

THE ART & LITERATURE JOURNAL OF

Naugatuck Valley Community College

Fresh Ink



2023

ISSUE 54

The Art and Literature Journal of
Naugatuck Valley
Community College

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The 2023 Luke S. Newton Memorial Award

Winners:

Art:

“Love in the Piazza”
by Shawna-Lee Kwashnak

Short Fiction:

“The Author”
by Rachel Bogan*

Poetry:

“Odes to the Roller Queens”
by Kenneth DiMaggio

The Luke S. Newton Memorial Award honors Luke S. Newton, an alumnus of Naugatuck Valley Community College and a lover of great writing.

*

*“The air which is now thoroughly small and dry
Smaller and dryer than the will
Teach us to care and not to care
Teach us to sit still.”*
“Ash Wednesday” (lms 36-41) by T.S. Eliot
T.S. Eliot

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April 10, 2023

Dear Friends of Fresh Ink 2023,

As another academic year rolls to a close, and with it another edition of *Fresh Ink*, I would like to extend my thanks to all of you who have supported our journal. Whether your support has been given through submitting your work for publication, through acting as a member of the Fresh Ink Editorial Staff or in an administrative capacity, it is deeply appreciated.

Special thanks go out this year to CEO Dr. Lisa Dresdner, Interim Dean of Academic Affairs Antonio Santiago, and Academic Dean of Arts and Humanities B.L. Baker for continuously supporting this initiative. Without the help of Director of Student Activities Karen Blake and the Student Activities Staff, and Digital Arts Technology Program Coordinator Ray Leite this journal would not be published. Thank you, Ray and Vismel Marquez, for your work on the cover this year. Thank you Linda Ames and Robyn Mazzamarro, Secretaries for LABSS, and Lisa Anderson, Fiscal Administrative Officer, for your administrative help getting this to production.

Our Editorial Team this year was top notch. My heartfelt thanks go out to faculty Greg Harding, Wade Tarzia, Steve Parlato, and Sandra Newton (emeritus) along with students Rachel Bogan, Christopher Boniecki and Marissa Panasci and alumnus Joseph Adomavicia for conscientiously and efficiently evaluating the submissions for this year's edition. Thank you, Chris, for assisting during the long hours of lay-out.

Finally, congratulations and thanks go out to all the published authors and artists. Without your creativity and generosity, there would be no *Fresh Ink*.

Be well, everybody....

Jeannie Evans-Boniecki, PhD

Adviser to *Fresh Ink*

2nd Place - Art

Meghan Delp*
JENGA TOWER



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*denotes an NVCC student author or artist

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*denotes an NVCC student author or artist

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*denotes an NVCC student author or artist

1st Place - Art

Meghan Delp*
NEW YORK HAVEN



THE AUTHOR**1st Place - Short Fiction**

Rachel Bogan*

Winner of the Luke S. Newton Memorial Award for Short Fiction

Dear Reader,

I never intended to write horror stories. Surprising, I know. My name is practically synonymous with the genre. Booksellers with any business sense keep their shelves well stocked with my work. My most recent trilogy demands an ending and perhaps a prequel. Still, I want to be clear. The exploration of humanity's fears does not appeal to my creative mind. I resent the genre that made me famous because I cannot physically write anything else. I have tried to force lighter stories onto the page, but the final product is never anything less than ghastly. I fill notebooks with nightmares. When all I have beside me is a pen and a napkin, I will spell out grisly murder on every smudged corner.

I have it all. My peers respect me, journals praise me, and my loyal fanbase buys up every paperback. They circle like vultures, waiting to devour the next pile of pages, gore, and blood I toss their way. My initials may be carved into the spines of each leather-bound collector's edition, but the flesh within wasn't crafted by me. I can't continue to take credit for it all. However, I can't precisely credit the Author.

The Author is something outside of myself that moves my hand to write. I have deflected questions about my process for years because I didn't want the unbelievable answer to be mistaken for an attempt at humor. I write this confession with the same gravitas I felt as a child, whispering my sins through a screen. Just this once, I have the resolve to acknowledge it. It is not a ghost of fiction. It is real.

Even now, as I type, I'm suppressing it. Resisting is an unexpected thrill. I'm balancing on the precipice of a familiar dark abyss. The inevitable fall is never pleasant. Dread grips me

as I plunge downward. It takes effort to avoid looking down to glimpse what hoists itself up to replace me. I am glad for the numbness that swallows me, so I never have to behold its entirety.

I told my wife my work was never to be interrupted, a rule she only broke once. When I regained control, I found myself standing over her, backing her into the corner, my limbs extended at odd angles like a dangling puppet. The fear in her eyes didn't subside until she was out the door with a suitcase. I had promised to value our relationship over my career, but the next day I was back to writing, my vows forgotten. To her credit, she didn't divorce me until after the book was released with international success.

When the Author leaves me, my joints ache like they've been stretched to breaking. My skin feels ill-fitting. I become stiffer each time. The pain is worth it for a best-selling novel, but these words must be mine. If this description of my torture satisfies the Author's curiosity, so be it. Perhaps it enjoys watching me teeter on the edge of its influence. If this confession is the last of my free will, I will seize the chance to tell the truth.

In my college days, I took a writing course taught by a professor infamous for harsh critiques. I think he took pleasure in tearing student work apart. Looking back, I know what I offered up was average at best. Yet, youth and arrogance convinced me he was jealous. Perhaps eventually, I could have sharpened my skills if it weren't for the Author's intervention.

I worked longer and longer nights, staying awake to write by any means necessary. The few hours of sleep that sustained me were plagued by nightmares. At least, that's what I thought. If I had been asleep, how was it that when I came around, there were more words on the page than before? I blamed exhaustion. This fretful drifting in and out continued until I awoke to the light of morning and a completed paper.

I felt euphoric. I turned it in without reading a word. It

was only later, when curiosity overwhelmed me, that I opened it again. After a few paragraphs, I was gripped by panic. It was horrible. It wasn't what I had intended at all. I didn't want to think that some dark place in me was capable of writing such words, though they were a fairy tale compared to what came later.

The fear and shame I felt overtook my pride, and I ran to my professor's office the next day to beg for a chance to rewrite, but my pleading was ignored. He told me I had found my voice and told me to explore this new style. If I refused, I was all but guaranteed to fail. I resented the ultimatum, but I enjoyed the praise and the passing grade.

The Author infected everything I wrote from that moment onwards. Its creativity grew after I graduated, drawing inspiration from our surroundings. The monsters in my books take many forms, but each holds some remnant of a person from my life, reshaped into something horrifying. I can no longer look many of my oldest friends in the eyes. I can never settle down, fearing the Author will warp homes into hells-capes or settings for unfortunate events. What I don't recognize must come from whatever twisted place it resided before it came to me.

I have tried everything to avoid drawing the Author out. Writing in 1st, 2nd, or 3rd person perspective only changed the metaphorical distance between the reader and the terrors it wants them to witness. Beginning with stage directions resulted in five acts of depravity. It has a sickening grasp over prose, but poetry is worse. The fears it can invoke are let loose in a dizzying spiral of hypnotizing paradoxes and unsettling similes. A clumsy attempt at German prose turned into a dark fantasy. I didn't recognize most of the words it used, but a rough understanding dissuaded me from fully translating. If I try to write non-fiction, it creeps in slowly, painting our reality in the darkest possible light. If I write fiction, horror

quickly consumes the plot, the characters, and the setting until the Author leaves me with a bloodstained narrative, a pounding headache, and the biggest thing to hit bookstores since Game of Thrones. For understandable, if cowardly reasons, I never tried to write a biography.

Maybe I could have ended this torture. If I hadn't tolerated the pain and the loneliness, I could have changed things. I can't stop it now. If I stopped, I would be nothing, no one. I would just be a sad, scared old has-been with a hungry shadow. I can't refuse it entirely. I don't know what would happen if I tried. Recently, it was writing for three days straight. I shudder to think that I might someday sit down to write and never stop. No one would know that what hunches there furiously typing away will not be me. I mean, can you tell where I stopped and the Author began?

Can you pinpoint the sentence where it climbed up from the recesses of my soul and pulled my strings taut? Even when describing my experiences, I couldn't get the terror right. It so readily picks up the slack. This time is different, though. As a reward, it lets me see it. It is as real as you or me. As if my pathetic mind could dream it up. I am aware as it stretches and manipulates my useless flesh. I can feel its breath on my ear and its claws in my back. I think I am trying to scream. Silly thing. Puppets don't scream. They sit, nice and quiet, until someone comes along to pull the strings and tell a story. It is nice to finally meet you, dear reader. *

Poems by Kenneth DiMaggio

Odes to the Roller Queens

Winner of the *Luke S. Newton Memorial Award for Poetry*

Ode #1 to the Roller Queens
 Maggie May her rink name
 Maculata Meola the Italian
 name her immigrant parents
 gifted to their only child a girl
 who took up the crash jab
 & speed of a professional
 roller derby queen and long
 enough to break a few bones
 marry a guy in the rodeo to leave her with a child she
 supported as a certified
 nursing assistant
 (But Life couldn't quit on you this
 early especially with more ribs
 needing breaking)
 So the weekends where she
 rode a Harley and soon with other
 women on scooters a gang
 that became known as
 The Roller Queens
 Women that come Monday went
 back to waitressing assisting raising
 & educating children not to turn out
 like their ex-es
 Mothers who were always going to be
 damned whether they did or didn't
 Gals who realized that like the men
 they drank and sometimes rode
 with
 had to do for themselves
 as outlaws

*

Ode #2 to The Roller Queens

Some on Harleys
 Some on Hondas
 didn't matter
 so long as these ladies
 were on motorcycles
 So long as they had
 a few hours on a Friday
 or Saturday to leave the kids
 with the grandparents
 or ex-es
 So long as they could
 briefly steal back their lives
 before they were young
 mothers and lifelong
 certified nursing assistants
 No fighting
 No drugs
 No calling out folks for being
 different the way the guys did
 --these ladies were
 already outlaws just
 for riding away from
 the role of Mom
 for a few hours
 Vroom Roar Throttle
 --there goes one of those
 crazy broads riding past
 the dollar store the V.F.W.
 (just how far they think
 they're gonna get?)
 For the ladies soon back
 To motherin' and nursin'
 An hour or two on

a Harley a Honda
is like riding the waves
of eternity

*

Ode #3 to The Roller Queens
During the Parents-Teachers
conference the teacher talks
to you about your child in the
same tone she uses to talk to
her special education students
(Would she talk to you any
different?
If you had time to change
your smock after leaving your
double shift at the nursing home?)
But come weekends when
you and a few other ladies
put a Honda or Harley
between your legs
Women some of whom
supposedly rolled professionally
in a roller derby rink
--no one talks to you the way
they shouldn't be speaking
to your kids
sons and especially daughters
and who because of your inked

flesh and ex-es in the pen
are going to need a little
Zen of the motorcycle
a book you are going to read
after you first write another
chapter of your own

Friday or Saturday night

*

Ode #4 to The Roller Queens
Saturday night saga
roaring past the American
Legion Hall and the V.F.W
Men eighteen to eighty
with their faces plastered
against smoke-stained jaundiced
bar windows
"There go those crazy broads again."
Rolling on to the next adventure
at the bowling alley where Lorraine
refuses to change out of her
motorcycle boots for bowling shoes
On to the diner
to call the sitter or the folks
and then speak to the kids
promising them dolls that wet
or videos that actually explode
if they can act civilized for
another hour
Coffee and too many cigarettes
Teasing the cop who's still young
& and shy enough to barely say
"Evening Ladies," and tip his hat
And if the men they married
were never like that
you treat your Honda or Harley
right
you're in for a long marriage
with the American road
at night

*

Ode #5 to The Roller Queens
The gang's unofficial leader
--a former player in professional
female roller derby
--this unofficial gang's bylaws:
always help a sister in trouble
when she needs a baby sitter
or some extra work at the
nursing home
This un-chartered club's philosophy:
Find a sitter for the kids and ride
an hour or few on weekends
and beat the men in arm-wrestling
at The Dugout Café or the V.F.W.
Whether you ride up in a Yamaha
or a Harley
Whether your colors are your ex-es's
leather jacket or the varsity volleyball
team jacket you wore in high school
--there just was no need for leaders
ranks or rules
things that the ten or so riders of
"The Roller Queens" knew since
they were born
things they didn't need to bring
along for the ride when they
were not anyone's girlfriend
wife or mom

Andrew Dickinson*
VORTEX



Poems by **Christopher Boniecki***

Terpene: In Memorium 1st Place - Poetry

I sit next to all the dead people,
Chairs turned into memorials.
The stench of rot bleeding through the once sweet smell of pine
Especially when the silence stands in the middle of the room
Screaming at us.
Even when it's interrupted by an aunt or uncle it lingers.
Their names can be heard whispered in between every little
pause.
The ham tastes sick.
The filth of loss clings to every surface like algae claiming
a shipwreck,
Making a mockery of a futile attempt to blind ourselves with
red and green lights.
Even the merriest of jingles can't drown out the ever-repeat-
ing sound of a lifeless head hitting tile.
The weight of love's shadow held everyone in place.
No new hot tub or hectic football game can save us.
The queen of the ant farm sits left behind by time and betrayed
by her body,
Trying desperately to hurry the process of decay with every
cigarette pull.
Every puff of smoke carries a piece of her soul up to heaven,
Her skin knitted into her cardigan.

Through the smoke I saw her lying there.
Nearly lulled to sleep by food and wine.
In that moment I could see her realize
That the beloved ship she had sailed for so long was sinking.
The loving family that she sacrificed every joint and muscle for
was dying.
As I surveyed the scattered remains of a family I feared and
hated,

I shed a tear— and everyone in the room shuttered.
Even the silence seemed to be stunned,
Like I had stood up and screamed back at it
That I was content to drown like the others.

Preacher of the Wood

I heard of a man the trees worship.
The birds sing a song he wrote.
They say you can still hear his sweet hum
When the wind meets the branches.
So I sat beneath a patulous willow
To hear his scintillating hymn.
To a god not of heaven but of being.
I learned nothing but one thing.
There's nothing to know,
No leaders to follow,
No gods to worship,
Just a life to give.

Magus of Your Mind

Who is the Magus of your mind?
The master of all that is good and known,
Your assistant as you travel through the
Deepest depths of your psyche?
The light to reveal up so you can swim out of those lulling
waters,
An advisor as you rule your kingdom of managed thought
The secured territory guarded from the wilds of your brain,
A part of the constant war between what you understand,
And the untamable madness within?
When all that rules you changes
What is the north star of yourself?
The unquestionable sanctuary that will keep the tiniest flame of
hope alive and well,
Your irrefutable truth,
A prayer to a deity, an utterance to a philosophy, a message
for loved ones?
To whom will your last words be spoken?

A Memoir of a 21st Century Hermit

Out in the hollow streets lamp lights peeking through
blackened windowpanes
Aren't differentiable from the stars above.
The squash beetles seem lively tonight.
The whole of everything seems wired.
Maybe the moon's monthly burn has gotten into their heads.
It probably has me too.
All lights seem weary.
The night is odorless.
There is no hum from heat or the bitter grip of cold.
I stand in the feint memory of a town,
A carcass of a street,
A bunker of a bedroom.
The circles I walk in have begun to feel shamanic.
My muttering has turned into whispers from another world.
The scribbles of this notebook have begun to walk around the
page
And find their own place in a story of their own creation.

TAG WAS IT 2nd Place - Short Fiction

Christopher Boniecki*

Tarmac is a hideous beast, The Scraper of Knees, and Giver of Boo Boos. Its stoic nature may fool you but, if you drop your guard, a rogue shoelace will quickly send you plummeting to your peril. On one afternoon in 2013, at the end of the school year, a clan of professional tag players race across the surface of Tarmac. The players dodge and juke each other, swiftly gliding as their Sketchers skid and tread across the rough ground. Roaring trucks soar by the arena of this epic bout. They are playing a more intense tag only for league players called “Infected” where instead of the title of “It” being passed around from person to person, tagging someone would make that person also “It” creating an ever-expanding horde of elite third graders.

The two contestants of this altercation go by the names of Chris and Patrick, respectively. Little do they know how truly phantasmal this series of leaps and bounds is going to be. Patrick, both the favorite and “It,” begins the sequence with your token jolt forward and slash. Chris, the underdog, simply jumps out of the way. Patrick stutters forward trying to close the distance which Chris counters with an equally paced backwards shuffle. Realizing however how close the wall of the school is behind him, Chris decides he needs to get out of this position. Chris attempts this by first slightly lunging to the right before pulling himself back and running to the left effectively evading Patrick’s swipes. Patrick, seeing his mistake, starts running after Chris.

Both fly down the middle of the parking lot, their peers shouting in the background. Chris notices how close he is getting to the wall and decides at this moment to attempt a move never seen before - a move that if done properly will guarantee victory and finally claim his spot in the rankings.

Chris looks back to gauge his distance from

Patrick. There is a solid five-foot gap between Chris and Patrick which means this might just be possible. He goes for it, first slightly slowing his pace for a second decreasing the gap to four feet. He then bends his knees slightly and waits exactly three seconds assumably creating a one-foot gap between himself and Patrick and just as Patrick’s fingers are about the scrape the back of Chris’ shirt, Chris completely bends his knees and whirls his body to the right sliding directly past Patrick. As Chris trotted by Patrick, he could see his star struck face. Chris looks over to see the rampaging crowd of onlookers and for about twenty-five seconds he is an idol.

An ensemble of high-fives fly out to greet Chris’ hands. The best jukers and dodgers in the game show their respect. Eduardo and Lucas, two of the top five tag players in the school, rush over picking Chris’ brain on the specifics of that move. Creating such a great move, Chris might even be considered to enter the top ten, which, out of at least fifty kids is impressive, but that honor would only be bestowed upon him after a lengthy discussion by the best players because, after all, in this school tag was “It.”

Almost the entire hierarchy of the school was based on tag. The popular kids were the best tag players, and the outcasts were the kids who didn’t play tag. In this inner-city school, for recess, we had a kick ball that was deflated and booted over the fence within two weeks. There were some Beybladers, but they quickly realized that bringing their Beyblades to school either resulted in theft or their destruction. It quickly came to the point that, during recess, whatever else you were trying to do, would be interrupted by children playing tag. It was tag, tag and more tag, and Chris, up until this game, had been an average player. He was more of a tactician, respected, but he didn’t quite have the physical ability to keep up with the crème of the crop.

In those twenty-five seconds of adoration after my

epic game, I lived a life I never knew before. That crouching spin move created a little pocket world where I was beloved by everyone in my class. Too young for envious dislikes or cynical shrugs, every student showed their full admiration. Crushes even formed which was a concept I did not understand yet. Patrick was still the ruler of Tarmac, but on that day, the king bled. Such pure and simple adorning isn't a thing seen much. With age comes a deserved skepticism of the world and its champions, but as kids, we lived in the moment, and our ignorance was the parent of our uncanny ability to worship heroes and then move on.

I would go on to experience other instances of admiration but nothing as precise as those twenty-five seconds. I would do more impressive things, even more impressive jukes but all with a much more fitting level of positive reinforcement. That afternoon, my twenty-five seconds of fame was stifled by the ringing of the bell abruptly ending playtime. My classmates and I ran for the school doors ready to devour our lunch of Sloppy Joes and milk knowing that tomorrow there will be a new series of phantasmal leaps and bounds. Another kid will have their twenty-five seconds of fame and their own story to write about eight years later.

*

Poems by Natalie Resto*

The Rainmaker 2nd Place - Poetry

On a cold spring night
So late, yet still too dark to be called the morning
The Lord thought it best
To appoint me as the Rainmaker

Crashing down on my chest
Came the whole weight of the sky
From my throat
Came a great thunder so powerful
And so ferocious
Was the wind that escaped my lungs
It tore through
The Barrier between Earth and Heaven

Then came the rain.
I summoned sheets of water,
Fat droplets cascading
Hot and steaming did they land

My cheeks stung
From the night's bitter chill
But the tempest
No longer in my control, Not that it ever was
Only grew stronger
The howling of the wind escalated into a deafening roar
And pierced the clouds
To expose the velvety black night

I lifted my head
Preparing, fearing, wanting to suffer the wrath of God
Then I saw it.
There, my first shooting star

And all was quiet

Liminal Space

I woke up this morning,
but with heavy lids the universe remained
for a time, closed off from my senses.
To me, at that very moment,
there was nothing
but an enfolding darkness,
my breath,
and a feeling of deep warmth
that seeped into my bones,
the way a tea bag will seep its herbal essence
into the watery depths
of my shallow tea cup when I finally rise
from this pleasant purgatory
between rest
and wakefulness.

ShawnaLee Kwashnak THE TIGHT SHIP charcoal



ICEBOX WIND

Jordan Stern*

9:45 pm. Crazy mountain shit about five miles from home....

The winds are really blowing up here. App says 16 mph, but the pines are howling loudly. I live on Route 272, which runs north out of Torrington to Goshen, then Norfolk on up to the Berkshires and the Mass. line. It's a fast single lane highway through hilly forests, with no traffic lights, except the one blinking red light approaching Norfolk town center. People routinely drive it in the seventies. But at this time of night, an hour could pass without a car going by. It's very dark tonight.

On a curvy section just south of the Goshen line, I notice headlights shining at me about a quarter-mile ahead, at a dead stop, in the middle of the road. I immediately perform a controlled slow-down and was startled mid-maneuver by a large downed pine limb blocking the entire width of my lane. It was at least 100 feet in front of that stopped car, hidden in the dark. My slow-down turned into a controlled emergency stop. If I hadn't slowed down, I would have crashed into the limb for sure. I stopped about 10 feet in front of it. I put on my blinkers and jumped out of my truck.

In the distance, I saw the silhouette of a man with a phone in his hand, walking toward me from the stopped car. I quickly grabbed the base of the downed limb and pulled it off the road. That was when I smelled smoke. I looked around and saw that a tree was on fire, about 30 feet up. It looked like the wind blew the tree into the electrical cable running above the curb.

The man walked toward me. I said I would call Torrington FD and jumped in my truck. I believe he called them too. After the dispatcher took the info, I started to drive off. Nearing the man, I opened my window. He loudly advised me that TFD was on the way. We thanked each other, and I took off.

It was like something out of Hemingway. Stuff like that happens up here all the time. Mountain shit. Two years ago, just a few miles north of that spot, an SUV hit a moose, killing the moose and seriously injuring the occupants of the car.

Five minutes later, I arrived home. I stopped at the foot of the driveway and jumped back out to grab the mail. The pines were really howling along the slope of my pasture. It felt warm because it wasn't frigid. I crossed that same road to my mailbox. The familiar dark landscape was desolate but comforting. I was ready with the flashlight on my phone to find the latch on my mailbox. I needed it. Clouds are shading whatever moon there is.

I love the sounds of my house in heavy winter winds. It makes me feel like the house is consciously keeping me safe. It's a good house.

Andrew Dickinson*
HYPER REALISM EYE



VIRTUALLY YOURS 3rd Place - Short Fiction

Thelma Owoicho*

The little girl ran through the grass and breathed the herbal scent that filled the summer air. She shivered as the cool, damp grass poked between her toes. Gravity pulled her deeper into the earth as she turned her eyes upwards. A gentle breeze swayed the branches of the trees, and the leaves seemed to reach out to her.

“Rosemary, dinner,” came a female voice from inside the house, “it’s pepperoni pizza - your favorite!”

“Ooh, pizza,” thought the little girl as she scrambled to her feet. “Coming, Mom,” she replied.

She ran to the house and left an imprint in the grass behind her. As she approached, she saw the little white rose bush they had planted. “I’ll pick one for her,” she said as she bent down to pick a pretty one.

“Ouch,” she cried. She looked at her hand and saw the red drops fall. A thorn had pricked her finger - and she felt it?

The world went blank. The stark words “End of Transmission” filled the blackness....

Rosemary removed her headset and looked straight at her hand. No blood- but she could still feel the pain.

“Wow, Joe, it was like I was there- but we need to do something about the pain receptors. I felt that thorn pricked my finger, and it bled - we don’t want people taking damage when they are in VR.”

Rosemary was not a little girl anymore and worked for Time-Scape, a virtual reality company. Their motto was *Time-Scape - The Real World But Better*.

“The added narration is a nice touch too; it’s like walking into a fairytale - but of a real childhood memory.”

“Real Life but Better,” Joe replied. “Oh, yeah, I’ll take a look at the pain receptors. Your brain probably hadn’t caught up

yet. Have you heard of phantom leg syndrome?"

"Yeah, I think so. Isn't that when amputees still have pain in the limb that no longer exists?"

"Yeah, exactly. I heard a bomb victim once...."

Rosemary wasn't in the mood for one of Joe's Ted Talks. She let him drone on and tried to resist the urge to look at her watch.

"Fascinating...." she offered as she traversed the artificially lit computer lab and placed the headset on Joe's messy desk.

"Yeah, just one thing, the pizza had pepperoni. I'm a vegete...."

"Three years of work, and we are nearly ready to release the beta," Joe said as he dropped his pen at her feet, interrupting her mid-sentence.

"Oops, I got it" Rosemary crouched down to pick it up. Joe watched her every move.

"We still have a few things to iron out, but this is as realistic as we've ever gotten it, Joe."

Joe nodded.

Rosemary's eyes were still adjusting, and she was getting a headache.

"There are some issues, of course, with privacy as well- but I trust you, Joe" - massaging her temples. "I better show the report to Main Office."

Rosemary grabbed the VR set and rushed out. Joe watched her intently as she left the room.

"Finally," she thought as she pressed the elevator up button. Rosemary needed to grab a few work things to bring home, and her cube was on the first floor.

"Oh, hi," said a voice as the elevator door opened. Sally from Accounts was standing there.

"So, how is the VR project coming on with Joe?" Sally said with a consoling smile.

"Oh, fine, we are about to release the beta."

Most of the other employees avoided Joe, but she had no choice but to work with him.

"Well, I'd hate to be you down here with him all day," she said as the doors opened to the first floor. "He is here some nights really late. He must have no family to go home to."

Joe had been a member of the *INCEL Chat* group for the past six months. He had been complaining about women for hours.

VR JOE: I've been working with this one for years, and she won't get the hint I'm into her.

INCEL SID: They're all the same. She sounds like she needs to be put in her place.

VR JOE: Yeah, I don't know. I don't want to lose my job.

INCEL SID: How long have you been putting this off, man? She is making a fool of you.

Joe looked at the clock: 1:30 AM. "I better update that file," he said as he logged out of *INCEL Chat*. "That should do it," he grinned. He powered down his computer and pulled out the flash drive that read "Rosemary's Memories." Joe looked at it, made his decision - dropped it in his pocket, and headed home.

Rosemary stumbled into her apartment, holding her work files in her arms. Rosemary got herself situated at her work desk. Her job was to read feedback from the test subject's VR experiences- and look for inaccuracies.

"Lots of people experiencing problems," she thought as she read the reports.

"The most disorienting thing for me," wrote one subject, "is if I don't take the headset off, it just goes on repeat."

"Next year, I'll make it to software programmer," she thought as she trudged through each personal account. She had her eye on Joe's job, and he knew it.

It was 2 AM when Rosemary fell into bed. But woke to pitch blackness - for a moment; she was back there, the man with no face; she panicked - another nightmare. Rosemary

turned towards the kitchen, and just then, she saw a light blink.

“Oh, I forgot I brought that home,” she thought as she shuffled over to grab the VR set. Joe had sent her a text message saying, “I fixed it.” She decided to check it. Rosemary put on the headset, hit the engage button, and was in.

The little girl ran through the grass and breathed the herbal scent that filled the summer air. She shivered as the cool, damp grass poked between her toes. Gravity pulled her deeper into the earth as she turned her eyes upwards. A gentle breeze swayed the branches of the trees, and the leaves seemed to reach out to her.

“Rosemary, dinner’ came a female voice from inside the house; it’s pizza - your favorite!”

Ok, he took the pepperoni off the pizza.

“Ooh, pizza,” thought the little girl as she scrambled to her feet. “Coming, Mom,” she replied.

She ran to the house and left an imprint in the grass behind her. As she approached, she saw the little white rose bush.” I’ll pick one for her,” she said as she bent down to pick a pretty one.

Ok, that’s the same.

“Ouch,” she screamed. She looked at her hand and saw the red drops fall. A thorn had pricked her finger, and she felt it.

Oh, crap, he didn’t fix it; it feels like he made the pain stronger! He’ll lose his job for this!

I better stay a little longer and see if he missed anything else.

The little girl walked into the kitchen and saw her mom, her back turned towards her cutting the pizza. Rosemary, with her hand, outstretched holding the white rose, said “Mom, I picked this for you look.”

Mom turned around. “Look what I’ve got for you, baby.” Joe stuck the knife in deep, then stabbed and stabbed, and the rose was red now. She felt every cut.

The world went blank.

The stark words “End of Transmission” filled the blackness....

TEN SECONDS IN TIME

Thelma Owoicho*

She saw the boulder a split second before she struck it. She sucked in the salt air and then stopped breathing. Her eyes closed as a silent prayer attempted to be said but found no pulpit. Her wheels spun fast and then stopped. A sound rang out, but she heard nothing, unlike the flock of gulls scattered in its wake. The bike halted, but she kept going. She flew through the air, and time froze, and was lost at that moment. Her body took flight like a wingless bird and was an odd sight amidst the tranquility of Achill Island’s rolling hills and fields.

Her feet left the pedals as if levitating. They shed a tear, set her free, unencumbered, and carried on spinning. Like a tightrope walker, the bike held its balance, tittered gallantly, and was suspended for a moment before landing on one side. One wheel intact lay proudly while its twin, dented beyond recognition, molded to the shape of the boulder. An unlucky mirror shattered, reflecting only disjointed images of time. Debris from a broken light and bike parts were strewn around the quiet country road. She made her way through the air like a dolphin leaping from the ocean. The wind was too light to slow the strength of the force. Her arms flailed desperately as the fingers grasped at the air. The momentum was so fast that her hands had no time to block the impending collision.

During this flight, the girl was blissfully not present. A chasm in time opened, giving birth to a void and beckoning her in. The void was so full of secrets that could not see the light. Her mind was blank, and the memory was locked away, never to be revealed. The unforgiving road stood its ground, approaching fast, fast enough to rip through skin and smash through bones. The first thing to hit was her left shoulder, and then the cracking sound as the collarbone snapped once and then twice. She was breaking bones that snapped and poked through the skin. Then her head made contact with the stony

ground. It grazed her skin raw like coarse sandpaper, trying to reach her face, but it settled on her scalp. Her heart forgot to beat, but the blood still flowed. It made its way to all the open places it could find. Each wound wept blood, but still, there was no pain. That would come later. For now, the pain was suspended like an ocean tide too far away to reach. Her body continued its journey and finally came to rest wedged in a mossy ditch. The moist earth pasted on like ointment on her open wounds.

Then nothing as the sound of silence whispered in her ear. "Was this the place where all souls come to rest? Was this a place from which no one returned?" She waited here, reluctant to let go until the silence opened up its hand, and within the hand, she saw a stone upon which read the words "not yet." All was still for a split second more she held on by fingertips but fell. The world slowly came into view.

She lay there crumpled on the ground, and then her ears picked up a voice calling her name. She could see the light coming through her eyelids, and the red world she lived in felt so warm that she wished she could bathe and sink into its crimson pool. She thought, "How sad the body would not store this gem but instead saves us from the glistening pain." The whole moment had never happened to her; her mind did not allow it to exist. The puzzle of her life would always miss this piece. She tried to move one shoulder, and it would not obey. A bone that never spoke now loudly clicked and clacked. A stir of an old friend tried to emerge, that panic she would never walk again. But then she moved her hand, and her fear melted away. The voices in the distance filtered through the daze, and she gently opened her eyes.

The sky was vast above her and dotted with clouds here and there; there was a pause, a moment of stillness, grace, and beauty; then it was over as the pain came in like waves.

ShawnaLee Kwashnak BOOTS oil



Poem by **Laura Sali***

Gaunt Face

I've spent most of my 20 years teetering on a thin line.

Formerly a fat and happy child,

I now sit with a painful smile

stretched over cracked teeth,

a caricature of my mother in the mirror.

My emaciated face a mere semblance of hers

We are mother and daughter

Sitting at the crossroad of life and death.

Isabella Mattio

DEATH

paper with graphite



Poems by Thomas Warner Crouch*

Pray 3rd Place - Poetry

Pray,
It's the only thing we know to do,
Gripping crosses in faded candlelight,
We pray,
While the graveyards become full.

The squeak of shoes,
Crushing glass shards,
The shrieking through rattles and blasts,
Windows blacked out,
In the corners children cringe in balls,
While their piercing cries resound,
A societal prayer for an end,
As flailing as a sobbing parent's bargain,
For their children to return,
Our cowardice prevails.

But in the graveyard helpless spirits watch,
Their mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters,
Their faces sunken by empty words,
Through reddened eyes they glare at stones and whisper,
"All they ever did was pray."

Paper Prisoners

Ban it today,
They won't see yesterday,
Tomorrow will be opaque to them,
In fragile pages that hold its weight,
We conceal to avoid a rip,
A tear, a fault, a scheme, an evil that will spread,
If they knew,
Ban it so they never will.

They won't have to look far to question,
Our own flaws that it contains,
The past truths we bury won't be remembered,
If we ban it today.

A surge comes over those who want to know,
A scalding burn from a white flame,
Ban it and their flame dies among lifeless trees,
They'll know somehow it was there, but it won't matter.

You can't seek knowledge torn from minds,
You can't hear voices that aren't there,
These banished paper prisoners won't haunt us tomorrow,
If the people are blinded today.

Anne-Charlotte Silver*

LIFE EVOLVES

linocut print



Poems by Katharyn Machan

In Her Library

Shelves of cedar to ward off moths.
Windows angled to beg morning sun.
Underneath her three favorite books
cloth of scarlet, cloth of ivory, cloth
of burnished gold. A fountain pen
for poems, a comb carved from tortoiseshell
to pull through her long tangled locks
when the poems don't come.
And one, just one, small crystal snifter
for afternoons when new words pause
and she pours pale or purple brandy
then runs her fingers over spines
that hold together all the stories
her losses will ever need.

Pain

It's like learning how to become
a fire, this extension of you that is
not you: wrists, palms, fingers, joints
burning so steadily they almost
seem cool, blue in the heat
your reach is now, flickering,
curved, unable. You smile: how
can you let the world around you
know you've become an unsteady flame?
Doctors argue. The moon grows still.
She would like to help you, but
cool night has forgotten your name.

for Jaime

Isabella Mattio*

AT THE SEA

paper with graphite



YOUR FOREVER HOME

Thelma Owoicho*

Was that a creak? But she'd oiled the hinges just yesterday. Sarah brushed it off and went back to her writing. It was pretty old-school writing in a diary, but since inheriting Falmouth House, she found herself writing in her journal every night.

Sarah Beecham was living in the city as a freelance photographer, and now she was waking up to her two-hundred-year-old house in the remote countryside. It was huge, with weathered castle-like walls and chimney stacks. Sarah had never met her Great Aunt but heard about her reclusion in Scotland and how no one ever spoke to her again. Sarah took out her camera and started exploring each room, she noticed that one looked like it had belonged to a child. Strangely set up as if the child still slept there. A small four-poster bed with a creepy porcelain doll. This next one must have been where Margaret slept. A grand bed greeted her as she walked in, flanked by bedside tables, and a writing desk just in front of the window. Sarah loved the house. She got a good deal from Frank Parson's, a local repair man. She hired him for the following week to start a few repairs. She heard movement outside but no one was there when she got to the front door.

"Weird," she thought as she went back inside, but a package caught her eye.

Sarah grabbed it and walked into the kitchen. Her phone rang, and she put the package on the table.

"Sarah, it is your mother; please, I need to talk to you. That house is evil. Remember, Dad went missing well...."

Sarah hung up the phone.

Sarah avoided her mother like the plague. Her dad died years ago, and her mother found solace at the bottom of a glass.

She tried to brush it off and went upstairs to the bedroom.

"Tomorrow, I'm going to tackle the attic," and she slid into the

crisp cotton sheets.

The girl was like a Victorian doll, standing at the end of her bed with a lowered gaze. She looked seven years old with long brown ringleted hair. She wore a white silk dress with puffed sleeves trimmed with lace. Sarah looked closer.

"Are you lost?"

The girl raised her head and said, "Are you my mom-my?" Then vile black liquid vomited out.

Sarah woke up with a jolt.

"Oh, God," she was alone, "that was horrific."

Sarah did not usually have nightmares and was disturbed for the rest of the day.

Frank arrived at about 10 AM.

"Oh, and before you go, could you oil the front door's hinges?"

Sarah disappeared up the stairs, her voice trailing as she went. The attic door was pretty easy to access and had a dusty pull-down staircase. The room was bright but dusty boxes lay in rows. Sarah knelt down. A large wooden trunk sat half obscured by a dust sheet "What's in here," she thought. Excitement gripped her as she peered inside. A diary and a camera, "Are you kidding me," she thought as she inspected her treasure.

"Sarah, I'm done here; I'll be back tomorrow."

"Ok, Frank, I left the spare key. Let yourself in."

Sarah heard the door close quietly. "Ah, he oiled it," she thought. She picked up the book and camera and went downstairs.

So, that was how Sarah Beecham got the diary. She knew the MacTavish family was the first to live in the house. John, Beatrice, and their daughter Rose; the internet told her that. The daughter died, and the mother went mad and killed the dad.

January 5, 1822. John brought Rose to his studio. She was so happy. She did not seem to mind the "big dolls" he worked with in the studio.

“Big dolls, I wonder what she meant?” Sarah close the diary, and photographs slipped out on her lap. The subjects sat with serious faces in Victorian garb. One solemn lady held a sleeping baby in her arms.

“Is he really sleeping?” The word was lost as Sarah realized John MacTavish was a post-mortem photographer. She remembered reading that Victorian families would take pictures of their dead children. The photographer even painted eyes on their eyelids to make them look as if they were alive. Sarah shuddered.

She returned to the writing desk and read more diary entries.

February 2, 1822. When Rose returned with John, she ran to her room and shut the door. I found her talking to herself! I noticed she had something in her hand - a photograph. On no, John really should not expose Rose to his work.

Sarah flipped through more of the pages.

March 6, 1822. Rose is getting obsessed with these pictures. John says it's good for her to see death, but I am not sure it's safe. I found her in her room with lots more pictures. She was talking to them and acted as if they were answering. I need to put a stop to this!

Sarah could not help but think about Rose, her parents, and their strange pictures. As she felt around for her slippers, she touched something, it was a picture of a beautiful little girl and, at the bottom was the name Rose. Sarah remembered the girl in her dream. She looked just like her.

“Wow, this was Rose; I wonder how she died. It was tragic no doubt.”

Sarah lay down and drifted off.

The girl stood there again at the end of her bed. It was

Rose. This time she looked straight at Sarah. Sarah was transfixed; the girl's eyes pierced her senses, drawing her nearer. Rose flew directly at her, hovering over her with her face so close that Sarah could smell the paint.

“Oh my God, painted-on eyes!”

Sarah could see the glued eyes shut and the lids painted with eyes.

Rose spoke, “I drank the poison. Take some, stay with me! When Daddy did not drink the poison, mommy got the dagger.” She opened her mouth, and again the vile black liquid fell out, but this time straight down Sarah's throat!

Sarah woke up, grabbing at her throat.

“Ok, stay calm, Sarah. That was a dream. A bloody realistic one - but still just a dream. Frank should be over soon,” she thought as she tried to get up.

Rose stood at the writing desk, smiling.

“Mommy! I knew you had come back again. I hate when you go away. But where's Daddy? I like when you make him go away- every time, over and over, forever, and ever!”

Rose grinned as more poison seeped from her lips. Sarah walked as if on air to where the diary was on the writing desk to see the display of pictures Rose had proudly laid out and the strange package that she had meant to open. In those pictures were men; some wore suits, some wore flairs, and some wore sneakers. Sarah noticed one very familiar face – it was her father, but grotesque with painted-on eyes on glued-down eyelids.

“Open the package, Mommy,” Rose squealed through spluttering bile. As if in a dream, Sarah opened the package and took out an ornate dagger. She heard the door creak open and looked at her new daughter.

“Was that a creak?” But Frank had oiled the hinges just yesterday. “Hey Sarah, I've just come back to finish up,” Frank said as he made his way up the stairs to greet her.

“Don't worry, Mommy, Daddy's home!”

Meghan Delp*
OVERSHARING



Poems by Joshua Fitzpatrick*

Icarus

No such beauty has blessed my beating heart,
Like the sunrise has on this fateful day.
If I spent another moment apart,
For Its return I would longingly pray.

The frigid darkness could never compare,
To the warmth the powerful sun does bring.
And though I've chose my eyes for you to stare,
I know not why you scorched my blessed wings.

To take me swiftly from my sacred muse,
Like Aphrodite taken from her love.
Why must my heart be something I abuse,
The answer seems so clear to Zeus above.

Until I can be close to you once more,
And yet you took my sacred right to soar.
Until I can be close to you once more,
The lonely streets of Crete I'm left to tour.

Grief

The sun cradles my tears,
Suspended in a moment,
anxiously waiting to illuminate my grief.
Luminous it shines like gold,
quickly fading into black.
I sink.

Waves so violent grab hold,
Denying my freedom.
Hopeless in my disposition,
the depths beckon me.
An offer so instinctive but premature.

I struggle to the surface gasping for life.
The cold paralyzes my function.
As I rub the salt from my eyes,
my current venue comes into focus.
Towering above I see the rolling hills of a lone island.
Sandy beaches line the shore ahead.
As I gain some sense I swim toward it.

O' Life of Constant Wonder

Grey the clouds which fill your skies,
Much too quick to seize the day.
Left to think why you disguise,
Blue which pairs with summers ray.

Barren cold the branches stay,
But next lie the green untouched.
Weary starved the workers lay,
Yet the suits may fill their guts.

Snow falls down as spirits may,
For the sun was just a crutch.
But when dusk may end the day,
Dawn shall bring my spirits flush.

As my head may start to wander,
Just one thought may ease my somber,
O life of Constant Wonder,
O life of Constant Wonder.

The Sword of Man

To pull the sword against one's self,
To play the game of death,
Sound to most the Ill man's sick dream,
For pride prevents the degradation of the soul, pain
expedites it.
Triumph against the shrouded identity of the almighty hast
not be the goal of man
For he would be struck down at any sign of blasphemy
The toils of uncertainty haunt the mind of the faithful
For if they strike themselves down
They in turn damn themselves to eternal suffering

Redemption

As waters rise,
I gasp for breath.
As in my past,
I wished for death.
I tried to claim the cowards' prize,
Looked my wish dead in the eyes.
For if I try,
I will repent.
As if my sins,
From hell are sent.
In passing, days ascend below,
the pain around this life I owe.

As waters rise,
I must forget,
The devil's eyes,
For which I've met,
Whose gaze surrounds my youthful years,
To fill my nest with saddened tears,
I now must change And will prevent
The sacrifice to go to waste
This is not the journey's end
I must find my rightful place

Meghan Delp* **3rd Place - Art**
ARTIST'S ROOM - Fill with picture



Poems by Mary Tetreault

Priscilla

She was gentle,
and, I think, wise.
A large lady –
even her gestures were large.
Sort of a caregiver
without a certificate on the wall.

Her interest in my story
loosened my words and a tear.

A hug that wasn't hurried
smoothed my ragged soul.
She promised tea and cookies
the next time I appeared.
The child in me responded
with hope.

I think my footsteps wore a path
over her door mat.
I wish I could walk her way again –
she's gone!
Her wise words hold me up,
and I will always hold her dear.

A Picture I'll Never Forget

She shows me his picture
Of the one she didn't choose.

I see his eyes and comment,
"He's been hurt."

She nods, but doesn't go further,
So I make up a story...

His dad wasn't around – never had been.
A boy without a dad, a man without a friend.

His voice was gentle, smooth, too smooth.
She didn't trust the promises she heard there, I guess.

Dark, curly hair, slightly mussed,
Hands gentle, strong, and maybe capable of lashing out?

His story was spotty – jobs in short supply, easily lost.
Almost tearful at the word Mom.

His shirt had seen the inside of many paper bags,
Hastily packed ...he traveled light.

She's had enough of lies and bruises
Slammed doors and empty pillows.

He'd lost again – the man-child nobody wanted.
The pain walked him out the door and down the dark street.

Velvet Dreams--Folded Paper--Sad Awakening

I realize my chilly left foot
has touched my warm right ankle
and it has wakened me.

But I want to return to the velvet
softness of sleep,
and a dream of pretty words on paper.

I think awhile in my sweet sleepiness
about a poem I might have written
and might have read to friends.

Maybe I drifted off again, now into
a writing class or meeting, or gathering;
the leader is a man I don't know well.

My poem is still folded up in my pocket.

I was hoping to be encouraged to read it.
Then I realize nobody notices
that I haven't taken a turn to share!

I was mistaken; they didn't really
want me there,
They chatter about next week's meeting;
the group chat has gone on without me.

The hurt doesn't linger, but the words
start to insist that I write them down.
It's really morning!

And my warm robe and warm socks send me to pen and ink.

Knitting Joys and Tribulations

Sitting and knitting.
How many generations
Sitting and knitting?

The needles have changed.
The yarn has changed.
Patterns have changed.

Baby sweaters, booties and hats.
And blankets for babies never held;
Their names are on gravestones.

Christmas gifts.
Comfort shawls.
Warm mittens, hats and scarves.

A million happy tears -
Salty on bridal veils
and christening gowns.

Projects put away, never finished.
Put away from lack of interest
or sudden interest in something new.

New yarn, new needles, new patterns,
Knitting with love,
Sitting and knitting.

Miles of stitches ripped out
and reknit, and reknit, and reknit!
Mistakes-to-perfection, sitting and knitting!

Natalie Resto* A WALK DOWN THE RIVER



Anne-Charlotte Silver*

HUMMINGBIRDS

paper collage on acrylic painted canvas



Poems by **Benjamin Chase**

Heavy Rest

My bed is a kind
of forgiveness

where I lay light
as I am heavy

letting gravity
acquit me

for each
motion

of the day.

Insomnia

Night is never long
enough to sleep
for those left
undreaming

in the blue-black wreck
of in-between hours

charting the mind's
haphazard courses
and noting the hiss
of passing vessels.

Meeting Levi
--for Levi Mark Chase, 3/4/2023--

I wept when my son
burst from my wife—
pale and slick
as any captured fish—
yelping, horrified,
in this moment, start
as death, where he
was measured, weighed,
and assigned to his life
by more than our choices
and a medical team.
I became a father then
rubbing his little ribs
with my right hand
and repeating,
“Das okay, it’s okay,”
in a language and world
he knows not at all,
with a tone even he,
quieting, seemed to sense
was love.

Aubade

It’s best to wait
and learn how sunlight
makes its way
around.

So often I rush
a world in place
of one I might
receive.

Sometimes
I’m slow to love
what only slowness
yields.

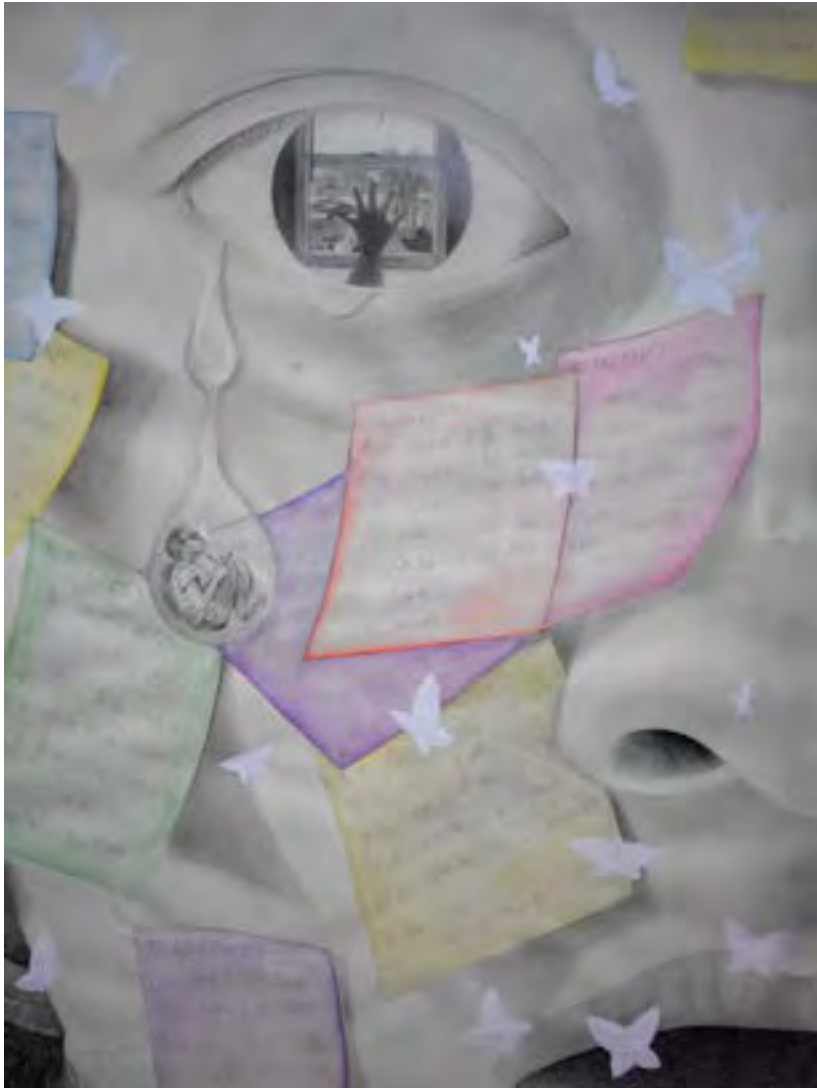
Minor Poet

I hope my poems—
at least one
or two—
lodge
kind and
companionable
with a few
fellow
sojourners—

the way
another’s
word or phrase
has sometimes
offered me
a fire,
supper,
a place
to rest.

Natalie Resto*

WHAT TO DO



Poems by Roberta Whitman Hoff

Scottie, Portrait of a Cat

I watch her breathe
 as if she were a lover
 that longing
 when a lover is dying
 one holds one's ear close
 to every breath
 trembling in prayer
 to hear the breath's rhythm
 go on
 and never let go
 when my lover died so young
 it seemed the angels had fled
 to goneness yet here this cat
 who has defied kidney failure
 watches me with an inner gaze
 as if we have always known
 each other and I become my child
 heart she looks through
 me to a summer in a garden
 before either of us was ever born
 now beneath the wide maple
 she stretches her striped limbs
 cradled in the exposed roots
 and green earth her fur sways
 with the movement of breeze
 in concert with her breathing
 and leaf green eyes closed
 into dreams the cool wind wraps us
 like an arm and the leaves rattle
 she peeks to be sure I am near
 the sun warming our skins
 and she is the summer

in the rippling crashing of leaves
 clapping like tambourines clattering
 incantations as if green, sepia, gray
 and wind are a key to a vault between
 treetop and sky
 as if there are
 saints and ancient poets peeking
 through, and yes, angels
 delighting in an aged cat
 resting in the summer sun.

Mother's Day

What it is like to hear the voice
 of the son of my Beloved over
 the phone after years have passed so quickly.
 It's the richest sound
 the heart feels deep as the cosmos.
 I remember when he was four year old
 and hearing his wee darling voice over the phone line,
 his voice like the remarkable sound of clear water and love
 deep from the earth from an unseen source
 invisible like the winds
 and ageless to my heart
 but real like the winds and warmth from the noon sun
 Thirty years and sixty years more
 the voice of the son of my Beloved
 is a beautiful sound.

Gods Pray

while white afternoon light fills
 the hospital room where
 the cancer patients sit like
 daisies plain and solemn
 in their identical beds covered
 by fresh crisp sheets
 bodies stilled with knowing
 and worn from chemo
 with some eyes looking out at the birdless sky
 the blue sky watching back.
 Death is breathless in one room
 it breathes like fear
 on the unsunned skins.
 A red rose blossoming outside the window
 shouts to whoever sees
 and the leaves of a tree
 speaks autumn
 in a sepia world.
 Patients tired hopeful
 hopeless sad forgotten or
 waiting for loved ones hear
 the sound of cars filling up
 the street outside in rush hour
 noisy with want and hurry.
 Inside the ward is quiet except for
 the sound of nurses writing or visitors sitting
 and patients resting
 in the open sterile spaces.
 White afternoon sun
 filters in like gods
 silently filling in the folds
 in the sheets holding the shadows
 with prayers
 unnoticed like motes in sunlight
 in the translucent air they hold hands
 they pray and love.

A Housecat Charm

My tortie cat is everything,
 she's a lamb, she's a puppy,
 she's a sister, she's my daemon,
 she blesses my ears with every vocal
 a cat can possible bark, meow or sing
 or chirp, she is my sidekick
 crooning along with me
 while the Neil Young CD
 spins songs into sound.
 For those of you who fear cats,
 there's nothing to fear about them.
 They can't carry guns;
 they only carry the souls of the dead.
 The kindly dead like gentle aunts or uncles.
 Cats' eyes like a time portal,
 a sphere into the past before the cosmos,
 they are of another plane,
 a warless plain
 where the only need is
 to be and to be loved.

Haiku

my quivering heart,

Thick silence before thunder,

The cat's hesitancy.

Anne-Charlotte Silver* BIRDS UPON BRANCH 2 Japanese style wood cut print



Poem by **Kathylee Perez***

Abuelita

The scent of your Spanish perfume,

I inhale when you come near my presence,

The sugar lingers in my mouth when I take a bite of your potato salad on birthdays.

Your soft-spoken voice trembles like a sad tune as you ask me to help you put on your shoes.

I truly love you so much!

You are here, and you live in me.

Your beauty and grace will not disappear.

I love you more and more as I grow older.

Jewel Trujillo*

**BASIC TOPOGRAPHICAL CYTOLOGY:
A Mapmaker's Guide to Cells**



Poems by T. Mags

Finding Alice

I saw you from a distance
 but wasn't sure that you were there.
 Then I began to follow down a path,
 just a plain woman in despair.
 You tell me I'm extraordinary,
 a thought I never dare,
 but I'm looking for something,
 so I keep walking, not knowing where.
 You lead me to a smoking caterpillar who tells me I'm not she.
 Not the she that he remembers, no that she isn't me.
 Still, you show me the way because you believe.
 As I fall deeper into a hole I wonder what that means.
 You hand me a mystical drink
 and promise all my truths will be told.
 As strange as it seems, my curiosity seems to grow.
 You lead the way to my adventure,
 one I'd long forgotten,
 you give me a key to a secret door that had long been locked.
 Once I drink in what I was gifted,
 and it brings me down to size,
 I discover the gate to my secret world,
 a truth behind the lids of tightly closed eyes.
 "Am I going mad?" I think, is this just a dream,
 in this strange world you bring,
 is everything really what it seems?
 As I walk through the shadows of my once-beautiful mind,
 I recall a former thread.
 So hand in hand we paint blank roses and bring them back to
 red.
 The red reminds me that I've long hidden my heart,
 left under the rule of an angry queen for so long,
 I'm not sure where to start.

But I follow you white rabbit
 because you see the real me,
 And I wonder when we've overthrown my bitter sister,
 what color will we be?
 So I'm here with you white rabbit,
 not sure just what will come,
 But I sense that you'll be with me when each adventure's done.
 Keeping me level although for, I wear many hats,
 Making me smile like a whimsical cat.
 I can now feel I am becoming the she,
 the one he will recall,
 so here I am in a hole you've made,
 allowing myself to fall.
 Never really knowing if I'll need to find my way out,
 I'm strangely assured I have no reason to doubt.
 So, lead me there, white rabbit,
 I'll follow wherever you go,
 and maybe together
 we can make this a place of wonder, only we can go.

Long Live the Queen

Princess in your tower
 never show that you're in distress.
 Sit, and behave, behind stone walls
 and put on your best dress.

Princess in your tower
 don't unbind your hair for the savior's call.
 Do just as your told
 so, the kingdom doesn't fall.

Princess in your tower
 dare not show your heart

for, your life has been chosen
from your wombed prison's start.

Princess in your tower
we've placed dragons on your guard.
They will breathe fire in hopes that glimmer
and your knight, he will fall hard.

Princess in your tower
don't try to choose your thoughts
your routes have been predetermined.
Expectations can't be fought.

Princess in your tower
there's only one way down.
You will be queen, it's what is set;
to be held captive by your crown.

Princess in your tower
stand back from the window's edge.
Kingdoms can't be built
when the queen has gone off the ledge.

Princess in your tower
they will never understand
why you chose not to be their queen,
leaving them short a playing hand.

Princess in your tower
we'll shed counterfeit tears when you've gone.
She never became queen and we will cry.
Long live the queen, for queens they don't live long.

Voices

Be not afraid.
Hush, I've got you, my dear.
I won't let you fall.
Fight the voices that tell you differently.

Be not afraid.
Hush, I've got you, my dear.
I won't hurt you.
I'm here to ease your pain.

Be not afraid.
Hush, I've got you, my dear.
The past is in the past.
I'm not like them.

Be not afraid.
Hush, I've got you, my dear.
Take my hand.
It's here open and waiting.

Be not afraid.
Hush, I've got you, my dear.
Dry your tears.
It's going to be all right.

Be not afraid.
Hush, I've got you, my dear.
See me for me.
As I see you for you.

Be not afraid.
 Hush, I've got you, my dear.
 I will be there.
 But you must allow me.

Be not afraid.
 Hush, I've got you, my dear.
 I won't let you down.
 Fight the voices that tell you differently.

Maelstrom

As gently as calm ocean waves
 you draw me in.
 Softly, subtly, brushing against my skin.
 Calling to me, my siren,
 such a sweet song you sing.

Daring me to come in closer, deeper.
 Gentle-motioned water flows stronger.
 Your hastening current pulls me in,
 until I'm bound, and I am yours.
 Such a vast vigor you bring.

Drowning in you now,
 I heed not Takoda's warning.
 Daring you to rush me off my feet.
 Take me now, I beg, and I'm captive.
 Such an enticing enraptured cling.

Crash into me harder,
 my body was swept by your tide.
 I give in, surrendering myself.
 And then calm, touching only lightly again, we,
 such a perfect passionate thing.

Isabella Mattio* AUDOBAN HERON ink press with lino



Isabella Mattio*

CONCH

paper with charcoal



Poems by **S.E. Page**

Heaven Is Too High For Us

Cloud skimming
over fresh sky from
the porthole of a plane,
it's almost easy to believe
humanity can fly away
from all of our sins
and shortcomings.
But we are not so airily made—
our hearts are clumped heavy
with rage, clogged
unclear.
Everything is honest
in the blue.
You can see intentions
for miles—
The sky can't lie
about itself.
It reigns, it rains
in gossamer drops
and streaks of light
made electric.
I wish I could shine
deadly pure
as beauty
without
body.

A Single Fleck: Meditations on Chronic Pain

Some days I scream a skull song
No one else can hear but me.

If I lie to myself, there are no such things as tears.
And some days, I've already cried them all—

But rivers within still thrum my name,
Murmur even in shadow plunge and night—

Damn them. Why must they remember
All the dreams I've dropped?

Seeds meant to be tucked into velvet beds
Now lost to me, though once I knew how

Hopes unfurled into perfect paper wings.
Shreds, all of it. I forgot my symmetry.

We are undone as one!

I toss scraps of soul to the air as pain
Siphons bright ink from my veins.

But I. Won't. Keep. Any of it.
This hurt, I will clump it all back,

I will let it fall with the rest of me—
Thrown away

So I can be new again.
From the wrinkle, from the wreckage

Fracture and fractal—
From the body that betrays the heart,

I'm coming on the edge of a prism flicker.

Blink, believe—Breathe.

If you must, if you can—
Wait for the water that knows you,

Wash in the moment that leaves you
Clear as a single fleck of dew.

Every Imaginable Sun

She is some less each day.
She is always, yet never
Where I think

I don't know what to call her anymore.

How do you name the dark?
Sound out the space between
Flesh and full-bodied silence?

Mother ash undone universe
Breathe into me—
(Just one more time)

But how does one plead with a ghost?
How dare I ask for some
More.

She was every imaginable sun,
Forging my heart and all
Two hundred and six bones
Deep inside her womb.

"There will be stars over the place forever;"
And I—I must flare my own
Bright kindness now.

*Line 1 from Sara Teasdale's poem "There will be stars."

Anna Kwashnak
DANCE AND MOVEMENT
mixed media



Poems by Ryan Garesio
Secrets

On Friday evenings

when the work was done

I would come to your house for Indian food

the spice of the curry stung

like the time you found out

I was texting that girl behind your back.

I remember saying I was sorry under the breath of the moment

heavy and humid

and I don't know if it will ever be enough

after we ate, we adjourned to the bedroom

a sacred meetinghouse for sacred things

and the love we shared drowned out the world.

Truancy

in the cold light of winter
 we trespassed into each other
 fueled by a rage that existed somewhere
that only you or I could quell
 in the moment I was afraid
 you spun me around and kept me dizzy
there can be no regret in a world we cannot see
 blurred by the unknown sensations, I laid there steady
 steady like a ship about to dock
drifting sideways against the grain of everything I thought I
knew
 it didn't last long
 but it did last forever
it's ok though when we disembarked
 tied the keel to the deck
 turned off the engine
flat land was waiting for us again
 we caught our feet and walked home
 our next journey about to begin

“Caricature”

You whittled me
from broken wood
into a totem of
anxiety
and empathy
and the tendency to question
the very process
from which I was created.
Who can play God like that?
But you took the reigns from his hands
and built for me a beautiful home.

ShawnaLee Kwashnak LOVE IN THE PIAZZA

pen & ink with watercolors

Winner of the Luke S. Newton Memorial Award for Art



ShawnaLee Kwashnak LOVE IN THE PIAZZA - BACK COVER

pen & ink with watercolors



Anne-Charlotte Silver*

COUNTRY JAY

linocut print with watercolor



Poems by Joseph Adomavicia

The Eyes Tell No Lies

Weeping eyes of a heartbroken widow.
Enraged eyes burdened by betrayal.
Jubilant eyes, a new parent's glow.
Blank eyes, cold as a stone, lacking hope.
Eager eyes of the ones hope-filled.
Exhausted eyes of the blue-collared worker.
Astonished eyes of the unexpected.
Befuddled eyes of those asking,
"why, why does it have to be this way?"
Lost eyes of those without direction.
Cunning eyes of a con artist articulating their next ploy.
Cautious eyes of the experienced observing before acting.
Curious eyes of those who wander, wondering what is next.
Horrorified eyes of those bearing witness to the grotesque.
Melancholy eyes of those soon meeting their end.
Glistening eyes of children opening presents on Christmas.
Steadfast eyes of the determined thriving to achieve their dreams.
The stoic eyes of those ennobled in heroism.
Rose-filled eyes of newlyweds committing to a life spent together.
Crazed eyes of the dark and demented.
The different looks of the eyes, tell no lies

Dear Lover, Forever More - Part 2

Dear lover,
do you see the world around us?
Please, give it the thought.
For, I love you,
and if the world around us
is all we have until our passing,
then I will cherish you
like I cherish the opportunity to live.
From our first I love you,
to today's,
and of course,
forevermore.

Dear lover,
do you see the meaning in life?
Please, give it the thought.
For, I love you,
and if the meaning of this life
is to love and live happily,
then I will advocate for us
until the stars above cease to shine.
From our first I love you,
to today's,
and of course,
forevermore.

Dear lover,
do you feel the energy around us?
Please, give it the thought.
For, I love you,
and if the energy of the world faded
I'll have you know that

I would do anything to replenish it.
From our first I love you,
to today's,
and of course,
forevermore.

Dear lover,
Do you feel the passion of our existence?
Please, give it the thought.
For, I love you,
and if existence was defined
by the love and happiness, we create,
then we have created life itself.
From our first I love you,
to today's,
and of course,
forevermore.

Dear lover, I promise, forevermore.

With Intent, Not Intensity

You must love her with intent,
 not intensity.
 Love with such a deep intimacy
 you seam the stitches
 of each other's time.
 It is that,
 or you will lose her.
 Even when dealing with vulnerabilities,
 and battling insecurities.
 You must love her with intent,
 not intensity.
 Love her with such a deep intimacy,
 you offer a sense of safety
 in your companionship.
 It is that,
 or you will lose her.
 Act upon the definition of your heart and soul
 with the engagement of wit and romance,
 and love her with intent,
 not intensity.
 It is that,
 or you will lose her.

The Street Signs In My Mind

Life has chewed me up and has spit me out.
 I bet I didn't taste too well.
 I probably shouldn't have been so careless in my decision-making.
 You know how it goes,
 one minute you're in control, and then the next
 you're wrapped around a telephone pole.
 Metaphorically, of course.
 Fortunately, for me, there's still another chance to make a
 change.
 Some don't get that chance.
 It seems I've encountered the street signs in my mind.
 They read, that somewhere down this road
 something will lead me to fulfillment
 as long as I'm willing to make the effort.
 And even if it hasn't presented itself yet,
 and even if my feet are becoming too weary to travel,
 I still, must search for something,
 somewhere along this daunting road.
 For, as long as I breathe,
 I live with the purpose of sustaining something greater than I
 am.
 It seems I've come upon another street sign in my mind.
 And now, with this guidance,
 my hope is I will find meaning in serving joy,
 far greater than anything pain could ever offer.

Lesson #90

I have worn pain,
like a yellow coat on a rainy day
and have appreciated joy
like a hiker staking his flag
on a mountaintop.
I have learned to be grateful
for both feelings.
Without one,
I would have never known the other.

Jewel Trujillo* MAGNETIC LABYRINTH: AN EXPANDING MAZE



Poems by Devyn Daniele*

Women at Night

We are the moons who walk the streets
 We clutch our purses like the moon, catch the waves, and hold
 them tight
 But when the moon is out at night
 She knows to listen
 The moon can hear their growls
 That heavy panting echoes through alleys
 What a danger it is
 When the wolves come out to play
 The moon shines
 Craters and all
 The wolves will awe at her beauty and bark at her pleas
 Because what is a girl's word if a wolf wishes her to bleed
 Oh, how scared a woman will be if a wolf is present
 Will he howl tonight and let his pack know she's near
 Oh, fun it is when a wolf knows he's the only one who can hear
 her screams
 As he licks the last of her out of his fur
 The wolf will brag about his fest
 Men like to hear stories of the woman their friends have
 conquered
 Because a woman torn apart
 Means a job well done

Repetition

Take note the difference between yesterday and today is the
 lunch I ate
 Take note the difference between yesterday and today is the
 hours I worked
 Take note the difference between yesterday and today is the
 uniform I wore
 Take note the difference between yesterday and today is that I
 forgot what made it different
 Take note the difference between yesterday is that it's today
 Take note that I no longer know what day it is
 Take note that I've grown a year older, and yet I have no new
 memories
 Take note that I work so hard I forget to live
 Take note that I've worked so hard that I've buried myself six
 feet deep and can see everyone standing around in black
 Take note that no one is crying
 Take note that they say it's like they haven't seen me in years
 But take note that I haven't had the time
 Because take note that I was trying, and it was never good
 enough
 Beware, as you take note that I wanted to be there or do that,
 but my money wouldn't allow
 Be kind as you take note because the same is happening to you,
 and just because you can see from the top doesn't mean you
 won't be the one looking up from the bottom next time

ND

I felt it there in my hands
A tiny dance party
Currents of energy pulsate through my chest
A squeal is released into the microcosm
It rings in my head like a commercial jingle
Repeatedly such a happy tune puts my body at ease
To stim is to breathe
My air is a song
With a dance to go along

Words Unspoken

It builds in your throat
The air of change is so close to your tongue
You can almost taste the sorry's, and I love you's
Sweet syllables cascade through you
Yearning to lift the heavy weight of the air
Oh, what you should have said when you had the time
But your eyes mourn the elongated shadow
Of someone who will always think that they cared more than
you did
Oh, what you could have said

And She Loved me

And she loved me
And she was brave
And she had the courage to speak all the things I could never
say
That girl lit up rooms and spoke of things you could find on
tumblr
She was queer before I knew of queerness
And I loved her
I loved her like moms love dads
I don't think I ever told her
Because I had not known myself
So the love had stayed in the past
And I don't know if she loved in that way
But I could never say

Isabella Mattio
LE PAST

paper with graphite



Poem by **Jonathan Farnham**

The Heartless Man

I see you everywhere
I see you at night
I see you in the day
I see you when I'm at home and when I'm away
I see you everyday
But I know you are gone
And it puts me in a way
For I cannot explain the pain
Like a ghost with a dagger pierced through his heart and vein.
For all eternity the pain still remains
But no matter how hard I try to wash your face away from my brain
The memory of you still remains and it's driving me insane
For the mind and heart are not easily mended
You have tarnished what was once splendid
And now I sit in the dark
Hurt and unmended with sadness
For you were my first love and will always be remembered
But alas I must move on
For they say time heals all wounds
But know I must end this tale with a question
Does time heal all wounds or is that too just a deception?
I hope you've learned a lesson to never give your heart away to those
Who won't truly protect it
So be careful because you might end up like me
A ghost of a man whose heart was too easily taken
For I am the heartless man
And this is how my story has ended

Natalie Resto*
IS IT ME YOU CALL?



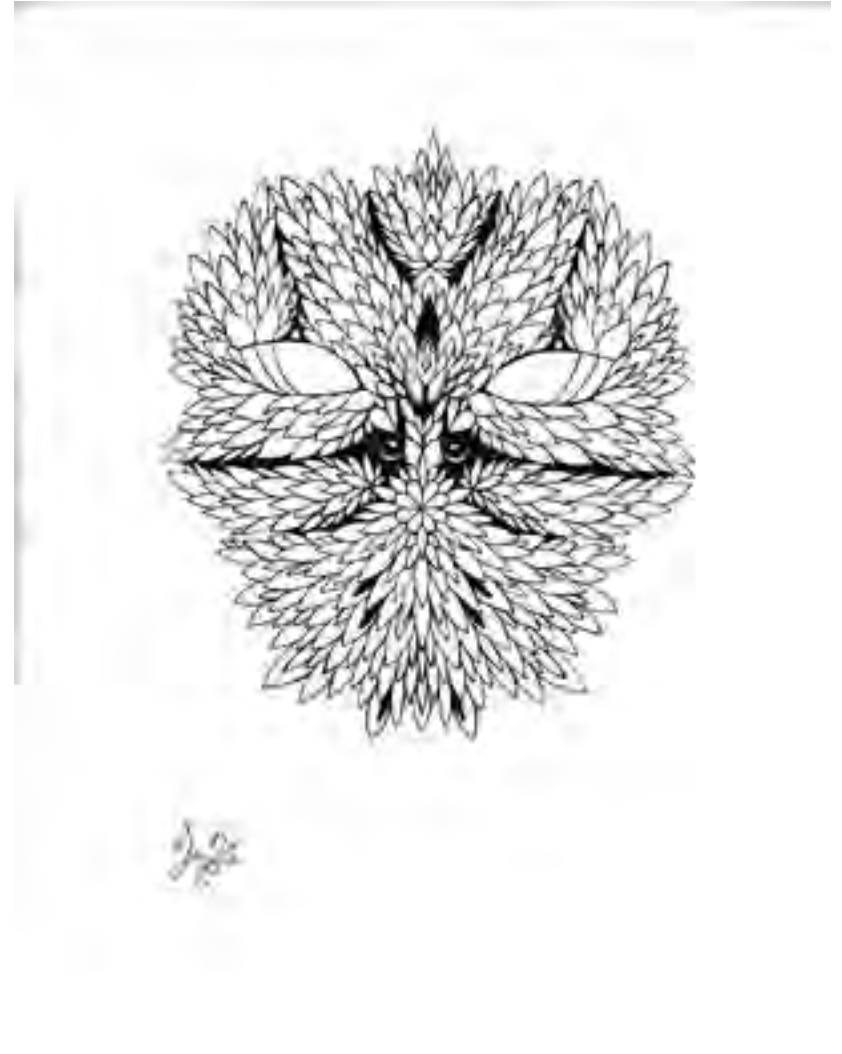
ShawnaLee Kwashnak
TIMELESS FLOWER
charcoal



Anne-Charlotte Silver*
STILL LIFE SPOOLS AND VASE
pastel on paper



Jewel Trujillo*
THE MASK



Submission Deadline: March 15, 2024

Fresh Ink 2024

**NVCC's Art and Literature Journal
will accept works in three categories:**

Poetry Short Fiction 2-D Art

- Up to five (5) individual works will be considered from each writer or artist.
- Each fiction and poetry piece cannot exceed 1250 words in length.
- Only electronically submitted text documents in .doc, .docx or .rtf formats will be considered.
- 2-D representations of any art genre should be submitted in hi-res .jpg or .pdf format (300 dpi)
- All graphic submissions will be considered for the cover design.
- All entries must be submitted via

FreshInk@nvcc.commnet.edu

- Each entry should be submitted separately as an attached file.
- Each file name should be the work's title.
- No author's or artist's names should appear on the submitted attached works.
- Authors' and artists' names, emails and mailing addresses should be included in the body of the corresponding email.
- Only works from self-identified NVCC students will be entered in the NVCC Poetry, Short Fiction and Art contests. All works will be entered into the Luke S. Newton Memorial Contest.

**For further information contact Jeannie Evans-Boniecki, PhD
Fresh Ink Advisor at JEvansBoniecki@nvcc.commnet.edu.**

