

THE Gist

Fall 2020



Sandra

Submission to The Gist
THE GIST

Fall 2020
Volume XIII

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THIS ISSUE IS DEDICATED TO SETH WADE AND CHRIS SOYCHAK. THANK YOU FOR YOUR YEARS OF COMMITMENT THAT HAVE MADE THE JOURNAL WHAT IT IS TODAY. THANK YOU FOR ENCOURAGING ARTISTS AND WRITERS TO BE FEARLESS. THANK YOU FOR KEEPING THE ARTS ALIVE. GOOD LUCK IN ALL YOU DO!

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Grinder

after Major Jackson's "OK Cupid"

redownloading Grindr is eating off diet
and eating off diet is filtering your selfie
and filtering your selfie is hiding from God
and hiding from God is going bareback
and going bareback is reaching nirvana
and reaching nirvana is moonwalking to harpsichord
and moonwalking to harpsichord is using emojis for eulogies
and using emojis for eulogies is being young and dumb
and being young and dumb is sending a dick pic
and sending a dick pic is going in debt
and going in debt is testing positive
and testing positive is a cruise crashing
and a cruise crashing is measuring your penis
and measuring your penis is learning your property value
and learning your property value is tapping a twink
and tapping a twink is playing Russian roulette
and playing Russian roulette is filling a gloryhole
and filling a gloryhole is flirting with disaster

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and flirting with disaster is shaking a beehive

and shaking a beehive is updating your profile pic

and updating your profile pic is holding your breath

and holding your breath is being topped

and being topped is waiting for a commercial to end

and waiting for a commercial to end is watching RuPaul's Drag Race

and watching RuPaul's Drag Race is witnessing Ragnarok

and witnessing Ragnarok is breaking your iPhone

and breaking your iPhone is forgetting how to breathe

and forgetting how to breathe is crushing on a straight boy

and crushing on a straight boy is beating a dead horse

and beating a dead horse is jerking a sugar daddy

and jerking a sugar daddy is admitting defeat

and admitting defeat is voting for Hillary

and voting for Hillary is running out of lube

and running out of lube is bracing for mortality

and bracing for mortality is applying for a loan

and applying for a loan is dating an activist

and dating an activist is riding a roller coaster

and riding a roller coaster is fucking discretely

and fucking discretely is shoplifting

and shoplifting is blowing a married man

and blowing a married man is being a glutton

and being a glutton is cheating because you can

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and cheating because you can is enjoying your privilege
and enjoying your privilege is watching wildfires
and watching wildfires is feeling alive
and feeling alive is attending a Pride Parade
and attending a Pride Parade is going to mass
and going to mass is using a condom
and using a condom is taking Gen Eds
and taking Gen Eds is aching to die
and aching to die is getting ghosted
and getting ghosted is shredding your skin
and shredding your skin is being called a faggot
and being called a faggot is being robbed
and being robbed is being catalogued into tribes
and being catalogued into tribes—that's not being at all

Playing Pinball Alone

They fell,
not like petals,
but like boulders,
out of my arms,
into another's.

Those other's,
they held bait
—dangled worms
in the shape
of pinky promises.

That's why this
—this friend thing—
it's a heavy subject.

Oh, to be Free!

Oh, to be Whitman! To appreciate the sounds of the everyday, the musicality of work! To listen to the rumble of the weapon that assaults my ears at 8:00 am, two hours before my alarm, and to understand the necessity, the beauty, behind that power tool. To relish the hammer that makes my walls quake, my brain rattle, my bones seize!

Oh, to be a writer! To be a writer of capital R romanticism! To be the writers I read of in school, the ones with money who sit and muse and watch landscapes and working men. To work a clerical position of no meaning and then to go home and write, write, write, delighting in not the work of the day, but the surroundings of that work – again, the workmen, with their phallic tools and muscles, pounding, pounding, pounding on my apartment building. There’s a rape somewhere, I see it, yet the beauteous metaphor it would create eludes me.

Oh, to be anything! For sure, the joy of that power would enable me to rise beyond this tomb, this wretched, expensive, tomb of yellow lights and construction! To be a rabbit that runs from these men that are contractors, faultless, but that request my “permission” and enter and trounce and rumble about in that loud way of artificial tools doing superficial work – truly, who needs functioning windows? Walls? No more, if I am a rabbit, a bird, a neighboring corgi pup.

Oh, to be what I am not! To own a future as free as a magic eight ball, malleable with but a repeated question and a second, (more) decisive shake! To be free of thesis work, of four hundred pages of reading per week, of a poor haircutting decision, of those men! Men! Ah, to be free of the

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construction... To live in a world of opposites, to be approached by women deconstructing, removing those walls and doors that could not keep out frost, removing my inhibition, my thesis. To remove one is to remove another! To remove, to remove, to enter quietly, no tools, just raw hands in physicality, entering, pushing, pulling.

Oh, to be a college senior! Entrapped in a fantasy, unlived! Fetishizing the working woman, like Wordsworth fetishized the working man. Oh, how I am him and yet not him, trapped in the modern day, typing, not writing, removed from the light of sun and the light of en-LIGHT-enment, eclipsed eternally by the screwing of those working men, their sharp bos and bits entering my brain, lobotomizing my thoughts, disrupting my narrative- Where was I? Alas.

Oh, to be me!

16

I have a dream
that I give birth
to a baby.

Breathe in his hair.
Soft wisps of goose feathers.
Press head against chest.
Smooth like 3,000 count sheets.
So, I grip tighter
because he's all mine,
and he loves me the most.

But then my eyes slap up.
My nails are swollen
from ripping at cotton.
The damp whiteness
surrounding my head
is not a creation of joy.

There's an ache.
There's a longing.

i am forcibly propelled back to 6th grade

kill me
behead me; sponge up my blue blood with my beard
bury my head; monitor the dirt
water it every now and then; use ginger ale

stuff my body in a ten-pound wafer bar; surround the bar with packing peanuts
drape a flag over it; make it half blue and half red-black
affix torches to the sides
chuck it in the ocean

do not retrieve it.

grab the plant that spawns from my skull
put it on a bagel with cream cheese and smoked salmon
un-bury my head; shove the bagel in my mouth
re-bury it

write in my obituary that it's raining snails

if all goes as planned, i'll reincarnate as a horse
named horse
on stairs
in flames

orange?

Some Sort of Self-Portrait

Charcoal, oil, and mixed media on paper



Thinking

Pen



17 Struggles That Broke Millennials With Beans For Hands Know All Too Well

Shooing away stray dogs lured by our beany aroma.

Awkwardly mashing our beans against the wrists of lovers in lieu of holding hands.

Making origami from our monthly student loan statements.

Doorknobs.

Mouthing I'm so sorry! after splashing strangers with beans during applause at our roommate's music gig.

Soggy pockets from keeping our beans warm during winter.

Feigning laughter when our boss serves up some classic boomer humor about our proclivity for swiping screens instead of turning pages, then sighing as our finger beans hinder both activities.

Snapping our beans at poetry slams.

Reducing our carbon footprint by composting our excess beans.

Assisting lost senior citizens by flinging our beans toward the desired direction.

Cultivating an authentic social media presence via candid selfies and memes about beans.

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Jamming protest signs in our bean stumps and keeping them clear of dribble.

No more post-coital glow: just the stank of sweaty beans.

Squinting through the sting of our bean-wiped tears while binge-watching anime because we're too depressed to do anything else.

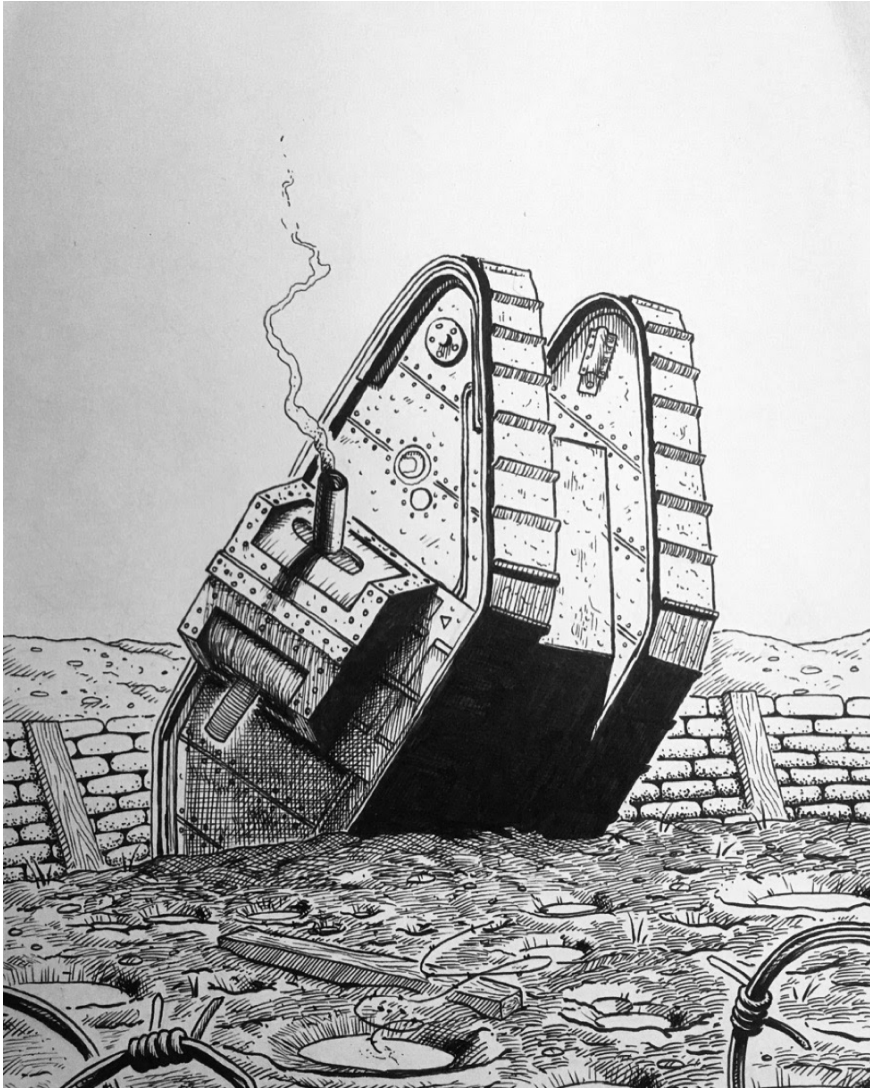
Bathing.

Avoiding that extra zest of beans when eating avocado toast.

Homeownership, opposable thumbs—both exist only in our dreams.

1917

Ink on paper



Four shots of Russe

One goes down,
Two flies by.
Three's over before you know it,
and Four came before Three.

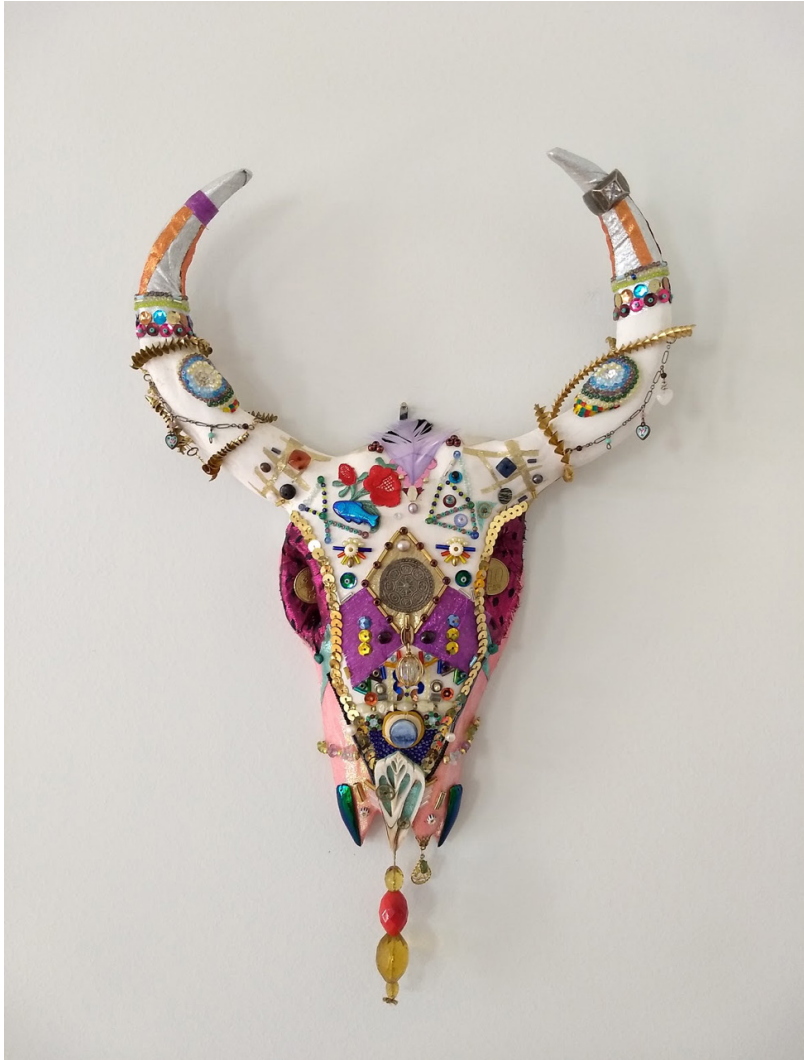
Foot Fetish

Charcoal on paper



Oof! The Vultures Left Their Mark on Her! And Their Beads!

Steer head clay base, mixed media



A Beautiful and Complicated Depiction of a Whale and Her Song

i read an article about dry drowning
and i thought about how, i swallow water
in the pool when i swim
sometimes it's as if i am gulping for air but water is running through my
lungs i wonder what it would be like to be a whale
swallowing jonah, saving jonah's life—
i believe jonah was a woman,
sent by g-d, pre-Joan of Arc,
she was swallowed by the whale, some say to escape,
and she breathed air in the whale's belly,
she thinks. no one will love her as she loves them.
nineveh is waiting,
spit up on the beach, she went, sand-covered, seaweed tangled in her hair,
and she asked a town to change.
she would have prayed with them,
between psalms, humming whale song,
and she walked, and walked, remembering g-d's threat,
her and her whale song,
yom kippur came and she and the town,
pounded their chests and prayed, rocking back and forth on their feet, jonah's
song, rising above the melody,
and they prayed for days,
forgiven, forgiven, holy, holy, holy,
and jonah watched, from afar, watched nineveh, curious, and fearful. and g-d
provided her shade, in the desert. but then she cut it down, and jonah, faint,
sunburnt, salt-tangled hair, begs for g-d to kill her, and she won't, for if jonah
took pity on the gourd, why should g-d not take pity, on nineveh, on the
people who now sing whale song as they pray. the day jonah left, to return

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home, the town cried in whale song. the braying of a sea beast, melodic and
droning,
holy, holy, holy, jonah, and her whale song.

- a beautiful and complicated depiction of a whale and her song

I think I deserve to scream

Maybe then you'd notice
how long I've been sewing my lips
(the needle's rusty)
when the stitching snaps.

Maybe then you'd see how my hollow mouth
is filled with dead, mother spiders.
Maybe then you'd feel
my stale breath.
Maybe then,
I'd talk,
and you'd listen.

Anniversary

wandering into the sea would feel calming right now i think
not to drown, just to let go
sometimes you need to wash away the hurt
physically scrubbing the body as raw as you feel
maybe i need the salt water to sting my wounds
maybe i need the hurt to disappear,
i want to experience the world without knowing these truths
that i allowed so much and it's as if he took the teeth out of my mouth and
put them in his own, mangled jaw, only to spit them out and crush each one
on the ground there are bodies that are not meant to be seen and mine is one
of them, voiceless as it is
i tried, i tried in that parking lot to piece the teeth together but they just
don't fit right anymore now i'm crying trying to explain to my mom why i
won't wear that black jacket screaming because there's nothing else that feels
cathartic enough
i asked her to let me out of the car while we were on the highway
i calculated the number of seconds in my head that it might take me to cross
before a car would hit me
i don't want to be this person anymore
i don't want to be this person anymore
tomorrow is a year since
tomorrow is a year since i was mangled
spat out and thrown back like i was worth nothing
chew and spit, don't swallow
i'd like the parking lot to swallow me whole
a sinkhole finding solace in the way i fall
physically scrubbing the body as raw as i feel
letting the water wash my wounds
i want to experience the world without knowing these truths

Gulp

Oil on canvas board



Grinding Salt

Arching over the hump of a Himalayan rock
bit is a fire ant who lets out a
belch after lunch: turkey BLT
crumbs. Once the creature is
defeated by sriracha aioli heat, he
evades the July weather and the
functions of his colony while bacon
festers in the whole of his abdomen. A
groan releases from wide pinchers too
small to be
heard, like a feather hitting wind
it goes unnoticed.

Icing from picnic birthday cake
jackets the point of a hind leg now
kinked into the groove of a pink parcel
left from a small girl's
mother when seasoning burgers.
Noticeably reclining further into
nook, he begins naming favorite appetizers:
orange peel, quesadilla, radish, salami.

Thankful for food
ubiquitously layered in blades
of park grass, falling

victim to gravity and then to
appetite. Like rain
water clogs his hollowed home,
he supersedes as morsels choke his thin,
x-ray frame. With a final post-meal yawn
the fire ant is a
zombie to the afternoon.

Alone, the forgotten
shadow of every outdoor lunch.

Peeking

Mixed Media



Dungeons & Dragons & Social Justice

SESSION 1

Adventure begins with heroes entering a small fishing village. Tiefling sorcerer (Noru) & dragon born barbarian (Gesh) clash with merchants who refuse to sell anything to anyone with horns. Elven ranger (Agis) defends a farmer from a bandit. Human rogue (Larry) assumes the gender of a cutthroat female dwarf with a beard, triggering a brawl in the tavern. Everyone roles for privilege.

SESSION 3

Heroes return to the tavern after scouting nearby bandit camps (Agis), researching reports of a mysterious illness spreading throughout Middle-Earth (Noru & Gesh), and pickpocketing elderly villagers with dementia (Larry). Heroes encounter Chad, the Demonic Bard of Bros, whose flourishing odes of micro-agressions are impacting patrons. Larry does a little jig. Agis, Noru, & Gesh perform a restorative circle around Chad, banishing him back from whence he came. Patrons cheer. Larry fails constitution check, gets blackout drunk.

SESSION 5

Days after arriving in a city afflicted with miasma, Agis, Noru, & Gesh organize a rally demanding the governor resign. He's obviously spreading pestilence via his crystal necklace that pulsates foul odors & keeps hissing foolish mortals. The governor denies these allegations. Larry proposes they hear him out. Agis

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succeeds her perception check, confirming the governor is super sketch. Noru casts Dispel Magic. The crystal breaks. The governor reveals his true form: an undead minotaur oozing toxic masculinity. Larry gasps. Gesh rushes forward, ready to cleave him in two, when he suddenly sprouts wings, howling I am Govo-taur! Long live the Patriarchy! before flying away.

SESSION 7

Heroes train in the woods. Agis & Gesh battle goblins who feast on kidnapped vegans. Noru self-reflects. Larry rolls a nat 20, convincing some halflings gathering medicinal herbs that Middle-Earth is actually flat. Noru bumps into a train of refugees, who share that the mysterious miasma has overtaken their beloved fishing village.

SESSION 10

After fighting through undead infesting the fishing village, heroes return to the tavern. Govo-taur sits upon a throne of goo, guarded by demonic knights wearing white pointed hoods. Larry muses that actually the patriarchy has been harder on men than women. Noru suggests Larry go fuck himself. Gesh tells Larry to please just stop. The knights express surprise that the tiefling & dragon born are so articulate. Govo-taur roars, nostrils flaring, wings flapping, undead clawing out the globs of slime oozing from his throne. Everyone rolls for privilege—except for Larry & Agis, who start arguing about the wage gap.

Seasonal Growth

Acrylic on canvas



On My Father's Quiet Love

*What did I know, what did I know
of love's austere and lonely of ices?*
-Robert Hayden, "Those Winter Sundays"

i.

My mother tells me he wrote a poem once, had
some spontaneous flurry of creative passion
on the drive home from work.

It was on a legal pad.

ii.

In not-too distant succession,
He, big man of few words,
taught me how to properly hold a pencil,
then how to properly form a fist.

Guess I took more to the pencil.

iii.

He keeps his letters short, prosaic:

I heard it snowed there.

Let me know if you need new boots.

Hope you're staying warm.

iv.

Often, on winter mornings
during the long Year of Not-Talking,
I'd stumble onto our icy driveway
to find my car already started,
humming gently
and filled with
warmth.

v.

There's something deep in a love
where all you want is to keep somebody warm.

vi.

On Valentine's Day,
he sent me a box of candy hearts.
Call it a factory malfunction or a convenient metaphor,
but when I opened it,
all of them were
blank.

Airhead

Collage, acrylic and mixed media on cardstock.



Sleep Don't Come Easy, Try Walk'n To It.

The church calls one, the first call of tomorrow
disperses into the blare of blue and red, black
flashing shadows chasing sulfur sorrow. The
aftermath of a muzzle flash,

The bells call two, the last call of the night, melt into
the harmonic barf of the crowd made chorus of
bruised up voices here to fight for their chance
above the low hanging sound-cloud.

Three dongs call, giving fond farewells
to the few silent steps left to find their way
and the few whose steps are yet unfulfilled.
Time to sober up from that sleep drunk sway

or stick to walking till the night stalls,
standing up, counting sheep, till the next call.

Fruit Goop

Acrylic on canvas



Windowpane

for Aunt Debbie

When you leave a bowl of soup on the counter the dust will send stereo echo across the room while the soup waits for you to get back to it soon, soon. Soon is days. Meant to be hours. Hours are late when the soup is ours. Our soup sits on the counter below baskets of fruit that can't help but hang over the edge. Baskets will be the counter which is soon waiting for us to get back, back to the soup. But you are a widow & if you are a widow the soup is not chicken, chicken noodle. If you are not a widow the soup is tomato. Tomato soup is hot waiting, waiting for a he & a she on the counter as you sink into the windowpane looking outside.

On the windowpane, looking outside you see another widow who has forgotten her cloak, her black, black grieving. She has left her soup at the altar. It will be buried next to a cousin, a second cousin & a great great grandfather. Great grandfather. How are they buried? The chunks of her over boiled veg will rot: a marination of dirt. Into marination you see the double dirt, dirt piles, but not her black, black grieving. Everything is turned over. Worms from burrows, grass from root, a centipede, a millipede & the beetle near the willow tree. Even richer soil. You wish to ask: How is your dead husband getting along? She would reply: The new fertilizer is giving him a rash.

When you are the widow you will have keys to his car. The car will probably start, it will start every time. You do not have to drive it. It is true that when you are a widow you do not have to drive his car because it may smell like him. You will see things twice through the windshield, through your eyes & his. You will see things twice.

Your counter is warm from the bowl that you will forget. It is something you will never get back to, soon. You will never get back. Back the truck to scoop the dirt-black mud. You will pour the soup down. It soils your shoes. Shoes are divorce. Meant to be grieving. Your shoes walk through windowpanes onto counters of widows scooping soup, wet shoes that walk in dirt in a rainy cemetery. The gray graves of dead husbands & dead vegetables.

Cambrian Explosion

Acrylic



When you donate your body to science,

you think it's going to be something great,

And often it is—

Sometimes you're the key to a new heart valve transplant,

A robotic limb, a miracle drug.

Sometimes, though, the beauty is harder to find:

A rhinoplastician's magnum opus,

A display of decomposition,

A crash test dummy:

Your brains flung through the Nevada air,

a Jackson Pollock on some concrete slab.

Don't you know?

Micron pen & digital illustration

Don't you know?

Don't you know
you're supposed to water your garden at night?

When the sky is a soft, pale mold and is filled with tufts of rabbit tails,
drifting down blues and caterpillars and creams and goldfish
until they're pink.

When the flowers are lonely and cold
and the vegetables are preparing for war
with four legged night crawlers.

When the drunken bees are stumbling around the sticky Rhododendrons
trying to stuff their golden pouched legs
until they're cotton balls.

When the tips of the trees look oiled across the street
from fading light
and the peepers squeak their echoed songs.

When dogs yell from fenced backyards,
mimicking their howling owners inside.
When planes-no dragonflies-dive through seas to catch the last of their prey.

Don't you know
you're supposed to water your garden at night?

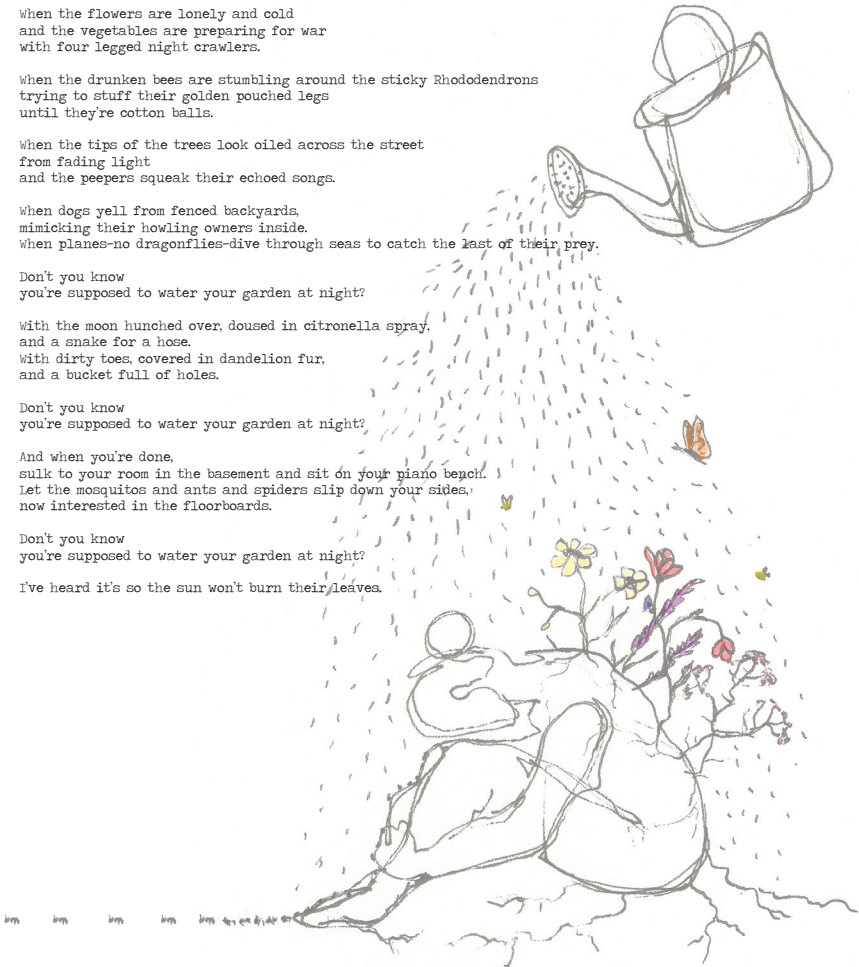
With the moon hunched over, doused in citronella spray,
and a snake for a hose.
With dirty toes, covered in dandelion fur,
and a bucket full of holes.

Don't you know
you're supposed to water your garden at night?

And when you're done,
sulk to your room in the basement and sit on your piano bench.
Let the mosquitos and ants and spiders slip down your sides,
now interested in the floorboards.

Don't you know
you're supposed to water your garden at night?

I've heard it's so the sun won't burn their leaves.



A Hippie's Homecoming

My duffle bag, approximately the same weight as a 23-year-old man, is heaved to the floor. My record player has never looked sexier. I could kiss it, but that hardly seems appropriate. I put on *Rubber Soul* by the Beatles and assume child's resting pose on my stained, grey carpet. To the indigenous spirit that haunts my room, it may seem that I'm praying to John, Paul, George and Ringo, but this is not the case. The depressing reality that I'm no longer in Vermont has hit me hard. I'll be in Massachusetts for a month. I call on the spirits that be to align my chakras and send me enough granola to survive the trying times to come.

The first day back home I luxuriate, waking at nine but sleeping until two in the afternoon. Last night's rain has turned to snow; when my gaze shifts toward the window I see a world crystallized, every branch dipped in holographic resin; but where are the mountains? The righteous slopes?

There's a cutout of James Dean taped next to my door frame. Don't ask why. I touch two fingers to it as if it were a holy cross, and like a rat leaving its nest I venture into the bathroom. I squint, ignoring the spit marks speckling the mirror. The gravity in Massachusetts is weaker, I think, as my hair sticks up straighter than a boy who's 5'11 but trying to pass for 6'. The water pressure in the shower is weak, and the spray smells like newly minted pennies minus the pennies. But never mind. I don't smoke, yet somehow the shirt I pull on reeks of basement and cigarettes—the smell of my people.

I take a swig of some witch's brew I concocted in a panic, forced to empty my minifridge of half-finished Four Lokos, tequila and White Claws into a heavily stickered water bottle fifteen minutes before the bus to Boston was scheduled to leave. I pray this potion gives me strength for what I'm about to do. Every

muscle in my body threatens to bless me with a charley horse as I make my way down the stairs.

Target acquired. My mother is locked and loaded, squealing my name in delight at one-hundred and forty decibels. I'm barraged with questions. How's college? Do I have a boyfriend? Did I know 'smoking pot' makes people schizophrenic? Vertigo sets in quickly. Goddammit, where are my Newman's Organic coffee pods? Oh, now they keep them on this shelf. With my heart moshing against my ribs I make a clean getaway to the garage, just barely grabbing my keys.

My chariot, a silver 2005 Acura MDX, awaits. The curved drivers seat fits my terrible posture like a glove, and as I sink into its leathery embrace I feel all the malas vibraciones leave my body. I set a course for the nearest thrift store about twenty minutes away.

In what feels like a skip and a hop, I reach Sister Thrift. Mecca. The Taj Mahal of secondhand gold. The minute the bells above the door ring, signalling my arrival, my mouth begins to salivate like one of Pavlov's dogs. The essence of thrift store mustiness floods my nostrils. The dopamine hits. Pitbull's godly tenor pours through the speakers like honey, quenching my soul.

Suddenly, it's great to be home.

:

I used a black, elastic hair tie
as a bookmark.
It fell between the pages,
like a strung caterpillar onto a leaf.

Then I looked up.

I saw two hands.

Mine.

And they were reaching for the sun
as my body screamed across the hammock
and joy swung from my lips.
My hair swept sweat
from my shoulders and chest
as it billowed down
and I sighed,
releasing flowers from my mouth:
summer ecstasy.

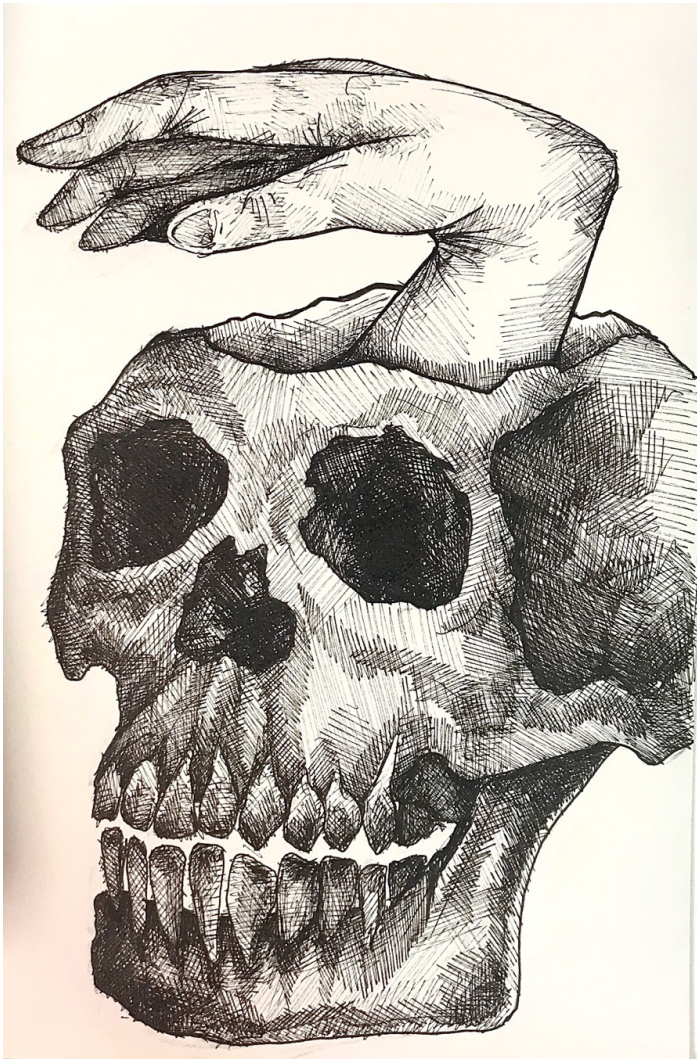
Tensions

Multimedia collage



Resurrection

Pen



Ode to Clitoris

Hit &

Miss, Hit &
Miss Pink, Sliver, Eye, Cheek.

Kiss it sweetly with too-soft lips.

She is at once,
A very small child & a very old woman.

Orange peel, zest & squeal in the

Center of you. Tear through

the real or imagined thing.

The tug of skin, a burst of flowers; like the magician's sleeve being
Revealed, you cry, with child-like reverie. Juices
Palliate the tender insides of your jaw. To savor the breast & the nipple, no milk
in your maw even as I hold your head like an infant, so small.

Sometimes she is a shrinking bud, sinking back into my labia folds, sometimes
Cold & tender, a flower only risen with the kisses on the neck. Sometimes—

She is all she wants of everything, a single bright bulb in a dark, wet
forest.

The only light for a 100-mile radius. Nothing too chaste about her in the

Submission to The Gist

ferocity of her desire to love and be loved. Sometimes, a swelling bulb, a red eye, alarmingly hot & watchful.

The way she moves, the way she smells.

Like a violet haze or the inside of a refrigerator on some days.

Sometimes just the warm milk of your tongue, the subtle fuzz around her crest, a protective layer around this all-too-precious insular orb of beauty & power & worship &

The simple pleasures of
Eating & smiling & falling in love.

Soft as a dove, she coos in my ear when you are near &
She opens me up, brimming with lava & volcanic matter,

Edging on disaster with the brink & the cusp of one tremendous—

Orange zest, a mess inside of you.

One cherry two cherry three cherry four...

I am so red & wet & laughing & beautiful.

You kiss my hips.

She asks for more.

Seppuku

The sun was setting on one of those summer days that makes the sky look like an orange creamsicle. I paced around my backyard, a lone samurai patrolling the territory. Clenched in my fist was a stalk of bamboo I had ripped from the ground thirty minutes before, my trusty katana which had seen me through decades of war and duels. Normally, any oblong, vaguely weapon-shaped item, be it a broomstick or a tree branch or a paper towel tube, became a lightsaber in my eyes. But something about that bamboo stick made me think of the Orient—as my grandfather called it when he told me war stories—and the warriors I had seen in cartoons like Samurai Jack. What can I say? I was a little racist. It was a different time: Bush Jr. was still president and I was nine.

My opponent was a ronin scoundrel who pillaged all along the countryside with his band of outlaws. He wore all black and three scars on his face. He carried a sword in either hand and spun them wildly about. His eyes were squinted and he spoke in a funny accent through buck teeth (again, I must stop to acknowledge that I was a little chauvinist swine at this age). Unfortunately, my friend Toby had been grounded for failing a geography quiz, and so the ronin had to be recast as the old maple tree behind my house. My palms were slick with sweat as I approached it, bamboo in hand. I raised my blade over my head and charged, feeling the ground beneath me with every stomp of my light up Sketchers. I brought the stick down with all the strength in my scrawny arms into the bark armor. A sharp crack pierced my eardrums and sent a chill down my spine. The blade of my katana bent back and snapped. I felt it as though it were an extension of my own limb. I turned my head to watch as the upper two-thirds of the stick flew off. Wind brushed my face as the bamboo did cartwheels through the air inches away, whooshing past with a whisper.

I was still reeling from this loss when my right hand felt suspiciously

warm. What was left of the sword had split down the middle, topped with two jagged shards of wood. The palm that was gripping the shard of bamboo was covered in blood. For half a second, I thought that I had somehow really cut someone down.

A gash had opened on the leather flap between my thumb and my palm. The wound was pulsating blood along with the rhythm of my heartbeat. Up until this moment, my experience with gore had been limited to paper cuts, scraped knees, and Call of Duty. I didn't feel pain. But for the first time I saw the stuff I was made of. Cognitively, I knew that the human body was a sack of blood and bones and organs shaped like beans that all had their own neat functions. I got a B+ in health class and earned a sticker on every quiz. Still, seeing blood, and a large volume of it at that, not as an abstract concept or a cartoon in a textbook, but as something pouring from beneath my skin took me aback. I now had to deal with the fact that I was a mound of vulnerable flesh filled with this weird, sticky, human juice. It was like realizing that I had been carrying around balloons filled with sour milk in my pockets this whole time, only narrowly avoiding popping them until now.

My head became empty and I was watching myself drop what remained of the stick and run through my yard. I held my wound with my other hand, trying to staunch the flow of blood, and pressed the handle of the back door with my elbow. I opened it slowly, trying to minimize the squeal that it always lets out. It was Saturday and my mother was home. But I didn't want her to see me in my shame. I was a nine-year-old man and I could handle this myself. I crept through the kitchen, trying not to bleed on anything. My honor had been stained but I couldn't let the same happen to our floors.

I stalked through the house into the shelter of the bathroom. I turned the hot water on full blast and kept my hands under the stream until they burned. The bowl of the sink turned pink but still the bleeding didn't stop. The full extent of my medical knowledge exhausted, I reached for the roll of toilet paper and grabbed the biggest clump I could fit in my fist. Within seconds, the clump was red all the way through. I peeled the wet toilet paper off of my palm and dropped it on the floor. I would have disposed of it more properly if it weren't for the fact that my wound began erupting again as soon as I wasn't applying pressure. I grabbed wad after wad of toilet paper, but they all lasted

only a few seconds in battle against the red tide.

The last thing I remember is looking at myself in the mirror. My face was wan and stricken with fear as I thought, *Whelp, I've had a good run.*

And then it was like falling asleep, only without my favorite blanket.

When I came to, I was lying down and staring at an off-white stucco ceiling. I thought I was in heaven. But I turned my head to see my mom, blood stains on her cardigan and a mix of bemusement and exhaustion on her face. A nurse with a set of scrubs that had Garfield holding a lasagna on them and a pink stethoscope came over. She called me by name, even though I had never consciously met this woman, and explained that I had fainted. Not from blood loss or anything medical, just sheer terror, like a woman in a Dickens novel. They had glued my skin back together—no need for stitches—and the mortal wound I had suffered was about an inch long. Still, since it was in an awkward place on my palm, they had given me a suitably dramatic gauze catcher's mitt which wrapped all the way down to my wrist.

But not even the prospect of my classmates fawning over my bandages could save me from the embarrassment I felt in that moment, or from the eventuality of having to explain how I had managed to mutilate myself. I began looking around the hospital room for an object sharp enough for me to end this suffering, but I lacked the courage even to do that. Instead, I got off the bed, the sanitary paper rolled out on it crunching beneath me, and went home with my mother. She let me ride shotgun and we stopped at an ice cream stand. But no amount of swirl soft serve or rainbow sprinkles could wash away the realization that I would never be a samurai.

Oh No, It's Me, Some Girl With A Flyer

You're welcome.

You stop and turn around, unsure if you heard me right.

I point to your wrist, to the free Apple watch you received just for participating in our study.

You nod blankly, about to turn away. So, I thrust a flyer at your face. You flinch. It's the same promotion your Wellness Environment plasters everywhere in the city during spring, the image so seared into your mind you see it when you close your eyes: a poster about the annual 5K for Wellness on 4/20 at 4:20 pm.

You take the flyer, thanking me.

You're in WE, right?

I saw you in Healthy Brains, Healthy Bodies—that mandatory class all first years endure so they can enjoy the best housing, the best dining hall.

You nod again.

You were sleeping.

You're flustered.

But I'm laughing, so you laugh as well. It's okay, I say, your secret's safe with me.

You say you're sorry, that you've just been so exhausted, plus that class is so boring.

But informative, I add. You shrug. My eyes narrow. I gesture towards the flyer in your hand. *Will you be attending?*

You shake your head, unable to withhold a chuckle. You say you'll probably be chilling with your friends.

Chill-ing? I ask, my neck cracking to the side between syllables.

Your eyes widen. Your ruse has failed. *Just like Netflix or something*, you add.

I question your devotion. You can sense it. Before you can react I seize your sleeve and hover my nose above the fabric, breathing deep. My suspicions are confirmed.

You yank your arm back, start to back away, then bump into another girl with flyers. You look around. Girls with flyers surround you. We're all white twigs with long hazel hair and our faces, you realize, are all the same.

Suddenly your Apple watch shocks you. You yelp in pain. You're taken off guard. Two girls drop their flyers, hold your arms back. Now you're angry. Kicking and saying things like *I have rights!* and *You can't do this!* But you don't even know what we're doing.

Some sort of mechanical chair is wheeled around. It looks a bit like an electric chair. I assure you it's not. You put up a fight, but you're forced inside. Arms strapped down, a helmet with wires plopped on your head.

You don't understand. I lean forward. You look deep within my eyes and, for the first time, notice that they reflect nothing back. That strings of zeroes and one's tint my pupils.

What are you?!

We are WE and now, so are you.

I flip a switch. The chair hums.

Your vision doesn't fade: everything just starts plucking apart, bit by bit. Colors fragmenting, memories unstitching. You're afraid. You're fighting to stay awake.

I tell you to relax, that it will be over soon. Just imagine you're in another boring class, and let yourself drift away.

You resist. Then other thoughts wash over you, thoughts you don't think are yours but you no longer care. You're losing all your senses. You feel untethered.

You really should feel lucky, I say. You're about to experience ultimate wellness, maximum mindfulness—the most efficient body.

I lock hands with the other girls, our flyers carpeting our feet. We chant—*healthy brains, healthy bodies, healthy brains, healthy bodies*—in mechanized harmony, swaying as your consciousness is uploaded into us.

Welcome to WEternity.

Color Conundrum

Watercolor and graphite on watercolor paper



Mon Cheri, Tournesol

Digital Photography



trail mix

no bigger than a pistachio, perhaps,
is this moment to you
a small green nut
in a “heart-healthy” mix.

your lust, her resistance
walnuts, sunflower seeds
what does it matter?

you pick through her fear
like a child looking for blue M&Ms
in a handful of trail mix.
you cast aside cashews,
nervous objections,
to make for yourself
a more manageable handful
to swallow,

you are selfish.

your tone is soft and playful,
but you pry past your welcome
you trace your fingers
over the waistband of her leggings
you smile, kiss her ear
pluck a pistachio from a bowl.

you try to lull her
at first, try to ease her legs open
with your lust,
with whispers and purrs

your thumbs apply pressure
at the seams of the shell

it's not easy
to crack her resolve

your fingers darken
against the wooden husk
mottled pink
with persistent precision

it only takes a few more seconds,
her elastic waistband
gives way
to your prying
fingers—

do you care
that she goes limp
in your arms?
do you notice?

when will you stop—
when you see her start to cry?
is that what you need from her
to realize you cracked her open?
is her silence, her reticence—
her meek stop—not enough?

for You?

You Are Selfish.

I throw the bowl.
in my mind's eye it hits you
above an eyebrow and bounces away,
cashews and raisins, almonds flying
through the air. your heart
needs healing,
after all.

besides, I am allergic to pistachios.
this whole metaphor is making me sick.

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All works must be titled. Art submissions should detail the medium. There is a 2,000 word limit for prose and a 150 line limit for poetry.

Any questions? Email us at submissions.gist@gmail.com.

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