

The Red Jacket

Spring 2022



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Preface

The *Red Jacket* has not been published since 2018. Suffice to say, a lot has changed in the world. Apart from the mass suffering and many livelihoods and lives lost during the pandemic, recent chaos deepens the wound on our collective consciousness. Evil has been festering and breeding in the open for years. A certain two bumbling, rumpled haired, blonde men in politics are perfect examples of a growing international shamelessness towards ignorance, hunger for power, and hate. Empathy and alliance have not been extended towards all who are affected by blind violence and cruelty. This has only cultivated further violence. We have all suffered through these unprecedented times. We have lost more both individually and as a society than anyone can ever truly fathom.

When faced with adversity, oppression, or loss, we turn to art to either escape our present reality or help us understand it better. Some find solace in the creation process, while others enjoy the experience of the final product. Art is needed most during times like these. To engage with art—be it poetry, prose, paintings, or digital art—is to tap us back into ourselves, our collective humanity. Exploring how our global, local, and personal environments influence our emotions is part of the process. Art of all forms can be a vessel to fathom the unfathomable. To give shape to our desires. To vent our spite. To channel our torment into something beautiful. To surrender to chaos. To seek out the bliss that evades us. As the late poet, activist, and cultural critic Amiri Baraka said, “Art is whatever makes you proud to be human.” We at the *Red Jacket* decided to focus on emotions and the human condition to affirm our personhood. After 4 years of inactivity, we sought to use this issue to explore the wide spectrum of emotions that we have all been experiencing. When we sent out for submissions at the end of 2021, we asked specifically for pieces which explore human emotion through five facets: desire, spite, torment, surrender, and bliss. Creative work is very much a process of self-discovery. And in our introspection, we uncover things we have kept tucked away. Creating from desire, spite, torment, surrender, and bliss allows us to be fully human. In a society hellbent on dehumanization, that affirmation of personhood is something to be proud of, even as we reveal shameful pieces of ourselves. We received so many wonderful pieces that encapsulated these five emotions and more. We hope that, in reading our magazine, you will walk with us through the darkness and out into the light.

- The *Red Jacket* Editors

Advisor's Foreword (or, Saluting the Grateful Eight)

I have joked about herding and hounding editors this year, but that might be a fair way to phrase an advisor's role. Add the compound challenge of meeting them virtually, and one grasps a fraction of the challenge inherent in putting out a magazine these days. This is not to say that the burden of rendering an issue is mine, or that of any advisor; we know that the work falls upon the broad shoulders of student editors; but facilitating their inspired efforts and providing the possibilities for their constructive completion, well. . . . Those avenues are paved by faculty, or can be.

When I look back to 2018, when the Red Jacket was last fit to print, to use our habitual, sartorial allusion, I review a "Foreword" in which I wrote "It has been quite a year"; I leave it to the astute archivist to realize the political context of that claim; but if one looks back now on the years during which the *RJ* remained, shall we say, in the closet, particularly the years of the pandemic, it just seems inadequate to revisit that now-lack-luster observation of 2018. To sum up the past couple of years? A wise advisor dare not try. Instead, I leave it to the articulate editors, and also to those who have penned the poems and works of prose, those who have fashioned the figures, in art and image: our student contributors. Let them speak to these times; one glances back in relief but peers in some dread at the present horrors, too. Whence our gaze now?

Herein, mine is not to peer, but to see my way to acknowledging this issue's editors. Editor in Chief, Gabriel Gotiangco stepped into his role with verve, replacing Miranda Torres when she was unable to continue as an editor; later, Eva O'Hara rose to the position of Co-Editor-in-Chief with Gabriel, having proved herself to be of inestimable value to the staff through her apt abilities and initiative; Kelsey Ogbewe seemed always available to edit poetry and collaborate with Gabriel and Eva; moreover, I enjoyed his assistance with Club Rush, when he fielded questions from students and potential contributors; Elielle Kayomb offered her skills in editing art and photography, in addition to managing the magazine's status as a club. I recognize the aforementioned four students, since these are the editors with whom I actually met and worked face-to-face; given the conditions foisted upon us by the pandemic, it is not surprising that I never met the others.

Notwithstanding, it is incumbent upon me to offer thanks to those students who edited from afar, as it were; if I saw them at all, it was on Zoom: Sarah Galczynski assisted in the editing of poetry; Nene Keita was given editorship of fiction and non-fiction prose when Eva assumed the role of Co-Editor-in-Chief; Somyr Perkins, officially editor of art and photography, assisted

Elielle with selecting and arranging the images; and Gilda Odio also assisted in this latter capacity.

Altogether, these indefatigable individuals comprise the Grateful Eight. My exuberant thanks goes out to them all. So, as you handle your *Red Jacket*, note its sleeves and collar, and marvel at its pleats. These apt weavings are the work of our editors in this year's issue. And the issue is, as always, yours to wear.

Swift Stiles Dickison, Ph.D.

Submission Guidelines

We accept submissions year-round!

All submissions must include your email, first and last name and the title of your piece. Make sure to specify if you would like your name to be listed as "Anonymous."

For artwork, include the medium/material used. Photography and photographs of any artwork should be .jpeg or .raw files of the highest possible quality, with resolution greater than 300 dpi.

Essays, short stories, poetry and other written works should be no longer than a few pages. Written work should be in .doc or .pdf form.

The deadline varies year to year, and guidelines are subject to change. Send inquiries and submissions to red.jacket@montgomerycollege.edu

Electronic submissions via email are preferred, but you may send submissions to:

Red Jacket
Department of English
Montgomery College Rockville
51 Mannakee Street, MT-526
Rockville, MD 20850

The pandemic has shed light on the dark corners of our brains that we may have never known otherwise. Artists have used their creativity to cope with these challenging times. In response to the new normal, we wanted to use this issue of the *Red Jacket* to explore emotions and the human condition. We asked for pieces related to desire, spite, torment, surrender and bliss. While you may not find explicit divisions of those sentiments, we hope that you are able to feel the depth and breadth of emotion dripping from these pages. As you flip through this issue, you will be taken through the darker emotions into the more joyful. Many thanks to you, the reader, and to those whose submissions we are featuring!

Sincerely,
The Editors

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No Pulp

Eden Unger

Soon the Sun will set and I'll be out of light. The Sun slips below the horizon on a sheet of black ice.

The stars play connect the dots as the Sun careens past,

and sometimes,

I brace for the crash that does not come

Olympic figure skaters never run straight ahead,
head on into the walls that ring the rink
but what if they did. Would we bother to turn away?

I almost got into a car crash today

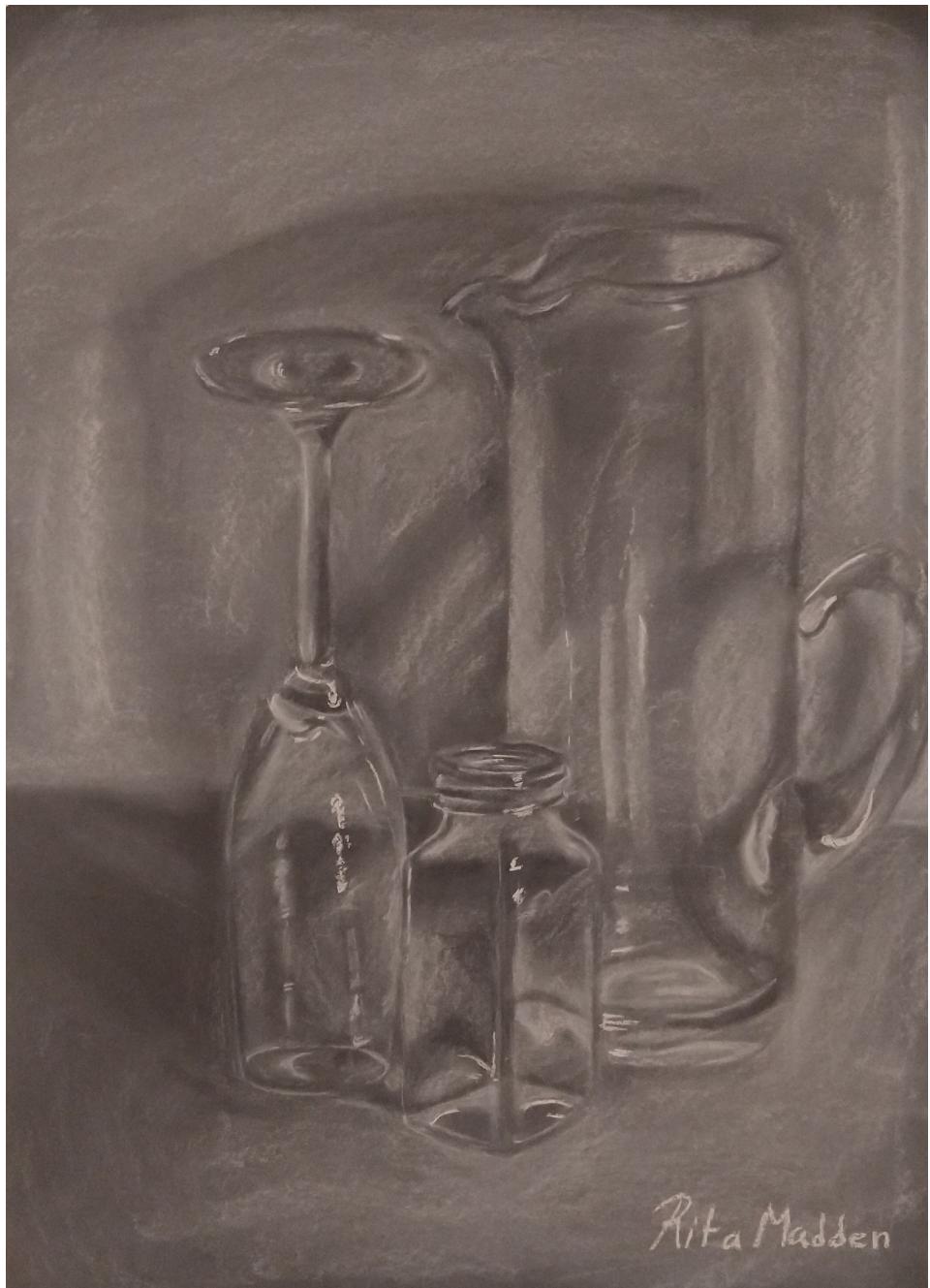
and as I drove on unscathed, I mourned the version of myself that didn't make it. I wonder what she might've gotten up to if she had.

Would she go home
to suck the same cold cup of forgotten green tea,
the same as me?

I don't have a Capital D Deficiency of Vitamin D
and yet,

I still take supplements to supplement the Sun I don't get.

And sometimes, when I swallow pills they get stuck
stuck in my throat like sand gets stuck in the craw of a clam.
There's no pearl, just a slight sticking, and a cough. Sometimes I wonder if I'll choke.



Glass

Rita Madden
Charcoal on paper

white dwarf

Alana McCarthy Light

this blizzarding prison ages my hair
everything,
from the tip to the root, is snow
all i can taste is milk
all i can taste is this glue-flavor; glue-colored dystopia,
sticking me
this glue-colored dystopia empties me,
a hollow machine,
reduced to sine waves in a white noise machine
transcends me to a sodium state where
i am as restless as colorlessness
i am as unsatisfied as colorlessness
i live inside layers of mundane
i love when snow falls dead
i love when snow falls deathly
i love when my love is the salt that seasons my lightness
the salt that reasons with my colorless likeness
depigmentation
the vampire king constructed during the first winter
immortally mute
have you been taking your vitamins?
breakfast is the most important meal of the day
do you enjoy being starved of vibrancy?
so thin, so milky
my backdrop, my foreground, my sky, my flooring
all require depigmentation
i breathe in light mode
my meat and my remains are just a thick cream
cream marble tape bandages the white spaces that pierce
hollowness through my bleach
white picket fences breach my cold my cold
nothing beats nothing
you look so pale today
like your blood was sucked by the king
was your blood sucked by the king?
i hear that when the king sucks your blood
he takes it all
his bloodsucking is unforgivingly ruthless
my white dwarf is blocked out by a white fortress
the bleach makes me feel so powerfully empty
visual snow snows on my christmas stockings, sickly, weakly
bound together, weak hair strings hanging off
to the purposeless marble
to the clown-faced picket fence
the thorny tips of its milky stakes
like udders blistered at their ends

demand a thorough draining of pigmentation
i foam, saliva
heavenly, as salvia
my holiday stockings, sickly, weakly;
a ritual bound together by sickly, weakly white hairs of string;
nutritionless dietary fibers
that cream lays with you like a sugary accent
i shoot blanks wildly ejecting from the barrels of my crazed
eyes
a sparkle so bright and lucid
it whitely burns me to eternal rest
burnt like a white dwarf, and
the lights of my eyes
the white-color brick scrapes my skin, scarring lines of white
nothing so burnt out

6 [this is what god is]

Eden Unger

have you ever stared at yourself for too long in the mirror
have you ever watched as your features grew grotesque
have you ever stared yourself in the eyes and been appalled by the
emptiness and alienness of your own soul staring back
have you ever watched as your reflection turned away in disgust

when i looked in the mirror i cried and no tears came
the face that stared back at me was an enigma and as i fell to the
floor in a heap like a wet towel
i felt myself rise through the ceiling

and looked at myself
and looked at myself
and looked at myself

the silence in that moment was the same silence that does not
respond when you cry mercy into your pillow

i stood
waiting for someone to blink, waiting for someone to blink,
waiting for someone to blink
wondering if i would be alone again if i did

i reached back through the mirror to cup my cheek
i felt someone reach out and touch my cheek
i saw myself reach through the mirror and cup my cheek

like some wretched angel caught between worlds

when i looked at myself
i cried
i cried
i cried

and my tears were brine and the whites of my eyes were the sea
foam that birthed Venus herself
and in that moment i was reborn
the sea rose and swallowed me up, swallowed me up, swallowed me up

i woke up with a headache and the grit of the sands of time in my
eyes
a pelican swooped down and caught a fish and i thought to myself

this is what god is

U-n-I

Trevor Garett

A green world, manic.
Promised I'd never return,
But maybe I never left...

*Our cycle of fun,
You wanted to live without,
But I will never let go!*

roommate

Eden Unger

i don't know how to live with myself.
it's hard, sharing a space
with a stranger.

there's not enough room for both of us
in my one bedroom.
but her name's on the lease,
so

when i sit down to write
my laptop is out of power,
because she forgets to plug it in at night

but when i open it the next day,
she is staring back at me
from the dark screen.

namesake.

Karter MacLean

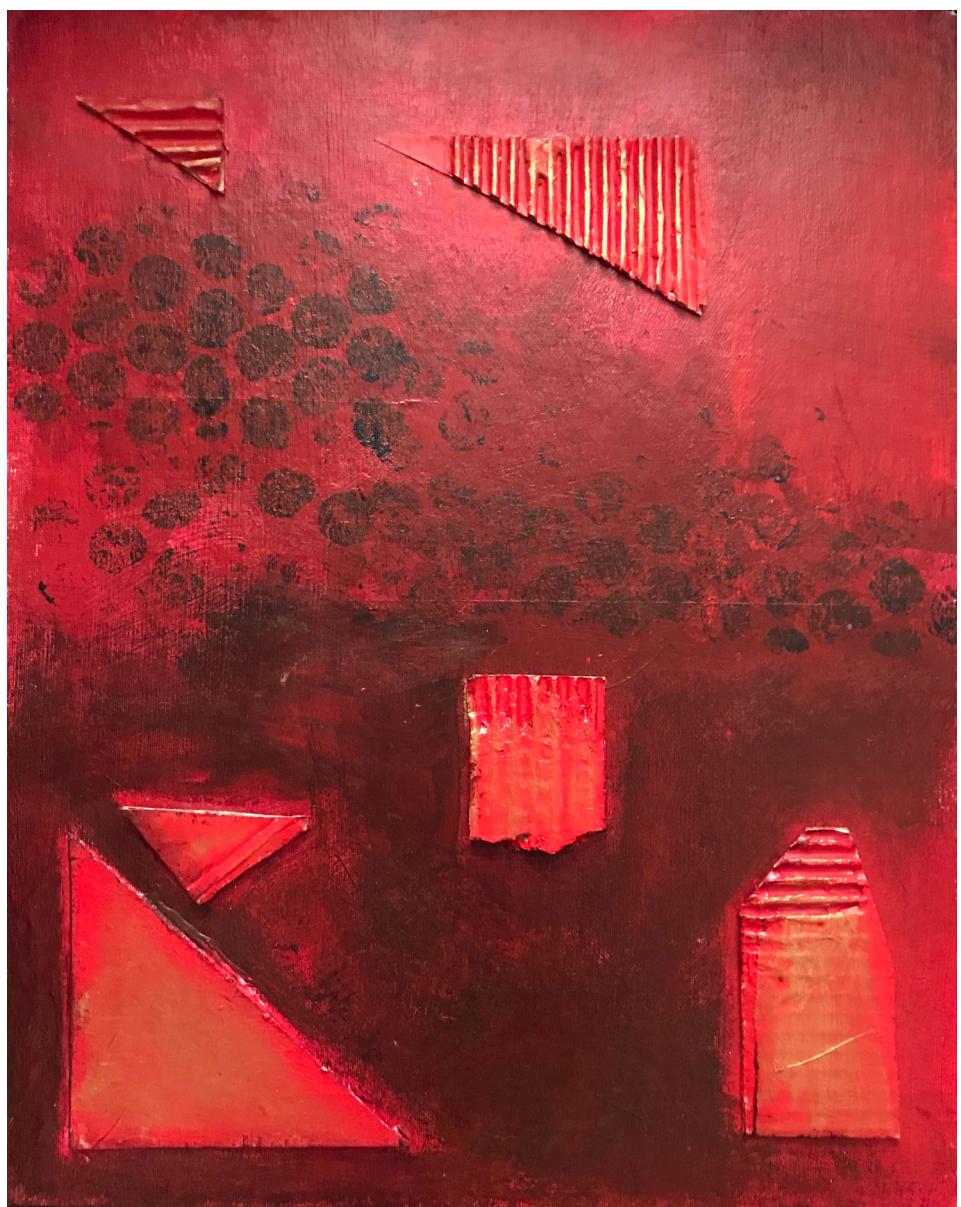
safety is my first and only name,
my one desire and sole impossibility.

as long as this house is loud, and my ears still ring, it
does nothing to beg for my name even louder- this is the
one truth i hold in my heart, even as it breaks it.

my name, in this sense,
is not what will be written on my headstone-
just echoes in a chamber, mimicking only the pleas of a
child.

the soft voice begs "*do not bury me in my mother's
color,*" my spirit was never more broken than it was while
dressed in rose.

safety is my escape, my wake from terror-
and one day, my name.



Anxiety

Alex Rogozin
Mixed media

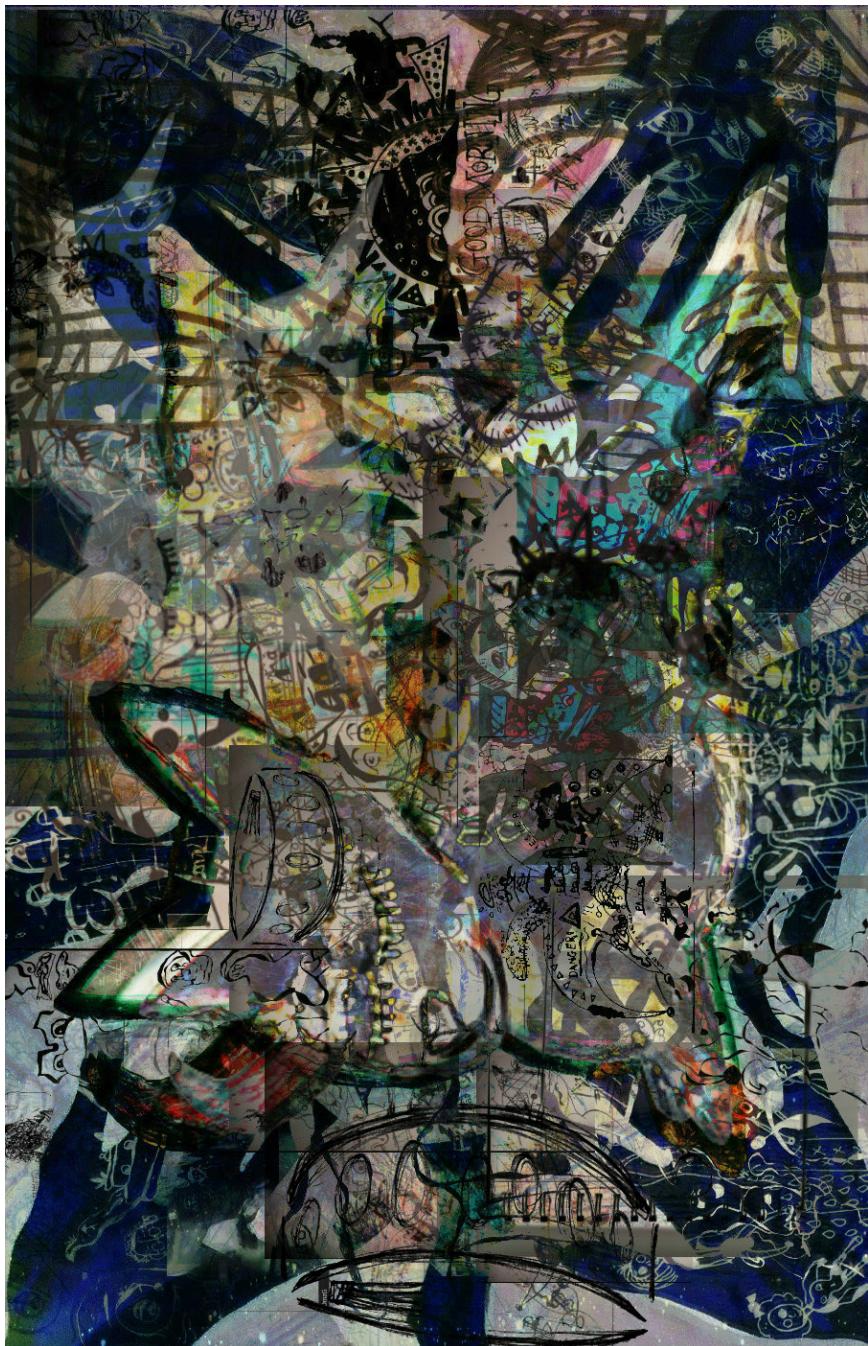
posttraumatic.

Karter MacLean

i thought we were going to die that day.
we were going to die there, together,
but that's not what i say.

which of us held on tighter as we hid?
i don't think i've ever really let go,
but maybe you did.

maybe you remember who saved who,
but all i remember
is terror and you.



Mishipeshu Hands of Time in Copper

Alana McCarthy Light
Mixed media

Learning to Breathe

Piper Fair

After

After a panic attack, my bedroom becomes Ground Zero, and I the explosion. Crumpled tissues pepper the carpet like downed soldiers, my weighted blanket left twisted on the floor from the war against my lungs. The lights out, my noise machine dominates the space as I breathe carefully, cautiously; I do not yet trust that my body is real. Coming out of a panic attack is like someone returning oxygen to the world after bottling it all out of greed, and I must adjust to their change of heart. My cats pick their way across the floor, green-as-can-be EMTs assessing the damage. My heart sinks at the sight of their terror-sized pupils as the feeling in my limbs begins to return, a long-lost friend nearly forgotten. The tears always dry the slowest, leaving tiny salt trails down my cheeks. I let myself sink into the mattress, the world falling away as I drift off, time marching on, oblivious to my open wounds that sting against the air.

During

During a panic attack, I am not myself. My lungs are balloons with heavy, wet sand at the bottom; there is only so far that I can inflate them before it hurts to breathe. There is a too-familiar burning that rises in my chest as I gasp for the air that was stolen, this selfish human who decided to keep it all for themselves. I cannot snuff out the fire, and it licks at the ceiling as embers fall around me, burning invisible holes into my skin the way clothes moths go after a beloved cashmere sweater. Someone has used my ribs for matches, snapping them from my sternum and spine, using them to stoke this fire that fiercely burns, striking the tiny red ends on my collarbone until they erupt in an orange glow. After a while, numbness begins to prickle in my chest, spreading down into my stomach until I cannot feel a thing. Where has the air gone, and when will it return? Patience was never a strength of mine.

Before

"Before" is quite the word, signaling an unalterable change that something—or someone—undergoes, something that cannot be undone. Life before the war. The energy of the dog before the cancer diagnosis. The way someone's eyes lit up before they lost everything, poverty's knock heavy on their door. Her laugh before the crash happened, the glass on the pavement like tiny icicles. This "before" narrative leaves nothing untouched, becoming more familiar as the years pass and reality settles like an old house with good bones. Before a panic attack, I am alive, vibrant as a butterfly against flowers of the brightest colors. Suffice to say,

panic disorder does not care about what I am doing. It has crashed lectures, concerts, dinners, and the party that is my life. It is merciless and strikes with little warning.

The Future

Panic disorder is not without its costs, and it does not ebb and flow from my life like the tide; it is always there below the surface like a coin at the bottom of a fountain, sunlight playing across the water. Most people with panic disorder end up developing agoraphobia, which is when the fear of having a panic attack outside the home is so strong that lives are contorted around this looming anxiety. As a result, many people do not leave their homes for any reason. I refuse to become another statistic, and this resolution comes at a price; I am stared at like a sideshow when I have a panic attack in public, and no amount of experience is going to lessen the blow. Rebuilding after a disaster is never easy, but I fight every day for my life and am committed to my future.

I Belong to Mountains Only

Maryam Danish

I belong to mountains only
My eyes see only through the caves
And sparkles like stars in the sky
And in the darkness
But then recedes next morning
As the world gets brighter with the sun rise

Descending clouds
Ascending arrogance
And the force of power
Cuts-off her wings
So, none of them can ever fly
Although for centuries, she was trying to learn the skills
To fly like eagles over the mountains and clouds

History becomes present again
With more intensity and instructions
Again- you dictate my life-
You control my body by Power
You use my body for Purpose

Despite- I hide my body under veils
And even though, I do not know
How yet to walk
You complain that
My heels make erotic noise
So, you tie me in chains



Still Life with Drapery

Kainat Waheed
Graphite on paper

So Long, Mother Earth

Lucien Jarrett

In her wake she'll rage
Stomping, clashing against us
For we have mistreated her

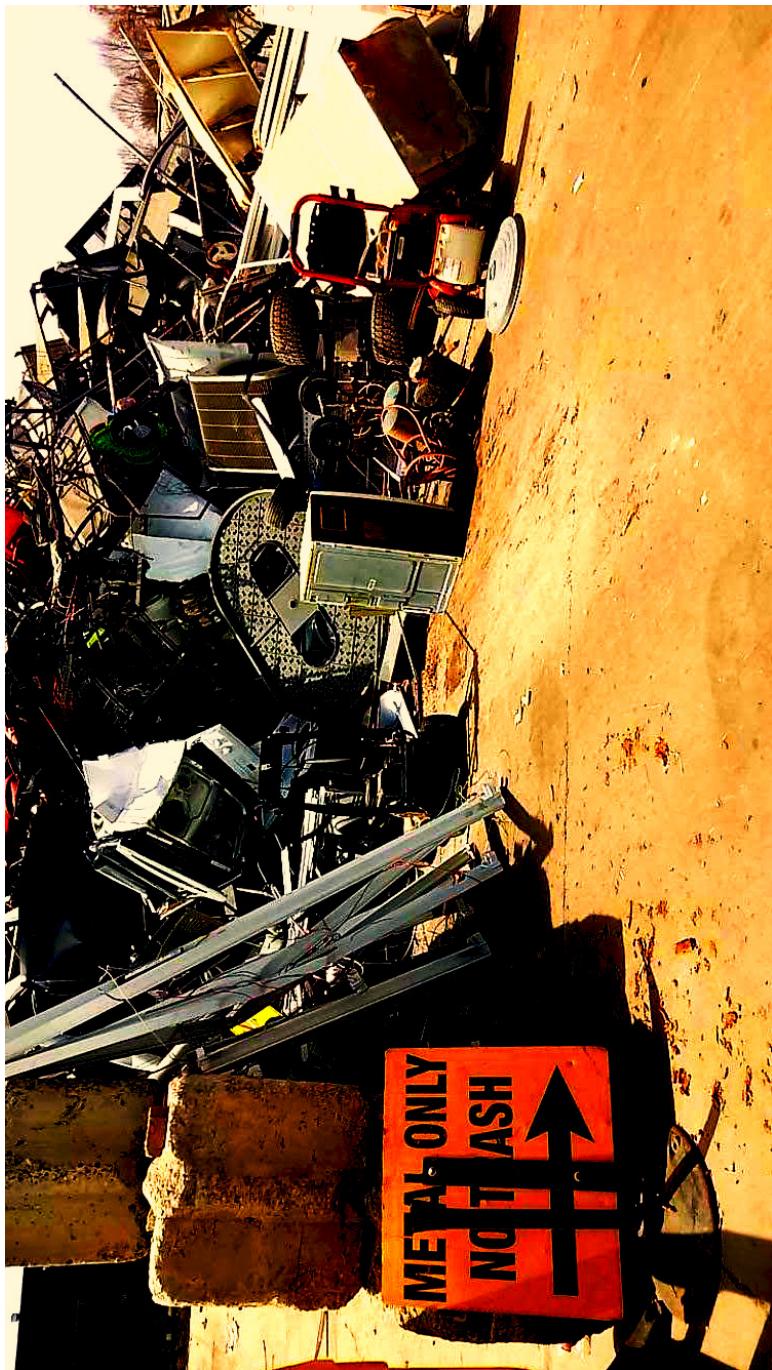
In her anger she'll roar
Violently against us
For we gifted nothing back

Nothing, but sore pain
She will pay us recompense
Making us feel her anguish

This Nature

Lucien Jarrett

Man comes, destroys home
Yet Earth embraces him still
But soon, not for long



Power Shortage

Alana McCarthy Light
Photography

The Long Bus Ride

Alana McCarthy Light

As written in the gospel, commuters must peel their eyes open at 5am before encountering the bus driver. So I did, exactly, at 5 am, I exercised, energized, spiritualized, grabbed a 100-pound kettlebell to strap to my misaligned back, and hiked down the loser's gutter of the main road. Since I was focused on getting to the stop, drivers honked at me, flashed their lights; a pickup driver, perhaps a landscaper, hollered, "Sweetie, you're going to get run over! Do you need a ride?" I kept walking, walking, taking no mind to the littered bottles and littered plastic and littered whatnot; nothing concerned me other than getting to my bus stop - a culture shock for me, as this was my first time on the bus, and I had to be prepared by memorizing the route and counting all the prime numbers in my head. With a sigh of relief, I finally got to the stop.

For maximum efficiency as a bus rider, one must mentally record the intervals of the bus schedule, which requires doing a lot of math and training the brain to the fluidity of this pattern. I, a free spirit, had never encountered such timed discipline before. A voyeur of everyday chaos, I chose to suffer in liminality. Soon, I arrived at the bus post, an informative blue. Blue is quite a rare color to find in nature; the bus is sacred as finding a tortoise on a rabbit breeding farm. When I asked the gas station clerk for the northbound's arrival time, he scoffed, "I do not know the bus schedule; I am too busy doing math with this cash register to care." On the sign listed a code of times, which required a lot of math; this bus, with its panels of rare blue and spatial white, dots of passion red headlights, dots of spatial white headlights, had such an antithetical and shocking awareness of space and time compared to my own. I hopped on the first bus, and in my typical impatience; I did not realize I had taken the southbound. I must have miscalculated my trajectory.

Commuters must acknowledge the divinity of a bus driver by properly exercising the art of communication. Absorbing the bus culture; observationally, olfactory, and visually; a full-body experience, I performed fieldwork on this bus; an exploratory petri dish, a glimpse into the sonder of rush-hour life. An olive-skinned mother in a puffy gray jacket huddled over her grocery bag with her shoulder pressing her phone to her ear. Another man paced back and forth with his laptop, another divine machine that requires a lot of math. I, however, ruminating in my alternate anti-modernity, double-checked my kettlebell, confused how these people could be in such a rush. I read and reread the commuter's instructions in front of me as my daily biblical verse. Then, from the side of my eye, I noticed the bus's silver screen increasingly urbanizing with walls of graffiti, windows of 9-story

apartments and pillars, federal buildings filling up the pane - how did I end up in Washington, DC? Did I need to be governed? "How do I get to the Z2?" I frantically asked the friendly bus person.

"Get off at the main connection, something, something, upstairs, wait, take the 12 something to where you need to go. Don't worry, you'll make it."

I, in my aloofly immature self, obviously fluent in bus driver language, understood this, got off at the stop; the bus driver, highly intuitive, signaled to another bus driver to guide me, an otherworldly commuter, to my stop. An hour of my youth washed into the sewer, unrenewable petroleum wasting away.

Storytelling is a crucial element of the lessons of my new guide's fables. "I was an ex-con; worked at NIH cleaning up rat feces. I got my commercial driver's license. Being a bus driver helps me understand people. I have incredible social awareness. Like, what do you think of that person over there? You can achieve anything in life if you put in the work - my son, he's getting his GED, he's a basketball player; my brother, an accountant, who does math, a lot of math. Listen; being a bus driver saved my life."

Experiencing symptoms of disorientation may mean a commuter must seek assistance. I darted across the concrete, zig zagging around the kiss-and-ride vehicular commuters, who were angered by my crossy road endeavor. "Are you mute?", a math professor screamed from their car, as I walked towards the next bus stop. A business-casual blonde with a delicate Russian accent herded me, "Look, I'm taking the same bus as you; come on, follow me." And, nearing my stop station, a girl of my age, dressed in a grey sweaty shirt with Dali's clock printed in low-quality ink, made room for my departure. Busses have so much direction. Perhaps a commuter will one day drop their compass. Perhaps I will pick it up. Perhaps, I can use it myself.

Waiting at a bus stop is meditative and may induce ejections of manic creativity. Eve, dressed in her neon yellow construction uniform, bit her daily apple; "Good luck at work," I told her, gazed into the hospital in front of me where I waited; hmm, maybe I will write a gratitude letter to the loonies today before their lobotomy. Hopped on the bus; off at the wrong stop, again. This random act of kindness, in my scattered state, the only productive activity of that day. Twisting and turning; a man with dreadlocks and an open jacket gave a side-glare to me, stared at his watch, smiled at me, stared at his watch again, and laughed. The bus stood there in inaction.

Taking the bus is a commoner's practice. "The average man, like you and me, they don't care; these schedules are ridiculous!" said an elderly man with a scruffy pepper chin; a seasoned bus rider. A waitress with a green apron handed me a map - "Good luck with your studies!" Oh, how funny of her to assume I had a place to be, things to do. I tossed the map aside and headed towards a man garbed in silk emperor robes, stringing his guitar at an

aerial angle. This was my mindlessly devoured dessert for the day.

A bus rider has a much more liberating commute than if they were to resort to an alternate method; say, bondage to a gurney. However, after all those missed stops; lost times; walking back and forth; the head of the transportation agency (God) deemed me insane. I tried the same small talk to the ambulance driver; every interaction is a learning experience, after all. The responder said, "Oh, I only do this job to help myself." How boring. I missed the rat feces guy. I could not wait to declare my independence and get back on the bus again.

With the bus as my doctrine, I now knew patience. Sitting in an uninsulated white room, staining napkins with coffee and beating my head against the white wall until it blistered, I thought to myself- the wasted time just a delay in the transit service; another missed turn; interconnected; eventually. The bus; a vessel in my relationship with time. "Patience," said the nurse, a commuter herself. As the air conditioner hummed, I did some math, inventing patterns, songs for myself. I wondered what her schedule would be for the day.

I am obsessed with taking the bus; maybe it is a pride thing; I would marry that engine. Bus rides are introspective; showing and telling and overwhelming. A bus, regardless of its capacity, is always half full; a vessel; filled with an attentively stoic audience. The bus slowed me down. Shouldn't I be excited to get off? Another stop, a teenage boy, texting, going to school, on his phone. If I miss the bus, I will not enjoy anything!

Bus rides are my absurdist comedy. I walked into a theater; imagining this sprawl to be a play; an endeavor difficult within the creativity-restricting implications of wasted time. I asked the ticketer if they had any opportunities for me to have a reason to get off the bus. "No," they responded in Shakespearean. I took a flier, and left the theater, continuing my walk down the road to the next stop. Along the way, I encountered a girl on a galloping white horse riding along an elementary school field, and I counted the number of steps the horse took before the equestrian was too audibly distant. I felt so strange.

Riding a bus is a misunderstood, violent art. I got off the bus indecisive and camped in the parking lot of a 7/11 doing math; doing a lot of math, basking in the warmth of a battery pack. Smokers collected their 8pm soda. I made my way to the next stop, ran into an art museum; sat down; an employee smiled at me. Librarians and art gallery owners, much like bus drivers, know everything, with their tight-knit buns and all. From the distance, I heard music - a party! Wandering inside, I eyed the scribbles impatient prisoners graffitied on the wall, folded some chairs, and chit chatted about the routinery of feeding dogs. "Don't take the bus; let me give you a ride," the drummer boy said. After all, the rhythm; the pulse of the bus schedule; still syncopated in my brain; I kept missing the time of the bus; it took a lot of math.

Bus drivers promote a heightened state of consciousness itself. Through this pursuit, I learn patience. I learn how the bus driver waits for no one and how the bus riders are everyone. It is impossible to end this route. One bus breaks down; another replaces it. In curiosity of the negative implications of bus riding, I questioned the driver on his most frustrating passenger. He responded, telling me of when their bus caught on fire when a man smoked hash. How strange. He assured me. He would get me to my stop, as I seemed like I would cause no trouble. Oh, I hope there would be no more delays.

Bus riding is a strengthening experience. Once again, lost in time, I missed my stop. "I have to get to the gym!" I told the bus driver. "Can I walk?" "Absolutely not; take the bus across the road!" Another day of inactivity, oh what a pity.

Bus drivers are expert planners. "You should be a journalist, with all the questions you ask," Dante advised me, the clueless commuter. "I used to be a veteran, a quantum computer calculating, detecting, sonar, radar, did math, lots of math, on naval ships in Vietnam, escaped an abusive mother, and now I drive a bus." Perhaps he could calculate my life's trajectory, as this ride seemed endless.

Today, I woke up in the hairy body of an instant gratification monkey at 5:01am. My bored eyes peeled open in bed; thinking, not doing. I missed the bus, so I threw myself into traffic and let the wheels juice my soul into oblivion. Bus riding is social etiquette and the reality of living in the microcosm of everyday life. Perhaps, my next step is to meet Hades or Saint Peter, ask them a lot of questions; and perhaps they are bus drivers themselves. I've accepted that, for the time being, I may be on this bus forever.

The Passage of Time

Piper Fair

The driveway was crumbling at the edges, sending asphalt into the grass like little cannonballs. Treasures peeked out expectantly from Sharpie-covered boxes, perched precariously on fold-up tables; I saw everything from vinyl records to vintage Easy Bake ovens, to Cabbage Patch dolls missing their clothes. A parade of well-loved teddy bears covered the top of a cherry dresser, presently being raided by two kids in rainbow skirts as they stood on tiptoe. Clothing racks lined the driveway like kindergarteners waiting patiently for recess. An elderly woman in front of me had an armful of children's books, a faded copy of Curious George on top. The Beatles' Blackbird drifted over from someone's car, mixing harmoniously with the sound of the sprinklers next door. I liked the way the droplets caught the sunshine.

Neighbors huddled together around the toddler toys spread across the emerald lawn, the gardening tools that had barely been used. Snippets of their conversation told me they were more interested in a local estate sale than anything else, yet here they were on a summer afternoon shooting the bull. Someone opened a can of Coke, a satisfying pop that suddenly made me cognizant of my own parched tongue. A Chevy drove by and revved the engine. I smacked my leg to shoo away a mosquito but missed like always.

My fingers lit upon boxes as I walked, the cardboard soft and worn. Madeline darted ahead of me to investigate something in the clothing racks while I sifted through a pile of books, her car keys jangling behind her like a dog collar. Someone bumped into my shoulder and apologized before I even registered what happened, distracted by an old copy of Frankenstein. The cover was formal and embossed; I turned it facedown and flipped through the pages, relishing the feel of the paper. Age had treated it well, the spine comfortably cracked from love and interest.

"Charlotte," Maddie called from amid the clothes. I had started to read the first chapter and turned around and squinted. She was clutching a sundress that had her name all over it. She held it up to her with a flourish and shot me a smile. "Verdict?" She spun around a couple of times, kicked up a heel. It was Hawaii-water blue and looked like muslin. "I like it, personally, but I want a second opinion."

"It looks nice on you," I said, pushing my sunglasses back up my nose. A toddler ran in between us with a jump rope trailing him, laughing as he scuttled up the driveway; Mom wasn't far behind. "Just don't ask me to wear it."

Maddie scoffed, twirled around. "You're the tomboy of the family—I would never."

I went back to the book, running my fingers over the text

as if the ink would seep through my fingertips and grant me magical powers. If only. Mary Shelley was one of my favorite writers, but I had lost my copy of the novel when the basement flooded. Why hadn't I replaced it? The tap on my shoulder moments later startled me as much as the denim bundle that was thrust into my arms. "I found this for you," my sister said, matter-of-factly. She'd added a wide-brimmed hat and a cardinal brooch to her haul since I'd seen her last. Typical Maddie.

I fanned out the bundle and was greeted by a faded Levi's jacket. It was missing a breast pocket button and the tiny red Levi's tag was almost brown, but there was nevertheless an unusual charm about it; it seemed worn in all the right places, well-loved, and ready to start a new chapter. I slipped it off the bent hanger and turned it over in my hands, gently and slowly like I was examining a small puppy for fleas. I'm not sure why I did this so delicately, to be honest; it was just a piece of clothing on the brink of a garbage bag at the end of the day, but I couldn't bring myself to treat it any other way. The cotton had lost some of the dye, and some of the gold stitching on one of the cuffs was MIA, but that was an easy fix.

I tried it on and still saw no deal-breakers.

Maddie shifted the dress in her arms, a beetle making its way across the toe of her purple Chuck Taylors. "Looks like it was made for you, Charlie."

I thought so, too.

Maddie dropped our treasures in the backseat of my car and shimmied into the front passenger seat, in one big motion and lithe like a cat. She held out a folded sheet of paper as she shut the door, stretching to pull her seatbelt across. The paper was feathered and soft on the edges, a tiny square that reminded me of the paper footballs I'd tried to make as a kid. "I found this in your jacket," was all the explanation I got before she turned her attention to the radio. Her nail polish was chipping at the edges, a glittery blue she'd said reminded her of aquariums when I'd gifted it for her birthday.

When I opened it, cradled in my lap like a rescued bird, Maddie was jamming to Billy Joel, oblivious. At first glance, the sheet was a kaleidoscope of handwriting, blue ink in loops that together looked like I imagined an orchestra would if the music became lines on a page; each word was right where it was supposed to be. Names and phone numbers that seemed to have been written in haste—under duress, even—judging by the slant, filled the page. It must've been folded and refolded hundreds of times; it was beginning to tear at the creases, dividing the orchestra into sections. There was a suicide hotline's number underlined at the top, and someone had written There's always time to wait! in a careful scrawl below it.

"This was someone's lifeline," I said to no one, under my breath like a secret; Maddie didn't hear me, and I didn't say it again. I didn't have to. The gravity of what I'd found was not lost on me that summer day, as I drove my sister home; questions ran like a ticker tape in my mind. I had to find a way to be comfortable with the silence that this little note had borne, one way or another. So, I carefully refolded it and put it in my glovebox and vowed to never drive without it. I would never have an answer to my questions, but there was always time to wait, and it would always be there in case I—or anyone else—needed it.



In Cemento Veritas

Mario Loprete
Cement and clothing

the hands that held me

Alexzander Baetsen

your hands were always warm
on cold nights i dream of them
onto me dearly, but the hands on
never reflected a love that was
to my heart, but to my skin.
reflected a love that was
for me to kiss the fingers
picked my personality away.
wasn't what i thought it
nothing close to what i'd call

and
holding
me
close
never
meant
that
it
was
love.

Another Plan

Trevor Garret

Why couldn't you live?
Our souls shared communion; love.
If it were my choice you'd be.

They act like you died,
And wonder how I miss you,
But, "not ready," is not fair.

taxidermy.

Karter MacLean

a half-lit sign that says "bite me!" in so many words; the same shade of red you'll find
dripping off my tongue,
dripping on the couch that you'll
never look at the same again.

it's all we can do to ignore the sand spilling out of your bag,
out of your mouth,
reminding us that for all the time in the world, ours is running out.

so get the glue, there's more than enough. fit the pieces back together,
i'm sorry it's you who has to sew me up.

but i'll be here tomorrow,
so please, don't cry.

i'm the only one here with a need for glassy eyes.

Dark Love

Jennifer Duenas

I love you my fool even if you don't
Acting so cool turning your heart to stone
That smile that hides the truth of the darkness
Trying to fit in with lies regardless
Her lovely voice you heard from a distance
Conquer her heart you shall for this instance
The keys to her heart you gained with no fear
The feelings no longer contained are clear
Fear washed over me as you did not show
Despair in place as you let the blood flow
As I walked upon the cobble stone path
The dark storm in my eyes unleash their wrath
All dressed in black, as I say my last words
With you I shut my eyes with no clear turns



Rita Madden

Color Limitations with Marilyn Monroe

Rita Madden

Digital

Winter

Emma Stevens

Smoke from the chimney
Knitting in the glow of warmth
Woman, waiting patiently

Bitter snow falling
Trembling tinder that won't spark
Soldier, longing for his home

choke.

Karter MacLean

let's toss our thoughts into the fire now, and i'll tell
you a secret
you've been waiting to hear.

how many different ways can i put it? you're holding your
breath for the words that i can't say.

maybe when i said i'd tell you,
i thought the words might come to me like a poem

poems that you don't read,
poems that i can't recite
with my heart in my throat.

i write it anyways,
in the songs and the stars
and everywhere else that
you might think to look.

i'll give you this book
you didn't want to begin with.

i'm telling you in the only way i know how.

matters of love and obligation.

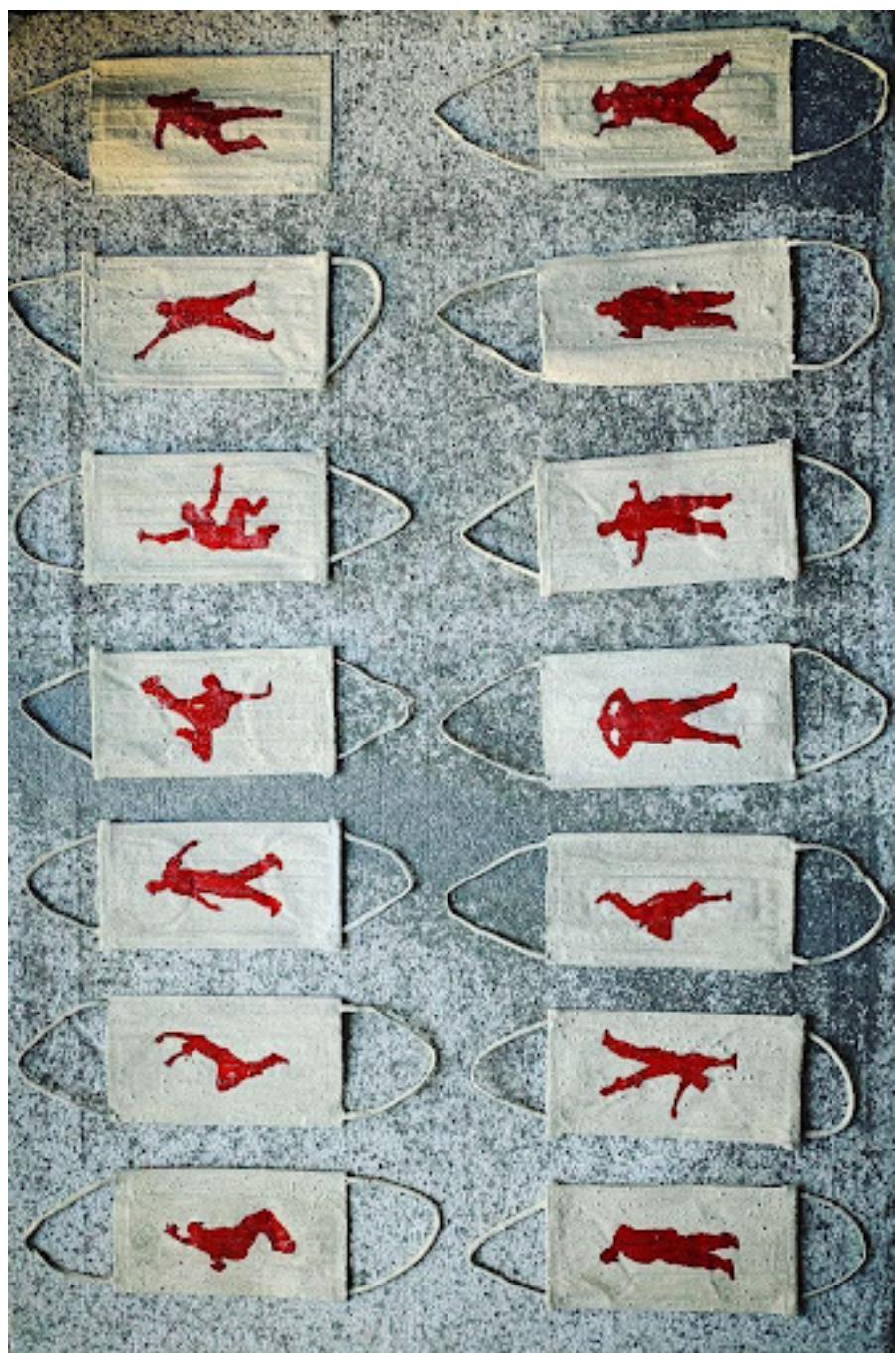
Karter MacLean

how quickly you can become accustomed to the
comforts of terror-
ask me how quickly
or teach me yourself.
the terror of haunting,
the terror of being-
whispering devotion to the thing that sleeps beside you,
wordless goodnights to the shadows that dance across the walls.
the monster in his throat will sing you to sleep if you ask it,
ask for the cold hands to dry your tears & the gentle embrace of
the dread in your chest.
ask for the world
& he'll hand you a knife,
& he'll tear you apart,
& you'll live with that too.
one more favor: no more asking.
there's far worse terror than
sleeping alone.

Winter Blues

Kiara Elmore

Cold, white light gleams on
winter snow dusting treetops,
while we brood indoors.



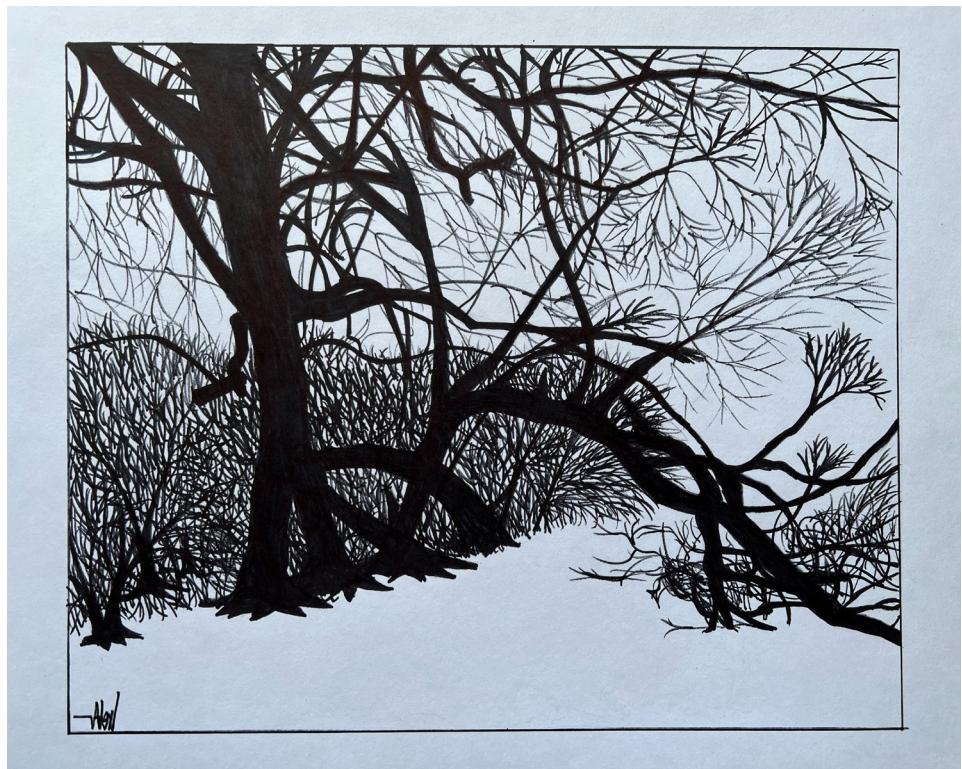
B-Boys

Mario Loprete
Cement and enamel on surgical mask

Chance Meeting

Emma Stevens

Weren't you a peach
in a fever dream?
Soft and sweet.
So I bit you,
down
to the bitter, red bone,
and made you bleed.
Your skin tickled my tongue
as you tried to slip your poison
between my teeth.
But your flesh fell away
so easily
until all that was left
was the center stone,
exposed.
How could you have known
that I was so hungry
and you were all there was to eat?



Broken Tree

Alex Rogozin
Ink on paper

As Winter Comes

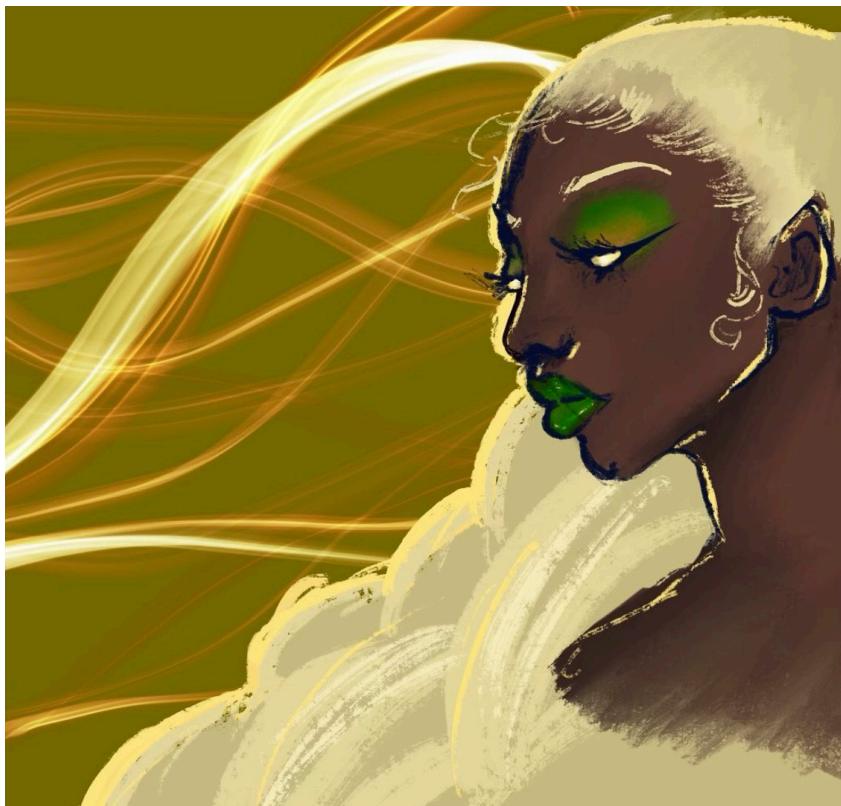
Lucien Jarrett

The Earth becomes cold
It withers and dies today
To meet its rebirth

The Splendor of Spring

Lucien Jarrett

As Winter departs
Rebirthing anew begins
From womb of nature



Mother Nature

Pryncess Lawson
Digital

Cotton Candy Skies

Preston Brooks

Hey there southwest skies
I look at you in awe with innocent eyes
As you dance in the sun making cotton candy skies
Oh those cotton candy skies
So stunning so sublime
Your beauty stops all time
Spinning, swirling, swimming above both Mesa and mountain
Pouring across the sky like an overflowing fountain
As couples dance, love and laugh under your grace
Oh cotton candy skies
You make this world such a beautiful place

Mi Amor

Samantha Atherton

The arch of your lips
shaped perfectly to fit mine
soft and smooth like no other

The kindest man yet
You make me feel beautiful
You ensure that I am loved

You make me feel safe
your constant reassurance
uplifts and shields me from woe

You were made for me
Undoubtedly my best half
I am so grateful for you

Oh How I Miss Puerto Rico

Samantha Atherton

Oh how I miss Puerto Rico
Crystal clear waters of Culebra
The renowned rain forest of El Yunque
Teeming, tall palm trees

Sweet and savory smells of the island's dishes
Magnificent mofongo
Tasty tostones
Pasteles, Pernil, Pastelon
The great arroz con gandules

Stray dogs and sunny skies
Warm welcoming weather
Proud and personable natives
Oh how I miss Puerto Rico

Ocean Day

Isabella Filoia

Under the sun, ominous waves crash into the unsuspecting shore

Childhood Memories

Kiara Elmore

In California, next to an old shed in
our backyard, there stood an orange tree,
from which we picked the sweetest,
sourest oranges we'd ever tasted.

We played tag and hide-and-go-seek
in that backyard, and caught fireflies
with the neighborhood kids, their
delighted squeals enveloping us.

Birthday parties were held
in that backyard, and my own
where I was presented with a cheap,
knock-off version of Barbie from the Dollar Store.

In our backyard, pretend smoking a twig,
the woody stick dangling from my lips,
I inhaled and exhaled pretend smoke
like a cool guy on T.V.

We'd catch tadpoles at the
neighborhood park, then take them home to
our backyard, thinking we could watch them
grow into frogs; they never survived.

In California, next to an old shed in
our backyard, there stood an orange tree,
from which we picked the sweetest,
sourest oranges we'd ever tasted.

A Quiet Love

Daniele Nguyen

I keep my curtains open, even though I can't sleep when it's light. My little cat likes to rise in the wee hours of the morning, and just watch the world wake up. Eyes focused on birds and squirrels stirring outside the glass, his tail swings from side to side. Occasionally, he will jump up, from his place on the windowpane. Paws smashing against the frame, quick meows desperate to capture the prey outside. Once the first sun bunnies start to hop into my small bedroom, he will stretch and roll, mouth open in a big yawn, his tiny body no mercy for anything in its path.

Domestic dawning

A small ball of fur awakes

Knocking down the plant

Youthful Memories

Bernabe Velasquez

A breezy and cloudy day
in autumn. The kids are
running and playing. Adults
are sitting and chatting.

It is the playground. It smells of fresh pine.
Orange and red leaves fall
from maple trees. Dead brown leaves
pine cones crunch under our feet.

Mom, a woman of forty in denim jeans and a fleece sweater,
keys jangling in one hand,
the other slammed on her hips,
Hollers at us to hurry.
My brother's legs dangle from
the monkey bars. My sister kicks her legs on the
swing. A gentle wind caresses my face
as I spin round on the merry-go-around.

A breezy and cloudy day
in autumn. The kids are
running and playing. The
adults are sitting and chatting.



A Second of Bliss

Stephanie Fernandez
Oil paint on canvas

