



Inside Out 2019



Morning Commute - La Molina, Peru
Sarah Roselli

Inside Out

Jefferson Literary/Arts Journal
Spring 2019

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Content Warning: This magazine includes some written pieces with mature language and potentially triggering subject matter.

Foreword

Welcome to the 2019 issue of *Inside Out*!

Inside Out is the literary and arts journal of the Jefferson student body. As such, it gives voice to our scholars as they migrate through their educational experience at our University. The creativity and vision of our students is featured within the pages of this book. Showcased is student work that was created in the intervals between classes and notebooks, dorm rooms and city streets.

Please enjoy this issue of *Inside Out*, as our students offer a unique view of their world using images, colors, words and light.

Charles A. Pohl, MD

Vice Provost for Student Affairs, Thomas Jefferson University

Vice Dean for Student Affairs and Professor of Pediatrics, Sidney Kimmel Medical College

Editors' Statement

We are thrilled to share the 2019 edition of *Inside Out*: a stunning collection of visual art and literature that reflects the complexity of health and the myriad emotions tied to caregiving. Within this compilation, we see art that mirrors the ethos of the Jefferson community: one that recognizes an approach to healthcare that is deeply embedded in the humanities and in acknowledgment of all aspects of the human experience. With vivid textures and captivating language, artists in this magazine tackle questions about the lines between helping someone and harming them, coping with the loss of a patient, managing guilt related to familial relationships, how place affects our understanding of ourselves, and how identity impacts societal and personal expectations.

We are in awe of the immense contributions from our community members and are honored to share them with you. We hope that you find these beautiful pieces as meaningful as we do.

Kevin Tang & Madeleine Norris

Editors in Chief

Preeyal Patel

Art Director

Danielle Crabtree

Literary Director

Cara Mergner

Production Director

Submission Information

Inside Out is a presentation of artwork, photography, short stories, poems and essays that is published annually. All full-time and part-time Jefferson students are welcome to submit work and to apply to serve on the magazine's editorial board. Submissions may be emailed to Dorissa.Bolinski@jefferson.edu. Photographic submissions should be saved as a .jpeg file using the highest resolution possible. Artwork should be photographed from a direct angle, without glare or visible background, and saved in the same manner as photographs. Artists who submit non-photographic material will be given the opportunity to have their accepted pieces professionally photographed by a Jefferson photographer in order to assure the best presentation in the printed magazine.

All submissions will be reviewed anonymously; not all submissions will be printed. Please note that entries will be judged as submitted; *Inside Out* will not crop, sharpen or otherwise adjust an improperly-saved graphic submission.

Manuscripts (prose, poetry, translations, short plays, etc.) should be submitted in a Word-compatible document, and saved under the name of the piece (or "untitled," if applicable).

All submissions must be accompanied by a separate cover letter document containing the following:

- Author's or artist's name
- Email address and local phone number
- College, department or undergraduate program and year in school
- Genre/medium and title of each submission

View the online version of *Inside Out* at:

jefferson.edu/university/campus-life/inside-out.html

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Untitled Constellations

Kevin Tang

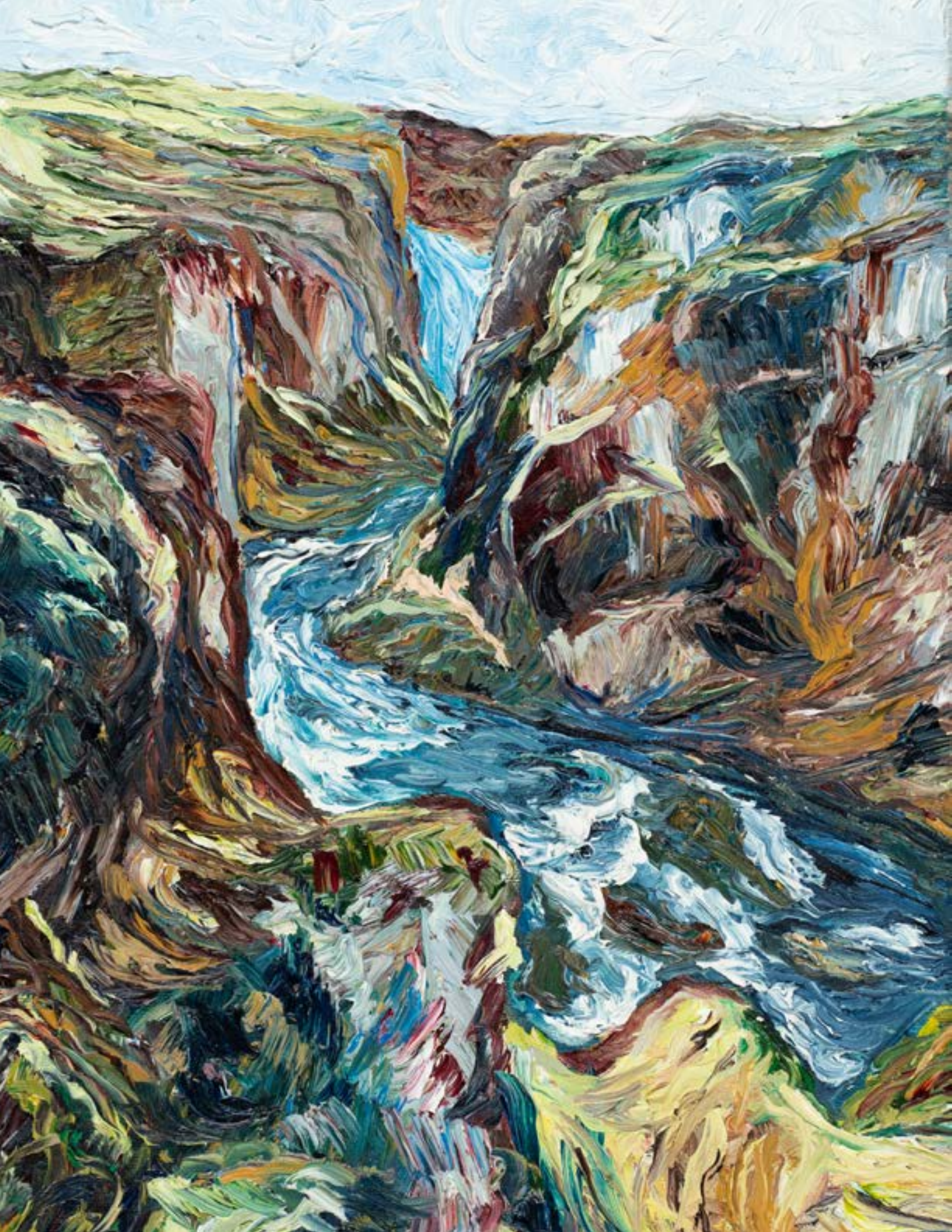
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Desire
Daisy Zhang
Acrylic on canvas



Fish Tails

Sean Considine

It was the first time we went fly fishing
where I didn't get tangled in the cattails
and make you spend half the day
unravelling my mistakes.

Careful not to stick myself,
I laced the *Quasimodo Pheasant Tail*
to the end of the line—
you called it the "trout whisperer,"
sure to hook a keeper.

The fly touched lips with the water like
a first kiss with too much tongue,
and as I clumsily lured it back
the line tugged under the glassy stream.

10 inches, big enough to take home.

Back at the dock there was the cleaning station—
water-logged wood, covered in entrails and blood.
Here, the flies fed on the fish.

Under the cleaning station,
a bucket was filled
with fish heads, connected by straw-
like spines, to fish tails

"You catch it, you clean it," you chuckled at me.

And as I slit through that cerise belly,
up the golden-green gills
that glistened like an oil spill,
you were surprised at how much I liked it.

Opposite page:
The Cliffs
Kevin Tang
Oil

moratorium.

Harnoor Kaur

"ooh, I wanna put this cric in."
eyes flicker from computer screen
to phone as he, slumped forward in his
chair, suddenly jumps up and I stuff my granola
bar remnants into my scrub pocket.
the entire team swims swiftly through
blank bare hushed hospital corridors.
in a place where the time of day often cannot
be identified amongst the guise of windowless
walls and fluorescent lights, somehow the night
still carries a standstill. we wade into a room with
waves of people undulating over a static body
suspended in some unknown position between
life and death. A moratorium.

one wide-eyed medical student, two hands
pushing on a chest for the first time, three surgical
residents slicing the neck, four nurses at the feet. countless
waves of people, in and out, thrashing at this patient's
shore in an attempted revival.
"those aren't real compressions."
I look at his face and shudder at the
lack of perfusion, the excess of vomit.
trying not to choke on my nausea or failure,
I shove the heels of my hands into his chest
as his body flaps against the bathroom floor.
the wave recedes. Defibrillation. A moratorium.

someone else dives in, thank god
and I wade into the background, gasping for
relief, trying to push away my embarrassment, my terror,
as everyone else fights the impending tide.
"he was supposed to be discharged tomorrow."
"I thought psych said he was doing better."
"she found a syringe in his arm."
"he mumbled earlier that he was thankful."

they throw anchor after anchor, but the sodden shore
would not hold. the tide's tug tightens.
"Time of death. Two-oh-seven."
A moratorium.



Fisherman's Nook
Boglarka Jordan

Cain and Abel

Sean Considine

It's eight in the morning—
on our rickety porch
I find a half-drunk bottle of Old Grand-Dad
and a half-full spittoon of Copenhagen—
that's late for this.

I walk into the field
as the sky grays,
and find you among the flock,
preparing to shear the ewes where they graze.

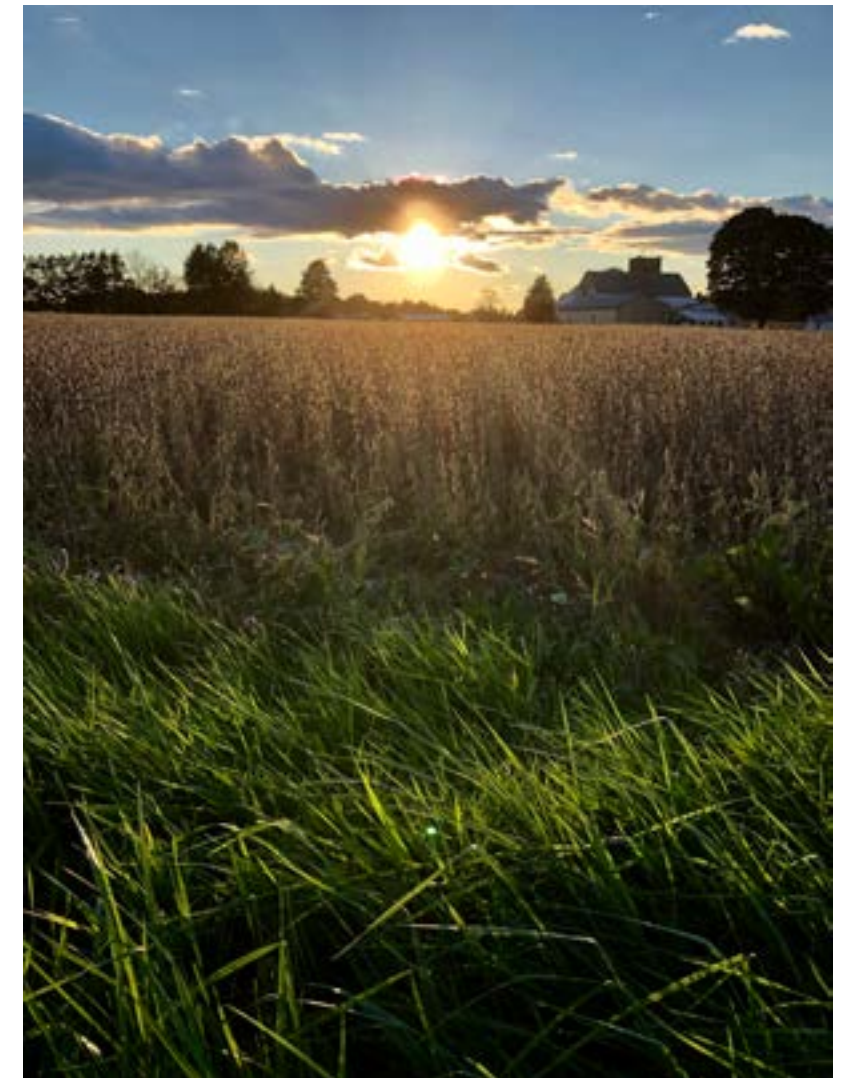
Morning dew baked with cow-pies and piss,
a gnatty cloud encircles the sheep.
You tell me to grab the one at my hip.
I do.

Here, alongside the cane breaks,
my damp jeans covered in clumps of wool,
I wonder if I would be able to kill you.

You wouldn't be heard over the bleating.
There wouldn't be mourning.

Your eye locks with mine and
I see that you want me to.
But your genes are my genes
and it takes the two of us
to keep the helix together.

I look down and keep the shears
to the back of the animal.



Sunset Outside Philly
Cara Mergner



Daughterhood

Danielle Crabtree

I was made from my mother's rib:
clay dust pressed into crisp bone.
Her small body carried me until her sternum bent,
and I tumbled slimy new from her chest.

Tonight, I kneel at her worn
feet, and cup my hands as buckets
to catch hot tears, cradle
deep handprint bruises along the frayed cracks
in her side.

I blow prayers and warm breath into her papery skin
and hope blooming lungs
will awaken her.

Tonight, I want my mother,
I want to be her mother.
I want to reach inside
and pull an eggshell rib
out through my navel
and hand it to her as an offering—
something to mold on the altar
untouched.

Opposite page:

Abstract Anatomy: Umbilical Cord

Jordyn Tumas

Acrylic and modeling clay on canvas

Al Kabsa

Sh'Rae Marshall

My mother soaks
a pinch of saffron
in warm milk.
She grounds
pieces of the Earth
into a powder.
cardamom,
cloves, black pepper,
nutmeg, and turmeric.
This is how
we remember
our land.

My mother
fries chicken
until the skin is golden brown.
She says
"I need the garlic"
and I step out of my body.

I watch as fingers
forget how to
peel off the outer layers.

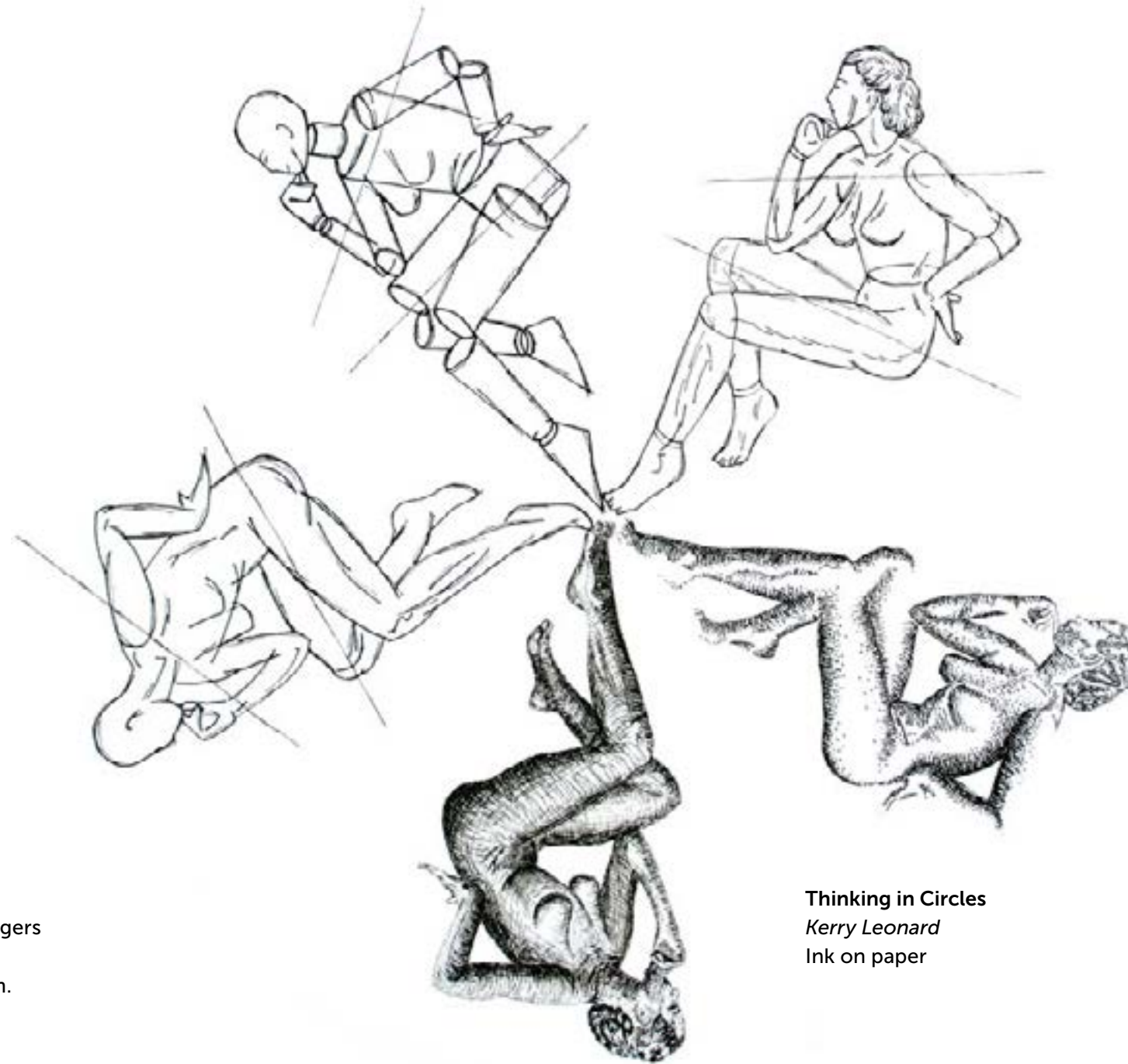
I watch a palm
that doesn't
press down on the garlic.

I watch my right hand
neglecting the knife,
refusing to chop.

I remember his fingers
peeling off
my school uniform.

I remember his palm
pressing my face
against his desk.

I remember the fingers of his right hand
entering my body,
stabbing me, collecting my blood.



Thinking in Circles

Kerry Leonard

Ink on paper

"he touched me."
I tell my mother.
she forgets to reply.
she forgets
how to grow her body
into a refuge.
she forgets
how to be a home.

she grabs the garlic
and hums.

This is how she reminds me
that it is safer
to be silent.
that offering my stories to a sea
will carry them farther
than my body ever could.

I am voiceless for 5 days.
I read poems
until there are no more
to seep into.
I cry on my bed
until it is tired
of hugging me.

I envelope my traumas
and mail them to
a version of myself
that is capable of healing.
I braid my hair.
I fix my hijab.
I politely decline the moon's invite to my funeral.

one day,
I will declare my freedom
by naming my ghosts.
one day,
I will breathe again.

Take a Turn

Benjamin Barnhart

These days tea is keeping me alive:
Tumbler on my bike, January ice.
Oil of bergamot to wake, mint to sleep
Deep brown dusks, early grey skies,
A tether to my force, a cared-for musk.
Stairs to the hot water, peaceful drips.
Two weeks unreel, consume and supply.
Resume ruts awry, grips a wound,
Rips to bleed, pinched to heal.
Tying the bag to the lip, I'm lost again:
The only place to be, not grounded or shy.
Mine the power Ouroboros. The threat of stability,
Continuity and dappled bliss. My computer screen
Swallows me again. The best thing I pray is
Goodbye to bad habits. Oumuamua, a blink
And suddenly pink rabbits. Another swing and miss.



Concussed
Rachel Blair
Acrylic

Consciousness

Daniela Fishbein

Watercolor



Ooze

Andrew Lynch

Tiny busted blood vessels
Overworked little windkessels
Ooze your contents outward.

Ferment your spillage
just beneath the surface
until the whole thing stinks of India Ink.

Hungry flies lurk magnetically
when the Honeycrisps slip—
when their slick skins rip—
when their pristine, plump whites fester
dissolved to a mucous-y mush
goo-ing over dark
and deathly brown
and syrupy sweet.



Symmetry
Erica Westlake

Peach
Anna Melnick

How dare you
Split my ass
Like it was your peach to bruise.

Was it my peach-colored dress
That gave you the idea
To turn me around up against the tree?

Like a fruit
Returning home to her bark,
But you can't reattach a fruit
Once its fallen.

Instead, she rots in her
Whiskey syrup,
The beer biting sharp
In your veins and on your breath.

Peach fuzz shaved smooth
Does not mean I say yes.

Perpendicular
Erica Westlake



Valentine's Day 2018
Rachel Werk

A day
Only meant to celebrate
Love
And
Peace
Filled with obnoxiously
Red and pink balloons
Enough chocolate
To turn everyone
Into diabetics,
Sappy posts on social media,
The candy aisle at target
Empty.
As I pass on the street,
Black smudges
On someone's forehead
Reminds me
Of humility
Respect
And tradition.
But also today
A parent is living out
An unspeakable nightmare
A spouse is
A child is.
Less than ten minutes of
A life
Has just pierced the next ten decades
Horrified
Disgusted
Outraged
Powerless.

Philosopher's Walk
Stephanie Beldick
Watercolor on paper



A Mother's Love
Samantha Chong

A mother's love was never measured by physical proximity.
it is every cell underneath your skin
every breath you take
the weight that keeps your feet on the ground
and all the beautiful things
that have yet to happen to you in life.

–Heaven is so lucky to have you.

Plato
Roy Kim

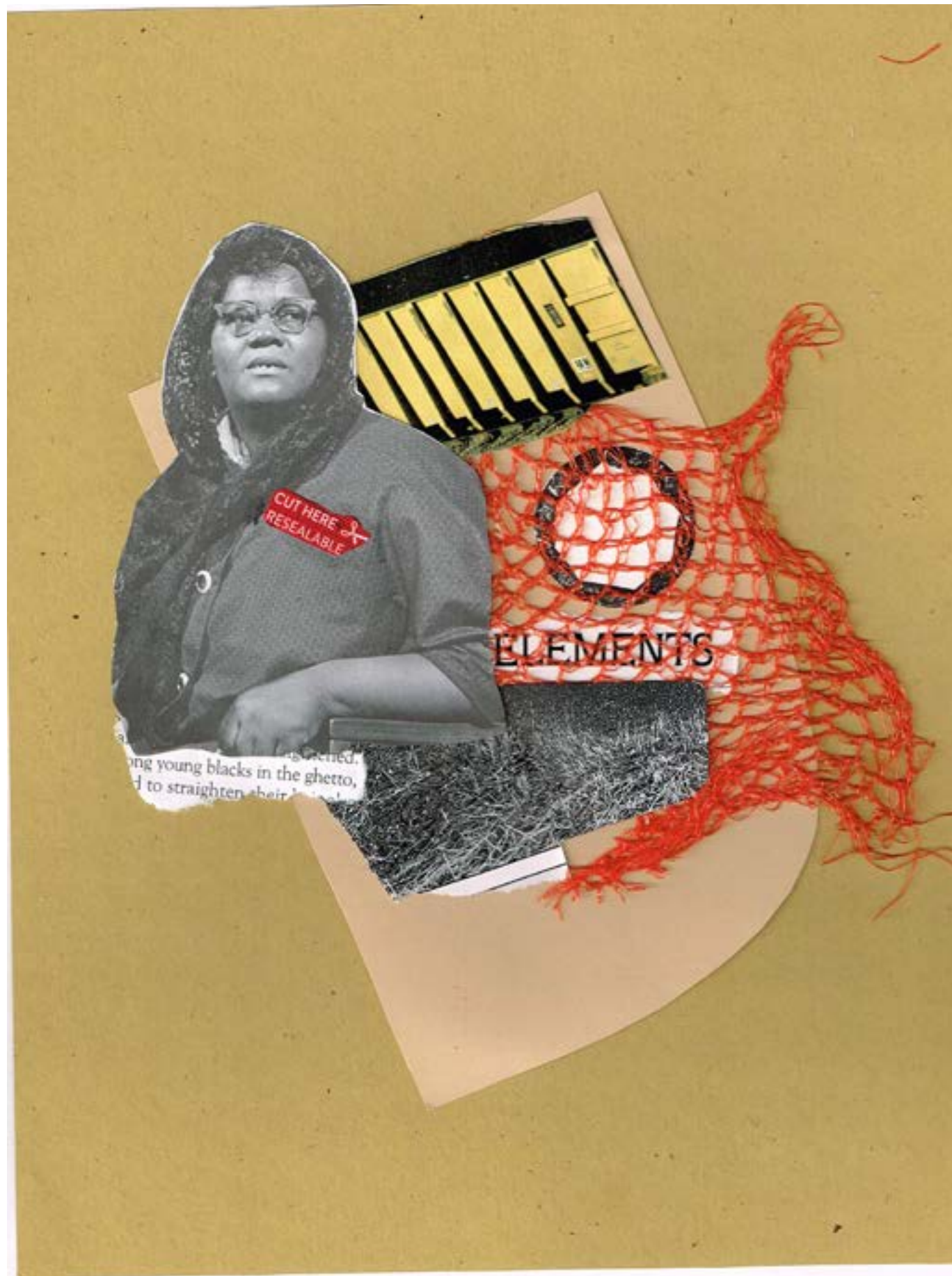
We can get out of this cave
Follow the sounds of the waves
Imagine how far we can sail
And our day of return with tales
Let us enlighten the cave we call home
As we cherish the days we used to roam
So that people will seek for sight
Of the world beyond that old light

Let us dedicate our youth
To the ardor search for truth
But remember those left behind
Who also tried but could not find
The exit from this comfortable cave
And long forgot the sounding of the waves
They are the ones we have to teach
In order for our sons to reach

Some better place closer to the sun
Where justice and order can be done



20/20
Stephanie Honig
Charcoal



Resilience
Tariro Mupaso
Collage

What once was water

Sh'Rae Marshall

there are some days you forget to be soft
there are some nights you choose to worship
the transience of another
man's skin
on other nights,
there is a light that refuses to flicker
you call this survival

there are some days you lie under a burning tree,
there are some nights you dance to
the summer of
1994
on other nights,
your fingers trace the bite marks of beasts who loved you
you call this a blessing

there are some days you settle for fake flowers
there are some nights you fold
your lips into
a coffin
on other nights,
your breath is enough to turn dirt into soil
you call this a healing

and isn't this a healing – an elegy for those deserving of peace



Seated Nude
Chen Zhou
Oil on canvas



To Be Invincible
Danielle Crabtree

it's morning and you,
you are beautiful.
you crawl out from beneath the crook of Sleep's winged elbow
and Day hasn't yet touched your face.
the tears from last Night's every emotion crust
in the corners of your eyes
and they look like crystals
that i would set in silver
and wear as a necklace.

lips: wet, raw with naïveté
and the harsh question mark shapes
of your eyebrows and ears soften.

your dark eyelashes were made to comb beaches,
to pick up long algae and jellyfish remnants
as you chase the waves into the ocean
and they chase you back out—
collecting everything you left behind.
you carved your name into the sand
so that a sea foam-ridden Wave would gather
you into Her arms and take you everywhere She went.
when those lashes flutter awake
my heart skips a beat in anticipation of your eyes.

you lift your cheek off the pillow and it's caked
in red designs so I can see the fragments of your dreams.
cowlicks stick in all directions
and it reminds me of how you must have looked when you were six.
before your mom would've poured cold water onto your unruly hair
and you, holding a cereal spoon in your fist,
choking down lucky charms,
grinning with marshmallows in your teeth
about the crisp air from the open window
whipping at your flannel sleeper.

and me, remembering last Night's dream,
of sprinting down a highway,
racing a Sunbeam to the beginning of a dirt road.

Elephant
Zoe McWatters
Pen and ink

Looking for Your Face

Emily Bucher

At first I saw you
in the eyes of strangers
Anyone, really
Eyes big enough, brown enough
Then your smile broke through
on the lips of others
Those daring enough to smile at me

Soon enough your whole face
Was on the bodies of strangers
Every block
Every corner
Every street

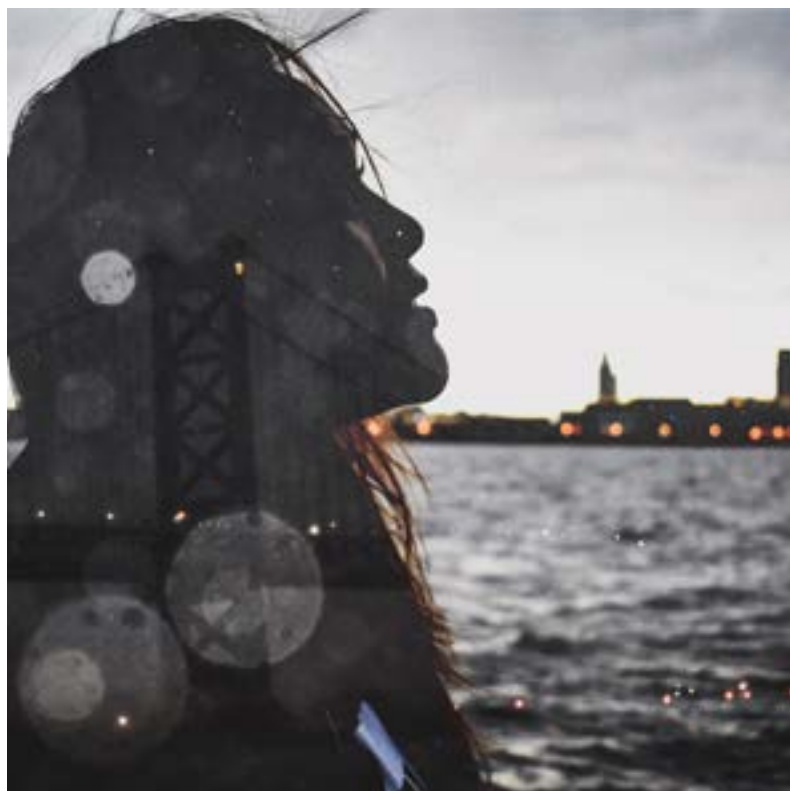
Eventually i was making your nose
Out of grooves on the trees in the park
Your feet sprung up
Out of cracks in the sidewalk
The telephone wires
tangled to become your hands
Whose touch i knew all too well

Then one day the city became man
A man who looked like you
As if god had sculpted you
From dirt and skyscraper and the sleeping bags of the homeless
And bathed you in his exhale to give you life

The city stood and got up
And It left a cleft in the earth
It shook itself of the dirt
It wrung out its spine
It had your hair
Your dimples
The freckle on your neck

The city stood up
And it trudged away.

She lives in the city, but the city also lives in her
My Nguyen



Layover in Zürich Lake
Rechal Siteng Lou

Sun-slug

Andrew Lynch

You,
you're a sunbeam.

If I could, I'd have you scorch me--
all red and blisters.
Chaise lounge on white concrete.
Aluminum reflectors and coconut oil.

Clouds in the forecast, fine, but come on.
Who trusts a weatherman?

Well here I am: slimy and shivering, slug-like.
The homey glow calls me in,
but my eyes
won't stop scanning the underbelly
for cracks.



Monochrome
Daisy Zhang
Acrylic on canvas

Falling Water
Emily Bucher

We had walked thirteen miles to the edge of a cliff where the breeze met the hurtling, falling water. Not to jump, not to photograph it, but to let the mist land on our skin and stand there with a film of the river on us for a few moments. It was one of those evenings in July where the night takes its time, the moon sharing the sky with the sun for a few hours—both a mistress to the stars but not at all minding one another's presence. We made our way to the very end of the rock, beneath our feet a drop to nothingness until a shallow pool of certain death punctuated the air. We hesitated—not because we wished to die—but because right there, at the border between existence and nonexistence we felt we had all the possibility in the world. So we stood there and turned our faces downward as we spat laughter down the walls of the the cliff until it splashed on the surface of the water.

Hours later we found ourselves in a juice bar off the highway, drinking sugared ice out of thick straws, tongues so cold we couldn't speak of the intimacy of our day at the mouth of the river.

I wait.
Kanika Ramchandani

Measure the length of the sun's shadow
The height of the tide
The phases of the moon
How long until the ice melts?
Will the flowers bloom?
The birds sing early morning songs
Become day songs
Night songs
How long before her hair makes braids
Thick, rose smelling
Coconut oil slicked braids
Count the hours it takes
By foot, by sea, by sky
Until you return home
Or until home returns to you

Nordic Heights
Boglarka Jordan



Wolverine Skull
Zoe McWatters
Charcoal



Cowtown, New Jersey
Sean Considine

The flea market still pitches up on Tuesdays,
rising slowly with the smell of wet grass,
and sun-baked cow-pies.

Only a few of the original venders are left—
with their army surplus, hardware,
and canvas coveralls
taken over by knockoff watches and purses
sold to wannabe cowboys,
whose boots haven't seen hard work,
haven't scuffed from a square-dance.

Dad still talks about it with a smile—
about getting on tip-toes to see the livestock
brought for auction from the old Italian farmers.
It almost makes you forget
the garbage it's become.

A mile down the road a billboard shouts,
"The Oldest Weekly Rodeo in the USA!"
Every Saturday in the summer, rain or shine.
Steers, and beers and bucking broncs,
"Daisy Dukes" and cowboy boots
all move to the sound of that faux-country twang.

A boy died there two years back—
his horse kicked him off and crushed his skull.
The sound was the worst part, they said,
like a watermelon hitting concrete.

But the tents are still pitched,
the music still plays,
the brave and reckless still grip tightly
to the back of the beasts,
because Cowtown,
like my father's nostalgic grin,
or the piss-drunk rodeo clown
taunting a flailing animal,
looks best when you just don't think about it.

Pike Place
Matthew Beucherie



Donne Quixote
Anonymous

Donne said no man is an island, but he knew not
Of the Pearl-Qatar or the Palm Dubai,
For now man can make his own island,
And an island of his own.

This island raised with ease,
Isolated and distant from continents that are
More friend than foe but that matters not,
For the island is afeared.

Not for itself but for others,
An island birthed from a volcano is only dormant so long,
It shan't risk accosting the continents and its residents,
As Vesuvius did Pompei.

So let a clod be washed away, then another,
Let the island be diminished,
Apart from Mankind,
Where they be protected.

For if the bell must toll,
Let it toll but for me.



Food for Thought
Alison DePew
Colored pencil

the easy sport
Cara Mergner

jumping, leaping through the air,
adrenaline pumping without a care.
flipping, soaring, twisting high,
never asking how or why.

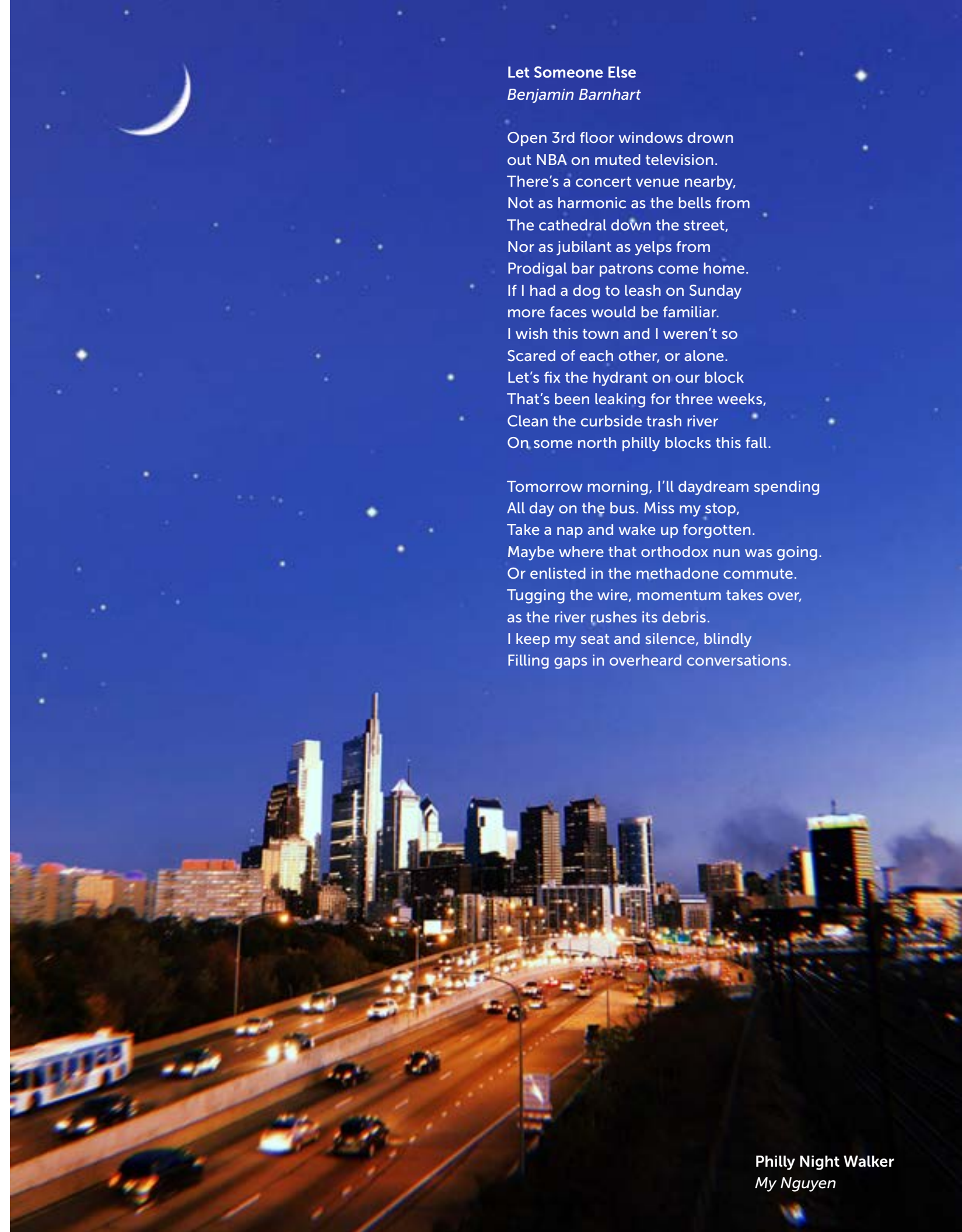
like how i make it back to earth
sliding through the watery turf,
and why my head can slam so hard
to initiate a glass-like shard.

in my head i know i should stop
or take a break when i flop.

my body aches and begs me no,
this can't be safe you have to go.
when athletes are warriors i can't show

i'm weak.
wounded.
feeling slow.

so i'll shuffle to class because i must,
not sure i'll remember what the professor discussed,
i fear once again i've been concussed.



Let Someone Else
Benjamin Barnhart

Open 3rd floor windows drown
out NBA on muted television.
There's a concert venue nearby,
Not as harmonic as the bells from
The cathedral down the street,
Nor as jubilant as yelps from
Prodigal bar patrons come home.
If I had a dog to leash on Sunday
more faces would be familiar.
I wish this town and I weren't so
Scared of each other, or alone.
Let's fix the hydrant on our block
That's been leaking for three weeks,
Clean the curbside trash river
On some north philly blocks this fall.

Tomorrow morning, I'll daydream spending
All day on the bus. Miss my stop,
Take a nap and wake up forgotten.
Maybe where that orthodox nun was going.
Or enlisted in the methadone commute.
Tugging the wire, momentum takes over,
as the river rushes its debris.
I keep my seat and silence, blindly
Filling gaps in overheard conversations.

Philly Night Walker
My Nguyen

A Missed Date

Timothy Kuchera

Mary's admission was abrupt and unexpected. She was 69 years old and had been otherwise healthy until she presented with two weeks of fevers and fatigue. On admission, she was found to be pancytopenic, and a bone marrow biopsy was performed. Shortly thereafter, Mary was diagnosed with Hemophagocytic Lymphohistiocytosis, also known as HLH, in addition to a very rare T-cell lymphoma. HLH is an aggressive and life-threatening syndrome of excessive immune activation. A diagnosis with HLH can drastically cut life expectancy. Mary's dual diagnoses of HLH with T-cell Lymphoma reduced her life expectancy to one to two months. Despite the overwhelming odds, like any family struck with this sudden news, Mary and her family were hopeful that prompt treatment would alter the course of her illness and reach a cure.

In spite of her grave prognosis, I was struck by the life and energy that Mary exuded. Even at the age of 69 with multiple organ failure, she would greet me every morning with an energetic, "GOOD MORNING, BABY!" She constantly joked with the nurses, residents, and attending physicians. She was a favorite patient among staff. Everyone was pulling for her. One morning out of the blue, Mary asked me where I was taking her on our first date. Completely caught off guard I sputtered, "Well, where do you want to go?" "I don't know!" She shot back, "But if it ain't somewhere nice, you and me are through!" When my attending heard about this, she stated that Mary had the worst case of steroid-induced psychosis she had ever seen.



It seemed Mary's spirit could not be extinguished. Diagnosed with HLH? Bring it on. Lymphoma? Whatever. GI bleed? Flirt with the GI fellow. One morning, a rapid response was called for syncope. By the time I arrived, she recovered and was cracking jokes with the residents and nursing staff. In even the most desperate of times, she maintained her enthusiasm and lightheartedness.

Unfortunately, this story ends the way you probably expected. One morning, Mary was transferred to the ICU for emergent dialysis. From there on, her clinical course took a precipitous turn. The HLH, lymphoma, GI bleed, UTI, pneumonia, liver failure, and kidney failure compounded, and Mary and her family decided that they had enough. For four weeks, Mary was poked, prodded, biopsied, imaged, dialyzed, and filled with cytotoxic chemicals. A mutual decision was made to pursue comfort measures and have Mary spend her final days in the company of her family. Coincidentally, this decision came on the final day of my oncology rotation. I had not seen Mary since her transfer to the ICU and when I stepped into her room I barely recognized her. The previously raucous, animated, jubilant Mary now lay cachectic and motionless in her hospital bed. I stumbled over my words as I filled the silence with superficial conversation. I began to experience overwhelming feelings of loss and despair as I realized our time was short. I missed the energetic person I had come to know and care for one month prior. If I could just see her laugh, I thought, maybe everything would be okay. I asked, "Mary, where are we going on our date?" What I hoped for was a quip. What I hoped was for Mary to spring back to life. Instead, I got something much different. She slowly shifted her gaze to mine, pointed at the sky and whispered, "In Heaven." I attempted to collect myself and managed to choke out, "Well you better pick somewhere good!" "Don't worry," she said. "I'll have plenty of time."

Castle

My Nguyen

Remedy

Rhianna Hibbler

I come into your room
From that Halloween morning
While you're contracting
And I place my cold hand
On the back of your neck
And you sigh *thank you*
So we wait, talk, and breathe
Hours later the doctor is called
When he cuts you sound like cardboard
But the baby is born
Salad tongs around skull
During our postpartum visit
You say this healing
Hurts more than your C-section
And I don't know how to help

I come into your room
After we learn you are dying
Your brother is visiting
He tells me your stories
Over the next five days
As we wait
For the rest of your body to fail
I know who you were
Before you were racking gasps
Dry maw and moans
So I breathe with you
As I have with mothers
And it may be chance
But it seems to help

I come into your room
With nylon strings
And ask if you like Neil Young
My youth feels insulting
As I sing about wanting to live
And getting old
Because what can I know
About those matters
While your cells pay no mind
To your will
Your young daughter leans closer
Poisons and potions pumping
Monitors like metronomes
I hear you sing along
And you say it helps

I wonder if there is room
A quiet space to reside
As a person
With a person
Minute moments
Helping us both just be

Figure Study

Chen Zhou

Oil on canvas



Caput Medusae
Sean Conside

I shuffle through the portal,
my eye's cling
-ing to iodine-stained linoleum,
trying not to look up
but knowing I will eventually have to.

No need to see if the myth is true.

A woman sits by the bed.
His ex-wife I imagine
because any attempt at sympathy
has yielded itself to indifference
and her stone-cold glare.
That, and no wedding ring.

Except for the brown-filled catheter bag,
everything is yellow—
yellow floor
yellow shirt-stains
yellow eyes
yellow teeth
yellow belly.

A potpourri
of his last cigarette
mixed with bile and booze
climb the hairs in my nose
as I place an IV.

Together, the woman and I watch
the serpents slither around his navel
and up his neck,
trying to find their way out.

It won't be long now.
She knows it,
and her relief is palpable.
She's the Perseus of Room 17,
having conquered the gorgon
that will eventually turn this poor bastard
to stone.



Unknown
Kaitlyn Dykes
Acrylic



Chilly
Kerry Leonard
Charcoal and white pastel on toned paper

CXR: Solitary Fibrous Tumor
David Ney

Don't just stand there,
Do something.
Better is good,
Is better
than nothing.

The pattern
is; there is no pattern.

The pieces
that were him
in stark contrast.

Now only in lights
Racing apart never
To be put
Back together.

How finding a therapist is like trying to keep a succulent alive

Anya Platt

Step 1: come to terms with the fact that you need some color in your life.

You're gifted a little green guy, or you feel fancy one day and buy a potted fella at the farmer's market. Maybe an aunt gives one to you, or a coworker has extras. You can't resist that little ceramic tub, just bigger than a thimble.

It takes you a while to realize you're sad. You tell your friends they should see therapists, make the "you don't have to be sick to get help" plug, but the hurdle for you is high. You stay in your discomfort zone a while longer. Then, it gets to be too much, and the scale tips. It suddenly feels urgent, like your friends' advice, once sage, is dried up soil and you need a good watering.

Step 2: plant the idea and stare at it for a good long time.

There it is, this fresh budding babe on your windowsill. You stare at it all the time. You feed it water, just a few drops, reciting "not too much" in your virgin plant-brain. You feel compelled to take a close-up photograph of the little globe of dew that stays suspended on the leaf, jiggling, intense, serene. You think about your plant often, how it takes your bedroom to the next level. It looks good next to the woman on your wall, her legs spread.

The weight on your chest lessens when you remind yourself that there are steps forward, then your breath catches and drags a bit as you take those first steps. Your mind shuts off when you start planning. It tends to shut off. And still, you can't stop thinking about needing someone to talk to, someone who might solve the problems that clutter you like the silvery moths that just won't leave your closet.



Day at the Sketch Club
Chen Zhou
Oil on canvas



Appearance
Kerry Leonard
Oil on canvas, collage

Step 3: the sun is gone.

The leaves are screaming for sun, wishing they could grow limbs and part the fog, crawl closer to the warmth.

You are screaming, for sun, for sun.

Step 4: you learn that succulents live hard, and you try to believe it.

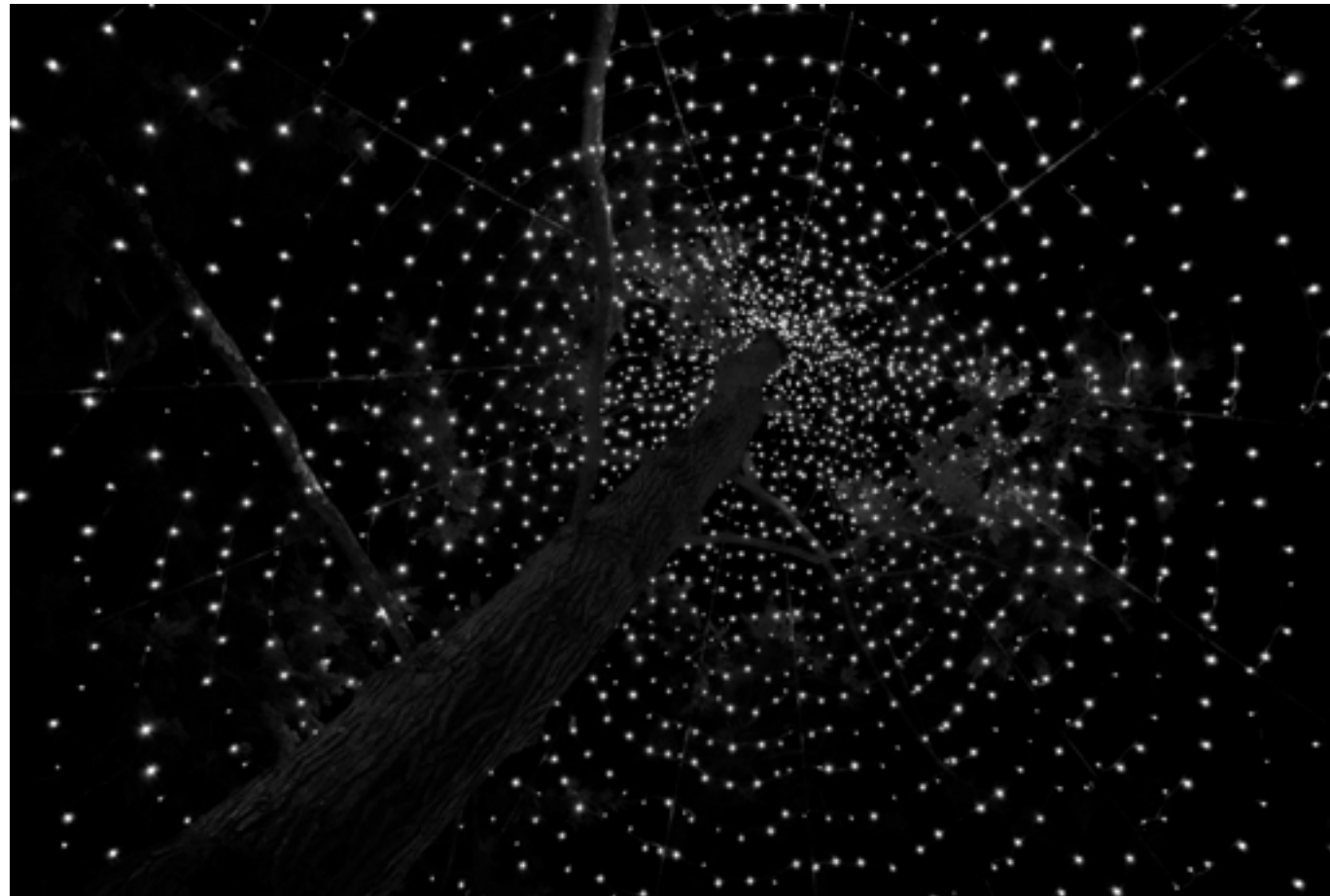
The routine comes easier than you thought it would. Sometimes, you're eager to water even though it's not quite time, like that urge to chew another gummy vitamin when you've already had your two for the day. Your little buddy forgives the weeks you forget, and you read online that crumpled leaves are part of its lifecycle.

You march into her cozy, highly decorated office space, spot the airplant in the corner. She sits cross-legged; you can't help but notice that her skirt doesn't fully cover her thighs; you grow embarrassed as her underwear peeks through. Breath after shaky breath, you begin your story from nowhere and everywhere, somehow intensely distracted by not knowing where to put your hands. You grab a pillow, squeeze it.

You sit there, trying not to cry, that shifty, weighty feeling crowding your chest. Of course, you're weary that too much water will kill the plant.

Next steps:

Looks like your little guy is on his last legs. You email the therapist because you can tell she isn't quite right for you. The shifty-weighty feeling shouldn't be there still. You consider the freeness of some future day, where you might pay the farmer's market a visit or complete another intake form. You find comfort in the crisp dryness of the now dead leaves.



Spiderweb of Lights
Erica Westlake

MASK
Brittany File

Moonlit crows croon to celestial skies
Mocking the worth of the motionless man
Mercilessly waiting, they sneer as he cries
Muscles melt from his bones; on boughs they plan

Averting his gaze, she struggles to see
An actor behind the smile that shines
Armor falls to floor as truth makes a plea
Air escapes words as apprehension unwinds

Strangled from inside he struggles for air
Sinister reaper awaits his last breath
Seeing her tears almost too much to bear
Shadows creep to his bedside smelling of death

Knuckles stiffly clenched grasping for vigor
Kidnapped from life, ALS pulls the trigger

For Someday
Ashley Foreman

Take photographs
with an old camera.
Smell the plastic and the burn
as the film rolls it's chemic paint
brush into your hands.
Take the table for one by the window
and drink warm coffees with extra cream
and watch as the foreign men
light their cigarettes and drag their silhouette
strings behind women in dresses.
And smile because the polarity is raw
and beautiful when they don't feel watched,
when they don't feel they are holding power
but chasing it.
Swan dive into head spins
of amber sands and crowds
of sweat and heartbeats.
Taste the salts of different skins.
Know your own. Embrace
the curls at the back of your neck
that the salinity and shine bring out in the afternoon.
Dance the ribbon spectrum of your bloodied
skin from flush to blanch. Write often.
Postcards stamp adventure and promise
more than anything I know. Address them to yourself
so you remember when the bays no longer
swallow you in blue, when the cobblestones
and quaint crooked streets don't trick
your sandals into grooves, when you sit
by a window at the end of your life and
look for times when you were not another face
huddled around a birthday cake or an alter
or a hospital bed. You were the principle of a famished
woman that stood on worlds outstretched
and catalogued faithfully. This alone will feed you.
This will bring you home.

Philly Love
Reinardus Chindian



Heat
Emily Bucher

So this is how we warm the air on the coldest day of winter:

We walk to the pulse of our own heartbeats.
Sighing,
with length and with purpose,
To see what will become of our breath
When kissed by the cold.

Puffs of cigarette smoke,
cold on the inhale,
Sweet and hot on the exhale,
The stale honey of its scent dancing
With the buttery fragrance of olives that slipped from
The cutting boards of the Mediterranean restaurant nearby,
pushed out in a gust of hot air
from the laundry vents where they washed the
Linens from the night before—

The imprint of a stifled laugh in peony lipstick on a napkin,
Red splatters of sauce from a meal shared by two,
the spoon waltzing its way between hands, across the table,
Into mouths all night long.

Outside we warmed the air with the heat of our complaints
to the person on the other end of the phone
Risking the tips of our fingers and exposed flesh to
Shout our curses at Mother Nature
As taxis pass by, sloshing up sleet

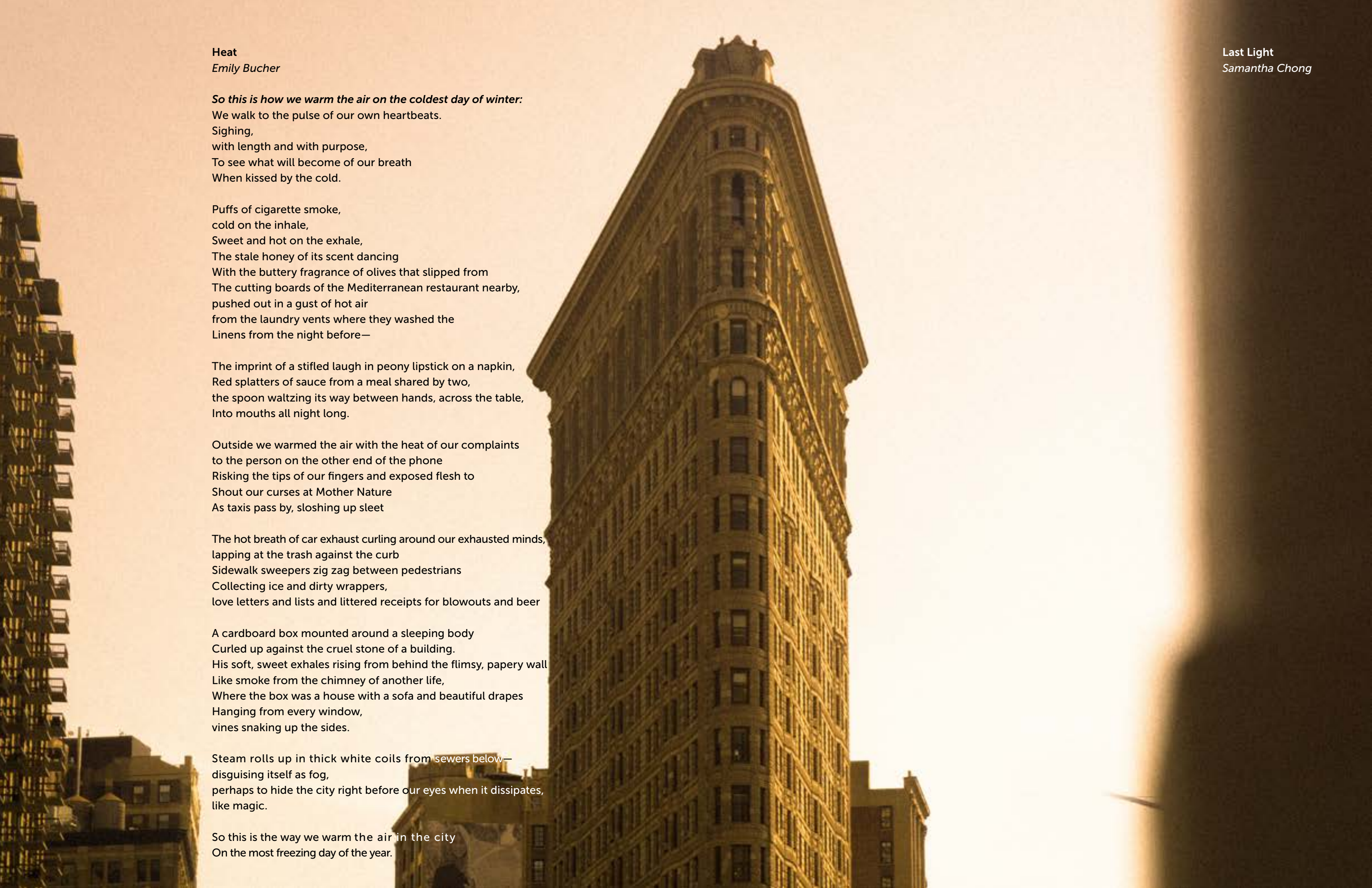
The hot breath of car exhaust curling around our exhausted minds,
lapping at the trash against the curb
Sidewalk sweepers zig zag between pedestrians
Collecting ice and dirty wrappers,
love letters and lists and littered receipts for blowouts and beer

A cardboard box mounted around a sleeping body
Curled up against the cruel stone of a building.
His soft, sweet exhales rising from behind the flimsy, papery wall
Like smoke from the chimney of another life,
Where the box was a house with a sofa and beautiful drapes
Hanging from every window,
vines snaking up the sides.

Steam rolls up in thick white coils from sewers below—
disguising itself as fog,
perhaps to hide the city right before our eyes when it dissipates,
like magic.

So this is the way we warm the air in the city
On the most freezing day of the year.

Last Light
Samantha Chong





Checkmate
Preeyal Patel
Acrylic and ink

Artichoke Hearts

Emily Bucher

Today we had a good day
All smiles when he shuffled to the door
Dark green checkered slippers
Thick grey coils of hair, every single which way you could name
Laugh lines of echos from a pebble into a deep lake

He played with the ceiling fan
With the furnace in the basement
Like they were some kind of chore
Some kind of toy
Some thing, anything to keep himself busy
Some times I wonder if he knows he's slipping

He sat down to tell me a story about vegetables
Artichokes, specifically
Lot space- that was the deal
Lot space for their trucks in exchange for any kind of vegetable he could get his hands on
And that day, it was artichokes

Fourteen artichokes
That's a lot, even for a young working boy
But they stuffed them anyway, Aunt Connie and Aunt Dolly
I can imagine them in the kitchen for hours
Breadcrumbs up to their forearms
Hair swept back, necks bent back, throats choked with laughter

"The heart's the best part you know, the core, it's the softest"
Yeah, I know, Pop
Sometimes I wonder if he knows he's slipping
He must
But on days like today it's better
That core, that soft spot is there and its real
And it's easier to pretend he's not

Mushrooms
Zoe McWatters
Pen and ink





Valuable
Tariro Mupaso
Collage

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