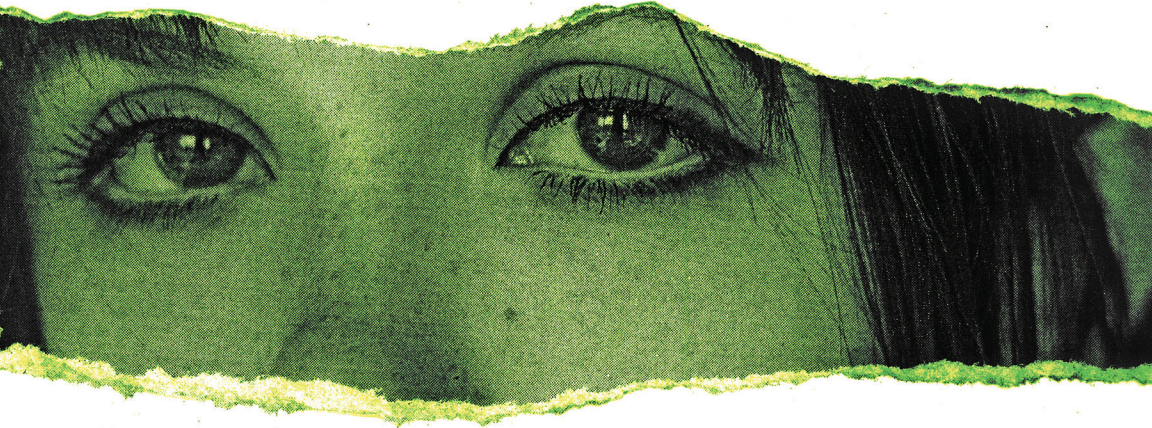


LUX

UNDERGRADUATE
CREATIVE REVIEW



Volume 18 | 2021 - 2022

LUX

UNDERGRADUATE CREATIVE REVIEW
VOLUME 18 | 2021 - 2022

Front cover artwork, Home Body Series 3 by Ollie Slade
All rights revert back to contributors upon publication.

Music selections are available on our Soundcloud: @luxcreativereview
Contact the editors at luxcreativereview@gmail.com
Follow us on Instagram: @luxcreativereview

Copyright © 2022, Lux Undergraduate Creative Review
Arizona State University
Printed in Arizona

STAFF

Editor-in-Chief
Gloria Chrisanty

Marketing + Design Directors

Ekaterina Korneva
Ritika Anand

Art Editor
Amelie Clark

Poetry Editor
Carolina Quintero

Nonfiction Editor
Kelsey Fuson

Fiction Editor
Mason Yates

Music Editor
Lilly Golich

Film Editor
Amritha Karthikeyan

Associate Literary Editors

Ruth Beadle
Veronica Gonzales

Associate Art/Film/Music Editor

Isabelle Kinney

EDITOR'S NOTE

Lux would not be what it is today without the members of the ASU community continuing to show its support and contribution. With all that is happening in the world today and the challenges of transitioning between online to in-person life again, Lux can't thank its contributors, staff, advisors, and the ASU community enough to continuously challenge us to redefine what it means to be a literary magazine.

To this year's contributors, Lux is honored to be able to share with the rest of the ASU community your passion, authenticity, and vulnerability. Your work represents the resiliency of creative expression and how your passion can bring solace to not only yourselves, but the rest of the ASU community in times of hardship and growth. Your contributions are a symbol of hope that things will and do get better.

Lastly I would like to thank this year's staff. Without you all, Lux could not have survived the growing pains it had to endure to serve the ASU community in such a great scale. Because of your commitment and efforts, we were able to expand Lux's mission and vision to multiple campuses. Thank you for all your hard work and I'm excited to see where you can take Lux in the years to come.

It is with everyone's passion and commitment to Lux that we are able to produce yet another incredible publication. I'm so proud to have been a part of something so beautiful, and so honored to have witnessed how much Lux has grown in the last three years. To many more incredible years, without further ado, I'm excited to present to you Lux's Volume 18.

Gloria Chrisanty | Editor-in-Chief

MISSION STATEMENT

Lux encourages the emerging talent of undergraduate students by providing a creative outlet for their literary, artistic, and musical work. The review is produced annually with the help of Barrett, the Honors College at Arizona State University. Lux accepts poetry, creative nonfiction, visual art, music, film, and other modes of expression beyond the bounds of traditional genres. We value originality, individuality, artistry, diversity, and passion.

AWARDS

Art

This year's art award goes to *Wingbeat* by Kelsey Phillips. Lux thanks Barrett, the Honors College, for honoring the winning submission.

Poetry

This year's poetry award goes to *Blue* by Shepard Adkins. Lux thanks Barrett, the Honors College, for honoring the winning submission.

Fiction

This year's nonfiction award goes to *Metal Man* by Scott Adiconis. Lux thanks Barrett, the Honors College, for honoring the winning submission.

Nonfiction

This year's fiction award goes to *The Story of My Life in 3500 Words or Less* by Megan-Marie Cox. Lux thanks Barrett, the Honors College, for honoring the winning submission.

Music

This year's music award goes to *rainy days (on your face)* by Lil Sad Boi. Lux thanks Barrett, the Honors College, for honoring the winning submission.

CONTENTS

ART

Israel Hurtado	12
Ollie Slade	17
Sami Al-Asady	22
Shambhavi Singh	32
Gabriella Jording	40
Megan-Marie Cox	42
Kelsey Phillips	50
Aislin Lozano De La Cruz	62
Tess Ward	64
Miguel Fajardo	77
Camille Misty	82
Lucy Song	90
Samantha Sabbara	106

FICTION

Shepard Adkins, <i>My Mother's Stew</i>	14
Ash Kingery, <i>Silver Screen</i>	30
Scott Adiconis, <i>Metal Man</i>	68
H. Heath Bigelow, <i>Mrs. Dansey's Cat</i>	84
Gemma Trimble, <i>Floriography of a Stomach</i>	97

NONFICTION

Sami Al-Asady, <i>In the Wilderness</i>	26
Megan-Marie Cox	44
<i>The Story of My Life in 3500 Words or Less</i>	

POETRY

Elliott Maxwell, <i>streetlight lovers</i>	10
Camden Beal	11
<i>untitled</i> (after "Orbit" by Victoria Chang)	
Eleanor Ambler	20
<i>Danse Macabre (Dance of Death)</i>	
Gemma Trimble	29
<i>I Relearn the Primary Colors and Don't Know What They Mean</i>	
Shepard Adkins, <i>Blue</i>	35
Claire Agee, <i>Milk Blood</i>	56
Cassandra Briones, <i>catatonic.</i>	60
Fin Ward, <i>Beyond These Things</i>	66
Mia Milinovich	80
<i>insatiable things and truth untold</i>	
Ellie Smith, <i>Yellow Fairy</i>	96
Olivia Bolles, <i>Monk by the Sea (1808)</i>	105

MUSIC

Lil Sad Boi, <i>rainy days (on your face)</i>	58
Brandon Ligon, <i>Nocturnal Bird Garden</i>	94

Elliott Maxwell
streetlight lovers

she is the honeydew on my lips
with swaying hips against fingertips
bleeding down my thighs—
 my shaking skin,
 crying eyes,
 and a long goodbye

linger longer
slipping further—
 she is bittersweetness

watch me now
trying to love the sound
of singing swans
at 2am—
 my words were never reaching
 you

Camden Beal
untitled
(after "Orbit" by Victoria Chang)

Love - died august 25, 1999. felt first in between my legs. when he was edging me and it hurt and i let him keep going because i wanted him to enjoy it. because i wanted him in the first place. love left like cherry blossoms dying in the winter. flowing from dead trees to flowering cakes to dying petals to dead trees. the beauty lies in the change. like proud moms jumping out of chairs after their kids' piano recitals. they stored it all up so they could release it in one moment. like supernovae. like interstellar nebulae. it wasn't until now that i realized love wasn't something you could grasp. like the river rushing towards the ocean. just unfrozen and rained down. waiting in a pool and wanting to come back again. only changing shape, only changing form. like grief.

Israel Hurtado

My name is Israel Hurtado and I am a senior undergraduate at Digital Culture. I have been fascinated with technology and explored creative ways by interrupting the medium with software and art. Photography has been my enjoyable form of art. I was deeply in touch with capturing one of my favorite moments: at public events, spending time and love with people I appreciate, and relish the life chapters that help me become who I am. Computational photography has been an absorbing sensation that continues to go far beyond the perception of a photograph. Software changes the way we see an image and becomes an extraordinary feat of digital processing and cognitive imagery. Before I decided to move forward with photography with a transition from mobile photography to a full-frame mirrorless camera, I have worked on three years of practicing and self teaching the concept of photography with a mobile device, creating an illusion for both amateur and professional photographers. In my collection of photographs, I considered them to be a feat of progress I was proud of with moments of stepping outside of my comfort zone and exploring the challenges of both computational photography and the approach of imagery.



Untitled, 2019
Digital Photography
Israel Hurtado

Shepard Adkins

My Mother's Stew

When I was a child, my mother placed me in a crystalline jar. Through the webs of glass and cracks of disrepair, I was forced to watch the world as she saw fit. I did not mind the jar, for it was comfortable and sometimes a little big for someone like myself.

My mother gave me two floors in my glass jar. The top, of course, was for watching, where she would allow me to peek out from over the rugged rim and admire the world I was not yet privy to. I had a couch—a stretched-out cotton ball, rough at the edges and fraying like spider silk. The floor was a broken-up tongue depressor. I was never sure how she made such fine wood flooring with such cheap materials, but I also didn't mind the glue that threatened to trip me once or twice. Gratitude always dripped from my lips because the bottom floor was nothing less than a prison cell intent on devouring me whole.

But mother always liked it better when I was there.

I despised the glass. It was always so cold, so slick, so damp and so very haunting. It called to me in my dreams—or, perhaps, my nightmares that filled the endless void I called sleep—and it begged for me to touch it to remind it that it wasn't alone. I was always forced to comply, to curl up into a ball beneath the floor of the top level and freeze against the glass bottom that always dug so uncomfortably into my back. My mother refused to let me out when I asked. I always told her that I enjoyed the top more. The couch. The warm wood. I enjoyed seeing the world, even if it was obscured by the lattice of milky glass.

My favorite thing to do was watch my mother cook. She would carefully open the floor, allowing me to crawl up the jar until I sat comfortably on the cotton ball. Her gnarled fingers would creak and groan as she pulled out various foods. "For my stew," she had said, flashing me the tomatoes, or oregano, or maybe even a bone or two.

It was always for her stew.

I found the ingredients odd at times. I never knew much about cooking, only from what I saw with my mother's stew, but I was certain that locks of hair—always in colorful variance—didn't belong in food. I thought it odd when she added a doll along with cubed steak. I cocked my head when she lifted a book and sprinkled in pages after the parmesan and before the thyme. Once, I almost asked if she had meant to drop in the colored pencils when there were stalks of green onion right beside her.

Somehow, my mother always made that stew. Her ladle was a brush, blue in hue. I had seen her use it before, on girls she called 'daughter' and on boys she called 'son'. I tried to see the children more, but I was always locked below when she was with them. I found it odd that their hair colors always changed—always shifted—like the moods of a teenager unknown to the world. But that didn't matter, because that blue brush ran through their hair all the same. She would coo and preen like a fluttering dove, and then she would send them away to make her stew.

The stew she fed me.

"Eat up," she had told me with a smile on her wrinkled face. "Eat up and one day you will be big enough to leave the jar. One day you will be big enough to live with your mother."

I always ate from the brush that became my spoon. The stew was both hot and cold to the touch, but I never once complained about the feeling. I despised how it burned my throat, how it made my stomach curdle, how it was supposed to fill me up yet left me emptier than the cold glass jar. I always hummed and told her,

"Thank you."

I always ate every drop.

And one day, as she said, I would be big enough to leave the jar and take care of her, too. I had begun to grow to the point where I couldn't stay on the bottom floor. Next, I needed a box. A few days later, she had set me in the sink to watch and learn as she cooked her stew. Soon, I was able to walk freely around the kitchen, then upstairs, where I found she had made me a room. I had a bed made of glass and silk, and I was able to sleep on something that wasn't too cold. Stairs weren't too difficult to navigate, and by the time I was a teen myself, I had free reign over the whole house.

I got to live with my mother.

I got to be free from that crystalline jar.

Then, and only then, did she cease to feed me her stew. "You're all grown up," she had explained with a shrug. Her joints clicked and clacked, grating on my ears in ways they had never done before. "Since I took care of you, you will do the same for me."

So, I did. I took care of my mother because she had taken care of me.

And then one day, when I was grown, she sat me down on the floor and pulled out her blue brush—the one I had watched her use on the children she called 'sons' and 'daughters'. I wanted to ask what she was doing, but she softly shushed me and began to drag the metal teeth through my hair. She was my mother, and I knew I should not question the woman who raised me from a crystal jar. So, I sat, waiting and silently begging for the metal teeth to retreat, to disappear and release me from the cruel maw upon my head.

Instead, the teeth grew sharper. Harsher. Crueler. And I... I sat and waited because she was my mother and I knew better than to cry out against her.

But the pain seeped and spread like a poison upon my head. It ached, and I cried as warmth began to bubble along the crevices of my mind. As my skin began to crack and split. As my mother opened my skull and peered into the gooey midst. As my mother scooped up my thoughts, blowing to cool them. As she tested the temperature while the liquid base spilled down my face, mixing with tears she knew would be perfect for salt. As I blinked. Once.

Twice.

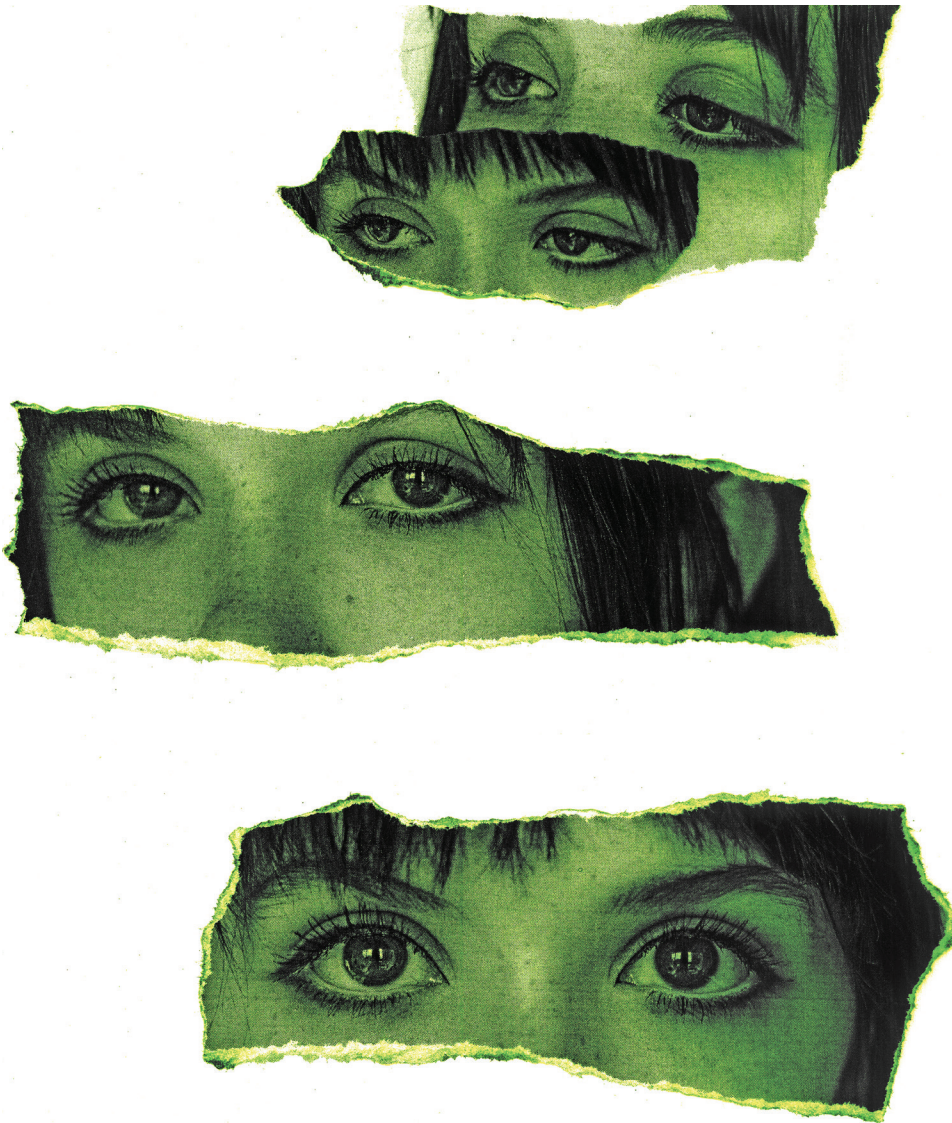
Three times as the world began to spin and stumble and tremble.

Hot. Too hot.

But my mother thought it perfect—better than the others—and while I wished to be on the cold floor of the jar once more to escape the searing heat that dripped down my cheeks, my mother only chuckled and hummed, saccharine delight sprinkling into my skull like a dash of sugar.

Ollie Slade

This series of self-portraits was made during a period of isolation during which I spent a lot of time looking inwardly. This piece is a reflection of how I saw myself at that time.



Home Body Series 3, 202
Manipulated Photography
Ollie Slade



Home Body Series 1, Year
Manipulated Photography
Ollie Slade

Eleanor Ambler

Danse Macabre

Dance of Death

martha graham says a dancer dies
twice and the first death is more painful.
does this death wear a hooded cloak? materialize
as a lady in gray on a stage-light-white steed? will a
pas de cheval [fr] step
of the horse [en] summon her one morning half-
way through the tendu [fr] to
tense; to stretch [en] to whisk me away in
the swirl of a smoke machine to some
office cubicle where blank stares snatch
at my memories until all is
artless figures? ballet blanc [fr] white
ballet [en] will a corps [fr] body
[en] of artists spurned
by centuries of racist elitism rise
from the grave to dance their
well-earned vengeance? will an
anorectic skeleton take me by the hand and say
look what you have created, petit
rat [fr] look, little rat [en]
and see what ghastly wonders your
perverted love has maintained? danse
macabre [fr] dance of death [en]:
an inevitably choreographed confrontation

friedrich nietzsche says a dancer looks
insane without the sound of a song.
what is a breath or a heartbeat if not
music? maybe this is what he saw -
rows of dreadful dryads élevé [fr] lifeless

rise [en] from a silent stage while men
chassé [fr] chased [en] them into
somber statues scrambling
for a crust of bread. maybe i am
dancing just to show the world my heart
is beating maybe i
am the only one who can see this pas
de deux [fr] step of two [en] between my breath
and my corps [fr] maybe
the second death of my body [en] will come before
the first and i will not have to know
what stillness means. danse
macabre [fr] dance of death [en]:
a centuries-long exercise in procrastination

jennifer homans says the art
of ballet is dying in the 21st century.
this is a matter of definitions but
even if it is true, hasn't dance been about death
all along? anyone who flings themselves
en'laire [fr] strives
in the air [en] to suspend
the gravity of time. what is choreography
if not an elaborate simulacrum of
control? bodies mis en scène [fr]
put on the stage [en] do not age until
lights burn dark. fondu [fr] to melt
[en] if the image is lost what
direction will its oozing colors flow? if
i am not a dancer will my soul survive
in the puddle of my unused limbs? will
my corps [fr] re-form a body [en] that
speaks new languages? movement
has no tongue. death
is universal. danse
macabre [fr] dance of death [en]:
an infinite war for survival

Sami Al-Asady

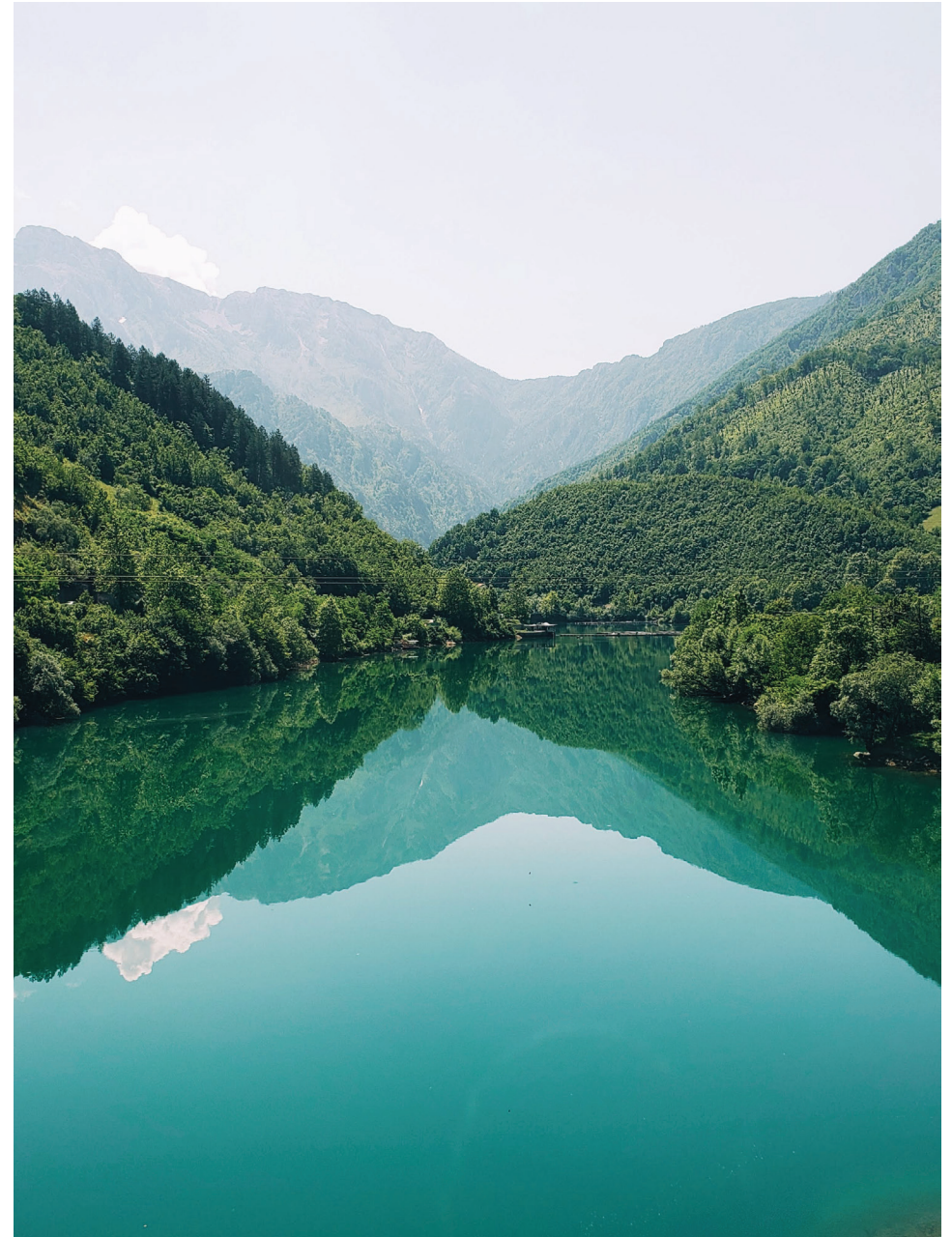
My creative work is an act of expression. The way I observe the world manifests itself in my prose writing and photography. I am a keen observer; in my given environment, I strive to find balance or unbalance, then tease out the relationship between its poles with special attention to its nuances. I find aesthetic beauty in nature, where I am most drawn to the form and material of the natural world. But sometimes the beauty of the world is too heavy for me, the "absurd," as Camus coined it, is everywhere, so I bend rules deemed fixed with my imagination. Sorrow is insufferable but creative expression, through art, brings forth relief, recognition, then ultimately acceptance. My art is an extension of myself.



*Mostar Bridge, 2019
Digital Photography
Sami Al Asady*



Danish Roses, 2019
Digital Photography
Sami Al-Asady



Harmony, 2019
Digital Photography
Sami Al-Asady

Sami Al-Asady

In the Wilderness

April 27, 2021

Dear Jonny,

I'm sending this letter as though I'm sending it to sea in an empty wine bottle: I am not expecting anything in return. Perhaps it is this very fact that has emboldened me to pen this composition. Or, perhaps, caffeine is the culprit. I guess we will never know. Where do I start? They always say start from the beginning, but how do you define a starting point? So I guess I'll just start somewhere, anywhere. This message is going off to sea, after all. It will be carried at the whims of currents, riptides, and even The Great Pacific Garbage Patch—which is two times the size of Texas. That is to say, where it began really doesn't matter. Where it goes and what it is are far more interesting things to define.

I want you to know that I still think about you. Your friend, hundreds of miles away, thinks about you. Isn't it strange how one connection can subsequently change the chemistry of all future connections? There are billions of neurons in our brain working, tirelessly, to power the human condition. Things we call emotions, feelings, thoughts, all those things, are the product of a catalyst. By that logic, you were a catalyst in my life.

I think about the first days, when time flew, when I would wake up giddy with excitement and anticipation. Would I learn something new about you—the way you think, the things you believe, the hopes you harbor? Then, finally, night would arrive, and two became one. What was so satisfying was the knowledge, the fact, that while we both went through our day, our minds inhabited each other, like a virus infecting a host.

Perhaps that was the greatest thing of all, knowing that the connection was not imagined but tangible, as if we could almost grasp it. Just as the sun sets in Los Angeles, so it does in Phoenix.

It's an interesting fact that we stare at the same sun, albeit at different times. We both see exactly the same gaseous star, making it possible for us to also see each other. As I stare into the sun, blinded by the rays, I know that wherever we are, and wherever we go, it will continue to shine in oblivion.

But, nevertheless, maybe I am just imagining the connection. Was it really a connection, or has months of existence erased what connection there was to begin with? Maybe the sun is holding a secret, a desire, a thought, that may even be false. I am not naïve. Experience is but a distraction from mortality. What feels more real than anything, though, is desire; longing; regret; love; concern. None of these things are real, yet these ideas, these emotions, which hold meaning not only in language, but also in the heart, have motivated me to write this proverbial message-in-a-bottle.

What I want you to know is that I still think about you. Because that counts for something. As you perform your daily tasks, know that there is someone in the Sonoran Desert who still thinks about you; cares about you; worries about you. When you stare into the sun, know that I see the same thing, but from a different latitude and longitude. It's the same sun but through a different lens—after you.

I am about to throw this empty wine bottle into the sea. God, I hope it doesn't wind up in The Great Pacific Garbage Patch, for that would be profoundly unpoetic. No, I hope the current takes it to a rocky shore, one filled with imposing geological structures that look like fossilized elephants emerging from the water. Just as the waves hammer away at the rugged terrain, so I hope this message-in-a-bottle etches into the coast with the confidence that, someday, it will unite with the elephants and march towards the setting sun.

Sincerely,
Sami Al-Asady

Gemma Trimble

I Relearn the Primary Colors and Don't Know What They Mean

when i wash my hands with my mother's soap,
they bleed. my knuckles split an ancestral anger down the seam,
down the length of the yellow lit rind of my bedroom:
the walls scream a jaundiced childhood commandment, precept, law
and it is lonely here, in the kitchen with a mango. i peel it for turmeric
rubs and mercenary teeth, ones that tear aridity from the bone
in that casual barbarism of people who have long made a home from
it. the knives are sticky and wet and i am heaving my limbs over to the
sink, where i scrub at my arms like a surgeon. close your eyes against
the light. be here, the liver-spotted fruit flies say, be here like this,
and from their chitin exoskeletons hold out a birdcage, gilded;
it is fused to their wings, and they are gasping,
they are drowning in it.

tomorrow there are three hours between me and the pigs,
the scream of their well-swatted cheeks, and i am training, like them
to be better bought, better received. there is blood rust
on the band of this watch and my wrists cannot rise to meet it,
not when the cold seals it in again, the balm of coffee i shouldn't have
had and cinnamon scattered across the red leather seat. my thumbs
hook around the protrusion of a hip. tight pressed to the revival is my
sisyphean womanhood, the way it spirals in the chamber with half a
mind to turn back—
i cry when the blankets reach for my neck, for a glimpse of the fervor,
scarlet as it comes to touch my skin.
tell me how it hurts you, how the stifle and the sweat
point you nose down at the ground, rooting,
and i am burning in the catacombs beside;
the many-skulled veins of my vertigo spin me against the view.

in the gallows they teach you to chart the stars,
to trace kindness up the nose and through the branched lung, like a
woman who ambles around the house, a phantom and a wisp.
there is nothing to be hallowed, no blackened blue to find,
and i must be content with contrition. it fastens, spreads,
first to the tips of my eyelashes, where i blink it away and then grow it
again. someone says devotion is azure beneath the skin, and i believe
them, i pin it to the wall and think of iris bulbs in full sun.
my throat is thickening so i cannot write, cannot choke the ink-stained
water of my words onto paper—
it is mixing with something opaque, and i muddle the time;
i am running frostbite down the length of my hips,
slumber my only respite from sleep.

Ash Kingery

Silver Screen

Kora sits and watches movies in her dorm instead of doing homework. She does the homework eventually, about an hour before the deadline. She checks the course shell two days later and sees she's gotten full marks. It's not like she's not doing the work.

Some of her classes are more participation-focused, and she doesn't really... participate. She hates seminars. Hates talking to other people. Hates having to form opinions on the reading she skimmed at best. None of the reading interests her. Her participation grades are awful, but her essays are always so good that she gets decent grades anyway. She'd rather be watching movies.

She sits on her bed with her laptop across her legs, only moving it when it starts to burn her. Not like it hurts that much. Every day, she watches a movie, or at least half of one. Usually it's more than one.

She does have a roommate, but they don't talk. Their schedules aren't aligned. When they are home at the same time, they don't talk anyway. Kora goes to bed late and wakes up just barely in time for class, while Maria is all 'early to bed, early to rise.' Kora wears headphones, but she can sense Maria's irritation at the blue light that poisons the room at one in the morning (the most unholy of hours). Maria's too nice (or just too shy) to say anything, but more and more, she's been spending the night at her boyfriend's place. He has an actual apartment, not a dumpy dorm. That's fine with Kora. She can stay up as late as she wants now, watching movies.

Tonight, she's watching an action movie marathon when her mom calls unexpectedly. Reluctantly, she pauses the movie and answers.

"How are you, sweetie?" Good. "Are you enjoying your classes?" Yes. "How is your roommate?" Fine. "What's her name again?"

Maria. "Is she nice?" Sure. "Are you eating enough?" Yeah. "How are your grades?" Fine. "Are you doing your homework?" Yes. "Are you... doing alright?" Yeah. "Do you want to talk about anything?" No. "You sure?" Yes. "Okay. Feel free to call any time. Love you, sweetie." Love you too.

There's a hesitation on her mom's end before she hangs up. Kora puts the phone down, puts her headphones back on, and unpauses the movie.

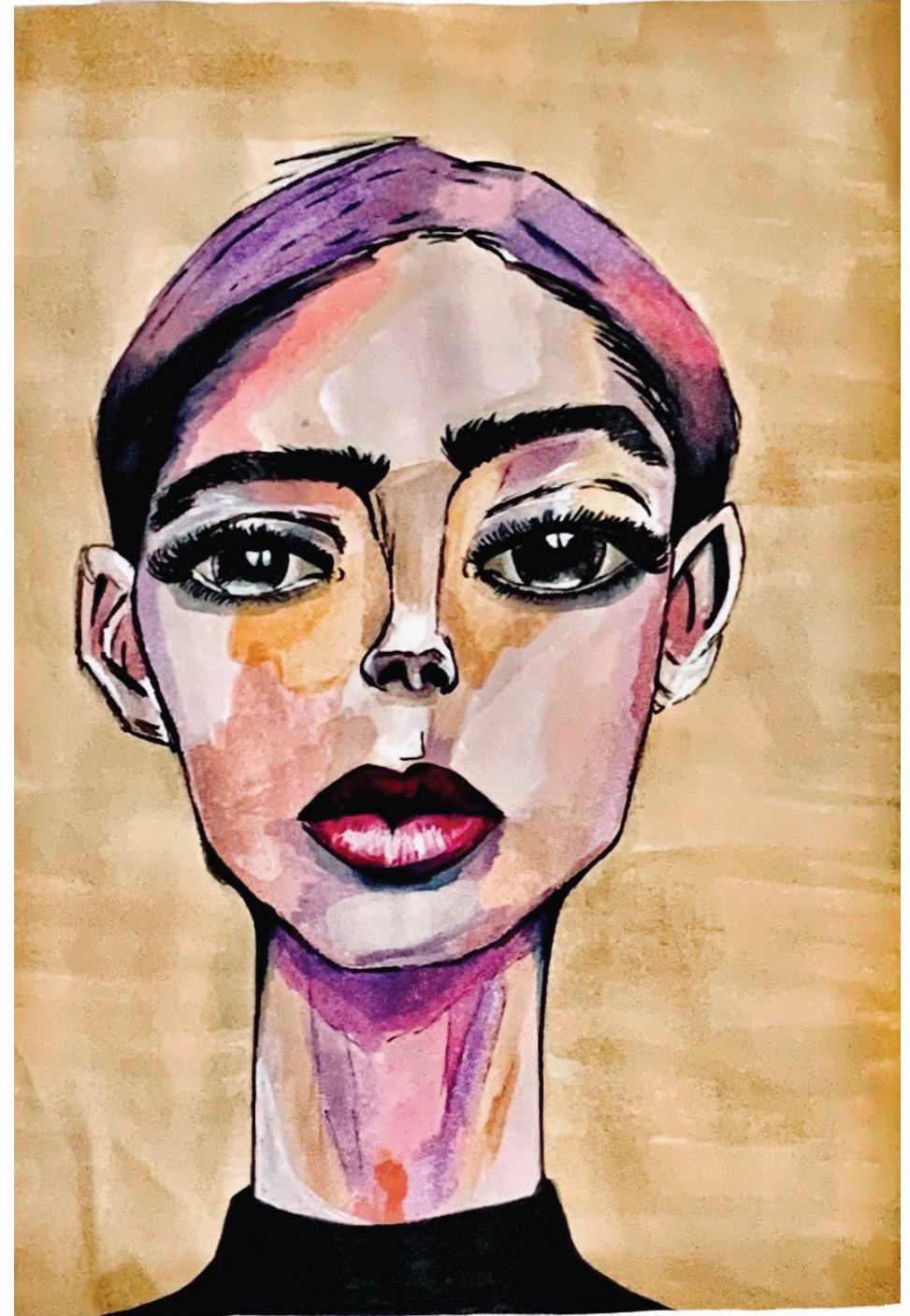
She hopes her voice was chipper enough, even if her responses were short. Her mom doesn't need to know about the movies. There's a lot she doesn't have to know about: the pathetic excuses for meals, the crushing lack of friends, the gnawing terror that's kept her indoors except to go to class (and even that's a stretch), the hollow pit in her stomach. But when she watches a movie, that hollow feeling goes away. For two hours, she gets to feel happy, or sad, or angry, or anything else she ought to be feeling. So she watches them until the sun comes up, and she prays that the vague half-smile she pastes onto her face during class is enough to dissuade questions.

Part of her wants to shower. It's been a couple days. But she can't. The movie is still going.

This story first appeared in Bright Flash Literary Review.

Shambhavi Singh

That is what makes it stand out from all the worldly things and that is exactly what I make. I use mixed media and challenge myself with every piece I create. I use art as a medium to connect to my unconscious and find my artistic voice. I like to show motion and liquidity in my pieces as it speaks to my feminine character.



*Easy Mathilda, 2020
Mixed Media
Shambhavi Singh*



Easy Mathilda 2, 2020
Digital Photography
Shambhavi Singh

Shepard Adkins

Blue

When I was a child—one who
still believed in God and
a Catholic cross,
and that only men could lie with women,
and that there was no such thing as more than two genders—
I believed everything my mother
told me.

She would sit behind me, her
hands lifting my long brown
hair, which I proudly showed off on
Sunday mornings.
She would take a blue hairbrush while I—
so focused on a movie—sat quietly.
And she would brush.

And brush. And
brush. And brush until an ache overtook my mind because
she brushed all of the knots out and then some. And she
brushed. And brushed. And brushed because she was my
mother and she had to brush
my hair.

And sometimes we would talk. I'd tell
her about my day. *What crafts did you make?*
Paper snowflakes. *What songs did you*
sing? Twinkle-twinkle! *What friends did*
you make? A girl with my name!

You need to make more friends. You don't have enough.
Imaginary friends
aren't
real.

And she brushed my hair, a
 little harder, but she brushed out all of the knots
 and she kissed my crown of brown.
Trust me, it's easier. I know these things.
 She was my mother;
 she knew best.

She brushed my hair, and
 every time she did, we would
 talk. She was my mother, I
 had to talk to her. With my head of hair always so exposed,
 my skull may as well have been split and she could stare down
 at my thoughts. My hairbrush was a ladle,
 ready to sift and stir my dark secrets as age
 lent me a hand, pulling, pulling, pulling,
 until it couldn't pull anymore, and I was able to stand on my own
 but my mother still brushed my hair.

When she brushed in college, I was quiet.
 She had known everything of my
 life by then, down to
 the way I ate or the way I had sex or the way my boyfriend at the time
 had broken up with me or the secrets my friends had told me
 that my mother was then privy to.
 The brushing was harder. Harder. Harder. Pulling my scalp
 so far back that I thought I would lose my crown.
There are more knots than normal.
 Of course, there were.
 My hair had been fried by reckless dyeing that seared the ends
 into oblivion.
You need to take better care of it.

We don't talk as much. I'm too quiet. Too focused on the pain
 of the brush's plastic bristles that rake over my sensitive scalp. But
 my mother always picked up on it.
Why are you so quiet? I'm tired from classes. *What classes?* I
 don't know, just classes. *How are your grades?* Same as last time.
Any boys distracting you? No, I don't even like
That's a phase. No, I
You'll get over it.
 Please, can you just lis
Am I a bad mother? You're making me feel like a bad mother.

She cried a lot, and I was
 the worst child in the world for it. She brushed my hair and
 I made her cry. It was so common that I knew to
 scoop her into my arms and whisper
 how I am a bad daughter, and she is not a bad mother. I
 am ungrateful. Spiteful. Rude. Bratty. Annoying. I am the
 problem. Not my mother.
 She knew best. So,
 how could I ever argue when she stared at me with tears in her eyes?

I'm sorry. *No, you're not.* No, I mean it. *No,*
you never mean it. If you meant it, you would listen to me.
You wouldn't make me cry. Mom, I'm sorry,
 I'll be a better daughter.
 Good.

But 'daughter' feels wrong on my tongue. It
 poisons my mind as discomfort tickles my spine. I
 am not a daughter. I'm a person. Not a girl. Or woman. Not my
 mother.
 I despise my reflection. My breasts are too big. My face is too narrow.
 I want to flatten my chest. I don't mind a mustache. Men's clothing
 is more comfortable. No skirts, sometimes a dress, but mostly slacks.
 I cut my hair.
 It no longer trails down my back.
 It's black. Shagged. Bangs tickle my eyes.
 My mother can barely brush it.
 But the bristles bite me all the same.

She brushed. And brushed. And brushed. And brushed
 until she couldn't brush anymore, and my mind was
 aching, screaming, begging, pleading
 for the brushing to cease.
 She was digging, digging, digging
 until she couldn't dig anymore for the secrets
 her ladle failed to reach because I
 had gotten so much better at hiding my
 thoughts in the soup of a mind she had cured over the years.
So many knots, why are there so many?

Why'd you cut it? Something new. Your hair was prettier long.
 I like it short. *You look like a boy.* Is that wrong?
You're a girl. I don't mind looking this way.
Are you on drugs? God, no (that's a lie).
 Lying has become so easy.
Are you lying to me? Hiding something?
 No, I
I hate liars, Sarah.

That's not my name.
 That name is dead.

Do you not like your name? It's fine. *Why don't you like it?*
 It's fine, mom. *I picked that name out for you.*
 I know.
Do you not like me, then? Mom, please, I
No. I get it. You hate me.
 I don't hate
After all, I've done for you and this is how you act?
 Ungrateful. Rude. Bratty. Wretched. Horrible. Wicked. Liar. Sinner.
 An utter fucking nuisance.
 A burden.

She stops brushing. *Get out.*
 My head is throbbing. Mom, please, let's just talk.
I will not talk to you. I'm not your mother.
 Mom
No. You've broken my heart.

Then why does my own heart ache?

She sends me away, my brush in her hands as she
 screams and screams and screams.
 No tears roll down her cheeks. White-hot anger sears her eyes.
I am not your mother. My daughter would have listened.

My mother died not long after.
 I was barred from her funeral. I didn't mind.
 My heart and head throbbed at the thought of seeing her one last time.
 I feared my brush would be in her hands before they closed the casket's
 lid. I could still feel her
 pulling, pulling, pulling
 as she
 brushed and brushed and brushed
 until she pulled all of my hair from my scalp.

I found the brush. Blue and cracked and old,
 the plastic bristles falling off.
 The couch is old, covered in plastic.

brush
 And I
 I sit.
 my hair.

*This year, Shepard's piece "Blue" is the
 winner of Lux's poetry section.*

Gabriella Jording



Paradise Pot, 2021
4"x 5"
Acrylic on air dry clay
Gabriella Jording

I am an artist based in Phoenix, Arizona. Studying Art History at Arizona State University, I pull inspiration from what I learn in her classes. My work often bends and shapes into whatever art period or artist she is studying at the moment. I pull inspiration from as early as the ancient Egyptian works all the way to the Impressionist period. I create in a variety of mediums and am always looking to expand her materials. Some of the mediums I primarily work in is: clay, paint, sculpture, oil pastel, and ink. Aside from my studies, I draw out inspiration from my surroundings, as well as, my experiences. My work reads as a journal of my daily findings and continuous studies. The goal of my art is to tell stories and document my studies through my work.

Megan-Marie Cox

I write about my day. My art is really just that simple when you boil it down. To quote Nora Ephron, "I don't know how anybody can write fiction when real life is so goddamn interesting." My art explores things people have accepted as "normal," and shows how daily life is actually often shocking, hilarious, and horrifying. Womanhood and queerness are central to my work, but that is because they are central to my daily life and critically shapes the way I experience the world. My content is rhythmic and relatable--it makes you confront things that you already know, but haven't necessarily conceptualized.



Magazine 1, Year
Digital Art 2D
Megan Cox

Megan-Marie Cox

The Story of My Life in 3500 Words or Less

Inspired by Nora Ephron's Essay of the Same Title

What my grandmother said

My grandmother calls me and tells me to write something down in my journal: "Keep the big things big and the small things small." She also says to never go to the grocery store hungry, but I don't write that part down.

I love to write

In fifth grade, I write a "Creative Narrative" paper about the lemon meringue pie my grandmother made the previous Thanksgiving (she had used salt instead of sugar which was peak comedy for my 10-year-old sense of humor). Dependent on your perspective, I either confidently or cockily volunteer to read my essay out loud for the class. With the figurative language course unit right around the corner, my teacher continually interrupts my reading to point out examples of personification ("...the flavor danced on my tongue") and simile ("...made my eyes as big as bowling balls") in my writings. I interpret these observations as praise.

I decide I am going to become a writer.

I love to read

I am about to travel to Boston. My high school psychology teacher loans me a copy of *Ready Player One* to read on my flight. I read the whole book on the plane ride there. When I come back, he loans me *Angels & Demons*. I read it on the snow day that happened to grace my school later that week.

I decide I am going to become a reader.

I tell all my friends, who are readers themselves, and the next day they excitedly bring me copies of their favorite novels. I put them in my backpack, but never open a single one.

It will be four years until I read my next book (which is a significant achievement considering I graduated college with an English Major during that time).

The best advice I have ever received

I get rejected from Stanford. My dream school. This prompts a lot of crying, stress eating, and over dramatic statements about how I will never ever accomplish anything in this world.

After posting something self-pitiful on my Close Friends Instagram Story, Kacey Lee sends me a DM. She is four years younger than me and has probably never felt cataclysmic rejection like what I am currently experiencing.

She says:

"Your favorite professor doesn't teach at Stanford. Your next best friend doesn't take classes at Stanford. Your next favorite coffee shop, sushi restaurant, study spot, dog park, liquor store-- None of it is near Stanford. What a gift it is that you now know that."

The second best advice I've ever received

My mom and I walk our dog around the block on Christmas morning. I say, one day I want to move to New York. She says, move there now.

Two months later, I am on a plane to Manhattan.

From my (never produced) screenplay The Grind

JUNO

How did you get into writing?

BOBBIE

When I was in fourth grade, I wrote my own version of *The Three Little Pigs* from a feminist and body-positive perspective. I showed my teacher and she converted one of our recess four square courts into a stage so I could put on shows for my classmates.

JUNO

That's so cute.

BOBBIE

Oh, I was bullied bad for it. But I was happy. How about you? What made you go into comedy?

JUNO

Very classic tragic backstory. "Uses humor as a coping mechanism." You can already guess it, so I won't bother telling it to you... And I'm good at lots of stuff, so it's not like I *couldn't* do anything else. I just *couldn't* imagine doing anything else.

BOBBIE

I know exactly how you feel.

JUNO

And now we work our asses off. Cut throats over minimum wage jobs. All just for the chance of getting lucky. We could have been engineers!

BOBBIE

No, we couldn't have.

I start wearing eyeliner

I realize that I'm not pretty, but maybe I have the potential to be. I have been very neglectful of my appearance, and can't remember the last time I brushed my hair or washed my face. With enough effort, I think I can probably become attractive.

I also realize that I have fantastic tits.

I buy a push up bra.

Homophobia exists and will affect me

I fly home and introduce my girlfriend to my family. After my parents go to bed, I sit out under the stars with my sister, her boyfriend, and a twelve-pack of White Claw. My sister's boyfriend says same sex couples are improper and Anti-Christain. I think I misheard him. I didn't.

I want to be a pigeon

I am eating bagels with my roommate in Battery Park. I mindlessly toss pieces of my bagel to the pigeons. One crumb

bounces into the bike path and the pigeons flap over, boldly occupying the entire path to retrieve the morsel. An oncoming biker swerves out of the way just before hitting the birds. He flails and curses. The pigeons smirk back, knowing that they can be in whatever lane they want and the bikers will always swerve to avoid them. My roommate says, "I hope one day you are as confident as a New York City pigeon."

I am not going to marry Fiona Samburg

There is a book shop on 39th Street halfway between where Fiona Samburg and I work. It has comfortable chairs, good wi-fi, and lots of power outlets. It is one of my favorite places in New York.

We are leaving one days and she says, "If we ever break up, I get custody of the book shop." She giggles and kisses me, like the idea of us calling things off is laughably inconceivable.

All I can think is, damn it.

Eyeliner is not enough

I go to a comedy show with my best friend. He's a guy who reads instead of watching TV and smiles with only half his mouth. You know the type. Him and I met doing college improv and share the same affinity for stupid jokes. Afterwards, he invites me to drink in his basement with some friends I hadn't met. I don't want to drink, but I want to stay out longer. These friends I hadn't met turn out to be mostly women. Small, skinny, fashionable, clear skinned women.

My friend introduces me as his "gay friend" so the women know he's available and not in a committed relationship with a gremlin dressed in teal cordouroy. This hurts my feelings even though I'm probably not even in love with him. The women look at him. I look at him. He is taller, tanner, and more muscular than I thought. I realize that not only is my best friend attractive, he's actually a catch.

I drink, even though I said I didn't want to. The women are not nice to me. I am nervous, so I am too nice to them.

My friend is playing beer pong (which I have seen only in movies). When enough cups have left the table, he calls out, "Zipper!" to call for a repositioning. I'm sure you don't have to play very many beer pong games to know the term "Zipper," but it still

knocks the breath out of me that he does. I don't think I know any terms that could knock the breath out of him. Furthermore, I have no friends I could introduce him to that would make him feel blotchy and bloated and excessive and obnoxious and pesky. I don't know if that says more about him or more about me. Probably me.

I realize him and I live very different lives, which is very difficult when you think you've finally found a person who is similar to you. Who gets it.

Now when I get dressed in the morning, I can't help but think about him (even though I'm probably not even in love with him). I can't help but think about all men. I want to attract the male gaze (even though I'm not even sure I'm attracted to males).

When I'm about to bite into a cheesesteak or an Italian cookie, I can't help but think of those girls. Their stomachs that are much flatter than mine and their skin that is much clearer than mine. I wonder how often they eat cheesesteaks. Less often than me, for sure. I've been having trouble eating anything recently.

I just know he doesn't think about things like this.

I need a better pushup bra.

From the song "Calamari" by Dae Zhen

"Tell me about the last time
You did something for the first time,
I've been caught up in these memories,
Fuck trying to reverse time"

Why I like that part

I am riding a bike through Central Park. It is cold enough and early enough that the tourists are still inside drinking their coffee. Yellow and red creep across the green-- Fall is impending. Everything seems still until you catch a glimpse of a leaf breaking free and losing itself in the wind.

I think about the girl who recommended that song to me. I think about her a lot. She's the girl I never talk to who I think about the most.

I have never ridden a bike in Central Park before.

I think, this is the last time I did something for the first time.

The trouble with reminiscing

I make my friend (Zipper Boy) play catch with me. I relive my High School softball days and tell exaggerated stories of a younger and more optimistic version of myself. Ironically, talking about this just makes me seem old and pessimistic.

We finish playing and I begin to cry.

He tells me that being friends with me is like all the worst parts of having a girlfriend.

And by the way

I didn't eat breakfast before I went to Trader Joe's this morning. I bought a pack of dark chocolate peanut butter cups and some kettle corn, but I haven't tasted either yet.

This year, Cox's piece "The Story of My Life in 3500 Words or Less" is the winner of Lux's nonfiction section.

Kelsey Phillips

"To be a monster is to be a hybrid signal, a lighthouse: both shelter and warning at once."

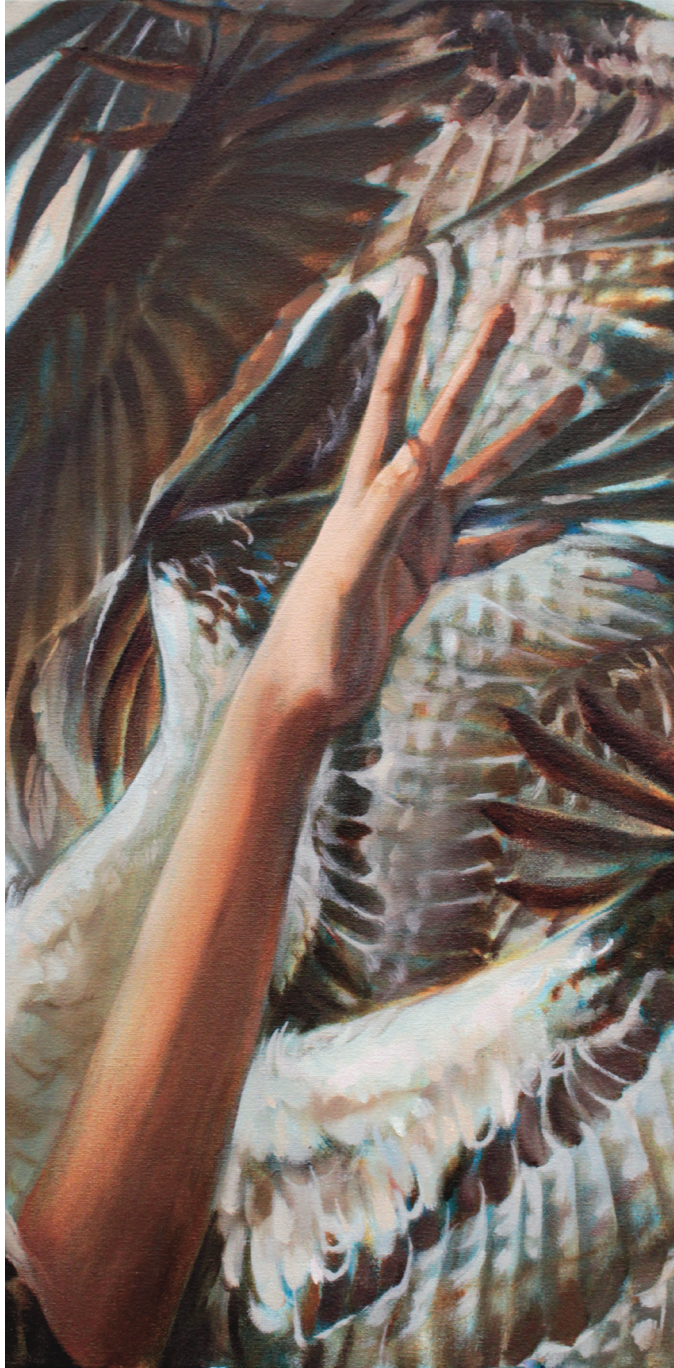
- Ocean Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*

I am a fifth-generation Arizonan artist who uses natural imagery and symbolism alongside aspects of the uncanny to explore what it means to be human, nonhuman, both, or neither—and if that makes a difference. To empathize with the nonhuman is to acknowledge the monstrous or "unnatural" parts of oneself, and the fluid nature of defining monstrosity leaves room for exploration and transformation. I approach my subjects with a naturalist intent; in placing them in reality or almost-reality, they render the fictional as something tangible and almost-believable as opposed to pure imagination. Alongside the more traditional pen, oil paint, and acrylic paint, digital media is also a part of my creative process. I use my flexibility with mediums to enhance the mood of their pieces.



Wingbeats, 2021
Oil on canvas
24" x 24"
Kelsey Phillips

This year, Kelsey Phillips' piece "Wingbeats" is the winner of Lux's art section.



Crescendo, 2021
Oil on canvas
24" x 12"
Kelsey Phillips



Fervor, 2021
Oil on canvas
24" x 12"
Kelsey Phillips



Cathedral, 2021
Oil on canvas
18" x 24"
Kelsey Phillips



Tongues, 2021
Oil on panel
12" x 20"
Kelsey Phillips

Claire Agee

Milk Blood

You were my friend
And you still are
I watched you when you vaped for the first time
I watched you when you smoked for the first time
I wonder if it all started in these games – *your climb*
You were strong, willful, and bright
So, imagine my surprise when I saw you that night

I dragged you back to your house
And you grabbed me like a child
Sobbing on my leg seemingly feral, *wild*
You swore to me it would never happen again
But I wasn't listening *I should have listened*
I was trying to find the source of the blood mingled into the sheets
And held down your thigh stopping the flow of life
And words
And You
Seeping out of the wound

I always wonder what I could have done
What I could have said *Who I could have been*
To keep the idea of you walking down that path
Out of your head


I watched whatever it was that had entranced you
Was it really just a few chemicals and powders?
It ate you alive.
Like crows pecking at a carcass
Like a thousand bugs tearing at your insides
It was an out-of-body experience
At some point, I was only watching, narrating

Now you're out of school
Now your parents kicked you out
Now you're asking me for money *I should have given it*
Now I don't recognize your body
Now I don't recognize your mind
Maybe there's still time Now I realize that you will never come back to me
And I just hope that somewhere, you are finally free

...

I try to see you as I remember you
Not as milk blood spilling on the ground
Not as the ghost of yourself *I can't picture you*
I want people to understand the cruelty
I want people to understand the loss of your ingenuity
But not what it was like to watch your life become a sigh
Or the pain of having to say goodbye *IT WAS ALL MY FAULT*

I know that it is time to put this all to an end.
And I know it is time to cut through these thoughts for good.

This if for you, 
You were my friend
You were my pain
You were a normal person taken too early
Trying to live in the fast lane
Goodbye





Lil Sad Boi rainy days (on your face)



"I started creating music in 2016 when I was a sophomore in high school. It started with a freestyle I did with my cousins actually and after that I just fell in love with it. I wanted to make more. So my cousin hooked me up with an artist he knew in Tempe, his name was Teammate Markus. I made my first tape at his house under the stage name Cole Train. My cousins gave me that nickname so I just rolled with it. The music I was making back then was for fun pretty much. I didn't start taking music seriously until three years ago when I was a freshman in college. That's when I really started to find my sound and wanted to do this as a career. I changed my artist name to lil sad boi. It just resembled how I mostly feel. A lot of my music is sad but I make happy and feel good songs as well. My inspiration for my music is Lil Peep. He inspires me to be myself and keep creating. He's what really changed the emo rap scene for artists. I wouldn't even consider him or myself a rapper though. We sing in our songs but also blend in our own style from artists we listen to. Creating music is therapy for me. I love writing music but when I'm recording a song, it's therapy. I put all my emotions and feelings into that mic. I also have been creating music with my best friend since my freshman year of college. We met in high school, I was a senior and he was a sophomore. We create and write songs together, it's amazing to be able to do this with my best friend. Lastly, I just want to make music for people who are the same as me. People Who feel the same way I do because I know I'm not alone. I want them to know they are not alone either. If I can make one person connect or relate to my song, that means more to me than a million dollars."

- Lil Sad Boi

Spotify: @Lil Sad Boi

Soundcloud: @  lil sad boi 

To listen to Lil Sad Boi's
song, scan the QR code.



This year, Lil Sad Boi's piece "rainy days (on your face)" is the winner of Lux's music section.

Cassandra Briones

catatonic.

I have spent eight days
with a roommate whose existence
I could only verify
by the shallow breaths
that harmonized with
the syncopated honking
of the cars along the I-17,
never to be disturbed
by the suffocating cuff
that cuts off circulation
at the top of every hour,

the birds sing their song
menacingly, eyeing me through
the unbreakable glass
like the little girl who
gazes longingly
at the extravagant dollhouse
on display at F.A.O Schwarz,
while the day blares through,
greeting me with its burning blaze
like the little boy who
excitedly makes
friends with the ants
by introducing them to his
magnifying glass,

muscle memory plays
a cruel trick on my legs,
programming this
unfinished masterpiece
that I have made of
my own body
to rise with the sun
and dance to the birdsong,
but the socks on my feet
glue my soles to the ground,
like stepping on someone's

chewed up breath freshener,
planting me firmly
where I must remain,
where I must
take after my roommate
and stay still
until
my work in progress
feels like art again.

AISLIN LOZANO DE LA CRUZ

These past months, I felt like rain was pouring down on me. It became a routine for me to think that whatever comes at me it will not end. Until I realize later that it was not a storm anymore but just a drizzle.



Llovizna, 2021
Linoprint
9" x 7"
Aislin Lonzano De La Cruz

Tess Ward

My work explores themes of self-portraiture, surrealism, and abstracted elements as a form of self-expression. With a background in fine art painting as a current animation major, I continue to experiment with various mediums and styles in order to cater to my interests in both respective fields. As a result, I've taken a particular liking to combining traditional graphite drawings with digital elements to add variety to a body of work that has formerly focused on acrylic paintings exclusively.



Imposing Perspectives, 2021
Acrylic on canvas
9" x 12"
Tess Ward

Fin Ward

Beyond These Things

After Protocol Harum

Lanterns sear-nos strung up on the floor, decor for
Our celebration of sorts. The kin-ness full tilt, still,
Except the sound of brinks having met each other halfway.

Cheers from my right strain lips on the left, my best to bed already. Dry-
or better said— parched on the edge of that res called Mead, I side-eye
night's face, as a cloud, stale, leaves her veil like a spirit from its shroud.

Echoes surround as the band breaks, bow waves clap walls of a cleared
throat. A silent prayer and I hum a hymn just to be drowned out
By a gutless organ, chained to the sight of the rest of my life.

In the warm bath in which I lie, waiting like a lock for a click,
A glass jar cried, and the water rang quiet as a diving bell.

"May you, let there, and don't forget, be where—."

They'll drown themselves blind studying scientific theory
Of faith and the synchronicity of fate, but why not make use
Of their minds and try and bluff the jack for a king,

Before the queen of hearts folds from the ring game leaving you-all A
single thing. Only a prince with the lips of a spider woman
Could color the pallor of a princess embalmed in glass.

In an identical room adjacent made from mirrors on the wall,
A limp marionette spread its legs, hollow-eyed petrified, with the painted
Face of a planted audience who knows what's about to happen.

I'd leave love and live longer, but what kind of life
Would that be, no happily ever after, the latter we walk under as a pair of
Roles foreplayed for others, all at our own expense.

So why stand each at the end of a canon
Kissing ourselves for holy matrimony,
Buying sacrament for something better to come,

Hoping for the worst so everything will turn out fine.

Scott Adiconis

Metal Man

I peered out through rusted eyelids at the quiet town before me. A single fractured concrete road served as the sole entrance and exit to the settlement that sat carelessly along the edge of an icy, gray plateau. Along the outskirts of the town, brown grasses and weeds poked through the sleet, barely clinging to life. I assumed that vegetation had flourished here once, but the life of any greenery that tried to grow now was being quickly snuffed out, suffocated under the weight of constant snow. There was nothing beyond the town, save for the steep drop-off that promised to swallow whole anything foolish enough to approach the edge. Every visible light in the town was broken, shattered like someone deliberately tried to extinguish them all with their fists. Small, worn-down homes littered the sides of the town's single long road. The rooftops of the houses were adorned with a veil of white, while tall snow drifts had formed in front of the doors to most of the dwellings. The only building that seemed immediately accessible to me was the empty convenience store that rested approximately halfway through the small town.

The speed of the snow picked up without warning. I needed shelter quickly. Snow was no good for me anymore. I was old machinery. Another clunky tinman falling apart. The heater inside of me broke three days prior after keeping me warm for the past several decades, and with no way to fight it off, the extreme cold was making my battery malfunction and drain at an expedited rate. While a full charge could normally keep me moving for eight days, I was currently at three percent remaining battery power having just been at full a few hours ago. If I couldn't keep my temperature up, I would turn off and go to sleep like a moth in the middle of winter. That would have been fine a hundred years ago, but there was nobody to wake me now. I needed to get inside, warm up, and charge myself before my battery died.

I trudged through the sleet and ice that mixed with decades of road filth and sludge to become a viscous gray goop around my feet. I focused on the battery-life indicator strobing inside of my eyeball to distract myself from the grime accumulating on my legs. As I approached the door to the store, I realized it was locked from the inside. Hardly a problem for me, though.

My arm pierced the glass like a pin through plastic wrap. The door stayed largely intact, aside from the hole that my arm now inhabited. I fished around and gripped the lock that separated me from necessary warmth. I twisted it, unlocking the door, then took a moment to twist and hop around to dislodge my arm. It would have been easier to free myself if I still had my left arm, but I lost it during a confrontation with a rude brown bear some twenty years ago in Siberia. I had no intention of marching back across what remained of Russia to bargain with the creature, though.

I entered the store, pleasantly surprised to find the heat was already on. The warmth was causing the snow sticking to my feet to melt, wetting the black and white squares beneath me. My feet began to squeak with each step. My eyes were drawn to the solid green gas generator sitting in the far-left corner of the room. It appeared to be powering the store's heater, while another cable coming from it led to the back of the building. It looked like the perfect place to rest, but it was obvious someone else was here. I needed to make sure I was safe before I plugged in to charge.

Ignoring the red two percent flashing in my eye, I peeked behind the empty brown shelves that made up the aisles of the store, looking for signs of sentience. Empty freezers lined the walls, but nothing was hiding in any of them. There was a hotdog heater that still had a few pieces of mystery meat older than me resting on top of it in the center of the room. Brushing past ancient celebrity gossip, I worked my way to the back of the store, which was occupied by an isolated office with "Man g r" spelled in dented steel letters across its oak wood door. A dim orange light peeked out from the crack along the bottom. I reached for the handle and turned it slowly, so as not to alert whatever was on the other side. As I pushed in, the door began to creak, ruining any intentions I had of being sneaky. I flung it open, and a small figure turned quickly to meet my gaze.

We both paused for a moment, then the young woman before me exploded into a flurry of insults while smacking my cold

metal torso. She was hurting herself more than me. There was no way to speak with her and tell her that I meant her no harm. My vocalizer box broke decades ago, and there was nobody around to fix it anymore. I studied her for a moment as she continued battering me. She was two heads shorter than me with blonde hair that reached all the way down her back, the ends splitting and speckled with dirt. A ripped brown cloak fell from around her neck down to her knees, which were covered by ripped blue jeans that met her tattered shoes around her ankles. A normal human. No threat.

I scanned my internal memory for methods to end the altercation without harming the girl and decided to take a step back and throw up a peace sign. Tears were streaming down her face while her hands turned red and purple, and she too took a step back and observed my message. She wiped her face and took a deep sigh before asking me my name. With no apt way to respond, I pointed at myself and nodded. Not amused by my answer, she asked another question while I tiptoed to a warmer part of the room in hopes of pausing my battery's depletion.

"How old are you, metal man?" she asked, carefully tracing my movements.

I had existed for approximately two hundred twenty-seven years according to my internal clock. The age of a robot was generally indicative of how violent they were, so humans liked to know for their safety, as if it really mattered. A bot like me was almost as harmless as they came; I was made in the third wave of production when we were still being marketed as "household helpers". By the time they got to the tenth wave, we were being sold as an alternative to soldiers to various world superpowers, and by the twelfth there weren't any rich humans left to buy us. As we came to find ourselves without masters, many like myself began roaming around the world, looking for something to do with our time, doomed to drain and charge our batteries until the heat death of the universe. Though, the most unfortunate among us have seen their personal memories corrupt long before then, leading them to develop new personalities around previously downloaded information as they lose themselves completely.

I decided that the best way to respond to the girl would be to sign three to indicate what wave I was made in, but as I raised the sign to my face the flashing one percent in my eye changed

to a zero. My arm fell to my side as I slumped over, the scene before me growing darker. I could no longer hear the words the girl shouted at me, and the faint image of her face merged with the pitch-black walls closing in around me as I forgot how to think.

The cameras in my head whirred to life. The rusted flaps that protected them creaked open. My clock told me that nearly two days had passed since I fell asleep. My battery indicator was green now and read 78 percent. I looked down to my chest, where an extension cable was protruding from the port that rested between the sloppy weld marks and disintegrating nuts and bolts that struggled to hold my upper body together. The cable snaked across checkered tiles and over brown shelves, extending out from the gas generator sitting in the corner of the room. It was long enough for me to move around some. I climbed to my feet and looked around the store for the girl.

I wanted to thank her; not many would be willing to plug in and guard a potential threat while it recharged. Once I reached the door in the back marked "Man g r", the cable in my chest started tugging back to let me know I had gone as far as it could allow. I extended my arm to knock but found myself swatting the stiff air behind it as the girl opened the door to greet me. I placed my hand in a ball and raised it to my forehead to say "thank you" in Russian Sign Language, but she cut me off before I could finish the gesture.

"You're helping me with something, metal man. You owe me!"

Hockey pads were strapped tight over her cloak, and she carried a water-stained soup ladle that seemed to serve as a weapon. She led me towards the exit of the convenience store, but before she could open the door, I tapped her shoulder in hopes of getting her attention. She turned with caution, pointing the ladle towards me as she did, prepared to strike me without warning. Shaking my head from side to side, I pointed at the cable that was still in my chest, attempting to ask why she helped me. She responded by stepping outside and pointing down the street. I unplugged myself and ambled out behind her to see what she was referring to.

At the end of the only road in town, just before the drop off into the hole of nothingness, sat a small warehouse. It was a faded red building, shaped much like the boxes it was built to house. The paint chips on its exterior were preparing to leap from the walls, revealing the dull metal underneath. The door was steel and appeared too heavy for any one person to move on their own, while poorly cut sheet metal blocked out the windows.

"I need food, and I need gas. I can get them there. And you're gonna help me."

I shrugged the best that I could and followed down the road after her. The snow was picking up again and thick gray storm clouds were moving in, blocking out the sun. Armed with just a dirty ladle, the girl pressed forward. Every time we passed a rock or chunk of ice, the girl would kick it, harder each time. As we moved closer to the warehouse, the stones she kicked began hitting the side of the building, reverberating against the metal walls before falling silently into the snow below. She kicked one final rock. This rock sailed directly towards the door of the warehouse, but before it could make direct contact the door swung open to reveal an irritated silver robot. The rock continued flying, slamming into the head of the angry automaton that opened the warehouse to the public. Little bits of metal tumbled down his damaged, expressionless face as his eyes began to glow an offensive bright shade of red.

With a well-worn tricorne hat placed neatly on his head, the robot standing in the doorway appeared to be a tenth-generation model, nearly identical to me on the outside, save for the key difference of arm size. Not only did he have two, but they were also wide and rectangular, as the tenth-generation models housed laser cannons in their arms, held behind detachable hands. He raised his arms to eye-level with the girl in front of me, popping his hands off at the same time, leaving them dangling from cables attached at the base of his wrists to reveal the compact rotary guns he hid. Steam rose from the ends of his arms as the heat from his laser weapons melted the snow in the air around him. The guns hummed as they began to glow a fiery orange, heating up until they were warm enough to begin firing. Once the cannons reached their desired temperature, red beams of light no bigger than a bullet erupted from the robot's arms, striking the ground around us, melting away snow and ice in the process.

"Are ye here to kill me and steal me hard earned treasure?" he said. This unfortunate robot appeared to believe himself to be a privateer, and likely only had downloaded memories left with none of his own remaining. He was clearly angry about the rock that left a 'Y' shaped crack in his face, but his primary focus was on the girl, aiming most of his shots at her but missing her slender frame by no more than a hair. While the robotic swashbuckler continued to rain heat down around us, I scooped up the girl and dove into a snow pile near a small cabin. Several laser beams grazed my back, melting away the metal at the points of contact, leaving my internal wiring exposed. The heat was intense; it felt like small fires were being lit across the surface of my body, yet the burning sensation went as fast as it came. The harsh crackling of lasers paused, but the sound was just as quickly replaced by booming robotic laughter. He snapped his hands back onto his wrists, again concealing the weapons he carried, and hastily sprinted to our location. There was no spring in his step. He beelined towards me while I tried to free myself from the snow, but he got there before I had the chance. Wrapping his hands around my head, he shouted at me.

"Where be the girl, ye magnetic outhouse?"

The girl should have been below me, but there was no sign of her now. He repeated the question with additional obscenities, demanding her location while positioning a metallic finger over my right eye. Gazing beyond him with my left, I noticed the girl snuck out from under me and was making her way towards the door of the warehouse. He asked the question a final time while driving his finger forward, shattering my eye. It could be replaced if I could find another one, but my pride was irreparably damaged. I gave him a half-shrug while blinking the letters 'F' and 'U' in morse code with my remaining eye. Releasing his grip, he dropped me back into the snow and turned to face the warehouse, spotting the girl. I needed to distract him to protect her, so I grabbed onto his leg and pulled him into the snow with me. She threw me a big double thumbs up from across the way and pushed forward into the building.

He flailed wildly on the ground, angrily blathering about protecting his treasure like a child whose toys were about to be confiscated at the end of playtime. If I could keep him down with me for just another few minutes, the girl would be fine. I tightened

my grip on the robot's leg, but as I did the girl was sent flying back through the door frame like she had been thrown as a different robot emerged from the warehouse. Approaching the girl who now lay in a ball in the snow was a shiny cobalt sixth-generation robot, covered head-to-toe in the family jewels of several long-dead dynasties, with a silver tiara resting at an angle upon his head. The sixth generation, sold as an alternative to private security, carried no weaponry with them, but possessed extraordinary strength and came pre-installed with a mastery of Kung Fu and Jiu Jitsu.

I remained on the ground, grappling with the silver buccaneer whose eyes flashed red with rage as he struggled to escape my grasp. His hat fell into the snow as we scuffled, but he didn't seem to notice, his full focus on kicking me in the face with his free leg. He realized the futility of his actions and detached his hands once more, beginning the laser cannon heating process again as well. With limited options, I released my grip and pointed at his head, then back to mine to indicate that his hat was gone.

"*Eh? Me hat?*" he said, sliding both arms up the sides of his head to check on it as the cannons finished warming up. He quickly understood his error, but as he attempted to pull his arms away from his head, the cannons began firing, melting not just his head but the central processor inside it as well. The central processor functioned like a brain for us, and what remained of him slowly powered down as I pulled myself up from the ground.

The blue bot was now more concerned with me than the groaning girl in front of him. He crooked his head and pointed at me, pausing for five seconds before uttering the phrase:

"You transmitted my apothecary! Mediation summons for you, foppish erf!"

I spoke 2254 languages, but I had no idea what he was saying. The poor bot's vocalizer must have been malfunctioning.

"Avast and goodnight, sacrilegious gorilla! I bother to requite the narrative whose marsupial you recompensed," the blue bot said, adjusting his tiara as he spoke.

He assumed a forward stance, placing one arm above his head while lining the other up with his chest. My one eye locked with his two, and he made his move, rushing me with the speed of a cheetah riding a lightning bolt. I was nowhere near as fast as him, but the gobbled mess of rings and bracelets twinkling on his arms slowed his movement, allowing me to move my head to the side.

This caused his arm to penetrate the wooden walls of the cabin behind us, lodging there as I shimmied away.

"This calaboose cannot evoke me, I will enunciate you," he said, as I broke into a sprint towards the left side of the warehouse, approaching the edge of the plateau. The remnants of a chain-link fence that had long since collapsed in on itself and had fallen away marked the farthest one could go without perishing in the bottomless pit. Spinning around to analyze my surroundings, I realized the ninja bot was no longer stuck or in sight. The violent clinking and clanging of diamonds, silver, and pearls became audible above me, and my glance shot upwards to the rooftop, where the robotic jewel thief was now perched on the ledge.

"I have rebuked you, and you will not serendipity this aesthetician. Embark to amalgamate, turnip!"

His mistreated lexicon rained down like piercing arrows. I may not have understood what he was saying, but the killing intent behind his words was universal. He leapt from the rooftop, landing with his arms in front of his face and his right foot placed ahead of the left, ready to strike. With a final unintelligible quip, he jumped towards me, springing forward from his right foot while extending his left leg. He soared through the air in a flying kick, attempting to push me off the ledge and into the pit. With speed, I closed my eye and enacted the bravest defensive tactic I was familiar with: I ducked.

My eye remained closed for another five seconds as I awaited death, but it never came. I finally opened it back up when I heard the girl shouting, charging towards my location with the ladle clutched tightly between her hands. She stalled as she drew closer, darting her eyes around as her brow furrowed.

"Where'd he go?" she asked, as I turned to peer down into the all-consuming cavity that threatened to serve as my resting place mere moments ago. Giving her my best educated guess, I pointed down into the chasm, and she burst out into laughter. She walked towards the front of the warehouse, motioning for me to join her while letting out a sigh of relief. We proceeded through the door to examine our reward. Overfilled jerry cans, portable generators missing a button or two, canned goods, shredded blankets, and bagged snacks a hundred years past their expiration date.

"This. Is. Perfect! There's enough junk here to keep *both* of

us going for at least another month or two," she said, filling her arms with black beans and potato chips. I moved towards the back of the room. Gasoline was being stored behind soggy cardboard boxes near two generators that the robots living here seemed to have been using, so I reached for a can, but I was too slow. My battery hit one percent near the end of the skirmish and despite being hopeful I would make it back to the convenience store, I was already entering sleep mode. I lost my grip on the can of gasoline and dropped to my knees. The world was going black around me. I was forgetting how to think again, but it was okay this time. Now, there was someone to wake me up.

Miguel Fajardo

Any form of creative occasionally finds themselves in deep ruts that disables them from creating their next favorite work. Some unintentionally throw themselves deeper into that track while others embrace it until they reach that uncomfortable breaking point—to which unexpectedly gives way to the most satisfying work one could produce. And with a little bit of retrospection, you realize at some point in your creative career that your creative growth has been a never-ending cycle of breaking and creating.

In my creative journey as a photographer & designer, I've been using these changes in states to sculp my creative identity, which is prevalent to the constant changes of style within my work. These mediums have also become the best way to tap into my inner thought. This has truly been the most form of self-reflection and it has alleviated most of my stress in the most productive and



Escaping the Burnout, 2021
Digital Photography
Miguel Fajardo

Mia Milinovich

insatiable sins and truths untold

conflagration lingered
on the tongues of paper men,
swaddled in finery and velvet and prostituted love, fingertips
hemming the edge
of the shoreline,
parchment palms wetted
by salt and sand,
the commingling of rain
in a single repulsive body
which moves so steadily
to reject their embrace.
they screamed at its crashes,
fell with the tide and temperament,
impatience drawn
in indistinct bubbles of thought,
captured in ink,
the sin of impatience,
the vanity, the greed
of folds and creases
resealed with gold and glue.
irreparable men, with gaping jaws
and gnawing, gnashing teeth.
their fire tongues
melted skirts,
burned hair,
devoured truth,
until nothing remained
but ash-coated lies and haze breath,
thin as the line they toed
across a turbulent sea,
a passage carved

by past distinctions,
righteousness carried by blood
and surpassing the envelopes of generations, men compacted
together by sin
and threatened forever
by the wind-battered air
carried by the ocean,
a water so cold and far
they dared walk
in morning dew and smog peaks.

CAMILLE MISTY

My mother put me into dance classes at the age of 3, leading me to be shaped by the assistance of a creative outlet early on. Looking back, I think dance culture introduced the world to me in a somewhat unrealistic light. I remember my instructors pushed us to look, move, and learn the exact same way as one another. I remember the intensity of gender roles in the dance industry as well. The boys are always carrying the girls. The girls are always dressing and dancing in feminine roles. I'm older now, and as I'm allowing myself to explore my own gender identity, my heart aches in opposition to a logic I once believed to be true. In a universal sense, I believe the purpose of dance is simply to communicate our inner emotions through our bodies, as well as connect with others. And I know there are niches in the industry who believe this too.



*Dance 1, Year
Digital Photography
Camille Misty*

H. Heath Bigelow

Mrs. Dansey's Cat

Donald knocked hard on the RV's plastic door. He looked at his knuckles, then wiped the dirt off them with the side of his jeans. "Hello?" he asked. No answer. He looked around. Bright sticky flypaper traps hung like speckled party streamers from plastic gutters. Broken flower pots were on their sides, spilling dirt and the remains of forgotten leaves and petals. Cigarette smoke had left crusty yellow stains on the door frame, and the smell of old tobacco leaked through the edges of a tattered newspaper-covered window on his right. He tried to look through the other small window on the front door, but it was old and probably had been fogged up for some time. He hadn't seen his little elderly neighbor leave her camper in six days.

Donald wasn't home all the time because of work and night classes on Mondays and Tuesdays, but he would usually see her tending to her flowers every other day around dinner time. He tried the knob, and it opened for him with a little force. His right hand remained on the doorknob, and the left one went immediately to his face. He used the end of his sleeve to cover his nose. Damn. He pushed the door open all the way and stepped in.

"Mrs. Dansey?" he said. Nothing again. The air was dead.

Donald's eyes groped around in the dark but couldn't see anything, all the blinds were closed. He reached up to turn on the ceiling light. He was facing the kitchen. Pans and dishes littered with moldy bread and rancid meat were stacked on top of each other in a big messy pile on the countertop. Hundreds of flies swarmed about in the open cabinets and in the sink, where the faucet was slowly running. With his left hand still covering half of his face, he swatted at the flies and turned off the trickling water. As he twisted the faucet shut, he caught something in his peripheral—movement from the back bedroom. The small ceiling light above the kitchen wasn't bright enough to reach the room.

He saw it again—a small finch. His skin writhed in goosefleshy knots.

He walked slowly, the creaking floor deafeningly loud in the silent and stale RV. Something stirred again in the blackness at the end of the bed. He reached up for the ceiling light, then jumped as the thing from the bed leaped to the floor near his feet.

"Shit!"

A big orange cat ran past his ankles and into the kitchen. He regained his footing and started kicking at it. Its fur was wet, matted down with something that looked sticky and dark. The cat leaped again and ran towards the door.

Donald's eyes followed its tail as it ran outside. That's when he saw her. His left hand dropped to his side. There, on the other end of the RV, Mrs. Dansey was seated at her dining table, her head resting on her right arm that was draped across the table. Her throat, a mutilated and bloody mess, was streamed out on the table beside her.

Shit.

Donald put his hand back over his nose and ran out of the RV. He vomited in one of the flower pots.

"D-d-d-d-dead bo-body," he stuttered. "Dead b-b-body. Holy sh-sh-sh-shit!"

Donald had seen dead bodies before. First when he was twelve and his grandmother died from lung cancer. And then a second time, just two years ago, when his dad went down after a heart attack at Thanksgiving. This was different, though. His dad and grandmother had been nicely dressed and tucked away into their soft white caskets for one good long nap. Mrs. Dansey's shredded remains were painted across her RV's dining room table like some sadistic impressionist art piece. He threw up again.

He stood in front of the RV for a while, hunched over, his hand on his knees. The sun had started to sink and was almost completely gone now. The orange glow cast long shadows across Mrs. Dansey's yard. Donald stood up straight and started walking away from the smell of what he now knew was a rotting corpse mixed with his own sickening bile.

At the end of the yard, he reached into his pocket for his cell

phone to call the police. The phone wasn't there. He thought for a moment that he might have dropped it inside of Mrs. Dansey's RV, then, to his relief, he remembered leaving it on the charger by his bed. He walked back to his own RV a few lots down.

Donald hadn't realized how aggressively his hands were shaking until he picked up his phone to dial 9-1-1. His heart throbbed in his throat as he listened to the ring.

"9-1-1, what is your emergency?"

"Yes h-hi." Donald had to choke out those first words. "I... I f-found a d-d-dead b-body."

"Sir, slow down. Are you okay?" the dispatch lady said.

"I st-stu-stutter. I'm-m-m okay. My n-n-n-neighbor is dead. I f-f-found her body."

Donald painfully gave the dispatch lady his address and hung up the phone. Before tonight, he hadn't stuttered in almost ten years. He breathed in deeply. His heart had returned to its normal cavity in his chest.

Donald looked out the window at Mrs. Dansey's trailer. Her door hung open still. He'd forgotten to close it. Or had he? Why did he remember closing it? The thought brought back the compulsive shaking in his hands. He shrugged it off.

He sat down in his doorway, legs dangling off the rusted metal steps, and waited for the cops to show. When was the last time he had seen Mrs. Dansey? At first, he had thought it'd been something like five or six days. But could it have been more? Mrs. Dansey didn't have any family come around to visit her in the seven months that she'd been living in the RV a few spots down from him. She lived alone with that creepy old cat.

Back in January, Donald had found the cat curled up under his '91 Bronco behind the front driver's side tire.

"Hey little guy," he said, picking it up and cradling it in his arms. The cat purred and closed its eyes, twisting its head over against Donald's forearm. "You're lucky I saw you under there. You could've been smashed." He started walking the cat over to Mrs. Dansey's camper. He noticed a grocery bag full of cans that had fallen in the snow beside the pathway leading up to the door of the RV. Poor old lady must have dropped it bringing in her

groceries, he thought as he continued walking. He climbed onto the metal steps and knocked twice on the cold, white door.

"Who is it?" came a fragile voice from inside.

"It's Donald, Mrs. Dansey. I found your cat under my car."

The door swung open with a suddenness that made Donald jump back a step. Mrs. Dansey's short arms reached out of the doorway, grabbed hold of the cat, and slammed the door shut.

"Thank you, Daniel," she had said through the door.

"Timothy thanks you, too."

"It's Donald. You're welcome, though. Are you okay in there, Mrs. Dansey?"

"I'm all right." There had been a long pause, then she added, "Just trying to not let the cold in."

"Okay," Donald said. He started to turn around and make his way back through the snow to his car when he remembered the grocery bag. He turned around, picked up the sack, brushed the snow off the best he could, and walked up to her door again. He reached out to knock but stopped himself. There was a voice coming from inside the trailer that wasn't Mrs. Dansey's. The voice was deep and gravelly; it sounded like Louis Armstrong swallowing rocks.

"... me outside again old lady and I'll kill y—" the voice cut off and then lowered to a whisper. Donald leaned in closer to hear what it was saying. "Someone's outside, Dansey."

Donald jumped back as the door swung open again.

"Derek!" Mrs. Dansey's head flicked back and forth taking in the scene from all angles, "What's the matter, boy? What do you need?"

"Sorry, Mrs. Dansey." Donald held out the bag. "I think you may have dropped this."

"Oh," she started. "Right. Thank you, dear. Have a blessed d—"

"Mrs. Dansey, are you sure you're all right?" he cut her off, not wanting her to shut the door on him again.

"Son, you mind your business, and I'll mind mine," she started closing the door. Her eyes began to wet. Bright white light from the snow reflected off her welling tears. "Please Donald, go home."

The door clicked shut.

The police arrived about ten minutes after Donald sat down to wait for them. One officer jumped out of the driver's seat and walked up to Mrs. Dansey's open door. The orange cat ran out of the RV again, and the officer walked in. The other officer spotted Donald and walked over to him.

"Are you the one who called this in, sir?" she said.

"Y-yes, of-f-f-" Donald cleared his throat. "Officer."

"You just walked in and found her like that?"

Donald recounted the events of the evening to the officer slowly, trying hard to stutter as little as possible. Then, he told her about the voice he had heard in the camper with Mrs. Dansey a few months back.

"And you think this other voice might have been who killed her?"

Donald shrugged.

"Any idea who this mystery voice might have been?"

Donald started to answer when the officer's partner came out of Mrs. Dansey's RV. He was writing something down on a notepad as he walked over to his partner and Donald.

"Well," the officer said tucking away his notepad and pen into his shirt pocket, "there's a lot of blood in there. But I didn't see a body."

They asked Donald a few more questions before leaving. Yellow "DO NOT CROSS" tape had been stretched across the front of Mrs. Dansey's camper. Donald walked back to his RV; the night air cold on his cheeks. He felt something rub up against his ankle as he opened his door. He looked down at the orange fur of Timothy and bent down to pick him up.

"Hey b-buddy," he said, scratching the small cat on its head, "you m-m-must be hu-hungry."

He took Timothy inside, turned on the light, and saw that the matted and sticky stuff in Timothy's fur was blood. Her blood.

"Shit."

He set the cat in the kitchen sink and turned on the water. After the bath, Donald opened a can of tuna and set it on the floor.

"Here," he said. Then Donald made his way over to his bed and flipped on the TV. He dozed off almost at once, exhausted

from the evening events.

"Donald."

Donald awoke thinking he had heard a voice in his sleep call out his name. He turned over and looked at the clock: 3:27 A.M. He rubbed one eye with the palm of his hand as he reached for the remote with the other and turned off the television.

In the reflection on the glass screen of the TV, Donald saw that above him, in the dark, Timothy, the orange cat, was perched on the headboard of the bed looking down at him. Donald looked up.

"Good morning, Donald."

Donald recognized the deep and gravelly voice coming from Timothy. His body went stiff, and he opened his mouth to speak but made only a small scream. Donald's hands started shaking again. No, his whole body was shaking now.

He tried to speak again, "Tuh-tuh-tuh-ti-ti—"

"Timothy," the cat finished for him. "Yes, Donald, that's me." Timothy jumped down from the headboard and onto Donald's chest. He turned around, his small, heart-shaped nose now inches from Donald's.

"I don't really like tuna," the cat continued, "and you made me get rid of my last meal. Too bad, too. I liked her."

Donald had stopped shaking; he was paralyzed again. The cat only weighed about eight pounds, but the fear pinned him hard to the bed. Unable to move, unable to make another sound besides the stuttering first syllables of this demonic cat's name, he stared at it. Thirty tiny teeth dug into his throat. As the last images of blood and horror blurred into darkness, Donald saw the cat begin to change form.

Lucy Song

Art fills the spaces that words cannot fully convey. Growing up as a shy and quiet child, I gravitated towards the arts, including music and dance, as my main form of expression. In more recent years, my focus has turned more toward nature, landscapes, and nightscapes photography and dabbling in the genres of abstract and creative portraits as well. To me, photography is an opportunity to inspire new, and sometimes unexpected, perspectives on how we view the world. In my work, I highlight the silver linings and hidden facets in seemingly simple and common subjects. Since much of my photography is centered around nature, I also hope to share captivating memories from my outdoor adventures that might be less accessible to others. For some of my photos, I may hike up to 15 miles with a backpack full of heavy camera equipment and remain outdoors for hours in the cold night to get the right shot. There's something so exhilarating about being one of the only people awake at night in nature and gazing up into a dome peppered with stars and meteors. Although I am an artist, most of the time, I am a computer science student at Arizona State University who is involved in exciting research at the intersection between engineering and art.



Sea Glass, 2021
6000 x 4000px
Digital Photography
Lucy Song



Winding Down, 2021
5971 x 2610px
Digital Photography
Lucy Song



Brandon Ligon Nocturnal Bird Garden



“Nocturnal Bird Garden” is an attempt at translation from the language of music to English: I had first created the composition, then shortly thereafter, I wrote its English equivalent. These works were in turn inspired by Paul Klee’s painting, “Landscape with Yellow Birds,” as they recreate Klee’s gorgeous garden landscape through the two other mediums. The music portion of the project takes Hermit Thrush and Lyre Birds songs and stretches, lowers, and adds further reverberance to evoke a surreal, soothing conversation between imaginary bird species. The written aspect describes the visual qualities of this landscape, bringing in a character who provides purpose and an audience to the birds’ mysterious nighttime melody.

*These are the sound sources used for my electronic composition: Hermit Thrush, Night ambience, and Lyre Bird.***

- Brandon Ligon

To listen to Brandon’s song, scan the QR code.



***Sound source links are available via Lux’s digital publication copy on our website.*

Ellie Smith

Yellow Fairy

Like kindergarten consciousness
I flow freely with the wind
Play hide and seek with my identity
The old me wanes and bends

But I bring her along with me
Like a fairy in my pocket
Her yellow glow lights the way
The old me is a picture in my locket

And with a little trust and dust
I know we are special kin
It takes one to know one in this cowboy town
For love and light come from within

Gemma Trimble

Floriography of a Stomach

1987, age 10

For dinner she had a plate of poppies, her favorite kind:
painfully red, stems intact.

Whenever she had trouble sleeping, her mother boiled a large pot of chamomile tea. Blythe would watch her slender hands carefully measure out seven tablespoons of the flowers—eight on a particularly bad night—and pour the steaming water over the bowl. Her mother's face would be awash in that strange, balmy light, and Blythe would already feel as though she were dreaming, the scent of chamomile not nearly as strong as her mother's gentleness, an almost stomach-churning sort of love.

What helped most, though, were the poppies. Blythe liked them best raw, simply gathered in a pile atop the painted ceramic dish her mother used exclusively for nights like these, when Blythe hurt deepest in her gut, when forgetting was the only thing that led her to sleep.

She remembered the first time she ate a wild poppy, plucked from the large field that belonged to their neighbors, the cranky elderly couple that liked to watch each other read. They were on the porch, thick novels in hand, and five-year-old Blythe was sneaking amongst the green. Her mother had always warned her to stay away from the poppies; they were poisonous, she knew, even for a girl who ate flowers like air.

But she had felt the inexplicable urge to bend down, put those red blossoms to her lips, as if their touch would redden her paling mouth, paint her autumnal and large and sweet. Blythe ate the first one carefully. One petal at a time. She chewed slowly, thirty-one times, swallowing the heart-shaped blooms deliberately. And when she was finished, she plucked seventeen more and shoved them in her mouth all at once.

Her mother found her asleep in the flowers, where Blythe

dreamed she was a girl who ate nothing at all, and could always find her fingertips grazing the sky.

When she awoke, she wanted so badly to go back to that field, clawing in anguish at her mother's arms as they held Blythe firm in her bed. Before this moment, Blythe had never known the sickly smell of forgetting, the saccharine taste of it on her tongue, the way she could wrap herself in it and feel, for once, a child like any other.

For months afterwards, Blythe could not sleep. She was not poisoned by the poppies; rather, she was soothed by them, washed anew. Knowing that, and knowing she still could not have them, felt as if it would destroy her. Blythe writhed in her sheets, broke her mother's heart, begged and pleaded for the scarlet release. But her mother simply smoothed back her hair, stroked her forehead. She taught Blythe what it meant to love something, to lose something, and remain intact. Blythe, at five years old, had her first heartbreak among crimson florets and chamomile tea.

Now, Blythe's mother only lets her eat poppies when she is so pained that she can barely speak, let alone fall asleep. She makes Blythe eat them slowly, like she did that first blossom so many years ago. And Blythe is comforted by the taste, by the tea, by her mother singing softly as she slips off into a darkness as warm as the white light of morning sun.

1994, age 17

On the Day of the Dead, Blythe wove marigolds into the deep black of her hair.

As a child, Blythe used to think the entirety of the November 2nd celebration was for her father. She felt him in the shimmering streetlights, in the sugar skulls and vigils upon each grave. She would look around in wonderment and think about what a man he must have been to warrant this kind of devotion from hundreds of people Blythe never even knew.

He died before Blythe was three. Her mother said he never liked flowers, so Blythe took the orange-gold blossoms that her grandmother brought for his grave and learned how to plait them into thick sections of her waves. Looking at herself in the large hall mirror, she felt almost pretty. Then, almost immediately after, she felt guilty, as if Blythe had spent the marigolden currency too selfishly, and wished she could take it back. But she was as

entangled in the flowers as she had ever been, so she simply straightened the hem of her dress and made to leave.

A boy found her sitting alone on a bare patch of grass, long after the festivities of the night had ended. He sat next to her without saying a word, and Blythe looked at him then; he was beautiful, a honey-haloes boy with deep brown eyes, and she loved him fiercely in a way she knew was not real. How could it be? She had just met him. But it grew around her, tightening her chest, knotting the branching air of her lungs all the same.

Blythe glared at him.

I like your hair, he told her.

He knew Blythe from school. They sat a couple seats away in their American Literature class, and he had always thought she seemed so sad, and he was glad to finally see her face out from underneath the curtain of dark hair that consistently seemed to keep her just out of view. He told her all of this in a rush, breathlessly, and when he trailed off, she smiled despite herself. Blythe felt no need to pretend with this boy, and she eased into the moonlit grass, into him.

He wanted to know why she ate flowers. As wonderful as he was, it seemed he did not possess the originality to ask a question Blythe had not been asked a million times before. Sometimes, she felt that answering this question was just as much a part of her as eating the flowers was. She wondered why it mattered so much to people. It happened; she did it. To Blythe it was a fact as incontrovertible as it was dull.

Blythe shrugged, gave him the usual vague explanation: no one knew why. The doctors couldn't explain it. She was a baby who was starving, until one day when she stuffed a daisy into her mouth and she wasn't. All other food bore the rancid taste of rot. What do the flowers taste like, then? he asked, and there it was, a question Blythe was actually inclined to answer, because the answer sang deep within her bones.

The answer depends on the species of flower. This, she told him, pulling a marigold from her braid and yanking out several strands of hair in the process, tastes like tonight. Blythe placed the orange petals on her tongue and pressed them to the roof of her mouth, savoring the taste. It was earthy, grounded, dense—almost the opposite of the poppies, a taste dedicated to remembering. It tasted like her mother's stories about her father, like the faded

gray-blue blanket he'd bought for her when she was born and that she still slept with even now. It tasted like the women crying next to the graves, like freshly baked bread, and now, like this boy beside her, a fast-talking, gentle love.

He tucked a loose piece of hair behind Blythe's ear, and carefully pulled a marigold from the strands. He rolled it around in his fingers before popping it into his mouth, and Blythe watched him consider it.

I don't taste any of that, he said, a perplexed look on his face. I just taste dirt.

And Blythe threw back her head and laughed, pale throat bared to the moon.

2008, age 31

The spidery varicose veins in her legs reminded her of the pile of dried irises on her bedside table, purpling and climbing up towards the ceiling.

In those past months, she often lost herself for hours in front of the mirror, caught up in the exploration of the woman before her, unfamiliar except for the ways her hands shook like fragile branches caught in wind.

Blythe's body was a stranger to her now. Her stomach had begun to swell early, well before the second trimester. The baby seemed to pull Blythe forward and down, as if she was always just an inch away from falling face first into silt, dirt-rich and sprawling. Her husband assured her that she looked beautiful, as youthful and vibrant as she did the night they met, when they were not yet lovers, when they were nothing more than teenagers eating flowers in the grass.

Beauty, strength, vitality—these were things Blythe felt had left her in her pregnancy. She was constantly tired, stooping, the shape of a woman crudely drawn. She remembered her own mother, long dead, and her beautiful hands, long and winding with perfectly oval nails, the diamond ghost of a marriage sparkling on her finger...

Blythe's own hands were too swollen now to wear her wedding ring.

As the months went on, Blythe's discomfort heightened. She felt some sense of wrong, deep in her gut, an unease that kept her awake at night. In their little white-walled house, there was a

spectre in her bed: the shadow of her doubt, sticking to her side with limp sweat and something else, nameless, formless, present nonetheless.

It took her 34 weeks to find the word on her tongue, and when she did, she felt every inch of her body grow cold.

Blythe was afraid.

She wondered at the thought. Had she really not been afraid in so long, long enough to forget the feeling? Or had she buried it deep within her womb, a place where no one could reach until the child inside her grew impatient around it, pushed it out and up into the fluttering beneath her ribs?

For a long time, Blythe supposed herself to be the kind of woman who didn't want children. She did not grow up dreaming about a life that consisted of shuttling the kids back and forth from school, from practice, devoting every bit of her time to being something to someone else. But she did grow up wanting. It was the kind of want that Blythe constantly felt in the air, a tense anticipation, as if something was always on the horizon. Blythe did not know what would still that urging in her, until one morning she woke up next to her husband and watched his chest slowly rise, fall, and then it was clear: a child. It was as if it was not enough to feel that longing on the outside. She needed to hold it inside of her, to feed it and watch it grow.

But now Blythe's panic consumed her. She could not think. She could not speak. She went to the grocery store and checked the labels of various kinds of baby foods, ones her child would not be able to eat for months yet, wondering which ones would taste good to her baby girl, wishing she was able to tell.

Outside of the market, she sat down on the sidewalk, crossed her hands over her enormous belly, and cried.

To Blythe, the world did not exist. It was her and her daughter on the curb of the market, and she felt as though her baby was crying too, lamenting her life before it had even begun. The thought made Blythe weep harder, chest racked with sobs.

It was a long time before she felt the gentle weight of a hand fall on her shoulder. A woman smiled down at her. She was older, maybe a hair past middle-aged, with a kind face and chestnut brown hair streaked with gray. The woman did not speak. She simply reached into her shopping cart and pulled out a

small bouquet of flowers. Purple irises with yellow centers, edges pinpricked with white.

Gingerly, as if handling a wild animal, the woman placed the bouquet in Blythe's lap, tucked it beneath her stomach. And then the woman was gone, walking purposefully and briskly into the distance of the parking lot as if she had just crossed off another task on her to-do list for the day.

Irises were a taste unknown to Blythe, and she hesitated. She inspected them carefully, scrutinized the stems and the leaves. The petals on each flower sloped towards her, inviting, and Blythe touched the tip of her tongue to the plant.

Every day that remained of her pregnancy, she began each morning with an iris. Lovingly, adoringly, she placed it in her mouth and tasted courage. Faith. Blythe would fold it with her tongue and store it in her cheeks, and she would be the divine feminine; something she had lost had found her once again, and she was reminded of that day at the store—how she ate a bouquet of irises in front of dozens of strangers and did not care to hide.

When her daughter was born underweight and undernourished, refusing to eat, Blythe was calm. She reached down and pressed an iris into the baby's tiny fist, and watched the fingers tighten around the bloom, grasping, claiming, and Blythe felt it leave her. No more worry. No more grief.

In its place, a baby girl swathed in blankets, who Blythe loved and loved and loved.

Today, age 82

Nurses pile pillows and blue hydrangeas around Blythe like a shield.

It is always cold here. There are women who roam the halls, reach for Blythe with pale fingertips that she can see straight through. But she knows what it is to lack sustenance, form, so she gives them sympathetic smiles, serves up open-faced kindness like meat on a platter.

Blythe nibbles on the globular flowers that surround her on the wide bed, pressed up against the railings. Her eyes are milky with age, and she is so small now, so birdlike. Sometimes she feels as though she has grown wings, and they spread out from between her shoulder blades like a promise: she will leave here for somewhere better, somewhere where there is peace.

A man asks her questions in the morning. He wants to know about the flowers. She tells him about the poppies, her mother's careful hand. He writes it down word for word—even records her!—as if he will need to remember it later. What a funny man, Blythe thinks. But then it is always amusing to capture the attention of handsome young men.

In the afternoon, she is sick in the toilet. She ate too much, maybe, or not enough. Either way, she is all right. The sun is high outside her window, and it warms her through and through; Blythe is a small child in a field, a mother outside a market, a teenage girl loving a stranger, the furthest thing anyone could be from finished. Her mother calls for her from the kitchen. Blythe turns her head, strains to listen, but the twinkling sound of the voice is gone.

It is forgiveness, Blythe remembers, in a sudden clarity. The pleasant scratch of sea-salt in her throat, the taste of being washed clean; this is a mouthful of hydrangea. She hums quietly, happily, covers her arms in petals and leaves.

Someone comes to visit her, a gorgeous young woman with soft eyes and waist-length black hair, much like Blythe's used to be. You look so much like my daughter, Blythe tells her, and the woman's eyes grow sad. But she is only eight. She's at home with her father, until I get back.

The woman kisses Blythe on the cheek.

Blythe's husband sits in a plush green armchair in the corner. He smiles widely, openly, and he is beautiful in that way only truly good people are; he is young and broad and the color of amber light. He beckons to her, and she strains to get up from the bed, but the young woman gently pushes Blythe's shoulders back against the pillow.

Soon, the room is filled with children. They are sweet and exuberant and tease one another, and Blythe watches them play through barely open eyes. The young woman scolds a little boy, and Blythe giggles to herself when he sticks his tongue out in response. She is glad they are here, although she does not recognize them, the memory slipping through her like water in a hand. She wonders if she has eaten too many poppies again.

But no, these are hydrangeas, she reminds herself. And her vision is full of blue, a radiant shade of life that she desperately wants to not forget, something to hold onto forever, and the wings emerge from her back once again.

Boundless, tether-free, Blythe is surrounded by a love she cannot place.

There are flowers on her tongue, and as she lets her eyelids fall shut, she feels no fear.

Olivia Bolles

Monk by the Sea (1808)

over and over again
the monk runs towards the tide and God.
they're one and the same. prays, he prays.
by the time he's done praying Him into existence,
a dense fog as thick as grief rolls in
and beneath the grief, ships collide but it's a
distant, gentle sound
almost indistinguishable from the waves themselves.
the monk squints, rubs his eyes, cleans his glasses. waits, he waits.
uncompromisingly and
deliberately, emerging from the fog-grief, is a Figure
walking on the water, waltzing on the water,
out of sturm und drang came a Lord.
and all of the questions in that monk's darkest meditations
*(why do bad things happen to good people?
who created evil?
what happens after death?
who created grief?)*

were all but forgotten in the seagulls' song:
"holy, He is holy.
glory, He is glory."

Samantha Sabbara

I am a senior at ASU studying Genetics and Communication. In my free time I am a lyrical poet and a painter, primarily in acrylics and oils. I love capturing moments of serenity whether it is in words or images. To me, art gives us an opportunity to turn something fleeting into something infinite. I look for inspiration in these spaces, whether it's a sunset, or the look in someone's eyes, if it's something I've wished I could bottle up and keep, I've tried to transform it into art.



Forest Feeling, 2020
Acrylic on canvas
10" x 8"
Samantha Sabbara



In My Dreams, 2020
8" x 10"
Acrylic on canvas
Samantha Sabbara

STAFF BIOGRAPHIES

GLORIA CHRISANTY | Editor in Chief

Gloria (she/her) is a seeker of new knowledge and experiences. She is a proud immigrant from Indonesia who grew up in Ohio, so she wants to make the most of her experience here. Gloria is a senior majoring in Industrial design and minoring in Art history. She works at the ASU Art Museum as a Museum Ambassador and Gammage as a Floor Manager to engage with ASU's diverse and creative communities. Gloria wants to use her knowledge and skills to empower others in their creative endeavors, so she first joined Lux as an Art Editor to help showcase other students' artistic talents. As Editor in Chief, she wants to continue to provide a platform where students can express themselves. Outside of Lux, she is designing a solar-powered tablet for art/design education for children living in remote areas with no access to internet or technology for her Honors capstone project.

EKATERINA KORNEVA | Marketing + Design Director

Katrin (she/her) is an artist by mindset and an entrepreneur by training. Her professional goal is to ensure that talented artmakers have the tools to build sustainable careers and continue making art. Katrin was born in Russia and spent several years after high school traveling around Europe, East and Western Asia, and now the United States. At ASU, she seeks ways to leverage these experiences to reimagine the contemporary art world and foster a relationship between the arts and social impact. Working at Lux, Katrin organized numerous events to engage students in arts and crafts service projects, dialogues about the sustainability aspect of art, and workshops on civic engagement. As an honors student at Barrett, The Honors College, she currently works on her thesis project that addresses problems of inequity and exploitation in the arts. While researching this topic, she became a volunteer at the Amsterdam-based initiative "What Art Can Do."

RITIKA ANAND | Marketing + Design Director

Ritika (she/her) is currently a sophomore at ASU, studying Biological Sciences with a focus in Genetics, along with a minor in Philosophy. A big lover of everything art, Ritika has been pursuing classical Hindustani dance and singing for the last 10 years and she loves to find unique DIY projects that she can work on in her spare time. Through the last three years, Ritika discovered another passion of hers: nature. She loves spending vacations and long weekends traveling all throughout Arizona to hike and camp through the lesser-known and popular parts of Arizona and is always planning her next adventure.

AMELIE CLARK | Art Editor

Amelie (she/her) is the art editor. She is a sophomore majoring in Civil Engineering with a concentration in Sustainability. She has lived in Arizona for 5 years now. In high school, she also worked on a literary magazine. She was born in Paris and then lived overseas in the British Virgin Islands for 14 years, on an island called Tortola. This, and her parents being from France and England give her quite an international background. In addition to having a passion for the environment and STEM, she loves to read or do anything creative (like DIY) and also enjoys photography and design.

CAROLINA QUINTERO | Poetry Editor

Carolina (she/her) is a senior studying English (Creative Writing) & Justice Studies. She is the president of Pi Lambda Chi and an intern for the Piper Center. She is passionate about poetry, cats, and iced coffee.

MASON YATES | Fiction Editor

Mason Yates (he/him) is from a small town in the Midwest, but he currently lives in Tempe, Arizona, where he is a junior studying English at ASU. He has had short stories published in various magazines/webzines such as Dark Dossier, Scarlet Leaf Review, Land Beyond the World, Pif Magazine, and many others. Before working as fiction editor for Lux, he interned with the ASU literary magazine Hayden's Ferry Review. In his downtime, Mason can be found either writing, reading, playing guitar, or watching a variety of movies.

KELSEY FUSON | Nonfiction Editor

Kelsey Fuson is currently studying English at Arizona State University. This is her third attempt at college after two separate mental breakdowns and she is thrilled to finally be almost done. She once drove from South Carolina to Vermont for a pint of ice cream. She has plans to fly out to Houston, Texas for a different kind of ice cream. She particularly likes when writers aren't afraid to get a little weird with their work and push the boundaries that we tend to accept. Her poetry and fiction have previously appeared or are forthcoming in perhappened magazine, LandLocked Magazine, CLOVES Literary, Vulnerary Magazine, Strukturriss, Eunoia Review, and others.

LILLY GOLICH | Music Editor

Lilly (she/her) is a junior at ASU majoring in English Lit. In addition to working on the editing team for LUX, she also tutors during the week at the Barrett Writing Center. Although not studying music academically anymore, Lilly has taken music theory classes in the past, was in honor choir for most of school; and has been writing and performing her own music publically since the 4th grade. She is mainly a lyricist and singer who enjoys collaborating with other musicians to work on instrumentals, but she does play piano as well. Her favorite genres are indie rock, indie pop, and alt rock. And, while it changes often, her favorite song right now is Small Talk by Briston Maroney.

AMRITHA KARTHIKEYAN | FILM EDITOR

Amritha Karthikeyan is a second year at ASU Barrett majoring in Data Science and Sustainability with a minor in Studio Art. Amritha loves watching films and has a blog where she reviews movies and tv shows called brownngirlsguidetofilms.wordpress.com. She especially loves animation because of the creative freedom that it lends to as well as the simple stories and nostalgia they bring. In her free time, she likes to paint, take care of her plants, and watch movies with friends.

RUTH BEADLE | Associate Literary Editor

Ruth (she/her) is a Junior currently majoring in English Literature and minoring in Math, Art History, and French. Her fiction writing is mostly inspired by Tucson, where she grew up. Ruth was lucky enough to receive an honorable mention for one of her stories in the Swarthout Awards in 2021. When not writing her own fiction, she acts as a writing tutor on campus for the Human Event. Outside of school and writing, Ruth loves to swim, watch bad movies, and hanging with friends. Through Lux, Ruth hopes to inspire more people into loving reading and writing fiction.

VERONICA GONZALEZ | Associate Literary Editor

Veronica (she/her) is a junior who's double majoring in Political Science and English. After she graduates, she plans on going to law school. Besides school, she is currently a Writing Tutor at the Writing Center on campus. Although she loves reading anything and everything that piques her interest, she's incredibly passionate about poetry and prose. In her downtime, she loves binge watching Love Island UK and spending time with her pets (2 geriatric Chihuahuas, a rowdy Australian Shepherd, and a lazy street cat whose decision to hop into her car turned into a road trip to his permanent home).

ISABELLE KINNEY | Associate Art/Music/Film Editor

Isabelle (she/her) is a third year student at Barrett majoring in French, Political Science, and Religious Studies with certificates in Russia and Eastern European Studies, International Studies, and a minor in Justice Studies. She is currently working on research projects as part of the Melikian Center Undergraduate Fellowship and a research aide for the Center for the Study of Religion and Conflict. In her free time, Isabelle enjoys reading and talking about sculpture and fashion design with her friends.

Acknowledgements

Barrett, the Honors College
Dr. Mark Jacobs, Vice Provost and Dean
Dr. Nicola Foote, Vice Dean
Kristen Hermann, Sr. Associate Dean of Student Services
Erika Ladewig, Director of Fiscal and Business Operations
Johnny Travis, Program Coordinator Sr.
Kimberly Smith, Office of the Dean
Kathy Keresty, Front Desk Administrator
Corinne Olsen-Greiff, Office Specialist
Nicole Greason, Public Relations
Keith Southergill, Director of Admissions
Geraldyn Toth, Business Office
Susan Millar, Business Operations Specialist
Dr. Donald Fette, Honors Faculty Fellow

Additional Thanks

Lang Printing & Mailing
Kenzie Fitzgerald, Account Manager at Ironwood
Greeshma Challaram, Barrett Honors College Council
Changemaker Central @ ASU

LUX n.
a unit of illuminance,
brightness, or intensity