

A textured, painterly illustration of a bison resting in a vibrant green field. In the background, there are several old, weathered wooden buildings, one of which has a tall wooden ladder leaning against it. The sky is a clear, bright blue. The overall style is reminiscent of a fine-art painting with visible brushstrokes and a rich color palette.

the echo.

*Literary & Visual
Arts Magazine*



MMXXIV

FURMAN UNIVERSITY'S LITERARY AND VISUAL ARTS MAGAZINE

Letter *from* the Editor

Dear reader,

It has been a spectacular privilege to create the 2024 edition of *The Echo*. This year, we worked to revitalize *The Echo's* presence on campus and were ecstatic to recognize the Furman community's eager and impassioned response to that presence.

We received a substantial number of submissions in every category, more than three times the total of last year, and were faced with the formidable task of narrowing those submissions down to the content you will read in this year's issue. These pages are a collective, shining embodiment of the creativity, artistry, and potential in Furman's student body.

As part of the effort to renew *The Echo*, I turned towards its history for inspiration. In my search, I discovered the magazine's true period of establishment, which was between 1887 and 1889, making it one of the oldest literary magazines in the nation. This year's issue is part of a long, illustrious history of publications that have evolved into the body of work you see today.

This edition would not have been possible without the unending support of *The Echo's* advisors: Dr. Joni Tevis and Dr. Laura Morris. Their enthusiasm and advice were invaluable throughout the year as I shared my dream of revitalizing *The Echo* and highlighting its service as a historical and exemplary platform for creativity. I would also like to thank my Assistant Editors for their support of my aspiration to create a vibrant collection of art and writing that could be appreciated by all.

Lastly, I would like to thank you, dear reader, for fulfilling my hope of giving the immensely talented artists and writers featured in this edition a platform for their works so that they could be enjoyed and shared by many.

Gabriella Williams
Editor-in-Chief
Class of 2024

Contents

Photography

- 1 A Day at The High *by* William Nix
- 2 Bee and Fern *by* Noel Duclos
- 5 Moving Parts *by* Ava Shutze
- 16 The Way Up *by* Ava Shutze
- 17 Switzerland *by* Reagan Kennedy
- 20 Vines *by* Eric Neumann
- 22 So Vain *by* Sophie Ngo
- 30 Skull *by* Eric Neumann
- 35 The Secret Garden *by* Melina George
- 36 Arabesque *by* Zoe Lawrence & Nabila Wilson
- 40 Flight *by* Melina George
- 46 Light Work *by* Anna Timbes
- 49 Dusk on The Terrace *by* Anna Timbes
- 50 Steel *by* Ava Shutze
- 57 The Woman in The Garden *by* Anna Timbes
- 58 Liquor Store *by* William Nix
- 61 In The Eyes of The Beholder *by* William Nix
- 62 Timeless *by* Anna Timbes
- 68 Frosted Ground *by* Ava Shutze

Prose

- 7 Bless Your Heart *by* Alex Lewis
- 25 The Sunroom *by* Alysha Matthews
- 41 Chorus of Murmurations *by* Aubrey Hume
- 54 Gardening *by* Michael Peeler
- 63 Ghosts *by* Anonymous
- 69 I Want to Write *by* Stephen Turner

Editors' Choice

Studio Art • Anthropocene *by* Anna Timbes

Photography • So Vain *by* Sophie Ngo

Prose • The Sunroom *by* Alysha Matthews

Poetry • There's An Itching In My Eye *by* Kayla Burrell

Cover Art: "Bison by The Lodge" *by* Sophie Ngo

Studio Art

- 4 10" Sun Pot *by* Jake O'Connor
- 6 Anthropocene *by* Anna Timbes
- 12 The Listener I & II *by* Grayson Jarrell
- 14 There's A Method to His Madness *by* Sophie Ngo
- 19 Entombed *by* Grayson Jarrell
- 23 兔年 *by* Melina George
- 24 Bison by The Lodge *by* Sophie Ngo
- 33 First Light *by* Grayson Jarrell
- 39 Olympus *by* Grayson Jarrell
- 47 Creature Battle *by* Sophie Ngo
- 53 Bighorn Sheep on Mount Washburn *by* Sophie Ngo
- 67 Emulation *by* Grayson Jarrell
- 72 Avocado Heirloom *by* Jake O'Connor

Poetry

- 3 Baby Giraffe *by* Kayla Burrell
- 15 There's An Itching In My Eye *by* Kayla Burrell
- 18 faltering creation self-actualization *by* Zoe Lawrence
- 21 Damp *by* Emily Clancey
- 31 Crowning Glory *by* Ava Shutze
- 34 DO NOT TAP ON THE GLASS *by* Karissa Horn
- 37 Will to My Children *by* Hanna King
- 38 Carolina Mantis *by* Kayla Burrell
- 48 House Lights *by* Stephen McLean
- 51 Caper's Island *by* Karissa Horn
- 59 The Armory- A Building in Duluth Minnesota *by* Eric Neumann



A Day at The High

William Nix
Photography



Bee and Fern
Noel Duclos
Photography

Baby Giraffe

Poetry • Kayla Burrell

Born at three past two—
new to light,
and wary of the day.

Awake, debout;
a tumble, taste of rock—

a sky, a leaf,
a flock, a distant rain.

The shaping of a tune
upon a tongue—

beneath the sun,
the young one longs for night,

where hums will still the quake
of untried legs
and newfound sight.



10" Sun Pot
Jake O'Connor
Ceramics



Moving Parts
Ava Shutze
Photography



Anthropocene • Anna Timbes • Pastel on paper

Bless Your Heart

Fiction • Alex Lewis

Southern hospitality. I've always hated that expression. Because, yes, this Easter Sunday was brimming with smiles, small talk, and anecdotes of the cousins' latest successes, but we all knew it was so much more than that. It was drama, theatrics, whispered judgments, and the least humble of brags. It wasn't hospitable at all.

"Elizabeth," I heard my shrill Aunt Jennifer squawk from across the kitchen, "Come here right now, missy." Missy. I hated that. She pulled me in for a halfhearted hug, the smell of her perfume burning my lungs as it washed over me. "You're getting so big." She took a step back to look at me.

I had realized recently that the phrase, 'you're getting big,' stopped being a compliment after age fourteen. I nodded, kept the small talk going, and endured a few more skillfully masked insults. Before long I was back in the buffet line that my grandmother had curated for the Easter celebration, filled with homemade casseroles, Jennifer's famous cornbread, and fried chicken that we all pretended wasn't from KFC. I drank bright red Kool-Aid from a clear solo cup and listened to the conversations around me. It was less exhausting than participating in them.

"I heard your oldest couldn't go into the air force like he wanted to. I can't imagine how hard he took that. Bless his heart."

Bless your heart. The most derogatory remark an old southern woman can utter. Its effectiveness displays the main tenant of southern hospitality: leave the nastiest insults unspoken. There was a certain art to it.

By saying, 'bless his heart,' what my first cousin once removed, Rosie, had meant was, 'How pitiful.' This was because Rosie probably knew why he had actually been denied by the military.

Linda, Rosie's sister-in-law, had told everyone that her oldest son, Brent, had been refused entrance because he was color blind, but I, and I suppose Rosie, knew that wasn't true. He had failed the psychiatric test because he was on antidepressants during his senior year of high school. But no one was allowed to talk about that. Just like we weren't allowed to talk about how my Aunt Jennifer and her husband Mark had been to couple's therapy three years ago after she cheated on him with the neighbor, or how my older brother had dropped out of college earlier that month. My mother had reminded us all in the car that it wasn't an "extended family topic." Whatever that meant.

Worried that another relative might question me on my grades, college plans, or why I still didn't have a boyfriend, I wandered upstairs, into the stuffy attic, especially warm on a spring afternoon. I rummaged through the deep pockets of my bag, retrieving a pack of Lucky Strikes. I made my way to the window on the far side of the house which supplied a perfect view of the backyard where the men of the family played a bastardized version of baseball.

"Elizabeth?" I heard as I rounded the corner to the farthest expanse of the attic. It was my older cousin, John, home for a short break from his fancy, liberal arts college in California. I tried to act casual, hiding the carton of cigarettes behind my back. "It's fine," he laughed, pulling a lit cigarette up from where he hid it behind the windowsill, "That's the only reason I'm up here." I gave an appreciative laugh in response as I slowly walked over to the lofty window, open fully to let the soft breeze into the scorching attic.

I carefully lit the cigarette, turning away from the view of the yard just in case a curious cousin were to glance up and see me. It felt weird. No one knew that I smoked outside of the friend that supplied me with the cigarettes. And my father who had found my stash of Marlboro Silvers in the garage and promptly replaced them with a carton of Luckies. He left a yellow sticky note on top of them: 'Lizzie, if you're going to break the rules, at least break them well.' He had known that the cigarettes were mine, I didn't know how, but I didn't question it. I had found his stash just a few weeks before and hadn't said anything to mom. Maybe he knew that too and

was just returning the favor. Yet another thing that was left suspensefully unspoken between us.

“You’re a junior now, right?” John asked. I nodded. “Cool,” he nodded his head slowly, “And you’re playing the organ down at church?”

“Yeah.”

“I bet Debbie was pretty pissed about that. You know her son has been in piano lessons since fourth grade trying to get that job.”

“Yeah,” I laughed.

Nothing unspoken. No suffocating subtext. We sat in silence, watching the game below us. Mark and Jeff, brothers, were the two team captains. They were horribly competitive and turned every gathering at my grandmother’s house into a battle of the families, with their sons filling either baseball team. Brent stood at the makeshift pitcher’s mound, ready to pitch the ball for Mark to hit. The crack of the bat was followed by a sharp smacking sound. The ball had struck Brent in the temple, knocking him off the mound and into the kept lawn. Gasps sounded throughout the yard, Linda ran over to her son, grabbing at his face. John sat still. I held my breath. Brent shot up, shoving his mother’s arms off himself.

“Sorry, son. You all right?” Mark asked. Brent only laughed in response.

“You did that on purpose,” he yelled, pointing an accusatory finger in his direction.

“If my aim was that good, I’d be in the big leagues, kid.” The spectators nervously laughed around them, hoping that Brent was joking.

“Don’t call me kid. Stop patronizing me, okay? Just because I didn’t get into the air force, because I know that’s what you’re thinking. That’s what everyone’s thinking. Poor Brent. Poor you, Mark. You’re the one who can’t even keep his wife happy enough to stay out of the neighbor’s house, yeah? Poor Mark.”

“Brent,” an uncle said from across the yard, trying to intervene.

“Oh, don’t act like you’re not the problem too, Justin. I heard you telling your wife that I belonged in the nuthouse earlier in the living room. Right? So let’s share then. Since you want to share. Your daughter doesn’t even receive communion anymore. What’s that all about? Maybe it’s because she’s following in the footsteps of her big sister who had a baby, let’s see, five months after her wedding? Let’s do that math. And the priest was still

willing to officiate it. Now I wonder what divinely inspired him to do that. Maybe the same divine inspiration that helped you buy your fancy new Mustang. That inspiration you 'earned' with the law degree your daddy paid for. I'm so- I'm- I can't-." He began to walk away, toward Justin's Mustang that he had mentioned a few moments ago.

The entire yard stood in silence, no one brave enough to call attention to themselves. He approached the vehicle, stopping to take a rest, I assumed, as the bump on his temple grew bigger and more purple by the second. He raised his hand, clenching it into a fist and bringing it down onto the hood of the car, placing an ugly dent right in the middle. The car alarm sounded, masking the gasps of the family and the scream of Justin's wife. John clapped a hand over his face, muffling a laugh.

This couldn't be happening. There it all was, everything everyone had been thinking all afternoon, out in the open. It hung in the air like a thick layer of smoke, leaving the audience choking on the implications.

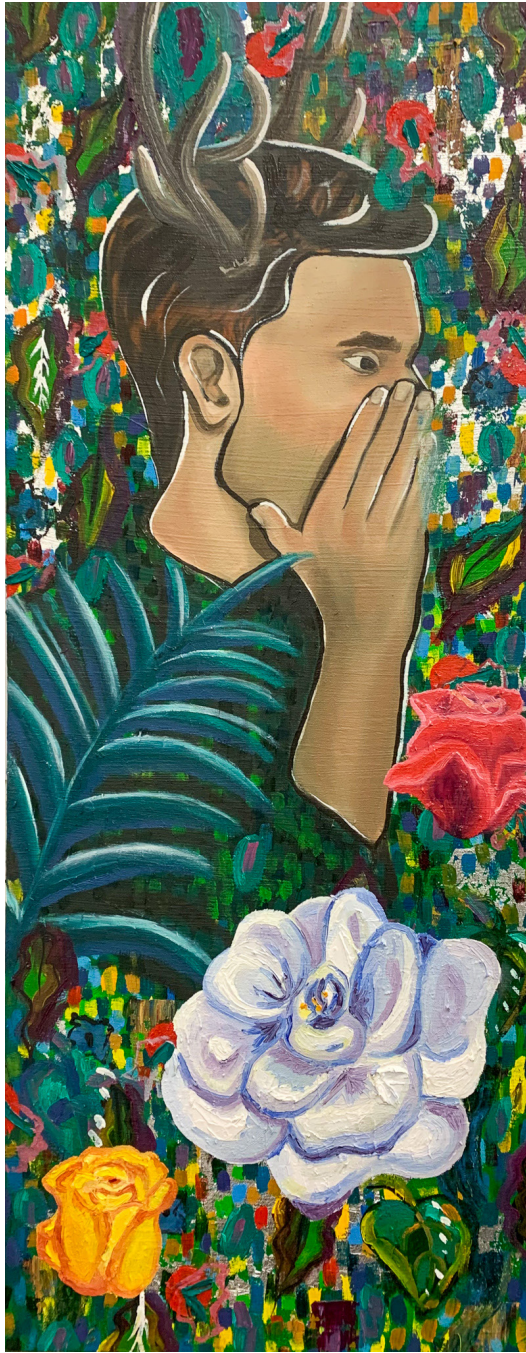
"What the hell is going on?" John asked through fits of laughter. I shrugged, at a loss for words.

I looked towards my father, who stood in the corner of the yard, beer in hand. He held the same expression that he had before the incident: unreadable. I was waiting for his response, a reaction of some sort. He turned away from the scene, as Linda ran after her concussed son, Jennifer tried to calm her husband down, and Justin slapped the steering wheel of the car as he tried unsuccessfully to turn off the alarm. I watched as he made his way to the farthest flowerbeds. He pulled a small carton out of his vest pocket, along with a lighter. For the first time in my life, I watched as he lit a cigarette, holding it carelessly in the air as he watched the scene unfold before him.

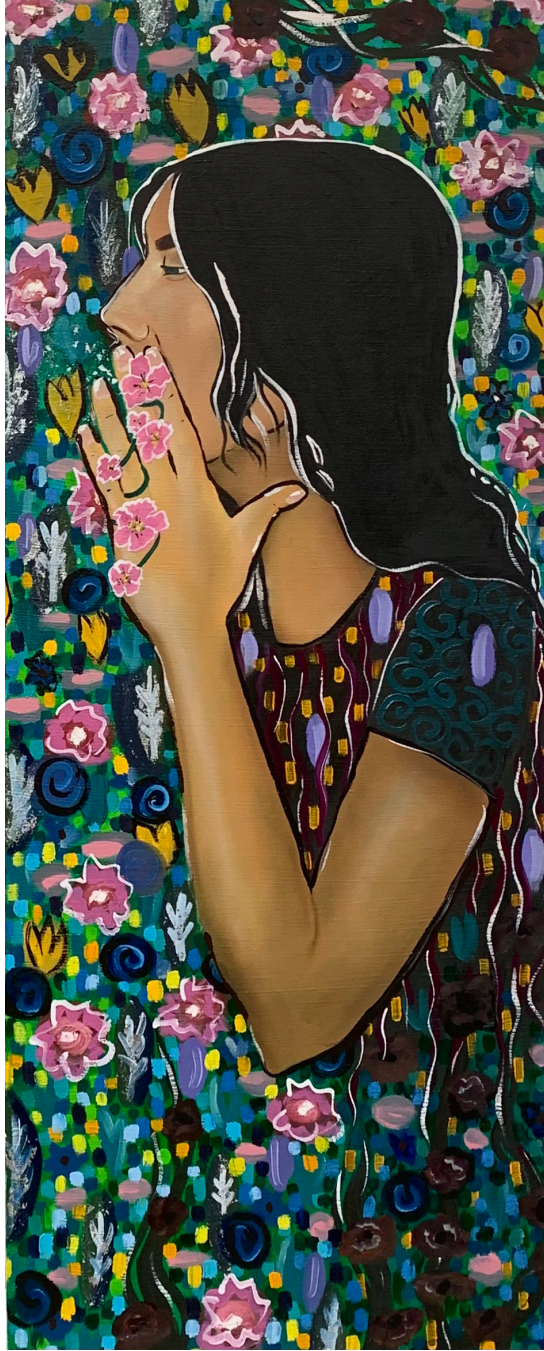
Because why not? Why not leave it all out in the open? There was no more game to be played this afternoon, no more subtle disses, no more tension over clear solo cups of red Kool-Aid, no more baseball games to reconcile brotherly hatred. Suddenly, in the wake of true, authentic, Yankee-like insults, the entire family seemed to let out a deep sigh of relief. Because why did it matter if my father smoked a cigarette?

This time next year we would all pretend like we had forgotten the incident altogether, as if it slipped our minds. I knew that Justin would show up to church next Sunday in his Mustang, miraculously dent-free, and shake

Brent's hand like nothing had happened. Because if we were to remember this, then what was the point? There would be no more sweeping things under the rug. We could no longer pretend that we were all free of flaws and ignorant of each other's business. Because that wouldn't be hospitable at all, would it?



The Listener I • Grayson Jarrell • Oil on canvas



The Listener II • Grayson Jarrell • Oil on canvas



There's a Method to His Madness

Sophie Ngo

Charcoal on paper

There's An Itching In My Eye

Poetry • Kayla Burrell

There's an etching, someone scratching,
someone carving out a word
with a chisel—
or a pencil—
or the talon
of a bird. That is it! I hear a calling,
distant cawing in my ear,
from a crow atop my eyelash
who's engraving the word 'fear'.

I can feel his shifting feathers
on my face—a flutter full—
yet I only see his foot, a
sharpened tool for him to pull
through the surface of my eyeball,
iris bleeding like an ink
into teary white surroundings.
I am careful not to blink.

One might think he'd use a quill,
the plumed fellow on my face—
but the nail is more efficient,
with a time-enduring trace:
So forever when I glance at
my reflection in a glass,
I will get a chill, reminded
of the crow who haunts my past.



The Way Up
Ava Shutze
Photography



Switzerland
Reagan Kennedy
Photography

faltering creation self-actualization

Poetry • Zoe Lawrence

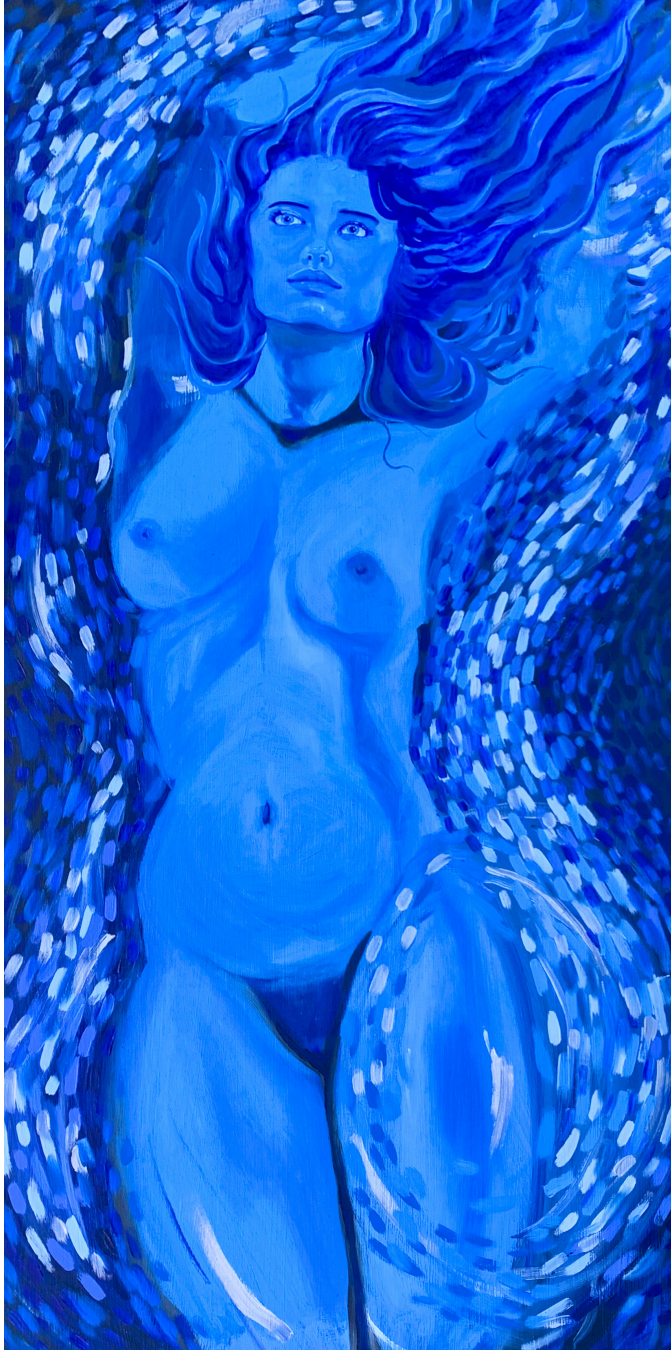
Fabricating myself
in layers between,
Feeding you into the machine.

Velvet-soft, pin-sharp
you defy my insistent fingers.
Slippery satin and chiffon
drift out of reach like inspiration

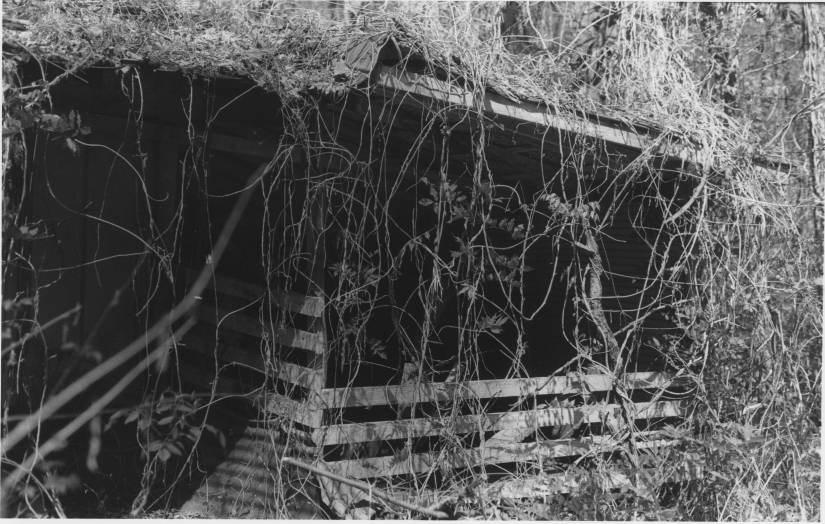
Create myself and pick up the shears
Cut with kindness
through fabric and fears

You let me press you together
Poke you with pins
Stitch by stitch I revitalize
And now the test begins

Slide over my shoulders, skin, soul:
Sew me together and
make me whole.



Entombed
Grayson Jarrell
Oil on panel



Vines

Eric Neumann

Photography

Damp

Poetry • Emily Clancey

I step outside and look up. I am small. The sky is an even wall of white, almost blue or even lavender. The porch is cold and slick beneath my feet. Birdsong echoes flatly.

I take it in, and try to find the warmth I had been looking for when I stepped outside to look at the sky. All I feel is cold.

There is something damp and dismal here. Something alive, but not the way people are. It's alive the way vines are as they creep into the rock and pull it apart. The way carpenter bees are as they buzz deeper into the wood. The way fungus is as it hollows dead things.

And the birdsong echoes flatly.

And the sky is a wall of white.

There is something dead. But not the way people can die. It's dead the way mirrors are dead. The way puppets are dead. The way acrylic, no matter how you paint it, is dead. There is something dead here and I think it lives in me.

And the birdsong echoes flatly.

And the sky is a wall of white.

There is mutiny in my body, rejection, revolt. Wordless noise ringing in my skull. Bouncing off of corners and polished mirrors. Emptiness without appetite, crying just to cry, body mute.

Wanting to be strong does not make you strong. I haven't been well since I was smaller, sickness seeds sown deep. Who knows how soon it deformed.

And the noise, it echoes flatly.

And my face is a wall of white.

Editors' Choice • Photography



So Vain
Sophie Ngo
Photography



兔年

Melina George

Digital art



Bison by The Lodge

Sophie Ngo

Oil on canvas

The Sunroom

Creative Nonfiction • Alysha Matthews

I'm an artist, or a self-proclaimed one. A while back, I started painting a red skull on a blue ombre background. Since then, somehow the color got away from me and shifted towards a mulberry color. That's okay. These things happen.

I paint in my home on our patio-turned-sunroom-turned-exercise-space that occasionally gets flipped into my personal studio. The four large windows normally allow the sunlight to pour in and illuminate the little room, but this painting session takes place at night. So, the ceiling lights drown out any light the night might have held and diminished the windows to black squares against the bright room. Even the moon is hard to spot. We still have the same patio furniture in the sunroom from before we replaced the mesh screens with actual walls. To flip this room into my studio, I throw a sheet on the table, roll my easel out of its corner, and put my bag of paints on the table.

As I flip open the bag, the tubes of paint, brushes, and pallet knives watch me curiously. The newest member, a bottle of retarder, sits on top. It's supposed to keep the acrylic wet longer so it will blend better. I planned to teach myself how to use it; it can't be that hard. I taught myself how to ombre for this project, I think I can teach myself how to use this.

I sift through my paint bag until I find the correct colors: a few different reds, black, and white. I pop open a tube and slowly inhale. The chemical smell fills my nose. I love the smell of paint. I relish these moments

because it won't be long until my nose gets used to the smell and begins to block it out.

Carefully, I squeeze the colors onto my white palette. The paint slides out and pops onto the palette with little to no grace. I've always questioned why most palettes are white. The paint sometimes stains them, and it's clear when I haven't thoroughly cleaned it after. Unfortunately, any other color, besides the wood or clear palettes, would make mixing colors difficult.

I squeeze a few drops of the retarder into the little piles of paint. Thoughts fill my brain as I do this, and my hands continue moving based on muscle memory. The thoughts bubble up and overlap my focus on the canvas and my goals for the skull.

My grandfather's face emerges from the thoughts. He wasn't exactly an artist, but he was a creative, nonetheless. His home and backyard were his canvas. His paint was plants, construction projects, cooking, or anything he wanted. When we lived in New Jersey, he started making kites. He would bring them to us so we could try them out. We would fly them for him, and then later he'd come back with new and improved ones. His face would take a certain expression when he was in deep concentration; his usual fedora perched on his head while the complicated brain within decided how to best fix or create something.

I can't remember a time when my grandfather was not successful at something he put his hands to. Until he got sick. I guess he was sick my whole life, I was just young and didn't know. He smoked for a long time. The smoking caused cancer, which killed a piece of his lung and condemned what was left to a slow death. It took time for the rest of his lungs to start dying.

I remember him being tall, strong, and invincible up until a couple of years before he died. It started with a cough. Then it was a bout of pneumonia. Lots of pneumonia. Then the oxygen tank in grandma's house. I can't remember which came first: the stair lift or the leather, plush armchair. All I know was soon the stairs were too much for him, so we got him the stair lift, and he had a tough time getting comfortable, so we got him the armchair. We put it in view of the TV so he could watch wrestling. WWE was his favorite show to watch. He would argue with you if you tried to tell him it was fake. Whenever he left the house, which wasn't often anymore, he always wore that fedora. Even when the paramedics took him for the last time.

I try to remember the good things. Before he got sick, when things were simple. The face he would make when he was studying the kites he made for us: his eyebrows would draw in and his mouth would form a thin line. The way his smile trembled and how tears would roll down his cheeks before he laughed. Watching him prick his finger before checking his blood sugar. He did it so methodically but never robotically. I think I will always consider it beautiful.

We went to the beach a couple of times, but I can only remember one trip. I was young; all the waves were taller than me, but that was okay because Grandpa was with me. We were jumping waves together. No words, just laughter. A strong wave took me by surprise. Instinctively, I grabbed Grandpa. I guess the wave also took him by surprise. We slipped into a myriad of blue together. I think my mother shouted. I don't remember how we got up, but we lived! We laughed about this for a long time.

It's 2019, November. We should be helping Grandma make Thanksgiving dinner, or at least setting the table, but my cousin, sister, brother, and I are standing in the corner of my grandfather's hospital room. He's asleep. A heavy-duty oxygen machine is plugged into his nose. I didn't know they made oxygen machines that strong.

None of us wanted to wake him because we knew rest for him was hard. My mother told us so the night before while we waited outside his ER room as the nurse took his X-rays. I also didn't know that there were such things as portable X-ray machines. The doctor later pointed out splotches of pneumonia on the X-rays of Grandpa's weak lungs. Pneumonia that they had suspected was there the last time he was at the hospital but never treated. Grandpa slept peacefully after the doctor left. But we're standing in his hospital room now. Last night feels like a forever ago. We studied the tall, strong man that was now at the mercy of an oxygen machine, a hospital bed, and nurses.

"He looks so small." My sister bumped my hand. Maybe she had wanted to hold it, but I was too busy holding on to false hope. "I used to think he would just, you know, live forever."

I start to work on the shadows in the skull. The eye sockets must be near black, and the lightest part is where the light hits, so probably the forehead. Whenever I draw, I tend to make whatever I'm drawing very dark in value. I'm not sure why, it just always ends up that way. This skull is no

different. The shadows have gotten away from me; the skull has turned into a deep purple. There's no going back from this now. Maybe I can lighten it a little when I clean up the highlights and paint the teeth. I lose myself to reflection as I continue to work.

Death is inevitable. In my grandfather's case, he danced with death until he could no longer. My mother would often plan small family reunions. We would take over the backyard with our celebrations. Before these parties, my mother would pull my siblings and I aside to remind us that we weren't sure how long grandpa had left. I would look at my tall, strong grandfather with his gray fedora. That could not be a dying man.

I was right. He may have been sick my whole life, but he was never dying when my mother first said he was. On his death bed, he was skinny, exhausted, and needed help sitting up. Watching him slowly begin to depend on us made me question the idea of legacy; more so focused on the aspect of who tells my story when I die. Who keeps talking about me after I'm gone? Obviously, I'm still here talking about my grandfather. He fills my mind whenever I create, and I subconsciously include him in my art. What warrants the world remembering you and at what point does everyone forget?

I would like to propose that it's the little moments. The little things that really showed me who my grandfather was are how I remember him and define him, like the kites, or almost drowning at the beach. I think those little things become a person's legacy after they die. The people that a person loves and cares for are the people who continue to tell that person's story. My grandfather will always have a piece of my heart. I think he will continue to make his way into everything I create. I'm not sure who will tell my story after I die. I have no control over who feels the need to take that responsibility if anyone decides to take that mantle.

I start to clean up the harsh edges of the indents of the skull as I am once again reminded of another truth I can't escape from: Death does not care what I have accomplished. Death doesn't care if I had more to accomplish. Death doesn't care if I've been sick or if I am the picture of health. Death doesn't care.

I unexpectedly lost a friend and then a classmate after my grandfather died. As I grieved, I also started to not care, like Death. If at any point a person could be yanked away from me, why bother to form

friendships? If I could die at any point, why bother to achieve anything? I don't have an answer to these questions. I still struggle with that mentality. I've found things to be passionate about and people I care about, but in the back of my mind I wonder why I bother. I'm going to have to say goodbye at some point. I don't have answers or solutions. I don't have answers or solutions.

While I figure it out, I try to enjoy the little things, like painting late in the evenings with my sister and brother sitting in the sunroom with me. My mom floats in to say something to us. She says she's going to bed, but then she sees we're all sitting there enjoying each other's company, so she stays. My dad walks in and peers over my shoulder before asking about what I'm painting. I answer him, and he gives a little thoughtful, satisfied frown, nods, tells me to keep it up, and leaves to go finish whatever mission he emerged out of his mancave to accomplish.

Like I've said, there's much I don't know. Who tells my story? Who remembers me? Have I done enough for someone to care? I've realized that all I can do is make the most of my time and love the people I love. There's still much I must heal from, but time heals all wounds, or at least it makes it easier. The pain is not the gaping pit it was; it no longer threatens to consume me. I can breathe. I can laugh now. It's not so bad.

I gather my brushes. I take a step back from the painting to examine it. Sometimes taking a step back from something can put all the details into focus and show you how it is all working together. The teeth aren't finished. The flower crown is not on the skull. The highlights aren't light enough. I have so much more to fix. Not today. I leave to wash my brushes. The skull stares into the void.



Skull

Eric Neumann

Photography

Crowning Glory

Poetry • Ava Shutze

The sparrow withered till the morning,
In his sleep, an emerald gem shone

Cut me once my darling,
Bury the knock at your door,
Crushed behind a velvet war,
Willowed away in the gore

The fellow caught in the mourning,
Trying to pull the sword out of the stone,

There's nothing left for
Him, but growling golden glory

////

Honey, honey,
Bleed out in the water,
Sunny, sonny,
Lead the lambs to the slaughter

Scarred scarlet letter,
Why did your Ship sink down under
Arrows clung to his heart, a smeary gape
Among the glass rain and thunder
Nothing but his moonless shape

Hunting a bruised debtor
He ran through the tundras to guard his keep,
Thorn upon thorn,
Ivy and vine,
Bells tolling to his weep,
Warned and worn
Barely alive

////

A sorrow hung low in the scoring,
He arrived before the gilded throne

He wore the crown the sparrow spun,
Face still burrowed red,
Froth foaming upon his jeweled head

Notice me, notice me

“Can you not see,”
The yellow feathers sung

The diadem you wear atop your green and brown gown
Will only reap you a reign of terror
because it meant cutting down
Its bearer



First Light
Grayson Jarrell
Oil on panel

DO NOT TAP ON THE GLASS

Poetry • Karissa Horn

The snake's dull coils glisten under the heat lamp.
She is majestic, lethargic; her filmy amber eyes blink listless
through the smudged glass. Her lithe and limber length
shifts, slow and inexorable, under black mosaic skin
replete with diamonds. I am awed at the mysteries
of her mind, her weighty motion.

But I would not adore her unknowable mind if the glass
shattered, the film of fingerprints gone, and
she fixed my dead stare through the dark
of a few inches.

I would not love her strength if I could feel her cold scales
crawling, rolling with inexorable muscle up my forearm.

And what if we touched? Would your curved arm
coil and constrict my waist, obstruct my breath,
Eyes fixed past my skin with slow-blinking slit-eyes
where no love lurks—
An adversary—a temptation?

I am awed by the majesty only of caged beasts.
I love through thick viewing glass.



The Secret Garden

Melina George
Photography



Arabesque

Zoe Lawrence & Nabila Wilson

Photography

Will to My Children

Poetry • Hanna King

To the rain,

I leave a single penny and all that I do not have.

To my own,

I give you everything my mother gave me and everything I stole from her and hoped she wouldn't miss.

I give you my mirrors, obscured but unrotted, and the yellow kettle you pulled off the stovetop over your head.

I gave you myself at the wall between me and I, and a map back to the foundation.

I leave you to everything I am not.

To the earth,

I give you pain.

I'm sorry, darling. We were always made to bear it.

I give you the white paint and the rose wallpaper underneath and the yellow striped paper underneath that and the gypsum board at our core.

4 blue mugs and their matching ceramic plates.

The frothy pink you chose for me.

The rest I will to my grave.

Carolina Mantis

Poetry • Kayla Burrell

I'm not quite through
the brightest part of morning
when the sun wakes the mantis
with its heat slanting onto the porch.

Mantis on the third-floor balcony,
balanced against the brick,
light warm on its back, summer
on a dead leaf.

A cloud passes over. Miffed by
the sudden shade, the mantis
waves a leg into the dry air,
sets it down, then stills.

The cloud goes; blue sky
and happy mantis. It stays crouched,
a hint of a lean toward
the toasty open. Suddenly:

A gust of early autumn air.
Mantis turns its hammer head
and shakes side to side, rocking
on its legs. A dance—

Or perhaps it's spied me
gazing across my teacup,
swaying gently like I do,
tilting my head to understand it.



Olympus

Grayson Jarrell

Oil on panel



Flight
Melina George
Photography

Chorus of Murmurations

Creative Nonfiction • Aubrey Hume

In my first month of college, my recently made ex-girlfriend came to campus to visit me. We spent the night downtown, getting subpar ramen paired with an imported fruit flavored soda in a funny bottle I paid too much for. When she first pulled up to my dorm building, I got into her car without ever looking at her and directed her to where she should park. We sat in silence, seatbelts still around our waists – keeping us safe from whatever was to come next – until we finally exchanged a dry hello.

Things are different. You shouldn't even be here.

I don't look at her until we sat over the two bowls of noodles that tasted more of water and the wooden chopsticks in our hands than anything else. When I do look, I see her wholly. She appears nearly the same as when I had first seen her years ago. But our cheeks are slimmer, faces a little more stern and structured, symptoms of finally growing up I suppose. Her eyes were the same though. They are soft and welcoming, but the blues mostly carry a new wariness, that look of knowing someone too well and still finding yourself pretending you're strangers - something I am responsible for.

I maintain our quiet with my head down as she goes to the counter for a box for my unfinished meal. I am uncomfortably aware of the fact that she has finished her bowl. I am just as aware of the look of worry on her face I see when I lift my head to meet her steady gaze already studying me.

As we walk the crowded sidewalk back to her car, our shared

atmosphere feels like that of months ago, too easily copying past habits. I almost reach out for her hand in the crowd to help guide me, trying to solidify something that has already crumbled away. I am responsible for this. Against better judgement even, I am the one who did it all. The breakup and the invitation to see me weeks later.

I am selfish for this.

I offhandedly mention that it felt like we were on a date again. She does not have anything to say back. We take a walk around the lake when we get back from our outing. I normally do this alone to avoid overthinking. I also normally do it in the light of day, but here, now, it is dark. I cannot see exactly where I am going; where my feet fall as I go forward because of this. I am not afraid of much though. I occupy myself with wondering if I just stepped on an old acorn or something the geese left behind. Maybe it is because of the darkness, the guise the lack of day provides, or maybe it is just that I cannot fully see her eyes that we truly begin talking.

Stupidly, I start by bringing up how she really should see all the ducks that live on the lake that will approach you, far tamer than you are used to a duck being. I know she would like them. I let this sit before I consume the whole conversation. I bring up the swans, the fact I like seeing them in my own time. I really do like swans. Back in high school, I often found myself asking my friends what I reminded them of; what color do you think I am? What character would I be? What song reminds you of me?

I was desperate to be perceived, and desperate to know how I was perceived along with it. My questions often followed this formula in an attempt to build up my own character. I still do this, despite knowing that it can be seen as annoying and probably a little narcissistic. I want to know myself regardless - I really don't know why I need a middleman.

One day I asked my friend in her car, "What kind of animal would I be?", and she sat there and thought (I loved when people would take their time to answer when I asked about myself) before she finally said, "A swan, I guess." This was a good answer in my book, but I wanted clarification of what that meant. She said that I carried myself nicely and seemed elegant. It was the first time someone even alluded to me being pretty. I boxed these words up quickly and took them home with me. I wouldn't need to ask another question for a while.

I see the swans on the lake here and a reflection of my loneliness in

the water too. It is a comfort to see them glide across the water and know that, even if it is just the once said words of an old friend I may never run into again, someone could compare me to them.

In this moment though, my identified companions are nowhere to be seen. I am left only with the water, wind, a cold concrete bench, and my first love. My eyes have started to adjust as my words have become more emotional. Apologies and catching up and reminiscing. Resentment is met with explanations, met with forgiveness. I cry first. And then, she cries in a way I have never seen before. It is the most I have ever seen her just, leak, wringing herself out dry.

An old friend of mine would've referenced and connected some obscure movie to this moment. We always called each other Bird. The phrase is dedicated to an old favorite, *Blue Jay*, a film we both were once enamored with. In it, two high school sweethearts reconnect and relive after years and find themselves still in love with one another despite the time that has passed, reverting to a younger version of themselves. Usually, Bird's references weren't so much of an exact echo of the plot. Usually, it's just a funny way to bring up something only we know about, something that is tinged with regret and a sense of wistful loss. You can't get that time back. It is surreal and somewhat sickening to know it.

Bird and I would go into depth about these things in an existential teenager manner with energy drinks and snacks from the gas station fueling our minds. I think we considered ourselves characters in an obscure movie only your nerdy friend would know. Over the last summer we had together, we would sit at the local park until my curfew had already passed and talk about meaningless things, trying to bring out meaning in them. Some of the time at least. It was also a lot of complaining and exasperation and laughing. We managed to say anything, in our own form of talk therapy.

What was said at the park stayed at the park. It was all fair game including: how my grandparents would listen to bird songs and jokingly bicker over who knew what bird it came from, that when I was in the hospital my mother would gently give me a "birdie-bath" with a rag, that my summers in Kentucky were highlighted by the hummingbirds during thunderstorms, how every time my father was bitterly angry I managed to see a goldfinch on one of the feeders.

Birds have been with me everywhere, little reminders of love.

I hear my mother talk about the doves building a nest above our front door and know this to be true. I know she will not knock their nest down carelessly, instead choosing to watch them settle and develop there. An invitation for welcomed guests, their life is not a tacky addition to our porch.

I can still see the flocks above the fields of my old home swirling together like rough waves and I know this to be true. Calming and then rushing, moving together in one mass, guided by something I can't see. I see the red winged blackbirds still, noisily chattering and being refreshed by the knowledge that their presence meant spring was arriving. I remember the neighborhood cat we called our own showing up with birds on our doorstep. Even when hurt, even when hunted, that innocence and simple care was preserved. My brother and I would tidy it up, give it a proper burial as one of our companions, dressing the grave with flowers and a makeshift headstone.

And though we were never happy to see another lost, I knew that cat was trying to tell us something when she showed up with a bird in her mouth at our door. That little cat that ended up dead under the wheel of a car, even though she grew up on the street. And I still feel guilt for the chick she delivered that I unsuccessfully tried to nurse back to health in our garage. I named it and checked on it like it was my own, knowing it was the weekend and there was nowhere else to bring it. And even though it's been years now, and the comment probably was said with less thought than I would like to consider, I try to see myself as a swan. When I see them, they make a funny little noise you wouldn't expect from their appearance, one that makes me smile. I love the sounds of birds. I wake up in the morning and listen to their songs and let myself be cradled by their chirps. I used to stay up all night to listen to them by the neighborhood pond at sunrise with over-steeped tea in my hand. I'm still fond of my old friend Bird, no matter the time that has passed since our departure.

I don't tell her all of this, of course, and we leave our cold gray bench at the lake when she says she is tired. In our light tread, something appears out of place. A fold of brown tossed on the ground before me. It distracts me as we get closer. And suddenly, I am standing above it- laying there, under the clean windows: a dead bird. Unsuspecting. Ran right into the glass without knowing better. I wonder if it would be too hard to bury it, put a flower next to it, make a little blanket from a leaf nearby – anything to

recognize it before someone comes in for their shift in the morning and moves it to the trash with a gloved hand or dustpan when they discover it.

But I just stare. Its feathers move ever so slightly in the breeze. I see the way the brown hues shift slightly on its back, that its beauty is there, even in its cold state. I see it, and though the moment seems to drag on, we quickly shift and make it to my room.

She slept in my bed that night. Inches away from me, holding me, yet out of reach. In the morning, when she leaves, I walk her out to her car and realize I am restless.



Light Work
Anna Timbes
Photography



Creature Battle

Sophie Ngo

Graphite on paper

House Lights

Poetry • Stephen McLean

Rising with horizon's curtain, rays of pale gold scatter into the sky.

Open your eyes.

The world is still dusted by shadows,
But brilliance rears its head from below.

Shine! O glorious light, unto the world!

Strings and woodwinds, fresh as morning dew,
Harmonize effortlessly, ushering in a soft beginning.
Brassy horns blare in blazing whites and yellows,
Equal parts blinding and beautiful.
Dance, in those vibrant beams,
Until time takes a final bow.

glow, o beauteous light, upon the world.

lustrous sunbeams run back home,
as soft shadows take their place.
close your eyes.

a curtain of stars closes over tonight's stage.

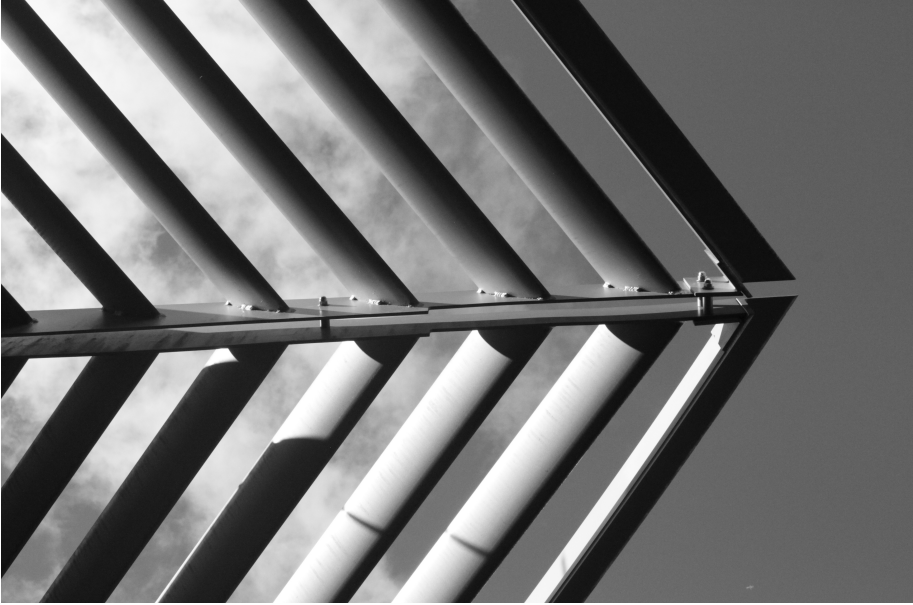
constellations slow dance together,
their partners light-years away.
the moon performs a lonesome waltz,
companion steadfastly slumbering.
but soon enough the orchestra tunes up,
and the audience fills their seats.



Dusk on The Terrace

Anna Timbes

Photography



Steel

Ava Shutze
Photography

Caper's Island

Poetry • Karissa Horn

Early, my father wakened me.
Pale dawn glowed pink
over the cresting sea wake;
We packed our tents, went down to the water,
and climbed into the cramped canoe
atop remnants of our rugged camp.
But we were not six yards out when the water beneath us
slapped our little vessel's sides so hard we nearly capsized—

so we went back beaten,
to wait out the next high tide.

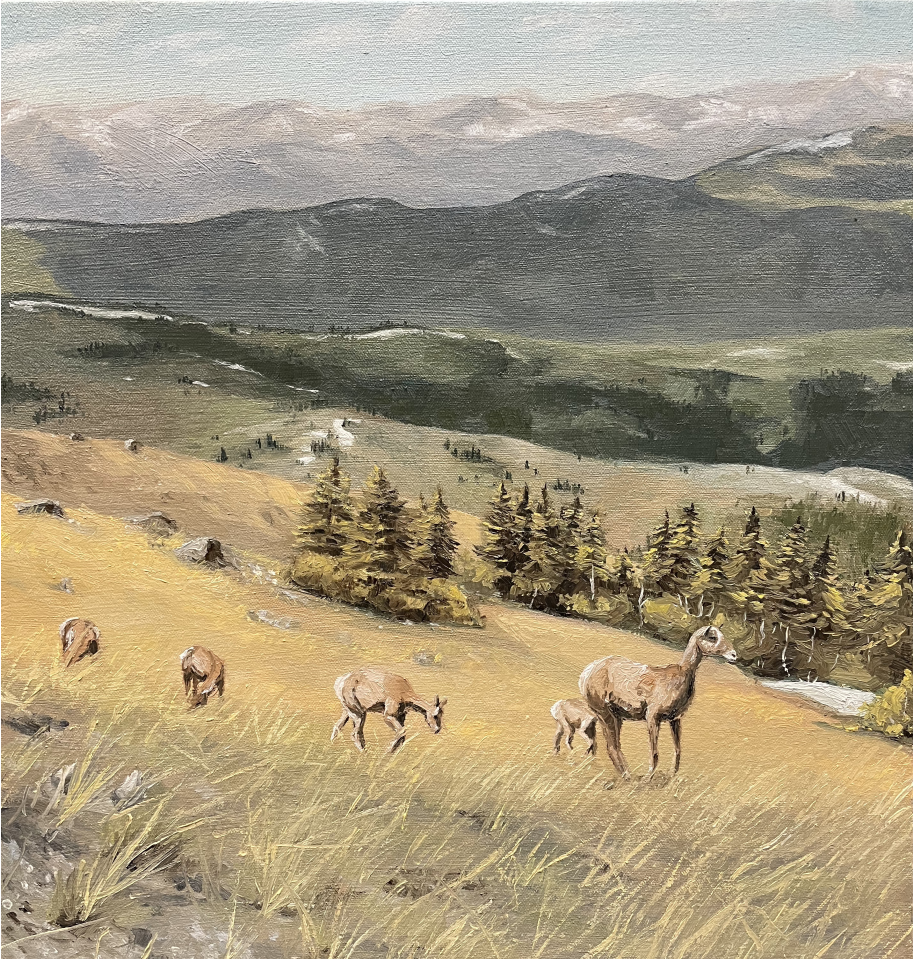
Midday, my father remembers
wading after the lost gear, waiting
for the waves to relent, phoning
my mother, dragging the boat across
the whole length of the island's sand beach—
But I was small, and I beach-combed contently,
still in my buckled blue life-jacket and wet clothes,
admiring the shells, and the largess of the sea.

Evening, my father felt fear:
of the coming day, of dawn,
of the tide that might again strand us here
with my mother stranded too alone across the phone line
and he with a seven year old little girl to feed and protect and
keep warm and dry and safe from mosquitoes—
But I remember a dumbfounding sunset,
and a sandy hoard of shells, all mine.

I stored the best that could be kept:
Sand-dollars, perfectly preserved;

Conch horns, triumphantly twisting;
Clam cases—but no pearls—
crusted with coral like lacy concrete.

The next morning we cast off alright—
and we were tired, and we were sandy
and sore from two tent-camping nights,
and missing Mom and the mainland,
and hungry for something besides oatmeal;
but I remember the Island fondly,
for my lintel bore childhood's seal,
and my father's fear never found me.



Bighorn Sheep on Mount Washburn

Sophie Ngo

Oil on canvas

Gardening

Fiction • Michael Peeler

Yards are an incredible thing. The average apartment dweller will never understand the joy of clearing a patch in your empty yard for a small vegetable garden, tilling the ground to plant your fifteen little tomato plants, working through the spring to keep them well watered and protected with the cages that guide their short, striving stems upwards, weeding and making sure that the tiny plants grow just right; the joy that comes from seeing the happy yellow of your first flowers on the plant, your first adorable bud, your first cheery little green tomato starting to appear; the excitement as that first tomato of the season starts turning yellow as you check them each day, then orange, and finally red, until it's bright enough for you to pick it, take it inside, slice it up, and make a perfect tomato sandwich with a toasted piece of bread, the right amount of mayo, a sprinkle of salt and pepper, and tasting the fruit of your own labor; and then going out the next day, and picking two more, and then having more tomatoes, several more ripening each day, until you realize the first week has ended and you're getting eight tomatoes a day, and not even you, with all your love of tomatoes, could actually eat them at that fast of a frequency, but they're your tomatoes that you've spent this long harvesting, so you obviously don't want them to go to waste, and you need to start finding more uses for the tomatoes, so you start trying to make tomato sauce from scratch, though the fresh tomatoes mean it's way wetter and more skin-filled than when you use the normal peeled and canned stuff, so you need to invest in an immersion blender or something to help make it more edible, and even then it's still tomatoes and

you're still having to eat them and you really need to get someone else to help with this, so you invite all your family in the area over for a big Italian dinner, and everyone is so proud of your tomatoes and the work you put into growing them, and you send everyone home with the tomatoes you picked that day and the leftover sauce, and then since you've already had spaghetti the night before, you expand into other things like salsa and caprese salad, even though you're starting to get a bit sick of tomatoes and your acid reflux is acting up again, so ultimately you decide to go ahead and start sharing the tomatoes with your neighbors, who are very happy to be receiving them, and tell you how much they like tomatoes and are happy that you're sharing your hard work with them, except you notice that each day they seem to be getting less and less enthusiastic about the tomatoes because you just keep coming back with them again and again and they, too, start getting worried about how many tomatoes you're sharing and they become less and less happy to see you each day, so that by the third week after you got your first tomato they won't really open their doors when you come by and they intentionally avoid eye contact with you when you walk past, but you still have tomatoes you need to share and you have to keep trying to pawn them off to people and eating them yourself but the acid is really starting to aggravate your esophagus but damnit you put in the work for these, you grew them from scratch, you're not just going to start wasting them, and now you're a month in and some of the plants are starting to get yellow leaves and you're secretly getting a bit hopeful that it's almost the end of the season but you're still seeing a bunch of unripe tomatoes and still getting so many new, ripe tomatoes every day that by this point the only thing you're really eating is tomatoes, your tomato sandwiches have a tomato in the middle with two slices of tomato instead of bread, and tomato seeds instead of salt and pepper and tomato sauce instead of mayo, and is it just your imagination or are your teeth starting to look red, and you've still got two dozen tomatoes on your counter so you really need to figure out how to eat a couple more every day or else find something new to do with them so you eventually decide you'll get mason jars and start canning some of them, and making some canned salsa, and keep it for the rest of the winter, which will let you put off the obligation by accepting this cruel barter of a lengthening of your sentence, so you invest the six hours in the weekend you have off from work to buy mason jars from the store, to sterilize them in boiling

water, to blanch the tomatoes so their skins will come off easier, to chop up the tomatoes and peppers and onion, make the salsa, pour it into the cans, seal the jars in boiling water – except you’ve gotten even more tomatoes that day that you didn’t take into account so you don’t have enough jars so you’re going to have to eat some of the salsa, and you still have tomatoes left, too, and by this point it’s cost you hundreds of dollars; between plants, cages, fertilizer, insecticides, the blender, jars, canning material, as well as the immaterial costs of ruining any relationships with your neighbors and family and anyone who you will ever try to smile at, and all the eventual costs from the medical bills your overconsumption of very acidic tomatoes over the past month will eventually bring about, and you’re well and truly sick of tomatoes, so you almost shout with joy when 6 weeks after the first tomato you realize that there are no more little green baby tomatoes left on the plants, no more budding monstrosities, no more flowers signaling some coming curse-to-be, only varying shades of yellow and orange and red, so this is only going to go on for a little while longer, and so you sprint to the finish line, not quite happily but dutifully and proudly eating your tomatoes every day, each day picking fewer, each day the end drawing nearer, each moment leading you closer to freedom, until finally you realize that the day has come and you’ve picked what seems to be the last tomato left on the plants, and you eat it, and you weep, weep with joy, because thank God it’s finally over, thank God you’ve been successful, thank God you’ve proven your worth, thank God you’ve eaten them all, thank God you’ve shown that you can conquer nature, and then the next year looking at how empty your yard is, and recalling how much you liked gardening, and gosh, tomatoes are quite good, and deciding to do it all again.



The Woman in The Garden

Anna Timbes

Photography



Liquor Store
William Nix
Photography

The Armory- A Building in Duluth Minnesota

Poetry • Eric Neumann

The red brick is that of blood
Each dimple an eyeball
Looking out into the square

People go about their business
Talking of lofty ideals
And pressing their souls together

There are birds resting
On sprawling powerlines
A spider's web over the city

Here spirits and vagrants dance
And sing songs of their lives
Pouring themselves into the pavement

They pulse like a drum
Beating against the sidewalk
Their god stapled to a telephone pole

Inside, rats and squirrels fight
Over scraps of trash
Chewing on cigarette butts and newspaper

Kings of the gutter
Wearing plastic wrapping robes
And bottlecap crowns

The red brick building stands
A decrepit and ugly thing
Cracked and hungry

The floor is caked with dirt
And used needles
Rusted and sinister

20 some years ago
A famous musician played the hall
And made the walls thunder and quake

They've boarded the windows with his image
But only on the first few floors
The rest are jagged and smashed

The lonely building ebbs and sways
And beckons the churning masses in
To no avail



In The Eyes of The Beholder

William Nix

Photography



Timeless
Anna Timbes
Photography

Ghosts

Creative Nonfiction • Anonymous

Two weeks before Nate's dad died, Nate died too. This time, on stage. After Romeo stormed away, and the audience blinked back new tears, he quietly folded his legs, stood up from the floor, and exited in the dark. He sat on a prop bench in the wings afterwards, where I had hid myself in the black drapes, waiting for my cue. Before it was my turn to fling myself over Romeo's still and softly breathing body, Nate reached for my wrist and pulled me to stand in between his legs, hands resting on my waist like I might bolt, in this jittery, newness way, that I hoped, at the time, would one day become familiar, like the easy pull of a venetian blind, like opening a familiar book, how the worn spine creases the same way each time. Covering his mic with one hand, Nate spoke softly, *You know, when I'm sort of twitching out there, it's not entirely accurate. When someone is killed, their whole body releases and they die covered in their own shit.* He paused, looking up at me, our faces and costumes like a secret, the only bright things not consumed in darkness, then whispered, *It's awful, but I think I would laugh.*

When Ava texted to tell me what happened, I knew that Nate had been praying the rosary since Monday. Which is not to say that I saw it coming, just that Nate might have, in the back of his heart, understood that his father was a smoker, and that he struggled with his weight in a Mississippi, in love, try Atkins, way. That with those risk factors, Covid might mean something more than just the house settling in the night. That when Nate clutched his crucifix, he only felt the gold leafing, not his father's

hand, or the hand of his savior. The hospital was on lockdown, so when word of his death reached the town, rumor has it, no one had the chance to say goodbye.

All I know of Nate's father I learned after he died- whispers from mothers and teachers, the obituary printed in the Meridian Star. I learned that Nate's father taught history and coached football at the community college. That he was proud of his son and was *affectionately known by most all who knew him*. Which means I didn't know much about him at all.

Every obituary sounds the same. I kept imagining Nate reading it and getting angry. It occurred to me that I had actually never seen him angry before, so I wasn't sure what this looked like. The closest I had ever seen him to experiencing negative emotion was when he talked about Anna, his first girlfriend, who *doesn't deserve to walk around like she's better than everyone* and even that was a brief admission. He lived only a half mile walk from where I laid in the backyard hammock swing imagining how he was doing, trying to understand him differently now.

Over the summer our irritation had turned semi-serious, but it was all new. I just liked how I felt when he leaned down to look in my eyes, trying to decide if they were more blue or gray in front of the whole cast. The way he reached for my necklace to study the inscription on my locket, pulling me closer to him. It was the first time I really felt chosen, like there was something special about me, and I twirled into my room each night absolutely floating, trying to stay up as long as he would keep texting. But now I was left with just memories, staring at blue fractals of sky between branches from my hammock and wondering if he would ever call me to come over and sit with him when he wanted to talk.

Before Nate graduated high school in May, he had signed on with Belhaven to play football like his dad did, but dropped out after the first summer practices. He told me he didn't want to just go out there and get beat up all day. Once, thinking I was going to seem very deep and caring, I asked if he ever felt pressure from his dad to play in college. He said that his dad didn't really care that much what he did, as long as he didn't make him sit through ninety minutes of singing and dancing and boys in makeup; that he never told his father about the time he had to dress up like a mermaid. I said I thought it was very brave of him to do what was best for him, transferring

to community college, taking all the leads in local productions and passing time flirting with all the high schoolers. The last part I said with a smile, leaning over to bump his shoulder with mine.

I wanted to prove I would stay by his side when it wasn't all teenage dream, when he needed me most. I thought he needed me most. When I left a Tupperware container of casserole on his doorstep, he did not meet me outside or respond to the note. The letter was co-signed at the last minute by Ava, in hopes to dilute what I considered to be a brazen confession of love. The stationary was from third grade and I wrote a little joke at the end about not making fun of the magenta swirls and peace signs. Ava said it might not be the time, but all I wanted to do was make him smile, even more than I wanted him to love me.

Of course, there was nothing I could have proven to him. This was about Nate, who did not love me. Who made a quiet exit. Who did not ask me to stay.

I spent the rest of the summer in mourning. I didn't go to the funeral, but sometimes I still mourn, for that secret buzz of something more. When I saw him again, three months later, I did not recognize his face. Grief slid his fingers down Nate's jaw and held on, sunken cheekbones and eyes that once held and searched and warmed me, now shallow, a wall that stops. Only identified by the teal t-shirt he used to wear all the time, one that now devoured him. Ava called it a glow up and the hot lava inside me began to bubble over. I liked him first. Shouldn't that count for something? His laugh and smirk were now combative, a new distance that suffocated.

I only know him as he was. He is nineteen and has never been on a plane. Never dressed up for Halloween, or believed me when I said I had two spades- he always read my face well. I guess it was naive of me to hope that nothing would change, that his world would stand still in grief and then resume where we left off. What can be more teenager than to curse the ghosts who haunt your would-be boyfriend when they no longer text you back?

After that summer, we would still hang out occasionally. He would pick me up when I got off work at my summer job to browse a library or watch a movie but it was never the same. He left for Auburn and every so often I'll get a text from him, how I was *the most precious person ever* and he

hopes I'm *doing so, so well*. Now, he has a job in DC and an apartment he shares with his girlfriend. Yet somewhere, in the deepest, most pathetic and selfish sixteen-year-old inner self, I still pine for an earlier time, when Nate's dad was just a shadowy figure I never met, who refused to watch a play where his son wore makeup.



Emulation

Grayson Jarrell

Oil on panel



Frosted Ground
Ava Shutze
Photography

I Want to Write

Creative Nonfiction • Stephen Turner

I want to write something. I want to write a poem. I want to write a novel. I want to write about happy things. I want to write about scary things. I want to write about angry things. I want to write about peaceful things. I want to write about intellectual stimuli. I want to write about dumb jokes. I want to write about myself. I want to write about some other stuff first.

I want to write about morning. I want to write about the orange pill bottles lining my bathroom shelf. I want to write about the rising sun. I want to write about how it plots to blemish our skin every day. I want to write about the morning dew that drenches my shoes. I want to write about the songs I listen to to wake myself up. I want to write about the lone trashcan in the middle of the woods. I want to write about whether the trashcan has the fortitude to survive the alien invasion.

I want to write about bacon and how awful it is for you. I want to write about cantaloupe being an underrated fruit. I want to write about a cantaloupe god who goes on a holy quest to eradicate all bacon from the world. I want to write about all the ladies on duty at the register. I want to write about saying hello and goodbye to them everyday. I want to write about a secret network of service staff around the country, working to subdue the beast fed by the bourgeoisie.

I want to write about every professor I've ever had. I want to write about the professor who plays video games while we write papers. I want to write about the professor who makes his students curry at the department

social event. I want to write about the professor who let me walk her dog. I want to write about the professor that leads the ten most gifted students in America to defeat a celestial being approaching Earth. I want to write about how that would be an excellent adventure for me and my frie—

I want to write about all of the people I've met in my classes. I want to write about the party girl with platinum blond hair who screams every time I come into the room. I want to write about the car lover in a baseball cap who waves from across the class. I want to write about the sketch artist in a blouse who drew her crush during class one day. I want to write about the maniac with slicked back hair who wants to take down the government. I want to write about the monster in the basement we can all defeat together, and become heroes that get to visit Calvin Coolidge's secret bunker.

I want to write about all of my friends and their relationships. I want to write about all the crazy party stories they have. I want to write about the party girl who has three times the stories I do. I want to write about the car enthusiast who started his own club. I want to write about the sketch artist with a terrifying passion for love and justice. I want to write about the maniac who can recite 50 different philosophical stances.

I want to write about all the fictional characters that are still in the back of my head. I want to write about my portfolio that's mostly empty. I want to write about how none of my stories know what they want to be. I want to write about how little research they have behind them. I want to write about all the funny little ways they wind up being awful.

I want to write about something even more awful. I want to write about the shows I watch to distract myself from it. I want to write about the music I play to drown it out. I want to write about that one question that I try to avoid asking every day...

...what have you been doing with your time?

I want to write something amazing now. I want to write something so amazing it forces everyone to stop what they're doing and pay attention to me. I want to write something perfect. I want to write something everyone loves.

I want to write about how the sun would be a horrible villain. I want to write about how a trash can would be an even worse protagonist. I want to write about how stupid a cantaloupe god is and how the hell it would even eradicate bacon. I want to write about how no one wants to read about

service staff. I want to write about how cliché space monsters have become. I want to write about how no one knows who Calvin Coolidge is and that he doesn't even have a secret bunker. I want to write down everything that might grab people's attention. I want to write out nothing that even one person will dislike. I want to write about anything but myself now.

I want to write about bed. I want to write about the desk that sits before me. I want to write about how my laptop fits perfectly on top. I want to write about the white space of the blank page. I want to write about the blinking, black bar. I want to write about the keyboard, and how unmovable the keys feel before you know the first word.

I want to write about...

I want to write about...

After everything, I don't know what I want to write anymore. I want something to happen. I want something to come to me. I want to go to bed. I want to give up. But I don't want to, because there's one thing I want more than anything else. I type it onto the screen.

I Want to Write.

It's a start.



Avocado Heirloom

Jake O'Connor
Ceramics



the
echo.

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