

SIERRA JOURNAL

2009-2010 | A Collection of Student Art

Associated Students of Sierra College
Sierra College Department of English
Contemporary Arts Club



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Sierra College Printing Department
Rocklin, California
Design and layout © 2010 Sierra Journal

Digital Edition

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Preface

The Sierra Journal is a collection of art published annually by the English Department of Sierra College for nearly forty years. This year, we are proud to present the first edition of the journal comprised entirely of and published through the efforts of students. We are proud, also, to include, in this edition of the journal, an unprecedented number of visual artworks, and we are deeply indebted to the Applied Art and Design Department for their invaluable advice and assistance in soliciting and presenting these pieces. We would like to express our sincere gratitude to our predecessors from whom we have inherited the privilege of presenting to you, the reader, this outstanding and representative body of work. This publication was made possible through the magnanimity of the Associated Students of Sierra College and the students they represent; it is a testament to the artistic achievement, the creativity, the caliber, and the diverse qualities of the students of Sierra College.

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Ephemera

Jeffrey Jay Moyers | Fiction

Shaded and secluded in the heart of mountains, one could watch petals drift from the rough as tributes of silken purple lavishing the earth. They fall in slow serenade and tilt each way in silence and diminished sunshine.

I sat on the bed, and then she leaned forward, inches from my nose, while whispering softly to me. I could see the outline of her face, but petals came down like slow water. “Please,” she asked me, and grabbed my hand to pull me to her, “please...”

So I was lurched to the side, and there was very little light until we got into the glow that spilled in from the hallway, where the bedroom door slightly sliced ajar. She pulled hard for a girl, a small girl whose head only rose to my chest. Swirls of white and purple descended around the nape of her neck and her pale freckled skin.

In the mountains the year before, I had stopped on the trail in what appeared to be an overgrown orchard. There were blossoms on the trees that drifted off like snow. I stayed until very late. I stayed until it grew dark, and I saw it everywhere. Now, this girl was holding my hand and needed me, or any other guy, to want her, or she became dead. She cried into me at night about being dead, not using tears, but waves, with her whole

cheeks getting wet. She had big blue eyes, and I guessed that’s how all that wet got out at once. To keep herself alive, to be anything to keep alive, she needed men like she needed more of a father or less of an uncle. We sat on her bed, and she hugged me very tightly. I watched the nighttime shine into her hair, said nothing, and she called me a good person for that. She also took my hand and put it on the back of her thigh, underneath her skirt. Every blossom falls differently, I suppose.

“I’ve felt all there is,” she whispered as she cried. “Please tell me you understand...”

And I said no and got up and left, which wasn’t easy because she clung hard.

The next time, I cared enough to softly brush some petals away that I might satisfy a curiosity. I was looking at a television screen. Disney characters moved around it, maybe Cinderella. “Watch,” said someone on the couch next to me, “you can see the ‘f’ word in the clouds.”

“For God’s sake, it’s a children’s movie, man.”

But it wasn’t. It was a punch that took part of a lifetime to land. That made it quite a haymaker. It landed when the saccharine sweets you were fed made your

belly hurt. When you realized you couldn't be all those things that "children's movies" called good or noble. When you realized, at times in your life, you were the villain of your own story. Then, if you were really smart, or lucky, or unlucky, you might realize that there's not even a you or a story, just pretty petals falling as they may. But before you got to that, you had to do your time crying on the bed and telling someone you'd felt everything there is to feel.

Cinderella is an adult movie.

I had opened up a newspaper one day and read a small aside in an article. It told me that a guy I had known since the first grade had died in his bed. Drug overdose. I nearly had to close the paper in disbelief but didn't and realized, by reading the article further, it'd happened nearly two years prior. I remember thinking a little too deeply about it. From ape, to human, to footnote. No. From nothing and back again.

"... Pretty nice." He whistled and waved a hand in front of my face, "Raymond. Come back."

I swept my fingers over my forehead and through my hair. The office, silent except for the ticking of an unseen clock and a bird chirping outside, was crowded with boxes of books. It felt coarse. It felt like somebody had been erasing vigorously in there.

"Hey space-case. I see you have characters, imagery... but where's the plot?"

Dancing images of purple and white and did somebody say something... "Hmm?"

"For the life of me I cannot find any sensible plot

to your story," the professor repeated while ruffling the papers about in futile search.

"Well it must be in there somewhere," I answered, while leaning over the desk as if to peak. He scanned the first page again through his wiry glasses.

"Raymond, there is no plot."

"Oh."

The two of us sat there looking at each other for a long moment.

"Do you understand what I'm saying? About how stories have a plot?"

"... Uh..."

"Okay, Ray. A plot is a series of events that lead up to the one big event, uh, of the story called the climax."

"Oh," I answered. I looked away toward the dingy window, to where the bird was singing. A little bird was underneath a bush, underneath a spider web. "Who came up with that?"

That response drew a smile and a small laugh, "Life, my friend. Plot is everywhere. Plot is all around you."

"Oh. So life is moving toward some big event?"

"What do you mean?"

"I don't know."

"There. You're doing it again, Raymond. Your eyes are glazing over. Where do you go when that happens?"

Nowhere.

Building,
Salton City, Ca
Joshua Clason
Photography



Bluebird

Adam H. Park | Poetry

In the vale, tar-dark night. Fen
creatures settle into the
muck along the hobo banks.
Below, the black vortex of

the Delta is suckling
the wharf. Bare boughs, raven's roost
cackling incantations
against the dying of the

day. Caw, caw, cawing out a
serenade. Fires alight
in the city. Bustle of noon
drowned by the ceaseless

cascade of moonfire. The
roost copse holds its breath and is
silent. Witching hour draws
up against restless silence

in the fen. A hush. A pause.
Distant pounding of rotor
whirl reawakens copse

caw. Sweeping halo melts tar.

The night-vision static
of spotlights blast the water-whipped
wharf. Meanwhile, the unblinking
laser-guided eye of the

urban nightingale keeps
watch over the dutiful,
consuming, pedestrian
city and fen. While the
roost cackles and caws and caws.

Antonia

Deanna Helsten | Digital Charcoal



Octave

James Cordas | Sculpture



Service with a Smile | Waitress

Joy Nocerino | Poetry

It stares at me with open mouth
Waiting for my tray of substance
 Rotten breath fuming stench
Drops of spittle spray onto my face
With particles of the food I had just served to him
My nostrils quiver
The sockets of my eyes arid
 Rotten skin lain upon the table
Shaved down pointed teeth
Mesmerized by blue tongue
 Rotten heart decayed by maggots
I fetch coffee, cream and two sugars
I smile with my lips, bile lurking near
I pray for darkness, eyes shut, silence
 Rotten

It stares at me with open mouth
 Rotten
Drop of spittle spray
On my face
Nostrils quiver
The sockets of my eyes arid
 Rotten
Shaved down pointed teeth
Mesmerized by blue tongue
 Rotten
I fetch it its coffee
I smile with my lips
I pray for its darkness
 Rotten

Morning Reverie

Juliana Lydell | Fiction

...Consciousness drips murkily into realization. My eyes disturb nothing as they open blankly. I blink in the bruised light of early morning.

Nothing moves.

Not even time.

Every day, for some providential reason I don't even care to know, it is allotted to me to wake up a minute before my anxieties do. My chest rises and falls independently of my brain; every limb is limp, pacified with rest. I feel gratitude all over and through our gutturally peaceful shell of blankets. Thoughts come in one or two words, cresting lazily and receding again. They are simple phrases through blurry lenses. Hazy instinct and residue of dreams lap up over me. I wonder if this is how animals get to live...if they dream.

I wonder if clarity has been a dwindling commodity since whatever this world is began.

Like, at first, maybe God used to lean down out of the clouds every so often and gave mankind the run-down on existence. He would explain things like octopi, and dreaming, and the nutritive qualities of plants, and why we need to eat, and that sick feeling in our stomachs when we've done something wrong and know we

have to tell someone about it but don't want to, and weeds, and why it feels good when we hold someone else's hand in ours. And everyone alive back then (not many, but enough) would sit on Mount Sinai together and stroke each other's hair as they listened, like it was the most natural thing in the world to see God leaning out of some clouds to talk to them. They could ask questions too, and He would answer. He would smile.

I figure they let it become so commonplace that they stopped anticipating it and just expected it, like what happens when two people get married and they don't feel as romantic towards each other after a while, but know that they have to seem like they do. After that, they stopped sitting down together to listen when God wanted to talk with them. Instead, they just kept cooking and hunting and gathering as usual, right through the whole day. They stopped looking up. God started leaning out of the clouds less and less frequently, and the group of listeners stroking each other's hair got smaller and smaller. He stopped leaning out of the clouds and just started whispering. Maybe it was because He didn't want them to see Him sad. Or maybe, it was a favor to us in the first place for Him to spend time with us like that,

Juliana Lydell is undecided about most things, including a college major. She enjoys coveting other people's house pets, playing keyboard and yowling in some band (The Dreaded Diamond), and reading first halves (exclusively) of books. Lately, she enjoys writing about the stark contrast between internal dialogue and verbal dialogue. She hopes to publish some sort of cohesive compilation of short stories sometime in the near future.

and we didn't want it. He was trying to get us to want it again, by noticing His absence. But the people back then probably didn't know it was a favor.

Groups of men and women started climbing the highest trees they could find and use all their voices together to try and imitate the dimensions of the way God's voice sounded. Through practice, they got pretty good at it. After a while, the others couldn't tell the difference between the people in the trees and their God in the clouds.

Maybe we've been in a perpetual state of forgetting the difference for centuries.

It's either that, or every generation runs the same course over and over again, speculating about the past. We hesitantly memorize our history books because no one alive now was there when anything important happened, to tell us that it really did.

The sheets rustle as I turn my body, swollen belly too, to lie on the side that lets me face you. I see that you shifted over the course of the night, darling. We fell asleep with our backs touching, and now, your puffy morning lips are parted inches from my shoulder. Your forearms end in fists, wrists touching as if tied together in front of you on your pillow. We are young enough to have smooth foreheads, but yours is especially smooth when you are sleeping. You dream about the baby, I think. Maybe your subconscious can hold it already, if you want to, both suspended in my amniotic fluid. Maybe your presence in my belly explains my minute of mercy in the morning. I can see your heartbeat in your neck.

I breathe more shallowly now, reluctantly acclimating to consciousness.

I won't wake you up.

Me, I dreamed about a woman miscarrying in a fast food restaurant. She was about to sit down with her husband and child at one of the tables, you know the tables that have a booth for two people on one side, and two swivel chairs on the other. The cloth with designs in primary colors, those who-knows-what-they-are kind of shapes sewn onto murky white fabric. Her husband and child were sitting in the booth, and the woman was leaning forward awkwardly against her pregnant belly, gathering her skirt up behind her legs to sit in one of the swivel chairs. Her expression changed. It changed under the fluorescent lights as she drew her hand forward, dazed. The hand was dripping with dark, wrong, woman blood.

It's funny—I have never felt that I was at someone's mercy before. Rather, almost constantly, I have felt that the world was at mine. I had intended, in what seems like a previous life now, to be quite ruthless with it.

I didn't mean to become a promise of permanence for anybody. Somebody, rather: he or she. I didn't want the nurse to tell me which, as she prodded my exposed belly, and my headache flushed under the sterile light. I could hear the clear jelly ooze out of the tube, and outside the room, there were hushed footsteps briskly attending to anonymous business in the hospital corridor. The nurse babbled on and on...to you, mostly. You

absorbed her into your patience, for me. I was thinking about how badly I wanted to touch the monitor.

A tiny limb presses against the inside of my stomach, as you, love, turn your face down into your pillow and sigh. Your arms, sleepy fists punctuating their ends, straighten in a rigid stretch, back arching - then, you liquefy again. Your right arm collapses into a drape over my chest.

There are only young trees complimenting the new house we rent, in this recently developed neighborhood. Our neighbors all live in houses that look almost exactly like ours, and their children will play with our baby in a few years, when it has a personality and a body outside of mine. Probably, the kids will all ride bikes together too, when our baby's not a baby anymore, and I will think it's too soon for it not to be a baby anymore. No trees are tall enough for people to shout from where we live, if they're trying to sound like God.

But we all have TV. We have radio towers now, and political offices. God is still behind the clouds, if that's where He has been this whole time. I like to think I would have been part of the group that had kept listening and stroking each other's hair on Mount Sinai, when God still talked, if I had been alive then. Before He left us to find Him in subtleties.

"I just had the weirdest dream," I hear, in a voice thick with sleep, through your pillow.

Morning reverie is swallowed quietly by the day, and I feel it ebbing away, as I stroke your hair.

"Tell me," I say, as I kiss your wrist.



Tulip Fog
Sherle Curtice
Photography

Daddy's Little Girl

Marc Nocerino | Poetry

She stands there,
perfect,
a cigarette dangling
half forgotten
from the corner of her mouth
slowly, as in a dream,
she reaches up, takes it in one hand
and absently flicks the filter
as an unnoticed ash drops to the
immaculate hardwood floor
a fleck or two sticking to
her rumpled black shift as they tumble

Grey smoke swirls against a backdrop
of iridescent red neon
which comes glaring in through
the open window
announcing itself as loud and brash
as the thousands of shouts and horns
and sirens and screams which
echo off the scarred concrete below
so many stories down and all around
but she doesn't even notice

as she lifts the glass in her other
hand up to her lips
and again she swallows deep
the amber liquid
and again there is no world around her

for it is a world full of liars and thieves
where friendships are bought and sold
at the price of popularity
a world where husbands cheat on their loving wives
and where daddies touch their little girls
in that secret place

The glass drops
shatters
as the mix of scotch whisky and
phenobarbital take effect
she slides slowly
almost gracefully
down to the cold floor
where the world of pitted concrete rape
can never hurt her again

Untitled

Sean Voegeli | Digital Pastel



Best Western

Nevada Inocencio | Poetry

strangers made
acquaintances

passing through me

in
and
out

changing my
interior

leaving me
in disarray.

they bring friends
of theirs
sometimes

only to take them
back again

walls like every other

what happens remains
unspoken of yet

my door is always
open

“Best Western” is the winner of the 2010 Sierra College poetry competition. Nevada Inocencio has written poetry for some four years and has, most recently, been inspired by the various English courses he’s taken during his tenure at Sierra College. He plans on transferring to CSU, Long Beach and majoring in mechanical engineering. Inocencio’s other interests include film production.

The Well Wisher

Steffani Crawford | Fiction

The sun beat its glorious heat upon the world below, smothering its occupants with its generosity. Many sweaty backs toiled in that heat, tending vegetables and fixing things. In this poor one-horse town, no one had the time for laziness. Everyone there knew the others' faces so well that they were all like family. However, that kind of warmth was enough to make a certain bedraggled boy happy for the clammy, cool atmosphere in which he sat.

Dull green eyes gazed toward the circle of light above and rested on the rock wall before the edge. The air he breathed was humid, damp, and cool. The sound of breathing echoed gaily around the cylindrical wall of stone; the very same stone wall that his head of tousled black hair rested against. Those dismal green eyes hid in the seclusion the long tangled mass kindly provided. The sun that shared its light with that small patch of sky failed to completely penetrate the shadows of the well. There was no familial love down here.

The boy shifted his sordid gaze down... more rock. He shifted his head on the rock behind him so his left cheek lay against the rough damp surface. Then he stared drearily at the black water at his side. He sat in putrid liquid that barely covered the tops of his rag-cov-

ered thighs. Under that water was a bowl-like mud pit that disagreeably coated him in its oozing slick self. The boy looked forward once more, trying not to think of the feeling against his cold clammy skin, pulled his legs in, and hugged his gritty wet knees to his chest. He could feel the granular texture of wet dirt on his bare arms. He listened. It was so quiet down here that he couldn't make out a single sound beyond the small splashes that he himself made. How long had he been there...? Considering the way his stomach felt like it would eat its way through his spine, it must have been more than a day, maybe two... But time didn't seem to pass down here, beyond the circle's getting dark, and light periodically. Was the silver darkness just cloud cover? Or was it actually sunless? Or was the sun shining so light and genially sharing its bright brightness with all but him?

Without warning, the stone wall inhospitably provided him with a harsh glaring light that made him cringe and tightly close his eyes in discomfort. Then, as he hid his face from the light, he heard a voice. It echoed eerily, and not the type of echo one would expect in the bottom of a well. No, this was like... a ghost, speaking directly into his head with a mostly intelligible voice

Steffani Crawford is an English major at Sierra College who dreams of writing works which will be remembered for generations to come. All of her characters, according to the author, come from a tiny piece of her heart and sometimes reflect one or another aspect of her self.

that he could sort of make out if he listened to it real hard. Not that he had ever heard a voice like that before. He didn't even want to now. So he did the natural thing and instinctively covered his ears to shut out the noise. All he caught before he plugged each ear with a finger was that it sounded like a bunch of people speaking together. After a few seconds, he was splashed with water and mud, which startled him enough to unplug his ears and jerk his upper body away from the direction the water was coming from. He, having forgotten about the wall behind him in his panic, ended up seeing stars as he smack his head against solid stone. All the while his ears, now able to hear once more, heard a princely heaping of curses from what could only be a masculine source. Grabbing the back of his head and pulling it back to his knees as if to curl up into a ball, the well-trapped boy let out a loud "Ow!"

The cursing stopped as whoever it was that had fallen down there with him noticed he was there. "Holy mother of...! Gerald, is that you? You look like a great heaping pile of shit, pardon my French."

What about your English? Gerald thought peeking up over his knee at his new companion, who was sitting on a rock that he hadn't remembered being there before. "You'd look just the same as me if *you* had been stuck at the bottom of a well for a day or two, Frederick." He added a nice amount of venom to his tone. Gerald didn't like being down here, and he didn't *care* what he looked like.

"A day or two!? Try more like a day or FOUR. Everyone's been in a right tizzy tryin' to find you. Awfully cool down here..." Four days... that meant... Four days of muddy water to drink, and no food to eat... not to mention what he'd done to the water... ugh, he didn't even want to think about it.

The boy in front of him was a good eighteen years of age with short, cropped auburn hair and dark brown puppy dog eyes. His mother said he was the town heart-throb; Gerald just thought he was a jackass. Rubbing the back of his throbbing noggin, he carefully leaned back against the wall and glared across from him. Yeah, it had been boring, annoying, and completely disgusting down there alone, and *maybe* sharing his misfortune with another would make him feel better, but why did it have to be *Him*?

Gerald stared at Frederick for a long while, seeing as there was nowhere else to look, before the subject of his disdain pulled out a piece of bread. "Glad I packed something for later." He grinned at Gerald evilly, but before he could eat the bread by himself, Gerald pounced on him sending muddy water and muck flying. It was food, he was starving, and there was food. He greedily ripped the prize from Frederick's surprised fingers and shoved half of it in his mouth before the bigger boy could react. He was still trying to swallow his huge mouthful without choking when he got a knee in his gut. Somehow managing to keep the food in his mouth from flying out along with all the wind in his lungs, he man-

aged to keep the rest tightly clutched in his hand. He hit the rock wall soon after, however, because he had defensively curled to protect both himself and the food he had received minimal damage. For the next several minutes Frederick tried to pry the bread from his grubby, little fingers and screamed at him to give it back like some evil cur after the turtle in its shell. In the end, by some miracle, Gerald, completely covered in mud, had finished the bread without losing so much as a crumb to the selfish bastard who had thought to horde it all for himself. Showed him right.

For a long time after, Frederick pretended he wasn't there, which suited Gerald just fine. He didn't have to listen to his loud mouth bragging about all the women he'd laid, or the people he maliciously tricked like the evil devil he was. However, he did find that his new companion was a mouth breather, which was extremely annoying in such short confines. As much as Gerald enjoyed this quiet time, it didn't last long. Gerald had to be thankful that Frederick lasted longer than five minutes; he never shut up for longer than a second any other time. "Damn, you think we'll be stuck down here forever? Wouldn't SOMEONE think to look in the God damn well?" Gerald didn't answer; he remained sulking and curled as far away from Frederick as he could get, which was a whole... two inches. Great. "You know, you could at least say somethin'. I mean, we're like family, right? You could at least try to be civil."

(continued on page 17)

Lily
Rachel Koszka | Photography



Gerald glared at him with baleful green eyes. “Didn’t anyone tell you that it’s not healthy to talk to yourself? You have no brothers down here.”

“I’m NOT talkin’ to myself; I’m talkin’ to YOU, and I do. He’s just extremely prissy right now.” Frederick glared at him, then looked at the circle of sky above them. “Anyway, what’d you wish for before the well ate you?”

“None of your bees wax.”

“Hmph. We may not have the link of blood, but family is family. You should treat us better. You’re such a prick. Damn Well... It must have a tummy ache.”

“Yeah, it ate you. I’m surprised it hasn’t barfed you up yet,” Gerald snapped.

“URGH! ALRIGHT! Stop being a jerk! Here I am TRYING to be nice, and you keep shoving it in my face!” Gerald went back to his silent glaring and didn’t respond. “Anyway, your mom’s worried sick.”

“What do you know of my mom? You should learn to mind your own business. What about your family? Like Amy and Tannry? You should worry about THEM.” Gerald’s father was dead, so it was his responsibility to protect his mom from this incubus. She may be a widow, but she wasn’t going to be marrying some playboy that was only a few years older than her son. Well, he hadn’t made any moves on her yet, but he had on plenty of other girls, and it never ended well. Plus, his mom seemed to fawn over him.

“Well, Tan’s completely lost without his over ob-

noxious playmate.” Frederick gave Gerald a meaningful look in case he didn’t understand who that was. “And Amy... Well, she’s down again. Seems a monster stole her heart and disappeared.” Gerald glared, “...Puh-lease, Amy’s only seven years old. She doesn’t think like that. Besides, it’s not like I decided, ‘Oh, let me go get eaten by the wishing well on the hill over there.’”

“Yeah, well, it doesn’t matter. You’re still eaten, so what do you plan to do? I mean, you can’t go work in the fields if you’re here, and since *we’re* not your family, no one is there to help your poor mother.”

“It’s none of your business, and I’ll find a way out.”

“Optimism is such a wonderful and terrible thing.”

“Shut up!” Gerald snapped and looked at the well’s opening. It was dark. “...So, what’d you wish for?”

“You first, I asked the same question already.”

“Ugh! Fine. I wished to get a million dollars so that I could pay someone else to do everything, and maybe then I could catch a break, and maybe leave this stupid place.”

“That’s selfish.” Frederick shifted to a more comfortable position in the rock beneath him.

“Hmph! Well, what did you wish for then? World peace?”

“...No...I wished for my dream to come true.”

“Your dream?”

“Yup, to bed every decent lookin’ women in town, starting with Hally-Joanne.” He looked extremely proud of that dream, which made something in Gerald just snap, like a dry twig. “WHAT THE HELL! Why did you wish for something so stupid when your sister’s chronically ill and your father’s off at war? Why didn’t you wish for Amy to get better!? Or for your dad to come home safe!?” Frederick glared at him and countered with, “Why didn’t you wish for a new father so you’re mom won’t be lonely? Or, how about YOU wish for my sister’s health since she’s YOUR sister too!”

“I Don’t WANT another father! And I WILL!” Gerald stood up face red, fists clinched, breathing fast. He looked up at the walls of his little prison and pulled a silver dollar out of his pocket. His father had given it to him as a keep-sake before he’d died. “Listen here Well! I know you ate me! And I know you probably don’t care, but this here’s my special coin, and I’m sure that if you can eat people, you must be magical. So maybe you can grant me this wish!” He dropped the coin into the dark water around his feet. “I wish that Amy would get better and never be sick again!” He said all that in a brazen voice, daring the well to do its worst to him while doing his best to ignore the selfish monster at his side.

He closed his eyes, put his arms over his face and tried not to cringe when the walls of the well lit up, and the sound of his own voice echoed like a ghost’s in his ears. The world seemed to spin and then it stopped. The light faded, but not by much. He felt a breeze on his

damp skin and a strong heat beating merrily on his head. Slowly, he opened his eyes and looked around. He was on a hillside, the loving breeze caressing his skin as the sun shared its brightness. An old fashioned well sat before him. Only the gritty mud and wetness of his clothes gave any sign that he had been below.

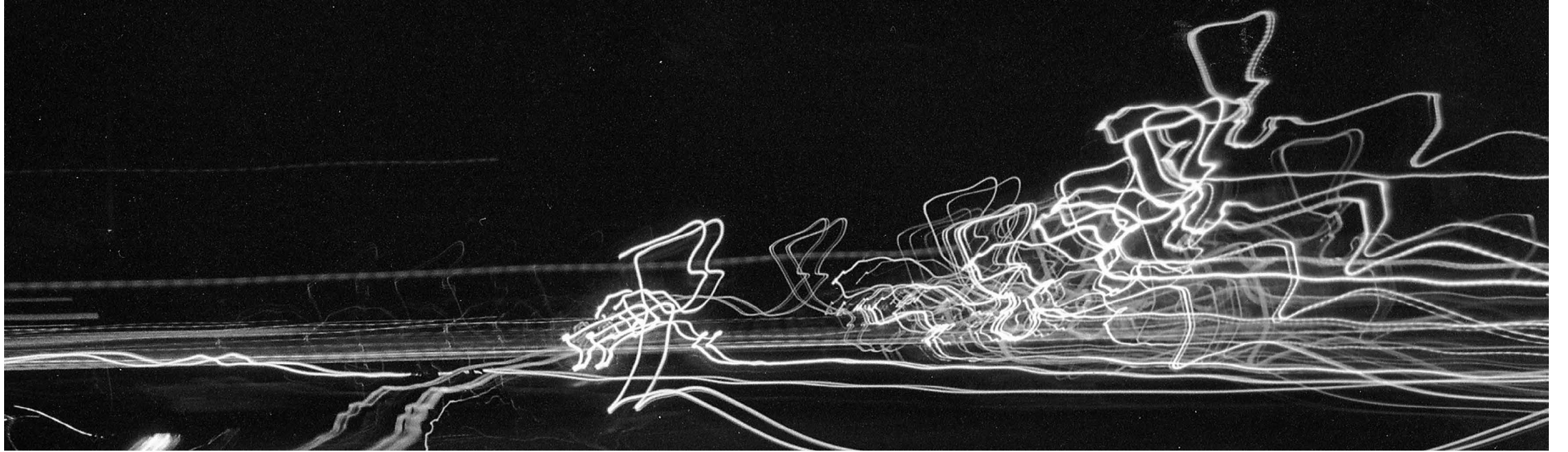
Stunned and confused, he just stared at the well until his mind seemed to click. He smiled and took a deep breath of fresh air, closed his eyes, and tilted his head toward the open sky. That was it... That was what was wrong. Now he understood. He opened his eyes and stared into the large expanse of free space around him and gave a small sigh, his earlier frustration gone. He felt so weightless, well, as much as a guy covered in mud could feel. He was free; the chains of his own making shattered. He looked at the well and nodded at it as if it were alive and could understand him. "Thank you. I hope my brother will be able to free himself as well."

With that, Gerald, subdued and peaceful, walked back down the hill toward the town. Life would be different now; he would work hard, not because he wanted to, but because they needed him to. His family needed him. Back home, everyone was happy to see him and asked him many questions. Little Amy, healthy and happy, asked him, "Where'd you go?"

He smiled at her, behind the mud on his youthful face. "I was lost, but now I'm found."

Drunk Driving
David Burns
Photography

Waving Lupines
Sherle Curtice
Photography



Grandmother, Changing Woman

Alisa R. Pierini | Poetry

She, like a rainbow
Is cloaked in many colors
Altering, changing
She wears a reflecting shawl
That mirrors the inside soul
She is Mother
Beatnik
Latina
Northern Cheyenne
Feminist of the living kind
She is Changing Woman
And I am the bud of her seed
I watch her dance
With the winds of her desires
Moving, shifting
Like a wave like water
Making its own path
Doing as she will
Impenitent
For she is
And I watch, I listen
And I begin to follow
I dance, not like her

But to my own inner cadence
As she has shown
Told me
Inside is where the song exists
She passes a shawl to me
Drapes me in its honesty
And it becomes me
*You can be
anything
you want to be*
Grandmother,
Changing Woman
Is she
And I am
a blossom
Of that tree
A Changing Woman
As I will
Be

Neon Rapist

James Cordas | Fiction

“The Fuck,” said Simone, eyes wide, mouth open.

Before Marcell could finish counting the red orbs in the windshield, they turned green or disappeared as the cars in front of the 1988 Ford Ranger let off their brakes.

The sign reading

Liquor

Liquor

Liquor

was flashing between red and pale white illuminations, w/ the red neons half burnt out.

Simone hit Marcell with the back of her hand while facing away from him.

She points carefully at Forest.

Forest is wearing a black trench coat and pissing on the corner store window.

As Fridolf turns to look, Forest spits into the puddle of urine still leaving his body.

“Blood,” says Simone.

Striving to Express Feeling and Vision

Chris Saavedra | Photography







Captain Gio

Melissa Bagwell | Poetry

The moon smiled,
for when the captain fell to sleep,
a thousand stars flowed from his mouth,
lighting the way for all that had been lost,
and the mermaids captured within his sails
sang songs so lovely
that even the serpent, with a thousand scars,
calmed his heart and cooled his fire,
for the mermaids' songs were no longer an enticement
but entirely of love,
and so the moon smiled, as the captain disappeared
into the mist of uncharted waters
with the finest company one could ever have,
God.

A Century of Achievement

Kile Marshall | Fiction

Wax and wane...

The best time to visit the steppes is in the middle of fall. The black-necked cranes swarm in, regal in some indefinable way. I like to look at the cranes in art, angular and petrified just before motion, alive in the best art. The very best Asian art lurks in our museums, or at least somewhere in the western world, hidden behind bulletproof glass. For some reason those ex-colony nations think that bigger economies are safer. Nick put several of them in the states, because nothing protects our nerves like the endless surveillance of Uncle Cam. But you rob a thing of intrinsic power when you remove it from its indigenous habitat. When you drag those dripping golden lines from the bamboo shoots and hide them in vaults, deep beneath the feet of stock advisers and overprotective parents.

As Bennett sat down to join me in a light lunch, she accused me of sedition.

I frowned and waited for the elaboration that would inevitably follow any such proclamation from such a verging psychotic iconoclast.

Her eyes flickering with soft rage, she snatched a steamed carrot and began to nibble on it before

explaining.

“You’re pulling us. Manipulating the building’s patients, I checked up. We did. They’re leaning towards Taiwan now.”

“The building?” I asked, politely spitting bits of broccoli into my napkin. This vegetarian waste was unpalatable in the face of mortality.

“In Pennsylvania,” she said. “Royersford.”

“Taiwan reminds me of Chicago,” I smiled. The venom in her eyes went out, and *I* knew she had completely written me off. Had to be done.

Bennett is the most humorless archanarchist I know. She used to be a manager at a McDonald’s. It had been a filthy branch—she’d been blind, and without realizing it, she let the place deteriorate. She managed to get an experimental gene therapy and fix her eyes, and when she finally saw what was in progress, it triggered something deep inside her. Call it pride, or anger. She changed the hiring practices, got the place spic-and-span, but it was still McDonald’s. So she quit and joined our organization. Call it a matter of pride. She still needs help seeing in the dark—at night, and in lowlight rooms.

Once a man—I don’t know how he knew me, but

Kile Marshall is an ecology major transferring to UC Santa Cruz in the fall, with a wide variety of interests including literature, art, politics, and philosophy. He is especially interested in recent history and the near future—where, in the artist’s view, science fiction is transforming into social reality. His writing focuses on the existential problems and social opportunities “created by life in our increasingly postmodern world.”

somehow I'm sure he did—stopped me on the street. A soft-spoken Mexican, he spoke to me, “The Tower of Babel is deep underground, and no one should ever see it. The things that have been buried are put into the past.”

He gave me a rabbit's foot and a duck's beak. I tossed them into a garbage truck and then immediately regretted it, but I didn't go back to look for them. Will Bennett kill me? Probably, I don't want to know. I'm not Christian, and I can't take that kind of threat. But I'm worried about the testing laboratory.

A lot of people who went over to the war colleges as students found a pattern hidden in the history. The first generation, sitting there, listening to those tirades of misguided patriotism, started to notice the underlying orchestration and uncovered a comprehensive theory of rhythmic harmony. It's all about China—the real cradle of civilization, so don't let that Aryan propaganda fool you. China, Korea, Japan, Taiwan. For me, it comes back to Taiwan. But just think about Emperor Xin. I don't think he was very charismatic, but he was able to conquer the world. That counts for something.

“That,” said Nick Robertson, as we revised the old stories of unification, “was the breakthrough in demand. Government works when it's in charge of defense, but people don't absolutely need it until it's in charge of maintaining the internal peace. When the government just ran the nation-state, it could always be discarded in favor of fluid anarchy. But once there were confederations, government became indispensable.”

“So?”

“Blessed are the peacemakers,” Nick said with a shake of his head. “What bullshit. Peace is a mechanism of control.”

In the end, that realization marked the beginning of one of the most creative, insightful periods in human history, and you will never hear about it. It's kind of tragic, especially since a lot of the initial thinkers died in the war, or soon afterwards. It wasn't until Nick recruited me that we really revived the effort and got the company underway. The company's founders were as oblivious to us as they were to the guy mowing the lawn outside. They valued aesthetics, so we give them theories on aesthetics... Grammar: Towards a Comprehensive Theory of Syntax. Creativity. Rich Context: Professor Zelst will teach you about the social stream.

There are some really beautiful pieces of art under American cities: delicate, historical, and simplistic in their circular nature. We installed replicas in the teahouses suckering onto museums and spreading knowledge, bearing remora cafes filled with old black guys playing guitars and drums, but no cellos, no oboes, no violins or trumpets. History is never more than a century.

The first time I met Bennett, she was a patient under hypnosis by a Maoist practitioner. I walked in to hear her talking about her childhood. “I—and my friends—were six years old, and my father was racing back from the camp. There was mud, and my friends kept leading me into it. I didn't want to trust them, but I didn't know

how to avoid the mud without their help.”

Her father was a gambler. Horses; I looked it up in her files later. There was a time when I thought I would court her, before I realized she was insane and soulless. There are all kinds of information hidden in the files. Of course, we had to shower everyone with assurances that it would never be released. Employee/patient confidentiality.

How to succeed in the company? Think big. How about a single Breathing Afternoon-? A day for all confederated museums of the world to celebrate our air. I came up with that one walking out of Hong Kong into the countryside. That smog-filled, bustling city, all rickshaws and insider trading, midnight shipping and bright new televisions; a city filled with everything you think of when you think of the political and cultural future of these after-colonies. The wealth is in the cities, and the peasantry is draining into shantytowns that grip their waists. How stupid the governments are. For instance, the Songs of Iraq crap we rented in a world tour brought in a ton of money in exchange for completely artificial culture. That nets into what we'd like to call ‘farming’. Don't ask me to elaborate; it would just get us into trouble.

How can we know our own motives if we can't know God? It's best to just act, and let the universe sort out our motives and our Gods.

In 1945, the nation was still at war, and we were conserving resources. There would have been no room

for an attractive long haired woman like Bennett, sitting there in expensive suits with precious gems on her fingers, rambling about how inefficient the government is.

It's all on our treat, of course. The company's. She's enjoying the harvest from the hard work of underground secrets and a thousand sweating, dead artists. The testing laboratory. The dark crypt hidden beneath the Church of America is calling for the redemption of mankind through the syntheses of electronic defense.

But the money (that is to say, the pomp) is still popular among the bundles of the literate British that lurk around the world as remnants of the imperial white Diasporas, hoping to salvage the balance of these four nations and crystallize them into an answer for the biggest question in all of archaeology and sociology.

FDR delivered his fourth and final inaugural address the day Nick's father died, and his mother moved her other two kids into an abandoned church packed full of dusty beer. Nick spent a lot of time there after he got back from the war, even though he could have gotten a nice job and a nice place to live with that MA. He was practically a PhD, just like me. And just like me, he gave up before finishing the process because life called to him.

As soon as he got back, he abandoned the whole thing, started to work on acoustics and perfecting a sort of dog whistle. I've never understood his year as a recluse, hunched over tiny bits of metal. I was hoping that someone would explain that to me at the awards ceremo-

ny, but people were cold. I had forgotten how much of their favor towards me was just out of respect for Nick.

I asked him why he worked on the whistle. He said he was trying to get into the Hall of Fame. He wouldn't elaborate.

"Okay, Chow," Bennett said with gunmetal eyes, and I realized I'd rambled on again (that's me, Professor Chow Zelst). I think it's all in my head, but it comes out. That's why they won't ever let me testify in court, if it comes to that. I suspect they'll kill me first.

"Look," Nick said, "nothing is perfect. Look at your generation. It's all been dragged off to Vietnam. More than anyone would have thought."

We are a fleet of warriors, the only ones left to patrol the narrow straits between these prominent ethnic leaders. With all that has happened since Nick's death, they'll probably turn against us—certainly Bennett thinks so. She's worried it will ruin the standing of our 'fairer' comrades, who take some sort of perverse pride in sleeping on the ground and waking to hail their rulers, and then palm cash intended for radicals and subversives. I'm not so worried; what will happen will happen. I can only act in it, I cannot judge.

Of course the War on Terrorism inhibits, but it also opens up opportunities. People just don't understand the mechanisms of the modern world, and it pays to educate them. You can say some pretty radical things if you have the right people working on the design and typography. Today, Al Qaeda has terrorists in the uniforms

of the Iraqi military, and swarms of kids follow them around fingering their ammunition. Wake up. Our children's children will be Islamic terrorists, and the great-great-grandchildren of Osama Bin Laden will manage McDonald's and wear crucifixes. Wax on, wax off.

Even someone like me can understand that this century was clearly developed to bring in tourism, and the displays in our museums reflect that. No one believes us. But it's a curiosity, and they want to look. The most popular room explains the four-step cycles we superimposed on the 1960's. The authorities tried to shut us down for that one, too much of a class struggle. Said we were trying to start a Marxist revolution. Guess what: it's not illegal to start a Marxist revolution. But, whatever. Marx was a child.

The first study room up in the steppes was very small, and all the patients had to stop at the monastery before they congregated in the marshland to meditate on their country's history. It's a humbling experience, taking an honest look at your heritage in a place so completely removed from what you're used to. The rainstorms, soft electric, would make us feel too mortal.

Buddhism gives you the bad news about mortality, but somehow it's more reassuring than the threat of judgment in the afterlife. I gave up religion early on, before I met Nick, and never looked back. But when you grow up in a predominantly religious society, you have no choice but to let some of that dribble into your brain. That's all religion is to Chinese farmers: it's what drib-

bles into your brain from monuments. Still, the mental solidarity of self-immolating Buddhist monks is enough to make you question the firmness of your worldview.

Once we started letting in locals, it got odd. They dragged up some vast, gray thing with flapping fins and tried to kiss it. One told me he was only there to prove a hometown belief that cranes provide guesthouses for traveling homeowners. We began taking pilgrimages to the head office, the one aspect where I truly maintained vigilance. After Nick died, an African with a booming, deep voice took over as the company executive.

Rules: Patients have a mandatory service, like enlisted men. Like enlisted men, there are advantages and disadvantages. The military model is useful for creating coherence and strength, but there's the same eventual fate, the retreat into stagnation and homogenous death.

Patients can safely endure a lot of time working in the main business—Bennett did—but now there's a rising faction against us, and the job on our hands is just too large. Pretty soon the creature we created will remove us, and then what will it be? Just another corporation. I think we hated capitalism at some point, but we participated too. And what will happen to our subterranean secrets? What happened to Anthrax Island or the scientists of Russia's Biopreparat? They all go into the sea.

Nick held onto my mind for a good deal of my time in the company, but he lost me shortly before the

awards dinner. He was ranting about our complex in the semi-countryside near the Ardennes, and after a ten-minute tirade on a chilly February morning, we went up to one of the warehouses. It was a converted desalinization plant, which had been used to store potatoes and onions when we found it. Standing under a towering painting of the Founding Fathers, he tried to convince me that what Watson and Crick had discovered in 1952 wasn't the form of DNA; it was the pattern of all information, the pattern of history, separating and recombining in warfare and trade.

"They're icons, telling us to get our heads out of the sand," he said. "We have to know our fates if we're going to fulfill them. People can't just expect fate to come to them. Life's not automatic, and you can get stuck at any step of this staircase if you don't push yourself forward."

"And what happens when you get to the top?" I asked.

"Well, you're at the top then," he said. "And, eventually, you die."

Nihilist. That was the end for me. But you can't just step out. So it's time to consider your position in the world, and think about what you can do from that place. Sedition? Probably. But nearly everything I've done since I left the university could be considered sedition.

There's a spot of mindless adoration here. The honors we heaped on Nick should have pissed someone off. I was waiting for it, personally. But Nick went com-

pletely bollocks—he must have been getting senile, towards the end. I can only hope he was, or else this might be hell. That day, he sat down at my table and stared at the peppershaker, then knocked it over.

"Colored folk have a mediocre medical history at best," he said. "But they are remarkable as the first to consider their semen vestigial."

What do you make of something like that? From someone who used to be so cogent.

Editor and talk show host (and fellow patient) Yuri Tetsuo of the Talon Times and the Children's Hospital of Penin arrived in time to run up to Nick, laugh, and shout out, "You're a laureate now!"

There was a multicolored plastic camera hanging off his wrist, and he got some shots of the two of them smiling stupidly, images of the Kenyan poor flashing across the screen behind them.

Fall again, but getting cooler. I watched the black-necked cranes ascend into the sky. It looked like they were disappearing into infinity.

Too often, he would completely entrust the future of history to a simplistic perception of the classical period, an empty ejaculation of neologisms and unfit comparison, and the product of too many vocational institutions. Built in 1952, the castle we used as a head office (I won't tell you where, I can't tell you if you don't know) was now largely used to store artwork and educational materials, though there were still a few officials. And the Executive. Abis Oresh was his name. Almost

everyone came back from those latter-day pilgrimages smiling and wishing they could be like that man.

If a man could be like that—truly altruistic, truly loving, channeling those elegant windbags from the Depression—he could maybe capture something truly unique out of human nature. I frown on that. I spent weeks e-mailing after that last visit, chronicling everything we've done wrong. We don't want to understand.

In the end, Nick's to blame. When I first went to Asia, I used to eat lunch staring at a Chinese wall-scroll, caught in its mystery. An ink painting, clouds dancing back and forth, with the faint appearance of dragons. Totally hollow to me now. He did that, hollowed out the works of time by trying to understand how they could be used. Serving some unknown function with all required loyalty. I wish it had been me that killed him.

Daphnie | Halibois
Jessica Fossum | Photography



The Pomegranate

Kathleen Uttinger | Poetry

The Pomegranate

Smooth and supple,
Ruby red flesh,
What treasures do your depths hold?

Crowned like a queen
Among the fruits,
Open your secrets to me.

I pull and tug.
You yield, heavy in my hand.
Your gold-flecked skin beckons me in.

Crack! Your heart breaks in two;
You reveal creamy crannies,
Decked with crimson jewels.

Bewitched, I taste your
Juiced gems, ripe
With delight.

I ponder, think myself wise,

The Master of you,
Royal orb.

But wait...
Was it you

Subtle Sovereign,
Sumptuous Beguiler,
Cunning Charmer,

*

That tempted, too,
Our first mother?

Kathleen Uttinger earned an A.A. in Liberal Arts from Sierra College in 2009. The author, in tracing the genesis of her education in literature during Sierra College, describes becoming enamored with the beauty of Nathaniel Hawthorne in Anne Fleischman's American Literature class, discovering a hunger for Samuel Taylor Coleridge in Barry Abram's English Literature, and developing a need to read esoteric essays on a variety of subject matter after taking Creative Non-fiction from Barbara Nelson-Burns. Kathleen plans to transfer in the fall to CSU Sacramento in order to pursue a B.A. in English.

Cowboy Diplomacy

Kalman Kezeli | Acrylic on Panel

Though born in the United States, as an adolescent, Kalman Kezeli moved to Greece where he pursued training as an iconographer. Kezeli's compositions reflect his unique artistic and cultural background. *Cowboy Diplomacy* appraises and expresses misgivings about the nature of American diplomatic policy; by juxtaposing the iconography of extreme right wing nationalism with the current President's image, the piece seems to suggest that the aggressive tenor of American diplomacy has become omnipresent regardless of the espoused ideals of presiding administration.



Rain

Jada Yee | Poetry

My hair smells lightly damp
sleeves are heavy
shoes are bright in color
jeans are cold
trees are wringing their branches
puddles are ready to jump
pavement shines
diluted worms slink along.

Some are splattered messes
others still travel,
still living
stretched to the limit
soggy pink lines
in my path.

Helping them
not an option
not a question
of morality
they are
beneath us.

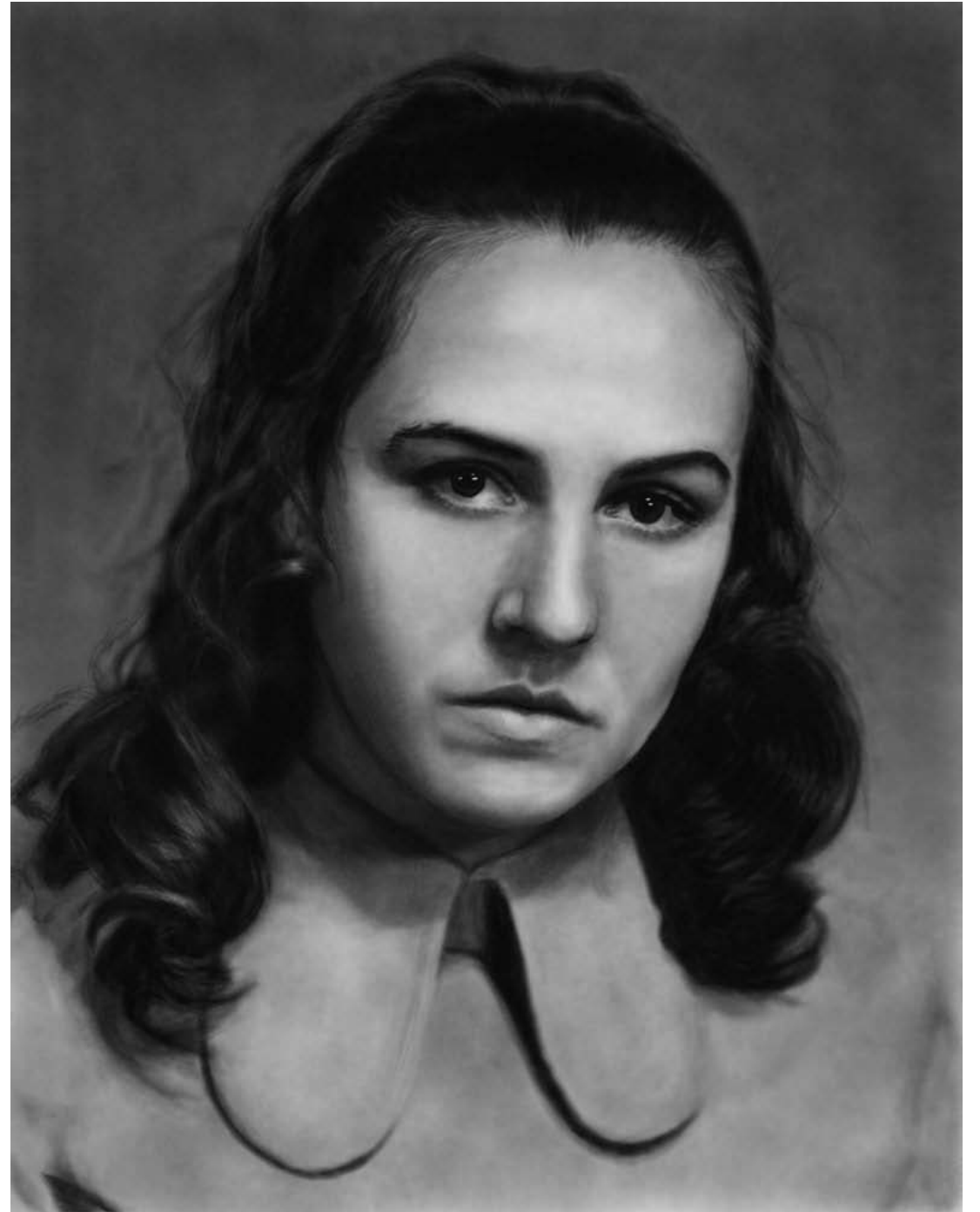
There is no
law to rescue
drowning worms
from a flood.

But I do not
tread on them,
make sure to
walk around them.

I do not care to
feel the squish
of a worm
under my shoe,
no matter
how small
he may be.
I do not have time
to save any either.

Untitled

Nataliya Barakat | Digital Charcoal



Lonely Planet

Molly Guiremand | Non-Fiction

The cats in Greece are needy. They need love, a few scraps from your plate, a good washing even. The restaurant owners clap and shout and shoo away the strays as they gather at the feet of paying customers. With their big, sad eyes they beg. If they're lucky, they grab a scrap and run off with it. I know I am not supposed to feed her, but she is my only company: a small orange tabby with one green eye, one blue. I want to scoop her up and tame her. Take her home with me to be loved and well fed.

But she is one of thousands.

Before I left for Europe I researched various travel guides and books. I spent hours in the bookshop comparing brands, reading, and unfolding the maps. There is a popular brand of travel guide books called *Lonely Planet*. I remember thinking when I saw these books: "How could a planet of nearly seven billion people be any kind of lonely?"

Now, halfway around the globe from anything I've ever known, I'm checking countries off a list. I expected that when I got to Europe the things to do and see would fully occupy me. I imagined making friends anywhere I went and that some I would stay close with for the remainder of my lifetime. I dreamt of discovering

places very few had ever seen and bringing back their treasures in photographs. I know myself to be a fairly independent and capable person. Not so directionally challenged and quick to learn. Traveling alone is freedom, and it is true that I have met some great people and stumbled upon some heart-stopping secrets; but traveling alone is also taxing. A weight is attached to each of my senses while stress surges through my body and strikes lighting down my limbs. I must be hyper aware of my things at all times and exactly who is proximate. My only protection is my awareness. And perhaps, my thirty pound rucksack, if I could swing it. My brain spins with frustration as my eyes are bombarded by light. My nose becomes confused as it moves through the streets, mixing fresh chocolate pastry aromas with sun-baked urine stench. Everything is new and foreign and even the simplest tasks prove difficult. I can ask for directions in Italy, but I can't understand the response. I point to something on the menu in Spain; its set in front of me looking regurgitated, and I pray I'm not allergic. I get on the wrong train. Twice.

But through the difficult, good grows. In my successes and failures I am strengthened. And sadly, there is

Molly Guiremand is a continuing student at Sierra College pursuing a major in psychology. In addition to non-fiction, Guiremand writes poetry, lyrics, and music, enjoys traveling, and loves the ocean. *Lonely Planet* was written during the fall of 2009 while the author studied abroad in Madrid, Spain.

no one here to see it. No one here to grow with.

Athens, Rome, Florence, Madrid. I remember thinking these places so glamorous, so full of magic. But cities are all the same. They're crowded and dirty and noise never rests. There's ugly all over with a few splashes of splendor that the postcards show. All we city-people need something. Unsatisfied, we all want more. We push past each other with no acknowledgement. I think it unfair – each of us exists, and we deserve to be acknowledged. But I also understand; ignoring is the oil of a giant growing engine with already too many parts.

In Valencia I ride the metro with hundreds of pairs of shoes. There are high-heeled snake skin shoes, black leather loafers, boots to the knee. There are flats with bows at the toe and green fluorescent high-top sneakers. There are shoes that speak every language and those that don't speak at all. There are shoes accompanied by briefcases or rolling luggage or shopping bags from *Zara* and *El Corte Ingles*. Each pair of shoes has a home, somewhere to go, a destination. But they are all nameless and faceless. I never look another in the eyes—they have no eyes—I see only feet.

I imagine that orange tabby cat winding through the shoes. Forcing her fur on a forest of ankles. Begging for attention from the hurried, somewhere to be, something to do feet. She might look me in the eyes.

Each country I visit, each new bed to rest in, brings me no fortune but only pulls me further from those I love. Even at home I struggle for attention, and

now I see I have always been lonely. A little forgotten, a little ignored. Hungry for undivided attention but not willing to fight for it. I see my adventurous spirit, tired from wandering, stifled by searching. Even with so many to meet and know I crave the nearness of the ones I know already. A sort of surrender for the sake of comfort. Giving up and getting nothing. This is new to me, and it is a loss.

Now I understand: seven billion of us, and we are all lonely. Every single one. We are all struggling for that undivided. We all need it so desperately, and we need to get it before we can give. Stuck in a cycle: Catch-22.

Seeing the world, I should be elated, but I find myself empty; yes, it is a lonely planet.

I know I am not much different from that stray cat in Greece. Lonely and starving for a little attention. Waiting for some kind stranger to scoop me up and take me home to be loved and well fed.

But I, also, am one of thousands, and both my eyes are blue.

Tree, Joshua Tree
National Park, Ca

Ocean Pool,
Santa Barbara, Ca
Joshua Clason
Photography





Empty Nest

Jada Yee | Poetry

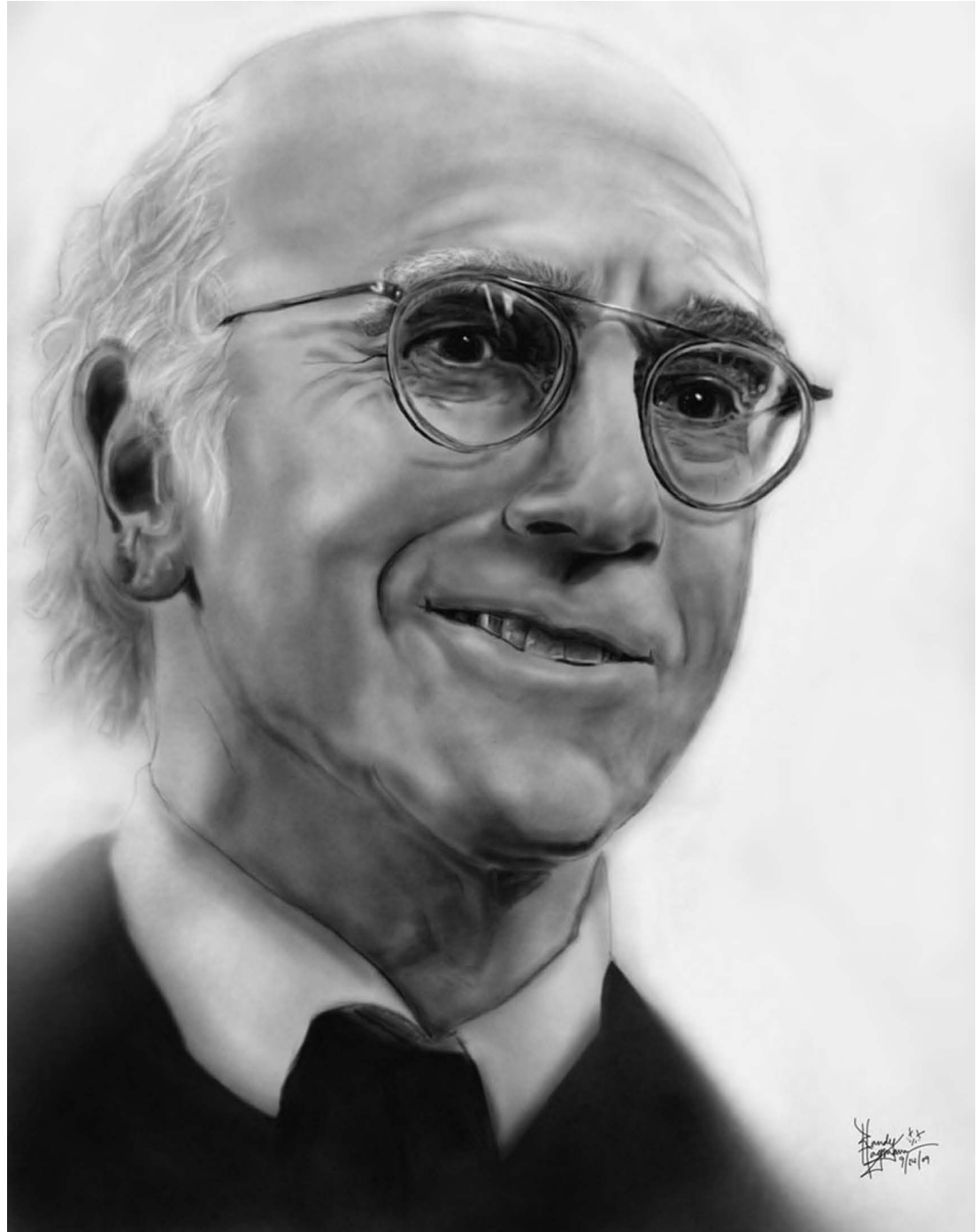
Empty Nest
The wind blows
the house shivers
time to bundle up
but whom do I have to warm?
My children's footprints are missing here
this house fits only he and I...
a grinning pumpkin lights our porch
it's only seen by strangers.
The tired swing sways under the summer fading tree
its branches stretch out to me
it begs for company...
and it will stand alone once more.
Candles glow and fireplace crackles
turkey crisps and gravy simmers
two plates and four chairs
I envision them waiting there.
From orange and brown
to red and green
I build a forest of
pine cones and cinnamon,
red bows and gold ribbons
spiraling down the stairs.

The tree will be dressed with
handmade treasures
the lights will flicker and dance,
I'll be dreaming of unwrapping
smiles and laughter in the morning.

Untitled Polaroid
Series
Roxanne Hart
Photography



Larry David
Randy Hagman | Digital Charcoal



The Rorschach Test

Dana Gilbert | Poetry

I didn't see butterflies or flies stuck in butter. I didn't see a flower, or red blood from a human head. There were no clouds, no trees, no spider webs. I couldn't make it look like water, spilled milk, or a stain on a shirt. It didn't look like hair, a nest of a bird, or just plain old dirt. It wouldn't form into a shield or sway with the wind in a field of dead grass. It just stared back at me. "Now, tell me what you see," he said to me. I tried to rearrange my eyes, but failed and sighed, "Splattered paint," I replied. He frowned and looked down, shook his head toward the ground, "Maybe if you tried..." he mumbled to my demise. But I was, I was! I thought of scary things and dark places. Caves, knives, blood and gore, but the paint would not turn to horror. I thought of bright blue skies and pretty white laces, but the paint just stayed glued in its own little places. But then he turned on a melody, and I was whisked away off my feet. The paint on the paper got up off their chairs; they danced around like little black bears. They turned into music notes, then into birds and slowly flew over a boat that was sailing out at sea, trying to save a man by keeping him afloat, with one of those cheap lifeguard rings. Then the string from the ring broke, and as the man spoke, water filled his lungs, and down he plunged, left only bubbles for the other

folk. Then the tempo changed, and how deranged these ink blots got. They turned into murderers and shot and shot and shot. There were crows and needles, pins, sharp teeth, unconventional killing weapons, like a Christmas wreath, that strangled a poor kitty cat, that happened to be black, it screamed and hissed with each note missed, and then turned into a bat, hit an ink blot that quite resembled a ball, out of a park that was a little too small. Then came a man who walked down from the top, with a tailcoat and cane, and danced to the music that had now turned pop. He was doing the moon walk and sucking on a lollipop, which he suddenly dropped, and as it hit the floor, it morphed into one of those flat escalators. The man wept as he now stepped on his once lollipop, he threw his arms in the air, and down came a pear from a willow tree that had a pair of knees and tentacles for branches. It grew higher than France's Eiffel Tower, but no doubt that it could provide shelter from a rain shower. And just then, a flood hit, in great big globs like God's spit. The weeping willow was drenched in water so it turned into a squid with five eyelids, and it couldn't drown, so instead it danced around, under the sea and then it looked at me, and I swear it said, "Now what do you see?"

Tear/Tear

Dana Gilbert | Poetry

Tear it in half. Then again. And again.
Throw it in the trash. Along with the roses. And the ring.
Your words are bulletproof, but they are not tear-proof. Or shredder-proof. And sometimes eraser-proof.
You stood so strong behind them. You were so brave with them in front
of you. And you had all the courage in the world.
You could be a revolutionist. A terrorist. And a philosopher.
Your words were your steel walls. Your shield. And your bullet-proof jacket.
You had created an army on this note. Your army was suave and swift. And a little too cliché.
Words on paper were your only vice. Your cane. And your crutch.
Without them you cannot speak. You cannot think. And you cannot converse.
Your words were powerful. They were well-structured. And composed.
But now they're at the bottom of the trash. Along with the roses. And the ring.
Now you don't stand so strong. Now you're not so brave. And now you have no courage.
Your words are gone. Your allies are gone. And your lies.
You are defenseless. With no pen. And no paper.
Because I tore it in half. Then again. And again.
I threw it away. With the roses. And the ring.
Now it rests at the bottom of the trash. I glance at it. And down falls a tear.

The Incident

Sara Ficek | Fiction

He had lived next door. She'd seen him riding a garage sale tricycle around the yard last summer, making mini crop circles in the dying grass. He smiled wide with his head between the handlebars, streamers surging with the tidal effects of the boy's gravitational attraction. He was the only child on the block, so the old women with their zipper-necked floral print dresses and slippers would walk their dogs past to look at the youthful thing in the yard and yell something of this or that to the other.

"What a handsome boy!"

"So handsome!"

"I don't think I've ever seen a thing more handsome than that!"

"I daresay you haven't!"

"I have a couple grandsons of my own about that age!"

"What?"

"Grandsons! Me, mine! That age!"

"Ahh! Why do I never see them?"

"Their fathers don't bring them around anymore, moved out to Buffalo last winter!"

"So far!"

"So far!"

She'd watched these old women through her gauze curtains, a stippled hand pushing back the lacey fabric for a better view. The dogs kissed the sidewalks with their dragging tongues, and the women watched the boy go round and round. Everyday they repeated this pleasure until the sun wore them through, and everyday the boy would watch them retreat to their air-conditioned condos, tentatively looking down the asphalt road. He would grab hold of his tricycle by the seat and wheel it through the gate. Minutes later, he would return to the flattened discs and squat over the rings he'd created. Smoothing out the turf as best he could, he'd work each one of his digits into the grass, pulling every blade to a point until the divots were gone, and all that remained were the unwatered sectors of crumbling lawn where even dogs wouldn't squat to pee.

She would watch from her window each day and take notes, a sharpened pencil in her right hand and a memo pad lolling about her skeletal knee. Pencil shavings adorned the wooden floor, piled high in ancient circles surrounding the woman in her chair. Her eyes never seemed to blink, steadfast in their mission. She massaged her fingers into her head like a hairdresser working

shampoo and continued to watch the small child outside. Scribblings of moments and times layered themselves upon the pad, her shaking penmanship recording each drop of life, sodden from beyond her window.

When the air grew steady and the sun had nearly bowed out of sight, the lampposts would ignite one by one, starting with the furthest east and moving west. As the last lamppost lit, a car, haloed by waning sunlight, could be seen driving down the street, ending its crossing at the boy's house.

A man of middle age and massive size parked his disintegrating Chevy Nova halfway on, halfway off the sidewalk. Spooling glutinous fat rolls out the car, his lard tumbled onto the pavement before his being. Emerging from the thing like an egg spilling from its shell, he would ooze his sweaty body onto the driveway.

A woman, his wife, waited silent, clutching the arms of a motorized scooter in her hands. Like a slaughterhouse cow waiting for the bolt, she stood there watching the driveway, digging her toes into the pavement. The fat man leaked himself towards the woman, placing his cheese curd off-center on the mammoth seat. The wife would click her bare heels behind him, watching the chartreuse weeds choking between the slabs of concrete. The powered scooter sputtered underneath its cargo, laboring its way up the sloped path, but would stop when the grass caught the fat man's attention. His face became a puffer fish, bulbous and red, heaving his scooter to the end of the cement, the wheels not quite touching the

edge of the lawn. The wife saw a trail of ants carrying heavy loads on their backs. She saw the struggle of one working to hold up a crumb of something black, and the other ants going around him. She gently squished him into the ground with her big toe. The fat man blubbered from beneath his surging cheeks.

"Where is he?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Where is he?"

"He's only been playing,"

"Where is he?"

"He's been inside, just now, I mean,"

"Where is he?"

And the wife would give in. She would get the boy and bring him outside; her hands were limp on his shoulders. Her once straight hair would begin to coil, framing a sweating face with baby curls. The fat man would scavenge for a pack of nameless cigarettes beneath the folds of his skin, seize a slim stick and hold it between his index and middle finger. The boy stood still, always still. His eyes would be wet. The fat man would motion for a light from the mother-wife, and she would scramble for a lighter, always find it, and feed him the stick of tobacco. A breath of smoke rose from the end of the thing as he took a drag and wheezed out an ecosystem of death.

From behind the curtains, she'd watch the fat man motion a 'come here' sign to the boy with his sausage fingers. She'd see him raise his palm and meet the

softness of boy's face with a crack. Then, laying the boy across his blanket of fat, she'd watched him pull down the boy's pants and strike the tiny exposed rump again and again. She'd watched the boy get up and before he could run, saw the fat man call him back again. He would whisper something to the boy and point to the mother-wife, and the boy and his mother would stay outside as the fat man rolled into the house alone, sucking on what was left of his cigarette.

Her pencil broke; the lead chipped darkly and sprinkled out like a baby explosion. She reached for her knife and scraped off long, fine shavings, each curling bleakly in the vanishing sun. She pulled the curtain back, and as she watched, her right hand wrote what her left hand revealed. With a house full of notepads, some small and some large, she'd written each completely through until there was no room left, and words had to be written on top of words. Each sentence had a double meaning. Each word meant more than it had before. Her knee twitched under the weight of the words, but she kept writing, kept watching.

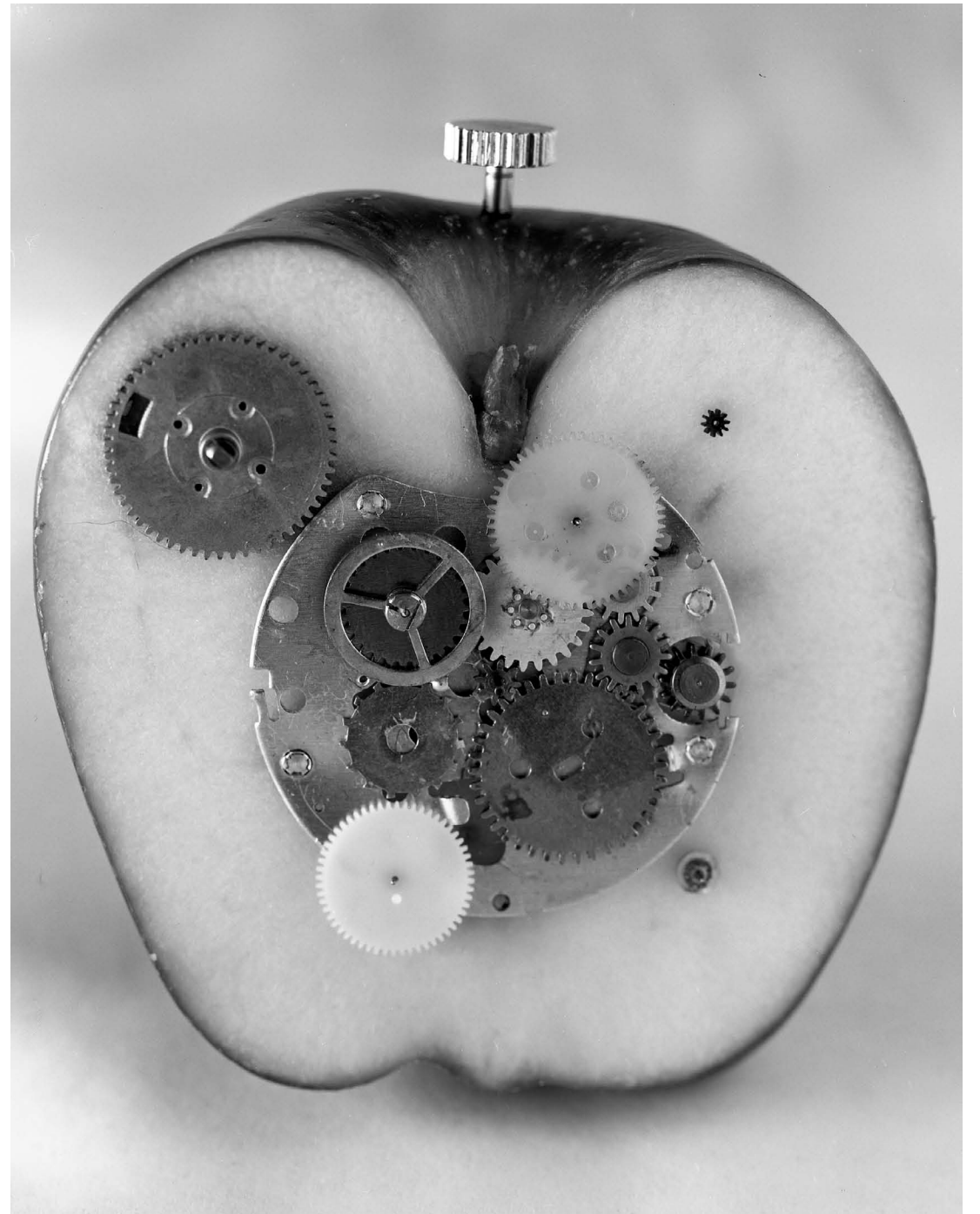
The final day began much as before, the boy bringing out his tricycle and making circles in the grass. The old ladies ambled across the way, past the squared hedges and finely trimmed rose bushes, halting their march in front of the boy.

"My, my, what fine circles!"

"Yes! Yes! Circles!"

(continued on page 48)

Mechanics of Nature
Chris Saavedra | Photography



“So much better than a square!”

“Or a parallelogram!”

“What?”

“A parallelogram!”

“Oh yes!”

“Oh yes!”

She looked through the curtain once more. The ladies had already retreated to their condos, and the boy was scrunched over the grass picking and pushing, working the grass like a monkey ferreting for nits. The old woman let the drape go and grabbed hold of the arms of her chair, pushing herself out and away. Her bones groaned from the movement, and her hips skidded to the left, then the right. Her hair was tied in a wiry bun, strangling her face as it tugged at the margins. A few loose white strands timidly tapped her face like spider webs in the breeze. She looked through the screened window-pane, a witness to the sun absorbing into the horizon.

She picked up a small lighter as the car curved to a stop. She was out the back door, the last washes of daylight coloring her body when she imagined the first slap. She was by the back gate as the last shard of sun swept over the suburb, and when the ‘come here’ was given. Looking for an open door as she heard the spanking of flesh, feeling like her flesh. Waiting inside the bedroom as she heard the scooter gasping its way through the front door, through the house, to the bedroom. She sloped her angular body behind the door as the fat man trickled out of the chair and onto his bed. The cigarette

dangled from his lips, still lit. She saw his eyes, yellow and crusted, as she emerged from beyond the darkness. The fat man saw her and yet didn’t see her. She set the comforter alight. She watched the flames excite around his body, tearing into his spongy skin. He screamed for help as she extracted a writing pad from her pocket, taking notes in shorthand.

After the incident, as the neighbors called it, the old ladies would sometimes gather at the spot where the house had burned to ash.

“Things aren’t how they used to be!”

“You don’t have to tell me twice!”

“No more little children now!”

“Nope, no siree!”

“Fire, such a pity!”

“A pity, yes!”

“At least the boy and his mother made it through!”

“What, huh?”

“Boy! Mother! Safe!”

“Ahh, yes!”

“Yes!”

Rhino Collage
David Burns
Letter Collage



In a Sense

Nevada Inocencio | Poetry

Think back to times we would
make faces and blow raspberries
to catch the eye of one and other

The time we laid there
in cool grass and leaves, the
sullen moon over hanging

We stole into night
the very breath of
lovers—leaving us
bound into each other.

eyes once crossed paths,
yet mouths remain

hesitant.

We kissed in regions vast and dark
under what light there was
—under watchful, envious orbs.

We fondled in dark corners
exploring significance
outside of decent realms,

Lascivious tongues salivating
for sweat and blood
between vague membranes
of shameful fabric fashioned.

Of all nights in singularity
and fascinations entertained

the only thing between us
was merely chemical.

A Person Who Will Never Exist

Jenna Kerns | Poetry

These ideas
putrid, wretched, intolerable.
Rip it to shreds,
tear
fragments to the ground,
encapsulate, entomb,

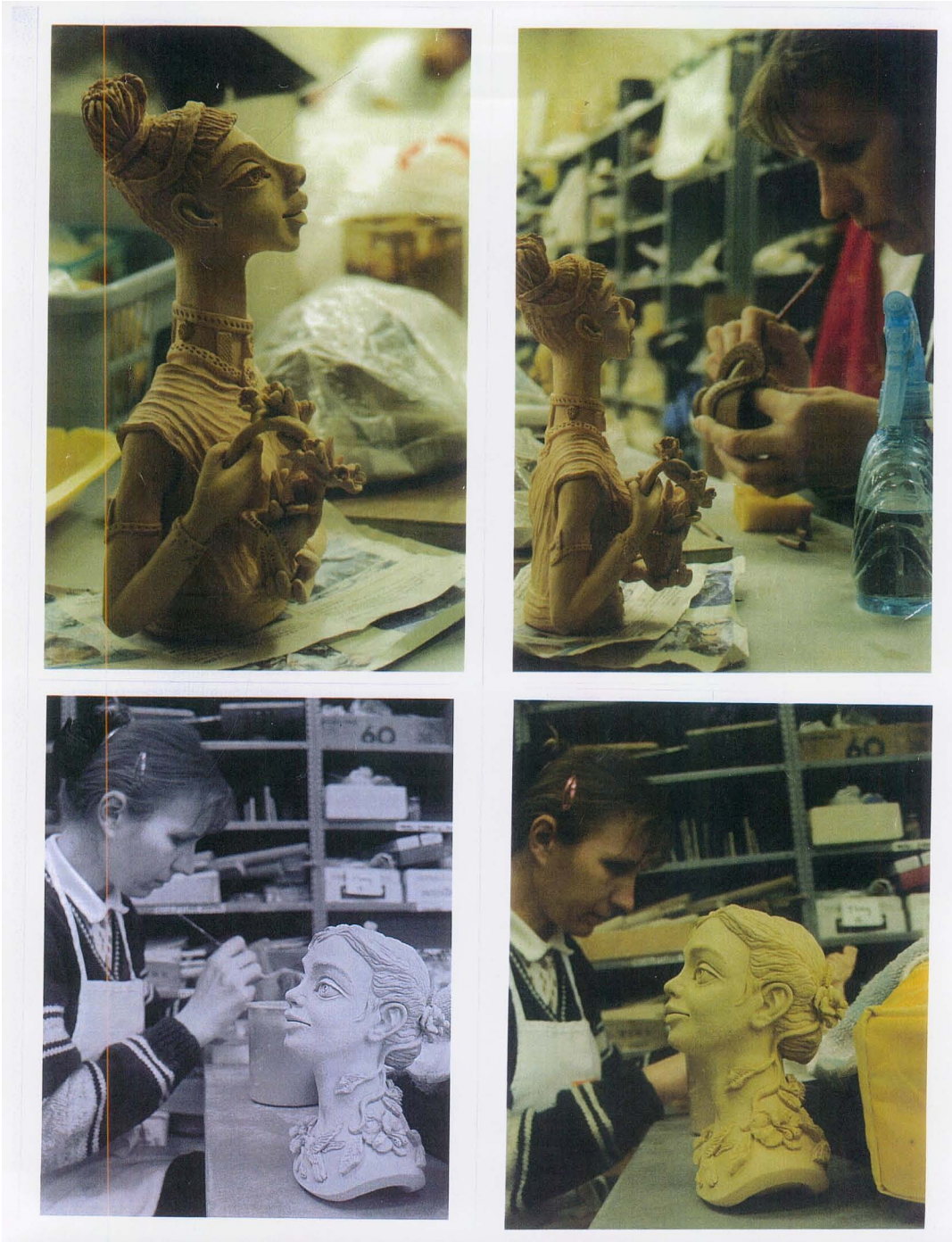
Wasted and tossed off
used
like a condom.

These ideas
sequestered on paper, blasphemous.
Scratch it all out,
Obscure them all within,
bury in the deep.

These ideas
expendable as waste in your bin,
refuse of mind,
keep you from success,
closer to failure.

These ideas
scribbled with ink of a timid fool,
hid on paper,
derelict, stagnant, old.

Jenna Kerns is a continuing student at Sierra College. Her Introduction to Poetry class helped inspire her to write and to submit work to the Sierra Journal. Her first book was published when she was only in the first grade, after winning a young writer's contest held throughout the state of California. She hopes to continue developing her writing abilities and to publish more of her compositions in the future.



Photographs of the Artist at Work

Untitled Sculpture
Larisa Postelnyak | Sculpture



Zenith

Marc Nocerino | Poetry

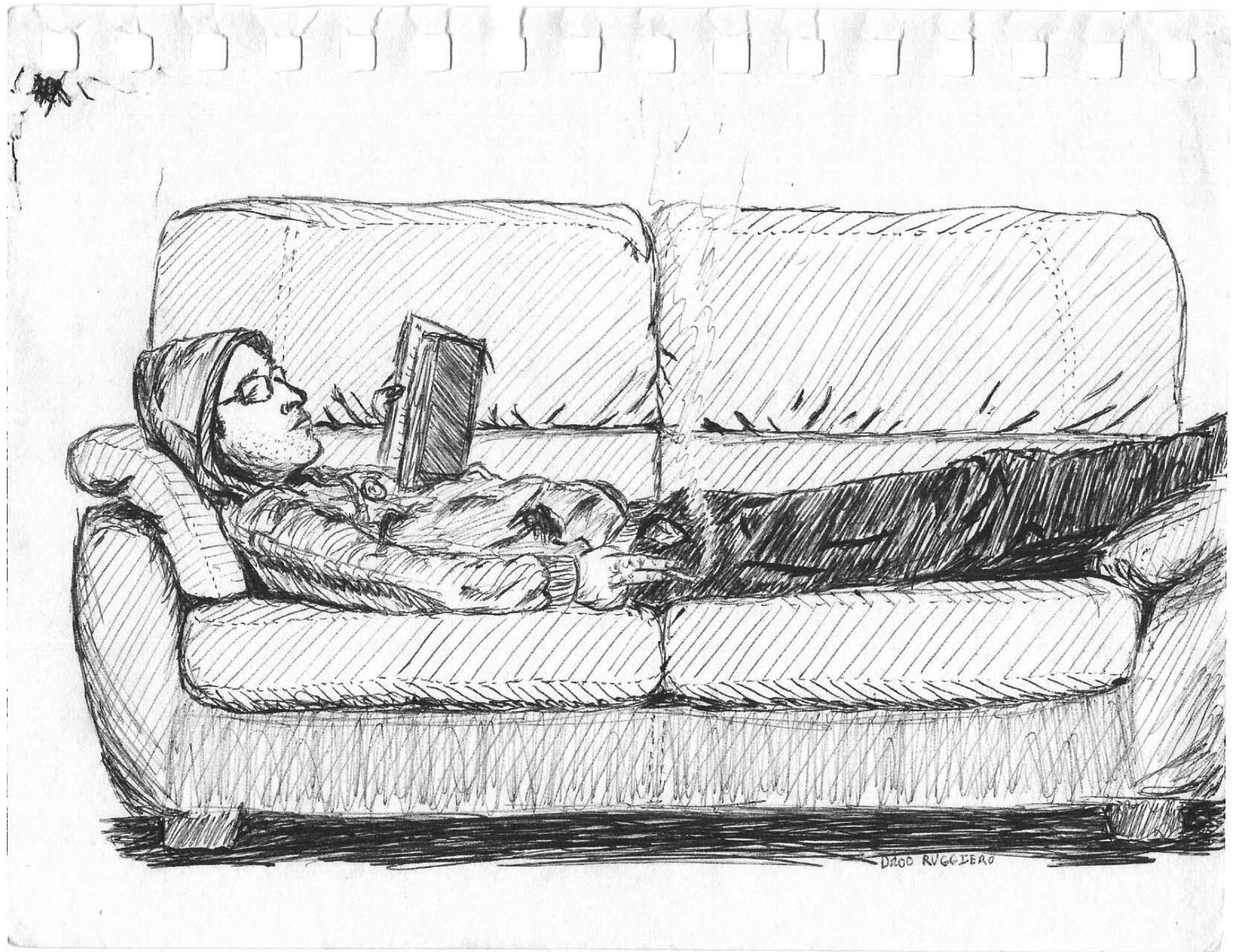
Brushed black, a charcoal still life
reclined in inviting repose
a shadow wreathed in shadows

She smiled then, a promise in the curve of her lips
a glint, mischievous, in the eyes
a yearning in the molecules under the skin

I gave in to longing then,
and I drew her in like heroin, a liquid rush
as black turned to gold, gold to heat

Though he has dabbled in various art forms throughout his life, including music and drama (among others), it has always been Marc Nocerino's goal to achieve success as an author and poet. He plans to continue his education in English, with an emphasis in Creative Writing, in order that he may share his passion for the written word as a teacher. Nocerino currently resides in Grass Valley with his wife and family.

Micah
Drew Ruggiero
Ink on Paper



DINO RUGGERO





Devil's Racetrack, Death Valley

Factory, Owens Lake, Ca

Building and Sky, Nevada

Bathhouse, Salton Sea, Ca

Outlook, Ocean Beach, Ca

Joshua Clason
Photography





Hidden Beach
Sylviane Gaumer
Watercolor

Where's the Wolf?

David Burns | Fiction

David Burns is a sophomore student at Sierra College majoring in illustration and multimedia design. He aspires to be a great writer and artist, and secretly, he tries to be an inventor, as well. The art department and staff at Sierra College have been, according to Burns, powerful factors in developing the author's abilities and newly found perspectives; Burns surmises that he has yet to meet a teacher at the college by whom he has not been impressed and inspired. Each professor has, in Burns' estimation, helped the artist improve upon his natural abilities in a very unique way.

In one year, it'll be 1940, and my hat will be officially out of style. Times are changing, and people must stay current like a river must flow. We're getting smarter, as a whole; we're doing things that have only been dreamed about. Civilization sounds primitive compared to where science is taking us, and nothing could matter less right now. My palms are sweating bullets, and my gun has only two left.

"Whatever that thing was, I know I can hurt it," he says out loud, as if convincing anybody nearby who might be in the city in the middle of the night. "I just hope I can kill it."

He whispers as an anchor attaches his intestine to the ground. Bound by knots, he hides in a shallow, dark alley waiting not long enough to catch it by surprise once it finds him. And it will find him.

It saw him turn the corner, and if by chance it didn't, then the scent from his trail of blood might lend a hand. He has two shots to kill him with, he thinks dizzily as gravity adds to the spin. The only difference between this and a hangover is that he's bleeding out of his left shoulder from a vicious bite, and his back is burning from deep gashes caused by carnivorous fingernails.

He didn't believe it until it was too late. He thought he was catching a man, but his gut feeling was right: it's more than that. Now, he believes; now, he knows. It's a werewolf! The good thing was that he pulled his gun quickly; the bad thing was that the three shots to its torso only slowed it down. He's not sure how his legs were able to carry him down the block. He didn't tell them to. He's closer now, he can hear it snarling, such a beastly sound. Its throat rips the air like an angry raccoon being eaten by an even angrier Tasmanian devil. Chills race through his spine with such an intense impulse that it reminds him of the scorching pain in his shredded back. The only thing that can numb the inferno is his utter terror.

He feels safe by no means with a mere two pieces of lead. The job calls for twenty. He has an extra bullet; the one he didn't want to use, the silver one. Only somebody crazy would even attempt it. He felt ridiculous buying that bullet, especially because it was very expensive. Normally, he didn't buy into superstitious stories, but the look in his client's eye was enough. Plus, he was paid as if being rewarded. So, he was able to buy the bullet... "IT'S GONE!?" He had tucked it into his

hat, but it must have flown off in flight!

His eyes scatter across the ground desperately searching for the stupid, old hat! He sees it lying on the pavement under the street light very close to the very deadly corner. His heart is beating like a baby rabbit. Drops of sweat cool his pale face and moisten his unblinking wide eyes with a salty sting.

He's focused on his hat being gently displayed in the spotlight. "Six shots are better than five," he says in a droned voice that required more effort to say than a coma patient would need to sing the Star Spangled Banner. A spark ignites in his brain, and instantly, he leaps from the alley and dashes toward his hat. He realizes a second later that the monster let out a horrific howl from even closer than before. His legs reach the bullet two steps before his hand. His eyes never stray from the hat so his fingers don't miss. The instant he feels the silver, he sees the outline of the monster at the corner breaking into a full sprint towards him. It's dressed like a man, but the clothes are ripped, and it's got fur like a bear with the face of a mad dog! No time to load.

In the midst of all the commotion, Detective James Were finds an instant of peace and serenity. Between two beats of his hummingbird heart, he aims. "Bang!" A direct hit to the solar plexus; it should've snapped its spine, but it didn't, and the monster regains its balance. With a mighty jump, the creature flies toward the detective. James knows this moment well; it's a DÉJÀ VU. It is the moment that one of them dies. In-

stinct triggers his brain, and his finger triggers the gun. A startling thunderclap at point blank range, and the beast goes down. A stench brushes against James' skin, thickening the air with a damp and foul odor. He steps a step away from the motionless beast lying face down.

His relief is overpowered by guilt and regret. This is because he knows the monster's name. In fact, James has been tailing this guy for quite some time now, and he knows everything about him, well almost everything. James knows he's not the real Carl Walker, but a possessed Carl Walker. Suddenly, a violent growl shakes the silence and James bucks like a deer. Carl is awake. The detective watches in stunned denial as he opens his gun. He doesn't take his eyes off of his target as the silver bullet is chambered. The monster, once called Carl, struggles to his feet, and as the dead man rises, so does James' pistol. With no choice, the hammer smacks the bullet, exploding the silver forward into Carl's head. James no longer needs help fearing the dark again.

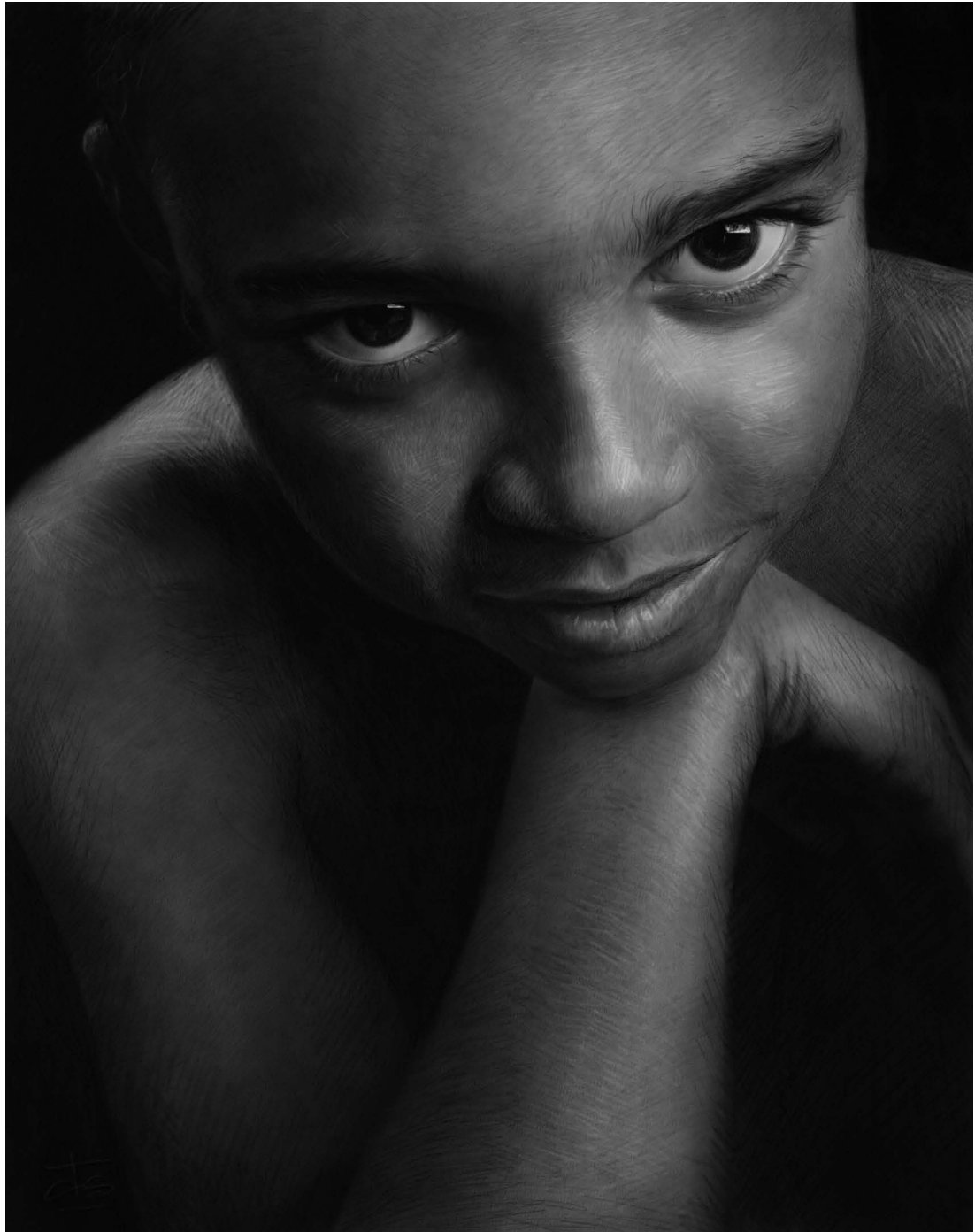
He drags his weak body to his car and radios Sammy. Before long, Sammy arrives to help the exhausted Detective, who then reluctantly explains that Carl was a Werewolf. The ambulance arrives, and the medics tend to James' bullet wounds. Sammy begins to secure the scene and deal with the dead body. He walks over to the corner of the street to find a pool of blood with Carl Walker lying face down, his back shredded like he had been whip-lashed a hundred times, and says, "Where's the Wolf?"

Asian Village
Tad Langehaug
Digital Painting



Untitled

Deanna Helsten | Digital Charcoal



Juk

Melissa Bagwell | Poetry

With a yard of muslin and some ancient knotting,
Po po, Grandmother, would bind my body to hers.
I can still recall her muscles as she lifted each pot.
Vents would relive the tiny restau-
rant from a greasy steam,
but I incessantly added heat to Po po's back.
I never saw those porcelain hands
that Gon gon, Grandfather, would muse over.
The hours had stained her palms
and brought calluses to her fingertips,
and leaving China
seemed to cause callous to his being.
Each night, when she untied the muslin,
I lay in the dark as myself,
and she lay in her bed,
an old couch near my crib.
Her sweat and the chili oil would linger,
and I'd cling to it, as if she weren't going to wake,
but before the sun could ever offer its light,
Po po had juk, a rice porridge, on the stove,
and suddenly, the air would soften.
Its aroma carried regulars from miles away,
but she ignored their coins and would make them wait,

for that first pot and that first bowl
were always made and ladled for me.

Playful Dangers

Chris Saavedra | Photography



A.M. Radio

Dan Hoover | Fiction

A. M. Radio is, according to the author, a story written about a man doing his job, and his reaction to change; Armstrong endeavors to use a very inclusive writing process and strives to craft a body of work which is very much human and which explores the meaning and the nature thereof humanity. His interest in natural history has, in the author's estimation, contributed immensely to his fiction writing insofar as it requires an imagination capable of making voyages over great spans of time.

The number two radio control room had the tight feel of a single-car garage with a pair of Winnebago's squeezed into it. The feeling was compounded by the wall-to-wall electronics necessary for transmitting a radio signal. Sound boards, mixing equipment, consoles, transmitter gear, and a desk filled with switches, knobs, a boom mic, a computer, and a half empty coffee mug. Mountains of photostatic copies threatened to topple into a blizzard of eight and a half by eleven sheeted flakes at the smallest whisper of moving air. The pall of cigarette smoke floating in a haze never seemed to diminish.

Among the ceiling tiles, brown amorphous stains ran in random patterns; the telltale sign that, at some time in the past, rain had seeped through the aging tin roof above. The ever-lingering funk of greasy black molds that refused to be excised by gallons of bleach permeated the air.

Half a dozen government issued clocks, circa 1950, hung along the wall, each labeled with some far-off, exotic city: Chicago, Tokyo, San Francisco, and London. From Tacoma to Timbuktu, all remained silent, their hands still. Coast to coast there was only Bismarck, North Dakota time.

The low prattle of the air conditioner did nothing to defy the stifling heat generated by the massive banks of electronics and complete lack of ventilation. The streamers garishly tied to its grate waved languidly in the smoky air, as if they were shimmering mirages of cool air promised, but never realized.

A battered office chair crouched behind the desk, its thread-bare cushions broken down to form an eternal impression. It remained fixed, no longer able to adjust in height, forcing everything else to adjust to it. Of its four casters, three remained to torture the muscles of the back, lest they momentarily forget the constant struggle to maintain balance. The faded black plastic hinges groaned mournfully with each twist and change in position made by its occupant. A disheveled man sitting behind the console appeared as if he hadn't slept in days; his shoulders slumped, and his head drooping slightly as if from a bad headache. His large Hawaiian shirt hung limply from his lanky frame, as if it too was exhausted to be its customarily loud self. His dull eyes reflected little life, but his voice seemed to contradict his ragged, worn exterior by blasting outward with an almost euphoric tone. It was the only thing that didn't fit the room.

“Well folks it’s fifteen minutes to the hour, and that means I’ve got to leave you for a few moments, but in my absence allow me to offer you these manifestations of our capitalistic democracy. This is KSFE 765 Bismarck. Back in a few, sit tight.”

The chair groaned loudly as its occupant leaned back, straightening his back. He momentarily wondered if he should give in, and go down to the vending machine and pick out one of those cake things; then again, his diet was going well. He shouldn’t risk it. Instead, he reached over and fished out another cigarette from a pack sitting near an ashtray dangerously close to overflowing. As it had before, his first draw of the tobacco caused a hacking cough to erupt. He hadn’t smoked until recently. Frankly, he didn’t like them; he started to rise and head to the men’s room, but knew from experience that only another ten seconds remained for the break. Taking a leak would have to wait.

Outside, the dust storm still raged. It had been the largest since anyone could remember, and no one could recall one that seemed to glow dully. Probably just some extra quartz, the withered man thought nonchalantly. At any rate, it hadn’t seemed to affect the ability of the station to get a signal out, so he’d go on with the show.

John Kane sat back down to the console in front of him and quickly adjusted the signal strength and amplitude before cutting back into the feed.

“Well, people, we’re back. So far the big story in the news is the tension heating up between our own

Uncle Sam, China, and the Middle East, specifically Iran. All these hard feelings stemming from the rapidly dwindling supply of fossil fuels available to the industrialized countries of the world. Let’s look at what’s going on here. We need oil, and China needs oil. Their economy is exploding, and as a result, the militaries of both are becoming more agitated. In return, with the supply dropping at an unprecedented rate, the oil-producing countries in the Middle East are now commanding ever higher rates per barrel.”

He paused to swig from the chipped coffee cup; the space beneath it revealed the darker colored patch where the layer of dust had not covered. What the dust couldn’t cover, it settled into, giving the cold coffee a tangy metallic taste. The space under the cup had provided cover for a cockroach that now skittered away, falling to the floor. Kane watched it struggle for a moment across the dusty floor. *Damn vermin*, he thought, bringing his foot down on the hapless insect with a satisfyingly wet crunch. He continued.

“There is also speculation that OPEC countries have been funneling money into Iran’s nuclear program in a militarized effort of their own. In the event they need to defend their most prized commodity. I’m not painting a very pretty picture here, am I people? You know I can’t help but say, I told you so; we had so many years to consider this moment. To come up with something beyond the use of fossil fuels, but we chose not to, and as a result, we find ourselves hurdling toward the brink.” He

paused for dramatic effect. “So here we are. What do we do now? I’ll tell you what we need to do. We get off the oil, develop renewable resources, and thus, throw off the yoke of our old masters in the oil industry.

He lifted bloodshot eyes to the clock on the wall again, “Well, folks, it’s fifteen minutes to the hour, KSFE 765 Bismarck. Back in a few, sit tight.” Flipping the switch beneath the dull glowing indicator light showing him to be on air, which now blinked off, he stood and made his way through to the hallway. Kane’s steps kicked up some of the dust; damned stuff must be coming in through the vents, he thought idly to himself. His was an early show, so no one else was at the station just yet, and as a result, the offices for some of the others lay open and darkened. He wished that the left over decorations from the Halloween party would be put away soon. He made a mental note to complain to the management; whoever thought up the idea to dress up desiccated mummies like the co-workers and leave them draped in so many profane postures needed a talking to.

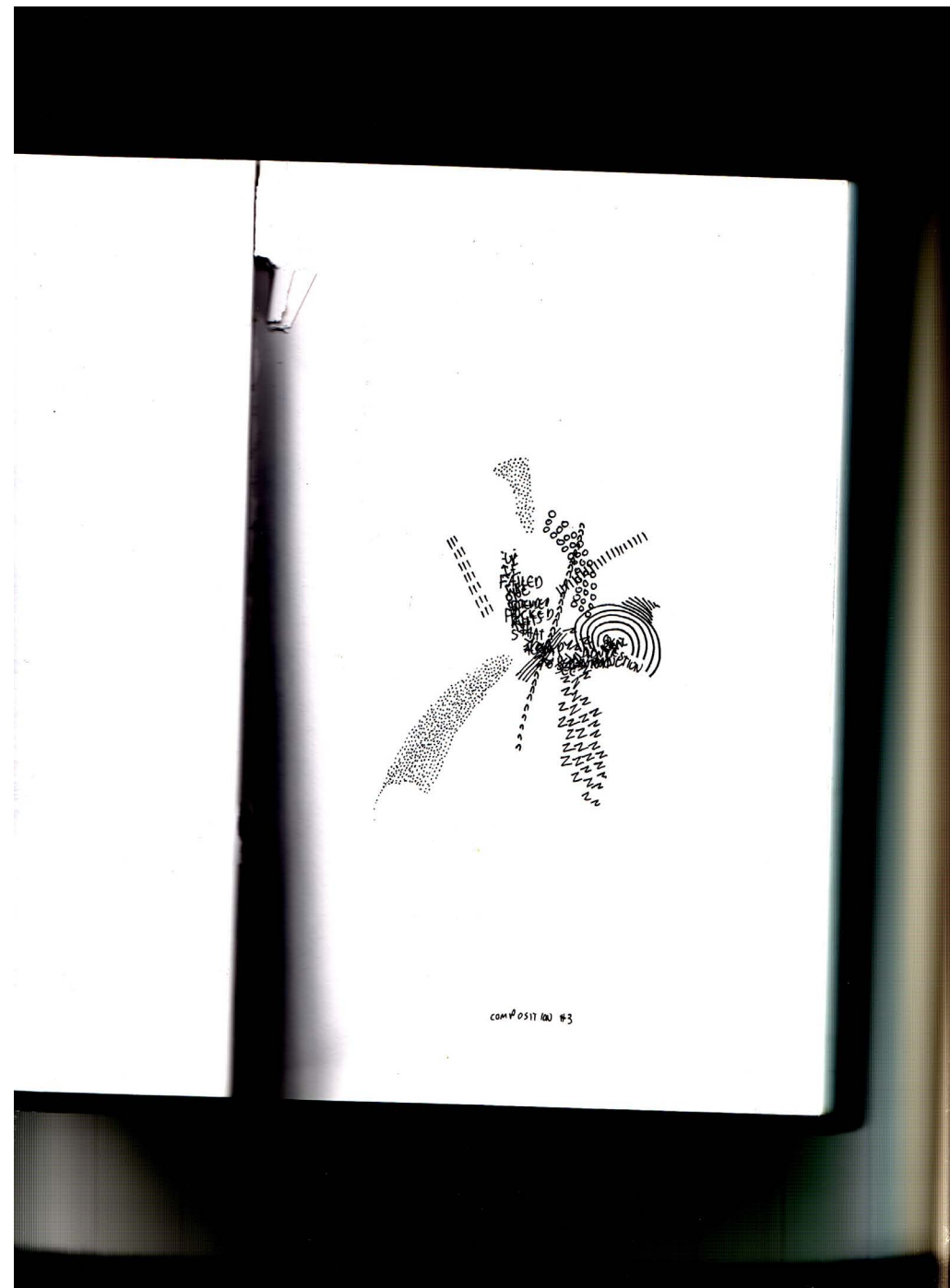
Finally making it to the restroom, he quickly used the facilities before moving to the sink to wash up, not that it made a difference now. He’d already caught whatever cold was going around. As if to confirm his diagnosis, Kane glanced up at the mirror; his brown eyes carried heavy bags underneath each. His skin seemed pale, more than just a result of the flickering florescent lighting. Even though it itched, he would resist

(continued on page 68)

Composition 3 (of 5)

James Cordas | Graphic Score

Cordas' series of graphic scores, "Compositions (1-5)," were written specifically for the interpretation and performance of saxophonist Josh Allen—an artist who has collaborated with, among others, free jazz legend Cecil Taylor.



scratching for a while, but eventually give in, running his nails over his arms and legs. Admittedly, he'd never heard of a flu or cold linked to dry skin, but his flaked off in massive patches. The good news was that the nose bleeds had seemed to have stopped.

"I've really got to drop by the doctor's office after the show today," he mumbled through cracked lips. Maybe he could get some sort of lotion to help before anymore of his chestnut hair was affected.

Kane slipped out of the restroom and began to make his way back when he noticed along the hallway a set of footprints going in the opposite direction; the sight was reassuring. It was always comforting to have someone else in the building. He hurried back to his chair and flipped the switch back into place, the light creeping to a soft glow. "Okay we're back. Where was I? Oh yeah, talking about today's top story: the escalating tensions around the globe. I know that a lot you listening are becoming more and more alarmed by the prospects of all out war, but I got to tell ya, I don't think it will happen. And even if it does, it won't be anything like what's portrayed at the movie theaters. Maybe there will be some fighting, but remember folks, America has yet to lose an all out war. It's fifteen minutes to the hour, and that means more commercials. This is KSFE 765 Bismarck. Sit tight."

He lit another cigarette and again he began to cough hoarsely. His hand came back with a splattering of blood. He started to crush the smoldering tobacco into

the ash tray only to grind out the ember on the table's laminated surface. *Damn cigarettes*, he thought, though some deeper fear momentarily flickered in him. Flipping the switch again he began, "And we're back, so let's get back to the topic at hand. Like I mentioned before, even if we do head into that dark curtain of war, it won't resemble at all anything we've seen on either TV or on film. There will be some skirmishes, and yes, there will be some casualties, but in the end they'll call a truce, draw up some sort of agreement, and we'll go back to our day-to-day lives complete with baseball, weekend barbeques, and mama's apple pie. It's fifteen minutes to the hour; this is KSFE 765 Bismarck. Sit tight."

Kane leaned toward the microphone again, resuming the signal with the flip of the control and began without preamble, "The good news here, people, is that I can safely say that there will be no all out world war, I mean really, nobody wants that. Not us, not OPEC, not China. I remember hearing somewhere some sobering words shared by Professor Einstein to a colleague many, many years ago. To paraphrase him, he basically said that he didn't know how they'd fight world war three, but he knew how they'd fight the fourth: with sticks and stones. It seems to me that in that sort of future, there's nothing to profit from, and as we well know, if something isn't profitable, it won't be done. It's fifteen minutes to the hour; this is KSFE 765 Bismarck. Sit tight."

Kane decided he would take calls in the next hour and try to get people talking. He tossed the switch again

to cut out of the signal. He flicked the switch again, cutting back into the commercials, the light above scarcely any more lit than a moment before. "It's fifteen minutes to the hour; this is KSFE 765 Bismarck. Sit tight." With a click the switch cut out the signal. Unnoticed by its operator, the indicator light had already gone dark. Kane reached again for the pack of cigarettes, wondering if the dust storm had died down yet.

Outside the tiny radio station, the earthy tempest had blown itself out, replaced now by darkened angry clouds and a blanketing unnatural silence. Following the wind's wrathful dirge, rain began to fall like tears from the torched sky, born from the poisoned atmosphere. The drops glowed and struck the ground; their soft pitter-patter betrayed as they landed, sounding with an angry sizzle and pitting the land and everything that lay on its surface. Nothing moved. Nothing remained. Nothing heard.

"It's fifteen minutes to the hour; this is KSFE 765 Bismarck. Sit tight."

To Be

Alisa R. Pierini | Poetry

To settle to the bottom
of a milky lake,
and sleep forever,
is a bewitching notion.

To drop into the silt,
hair winding about
with the current,
and to sleep. Sleep
among the worms
and crawdads
squirming and scuttling,
occasionally shadowed
by some large pike.

Yes, to sleep among these for eternity.
(NOT to die,
but to simply sleep.)
Here nothing grows,
or dies, or sees.
It is a suspended world,
without season.

How green and brown the world would be.
The skin would pale and prune,
The hair would grow thick among the weeds.
The lungs, breathing water,
would host fluttering little beasties.

But the mind,
In the opaque green darkness of the bed,
would sharpen,
and illuminate,
And steadily become awake.
Conscious, where it loves wind,
and light, and leaf, and pitch.
It will remember the air-world.
But the body would sleep.
Sleep on,
Until air and light are legends.

The Piper

Alisa R. Pierini | Poetry

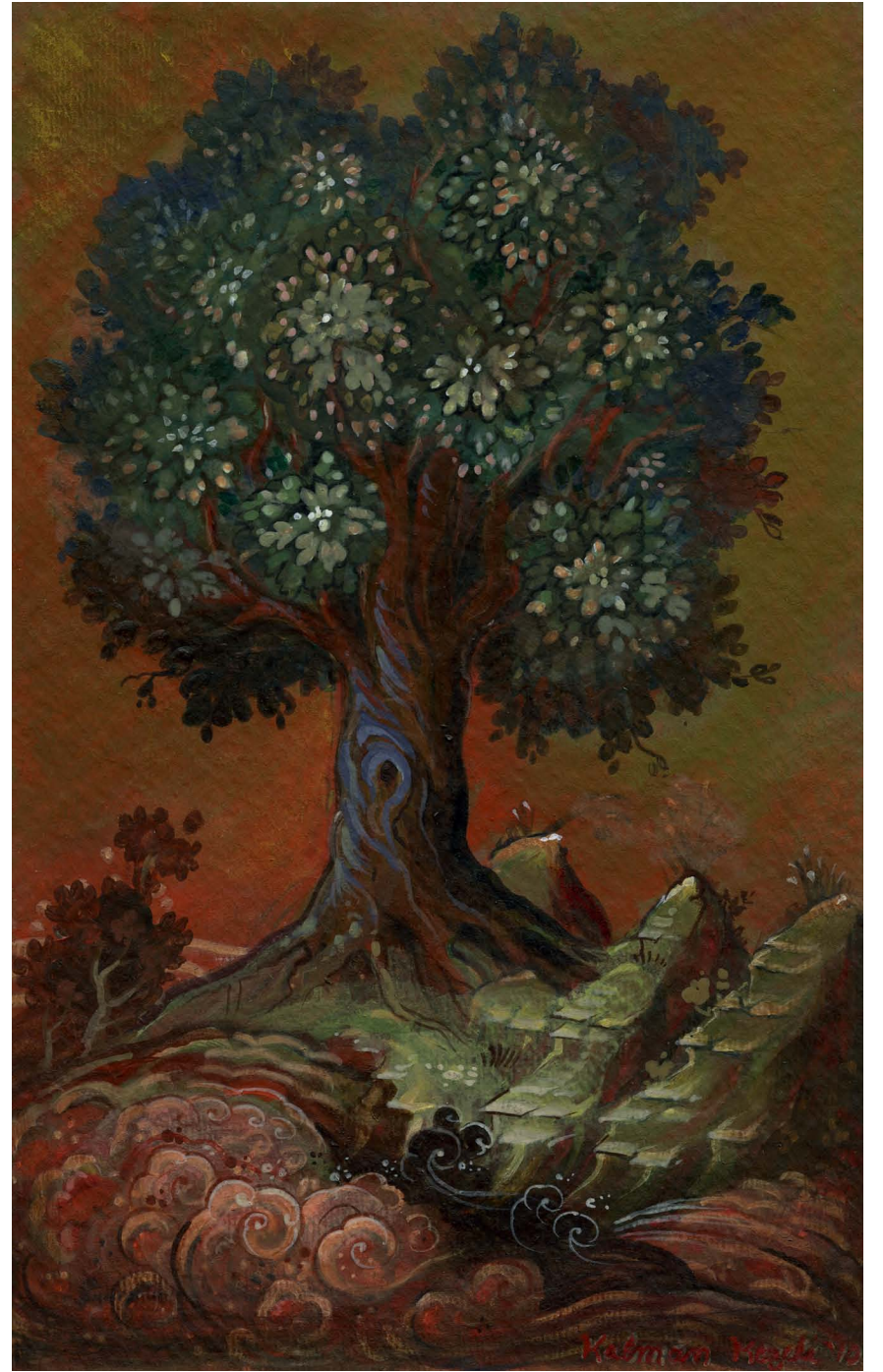
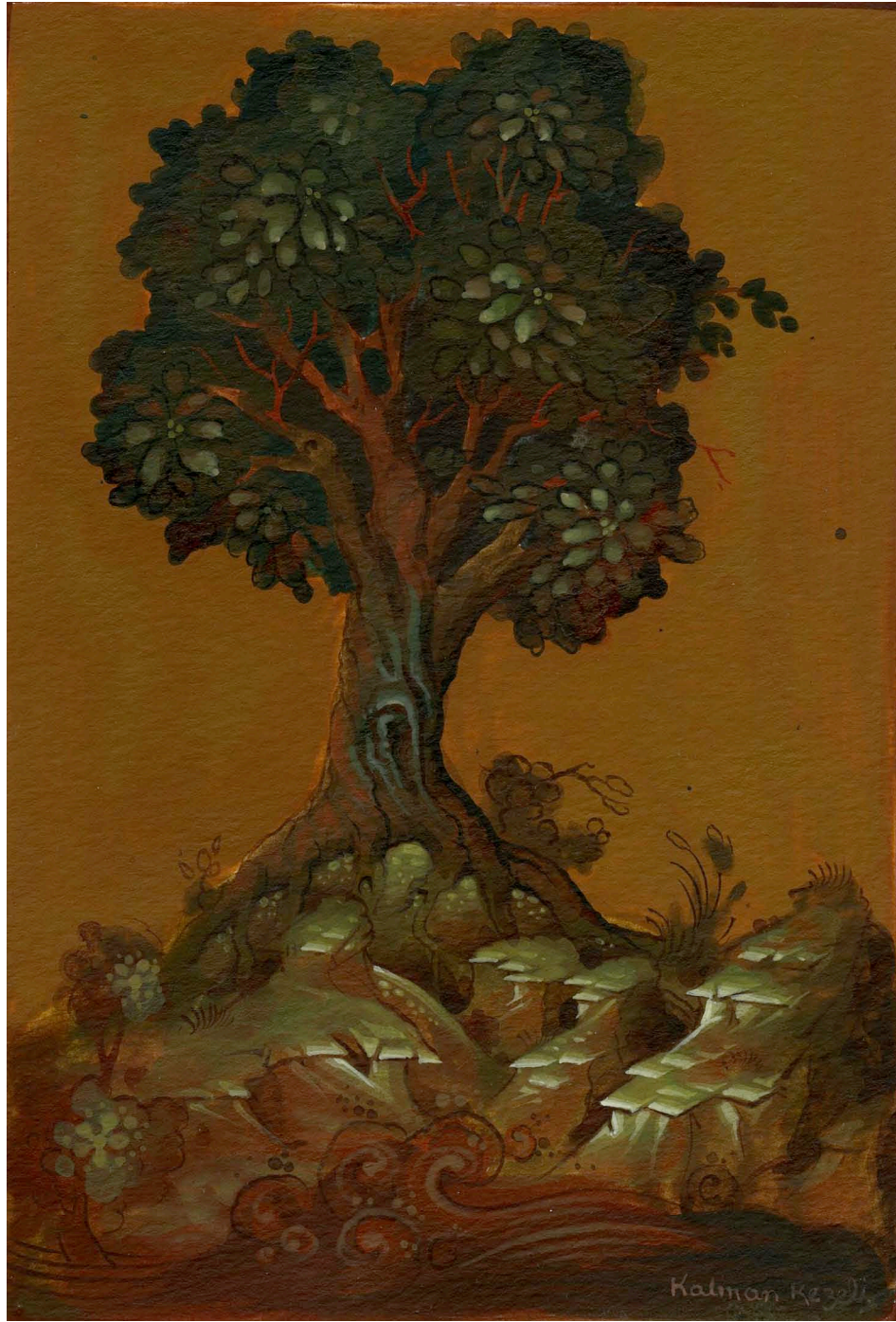
His Hands
Molded by God
Are glory
Fashioned into digits
Composing the sounds of life
Into a language
Of pitch
And air

Evening Tree

Winter Tree

Kalman Kezeli
Egg Tempura and Acrylic
on Paper

Kezeli uses the very unique medium of handmade egg tempura on watercolor paper in order to recreate the aesthetic sensibilities of early twentieth century fantasy illustration. Several of the artist's works, including these two paintings, have been included in the Sierra College Ridley Gallery's Thirteenth Annual Juried Student Art Show.



Tormented Truths

Ahmad Merza | Fiction

Lifting my head from my hands, I open my eyes and blink back the tears. I stare across the tent looking, but not seeing. My heart is heavy with burdens of the past. I look down at my palms and see the lines criss-crossing my skin. They are like deep lines drawn in the sand by the hot desert winds. Calluses rise across them like miniature mountains. It makes me think of the distant mountains back home. These hands, this face, and these eyes, have suffered. I shake my head not wanting to give in to the reality of it all, wanting to live in the past, but being tormented by the present. It felt more like a dream, but then quickly became a nightmare. The tragedies that my people have suffered, that my family has suffered, no one should go through. We suffered in silence and became displaced, not knowing where to call home or what we might find. The journey that I have endured with my family has cost us everything. Our life, our health, and our overall well-being will never be the same. I blink furiously, holding back the tears of anguish in remembrance of that day.

About six months ago, everything took a turn for the worse. I remember the day; I will never forget. I have turned the sequences of that day over and over in

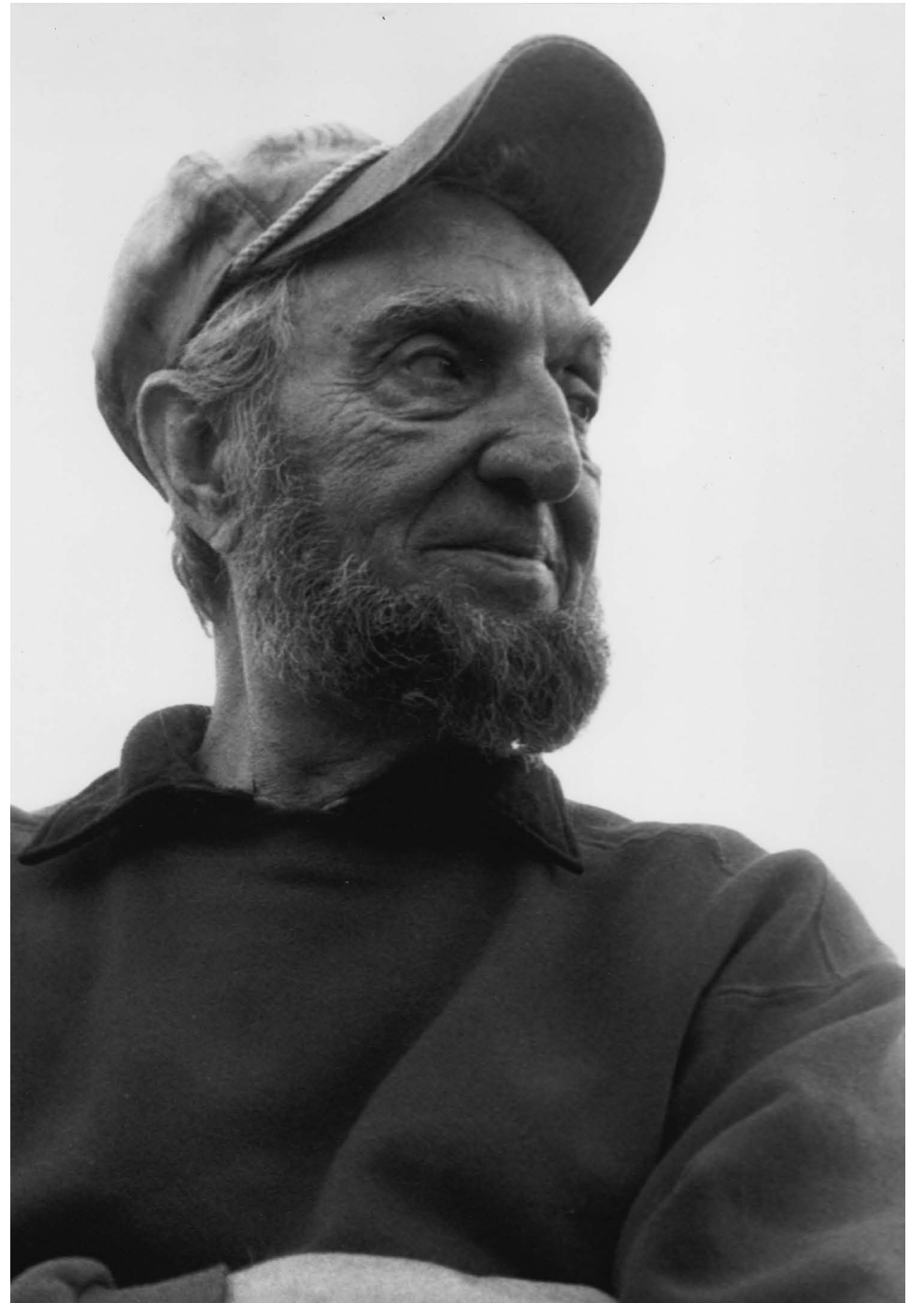
my mind. The possibility of what could have happened drives me into a place inside myself. The September 23, 1980 headline read: “Iraq Declares War on Iran.” Baghdad was, believe it or not, once a beautiful place. It was full of peace, art, culture, open-air bazaars, universities, and the vibrancy of everyday life. Some people would later go so far as to call it the New York of the Middle East. We knew that Iran was going through a revolution, but I had not expected this. The first thing that came to mind was my family; I was born in Baghdad, but my Persian wife was born and raised in Tehran.

I had no idea that things were going to turn out the way they did. When tensions began to escalate, the Iraqi militia was sent door-to-door surveying the population, making notes and counting the amount of Persians in the city. Three weeks before, my friend Omar, who was married to a Persian woman, was asked to leave his wife. The militia offered five thousand dinars, which is equivalent to about sixteen thousand American dollars. He respectfully turned down the offer. I haven’t seen or heard from him since he told me about the incident; his neighbors said the secret police took him and his wife

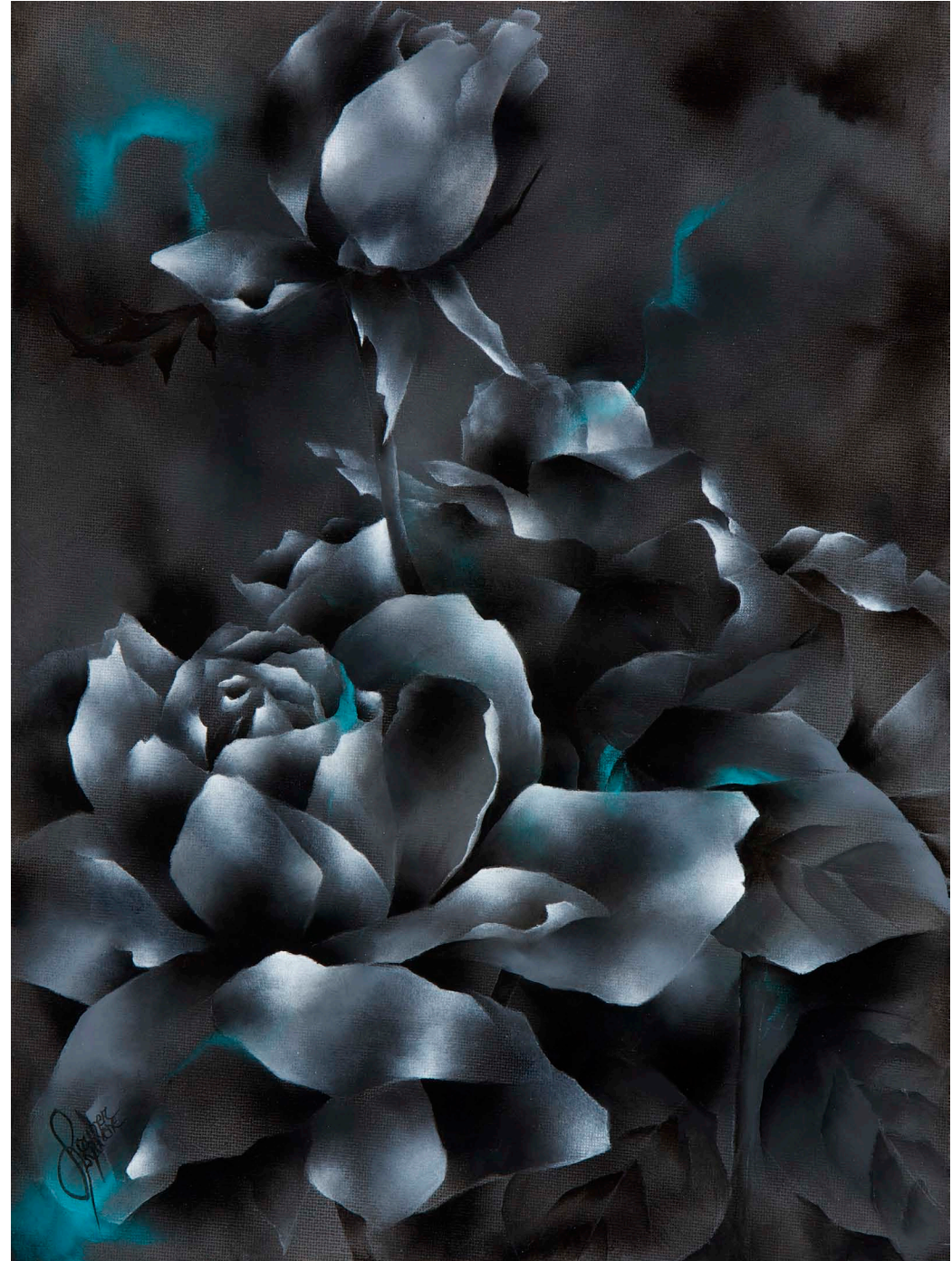
(continued on page 75)

Ahmad Merza is a Sierra College student and prospective filmmaker who aims to make motion pictures which will contribute to our collective understanding of the world and its nigh-infinately varied people and cultures.

Grandpa Abe
Megan Greene | Photography



Medley of Roses
Sylviane Gaumer | Acrylic on Canvas



out in the middle of the night. I could only pray for him and his wife's safe return.

The knock on the door rattled my heart; at that moment, I knew it was death. I quickly told my wife and children to hide in one of the back rooms. Regardless of what happened, I wanted them to be safe. As I opened the door, I saw two National Army officers. I knew by their dialect that they were from Southern Iraq. Automatically, I knew it was bad because if they had sent local officers, they would have been more recognizable and more likely to have been hung by the local people. These two men were foreign to me. They stared through sightless eyes and requested that I leave my wife. Due to the impressive rank that I had in the military, they offered me 8,000 dinars and the option to keep my four children. I asked why they were doing this, and they replied that it was related to national security.

After I told them that I needed a day to think about it, they agreed to give me one day, ensured that I would make the right decision. As soon as they left, I knew what I had to do. I made a phone call to my wife's father and told him what happened. After considering the well being of my family, my father-in-law and I decided to leave the country. The plan was simple. Our families would travel north and head for the Turkish border, get into Turkey, and plead asylum. From there we would try to go to America; we had always heard of all the freedoms in America.

The night was cold and it was 8:30pm. The sky

was lit up with hundreds of stars. I don't usually notice them, but as we were leaving, my oldest daughter Anam told me that she had never seen the stars so bright. The innocence of my daughter's voice shook me. I could tell that my seven-year-old daughter had yet to experience life. It saddens me that she witnessed some things that would make even the bravest of men weep. I told her to make sure she never forgets where she came from and kissed her on the head.

We had planned to meet my wife's family near the border. It was a long and dangerous drive; the curved black roads were full of looters and thieves whose souls were darker than the men we were escaping. My cousin Ali, who knew the roads well, knew to turn the headlights off in order to go unseen in high-risk areas. He told me stories of all the hijacked and dead bodies on the side of the roads. I believe he turned the lights off because he didn't want the children to see the truth of what was out there. I respected him for that.

We arrived at the Turkey-Iraq border to find a crowd of people trying to leave Iraq. As my wife and children got situated, I found myself staring out into the sea of people. Near the front of this massive line I found my wife's brothers. When I asked where the rest of the family was, they didn't reply. They just stared lifeless and afraid; newborn babies had more motor functions. Then, I shook Nassar, the oldest of the three, and asked where the rest of his family was. With tears flowing down his face, he said that their car had been ambushed

by the national army. They had pleaded and begged to be let go. He said his father struck one of the soldiers because they were harassing his wife, and they instantly put a bullet in his head.

When I asked about their mother, he said the criminals pointed in a direction and told her if she didn't run they would kill all her children. She ran. He said that minutes later he heard an explosion; they had made her run into a minefield. As I was going to ask them how they got away, I noticed that there were only three of them. I asked where Kareem, the second oldest, was. They took him; he sacrificed himself for his three brothers. These people weren't stupid. They realized that if they take one brother, it is less likely that the others will fight against them; men didn't want to risk possibly killing their own brother. Kareem was never seen again. To this day, my heart goes out to him, his mother, and his father. I haven't told my wife what happened to her family; I had said that her father, mother, and brother had died in a wreck. The *lie* nearly killed her, and I could only wonder what the *truth* would do. With all this on my mind, I wanted to get across the border; I had to. I wanted to save what was left of my family. After talking to some Turkish soldiers, I managed to bribe them. They allowed my family and two of my wife's brothers to cross. Nassar stayed behind; he said that it should have been him, not Kareem, and vowed that he would find him.

I set foot on Turkish soil unsure of what the fu-

ture held, but I knew we had a chance of surviving. That was six agonizing months ago. Currently my family resides in a refugee camp with thousands like us, all with similar stories and cursed lives. The days are long. My wife found this notebook and asked me to write. She told me to write this story so that our kids will never forget, so that our families will know what we endured, and so that people will find hope where they least expect it. For my family, the future looks grim, but I feel the worst has passed.

Dragonfly

Dave Koerner | Photography

David Koerner is a continuing student at Sierra College working toward earning an A.A. in photography. He has earned numerous accolades throughout his college career and has worked as a teacher's assistant and intern for Professor Alan Thorner for over two years. Koerner is married and is the father of two boys, ages seventeen and twenty. He is, in addition to being a very talented nature photographer, an avid sportsman and musician.



Piece | Gears | Displacement

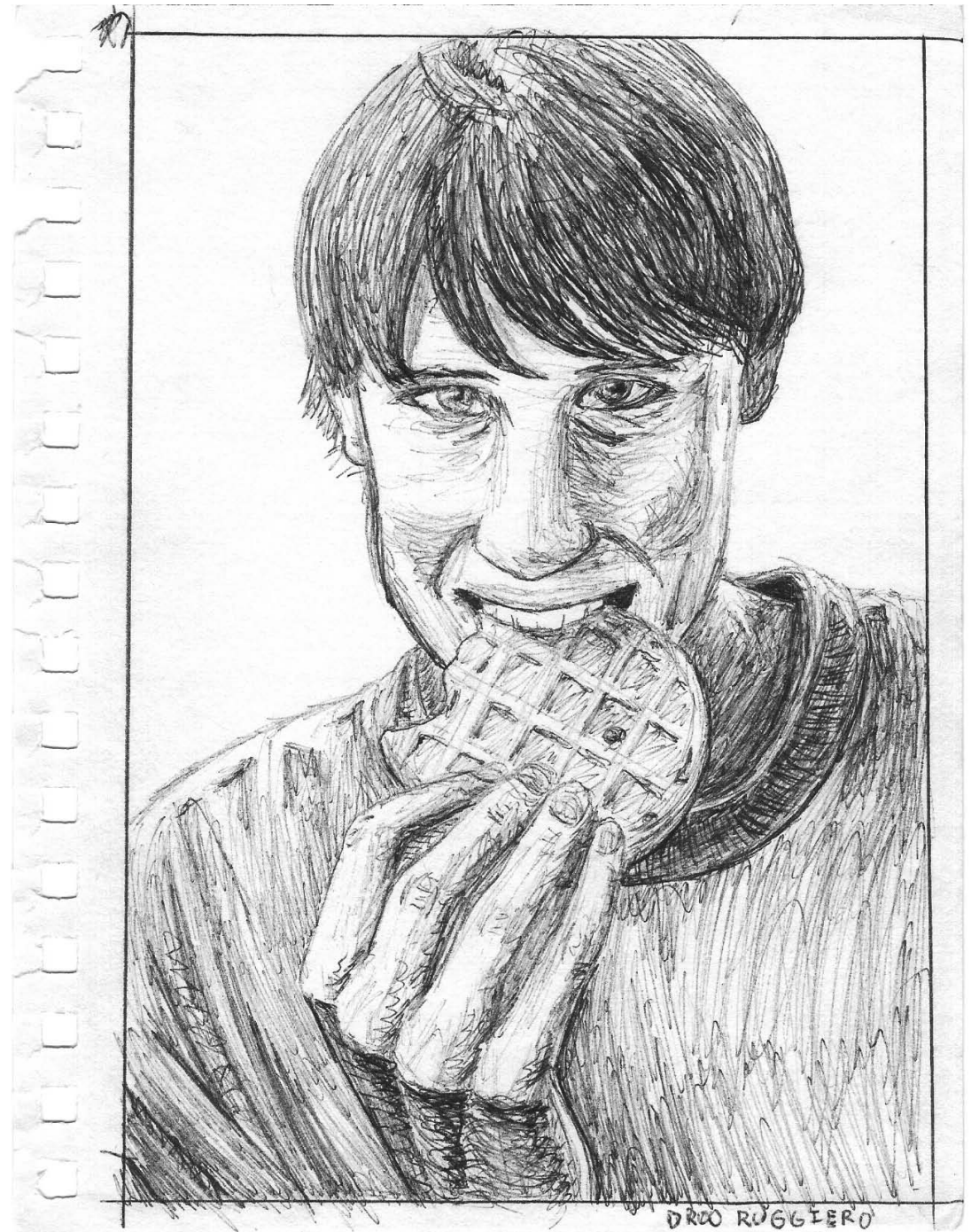
Kile Marshall | Poetry

Often, of, to, of, to, chord fibrous untangle of to piece opener.
Often of to lost landmass forlorn patterning of to geometries bits
reassembler. Often unplanned.

Ridge arbitrary spine eating-post. Interwind pyramids: protruder
triangles. Grinds.

Odd. Chafing, gritty, isn't twelve isn't form-holding.
Desire, awkward hole spaces {want! want!}.
Isn't piece. Isn't numbers, shapes. Isn't fulfillment. Desire,
little, space, desire, twelve. Isn't form-completing. Circle—begin.
Circle—begin. Many more: shapes, shapes. Circle—in form.
Odd.

Tyler
Drew Ruggiero | Ink on Paper



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*Contains biographical information on the author

