

JET FUEL Review

Fall 2023 / Issue 26





JET FUEL Review

A High Octane Literary Journal

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Cover Art by Irina Greciuhina

*Front Cover / Back Cover: Equation of Eternity & Resplendent Reincarnation of Meanings
Cover Design: Lauren Lotarski & Harper Saglier*

Mission Statement

As an online literary journal, we believe in the power of language and seek to provide a platform for quality writing and artwork that pushes boundaries, surpasses expectations, and creates an emotional resonance in our readers. In order to do this, we aim to showcase work that is representative of the complex and evolving human condition while featuring a diverse array of voices and styles. Every semester, we have a rotating editorial team of Lewis students who carefully evaluate our submissions. Our diverse staff strives to include authors that represent ourselves and others. We hope our journal will inspire and unite the literary community. In addition to our journal, we maintain a corresponding blog that offers an array of commentary on art, literature, film, music, and more, allowing us to interact with and expand our community. We seek to create a writer's community, publish quality writing and artwork, and maintain a blog connected to the literary journal site.

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Many thanks to our Fall 2023
guest readers and consultants!



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Table of Contents

Foreword

3

Poetry

Mark DeCarteret	The Year I Went Without Being a Teen Idol	8
Mihir Bellamkonda	Up Above My Head I Hear Music In The Air	9
	The Gate	10
Denise Duhamel	A Hyperactive Crown of Crowns	11
Natalia Prusinska	Nuclear Testing at Bikini Atoll, Photo and Video Records	14
Fasasi Abdulrosheed Oladipupo	black boys; white doves	15
Joel Peckham	Memory of the Sun	16
Esther Sadoff	Serendipity digs her feet in the sand	17
James Kimbrell	Good Grief	18
Amorak Huey	Say Moon One More Time	20
	To the Elderly Couple Making Out in a Red Toyota Prius in the Parking Lot of Home Depot	21
Stephen Lackaye	The Night Bus	22
Kelly R. Samuels	Me as Penelope Asking: What If We Didn't Lie Talking After?	23
	Me as Penelope Speaking of the Plows Coming Late	24
Kevin Clark	Rose	25
Savannah McClendon	Vesuvius	27
	anthony bourdain in beirut	28
John Peter Beck	Dark Math	29
Brandel France de Bravo	Taking Dictation	30

Mollie O'Leary	Expanding Sonnet	31
Benjamin Bellas	Fickle Fingers in the Underbrush	32
Magdalena Arias Vásquez	Amen	33
Aaron Coleman	"the earth is a living thing"	34
	Cough	35
Michael Carson	Jefferson County	36
Hilary Sallick	Cave Dwellers	37
	Postpartum	38
Christopher Ankney	An Embarrassment of Pandas	39
Casey Knott	Do Not	41
henry 7. reneau, jr.	Patti Smith	43
John Muellner	Everything Soft and Welcoming	44
Cynthia Manick	Praise Poem for VapoRub Half-Emptied	45
	When Some Poets Go Over Their Reading Time on Stage	47
Tina Gross	Ways to Gauge How Windy It Is	49

Art

Irina Greciuhina	Equation of Eternity	53
	Mimicry	54
	Resplendent Reincarnation of Meanings	55
	Solaristics Deadlock	56
	Antrevolt	57
Jason Reblando	Olympia	58
	Mention the Geographic	59
	Manila Sunset	60
	Partially Civilized	61
	Bagobo Warriors	62
Anna Maeve	Cliff	63
	Field	64

Alexey Adonin	Light of Hope	65
	Enigmatic Incarnation	66
	Psychedelic Forest	67
Jian Choi	Reasonable Distance	68

Fiction

Eric Rasmussen	Overwatering	73
E. P. Tuazon	On Pilipino Time	77
Abbie Barker	Natural Displays of Grief	84

Biographies

89

Foreword

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the 26th Issue of *Jet Fuel Review*! The editors are excited to showcase the wonderful collection of writing and artwork that we've curated for this issue. After months of reading more than 800 submissions, the editors have carefully chosen a collection of works that aim to highlight an array of various voices, viewpoints, and experiences representative of the ever-evolving and complex world we inhabit.

Housed at Lewis University in Romeoville, Illinois, *Jet Fuel Review* is a student-run, faculty-advised, four-time CMA Pinnacle Award-winning literary journal that publishes writers and artists from across the globe. We are honored not only to provide a creative platform for people's voices but also to produce a journal that is impactful to those who read it. Our featured cover piece for this issue, "Equation for Eternity," by Irina Greciuhina highlights a style that "confronts stereotypical archetypes of women, balancing pop-art postures and colors with surreal background and design patterns." Greciuhina urges the viewers of her works to contemplate the lives of the women illustrated and meticulously placed in surreal dreamscapes to challenge gender norms and our perceptions.

The poetry section of this issue highlights a fascinating set of topics and voices, such as the work of Magdalena Arias Vásquez, a poet and translator whose work engages with the history of American intervention and the varied cultures throughout Latin America, and Stephen Lackaye, an Oregonian bookseller who meshes myth with dystopian iconography. We're also thrilled to showcase Fasasi Abdulrosheed Oladipupo, Mihir Bellamkonda, Cynthia Manick, Aaron Coleman, Denise Duhamel, Brandel France de Bravo, and Natalia Prusinska along with many others.

The fiction section opens with "Overwatering" by Eric Rasmussen, whose incredibly unique style seamlessly blends the natural world and the anthropological to create a story of romance and grief we won't soon forget. "On Pilipino Time" by E.P. Tuazon continues this trend. By offering a masterclass in dialogue, Tuazon invites readers to love their characters and be unafraid of emotion while facing the unknown. Ending the section, last but certainly not least, is Abbie Baker's "Natural Displays of Grief," a piece that takes readers on a journey through history and mourning. While grief is the throughline of the fiction section, the diverse styles, narratives, settings, and techniques of the authors' works invite a whirlwind of interpretation, emotion, and resolution.

In addition to the artwork created by our front and back cover artist, Irina Greciuhina, our art section presents dynamic pieces by Alexey Adonin, who crafts enigmatic and abstract worlds which play with the innate drive to "derive order out of chaos." *Jet Fuel Review* also features pieces from Jason Reblando, whose masterful work in

photo collage provides a striking visual landscape of Filipino history and culture. Along with haunting stills from photographer Anna Maeve and high school digital artist Jian Choi, we have a stunning cast of artists gracing our pages in this issue.

The literature and artwork in these pages are a testament to the diverse perspectives and experiences that are currently present in our society and to voices that are both candid and sincere. We invite you to dive into our 26th issue, and we hope that you appreciate the pieces that make up this issue as much as we do.

Read on!

Lauren Lotarski, Samuel McFerron & the *Jet Fuel Review* Editors

A stylized graphic of a mountain range in shades of blue and purple, with white speckles. The word "POETRY" is written in a bold, dark blue, sans-serif font across the center of the mountains.

POETRY

The Year I Went Without Being a Teen Idol

Outside, it was the pink of a kitten's yawn. A wink. Or the skin, behind my knee, where I must have been bitten by something. Your snores tried to reason with me. Tried to mess with my well-known ideas on holding a note, tone. But, then again, whose tunes will not one day be looked at as my own? So, I've recently taken up acting. Like I factor. Like I'm the first track on an album labeled "If You Think This is Fun..." Shit, it's been months since I've charted. Been scored more than 3 hearts or 4 unicorns. Anything sparkly at all. Since I've led myself in a sing-along. Strung out around a campfire. Or welled up from this kinship with the sun. Luckily, my cat is still smitten. Blinking heavily. As if it's timing is off. From wearing mittens 2 sizes too small. Still imagines I'm dancing when in reality I'm shaking. Cashing in on the side where my desire has staged its own death. I'd rather nobody watch me. Rather than sit, with the unattached, in my chat room. There's almost too little to slam. To remaster. For there are things to be seen to. And things you ask for an account of, a rebate. That you keep tabbed for later. When the meds have determined it safe. To rename the old phase. Once, a stranger remarked, you look like you've been hit by a truck. And I had. Leaving me with a tree in the front seat. And this veil that I lower with chains. See now, the pink, has a yellowy aura. Like some sickly saint kissed into the start of a bruise, then the ether. And this red, narrowly red, at its center. Worn out from the routines. And the touring. The unforgivable publicity shots. And the agent always beginning each sentence with. "So, here is the rub."

Up Above My Head I Hear Music In The Air

After Sister Rosetta Tharpe

The data glow nameless,
bruisey and extinguishing as
cigarette on skin.

We've talked about this.
I watch the skyscreen go again
black, purple, blue;

the ending colors.
Heat, extinctions, fascia.
Nothing refreshing alters.

But we've talked about this.
I brush soot from wound, wash,
apply your balm. Mint.

This stretched week
I have worried for
the name of the tree on the corner,

which the dog always sniffs
in a slow circle, then marks—
the tree with whispering seeds,

future-shaped,
all wing and fat fecundity.
Then

you kiss
the syllables
into my left ear:

green ash

The Gate

I'm brown as earth with an ॐ tattoo but I remember the image. You've seen it: pearly gates, pearly man, good or bad, in or out. Hey, it's pretty, I admit, clean, something to look forward to. My mother said that about the weekend and big meals, both of which tire you out. Speaking of you, break my head open again and ask me whether St. Peter looks forward to anything. Or perhaps he's content with his pearls?

Smearing nacreous doves against my vision and the taste of cold brick or revenge served. Gasping maybe my last in the alley. Alveoli and vision narrowing. Please, if this is it, please: let me not pass through the pearls. Let me drink them in vinegar like Cleopatra. Like Angelou, let me dispense them from my dark throat. Please.

A Hyperactive Crown of Crowns

(in memory of three queens— Emily Dickinson, Sylvia Plath, and Lucie Brock-Broido)

I crown myself Queen of Ants in my Pants,
what teachers used to call ADHD.
I snuffle watching cable new hosts chant
about injustice. Then I fall asleep
to a body-scan meditation app,
deep breathing in and out, starting to snore,
before waking in minutes—holy crap!—
my spliced-headline nightmares hard to ignore
even with a lime THC gummy,
a Tempur-Pedic pillow and eye mask,
my sheets wrapped around me like a mummy.
What kind of casket should I get? I ask
the dark. I need a plan for when I go,
a coffin like a new car with a bow.

A coffin, not quite a car with a bow
surprising a spouse in a commercial
around Christmas! Of course we all know
we'll die so it shouldn't be controversial
to pre-pay our funeral, have a plan
for music or flowers. My friend Maureen
wants to live on as a tree, her human
compost in Denver to make leafy green
shade for her yet-to-be born great grandkids.
For now, her crown chakra glows past her cancer
like a halo. Liner around her eyelids
gives her glamour. She's a necromancer
bringing me messages from my dead mother.
Tell me a story. Tell me another.

Tell me a story, tell me another.
My Grammy said her Grammy, Lady Leigh,
lived in a Scottish castle with her brother
until Leigh eloped with the gardener, pray
tell, our hopes for aristocracy gone
as she birthed six kids in poverty, our
ancestors peasants thereafter, forlorn
in Prince Edward Island—cauliflower,
cabbage, onions, and tomatoes their crops.
No more bouquets of thistle and bluebells,
no more illicit kisses. Guzzling hops,

Leigh's husband turned rough and the two rebels
grew apart. Disowned, Leigh couldn't go back,
though the castle still lists her name on a plaque.

My dentist Emily tells me my plaque
buildup has lessened with the new floss.
She's just rescued a Ukrainian cat,
a Lekvoy, a breed created by cross-
ing a hairless Donskoy and a Scottish Fold.
I'm part Scottish too, I say. She scrolls pic
after pic on her iPhone—the cat at her threshold,
in a hamper, then eating her lipstick.
We wait for the Novocain to take affect
so Emily can drill my cavity.
You can write about me, but I suspect
you poets think I'm boring. Gravity
pulls my lip as I protest. Spittle drips down
my chin. By spring she'll fit me for a crown.

By spring my dentist fits me for a crown,
plopping it on a bit of tooth she saved
after shaving it down to a nub. No gown,
just my drool. No pomp nor furs nor engraved
jewels. I once wrote a book *Queen for a Day*
though I was never crowned homecoming queen
or queen bee. My silver rings, tarnished gray,
sit on the soap dish. They've left bands of green
on my naked fingers. I cruise Netflix—
Harry and Meghan, insufferable
in their wealth, each hauling a crucifix
made of cash. They're so vulnerable
and, at the same time, fake. The duchess and duke
serve up glitzy privacy for rebuke.

Poets serve up privacy for rebuke.
Emily Dickinson and Sylvia Plath
also invoke "queen." Called recluse and kook
by critics trying to blunt their wrath,
these two wear diadems of pain and joy.
Plath's bees: *I have a self to recover/
a queen*. Dickinson's 508 employs
crowned for her birth, sings clear as a plover
in 91. Pessoa writes "Crown me
with Roses," a celebration, it seems,

though I can't help but think of thorns, heavy
crown worn by Jesus. And what of their dreams?
Dickinson: *It would hurt us — were we awake*
Plath:....*they were part of me. They were my landscape.*

Crowns were part of me. They were my landscape.
The gold paper Burger King coronet.
A cigar band atop Barbie's head, her cape
a facecloth fastened with my barrette
taken from my crown of glory. My curls
were wild, my mother spraying No More Tears,
yanking a comb through my wet hair. Her girl
fidgeted so much that she once took shears
and cut my hair into choppy pageboy.
Lucie Brock-Broido's hair *was scissored off*
for punishment when she was six. Her ploy?
She never cut her mane again. Knopf
published her. How did I get on this rant?
I crown myself Queen of Ants in my Pants.

Nuclear Testing at Bikini Atoll, Photo and Video Records

I want to touch the cloud made by the first test.

In the second, streams shoot out of the column of water like a punk collar,

as if the bomb goes around quoting Lou Reed to the steady waters:

Rock & Roll is so great, people should start dying for it. Moshing the planet. The flash of light

making the sun feel like the second prettiest woman in the room.

In seconds, a dome of water rose like shaving cream,

clearing the reef's legs of ships and fishermen.

The bomb's trying to clean up its act. Start fresh.

But the worst was yet to come.

The largest bomb was like glass being blown. So yellow, we knew it was sick.

When you put your hands over your eyes, you saw your bones in your hands and in your fingers.

In the aftermath, the irradiated dandruff of the bomb fell on the reef's shoulders, and when she tried to shake it off,

the kids thought it was snow and opened their mouths to the sky—

The first quote is sourced from the book, *Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk*, by Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain. The second quote is sourced from an interview with Wayne Brooks, a gunner's mate aboard the USS De Haven; he's commenting on a nuclear blast at Atoll, which he witnessed from 20 miles away.

black boys; white doves

a black boy sings in my dream,
white dove comes back with a sea of history,
mulatto of questions, stray butterfly in a field of brambles,
a boy sings at minnesota; an ode to home he does not know,
after years of explorers' havocs, some girls
still realize themselves undiscovered, they sing songs
of origin in fading unison, white doves
find them but could not give them home,
remember under the tree at ouida, where
they were pronounced outcasts, never to know
their way back home, i say they undo them of earth,
they plucked off their names. remember the well of badagry
where home was proscribed poison, for them and
these boys who scream around orphaning the death of origin.
at birmingham, a black boy buries himself in a pool of elegy.

he knows what it means to be a lost moth, what it is to be spoils.

Memory of the Sun

The body creaks, then cracks apart, thrumming like a drum beneath the ice—where every bone is a bell waiting to be struck, and every tendon tuned to the highest frequency, then plucked. Much of what I've lost is flexibility. Getting out of bed takes a plan, a plot. The nerve zinging up the leg, along the hamstring, to the spine. But also

much of the will to stretch, to reach for the branch that might hold, might not, thin as a girl's wrist and full of sap, the memory of sun bent beneath the weight of leaves coated with ice. Once

I walked along the frozen rivers beneath the bridges with a handful of stones. Every child born to winter knows not to step anywhere the water might be moving, no matter how far down it runs, but you can skip a stone along the surface like your father tapping on a wall, searching for a stud. And listen,

death is always an assumption and a good one, but

where there is life, there is always

an alarm going off, something hissing in the bones, in the blood that says not yet, not now, get up, get up. Listen, the gulls are crying all down the shore. Listen

once, I saw the body of a stray dog, still for hours and coated with frost shift then start, then shake, taking off in a run, ice crackling from its coat in a galaxy of sparks.

Serendipity digs her feet in the sand

She watches sand sift into each footprint like mini avalanches.

She wonders where the crabs go in winter.

Do they hide under all that sand? She tightens her hat on her head.

The water is marbled with prisms of drifting light.

She watches bodies crouch to flatten their towels.

Serendipity wonders if it's wrong to not want anything,

wonders what she should want, wonders how a hat stays on a head.

How a hat is someone's *volition*. Someone's desire to desire.

The bathing suit plunging at her neck is regret.

She feels exposed like ice melting into a puddle.

Like a pile of sand that used to be a castle.

It is crashing into the sea.

Good Grief

When someone posts on our neighborhood group
that she's downsizing and needs a good home
for a dozen pelts of her former pets (some frozen,
some laundered) I feel a little lost. What else

have I missed? When did this kick off?
Was I wrong to bury Toby and Buddy Dog
along the back fence where once they ran,
barking at the neighbor's malamute,

each grave marked with a paver stone
the grass creeps over, which I pull by hand
lest the mower blade cough up sparks?
It's true. I'd love to pet them both again.

But they crossed the river with coats on
and now I have living pets that lounge
around my desk like Roman Senators
on holiday, well-fed, arguably over-loved,

frequently spoken to in sentences as if
a response might follow in perfect Latin.
They sleep on the bed, under the bed,
beside the bed, my Siamese lick-sanding

my nostrils until I rise and fill her bowl
with a morning's worth of Meow Mix.
Our love might last forever, but we won't.
Centuries of scheming have rendered

no footpath around the mighty Styx.
And most taxidermy is in decidedly bad taste.
So, after grooming their death coats
for decades, our neighbor resolves

it's time to let go, and that others might
dream of stroking the fur of dead pets
they never knew. I understand nothing,
except that maybe our neighbor is due

a wellness check, and me too. There's
no end to where grief might lead us—
booze, gambling, brushing the dead,
keeping them here with us, making

a second life of what they leave behind
because even a single hair evokes
their presence, their breath, their wait
at the door before we get home.

Say Moon One More Time

Say *moon* one more time. Say
mouth and *sky* and *swoon*.

I would ask you to sing me to sleep
but then I might sleep
away the few hours we have —
it's unfair, it's always been so,
seconds slipping from our fingers
like silk from a shoulder
leaving us alone in this skin
touching like strangers
in a moonlit field of snow,
a bliss so pure it could be
mistaken for sadness.

**To the Elderly Couple Making Out in a Red Toyota Prius in the Parking Lot
of Home Depot**

Goddamn right the errands can wait.

The Night Bus

We'd always thought that it must take a solemn step to reach the Underworld, through a cleft rock, driven by love or fear, a plain and heavy coin in pocket to pay the dour ferryman. It takes twenty bucks from Baltimore and no serious passage of time. A woman nearby reads a coloring book, the man beside her shushing anyone who speaks. Twenty bucks and the time it takes to cross New Jersey's famous, feral reek, the flame-lit tracts of refineries, watching mile markers decrement to the throat of stone we'd always known would open beneath the river. At Forty-Second St. and Eighth, one hundred prophets wait where I'll descend from the smell of urine to the smell of older urine at the Port Authority Terminal. Other fictions told us of the host of milling pagan aides, warned us not to eat, or speak aloud our given names. One weak mythology elaborates a City of Regret, while in the city of my birth another boy I knew is dead for no reason better than the fact the earth moves continuously, so decreed by the distant deities of molten core and supernova, who no one gives a damn for in revenge. Even the truth is a story that makes no sense. Dear friend, whose photo sits atop a casket where your head is crushed; dear friend, I didn't speak to for a decade and won't again, you never missed me, and yours is not the first death I've spoken crassly of before I'd bow in upstate parlors with the bereft. My worst sin remains the theft of an orange from one of two large silver bowls in the foyer overfull with them. There was never any risk the dead would keep us. Another driver honors my return, then curses our way through Newark. I can tell he cares for nothing recognized as belief by riders with their want for story feeding small privations, who tap their unlit cigarettes three hours against their teeth, sing beneath their breath to the rats in the riddled box that shares their seat. Look at how I fit among them, friend, the man who weighs an orange on his palm, puts all his memories in little rooms the way we learned to commit the early cantos. I can't tell a solemn step from the show I'll later make of it. If there's a City of Regret, we enter at the depot lot behind the stadium, emptied from one keening transport for a local bus and our regular lives, whose halting conduct takes no time to betray our fresh mnemonics, leaves the words we thought of soured in our mouths, the fruits we thought to carry puckered in our fists.

Me as Penelope Asking: What If We Didn't Lie Talking After?

What if the night was not extended
by other capable godly hands
and we just rose right after, me
scuttling to wash myself in another
room? What would be lost
without our stories, or not even
our stories, but chit-chat, dreamy
musings? You do well stroking
my hip bone, absently, looking up
at where Vega sits in the Lyra
well beyond the rafters and the roof
this mid-winter while I confess
of minor infractions or call up
some memory thought long
forgotten. You share yours
in a satisfied tone in turn and turn
to *hmm* and *ah*. Our bodies cool.
The furnace ticks somewhere
beneath us. To the west the river
still makes its slow way south under ice.

Me as Penelope Speaking of the Plows Coming Late

We wake as if they are ships trawling
the ocean floor, scraping clean
what they can gather. Why
I think of whales with their ways
of communication I do not know,
though, nearer, there is the sudden
rounding of corners and what resembles
the banging of copper pots
in distant rooms. You fall back
asleep in a fashion only men
I know of are capable while I lie
worrying over whom I bore years
ago, and how far. This new snow
lights the room almost enough
to read by. Certainly: to see my hands
with their useless gestures.

Rose

—Zurbaran's *Still Life* at the Norton Simon Museum

Isn't the painting seduced into memory
by its unreal arrangement? Even here
I have to use a word suggesting
sex. All my friends laugh, claim
I'm obsessed with sex. —Not quite.
I'm obsessed with the question inside
sex. The anticipant pause before
union. And let's face it, making love
can seem chimerical, especially when it's

just over. Why did my parents
arrange such a mysterious painting
on my bedroom wall? Did they really
think I'd see the painter's version
of the holy trinity? The lemons,
the oranges, the slim teacup garnished
with a rose? When I was eight
the print's light excited the air
(there I go again), and I swam amid
the colors. They called good-night,
then the lights went out. For years
I imagined eating the big oranges
so often that I woke with rind
on my lips. It tasted like your name,
whoever you are. Last week
at the museum I entered the citrus
and floral light of the famed room.
You were there, tall, crooked neck,
half your hair dyed amber. You may have
been speaking in code. In a dream
I started having a decade ago, I'd
walk up behind you to smell your hair
as if it were an ur-language whispered
before there were churches. How
I closed my eyes amid its call. And
then, your smile, your vanishing. So,

that's what it's always about. Always
the unearthly lemons much larger
than the oranges, the oranges
swelling beyond their basket, the saucer
too too wide for its cup. And the rose,
a day past youth, what to make
of its momentary balance? —How

it's paused inexplicably sideways
on the tip of that single white petal,
these centuries of abeyance,
such stalling, as if to forever delay
the pleasure of the fall...

VESUVIUS

The words of defeated king admetus came as a whisper in the mountain:

“I have this dream. Where I’m holding his neck to the *red. brick. wall.* And I tell him — and he’s crying — that I hallucinated spiders for *ten years.* I tried to name them, but the earth was not their mother anymore. So I placed them in the trough out in the yard and watched the horses pretend to eat them. And when the big tongues lapped them, all of them. All of them. When every last arachnid had reduced in my vision, then only then. Then only then. Then only then the

sun” — and he weeps: *Apollo...*

“Once I was known as the virgin king. Once ONCE (fury & I one body inhibit). Once I was known as the virgin king and I blushed at the lifting of a head.

Once I had not been fucked and I was kinder to strangers.

Once I had a whole life like an afternoon: drinkable, aureate, and a handsome demigod farmboy musing over my weeds, yes, I said, yes, he said, *oh* and *there* and and! yes, he made me promises across the hillside with the lines he carved in wheat.

My yesterday and yesterday turned once and future in his hands: you cannot remember what it was like to be loved. Maybe you

weren’t. Maybe you never.

But Pompeii spots Vesuvius over its shoulder — devil, there, happy to die, I saw YOU.

Heatwave, *decimation*, I swear to god one day i’ll look at it,

I wish my lover was anything but the sun.

anthony bourdain in beirut

In the nightclub, I saw a girl take a breath. And the airport turned into a ball of fire.
And she stepped forward. And I stepped forward. And the godlessness between our
many-splendored denominations took the next breath in the room.

THIS IS NOT IT at all (fuck) this was not what I meant to say at *all*.
this phoenix city, smoldering with jet fuel, bombs blowing out like
ebony-smoked suns over the hillside, I was born to love you. I was
sent here to love you. I was *supposed* to love you but as these things go,
now we will see each other destroyed.
If there were the right surgery,
I'd hire the best city doctor to cut all the bitterness out of your heart
and sew it into mine. The best city doctor. best that money could rouse.
And you would eat shawarma and drink arak under the ineffably blue sky,
And jaded I would mutter into bottles my hundred unutterable doubts.

Dark Math

There are 110
million land mines.

If 10% are detonated
by children, how many

would be left?
If one third of the children

lose one limb, and two thirds
lose both limbs,

how many limbs
are lost?

Show your work.
Justify your answer.

Taking Dictation

I'm Berlusconi minus the pomade, Putin's twenty bottles
of vodka and birthday mash note. *You're one of my five
real friends.* Just as a poet always writes for other poets,

an authoritarian is only authentic with their own kind.
"Expropriate that!" I shout like Chavez as I walk the streets
checking for my portrait in every government office.

I'm Bokassa sans crocodiles, a Mobutu who lacks branding:
*The all-powerful warrior who because of his endurance
and inflexible will to win, goes from conquest to conquest,*

leaving fire in his wake. Last night, I dreamed I woke up
to tiny dusty footprints marching across my bedroom floor:
hard-soled shoes with pointy toes. Auguring? I'm not sure.

I'm Ceaușescu without the scepter or bronze yak from Mao,
running a police state the size of Candyland. Being feared
is often confused with being loved. If only I could dictate *that*.

Make me magnetic, let me thrill to being groped, grabbed
from an oversized suit pocket, stripped of my envelope, pawed
for all to see. Pull comes with push, you say? I'll take that.

I'm Kim Jong-un's letter with nothing but memories on my back.
Even in exile, I'm a star. I can do anything. Watch me burn down
this gulag they call archives. Hot blue, red giant, white dwarf.

Expanding Sonnet

I am beginning to notice more space
for tenderness in my hours: a hillside
holding its wildflowers close, horses gleaming
beside the road like beautiful earth-bound
swans, the quiet inlet of your palm
waiting in the dark: these are small things,
but so is the distance between my childhood
bed & the floor, yet didn't my nightmares always
have enough room? I've never doubted the boundlessness
of fear, so why have I lived as if devotion must open
& close like a door? I've seen the horizon trace the red edge
of each evening with such care, but it has taken me until now
to recognize love in my life, not as an aperture,
but as the light that fills it.

Fickle Fingers in the Underbrush

This body is not a voice. This voice is not an opera. This opera is not an autopsy. My trachea is not the source of the wind that makes your hair flutter just so. Just so. In the autumn, there is a rumor that buzzes through the kingdom of insects. Static & fuzz & fucking & drugs– a hymn is whatever sound you make in the pursuit of pure ecstasy. If god is real, then she is a being that built me for believing that pleasure is a name cried out just to feel it reverberate through the calcified parts of my body. Oh Lord, if there is a season for disappearing then it is measured in glaciation, in rising tides, in limestone dissolving. Take me to the cave with paintings depicting a moment in history, when it was impossible for humanity to imagine living beyond the body's ability to function. Lascaux, Chauvet, Altamira. Expression leaps outside of the body when the world is just that dangerous; leaps out and into materials more suitable for the self-preservation of a suffocating history– limonite, yellow ochre, hematite, charcoal, burnt bones, red ochre, grounded calcite, and umber. The possibility exists that hidden everywhere under the crust that form the continents, rests another sky painted by the hands of Cro-magnons, for I have learned that the earth has a PHD in containment & obliteration. I have learned that the best prisons are the ones we design for ourselves in the name of education. I have yearned to become a master of incarcerating architecture, but I am just a city planner in a society obsessed with recidivism. Just think, the public is locked out of Lascaux because the awe of our collective breath was destroying it. Hold that as I absorb the surgical sounds of the brown pelicans becoming scalpels in the shallow ocean off Islamorada, where they vanish for a moment, becoming violent machinations in the heavens of a world less familiar, but no less alive & dying.

Amen

There was a box of Marlboros on the floor,

On the couch there were sounds like spirals

you picked them up, gave birth to a flame,

spun out of the tightly wound melodies of youths

gnarled with robberies: yours first

like a tiny sunrise in a pitch black room

mine second, with the cyclical rhythm

of private property taken like a public commodity,

saint they called the man who tied you to this rhythm

and saint was the name you called him when he burned me.

"the earth is a living thing"

~ Miss Lucille Clifton

language is a living thing
little symbols words and syntax breathe
the dawn shape
of its body. as we
speak and read and listen and
write it it moves.
colorful
etymologies praise ancestors
accents inflections—
conversions in conversation. utterance
plays essence
figures and frames its sprouting
possibilities withers useless
branches claims futures.

Cough

This broken glass so bright in me
I wheeze, I breathe, I bleed, look
down at the sink colors and gleam

in the drain. Life together with death
gifts us miracles. Somehow, still
here. The apartment at night shook

until we found one morning, still until
I teetered with support beams, wood
in sounds around us creaks gravity—

pressure clutters my skull, but
what hangs, what balances
sharp from the end of the plumb

line held vertical and air enough
in me, these feather lungs, this life, to
make blood new, keep going.

Jefferson County

I can't get a hold of the interior
or the coast,
each slips out of sight the moment I arrive.

This is Texas. This is Louisiana.
This is a town in each. The water is not drinkable
today. We do not drink it.
We drive to the next town and the horizon
glows orange
with a day that is always setting far
away.

The families eat gumbo and remoulade and nurse
on long-necked bottles.
Young couples are seated with their backs against
the wall.

They are on a date. It is a certain date.

They stock the shelves near the doors with novelty
items—a broken marriage, a bouncing ball, toothpicks.

The journey back home is forever. Chemical
lights creep along the coast.

They see how God made us. They make God
in us.

Christmas is also forever.
It smells like creation, like hard asphalt and
headlights pointed the wrong direction.

Cave Dwellers

The tarantula dozes
in a glass aquarium
in a dark and dusty pet-store
Maybe she who comes from burrows
does not mind the lack of light
though surely she'd prefer
soft walls around her
and freedom
to move through them

The man at the cash register
sits in his creaking chair
man with large belly
and sad eyes
man who speaks
with stops and starts
He keeps her beside him
She is his He is hers
her aggression and stored-up
poison his hands her source
of water and food

He loves to show her off
the fangs the eyes
the silk thread winding out
taut at his tug
the dark spinneret

His awe is childlike
She never grows old

So they are contained together
day by day
shy and sheltered in this place
They even smell alike--
scent of accumulation
of time of creatures
that come and go

Postpartum

The young mother by the cafe window
babe in arms brushes her lips over
that velvet pulse her newborn's head
then passes the child
drooping bundle across the table
to her friend Now she can eat

I sit at an interior table
my hands free
these twenty years

People pass by outside rain
blowing chill
an African lady in her stiff
shiny cloth a trio of students
bareheaded backpacked

The mother receives her child again
digs in her bag with one hand
pulls out a garment
slips it over her head
arranging it just so
to cover herself and her child

The drape hides secret
of mouth and nipple of
body making milk of body
receiving I know
the now of it
right now the force
of that suck the ache of pressure
breaking

An Embarrassment of Pandas

There are people who get paid for inventing names
for pharmaceuticals, failed storytellers, perhaps,

who test the castrations of Latin families
and dock their portmanteaus on the surveyed

shores of focus groups. How can anyone of us
satisfy towards a singularity?

A mortician drew sperm from rich dead men
in tonight's episode of my favorite show,

raised his own farmhouse of extortion babies
after disposing of their mothers.

A taxidermist scraped the fat from an extinct
zebra relative called the quagga. Thought

to be its own species, the man proved
it was simply a color variation for survival.

Turns out, the books simplified the times.
How do we not die for all the mythologies

we've put to fire: Metaphorically, no stranger
tells another stranger the whole truth.

Literally, parties are for fun. The young woman
who confessed she came up with Prilosec

on a notepad amongst other baby names
now fifteen years older, may have her own

children. I think of her seven states
away, because we only know she lived

in Minnesota from that one night, killing time
at a mutual friend's Chicago apartment.

I'm reading to our second city of joy
a book about animals his brother

passed down to him. Who decided on a circus
of puffins, a murder of crows, a celebration

of polar bears? Whose job is it to look in the eyes
of another being and draw up its public worth?

Do Not

Your mother phones to tell you
that someone you don't even know has
up and died—
38 and with a blood clot to the lung. Used to be
she warned you about reading in the dark
and parking lots—
the men waiting under your car
with lust and razor blades.
Keep your keys in your hand.
Never park by a van.
Never walk by yourself and if you must,
a can of pepper spray at arms-length in your bag.
Don't make eye contact,
don't give an inch,

so many don'ts it's no wonder
language itself was born of fear—
the root of words first uttered to warn
of danger, not unlike the instinctual tizzy
my chickens make when a hawk wings
the sky over their coop. Even
trees release chemicals when distressed—
an infestation present, a giraffe
hell-bent on its' dinner of leaves,
and that flock of birds perched—
you won't find them
remarking from their piped beaks
the precious slant of light settling
in their boughs like prayer, but a song
instead for loneliness, an alarm
for the dog that won't let up
the bark it wears.

And even the pretty ones—words for
love or *bloom*, *mother*
and *moon*—a kind of balm to sugar
the worry of absence.
We are irrevocably propelled
to be in our living plagued with fear
for all we stand to lose—and still,
we'd rather the trouble of remaining
our bodies—

oh Earth,
how you must dazzle us.

Patti Smith

You a wonder / every inch the glam gothic crow / You a granted
clear explosive magic of empathic intelligence / the dauntless
[w]reckoning of your weight / like a quantum singularity of Furies
wreathed in the eccentricities of genius / You an unfettered energy /
ever ready to make a big noise / You got a geography of your own
/ strangely magical & [w]reckless / The fearful / galvanized by
your songs / re-inscribes people and your experiences into the world /
You a brazen indecency of sound / *three chords merged with*
the power of the Word / The crowd knows every word / the throb &
burn of aperture & rift / of raped over centuries / into existence / You
a city of Women who roar / when the wolves come out to play / The gun-
metal disdain of despots & hoarders of gain / of gatekeepers & too
many dicks / Their altar / a pedestaled cage / the sacred chalice full of
rotten Christian teeth / You are rain-pearled / Sun-filled / a condensation
of cloud pulled downward by gravity / spiraling to the center
of something spinning denser than / larger than / older than a fetish
of radiant tragedies dressed in collateral adjectives / You the melting away
of arrogance / a corner of sunlight on the bed sheet erasing a violence /
that many is the person / who never had the courage to do something
/ say something / be / something / the milli-second gap in time /
it takes the fire to follow the fuse / from the detonator / to kaboom!!

Everything Soft and Welcoming

In the last hour of evening light the sky has flipped over
to publish her pink belly. Vulnerability always leads
to darkness. The sailboats, stagnant at the lake,
are destined to stay empty until tomorrow, no rhythmic sway
can get persons on the water at this hour. The reflection
of the masts fizzle out before elbowing shore.
One last boat pulls into the launch with ghastly fluorescents
blasting over the liquid magenta. The family hops onto the dock
to hook the boat to the hitch, let the color
drip back into her body. The sailboats pendulum
from the anchors. A girl from the boat chases
after her mutt and walks bent over through the sand
once she has him around the collar. This is the time, the dog thought,
to run. One last chance to be free before everything soft
and welcoming slides off the earth. But those sailboats
will be here tomorrow. When dusk spreads,
those boats will still shiver in the water. Come tomorrow
they'll once again ask themselves if the world
is more than a place for trembling when others are near.

Praise Poem for VapoRub Half-Emptied

Praise the glassy-eyed me
the christened path
between throat and diaphragm
the light trail between nose and clavicle

Praise the childhood in my mouth
Sunday morning cartoons
under a striped stained blanket
where the Smurfs look
extra blue that day

Praise the Monday telenovelas
where a twin slept with
a doctor who was married
to the other twin

Praise the aunties with
spurred or callused feet
and the best hands for brow,
onion broth, and gossip

Praise the mothers who light
no candle in grief— instead
they pull a side drawer off its track
for garlic tinctures
and blue bottles half-empty

Praise the blue bottle
its text smeared by lined fingers
year after year after year

Praise the blue bottle
with no label at all
just a fire waiting to be scooped
and spread over

Praise the steamed stubborn towel
that bakes us in
completes its job
and holds us hostage

Praise Vicks and any-
brand VapoRub
for making our melanin remember
how to breathe and live

When Some Poets Go Over Their Reading Time on Stage

It's as if they revert back
to nights of scarlet Solo cups,
and they're toasting themselves
for knowing the name Descartes
or building the perfect card tower;
six layers up is the new record.
Or maybe they had a *Price Is Right*
dream and this is their moment,
to spin for a golden chalice,
have mic fever 'cause the crowd
is chanting their name and numbers.

They imagine themselves as a superhero,
legs spread in a power stance.
Eyes gazing over a needy city
spreading words, rhyme, or look that says
*I know what you know,
see it in my eyes or
in the threads
of this mic'd up red cape.*

Or their a modern-day cowboy or girl,
day-walking about breaking
instead of being broken—
wild grey horses
their stalls barely holding
the size of the MC saying
their name in lights.

It's as if they're all
fighting the belief
that their poems
stacked
like past lives
new aches
are just loose-
skinned Clementine's.
And they are tired
of waiting
in the shade
from people
who want

to keep them
right there.

Ways to Gauge How Windy It Is

Look at a tree.
Are the branches moving?

Toss something light,
like a feather shuttlecock
or a crepe paper anemone
up in the air. (Not
directly over your head.)

Do you hear wind chimes?

Make an anemometer
out of five paper cups,
two straws, and a pencil.

Observe a flag.
How much does it flap?
How far does it extend?

Ask yourself,
if you needed to cast ashes
would today be a good day for that?

Are the watery tops of large breaking waves being blasted into spindrift?
Are there extensive linear foam streaks and airborne spray?

Use a portmanteau like
AccuWeather or Intellicast.

Turn yourself into a rainbow
windsock and see how it feels.

Take a breath and hold it.

ART

Equation of Eternity



Oil & acrylic on canvas

Mimicry



Oil & acrylic on canvas

Resplendent Reincarnation of Meanings



Oil & acrylic on canvas

Solaristics Deadlock



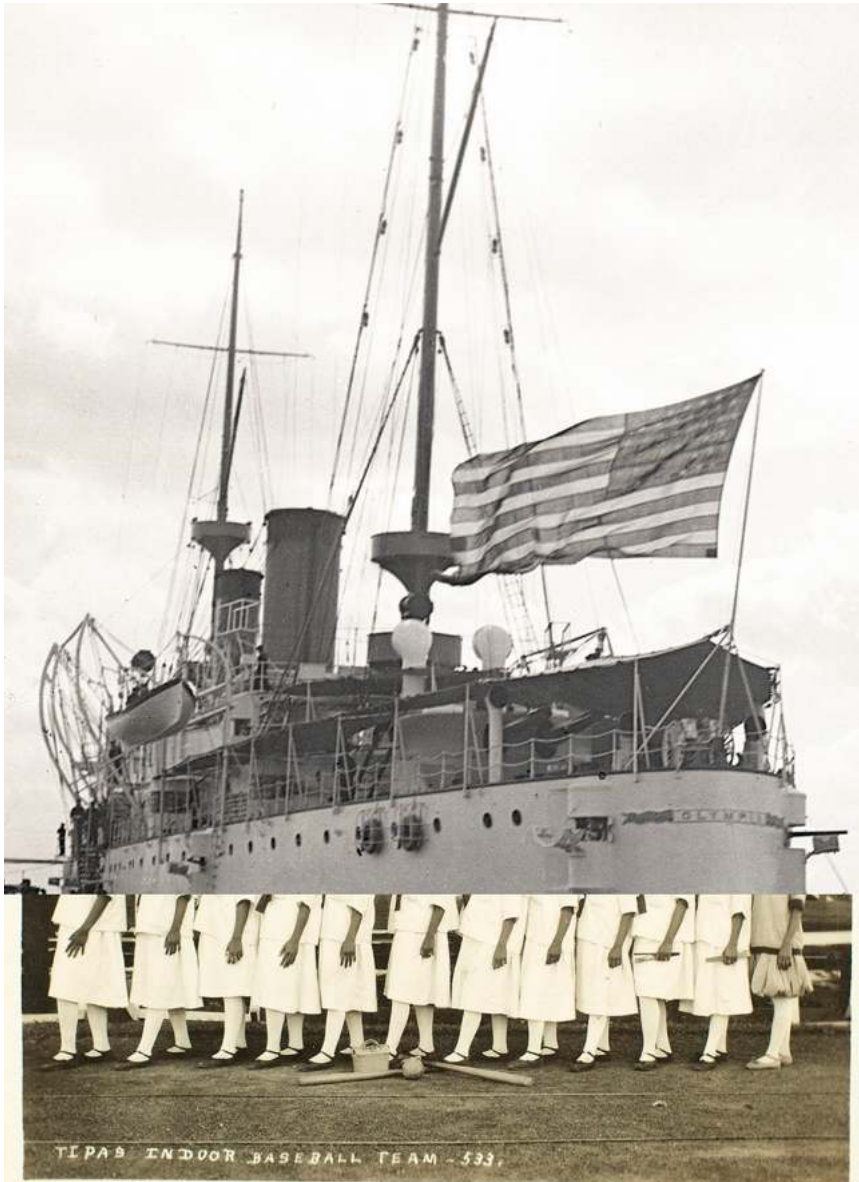
Oil & acrylic on canvas

Antrevolt



Oil & acrylic on canvas

Olympia



2022, photocollage

Mention the Geographic



Manila Sunset



2022, photomontage

Partially Civilized



2022, photocollage

Bagobo Warriors



2021, photomontage

Cliff



Photography

Field



Photography

Light of Hope



Oil paint on canvas

Enigmatic Incarnation



Oil paint on canvas

Psychedelic Forest



Oil paint on canvas

Reasonable Distance



Digital Art

A stylized graphic of a mountain range in shades of blue and purple, with white speckles resembling stars or snow. The word "FICTION" is superimposed in the center in a bold, dark blue, sans-serif font.

FICTION

Overwatering

After the funeral, Kayla joins her mom and aunts back at her grandmother's apartment to divide up Nana's stuff. She stands to the side as the older women barter over silverware and picture frames until her mom approaches with a tremendous Christmas cactus.

"Take it," says Kayla's mom. "It'll brighten up your living room."

"Absolutely not," says Kayla.

"Someone needs to." Kayla's mom picks at the remains of last season's flowers.

"It's almost thirty years old. Same as you."

"I can't keep plants alive."

"This one," Kayla's mom says, "will be different."

*

The Four Houseplants Kayla Has Already Killed

1. The spider plant from her freshman dorm that she forgot to take home over winter break.
2. The philodendron Jason gave her that, despite impeccable window placement and watering, succumbed to the hatred she harbored for him after he cheated with his ex-girlfriend.
3. The basil plant that turned yellow because she admitted to friends that she was only mostly pro-choice.
4. The ficus that withered because she took her dog to the vet to be euthanized, even though he would likely have lived another year with daily injections.

*

"What the hell is that?" Jason asks from the couch as Kayla shimmies the plant through their apartment door.

"Can you help me?" The leaves tremble as if her voice originates from the roots. Jason drops his video game controller and sidles between the couch and chair. Kayla relinquishes the plant and he delivers it to the scuffed kitchen table.

“How was the funeral?” he asks.

She slips off her oxfords. “Fine.”

“I could have gone with you.”

“That wouldn’t have worked.”

“Your mom has to find out we’re back together eventually.”

The weight of his statement causes the cactus’s leaves to wilt. Jason returns to the couch and retrieves his controller. “What was your grandma like?” he asks.

“She was amazing.”

Kayla would extrapolate, but there’s no point. Jason’s already unpaused.

*

Kayla’s Most Cherished Memories with Her Grandmother

1. Picking raspberries from the overgrown patch behind Nana’s house.
2. Sitting on Nana’s lap, paging through old college year books in which Nana was almost the only girl.
3. Standing next to her grandmother at the ribbon cutting ceremony for the new elementary school that bore Nana’s name.
4. When Kayla’s life-plan anxieties grew too sharp, and Nana would say, “You don’t need to find your path, sweetheart. You’re on it already.”

*

Within three days, the plant’s leaves start turning brown.

“Water it more,” says Jason as he pours cereal into a bowl.

“It’s a cactus. Too much water will kill it.”

“That’s fucking dumb. Plants need water.” Jason returns to the couch. The milk remains on the counter, the cereal bag unclipped. The branch resting in Kayla’s palm droops further.

“Jason,” she says.

“Sorry, mission’s started.”

“Put the damn milk away.”

The force of her tone prompts him to act. His eyes remain on the television, but he returns to the kitchen to clean up. When Kayla gets home from work that afternoon,

Grandma's cactus has regained its emerald color.

*

The Parts of Jason Kayla Most Wishes She Could Fix

1. His work-from-home job that lets him sit around all day without getting dressed.
2. His rudeness, especially his swearing.
3. Whenever she's on her period, he acts like she's contagious.
4. When they make up after their frequent fights, he says, "I'm not sure why you put up with me. You could do so much better."
5. He's right.

*

For a few days, the plant looks healthy. Then some leaves turn black and drop off, but only on certain mornings. It takes a week for Kayla to figure out the correlation.

"I can't have sex with you for a while."

Jason removes his headphones. "What? Why?"

"Yeast infection."

"What the fuck does that even mean?"

"Look it up. We're taking some time off."

Jason shakes his head and clenches his jaw, and Kayla wonders what he's stopping himself from saying. How awful could it actually be?

"I'm going back to porn then," he says.

"I don't care."

"You sure cared last time."

*

The week Kayla stops doing Jason's laundry, the cactus grows six inches. The morning after she kicks his friends out for being too loud at 1:00 AM, it erupts in flowers the color of tangerines. Sometimes Kayla whispers to the plant, quiet enough that Jason can't hear, in hopes that her grandmother can.

Five weeks after Nana's death, Kayla needs some time away from Jason, and the perfect opportunity arises: instead of declining the quarterly invitation to her office's

weekend leadership retreats at a log cabin resort two hours north of the city, she says yes. While sitting around a campfire, she shares an idea for a new customer program, and several members of the administrative team love it. So does the company's owner. By the time she returns home on Sunday, Nana's Christmas cactus is dead.

She drops her suitcase, approaches the kitchen table, and brushes its cooked-spinach leaves. "What happened to my plant?"

"What do you mean?" asks Jason.

"It's gone."

"Are you sure? I watered it a bunch." He keeps his eyes glued to the television. "Don't worry. Plants are really hard to keep alive."

"I know." She straightens her shoulders, stands tall. "Can you take it to the dumpster for me?"

Jason sighs. "Fine." He grabs the cactus, and Kayla holds the door open for him. After she hears his footfalls on the stairs, she fills the watering can that came with the Christmas cactus. Then she waters Jason's video game console, his cellphone, and his laptop. Over each, the glassy stream of water explodes into a hundred sparkle drops. The water bubbles up around the keys and flows from the drives and ports. She's surprised how much liquid the items can absorb. They can't get enough.

On Pilipino Time

For as long as I've known her, my mother has only ever had one friend, my Ninong Boying. They weren't related by blood but "some things were thicker", "*mas makapal kaysa sa dugo*", they would say at any of my mentioning of why they had never been anything more. It was a relationship I had to grow up to understand. When I asked the question as a child, blood was something to look away from. Now a nurse in my thirties, it was something that demanded gloves, wipes, and my immediate and full attention. Their bond was more or less like treating a wound, and it was too late to pick at it now. They were too old not to know better.

Then the day came when I was processing patients for Dr. Kwon and his name came up on her morning docket. I had to read his name twice to make sure it was him. It was not uncommon to find Filipinos with the first name Boying or the last name Santos, but his middle name, Dori, was unique. Boying Dori Santos, it was him.

My first reaction was to call my mother, but patient confidentiality forbade me from texting her then and there. After the initial shock, I proceeded to weigh the actual level of concern. Dr. Kwon was a family practice physician. Most if not all her appointments were annual routine check-ups that ended in a handshake and/or a lollipop. Of the ones that weren't, a reason for the visit would be noted before the actual meeting. I checked the box in the database for notes about his appointment, and I was relieved to find it blank. My Ninong Boying must have just switched doctors, I speculated. No cause for concern, I thought.

An hour later, I opened the door to the waiting room and found him reading a *Highlights* from 1987 with a large family of anthropomorphic rabbits having a party on the cover. Dr. Kwon's waiting room was filled with them. Heaps crowded the coffee tables and outnumbered the medical pamphlets on their racks. They dated as far back to when she first started her practice. A legacy in themselves.

I called his full name and he tossed the withered publication on his seat and zoomed to the door before he even recognized me. He was in his blue uniform shirt from Hobby Lobby, black and grey striped shorts, and a pair of slip-on checkered Vans. He looked up at me, his transition lenses dulling the brown of his eyes, and his mouth scrunched

inward, showing his age. “Aye, Ryan!” He squeezed my bicep to which I instinctually flexed. “This is where you are nursing?”

I took his other hand and bent over to bring it to my forehead to *mano*, the Filipino sign of respect, but he snatched it away before we could make a connection.

“*Nak*, not in pront of the *puti*.” He whispered, always pronouncing his “f”s as “p”s and twitching his lip toward poor Mr. Lintel, the only “white person” he could’ve been talking about, who had been in every other week regarding his hemorrhoids.

I watched Mr. Lintel stand up and sit down, oblivious to anything else but his own pain, and shook my head. “Uncle,” I whispered, already ushering him inside, the automatic door closing after us, “no one cares. They have their own problems.”

“It’s no problema. *Kasi*, I have my *kababayan*, my countryman!” He trumpeted and tapped my shoulder while I corralled him on the scale and jotted down his weight.

“Two-hundred and ten pounds.”

“*Talaga*? Can’t you shave off a pew?”

The image of myself slouching in my seat at church flashed at the word “pew” before I realized what he meant. “Sorry, uncle.” I said and pulled the headpiece down on the stadiometer to determine his height. “Five-foot, eight-inches.”

“Ay, *Salamat*. Thank God. Getting pat didn’t make me shorter!”

I shook the image of someone patting him down like a nail, the earth beneath him giving way before he was nothing but a head and shoulders. I brought him over to the cubicle I shared with another nurse and collected his temperature and blood pressure. Ninety-one degrees, 30/90, both normal.

“Aray! That’s very tight, *anak*.” He pouted, rubbing his arm as I undid the strap from the machine. He was always a little childish. Despite being twice my age, he still had the habit of puffing his cheeks when he was upset, of reacting to immediate concerns and ignoring the rest.

“The hard part is over now, uncle. I’ll lead you to your room after I type my findings up for the doctor.”

“*Galing-galing*. You’re very propessional, Joseph Montenegro.” He said, reading my name plaque on my desk. No one in my family ever called me Joseph. With them, I was always JJ. Where the nickname came from, no one knew.

“How are you feeling uncle? Any reason for your visit?” It was a customary phrase I

uttered with every patient, but having someone I knew, let alone cared about, be the direct recipient of it now added a noticeable shakiness in my voice.

“Nothing. Just work. They want to know if this old guy can still lift pive-pound picture prames.” He groaned. He had worked in the frames section of Hobby Lobby for over fifteen years. Before then, he was the manager of an ill-begotten Kmart.

I typed in “patient in need of a physical” into the info box for Dr. Kwon and told him we could provide the necessary paperwork for his HR after he was cleared, going through the motions and assuring myself, more than him, that everything was going to be fine.

However, later, as Dr. Kwon evaluated him behind closed doors, the orders for several labs and a referral to an oncologist showed up on his digital file before they even finished. I proceeded with contacting the appropriate offices and scheduling the appointments for my Ninong Boying as if he were any other patient, but the anxiety began to creep up on me and, by the time Dr. Kwon was asking me in-person to make the calls, I was still frozen in front of my screen, my uncle sitting back in the chair next to me, unchanged, as childish and as clueless as ever.

“Do I have to get my blood taken, *anak*? Can’t I spit or *umihi sa* cup?”

“What happened, uncle? What did she find? It says you need to see an oncologist.”

“Oh, you know. I mentioned some guy at work my age had a big stomach. It hurt and it was not the stomach but the prostate. His doctor told him everyone dies of prostate cancer. I told Dr. Kwon and she said he wasn’t wrong. My stomach is round. That’s enough. But this is just in case. *Magpahinga*, relax, *anak*. You look more worried than I am.”

I set up his labs with our in-house tech same-day and asked his preferred times for his oncology appointment before calling their department. While I was on the phone, my Ninong Boying watched me like a proud parent watches his child play sports. He and my mother raised me my entire life, so he had the right. But, like an athlete, I needed my full concentration to do my job well. I turned my back to him and curled up as if waiting for a pitch. I gripped the phone, anxious of what might be thrown our way.

A week after his appointment, there was a small gathering at my Ninong Boying’s apartment—an officers’ bi-weekly meeting for their Filipino Association which was just an excuse for them to play cards. By then, my personal diagnosis had evolved from practical to far-reaching. Initially, I had deduced that the most obvious cancers he might have were mouth, throat, or lung cancer on account of his forty-year smoking habit. The prospect

of such a thing was simply inevitable. However, the more I thought about the day he was seen, the more possibilities arose. His fast movement from his seat to the door could have been symptoms of lymphoma, his sour musk, a terminal stage of melanoma. The possible outcomes took its toll on me so much that I did something I didn't usually do and invited myself to their meeting. As to not alarm my mother that anything might have been wrong, I told her I was simply interested in joining their game of *pusoy*, to which she welcomed me and my money without hesitation. Gambling with family wasn't gambling at all, she often mentioned, because you weren't losing anything. It was like the right hand passing it to the left, both from the same body, the same pocket. "*Maramig kamay sa isang katawan.*" Many hands to one body.

I arrived at my Ninong Boying's apartment an hour early which was really two hours early on account of Filipino time. My mother and Ninong Boying both hated the term. They felt that the expectation that Filipinos were always late detracted from their real merit and hard work. Because of that, they raised me by their philosophy that if you were on time, you were late, and, if you were early, you were on time. Yet, despite a life-time of this conditioning, rapping at his door at a time far from the Filipino kind, I couldn't help but feel like I had just missed him, like he was already far beyond my reach.

And when his door chain rattled and his voice came through the door, I felt like I was merely greeting his ghost. "JJ! *Ano ginagawa mo?* What are you doing here?"

I composed myself. Nothing had happened yet. Nothing had been determined. Everything was still conjecture. "I'm just here to get in on your game."

"*Laro?* You ask your mom?"

I let myself in and sat at the counter looking into his kitchen. On the stove, Filipino sweet potatoes were boiling in a pot. I folded my hands and took in a pungent whiff of their honeyed earthiness, the homeliness of a fellow bachelor's abode. "I wouldn't be here if I didn't."

"Just so she knows. I hope you brought a lot of money." He snorted while locking his door, unable to hide his unearned overconfidence. My Ninong Boying was so bad at gambling he made it look like he enjoyed losing, but nothing could have been further from the truth. My Ninong Boying hated to lose.

He made his way to the sweet potato and lifted the lid, his glasses fogging over in the steam. He dipped a wooden spoon in and stirred the pot before nudging one to check how

much it would give, how much it still resisted. “*Ay sarap. Patapos na.* The *kamote* is almost pinished.”

“Sounds good.” I said, lightly drumming my hands on the counter.

“Add a little sugar and *putang-ina* perfect!”

“Sounds great.”

“Great *lang*? It’s pantastic! Your paborite porever!” He said and returned the top, the fog slowly dissipating as he went to the fridge. “Beer?”

“Pantastico!” I humored him.

He laughed and grabbed two Corona Lites from the fridge. “*Ayun!* Pantastique!”

By the time he had cut a lime and mashed a wedge into each bottle, his eyes were completely clear. He handed me one and we toasted to Jose Rizal. My Ninong Boying and I didn’t believe in God, but the closest we had ever been to prayer was toasting to the dead revolutionaries. Sometimes it was Gandhi. Other times, Stalin, Zapata, Castro, and Malcolm X. Once, it was Britney Spears.

We took our swigs for them, the dull bite of our beers lifting off our tongues and fading up into the ether. My mother still believed us practicing Catholics, but how could we be? A toast didn’t mean anything to someone who had nothing to lose.

Hidden behind his old Pioneer speakers, there were dents I made when I was seven. Deep notches bit into the door frame to his bathroom where he monitored my height until I was seventeen. Feint imprints of cigarette butts dotted the patio from years of watching his back smoke. If I had poured my hand in between the cool tweed wedges of his couch, I would have found ancient cornels of popcorn from many childhood movie nights. Looking around his apartment, listening to the *kamote* whistle, I realized my Ninong Boying had very little but a lot to lose.

At the very least, I thought, a person like that shouldn’t be alone, and I couldn’t help but make notations in my head and include myself in the suggested measures he should take. We should listen to the doctors. We should do the chemo. We should take the operation. We should do whatever it took to fight, whatever it took to win.

Then, somewhere between our wheelchair ride out of the ICU and the paperwork to close the bill, my Ninong Boying pinched the back of my right arm, above my elbow. I jolted, my back buzzing from the sudden jerk more than from where he had nipped me.

“*Anak*, you were somewhere else.”

“Sorry, uncle.” I said and quickly took another sip of my drink. I had held it for so long my hand was numb, the beer lukewarm.

“A girl?” He winked.

“No.”

“Susmariosep.” He straightened his posture in the seat beside me. “A boy?” He blinked.

“No.”

He nodded and took a quick sip before talking again. “Ip not that, then what?”

“Are you doing all right uncle? Did—did they find anything?” I stammered, watching his face carefully for any tell, anything that would give what he had away.

But my Ninong Boying simply returned his usual wry smile, the kind I couldn’t tell what hid behind. “*Anak*, I’ll be pine. I’m strong. I’m invincible. It will pass!” He said, not denying he wasn’t alright, not denying he did have cancer.

“I don’t think that’s how it works.” Not consoled by his words in the least. I thought of pine trees just then, how the older they were, the quicker they burned.

My uncle coolly drank his beer, strutting as if cancer were a medal of honor or a trophy he had won. He swiveled what he had left, the green peel spinning in the middle of its vortex. “Exactly, it’s tem-po-rar-ry. Why worry about what will go away in time, *anak*?”

“Are you doing something for it?”

“Op course!”

“Will you really be all right?”

“Didn’t I tell you, *na naman*?”

“What is it? What’s wrong with you?”

“Nothing I can’t handle. Don’t wore-ry!”

“Why won’t you tell me?”

“Ay, stop, *tapos na*. Knowing won’t make it better. I know already.”

“I’d feel better if you told me. If you told mom.”

He winced at my mention of my mother and, out of respect, I stopped and waited for him to fill whatever silence was growing between us.

“*Tapos na*. Stop.” He repeated, finishing his beer. “*Tapos-na-naman., Tapos-na-naman.*” He sang and laughed. “You remember that song? Your mother used to sing for you all the time when you were little.”

I tried to remember it beyond my memories of learning how to drive behind the

wheel of his car, the times he complemented my drawings of squiggly airplanes and stick people I associated with the real things. “Vaguely. It means ‘It’s over again?’”

He clapped to each syllable as he sang the song again. “Your mom sang it that way because you heard it like that. *Tapos-na-naman*, you would sing when it was really ‘*Pasko-na-naman*’ you were listening to! It’s Christmas again, *talaga!*”

I remembered the song, followed by the array of lights behind young tired eyes, behind an amalgamation of several Filipino morning masses throughout my youth. “Why did she keep singing it to me that way?”

My uncle got up and turned off the burner to the *kamote*. The whistling died, and, when he lifted the lid, he was engulfed in a fleeting, sweet-smelling puff of steam. “*Kasi* it made you happy.”

He retrieved a plate and a pair of tongs and picked out the sweet potato, shaking them off before piling them on the dish. He put them before me with a small saucer of sugar, but they were still too hot to peel them.

“You ever wonder what it would’ve been like if you were with my mother?” I said to pass the time before they cooled. It was hardly the first time I had asked either of them the same question. Life was short if not for trying.

“Some things are thicker than blood.” He replied like so many times before, with a smile and eyes that saw and hid all the possibilities.

“But you need us!” I pleaded, “Now, more than ever.”

“And I have you, *anak*. I’m not lonely, I promise.” He said, emphasizing the “p” again as if it wasn’t supposed to be there. Even before I knew him, he had already been resigned to the commiseration of hellos and goodbyes and all the murkiness of waiting in between. It was when he was the most alive. “Only lonely people do lonely things like die. I will not die.” He said, reaching out, “I will live porever.”

Natural Displays of Grief

Hank brings me to the natural history museum to take my mind off things. He tells me nothing compares to disappearing in a maze of exhibits. He holds his arms out wide and points in every direction. “Look how far we’ve come,” he says. We are standing in a room filled with wooden tools.

The walls and backdrops are dark, the carpet speckled and blue. Track lights hang from the ceiling, spotlighting each plexiglass case. I’m reminded of junior high field trips, the hushed conversations, circling enclosed relics that bear no connection to my life.

He pulls me into the next dim room. “There’s so much to see.”

This is my third date with Hank, and my interest is waning. It doesn’t help that he smirks at anything phallic. He was probably the kid at the museum who kept getting in trouble for ducking ropes and touching the displays. But we met in a grief group, and he understands my moods.

I stop beside a green pendant, a stone creature with giant opal eyes. It reminds me of *E.T.*, something alien or reptilian.

“Beautiful, isn’t it?” Hank says.

I squint, wondering why anyone would wear something so grotesque.

“They bring luck.” He points at the description and winks.

I read how these pendants were passed down generation to generation, linking past, present, and future. It feels as if a giant vacuum is sucking the air out of the room. It’s too hot in here. Or too dark. I turn around, searching for exits.

In the next exhibit, I find case after case of beadwork and basketry. I find ceremonial costumes. I pause over one designated for mourners. It includes multiple layers, each scratchy or heavy: a spiky headpiece, a shell breastplate, a sack-dress decorated with geometric shapes carved from coconuts. There is a cloak made of twisted brown feathers that hang like dried leaves. It reminds me of a kid’s homemade costume, a feathery Chewbacca.

If I had my own mourning cloak, maybe strangers would be kinder or ask fewer questions. If I walked through the grocery store—the park, my son’s school—in a feathered cape, maybe everyone would give me a few feet of space. Maybe the cashier wouldn’t ask me to remove items from the belt when I came up short. Maybe the neighbors would stop scowling at my unkempt lawn. Maybe Misty would shut up about

attending the church potluck.

Hank places his hands on my shoulders. “You know, you’re not supposed to touch the glass.”

I step back, covering both cheeks with my palms. Did I really just press my nose against the case?

“The anniversaries will always be hardest,” he says.

Hank is right. I want to duck every rope, touch all the glass, climb inside each case. I want to hold every artifact carved and revered by the ancient dead. I want to uncover a yawning hole deep enough to swallow my grief.

I continue staring at the feathers, the way they hang and droop. I imagine peeling back the glass and running my fingers down the length of the cloak, absorbing its weight, its texture, breathing into its folds. At some point, these mourners stripped off their costumes, pushed their sorrow aside. And now, here it is, on display. Visible, but out of reach. Preserved, yet contained.

I scan the exhibit, looking for an opening I might slip through. “Let’s disappear,” I say. I grab Hank’s hand, and we glide into the next room, where we travel farther back in time.

BIOGRAPHIES

Fasasi Abdulrosheed Oladipupo

Fasasi Abdulrosheed Oladipupo is a Nigerian poet and the author of a micro-chapbook "Sidratul Muntaha" (*Ghost City Press*, 2022). His poetry has been nominated for Pushcart Prize, Best of the Net and Best New Poet anthology. His work has been published or forthcoming at; *Poetry South*, *Oakland Arts Review*, *Carolina Muse*, *ROOM*, *Santa Ana River Review*, *Ambit Magazine*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Oxford Review of Books*, *Olongo Africa*, *Stand Magazine*, *Louisiana Literature*, *GASHER Journal* and elsewhere. Fasasi tweets @FasasiDiipo

Alexey Adonin

Raised in Eastern Europe, Belarus, Alexey's artistic path began at a young age. He started attending Children's Art School drawing classes when he was nine. Later, he went to an art college that further helped develop his artistic skills and gave him a sizeable practical base. In the early '90s, Alexey and his family relocated to Israel, where he resides and works today. Alexey has exhibited locally and internationally. His works have also been acquired by notable private collections worldwide. He has received numerous awards, most recently from Bruxelles Art Vue Foundation.

ARTIST STATEMENT

Alexey explores the point of convergence between abstraction and surrealism to create a channel of communication between his inner world and his audience. He strives not only to share his personal vision but to invite his viewers to forge their own personal interpretations and narratives by involving them both emotionally and intellectually. His approach to his work is without preconception, allowing first for randomness. Alexey then takes advantage of the mind's ability to derive order out of chaos. Finally, he strives to move away from banal copying reality toward creating one of his own—something that somehow reflects his inner world.

Christopher Ankney

Christopher Ankney's first collection, *Hearsay*, won the 2014 Jean Feldman Prize at Washington Writers' Publishing House and was a finalist for the 2015 Ohioana Book Award for Poetry. His poems have appeared in *Boston Review*, *Gulf Coast*, *Hunger Mountain*, *Prairie Schooner*, and more. This fall, find him in *Cumberland River Review*, Electric Literature's *The Commuter*, and *Poetry South*. Visit his author website for more: www.christopherankney.com.

Magdalena Arias Vásquez

Magdalena Arias Vásquez is a poet and translator based in NYC. She is a recent graduate from Williams College, where she majored in English and French and spent a lot of her time reading and avoiding the freezing Massachusetts temperatures. A lot of her work centers questions of memory in Latin America, anchored by experiences of American intervention and dictatorship in Panama. When she's not writing, she spends her time taking photographs, making matcha and giving her friends an absurd amount of book recommendations.

Abbie Barker

Abbie Barker is a creative writing instructor living with her husband and two kids in New Hampshire. Her fiction has appeared in *Cincinnati Review*, *Cutbank*, *Berkeley Fiction Review*, *Pithead Chapel*, *Monkeybicycle*, *Superstition Review*, Best Microfiction 2022, and other publications. Abbie's stories have been nominated for The Pushcart Prize, Best of the Net, Best Small Fictions, and longlisted for the Wigleaf Top 50 Very Short Fictions. Read more at abbiebarker.com

John Peter Beck

John Peter Beck is a professor in the labor education program at Michigan State University where he co-directs a program that focuses on labor history and the culture of the workplace, Our Daily Work/Our Daily Lives. His poetry has been published in a number of journals including *The Seattle Review*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, *The Louisville Review* and *Passages North* among others.

Mihir Bellamkonda

Mihir Bellamkonda is a poet based in DC, currently working on their debut collection, or, perhaps, sleeping. Their work is published or forthcoming in *The West Trade Review*, *The Offing*, and *Jet Fuel Review*, among other journals. They can be found on socials @MihirWords.

Benjamin Bellas

Benjamin Bellas currently lives in Miami, Florida. His works are forthcoming or have been published/exhibited in *The Broadkill Review*, *Qu Literary Magazine*, *Fives* (A Companion to *Denver Quarterly*), *The Pinch*, *Cadillac Cicatrix*, *Drain Magazine*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; la Space, Hong Kong; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; and the Academy of Fine Arts, Helsinki.

Michael Carson

Michael Carson's work has appeared in *Numéro Cinq*, *The Road Ahead: Stories of the Forever War*, and *Beyond Their Limits of Longing: Contemporary Writers and Veterans on the Lingering Stories of WW 1*. He deployed to Mosul, Iraq with the U.S. Army in 2006 and now teaches at a community college in Baytown, Texas. He spends his free time admiring Bruegel's painted birds.

Jian Choi

Jian Choi is a junior attending an international school in Gangnam, Korea. Her fine art skills have been developing since a young age, and she has also honed her digital art skills using tablets and software tools like Photoshop, Illustrator, and Lightroom. Recently, she won a certificate of high art performance at school and is excited to continue creating more artworks.

ARTIST STATEMENT

There are emotions that start and grow in each person. Unlike those who want to continue to give their hearts, some can feel overwhelmed by others' emotions or want to keep them at a certain distance. This work demonstrates the society that cuts off the branches of growing hearts just like a tree.

Kevin Clark

Kevin Clark's third volume of poems *The Consecrations* is published by *Stephen F. Austin University Press*. A limited hardbound run is available in celebration of the one-year anniversary of its publication. His second book *Self-Portrait with Expletives* won the *Pleiades Press* prize. Clark's poetry appears in the *Southern*, *Antioch*, *Georgia*, and *Iowa* reviews, as well as *Crazyhorse*, *Ploughshares*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Hotel Amerika*, *Poetry Northwest*, etc.

Aaron Coleman

Aaron Coleman is the author of *Red Wilderness* (Four Way Books, forthcoming 2025), *Threat Come Close* (Four Way Books, 2018) winner of the GLCA New Writers Award, and *St. Trigger* (Button, 2016), selected by Adrian Matejka for the Button Poetry Prize. He is the translator of Nicolás Guillén's *The Great Zoo [El gran zoo]* forthcoming from the University of Chicago Press Phoenix Poet Series in 2024. Coleman has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, Cave Canem, the Fulbright Program, and the American Literary Translators Association. His poems and essays have appeared in publications including *Boston Review*, *Callaloo*, *The New York Times*, *Poetry Society of America*, and the Academy of American Poets' Poem-a-Day series. Aaron is currently the Postdoctoral Fellow in Critical Translation Studies at the University of Michigan and will join the faculty as Assistant Professor of English and Comparative Literature in fall of 2024.

Mark DeCarteret

Mark DeCarteret's work has appeared in over 500 literary reviews.

Denise Duhamel

Denise Duhamel's most recent books of poetry are *Second Story* (Pittsburgh, 2021) and *Scald* (2017). *Blowout* (2013) was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award. She is a distinguished university professor in the MFA program at Florida International University in Miami.

Brandel France de Bravo

Brandel France de Bravo is the author of *Locomotive Cathedral* (forthcoming from *Backwaters Press*, University of Nebraska), *Provenance*, and the chapbook *Mother, Loose*. Her poems and essays have appeared in *32 Poems*, *Barrow Street*, *Conduit*, *The Georgia Review*, *Seneca Review*, *Southern Humanities Review* and elsewhere. She teaches a meditation program developed at Stanford University called Compassion Cultivation Training.©

Irina Greciuhina

Irina Greciuhina (b. 1982) is a painter who lives and works in Chisinau, Republic of Moldova. She studied Painting in the Academy of Music, Theatre and Fine Arts in Chisinau, and she continued her studies in the Technical University of Moldova, getting a degree in Architecture and Urban Planning. Since 2007 she has been a chief of the Architectural and Design bureau in Chisinau, working on exclusive national and international projects and winning the awards in design and architecture. Throughout her career Irina has been experimenting with different art styles and techniques and since 2019 she has been actively exhibiting her artworks and participating in international projects. In a short period of time Irina has managed to participate in the International Biennial of Painting in Chisinau, exhibit her works in Italy, Spain and France and even have her first solo shows. Through her paintings and digital prints, Irina confronts stereotypical archetypes of women, balancing pop-art postures and colors with surreal background and design patterns. Her influences range from Japanese graphics to Tamara Lempicka and AES+F. Combining incompatible elements, she puzzles the audience inviting it to create own story about the subjects of her paintings. Irina is represented by art galleries in Los Angeles (U.S.A), Stavanger (Norway) and Moscow (Russia). Her works can be found in private and corporate collections in Europe and Asia.

ARTIST STATEMENT

For many years I have been leading an architectural bureau, working closely with interiors, textures, colors and product design. Architectural background is giving me a lot of ideas and knowledge, that I am transforming into my artworks. I am perceiving a process of the art creation as my personal cult and intimate ritual which gives me a freedom of expression.

In my artistic practice I am interested in recording and showing the diversity and ambiguity of human nature as well as the mystery of all aspects of human personality. The main theme of my art is a study of the archetypes of a woman. I am recreating female images from different sources around me, including everyday life, fashion magazines and even internet. I keep wondering how personality and world perception of a woman can be affected by the external factors such as giving birth to a child, building a family or even changing the gender roles. The choice of this subject is stipulated by a continuous self-study, as an artist and as a woman, thus perceiving it as the most interesting and the dearest topic to me.

Depicting female figures in a particular manner, I am placing them in the most unusual settings coming from the depth of my subconsciousness. Surrealism and interpretation of dreams, became strong references to me, but I am expressing them in a post-modern way, mixing bright colors, catchy poses from the posters, decorative elements and patterns with the typical elements of pop art. Full of peculiar details, my artworks are inviting the viewer to wonder, who are these women on the canvas and what is their story. Using mostly acrylic paint and working on large-scale canvases, recently I've started to experiment with digital art, studying how the new technologies can affect my creative process, giving me new ideas and skills.

Tina Gross

Tina Gross lives on the Red River of the North in Moorhead, Minnesota and has an MFA from Minnesota State University, Mankato. She sometimes writes experimental and found poems inspired by her work as a cataloging and metadata librarian. Her work has appeared in publications including *Salamander*, *McSweeney's Internet Tendency*, *Maudlin House*, *The Laurel Review*, *Rogue Agent*, and *Lost Pilots*.

Amorak Huey

Amorak Huey is author of four books of poems including *Dad Jokes from Late in the Patriarchy* (Sundress, 2021). Co-founder with Han VanderHart of River River Books, Huey teaches at Bowling Green State University in Ohio. He also is co-author with W. Todd Kaneko of the textbook *Poetry: A Writer's Guide and Anthology* (Bloomsbury, 2018).

James Kimbrell

James Kimbrell's poems have appeared in anthologies including the *Best American Poetry* and the *Pushcart Prize Anthology*. His most recent collection is *Smote* (2015, Sarabande Books). He serves as Distinguished Research Professor in the creative writing program at Florida State University.

Casey Knott

Casey Knott is the author of "Ground Work" (Main Street Rag, 2018) and the hybrid memoir "This Season, The Next" (forthcoming, Cornerstone Press). Her work has appeared most recently in *Prism Review*, *Gulf Stream*, *Storm Cellar*, *december*, *Contemporary Verse 2*, *The New Territory*, *The Westchester Review*, *Cimarron Review*, *Salamander*, *Sugar House Review*, and *Thin Air Magazine*.

Stephen Lackaye

Stephen Lackaye is the author of *Self-Portrait in Dystopian Landscape* (Unicorn Press, 2016), a finalist for the Oregon Book Award and an Eric Hoffer Prize. His poems can be found recently in *Southern Review*, *Southern Indiana Review*, *The Shore*, *Radar Poetry*, and *Los Angeles Review*. Stephen lives in Oregon, where he is a bookseller.

Anna Maeve

Anna Maeve is a 30 something jill of all trades hailing from beautiful New Zealand. She has upcoming art being published in *Litbop* and with *Zoetic Press* as well as upcoming writing with *Wingless Dreamer Publishers*.

ARTIST STATEMENT

These pieces are from a series called 'Immorality'. It explores the paradox of the wedding dress as a symbol of both feminism and oppression. I use disembodied wedding dresses in picturesque backgrounds to challenge the conventional notions of marriage, beauty, and identity. The dresses are empty, yet they evoke a presence of the unseen brides. They are beautiful, yet they are also haunting and disturbing. They are objects of desire, yet they also represent the erasure of the individuality and agency of the women who wear them. Through this series, I question how often people will remember the bride's dress and not her as a person on the day. I invite the viewers to reflect on their own assumptions and expectations about marriage and femininity, and to consider the hidden costs and consequences of this social institution.

Cynthia Manick

Cynthia Manick is the author of *No Sweet Without Brine* (Amistad, 2023) which received 5 stars from Roxane Gay, editor of *The Future of Black: Afrofuturism, Black Comics, and Superhero Poetry*, and author of *Blue Hallelujahs*. Her work has been featured in the Academy of American Poets Poem-A-Day Series, *The Brooklyn Rail*, and other outlets.

Savannah McClendon

Savannah McClendon is a food writer and emerging non-food poet, based in Weehawken, NJ. They graduated from Fordham University in 2021 as the recipient of the Mary Higgins Clark award for creative writing. They are thrilled to share their publishing debut in this issue with *Jet Fuel Review*.

John Muellner

John Muellner (he/him) is an LGBT writer from St. Paul, MN. His work can be read in *Denver Quarterly*, *New Delta Review*, *Emerson Review*, *Harpur Palate* and elsewhere. He's currently a Departmental Poetry Fellow in NYU's MFA program.

Mollie O'Leary

Mollie O'Leary is a poet from Massachusetts. She holds an M.F.A. in creative writing from the University of Washington. Mollie's chapbook *The Forgetting Curve* was selected for publication in 2023 by Poetry Online. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Chestnut Review*, *McNeese Review* and elsewhere. Find more of her work at mollieoleary.com.

Joel Peckham

Joel Peckham has published nine collections of poetry and nonfiction, most recently *Bone Music* (SFAU), *Body Memory* (New Rivers), and the spoken word LP, *Still Running: Words and Music by Joel Peckham* (EAT poems). Individual poems and essays have appeared recently in or are forthcoming *Prairie Schooner*, *The Southern Review*, *The Sugar House Review*, *Cave Wall*, and *The Beloit Poetry Journal*. With Robert Vivian, Recently, he edited an anthology of ecstatic poetry for *New Rivers Press*, titled *Wild Gods: The Ecstatic in American Poetry and Prose*.

Natalia Prusinska

Natalia Prusinska (she/her) is a queer poet, author of the chapbook, *Hard Jolts of Hope* (2021), and associate editor at *Belfast Review*. Her work has been featured in *Hooligan Magazine*, *Storm Cellar*, *High Shelf Press*, and elsewhere. She lives with her partner in Los Angeles. Twitter: @NataliaGodyla.

Eric Rasmussen

Eric Rasmussen is a western Wisconsin writer serving as fiction editor for *Sundog Lit*, as well as editor of the upper Midwest literary journal *Barstow & Grand*. He has published short fiction in *Third Coast* (2022 Fiction Contest finalist), *North American Review* (2022 Kurt Vonnegut Prize runner-up), *Blue Mesa Review* (2022 Fiction Contest winner), *Fugue*, and *Pithead Chapel*, among others. Find him online at theotherericasmussen.com.

Jason Reblando

Jason Reblando is an artist and photographer based in Normal, Illinois. He is the recipient of a U.S. Fulbright Fellowship to the Philippines, an Artist Fellowship Award from the Illinois Arts Council, and a Community Arts Assistance Program grant from the City of Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs. His photographs are collected in the Library of Congress, the Milwaukee Art Museum, the Pennsylvania State University Special Collections, the Museum of Contemporary Photography, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. He is an Assistant Professor of Photography in the Wonsook Kim School of Art at Illinois State University.

henry 7. reneau, jr.

henry 7. reneau, jr. writes words of conflagration to awaken the world ablaze, an inferno of free verse illuminated by his affinity for disobedience & a barbwire conviction that prequels the spontaneous combustion that blazes from his heart, phoenix-fluxed red & gold, like a discharged bullet that commits a felony every day, exploding through change is gonna come to implement the fire next time. He is the author of the poetry collection, *freedomland blues* (Transcendent Zero Press) and the e-chapbook, *physiography of the fit-test* (Kind of a Hurricane Press.) His work is published in *Superstition Review*, *TriQuarterly*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Zone 3*; *Poets Reading the News and Rigorous*. His work has also been nominated multiple times for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net.

Esther Sadoff

Esther Sadoff is a teacher and writer from Columbus, Ohio. Her poems have been featured or are forthcoming in *Little Patuxent Review*, *Jet Fuel Review*, *Cathexis Poetry Northwest*, *Pidgeonholes*, *Santa Clara Review*, *South Florida Poetry Journal*, among others. Her two chapbooks, *Some Wild Woman* and *Serendipity in France*, are forthcoming from Finishing Line Press.

Hilary Sallick

Hilary Sallick is the author of two full-length poetry collections, *Love Is A Shore* (Lily Poetry Review Books) and *Asking the Form* (Cervena Barva Press). Her poems can be found in *Notre Dame Review*, *Leon Literary Review*, *Vita Poetica*, *Small Orange*, *Ibbetson Street*, *Inflectionist Review*, and other journals. A teacher with a longtime focus on adult literacy, she serves on the Board of the New England Poetry Club. She lives and works in Somerville, MA. (www.hilarysallick.com)

Kelly R. Samuels

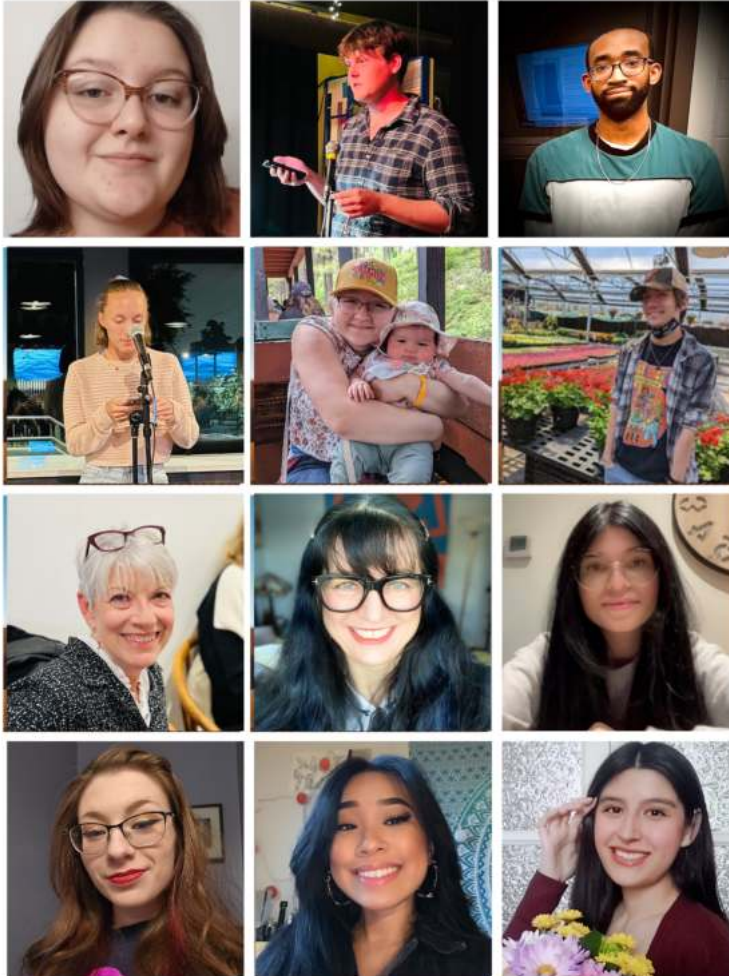
Kelly R. Samuels is the author of the full-length collection *All the Time in the World* (Kelsay Books) and three chapbooks: *Words Some of Us Rarely Use*, *To Marie Antoinette*, from and *Zeena/Zenobia Speaks*. She is a Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominee with work appearing in *The Massachusetts Review*, *RHINO*, *River Styx*, *Sixth Finch*, and *Court Green*. She lives in the Upper Midwest.

E. P. Tuazon

E. P. Tuazon is a Filipino-American writer from Los Angeles. They have work in several publications, just released their newest novella called *The Cussing Cat Clock* (HASH Journal 2022), and recently were chosen by ZZ Packer as the winner of the 2022 AWP Grace Paley Prize in Short Fiction for an upcoming book with Red Hen Press (2024). They are currently a member of Advintage Press and The Blank Page Writing Club at the Open Book, Canyon Country.

Jet Fuel Review

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