
Inside Out, Spring 2018

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INSIDE
OUT
2018

Inside Out

JeffArts Literary/Arts Journal
Spring 2018

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Foreword

Welcome to the 2018 issue of *Inside Out*!

Inside Out is the literary and arts journal of the Jefferson student body. As such, it gives voice to our scholars as they migrate through their educational experience at our University. The creativity and vision of our students is featured within the pages of this book. Showcased is student work that was created in the intervals between classes and notebooks, dorm rooms and city streets.

Please enjoy this issue of *Inside Out*, as our students offer a unique view of their world using images, colors, words and light.

Charles A. Pohl, MD

Vice Provost for Student Affairs, Thomas Jefferson University

Vice Dean for Student Affairs and Professor of Pediatrics, Sidney Kimmel Medical College

The Jefferson Arts Organization was founded primarily to offer Thomas Jefferson University students the opportunity to express themselves through art. The Jefferson Arts organization focuses on such media as art and photography, writing, and music and supports diverse activities including live readings, art exhibits and musical performances. In addition, the organization publishes *Inside Out* annual art and literary journal which showcases photography, paintings, sketches, short stories, poems and essays contributed by university students. All of these activities are designed to bring more diversity to the Jefferson community; to allow students, faculty and staff the chance to stop and reflect on their daily lives; and to provide a creative outlet from the rigors of school and work.

Content Warning: This magazine includes some written pieces with mature language and potentially triggering subject matter.

Editors' Statement

We are delighted to present *Inside Out, 2018*: a raw commentary on physiologic, psychologic, and social health. In this production are expressions of awe, anger, anxiety, and grief; here you'll find colorful intersections of satire and introspection, blacks and grays highlighted with wildly vibrant texture and mood. The artists featured in our compilation approach complicated questions such as –

How does one process illness—morbidity and mortality—in themselves, their patients, and their loved ones?
How does one explore one's identity in the context of societal stigmas and expectations?
How does one manage the sudden and sometimes overwhelming responsibilities of caretaking, in all of its forms?

These pieces range from meditative to whimsical to provocative; they invite the audience to feel, speculate, and understand—to accept the abstract, and think carefully about the gaps between factual and emotional truth. We hope you enjoy the craftsmanship and critical thought of Thomas Jefferson University's student body!

Anitha Ahmed & Anya Platt
Editors in Chief

Kevin Tang
Artistic Director

Madeleine Norris
Literary Director

Submission Information

Inside Out is a presentation of artwork, photography, short stories, poems and essays that is published annually. All full-time and part-time Jefferson students are welcome to submit work and to apply to serve on the magazine's editorial board. Submissions may be emailed to Dorissa.Bolinski@jefferson.edu. Photographic submissions should be saved as a .jpeg file using the highest resolution possible. Artwork should be photographed from a direct angle, without glare or visible background, and saved in the same manner as photographs. Artists who submit non-photographic material will be given the opportunity to have their accepted pieces professionally photographed by a Jefferson photographer in order to assure the best presentation in the printed magazine.

All submissions will be reviewed anonymously; not all submissions will be printed. Please note that entries will be judged as submitted; *Inside Out* will not crop, sharpen or otherwise adjust an improperly-saved graphic submission.

Manuscripts (prose, poetry, translations, short plays, etc.) should be submitted in a Word-compatible document, and saved under the name of the piece (or "untitled," if applicable).

All submissions must be accompanied by a separate cover letter document containing the following:

- Author's or artist's name
- Email address and local phone number
- College, department or undergraduate program and year in school
- Genre/medium and title of each submission

Inside Out does not publish anonymous submissions or previously published works. Further submission inquiries may be addressed to dorissa.bolinski@jefferson.edu.

View the online version of *Inside Out* at:
jefferson.edu/university/campus-life/inside-out.html

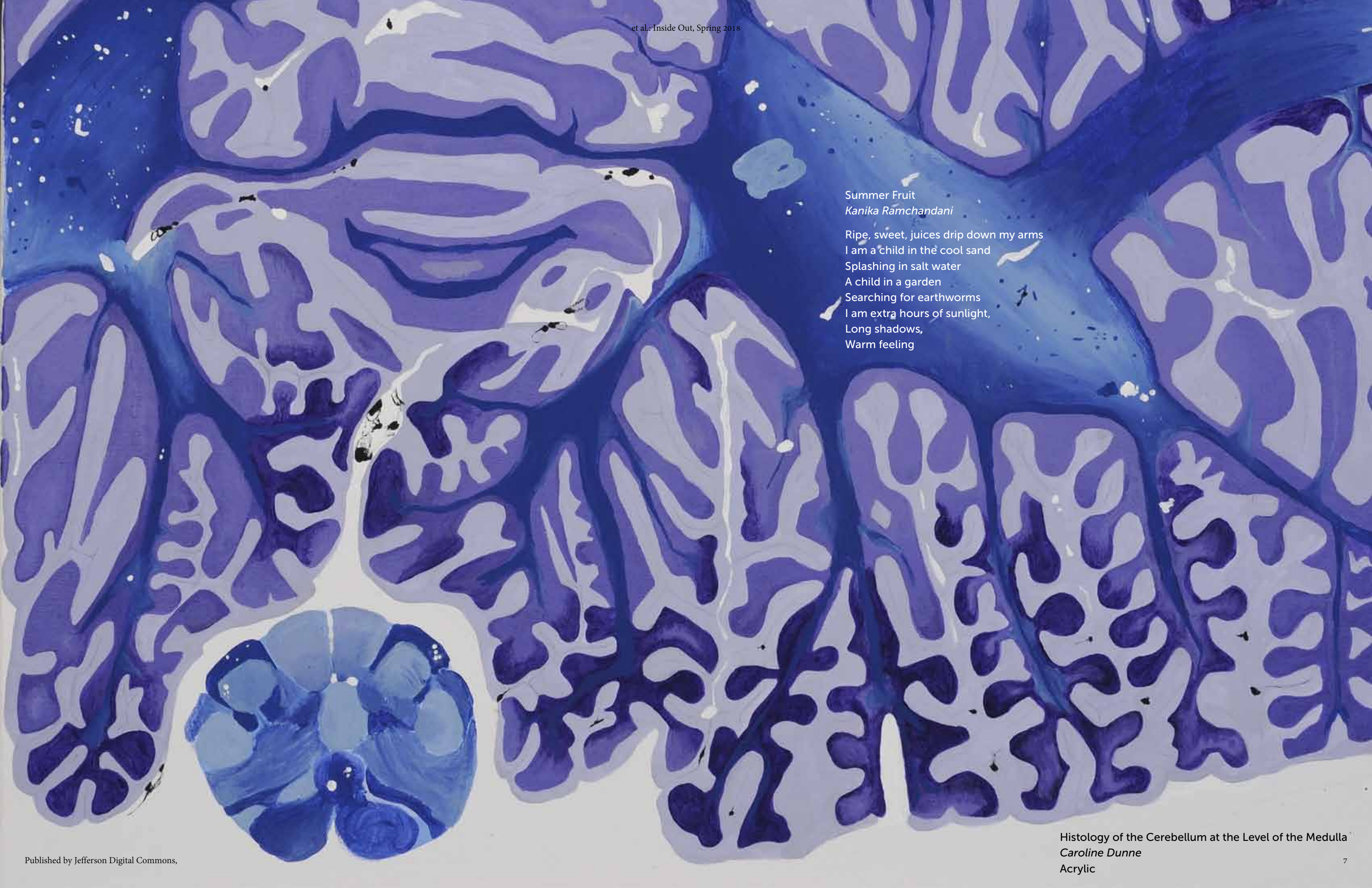
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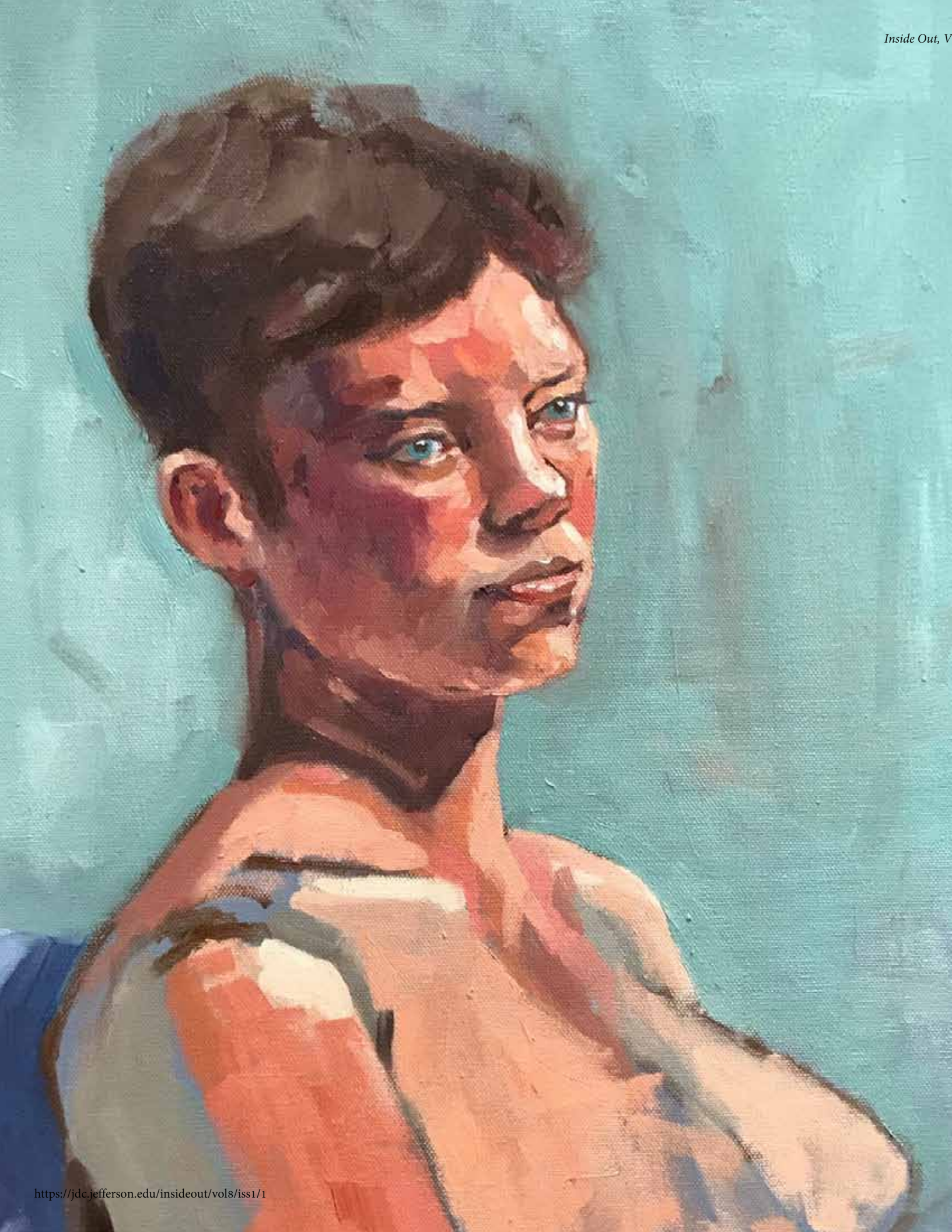


IM Rounds
Michelle Chen
Watercolor and Ink



Summer Fruit
Kanika Ramchandani

Ripe, sweet, juices drip down my arms
I am a child in the cool sand
Splashing in salt water
A child in a garden
Searching for earthworms
I am extra hours of sunlight,
Long shadows,
Warm feeling



Stage IV
Jordyn Tumas

"White Wisp" is the color of hospital floors. It is the hospital curtains, the hospital gowns, and the hospital walls. It blends everything together without beginning or end. "White Wisp" lightly settles on my patient's emaciated figure, all the life seemingly drained from her, a reflection of the arduous journey she has been allotted. It wakes her up in the middle of the day and gently lulls her back to sleep moments later. "White Wisp" is a long corridor that appears exactly like all the others, leading her towards a CT scan of her brain, a scan looking for metastasis of the ovarian cancer, a scan which her doctors didn't explain to her before she was wheeled out of her room. "White Wisp" is sewn into the fibers of every white coat that listens to her heart and lungs while the true illness shouts from her pelvis—it clings to the cheerful smiles that exchange pleasantries, which last only until they leave to check in on the next room.

"White Wisp" lives in the sclera of her husband and sister's eyes, every morning betraying the fear behind their brave words. It shrouds us in our final hug, though leaving only compassion in its wake.

"White Wisp" is a diagnosis with no cure.
It is a promise you want to make but know you cannot keep...
And yet, "White Wisp" is still hope.

Opposite page:
Serenity
Chen Zhou
Oil



Pitting
Anitha Ahmed

cardiology floor, jefferson hospital

the skin of your dry shin
scales, breaks to touch
and oozes.

you cough and pull the yellow
phlegm with fingers
off your tongue

—as if, from my gut—I jerk away;
our guilty eyes meet.
then, I press

my finger pads to your bone
and leave my mark,
a crater

a full white moon
dead skin and serum
on my hand

three full seconds to fill the pit
fluid has a funny memory—it spills under the skin
and holds on

The Other Hand
Sophia Dang
Ink and watercolor

Dust
Victoria Stevenson

I live in a world dusty and true
I never knew dust's meaning 'till now
Millions of particles
A reminder of what we've done

The only way to see a beam
Is through one's own
Cells dirt fibers & dreams
A synopsis of where we've been reflected in winter light

Dust collects it all
Every conversation
Every act of physical desperation
Every lonely compartment of the mind

A memory of what once was
Now refuse collected in corners
Forgotten under the bed
In the seams of sweaters

Sheets into the wash
Pillows beaten out
Wipe down the bedside table
Desk and dresser too

Soon you'll be gone
Swept up and thrown away
No longer twinkling comfort
In the sanguine silver rays

But do you ever really leave?
Can you ever be rubbed away?

No, the record can't be purged
Not just you and me—our predecessors too
All of us submerged in our collective past
Intermingling atoms

Amassed, on fan's blades
Between floor boards
A succession
Of intimate transgressions

Conflagration
Anitha Ahmed

fez, morocco

in late may the garbage burns
from the taxi home i watch the flames climb
piles of waste on the dry hills
black smoke twists by the road

at dusk the jacaranda tree blossoms
behind the villa i watch its weeping crown
its sweet purple deepens in the red light
dark petals land in my palm

at night i lie awake with the windows ajar
nectar in my nose and smoke in my throat

Newborn Exam
Jordyn Tumas

Soft and supple are the fontanels I trace
As a phrenologist or a soothsayer,
Feeling fault line mountain ridges under translucent skin.
With gentle pressure the wisps of black hair yield
Into perfect crests,
The fresh survivor all the while calm and still,
Exhausted from the victory,
The memory already fading
Before it is even spun—
Resurfacing from the tsunami glorious
Expatriate, gasping first breath
The burn of Life washing through his jaws and bronchi,
A heady cocktail bounding deep into the ravine
While unknowing eyes search this new chasm for reason,
Scan the horizon for answers,
And reconcile an existence without metric.

Sweet Shop - Tangail, Bangladesh
Micaela Langille Collins
Photograph



The Descent
Jeffrey Lee
Photograph





Snapple Facts
Madeleine Norris

Did you know that cashews are technically a fruit?

My brother is a hedgehog. He believes the world is out to get him. He has since he was a child and the world saw him as out to get it. So now, he sits curled up, his sharp spikes protecting him from the outside.

Have you ever heard that there is a strawberry museum in Belgium?

On rare occasions, he softens the spikes. Alone, at home when we're bonding over books or Snapple facts. My soul will reach a willowy hand out and try to touch his, only to learn I have no idea how to recognize him, or how to trust a stranger.

Autism Spectrum Disorder is also called "Wrong Planet Syndrome."

Sometimes I wish I could be a hedgehog. I want to curl up and show just spikes to the world, so no one can see my face. Not unless they carefully hold me and allow my spikes to soften. Not unless they wait patiently, and allow me to roll over when I'm ready to show them my soft underside.

Did you know that scientists have no idea why Tylenol works?

Scientists don't know what causes Autism Spectrum Disorder. Leading research suggests "it's connected to early developmental changes in brain structure." I wonder when they'll clarify that.

Did you know that hedgehogs are not native to America?

They must feel like aliens.
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Daydreams
Kevin Tang
Oil on canvas

Glitter
Rachel Werk

The sun struck it,
Creating an effervescent glow
In the middle of the beach.
My feet took off
Dragging my legs, my arms, my head, my heart, my Heart,
Along for the ride.
Leaping into that pile
Analyzing every crystal.
Diving in and out
For ten months,
Searching
For what I had seen from a distance.
But instead,
I found the harsh
Truth of light;
And realized,
It was just sand.

The Twelve Apostles
Kevin Tang
Oil on canvas





Fog|January|Delaware River|North Philadelphia
Holly A. Rankin
Photograph

home

Anthony Vu

in little places we each called home
where our flesh was once formed
and minds were once molded
yet ever so often, tempers fray like brushfire
as our fathers seized the Crown Royal
and our mothers sought the frontlines
telling us to run like gazelles
so we listened
and we quickened
meeting halfway between the fumes
that billowed from our chimneys
thousands of yards apart

when we meet eyes, we lay across the harvest
with our damp backs unadulterated to naked soil
and our bare toes titillated by rustling grain
we stare upon the sky where there are no traces
of anything grey except for the sparrows
whose shadows tessellated our faces
like we were two strangers in a masquerade
without any care of the chaff between our hands
nor the waning sunlight above our heads
because we were together alone
in a little place we now call home

Still Life
Samantha Nguyen
Pen on paper



Plain

Anya Platt

And finally it becomes clear to me that I'm too afraid to write in plain words – shy to be seen, safer veiled. So, I write in hidden verse, so smeared with fog that I can't see through it when I look back. I write in gray weather because it sounds better, too.

Thirty thousand feet up, I circle my way around the inescapability of solid matter. I try, so futilely, to find a loophole – one where I can slip in and out (always so guided by whim and doubt), where dense fog marries thick moss, raises baby sprouts. Young child, have you not yet learned to just have your cake or eat it? My brain crunches on carrots and dip. The sky is beautifully sad, a stormy plain, vast highlights of this yellow light. It catches my eye as I sit here contemplating. In the midst of travel, turbulence trying so desperately to shake me awake way up in the sky, I tie weights to my belt, call them grounded.

This is my least favorite time of day. When light becomes night, I feel the sadness of the last sentence on the last page of a book, the wanting to slow down the inevitable. I fight a forward-pointing arrow; sunsets sink, eyes read to the end, and it is here that my mind wanders most heavily.

I dwell on the repetitive drip, raindrop currency (bartering smiles for sulk)

my head clouds, feelings condense with no words to put names to, precipitate out in this leaky rain

I'm Sorry
Yashmi Mahat

"You'll be fine"
A bright cheery smile
I gave you
As propofol
Burned
Through your veins

"We'll take good care of you"
I told you
Not knowing you
Not fully understanding
You. Your story.
It. The pathology

"I'm scared"
Your eyes told
Right before the mask
Shut them close.
Unacknowledged

Belly splayed
Burning fat
Blood

MY hands in guts
MY fingers wrapped
Around pulsating aorta
The rush of adrenaline
The thrill of incision
The delicacy of a dance



Poked and prodded
In the cava
Our knife
Where we hadn't anticipated
Opening spaces never seen
Lost.

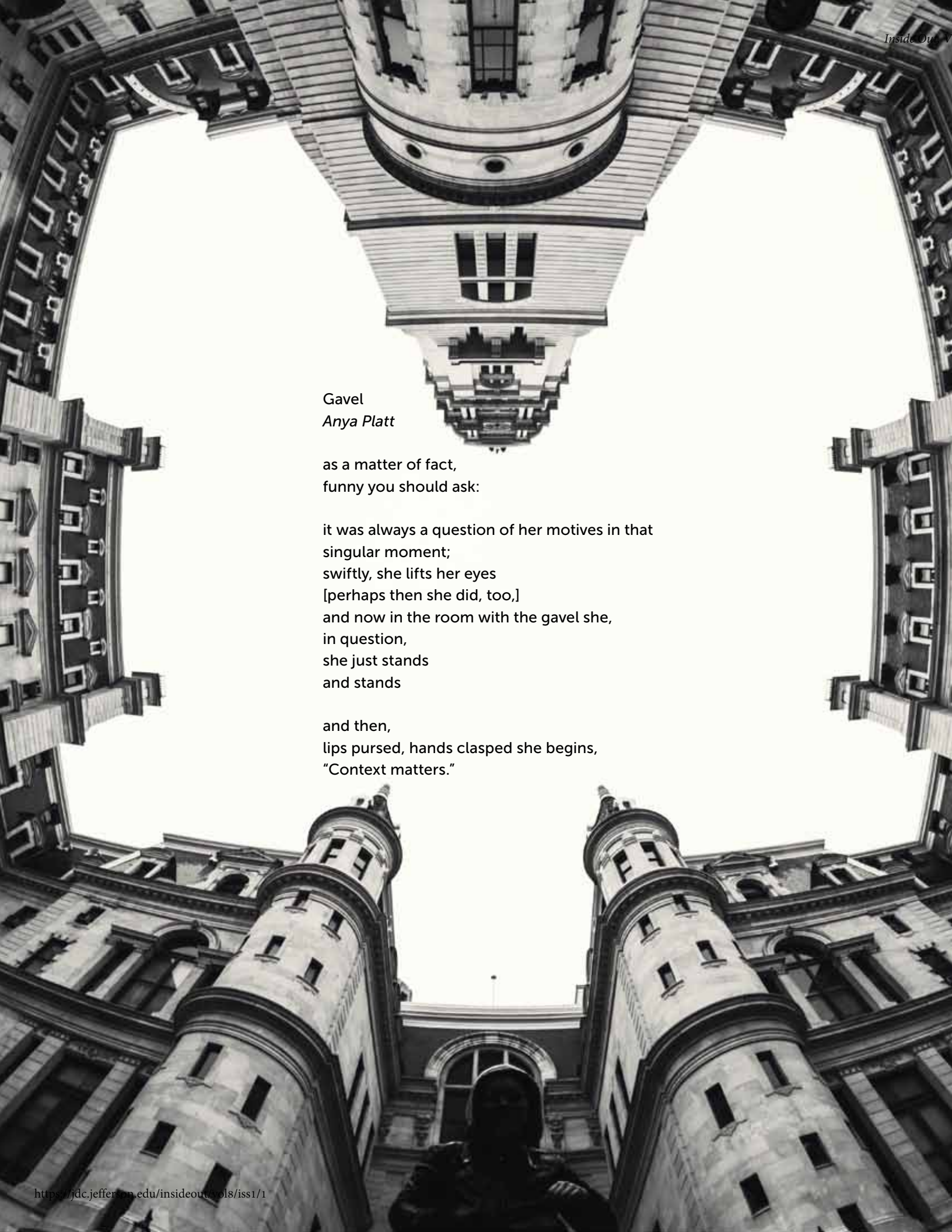
Lost
I forgot.

I forgot
You.

You

A boy of just 19
A lifetime dissected away
The consequences of our knife
Lay before your life
The purest joy
The greatest privilege
I gained
In exchange
Your suffering.
Because we couldn't
Because we did
And I had told you
"You'll be fine"

Elodie
Madeleine Norris
Dyed Canvas, digital manipulation



Gavel
Anya Platt

as a matter of fact,
funny you should ask:

it was always a question of her motives in that
singular moment;
swiftly, she lifts her eyes
[perhaps then she did, too,]
and now in the room with the gavel she,
in question,
she just stands
and stands

and then,
lips pursed, hands clasped she begins,
"Context matters."

Specimen for Frozen Section
Michelle Chen
Watercolor and ink



Untitled
Anya Platt

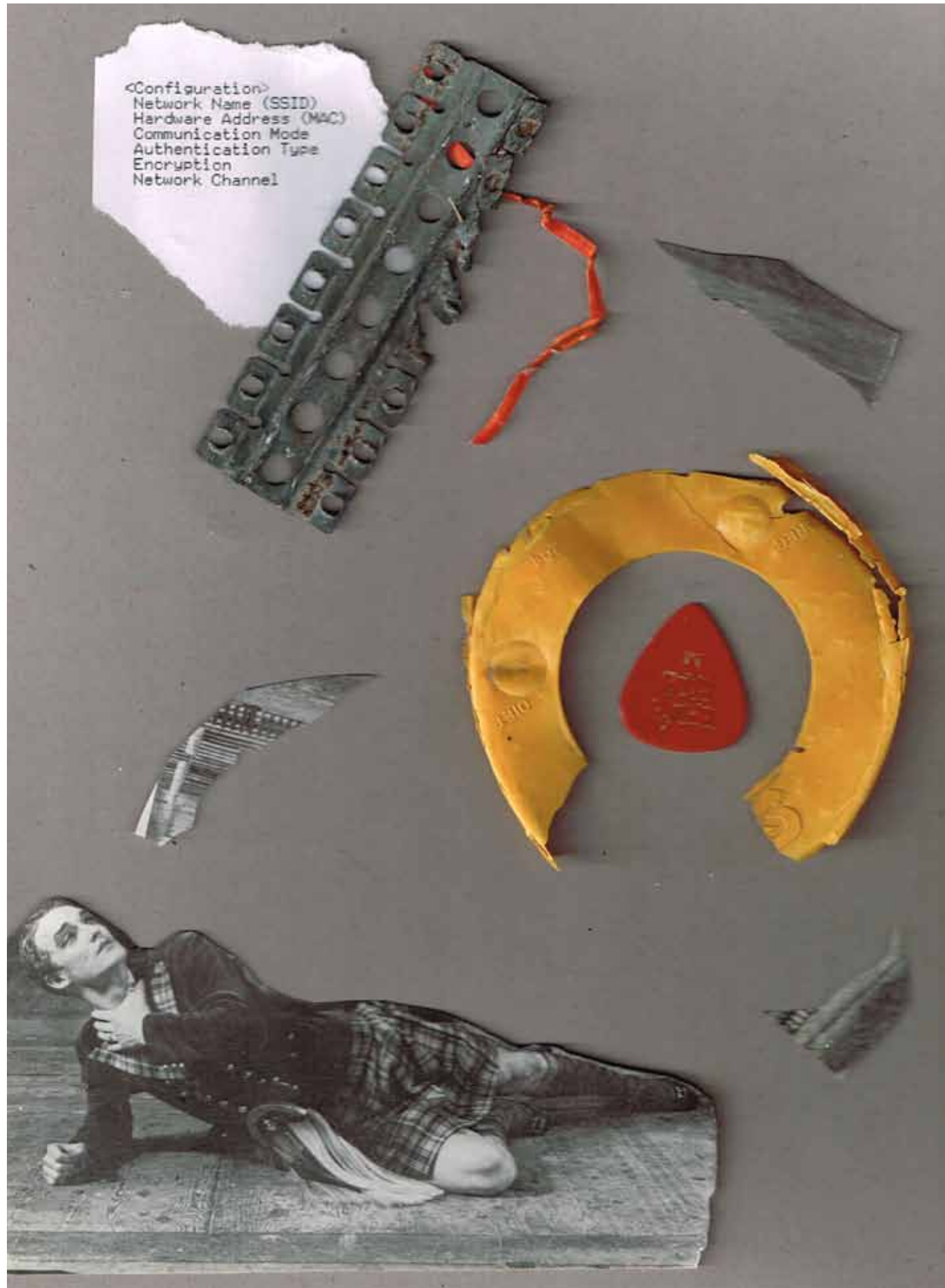
A. (Barter)

Because I can't give words
I give little kisses, dry
Smiles, small, so as only to be slightly disingenuous
I give birth to games
played only because it was all too smooth
With too much happiness that was never meant
all for me (too much, all the niceties)

B. (Spool)

Love, timid tapping, tattoo on chestwall: I spin it in my hand, spin it top-like spinning so it doesn't fall,
just keeps spinning; spin it weave-like into spools of thread, sew it into all my jean patches and buttons
and knit sweaters, keep pieces of it on my body, easy, running stitch running after me; spin it into stories,
tales of missing and longing and wanting and my full name spoken by full lips and my simple presence
simply missed.

Opposite page:
City Hall
My Duyen Nguyen
Photograph



Birthing Hands
Samantha Schoer

ripped vaginas
skin cut with scissors
like children's play
without time for straight edges

my hands
like slender wonder
inside
red blood on my cold cracked hands
almost like a hot bath
i could stay here

lifting her body out from inside you
slippery wet and heavy
with a heave onto your lap
this time i don't worry i will drop her
my hands have memory

these hands
that tie knots
like interweaving patterns
keeping a bond between women
with each loop
i will remember the motions
of how you came into this world
and i found your little heart
cupped inside my palm

Opposite page:
Metal Fiend
Tariro Mupaso
Mixed media



Ground Glass
Samantha Schoer

Alone in a room
The central air flicks the robe around her bare legs
Have you ever been as cold as when waiting for the doctor?

Between her legs, all the secrets and smells of life.
I ask her to relax her knees
As if she's slipping into bed
Like I won't harm or hurt or open up the parts of her sewn closed.

The ached position of my neck
Never enough light to see through her, all of her
But she feels like glass
As if her bowels are displaying every churn
As if I can see her swallow her secrets and watch them pass into my
gloved hands.

I wash my skin raw at the sink.
The door shuts.
My fingers remain cold all day.

Tree
Katie Sommers
Pencil on paper

whistle
Harnoor Kaur

whistles take countless forms,
whether they stem from shrill
pierces of sound with wiry blades
of grass sticky in-between my tiny
childhood thenar mounds, sweet
soulful feathered chirps that my eyes
could never move quickly enough to match,
unwelcome horns made by prying fingers
stuck in the mouths of men that make me
pause in my first step and speed
up in my second. whistles, so seemingly
natural in their ubiquitous presence,
human, animal, kind, chiding, commanding,
always attention-seeking, head-turning,
a gesture of communication,
flirtation, migration, or predation.
yet, at its very core, a whistle is the
forcing of breath through the gap between
your fingers, teeth, or lips, pilgrims narrowing
to prevent air from escaping silence with shattering trills.

someone once told me that little girls shouldn't whistle.
you know damn well that I became a good whistler.

Zeke
Samantha Nguyen
Pen on paper





Women's Month
Samantha Schoer

each month she comes
a red tidal wave
and i am reminded of my sex

despite baggy jeans and anger
my breasts grew against my jerseys
popping up overall buttons
and my mother handed me a training bra

i like to think about my genes,
two strong X's together, holding space
science teaches me: one is coiled up, letting the other run the show

community is not Barred
but we bar the women who didn't grow up bleeding
the ones who were happy to develop breasts
from holding space with us

my mess cannot be controlled
i spend dollars on supplies
scrubbing blood out of tiles, cotton, covers
i am so damn tired of this life

it takes a woman doctor to tell me i do not need to bleed
it takes a movement to have my pills paid for by insurance
it takes a revolution to allow me my own cells.

each month they come
a wave of hatred and pus
and i am reminded, i am not this
this month is mine
and nothing is.

Opposite page:
Study for a Graphic Novel
Naomi Newman
Oil on canvas

Lessons for My Daughter
Madeleine Norris

When I think about my daughter,
I think about teaching her to read;
that the word laughter and daughter
are spelled the same, sound so different,
yet both feel like silk leaving my mouth.

I think about holding her hand,
showing her the firm grip to keep on her dreams,
and the paradoxically soft touch
with which she should hold the world.

I see her tiny hands chasing bubbles,
with reckless hope in stretched palms
that somehow, she'll be able to catch one,
and keep it safe forever.

When I think about my daughter,
I see bubbles, hearts, and glitter,
cars, superheroes,
and boots made for adventure.

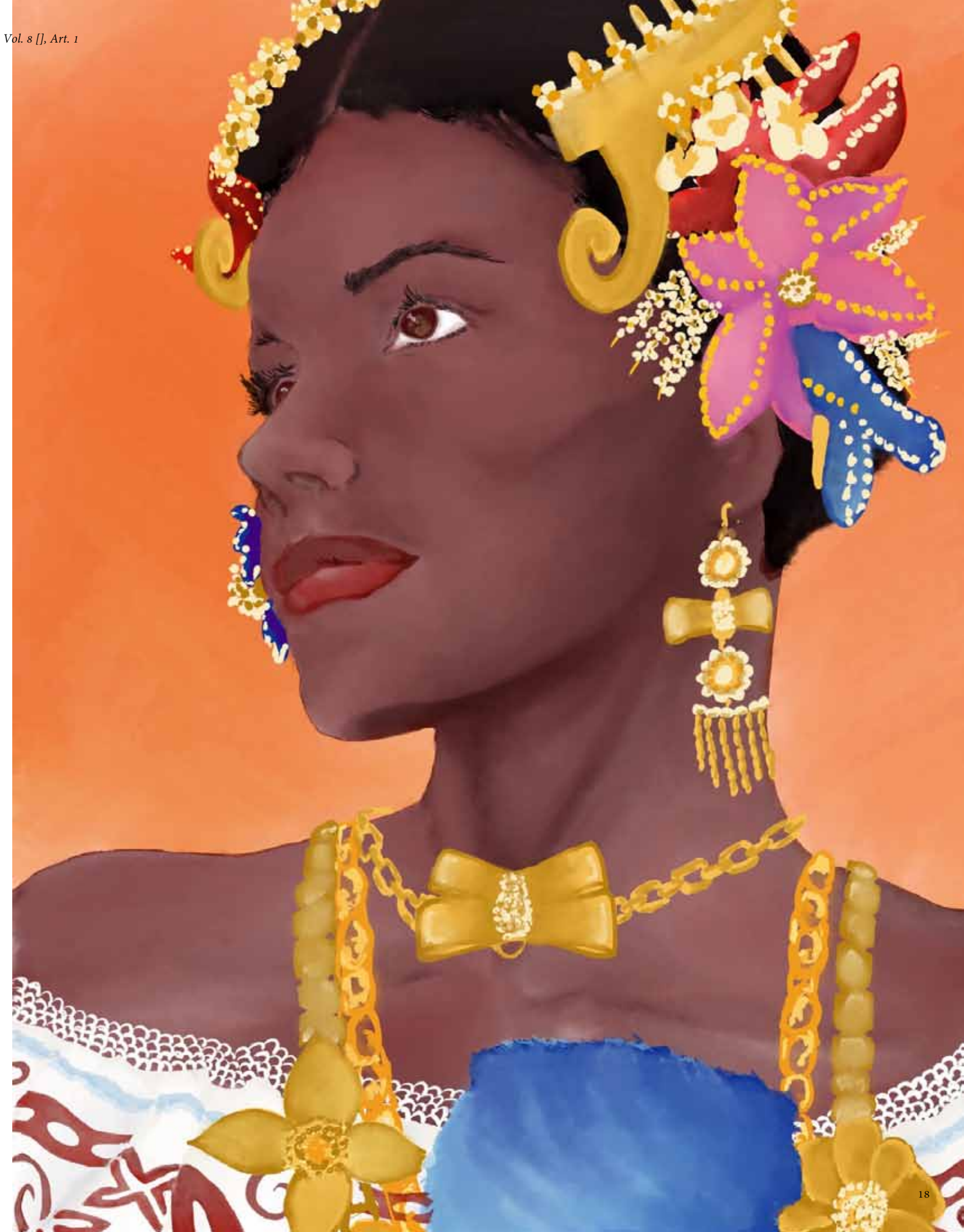
But, I also think about the fear I had
before my first kiss;
or that Friday when my stomach spilled over my jeans,
and my shirt couldn't hide it.

When I think about my daughter,
I try not to see a dark bed,
my body trapped beneath the firm grip of a boy,
who told me I was skinny and pretty.

When I think about my daughter,
I think about the Me Too's.
And the men who only understand the hurt
when it's their sisters, and mothers, and daughters.

And, sometimes I think about Japanese pottery.
They fix broken pieces with liquid gold.
So, something becomes more valuable once broken,
its history now wrapped around it like a glistening web.

When I think about my daughter
I don't know what to tell her.
Do I warn her she'll be wrapped in gold?
Popped bubbles, broken hearts, and weighed down with gold.



Opposite page:
Folklore
Jarred Holt
Digital art

I am art
Sh'Rae Marshall

I am not sure
if this is love,
but I am falling for a boy
who calls me art.

With hands that
teach me
how it feels
to crave death,
he sculpts me.
As if
these bones
can be molded like clay
instead of
shattered like glass.
As if
this skin
can learn how to
tell stories
of an artist and his brush
instead of a poet
and her trauma.

I am not sure
if I forgive him,
but at least
he is sorry.
He tells me this
after he paints
a moon around my eye.

But,
he comes home
with chocolates.
And allows me to
sink into him.
Like.
He can absorb my pain.
Like.
The arms that make me feel safe
aren't attached to the hands
that make me feel hollow.

I am not sure
if he is emotional,
but I am sleeping with a boy
that introduces me to his demons.



Lungs
Alex Siegelman
Digital art

And I don't know which one
I'll be blessing tonight.
But, I will invite him
to pray in my shrine.
To be baptized in my ocean.
To taste the flesh
of his savior.

I am not sure
if he will change,
but at least
he is trying.

His yells
begin to harmonize
with the sound
my body makes
when it is thrown
to the floor.

I believe this is performance art.

But,
I never agreed
to have our home
be a museum.

I am not sure
if he will realize,
but I have fallen
again.

I want to rise on my own.
I want to be the Jesus
my mother raised me to be.

But instead,
I live
on the floor.
Broken
into
so many damn pieces,

waiting for you
to rebuild me
with the lacquer
and gold
and silver
that you promised.

I may not be in love,
but at least I am art.

Cherry Chiffon Cage
Daisy Zhang

I lost my breath when you pulled me off my feet
And our hips swung to the times
As we tried not to trip on dress trails

Red dress chiffon love hit me hard
As I helped you tie your tie
While you tied my heartstrings into knots

When your heart bloomed daisy petals
And you said it was my fault
I could have cried into your hand cupping my chin

And many times later
We drowned ourselves in swinging skirts
And scarlet suits

Suiting up to impress who
We didn't know or understand
As cherry chills rode up my thighs

Lace string strung around mesh
Caging in a corset cavity
That smothered the petals beauty died for

That time you caught my hand
And held my heart in a heavy fist
And stared

I knew something was wrong
As your gray eyes grieved
And your mouth set a grim line

Worry had whipped up my will
When I grabbed your hand and lead
That night we spun pretending nobody was in our
way

That night, you drove me home without music
I was left feeling the knots of my earphones
That I kept forgetting you didn't tie

That night, I laid awake in bed
Blinking to passing headlights
And bathing in moonlight slits,
Knowing that this would be the last time.



Jewel
Chen Zhou
Oil

Country Roads
Sh'Rae Marshall

My mother is dramatic. The day I received my first college acceptance letter, she cried for a half hour on the phone. I pictured her sobbing, apologizing with a wave of Kleenex tissues, and patting under her puffy eyes to prevent the mascara from running. She invited four of her coworkers to personally congratulate me over the phone. The last one was some creep who instructed me to pack plenty of condoms. I gave him an obligatory giggle and then my mom quickly shooed him away.

My father's reaction was a bit more contained. I wasn't sure what to expect precisely, but I knew that it would be aloof. This was just the type of man he became.

"Good job, kiddo" he said.

I stood there as he pretended to read beyond Congratulations. I wanted more from him. He glanced up and smiled at me from a La-Z-Boy chair he inhabited since he arrived. That damn chair. I always offered an applause whenever I saw him up at the refrigerator or answering the door. He probably thought that it was teenage sarcasm. But, that wasn't it. I was genuinely proud.

This last year had been tough for him. After he had his left leg amputated during a tour in Iraq, he was coerced to return and assimilate into an unfamiliar lifestyle. My mother called it his biggest fear: living with her for more than 6 consecutive months. When he did arrive, the warmth and laughter that had been dancing throughout our home hid away. It resurfaced in the kitchen, while my dad had been napping. Sometimes, on the porch, when my mother and I shared a cigarette. Yet, I felt sympathy for him. He went from a muscular man, who was lively and personable, to barely weighing 140 pounds and religiously watching reruns of shows in black and white.

For months, my mom and I tried to bring him happiness. My mom cooked his favorite meals, invited his buds over for dinner, and massaged his back almost daily. It became a routine after she worked a 10-hour shift, herself. He thanked her with a plea to stop treating him differently. Sometimes through yelling, other times through silence. Their love didn't always look like this. Before his accident, they were nauseating to be around. They made out in his Ford pickup truck and she laughed at his incredibly witless jokes. Whenever he came home from deployment, they stayed out late and jogged together most mornings. When he wasn't home, mom would wait up hours past her bedtime just to FaceTime with him. Their conversations usually consisted of recipes my mother wanted to try and summaries of football or baseball games eagerly presented by my dad. They always ended with "I miss you and I love you." However, after his accident, their conversations changed. She would ask about his day, he would get annoyed. She would apologize, he would ask her to stop apologizing and then he would redirect his attention back to the television. Every day, it was the same story.

I took a different approach. Pops and I used to obsess over college football. We lived near Clemson University, so naturally we bled orange and purple. Pops had a fraternity brother who was also a fan. Every season, this guy rented a luxury suite at the stadium. They served shrimp cocktail, a hundred types of cheeses, and sparkling wine my dad used to sneak into my hands. "Don't tell your mother" he would say, grinning and rubbing his knuckles on the top of my head. We went to so many games that he began greeting some of the security guards by their first names.

He was much more enthusiastic about the Clemson culture than I ever could be. But I attempted to match his excitement anyway. We screamed obscenities at the referees who couldn't hear us, jumped up and down when Clemson made a touchdown, and threw punches in the air when the opposing team scored. I knew football made him happy. So, for the sake of nostalgia, I bought him a Clemson mug and hat for his birthday.

I didn't bother to wrap it. Instead, I dropped the hat and mug in a birthday bag I recycled. We were all at the dining room table, even my dad. I gave him the bag right after my mother and I butchered a Happy Birthday harmony. He opened my mom's gifts first. He was going through the motions of unwrapping like it was an annoying duty. Slippers, expensive cologne, massage oil, and a smoke-wood candle. It was clear that he wasn't impressed. I knew that he would appreciate mine more. I knew him. When he pulled out the presents I bought, he softly said, "thanks, son" and smiled, without showing any teeth. He immediately asked for tea so that he could use his mug. I then noticed that he put the hat behind him, as if he was already discarding it.



Industry|January|Delaware River|North Philadelphia

Holly A. Rankin

Photograph

"Sorry, I figured your head may be too big" I joked. He clenched his jaw and managed to force out a few laughs, but none that were convincing, none that sounded like my dad's.

"I think he may be depressed or have PTSD" I said shyly to my mother. I was expecting her response to be an urgent demand for me to take those words back. Instead, she merely said, "He'll be okay." Her eyes stayed fixated on the country road ahead of us. She then turned up the car's radio to hum along to old Dolly songs I didn't know the lyrics to.

When we arrived at my graduation, we were greeted by my neighbor's family in the parking lot. They looked like one of those families in a stock photo, framed on a shelf inside of a Target. Miss Salutatorian Stacy and her younger sister were wearing matching floral sundresses. The very flirtatious mother was wearing a white sundress with a hat straight from the Kentucky derby. And of course, her pearls. Dr. Green, Stacy's super-old dad, was a bit more casual. He must have thought that tucking his Brooks Brothers polo shirt into his straight fitted jeans made him look younger. Surely, people considered them a lovely family. I, however, found them to be repulsive. The monogrammed accessories, the overzealous South Carolina pride, the 'Thank You' cards. I didn't buy into any of it. Yet, they easily beguiled their way into my dad's fondness. Before his accident, my dad made my mother jealous by relentlessly praising Mrs. Green's sweet potato pies. "Stacy's mom has got it going on" he joked, knowing that my mother loathed her.

"How's Joe, darling?" Stacy's mom asked. She was looking at me but directed this question to my mother.

"He's doing just fine," my mother replied.

Later that day, at the barbeque my mom organized for my graduation, things got worse. Pops and my mom got into a little argument. I was going to walk into the house to grab a bag of chips. When I opened the back door though, I heard my father yelling. "I never agreed to this shit!" At that moment, I wasn't sure if he was referring to the party or his disability.

"I'm exhausted and just don't feel like entertaining people. You should have had this somewhere else!"

I saw my mother from where I was standing. She was wearing those stupid pleated khaki shorts and a loose fitting "army wife" shirt. She stirred the potato salad and replied without even bothering to look up.

"Our son graduates. I'm at his ceremony at 8am after working until 1am the night before. I planned and cooked all of this by myself. But you are exhausted?" She paused and then repeated the question that any sane husband would know not to respond to. "Exhausted? Joe, all you do is sit around in that chair and sleep. You have a prosthetic. Get up. Use it." I was standing at the door separating a house of 2 bickering adults and a backyard of hungry teenagers.

"Fuck you" he said. Not loudly, but loud enough to drown any voice my mom had before those words fired from his mouth like bullets. "Fuck you. I don't need some fake leg and I don't need this shit. Especially from you!"

She stopped stirring the potato salad and stared down into the bowl as if she was watching a funeral. She fought back tears that she deserved to let flood this place which no longer felt like our home. After another minute or so, she looked up and quickly glanced in my direction. I scurried outside when she noticed me. She emerged a few seconds later holding a huge bowl of potato salad. Anger that evolved into sadness was painted all over her face. I wanted to hug her but I didn't. I grabbed the bowl, thanked her, and watched as she rushed back into the house to make sweet tea.

The weeks leading up to the beginning of college were slow. My mother began to spend more time at work and less time around my dad. My father still lived in his chair. I still tried to rekindle that father-son relationship we had. Admittedly, I missed how offensive he used to be. His misogyny and profound disgust for liberals always kept me entertained. That all stopped though.

When the day arrived to move onto campus, my mother woke me up with tears already leaving trails down her cheeks. She had rented a U-Haul truck we packed the night before. Foolishly, I gave her consent to go shopping for my dorm room. She came back with countless bags of cleaning supplies, soap, underwear, socks, and toothpaste. She also successfully bought bed sheets and a comforter that were even more embarrassing than I thought was possible. She designed my room in a pre-pubertyesque fashion but I knew not to complain.

My dad told me that he was not going to join us for the trip and would instead see me for Thanksgiving. "I'll just be in the way" he said, as he flipped through channels on the television. He was still wearing his pajamas and seemed content with already being downstairs without showering first. I half-heartedly tried to change his mind but I knew my attempt would be futile. After about 5 minutes of trying to persuade him to come, I finally said, "whatever." I then opened the fridge to grab a few bottles of water for the trip.

He called me over and casually handed me his dog tags from the military. I always thought his dog tags were special. When I was younger, he bought me a pair with our last name etched on both sides. I didn't take them off for years. I wore them in the shower, when I slept, and even at church services. However, when I reached high school, I stopped wearing them. They just stopped being that important. But, these were his official dog tags from the army.

"Dad. What are you doing?" I asked.

"Just take them. I want you to have them," he replied. I knew that he would interpret my decline as disrespect, so I put them on. I let the chain drape around my neck with the two tags dipping into the middle of chest. I then kissed his forehead and told him that I loved him. He nudged me off and said that he loved me too.

"Call me when you and your mother gets there" he demanded.

"Will do, pops." I then closed the door behind me and joined my mom, who was already waiting for me in the U-Haul. She smiled, asked if I was ready, and started up the truck.

Two hours into our trip from South Carolina to Ole Miss, she turned down the music I was playing from my phone. I turned my head to face her and then she took a deep breath.

"What mom?" I asked, upset but simultaneously concerned. Tears began to roll down her face. I noticed them even though she was wearing oversized sunglasses.

"Your father and I are getting a divorce" she said. I didn't respond. Instead, I turned the music back up, rolled the window completely down, and stuck my hand out of it. I wanted to feel fresh air passing through my fingers. Her eyes stayed fixated on the country road ahead of us. Though I could feel her heart break with guilt and shame, I thought, at least she tried.



Alleyway
Samantha Nguyen
Pen on paper

Innocence
Daisy Zhang

You lay with your hand curled on his lap, facing an open sky.
The melody of birds chirping numbs your ears as the blue becomes pink
And the pink, becoming of infinity.
Idle chatter halts at your lips as you watch twisted branches unfurl in the darkening sky
The summer air is hot and heavy and the arched wood, ancient and grand, dances in a light breeze
As silence descends upon two seedlings under an old oak,
You staring up into an infinite pool, him admiring the final drops of light glinting in your eyes,
You don't know how to tell him that you think trees are more beautiful than people,
And he doesn't know how to tell you that he thinks you are more beautiful than the world.

Broken
Sh'Rae Marshall

Broken.

Sometimes,
I dream about the past.

In these dreams,
my son is laying on my chest.
Our breaths are in sync
and
I am rubbing his back.

It is a Saturday morning.

My wife is there, too.
brewing hazelnut coffee
and
burning an egg omelet.

Then it happens.

There is a car accident.
There is a hospital.
There is a funeral.

And then I awaken,
with veins
that starve
for amnesia.

When I am *with* Heroin,
my body forgets how to feel.
I mean,
my body refuses
to acknowledge pain.

If they were here

My son,
those eyes
would break me.
In them,
I would swim.
And
drown in anger,
drown in yearning.



Contemplation
Jeffrey Lee
Photograph

My wife,
she would say
"Coño, you're pathetic."
But I wouldn't see
what she would see.

There are no mirrors in my home.
Just a floor
that is painted with blood and needles.
A mattress
that hugs me when the drugs wear off
And music
that I dance to alone.
A bachata sway
and smooth footwork my father passed down.

I am okay. I am not empty.
I am not filled. But I am not empty.

I was called broken.
But
if I am broken,
plant the pieces of me
that are salvageable
into the earth.

So that my soul
becomes a seed for growth.
So that my burial
becomes a ceremony for birth.

The remnants.
Burn and blow into the Harlem air.
I want to experience the life of a colorful mural.
I want to submit to the notes
of a saxophone.

Once, I dreamt about quitting.
But how do I quit when this drug is the only love that I know?
How do I liberate myself from the only thing that allows me to feel free?
Who will I be after I give up all that I am?
Who is under this skin if I were to unzip it like a body suit?
How will I cope if I abandon what protects me?

I will never kiss my wife again.
I will never teach my son how to play baseball.
If I've lost the only people I've ever cared about,
Who will I be changing for?

Figure Study
Chen Zhou
Oil



My Adela
Shayan Waseh

He turned on the faucet and began to wash his hands. He heard the grandchildren's laughter fill the kitchen as they played in some corner of the house. He smiled. Home was good when it was full of family.

He turned to the granite countertop behind him, and took a moment to look at the assortment of knives as well as the meats and vegetables waiting to be cut. The ceiling light above gave the kitchen a warm atmosphere. He smiled at the memories of cooking at this countertop, recalling over forty-two years of meals. Then he was reminded of Adela, and his smile faltered for a moment.

But he pulled the cutting board stacked with boneless chicken thighs towards him. He picked the cleaver up, balancing its weighted handle in his palm, and he began to cut. *Oh Adela*, he thought.

She was never thin like girls in the magazines. She loved cuisine too much to be slender, but she was never big either. She would eat a whole rack of ribs on Sunday, but then only have a bite of dessert. He would jokingly call her Goldilocks. *My just-right in-between*, he would affectionately say.

As he finished cutting the chicken thighs into chunks, he remembered one evening about six months ago. He was standing in that same kitchen, making a seafood paella for Adela. It was her favorite dish. She leaned with her back against the sink and with her arms wrapped around her waist. She was very skinny and pale, and the smell of the shrimp and scallops wafted towards her and made her queasy. He remembered having to wash his hands and help her as she vomited in the bathroom.

It'll be okay Adela, it'll be okay, he had said as he rubbed her back. She believed him in that moment; there was no other choice. He reflected on that memory. It was surreal to think of Adela as the skinny woman she was those last few months of her life. It had gotten worse as the chemotherapy regime had progressed and gotten more desperate. Even the smell of chicken cooking on the grill would make her retch endlessly. She had made him promise, *always keep cooking, even when I'm gone*. There were no more assurances that she would be okay in those last few weeks.

He threw the chunks of chicken thigh that he had cut into the skillet and listened to them crackle as they cooked.

A Question of Death

Malika Madhava

"Wake up, we're going to Virginia." My 10-year-old brain jolted with sudden alertness; there was an unusual urgency in my mom's voice. I wondered why we were making the five-hour drive from New York to visit family on a lazy Saturday morning. Direct as ever, my mom explained, "Your grandfather is dying."

Not fully comprehending the reality of those three words, concern dissolved into excitement as I realized I would get to play with my cousins, who lived with my grandfather. I was unable to understand that this would be the last time I saw him. As soon as we reached my uncle's house, the midday sun high overhead, we raced up the steps to my grandfather's bedroom. He was lying peacefully on the bed in the corner with my family all closely surrounding him, vigilant. I snaked past them and pressed myself against my grandfather, whose breath was just barely perceptible. His fingers brushed softly against my hand as I slipped my small palm in his. My aunt whispered, "He was waiting for you guys to get here." Waiting for what? I didn't ask. I just watched the fragile rise and fall of his chest. It slowed painstakingly until finally, it stopped.

I didn't understand the concept of death at the time. Maybe if I did, I might have questioned how he 'held on' until we arrived. Or I might have asked what about the body allows us to be here in one moment and gone the next.

It wasn't until anatomy lab during the first few weeks of medical school that this question crystallized. After tracing the nerves that allowed my cadaver to taste, dissecting the arteries that breathed life into his muscles, and holding the heart that pumped oxygen throughout his body, I found myself wondering what was so different about those organs that they were no longer able to function. The large white plaques on his inconceivably large liver were evidence of the cancer in his body, but not of how it caused his soul to dissipate. There is little difference in the atomic composition of a living body and a dead one. The carbon and nitrogen building blocks are still there even if their ability to compose life ceases to exist.

As a first year medical student, I often turn to science to try to answer questions with a biological basis. I know that, scientifically, death is ultimately caused by a lack of oxygen to the brain, no matter what is penned on the death certificate. The moment of death is when the brain ceases to function, characterized definitively by the body's inability to breathe when removed from ventilation. In my search for an answer, though, I quickly realized that this definition fails to take into account the intricacies related to the moment of death.

In our era of life support and ventilators, cells in a brain-dead body could exist indefinitely. Even if the brain dies, the organs continue to be viable as long as the blood is receiving oxygen. It is only the brain that is dead: our medical concept of life is the ability to be aware of it. This distinction between life and death can appear rather obscure at times. Someone who fits the medical definition of 'dead' often exhibits the Lazarus sign, named for the saint that Jesus resurrected. The Lazarus sign involves a deceased person jerking upright and reaching their arms outwards before settling down and crossing their arms over their chest shortly after a ventilation tube is removed. This simple reflex arc, like a knee jerk, doesn't involve the brain. But a biologically-defined non-living organism would not be able to move on its own.

This ambiguity came to the forefront in the 2013 case of Jahi McMath, a 13-year-old girl who was declared brain dead after a routine tonsillectomy. Her family refused to accept brain death as a diagnosis of total death, and filed a lawsuit against Children's Hospital Oakland where she was being kept on life support. The court ruled that she fit the criteria of death, at which point the family moved her to a facility in New Jersey, where objections to the declaration of death on the basis of personal beliefs are allowed. She remains on life support and a feeding tube in a state of limbo to this day.

To those who follow the bible, she has a beating heart, and is therefore still alive. To a biologist, only parts of her are alive. To a doctor, she is undeniably dead. Who are we to say which is right?

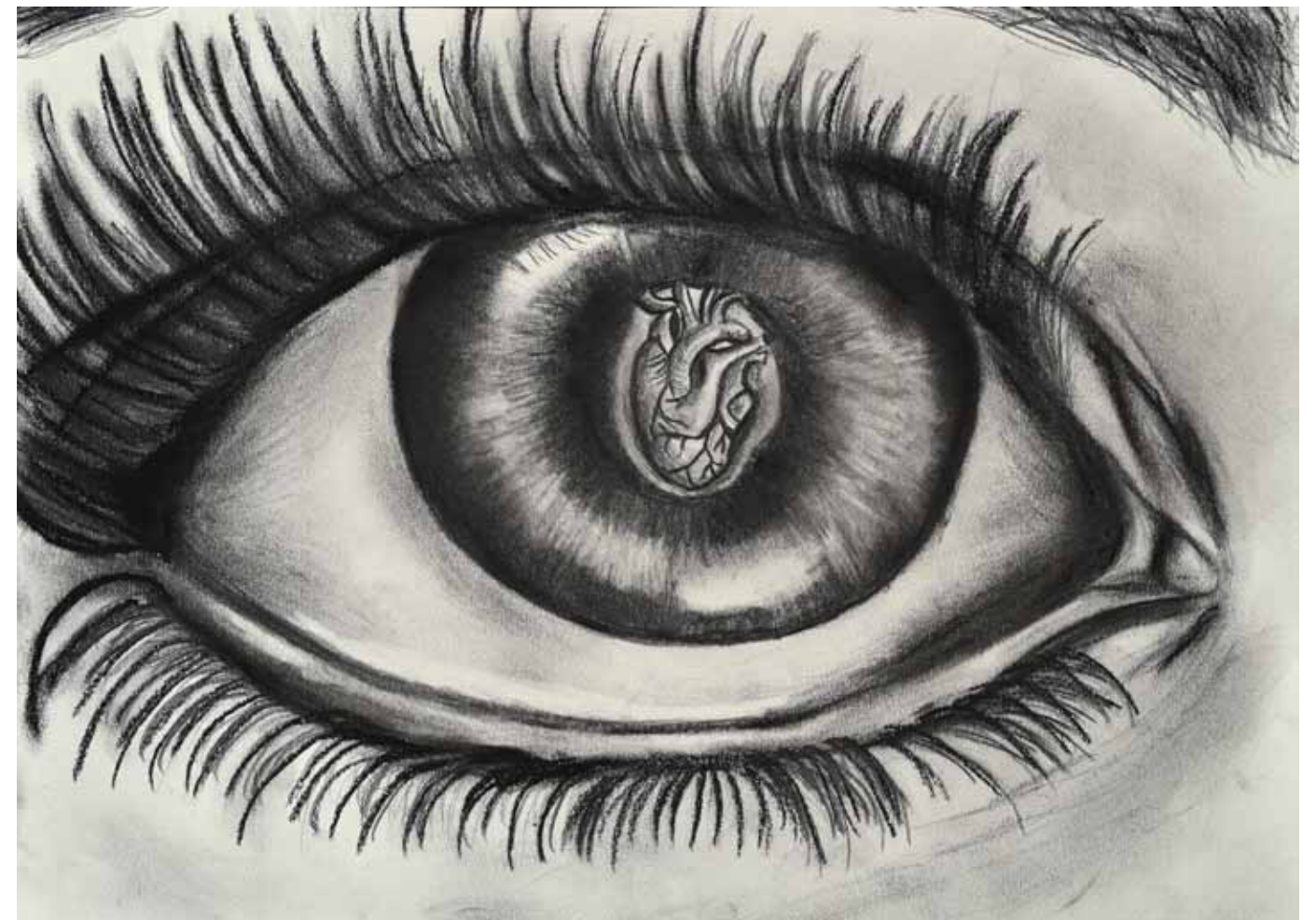
I may never have an answer to this question. Even now, knowing more about death than my ten-year-old self doesn't help me understand what caused my grandfather to die. I still don't understand if or how a person could stave off death, somehow controlling the moment that his or her organs cease to function. What makes the living state of molecules of carbon, nitrogen, and oxygen so fragile? Why is medical death not the same as biological death? All of these are questions that I may never be able to answer.

One day, as a practicing physician, I may see a 10-year-old watch her grandfather die. I may be the person to tell her family that their beloved has passed. And I may have to say that with a confidence that I might never have.

Eye Contact

Rachel Werk

Pencil and charcoal



Food Water Shelter

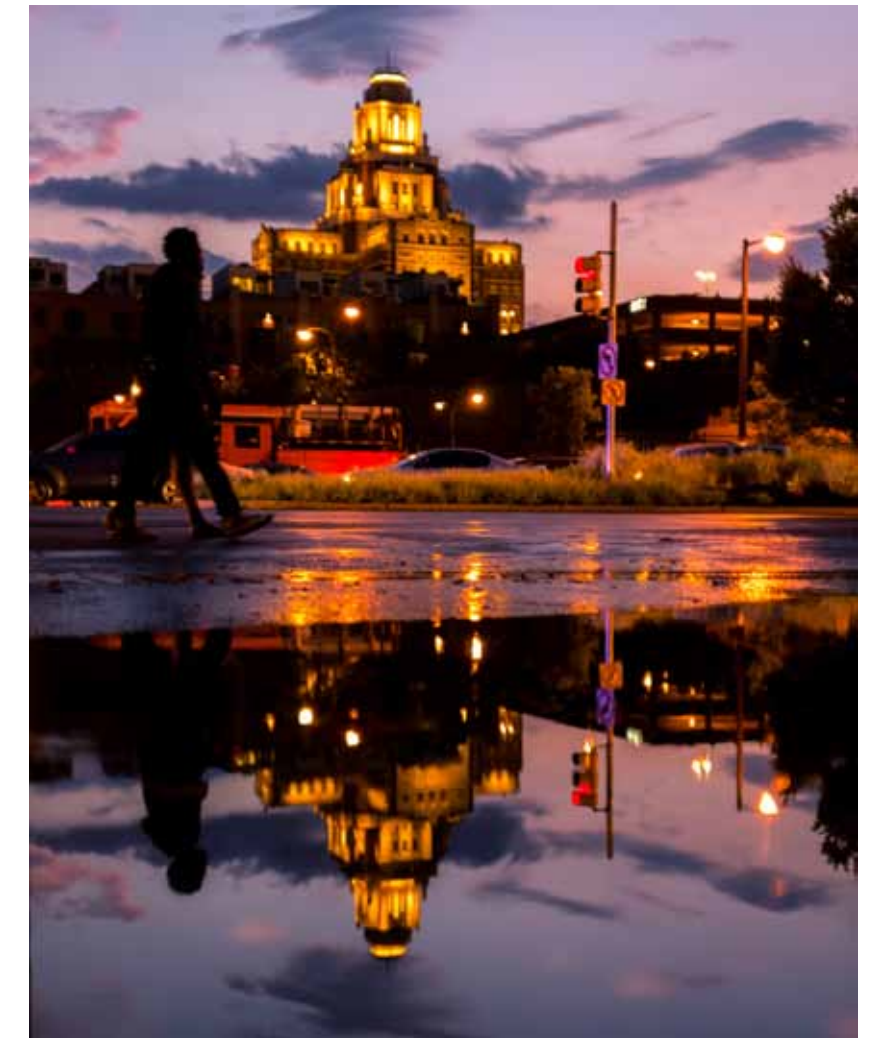
Zachary Howell

whats that noise oh get up just sit up whats today go to the bathroom brush teeth shower put on clothes be a human get food need food is there food no no food need to get some but where run get it in ten minutes so tired get coffee need coffee need my brain get to class deep breath pay attention wow youre understanding paying attention youre doing well so well wait what was that catch up no too late now keep up dont think just know keep eyes open focus that body not yours the words theyre sleepy slow CLICK new topic new words theyre filling but always need more more more times up hungry busy sleepy meet the patient talk listen react care give more more more study cave live there feed the brain starve the body keep going keep learning cant waste the day got an email quick respond back to work need to eat go shopping carry it back put it away cook fast eat fast moms calling no time pack up back to the cave knowing is surviving need a break need water find the fountain drink it need more more more back to the cave back to safety survival is work work is survival keep reading need more more more im done leave the cave its dangerous but have to leave must leave get back floss brush bed.

The Last Kiss

Jeffrey Lee

Photograph



sunsets from antelope island

Karishma Kodia

lilac and lavender
purple vale
rose whirled sky
with a peach worship beneath the sun
clouds in perfect formation
cool undertones, patches of shade
and pale ice blue upon a summer's night

this sky
this view
this peace.

mountains scraped, jagged with love from Mother Earth
deep sky grays
and upon this view
a shimmering lake
sparkling, dancing with light under Sun's glory
with gentle, soft upon the night
jades of erect leaves
Sun and virtuous, pure Moon – ever together, ever apart
shades of straw
upon pink / gray / white rock

permanent upon Man's transience
rays of strength emanating among the valley
the clouds a crescent and a crow
sun slipping sliding, a rest for the night.

A Night at Penn's Landing

Xiang Zhang

Photograph

The Spade
Mak Sarich

Far beneath the plain
Drudges dig deeper.

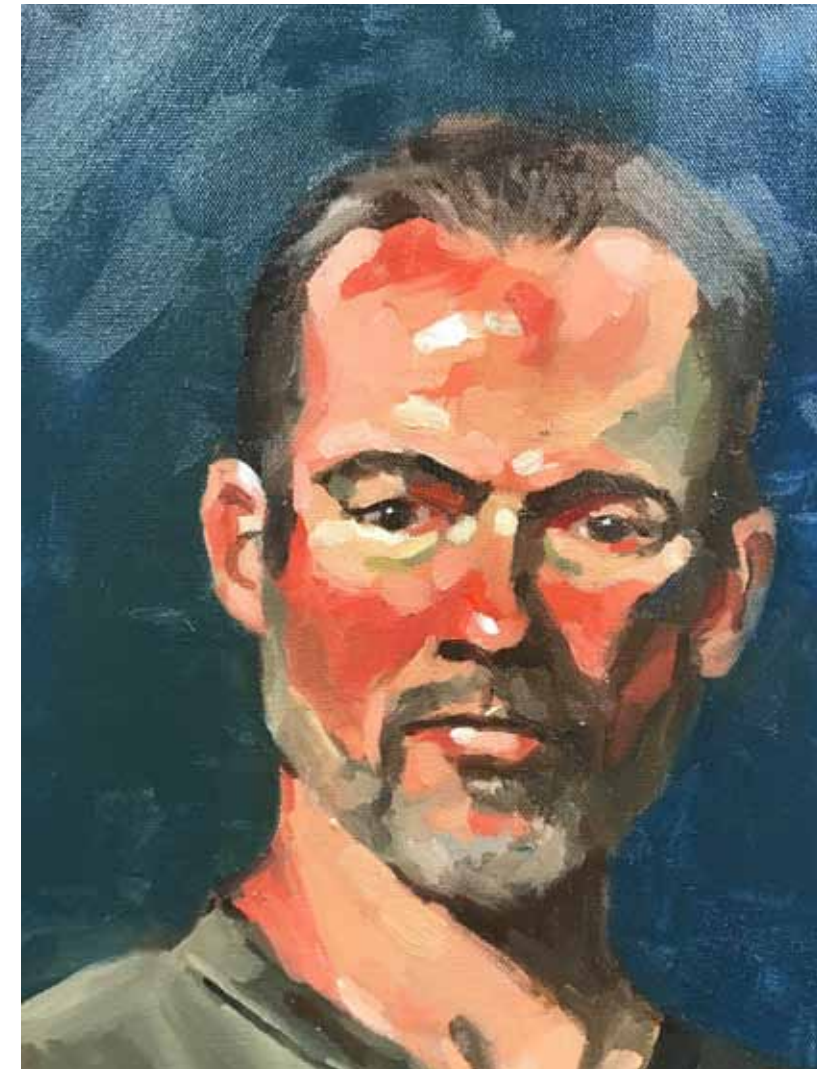
Wherever the ground is soft,
they are pioneers.

Faster and harder.

Until their knuckles bleed,
and their brain sweats

Saving earth for scrutiny
Never for lament.

Queen's View, Scotland
Katie Sommers
Oil on canvas



Portrait Study
Chen Zhou
Oil

The Scars I'm Too Afraid To Get
B. Samuel Meyers

I can't breathe.

At least, not well. Through my nose. Crooked, long, identifiable. But the rest is fine and I sleep on my side with my mouth open and sometimes I snore on my back, but it's fine.

Or. I'll wear a nasal strip. To sleep. Not all day. We only use one nostril at a time anyway, so half the time I'm normal.

I'm missing two teeth.

Adult choppers. Born without 'em. Bottom jaw, premolar, hidden. But I still have the baby teeth in their stead and they only jiggle in their planters when I crunch a carrot or yank a bagel. Just a bit. They don't hurt. They'll last a while longer, I think.

I'm not seeing anyone.

Not right now. My preference. What would she think, what would they? But there are faces who've caught my eye, and they may have caught mine too, so we'll see. I tried to invite them to stuff. One looks the way a fleece blanket feels on your face on a cold Sunday. Run it over each cheek. Not in a creepy way. If I could then I'd be over it, it's just a blanket.

There's a surgery should get, another I'll have to get soon, and a woman I should ask to coffee. In fact, I'll ask her. With another friend. Just in case.

Vegas Remembered
Bryce Eng

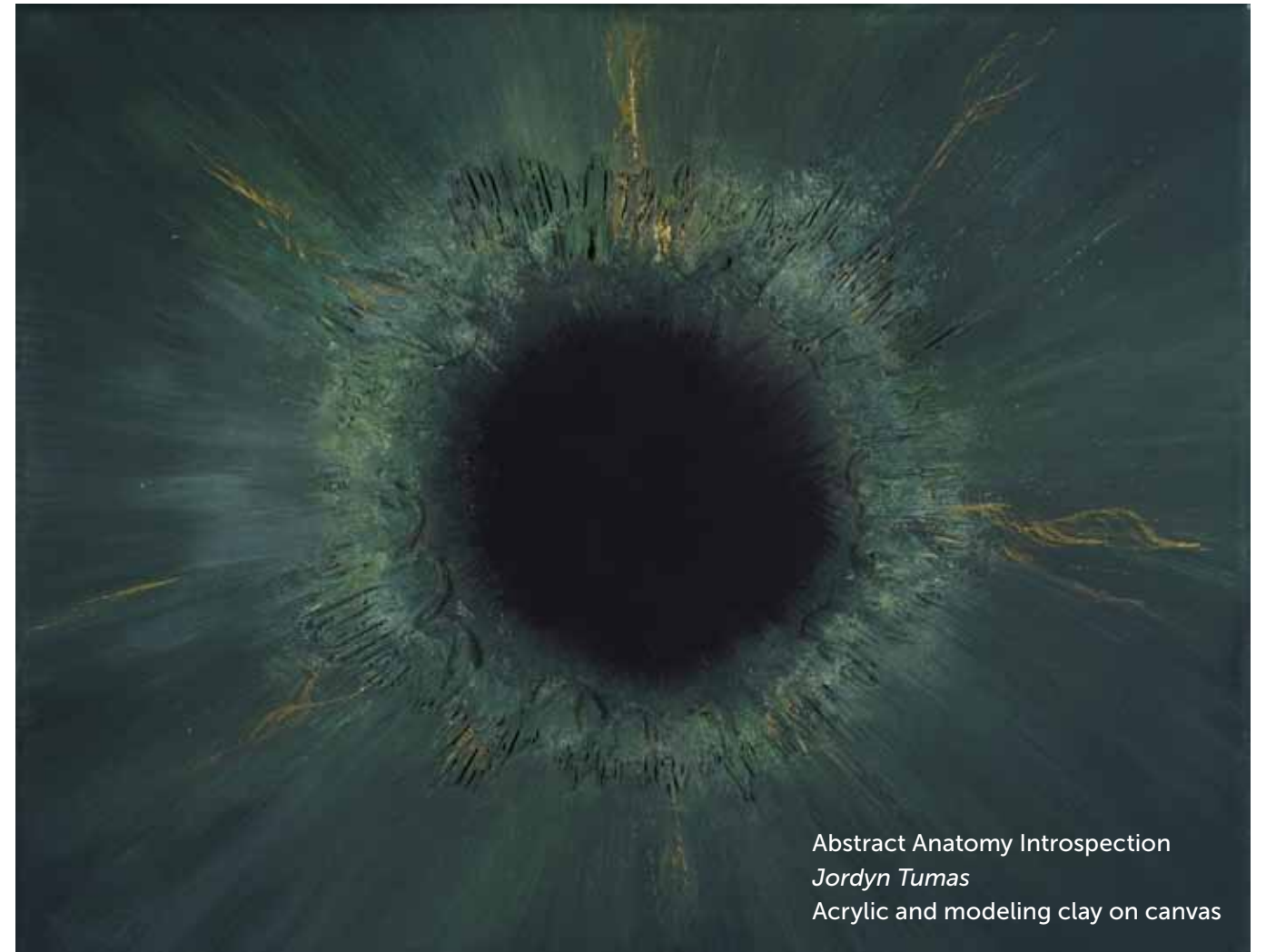
I lay by the phone
expecting you
to call, expecting you
to tell me you had not
been there at all

Then I lay by the door
expecting you
to come, expecting you
to make all my fears
look dumb

Now I lay in your bed
hoping you
will find rest, hoping
one day I may lay down
on your sweet breast



Best Friends
Jeffrey Lee
Photograph



Abstract Anatomy Introspection
Jordyn Tumas
Acrylic and modeling clay on canvas

i'm sorry
Harnoor Kaur

They were empty, scared, lost. They took their fears out on him, in their slurs, stones, and screams. He reached for his revolver, knowing well that bullet holes couldn't fill their souls, but that was too much to ask for anyway. He tried to buy time. He sat on the second floor with the window open, and pulled the trigger at the space in-between them. 1 shot. 1 foot back. 10 seconds. 10 inches forward. Their wave undulated until his trigger no longer held its power. They surged forward, crashing on the house. He yelled for his kids and wife to run, and stood, waiting for the sea to strike him. His family stood chipped, far away from the fight, but he lay at the epicenter of it all, smashed in a million pieces.

They fled the danger zone, searching for disaster relief. He was one of many. They were a few of thousands. Victims by confusion, refugees by ignorance, lost in turmoil. Displaced from their homes, their hopes, and dreams.

I'm sorry you couldn't be there to support them. Support your wife, freshly widowed and diagnosed with bipolar disorder, stuck living with half of her dead. Support your oldest daughter, with her keen mind and saddened eyes, who learned to fly to search for you in the skies. Support your middle son, whose intelligence took him far overseas, but too far without your guidance, as his vices painted his path. Support your youngest daughter, crying over books as she thirsted for knowledge, the only thing no one could take away from her.

With time, their chips repaired, their bruises faded, their hopes reappeared. I have reincarnated your youngest daughter's dreams, but even I have bullet holes I cannot fill. I'm sorry we could never meet.

Autopsy
Laura Simpler

When we walked in the room, the body was already open. If we hadn't gotten lost in the poorly lit hallways on the 3rd floor, maybe we could have seen it from the very start. Either way, there were 4 of us there, or 5 I suppose. A small older woman was holding the scalpel, a young woman stood not-so-nervously in the corner, and my 3rd year student who looked to me, the newly minted 4th year, for what to do next. I showed her how to don the surgical gown and gloves, though I'd only done this before for surgery on live patients. I thought how we weren't using the normal sterile technique, but I reasoned it mustn't matter too much now.

With soft jazz playing in the background and a wooden word spelling "Respect" resting on the window sill, we approached the cold metal table. Dr. Peterson explained why there was water running in channels under the slats of the table, though we could clearly see the red stained river it was washing away.

The breast bone was cut away with silver shears, like removing the crest from a suit of armor, revealing the most vital of organs. Her heart and lungs laid there in stillness, looking somewhat redder than I had remembered from my days in the anatomy lab. Wasting no time, Dr. Peterson began to pull the organs away from their resting place. Swiftly and precisely cutting the roots and connections between the body and its pieces. "Ah, see these adhesions, must've been a bad infection there," Dr. Peterson remarked. I supposed we found our answer, pneumonia. She had gone so quickly, we didn't have time for our usual workup. At 95, it wasn't unreasonable to succumb to an infection like that, but I guess the family needed closure. I wondered if I needed it too. We'd always been able to help them before, or at least try.

What came next felt more like Mortal Kombat finisher move than a routine medical procedure, one that inevitably happens in hospitals around the world - and funeral homes as I learned from Trina the young woman in the corner who is opening her own next year. Dr. Peterson grabbed the arch of the aorta and pulled, bringing all the organs along with it, like the deep roots of a weed revealing the connection and geometry hidden within.

Now safely transferred to their new metal bucket of a home, the organs were brought over to the bench for closer examination. She removed each organ in turn, remarking how she thinks her heart is probably the same size because she too is a little old lady, and that probably all our lungs are this blackened from living in this soot filled city. The endless commentary swung wildly from historical trivia to filmmaking analysis to the JFK assassination - or conspiracy as she proclaimed. All the while, she was carving out small rectangular sections of each organ and placing them in small rectangular cages to be made into microscope slides. "We don't really need these, I mean we know what took her, but I go through the motions. The body never ceases to surprise you." The lungs were filled with fluid from her pneumonia, the liver was congested with blood from her heart failure, the kidneys were scarred from years of hypertension, and the spleen had shrunken by age.

I wasn't sure I was surprised. Not about the pathologies, at least. I thought wouldn't it be more weird if she didn't have distortions at her age? It odd was to think that way, so morbid, so grim. It made me think of how much I had seen in my one year of work in a hospital, how much heart failure, kidney disease, how much illness. How much I still had to learn.

I felt the glance of my 3rd year student. I wondered what it must feel like for her to see such a procedure so early in her years. I wondered if she knew I had never experienced this before either, that I was just as wide-eyed and slack-jawed—thankful for the surgical mask hiding the view.

As we reached the heart, the final organ of this investigation, Dr. Peterson used her scissors to cut down to the coronary artery for sampling. She explained that the calcium deposits from atherosclerosis in those small vessels would be too much for the scalpel's blade.

"But hey, for a woman her age and all the years she kept her little heart going, I think she's entitled to that."

Anatomy Spine
Leena Ramani
Paint on canvas



Her Grief Changes

Lily Black

Her grief changes. The changes are slow like the earth's movements. Only visible once they are complete. I do not see her underlying shifts and waves of emotions as she walks through the world with the edges of her mouth in the shape of a grin. I see her eyes twitch, but only sometimes, as if they are uncertain of which way to go – up or down, open or closed.

Sometimes, she raises her head out of the pool of tears and can see the faces in front of her. She breathes and sees the world surrounding her shapeshifting figure. Other times, she walks among the crowd, just like everyone else. She wears the black robing of the city dwellers, stepping in puddles with new boots as all others do. She can't see what's ahead but roams the ocean of mourning without a compass, untethered to time, direction, place. Place. Home. Where is that? What is that? Who is home to me now?

She has found home in the company of others. She finds it in those who love her, others who share her loss, and even people who have some unexplainable connection to her story. This connection seems rooted in the sorrow of preceding generations. Generations. "What does it mean to be a unique, never lived before human being," she wonders, "yet so profoundly made up of one's ancestors, grandparents, parents." She thinks this as she sees his eyes looking back at her in the mirror. Her father's eyes. They twinkle like his but resemble a more turquoise version of his deep ocean blue. Sometimes she even notices his off-centered smile come through to her in unexpected photos taken by another. How did she not notice these similarities until now? Now that he's gone.

Away. Gone. Lost. Somewhere out there she feels him around. Other times she does not. Has he just lost his way? Is it possible that he is on his way home from some roundabout route he stumbled upon? She questions her sense of reality as she feels the pounding of her heart, a glimmer of hope. Suddenly, she shakes it off and keeps walking among the crowd, pushing away the urge to see his face among the familiar boxy statures of the men around her. She sees his Irish caps floating amidst the streets, but she can only hope. Hope is all that is left.

I returned to that bench

Bryce Eng

I returned to that bench
down by the river
its coarse wood
softened by touch
of rain, ivory foliage
sprung
from bed below
and moss-
covered cracks made
it whole

That long bench
down by the river
had space for two
but I as one
was left
undone

Winter Farmscape

Samantha Nguyen

Pen on paper



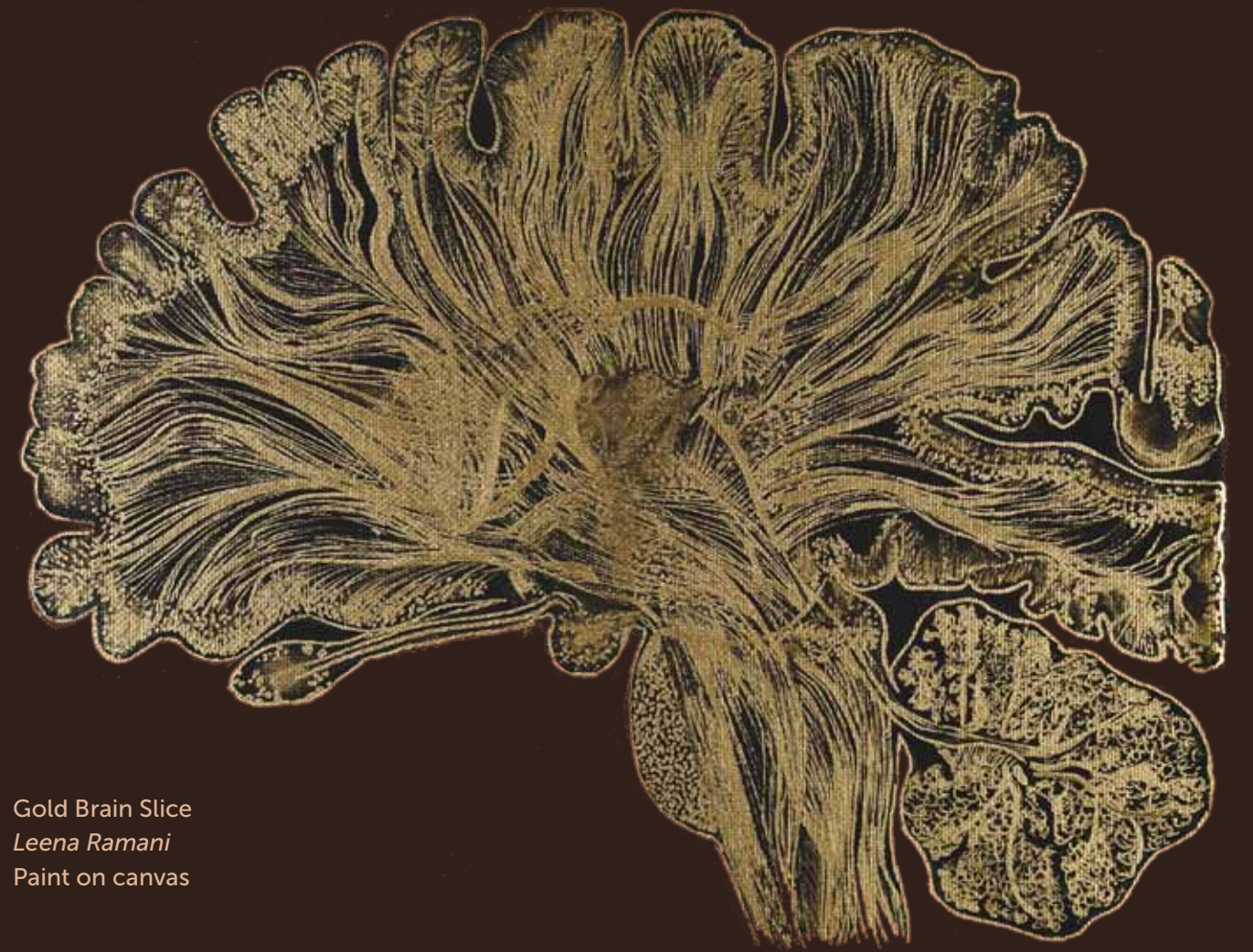
Untitled

Kanika Ramchandani

The crackling sounds of oil frying batter
The faint sounds of simmering dal
I observe my mother's focus as she prepares a meal,
all burners on the stove occupied,
her hands dance across the kitchen moving to a rhythm only they know
These aromas have raised me for as long as I can remember,
seeped into my hair, clothes, skin
I smell of elaichi, of jeera, laung, haldi
They leave a memory, the essence of home
Where my mother's sabzi and her mother's dal are made of pure love
And still, they bring me tears—of knowing I will never be able to recreate what
they know
My hands, are their hands, but they have been watered away from their roots
They have not lived and grown in the red soil of the motherland —
They do not know the same stories



Untitled
Jane Jacob
Charcoal



Gold Brain Slice
Leena Ramani
Paint on canvas

alternate names for curiosity
Sh'Rae Marshall

inspired by 'alternate names for black boys' by Danez Smith

1. a deep breath as he whispers "every guy tries it once."
2. a 2 am google search on homosexuality.
3. using 3 fingers to dance inside of a home you never thought would be so inviting.
4. 4 unanswered text messages from a boy you've been ignoring for weeks.
5. staring for 5 seconds longer than any other guy in the locker room.
6. Having the 6th sleepover in 2 months
7. Calling a guy faggot 7 times before diving into him like the neighbor's pool you've been burning to swim in.
8. Keeping your eyes closed for 8 minutes as he uses his mouth and lips to sacrifice your concept of masculinity.
9. Posting on Craigslist "Bicurious. Can host after 9."
10. Using 10 fingers to build 2 fists when he calls you his boyfriend.

Red
Mak Sarich

Dark thoughts
Scorched down my arm into my grip
My fingers tightened

Below me
Your face made a turn towards mine
My hand loosened

Dark eyes
Unaware that the meaning of innocence
Was defined by this moment

A fragment of a thought
Malika Madhava

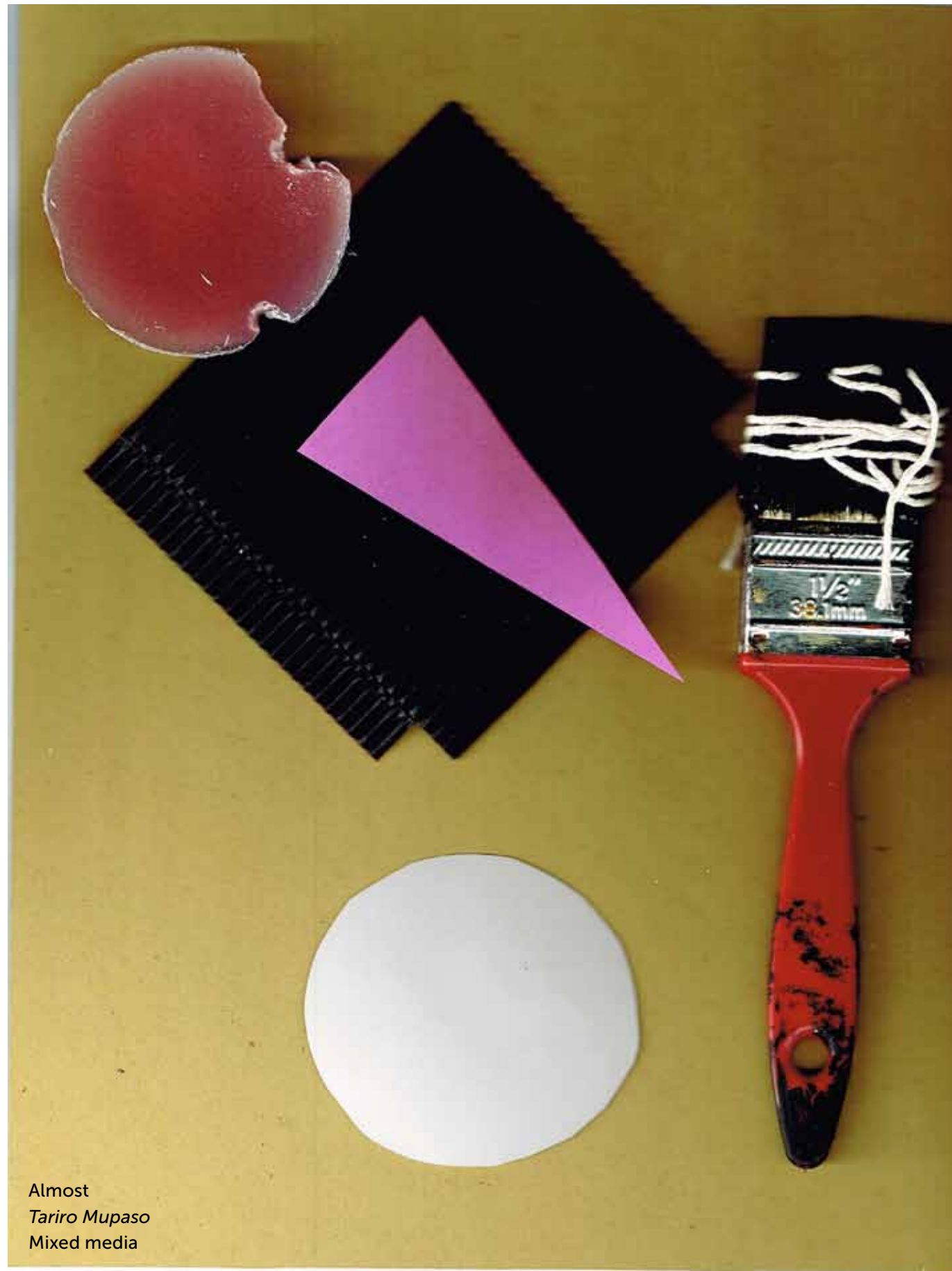
A simple word shatters:
a thousand lost connections,
tightly twisted knots untangle.

The mumbled mice of the mind
skitter scamper squeak—commotion
drowning out sound notions.

Three six five, just letters:
the meaning as fallible as the mind
That promised to hold on to it.



Cat Fight
Leena Ramani
Photograph



Almost
Tariro Mupaso
Mixed media

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Untitled
Katherine Cambareri
Photograph