

the **SLIGGO**  
Journal  
of Arts & Letters

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the **SLIGO**  
Journal

# Poetry

# Reporting a Crime

Harper Robinson

First Place Winner, 2020 Sligo Journal Student Poetry Contest

*I would like to report a crime.*

What is the crime?

*Last night as I slipped through the door, another entity joined me.*

Did you know the assailant?

*Only in the way human beings know other human beings. They looked as foreign as my reflection in the mirror.*

What do you remember about them?

*The smell of sunlight. The taste of heartbreak. What want looks like reflected back on you.*

Walk me through the evening.

*I met my coworkers after our daily sacrifice. We laughed until we cried. I hated their faces more than I hated my own. I tangoed home.*

Alone?

*I was more alone with them than I was with myself.*

Did you drink?

*Only the stars. It bubbled and burned as it slid down.*

Were you drunk?

*On dreams and fascinations. On deliberate notions to overhaul the sorrow silver-lined sky.*

What were you wearing?

*x*

*The idea of clothing. It knits itself around you until you cannot breathe.*

How did they restrain you?

*With their mouth. My stomach turned itself inside out. My viscera practiced arpeggios until they exhausted themselves to unconsciousness.*

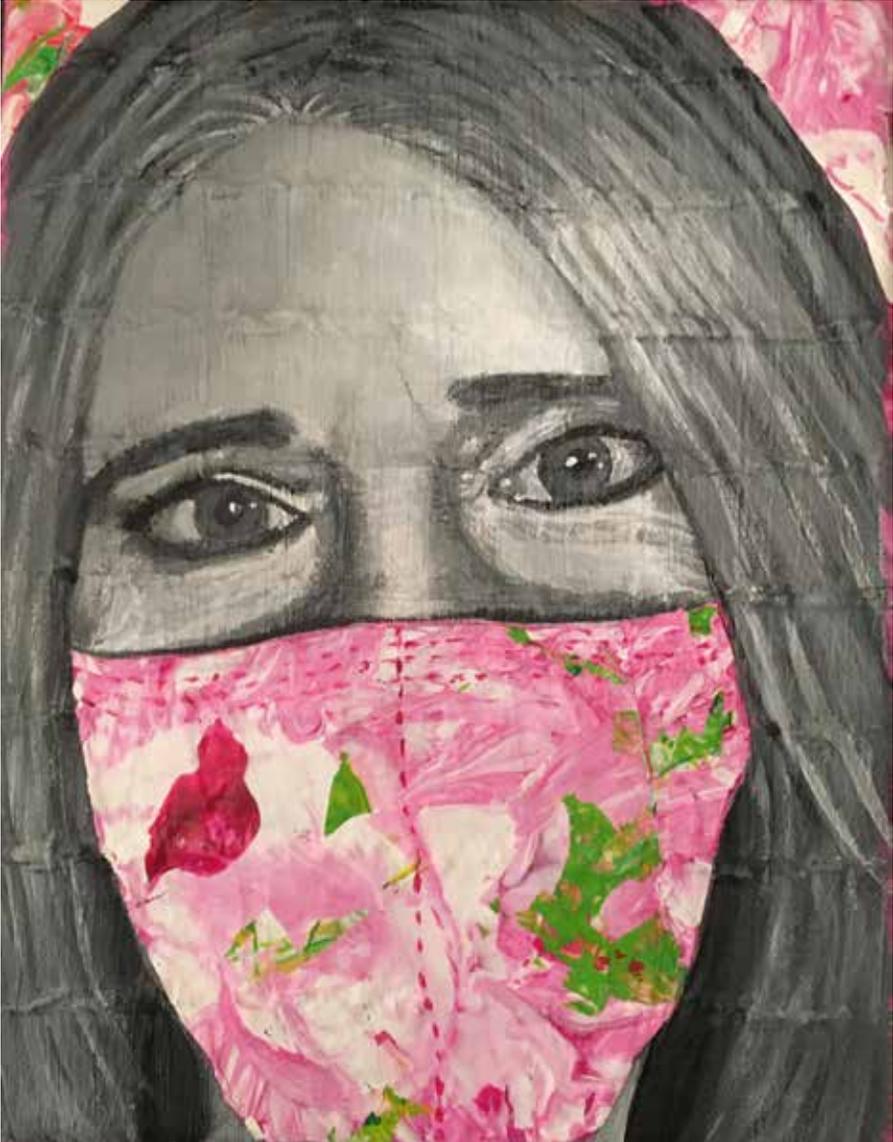
Did you say no?

*I couldn't speak. I traded my voice to Ursula in a bid for love. Why didn't anyone tell me not to put my money in the stock market?*

Did they steal anything from you?

*Nothing that hadn't been stolen before.*

Windows to the Soul  
Lisa Trevino



# Quarantine

Gloria Jackson

Second Place Winner, 2020 Sligo Journal Student Poetry Contest

Confined to our minds, faced with this economical decline, we stand in line 6  
feet behind.

I guess they think we got all the time!

I guess we are forced to believe that we can't leave, or we will succumb to this  
so-called airborne disease.

I bet they wish they kept them trees!

Jobs shutting down, we can't even move around, this abandoned city seems  
deserted like a ghost town.

I see how they keep us trapped and bound!

Teachers instruct multiple courses, while students at home with limited re-  
sources, 5G powers their virtual fortress.

Yes, I can see the institutionalized forces!

My pineal gland I activate, to reach a conscious state, when my eyes awake,  
they try to vaccinate.

So my vibrations I elevate!

A socially distant separation, starts to feel like segregation, while everyone is  
in isolation.

When will we get our Emancipation?

Proclamation!

# Mother's Tears

Sam Nguyen

As the month begins, my eyes slowly open.  
With every passing night, I watch over my children.  
My beloved Sol tells me what happens during his reign,  
and I cannot believe my children are capable of such things.  
War. Disease. Corruption. Greed.  
Since when did my children curse their souls?

Their guiding nocturnal sun, ever watching.

Mortal men and their petty squabbles threaten the lives of innocents,  
of unborn offspring, awaiting their turn in this cycle.  
To my horror, I witnessed many deaths, many souls awaiting judgment.  
But how can we judge if they perish before given the chance of taking their  
first steps?  
After tasting one of the Sin's sweet calls, men forget who they are.  
Succumbing to their greed, blinded by lust, they destroy this once beautiful  
world.  
Instead of working as one, they puff their chests and boast of their great  
power.  
Instead of working together, they lead this world to ruins.

Their guiding nocturnal sun, ever watching.

Am I worthy of being their mother,  
when I send them to their deaths?  
With every tear, the oceans rise, threatening to flood once more.  
In every lifetime, the outcome remains the same,  
mankind will be their own downfall.  
But what can one do, but hope?

Their guiding nocturnal sun, ever watching.

Portrait de Famille  
Mike David Legrand



# Do you hear something?

Sarah Tedla

Spidery spindled fingers in the filaments of silks  
Weaving and interlocking secrets of tradition  
Humming of the bees and the zephyrs murmur their notes of the world that  
has passed  
Begging so silently to listen to the tale of barely audible voices in the air

Weaving and interlocking the secrets of tradition  
Gently caressing through the webs of strands  
Begging so silently to listen to the folklore of barely audible voices in the air  
Hearing the echo of the footsteps of the recital

Gently caressing through the webs of strands  
The flickering silhouettes wisp through the sunlight  
Hearing the echo of the footsteps of the recital  
As the weaver's fingers weave the strands

The flickering silhouettes wisp through the sunlight  
Maple leaves shaking and curling ready for freedom  
As the weaver's fingers weave the strands  
Winds scowl as they cluck their tongues at the collection of riddles

Maple leaves shaking and curling ready for freedom  
Being electrified by the sun  
Winds scowl as they cluck their tongues at the collection of riddles  
Their wrinkles ebb and flow into the contours of their hands

Being electrified by the sun  
Recitatif of the sugar skeleton bones drumming their dialogue for someone to  
listen  
Their decay ebbs and flows into the contours of their phalanges  
I watch in child's delight as the spindle fingers comb through the filaments of  
my hair

Recitatif of the sugar skeleton bones whisking up their whispering dialogue  
for someone to listen

Weaving a tapestry of knowledge into my head  
Eyes watch in child's delight as the spindle fingers comb through the filaments  
of my hair  
Braiding stories of lifetimes into my hair

Weaving a tapestry of knowledge into my head  
Combing out my tangled disbelief to bring back the wonder  
Braiding stories of lifetimes into my hair to give me a compass to guide me  
back home  
On the back porch's stair step

# Prayer to Nature

Tharma Philogene

May the sands hide my misfortunes

Let the sea drive away the mess

May the waves keep my fears away

May the mountains cover my horrors

May the trees absorb my tears

Let the birds take away my doubts

May the earth bury my sorrows

Let the wind sweep my worries

May the universe veil all my faults

Let the branches dance my laughs

May the sky heal my illnesses

Let the moon reveal my soul

Let the stars shine my voice

Let the sun spread my joy

Sometimes you have to kill your own demons  
Mary Mena



# Grease

NaBeela Washington

I was once from grease

Stale orders rang up at Burger King  
And curly fries at Arby's  
Shuffling from grandma to uncle  
From uncle to auntie  
**Mama couldn't afford a sitter!**

I am from the 90s

AOL in all its glory  
Carmen Sandiego and Xena the Warrior Princess

I am from isolation

No brothers or sisters to pick a fight  
**Where's my daddy to tuck me in right?**

I am from troublemaking and curiosity

Stealing Mama's car keys for a joy ride  
Cutting off plaits with scissors in the dark  
Soaking in the bathtub to wash my sins  
Dodging Jim Crow

I am from laughter

While tucked in Mama's arms  
After being picked up  
Spun around  
And flung into bed  
**Then waking up to Mama gone**  
Smells of old grease to comfort me

I am from Psalms 23

Would rather have a slumber party  
Than bible study  
Or a sister I reckon  
Or more hours in the coarse dirt  
Or more hugs from earthworms

Or another Hot Wheels playset

The grease never came out  
And the tears never stayed put  
*Go to sleep little Bee*  
She would sing

Youth's Evocation  
Sultana Rahim



# Delivery Driver

Jakob Little

Being one of the only people  
from the outside world these days  
is strange.  
It's a ghost town in my city,  
the streets don't look the same.  
I see the people inside looking out  
with a mix of envy and pity  
like fire and ice.  
They still smile, and I still wave,  
but we both know it's not as nice.  
The only positive is today on my way in,  
not one person asked me for change.  
But it's a ghost town in my city,  
the streets don't look the same.

# What if?

Alejandro Leopardi

What if you take a walk because nothing else matters?

What if, on that walk, you discover a field of sunflowers and lilies and dandelions?

You choose to take your walk through that field, to embrace the sensation of petals as they brush your skin, breathe in the scent of flowery promise; Each and every step taken creates flourishing blooms, the stalks growing taller, wilder, reaching high above you, enveloping you inside, preserving you; This is the perfect day, the culmination of warm, calm air, soft breeze, and cloudless skies;

When you move your gaze away from the floral patch, shift your eyes upward, nothing could be better than this moment right now, underneath the blanket of sun.

What if when your eyes return to the floral patch, it isn't that at all?

What if when your eyes search for the sunflowers and lilies and dandelions, they've vanished, dissipated in an instant?

Those blossoms have been replaced by, or always have existed as, a field of wildflowers and weeds and shrubs;

They've decimated a once magnificent landscape, turned it dull, lifeless; They never brushed you, but scrubbed and scraped, and the only sensation you feel is agony and sorrow;

The walk becomes intolerable, excruciating;

This is the worst day, the culmination of frigid, erratic air, commanding winds, and turbulent skies;

You seek solace in the guiding warmth of the sun, but you look up to see it, too, has been supplanted by something more ominous, sinister even.

What if these two fields are one in the same, existing concurrently?

What if you are in one, but also in the other?

You are entrenched in an endless tug and pull, each field overpowering at times, submissive at others;

You cannot reconcile what one offers and what one takes away, submitting to a squandering crusade to find some semblance of peace, of tranquility.

What if you never can?

What if this is every day, the culmination of all that was, is, and could be?

What if you're good enough?

What if you aren't?

What if you told someone how the world has turned dark, that the light that once shone bright,

has been extinguished forever?

What if you told them how the field has become barren, its return impossible, no water, no sun, no replenishment?

What if they listened?

What if you told more people?

What if they listened?

What if they did something and you did nothing?

What if we never know the answers to the what-ifs?

All we can do is see the people around us, truly see them;

All we should do is look for the what-ifs in those we care for;

All we must do is understand how to uncover the what-ifs that turn a field of flowers into a patch

of weeds, that turn light into dark, forever.

What if you don't?

What if no one does?

## ¿Qué pasa si?

Alejandro Leopardi

¿Qué pasa si das un paseo porque nada más importa?

¿Qué pasa si, en ese paseo, descubres un campo de girasoles y lirios y dientes de león?

Tú eliges dar un paseo por ese campo, para abrazar la sensación de los pétalos a medida que te cepillan la piel, respirar el aroma de la promesa florida; Todos y cada uno de los pasos dados crean florecientes flores, los tallos crecen más altos, más salvajes, llegando a lo alto de ti, envolviéndote por dentro, preservándote;

Este es el día perfecto, la culminación de aire cálido y tranquilo, brisa suave y cielos sin nubes;

Cuando alejas la mirada del parche floral, mueves los ojos hacia arriba, nada podría ser mejor que en este momento, debajo de la manta de sol.

¿Qué pasa si tus ojos vuelven al parche floral, no es eso en absoluto?

¿Qué pasa si tus ojos buscan los girasoles y los lirios y dientes de león, se han desvanecido, se han disipado en un instante?

Esas flores han sido reemplazadas por, o siempre han existido como, un campo de flores silvestres y las hierbas y arbustos;

Han diezmado un paisaje una vez magnífico, convirtiéndolo aburrido, sin vida; Nunca te cepillaron, pero te frotaron y rasparon, y la única sensación que sientes es la agonía y la tristeza;

El paseo se vuelve intolerable, insoportable;

Este es el peor día, la culminación del aire frígido y errático, los vientos dominantes y los cielos turbulentos;

Buscas consuelo en el calor guía del sol, pero miras hacia arriba para verlo, también, ha sido suplantado por algo más sombrío, siniestro incluso.

¿Qué pasa si estos dos campos son uno en el mismo, existente simultáneamente?

¿Qué pasa si estás en uno, pero también en el otro?

Tú estás arraigado en un tirón sin fin, cada campo abrumado a veces, sumiso a los demás;

No te puedes conciliar lo que uno ofrece y lo que uno quita, sometiéndote a una cruzada derramada para encontrar alguna apariencia de paz, de tranquilidad.

¿Qué pasa si nunca puedes?

¿Qué pasa si esto es cada día, la culminación de todo lo que fue, es y podría ser?

¿Qué pasa si eres lo suficientemente bueno?

¿Qué pasa si no lo eres?

¿Qué pasa si le dijeras a alguien cómo el mundo se ha oscurecido, que la luz que una vez brilló brillante se ha extinguido para siempre?

¿Qué pasa si les dijeras cómo el campo se ha vuelto desolado, su regreso imposible, sin agua, sin sol, sin reposición?

¿Qué pasa si escucharan?

¿Qué pasa si le dijeras a más gente?

¿Qué pasa si ellos escucharan?

¿Qué pasa si ellos hicieran algo y tú no hicieras nada?

¿Qué pasa si nunca sabemos las respuestas a los qué-sí?

Todo lo que podemos hacer es ver a la gente que nos rodea, verlos de verdad;

Todo lo que debemos hacer es buscar los qué-si en aquellos que cuidamos;

Todo lo que debemos hacer es entender cómo descubrir los qué-sis que convierten un campo de flores en un parche de hierbas, que convierten la luz en oscura, para siempre.

¿Qué pasa si no lo haces?

¿Qué pasa si nadie lo hace?

# At the Museum of Rocks

Marianne Szlyk

I try to recall  
New Mexico,  
not the vast red seen from  
west-bound trains  
but the near-ghost town

we two stayed in  
the winter we fled east,  
our new life  
broken. We strayed just  
one week, enough

to taste life in free fall:  
pop, grapefruit,  
chips bought at the store  
near our motel.  
We saw no one. We walked

everywhere.  
In the bleached-out desert,  
creosote grew.  
In the graveyard, pebbles  
and rocks grew.

No snakes sprawled below.  
No tumbleweed  
spun past, only parched cans.  
Used to plants,  
we could not read stones.

Self-portrait  
Monica Yuliza Rodriguez



# On Kehinde Wiley's Statue 'Rumors of War'

Joseph Ross

'Rumors of War' reminds the viewer of a Civil War hero atop a horse. On closer examination, it is a young Black man with basketball shoes and a hoodie atop a powerful war horse. It stands outside the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond.

for Trayvon Martin, 1995-2012

Trayvon Martin could have  
used that war horse, powerful  
as a truck, graceful too.  
The horse might have  
scared him at first,  
but I bet once he was on it,

squeezing its reins,  
pressing his legs into its heaving  
sides, he would savor

its power.  
I bet it would taste  
sweet to him.  
On a Florida night when  
America was being its worst  
self, Trayvon could have

ridden that horse hard.  
Trayvon could have  
shown America

his boyhood grin,  
his baptized skin,  
his hoodie blown back,

letting the wind gallop  
past his ears.  
Trayvon and that war

horse could have become  
one: the horse's mane  
whipping his cheeks,

the horse's hooves  
hammering the damp soil,  
like a thousand fists,  
like an agony of hands,  
like a blind man's bullets.

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## Fiction

Colors of San Salvador  
Gabriela Franco



# Rolling Along

## Sue Page Hughson

The alarm clock shrieked twice and fell back into its collapsible case. Steven sat up and ran his fingers through his salt and pepper hair. It was as thin as a flyer insert from the Sunday paper. I don't read Sunday flyers or magazines or books. The last time I even saw a magazine was when I was standing in line at the grocery store two months ago. The cover of a tabloid magazine had a caption that read, "How to recognize the signs that you have become excess baggage," which hit a little too close to home for me.

On this day, we ventured far from home on a flight to San Diego to visit Steven's mother. I was packed and ready to go. Besides me and his mother, Steven's interactions were limited to his work partner Mark and friend from high school who he hadn't spoken to in many months. Steven spent a lot of time on the computer for work as well as playing games. I think this was a continuation of having to entertain himself as he was an only child. But when Steven did decide to go somewhere, I usually went along with him.

Steven picked up the phone on the second ring.

"Hey, Mom. Casey and I are about to leave for the airport... yep... yep... We are all packed up. I just have to stop at Walmart to pick up my prescription.... Love you too."

Steven and I had met at a Walmart in November 2006. Walmart had brought in a bunch of us during the Christmas holidays because that is when they get the most business. I met Samson and Tori in the travel department. Despite becoming fast friends, the three of us went our own ways after the end of the season. But since news travels fast, I had heard what happened to them.

Samson had always been full of himself; he never felt the rules applied to him. He had a scrape with the law that became an international incident. He was apprehended in Rio de Janeiro for smuggling drugs. Of course, someone else was responsible for the contraband in his possession. He was held for several days until someone finally got there to pick him up.

Tori was riding in the back of a pickup truck when she and a couple of her friends were T-boned by a semi truck. The paramedics had to wheel her away. Her most grievous injury was the damage and misalignment of her spine which now looked like a zipper with a few missing teeth.

Steven had come to Walmart looking for a new suitcase. I was the one who caught his eye, even though I had only been at Walmart for a few weeks.

We ended up at a coffee shop. As we sat at an outdoor table that overlooked the town center, we discovered that we shared a love of travel. I wanted to travel with him. I just needed him to feel the same way. He had for the last fifteen years. But as of late, it felt like he viewed me as a dead weight and was tired of doing all the heavy lifting.

So for this trip to San Diego, I was determined to pull my own weight. Steven and I walked to the car and as we neared the curb, my thoughts swirled around trips he had taken without me. Deep in thought, I lost my bearings. Steven caught me before I fell flat on the concrete and helped me into the car. If he noticed my distress, he didn't let on. I didn't let on that I knew about the other one.

Oh, I didn't know her name, but twice over the past two months he had stayed overnight in Chicago for business meetings. He traveled light with just his laptop and an overnight bag filled with a change of clothes. I was never invited on these jaunts to the Windy City.

We left in plenty of time to get through security and reach the assigned gate for travel to the West Coast. I was much more vulnerable than Steven. I didn't always look where I was going, I didn't have to worry about the passports and tickets. He kept them safe in his jacket pocket. Though the ride was short, it was long enough to dredge up memories of our trip to Santa Fe, a wonderful trip except for one event.

In 2016, Steven decided to celebrate our ten-year anniversary in New Mexico. Our flight into Albuquerque went off without a hitch. The shuttle to Santa Fe gave us time to relax and enjoy the delightful southwest scenery. We had several hours until we could check into our hotel, which gave us time to walk through the historic district. Steven led the way, and I held onto all of our possessions. We navigated through the narrow streets filled with pedestrians. We stopped at one of the many curio shops that lined the plaza. There was enough turquoise jewelry in every size and shape to fit anyone's budget.

This trip stood out because of the events that happened when we strolled down the cobblestone streets through the Santa Fe Plaza. There were moments that were breathtaking. We were captivated by the bells at the Cathedral Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi which chimed together in a magnificent welcome. We marveled at the spiral staircase in the Loretta Chapel that twisted and turned and towered above us. We were astonished by the glorious morning glories that felt real enough to pick right off the canvas of a Georgia O'Keeffe painting.

After all that sight-seeing, Steven got a table at an outdoor eatery across from a mariachi band. It brought back memories of when we met at the outdoor coffee shop, minus the band of course. I was delighted with the vivid colors of their clothing that looked like Joseph's amazing technicolor dream coat, which complemented the huge sombreros on their heads. The singers,

guitar players and three trumpeters captured everything I was feeling: my struggles, my joys, and my desire to enjoy a life without carrying the weight of the world on my shoulders.

Steven went inside the little eatery to get margaritas to celebrate. I didn't notice his departure as the music swept over me. In the blink of an eye, I was knocked over and some personal possessions were stolen. They stole Steven's prescription and most distressing was the theft of the riveted bracelet that he bought for his mother at a curio shop just minutes before.

The marks of the assault remained covered up on the inside for the most part. I felt a little tattered and torn. I will never forget those pickpockets who took advantage of me.

Even the flight home from New Mexico caused my anxiety to rise. I dreaded being touched by security guards and being pulled over for a pat down. I remembered the conversation between Steven and the guards in Albuquerque.

"Sir, you need to open up your suitcase."

"Is this really necessary?" Steven said in exasperation.

"Sir, this will only take a minute if you cooperate."

Steven's face became flushed: a sure sign he was getting irritated. I was locked in step right beside him in his thinking. I stood very still. I didn't want to draw attention to myself or be arrested for looking suspicious.

The clicking sound of the turn signal brought me back to our trip to see Steven's mom in California. Steven parked the car and gave me one half of the parking ticket that listed our parking space number.

"You keep one half and I'll hold onto the other," chuckled Steven. "At least one of us will know where the car was parked."

The automatic doors opened onto Concourse C, but I wasn't sure we were in the right place. The airport was so busy it looked like the running of the bulls. Catching up with the herd, Steven let go and I fell forward. The linoleum met my face with a thud. Someone tripped over me and another kicked me. Between the announcements for gate changes, parents yelling at their kids and beeping baggage cart warnings to move over, the noise was deafening.

At some point, someone picked me up and pulled me down the corridor, past a food court, a handicapped bathroom, a Rosetta Stone kiosk, and I ended up in an unfamiliar corner of the airport at an information booth. I noticed others lying on the floor in distress. I was in distress, but at least I was upright.

I scanned the area and observed a Russian family of four standing in the corner like a stack of unnested dolls. Sampson, Tori, and I, almost like family, could never be nesting dolls. Despite the fact we all had the same dark coloring and stair-step height, we have taken different paths in life. The choice of lifestyles and distance separated us more than just physically.

# Interdimensional Folding

Ella Valenstein



Immediately to the left of the unnested dolls huddled a group of mourners all in black leaning on each other. I wondered if they were going to or just returning from a funeral. Their stark appearance was in sharp contrast to the variety of color choices for the several free spirits who donned bandanas to their right.

I didn't realize there were hippies anymore. I remembered Tori telling me about a time when she was waiting through an extra-long layover at the airport, and she observed a group chanting in a language unfamiliar to her. They wore bandanas and free flowing frocks. Maybe the bandana-clad group were descendants of the curious chanting clan she encountered.

In a dimly lit corner, there were more displaced travelers with tattoos across their chests. I didn't stare for fear of being noticed by them. I caught a glimpse of a few travelers being wheeled away.

Up ahead was a woman who dodged and weaved through a throng of travelers. Her shoulder-length red curls bounced up and down, irritated at the hectic pace of her gait. She stopped a few feet from me. I leaned forward and eavesdropped on what I hoped was a rescue.

"There you are! Next time I am going to leave you at home."

Her voice raised and her hands tightened, which led to the manhandling of whom I assumed was her teenage daughter. The daughter was in a catatonic state and leaning against the wall. The mother dragged her down the corridor and continued to berate her until they both vanished from my view.

This whole scene reminded me of my encounter with the pickpockets. Panic soon followed. It was similar to how I felt when forced to ride the escalator. That moveable set of downward stairs to hell with teeth that threatened to grind and chew you up over and over again.

Oh my gosh! What was this place?

Where was Steven? Maybe he wasn't even looking for me. This was worse than the attack in Santa Fe. I heard his voice before I saw him.

"I can't believe they dragged you over here! Do you know how long I have been searching for you? I ran back and forth three times between Concourse B and C!"

He reached out and held me close. With the few strands of hair on his head flapping up and down as if to propel us faster to the gate, we managed to make it in time.

Seated, settled and satisfied, Steven's breathing slowed and he seemed lost in thought as another passenger on the aisle seat leaned over.

"Excuse me. Do you need this pillow?"

"No," replied Steven with a tone that I knew very well. I hoped this guy could read Steven's body language.

"You travel a lot?"

I guess he wasn't perceptive enough to realize Steven didn't want to

speak with him.

“Yes,” said Steven without looking up.

“This will be my first trip to San Diego, but it might be my last.”

“You and me both,” concurred Steven.

The passenger’s eyes widened, and his head leaned forward. “Did you enter the airport in Concourse C?”

Steven looked up and his jaw dropped. “Oh my gosh, yes! What a nightmare!”

“You’re telling me,” said the passenger.

Steven proceeded to share how we became separated due to the high volume of travelers in the airport.

“Thank goodness you found her.” He started to rise and said, “I’m sorry. Am I in her seat?”

Steven smiled. “Oh no. She’s in the overhead compartment.”

Maitê  
Isabella Versiani



# Order Versus Chaos

Elliott Ngripou



# Don't Leave Yet

Sevin Hannon

*Dear Sam,*

*Happy Birthday! It's been a while, I miss you. I've been trying to figure out what the perfect gift would be for ages now, and I think I've finally got an answer: Me! I know it's been too long since I visited, but I wouldn't miss our birthday for the world.*

The snow never stopped falling after Sam left. The flakes in the wind cut my arms and face like thousands of tiny razors. At first it was a light dusting, nothing I couldn't ignore. But then it kept building up, and I kept pretending it wasn't there. Maybe it would go away on its own, I had thought to myself. But now that I'm standing waist deep in snow, I have no choice but acknowledge it now. In fact, it seems to be snowing much heavier than usual today.

*The work at the office is still as boring as before, but it pays well and it's right down the street from the train station. Makes visiting you a lot easier, and if that's the price to pay, I could suck it up for a little while longer.*

Right, the train station. I'll be fine once I get on the train. Then I can go see Sam.

The snow crashes onto me like rain during a hurricane. I try running, but with every step I take, the snow pushes against me with all its might, slowing me to a snail's pace. It's at least a few inches higher already. My eyes dart back and forth, searching for shelter. All I can make out are faint silhouettes of people out and about, walking in and out of shops, talking, laughing. Can't they see what's happening to me? I open my mouth to call out for help, but no sound comes out. The silhouettes glide through the snow around me like everything is fine. One gets close enough for me to notice that their clothes don't have a single flake of snow.

*Remember how it would snow on our birthday every year, and we would go out and spend all day playing around in the snow? I wish we could do that again. All this snow just gets in the way now.*

I resort to stumbling aimlessly through the storm, hoping to chance

upon something or someone. It's up to my chest now. I begin choking up, my breaths coming in short bursts. The carefree conversations around me start to blend; they're all mocking me now. I'm about to die in front of all these people, and they're strolling by. I used to play this scene out in my head at night over and over when I couldn't sleep. "I'll just let it consume me and fade away," I thought, but I never stopped to consider how terrifying and unwelcoming the dark would be.

*I still ride the train to the old park from time to time. It's a long ride, but the train is always empty so I can sit there and forget about everything for a while. My favorite part is that beautiful bridge that crosses the river. I think you'd like it.*

I struggle, flailing my arms in the air, begging for something to save me. The snow has risen to my neck, I tilt my head up to keep myself from suffocating. Suddenly, a familiar sound rings out. Squinting my eyes, I catch a glimpse of subway train doors above me. I thrash against them, praying that somehow, they would open. The snow is crawling up my face, dragging me down inch by inch. Right as I had start to resign to my fate, the doors slide open. I take the opportunity to scramble up onto the train.

*Spending all that time there by yourself must be lonely. I know that I've been lonely myself. Not a day goes by without me thinking about you. It's fine though, we'll be together again soon. I can't wait to see your face again.*

*Love,*

"Hey Alex."

I cough a couple of times and blink snow out of my eyes. My shallow, fast breaths turn to deep, relaxed ones as the solid metal floor of the train reminds my body of where I am. The trembling of my arms stops, and I pull myself up off the ground.

A person stands in front of me. They carry a familiar air, like I should recognize them instantly, but when I look at any part of them directly, they becomes a blurry approximation, devoid of detail and any outstanding or identifiable features. Even their voice was something I couldn't quite place. Suddenly, an unpleasant tingling sensation shoots throughout my body. A dark amorphous shadow, separate from the person, stares at me from the back of the train, but the moment I look at it, it dissipates.

The person takes a seat in a row across from the windows, and I sit next to them, as though my legs were moving on their own. Maybe I'm just seeing things, I think to myself. But that is undeniably real, as if a crowd of people were watching me. I start to ask a question, but they interrupt me by raising their hand, and point outside the windows above the empty row of

seats.

The massive buildings that make up the skyline of a city in the distance soar above the clouds, standing over a sparkling river. Sitting next to the person envelops me in a kind warmth and weighs me down. I hear the train moving across the tracks, but the usual shaking and rumbling that accompanies it is absent. My eyelids get heavy, and I start nodding off. We're not moving past the skyline at all, I notice, but the thought leaves my head as quickly as it enters. The person smiles at me as I drift to sleep. The shadow looms above the person, two different beings somehow connected.

"You're right, this is beautiful."

Snowflakes falling gently on my face bring me back to my senses. I'm sitting on a bench, and the person is nowhere to be seen. I leap to my feet, but as soon as I stand up, something grabs me by the shoulders and forces me back down.

The person is gone. Instead, the shadow appears before me. Its face is hazy, like the person on the train. Without warning, hundreds of eyes bloom from the shadow's face at once, like a horrible field of flowers. Every single one is looking into my own, blinking independently of each other. Its impossibly large smile stretches from ear to ear, exposing an incomprehensible number of razor-sharp teeth. It peers into me as if I am a toybox, and all my innermost thoughts and feelings are its playthings. Despite the shadow's unnerving appearance, I'm strangely calm, like I've been here before.

"You haven't forgotten about everything I've done for you, right?" the shadow asks. Its voice is some awful, distorted amalgamation of two other voices, but I can't put my finger on whose. It disappears once more, revealing a playground and a boy.

The boy sits alone in the snow, hugging his knees to his chest. It doesn't take long for me to realize that the boy is a younger version of myself, no older than ten or eleven. Aside from the small playground we're in, there's nothing but fields of snow as far as the eye can see. Another child walks up behind young Alex, dragging a sled.

"C'mon, Alex, it's our birthday, I'm bored. Let's do something. You can't just sit here all day," the child says, tapping young Alex's back with their boot impatiently. Most things about the child get blurry when I look at them, but I can tell that they have black hair sticking out from under their hat, and their voice is clearer. Other than that, they're the same as the person on the train.

"I hate birthdays, they're dumb," young Alex mumbles. "No one even remembers ours." He starts picking at the ground.

"So? Other people are boring anyways." The child picks up the sled and walks in front of young Alex. "Check out what I found; we can go sled-

ding on that big hill by the field?”

Young Alex perks up and looks at the sled but tries to go back to pouting before the other child notices. I can tell that it didn't work. The child grins and runs off.

“Last one there's a rotten egg!” they call out. Young Alex sits there for a moment, then suddenly gets up and scrambles after them. The sound of laughter fades into the distance, giving way to the wind. I try to muster a small smile, but deep pangs of guilt from a place I can't remember stop me. So, I sit there, in silence. Alone.

“You wish you could forget,” whispers the shadow from behind, with its hoarse, dissonant voice. It shoves me off the bench with a surprising amount of force. Instead of hitting snow, however, my hands fall through, and I land on a tile floor.

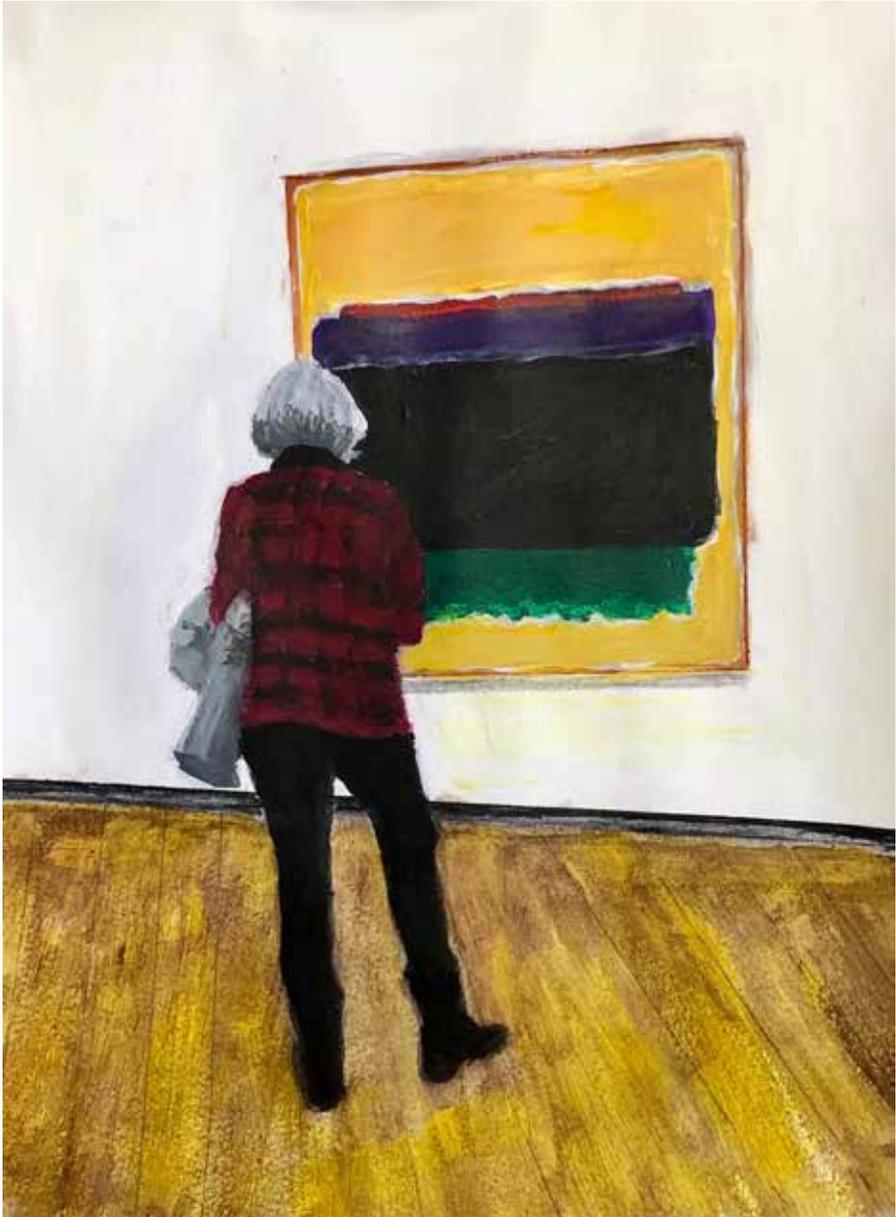
As I get up and brush myself off, I notice that there's no snow on me whatsoever. I look around and immediately realize where I am. The curtains are drawn, and another Alex close to my age sits on the couch underneath, staring listlessly into space. The person from the train is sitting in the hospital bed. They still look as blurry as before, except for the black hair. That's clear as day. The shadow stands over the person in the hospital bed, its many eyes gazing intently at me. It's not smiling anymore. Those pangs of guilt are getting harder to ignore.

Fluorescent lights hum overhead. I stand still in the doorway, unsure what to do with myself. The other Alex leans back on the couch and mutters something to himself. I remember how they had felt especially ill these last few days, so all they could manage was a “Hi” before falling asleep again, leaving me in deafening silence. I never brought anything to keep myself busy. I would just watch as they withered away. It was all I really could do.

I dreaded these visits. They chipped away at me little by little, unbearably. It was like a dull, nagging ache that got a little stronger every time I visited. We only had each other, so I still forced myself to come every day. I'm not religious, but under my breath, I would pray: promises to become a better person, asking to exchange time, begging for just one more year, one more month, one more week. Please, just another week. I can't be here alone.

The other Alex stands up from the couch and starts walking towards the door. The shadow watches him carefully. Instinctively, I try pushing him back onto the couch but my arms phase through him. I keep trying to get in front of him, but nothing I say or do can slow him down. His face is totally blank; I can't read him at all. He opens the door, hesitates for a moment, then walks away. The sound of his footsteps grows ever distant. A hole forms in my chest, my body is getting colder. I turn back around to face the shadow, who stands inches away from me now.

Janet at National Gallery of Art  
Lynn Kidder



Picking at the Chains  
Brandon Geurts



“But you can’t get rid of me. Not while you still draw breath,” the shadow says, unmistakably in the person’s voice. Its face is no longer covered in eyes, its mouth is no longer inhumanely large. It has the same hair as the person in the bed. And the same amber eyes, not blurred at all, why aren’t they blurred? Why can I see its face? The shadow gives me a warm smile, and it makes me nauseous. I turn away and walk out the door.

Instead of stepping out into the halls of a hospital, I find myself standing on the train, still passing over the bridge. The shadow is sitting next to a snow-covered Alex. It gestures for me to take a seat across from them. The other Alex doesn’t seem to notice. A faint thumping can be heard in the distance.

At first glance, the other Alex’s face is blank. Back straight, with his hands folded neatly in his lap. His cold, hollow stare is cast away to a point nobody else can see. I turn to face the shadow. Its hair, its eyes, its face, they are now exactly like the person’s. Except when I look at the person directly, there is no blur. No, the person is crystal clear now. As soon as I come to this realization, the other Alex covers his face with his hands and bursts into tears, filling the silence in the train with pained, muffled cries. It’s as though an old dam that had been cracking over the years has finally given way. The shadow fixes its intense gaze onto me.

“You’re angry, right?” the shadow asks, using the person’s voice. I don’t respond, having nothing to say to that. It smiles, but it all feels like a cheap imitation. Like it is trying to copy these things from memory. The other Alex shakes his head.

“You don’t have to lie,” the shadow says, not breaking eye contact with me. “These bills have to be paid by someone, and we both know that nobody else is going to.” The other Alex tries stifling his cries for a moment as this fact hangs in the air for a long while. Small whimpers and sniffles escape periodically. We both stay quiet.

“You wasted years of your life. Threw away your future. All because of me. Isn’t that horrible?” the shadow says, with that mechanical smile. It hasn’t moved a muscle.

“That’s not true.” The other Alex mumbles, head still cradled in his palms. This elicits a twinge of doubt in me. His voice is unsteady. Uncertain.

“Imagine all the things you could’ve done with yourself. If only I was never there.”

The other Alex puts his hands on his ears, trying to block everything out. My expression softens out of pity for a moment. There’s something exceptionally unsettling about the other Alex. The way he’s crying, covering his ears, refusing to open his eyes. He’s no different from a child suddenly thrust into the dark. Lost and alone, all he can do is curl up in a ball and reject the

world as it has become, praying for someone to return him to the world he knows. That someone won't come. They're long gone. As is that world.

"I get it. Now it's just you, an urn and time you don't want. Nobody to give you what I gave you. It's easier to forget. Can't miss what you never had, right?" My throat tightens, and my fingers curl up until my knuckles turn white. I try to look away, yet my body doesn't listen. It's like I'm frozen, my eyes are locked with the shadow's. By this point, the other Alex had been reduced to a blubbering mess. His agony-filled bawls echo through the otherwise silent car, save for the faint thumping.

"You know, your prayers didn't go unanswered." The shadow stands up and starts walking away. My eyes stay put on the now empty seat. I can't bring myself to look directly at the other Alex.

The faint thumping that had been hiding in the background now draws closer as the footsteps of the shadow grow farther. I look around, but nothing and nobody else is on the train except for me and the other Alex, who is still curled up, murmuring something to himself. It's too prominent to ignore now, overpowering even the cries of the other Alex. I couldn't recognize it at first, but it quickly becomes all too clear. Getting louder with every beat, I cover my ears and close my eyes in a feeble attempt to shut it out, but to no avail. A heartbeat other than my own emanates from my chest, the two hearts asynchronous. It's almost deafening now; each pulse sends a shock rippling throughout my body. I bury my head into my lap and press against the sides of my head with all my might. Just when the rhythmic pounding begins turning into indiscernible vibrations, it stops altogether.

A momentary silence is soon broken by the sound of a tender and subdued breeze brushing past me. Opening my eyes, flurries are dancing in the wind, coating the metallic floor with snow. The chunk of the train where the conductor would normally sit is now ripped away, allowing the car to be bathed in light and snow. Instead of passing over the bridge, the train seems suspended in a cloud of white. Aside from the row of seats I'm sitting in, the train is totally barren. A cold hand falls onto my shoulder. The shadow, once again with innumerable eyes, stands in front of me and greets me with a cold, wide grin. It gestures grandly to its right.

"We had to come back eventually." My own voice rises from the shadow now. The end of the train that leads to the next car is replaced with the pale, white wall of a hospital room. A wooden door sits in the middle, and to its side sits the number 1125. Their room. A profound remorse and shame washes over me. I haven't visited in at least a week.

"What's their name, Alex?" The shadow whispers to me. With nowhere else to turn, I reluctantly reach for the door handle, and turn.

It almost looks like Sam is sleeping.

My heart drops, a sudden coldness overwhelms me as all the memories come crashing back into my mind with nauseating force. Everything starts spinning. I fall backwards, catching myself with weak, wobbly arms. I can't see straight; a loud ringing overpowers the soft breeze. The shadow appears in front of me, once again imitating Sam's face and Sam's body.

"As it turned out, you never wanted that extra week," it says dryly, in a voice that was not quite Sam's. It turns its back to me and opens the door wide, like it was telling me that what I was seeing was no illusion. Sam is facing away from the door, towards a table next to the bed. The shadow goes to the table, picks up the letter, and walks back to me. It tries to wear that mechanical smile again, but instead it contorts into a disconcerting half smile, thinly veiling the shadow's resentment.

"After all I've done for you." The shadow rips up the letter and tosses the scraps at me. "And you leave me to die alone. On our birthday, no less."

"I didn't want to leave," I say weakly. It is all I can manage. The shadow's eyes widen with pure disbelief. It pushes the door closed, snatches me up by the jacket and brings its face close to mine. I'm not looking into hundreds of eyes, and I'm not looking into Sam's, either. I'm looking into my own eyes, filled with animosity.

"You don't get to do that," it says, clearly in my own voice, through gritted teeth. "You left Sam behind. You don't get to play victim." It drops me to the ground, the snow breaking my fall. The shadow is right. Sam wouldn't have done what I did. I wish I was the one in that bed. It would've been the best for both of us. Tears stream down my face; I can barely support my own weight. The shadow takes a deep breath.

"There's one way we can fix this. One way you can really forget," the shadow says. An infinite darkness, blacker than black, seeps from underneath the door. Instinct takes over and I push myself away from it. "Don't worry, it'll only hurt for a second." The shadow bearing my face gives me a condescending smile and recedes into the dark. The darkness welcomes the shadow, as numerous dark, slime-like arms pull it in. I jump to my feet and try to run, but it's not long before I reach the edge of the train, a chunk still missing. I turn back around; it's made its way up onto the walls and roof, gradually clawing its way towards me. Understanding the inevitability of the situation, I sigh, and turn to sit on the edge of the train. My legs dangle in the air, I can't imagine how far of a drop this could be. I stay like this for a moment. Sam walks up from behind and sits next to me. I know it's not really Sam.

"What if I just stayed here forever?" I ask. Sam doesn't respond. Maybe the shadow was right. It'll only hurt for a second. I can feel the dark's cold whispers getting closer. The dark begins crawling up my arms and grabbing at my shoulders.

"Do you want to forget?" Sam asks, with my voice. I don't reply. A

small gust of wind nudges me towards the snow. Imploring me to try.

To live without you. Finding out if that's possible can't hurt, right?

I shut my eyes, and let myself fall off the train, tearing away from the dark, plunging into the snow.

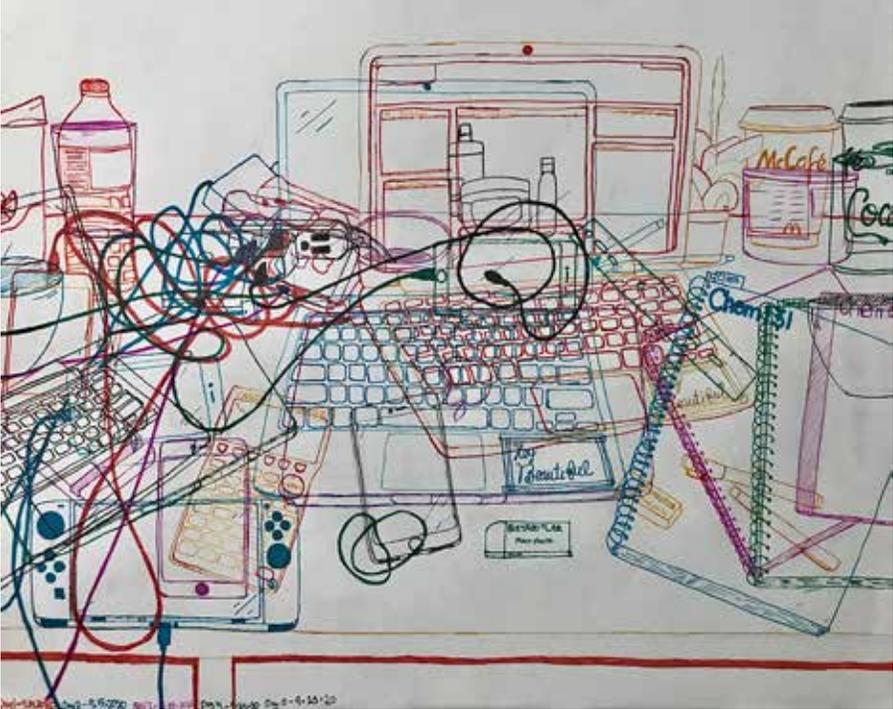
My eyes flutter open. I look down and I find myself atop a bridge, hundreds of feet in the air.

Juliette  
Junior Tchapdieu



# A Busy Week

Adamaris Chaj



# Contributors

Adamaris Chaj is a 19-year-old college student who is working on her Biological Science degree. She loves to paint and draw as a hobby. Spending more time at home during COVID-19 has made her fall in love with her hobby even more.

Gabriela Franco is a graphic designer who was born in El Salvador.

Brandon Geurts is an illustrator and teacher working in Washington DC. He graduated with an MFA from the University of South Florida in 2017.

Jennifer Guzman is a Latina artist getting an A.F.A. in Graphic Design. She plans on pursuing both art and medicine. Her dream is to have her own art studio teaching youth and advocating mental health.

Sevin Hannon is a first-year student at Montgomery College currently pursuing a nursing degree. He enjoys reading and writing stories in his free time and is a fan of Haruki Murakami.

Sue Page Hughson began her writing career retelling fairytale stories in German. As a Conversational Humorist, she enjoyed writing Creative Fiction and Nonfiction. Living in a log cabin on six wooded acres in Maryland, she finds the peace and solitude the perfect place to create. Her first critique on her writing ability was in the 4th grade. Her teacher wrote on her report card that she had a great imagination. That same teacher had her write “I will not talk in class” 100 times! Imagine that!

Gloria Jackson wrote this poem in a time when she was in a spiritual battle held in bondage inside her mind and during the beginning stages of a nationwide pandemic that led to the people of this world being quarantined inside their homes.

Lynn Kidder has been exploring painting at Montgomery College in retirement. She finds the faculty and facilities excellent.

David Mike Legrand was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti in November 1995. He chose to study sociology. Due to political instability in his country, he had

to drop out after two semesters to join the art school in his country, which in turn was closed two months later. He moved to the U.S. in October 2017. He is living in Maryland where he is working towards his Associate's Degree of Fine Arts at Montgomery College.

Alejandro Leopardi composed this poem after the loss of a close friend of almost thirty years in summer 2020. Typically a positive, cheerful person, this friend struggled with the pandemic and the riots, the protests, and the ugliness it brought out in the world, so she chose to escape it all.

Jakob Little is an average human with an above-average affinity for sarcasm. With a lack of material available to make snide comments about, one must work with what they have.

Mary Mena was born and raised in Silver Spring, Maryland. She is a visual artist who works in photography, painting, as well as 2D and 3D art. She will be graduating Montgomery College with an Associate of Arts Degree and soon will be attending University of Maryland to work towards a Bachelor's Degree in Studio Art. Mena's main goal is to create art that is relatable, inspiring, and touches base with mental and social issues in the world.

Elliott Ngripou is a current MC student and artist born in the Central African Republic. His family migrated to the United States of America in 2010. Elliott's artworks explore struggles of living in America as an immigrant and the many hardships that accompany it. Instead of focusing on the grander picture, he narrows in on the personal aspects of the situation. This includes himself and a portrayal of his insecurities, fears and worries.

Sam Nguyen has taken a poetry class at Montgomery College.

Sultana Rahim is a multi-media artist born and currently residing in Silver Spring, Maryland. In 2017, she enrolled at Montgomery College in Takoma Park for an AFA in studio art. In 2018 as well as 2019, her work was featured in the student art show at the Cultural Arts Center, also located in Silver Spring. Sultana's work has also been selected twice for *The Sligo Journal*.

Tharma Philogene wanted to be a writer as a child, starting to write in 6th grade. In 9th grade, Tharma began to write poems and still loves doing so because it feels safe expressing any feelings without judgment.

Harper Robinson is an ethereal being in corporeal form found in the suburbs of D.C. who longs to connect with humanity through her writing. Mother

Canto  
Jennifer Guzman



to two fluffballs named Gatsby and Sherlock, she is currently in a long-term relationship with Netflix and Ramen at 2 a.m.

Monica Yuliza Rodriguez's self-portrait was the first time she created artwork as a reflection of her skill with paint, and she looks forward to further practice in the future.

Joseph Ross is the author of four books of poetry: *Raising King* (2020), *Ache* (2017), *Gospel of Dust* (2013), and *Meeting Bone Man* (2012). His poems have appeared in many publications including the *New York Times Magazine*, *Southern Quarterly*, and *Xavier Review*. He teaches in Washington, D.C. and writes at [www.JosephRoss.net](http://www.JosephRoss.net).

Marianne Szlyk's poems have appeared in *Bourgeon*, *of/with*, *Mad Swirl*, *Setu*, *Verse-Virtual*, *The Pangolin Review*, and various other journals and anthologies. Her latest book, *Poetry en Plein Air*, is available from Pony One Dog Press and Amazon.

Junior Tchapidieu is captivated by having different ways of speaking and expressing his feelings. For him, art always expresses a message. Even when the author does not want it to, it always does. Through art, he is able to speak his truth and sometimes discover who he is.

Sarah Tedla is a student at Montgomery College who loves reading and writing on the side. She appreciates a good mythology or fantasy book to read.

Lisa Trevino creates art because she has an innate tendency to capture the world around her and put it in a new light. She sees through a lens that deepens her awareness or understanding of ordinary objects, which she tries to convey on canvas. She intends for others to experience a new way to see when they look at her work.

Ella Valenstein is a Maryland native artist working in multiple mediums and exploring the boundaries of reality. Her work features unique compositions that explore themes of memory, psychedelia, portals, organic forms, and ambiguity. She is currently working to create new experimental visual work and is pursuing a graduate-level education in fine art.

Izabella Versiani graduated as an architect and earned a Master's degree in town planning. She worked with interior design and town planning in Brazil and became a public servant – which brought her to DC. She studied art history and drawing through architecture school, developed art appreciation as her

passion through life, and she's delighted to, now, be able to make her own art.

NaBeela Washington is an emerging Black poet working towards her Masters in Creative Writing and English at Southern New Hampshire University. She was invited to read her poetry by the Takoma Park Poetry Reading Series, and has been published in Juke Joint Magazine, perhappened mag, The Cincinnati Review, and is forthcoming in The Washington Writers' Publishing House anthology *This Is What America Looks Like*.





