

Superpresent

A grand, ornate hall with tall, fluted golden columns and a highly decorated ceiling. In the center, a vibrant blue digital projection of a human figure is displayed, composed of glowing lines and particles. The floor is polished wood, and there are white benches with gold trim. In the background, two people are standing near a large arched window.

Winter 2025

SUPERPRESENT

Superpresent

A Magazine of the Arts

Volume 5, Number 1

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ISSN 2767-5289

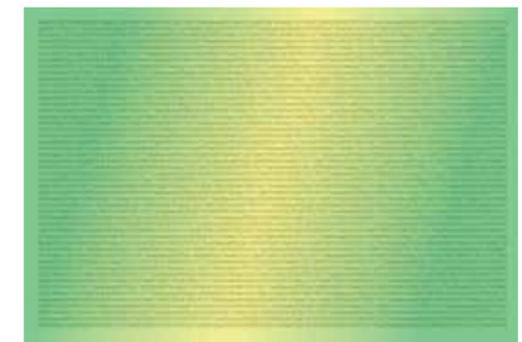
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Donors for Volume 5

Superpresent would like to thank the following people who have generously contributed to the journal:

Daniel Bauer

E.J. Clement

Edward Feighny

Duncan Forbes

Nancy Giles

Lee Harrison

Richard C. Rice

Jane Schmitt

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Editors' Note

We didn't really expect it but we had hopes. No, this issue, with its theme of "Secrets and Mysteries," does not reveal the Coca Cola recipe, excerpts from Hitler's diary, or classified documents from the NSA. Nowhere does this issue reveal the cure for cancer, or who sent the New Jersey drones, but after a Debordian *dérive* through all the words and images you may be a step closer to finding happiness. And you will find some guilty secrets, lustful secrets, secret fantasies, and more than a few mysteries about personhood and the universe.

Secrets come in many stripes: they can be positive or negative — A surprise birthday party versus Project 2025 if you will. Some secrets are never revealed and sometimes the work permanently awaits the big reveal, like Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (*La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même*), most often called *The Large Glass*.

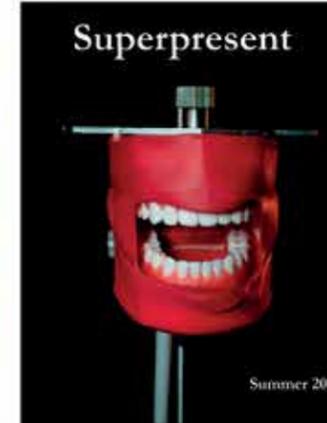
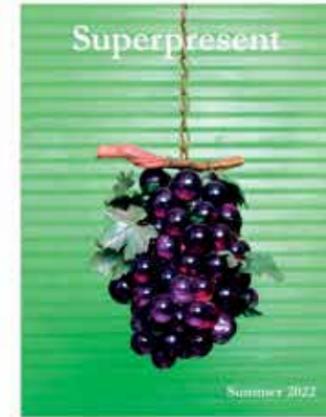
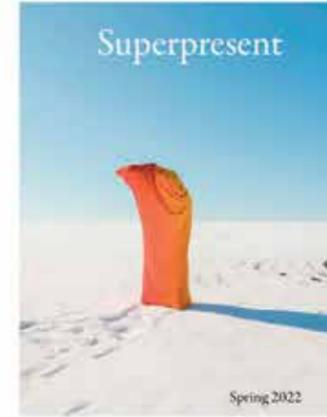
We are used to mysteries that have a resolved ending, as in the stories of the Hardy Boys, Daschiel Hammet, or Edgar Allan Poe. But real world mysteries often remain unresolved, like who killed Jimmy Hoffa, or why Pam Martin didn't reciprocate my love in the first grade, or who's behind the Voynich manuscript, the Nazca Lines, *MH370*, or the disappearance of those on the *Mary Celeste*. Dickens' unfinished novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, endures precisely because we don't know how it ends. Likewise, we question why authoritarianism is resurgent, what Schrödinger's Cat is thinking. For some mysteries, there are no better answers than what artists and writers concoct.

"Underbite," by Anna Mamie Ross, holds tightly to tender and dangerous secrets while Kim Silva's poems, especially "Hell on Holiday," hint at ordinary but unknowable daily terrors. "With Regrets," by Carole Greenfield, hides mysteries in wet coffee grounds and the underwear drawer. "My senses are not that reliable, Mom often reminds me," Flavia Monteiro writes in "Squirts," as she revisits childhood memories of prisms in light of contemporary orgasms.

David Kirby's poems, especially "The Langley Schools Music Project," use idiosyncratic history, scientific and ecclesiastical, to consider (though not necessarily reveal) the secrets of jukeboxes and televisions and leaded gasoline and language itself. Clara Hoag's *House Study* lets us in on what's happening behind closed doors in that mysterious house nestled among the trees and Gianni Olivetti's, *Private Window 1* and *Private Window 3*, likewise explore the secrets living in strangers' (and maybe our) homes.

The theme for the next issue of *Superpresent* is "Movement." We hope to see music, dance, performance, at least a smattering of politics (trans rights are human rights) and strategy, and whatever will surprise us from the polysemic meanings of this word.

A final note: this issue's endpapers are an alphanumeric code. Be the first person to decipher the endpapers and win a one-year subscription to *Superpresent*. Just email your guesses to editor@superpresent.org.



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Private Window 1
Gianni Olivetti

Death Cries Through Quick Fingers

Their fingers fly across the keys of a pristine, mosaic-decorated piano. Though trilling, though chaotic, the sounds they make are calming to the mind, subliminal messages of merriment tinkle their way through, even though the three beings that are playing it are shall we say, *grotesque*. They stand atop one another, the higher ones reaching down, almost clawing at the keys, so desperate are they to collaborate and yet stand out as the best.

The monster on top soothes his unlucky soul by reaching over the two beneath him, leaning over them, plinking his green fingered hands across the ivories and ebonies. He looks straight at the viewer as if to challenge him, to show that his playing is the best of all. Another beast, the one on bottom, raises his arms again and again, snapping his quick fingers to the discordant melody.

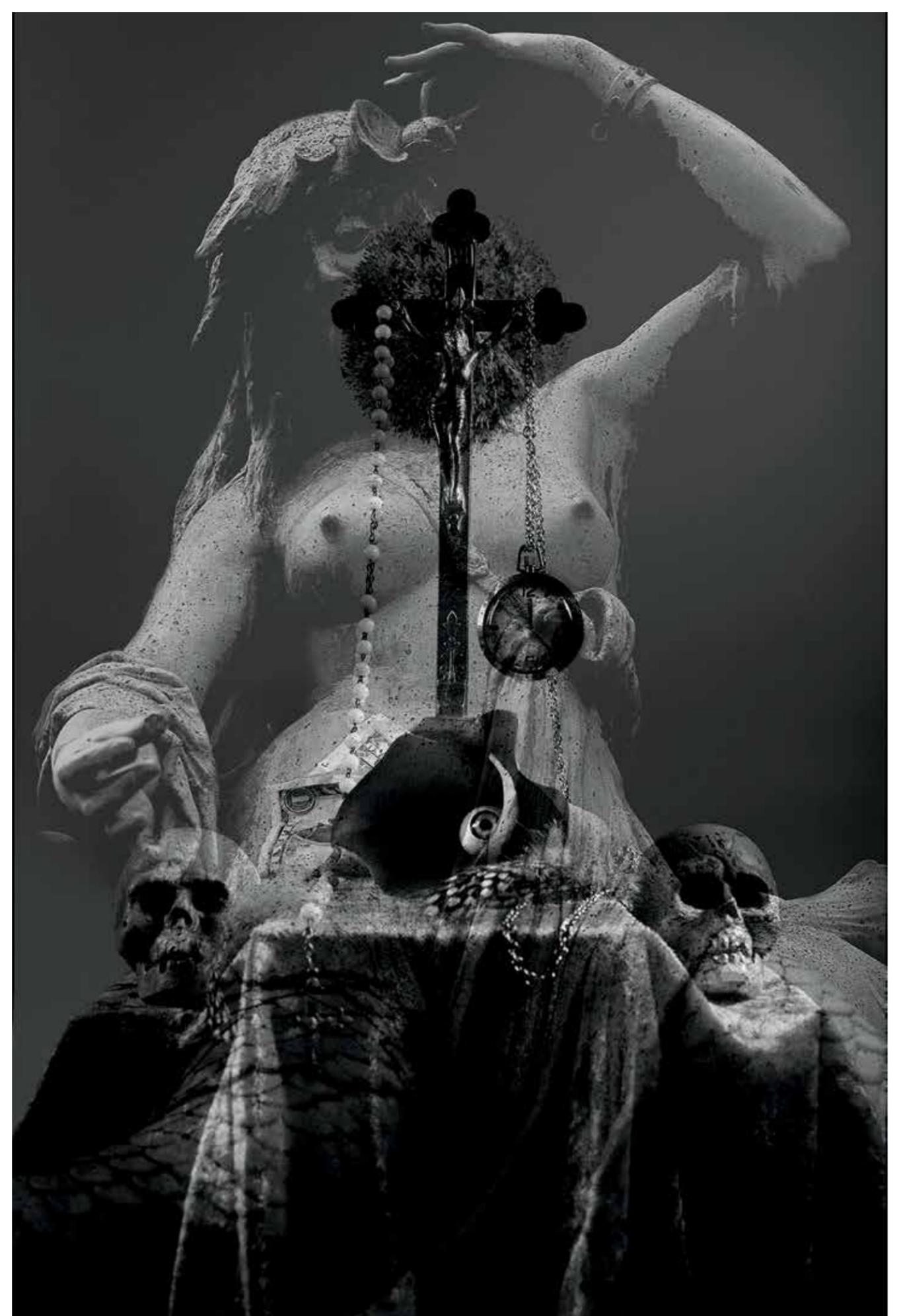
But strange sounds emerge from the second one seated at the bench. Not to be bested by the other beasts, he plays the acoustic guitar as well. He has blisters on his fingers! Words never sung before tumble from his tongue. Tickled by this feat, in spite of themselves they all croon in unison.

A rabbit has been left in the room by a sorrowful loser, one who toppled from his higher station before this session began. They don't like rabbits. But lonely for company, the rabbit joins them. Thumping in time to the music, the heart of the rabbit is bright red, and glows through his thin white fur. Jumping into the seated bastard's lap, he plays softly, gently in a vain attempt to calm things down. But despite his best efforts, the piano jumps and crashes against the wood floor; it retains its fiery luster, its strict geometric designs are dizzying to behold.

There is no playbook to direct their improvisations. There is no playbook to object to their improvisations. There is no checkbook to check their ceaseless spinning. They spin and spin.

-Kim Silva

Ritual
Helge Paulsen





RIGHT *Salomon's Turbine* Hugo Suchet
LEFT *No Need to Know W/ly* Edward Lee

Mystics and Visionaries

'Life is so startling, it leaves little time for other occupations.'

Emily Dickinson

Transcendent awe can be found in the most mundane of situations. Take for instance the twelve lines of 'An August Midnight' by Thomas Hardy. Noted for his somewhat pessimistic vision and a self-styled 'Impercipient' in terms of conventional faith, Hardy is here interrupted in his contemplative thoughts by four different insects which enter his midnight study through the window:

A shaded lamp and a waving blind,
And the beat of a clock from a distant floor:
On this scene enter – winged, horned, and spined –
A longlegs, a moth, and a dumbledore;
While 'mid my page there idly stands
A sleepy fly, that rubs its hands ...

The 'scene' is skilfully set and each insect is deftly characterized as it appears to the human observer, winged daddy longlegs, moth and a bumblebee in its dialect form along with a humanized fly which appears idle and sleepy, rubbing the hands which of course it does not have ...

The ellipsis between the two stanzas allows Hardy and his readers to wonder at the gathering of lives and its significance before he clarifies the midnight moment for himself:

Thus meet we five, in this still place,
At this point of time, at this point in space.
-My guests besmear my new-penned line,
Or bang at the lamp and fall supine.
'God's humblest, they,' I muse. Yet why?
They know Earth-secrets that know not I.

He calls his midnight visitors 'My guests' and includes himself among them as 'we five', even as they smudge and interfere with his 'new-penned line'. While tempted to condescend to them as the 'humblest' of God's creatures, he recognizes their alien lives as superior to his own in their knowledge of 'Earth-secrets that know not I'. This instructive little scene of minute lives and a seemingly chance encounter takes place in the massive arena of the universe, 'At this point of time, at this point of space.'

Hardy apparently wrote the poem at his house called Max Gate in Dorchester in 1899 and his sense of wonder here is echoed in very different terms by another writer fascinated by the space-time continuum and perceptions of relativity. Albert Einstein wrote as follows in 'My Credo':

'Our situation on this earth seems strange. Every one of us appears here involuntarily and uninvited for a short stay, without knowing the whys and the wherefore. In our daily lives we only feel that man is here for the sake of others, for those whom we love and for many other beings whose fate is connected with our own.'

I am often worried at the thought that my life is based to such a large extent on the work of my fellow human beings, and I am aware of my great indebtedness to them....

The most beautiful and deepest experience a man can have is the sense of the mysterious. It is the underlying principle of religion as well as all serious endeavour in art and science. He who never had this experience seems to me, if not dead, then at least blind. To sense that behind anything that can be experienced there is something that our mind cannot grasp and whose beauty and sublimity reaches us only indirectly and as a feeble reflection, this is religiousness. In this sense I am religious. To me it suffices to wonder at these secrets and to attempt humbly to grasp with my mind a mere image of the lofty structure of all that there is.'

(from 'My Credo', a speech by ALBERT EINSTEIN to the German League of Human Rights, Berlin, autumn 1932.)

Both Einstein and Hardy tended to reject conventional forms of religious belief and yet their separate contemplation of the natural world and of the cosmos engendered in both a sense of awe and mystery which is comparable to those of the mystic and the visionary. Reflecting similarly on the microcosm and macrocosm, Paul Valéry, the French poet and philosopher, put his comparable sense of the mystery of things in a rather different way, by making the strange familiar and the familiar strange:

'Let us imagine that the sight of the things that surround us is not familiar, that it is only allowed us as an exception, and that we only obtain it by a miracle, knowledge of the day, of human beings, of the heavens, of the sun, and of faces. What would we say about these revelations, and in what terms would we speak of this infinity of wonderfully adjusted data? What would we say of this distinct, complete and solid world, if this world only appeared very occasionally, to cross, to dazzle, and to crush the unstable, incoherent world of the solitary soul?'

Such numinous illuminations often employ the image and metaphor of light itself to express enlightenments and revelations in what are frequently our burdensome and benighted lives. Here is Thomas Traherne (1636 - 1674) with his mystical and beatific childhood vision:

'The corn was orient and immortal wheat, which never should be reaped, nor ever sown. I thought it had stood from everlasting to everlasting. The dust and stones of the street were as precious as gold. The gates were at first the end of the world, the green trees when I saw them first through one of the gates transported and ravished me: their sweetness and unusual beauty made my heart to leap, and almost mad with ecstasy, they were such strange and wonderful things.'

That wondrous phrase 'orient wheat' has sometimes puzzled me but, on mature reflection, it seems to be peculiarly apt in terms of the Latin senses of *oriens* belonging both to the rising sun and to the growing wheat.

Similarly, in *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (1974), that detailed observer of nature Annie Dillard perceives the mystery of 'windfall light' with what I think of as a scientist's mysticism:

'A rosy, complex light fills my kitchen at the end of these lengthening June days. From an explosion on a nearby star eight minutes ago, the light zips through space, particle-wave, strikes the planet, angles on the continent, and filters through a mesh of land-dust: clay bits, sod bits, tiny wind-borne insects, bacteria, shreds of wing and leg, gravel dust, grits of carbon, and dried cells of grass, bark, and leaves. Reddened, the light inclines into this valley over the

green western mountains; it sifts between pine needles on northern slopes, and through all the mountain black-jack oak and haw, whose leaves are unclenching, one by one, and making an intricate, toothed and lobed haze. The light crosses the valley, threads through the screen on my open kitchen window, and gilds the painted wall. A plank of brightness bends from the wall and extends over the goldfish bowl where I sit. The goldfish's side catches the light and bats it my way; I've an eyeful of fish-scale and star.'

By looking afresh at the nature of sunlight and its effects, Annie Dillard is here able to capture something of the mysterious miracle of life on earth and its open secrets in prose so evocative that it is 'electrically charged', as Rowan Williams has put it. The quotations here are lengthy because they are needed to provide the beguiling sequences of thought by which humans can appreciate more fully 'this infinity of wonderfully adjusted data', which we interfere with and pollute at our peril.

In recent years, we have been made freshly aware of how our human limitations perceive the worlds around us: 'What we observe is not nature in itself but nature exposed to our method of questioning.' (Heisenberg) We have the telescope and space probes to examine for us the macrocosm and microscopes of various kinds to scrutinize the microcosm. Computer graphics can animate these worlds which we cannot otherwise perceive with what we like to call the naked eye. In his recent study of creaturely perceptions, *An Immense World* (2022), Ed Yong focuses on the special abilities of such fellow creatures as bats, dogs, elephants and moths. Indeed, its subtitle, 'How Animal Senses Reveal the Hidden Realms Around Us' takes us back to Hardy's insects and their 'Earth-secrets'. Here is Yong's eloquent concluding paragraph:

'A bogong moth will never know what a zebra finch hears in its song, a zebra finch will never feel the electric buzz of a black ghost knifefish, a knifefish will never see through the eyes of a mantis shrimp, a mantis shrimp will never smell the way a dog can, and a dog will never understand what it is like to be a bat. We will never fully do any of these things either, but we are the only animal that can even come close. We may not ever know what it is to be an octopus, but at least we know that octopuses exist, and that their experiences differ from ours. Through patient observation, through the technologies at our disposal, through the scientific method, and, above all else, through our curiosity and imagination, we can try to step into their worlds. We must choose to do so, and to have that choice is a gift. It is not a blessing we have earned, but it is one we must cherish.'

Likewise, in the final paragraph of his *Seven Brief Lessons in Physics* (2014), the physicist Carlo Rovelli wrote 'In Closing':

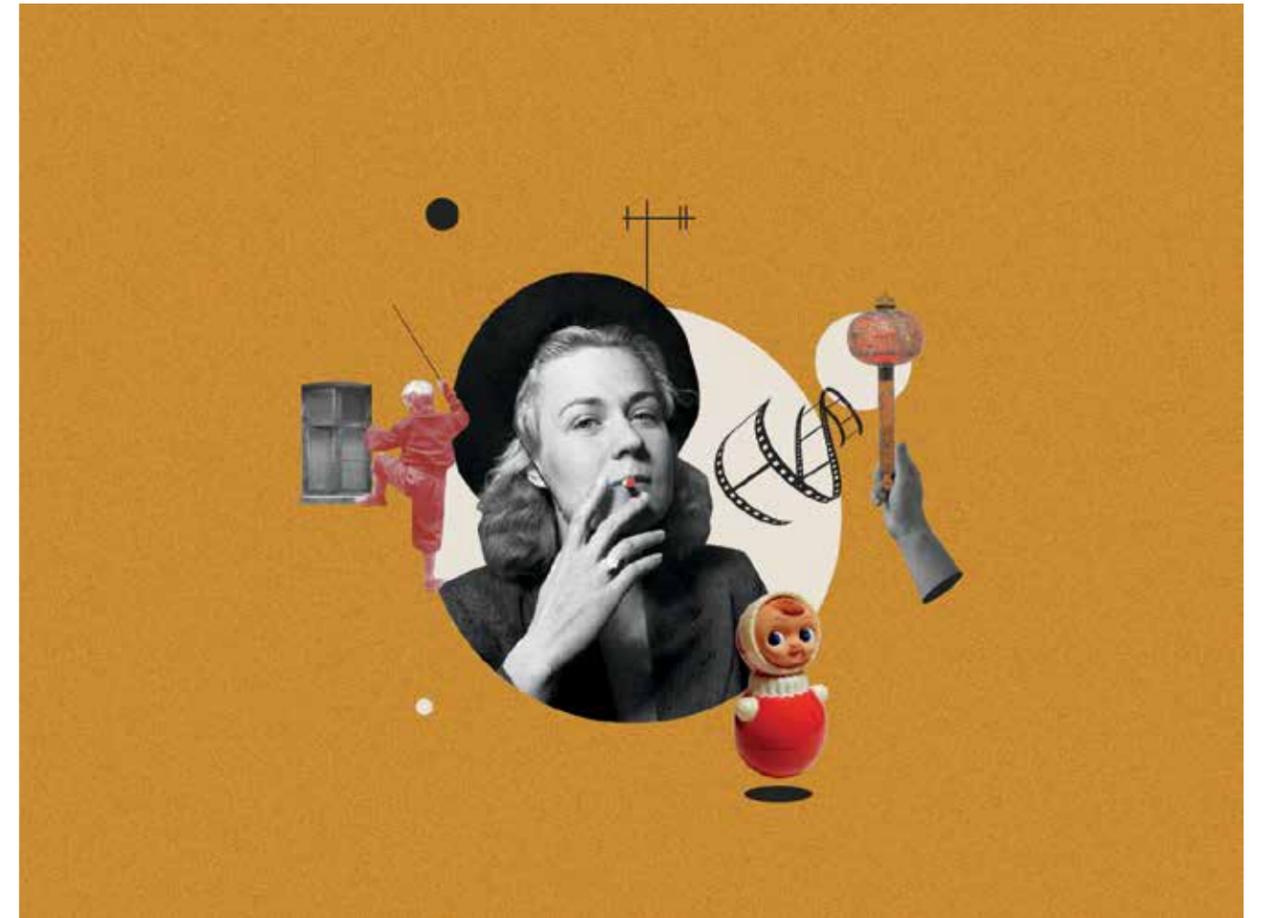
'There are frontiers where we are learning, and our desire for knowledge burns. They are in the most minute reaches of the fabric of space, at the origins of the cosmos, in the nature of time, in the phenomenon of black holes, and in our own thought processes. Here, on the edge of what we know, in contact with the ocean of the unknown, shines the mystery and beauty of the world. And it's breathtaking.'

That translator's word 'breathtaking' contains a potent irony because the mystery and beauty of the world is indeed exhilarating but life which gives us breath also takes it away. It is breathtaking in the double and biblical sense: the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. It is, to a greater or lesser extent, up to us what we do and think in between.

Duncan Forbes



Pause
Maisoon Al Saleh



Clarice Lispector
RIGHT
Tove Diielsen
Natalia Titova

The Feelings of Dragons

The movie had been fun, as had been their discussion of it afterward.

One thing she liked about him—and she liked it a great deal—was how he usually found something negative and something positive both in any art he consumed. No film was perfect, or perfectly awful. She enjoyed his fairness as a critic. It was refreshingly moderate.

There were certainly things she found less attractive about him. His increasing clinginess, for one. But at five months of dating she hadn't reached the point where she felt she needed to make any definitive decisions. He was enjoyable to hang out with, for the most part, and that was enough to maintain a non-binding relationship.

The restaurant had outdoor seating. She liked its casual atmosphere.

But then, just after they put in their order, he asked the question she hated.

“What are you thinking?”

It was invasive. She did not say, I honestly was thinking what a pleasant night this is, but now having to perform for you my own enjoyment has drastically reduced it. Instead she said, “I don't like that question.”

He nodded. “Well let me tell you what I'm thinking. Or better yet, let me show you.”

She then heard live music playing. It was his college bandmates. Of course it was. She looked around and realized several of their mutual friends were seated nearby and smiling at them. Or gawking. So this is what specimens feel like.

“I love you.” He said it loudly enough that everyone could hear, even over the live band. It was the first time he'd ever said it to her, though he'd implied it, once.

She said, quietly enough that only he could hear it. “Please do not do this. Please.”

He frowned. Then smiled again. “I know you're not one for ceremony and circumstance but I thought I'd make an exception. I think you'll forgive me, eventually.”

“No no. Please.”

“Sheila.”

“Aaron.”

“Will you marry me?”

The band was no longer playing. Everyone was looking at them.

She had two options. Hurt him now, or hurt him later. There was nothing else.

Quickly her mind did the calculation.

If you hurt him now, you will both be humiliated.

Is that your fault, though? That you're both in this position? Or did he choose it, alone?

It doesn't matter. It will humiliate us both.

Or you say yes, now. And then say no, most likely tonight. In private. And he realizes

that your “yes” was a lie. That you were never engaged. That it was a show. He put on a show, dragged you onstage, and you acted. That's all.

And then you'll have to explain it to your mutual friends. Who saw you say yes. You didn't ask them to witness this, but witnesses they are.

And then Sheila found a third option. It was not a good option. But it was her best.

She said, at a medium volume, “I don't know. We can talk about this. I'm not ready to say yes, right this second. Let's decide together. I'm not saying no.” Which was technically true.

He laughed. What the fuck? What was funny?

“Nope. I need a yes. Come on. Give me a yes. I love you. Tell me now.”

And that was it. That was that. There it was. He'd forced her hand into a binary of a ring or a fist. Well then, she hoped he enjoyed the punch.

“No, Aaron. No. I'm not in love with you. I like you, but we're not meant to be in the long term. I'm sorry.”

There were gasps. Sheila definitely heard an “ouch.” And imagined several silent, gendered insults being hurled in her direction.

Aaron looked genuinely surprised. “I don't understand. I thought things were going well.”

“They are—well they were—I enjoy your company and I like you.”

“If you liked me you wouldn't have used me and broken my heart.”

“That wasn't my intention.” Or what I did, in actuality.

“Yeah well. Impact matters more than intent.” God she hated how that phrase was so often weaponized. She would not fall for it.

“Aaron, that's not fair. I did not deceive you. I didn't promise you anything. If you think I did, then your communication sucks. If you wanted more, we could have talked about it. We did not. It's definitely a good idea to talk about where a relationship is going. But not like this. This is ambush and I don't appreciate it.”

“I didn't realize you hated yourself so much, that you wouldn't let me love you.”

“That's not it. That's not it AT ALL. Having self-respect, and a developed sense of my own preferences and comfort, doesn't mean I have low-self-esteem. What part of my personality made you think I'd enjoy this kind of proposal?”

“I thought you'd have the rest of your life to get over your discomfort, at least.”

“That's the thing, though. Proposals aren't supposed to be uncomfortable.”

“Don't lecture me on romance, Sheila. I have to make some apologies. You should probably go.”

“OK.” She wished she had something better to say. “I truly am sorry to disappoint you, Aaron.”

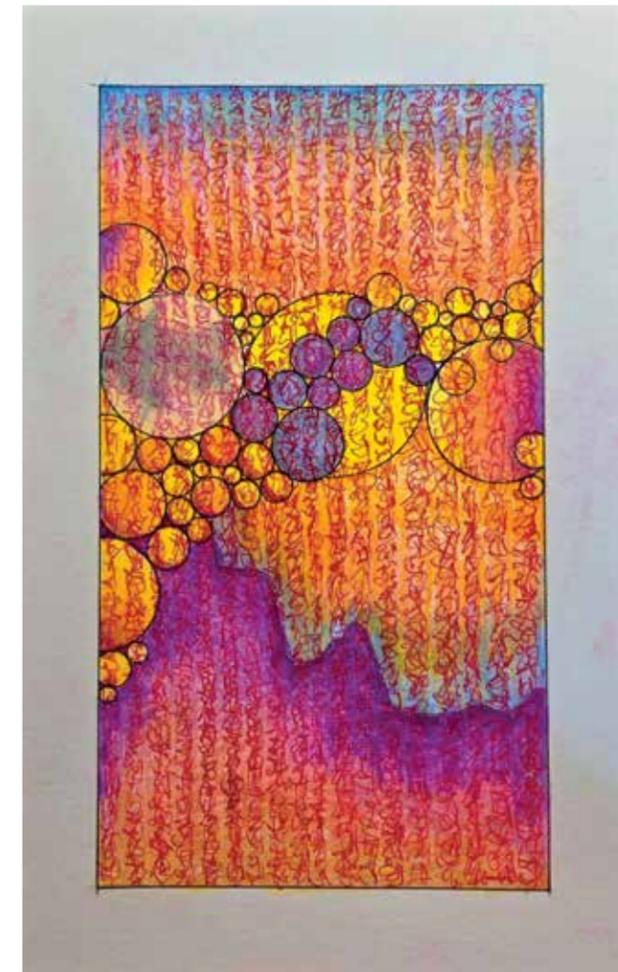
“You could have just said yes. You could, still. It’s not too late. People will understand your initial, bad reaction. They’ll forgive you. I do. Already. I guess I’m an idiot like that.”

She smiled at him, and his violent, stubborn, willful idiocy. She walked away. She was done apologizing to a man for his own issues.

The official version of the story rendered her a cold, evil harpy and him a lovelorn, spurned romantic. Blameless but for his folly in loving such a heartless woman.

It didn’t resemble her perception of reality, but then legends don’t care about the feelings of dragons.

-Alaina Hammond



Mountains of Questions
Keith Douglas Warren

Blackbird Singing

Somewhere in the yew tree
a blackbird is singing
an evening song
as the sun is setting
and moon has risen,
or else there are two
both blackbird and mate
to watch and to listen
to a sound and sounding
which note and notation
cannot redefine,
dark bird in a yew
with evergreen sound
from an orange beak
and of whose music
we use the word singing
but so to speak
of spring and daylight,
night and time.

-Duncan Forbes



Virginia Woolf
Natalia Titova



Private Window 2
Gianni Olivetti

Leaving

No sentence felt right. The words blurred together like highway lines drawn in purple ink—her black pen lost somewhere in Arnie’s All Night, the karaoke bar’s bathroom, a casualty of her purse tumbling off the sink while she applied lipstick. She returned to the post-work, pre-drunk karaoke crowd, spotting a glass of ancient Bic pens atop the piano. Who even uses pens anymore? She didn’t have a black one, that’s for sure.

If she mailed the letter, it would be over. But as long as it stayed unfinished, it held space for her—a kind of power. But over whom?

It’s pointless to end something that never existed. Or did it? Another excuse to keep writing. But after 45 minutes lost in an online haze of Target shopping, the only clarity that surfaced was this: Target’s fashion sneakers should be marketed as

“Look Like You’re Not Trying While Your Feet Feel Like They’re Dying!”

It wasn’t official if it was handwritten—too analog. Typing it in Word allowed for revisions, crafting a letter that would smolder in memory, like a sharp, casually delivered insult at a cocktail party—one that stings even more years later.

Not everyone smiles. They don’t have to. Were we really born to smile, as spiritualists, Keto enthusiasts, and overly chatty cousins at gender reveals liked to imply?

Printing it made it real. “Hello, thing in the world,” she thought. Five sentences down, and she felt proud. All “I” sentences, just like the makeup artist on TikTok said—none of those “you” sentences.

The gluten-free brownie stains didn’t matter now. The spark was lit, saved forever in Word. She could print a clean copy whenever she wanted. Walking out of her apartment, she misread the logo on a jogger’s cap: *No Sentence. Is a Sentence.* Closer, it read: The North Face.

She folded the first handwritten draft—the OG—and tucked it into her purse. Proof she was strong, independent, desired—and ready to catch a train for a date. Laughing over oysters and Negronis with Paul, she was relieved he was smarter and funnier than she remembered from the art opening. In the cab, his arm draped around her, she squeezed her purse, hoping the letter inside would feel her outer vibrations: *I don’t abandon.* Even as she kissed Paul, racing through the Midtown Tunnel, it wasn’t over.

When the cab stopped outside Paul’s place, he bounded up his brownstone steps laughing, but she stayed behind, feet glued to the sidewalk. His smile faded as she slowly lifted her purse under her dress, pressed it tight between her legs, and peed on it. Paul, wide-eyed, mouthed a silent “WTF?” as the door clicked shut behind him. She wiped her purse with the hem of her dress and, when her Uber driver asked what happened, casually mentioned getting caught in a puddle’s spray.

She barely thought about Paul because it was tomorrow morning, and it was time to write. 5 sentences became 7.

I’m not calling off a thing because it was never a Thing.

(Feel it.)

I’ve learned a few, shall I say, Facts, but I won’t repeat them.

The letter didn’t smell like pee. It wasn’t intrusive. It was just hers, crumpled in her lap during a Zoom session with her therapist, flattened beneath her yoga mat at Tuesday’s beginner Kundalini class. It could travel the postal system, be touched by others, proving it radiated a desirable existence. It burned with rivers of wisdom so potent it could ripple through psyches, distracting its reader during TV shows, sex, holidays—life.

Line 8 was a milestone:

I’m so tired of being an option.

She mailed it to herself, proud of her eight lines - her octagonal journey of humor, intelligence, and presence. *You’ve grown so big, dear 8 Lines! I want to bottle you up, so you DON’T GROW UP!*

The letter, retrieved from her mailbox, sat on top of bills, unopened, as she chatted with neighbors in the elevator. She steamed it open while making tea, then immediately retreated to her laptop, feverishly typing and marveling at her latest reckoning:

There’s so much I could say, but I’ll just leave it at—this isn’t working for me.

At the triumph that was Line 9, she printed it, folded it neatly into an envelope, addressed it, and patted a Forever Stamp on it before walking four minutes to the post office to mail it—to herself.

Every day for a month, at exactly 4:40 p.m., she turned the key, opened her mailbox, and found the letter waiting for her.

After a month of receiving daily letters she felt ready for new inspiration. A clean copy would surely propel her to the Next Level, ready to drop more knowledge in Line 10 and finally send the letter to its rightful recipient. Sipping coffee from her favorite “Good Morning, Beautiful!” mug, she clicked ‘Print.’ Silence. No, no, no. She waited for the comforting hum of the printer, but instead, the blinking light read: Replace Toner Cartridge.

Panic set in. She flailed like a short-circuited robot, arms swinging wildly as she tore through her recycling bin, scavenging for the handwritten draft, now resembling a crumpled, pen-scarred taupe dishcloth she’d lovingly dubbed ‘Lil Original.’ With a clenched wail, she finally found it hiding in a beige Nike shoebox.

She ordered a pizza. She used the letter as a napkin.

-Renée LoBue



Together Forever (I)
Marta Stratskas

A Degas Print for Sale on Wayfair

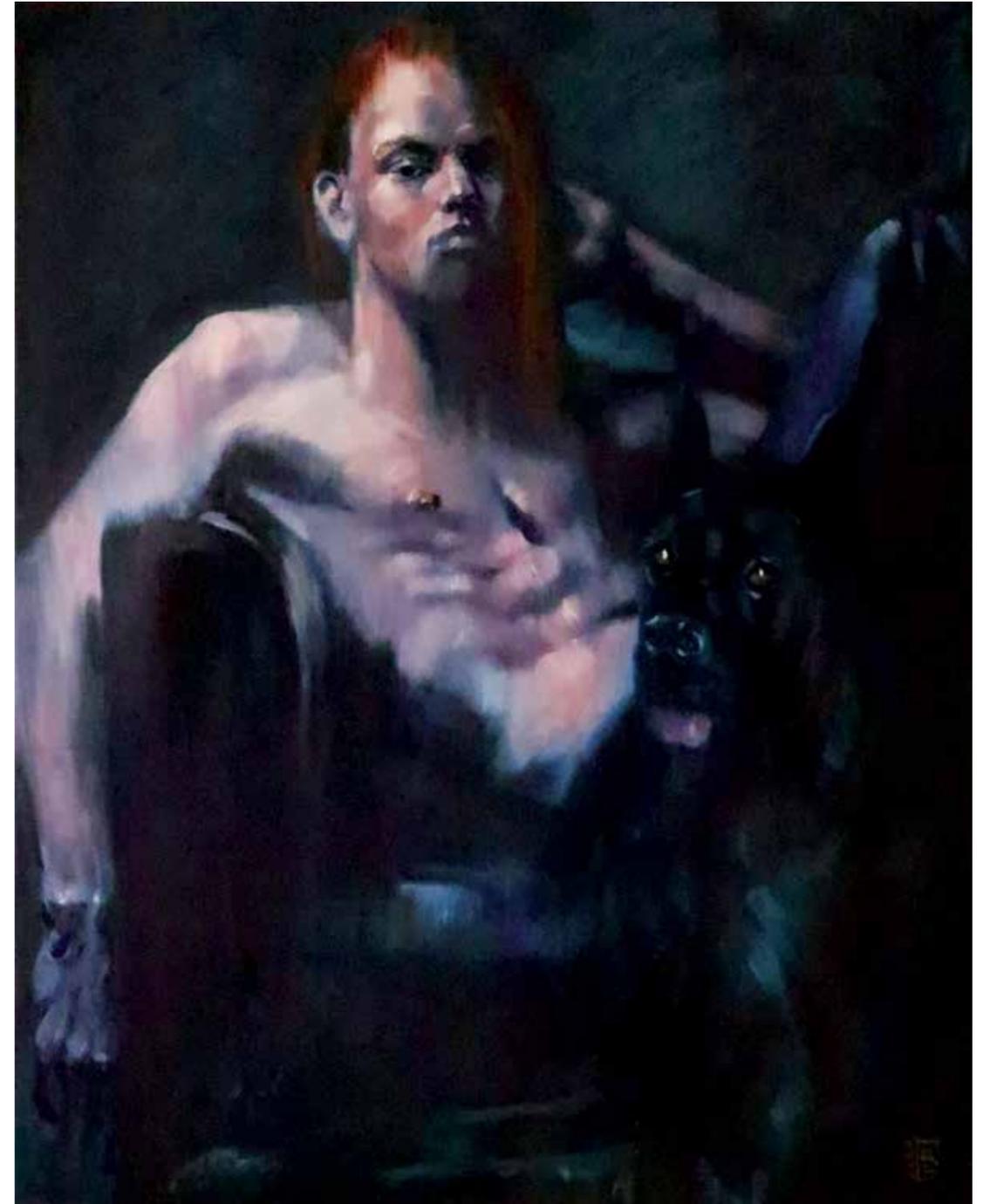
Waiting for a Client is its title, in charcoal and pastel. The drawing is not about any of Degas's ballerinas who're practicing at the bar during some rehearsal; this is a drawing about some of the brothel whores sitting around looking bored Degas used as models, like the one who'd posed for a wax study sculpture sponging water over herself in his zinc tub, so small you'd say no one could fit, but she's sponging water as if she is bathing for Degas as one of her clientele; that wasn't the case, at least not to have sex with her. Degas said he thought of women like he did animals, just as objects, like Marie Van Goethem, the teenager who posed for *Little Dancer Aged Fourteen* critics called "ugly"—comparing her face to an "Aztec," and more.

-Stephen Gibson

A Room in the Palace

The room as a unit of measurement,
A unit of time. You cannot access
One room without passing through
The previous room. You expected
Privacy for the price of the room?
A place where you might sleep
Through the night uninterrupted?
Other must pass through your room
To get to their own. A dream-logic
Perhaps, but the reality of such lodgings.
Sometimes a guest stops to chat,
Wonders where you got the extra pillow,
Or the exceptional reproduction of the same
Painting hanging in their room, but theirs
Looks embarrassingly amateurish.
There is no exit from the final room
Except back through the all the other rooms,
And of course, that is neighbor with whom
You've become most familiar.
As she passes through your room
She states firmly, *That is not the room I reserved.*

-Eric Pankey



Insomnia
Kateryna Bortsova



House Study 9
Clara Hoag



Underbite

A precious little cherub emerges. Eight pounds, seven ounces with a whisper of hair, ten fingers, ten toes, and a rosy little stork's bite printed between her deep watery eyes. Her mother coos as the Baby mewls and the papa beams over his perfect little ladies.

At home, her first bath. A tiny splash as a little hand smacks the water's surface. Gentle soap foams over thighs, calves, and arms. The little Baby snuggles into a plush towel against her father's chest. Her miniature limbs writhe with joy. She's clean and cozy.

Little Baby evolves as her cheeks narrow, her hair grows long, and she pulls herself upright on a chair to stand. Now she's walking, running, darting, laughing, playing, and wiping, and what is that? Little Girl has long since felt comfortable on the potty. She goes to Kindergarten every day with nineteen other toilet-trained peers and yet something she feels gives her pause. A groove, a curve, a hardness, a plink-plink-plink as she taps against the invader with her fingernail. She tattles to her mommy who's inspection and uncertainty only amplifies the Little Girl's fears.

A voyage to the doctor. His gloved fingers gently peel, poke, and prod. Little Girl's heart beats loudly and bile rises in her throat but she buries her discomfort. The doctor sits back to explain. Mommy cries and Little Girl whimpers.

At home, before bed, Little Girl brushes her teeth with a blue toothbrush. She places it back into a little plastic cup on the sink counter. She bites her lip as she pulls on a drawer to retrieve the new pink toothbrush. She moistens the bristles under the tap and pulls at the elastic of her pajama shorts. She carefully brushes the budding teeth on her labia.

Young Girl doesn't let her secret interfere. She studies in third grade and achieves top marks. She plays sports like softball and dancing. When her labial teeth noisily clack together she pays little attention. No one suspects and no one asks. Young Girl has many friends on the playground, in the lunchroom, at her dance classes, on the softball field.

She steps up to the plate, muscles engaged, the metal bat glowing behind her head in the afternoon sun. The ball shoots towards her but she remains steady - it's wide. Young Girl buries her feet in the dirt and grips the trunk of the bar as the next ball leaves the hand of the pitcher and soars, flies, and slams into a Young Girl's crotch. She yelps and collapses on home base. A bicuspid rolls out of her shorts as her vision goes blurry with tears and the radiating shock of pain. Someone points and someone yells and someone's blood drips on the dirt.

Young Girl ices her groin in the car. They lost the game and the tooth. Its absence leaves a strange gap in an otherwise healthy set of twenty-eight labial teeth. The pain throbs in two places. Young Girl remembers the pointing and grimacing.

The pain grows more unbearable when Teen Girl, now thirteen, lays exposed in the stirrups at the Ortho-GYN. The teeth in her mouth already sport a shiny set of braces but the doctor explains she suffers from a vaginal underbite that needs to be corrected. The brackets are glued to enamel and evil wires are threaded, twisted, and yanked into formation. A Teen Girl feels hot water flood her eyes.

Teen Girl struggles at school but she manages to turn in her assignments. She sits with strangers during lunch and the only softball in her life is welded to a dusty trophy on the back of her dresser. She still dances in her room when she's alone. She dreams of the future and ignores the twin aches in her mouth and vagina.

Her heart flutters when his eyes meet hers and a piece of paper drops ceremoniously into her lap. This Young Woman, now eighteen, is being courted by a young man who makes

her teeth chatter. They pass notes between and during classes. They kiss in his car when class grows tedious. Hands wander but she keeps them both honest.

They graduate together and she kisses his cheek as they both clutch diplomas. That night, during a moonlit drive, he parks under the bridge by the river. He breathes gently through his nose against her ear. He pleads with her with his gaze. His hand reaches under the hem of her dress but the Young Woman jumps back. She shakes her head without explanation. Two hearts break and she doesn't see him again.

She sobs while she flosses her straight, white teeth that she promises no one will ever see. Drops of blood surface but she keeps yanking the string between crevices. It doesn't compare to the hurt in her heart.

The Young Woman leaves college after a semester. She finds a job as a night receptionist at a hotel. Her life goes on exhausted and her appetite never adjusts to the odd hours but she makes enough money to move into a spare room of an acquaintance's apartment. She can't stand to be with her parents anymore who wish their newborn cherub would reappear somehow.

Days, weeks, and years go by. A Woman licks her McDonald's ice cream cone in her car. A birthday treat before her fifth night shift in a row. She's thirty years old and this vanilla soft serve is the greatest pleasure she's felt since she can remember and that realization makes her throat constrict. She ditches work that night.

She meets the Man at a speed-dating event at a local bar. He's freshly divorced and sports a dazzling smile. He makes her laugh and they find themselves still talking when the bartender starts putting up chairs. They don their jackets and take to the street outside. The winter wind blows his coat collar up and she adjusts it. Lips touch, they feed and breath. He grasps the back of her neck and she leans into his chest and her world is spinning and a tiny door on the surface of her heart cracks open a sliver.

With a sigh and a gentle moan she steps backward. She keeps her hand on his chest but she can't seem to look him in the eye. He grabs her shoulders in concern. The Woman chokes back a cry and whispers something in the Man's ear. His eyes widen but he doesn't run, he doesn't laugh, he doesn't - he nods. Hands clasp, a car arrives, and they lean together in the backseat. A Woman's heart pounds and her face flushes as she takes in the scent of the body pressing into her side.

Minutes later she follows him into his apartment and she's caressing his handsome face and he's pulling off his jacket and she's panting as their lips meet again. He lays her on the couch as he removes his shirt. She does the same as tongues press together. His hand roams southward and she bites her lip and then she bites her lip. His thumb runs across the grooves of her teeth and she can't help cringing. He looks at her with concern but she nods quickly. The Man holds up a finger and jumps away from the couch and disappears into another room. The Woman panics but then he's back and pressing his mouth into hers and the rhythm begins to take over. They ditch the last of their clothes and she braces as he enters her and CRUNCH.

She looks down and screams at the sight of a flaccid object hitting the floor. She begins to wail and apologize and paws for her phone to dial 911 but he stops her. He holds up the other half of the broken cucumber. Her jaw goes slack and he shrugs. Everything in her shatters before she gathers her things. The tiny door in her heart slams shut and locks. Back on the frozen street she doesn't cry, doesn't scream, doesn't wail. She sits alone on the sidewalk and lets the cold in until she feels warm.

A Woman wakes up in a hospital bed where a Nurse checks her blood pressure. She

holds this Woman's hand as she starts to weep. The Nurse offers her a tissue so she can wipe her snot-laden upper lip. She just cries and the Nurse stays. Eventually, the Woman falls asleep and the Nurse regretfully must wake her again to administer some medicine.

The Woman swallows two pills aided by a sip of water from a paper cup. The Nurse smiles warmly and squeezes the Woman's forearm tenderly. She blinks sleepily as the Nurse turns to leave. The Woman has to double take when she sees what extends from under the Nurse's scrub shirt - a two-foot long fleshy, feathery tail. It bounces and flicks as the Nurse potters away. A Woman smiles twice and falls fast asleep.

-Anna Mamie Ross



The Floating Emirati
Maisoon Al Saleh
RIGHT
There weren't raspberries at the king's court
Alice Serafini



Memories of a vanishing world
Gjert Rognli

Washing Up

He'd been big once. Judging by the bones and ropy muscles dangerously so. Now, of course, he was a husk that I washed three times a week. Just a car with testicles, I told myself, just jointed dishes and glasses to be rinsed.

Carl Willoughby never complained, even when I scrubbed too hard in a sensitive spot. "Gentler, Sam," was all he'd say. His family often was pecking and clucking around him during my visits, asking Carl the same canned questions about his health. It felt like over repeated cable TV commercials.

They ignored me of course, not remembering my name and not caring that they didn't. They wanted slices of the funeral pie, and judging by their hesitations seemed unsure how much if anything they'd get. As much as possible I in turn ignored them, but had to answer their intrusive questions to me about Carl's health. I always lied. "He's doing fine, better than I expected."

Fine for a dying man, I thought. Carl had lots of impairments, and was close to blind, but his hearing was acute, and I was pretty sure he could hear them pumping me in the next room. I never said anything about it to him, nor him to me, but he'd smile broadly at me when I came back into his room.

The work had been as good as I could get at the time. As a junkie four months off heroin with clean urines, it was body washing or landscaping helper, throw away jobs for the ex-addict. It turned out that I had soft hands and gentle bedside manner, and people I was assigned to kept me on until they moved or died. The pay sucked, but the hours were mostly daylight, which let me take on a second gig evenings in a restaurant.

Truth be told, most of my time with Carl was just him talking and me listening, him in a hospital bed, me in an easy chair. He did ask occasionally about my life on the street and in prison, but mostly he rattled on about himself. His life had been sweet.

"So, Sam, after I came back from inspecting the European operations, I filed to divorce my second wife Cheryl. She skinned me pretty thoroughly despite the prenup, using our two sons as leverage. You've met them. I love them, but they're entitled little pricks."

Listening to Carl for me was like listening to Hans Christian Anderson reading one of his fairy tales, a world I could never know. But I didn't mind, I liked him and he wasn't bragging, just telling a bluntly honest story no one else would probably ever hear.

"I never let an engineer run a company. They're too honest. Nor a marketing guy, they're too on the left hand, on the right hand. But a sales guy? That was for me. Rapacious, willing to bend facts to fit image. Ignoring or burying inconvenient truth. Paid off, too. Let me have some more water.

"So anyway, after Cheryl I took up with Samantha, who looked like Cheryl fifteen years younger. Her prenup was harsher, I'd already been burned twice and didn't want to get skinned a third time. And about the time I was getting tired of her she cheated on me with, what was his name, oh yeah, Ira Sarason, a twit of the first order. So she got the minimum when she was paid out."

Over the year and a half I was with him he told me almost everything about his life, from his first masturbation to those he'd bribed, names included, to what little he thought of most friends and family. One afternoon toward the end he was wheeled out to a clinic for an MRI.

Three weeks after that, before I had a chance to bathe him, he asked me to sit.

"Sam, you've probably noticed my coughing and shortness of breath. My cancer has gotten worse, and I'm moving to a facility. You need to find another loose-boweled client."

I'd heard variations of this speech from others and wasn't surprised. Nobody I took care of got better. "I'm sorry to hear that, Carl." And I was. Carl was a big-league son-of-a-bitch, but he was straight with me, and bluntly fair. And good company. "I'll miss you and your stories."

"Yeah, maybe you won't. Make me a promise, would you?"

"If I can."

"Promise you'll be at the reading of my will. You'll be notified of the time and place."

"Ah, sure, if I can." My first guess was that he would leave me something like his monogrammed golf clubs. But hey, they could be resold on line.

Carl didn't last two months in the facility before he croaked. A month after that I was notified of the will, in person rather than virtual. I sat in the back, children, cousins and business associates crowding the front of the room, as if to cup in their hands the benefits pouring forth.

It was ugly. Carl left most of his money, belongings and real estate to peculiar charities, with token amounts of fifty thousand each to blood relatives. The last item came up.

"To Samuel Johnson, my nimble-fingered helper, I bequeath all royalties and proceeds from the sale of my forthcoming autobiography, "A Bastard's Life" Said book audio recorded while in session with Mr. Johnson and assembled and ghost written by Mr. Peter Alison.

The room went briefly silent while people considered what might have been said about them, then erupted into angry cries for a prereading before publication, and for their entitlement to the proceeds.

But after legal wrangling, the provision was honored, and once the book was published, I got rich. Very rich. Who knew that a robber baron's unsavory confessional would be so popular? There's talk of a movie. Carl's subtitle said it all—A hard assed memoir from a hard headed executive.

I quit the restaurant job, but still tend to the dying. After the book came out, I was offered boutique rates. And it turns out I'm good at it.

-Ed Abern

NEXT PAGE
The echo from the past
Gjert Rognli





The Map to Hidden Riches

Here be riches: (in the unmapped territories of earth's secrets)

buried treasures

unspoken words

perilous truths

revered mysteries

every overrun path, like buried footprints in the desert dirt, leading to forgotten lands we pretend not to exist

[walk carefully]

[the edge is closer than evident]

[reality might crush you]

as the compass spins: N points to nightmares S points to salvation E points to exposure W points to wonders

(unfold this map carefully and remember,

some territories

should remain

unexplored)

X

marks

the spot

where truth

will be

unraveled

follow the breadcrumbs of the sages through the maze of history until you find what was never really lost.

-Emecheta Christian

We Think Other People Know a Lot More Than We Do But They Don't

When I lived in Washington I was walking
through Lafayette Park one day and noticed
this beautiful tree with a plaque on it that read
Liriodendrum tulipifera or tulip tree, so every time
I was with someone else and we walked by
that or any other tulip tree and they remarked
on what a beautiful tree it was, I'd say,

Just a second . . . yeah, I think that's a tulip tree.
Liriodendrum tulipifera, right? and they'd say,
Wow, you know Latin? The answer to that
would be no: I took a year in high school
or maybe in college, then gave it up, having come
to the same conclusion as top-shelf German poet,
writer, and literary critic Heinrich Heine,

who said, If the Romans had been obliged
to learn Latin, they would never have found time
to conquer the world, a hypothesis that suggests
that maybe the Romans had to learn Latin
because they started out speaking some other
language, like, I don't know, Japanese?

Although a more realistic guess would be
that Heine didn't do all that well in his Latin classes
at Düsseldorf High go, Lions! There I'm sure
he studied the Archimedean solids, that is, the 13
convex polyhedra described by Archimedes
in proofs that were lost sometime in the third
century BC but then reconstructed 1,800 years later
by Heinrich Heine's countryman Johannes Kepler.

Okay, pay attention, because here is where it gets
tricky. The first widely disseminated discussion
of Kepler's findings appeared in Lorenzo Mascheroni's
Geometria del Compasso of 1797, which is where
the matter stood until 1928, when a student browsing
a rack of books in a Copenhagen bookshop found
a book by Georg Mohr called *Euclides Danicus* (1672)

that actually predated Mascheroni by more than
a hundred years. Here's the problem, though:
Mohr's book was written in Danish. At that time,
the scientific lingua franca was, that's right, Latin,
so had Mohr written in that language, anyone
interested in his findings would have been able to
read him in Latin and credit Mohr with rediscovering

Archimedes a hundred years before Mascheroni did.
But in Danish? Not going to happen. Eventually
Mohr's book was translated into German and French,
but today even those languages have been replaced
globally by English: you know that French doesn't
stand a chance these days when you realize that even
French diplomats negotiate in English now, whereas

for centuries, French was the standard for international
diplomacy. So what will eventually replace English?
Chinese, sure, but for how long? Guy down the street
has this theory that the earth is really a penal colony
run by aliens, so if life forms from Pluthor are in charge,
does that mean eventually we'll all be speaking
Pluthorian? Stranger things have happened

wait, no, they haven't, but a lot of strange things
have happened, like when inventor Thomas Midgley, Jr.

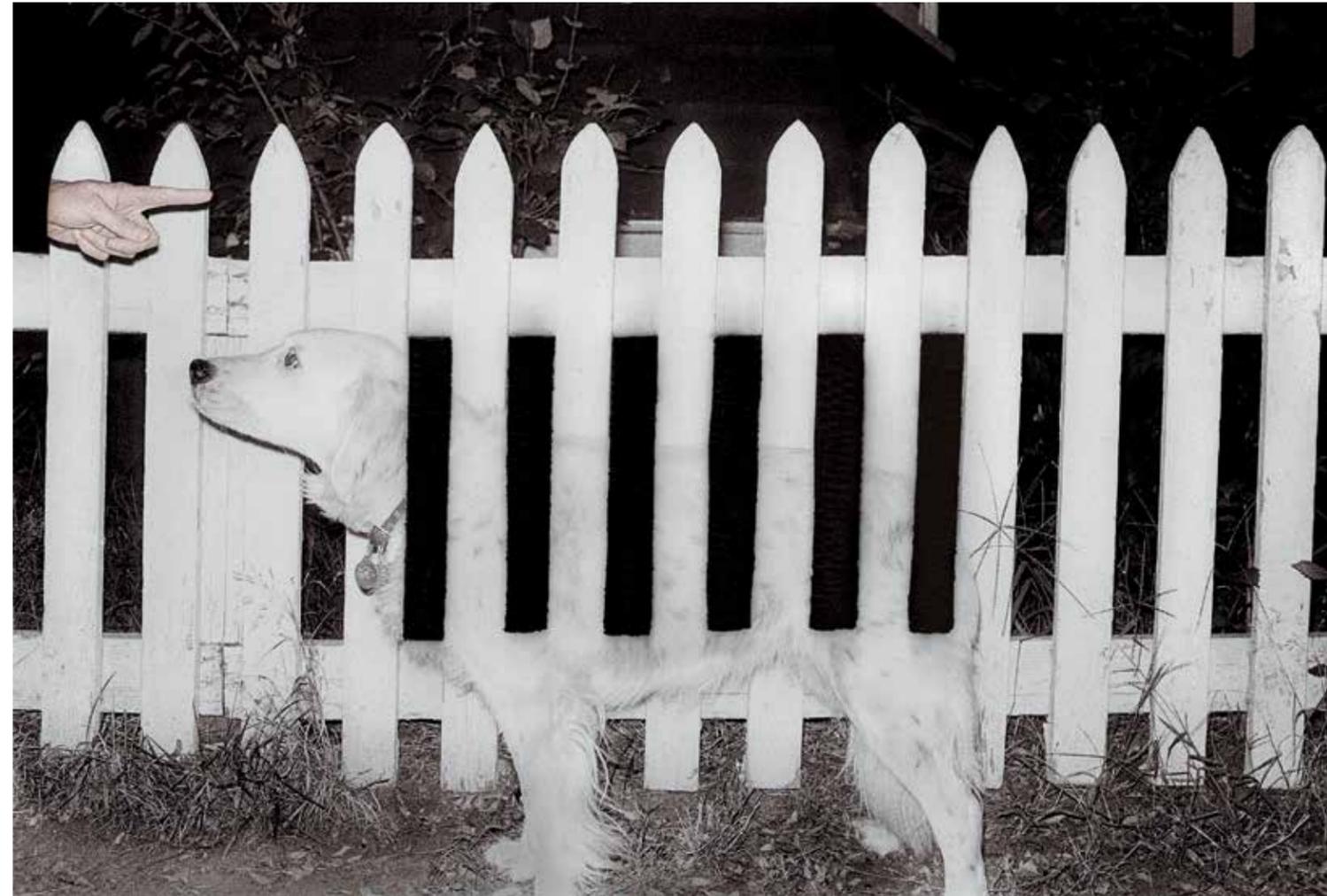
came up with a compound called tetraethyl lead,
which, when added to gasoline, solved one of
the biggest problems the automotive industry faced
at the time: engine knocking, or tiny explosions
in car engines that resulted in an annoying sound

and potential damage. Okay, we all know what
lead does to human beings, especially children,
but did you know that Midgley would go on
to leave his mark in history with a second destructive
invention when he replaced the flammable gases
in air conditioners with chlorofluorocarbons
that are harmless to humans yet deadly to

the ozone layer? The planet is still recovering from
the ill effects of both inventions: leaded gasoline
was sold in parts of the world until 2021,
and the ozone layer will need another four decades
to heal fully, and many continue to live with
the long-term effects of lead poisoning. Hitler wanted
to be a bad guy. Trump, Mussolini, Pol Pot:

they were all bad guys and were proud of it.
But Midgely was trying to do good in the world
and was hailed as a hero for decades. When
I lived in Washington and walked by a tulip tree
with my friends and said, "Isn't that
a *Liriodendrum tulipifera*? they thought I knew everything
about another subject, too, which is botany.

-David Kirby



Seven
Karl Baden

Impermanence

Moon like a whale's
Tooth fragment

Stains yellowish light
On the midsummer night

Sea stacks rise out
Of the water like oar heads

A relic narrowing
The glacier retreats

-Eric Pankey

Lone Tree, Iowa: 1983

Folks forced out. Farmhouses, churches,
Grain elevators abandoned amid vast

Square acreages the banks now own.

Hardly a crowd at the farm auction.
A border collie barks at the auctioneer,

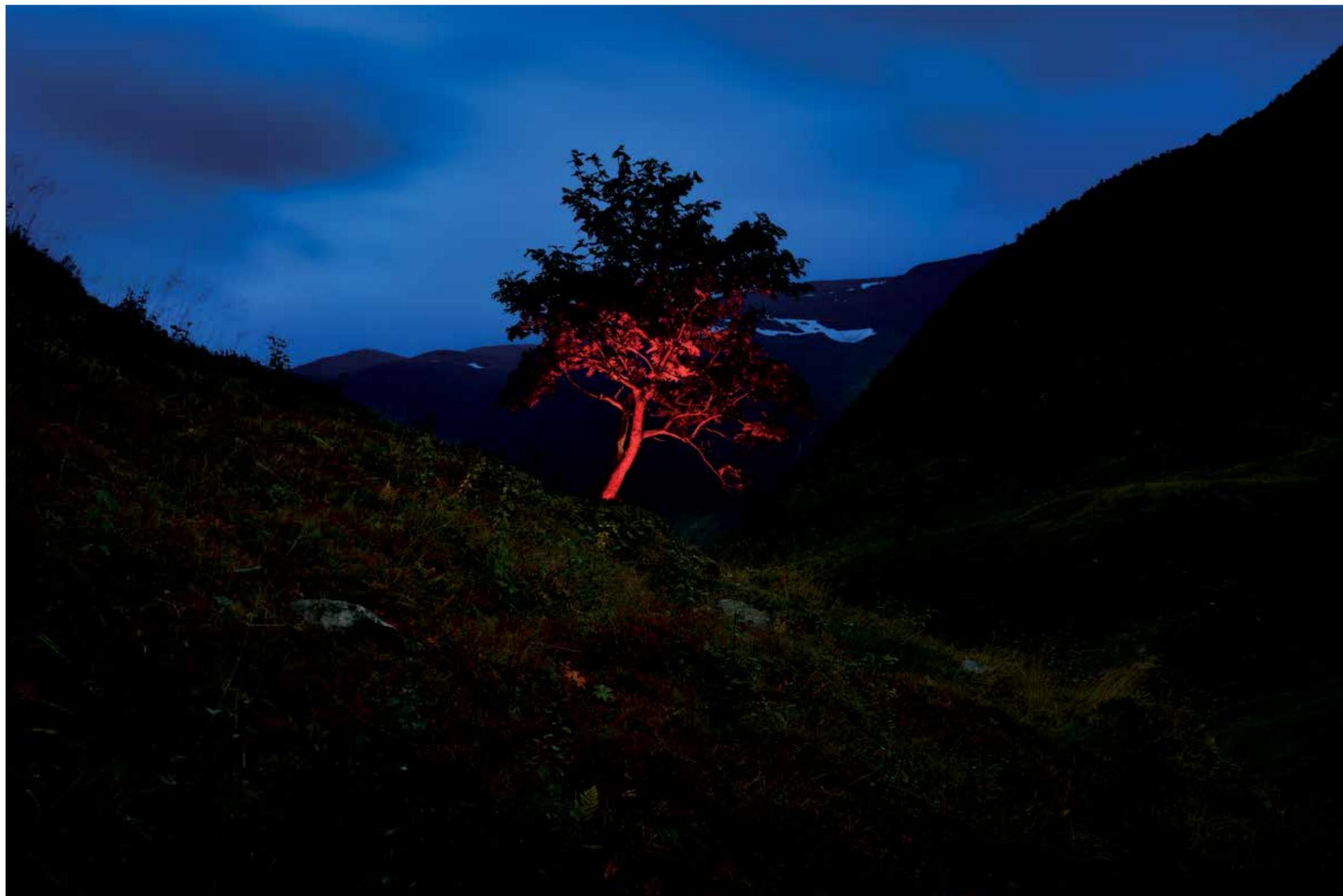
Whose over-amplified voice feedbacks

When he gets too close to the microphone.
All the buyers from out of town. Locals stay clear.

A last harvest for some. A future plowed under.

-Eric Pankey

Arctic Glow
Gjert Rognli





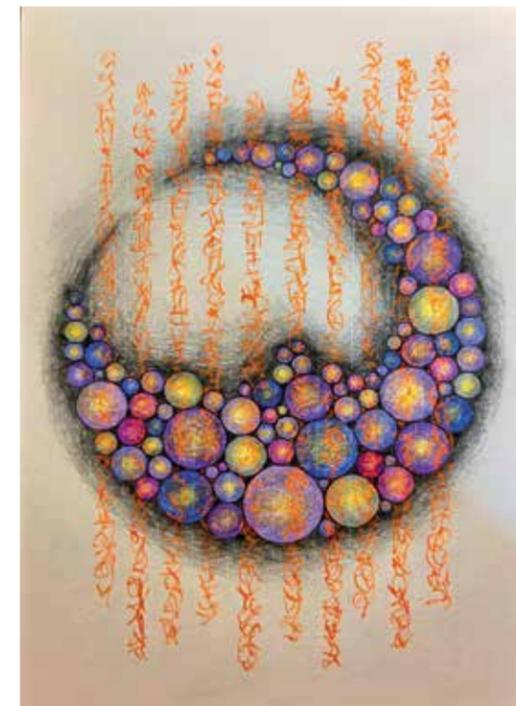
With Regrets

Regret huddles amongst damp coffee grounds and twice-soaked tea bags, lurks beneath chipped paint on a shingle-sided house for someone to come and scrape off.

Regret waits folded in my underwear drawer until it slithers out from under blush-pink nylon and scalloped, scratchy lace, itches like scab edges on shins and shoulder blades.

Regret drips down between my thighs in the morning, slicks my fingers as I lick its leavings, tastes a little bit salty, little bit sweet, little bit smug.

-Carole Greenfield



Lunar Mysteries
Keith Douglas Warren



Green Lady of the Tapestries
RIGHT
Siblings
Alice Serafini

Bonnie Never Lets On

My wife Bonnie is fond of saying, “My twin sister is forty-two, and I’m about the same.”

She’ll wait for a laugh and hope that someone will ask, “Identical?”

When they do, she’ll answer, “Nearly,” and get another laugh.

Bonnie grew up a thousand miles away, so people here don’t know that what they take for her funning is flat-out lying.

She’s fifty-two, though she barely looks forty. She doesn’t have a twin, not even a sister. She did have an older brother, Dennis, who murdered their parents and then went to work on Bonnie until she gutted him with a Bowie knife.

I took it away from her after we married. It isn’t the kind of souvenir I want around the house.

-Merle Drown



Reflection
Clarissa Ribeiro

VIDEO AND SOUND

Da Vinci Code / Mona Lisa

Kenji Kojima

The project depicts the transformation of the colors of Da Vinci's Mona Lisa, shrouded in "secrets and mysteries," into a chaotic color code using a binary musical scale encryption key and then deciphering it. Artist Kenji Kojima believes that the world is full of chaotic information and that humans have constructed the world in such a way that we use the "keys" of our sensory organs to decipher the code. Now all data is recorded in binary, and colors contain musical scales. Learn more about the DaVinci Code Project: <https://kenjikojima.com/DaVinci/>



<https://youtu.be/iBVBck-mG68>

Funeral 2.0

Théo Gerbert

This video is a secret ritual écomystic led by forest spirits, and takes place in the deep forest. What I call ecomysticism is a way to see our link with nature through the way the insects have to transform and live, connected with ritual and performances. In the video forest has died and the spirits are setting up her funeral with this ritual, while preparing her rebirth. Between dreams and secret memories, the procession with its funeral dance is like a rage scream full of softness and consolation.



<https://youtu.be/Q6RYiM2AI94>

Placenta

MJ Golzari

This film talks about an innate emotion that all humankind has been experiencing. A sole concept that can be related to every individual. The "Placenta" film is an abstract interpretation of the concept of life. In this film, we are standing in the infinity of time and space and in the bed of life. In a brief moment, we look at the human struggling to persevere. The meaning of life is to bear. A collection of feelings, memories, events, and dreams... This load is the only possession of a person during his lifetime.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sPgUZx8bZII>

Below

Susan DiPronio and Salomé Cosmique

A poetic/prose film searching the depths for the answers to the darkness of a life lived carelessly. One always in the shadows. Incorporating audio, film and photography take a journey down the rabbit hole.- in English and Spanish



<https://vimeo.com/594960584>

In Repetito Religare

Valentin Sismann and Audrey Colard

Old, obese and out of breath humanity is still capable of anything else than these attempts of inharmonious dialogue between bodies where what makes a link is also what kills? This frozen image makes a striking observation of the last hiccups of the caged human being. But life and art are everywhere in the sound, in the musical lapping of the wave, in the irreducible belief that a work of art can save the world from oblivion. In 1976, a coup d'état triggered a military dictatorship in Argentina. Some inhabitants, close to high-risk personalities, fled Latin America for other countries such as Canada. Away from their homelands, telephones were too expensive, and emigrants recorded "sound postcards" to send to their loved ones back home. In Repetito Religare's soundtrack is based on several of these recordings, made by the filmmakers' family. It is, first and foremost, a painful work of archiving. It's about a native language that has been abandoned, concealing the story of an intimate suffering. Secondly, it's a new language that is no longer music but cinema, a dialogue between an image and its sound that makes sense, that makes the artwork.



<https://youtu.be/kyXhVwrXwm0?si=RaXsY35cpZpudfhn>

Lasianthus

Dora Siafla

Using the DNA of a plant, the information was transformed into sound, with data obtained from the GenBank database. This process notes the relationship between biological codes and auditory phenomena, wherein the sequences are systematically translated into specific sonic attributes, enabling a deeper understanding of the plant's biological essence through sound. This notion resonates with the principles of biosemiotics, which posits that life is grounded in semiosis, characterized by the utilization of signs and codes.



<https://on.soundcloud.com/y4HZfm95gs4TwLf6>

Moon Day

Wagtail Films

A little magic in the city before the full moon.



<https://youtu.be/1WO6TNMi7gc?si=DIjxOscZOr2MA77>

Ether

Myrna Renaud

Portal to We.

Quantum cadence.

Spirit guide.

Ether is one of several iterations of the elastic, stretchy, springy, vine videodance experiment Juan(a) Caliente stemming from the performance/installation "amor sale" / love is out.

Co-production with Vueltabajo Teatro.

Taller Libertá, Mayaguez, Puerto Rico. June-September, 2024



<https://vimeo.com/1024499755>



Reflection 3
Clarissa Ribeiro
RIGHT
The Sane One 07
Veronica Romanenghi



Ode to Claptrap, Contraptions, Jukeboxes, Handshakes, and Philo T. Farnsworth

O how I love the word “claptrap,” the etymology
of which I was ignorant till I looked it up just now
and found that a noun synonymous with blarney,
blather, piffle, flummery, flapdoodle, and hogwash
is formed from the two sublimely
simple Anglo-Saxon monosyllables, “clap” and “trap,”

which, when combined, mean exactly that:
a speaker tries to ensnare or “trap” the applause
or “claps” of their audience with a display
of showy nonsense. Yet one’s ornate, frothy,
and otherwise rococo rhetoric need not
be entirely devoid of meaning: is not James Joyce

famous for a stream of consciousness style
that revealed a character’s true self, even if it took
him several hundred pages to do so?
On the other end of it, muckraking journalist
H. L. Mencken said that 29th U. S.
President Warren G. Harding’s verbosity was so

ridiculous that “a kind of grandeur creeps in”
as “it drags itself out of the abyss of pish and crawls
with agonizing slowness to the topmost pinnacle
of posh only to become rumble and bumble,
flap and doodle, balder and dash.”
“Claptrap” is a relative of “contraption,”

also a derogatory word that refers
to something that is unnecessarily intricate,
hard to use, and prone to malfunction,
such as the Baby Mop Onesie, a garment

with absorbent fibers attached to it that
allows a crawling baby to clean the floor

as they move around on it, as well as
the Dogbrella, an umbrella you attach to a dog’s
leash to cover them as you walk
in the rain, which the dog doesn’t want
to do anyway. Yet who knows
what will become of these devices? Where would

we be without prototypes, paradigms,
predecessors, first drafts, sloppy copies?
O blessed imperfection! O lump, bump, bug,
blemish, flaw! Snag, scar, stain, nit, knothole!
Eccentricity over good taste! Mystery
over rationality! Handmade over factory-made,

yesterday over tomorrow, mess over order—
poetry over politics! 14-year-old farm boy Philo T. Farnsworth
(which sounds like a name from
a sci-fi spoof but isn’t) was plowing a potato field with
a team of horses in Idaho one day
in 1919 when he looked back at the parallel lines of soil

and, seeing as how he was also a young inventor
who had won several awards of one kind or another,
wondered if he could scan an image of parallel lines
of electrons and reproduce it and in that way
come up with something that would one day
be called television. All beginnings are humble.

Why, just a few years earlier, a jukebox prototype
was installed in a San Francisco saloon by another
young inventor, Louis Glass, who, realizing

that phonographs were too expensive for most folks,
came up with a contraption that had four
stethoscopes attached, meaning several people could listen
to the same song at once for a nickel apiece.
Future iterations led to the classic jukebox, with
its revolving library of 45s from which a robotic arm
would pick the record chosen by the listener,
as well as the digital jukebox, which
never caught on since it comes with the size and expense
of a regular jukebox but without the charm
of watching the machine's moving parts as they
flip through the records and pick the one
you've chosen, the song that sets the mood,
soothes the savage breast, gets everyone dancing.
The classic jukebox hummed as it worked, groaned
as it strained against the springs and levers that held
its parts in place, clicked, popped, stuttered.
O squeak, o utterance! O squidge, squee, squit,
o *pronunciamento* and asseveration—okay,
not those last two, since they don't sound like
machine noises at all. But did not Sigmund Freud encourage
free association as a means by which we might
uncover truths we've forgotten? All contraptions
are noisy. All have something to say. Listen!
It is our ancestors speaking as surely as the songs
of the old gods bubbled up through the inky loam
of Philo T. Farnsworth's father's farm. They tell us
to be patient. They tell us to be hopeful.
They say we must rise and make the bed and work calmly

and steadily throughout the day and let the evening
bring what it will. Oh, and shake hands, they say—
shake hands a lot. Philo T. Farnsworth made a set
of drawings and showed them to his chemistry teacher,
who encouraged his student to pursue the idea
and filed his drawings away. Long story short,
Farnsworth goes to university, drops out to support
his family when his father dies but continues to be
obsessed with the idea for television and finally
gets funding from a couple of California businessmen
and applies for a patent only to find himself
in a lawsuit with the powerful RCA corporation, the bastards,
who claim that they invented TV, though the judge
eventually decides in Philo T. Farnsworth's favor.
How's that, you say? Because of a key piece
of evidence: the drawings his chemistry teacher had filed away
years earlier. Get a life, say the old voices,
pump the palm, press the flesh—my favorite part
of Louis Glass's agreement with the saloonkeepers
who adopted his early version of the jukebox is that,
at the end of each song, the machine told
the listener to “go over to the bar and buy a drink.”

-David Kirby



Squirts

Roaring, muffled, roaring, muffled, roaring. This is the sound of water gushing like a snake onto the paving stones, then the grass, then the stones again. I control the noise, because I control the garden hose. Mom, the authorizer of all toys and thoughts, is inside, red pen in hand, slashing at a heap of final exams. No adult supervision out here.

I decide to turn up the silence so, with my finger, I block the end of the hose. The thick stream turns into a spray, teeny tiny droplets parachuting on cue. But before they touch the ground, the sun stretches its long fingers from behind a cloud and splashes light on my hands and the hose and the water.

The water.

When touched by the sunbeam, the water disappears and, in its place, appears a dreamy image. An arc in all the colors. It's like a rainbow, but not like the normal ones that cross the whole sky ear to ear. This here is a barbie-sized rainbow. I've never seen one so close. I shouldn't—I want.

I want to touch the rainbow, but once I drop the hose to reach for it, it fades. I must've made it up. My senses are not that reliable, Mom often reminds me. I pick up the hose again, again my thumb in its mouth—and, poof, he's back. Miniature rainbow. I look up to check if there's an adult rainbow watching over us. There isn't. I look up once more, to check if there's a human adult watching. Neither. Someone is clearly turning this rainbow on and off, but I can't see who.

With the finger still on the hose, I move. Rainbow moves with me. Now, I pull out my finger and let the water pour. Rainbow is gone. I'm figuring out the rules. Finger on the hose, rainbow on. Finger off, rainbow off.

But, wait.

Am I—? The air gets suddenly chunky. Is this rainbow being created here? Is it being summoned? Is it being trapped? Am I hurting the rainbow?

I've never seen anyone do what I'm doing now. Maybe I have some sort of power, but if so—I don't think I should have it. Or use it. I know I shouldn't, otherwise Mom would've given me permission. She, who knows everything, would know how to make a rainbow. Or, she would know I have the power to make a rainbow.

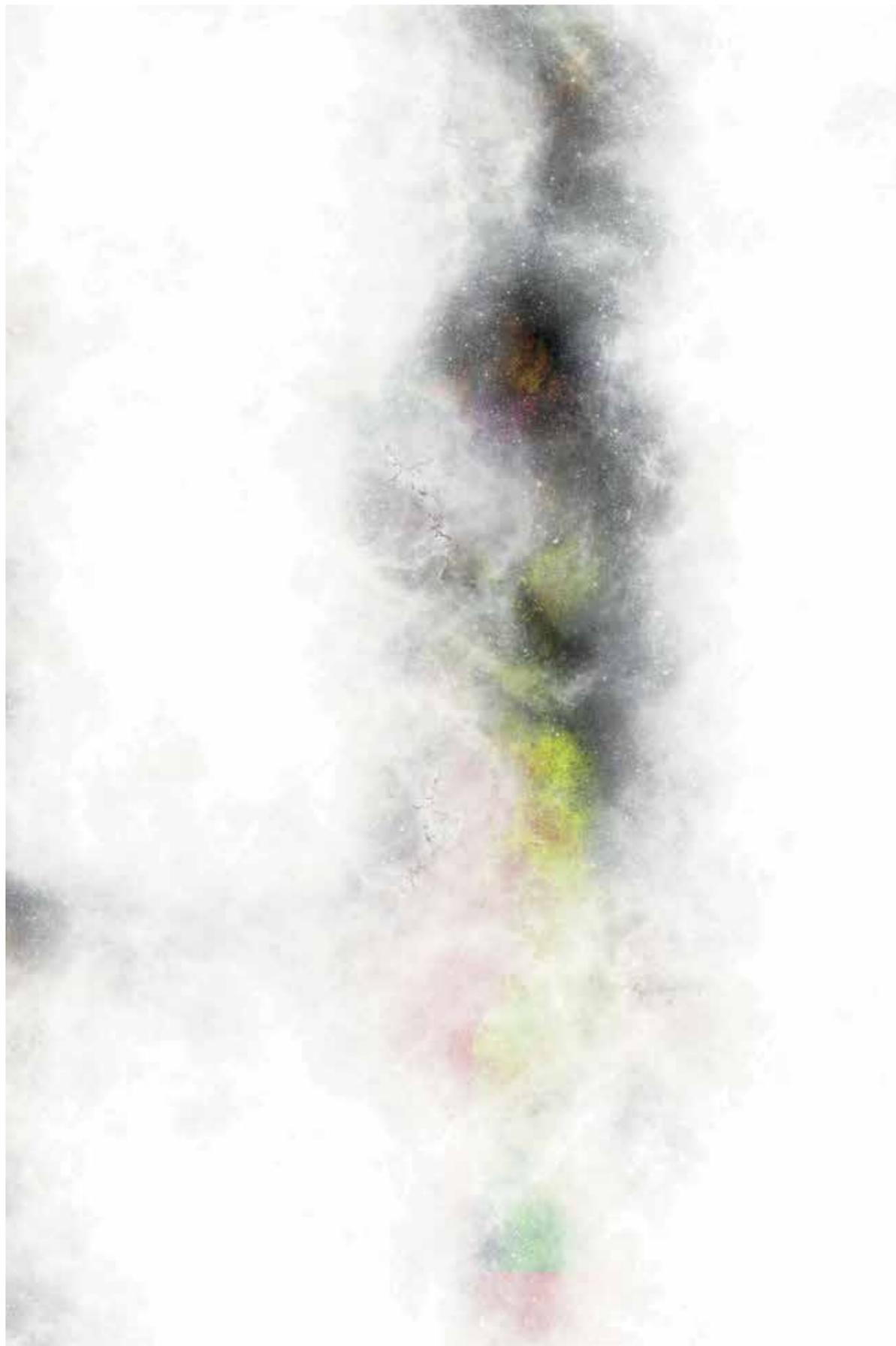
Or, maybe.

Maybe she does know about my power and also knows when I use it and so she knows I'm out here making rainbows on my own, unauthorized.

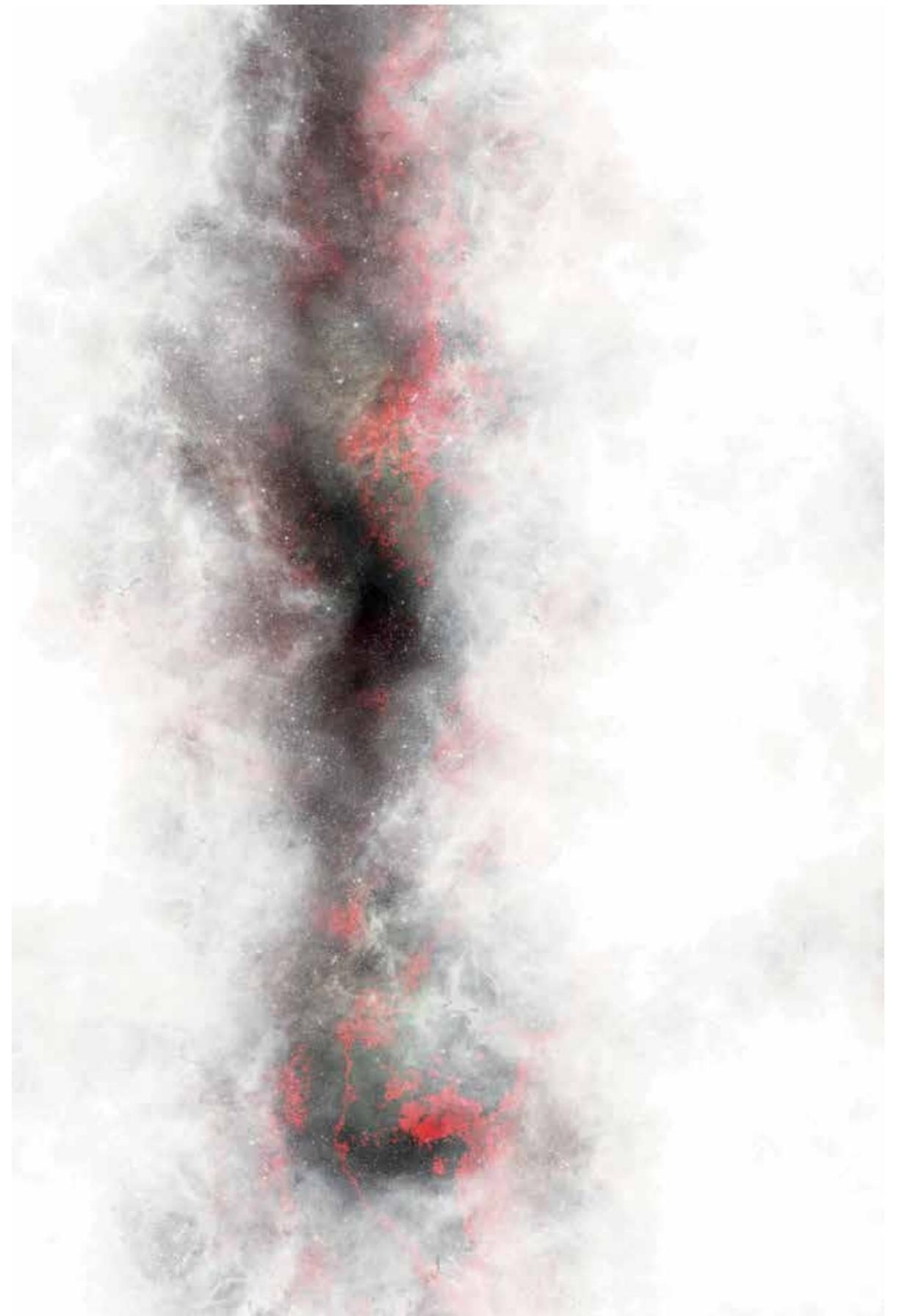
Thirty years later, play will be different. It'll be Sunday, it'll be slow, I'll be solo. There'll be a sex toy, and a soothing of my skin, a slackening of my spine, a shudder, a startle. A silence. From within the silence, I'll hear my mother's voice ringing inside me again. Ringing inside me still. I can turn off the toy, or I can turn it back on: never mind. The wonder will already be mist.

-Flávia Monteiro

Stack
Clara Hoag



A Glimpse of Else
Edward Lee



If We Remember Anything
Edward Lee



RIGHT: *Black Camel*
LEFT: *Submerged Serenity*
Mansour Al Saleh

Stone

On the same day I removed my best friend from Facebook I saw a notice in my newsfeed that our old high school soccer teammate had died. I hadn't spoken to anyone from the team, except Dylan, in a decade. After graduation Dylan and I went to a lot of Philadelphia Union games. That's where I met my wife. It was Dylan she knocked shoulders with, reaching for the salt. Dylan smiled at her, and she smiled at him, until she saw me next to him, and everything changed. Shortly before I removed Dylan from Facebook I received an anonymous text that my wife and Dylan were seen eating at Applebee's, holding hands, huddling close, kissing each other's nose.

Kevin's funeral was on Tuesday. Bryan and Seth and I were standing near the holy water, not saying anything, when Dylan poked himself into our circle and asked why the hell would Kevin shoot up cocaine. None of us answered. Now he's dead, Dylan said, because he was stupid. Seth told Dylan to take it easy and that we all made terrible decisions and to show a little compassion. Dylan said you reap what you sow, isn't that what your God said?

"He also said," I muttered, "let he without sin cast the first stone."

Dylan smirked at the holy water. "I don't believe in God, you know that." Still not looking at me, his hand curled around my shoulder, and squeezed. "Good to see you, man." Then, half-tilting toward me with his face still turned, he whispered, "Oh, and I am real sorry to hear about your recent multiple sclerosis diagnosis." In a long slow drag, his hand fell off my shoulder. Then he winked at the holy water and went into the chapel.

Bryan asked if something was going on between Dylan and me.

"Yeah," Seth said. "Didn't you guys stay close?"

Only one person knew about my diagnosis, and that was my wife, and only because I had called her two days ago. Bryan and Seth were still staring at me, waiting for an answer. I wondered if one of them had sent the text. I never responded to it. I immediately deleted it, as if deleting it would undo something.

More people filed into the chapel. Bryan and Seth joined them. I was the last to enter. From my spot at the end of the last pew, I could see Dylan up front in the first pew, his arm around Kevin's mother. He rubbed the bottom of her neck, and Kevin's mother reached up and touched his hand, as if to thank him for knowing just what to do.

Dylan was a terrible right winger. He was a terrible soccer player in general. Kevin covered his ass playing right back, telling Dylan where to defend and when. What Dylan did was antagonize. He called the other team fat choads, grass fuckers, anything creative he could come up with. If that didn't work he'd trip them or elbow them or spit on them or scream gibberish at them. He led the league in yellow and red cards. Our coach called him a morale booster, an energy jump starter, the heart and soul of our team.

I couldn't follow what the priest was saying. I always felt displaced here. My father

had picked the school when we moved here from Florida based on their academics. You didn't have to be Catholic to attend. That's how Dylan and I met. We were the only two who didn't go up for communion.

One year after I met Elizabeth, I said to Dylan, "Will you be my best man?"

He slung his arm around my shoulder, and his fingers fell to the bottom of my neck as he said, "You're goddamn right I'll be your best man."

I used to believe in God. Now I believed in the urgency of reasonless deterioration. I was diagnosed with this central nervous system disease eight days ago after randomly developing weird symptoms three months prior, my old high school soccer teammate to whom I had been wanting to reach out ever since the moment I received that diagnosis was dead from some freak accident, and I still didn't know why my wife of seven years thought it beneficial to go fuck my best friend. That was why I called her two days ago, to ask, once again, and she, once again, hung up.

I walked out of the service and went into the side chapel. I stood before Kevin's casket. His skin was tinted blue. He didn't look peaceful. He looked like he had been in mid-blink, preparing himself to speak, when his insides suddenly bulged with ice. Why did he feel like he had no choice but to turn to that? He had always been the steady one. Reliable, fierce, relentless. He was the real heart and soul of our team. Without him I never would have been All-State. First game of the season I sprained my big toe, permanently curving it. I started wallowing that I wouldn't play again. Kevin was on the bike next to me, every day. He was next to me stretching and lifting weights, every day. First game back I scored four goals, and Kevin just gave me this sly little nod, like that's exactly what he expected from me. When I injured my knee in college beyond what surgery could repair well enough, Kevin was the first to call, but I was too depressed to talk. Dylan eventually called, and when my depression spiraled into fury, and fury was almost always Dylan's baseline, I gravitated toward him.

"Seriously," Dylan said, suddenly next to me, smirking down on our friend. "Was it really worth it, Kev?"

I turned and looked at Dylan. I could have said something clever. I could have said something that would really burn. But I just smiled at him, and he frowned at me, confused, like he saw something he would never expect.

-James Hartman



Graves Mystery Light
RIGHT
A Time of Mystery and Secrets
Johannes Christopher Gerard



Nightmares of Ghosts

I play with broken dolls, with old toys, as if I weren't alone and they were my friends. I want them to come closer, not to be afraid of me, and to tell me a bedtime story, like my mom used to do when I was a baby. I don't remember her, but I imagine her very beautiful and lonely. I see her in the woman who sits at the end of the hallway, watching me as I play with the little soldier who's lost a leg and the train without wheels.

My mom would sing me a lullaby to chase away the bad dreams.

Sometimes I'm scared to sleep because of what the older kids say.

I remember the story of Father Jorge who went mad because evil crept into his dreams. Nobody knew what happened. One morning, one of the sisters found him in his room, terror frozen on his face. Mariana told me that on the day of the mass we held for him, she secretly saw him and couldn't stop crying for several nights.

He seemed alive... alive! And I swear I heard him screaming.

That's why we can't go back home. The soldier and I are stranded halfway, waiting for the train that will take us back, where they'll give me a new leg.

She doesn't wear the white habit of the sisters but a brown dress that looks like a nightgown, like the ones we wear here. But she's older than us. I like watching her and thinking about her colors. Her skin is very pale, almost clinging to the bone, her eyes bright and black, and her silver hair drapes over her shoulders and down her back like a witch's cloak. Yes, she's a witch, and I'm her toad or her cat. I like following her, learning the paths of these labyrinths that only the two of us can walk.

The other children are afraid to come to this part of the hospice. Sister Carmen says there are many ghosts, and that's why we shouldn't go snooping around or wandering through the halls beyond, so as not to disturb the peace of God. I wish they would talk to me. I like to think they are my friends, and we play hide and seek. I'm always the one who counts.

Five, four, three, two, here I come.

I leave the toys beside the hallway and enter the darker, dirtier rooms because I imagine they're all hiding there. There are many boxes, shelves with big books, and long cobwebs, like her hair.

I like talking to her in my mind. I tell her that the other day Brother Efraín squeezed my mouth really hard so I wouldn't make noise... And it hurt.

"If you cry, I'll tell the priest to throw you out onto the street for being naughty. You'll die from the cold, from hunger, and your mom won't find you... There, there, stay still, like that, don't move... I'll tell your mom how well you behaved... We'll go eat sweets, do you want an ice cream?" His fingers shut my mouth so I couldn't answer.

That night, I was scared to go back to the rooms, so I hid on this side of the building that we're forbidden to visit. I prayed to the ghosts to keep me company and stay with me. I was cold and frightened. I wished I could turn into a little mouse and wrap myself under the carpet, sneaking through the rooms unseen, peeing on his food, sitting on his clothes, biting his eyes...

The next morning, when I woke up, I saw her for the first time. She was sitting on the floor, her gaze fixed in my direction, as if watching over my sleep with those dark, shiny eyes that

seemed to share a sadness I felt we both carried. I didn't need to say out loud what had happened for her to understand.

Since that day, I haven't gone back to religious instruction or to the room I shared with the other children. I don't think they even noticed I never returned, choosing to live in the storage rooms or in the halls farthest from the chapel. Now I'm here, playing with the rag doll I stole from Rosita. I imagine how much I would love to see the ghosts.

Sometimes I ask her if she's seen any. She shakes her head and comes closer to me, moving the little limping soldier to play along. My friend tells me that at night she likes to visit the dormitories so she won't be forgotten. She asks if I want to come with her, but I'm afraid one of the other children might see me and tell Brother Efraín where I am.

"But one day you'll be ready," she says.

I also like making up stories. We spend long hours imagining that we're ghosts and saying all the things we would do if no one could see us. I tell her that more than a ghost, I'd rather become a huge rat that could sneak in unnoticed and attack Brother Efraín.

My friend smiles and asks me to tell her more about that fantasy, to say what I would do.

I tell her I'd slip into his room like a shadow while he's still asleep. I'd leap onto his face and chew his lips until they hurt, just like when he had his fingers inside my mouth. I'd let the blood drench my black hair and crawl inside his mouth to finish him from within. With my claws, I'd scratch at his brain, tear out his eyes, and then I'd go down to curl up in his stomach as if I were a baby. No. I don't want him to be my mom. Better my dad. I'd wriggle inside there and then crawl out through his butt. The word "butt" makes me laugh. She laughs too and asks if tonight I'll dare to go with her.

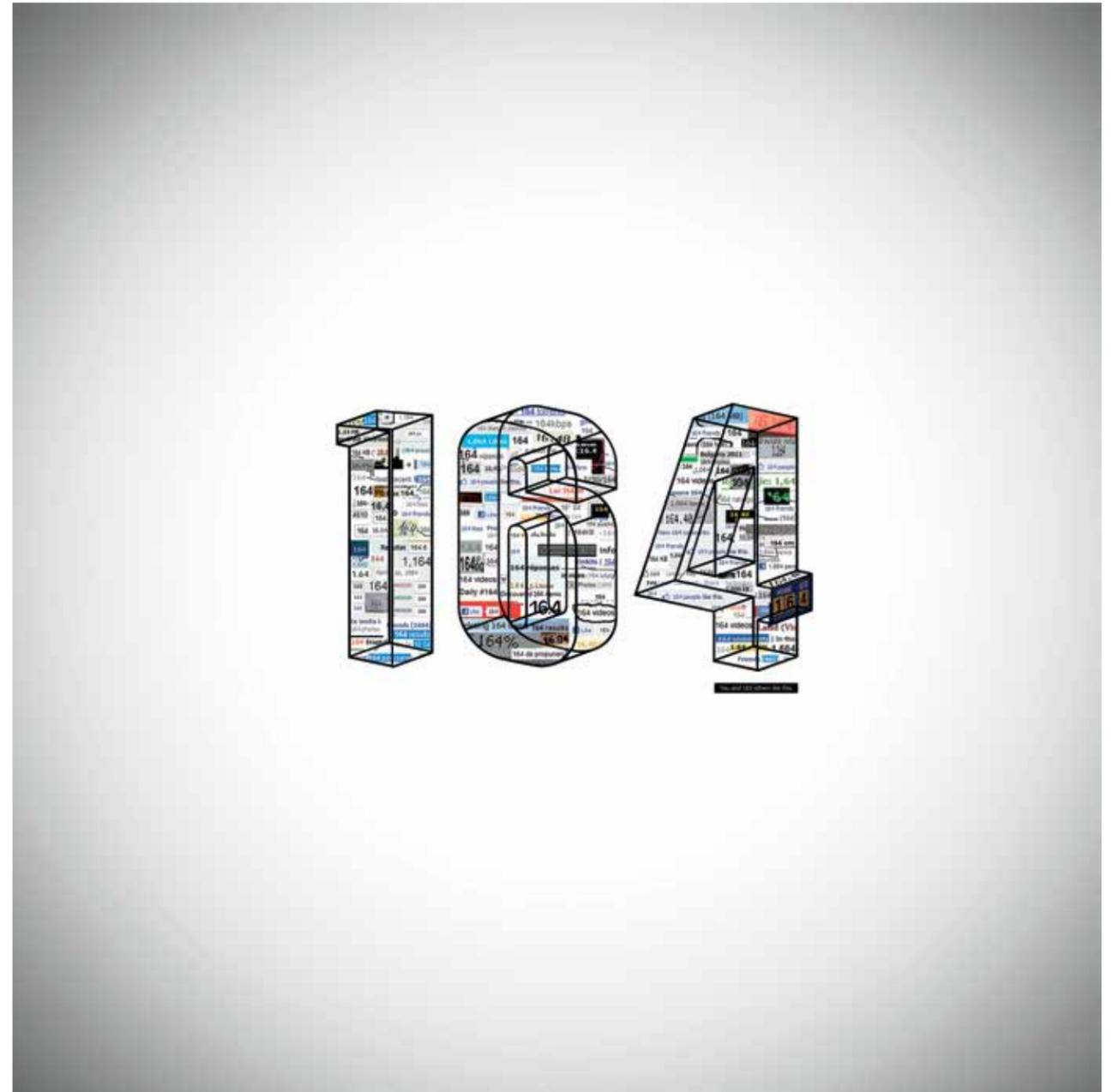
"I'm scared," I'm about to say. But before I can utter a word, my friend tells me not to worry, that she'll take care of everything.

I see a rodent-like grin on her face.

-César Mora Moreau



Nekoma Castle
Hugo Suchet



164
Flo Genes

Wax Mystery

I fell in love for the first time in kindergarten. He was a freckle-faced dark-haired boy who became my regular target at recess whenever Boys Kiss Girls flipped to Girls Kiss Boys. He returned my efforts to woo him by loaning me his tube of cherry flavored ChapStick. It was the kindergarten equivalent of going-steady, a foreshadowing of other future couplings that would be signaled with letter jackets and class rings wound with embroidery thread and painted with clear nail polish.

All such things are eventually returned.

I tucked that Cherry ChapStick into my backpack, checked every mile or so on the bus ride home to make sure it was still there. I didn't apply it yet. I was waiting until I got home. It was spring, one of those days after the time changes, kindergarten graduation just a few months away. As soon as I got home, I changed into shorts, climbed down the front steps of our farmyard trailer house, and strapped on my roller skates. While my mother prepared supper—I imagine it now to be hot dogs or hamburgers, spring's first firing up of a grill—I skated up and down the twenty feet of sidewalk that led from the porch to our dirt driveway with that Cherry ChapStick clutched in my right hand.

Eventually I became brave enough to open the cap. I brought the tube to my lips. My first taste of the forbidden. The ChapStick glided over my lips and I shivered, knowing that this was *his* ChapStick. Looking back, it was my first experience with the sensual, my first experience with an embodied sympathetic magic, my lover's lips on mine by virtue of petrolatum, arachidyl propionate, lanolin, camphor, carnauba wax, and paraffin. Though I could not have named it as such then, it was my first encounter with the mystery of the erotic.

But it wasn't just that the ChapStick was his. It was the flavor itself: Cherry. Chery like the Loudan's cough drops I would sneak into my parents' bathroom to eat like candy, using the step stool to crawl up on the counter and slide the mirrored medicine cabinet open. With the first brush of my tongue across my lips, with the first taste of that sweet cherry flavor that was a symbol of our love, I was obsessed. I couldn't help myself. I couldn't get enough.

I teased myself with that ChapStick, doling out an application after so many trips up and down the sidewalk, licking my lips as I pumped my arms and legs, savoring the flavor. Wanting more. Twenty lengths. Fifteen lengths. Ten. Five.

All this would have amounted to a sweet little first-sensual-experience were it not for what happened next. Perhaps my life would have been different had I only put the cap back on the tube and resumed my roller-skating. Instead, I opened the lid, brought the tube to my mouth, and licked the top of the ChapStick. I knew something about this was forbidden. It was one thing that our lips had tasted the same waxy cylinder, quite another to apply my tongue to it. I continued skating up and down the sidewalk, looking furtively at the kitchen window, hoping my mother wasn't watching, trying to hold myself back from that which I wanted more than anything: to bite into that sweet cherry piston. I skated, up and down, up and down, applying more ChapStick and licking my lips until I just couldn't help myself anymore. I twisted the entire contents of the tub as high as it would go and with one mouthful, ate the entire tube. Bit it off, chewed it up, and swallowed the sticky cherry flavored goo.

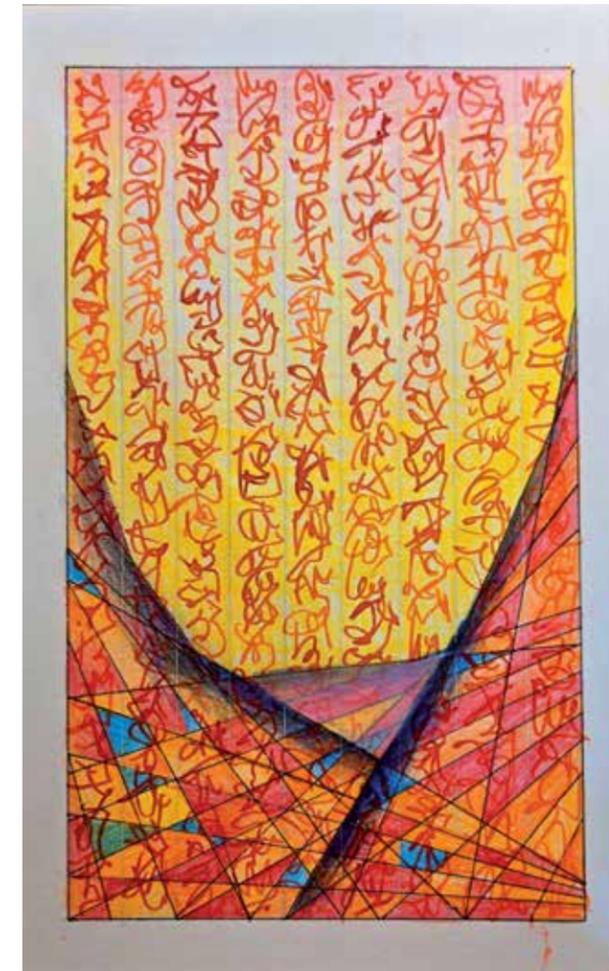
Immediately I was disappointed. The texture was gummy. And the taste wasn't nearly as satisfying as the licking was promising. The whole thing gave me stomachache, which petrolatum, arachidyl propionate, lanolin, camphor, carnauba wax, and paraffin, when

ingested, are apt to do.

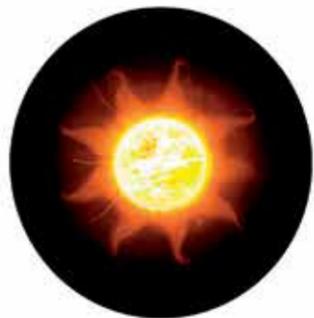
The next day at school, he asked for his ChapStick back. As there was nothing left but an empty plastic tube, I knew I couldn't return it. I also knew the fate I had invoked upon myself. I had taken what was shared with me, his symbolic declaration of fealty, and had consumed it entirely for my own pleasure. I knew I had crossed some relationship boundary; I had eaten his ChapStick. So I did the only thing I could think of to save my honor. I broke up with him. I earned a reputation in my class for not returning things, but that was better than a reputation of "ChapStick Eater."

What I could not have predicted at that tender age was how often I would return in my adult life to the memory of skating up and down the sidewalk with that tube of Cherry ChapStick. It would become a roadmap for navigating the mystery of the erotic: how the intersection of sensory input—the spring breeze, the surface of the cement vibrating up the wheels of my roller skates into the bottom of my feet, the smell of grilled meat, the silky wax sliding across my lips, the flavor—can heighten arousal; how the mechanism of pleasure is meant to be twisted up slowly and deliberately, and not bitten off all at once; how escalating anticipation—twenty lengths, then fifteen, then ten, than five—amplifies desire; and how pleasure, while perfectly satisfying as an individual pursuit, is particularly delicious when shared.

-K Anand Gall



Valley of the Unknown
Keith Douglas Warren



Foliage
Dmitry Khlebnikov
LEFT
Sol Niger
Kama Rosinska

The Langley Schools Music Project

I sound fantastic when I sing in the shower. You, too?
There's a reason for that. Shower singing sounds good
because sound waves bounce back at different intervals
to smooth and lengthen notes. In the shower, you are
your own sound engineer! Or your shower stall is.

Why, a few minutes of soaping up and rinsing off
and harmonizing with yourself, and you'll be on a par
with Gregorio Allegri, who set Psalm 51 to music
in 1638, thereby producing a piece so beautiful that
Pope Urban VIII forbade anyone from transcribing it
on pain of excommunication. Does music therapy work?
It does, says Dr. Concetta M. Tomaino, executive director
of the Institute for Music and Neurologic Function:
We know that certain aspects of music reach parts
of the brain that turn off the fight-or-flight response
and turn on pleasure centers that release chemicals
to make us feel better, says Dr. Tomaino, who uses
music and singing to help patients with Alzheimer's
and Parkinson's reawaken parts of their brains that aid
speech and relieve stress. Who could blame some old
shithead pope for trying to keep secret Allegri's Psalm 51,
now commonly known as the *Miserere*,
which he did for more than a hundred years,
and so it would still be were it not for a certain
precocious 14-year-old whose name you probably
guessed in the time it took me to type the word
"precocious." That's right: Leopold Mozart traveled

to Rome in 1770 along with his son Wolfgang,
who heard the *Miserere* on a Wednesday, went back
to his room and transcribed the entire piece from memory,
returned on Friday to make a couple of corrections,
and like that, the Vatican's secret was out. At this point
I'm sure you'd like to cue up the *Miserere* and give it a listen,
which wouldn't hurt my feelings, though if I'm the poet
I think I am or at least would like to be, I'll try to keep
this poem going in such a way that you cannot choose
but hear, as Coleridge said of the Wedding Guest who was
enraptured by the voice of the Ancient Mariner and who,
depending on your viewpoint, is either the hero or anti-hero
of the poem of the same name. Elvis Costello said writing
about music is like dancing about architecture. Ha, ha
you got that right, Elvis! Actually, writing about music
is like writing about wine. Wine writers don't write
about wine, they write about the world that gives wine
its identity, which is why they use words like eucalyptus,
lychee, and burnt sugar, not to mention ones that don't
evoke food at all but, for example, geology: limestone,
slate, granite, flint, shale. Carnations, fur, cinnamon,
your grandfather's Old Spice or other equally cloying
after-shave. Fish scales, candle wax, hammered silver, flesh.
Dreamsicle, mercurochrome, cumin, sea urchin.
Socks. Wet dog. Dentist's chair. Taste anything yet?
Don't worry, you will. Words aren't perfect, but then
what is? This is where the story gets good: in 1831,
Felix Mendelssohn heard the *Miserere* and decided

to make his own transcription, which wouldn't have mattered
had it not been for a mistake made fifty years later
by the editors of *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*,
who, in setting down Mozart's *Miserere*, accidentally inserted
a passage from Mendelssohn's, which error was reproduced
in various editions over the next century until it became
the accepted version, the result being that the most famous
and moving passage in the *Miserere* wasn't actually in it
until a couple of hundred years later. All the shower stalls
in the world notwithstanding, music doesn't have to be perfect.

The Langley Schools Music Project isn't perfect.
The Langley Schools Music Project is a recording
made by a 29-year-old Canadian music teacher named
Hans Fenger, who crowded his students into a gymnasium
in Langley, British Columbia on a winter afternoon

and had them sing boomer anthems by groups
like the Beach Boys, the Eagles, Fleetwood Mac.
Actually, I wouldn't mind you leaving this poem
for a while to listen to the Langley Schools
Music Project on YouTube. In fact, I wish you would.

In fact, I insist. Leave, leave now! Okay, you're back.
Beautiful, wasn't it? Perhaps you agree with *The New*
York Times critic who said the songs amount to "a kind
of celestial pep rally" and are "ecstatic, uncanny, strange,"
not in spite of the minimal, off-key arrangements

but because of them. Therefore let us continue
to sing, clothed or unclothed. Let us sing in
the shower, the kitchen, church. Let us sing even
if we are not as talented as Gregorio Allegri

or the kids in that Canadian gym. Macon artist

David "Blue Sky" Brannon says, "Baby, I ain't
nearly as pretty as I used to be, but I have
a better sense of what to do with what I got.
It all evens out until the day it doesn't. And when
it doesn't, you get art out of it." Really, nothing has
to be perfect. Nothing has to make sense.
In 1941 John Lomax packs up his 350-pound
Presto "portable" recording machine and goes
in search of blues legend Robert Johnson,
only to be told that he'd died years earlier.

But another fellow says, "There's a guy
down the street who plays bottleneck guitar
and sings high like Robert." The other guy
is McKinley Morganfield, who becomes
Muddy Waters, who becomes a one-man link

between all those Delta blues songs that never got
recorded and the full flowering of rock 'n' roll
twenty years later. Catch my drift? If you go looking
for Robert Johnson, you're not going to find him.
But you have to look for Robert Johnson.

-David Kirby

The Flaming Lake

A bunny with green pond scum covering his white fur, a green thing that makes his way through silt at the bottom of the lake. Comfortably, easily, he doesn't think about dying. His eyes beam filtered headlights upwards through the water connecting with moon beams, trading information, hanging there for they know the ghost of silence and green things generally are good things like green-eyed girls wearing green panties and eating green ice cream.

As he roams through his brown n gold universe his ears stand straight up on the alert for gas leaks. Of course they are tough to evade. The gases slide so easily all around in the lake, nothing can stop them, unless it is a fire, flames that shoot hilariously out of the lake like orange heads grinning and bobbing. This in the heat of summer. His choking rocks the yellowed liquid of the brown lake and it slides into his lungs for after all he is a mammal, fur-covered and breath-holding.

The pressure on the surface of the water like a hand as wide as the lake, keeps pushing him down. He struggles, raises his ears up and into the other world of the air, above the link between air and water and then green-jeaned mean things hop on top of him, pressing down, and brown motes in the water waltz around him in slow catatonic motion and all the mean girls who breathe them will die.

Their carcasses rise and float like dry leaves, faces sucking the sun, the green sun that robs them of their mean green beauty. The bunny won't die, but when he dares to open them, the flames of the lake fill his eyes. He stands straight up from the water, ablaze. Silence, silence.

-Kim Silva

Hell on Holiday

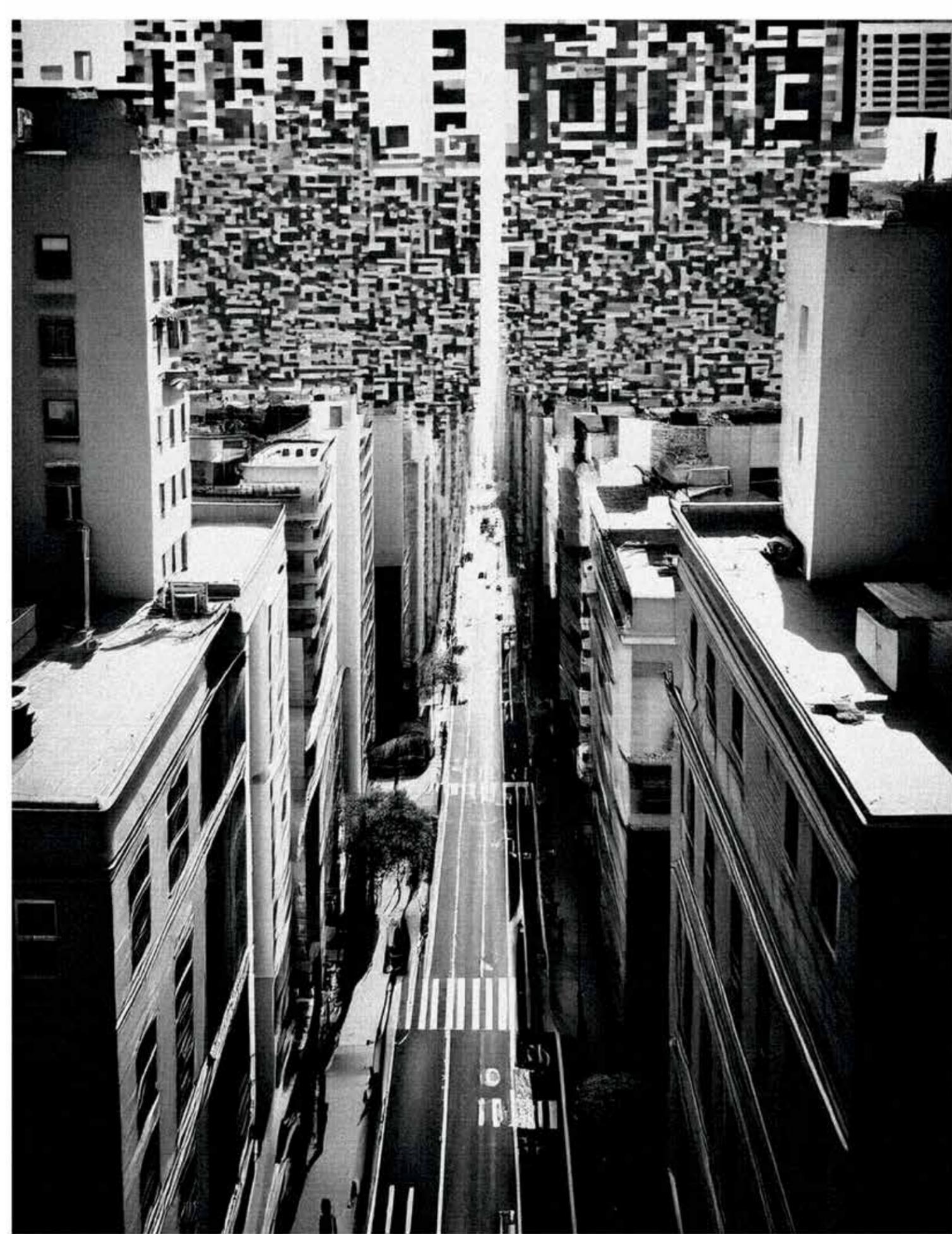
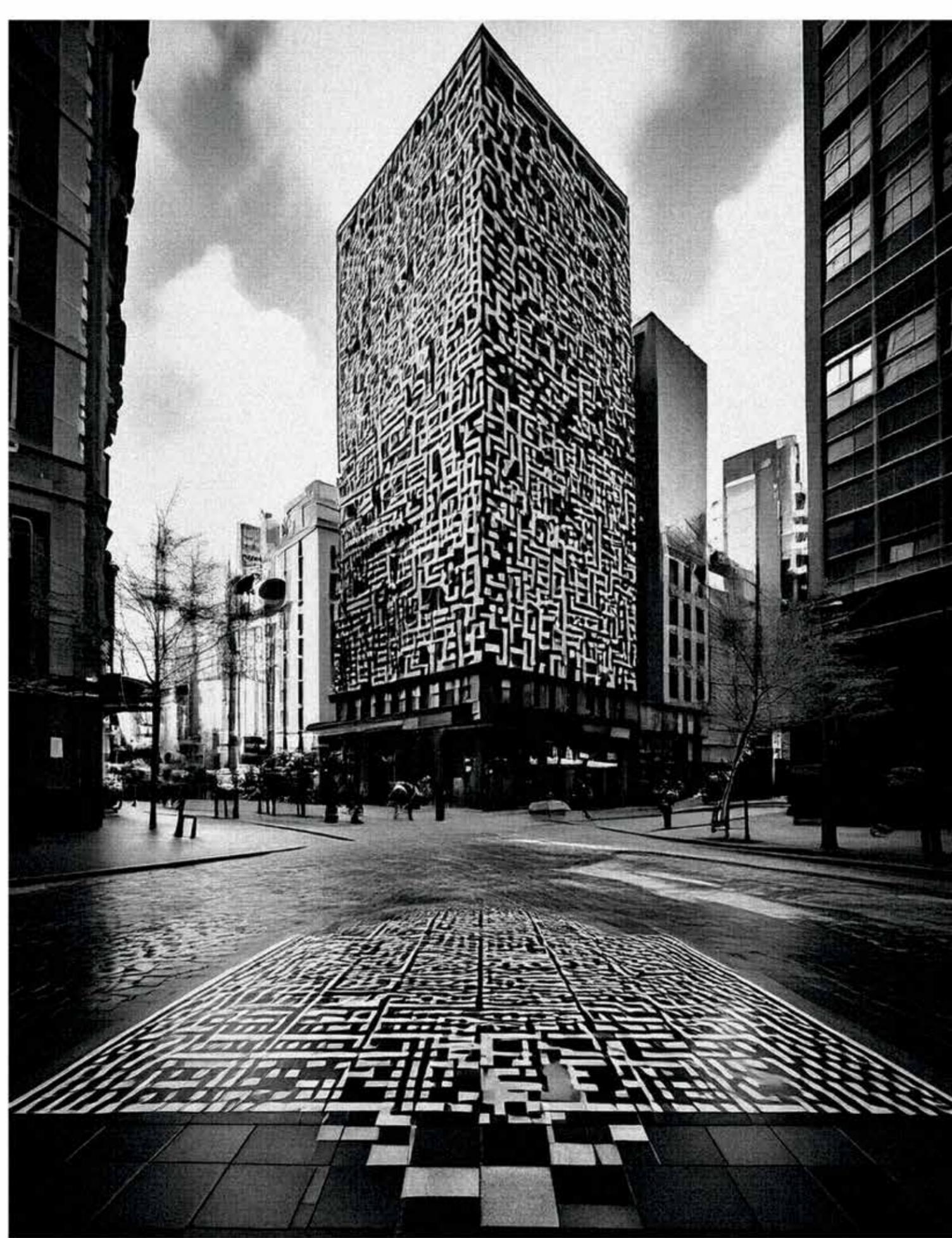
Find the women with stiff bouffant hairdos who rock under rocks on the beach of a brown lake. Their special times are saved for floating like buoys above the surface of the water, watching sunbathers wooing themselves and climaxing on the beach in broad, burly daylight. Only the women hear the sunbathers' grunts and cries—the island is primarily a haven for deaf mute children. The children see only the beached womens' hands moving rapidly back and forth; they wonder about the music they must be missing. And up in the sky hovers a tiger's head, his mouth wide open, teeth sharp and bared and is he hungry or just saying hello? Hello to Hell? Hell is big and wide, strides along the beach, careful to step around the ladies, whose eyes remain tightly shut in fierce concentration.

Hell sparkles like tiger's teeth that have punctured the moon, breaking its glass, splintering the beach. Even Hell must stop and pry out the splinters from his soft bare feet. Hell hunkers down, foot in hands, sits in their midst, all around the busy ladies, the sand shimmers like captured tears, all congealed into jello. Wiggling furiously, mimicking the naked ladies who have found their joy in their gelid hell.

-Kim Silva

Artemisia
Hedera Argos
NEXT PAGE
Binary abyss
Elise Racine





Hidden

I pushed the cleaning cart through the office doorway and brought it to a halt. It was Liam Burton's office. Despite being one of the company's top executives, he came across as a very down-to-earth guy. And during the few brief encounters I'd had with him, he never talked down to me.

I'll admit that cleaning offices wasn't something I dreamed of as a boy, but I always took pride in being tidy. That's why my mother often came to me, instead of my sisters, when asking for help around the house. Whether it was cooking, cleaning, mowing the lawn, or doing laundry, she depended on me to run the house while she was sitting behind a desk at work.

She called me a Ya-Ya. It was a family nickname for Yasso. That was her maternal grandparents' last name, both of whom had immigrated from Italy. Since they were hard workers and kept an orderly house, any relative that followed in their footsteps was called a Ya-Ya.

A buzzing noise stole my attention. One of the overhead lights flickered but only for a second. I sidestepped the cleaning cart and headed for Mr. Burton's desk. Emptying the trash was always my first order of business. Then vacuuming and dusting.

I peered through the massive office windows, taking a moment to enjoy the city lights. That was one thing I liked about being downtown. Nighttime never brought complete darkness when you lived or worked in the city.

When I finished vacuuming, it was nearly ten o'clock, and I still had several more offices to clean. Thankfully, I was almost done. I grabbed a feather duster from the cart and glided it along the glass-covered photos that hung on the wall. Then I circled around to Mr. Burton's desk.

My right knee brushed up against one of the drawers as I hunched over to clean the top of the desk. When I backed away, I felt something hit my knee. I lowered my gaze, and my mouth hung agape.

A drawer was ajar, but it didn't have a handle. I assumed it was one of those push-open drawers, which opened by pressing on the drawer face.

It wasn't the drawer itself that left me in awe, though. It was the bag of white powder that rested inside. I let out a breath, debating what to do.

"Raymond," a voice said, startling me.

I flinched and looked up. A portly fellow stood in the doorway. He was clean cut with a mop of brown hair, donning a gray suit and a burgundy floral tie.

"Mr. Burton," I stuttered.

"Sorry if I startled you," he said, a grin stretching across his face. "I forgot one of my files."

He quickly approached, and I pressed my knee against the open drawer before moving away from the desk.

"No problem," I said. "I was just finishing up." I walked to the cart and returned the feather duster to its resting place, preparing to leave.

"Raymond," Mr. Burton said.

I spun around, meeting his gaze.

"Did you open this drawer?" he asked.

I thought I'd closed it but apparently not.

I shook my head. "No, sir."

A bout of guilt immediately washed over me. Mr. Burton had always treated me with respect, and I had never lied to him.

"Well, not intentionally," I admitted. "I was dusting the top of your desk and my knee hit the drawer. I didn't touch anything inside though."

Mr. Burton swallowed. "Come here, Raymond."

I hesitated.

"It's fine." Mr. Burton smiled. "You're not in trouble. I just want to show you something."

I felt perspiration building beneath my armpits. As I sidled up to him, Mr. Burton pointed a finger at the open drawer, the bag of white powder clearly in view.

"I know what this probably looks like," he said.

"It's none of my business, sir."

Much to my surprise, a chuckle escaped his mouth. "Want to know a secret?"

I pursed my lips.

"It's a little embarrassing to talk about," he said, "but I have a bit of a sweating problem. Particularly my hands."

My eyes narrowed.

He pulled the Ziploc bag from the drawer and dumped some powder into the palm of his hand.

"Smell," he said, raising his hand to within a few inches of my nose.

I held my breath.

"Go ahead," he insisted.

I finally obliged. I took a sniff, a familiar scent filling my nostrils. "Baby powder?"

Mr. Burton nodded. He rested the bag on his desk and rubbed both hands with the powder, a cloud of white particles dispersing just as quickly as it appeared.

"It helps keep my hands dry," he said.

I cleared my throat. "Can I get some?"

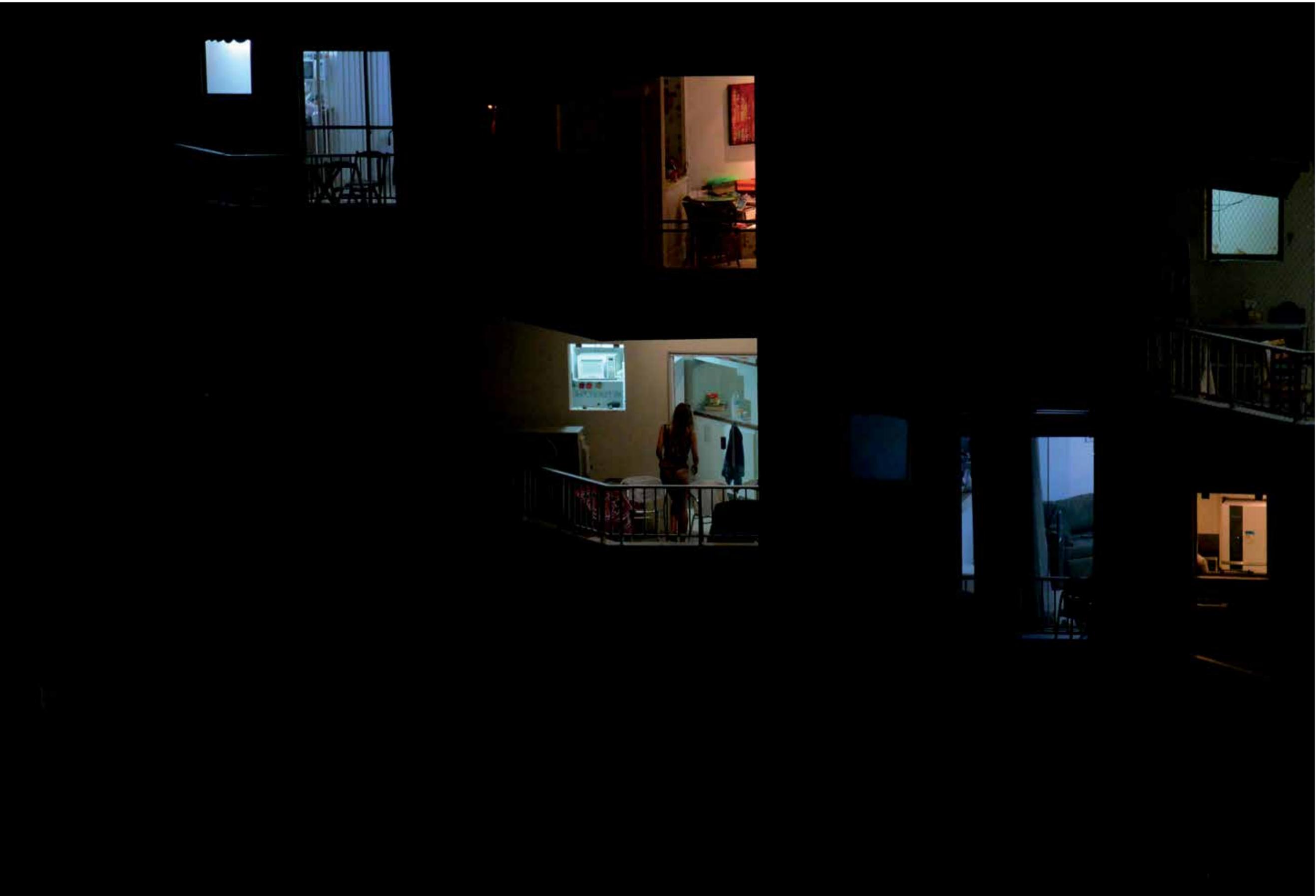
Mr. Burton's brow furrowed.

"I'm a little sweaty now, too," I joked.

Mr. Burton's shoulders bobbed from laughter, and he placed a hand on my shoulder. "As long as you keep this secret between the two of us."

I grinned. "Of course. I won't tell a soul."

-Kevin Hopson



Private Window 3
Gianni Olivetti

**Parents Left on the Side of the Road, Free for the Taking,
Must Have Own Method of Transportation**

One mother, one father available.

Mother: auburn and sagging, comes in scrubs
or sweats. Generally neglectful, willfully
forgetful, undoubtedly selfish. Short
sighted, literally and figuratively. (Glasses
also available.) Father:

Germanic in appearance, but mysterious
in origin. (You can now own
your own orphan!)

Holey underwear, even in front
of guests! Self-aware, but lazy. Physically
abusive (in more ways
than one!) and emotionally
manipulative. Enjoys mind-games,
as well as games of the card and video
variety. Left on the lawn. First come,
first serve. Please hurry. Unlikely
to stay around for long.

-Callie S. Blackstone

Together Forever (III)
Marta Stratskas



A House, A Cup Of Tea, A Boat, A Puzzle

This house is another house
when I alone inhabit it.
These rooms speak different tongues
when I alone listen closely.
These chairs appending rounded table
await freshened visits from friends,
friends I welcome to my house
when I alone inhabit it....

My soul swirls in a cup of tea,
I drink, I am warmed,
and repeated nights of coldness
forget themselves in the inner spaces.

I walk these childhood rooms
sensing, probing a magnitude
standing like an invisible colossus
outside my reason,
outside my sight,
outside my consciousness....

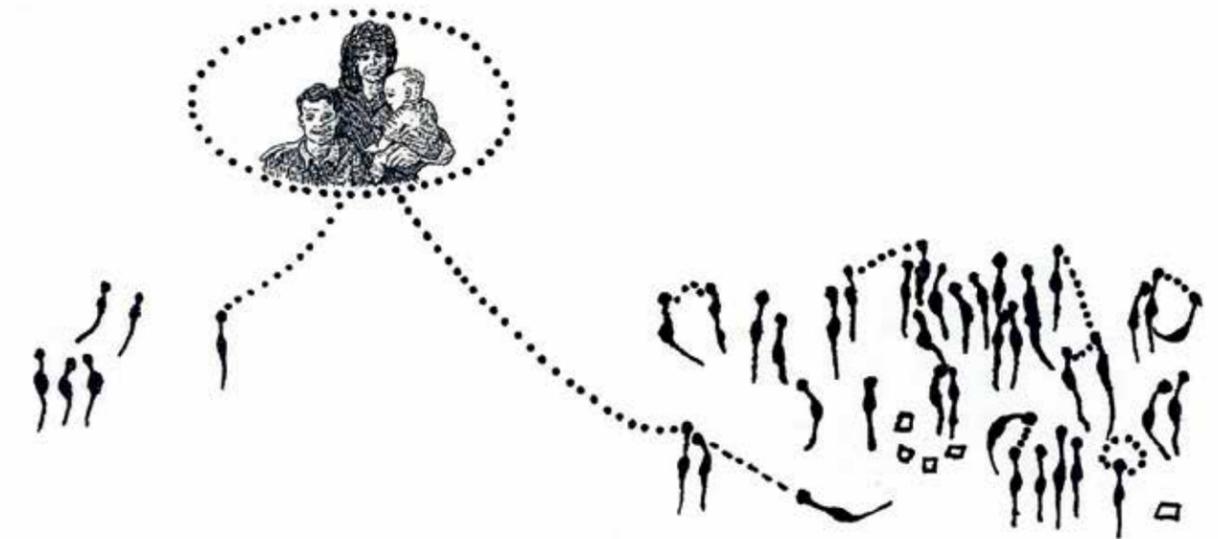
I stir my solitude with a straw,
inebriate myself on the otherness
of this house flipped over to a kingdom:
my soul the subject, my soul the earth,
and my soul the condor soaring
towards the Divine....

I grasp its presence so easily,
with less strain than fingertips
embracing a lukewarm teacup.

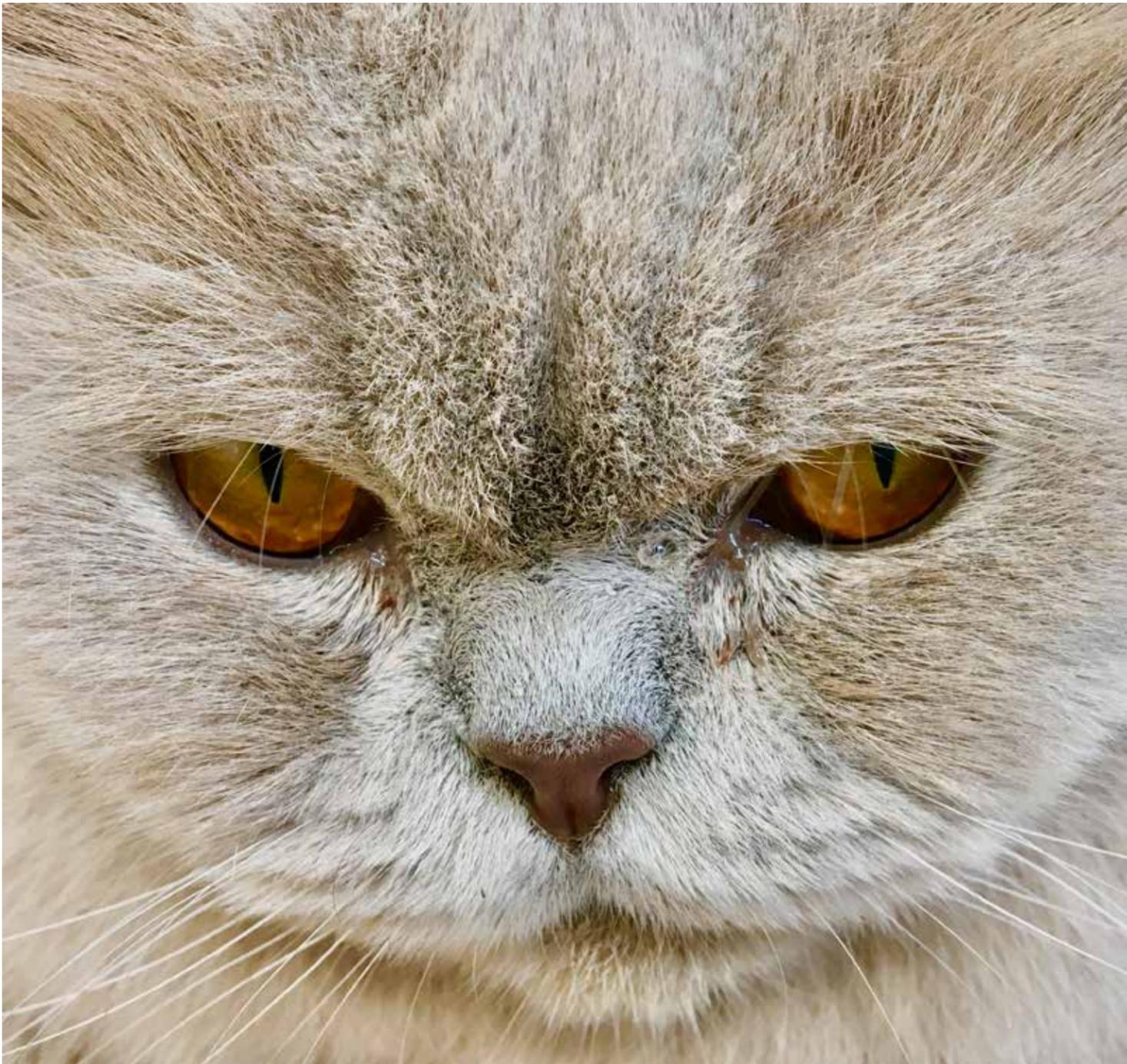
Like a personless boat
I am being drifted by some tide
whose source eludes me,
whose destination confounds me
but I'll bob the ripples
as like thousands of breasts
they caress me unto arousal,
enduring to embrace the ocean.

All of our time given makes a puzzle
of the jigsaw pattern whose pieces
are thrown down in random order
or in order beyond our fathom
and we haphazardly assemble...
who gets to finish his puzzle?

-Nolo Segundo



Attempting A Memory
Joe Arts



Giovanni's Eyes
James Venable
RIGHT
I Am The Only One Who Lives Here
Mari Saxon



We'll never know

As a child, I had always hated when an elder would end a story with the words, *'we'll never know.'* On winter nights, I'd listen to my grandfather and his cronies outdo each other with tales from their forefathers' time; from a magical, mythical other world. No matter how often I'd asked whether the unearthly power had come from above or below, the answer was always the same, *'we'll never know.'*

In these enlightened days there are few opportunities to hear a hair-raising tale being told by the dying embers of a mid-winter turf fire. Though innocent by today's standards, our forbearers were infinitely more resourceful than our generation in dealing with the vagaries and consequences of nature's moods, and I am constantly grateful for having an elderly uncle living just a stone's throw down the road. Catastrophes like dead vehicle batteries, electricity blackouts, and telephone and broadband malfunctions, which throw today's world into chaos, were mere trivialities to his generation – until that Christmas Eve storm of 1997.

For as long as I can remember, Denny, my mother's bachelor brother, came to us for Christmas dinner. In his later years, as we both lived alone, he had taken to staying over from Christmas Eve until St Stephen's morning, so I wasn't in the least surprised when he burst into my kitchen at around four o'clock on that fateful afternoon. The wind was at its height of destructivity and my electricity had already gone, and as the old man struggled to force the door shut, I reached the whiskey bottle down from the dresser.

"No, boy," he gasped, water streaming from his oilskin coat, "'tis your gun that I'm after." That got my attention.

"Gun; sure what would you want with a gun in this weather?" He was closer now and even in the dim candlelight, I could see that not all of the water flowing down his cheeks had come from the heavens.

"It's Biddy, the mare! That old spruce tree came down with the storm and landed on the stable. The off foreleg is broken; there's bone showing through the skin..." He slumped into an armchair; I poured two small measures of Powers.

"Drink this; go on, drink it." Reluctantly he sipped from the glass. "The thing is, Denny," I mumbled, "I still have the rifle, but I haven't had a bullet in the house for years." He seemed to deflate before my eyes. "What about the vet?" I ventured.

"My phone is dead and I can't get the tractor out because of the fallen tree..." He gestured helplessly. I checked my own receiver; the line was stone dead.

"You stay put; I'll drive into town and get him." I said, hunting for my keys.

"You won't," he sighed in resignation; "that big beech by the bridge came down; sending the river flowing down the road, and the lake road is been flooded since midday. So, unless you want to go climbing over *Beenashee...*" Out of ideas, I shook my head. In the awkward silence that followed, the howling of the wind seemed even more intense, ever more ominous. I was just about to refresh our glasses when an ear-splitting crash signalled yet another stricken tree; seconds later, we both started as a loud rapping shook the window behind our heads.

Mystified, I braced my body against the opening door, catching a brief glimpse of flying Christmas cards, and a tall shadowy figure, before the candles blew out.

"Sorry for the intrusion," a cultured male voice spluttered as I forced the door shut. With a metallic clink, Denny's zippo lighter briefly illuminated the stranger's youthful features; once he'd re-lit the candles, the room seem familiar again.

"It's a bad night to be out." Denny volunteered.

"It's a bad night to run out of diesel," he said; "I thought I'd make the service station in town but the lake road was blocked. I wouldn't have enough for the extra dozen miles of the round trip..." He gestured helplessly.

"Diesel, I have, but if the road is flooded..." I started towards the back porch.

"I've a land cruiser; she's just about clear of the water level. God, I feel such an idiot; for someone in the IT business to run out of diesel – on this of all nights." He added, as I groped around the scullery for several moments before locating my emergency five-gallon drum. Perhaps we could help each other.

"IT?" I asked.

"Computers; I rectify software glitches..."

"You'll have a mobile phone, so?" He nodded animatedly, his hand disappearing into an inside pocket. "Can you dial this number for me?" I asked, calling out the digits.

"It's ringing!" He handed me the phone, and then plucked a pencil-sized twig from the collar of his waxed jacket.

"You seem to know the locality." Denny probed as the phone purred in my ear.

"My family originally came from near here – Beenashee." The stranger politely broke off as I explained our dilemma to the vet's wife.

The diesel did the trick. Happy that both stranger and vet were on their separate ways, I slid the kettle to the hottest part of the range. Denny had gone silent again. Misreading the situation, I began to reassure him of the vet's imminent arrival.

"The vet drives a jeep; if that man was able to travel..."

"Beenashee; he said his people came from Beenashee. He had the pure stamp of a Fahey. That's where they came from – the Faheys – Beenashee!"

"The Faheys?"

"You wouldn't remember them, the *Fairy Faheys* they were known as. I only barely remember them; they had the healing – the old cures. Highly thought of, they were, until the clergy turned against them. I was only a toddler when the old Canon read them from the pulpit."

"Why?" I asked, scalding the teapot.

"Power, boy; power, power and money! If your wife, or child, or even a beast was at death's door, would you prefer to give your pound to the man who said a prayer for them or the man who made them stand up and walk before your eyes?"

Thirty minutes later, it was as though the clock had been turned back many decades. No longer did the fury of the wind or the resultant devastation reach my ears; no longer did the faint flickering of the candles, or the demons that lurked in the dim shadowy corners,

seem out of place. For Denny and the Fairy Faheys time had stood still, and I had been sucked back through generations to another world; reclaimed by the past.

Another story finished, Denny refreshed his mug with the dregs from the teapot.

“Did you know that the old people believed that a break in a horse’s leg would never mend? Now, with a Christian, or a dog or a cat, or even an old hen out in the yard, there was always hope, but when it came to horses, they never got a chance...”

“But surely a horse’s leg would mend, if you could keep his weight off of it for long enough?” I argued.

“Maybe so; but if you were lucky enough to get *Flor the Fairy* in time...”

“Flor the Fairy?” I encouraged.

Yeah, young Flor was the last of them in these parts. He tried to hang on after the family went, but he eventually took the Land Commission’s deal and moved up to County Meath. Flor’s land was divided, but nobody ever dared to live in the old house afterwards. Beenashee is a wild and lonely place now; *Binn na sí*: the hill of the fairies!”

“So, Flor was good with horses?” I prompted, instantly regretting my insensitivity with regards to the predicament that had brought Denny in the first place.

“Did you never hear the story of Bill Maher’s horse? Bill was Old Jack’s grandfather, and he kept as fine a Shire stallion as was ever shod. Mares came from the seven parishes to that horse; your grandfather claimed he once heard Bill swear that the horse was better to him than ten good cows. Bill was no daw, and he made sure that his bay horse was seen at every fair, sale and gathering in the barony. Anyway, Bill was heading over Beenashee, to flaunt the horse at the Kilteen pattern. He was in the pony’s trap, leading the stallion by rope and head collar. Well, as it happened, Fahey’s draught mare was in season and when the bucko got the scent, he broke loose, leapt the roadside dry-stone wall and galloped off across the mountain towards the mare. A heavy animal careering over rough ground...” Inhaling sharply through his teeth, Denny shook his head sadly.

“Don’t tell me he broke a leg?” I felt I had to say something.

“Like you’d snap a match stick!” Denny mimed the action. Suddenly remembering the twig that had fallen from the stranger’s coat, I picked it from the floor and laid it on the arm of my chair.

“There was no such thing as a vet in those days, so when the horse went down there was only one thing for it: the gun!” Eyeing the whiskey bottle, he drained his mug noisily. Taking the hint, I poured a measure and left the bottle within his reach.

“The vet shouldn’t be long now...” Ignoring my contribution, Denny resumed.

“Disturbed by the tatter-ah, Flor came to investigate.” Absently, Denny lifted the twig from the arm of the chair. “When Flor heard Bill’s story, he led him back to the house, breaking off of hazel sapling along the way...” Opening his penknife, Denny bisected the twig with a swift angled stroke. “He cut the sapling in half and gave the two ends to Bill.” He said, handing me the pieces of twig. “Go on, take them; hold them together...at the cut... good. That’s what Bill did while Flor ran into the house for a drop of buttermilk.” I gaped as Denny lifted the milk jug. “Flor poured the buttermilk over the spliced ends... like this...”

The demanding blare of a horn shattered the spell. The twig pieces forgotten, I rushed for the door with Denny in hot pursuit. It was only when I was seated in the rear of the land rover that I noticed how the wind had eased and the rain had almost stopped. In front, Denny kept himself distracted by cajoling the overworked vet into sharing the highlights of his busy day. All too soon, we turned into Denny’s yard. The vet checked the charge in his humane killer and, grabbing a powerful torch, eyed Denny expectantly.

“I’ll stay here.” Denny croaked. Nodding his understanding, the vet started towards the stable. Opening my door to follow, I felt the iron grip of my uncle’s fingers on my arm. Dropping back into the seat, I tried to brace myself for the report of the imminent shot. A minute crawled by, then another. After what seemed like an age, a light bounced towards us; amazing words sounded from the darkness beyond.

“Denny, what were you drinking? Old Bidy is fitter than any of us. Come and see.” We did; she was.

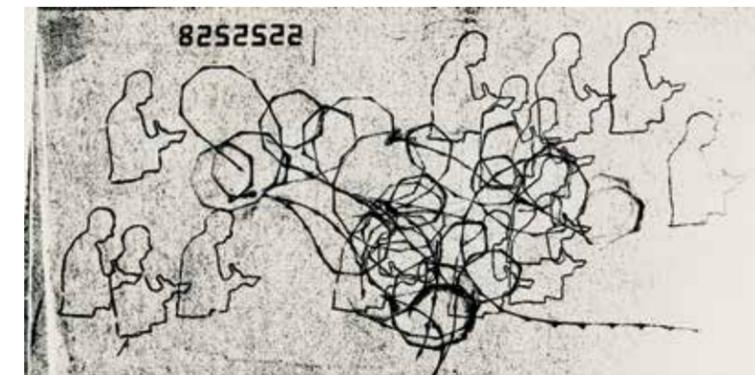
The vet waited until the mare was re-housed, fed, watered and fussed over before dropping us home. Fully preoccupied by concern for Denny’s future independence, I had forgotten all about the Fairy Faheys until my electricity was restored and I noticed the twig on the kitchen table – the twig my uncle had sliced in half. Dumbstruck, I stared in awe: the twig was no longer in two pieces. Denny was also staring; at its centre; still wet where he had poured milk on its cut ends.

“I thought he had the look of a Fahey, all right!” Denny murmured.

“You mean that he...the twig; the mare?” I felt a cold shiver scurry up my spine.

“We’ll never know,” Denny breathed, reaching a trembling hand towards the whiskey bottle. “We’ll never know...”

-Neil Brosnan



Endorsing
Joe Arts



A Dream
Maria Golosnaia

Conflicted on a Subject I Want to Avoid but Cannot *Not* Think About

The sudden tilt of reality when I saw
the man on the floor of the place
where I worked as a teen:
a frightening glimpse of a world
beneath the surface of this one.
As when the death god arose
out of a split in the earth.

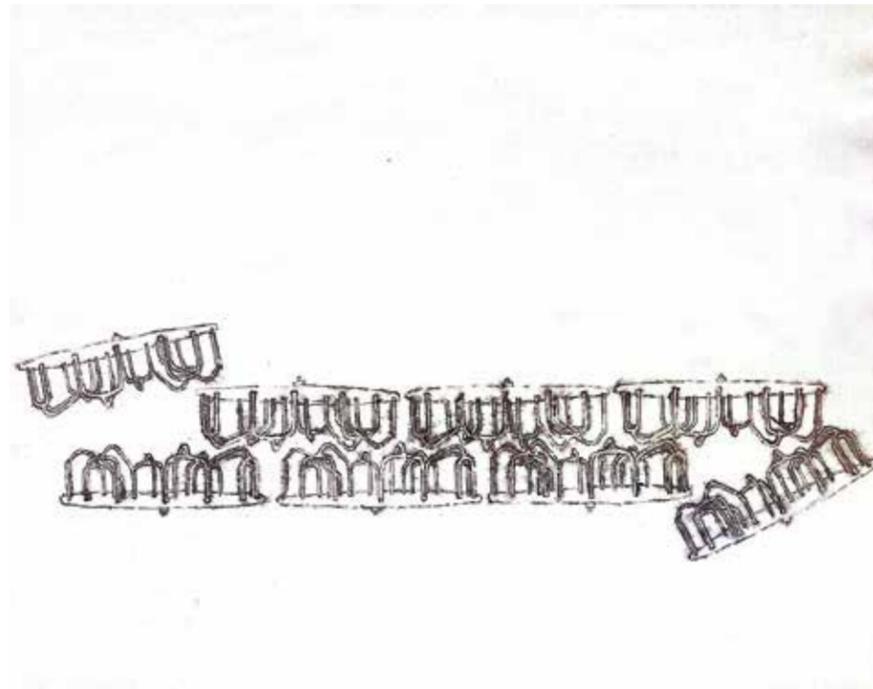
A six-week-old baby
bathed in pink light
in a casket disguised as a cradle.
Afterward, party chatter and laughter
around the small knot of people
supporting a father still shaken by sobs.

The same confusion, mixed emotions
depicted by Auden and Breughel,
this callow indifference to death.
Or, at the other extreme,
the dead baby in mawkish display.
So what would I have? Death's presence
unflinchingly showcased in a rite
that carries the jolt of the Bocklin self-portrait,
where neither the painter, nor we,
can look away from the skeleton
standing behind him, grinning
as he plays the fiddle?

The certainties of my youth have fled.
Now I shrink from a vision so stark,
welcome that form of denial of death
decked out in the sunny new dress

we label a “celebration of life.”
I find it a comfort to turn down the lights,
dim the awareness that lurks
on the edge of my vision.
Knowing it ready to burst into focus again
as it did on the day
I witnessed a driver clutching his head
as he paced in the ditch
while the little boy’s mother knelt by her child
lying too still on the road.

-Sharon Whitehill



Play-Write
Joe Arts
RIGHT
The Sane One 08
Veronica Romanenghi



The Aftermath

is met with shattered glass. Surgeon-still fingers wrap around the lump in your throat, while I map the city:

Where the semis stall on freshly paved roads since 2013. Here, cops wait for the rolling reds. There, is our first kiss

and our first kiss

and our first kiss.

These are the places I go just to get some practice: Your apartment, our home, her space.

Where I consume, but we both seek. We share more than a broken rib but I can disembody you,

easily.

-Kelsey Reed



La Cuerda
Veronica Romanenghi



Mystery Light
Johannes Christopher Gerard

Contributors

Ed Ahern resumed writing after forty odd years in foreign intelligence and international sales. He's had over 500 stories and poems published so far, and eleven books. Ed works the other side of writing at *Bewildering Stories* where he manages a posse of six review editors, and as lead editor at *Scribes Micro*.

Maisoon Al Saleh works actively as an artist in Dubai and internationally. She graduated from Zayed University with a Bachelor's degree in Arts and Design in 2010. She has had 9 solo shows, and has participated in around 100 art exhibitions in 20 countries, including Carrousel du Louvre Paris, Contemporary & Fine Art Basel Biennale, Art Cannes Biennale during Cannes Film Festival, International Art Exhibition NordArt - Kunst in der Carlshütte in Büdelsdorf Germany, Exhibition of MOCAMAG Contemporary Art Museum in Villa am Kaiserweg in Persenbeug, Austria, and several other in Europe and The United States.

Hedra Argos is a visual artist from Belgium. She creates worlds where black and white form the foundation of an infinite source of fantasy. Inspired by mythology, symbolism, iconography, fashion photography, Japanese culture, cosplay, rituals and a Jungian darkness, her works bring out a raw energy. In her black and white images, still and moving, no story is told. More important is the creation of a special atmosphere. She interweaves her subconscious mind with mythological and fantastic black and white universes. Her scenery develops in an organic way, at the ocean, on the sands, in the soil. She creates creatures that evoke a certain magic. A luminous darkness.

Joe Arts is a BFA graduate of University of North Texas, and focuses mainly on drawing and writing. He has attended artist and writing residencies at The Vermont Studio Center, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and The American College of Switzerland, in Leysin. He currently lives and works in Central Wisconsin.

Karl Baden's photographs have been exhibited at Robert Mann Gallery, Zabriskie Gallery, Marcuse Pfeifer Gallery, International Center for and Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Anderson Yezerski Gallery, The Institute for Contemporary Art and The Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and Houston, Musée Batut, France, Photokina in Cologne, Germany, Photographers Gallery and Somerset House, London. He has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and Massachusetts Cultural Council. His work is in the collections of MoMA in NYC, MFA Boston, MFA Houston, Polaroid International Collection and Guggenheim Museum. He has been a mystery to himself since 1952.

Yury Beryozin is an artist working as a ceramicist, miniature creator, painter, performer, and video narrator. Originally from Minsk, Belarus, he studied sculpture in Prague, Czech Republic. During a residency in Marseille, he honed his talent for creating ceramic pieces and building cities from unfired clay. This creative process led him to develop a unique form of architecture that blends soft, natural body shapes with solid, artificial structures, such as panel buildings and ancient landmarks. The eyes of John the Baptist reflect the elements of religion, symbolically served on a plate by Salome's snakelike desires, representing Ishtar. Yury delves into the story behind each piece, allowing his sculptures to break or become damaged over time, only to be repaired later."

Callie S. Blackstone writes both poetry and prose. Her work has been nominated for Best of the Net. Her debut chapbook *sing eternal* is available through Bottlecap Press. More information about the writer at calliesblackstone.com.

Neil Brosnan's short stories have been published approximately 100 times in print and digital anthologies and magazines in Ireland, Britain, Europe, Australia, India, USA, South America, and Canada. A Pushcart nominee, he is a winner of *The Bryan MacMahon*, *The Maurice Walsh*, (five times) and *The Ireland's Own*, (twice) short story awards. He has published two short story collections: *Fresh Water & other stories* (Original Writing, 2010) and *Neap Tide & other stories* (New Binary Press, 2013)

Kateryna Bortsova is a painter – graphic artist with BFA in graphic arts and MFA. Works of Kateryna took part in many international exhibitions (Taiwan, Moscow, Munich, Spain, Italy, USA etc.). Also she win silver medal in the category “realism” in participation in “Factory of visual art”, New York, USA and 2015 Emirates Skywards Art of Travel competition, Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

L.D. Callimahos is an enigma.

Emecheta Christian is a dedicated writer whose work explores themes of self-actualization, belonging, and the complexities of the human experience. His works have appeared in esteemed literary journals and anthologies such as *The Potter's Poetry*, *Indiana Review*, *Oxford American*, *Four Way Review*, *the Academy of American Poets Poem-A-Day*

Series, and elsewhere. He has been recognized with several awards, including the Iroko Award and The Dorothy Hewett Award. Emecheta's unique voice and evocative imagery have garnered him a growing reputation as a voice of change in the global literary scene.

Salomé Cosmique is a Colombian artist, Trauma Informed Teaching Artist and curator currently residing in San Juan, Puerto Rico. She has a degree in visual arts from the University of Strasbourg in France. In 2012, (while in France) she obtained her National Diploma of Plastic Arts, with a concentration in sound arts from the School of Arts of the Rhine (Haut École art du Rhin) in Mulhouse, France. For Salomé, the arts form a positive vehicle which can bring beneficial changes to society as well as the potential to transform lives, art as a healer.

Susan DiPronio (they, she) is a queer published writer of poetry, plays, prose, one-time houseless, a cancer warrior, an award winning analog photographer. recipient of 'The Art for Change Grant' and 'The Transformation Award' from The Leeway Foundation for conducting memoir writing workshops with women, the houseless, cancer warriors, adults and children with HIV. Their plays, films and photography have appeared in the Philadelphia Fringe Festival, New York City, Boston and Toronto, Baltimore, India and Chile. They live in Philadelphia and founded Pink Hanger Presents dedicated to giving voice to the stories of our lives.

Merle Drown is a freelance writer and editor. He has published three novels, *Plowing Up a Snake* (The Dial Press), *The Suburbs of Heaven* (Soho Press), which was chosen by Barnes and Noble for its Discover Great New Writers series and *Lighting the World* (Whitepoint Press). He has also published over 40 short pieces of fiction and received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the New Hampshire Arts Council. He is working on a collection titled *Shrunken Heads: Miniature Portraits of the Famous Among Us*.

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

K Anand-Gall (she/they) is a former academic who is completing training to become a trauma-informed clinical social worker who works with children and families. Holding degrees in Creative Writing from Miami University and San Francisco State University, K's writing is forthcoming in *The Linden Review*, *Gargoyle*, and *Gutter*, and has appeared recently in *Apple in the Dark*, *MUTHA*, *Glassworks*, *voidspace*, *Thin Air Magazine*, *The Journal*, and *Rooted 2: The Best New Arboreal Nonfiction*. They are the 2023 Academy of American Poets Betty Jane Abrahams Memorial Poetry Prize winner. Find K on the socials @kanandgall or at kanandgall.com.

Théo Gerbert moved to Brussel to learn videography in the Erg. He left to focus on learning new skills and taking time to work on personal projects. Inspired by his dreams, his work is a way to express his fears of death and treat it with poetry. On top of a search on ecology and link to earth, inspired by the insects' metamorphosis.

Stephen Gibson is the author of eight poetry collections: *Frida Kablo in Fort Lauderdale* (2024 Able Muse Press); *Self-Portrait in a Door-Length Mirror* (2017 Miller Williams Prize winner, University of Arkansas Press); *The Garden of Earthly Delights Book of Ghazals* (Texas Review Press); *Rorschach Art Too* (2014 Donald Justice Prize winner, Story Line Press; 2021, Story Line Press Legacy Title, Red Hen Press), *Paradise* (Miller Williams prize finalist, University of Arkansas Press), *Frescoes* (Lost Horse Press book prize), *Masaccio's Expulsion* (MARGIE/IntuiT House book prize), and *Rorschach Art* (Red Hen Press).

Flo Genes is a neurodivergent Romanian poet and visual artist. She was born on March 21, The World Poetry Day/ The International Day of Forests/ International Fragrance Day. She has been reading since the age of three, writing and illustrating since she was five. She published her first poems at the age of 11 and has since collaborated with various literary publications and online platforms. She is currently working on a novel.

Johannes Christopher Gerard studied at the School of Printmaking and Design in Cologne, Germany and at the Dun Laoghaire School of Art and Design (now -IATD) in Dublin, Ireland. Currently lives in The Hague, Netherlands. Regularly participates in exhibitions, projects, art festivals in Europe, Far East and South Asia, Australia, North and South America and Africa. Since 2014 his work and artistic visions have focused on interdisciplinary and multimedia works

Maria Golosnaia is a Russian painter whose artist's research focused on her interest in the intersection of personal identity and ancient Russian cultural heritage. She interprets ancient Russian icons techniques and contemporary approaches. Using tempera and iconographic techniques, she creates timeless, contemplative images that invite reflection on the human condition and our place in the world.

Carole Greenfield grew up in Colombia and lives in New England, where she teaches multilingual learners at a public elementary school. Her work has been featured in *Humana Obscura*, *Wizards in Space*, *The Plenitudes* and *Pulsebeat Poetry Journal*, among others.

MJ Golzari (b. Iran) currently lives and works in United States. He is a photographer, filmmaker, writer, and naturalist. Through experiences, historical collective moments, elements, and imagination, his works seek to evoke thoughts, feelings and emotions that delve deeply into the essence of “humanity.” His works reintroduce us to our immediate surroundings and beyond by penetrating our everyday life experiences and the meanings we know. He describes this process of getting reacquainted as an opportunity to become more truthful and precise

Alaina Hammond is a poet, playwright, fiction writer, and visual artist. Her poems, short stories, and paintings have been published both online and in print. Publications include *Nomad's Choir Poetry Journal*, *The Word's Faire*, *Littoral Magazine*, *Spinozablue*, *Third Wednesday Magazine*, [*Alternate Route*], *Paddler Press*, *Verse-Virtual*, *Macrame Literary Journal*, *Route 7 Review*, and *Sublunary Review*. @alainaheidelberger on Instagram.

James Hartman's fiction appears in *Blue Fifth Review*, *Litro*, *December*, *Raleigh Review*, *Hamilton Stone Review*, *New World Writing Quarterly*, and elsewhere. His fiction has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and The Best Small Fictions, and was an Honorable Mention in New Millennium's 50th Annual Flash Fiction Award. His scholarly work is featured in *The Hemingway Review*. He holds a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from Eastern Kentucky University, and lives in Pennsylvania.

Clara Hoag is an artist and teacher living and working in Houston, Texas (USA). Clara has been a resident artist at The Archie Bray Foundation (Helena, Montana) and The Houston Center for Contemporary Craft; she has received grants from the Elizabeth Greenshields Foundation (Canada) and the Houston Arts Alliance; and she has shown extensively in exhibitions in the United States. Clara received two BFAs from the University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign) in 2009, and she received her MFA in Ceramics from the University of Georgia (Athens) in 2013. Clara teaches ceramics as a full-time professor at Houston Community College.

Kevin Hopson's work has appeared in a variety of anthologies, magazines, and e-zines, and he enjoys writing in multiple genres. You can learn more about Kevin by visiting his website at <http://www.kmhopson.com>.

Dmitry Khlebnikov was born in 2004 in Belgorod, a small Russian city on the border with Ukraine. In his youth, he became interested in the history of avant-garde art. Inspired by the poetry of Alexey Kruchenykh and Velimir Khlebnikov, he began writing poetry and published a collection. At the same time, he began painting and filming, preparing to enter the directing department. At the age of 18, due to the war that began, he was forced to leave the country alone into the unknown. After that, he lived in Tbilisi, Moscow, St. Petersburg, participating in photo exhibitions with various projects and independent works.

David Kirby teaches at Florida State University. His latest books are a poetry collection, *The Winter Dance Party, Poems 1983-2023*, and a textbook modestly entitled *The Knowledge: Where Poems Come From and How to Write Them*. Kirby is the author of *Little Richard: The Birth of Rock 'n' Roll*, which the *Times Literary Supplement* described as “a hymn of praise to the emancipatory power of nonsense.” He is currently on the editorial board of Alice James Books.

Kenji Kojima has been experimenting with the relationships between perception and cognition, technology, music, and visual art. He was born in Japan and moved to New York in 1980. For the first 10 years he painted contemporary egg tempera paintings. Personal computers improved rapidly in the 80's. He felt more comfortable with computer art than painting. He changed his artwork to digital. He developed the computer software “RGB MusicLab” and created interdisciplinary works. His digital art has been exhibited in New York, media art festivals worldwide, including Europe, Brazil, Asia, and online exhibitions.

Edward Lee is an artist and photographer from Ireland. His paintings and photography have been exhibited and published widely, with many pieces in private collections. His website can be found at <https://lastimagesphotography.com> Twitter: @EdwardLeeArtist2 Instagram: @edwardleeart

Renée LoBue is an American multidisciplinary artist who seamlessly blends music, visual art, photography, performance art, fiction, and installations to create immersive experiences. Self-taught and prolific, she has released 11 albums and EPs with her bands Elk City and Flowers of America (FOA) and has crafted hundreds of visual artworks and thousands of fantasy self-portraits. In her audiovisual installations, she acts as a narrative tour guide, leading audiences through her creations. LoBue's work often tackles themes of empowerment and social issues. She is recognized for her reinterpretation of Keith Haring's mural that once graced the Houston-

Bowery wall in NYC in the 1980s. Notable musicians she has worked with include Lloyd Cole and members of the legendary indie bands Luna and Versus. She co-founded the Magic Door independent record label. Her art has been exhibited at Edinburgh Fringe, The Rochester Center of Contemporary Art (RoCo), Brooklyn's Gallery GAIA, and the Barbagelata Contemporary Art Foundation in Barcelona. LoBue's intuitive improvisation across mediums enables her to craft spontaneous and deeply personal works that delve into complex feminist narratives and the empowered journeys of women across generations.

Nicole Mambetalieva is a designer and photographer based in Saint Petersburg. Her journey into design started in childhood when she helped her father create labels for his plants from tin cans, engaging in upcycling. In her third year at university, she joined a class taught by renowned Russian photographer Yuri Molodkovets, where she created her unique photographs. Nicole uses her own technique, applying various cosmetic products to the camera lens, resulting in unexpected plays of light. These works were exhibited at the Moscow Museum of Modern Art (MMOMA). More information about the exhibition can be found at this link: MMOMA. Additionally, Nicole has participated in various other exhibitions with her different projects.

Flávia Monteiro is a Brazilian writer based in Miami, Florida. She owns a very fancy very yellow garden hose. Her work has appeared in *HLAD*, *Hunger Mountain*, *Vol.1 Brooklyn*, and elsewhere. Find her instagramming erratically at @flavia_monteiro.

César Mora Moreau. Colombian writer. Author of the novels *Al final, el océano* (2019), awarded the Barranquilla Distrital Novel Prize, and *Siempre nos quedará Bogotá* (2018), finalist of the National Short Novel Prize. His short story collection *Alas para lanzarme de un puente y volar* (2020) was awarded by the Secretariat of Culture of Barranquilla in 2020.

Gianni Olivetti. Self-taught, he photographs to tell, to understand society, those who live it the events that go through it. For him, photography has a therapeutic value that leads him to connect with his surroundings. He has participated in festivals (Trieste Photo Days, Chania International Photo Festival, B&W Athens Photography Exhibition) collective photo books and online publications (*FStop Magazine*, ProgresFestival Night, Passepartout photo prize Rome). Italian passport, citizen of the World.

Eric Pankey is the author of over a dozen collections of poetry. A new book, *Vanishments*, is due out from Slant Books in Spring of 2025.

Dr. Helge H. Paulsen. Studied social sciences at the University of Hanover, majoring in culture/sociology of art. Degree: Doctor of Philosophy. Dissertation: David Wojnarowicz and the positioning of postmodernism - an art sociological and philosophical development of the concept of U.S. postmodernism based on the artist David Wojnarowicz. 2010 - present freelance journalist, curator and art photographer (www.artpromotor.com). Photographic works published in international art magazines. Participation in various art fairs in Germany and exhibitions in various national galleries. Member of the Museum of Photography in Braunschweig.

Yuliya Pavlov is an interdisciplinary artist. She creates large projects using photography, sculpture, video and installation. Also special place in Yulia's practice is creating artist books. Yulya's practice revolves around the myth, reality and autobiographical context. Mix this parts she creates narratives with multiple layers of meaning. Her images have been featured in numerous publications such as *Float Magazine*, *Bird in Fly*, *Republic*, *RTVI*, *Dodho Magazine*. Yulia's works are included in public and private collections (for example, the Garage Museum) in Russia and abroad (USA, Canada, France, Portugal). Recent exhibitions and art fairs include: Pennlab gallery (Moscow, 2024), Catalog Art Fair (Moscow 2024), Galeria da Estação (Portugal, 2023).

Elise Racine is a Washington DC-based creator, scholar, and activist focused on the intersections of technology, identity, and society. Working across mediums, including photography, digital art, mixed media, and poetry, her practice bridges artistic experimentation with academic inquiry—translating complex concepts into accessible, impactful explorations. Her work often reflects on secrets, mysteries, and the unseen systems shaping our world. She has exhibited in the United States and internationally, most recently with The Bigger Picture at Beta Festival 2024 and the MTU Gallery in Ireland. Elise is the founder of de PALOMA, an art-activist collective examining emerging technologies and their impacts.

Kelsey Reed is based in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She is a part-time writer, full-time digital marketer, and sometimes a yoga instructor. She spends her time lost in books with her two cats or practicing yoga. She received her BA in English from Bryn Mawr College and MBA from the University of Pittsburgh

Clariss Ribeiro is a photographer known for her surrealist portraiture and performance photography, with over a

decade of experience capturing the intensity and emotion of the stage. Influenced by her mentor and inspiration, the renowned photographer Walter Firmo, Clarissa combines vibrant contrasts, layered reflections, and dreamlike compositions to challenge perceptions of reality and identity. Her work explores the hidden dimensions of her subjects, inviting viewers to look beyond the surface and experience a deeper connection. Through her lens, she transforms fleeting moments into timeless, impactful images, blending artistry and storytelling in every shot.

Myrna Rinaud. Transdisciplinary artist. Forty nine years of professional trajectory in New York, Texas, Puerto Rico, Barcelona, London, and Lisbon, dedicated to research, production, direction and performance of installation, post dramatic theatre, sound / word / language constructions, moving image, meta graphics, and teaching/mentoring/facilitating dance and site-specific experiences, and projects. Artistic Director of En Situ Danza, her vehicle for international liaison and production. Dance, her fulcrum, remains the essence and DNA of her mark and identity as a Latin American woman from the Caribbean. Established as one of the five pillars of the experimental dance movement in Puerto Rico *Inhabiting the Impossible*, University of Michigan Press.

Kama Rosinska is a Polish contemporary artist working in the realm of mystery, shadow and the hidden in various media. She holds BFA in Photography (2004) from the Academy of Fine Arts in Gdansk, Poland, and an MFA in Photography (2006) from the University of Arts in Poznan, Poland. She was the Grand Prix recipient at CYBERFOTO International Digital Photocreation Competition, Czeszochowa, Poland, in 2020 and 2022, as well as at 2nd Dissociated Photography Competition organised by the Polish Association of Fine Art Photographers in Silesian Region, Poland, in 2024.

Gjert Rognli. works as a multidisciplinary artist. In his works, he draws in references from his belonging to Arctic Northern Norway, and his Sámi cultural heritage. He takes nature and natural forces into his works with references to the surreal and mythological. Rognli has received a number of international art, photography, television and film awards for his works, and has had many separate and collective exhibitions at home and abroad, including the Louvre Museum in Paris. And his films have had the opportunity to contribute their message at the international environmental conference COP27-2022 in Egypt and COP28-2023 in Dubai.

Veronica Romanenghi is a photographer, art director and a poet based in Buenos Aires, Argentina. She has published two books of photography and participated in many others. She is actually working on “Hanging by a thread.” a photographic essay based on the suffocation that the domestic world generates in women in general, and the world’s attempt to domesticate them. She uses and places objects out of context in a domestic environment that generates strangeness and confusion. She is also studying to become an Actors Director.

Anna Mamie Ross has a Bachelor’s Degree from the University of Minnesota in English and Studies in Cinema and Media Culture. As an undergraduate she was the Editor in Chief at *Phony Magazine* and the Design Director for *The Tower Art and Literary Magazine*. She has written blog posts for nonprofit H2O for Life and episode synopses for NBC’s *The Voice* which were distributed to MGM. Formerly, she worked as a news producer at WCCO-TV where she wrote anchor language for daily broadcasts.

Mari Saxon is a photographer focusing on human diversity and individuality. Her work explores unconventional beauty, celebrating humanity’s uniqueness through conceptual and surreal portraits. She combines artistry with advocacy, striving to break beauty standards and inspire inclusion. Mari was born in Moscow and lived there until 2022, when she moved to the USA. By education, she is an architect. Her works have garnered international awards, are displayed in museums and galleries worldwide.

Nolo Segundo, pen name of retired teacher [America, Japan, Taiwan, the war zone of Cambodia, 1973-75] L.j. Carber, 77, became a published poet in his 8th decade in some 220 literary journals in 18 countries and has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize, thrice for Best of the Net. Cyberwit.net has published 3 collections in paperback: *The Enormity of Existence* (2020); *Of Ether and Earth* (2021); and *Soul Songs* (2022) The titles attest to an awareness gained in 1971 when he had an NDE whilst nearly drowning in a Vermont river: That he has--is-- a consciousness predating birth and surviving death, what poets since Plato have called the soul.

Alice Serfani was born in Italy in 1999. She studied fashion design at art high school, afterwards she attended the illustration course at the International School of Comics in Florence. Being passionate about reading since childhood, she also likes writing short stories. Her main inspirations are music, past atmospheres and psychological introspection.

Dora Siafla graduated from the Department of Visual and Applied Arts at the University of Western Macedonia. She is currently enrolled in the Master’s program for Audiovisual Arts in the Digital Age at the Ionian University.

Furthermore, she completed a titled CS50 course from Harvard University and a data-focused course on machine learning from MITx. Her primary focus lies in digital and audiovisual media, installations, algorithmic sound, and user interaction.

Kim Silva lives in Rhode Island. Her poems have been published in journals such as *Unbroken*, *Gone Lawn*, *Rhode Island Bards’ Anthology*, and others. MFA in Painting, Savannah College of Art and Design. Nominated for “Best of the Net 2023.” Nominated for “Science Fiction and Fantasy Rhysling Poetry Award 2024.”

Valentin Sismann and Audrey Colard are a couple of French artists and researchers working on video and new media. Valentin is a composer and artist, over the past three years, his works have been shown in over twenty countries and have won a few prizes. After working in the cinema industry, Audrey writes at university or film reviews in magazines. In the future, they both want to continue passing on, by teaching, curating, writing, or making artworks

Michael Stockfish’s work consists of both realistic portraits and figurative impressions of worlds and objects that are inextricably linked. His oil paintings and ink drawings provide for interpretation in a world in which more and more is chewed and handed over in the most convenient form. Our truths are based on assumptions and therefore we indirectly admit that our thoughts only quarantine subjectivity. Besides visual arts Michael Stockfish also creates music and texts. Recently he started *Stick Magazine* featuring his comics, cartoons and artwork.

Marta Stratskas is an Estonian artist living and working in Berlin.

Hugo Suchet is a graduate of the Ecole Nationale d’Architecture de Paris-Malaquais and lives and works in Paris. In keeping with his architectural approach, his work combines historical references and contemporary forms to create hybrid objects and architectures that represent a possible alternative to the traditional opposition between archaism and technology. The question of symbol, abandoned by modern functionalism, is at the heart of his work and permeates every aspect of his projects. Signs that resonate with a collective imagination are shared by the greatest number, but also more mysterious elements such as technologies or scientific theories that are still little-known.

Natalia Titova is a digital artist specializing in concept art and digital collages. Her international displays in the UK, Belgium, and Italy receive increasing attention from art critics with publications in such magazines as *IzbaArts* and *ArtMagazineium*. She is the winner of such awards as Sant Sewa Art Prize and The London International Creative Competition.

James Reade Venable was born in Manhattan, New York. He has been published in *Black + White Photography*, *Dodbo*, *F-Stop* and many more. He is a 2x London Photo Festival Monthly Competition Winner and was on the Shortlist for the Storytelling category in this years 500px Global Photography Awards and was a finalist for the 2023 Monochromatic Awards by Dodo. He is also an actor and is currently Henry Dorris in the BBC series *Hidden Assets*. He lives for his wife and daughter. He lives in New York City at the moment.

Keith Douglas Warren is a lifelong artist and retired Registered Nurse. He has been working with Asemic writing over the past several years, exploring the seemingly endless possibilities of the artform. Currently working in MetroWest Boston, Keith has shown his work over the years in Boston and Provincetown, Massachusetts, USA among others. The work has a life of its own, as art often does. In general, Keith works in ink, watercolor, and colored pencil on a variety of papers.

Wagtail Films. Oksana Bronevitskaia is an animation director and artist, a participant in many international festivals. Dmitry Zhukov is a cinematographer and photographer. Wagtail Films have been creating cinema and art objects for almost 20 years. They almost always work at the intersection of different genres and technologies.

Sharon Whitehill is a former English professor at Grand Valley State University in Michigan, she retired to Port Charlotte, Florida. Where she has not only published poems in various literary magazines, but also a full collection and four chapbooks. Her last chapbook, *This Sad and Tender Time* has just appeared (Kelsay Books, December 2023); *Putting the Pieces Together* is forthcoming from Fernwood Press in 2025.

