

Sidelines

2020

Literary & Art Magazine

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Simmons University Literary & Art Magazine

Fall 2020 Edition

A word after a word after
a word is **power**.

— Margaret Atwood



Simmons University
300 The Fenway
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Sidelines

Simmons University Literary & Art Magazine

Editor-in-Chief Sara Getman

Prose Editor Kirby Assaf

Poetry Editor Kayla Safford

Art Director Haley Rosenthal

Layout Designer Bridget Fong

Assistant Editors Lucy Lawrence

Grace Weinberg

Olivia Bozuhoski

Elena Stratoberdha

Chloe Crelia

Paula Espinoza

Advisor Richard Wollman

Cover Art Kaylin Wu

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Behind the Picket Fence

by CaSandra Masters

I'm coming home, sweet Urbana,
where rows of gold stand
on tall, green pedestals.
Yellow walls welcome me in.
The floral print sofa embraces me.
I sink into the clutches of the house.

There are no skeletons in the closet-
they're buried in the backyard
surrounded by titanium white fences.
Kentucky bluegrass hugs their naked bones.
They still converse, jaws filled with soil.
Poplars guard the yard's edge
from eavesdropping neighbors.

Grampa in the garden again
relentlessly tending to the roses.
The same sun that feeds them
scorches their leaves
until they're nothing but thorn.
He pricks his fingers.
Petals are painted with his blood.

Grandma scanning albums
with lightning in her eyes.
"So much death," she whispers, breathless.
She begs the Lord to answer why.
Arthritic fingers caress old photos
while she reads the obituaries

Cousin Liyah in the kitchen
baking hash cookies,
desire rich in her bloodshot eyes.
At sixteen, she's already outlived her youth.
Turns out the stars may just be
the glistening tears of angels.

Loon

by Hannah Rice



Reds

by Kaylin Wu



Waking Up First

by Lucy Lawrence

Sunlight creeps softly through the slats in your blinds,
and tiptoes across your floor,
trying not to wake you up.

Your eyes stay closed
despite the gentle flickering of Sunlight
between your eyelashes.

I watch for a minute more from the warmth and
comfort of bed, as Sunlight flirts with your floorboards,
and dances around your dream catcher.

Tentatively, I stretch my toe out,
dipping it into the soft pool of Sunlight
who has leaked onto the floor from the window.

The rest of my body follows
and I slip into that little pool,
from one warmth to another.

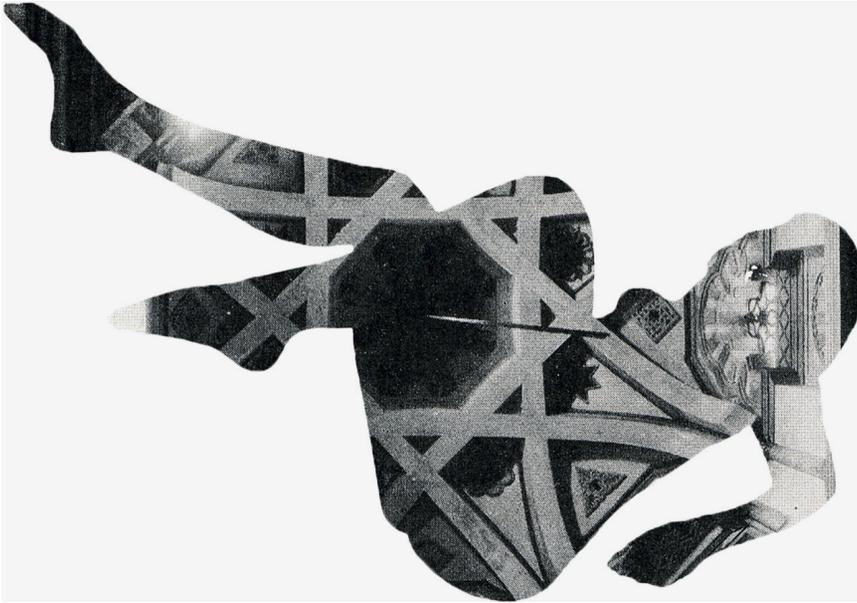
Sunrise

by Hannah Rice



Stygian

by Bonney Couper-Kiablick



Forbidden

by Megan Purser

Juicy-
this wanting.
Branched and ripe,
easy to take.

Wicked,
innocent, and twisted-
strangling desire
with deceitful fangs.

He and She,
ribbed and ravenous,
frenzied for taste
of this sweet sin.

Knowing
what could've been
now feeds our famine
for succumbing to temptation.

Under the Cover of the Sun

by Emma Mouradian, May 2019

Dear Self,

I hate being in NH. I don't know why your mom leaves all day or why mom just decides to get up and leave. it hurts so much when u feel like ur raising 6 kids at the age of 14. it really hurts because i feel like she just doesnt care about us and she says she preparing us for having kids. its fucking bullshit when all u need is ur mommy and shes fucking god knows where. i hate it in nh. i hate being absolutly stuck. if i could i would walk home. why do u think i like being winchester? its because i can walk to anywhere i wanted to. i know its totally cleeshay but i swear the minute i turn eighteen im off to london. better start saving now. i am going to U of O and become an amazing bestselling author. im going to get an accent and meet the guy of my dreams. Josh HUtchinson????????? i wish. i cant wait to drive and have the feeling that if i wanted to i could just pack and leave but thats 2 years away. i feel better now so im going to bed but feel free to reply when u feel like this again. u are truly made to be a writer :) Love Always, Emma (you can only really trust one person and thats urself)

* * *

My routine at the lake was the same each summer after middle school started. My days never began, or truly ended. When the sun was starting to break above the lake, clearing the cloudiness of the dawn, I was in the water. Swimming in circles around the small cove we had access to. I made my approach out of the water at about 5:30 each morning. The sound of nature was loud as I walked in silence up the gravel hill. The walk up the hill was tight between the two bounds my summers were

trapped between: the lake and the house. My pace quickened as I got closer to the house and I snuck back through the sliding glass door into the cool cottage. I slipped my bathing suit off in the bathroom. The soaking red one piece hit the floor with a slap. I ran the shower until it was warm and rinsed the lake off.

Over the running water I would hear the noises of my siblings and cousins awakening. The television was on. Curtis, at six-years-old was fighting for the remote. Gracie, my sister, also six, was opening and shutting cabinets in the kitchen scouring for food. And Ryan, the oldest, at seven, I could hear his spoon hitting the walls of a glass to mix the perfect chocolate milk. I knew as soon as I stepped out of the bathroom I would see the three "Minis" acting out their own domestic, like the Lost Boys in *Peter Pan*. I took a quick right with a towel wrapped around my body and moved into the quiet darkness of the room with the bed my mother, sister, and I shared. Gracie was already chugging her chocolate milk.

I put on a pair of running shorts and a camisole before curling up in the spot her small body had left warm and tried not to wake my mom. The two twin beds pushed together and covered with a king sized sheet barely held enough room for my mom and sister, never mind all three of us. It was part of the reason I spent my nights on the couch and in the lake. I tried not to touch my mom, she didn't like to be touched while she slept. My heart reached out to her, just inches away from me, even when my arms couldn't.

I stirred awake to the creak of the door opening.

"Emma. It's almost dinner time." I saw the silhouette of my mom in the doorway. Her voice was soft and hesitant. *Had she just gotten home? Was she about to leave?*

I felt groggy and disoriented. I grabbed my phone and checked if I had any messages.

There were none.

I walked out into the chaos of the living area of the cottage and saw the aftermath the Minis had left. I looked outside, there was only one car in the driveway. My mom and her twin, Liane, they were waiting for me to come to consciousness before disappearing. This is what they did. My mom woke me up as Liane sat in the idle car, ready to evacuate. Their thought was now that I was awake, they could go, and I could watch the Minis. I ate a bowl of cereal and found my book, John Green's *The Fault In Our Stars*, before setting off to look for my sister, Ryan, and Curtis. All born within 15 months of each other, Gracie, the youngest, was inseparable from my two little cousins.

I took a deep breath and walked out of the house. I was hit with the humid heat wave special to the lakes region of New Hampshire. Walking down the beach was a task that weighed heavy on my unproportioned chest. I stood at the top of the hill where I still remained unseen by the beach-goers below on the sand. I surveyed the area. Good, they were all at the regular table. Nothing out of the usual, all I had to do was put my head down and walk to the sand pile the Minis were occupying with shovels and pails. I didn't even have to go past *them*. Not yet.

This safe haven, this closed community in the oldest resort town in America kidnapped me and kept me under its wing of long, green branches. It was my mother's fault. Her dad bought the small red house, made it about three rooms bigger, and assigned weeks of allowed inhabitancy to each of his children. My mom, being the baby, has no boundaries to showing up and staying whenever she wanted. But, she was also the first to have children. As the oldest, I was duped into watching each of my six cousins and siblings all of the time. The other vacationers didn't understand my reluctant responsibility,

and they made that very clear by not wanting to spend time with me and my younger cousins and sister.

I stood in front of Grace, Ryan, and Curtis for an entire minute before they noticed me.

"You're awake!" Ryan yelled.

"Why do you sleep all day?" Curtis asked.

"Emma! Play with us!" Gracie begged.

I hushed them, my cheeks growing red. I could feel the heat in my face. I asked where the moms went. The dads were home, they made money while the moms retreated to the lake. I wished I was home, where I didn't have to keep track of them.

Without any notice, Ryan, Curtis, and Gracie ran to the dock with haste.

The sun was beginning to set on the lake. It was one of the best times of the day. The water was rough from the boats, but warm from the sun. The sun set in the most picturesque way every night. People were drawn out of their cottages to see the reds and pinks and oranges and yellows paint the once blue sky. At five o'clock you could hear the cannon go off; it was the dinner cannon for the YMCA camp across the island. The beach was quiet after a full day of kids running around and adults soaking up the sun with the teenagers lounged on the docks. An occasion I was only rarely privy to with my sleeping habits.

I made retreat to the boat. I longed to feel the safety under the warmth of the sun.

I went down the list in my head to count attendance of who I had to walk by. Teddy. Jake. Joey. Katie. Chris. Nicole. Alyssa. Noel. April. Ashley. Sam. Perhaps all of them were there. I put my head down again and walked past their table and leaped onto the dock. I used John Green to hide me from the Minis in hope they wouldn't follow me.

I rocked back and forth, back and forth. The waves coming to the shore slipped under the boat and set it into motion as I

laid there. The boat was my retreat where I would lay on the worn cushions and tuck my body away under a towel, as small as I could make myself. The sun was high in the sky in the late afternoon. I liked to have the towel on under the sun to create a cocoon of warmth. The kind of heat that when you start to sweat you feel comfort and relief. My body would mold itself into the curve of the bench, my thighs would stick to the leather as I started to sweat.

My book in hand would serve as a pillow when my eyes feel droopy from sway of being on the water. If I wasn't asleep or reading or writing, I looked up into the everlasting cloudless blue sky, the dock was close to a tree line and the tall green pines looked like skyscrapers from below. At this time the water would glisten with the reflection of the light. The tall pines cast the perfect shadow over our small part of the big lake.

I don't remember how many times in the summer of 2012 that I climbed into my grandfather's boat and pretended to be drifting far away, but those few months are clouded apart from the back and forth of the boat's sway. I didn't like to remember feeling inferior, or at odds with the other kids. I wanted to forget the way that made me feel like I wasn't myself anymore.

I had spent every summer in this suffocating community. There were two rows of seven red cottages, each one held a family I have known since I was born and now dread to see. My relationship with these boys and girls, some older, some younger, was forever changed with the sudden disappearance of innocent fun at the lake. Summers went from being about friendship bracelets, card games, and mussel hunting to getting tan, riding jet skis, and figuring out who had crushes on who. I suddenly was on the outside. I didn't look like them, I didn't have the bikinis or the jet-skis. I didn't sneak Mike's hard lemonade. I didn't go skinny dipping. And when they didn't notice that my presence was becoming less and less I retreated to the steady sway of the boat.

My hideaway was docked only a stone's throw from the cottages of those who I pretended not to know. But the peace of the boat was worth the awkward silence on the way.

After I watched the sunset from the boat, I made my way back up to the house. The television was on and the Minis were taking showers. Dinner was on the table. Spaghetti and meatballs. The moms probably went to my Mimi's to pick it up. My Mimi, their mom, lives just fifteen minutes down the road, but she was not one to babysit. *No*, that was *me*. I walked through the living room and into the kitchen. I grabbed a plate and loaded it up. As I sat eating MTV played in front of me. My mom was talking to me, I wasn't paying attention. *Where were you?* I wanted to ask. But, deep down, I didn't want to know. I didn't want her to know that I cared, because I knew it wouldn't change anything.

As it got later the Minis went to bed, and the moms soon followed suit. I went into my Grampy's vacant room and turned on the dinosaur desktop. He wasn't at the lake house on the weekdays, so I took full advantage of logging into my email and writing all my inner turmoil into an email that I would address to myself. Switching between writing, Tumblr, and fanfiction, I spent all hours of the night on the Internet praying for a higher power to remove me from that godforsaken place. When the dark turned to light, I put on my red suit hanging in the bathroom and walked confidently down to the lake. It was always a little cold at first, but I got used to it quickly. I watched the minos scatter at my disturbance at the water's edge. There were no waves, no wind, no boats. Just me, the fish, and the breaking dawn.

* * *

Rereading that email, seven years later, so much has changed. I can't help but laugh at all the mistakes I had made with spelling and grammar while at the same time saying that

I would be a writer. I can't help but be sad for the lonely girl at the desktop who was clearly upset, yet no one ever noticed. My mom never said anything about my drastic sleeping schedule or that fact that I didn't hang out with the other kids anymore. When I was little I resented her for having kids so young. She was pregnant for almost the entire year of being twenty-one. With my twenty-first birthday fast approaching, I respect her being brave enough to raise a child at this age.

At twenty-years-old, I have recognized the smell that always clung so intrinsically to my mother was weed. And after discovering that, pieces of my life started to make sense. I don't love her any less for smoking pot. In fact, it made me love her more. I became closer to her because of it; I was finally able to be a part of her world.

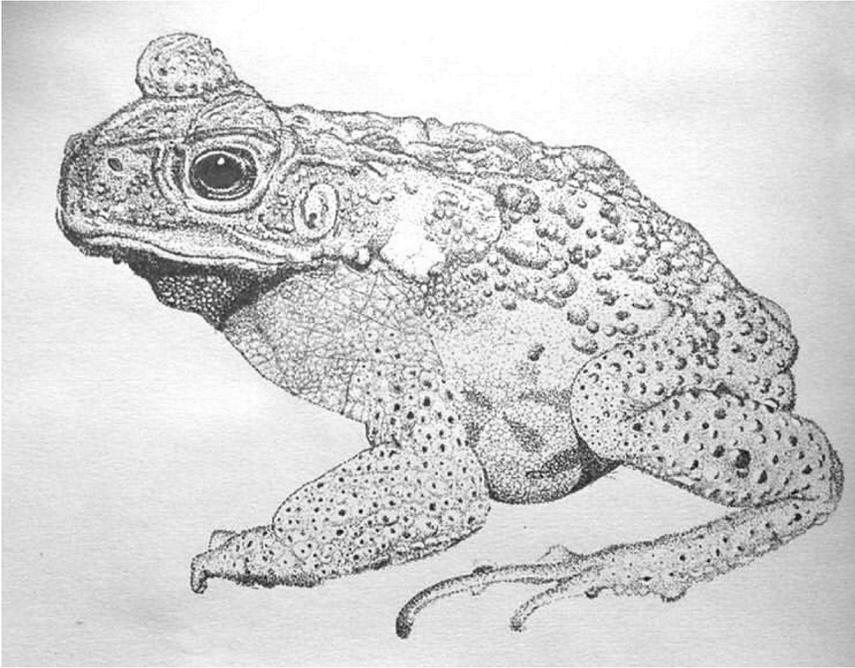
Awakening

by Hannah Rice



Frog

by Sarah Defanti



Treasures

by Evelyn Bernard

It's late November. I can tell from the air, cool and still, from the dry leaves breaking under our heavy boots, and the dark mass of bare trees staring us down from across the field. Their shadows stretch across the grass, reaching toward the steep slope to the water, disappearing at the spot where the ground falls away. Every time I look up the sky has changed colors—first blue, then hazy burnt orange, now a dusty gray that settles on our faces and seems to pull the forest closer to us.

I brought Dru here so he could run around, but right now he's not interested in running; content instead to wander along the forest's edge, eyes always on the ground, he stops only to pick up stones and acorns with his tiny fingers. These, I know, will be lined up on bookshelves and scattered across tables when we get home tonight. He calls them his treasures.

I watch him closely as he steps onto the edge of the swimming pool. One foot carefully in front of the other, eyes squinting in deep concentration, he creeps along the perimeter. He jumps in at the shallow end, his rain boots landing on the concrete with an echoing thud. It's hard to imagine people swimming here, when it was filled with water instead of dirt and dead brown leaves, before spray paint covered every surface on the inside. You could look up and be in the water and the forest and the sky all at once. Dru looks so small as he walks toward the deep end, closed in on either side by graffitied concrete. The quiet is jarring; no birds, no wind, no distant voices, just the dull echo of rubber boots on the bottom of a swimming pool.

And way across the water, growing darker each minute, are the hills striped with streets that could be mine, and the strip of car lights streaking across, and the blue-gray bridge stretching across the river. Years ago, my sisters and I used to stand here on the edge of the forest and scream, imagining our voices soaring over the water, wondering if anyone could hear us on the other side.

I didn't believe my sisters until I heard it for myself. Standing in the hallway before the entrance to their attic bedroom, my fingers fumbled against the wall, feeling for the light switch. Then

I noticed the soft breathing, slow and regular. Someone was lying asleep in the pitch darkness. I stood frozen in the doorway for a minute, holding my own breath to make sure that my mind wasn't playing tricks on me, and remembering with a sinking stomach that I had left my entire family downstairs. The sound wasn't going to stop. I turned around and walked slowly back down the hallway, refusing to run because that meant admitting that whatever I had heard was really there.

My parents never saw or heard anything, but at some point my siblings and I all did. The breathing in the attic bedroom was the most common at first. Then the dreams began. Lucy and Grace were the only ones who ever got them, but their stories were enough to keep us all awake at night. First the waves of vibrations would come over them, starting at their heads and moving down until their entire bodies had been electrified. Then the buzzing in their heads would start, growing louder and more intense as they lay paralyzed. Lucy said that she once thought that she was going to die, but her attempts to scream all stuck in her throat. She always saw a white pinprick of light above her head, as if she lay at the bottom of a well, miles under the ground. Grace was the only one who saw the shadowy figures around her bed, and she could never say if she had actually been dreaming or not. Once, they whispered to her that she would break her leg. The next day, she did.

My parents stopped questioning whether what we experienced was real. Instead, they nodded their heads, took down the paintings whose eyes followed us at night, and covered up the tiny closet door in the attic bedroom that we swore held something evil.

No one really knows when the dreams or the sounds stopped. We certainly don't know why they did. What's important is that by the time Dru was old enough to know what was going on, whatever was tormenting us had decided to leave us alone.

Dru is the youngest, a boy preceded by five older sisters. He is more carefree, more giving, less timid than any of us ever were. We've tried to create a different world for him—one where only good magic exists. We built fairy houses, scattered pixie dust, left out notes from the fairies and the gremlins until the woods where we spent our summers became his own magic world. He is seven now, and stashes of his treasures are hidden throughout

the house—smooth stones, pieces of bark, sea shells, and clumps of moss. As long as I continue to find these treasures, miniature tokens of his belief in the fantastic and the good, I feel that he will be safe.

Before the darkness can grow any deeper, I remember the ten-minute walk back to my car.

"Hey, Dru! It's time to go!" I call. I turn around, struck with a strange feeling that I should check whether the path back into the woods is still there.

Dru shuffles through the dead leaves at the bottom of the pool, then climbs the steps to meet me where the concrete turns to cool grass. He walks beside me as we retrace our steps across the field, through the woods, past the wishing well and the empty flower beds. He tells me about the treasures he's collected, oblivious to the silence pressing down on us from all sides and the way that the trees seem to shift as we pass by.

This way takes us past the root cellar, a concrete cave built into the side of a hill. If I had never ventured inside with my sisters, equipped with the flashlights on our phones, I would still think that it opened into an abyss—the darkness inside is so infinite. We have stood inside and turned our flashlights off to feel the black matter stretch around us in all directions, to feel the familiar sensation of being in the presence of something powerful, dark, and unknowable. Whether we whispered, sang, or screamed, a thousand voices thundered back at us.

Dru stops near the opening to the root cellar, finally looking up from the collection that he holds in his cupped hands. I watch him as he stares, unblinking, at the shadows that have begun to spill out of the opening, stretching towards us. I place one hand on his shoulder, and he turns around to follow me home.

Yellow Paint

by CaSandra Masters

Van Gogh drank yellow paint
in pursuit of happiness.
And I
pick broken flowers
half brown and dried
to glue onto acrylic paintings
bring life into dead
as my form of art;
play vintage music
while I drive down Salisbury backroads,
pop my head out the sunroof,
two hands in the air
catching the wind,
scream, tongue out
taste the ocean in the air;
strum steel strings
of a secondhand Ibanez
lullabies from poems
I wrote a different night;
strip down to my bra
and dance atop my bed,
covers strewn along the floor,
curtains open to the world;
hike to mountaintops
flirting with the edge,
strong gusts of wind
pushing me back,
I grin.
Still some nights
I lay awake
but not alive,
and I wonder
what yellow paint tastes like.

Sunset

by Hannah Rice



A Thread of Luck

by Bridget Fong



Featured Artist

Danielle Coenen



Danielle Coenen is a Boston-based painter who creates portraits characterized by saturated palettes and merging of realism with expressive abstraction. She received a BFA from The Art Institute of Boston at Lesley University in 2011, trained in both figure painting and sculpture. Danielle has had solo exhibitions in Boston and New York City as well as participated in numerous group exhibitions across New England. Her work is held in private collections throughout the U.S. and internationally. The most notable feature of her work was in Dr. Robert Mendoza's Harvard College Ted Talk "What If I'm Wrong," connecting her process to forensic neuropsychology. Danielle also teaches art privately and is a nationally recognized art educator with awards from The Scholastic Foundation and The National Young Arts Foundation.

How do you choose your subjects?

I primarily work from images of women that I find, though at times I'll have people model for my reference photos. It's easier to have no prior impressions of the individuals I paint so that I can use the reference in a more detached, creative way. The two characteristics I generally look for when choosing subjects are the forms of their faces, from a sculptural perspective, and something about their look that resonates with me.

Many of your portraits position the subject very close-up. Why do you choose to specifically focus on the faces of your subjects?

Before I got deeper into portraiture my work showed more of the figure, additional subject matter, and background space. About seven years ago I remember feeling enamored with portraits by James Jean and Akira Beard, and then many more contemporary portrait painters. I became engrossed looking at them and simultaneously realized while working I was disproportionately engaged in painting the face. I began to focus solely on paintings of the head and as my work evolved, the face got closer and began to fill the composition. Many times I had an underpainting that was significantly more zoomed out than the finished piece and I didn't fight it; this happened naturally as a consequence of that being the only thing I wanted to paint and I enjoyed the confrontation of a close-up evocative expression.

What is your relationship to color? What inspires the vibrant colors you use in your paintings?

I have a deeply visceral response to certain colors and palettes, and color has always been an important characteristic of my work. The inspirations for colors I use have accumulated over time and were mostly inspired during my teenage years. Growing up I was only exposed to art shown in a public school curriculum and the internet wasn't saturated with it like it is today, so when I began to see things like graffiti and street art, work in Juxtapoz and Hi-Fructose magazine, art that felt more fresh and alive but most of all used color in ways that I hadn't seen before, that's when it really clicked for me, the kind of work I aspired to make. I think part of what draws me to vibrant, colorful palettes

is they have an otherworldly quality that feels dreamlike and psychological, which is the tone I like to portray in my work as well.

What is your thought process behind creating large and abstract marks on your paintings, some that hide or obscure certain features of the face?

I like painting both realistically and abstractly and in portraiture it brings layered meanings, being undefined forms in flux, sometimes concealing parts of the face. For me the faces floating in abstraction feel like people that exist in their own mindscapes. Then from a purely visual stance, leaning too far to one side feels like something is missing. Too real and refined feels lifeless and removed from paint, too abstract and there's no anchor. When I'm rendering the face I work tightly from my reference, which requires patience and careful observation. The abstract marks are of the opposite sentiment- a lot of paint throwing and spontaneity, using several other mediums and tools. Having these two exist together and to paint in opposing mindsets creates a balance for me that is really satisfying.

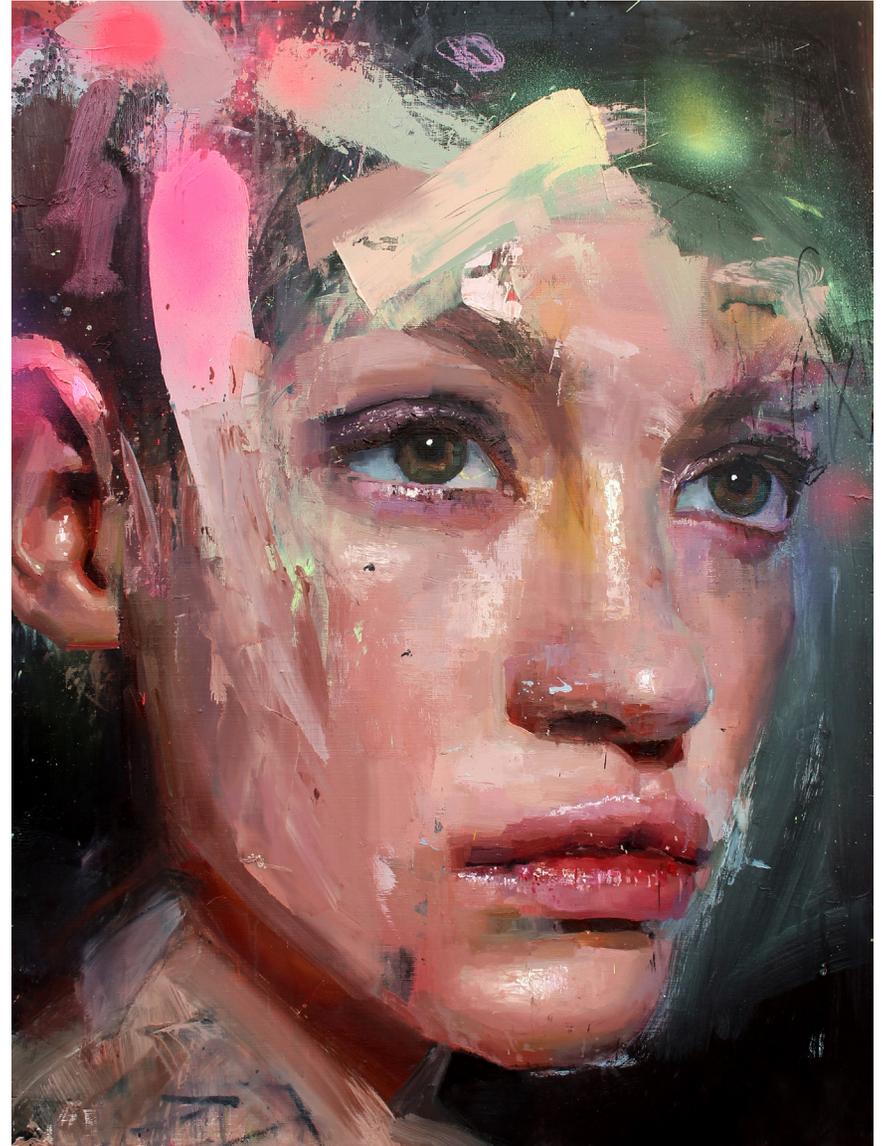
Your most recent solo show, XX, highlights 20 works from four series you developed between 2018 and 2020. How does this show display the evolution of your work?

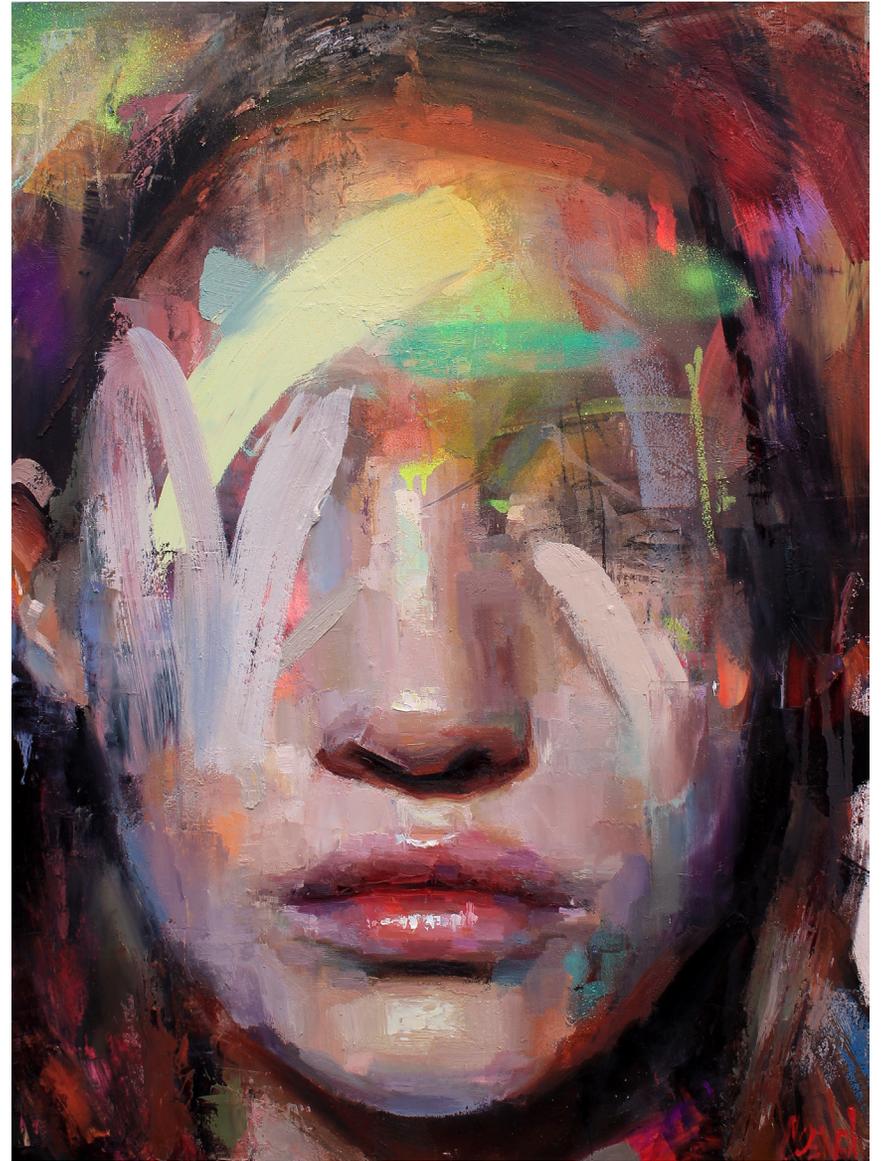
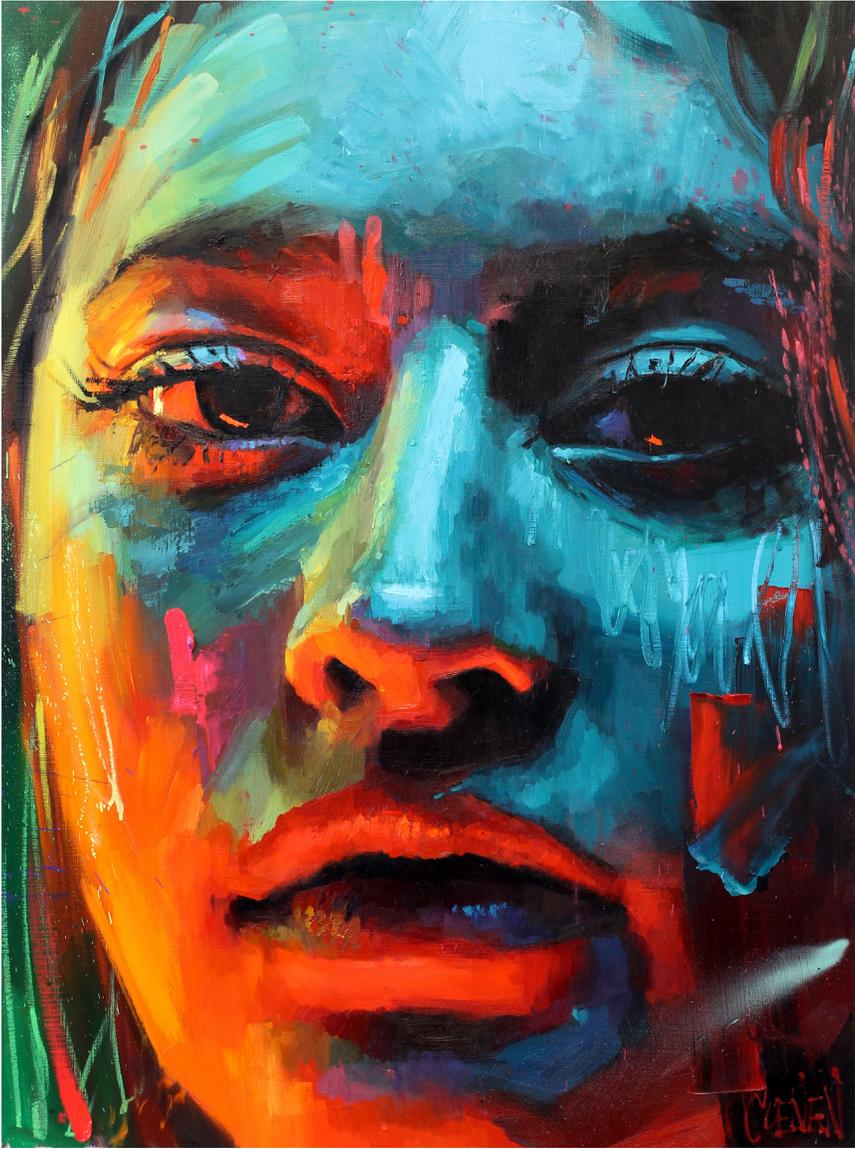
I wanted this show to reflect how work evolves through a complex interplay of responses from one series to the next. The first series I did between 2017 and 2019. The pieces were emotionally charged and played with distorted color and marks that concealed the mouth and eyes. Following that series, I worked on a collaborative project with photographer Bob Packert, where we photographed models under colored lights. The paintings I created through this collaboration represented a significant shift from my previous work. The colors were completely saturated and I was painting more from direct observation. After using so much color I became interested in trying very fleshy tones for the following paintings and returning to more of the abstraction I typically incorporate. And in the last series, rather than changing the subject in each piece, I wanted to try painting the same image five times and see what changes occurred from each having its own palette and series

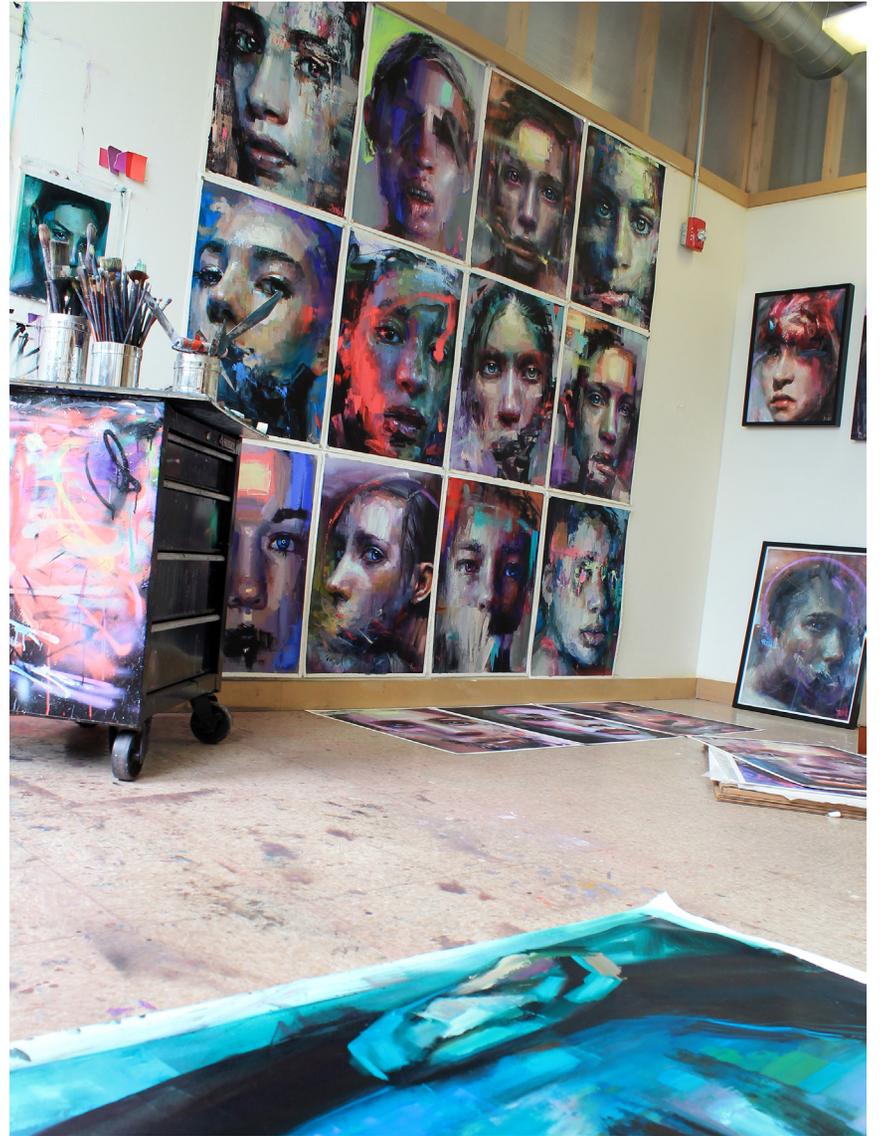
of responses. Getting to the work I ultimately want to make is an iterative process, perhaps one that doesn't end, and is as interesting as the work itself.

What advice would you give to artists at Simmons in their transition from the academic world to the real world?

I think one challenge from graduating and transitioning into the real world as an artist is you're no longer in a space where you have a built-in community of artist peers and mentors. In the real world being an artist depends on you being self-motivated while most likely having a day job. It took me a while after graduating to have a steady art practice, and the most beneficial thing I did was get a studio in an artist community building. Having the opportunity to witness how professional artists work, converse with them, and be part of a community that understands what you do is extremely helpful. My advice would be to have a designated space for your practice, ideally in a studio building with other artists, or a corner in your home until you get to that point and actively make work. Seek out opportunities to exhibit, build a network, put your work online, and try not to get discouraged by the inevitable rejections.







Soak

by Kirby Assaf

I think I dreamt of drowning one night in a vast tank surrounded by science-fictionesque steel walls. I fell slowly, as if the water were dark grey jelly, until I could no longer see the surface. A traveler lost in a sandstorm, giving up to the swirling winds of sand encompassing the dunes. A pig stuck in the mud. An astronaut untethered from their spacecraft.

I must have been about seven or eight. I remember telling my parents the next morning that I had had a nightmare, but that wasn't completely true. It felt comforting, like when you collapse onto a couch after a long day and you can sink, sink, sink into the soft cushions and drift away. There was a book in the self-help section at a Barnes and Noble that said that dreams about drowning mean you want to go back to the comfort of the womb; that the emotions of the world are too much for you; that you want to revert back to the ultimate moment of peace. I can't remember the peace of the womb, and I'm not inclined to return, but there is something to be said about the peace of being completely submerged in deep water. "A mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam." Euphoria.

Whenever I swam, I was drawn to the deep end. I tried to recreate that feeling by floating in the deep, holding my breath as long as I could. Of course, I kept my eyes open, until my chlorine-stung eyes had to close and my pruny fingers had to lift my body out of the pool. It was never as satisfying as the dream. You can see the bottom in a swimming pool, which appears after a humble six feet. I always floated to the top, unable to keep myself as low as I wanted to be. It was too sunny. The water was too violent, always in flux from the bodies moving around and playing in it. There weren't any ripples in my abyss, just a smooth, foggy fall.

Hold a minor chord on a piano and push down the pedal.

Let it reverberate.

Close your eyes.

Breathe.

Sink.

When you swim in a pool, it's clear. You touch the rough bottom and stand in the shallows. When you swim in a lake, it's murky. You touch the uncanny bottom and feel the silt and algae between your toes. When you walk into the ocean, it's foamy. Your feet sink with every step into the sand as you navigate among the shells, rocks, seaweed, and maybe even an imposing crab. I want to go further. I don't want to feel the ground. When you cannonball into the deep end, you have three sweet seconds of sinking down until you hit the bottom or until your full lungs propel you upwards, inevitably pushing your head towards the surface while the rest of your body remains submerged. Three seconds of onomatopoeia:

Pfwushhhh. Silence. Fwishhhh. Pause. Applause.

I settle for playing video games where you navigate the alien world in your scuba gear and discover the depths. I watch YouTube videos of daring folks who put on wetsuits and oxygen tanks and explore deep-sea wrecks, who find lost iPhones and old fishing lures and sea glass, who interact with the sea life and even some who pet sharks. I look at the Mass Diving website and stare at the price of the diving courses. For the online learning course, the pool practice, the equipment, and the ocean training, the total cost comes to \$894.32. Nine-hundred bucks of aspirations. \$894.32 for the chance to sink.

At the end of an exhausting day, I'll collapse onto my hard twin bed and rest my head lazily onto the cool pillowcase. I'll drift off into a dream, sailing on a raft taking me anywhere my subconscious finds relevant. The waves guide me into a slow and relaxing rhythm, pushing me along. No matter how hard I try, I stay afloat, never to sink again into the endless depths below me.

Simmons

by Izzy Babicz



Mountains

by Izzy Babicz



Danny Boy

by Abigail St. Peter

The sun is relentless in its summer torment so we swim. Danny is doing laps and dives and flips. He is moving so quickly he is just a blur. I wade in the shallow end, not quite convinced that water is an altogether safe element. When I look to the shade of the umbrella I notice Jamie laying limp beneath it. This was our summer, my sister and her boyfriend and me. We found our ease with each other. I join Jamie in the shade and crack open my book; the water drips off my hair onto the page, making it wrinkle and bleed. Danny leaves the pool, but not before making sure half of the water was sprayed across the concrete. When it was the three of us something in my chest stilled. He tips his head back and searched the sky, probably obsessing over every species he spots. My eyes glance over him, a pale kid built like he is made for breaking. I could probably fit one hand around his arm. I point to the concave dip below his left rib cage. "Oh," Danny says. His hand gestures as if to swat an invisible fly. "That's where God stepped on me when I was made." Jay rolls her eyes but affection pulls at the corner of her mouth. I try to laugh along but a separate image of Danny invades my vision. Once he had laid on the kitchen floor without a shirt on and all I could see were bones. Each rib pressed against the confines of his skin. There was a valley that stretched between his chest and hips. The image makes me nauseous. It doesn't matter what he eats. Fear eats him faster. Now, at my house, no one can touch him, so I lay my head back too.

I don't remember which summer we had gone to Maine. Somehow our all of our summers felt endless. The sun burns its way through the fields, leaving the dead grass to crack beneath our feet. I don't care about the heat wrapping around me or the relentless flies or anything because I am winning the race.

Risking a glance over my shoulder, I see Danny catching up. His long legs eat up the ground, the dogs are trying to reach his heels. I pick up speed and my lungs catch fire. There is a thundering where his feet touch the ground, it gets louder and louder until he is beside me. For a few moments, we match pace, chasing the same hilltop. Then he grins. Danny ducks down as if gathering strength— then bursts off. He is gone. Down the hill and up the next in one fluid sweep. The dogs cry as he flies ahead, desperate to keep up. I just slow down and curse his long limbs under my breath. Taking in long drags of hot air, I look back to the woods we flew out of. My parents are making their way out, stopping every once in a while to point out a tree limb or pick up fallen seeds. Jamie looks ahead. Her eyes are trained on a flash of blonde hair that winks on the horizon. Something foreign softens her gaze. "He's something else isn't he?" Jamie asks, sounding far away despite standing next to me. "You could say that again."

Danny doubles back and comes to stand beside us at the crest of the hill. He says something along the lines of being able to outrun wolves. Danny is convinced the way he's going out is fighting a pack of them or a bear. But I don't listen to what he's saying. I listen to his breath between each word. It hitches and wheezes as Danny stands at an awkward angle. Long fingers gingerly rest on his ribcage. My mind reels. I remember a few months ago Jamie had gripped her phone so hard her knuckles turned white. When I had asked, she said Danny punctured his lung. He couldn't really breathe, couldn't keep anything down. He had said it was some unnamed accident that caused it. We both knew that it was a lie. His Dad had been around. The one person Danny could never outrun. Now, the three of us walk back to the house together talking about nothing at all.

Later that night, Danny lets me attempt to braid his hair, despite the fact it was far too short. Jamie is somewhere in the kitchen behind us, probably making tea or something. His head

rests on the pillow in my lap as I plait a few strands together. I take note of his angular, crooked nose and the sprinkle of freckles that covers his skin. His scarred are hands folded over his stomach, for once unmoving. They seem so delicate and impossible to me. Like a figure carved from ice, he is an unimaginable creature that we look at. We hold our breath, waiting for him to break.

Jamie makes us dinner on the last night of our summer. Danny saunters through the door, slow and careless. As he throws himself down on the dining room chair, Jamie's mouth sets in a hard line. I slip into the seat at the head of the table and I am overwhelmed by the smell of alcohol. No, my mind begs. Jamie gives us plates of hot food and settles across from Danny. I try to keep up a conversation, talking about something irrelevant as a TV show scene he likes. My eyes switch between the two, Danny who is unwilling to meet either of our gazes and Jamie whose face hardens with disappointment. I don't remember the end of dinner or where I had gone while they talked; I only know that night was the last meal I would share with him for a long time.

When I first see him in the bagel shop, he is silhouetted by the beaming fridge lights. It's so bright that he's fading at the edges, but I know the curve of his shoulders anywhere. A year sits in the space between us, maybe more. The bell over the door sounds and he does a double-take. Twin pools of blue smile at me but all I can see are scrapes and bruises that circle his right eye. Everything feels very, very still like the pause between my next breath. Then he's opening his arms and I just fold. He still smells like aftershave and pine trees. The boy I knew practically lived in the woods and I wonder if that is still true. Guilt tugs at my gut when I think of Jamie and the summer she spent grieving that boy. I don't know what repercussions will follow but now, in the circle of his space, I allow myself this one moment to be with my oldest friend. When I let go, I smack his shoulder. Hard. "What

the hell happened to your face?" His eyes find a point on the floor. "Nothing. Just being an idiot. You want to get something? I'll pay." I purse my lips, scowling a little. "I'm going to find a table and then you're going to tell me about it." I find us a seat in the corner, tucked away from the rush of foot traffic. Outside the window is brown slush and sleeping trees. Nothing that indicates the closeness of Christmas. Nothing at all. When Danny joins me he shrugs off his heavy coat to reveal an altogether different person. I poke his bicep repeatedly, "What is this?" He laughs his familiar short bark. "I know, I know I'm not the scrawny kid anymore." But to me, he still is; I don't say that. Instead, I say "So your face." He leans back in his seat before explaining his heart problem. He says just standing up from a barstool made him blackout. I don't know if I believe him. Danny slides his cup of coffee toward me. "Don't tell me you don't like coffee now?" I scoff, "Some things never change." As I take a tentative sip, he asks about my family. There's no reason to hold back about them; after all, my mom used to call him her son and my dad offered him a room at our house. "My Dad lost his job, so that's been hard. Mom busted her knee doing god knows what."

"Seriously? Right after everything with her back. That's awful."

"Yeah, I know. And Emily is, well, her usual charming self."

He laughs at my remark. "I'm sure." There is a beat of silence, where one name is left unsaid. "And Jay?" I hesitate to offer anything. "Well..." The months I watched her cry and rage and grieve play like a movie in my head. "This hasn't been easy. For anyone." His eyes break, like a layer of ice cracking to reveal darker waters. In that moment I know he's still in love with her and maybe he will always be in some small way. "So are you applying to schools yet?" I indulge his turn for lighter conversation and fill in the past year. As I watch him nod along I think of all the things Danny isn't saying. The reason why there are blues and purples across the rolling hills of his knuckles. One

of his friends told me on the way home from a bar he'll find the biggest guy in the parking lot and start a fight he can't win. Danny finishes his breakfast and I take the last sip of my coffee.

Outside the wind pushes me away from him. Danny gives me a casual wave and heads toward his own car. "Hey!" I run back into his arms. When I get home Jamie will be angry with me, and Hannah too; she told me not to meet him. When I get home I'll have to pretend he's the bad guy in everyone's story. When I get home, this version of him won't exist. But now, just this once, Danny is laughing in my ear.

Stygian

by Bonney Couper-Kiablick



Translation

by Grace Weinberg

In its simplest form,
a sentence is composed of
a subject,
object,
and verb.

To complicate it,
one might link an independent clause
with another,
blending together a myriad
of sounds that
reproduce feelings
and enrich meanings.

Herelies
the wall that situates itself
between
experience and
words:

what I feel
remains
immovable,
firm,
and stubborn

I push it,
I yell,
I try to break it,
yet it remains fixed.

How can I describe something
that I can barely grasp myself?

I could reach within
the folds
of my brain,
but if I were to extract
one of the threads
that construct my thoughts,
they would fall apart

and there I would find
fragments,
fractured memories,

feelings lacking
time
and
place

I would reach within
vacancy,
grasping
glimpses of moments like

a caress that
turns me into
a puddle
composed of
clarity and pleasure or

rage that erases
any sense of reason,
my mother's arms
wrapping around my waist and
pulling me
backwards;

hot tears,
my throat swelling before
the beginning
of a sob.

But when I try to speak,
I stumble over
my words,

losing myself within
subjects, objects, and verbs
that don't fit together.

Heads

by Kaylin Wu



Featured Poet

Lynn Shorter



Lynn Shorter is the winner of 2020 Slate Roof Press Chapbook Award/Elyse Wolf Prize with her first chapbook, *Singer in the Gray of Jean-Michel*. As a senior lecturer in England from 2008-2020, she taught non-traditional students and co-founded Reading the World, a creative writing and performance project for marginalized groups and artists.

Your poetry clearly takes influence from Basquiat. What about him or his art sparks the feeling of writing in you? What do you wish to convey by using him in your poetry?

There is so much to hear in Basquiat's work. 'The skulls, the masks, the head of logos-Lagos dithyramb' is my way of describing the effect his paintings have on me. Their incredible concentration of energy perfectly captures creative impulses that have been socially circumscribed and denigrated while simultaneously unleashing their power.

The way you form your poetry is fascinating and unique. What draws you to use such a fluid style instead of working with

more traditional or structured conventions?

While I draw on Greek and Inuit archetypes in *Singer in the Gray of Jean-Michel*, the chapbook that the *Sidelines* poems are taken from, I'm not wedded to any specific poetic forms; rather my writing is driven by what is not there when I move from inner to outer spaces where I no longer appear whole or wholly myself. Fluidity here is integral to poem making and well-being.

Or perhaps what you're asking has to do with how one metabolizes sound (and its absence).

Jazz seems to be a common theme in your writing--whether it be mentioned or reflected in your stylistic choices. What influence has this genre had in your writing career and is there a musician in particular (you mention Monk quite a bit) that piques your interest or jazz as a whole and why??

In *Singer in the Gray of Jean-Michel*, Rafael Rafaela, the singer/speaker, is immersed in a Jazz inflected universe which gives her ease of access to multiple layers of consciousness. In the five poems that follow, Joseph Jarman, Lester Young, Thelonious Monk, and John Coltrane are referenced as indeed is Ornette Coleman who is Rafael Rafaela's primary source of inspiration.

My aspirations in the piece are to move imaginatively and again fluidly in and out of time and inside, outside and across the charged terrain of North American oral geography to tell the story that I need to tell with Jazz, the world's foremost planetary and galactic citizen, as my guide.

What does writing poetry mean to you? Does it allow you to escape into another world or is it more of a cathartic experience to understand your life and what is going on around you?

It is to smolder and burst into an ancient to new continuity of possibility for a fractured world.

What phrase, experience, author, book etc. has had a long-lasting impact on your career??

Albert Murray's phrase 'velocity of celebration'.

Thirst of Skin

Of all my disappeared not Sedna!
Inuit & jail house icon glacial

treading water lighting it up in Ornette
I'm tempted to scream

upon entering
the skulls the masks the heads queer

as if there were no other way to own myself
as queer

than in the voice of Sedna
overtaken by the pulse of her vulvic insolence

her brash reckonings

vanishing
into the smoke of burnt ladders

Rear View Mirror

Somewhere in L.A. between
the taillights of my set & Jeanne Moreau

tempers ran wild in a tangle w/ the Jazz Magi
some say in search of Thelonious Sphere

& his sonics for befriending the void

Not the Monk Lorraines' though
twistedly imbued w/ girl group blasé

even when I'd bailed on Sedna
even when

with one last chance in the trunk
of her Aunt's blue Toyota

& two bodies covered in a yellow tarp
I bailed

too busy
soaking up the keyboard gospel

of the black Sherpa T S Monk
to enunciate & repel

to enunciate & repel any incursions of the abyss
somewhere in between

the two of us

Bop Baptized

Great Jones Street Loft. Ted Joans.

When Ted made Basquiat an offering of burnt
ladders I was yanked out of the parade of crêpe

machetes & onto a pew in the jazz basilica
of timeless hip utterance to choose:

Sing tomorrow back into the sound stream
of its inextinguishable light or

cop from a young Scott-Heron dishing:

You've seen my Bo Diddley scar
smoke crack that was coughed up bluesing
but not the nosherai habits of the Norse gods
Prez said were like glimpses of fables
from the Delta before the toss
into the lap of the proud boys
they ravenously ate with the starlings

If you had you would now be heir
to Bearden

his Beat Bop child
with time on the lam with Jarman

if he had claimed you

& I would have learned not to see you like this

in threes
in protest despair & detachment

if he had crowned you

I would have learned what it meant to see you resist
like Trane

acknowledging resolving pursuing a psalm
or minus the fours unlike him

I Rafael Rafaela speak Ornette
boom off cisterns of skag thru a blight of Stroms

twinning the vows of beauty & stealth
a caretaker of the Tao to his Charles the First

scratched out cast out

whereupon straight outta Phoebe Hoban
boys turn skeletal become skulls never men

Gray the art sharks
were but a swagger of wet mules on a bender
those Maian nights

They couldn't stop me

I sought Maia I brought joy
in the Mark Rothko of my elm canoe
unafraid of death

~~or erasure~~

as if in a starling resurrection
there were any other way to own myself

entering the skulls
the masks the head as logos-Lagos dithyramb

Sedna's hair

whispers in my tazed & sutured ear
obscurities in Algonquin slave names in Arabic

It troubles me with my desires run amok that
pummel the Mark Rothko of my elm canoe not

clamouring with the horns to conjure an undoing
of her hands bloated ensnared lost to touch

It whispers the cost of trespass
the bite of that holy thing defiled

It seethes Starling do you love me?

I draw her closer away from
the partying fulmars

& their Grace Jones fetishist hosts

A Breath of Fresh Air

by Bridget Fong



Corpse

by CaSandra Masters

Some nights I sleep with my dress on.
My teeth clenched,
I lie on my side with knees
pressed to my chest.
Paralyzed, I melt into the sheets.
My ghost watches me breathe.
I don't think.
I am a shadow-
present and unreal,
my body a machine.
Eat, sleep, breathe, repeat.
Thoughtless motions shepherd me.

When did I stop living?

Home

by Melody Tuan

Two long plane rides later, I am back on Taiwan soil. The carousel spins endlessly at baggage claim, much like the anxiety swirling around in my hands and feet.

I collect my thick dark suitcases, careful not to trip over the wheels. I walk out of Departures, and my eyes dart around aimlessly at the crowd of people. Though I have my glasses on, the faces all blend together. From the corner of my eye, a distant figure is bouncing and waving excitedly like a toddler on a sugar rush. Mother. I slowly walk over to her, my feet dragging as I avoid making eye contact with anyone. She instantly closes the already minuscule distance between us by forcing me into a hug. I try to squirm out, but resistance is futile. She bombards me with questions:

"How was your flight? Are you hungry? Are you tired? Did you miss us?"

I can't get a word in between her frantic sentences; all I can do is nod along to match her rhythm.

She tells me about how things have been since I've left; I'm not listening. I know the words that escape her lips don't reflect reality. She paints a dream of delusions she has closed herself in, trying to drag me in with her. I follow her to the parking lot to our car. My father is standing outside, waiting. My stomach drops when I realize how frail he is. Just a year ago, he was muscular from his youthful days in the army yet padded with a healthy amount of fat from fatherhood. Now he looks thin, his jeans weakly framing his legs like loose paper. This is my fault – the result of leaving him alone with her. My mother's appearance didn't change much. Her long hair was coarse, dye spreading in uneven tones and patches.

My father reaches out to load my suitcases into the car out of cultural obligation. I can do nothing but watch uselessly as my weakening father tries to handle my baggage. My mother insists on sitting with me in the back seat. She dotes over me and studies me intently as if my face possesses the love she craves. The roof of the car is too low, locked in with my mother's suffocating perfume. The air is thick and tense. I'm parched, my throat throbs in the dry heat. She hands me a half empty bottle of water, the edges moist with saliva and humidity. Traces of lip gloss gleam against the edges. I reach my hand out and hesitate before pulling back. "I'm fine" I reply.

I look outside of the car window and try to distract myself. The greenery of the island is denser than I remember. My mother attempts to fill the silence, but my father cannot hear her. He tells her to speak louder, and his replies are impatient. I do not speak. I know something is wrong, and it is hanging above our heads. I try to read the road signs, but the characters are foreign to me. The familiar wave of saltwater washes over and reopens wounds that started scabbing.

That night, I lay in my bed trying to fall asleep. I tried to tell myself the insomnia was caused by time difference or the foreignness of the sheets. No, it was the strange sound of bells ringing from the next room. The floor creaks as I shift my weight onto it, leaving my room to follow the noises. Making my way through the darkness, a loud crash echoes as a pungent smell buries its way into my nose. Turning on my flashlight, I see glimpses of broken glass and red. It's wine; thick like blood. My mother is sitting there in front of the spill, her puffy eyes solid and red congested face devoid of expression.

Home is where the heart is; both are broken.

Signs

by Izzy Babicz



Angels

by Kaylin Wu



Look Who's Talking

by Catherine Bernard

The room was small and cluttered, closer to an office than a classroom because there wasn't any extra space for the bad readers group--not that we were actually called that, though it was true. If I had bothered to lift my head, I would have seen the numerous motivational posters Ms. Patty loved. The largest one hung behind my head and preached the power of yet. "I can't do this...YET" it said in bold, rainbow type. I didn't have to turn to know what it looked like; I had been looking at it for a year.

"It's all right, Brandon, just try again," Ms. Patty said. I glanced up from where I was quietly digging my nails into the soft edge of the table to look at the boy sitting across from me. Brandon was the worst reader I'd ever met. We were in the same grade, both ten years old, and stuck together in class all day. He couldn't sound out the simplest words. He never understood the stories and couldn't answer any of the questions at the end. If Ms. Patty corrected his pronunciation, he forgot about it by the next time he saw the same word. I lowered my eyes to the table, counting the tiny slashes I'd been leaving in the wood for the last half hour as Brandon stumbled over the word cat again. The other three students at the table were fidgeting, pulling at clothes and biting at nails, waiting for their turn to read. My backpack was leaning against my plastic chair. If I unzipped the front pocket, I would be able to see my dad's copy of *The Shining* that I had grabbed from the bookshelf yesterday. My fingers twitched in my lap.

"Catherine?" I looked up at Ms. Patty, her squinty eyes looking slightly bigger behind her thick glasses. "You need to pay attention or you won't know the story," she sighed. I didn't tell her that I finished the story while everyone else was reading the first page. Brandon snickered as I straightened my back, my cheeks flushed with blood. I glared from under my bangs for a moment before focusing on the page I had to read, taking a deep breath as quietly as possible. My tongue already felt heavy where it sat in my mouth. But Ms. Patty never let me skip my page or write my answers to the discussion questions, so I opened my mouth to read aloud.

I was younger and shorter when I started speech lessons. In fact, I was still short enough to hide under my mom's chair in the waiting room when my name was called. By the third appointment, I silently watched Mom's sandals scuff against the tile floor next to the therapist's brown loafers, never taking my back off the wall to peek past the chair above me. "Kitty, you need to come out now, honey," Mom said gently. The hem of her beige pants dropped into view as she bent her knees low enough to see my dirty, pink sneakers, dulled by the shadow of my hiding place. "You don't even have to talk if you don't want to, but you should still--"

"Get out from there, Catherine--your mother has things she needs to do while we're together," the therapist said evenly. I wanted to tell her that Mom would stay in the waiting room the entire appointment, knitting while waiting for me, but I pressed my lips together; when I talked in front of her, she started correcting and teaching. There was a moment of silence before Mom's knees settled on the floor and an open hand reached toward me.

"If you don't come out, you won't go to dance class this week," she said, sighing quietly. I pouted at her thin hand. Slowly, I unfurled my legs and crawled back into the artificial light of the waiting room, looking down sadly at the dust sticking to my skirt and leggings before halfheartedly brushing it away with a hand. Mom smiled as she wiped the rest of the dirt away and sat down again. I didn't look away as I walked with the therapist into her office, keeping my eyes on the red and beige against the white walls until a door separated us.

The chair in the therapist's office was smaller, but my sneakers barely touched the ground as I sat down next to her desk. Her own chair was large and black, and the wheels let her roll closer to me as she started talking. "How old are you, Catherine?" My eyebrows lowered, almost completely hidden by my messy hair. I lifted a hand above the desk where she could see and signed seven; I didn't care if she couldn't understand sign language because she should already know the answer. She smiled tightly, wrinkles spreading across her face, making it look

stretched out like the skin didn't fit right. She twirled the ends of her brown hair, taking a second to pull out papers from a drawer. "Do you talk at home? with your family?" A pause. I nodded. "Don't you want to talk to other people, too?" she said as she leaned in, resting her hand on my shoulder lightly. Another pause. I shrugged, both as an answer and to move her hand. She laughed as she settled back into her chair, shaking her head slightly and picking up her papers "When you start going to real school, you'll need to talk. Maybe it will be easier if we start practicing now instead of then," she said, softening her voice to something kind. But I didn't want to practice. None of my sisters had to practice, not even the baby. They could just talk. I clenched my small fists and shrugged. "Besides," she said in a stage whisper, "I feel like you're going to be a very fast learner; the stubborn kids always are. But first, we have to start." A pause. I nodded, smiling just a little.

Maybe I would have been in kindergarten if I hadn't been homeschooled. Mom still tried to take me and my siblings to nearby playgrounds when other kids were out of school; she was afraid we wouldn't learn how to socialize if we only talked to each other. There weren't any children to talk to that day, so I circled the neon, plastic playplace, waiting for my turn on the swing. Mom couldn't push me and Evie at the same time. We both wanted to go too high. I focused on kicking mulch into different patterns as I walked, dragging my velcro sneakers through the dirt underneath. The only slides were made of metal that had grown hot in the direct sunlight and the monkey bars were too high to be fun for a slight six-year-old, which meant I had to wait for Evie to get off the swing set. As I turned for my next lap through the wood chips, I saw two new kids jumping up to grab the monkey bars. A new mom sat on a bench nearby. I looked down at my buried feet before aggressively shaking away the mulch, running back to the main playground, kicking up a cloud of dust and wood chips as I went. The taller-than-me boy dropped down from the bars to stand next to the shorter-than-me girl when I reached them. "

"Do you want to play with me?" I asked, out of breath from my run.

"What language are you speaking?" the boy asked, head tilting to the side. The girl laughed nervously and grabbed her brother and ran away before I could respond. I stood in the dirt as they left to play on the slides. All at once my muscles, rigid from the sudden cold, were shaking; I could see the vague shape of Evie and Mom in front of me, warping and tilting the longer I stared. My bright pink sneakers walked toward the swings.

"Kitty? Are you ok?" Mom said, breaking me out of my daze with a solid hand on my shoulder. I shook my head *no*.

SPARE ME, OH HEAVENLY FATHER

by Catherine Cox

spare me your heaven.

spare me the golden gates
God's arms and resurrection.

spare me your serenity & peace;
your belief in a life after this one.

heaven's a city
i've been priced out of.

heaven for me is here
on earth

heaven's a girl
who wants me to hold her hand;
crawl through her window at midnight

heavens her eyes in the morning light.

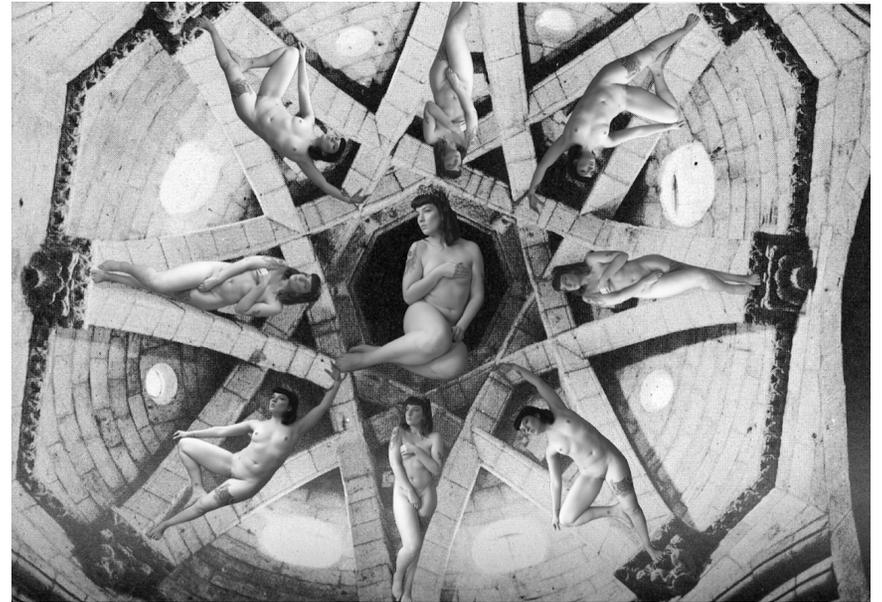
so spare me the pastor & the preacher;
the baptism; for I will burn,
spare me levticus 20:13.

spare me the look
of loss in your eyes
your child is not dead.

spare me the lecture
on God,
and of righteousness
& i will spare you
my love.

Stygian

by Bonney Couper-Kiablick



get home safe

by anna mcguinness

here is something that scares me the
arrival board at north station the letters are
yellow or if they spell out "ON TIME" they are green or
if they spell out "DELAYED" they are red
always at the bottom
with the amtrak arrivals in the middle of the word "BRUNSWICK"
(yellow) the letters R and U and N are green so you can read the word
"RUN."
twice.
like it's trying to tell you something
like it's screaming

he bruises easy. i bruise easy but he is like
fruit. i bruise if you aren't careful if you aren't careful enough with me
i always ask people to be careful (they aren't)
he just bruises and bruises and bruises

mom, can i call you on the telephone?
do you have a minute? a couple minutes, a few?
i am feeling very young. i am feeling
afraid.
mom, can i call you?
i am feeling thirteen again. i know. unlucky.
what a bad number. can i call you?
i don't even know how to make a dentist appointment.
i think i killed myself. i think i never made it past thirteen

here is something that scares me the
sound of everybody in north station getting
an amber alert. a soft rumbling
my phone says my cooperation
is appreciated. a little girl.
i wonder who was there when it happened.
i wonder if someone told her to RUN.

here is what he looks like moving away from me.
he looks like a train and the number nine and big letters spelling out

"ON TIME" he looks like a kiss that isn't long enough and a hug
with a backpack on and i
shouldn't still be standing here.

get home safe. but i am home. (reread that.
think about your english teacher)
but we are home we were home his hand
on my stomach. we text each other we say
get home safe and i can feel the tug
enough to make me cry in front of the pigeons
and the green letters at north station they spell out
"RUN"
i want to scream i want to tell him to RUN
to come back
to look at me again and tell me he wants me
to look at me and tell me he knows i'm evil and RUN and i'm
really crying in front of the pigeons

mom, can i call you?
do you have a minute?
i don't know how to do this. i can't be evil i never even
made it past thirteen i don't know
what a deductible is.
he wants me wants to touch me and i want it so bad.
i stood in north station and
i stared at the arrivals sign and all i could do was scream or
let him leave in silence.

Where You'll Find Me

by Evelyn Bernard

"Some of my favorite memories with you," he'd say, "are when I used to take you out in the stroller during snowstorms. You were just a baby, barely six months old, and I'd have you all bundled up in blankets and your pink snowsuit."

I've heard him tell it so many times that the memory feels like my own—the sharp snowflakes stinging my cheeks, my eyes squinting through the wind at the dim streetlights and brick buildings on the desolate sidewalk. There's a photo of us somewhere. He crouches next to the stroller, his eyes glassy and cheeks red from the cold. I'm barely visible, a pair of eyes peering out from under the blankets.

It seems it was this way from the very beginning—him pushing me closer and closer to the danger, but never close enough to lose me.

Memories keep coming to the surface. Walking the jetty with him, hand in hand, as charcoal clouds hung above us and white-tipped waves crashed angrily on either side. Leaping from boulder to boulder on Rocky Neck, him standing below and watching proudly as I laughed off my bruises and scraped knees.

"Dad, look!" I would scream, before taking a running leap over the jagged rocks.

I once stood on a river bank somewhere in the White Mountains, years before those same mountains became his home. I craned my neck to see him standing at the edge of a cliff, anxiety settling in my stomach like a rock as I watched him savor the adrenaline rush that comes before plummeting to the water's surface. That's what pushes him: the feeling of driving himself toward danger, the uncertainty of what may happen to him. He pushed me, too. He pushed me to climb higher when I was scared, to take another step when I felt that my legs would give out. He pushed me out of his orbit, as the distance in miles grew between us and we forgot how to understand each other.

What I know about him now, I hear from others: short reports from my grandparents, and from my siblings who still see him every once in a while. They say that he is part of a rescue

team in the White Mountains—that he goes out at all hours of the night to face the pitch darkness and freezing wind on the mountain trails. He has put his thrill of danger and the unknown into good use, regularly risking his own life to save others.

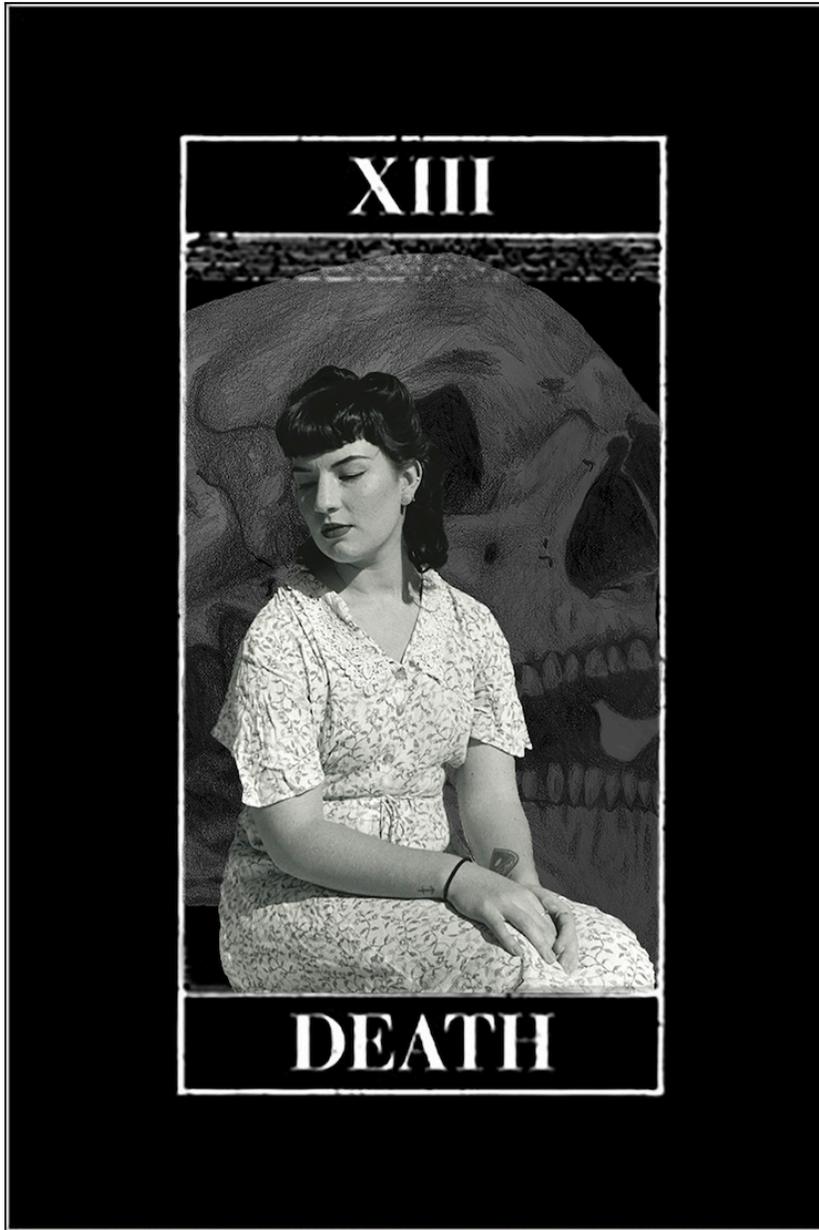
He lent me a book a few years ago, called *Where You'll Find Me*. I never read it, so it sits unopened on my bookshelf still. I haven't had a chance to give it back to him. I remember the way he described it as he put it into my hands, his face flickering in the glow from the candles on the kitchen table. It's about a hiker named Kate Matrosova; she was experienced at hiking, thoughtful, and always planning ahead. She went out alone to hike the Northern Presidential Range, and a day later her body was carried down by a search and rescue team.

"When they found her body," he said excitedly, "it was completely frozen." His eyes widened so that they shone clearly through the dim light. "That just shows you how dangerous it can be out there."

I picture it sometimes, without meaning to: the limbs, rigid and motionless against the snow, the icy flakes coming to rest on her eyelashes and coat. The wind and rustling trees sigh as her breath comes to a stop. Sometimes it's his face that I see on the frozen body. Sometimes it's mine.

Stygian

by Bonney Couper-Kiablick



Contemplating My Death on a Saturday Morning in Late Summer

by Lucy Lawrence

I.

I sit on my front porch and take in the garden.
It is Eden without its serpentine judgement.
Fallen peaches and apples fertilize it, as does the excrement of worms.

Chamomile flowers doze lazily under the hot sun.
Their petals reach toward the soft pungent soil,
Like a child holding her arms out for an embrace.

The peppermint gathers thick and heavy close to the ground.
Their leaves drip a sharp oil that nauseates the senses,
And sweetens the earth.

II.

When I am summoned by that cloaked figure,
I will take time to harvest the sickly petals and leaves for tea.
I will pour out two measures into clay mugs for my caller and I.

We will drink deeply and it will warm my stomach.
My limbs will be quieted, And I will fall amongst the flowers.

I will rot with the peaches and apples.
I will rot with the worms.
I will rot with the chamomile and mint.

III.

The morning dew will accumulate between
My eyelashes, in the hairs of my eyebrows,
And between the lines on my hands.

This dew will dissolve me.
The peppermint will cover my body,
Digging its roots into my flesh, it will consume me.

I will become the soil that the chamomile flowers reach for.
The apple and peach tree roots will wrap themselves around my bones,
Anchoring themselves until death fells them too.

A Boston Morning

by E. Smith Umland

A morning calls us once again
to travel the cracked bones of this

soft-sunk city, every hollow sucked
for its marrow. The sun blithely

collides with the fog of morning
breath and the heat that rises from

bodies who have just discovered
they are not dead yet. The split

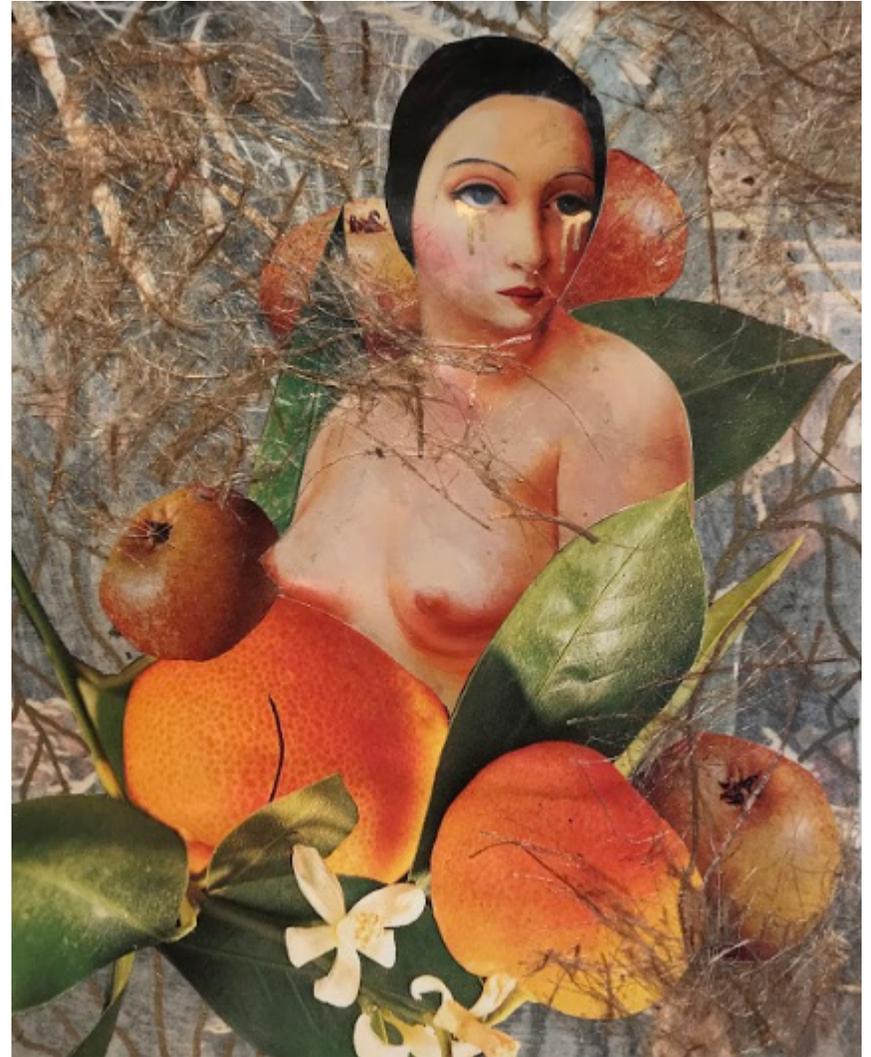
of living in a long un-bound corpse
is in every eye but no mouth. We

do not want to remind the sea
of our little home of bones that

belongs to it.

Fruit

by Kaylin Wu



Sidelines

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