

THE Gist Fall 2019

Gist



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THE GIST

Fall 2019

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

The Gist: Fall 2019

As we close our twenty-first year as a journal, *The Gist* (previously known as *Vantage Point*) has continued to nurture the University of Vermont's creative community by publishing exceptional student art and writing.

Over the last year, our membership has tripled. We reestablished our editorial board. We've been honored to receive hundreds of submissions, and while we wish we could publish more, we're grateful to be publishing more art and writing with this issue than we ever have before.

This year also brought UVM's first ever Creative Arts Expo, which *The Gist* hosted alongside other creative arts clubs and publications, under the newly established Arts & Writing Council.

We're also overjoyed to announce that multiple works from *The Gist* were selected for plain china—the national literary anthology for top-notch undergraduate art and writing.

And as we begin yet another Vermont autumn, we hope you savor the works within these pages, as we hope to savor the works you continue to share with us, and the readers of *The Gist*.

— THE EDITORS

“No live organism can continue for long to exist sanely under conditions of absolute reality.”

— Shirley Jackson, *The Haunting of Hill House*

“In our work, the question is, how much you absorb from others. So for me, creativity, is really like a relay race. As children we are handed the baton. Rather than passing it onto the next generation as is, first we need to digest it and make it our own.”

— Hayao Miyazaki

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Secret Code

Before the falling of sun on cool, whitewashed
skin, before you lost control of temper
from the loss of words.
Before mirrors were wrapped in holiday
paper because you were trapped
in reflection. Before adult diapers were the new fad.

After the puzzles were put away and bar stools
empty of our bottoms. After the popcorn
was no longer out for popping-
Orville warming shelf with dusty memories.
After whistling *Santa Baby*. After your magic
bounce and sway hushing grandbabies.
After rigged pool games with blue
staining our fingers like secret code.
After morning swims in 50's trunks.
After scars on your forehead
because you never missed camp's door frame.

Before I inherited sweaters
the scent of lavender and eucalyptus lingering
in fabric I knotted around waist.
Before rifles were given to Father.
Before Aunt hammered into the front lawn:
FOR SALE.
Before books collected on my shelves—

your Stephen King, your physics:
A bible of scholarly pleasure.

After fishing. After pillows stacked in front of fireplace.
After Cherry Garcia on Saturday nights with metal
spoons clinking to Mr. Bean's latest adventure.
After a worm hunt, mud caking to boots
and after sunsets overlooking Keelers bay.
After Guinness and gathering gold tabs.

Before the cemetery. Before clouds collected
your features and before wind claimed
your wisdom. Before the empty branch on our tree,
before the tears of a niece.
Before dementia.
Before. Before. Before.

Hodgepodge



Baby

Sugar or burnt bread.
You can decide how her skin tastes.

Or they will,
when the baby showers are over
and they slide her down a grey arc
into a pot of oatmeal.

Tikka



Oh No, It's Me, Your Resident Advisor, And I'm Already Asking How You're Feeling

We pass each other in our reshall and I ask, immediately, how you're feeling. You stare, dazed, thinking 3:48 am is the wrong time for checking in. You're wrong—it's the perfect time. Because it's never the wrong time for community building and I am your Resident Advisor, your guru of wellness. I begin what you assume is a rehearsed monologue detailing all the exciting events Reslife is hosting this weekend. You stand in half lurch, nodding, frozen—unable to cross the bridge of awkward resident-RA small talk that bars you from slumber—until I pause for a breath.

You seize this moment, tell me you're sorry but you're very tired. You think your hint was taken. It was and I tossed it out. Now I hook onto your admission of poor energy levels as grounds to ask how you've been sleeping, how you've been eating, how classes are going, if you feel your voice is heard. You mumble generic responses and I sense your indifference. My eyes narrow.

I ask why you didn't come to our hall circle tonight.

There were pizza and puzzles. Why didn't you come?

You say you just couldn't make it and look around for someone else to foist me on. But there's no one—it's just you and me, and now I'm leaning against the wall, blocking the path to your dorm door. I maintain eye contact so intense my pupils dilate as I explain how vital inclusion is for students to thrive. You begin to wonder why an institution of higher education can't treat you like an adult—like other housing complexes in the real world—and not have self-care worshipping enforcers of happiness prowl near your room every night, that room that you're already going thousands into debt for.

My head cranks to the side and I correct you: I'm not prowling, I'm community building.

Chills sprint down your spine and you try to back away. I walk forward.

You attempt to flatter me. You say you love my new CONSENT IS SEXY bulletin board, that you can't wait for the ice cream social I'm planning next week. It's ineffective. I'm now blasting you with a torrent of affirmations—I VALUE YOU ARE DOING AWESOME—that begins to slur into Jurassic snarls.

You turn to flee. My howls boom down the halls. The lights begin to flicker and all the posters on the wall flutter. You start to run. I pursue. You crash through the stairwell door and I'm right behind you, quoting this one TED Talk that will totally change your life.

You bound down the stairs, whip around corners while screaming. You're hoping the echoing wails will attract attention. But I'm still catching up. You can feel my breath on the back of your neck. I'm explaining the four pillars of wellness. You're getting tired. You're exhausted after a grueling day of classes and work, while I am sustained by my unyielding devotion to restorative practice. I tackle you at the bottom landing while shrieking "Positive Vibes!" You give up. We lay still, wheezing, recovering.

I suddenly realize how my actions might be impacting you. I apologize. I tell you to go ahead and get some rest. Let's process this in the morning—we'll have a circle. You'll come to this one, right?

Dino



Track Stars

I am fourteen and I am bursting
days open on concrete like melons
I am learning to run with my legs
and not my mouth
I am lapping fields like
compliments and spitting
turf from my heels
until my lungs sputter like footfalls: I am too scared
to slow down.

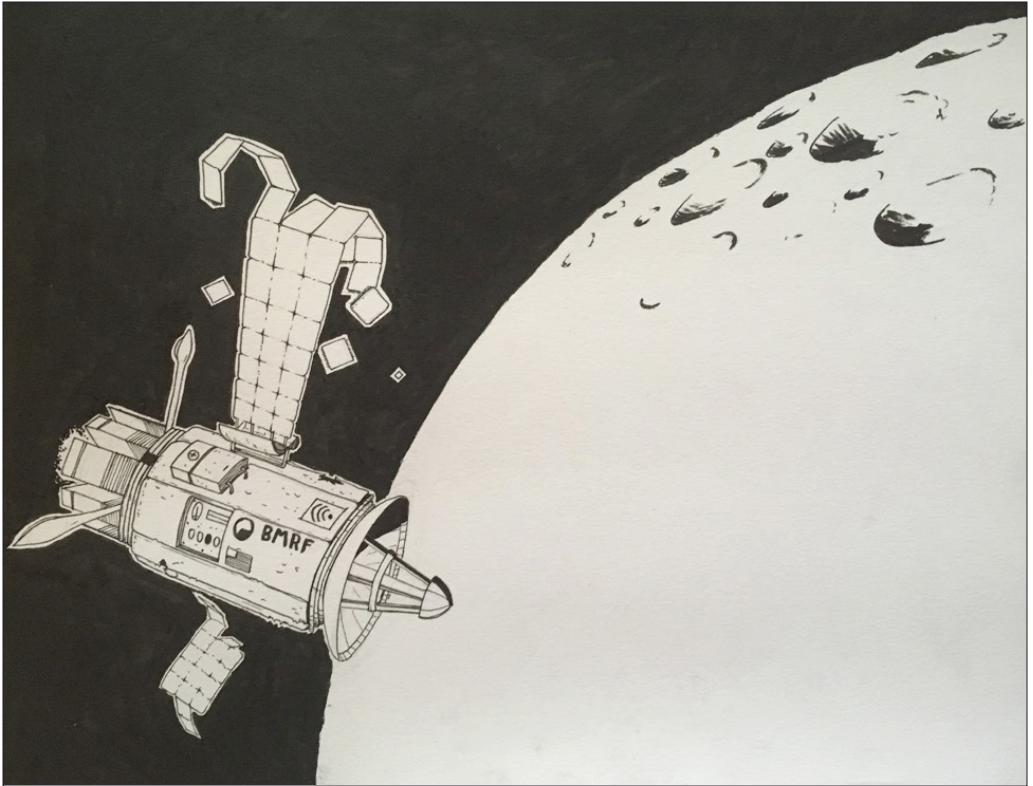
I am fourteen and I know more
words than I ever thought I should
and I can run through each one for you
if you want
but none of them apply to me
not even the nice ones.

I am fourteen and I am pouring my body
into places and pictures it shouldn't be in
and I now know that the blue
spandex make my ass look better
than the red ones and that
runners don't drink diet soda
or eat sugar on weekdays.

I am fourteen and if I run
hard and fast enough
into the trees at track practice
there's a muddy beach

stippled with a million prattling oysters
where I can drop gasping to the bank
stick my arms in the river
and watch tadpoles roll over them like oil.

Lunar Satellite



above all else, a plea

Love is an accompanied snooze on the couch,
 blanketless but warm, five hearts riding
 the same melodic wave; a half-conscious doze,
 a languid domestic warmth, a communal kiss to say,
 a nose-whistle of enervation, a soft hum of contentment.

“I love you”;

Love is a drunken stumble to the porch; a reprieve
 from that palpable, tonic organ, absurd and uninhibited,
 embers flying with every stomp and stroke: that
 metaphor for what everyone means when they proclaim,
 Or, at least sometimes.

“I love you”.

Love is directionless bonding by the bathroom door;
 empowering a dull girl’s daydream, then asking if she
 has a ride home; enthrallment with the guacamole,
 enticement with a blouse, enchantment with eye glitter;
 is imprecise affection, the easiest words to say.

“I love you”

Love is sleeping next to the one you have surrendered to —
 willfully, consentingly, enthusiastically — arms around
 each other, as you lucid dream you are ravenously, brashly
 taking hold of a blue-haired girl you talked to tonight,
 demanding coexistence with your thrashing sub-conscience.

“I love you”

Love is awaking to the fire alarm, then ignoring it.
 Love is not snapping until the tenth time the phone rings.
 Love is cleaning what isn’t yours as though it were.
 Love is asking, “Will you call me later? I want
 to be the final thing I feel tonight”.

‘I love you’

Lessons & Growth from the Opioid Epidemic



I Used to Have Green Thumbs

Fat and wrath and cobwebs
in gin, splashed Thanksgiving
grease when father punched up

to beats of Sting, of KISS, while outside
our lilacs barked: *you are not a man.*

I chewed fried rhubarb, too. Played
with wishbones on windowsills and—I knew
I loved men because they scared me.

So I sought sustenance from saints
fixed in candy glass, weeded my habits

and kneeled before the hammered son,
this son dying because his daddy
said so, because somebody needs

to pay, unlike father—who wilted
while Bank of America seized

his home, who uprooted me from mine
when he struck me with his precious Bently
and called me *dumbass faggot* before my dreams

could even be wet, before my voice

could even dip, before I even had a closet

to come out of. When father skinned the wild turkeys that I had failed to catch, our tomato leaves howled: *you will never grow up.*

And when I fled Illinois the cornstalks said nothing. The grass-gravel roads said nothing,

the pond scum said nothing. No one said anything. And I still feel soiled, one lung forever filtering out cow dung reek, like weevils

ravishing wheat in a silo. Today my indoor cactus died and—what has happened here?

La Jungla



Aubade for Signal Lost

Dawn now red
eyed mice nipping at
wires from which
you weep,

the lights go off and
you power on with
neon bulbs.

A calic sprouts from
its root, an antenna
to televise your
heavy signal nonstop.

And though I could
always change your
channels to white

noise murmurs of
wars, or roll my eyes
back into tomorrow,
I'd hate to miss the

part where that
screen goes dark.

So here I am,
asking the weather
man on channel seven,
what's in store for us?

He's spent a lifetime
building a career off
of predicting
the unpredictable.

I'll dial in to talk
show psychologists;
they'll guide us through
necessities, like

proper volume,
frequency, and
adjusting your picture settings.

Call up that ad.
There's a cure for
incompatibility, a
bundle of sensors

that allows boys to
love other boys despite
their toxic masculinity,

worthy of broken piggy
banks and rainy day funds.

Watching Jimmy Fallon,
and look, there we are—

late night host is consumed by
your technicolor teeth glowing
brighter than neutron stars.

You often hesitate to
respond, and,
when asked,

America is on the
edge of its seat as
it chokes on what you'd
dare say next.

When the sun rises to reveal
how you've masked
me with wires,

and I can't find any
other solution than to
unmute my television,

I'll take a bat to
your shrapnel screen:

a fritz carried on past the dusk,
that short circuits us to sleep.

Self-Determination



Margaret Eudene

In the wake of my grandmother's death,
the waves of which are five years in the making,
I sometimes think of:

Thin lips and stern jaw,
watery eyes,
a voice sharp and cracking,
like a thunderstorm over a cotton field.

Dancing pinwheel patchwork quilts in
kelly green, cerulean, scarlet.
Soft mints dissolving like clouds
when the days dry in autumn.

An eggshell-white Buick with soft seats,
an earthy brown interior,
smelling like a museum
of worn leather and wood.

Peaches blistering in the oven,
glowing yellow in the Georgian sun,
while tempers flare and sputter
and catch fire.

An oxygen tank humming and gasping.
A wooden rocking-chair that looked
more like a deathbed.
Bushes at the window groping skyward.

A body, still barely a person,
passing on a white gurney
like a ghost over the threshold
and into the house one last time.

Did she see me wave to her?
Did she ever think she would end up there?
With a granddaughter
who would barely lift a hand in her direction?

Did she even taste that final sugary, mealy bite of applesauce?

Sometimes I fear the acrid taste and smell and heat
of guilt
rather than grief.

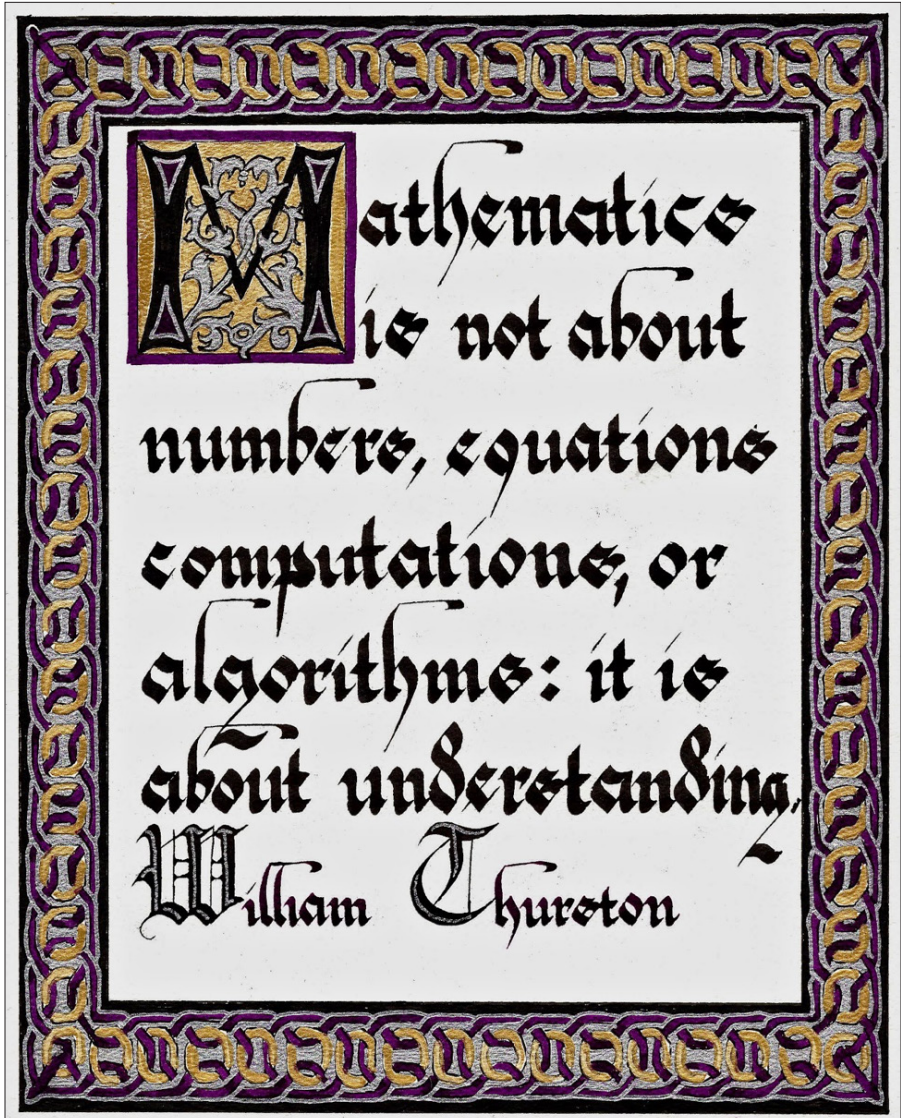
Monarch



Merengue

The sugar of you
On my tongue
Melting fast.
Eager fingers
Skim your cloud-
Like softness
So light, so light
I am afraid
You'll disappear.

Mathematics



Weapons of Class Destruction

We attempted homicide under an orange creamsicle sky.
Toby&mitch gave us Hell with their blaster fire
while Bryce soared above in a starship
dropping bombs that made us dive for the ground
like the T.V. said they did in Iraq.
Luckily, I was never without my lightsaber.
I parried and pirouetted in the rocky road dirt
and failing all else I had my invisible force shield.
But still, I was routed and I fell back deep into the pine trees,
needles crunching like bones beneath my feet.
Not too deep though,
not deep enough for The Man In The Forest with the BB gun and the appetite
for the flesh of children to see me (unrelated to The Homeless Man
In The Basement Of The Middle School with the baseball bat and the appetite
for the flesh of children and adolescents)

We didn't always resort to warfare
but Corey's mom said we couldn't play wallball
anymore while she was stuffing tissues in my nostrils
to soak up the blood.
I didn't cry, but she gave me a fudgesicle even though
my mouth tasted like slides and monkey bars the rest of that day.

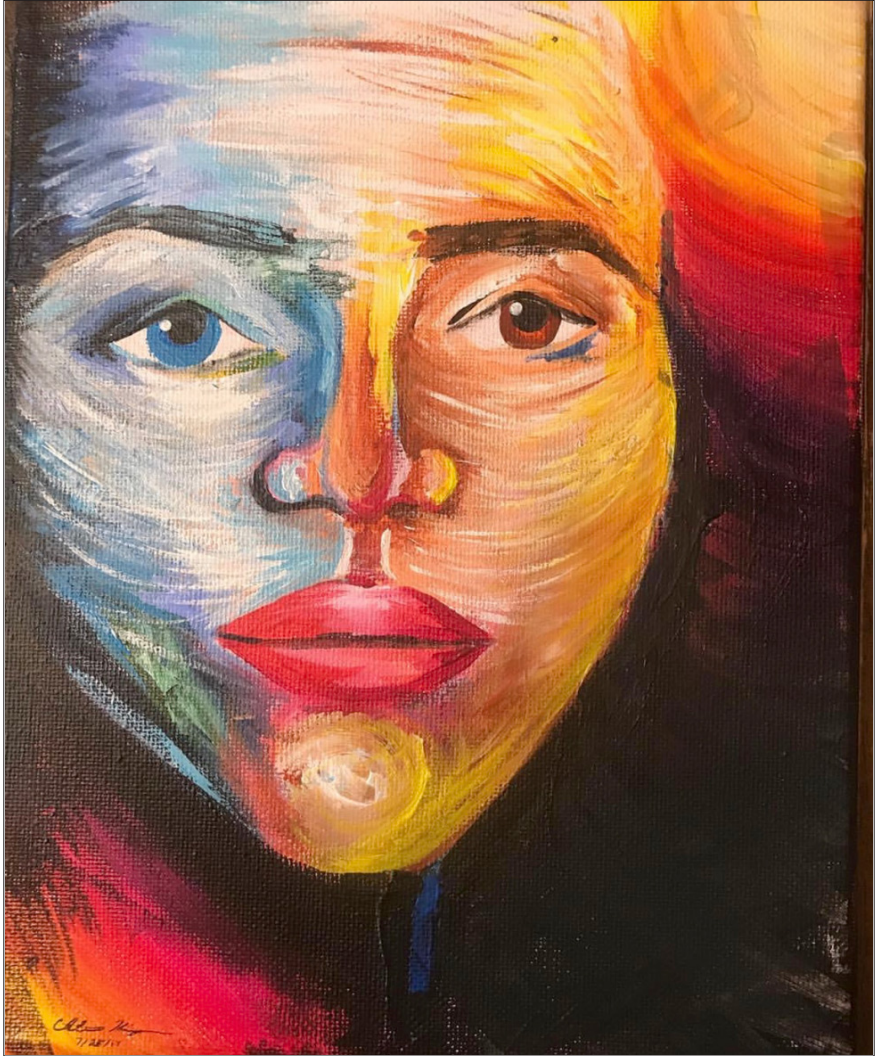
We had all seen harsher combat.
It had been weeks since we shook spittled hands

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with Mr. Selvitella's class to seal the end of the Acorn Wars.
But I still woke up in cold sweats some nights.
We needed to make peace again soon enough.
The orange was beginning to melt into black raspberry
and we needed to beat the streetlights home.
We brought the vanilla daydreams back with us.

One of these days we were gonna go to battle for the last time
and we wouldn't even realize it.

Torn



Round Trip

“Johnny! Get o’er here.”

Johnny pushed himself off his elbows away from the ticket window.

“What, Charlie? I was working.”

“No, you weren’t, you dip. Now, you see that broad over there by the street?”

Johnny walked over to where Charlie stood and bounced up on his toes to look over his shoulder. “The one with the pup?”

“That’s the one. Reckon she just got off the train. Go and tell her to leave, will ya?”

“She ain’t hurting no one.”

“Well, her dog just dumped in front of our booth, and people don’t seem to want to come up to window to buy tickets. So how bout you stop yapping and go take care of it?”

“Aw, hell, Charlie. I’m going.”

Johnny pulled his cap tighter on his head, grabbing an old newspaper on his way out of the ticket booth. As he turned around the curved corner of the building towards the front window, the smell hit him.

“Hell,” he muttered. As he stooped over to grab the offender, he took another look at the woman, standing slightly off to the side, watching him. Tall, slim. Has one of those funny fur shawl things. High class then. Probably thinks she can get away with it. Johnny glanced over his shoulder through the window. Charlie had lost interest, gone off to yell at another inattentive employee. Time to have a bit of fun, then.

Johnny straightened up, holding the newspaper gingerly in front of

him, and started in the direction of the woman. As he approached, she turned her face away to watch the traffic. Her little dog started yapping, pulling against its leash towards Johnny. Guess it wanted its handiwork Back.

“Scuse me, ma’am? Think you lost this.”

Her nose scrunched as she glanced at him sideways.

“You may put that away,” she said. Johnny didn’t move.

“Your mutt left this outside our booth. Reckoned I’d return it.”

“He’s a chihuahua,” she replied indignantly. “Do you treat all your customers this way?”

“Haven’t seen you buy a ticket at the counter, ma’am.”

“Isn’t your little establishment owned by Pennsylvania Railroad? I just arrived off the train. Does your manager know what you’re doing? Where is he? I will certainly be speaking to Him.”

“He’s inside, ma’am. Asked me to tell you to leave.”

“I will do no such thing; I happen to be waiting for a car.”

The dog yapped again, looking up at Johnny as it licked its nose. Johnny sighed.

“Sorry, ma’am. This here is Penn Station. Got a couple dozen buses coming and going every hour. Ain’t no place to call a cab.”

She laughed, a tinkling sound that caused Johnny to shudder and look at her. Really look this time. “I don’t take taxicabs.”

She didn’t seem as old as he first thought. Maybe mid-twenties. Could never tell with those pompous types.

“Bus then? Let me guess. Philadelphia, round trip for three bucks. Pleasure or business?”

“I don’t take buses, either.”

“No, ma’am. Suppose you pay more than three bucks for pleasure, too.”

She cocked an eyebrow at him. Johnny dropped his eyes and coughed.

“Scuse me, ma’am. Oughta take care of this.” He gestured with the newspaper, sending the smell to permeate the air again. Her nose scrunched again. Damn. Made her look almost approachable. Johnny turned to walk back to the ticket booth.

“What’s your name, boy?”

He stopped, looked at her. She didn’t seem mean in that moment. Almost interested, arms crossed, her eyes staring into his again.

“Johnny.”

“Margaret,” she replied.

“Maggie,” he said. “Nice ring to it.” She raised an eyebrow again, but this time it was softer.

Johnny shuffled back to the building, heading around back to drop off the newspaper under in the trash can, then entered back into his booth.

“Well?” Charlie was waiting.

“Said she’s waiting for a car.”

“Did you tell her she can’t wait here?”

“Tried to. She’s the stubborn type.”

“Useless,” Charlie muttered, sauntering to the back of the building.

Johnny took his place on his stool by his ticket window, immediately slumping over on his forearms. He watched the back of Maggie as she stood there, the queen watching over her subjects as they passed by in their automobiles.

His view was suddenly blocked by a man who came up to his window. “One ticket to Long Island City.”

“15 cents, sir.”

The man dropped his coins on the counter. Johnny grabbed them, quickly counted, and popped off the stool to reach for the ticket.

“Leaves at 3:05, sir. Have a safe trip,” he said, handing the ticket through the window. As the man walked off, Johnny glanced over to where Maggie stood. She was no longer there. In her place was a young couple, the woman standing on her toes to reach the man’s ear.

“Johnny!”

“Coming, Charlie.” He slid off the stool and started walking off towards the back, as a dog began to yap in front of the building.

“Excuse me?”

Johnny stopped, turned on his foot. The voice had come from his window.

“Hold on, Charlie. Got a customer.”

He headed back to his window, leaning down on his arms to peer out the window.

“Yes, ma’am?”

He squinted against the sun to make out her features. The chihuahua yapped again.

“Hell, Margaret. Thought I told you to leave.”

“Maggie,” she replied, “and my car seems to be delayed.”

“Pity.”

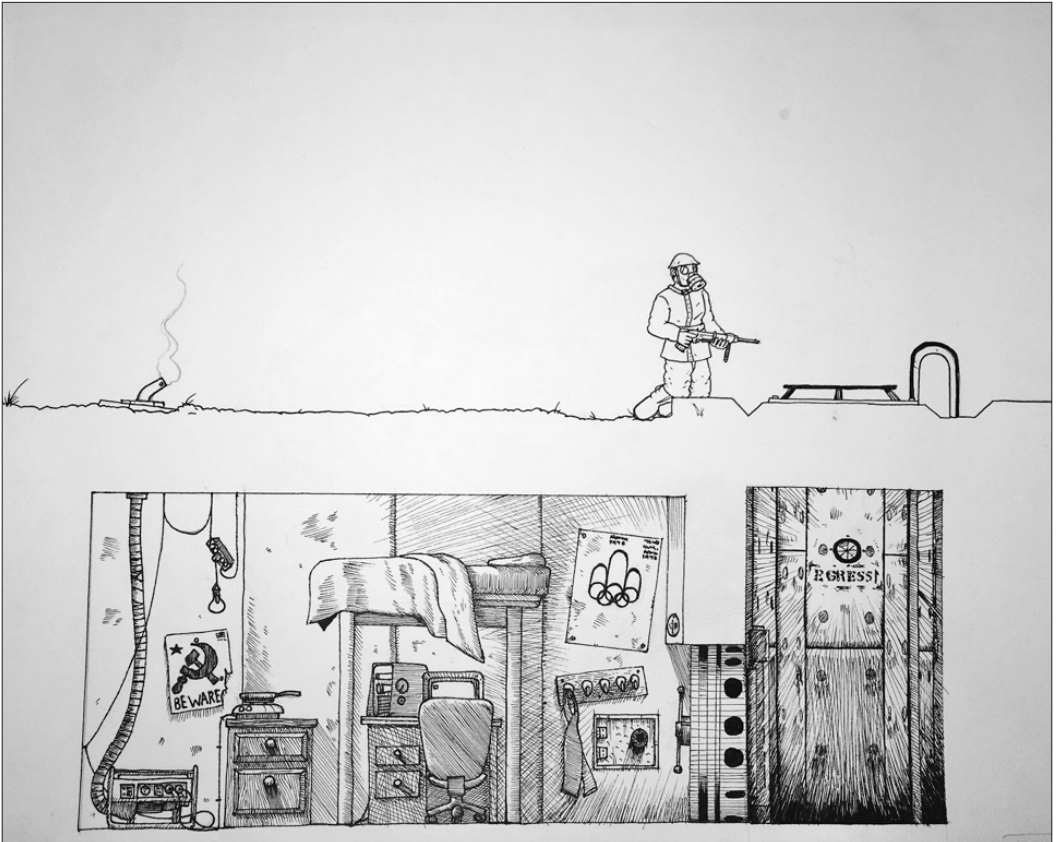
“I heard you could sell me a ticket. Round trip to Philadelphia. Three bucks?”

“Of course, ma’am. May I ask business or pleasure?”

She smirked, leaning onto the window, her arms folded right in front of his.

“Pleasure.”

Post-apocalyptic Bunker



Reaction

You see your roommate watching a YouTuber watching an Instagram Star. The Instagram Star is beautiful & young & she is rich because people watch her flip her hair & call people who comment on her videos *haters*. The YouTuber is handsome & young & he is also rich because people watch him laugh at her videos & call her *stupid*. Your roommate chuckles & says the YouTuber is *so dumb*. You keep watching your roommate, calling them silly in your head, until you're struck by twin anxieties: who is watching you & where is your money?

Gardens



Italian Alps



Funeral Dirge for A Man Who Died In An Unmarked Grave

Spring has come and it is green green green, Federico
Como me quieres verde
Sillabent syllables your dueños me duelen
Nos diste duende
Y sueños
Por suerte
Water, when gilded, can never ungold
I feel your elevated assonance
Echoing in olive groves
This heat makes me fanciful, Federico
This dry, hot, green
Did you love wrong, my friend?
Did you love too loud?
Ay voz, ay voces
Lloramos por
Los jóvenes de los secretos
A resistance in radical linguistics
You gave them voice
Even while losing yours

Pandora



Wind

Maybe.
You're under the impression that I won't let go but
Honey
I already have.
Didn't I tell you I was like the wind?
A gentle breeze at first.
My only desire
To tickle your skin
And ruffle your hair.
When our hearts collided,
The eye of the hurricane inevitably formed.
Peaceful in the middle,
The storm brewing outside our windows.
Love makes a house a home.
I know it is nearly impossible to accurately determine
The path of such a natural disaster.
Hail shattered the car windshield
You didn't care to repair.
Now you might feel me in gusts.
A quick scent of the flowers I used to pick for you,
Hoping you would use them to weave us crowns.
But I am a queen regardless.
When you decide to underdress for the cold,
You'll feel me down to your bones
And wish my arms were around you.

I am your ghost but I will not linger-

I have more important things to do.

Carrying seeds and birds to where they want to go.

And wrapping lovers in my embrace as they watch the grass sway like my hips
once did

for you.

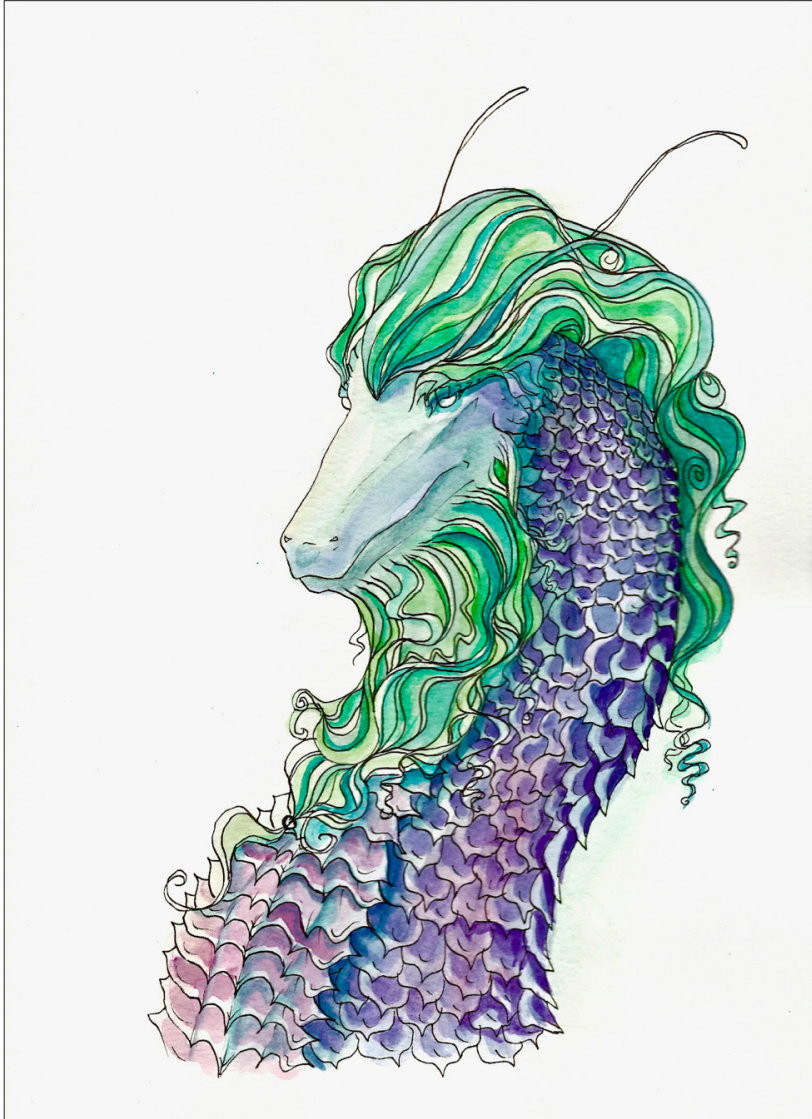
In the Wind



Doesn' that hurt?

I
am
rolling
down
a
hill
of
gravel,
giggling,
while
thinking
about
you.

River Spirit



To the Neglected

Dear dishes piled
on rings of gnocchi debree,
stains of tea and the stench
from white wine soaking
in pesto.

Dear metal of toaster
coated in food splotches and firm
plastic. Dear tray and glass
door, dear rack
bumped with warts
of burnt cheese.

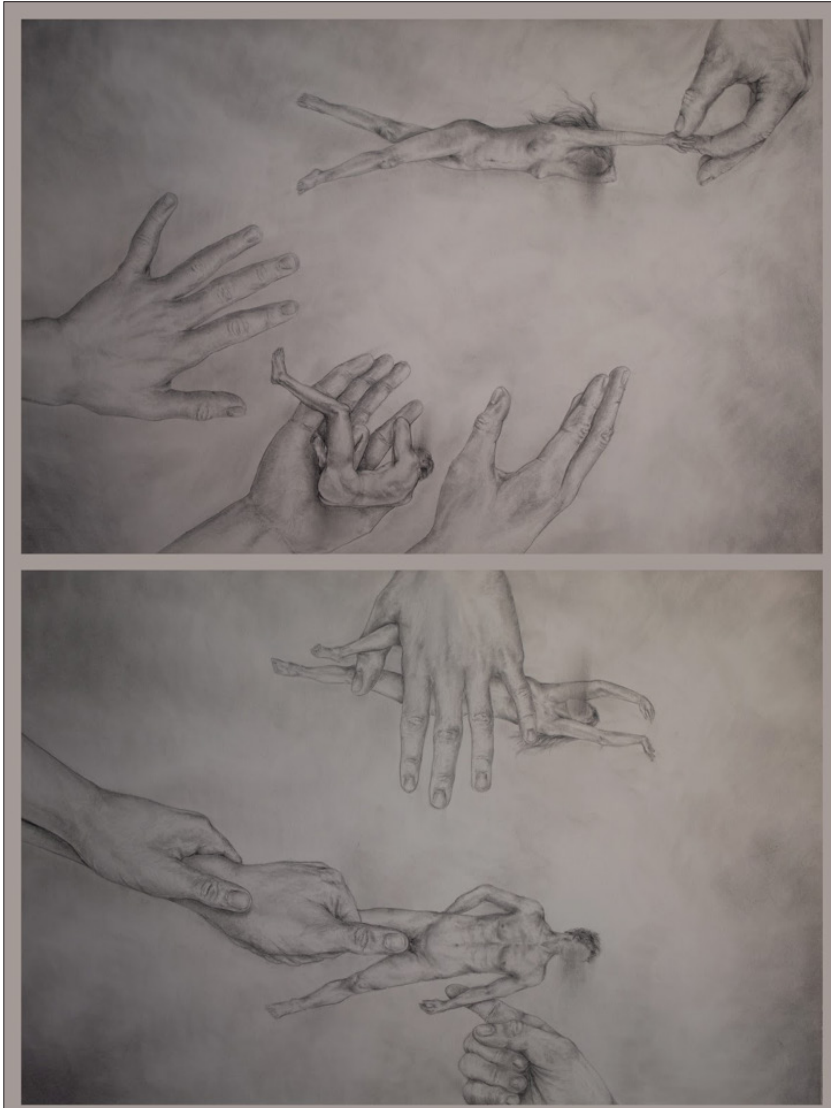
Dear drain catcher, your
mesh of thin coil
coated in swollen
rice, in soggy scrambled
egg. Dear nest of rotten vegetation
screaming of roommate negation.

Dear broom with empty
fibers. Dear red pan with empty
womb, trickling only with dust
from unused mop looming
overhead. Dear bare bristles
I too ache for your use.

Dear coffee drip
lost in pooling moats
of scattered grounds
surrounding your form
in mud puddles of morning
desire. Dear abused royalty.

We are becoming
brittle, weighed down
by bacterial culmination
in a ceremony of rotting bananas
our silence welcomes fruit flies.

Hide and Seek



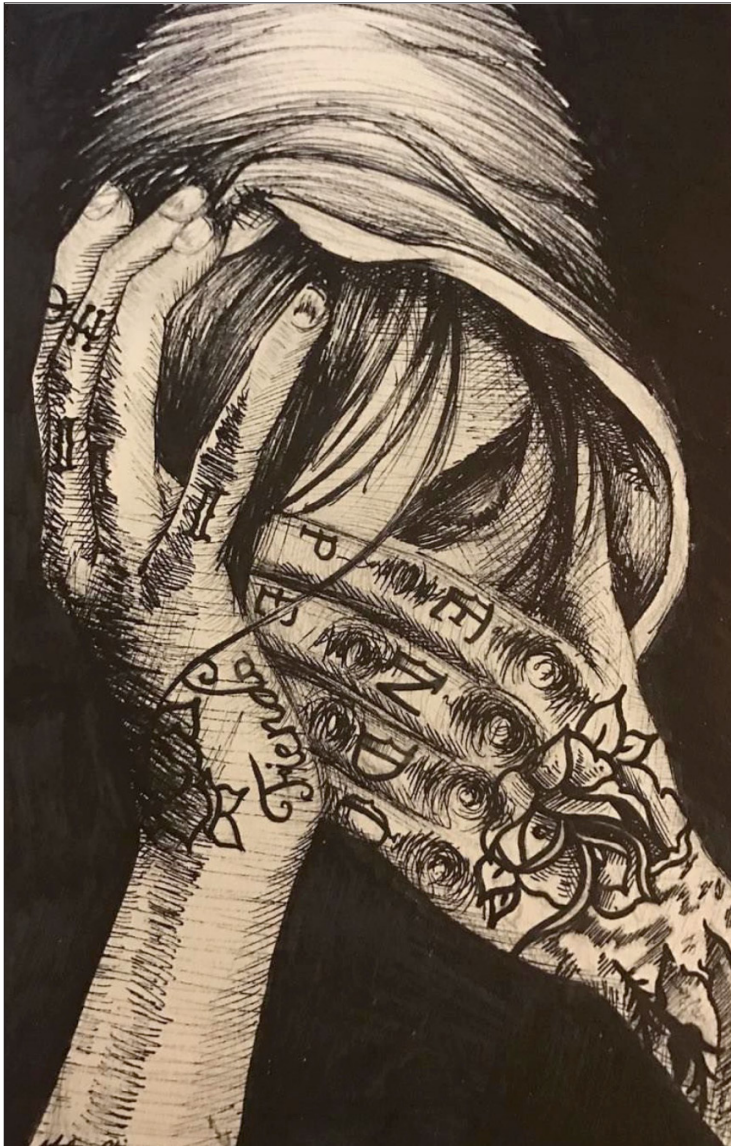
Reactions to the First-Ever Image of a Black Hole or to Will Smith as Genie in Aladdin

1. It's like gazing into eternity.
2. Why does it look so evil?
3. People will meme the shit out of this.
4. Yeah, this looks like it'll destroy stars.
5. How much did this cost?
6. We've now seen what we thought was unseeable.
7. I'm scared.
8. I can't believe my eyes.
9. I'm oddly aroused.
10. HOW?!
11. So, this is what the end of space and time looks like.
12. This a joke, right?
13. This is a defining moment in human history.
14. I will see this in my dreams.
15. We're witnessing something which not even matter or light escapes.
16. Why'd it turn out this color?

Answers:

First-Ever Image of a Black Hole: 1-6, 11, 12, 14, 16

Melancholy



The Invention of Love

Love is a losing game.
How can you win at poker
When you can't even look at your own hand?
All I knew was that those hands were
All I wanted.
I could feel the heat radiating off of them,
Melting my skin with every soft touch.
I let you inside my heart

Before I let you inside of me-
Something uncharacteristic.

I used to say sex was just sex.
But I never knew what real intimacy was
Until I felt love.
And I don't just mean it felt better
In the bedroom.
Everything about us was carnal.
A glimpse across the table.
The way you ate pizza
And always gave me the crust.
I know I can eat the whole piece by myself,
But I'm lactose intolerant.
Now I just give the rest to my dog.

Chinook



Kaleidoscopic Mess

he skims through books
makes him look smart
eyes deflect the words
she's scared of buses
too cramped and cold
indifferent boxes

their eyes meet, catching
a flicker of vulnerability
fearing exposure
covered up efficiently
fabricated memories
override personal history
vintage records erased
they can feel
the ground beneath them
and wonder, as rubber wheels
heat up with friction,
if it's really there

cameras focused
on salient spectators
a private life made public
instant gratification
in knowing
that other people care

see the spotlight strung up
by strained wires,
seeking diffused power
swings away in a hurry
you run crying, falling behind

the noise of undirected traffic
ceaseless yelling
drivers who violate public safety
put everyone at risk
car crashes and dramatic screams
turned down to a white noise
prickling numb ears
in the heat of the moment
primed, ready for engagement
slamming on creaky brakes
until they're worn out
useless metal stumps

I wonder what they look like
those people outside
huddled together
generating closeness
compressed powder
shoveled away, the chore
of holy communion
beaten by harsh winds
icy fists that strike
with an impersonal accuracy
warm clothes conceal a frozen hell
hidden away, the energy builds
until their bodies shatter and melt

your face
changes, the pattern
a formulaic mold
like plastic, recycled
repurposed,
read your lines
invisible stage cues
I can't keep up

how I am supposed to interpret
this kaleidoscopic mess?
imprisoned in a styrofoam maze
hands gripping cold iron,
cell bars provide
a glimpse of light
release from this
microcosm
built up around me
by a varnished self

Blue-Green Venus



Born Again Today

I tore my tights on Tuesday and today, the rain. Streets like small cities being born again. Torn from the gravel the water runs into the city like I used to when I could see through the rain but on Tuesday I was born again with a spot on my thigh exposed. I was born again on top of a sugar mountain, tall, the river drank a path up to me. The tide opened wide and showed its sharp sweet tongue. I came forward. The tongue roped its wet grime through a slip in my sleeve. Slicked up, slicked down— down under my shoulders, down towards my bent bones, hipped like door knobs and still down

down.

One move and the sweet tongue fell.

The waves, furious, bathed me in salt and my tongue quickly forgot how sweet the water once was. Flood and split salt rocks flew from my body as the river left the way it came.

The river has been making strange sounds since the rain. It spits through the gush. Spews muck from the blunt.

To my ears. It weeps, rolls, shrieks.

Goldfinch



To my ex: your absence makes for the best cigarettes

You became the forebearer of my trail
from front door to where
I'd slip & settle on kitchen
floor, sinking along cherry cabinets
consumed by nicotine buzz, I am fixed. Like
the picture frames you'd straighten. Fixed
but like a spider condensing
limbs in fear, knees-folded-thighs-drawn to chest &
I am fixed as a mouse on sharp cheddar,
I took the bait.

You became the reason for guilty pleasure
making this cigarette even better,
I'd reach a hand to fridge handle
retrieving the first slice of chocolate cake
In seven months.
Yes, the kind you hate.

I sit transitioning between bite
& drag, sit fixed on forgetting you
sit resisting the no-longer-required urge to please
You.

Billy Collins believed the best cigarette was
one had amidst creativity
making his trail from kitchen to study

buzzing with espresso-charged thought. Cherishing
the residue of typewriter keys
& the exposed flesh of a crisp, blank sheet.

But mine was always when you'd leave-
an exhausted exhalation would release
making room for the cancerous clouds I crave,
an exit igniting zippo flame
you became my Prometheus.

Overseer



I Know What Death Tastes Like

I am twelve,
 Feet slapping
 The concrete
Unaware of the disappearing sun
 And the changing air
Billowing clouds encroach upon my horizon.
I am not a child
 My eyes speak
 You speak louder. Each syllable a strike to the face.
Shadows of death in my wake
 They look like loved ones
& they turn from me
Hollow. Scarred
 Skin, see through it.
I was twelve.
I am sixteen.
 My eyes will bore into yours.
 And if you look close enough
No life can be seen.
 I don't know how
I got to these tracks.
One afternoon I am eighteen
 Sprinting barefoot.
My head buzzing,
Chest compressing
 Broken bottle

Blood running black.
Sometimes I stood so close
 I could hear my heart
Whisper
Save me
 Sometimes they wave
& holler for me to come back.
I laugh and live and cry and
 Howl. My head hurts.
I also know the seasons changing
 The earth's brisk breath settles
 I wonder why Daddy
Calls Mama crazy
 My friends all live
in big houses
And then this little one
 Rotting
From within.
I know what death tastes like.
 Sometimes sweet and sour tongues
Pierce my ears.
I could start walking
 & never stop.
These city sidewalks
Go on forever.
 I wasn't meant to live this long.
 Nor wander this far.
So I pick leaves out of my hair
 Extract glass from my skin
Release the rocks
Rattling my ribcage. I right my wrongs
 Raise these wings of steel
And depart for the stars.

Poison Art Frog



It sleeps between two towns

Smoke belches out in swirls so sick and green
after thickly emerging in slow heaves from the many
branching legs of the center's internal machinery.
The asthmatic haze thins itself against the horizon.

Heavily constructed pipelines act as a twisted,
shining esophagus. Jutting forth from the ground,
they end in tall imposing towers that seem to violate
the skyline. Trees are but distant faded ink stains.

Thousands of small lights flicker orange and angry
Winking as its own dense cloud obscures it,
a release of monstrous vomitus into the bright
and innocent air. It smells of terminal disease.

The dark construction exhales, staining the world
with its rusty film, clunky limbs plunging deep
within earth as it feeds the parasites that crawl in
and out of its metal frame. Abused and built to abuse.

Walk-Away



Aging Feathers

Come autumn, the aged hen will nestle over
straw, her sex capable of bearing but one
speckled masterpiece.

And her keeper will scatter dry corn,
beckoning her, and she will waddle from coop
as he reaches in to scavenge a freckled
sculpture.

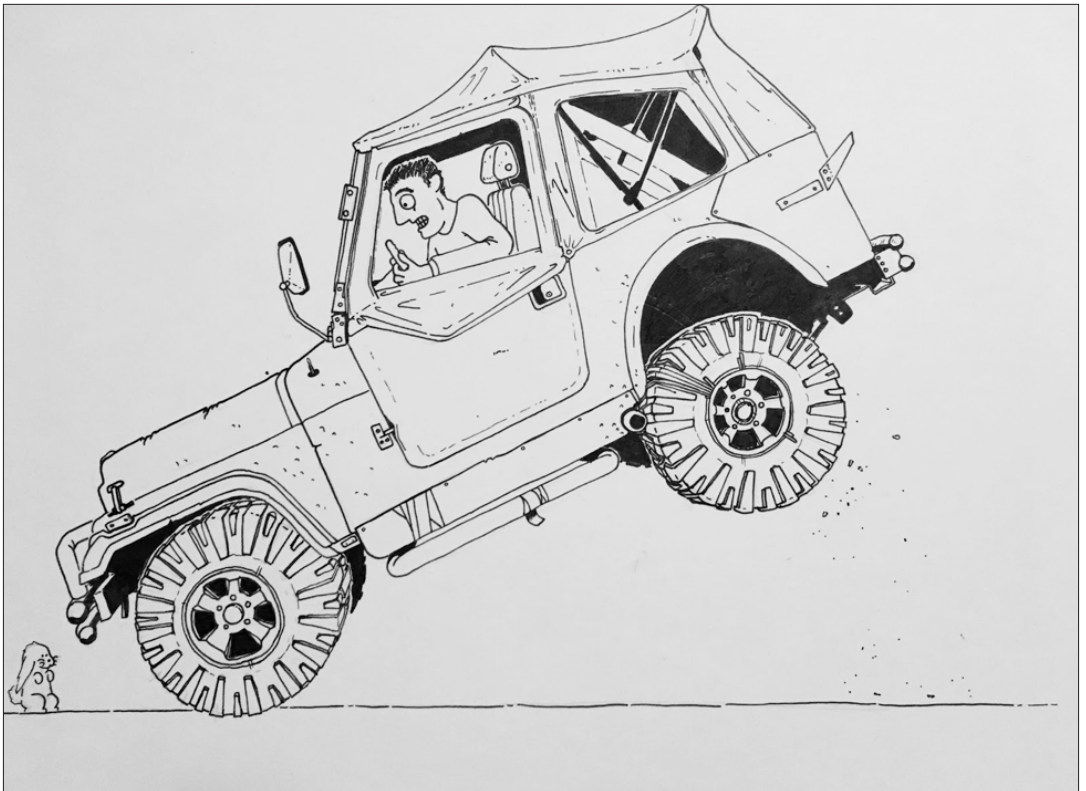
The morning breeze will pick up- hay scattering
across sharp blades of grass and his mucked boots
will be flopped into the entry of a senescent
country home that creaks with the weight of
movement.

Against the window pane
you will hear the ricochet-
crack and bang, a single yolk
folds into sizzling butter.

And soon after Autumn, his muddy boots will be
caked with snow- and the aging hen's pelvic bones
will begin collapsing- just as the rotten roof on her
home plummets down- disguised by falling snow.

Her feathered bosom has been
free of eggs for months now- is
free of eggs forever now.

Jeep Stop



The Man I See Over my Shoulder (or is he in my mind?)

Many times, when I look out of the corner of my eye I see the figure of a man. As soon as I turn my attention to him, he disappears like vapor. He walks towards me when I'm not looking, sneaking in strides that are more horizontal than vertical. Each time a different person comes to me.

The first is a blank man. He is nothing but an empty shadow but. He wants me. Sometimes he is a generic man with sandy brown hair and tired eyes. He watches me because I am nothing like his miserable wife and I wear tight jeans.

It would be a lie to say I was never frightened by these sights. Confusion fuels my fear because I can not tell if I am afraid of something that will cross me in the physical realm or if the man is just company in my mind. They are not hallucinations.

On rainy days when there is nothing to do but reminisce, I am visited by an elderly man on my shoulder. He is not bitter, though- no one should be sad to grow old, he says; aging is as natural as the changing of the leaves in autumn. Wrinkles are road maps of a life well lived.

There are days when he is merely a memory. A quick glimpse and suddenly I can smell tobacco and ramen noodles. Smoking in the house is not safe if there are children home. He was the first man to ever leave me.

Don't fall asleep on the beach.

When I find myself in crowds, it is still never hard to find a spy. Eyes you can feel, eyes that are distant. But by the time you see him it is too late: he knows where you've been, where you are, and where you ought to go next. I never go where I ought to.

In my own home I catch him lurking around corners, although he looks more like the idea of a man than an actual one. I wonder if his presence is what spooks my dog sometimes. I hope he doesn't knock anything over.

He never makes a sound.

In an old house the creaking of floorboards is enough to put a tingle down your spine. The shift and hum of the radiator coming to life ignites a fire in the pit of your stomach. Don't look for him then.

Spyhopping



Blake's Ink Skies

Blake's ink Skies,
against star wheel thighs,
that crunch in the Devil's alleyways,
where glass stays underfoot for days.

Dumpster soup with ancient paper towels
like croutons melting in my bowels,
professes its raw pleasure
to Sunday garbage man leisure.

31 total plates, etched into sewer grates.
How many rats? How many fates
lie in the puddles of sullied faiths,
puddles ready to receive the boots of mottled wraiths.

of those rats, how many are Tyger size?
This is not the alleyway of immortal eyes
or symmetrical fear.
It is off balanced by a single tear.

Who needs to ask for explanation?
It's a long tale, full of lamentation.
Not meant for latent lips a sunder,
but only for Tyger lips under

Blake's ink skies,
against star wheel thighs,
that crunch in the Devil's alleyways
where glass stays underfoot for days.

Ghost



Warming up to Guilt

1. An oven-toasted room & bedside lamp
& sheets that cover sickly with warmth.

This old white home
committed to heat us each
minute; second
to lull our thinned bones

which is more
than the men with
thawed beards & thin toes

but remember the bill was 67.42.

2. Lighting a candle on the
kitchen table under the lamp &
beside the books we've collected for a year.

Novel by the professor
poem by the assistant & I hoped the
flame was curious enough to lick a page
or two or all and all of the collection
and the old white home too

3. The weather report from Bangor
the camera, steady like a glacier focused on
ocean was the lens on the man
who gave us degrees, the rises and falls.

The producers did not tune over
the tremors in his voice
his shivering lip and we listened to the
music of his falters like Haydn.

4. We threw the sheets down
on carpet & clothes on floor
the knits of fabrics imitated our bodies

we made heat of our own but protected
our product from the edge of our bed
our old white home
ourselves.

5. I am out, the snow on Willard falls
like blankets sheathed from the sky
as violent and sweet as Chaconne at
9 p.m.

The long white building
imitates the snow except the
black type sign out front.

It is a funeral home
but I've never noticed how

the snow commits to the
ground now and brings the old white
building with it.

The snow, the home
the dead together sink down

down

down.

Twilight Hoe



Ode

These eyes are wells:
edgeless, cloudy, reddish
in their rippling sweat.
I wish I knew
how to make it last,
the look they give me
after such a convulsive cry:
more green, brown--even craters
of gold show themselves,
like marbles uncupped
in a hand--vulnerable, born.
And these eyes are planets:
steady, round, reflective,
partial to themselves.
I wish I could
stay here for hours,
face only inches from
the mirror--a million
tiny spasms rolling across it,
set off deep inside. It changes.
Who sanctified this public restroom?
When did I become this kind?

Pigilicious



Image Not Found



In the Voice of an Angel Without Wings

“My poor ass strains to work as a counterweight.”

From Michelangelo to Giovanni da Pistoia,

“When the Author Was Painting the Vault of the Sistine Chapel” -1509

The twisting evergreen silk has wisped
in flight leaving my rear bare-
one wouldn't think for God to care nor see
with his knee hinged on my forearm,
hip gliding
into my sternum
like the heaviness before a confession
while a curl departs
from my head of locks caught
in God's shapely buttocks.
My traps lift see-saw
to compensate for the weight,
but Christ Child drives a hammy
leg down and with a jerk
of surprise I'm stunned like a father
when a nun goes wild.

Must I go on?
What if I were to leave?

I could relieve myself of a sudden chilling
of the breeze,
let God drift on, just missing
the almost-human frame

of Adam lounging like a siren
awaiting the fall of a sailor...
God could sail
or I could let him fall mid-air.

I suppose this is God's work
and to this duty I must attend,
arms heaving to no end
while my poor ass strains
to work as a counterweight.
What a life of pain:
an angel without wings,
only a halo to gain.

People You May Know



Song for Cracks and Chips

No matter how many times we have it fixed, the lock to the back door doesn't work

We wedge it shut with a spare piece of wood.

The windows never quite fit their frames

We stuffed scarves in the cracks but there's still a draft.

Choose your steps carefully on the porch or you'll fall through

We keep saying we're gonna fix that.

Ignore the small scratchings in the walls at night, they're just squirrels

We lure them out and plug the holes every summer.

The world seeps in through every crack reminding us that we inhabit it and it can do to us what it likes

The reason for my running refrain of humans are deeply flawed

Mingling with the lulls and swells of dos gardenias para ti...

In the cracked voice of my father when my brother asks to be sung to sleep.

When he slowed the car to tell me that he had never killed anyone

He didn't want me to ever worry that he had.

I smiled low because through the cracked passenger side window I could hear the bird's song

Con ellas quiero decir te quiero, te adoro, mi vida...

The hush of simmers on stove-tops, even measured clicks of ceiling fans

Sounds of candlelight and drowsy salsa steps in 2am condolences.

A dance to the tune of crushing debt and we are deeply flawed

Murmured into the arms of conspirator and savior and I still start at the touch of a lover.

Que tendrán todo el calor de un beso...

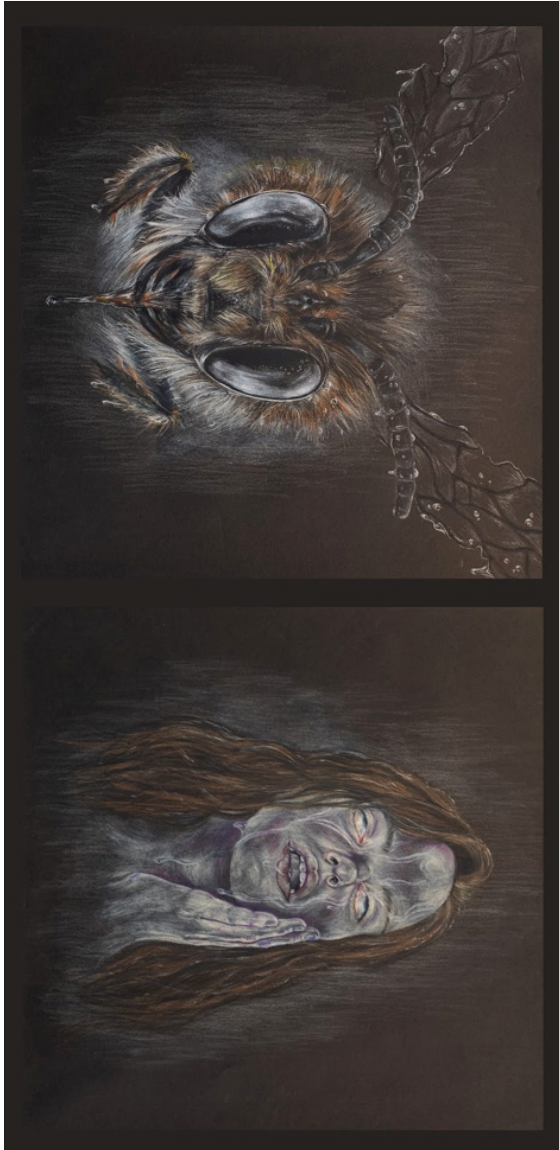
With every creaking floorboard this world filters in a little more, brushed in
with combs
Blown off the covers of old books
All chipped paint and ceiling leaks a reminder that we are at its mercy.

In the ashes to ashes world there has never been more flesh and blood than in
the backseat
of the stranger's car in the early morning drunken daze of New York nightlife.
Recognizing how to get from here to the supply closet apartment where I first
knew deeply flawed
And rats tore through carefully stowed easter candy at the world's bidding.
Crouched over the toilet realizing pills are not pills are not pills or watching
my father wiping tears at the Restaurant he and his love would slow dance in
long past closing.
Blessed with the golden glow only memory can give, feeling all this world in
the clinking of glasses
Las gardenias de mi amor se mueren...

Rhani



Residue



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All works must be titled. There is a 2,000 word limit for prose and a 150 line limit for poetry.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this issue. Our success is impossible without the creative talents of our contributors who continue to reawaken this journal's spirit.

And a special thanks the English Department of the University of Vermont, which continues to support this journal even when the liberal arts are under attack. *The Gist*, along with other UVM publications, stand with you.