana University Southeast studying neuroscience. Despite her science major, most of her hobbies are creative, such as singing, writing, and photography. Thus, it's no surprise that she plans on returning to IU Southeast after graduation to pursue a Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Digital Media.

Aaron Robert

Grand Valley State University

Aaron Robert currently studies public relations and writing at Grand Valley State University. When he is not busy writing for his classes or internship, Robert enjoys drafting poetry in his journal, experimenting with paint, and running on forest trails. Originally from the Metro Detroit area, Robert loves to spend time with his 101-year-old grandmother and write down her stories in an effort to preserve his family's Italian heritage.

Nathaniel Seres

Kent State University

Nathaniel Seres is a student at Kent State University currently studying TESL and English. He has a love for foreign languages and has lived and studied in Chengdu, China. One day he would like to teach ESL students so that they can reach their full potential in the beautiful language of English. After graduation, he is tentatively considering joining the Peace Corps. In addition to foreign languages, Seres has always held a love for the arts; some of his finest memories are of performing in theatre productions and singing in choirs, as well as writing poetry and prose. When he isn't dabbling in the arts or studying, he enjoys running in long-distance races such as 5Ks, 10Ks, and half-marathons.

Noah Sitch

Kent State University

Noah Sitch is a digital media production student at Kent State University hoping to pursue a career in sound editing and mixing. He loves listening to music and is interested in poetry and songwriting. Sitch serves as a voting member on Kent State's Student Media Board and volunteers at his old high school, helping the football team stream its games online. When he's not studying, Sitch is usually skating around campus, playing games, and practicing guitar.

Melanie Sugalski

Kent State University

Melanie Sugalski is a recent graduate of Kent State University with a Bachelor of Arts in visual communication design and a minor in writing. When not in pursuit of a career in graphic design or illustration, she can be found in between the shelves of her local library, exploring the beautiful outdoors, or traveling both near and far.

Olivia Swasey

Kent State University

Olivia Swasey is a junior English major at Kent State University, and has previously been published in *Luna Negra* and *Brainchild*. She enjoys cooking and painting in her spare time. In addition to studying English, she is also a vocal LGBT and disability rights advocate. Following her graduation from Kent State in 2019, she plans to move to Boston to live with her partner and attend graduate school. Swasey one day hopes to become an author and English professor, so that she may instill in others the passion that she has for writing and literature.

Allison Thomas

Kent State University

Allison Thomas is a freshman at Kent State University. She has a strong love for the arts and enjoys acting, dancing, photography, and many other art forms.



