

Lake



Issue No. 14 Fall 2025–Spring 2026

Mission Statement:

The purpose of the RLC Arts Publication
Lake is to celebrate art in all its forms.

Issue No. 14

Fall 2025 - Spring 2026

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Reflection of Pride

Mixed Media

2025 Student Art Show - Winner:

Instructor's Choice Award

Headline font: Josefin Sans Bold



Self-Portrait

Hayli Charron Haney
Acrylic



A Missed Companion Animal

Isabella Abenes
Oil



A Grumpy Cat

Isabella Abenes
Acrylic



Sierra 2
Braden Clem
Colored Pencil



Diamond Eyes

Jared Roberts
Photography

Send Me Dead
Flowers



Another Year

by Lily Owen

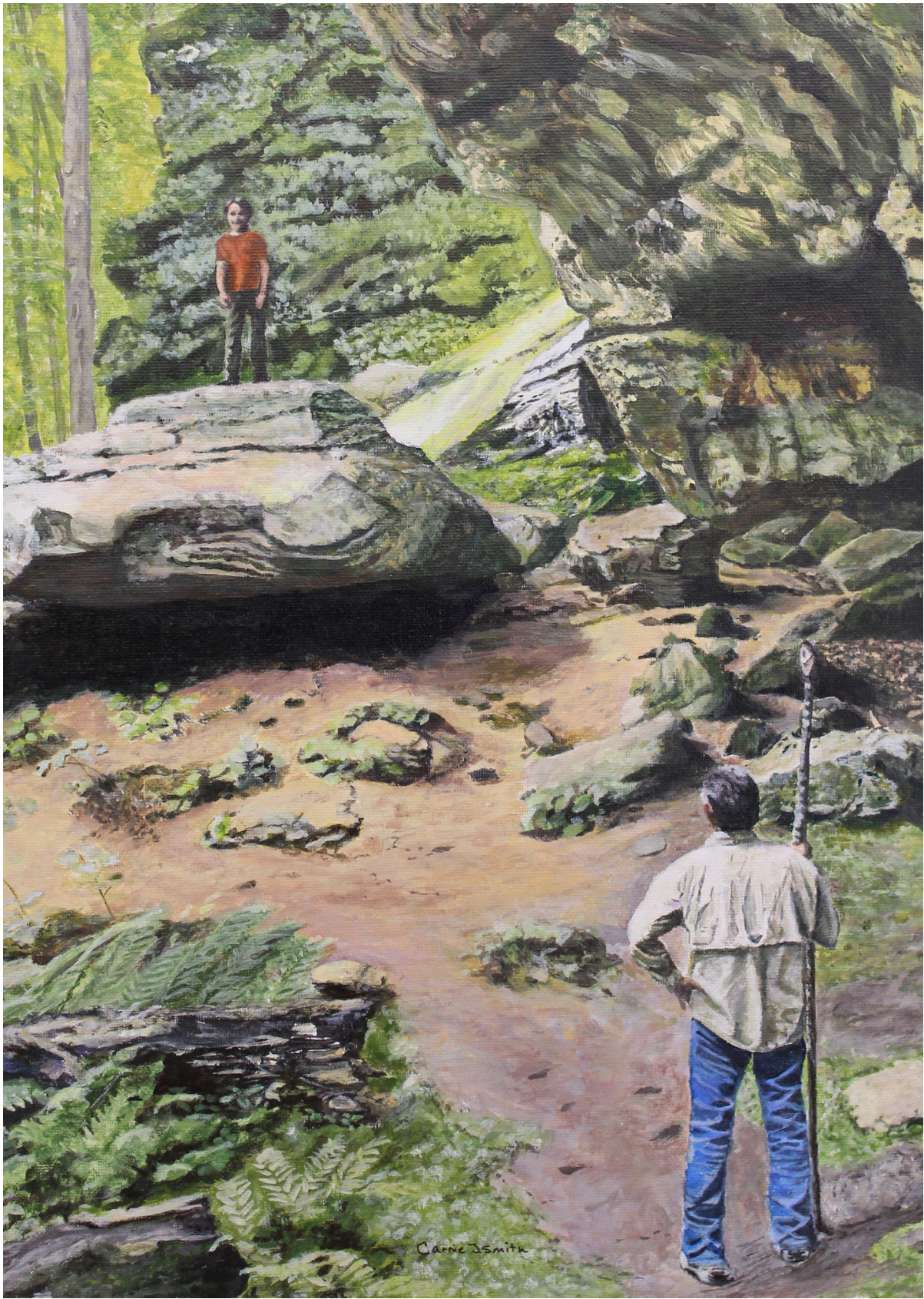
Another year has revolved-
Winter's grip was loosened by the girdle of Spring,
that fair, light-haired maiden who danced barefoot through
the April showers.
Flock in do the swallows and red robins—
they hop amongst the budding green grasses
and flash their dimorphic plumage—
While ears revel in the coo-woo-woo of the mourning doves.
The heat of summer saw her bloom into maturity,
with honeysuckle and peonies crowning her hair,
and the high heat of Helios kissing her skin.
The July thunderstorms crackle behind charcoal clouds—
They strike the earth with the rainy scent of petrichor.
She tired of only green-
And so released a thousand shades of orange, yellow, and red.

Walnuts and spiked sweetgum pods clustered
on the boughs of the painted, calico trees.
The air turned crisp, the nights frosted
while she watched the birds journeying southward.
Winter coated the land in crystalline beauty, iced.
Snow flurries are highlighted by the silver moonlight
and holly is strung from the rafters by the druids.
Gingerbread wafts fragrant; evergreens spice the air.
Each breath inhales the newness of the cold.
But now the earth thrums with the eagerness for change
as the ferns unfurl and the mockingbirds warble their mimicries.
The sweet rains dash the ground- the gentle zephyrs caress our hair-
and promise an abundance of crocus and forsythia.
We can gaze about, conscious of the fleeting beauty,
knowing that metamorphoses will come soon enough.

Reserved for PK's

Jared Roberts
Photography





Carrie J. Smith
Acrylic

Granddad & Finn at
Ferne Clyffe

Sunset at Shady Rest

Carrie J. Smith
Water Color



Birthday Surprise Lilies

Carrie J. Smith
Oil



Rainy Italian Night

Elizabeth Bailey-Smith
Photography

The Farm

by Jared Roberts

How I long to be there,
To live there
With you and the dogs
Just us, the fields and the frogs.
How I long to sleep there,
Walk through the morning mist,
Hand in hand
We stop to kiss.
At peace with the world,
Needing nothing but you,
Love and the farm.

Day Haints

by Clyde Hall

Hustle and bustle,
Work and react.
Life moving fast,
Along day-to-day tracks.

Shadows grown longer,
The pace, it slows down.
And phantoms escape from
Mind palace ghost towns.

Some we have wronged,
Others we've loved.
Faces forgotten,
Memory best left unplugged.

All crowd their way back,
Thoughts infested with haints.
All the hurry and scurry
Were unreliable feints.

Hoover at Dusk

Elizabeth Bailey-Smith
Photography





Basking in The Sun
Moth LRC 2025

Sarah Draper
Photography

Deer at Sunset
Deer Mt. Vernon , IL 2025

Sarah Draper
Photography



Memphis

Blue paper, colored pencil,
white ink



Nashville

Red paper, charcoal,
pencil eraser



Ava Derry

Panama

Grey colored pencil,
cross-hatch

Chicago Lights

Elizabeth Bailey-Smith
Photography



All The Places I Haven't Seen by Lily Owen

I have never wandered the streets of Rome—
never inhaled the steam from the public baths,
nor navigated the frescoed walls of the twisted side-alleys.
I have not stared up in awe at the towering beauty of the
Parthenon, or traced the grooved
columns of the Colosseum.
Pompeii's cataclysm-washed silence calls to me—
the echoes of ancient voices.
But I am a stranger to them.

I have never sat in a Paris café—
sipping a latte with a croissant in-hand.
I want to see the Eiffel Tower—
that symbol of industrial romanticism,
that splendid, spindled iron framework!
What modernity- sleek, pampered fashion,
the pinnacle of cosmopolitan beauty.

I have never travelled along the Great Wall of China—
The firecracker-framed New Year has never been viewed by
any eyes of mine.
The dragons taunt me with their ornate glee, enticing—
And the Shanghai Bund light show strobes the city with
multicolored illumination.

I have never hiked the peaked green hills of the Alps—
to see the goat-herds roaming pastoral.
Or tasted the creamy yogurts, paired with artisan breads,
cheeses and fine wines—
They would delight my palate.

I have never seen the Tower of London—
or heard Big Ben toll out his booming midnight token.
To trod the pathways on the banks of the Thames is but a
dream to me,
to munch newspaper-wrapped fish and chips with the cold
night fog rolling in.

I have never kissed the Blarney Stone—
not received the gift of eloquence from leaning over a
daunting parapet.
I want to see the castles and the cathedrals of Dublin,
and be as elevated as the Spire for the world to spread out
below me,
or to stroll through St. Stephen's Green.

I have never reclined on the white-sanded beaches of the Ca-
nary Islands—
such a pristine, biodiverse Spanish archipelago,
the Mediterranean's hotspot of tourist attraction,
where the stars spin around the sky in dazzling vividness.

I have never even been to New York—!
How sheltered I am.
Times Square and Central Park with all of its pigeons,
the Statue of Liberty, the Empire State Building-
I can only buy postcards and pretend.

Oh, all the places I haven't seen.



Bunny

Madelyn Dilday
Graphite Pencil

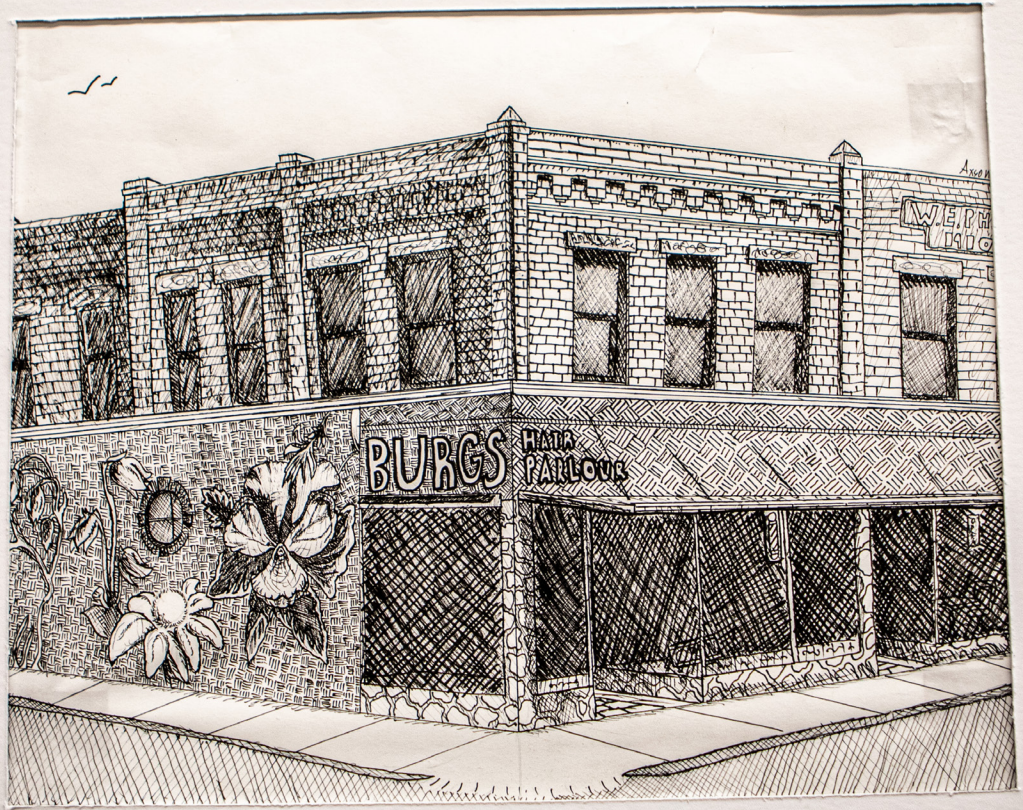


Tarsiers

Gage Engler
Pencil Drawing

Burgs

Axson Brotherton
Ink Pen



Dog

Madelyn Dilday
Ink Pen





Smoke Break

Samantha Smith
Mixed Media

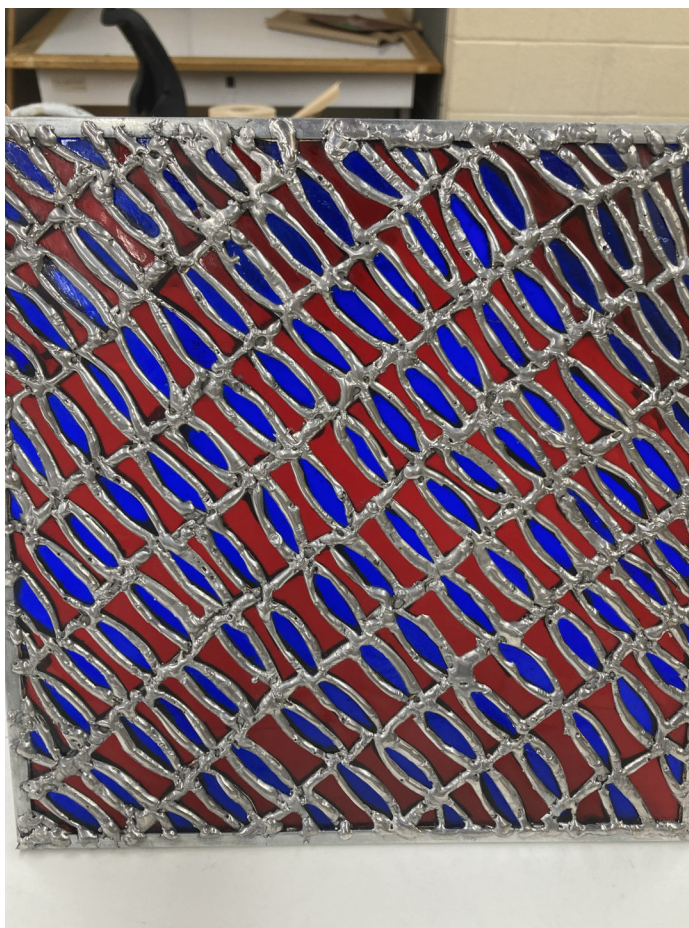


Jared Roberts
Photography

Water Landing

Encased in Ice





Finger Bones of Glass

Xavier Kramm
Stained Glass

World Of Blue

Gavin DeWitt
Stained Glass





An Arch of Blues

Isabella Abenes
Stained Glass



Illusion

Alexis Davis
Stained Glass

Wonders of a Cosmic Bee

by P. Suess

One warm summer evening, early,
Resting in the cosmos weary
To kip upon a pillowed disk
Within corollos white and blue
Enfolded in one satin petal
Clutching to its gold dust revenue

A bee, black and yellow, sleeping
Swaying on cosmo's slender stem
Dreaming, gliding with wings abuzz
Dreaming of its flowers tended
Dreaming of many more to come
Dreaming of its royal ambered home
Now so far far away

Vision in a Blue Bowl

by P. Suess

Below the blue bowl above
I see a moose wearing glasses—pince-nez,
draped in blue silk robes
sipping martinis and reading the news
from the The Cloven Hooved Review.
Beside, a satyr nemesis
cowled over with white satin,
stirring thick black ambergris
boiling in a grand silver sarten.
Adding cloves, hooves and rouge
making rare perfume,
together sipping martinis
on a fine afternoon
with the genie and the jinn
by lucent water winding,
roiling silt and shards
above the blue bowl below.

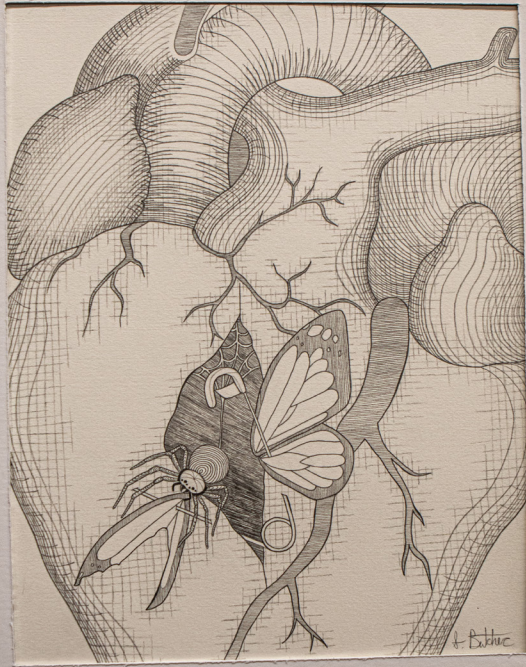
Bizmo

Skylar Butcher
Graphite Pencil



Punctured Heart

Skylar Butcher
Graphite Pencil



Loud Mouth
Brooke McGovern
Graphite Pencil



The Undivested Visitor

by Clyde Hall

The shoebox of photos was a 1980s time capsule, if a time capsule had sacrificed one corner as a mouse nursery. A few Polaroids, too. Most were intact, though the rodents did have the good taste to chew through the face of Brent, a General Manager who'd made my first fulltime job a living hell. The group photo, with his fat jowls hollowed out and his eyes reduced to empty sockets, captured Brent's best side. To my way of thinking, the unpleasant bastard never looked better.

"Hi, I'm Jim."

I didn't jump. That's to my credit because it was late. Late like when White Castle employees ponder turning off the sign and grabbing a couple hours nap late. I was the only one up, wife down the hall snoring away.

Our bulldog, J. Edgar, was also snoring, curled up beside me in his doggy bed. He jumped. Then lifted his nose and sniffed, detected nothing, and slumped back down with a sigh. The animal's dismissal caused me doubt. Maybe going through the snapshots, along with a Paxil nightcap, conjured a vision? Or, less kindly, a hallucination?

Jim sat on the room's tiny daybed, leaving no physical indentation on the blankets. There should have been one. Because Jimmy, he was a barrel man. Five point five tall, four point eight wide. Except for his gray-blond goatee, he looked mostly the same as he did in the picture I held, taken at a sci-fi con where he dressed as early version Beast of the X-Men. Everything being equal, he looked great for a guy who died in 2012.

For a cadaver strangely undivested of his life force, he was definitely Jimmy. Still, something was off. Unnatural, non-indented bedsheets aside. A sort of staticky aura with color diffusion. He looked a lot like Jordy Verrill's dad in *Creepshow* when speaking from beyond the veil to his alien crabgrass-sucking son. Jim would've liked the comparison.

"The question is," I answered, since my friend announced himself using the first half of his pat, back-in-the-day introduction, one he swore made him unforgettable to new acquaintances, "do you still have onychomycosis?"

The figment grinned. "If I said, 'Yes!', would it give you second thoughts about the afterlife?"

"It'd make me curious about your destination in it. Sounds like a byproduct of Purgatory," I smiled. "Last time we spoke, you made your feelings about heaven and hell pretty clear."

"You brought *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter* to watch as our last movie together," he smirked. "That'd shake anyone's faith."

"You didn't seem to mind it then."

"Bite me. I was dying. Better doing it with a bad movie and someone to talk with than going it alone."

We paused and quiet shrouded the room, the traffic-less quiet reserved for 1950s hospital zones and all cemeteries. I noted how, while not having a double exposure aesthetic, Jimmy wasn't exactly solid, either. I saw the outline of things behind him, like the lamp on my nightstand. A Superman poster on the wall. Dying made Jim marginally opaque, and that somehow unnerved me more than the conversation itself. So I continued.

"Whatever afterlife you drew, you took your sweet time for an encore. Spill it, Jim. What? Is it my turn now and you're return-

ing the favor with a last call? My bouncer to the great beyond?" "No," he laughed. I was always good at getting that reaction from him. "It was predetermined. I have a warning."

"If you're announcing the arrival of three spirits, make mine the ones from the George C. Scott version. Especially Christmas Present. Edward Woodward slayed."

"I'm not. And if I were, it'd be Alister Sim all the way, you culture-less simp." His boyish smile slipped slowly before flatlining altogether. "Do you remember when I told you about certain dreams I had? Especially that scary one?"

"Jim, we talked a lot of weird shit in those days. Exceptionally weird for not doing drugs. Like, how everyone should be ready to kill you in case you ever went insane."

That was some leftover from military training. Despite his size and girth, Jimmy was Airborne. The heaviest man ever to graduate Ranger school at the time. One rainy afternoon during a commercial break of Channel 11's *Godzilla Movie One*, he'd asked how I'd take him out if he went berserk. Because Airborne taught you to assess the threat level of everyone you knew, anyone you met, and have a plan for eliminating them if necessary. Just in case. A Batman contingency plan long before the DC writers came up with the same notion in their Justice League comic.

"You said you'd shoot me," he nodded, approving.

"Cause I wasn't about to risk your big ass getting hold of me. A scary dream, though? That's not ringing any drums nor beating any bells."

"It's dark. Like in a basement, not pitch black but not light enough to see much detail," he said. "The power's out and there's a storm happening. Only it's not thunder we're hearing. And we're sitting on the cold concrete floor, a bunch of people shoulder-to-shoulder. Cowering in the darkness together. Crying. Terrified."

Then I did remember. Before the Berlin Wall came down, we'd talk about chances of nuclear war. What might lead to it, what sort of scope it could have, how apocalyptic it'd be. Jimmy felt that something big like that was coming sooner or later. Inevitable. Which, again, I attributed to his Airborne days. His was a prepper mentality. He made plans for establishing a small group of survivors when, not if, a nuclear war came.

"What if there is?" I'd asked back then. "I'm an insulin-dependent diabetic. How would preparation matter?"

And then he'd opine that, by the time such a thing happened, we'd probably be too old for anything proactive about it anyway. But he'd added that, throughout his life, he'd had strange dreams, prophetic ones, all of which had come true. All except this single one. The scariest one of people huddled in a dark basement while hell on earth commenced. Back in the day his level voice, normally full of optimism, cracked describing it. Reliving it had the same effect on me now as it had then. I squirmed, icy fingers running my spine like a virtuoso skeleton's keyboard flourish.

"Yeah, now I remember," I replied. "What, then? You're saying that one's now gonna come to pass?"

"That's what I'm saying."

"Can I play devil's advocate here for a sec?"

"Advocate away."

"Weren't you also the guy who told me a high fiber diet was the key to good health because all the food additives were poison? How pushing food through your system quick as possible lessened the effect?"

"I did."

"Then died of stomach cancer because you spent all your money

on Smellzee fragrances after deciding stress toxins were the real root of all human ills."

Jim's phantom gained color in the cheeks. "I went a little overboard on the Smellzee claims."

"Jimmy. A little? Man, you skipped regular checkups because the diffuser made you feel better. You started a Smellzee cult and began looking for converts. Didn't you wonder why friends avoided you? You'd have creeped Scientologists out back then."

"I'm sorry, alright? Get off my ass."

Apologies weren't in Jimmy's vocabulary. I couldn't remember a time he'd apologized to anybody for anything. Not because he was a dick, but because he was deliberate in what he did. Intentional. Which made his Smellzee obsession even more unsettling at the time.

The cone of silence descended over us again, but now the irony of his apology dangled from a pregnant pause. He looked sorry. But still, his upper lip quivered. I snorted. Then chortled, and a second later we were both laughing. It sounded like our college days, driving back from a marathon D&D session, reliving the adventure we'd shared both in character and with the quirky gamer group we were in.

J. Edgar stirred, sniffing the air again drowsily. One ear was lifted like a receiver dish, the other drooped windsock limp on a breezeless day. He looked at me as if trying to figure out what was so damned funny, then trotted out the door, heading for the quiet of the bedroom. Despite the wife's snoring.

Wiping my eyes, I wheezed, "We haven't laughed that hard since seeing *Porky's* first run."

"I miss this," Jim said, though he wasn't catching his breath the way I was. "I appreciated you coming over that last time, you know. Even with a shit movie. We'd drifted apart."

Some secrets, it seemed, went to the grave while others apparently came back from there. It was my turn for burning cheeks.

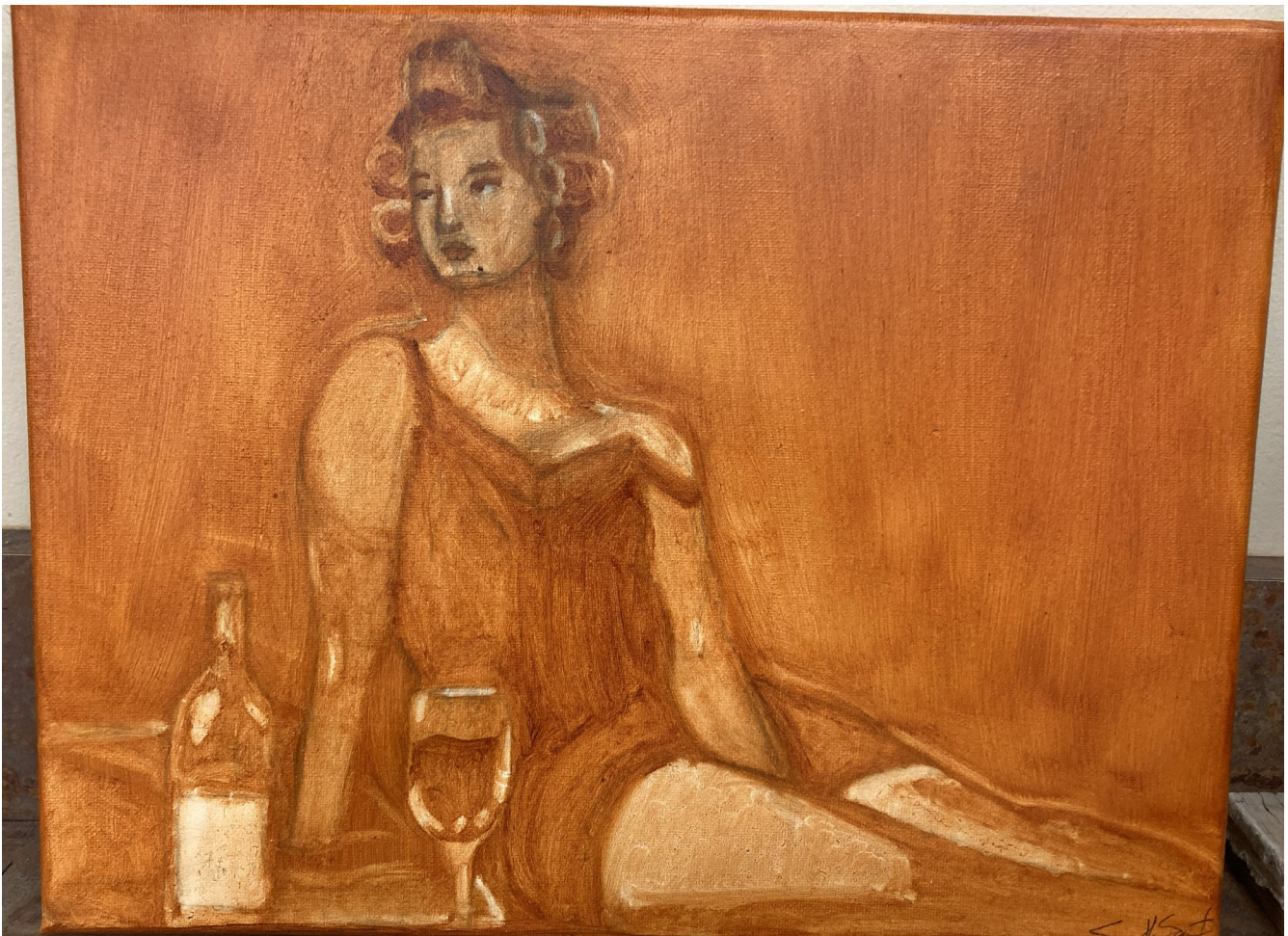
"Blame the Smellzee plume," I laughed. Then, more serious, "Doesn't matter. We were friends, Jimmy. I didn't want you to face eternity all alone."

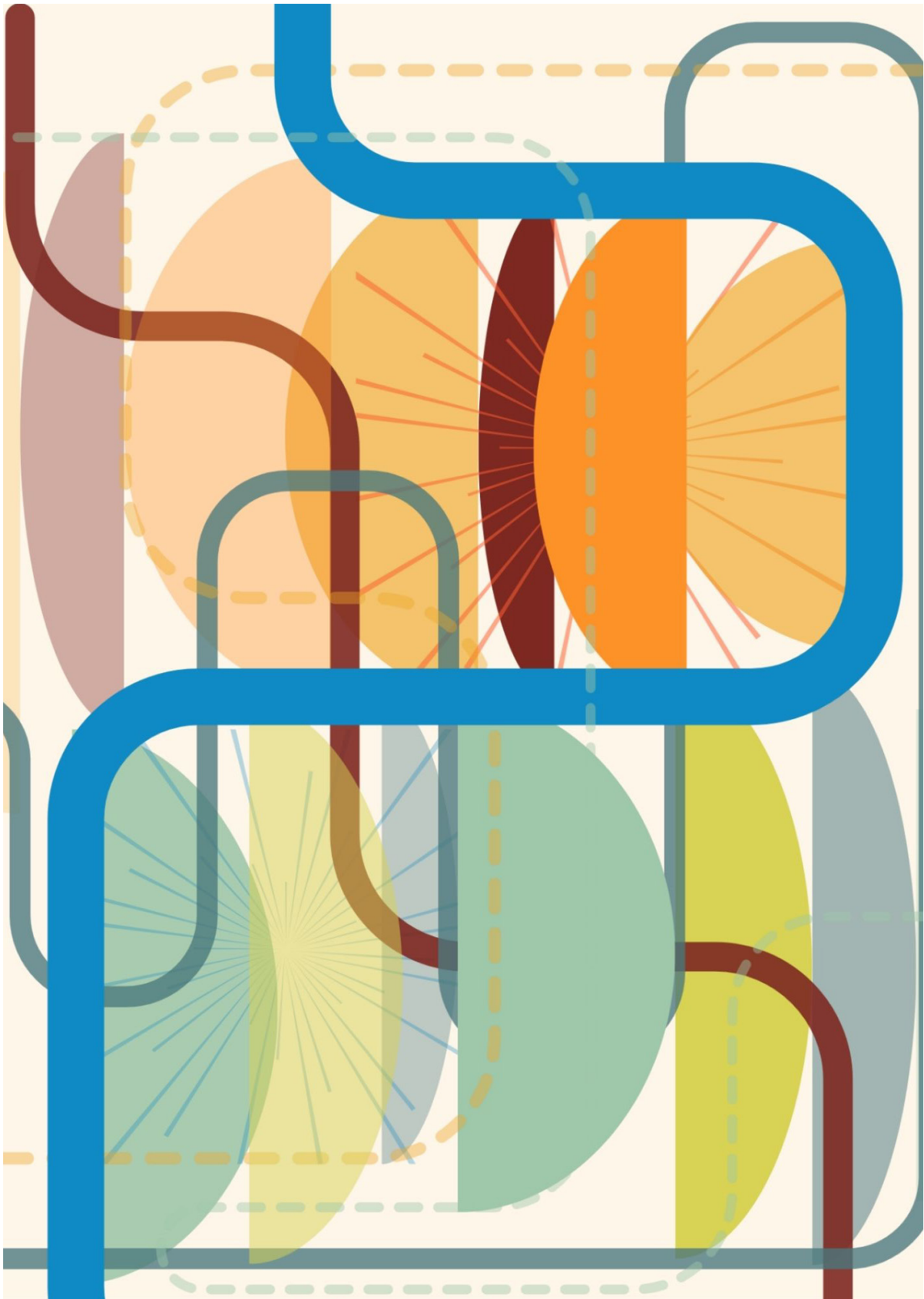
"Ditto," he smiled, the lack of luster in his eyes striking a note of sadness before he faded away.

The next moment, the town's warning sirens blared their mournful wail. They were joined by other Civil Defense alerts across the land, a choir in perfect disharmony heralding the beginning of the end. FINI

Winding Down

Samantha Smith
Oil Rubout





Crossing Borders

Asiah Curry
Digital Art Canva /Adobe

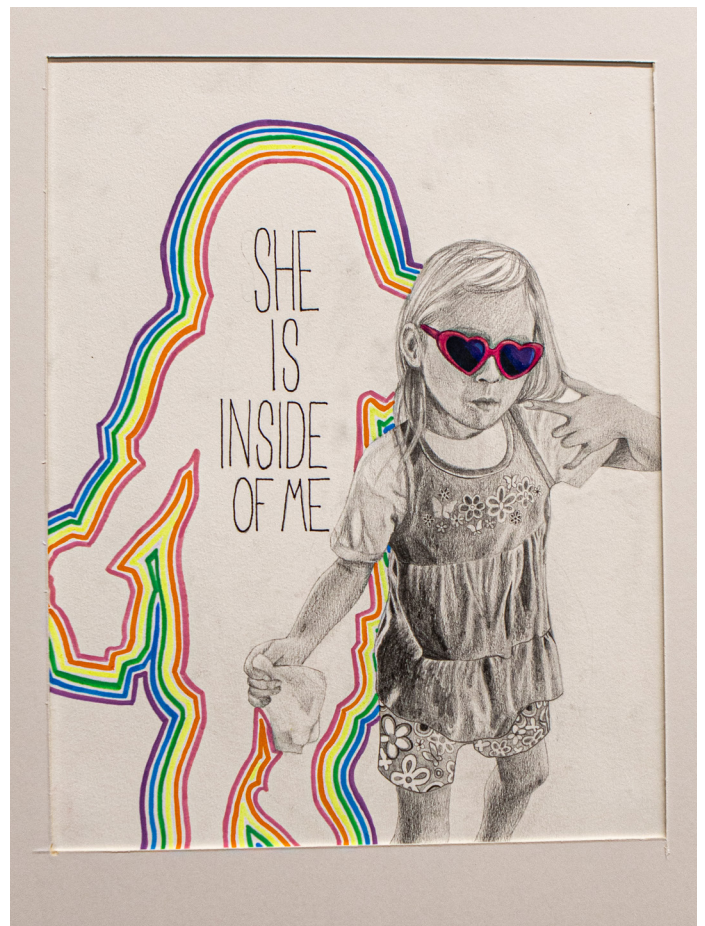


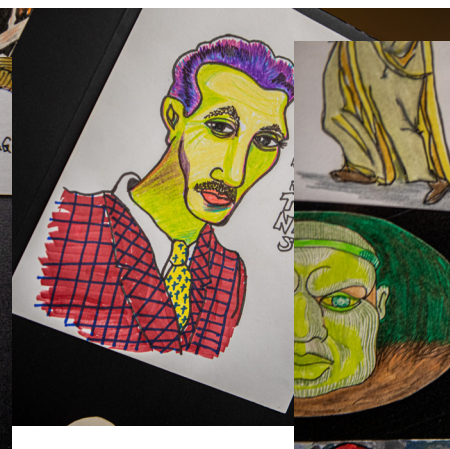
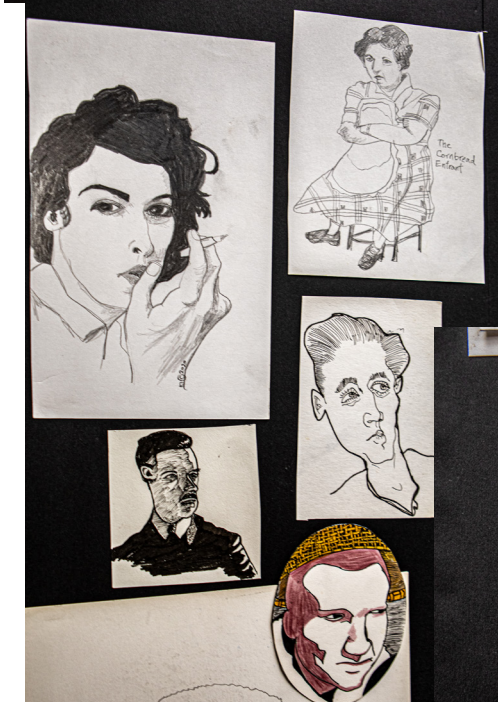
Fractured Memory

Gage Engler
Pencil Drawing

The Child Within

Brooke McGovern
Mixed media





Kyle Ingram

Poet, Writer, Artist

Prolific contributor to *Lake* and
an inspiration to all of humanities graces.
October 23, 1957 to April 30, 2025

Oh Time, Persist thief
Kyle Ingram, Stolen before us
With a wind of sorrow and grief
So time will take . . . So time takes again
Oh Time, Persistent Thief

Unburdened now as once a secret's told
Creative dove silenced and
Wise pinions ever stilled.
Where now thy sanctuary
Of vexations free and ease?
Drowse there with gentle imaginings
And by forever soothing wings.

—P. Suess

Fine, Just Fine

by Madison Brower

Cast of Characters-

Brenda: A harsh and honest person. She says what she thinks without caring what anyone else says. She comes off as condescending and most of the time is perceived as a Bully. She wears darker colors and looks well put together.

Gayle: A mostly docile and quiet person. She has a very caring nature but tends to come off as overbearing. She wears pastels and has a more casual appearance than Brenda.

Rae Grett: A fairly neutral and average person. Her personality is mostly reflective of the environment around her. She is easily annoyed and prefers to be by herself. She wears grays and black.

Mrs. Peterson: An older and refined woman. She is a proper person and dresses the part. She wears shades of brown and walks very rigidly.

Setting:

A blank slate. There is a rectangular table in the center of the stage with three chairs lined on the upstage of the table. There is a pencil and notebook in front of the middle chair.

—

(AT RISE: Rae is sitting at a table with Brenda in the chair to her right and Gayle in the chair to Rae's left. Mrs. Peterson is leaned over Rae's left shoulder helping her with a math problem.)

Mrs. Peterson: Finally, you will take the square root of the quotient. That is how you find the standard deviation of a set of numbers. Now, if that's all you needed, class is starting (Rae nods and Mrs. Peterson exits SL, as she walks her voice trails off) everyone turn to page 72 and . . .

(As the teacher leaves Rae goes back to writing. Brenda and Gayle get up and walk over to Rae.)

Brenda: What's wrong with her now?

Gayle: I don't know, Brenda. Did you try asking her?

Brenda: (Sarcastically) Oh, wow, what a spectacular display of intellectual thinking. I hadn't thought of that, Gayle.

Gayle: Well maybe you should start thinking more and talking less.

Brenda: You little-

Rae: Nothing is wrong, I'm just focused.

Gayle: Oh great! Now you've really done it. Now she isn't processing her emotions properly.

(Scooting closer to Rae and wrapping her arms around Rae's shoulders) Rae, sweetie, it'll be ok, just tell me what's going on.

Brenda: Why don't you just leave her be. If she says she's fine then she's fine.

Gayle: (Standing up) You're a piece of work, you know that. I don't know how anyone can-

Rae: Would you two stop fighting! I can't ever focus with you two constantly at odds. I'm just working on a project right now, (sighing) everything is fine.

Gayle: Everything is not fine, you've been sulking in your room for weeks.

Rae: I'm not sulking, I just like being in there.

Brenda: Yea right. You look like you're hiding something, never coming out in the daytime and slinking around at night. What are you up to?

Rae: Nothing, ok?! Nothing is going on!

Brenda: Did you see that reaction? There's definitely something up.

Gayle: Why can't you be supportive instead of accusatory? Maybe she's upset.

Rae: I'm not upset! (Standing up and walking in front of the desk) Why can't you two just be happy with me the way I am?

Brenda: (Walking up to Rae's left side) The way you are? Come on, look at you. You stopped wearing those cute, bright colors that everyone else does.

Rae: I like what I wear.

Brenda: Your grades are slipping.

Rae: It was a one time mistake, really! I promise I'll be better, I-

Brenda: You're gaining weight.

Gayle: (Walking up to Rae's left side) Hey, you're taking this too far, Brenda. You shouldn't say things like that to her.

Brenda: What? The truth? Ha! Somebody needs to tell her. Do your friends even really like you?

Gayle: Hey-

Rae: Of course they do! Why wouldn't they? I mean I'm really nice to them, and I help them with school work, and-

Brenda: Look at you, so defensive. Miss Perfect, Miss Always Right, Miss Sunshine and Kindness. You're the bleakest ray of sunshine I've ever seen.

Rae: Well I didn't ask you!

Gayle: Rae, you don't need to yell-

Rae: And you, (Pointing at Gayle) what help are you anyway?

Gayle: Wait, what did I do?

Rae: Exactly, what did you do? When have you ever helped me? Always asking me 'What's wrong? What's wrong?' You know what's wrong? It's your nagging. One second I'm too calm, the next second I'm too much, there's always something wrong with me!

Gayle: I don't mean it like that, I just want to make sure that you're-

Rae: Fine?! Of course I'm fine. I'm always fine. Fine, fine ,fine, fine!

Brenda: See? What'd I tell you? She's a loose cannon. Snaps at the littlest things. No wonder nobody likes yo-

Rae: (Pointing at Brenda) And you! Don't even get me started because you're just as bad! Not only am I always wrong, I'm worse! You act like I'm the dirt under your shoe. 'Why can't you be more like the other students? Why did you get a B on that last assignment?' Sue me! I'm sorry that I'm this huge screw up that can't make you proud!

Brenda: Well-

Rae: And FYI a 4.0 isn't just 'standard' it's perfect! I can't always be perfect.

Gayle: (Trying to diffuse the situation) Can't you calm down now, Rae? Let's be rational.

Rae: Rational? For the first time in my life, I feel like I'm actually making sense! I'm telling you how I really feel. Isn't that what you wanted? Is that not rational?

Gayle: I'm sorry, I-.

Rae: Oh you're sorry now, Gayle? Well thanks. Thank you so much for being so passive, while Brenda teased me all this time, that I've become this horrible monster no one can stand. Thank you for tormenting me with your questions for so long that I can't even stand myself anymore.

Gayle: You're not a-

Brenda: You're right. You are a monster. A disgusting, loathsome monster that nobody cares about.

Rae: You're such a-

Brenda: You've driven yourself so crazy that you're arguing with the voices inside your head.

(A brief moment of silence ensues.)

Gayle: Can't we all just calm down? I mean this has seriously gotten out of hand.

Rae: You know what? Maybe you're right. Maybe I am crazy, but if I'm going to be crazy I can do it, By. My. Self. Now, get out.

Gayle: What?

Rae: Can't you hear me? Get out! Both of you! Out of my head! (Rae runs around the desk chasing them out of opposite ends of the room.)

Gayle: (As she's leaving SL) I thought you were better than this.

Brenda: (As she's leaving SR) What a diva, no wonder you're alone all the time.

Rae: (Rae sits down and sighs.) Finally, peace at last.

(Mrs. Peterson enters SL and sees Rae in her own world.)

Mrs. Peterson: Ms. Grett! (Rae's head snaps to look at Mrs. Peterson. Mrs. Peterson sighs.) Finally, I've got your attention. You can't be in your own world like that when you're in the *real* world. Do you even have your textbook with you? In my day, we had more respect for our teachers than to be in a daze like that. Hmph!

(Mrs. Peterson exits SL)

Rae: Right, of course. (Gayle and Brenda walk back in through the sides they exited from and put a hand on Rae's corresponding shoulder.) I'm never free.

Disorder

by Chloe Robinson

The wind blows in my messed up mind
My heart is wrenched in anger I deny
My soul is numbed by this goodbye
I'm ever so tired of this complex condition

I triumph in failure for all I know
Is how to struggle in grace and woe
My solace is replaced by heavy weights
I wrestle my thoughts in this void called life

My arms struggle when my hearts in pain
My knees tremble just like the rain
My body aches from this stupid game
My soul is ever so tired of this complex condition

My head pounds for all I have
Is troubling pain that makes me sad
Gaping wound in my soul I feel
Dripping off the sorrow like I have never felt

My heart gets jittery my hands get cold
My soul feels heavy like I'm being controlled
My mind won't stop for it can't understand
I'm ever so tired of this complex condition

Pin-Up Series #1

Mixed Media



Pin-Up Series #4

Mixed Media



Aleah Gore

Pin-Up Series #5

Mixed Media



Huntress

Alexis Davis
Ink

Who Am I, and What Did I Do?

by Michelle Arriaga

I suffered.

I apologized without knowing what I was sorry for.

I tried to break the hold.

I begged for it to stop.

I repeated "I LOVE YOU."

I heard: "It's for your own good."

I believed the lies, the empty promises, and most of all:
THE THREATS.

First slap: I apologized.

When you held me down on the floor in a chokehold: I tried to
rip off your hands and utter-"What did I do wrong?"

When you pulled me by my hair, strands weaved throughout
your first and fingers.

When you punched me with a closed fist, I begged you to
STOP.

The abuse and my confusion only got worse---
Who Am I, and What did I Do?

All I saw when I looked in the mirror were the bruises.
Frantically trying to cover them up with foundation and
eventually tattoos.

Every time you would strike me, it THRILLED you.

Harder and more frequent, it made YOU happy.

I saw the good in you every time but

Confused though ...

Who am I, and What Did I Do?

My BLOOD was a coat over his hands and clothes.

You looked at me with an inhuman desire.

Then RAPED me while I cried silently.

You proclaimed your ultimate love while I mentally travelled...
Anywhere but there.

ESCAPING in my mind was only temporary because I was
overpowered with confusion.

Who am I, and What Did I Do?

I became your FRUSTRATION outlet when your family made
you angry-I took the punches most of the time without a single TEAR.

Tears would not stop your POWERFUL fists.

When someone backed into the old truck without leaving a
note; I took the blows meant for a stranger.

Four RIBS snapped but you felt better.

You needed me, but wait ... I am CONFUSED.

Who am I, and What Did I Do?

I had to look my best when ALLOWED to venture out with you.

We went to the store, and men were staring, I diverted my
gaze, and it landed on YOU.

I offered a platitude of going home, hoped it would calm you
and ease your mind.

I was wrong- the BEAST raged.

I was knocked down and kicked in the face repeatedly, while

you proclaimed, angrily,

"NO MAN WILL EVER LOOK AT YOU AND WANT YOU AGAIN!"

I tried to scream, "that I was meant for YOUR EYES ONLY!"

The blood CHOKED ME, All, but a few teeth remained in
my once beautiful smile; and I eventually could not speak when

I felt my jaw break in two different places.

The PAIN went NUMB, as I thought to myself.

Who AM I, and What Did I Do?

Over time, the NUMBNESS eventually started to subside.

The PAIN was finally making my mind sharper-
and the CONFUSION cleared.

Over time, I realized that I was a VICTIM of Domestic and
Emotional Abuse.

I stood up and decided WHO I AM.

Still not Knowing what I did,

I eventually had an opening to ESCAPE, and I took it.

It was time to STAND UP.

I WAS INNOCENT!!!

I just wanted and deserved LOVED.

I realized I did nothing wrong.

IT WAS YOU!

Who am I, and What Did I Do?

I am ALIVE, but I will always be broken.

I will always be judged by my physical appearance, and that
HURTS the most.

But I found the most SECURE and SAFE love in the world ...
In the arms of my now husband.

My husband has held me in times of PTSD episodes.

Replacing angry fists with hugs even when my ABUSER haunts
my dreams.

I was still looking over my shoulder over a decade later, hoping
the DEVIL in disguise would not appear.

I got word from an online article, that that EVIL man had
passed away.in his slumber- a DEATH far too peaceful for
mine and my family's liking.

I cried from RELIEF, knowing that I was SAFE and no
longer needed to look over my shoulder.

I still sometimes think I see you in a crowd, but it is just my
mind playing tricks.

BROKEN but SAFE.

Able to love and BE LOVED.

Seeing the damage you caused every day in the mirror, and in
the JUDGEMENT of others...

People who do not know MY STORY.

But the important part of this is ...

I am MICHELLE and I SURVIVED !



Hold Still

Brooke McGovern
Mixed media

Thanks, I Hate It

by Jared Roberts

Thanks, I hate it.
Don't get me wrong,
I appreciate the help.
But it is what it is, you know?
A dirty bubble for me to hide from the future in
A dirty bubble to peer out at my life from
A dirty bubble that will only

POP!

When I make it.



Sacred

Brooke McGovern
Oil Paint



The Life of A Slow Creature

Isabella Abenes
Charcoal



Nature's Beauty

Isabella Abenes
Graphite

refrain of the whip-poor-will

by Lily Owen

whip-poor-will
whip-poor-will
landing in the tree
whip-poor-will
whip-poor-will
named for syllables three

the psychopomp and omen
with the lonely, calling cry
who is your cognomen?
why he's harried wonders i

whip-poor-will
whip-poor-will
sitting in the tree
whip-poor-will
whip-poor-will
the future it foresees

referenced in many a passage
dickenson, irving, lovecraft, frost
bringing insanity or assuage
to woodland travellers lost

whip-poor-will
whip-poor-will
flying from the tree
whip-poor-will
whip-poor-will
won't you wait for me?

nightjar heard at selene's rise
cooing rural mountain lore
appalachian charon in disguise
forgotten guardian of yore

whip-poor-will
whip-poor-will
gone now from the tree
whip-poor-will
whip-poor-will
ne'er again will you be seen

Author's note:

A whip-poor-will, *antrostomus vociferus*, otherwise known as a whip-o-will or whip o' will, is a medium-sized bird within the nightjar family. They are nocturnal and have mottled brown, black, and grey plumage, with a black throat and a short bill. Males have a white patch under their throat, while females have a pale brown patch. They prefer deciduous forests with plentiful leaf litter to nest on.

The 2025 State of the Birds report lists the Eastern whip-poor-will as a Yellow Alert Tipping Point species, meaning that it has lost more than 50% of its population in the last 50 years. This is primarily due to deforestation and urbanization. However, conservation efforts have been made to preserve the species, and their population has recently started to remain steady. The Ward Laboratory at the University of Illinois is currently conducting field studies to track whip-poor-wills in the Missouri Ozarks, and the Vermont Center for Ecostudies runs a dedicated whip-poor-will conservation project.

The whip-poor-will is named onomatopoeically after its song, and is the subject of many local legends. In New England, a whip-poor-will is said to be able to sense and then capture a soul as it is departing. It is my favorite bird.

Everything to Nothing

by Chloe Robinson

Everything to nothing
That's about how things go
Shaking and shaking from my head to my toes
Pain in my body that I just can't describe
Voice in my head that only tells me lies

Feeling Light headed
My body gets cold
I'm feeling controlled
I start to sweat
Begin to fret
Can't explain what I feel
At least not yet

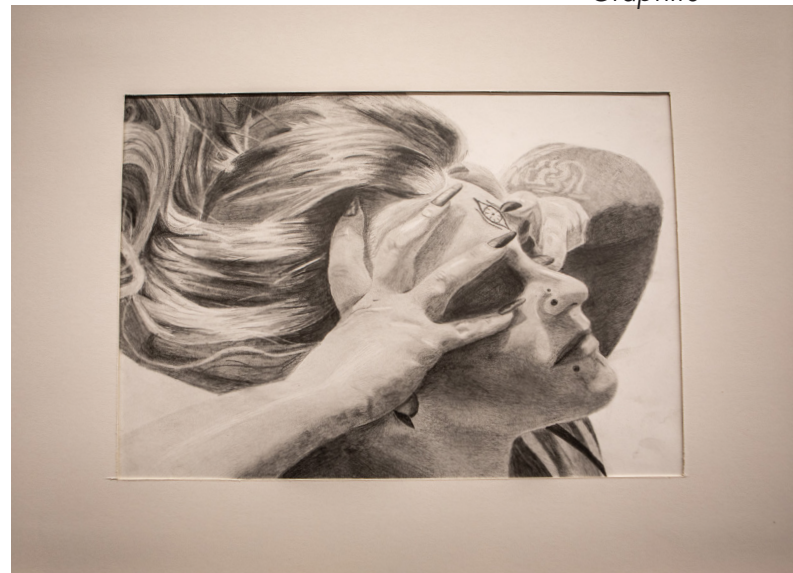
My chest still heavy
My heart still pounds
The quietness is thunder
As I lay on the ground

Start to feel numb
Start to get glum
Quietness comes
I began to sink
My thoughts still there
But bound to leave

My head's not pounding
My heart slowing down
My mind stops racing
I get up off the ground
Still numb
Like a little bug
All I feel is everything and nothing

But I guess that's just the power of the pills

Sierra 3
Braden Clem
Graphite





False Prophet

Aleah Gore
Ink

Time and Dreams

by P. Suess

I stood in the time of dreams
in between intangible things
as from whence I came
and on windows words written in rain.
And it drew me back
alone for an instant
in time, as it seemed,
across an ethereal line
rendering my reveries muse
beneath a different moon –
beaming airborne consolation
amid a Morpheus theme,
spinning time into a phantasm's dream.
With gliding bow's ephemeral grace

spanning this tenuous string
spinning my spirit
and its glass clock of sand
through an embrasure streaming
as empyrean fire –
a vast beam conveyed
spanning on to the high-heavened
arches of eternity's haunts
through the blear-mingled splendor
between tears and black velvet palls.
Alone for an instant,
my time, as it seemed, befell,
surrendering to dreams ever-ending
vignettes within a marble vault.

Shadow In Silk

Alexis Davis
Ink



Heir of Anubis

Alexis Davis
Charcoal



Why So Blue?

Samantha Smith
Acrylic Rendering



Blood Thirsty

Samantha Smith
Oil Rendering



Sierra

Braden Clem

Cut Paper Mixed Meda

Echos Behind The
Glasses

Alexis Davis
Paper



Enemy of my Enemy

by Lily Owen

The snow bled crimson in the light of the dying sun. That mighty titan, fiery in its glory, was sinking below the slated cut of the horizon, its strength extinguished. Night's gloom gathered, waiting eagerly at the edges of twilight to swallow up the earth in the darkest of velvet hues.

If a magpie had happened to be flying past, its interest would have likely been piqued by a glint of metal in a patch of scuffed earth. It was a leghold trap, set into the ground by a deep stake. Caught mangled in the cruel steel jaws was a great grey wolf. He was a magnificent beast, a proud and noble specimen of his species. Weighing in at a hundred and thirty pounds, he was nearly forty inches to the shoulder and six feet to the tail, which was a bushy, bristled thing crusted over with ice. His muzzle was as thick as a young pine, his nose a black smudge over the peel of his lips. With fur made coarse and white with age, he blended well into the backdrop of the Mackenzie Valley's coniferous landscape, a land harshened by the unforgiving rage of a winter colder than any living creature could remember.

The wolf was facing his final night. He did not fancy the choice of autotomy or death, but refused to debase his own sense of quiet dignity by way of self-amputation. His breaths puffed cloudy in the pre-night air. All he could do now was wait for the cold to claim him. Footfalls pattered gamely along the oft-trod animal path leading up to the broad ridge where the wolf was ensnared. The wolf raised his head, his eyes rheumy with suffering. A fine yearling buck crested the rise, covering ground in the bounding gait unique to mule deer, called *stotting*, in which all four legs strike the ground at once to power their explosive jumps.

The wolf was downwind, so the buck had not yet realized his presence. The buck was intent on getting to the other side of the watershed, where the terrain sloped steeply down into mossy hollows that would be sheltered from the arctic gusts blowing in from the tundra. There would be others of the bucks kind in the hollows, driven together by the elements to herd by the few streams that remained too fast-flowing to freeze over. MacKenzie was not the deer's ancestral home, the overpopulation of humans in the lower Western states having driven them northward in search of sanctuary from the pollution of mankind.

The buck halted abruptly some twenty-five feet from the wolf, his nostrils flaring and the grey-dun hairs of his nape prickling up. The buck snorted, pawing and stamping at the ground like a flighty colt. Danger was in close proximity, though with how still and silent the wolf was, the buck could not find the cause of his instinctive reaction.

"Do not fear, brother buck," said the wolf. The buck's head whipped around. "Trickster!" The buck jutted his antlers forward aggressively. He had the angst of youthful maleness about him, and likely would not see the coming spring if he did not take wisdom from the ten-and-twelve-pointers that had sired himself and the rest of his year's fawns.

"Come out, coward!"

The buck had poor visual acuity, but a high definition of motion detection in a wide field of view, so the moment the wolf moved, he would be seen. The wolf, knowing this, raised his shaggy, maned head so that the buck could clearly see him.

"There you are!" cried the buck jauntily, thinking himself clever. He had a very gallant, exuberant way of speaking, compared to the somewhat archaic speech of the wolf. "Find your dinner elsewhere. I'm set on going to the hollows tonight, and I won't let you stand in my way." The wolf laid his chin back down upon his front paws. "Go around me, for I cannot move. I am to die here."

The buck scoffed. "You must be senile. Get up and chase me! Why won't you let me show you how fast I am?"

"I told you," the wolf replied. "I am held fast. I may move only mere inches in any direction. The leash that leads me is very short. That is why I do not pursue you."

Harrumphing in discontent, the buck stepped lightly forward, his head lowered to inspect the length of chain, though he stayed just out of jaw's reach. The wolf remained passive. "You'll die," agreed the buck. "At least, as long as you have that thing on your foot. Can't you just pull it off?"

Sighing, the wolf let his ears lay flat against his head. He had an arthritic quality to him, like a dog lived too long past its life expectancy. "It is too painful. Perhaps I could have borne it before today, but my constitution is weakened by age."

"You cannot be so very old as to no longer want to live."

The wolf peeped open an eye. His brow arched. "I have seen the four seasons turn thirteen times in my life. Many in my pack ceased running at only seven or eight. My mate fell and did not rise at nine. My children have gone on before me, and now my grandchildren are slowing. Their pups, too, are grown, and have dispersed in all directions. It brings me solace to know that my bloodline will not end with me."

"I didn't ask about your bloodline," the deer said huffily. "The survival of yours means the death of mine. You're my enemy."

The wolf shook his head, a sad kindliness on his face. "I have killed deer, that is true. But so, too, have my pack fallen in the hunt. We both accept our dangers as the cost of life. I have no wish to quarrel with you over this."

"Hmph!" The deer turned away. "Pish, posh. I'm off to the hollows. I'll come back in the morning to see if the ravens have picked you clean."

The wolf watched as the buck made his way down the ridge, disappearing into the thick tree line below. In the distance, a barred owl, a species invasive to the taiga, called out its distinctive eight-note tenor. It, too, had been driven to the boreal forest by human influence. The wolf settled himself to enjoy the last pink glow simpering on the horizon. Overhead, the stars, cold, peculiar beings, emerged in invariable succession. Cassiopea, the primping queen, Andromeda, the bound princess, and her rescuer and abductor, Perseus. Ursa Major ambled out with her son, Arcas, in tow.

The wolf could read the time by the stars' positions and knew the general directions pointed out by Polaris and Sigma Octanus, north and south respectively. It was by this that he knew it was roughly four hours past moonrise when the cobbled hooves of the buck picked a path back up to the ridge.

The wolf was stiff and shaking from the cold, but he offered a chuff of greetings nonetheless. The buck's reflective eyeshine drew nearer.

"So," commented the buck, "you're still here."

"I am," assented the wolf.

"Are you getting cold yet?" queried the buck.

"I am," repeated the wolf.

The buck walked a wide circle, his bobtail flicking back and forth. He deliberately avoided looking at the crushed ruins of the wolf's bloodied back foot. "You know, I thought that you'd be gobbled up by now. I suppose not many creatures have a taste for tough old wolf meat, after all."

The wolf rumbled in amusement. "I doubt that I am palatable." The buck took another step, his front hooves splayed wide apart. He stretched his neck forward, displaying the white blaze beneath his chin as he sniffed at the chain. "Man's work."

"It is."

"They are a foul kind."

"A slow-spreading poison," lamented the wolf. "In every wood, traipsing every glade. They strip everything good from the land and leave behind starvation and rot. I am not the first who will die by their hand."

The deer's tail drooped morosely. He had not seen his second spring, and already man was a fixed point in his life. As routine as the July thunderstorms and the August midges, the hunting season would come. The buck could go no further north to escape it; Canada was the home of the moose and elk, not of the mule deer. "Is there nothing that they won't take from us?" "The stars," rasped the wolf. He turned his gaze to the sky. "It is the only thing that they will never reach. The day the humans pluck the stars from our night is the day the world will unravel."

"Do you think that it will ever happen?"

"There are many things that have happened that I thought never would." The wolf strained feebly against the saw-toothed metal. "When I was a pup, I thought that the pine over the riverbend would never fall. That tree had been there since before my grandfather's great-grandfather was whelped. But during my fifth year, the rains swelled the river until it burst from its banks and washed away the soil. The current was so fierce that it swept away all traces of what had been. Nothing is exempt from change."

"The stars are. You said so."

"No, I said that humans will not take them from us."

"You're spouting nonsense!"

The wolf nodded upwards. "The stars spin across the sky every night. Someday they may become jaded and decide to take another path. Some have leapt down to earth and never

returned. They might all decide to follow."

"A ridiculous notion," the deer groused.

The wolf stretched out, trying to find a comfortable position. He winced as the chain scraped across the rocky shale. "Artificiality is encroaching on us. The trees are flattened to pave roads, the rivers are dammed, the air becomes smoggy, and barbed wire fences in the thickets that once grew freely. The wild will reclaim it all, one day, but until then, the enemy of my enemy is my friend. We will appreciate together what we have that has not yet been stolen."

The credibility of the wolf was doubtful to the buck, but he remained where he was anyway, even as the wind blustered, kicking up the snow in curling fem fiddlehead patterns. The buck shivered, prancing indecisively. His hindbrain told him to seek shelter, but he could not force himself to leave the wolf, whose careworn appearance was crystallized under the silvery, frostbitten light of the moon. A mournful beauty was he, like a statue left to crumble in the ruins of some ancient woodland sanctuary.

"The temperature is dropping," the buck said, in the manner of someone justifying scruples of dubious quality. Guilt, with a touch of tetchiness. The wolf saw through the buck's offhandedness. "Do not stay here for my sake."

"But you'll be dead by morning."

"So? That is no reason for you to be, too." The wolf's black eyes shone with a thousand diamonds, his face still turned to the sky.

"My bones will go to the earth, but my heart will leap up to the star belts to run a thousand strong with my kin. Our destination is Uridim- the wolf-star. You will not know it, but your sire may, if he journeyed here from the southern meadows. Uridim is not visible as far north as this, but I have seen it once when I was a dispersal freshly outcast from my father's pack, and travelled to the south. I saw Uridim for only one night before I returned here to the MacKenzie, but it was a sight that I have never forgotten.

Now I will never again go without its brightness."

The buck stepped back, uneasy. "You sound almost as if you're looking forward to it."

"I never said that." The wolf shifted again, groaning lowly in pain. He knew well that his time was drawing to a close, and he wished for the moment in which he closed his eyes for the final time to be privatized, so he made the decision to ask for the buck's prompt departure. "But I am not in distress over it, either. Now, go on along to your family. An admirable quality of yearling like yourself has no business catching his death of the cold." The buck blinked in surprise at the dismissal. In the moment, he did not realize why he was being snubbed.

"Oh. Alright. I-I guess I'll go, then."

The wolf dipped his head in farewell. "Goodnight, brother buck."

"You'll be fine here, then? You're sure?"

"I am. I would like to be alone now, though I have enjoyed your company. See to your own needs, and leave me to sleep."

It was impossible to see the carcass through the unkindness of winter-starved ravens the next morning. There were only brief glimpses of bones, scrimshawed by plucking beaks, and tattered rags of fur. Two dull eyes stared sightlessly up at a sky with not a star to be seen.

The buck turned away and tried to ignore the pervading sense of loss that followed him throughout the rest of the day.



Ceci holes
Asiah Curry
Digital Illustration

About Larry

by Mike Warden

Susan paused in the doorway of the small room. She could see her mother inside, seated in an upholstered chair and dabbing at her eyes with a handkerchief. The furniture in the room was good oak. And the room was decorated in colors that were tasteful and understated. But to Susan, the room still looked unmistakably like what it was, an office in a funeral home. She crossed the room and leaned to kiss the older woman on the cheek.

"Mother," she said.

"Susan," said her mother, reaching for her daughter's hand. Susan held it for a moment and then took a seat.

"Mother, I'm so sorry about Larry. I tried to book an earlier flight, but with the holidays" ...

Her mother touched her eyes with her handkerchief again. "I still can't believe it. I still can't believe that your brother took his own life. It's such a shock."

"It's a shock to all of us."

"He had been so much better. But after you and Alan moved

to Alaska, he stopped taking his medication. He refused to go to the doctor. He wouldn't leave the house. And, finally, he wouldn't leave his room."

"I know."

"I keep thinking about all the living that he will never do, about all that he will miss. If only we'd known what he was thinking that night."

"There's no telling what was going through his mind, Mother. You can't predict someone's actions when he has that kind of problem."

"He was never the same after you left, Susan, never."

"Yes, you said that on the phone."

"Your sister was just beside herself on the night that it happened, on Wednesday night. Larry refused to go to the hospital. She tried to talk to him. She tried everything she could think of to get him help."

"Where is Belinda? She should be here."

"She couldn't come. Don had to work in the fields because bad weather's coming. And Belinda didn't have anyone to watch the baby."

Susan wanted to say, "That sounds like one of her typical excuses." But she swallowed her words. Instead she said, "Mother, is there anything that I can do for you right now?"

Her mother just shook her head. "No, thank you, dear. I'm just sorry you had to make that long flight after just getting back from your vacation."

"It's nothing, Mother. These things happen."

"You and your brother were so close. I can't help thinking that if he could have heard your voice that maybe it would have made all the difference."

"Well, we'll never know."

"That night it happened, that Wednesday night, Belinda said, 'If Larry doesn't talk to Susan tonight, he won't be alive in the morning.'"

"Mother, please."

"She said that she must have left twenty messages for you on Wednesday."

"I checked my messages at the airport in Seattle. And then I called her right away. It was all over by then."

"She said that she knew it didn't do any good to keep calling if you weren't receiving her messages. But she was desperate because she knew that you were Larry's last hope."

There was a long pause. Susan could hear the ticking of the clock on the wall. And then her mother said, "Susan, do you think that Larry would be alive if you had spoken to him?"

"How the hell do I know?" Susan said. Then she softened her tone.

"Mother, I'm sorry. Larry was my brother and I loved him. But I can't change what has happened. None of us can. What we need to think about now is how to get through this."

"I'm sorry too. It's just that I can't help thinking about Larry. I think about how much he depended upon you, especially after he got sick. I know that you and Belinda aren't that close, that you

don't always see eye to eye. I'm hoping that this will somehow bring you two together. You know, she did everything for Larry after you left."

"That's what she says now. Are you sure that she did quite as much as that?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that Larry couldn't depend on Belinda for anything. It was always me. I called Larry and urged him to keep his doctor's appointments. I tried to talk him into taking his medication. He'd call me in the middle of the night. And by the time he'd hung up, he would seem better. But a few days later, it would start all over again. I mean, I cared but I got tired. Anybody would. "I tried to help him. And I hate to say this, but I'm the only one who did. Where was Belinda?"

"She lived twenty minutes away but was never available. She acted like I was supposed to cure Larry. Everybody did. If I was a psychiatrist, I'd hang out my damn shingle."

"Don't be mad at Belinda. I know she embroiders the truth sometimes, but she's a good girl. She'd never lie about Larry. I'm sorry to keep going on about this, but there are so many things that I don't understand. I don't understand why medication helps some people like Larry but not others. I don't understand why he couldn't wait one more day. One day can make so much difference sometimes."

"And there's one more thing that I don't understand. Belinda tried to reach you all day Wednesday after we found how bad Larry was. She even called your neighbors, the ones I met when I visited you, the ones who send Christmas cards to me."

"They said that you had gotten home late Monday night, not Wednesday. They said that they'd seen you, talked to you. That means that you were home when Belinda called, when the messages came. So I'm asking you, why didn't you call Larry like Belinda asked you to do? Why didn't you call your brother?"

Lemon Trees

Elizabeth Bailey-Smith
Photography

Grief

by Chloe Robinson

I can almost feel the brokenness of your soul
And touch the scars of your heart
The pain in your eyes is heavy I can tell
The cuts that are in your mind hurt and bleed
Your emotions have been bruised and battered
The bags under your eyes say it all
Your mental health is infected with grief
Your heart fragmented
Your bones in agony
I can't begin to express the pain I see in you
How long must we wait
How long must we suffer
How long must this pain continue
O God my God How long?
Even Though you stand by us
The sorrow seeps into our soul's
And the darkness is growing
Our burdens lay heavy
But you O God are my refuge and place of safety
You stand firm and have never wavered
You take our burdens from us
So we might have rest in you My God
O God my God
though this pain may continue
You are our healer and savior
And you stand firm forever



The Velvet Gentleman

by P. Suess

I listened to the velvet gentleman,
his eloquence performed
in smoking rooms and grand saloons –
the dance: zarabanda.
Pondering through azure haze,
wondering why shy Merope
I could not see
among the cold blue Pleiades'
mist-censured clouds –
apparent apparitions,
celestial velvet visions
holding floating stars all
within a silver-sparkled parasol
spinning as a gentle swirling snow.
With the blushing blue Pleiad
we slowly spun a sarabande
to the *Gymnopédies* –
Merope, me and Satie

Vegas

Elizabeth Bailey-Smith

Photography



Untitled

Rylin Huie
Mixed Media

Nasa

by Chloe Robinson

National Aeronautical Space Administration
The magnificent times of this glorious nation
Gone to the moon in 1969
The first steps in a very new time

Artemis 2 going to the moon
A new colony will be built there soon
In September '25
It will be a unique time to be alive

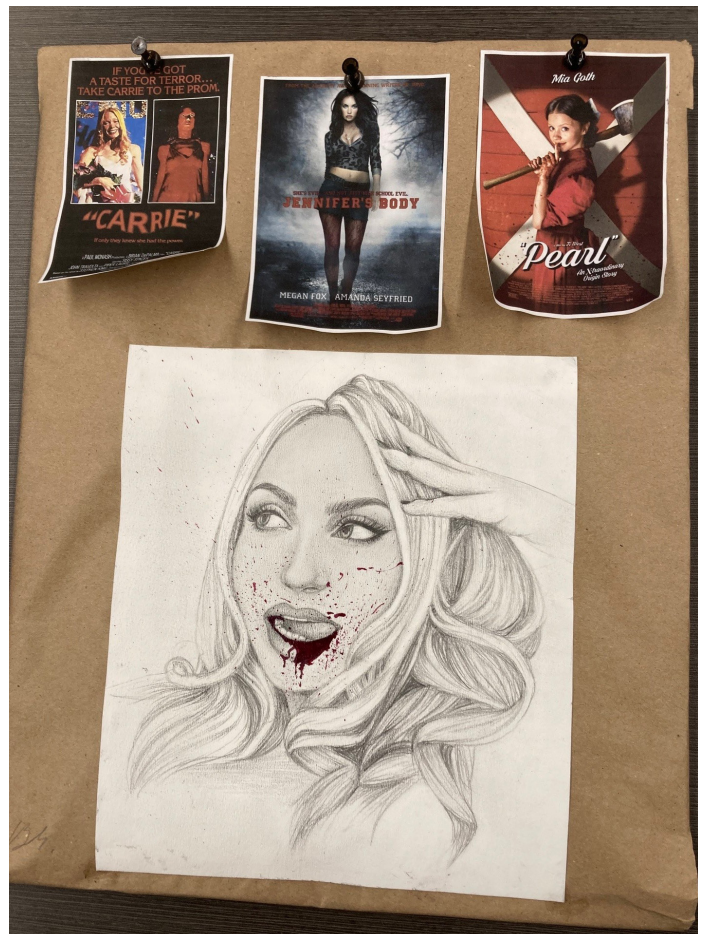
Building rockets
Launching projects
Training astronauts
More than ever thought

First to space and then the moon
Now to Mars to the Milky Way soon
Artemis 2 is leading the way
It is the project of today

These are the missions astronauts will do
Perhaps it could even be you
National Aeronautical Space Administration
To the moon and beyond

Final Girl

Mixed Media



Brooke McGovern

Seeing In Color

Colored Pencil



The Hitchhiker

by Mike Warden

If Susan had just kept her mouth shut, he wouldn't have hit her. And if he hadn't hit her, he wouldn't have gone for a long drive to cool off. And if he hadn't gone for a drive, he wouldn't have been playing the radio. And if he hadn't been playing the radio, the radio wouldn't have gone dead - just like that -

while Grace Slick was halfway through Somebody to Love. And if the radio hadn't stopped working and, maybe, if he hadn't drunk a six pack along the way, he wouldn't have started to get sleepy. And if he hadn't started to get sleepy, he wouldn't have stopped to pick up a hitchhiker in order to have somebody to talk to so that he could keep awake.

Picking up hitchhikers was dangerous. He knew that. But he looked over at the guy as he moved around the headlights and towards the passenger door. He was small. He looked more like a kid although the face was middle-aged. He'd be no trouble.

Derek Jones had always wished that he had been born in the SO's. He wished that he had come of age in the days of Woodstock. A rock star, that's what he should have been. That was the life that he had deserved. He might have been another Jim Morrison or Robert Plant. Or he might have played the guitar like Jimi Hendrix or the bass like Jack Bruce. He thought about the places that he might have gone. He thought about the fame and the money and the women. Beautiful women, not like his wife.

Women who knew their places and kept their mouths shut.

The hitchhiker had looked pale in the headlights but as he climbed into the pickup Derek saw that he

was as brown as a berry as if he had been hitchhiking under the summer sun for days and days. He really was a small man, tiny, like a doll. He was wearing a hat like Humphrey Bogart wore in those movies that his old man used to watch late at night.

"Please to meet you," the man said extending his hand, a hand that looked soft but whose grip was surprisingly strong.

"Meetcha," said Derek. "Derek Jones."

"My name is Mikhail."

"Mikhail what?"

"Just Mikhail."

Mikhail? What kind of name was that, Derek wondered, Russian? And was there a trace of an accent?

"Oh, great!" he thought. "A foreigner! Probably one of those troublemakers from another country!"

For the first few miles, they were both quiet. Derek started to reach for the radio and then he remembered. Instead, he reached for the air conditioner and turned it up a bit. It was hot in the truck.

The radio was quiet but there was a song playing in his head. It was a song that he knew very well but, as sometimes happened, he couldn't place it. He couldn't remember the name of the song. He couldn't remember the lyrics or group that had recorded it. He knew that he should have remembered all these things but somehow, he couldn't. But the beat kept playing and playing in his head. It opened with a conga drum and with a snare and a hi-hat.

It had a samba beat that sounded Brazilian. It was a dark song. And then something came over him, a wave of panic. Suddenly, he wished fervently that he had stayed at home. He wished that he had not taken the truck for a drive, that he had not picked up a hitchhiker.

For a space of time that was less than ten seconds but that seemed like hours, he thought of aiming the truck for the massive oak that stood just ahead on the passenger's side. He thought of opening his door and rolling out onto the road and, if he could still walk, diving into the tall rows of cornstalks that bordered the road. He knew that it might kill him but that it would be a clean death in the dark and that was better than ... better than what? He didn't know. He didn't know what was wrong with him. And then, the spell was broken. It was broken by the sound of Mikhail's voice.

"What do you do for a living, sir?" said Mikhail.

"I work in a factory. Or, I did work in a factory."

"You've left your place of employment?"

"You might say that. You might say that my supervisor and I had a disagreement."

"Oh, I'm so sorry to hear that."

"It was like this. I accidentally dropped a box from the upper level. My boss was down below. It missed him so I don't know what he got so bent out of shape about. But he came upstairs yelling and one thing led to another. I told him that next time I'd get a better aim. Then we both started yelling. And then I gave him a shove and he fired me."

"That's unfortunate."

"So, it wasn't my fault. Or, at least, it wasn't all my fault. And then, when I told my wife about it, she got all bent of shape. Instead of being on my side, all she did was whine about what we were going to do for money, as if I knew. I had to blow off some steam and so I decided to take a drive."

"A wise decision, I think."

"So, you think I'm not to blame?"

"That's a complicated question. I think, really, that everyone is to blame in any kind of altercation, even the seemingly innocent. There's a scripture in the Bible about visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the sons. Someone always has to pay."

"You mean, the kids have to pay for something that happened before they were born? That's crazy!"

Mikhail shrugged.

"It's happened many times in history. Take the Second World War or your own Civil War. It wasn't only the defeated who suffered. The victors suffered too, the civilians, the ordinary people, if not during the war then perhaps years and years afterwards."

"I don't get you. Why should they suffer, regular people, if they didn't do anything wrong?"

"The wealth of nations, the wealth that its citizens enjoy is sometimes built upon the backs of people whose lands have been stolen. In America, it was built upon the backs of slaves. The people whose lands were conquered and the slaves, they did nothing wrong either."

"So, were there a lot of people who did that, what you said, who

paid for what somebody else did?"

"Oh many! There is a long list of them - artists, generals, kings and queens. There were, for instance, the Romanovs."

"Who's that?"

"Nicholas. Romanov was the last czar of all the Russias. He was executed in a basement in 1918 along with his wife, his four beautiful daughters and his lame son."

"Say, that's sad !"

"Very sad. But for generations the Romanovs had worn crowns inlaid with diamonds and emeralds and pearls and had eaten their dinners from gold plates while the peasants went hungry."

"Is that so?"

"And then there are your presidents. There was President Kennedy, for instance. His father, Joseph, was the ambassador to England, an anti-Semite, an admirer of Adolph Hitler, a man who was afraid that one of his daughters was promiscuous so he had her lobotomized so that she couldn't harm his sons' political careers."

"Now, wait a minute!" said Derek.

"The iniquity of the fathers, remember?"

"Say, what's your racket, anyway?"

"Pardon me?"

"What kind of job do you do?"

"You might say that my position is accounts receivable. But, right now I'm just traveling across the country, observing."

"Observing what?"

"Well, at the moment, I'm observing your attitude regarding your wife and your supervisor. It seems as though you believe that there is a set of rules for you and a set for everyone else."

"So, you're adding me to your list? Well, I'll tell you what. I'm not going to take any crap, not from Susan and not from the jerk at the factory. And I don't need any advice from you."

"Oh, it's late for advice. I was just assessing your character and thinking of some of the things that you have done."

Derek adjusted the air conditioning again to high. It was very hot in the cab. It was not the damp heat of an Illinois summer night. It felt like a baked heat, like the baked heat of the desert.

"Yeah? Well, I could do a lot of things," Derek said. "I could pull over and put you out in the middle of nowhere!"

"You could but you won't."

Mikhail's voice was light and untroubled. The tone was that of one who was very sure of himself.

Derek turned towards his passenger, about to swear at him, and then froze. Mikhail was smiling. It was a broad smile that somehow reminded Derek of a dead fish. Derek's anger dissipated and, despite the heat, a chill rippled through him.

"And then, there was the \$20.00 that you stole from your mother-in-law's handbag."

"How do you know about that?"

"Oh, I have my ways."

"Hey, I needed gas money. I'm going to pay her back."

"Oh yes. You're going to pay."

"So, you're saying that you're here to collect, huh? Is that it? You're here to collect from me? Well, I'll tell you something. My old man wasn't the greatest but he never did anything like those others you talked about."

"Oh, but I'm not here because of your father. I'm here because of you. And since you never had any children, I'm afraid we'll have to settle your account tonight. It's a very large one."

Derek didn't answer. He didn't know what to say. He didn't want to talk. He didn't want to think. He only wanted to stop hearing Mikhail's voice. He only wanted the ride to end.

He decided to try the radio again.

"I'll put on some music," Derek said. "Anything's better than talking to you." He turned on the radio. The call letters of a station appeared, but there was no sound. He turned up the volume knob and then moved the tuning dial through the stations but, again, there was only silence.

He sighed and turned the radio off.

"Damn! I wish the radio worked!" he mumbled, more to himself than to Mikhail.

"Here, let me try it."

"What do you know about radios?_ I'm telling you, it's broken!"

"Please. I have a way with these things. It's one of my gifts."

Mikhail turned on the radio. And the music came, the music that had played in Derek's mind earlier -the conga, the snare and the hi-hat, the samba beat. And he recognized Mick Jagger's voice and remembered the lyrics and the name of the song at last.

"As heads is tails, just call me Lucifer cause I'm in need of some restraint. So, if you meet me have some courtesy, have some sympathy and some taste. Use all your well-learned politesse or I'll lay your soul to waste."

And then Derek knew everything. He turned to look at his passenger. Mikhail had taken off his hat.

The small delicate horns that protruded from his coarse dark hair looked as though they were made of ivory or, perhaps, of china like the cups and saucers at Susan's mother's house. Mikhail smiled again and his long tongue flicked at Derek. And then he opened his mouth very wide and a wave of warmth blew out of it. And Derek knew that Mikhail was the source of the heat in the truck. His small body was a furnace and out of that furnace blew a flash of fire. It was the last thing that Derek ever saw.





ARTS & CRAFTS

Arts & Crafts

Selena Donovan

Digital Art / Adobe Illustrator

Realization

Aleah Gore

Pencil Drawing



The Coyote in the Field

by Lily Owen

I was once a passenger down a lonely country road. I happened to glance out of my window, and caught sight of a grey-dun smudge streaking across the empty field to my right. At first glance, it was greyhound-swift, exulting in the wind rushing through its fur. A coyote, I realized. Not an uncommon sight, but a momentary novelty nonetheless.

I laughed and pointed, beaming. What a happy day.

Ignorance, in this case, was bliss. Over the muffled chug of the automotive engine, I heard the screech of tires' yaw marks. The quarry had been spotted.

I looked again to see a man vaulting out of his truck, swinging himself over the side of the bed to unlock a row of kennels bolted to the back of the cab. A quartet of dogs burst from their holdings and bounded into the field. I realized, with horror and outrage warring inside of me, what the man meant for his dogs to do.

The hounds sprang into action as if having been assigned to run down a fleeing convict. Their excited cries carried over the expanse of the winter-dead grass.

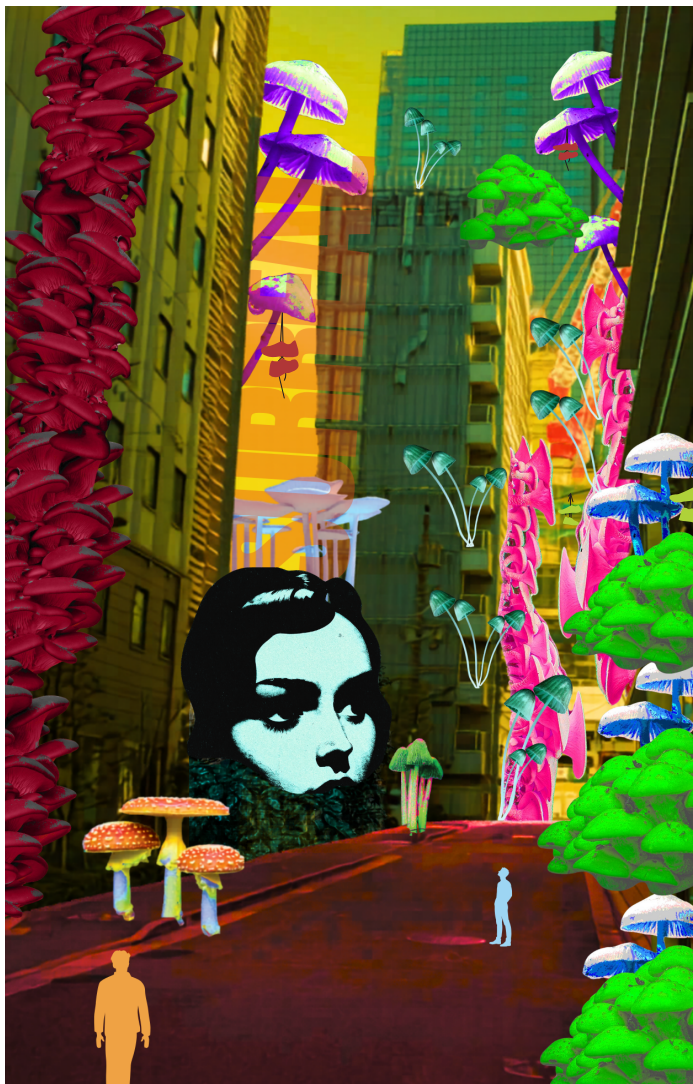
There was nothing to be done as the coyote ran for his life. He was aiming for the ditch that furrowed through the edge of the treeline up ahead, where the field ended and the woods began. If he could make it there, he could plunge into the icy slurry of the creek and fight through the clotted water-weeds to wash his scent from his fur. This would confuse the dogs, he knew, for they were as stupid as he was clever. Then he could weasel away into the thickets where the dogs could not follow, through the burrs and thorns that his coarse pelt would protect him against.

But there were meters left to go until then. The coyote was hard-pressed, long-hunted, harried- begging by whatever gods that desperate creatures pray to for survival.

I never saw the end of the chase. I could not say whether or not the hunt ended in fratricide, with brother domesticated bringing down the brother wild still, or if the coyote was fueled by his instinct to live, lending him speed.

People say that coyotes are pests, nuisances- that they are good only for their fur and to eat away the death that the buzzards fight them for. But the coyote doesn't know not to go after the chickens. He doesn't understand why the traps and wires are there to ensnare him, or why the poison tastes so bitter. He is just hungry. He is just an animal, and he was here long before we were.

He deserves for his last moments to not be of fear, to not be of gnashing, tearing teeth and gleeful baying. Why can we not be benevolent to him? Why must he be dead to have any sort of value? Let him trot freely through his own backyard without fear of a threat to his life; he means us no harm directly. We should not mean him harm, either.



Letter to Love

by P. Suess

Love's silken lock — a sanctuary,
youth's immortal balm,
once sustained my heart
embraced with gentle passion
and made my course afresh
lade with lavish tenderness
whose wonders are blessed by
the whims of young lovers and lies.

Slumbered now away
among its many melodies
from betrayal's cold soliloquies
to memory's silken sanctuary.

Till flame rejoins again
upon the ashen embers of
love let to fall
once more — then
love holds my breath when
with a whisper
I think of you — Love

Magic Mushrooms

Asia Curry

Digital Illustration / Adobe Illustrator/PS



The Betz Family Sphere

Selena Donovan

Digital Illustration / Adobe Illustrator

Artist Statements

Elizabeth Bailey-Smith

Photography

Each piece is a photograph.

I capture simple moments of places or nature that make me smile, think, or make me look twice.

Sometimes, I walk down the sidewalk – stop, take a few steps back and take a picture to be able to relive the moment.

Asiah Curry

Crossing Borders

I used natural tones mimicking the way water meets land.

My art work is meant to leave my viewers wondering, seeking, searching for the “whys” or the “hows” of the world. My work allows for the water to wash away the turmoil of the land.

This piece emphasizes the cycle of life. No rhythm or reason.

Michelle Arriaga

Poetry

“This poem was written about the verbal, emotional, and physical abuse I endured during a toxic relationship. The result of the abuse has left physical disfigurement and PTSD that I live with daily. I was lost, but I finally found MYSELF again. I hope this poem reaches out to others and gives them the strength to break the cycle of domestic abuse.”

Chole Robinson

Poetry

“I wrote this (Everything to Nothing) when I was on a medication for anxiety and depression. It made me numb, but I needed it for a season of my life. I wrote this poem (Disorder) when I was dealing with some mental health challenges. I wrote this poem (Nasa) for a school project. I had to present what I had learned about space exploration in a creative way. Though I wrote this poem (Grief) after someone in my youth group passed away, I write this for anyone who is going through a loss. Grief is hard. But knowing there are others going through the same thing can make you feel less alone.”

Axson Brotherton

Ink Pen

“It’s a cross-hatching drawing of the barbershop BURGs in West Frankfort.”

General Submission Information:

Everyone in the Rend Lake College district may submit work.

You keep copyright to your work.

To improve your chances of acceptance:

Carefully follow the specific guidelines relevant to your submission.

- Be original
- Proof carefully and edit
- All Fiction/Poetry/Non-Fiction submissions must be typed /in 12-point type/ in Rich Text Format.

Submission Deadlines:

Submissions entered by the deadline will be eligible for publication in the Spring issue of the magazine.

Note: Check specific Contest Guidelines and Deadlines as these may differ from general submissions.

The magazine is not responsible for submissions that do not reach us for whatever reason. It is advisable for writers to verify that submissions have been received.

Writers whose manuscripts are chosen for publication will be notified by e-mail. Be very certain that your e-mail address is correct on the manuscript.

Fiction/NonFiction Submission Guidelines:

Submit short fiction/nonfiction (2000 words or less).

Nonfiction may take the form of Creative Nonfiction or Critical Essays.

Submissions **MUST** be typed (ds, 12 point, Times New Roman)

You may submit more than one work at a time, but all should total 2000 words or less. Longer submissions will still be read, but the possibility of acceptance may be impacted.

Submissions must be original.

Submissions must include your name, address, Warrior Tag # (if you are a current student), e-mail address and approximate word count of the manuscript.

The story or nonfiction essay title and page number must appear on each page of your submission.

Submissions will be accepted both electronically and in hard-copy form.

Hard Copy Submissions:

- Should use standard white paper/black ink
- Should follow the general fiction/nonfiction guidelines above
- Each story or essay must be stapled together

If more than one story or essay is submitted, each of your stories or essays must be individually stapled. You must provide a cover sheet with the following information: (Story/Essay titles -- with the word count of each-- your name, address, Warrior Tag number, and e-mail address.) The cover sheet should be placed on top of the manuscript and all held together with a binder clip. The manuscript should be delivered to the following addresses:

For Fiction:

Jessica Bertolozzi
North Oasis 121
Rend Lake College
Ina, IL 62846

For Nonfiction:

Rebecca Biggs
North Oasis 147
Rend Lake College
Ina, IL 62846

Electronic Submissions:

- Submissions should be in Rich Text format.
- You must provide a cover sheet with the following information: (Story titles -- with the word count of each-- your name, address, Warrior Tag number, and e-mail address.
- Follow all relevant guidelines above.
- Send submissions to the following e-mail address:

Fiction: bertolozzij@rlc.edu

Nonfiction: biggs@rlc.edu

Poetry Submission Guidelines:

No limit is placed on the number of poems you may submit, but a good general guideline is three. No limit is placed on word count.

Submissions must be typed, single-spaced, in 12 point type, using Times New Roman.

Submissions must be original. Submissions must include your name, address, Warrior Tag # (if you are a current student), e-mail address and approximate word count of the manuscript. The poem title and page number must appear on each page of your submission.

Submissions will be accepted both electronically and in hard copy form.

Hard Copy Submissions:

- You should use standard white paper/black ink
- If a poem is over one page long, please staple the pages together.

You must provide a cover sheet with the following information:

(Poem titles -- with the word count of each-- your name, address, Warrior Tag number, and e-mail address.) The cover sheet should be placed on top of the manuscript and all held together with a binder clip. The manuscript should be delivered to the following address:

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Warrior Tag number, and e-mail address.

- Follow all relevant guidelines above.

- Send submissions to the following e-mail address:

bertolozzij@rlc.edu

Playwriting Submission Guidelines:

The play should be short, running 6-8 minutes or so in length. The play may be a comedy or drama as long as it has a beginning, middle, and ending. The play needs to follow Aristotle's "Three Unities":

- Unity of time (only a short span of time - no episodes)
- Unity of place (only one setting: a living room or a gymnasium, kitchen, etc.)
- Unity of action (only one plot - multiple plots will complicate the play too much)

There must be a crisis that is happening or has just happened. All characters need to be named in the script somehow (either they introduce themselves or others identify them) All characters need to be developed and reveal something about their personalities, motivations, etc. All characters need to serve a purpose. A twist at the end of the plot is often a neat device that may teach a lesson or surprise the audience. The play needs to provide a message of some sort to the audience. In order to save room on paper, the play needs to be formatted with the characters' names all in caps, and to the left of the dialogue. The dialogue should be tabbed over from the names about 5 or so spaces:

JOE: I am having trouble, Jill!

JILL: Really? What kind of trouble, Joe?

JOE: (Sits down with head in hands)

I lost my homework, my car keys, my cell phone, and my dog.

JILL: Yes, I'd say you're having trouble.

Stage directions (what the characters DO during their dialogue) must be set off with parentheses so show they are not spoken.

Questions or submissions (in MS Word) should be sent to:

Tracey Webb

webbt@rlc.edu

618-437-5321, Ext. 1295

General Graphic Design Submission Guidelines:

All artwork must arrive at our offices on or before the published deadline. High-res digital image (300 dpi at 8½" x 10") entries should be sent as JPG, TIF or PDF files preferred. If work is 3 dimensional, photograph the work and submit electronic file. Each submission must be labeled with "Designer - Title" All submissions must include in the top right corner of the document (or on a separate cover page/in the body of the email for design piece):

-Designer's name

-Title of the work

-Designer's contact info (email, address, phone)

1. Email your work to Tarantino@rlc.edu

- In the subject line, type your name and the submission's title.

- If you have more than one submission, type your name and

"Submissions" in the subject line.

- List all of the titles in the body of the email.

OR

2. Drop off hard copies or flash drive of your work in Tarantino mailbox in North Oasis, room 111.

Submission of two works into any one design category. You may enter as many times as you wish.

All forms of Designs are accepted, including but not limited to: posters, logos, ads, mailers, brochures, packaging, architecture, and more. If you do not follow the submission guidelines, your piece may not be considered for publication.

Fine-Arts Submission Guidelines:

All artwork must be sent to my email (davis@rlc.edu) on or before the published deadline. High-res digital image (300 dpi at 8½" x 10") entries should be sent as JPG, TIF, or PDF files preferred. If work is 3 dimensional, photograph the work and submit electronic file.

Each submission must be labeled with:

- Artist's name

- Title of the work

- Medium

- Artist's contact info (email, address, phone)

Email your work to bertolozzij@rlc.edu

- In the subject line, type your name and the submission's title.

- If you have more than one submission, type your name and

"Submissions" in the subject line.

- List all of the titles in the body of the email.

Photography Submissions Guidelines:

Please send digital files to bertolozzij@rlc.edu

Each submission must be labeled with:

- Artist's name

- Title of the work

- Medium

- Artist's contact info (email, address, phone)

Email your work to bertolozzij@rlc.edu

- In the subject line, type your name and the submission's title.

- If you have more than one submission, type your name and

"Submissions" in the subject line.

- List all of the titles in the body of the email.

The journal is under no obligation to accept submissions in a specific category if none are deemed appropriate for a particular issue.

