

PINK PANTHER

MAGAZINE

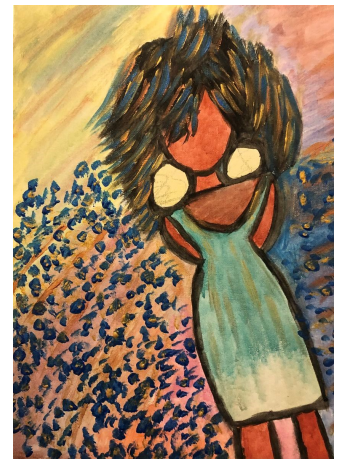
A celebration of women's art and writing



8 September 2022 | Volume 13, Number 2



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Edited by Angelina DeBellis



High on Cloud 9
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Issues will be shipped in March and September. Missing issues must be reported within three months of missed shipment date for replacements to be arranged.

PPM's vision is to give women a voice through the promotion of their art and writing. *PPM* provides a multicultural atmosphere that focuses on today's women's issues—a safe, nurturing place to explore ideas and celebrate women's unique experiences in every phase of their lives.

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A celebration of women's art and writing

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MEET OUR STAFF

Full bios at back of issue.

A letter from the editor . . .

It's always with great joy that we bring you the newest issue of *Pink Panther Magazine*. Each issue seems tougher and tougher to assemble as our staff and contributors navigate their new normal routines with its time warps and dwindling resources. While every edition of the mag is a product of our love for art and literature, this one feels both nostalgic and hope-filled. Whether you're longing for the simpler times of the past, longing to be inspired by how others roughed through turbulent waters to find their way back to solid ground, or longing for a degree of connection that reminds you how this too shall pass, let yourself be swept into the current that celebrates extraordinary women, art, and writing.

Since *PPM's* debut thirteen years ago on International Women's Day, we've maintained a twofold vision along with our mission to remain ad free. Our foundation is built on advocating women's voices and vision by promoting their art and writing. Through mass media outlets, we nurture a multicultural atmosphere that focuses on global women's interests and concerns. Our aim is to offer readers and contributors a safe and inviting place to explore feminist-inspired ideas and celebrate women's unique experiences in all life phases.

PPM's main feature this issue is an interview with Boston based poet Kathleen Aguero and a poetry exhibition-in-print of selected poems from her Tiger Bark Press titles. Prepare to be enchanted by a true "spirit of sea & sky" and her exceptional poetry and literary lifestyle. The art and literature in this edition probe beneath the surface of the female experience into the realm of relationship disharmonies, survival, and loss—be these with biological or chosen family, friends, lovers, or self. Our mini art feature highlights Towana Wright's Exhibition at Boston's Ula Café and our poetry feature showcases the works of Jane (Yevgenia!) Muschenetz. May you be deeply touched and inspired by these works of art and literature that examine the bonds that bind us, that break us, and that shape us.

Team Panther hopes you enjoy volume 13, number 2. More about the magazine is available on our website. Thanks always to our contributing artists and writers who share their work and help stitch together *PPM's* complex sisterhood with art and writing that explore our connectedness. And, as always, thanks to our readers for a beautiful shared space.

Shine on,

Jenifer DeBellis

Executive Editor

Team Panther



Jenifer DeBellis
Executive Editor



Louisa Clerici
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Jennifer Gentile
Fiction Reviewer



Roselyn Kubek
Prose Editor



Lisa J. Sullivan
Poetry Editor

AN INTIMATE INTERVIEW & POETRY CELEBRATION

Featuring Kathleen Aguero, developed by Jenifer DeBellis & Lisa J. Sullivan

In life you have the family you're born into and the family you build over your lifetime. Then there is the family who takes you in as their own as if you always belonged. This was my experience when I entered the Solstice MFA in Creative Writing Program of Lasell University (formerly Pine Manor College). From my very first residency prep and arrival, Kathi Aguero became more than one of my first and one of my favorite mentors. She pulled me into the folds of the flock—what they referred to as The Few, The Proud, The Poets—and treated me like one of her own. To some readers this may seem trivial. To those of us blessed to call her mentor and friend, it's a lifeline in turbulent waters.

One of Kathi's most striking qualities is her generous and nurturing heart. Though her sense of humor that shares my love of irony is a close second. She brings an energy into any atmosphere that's radiant and joy-filled. Even when delivering tough love, her smile and enthusiasm are contagious. She's a force. Don't let her 4"-something stature fool you. She transfers this same energy into her poetry and her guidance as a mentor. For Kathi's birthday a few years back, I wrote her the poem, "Sweet Daughter of Oceanus" (featured right), in gratitude for helping me fall back in love with mythological influences in my poetry. As an undergrad, it was drilled into me that mythology in present day poetry was outdated and overdone. The same with traditional forms and what one instructor deemed "dead mechanics." Studying Kathi's poetry that masterfully follows form and modernizes mythological tales *and* closely studying the insightful reading list we built together have had an extraordinary influence on my writing and my approaches to teaching. May you be just as inspired and changed by Kathleen Aguero's beautiful spirit, poetry, and literary lifestyle.

You have quite an enviable list of published poetry collections. Take us back to your roots. How does your poet story begin? What led you to read and write poetry? Were you an avid poetry reader before you began developing your own poetry or vice versa?

My mother used to read poetry to us from a large green anthology called, I believe, *The Treasury of the Familiar*, so I was introduced to poetry at an early age. Then, during elementary school, along with my brother and sister, I spent two years in a two room British school with a phenomenal teacher who taught us all no matter what our grade level. As part of the curriculum, we chose a poem a week to memorize, so I got poetry in my head.

I love this discipline of memorizing poetry. I wish I had been exposed to this practice before returning to college in my thirties. What can you tell us about your educational background and formal training in poetry and writing?

I took creative writing classes in college with Fanny Howe, Bob Grenier, and X.J. Kennedy, then went on to get a MA in Creative Writing from Boston University where I was fortunate to study with Anne Sexton, George Starbuck, and John Malcolm Brinnin.

Wow, fortunate indeed. What I would give to hear Anne Sexton tell me in person, "kill your darlings!" Which poets and works have influenced your own craft? How have these influences evolved over your poetry career?

That's always a hard question for me to answer. In high school and college, like everyone else, I read confessional poets such as Sexton and Plath. I was struck by their vivid, powerful imagery but also by Sexton's unexpected sense of humor. I'm also a fan of the early Alice James poets when Alice James was still a press "with an emphasis on publishing women." In the 80s, Marie Harris, a friend and fellow poet, and I, published anthologies of and about multi-cultural poetry, before that became such a buzz word. Doing that certainly broadened my sense of what a poem could address, who the audience for poetry encompassed, and what kinds of language it could hold.

Sweet Daughter of Oceanus

© Jenifer DeBellis

Spirit of sea & sky,
you're a grounded echo
open to a world
of infinite promises.
You're the binnacle
keeper, lanyard arm
portside, ratline hand cast
starboard. You're the patrol
at the helm, watching
weather & marine threats.
You're post-storm winds—
spinnaker's lifeline. Landless,

you're sand between my toes,
guiding my saltwater steps.



Photo: Dzvinia Orłowsky



Reading at Northshire Bookstore, Saratoga Springs

I'm glad you explored these things since they insightfully inform your poetry works I've read and your mentorship over my own craft practices. What craft elements and/or styles do you admire most in poems? Why do you admire these elements and/or styles?

Imagery and music have always been important elements to me. I admire poems that take risks but are also aware of and trying to connect with their audience. "Take risks" is a term that encompasses a lot: subject, style, language, as well as imagery. By connecting with an audience, I mean poems that are written with the awareness that someone will be reading them, and, even if such poems are challenging, they offer the reader a way into the poem. Language is a social artifact, a cultural, communal, creation. I'm interested in all the history a word can carry. I'm grateful to the way edgier, "language poets" stretch the boundaries for all of us, but I don't turn to the more avant garde poets for inspiration or write poems in that style myself.

My own experience with language poetry and avant garde is similar. Though I did experiment with these at the beginning of my writing career and learned how to take risks with language and poetic conventions. Then, when I was exposed to form, I appreciated what structure and tradition offered poets. You sometimes write in forms (quite masterfully). Does the form come first or the poem? Can you give us your insight into the correlation between content and form?

Thank you for that compliment.

I've always regretted not taking a course in writing formal poetry while I was in graduate school. At that time Boston University offered a one-year program during which we took four workshops and four academic courses and completed our creative thesis. It seemed a lot to accomplish in two semesters, so I opted for the workshops. In later years, I began to experience my ignorance of form as a significant lack. I thought that whether or not I became proficient in writing formal poetry, I needed to become familiar with all the tools of poetry. I began to read about form and meter and worked my way through all the exercises in Mary Kinzie's wonderful book, *A Poet's Guide to Poetry*. Learning, for example, that metered lines may be scanned differently by different poets was tremendously liberating. So at first, my formal poems came out of the exercises I was doing. I became interested in form for its own sake, so many poems in *Daughter Of* are written in form. In subsequent books, I used the form that the content seemed to call for.

"I found writing, particularly in form because of the distance and distraction of its rules, a way to explore and come to terms with my grief . . ."

Hm, learning form and meter from working through all the exercises in Kinzie's *A Poet's Guide to Poetry*? Thanks for giving me my next series of homework. What poets and poems do you return to and what attracts you to them? Have you worked with and/or closely studied any established poets?

The poets I studied under at BU are the most well-known that I've worked with. I have a group of poet friends, including Erica Funkhouser, Suzanne Berger, Helena Minton, and Christopher Corkery, who have formed a long time poetry workshop. Those are the readers I most depend on to give me feedback on my work. The poets I return to are many and drawn from varying traditions: John Donne, William Shakespeare, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Adrienne Rich, Robin Becker to name just a few.

This list of poets in your workshop is enviable. #goals. I'm grateful that you exposed me to Funkhouser's *The Actual World*. Deeply studying this poetry collection was one of those craft-and life-changing experiences. You don't just have an impressive workshop group and mentor list, you also share a life with another well-published poet. What is it like to share a life and creative journey with a spouse who's also an established poet?



Photo: Richard Hoffman

I don't have much basis for comparison because I've never been married to anyone else! Being married to another poet is a plus because we understand each other's need for solitude, support one another's work, and have all those literary interests in common. It also has its drawbacks. When our children were young, for example, it was hard to balance both of us working full-time, writing, and parenting. Not having adequate time to do all those three things created tension. It's also difficult when one partner's writing and publication is flourishing while the other is in a slump. And gender expectations still exist regarding who feels they can put their writing first, who pays more attention to domestic responsibilities, even who gets noticed. In my experience, men often feel more comfortable promoting themselves and claiming public space for their work. That balance may be generational, however. I think women poets are coming into their own. Over the years, my husband and I have worked things out, and I'm grateful to be with someone who shares my passion for literature and writing.

I'm interested in learning more about how women artists married to successful male artists managed their own creative work. *Ninth Street Women* is definitely on my must-read list.

Is it bad if I admit I laughed all the way through your last

answers? Seriously, though. While some of your confessions are specific to the industry, many of them are universally relatable—especially the gender norms and default roles. Your transparency in these answers is inspiring, as is how everything comes full circle on the importance of working these things out. I love you and Richard as a couple and am a huge fan of both your work. So, I'm personally grateful for these answers.

Who are you currently reading? What draws you to these poets and writers?

Oh dear, I'm one of those people who can't stop buying books of poetry, so I have stacks piled around my study that I haven't gotten to yet! I'm also a slow reader of poetry. I like to savor poems, so it takes me awhile to finish a book of poetry. I never could do that read a book of poetry a day project!! Right now I'm almost finished with *Not a Soul but Us: A Story in 84 Sonnets* by Richard Smith, winner of the May Sarton New Hampshire Poetry Award. Not only is each poem a precisely written sonnet, done so well the form is completely unobtrusive, but the book calls on substantial research and quietly tells an emotionally powerful narrative. I admire the skill and depth of these poems. A very different kind of book I'm taken with is *Liar* by Jessica Cuello, which has intense content and a daring style using repetition and fragmentation as well as more conventional narrative and



Photo: Linda McCarriston

lyrical techniques. Similarly, I adore Jennifer Martelli's *The Queen of Queens* for some of the same reasons. I want to study these two poets who write so differently than I to find out how they do it.

I'm with you on being someone who can't stop buying books. I have so many I want to read and never enough time to read them. Martelli's *The Queen of Queens* is on my list of books to buy. I'll have to add Cuello's *Liar*. Your bio mentions you also teach in multiple settings. What is your teaching background? How did your background lead you to teach at the graduate level in a low-residency MFA program? Give us a glimpse into your roles and interactions in this program.

Like many with degrees in creative writing, I started out teaching college composition, a course that always seems to need instructors! I was fortunate to get my first teaching position under Don Murray, an influential compositionist, who held weekly meetings for composition staff, invaluable to me as a new teacher. For many years after that, I cobbled together a living teaching as a composition adjunct at various institutions and as a Poet-in-the-Schools, so my teaching experience ranged from kindergarteners to college students. Luckily for me, my adjunct position at Pine Manor College turned into a full-time tenure track job. I directed the college composition at Pine Manor for about fifteen years and, because it was a small college with a small English department, was also able to teach a wide range of literature and

creative writing courses. By the time the Solstice Low-Residency Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing program became part of Pine Manor, I'd already published several books of poetry, and so I was qualified to teach in our new graduate program. As you know, because you're a Solstice alum, thanks to our director, Meg Kearney, Solstice is a very special program offering a great deal of support and community to everyone who is part of it. I feel very fortunate to be a member of the poetry faculty in this program. The low-residency model allows mentors not only to develop close one-to-one collegial relationships with students but also to teach and to audit a wide variety of seminars during residency. I've learned so much from colleagues and students in the program, and I treasure the supportive relationships I've formed there. Residencies are called "intensives" for good reason. They're stimulating, exhausting, and extremely rewarding.

Yes, I'm equally grateful for the support, knowledge, and community I've gained from the Solstice MFA program. I'm especially grateful for my time working with you and for the fellow travelers I bonded with as a Solstice student and now alum. Community is important. It's important to a healthy literary lifestyle. It's also important to bring literature into our communities where access is limited or missing. I know this is something you're intentional about doing as well. Tell us about the Changing Lives through Literature Program and your involvement with it.



Photo: Richard Hoffman

I've been a facilitator for Changing Lives through Literature, an alternative program for criminal offenders on probation, since 2006. I've led groups in West Roxbury, Roxbury, South Boston and Salem, Massachusetts. The program was founded in the belief that reading and discussing literature can help people change their lives. A judge, probation officer, and facilitator (often a college professor) attend each class. Each person's opinion is equally valued, and this principle gives participants increased confidence. In addition, to successfully complete the program, participants must attend all meetings and complete the required readings. Maintaining the discipline to meet those requirements shows participants that they can be successful. Right now, I'm working with an extraordinary Judge, Carol-Ann Fraser, and probation officer, Yesenia Baez whose enthusiasm for the program is a major component of its success. In addition, the Peabody Essex Museum of Salem has lent us space to hold our meetings in an elegant room in their museum. Their generosity makes students feel valued. Obviously, I love teaching in this program. I admire its values and am grateful for the people I meet through my involvement in it. Rather than blather on, I'll include links to websites where readers can find out more about the program if they're interested:

www.uscourts.gov/sites/default/files/62_1_6_0.pdf
www.press.umich.edu/pdf/047203040X-ch1.pdf
masshumanities.org/files/news/mhfall06.pdf

There's much to admire here. I can see why you love this program and teaching in it. Your community teaching doesn't end here. What is your role as a teacher for Creative Writing for Caregivers workshops? What happens in these workshops and who benefits from attending them?

I started teaching these workshops after my mother's death from Alzheimer's. I wasn't her caretaker—my father heroically took on her care—but I found writing, particularly in

form because of the distance and distraction of its rules, a way to explore and come to terms with my grief at the manner of her death. Seeing what my father went through made me realize how little time and psychic space caregivers have to meet their own needs and to express their grief and anger. I started these workshops as a place for caregivers to give voice to their own stories. Metaphor, especially, allows caretakers a powerful but indirect way to describe what they're going through. I think its use helps people to express anger, in particular, without feeling guilty.

Caregivers sure do have limited time and psychic space for their own needs. This is an extraordinary workshop model, as are these poetic strategies for writing through difficult experiences. Speaking of metaphor, something we admire about your poetic style is your imagery and mastery of metaphor. How do you develop these elements in your work? Do you begin with specific content or narrative in mind and the imagery rises to the surface? Or do you cull through metaphor to uncover its hidden stories and details?

All of the above. Sometimes the image or metaphor arises first and I explore it. Other times, I search for the image that will bring a theme to life. Most often they seem fused, arriving as a unit. I'm drawn to re-imagining received narratives, in particular myths and fairy tales, as a way to write about, protest really, the situation of women in the contemporary world.

Are there techniques and outside influences you rely on to flesh out imagery and other elements in your poems?

When I'm stuck or need to develop a poem, I often go to something I call "writing outside the poem," a kind of free-writing that takes parts of the poem and expands them. Then I see if there's anything from that writing about the poem that will help me move forward. Anne Sexton makes powerful use of imagery and metaphor in her poems. When I was studying with her and blocked in my writing, she told me to choose something in the room and brainstorm all the things it was not e.g. that window is not the Atlantic Ocean, not a glass of water etc. Obviously, all the "nots" you come up with do, in fact, have similarities to the object you're (not) describing. This exercise is a rich source of metaphor and imagery.

What fabulous exercises to help writers explore finer details, those intricate details that inform imagery in memorable ways. Another striking quality in your poetry is its exploration of the internal workings of the human struggle to make meaning from experience and our individuality within a shared humanity. How do you approach this internal exploration? What strategies do you use to probe memory and personal histories for deeper meanings and understanding?

Another challenging question! I don't think I can address this one in an articulate way. I'm a slow writer and often have as many as seven years between books. I write a lot and throw a lot away. I fill notebooks and journals with half explored ideas and snippets of imagery, phrases that interest me etc. then go through them to see what they yield. When I find something, I pull it out and explore it. I imagine it's a lot like fish-

ing. Somedays you catch something; other days you don't. In either case, you're there at the water.

I do a similar type of notetaking and "fishing" in my own writing life. It definitely feels like you're at the water's edge, waiting to see what the tide washes ashore. To build off this exploration of human agency, what other themes and topics emerge in your poetry?

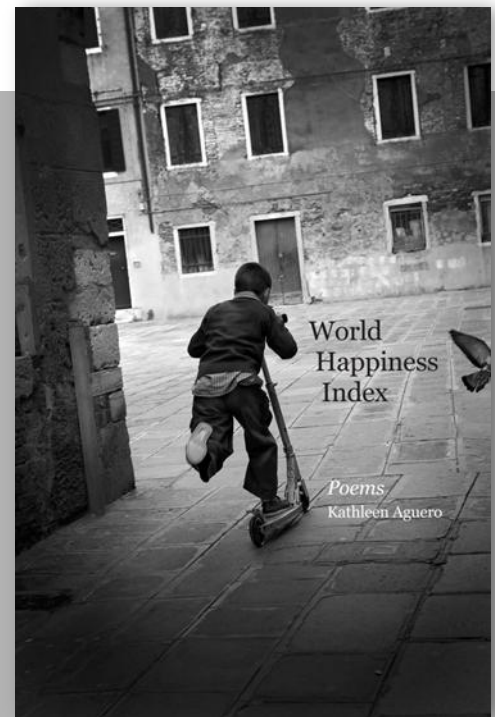
I think it's hard for us to escape our obsessions. When I started to write the poems based on my speculations about what happened to Miranda in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* after she returned to Venice, I was excited to be writing about new themes. After all, the idea originated with an image from the movie *Prospero's Books* in which Miranda and Caliban are seated on either side of Prospero while he teaches them. All I had in mind was that image and my love of the play. Then somehow my sequence became about her search to discover more about her mother.

That's an intriguing point of inspiration. As an admirer of your writing, I'm glad you follow your obsessions and—even if it's seven years between projects—that you continue to publish your work. Congratulations on your newest poetry collection, *World Happiness Index*. What can readers expect in this collection?

Although I have many poems about family in this collection, the poems in it also address social/political situations more directly than in other collections. I was and am angry and concerned about the situation in the United States, and the way fear begets violence. *World Happiness Index* also has a group of self-portrait poems, begun as a lark, that wound up exploring what it's like to be an older woman in this society.

Do you have favorite poems or a favorite poetry collection you've published? If so, what endears this collection to you?

I suppose like most poets my most recent collection, *World Happiness Index*, is my favorite. I also have a soft spot for *Daughter Of* which contains the Miranda sequence as well as many poems based on myth. I fear its reliance on other Shakespeare (I quake on my temerity in calling up his ghost in my own writing!) and myth may be off-putting to readers, but I love both those sources.



HAPPY SKIES SPA: REFLEXOLOGY

© Kathleen Aguero

A neon halo shines above a flashing foot
but when I go inside to buy
a gift certificate for my daughter,
a young woman, sleek fall of dark hair,
shakes her head, adamant in struggling
English: No reflexology. Bodywork.
Only bodywork. Back at home—no websites.
Just online reviews on rubmaps.com: Beautiful masseuse.
Try the table shower. It's the balls. To read more pay and join.

I read about a family that traded their daughter
for enough money to stop death threats from loan sharks.
Does this really happen:
fields poisoned; son
dead; daughter
on a plane to us?

She could be inside that storefront
where the shades are always drawn
and the sign reads Massage or Bodywork.
No doubt the ones who took her discovered
all her useful attributes: her hands, her mouth, her pretty
unlined face.

The weekend detective gives me the number
of the day detective. The day detective takes a message
for the night detective. No one calls back.
On the FBI hotline a woman answers: rubmaps... usually a tip-off.
Was there an ATM? Were the windows shuttered?
Here's the reference number. May we contact you?

A month later, the night detective leaves a message.
Assures me, It's under control. And me—
white lady in a down coat and boots, appalled,
calling the police, the FBI, then warming up a plate
of fragrant stew, what am I prepared
to understand? That young woman
gets arrested. Another takes her place.

From *World Happiness Index*,
Tiger Bark Press.

Colloquial, direct, and rich with insight, these dispatches from the nineteenth happiest country in the world shine a keen light on what Kathleen Aguero calls “land of trash and extravaganza”; *World Happiness Index* is both focused and broad, including everything from the challenges of grandparenthood to Sacco and Vanzetti. The public and the personal are intertwined here, and this book has much to offer about both. It may not make you happier, but prepare to be enlightened and moved.

—Don Bogen, author of *Immediate Song*

This compelling collection speaks with firm tenderness to the inner-struggle of human agency that we all feel, caught between our resoluteness and our limitations, especially during these trying times. Through Aguero's arresting metaphors and intimate yet oracular voice, these poems feel like lucid dreams that we don't merely read, we experience as if they were our very own.

—Richard Blanco, 2013 Presidential Inaugural Poet and
author of *How to Love a Country*

YOU

© Kathleen Aguero

Did it begin with the sky holding back its rain like a fist
stopping just short of your face, the slight rush
of air on your jaw? You'd rather a thunderhead's anvil
stalking as you back into a room
with a lock, because that actual fist
clenched round a storm could let loose,
break down the door. Now you're stuck
in the bathroom trying to retrace the map
that got you here. You lean on the wall,
slide to the floor as the shouting grows stronger,
loud bang on the door. If you climbed out the window
where would you go? How could you run
carrying that heavy sky on your shoulders?

First published in *The Progressive*.
From *World Happiness Index*.
Tiger Bark Press.

MUTE SELF-PORTRAIT

© Kathleen Aguero

If only a hibiscus bloomed from my mouth
If flame
If my words persuaded
like ice in a heat wave
my voice poured like a waterfall
down a silver slope
and a hurricane roared from my throat
But not this stuck stone,
this mouth filled with grit
When I speak sand floats
through the air and the room
is covered with dust

From *World Happiness Index*,
Tiger Bark Press.

Is it possible to be both clear-eyed and deeply poetic? Direct and deliciously delicate? Kathi Aguero manages these binaries in poems that extinguish binaries and situate us in gripping depths of feeling. Mapping emotional terrain and the politics of relations—with the self, with family, with neighbor, with country—Aguero has us contemplate the beauty, complications, and contradictions inherent in the human experience. *World Happiness Index* reveals Aguero's considerable powers of image-making and understanding.

—Danielle Legros Georges Poet Laureate,
City of Boston, 2015-2019

[Tiger Bark Press, 2021]
Cover: Glen McClure

Featuring meditations on Nancy Drew and confrontations with dementia, *After That* is a book of poignant surprises and connections. This collection moves beautifully through several territories, not only because Aguero's craft is exacting, but because of the relationships she establishes between poems, which make the reading all the more rich. I want a book to invite my engagement then demand it. This one does that. —Tim Seibles
[Tiger Bark Press, 2013]

Ambition © Kathleen Aguero

Nancy, like Athena,
born straight from her father's head.
That's why she never menstruates,
and why we love her most
pre-puberty when bodies were
no bother. She was us,
but older, with a car. Climbing
out of windows, hiding
in dark cellars, hardly
a woman at all, at least
not like our mothers,
hair in rollers, lipstick
smears on coffee-cups.
Go into law or business,
my mother told me,
meaning I should have a chance
to call the shots, meaning
she'd also wanted to be Nancy.

From *After That*, Tiger Bark Press.

Parable of Wakening © Kathleen Aguero

He is the first thing she sees
so she thinks he is the sun.

She is the first thing he's wakened
so he thinks he is a god.

She mistakes his strangeness for brilliance,
her gratitude for love.

He mistakes her beauty for serenity,
her desire for compliance.

But as her hunger grows,

he leaves to shoot birds
whose soft fall to the ground

remind him of his lover
falling backward into sleep.

The moment of each death
is like the moment of her wakening.

From *Daughter of*, Tiger Bark Press.

Aubade © Kathleen Aguero

Sheen of wet sand,
smooth back of a whale the world rests on.

Pearl gray, blue gray,
the mauve tinged gray east.

Gray thread of bird song
spinning clouds overhead

where they mass, gray underside
of a vast bouquet of flowering white.

The sun keeps its secrets.
The air, rich and heavy with holding.

Soon imperatives will drop down before us—
go, choose, do—

but now the glass is fogged—
gray pause, muffled—
our futures swirl in a jar.

From *After That*, Tiger Bark Press.

Prelude © Kathleen Aguero

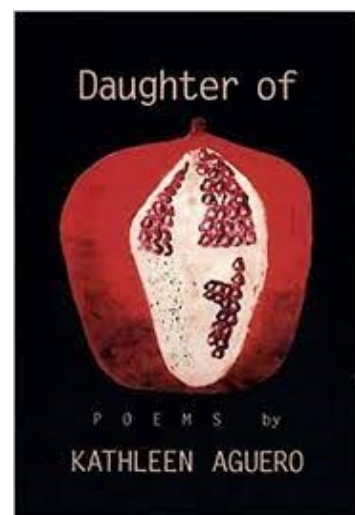
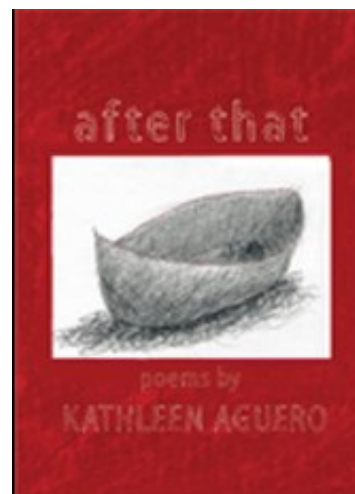
The flame
of your father's vengeance leaves you lame
and halting. The aim
of his magic starts to falter.

Raised to mirror
only one, move from that error
to uncover the hidden mother.

The turbulent waters praise
her. The high winds raise
her perfume all around you. Ease

into that small boat, your resolve.

From *Daughter of*, Tiger Bark Press.



"The Miranda of the brilliant opening sequence in Kathleen Aguero's new collection, *DAUGHTER OF* embodies Gilles and Guatarri's radical insight, from ANTI-OEDIPUS, that 'the unconsciousness is an orphan and creates itself out of nature and man.' Forged of equal parts will and insight, the Miranda who abandons her fate for the dark lore of her mother and brother is the mind and heart that course through all of the poems of this collection. Wide ranging and masterful in form, they wed sheer lyric gorgeousness with discursive gravity"

—Linda McCarriston
[Cedar Hill Books, 2004]

Kathleen Aguero has published several collections of poetry: *After That*, *Daughter Of*, *The Real Weather*, *Thirsty Day*, *Investigations*: a collection of poems inspired by Nancy Drew. Her work has appeared in numerous literary journals, including *Poetry* magazine, *Massachusetts Review*, and the *Cincinnati Review*. She is also co-editor of three collections of multicultural literature: *A Gift of Tongues*, *An Ear to the Ground*, and *Daily Fare*. Her creative nonfiction essay "Marriage Koan" appears in the anthology *Why I'm Still Married*. Recipient of a Massachusetts Fellowship in Poetry and a fellowship to the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, Kathleen also was awarded a writing grant from the Elgin/Cox Trust. She has taught at the Writers' Center at the Chautauqua Institute in upstate New York, the NY State Young Writers' Program at Skidmore, as well as in the Poets in the Schools Programs of New Hampshire and Massachusetts. In 2004, she held the position of Visiting Research Associate at the Brandeis University Women's Studies Research Center in Waltham, Massachusetts. In addition to teaching in the Solstice MFA program at Lasell University, Kathleen teaches for "Changing Lives Through Literature," an alternative sentencing program based on the power of books to change lives through reading and group discussion. She is a consulting editor in poetry for *The Kenyon Review*.

Art

Towana Wright

Located in Boston, Ula Café is a black owned, woman owned, veteran owned and locally owned business on a mission to unite their community around wholesome, local, sustainable food and meaningful community interaction. One way Ula offers meaningful community interaction is by proudly supporting local artists like Towana Wright. Towana's art exhibit is currently showcased at Ula. All art on their wall is **for sale** and directly benefits our artists. Here's what the artist has to say about this art exhibit.

Towana, what can you tell us about this exhibit and the selected works pictured in this feature collection? Do any belong in a series? Are there interesting stories, points of inspiration, or backgrounds to particular pieces and/or series?

As the featured artist of the month at Ula Café' my goal was to showcase pieces depicting the invisibility, strength and hard-won joy of black women. I write what I call teacup tales. When the Pandemic hit, I was gripped with fear and severe anxiety, and it was difficult for me to focus on my writing. I managed to continue my journal practice, but I needed another outlet, something more emotive. Initially I started with making collages from magazine clippings. I had no idea that I had artistic abilities, but sixteen months ago, I awoke on a Saturday morning determined to teach myself to draw. Shortly thereafter, I gave myself permission to paint.

My mom and my extended family are my points of inspiration. I was born in Mobile, AL. My parents came to Massachusetts when I was a year old. I spent many summers in St. Elmo, the small town where my mother was raised. My great-grandmother, Anna had these wonderful sayings. I can still hear her voice in my head. There was no air-conditioning in her house on Boe Road. The St. Elmo sun was far too aggressive for me. I wanted to be in Boston, in my house, in my finished basement playing Operation with my sister. Whenever my great-grandmother heard me complain about wanting to go home, she would look at me and say: *"This is your home."* I thought she was crazy. She wasn't. My imagination lives in Alabama, it is the well from which I draw from—Its sky and sun are my muses.

Several years ago, I wrote a piece, "The Redbone Girl from Satsuma." It's about a beautiful young woman named Lorraine, who is overtaken by the desire to paint; she has little means, so she paints on paper bags and cardboard boxes. She's raising a child on her own. She knows she isn't suited for motherhood, so she leaves her baby on her mother's front porch with a note attached to its sweater. Lorraine makes her way to Louisiana hoping her beauty will aid her in finding a well to do man that will take care of her, so that she can spend her days and nights painting. When I reflect back on this story, I can see a small grain of myself in Lorraine, her desire to spend her time exactly as she sees fit, instead of having it dictated by others. I don't have children; I want to believe that if I did, I wouldn't have made the same decision as Lorraine—but I definitely



© Towana Wright
Ula Café, Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts



Ula Café Exhibit Wall © Towana Wright



Aunties © Towana Wright
Oil pastel on stretched canvas
Pink Panther Magazine 13

Art

Towana Wright

identify with her “urgency” to paint and not wanting to parcel out so much of one’s time. I believe that connecting with others is crucial, but I also know the importance of solitude and having something of your own, an inner world to climb into.

“The Guardians” piece is one of several depictions of my ancestors. My hope is that my exhibit pleases them and that they are in the great beyond rooting for me.

The “Cloud” works belong to my *CJ Series*, collection of work dedicated to my mother.

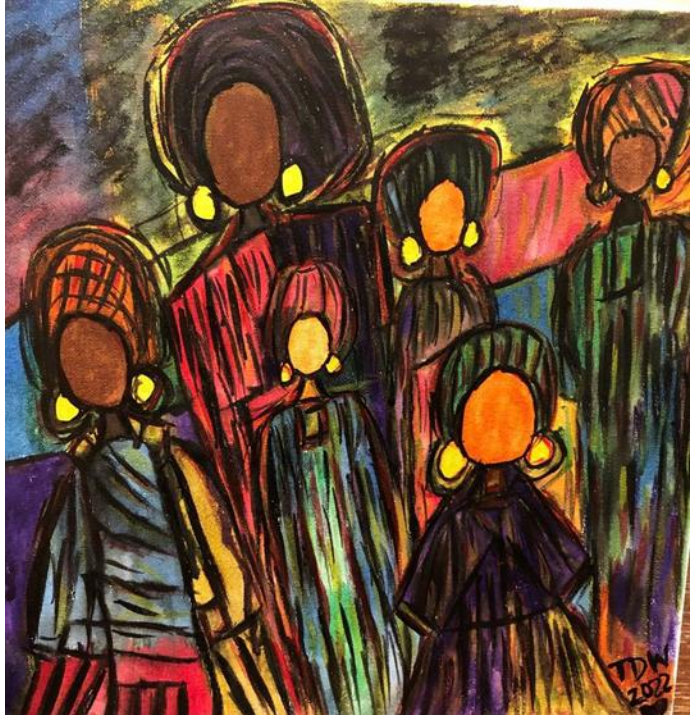
I’m intrigued by your exploration of African art, particularly the creative expression you bring to the female form and abstract representation of these female focuses. Tell us about how these elements work in your art and what inspires these focuses and elements.

Art is a brand-new world and language for me, so It’s a far reach for me to respond to this question other than to say that I feel I use rhythm and motif (black women getting free and claiming their space) in my renderings. I use vibrant colors as a means to give them the visibility they aren’t afforded in their daily lives.

I can’t help but make an interesting correlation between your abstracted representations of themes and women’s features, how these qualities essentially interplay with African art’s tradition of weaving visual arts with performance art. Where African performance art relies on masks as the creative abstract expressionism in the performance, your faceless thin (wo)men allude to the masks African American women historically have and continue to wear. The faceless forms in your art share folkloric appeals that are reminiscent of Gullah art and Lia Kimura’s noppera-bō and the dualities these traditions offer the audience to view the art as mask and mirror.



Baptism © Towana Wright
Acrylic on canvas



The Guardians © Towana Wright
Watercolor on canvas



Guitar Woman © Towana Wright
Acrylic on canvas



Wisdom

© Towana Wright
Acrylic on canvas



Happy Place

© Towana Wright
Watercolor on canvas

CJ 1968

© Towana Wright
Watercolor on canvas

I am honored that you see a correlation between my representations, Gullah art and Lia Kumura's noppera-bō. There is a watcher in my pieces, she manifests in many forms—*The Patron Saint of Lost Earrings*, *The Dream Unit Recovery Agent*, and *The Sidewalk Saint*.

Lovely. What inspired this signature style and approach to your art? What qualities do you hope shine through your vibrant color palette?

I was influenced by the work of Cynthia St. James and Jacob Lawrence. At first, I was determined to draw features because I didn't think I could get away with what Lawrence and St. James did on the canvas because I am self-taught. I'm not interested in becoming a "fine artist" or making "high art." I like the fact that my work is rough-hewn. My hope is that black women know that I see them and love them even if the world doesn't.

I admire this rough-hewn approach. What mediums and other techniques do you rely on when creating art?

I rely on black acrylic paint and black markers to outline my pieces and oddly enough I like to use watercolor paper for my acrylic projects. I used my fingers to create my piece "United."

What's your connection to Ula Café and their Art @ Ula project?

I wasn't aware of the café's existence until my niece, a budding artist in her own right called me and suggested that I contact the café' about displaying my work. At the time, I dismissed the conversation but thankfully courage found me. I was welcomed, embraced, and encouraged by the café's owner, Beth Santos and its art curator, Anne Hernandez.

Well, we're glad courage found you and this has been a



powerful experience. What else would you like our readers to know about your creative journey and art?

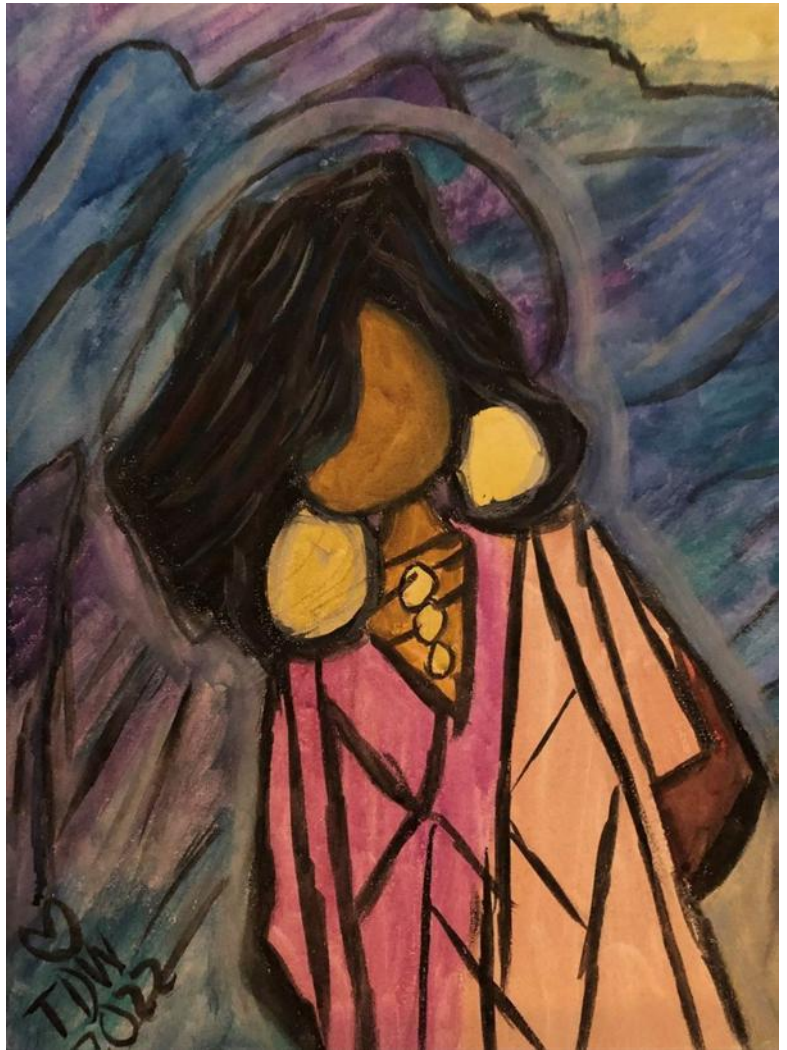
I'll be doing my second exhibition at Brew'd Awakening Coffehaus in Lowell, MA.

My next goal is to combine my art and fiction in a chapbook, so I can hold them both in my hands.



High on Cloud 9: CJ Series

© Towana Wright
Watercolor and acrylic on canvas



**Higher on Cloud 9:
CJ Series**

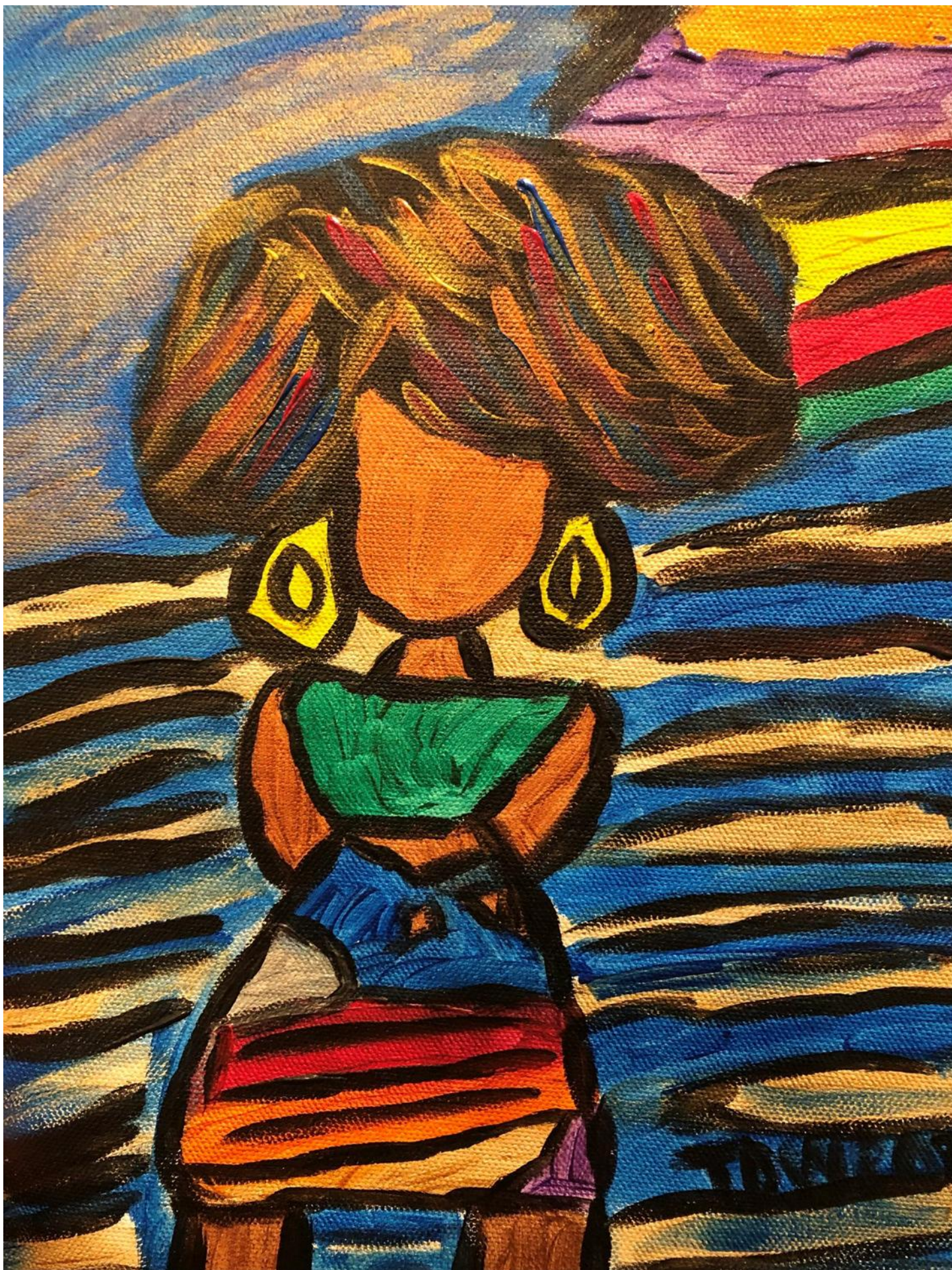
© Towana Wright
Watercolor on canvas



**Never Leaving Cloud 9:
CJ Series**

© Towana Wright
Watercolor and acrylic on canvas

Dancing Lady © Towana Wright
Watercolor on canvas





United © Towana Wright
Acrylic on paper

Drummer Woman © Towana Wright
Watercolor on canvas
[Image on right]

Towana Deann Wright was born in Mobile, Alabama to Lionel (deceased) and Carol Wright.

Lionel moved the family to Massachusetts when Towana was a young girl. She, her mom, and sister Angela would remain in the Boston area where Towana currently resides today. Although she moved from Alabama at a young age, she would periodically visit family. The impact and the culture of the south would remain influential and serve as artistic inspiration for much of her later work.

The rich and complex history of the south, its music, writers, artist, architecture, food, family, and memories offered enrichment, sadness, gratification and most importantly unforgettable memories. Those things would go on to shape her as a remarkable artist.

After getting a Bachelor's Degree in Human Services, Towana pursued a lifelong dream and attained an MFA in Creative writing. She graduated in 2015 and went on to participate in numerous prestigious workshops and residencies including traveling to Oxford University. Her passion for writing and artistic expression found its way to the canvas where she has blossomed and delighted many with her colorful and dynamic signature pieces .



Being a self-taught artist, Towana takes pride in embracing her local artist community. They have offered tremendous encouragement and support. Artist and entrepreneurs have welcomed her into their close-knit circle. She is forever grateful.

Towana spends much of her time in the Boston area embracing New England's culture. She often frequents local businesses, museums, festivals, and events around Cambridge, Chelsea, Belmont, Dorchester, Hyde Park and often makes her way to Rhode Island and New Hampshire. She is an avid traveler and enjoys venturing abroad. Some of her favorite destinations have been Portugal, England, Paris and St. Kitts. When home, you can find her creating artwork, reading, cooking, and knitting. She enjoys the ocean and sunsets. For Towana, art is experimental. Art is escapism. Art is therapy. Art is freedom. From the mouth of Toni Morrison, "Freeing yourself was one thing, claiming ownership of that freed self was another."

Towana enjoys using her art in many forms including T-shirts and notecards. Her notecards can be found at "All That Matters Antiques" in Belmont, MA.

Each issue begins without a theme in mind and evolves to stitch and weave common threads of experience infused by our struggles, curiosity, survival, and often the triumphs and successes that fuse us to the human condition. Many of the works in this Art & Literature collection explore the grief and releases that are intertwined with relational disharmonies, failures, and loss. While all relationships come with their own difficulties, dialects, geography, and doctrine,

family relationships are a difficult landscape that its members don't choose as their homeland. Rather, they inherit it, its politics, its dialect, its culture, and its doctrine. Since *Pink Panther Magazine* is centered on the female experience, many of the works selected focus on the complex mother-daughter relationship. The grit and grief stains that ink our histories are informed by these mother-daughter relationships and how they shape all other relationships, as these works illustrate.

Sometimes members in their literal and figurative homelands feel like or are treated like foreigners in their native lands—thus the proverbial expression, *You can choose your friends but not your family, so choose wisely and dust off the dirt wherever you are not welcomed*. Sometimes individuals begin to feel like foreigners in their own bodies, their own lives, and the relationships they were assigned or built with care. Here's to the bonds that bind us, that break us, and that shape us. Regardless of the relationships that emerge in this issue's selected works—be these with family, friends, lovers, self—they will stir something within your soul that is hauntingly familiar.

Slade

© Olga Gonzalez Latapi

I
convince myself

every day that
is I spend every
single day con-
vincing
myself that I feel abso-
lutely everything you do to me
but I

it

it
is my
bo-
dy who remem-

bers across my
ribs the purple and
green that wallpa-
pers my
skin it is also my bo-
dy who remembers the one who re-
members who
who re-
mem-
bers to breathe un-

derwater what
do you say every
day for the ink
on my
sin to adopt such differ-
rent colors what do you say every
day in the
presence
of
my mind in the

presence of life
and now that the time
has come how e-
xactly
do I love you how exact-
ly do I end
loving you



Becoming Absent II © Thelma van Rensburg
Ink on German etching paper



Unmoored © MaryAnn Reilly
Abstract expressionist painting

Unbecoming © Laura Williams McCaffrey

The ten-street town had no bus station, and so Lina dragged her purple-fading-to-gray suitcase toward the curb where the bus stop sign stood. Snow fell from the overcast sky onto the brick buildings and concrete sidewalks. It fell in her hair. People in knit hats with tassels and pompoms walked past without looking at her.

She pulled the suitcase slowly over the litter of ice chunks and grit. She held it steady so it wouldn't tip. As she stopped under the bus stop sign, she carefully set it from two to four wheels, as if it was full even though it was almost empty.

Lina didn't know how she had lost all her things. She had left some behind, mittens on a table in Dunkin' Donuts after she finished a cup of coffee. Socks wet from stepping in a puddle of slush that she'd peeled off and dropped in the bathroom of the Walmart.

But most of her things had lain on the old wooden floor of her bedroom and had seemed to simply disappear, like her Fast and Furious t-shirt, and her favorite apron with the dancing kittens. The charm anklet her dad had given her when she graduated high school also had disappeared, along with the charms — the ship, the dolphin, the lighthouse, the running horse. Also the charm she'd found and added, the baby in a basket.

She remembered taking the anklet off. She remembered dropping it on the floor by the mirror. One day it was there, the next it was gone.

A huge black SUV drove past, splashing ice and slush, and she flinched back. Chattering women in long wool coats over short suit coats swerved around her, and one almost stepped on her foot. A man who carried skis against one shoulder hit her with his elbow.

"Sorry," she said, and then wished she hadn't. Why should she say sorry to someone who almost hit her?

A woman and man stopped next to her, the man too close, as if her space was his. "There's no Starbucks here?" the woman asked. "How can there be no Starbucks?"

"Excuse me," said the man, and at first Lina thought he was talking to her, but he wasn't. He was looking at a woman in yoga pants and a puffy coat who carried a baby in a wrap of fabric. "Is there a Starbucks here?"

The woman with the baby gave a little smile and shook her head. "There are two very good coffee shops if you go down this street and turn left. One roasts its own beans."

"Thanks." The woman and man clasped hands, and the

man's boot scuffed Lina's as the two walked away.

Another man came over. He wore jeans, and he had no gloves. Without saying a word, he took the handle of her suitcase, and Lina stood, off-balance, saying, "That's mine."

He didn't look at her. He tilted the suitcase one way and then the other, studying it.

She tried to grasp her suitcase's handle, but it seemed made of air or maybe water. It passed through her fingers. It was leaving her, too.

The large blue bus pulled up. It had a sign on the top of it, but the red neon lights didn't show the bus's destination. Instead of letters, the lights were random squares, a pixelated picture that made no sense.

The man started to roll the suitcase away. "That's mine," she called again, but he didn't turn and look at her.

What was actually left in the suitcase? She hadn't packed the old work clothes smelling of French fries. Had she put in her ex's old sweatpants, the ones she'd been wearing on and off for weeks? She didn't think so. She had packed the sweater she had worn when she was pregnant and then had worn after, when she wasn't.

The man kept dragging the suitcase down the sidewalk. The sweater was leaving. Although maybe it was already gone, disappeared like the rest of everything.

The bus driver had stepped out of the bus and stood on the sidewalk by the open door.

Lina had no hat. She had no mittens. She had no socks. She had no suitcase, no sweater. She had plans to leave, that's all she had.

She walked to the bus driver. "Where is this bus going?"

He was an older man, with wrinkles and watery eyes. He didn't answer, just sniffed and looked off toward girls walking past who shared earbuds and leaned together over the same iPhone.

Lina stuck her hands in her pockets. She didn't feel her keys to her apartment.

They had been there when she left the apartment, but now they weren't.

She leaned and looked at the bus's pixelated sign again. Red squares of light spilled across the screen. They weren't letters or numbers. They didn't predict a destination.

She should search for the keys — she should search for everything she'd lost.

Instead she put her foot on the bus's first step and climbed upward.



Metamorphosis of Roses

© t.m. thomson

*after Maria Sibylla Merian,
anticipating ecology in her art & studies*

Four plump roses out of thin air:
light on one side of each
as if an invisible sun
landed on them.

Petals make for heavy heads
leaning this way & that
& stems bend
like patina'd swan necks.

But later the truth comes out
as focus comes in—
one rose head has plunged
to ground

& there settles.
It accepts nibbling moth's
winged weight nudge
of bee banded like a coral snake

& mossy caterpillar's sharp chomp.
Tiny flies with blue-black bodies
& irised wings climb up & down
green city of sepal & stem.

Over a page or two jasmine & iris
suffer same fate—brown beetles
& black ants topple petals
& feast.

*Never mind the theoretical
& pristine, says the watercolorist
as she traipses across fields
& gardens & later, rainforests.*

*Only the intersecting matters:
stroke of caterpillar, line of passion
flower wrestling bobbing in wind
bowing in sun crumbling*

*all things in love with movement
& one another.*



Violet © Catrin Welz-Stein
Digital collage



Offering

© Esinam Bediako

For mercy, I lay at your feet all
 I own: rocks and stones and bricks I collected
 as a child who liked the idea of collections;
 my summer of permed hair when my mother
 finally let me let the Jheri curl go; the fall
 when all that heat-stressed hair broke away
 in clumps in my comb; my blood and
 the shame that came with it, the buds
 and their bloom and the cramped style
 of becoming; a woman—my seventh-grade
 best friend’s mother, no less—laughing
 at my body in a bathing suit, at the way
 my hair shrunk in the pool; my father’s hand
 with the hole in its heart that I missed
 when he forgot to wave goodbye;
 the heart-shaped notebook my sister gave me;
 all the notebooks everybody gave me;
 all the words that didn’t come;
 all the words that did.

Forest Vespers

© Griet van der Meulen
 380 x 300 mm

Grief Again

© Joy Gaines-Friedler

Every turn I took that summer
 pressed me deeper into the singularity of it.

A long slatted boardwalk—composed in wood,
 morning coffee in hand, my feet repeating its coda:
 solid, denuded, solid, denuded.

Cherries ripened on the tree.
 Birds brought broods to the feeders.
 The beach grasses grew long—
 by Fall their sway, like cello song, sorrowful,
 yet fully alive.

That is the irony of Grief.

The ghostly houses of memory
 align along the shore.

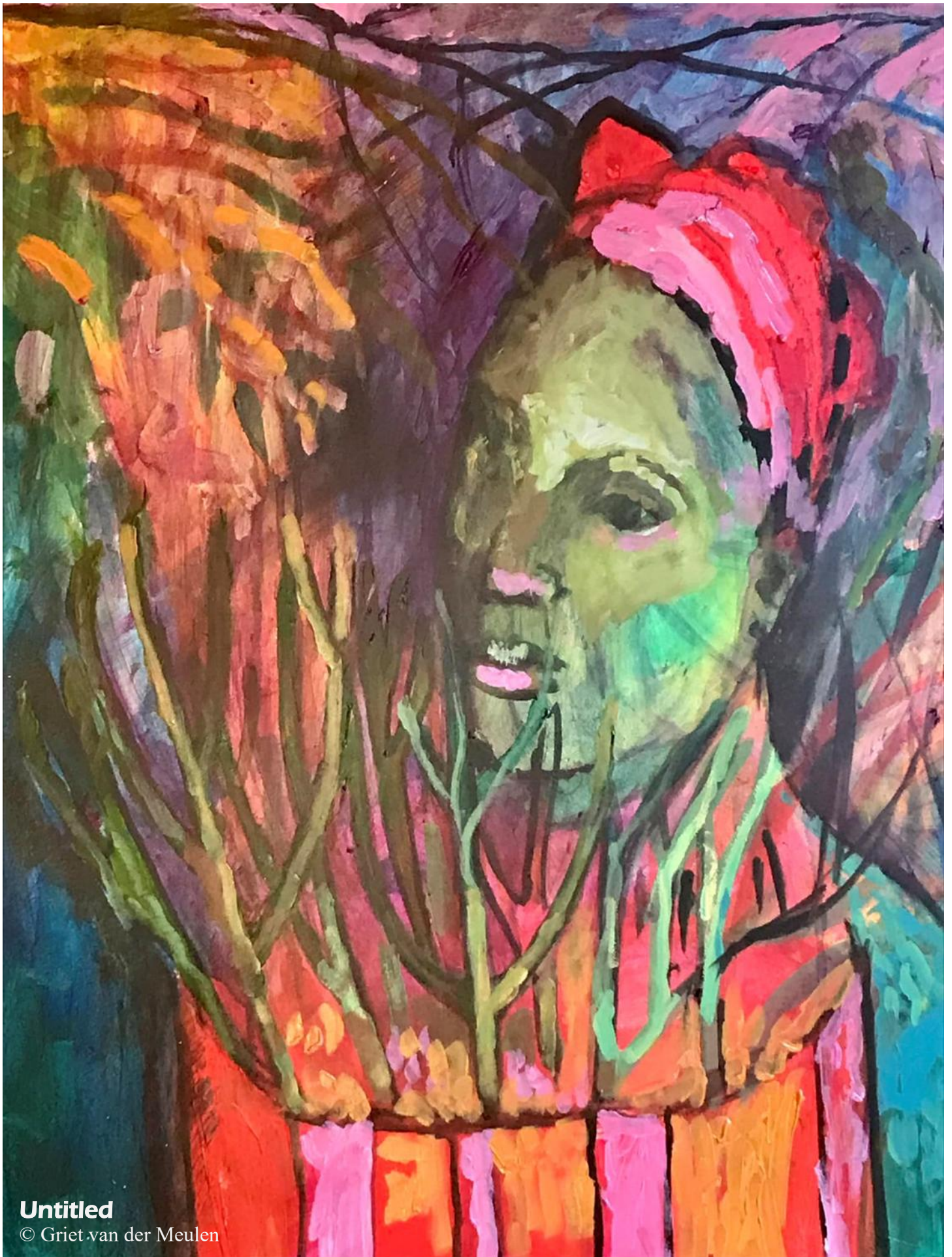
All summer I found myself not at the water’s edge
 looking out, but on the water itself, looking toward
 those houses.

The tide gave itself over to reflection—
 absorbed the changing light.

I think of you more fluidly now.
 In the memory of dark beer & carryout boxes,
 and the way your eyes fell so softly
 on your wife. The four of us—
 we had our laughs didn’t we?

Just now the buzz of dragonflies in the grasses—
 eclipsing the silence.





Untitled

© Griet van der Meulen

What Naomi Wanted

© Judy Belk

Naomi was stalling. She had carefully brushed her teeth, flossed, and gargled with two cups of cool mint Listerine. She peed twice but already felt her bladder filling up for a third trip to the toilet. She had plucked several embarrassing hairs from under her chin and around her brown aroused nipples.

She looked in the mirror and saw beads of sweat had formed around her nose. The alcohol was wearing off. She was scared. On the other side of the bathroom door was a naked white man. At least she thought he was naked. Naomi had been in the bathroom for fifteen minutes. Earlier, when she had excused herself from their heavy necking session with a "I'll be right back," she noticed he had started taking off his shoes, a sure sign that he thought they were going to end up in bed. Naomi thought they were headed in that direction too, which is why her heart was pounding with fear, not passion.

It wasn't just any old white man who was likely standing naked in Naomi's living room. It was Luke Jenner, the vice president and general counsel for Allied, the company where they both worked. Earlier that morning they had been in an executive committee meeting together. Well, not really together. Jenner was on the executive committee. Naomi was on the agenda for her quarterly update which turned out to be a disaster.

The laptop died in the middle of her PowerPoint presentation and she spilled coffee on the CEO. It was downhill from there. Just before five, Jenner had stopped by her office to console her. By 5:30, Naomi had accepted his invitation to go out for drinks. Four cosmopolitans later, at her invitation, they were necking on Naomi's brand-new Crate and Barrel denim sofa. That's how he ended up naked in her living room, with Naomi in the bathroom wondering how she could make a hasty escape by squeezing her butt through the little circular window over her bathtub.

She put her ear to the door to see if she could hear if he was naked or not. What she heard instead was Luther. Somehow, he had figured out how to turn on her Smart TV Pandora app and found his way to Luther Vandross! At least he had good taste in music. She immediately felt more relaxed. Luther always had that effect on her. She had often fantasized about doing it with a white guy, but up until now it had always been just that, a fantasy. She never really expected to act on it. She had always assumed she wasn't attractive to white guys, and few, if any, turned her head.

But Luke Jenner was different. He was one of her favorites at Allied. From his name to the way he dressed, he seemed to break the mold of the TWB (typical white boy) syndrome. That was the label coined by Naomi and her best friend Neicy, during their college days to describe most of the white boys on campus who all seemed to be named Tom, Bob, or Jim and who seemed to have a thing for the same sleeveless down jackets and short brown or black crew socks which barely covered their ankles. (Naomi and Neicy had signed a pledge they would never marry a guy whose socks fell below his calves. Later they amended the pledge to also include guys who wore clip-on suspenders.)

The TWB label didn't fit Luke Jenner at all. He didn't dress like a white boy. All of his suits were tailored-made and hung gracefully over his six-foot frame. His trademark was his exquisite silk ties that were always coordinated with

a monogrammed silk handkerchief tucked neatly in his breast pocket. Most importantly LJ knew his socks. His designer pattern socks always ended where they should, well above his calves. This was a guy who could cross his legs with confidence.

She peed one last time; brushed and smoothed down her hair knowing it would be sticking straight up in ten minutes or less; gargled once more with a swish of the cool mint; tied her sexy short silk bathrobe belt in cute tidy bow and slowly opened the door.

Maybe if he had turned and faced her, things would have turned out differently. But he didn't. The music was playing so loud, that at first he hadn't noticed that she was finally out of the bathroom. He was bent over fiddling with the remote with his back to her, providing Naomi a full view of the whitest ass she had ever seen.

That's when things started getting blurry like she was drunk again. And at that moment, more than any other time in her life, Naomi knew what she wanted. Maybe it was Luther singing, "A house is not a home," or the four cosmopolitans finally kicking in; or the shock of seeing Jenner so naked and so white in her living room, or more likely the pain of remembering who wasn't there. Whatever it was, Naomi lost it. She started quietly weeping.

Jenner turned, initially smiled, but as he came closer and saw her tears, guided her to the sofa, and with real concern and tenderness asked her what was wrong.

He was so nice that it pushed Naomi over the emotional edge she was clinging to with desperation. She let go and began sobbing and hiccupping uncontrollably.

"Naomi, what is it? You know, I don't want you to think I make a habit of sleeping with my colleagues." Then he started rambling on and on about consensual sex, him being a big supporter of the "Black Lives Matter" movement and on and on.

In between sobbing and hiccupping, Naomi tuned him out and could barely talk. She just nodded.

He moved closer and pulled her towards him. "I'm probably just as nervous as you are. We'll just take it real slow and not rush ourselves. I'm talking too much, right?"

It wasn't just any old white man who was likely standing naked in Naomi's living room. It was Luke Jenner, the vice president and general counsel for Allied, the company where they both worked.

Finally, Naomi, took a deep breath. "It's not you. It's what I need and want."

He didn't get it, but thought he did.

"Oh, is that what you're worried about. Not to worry. I came prepared."

He pulled a purple condom out of one of his nearby shoes. "Does this make you feel better?"

Naomi looked down at the condom and into Jenner's worried blue eyes as her body continued to jerk in rhythm with the sobs which were now coming from somewhere deep inside her.

Almost whispering, Naomi tried to explain. "I want a black man."

He leaned over straining to hear. She could feel his hardened “Johnson” pressing up against her silk robe and his hand caressing the inside of her thighs. “I didn’t hear you Naomi.

mi. What do you want? I really want to please you.”

Her voice was a little firmer this time. “I want a black man.”

His head snapped back and he looked at her like perhaps he misunderstood. “Did you say you want a black man?”

Naomi nodded.

He pushed away, laughing nervously, but Naomi could tell he didn’t think a damn thing was funny.

“You want a black man...now?”

Almost on cue, Luther ended his serenade. The room filled with a loud uncomfortable silence before Pandora tried to fill it. For a while, both of them just sat and stared straight ahead. He moved first. Out of the corner of her eye, she knew he was getting dressed.

Naomi looked up and watched as he put on those nice long over-the-calf socks, zipped his pants, tucked his shirt in, and fastened his belt. He caught her watching. Smiling, he paused, and shook his head.

“I’ve had my share of rejections. But I think this is a first.”

Naomi bit her lip hard, but the tears came anyway. “I’m sorry.”

He gathered his keys, wallet and jacket. He leaned over and kissed Naomi lightly on the cheek. “I’m sorry, too. I hope you find what you want.”

When the door closed, Naomi leaned back and allowed the tears to flow.

Of course, like a bad dream, the next morning at work, the first person she saw in the parking garage was Jenner. It was hard to believe that less than twelve hours earlier, he was standing naked in her apartment. They waited for the elevator in silence until Naomi finally spoke.

“Look, I’m really sorry about last night.”

The silence was so quiet you could practically reach out touch it as if it was standing awkwardly between them.

“Let’s just forget it, ok?” Jenner said finally, keeping his eyes focused on the unopened elevator door.

While he looked as good as ever in a starched white shirt and radiant rust orange tie with a matching handkerchief, it was obvious by both his tone and stiff body language that he wasn’t going to be nearly as accommodating as he was last night.

“Listen, I really am sorry. It really didn’t have anything to do with you.”

Facing her directly, he spoke in a loud whisper.

“Nothing to do with me? Really, I am standing in your living room without a stitch of clothes on while you’re yelling for a black man. And you say it has nothing to do with me?”

“I wasn’t yelling.”

“You’re right, you weren’t yelling. You were hysterical. The fact is you brought me there under false pretense.”

The elevator arrived. Naomi was now so angry; she forgot to push the button for her floor. They argued all the way up to his 25th floor.

“Wait, Wait a minute. False pretense. What the hell does that mean?”

“You knew I was white before you started coming on to



Freja—Goddess of Love and War

© Alexandra Melander

me?

“Coming on to you? Excuse me. You’re the one who invited me out.”

“Yeah, but you invited me up to your apartment.”

“Well, clearly that was a mistake.”

“Now, that’s something we can both agree on.”

They again stood in silence as the elevator took its time making its way upward. Naomi felt angrier and more misunderstood with each passing floor.

“And I don’t know why you’re getting so hostile anyway. I’m just trying my best to apologize here,” said Naomi while focused on the flashing floor numbers.

“Listen, last night has to rank among the most humiliating evenings of my life. So, while I appreciate your apology. I just want to forget about it and hope you will get the help you need.”

“Help, what help? What help?” snapped Naomi now facing him directly.

“Clearly you got some unresolved issues about men, race. Listen, I don’t know you very well, Naomi, but talking to a professional therapist might help. I know a few I could recommend.”

“Therapist? I don’t need any therapy. I admit I got a

little emotional, probably had a few more drinks than I should.... but nothing totally abnormal.”

“Last night was anything but normal! Coming on to me... an obviously looking white guy, inviting me up to your place, encouraging me to undress, then going off on me by yelling for a black guy. Clearly, lady, you got issues.”

“Issues? Oh, please,” Naomi could hardly see straight. Under her breath, she whispered, “Fuck you.” And didn’t care if he heard it or not. He heard it.

The elevator stopped on his floor. He walked out, turned back, and quickly caught the door before it closed. He smiled wickedly, leaned his head towards her while wagging his finger in her face, “I’m afraid you had your chance to do that last night and you blew it. Call me if you want the name of that therapist.” He stepped back and the doors closed.

Stunned for a moment, Naomi pushed the button for the 4th floor and leaned back. By the time she reached her floor, she was thinking to herself what a fuck-up she was. And, obviously, she needed to change her thinking about white boys. He wasn’t the least bit wimpy and he was probably good in bed, too. She wanted to go crawl under her desk.

Later that evening Naomi arrived at Neicy and Clyde’s house exhausted, embarrassed, and emotionally wounded. Neicy was her best friend and touchstone going all the way back to second grade. Right after Jenner had left her apartment, Naomi, still sobbing, made a midnight SOS call to Neicy who was half-asleep recounting, all the horrid details and swearing her to secrecy. Naomi could tell this one was over the top even for Neicy, who rarely was shocked. Neicy kept asking the same question over and over again, “And he didn’t have any clothes on? “You mean he was really butt naked while you were hollering for a black man?”

Neicy then reminded Naomi what this was really all about. A week earlier, Moses, her long time off-again, on-again boyfriend told her he needed a little space and that it was better they not see each for awhile. Two nights later, Naomi saw him downtown necking with a woman---a petite blond white woman. She felt rejected on several fronts. His lying, his being with another woman, his public show of affection after years of telling Naomi he didn’t even like holding hands in public. Naomi tried to tell herself that the race of the woman didn’t matter. Moses was just a dog. But, deep down Naomi knew it mattered. It felt like a stinging rejection of her total being. She could change her hair, dress differently, lose a few pounds, or try to be a nicer person. But she couldn’t be a white woman.

Neicy, who has an uncanny ability to verbalize whatever Naomi is thinking at the moment, put it all in clear perspective.

“Fuck him. Moses is an equal opportunity dog. Always has been. Always will be. No woman, black or white, is going to put up with his shit for very long. He will come crawling back like he always does and this time when he does, girlfriend, I hope you

will have enough respect for yourself to tell him to keep on crawling. You deserve better.”

Now Naomi just wanted to relax and forget about Moses, Jenner and the last twenty-four hours. Clyde had other ideas. As he was taking their pizza order, he asked Naomi what she wanted. When she replied, she didn’t know, Clyde responded, “Oh, I know what you want, Naomi.”

“What?”

In a tearful voice with great dramatic flourish, “You want a black man. You want a black man. You need a black man.” He collapsed into a fit of giggles.

Naomi looked over at Neicy who was practically under the table laughing.

“I really do hate you. I really do. Could you just for once, Neicy, keep your mouth shut?”

“Oh, come on Naomi, this was too good to keep to myself. Besides what was I going do? Once Clyde overheard naked white man, he was wide awake. I had to tell him the entire story to get him back to sleep.”

Neicy walked over to give Naomi a big hug. “Besides, honey, you know we both love you to death even if you are crazy as hell.”

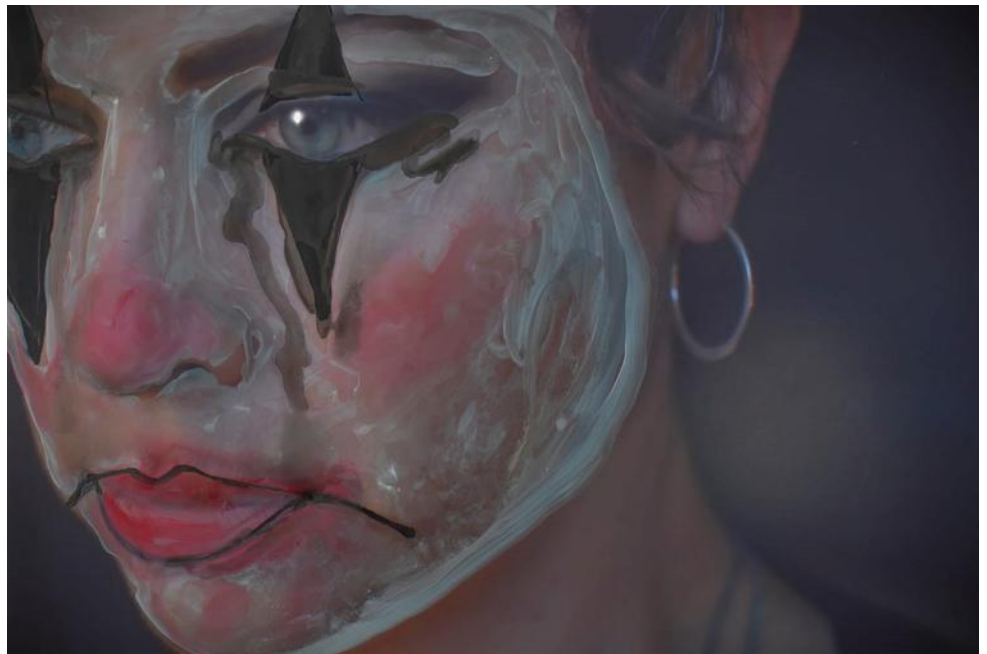
“So I really acted like a fool, huh?”

Both Neicy and Clyde nodded in unison.

Cliff chimed in. “Hey, I’m a black man and while I appreciate the vote of confidence, sister—I still think you acted like a fool. You gave that poor guy a bad case of the blue balls and that ain’t nothing to play with.”

He bent over and crossed his legs tightly while grimacing, “It pains me just thinking about it. Ooooooh!”

Later that night Naomi wrote a letter of apology to Jenner on her newly engraved cream-colored stationary. When she saw him a week later in the garage, he thanked her, wished her well. They never mentioned the evening again. Naomi switched from cosmopolitans to white wine. A few weeks later, Moses sent her several text messages followed by a long-winded voice mail asking if he could stop by and bring all the goodies to make their favorite cosmopolitans. She blocked and deleted him.



When the Show Is Over

© April Mansilla

Hybrid photography using
paint, markers and photoshop

Leda

© Alison Stone

Babies need love
so I loved her
but she was a cold child,
all gold hair and entitlement,
stamping her majestic feet.
No surprise she made a nation burn.

I live a constricted life,
head down, jumping at shadows.
There are so many birds in the world.
Though I put out poisoned seed
to thin the flock, they find me
even in winter, even in sleep.

The Consolation of Geometry

© Alice Campbell Romano

Inside Richard Serra

The house tilts. Parents shriek, storm into rooms.
Any surface becomes an unsafe thing. The crack can never be
repaired. Even now, I can be cornered in a sharp

angle by the person who lives with me. I cringe,
as if about to be hit. I come to myself in a place where the floor
is torqued, unstable, tilts. I'm afraid to take

a step. I face a high, curved wall. There is no top
to this space, this ellipse. Light washes down the wall, shows it
to be hematite, the color of iron named for

blood. I am inside a massive metal sculpture.
But I am also inside a heart, a womb, a living redness. I inch to
the wall. If I can hold to the wall, shuffle along it,

I will reach an opening where I can escape this enclosure.
Instead, I come face-to-face with another curved, blood-
metal wall. I stand between the two walls, can know only

the two red walls and the path between them
where the floor is flat. I step. The ground is firm. I am in a canyon in
Arizona. Ancient, sacred. From over the outside wall, a crow

disciplines her child. The child will do as it wants,
will pound on the wall. The metal will vibrate with a deep
thrum and the deep thrum

will pulse through me and the broken bits of me
will coalesce in the fullness of the sound, and I will become
whole in the safety of a timeless place and a dark, red hum.



Half mother—Half cedar

© Sandra K. Sahyoun

Corten steel sculpture: migration art

Different angles of **Half mother—Half Cedar**, a big narrative sculpture as part of **Roots and Wings Exhibition** at Perch Lodges in Chabrouh Faraya, Lebanon.



"The Way You Talk Me off the Roof"

© Laurie Kuntz

On My Husband learning the song
If We Were Vampires by Jason Isbell

I asked you to learn a love song with a sad chorus:

*This can't go on forever
Likely one of us will have to spend some days alone...*

And, you spent all morning
tuning your guitar, refreshing the chords,
getting the rhythm down, learning the lyrics:

One day I'll be gone, or one day you'll be gone...

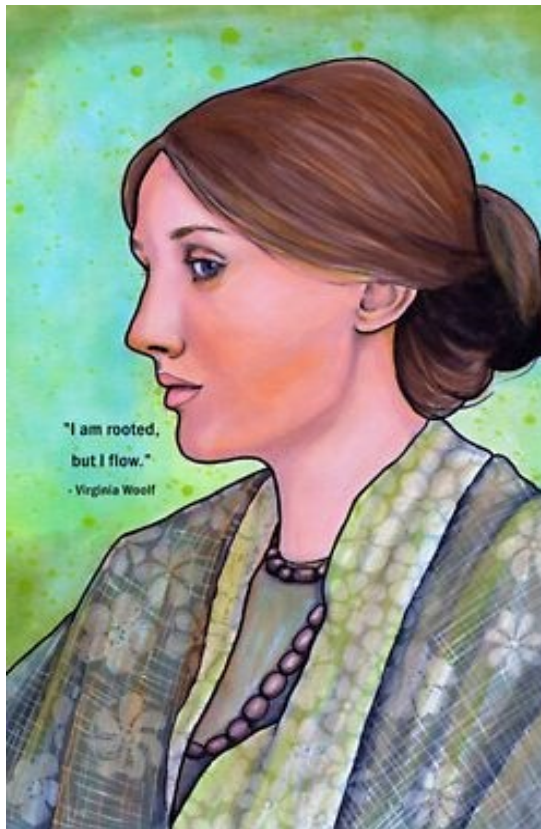
You told me, It's too sad to sing
about loss, about spending time alone,
about something inevitable—

So, we lightened the moment,
said the song reminded us of stories
we read to our son about a mother watching her child grow
until the child was the parent and the parent the child,
or the one about the tree that gets cut down
little by little, to gift a boy all he wants.

These days all we want is not to spend
time alone, to avoid the inevitable,
to be vampires living under many waxing moons.



Moonlight Fable © Catrin Welz-Stein
Digital collage



Virginia Woolf

© Alexandra Melander

Ink and watercolor on watercolor paper

Chevra Kadisha

© Joy Gaines-Friedler

A Holy Society

As I enter the building for my mother's funeral
A woman in a white head-wrap, long skirt—
Is thanking me.

The first person I see,
Her voice a psalm
She is a heron,

She is the opening liturgy of the day.

Thank you, she repeats, for allowing me
To care for your mother. Tahara,
The ritual of cleansing the body, of spiritual bathing

it is her job, this privilege.

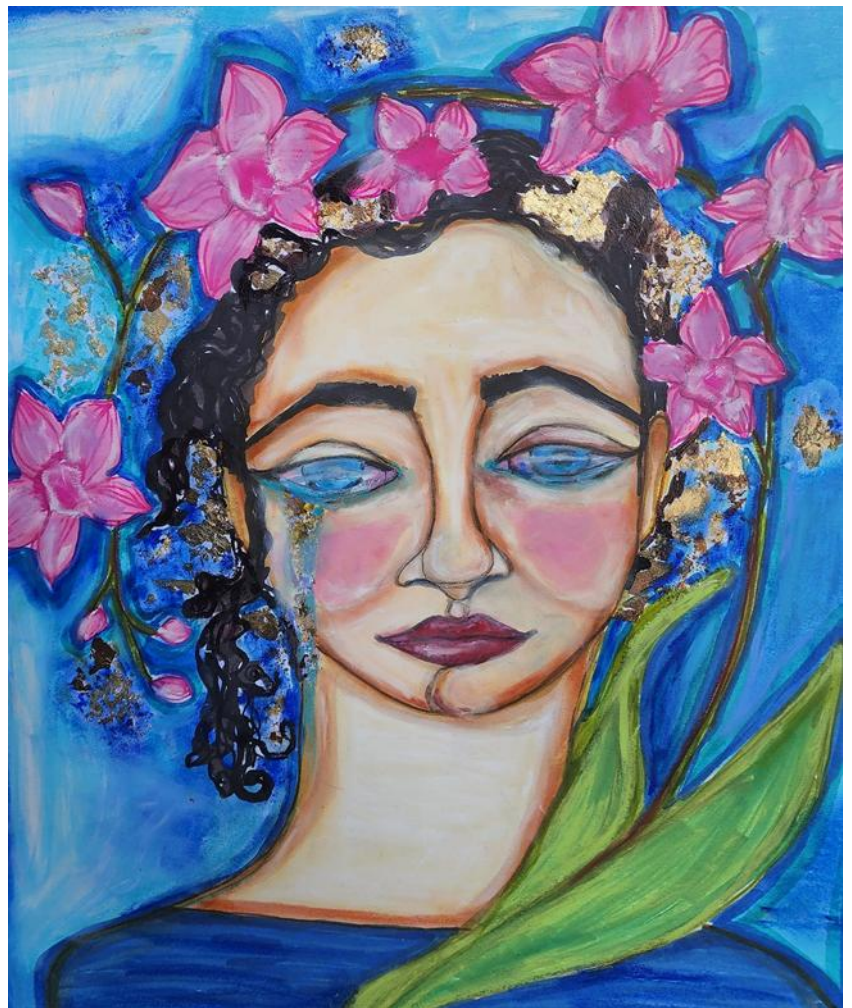
Mine is over.

If, as they say, we are descendants of a single life,
then caring for one is caring for all.

My mother can no longer
Repay such a kindness as this—

You're welcome I say

Believing none of it. And all of it.



Untitled

© April Mansilla

Ink, watercolor, and gold leaf

“Chevra kadisha” is pronounced: Kevra - Kah dee sha (accent on the second syllable “dee”). It literally means “a holy society” and refers to the men and women who take it as their duty to protect the body from desecration. They care for the dead from the moment of death to burial. It's a deeply spiritual act in Judaism that embodies the command “ashes to ashes—dust to dust.” ~Joy Gaines-Friedler

The Green Pepper

© D Larissa Peters

My mother will take a spatula, clean out every last drop
of the Campbell's tomato soup even the hard-to-reach bits

under the can's rim. She's a surgeon, slicing a green pepper,
cutting off the foamy white insides. And I just break it up

by hand, tossing the stem in the compost bucket. “There's so much left on it,”
she says, hovering. The compost bucket full, stems and peelings

reveal my shortcomings. Her compost heap: a teensy tiny scrap of a pile.
Shavings really. Two dollars is too expensive for a book.

When I open up a gift, she tells me with pride, “Now, I got that mug for thirty-five cents.
Can you believe it?” Yet, when I visit: “Don't be ridiculous.

You're not renting a car. We'll pick you up.” And she drives
fours hours round trip, squeezing every last drop of me.

Breaking Shape

© t.m. thomson

How shall I tell of the years in which I stood—
stooping with rounded back like a bridge
that others walked across
never evolving but weighing
me down, ruts etched in the stone between
my shoulders, me never lifting my head to see sky.

I shall tell you more than that—my monolith
self moved, picking up one foot, then
the other, slowly, slowly,
until I gained speed
& ran, stumbling at first, up hill & down,
& finally cleared the cliff of my former vessel.

The shattering began with mind—skull broke,
zigzag channel narrow but rapidly
spreading down neck
& spine, all the way
to heel, rock of expectations crushed
underfoot, rubble in my wake, & now a sunrise

within grasp as I watch others traipse & plod
searching for a bridge to span
their own emptiness
my neck unbent
my mouth
drinking
stars.

Antigone

© Alison Stone

I perished how I lived—
my voice and desires smothered
by my brother's needs.

As a child, I resisted,
sulked when Mom gave him
the sweeter fruit, her brightest smiles.

Her looks of pain, more than
any scold or slap, trained me
to wait patiently behind him.

I acted from devotion, sure, but also—
Polynices' unburied corpse kept him
in our sight and conversation.

I hoped that when I filled
his mouth with earth
and left him underground,

I could walk home through the sweet
night air and there would
finally be enough for me.

VIOLETS

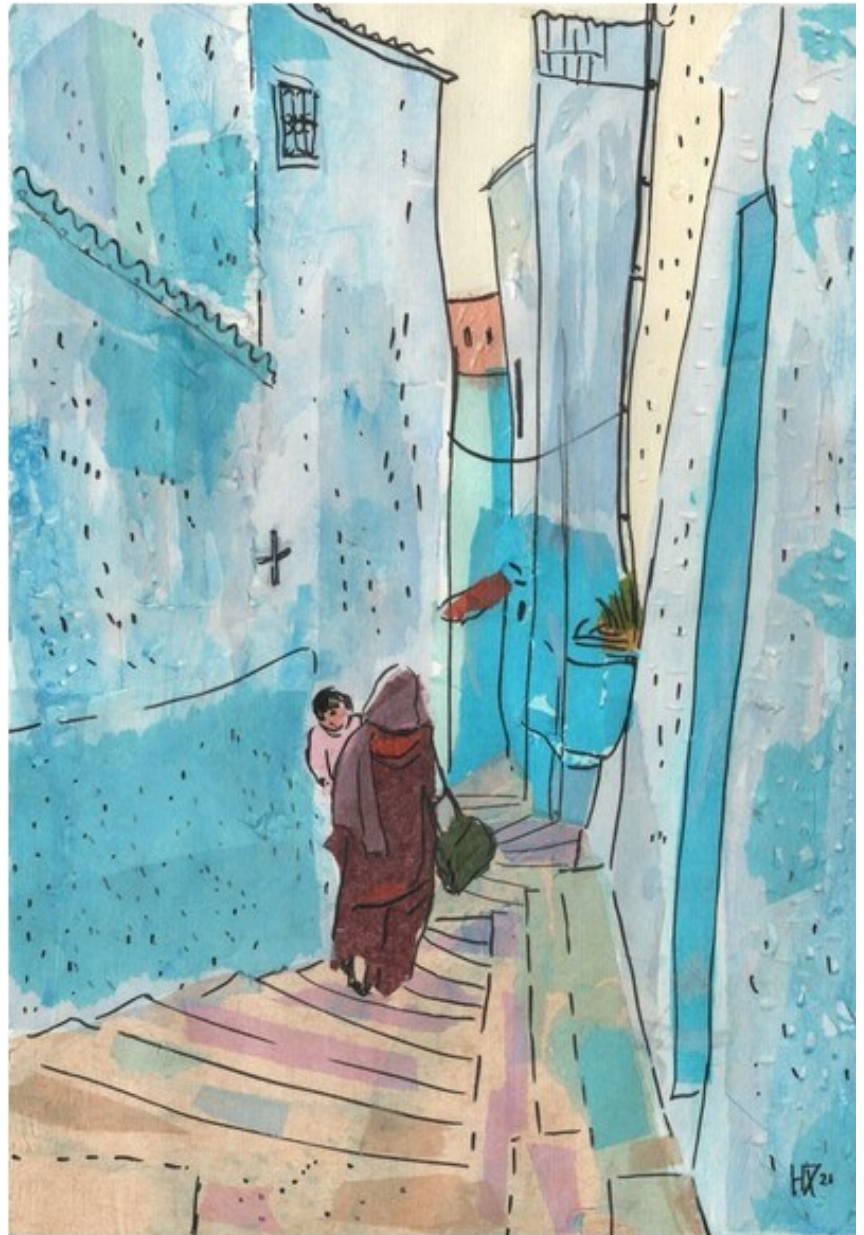
© Celia Lisset Alvarez

Mamma always said I was a slut at heart. She'd dress me in pinafores and butterfly collars, and I'd paint my toenails Fire and Ice. I'd say "Mamma, there's plenty of girls don't look like me and do worse things."

"Worse things than *what?*" she'd say, looking down at me suspiciously from the top of her half-moon glasses and handing me another cotton ball from the first-aid kit, soaked in lemon-scented acetone.

"Nothing, Mamma."

We argued about everything. When the heat got so bad that we had to sit outside our trailer, Mamma in her cotton housecoat and me in my cutoffs, she'd cluck her tongue at me and say it: "No matter what you wear you look like a slut."



Street of Chefchaouen, Morocco

© Julia Khoroshikh

Old town paper collage sketch art print:
mixed media sketch for "Virtual Pleinair"
project—tissue paper collage, ink pen

I didn't know what to do. The navy surplus store in Pensacola always carried the same polyester blouses and bell-bottomed jeans it did on my ninth birthday, when Daddy took me out of school in the middle of the day and we ate bubble-gum ice cream at the Swensen's, and he bought me all those pretty clothes. I really didn't see the point of having Daddy take a whole day off work again to drive me in his pickup just so I could get the same clothes I had in my closet. It wasn't as if I'd changed so much anyway; I just got taller and taller until I was all bones and angles, so that the same clothes I had when I was nine fit me when I was thirteen. They just looked shorter. Could I help it if it was so hot? Mamma knew that. She used to say you could fry an egg out on I-10 in the summer. I tried it once when I was six, but it just ran into the gutter. I got a good thrashing for it with Daddy's belt, too. Whole good egg like that.

In 1986, the summer I was thirteen, I decided to stay away from Mamma as much as I could. In the afternoons I would walk two miles to the garage to watch Daddy work. He fixed all sorts of things like cars and trucks and even construction equipment, and sometimes a trucker would pull off the highway on the way to Alabama with a broken transmission. They would wait impatiently right beside where Daddy was working on his back under a truck, and then look me up and down, finally settling on my eyes and smiling. Some of them would say things to tease me, like whether I worked at the garage, and some of them would just stare that red-eyed stare they get from driving so long. Daddy would stick his head out from underneath the truck and holler "Go on, git!" at me, his face covered in greasy handprints so that all I could see was the steel-blue glimmer of his eyes. That was the only sort of thing he ever said to me after he moved out of our trailer when I was ten, as if he didn't mind me hanging around so much as seeing how all those pretty clothes didn't fit me anymore, or how I didn't fit them.

Around two I would go out to his big metal trailer out back of the garage and fix him a sandwich. First, I would make his bed, tucking in the corners the way Mamma used to when he lived with us. I'd clean up some, too, even though he complained that he "could never find a single darn thing" after I was in there. One day I found an oversized ceramic mug, them fancy German kind for drinking beer, so heavy I almost dropped it expecting it to be lighter. I filled it with some violets that grew behind the trailer and set it on the table. He never said anything about them or about the sandwiches, but I saw how he scarfed down those peanut-butter and jellies like a bear in spring. I got a kick out of that, even though he never did pat my ass and say, "Good stuff!" with a smile and a wink like he had that day we'd had the bubble-gum ice cream.

But nothing I did compared to being with Charlie. He started working for Daddy a week before school started. The day I met him he was wearing a red flannel shirt with the sleeves torn out and baggy jeans with an oily rag sticking out of his back pocket. He was crouched beside Daddy's pickup, changing a flat. I watched him

unscrew the wheel nuts with a quick motion of his right arm and remembered me and Mamma straining together over the iron last March when we got a flat on our way to Aunt Margaret's in Brent. He had curly brown hair and eyelashes so thick and long you almost couldn't see his eyes, which were the shade of blue green you get from dollar bills that have been washed by mistake in the pocket of your jeans. When he walked, he swayed from side to side, and when he smiled you thought he knew something you didn't.

"And who might you be?" he said.

"My name's Bobbie Joe. My daddy owns the place."

"Bobbie Joe! How the hell did you get a name like Bobbie Joe?"

"My daddy gave it to me. He thought I was going to be a boy."

"Damn," he said, shaking his head. "Pretty girl like you? I'd figures you'd be a Marilyn, like Marilyn Monroe."

I smiled.

"Yeah," he said slowly, smiling back. "Hey—maybe I can call you Marilyn. That'll be my secret name for you." He was standing now, towering over me, and I could smell gasoline and motor oil coming from him like it always did from my daddy, and something else, like ripe muskmelons. He was much older than me, maybe even more than twenty. "That Marilyn wasn't no natural blond neither. You're twice as pretty as she ever was."



Peek-a-boo © Claudia Tremblay
Paper, water color, hahenmuhle paper

I watched him pull a cigarette from a crumpled pack in his shirt pocket. He held it loosely with the corner of his lips and cupped

his hands as he lit it. "My daddy smokes Marlboros," I said.

I told Charlie I wanted to learn about cars. When school started, I spent the whole morning thinking about him, and when the bell finally rang I would run as fast as I could all the way to the garage and lean on the hood of whatever he was working on, twisting my ankles and listening to him talk about carburetors. Every once in a while, Daddy would give me a measuring-type look, like he wasn't sure about something. But I thought that maybe Charlie was different on account of being younger than the truckers, who were always bearded and ageless as gnomes.

"Your mamma know where you are?" Charlie used to say, the curls on the back of his neck sticking to his skin like copper wires.

Once, Mamma made me braid my hair saying it looked positively obscene hanging down to my waist like that. He said, "How old are you, sixteen, seventeen?"

I said, "Maybe."

Another time Henry Bradford came to pick up his daddy's station wagon with his mamma. I was sitting on a stack of tires listening to Charlie sing me a new song he'd heard on the radio that reminded him of me and eating a strawberry-flavored popsicle from the ice machine in the back of the garage, where Daddy had his air conditioner and his beer. Henry came over and said hi, scratching at his elbow like he always does. Last summer we'd spent the whole time fishing mullet off the Perdido. We'd caught a broken bottle of champagne and kept pieces of the glass in our pockets for good luck, sort of like the way you keep something real classy like Mamma's pressed corsage Daddy'd given her on their prom night. I used to smell it sometimes, the glass I mean, although I smelled the pressed corsage too once, pressing my nose up against the plastic album cover. I could swear they both smelled like some kind of celebration, like wine, although I'd never had none, but I imagined it smelled kind of like beer, only better. Perfume too, real strong, and silk. Silk has a real particular smell—Mamma kept that old pink prom dress in a nylon Sears Roebuck bag under the bed. It smelled real old and dusty, but beneath that I thought I could still smell some Chantilly, something pink and all faded. That's what that green champagne glass smelled like, special.

"Remember this?" Henry asked, showing me the greenish glass in his sweaty palm.

Charlie was watching me, blowing air into a tube thing he'd just washed out. He looked like he was eating something sweet and creamy.

"Go away, Henry," I said, "I'm busy," and smiled at Charlie. Henry got all flustered-like, which is difficult to tell on account of all them zits. "Okay . . . bye," he said, sort of turning. He had the hand with the glass in his pocket now and I could see him twisting it around nervously. "I'll see you in school," he said, and walked away, still looking.

"Is that your boyfriend?" Charlie teased after Henry left.

"Hell, no!" I said. "He's just a friend from school,

that's all."

"Looks like a boyfriend to me," he said, winking. He jerked his chin at the station wagon speeding off, with Henry's dark head leaning on his hand, his elbow sticking out the window on the passenger side, looking out like some old dog. "Look how he's leaving, all sad like that. Like someone just ran over his heart with a lawnmower."

I wouldn't talk to Charlie for a week, after that. When I got home, I took the champagne glass out of my fishbowl with all the marbles in it and threw it hard in a rain puddle. It smacked the pavement and splashed up dirty water, but it didn't break none. I stepped on it and stepped on it until my sneaker was all muddy up to my ankle, and the glass had disappeared into little fragments like silver glitter, too small to see. I thought somehow Charlie would guess I'd done that and stop teasing me about Henry and his mowed-over heart.

* * *

Finally, Mamma found out what I was really doing every afternoon. I'd told her I was helping Mrs. Abernathy sort the books at the school library after class, but Mamma ran into her in church and asked her if I was being much help. She waited quiet as a cat until Monday, and came to get me at the garage, still wearing her flowered apron and pink foam rollers. She told Daddy he had to fire Charlie, which of course he didn't.

"Why were you flirting with him?"

"I wasn't Mamma, I swear it. Charlie's just my friend." I was sitting on my bed in our trailer, looking out the window, out on the highway. At night I could hear the faint murmur of engines and horns from the city, but no matter how hard I tried I could never see the lights beyond the moonlit glow of the water tower. But I knew they were there, and that maybe Charlie had been there too, in the city, and sometimes at night I lay in bed till dawn, thinking of how it would be if I could go there with him. When I saw him the next day, I always felt like all those things I dreamt of had really happened, and it made him and me closer somehow. But I knew Mamma's mind and how it worked, and right now it was working so that I could never lie here quiet again and think those things without her screaming in the back of my mind.

"You don't fool me with your goody-goody airs, young lady." Mamma had a habit of leaning on you when she talked, so that you could feel her warm breath on your face and little drops of spit would come flying out and smack your eyes. "You think I don't know what you're doing over there every afternoon, fawning over that grown man like a bitch in heat?"

"Mamma!"

"You like it when he touches you, don't you? You think it's always going to be like that, so good and sweet. But there's only one thing he wants, and when he gets it—well, you'll see. You'll see."

Mamma had that preacher talk down real good, but I was too used to it from listening to the real thing every Sunday morning to be much impressed. I wanted her to stop pretending like I was hers to redeem, though. I said, "Stop it! Stop it Mamma, he's not like that. I'm not like that!"

I could see her trying to figure how far she could go, how much I could or would take. Finally, she said real low, almost at a whisper, "I could see it from the first day you sat on your daddy's lap so he could brush your hair. There's only two kinds of women in this world, and I don't have to tell you which one you are."

And that was it. I ran from the trailer so fast I felt it shake.



Awakening Dryad, Forest Fantasy

© Julia Khoroshikh

Soft pastels on paper, 23 × 32 cm

I was tired from all the walking I'd done that day, home to school, the garage, and back—maybe six and a half miles. It was almost dark before I finally reached the garage. I kept going until I stood in front of the flowers I'd put on my daddy's table, all wilted and crumpled up like purple baby's breath. They had dried just so, and I thought they looked right that way, like something you buy at the ten-cent store. But now they just looked dead, and I tore them up, one by one, then fell exhausted on his bed and went to sleep.

* * *

When I woke up, I couldn't remember where I was, but I felt as if Charlie was there. My daddy's trailer was smaller than ours, and Charlie seemed to fill it, the smell of exhaust fumes and gasoline mixed in with what I now knew was his cologne, like oranges and green grass and sunshine. When I sat up and rubbed my eyes, though, it was Daddy I saw looking down at me instead of Charlie.

"You got half the town looking for you," he said to me. "I'm about ready to spit fire. First you run off and don't get me no lunch. Then you run off again and I get your mamma come running after *me* to go look for you so I can't have no proper dinner. I been working now for twelve hours straight today."

"I'll fix you something now, Daddy," I said, running a hand through my hair and getting up, thinking I'd maybe make him a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. I didn't really

know how to make much else except spaghetti, and it was real hot inside the trailer for boiling. He followed me to the refrigerator, standing behind me as I took out a loaf of bread and the two jars.

I was sort of glad he was there, so I wouldn't have to wonder about what I would say when I finally met up with Mamma just yet. I knew he was mad. I could tell by the way he was all quiet and seething, but at least he wasn't a screamer like Mamma, and would likely just eat his sandwich and start in on the beer till he started falling asleep. Wouldn't care about none of this come morning. Besides, it was kind of nice for us to be in the trailer like that, alone. I pretended Mamma was dead and this was our trailer.

"You just like your mamma, you know that?" he said, still pretty quiet so that I thought he wasn't so mad no more now that I was making him something to eat. "Just like her. She was tall and skinny as a beanpole when we met. Wore them cute little clothes, too."

I snickered at that. It was hard to believe Mamma had ever been young or pretty, although I'd seen pictures, and I knew I could fit into that prom dress like it was mine. I had tried it on just two months ago one Saturday when Mamma had gone to the grocery store. I had to stand on top of the toilet so I could see myself in the mirror. The skirt was big and poufy, and the strapless top was tight so that it smushed my breasts together till I had cleavage, which started me to laughing. I did up my hair in rollers and pretended to be Marilyn Monroe all afternoon. The dress was back in the bag by the time Mamma got home, but I forgot about my curled-up hair, and she gave me the third degree all night long, wanting to know *what I had done to myself*.

"Yeah. I should have known about her," Daddy said after a long pause, jarring me so I started. He didn't seem to notice. I looked back at him, and he was kinda looking out the window, wringing his hands in a funny way. I figured he was maybe more sore at me than I had thought and started hurrying up the sandwich. I heard him say, "You all the same, every one of you."

Then I heard him spit on the ground behind me and come at me real fast. I thought he was going to hit me, although he'd never done that before, had always let Mamma do all the punishing. But he didn't. He put his arm around me and grabbed the bread and tossed it on the floor, pushing me up against the counter. The edge jabbed into my hip, and I gasped. "Shut up," he said, and put his hand over my mouth. His palm felt warm and sweaty.

I wanted to tell him his hands were dirty with grease, but my whole body was trembling, and I could feel his warm, moist breath on the back of my neck as he kissed me.

You think it's always going to be like that, so good and sweet.

I turned around to face him and he pressed his lips against mine. I couldn't breathe. I fumbled around behind me and dropped the jelly jar on the floor, heard it crack. I looked down at it and thought about the champagne glass, and how glass don't break easy as you think. There was a smear of purple jelly on the floor.

You like it when he touches you, don't you?

"What—what're you doing, daddy?" I muttered, squirming. My voice sounded strange and high, like it was coming out of someone else who was as scared as me. I could feel the strength of his hands on the small of my back and then as he circled my arm with one hand and pushed me onto the fold-up table next to the window.

He was holding both my wrists behind me with one hand,

hand, and with the other one was feeling his way slowly up my thigh. I knew what he was doing, what he had been thinking all the time when I knelt up against the open

cars and stood on tiptoe in my cutoffs. I thought of saying something like stop or get away. "Dammit, Eliza, there ain't no sense in me firing my best mechanic over that girl. He's probably gotten in her pants already. Ain't nothing I can do about it, either," is what Daddy had said, leaning up against the ice box in the back room, drinking a beer, Mamma cussing him out.

* * *

Charlie left anyway after Christmas, heading off somewhere where he could spend the money he'd made right, he said. I asked him to take me with him, thinking of places we could go like New Orleans or Las Vegas where I could work as a waitress like Aunt Margaret. Someplace where I could look out the window and see something other than that moon-like water tower. He said to wait for him by the side of the road behind Daddy's trailer at five o'clock in the morning, before anybody'd be up to see us.

I snuck out my bedroom window when it was still night, with the crickets screeching and the frogs still snoring loud enough so that all the rattling and creaking I did to get out that old window didn't wake Mamma up front where she was sleeping in her rollers. I wore my bell bottoms and a new pink blouse Mamma had sewn for me to wear for church. I tied it just above my navel to make it look sexy and braided my hair the way I had that day Charlie had said I looked seventeen. Then I unbraided it, thinking I didn't need to look older anymore. I parted it on the side and tucked it behind my ears, then thought I looked kind of plain, so I took a section and just did one long braid on the side. I combed the rest out nice.

I put some things in Daddy's old army-issue duffel bag. I really didn't know what to take, so I just took the things I used most, like my cutoffs, a couple of blouses, underwear, some lipsticks, and a brand-new nail polish I'd pinched from the drugstore the last time me and Mamma had been in Brent. I put in my hairbrush, and it still looked kind of empty, so I tossed in my fishing pole, just in case we ever stopped by some place we could fish.

I peeked in at Mamma from the front window before I left. Her mouth was open. She had her half-moon Walgreen's glasses all unfolded and crooked in her hand, as if she'd just taken them off for a minute to rest her eyes. On her lap her bible with the gold-trimmed pages lay flat right where she had left it, some passage that reminded her of me no doubt, I thought. I kinda felt sorry for her then, about how all her screaming and praying had done none of us no good. She had tried to warn me, the only way she knew how. I was beginning to think there wasn't nothing none of us could have done to save each other that summer, not Daddy moving out, or me having cut my hair the way Mamma had wanted. I had set something in motion with my growing

up somehow, and once it had started going there was no stopping it. Like the sun going down or the grass drying out. You could pretend you had something to do with it if you wanted, but it was nobody's fault, just something that happened.

Now it was starting to get light, so I couldn't see Mamma's face too good. I could only see myself staring back at me from the muddy windowpane, like a silvery ghost standing over Mamma. I walked to the garage and stood by the road.

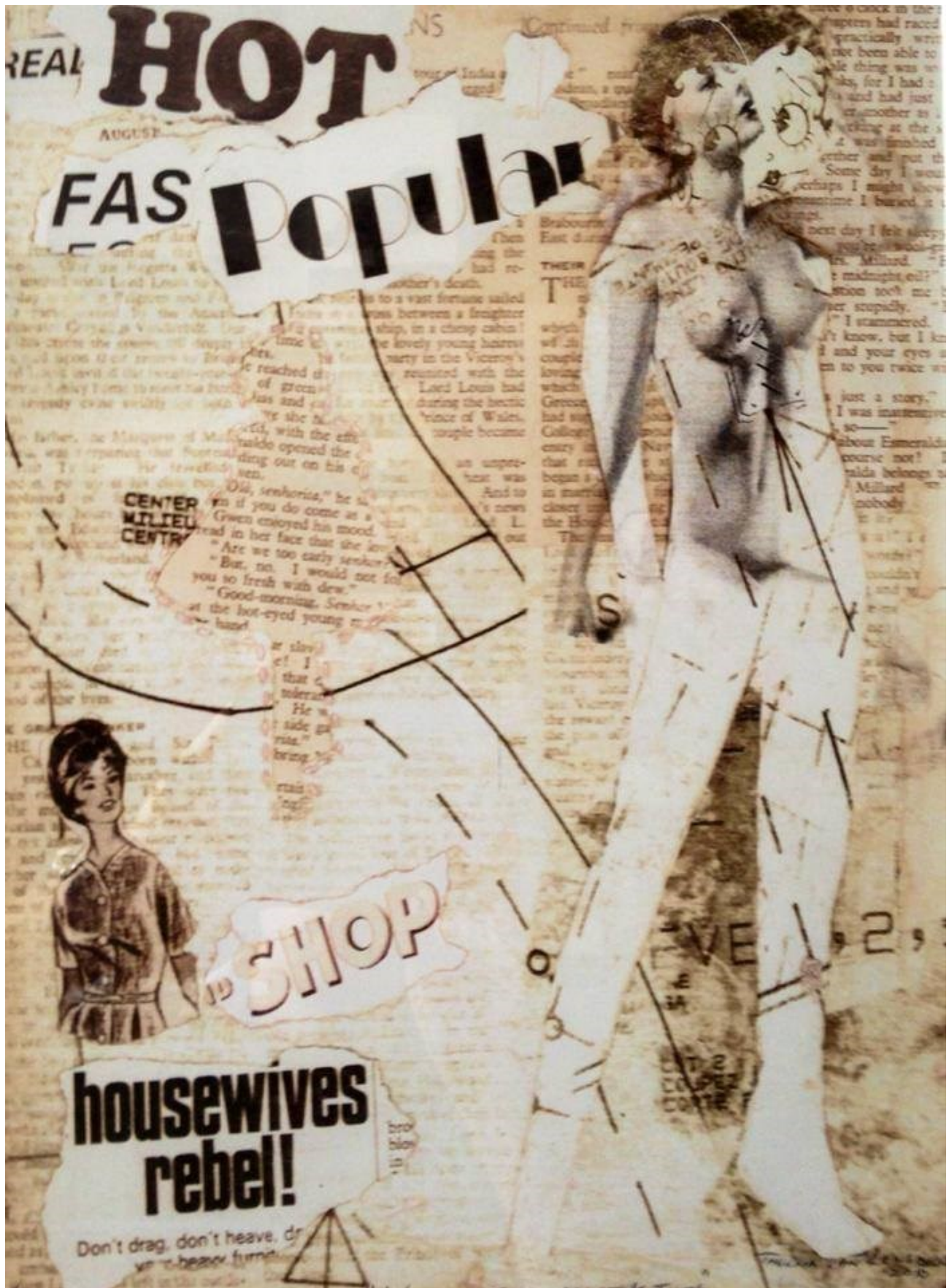
It was cold at first and I stood with my hands in my pockets, but then the sun really came out and soon I started feeling it on the bridge of my nose, started getting freckles for sure. The highway was quiet despite it still being after Christmas. I figured everybody who was going to had probably gone home already. The land was flat as a flapjack and all I could do was kick at the little stones with the tip of my shoe.

I decided to go sit behind Daddy's trailer, on the cinder blocks. From there I could see the road and would have time to flag Charlie down when I saw his pickup. I fished out one of my more colorful blouses from the duffel bag to flag him down with, a bright red one he'd be sure to see.

When I knelt, I saw that tuft of wild violets that kept springing up beneath the trailer, on a patch of grass that needed mowing if there had been other patches nearby to warrant the effort, my daddy said. They gave off a sweet, heavy smell that faded the minute you plucked them. I took one anyway and put it in my hair, thinking it was the finishing touch I needed. A motorcycle sped by, then another. Then a couple of trucks and two station wagons, one cream with them fake wood planks and one aluminum blue.

I sat with my chin in my hands, waiting.





Dreaming in blue

© Dorina Costras

Acrylics/gold leaf on canvas, 100/100 cm

Number 2

What makes a man look twice? © Thelma van Rensburg

Digital print, 440 x 290 mm



Howling

© Laura Williams McCaffrey

At night, the woman lies in the dark and listens to the howls echo across the valley. One cries out. The rest answer, ululating, hungry.

The walls of the house are strong, she reminds herself, the fence around the house is strong.

This is not something she used to worry about, long ago, when she was another person and the world was another world. That long ago seems like a story—Once upon a time there was a girl who went to classes and studied equations. She learned how to use spreadsheets. She calculated risk.

Now, in the real world, she is a woman who fears early and late frosts, sudden windstorms. She cans beans, peppers, and cucumbers. She counts stacks of cans on shelves and calculates how many will remain by January, February.

She used to calculate with complex formulas. Now the formula is simple. If they eat too much in December, they could starve in March.

And this March is frigid. The weather forecasters said the world would get warmer and it did, but sometimes it's colder. Cold like she never knew before. Cold that can freeze her eyes shut.

The loud howl. The chorus of yips and cries.

The woman lies in the dark and listens to the others in the house sleep. The once-strangers, now, what? They aren't family. They are people like her, who couldn't survive alone. Together, they have a chance.

Though not all have a good chance. The baby and the children are curled on their pallet near the stove, keeping warm. The woman never sleeps near them. They're sturdy for now, but that could change quickly. Only the strong survive.

The howl. The chorus. Closer?

They won't come too close. They can't.

She almost never sees them. Once in a while, as she hauls wood, as she fetches potatoes from the root cellar, she catches a glimpse—a dirty face and suspicious eyes.

Or maybe she imagines that glimpse, because she blinks, and the face, the eyes, are gone.

She still turns and runs then, back to the fence and the house, swiftly and silently, looking over her shoulder.

#

In the morning, everyone's slow rising out of bed. The baby cries a thin, hungry wail, as if he knows there won't be enough.

She stands at the kitchen shelves and stares at the jars. Too many are too close to empty.

The root cellar is almost empty. Last year in March, she had seedlings and she was counting the days until she could put them in the ground. She had fresh greens in April.

Time Sensitive Redux

© Cynthia Lund Torroll

Mixed media

Not this year. This year, they all are still eating last fall's potatoes.

Long ago, there was a girl who ate fresh strawberries in winter. Mangoes, bananas, avocados, oranges, lemons. If they had a small blemish, she threw them away whole.

Now, there are no more dried apples to eat. There are no more jams, no more canned beans or tomatoes. The flour is gone, and the household has eaten all last year's chicken and goat. They didn't expect this March cold snap. No one did. Everyone's root cellars are almost empty. Few have anything to sell or trade.

The baby, she can hear, is nursing, but also moaning a little. They'll have to give him some of the goat's milk, and already there's not enough.

Someone needs to go out hunting. Which will mean walking out beyond the house, beyond the fence.

Others in the household can be squeamish, as if they are still in their long-ago stories. As if they can buy food anywhere at any time. As if they can choose to avoid meat altogether, because there are so many choices. As if there is always enough.

She unlocks the gun cabinet.

Cradling the rifle, she has to walk past one of the children. He says, "bye," and she pretends she doesn't hear him.

#

Snowshoes strapped to her boots, the woman winds down the slope. The snow is heavy. She sinks as she walks toward the thicket where she knows the rabbits hide.

She sees tracks: deer, turkeys, the wing brushes in the snow of some bird taking flight. At night, this valley echoes with howls as they hunt. But now, in daylight, it is silent, except for the wind blowing snow from branches. The snow thuds softly against the ground, like a small body.

As she weaves around a tree, she feels a prickle at the back of her neck. Something is watching her. Once upon a time, she was a girl who paid five dollars for each cup of coffee, and she couldn't sense predators in the forest.

She stops, one foot ahead of the other, and she half raises the rifle, ready if she needs to shoot. She turns slowly, scanning the overlaid boughs, the tangle of briars. In her peripheral vision, something shifts. She turns to catch sight of it.

Peering at her through evergreen branches are eyes in a dirty face.

The woman is the hare, the rabbit, the deer. Frozen, heart fluttering.

She's seen other faces out here in the forest, the faces of scavengers who grow nothing, thieves and killers. But she has never seen this face.

This face is hers in the mirror—a high forehead, large eyes, a small mouth. This face is what she used to look like, the long-ago girl. Twelve. This face is twelve years old.

This face is filthy. The girl's hair is long, tied back at her neck. The fingers of one of her hands are still claw-like, unable to plant and weed easily, unable to easily can or cook. The girl could have stayed if that had been all, but there had also been the wheezing, the breathlessness, the gasping. That awful night when her face went blue.

The woman had done what one did, what was merciful, what was necessary. She had given the baby to the traveling doc, and she had known what that meant.

Or she thought she had known, but she had been wrong. Because here is the girl.

She is alive, she is alive, she is alive, the woman's heart beats.

In a hoarse voice, the girl says, "Why do you look like me?"

We all could so easily starve. This truth is stuck on the woman's tongue. *It's what I had to do.*

She should lift the rifle, but it hangs from her hand like a broken weight.

The girl raises her head and begins to howl.

The woman turns and runs.

The girl's pack takes up the hungry cry.



War in my Mind, War in my Soul

© Christel Roelandt
Charcoal and acrylics
on newspaper

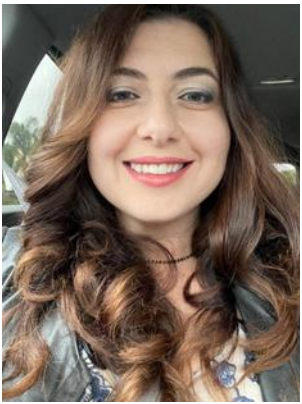
Poetry

Jane (Yevgenia!) Muschenetz

Teaching my immigrant mother to use Google or "Spell to Find What You Seek"

© Jane (Yevgenia!) Muschenetz

Ukrainian-born, Russian-speaking Jew, Jane (Yevgenia!) Muschenetz was granted asylum in the US as a refugee from the USSR at 10 years old. Today, she is a mom to two very American kids. In addition to daily parenting achievements, in 2022, Jane also won the Good Life Review Poetry Prize and was short-listed for the Jacar Press Chapbook Prize. Her first poetry chapbook, *All the Bad Girls Wear Russian Accents*, Kelsay Books, is forth-coming in January 2023. Connect with Jane's work at her web-site, PalmFronD-Zoo.com, and in various publications.



You must take care when spelling,
otherwise, the search will bring unwanted things.
Searching always does that, I think,
but what can we do? We make the most of the tools we have.
I speak of the invisible algorithmic forces at our fingertips,
the power waiting, needing to be directed, full of potential, I speak
of links forking our path, hoping something will click.
There is too much between her questions and the world
wide (and full of) webs, it's helpful sometimes to leave the room
for interpretation open, but not too far...
You have to focus, I tell her—the student teaching the master.

How hard it is
to find what she wants
(a 100% cotton nightgown, not expensive, not too short, with sleeves,
not see-through brittle, not too tight
against the body, a pretty pattern that still lets you breathe)
A thing so common 20 years ago at Sears,
she starts to tell me, bewildered at the change time wrought,
I wish that I had bought a dozen and just kept them, but it's impossible to know
The Future, she confides, makes my eyes swim,
I'm lost in ever-changing, growing transformation of the familiar
landscape, looking for an easy purchase only
to be left behind, irrelevant and outmoded, in innovation's ruthless wake...

There's nothing truly new in this—
casting about, all we are doing is sifting what already came to pass.
The past, spell-bound and eternal,
this moon-lit mirror in the cloud/portal to the yet unknown,
these ones and zeros—skulls and bones
(one small, bright window, one grown woman, and one crone)

Frida as a Bird

© Thelma van Rensburg
Contemporary watercolour
380 x 300 mm



The Uterus Compulsion

© Jane (Yevgenia!) Muschenetz

In the middle of it, 3 months and counting the exponential cell growth of your incubating future, while you're eating healthy and skipping caffeine, always, without even thinking about it, you are making, making, building a human being from scratch. You do not realize it then—this uterus compulsion is more than just one beginning. The DNA snapping transformation from the blood count, up, invisible to the naked eye, has already laid the groundwork to turn you inside out. Soon, you'll be bursting at the seams.

About this *becoming* you will learn in pieces, later.

When trying out post-natal massage, you will convulse into sudden tears under a stranger's gentle caress.

The therapist will explain
how the body homes trauma and how
that is what giving birth is—
Trauma, and how being born
is trauma too

Years on, after your third trauma results in surgery, the Physical Therapist will point out: this way, in which you have been carrying on, is all wrong. (It is hardly a wonder that your back and knees are suffering.) The core of you is weak.

Later still, (you no longer recognize yourself at all) you will look back at this time, when you believed yourself to be housing a cocoon. Dizziness, nausea, metabolic revolution via night sweats. It's obvious in hindsight, really, you were already half-way to Kafka.



Sundays

© Jane (Yevgenia!) Muschenetz

As always, I am cleaning.
Circling the house like a bird, picking up
discarded items that nest every few feet—*socks, letters, books*
reading into things, setting them down in new places,
shelving, wiping, taking off
my slippers in one corner of the room,
putting on my garden shoes in another...

I open the refrigerator.
The yogurt container says all the right words:
“Grass-fed, Pasture-raised, Certified...” but
How does it taste in the mouth? I think
Like surgery, the blooming vision by the window asks
for water. I lift once more
the empty can and pour,
forgetting already, where
I put down my last thought.

Warrior Woman

© MaryAnn Reilly

Abstract mixed media

Book Review

Novel, *Vladimir*, by Julie May Jonas reviewed by Jennifer Gentile

Who is the title character of Julie May Jonas' novel *Vladimir*? And why is he tied to a chair, sedated?

That's the question in the opening pages of this novel about a small liberal arts college professor who finds her reputation and career at risk due to her professor husband's affairs with female students on campus. In her debut novel, Jonas offers a cynical take on the modern sexual politics of college academia and how they clash against older school takes on matters of sex, age, and power.

The unnamed narrator's husband John is chair of the English Department at this upstate New York college and had many dalliances with his students before it was officially disallowed by the school. The protagonist has mild knowledge of the affairs but is not offended as she and John have an open marriage. Now, a petition signed by 300 students calls for John's removal from the campus. More complicated—the wolves are gathering around the narrator too because they consider her complicit and enabling. At first well-meaning (if not patronizing and naïve) students show up at her office to express their concern that she is staying with John. Then, the English department gets involved.

As the narrator fights for her career, so does John via disciplinary hearing. A great distraction from the sordid mess is a new, handsome assistant professor on campus. Enter Vladimír, a middle-aged novelist who lives in town with mentally fragile but talented literary ingenue wife, along with their young daughter. As this foursome starts a slow dance towards being "married friends," these writers compete against each other, and show insecurities about physical appearances, mental health, job security and literary value. They also suspect affairs on both sides.

Vladimír becomes the narrator's muse. And his wife Cindy her friendly rival. Turning Vladimír's head, drawing need and attraction from him, or better yet, get him to reveal a marriage flaw, becomes a fixation for the protagonist. Is she projecting after being labeled a #MeToo sellout by the campus kids? Probably.

Although the reader understands off the bat where this woman's moral perimeters line up. The book begins with an eyebrow raising line: "*When I was a child, I loved old men, and I could tell that they also loved me.*" Thus, the narrator assumes that these impressionable students are happy recipients of sexual advances from all men in powered positions who could make or break their writing careers, [confessing]

At one point we would have called these affairs consensual, for they were. Now, however, young women have apparently lost all agency in romantic entanglements. Now my husband was abusing his power, never mind that power is the reason they desired him in the first place...

All the while, the narrator allows these students to believe that she's listening and learning and admiring their modern voices, while mildly appealing for them to respect her agency. Still, as the book unfolds, the narrator learns of the long-term damage done to some of these women, almost to her annoyance.

Seeking release, she dehumanizes Vladimír, who in the book's prologue is unconscious and tied to a chair. He serves as the narrator's prisoner, possession, and object of lust. Capturing him was complex and less about sex than it is a power dynamic. She only wants and needs this prize to prove a point. But when he willingly accepts these conditions, she loses interest, and this leads to an ending that is unpredictable and at times jaw dropping.

Jonas uses beautiful writing with unique phrasing that causes double takes. ("*I've always felt the origin of anger in my vagina and am surprised it is not mentioned more often in literature.*")

In real life, Jonas is also a teacher at a small liberal arts school in upstate New York, so crafting a story exclusively about writers in an overly familiar environment might seem indolent, but you'll forgive Jonas thanks to her frank insight into the psyche of a manipulative and increasingly dangerous woman who is smart, sexual, independent, and complex. It's simply fun.

By offering character mindset that runs contrary to college academia groupthink, Jonas certainly goes against the grain as an author, and has produced a page turner that's feels almost liberating, as if there's still room for the ugly and flawed points of view that may be behind-the-times but are uniquely and devastatingly human.



Julia May Jonas's *Vladimir* (Avid Reader Press)



Julia May Jonas is a playwright and teaches theatre at Skidmore College. She holds an MFA in playwriting from Columbia University and lives in Brooklyn with her family. *Vladimir* is her debut novel.

MEET THE CONTRIBUTORS

PPM STAFF

Louisa Clerici's stories have been published in literary anthologies and magazines including *Carolina Woman Magazine*, *The Istanbul Literary Review* and *Best New England Crime Stories 2016, 2015 and 2012*. Her short story, *The Rose Collection* was named Best Mystery Story of 2012 by Sleuth Sayers. Louisa Clerici's work was featured at the SWAN, Support Women Artists Now event and chosen for the Mayor's Prose & Poetry Program commemorating the Boston Marathon tragedy. Louisa is a winner in the Soul-making Literary Competition of the *National League of American Pen Women* and her articles on the South Shore art scene appear in local newspapers. Louisa works as a therapist and sleep educator at Clear Mind Systems in Plymouth, Ma. www.clearmindsystems.net.

Jenifer DeBellis, M.F.A., is author of *Warrior Sister, Cut Yourself Free from Your Assault* (Library Tales Publishing, 2021), *Blood Sisters* (Main Street Rag, 2018) and *New Wilderness* (Cornerstone Press, forthcoming 2023). Her freelance career spans over two decades, allowing her to ghostwrite and edit full-length books, smaller works, mass media content, and manage strategic marketing. She edits *Pink Panther Magazine* and directs aRIFT Warrior Project and Detroit Writers' Guild (501c3). She's featured in *Psychology Today* and Seattle's *My Independence Report* and her writing appears in AWP's *Festival Writer*, *CALYX*, *the Good Men Project*, *Medical Literary Messenger*, *Solstice*, and other fine journals. A former Meadow Brook Writing Project fellow, JDB facilitates summer workshops for Oakland University as well as teaches writing and literature for Saginaw Valley State University. Find more at JeniferDeBellis.com.

Jennifer Gentile, a Melrose, MA native, received a liberal arts degree from Suffolk University and a Masters of Fine Arts degree in Creative Writing from Pine Manor College's Solstice MFA program in 2017 with a degree in fiction. She is a fiction screener for *Solstice: a Magazine of Diverse Voices* and an editor of a weekly newspaper outside of Boston. A mother of three, she recently completed her first novel, *Housebroken*.

Roselyn Kubek's poetry has appeared in a variety of journals including *The Common Ground Review*, *Lily Poetry Review*, *The Avocet Journal of Nature Poetry*, *The Stonecoast Review*, and *PPM*. While she was the English Department Head in Pembroke, MA, she was twice a finalist for NEATE's (New England Association of Teachers of English) Poet of the Year. In addition to her role as Prose Reader for *PPM* and working on her own writing, Roz tutors and teaches literature, non-fiction and creative writing to teenagers and adults. Roz and her family live in New England where they divide their time between Massachusetts and Maine.

PPM's Founding Editor **Anna Shaw** is a photographer and graphic artist residing in Canterbury in Kent. When she's not helping others capture their magical moments, she finds time to turn her own photography into whimsical digital montages.

Lisa J. Sullivan is a Massachusetts native who holds an MFA in Poetry from the Solstice Low-Residency MFA Program at Pine Manor College, where she was a Kurt Brown Fellow. Her poetry has appeared in *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Common Ground Review*, *The Comstock Review*, *Puckerbrush Review*, and elsewhere. She teaches poetry classes at the Plymouth Center for the Arts and is a poetry editor for *Pink Panther Magazine*.

Women Supporting Women

While *Pink Panther Magazine* has always been and hopes to remain an ad free publication, that doesn't mean we don't like to support our contributing artists and writers on their accomplishments, products, and services. That said, let's take a moment to celebrate our artists and all the ways they contribute to this magazine and our visual and liberal arts communities. Do you like the art you see in these pages? Check out the contributing artists' bios for how to find their work for sale. And, authors, whether you're preparing to publish a book with a commercial house, indie press, or self-publishing, consider exploring the artists in *PPM*'s fabulous community for your next cover. I found both my book cover artists in this sisterhood and already have my eye on my next cover art by an artist published in this mag. And don't get me started on all their amazing art that hangs on my walls in my home.

Along these same lines, we publish book reviews. If you have a book you want reviewed or if you'd like to contribute a review, send it to us via Submittable: pinkpanthermagazine.submittable.com/submit.

CONTRIBUTING ARTISTS & WRITERS

Celia Lisset Alvarez is a writer and educator from Miami, Florida. She holds an MFA in creative writing from the University of Miami and has four collections of poetry, *Shapeshifting* (winner of the 2005 Spire Press Poetry Award), *The Stones* (Finishing Line Press 2006), *Multiverses* (Finishing Line Press 2021) and *Bodies & Words* (Assure Press 2022). Her writing has appeared in numerous journals and anthologies, most recently in *DarkWinter Literary Magazine*, *Last Leaves Magazine*, and *dyst*. She has work forthcoming in the anthologies *SMEOP 2: HOT* (Black Sunflowers Press) and *The Book of Life after Death* (Tolsun Books), as well as in *Blue Mountain Review*. Nominated for both the Pushcart and Best of the Net Prizes, she was the editor of the literary journal *Prospectus: A Literary Offering*. *Multiverses*, a finalist in the narrative poetry category of American Book Fest's Best Books Award, chronicles the loss of her twenty-six-day-old son.

Esinam Bediako is an English teacher and writer, and holds an MFA in fiction from Sarah Lawrence College. Her work has been published in *Dark Phrases*, *The Scholar and Feminist Online*, and *Floodwall Magazine*, and she has an essay forthcoming in *North American Review*.

A Ghanaian-American born and raised in Detroit, I live in Southern California with my family. As an African American writer, **Judy Belk** is constantly exploring storytelling which weaves the past and present in making sense of racial injustice. Her short stories, including two "Naomi stories," have appeared in *The Phoebe*, *The Griffin* and *Wind Magazines*. Her essays have also been published in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, *The Washington Post* and aired on PBS Radio. In recent years, the *Los Angeles Times* has published eight of her essays on race and family. She has been honored to have been awarded two writing residencies at Hedgebrook, a women's writing retreat on Whidbey Island. More of Belk's writing can be found on www.JudyBelkWriter.com.

Dorina Costras studied in Iasi, Romania, at Universitatea de Arte si Design in the Facultatea de Arte Plastice and in Boulogne-Billancourt, France, at Formation Décoration d'intérieur—Ecoles de Design ESDAC where she earned a certificate in interior design. Originally from Iași, Romania, the artist now lives in Saint-Étienne, France, where she's artiste peintre at Dorina Costras Art and a visual arts teacher at Atelier d'Art—Cours de peinture et dessin. Almost all her works are also available in print/poster for sale at fineartamerica.com/profiles/dorina-costras. The original works can be found on her website, www.dorinacostras.com.

Joy Gaines-Friedler is the author of three books of poetry, her most recent *Capture Theory* (Kelsay Books, 2018) is a Forward Review Indiefab Finalist, and an Edward Hoffer Award, Finalist. A multiple Pushcart Prize nominee, her work is published in over 100 anthologies, literary magazines, and craft books including *The New York Quarterly*, *The San Pedro River Review*, *Rattle*, *The Path to Kindness*, edited by James Crews, 2022. *The Strategic Poet*, edited by Diane Lockwood, *The Bloomsbury Anthology of Jewish American Poets*, *Michigan in Poetry in Michigan*, and elsewhere. Her chapbook *Stone On Your Stone* is a 2021 winner of The Friends of Poetry, Celery City Chapbook Contest. Other awards include, The Litchfield Review Poetry Prize, and the first recipient of the Eva Otto Scholarship Award for Academic Excellence. Joy teaches creative writing for non-profits, and communities at risk in S.E Michigan.

Julia Khoroshikh/Clipso-Callispo is a St. Petersburg based artist and art addict. Her works are inspired by music, fantasy and nature. Clipso-Callispo's favorite techniques to work with are traditional media mostly, soft pastels, acrylic painting and wool painting. Links to her online stores, social networks and sales info are available at https://linktr.ee/clipso_callispo.

Laurie Kuntz is a widely published and award winning poet. She has been nominated for a Pushcart and Best of the Net prize. She has published two poetry collections (*The Moon Over My Mother's House*, Finishing Line Press, *Somewhere in the Telling*, Mellen Press), two chapbooks (*Simple Gestures*, Texas Review, *Women at the Onsen*, Blue Light Press). Her 5th poetry collection, *Talking Me off the Roof*, is forthcoming from Kelsay Press in late 2022. Many of her poems are a direct result of working with refugees in refugee camps soon after the Vietnam War years. Recently retired, she lives in an endless summer state of mind. Visit her at: <https://lauriekuntz.myportfolio.com>

Olga Gonzalez Latapi (she/her/hers) is a queer poet with an MFA in Writing from California College of the Arts. Although her writing journey started in journalism, she is now pursuing her true passion: exploring the world of poetry with a mighty pen in hand. She got her BS in Journalism at Northwestern University. Her work has been published in *Teen Voices Magazine*, *Sonder Midwest* literary arts magazine, *BARNHOUSE Literary Journal*, *Wild Roof Journal*, *Impossible Task*, *Genre: Urban Arts*, *Biscuitroot Drive*, iaam.com, and *The Nasiona Magazine*. She is the translator of the upcoming *Reflections of an Old Man* (Pensamientos de un Viejo) by Colombian philosopher Fernando González and a spoken word album with Amaryllis Recordings. Originally from Mexico City.

Artist **April Mansilla** is a professional art consultant/teacher for a expressive arts project at St. Joseph's Hospital West 5Th Campus Dementia Unit and workshop facilitator Sitelines at Centre3—Teaching the Art of Madness. Her artworks present beautiful narratives of the human condition that are visual representations of what many individuals struggle against and the unbelievable levels they reach in overcoming life's hardships. Find more at www.aprilmansilla.com.

Alexandra Melander is an artist living in Sweden. She loves to use bold color, strong lines, and deep contrasts in her works. Her favourite medias are markers och acrylics, ink, and other techniques. Find more about her and her art at <http://alexandramelander.se/>, on FB @kladdalex, and www.instagram.com/alexandramelander_art/.

Laura Williams McCaffrey's short stories have appeared in *Cicada*, *YA Review Network*, and *Solstice Literary Magazine*, earning such honors as the SCBWI Magazine Merit Award for fiction and a Pushcart Prize Nomination. She's also published three YA fantasy novels, *Marked*, *Water Shaper*, and *Alia Waking*. The former fiction editor at YA Review Network, Laura now teaches at Champlain College and at Solstice, the low-residency MFA program at Lasell University, as well as at Pacem School, an independent school for middle and high school students. For more information about her and her work, visit www.laurawilliamscaffrey.com

D Larissa Peters was born and raised in Indonesia. Somewhat of a nomad, she meandered around the East Coast for more than 10 years before moving to California—in the middle of a pandemic. She loves discovering cities and hide-aways, mixing cocktails and mingling, and a quiet beach day with a book. Her most recent poems have appeared in the *Stickman Review*, *Flora Fiction*, *Makarelle*, *Last Leaves Magazine* and has a few forthcoming pieces elsewhere.

MaryAnn Reilly is a fine arts photographer and author born in Dublin, Ireland and raised in New Jersey. Her work has been selected for national and international juried shows, awarded honors, including several Best in Shows, and has been exhibited in galleries in Manhattan as well as galleries in California, Colorado, Florida, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. Additionally, several photographs have been published in *F-Stop*, *Dark Sky Magazine*, *Honey Land Review*, *Wild Violet*, *In the Mist*, *English Journal*, *Digital Art*, *descry magazine*, and *Life Images* and others have served as cover art for books.

Christel Roelandt is a Belgian painter-portraitist based in Beirut. She has participated in several art fairs and exhibitions in London, Madrid and the Middle East. Self-taught, she says: “The gift of painting was handed to me as a birthday present when my friend-artist May Ling Yong gave me my first canvas and paint kit. I never suspected it would be such a passion, but there’s no stopping me since.” Find more about the artist and her art at www.christel-roelandt-art.com, fineartamerica.com/profiles/christel-roelandt.html, and www.redbubble.com/people/chrisroelandt.

Alice Campbell Romano is a published poet who writes what rises to the surface and works its way out the fingertips. As someone said—maybe she herself—a poem is the face of what we’ve lived. She grew up in the Hudson Highlands, lived 13 years in Rome, translated and doctored Italian movie scripts, married a dashing Italian, moved to Los Angeles, made children, grew businesses, and now writes poetry with poet Jennifer Franklin at the Hudson Valley Writers’ Center—back to the Hudson, thanks to Zoom. Recent and upcoming acceptances are in *Prometheus Dreaming*, *Persimmon Tree*, *Orchards Poetry*, *Beyond Words*, *Willows Wept*, *Instant Noodles* (Devil’s Press), *Quartet*, among others. She has two chapbooks and a full-length collection in the works.

Lebanese artist **Sandra Kheir Sahyoun** took drawing and painting lessons as a teen in workshops where she met Lebanese painting masters, Paul Guiragossian and Samir Tabet, who encourage her to pursue her passion. At the Académie de la Grande Chaumière, she tirelessly trained herself to grasp the anatomy of the human body, which had fascinated her for so long. She studied Interior Architecture and Design at the Lebanese Academy of Fine Arts (ALBA) in Beirut. Decidedly multidisciplinary, Sandra was invited to teach Interior Architecture at ALBA. In 2009, she launched in Beirut, in the industrial city of Bauchrieh, her Architecture and Design studio, a space where she exhibits her furniture and paintings—creations she makes with as much vigor as she puts into her other residential projects: buildings, hotels, officers, wooden chalets.

Alison Stone has published seven full-length collections, *Zombies at the Disco* (Jacar Press, 2020), *Caught in the Myth* (NYQ Books, 2019), *Dazzle* (Jacar Press, 2017), *Masterplan*, a book of collaborative poems with Eric Greinke (Presa Press, 2018), *Ordinary Magic*, (NYQ Books, 2016), *Dangerous Enough* (Presa Press 2014), and *They Sing at Midnight*, which won the 2003 Many Mountains Moving Poetry Award; as well as three chapbooks. Her poems have appeared in *The Paris Review*, *Poetry*, *Ploughshares*, *Barrow Street*, *Poet Lore*, and many other journals and anthologies. She has been awarded *Poetry*’s Frederick Bock Prize and *New York Quarterly*’s Madeline Sadin Award. She was Writer in Residence at LitSpace St. Pete. She is also a painter and the creator of The Stone Tarot. A licensed psychotherapist, she has private practices in NYC and Nyack. www.stonepoetry.org www.stonetarot.com. YouTube – Alison Stone Poetry.

t.m. thomson’s work has appeared in several journals, including *The Aurean*, *Potomac*, *These Fragile Lilacs*, and most recently in *The Sunlight Press*. She has co-authored a chapbook of ekphrastic poetry entitled *Frame and Mount the Sky* that was published by Finishing Line Press in June of 2017. She is the author of *Strum and Lull* (2019) and *The Profusion* (2019), and three of my poems have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize. Her full-length collection, *Plunge*, will be published in 2022.

Cynthia Lund Torroll is self-taught. Her fascination with the dualities involved with being both a physical and ephemeral creature is front and center in her work, which has been exhibited, awarded and collected nation-wide. Her recent experimental work at NewHive was featured at “Manufacturing Transparency”, an interdisciplinary conference hosted by the Berkeley Center for New Media, the Cultural Services of the French Embassy, the Goethe-Institute San Francisco, and the Office for Science and Technology at the French Embassy. She also took Best Of Show at The New Bohemian Gallery and was recently awarded by Manhattan Arts International for her work in HERstory.

Claudia Tremblay was born in Amos, Québec, Canada. She worked with C.E.C.I, an NGO, where her work consisted of building medicinal gardens alongside Mayan refugees returning from Mexico after a long and deeply tragic civil war. Here she was inspired to paint these hard working women. Her paintings represent the melancholic souls and inner strength that motivate these women. She also likes to explore the universal connection between mother and child. She stayed in Guatemala for 14 years, opening an art gallery and establishing herself at the heart of regional culture. Her work has been exhibited throughout Central America. She’s returned to Montréal with her Guatemalan born son and still paints children’s books and new images for her etsy shop full time. The intention behind every painting remains the same after all these years, love.

Griet van der Meulen is a South African artist based out of Nelspruit. She informally trained at Ruth Prowse School of Art in Cape Town and Ottawa School of Art in Canada. She earned a BA in Afrikaans and History of Art and a Post Graduate degree in Museum Sciences at the University of Pretoria, an MFA in Distinction in Drawing and Painting from Tshwane University of Technology, and an honorary Visual Art Degree from UNISA. Her award-winning art has been widely exhibited in galleries and institutions in Germany, Canada, and South Africa. She has spent the last decade as a professional artist and gallerist/owner of Sunlight Gallery in Graskop, Mpumalanga, where her work can be viewed on permanent exhibition.

Thelma van Rensburg was born in Pretoria, South Africa in 1969. She has a B.A Honours degree in Physical Education and Psychology. In 2004 she decided to study art full time and received her B.Tech degree in Fine Arts at Tshwane University of Technology in 2007. She completed a further Hounours degree in Fine Arts at the University of Pretoria in 2013 and completed a Masters of Arts degree at the University of Pretoria in 2016 titled, *Uneasy bodies, femininity and death: Representing the female corpse in fashion photography and selected contemporary artworks*. She is currently enrolled as a PhD candidate at Plymouth University in the United Kingdom. She is also enrolled at Transart Institute for Creative Practice which provides regular artist residencies in Mexico, Berlin and New York.

Catrin Welz-Stein studied graphic design in Germany and worked as a graphic designer for various agencies. In her spare time she experimented with mixed media, collages and paintings on canvas and finally entered the amazing world of digital art.

