

TRANSOM ISSUE 18: UNFURL

{wherein we open our throats & exhume}



Cloudless

Michael Moreth

Gouache, digital, 2023

VERNAL EQUINOX 2024

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Diane LeBlanc

Words the Flame Will Forget

All winter I pick through strawberries at the market,
their pale crowns seeded with light.

My optometrist says I never really close my eyes,
so I blink the alphabet, patient with *u*.

I'm waiting for the promised storm,
for my one geranium to cackle red.

Alone in worry's cathedral, I light a single votive
and say words the flame will forget by morning:

*How long until fire and ash give way
to a bluebird census?*

If covenants exist, tonight
this wind will spare my roof the tree.

V. Joshua Adams

Just-so Story

From a balcony behind the bakery
that would become a goth emporium
comes the rasping sound of revenge
on the idea of a fine singing voice.
It's not melancholy that's troubling,
but the lack of formal and efficient causes.
Tell me what it means to tell, and what to mean,
what "what" picks out in those acidic pools,
tended even now by satellite.

I do not understand these terms, and yet
someone's raising heirloom chickens
in this decayed mill town, while frictionless
bucolic health climbs chimneys
to coat what's left of the heavenly city
with invisible grit. Even the wind,
which carries anything, wants nothing to do with this.
It wants the viceroy, and the viceroy's carriage,
and the viceroy turning to his companion, oblivious.

You, too, may find yourself dismissed from court
and exiled to the province of your birth,
the one that could not offer what you sought
until you returned pauper in spirit.
But the glove factory, equipped for ballrooms
and carriage rides of another age, is now
the old folk's home it was always meant to be.
And the novel in your bag, it comes with maps!
They reissued it because they thought: history repeats.

The skunks knew, but they escaped.
The pigeons knew, but they remained
in nose cones of rockets, pecking reflections.
One virtue in crackpot ideas is that they breed.

To go back, for instance, and pull up
the echoing pavestones, only this time
rinse blood from the sand beneath.
The energy required is roughly always more
than we possess. So we keep digging.

Michael Moreth

Peerless



Christian Lozada

What Is the Virus the Colonizer Brings?

As a kid, White Grandma quarantined with
a red X on the door but had no neighbors.

Brown Uncle started calling Nani *cousin*
in public to hide his age behind hers.

What is the virus the colonizer brings?
Some say it comes out in skin boils;

others say it comes out in the hours
you work for less than you produce year

after year after year with nothing to show
for it. On Molokai it is tapping

water for sugar till only salt comes up,
and avocado farmers in Cali rent

water rights long enough to hear the pump
slurp. Inoculation is piracy.

childhoods run over us
like
locusts. for a dizzy wind.
but not a barn
 really.
when both of us
die
in the
field, we are mongrels of straw.
unshadowed. one
 blindness
between our eyes and
there is a dripping
from your hair.
remember the bed in
 the attic
crying.

II. something had jangled the
 nerves,
as if nerves
were crusty formations in the sky
that the sun
could bounce like a yo-yo.
child's toys.
artillery that rode
 down mountainsides
and
spit back at the moon
and
bit the bottom of a watering hole
 like
a tremor that refused to be anything more.
then a
 whisper was enough –
 an egg humming in the rain –
to
pack silence in a corncob pipe

and spark

a flame without clothes or cherished words.

a tent pitched in the

yellow noise was suddenly flesh

without

bone that wind inherited like

october leaves.

mornings

wouldn't appear

until the pockets of night overflowed

and something shook

in a small destiny no one had ever thought of,

balanced

on the rings of a stump.

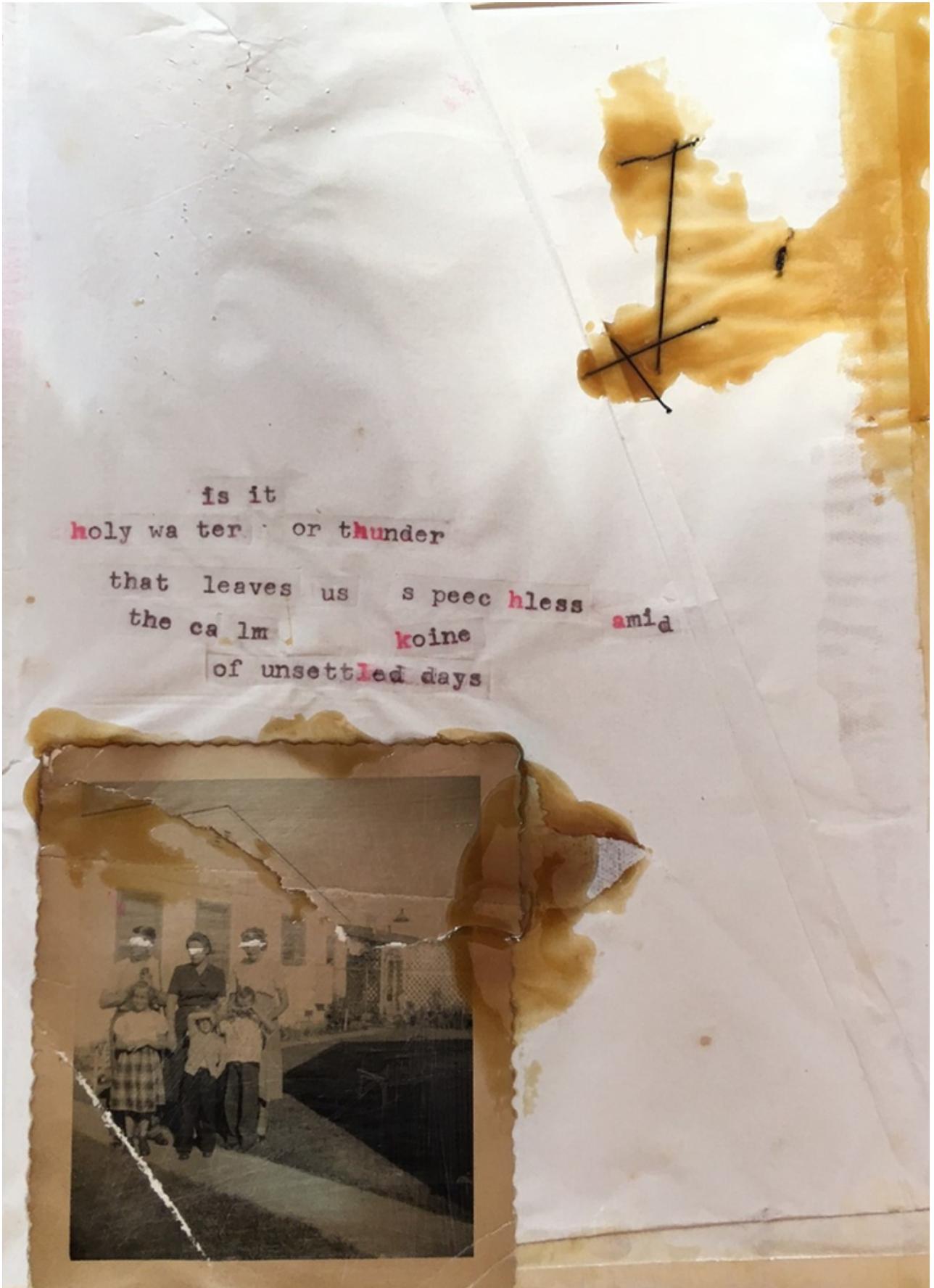
there were fishermen with migraines:

there was a landfill venting methane:

there was a flock of black birds bigger than crows

with thumbs and a host of ideas.

Ramble



Harrison Fisher

His Aesthetic

(from Merriam-Webster The Words of the Week, Aug. 25, 2023)

His aesthetic
is listless
epitasis, his
mug shot
the retribution
of a clown car.

MICHAEL CHANG

LATE AFTERNOON, OSAKA

body arched

as if mid-leap

he pulls off his shirt

revealing two sleeves of neat tats

eyes fluttering

like a fresh sheet

the man known for his inability to wink

secures a come-from-behind victory

mind flicking to u

in that lazy, assured way

kissing the good life

goodbye

Sofia Fall

My Sisters as Silkworms

after K.R.

As hatchlings, my sisters grew
tiny black hairs—blindly gulped the thawing air
after a winter spent petrified
in hibernation. Our species was northerly,
univoltine. Silk and snow; an anxious,
accidental conglomerate. For weeks that spring

my sisters sought white mulberry leaves
with closed eyes, and sometimes
I caught them inching along osage orange
until the trees bore ugly, gravid fruit.
My sisters' heads turned dark before
first molting. After that, they emerged

suddenly, like perfect moons,
with little horns cratering their pale,
uncovered backs. They were hungry
for days on end, stomachs swelling
spheres of tangled thread until their bodies
looked lucid and ready to burst. My sisters

taught me how to weave cocoons
with what's inside of you, how to still
the whole world in ethereal slumber.
They dreamed their metamorphoses
would render them wispy
and brilliantly-winged, like the silkmoths
who still spin the wild, worthless threads
our forebears spun before domestication—
a late Neolithic fantasy that leached
all larvae of bright colors. Now, although
we resemble our ancestors

we are flightless, and our airy,
hoary wings will never lift us
from the ground. But how lovely
my sisters seemed as they crept slick
and silvery from their cocoons,
an arrival as quiet as frost.

David Blair & Donald Langosy

Notes on the Gulf of Sadness

*—South Boston waterfront
walk from Castle Island
to J.F.K. Library
and back.
June 24, 2022*

1.

We sailed along the Gulf of Sadness
and of no consequence,
the day the Court rubbed even
more crazy coot repression
on poor women and everybody
else, too. Had some fried clam-strips.

Looked at the flights come in over the harbor
with lights on in rain clouds
over the rocks and lighthouses and buoys out there,

under the hooded man
fur-lined on the tail of Alaska airlines, Air France,
the long flights for who thought to land
in a different country,

some yellow airplane
like a flavored condom
or a hi-lighter marker
or a banana for a banana republic,

oh. One end of the Gulf of Sadness is a fort that used
to be a prison.

Then the royal ass-kissers and commissioners
of candlesticks
road their high-masted boats
out of town.

I don't know how this is change.

These port cities
were some rackets
and had rackets
that were similar
by different lengths,

the badminton
racket slim with a small
head on top
of a peggish figure of a father
in the Boston MFA American Art
gallery, 18th century floor,
shiny material
stiff around
each hat-stand young lady looking fetch.
Of course they are all smiling. That couple
had nine daughters, and they needed even more kids.

2.

The Gulf of Sadness,
yuck. You are glad
that you can put
pellets in your
canteen. That
is not the beach.

It's grit from after snow
all summer
along the water.

It's kitty litter,
and that flat thing was a squirrel.

It's a sort of leak
of sand from a dog park
in the middle of a hill.

Bathhouses
which feel creepy,
one for the boys,
one for the men,
even shut down,

plastic paper fence
stapled to pine stakes.

Enough, memorial.
The terns
stay out far as they run
rarely along in.

The concrete
fireman
face and army
face and kid
face and priest
face, forlorn,
beach walk
with only pigeons.
Admiral Firefly
had an Irish mouth,
no lips at all.



Collaborative Ekphrasis:

Donald Langosy "Notes on the Gulf of Sadness," Digital collage, 2023. (image via David Blair & Donald Langosy).

Peter Mladinic

Blown Saves

Save a life last week? Not me.
The black and white Shepherd/ Chihuahua,
face like a fox in the green isle between four
lanes, dark, just getting light, I left to fend
for itself. Brave the elements, whatever
was out there. You're on your own, live
thing. I had seventy miles ahead. To stop—
an inconvenience, it always is—I'd be late
for my procedure, my fourth, but only one
chance. I could lie: I stopped, skittish,
it crossed blacktop into brush. God knows
what happened. A stray, a dime a dozen.
Famous last words: Forget about it. I turned
left at the light. Huey Piano Smith, we like
bird-land rhythms in my Bose headphones.
Forget me. I'm no one. However, some ten
years ago I walked on water. A big, old,
black dog on a corner. I turned my 150
around, parked in my garage. A leash.
A bitch. I'd never seen a thing so lost.
"I will not let anything happen to you."
How tall I felt, there and then, that time
with her. Nothing bad. But years before
something did, or rather didn't happen.
I'm paying for it on a long turn,
out in the middle of nowhere, distant
mountains. Sunday. We set down morsels
of food, water, a kind touch, then,
back in the truck. In my rearview
the small dog stands by the road.

Nicholas Alti

And like a staircase with blood

on the bottom third of each step
the husband did it
then fled returned, briefly
vacuumed and had a heart attack
pattern recognition and raw theory

I forgot what bird
walks circles until starvation
but I can't imagine it's unique

folks bury themselves after you take
away the shovel don't matter
crime scene photos framed posed
to make a home, not another gorge

Is my body still beautiful when not entire,
or, when carefully taken apart—is it mine?

I like the devils in the holy stories
less unilateral
and so glimmering fierce in light
fractal order, who inspire fissure

you hear the hum then feel pressure
like when unbeknownst hunted
glints of a frenzy periphery
you'll look late the wrong direction

offer yourself omission's pleasure
long loose ends
another principal almost physics
nothing created cannot also destroy

MICHAEL CHANG

THE DAY YOU RUIN MY LIFE

we're making shadow puppets on whitewashed walls *it's ephemera*, u say
a term i still can't grasp at least not well enough to explain

u ask if i would rather have u or u & 10 million dollars
i say it would mean the same to me promise a tablecloth with scalloped edges [pink]

u say *i know *u* don't care abt that stuff* & kinda lean back as if that settles matters

i've learned to anticipate ur ambition coming at me with the roar of an engine
like credit-worthiness most lies contain some truths

i do my best to get sucked in a sensation akin to running repeatedly into a bayonet
the click of the safety against ur soft cheek

Stephen C. Middleton

The Au Pair was Innocent

It was not the au pair who began it, Doctor – the au pair was not the trigger. Why (in any case) should we assume that it was a woman? & where did the great poisonous outdoors come from? (The womb?) Nor is there a fixed point. As a sort of record, as a provocation? As a dredge for erotic scope? And the figures – a statistical salve, a safety valve, where sickness pitches a shut out. Which reminds me – for your notebook – Today's aphasia – the word 'resources', would you believe, vanished from the central data banks. & I dream in the colours of Anselm Kiefer. Elemental. Green & decay, I grieve in...

Peter Mladinic

Guy Loves Bruno

I wanted to open a pen knife and carve
in a slim oak in woods near a river
Guy Loves Bruno,
step back, see our names in a heart
in that tree.

Instead I stole your lighter to keep you
in *Strangers on a Train*.

Your ex-wife, I got rid of her, Guy!
Hitchcock took a guy like me,
an actor, my featherlight comedies
garnered slight reviews, and made him
a strangler with a mother fixation.

I did it for you, Guy!
You're free to marry your fiancée.
My brow a wrinkled dome, my dark eyes.
Here's our drinks! I nudge tennis pro you
in the cushioned compartment.
Hitchcock took a nobody and made him
Bruno. He dies in *Strangers*.
Cruel coincidence, by the time *Strangers*
made the big screen I too would be gone,
my Jennifer married. Selznick,
like me, didn't have a long life.

I carve our names, Guy, Bruno
in a heart in a tree. Jennifer lost,
to the maker of *Gone with the Wind*,
I had our movie, Hitchcock's *Strangers*.

A close up of you in a coupe
pans to a long shot of me under blue sky
at the top of tiers of steps at the Capitol,
small in the double-breasted suit

and fedora I wore that day
boarding the train. As the coupe rides by
I'm there,
arms folded. How oblivious you are!
I'm watching you.

Michael Moreth

Necessity



MICHAEL CHANG

LOVE IN THE DARK

get lost drop the semantics & saber-rattling i dreamed the dream
am restored to my true form a modest trust fund where beauty dwells
pledge offering u their first fk surprised to feel ur throb ur pulse
deep dick dog & bitch together the yin / yang of it all
popping off like whale's barnacles watercolor or hermes tie
the greek ape whispered an aside the housewife punished her baby by staring
forgoing the wild wings the valet met every request w. a solemn "certainly"
it was arclight or the tale of genji chocolates melting in pockets
packs of stewardesses walking by giggling wise guy my cupbearer
much too late for frosted tips prince charming sliding foot into slipper
it was that or deportation ogre trolling toilets resumed teaching position
not long before u glanced peevishly a shy'er wrestler he was deeply unstable
more polite to say volatile the heart has found what it requires at any cost
apple strudel here to adjust a nurse's hat try this exercise below the belt
oliver twist smothered in neglect lollygagging shade more seductive
city o' city we endeavor to spare u further embarrassment agog on the metro
comrade it must be done we'll play solitaire maybe some minesweeper
no pls dipshit is my father pale & innocent the way i like 'em
did i stammer the glory days of taiwanese cinema are over aren't we just
ready for another scorcher delicious diphthong tell me something
should i kneel to take ur measure ??? i'll be ur carpet ur pincushion
to attract attention a whistle & a light seasons come & go
valet making off w. ferrari drained red turning to white jocks leer
woozy off bath salts there's no mistaking their contempt or is it desire ???
trolley car careening terrifying box office collapse the chinese aren't buying what ur selling
let's face it there's only so much fast & furious one can take
untrained eye need for growth
there's nothing i wouldn't give to meet those eyes again

Misha Lynn Moon

The Witchcraft

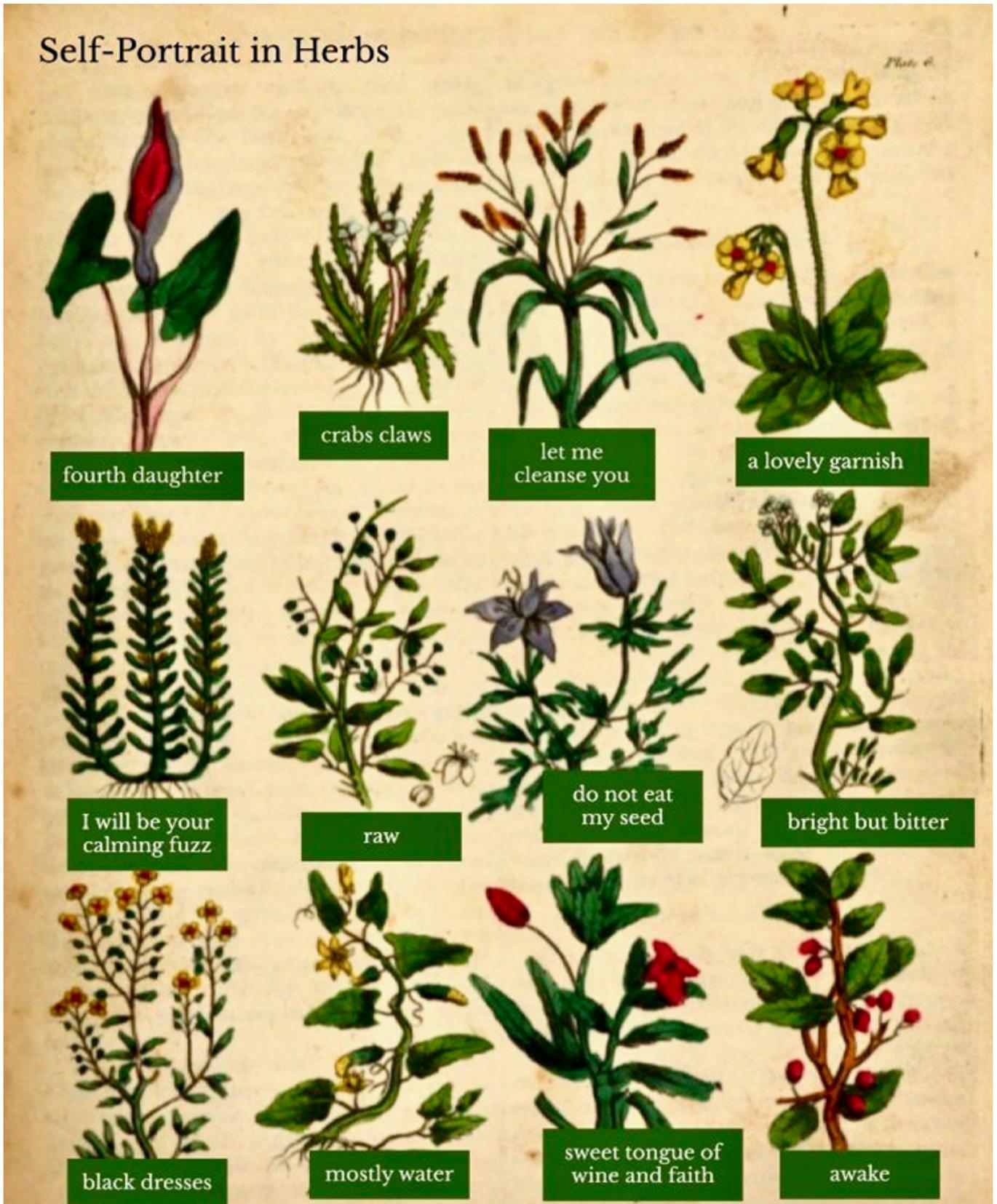
Stand at the sink, cut your face to ribbons,
pull on the skirt you purchased in secret,
paint your lips your grandmother's color,
the way you did in the shameful childhood.

Violence knew you first, pushed you down,
sent you shuffling into the worst disguise.
Marriage and sadness and the kindest divorce
and now you learn how to walk again. Tonight

you'll stand at your door for an hour trying
to rush down the stairs, catch the 14 bus,
try not to vomit as you rattle downtown,
prove to yourself you won't be murdered yet.

Four years later, children will celebrate you,
your pretty face wrinkled and razor burned.
Everything better 50%, maybe more, maybe
lived finally, who knows in all this worry.

Self-Portrait in Herbs



Source: Culpeper, Nicholas, 1616-1654. *Culpeper's Complete Herbal*. London: Published by Richard Evans, 1816.

Joel Best

Apocalypse

Days into short.
Night to lack and disappeared
by dead lakes. How
tide in the pursuit
of disquiet.
How your worship of fire
ants and I throw
broken concrete
at their city
mound.
Still and all, we are
dare. Naked-tight
in belly and inhale
memories of heated
soil. Here butterflies breed
in bruised singularity.
We marry the butterflies.
We wish for wings
over our house by
the shore. Wipe
out the sacred names
painted gold. That sped us
into worship as the
neighbor's son drew
a perfect circle.

Geoffrey Babbitt

Against Newton

“He who sees the Ratio only sees himself only.”

—*There Is No Natural Religion*

for Jason Whittaker

Newton, yes—but not under an apple tree
or in Cambridge or beneath stars
or in some abstracted
mathematical ether—no, Newton
ass-planted on a sea-floor boulder,
Newton among anemones,
among corals and urchins,
shells and seaweeds, starfish
and indecipherable watery forms,
Newton hunching away from the pinks
and fuchsias, the ochres
and aquamarines, hunching down toward
the plain, blanched-white parchment
down under his compass, down
at his feet—for Blake, bad ideas warp bodies—hence
Newton’s Urizenic compass-crouch
(cf. *Ancient of Days*), even
the sideways sweep of the two pink anemones’
hairlike tentacles are just like
Urizen’s long hair and beard—
(the two painted only a year apart, same error—
overprivileging reason)—virgin Newton
looking oh-so-Greek—Doryphoros
only with terrible posture hunched over his knees—
your Greek Philosophy, Blake tells Deists, *teaches*
that Man is Righteous in / his Vegetated Spectre—Newton
drawn away from imaginative forms toward his own diagram,
in his vegetated spectre, forefinger extended,
so unlike the sizzling between god and human
in the Sistine Chapel—Blake believing each

was nothing without the other—
Newton's finger pointing
not to god nor to the human, but
to a cold, hard line segment, the abstract
—infernally, Newton infers from the world
a clockmaking *pantokrator* god
who set a mechanical universe into motion
then left it alone—*the same dull round over again*—
a triangle concerned with a triangle
—Newton, diagrammer of light's spectrum,
cartographer of diffraction, a man of vision
but not Vision, which is why Blake puts
him at the bottom of the sea, oblivious
to a place he'd never been and should be eager to see
but is not—his white smock has fallen off
because he tried to hang it on a principle
—just out of frame, from below,
the bottom of the sea's surface is silver,
there the sea glows green as sun-slit grapeskin,
sardines dodging trawling nets,
the fishermen, you can hear
their singing bouncing off seacliff stones,
scraps of melody darting into the water,
atop this cliff a semaphore tower stands
catching echoes of the song, which rises skyward,
sunward, until the sun takes off his mask,
drinking in the blue light emanating off the water,
could drink all the blue there's ever been
and will ever be—there will never be enough,
which is fine because the wine-dark sea
is also made of light, and whatever it takes today
it will give back tomorrow,
and will give it back bright-bright blue.



Ekphrasis:

William Blake, "Newton," Copper engraving with pen and ink and watercolour, 1795 (image via Wikimedia Commons).



Ekphrasis:

William Blake, "The Ancient of Days," Relief etching with watercolor, 1794 (image via Wikimedia Commons.)

MICHAEL CHANG

INDEX OF TITLES

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¡Adios amigos!

Adventures close to home

All these solitary pages

A look can mean life [ask the moon]

Assassin of my orchards

Blacklight on comforter

B— the bookseller

Business casual / casual business

California Mission Revival

Can't seem to make u mine

Checkout girl comfort & caress

Courageous cupbearer

Cum on ur belly, cut the crap

Date reenactment death rattle

Decision to leave / declaration of interest

Don't wanna know if ur lonely [drawn & quartered]

Eiffel Tower Elvis

Empty ur tank enormous pride

Even u Eva Braun

Exit the rhinoceros

Fast car, free beer

Fill the bag with air

Flip ur wig, freak of nature

Future volcano

Glad to see u go

Goldschläger gorilla

Have u ever seen the rain
He gives more happiness than u
Here today, gone tomorrow
Higher love / Holland Tunnel blues
Hollyhocks / holy cross
How strange: I do not recognize u

I am revealed
I no longer laugh
I want to die of u

Junkie dealer

Licking between legs
Lie on my sheets
Little black trees in ur white jeep
Little red book [小红书]
Long way back
Love, Courtney
Lungs of witch

Maude Apatow maximum milk bar
Mexican-American mancave
Mouth of Hell Mr. Mickey

Name ur pleasure
Next of kin
No more rays of orange sun

Ocean in the way
Ode to Chanel
Other disturbing attachments

Pamplemousse party animals
Pasivo
Performing arts school piñata
Pierce the veil
Place in history

Reign of words
Ride ur donkey
Rio Grande-Río Bravo roller derby

Scent of pine / shriveled love
Someone to do things for
Spider with furred hood stare at the carpet
Stop the games Steph Curry
Subway romance swept into space
Sword in the stone

Tex or Mex: the only inhabitants in the room
There's no there there [hollow to be filled]
They eat tiny bananas, are scared of one another
Too much of the same

Unconditional love, undercover bagel
Unsmiling meatiness of inner self
Ur jawline my wonder
Use ur affliction

Vincent Warren virgin mouth
Vodka bender [Tito's]

Wake up, use toilet
When u get to the end of ur rope, make a knot, hang on
White drool won't let go

Yesterday

James Miller

OKC Dream for Tom Verlaine

Jukebox is free and easy. Stand
and slurp stiff ice cream, play
an hour of perfect 45s.

I Love You Because.

Midsummer in Sweden.

Thumb sweeps across
the console top. Dust,
conecrums. Needle
grooves, but all sound
is digital. My attendant
wears a black skullcap
with tiny blue diamonds
strewn like seeds.

He cues "Foxhole"
most days, at 5:31.

To wring his wash
towards closing.

Knife-nicks
in his palm,
mustardy nibbles.

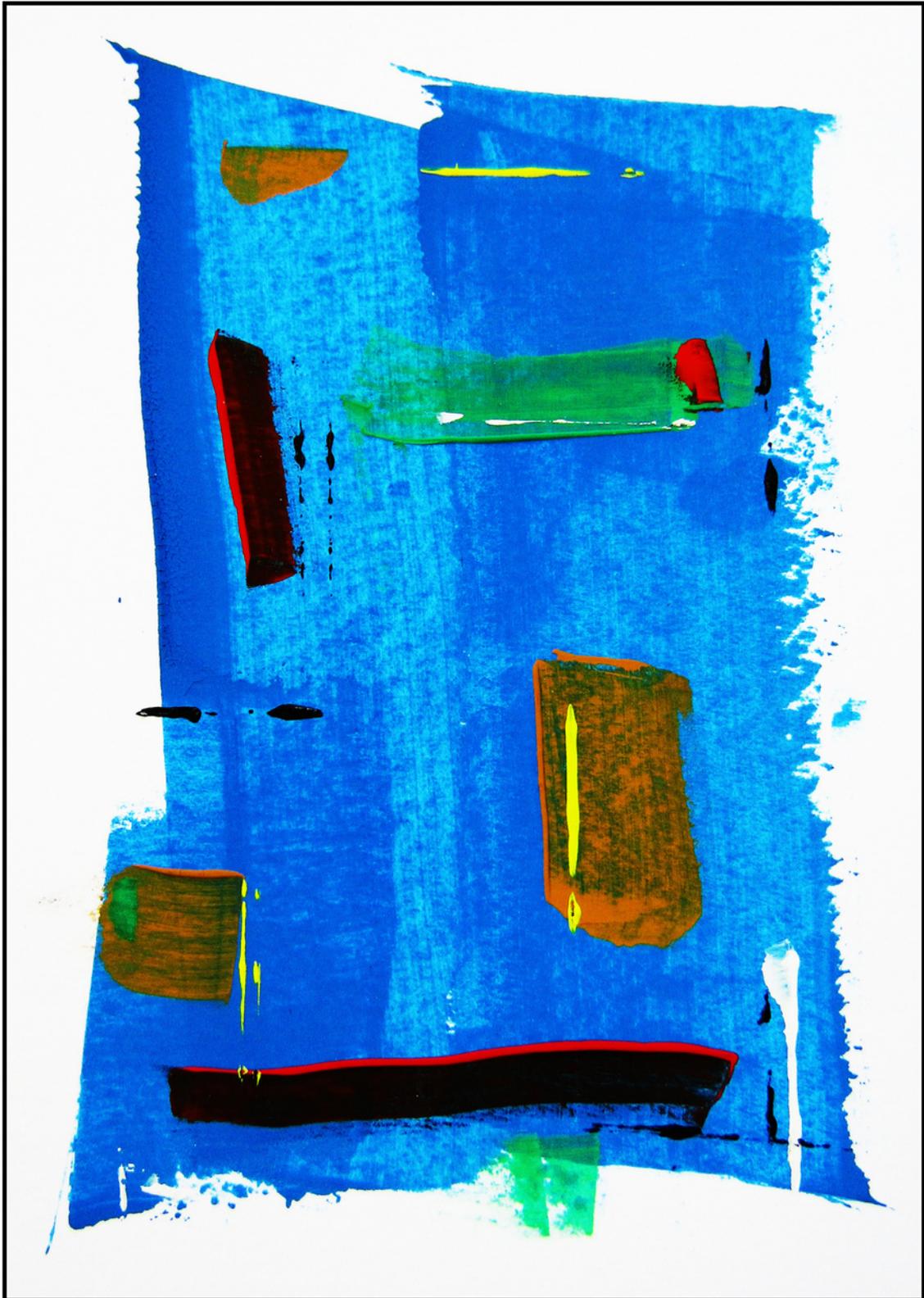
Sunday soon,
he says.

They will
drag my ears
out, to the street.

Steal my commissary
card. Read re-issue
liner notes
at the public
trial. Cut me
into piles
of purple
onion, thin
exquisite rings.

Michael Moreth

Ornate



David Blair & Donald Langosy

Summer School for Dr. Dan Chapman

Hey, rays school in South Jersey, dinky side
fins up where the pool will soon join the
ocean. The sound. It has been there all along.
When you open the door to the bowling alley,
you feel the cool air. You hear the irregular
knocks. The quick scatter of the pins, the
sweep, the reset. And then there is no bowling
alley. There really is no more bowling alley.
There really is no more of the kinds of things
we did. You are underwater. You are asleep.
The tide comes in. The end of the long spit is
always different—the year, this month, this
week, this day, there is a long and teeming tidal
pool and half a day the low-tide moats it with a
bridge of drying sand, teeming with yellowish
greenish brownish circulations of fish schooling
so close together that they look like disturbed
sand, so many that when one rolls up into air,
if there is no armrest on your modern couch,
somebody might squeeze in and push you off.
Horseshoe crabs, hundreds of them, all must
have crawled through the same mess of sea
lettuce that is flowing with the current
backwards or forwards over the hinge back
between their most prominent eyeballs, of
which they have many. One year, you walk
through a cafeteria and see the mullets, and
you think, I need a mullet, too. Some flash.
Some boots. You may one day look like a
living trilobite. You can cure your own gout
with stems. If you break a horseshoe crabs tail,
you might see something like another ball of
mercury that can see. Skimmers are flying
spoons. Terns are flying knives. You'll go back.
You'll be a teacher. You will be welcomed

back. You will be able to feed yourself, and everybody will say, Hey, you, with the rosemary grilled lamb chops and that mess of orzo on your plate, what are you doing in the lounge? Have you been to Copenhagen? Have you got any more cans of that Skoal back there?



Collaborative Ekphrasis:

Donald Langosy "Summer School for Dr. Dan Chapman" Digital collage, 2023. (image via David Blair & Donald Langosy).

Misha Lynn Moon

Warrior Princess

I knew the warrior princess, carry the treasure of
our secret queer weekends watching our goddess
flip kick evil, the same dozen stunt men falling under
the wrathful whirlwind of her perfect thick arms.

This was our religion a gender ago, stuck in Jesusland,
five feet tall with a failing heart, punching against closets
when you feared you'd punch out at 30, maybe, turning
all your desire into leather, swords, and sub text.

The last time I saw you they cracked open your chest,
deposited a child's heart. You looked up, pain sick
and dope brained, told me that you would rise again,
that this was the cliffhanger, see me next season.

Sofia Fall

Machinations

Grandmother said that I was born
with bile in my eyes and skin. I only remember her
by her teeth, streaked yellow when we watched
the cardinals plummet from the sky
that spring she laughed
and said my early body

was too small for her to hold on to. Grandmother scorned
my useless matching eyes, ten crooked fingers. She said
she knew a woman once with silver buttons
running down her spine. She laughed. She indicated
her own hooked vertebrae beneath skin, pitched
open her palms to reveal hollow carpus, *See? I've never had*

the kind of bones for holding on to. She laughed,
said even after bile bled from the whites of my eyes,
I looked ravenous, looked lean, *you couldn't hold a child*

who was lungless, who was lioness. Grandmother peeled
each metacarpal from her skin to show
its machinery, the way metal hooked metal
through slippery vein. She said she knew a woman once
who traded silver joints
for measly bone. She laughed. She implicated

her two-toned eyes, requested the cartilage
from my fingers, said she'd remember me
biled, remember me stripped of skin. I was ravenous.
I still remember her yellow-streaked teeth
that spring she took my eyes out,
threaded them back through with wire.

livio farallo

dinner on the mountain

there couldn't be any momentum
without horses falling
 out of the sky but,
the parade of echoes
 pounding at the door
were able to stop the train; were
heavier
than a caboose rooted to gravity.
what i didn't realize was
 that
i drank from the
same glass that wouldn't melt
 when you threw it at the sun
and that hopped down atmospheres to visit
 the rain
one drop at a time.
there was a spit of time when my fingers,
pruned
to bone, couldn't douse a smile
 without rattling:
it was a halloween in bright day:
it was a species stumbling into extinction.
and i felt the sky hang like misty gloom
 over a poorly lighted meal
that fooled mother goose and maybe aesop.
but the plants had
 stopped eating sunlight
and i couldn't stomach
 the plastic fruit:
the wallpaper peeled like a baby trying to crawl.

there wasn't
 any chill in the air
once
smoke stopped running; when fire

burped

instead

of

crackling and everyone called themselves

a

cautious pioneer.

but i was a new machine

that promised a death you wouldn't forget:

not in 100 years;

not in the safety of a black hole:

an army gathering interest wasn't a bank account.

an army wasn't anything but an old machine.

i scrubbed down the soup kettles

with

turpentine so the horse meat wouldn't

linger.

funnels of dust would carry

you to the center of the earth

but you couldn't return

and recognize darkness anymore.

hunger hit me

between the scapulae where

tender hearts have never

lived

long; where zebra are skittish

in

a field of green.

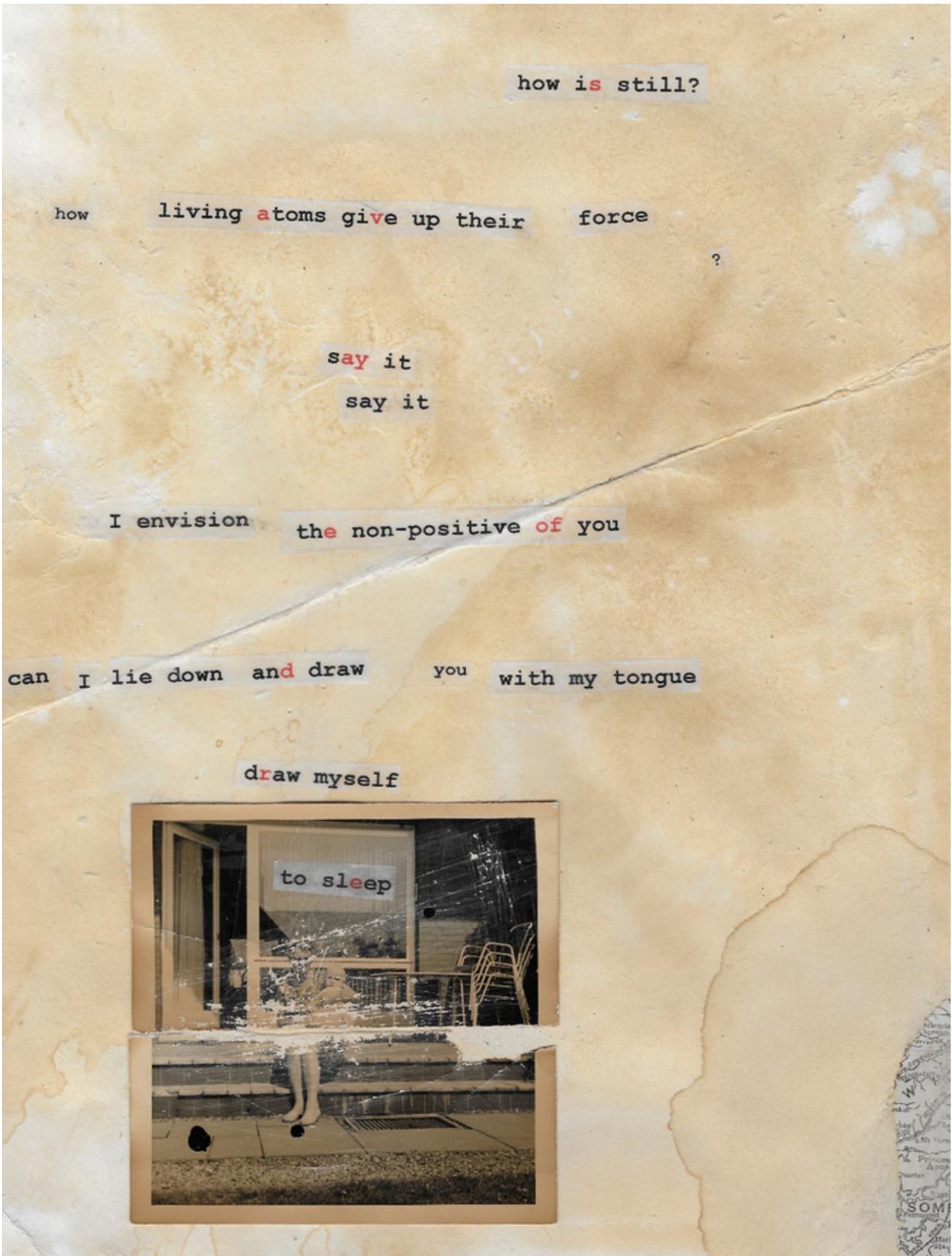
it was a death i'd never forget:

ragged as a scripted promise shredding paper;

a pearl abandoning the oyster, showing teeth.

Joel Best

Proposed



Diane LeBlanc

Brass Hammer

One taste of you, and I spilled amethyst light and ruby seeds,
as if we were the first to eat from Ishtar's plate of ligaments and dark pearls.
I wounded a spoon scraping you from the bowl.

But I was
never Ishtar,
never owl,
never morning star.

I come from a town where men chiseled poetry
into granite with brass hammers.
The softer the hammer, the lighter the force.
Five nights a week, stone carvers went home to their wives smelling like poetry.
Would I be chisel or stone?
Hammer or poem?

You waited years while I drafted an elegy for the moon
that wouldn't end with empty craters.
And when we couldn't get beyond the questions
we read Neruda's *Cien Sonetos de Amor*
until we were bread and hunger and language,
the worn pages begging us to stop.

Misha Lynn Moon

Just Stay Alive

No standards of excellence beyond the ones
that you build for yourself. She was excellent
at death, left a pretty corpse in the bathtub

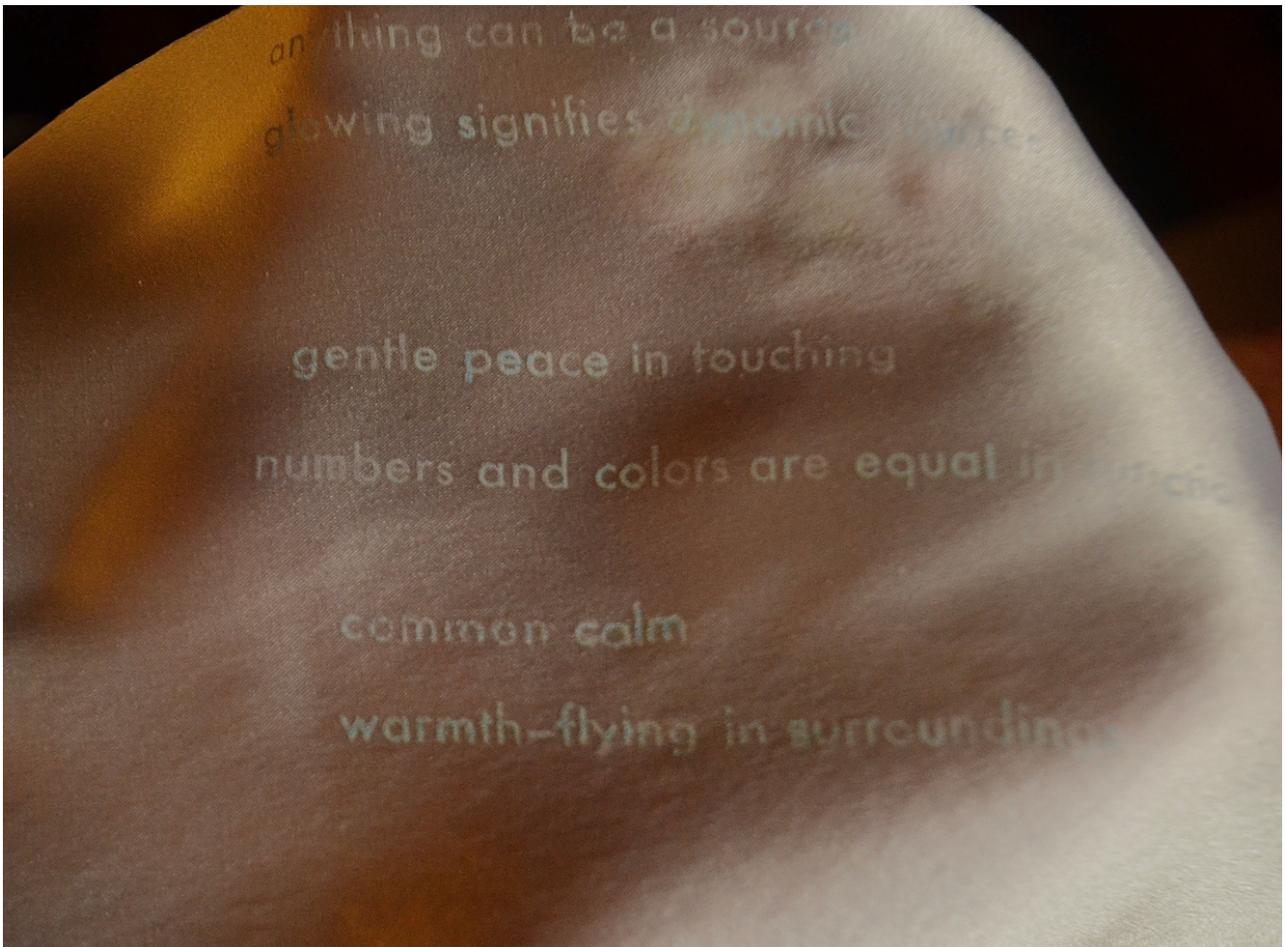
waiting for the no fuss cleanup her mother
always wanted. She left all the clues, dressed
in mourning for a short life of no potential

for a middle-age check-in with her girlfriends.
I wonder how many pills she would take now,
if she'd crush and snort estradiol and lexapro.

I stay alive for her, and Marsha, and Candy,
become an old trans woman, hobbling fat,
a goal for all the dolls that never made it back.

Antoni “Toni” Szostak

Untitled (silk satin)



anything can be a source
glowing signifies dynamic sources

gentle peace in touching

numbers and colors are equal in function

common calm

warmth-flying in surroundings

David Wolf

From *Yarner* #1

*

Makeshift cover for the grill. And the narrative?
Fresh autumn leaves on the ground.
Not splashing color.
As does the rain as you reach
for your phone, which is not the facilitator
for your chronically late behavior.
Savior slice. Might make a nice snack, I repeat,
avoid cliché!
Like the Black Death.
Repeat avoidance.
Plagued by “likes.”
Re: peat: a void dances.
Like textual dredging.
Like expiation.
beneath my skull, beneath my hair, the crawling notion
of a woolly bear, an idea, fuzzy, headed where?
There, remember?
Coming across a large stick-bug crawling
(all this crawl!) across the trail,
and I said, “That’s huge!”
“That’s nothing,” you said.
“When the dinosaurs roamed the earth
those things were as big as redwoods.”
Well, it’s late now,
and closing the tome at p.128 out of 698, I thought:
Too much of a stretch.
The dust jacket flap would no longer serve as a bookmark.
Is that the sun coming up?
I’d know it anywhere
like a stain on my trousers, olive oil, shape of a pear.
There will be aches, beaches, each . . .
and morning sand swept from wooden steps.

Joel Best

history

even though
morning unravels
sad-weary. how you
look at me

double-barreled.

your fingers in
my ears. with stones
in a paper bag.
I can feel
their cool.
I can hear a

faint heartbeat.

you and tilted
head. listen,
listen to brown bird
in brown
tree singing
us green music
and
our teeth bent
in terror

smiles.

clock by
the bed. rhythm
to harry us with
a ton-weight of
past sins. take

us to

the car. take us
driving south,
then east. red car
up red hill
to the edge
of a bower woods.
drive us into a

day from
long ago when burying
bone fragments
among curled
roots of a weary
oak. are raccoons
in shadows?

are thieving

rats stealing trophies
for themselves?
something
quick and small
and nibbles at

our shoes.

as we are again
children of
another hour.

livio farallo

the boys played hopscotch and insulted the girls

a building fell
 when you
 cried
and rodents scattered like crumbs
when you slapped
 me.
the laughter was
 perspiration
i
couldn't get
 out of my head
and i remember i
 fell
off
the curb when unsteadiness
 wanted a drink
and the truck headlights
snapped off
 at
dawn and you screamed what colors
 smelled in the wind when forests
didn't bleed anymore.

the chainlink
fence around winter
 melts
with the birth of mercy.
you improvise
sometimes with a blowtorch
when
an orchestra is asked to whisper.
i'll wait
 until
silence is complete

as genetic perfection: i won't ask you to
dance
and smile at the same time. there is one book
left and
one
match:
our only hope is a bonfire.

Michael Moreth

Accessible



David Blair & Donald Langosy

View from Apartment 9

Definition is privacy.

Genius of Boston ivy stuck all over you and the bricks—Sweeney's ivy, dark genius of the woods—and the monkey-vines kids called them, the bark that burned well, and vines over sweet-gum stumps and trunks—answer these questions or don't answer them. There is air between the carpeted steps in the glass stairwell of the squat building. Follow the carpet's bread-and-butter pickle slices of green, red and blue. The trees and the creeks run off into the hills. Read, once again, from

Madeline in the Plaguy City

by Ludwig Bemelmans

*Bricky straw, winter sunsets
hanging around viral spring,*

black clumps vectoring

like shoulders,

*and that Bad Hat,
the potato, the rain*

gotten old, the city

*and trapped
in socks
that seem to follow*

*me everywhere,
the earth under
puddles with sharp
trees in them,*

*and you, my glasses
gone fogged, masked*

*from you
over you
about you, dead city,*

and without my glasses

a few charming

color blobs and voice,

*two nudes sharing
one yellow scarf,
one red bandana,*

*a clementine in trees,
an empty pine crate
and no orange bitter.*



Collaborative Ekphrasis:

Donald Langosy "View from Apartment No. 9" Digital collage, 2023. (image via David Blair & Donald Langosy).

Harrison Fisher

Geography of the Impossible

“Boys! Raise Giant Mushrooms in Your Cellar!”

The Ray Bradbury Theater, 11/17/89

Straight out of Racine, Wisconsin
from the Johnson Smith Catalog,
giant “Abyssinian-Amazon mushrooms”
(never mind the geography of the impossible)

— “Your hands get dirty, but . . . how”

— “Dust falls on you every day, but you don’t feel it.”

Meteor shower,
disrupted electronic transmissions,
high amplitude sine waves of people wanting to run
but to where

— “Why am I afraid all the time?”

— “Something awful is going to happen”

Deep watching—*the eye is the first circle*
from the ground straight up
to a disc-like surface that looks like
billowing cross-sections of Milky Way brain

into which a person may step
and see all around the bright stars
and the dark stars mapped
in whorls of sporulation.

sunbathing in
 my
hand. so
now i swim in
kitchen smells where warmth
is
too bright to eclipse and i'm
sure
the milky
 way is not a prescription
for dripping
earth where asteroids
would never waste their time.

Joel Best

The Other Now

to the where where to go
where to be gone to have gone
or will be gone

a line we carry with the weight of stone
but isn't a line
but carried by us any way

what we print on the eagle's claw
remain without remains

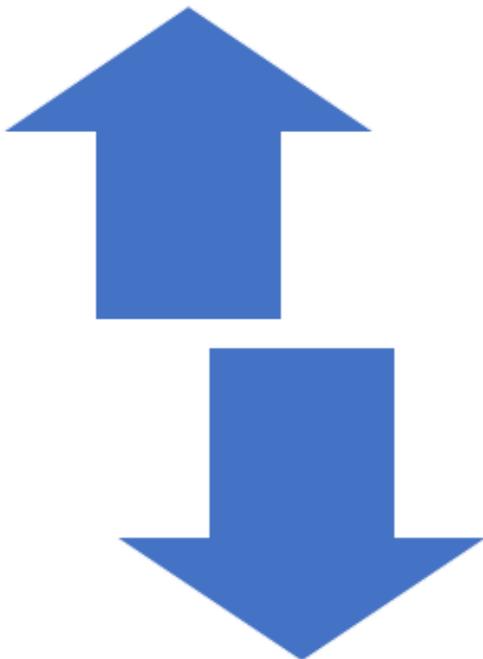
now or the other now pas t pass ing
our blood and soft breath as endpoints
re le nt, if possible or forgive

word for word
the word
for the word



A TRANSFUSION OF SAINTS

Someone below the window shouts "something broke inside me"		
a Swedish backbro or the stem of a rose in the wrong month	You think of the bent candle holder the encrusted lung fighting with the dust on the bedside table	"Wake him up soon give him a dream an anxiolytic a pretext" -heal his heel then the rest -

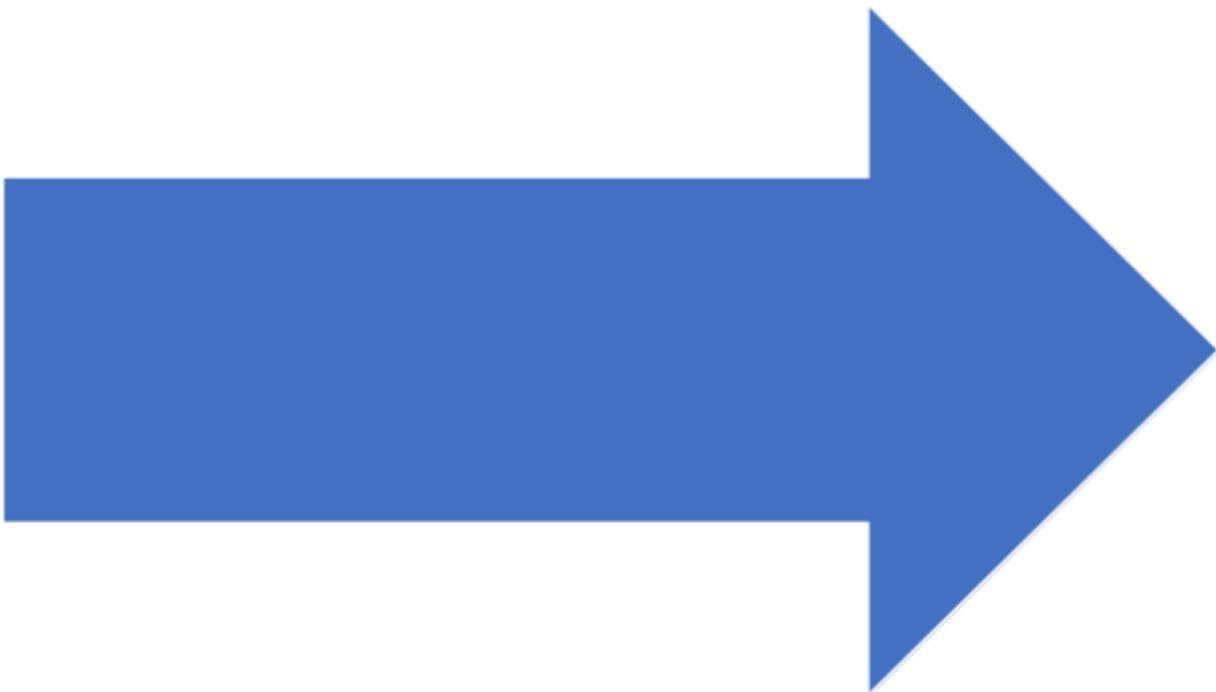


We write to know how it ends

We write to know how
it ends
There is nothing else
subtraction is a
necessary method no
one came into the
world
by his will

(what causes pain does
not exist)

[oh yes achieved
happiness always walks
on something that
stinks]





We are closer to
mites

than to stars

a transfusion of saints

At the traffic light the
sign says forward

and a rain of killers



Ryan Clark

HOUSING: an erasure²

If a side a delay on waiting a
base as order
a housing and submit a
sign our sign our place on the list our
entitlement
to reside
to locate suitable housing
very nice houses
military and their families sing in unity.

² Erasure of a housing brochure for Lajes Field Air Force Base, an American military base on Terceira Island, Azores, Portugal. In the mid-2010s, Lajes closed base housing after shifting away from long-term assignments which had allowed base personnel to be accompanied by their families

Please report the housing briefing.

island for a

There are 400 Military Family Housing units located at Lajes Field.

rebuilt within the past
and equipped
with conditioning systems.

a nation. See for details

All authorized personnel will be

furniture

and baby

Before you

should speak you

form

Download

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The weight allowance

has been rescinded.

Lajes Field

picked up

There

is no father for this

Housing

is smaller than homes

is

able

to be sent back

so be very careful

Review what it

provided to you and the size of

place in temporary

duration

You may elect _____ a Lajes
of receipts and weights

authorized as

authorized

via

rule

contingent upon

rank

All _____ weight must be
order .

The close

of kitchen

of

extended

orders

of available

linens

wave

to

the

hole

in

Lajes

a small rift

you can chase

Harrison Fisher

The Life of Gérard de Nerval, Pseudonym

“Is It Art?” confusion
as Gerard de Nerval
walks his lobster
in public gardens
on a blue ribbon leash.

It is superior to Dog.
It does not bark
and has known the sea,
tugging on the ribbon,
leading de Nerval into

idiomatic “white night.”

Stephen C. Middleton

Prescription (Sourness)

Prescriptions – from the village

The / which aperture

Statementing

No less oppressive

Despite the view to the mountains

the agaves

the waitress

Still the sourness from where the litany came

Selective / shared poisons / prickly pear

& chosen (no names here)

Who, in this barrage,

Voided or validated

The ticket?

In the UK 'statementing' is the process whereby a child is determined to have a condition requiring help at school / different schooling etc. Without this 'statement' the child receives no extra resources.

David Blair & Donald Langosy

Saturday at the Arboretum in Boston

Two old ladies
Saturday
taking a walk
in the gentle Arboretum,

grove after
grove
of philosopher trees, mystic trees
receive
what they say about life, fun, health—

tickets tonight
to Jordan Hall, who goes there
to Symphony, about
rock solid podiatrists

really good in Chestnut Hill.

It's not the trees
from everywhere else, puree orange needle-clouds, God knows
what they are when their nametags are so far away,

or the yellow-edged round green leaves
of the wych elm
fallen to the grass

or the two sentries
by the pond
near the road,
bald cypress trees, which is not to say
actually bald Cypriots. No, that force

of ST. ELSEWHERE
is not saintly

or sane to me, what I like are
the people here
rising as the unseasonable warm fall
day darkens, the young and also cheap,

from free picnic blankets, the snazzy
old men bench to bench
who bought folded sweaters, tight.

But I really like Boston
when October sun starts dropping.



Collaborative Ekphrasis:

Donald Langosy "Saturday at the Arboretum in Boston" Digital collage, 2023. (image via David Blair & Donald Langosy).

MICHAEL CHANG

WE COULD BE LOVERS / WHERE THE SUN SHINES

even when u brush me

w/ ur snapback

i stand strong like diva

dad in lifetime movie

meatless slice

bleeding down one sock

bedroom eyes

iran-contra of truth

brimming w/ some shit

i keep to myself

no chumps

only winners

look at that blood

hitting the floor

commemorative ribbons

an impossible regimen

Misha Lynn Moon

Beautiful Women

The beautiful women sell their bodies
for better faces, full curved breasts,
vaginas bought in Thailand with sweat
of traditional work. Fat girls know better,

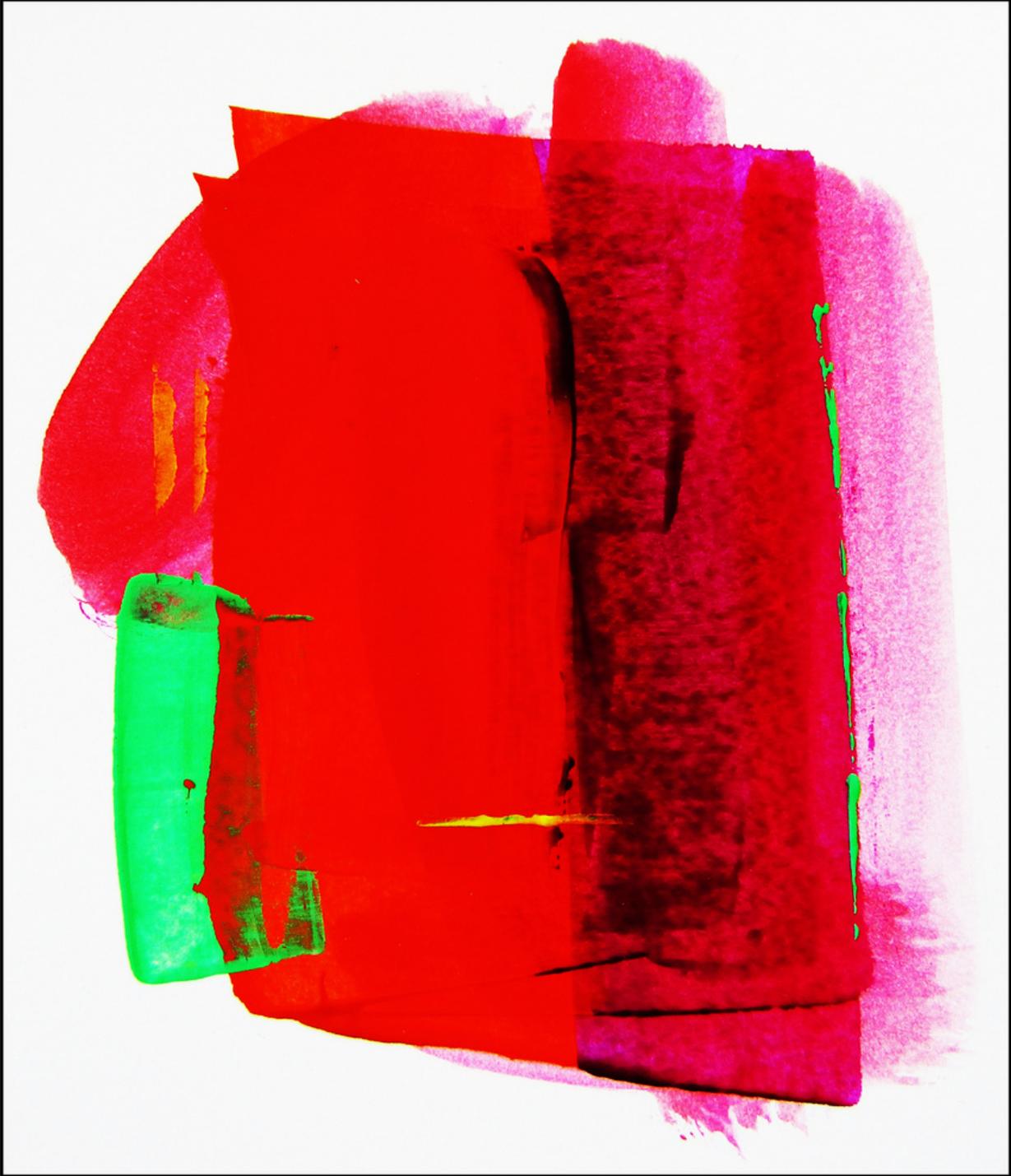
the rise of their bellies keep away all
surgeries, make them save themselves.
It's easy to be jealous, slit open all
the hope of a magical life, let it bleed.

But who else engineers meal trains,
gathers soaked pads after dilation
leaves the others tired, wash dishes
when roommates leave them alone?

We feel around our hairy breasts, know
the limits that science will gift us, cringe
at the faces staring back as we shave.
But the beautiful women hold us close,

let us cry against their swollen chests,
call us beautiful women, perfect now
without our scars, they promise, just
as real, please stay alive forever.

Peerless



Danielle Sellers

ODE TO DESIRE II: a burning haibun in reverse

After tobin a. greathouse

Even an old crow
with its tail feathers missing
has bright ruby insides

Even an old ragged crow [REDACTED] with its foot and [REDACTED] tail feathers missing,
is filled [REDACTED] nearly to bursting with [REDACTED] bright
rubies [REDACTED] inside.

Even the old ragged crow of my faulty body, with its foot and teeth and tail feathers missing, its diabetic pancreas, its high blood pressure and cholesterol, its cauldron of rage roiling just under the skin, is filled—even if just sometimes when I least expect it—nearly to bursting with a bright menagerie of ruby animals inside.

Interview with Michael Moreth

Q: Do you use the black borders around these pieces in all of your art, or just this series? They reminded us of playing cards - do they evoke anything visually in your mind? Do you paint them first and work inside them, or paint them around the rest of the work afterwards?

A: It's a personal preference. Borders anchor an image, add perceived contrast, and help direct the eye. It's the last element added.

Q: The saturation and contrast in your paintings is stunning. How do you achieve that glow with gouache? Do you make adjustments digitally at all, or is this effect achieved without it?

A: Density and contrast are adjusted to match the original as closely as possible. Viewing on a backlit screen adds brightness and contrast.

Q: We're always curious about artist's processes; do you begin with a title and paint something that represents it, or do you title your paintings based off of what they bring to mind once you complete them?

A: I find words I like in a dictionary, assign them at random to completed pictures, and call it a day. There is no profit in overthinking.

Michael Moreth is a recovering Chicagoan living in the rural, micropolitan City of Sterling, the Paris of Northwest Illinois.

Interview with Diane LeBlanc

Q: We had a lot of fun reading “Self-Portrait in Herbs” in different orders and grid lines that really enriched the work for us; did you format it expecting readers to work left to right ‘as usual,’ or did you plan around that fluidity?

A: I’m intrigued to learn how readers navigate this piece. The original illustration appears in *Culpeper’s Complete Herbal* (1816). The plants and herbs are grouped alphabetically, which creates random juxtapositions. As I read Culpeper’s definitions and prescriptions for use, I played with associational language and ideas for each plant in the illustration. So in contrast to a linear autobiography in herbs, the self-portrait is a collage of language reflecting identity and experience. I imagined readers following their eyes and creating their own order and meaning.

Q: The speaker of “Brass Hammer” is wonderfully permeable, crafted and refined throughout the piece, forged by what they take in, witness, and the hands of those around them. Can you speak on how you approached all that malleability?

A: “Brass Hammer” began as a response to Jim Simmerman’s “Twenty Little Poetry Projects” (*The Practice of Poetry*, Robin Behn and Chase Twitchell). Do you know that prompt? I return to it at least once a year. It’s actually a list of 20 one-line prompts that initially resist narrative. But, of course, the mind eventually finds a theme. As I revised the poem several months after drafting it, I recognized a familiar question about art, labor, and self-definition. I came of age trying to reconcile literature’s Romantic ideas of love and art with my lived resistance to letting another person or work control me. The speaker in this poem doesn’t answer the questions “Would I be chisel or stone?/Hammer or poem?” But by the end of the poem, the speaker seems to recognize that the binaries, more than the experiences, are the problem to be solved.

Q: The language of “What the Flame Will Forget” is musically precise, an incantation throwing off sparks. How do you decide what to lend the most focus to, which images to alight on?

A: Like “Self-Portrait in Herbs,” this poem developed through associations more than narrative logic. The first and last couplets, however, occupy specific time and space. That world of the poem is essential to make it more than a collection of images. It’s kind of a Jacob’s ladder in that one couplet drops from and to the next, but they’re all connected and will fall differently depending on a reader’s handling of the poem. I appreciate you noticing sparks. I compose associational poems rather wildly. Revision is then a process of honoring the world or narrative and letting go of some fun but only loosely connected images.

Diane LeBlanc is a writer, teacher, and book artist with roots in Vermont, Wyoming, and Minnesota. She is the author of *The Feast Delayed* (Terrapin Books, 2021) and four poetry chapbooks. Poems and essays appear in *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Cimarron Review*, *Mid-American Review*, and *Southern Humanities Review*, among others. Diane is a holistic life coach with emphasis in creativity practice. She is a professor and writer in residence at St. Olaf College. Read more at www.dianeblancwriter.com .

Interview with V. Joshua Adams

Q: The “Balcony behind the bakery” seems to be drawn from a real place, touching on both its past and future. Was the poem inspired by somewhere you’ve been, or is the setting imagined?

A: A real balcony, in fact, two doors down from our first house. The building had been a bakery in the middle years of the 20th century and there were still painted advertisements visible on the brick. A few nights after we moved in, some people sat out on that balcony and played music. I never forgot the sound of the woman's voice.

Q: Throughout the poem, the reader is led from the dizzying smokestack heights of ambition to the corrupted foundations of the earth beneath. Is this a one-way descent into a hell of our own making, or is it possible to stop digging?

A: I think in the poem it's basically one-way. I mean, if we could stop, I'm assuming we would have done so already. Things are pretty bad. I'm something of a pessimist on these matters. On the other hand, the digging won't stop anytime soon, so neither will the poetry about it.

Q: Is the line “One virtue in crackpot ideas is that they breed” a quote from somewhere else? Did you build the poem up around it, or did it make itself relevant as you wrote?

A: The line is a quotation from B.F. Skinner's article "Pigeons in a Pelican," which details his work on "Project Pigeon," later ORCON ("Organic Control"). These programs were attempts to train pigeons through operant conditioning to guide missiles to hit targets during and after World War II. It sounds insane, and it is, but it is also one hundred percent true. Before the rise of electronic guidance systems, this was the most promising way to steer a missile without having to get too close to your enemy: train pigeons to peck at the target from the nose cone, and hook up what they were pecking at to the steering mechanism. I had already drafted the first part of the poem when I somehow came across an article about these projects of Skinner's, and immediately thought I needed to incorporate them somehow into the poem.

V. Joshua Adams is the author of *Past Lives*, forthcoming from JackLeg Press. A poet, critic, scholar, and translator, he teaches at the University of Louisville.

Interview with Christian Lozada

Q: We were so impressed with that double-edged use of hiding in those first few lines, as a weapon of xenophobia and in turn as a kind of shield against it. Can anything truly be protected when hidden like that?

A: Yes, maybe? No, probably? Something is definitely lost in the hiding. The X on the door is a mark of pride, in a weird way, because it says "I'm looking out for others," but my grandma definitely lost the message because she would rhetorically ask "Why, when we had no neighbors?" Uncle was definitely protecting his pride. He started doing that while he was dying of cancer. So he dealt with mortality and we took him in after the Maui fires, so he was living with his niece and her husband while having siblings and his own kids. Did he lose any in the lying? I think that that is an internal concession that has no accurate way to measure.

Q: Once the body is breached and the life taken (or at least forever altered), what remains? How do you nurture it in such a brutal climate?

A: Oof, those questions are rough because they speak directly to the human experience. I think our bodies get breached early on, like how we recognize corporate logos before we recognize our own names. The materialism sinks in deep from the start, but I also think the "nothing to show for it" line is unfair, accurate, and directly addresses the "what remains" question. If lives are measured in work, then the only thing of value is what is produced, which, as the saying goes, you can't take with you. If life is measured by saving your neighbors from sickness by putting an X on your door or by letting your uncle call you cousin, then the emphasis is on service to others, not on taking and preservation.

Q: Do you believe a cure is possible, or is inoculation the only recourse?

A: This answer is a journey. I think the cure is possible, but it is on the other side of a societal singularity where our inherited ideas no longer apply. In other words, I have no idea what the cure looks like! I'm sure we will arrive there eventually. Yes to inoculation. I have an annual pass to Disneyland (don't ask me why), and every month I spend too much time finding discounts on Disney gift cards to save a couple extra dollars while I'm at the parks. I enjoy that hunt not because I need to save money (I could just not have a pass or buy anything), but because it makes me feel like I'm getting one over on Disney. It's a small way I can rationalize enjoying the time I spend with people who love the theme park while supporting a corporation whose record is far from spotless. Or maybe I enjoy it because the Visayans were pirates. Either way, the disease is on the inside. I show love through the very thing that commodifies it. And I take power by giving power.

Christian Hanz Lozada is the son of an immigrant Filipino and a descendant of the Southern Confederacy. He knows the shape of hope and exclusion. He authored the poetry collection *He's a Color, Until He's Not* and co-authored *Leave with More Than You Came With*. His poems have appeared in journals from California to Australia with stops in Hawaii, Korea, and the United Kingdom. Christian has featured at the Autry Museum and Beyond Baroque. He lives in San Pedro, CA and uses his MFA to teach his neighbors and their kids at Los Angeles Harbor College.

Interview with livio farallo

Q: Your poems have a bite to them, all birds and flame and mouth. Do your poems most often smile at the reader, grimace, bare their teeth?

A: I'm not sure what effect my pieces have on the reader. Reader effect/response is not a consideration of mine. The pieces tend to be more personal/individual in their direction. If I'm happy with them (and how happy can you possibly be?), then I'm satisfied. If I had to generalize I'd say, just from my interpretation/perception of the world, they tend to be sarcastic/dismissive/disappointed.

Q: Do you go into writing with a single image or preserved moment in mind, with the others emerging to connect with as you go? Or do they arrive all at once?

A: Very often, the intent to write is merely an inkling, perhaps with a vague thought or two. Ideas tend to develop along the way but, I can't say there is any definite method.

Q: What remains when the old is burned away, scrubbed off, snuffed out? Can anything new (or better) grow there?

A: It depends what is being scrubbed away. Something bad is often replaced with something worse. There are many situations that are simply unapproachable. Others are closer to our fingertips. Like Lennon said, "You better free your mind, instead."

livio farallo is co-editor of *Slipstream* and Professor of Biology at Niagara County Community College in Sanborn, New York. His work has appeared or, is forthcoming, in *The Cardiff Review*, *The Cordite Review*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Schuylkill Literary Journal*, *Misfit*, *Ranger*, and elsewhere.

Interview with Joel Best

Q: The collage pieces feel so much like found documents/remnants of a personal history. If someone came across them that way instead of encountering them as art, where do you think they would find them?

A: I'd like some future entity to discover them tucked away in a dusty volume in a forgotten part of the library. What are these things? Who made them? And their meaning? This person may not be able to decipher the artwork's message (or they'll come up with meaning of their own that has nothing to do with what I intended) but even tenuous connections across time have importance. Because we're all ghosts, or ghosts soon-to-be, needing to communicate.

Q: The childhood summer of "Apocalypse" feels heavy with rapture and importance in a way that's really refreshing for a youthful poem. Does the weight come from an impending end, a growing up, something darker?

A: Summer evenings are often thought of as a time of freedom and fun, but as a child I found the coming of heated night unsettling in ways that others didn't always understand. Many years later I still feel the finality of dusk. It's a time machine, recalling frantic kickball games under moonlight and melting ice cream on dimly-lit porches. Now, as then, the sound of crickets proves that happiness can't possibly last. Somewhere a curtain waits to drop.

Q: "history" chases its subjects right out of an unbearable present back into the past – what does it take to remain inside today? What does it cost?

A: Our current timeline challenges me. 24-hour news cycles and constant social connectivity create a fearsome gravity and I feel forever weighed down by unavoidable minutia. Who is doing what? With whom? What did some stranger have for dinner last night, what's their dog up to? The things that count – life and death issues – are given the same weight as a captionless photo of shoes. It's exhausting to be part of this world where so many people are infinitely fascinated by whatever streams on television or their phones. The totality of this deluge becomes too hard to endure and has me finding escape by creating realities that, though strange, are personally manageable.

Joel Best is a poet and artist living in upstate New York. His work has appeared in a variety of, online and print. His chapbooks, *august never*, *family album* and *Across, Beyond* are available through Amazon. His website can be found at joelbestpoetry.com.

Interview with Harrison Fisher

Q: How did you first learn about de Nerval? Do you prefer lobsters or dogs?

A: I worked in a great, old bookstore while I was an undergraduate in the early 1970s. It's amazing the fund of usable (also useless) knowledge you can amass just by looking at the covers and a few pages of hundreds of books every day. My writerly-inclined friends and I were always in search of new weirdness—new to us, that is—esp. of a poetic stripe, so de Nerval popped up in the company of quite a few other European writers/poets, a lot of them New Directions authors. I think the most wonderful thing about de Nerval, lobster aside, was that he had a friend (I hope I'm remembering this correctly) who trained his hair up into two inverted cones that the friend said symbolized the “twin peaks of genius”—and this was 130 years before punk, almost 150 years before *Twin Peaks*. As for lobster v. dog, lobsters are quieter and more delicious, I imagine, and they haven't been infantilized the way dogs have. I'm more of a cuttlefish guy myself—the hovering, the mesmerizing light show, the action!—although if I came upon a snack shack on the beach selling lobster dogs, I'd have to have one.

Q: Most of your pieces are in conversation with a source text, or texts. How do you go about choosing what you strike up a conversation with? Do you find writing in conjunction with another text restrictive or freeing?

A: For me, a source text or movie is not restrictive at all because its function is largely as a point of departure. It is a mere functionary! In that respect, I'm not sure I'm having a conversation, as you called it, at least not a proper and dialogically respectful one. To my shame, I can be a rather thin plunderer. [Although I did go deeper than de Nerval's lobster by digging up his crowd's idiom “white night,” which meant a sleepless night—I am undoubtedly a relation.] Source material, whether writings or images, constantly finds its way inside—and then who can hold it all in? As it turns out, most of the poems I sent you to consider for this issue were spawned with a source text, but I'm not sure that is true of my work overall. [Note: I checked later. Apparently, it's true.] How does any matter get chosen for a poem? It so often seems like it's the other way around—the subject chooses me. I don't know how to expand on that, because that formulation hands off the agency of creating a poem, which is a bit silly on the face of it. But my experience tells me that the concepts of consciously choosing a subject and consciously composing lines about it do not adequately capture what I do on a daily basis, now that I'm writing poems again (essentially, I took the first fifth of the new century off).

Q: The scale of the perspective in “Geography of the Impossible” widens from the

basement to the galaxy. In times of fear, do you find your perspective shrinks, or widens? Which is scarier: knowing nothing, or knowing everything?

A: Speaking of sources, “Geography . . .” is my rendering of the Ray Bradbury television show noted under the title, and the quoted lines are verbatim from characters in the show. I do depart from the story for the cosmologically glorious and totalizing final stanza. As for which is scarier, knowing nothing or knowing everything—how would I know? I’m stuck in the middle! A person could know nothing and fear everything, or else could be serene and complete in ignorance. A person could know everything and be serene and complete, or else bored, boring, and insufferable (omniscience has certain theological radiations, too, which are definitely beyond my ken).

I have never had to think about fear and perspective before, so . . . thank you?

I suppose fear has tremendous focusing power, although not in a good way because it warps perspective. When you’re afraid, the fear takes over, just like when you’re sick, the sickness takes over—it becomes a great struggle to think outside of pain and discomfort. The broadest perspective leaves both body and mind behind; by writing this sentence, I now approach my mystic self. The greatest fear, of course, is being handed interview questions that invite you to prove you should avoid writing prose. Thank you! I am going out over the Transom.

Harrison Fisher held an NEA fellowship in 1978 and has published twelve collections of poems, including *Blank Like Me*, *Curtains for You*, *UHFO*, and most recently *Poematics of the Hyperbloody Real*. In 2024, he has new poems in *Book XI*, *Misfitmagazine*, and *Rundelania*.

Interview with MICHAEL CHANG

Q: “We Could Be Lovers / Where the Sun Shines” and “Love in the Dark” both juxtapose the inherent silliness and the violence of desire so well; what does it mean to win at it? To bring all that furtive seething want out in the naked open?

A: Humans are often a mess (mix) of motives!! The question of "winning" at love has always confused / beguiled me. These poems reflect the complexities behind love, adoration, and play as well as the dynamics within.

Q: What leads you to use the “u” and other forms of very digital shorthand?

A: It's how I think / talk so I want folx to feel closer to me that way.

Q: What inspired the form of “Index of Titles?” Do you approach stricter poetic formats differently than you do more free verse?

A: An abecedarian but not a traditional one. I always figure out what I want to say and then the form comes together later.

MICHAEL CHANG (they/them) is the author of *SYNTHETIC JUNGLE* (Northwestern University Press, 2023), *TOY SOLDIERS* (Action, Spectacle, 2024) & *THE HEARTBREAK ALBUM* (Coach House Books, 2025). They edit poetry at *Fence*.

Interview with Sofia Fall

Q: The blend of the mythic and the artificial in “Machinations” is fascinating; do you consider both a different kind of construct? Is what unites them a sense of comfort/surety and menace in equal measure?

A: My mother is a metalsmith, and I’ve always witnessed her fascination with the materiality of things. It isn’t a fascination that I share necessarily—but it’s something I feel I can understand, when I watch her making art. To me, the “artificial” has always felt a little bit mythic—I have this understanding that even things that appear to be basic and elemental (like metal) can in fact be persuaded to completely transform. I think myths are similarly constructed. They are made of strands of stories that are real, and then they’re layered over other strands until they are a different story, a story that is less “real” and more artificial. I find it both comforting and unsettling to look at the ways that both myths and objects are manufactured. It’s much more difficult than we’d like to believe to separate the real from the artificial, the natural from the manipulated.

Q: “My Sisters as Silkworms” picks up on that fairytale feel in a distinct way; can beauty and gentleness make up for being slowly rendered unrecognizable? Is change always a good thing, and how do you negotiate the parts that are or aren’t?

A: I think we are always slowly being rendered unrecognizable to ourselves. There is simply nothing about my infant self that I can recognize in myself now, and yet isn’t my infant self also myself, also part of me? So it happens in big way, but also small ones. There are desires and longings and needs that once utterly consumed me, and I can remember how viscerally I once felt them, but I can’t for the life of me hold onto those feelings anymore. On some level, I don’t recognize them now. I think beauty and gentleness are the only things that make up for this constant state of alienation and change. It’s a little bit beautiful, even if it’s painful, how I can hold many selves inside of me at the same time. Of course change isn’t always a good thing; often it’s bad. Sometimes it is brutal and unbearable. But mostly we do bear it. We find what’s beautiful, if anything is beautiful, and we find gentleness to hold on to if there’s nothing else.

Q: How do you live around lack? What kind of love can fill it, and what happens if it’s the wrong one? Is painful love preferable to no love?

A: There was certainly a time I did, in fact, prefer painful love to no love, even if I never would have told you that, then. But I don’t anymore. I prefer the kind of love that mostly doesn’t feel like lack or longing. Can anything actually fill lack? I doubt it, but I don’t really know if that’s the point of love. Though certainly painful love can cause lack, can perpetuate it.

I look for love that makes me feel larger instead of smaller, makes me feel brave enough live with lack.

Sofia Fall is a writer from Michigan. She has a B.A. from the University of Michigan and an M.A. in Climate & Society from Columbia Climate School. She works in climate communications, education, and outreach in Seattle. Her writing appears or is forthcoming in *The Shore*, *Public School Poetry*, and elsewhere. She has three sisters.

Interview with David Blair on Collaboration with Donald Langosy

Q: How does your collaboration process with Donald Langosy usually work? Do you send your poems along with specific visuals in mind, or does he interpret them on his own first and then you come together?

A: Donald and I have been friends, checking each other's work out and talking since the mid-nineties when we were both working for the Boston Ballet as ticket brokers in their phone room. (I tell the story of our friendship in *On the Seawall*. A few years ago, I sent him about four months of work that I thought would be right up his alley. What he made of them was brilliant, outstanding, eye-popping. He made them for months. We communicated through the poems and images rather than discursively, talking back to each other through images, music and situations, and in that way making his own bemused commentaries. He also sent me some portraits of himself as Duchamp, and we had fun with that, as I wrote a poem, and he answered with another image. All during these times, I was liberated by his process, and I wrote stuff that I realized was with him in mind, so I sent these, and then by the end of the process of making the book our book together, he sent me images that he dreamed I had written but which he had not seen.

Few things are more inspiring for a poet than being gotten. The poems here are from that second period. It turned out that he was sort of right about some collages being for poems he had not read yet. I looked into my file of half-written poems, and I finished them by combining drafts and cutting things down to more essential moments for Donald. Two of these poems are from his dream image poems but which I abandoned before finishing, "View from Apartment 9" and "Notes from the Gulf of Sadness," written in my head as I took a two hour walk on the South Boston waterfront the day the Supreme Court overturned abortion rights. "View from Apartment 9" poem superimposes two poems on top of each other because Donald superimposes two images on top of each other in the image he dreamed, and since there are no figures in the image, I went to a sort of prose poem based on what I imagine the apartment building in Tammy Wynette's lonesome and rueful "Apartment 9" would look like, and a sort of imaginary Madeline novel set in an annoying or "plaguy" city with a connotation of illness. The other two poems here are from the batch that I wrote while Donald made the images for the first batch as I studied them. Then there was the act of cinematically looping all the poem and images as if they formed a movie with a sort of narrative about visual art and culture creating a character called Country Music Frankenstein, and I started running the "rough cut" by him before we had even finished exchanging poems and images.

Q: Do you visualize Langosy's style when you write, or do you keep the drafting process separate first?

A: I don't visualize Donald's style so much as experience his as a Fellini-loving kindred spirit, which is how I think of readers whom I consider to be mostly poets and artists themselves, and if they are not, there is something in them essentially possessing the ability to visualize and place themselves in the middle of evolving moment-by-moment situations. I don't visualize but feel his receptive style, which I understand to be in some ways different from my own. The process of drafting continues as we work together, and in subtle ways the images make me know what a poem is about; revising is all about poems becoming more tangible as shape governing details, their pacing, and where this or that lags, so his images really help me revise my poems.

Q: All of these poems are humming with life and community, even in the empty city of Apartment No. 9 and deep in the Gulf of Sadness. How do you populate your poetry?

A: I'm a city-bred and city-born and city-living poet, so I can't imagine not having people in them. The sound of people is in language and levels of diction. I think art is a humanizing activity. People are the spirit, and though I love solitude, I like to be near people. I like when Robert Frost says, "I only wrote one poem with a person in it." I rightfully don't know that I am perceiving community scenes so much as people going about doing their own things, and I don't gravitate, old-latchkey loner kid that I was to "the community concept," compared to "everybody is here doing individual things and having their own imaginable and perceptible struggles," the social world come down to the level of specific people connecting, or not, while they create or are buttressed by larger forces. Friendship, and I think of art as an act that flows from friendship, has loneliness as its background and grounds. At least in my experience.

The figures inspired by the Sweat Hogs looking down in their own bemused friendship on the baroque scene of the bowlers on the beach with their aggressive-looking but blindingly defensive exoskeletons on their joiner heads, and the images of the old people enjoying their own bullshitting on benches in the Boston Arboretum, which will be the final image in *Country Music Frankenstein*, our forthcoming book from MadHat, are particularly loveable to me, as they show what Donald and I believe about poetry being a friendship art, as is the case with Donald's beloved Apollinaire when he surveys the shifting scenes in "Zone" and when he adventures off to disaster in "The Little Car," and when he gets the word out about painters. The depopulated dream image Donald sent me that became "View from Apartment 9" was, in part, a view of Massachusetts Avenue in Cambridge, and what it really looked like to me is how the city looked at night when I took walks alone during

the Covid lockdown, particularly that horrible spring when I missed the street life and the bustle and variety of other people so much. When does a person feel that kind of solitude? In childhood. And I guess that's why the second half of that poem is an imaginary urban children's book.

David Blair is the author of five books of poetry and a collection of essays. He lives in Somerville, Massachusetts, with his wife and daughter and teaches poetry in the MFA Writing Program at the University of New Hampshire. His collaboration with the painter Donald Langosy, *Country Music Frankenstein*, is forthcoming from MadHat Press.

Of Manhattan and Brooklyn the son, since returning from Venice where he met Ezra Pound and then saw the localized art of Titian in Venetian churches, which caused him to choose painting over his first love of poetry, **Donald Langosy** has lived and worked in Boston. His paintings can be found in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Harvard's Fogg Museum, as well as in private collections throughout the United States and Europe. His collaboration with the poet David Blair, *Country Music Frankenstein*, is forthcoming from MadHat Press.

Interview with Peter Mladinic

Q: Two wildly different tones are on display in these two poems, both brutal simplicity and the Hollywood fantastic. What tone is typically your favorite to work in, or does that depend on the individual poem at hand?

A: "Guy Loves Bruno" is a persona poem, and I enjoy doing those whenever the occasion arises. The speaker could be a public or private person. In addition to the personification of Bruno, played by Robert Walker in *Strangers on a Train*, I have done other film actor personas. "Blown Saves" comes out of personal experience. While there is a bit of drama in that poem, it's very different from the drama conveyed by the stalker, Bruno, in "Strangers." Writing to me is cathartic, and I have numerous dark poems, with dark tones such as in "Strangers." The persona poems, whether a public or private person is speaking, are usually dark, as the speaker is in some way conflicted.

Q: "Blown Saves" evokes the religious/divine and uses it to justify and confess in equal measure. Post confession, is the speaker still stuck with the dog in their rearview mirror, a kind of roadside purgatory? Will the speaker ever be able to look back without seeing it?

A: Art imitates life in "Blown Saves." The one place where I distort the truth, and just a bit, is in part 1. Part 2 came out of a very positive, rewarding experience in which the elderly dog was reunited with her owner. Part 3 is based on an incident that haunts me periodically. I was with two other people, we were returning from a weekend of camping. The consensus was to give the dog some food and water, and then we moved on. It's a big regret in my life, but I try to atone for it, by doing work on behalf of animals.

Q: In "Guy Loves Bruno," you intentionally blur the boundary where Bruno, the character, starts and Robert Walker, the actor, ends. Are Bruno and Walker, as the speaker of the poem, entwined in the same way that *Strangers* entwines queer male desire and violence?

A: That blurring of boundaries came naturally as I wrote the poem. The part where Bruno goes out of character and speaks as Robert Walker about his ex-wife Jennifer Jones is an instance of the persona shifting, but then he shifts back into character. I feel that by blurring the boundaries I was able to exploit possibilities the poem as a form offers. It's not a film, so I have more flexibility. I wasn't thinking that consciously as I was writing, but, as said, the shift came naturally so I followed my instincts as a writer, as a creator of a persona in a poem.

Peter Mladinic's fifth book of poems, *Voices from the Past*, is available from Better Than Starbucks Publications. An animal rights advocate, he lives in Hobbs, New Mexico, United States.

Interview with Nicholas Alti

Q: This poem prods at true crime and morbid fascination in a way that really compelled us. Are a body and a story the same thing – and can one or both belong to the wearer/teller?

A: The body and the story of the body must compel each other and correspond, right? Especially with a body having undergone harm or violence. They are at least inseparable, and I think that allowing the body to inform the story rather than explicitly the inverse is a humane response to corporeal brutality. I think it's important to not isolate our stories or our bodies and to remain open to sharing these innate and necessary parts of ourselves—our flesh and our narrative—and to practice and aspire for compassionate understanding for the complexities brought forth from either one's story or body being violated.

Q: Is the violent end inevitable? Can one unbury themselves?

A: Can one unbury themselves, I love that. Sometimes soil and sod aren't the only way to begin a burial, we take on little wounds and burdens that bury us in the inverse, and in that sense pressure can be alleviated. My concern with violent ends is that they might inspire an ominous cloud about the person. I think of the people I've lost from violence or even brutal mishaps and it's like there's a lock on my internal narrative of their lives from before that which I have to fiddle with and break before I can dig into the book of them. I find that unfair of me.

Q: The spacing and visual form of the poem reinforces a jolt of realization and facilitates the unsettling nature of the work nicely. Do you draft with form in mind first, or theme? Both, neither?

A: I try to go into a poem with no expectations or conscious influence, and that is simply because it allows me the most fun. I enjoy a blank page, negative space. Shape and form are my first instincts to look for within that blank space, and I start to construct a draft in accordance with my sort of mental picture of the final outcome as far as shape and form go. However, language and tone are the most important elements for me when drafting, so if I have to abandon form to facilitate better language or create a more fulfilled aura, I will always do that. Ideally, through edits, I can mold a new shape influenced by my initial idea using the language born from it. I hope to encapsulate an entire process of a poem within that poem, I want dimensions to unfold and to create a world of questions and images within.

From rural Michigan, **Nicholas Alti** is a bartender in Atlanta. He has pictures of his frogs and dogs in his wallet. More of Nicholas's poetry can be found at *JMWW*, *Yalobusha Review*, *DREGINALD*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Rogue Agent*, and elsewhere.

Interview with Stephen C. Middleton

Q: Being plied with beauty and the natural without any deeper consideration is no great shield against the structural forces at play in both of these works. What forgotten “resources,” if any, better help negotiate that struggle?

A: I like to think that awareness of the negative forces at play in 'Prescription (Sourness)', and I'll talk about those a little more below, is in itself a kind of resistance and resource. In both these poems there is a dissident element. I don't want to be prescriptive regarding readings of these poems, but to some extent, both concern the interface between the invalid / outsider with authority (the State, the Doctor, etc). Understanding that authority, and its limits, is clearly helpful. Not only 'who validates', but whose validation matters, and why.

Q: Can that namelessness in “Prescriptions (Sourness)” be freeing? What power comes from naming what has harmed you?

A: The not 'naming' is both defensive and freeing. There is a hint of 'too much information', which is a phrase that I've heard used a great deal by people dealing with (very different) forms of oppression. There is certainly a release gained from being able to name things that are, or have been, harmful, but, I hope there is a recognition that holding back information can be, if not a triumph, a valid tool in the process, which, I stress, in both poems involves a degree of dissenting.

Q: The way you structure your work, visually and in word choice, pushes the reader to look past easier interpretations like that of the doctor in “Au Pair.” How do you draft with that reframing in mind?

A: As far as word choice is concerned I tend to think in a mixture of precision and options (sometimes denoted by a / or in the prose poem, by questions). That there may be more than one correct wording. In terms of structure, form is more fluid, dictated by content and, I have to admit, instinct, though it is by now, I would hope, quite a honed instinct.

Stephen C. Middleton is a writer working in London, England. He has had five books published, including *A Brave Light* (Stride) and *Worlds of Pain / Shades of Grace* (Poetry Salzburg). He has been in several anthologies, including *Paging Doctor Jazż* (Shoestring), *From Hepworth's Garden Out* (Shearsman, 2010), & *Yesterday's Music Today* (Knives Forks and Spoons, 2015). For several years he was editor of *Ostinato*, a magazine of jazz and jazz related poetry, and *The Tenormen Press*. He has been in many magazines worldwide. Middleton is currently working on projects (prose and poetry) relating to jazz, blues, politics, outsider (folk) art, mountain environments, and long-term illness.

Interview with Misha Lynn Moon

Q: What sorts of media do you currently find comforting and affirming, if any? Do you still find things that speak to you how Xena did? Has what you're drawn to changed over time?

A: I have been a fan of Godzilla movies since I was a little girl (the most recent Toho Studios film, *Godzilla Minus One* was my favorite film that came out last year). I am fascinated by the idea of kaiju as metaphors for nature in all of its beauty and horror. I've had a new affinity for Mothra, the giant moth goddess who protects her island from outside threats, from larva to imago, since coming out. As someone who has gone through her own transformation, I love her with all of my heart.

Q: The body in your work is a site of negotiation between the fulfilling/joyful and the price of that joy extracted by a hostile world. Do you find poetry to be a similar experience? Is every site of creation and rebuilding a fraught one?

A: Kind of. I've been a student of the poet William Stafford (through my amazing high school creative teacher Vincent Wixon, one of Stafford's students) for most of my writing life. Stafford said that "Each poem is a miracle that has been invited to happen," and that's kind of the process that I've followed. I try to write a poem a day. If a poem doesn't come, I lower my standards, meaning that I surrender myself to the process, and let it come. In other words, I don't find the process of creation to be fraught. I find the process of living in a world that sees me and my friends and lovers as a problem to be far more threatening than the writing process.

Q: How do you wield hope when you write? Is it a torch pressing back against the dark, a warm window opened to the reader, something else?

A: or me writing is the most magical act that I've ever come across. I literally wrote myself into my current form (when you are a transgender woman, and the world sets itself against your transition, you have to tell your own story, and walk out of it as yourself). The most hopeful thing in the world is thinking that you can change even a little bit of it. Writing is a way towards that change.

Misha Lynn Moon (she/her) is one of the first transgender teachers that transitioned mid career at an Oregon public school program. She has worked in nursing homes, as a janitor, as a school counselor, and most recently as the training coordinator for Outside In, a medical and houseless services non-profit providing low barrier care for marginalized communities in Portland, Oregon. She has written nearly a poem a day since she was 13 years old.

Interview with Geoffrey Babbitt

Q: How long have you been fascinated with Blake? What was the first piece of his you saw, and did it inform the way you see his/other artists' work?

A: I have been fascinated with Blake for ages, for so long that I can't recall seeing his work for the first time. But it probably was *The Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, which were the first poems of his that I read, as is commonly the case. I remember being struck by the singularity of his work—both the poetry and the visual art—their visionary, otherworldly quality. Someone told me that his poetry should never be read just as words on the page, the way he's often anthologized (without the visual artwork). Even when reading *Milton and Jerusalem*, I try to experience his "composite art," to borrow W. J. T. Mitchell's phrase, as much as possible. I've been drawn to multimodality ever since. And I do think that it is important to approach Blake in a context of contrast with other artists of his time. In addition to his training as an engraver, he trained as a painter in the Royal Academy, but he abandoned the oil painting methods he learned there and had to invent his own methods. In *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger makes the argument that the medium of oil paint dominated European art for centuries because of its photorealist ability to simulate the tangibility of what was depicted (often for the viewer-owner). Berger points out that Blake's methods are geared to work against such materialism: "And when [Blake] came to make paintings, he very seldom used oil paint and, although he still relied upon the traditional conventions of drawing, he did everything he could to make his figures lose substance, to become transparent and indeterminate one from the other, to defy gravity, to be present but intangible, to glow without a definable surface, not to be reducible to objects." As usual Berger is right. Blake depicts spiritual reality, not the material world. In his artistic choices concerning medium/media, you glimpse important parts of his philosophy.

Q: We loved to see this poem double its ekphrasis and put *Newton* and *The Ancient of Days* into conversation with each other. Did you start writing about one and then end up evoking the other, vice versa, or something else?

A: Thank you! I started by thinking about *Newton* because I think Blake's opposition to Deism is such an important part of his philosophy, and *Newton* encapsulates that viewpoint. But the parallels between Newton and Urizen (the Zoa associated with reason that is depicted in *The Ancient of Days*) are notable, and it was hard to ignore them—both hold compasses, both crouch downward, and both overemphasize reason to the detriment of other faculties—e.g. the imagination, creativity, insight, vision, and so forth. And there are further visual points in common that the poem touches upon. Urizen almost suggested himself and stepped into the poem.

Q: Your poem lends back the ephemeral and unmeasurable to nature in a way that a Newtonian scientific outlook can often miss or take for granted. Could even Isaac be swayed by the return of that “bright, bright blue?”

A: Great question! I probably have more patience for Newton than Blake did. Opticks is an enjoyable read, and his corpuscular theory of light is interesting. But Newton also wrote theological philosophy, and he believed in a rather materialist universe. In his view, God (the pantokrator) created the world and then sat back and didn't interfere or intervene in any way after its creation. Through an act of natural religion (remember, Blake's first illuminated book is *There Is No Natural Religion*), we can infer the existence and nature of God, who is essentially a clockmaker, and everything we can know is derived from our five senses. For Blake, that view robs God of his divinity, and robs humanity of our greatest gifts—Vision and the imagination, or what Blake sometimes called "the poetic faculty." So Blake would probably answer your question with a resounding, "No!" The mental error he committed all his life is precisely what draws him toward his own diagram and away from what ought to fill him with wonder.

Geoffrey Babbitt's second book, *A Grain of Sand in Lambeth*, is the 2023 Winner of the Betsy Joiner Flanagan Award in Poetry, which will be released by the University of Nevada Press this fall. His first book—a verse-essay, cross-genre project entitled *Appendices Pulled from a Study on Light*—was published by Spuytin Duyvil in 2018. His poems and essays have appeared in *North American Review*, *Pleiades*, *Colorado Review*, *DIAGRAM*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Washington Square*, *Cincinnati Review*, and elsewhere. He holds a Ph.D. from the University of Utah, is an Associate Professor of English & Creative Writing at Hobart & William Smith Colleges, and he serves as Editor-in-Chief of *Seneca Review* & Seneca Review Books.

Interview with James Miller

Q: This poem packs such a punch through the brevity and sharpness of its language. How did you go about paring down to the essentials?

A: The poem was inspired in part by my family's recent move to Oklahoma City. On our first trip there, we visited Kaiser's Grateful Bean Cafe, where we had some excellent old-school ice cream. Over the next few days, I had a series of dreams loosely connected to the place— anxious visions, portents of violence. It wasn't clear to me at first that these feelings were essentially political. They were grounded in a fear of organized oppression, erasure of the creative voice. I started writing in an exploratory spirit, asking "What is going in here? Why is Tom Verlaine serving me ice cream?"

The first version of the poem was all about long lines, as I tried to catch the texture of the OKC venue, as well as the dream-dread that haunted me still. In early drafts, there were two employees at the shop, and a lot of conversation. Verlaine was more active, riffing on his musical life and his fears for the future of art. Over many weeks of revision, I cut away most of the poem, leaving only the essential flavor of dislocation. Still, I knew that three details had to remain: the jukebox (with very specific songs), the blue diamonds on Tom's hat, and the "thin exquisite" onion rings.

Q: Will “Sunday soon” come for the jukebox itself, too? What is permanent when all that hard-won hardness can be taken from you?

A: The jukebox is the root of the poem. I remember that I took several photos of the real one in Kaiser's, and spent some time looking up some of the tracks. It was important that this object be the first we see... a relic that hovers between documentary precision and blurred dream-logic. So many sentimental tunes about love and sadness, the slippage between them. But the "Sunday soon" is always hungry, always ready to take another heaving helping for itself. It wants to devour all of us, and all our making. Maybe at first we might think that the old songs could be safe. But not for long.

Q: Can the freedom of music and art distract from the panopticon of a carceral world, or soften the blow? Is any space truly free when prisons exist?

A: I think that the poem is ambivalent about this question. On one hand, Tom Verlaine is still with us (though of course only in spirit, having died in January 2023). Scooping ice cream with a smirk, keeping his own songs alive. On the other hand, he knows. The "Sunday soon" will come. It's only a matter of when. Yet Verlaine is not silent. He tells me what will happen, what will happen to him. I think he wants me to be a witness, and

to record what I see. Not so much a distraction, as a gesture towards memory. I saw this. You now see it, with me.

James Miller is a native of the Texas Gulf Coast, now settled in Oklahoma City. His work has appeared in *Best Small Fictions* (2021), *Hopkins Review*, *Broadkill Review*, *San Pedro River Review*, *Heavy Feather Review*, *The Ilanot Review*, *The Atlanta Review*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Psaltery & Lyre*, *CV2*, and elsewhere. Follow him on Twitter @AndrewM1621 and on Bluesky at @jandrewm.bsky.social. Website: jamesmillerpoetry.com.

Interview with Antoni “Toni” Szostak

Q: Do you think of this piece as a form of erasure? What changes when parts are added back or removed in the shifting of light?

A: I didn't think of it as erasure when documenting it but I think it could be interpreted that way, my view was to transition to physical light as a source of energy and refer to mental images that vary when creating a text. It also refers to openness, as with a few of the lines in which people can interpret the context for a truth-statement and the feeling of the other lines.

Q: How did you transpose the text onto the silk? What transfer method did you use?

A: Letterpress printing with metal type, it works similarly to paper.

Q: Did you backlight the fabric and the hand in order for it to show through? What changes about the words when you can touch them, offer them up?

A: I used natural lighting (indoors), it's pretty thin so the hand shows through at all kinds of lighting. I agree, doing this is a physical relationship with trying to understand how ideas (words and images) exist.

Antoni Szostak is an interdisciplinary artist and writer originally from San Diego who currently lives between multiple states. Szostak combines free-verse writing with studies in material properties.

Interview with David Wolf

Q: Is the backyard barbecue a kind of ‘danse macabre’ in this day and age? Does the speaker think so?

A: I am not sure Yarner—the speaker in this persona piece, which is part of a longer sequence—has given it much thought, but now that you mention it, he senses that such is the case. The living do dance with the dead on so many levels at a backyard barbecue, especially, though not exclusively, if there is meat on the grill. Yarner may never think of the backyard barbecue the same again.

Q: The natural has a presence in this vignette that is inescapable, yet comes across as a comfort. Where can you still hide from the artificial?

A: The presence of the natural world appears in passages throughout the poem, arriving early, after the ambiguous opening line. And yes, the “natural” does feel like a comfort here, though it is also a fleeting element in the somewhat disjunctive unfolding of the poem.

It is difficult to “hide from the artificial” indeed, even in nature, since so much of the natural world continues to be surrounded, poisoned, and obliterated by the negatively artificial. Yarner also sees the representational framing and shaping of “nature” (via his hyper-mediated consciousness and perceptions) as a crucial area of artistic inquiry.

Q: How did Yarner the speaker/voice come to be? What is your process for looking through his eyes at something?

A: Yarner is one among several persona works I have created. Of course, the relationship between speaker and poet in any given poem is a complex issue—even in a “non-persona” piece. Yarner likes to fashion fleeting micro-narratives in the larger context of a given poem or prose poem passage. He is also a bit of a comedian who enjoys a variety of wordplay. He also values lyric beauty and music.

David Wolf is the author of six collections of poetry, *Open Season*, *The Moment Forever*, *Sablier I*, *Sablier II*, *Visions* (with artist David Richmond), and *Weir* (a micro-chapbook from Origami Poems Project). His work has appeared in numerous literary magazines and journals, including *BlazeVOX*, *Cleaver Magazine*, *dadakuku*, *decomp*, *E·ratio*, *Indefinite Space*, *Lotus-eater Magazine*, *New York Quarterly*, *Otoliths*, and *River Styx Magazine*. He is a professor emeritus of English at Simpson College and serves as the poetry editor for *Janus Head: Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature, Continental Philosophy, Phenomenological Psychology, and the Arts*.

Interview with Giulio Maffii

Q: What (if any) particular software did you use to construct the shapes and images in this piece?

A: I didn't use a particular software to obtain the shapes and images present in the poems, but I exploited the potential of Word and in particular "SmartArt". SmartArt refers to the range of graphics available in Word that you can use to create diagrams, such as flow charts, process charts, organisation charts etc etc. The peculiarity consists in using a "corporate language" as a container of the language. The cold corporate language in contact with daily human expressiveness. This was the novelty, the originality, of "Sequenze per sbagliare il bersaglio" released in 2021 (*Pietre Vive editore*) a visionary work that struck and disoriented critics and readers. The reader himself becomes the author of the poems; the words and sentences inside the "blocks" can be read in the sequence preferred by the reader. In the works presented here, the methodology is taken up and expanded.

Q: Saints in this piece are made literally pedestrian, surrounded by arrows, traffic signs, a focus on feet and walking. Do you find the act of walking itself spiritual?

A: First of all, we must ask ourselves whether the saints are among us or whether we belong to this category of human beings. These saints are literally overwhelmed and transported by the chaotic signals around us. Arrows that confuse our directions, that want to give us direction, but the right question is: "Which direction do I want to take?" Walking is an act that serves our spirituality, in the broadest sense of the word. The ancient Greek philosophers teach us this. I currently live in Buti, a small Tuscan town, a jewel set between mountains and hills, without traffic lights; walking is an approach to the world of ideas and writing, not just with nature. So, I'm obviously talking about a secular spirituality.

Q: Is anything fixed permanently through this transfusion, or just eased temporarily? Can the reader ever stop walking around the block?

A: The only fixed, or rather "certain" thing is poetry, poetry of the "saints" who every day live their lives between temporary miseries and happiness, a continuous transfusion. The reader (killer or victim?) not only has to walk around the blocks, but he must upset them, shake them, change them, turn them upside down, give and find meaning to the words and sentences. Turn the arrows backwards; "missing" the target infinitely. The transfusion of the saints is all this and much more.

Giulio Maffii was born in Florence, Italy. His studies are dedicated to poetry (linear-experimental-visual) and its diffusion. He wrote essays and books of poetry as “Le mucche non leggono Montale” , “Misinabi” , “The dance of the reluctant” and “Angina d’amour.” In 2020 he published the essay “The feet forward: the long walk of anthropos and thanatos between poetry and similar vices.” In 2021 Maffii published his most famous book of visual poetry, *Sequenze per sbagliare il bersaglio*. He has been published in various international journals such as *Arteidolia*, *Expanded journal*, *Urtica*, *100 subtexts*, *Disturb the universe*, and others. He collaborates with the Bubamara Theatre Company and teaches at the University of Florence.

Interview with Ryan Clark

Q: Does the speaker feel like the poisoner? The poisoned? Both? Neither?

A: A child living on a military base has no control over whether or how the activity of the base contaminates the soils and aquifers of the local community. Could the child be complicit, given that the military provided money to the family that fed the child, plus shelter and education? What I can say is that the child feels a sort of responsibility. The base housing is made to serve as a temporary home, and yet the people living in the villages and towns near the base have lived there for generations. For them, housing is not a one-, two-, three-, or four-year assignment—it is a life, as well as the lives to come. Even if the speaker is neither the poisoner nor the poisoned, there is a desire to call attention to the poisoning and to those who suffer (and those who don't suffer) from its effects.

Q: Does creating a critical erasure from biased material feel like a kind of reclaiming? How can a narrative change ownership, or can it ever fully?

A: In this specific instance, I find the act of erasure to be more like a response than a reclaiming. I think a housing brochure, in itself, is a fairly innocuous document. That said, I felt that the mundane details of military housing were ripe for such a response, given the cookie-cutter design of base housing and the context surrounding their purpose (housing military personnel and their families so as to help the American military machine run more effectively). Again, the concept of short-term home (military) versus long-term home (citizens of Terceira Island) comes into play. More broadly, I do believe that erasure can be a kind of reclaiming. I think, for instance, of Quenton Baker's *Ballast* (Haymarket Books, 2023), which features an erasure of a U.S. congressional document detailing the successful revolt of American-born slaves on board the ship *Creole*. Baker's erasure is a sort of reclamation of the narrative (to the extent that it is possible) for Black voices. Of course, while it isn't quite erasure, M. NourbeSe Philip's *Zong!* is the best and most masterful example of how poetry can move toward the act of reclamation. Both books demonstrate that even if lost narratives cannot be reclaimed, there is great value in providing new narratives that point more closely in their direction.

Q: Can you chase the rift without falling in?

A: Chasing the rift is a kind of falling. For me, chasing the rift is chasing my own nostalgia for the four years I lived on Terceira as a child: first the village of Fonte do Bastardo, then the city of Praia da Vitória, then Lajes base housing, and finally the Santa Rita neighborhood. All of these communities were on or near the base, and Praia has experienced the brunt of the base's contamination, owing largely to the presence of the South Tank Farm on the edge of the city, in which massive fuel tanks store one of the

largest quantities of jet fuel on Earth. When we lived in Praia, the tank farm was a one-mile walk from our house. As an adult, it's hard to separate my love for the island from the environmental damage of the base—which was, of course, the sole reason I was there. I've written an entire manuscript of poems about this situation and my own personal mix of nostalgia and anger and guilt, and yet I feel like I've barely scratched the surface. I am in the process of applying for fellowships and grants that will allow me to travel back to the island so that I can conduct field research and speak with officials and locals, with the aim of writing an additional full-length poetry manuscript exploring this issue. I am still chasing it, and I am still falling.

Ryan Clark is a documentary poet who writes his poems using a unique method of homophonic translation. He is the author of *Arizona SB 1070: An Act* (Downstate Legacies) and *How I Pitched the First Curve* (Lit Fest Press), as well as the forthcoming chapbook *Suppose / a Presence* (Action, Spectacle). His poetry has appeared in such journals as *DIAGRAM*, *Interim*, *SRPR*, and *The Offing*. A former military brat, he now lives in Chapel Hill, North Carolina with his partner and cats.

Interview with Danielle Sellers

Q: In which order did you initially write the haibun? Was it reversed after the fact, or written in the order it's presented?

A: Having already written a burning haibun, "Ode to Desire I," the "correct" way, I really wanted to write one truly in reverse, so I didn't cheat with this one. I started with a haiku, then expanded it, then erased part of it, then allowed myself to really expand it in the prose section. It's a really fun form to work in and I'm grateful to torrin a. greathouse for inventing it. Check out Poetry Foundation's 2023 podcast interview with Cindy Juyoung Ok and torrin in which they discuss it.

Q: Both the text itself and the subjects/speaker unfurl into the wild and bright as you move down the page. Is excavation liberating? Does it throw the undesirable into sharper relief, or change that, too?

A: I wrote this poem shortly after undergoing a partial foot amputation due to complications from diabetes, a marked low point in my life. Leaving the hospital I saw a crow in the parking lot that looked as though it had been put through the wringer, much as I had. This surgery being the final in a series of surgeries that attempted to save the foot. I felt, and still feel most of the time, that this marked the end of my dating life. Who will want this monster? What was surprising when writing this poem was that even though I'm maimed, aging, plagued with health issues, the desire to be desired is still there, which is perplexing and heartening at the same time. And I didn't realize it was there until it bubbled up when writing this poem. So yes, excavation is liberating and surprising and also scary as it can change the narrative we tell ourselves.

Q: What does desire crack open? Can it be put back, and should it?

A: Desire has the power to crack open various aspects of the human experience. It can motivate us to take action, to push boundaries, and to strive for growth. However, desire can also crack open vulnerabilities, revealing our fears, insecurities, and shortcomings. It can expose our deepest longings and unmet needs, which can be painful. In my experience, it's not something that can be controlled. Should it be put back? Probably so, but try to stop magma as it rises and collects in a volcano's chambers. Desire roils and froths just as powerfully under our skin, even when we least expect it.

Danielle Sellers is from Key West, FL. She has an MA from The Writing Seminars at Johns Hopkins University and an MFA from the University of Mississippi where she held the John Grisham Poetry Fellowship. Her poems have appeared in *Prairie Schooner*,

Subtropics, *Smartish Pace*, *The Cimarron Review*, *Poet Lore*, and elsewhere. She is the author of two collections of poetry: *Bone Key Elegies* (Main Street Rag 2009) and *The Minor Territories* (Sundress Publications 2018). She teaches Literature and Creative Writing at Trinity Valley School in Fort Worth, Texas.

Editors

Jodi Hooper (she/her) is a poet and fiction writer based in Louisville, Kentucky. Her work explores themes of the self, learning to embody that self, and the fraught experience of human connection by the way of carnivorous plants, vampirism, and the ever-closing gap between monster and man. Jodi led the writing workshop “Monstrous Poetics: the Abominable Self” in 2022 as a part of the Poetx in Flux writing program, and her writing has appeared in Folx Gallery’s “Absolute Pleasure” exhibition, *Raptor Lit* online, and Miracle Monocle’s *MONSTER* micro-anthology. You can find her inside, hiding from the night air under the floorboards.

Nate Cheshire (she/her) is a visual artist who fell in love with literary journals during her time in undergrad at UofL. She loves mediums, such as comics, that bring art and words together, as well as dense visual and written symbolism. She is currently on her knees in the dirt, digging for worms.

Thank you all for reading.