

Beanswitch

Literature and Fine Arts

And Sometimes Cats...



Spring 2019

We on the BeanSwitch Team would like to
thank our advisors
Tomi McCutchen and Chris Hill

Our BeanSwitch Team



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Graphic Design Major



Alex Halbrook
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Aly Rusciano
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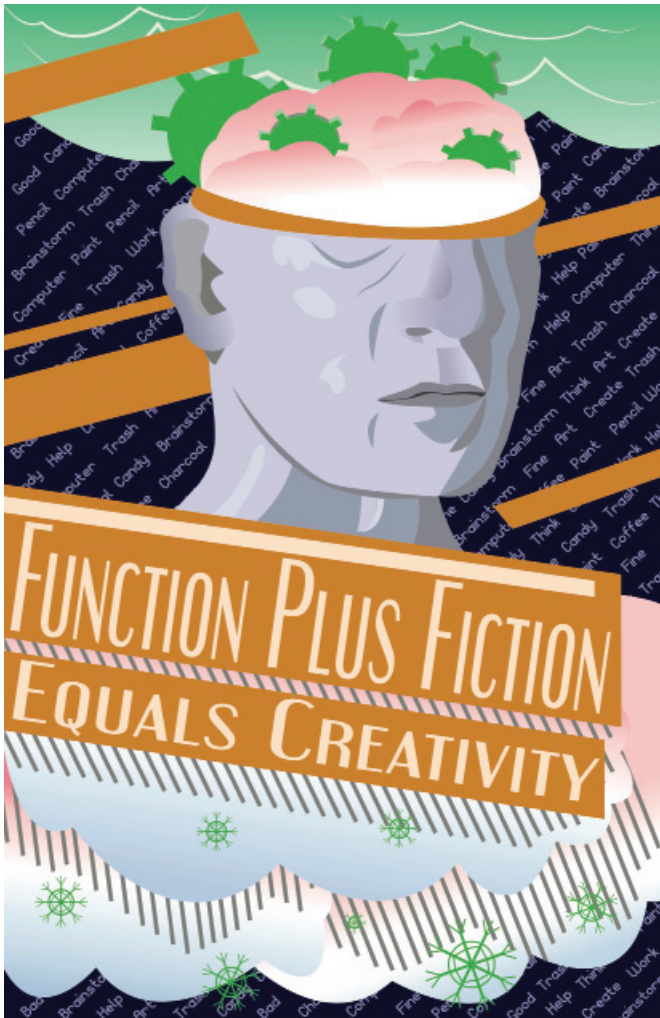
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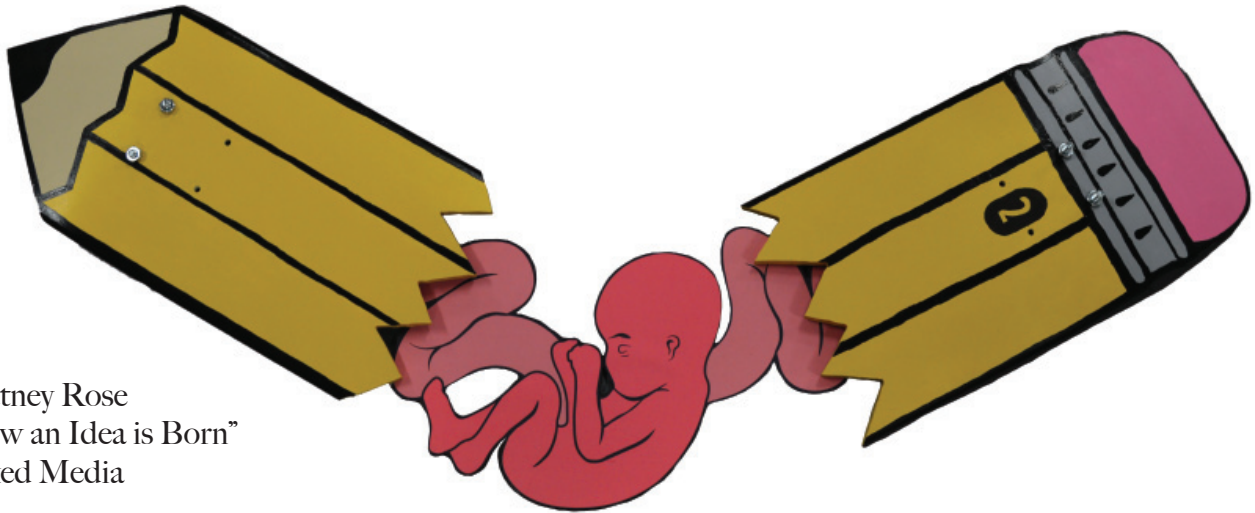
James Lamb
“Creative Brain”
Graphic Design



Grant Campbell
“Bug Off”
Graphic Design



Brittney Rose
"How an Idea is Born"
Mixed Media



Word Spinner

By Zhariah Peaks

Writing keeps the monster
at bay, but it's hungry
and words are its
addiction.

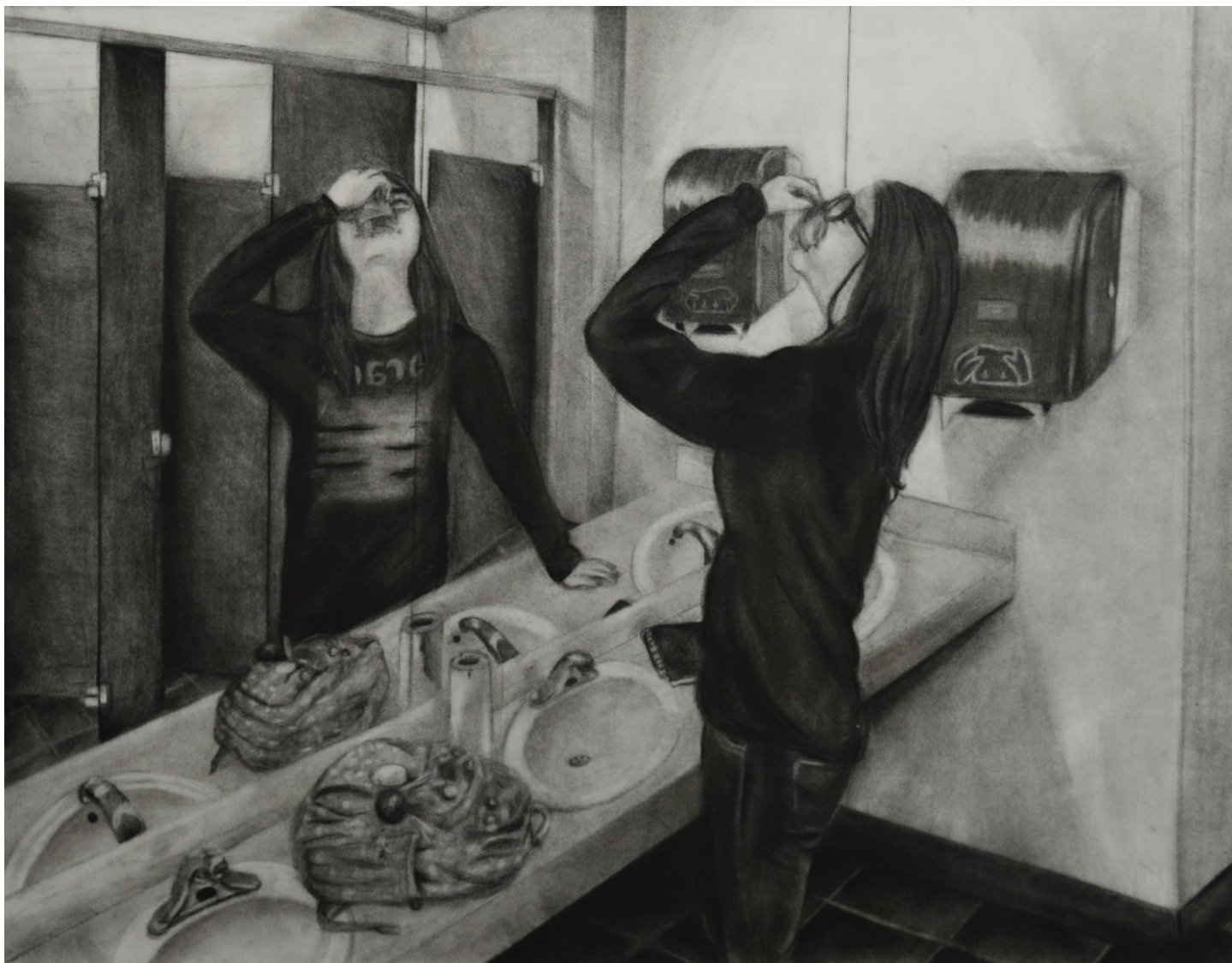
Words are power
to lift one up, or crush
when combined
just the right way can
change minds, build
countries, or
tear them apart.

Quicker to the draw
than any gun could
ever be.

The word spinner is God
crafting words with
their blood and
breathing life with
the tip of a pen
and forming entire
Universes beneath...



Anna Lax Gatti
“Breast Cancer Gene”
Mixed Media

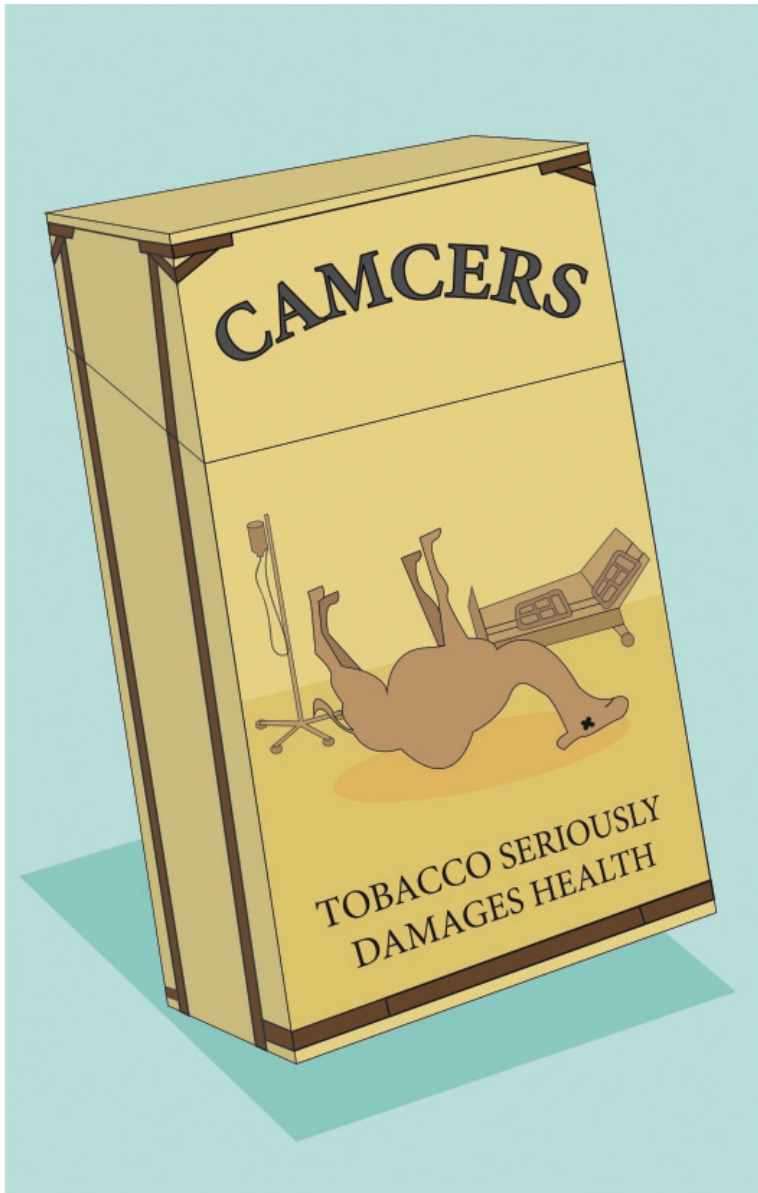


Daphne LaGrone
"Pitstop"
Charcoal

Malicious

By Shannon Merrell

The poison dripping from her lips
erases everything.
Lies whispered in your ear—taught to hate.
Molding and shaping you,
she keeps you away.
Placed into the hands of the court
that refuse to see the truth.
Blinded, your well-being erased
by greed and lies.
She plays the victim well:
track marks covered by
long sleeves and promises.
Broken home—you become
accustomed to the acid she feeds.
Fragile, our bond splinters
by the vindictive mother
using you as a pawn, a weapon
to control, to crush
this father that only wanted
to protect you
from the venom she injects
into your very being.



Anna Sison
"Camcers"
Graphic Design

Cierra Henderson
"Fear"
Graphic Design



PTSD

By Shannon Merrell

Afghanistan took you away.
Days, weeks, months seemed endless.
The army returned a shell, a ghost
of the boy you once were
and I watched as you tried to drink
the pain away—chain-smoking and
cutting, keeping all your secrets locked
away inside, as you were trained to.
Nothing was enough to quench your sorrow,
your anger, your agony. Only two months home
so fleeting—gone before it had even begun.
I woke early that day, my head overflowing with
worry, keeping sleep at bay. As soon as I heard
the sirens go by my heart clenched and
I knew...it was like my very breath
was pulled from my body, triggering alarms
that blended with the phone ringing
with the answer that brought me to my knees.
Shouldering the blame of an older sister,
convinced there was something—anything
I could have done to change the outcome,
to help you—the Army took you—
pain, sorrow, and madness—took you.
You were gone long before that fatal wreck
and I am left without my little brother—
a piece of me buried in the earth
with the remains the Army left me with.



Where I Laid

By Zhariah Peaks

Kaitlyn Courtney
"Early Nostalgia"
Oil Paint

seedy scent cloying and clinging
to the billowing canopy,
a duvet made
of young 4 AM rays
creeping through downturned blinds
and white linen curtains
a home made
of hickory smoked eyes,
flinty and flighty
hickory smoked voice
crackling like wildfire

from early morning euphoria
brown eyelash on left cheek
horn-rimmed readers hastily worn
crooked
threadbare baker boy hat
abandoned
on nightstand alongside
slightly bent warm gold band
mauve laced
satin nightie
abandoned
on dark hardwood floor
long lost love,
perfumed with Obsession,
abandoned
for calloused hands on bare brown back,
russet fingers hazily connecting
the moles and inked images
of upper abdomen
blushed dimple, crooked smile,
rare
in the way he laughs
sardonic in his humor
but soft,
like the dark mop curls of his hair,
with her,
not me.
book in hand:
I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings,
 he does, I know; he makes the little songbird belt
out lovely notes and ruffle her coifed plumage
yellowed, borrowed, foreign—
hers
not mine now.

you didn't use to read so reverently, fingers tracing
each word carefully to fathom every nuanced meaning.
warm bare bodies
sticky and humid to the touch
contented and tangled
white sheets
soiled with novel love
low hum and growl as sleep returns
sleep's return—
a dream that drips
through my fingertips,
teasing,
like the scrunched smirk,
scar above upper lip,
half hidden in wispy mustache,
crescent-mooning in the dim light,
and murmured bittersweet nothings,
uneven lips pressed against relaxed hair,
whispered "I love you's"
that bless the morning
and haunt the night.
that bless the morning
and haunt the night.



Cat Sanchez
 “Actias Luna Illumination”
 Mixed Media



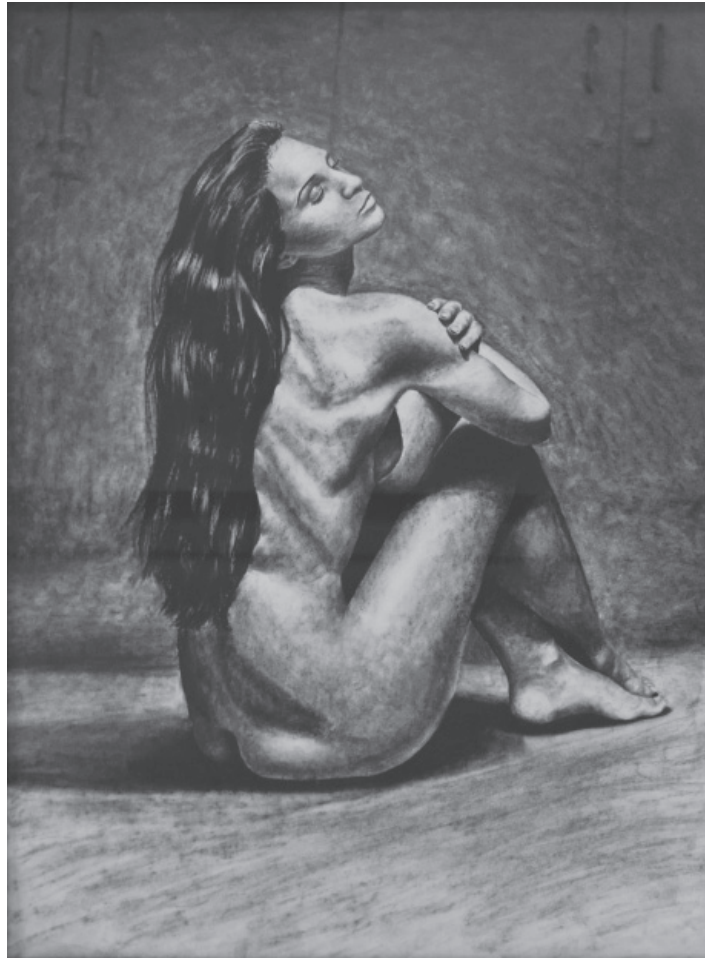
Cat Sanchez
 “Delphinium Elatum - Full Bloom”
 Mixed Media



Dillon Faith
“Step Inside”
Graphic Design



Kaitlyn Frandson
“Lady What’s
Tomorrow”
Charcoal



The Essence of Me
By Zhariah Peaks

I giggle.
“You’re grounded.”
“Yeah?”
I was kinda mad kinda dazed
kinda scared outta my mind
They drugged me

And it could've been worse
If not for real good girlfriends who also happen to be Vengeance.
I could've woken up with a miasma of him deep inside.
But he broke inside my most intimate self and stole the essence of me
My skin
the deepest part
the softest part
a little tiny scratch not so tiny or little
under strange dirty fingernails covered in grime and his own dandruff
My DNA forever with him
Right now.

But I'm not The Dead Girl.
I'm sitting in a puddle of rubbing alcohol
Not half part of damp Earth and half part of cold tombstone
Telling Mom that I'm fine. I'm fine. I'm fine.
I ignore the burn because fire cleanses the soul
or punishes it
or something
that something scattered on singed neuron ends struggling to comprehend.
Mom said my father went to the church to look for me.

I giggle
She does too
It wasn't funny, but hell if either one of us knows how to react properly.
I'm grounded.
That's all fine. I'm fine. We are all totally fine.
I'm just grounded.
Not cold. Mutilated. Dead.
Grounded.
But not buried.

To Men

By Shannon Merrell

She holds onto my hand, eyes set and
determined.

She is fierce, like me
and I am glad because the world is tough
on girls

She doesn't know this yet; the world has not yet begun
to bare its ugly teeth.

I hold her hand a little tighter—knowing
there are only so many years left where I can
protect her

So many years left of her tight grasp on
my hand.

She is strong, though,
and she will need that because the world is not
kind to girls

The world, my dear daughter, is only kind
to men.



Mia Upchurch
“Drained”
Charcoal

Ivie Pfenning
"Oxytocin"
Printmaking



Her Heart and Soul

By Damian Johnson

There's more than that that taps at the pupil pane
There's more pain in the glass of shards than champagne
There are more scars than there are pores
So she sips and pours another sour drink
Her heart stops, stares, then nods away
The shame and guilt tilt with the crescent after her wake

My Story

By Shannon Merrell

They say to write what you know, but
who are “they” anyway?
My story twists around my veins—with roots dug so deep
that I’ll never be able to pull free.
The branches pull, tug, and twist
like words longing to be said,
but held back by clenched teeth.
What is it then that encompasses
the story of me? For we all have stories to tell,
a web of woven words, strewn
across this path of life, not stopping—our stories
are not our own: they melt
like lava into others we cross
paths with, becoming a part of them.
Our stories crisscross through time—touching places, faces,
through love and pain until
those stories fade away with death,
but if we’re lucky our stories live on,
told to new generations to cherish, to learn from.
Or, if we’re unlucky—to remain buried
deep among a box of tattered
remains that get hidden from the world
by those left behind—those stories
that hold secrets too hard to face.
My story begins with such a box—dusty, cast-aside,
and shoved under a bed...



James Lamb
"Brainstorming"
Graphic Design

Can You

By Zhariah Peaks

“Can a cherry blossom, fresh from seeded womb, begin to know what its life shall bring?
Can it know the hardships of Winter it must suffer through?
It knows not anything other than its current state.

Of innocence,
Of purity,
Of hope.

To new life, a life is but a novelty.
Not a culmination of decisions and consequences
But an infantile adventure
Glossy and sticky and fresh from seeded womb.

To new life,
There is only joy
Only happiness,
Not a care in the world
As it nurses from a weary mother's bosom.

A bud on the cusp of blossoming,
Remains sheltered
By strong oak branches
Weathered by Time and a life full of Misery.

You give your new life shelter,
Though I know not why
You cushion the bittersweet bite of Reality
By feeding youth the blood of your own innocence
In turn, devouring their own.

Why? I might ask,

Should I not know the answer.
It's a poison, marrow-deep in your kind.
An obsession with youth,
A denial of Time,
A toxic Jealousy against your own younger versions

It is because of this,
Your blossoms never bloom
As vibrant as the last Spring.
You bitter branches, obscure the sweet sun.
Under the petty guise of
Shelter.
Of home sweet home.

I show preference to your youth
The ones who have yet to be sullied
Yet to grow into you.

But I'm only allowed a limited number of budding blossoms
And you mourn their loss
The wasted years
The wasted youth
Much more than the rest.

To you, youth is meant to be beautiful
A pretty lie
Mask of ugly truth.
You teach your young to
Feel most alive
While flirting with me.

Shame. Shame. I am degraded to drag the chains of your branches
So weary
So bitter

Unfruitful
A life not lived.
I must suffer the brunt of your regret, your misery, your fear.

But to the budding of new hope I ask,
Can you, cherry blossom, fresh from seeded womb, begin to know what a hard life shall bring?
And blessedly they will answer,
On their untimely bed of mine,”
“Not I,
Not
I.”

Isaiah Kennedy
“Untitled Photography”
Photography



See

By Zhariah Peaks

The world of men is

As old as the morning lyghte,
And his soul burns bright with Anger and Blood

Pain serves as the medium of life lessons
The man yearns for the ageless beauty of more Time

Yet their anthem of glory and revolution is composed of
Purposed egos and greed
Worth quantified by war's earth-rending conquest

Yet still, they complain when I arrive,
Searching
Searching
For their filthy souls
As if they did not cry out to me
Beg for me
To come and free.

The life of man is

Riddled with burdens
How loud you groan quantifies the depth of your happiness
Well worked hands are as essential as they are deplorable

All of his life
He loves to hate love
Melancholia runs rampant
Setting fire to the romanticism
The beautifully intrinsic novelty

Of a life well lived
All of his life
He loves to reminisce,
Better times of the past
Never look forward towards Future
For it may hold well-deserved Misery

All of his life
Is lived in denial
So much so
It has become the lullaby
Tender babes still nursed by a worn mother's bosom
Remember remember
Till adulthood rings true
(But blest be those who never see the Spring)

I had once asked a young blossom
Of good standing cherry tree
If it could stand the test of time
And not disappoint me

But a mere bud is but a blind thing
Preached to be so from its burgeoning
And could not answer me
When I posed the simple inquiry
Can you see what I
See?



Alex McNeal
“Your Body is a Temple, but Mine Feels
More Like a Swamp Hut”
Raku





Brittney Rose
"Human Control System"
Mixed Media



Reanna Francis
"Untitled"
Mixed Media

Me?

By Zhariah Peaks

Who am I?
With my laugh like nails
Hypnotic gaze hallowed
Omniscient presence lurking
At every turn of daily breath
Every Morn
Every Eve

Who am I?
But a dream deferred
But a single moment of dreaded
Silence eternal
Consequence of your karmic conclusion
Few doth not fear my severe victory.

Who am I?
But a cyclical nature
Of life begotten life
A conglomeration of choices
Too late to regret

I am the Lost
Who drag their chains on the jagged shore
Who seek safe passage, unimpeded
In my dark abyss

I shepherd you, meek souls
Tormented by your weight
I've been called to know the stories of a hundred
million eyes.

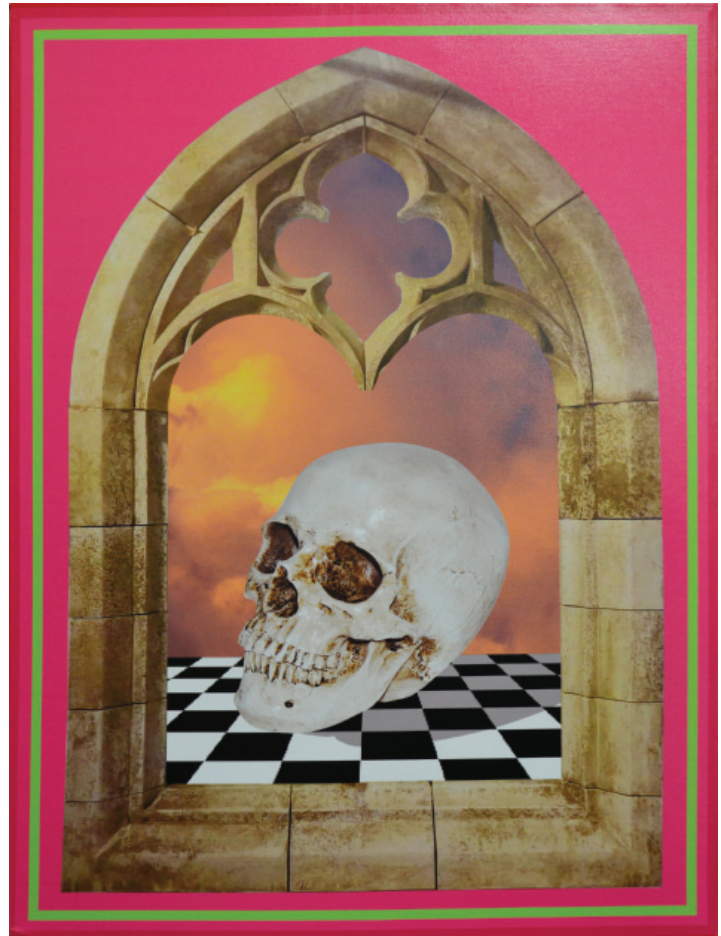
Forgotten by all who matter
I am like you in this way.
Eternal but not,
Conquered but thus prevailed.

O how tragic it must be
to love something close to me...

Who am I?
They ask,
In raspy whispers,
Though they know not but the anguished truth
The pain of such knowledge,
Only assuaged by me.
You cannot escape my wrath, sweet younglings.

Trouble me not with your mourning
For the river we'll cross to your new found nest
Floods with the woes of men beyond repair.
So traverse the illimitable unknown
And away with me
You have little choice in the matter.

But to lessen the longing
The burden
The sorrow
Do ponder me this
On the brink of eternity
For I've told you whom I might be-- but
Who--
By Jove--
Are
You?



Brittney Rose
"Reviere"
Graphic Design

Heather Wilson
"Forrest Spirits"
Acrylic



After Dark

By Alex Halbrook

The summer before our sophomore year, we started going out after dark. It became a ritual for us to meet up at the old bridge that ran over Jack's River. The bridge was derelict and smelled heavily of rot and decay. It hadn't been used since before we were born, and its state of ruin held a strange appeal for rebellious teens, such as ourselves. Billy would break into his parents' liquor cabinet and slowly siphon out alcohol, so he didn't get caught. Looking back, you would have to be an idiot or a drunk, like Billy's folks, to not have noticed the amount of booze we managed to swipe.

On nights like these, I always caught a ride from Marcus. He drove a beat-up red Chevy that

groaned like a dying animal when the engine flipped. Because of this, he had to pick me up a block away from my house so my parents wouldn't hear his truck. This night I took my time walking through the humid night air. I stumbled a bit, tugging at the hem of my too short skirt that barely kept my modesty and turning my kohl smudged eyes toward Marcus's truck in the distance. I made a lot of changes that summer and the only people that didn't seem to mind were the neighborhood boys. They seemed to appreciate my new style and carefree attitude.

I straightened up and gave my skirt one final tug before I made it up to the truck. Marcus leaned over the passenger seat and unlocked the door for me. It squeaked as I swung it open and hopped up into the cab. Marcus's eyes drifted down for a minute during my entrance, but he immediately whipped his eyes to the road, his ears going red.

"How's it going, Marc?" I asked, crossing my legs with effort.

"It's going good. Oh! Danny, I listened to that band you mentioned. They're amazing." Marcus was shy and always avoided eye contact. He was sweet in a strange way.

"I know, right? They're my favorite, by far." I'd told Marcus the day before about this band, MGMT, that I was newly obsessed with. I pulled down the visor and dug around in my bag for my chapstick. "Mind if I plug up my music?"

"No, go ahead."

I grabbed the aux cord and pulled up

my favorite night out playlist. The music filled the truck, and I rolled down my window and shouted out the lyrics at the top of my lungs. Marcus softly sang along from the driver's side, looking a little out of place next to my obnoxious "singing."

I was yelling my way through "Me and Michael" when we pulled up to the bridge. I unplugged my phone and hopped out of the truck, wobbling on impact. I made my way over to where the others were gathered around Ash's speakers, which were set up in the back of a truck, and immediately had a beer shoved in my hand. I took a deep gulp of the lukewarm beer, feeling the warmth spread through my chest. Feeling satisfied, I tilted my head back and moved to the music, swaying towards the closest person, who happened to be my friend Ash. I wound my arms around their neck and pulled them closer.

"Ash! It's been so long!"

"... It's been like a ...a week," they said, giggling a little and swaying in a tipsy way.

"A week too long."

We moved around to the beat, bumping into each other a bit. After a couple minutes of "dancing," I went to get another drink, getting caught up in random gossiping along the way. It took thirty minutes to make my way over, dodging everyone who had something to say. When I finally stumbled up to the back of someone's truck where a cooler was set up, I dug around for something decent. A pair of hands grabbed my hips from behind, causing me to



Heather Wilson
“Keeper of Secrets”
Watercolor

jump and stumble forward. The hands caught me from falling and spun me around, where I saw Marcus looking sheepish.

“Sorry, didn’t mean to make you jump.”

I took a step back, smiling a little in relief. “No problem, Marc.”

“I was wondering... do you want to hang out sometime, just the two of us?”

“Oh, Marc... I’m not sure... You know I love you, right? Just not...”

He looked down, red creeping up his cheeks. Speechless, I mumbled out an excuse that I honestly can’t remember now. The alcohol and the strange mood in the air were making me feel a little off. With a poor excuse, leaving Marcus looking defeated and lonely, I stumbled off, checking my phone. I decided to head home because it was almost 2 a.m. now, but Marcus was passed out beside a friend, so I decided to walk, rather than accept a ride from one of my friends and end up in a ditch somewhere.

The night had gotten windy, so I hugged my arms close as I followed the road home. It wasn’t too far from my house, maybe 30 minutes on foot. I was making my way past Hurts St., a residential area about halfway between the bridge and my house when I heard a noise in the distance. I turned toward the noise, a sputtering sound. It wouldn’t

have seemed like anything, except it was the middle of the night and everything was silent, except for the crickets softly chirping. The sound seemed so much louder when compared to the quiet night surrounding me. I cautiously walked in the direction of the noise, turned the corner of a nearby house and leaned into the area between two houses, where the street lamps didn't quite reach. He was just standing there in the dark, motionless, turned toward the side of the house I was peering around. I could tell it was a man because of his size; the silhouette was tall and broad. I thought he was alone at first and as the sound continued, I got concerned.

"Are you ok?" I asked, reaching out to him slightly. He whipped his head toward me, his eyes were wide and crazed. That was when I realized he wasn't alone. Behind him lay a girl. Her eyes stared up at the sky, blank and empty. I wondered momentarily why she was staring off like that, unmoving. Why didn't she get up? She didn't look comfortable, to say the least. As a lone car passed by, the light hit her face, and I understood. Her clothes were soaked through with blood, and her throat gurgled as blood dripped down her chin. My eyes caught sight of the man's hand clenched on the bloody knife, knuckles white. I screamed, jerking away as the man lurched forward to try to grab my arm.

"Wait," he said. "Let me explain." He stumbled toward me reaching his hands out as the blade fell to the ground with a dull thud as it landed on the grass.

I ran. I don't think I've ever run that

fast, before or since. I sprinted away from that house, all the while conscious of the sound of his shoes on the asphalt behind me. My lungs screamed and felt like they would tear, ripping my chest open in the mirror image of the girl. I pushed my legs faster, ducking into the trees that surrounded my neighborhood, losing track of the road and the man.

My legs finally gave out, sending me sprawling on the damp ground. I heaved for what seemed like hours. Now that my body had stopped moving, it seemed impossible to get back up. I laid there until the light started stretching across the trees toward me. Finally, I dug my fists into the dirt floor and pushed myself up. Staggering, I finished the walk to my house and quietly climbed back through my window. Wrenching my dirty clothes off, I toppled onto my bed, my eyes unfocused and foggy. It didn't take long for my eyes to fall shut and for sleep to overtake me.

Looking back, I've always wondered, if I had stayed, how he would have explained why he had killed her? Would he have expected me to accept if I knew the reason? Or would my body have been found next to hers? Would the police have had two murders to investigate, or would I have really understood? I don't think I could have ever understood, and I never regret having run, but I sometimes wondered why. I never told anyone. Maybe out of fear, or out of shock. Because no matter how much someone says, "Don't shoot the messenger" the messenger always gets shot.



Aja Francis
“Useful”
Mixed Media

Something in the Background

By Hailey Slaughter

“I still don’t understand why Mom has these,” Lauren said, eyeing the cardboard box of photo albums in the corner of the attic, “No one prints out pictures anymore. Can’t she just use her phone like a normal person?”

“You know she’s always liked having photo albums around,” I said, handing her the one on top, “And besides, I wouldn’t be able to remember a time when you were nice if we didn’t have these.” She rolled her eyes and started flicking through the pages. Her face scrunched up into a frown.

“Ugh, I do not need to remember all the ugly haircuts I had when I was little,” she said, pointing to a picture of her with short, choppy bangs.

I laughed and picked up the next photo album on the stack. It had “Disney World 2007” written on the front in Mom’s messy cursive. As I started flipping through the pages, all the memories came flooding back. There was a picture of Lauren and me smiling next to Mickey Mouse. Another one showed four-

year-old Lauren happily licking an ice cream cone, her pudgy hands smeared with chocolate. The next one showed seven-year-old me, holding her hand while we waited in line to meet Cinderella. I didn't care what Lauren said. I liked looking back at old pictures. I was thinking that it really was a sweet picture of the two of us when I noticed something in the background. The photo had captured the lady behind us mid-sneeze, her face contorted into a terribly unflattering expression.

"Do you ever think about all the random pictures you're in?" I asked.

"What do you mean?" Lauren replied, glancing up from her album.

"I mean look at this lady," I said, slipping the picture out of its plastic covering and passing it to her.

"We have no idea who she is, but now she's in our vacation album. How many strangers' photos do you think we're in? I mean what if there's a nice picture on some family's wall, and we're in the background somewhere making a dumb face?"

She regarded the photo for a minute and then shrugged.

"I can honestly say I've never thought about that, Jen. Who cares? Now quit messing around, and look for those pictures mom wanted."

She went back to her spot on the floor, and I shoved the photo back in its place. I grabbed another album from the box, this one labeled "Beach 2010." The first photo I turned to was of mom and me grinning from ear to ear next to our sand castle. We worked all day on that thing, and I remembered being so proud. My reminiscing was interrupted when I noticed something strange in the background.

"Hey Lauren, get over here," I said.

"What is it now?" she groaned, throwing her album on the floor with a thud.

"Isn't this the same lady? From the Disney picture?"

I pointed to a woman lounging on a beach towel in the background. Her face was turned to the side, but I could have sworn it was the same woman. Lauren frowned at the photo for a second.

"I don't think so. It's hard to tell, but there's no way it's the same lady," she said.

I grabbed the next album from the box, "Smoky Mountains 2013." I held my breath as I opened the front cover, frantically scanning the first photo. I let out a sigh of relief. It was just a picture of Dad sticking his tongue out to the camera. Nothing in the background. Then I flipped to the next page and let out a scream, the album falling to the floor.

"Lauren it's her. It's her," I said, my voice shaking.

My finger trembled as I pointed to the photo. It was a cute shot of Lauren and me in front of a beautiful landscape of mountains and trees. But there was something else in the background too. Standing behind me was the woman, but this time, she was looking directly into the camera, a sly smile on her lips. Lauren was silent as she studied the photo.

"It's her. You can't deny it this time," I said.

"But it can't be, Jen. There's no way," she said. Her voice was an octave higher than usual.

"Okay, I'm officially freaked out. Has this lady been stalking our family vacations for years?"

“I don’t know. There’s got to be a reasonable explanation.”

If there was a reasonable explanation, I couldn’t think of it. I wanted to forget the whole thing and run back downstairs, but morbid curiosity pulled me back to the box. My hand reached for the most recent album, “Grand Canyon 2017.” Mom hadn’t even finished putting all the pictures in this one yet. I started to open the cover, but Lauren’s hand stopped me.

“Jen, don’t. Please,” she said.

“I have to know,” I said.

I took a deep breath and flipped to a random page.

“No no no no no,” I said. My eyes welled up with tears.

The picture was of our whole family this time, posing in front of the canyon’s rim. She was there again, but this time her hands were outstretched toward me, inches from my neck. She had that same grin on her face as before, and I could almost feel her eyes peering into me. I turned the page. She was in the next picture too. Frantically, I flipped through the entire album, my heart pounding in my chest. She was in every picture that I was in, her hands reaching for me.

“Lauren, what do I do?” I said, collapsing into sobs.

“I don’t know Jen, I don’t know.” She was trying to be calm and brave, but I knew she was barely holding it together.

“What is this? Is this some kind of cruel joke? Who is this lady?”

“More like what is this lady.”

“What did you say?”

“I’m just saying this is too weird. Don’t you think we would have noticed some creepy lady in all of our pictures? Why would mom put them in the album if they were all like this?”

She had a point, but I didn’t like where she was going with this.

“So what are you suggesting then?” I asked.

“What if she’s more of a thing than a person.”

“You can’t be suggesting she’s some kind of—”

“I don’t know what she is,” she interrupted, “But let’s do this: I’ll take your picture, and we’ll see if she shows up in the background.”

I nodded and wiped the tears from my cheeks. Lauren pulled out her phone and snapped a quick photo. Even though I was terrified, I couldn’t help but think about how bad I would look in the picture, my face red and splotchy from crying.

“Well?” I asked.

“Nothing there!” she said. Her face broke out into a grin as she tilted her phone’s screen toward me. I let out a sigh of relief as I scrutinized the picture. There really wasn’t anything there. I let myself relax and started packing the albums back into the box. I’d had enough of looking at old photos for one day. Lauren was still staring at the picture, her face scrunched into a frown.

"Is everything okay?" I asked.

"Yeah, it's just." Her eyes drifted to the photos again. "I'll be right back."

Before I could reply, she had bolted down the stairs and out of sight. I shook my head and went back to putting the albums away. Right as I was placing the last one in the box, she came bounding back up the stairs.

"Lauren, no. I've had enough bad pictures for today," I said when I saw what was in her hand.

"Come on Jen. Just to be safe?" She lifted up her Polaroid and flashed a winning smile.

I hesitated. It couldn't hurt, right? Just to be safe? I could feel a knot starting to form in my stomach again.

"Okay fine just make it quick," I said.

Before I could even pose, she snapped the picture. My vision was still spotty from the flash when the camera spit out a crisp photo. I huddled next to Lauren as the image slowly appeared, little by little. My stomach dropped when the picture came into view. No, it couldn't be. I let out a choked sob.

"There's not anyone else here. What's going on?" I said, dissolving into hysterics.

Lauren was silent, her eyes wide. I turned away, but my eyes gravitated back to the image. The woman was there behind me. Her mouth was twisted into a snarl, and her hands were gripping my throat. My mind couldn't even form coherent thoughts.

"Jen?" Lauren said, her eyes fixed on my throat.

"What?" I said.

"What's that on your neck?"

Time slowed down as I reached up to feel my throat. As my fingers grazed the skin, I felt a stab of pain. It was like someone had punched me, hard. Before I had a chance to process what was going on, all of the air evaporated from my lungs.

"Jen!" Lauren screamed. She lunged toward me, but I was already on the ground, my face pressed against the wooden floor.

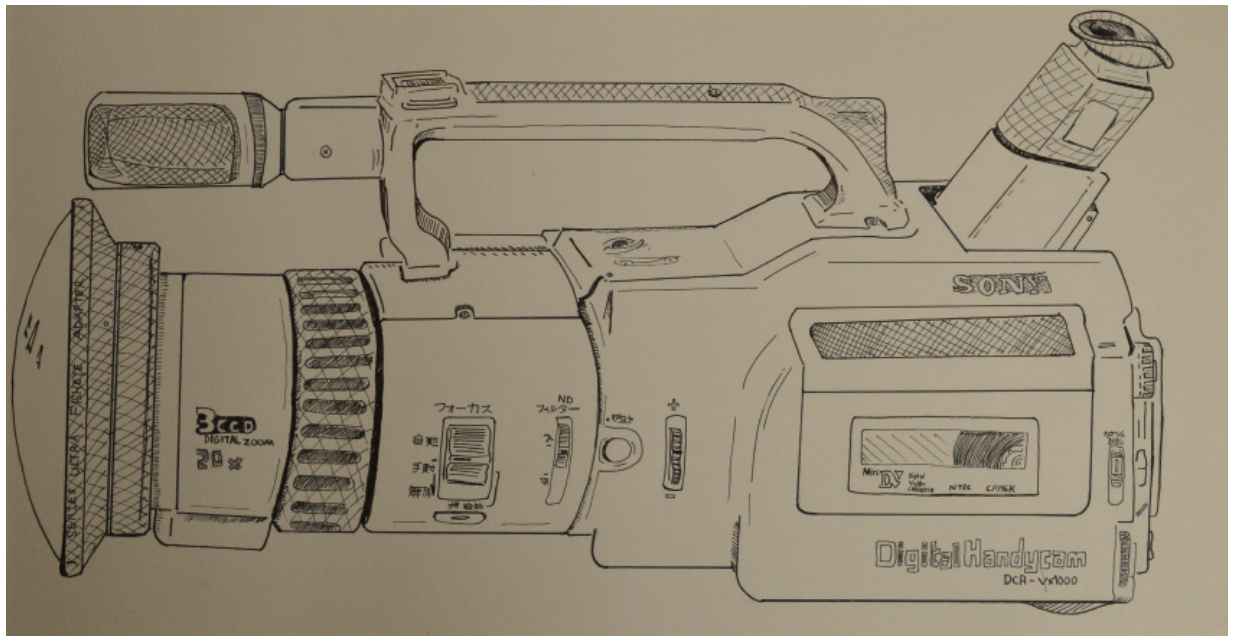
I clawed at my throat, my lungs begging for air. I could still hear Lauren screaming my name as I slipped away into blackness.

Now I watch the girl with her family. I remember that I used to be scared, but I am not scared anymore. The girl giggles happily as her mother pushes her higher and higher on the swing. They do not see me. I stand behind and watch. The girl's father pulls out a camera. I turn my face to the side and pretend to examine a tree branch as he snaps a picture. It is not time yet. He lowers the camera and laughs as the girl sticks out her tongue. I take a step forward, and I wait. I know what I have to do.

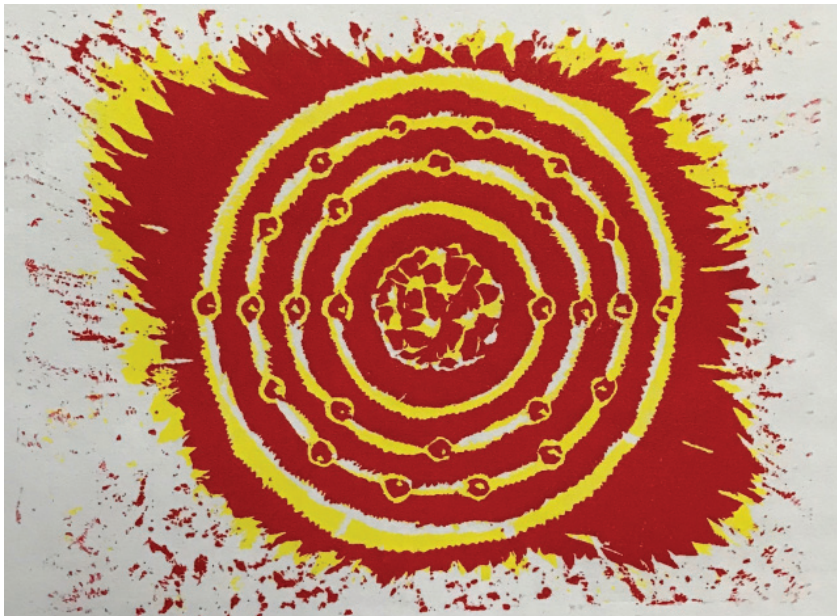
Kaitlyn Frandson
 “Anti-Self Portrait”
 Acrylic



Isaiah Kennedy
 “The Lens”
 Pen



Vnushank Mali
"Untitled"
Acrylic



Rachel Roberts
"Iron"
Printmaking

Oroboros

By Max Korsch

The day that I died was a grey, cloudy, and rainy day. I do not remember the details anymore, but I remember that I was with someone I cared for a lot, maybe even loved. We had a fight because I distinctly remember the anger and frustration that were gripping my heart as we were yelling at each other. What I do not remember is the cause of our fight. Or her face. Or even her name.

Those are the first things that disappear from your... let's call it "mind" for lack of a better term. But yes, those are the first things that are gone from your mind once you pass on to the other side. The details. All the little details that in life seemed so important. Faces, names, relations, birthdays, marriages, deaths: gone like a feather carried on the current of your last breath. What remains with you, and I mean what really remains stuck to the core of your soul, are the emotions you felt. Every moment of joy, every moment of sadness. Every time you felt angry, or frustrated, or lonely. The times when you loved and the times when you hated with all your heart. That and vague recollections of things, nothing more than abstract chains of actions that form events that, in a past life, you had experienced.

So I do not remember why we were fighting, but I remember that I cared a lot more than I was willing to admit. She ran out into the rainy evening, tears streaming from her face, which I only remember with the quality of an old, static-ridden TV picture. But the sight had turned my stomach into knots, and thus the emotion became engraved into my soul. I didn't follow her immediately, because there had been a feeling of hopelessness that robbed me of all strength in my legs. But the desire to be with her, to cling on to what we had, to fix things grew stronger and stronger, so eventually, I did follow her.

I caught up to her when she had to wait at a red light. Somehow the memories are sharper the closer they were to my death. I guess your memories unravel from the beginning to the end, or that the trauma of death impacts you more heavily than others. But there she stood, she looked at me and ran onto the street when there were no cars in sight. I yelled after her, begging her to stop and, to my surprise, she did. There was hope, I thought. And there we stood yelling our feelings at each other in the rain. She in the middle of the road, and me standing at the edge of the sidewalk. Just when I thought we were making progress, the sound of a horn pierced the air between us. A car was approaching fast, colliding with her fragile body if she did not get out of the way.

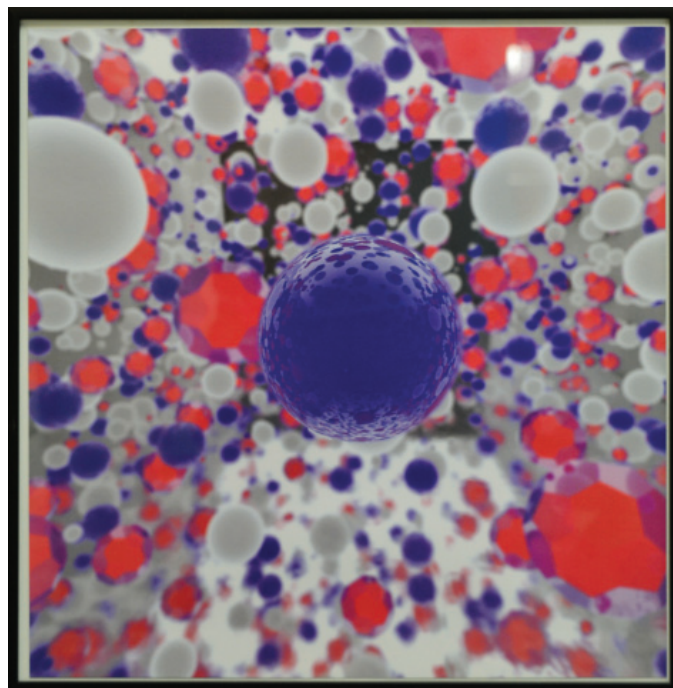
The next thing I knew was that my body was flying forward at great speed, followed by two collisions. First, my body rammed into hers, pushing her out of harm's way with all my strength. I remember her falling backward, her hand reaching out to me. Then the car hit me.

All was black for a while. Sound became weirdly muffled and distant. When I tried to open my eyes, they felt incredibly heavy, and my vision was a blur. All I could see were shapes and colors that

resembled her face. All I could hear was a sound of someone calling out to me in the distance. What I remembered more clearly was the pain, then the lack of it. My body felt heavy at first, then incredibly light. Those sensations were accompanied by a wave of cold that slowly washed over my body, originating from somewhere around my spine. And as my mind grew darker and more distant to the world, I could feel that some raindrops felt strangely hot against my face. At least I died knowing that I managed to show her just what she meant to me.

Then the darkness came. Complete, perfect darkness. I lost all sense of direction and time. My body became weightless. In fact, I wasn't even sure I had a body anymore. Time became meaningless as I floated through the dark, but I wasn't idle. Every moment I was assaulted by a flood of emotions, most of which I recognized from my previous life. But there were others that felt like they came from somewhere deeper within my being. Emotions that stretched far back in time, into ages long past, but as clear as if I had just experienced them. I wasn't ready for them, yet they relentlessly flooded over my mind like a film reel from a projector whose on-switch had broken off.

Eventually, the flood subsided, or maybe I learned how to cope with it better. But now I felt like I wasn't merely floating in the darkness anymore. I was moving, drifting on invisible currents towards an unknown destination. In the memories of my emotions, there was one that would have felt appropriate for the situation: the despair of being lost at sea, being moved by currents no man could control, at the utter mercy of fate. But in my present state, I was unable to actually experience emotion. I



Brannon Kelly
"Me Vs."
Graphic Design

could only remember it.

And so I moved on, ravaged by the hauntings of lives long past, and completely apathetic to my own situation. Then, despite not having eyes with which to see, I sensed something in the black pitch around me. As I focused on these sensations, they became clearer, and I found that I was surrounded by motes of light, drifting through the darkness just like me. Then I realized that I was probably just like them, just a bodiless emanation of light.

There were only a few at first, scattered around the edges of my field of “vision.” Their lights barely discernable against the abyss. But as we drifted on their numbers grew. More and more of these fellow souls appeared all around me. The ones that had been with me first came closer and closer as the currents corralled us into a more cohesive herd. Some were drifting by me close enough that I could have touched them, had I the arms to do so.

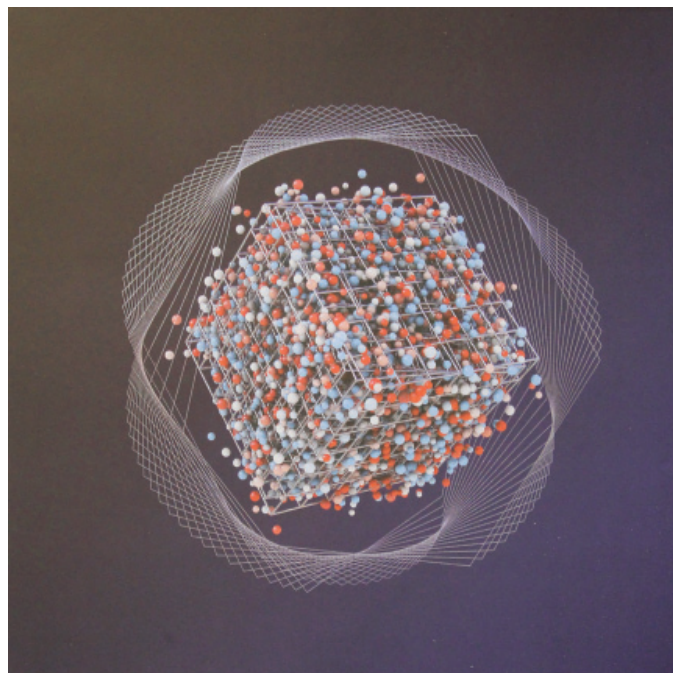
We had no mouths to speak or to call out to each other. Yet, as we drifted towards our unknown destination together, we were communicating. Sometimes another soul would pass me and invoke a certain string of memory emotions from within me, and I could tell they were experiencing the same. Some of them made me feel incredibly happy, others threw me into uncontrollable fits of sadness. A few would invoke the fires of anger into my core, but others would fill me with a sense of belonging and contentment. It dawned on me that these were the souls of people I knew in past lives. Friends, brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, lovers, enemies. Some were more than one of these things at once. But despite this sense of familiarity, we could still not remember any names or faces. All we had taken with us from those pasts were our emotions.

Eventually, we became so numerous that we no longer resembled a star-speckled night sky, but became more like the Milky Way or another galaxy. One large, cohesive mass of souls moving with great purpose. And then, at last, our final destination came into sight. Other galaxies of souls were approaching from different directions ahead of us. Where they met, there was a large swirling mass, like a whirlpool, and at its center pure whiteness. This, I knew, was where we were all headed. I wanted to give it a name, even though names had lost all meaning and I would not remember it later. A part of me wanted to call it the “Gate of Life,” but that seemed too obvious and too simple. “Wellspring of Souls,” was another name, and it felt more profound, in a way.

As our galaxy joined the swirling currents that dragged us all closer and closer to the center more souls were reacting to me, from other galaxies. Once again I was being overwhelmed by torrents of emotion, just like when I first passed into the black. Only this time they weren’t my own emotions, but those of billions and billions of other souls, all connected to me by some fleeting moment in time, back when I was alive, not just for the first time, but a thousand times over. And we all shared in this sensation as our lights came together, drowning out the impenetrable darkness that had previously surrounded us. There

was a great sense of understanding, of purpose, and of unity. All was one.

When I reached the center of the Well-spring, I once again passed into the world of the living, though I do not remember much past that point. Nobody can remember the circumstances of their birth. But I imagine it to have been something like this: Light was replaced by darkness once again, only it was a different kind of darkness. When I was dead, the dark was passionless and sterile. This one was warm and comfortable and safe. Of course, it did not last forever. I would feel a pull, drawing me out of my cozy burrow. Light would try to pierce my eyelids which I would then keep tightly shut. I would take the first breath of my new life and scream out into the world, a message to all that I had arrived, that I was back from the beyond. And there would be other people with me, already grown with experience. A doctor or a nurse, perhaps, to help bring me into that new life, to bathe me, and to place me into the warm embrace of a caring mother. Perhaps there would be a father as well, smiling down on the new life born of his own flesh and blood. This would be the beginning of another one of these journeys which we call 'life.' And every person, every experience would grant me new emotions to carry on to the black beyond where no mortal eyes or minds may glimpse.



Brannon Kelly
“The World Around Us”
Graphic Design



Chelsea Willis
"Reflection of Family"
Acrylic



Dylan Schaefer
"Otono"
Charcoal

Banana Girl

By Aly Rusciano

The bar of the shopping cart was slick with sweat, her knuckles white from gripping it with all the strength she had. She wheeled past fussy children who wanted the cookies more than anything else in the world, slow elderly who couldn't for the life of them figure out how to operate their motorized scooters, and the indecisive young adults who were new to the grocery shopping world and didn't know what items to buy as pantry staples. Her list was short: bananas, apples, milk, and coffee creamer. The latter wasn't supposed to be on the list, but perhaps that was why her anger was already hitting the orange level on her inner anger-scale.

It wasn't ideal to be at the grocery store on a Saturday morning when everyone else and their mother was there as well, but she had no other option. There was only one grocery store in town, and with there being no other means for coffee aside from the rundown McDonald's across the street, she had to turn her normal Monday morning shopping plans into Saturday morning shopping plans. It was a means of survival, and she wondered as she stared into the endless, bustling aisles if she would come out alive.

As she stared into the sea of people before her, she supposed she could have gone through the drive-thru of the crumbling fast-food joint, but, then again, she knew who would have welcomed her the moment she had rolled up. She could already hear his familiar, rough voice asking for her order through the distorted speaker and, once realizing it was her on the other side, spewing a load of necessary but unwanted apologies. She was twenty-two and didn't need to listen to her father's ramblings of how sorry he was anymore. She had heard enough. Her mother may not have been brave enough to leave, but she was and hadn't wasted another second the moment she had gotten her chance. It had been her mission to leave the moment her father had come home with a stagger in his step and a vendetta against an eleven-year-old.

She looked down at her small yellow sticky note which she had scrawled her four item list on with blue ink. It seemed unnecessary to have written down a list so small, but she knew that if she didn't write down the items she only needed, she would walk out of the store with a basket full of things she didn't need. At least, that's what she told herself when she had grabbed her pen and made the decision to come to the store even though it was a Saturday morning. She told herself she wouldn't see her mother's sad, wrinkled eyes in the crowd even though Saturday had always been her scheduled shopping day.

The crazed shoppers hurried around her as she devised a strategic plan that would allow her to leave the grocery store without any unwanted run-ins in the least amount of time. Her eyes narrowed as she scanned the scene in front of her. Her attention landed on a mother trying to herd her many children

together while simultaneously asking them what she had forgotten to put in their already stuffed cart. She shook her head and knew that writing a simple list was the smartest idea. She didn't need to look like all the other nut-jobs in town.

She took a deep breath and made a beeline to the produce department, the first stop on her shopping mission. The cries of children and hushed whispers of gossiping elders cluttered the aisles she passed. Thankfully, the area where the bananas were kept was free of any familiar faces.

She glided her cart over, her anxiety lifting as she scanned the rack of bananas for the perfect bundle. Picking out bananas was something she took pride in. The perfect bundle may be hard to find, but it was always there. Over the years she had developed a checklist for what the perfect bunch of bananas must consist of: at least five bananas in total, they must be slightly green on top with yellow centers, never battered, have a ratio of both long and stout bananas for equal choice later, and have a dimension that never exceeds seven and a half by three inches.

The harsh noises of the store diminished as she spotted the perfect bundle. The fluorescent lights even seemed to shine solely on it, illuminating all its glory just for her.

She couldn't help the small smile that formed on her lips as her inner anger-scale dropped down into a manageable green. Once again, she had found the perfect bundle of bananas. Not too green, not too yellow, just right. She would take them home and let them mature for a day in her own space away from the crying children and eager customers of the grocery store. They would be perfect.

As if in slow motion, she reached her hand out to grab the illuminated bananas that rested on the middle shelf of the display and, just as she was about to grab them, another hand quickly reached out and pulled them off of their pedestal. Her inner anger-scale quickly soared back into the orange, the dial dangling dangerously close to the red.

"Hey!" she objected without even thinking. She whirled around to find a young man, who appeared to be about her own age wearing a t-shirt of some band from the 80s she didn't know and tattered jeans, holding her perfect bunch of bananas. "Those are my bananas!"

The young man looked up at her, the bananas still in his unnaturally smooth hands. He rose his brows, which matched the rusty brown of his shaggy hair, and stared at her with sea-green eyes that made her heart ungraciously stop. "Your bananas?" he questioned with a sarcastic confusion.

"Y-Yes," she stammered and inwardly cursed herself for it. "My bananas."

"Well, there's a whole lot more for you to choose from and I don't see your name on them," the handsome stranger said as he placed her perfect bundle of bananas in his filthy cart on top of a box of cheap beer.

She clenched her fists at her sides as she stared at her bananas in his cart full of college party junk, her upper and lower molars grinding together in an attempt to control her rage. By the items in his cart,

which included a pack of Natural Light, two large bags of Cool Ranch Doritos, a pack of blue Gatorade, and a bag of Dino chicken nuggets, she could imagine just how stereotypical this guy was even down to his old band t-shirt that she figured he bought new to look old. The dinosaur shaped chicken nuggets were the only thing that seemed out of place against all the stereotypical nonsense.

Her tongue couldn't form any coherent, polite words, so instead of speaking, she reached behind her and grabbed a random bundle of bananas from the display. She took a brave step over to his cart full of junk, grabbed her perfect bananas and placed the seemingly imperfect bundle in their place in his cart. "I saw them first, making them my bananas," she said as she went back over to her cart and placed the delicious bundle of fruit into the front basket.

"Who says you saw them first?" the young man questioned as he placed the bananas she had put into his cart back on the display and wheeled his cart next to her's. "Anyways," he said as he reached for her bananas again, "I grabbed them first."

She swatted his hand without thinking, but she didn't care. She didn't know this man. He was just another crazed fool in this grocery store, and she was not about to let him take her perfectly picked a bunch of bananas. They were her's and not anyone else's.

The young man's hand froze, and he met her eyes. A playful smirk danced upon his lips, and she cursed herself for letting her heart flutter within her chest. "Alright, banana girl," he said with a voice that could melt iron. His green eyes scanned her empty cart, her crumbled up list the only thing welcoming her bananas. "You came here just for bananas?"

"You came here for beer and Dino nuggets?"

His smirk turned into a dashing, smug smile. "Perhaps I did."

"And perhaps I am a banana girl that only eats bananas." And just to spite him, she turned back to the display of bananas and grabbed every one in sight, whether decent or imperfect and tossed them into her basket until the display was empty. She could hear the judgmental whispers and shocked gasps cascading around them and could only imagine how the scene looked to the other grocers: a drab looking young woman wearing what nearly passed for pajamas hurling an entire display full of bananas into one cart. She probably appeared to be as crazed as them but, for once, she didn't care what they thought or what she looked like. She didn't even care if her mother was among the crowd with shame in her eyes. Showing up this handsome stranger and making him eat his words was her new mission.

"Sorry," she said with a fake pout, "looks like there's none left. Come back another day."

The shocked expression on his face was enough to cause her stomach to swirl with butterflies. With a smile tugging at her lips, she wheeled her heavy cart filled to the brim with bananas, her perfect bundle placed delicately on top of the rest, away to search for the last thing she decided she needed from her list.



Samantha Key
“Blues”
Charcoal

“You can’t be serious!” she heard the stranger say from behind her as she continued walking towards where the coffee creamer was located at the far end of the store.

“Oh, but I certainly am,” she replied, keeping her head forward to hide the smile on her lips. It was all quite amazing, right from the hurried squeaking of the man’s beer and Dino nugget filled cart down to the confused looks of the other people she passed. Mothers looked questionably at her with worry in their eyes, children snickered and pointed with joyful smiles at the crazed banana girl, and the elders shook their heads with mutterings about a pathetic generation on their tongues.

She stopped her banana filled cart in front of the glass door which shielded the coffee creamers from the outside world. Even though she knew exactly which brand and flavor she wanted, she took her time pretending to glance over her options.

“A cart full of bananas and one coffee creamer,” the handsome stranger said as he wheeled his cart up next to her ridiculously yellow one. “You are a sensible shopper, banana girl.”

She cocked her head to the side in thanks and opened the glass door to retrieve her beloved creamer, already tasting the smooth coffee on her tongue.

“What do you plan on doing with that many bananas and one creamer?”

“And what are you planning on doing with a case of beer and Dino nuggets?”

He rose his brows once more, a smile tugging at his lips. "Perhaps your cart of bananas and lonely creamer can join my beer and nuggets."

She couldn't help the heat that rose to her cheeks as she wedged her caramel creamer in-between some bananas in her cart. "And do what? Make the world's weirdest banana bread?"

The handsome stranger shrugged. "I'm sure you could come up with something, banana girl."

Her breath caught in her chest as he reached into her yellow basket and pulled out a bundle of bananas, which she had to note held none of the requirements on her banana checklist.

"Maybe I could," she replied with a steady voice despite the rapid beat of her heart, "but I can't possibly make banana bread with someone who likes blue Doritos."

The handsome stranger was about to reply with what she could only assume to be another witty, flirtatious remark when a child, who appeared to be around the age of ten, came running up to his cart with a bag of gummy worms in her hand. "Daddy! Daddy!" the girl cried with a sweet voice as she waved her bag of candy in the air. "Can we get some candy, too?"

The smile that had been forming on his lips fell into a grimace.

Her heart dropped. She should have known better. Every male in this town was the same. Only she could imagine a world where a handsome, single stranger with a quirky taste for Dino nuggets would take an interest in her, let alone be a part of this hell town.

The stranger looked between his daughter and her, his once mesmerizing eyes now only a tunnel of lies. She could see it now. It was like staring at a younger version of herself and her father.

"Why do you have so many bananas?" the girl asked as she stared at the yellow cart with wonder. "Do you like bananas a lot? You must like bananas a lot."

"Where do you work?" she asked him, ignoring the girl's question.

"Why?" he asked as he took the candy from his daughter's hand and placed it in the cart.

"Where. Do. You. Work?" she asked again, her inner anger-scale returning to its neutral state of peril.

"Arby's," he stated and looked back up at her. "Why?"

"Daddy makes me French fries!" his daughter said from her spot next to their junk-filled cart.

"Bastard," she said under her breath before pushing her banana filled cart away, leaving the puzzled father and daughter behind.

They were all the same and all she would ever be was a banana girl, helpless and naive.



Jessica Rodgers
"At the Bar in My Folly"
Acrylic

George Reads the Paper

By Ethan Tester

George Griffin sat down across from his wife, grabbed the newspaper, and burped. “You really don’t have to do that,” she said.

“Look at this,” said George without showing Edith what it was she was supposed to be looking at. “Says here some woman was on, eh, third street and stepped in front of a bus.”

“That’s a shame.”

“Yeah.” The dust-coated grandfather clock swung its pendulum from side to side, softly ticking in the background. The minute hand made its way to twelve as the clock chimed in with a dissonant reminder that it was three in the afternoon. The face of the clock opened up to reveal a disfigured hummingbird giving off more of a howl than a chirp.

“I thought you were going to get that clock fixed, George.”

“It says here that she was on her cell phone.”

“George?”

“What?” George glanced at his wife and back down at the paper. “These stupid kids are always tip-tapping on their blamed phones all the time. It’s a wonder they don’t run into each other all the time.” He took a sip of his tea, found the bottom of the glass, and lightly shook the ice cubes in front of Edith. She shot him a dirty look.

“Reminds me of Korea.”

“What the heck you talking about?” asked Edith.

“Korea.”

“Yeah?”

“These blamed kids are like them hypnotized people.”

“Hypnotized people?”

“Yeah.”

“How so?”

George told her all about Ronny, the brother-in-arms who took an R-n-R trip to Seoul and ended up being hypnotized by a “Korean witch doctor.”

“That’s just a bunch of hogwash.”

“You just wait. These phones are gonna do the same thing.”

“Now just what do you mean?”

“It’s plain and simple. One day, I’m gonna forget to lock the door, and in comes some silly, young woman tapping away on her phone, and I’m gonna try to get her attention, but it just ain’t happening. So

I try to get her out of the house, but lo and behold, I look outside and what do I see?"

"What do you see?"

"I see seventeen, no... seventy, no... seven hundred youngin's on their phones coming for the house. So what do I do?"

"You leave me out of it."

"I grab you and tell you it's too late. It's started."

"What's started, George?"

"The end of days."

Edith got up and walked across the carpet into the kitchen. "You've lost your marbles, George. Been watching too much of that blamed television." She grabbed a tea bag and a bot and began boiling some more tea.

"So I's grab my shotgun and load that baby up, I jump up on the hood of the car-"

"I thought you were inside protecting me."

About that time, Edith heard a loud thud and rushed back into the living room to see what the matter was. George stood, two feet above her, right on top of the coffee table, the look of a madman in his eyes.

"George! Get down from there!"

"I take my shotgun and let out a BANG! BANG! I take those zombies down one after another. Them blamed kids don't stand a chance!"

"George! Why are you shooting children on my coffee table?"

"I grab a hand grenade and light up those mother-"

"GEORGE!"

"WHAT?!"

"Get off my blamed coffee table before I shoot you, you old fart!"

George got down off the table. Stupid old woman better just be happy she's not a widow yet, he grumbled.

"Now, would you care for some more tea?"

"I'd love some." George handed her his glass, sat back down, and continued reading the paper.



Brianna Hinton
"My Mind's Blooming"
Encaustic



Heather Wilson
"Thoughts"
Watercolor

Heading Home

By Anna Sison

It broke out like the sun setting in the sky, impossible to stop. I was buried in cold, isolated bondage, held as a prisoner, chained to the wall. Fear deepened within my chest as the shapeless figure came closer and closer. I felt the still of the darkness creep over the silence. I tried not to move, but fear made me shiver. The figure stopped in front of me, and I looked up. I could not see his face, but I could make out his cruel identity. Today was my last day to be here on this earth. I prayed I would die in my sleep but always arose the next fearful day in the darkness. I had not been a perfect slave, fighting and screaming for my freedom. My year was up, my use was none, and I was to die a cruel death. The figure grabbed my arms and squeezed my bruised shoulders. If I could have, I would have screamed, but I didn't have the strength. He broke my chains, threw me down, and then dragged me by my hair. The door opened, and light flooded over my ghostly, pale skin. It burned; I had not seen light in months. I felt as if I could die right then, I could not even see, the light blinded me. He stopped at the gallows, my fingers felt the worn ropes. I heard screams of torment and cracking whips. Pushed aside and sat upright, I silently moaned the sudden realization. Blood trickled down my arm. A dying man pulled me down and buried his head on my shoulder. He whispered in my ear weakly that he was whipped and left to die, and if I were dragged right, I would go as he. He kissed my cheek, leaving blood, and prayed for me. But all too soon we were ripped away and beaten viciously with whips. I heard him die and felt like crying for him, but I did not have the tears. I was dragged again and thought about the man's words. But I was not dragged the way he was, I was dragged to the left. What cruel fate would I face? My back was already bleeding, and I was suffering. Pain rumbled on my back as I was dragged down a gravel path, stones stabbing my opened wounds. A trail of blood was left behind me, I wished I was dead right then. We soon stopped. He dropped my hair and left me there, but where? My eyes began to darken. I was baking in the hot sun, boiling in my own blood. I used all my strength to cry out, but only a squeak escaped my lips, and then the torment was over. My breath stopped. My body cooled, and my pain ceased. I had the strength to cry for the first time in a long time. I felt loving, strong arms around me, and hand with holes in the palms wiped away my tears. I felt safe, saved from the cruel memories that slowly slipped my memory. I was finally home.

Jace Williams
"Linear Burn"
Graphic Design



My Brother is a Duck

By Audrey Adams

I was in elementary school, and my brother was in middle. He has always been 4 years older than I, always in the next chapter of his life, always experiencing more. I didn't exactly know what more was, but I wanted it. Elementary school me idolized middle schoolers. They were putting on makeup and going to the movies with friends and picking out their own clothes and doing real homework with real textbooks and changing classes and using lockers. They carried themselves differently, with certainty and a sense of understanding that I could not grasp. I can recall several times sitting at the dinner table where my brother would hold intellectual conversations with our parents about everything he had learned that day in school. He shared his newfound insights of the quadratic formula and Alexander the Great and the Harry Potter series. I would then share my curriculum of subtraction and Abraham Lincoln and Junie B. Jones. They nodded. And they tried to be sincere with their praises. They really did. But I could tell that the discussions we held were different than the ones they and my brother held. Their conversations were so detailed and argumentative and fact-based. I knew they were different, but as an elementary schooler, I did not yet have the capacity to hold such conversations. Oh, how I craved that capacity. I was just an elementary schooler. What did I know? My parents dressed me. My parents fed me. My parents took me places. My parents were completely responsible for me. To me, middle schoolers had it all figured out. And I wanted to have it all figured out, too.

But then I was in middle school, and my brother was in high. He and his friends were now driving cars and going to parties and wearing nicer clothes and growing taller and going on dates and making intellectual jokes that adults would laugh at and using even bigger lockers. And I was just a middle schooler. What did I know? Sure, I had learned about the quadratic formula and could sing it to the tune of Row Row Row Your Boat. And sure, I could discuss Alexander the Great and Harry Potter. But my brother knew so much more. He was being tutored in calculus. He would work with my mother, trying to solve intricate equations and memorizing much more complex formulas than my jingle offered. They would struggle together. And for some reason, I wanted to struggle with them, too. Now I realize that the struggle I craved so badly is accompanied by anxiety and sleepless nights. My brother would discuss Genghis Khan and his reign. He would discuss his extreme passion for Steven Erikson's Malazan book series and encourage every adult he encountered to read them. I wanted to be that well-read. I wanted to encourage adults to do the things I was passionate about. I wanted to share my newfound knowledge without someone claiming "I have read that before" or "I learned that several years ago." As I journeyed into my high school years, my brother moved out of the house, went to college, got a job, paid bills, and started studying geology, a subject he had been interested in his whole life but never got the opportunity to study. I envied that. I envied his freedom. I was just a high schooler. What freedoms did I have? I had a curfew. I had a car, but I couldn't drive it far. Even at school, I had a dress code—polos tucked in, belts, jeans.



Ivie Pfenning
"Swingin"
Ink

Now that I am in college, I look at my brother. He is finishing up a graduate degree in geology. He is gaining so much insight and so much knowledge where he is. And I crave that. I look to him as if he has figured it all out as if he could do anything and everything he wants to. When he comes home, though, he envies me. He misses being close to home, close to family, close to security and comfort and away from the unknown. He misses the routine of Sunday dinners with our grandmother and Wednesday trivia nights at the local bar and grill. He comes home with his graduate study baggage—his sleepless nights spent staying awake to research the same crater he has researched for nearly two years, his introversion being tested as he transitions into a new environment. His eyes are heavier. He is tired. His disposition is not as quirky. He is anxious. His jokes are not as playful. He is sad. I have always looked up to adulthood, to the next chapter, to the next big thing. But when I look at my brother, as he gains knowledge and insight and experience, he grows wearier, heavier, less.

I worry that he had similar thoughts to me. Perhaps he was always looking forward to adulthood, only to realize that adulthood can be filled with uncertainties followed by anxiety and pain. Except, unlike me, my brother did not have an older sibling to tell him that. He did not have someone sit him down and tell him to enjoy the beauties of the present, basking in the safety and solidity and certainty of his family. No one told him that even though knowledge is powerful, happiness is so much more. No one told him to take advantage of his youth, to work to maintain that innocence and naiveté that children use to perceive the world as a

better place, to love everything and everyone as fully and as wholly and as often as he can.

To me, my brother is a duck, who on the surface appears serene, certain, secure. However, what I did not see before was what is below the surface. I never saw his feet constantly kicking, pacing, keeping him afloat. I always wondered how he managed to look so calm. How did he fool us all? It is not until we become the duck that we recognize its strife. We don't see the calamity. We only see a carefree duck. Now, however, after him coming home and expressing his anxieties and fears, I see his feet paddling when I look at him. As if I sunk below the surface, I see him constantly kicking to stay afloat. How I wish he were still just the top-half—the untroubled, above-the-surface, happy-go-lucky duck. How I wish he could be calm and secure and carefree. As I grow up, I feel my feet kicking faster, as if a positive correlation exists between the speed of my feet and the accumulation of my responsibilities.

And it is not just my brother. I looked up to all of my elders as I was growing up. I still look up to my elders now. I look up to adults who have careers and families and confidence I cannot seem to acquire. But, all I see of them is the top half of their duck bodies—the half that is simply staying afloat, yet doing so in a serene, secure way. All I see of them is something I do not think I possess—solidity, certainty. Below the surface lies anxieties of financial insecurity, job loss, fear of the future, raising a family, death. Though such burdens exist, the ducks bury them, somewhat ignoring them until they seem to “go away.” That façade is not fooling me. Growing up, I was just a duckling who relied on the solidity and certainty of my parents and of my elders.

Yet now I realize that the reliance I had on them was just another responsibility making their feet paddle faster. And, lately, I feel mine paddling faster, too.

I think there is a lot of danger in always looking forward to, or, rather, dwelling on what could happen. The fondest memories I have as a child are those where I was not focusing on the future but on the present. The fondest memories I have are those where I am playing a game of spades on Sunday evening with my family or pretending the house next door is haunted with my neighborhood friends or eating charcoaled black, gooey marshmallows next to a fire at summer camp. I was happiest when I was living rather than surviving. Brian Doyle's essay entitled "Joyas Voladores" focuses on the life of a hummingbird. A hummingbird's heart beats the fastest among any other living creature in existence. The hummingbird does not have the time to dwell or sulk or envy or worry. Rather, the hummingbird lives wholly, completely, fully. The hummingbird is not afraid of dying, even though death comes quickly to that species. The hummingbird simply basks in the life it is given (Doyle). I have come to realize that I am happiest when I am a hummingbird, a heart racing ninety-to-nothing, wings flapping faster than the speed of a light hummingbird.

But, perhaps we are all ducks. Perhaps we are all just fooling those around us, making it seem as though we have it together when in reality, our feet are paddling below the surface, faster than ever, waiting for the next big thing. We are stuck in a pond of anxieties instead of the sky of possibilities in which a hummingbird inhabits. We look up to that. We acknowledge the somewhat hysterical nature of a hummingbird, but we appreciate it for its

persistence. We see the hummingbird for all its flaws yet admire it still. The hummingbird is not fooling anyone. The hummingbird does not carry itself with an artificial certainty, rather, it does the best it can with the little time it is given. My brother is not fooling me. I see the duck in him, but I also see moments of his hummingbird heart as he travels back home on breaks, playing Sunday evening spades and Wednesday night trivia with us. I see his hummingbird heart pounding ninety-to-nothing, and I see his wings flapping faster than the speed of light. But as he gets in his car at six in the morning to drive back to Auburn, Alabama, the sky foggy and the world stiller than it seemed before, I see him transform back into a duck. I see his feet speeding up, trying to paddle away his coursework and research.

When we find those things in life—those Sunday evening spades tournaments or Wednesday trivia nights—that make us hummingbird-esque, we should hold onto those. We should cherish the things that make our hearts pound ninety-to-nothing and wings flap faster than the speed of light. We should not be afraid of our anxieties and bury them below the surface. Are we not fooling anyone but ourselves? We should live rather than dwell. We should be a hummingbird rather than a duck.

A Dirge

By James Robert Jarboe

I can recall with crystalline clarity,
The day that you and I first met.

We were children, then.
Playing at life as we had seen it performed
Many times before.

Yet nonetheless we were thrilled,
Eager to bring forth music
From those instruments that we chose.

We have since changed,
You and I.

We are older, wiser and battle-worn.
Sporting unseen scars
-Collected as we play this marvelous music.

We no longer imitate the melodies of another.
Instead choosing to weave
Each our own song, notes, and tunes
-Alluringly divine in their complexities-
Made by the life we choose to lead.

As time passes, and the score is changed once more,
It is more and more apparent
-For all and for me-
That we are entering a crescendo, it seems
-A time of fond remembrance evermore.

This new exuberance, this altered artificial intensity,
Has just begun.

I know not where it will take me.
I know not where this ballad will end.

I know not where the final note's resonance
In this orchestral piece
Will echo its last reverberation.

But whether we wait
For our own curtain's fall or leave midway through the song,

Whether our songs may lead us
To the same house or to separate shores,

"A Dirge" (Continued)
If we meet tomorrow or a decade thereafter,
I will still wish for you to know:

There will never be a moment
Where I do not wish to be by your side,
My Dearest Dear.

Praise Pettes
"Train of Thought"
Printmaking





Anna Sison
“Marlbrain”
Gaphic Design

Anna Sison
“Liver Strike”
Graphic Design



Dissonance

By James Robert Jarboe

Words lie heavy and immobile
This broken beating heart cringing, contorting reflexively
-the instinctive lessons long beaten in until they are flawlessly reproduced,
regurgitated upon command.

Bitter barbs are flung to fly and pierce this,
The blanket of apathy that protects and poisons a hollow
Husk of what once was, the caustic corrupting of what could have been.

Arrowheads dipped with a vintage venom that
Bleeds from your blackened burned heart.
The bile that had been bottled and buried inside, suppressed but shelved away
For just such an occasion as this, I suppose.

Indeed, the distance now between us is no more
Than the many, many miles that separate me from them
-perhaps if I knew the language
(the beat, the steps, the dance)
Then I could have given more than my meager best, and certainly no less.

And yet, for all that it was and for all that I am...
It was not enough, it seems. To bridge this
Distance, this dissonance, between you and me.

I cannot but hope to one day deign to learn
And begin to better understand that foreign, alien, inane world
That you and they glide through with such ease.

But. Until then, I am left
To simply say:
Goodbye and goodnight, my dear and my heart.
-Indeed, I hardly knew thee.



Vnushank Mali
 "Duality"
 Acrylic



Brianna Hinton
 "Two-Faced Bitch"
 Chalk Pastel

Reminisce

By Damian Johnson

I visited that place again today
Or as close as I could come
Outside my grandma's house by the fence with the rungs
My breath caught down the green, gray plummet
My lungs called out to myself, sprawled out by a log
The crows only cawed
I notice moss upon a mushroom, my mind must have misted
Lonely it is when past events are caught within a crevice; an abyss
Yet they still emit
Such softness presents itself to me
And seeing paths lead to the spot I view from a distance



Chelsea Willis
“Stories of My Life”
Charcoal

Daddy

By Shannon Merrell

It started with a tank top
My Little Pony on TV
and my Lucky Charms spilled
milk across the table
as your hand found its way
up my nightgown
I started eating less
after that day
and never ever at the table
I was only seven
as the years went by
I was never able
to go down the cereal aisle
without seeing your face
to hear My Little Pony
without feeling your touch
I WAS ONLY SEVEN
all the #metoos in the world
and I still cannot find the voice
MY voice
you robbed from me to scream: #METOO
my #metoo is
only a whisper of the
childhood you stole that day
at the table
playing on repeat
everywhere I go...

Isaiah Kennedy
“Untitled Photography”
Photography

Jordan Copeland
“Labeled Toxic”
Printmaking



A Pair of Shoes

By Shannon Merrell

My daughter wanted a pair of light-up shoes;
begged for them for months.

On her eighth birthday, her face lit up
as she opened her gift.

Two months later, another school shooting and
her school starts active shooter drills.

One day she comes home and hands me
her beloved light-up shoes as I ask her what is wrong
she simply states:

“I can’t wear these to school anymore, mommy.

A shooter will see me lighting up the halls
and then I will never come back home to you.”

Her statement took my breath away.

My child can’t wear her favorite shoes
for fear of death at school.

Those light-up shoes become a reason
she might get shot.

My eight-year-old daughter fears being seen
at school instead of

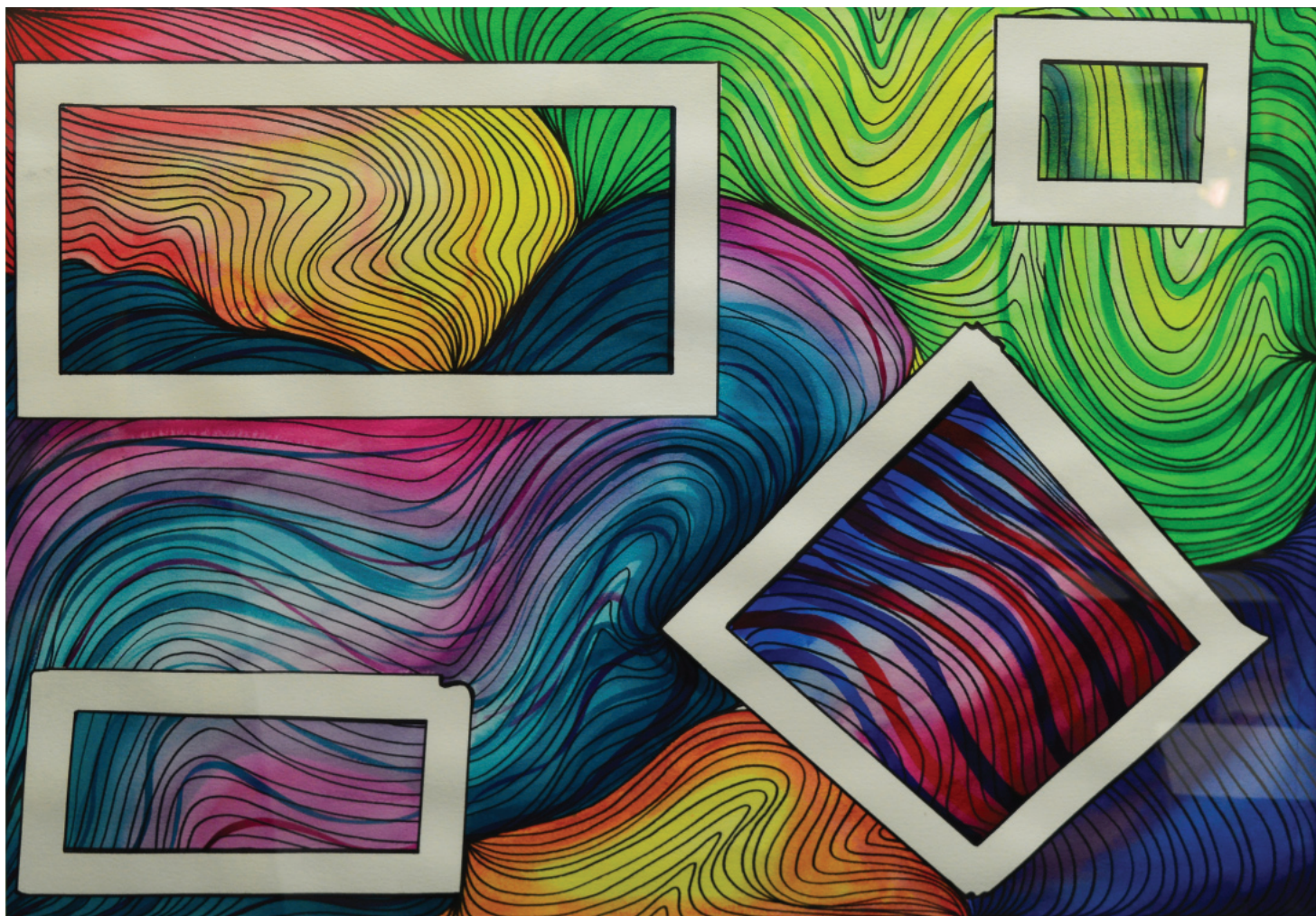
Playing

Reading

Learning

It took a child’s fear of shoes
to illuminate a parent to the dangers
of being anything but invisible at school.

Now, how cautious I must be
to not send her in those shoes
because a pair of shoes could possibly be
all that comes home to me...



Anna Lax Gatti
"Mood Swings"
Mixed Media

Oblivion

By Zhariah Peaks

Too young to drink,
Too smart to smoke,
Too cowardly to do much else but the right wrongs,
We found our oblivion elsewhere:
In each other—

Blissfully unaware of the knives we held to each other's throats,
Blind to parental advisories on the R rated soundtracks of our lives.
Full blast, on cruise control, driving forward, not knowing where we were headed.

But love isn't blind, anyone with a few more years would know that,
Love sees all, knows all,
Accepts most of it
While pushing for and striving for and supporting something greater.
Love knows that two plus two is always one.

I knew that, and you knew that
Our whole lives we grew on that
So what the hell was it that I let you shoot up my heart with?
(Or did you just rooie my emotions, all fuzzy and warm?)

All fiery and burning with ADD infatuation.
It hurt, but for some reason, we relished the pain.

For some reason, we were convinced that bruises drawn on by a lover's caress were one of the sweetest things.

And we treasured that thing until,
Like us,
It burned out.
Burned down to the butt with nothing but cancerous smoke in its wake.

Sometimes I wonder...
Why'd we ever do that?



Vnushank Mali
 "Crystals of Color"
 Acrylic



McKayla Cunningham
 "Together is a Beautiful Place to Be"
 Graphite

A Lecture on Delirium:

By Zhariah Peaks

A Definition: Delirium [di'li(°)rɪəm], noun-

1. An acutely disturbed state of mind that occurs in fever, intoxication, and other disorders and is characterized by restlessness, illusions, and incoherence of thought or speech.
2. Wild excitement or ecstasy.

How to Achieve Faultless Optimum Delirium:

Directions:

Ingest FG₄E tablet through the mouth. Use a cool liquid beverage to ease in digestion. Swallow. Wait. A period of one to two days is customary for proper enhancement of serotonin, GABA, acetylcholine levels to reach the maximum ratio. Should the levels not be where they should after two days, repeat dosage until results are shown. Symptoms that have been reported include, but are not limited to:

Epilogue:

I don't feel anything.

"That's the apathy," a voice says, supposedly apropos of my statement, but I can't recall saying anything aloud. "And that is the forgetfulness that will follow the peace, Adamina." I don't understand any of this; I haven't even tipped back the white tablet in my hand, and yet I still feel... empty, two-dimensional Evan had once said, like I've already taken the pill. "I know. My gift to you is peace." Peace. Harmony. Ecstasy. Delirium. And nothing.

Restlessness:

We had talked about it, in passing but never seriously. Taking the pill and being common for a day. Just to feel normal, to feel sane, but we would always laugh it off or smirk at one of the many averages in the manor, idolizing us as one would a god or fumbling over the simplest of tasks.

I never would have thought that he would do it. Take the pill and be common forever. But he did, in front of me, at breakfast, surrounded by frantic commoners all horrified at the notion of another council heir lost, on the only level they knew: idle, polite concern. Because all they knew was happiness, they couldn't feel the significance of Evan's eyes on mine, didn't see his question regarding the identical white pill on my napkin in his expression, and couldn't feel how unbearable it was to see his expression

change when I shook my head: hope, dying unsurprised. I downed the rest of my wine as I watched my oldest and only friend die before my eyes. They didn't mourn him like I did; they welcomed a new member of the average. No one understood the devastation of his new status, another average gained, another human mind lost. I felt the loneliness also, which they never felt, when I worked in the lab, alone, without a partner to brainstorm with. We were working on a cure for the pill, this close to a breakthrough, but I couldn't bring myself to do anything but pace and cry and scream. Seeing him in the halls was agonizing; I wanted to do nothing more than grab him and hold him and keep him from doing the menial tasks that averages do, but of course, he would never be him. It was stumbling upon him cleaning my room that made me assign him to a city job. I couldn't take seeing what was once such a bright, innovative intellectual, housekeep my home with no recollection of his past vibrant life. He left pleasantly, of course, but not without giving the commoner customary "See you soon," as if he believed we actually would or that I would ever consider the coward's way out like him. It angered me to think that, and I slammed the door in his face. Hot tears ran down my face, blurring my vision, obscuring a reseeded Evan from view. It would be the last time I saw him.

Illusions:

The following morning was sullen and cold. I couldn't bring myself to work on the cure anymore, and everything reminded me of him. I saw him everywhere I looked and hated it. I stayed indoors mostly, sheltered from the majority of commoner stares of awe and the possible run-in with Evan. I read and contemplated and dreamed when I slept. Those were the strangest, I dreamed when I slept, obviously, as all humans do, but it was a running joke between Evan and me, that I couldn't remember them in the morning to save my life. He always could, though, and would regale me with their ludicrous happenings while we worked. But today I remembered everything.

I dreamt of the creation of Pandaimonia, though I was just a baby when it happened, and of the original council. The creation of the FG₄E neuron-transmitter enhancer pill was a breakthrough in science history. It was an over the counter way to make everyone happy, literally. It was also a way to control the masses, the perfectly peaceful and stupid happy masses. Governments worldwide began encouraging the use of the drug and were met with little resistance. Every possible global problem was solved with just the ingestion of one small, white pill. It was a godsend for the people of earth. The only problem was that everyone was taking the pill: engineers, inventors, CEOs, scientists, and doctors included. We were quickly losing all the intellectuals that propelled our evolution forward, but the dilemma was solved with the establishment of the World Council, all of the world's leaders and their children to govern the new averages and keep themselves from being as such. It lasted for about a year, though, as the temptation of peace was too great for the members. I was two when the first succumbed to the

effects of FG4E. Five when over half of the original members were averages. Seven when my family was quarantined for being “under threat of delirium.” Ten when my parents became averages themselves directly after their release. We were still on the road back. Eventually, all the heirs replaced their parents on the council, and the same story played out. We disbanded when I turned 17 for the same reason. After that, it was just Evan and me for years, until yesterday. Now it’s just me.

Incoherence of Thought:

I couldn’t shake the feeling of dread off. It was like Evan was haunting me. Around every corner, he lurked, he stalked me. I mistook seven commoners for Evan throughout the rest of the day and kept looking over my shoulder as if he would be there, behind me, pill in hand, ready to force it down my throat. But he wouldn’t do that, couldn’t. He’d taken the pill and erased any neuron-transmitter data that recognized violence as a natural response. Besides, he was my friend in his past life, and I’d sent him away, and I was safe. I was safe. Dinner was cold tonight. I couldn’t quite taste the difference in the food either; perhaps I was coming down with something. I guess I would just check the lab for vitamins I could take before my symptoms got any worse.

I continued to eat my dinner, alone, save for the waiters. I reached for my goblet of wine, but miscalculated the distance and knocked it over. Immediately, I was surrounded by averages, more than I first thought to be in the room, all scrambling to clean up my mess. I tried to wave them off but stopped when I noticed a flash of pure white, offset against the blood red of the wine. Before I could question the suspicious whiteness, the mess was gone, a new glass of wine appeared in my hand, and I was once again alone with a more countable number of averages. I sipped at the replacement wine and fought the urge to spit it out. It tasted different somehow, more, bitter than the last time I had it, but that line of thinking was dangerous. The last time I had wine was the last time I dined with Evan. I shook my head to clear it, making myself dizzy. I remembered I needed to stop by the lab and bade the commoners goodnight, walking to my destination.

The lab was broken into, or wasn’t, I don’t know. All of my and Evan’s research was destroyed, the entire lab burnt to a crisp. I couldn’t bring myself to muster up rage or despair or even care at all, and it scared me. It wasn’t like me, but, perhaps I was just coming down with something. I dismissed the burnt room and the averages already beginning to clean it in favor of my bed. I would start back up on the cure tomorrow; the lab would be back to normal by morning. And with that contented thought, I fell into a dream filled sleep.

Submission:

I woke up late the next day; the sun was already in the middle of the sky, continuing a slow crawl to the evening. My bed felt more comfortable than it ever had, but the loneliness I felt suffocated me. I wanted it to stop. I needed it to stop.

I forced myself out of bed, the decision already made by my body, and I found myself in front of the vault doors. Just behind the steel doors was the large supply of FG₄E pills that kept the averages and commoners in this sector satisfied. My fingers typed in the passcode without my brain's permission, and the security scanner scanned my eyes. "Access granted to... Adamina Emmanuel," crooned the tinny voice of the security program. A few clicks in the vault door sounded before it popped open with a hiss.

Acceptance:

My feet moved mechanically through the vast underground catacombs that were the pill reserves. I stumbled on the sloping floors as I traipsed deeper into the vault. I didn't stop until I made it to the back, where the original, experimental FG₄E pills were. There were never issued to the public because the lack of time it took to transition and the immense dosages of the various brain-altering drugs in the experimental pills could prove fatal, but I needed fast and I needed it now. I grabbed a dusty box and made my way out, knowing where I wanted to be to take the pill.

Evan was exactly where I knew he would be, dutifully doing the carpentering job I'd assigned him. He smiled at me, a little too knowingly, but I paid it no mind and smiled back. He stopped what he was doing to sit on the bench next to me and took my hand. "You'll feel better after this, Adamina. I promise," he said, or maybe he didn't, as all the sounds surrounding the carpenter shop seemed to blend and merge together in a symphony of melodious noise.

I held the pill in my hand, trying to focus on the white tablet before me, but my vision blurred. My head span and my ears rang with Evan-like voices.

Ecstasy:

Peace. Harmony. Ecstasy. Delirium. And nothing.
Beautiful, wonderful, obedient nothing.



Zhariah Peaks
"Because of Her"
Oil



Vnushank Mali
 “Diptych”
 Acrylic



Alex McNeal
 “Cherry Chapstick”
 Fibers



Chelsea Willis
"Cereal Foodscape"
Color Pencil

Aja Francis
"Loose Lips Sink Ships"
Mixed Media



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And King Thomas the farm cat
(photo reprinted with permission)

