

Shapes

The editors of **Shapes** invite you to submit your poetry, prose and artwork for consideration for publication in the spring 2017 issue. Poetry should be typed and single-spaced. Please keep a copy of any poetry or prose that you submit. We promise to handle all artwork with care.

Submit written work to:
Steve Straight (English Dept., Tower 507, 512-2688)
Patrick Sullivan (English Dept., Tower 509, 512-2669)
or to the Liberal Arts Division secretary.

Submit artwork to Maura O'Connor (Graphic Design
Dept., LRC A229, 512-2692)

SHAPES

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of Manchester Community College
Spring 2016

Shapes

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Faculty Advisors,

Editorial:

Steve Straight

Patrick Sullivan

Rae Strickland

Design:

Maura O'Connor



photo by Matt Farnham



photo by Emily Person

Spring 2016

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photo by Rose Obedzinski



photo by Alexandra Eagleson



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cover design by Kristen Ensign



photo by Zack Carroll

Remy Swift

Communication

My words are cowards when
spoken aloud. Quiet, unheard, shrouded in shadow,
they step into reality and vanish almost instantly. They
twist and turn on my tongue, fighting against leaving my
mouth. Sometimes they do, and they fly for a while.
Sometimes they sputter short, failing, falling, fluttering
to gibberish that melts with a sickly sweet taste on my lips.

My words are heroes when
written down. Bold and big, staunch, seen
and heard. They stand proud, coherent, alive
and well. No gibberish— they are edited smooth
or sharp. They convey exactly what I want to say, conforming
to the idea of the sentence, of the paragraph, of the page.

Yet even when I read them back
I have to trail my finger ahead of the words,
to make sure I don't lose my way.



art by Maggie Morales



art by Michaela Flint

Kristen Williams

Meditation on a Hoofbeat

I draw the curry comb down
Her warm solid flesh, following the hollows,
The angles, the curves
Of her solid frame.

She twitches, shuddering
Her skin as I reach her ticklish flank,
And sighs heavily as I lean in, pressing
Against her hindquarters.

I switch to the soft bristled brush
And trace the rounded muscle of her chest
To her foreleg, down the knee,
To the cannon bone and coronet of her hoof.

Reaching back up,
Up underneath the heavy fall of mane,
I run the brush along the silkiest part of her coat,
Protected by hair the envy of any Hollywood starlet.

Forgetting the brush, I use just my hands, smoothing
The satin hide with the flats of my palms,
Mapping every whorl, moving from the flat plane of her cheek
To the soft cleft beneath her jaw, detecting the steady pulse of her blood.

I run my fingers along the giving flesh of her breast
To the flat muscles and hard bones of her legs,
Reaching past stifle and hock to gently pinch
The grooved trench just above her fetlock.

Shifting her weight slightly, she lifts her now
Gleaming hindquarter for me,
Gently resting her iron shod hoof
In the cup of my hands.



art by Courtney Malanga

Smooth as shell and hard as stone, I explore its
Nooks and crannies, wondering at the small
Miracle of the frog in the sole of the hoof. How
It pumps blood back up her leg like a miniature heart.

I think about walking on heartbeats,
So alike –the gait of a walking horse
And the rhythm of a heartbeat:
Chik-chok, chik-chok, chik-chok.

Once astride, her walk shifts me from
Side to side, front to back, and
We break into a slow canter, her rhythm now my own:
Da-da dum, da-da dum, da-da dum.

Leaning forward, my arms push up her neck
And I urge her on, our momentum gathering.
Soon, we are racing away and the pounding of her hooves
Is drowned by the thudding of my heart.



photo by Grace Luginbul

Nick Brundage

A Dream in a Van

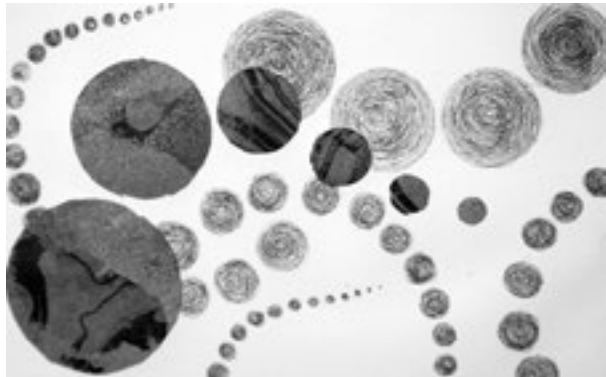
—after “A Dream Record: June 8, 1955,” by Allen Ginsberg

Strung out in a van again sitting with a pit bull in a rest stop on the Garden State Parkway trying to rest my eyes in a McDonald’s parking lot.

And then I am back to Starks, Maine sitting on Harry’s Hill and I am with you, Tyler I see you and the shit eating grin on your face.
We talk, I ask about your sister,
you tell me that she is running around as crazy as ever.
Where is Dylan you ask, smoking hookah in the deserts of Palestine I tell you.
We speak of Josh who will be in VA for a long time, but forty is the new thirty.

Then I ask about that lost love and it comes to me that you are just an aberration, and I remember what you said about love, “there are many ways one can feel love hot, cold, or somewhere in between and of course it can fill any empty vessel.”

You are gone from view now and all I can see is the green shag rug in the van and all I can smell is wet dog in the van and I look the stars with hope that you stay there floating in the sky like the clouds that cover the Rocky Mountains.



art by M. King



photo by Austin Wagner

Mike Backer

Without This Name



art by William Harper

I must proclaim immediately that
these words are from a Name in jeopardy.
As the last of this Name and my time at
risk, the fate of this Name appears unclear.
For the sake of all things this Name could be,
for the sake of all this Name ever was,
and all who shared in its moments of glee,
remember this Name, recall it, because
it may never be called upon again.
If this Name’s gone I wonder what will be?
Will the sun still rise and gleam as it’s been?
Will the moon still pull the persistent sea?
I know deep down that things will stay the same,
and the earth will still spin without this Name.



art by Abigail Pannecki

Alicia Rossi

Learning to Swim: The Butterfly

Push off the wall,
Biceps affixed to your ears,
Legs pressed together as one.
Press your chin and chest downward
In the water as you envision
Swimming like a dolphin.
Allow the movement to
Ripple down your body;
Form a steady undulation.

Sweep your arms under your chest
In an hourglass shape and
Bend your knees slightly.
Give a small flick of your feet
Aiding your forward motion.
Extend your arms backward. Allow
Your thumbs to caress your thighs.

Swing your arms out of the water with
Confidence. Knowing that your pull will lift
Your body out of the water enough to inhale.
Sweep your emerged arms forward,
Thumbs grazing the surface of the water.
Bend your knees slightly once again;
Flick your feet more forcefully now,
Momentarily your sole provider
Of forward motion.

Recover, as you begin again
Pursuing the sinuous path towards
The opposite wall.



art by Trae Brooks

Mike Backer

Shoveling

This is not my first rodeo.
Though truth be told,
I know very little about rodeos.

I know single digits,
multiple feet,
snow banks the size of small banks,
acres of white under stubborn gray skies.

My Yankee blood was born for the brisk,
the bitter,
the barren broadways blanketed by blizzards
and black ice.

I sink my tired shovel into the snow
and tussle with the sense of submission
while moving Mother Nature's relentless mess.
Lift with your legs or she'll break your back.

After days buried
in the dead of the winter,
my horse of a Honda
can finally gallop again,

Free to roam for a few days,
until another five to fifteen
is forecast to fall
from the frozen troposphere.

And I'll be wishing I was elsewhere.
Somewhere in hot air,
with cold drinks
and rodeos.



art by Eliza Cardwell



photo by Zack Carroll

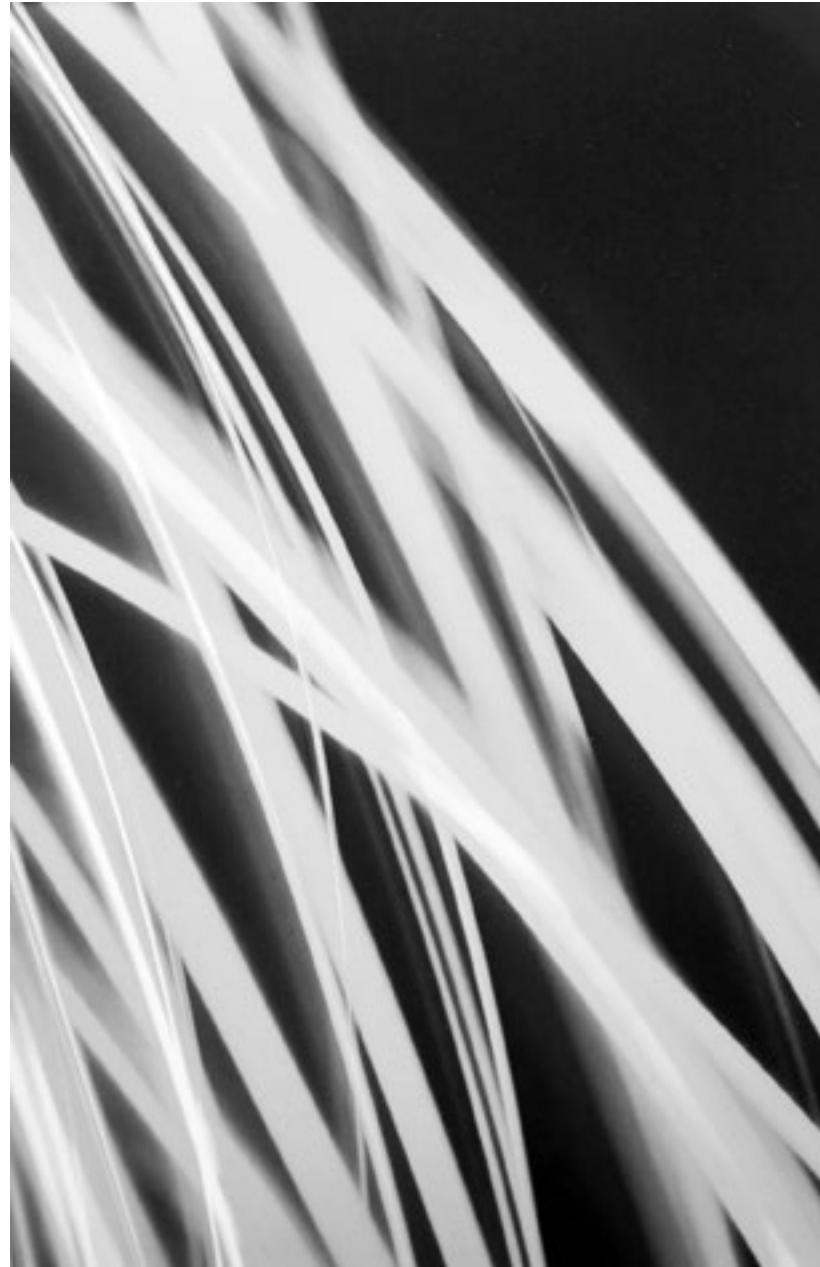


photo by Anna Fernandez

Penelope Arno

Penelope

[puh-nel-uh-pee] n. The wife of Odysseus, who remained faithful to him during his long absence at Troy.

Oh, Penelope,
You faithful weaver,
You've come a long way,
Patiently waiting two decades
For the return of your beloved husband
Not knowing if he has taken his last breath.

You sit at night by the window
Secretly unweaving your basket,
But when dawn approaches,
You perturbingly weave some more.

You'll do whatever it takes.
Oh, you could care less about those other suitors
Running after your beauty,
Or how many years you have gone
Without any romance.

Afraid that your son Telemachus
Won't recognize his *pater*,
It's agonizing to even look at his face,
A clone of Odysseus.

Oh, you are so conjoined
To your husband,
Like the pêne
And the lopás in your name,
The needle and the thread.

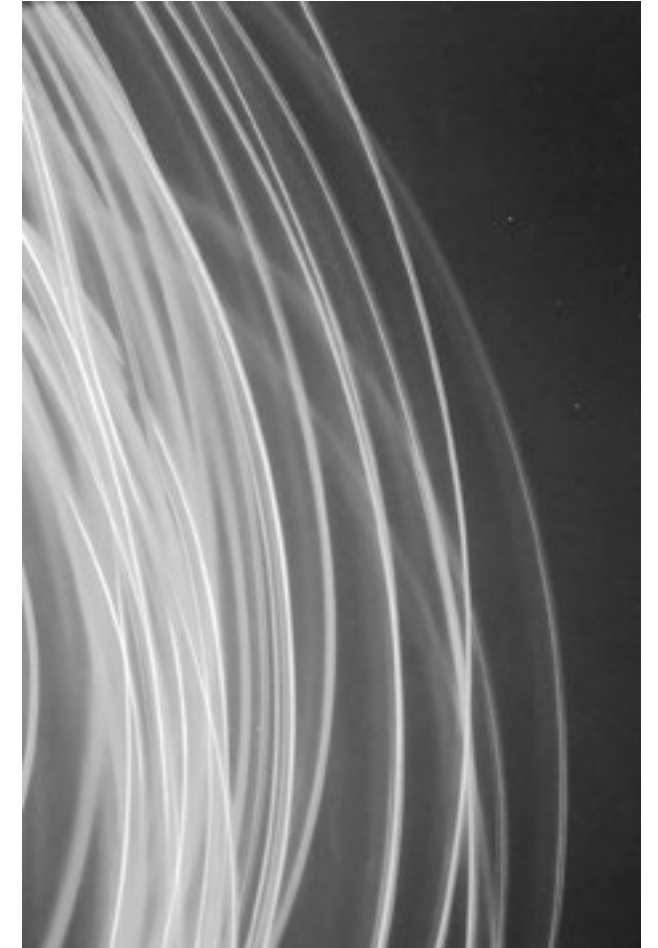


photo by Anna Fernandez

Oh, Penelope
You virtuous woman.
Do you know that you
Remind me of a duck?
Astonishingly, the other
Meaning of your name,
Who by their imprinting
Know whom they belong to.

Jeanine DeRusha

How to Throw Away Old Love Letters

With firm hand, as how God cast down the wicked angel.
With regret as how he shunned Cain to Nod.
Such hope you both had—you and God—
that loved ones would act kindly. Now you know
what must be spelled out

and that people fail.
Throw out those maps to nowhere,
toss them still tied with black ribbon
into streams of trash headed downtown
with other odds

and ends. Why keep them in a drawer
or bin of has-beens? The photos,
spent tickets, tokens of work
incomplete. The home left post and beam.
A fetal shell never brought to bone.

Let them spill their words
—the you, the love, the lips—
fish released from hook,
tethered dog gnawed free,
so that others find them, verbs and nouns, in some roadside bin,

mollusks washed ashore.
What lived here, they wonder,
and where has it gone? The house too small,
the words now empty, nothing lives in these pages
anymore.

Whatever you do, don't read them.
You know how the story ends.



photo by Lisa Bogardus

Maddie McKeever

Atrophy

Box fans sit in dirty open windows,
blowing hot air and dust around in invisible patterns.
Shadows on the hardwood floors reflect
piles of week old newspapers,
dirty socks, and food encrusted plates.
These pieces, congregating to make up a life
disintegrating to a shadow
in front of sagging eyes that
no longer recognize the
haggard person in the mirror.

A slideshow in nostalgia hovers over every day,
exhibiting an expanse of forgotten dreams,
abandoned loves,
and sepia tinted memories.
Reminiscent of what once was,
what could've been,
what never will be again.

We are nothing but canoe beings;
hollowed,
empty
and floating along
a water body growing more tumultuous
with each advancing inch.
Still, the river keeps swelling,
keeps moving,
keeps carrying our bodies away
from the chance to begin again,
to forget the past.

Lying on the ground with face to the stars,
the heart speaks to itself in loneliness,
wondering from within its dark cavity
if the lights are out temporarily,
or if this is all there is to look forward to.



photo by Ninette Fabian

Patrick Sullivan

One Night After Work

It's 9:43 pm and my daughter is plunging down our long gravel driveway in her dream car—a 1993 Saab 900S, red, with a little hatchback that's perfect for her artwork. She's coming home from a 9-hour shift at the Big Y pizza department. A fifth-year Fine Arts major, she is taking four classes at the University of Connecticut (one of them in basic math, unfortunately) and working 25 hours a week. Some days are so long (8 a.m.--10:00 p.m.) that she laughingly puts herself on “suicide watch.” Today, though, this unpleasantness is offset somewhat by the arrival of a UPS package containing gently used Frye boots, which have come in from Ebay after a series of savvy and cunning bids. They “fit perfectly” . . . and even match her pocketbook.

“We broke the store record for pizzas today: 68! This guy came in and he was only waiting three minutes and he says, ‘I hope to God that's my pizza!’ He said it like that: ‘I hope to *God* that's my pizza!’

The new girl got the pizzas stuck in the oven, so we had to saw them in half to get them out and then reassemble them. It was the worst possible night to be training a new girl!

People wanted breadsticks and I told them ‘No. You can't have any breadsticks!’ Can't you see we're selling a 40-piece pizza for \$10 and everybody in the world is ordering them? The earliest I can get you breadsticks is 9 pm, which is 3 hours from now. I was mean tonight, and people were nicer to me. I find that interesting.”

My wife kept dinner warm for her in the oven: a turkey hot dog, local corn on the cob, and a tasty noodle side dish w/ al dente noodles (prepared perfectly) with fresh tomatoes, garlic, onion, mushrooms, and basil from the garden. Between forkfuls, cellphone calls, text messages, and consulting the J. Crew catalog, the details of her day unspool in one long irresistible Proustian torrent. It is beautiful, hearing her speak.

Her black uniform is dusted head to foot with flour from the pizzas. On the way out tonight, she tells us, a customer said to her, “It looks like you've had quite a day!” She looks now like one of those snowflake rolls that we love so much--rolls the bakers garnish with flower to suggest freshly fallen snow.



photo by Kayla Savage

Anne Of The Stars

Anne lay among the upper-most branches of a tree. A tree whose limbs stretched to praise the heavens and whose roots kept the Devil at bay. The bark was smooth, a shade of dark brown that hinted of purple. The tree,

The woman, too, appeared still and lifeless, were it not for that tears fell, crashing from her eyes into the nothingness that lay below her. If you were to gaze upon Anne and her tree, both its branches and roots would be

visible at the same time. It is the only thing in existence and it exists in front of a black curtain that swallows them both. Anne's sorrow gave her no consolation; it was the kind of sorrow that gossips with neighbors saying things like, she ain't got nobody to blame but herself. It left her feeling completely alone. It is said that in the moment before creation there stood a tree and in the

the tree to see the view but the world was empty. No stars filled the sky; there was no dust; there was not a single atom. Upon realizing her solitude, Anne let herself fall. She fell from the highest branches hoping to wake up from a bad dream. However, she was bound to this tree and its limbs moved to catch her lifeless body, pulling her closer to the trunk in a comforting embrace. She gave in to her bed of leaves. Feeling powerless and defeated a tear fell from her eye. The tear was snatched up by the tree and cradled among its roots. That tear drop is what we now call the



art by Michaela Flint

Big Bang.

Contained within Anne's tears were her thoughts and emotions, her conscious and subconscious. Her tears filled the universe with space and her mind filled it with substance. For eons Anne lay in the branches

of that tree. Her tears created an orb, a pool that was cradled by the tree's roots.

Anne looked down into the pool to see a distorted reflection staring back at her. She quickly looked away. Something about the reflection was unsettling, in particular its eyes. She moved closer. Peering in she saw only chaos. Anne whispered, "enough of this," and everything

it was good.

This order brought clarity to the universe. Energy became woven into atoms. Anne watched as these particles interacted with one another. She watched as they formed bonds and clustered together in clouds. She began to see a reflection of herself in their behavior and began to see that their behavior was an expression of her. These



photo by Anna Fernandez

suddenly organized itself and order was brought to the universe. In that moment Anne created the laws of physics and saw that

particles possessed characteristics and personalities that made it easy to recognize the author. She smiled at her work.

Lying in the branches of her tree, Anne looked down at the universe spinning softly below her. For the longest time she just looked at her reflection in the water below, observing every movement. Sometimes she saw strangers, characters she did not immediately recognize as herself. Like pieces of a puzzle, she didn't know how they fit together to create the whole. Some of these characters made her burst into laughter, others, into tears. She watched as clouds of hydrogen atoms become dense and hot. She was mesmerized by their performance. Anne rose from her bed and climbed down to the base of the tree. Standing on its roots and looking down into the pool, she dove in.

And God said, "Shit," and burst into tears.

All around Anne, stars were flickering on and off, juvenile stars struggling to retain a sense of stability as they moved out of a nebula. She reached out cupping her hands trying to catch the light of one of the juvenile stars. She laughed and played with the flashes of light like a child plays with a lightening bugs in June. Sure that she had caught one, she opened her hands slowly, just enough to peak inside and take a

look at her captive. An intense light came bursting through the gaps between her fingers. She gripped the star tighter, but it became hot. She let it go. From her hands fell a huge star, a super giant. Anne looked at it with awe and followed its path. It was beautiful. She watched as the star's gravity influenced the fabric of space. She watched as hydrogen atoms within the star smashed into one another fusing to create new elements. She followed this star until suddenly, it popped. A super nova. Anne laughed at this behavior and made another. She cupped a cloud of atoms in her hands and packed them like a snow ball. She released another and another and so on.

Standing in the branches of the tree, Anne looked down upon all creation. She smiled and a tear of joy fell from her eye.

On the second day God made the stars and saw that they were good.

At the end of the third day Anne climbed back down to the roots of her tree. Peering into the cosmos she wondered why she was here. It is quite obvious that when blessed with a blank

canvas one must create. But why? Why create things? Why exist? Why not just

leave it blank? Dissatisfaction clung to her brow. Anne closed her eyes and began to weep. She knew she had a purpose; she knew that she had something to say. In the branches of her tree Anne sat and thought about all things.

Anne decided that it was her purpose to creatively express herself. She had the canvas and had painted the landscape; now she just needed a focal point. A tiny detail that would make this a masterpiece. With a single stroke of her brush, Anne brought Life to the painting. She poured all of herself into this work of art. All of her knowledge and wisdom was given to Life. Her creative spirit wove itself into a double-helix. Life was to be her contemporary, her muse.

Anne loved watching Life express itself in so many different forms. Awestruck by the wonders of DNA, Anne watched as these engines of creativity worked with different particles to create a cell. It was beautiful. Life's expression continuously became clearer and more detailed. Photosynthesis, one of Anne's favorite pieces, used the energy of distant stars as a muse. These organisms grew wiser and eventually became animated.

Anne was stunned by Life's expression. Organisms began to challenge the will of the universe; fish swam against the current

and challenged the boundaries of their habitat. She loved the plants and animals. They were beautiful, instinctual and certain. Anne did not see fish, lizards, birds nor bees struggle to find their purpose, struggle to provide meaning to their existence. They just were and it was beautiful.

But this realization left her feeling lonesome and defeated. This was no masterpiece; it was just another scribble. Anne wanted so badly to be able to create something that could summarize her experience, that could elaborate how she truly felt. In the branches of her tree, Anne wept for a day and rested.

When she awoke, Anne created human beings. She gave them a gift, a gift that makes them different from all other forms of life. Uncertainty. She blessed them with a conscience so that they too may reflect upon their existence and try to find purpose in it. "The minds of men are capable of anything, but it is their eyes that will deceive them," Anne whispered. Within the conscience she placed a lens, a third eye. This lens was her spirit. It gave humans influence over the universe; it was the mind of God. She breathed life into his soul.

And on the fifth day God created man in her own image.



photo by Zack Carroll

"Hello!" Anne said.

"Hello," said George.

George looked around. He was sitting in the branches of Anne's tree. He looked down at his hands and down at the cosmos below him. "Where am I?"

"I don't know," Anne whispered. They each sat in silence and stared at one another. Finally Anne spoke. "What are you thinking about?"

George took a moment to think about what he was thinking about. "I don't know," he said.

Anne saw him dive back into his own pool of thoughts. She waited patiently. She could read his facial expressions but she wanted to hear him speak.

"Where did I come from?" George asked.

"Down there," Anne

pointed at the pool. They both stared down into the cosmos.

"Where did that come from?"

"I made it," said Anne.

"How did you do that?"

"I don't know." She thought for a moment. "It was kind of an accident."

"What do you do with it?"

"I make things with it."

"What kinds of things?"

"All sorts of things."

Anne told George a story of creation. She revealed to him the thoughts that drove her to create the stars, planets and trees. He was fascinated by her and by the cosmos. Anne took George to a little blue and green planet and they walked along the surface together. Anne asked George if he liked it here.

"I love it," he said. "It's beautiful." George and Anne sat on the shore of a lake, watching the light of the sun as it fell below the horizon. They watched the stars slowly reveal themselves and move ever so slowly across the night sky before slipping back behind the blue curtain of day.

"Anne?"

"Yes, George?"

"Can you tell me why I am here? Why you made me and what purpose I serve?"

There was a long pause as Anne thought about how best to answer these questions. The truth, Anne thought, would serve as little consolation to George, the truth being that he is little more than a piece of clay in the hands of a sculptor, a variable to be measured in an experiment, an imitation.

"George, as you know, there is profound meaning in all things. However, this was not always true. There was once a time not too long ago when the universe served no purpose. There was only chaos. I decided that I had had enough of feeling meaningless and so I spoke these things that you see into existence and I created a purpose for myself."

Anne paused a moment to consider how much

of the truth she was ready to reveal. Although she had done so much good, Anne still wondered if she was doing it right. Doubt had always lingered in the back of her mind.

"You will awaken on this planet many different times and explore many different bodies and live many different lives. You will awaken knowing nothing of me, the cosmos or yourself. You will be my reflection." She paused once again. "Maybe more of a self-portrait. I made you so that I can watch what you do with it, see how you react, see how you place meaning into an empty space."

Anne reached out and took ahold of George's hand to provide him solace. She expected his reaction to be that of heart-break and to watch him writhe with unknowing as she had done in that moment before creation. Instead he seemed to be a peace, oblivious to the woe of doubt while standing in the presence of God.

"So what do I do," he asked.

"Nothing, You just be." She paused. "And you find meaning in that." She spoke these last words more to herself than to George. A moment of silence followed her statement.

"George." Anne spoke more

confidently now than before, as if she was making her closing argument. "Know that no matter where you go in life, you will always find a friend. You are a part of me and I am a part of everything. Just be free to express yourself and you will be just fine." She kissed him on the cheek and smiled.

George began to feel a great distance grow between him and Anne. Although her lips had barely left his cheek, he felt himself beginning to drift further and further away from the thought of her. He fell in and out of reality and lost track of time. He felt estranged but did not know from whom or from what. He lived billions of lifetimes without ever opening his eyes. All of his possessions were hidden from him; his knowledge, his creativity and his influence over the universe were buried beneath the consciousness and the teachings of others, others who told him how and why things were, who told him a story of creation and of two lovers, one of whom dared to taste the fruits of knowledge. Finally, George came to his senses and shook off the dust of a thousand years of slumber.

Jessica Hovde

Déjà Vu

You've done this before.

You look down at the coffee cup on the counter. Two packets of sugar and a splash of cream. You'd normally go without the sugar, but this early in the morning you need all the help you can get. Your stirrer has dripped on the counter, leaving the previously clean surface marred. And you can't help but think that you've done exactly this before.

Well of course you have. It's not like this is the first time you've gotten coffee here. You come in almost every day. It isn't even the first time you've gotten it with sugar, although you're not sure you've ever come in quite this early before. But you can't shake the feeling that what you're remembering is this exact moment. That you've experienced this moment at 3:30 A.M., staring down at your coffee, stirrer in hand. Fat drop of coffee splattered on the counter.

You shrug it off. It isn't like déjà vu is an uncommon phenomenon. Just chalk it up to yet another thing you don't understand about your own brain.

You put the lid on your cup and take a sip. It might be the best cup of coffee you've ever

tasted, getting rid of the weird taste on the back of your tongue. But then, that's probably more because of how early it is than the drink itself. It's still gas station coffee, after all.

You start moving over to the front of the store, pausing to peruse the potato chip selection before deciding you don't really need any of it. Maybe you'll stop and pick up breakfast somewhere on your way to the airport. It's not likely to be healthier, but hopefully it'll be more satisfying than a bag of chips will be.

Matt is where you left him, reading a magazine behind the counter and slumped on one elbow, and he looks up as you approach the counter. The dark rings around his eyes speak to how long he's been here, but he still manages to smile at you.

"So why are you here so early, anyway? Or is it late?" He arches an eyebrow, fishing for any lurid details about what might've kept you up all night. You're going to have to disappoint him.

"It's early. I agreed to go pick up my sister."

His other eyebrow rises to join the first high on his forehead. He glances over to the clock on the wall, and then back. "At 4 in the morning?"

"I'm getting her from the airport. She caught the red-eye. It was cheaper, so..." You

shrug, leaving the thought hanging. You know he gets it.

He snorts, wordlessly taking your money and handing your change back.

"What a good big brother."

He smirks at you. You roll your eyes but don't respond, taking a gulp of coffee. This is a mistake, as it's still very hot. You should've put more cream in it.

"Well listen," Matt says, "I'm heading over to Marie's later. You should come with." You stay quiet, cup to your lips but not drinking. "She has a pool." He tries to persuade you.

It could be fun, you think. It is the end of summer, and you know you might not have many chances like these left. But you're not sure you really want to spend the afternoon watching Matt make out with some girl, pool or no pool.

The bell above the door chimes behind you, and the sound of brisk footsteps approaching where you stand quickly follows. You shuffle over to let the poor guy with the misfortune to also be up this early by, giving the lotto tickets a blank stare from your new position. You probably should've gotten going by now, but you're not feeling as enthusiastic about the long drive to the airport as you were when you first volunteered. You wonder why you feel

so sluggish, and look down at your ineffective coffee, feeling as if it's betrayed you. You might be better off giving the pool a miss today and sleeping instead.

You look up at Matt to tell him so and say your good-byes, but he's not looking at you. Has he been that pale this whole time? You didn't notice. His eyes are locked on the customer still, not speaking. You turn to follow his gaze.

Two eyes peer from the holes of a ski mask back at you, and a shaking hand points a gun at your chest. How did you miss that happening? That coffee urn must be filled with decaf, you think. You kind of want to laugh at the thought. You don't.

"Do not move." The man's voice sounds rough and deep, and his chest is heaving like he ran here. His eyes are open wide, wide enough that you can see the whites of them all the way around, even with them darting back and forth. You wonder what he has to be afraid of. You guys are just kids, and he has a gun. You don't move.

The man seems unsure about who to point the gun at, aiming it first at your chest, then Matt's, then back again. He finally decides to keep it there, though his hand shakes in a way you're sure you would find alarming,

if you could feel anything at all but numb disbelief.

He keeps the gun trained on you as he speaks to Matt, nodding at the cash register.

“Open it up.” His voice is softer this time, quieter.

Matt nods quickly, moving towards the register, popping open the drawer with the twist of a key. The man seems to lose some of his stiffness now that he’s getting what he wants.

He shakes the gun at you. “Give him a bag.”

You don’t know what to do. What bag? You didn’t bring a bag in with you, just your wallet. Maybe he wants that? You don’t know if you should ask. You look to Matt for any clues, but he’s unmoving, posture rigid. You think he might be holding his breath, he’s so stiff.

The man gets agitated again at the sight of neither of you moving, and waves his gun at Matt. “You.” Then he returns to pointing it at you. “Give your friend a bag.”

Matt rips a shopping bag from underneath the counter, looking down at his hands as he struggles to open it. Then his eyes fixate elsewhere, and he’s able to shake it out more easily. The sound of

the rattling plastic makes all three of you jump, and you’re relieved that

the movement doesn’t twitch the man’s finger against the trigger.

You set your cup down on the counter to take the bag from Matt’s fingers. You glance at his face. His lips are pressed together so tightly they’ve gone white, but his eyes seem hard and determined when they meet yours. You wonder what he’s thinking. You wonder what your own face looks like right now.

“Now hold it open for him,” the man directs you, stepping back to let you come closer.

You do, feeling awkward as you stretch your arms across the counter.

“Put the money in. Quick!” He’s tense again, and as Matt starts shoving fistfuls of bills in the bag, he starts glancing rapidly back and forth between it and the entrance and windows behind you both.

While the man watches the bag and the door, you watch Matt, which is why you see him do it. As one hand transfers the last of the money from the register to the bag, his other hand sneaks just beneath the counter. There must be a panic button or something, you think, and you jerk your head back up so as not to give him away.

But it’s your movement that draws attention, as the man looks towards you, then at Matt who has frozen with his hand still beneath the counter.

“Hey!” The man starts to move the gun. You take a step towards him, not thinking beyond the sudden onslaught of panic that only now consumes you.

A shot rings out. You knock the coffee from the counter. You’re not sure which happens first.

You look at the man, who is looking back. His eyes are somehow even wider than before. The gun is still pointed at you. You follow his gaze, looking down at yourself.

There is coffee on your pants. There is blood on your shirt.

You are really slow this morning, you think. You think this as you follow your cup to the floor.

There’s a yell up above you. Another gunshot. You hear something fall behind the counter.

The bag rustles as the man snatches it from the counter, screaming something at you both. He’s so breathless he sounds like he’s sobbing, but you can’t look up enough to see, only able to listen as he runs for the door. And then everything’s quiet for a long moment.

You try to hear if Matt is moving or not, but as you strain your ears, the only sound that fills them is the sound of your own gasps and what might be your heartbeat, drowning out the

previous silence of the gas station. You think you taste blood.

You give up on trying to hear Matt. You’re not sure you want to know if he’s okay or not, given that whatever’s happened to him is your fault. Why did you move? You shouldn’t have moved. If you’d just stayed still, you wouldn’t be on the floor right now, staring at the selection of gum as you feel warm liquid spread beneath you. You hadn’t realized you had that much coffee left in your cup.

You shouldn’t have been here. You should have left and been on your way to pick up your sister. You shouldn’t have stopped for coffee at all. You shouldn’t have volunteered to get her at all. You should have been on the plane with her, instead of lying about having to work to avoid seeing your dad.

You should have done so much.

You realize you’re shivering. You hope your sister brought a sweatshirt with her, and that she doesn’t go outside looking for you.

You’re sorry she’ll have to sit in that airport alone, waiting for someone who’s not going to show.

You close your eyes.

You open your eyes. You stir your coffee a few more times, and then tap the stirrer on the rim. Some of the excess flicks

off the tip and onto the counter. You find your gaze drawn to the little brown splash, prominent on the previously clean surface, and can’t help but stare a moment, clutching the little plastic stick in your hand. There’s an odd taste you can’t identify on the back of your tongue.

You’re sure you’ve done this before. Just déjà vu, you guess. You’re probably just mixing this time in with the hundreds of other times you’ve gotten coffee here. You shake it off as you move to the counter.

Matt’s still there, slouching and looking like he’s about to drift off any minute. He still smiles when you reach the counter, though, and makes small talk while he rings you up. You contribute halfheartedly, focused solely on your coffee. When he hands you your change, you nod your thanks, moving towards the door.

“Hey!” Matt calls out as you’re halfway to the door, and you turn to face him, though you don’t stop moving backwards towards the door. You don’t want to be late to your sister’s flight. You’d feel bad if you left her to wait for you in the middle of a deserted airport, and you’d like to avoid the lecture you’d get from your mom if you did.

“I’m heading over to Marie’s later. You should come with,” he continues as your back

hits the door, and you pause to hear him out. “She has a pool.” He grins, trying to persuade you.

You shrug as you push the door open. “Sure, maybe. I’ll text you later if I can.” But you doubt you’ll actually go. You feel so tired, and for some reason you doubt your cup of crappy gas station coffee is going to help much. You’d much rather just bring your sister home and go back to bed than watch your friend make out with some girl.

Matt nods his head cheerfully though, waving goodbye as you leave. You hurry out to your car, ready to get moving. You exit the parking lot as another enters at speed, and you briefly feel bad for them, feeling a little solidarity for all the other people that have to be awake so early. But you don’t spare them much more thought than that.

There’s more traffic than you expected, and you only make it there five minutes before your sister does. You’re glad you left early.

She looks tired, and there’s a line on her face that suggests she fell asleep with it pressed up against something, like the side of the window or the seam of her seat. You don’t tell her.

“Hey,” you greet her as she reaches you, yawning widely and

grinning when it makes her yawn back.

“Glad your plane didn’t crash. Would’ve been a waste of a drive.”

She rolls her eyes at you, but it’s not like she was expecting something more sentimental. Neither of you are the kind of siblings that hug or say they missed each other.

“Glad that you didn’t drive the car into a tree. It would’ve sucked being stranded here,” she responds in kind, and you can’t help but smile at the familiar bantering as you both head to baggage claim. The smile disappears quickly when you get there. There’s a lot of people that own black suitcases.

You and your sister are some of the last people left by the time you’ve located all her bags, and you’re a little amazed at how much more stuff she seems to have produced over the summer. You’re busy hefting a duffel bag onto your shoulder when out of the corner of your eye you notice your sister has frozen. You turn to see her staring at her bag, eyes fixated on the tag wrapped around the handle, just above where her hand had gripped it so she could pull it off the conveyor belt.

“What’s wrong?” you ask her. “That’s your bag, right?”

You look back

at the belt, but there’s only a couple bags still making their way around, waiting to be claimed, and neither of them are your sister’s. You’re gonna be pissed if they lost it. All you want to do is go home and sleep, and having to go deal with whatever a lost bag entails is only going to delay that.

“What?” She jerks her eyes away from whatever caught her attention to look at you, and then she rolls them, this time at herself.

“Oh, yeah. I just had one of those moments, you know? Like I’d already done that. Weird, right?” She starts to shrug, but pauses at whatever she sees on your face. “You okay?”

You nod, because you don’t know how to explain the sudden plummeting feeling in your stomach. It feels a lot like dread.



art by Susan Whitehouse

Nicholas Dyer

Dreams Do Come True

There is something off about him. A different sense of style; no. Maybe he went to war and still has night terrors about death. Maybe his parents weren’t around much and he fended for himself. Does it matter? Maybe. Either way it’s going to happen but I’m fine with another father figure. However, sometimes I see a man with a mask and sometimes I see a man who doesn’t know who he is. Is that a problem? I’m not sure.

I stand behind his broad shoulders, looking over his grey head and black tux. He is almost a foot shorter than me, and makes the height of the line of groomsmen look awkward. They repeatedly smile at me throughout the ceremony as if they know something I don’t. I feel insecure and occasionally look out at the guests of the wedding, but I don’t recognize anyone. My mother’s parents must have missed it. Who misses their daughter’s wedding? Something feels wrong. Maybe this isn’t supposed to happen. The pastor says, “If anyone has any objections...” I yell out something I can’t recollect and everybody laughs as if I were making a joke.

“Ohh, Nick. Thank God someone in the family has a sense of humor.”

I can’t let out a response to state my seriousness, so I just stand there and observe until the end of the ceremony.

When they run down the middle aisle and everybody files out of the rows and follows along, I rush through the crowd to stop them. But they have made their way down the hill that the little white church and the guests stand on. I feel

the separation and it makes me clamor for every stride as I run as fast as I can. What am I running after them for? I need to save my mother from this strange man. The grass is a grayish tint of green and the sky is filled with black rolling clouds that sweep me back with the wind. I can’t run. What is wrong? I fall straight on my back, look up and see my mother smiling and laughing at me, running further and further away towards the rolling hills.

“You motherfucker! You know that’s not right!”

I open my eyes and see my alarm clock sitting on my dresser. It says 6:13. Where am I? My anxiety is increasing, but I can’t figure out why I was so anxious. I still gotta do home work? No. I gotta wash my clothes? No. I forgot to hide my cigarettes out back? No. I’m pretty sure I hid them.

“Niieeck!”

I raise my head up to see the light coming from under my door. Was that “Nick,” I think to myself. Ugh, let me go see.

I am trying to keep my eyes open as I get halfway up the basement stairs.

“NICK!!!”

“Shut up, bitch!”

I skip three steps and throw the door open to see my stepfather with a handful of my mother’s hair

and his other fist raised above his head. Time slows down and I don't say a thing. What can I say? I am thinking of a million different things at once. He gives me an evil look like a frustrated bull, but before he finishes his head turn, I push him across the room into the kitchen table.

“Mom, are you ok?”

“What are you doing?! I had this handled. Don't get in the middle of our fights. It's not your job!”

“Whose job is it, Mom?” She slaps me. I tear up. Don't say a word and run downstairs in shame. Lie back down in my bed with a soaking wet face and doze off.

“Nick!”

My alarm clock reads 8:30. I wake up in a panic and run to open my door. My mother is standing there holding the bottom of her pregnant belly where my little sister is and says, “Put something nice on. Pastor Freeman's coming today. He's gonna marry me and Dan. We'll have a nice quick wedding, just us as a family.” She smiles after. It isn't genuine, but it is necessary.

The pastor was here for 5 minutes and we have pancakes and Captain Crunch for dinner that night. It feels like they both wish they could restart the day. Maybe do something different. But the day is nearly over and the moon is forcing them to realize that. Actually, the way she looks at her shiny spoon above her bowl makes it seem like the moon is antagonizing her in the reflection. She has a right to feel that way. I remember saying goodnight as if none of that day happened and it was all a dream.

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I feel the softness of water that matches my body temperature per-

fectly. The only reason I can feel it is because it's moving; I feel the swiftness of the current moving through my fingers and my nose cutting through the water. I lean my head to the left and I'm spread out on white and tan stones that are perfectly round and shaped to my body like I'm lying in wet sand. I say nothing; I think nothing; its so peaceful that describing it only degrades the feeling it gives me. My past, my worries, my inevitable thoughts of death no longer reside in my consciousness.

I move my arms up and down slightly like a child does with his hand out the window of a fast moving car. And the current picks me up just enough so I can flow down with the water. I close my eyes and feel my body go vertical, then reopen them when I hear a soothing voice. A man or a girl? I do not know. The appearance? Nothing specific, only comforting. Maybe my real father. Maybe the illusion of god that my mind has created over the years.

He says, “You are almost done with what you had to do. Your time is almost up.”

This huge feeling of relief spreads over my body like a warm blanket. I'm not mad. I'm not sad. It is perfect. “Almost,” I ask.

“It may be one word. It could be a handshake; it could be a kiss... a slap on the wrist. What may seem like a small, simple task is actually of vital importance.”

“So, everything happens for a reason?”

“I will see you soon. Love you.”

Beep beep beep beep!

Ughhh. I slap the top of my alarm clock like I want to smash it into a million pieces, lie still

for a couple minutes then stand up lazily and get ready for school. I meet my friend Jess before class at her locker. She's not so pretty so people tend to make fun of her and sometimes I really think I'm the only person who talks to her. I don't know why; I always thought she was really cool and super smart.

“Hey! after school I'm going to take a test and tour at NASA's space program.” she says.

“Whoa, that's sick! What is it for?”

“It's for theoretical physics and this inhabitable planets course. Its really cool, but my dad hates it. Thinks it's a waste of time.”

“That's awesome. Don't listen to him. You look wicked pretty today, too, by the way. Damn!”

“I wanna make a good impression.”

“Oh, you definitely will,” I say. She blushes and smiles at me deeply.

“Thank you,” she says.

“Hey, text me after you take the test and let me know how you did. Ya know, you're gonna change the world someday, smartypants.” I lean off of the locker and walk to my class.

School sucked; too easy, too hard, too lazy. I need to sleep more. I stay after school to use the workout room and leave at a reasonable time. As I'm leaving I walk out of the front doors and hear a bing from my phone. I pull it out of my pocket and see Jess with a smily face next to it across my screen. It reads: “I aced the test! They said I did best in the class, omg I'm so happy! Im gonna work

for NASA after school! I can't believe this!”

I write back “I knew you could d...”

“Watch out!”
BEEeP!!!

I see the face of a startled old lady peering through her thick glasses behind the wheel of a green Buick. The screech of four old Goodyear tires leaving their reminiscences on the worn pavement pierce my ears. I can taste and feel the air as if I was a gas mixing in with the oxygen departing from the bright green leaves of the oak trees that inhabit Oak Street.

“Welcome home, son.”

“It's good to be back. So, what's next?”

“What happens next will be more familiar than you think. You will be born into a dysfunctional family, grow up constantly trying to be accepted, and take a path of war. Whatever happens, don't deter yourself. For the child you once were will now grow from your influence.”

“AHHH!”

“One more strong push!”

“Come on baby, you got this. I love you so much!”

“Here he is!” The doctor says. “So what name did you decide on for a boy?”

“Well, we really like Dan.”

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art by Elza Cardwell

Vicky Nordlund

Carcinogenesis

I read today that a mountain lion was found in Idaho
with a set of fully-formed teeth and whiskers
growing out of the top of its head.
Experts surmise that it could most likely be a teratoma.
And I never knew this was a thing,
that these tumors grow wedges of cartilage, patches of hair,
pieces of liver and heart,
fragments of fingers and toes,
in the brain, or perhaps the stomach, of an unsuspecting animal, or human host.
A horror show of tangled vessel and bone.

And I imagine now that this monster doesn't fancy itself a mistake;
conceiving us as the malignancy stopping its growth.
Replicating its proliferating cells,
swelling out of our tissues,
laboring in our blood
to birth its own ideal.
Believing its mass is the source and summit of life.
Terminating our structures in order to deliver itself.

And when this parasitic bundle of parts, this
destruction disguised as creation
realizes it can never let our cord go, says,
"Maybe they won't raze me if I make myself in their image."



art by Amber Schlatter

Julia Bonadies

Saved

*"Is it love
If they don't even know
How to love themselves."
—Rupi Kaur*

By the middle of the summer
It was a forest teeming
With my untamed thoughts.
Buzzing from the ground up
With the heat we found
Ourselves caught in.
You split my jaw open
With your jackknife tongue
But I cracked myself wider
To suck your poisonous past
From you like lethal venom.

His body was a wound
I bandaged with my lips.
We were foreigners
To gentle kisses
Bought and traded like penny candy.
It was the Last Supper every time we touched.
"This is my body which is given for you
Do this in remembrance of me"

We laid our words like palms
Underneath each other's feet.
Anointed our foreheads
With tree sap.
Canopies of pine needles
Were our sanctuary.

Rolled the stones away
From our hearts.
Resurrected our trust
And breathed life
Into dry bones.
Gave ourselves hope
And called ourselves holy.



photo by Noelle Michalik



photo by Akin Warner



art by C.M. Gregoire

Boom

“The pressure wave generated by the colossal fourth and final explosion radiated out from Krakatoa at 1,086 km/h (675 mph). It was so powerful that it ruptured the eardrums of sailors 64 km (40 miles) away on ships in the Sunda Strait.”

The possibility of rejection is always there.
It’s never supposed to come ashore.

When it does, it swoops in with all the force of a bowling ball to the stomach.
It settles in as gravel on a skinned knee: sudden, polluted, and foreign.
Accompanied by that hulking green-eyed thing
sieving vision so that anyone else who seems to be favored
ought to be an ant helplessly drawn under my sun-sharpened magnifying glass.

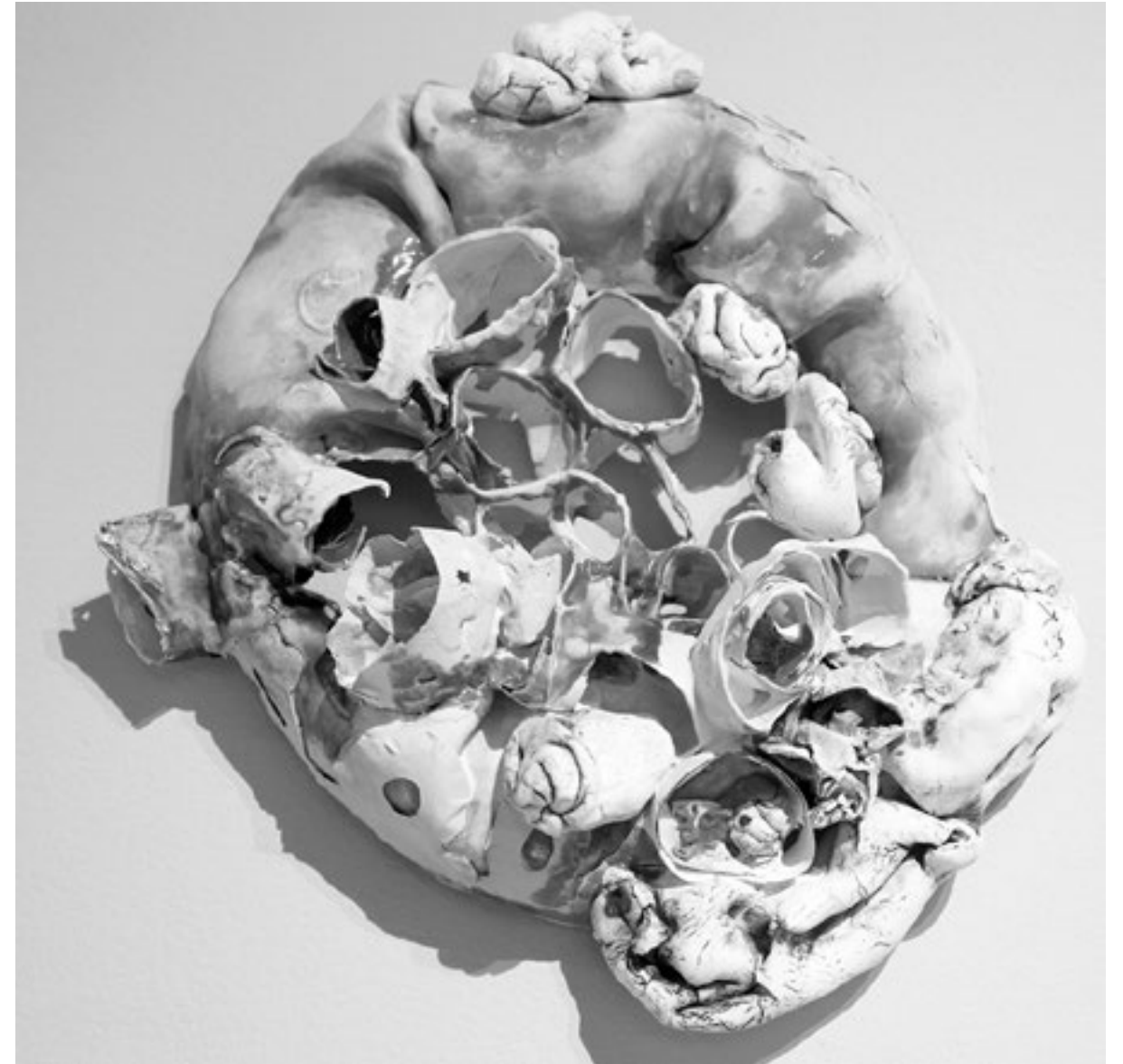
Put things in perspective, Safety Net tells me.
We’re like fire ants to a Brazil-Nut tree.
Pearls to the ocean.

Put things in perspective.
The Byzantine Empire blazed in glory for over a thousand years,
yet when compared to an Eon, it stands like a Microorganism would
against a two hundred ton Blue Whale.
Larger. The Milky Way in its Four Hundred billion star vastness is little
more than a grain of sand in the Sahara next to the Universe itself.

Put things in perspective.
You and I are so small and insignificant.
This is like a fuzzy little rainstorm compared to Jupiter’s Great Red Spot.
This is insignificant in view of all that has come before, all that is,
and all that is still to come.

Somehow this collage of encyclopedic reassurance misses its mark,
doing little to soothe the pulped and grated surface
left by three awful words.

Rupturing my eardrums all over again.



art by Amber Schlatter

Julia Bonadies

To Be Honest

I'm still a little bit drunk
When I hear imagination
Clinking in the form
Of Star Wars Lego parts
From my little brother's bedroom.
I crack the door open a few inches
And see those parts shaping
And reshaping into things
I no longer recognize.
I squat in the doorway
And talk to this eleven-year-old creature
With bedhead and glasses
As he mumbles replies—
I wish I were him.
Just a little drunk off dreams
Unaware of potential
And starving for adventures
That start where wonder begins.
I wish I could shrink my mind back down
To being small
While still believing in its own bigness.

He's always asked more questions
Than any kid I've ever known,
But somehow I still think
He's a prophet in pajamas.
And if you look closely
You can still see God twinkling
In his eyes
Laughing at my tiny reflection
Staring back
As He waves,

Almost to say,
This is where I've been all along.
You just haven't looked
For Me in a while.



art by Michael Carman

Kate Foran

Lineage

—for Nelson Johnson

When the great organizer—
who came to Greensboro
from Halifax County
with nothing much but
the knowledge he'd been
cradled by sharecropper hands,
the withered hands of
former slaves
that pressed on him memory
and a charge—
who when he preaches
and the congregation hums, they call
the ancestors up from the ground,
and out from behind the hush harbors—
who is known on the other side of town
as *Agitator, Communist, Dangerous*—
who makes community
with the ones they called
No Count, Triflin, Lazy,
now *Criminal, Gangsta, Thug*—
when this man sees his little granddaughter
across the room and his eyes shine
and her eyes light up—
maybe he calls her *Honey, Sugar, Sweetheart*,
but usually he crouches down,
arms outstretched and calls
Hello, Somebody



art by Robin Davis

John Stanizzi

The Idea of Order

January 1, 2016

Ramon Fernandez, tell me, if you know,
Why...

“The Idea Of Order at Key West”
—Wallace Stevens

everything gleams with ice this morning tree branches reach into fog	not looking over our shoulders nearly enough
roots music reaches up through small flames through the idea of new time	Santiago Ramón y Cajal tell me if you know why when the quiet surfaced
how long before the first shots flare oh Jah and we come together for a few teary moments	and the air was clean again why some of us were able
before the synapse of forgetfulness fires and we move on	to move forward in spite of our paralysis in spite of our haunting inability to comprehend

Santiago Ramón y Cajal (May 1, 1852–October 17, 1934)
Spanish physician and scientist considered to be the
founder of modern neurobiology.



art by Elaine Lyman

Julia Bonadies

Aubree

When her parents dropped her off
She'd hang up her purple jacket
And second-hand smoke
Followed her like chalk dust.
Her head was shaved
Because of the lice she'd gotten
Earlier in the year
But it was growing back
In the chestnut brown peach fuzz phase.
She'd had her ears pierced
Since she was two months old—
Little gold hoops like a pirate
Whose words could chop your hand off with the scissors
She hid underneath her tongue.
Her eyelashes were always shedding
Like the tears you never caught her crying.

She looked like a tiny Buddhist monk
In her black chucks
With what seemed like
Tibetan mantras scribbled all over them
In the pen kindergartners
Are never allowed to use.
You wanted to ask her questions
Just because you knew
She'd seen more than you,
Knew she held more knowledge
In her crumpled fist
Than the teachers trying to warn her
About the life she was already living.



art by Amanda Koss

Alec McAlister

Toward Howard

*“The Red Line provides 24-hour train service between Howard on the North Side and 95th/Dan Ryan on the South Side via downtown Chicago.”
—The Chicago Transit Authority (CTA)*

At night you can see the lights of your train twenty minutes before it arrives.
Twenty minutes are twenty years at ten below, wind-chill.

Finally it pulls in and it is the most beautiful thing you’ve ever seen.
You choose a seat as far away from a door as possible and slowly
tiny fragments of circulation start to emerge and rekindle.

Your eyes scan the heads of those around you and settle on what could be a pile
of clothes until it moves. The bundle may grunt, barely audible: public evidence
of private nightmares? Maybe, Maybe not.

Either way his fitful night’s sleep is on display for all to see and ignore, the way
you ignore pigeons.

Exhausted, cold, and not a little drunk, you drift off, missing your stop by twenty
minutes. The Conductor’s voice is an impatient trumpet—announcing last stop,
Howard, and another long wait for the South Bound.

The bundle is up and mobile—it sheds ambiguity and assumes human form in a
heartbeat seamlessly playing the part of a slightly disheveled old man—
he happened to drift off while traveling home from a long trip—
so flawless a dance of survival it seems impossible he was ever anything else.

Every worldly possession he owns attached to him like tadpoles on a frog’s back.

South bound arrives and you both board the blessed warmth,
you for twenty minutes and a cold walk to a steaming apartment,
the bundle for twenty hours. And twenty years

38 or more—if he’s lucky—
within a moving, heated lifeboat,
inside from the arctic blast as it screams off the Lake,

howling after his body and bones.



art by Marc McCloud

Stephen Campiglio

Heading into the Flats

The blocks of my former Worcester neighborhood were once fields,
farms, and carriage trails, long since excavated, developed, and paved over.

English-born John Eliot preached Christianity to New England Indians
in their own language and published a translation of the Bible for them.
Nearly two centuries later, the Worcester Lunatic Asylum opened for business
lunatic deriving from its *luna* “moon” root to signify mental illness
as believed to emanate from a moon-driven imbalance;
-atic, lunar addict, veins paved with moonlight.

My present position, paved over too—Rt. 84 through north-central Connecticut;
the highway, like a buzz-cut across a scalp of wooded hills.
The red mass of a deer carcass in the passing lane—crows’ meal.

East of 84, into Manchester, sections of paved Mishi-maya-gat—
Algonquian for a network of “Great Trails”—
the footpaths of Nipmuc, Pequot, Mohegan
that connected different regions of central New England.

Even this poem’s been paved, inlaid, or cobbled with words;
a surface that can be arranged and re-arranged,
like the changes wrought by construction—
lines surveyed, bulldozed, steamrolled, and resurfaced.

I can even reconstruct the ending like this

Elizabeth Thomas

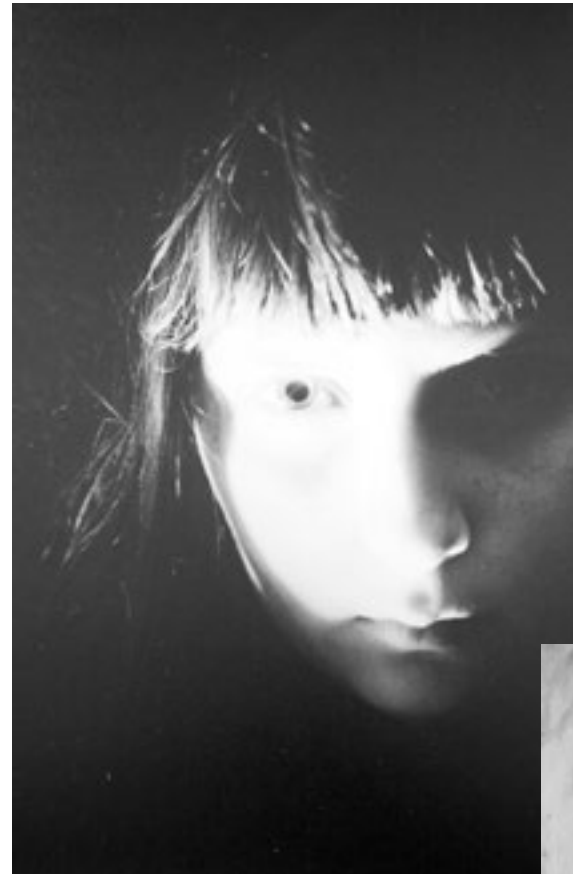
For Bev (1957-1999)

If your friends are there then everything's all right.
—Elton John

Quietly as possible, we closed the hatchway door behind us—its rusty creak, cobwebs tickling our faces. We three giggled like the girls we were when it shut us out into the hot August night. Our giggles—half rebellion, half rum. The bottle Bev held, stolen from her father's liquor cabinet, her parents long asleep. Then, we ran to the deserted schoolyard, dark but for the flashing headlights of a waiting car. With imagined sophistication, we each took one last swig, bottoms up . . . then piled on top of each other across the long back seat of Bev's boyfriend's car.

We drove through familiar neighborhoods, windows down, radio blasting—*"She's a black magic woman, trying to make a devil out of me."* Bev was what most parents referred to as "fast." She cursed and spit, wore a bra and lots of make-up, introduced me to cigarettes and pot, her boyfriend already in high school and she looked old enough to vote. "She's an explosion waiting to happen," my dad would say, though he liked her, because she never shied away from his hugs. Mom wasn't so sure. Both Bev's parents worked and on those hot summer days, their house was mostly empty, except for us kids. We'd all hang out, watching her dance to "Wipe Out," her hips moving with a mind we could not fathom. She taught me how to French kiss that summer, stuck her tongue in my mouth, mapped out where my hands should go.

Well past midnight, he pulled to a curb and Bev climbed up front. We watched them neck for awhile, trying to puzzle out the mechanics of tongues twisting, bodies hidden from view. Then they both lit cigarettes, just like in my mother's "True Romance" magazines. Finally, he dropped us off and we three headed home, taking backyard shortcuts. An in-ground pool looked inviting—ripples of moonlight on its surface. Bev stripped down to her panties, then managed a perfect swan dive into the deep end—while a chorus of stars sang, *"Ain't no sunshine when she's gone."*



art by Briana Flint



art by Mary Parzych

Meghan DePeau

A Car Ride on a Family Vacation

A warm breeze washed through the windows and across my relaxed face when my young daughter's squeal of laughter cued my own small voice, my father's sudden hand smacking at the sound. The rest of the memory is a blur: just my sharp inhale and widening eyes and his torrent of anger.

I notice the breeze as I float over myself searching for my breath. Now, the car, my family, zips past acres of corn lining NY-38's hilly shoulder. I'm struck by the contrast—the panic from being one step too far into the corn field, and how intentional the corn looks from the safety of the road.



photo by Kayla Savage

Lisa Butler

Below Zero

This morning I am grateful
for small circles of warmth:
the brief, pre-alarm cuddle
beneath two homemade quilts,
the steaming cups of coffee
thawing stiff fingers,
the black meditation cushion
gathering my own heat,
the gray cat nestled between my knees.
When I bow, encircling her, we purr.



art by Danielle Walsh

Meghan DePeau

Walking It Off



photo by
Jennifer Corcoran

Screw talk therapy. I need me some walk therapy.
Time to ditch the car and beat feet up a dirt, rock-studded
road. Time to climb the hill and pass those people on a stroll,
ignore the blister forming on my heel and lean in like I mean it.
The pastured cows keep at their cud, weeds sway in the breeze.

There’s a moment near the crest when my heart and my heel
are throbbing together, and there’s enough space in every direction
that even *my* limbic system knows I’m not trapped anymore.

The incessant wind pours past me in a rush, whips the sea
of grass flecked with clover in swooping arcs. The waves
will roll on long after I leave.

In the giddiness of the wind, I am
washed clean. My feet are rooted to the earth beneath me,
and somehow, in this wild waving of green, there’s a bee
nuzzling some purple vetch. It glides among dipping
blossoms, just as it was designed to do.



art by Laura Brown

Dacia Ball

Honey from the Old Country

—for Elizabeth

It is a ghost in the form of a mason jar.
You send me a text with the image of our honey,
the Benedictine gold we collected more than five years ago.
You discovered several jars in your mother’s basement,
and like Mary watching Lazarus wake from the dead,
I gasp at the amber liquid glowing from my phone.

I’m not ready for the warming of crystallized memories.
Just one spoonful could send me into deep recollection—
sweet threads swirled into pots of herbal tea,
a generous serving spread over warm wheat bread,
sheets of phyllo dough united with layers upon
layers of butter and bee nectar to make
Baklava in celebration of my vows.

You knew the mystical powers of honey,
smearing it across your face and up your arms
when harvest day yielded its abundance.
We sold a gallon for only twenty,
not knowing the extent of our generosity.
Swarms diverted us from spring picnics.
We followed deacons, who donned beekeeper white,
watching as they gathered life with gloved hands,
maneuvering a churning mass into the new hive
to be added to the lengthening lane of boxes
alongside peach and pear trees.

Today, your message humming in my hand,
you promise to bring me a jar when you
visit this summer, and I fear the taste
of its beauty will draw my sons’ hearts
away from mine into the hills of Maryland,
where they will live daily by the tolling bell,
forsaking all others to wear long robes
and tend the hives with great skill and sadness.



photo by Kimberly Kenyon



art by Daniela Flint



art by Adrian Pulido

Meghan DePeau

Thirteen Ways of Looking at the Body

—after Wallace Stevens

1
I am a free-moving frame
and the art within.

2
The apple raised to her lips is soon
pulverized. A long series of pipes
reduces it to water, minerals, vitamins,
sugar, roughage. Absorbed, stored,
burned, or discharged.

3
He is slick with sweat, drops
to a bench, lets the basketball
roll; skin cools to 98.6.

4
A tireless army of tiny soldiers
is designed to defend by recognizing
intruders, labeling them, bonding to them,
even ingesting them. Still others have
the duty of memory. They patrol all
hallways at all hours.

5
A balding executive winces when his ulcer
flares. A street urchin shivers in a dirty
alley. The body is relentless.

6
Cavernous spaces throughout
an organized haze
of associated atoms: inorganic,
organic, integrated; self.



art by Michael Campbell



art by Pheylin Prue



art by Corey Grant



art by Aaron Burleson

7
A coded link: the ancient past, now,
the future.

8
The bright, endless sky of the body is clear
until she has to leave the playground early.
Billowing clouds coalesce, are rushed
ahead by angry gusts of wind. Charged
atmosphere, fists of hot rain.

9
The body is a labyrinth of boundaries.
Each layer is permeable and impervious—
think of skin. Each inner fence has a form
that follows its function.

10
Subterranean rivers flow with suggestion.
They direct dreams. Some boats forsake
a paddle, lack a rudder. For those folks,
the current will always win.

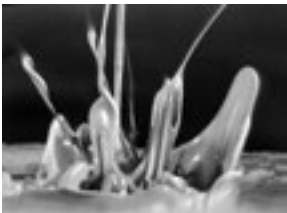
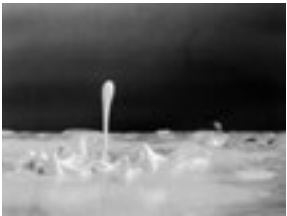
11
The poet rests on the shore, soaking in
the clean breeze, plumbing her
own depths—senses that she, the shore,
the breeze, are one.

12
Electrical impulses enter.
A gray mass makes a porch,
a summer night, darting fireflies.

13
A conduit—the universe in a newborn's
fingernail.



art by Ying Ye



art left to right by Juan Ramirez,
Mark Tran, Nathan Rockx, Luis Martinez

photo series by
Dreamoritza
Shrader



art by Emily Bard

Jerry Chaviaras

If You See Me

If you see me
outside of Paris or Big Sur or Colchester
and my eyes are bigger than usual,
may I be in the direction of understanding and lightness,
with true adventure in blossom,
like wildflowers and spring moonshine.

Brisk winter nights must have prepared me for this.
Wine and whispers and swings hanging on willow trees
are etched upon my heart and dwell in my soul
like lost keys in the snow.

Where do the young go to battle the foes of reason?
Do we ever really want to be satisfied?
So much about freedom feels so much like love.

Thank God for keeping me safe and alive and wandering.
From the beaches of Costa Rica to the meadows of Yosemite,
I have laid my head to slumber in your luxury,
smiling curiously.

My craziness is seldom overlooked these days.
When I stumble,
know I was only trying.
When I stutter,
please attempt to understand my words.
Through the vast and the vague,
I only want to see
everything and nothing.

If you see me,
and I seem confused or out of my mind,
remind me of love.
If you see me,
and I am restless,
remind me that I am still here.

46



art by Amy Muro



art by Sara Aube



photo by Shanice McKenzie



photo by Alexandra Eagleson



Joey Morrone

My Younger Cousin

My younger cousin has a hard time breathing.
A very rough case of asthma—
hacking, huffing, wheezing, puffing, shortness
of breath, chest discomfort.
I have seen her use dozens of different inhalers.

When I'm not dreaming about the important things,
I'm dreaming about her.
Just her breathing, really.
Her long, slow, painful grasps for air.
Her tiresome periods
of hunching, hands on knees,
making sense of the ground between her toes.

I once told her that she should be careful to avoid stalkers.
“Why is that?”
“Because you are very self-conscious
and I don't know if you could take it if somebody
called you every day and slowly breathed into the phone.”
“That's funny,” she said with a smile,
though she was afraid to laugh.

47

photo by Abram Hammer

Hannah Jahn

computer_Club

I lean forward from my creaky swivel chair to observe my mentor, tinkering with a malfunctioning motherboard. An abandoned computer tower; faded blue ethernet cables snake around black wire shelves that line the cramped walls; a few mismatched desks curve under the load of cryptic textbooks; monitors, necks turned in every direction, guard their cave; half a dozen misfit hard drive cases from various manufacturers beg for a mate, waiting to become whole.

A box of self-tangled mice here, a few keyboards with missing “Q” and “Alt” keys there. Blinking router gargoyles gaze down on the room from the highest of shelves; Phillips screwdrivers and flatheads are caged inside a desk drawer; a month-old sticky Sprite can molds from the humidity; a bucket of giggling screws and bolts; three jet black laptop chargers hide under the desk; two dozen USB flash drives stick their tongues out at me; fluorescent green sticky notes with sloppy digits litter the work area; and a dingy, grumbling carpet pads the ground for the geniuses that tread upon it to tame the mysterious electronics.



art by
Cassandra Poventud



art by Lauren Peoples

Joey Morrone

Two Things of an Average Size

Keith looked toward my face and asked,
“Who do you think would win in a fight: me,
Or two fisher cats?”
I scanned the motivational magnets and
Gawky high school photos that covered
The fridge and let the question hang in the air.
“Two average-sized fisher cats.
I only get to use my fists.”
A few more moments went by with nothing
More than the sound of cheap popcorn
Popping in the microwave.
“I don’t get to run away or anything;
There would be limits on where I,
And the fisher cats,
Can go . . .”
He got distracted by the ceiling fan
That spun silently above our heads.
“Like a sumo-wrestling ring,
Or something.”
We locked eyes,
Something we didn’t do very often.
“If you’re worrying about incentives—don’t.
In this scenario, the fisher cats would be
Motivated to fight me. Let’s say that they would be hungry.”
The microwave beeped the warning beep
Before the final *it’s ready* beep.
“Do you even know what a fisher cat is?”
“Of course.”
Keith took the bag of popcorn out and
Opened it. He started to chew, loudly.
“Well . . . who do you think would win?”
I started at his face and let the question hang
In the buttery air.



art by Mary Parzych

Steve Straight

Nowhere, Man

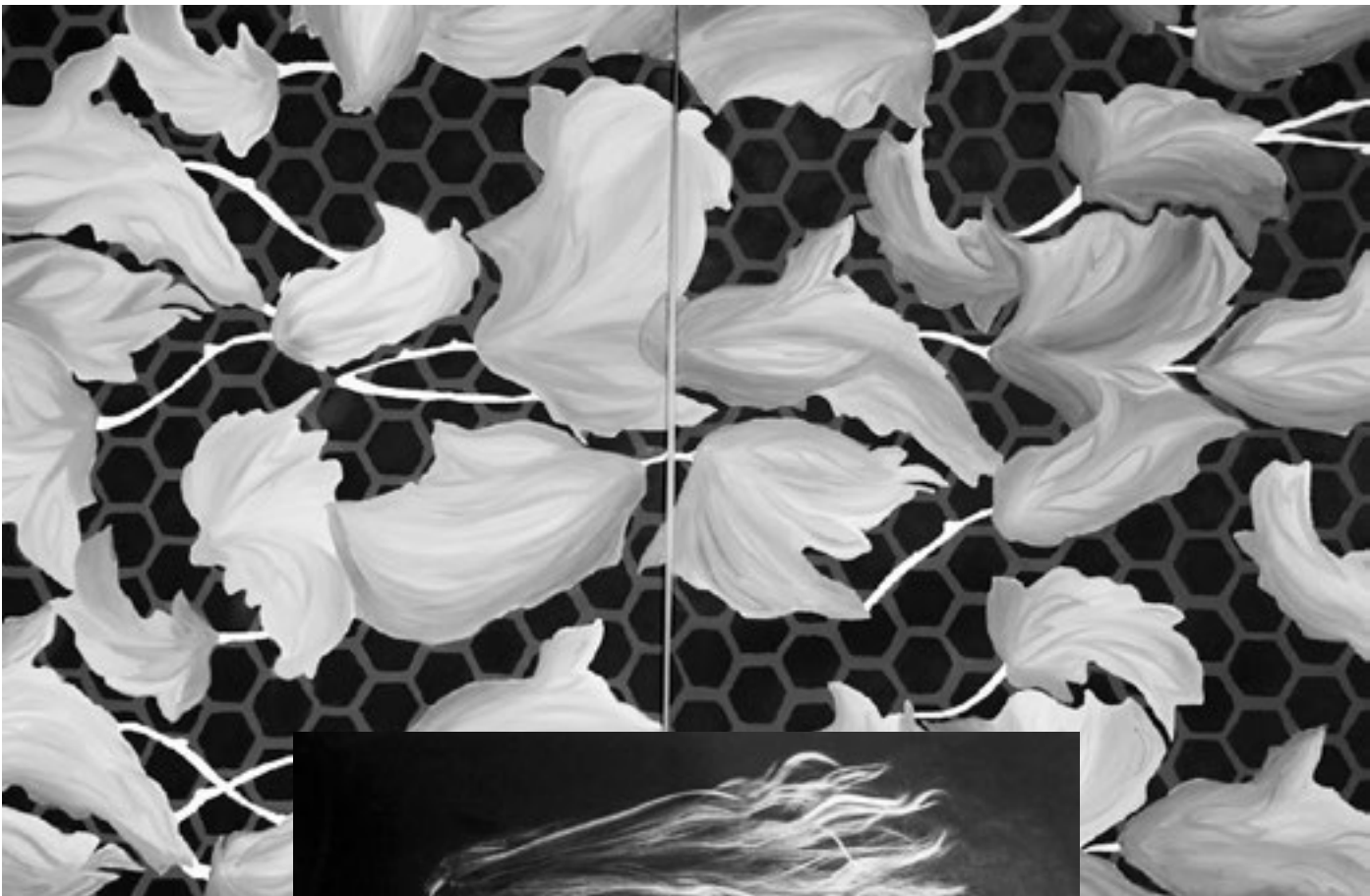
After we turned off Route 7,
I think it was,
and stopped meandering
along the Housatonic,
and took that left by the old mill,
crossed those railroad tracks
and found ourselves in a deep valley
on a narrow road with no turnoffs,
when Siri stopped talking to us
and our phone announced “No Signal,”
we knew we were in the boonies
for sure, that is to say out in the middle
of nowhere, the sticks, past Podunk
and East Overshoe and even East Jebrew,
and judging by the rusting truck
out back of that house down to
its last rows of shingles, its mailbox
stove in, we were in Hicksville, Rubeville,
some jerkwater town without a stop light,
past East Jesus and on the way to Timbuktu,
nearly to Upper Butcrack, the back side
of beyond, if you know what I mean,
not that we were lost, but let’s just say
we were out past the spot
where Christ parked his bicycle.



art by Nicole Aspinall



photo by Kimberly Kenyon



art by Nicole Aspinall



art by Alexandra Eagleson