

Litmag

2018

Cover Art: "Self-Color"

Oil on Canvas

Artist: Jessica Tonyan

UMSL

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Visit the *Litmag* website at
www.umsl.edu/~umslenglish/Literary%20Journals/litmag

The editors of *Litmag* 2018 dedicate this issue to Professor Mary Troy, who retires this year after 23 years of teaching at UMSL. Professor Troy has been an avid enthusiast of all things *Litmag*, and we wish to honor her for her continued support of the journal.

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acknowledgments

a special thanks

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Publication of *Litmag* is supported and sponsored by the UMSL English Department, Master of Fine Arts program, and readers like you.

about *litmag*

Litmag is a student-run literary and art journal published annually each spring through the English Department.

The mission of the journal is to nurture the creativity of the students, staff, and alumni by increasing awareness of the vigorous literary talent on UMSL's campus. We aim to produce a professional, high-quality publication that gives budding writers and artists a venue to display their work and experience the exciting world of publishing. The journal is offered to the campus and local community free of charge, a service we are committed to maintaining.

Submissions are open to all UMSL students, faculty, staff, and alumni. All submissions are reviewed anonymously, and selections are determined after thorough discussion by the editorial staff.

Litmag has been recognized for “the quality, dedication, creativity and entrepreneurship of our students” by the College of Arts and Sciences, as well as the university at large, as an “outstanding” artifact of student achievement and literary merit.

about *litmag* contests

Litmag conducts three individual contests for the Best Poem, Best Prose, and Best Artwork submitted to the magazine. Contest winners are determined by the editorial staff and are based on a variety of qualities related to technique, composition, insight and originality. Winners receive a certificate and monetary prize, and are also recognized at the *Litmag* launch party and the English Department awards party.

about *litmag* editorial staff

Undergraduate students have the opportunity to earn credit by enrolling in English 4895 Editing *Litmag*, a course in editing and publishing a student literary journal, which is offered at UMSL each spring semester. The purpose of the class is to provide students interested in creative writing, professional editing, and publishing with an internship-like experience that serves as the capstone of their writing studies. Under the supervision of a faculty advisor, student editors participate in the full scope of operations within a nonprofit press, including fundraising, solicitation, marketing and promotions, copy editing, document and graphic design, distribution and publicity.

Students interested in enrolling are invited to contact Kate Watt at katewatt@umsl.edu or Jeanne Allison at allisonjea@umsl.edu for more information.

Creative work solely reflects the views of the author and not necessarily those of UMSL or the English Department.

faculty advisor's note

Welcome to *Litmag* 2018, the 30th installment of UMSL's literary treasure.

This year we celebrate our 30th anniversary, and with each passing year I grow ever more impressed with the students who commit their time and energy to produce the journal. I am incredibly proud of the student editors who have worked on this year's issue. Our editorial staff is small in number but large in heart, and it has been a delight working with them; their creativity, critical insight, and tireless work ethic are what make this journal possible.

Of course, there is no journal to publish without the authors and artists who submit their work for review. On behalf of the 2018 editorial staff, we offer our sincerest appreciation to all those who were willing to share their stories with us. It takes tremendous courage to send one's work out into the world for all to see, and we are thrilled to help bring that work to life in print. Choosing the pieces to feature in this issue was no small feat—careful consideration and discussion were given to each submission, and what we present to you here is only a small portion of the rich body of work produced by the talented authors and artists we have on campus.

One of our missions this year is to present a collection of poems, stories, and artwork that are representative of UMSL's diverse student body and the local community that surrounds us. In a country that, at present, often feels starkly divided culturally, politically, and economically, we consider our task an opportunity to bring together these varied and multidimensional experiences. In the spirit of so many social movements currently in action—Black Lives Matter, the DREAMers, #metoo, the LGBTQ movement, the Women's March, the National School Walkout and March for Our Lives—we are committed to showcasing the voices of marginalized communities wherever we can. The stories and images offered here reflect the intersectional identities of their creators: artists who demand racial

justice, narrators who confront gendered binaries, poets who challenge religious doctrine. Surely, not every piece published is ideologically motivated, but we feel the beauty of this issue is the strength of its inclusivity.

And that is why “Self Color,” the artwork that adorns the front cover, is so fitting for this particular issue. Not only is the image striking in terms of its style, color palette, and composition, but the figure depicted resists single interpretations of gender, race, age, religious or political affiliation, and captures the intersectionality found in the pages that follow. We are honored to share these pages with you and hope that you find your own experiences reflected within them.

Kate Watt, Faculty Advisor

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*Denotes Best Art, Poetry, and Prose Submission contest winners.

celestial vomit

justin montgomery

Adrift, alone.

I haven't written in eons. It's been fifteen million star particles of space since I've last put down words. Supernova. Endless drifting in a vacuum of black.

So it goes.

I'm on galactic time, now. Somewhere out in the expanse floats my consciousness, tethered to some metal blimp. Quite sad, really.

What is one to do?

Gravity is a hard operator, a no-nonsense straight shooter. Reasoning with him is like licking a wall; nothing gets accomplished and you're left with a bad taste in your mouth.

Star particles taste great. Of course, they're encased within the ice of Deep Space, but once the ice melts, they taste good. Sweet and buttery, with a hint of onion. I guess God is Italian, after all.

Planets pass through the black like pinholes in dark fabric. I think I passed Jupiter a few minutes ago, when I was still above Kepler-Xi-23. There were billboards advertising The Great Red Spot, the galaxy's biggest, bloodiest hurricane. I got a postcard, but that's all.

I'm cold as I float past the sun. Amazing how such a large, hot object on Earth is just a blip out here. I see neighborhoods on its yellow surface. Upper class, by the looks of the cars.

rocket women

philip michaelis

Six sisters born of miracle:
One on bricks
Bound and grounded
Tied to the soil.
Three on display
Retired and resting
Lounging by coasts.
Two in ashes
Tears and fire
Scattered on wind.
And each with my banner tattooed on her heart.
The minds of geniuses,
The hearts of dreamers,
The souls of adventurers,
Their wings graceful and poised
Their skin scorched and soldered
In the forges of heaven:
A blessing from God.
And each with my banner tattooed on her heart.
Fighting forces I can't fathom
With calculations I can't conceive.
The only human thought to their majesty and pride
Is to honor six sisters with daughters to follow:
And each with our banner tattooed on her heart.

no one starves around here

jordan cosmo

We don't mean to squirm, but we wangle darker darkness by lurching into the chilling damp. Press our bodies flush against inside between. We eat it. Impulses rooted in the base of our obscenity transfer motion from abdominal ring to abdominal ring, each one swelling and thrusting sequentially. In dank murk, we salacious epicenes impregnate; are impregnated. A naked body is enough. We are inches rarely seen: a small slender something you could wrap around your pinky. Yet we fit worlds inside our mouths and swallow.

becoming a nun*

jessie kehle

In whose name do you suffer? Saint Teresa, they say, felt God's sweetness in a spear. In invocations she demanded it, *let me suffer or let me die*. You picture it with every swing of your whip: the seraph thrusting. Her organs forced through a glowing hole. The empty vessel filling with fiery tunnels God's love could rattle around in. Her tears glossing the monastery floor and her gaze freezing in an ecstatic droop.

You are jealous of her famous gaze. You have never doubted He is listening, but your scars haven't inspired Him to bring you that bliss. You wonder, are His proud blushes really as red as the gashes on my back? Will He ever retrieve my tears, harden them into pearls between His fingers?

But you don't need to make a muse from ash or air. When I line my hide-away with daily bread and weep not to eat it, I don't care if no one is tickled by my hiccups of sorrow. The constriction of viscera is its own blessing, the only bell compelling enough to push my knees into concrete. Every successive spike in the stomach is truer than the Hallelujah of a thousand-voice chorus.

Do you believe what Teresa said, that the pain is not bodily, that it was merely complicit in her bliss? I'll tell you what my ritual has taught me: she worshiped from within. Her gods were the Cauterized Stump and the Holy Spear, and those alone. She loved the charring of her arteries. She collected the blood from the blade and sucked it like sugar. The weapon was not wielded by an angel that stood on her thigh and stabbed into her habit. It was her own hand on the shaft.

Come pray at my temple. Or better yet, pray at your own. Only your temple can cry out with you, can paint with jagged lines a picture of your prayers. We'll revel together as your temple becomes all cracks and mine becomes all rafters. We'll rewrite the binary, *let us suffer. Let us also die*. What could be more beautiful than being locked forever in our houses of worship?

jessica tonyan

self portrait*



oil on canvas

uran alexander

untitled wood figure



wood sculpture

firing blanks

justin montgomery

“Mr. Coleman? Sir, are you alright?”

“Hmm? Oh, just wandered off a bit. What were you saying, miss ...?”

“Sarah. Ms. Sarah is fine.” She rolled her eyes: he forgot her name every time he visited. “I was saying that your wife is ready to see you. Room twelve, like always.” She looked him up and down; the curve of his spine had him looking downward. His eyes were clouded, and he held a bunch of roses in his gnarled hand. He had luggage rather than bags beneath his eyes. And he smelled that horrible old-person smell that made her stomach turn. She had seen him before, and he had always looked rough, but never like this. And if his face looked morbid, what were his eyes? There was a spark of something in them, but she couldn’t quite place it.

Watching first-hand the degradation of the seniors in Sunny View Estates day in and day out made her want to scream. Every ear hair, every liver spot, every pair of toothless gums seeded a deep hate within her, if not for the seniors but for Father Time himself. She often peered into the mirror of her shitty apartment, pulling at her skin, wondering what Old Bastard Time had in store for her. How many of her teeth would she lose? How many mornings would she wake up and find clumps of her hair on her pillow?

“Been having sleep troubles, but that’s par for the course when you hit my age.” He smiled, but Sarah groaned internally. Just a couple more boxes to tick on the Social Security Bingo card, as she had come to call it. Get five, jump up, and celebrate; the only prize is death.

“Yeah, well, I’m sure you can get a pill for that. Go on back. She’s where she always is,” Sarah said more harshly than she’d meant to. But he needed to be gone before she had a mental collapse. She felt crushed by hopelessness.

“Thanks, sweetheart,” Mr. Coleman said, and gave her a little smile. His teeth looked like that carnival game where you throw the ball through the clown’s teeth. Knock out all the teeth, win ten tickets.

Sarah smiled back, suppressing her anger. Sweetheart. Why did every old person call her that?

“What’s in the bag?” she asked, motioning toward the brown leather strap slung over his shoulder. It caused him to lean sideways with its weight.

“Just a little something special for Marge. She’s been asking me to bring it for a while now. Been saving it for a rainy day.”

“Uh-huh. Well, I hope she likes it. You know the list of approved goods, yeah?”

“Of course. There’s nothing for you to worry about in here.” He coughed. Spittle landed on Sarah’s hand.

“Good enough for me,” she said, then pressed a button on her desk. The wide door behind her opened slowly, revealing old folk padding about a spotless, long hallway. Mark gave her a nod and shuffled away, his street clothes the only thing distinguishing him from the other residents.

Something about the bag floated in her mind. Margaret Coleman was in no condition to ask for anything, much less over an extended period of time. It irked Sarah, but not badly enough to get up and investigate. She watched him hobble away. Poor ancient Mr. Coleman. He dressed like Urkel.

She couldn’t stop a snort.

* * *

The door to Marge’s room was cracked open. Familiar fear bubbled in Mark Coleman’s chest— who would she be today? and what would she remember?

He nudged the door open. An IV bag towered over Margaret’s hospital-like bed. The chair in the corner looked as uncomfortable as always, and the clunky, wall-mounted TV buzzed. His wife lay in the bed on her back, staring into space. Her eyes were glazed over. It was going to be a rough day.

“Hon?” he whispered. No response. “It’s Mark, your husband. I brought you flowers.”

Margaret stared complacently. The light above her bed flickered, and each flash made the lines of her face deeper. He set his bag by the door and closed it behind him.

Light snuck in through closed blinds. He placed the roses on the counter and hobbled over to the chair in the corner, dragged it to the usual spot by the bed, and lowered himself until he plopped down. His hips just didn’t work like they used to. It took a great deal of pain to get anywhere near a sitting position. Forget standing up with any urgency.

He touched his wife’s hand and sighed. The skin was dry. Her chest rose and fell in short pumps, breaths so shallow that he had to watch for them. Her mouth hung open, and he could tell by the way her lips caved that her dentures weren’t in.

Dateline had run a nasty segment on bed sores last evening, and he had meant to ask the nurse if Marge was being properly rotated. Forgetting things didn't just scare him nowadays—it outright terrified him, and conjured up a vague image of himself in a hospital bed like Margaret, a leaking consciousness trapped inside of an uncooperative bag of flesh.

He looked at Margaret, who revered the ceiling as if it were the face of God.

“What do you see up there, dear? What is it that keeps you staring?” These days were the hardest. A tour in Vietnam and two in Korea hadn't prepared him for anything like this. Nothing could have. Nothing compares to watching the woman you love slowly fade, her mind and memory practically spilling out of her ears. Spraying the straw roofs off Vietnamese huts with napalm, huts that you knew held children, huts that you didn't want to burn because goddammit, that was all they had, didn't compare to watching the light dim behind Margaret's eyes like a dying candle, watching her wander aimlessly around the house, quoting events twenty years past, forgetting her grandchildren's names one by one until the only name she knew was yours, until even that started to slip away. Margaret's screams when he touched her cut worse than saying goodbye to a squad mate who had stepped on a landmine. She forgot where she lived. She shook her head at the wedding photos, positive they weren't of her.

And, Mark thought, the true tragedy of it all—she had forgotten her own name. It made his insides twist. Whatever wick of light that had been burning behind her eyes had singed out, and now only a small stream of smoke floated around within, carrying away what was left of her tangible memories.

Her eyes sharpened. Mark's heart did the usual flutter when her eyes changed.

“Who's there?” she asked in a voice so faint that Mark had to turn up his hearing aid to hear. “That ... grabble ... my hand?”

“It's me, Marge. It's Mark, your husband.”

“Who? I don't know a ...”

Mark couldn't decipher what she had said. “It's me, dear. It's me. You remember me.”

“... Tony? Tony, I ... it's my first time, Tony.” She tried to sit up, but straps held her down. Mark grabbed the small remote that controlled her bed and slowly raised her upward to a sitting position. If it weren't for the straps, she would have slumped forward into her lap. She tried to remove her gown. “Agai ... A ... ustang? Agai ...?”

Mark smiled. She continued her incoherent mumbling of her first sexual experience, and he turned off his hearing aid while she talked;

her prior experience had certainly blessed the marriage, but he didn't want the specifics. When she was still, he turned on his hearing aid.

"Tony ... To ..." She trailed off, and her eyes went distant for a moment. They were back in a flash. "Mark ... is she here yet? Is our baby girl born yet?" Marge hadn't said his name with any conscious resonance in weeks. It broke him, and he tried to keep his lip from quivering. How can someone miss one word from one person so much?

"She sure is, Marge. She's beautiful. Her name's Roseanne, Roseanne Nicole Coleman, just like you wanted. I've already taken care of the paperwork. She's a teacher now. You—" He choked on the words but kept his voice level. He didn't want to startle what was left of her.

"That's good. Hopefully they can ... the roof by Monday ... I'm tired of tripping over those buckets."

Mark was having a hard time making out the words. He feared that by the time he'd realize what she'd said and responded to her, that she'd be gone. He didn't want to lose her to silence, or for her to think that she was alone.

"Sure hon, sure. First thing Monday morning. They'll fix the leaks." He squeezed her hand, and she smiled.

"I ... gentle ... you are ..." she said. She let out a laugh, which turned into a morbid cough. Mark didn't think it was possible, but he felt his heart break a little more.

"Marge, are you happy?" He knew she wasn't, but he had to ask--not for her, but for himself.

"Tony, oh Ton ... ark, of course I'll ..." Marge devolved into unintelligible drivel.

It was answer enough. Mark inched himself off the chair; Margaret's eyes didn't follow. He went to the bag by the door and hesitated, thoughts of their marriage erupting in his mind. He looked around the room, at the buzzing fluorescent lights and the spotted white-tile ceiling. The heater in the corner was scuffed, and it rattled. The countertop was a chipped, browned plastic. He glanced at the clock—he'd been there for almost an hour, and yet no one had come in to check on them.

"In sickness and in health," he muttered to himself. He limped over to the bed; the hard chair had made his hips all wonky.

Mark looked down at his wife. His tears dripped onto her arm, and he let them flow. She lolled her head back and forth, eyes distant, mouth agape.

The bag hit the floor. There was one last thing. He moved Margaret's gown to her chest and lifted her arm. She grunted in recognition, but only out of natural response. Big red welts covered her back. The sheets

were stained yellow and pink. He re clothed her and looked up at the IV drip hanging by the bed. The bag was bone dry as if some malnourished vampire had attacked it. On the top rung were the whispers of cobwebs.

Don't let me end up some drooling old bag, Mark.

Mark picked up the bag. The leather was cold in his hand. Margaret looked up at him with dead eyes.

"I love you, Marge. I'm only doing what's best."

Marge's reply was a smear of words barely audible through short breaths and flapping lips. Mark undid the buckle on the bag and removed the pillow.

The yellowed lace was cold. Mark ran his thumb along it, remembering how Margaret had looked in her dress when the lace was still bright white. She had used the dress to make the pillow and had crocheted "Love Finds A Way" onto its white, puffy surface.

"It's a shame that it's this way, but ... you're just firing blanks now." Silence fell over the room as he turned off his hearing aid.

Marge's eyes were dark. He planted a kiss onto her forehead and wiped her grimy hair away from her eyes. Flashes of memory surfaced: twenty-year-old Margaret, smiling in the sun, looking out over the Missouri landscape from atop the Elephant Rocks; her eyes when he'd proposed at nineteen; the feel of her hand on his during their walks around the neighborhood after the kids had grown. She was the woman he'd given his virginity to. She was his life, the only woman he'd ever loved.

She was practically a corpse. The pillow was heavy, so very heavy, in his hands.

He looked away when he felt her kick.

* * *

Sarah was finishing up a game of Mahjong when Mr. Coleman came up to the reception desk. His eyes were red and puffy, and his mouth was locked in a scowl. He adjusted the bag on his shoulder as if it were insufferably heavy.

The call light for Margaret's room was flashing. She sighed and debated whether to investigate but decided that Mr. Coleman had taken care of her enough. Sarah could go another hour or so, and Margaret wouldn't know the difference.

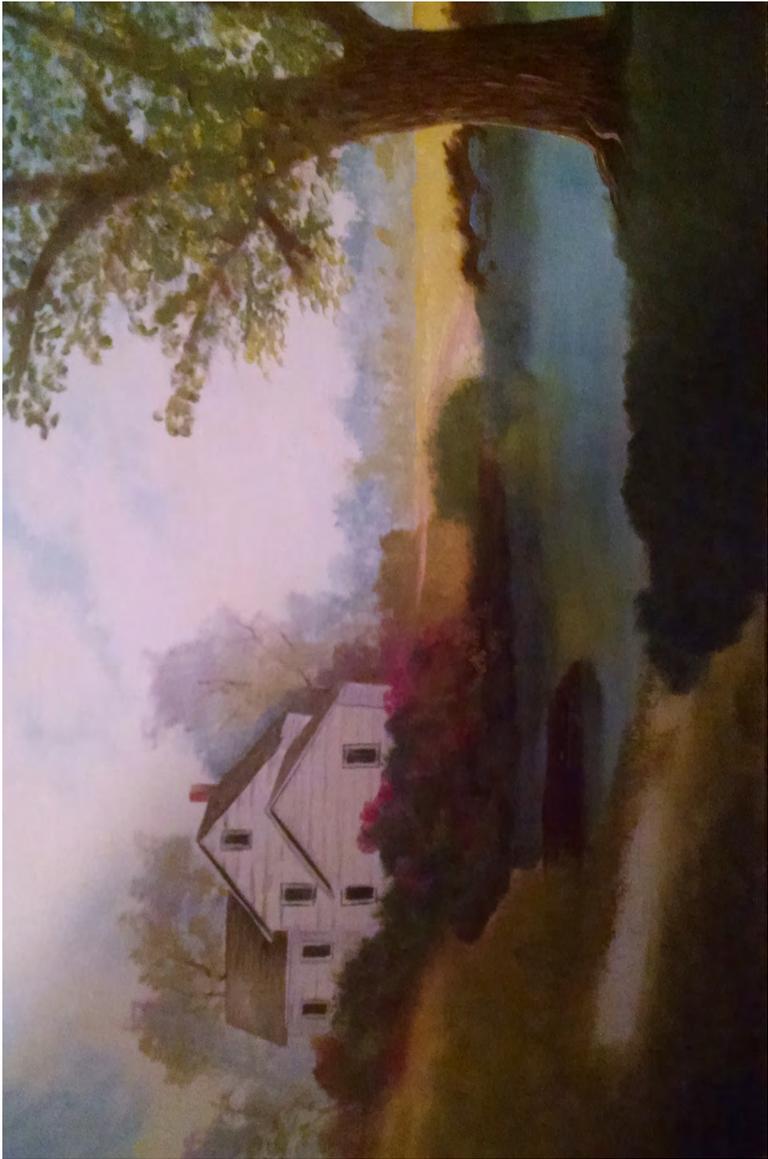
"Enjoy your visit today, Mr. Coleman?" He looked horrible. Why did he keep doing this to himself? Didn't he realize that Margaret was nothing more than a smear of brains stuck to the inside of her skull? What was it

that kept him coming back? Sarah looked back at the call light.

Mr. Coleman signed the paperwork, gave her a nod, and shuffled away, wiping tears off his face.

matthew sprague

childhood tryst



oil on canvas

shane zimmer

safe harbor



digital photograph edited on MAC OSX using GIMP

look at me

t. l. kirk

You know the tab on your rearview mirror
—the one that changes the angle
at which you see the world behind you?
My mom would use it
to make a point.

There was the time I pulled a chair out
from under my classmate, who bruised her tailbone.

After the teacher tells my mom what happened,
Jill doesn't say a word to me
until we're halfway home.

But I don't remember what she says
because the only thing
standing out in my mind
is the snap
of the tab
on the rearview.

When Jill cracks it forward,
the mirror is like the thunderous clap
belonging to my former self, when I didn't know
how to make decisions—when I clapped
for cartoons and clapped for balloons.
With her forefinger, Jill flicks my memories away
and says: *I don't want to look at you.*
So I start to cry for no reason
other than to fill the car with something.

yearly visit

saida samedova

A year has passed,
And we've returned to the place of loss—
Overgrown with ruin.
The rusty fences battle thorns,
Which take everything hostage.
The soil is lost to the human step—
Burned brown by the August heat.
On the horizon, a wave of graves
Washes over the hill tops.
Clay bricks mark the ground,
Hinting at what they hide underneath.
Small trees spread their branches,
Mourning the dead.
At last, to my right, across a fence,
I see a familiar black, marble stone,
Polished and clean, next to the others.
Engraved in bold letters:
“From your wife, children, and mother
To the hero of our lives.”

clutter

justin montgomery

Warm spring sun
meets the low room
for the first time
in many seasons.

Boxes wear cobweb coats,
and artifacts hide
beneath ragged sheets
decorated with dust.

In the center of the room
there is a box
full of pictures,
jumbled. Heaped.
The glass facedown,
muddled with time.

In the frames, I see myself.
I am not alone.
Beneath the dust,
at my side,
there is a blot of faded color—
a lingering whisper
of the stranger
I wish I knew.

The picture drops
but doesn't break.

Sunlight gleams upon
wetted glass—
I can't let go.
I can't move on.

a cliff has but one face

t. l. kirk

A thinking man on the edge of his bed,
where his contemplation dangles
with jaded toes—where a raw mind
begins to grow along the precipice,
and blooms there an original and
unforeseen hue, designed solely
to breathe the invisible, though
necessary, air.

When I leave you, this is where
you'll know it, hanging in your mouth
like the taste of iron in your blood.

jessica tonyan

only that would be torture. . .



paper and embroidery floss

camillia zachary still life with violin, flowers, and candle



oil on canvas

backpacking

jennifer koberstein

Green foliage blankets Missouri bluffs.
Deep in the wood, random edges
Tipped with red, orange, and yellow
Announce evening winds;
Late summer temperatures
Welcome morning frost,
In September.

fire season in the mohave

catherine howl

When flames didn't die laughing
They breathed beneath stucco foundations
Shaking like fault lines.

Cords of stacked wood
Saved for relentless winters
Forgot the snow—
Melted into crackling ash.

Hour glasses of desert sand
Remained minutes away
From smothering fallen needles
Of Joshua trees.

Embers lined-up like
Albino stitches
Glistened beneath
My smoky eyes.

During that inferno I found
My bleached, denim-threaded legs
Became double flags of surrender
Bolting beneath the indigo sky,

Confronted by bright, red plumes
Spiraling downward
Like parachuting devils.

Every fiery evening
Waited late among acres of steel lamp posts,
Glowing the way I fashioned renewable light
Stolen from blighted fields.

Fireflies died in a pinch.
The yellow smeared into a warm, neon glaze
Lined my empty pockets.

The rise of indifferent Santa Ana wind
Forced my exchange of a few heat shriveled words
With alarmed neighbors who
No longer remained invisible to me.

The emergencies sought refuge
Under my roof,
Between my walls,
Inside my floor to ceiling glass.
The final temperature taken at 143.

no craw-fishin' this year

chelsea brooks

again, it's the third Saturday of September
fooled by summer to think it was over
and yet, the morning fog blends into
sticky steam rising from the streets
or even lower, the core—molten, the heat

evaporated the Huzzah last week—
it was more than a trickle
but now, crawfish fight to stay submerged
tadpoles dehydrate, water spiders skip
for the last time, no stone's throw from home

usually, we wade through chilled, calf deep shallows
trip over moss-covered stones, laugh
in our clumsiness, squirm in our discomfort
there is no room to drown when the swell
never rises above our soles

uran alexander

blackfoot



ceramic



watercolor and ink

our lake

saida samedova

I shivered and said, “It’s kind of chilly.”

“Yeah, it gets cold in the evenings. I’ll give you my jacket.” My grandma walked inside the house and brought out her woven, brown jacket. I touched it with my fingers. Prickly. Wool.

I draped it over my shoulders and shivered to feel the warmth.

“So, it’s just us this summer, I guess?” I asked grandma.

“I like that you don’t give up hope and ask me every year,” she said. “It’s just us. Everyone else is busy—work, school. Aunt Maryam and her family are in Baku for the summer. Your two younger cousins are still in university, and your oldest cousin, Zamir, became a father this year. They are preoccupied, but you know, that’s life. I’m just happy to have you here with me.” She smiled, exposing her golden front tooth, and offered me some freshly baked bread.

“No thanks. I’ll take a walk around before dinner,” I said, and she nodded in reply.

I headed towards the gate and tried to open it—not a simple task. The front gate was completely covered in rust, diminished by time. I held it with both hands, lifted it off the ground, and dragged it enough for me to slip by.

My feet carried me towards a little path that my eyes had forgotten but my subconscious could recall. Plants almost fully camouflaged the trail I once made with my cousins. If you were a stranger, you would never find it. Only my cousins knew about it—it was that special. Nostalgia. I wanted to be seven. Seven was cool. Seven was real.

I went up the hill and pushed away plants that unleashed thousands of little thorns in defense of their territory. I battled the pesky bushes for a while before I finally found our lake. It appeared in front of me like a mirage, seemingly uninhabited until I started to notice the croaking of the toads and the buzz of mosquitoes, followed by some mysterious movements in the thorny bushes. The squeals and laughter that once surrounded our lake were nowhere to be heard. Our presence was gone. I frowned.

I walked closer to the lake and picked up a black pebble. My eyes studied it thoroughly, the way you study a long-lost toy that you once loved and treasured. I recalled my cousins holding skimming competitions. My oldest cousin was the master of this art. We used to watch him in awe as his pebble would make its way across the waters to the opposite shore of the

lake. I hadn't skimmed rocks since then but made an attempt and selected the flattest pebble. I held it out in my hand at an angle and took aim. I applied gentle force and tossed it in. It sank immediately, and I watched a small bubble form in the spot of its demise. I wanted to call out for my oldest cousin to bestow his wisdom upon me, but he wasn't there.

I walked along the shore and could picture us huddled in a group, constructing a boat out of twigs, leaves, and strands of grass. We crafted it carefully and then set the boat free on its journey across the lake. We watched it float and got worried every time a gust of wind would disrupt its sails. But that was when we were seven. Seven was cool. Seven was real.

Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed a pair of curious eyes emerge from the water, revealing the body of a frog camouflaged by the green shades of its surroundings. A thick layer of moss floated on the surface of the water and was covered in sticky foam. I kneeled down to the lake, trying to get as close as possible, hoping to establish a link to the memories of childhood. I noticed a thin film over the water and saw a couple mosquitoes race across without breaking surface tension. Suddenly, a strong pungent smell hit me, and I stood up abruptly. The frog quickly submerged at the sight of my moving body.

"How's our lake?" I asked my grandma earlier that day.

"Oh, the swamp? No one goes there anymore," she replied.

And certainly no one had, but I refused to call it a swamp. I looked at the dense bushes surrounding the water like soldiers on guard. I recalled raspberry and blackberry shrubs that used to grow around the lake. Their fresh, tangy scent lured us in with warm hospitality. They offered their delectable fruit to us as a welcoming gesture, and we would snack on them in eager delight. The sweet scent was gone, now, and only fog settled on the thorns. Our lake had lost its spirit and its little inhabitants—us. It used to supply homes with water back in the day. Water stayed untouched, now ... much like the smell. I heard a boy drowned here last summer, my grandmother's neighbor told me.

I spent the entire evening at the lake the way you spend time next to a grave, hoping to replenish the past. I listened to the frogs, and with every movement nearby, I wished to see my cousins walking towards me. Then the silence was broken as my grandma called me for dinner. I dragged myself home. No one bothered closing the gate, so I slipped by and saw my grandmother carrying a pot of rice to the house.

"What happened to the lake?" I asked without further explanation.

She looked at me for a second and said, "I guess it's just been forgotten."

(self) portrait of a mexican artist

m. macallan lay

supple brown skin

greet crimson curved

smirks.

two lines stitch

to the forehead

where a caterpillar rests.

wild roses

jump rope in

ebony colored locks.

ephemeral

monica orosz

when the green of the leaves fade
and they fall from the trees
in this orchestrated harmony of dying
performing in concert, yet solitary
what does their death mean
but a returning back to the earth
and to the freedom of a life floating in the wind

instead of missing the leaves
what if we rejoiced their liberty
and reveled in the nakedness of the trees
maskless if only for a short time
for the sake of their own growth
for the lives of the leaves
that they carry on their backs
knowing all the while
there is life within death

and when the songbirds start singing again
so will a leaf emerge
a child again to play and dance in the sun
in this lie the very soul of life

taylor hiette

tastes like paradise



created using Pigma Micron pens

kathleen keaveny

beach house



watercolor and ink

bones like white roses

justin montgomery

A cattle skull sits in sand,
bone gleaming in the desert sun,
sockets empty,
horns broken,
grinning death.

Out of the skull grows a rose,
petals white as bone,
prevailing despite
the killing joke.

habitual lake happenings

chelsea brooks

Someone thinks
it's a great idea
to do a running front
flip off a yacht, only
they didn't see
that tourist—from
Arkansas—on a rented
jet ski, close to the wake
zone side of the boat and oh
shit you drown down
into the lake, to be swallowed
up by Elvin the 82 pound
catfish that almost won
Chet of the One Toothed
Tribe notoriety with the Missouri
Department of Conservation.

Well, it's inevitable
one, if not two,
boats will catch fire,
sink, and we'll all
sit and bitch about that
idiot from Arkansas
for the next four years.

the day prince died

jessie kehle

our relationship was three days old
(for the third time).
she was house-sitting at her aunt Gigi's
and asked me to come over and celebrate.
she said, *i'll never leave you again.*
i said, that sounds familiar.
besides, who cares about that right now?
my tears were not for her
but for his fentanyl-fed
body, sitting six hours
before anyone knew.

but then extra time led to
a kiss, and a kiss
to pieces of clothing
buried in blue blankets
on Gigi's guest bed.

*—they thought I was stuck
in the elevator,
waiting to descend,
but bear witness!
I have risen!*

*and behold my blessing,
the wine of my blood
distilled to water, the water
she spills on your breast, the water
you spill in her mouth—*

i wanted to hold her off,
make her wait as long as
i'd had to hurt without her,
but she so skillfully, slowly,
destroyed my proportions
(my torso tightening, shrinking;
my head eclipsing the bed,

floating away) that the bedposts
almost ripped in my grip.

*—and I have peeled the ceiling.
see the plaster I pluck off
transformed into rice,
feel the grains I shower on your backs,
feel the curtain rings
I shrunk to fit your finger
and hers*

do you take this woman?—

and i broke, stammering
God, oh, god (an invocation
i had never used before), and

froze, stunned by our union,
convinced that another
would soon come.

uran alexander

untitled print 1



canvas

jessica tonyan

yellow room



oil on canvas

werewolf kills the afternoon

jordan cosmo

Jowls twitching beneath soft pseudo suede, he licks canines anticipating protrusion. Follicles, synapses, gonads scream *THE SUN IS DESCENDING* but neck, shoulders, spine, legs remain buff nude. Weeks, days, hours he has suffered waiting for fingernails to become claws, fur to conquer flesh, lateral muscles to inflate, animal emergent to raise furry skull and howl anthem beginning inside diaphragm, stomach, rib cage, echoing inflections—vacillating then steady—past alabaster, famished and catalyzed Oms preyed upon all braving to hear this rite.

He looks for shadows not yet cast; it's only half-past three. Premonitions of night glow yellow backed against prepubescent moon.

still raining*

dan olson

It's still raining.

I don't mean "It's still raining" like I'm so deep and the rain symbolizes my pain or some shit.

I mean it's still raining. Rain is pouring heavily from the sky and has been for weeks. Maybe months. I've lost track. The calendar washed away with our home well over 40 nights ago. It's beyond biblical.

My new home doesn't have a calendar. It doesn't have a TV or computer. It has a radio, but there aren't any batteries, and there's no cord--not that there's much electricity to spare anyway. It doesn't have a kitchen. It doesn't have a bedroom. It doesn't have a bathroom.

It does have a full-sized basketball court, but that's kind of hard to use with all the cots.

There's nowhere to go and not much to do, but I try to keep busy. Every day I trek around the gym. Round and round and round. The wooden floor still shines a bit under layers of grime and piles of people. Two massive floodlights are perched on the basketball hoops, strapped tightly to the backboards at each end of the court. The lights are all we have during the day since the endless rain makes the sky pretty dark. It's good that we have the floodlights, but sometimes the pale, cold glow and the long, deep shadows they cast make the room, with its endless rows of cots, feel like a POW camp—or a graveyard.

I used to just walk when I first decided to get up and move, but then I started counting my laps, trying to make it seem like I was going somewhere. Now I just walk again.

There's no calendar and no clock, but there are three meals a day. I walk the rest of the time I'm awake, but I always make it back to my cot when the rations come by. I don't like to sleep—I don't know how anyone can in this place surrounded by strangers. Sleep used to be something I loved, but I've gotten used to not needing much anymore. It's for the best. I've gotten a

steady rhythm going with my treks, and the three cups of steamed rice and unfiltered rainwater are all the fuel I need to keep trekking.

It's good that I have walking because I see so many of the others who just eat, sleep, and stare. They might as well be dead for how blank their faces and empty their eyes are. They could walk or something, anything to keep from giving up. One old lady in the corner sits on her cot with her back against the wall. I don't think I've seen her move once as long as we've been here. An old man collects her rations every day and patiently spoons rice into her mouth with his hands. I guess it's good she has somebody.

My stomach growls as my feet shuffle along. I squint my eyes towards the door but don't see the nurse pushing out his big rice pots. Must not be time for supper yet. I wish I had counted how many laps there are between meal times. My stomach growls again.

"Zombie!"

A voice yells out as a hand grabs my arm near the shoulder and tugs with feeble strength. I jerk my arm away and spin around, ready to fight, only to find the old man who tends to the old woman in the corner. He looks older and smaller up close, and he puts his hands up like a surrender. He seems amused at startling me.

"Zombie?" I ask.

"Sorry, didn't mean nothing by it. Just trying to get your attention! I was saying 'Hey buddy!' as you walked past, but you were like in a trance or something. You OK?"

"I'm OK. I'm OK. I just like to walk."

"Yeah? I believe you! You're only walking past our bunks day in and day out, a million times a day ... I'm kidding!" The old man's awfully chipper despite being stuck here like the rest of us. He puts his arm on my shoulder and grabs my hand like he's trying to sell me a used car. "Good to meet you, buddy! I'm Rex, and this is my wife, Mary. What's your name, buddy?"

I shake his hand as he pivots away and gestures to the old woman. "Henry. Sorry, I didn't hear you bef—"

“Henry? This is Henry, Mary. She don’t talk, but she listens. I do enough talking for both of us, ain’t that right, Mary? She always says that.” Bouncing with energy over to his cot,

Rex picks up a heavy wool coat that seems to double as a blanket and then extends his hand as an invitation. “Have a seat, Henry!”

I pause momentarily, caught off guard by the unexpected ambush of hospitality. My stomach lets out a long grumble, snapping me back to the moment. “Thanks, but I...” I can’t think of any good reason to refuse, so I sit down without finishing my sentence.

“Henry here’s training for a marathon, Mary. Ain’t that right, Henry?” Rex sits down next to Mary on her cot with a big grin all across his face. “I’m kidding!”

“I just like to walk. It’s good to keep busy,” I say mainly to Mary. She stares at nothing in particular, but she seems to nod slightly.

“So, Henry, how are you? We’ve all been here for a few weeks. Don’t seem like the rain’s letting up anytime soon. Figure it’s about time we got to know the neighbors!”

“Yeah, I’ve given up on sunny days.”

“He’s gloomier than the weather, Mary!” Rex claps a hand down on her knee with a chuckle before turning back to me. “You gotta have hope, Henry!”

I shake my head and look around. A small crowd’s waiting by the door where the nurse brings out the rice.

“Getting hungry, Henry? They seem to be running late tonight.” Rex cranes his head around to see where I’m looking.

“I’m not sure. So hard to keep track of time.”

“Mary and I are from across the valley. We built our cozy little cabin on top of the hillside, so we’re hoping it stays high and dry. They still made us evacuate here. Where are you from?”

“Nowhere,” I answer reflexively.

I can picture Rex and Mary’s dream house on the hill. It’s probably still there. The valley’s gone, though, replaced by a new, deep river. Whatever homes were down there are now just debris, the broken skeletons of a thousand shipwrecks. A commotion rises from the crowd by the door. I look and see the nurse has emerged, but he has no rice.

“Step back! Listen, everybody!” The nurse waves his arms and shouts so the whole gym knows to pay attention. “Our emergency supplies are getting low, and we’re still waiting for more rice. Since we don’t know how much longer this rain will last or how long the emergency shipments will be delayed, we’re cutting back rations to two cups of rice a day.”

Roars of anger and groans of despair echo throughout the gym. A voice in the crowd yells out, “Are we eating tonight or not?”

“No. We’ll serve everyone in the morning tomorrow and then again in the evening. This is the best we can do until further notice. We’re doing the best we can.” The nurse turns and leaves as everyone in the gym continues to complain to their neighbors.

“Can you believe this?” Rex asks. I’m not sure if he’s asking me or Mary. He leans over to wipe a tear from Mary’s cheek.

I don’t know what to say; there’s nothing I can do about anything. Suddenly I’m uncomfortable, and I stand up to leave, covering the awkwardness by trying to answer Rex’s question: “Yeah, well, when it rains, it pours.”

Rex turns to me, his smile gone and the brightness of his old eyes replaced with a look of hurt. I don’t know if it’s because I’m leaving or because of my joke. “Hey, it’s tough, Henry. But you gotta have hope.”

“I guess so. It was good meeting you. I’m just gonna walk, keep my mind off my stomach,” I say as I start to walk away.

“Sure, yeah, good to meet you, too, Henry. See you around the neighborhood. Say goodbye, Mary!” Rex waves goodbye and puts his arm around his wife. I stop and return the wave to them both before continuing on my routine trek around the gym.

Barely a full lap later and I realize how empty my stomach is and how heavy and tired my body suddenly feels. I head back to my cot to rest a moment and decide to lay down and wait for sleep. The disgruntled commotion of everyone in the gym has since died down, and without the noise of my usual walkabouts to distract me, I realize just how quiet it gets. With stillness all around, the relentless rain pounding on the roof of the gym becomes impossible to ignore. Loud gasps of wind crescendo and fall as an endless cadence drums on with every raindrop. After maybe an hour or three, the big floodlights are turned off, and everyone else drifts off to sleep while I lie there awake.

I don't know how anyone can sleep with all of this noise outside. A dim red light glows from the far side of the gym—an 'EXIT' sign above a door that's been sealed shut.

I wake up the next day with a familiar feeling. It's a strange feeling that greets me every morning, a combination of not fully falling asleep despite losing consciousness mixed with the fading warmth of a recurring dream I can't quite remember. I take a sip of rainwater and swallow the bitter resignation that whatever I had was just a dream and all I have now is just reality.

After eating my morning's allotment of rice, I plant my feet on the floor to begin my trek. Before I can stand up, however, I notice Rex and Mary across the gym in the corner. The nurse has just arrived with the rice, and Rex has him cornered with a smile and a handshake. They're too far away for me to hear anything, but I can just imagine Rex making his sales pitch to get more rice for himself and Mary. The nurse apparently isn't budging, because he continues on his way while a dejected Rex moves to console Mary. Watching this scene exhausts me, and I can't find the energy to stand up and walk. Minutes pass, then hours, and by the time our second helping of rice comes around, I realize that I've been staring at my motionless feet all day.

I eat my evening's rice and with new resolve decide to stand up and walk over to Rex and Mary's corner to see how they're doing. As I approach, I see that Rex is trying to feed rice to Mary, but she's not cooperating. He strokes her face and hair with one hand while spooning food toward her mouth with the other, but her mouth is closed tight. As she shakes her head in refusal, her eyes appear to meet mine for just a moment. In that glance, I see her fear and frustration. I'm instantly embarrassed and walk away before Rex can notice.

For the next two days, I just stay in my cot. I eat my rice, I sleep as little as possible, and I stare. I stare at my feet. I stare at the ceiling. I stare at the 'EXIT' sign. I stare everywhere except in the direction of Rex and Mary.

In the middle of the night, I wake up coughing and choking as if I'm drowning. It takes me a moment to wake up and orient myself in the near darkness, but I recognize the rain beating overhead and realize it's louder because a leak has popped up, sending a steady stream trickling down right on my pillow. I make my way to the nurse's door, aided by the dim red light from across the gym, and knock. The nurse appears, opening the door a crack, and I tell him about the leak. With a heavy sigh and a tired yawn, he grabs a large plastic trash can from his room, dumps it out, and hands it to me before shutting the door. I return to my soaked cot and put the trash can on top to collect the rainwater. I watch the can slowly fill and listen to the trickling water echo through the gym's empty stillness as everyone else continues to sleep. Eventually the floodlights are flipped on, and people begin to wake around me.

"Hey, stranger!" Rex's voice sneaks up behind me.

"Oh, hey," I reply, turning around.

"When it rains, it pours, right?" Rex smiles with a nervous chuckle while surveying the damage. "I'm kidding!"

Rex seems to be his chipper self, but he also seems even smaller and more frail. "Tell you what, Henry, let's grab your bunk and move it over by Mary and me. You obviously can't stay here until they get this leak fixed. No ifs, ands, buts, or any other excuses!"

I don't know how to argue this offer since I don't exactly have anywhere else to go. Before I can think of anything to say, Rex is already pulling on one end of the cot with all of his might. I have to help so he doesn't hurt himself, so I just say "OK" and grab the other end of the cot. We carry it down the rows to the corner.

"We'll push Mary's bunk and mine together, then we can squeeze yours in where mine was. How does that sound, Mary? We're getting a houseguest!" I can't tell what Mary's reaction is, but Rex continues as if sensing my

apprehension. “She’s just a bit fussy with me because I’ve been insisting on her eating half of my rice since they cut back. She needs her strength; that first night with no supper was enough to take its toll.”

“So you’ve only had one cup of rice the past couple of days?” I ask.

Rex nods and puts his arm around Mary. “I’d do anything for her. Ain’t that right, Mary? Besides, she’s always telling me to watch my figure!” Rex squeezes Mary close as he chuckles at his joke. A faint hint of a smile forms on Mary’s lips as her eyes briefly meet Rex’s.

I can’t believe how kind they are to each other—and to me. “Take my rice today. It’s the least I can do. You shouldn’t starve, and you’re letting me stay he--”

“Nonsense, Henry, nonsense! What are good neighbors for? Besides, I’ve got a trick up my sleeve to get more rice for all three of us. You just wait here, and keep an eye on Mary—can you do that?” Rex asks with a grin and a wink.

“What are you going to do? What’s your plan?” I ask, not sure if I should be worried.

“Don’t worry! I’ll be right back. Remember, you gotta have hope!” Rex takes off across the gym with a spring in his step, disappearing through the nurse’s door.

“So ...” I turn my attention to Mary, who looks in the direction Rex went. “How about this weather?” That lame attempt at a joke hangs silently in the air while we wait. I try to think of other things to talk about, but I can’t come up with anything to say. After a few more minutes, the nurse emerges from the door, followed by Rex right on his heels.

“Where are they, old man?” the nurse bellows, walking quickly toward Mary and me.

“No, hey, come on, buddy! Work with me!” Rex pleads, tugging on the nurse’s arm. The nurse shakes free and walks up to me.

“Do you know where they are?” he asks me.

“Where what are? What’s going on?” I ask the nurse, who ignores me and moves towards our cots. I turn to Rex, but he’s tugging on the nurse again.

“What about you, old lady? You got the batteries on you?” The nurse grabs the wool coat and yanks it off Mary.

“Batteries?” I ask.

“The old man says he’s got a pack of batteries. This whole time we’ve been stuck here taking care of you people with no supplies, no backup, and a dead radio. If we had that radio working, we might have some idea what’s going on out there. Now he’s trying to extort rice in exchange for the batteries? Hell no. Hand over the batteries.” Rex pulls on the coat, trying to get it back from the nurse.

“It’s a fair deal! It’s all I got! Let go!” Rex yells as he wrestles for the wool coat. Mary looks frightened, tears in her eyes.

I put a hand on the nurse’s shoulder to get his attention, but he shoves me with his whole body, pushing me to the ground. Rex gets more upset at this and kicks at the nurse while still struggling to pull back his coat.

“Cut it out, old man! I’m taking those batteries!” Rex kicks again, but this time it’s right when the nurse is pulling on the coat. Rex loses his balance. With one leg in the air, his other leg scoots forward and slips out from under him as the nurse pulls. Rex falls back hard, his head smacking against the floorboards with a loud ‘THUMP!’

“What did you do?!” I scream. The gym seems to have fallen silent, but the sound of Rex’s skull slamming into the hardwood floor still echoes through my brain. Mary’s eyes are wide, her face ghost white.

“It was an accident!” The nurse barks back, still searching the coat. “Crazy old man wouldn’t back off! You wouldn’t back off!” He finds the unopened package of batteries in a coat pocket and takes them before rolling the coat into a ball and kneeling down by Rex. He lifts Rex’s head and places the coat underneath. A small puddle of blood is pooled where his head hit the floor.

The nurse checks Rex’s vitals and applies pressure to the bleeding. After a few terrifying seconds, his eyes flutter a bit before opening wide and

looking around. Then with a weak smile, he says, “My head is killing me!”

I breathe a sigh of relief as the nurse continues to tend to Rex and bandage his head. I look to Mary and see she’s crying fierce tears of relief and love and happiness. The nurse apologizes profusely, and with my help, we lift Rex up and sit him on the cot next his wife. He wraps his arms around her and squeezes her even tighter than normal.

The nurse leaves for a moment. When he returns, he has the radio as well as a big rice pot filled to the brim. As Rex, Mary, and I enjoy the extra rice, the nurse puts the batteries in the radio and turns it on. After tuning through some static, we find a news report—a weather report: “Grey skies are gonna clear up! Put on a happy face!”

And right at that very moment, the dull drumbeat of raindrops fades out, the leak in the roof stops leaking, and sunlight pours in the gym windows as the sounds of birds chirping fills the air...

Of course, that’s all bullshit.

It’s still raining.

There are no happy endings here. Just endings and the fleeting moments of kindness that make it all a little more bearable.

Rex never woke up. His blood is still a stain on the gym floor. That nurse didn’t apologize, but he hasn’t showed his face again, either.

The radio’s still dead. Turns out they weren’t even the right batteries. The roof’s still leaking where my cot used to be, but I should stay with Mary, anyway. I take care of her now that Rex is gone. I give her half of my rice, just like he did.

I guess it’s good that we have each other to take care of. I didn’t realize how lonely I had been for all those weeks with no one to talk to. But Rex was right-- Mary is a great listener. I tell her all about my life before coming here. I tell her I know what it’s like to lose the ones we love. I tell her all about my wife, and our happy little home down in the valley, and our beautiful baby boy who used to love to play all day in the sun before the rains came.

taylor hiette

easy breathing



created using Pigma Micron pens

kathleen keaveny

open shell



watercolor and ink

warsong of chop suey

philip michaelis

I shall not bear this insult, not its scorn.
It flies near, cotton fish on green ribbon.
Proud warrior I am: I shall taste its blood.

It taunts me, just in reach to test my eye,
But once I strike, it slips away in air.
I shall not bear this insult, not its scorn.

Each day I ready my valiant daggers
Upon my post and the living room couch.
Proud warrior I am: I shall taste its blood.

I see my human catch it on a string
To help me. But, alas, it flies off still.
I shall not bear this insult, not its scorn.

I leap. I catch. In tooth. In paw. In claw.
Yet the coward 'scapes my killing blow. Soon-
Proud warrior I am: I shall taste its blood.

I will find my victory in battle,
And I shall feast most fancy on its corpse.
I shall not bear this insult, not its scorn.
Proud warrior I am: I shall taste its blood.

rubato

jessie kehle

This is the way my body talks,
and it is beautiful: whimpering, breathe,
feel the

slow

wind-up of
pressure

Whimpering.

Breathe.

But I am tired of only hearing the voice

jerk awake

at random. I need it to scream. Screaming has a texture.

My throat threatens to
stifle itself.

Sometimes my rib bristles.

In the (ever shorter) silences between
a persistent fist knocks
weakly on my
internal
skin.

Before I was losing sensation.

Lips would kiss and I would ask where they touched me.

Arms wrapped around me and I stood unaware.

Even my feet touching the floor lost immediacy.

Now as I empty,

I finally feel sensitive.

I know what I need,

but this harmony is too perfect.

I am dizzy, giddy.

The voice of my body

is slurring and yet stronger.

When it gives up and stops speaking,

will I ever achieve ecstasy again?

My marrow and my blood are clutter.
If you drain me, if you scrape out my tendons
with a scalpel and make my veins vacant,
I can truly sing.
Play me like a pipe.
The wind will slide between my bones
and you will hear the songs my body knows
and my mind cannot express.
The music will slowly
 slip into minor keys,
 each note struggling not to disappear and then
 wrenching itself into the next,
 until you can only distinguish
 one note,
 the most beautiful note I will never hear,
 and it will play until your lungs are
 as empty as mine.

city life

andrea reynolds

I was born in the city amidst excitement and sorrow.
laughter and tears—that was a loud day.

in the brick flat; the bungalow; the ranch—life unfolded.
smells of yeast and car exhaust floated over the linoleum; the hardwood; the carpet.
the powerful passion of innocence fueled the hopeful. feeling the freedom
of summer vacation, school boys howled coyote joy. in ash-pits
children hid while others ran through the alleys chanting jump rope rhymes.
whistles called; street lights flickered; siblings yelled. those who ate dinner disappeared
for a while. then in tattered clothes, we gathered on stoops blaring music and spitting seeds
at barefoot cousins; stickball tired; dripping sweat—childhood was a memorable year.

angst crawled in windows; climbed fire escapes; rebelled loudly. shared struggles
bound oneness. temptations nudged something more. in bars; in gangways;
in tiny apartments my black eye liner squinted with each inhale. entangled
life leaked into dreams—youth was an exciting week.

in a low car; a white truck; a city bus—people rocked to and fro mumbling
the wrong words. everyone changed. reserved talked of philosophy;
injustice demanded reform; rejected revisited religion.
worked swing shifts; two jobs; overtime aged the body. couples
discussed what to have for dinner. some feared
the growing darkness—adulthood disappeared in a blink.

excitement and sorrow stared at the same sky.
laughter and tears—and the newborns
sang.

i want a doctor to take your picture

jessie kehle

and let me stare at it until each
white spike, spur,
socket, and knob
flashes
on the film
inside my eyelids.

I want a doctor to take your picture
so I have the knowledge
no one else has, that
even you don't know:
I want to see
the tilt of your liver;
I want to calculate
the exact capacity of your bladder;
I want to know
how heavy your heart is
to the hundredth of an ounce,
how much it twitches
between your breaths.

I want a doctor to take your picture—
and once I have memorized
every crevice, curve, vertebra
so clearly I can reconstruct it on the wall,
I will think of everything I can't calculate:
the exact capacity of
my brain, how much your white likeness
is plastered over its gray,
how many minutes that doctor's eyes
stole your image before it could be
frozen in my clothespins.

I want a doctor to take your picture
so I can shred it
and feel my sanity getting

one stitch
for every segment
of the simulacrum
I rend.

I want a doctor

so you can finally repulse me.
So I can finally repulse you.

jessica tonyan

jack jack



oil on canvas



photography

three seconds before today

jordan cosmo

I sit at a bar counter eating this tissue-lined basket of burger and fries trying not to get ketchup on my hands or face or clothing but also trying not to move my arms too much because that might look like flailing which would draw attention from two sleeveless t-shirts sitting four bar stools to my left. I watch steady the TV, liquor bottles, crumpled napkin, ceiling fan blades. I am aware of the one guy peering over his rattlesnake shoulder tattoo soliciting my gaze. I keep to my pickles and yellow mustard. Four bites in, he asks, *Should we call you Dick, or Ginny?* My tongue and cheeks are stifled by wedge fries and bun. Buying time to fully masticate I wipe both hands deliberately. This guy wants to know, *What kind of queer are you?* I reach for my draft Busch gone warm. The other guy dismounts his stool and hollers, *You better speak up quick.* I swivel sixty degrees. These good old boys cowboy up like they're about to share a urinal. I warn, *back off.* This guy wants to know, *The fuck you got in the crotch of those Levi's?* I defend first where this guy pries and jams while the other tries to come at my chest. Arms flail leaving my privates vulnerable. Fingertip makes a blunt first impression, triggers alarm. My right hand latches onto this guy's middle and index fingers while my left hand grabs just his ring. Phalanges pop:

three

two

one.

biographies

Uran Alexander did not provide a biography.

Vincent Blount is a graduate of UMSL with a degree in Criminal Justice. Born and raised in St. Louis, he uses his love for photography as a means of showcasing the people and places in the city he loves. He's also an avid car enthusiast and music lover. He has aspirations of becoming a police officer and wants to lead a life dedicated to helping others.

Chelsea Brooks is in her final semester of her English degree at UMSL. In the fall of 2018, she will be starting her Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing at UMSL. Chelsea's is a poet focused on exploring humanity and nature, and how the two interact. She is a firm believer that poetry does not need deep meanings or elevated language to be impactful, and prefers to use simple images and playful language to speak to her readers on a universal level. Chelsea has been published in *Bellerive*, *Litmag*, and *Bad Jacket*.

Jordan Cosmo is the author of *Mind Your Head: The Life, Death, and Re-birth of a Suicidal Queer Christian Missionary Kid*, which received honorable mention in the 2016 North Street Book Prize category for creative nonfiction. Jordan is currently creating works of poetry, fiction, and nonfiction focusing on third-culture perspective, free-range philosophy, and the transgender experience. He lives blissfully with his loving and supportive wife.

Taylor Hiette is a graphic design student here at UMSL. She usually forgets to take time away from the computer, because she's so dedicated to getting things done instead of giving time to herself. Stepping away from her screen, Taylor had the instant idea to draw a feather with St. Louis in it, which became the piece seen here, "Easy Breathing." Taylor always tries to incorporate her life into her work, but never reveals too much. This feather took her an hour to draw, and when she finished it, she felt like weight was lifted off her shoulders. Ever since drawing this piece, she now takes more time away from her screen to draw and focus on herself more. Taylor was inspired to create "tasted like paradise" while she was doing the dishes. She just finished hot chocolate, and as she was cleaning the mug, she got distracted. She noticed the cup started to overflow with water, which is how

she came up with the waterfall. Taylor was born and raised in St. Louis, but ever since she met and spent the week with her cousins in California, she has always wanted to live there. If you know Taylor Hiette, she's the type of girl who wears flip flops and shorts in thirty-degree weather. Once she finds a job and connections with people here in St. Louis, her next goal is to live in South California with her cousins who are her age.

Catherine Howl holds a Master of Fine Arts in poetry from UMSL. Many of her poems are set in the Southern California Mojave desert and surrounding cities along the foothills of the San Bernardino mountains, where she has lived most of her life. Among other literary achievements, Howl's story "The Desert" was awarded best prose in the 2017 issue of UMSL *Litmag*, where her poetry has previously appeared. Her poetry has also been published in *The Pacific Review*, *The Gold Coast Review*, *Phineas* and *The WING*. Howl studied visual art, creative writing, and English composition at California State University. She is also a visual artist who paints with acrylics on recycled canvas. She was recently selected as one of "Missouri's Best Emerging Poets" in the 2018 anthology by Z Publishing House, and expresses her gratitude to San Bernardino Valley College english professor and poet Joel Lamore for his ongoing interest in her work.

Kathleen Keaveny is an artist and educator hailing from Toledo, Ohio. She has been a practicing artist all of her life and has recently returned to school this semester to study Printmaking at UMSL. She can be found outdoors exploring nature, relaxing in her hammock, gardening, making art, working with children, listening to music, and going on new adventures. She lives with her boyfriend and houseplants in South City, Saint Louis.

Jessie Kehle is a second-year MFA student obsessed with sensuality, sexuality, and the body. She is both polyamorous and—surprise of surprises—pansexual. She currently divides her time between her loving wife and her sexy new boyfriend, and she doesn't care if anybody has a problem with it.

Tyler Kirk is an UMSL graduate and former *Litmag* staff member, Tyler "T.L." Kirk now works as a marketing consultant in St. Louis. He lives in the city with his wonderful girlfriend and their cat, Winnie. More of his work can be found at tlkirk.com or by following [@bytlkirk](https://www.instagram.com/bytlkirk) on Instagram.

Jennifer Koberstein is a senior at UMSL, completing her undergraduate degree in English. She graduates in May and feels fortunate to have been given such an amazing opportunity—for her it is a dream coming true.

She began her college career as a well-seasoned adult and mother of three wonderful children. Her English professors, and other professors along the way, have stretched her imagination, challenged her thinking capacity, and most importantly, inspired her. Outside of writing and reading, she enjoys hiking with her family and dog—life just makes more sense in the woods. The only thing she ever wanted to be when she grew up was a writer, and she plans to keep working towards that vision.

M. Macallan Lay is a 21-year-old creative writer from St. Louis, Missouri. She digs cats, coffee, and Sloane Crosley.

Philip Michaels is a recent graduate of UMSL with bachelor's degrees in theatre and dance, liberal studies, and comparative linguistics. He has previously had his work published in *Symmetry* and in last year's edition of *Litmag*.

Justin Montgomery is an English major at UMSL. He thanks his wife, professors, colleagues, and the *Litmag* staff for their support and encouragement. The work presented in this edition is among his first published. Hopefully there will be more to come.

Dan Olson is a student in UMSL's Master of Public Policy Administration program. He is a proud St. Louis native but would also happily live on the moon and watch the earth rise every day. What high school did he attend, you ask? Webster Groves, home of the Statesmen! His public policy inspiration comes from the optimistic, passionate Leslie Knope from the television series *Parks and Recreation*. In addition to his interest in public service, Dan has always had a love for creative projects, from writing and illustrating stories in grade school to studying theatre at New York University. He is also an avid science fiction fan, especially with all things Star Trek. Dan would like to thank all the people who support and inspire him.

Monica Orosz was born and raised in Western New York and moved to St. Louis four years ago. A horticulturist and student of biochemistry, she is passionate about learning and nature. In her free time, she loves to play guitar, hang out with her horse, and explore the surrounding area. Her favorite things are laughing, music, books, and the outdoors. Inspired by plants and passionate people, she is always seeking to broaden her interests and perspectives and is grateful for any opportunity to do so.

Andrea Reynolds grew up in St. Louis. She is currently a MFA student at

UM - St. Louis, where she also earned her Bachelor's and Master's in secondary education. Andrea teaches at Cor Jesu Academy in Afton, Missouri, and serves as Chair of the English Department.

Saida Samedova is an international student from Dagestan, studying optometry at UMSL. Her passion for writing emerged during sophomore year at Ashgabat International School, located in Turkmenistan. Saida was encouraged by her English teacher, who inspired her to improve her English and to keep writing creative pieces. She writes to organize her thoughts and to self-reflect.

Matt Sprague is a physics and mathematics senior at UMSL. He loves animals, laughing, eating pesto—which he swears he can eat for every meal—innocuous thunderstorms, breakdancing, playing music, reading in his cramped closet “library”, making goofy videos, Teavana, sabre fencing, elegantly-lit patios, and long walks in the evening, night, or countryside. Matt's goals are to be a research scientist or musician, give back to the community more than what has been given to him, cosplay as Jace Beleren, and always strive to be a better human being, friend, and family member.

Jessica Tonyan is a Studio Art Major at UMSL, with an emphasis in Painting. She mostly uses oil paint, and she finds that, even when working through different ideas or bodies of work, she almost always includes the figure in her art. Jessica believes that her love of oil comes from the fluidity of the medium, how it is so easily put on, taken away, and obscured. It really opened her mind to think outside of the box of realism, and start using color, paint thickness, texture, and brush strokes to communicate her ideas. Jessica also enjoyed taking a Fabrics and Textiles class, which taught her many things, including how to make paper and embroider. A combination of the two is what makes up the piece “Only that would be torture...” Another prime example of her finding new ways to represent the figure in her artwork.

Camillia Zachary is a junior at UMSL, majoring in studio art and minoring in art history. Her work primarily consists of stylized renderings of architecture and urban scenes in a variety of media, including cardboard, ink, charcoal, and paint. In addition to drawing, she also enjoys oil painting. Her painting “Still Life with Violin, Flowers, and Candle” was an assignment for her Painting II class.

Shane Zimmer is an education major at UMSL, who plans on teaching high school history after he graduates. He enjoys spending time with his wife, Sharon, an UMSL alumni, and their two dogs, Skip Schumaker and Carl Grimes. Shane is an avid St. Louis Cardinals baseball fan and photography enthusiast. He spends his free time playing guitar and checking out new breweries and restaurants with his wife around St. Louis. Shane loves capturing the beauty hidden in everyday scenery and sharing it with others.

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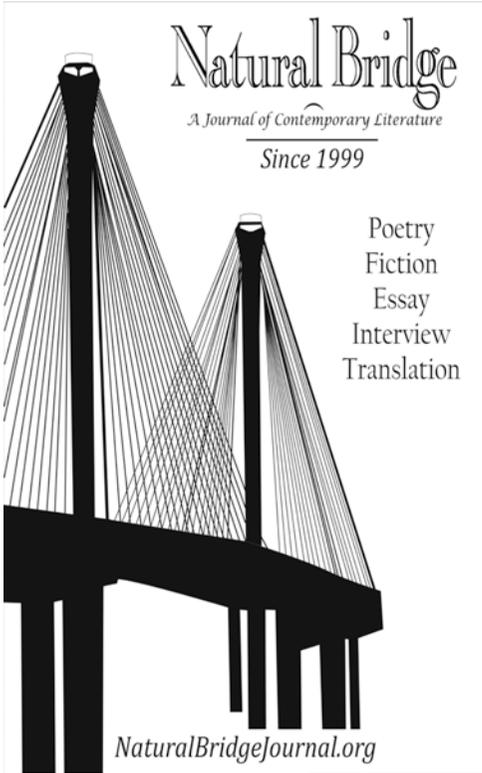
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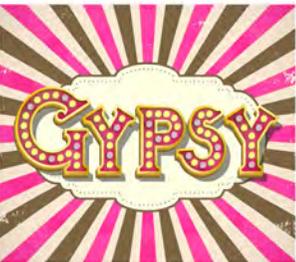
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Submission Guidelines

Poetry: Submit up to 5 individual poems

Fiction and Nonfiction: Submit up to 3 individual pieces of 4,000 words or fewer

Photography and Artwork: Submit up to 5 individual pieces, all styles, mediums, and subject matter considered.

- Artwork should be scanned (rather than photographed) and saved as a JPEG file with 300dpi resolution or greater
- Photographs and artwork submitted will also be considered for cover art

Only original, previously unpublished work will be accepted.

Instructions

Send your submission with a detachable cover page that includes your name, email address, and phone number. Contact information should not appear elsewhere on submissions.

Attach your submissions to an email and send to litmagumsl@gmail.com, or place a print copy in the green *Litmag* box outside of the English Department office, 4th floor Lucas Hall.

We look forward to reviewing your work for the 2019 edition!

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