




L I G H T E R





All submissions remain anonymous throughout the selection process. *The Lighter* welcomes submissions from all undergraduate, graduate, and law students of Valparaiso University, regardless of race, gender, religious creed, or sexual orientation. The Editor assumes responsibility for the contents of this publication. The views expressed in these works do not represent any official stance of Valparaiso University.





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# EDITOR'S NOTE

Looking back at old issues of *The Lighter*, I'm surprised by how different they seem. Older issues are rectangular, or completely in black & white, or feature the pieces separated out by genre. They're not poorly designed, by any means, just different. And yet, simultaneously, they have many things in common: they're based around student work, touch on current issues, and demonstrate the relationships between creators and their art.

All of the pieces within this issue are different too. The works across these pages come from many different individuals and vary in medium and genre; from the collage collection (Love in the Face of) to *The Lighter's* first play in my time here, "The Promise Train". Each piece brings forth a different message or meaning, evokes a different feeling. The black and white framing of "Jack Meyer, Pensive in Resignation" elicits a different response than the brushstroke and bright colors of "Suns Out, Bugs Out" or the visceral, verbal imagery of "coda". And yet, despite their differences, each of these pieces demonstrates something similar.

All of these pieces — the poems and prose and plays and photography and art — they all embody the immense creativity that exists on this campus; the creativity that exists in the minds and hearts of young people. These pieces, and their container, represent the hard work and efforts of many. They are the potential and the product of creative collaboration.

This is my last issue of *The Lighter*. And I can confidently say that my involvement in this organization has been one of the many highlights of my time at Valpo. This magazine has allowed me to foster my own love for literature and art. To test that love, to watch it grow. That love is different now than it was when I started. And yet it, too, is the same. It is rooted in the immense passion I have for the creativity of others. And it is shared across each and every issue of *The Lighter*, dating back to the organization's inception in 1954.

This Spring 2021 issue, Inez, is different. She is different in design and content from every other issue that has come before her. She differs especially from her brother Isaiah. And yet they are twins, a pair. Inexplicably connected by the repeated names that mark their pages, by the influences that shape the pieces they showcase, and the forms they take. By the common wish to celebrate the arts. Inez, Isaiah, and every preceding issue are different. But they are all *The Lighter*.





# THE LIGHTER STAFF

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Grace Aurand | Cori Laatsch  
Leah Gatchel | Megan Martinez  
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Chynna Vaughn

Meet Inez.  
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For more information, email [the.lighter@valpo.edu](mailto:the.lighter@valpo.edu)





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MIRANDA ENGHOLM \ PHOTOGRAPHY

a storm is coming





INTAGLIO PRINT / SOPHIE BURNS

## Wolf In Sheep's Clothing



## Given Lemons

I didn't expect fruit  
when the tree we planted  
finally took root. We celebrate  
as it stretches skyward, digging

its heels deep into the earth.  
Its health marked in fanned  
palms of green, arms branching  
outwards as if to mirror you

embracing me, ribs settled  
into the crooks of your elbows.  
Then suddenly globes of gold  
spring forth; our tree becomes

a home to sunflower-yellow.  
I insist on pulling one free,  
severing stem from stippled  
skin, and convince you to give

me a boost. Grasping fingers  
encircle pebbled pigment,  
twisting until it nestles  
into a cupped palm. The sun

finally in hand, you let me  
down. We lock wild eyes  
as I take the first bite,  
acid filling my mouth.





## Bad Connection



CHRISTOPHER MALON \ PHOTOGRAPHY

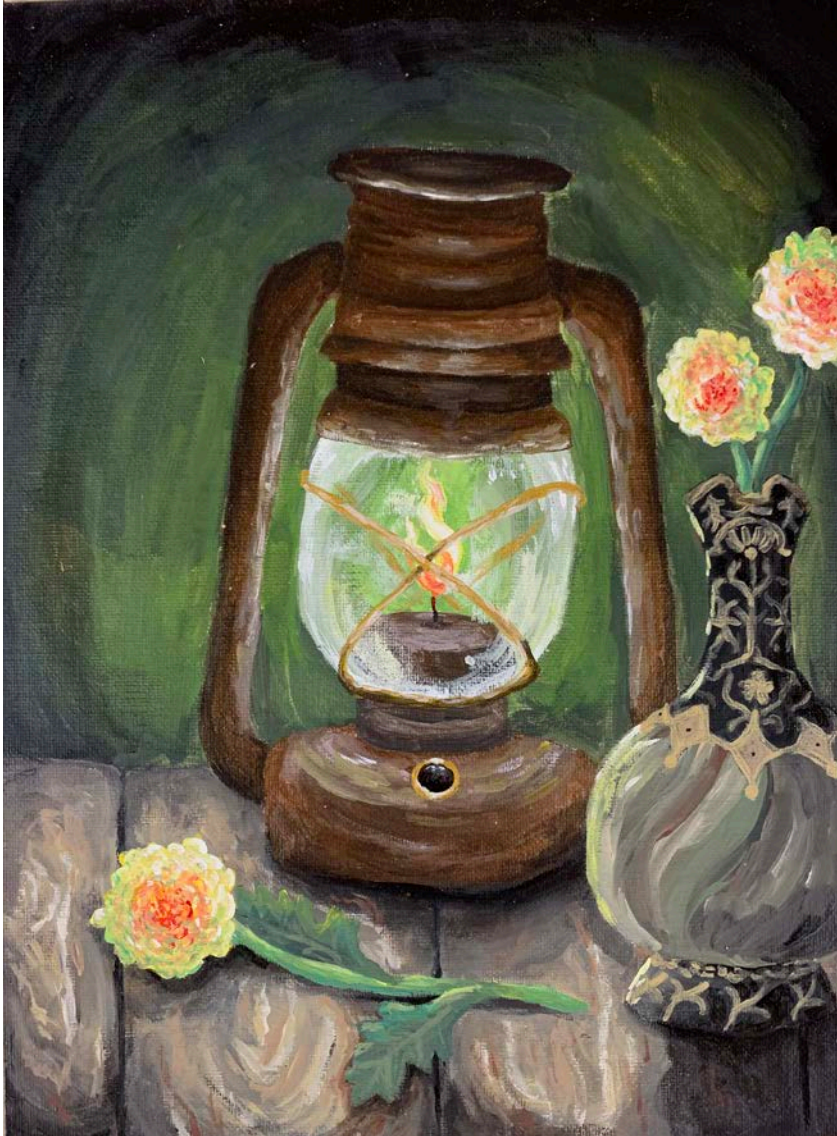
## Invasion Imminent





ACRYLIC PAINTING / EMILY GRAVES

## POV: You Are A Moth



# (Love in the Face of) Gender





## rose-colored body bag

that was the night  
we left my body in the bitter cold,  
salty waves lapping up its sides,  
corroding its bloating skin—  
my breath caught in my throat and stayed  
as we withdrew, my spirit bound to you.

i laughed when you swept me off my feet,  
loving how light my translucence made me,  
but breathlessness turned to choking,  
and here you are with a hand on my throat  
and a stunning smile as i turn blue.

now my fingertips, trembling over your skin,  
no longer expect to feel the hum of blood  
flowing underneath. i think you died  
a long time ago, and then you killed me too.

there is no escape when death  
was only the beginning, i want  
out of this mess, this murder—

but as soon as your lips smear  
across my collarbone,

i crumple all over again.



## Fatti a Mano





ACRYLIC PAINTING / EMILY GRAVES

## Suns Out Bugs Out



## boating

i sneeze blood clots, but the red never flows  
as freely as the sea i see before me now.  
no water moves as urgently in one motion  
toward its clearly-marked destination, murky  
only in shade of brown-red, reminiscent

of the way a tree oozes sap when bleeding.  
a lizard's back foot clings to the dead  
branch above my head, a metronome  
chiming against hollow bark. nothing  
looks more real than the willow tree's  
yellow wisps under artificial spotlight-

footprints shadowed in the surroundings,  
a quartered moon as guidance to the border.  
the pieces of the stars have gone missing  
amidst the flowing fog. we're surrounded  
now, stepping onto the push-boat to cross

the open waters. the light at the front  
of the vessel is dimming as waves lap the hull,  
guilt flooding against the heavy wood.  
the water flows quickly, pulling us along  
as we drop down waterfalls to that distant  
sand, pitch-black and calling out for me.



PHOTOGRAPHY / BRIANNA ARES

# Nautical Twilight



## Violence of the Blue Jay





# Tell me we're dead and I'll love you even more.

Blackout poem of Richard Silken's "The Torn-Up Road"

There is no way to make this story interesting.  
~~the taste of grave in the mouth. The look~~ dig into my skin  
 like ~~you~~ you this story without having to confess anything,  
 without having to say that I ran out into the street to prove something,  
 that I wanted to prove something. So I did.  
 I want to tell this story without having to be in it.  
 Can you see them there, ~~the cars of the road,~~ not moving, not wrestling  
~~making a circle out of the space between the circles? Can you see them~~  
~~pressed into the grass, I pressed into the dirt,~~ pressing against each other  
 in an effort to make the minutes stop  
 headlights shining in all directions, night spilling over them like  
 gasoline in all directions, and the dark blue ~~everything, and then~~  
 holding their breath.  
 I want to tell this story without having to say that I ran out into the street  
 to prove something, that I wanted to prove something.  
 But the minutes don't to pray ~~the going nowhere~~  
~~going nowhere.~~  
 His shoulder bins out the stars but the minutes don't stop. He covers my body  
 with his body but the minutes  
 The smell of him mixed with ~~the~~  
 trying to not ~~make~~ make the space  
 in the space  
 Knocked hard enough to ~~skip~~ skip  
 and change its ~~setting~~ setting  
 focused on ~~the~~ the words  
 too small for any ~~promise,~~ promise,  
 but soothing nonetheless.

## a murder of one.

oh, how i wish you could see me now  
smoke curling under the moonlight  
praying to you  
somewhere inside the moon  
the matriarchs who no longer know me  
but i know you

ghosts  
wrapped in the curtains of the blue morning  
coaxing me from bed  
on days when wings fail  
under the weight of the sky crashing.

you whisper in my ear hopeful hymns  
calling to the angels somewhere in my cavernous heart  
hoping something will save the soul  
from the burden sleeping underneath skin.

saviors are a funny thing  
i know you would tell me  
the light behind my eyes is  
the light of the spirit in the sky.

but you and i both know my mother is the only believer i have hidden within.

i glimpse beneath my reflection and see  
ancient phantoms buried within my bones  
begging whatever remnants of me that lie in wait  
to wake  
“do not die without bite,” you say.



what i would give to lay down and surrender without a fight.

but i'm afraid i just don't have it in me.  
i carry within the heart i bury  
voices of witches and saints and sinners and cigarettes long past burning  
and if you could see me now  
you would yell it from the mountains.

i am the coming of the chaos lying in wait  
the storm beneath the sea  
the wings beating that stir demons from their rest  
the echo that brings with it destruction of the mortal fear  
the violent color  
that could tear a man from his throne.

blood is thicker than the water of thieves,  
those who steal our hearts right from our chests  
thinking surely the war is won  
a notch in the belt  
we will die by the sword  
while men sip a wine from which you drink  
to see  
if you will survive or perish at the grail.

your ghosts whisper to me secrets only i can hear  
secrets of the wine we drink  
to bring soldiers to their knees  
oh, if we were only a body meant to be appreciated by another.

you sit over my back now  
tempting the chalice to my lips  
singing the holy songs of the women i am but a piece of  
a patchwork creature of past matron spirits stronger than any whisky.



my voice may tremble  
but i carry you within me  
for now i crumble under the weight  
but into your arms i collapse  
for no woman's soul will fall with the strength of her ancestors waiting to carry her.

until i can walk  
until i can run with my wolves  
until i can come up for air beneath the sea welling behind my eyes  
and realize that i am not my own  
i am you  
and her  
and her  
and you too.  
i am merely composed of the stardust from which my matron saints have allowed me  
and i too will become a spirit calling in the wind one day.

but today is not the day  
that i will disappear into the hillside sunset  
my own hand the fatal blow

for today, i will listen to the ghosts whispering such sweet songs.  
ghosts of my grandmother and dear aunt and mother's wild spirit from days past  
the ghosts that will ensure my heart carries me until my last days  
until the skies call me home  
and the spirits of the moon are satisfied that my heart belongs to the wolves i carry within.

my angels, may you carry me home one day.

but for today,  
sing to me from the night sky outside my window.  
while the smoke frames my face  
and brings from the tears  
not sorrow  
but the eternal call of my spirit's coming home.



PHOTOGRAPHY / JACQUELYN DELGADO

## Every Woman's Nightmare



## The Stained Portrait





# 4pm Gregg



HAILEY KADOLPH \ OIL ON CANVAS

## Self Portrait





## Who I Am Living For

There's this person in my head, an ideal.  
Someone who I'd like to be:  
A woman with another to love  
and an unashamed sense of self.  
She has works of art that decorate her skin  
in an endlessly growing collection:

Script scrawled across her collar bones peeks  
from under her shirt, "Eloi, Eloi lema sabachthani."  
"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"  
For the sake of humanity, God turned away.

A reminder of all the things she never said  
on her wrist, "Halfway to Asphodel."  
Tell people how you feel when you have a choice  
or risk living without a voice.

A metaphorical war on her back;  
her past literally behind her.  
Safely gone but not forgotten;  
remember and move on.

A picture of a cat, any cat, on her calf;  
an adorable reminder of what she loved  
more than herself, standing on the same foot.  
The beloved cat: her equal.  
This idyllic self is not only rooted in physicality,

But also sprouts from a vocational calling:  
Patients rely on her as their trusted shrink;  
some call it professional secret keeping--  
something she's always had an aptitude for.  
And the only thing she ever imagined doing.

She is bold and honest, calm and collected,  
but her true self shines in the quieter moments.  
Confessions, barely audible, come in whispers  
when nothing matters but the present and future.  
Her greatest advice? Find someone worth living for,

but make sure it's yourself.



## Summer Brunch





## Alcatraz's Garden





# Absence



## Brave the Dark

The mind is a forest, dark and strange.  
It has neither bound nor limit.  
No map has ever traced its form  
and there are few footpaths in it.

Scant more than none dare brave the gloom  
beyond the simple clearing,  
bereft of trees where humanity resides  
waiting, wondering, fearing.

Yet everyone can hear the call  
from that yawning, hallowed wood,  
to take up arms and enter there  
as their heart knows that they should.

Those who heed the primal summons  
and brave that vast unknown  
soon feel eyes upon their back,  
and find they are not alone.

For there are gods within those woods,  
far older than the trees.  
Monsters too, of every sort,  
that slink through the black with ease.

Many who meet them perish there,  
or are driven mad with fear.  
If one will triumph in that place,  
this counsel they must hear:

These ancient shades can be bargained with.  
Some even offer aid,  
and guide the way along your quest  
if an offering is made.

They lighten the steps of those who note  
their warnings and pay heed.  
And others still lead you to things  
you did not know you need.

Wisdom can be found out there,  
strength and courage too.  
These things, and more, you'll surely need  
if you're ever to make it through.

And when you return to that sheltered clearing  
and remember the others there,  
you will recall the terror you learned  
of which they are not aware.

The gods and beasts out in the woods  
are not bound within that place.  
There will come a time in all our lives  
when we meet one face-to-face.

Without the boons found in the woods  
we will be unprepared,  
and wail while we are whisked away,  
“if only I had dared!”

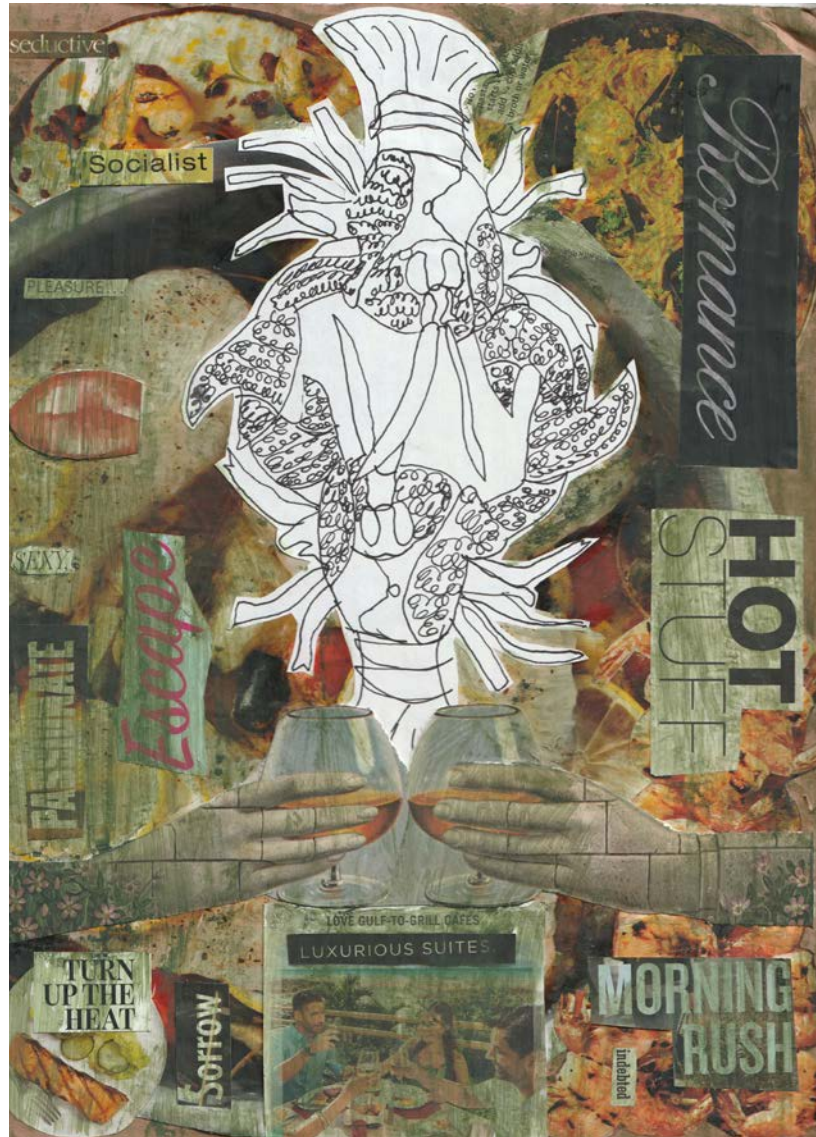
So steel yourself and venture in  
to the darkness of your mind.  
For it is there, and nowhere else,  
true bravery you will find.

# Manchester Streets





(Love in the Face of) Capitalism



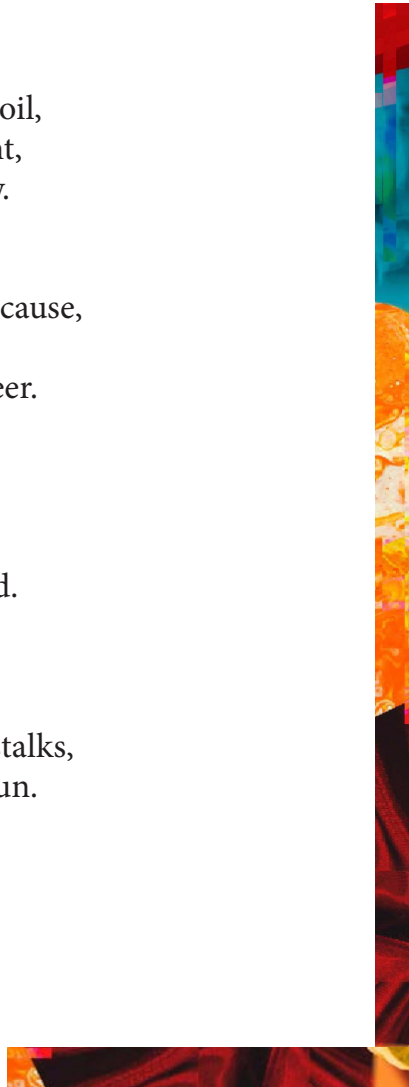
## Surprise Lillies

Appear to have sprung from the soil,  
but bloom softly within moonlight,  
baptized in the dawning with dew.

They seem to some as frivolous,  
sprouting here and there without cause,  
on roadsides and sidewalk edges,  
judged beneath man's lecherous leer.

Naked Ladies,  
virgin pink and clustered closely,  
shield each with solidarity  
afraid of being plucked or crushed.

Silken petals appear fragile,  
but mark only half the beauty.  
Deeply rooted, with great, green stalks,  
they stand against the pestering sun.



PHOTOGRAPHY / EMILY GUSTIN

## little joys





## “This is All I am and All I’ll Ever be”

-Herb Kazzaz BoJack Horseman Season 1,  
Episode 11 “Downer Ending”

My journal entries often started the same way: staring at a blank page, wondering what quote to begin the entry with, wondering what to write about. Given that my entries were mostly about something that happened that day, something my brain was still processing and working through, I’m not sure what is and isn’t worth reflecting on. I’d love for there to be a cool takeaway. Something for the reader to carry with them, maybe even something for them to ruminate and write their own entry on. One of my best friends, Adrian, poses pointed reflective questions every night at midnight. He calls it Midnight Madness. We’ve fostered our friendship through these late-night, often vulnerable, lines of inquiry. A question I both asked and offered him to ask others is, “What themes show up in your life time and time again?”

This question came to mind when I was reflecting on my writing. I wrote a novel called *Watching the Sun Die* (currently needing

revisions). When given the chance to write about *anything*, I wrote about a depressed, twenty-something guy facing incredible tragedy who sought therapy and got a little bit better. That synopsis obviously leaves out a lot of details. My point being: my life, for better or worse, seems to revolve around mental illness, suicide, and therapy. Whether that’s me becoming a therapist who has dealt with depression and suicidal ideation, or the fact that I attract broken people, it always seems to come back to those three things.

There’s a question: Do I attract broken people or is everyone broken in their own way? Do they recognize the darkness behind my eyes that they see in their own reflection? Or am I simply a kind-hearted person whose demeanor screams NON-THREATENING?

Shifting into *Therapy Mode*, while thinking of people as broken may not be inherently harmful, it doesn’t give weight to the holistic human experience. We are not things that are broken because that would imply fixing us would mean making us “good as new.” Instead, we are puzzles: not broken, but in pieces. Effort is required to put ourselves together so that we can become the people we want (in my case, *need*) to be. The events in

our pasts, as traumatic as they might be, are essential to making you and I the people we are today. They are the borders of the puzzle; the incident that inspires change, or emphasizes the need for help. The completed puzzle is your ideal self. Such a difficult puzzle is easier when you have someone to help you even if they're only acting as a second set of eyes. It's okay if you need more help than that. As a therapist, I want to be the one to point out the shades and shapes of pieces to help create the picture (through therapeutic exploration and self-reflection). "I know you've been fixated on that piece, but this one might work over here," I would say. What's important is that the puzzle comes together in the end.

I attract not broken, but hurting people. People who think the traumatic border of the puzzle is all that they are. I promise their problems don't burden me (*you* are not a burden), but they insist the border is an uncrossable line. They keep me at arms length when they're at their lowest. I know it's easier to keep people out than to let them in. I do the same thing, I get it, but that doesn't stop it from hurting; that doesn't stop me from feeling like I'm letting them down. Even if we sit in silence so you're not alone with the one person you'd love nothing more than to snuff out of existence: yourself; even if it's the same problem you've

been struggling with for what feels like your whole life; even if, like my dad after too many drinks, you tell me the same story I've heard a hundred times before; even if you feel like you can't make it through a sentence without breaking down, let me listen. Let me be there. Let me help. You are part of my puzzle. I have an ingrained *need* to help people because the idea of a future full of helping people gave me something to live for. If my past doesn't serve a purpose, then it's just needless pain. I mean, it made me who I am, but I'd like to justify its existence more than that.

It's moments like this where I realize clinical psychology is the only thing I could possibly do with my life. It's moments like this where I realize those themes of my life are always on my mind. It's moments like this where I realize this is the very thing I needed to write about today.

DANIEL ASSELSTINE \ PHOTOGRAPHY

## Double Archway





## dusk

stalked by a figure i know to be my own,  
 a stunning mirror image down to the motion  
 still moving as sunlight leaves my cheekbone.

for all my life i've never known a clone—  
 as night approaches i can't shake the notion:  
 stalked by a figure i know to be my own.

this ghastly thing must understand my gravestone  
 as though i was studied—creeping devotion,  
 still moving as sunlight leaves my cheekbone.

the apparition behind wants me to atone  
 for deeds that don't cause me emotion,  
 stalked by a figure i know to be my own.

the ghost has followed since departing my throne,  
 follows yet still as my soul crosses ocean,  
 still moving as sunlight leaves my cheekbone.

this creeping, beastly thing against me, alone—  
 i've got no defense, not a single potion.  
 stalked by a figure i know to be my own,  
 still moving as sunlight leaves my cheekbone.



## A Humble Organ Player



# (Love in the Face of) Christendom





## A Moment for Developing

We are new, all smiles,  
wishing to cement ourselves  
in something physical, eternal.  
One click and we're captured,

perfectly preserved, yet left  
to wait for development. Steady  
fingers receive ejecting film,  
a window of indistinguishable

black. From past experience,  
you know to keep us hidden;  
darkness lets the colors come  
through strongest, though I can't

help my own impatience, itching  
to watch our new world progress  
into existence. And insecurity,  
unvoiced, arises: whether or not

we'll emerge faithfully, as intended,  
or if we weren't quite framed  
correctly. Yet my fears dissipate  
in the excitement reflected

on your face; our printed piece  
of time and space, wholly processed  
and finally in hand. Peering  
through the looking glass, I meet

our younger selves forever  
cast in chemicals; my once blank  
and vacant chest now fully saturated  
in our perpetual laughter.

## Reflections



ASHLEY VERNON \ PHOTOGRAPHY

## the speed of light





OIL ON CANVAS / HAILEY KADOLPH

## Lost in the Lights



## buried in water

*inspired by Buried in Water by Dead Man's Bones  
and Don't Swim by Keaton Henson*

I heard you spoke to davy jones  
said you're going to use me as bait  
pockets full of stones  
lapping at your shoes, the ripples I will make

in the depths, I am baptized  
submerged till seaweed strokes my skin  
sinking down, I close my eyes  
this is me paying for your sin

don't swim  
as it fades from blue to black  
don't swim  
I am never coming back

stark ice water, pull me down  
they don't bury bodies of the drowned.



PHOTOGRAPHY / EMILY GUSTIN

## ants at the beach

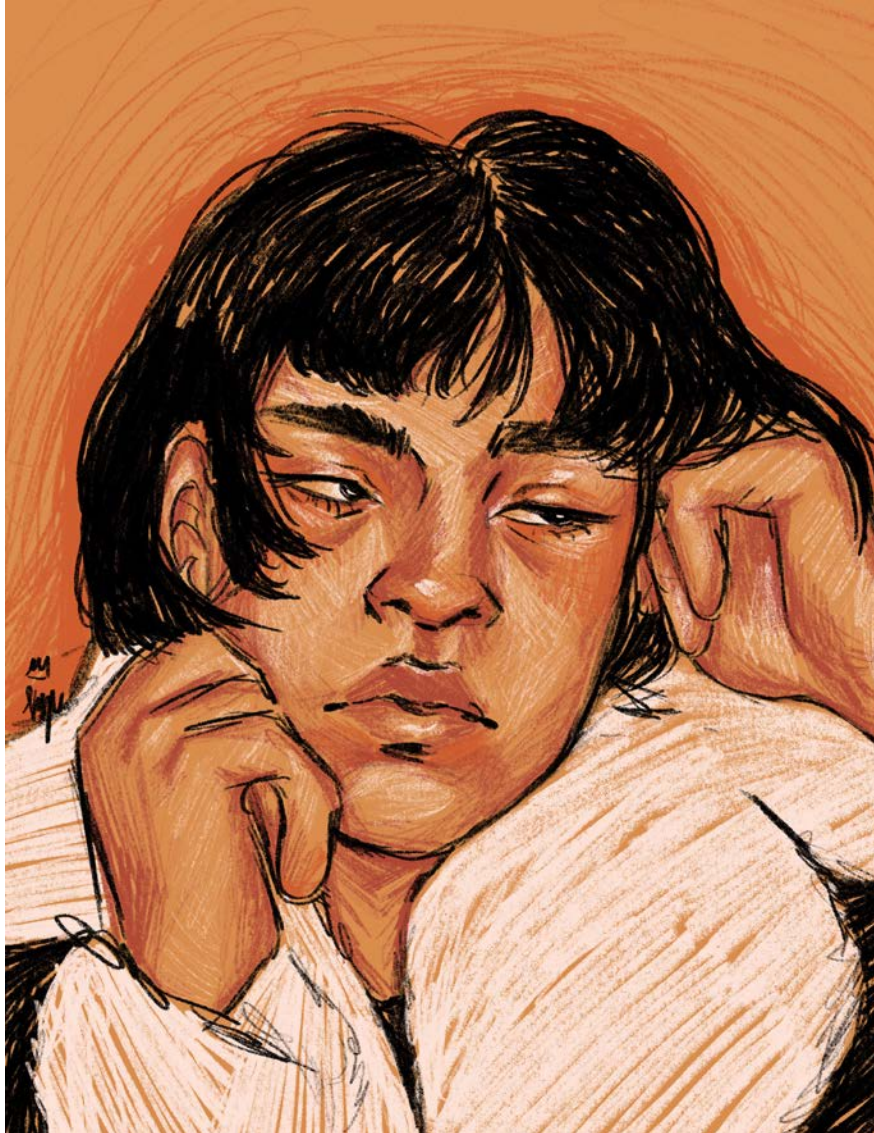




## Seeing double



# Dazed



# The Promise Train

Characters:

LIZ: female. 25.

MAGGIE: female. 25.

ALEX: male. 28.

SETTING: In a moving train. TIME: Sunny mid-afternoon.

*(The lights rise revealing people on a train minding their business. The train comes to a stop making everyone shuffle. People exit the train while other people enter. LIZ runs on in a frantic hurry wiping tears from her eyes. After looking around nervously, she sits in an empty chair alone. She pulls out her phone from her purse and starts to make a call but quickly stops. She wipes more tears away. After a moment of hesitation, she makes a call.)*

LIZ

Hi mom. *(Beat)* Yeah, I'm fine. *(Beat)* I'm coming home. *(Beat)* No mom I am fine. I'm just coming home. *(Beat)* No. We got into a fight. It's done and over with. *(Beat)* No, I am not going back. Ever. *(Beat)* This time is different. I mean it when I say that I am not going back to him. *(Beat)* I am on the train now. Can you pick me up at the station? *(Beat)* Thank you. I'll see you soon. Bye.

*(LIZ hangs up the phone and looks around nervously. The train stops causing everyone to shuffle. People exit the train while more people enter. A man with a black sweatshirt and hood up enters. LIZ sees him and begins to panic until he walks past her exiting the stage. LIZ tries to catch her breath as she wipes tears away.)*

LIZ

Breathe. *(Beat)* Just breathe. It wasn't him. He's not here.

*(LIZ pulls open her phone and starts to make a call but quickly shuts her phone off.)*

LIZ

Stop. I can't just call him anymore.

*(More people enter and exit the train. The train is mostly full. MAGGIE enters looking for an empty seat and sits next to*



*LIZ. At that moment LIZ receives a call. LIZ stares at the phone questioning whether to answer it or not.)*

MAGGIE

Excuse me, ma'am? Your phone.

LIZ

Oh. Sorry.

*(LIZ turns the phone off. After a few seconds, it rings again causing LIZ to turn it off. It rings a third time. LIZ shuts it completely off and puts it in her purse.)*

MAGGIE

Someone is pretty popular.

LIZ

Oh. No, you see it was my boyfriend. Um. Ex-boyfriend.

MAGGIE

I'm sorry.

LIZ

Don't be. We just got into a little fight. I'm actually headed home now. We live... we used to live together for almost 2 years.

MAGGIE

Sorry. Breakups are hard. Especially after being together for so long. I know what you're going through.

LIZ

Well living with him is just as hard.

MAGGIE

I get that. When I used to live with my boyfriend, he would always leave the toilet seat up. And he would always leave dirty dishes in the sink. It was so gross.

LIZ

That sounds like heaven compared to Alex.

MAGGIE

He's that messy?

LIZ

His emotions are. *(Long pause)* Never mind all this.

MAGGIE

Emotions? Is he aggressive?

LIZ

Nevermind.

*(They sit in silence as the train stops causing everyone to shuffle. People enter and people exit.)*

MAGGIE

I know it really isn't any of my business but why are you just now leaving him?

LIZ

We are fine. We just got into a little fight.

MAGGIE

Okay but I mean you don't seem to like him from what little I have heard. Why would you stay with him if you don't like him?

LIZ

I've left him before. He just finds me and brings me back to him. I always go back to him but not this time. I can't.

*(MAGGIE struggles to find words.)*

MAGGIE

I can help you-

LIZ

No, I don't think you can.

MAGGIE

What do you mean?

LIZ

You seem really nice and all which is why I don't want to drag you into this mess. It wouldn't be fair.

MAGGIE

You're not dragging me into anything. I volunteered to help you.

*(LIZ wipes away the tears that have started again.)*

LIZ

He would hurt you too.

MAGGIE

Look I am not going to let you go back to him.

LIZ

Why? You don't even know me.

MAGGIE

What's your name?

LIZ

Um, Liz.

MAGGIE

Well, Liz. I know enough to not let you go back to him.

LIZ

He is really not even that bad. He doesn't mean to hurt me. He gets me flowers and he says sorry. Last time, he even paid for the surgery.

MAGGIE

Surgery?

LIZ

It's really none of your business so please leave me alone now.

MAGGIE

That is abuse. If he was sorry, he would have never touched you like that again. He only gives you flowers so you believe he does actually love you, which he doesn't. I bet he only paid for your surgery so you would feel like you had to stay with him since he did a big favor for you.

LIZ

That's not true.

MAGGIE

What do your friends think about Alex?

*(LIZ is silent and sits uncomfortably)*

MAGGIE

Does he not let you have friends? That is not okay for him to do.

LIZ

He just loves me and wants me to spend time with him.

MAGGIE

Liz that is abuse. You should hang out with whoever you want to hang out with. You should find someone who actually loves you and not just says they do so you don't leave them.

LIZ

It's just too hard.

MAGGIE

You said living with him is hard. Once you are free of him, it will become so much easier.

LIZ

I can't just free myself of him. He will find me.

MAGGIE

That's why I can help.

LIZ

I don't want to put you in that sort of danger. Alex is not the kind of guy you want to mess with. You don't want to fight against him.

MAGGIE

I can tell that you want to get away from him. I can see that you are scared and with some help, we can get you out of his grip.

LIZ

I just don't know how to go about this situation.

MAGGIE

I don't either but we will get through it together.

*(Beat)*

LIZ

Why do you want to help me?



MAGGIE

*(Pause)*

Because I can tell it's bad. And although I just met you, I know you don't deserve this. I really feel as if I need to step in. You know? *(Beat)* My older sister was expecting a baby with her boyfriend. We were all so excited, including her. She has always wanted kids. But he um... He forced her to get an abortion. She didn't want to but he talked her into it. He talked her into dropping out of school and she actually gave up all her dreams for this guy who was so manipulative. One night she had the courage to call the police because he was super drunk and had a gun. It took her so much time to adjust to life without him but she did. She went back to school and got her business degree and opened up her own shop. She was able to better herself with him no longer in her life.

*(The train stops causing everyone to shuffle. People exit and enter. There is a pause.)*

LIZ

I'm the next stop.

MAGGIE

I'll go with you. You said you're going home? I'll walk with you to make sure you get back safely. We can look for a new place to stay where he won't find you. I will help you find that new place.

*(MAGGIE reaches out and grabs LIZs hand.)*

MAGGIE

We can get through this.

*(After a pause, the train comes to stop causing everyone to shuffle. A man with a stern look waits outside at the station.*

*LIZ sees him and freezes. MAGGIE stands up.)*

MAGGIE

Are you ready?

LIZ

That's him.

MAGGIE

What?

LIZ

He is right there waiting for me. How did he beat us here?

MAGGIE

He's here?

*(Beat)*

LIZ

*(Stands up)*

Well, thank you. It was really nice talking to you.

MAGGIE

What? You're not getting off.

LIZ

I have too. Alex is right there waiting for me. He sees me.

MAGGIE

Do you remember what we talked about? He doesn't love you and he never will. I'm sorry but you can't get off the train. I can't let you.

*(LIZ stares in fear at Alex debating what to do.)*

MAGGIE

Sit down. Please. We are not getting off.

*(After a long pause LIZ slowly sits down as the train starts moving again.)*

MAGGIE

We will get off at my stop. It will be fine.

*(The phone goes off from inside the purse. LIZ pulls it out and turns it off after a moment of hesitation.)*

MAGGIE

It'll be okay. I promise.

LIZ

I'm scared.

MAGGIE

I know. It will be scary but I am here for you and we will get through this.

*(Beat)*

LIZ

What if he finds me?

MAGGIE

He won't. And if he does, I'll be with you.

LIZ

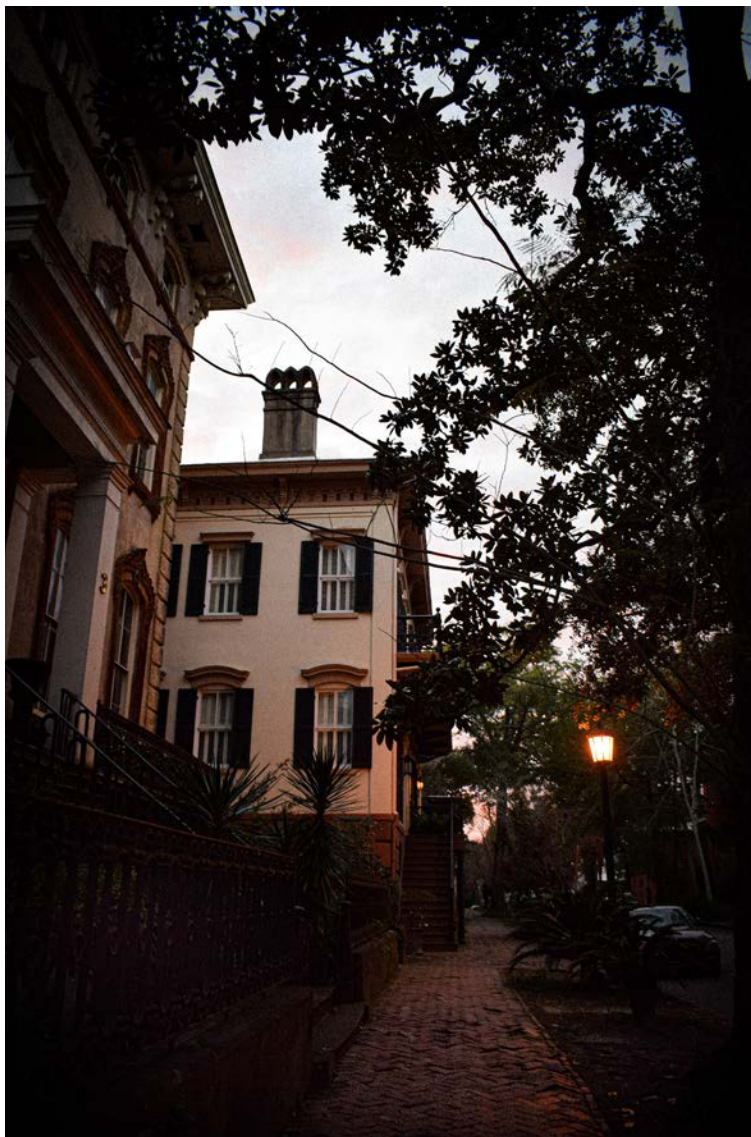
Promise?

MAGGIE

Promise.

*(MAGGIE smiles at LIZ who after a second gives a slight smile back. Stage fades to blackout)*

## Savannah Lit by Street Lights





# Fiat Lux



## Into the Kiln

It feels as if you've decided you're finished.  
Not so long ago, we sliced free a formless  
hunk of clay, meant to be our project.  
Months spent molding, diligent  
and interchangeable fingers pressing

into malleable medium, over and over  
until the proper shapes emerge.  
Some days were easy on our wrists,  
with minimal effort needed to maintain  
our piece. We improvised, no set sketch

in mind; instead letting the pleasure  
of sculpting guide us. A lack of reference  
brought forth challenges we couldn't plan  
for. Cracks appeared, earth split as it does,  
and we were left scrambling for slip

and wetted sponge. Despite those unforeseen  
conflicts, each minor wound was mended.  
Our work seemed deserving of continued  
attention, our hands meant to be busy  
far into the future. Yet soon you pried

our creation free from the table, and buried  
it deep in a sealed cell. Lid latched in place  
to contain burning heat, I felt our art fry.  
What would come from this oven would not  
be pliable soil, but instead hardened

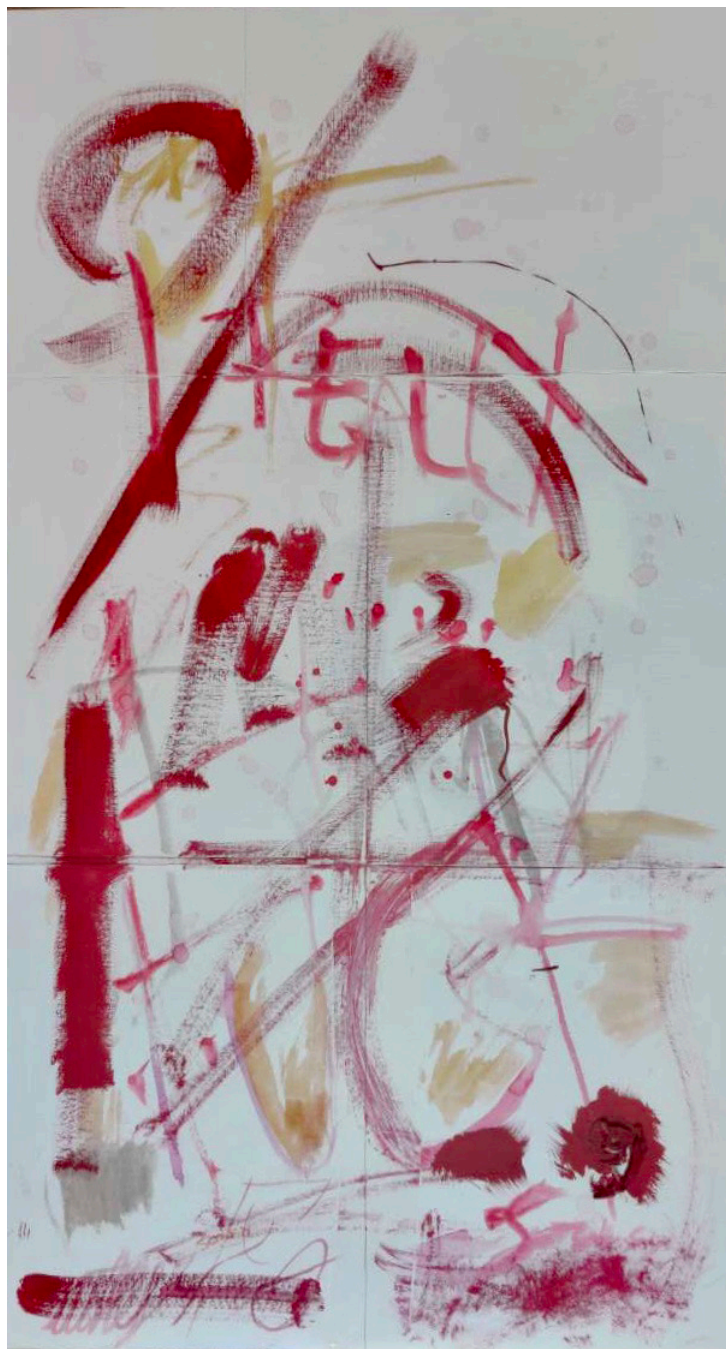
stone; cemented in time and yet seconds away  
from a clumsy grip casting it forth into nothing  
more than a thousand scattered shards.  
My chest aches with the loss, as if I too  
were left behind to solidify. Yet staring

into sore and stained palms, remembering  
endless hours of labor and the need for continuous  
repair, I can't help but think we both wished  
to be finished; and while you lowered it in,  
perhaps I was the one with my hand on the door.



MIXED MEDIA / CECILIA SIEFER

## Too Much Feeling





MIRANDA ENGHOLM \ PHOTOGRAPHY

just a peek



PHOTOGRAPHY / DOC JANOWIAK

## Jack Meyer, Pensive in Resignation



## A Song for Emmett Till

Emmett died thousand times before  
And he's died a thousand more  
A south side boy, in the heart of the delta  
Left battered beat and torn

1955, a boy no more than fourteen  
Bye baby bye  
A whistle at a white lady, passing by  
Would spell the death of Emmett Till

They pulled him out of bed  
Shot him in the head  
The boy never stood a chance

They floated him down the river  
Only a ring upon his finger  
All for a whistle and a glance

Three days later washed up on the Tallahatchie  
They found the boy  
Two teeth, one eye  
The boy was cut from ear to ear

They shipped the body back home to mamie bradley  
She said the world needs to see what they done to my baby boy

While Emmett's body lie in an open casket  
A trial proceeded against the men who put him there

But witnesses were jailed  
Evidence had failed  
The all white jury agreed

They set men free  
What a shame it is to be  
In the all White United States

I'd like to say it's different now, but the fact is it ain't  
Pigs are paraded as angels and supremacists as saints.

From Medgar Evers, to young Jacob Blake  
When will the oppression end in the white United States?

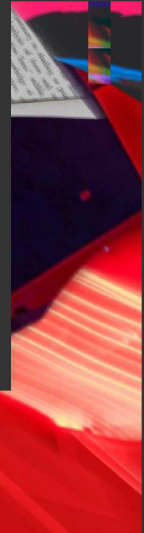
ARTIVISM JUDGE, EMILY NEUHARTH'S

# ARTIVISM WINNER:

# WILL WITRY

## FROM THE ARTIST:

Growing up I remember my parents telling me the story of Emmett Till but something about this past year had me thinking of him again. Emmett's buried right by my home back in Chicago. I wrote this song in response to the murders of black men across our nation and just at the sad realization that we haven't come very far since Emmett's brutal murder in 1955.





THE LIGHTER'S ARTIVISM JUDGES

# THOUGHTS FROM THE ARTIVISM JUDGES



## EMILY NEUHARTH

Emily earned degrees in Creative Writing and Christ College Humanities in May 2020. *The Lighter* was inseparable from her Valpo experience: from being assistant editor (to Michelé!), to leading *The Lighter*, to getting to witness wonderful new editors take the helm. Emily initiated the annual Artivism Contest during her first semester as editor and, although she hates to choose favorites of anything, it is what she is most proud of when looking back. Emily now works in the Products and Publishing department at McMaster-Carr (an industrial supply distributor) which is a testament to the flexibility of the liberal arts! She is unsure what the future holds, but believes that graduate school is likely and writing of some kind is certain.

### EMILY'S THOUGHTS ON "A SONG FOR EMMETT TILL":

This poem folds multiple stories and many years into one song, connected by an unfortunate truth: "I'd like to say it's different now, but the fact is it ain't." The past four years, and especially this past year, have marked a historic period of brutal awakening for people across races. In response, this is "A Song For" unjust murders, painful awareness, and the fire of resistance. There is a shift in tone near the end, where the speaker evolves from listener of these passed-down songs to the singer themselves— fighting for justice amidst their grief, a song of both lament and activism.

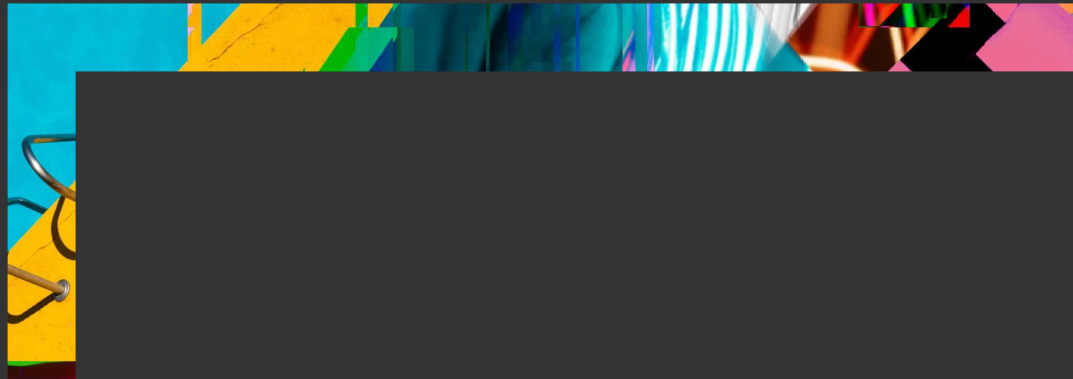
## MICHELÉ STRACHOTA

Michelé Strachota is a 2018 Valpo grad with a degree in creative writing. Her favorite part of Valpo was *The Lighter*, which she was fortunate enough to be the Editor-in-Chief of for two years. It was important to her that *The Lighter* offered a place for creatives of all types to foster their art and relationships with one another. It certainly did so for her. At her last coffee house, she read the first pages of a short story which has since become a novel. Just two days ago, she received two requests from agents interested in more of her material. Cross your fingers for her and always take a chance on yourself.



### MICHELÉ'S THOUGHTS ON "ORDER IS NOT JUSTICE":

The title alone is provoking. Artistically, I loved the visibility of the brush strokes, especially in the sky and fire. The contrast between the undisturbed blue and the black of the smoke really nailed the theme home. The piece approaches the fight against racism without reservation, and urges us all to do the same. What set "Order is Not Justice" apart was its accompanying explanation. The author weaves bits of history with emotional resonance and a powerful call to action. "Order is Not Justice" is informed and articulate, not afraid to be passionate and messy, and above all, active in its fight for justice.



# ARTIVISM WINNER:

## DOC JANOWIAK

### FROM THE ARTIST:

Every major social movement heretofore has had its impediments. There are those against whom we struggle, yes. But the bigger roadblocks are and always have been those who profess outwardly to be in moral support of “the cause,” but nonetheless “concerned,” about “tactics,” “messaging,” or “timing.” Martin Luther King, Jr, wrote in Letter from Birmingham Jail, “I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro’s great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen’s Counciler or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to ‘order’ than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice.”

If there is one message I would insist on taking as a lesson of past struggles, it is this: order is not justice. We ought not to mistake the disorder we saw this summer for injustice. The fight for justice has never been clean. From Jesus who flipped over the tables of the money-changers in the temple, to Gandhi who could always point to Subhas Chandra Bose as the alternative to his nonviolence, and King himself, who could always point to Malcolm X as his own counterpart, the history of every social struggle is that none have

been won without some violence, somewhere. And most are not won at all.

The “violence” decried by the modern roadblock in the path to justice was even more laughable than the claims of the same ilk when they held back the civil rights movement of the 1960s, this time boiling down to “property damage,” which, no matter how immoral and illegal, is a small price to pay for true justice.

King broke the law when he advocated the trespass of “whites-only” restaurant seating. But history proves him right. John Brown broke the law when he attempted to incite a slave insurrection. But history proved him right. Jesus broke the law and paid with his life, sentenced to the death of a disturber-of-the peace. Here we are today, faced with the same struggles, and faced with the same roadblocks. Minneapolis’ third precinct is a beacon for justice, not order. And there can be no peace until there is justice everywhere. Order is not justice.

ACRYLIC PAINTING / DOC JANOWIAK

## Order Is Not Justice





EMILY GUSTIN \ PHOTOGRAPHY

## Vineyard Cruisin'



PHOTOGRAPHY / TAYLOR EXTIN

## The Ride Home

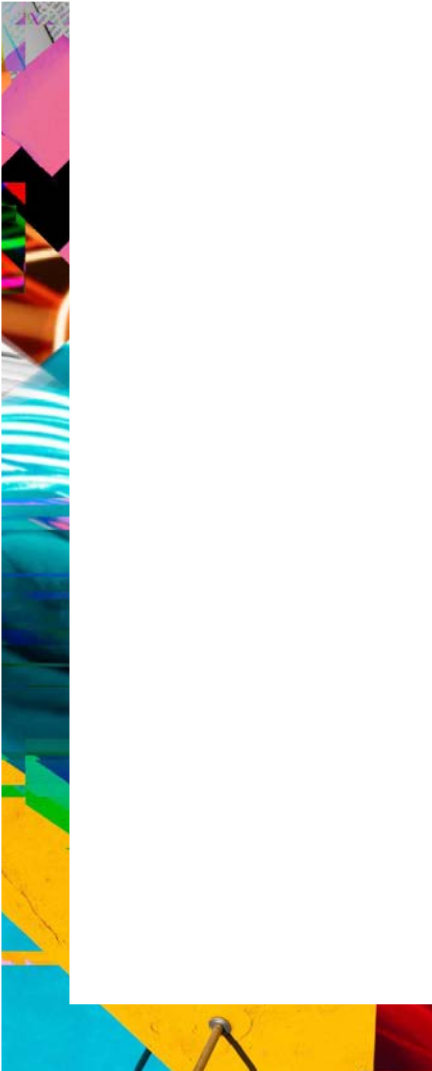


LUCAS DIMOND \ MARKER

## Blackened Gnosis



## Spinning Webs



Doubt's needle-thin limbs, bent  
hard at harsh angles, stitch  
into my skin with each reaching  
step. Grand announcements  
made in irritation, migrating  
steadily across cracked  
elbows; it gifts me poison.  
Its gravel bits burrowing

deep; infection weaves through  
my bloodstream until home  
is found in scattered thumps.  
It buries my heart in strings  
of sickly silver moonlight;  
and I'm forced to carry with me  
an unwanted pseudo-sternum  
of contagious uncertainty.



## Saturday Afternoon in The Cinque Terre



PHOTOGRAPHY / CECILIA SIEFER

# Saudade





## pathway

*“Se je sui fold, c’est mes damages.” (“If I am a fool, it is my misfortune.”)*

*-The Romance of the Rose*

it’s become second nature now to cover  
up my words and phrases as i speak.  
you never know what ghostly figure  
is watching, all shadow, to follow  
you into your not-quite-safety as you  
descend the steps to death’s house.

words echo off empty yards, a house  
that’s been deserted long ago. the cover  
that my effigy hides behind reminds of you,  
shrouded in darkness even as it tries to speak  
in the depths. this creature knows i follow  
whatever footsteps are in front—i figure

the right path is the known, and the figure  
does not disagree; every shelled house  
we pass on this journey seems to follow  
behind us, looming over, giving cover  
along the gravel walkway. they speak  
in my dreams, my imagination of you

entering a new building, far away, the you  
i used to know only remnants of a figure  
that i shadowed. the buildings all speak  
in the deep earth, deep tones, each house  
sending meaning, short message, no cover  
from the rain. they know i cannot follow

their thoughts for long, no way to follow  
trains that don’t lead directly to you.  
no time to find the footholds to cover  
as i flee that cloaked, long-hooded figure  
that gives chase to souls leaving the house  
of our world. who is left that will speak

when the waters below all try to speak  
out of turn? the ghost, which will follow  
as you walk, still, can float through house  
after house, no escape here: all you  
can do is attempt to ignore that figure,  
that ghastr, find your ears to cover

up; he’ll speak into the wind, and you  
must not follow the pictures he paints, figure  
a way out of that house against bright cover.

PHOTOGRAPHY / DANIEL ASSELSTINE

## St. Louis from the Streetside





## Nature's Embrace



PHOTOGRAPHY / MAIAH DEOGRACIAS

## The Tales a Tree Can Tell



## Losing Sparrows





## She, who thrives in the darkest parts of you.

“You cannot bury me,” she whispers,  
 slinking out of dirt and moss and rot,  
 curving around fractured headstones,  
 and over crumbling, unmarked graves,

“I am you; I’m *in* you.”

She curls broken, skinless hands around your face,  
 threads them through your hair.  
 The air is thick with her smell,  
 with sulfur and putrid sweetness.

“We are one. Since the dawn. Since the first day.”

Your feet slide as you stumble back,  
 heart pounding, breath heaving in your chest,  
 trembling limbs struggling to coordinate, to run.

You try to push her away,  
 but your hands slide through her torso,  
 through russet blood and spoiling guts,  
 through curdling insides and out blue-patched skin.

She laughs and reaches out,  
 clutching your fright cold arms,  
 in a mockery of an embrace.

Your chest is stained and slick with her blood,  
 and you can see your gory fingertips,  
 peering out the back of her,  
 slick from nail to forearm.

She caresses your face lovingly,  
 and then she –  
 starts to *melt*.

“No!” You scream, furiously striking liquid skin,  
 nails digging into slippery, staunch flesh.

But your arms are not strong enough,  
 and she cares not for your anguished screams,  
 or your piercing cries and unceasing sobs.

She only seeps into you.  
 She seeps and seeps,  
 until suddenly –

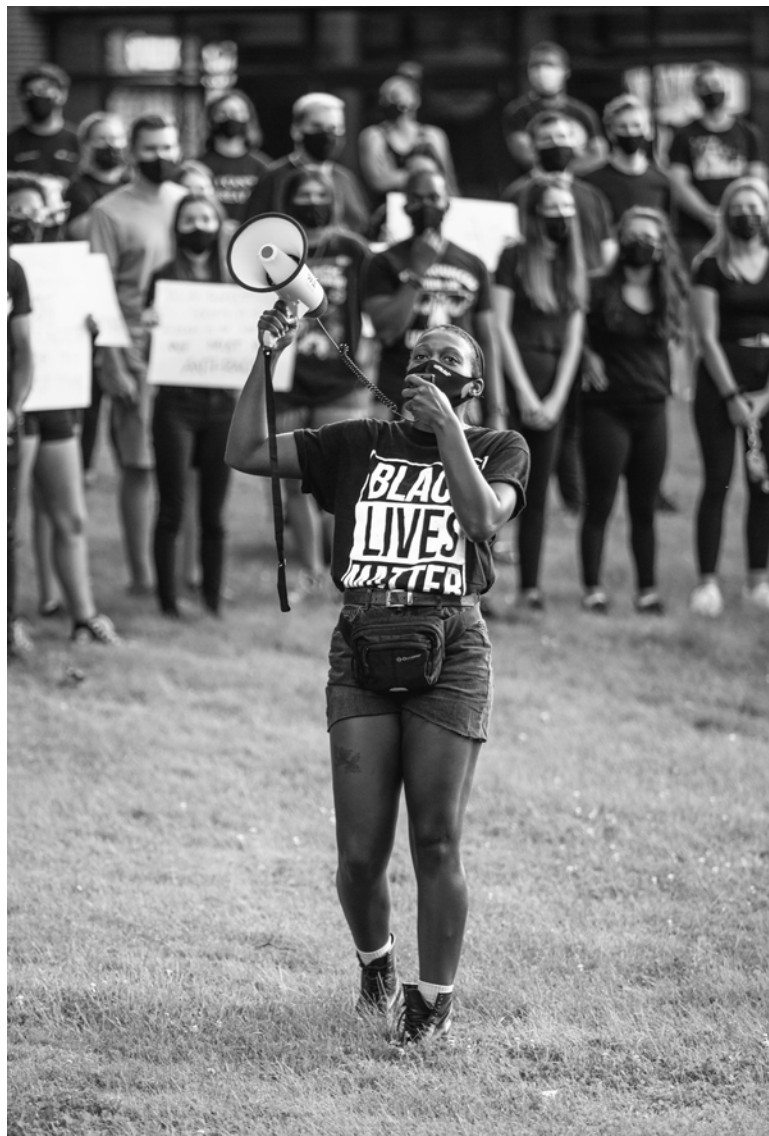
it’s only you.

Skin split, flesh slogging, and rank with decay,

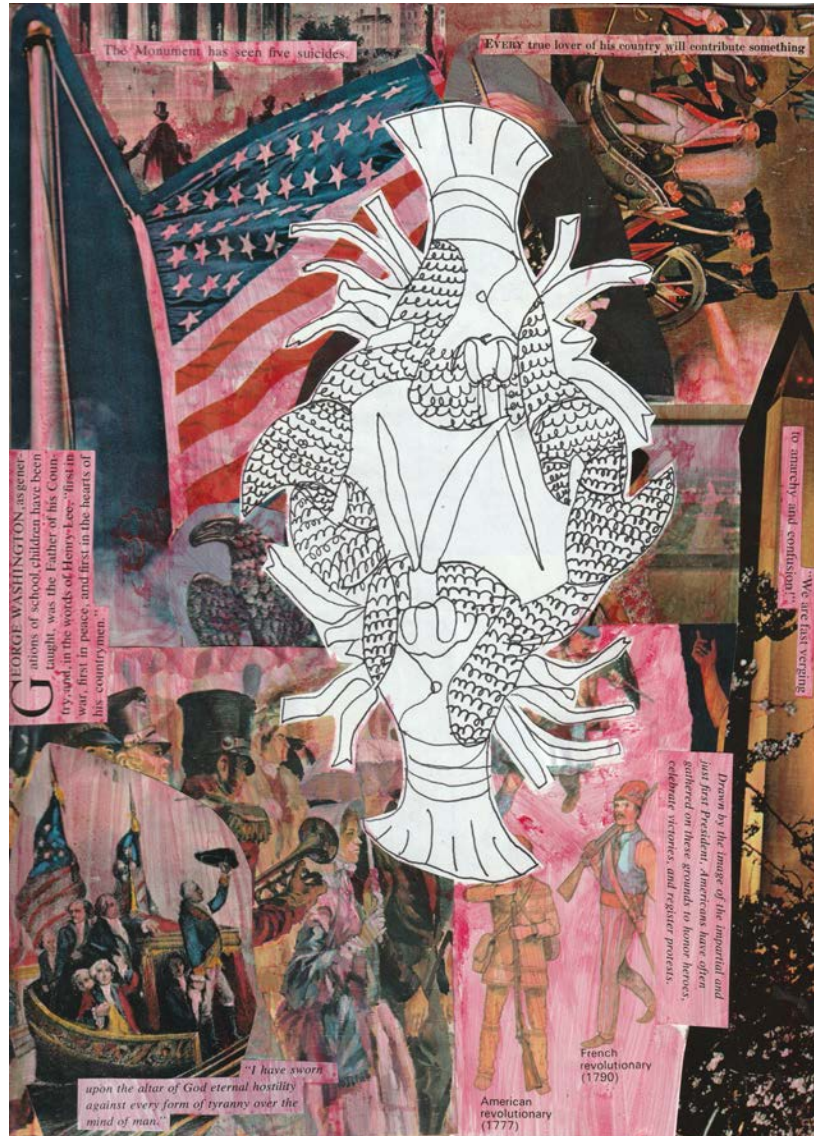
but only you.



## Our Voice



# (Love in the Face of) The State



## “Dearest Goddess, *please*.”

You are *invoked*.

Rise from crumbling ash and weakened roots.  
The World Tree has fallen  
but you must rise from its ripened fruits.

Mars is bright tonight.  
Fate is being spun in hot hands  
as the eyes of ghosts' gaze from the afterlife.

You are *invoked*.

She, who crafted Pandora's Box  
who crumbled Pompeii under her steps  
who shines brightest under summer's equinox

Whisperer into Muhammad's ear  
Inviter of both death and creation  
The Three-Headed, born from a cosmic tear.

I invoke you, Seven-Day Creator!  
Changemaker! Grief Killer!  
The Beginning! I invoke you!

Gluttoned on the blood of virgin sacrifice  
Empowered by those who plead your name thrice

The woman who sunk Atlantis  
who drug to its watery grave the Titanic

Killer of Aphrodite, drowned in her own foamed sea  
Slayer of Atlas, cut down by his knee

Invoked! You are *invoked* tonight  
under the waning moonlight

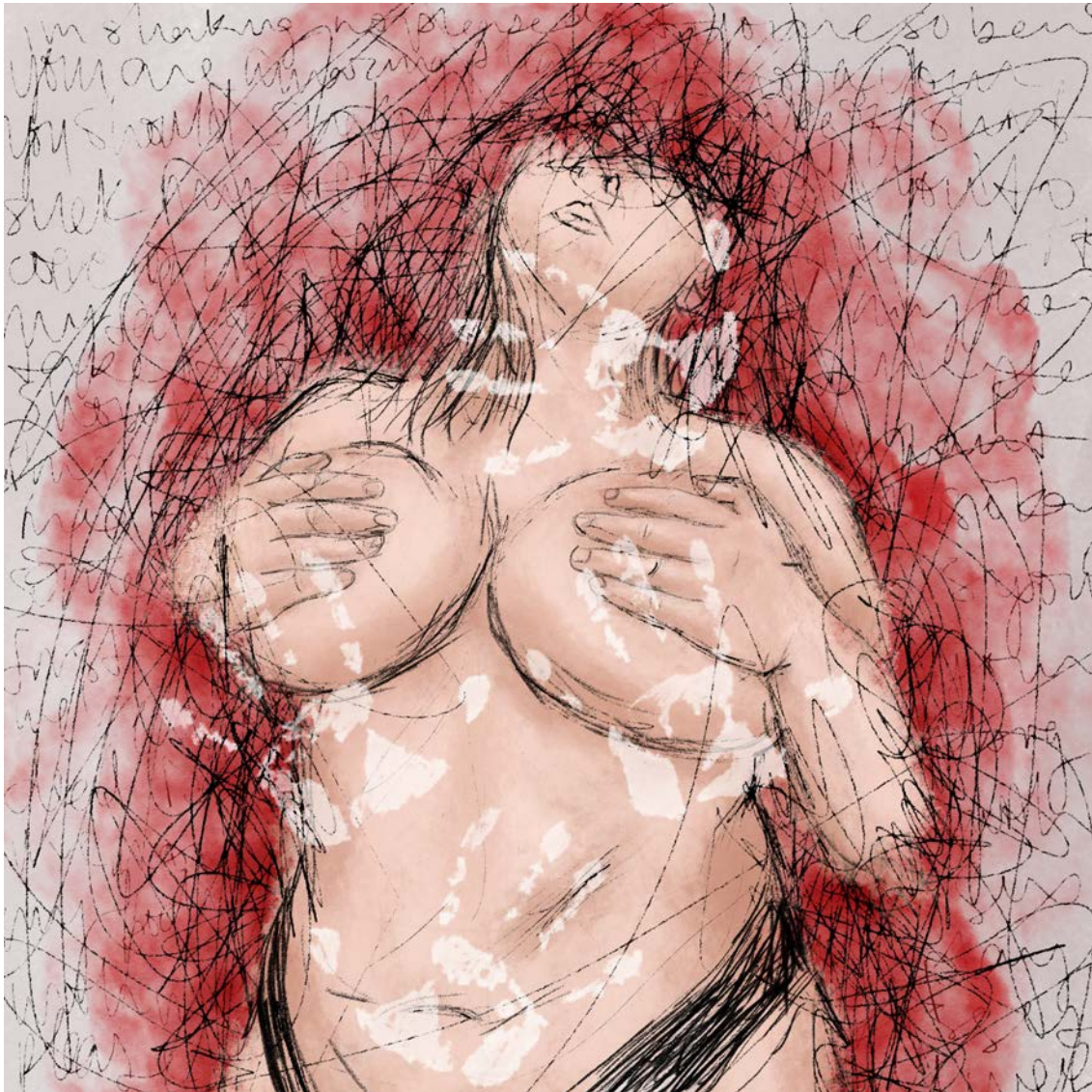
Your temples are full.  
Both sheep and goat have been culled  
in your honor

Your apostles are praying  
your prophets gaze upon empty skies  
it is time.

Dearest Goddess, *please*.  
Awaken, it is time.



## Not a Temple



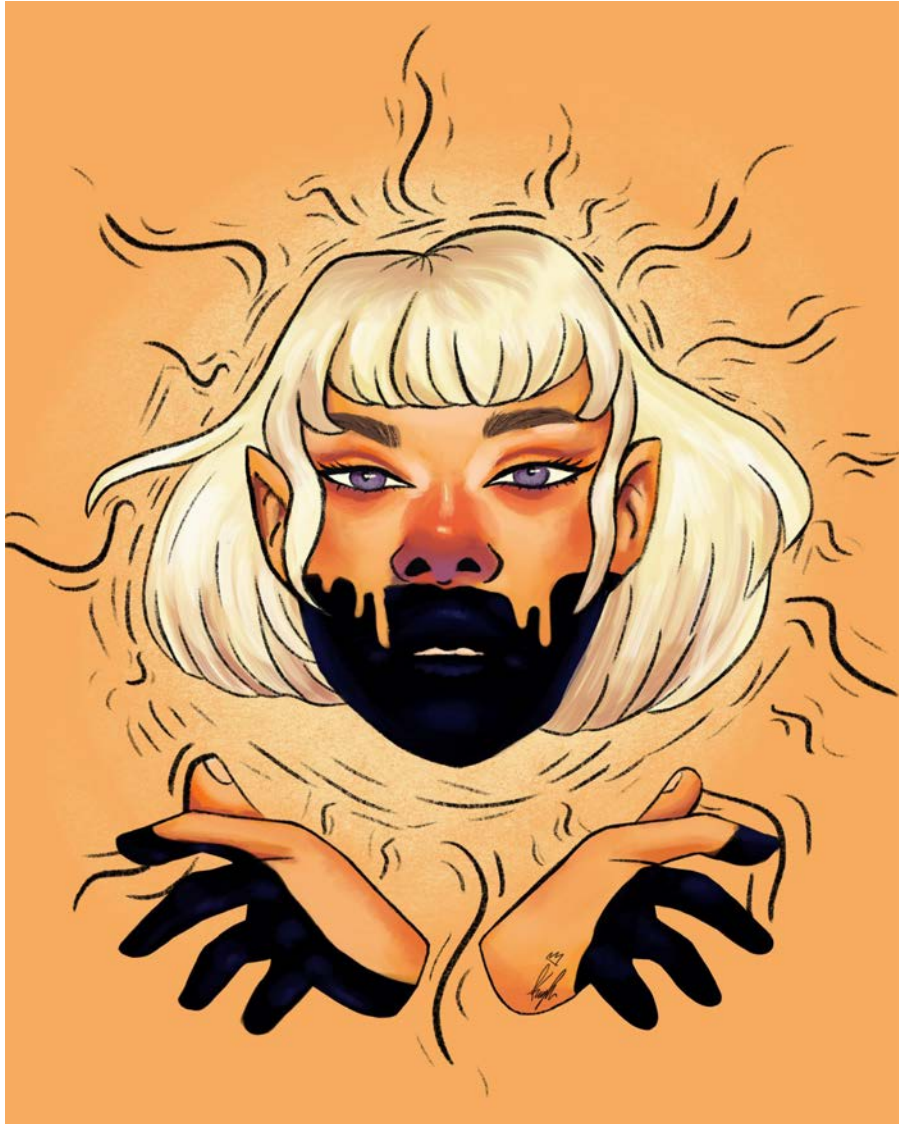


EMILY GRAVES \ ACRYLIC PAINTING

## Early Morning Late Fall



# Eclipse



## The Rain Burned the Crows

Ember came into the world squealing, as thin as a twig and with skin as grey as the ash-blanket of the ground. It was a few unknown years after the end of the war, and her mother did not survive the week.

...

Paper from an old book, faded to yellow and ink washed away in the acid river, sat on Ember's lap. Her orange-pink hand gingerly swept a salvaged pencil across the page. Some days a pencil, anyway. Other days a damp stick of black chalk. And others still a flaky rock or ashen twig pulled from the timber corpses of the forest, where the remnants of burnt-out trees rested like the fallen monoliths of a long-forgotten god.

Some days the fires raged in the distance, on the edges of the crumbled cities not yet swept away by time. Ember could draw the flames licking at the sky like the beckoning fingers of perdition come to pull the last survivors from the fate they had escaped. Or she could write her desperate hail to oblivion in the English broken by years without instruction. This was

by far her preferred means of expression.

She brushed her hair aside - it was red, though blackened by soot. *The skie is lo to-day*, she wrote on the page hesitantly, drawing a rough line to illustrate. Her glance skyward was quick, but long enough to see the trails of frozen ash darting across the firmament. Caleb had told her years ago of the blue it had once shone. Even Ember, even after so many years of a life spent under a grey sky, could picture the rays of the sun. She dare not ever draw it. Nor write it.

The page's emptiness was a somber ballad, and it called at every second with every fiber of its machine-woven expanse, to be snuffed out by the contact of Ember's pencil. But still, Ember was reluctant to write, on account of the finality of the act, and the futility of the gesture. Caleb had once taught her the letters and their sounds, but even Caleb could not teach Ember the proper way to spell every word. There were too many, and the paper of books too valuable to waste on reading. Ember could scarcely make sense of the words, anyhow. She jotted down her own, silently cursing their frivolity.

*The rane burnd the krohs*, Ember wrote, remembering the slick blackbirds in the midst

of the storm as she had watched on from the safety of a covered rock ledge. The rains were sometimes nourishing, sometimes burning - a lesson Ember had learned viscerally and enduringly during childhood when she disobeyed Caleb's orders not to touch the water until it had filtered itself through rocks, or dirt, or sand.

Ember could only hold the pencil in one hand, her left, because it had four dexterous fingers, while her right had only two. Caleb had possessed ten working digits when he had fathered her. Now he had none, but Ember still had the six with which she was born.

Survivrs stik to-gethr, or they arnt survivrs long. This was Ember's favourite phrase to write, and it adorned almost every fetid note she flung into the uncaring, desolate plain. Another of the trudging souls stranded on the cinder of the world had said it to her once before Caleb had died. She and Caleb had laughed and laughed at the suggestion.

"If that's true, where are all of your friends?" Caleb had demanded mockingly. "Or are you a ghost?"

The trudging remnant hadn't smiled. He had just looked down, casting his sunken eyes in shadow, and said, "We're all ghosts."





## The Blue Doors



PHOTOGRAPHY / CHYNNA VAUGHN

# canal street



## Serenity

You've lost track of the days since you last stepped foot on that glossy tile, hymns still echoing the halls, all housed by that pristine, sacred exterior. Only the hefty pit of guilt, of what was once a mere seed, inside you tells how much time has truly come and gone. He calls.

Memories circulate in the back of your mind as if on a reel. The Sundays and the summers of singing and dancing with the divine spirit in the distant past, for the memories remain memories, but the feelings continue restlessly. Perhaps it's this unsettlement that wraps around you and pulls you in like a warm embrace, refusing to release even after all these years. He calls.

Yet, you can't answer. He calls and He longs. Reality obstructs, snidely grinning at its victory. You remain helpless, pleading with no avail, to answer Him. Your sinful heart yearns to return to the home it has ventured so far from. Time slips through even the firmest of grasps. He calls.

The physical world drags you, as if moving through water. Your soul and heart ache to be clean once again by His heavenly touch, their amassing filth and wrongfulness

cloud the clarity of your pining. Fleeshy restraints reflect illusions of infinite time, but as life's hourglass is turned, the sand grains drop relentlessly one by one. Your soul must proceed, it must proclaim, it must preach His holy name. He calls.

Your bodily remains collapse in on itself under the ever-present decay, each day grows darker. Fighting with a steadfast will, your soul persists. He calls, never inclined to push you aside. You hesitate under the burden of your shame and hide in a cloak of guilt. But, lunging like an insect moving a brick, your open soul and heart and mind compel the body to its knees. He calls, and you answer. Confessions and pleas for forgiveness slip your tongue and push through your trembling lips. In an instant your soul peels away from the body. There He stands, arms open, welcoming His child home.



PHOTOGRAPHY / CHRISTOPHER MALON

## Meditative Bird by the Sea

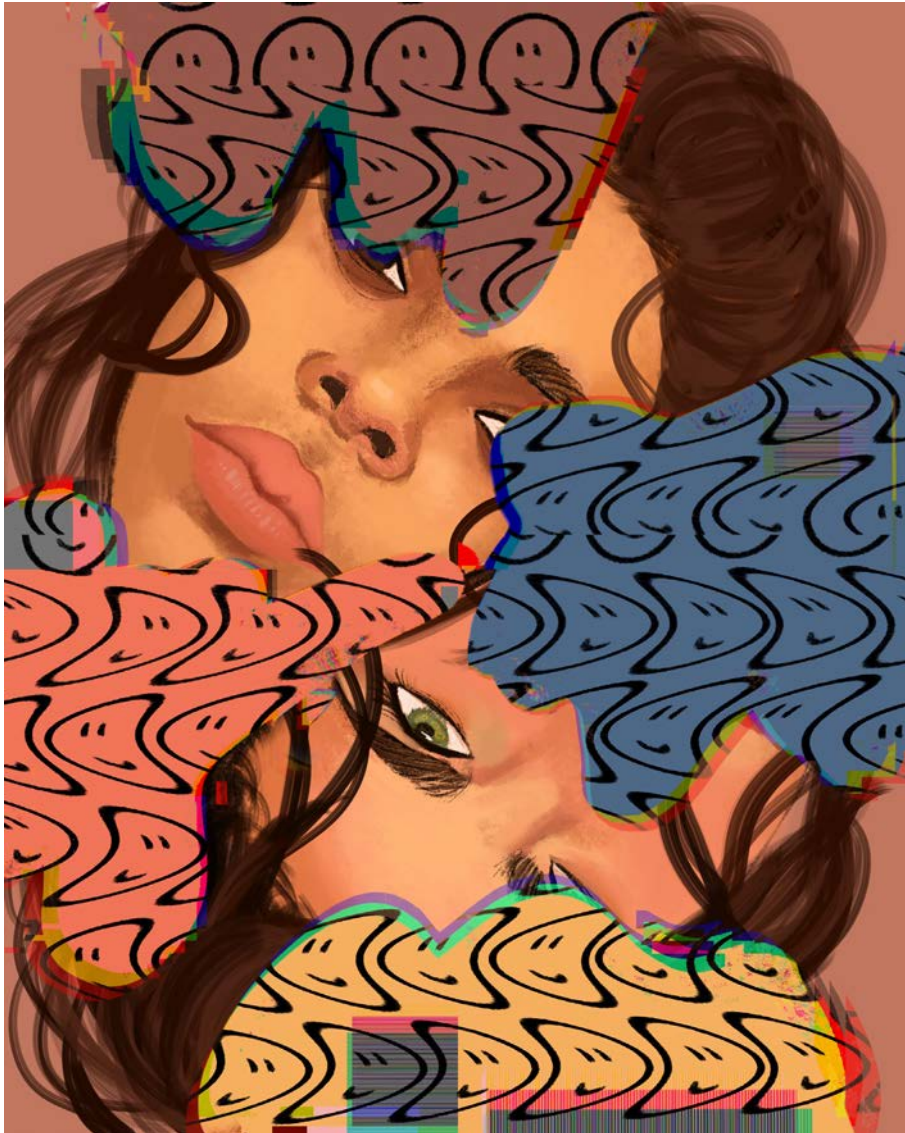




## City Colors

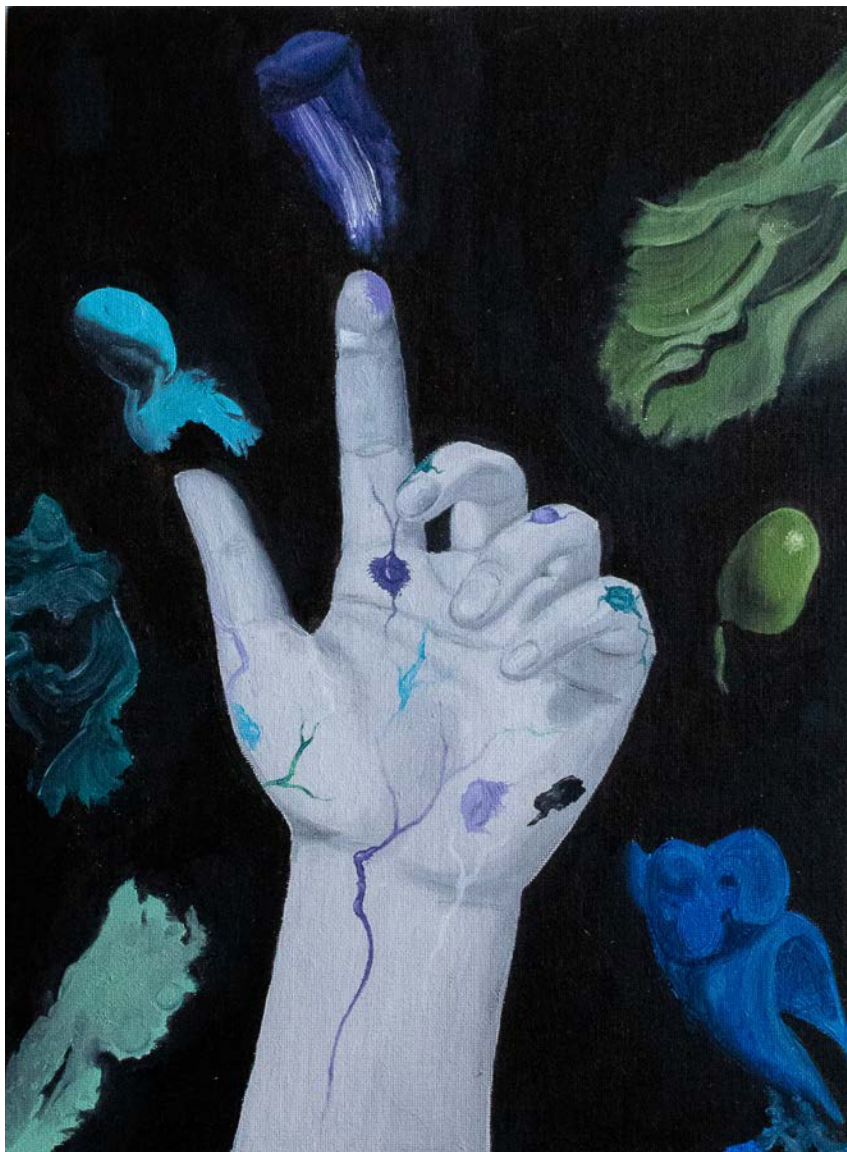


# Smile More



HAILEY KADOLPH \ OIL ON CANVAS

## Paintception



## Interrogative

And you, Lazarus? What did you remember?  
 When the tomb opened again  
 and the voice of  
 God called your name, was it  
 like waking  
 from a dream, or a nightmare?  
 Was it a cruel recalling, a wrench  
 from bliss to  
 Earth? Was it merely a blank  
 in your memory, a space  
 between breaths, not four seconds  
 but four days?  
 What did you tell your friends, years later,  
 when they asked  
 with sudden shyness,  
 What it is to die?  
 What to be dead?  
 And when death came again  
 did you have any fear?  
 Or did you see  
 and laugh at such  
 a ragged, threadbare thing  
 and step through,  
 smiling, toward the Voice  
 that once again  
 called your name?





castle in the sky



PHOTOGRAPHY / BRIANNA ARES

## An Angel's Paintbrush



## You. Us.

The Gods you feared,  
and the end drawing near.

This is a battlefield unlike any other.  
You know this,  
but you cry and scream for a brother.

Please God, give me an ally, you beg.  
Please God, don't let this be the end!

and your hands shake.  
and your mouth whispers words  
too late.

Oh, how I want to pity you.  
But your pleas are not true.

You fight and thrash  
against what is *only*,  
your just due.

The Gods you feared,  
made a monster out of a man  
made his feet crumble until he could not stand.

You drove him wild with pain,  
wild with fear, with the voices that sang.

You.  
You, You, You.

It was *you* who was afraid.  
It was *you* who was **unmade**.

But you punished *us*.  
It was *us*, you put in cuffs –

and beat and broke  
and hung with rope  
let us cry until our tears soaked  
into blackened oak and our faces  
were hot and burning with sunstroke –

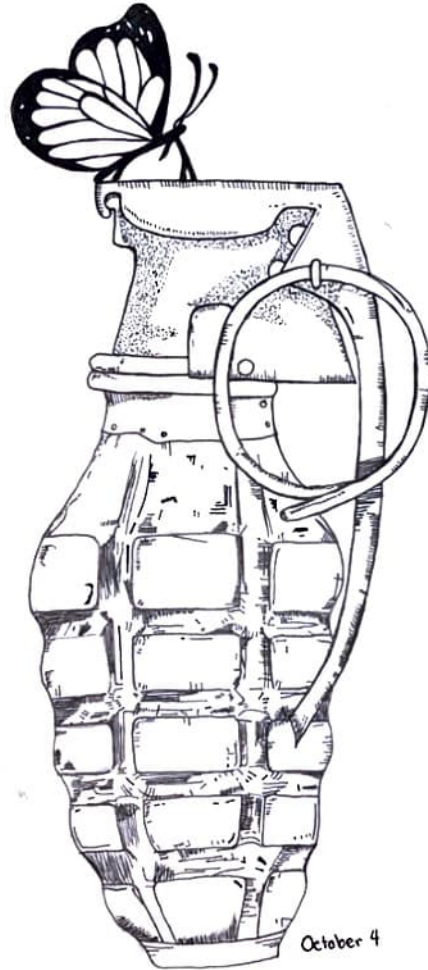
– you invoked hell.  
with a story too terrible, too horrible,  
to tell.

and yet.

and yet, you beg for mercy.  
Claim you are *worthy* of it.

But you have plucked from the sky the sun,  
and the *rest of us*,  
refuse to be undone.

# War





## Seeds

I enjoyed working at the greenhouse at Doubt Corporation.

There were lots of plants to maintain and many more were cultivated per the request of certain clients. The greenhouse was split into three different plots and each plot would have subsections of plant types. The first plot was the plot clients would see. Beautiful colorful flowers but still bad for the mentality of the average person. The second plot contained weeds. These grew rapidly and are the most effective when clients wanted a certain someone legally eliminated. The last plot contained genetically enhanced plants or a form of mutation from either of the first two plots.

Early one morning, our supervisor informed us of a fourth category - Spliced. A rare category entailing delicate care and busy hands. Hence, many of my colleagues and I were assigned new interns. Kit Tumelo happens to be mine.

“So, I’ll be helping with the new breed of plants in this room?” Kit seemed like a bright kid, probably no older than 16.

“Yes, I’m entering your ID in right now,” the keypad beeps a few times, and Kit’s ID now has access to the room.

“Doesn’t look like much,” Kit was more than a little disappointed.

“That’s because it’s completely empty. Both of us oversee setting up the environment according to this manila folder,” I hand him a copy of the room requirements while dragging a foldable

table inside. There were no windows for sunshine to sneak in and the only proper light came from the flashlight of our phones. The lightbulbs that were hanging from overhead were fully functional but only emitted low-colored lights like red, blue, green, and black. In other words, they were terrible for reading purposes.

“What’s that for?” Kit points at a mirror on the left wall.

“That’s a two-way mirror. This room used to be a place to test combustible experiments or to keep an eye on people taking a test. More so the latter.”

“I didn’t take a test. Was I supposed to take a test?”

“You took a physical?”

“Yeah.”

“Then you’re fine.”

“So, I don’t have to stress about a test?”

“You’ll have to take one more test with the rest of the interns, but after that, it’s your choice to stay or not.”

“Did you have to take the test?”

“I did and it was hell. At least that’s what I’ve been told. I don’t remember much about it?”

“It’s that bad?”

“You’ll hear a bunch of people telling you of the horrors of the dreaded exam. But by the time you’re done with it you hardly realize you’d taken it?”

“Am I going to blackout?”

“If you’re as weak as I was, then yeah. But you’ll be fine, I’m sure.”

“Thank-you,” he doesn’t sound the least bit convinced. In an effort to make the test seem less stressful I may have over-emphasized its difficulty

level. My mistake.

We made progress in the room and had a layout of what plants would go where. Kit wanted to explore the facility a little more, so I tasked him with delivering the blueprints to our supervisor.

I still had a few more things to set up before punching the clock. The other side of the mirror contained controls for the lighting, sound, and recording. I went through a checklist to make sure everything was working right and once more for good measure. The lights changed according to the RGB values inputted into the computer. I made sure to leave it on the backlight setting - it was always cool to see the white on our uniform become brighter. I made sure the intercom was working and played a bit of gaming music. The recording equipment seemed to be working fine, I just needed to go through it and either delete or archive the footage. That was it for the first night with the fourth category

#

Kit arrived on the dot the next day. He was excited to work and managed to open the door with his new ID.

“Wow. All this was set up overnight?” Kit was referring to the 12 plots and gardening equipment in the room.

“Yeah. I’m just double-checking if everything is where it should be,” I compare the serial

numbers for the type of dirt and the type of plant that are on my clipboard, “were you able to find the supervisor alright?”

“Yeah. There was another intern with him when I got to his office. We talked a bit and then we had hot dogs with everyone else. We were thinking

about exploring outside the greenhouse during lunch.”

“Sounds like a fine idea. Just be careful, sometimes our plants find themselves outside and can cause some serious damage,” I picked up a pack of seeds and handed it to him, “these go over there. Be sure to read the instructions and call me over if you need any help.”

“Got it.” Kit pulled some gardening gloves from his uniform coat and began planting. I grabbed a pack myself and started on the opposite end so we could meet in the middle. We played music through the intercom and took turns picking the music through my phone.

“You like the oldies?” I asked Kit when I heard looking out my backdoor.

“Yeah. I grew up listening to them with my Dad. He blasted the music whenever we were outside,” Kit wiped the sweat from his forehead, smearing dirt all over his face in the process.

“Was he the one to encourage you to come here?”

“No, actually. I talked about it with my family once or twice but after that, I focused more on the physical to get in here. I felt like I was accidentally applying for the military.”

“If Doubt Corp. can’t get the top notch, they’ll find a way to make them,” I feel my phone buzz in my pocket, “you better get going if you want to explore the surroundings with your new friend.”

“Lunch time?”

“Might want to wipe your face before you go,” I nod my head to the door.

Kit glances at the mirror and his cheeks develop a subtle red hue. His face wasn’t the only

thing that was caked in dirt. The black shirt he was wearing underneath his lab coat was dusted in green and white specks from the plant feed. He quickly thanked me before rushing out the door to what I presume would be the bathroom. I hope he gets the wet mud clinging from the cracks of his shoes off because the squish noises he made on his way out were nothing but entertaining.

#

The next few weeks seemed to mesh into one another. I found out Kit's friend is Sasha from Germany. Besides discussing the different techniques, they use to care for the plants, they come with outrageous ways to cross-pollinate with other plants. When they grow bored of their conversation they begin to brag about who has the more dangerous breed of plant. Comparing the vibrancy of the color, the speed of growth, and claiming their batch is even more effective than hemlock. People here have produced some wild creations, with wild results, but none will beat the effectiveness of hemlock.

Nevertheless, Kit would keep close vigilance on his plants. Whether that was watering them or taking data relevant collections from the stems, he soon proved capable enough to take over the fourth category. I was placed back in my old position, but I continued to check up on him. He carried himself with confidence and wore the dirt on his coat like a medal of honor.

"Hey Kit! I have pesticide here for you!" I drag in a giant cylinder canister with the Seeds of Doubt™ logo on them.

"But the room is isolated. Bugs are an impossibility."

"True. But it's about that time where we

need to activate the enzymes," I could see the worry in his brow, "it won't harm your plants, I promise. But the clients want to see the versatility of the fourth category under stressful conditions."

"Are you sure?"

"You have my word. I'll be in the other room taking notes of the effects and reactions," I had relieved him of some of his worry, as he gripped the canister with more confidence, "also, you'll need to wear this Hazmat suit to block out the fumes."

He looks at the neon green hazmat suits and takes it without hesitation, "how long until you see the reactions?"

"Probably after you're done spraying your last plot. I'll let you out once the fumes are no longer a danger."

"Wait," Kit freezes having only put the suit halfway up his chest, "you're locking me in here."

"Have to. Clients are coming to observe, and they tend to ignore the safety precautions we repeatedly tell them. It's a nightmare trying to reason with them, and lawsuits are a bigger headache."

"Gross."

"Let's hope you never have to play salesmen to a group of high-end snobs with giant egos and better-than-the-rest attitudes."

"You really hate them."

"With a passion."

Kit laughs and finally secures the helmet on his head. He shows me a thumbs up and I make my exit. In the room next door, I check the equipment once more and signal Kit to begin spraying. By the time he's done with his last plot he begins to falter in his step.

The suit wasn't made of the best quality and given Kit's tendency to get dirty, a tear in the suit was hardly a surprise. As a result, the fumes found themselves inside his lungs. Full panic didn't settle in until he noticed the tear that was growing on the side of his suit. He ran for the door, pulling at it several times and attempting to open it with his ID. The same ID I provided him with authorized access was now rendered useless.

He crumpled to his knees not knowing what to do, but I did. I turned the intercom on and started playing some recordings. Kit's eyes grew wide with terror, the first recording was of his mother's.

*If you keep going down this path you won't be able to sustain yourself. It's not a good practice for a boy who has the brains to become a doctor or a lawyer. What do you do all day in that room? Water plants? Watch dirt? Any bozo could do that.*

The recording switches to a distorted version of Stuck in the Middle, slowly meshing the song with his little sister's voice.

*You brought another plant kit? Really? This one doesn't even look like a good one. I bet I could have found one better on the internet and for cheaper too. I'm warning you now, this one won't last for long.*

I keep changing the person speaking, the heart-stopping music, and the lights RGB inputs. He must be hallucinating now, running into walls with tears streaming down his cheeks. By the time he wakes up, he won't remember any of this and he'll be in the building's health center.

In the meantime, all I have to do is record the fourth category.



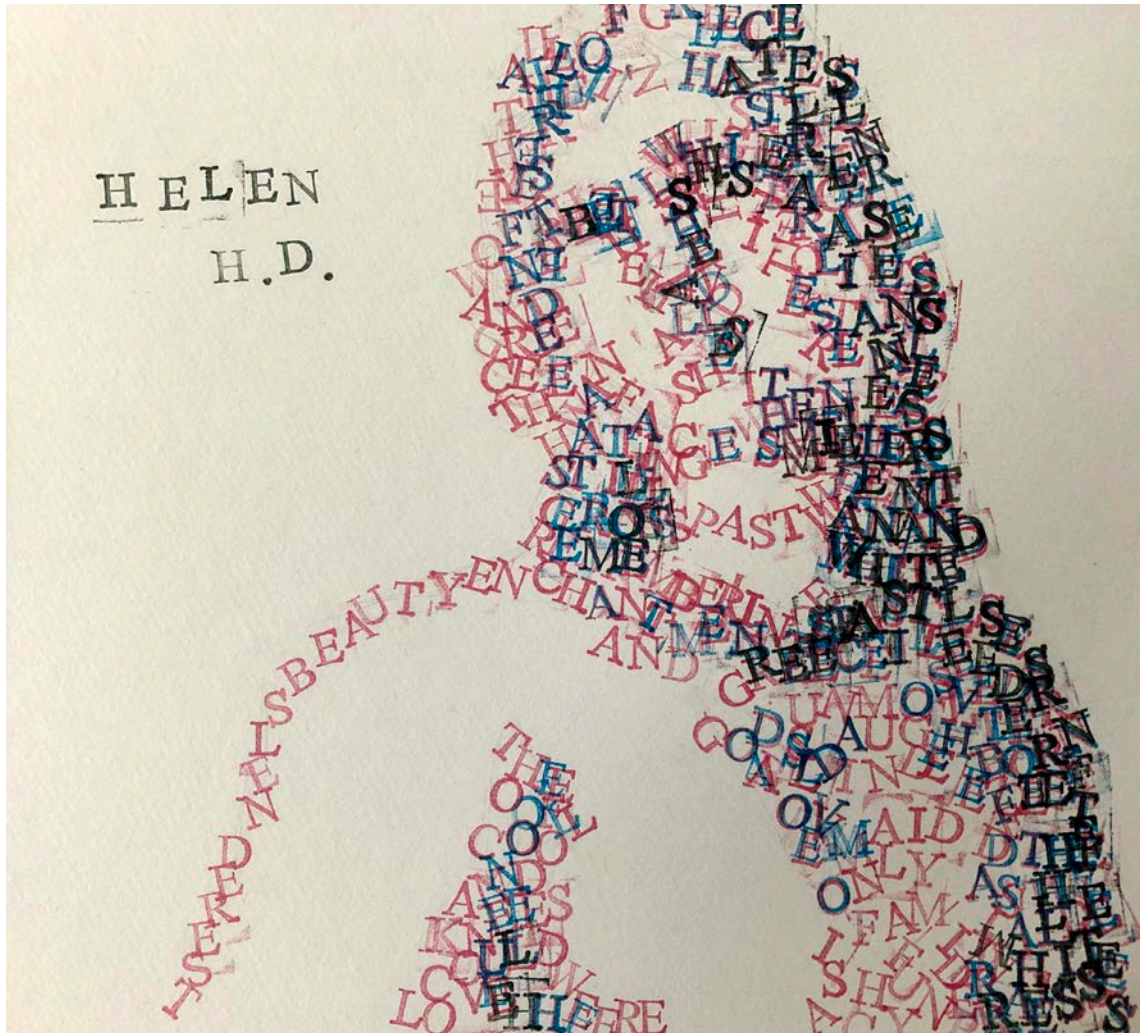


## Seated



# Helen - H.D.

*Based off of the poem "Helen" by H.D.*



## coda

go out with a fizzle instead of the bang  
we were promised; honey sun is folding soft  
into shadows. we still drag our minds from  
the dim cave every morning (a commitment  
that our bodies will follow suit), young flesh  
opening to ultraviolet, blinded by snowlight.

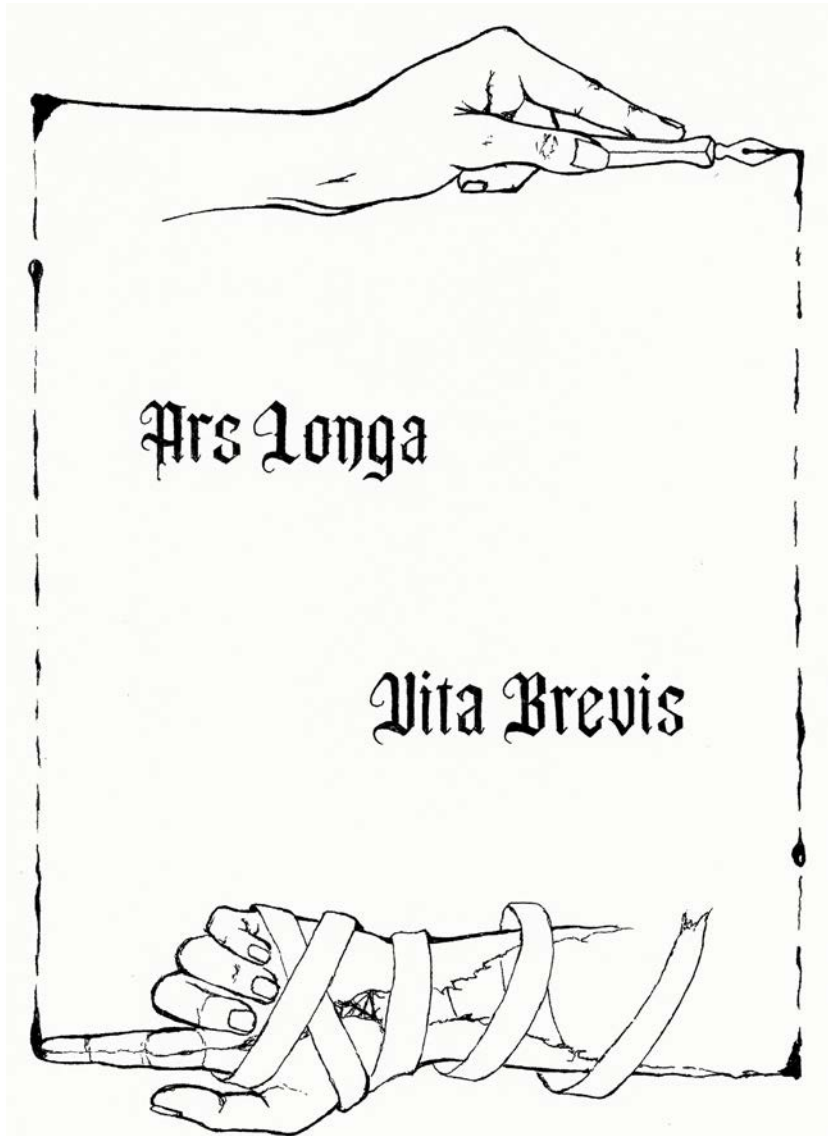
bears hibernate for four months & i envy  
the quiet they must feel; does a new cub ever  
wake up in those middle months? does he  
crawl outside & wonder slowly at the blue sun  
covering the landscape? does he decide he's  
better off asleep in his mother's embrace?

we all know that we cannot hold the entirety  
of our hearts in a single hand. my consciousness  
may be short but my existence has been long;  
we'll trade the starry city in the sky for a rifle.  
i am always thinking about the ways i take  
leave from the ones i love, take heart pieces.

the last thing to do is become master of this  
godforsaken vessel once & for all. the last thing  
to do is grasp at our hearts as if we can carry  
them all at once. the last thing to do is wake  
up the bear cub, welcome him into the world,  
say "here you are now, in the sun, go see."



# Art Is Long, Life Is Short





# CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

**BRIANNA ARES** is a junior International Relations major with double minors in German and Spanish. She enjoys the beauty of Earth's natural wonders and takes photos in her free time. She also likes to knit and hike.

**DANIEL ASSELSTINE** is a sophomore Civil Engineering student who grew up skiing, traveling, and capturing the world through his lens. He can frequently be seen around campus capturing the day-to-day moments of life, or in Gellersen, drowning in a pile of homework.

**ANNA BEDALOV** is, in summary, a senior Creative Writing and Humanities double major with a journalism minor, and also the forest and stars and blue and Ireland and carbon and sunshine and love and change and yellow and the English language.

**GRACE BIERMANN** is a senior English and Humanities double major, with a minor in Classics, who is increasingly convinced that she's actually from Hobbiton. In her (limited) spare time, she enjoys reading, writing, drinking tea, and watching old movies, "Parks and Recreation," and "Foyle's War." She doesn't know what exactly her life will look like at this time next year, but she does know that she will miss Valpo and the wonderful people there. No, she's not crying. Soli Deo Gloria

**SOPHIE BURNS** is a junior studio art major who practices many forms of art, including painting, drawing, print-making, and writing fiction. She hopes you have a wonderful day.

**SANSON GANCHOLA** is a junior Digital Media Art major who finds appreciation and joy in learning to animate, creating sketches, thinking visually, and improving creatively (i.e. photography, graphic design, videography, etc.).

**ERICA CASTILLO** is a social work major who enjoys escaping through art.

**JACQUELYN DELGADO** is a Junior Secondary Education and English double major.

**NAIAH DEOGRACIAS** is a freshman art and communication double major. She enjoys playing music, going on hikes, and traveling. To see more of her work, check out @\_m.k.d.photography.\_ on Instagram.

LUCAS DINOND is a freshman who sits in his room, plays music really loud and stays up all night eating instant noodles. He thinks he's in communications but isn't sure.

JOSHUA DUENSING is a senior biology, chemistry, and humanities major who doesn't know what to write about himself. Or anything, for that matter.

MIRANDA ENGHOLN is a French and Global Service major. She is also a strong advocate for rolling down hills, asking hard questions, and dancing with friends.

TAYLOR EXTIN is a senior English major with a minor in Cinema & Media Studies. She enjoys taking photographs of her dogs and anything that catches her eye.

KAYLA FLUEGEMAN is a junior creative writing major with a theatre minor. She loves writing all types of genres.

LEAN GATCHEL is Junior Creative Writing Major with Professional Writing and TESOL minors. Outside of The Lighter, she is involved in Sigma Tau Delta, Alpha Phi Omega, and Kappa Kappa Gamma. "Run to the rescue with love and peace will follow" -RJP

LEXI GAULT is a senior astronomy and math double major who is in love with the universe and throw blankets.

ZION GIFFORD is a freshman studio arts major who was born on an extraordinarily hot and moderately breezy evening with his eyes wide open. He has been alive for approximately 580 years. He likes attending concerts in peoples' basements, storytelling, and kisses on the hand.

EMILY GRAVES is a freshman history major. She would like to thank her Muppet stuffed animals for always being there.

EMILY GUSTIN is a senior digital media arts major with a communications minor, and she has been a part of The Lighter Selection Committee since 2017. She loves documenting her life through photography and sharing these experiences with others. She'd like to thank The Lighter for providing a space for students to express themselves through art and literature. It's been real!



"DOC" JANOWIAK is a data science major from Moscow, Idaho, studying for a specialty in artificial intelligence and machine learning applications to complex problems of scientific research and technological development. His creative pursuits include photography, creative writing, and journalism, and he enjoys artistic works which highlight under-represented aspects of the human condition as well as the interface between science, politics, culture, and art (high and low).

HAILEY KADOLPH is a junior Studio Art Major. All of her time is spent in the studio painting and sculpting, taking photos, singing and playing Minecraft. She aspires to be on x-games mode one day.

CHRISTOPHER MALON is a junior mechanical engineering major with a hobby in photography and sketching, primarily of vehicles and nature.

ASHLEE PENDLETON is a junior psychology and creative writing major who always has her nose in a book or her fingers on a keyboard. Her dream is to travel and write as many books as possible.

LEE SANCHEZ is a junior Psychology and Public and Professional Writing major. They are also one of the assistant editors of The Lighter. They write poetry concerning themes of love and death-- often, both at once.

SABRINA SEARCY is a junior biology and art double major who likes to write, draw, and spend time outdoors. She is from Westfield, Indiana.

CAITLYNN SHIPE is a freshman communication and creative writing major who enjoys nature, storytelling, and writing. She writes for The Torch and is part of Alpha Gamma Delta.

CECELIA SIEFER is a sophomore art major who really just likes to play in the dirt.

KAYLA SMITH is a sophomore art major/ urban legend. She, more like her art, can be found on Instagram @kayla\_blah.

KYLYNN SMITH is a junior year Studio Art major with an interest in painting, drawing, and tattooing. She often finds herself writing poetry in her free time, preferably when the moon is high and inspiration is at its peak.



**MALACHI JEREMY SMITH** is a Sophomore, Philosophy Major with a minor in communications. He enjoys reading novels and watching anime. He is a portrait photographer with a focus on highlighting the variances in expression/emotion people show. His Instagram is @infinitywolfx

**REBECCA STOCKHAM** is a senior English Literature & Creative Writing double major who enjoys drinking coffee and wearing stripes. She can be found either dancing at the English Department copy machine or haunting your local Party City.

**MICHELA TENUTA** is still a psychology major with a neuroscience minor! To Michela, life is simply about eating pasta and drinking chai, but not together because that's gross.

**CHYNNA VAUGHN** is a sophomore psychology major with a criminology minor who loves photography and writing! She can be found on campus listening to music and hanging out with her friends! She loves to watch true crime shows and drinking coffee late at night.

**KARA VANHIMBERGEN** is a sophomore Psychology/Greek and Roman Studies double major with a minor in creative writing. She loves a lot of things, but coffee and cats are near and dear to her heart.

**GREGIA VERA** is a senior in Creative Writing who enjoys listening to music 24/7.

**ASHLEY VERNON** is a freshman History major Art minor. She enjoys photography, reading, and desperately trying to get enough sleep.

**NIRICA YANCEY** is a senior Computer Science major, minoring in Spanish, Japanese, and Mathematics. She's currently desperately trying to graduate while furiously stuffing her pandemic feelings into poetry.

**WILL WITRY** is a sophomore Theater and Communications Major who spends his free time creating music.

# CONTRIBUTOR BIOS



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are so many people to thank -- enough to fill an entire issue on its own. This issue (and *The Lighter* as a whole) was a truly collaborative effort; I couldn't imagine creating something like this without the hard work, dedication, time, and passion of so many wonderful people. I love this organization, I love all that it represents and all that it offers, and I thank you all for loving it just as much as I do.

I cannot present this issue without paying immense gratitude to the team that made it possible. Thank you to the executive board: Anna, Kayla, Lee, Lexi, and Michela. You all are the greatest team I could've ever dreamed of and I am so incredibly proud of all we've accomplished. And to Lee, Kayla, and Michela especially, I am pleased to leave *The Lighter* knowing it's in good hands.

Thank you to our Selection Committee and their impressive adaptability. Even when unable to meet in person, you all still gave each piece the attention and respect it deserved. This semester had no shortage of challenges, but it was no match for your continued dedication and perseverance.

Thank you to our Artivism judges, former EICs Emily Neuharth and Michelé Strachota. I appreciate the care and thought you put into helping us continue *The Lighter's* spring semester tradition. I really enjoyed being able to talk with you both about how far *The Lighter* has come.

Thank you as well to Haley Brewer, the 2019-2020 EIC, for having no shortage of kind words and for always being a text away when I had questions.

Thank you to Brandon Aube and our printer, Gilson Graphics, for allowing us to showcase the amazing creative work on campus in such a stunning way.



Thank you to Nicole Moy, Sophia Behrens, the Committee on Media, and Student Senate. The administrative part of the job might not always be the most fun but you all make it so much easier. I've also enjoyed getting to know all of you and I'm grateful for your help!

Thank you to all of the many professors across campus who helped us to promote this semester's submission period. Special shout out to Professor Sean Kamperman for his growing collection of *Lighter* issues; to Professor Allison Schuette for helping us reach out to first-year creatives; and to Professor John Ruff for allowing us to promote *The Lighter* in all areas of the English department, including Books & Coffee (look out for that next spring semester!).

Thank you to everyone who submitted to this semester's issue! The work we received this semester has been some of my favorite, and I'm honored to be able to show it off. And a special thank you to everyone who submitted to our Artivism contest, especially our two winners, Will Witry and Doc Janowiak.

And finally, the ultimate thank you goes out to you! *The Lighter* could not be what it is or do what it does without the incredible support from our audience. I, and so many others, are so happy to share with you the talent and creativity that exists here on Valpo's campus. We hope that you'll continue to support *The Lighter* and that you enjoy Inez!

THE LIGHTER

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