

NoV 

Prism Center
-PRESENTS-



The Lantern

Issue 03





Foreword



When we last published an issue of *The Lantern*, in October 2023, NoVA Prism Center was on the cusp of many new beginnings, as we prepared behind the scenes to celebrate the grand opening of our physical space that November. Since then, we've launched a variety of monthly events and filled out our community support programs, stepping into our role as Northern Virginia's LGBTQ+ community center and library. We're open for drop-in visits every weekend, and hold community events almost every week, and our community has grown from our humble beginnings into a joyful and supportive collective.

But if I'm honest, we've thrived against a backdrop of continued violence against our community. As of last count, around one in three books in our collection— which counts over 500 books featuring LGBTQ+ perspectives and topics— is banned or challenged somewhere in the country. Pride festivals and Drag performances continue to draw armed protesters, and even in our relatively open and accepting region, our community has relied on safety in numbers and learning to protect and care for our own over the past year.

Our community has risen to the challenges of our time. With renewed strength, we have come together and chosen joy and hope, with our eyes on the future that we can build for ourselves, and the dreams within our grasp. We're celebrating queer joy with this issue of our zine, *The Lantern*, which you are holding in your hands or reading on your device right now. This is our third issue, but there will still be many more, because there are countless stories to tell here in NoVA and the DC Metro Area. And of course, this zine could not be made without the efforts of our contributors or the donors who helped bring this zine to life through preorders, so to all of you, we extend our sincerest thanks.

Finally, always remember: when you shine a light, you just might see a rainbow.

With love,

Leon van der Goetz

Executive Director
NoVA Prism Center & Library

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Half Of My Soul

Mischa D. Gleason (they/them)



Inspiration came from the fluidity of sexuality and the gender expression, and how it impacts relationships. It could also be interpreted as how fulfilling it is to find people in your community who understand you.



Tied Down



Benjamin Freedman (he/they)

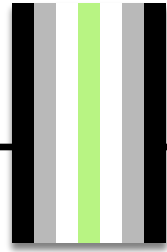


I wrote this piece during my junior year of college at George Mason University. It's one of my favorite works of mine, compositionally, lyrically, and production-wise. Writing it felt completely natural and uninhibited, something I always strive for with my sound. I think the way I conceptualize my music is actually very similar to how I conceptualize my gender-- I pursue what feels right, with little regard for making an effort to fit into a category, box, or under a label. I'm an independent artist based in NOVA trying to make change for queer musicians and audio engineers industry-wide, and this track is just a little glimpse into what I do, how I do it, and what I'm about!

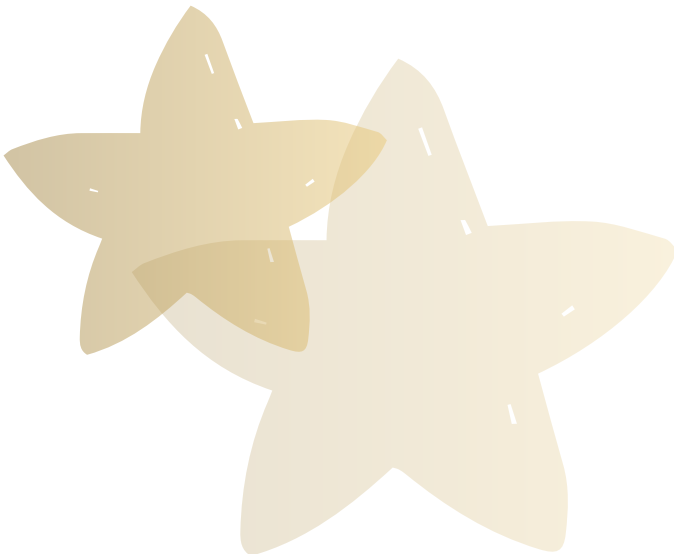


I'm Real Bad At It

R. Visger (any pronouns)



"I'm Real Bad At It" describes feeling burnt out and alienated by attempting to meet imposing, and often contradicting, standards and images of gender. Growing up in the early 2000s I found myself overwhelmed by magazine images of made-up, plucked, and airbrushed models and bombarded by ads of clothing and products I couldn't hope to afford or really actually wanted. Even Disney channel tomboys and Nickelodeon quirky girls felt out of reach to me.



Spider-butch Looking-glass



Lina Gio Hunt (any pronouns)



Bulletproof glass armor
Sturdy and fragile and transparent
Distorting my image
Everyone look through, and
See your own reflection
And think it's my true form

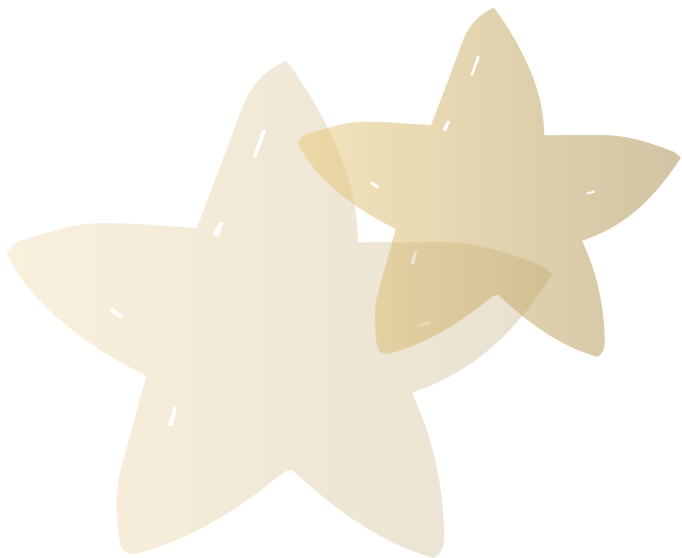
Arms like eight spider legs
Scuttling into your warm bedroom
I lurk at night and behind
Your eyes, I'm looking through
Your blood, see the white cells
They multiply again

More scared of you than you
Are of me, I prefer my own kind
My own nest, my lover
Like a mirror, spider.
Warmth self-generated
And self-venerated.

I'm a weaver of heat
More forgiving than you'd tolerate
For yourself. And more free
Cultivate my image
With buzzards overhead
Make it so much, precious

I'm beautiful webbing
Across the blades of the green meadow
I'm sun-drenched everything
Taking what we thought was
Cruel, now tough and kind
And lovely, I'm desire

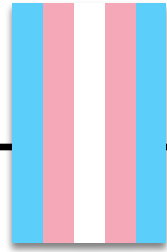
I'm surrounded by brothers
Also clad in glass armor, wielding
Paper knives to spook you
Look at your reflection
And we will refract light
Biblically accurate





Magic

Crow Turner (they/them)



This photograph was taken in 2022 during Colgan High School's walkout for transgender rights following bills proposed by Governor Glenn Youngkin that put the safety of trans students at risk. Despite statewide student-organized protests, these laws have gone into effect.

Joy and Music

Galen Barr (they/them)



This art piece is about queer joy. It shows a queer pumpkin just chilling to music on their record player. Something I often do.

Shake Well Before Each Use



MacKenzie Butler (any pronouns)



The piece is definitely centered around service. About how I present my body to others. To the onlooker. If you think about how those original female nudes, like Olympia, functioned to address a particulate gaze. The “shake well before each use” sticker is an interjection of my own sarcastic humor. In a way I’m reclaiming my body parts by using crude comedy. You’re seeing what I want you to see how I want you to see.



The Necessity of Pink Pony Clubs

Zenia deHaven (they/them)



I went to a drag show today.

It wasn't my first time, and it won't be my last, but it reminded me of something, something I shouldn't have forgotten in the first place.

My friend, I'll call them Dex, is visiting me this weekend. We became friends in high school, bonding over a love of video games and buff women. I struggled to think of things we could do together during their stay. As much as I enjoy living here, it's not exactly exciting. Sure, the schools are great, the neighborhoods are safe, and you'll happen across a Starbucks every twenty feet, but it's not known for an extensive list of fun things to do.

So, I tapped the Google icon on my phone, typed "pride" in the search bar, and found a drag brunch at the City Tap in One Loudoun.

I booked us tickets, which were free (big shout out to the City Tap for that), and we ventured forth.

Immediately upon walking in, I was surprised by the crowd's diversity. I've been to drag shows before, but only in the evening at clubs and bars, so the age skewed towards the younger side. On top of that, I'd only attended shows as an undergrad at Virginia Tech, which has a very white student population. So, before now, I'd only witnessed a predominately young, white audience at drag shows.

That wasn't the case today. A mixed-race lesbian couple sat in the booth next to us. A young girl was celebrating her

21st birthday with her mom. An 81-year-old woman told us that it was her first drag show ever. An entire nuclear family was sitting across from us: a mom, a dad, a grandma, and two young girls who couldn't have been older than six. At the bar, a huddle of suburban moms wielding pride-themed cocktails toasted to one woman's recent divorce from her husband.

Even before the show started, I was in awe of the community this event created. Virginia is an odd place. You can find a Confederate flag waving proudly over one house and then a "coexist" bumper sticker on a minivan a few doors down. Ashburn is not an unsafe place for gay people, but it isn't all warm and fuzzy, either. When you see more yellow "don't tread on me" license plates than pride flags, it's easy to forget you are surrounded by allies.

I can't put into words how drag shows, and LGBTQ+ spaces as a whole, make me feel. I don't think there are enough words in the English language to describe the mixture of happiness, peace, and thrill in my soul when I'm surrounded by gay people and allies. Queer joy, I think, is the best phrase for it, though I'd argue I experience queer rapture.

The drag performers were great. As they danced about, collecting hovering green bills from outstretched hands, my heart plummeted when I realized I'd forgotten to bring cash. I trenched back out of the restaurant and into the ninety-six-degree heat to fetch a 20-dollar bill from my car. After I converted the bill into ones, I gave Dex some of them, since they'd also forgotten to bring cash, and they said,

"I want to be rich enough one day to tip drag queens 20-dollar bills."

Gay aspirations.

It was a lovely time. The music was popping, and the queens were serving, but the image I remember most clearly was the little girls in the booth across the room, watching the drag queens in awe. As much as homophobes want to paint drag in a perverse light, kids see drag queens as, well, queens. Kids love dancing and singing and flashy costumes; they're ideal audience members for family-friendly shows. Kids don't know or care about the weird politics surrounding drag. All they see is a queen wearing a lavish outfit, lip-syncing and dancing.

I think those little girls might've been the happiest people in the room, only second to me, of course.

The important thing that I forgot was the importance of safe spaces for LGBTQ+ folks and straight allies. We need places where we can gather without fear of judgment, where we can bond over the simple shared truth that love is love, and we can enjoy a drag performance while we're at it.

We need Pink Pony Clubs.

Though I wouldn't mind if they turned down the volume just a smidge.



Medusa and Blind Woman



Elliana Blevins (she/they)



Medusa and Blind Woman is part of a series I created in 2023 Titled “Power Struggle.” This body of work explored relationship dynamics through the divine masculine and feminine archetypes: how the healed vs. non-healed versions of men and women interacted with each other romantically.

Medusa, in Roman Mythology, is a human girl cursed by Athena after being sexually assaulted by Poseidon in one of her temples. Her astonishing beauty turns, becoming oily, green, and pale. Her hair grows and thickens until it forms jaws and slotted dead eyes. Medusa becomes a hideous gorgon and anyone who meets her gaze is immediately turned to stone. Being scorned and betrayed by a male deity, and cursed forever to harm man, I like to believe she one day found comfort and softness in the arms of someone she can finally feel safe with. She meets a blind woman, one who can never be harmed by her, and vows to protect this love until her dying breath.

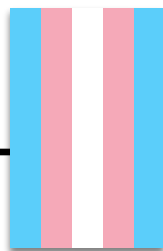
Growing up in a conservative, Christian household, I relate to Medusa. I know what it’s like to feel betrayed by my gods and my father. The men in my life weren’t there for me. There were times when I believed I’d only ever be safe again with a woman. After growing up, healing a lot, and exploring myself as a person, I know identity as pansexual and know that people can hurt me - any type of person. But I will always feel personally connected to this story. Medusa gave the young girl in me hope, and I love telling her story.





Hope

Xavier Hersom (he/him)



Performance for The Big IDEA (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility) 2SLGBTQIAP+ Concert Series Victoria Conservatory of Music, B.C. Canada

Xavier Hersom (b. 1995), Composer; Marsha Elliott-Edwards, Flute; Robert Holliston, Piano

Third prize winner of The International Music Composition Competition 2020, Creative Music Class

“Hope” was composed in 2020 during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is a simple, yet beautiful duet for flute and piano. The evolving melody passing between the instruments represents life’s changing tides. There are periods that are graceful and pensive and others that are fleeting and exciting. The end of the piece is grave like looming depression, but it finally resolves in a bright cord—this symbolizes how even as we face difficult situations in life, there is always hope.



Mindscape

Karon Teat (he/they)



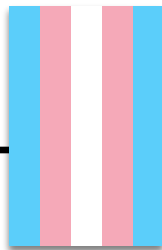
Graphite and charcoal on Strathmore watercolor paper

Mindscape represents an amalgamation of my self-perception, decay, creation, and lack of/ sense of hope; It also illustrates my relationship with the idea of love.

The Field Within, The Road Before



Laura Bingham (they/them)



She is laid to rest, my breasts are gone, a lifelong battle
feels won.

Women express their feelings, pouring out from their minds
eye, they feel left behind.

'Where did all the lesbians go?'

The dog whistle sounds in compulsive repetition.

I asked my friend for quintessential advice, Radical Hope.
Now I create hope and embrace it to the stitches of my
body, tight as a vice.

A Thermometer takes data.

A Thermostat takes control.

I greet opposition to connect to a
fellow human and it takes its toll.

In my heart, in my mind, staining into the weave of my soul.

I cultivate lavender weeds within me, tickling my innards,
and beget a gentle sneeze.

Chased laughter as my insides turn outside,
Indoctrinated into the world's breeze.

We humans recognize who is like us.

It's evolutionary, born of safety and who we can trust.

Well, If joy is radicalization.

I am a proud part of our queer nation.

I take my identity off the lot, out for a spin.

The sour stench of reality only draws me in.

My life is mine to live, more than a test drive.

A life of clutching the wheel.



Infighters in the deep blue



Lina Gio Hunt (any pronouns)

Potomac reflection
Waterskin like a brackish-green pearl
The viscous mirror
Renders and re-renders my face
Shadowed and nebulous
Swamp monster or butch protector
Salty captain or leering senior
Community member and antisocial
Beautiful and/or polluted
Which wave might catch your eye
You, knower of every sea?
Rainbow-blue flag bearer
Airtight goggles wearer
Explorer of the shallow
Veteran of the reserves
And knower of every sea?

The Release of Our Desperate, Captive Hopes Into the Wild



Anne Marie Wells (she/they)



The organ's aria rang out from the National Cathedral,
quivering free
the most delicate of the cherry blossom petals with its
chords, littering

the sidewalks of Wisconsin Avenue with belated valentines
as she took
her dog out on Easter Sunday morning alone, too early to
call anyone

just to say hi, not even her devout, Catholic mother. And
this queer's lonely,
atheist heart found itself brushing her hair for her, covering
her night-old eye

-liner with a pair of glasses, pulling up stockings
underneath a floral dress
and pink cardigan, walking herself, as if on a leash, the half
mile to childhood

familiarity in the shape of a pew and a hymnal. Is it so
surprising though?
When her heart knew she needed something, anything,
even if it was only

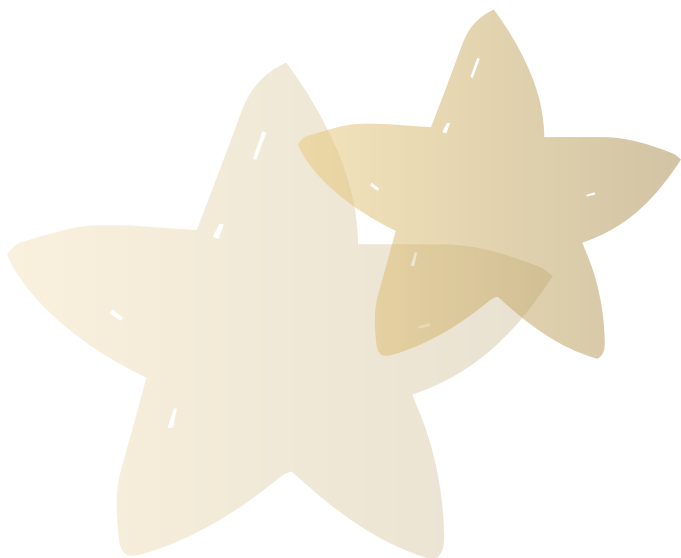
to admire Romanesque architecture and stained glass? To
fall trance to the hollow
murmur of responsorial psalms? She, like her mother, had
held onto so much

for so long without a place for it all to go. Hadn't she
already spent a year pretending
untruths were true for the sake of a quiet pulse and six
hours of sleep each night?

Hadn't she already wished on side-walk pennies, dandelion
seeds, birthday candles
and stars, and even nothing at all to manifest her
unrelenting daydreams into reality?

What would one more try hurt? What are prayers, anyway, if
they are not

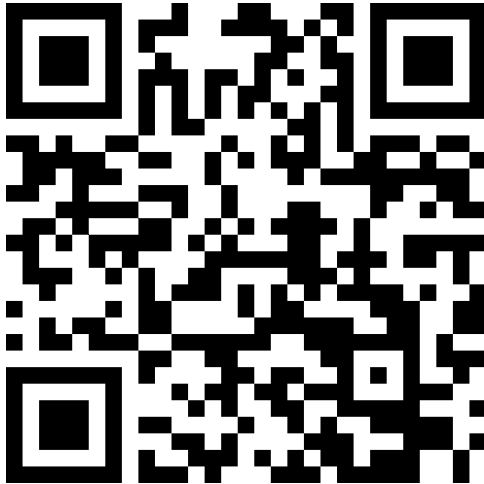
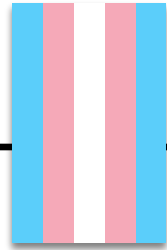
The release of our desperate, captive
hopes into the wild





nora.

Meagan A. (she/her)



Created out of the residual loneliness of the pandemic, nora explores the connection between creating art, queerness and the body, and the isolation it brings.





Prism Center

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CONTACT US

(571) 485-9308
info@novaprismcenter.gay



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ARTIST SOCIALS

Mischa D Gleason: [instagram/@paintedred.art](https://instagram.com/@paintedred.art)
Benjamin Freedman: [instagram/@benjaminfreedmanmusic](https://instagram.com/@benjaminfreedmanmusic)
Xavier Hersom: [youtube/@xavierhersom](https://youtube.com/@xavierhersom)
Meagan A.: [instagram/@meagan_arnold1](https://instagram.com/@meagan_arnold1) ft. [instagram/@spaceboy_jones](https://instagram.com/@spaceboy_jones)
Karon Teat: [instagram/@ron.neutron](https://instagram.com/@ron.neutron)
Elliana Blevins: [instagram/@Elle_grace_b](https://instagram.com/@Elle_grace_b)
Crow Turner: [instagram/@crowcinthus](https://instagram.com/@crowcinthus)
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Kenzie Butler: [instagram/@mackenziealabelonbutler](https://instagram.com/@mackenziealabelonbutler)
Zenia deHaven: [instagram/@zeniadehaven_](https://instagram.com/@zeniadehaven_)
Anne Marie Wells: [instagram/@AnneMarieWellsWriter](https://instagram.com/@AnneMarieWellsWriter)
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