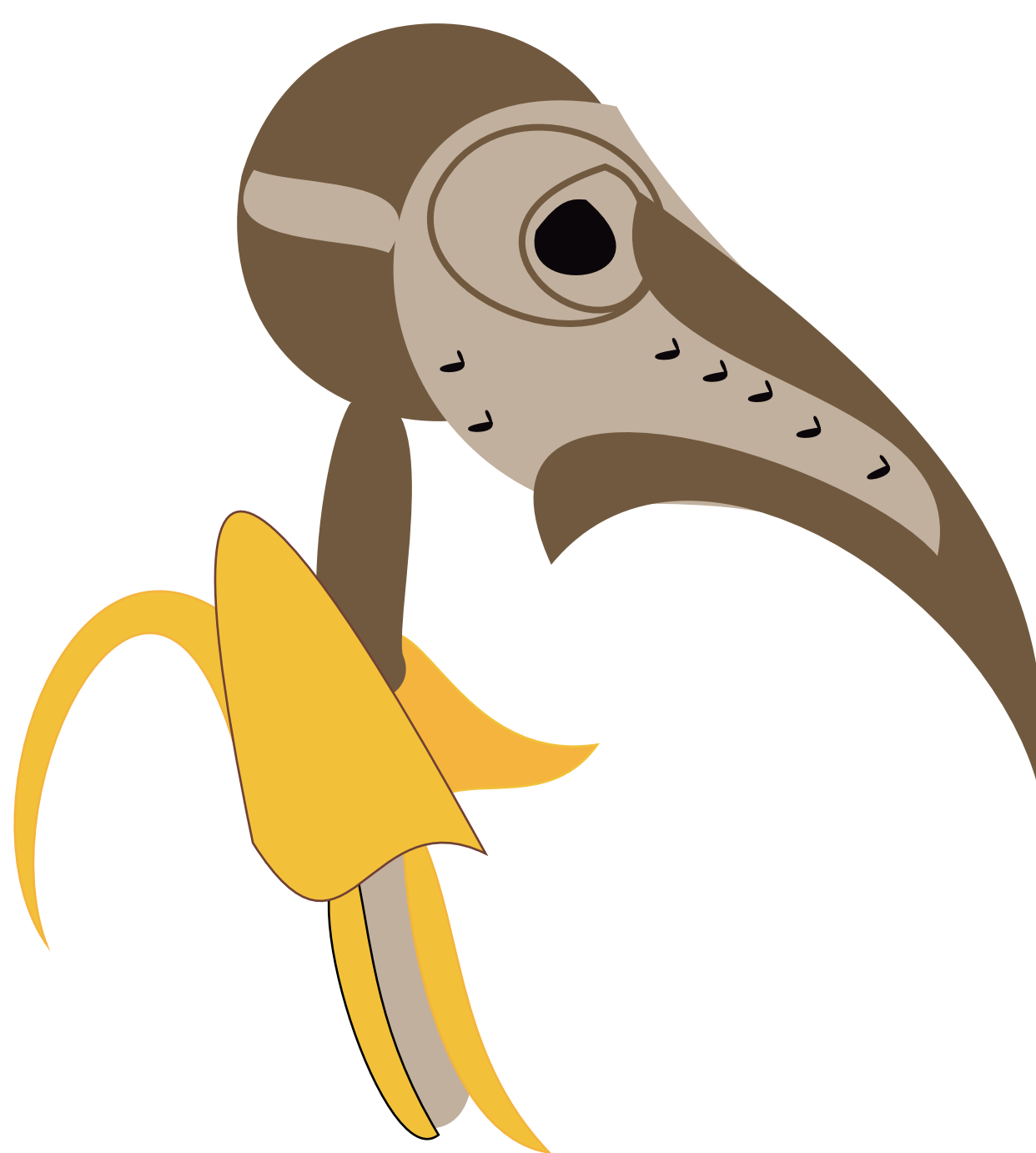


# Defunkt Magazine

Vol. VII





**DEFUNKT MAGAZINE**  
VOLUME VII

MARCH 2021



## COVER ART



### **A Woman with Regrown Roots**

Ivan Isaev



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# Vehicle-Tree Crash

Vanessa Gorsuch

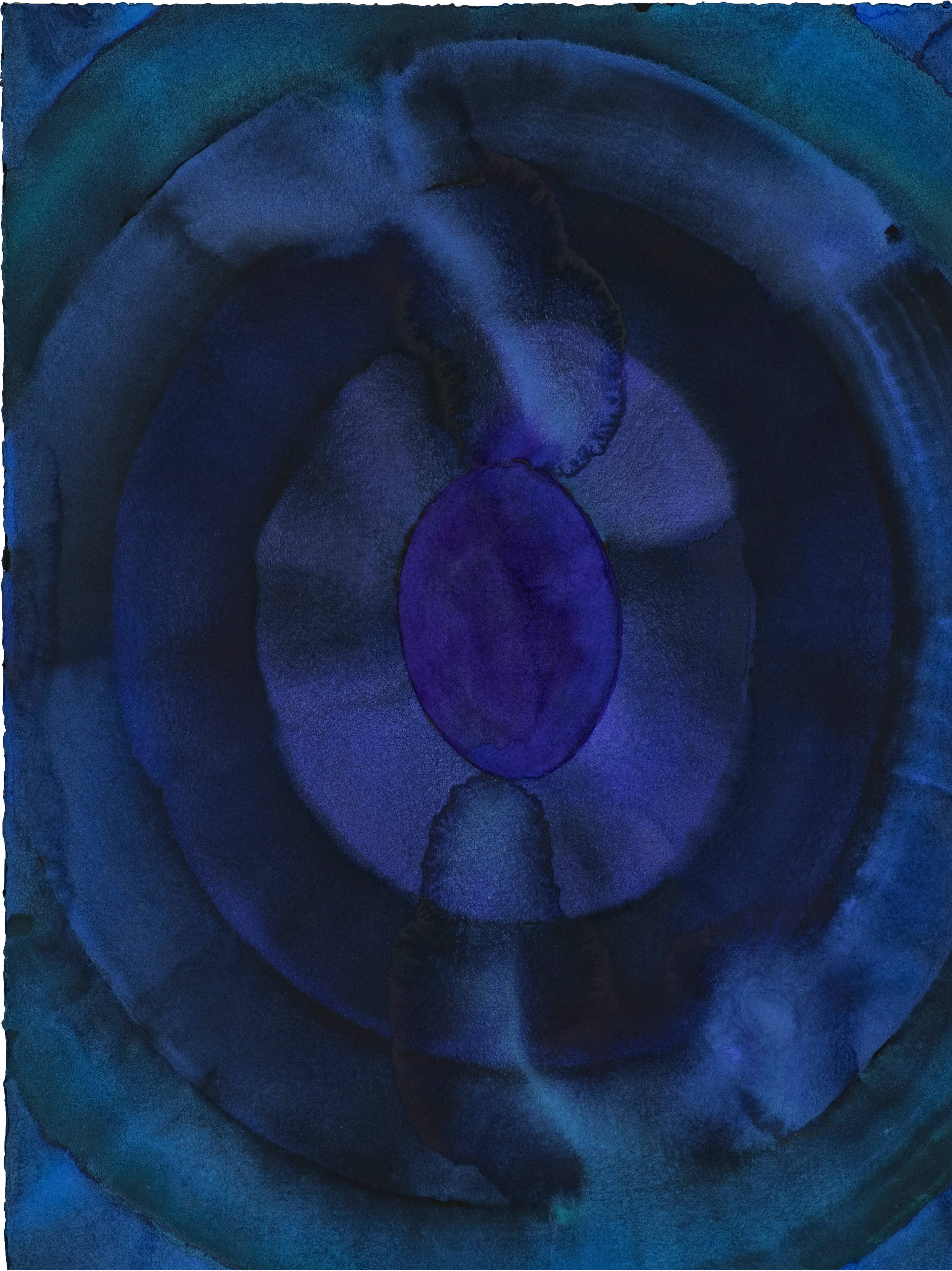
A Flamboyant tree,  
dark-skirted,  
practicing and pushing  
the tightest scream up  
from the roof  
of her ribbed mouth,  
her scream, a bouquet  
of pale orange blossoms suspiring,  
suspended, over one  
                    stiff-necked, barnacled palm--  
her scream, muffled, like fireworks in fog:  
a deafened set of gerbs,  
a botched roman candle  
moping in damp air,  
wading in dark water,

took my cousins  
high in both boughs. a mouthful. a gourd.  
the cracked watermelon dripping grin.  
the swallowed seeded-grapes. the ghastly  
sea-gulled breath.  
that night, the world swamped  
heavy with black holes  
camouflaged as trees.  
they rooted deeply  
into the grooves  
of the earth's quaking spine,  
anticipating the magnetism  
that folds the skeletons  
of steel cars in half.  
that confiscates  
the lives of cousins:  
their stories, their phone-calls,  
their favorite foods, chocolate  
and mangu. their rain and their boots,



their drives, their books, their  
families and nests, their hair combs,  
their dress, their frequented walks,  
their bed-ridden talks, their Christmas tree bulbs, their cereal bowls,  
leaving the rest of the world  
with gaping black holes.





**Whirlpool**  
Greg Edmondson



# The View from Here

## Howie Good

I'm watering the indoor plants when the doorbell rings. It's you, and you're bleeding from an ear. "What happened to your ear?" I ask. You touch it. Your fingers come away with blood. "Steely Dan on the headphones," you say. I don't move, don't even nod. Now that an estimated 150 species go extinct every day, I try not to rush through my days. And if, as sometimes happens, it feels like everything is speeding up, I'll lie down on the floor and stare at the ceiling or out the window, my view a small thing but all my own.

# Petrichor

## Caveman the Wise

Chicago-native Caveman the Wise (Victor French) is a producer currently living in Los Angeles. Originally a jazz saxophonist, he cut his teeth in the Chicago hip-hop scene before moving west. Caveman the Wise is known for creating original, hypnotic beats and sprinkling in traditional jazz sounds to create something unlike any other. He's collaborated with a wide range of hip-hop and rap artists, including Virghost, Felly, Truth Clipsy, Gatsby the Great, and Kontakz - infusing their old school style with his innovative melodies. As a classically trained saxophonist, you can find him producing beats and composing live accompaniment at venues all around Los Angeles.



**From the artist, on *Petrichor***

This song is a mixing of major and minor textures, often in direct conflict. I wanted to reflect the grimey renewal of the rare rainfall here in Los Angeles during the winter months.

Scan the QR code below to listen.





# scriptures on rolling papers, ash in wine

Elizabeth Train-Brown

*“The Father is greater than I.”*  
*John 14:28*

god watches us  
 drink until the world goes dark  
 and he smokes  
 and he smokes.

sometimes he stumbles home  
 half-blind  
 because one eye  
 is pressed  
 to the hole in his hand  
 (that hag stone  
 that sees faeries and gods and monsters)  
 or he sits on wet concrete  
 dangles his legs off buildings  
 cups his ears  
 to hear those dead voices  
 whisper

yeshua  
 yahweh

(thinks of a boy  
 pinned to wood)

he knows why we drink.  
 knows why we kiss strangers  
 hit walls  
 eat wildflowers  
 dance between cars  
 lie in the road  
 scream into old buildings  
 that will never be homes.  
 god knows.

god knows  
and he feels himself cave in  
like a city on a mire  
like sand in glass  
because in another life they would call him  
jesus  
and he would bring reckoning.

but  
oh  
how the prophets get it turned around.





**Treasure**  
Fabrice Poussin



# Angry Black Woman, Badass PD

Tanya L. Kelley

I was scrolling through Facebook the morning after the Vice-Presidential Debate. Meme after meme of the fly that landed on Mike Pence's head flooded my timeline. Some of them were so hilarious I almost spit out my chai tea. Then I came across a post from a fellow Public Defender I had worked with in Orlando who wrote: "This hurts and also feels extremely accurate for me personally. Trying to sit with the stepped-on toes here and let it motivate me to improve."

It was a tweet she had posted from Brittany Johnstone@SchoolPsychMsB:

"A lot of white women this morning think they're Sen. Harris in the situation we saw last night when actually we're Susan Page. Failing to hold white men accountable for their actions & failing to use what little institutional power & privilege we have to level the playing field."

My old colleague is probably in her late thirties, maybe early forties now. She lives in a suburb of Michigan. She's white, married, has three children, and is no longer practicing. I remember her as a nice young lady who worked hard for our clients.

While watching commentary after the debate the question arose, "Why didn't Kamala Harris go harder on Mike Pence?" I was happy to see black and white CNN commentators like Van Jones, Abby Phillip, David Axelrod, and Dana Bash say it was because Harris couldn't be seen as an Angry Black Woman (ABW). Finally, it was acknowledged on national television. It is damn near impossible for black women to fully speak their truth because we run the risk of the ABW label and tanking our career because of it.

There were quite a few comments on the original tweet. I focused on one of the comments since it reflected the exact sentiment rolling around in my head. 'Brittany you were doing good until you said little, please you white women have plenty of power.' And it's true. Moderator Susan Page could have done more to control Mike Pence because it was her role. Of course, there's patriarchy. We women all climb the ladder by reaching hand over hand higher and higher, chipping nails, and scuffing the toes and heels of our pumps, but keep climbing higher until we reach the glass ceiling. Whether it's literally or figuratively, the higher we get up in the building, the higher the floor, the less women we see in the meetings. As a woman trying to achieve, the decision is made to arrive earlier, stay later. Some may have sacrificed the family she wanted to have or miss out on spending time with the one she already has.

There is power and privilege in being a white woman because it can be used to level the playing field and can be weaponized against people of color. There's the infamous Emmett Till case from 1955 where the fourteen-year-old boy was lynched for allegedly whistling at a white woman, and there's Susan Smith who in 1995 lied and said a black man had carjacked her and kidnapped her two sons when she was the one who sent them to a watery grave. Spring of 2020 brought us Amy Cooper who used whiteness as an advantage to call the cops on Christian Cooper and said he threatened her life knowing full well her accusation could have gotten him killed when the cops arrived. The newest is the rampant rise of offensive "Karen behavior" spreading almost daily on the news or social media. For example, one month after the Cooper incident, James Juanillo was writing Black Lives Matter in chalk outside his San Francisco home where he'd lived for 18 years. Lisa Alexander "Chalk Karen" accused him of defacing private property, claiming to know the person who really lived there and called the cops.

BBQ Becky however is a prime example of how a white woman can use her power. In the viral video, a white woman angrily demands the cops to remove a black family who is barbecuing in a California park. After arguing with the white woman recording her, Becky storms off and transforms into a damsel in distress when she sees a white male cop arrive to rescue her. She bursts into tears, and sobs, "I am being harassed." The incident demonstrates how white women are aware of their privileged status in society and use it to manipulate and dominate people of color. The drama unfolded in real time showing how white women can resort to the damsel in distress archetype of innocence and victimhood when challenged. The original damsel in distress trope was a way for white women to exercise some limited power. Limited because it relegates them to subordinate status in relation only to white men.



Not all white women or white men exert power and privilege. It shouldn't be necessary to take up page space to say that. Just like not all white women, nor white men use their race as weapons or use their whiteness to manipulate for power and privilege. It shouldn't be necessary to state that either, because I feel it's a given. I also don't feel I should take up any page space to tell you that I have some good friends who are white women and men that I respect and trust. Because I'm sure that felt empty reading it, just like it felt flat writing it. But without putting those words down, it felt incomplete.

I'm stating facts, being raw and real, and this is some uncomfortable shit. I am tired of biting my lip until I bleed. Deep sigh and exhale. I am exhausted making sure the white majority is okay while I suffer in silence. Dare to speak up, stand up for myself, or do anything for me or anyone who looks like me and I get labeled the dreaded Angry Black Woman the death knell professionally and personally no matter how intelligent I am, how much experience I possess, how dazzling my personality, or how loving and caring I am. Black Women have been enraged for decades. But our fury hasn't led to many significant changes, because we are still on the fringes, not allowed many seats at the table. The angry black woman trope is a powerful tool which has been used to dehumanize and silence black women.

Calling us angry, demonizes us, labels us as aggressive. We are told to suppress our righteous feelings. Under normal circumstances, if someone were to make another person mad, it's expected for the offended person to be angry and react. Piss off a black woman, then diminish her for being offended, sounds utterly ridiculous, however that's our painful truth. Throughout history, white people have been allowed to act out their anger, and it was celebrated (most famous instances are American Revolution, Boston Tea Party, Women's Suffrage Movement, and Vietnam War Protests). No, not us. We have to swallow our anger. It's our burden to make everyone else feel better. Like James Baldwin said, "To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious is to be in a rage almost all the time."

The danger in speaking up is getting labeled as an ABW so it's always a balancing act for us Black Women. Black Women do not get the luxury to use our voice. White women speak up and are seen as leaders, as women who take charge, as supervisors, or upper-level management material. We do the same thing and we're difficult, aggressive, and will never get on the management track. We will get sent to HR and be counseled, it will go in our file, and fellow employees will be afraid of us. We will be seen as a head-swiveling, hands-on hip, finger snapping caricatures when that would not have been the situation.

Speaking our truth hurts the sensibilities of white people. Enter George Floyd's murder and white people becoming more aware of racial injustice and their privilege. All of a sudden "White Fragility" became relevant—it was trending. White fragility refers to the feelings of discomfort a white person feels around discussions of racial inequality and injustice. People of color sometimes find it difficult to talk to white people about white privilege and superiority because they get defensive, and the person of color may feel obligated to comfort the white person because we live in a white-dominated world. How crazy is that, but it's true.

During the summer and fall, the book *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo started flying off the shelves. Not everyone agrees with it, or truly gets it. When the situation arises when I have to consider whether to say what's on my mind or bite my lip, I think of Dave Chappelle's comedy gold bit *When Keeping it Real Goes Wrong in the Boardroom*. It fucking sucks having to live this way. I've learned to alternate between biting my lip and biting my tongue. Things you do to survive daily navigating our nation as a person of color.

My new court partner started off on the wrong foot. She constantly asked me to cover her cases, it's what partners do, we cover for each other. Only I was the one always covering. I had more than twenty years' experience than her, and I had been at the Public Defender's Office for ten years. She was relatively new to the office in comparison. Our current assignment was a specialty court where I had been for a year and a half. Monday is my docket day, her docket day is Thursday. In the four months she had been my partner, approximately an hour before my docket began, I would receive an email from her asking me to cover her Monday cases. My priority is always to the clients no matter whose clients they are. I can't blame her too much, she was just doing what my previous partner had told her, 'ask Tanya if you need coverage because that's what I did.' I was at the point with my previous partner where I was about to have a talk with her when she was



transferred to another division. Since this was occurring amidst the pandemic, I scheduled a Zoom meeting because I wanted to talk “face to face.”

“Caylee, you keep asking me to cover your cases. It’s a bit much, it needs to stop.” I said.

“Oh really, I hadn’t realized I was asking that much.” She said eyes wide, mouth a perfect “O” as she clutched her imaginary pearls.

“You keep asking me to cover your cases that fall on Monday, and even asked me to cover your Thursday docket a time or two. That’s way too much.” I said my face expressionless.

After the meeting, she sent me a longish email saying how she felt threatened by my tone, ambushed, and a lot of other shit which was blatantly untrue about my conduct during our conversation. She painted herself as a victim, the damsel in distress. I had recorded our conversation because I had a feeling she was going to pull some shit like that. HA! I didn’t respond to her email, instead I sent it to the grievance committee. I also forwarded all the emails where she asked me to cover and the recording. The Supervising Attorney called me down to the office for a meeting. I explained depending on the phase of the program the client is in they may only come to court twice a month or every three weeks. Therefore, if I’m covering all the time, she likely hasn’t met her clients. He told me he would take care of it. I also told him I wanted her to apologize for calling me an ABW. No, I never received the apology however she never asked me to cover again. She hasn’t learned her lesson though, as of last week she tried to take credit for a project I and two Admin Assistants completed for the court. She just promised to deliver on it again this year. I had to politely clap back on her attempt to take the credit, let her know to stop trying to fuck with me. I want to hurt her. I’m trying hard to forgive and let go, because I know she’s not worth it.

I was still fuming over her audacity when I was jerked out of it as I sat spellbound watching as the rioters stormed the Capitol. My brain was having a hard time processing what my eyes were seeing. Thousands of men and women with makeshift weapons, real weapons, police riot gear, American flags, Trump flags, Confederate flags, most wearing Trump gear, and even a Camp Auschwitz shirt carrying signs and slogans for the hate symbol of their choice were storming the Capitol like extras from a black and white movie with torches and pitchforks storming a castle. There’s one video of them going “Heave!” as they all lean back in a coordinated effort, and then “HO!” in a big shove forward to battle ram the doors open, it was surreal.

A day or so after the riot I saw this post several times during my morning Facebook timeline scroll. It was originally posted by Jennifer Sellitti of the New Jersey Office of the Public Defender.

“In time, the only thing standing between every capitol rioter and his/her prison sentence will be a BLM-supporting, ACLU-card carrying, RBG-loving badass public defender. It’s a shame the accused won’t appreciate the irony.”

In 1963 the Supreme Court case of Gideon v. Wainwright held that anyone facing the potential for significant incarceration if convicted of a criminal charge has the right to a free lawyer should they not be able to hire one themselves. Public Defender Offices sprung up nationally after the Gideon case was decided.



According to an article I read, approximately 170 people have been arrested including Republican Party officials, GOP political donors, far-right militants, white supremacists, and those who believe in QAnon, a conspiracy theory that believes Satan-worshipping pedophiles control the government. If they are not able to afford an attorney, one will be provided for them which led to Sellitti's post. Not everyone who is a Public Defender holds the belief system in her post, but the core message is many of those arrested in the riots will be represented by someone who has very different beliefs than their own, yet their liberty will be dependent on an attorney who will fight zealously on their behalf because the attorney believes in the Constitution, for equal protection under the law.

A Public Defender like me who will fight my ass off for them regardless of their beliefs. Imagine your favorite action movie with the two buddies at the final showdown where they stand back to back, battered and bloody with their fists up ready to fight the remaining bad guys. In my situation, instead of an abandoned warehouse or darkened parking lot, my client stands behind me in a wood-paneled courtroom where wielding only my legal pad and pen I stand in my suit and heels as I stare down the prosecutors, the judge looking down on us from the bench, and the cops and all the witnesses pointing at my client from the witnesses stand saying 'he or she did it!' After all the testimony I then face the jury and argue "based on the evidence presented the prosecutor has not proven this case beyond a reasonable doubt so I ask you to return a verdict of not guilty." No matter how racist, misogynistic, rude, nasty or disgusting my client is accused of being to the victim, me, or anyone else. In order to convict and send my client to prison, they have to come through me to get to him or her. It is on and popping when I go to trial on a case. Even if my very existence is something my client can't stomach like the color of my skin.

During the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, Trump ordered U.S. Park Police and National Guard troops to clear a path through the plaza using pepper spray for a photo-op with a bible in front of a historic church. Over the summer many protestors were pepper-sprayed, arrested, and killed because of the use of force by the "Law and Order" President. Trump's Save America Rally on January 6th was planned weeks in advance. Many attendees were armed. President Trump urged them to "Be wild." Where was the show of force for the thousands of attendees who showed up on January 6th? The Capitol was easily breached because police intervention is unevenly deployed along the axis of race.

I became a Public Defender because I wanted to provide excellent representation to people facing criminal cases who could not afford to hire a high-priced attorney. For every client I represent, I fight against injustice because it means something to me. Democracy means something, and so does the Constitution, because criminal justice is based largely on the 4th, 5th and 6th Amendments as applied through the 14th Amendment Equal Protection Clause.

On particularly ugly cases or when my client's views challenge the very core of existence, I go home, hug my daughter a little tighter, and do whatever I can to keep the darkness from the case enveloping me so I can go back and fight another day.

I have been a Black Woman for 55 years and a Public Defender for 25 years. The burden of being both keeps me in a rage at the injustice I see through my lens of being who I am, and through the lens I see in the faces I represent in the criminal justice system. Angry Black Woman, yeah I guess that's me.





**Pearly Gates**  
R. Trentham Roberts



# Snow

Jasmina Kuenzli

When it rains here, it does so in drizzles  
In fits and starts, like a car coughing to life  
Leaves its residue in puddles that swirl oil  
Multicolored slick and footprints, that disappear as soon as they're set.  
Nothing about our rain is easy.  
It's humid, and it sticks to your skin like sweat  
It's the kind of love that takes everything else with it  
And turns the rest of the world to darkness  
Even when the water doesn't come down, clouds still darken the sky  
A cold wind blows  
And the mud sucks at your feet so bad, you try to stay on the concrete  
You don't know if a sinkhole will open beneath you  
Don't know if the slowly lessening slope outside will turn to a mudslide

And the drain that heralds an entrance to another world has lately  
Been even more haunted than this one  
Which already has lights that turn off without anyone's volition  
And dark secrets lurking around every corner  
And a man, who looks so much like a dream  
That he's got to be a ghost  
A chapter built up in your head of a book you haven't written

You see him, and for a moment, the steadying drizzle  
Freezes in midair  
Crystallizes  
Into snowflakes.



# Chicken Salad Chick

Chanel Gomaa

My manager tells me that if she knew I was Muslim during my interview, she wouldn't have hired me.

~~I split my mouth into an upturned crescent moon when she laughs. Take the joke in place of overtime and wipe the counters until my hands stop shaking.~~

I make a prayer mat of my apron and climb onto the counter top. Say the azhan so strongly that all the walls crumble, except for five pillars. I make wudhu in the sink and pray until everyone stops looking. Pray until it's just another Tuesday at this shitty restaurant in this stupid city.

Pray until she takes it back. Pray until she has the scripture memorized. Until she sees enough of herself in me to recognize my humanity. When she takes out her rosary, I do not shun her.

She prays to her God and I pray for patience. When she tries to hug me, I do not let her. I quit.

Leave her open arms and open mouthed in the rubble. I do not get paid enough for this. I break through ceilings, expectations, barriers, but do not ever break even.





**The Mermaid**  
Ivan Isaev



# I Would Like to Go to Church More

LeChell R. H.

Tight curls and a tender head take a seat in the salon chair. Veined hands, with perfect nails, steady yet somehow shaky at the same time, massages the scalp. Part, blow dry and clip. Part, blow dry and clip. This process repeats multiple times until the entire head of 4c hair becomes a strait-laced afro, ready for its final journey. Soap operas play on the television in the background sparking conversation as the elder woman's hands begin to hot comb the young girl's hair section by section, each strand heated & bone straight. This trip to the beauty salon seems like any other until the television gives the congregation of elder beauticians something to talk about. In today's news, homosexuality & pride parades throughout the tri-state area.

This little girl of only twelve years old, whose feet cannot even touch the ground as she sits in the chair, listens attentively. She knows it is not a child's place to speak in grown up conversation unless invited.

She is invited. The beautician asks her thoughts on homosexuality & gay marriages—hesitation.

Even at twelve, the young girl knows she has an inclination for other girls. She recalls her first girl crush in the fourth grade. Remembers her name, the first time they secretly kissed a bit. Just a year ago she couldn't describe the feeling. But lucky for her, she had just started playing basketball, and for the first time saw women who liked women, who were comfortably masculine presenting. Being mistaken for a little boy despite the press and curl didn't bother her as much as it used to. But today she recoils. Turtles her way back to a lonely & quiet body. She tells the beautician, "Being gay is okay. I don't see anything wrong with it." The elder in shock, rants with vigor of the sinfulness in homosexuality. This elder is a warrior of the gospel and always prepared for battle. Places her weapon of choice into the young girl's laps as if to give a warning. Flips to Leviticus 18:22, homosexuality is detestable she says. The girl does not push back. Dares not combat.

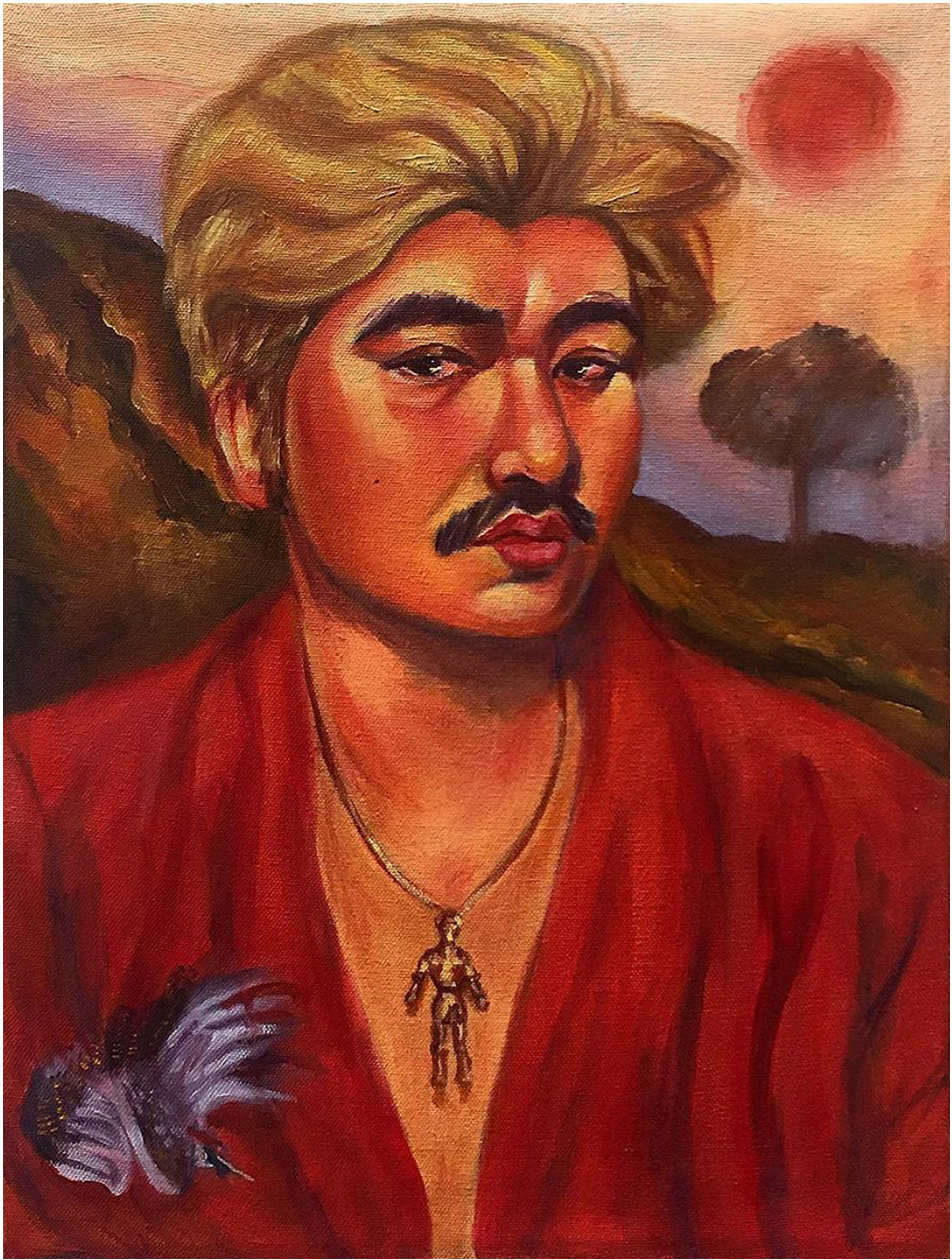
I would like to go to church more. I remember a time I did attend frequently. I went to bible study. Attended a good bit of Sundays, not just major holidays. I testified for the first time the summer I was fifteen. Started college at a private Christian institution, got baptized, joined the choir. I did all of this while somewhat secretly dating a girl for the first time, whose mother was actually a preacher while she was also dating a me, a girl, for the first time. We retreated into each other quietly but with fever exploring our sexuality in ways we never dared to. In ways that only the freedom of being away from home at college would allow. We did this, while watching the battle unfold for legalizing gay marriages. The media attention was at an all-time high as it became a presidential platform discussion. It was less than a year from the historic election of the first Black president. By junior year, church became a regular part of my schedule, but so did beautiful women. Historically Black colleges & universities have a knack for gathering the most beautiful & smart black women you could ever hope to meet. By senior year, the woman who would later become my girlfriend sat beside me for the New Year's service all while the choir soloist sang, one of the then most popular gospel songs, encouraging us to break the chains of homosexuality.

I would like to go to church more, but when entire sermons are dedicated to the condemnation of your identity, when your favorite gospel singers declare "I respect gay people, but I do not accept their lifestyle," when you are constantly being reminded that repentance of your born love is required to truly be welcomed inside its doors, when you move into corporate spaces and have your mentor say in an event for black & queer folks that their "morality as a Christian" does not allow them to accept your "lifestyle"—you wonder, are these walls safe for a black queer girl? Has this sanctuary been reserved for the straight only?



I would like to go to church more. I would love to wrap myself up in the religion I was born into. Hold it in reverence. Use it as my strength the same way my ancestors did in the darkest of times. I held out hope that with black women being the backbone of the church that somehow, they would love on me like I have always known them to. But in the pews, I learned even black women can fail me sometimes, that black women, even the ones who love us, are not infallible. A salon chair was the first place I learned how to swallow words of condemnation. How to shrink, to sink into a chair, hoping to bury my attraction to women all the same. I knew better than to debate an elder, especially not an elder black woman of the church, even more so when the elder is your grandmother.





**The Cut in my Cultures**  
Nick Lee



# How I Rise After I Fall

Anna Maria Morris

Morning breath reminds me I am alive  
 a gentle nudge to my senses that I'm awake.  
 Cold feet find comfort in regifted houseshoes  
 a half size too small yet warm like granny's.  
 Whistling reminds me to hydrate  
 like he would text me and I drink tea  
 cry scrolling through Facebook  
 complete a booty band workout  
 gotta keep this ass fat  
 gotta stretch  
 because I deserve to feel good  
 my body deserves to feel good  
 my body got me this far  
 my body got me to this mat  
 my body got me here.  
 I deserve to be.  
 Here.  
 Right now.  
 I deserve to just be.  
 Being is enough.  
 Being is more than enough,  
 I breathe.  
 Stretch these muscles, these tight hammies breathe into my splits  
 nothing remarkable at 26  
 but---  
 Don't you remember being so proud to show your splits  
     to anyone who would watch  
         to anyone who would say "good job"  
             or "wow, you're so flexible."  
                 To your father holding a camcorder  
                     "My daughter the actress."  
                 Watch me s t r e t c h  
                     bend  
                         morphe  
                     change  
                         eager for validation from others



so much that one day I stop stretching  
because it stopped being for me  
when its no longer a neat trick  
until your body forgets how to take care of itself  
your brain tries to take over  
but your heart can't  
or wont  
it just  
aches  
flesh ripped back revealing white meat  
scarred  
not deep enough  
for stitches  
not something surgical  
not something fixed with a pill  
but cleaned with hydrogen peroxide  
allowing all the dirt to rise to the surface  
bubbling  
a release  
a purge  
stinging  
but you pour more  
until the white foam dissipates  
a wound cleaned  
not yet healed  
because that will take time.  
And when you're left with a scab so thick  
you feel 8 years old again  
relieved when you're left with just the scar  
the raised skin  
the reminder  
the memory  
smacking into a fence while roller skating downhill  
slicing open your thigh





**Bird's View**  
Milton Parraga



landing directly on your tailbone  
hearing a few cracks.  
  
It hurts like fucking hell  
to breathe  
to walk  
to eat  
to sit  
to talk  
to feel.  
  
Until today,  
January 1, 2021  
today I will pick up my pain  
acknowledge the hurt  
put back on my skates  
thank my body for getting me here  
to this moment  
to every moment.

And I will stretch  
smoke a bowl  
drink a green smoothie  
manifest  
and be  
because I already am enough.

Not because anyone said so  
because I said so  
because I am a child of something bigger than this brokenness.  
I am not only grief, I am glory.



# Happy Birthday, Bud

Kyle Wright

I accidentally stumbled on a voicemail message from Mom. Wishing me happy birthday. On my birthday. Shattered instantly.

But my pieces refract the most beautiful colors spread on the hardwood floor like this. Prisms like smoke wisps, there then gone. Catch an image of her in me as I shuffle sorely past the mirror. Wiping spilled coffee off the table with my oversized sweatshirt sleeve, her arms are mine. There and then gone. Grabbing snacks stoned at 3 a.m. I am her giggling self, her absent mind and saggy eyes. I have her tendency to wake up slow and cranky. There and then gone. I continue passed the voicemail, her voice lingering inside the headphones like evaporating steam, pluming and fading. I was just trying to flip through my off-kilter beats and half-finished tunes, just trying to clean up my 8-track recorder on my birthday. Forgot I had dumped voicemails on a few tracks to clear space on my phone.

I leave the track untitled, work hard to forget what number it is, and hope I come across it again. There, and then—





**Figureheads**  
R. Trentham Roberts



# Tenants

Nadja Maril

I swore that if I ever became a landlord I'd be different. I would be kind. I would be fair. If you provided someone with a nice place to live, I had faith they'd want to take care of it.

Now, I was one of them. My husband Benny and I bought a cottage located half a mile from Cape Cod Bay. He was a carpenter and I was an artist. If we converted it into two apartments, the rent could help support us.

I looked at Jenny in her thin cotton dress and shivered. Maybe it was the missing teeth or the scared rabbit look she gave when asked if she was single, but I didn't wait. I gave her the key before I checked her references. Our previous tenant had left at the end of September and it was now mid-October. She reached into her battered leather purse and pulled out a thick wad of hundred dollar bills. I took the money.

"That's a mistake," Benny said. "I love you for it, but you are too soft-hearted."

"I'm going to deposit this in the bank," I said. "Or maybe just part of it."

The due date for her second month's payment arrived and I sat on the couch with our German shepherd Maxine staring at our mail slot, hoping I'd hear a click and watch a white envelope float to the floor. The check arrived ten days later. Then it came back from the bank with the letters NSF stamped across the front.

I had to juggle our finances to pay the mortgage. It was too late to find another tenant. We were stuck. When the weather changes in a beach town like Wellfleet, it's mostly the old people that stay.

"Take a chance on me," Jenny had said when filling out her application form.

" 'Take a chance on me' is tenant talk for 'I'm going to screw you,' " Benny said.

At least we had the first month's rent and security deposit. But then came the thumping sounds against the walls and the crying. Only a wall divided our bedroom from hers. I rubbed Benny's shoulder to wake him up. "What is it?" he said, "Want another piece of ass?"

"No. Didn't you hear that?"

"Nothing we can do now, except sleep." He turned over and began to snore.

The next morning by the dumpster, I saw a stack of beer cans and a dented gray Toyota with a broken headlight.

Surf and Turf, that's what we called it, when Darth, the tenant before Jenny, stuck a piece of steak and a lobster behind the refrigerator tucked into the heating coil when he moved out. The stench. It took three bottles of bleach to counteract the smell.

He could have grilled the fillet with mushrooms in a red wine sauce and served the lobster up with melted butter, but he wasted it all, just to get revenge. He was angry I wouldn't renew his lease. When his boyfriend Alan, who was the sobering influence in his life, moved out, Darth started throwing wild parties. Neighbors complained. The rent began arriving late. We complained.

I must have sensed he was evil and unforgiving. He proved it with the Surf and Turf stunt. But before we weren't speaking, before I found the cigarettes ground into the carpet, smelled his urine in the closet, retrieved the fins of the ceiling fan strewn across the deck, we used to have nice conversations about books we'd read. He liked Chuck Palahnuik and Yukio Mishima and I'd talk about Margaret Atwood and Doris Lessing. He told me he had a graduate degree in English, used to be a journalist, but had given it all up to follow his passion for theater. A playwright, director, and actor; he invited me and Benny to come see him perform in the revival of A Chorus Line at the Harbor Theater. He played the character, Bobby Mills. I've heard better singers, but he loved the stage. I think what he really enjoyed was writing scripts.

He demanded I pay for the garden he planted, so I reimbursed him for the seeds, but he dug everything up anyway. I think he's living in Key West.



Finally, after getting beaten up one too many times by her boyfriend, Jenny left one night without a forwarding address, and we were able to rent the apartment to an old lady named Margaret who needed to find a place quickly. Her credit was good. It's just that the 19th century Victorian where she'd been living was being sold. It had a view of the harbor and belonged to a childhood friend of Benny's, who'd inherited it from her grandmother. His friend was selling in order to leave town and I felt sorry for Margaret, who I estimated to be in her seventies.

We repaired the walls and had the apartment repainted. No steps for old Margaret to climb. The rent was what she could afford.

Benny helped her move. He always had a soft spot for senior citizens. She tried to squeeze all her possessions into her new place, but there was no room for what she called her cheval mirror. Full-length, it sat on a frame you could tilt back and forth and there were leaves and flowers carved into the stand.

"Do you think they could sell it?" she asked, "At the consignment shop?" Benny loaded it back into the truck and drove it there.

I used to bring Margaret casserole dishes filled with soup when I made a big batch —vegetable, chicken noodle, lentil—and cut her bunches of roses when they were in season. But the second winter of her tenancy, while we were in Florida visiting Benny's Uncle Mel, she died.

Her son, sporting a buzz cut and a camouflage jacket, came to pack up her things. We'd never met him before. He wanted to know what happened to all his mother's antiques. "I think she sold some of the smaller things over the years at the flea market when she needed money," I said.

"What about the big mirror she had, on a stand, where's that?" he asked.

"She sold it," I said, "At the consignment store on Main Street."

"How much? How much did they pay?"

I turned and walked away. "When you're done, please leave the keys on the table," I said.

Two hours later, I noticed he was gone and I went back to the apartment to lock up. I walked inside and couldn't believe what I was looking at so I just stood there, unable to move. What a mess. All the drawers in her bedroom had been pulled out—old photographs, bills, shopping lists and letters, the stuffed teddy bears that sat on her bed slashed open, her clothes torn off the hangers—everything tossed on the floor. Prescription drugs were scattered on the sink in the bathroom, next to her toothbrush and a broken bottle of the perfume she always wore—Wind Song. I opened a window to air out the place and thought of Margaret, so meticulous with her possessions. At least she wasn't alive to see what her son was really interested in— money and valuables to sell. Or probably she already knew that.

It was early spring. Crocuses and snowdrops were popping out of the ground. I put Maxine on a leash and headed to the beach. It was low tide. The seasonal cottages were still boarded up. I unhooked the leash and let her run across the flats.

I took off my shoes. The sand was cool and damp and I started to scream, all the words I'd wanted to shout at Margaret's son, at Darth, at Jenny and Jenny's boyfriend. Why is everyone so selfish? Why is it always about you? Why do you have to make it hard for everybody else?

When my voice grew tired, I bit down on my lip until I tasted blood. I stood on the beach and radled my head in my hands. I'd lost my faith in human decency and oh how I wanted it back.





**Dreaming**  
Fabrice Poussin



**Krima**  
Lucia Herrmann

is women clad in several gold chain links  
one of a santo  
and another with a name that ends in -ellis or -ia

is croquetas for breakfast  
nothing makes sense in this food world order

is shrines drenched in mojo  
bitter orange, whole bulbs  
of garlic

is inevitable dancing  
salseros y salseras apareciendo de nuevo,  
after a hefty serving of pork

is endless tiny cups of froth-topped café  
but only when Ceci makes it  
she's not afraid of the sugar  
mixed with bustelo, pilon, llave or  
whatever was on sale at sedano's

is planning a mass exodus  
from a city that never wanted you anyway

is a borrowed car death trap  
que aveces no funcionan los frenos

is a portrait of La Virgen  
in shimmering mother of pearl paint

is sighing into the sea,  
crying to Krima  
de la Caridad  
y sus hermanas  
as you float one last time  
a salty kiss de adios



is saying goodbye  
always saying goodbye,

never before  
knowing the little Christmas tree  
*el arbolito*  
en la casa de tus abuelos

mantiene la luz  
toda la noche

Meri, Meri Krima  
*we chant your name*





**Borne**  
Emily Bartolone



# Kite and Manjha

## Simra Sadaf

I want you to call me a mad poet when I write a sloppy P in a ruled book that I hide under a black cloth. One that Amma hands me to cover my head, the other that wraps your eyes.

Then I write the letter O chubbier than your niece's dimpled cheeks and hope that one day you would need me the way a kite needs Manjha to kiss the wide sky.

When I stretch E's last line, I remember typing an Eid Mubarik message, the thought of hitting the send button cut my body in half— the religious part believes my 3am prayers would change my Qadr, the other half likes to dip its mouth in raspberry vodka.

The vertical line doesn't touch the horizontal one in my T, the way your lips don't meet when you say Allah Hafiz. I keep seeing your hand waving goodbye at me like the last leaf swaying on its own.

I write R a little farther from T, because a POET is never close to anyone but other poets who romanticised death so much that they kissed it once and for all. One day I'll tell you how Shams walked miles looking for Rumi, how he made his poems/emotions fathomless.

Y looks like the road that's in front of your house where a mango tree is ignorant of coconut tree's presence, or maybe the former is just arrogant because it's the king of fruits, but I crave for your arrival more.

You'll find the notebook full of scattered prayers, sketched jawlines and poetry where God resides in semicolons. I've built your name holier than the mosque my father goes to pray for my destiny, and I to come alive in the last three letters of your name.



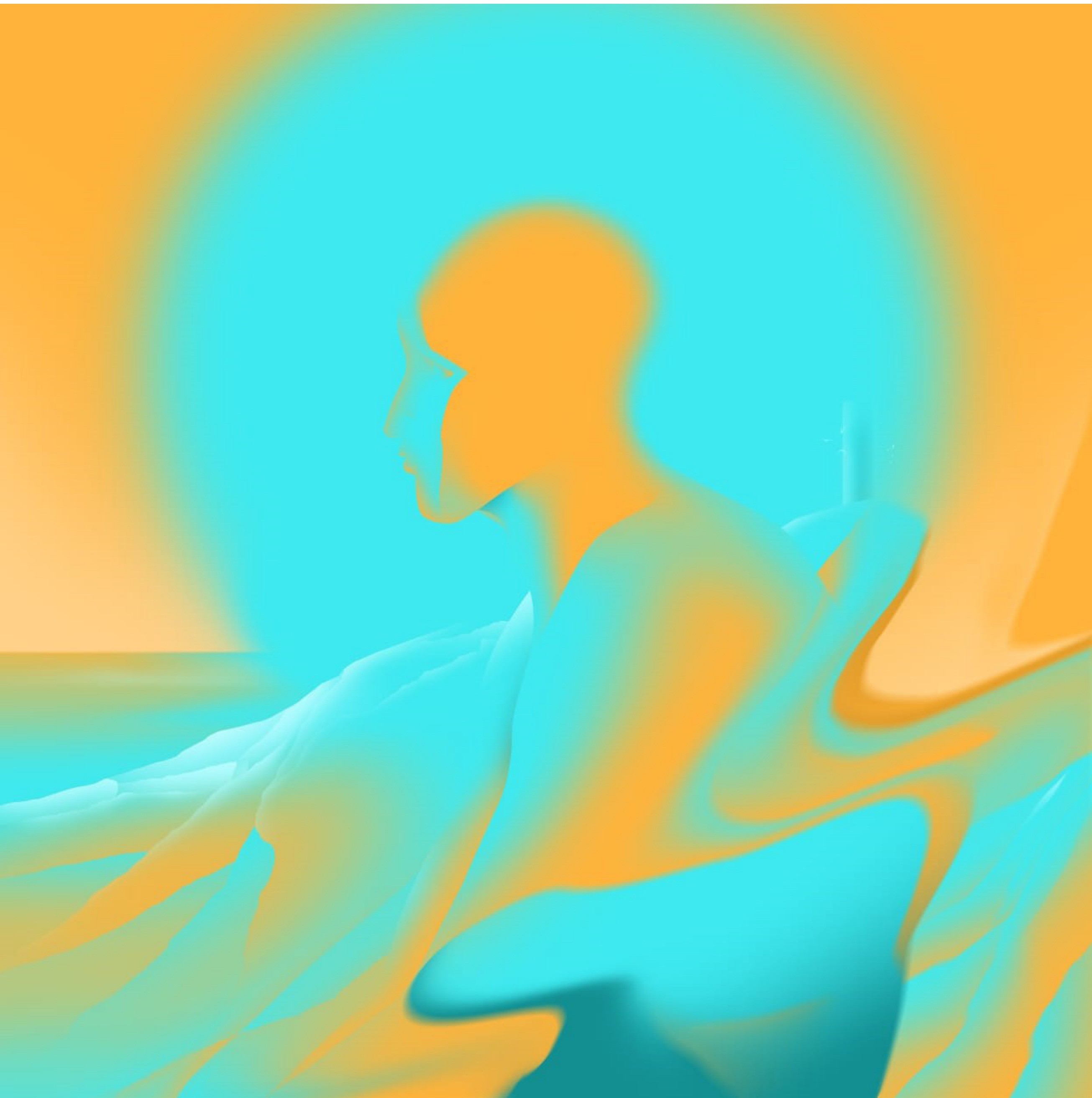
# Poema de Luna, No. 2

Coyoli

Óscar Coyoli's work interrelates his two greatest artistic passions: music and visual arts. Coyoli began his career in 2007 with the release of his EP *Una tarde de domingo en la isla de la Grande Jatte*, followed by *Bemót* in 2012, which was produced by Grammy-award winning Juan Manuel Torreblanca. In 2014, he started a new project with a more abstract, electronic sound, under the name *Mar de Sombra* and released three short-length albums: *El Mar Valiente* (2015), *Nocturno 1* (2017), and *L'Abîme* (2018). He has been honored by UNESCO (Montreal, 2014) and by many Mexican institutions, including the Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo, the Franz Mayer Museum, and Mexico's National Film Archive (Cineteca Nacional). He has performed live in Mexico as well as in the United States and Canada, the country where he currently lives.

**From the artist, on *Poema de Luna, No.2***

Te miré / hasta que la noche nos ahogó  
I looked at you / until we were drowned  
by the night



A desert ballad with melancholy undertones. The metallic sound of a guitar that evokes the banjo and miners singing songs at night, far from home. A campfire song with an amplifier in the middle of a lunar landscape.

Scan the QR code below to listen.





# I Drive Around with Tears in My Eyes

Lupe Mendez

The other morning I fumble around in my head, the debate of listening to Banda music or NPR still tripping around while I am still on hwy 90. It's early morning and the sun peaks a bit and muscle memory takes my hand and all of a sudden, I am in the middle of a StoryCorps recording. It is two brothers remembering their father.

And they speak of him; hard working, dutiful, and one man chokes up about a particular day where his father keeps him from school, instead, a day trip. The father delivers wood bundles for winter and he asks his boy for help. This grown man cracks his voice, the father does not ever shy away from the work. The boy travels with his father that day, reading the addresses to all the homes on his father's list.

He reads all the street names and the numbers for a father with a 3rd grade education. He reads for a father who can't read. He cries for his father, my breath quakes a bit, I pause, I know this man, this boy, this moment.

My father and I, we didn't deliver wood. We filled out progress reports on Galveston Parks & Rec. forms. My father only has a second grade education in his native Spanish. I know what it is to write all his English, without the accent, write his Spanish without the accents. I remember nights after my homework, I would serve as a secretary, a translator, a guide and a pupil. My papa, with Miller Light in his hand, describing to me what the next few days would entail. I learned all the different names of the fields he and his work crew attended to. His only directive, keep the details to the point. I knew the stakes. He had bosses that were looking for reasons to remove him. He would hit me if I asked too many questions. He would get angry if I interrupted him in the middle of a thought. So I learned to be a bruised stenographer.

I think on this for a moment. I know that when we speak of fracasos, it knows no color. We are all brown. We are all black. When we grow up, we will hold our fathers' jaws. We finally speak the way they speak, we place their tongues on the letters and their eyes on the print. We translate the world they cannot recognize. We do this in our youth. We do this in their old age.

We carry their voice boxes with us. We shoulder the burden of manhood before we even know ourselves. To my brothers, mis hermanos, we have always known what to carry; our hands are the same when we build the word humility.





**The Barkeep**  
Vaidehi Kinkhabwala



# THESE THINGS HAPPEN

John Grey

These things happen.

Late March rain and I'm  
driving alongside a swollen river  
which is already overflowing its banks,  
and lapping against my tires,  
with more threatening puddles up ahead,  
but I'm not slowing down  
because I need to be some place  
at a certain time  
though my windshield wipers  
are flapping like the wings of flightless birds  
and visibility is gray and tree-lined  
and suddenly I'm skidding,  
aquaplaning, steering one way  
while the car goes off in  
an opposite direction  
and I'm panicking because  
the river's moving in on me,  
wants to get its grips on  
my two ton of metal,  
when thankfully I twist  
and spin and head off  
towards the far side of the road,  
into pines, press hard down on  
the brake, and stop, near-sideways  
on a wet but not flooded surface  
and with just a scrape on  
the passenger side door  
like a notch in a gun of near misses.

These things happen.

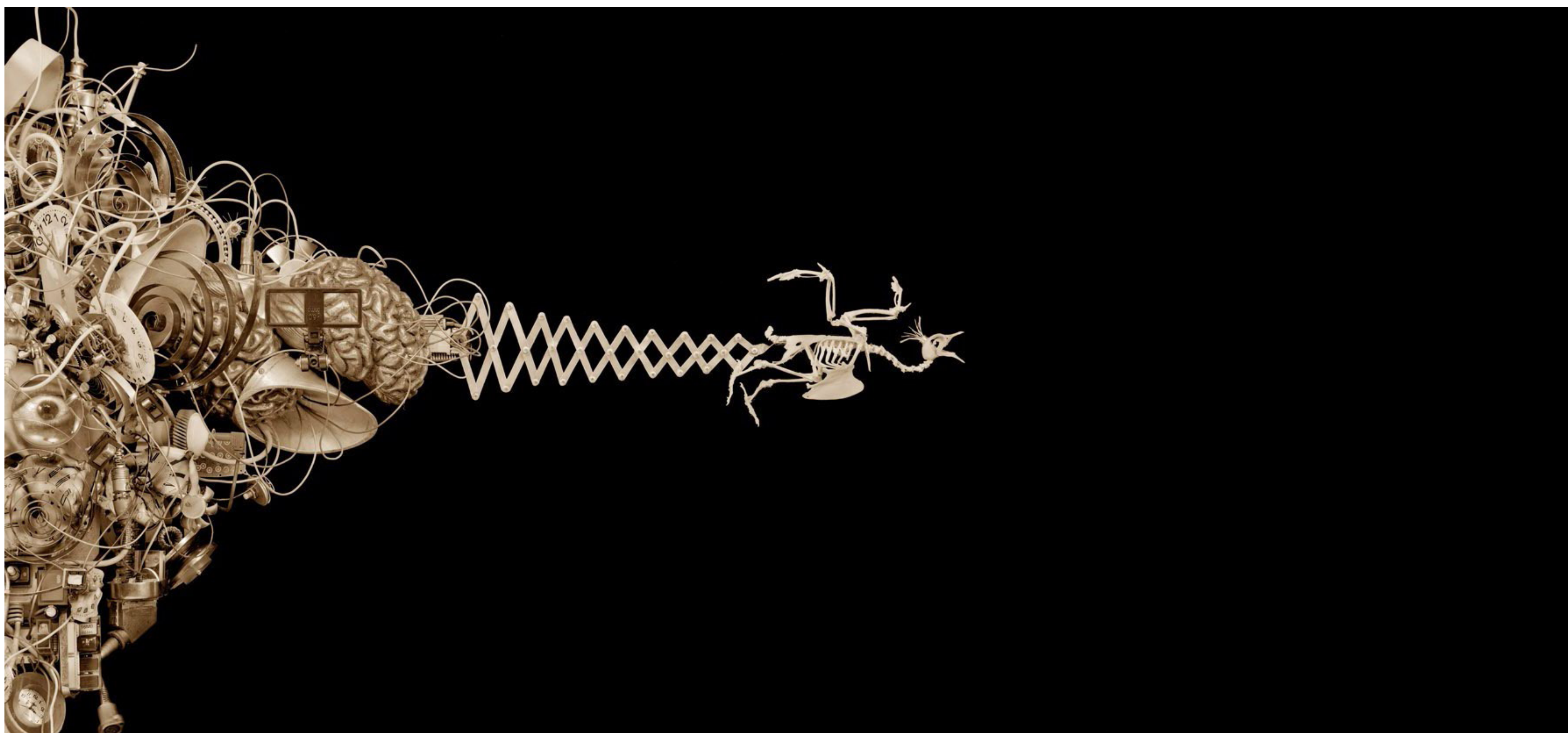
I could have drowned,  
instead I sat there in my car  
until rescue came.

I felt foolish and ashamed.



But I was pleased that these things happen.  
Because there's other things, much worse,  
that only happen once.





# Time Machine

Ivan Isaev



# Completely Candid, an Interview with Justin Jannise

Miranda Ramírez



The best distraction of fall 2020 was the chance to sit down with Justin's book, *How to Be Better by Being Worse*. Between the pandemic and a tumultuous political season, this part of the world felt a bit bleak. To beat the struggle of being trapped indoors with loved ones, I dove headlong into this vivacious little romp-like a cynic to hold your hand or hair back, all while quipping wit so quickly it may cut you. I have the joy and privilege of knowing this poet socially and used his impending book release as an excuse to pick his brain.

MR: Was there a key moment when you were like, "yeah, I'm going to be a poet?"

JJ: *I remember the first time somebody called me a poet in my presence. It was a few days before I started my MFA program, and a sec-*

*ond-year student said, "Oh! You must be a first-year poet." I think I laughed, then blushed, and then walked away, scratching my head, because "poet" always sounded to me like something one aspires to be. I'd been writing poetry seriously for a number of years, and I'd moved across the country to study it, but I'd never thought to call myself a poet until I basically had to use the word to introduce myself. I couldn't let people walk away with the impression that I wrote fiction.*

MR: Was there any other career choice you would have considered?

JJ: *A long time ago, I worked a summer internship at a marketing firm in Houston, and I was absolutely miserable. Bored out of my mind! I would take two-hour lunch breaks and wander around the aisles of Target. I'm a first-generation college student whose plan was to get educated to get rich, but that summer, I learned that playing all day in a corporate sandbox, chewing on corporate granola bars, and spitting out corporate buzzwords would KILL my SOUL. I hadn't cared much about my soul or even really believed I had one until I felt it being strangled by 9-to-5 chains. It was a crisis. I cried in front of my mom, and (being the best mom ever) she told me never to do anything like that stupid marketing job again and just go be an English teacher. Fuck 'em if that's not ambitious enough for some people.*

MR: So, I know you were in both the Yale and the Iowa Writers' Workshops? what was that like? and how was coming to Houston for your Ph.D.?

JJ: *I'm not going to lie—Yale was incredible. It's hard to summarize what it was like. I mean, it was also college. And coming from rural Texas, I knew nobody who could've prepared me for it. Literally, Yale's admissions team didn't interview me because there were no alumni within a certain radius of my home address. Yale did a lot for me—it introduced me to some of my best friends, it gave me the freedom to be a huge gay nerd, and boy, oh boy, the teaching and the resources (the libraries!) were just...interstellar! Galactic! Amazing! I've all but made it my life's goal to put as much of what I took from Yale back into the world. However, when I visited New Haven for my ten-year reunion, I quickly realized how much pain and frustration I'd either forgotten or buried. I think I repressed it while I was a student there, too. It will surprise nobody to hear that there are*



many highly toxic people in the Ivy League—largely students and alumni, I'd say, more than academics and administrators. Of course, there are bad apples in every barrel. Talk about microaggressions! There were students whose parents worked in the White House who'd complain of "looking poor" because their sweatshirts came from the Gap. Freshman year, I had to endure watching a group of so-called "smart kids" look up every other freshman's home address on Zillow (or something like it) so as to compare the extraordinary wealth of one another's families. And then there was the cliquishness that divided folks so predictably along the lines of otherness"—and it was depressing to see that ten years later, virtually nothing had changed. I'll never go to another reunion. They're just fundraisers, anyway.

As for Iowa, I'm also ambivalent. I seem to have had a unique experience in the sense that the poetry faculty enthusiastically supported my writing, whereas most other students did not. In any workshop setting, this "teacher's pet" effect can be awkward, but the Iowa Writers' Workshop is so much more than what goes on in the classroom, and while you might assume that the dominant culture was snobby and elitist like Yale, I found nearly all the grad students at Iowa to care much more about writing than anything else. Among the fine arts, I think writing is the most democratic since it requires so few supplies and so little specialized training—relative to, say, landscape painting or classical piano. I was a fish out of water in my hometown because I was creative and curious. I was a fish out of water at Yale because less than a hundred years later, I'd have been shining everyone's shoes. I was a fish out of water at Iowa because while I took the craft of poetry very seriously, I didn't take myself that seriously. That's probably what made my work attractive to ye olde professors—they'd gotten tired, understandably, of a new crop of punk kids coming in year after year claiming or pretending to be the next Rimbaud or Berryman, when the truth is that we all try out the same "radical" ideas or techniques independently of one another. I've actually taught long enough by now to see certain episodes as reruns. Very little of what I've written, by the way, has been published. If I had to estimate, I'd say less than 1%. I think the worst workshops are ones that assume that any bad draft can be salvaged. I had a friend, a painter, who took this intensive painting class in France. Students wore themselves out painting all day long, and when night came, they burned everything, no matter how good or bad. I'd love to lead something similar with poetry. The good news and the bad news are the same: we are all capable of bad writing.

This is all to say that I've never felt more at home in a writing program than I do at UH. Of course, there's plenty to bitch about, but generally speaking, I'd say I feel understood and supported by both the faculty and the student body. It's no-nonsense most of the time. The undergrad population is the most diverse I've seen. And our professors for the most part seem truly to embrace the art of teaching.

MR: We met through the UH program, I was an undergraduate, and you were the editor-in-chief of Gulf Coast, and I remember thinking, "whoa, this gent is grounded and witty." You were always so helpful and approachable. Do you miss that, being an editor I mean?

JJ: Ha! I'll accept "witty" as true, but "grounded"? That's a very generous compliment. Funny, too, since I actually once published a poem called "Grounded," although it didn't make it into the book. If I remember correctly, it was in three parts. The first was about being "grounded" in the sense of being punished, like when your parents make you stay home. The second was about my father cutting down a dead tree with a chainsaw—"grounding" it that way. And the third was about an art teacher, an old friend, who told me she used to be a flight attendant. She's grounded now, I guess. As for me, I want to be grounded more than I actually feel most days. A couple of years ago, I had a whirlwind relationship with a man who projected an air of unshakeable calm. I thought that was so sexy. It turns out he was brimming with chaos; his affect was the only thing he could control. So, of course, it ended in heartbreak—heartbreak so painful that it introduced me to a side of myself that, trust me, was the opposite of grounded. But maybe you're right because I have had the privilege of covering a lot of ground with my own two feet. I've been allowed into some highly elite spaces, but I wasn't born into any of them. I've not traveled nearly as much as I'd have liked, but I have lived in enough shitty places to know when I'm living well. And, well, being a writer is the perfect cover for being an inveterate slut for new experiences.





**Don't Stop Me**  
Polat Canpolat



*I miss being Gulf Coast Editor, but I don't envy those who are doing the job now in these circumstances. It's a tremendous amount of work and responsibility, and I'm glad it seems like you never caught me on one of those rough days when it just felt like I'd never get out from under the piles and piles of planning, reading, e-mailing, and so on. I was really lucky to have worked with Robbie and Paige (the other two senior editors during my tenure), and it's odd to be reminded that among the three of us I might be the most approachable—not because it isn't true, but because when else in my life have I been the approachable one? I'm an Aquarius. And a classic introvert. I think too much. I've been known to weaponize words and keep people at a comfortable distance. So, maybe on some level, I knew that to be a good Editor, I would need to open myself up more in order to embody what I thought the role required. I guess that's just what leadership is: you're always being watched, in a way—watched and judged. And there's one way to let that really play with your head and steer you off course, and then there's a better method that's like, "Oh? You're watching me, bitch? OK, then watch me. Watch me slay."*

MR: So, you're an Aquarius? Does that impact your poetry?

JJ: *I'm about as Aquarius as they come. I've always been ambitious, creative, and independent to a fault. I'd rather spend hours trying to figure something out than ask for help—only to fail or drive myself nuts. Writing suits this side of me because it really can be done alone, mostly.*

*People often assume Aquarius is a water sign, but it's actually an air sign, meaning that I'm a shapeshifter who's difficult to predict, often tough to categorize. My poetry is like that, too—or at least I hope so. I subsist on challenging writing. I like to think. I don't like being told to have thoughts I've already had, again and again. Oprah, Darwin, Lincoln, Shakira—all Aquarians, all so unique and successful that they're known by one name. Virginia Woolf and FDR are also Aquarians and heroes of mine. If I were president, I'd have a hard time leaving after eight years. Close friends and siblings get tired of seeing me win at things. I don't blame them. It's exhausting to have to congratulate the same person every time you see them.*

*But congratulations are honestly the least interesting part of it for me. Sure, I like attention and cherish praise, but if there were a way for me to keep doing the work that I love to do without having to compete, for prizes and fellowships and things like that, I'd take it. It's common to look at someone else's success and think, "Oh, they make it look so easy." What you don't see is the mess that they started with.*

*There's a type of poet who finds "process" immensely interesting—fragments, revisions, that sort of thing. I'm more interested in the best possible versions of what I read. Can I say that without sounding dismissive? I feel like it's an Aquarian attribute, or at least one that's related to those aspects of myself that I've mentioned, to see intuitively all that can go wrong, all that can be mishandled or misshapen, and yet to celebrate each triumph as a triumph. We have ideals because, as human beings, we can never be ideal. I say this as someone who has been in love many times and fallen out of love an equal number of times. We show one another insufficient forgiveness and grace, which is maybe why I want my poetry to be abundantly forgiving, excessively graceful.*

MR: You may feel ambivalent about the experience—but it is impressive that you've been in 3 of the most elite CWP's in the nation, and after reading your book, I can see why. It is chock full of the grounded, near-caustic wit that you've already displayed in the first three questions of this interview. I say the work also feels grounded because the text is approachable to all readers, from the streets to the scholars...not a common feat for a collection of poems. You have a way of making the quotidian pertinent in a very concrete and specific way. It's honest, refined yet gritty, and oh so colorful! I couldn't put it down. Thank you for sharing it with me. That being said, let's talk about the book, *How to Be Better by Being Worse* due out Spring of 2021 by BOA Editions, Ltd. I love the title, and the poem that shares its name—it reads like a personal mantra, is it?



JJ: “How to Be Better by Being Worse,” the title poem from the collection, first appeared in *New Ohio Review*; I’ll start by saying that it was a poem that (a) I nearly abandoned so many times but for some reason couldn’t let go of and (b) was roundly rejected countless times until it wasn’t. As I recall, the editor at *New Ohio Review* called it “Byronic,” which caused me to take another look at the poem to see what the hell he was talking about. I took a Romantic Poetry class in college. I’ve read some Byron. Not once would I have ever set out consciously to write a “Byronic” poem, and I’m still not 100% certain what he meant by that, but I prefer to think that he meant it’s about accepting one’s own recklessness and stepping out of the confines of obedience. I guess it all comes back to the people I’ve loved. Nothing they did—to me or to anyone else—could make me stop loving them, which sounds very sad, but I think it’s the way (I have to imagine) some mothers love their children, for instance. You could fill the New York Public Library with books that tell you how to become smarter, stronger, more beautiful, more virtuous. All I’m saying is that no book can tell you how to make someone love you any more or any less than they already do. And yet from some strange place, we get the very harmful idea that we have to earn one another’s attention and respect—when the reality, truthfully, is that either we have it or we don’t. It isn’t what people do that makes them worthy or unworthy of anything like love. And yet we’re all so terrified, aren’t we, of being unloved? I guess I needed to write a poem to tell myself to be less afraid of that. There are other heartbreaks to be had—other than “he doesn’t love me anymore.” I’m willing to say: grow your leg hairs out, eat a pint of ice cream every night, blow your savings on something you enjoy. You may be surprised to find out that THAT is exactly what somebody new will worship you for.

MR: I know you have a number of impressive pubs listed on your CV: *Copper Nickel*, *New Ohio Review*, but am I correct in assuming this will be your first complete collection that is being published—is this book numero uno?

JJ: Correct. This is my first book. But I did edit four enormous issues of *Gulf Coast*, each of which I treated—from cover to cover—as if it were mine. I’d like to take this opportunity to say that there are many great writers, poets especially, who have yet to publish a book. Editing a literary magazine is a highly taxing and yet substantially rewarding experience if for no other reason than it feels like assembling a brand new book every six months. I didn’t think of it as training for this experience, but I guess in no small way it was. You’ll soon know exactly what I mean—if you don’t already.

MR: Are the poems included from across your academic career (or prior), or are they a body of more recent works?

JJ: Two or three poems date back to the very first semester of my M.F.A. program, which was almost a decade ago. The majority of them were written much more recently, in 2019, which—if you can believe it—was a much harder year for me than 2020 was. It’s no secret that, especially when it comes to making art, our vulnerabilities are our strengths. It’s no secret, and yet it was ridiculously difficult for me to accept. But here’s something obvious, maybe, that also warrants being said: our strengths are also our strengths. Spoken like a true *Aquarius*.

MR: What would you say you were hoping to accomplish with this collection? To publish a book? To offer an authentic reflection? Emotional catharsis? All of the above?

JJ: Did you know that before Freud started referring to his “talking cure” as psychoanalysis, he called it “catharsis”? I’m vaguely aware that some academic somewhere has debunked the whole notion that catharsis is what art aims for. Imagine going to bed with someone who thinks that. On second thought, don’t imagine that. I’m likely stalling either because I don’t really know what I wanted to accomplish or because I don’t particularly like the most truthful answer. Accomplishments feel good, but the best they’ve ever done for me, as







far as I can tell, is keep me going. The worst they've done is reward negative behavior. By the way, I like that you put the word "authentic" in your question. I want to see more people using that word to make meaningful distinctions.

MR: These poems seem to hold together quite nicely—as in the collection's theme feels well-curated, and the sequencing is excellent. Did you have an intention to create this body of work about these particular topics, or did it evolve naturally from your own opinions and experiences? To clarify, were these poems that occurred organically? Did they just so happen to be about the same or similar situations, or did you "think I want to write a body of work that deals with these particular topics," i.e., relationships, identity, family? Would you even name those as your themes?

JJ: I'm authentically thrilled that you think so! I think the best word for how it came together is "organically," but let's not forget that we're using a metaphor here. I mean, obviously, I didn't plant a seed in soil and water it every day. I can't guarantee that any pesticides weren't used. I think the most misleading metaphors are those we frequently use and fail to acknowledge as metaphors. To me, there's nothing "natural" or "organic" about writing a poem or curating a book. If I had to choose, I'd be more willing to say both are wholly unnatural and inorganic, in the sense that a great deal of artifice has been used with the goal of making it feel as if it all holds together. It may not feel that way for some, but I sure hope it does. I'll say that one major difference I've noticed between writing a poem and sequencing a book comes down to your question of "theme." I don't usually think about themes or topics when I write poems. There isn't enough time. I'm too busy trying to coax the lion into its cage, so to speak—throwing out scraps of meat, purring, making promises, and so on. The sequencing process is interesting because now we have an entire zoo on our hands, and it becomes a question of what kind of zoo, which is a question of what kind of experience we might want our visitors to have, knowing that some will follow the map in numerical order, giving more-or-less equal time to the pandas and the gazelles, while others will head straight for the reptiles exhibit and save zero time for the sea otters.

My approach in this collection was to pair everyone up first, based on some clear affinity like a shared image or "theme," then to combine pairs into quads, and so on until I basically knew which poems went together and which were basically loners. I've always been partial to loners, so I figured I'd give them the most prominent places in the collection, working from the principle that it's easier to tolerate rude company earlier in the evening than later. As I shuffled things around, I made a mental note of anything that felt like a "discovery" and tried my best to keep it that way, masochistically reminding myself that—should this particular sequence ever see the light of day—an ideal reader might, by following the map, be led to that very same discovery and go, "Ah. Yes. Quite right." (I guess my ideal reader is a member of the Royal Family.)

I'll illustrate with one such discovery. "How to Be Better by Being Worse" concludes, "Someone will still fall madly in front of you." The next poem in the sequence is called "Falling As Adele," in which the speaker, who's dressed in drag as Adele, literally falls down outside an after-hours bar. In other words, we go from "someone" falling to perhaps the most operatic of tumblers. While the poem does not explicitly say that Adele's wig went flying off, it's possible to infer that it did. Turn one page, and the next poem is "Wigs Everywhere," which turns things up yet another notch. We have not just one wig on the ground but countless wigs—a veritable explosion of wigs!—Wig City!

I'll conclude by saying that not every series of poems in the collection is meant to escalate the drama as these three are. An ideal trip to the zoo provides an outlandish spectacle as well as moments of quiet contemplation; there are opportunities for learning and, at times, a healthy dose or two of conservationist propaganda. And for better or for worse, my zoo doesn't have a gift shop.

MR: Did getting a Ph.D. change a lot for you—daily living, publishing, teaching, etc.?

JJ: It's easy to forget, once you're in a creative writing program, that there are writers who never really go



that route, and there are even those who've made careers in writing without having gotten advanced degrees in creative writing. Sometimes those writers (and others) make a big fuss about how workshops and MFAs (and now PhDs) ruin originality and promote uniformity, but my take is that it's always easier to make such claims when one hasn't really been a part of them. I know that's not the question you asked, but I think it's been valuable to me to have spent as much time-I think, an equal time, more or less-outside of academic writing programs as I have been in them. I took three years "off" between my B.A. and my M.F.A., and three years again between my M.F.A. and Ph.D. Those were difficult years, but I think they made me a better citizen of the world and gave me a broader perspective about my place in it. If nothing else, those years taught me how to be grateful and not take for granted ANY time I could steal, in which my only job was to enrich my understanding of literature and advance my writing practice. Also, it helps to have friends. I don't simply mean "connections." I mean people who, like me and you, are compelled to face questions related to our own vanishing-how briefly a certain kind of joy can last, how fragile a certain kind of intellectual or artistic freedom can be. I'm lucky that I've gotten a second and now a third chance to carve out so much time for such joy and freedom, thanks to the M.F.A. and the Ph.D. It's not lost on me at all how few people are afforded this opportunity, nor is it lost on me how many people with these opportunities squander them or take them for granted.

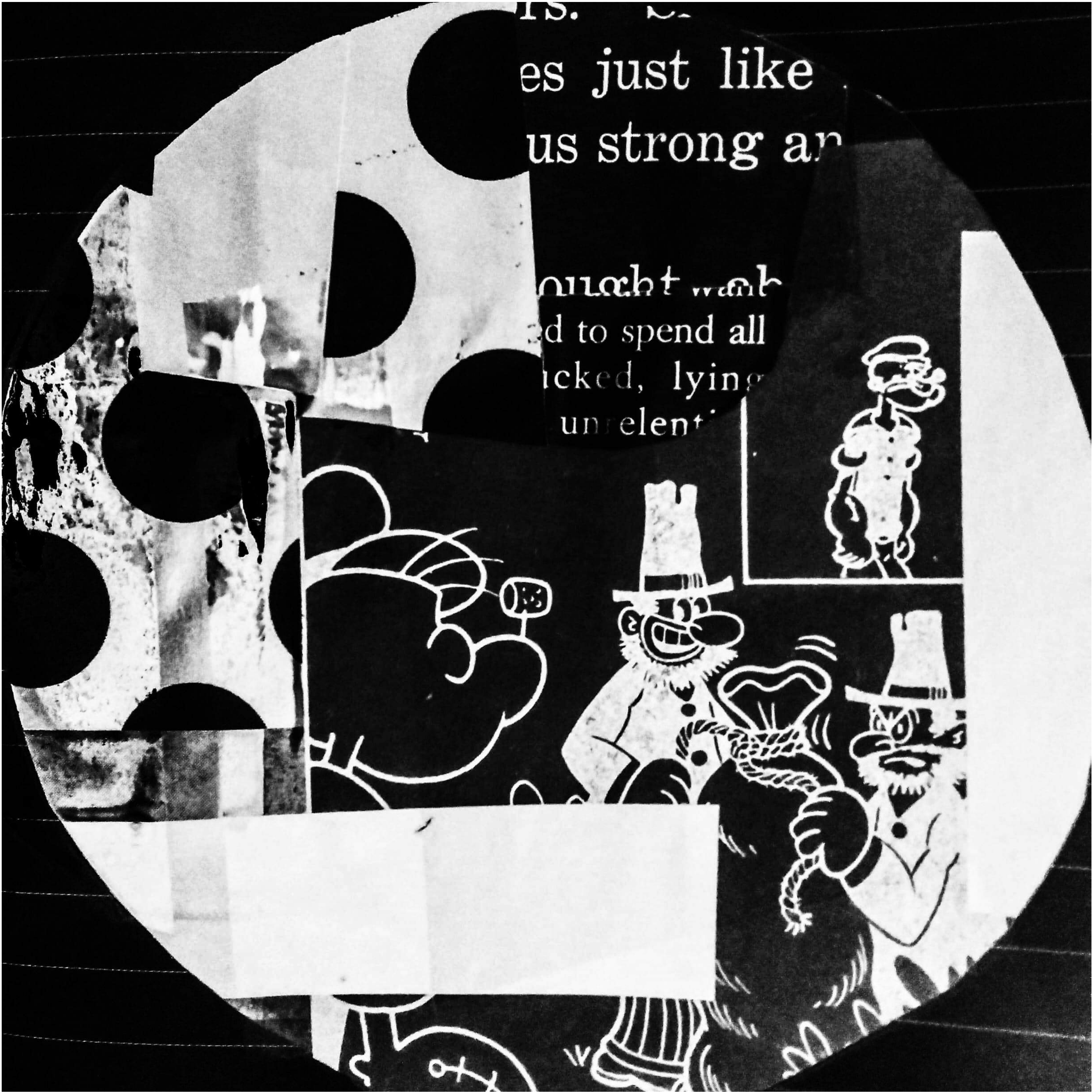
MR: Will you miss school? Are you planning to continue life in academia?

JJ: There are certain things about school that I will not miss, especially now that I've spent so much time teaching, and once you get a "peek behind the curtain" or learn "how the sausage is made," it can be frustrating to play the part of student yet again, to find yourself yet again angling for validation or approval or whatever else you're seeking. Personally, the more time I've spent in and out of school, the less immediate rewards have mattered to me, and yet (astonishingly! ironically!) the easier such rewards have been to come by. I seem to remember having to fight harder as a high school student and college undergrad for the grades I wanted and for the accolades I thought I needed. I'll be the first to admit I like approval, and I seek attention, but in a creative field, there isn't much to be gained by simply "cracking the code" of what this or that professor, editor, institution, peer, or whoever wants from you. They're all as fickle and complicated as we are. Perhaps somebody should write a paper on the erotics of academic life-the elaborate courtship of it-how important it is to appear indifferent to success while being secretly obsessed with it. I worry that academia is trending in the direction of being hostile to the kind of free thinking that made me want to be a part of it in the first place, but I see no way to reverse such a trend from the outside. I worry more about it becoming an environment that can no longer be hospitable to the very people who can flourish within it and make such flourishing a more available possibility for others.

MR: What's next?

JJ: All summer, I worked on a bunch of short, quasi-rhyming poems that I guess you could call epigrams, though they're not strictly epigrams. A topic I'm interested in (if you want to call it that) is embarrassment. We think of it as a private emotion, but its etymology, and the early history of its usage, involves something more public, more theatrical even; to know what I mean, just consider the idiom "an embarrassment of riches." I've also been thinking a lot about the wind. I know! But I wouldn't be the first poet to have far too much to say about the movement of air if that's really all there is to it. I suspect there's rather much more.





**Untitled**  
Shane Allison



# Satie: Gymnopédie No. 1

Juan María Solare

Pianist & Composer Juan María Solare (b. Buenos Aires, 1966) is a musician that opens scarcely travelled paths; his music traces a line that subtly connects art music with light music, and instrumental sound with electronics. He has studied with Kagel, Fritsch, Lachenmann, and Stockhausen, and he works in genres such as post-tonal music, chamber music, electroacoustic, tango, and film music. Solare teaches at the University of Bremen and at the Hochschule für Künste. He has performed recitals in Argentina, Germany, London, and Scandinavia. He is also editor of four piano albums for Ricordi (Universal Music) and a fifth for Peters Verlag (Leipzig).

## From the artist, on Satie: *Gymnopédie No. 1*

Satie: *Gymnopédie No. 1*, performed by Juan María Solare (piano), has been released through the label Janus Music & Sound, with artwork by the British artist Alban Low, one of today's best London artists.

This iconic piece by classical composer Erik Satie (1866-1925) was recorded at the studio of the Freie Musikschule Bremen Nord (Germany) on a Yamaha grand piano, with engineer Alexander Derben.

Satie composed the three *gymnopédies* in 1888. The word *gymnopédies* was derived from a festival of ancient Sparta at which young men danced and competed against each other unencumbered by clothing. The name was a (presumably) droll reference to Satie's gentle, dreamy, and far-from-strenuous piano exercises. (Satie is known to have introduced himself as a *gymnopédiste*.) The *Trois Gymnopédies* are the best-known of Satie's piano pieces.

Erik Satie is a major influence for Solare's style (and with whose music he is well-versed).



Scan the QR code below to listen.





## Art Contributors

The work of painter **Emily Bartolone** is grounded in shape and color, yet informed by ideas of the mundane, the awkward, and the jovial that surround everyday life. Informed by contemporaries such as Bernhard Buhmann and Amy Sillman, along with the late Richard Diebenkorn, Bartolone celebrates the playful and human qualities of painting through her use of amorphous shapes animated within the picture plane. Acknowledging that life is not always cordial, she places within her satisfying surface moments of tension, in the form of an abrupt mark, a disparate color, or a shift in scale. Creating space within her work through her use of analogous colors and contrasting textures, Bartolone leans into the traditions of painting and its role as a window. Using that idea to take her viewers outside of themselves for a short period of time, she hopes to offer a break from the distractions of daily news, technology, and life. Her formal usage of shapes and color transform into something more tangible, adding an ambiguous sense of familiarity to her work all the while challenging the history of masculinity within geometric, abstract painting by inserting soft, rounded forms into it. Bartolone, originally from Massillon, Ohio, obtained her BFA from the University of Dayton in 2019, and her MFA from Kent State University in 2021. Her work has been seen in publications such as Art Hole Magazine, London, ENG, and Okay Cool Magazine, New York, NY. Within her career, she has shown at the Cincinnati Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, OH, Felsenhaus, Cincinnati, OH, The Contemporary, Dayton, OH, the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust, Pittsburgh, PA, the Oceanside Museum of Art, San Diego, CA, and the St. Louis Artists' Guild, St. Louis, MO, among others.

**Polat Canpolat** was born in Ankara in 1980. He completed his art education in Dokuz Eylül University, Faculty of Fine Arts, Scenography Department in 2005. He continues to design stage sets, costumes, puppets and masks that she started when she was at school. Working with State Theaters, City Theaters and private theaters, the artist has also worked as an art director for many music videos. The artist whose works have been exhibited in dozens of national and international group exhibitions to date, has opened seven personal exhibitions. The artist, who continues his art and design productions in Istanbul, has been working as the head of the Stage Set Design Program at Halic University Vocational School for three years.

**Greg Edmondson** was born in Durham North Carolina. He earned his BFA from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville and MFA from Washington University in St. Louis. He is the recipient of numerous grants and awards including Fulbright and DAAD fellowships to Germany, and residency fellowships to ARTPARK, the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, Black Mountain College, the Santa Fe Art Institute and Kuenstlerwerkstatt Lothringerstrasse. His first book of paintings, RIVERS and BEASTS, was published by Spartan Press in 2017. His second book, After the Flood, was published by Stubborn Mule Press in 2019. Greg has exhibited widely throughout the US and Europe. Recent solo exhibitions include Sisyphus Calls It Quits, The Smalter Gallery, Kansas City MO, and Living Like Animals-paintings from a truly wild place, Columbia College, Columbia MO. His collaboration with the Physicist and Poet Agnes Vojta titled DARK MATTER will be exhibited at The Smalter Gallery in 2021. He may be reached at [www.gregedmondson.net](http://www.gregedmondson.net) or [voegel60@gmail.com](mailto:voegel60@gmail.com)

**Van O (Ivan Isaev)** was born at 1975 in Moscow, Russia, graduated the biological faculty of the Moscow State University and the School of dramatic art of An. Vasil'ev. He worked as the actor at the theaters "Dance-model" and "Mystery of costume", as the club designer- created the collections of vanguard fashion "200 volt ago or Some aspects of individual luminosity...", "The Circus", "Viniloplastika". Art-photographer since 1999, the member of Russian Union of Art Photographers since 2009 and of the Creative Union of Russian Artists since 2015. Works are in the collections of Russian museum of St. Petersburg, Moscow Museum of Modern Art and private collections. The heroes of the series "Werewolves" are mythological, religious and art char-



acters bearing distinctive proteistic features. The constant metamorphoses, loss and finding of own person, change of physical appearance, historical and social role, mask or image becomes the defining principles in their biography, forms round them changing, fluid, game reality. During my studying of entomology at the biological faculty of the university I devoted a lot of time to the study of complete and incomplete metamorphosis of insects – and photography, with its charm of documentary, allows me to accumulate my scientific, theatrical and design experience in one work. The series was shot on a black-and-white film and printed on a color paper. Sometimes I apply multiple exposure, and also introduce external images into the frame – graphics, scientific and technical schemes. Printed on various media (paper, textile, transparent membrane), they help to achieve the effect of collage, an unexpected transition from volume to plane. <https://vanoart.wixsite.com/photo/werevolves>

**Vaidehi Kinkhabwala** is a Multidisciplinary Artist who grew up in India. She received her MFA in Studio Art from Montclair State University in 2010. She lives and works in New York City. Bicultural experiences, gender disparity and struggle ensuing from transition to America have fundamentally shaped her recent work.

Fred Lambuth is a data engineer, Unix system administrator, sailor, Aggie, international playboy and bon vivant. Very early in his life he displayed a keen interest in the craft of visual art, which he pursued almost exclusively through reproducing scenes he found in comic books, video games, and the promo art for Warhammer 40k. His skill improves with age yet the subjects of his work have not shifted much since fifth grade. His process involves pencil & ink on paper, scanned into an image file that is painted over with GIMP or Krita. His favorite artists are Edward Hopper, Moebius, Norman Rockwell, and Greg Capullo.

Nick Lee (b. 1996) is a painter and full time student at Kent State University. Lee is based in Kent, Ohio. He is underway in getting a BFA in painting. Lee has shown work in, Ypsilanti, Michigan, Emmitsburg, Maryland, North Canton, Ohio, Kent, Ohio, and the Canton Art Museum. He has multiple printed publications in Kent State Magazines such as UHURU and Luna Negra.

**Candace Meredith** earned her Bachelor of Science degree in English Creative Writing from Frostburg State University in the spring of 2008. Her works of poetry, photography and fiction have appeared in literary journals Bittersweet, The Backbone Mountain Review, The Broadkill Review, In God's Hands/ Writers of Grace, A Flash of Dark, Greensilk Journal, Saltfront, Mojave River Press and Review, Scryptic Magazine, Unlikely Stories Mark V and various others. Candace currently resides in Virginia with her son and her daughter, her fiancé and their three dogs and six cats. She has earned her Master of Science degree in Integrated Marketing and Communications (IMC) from West Virginia University.

**Milton Swami Parraga** is a writer and a visual artist originally from Mexico City. His work has been featured in Mircofiction Monday Magazine. He currently resides in Houston Texas.

**The OtP (The Organism that Persons)** is a queer clubkid / dragthing / performer based in New York City & Brooklyn. OtP has performed and presented work at La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club, Mabou Mines / P.S. 122, The P.I.T., The Wild Project, The Martha Graham Studio Theatre, House of Yes, Dixon Place, Pig Iron (Phil.), Daniel's Spectrum (Toron.), and more. OtP has also worked with filmmaker Todd Verow / Bangor Films on several films including recently Goodbye Seventies, playing festivals internationally and being released for streaming in February 2021. NYU TSOA (Experimental Theatre Wing) 2013. IG / Twitter: @theotp\_\_\_\_



**Fabrice Poussin** teaches French and English at Shorter University. Author of novels and poetry, his work has appeared in Kestrel, Symposium, The Chimes, and many other magazines. His photography has been published in The Front Porch Review, the San Pedro River Review as well as other publications.

**R. Trentham Roberts** lives in Charlotte, North Carolina. After a 40-year career in newspapers, he is navigating retirement while trying to ride out the pandemic. His work can be seen at <https://whimtunnel.blogspot.com/>





**You Guys Want a Waugh**  
Fred Lambuth



## Music Contributors

Chicago-native **Caveman the Wise (Victor French)** is a producer currently living in Los Angeles. Originally a jazz saxophonist, he cut his teeth in the Chicago hip-hop scene before moving west. Caveman the Wise is known for creating original, hypnotic beats and sprinkling in traditional jazz sounds to create something unlike any other. He's collaborated with a wide range of hip-hop and rap artists, including Virghost, Felly, Truth Clipsy, Gatsby the Great, and Kontakz - infusing their old school style with his innovative melodies. As a classically trained saxophonist, you can find him producing beats and composing live accompaniment at venues all around Los Angeles.

**Óscar Coyoli's** work interrelates his two greatest artistic passions: music and visual arts. Coyoli began his career in 2007 with the release of his EP *Una tarde de domingo en la isla de la Grande Jatte*, followed by *Bemót* in 2012, which was produced by Grammy-award winning Juan Manuel Torreblanca. In 2014, he started a new project with a more abstract, electronic sound, under the name *Mar de Sombra* and released three short-length albums: *El Mar Valiente* (2015), *Nocturno 1* (2017), and *L'Abîme* (2018). He has been honored by UNESCO (Montreal, 2014) and by many Mexican institutions, including the Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo, the Franz Mayer Museum, and Mexico's National Film Archive (Cineteca Nacional). He has performed live in Mexico as well as in the United States and Canada, the country where he currently lives.

Pianist & Composer **Juan María Solare** (b. Buenos Aires, 1966) is a musician that opens scarcely travelled paths; his music traces a line that subtly connects art music with light music, and instrumental sound with electronics. He has studied with Kagel, Fritsch, Lachenmann, and Stockhausen, and he works in genres such as post-tonal music, chamber music, electroacoustic, tango, and film music. Solare teaches at the University of Bremen and at the Hochschule für Künste. He has performed recitals in Argentina, Germany, London, and Scandinavia. He is also editor of four piano albums for Ricordi (Universal Music) and a fifth for Peters Verlag (Leipzig).





**raindrop flowers**  
The Organism That Persons



## Poetry Contributors

**Chanel Gomaa** (she/her/hers) is a poet and teaching artist currently residing in Orlando, Florida. She has competed with her poetry on multiple national stages, representing the cities of Deland and Orlando, Florida, as well as her alma mater. You can view Chanel's poetry published on the online platforms Slamfind, Write About Now, and Button Poetry.

**Howie Good's** latest poetry collection, *Gun Metal Sky*, is due in February (2021) from Thirty West Publishing.

**Vanessa Gorsuch** is a Cuban-American New Yorker living in Berlin. When not writing poetry, she's taking photographs as reminders for poems, fiddling with collage art, and empowering preschoolers to remain artists.

**John Grey** is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in *New World Writing*, *Dalhousie Review*, and *Blood And Thunder*. Work upcoming in *Hollins Critic*, *Redactions* and *California Quarterly*.

**Lucia Herrmann** is a cubanita of the yuma kind. Miami-raised and Philly-based, she writes, performs, and collaborates on all kinds of creative projects. She was featured in two 2019 Philly FringeArts productions, has been published in print and online, and is a poetry editor for *Toho Journal*. As an artist-educator, she is dedicated to teaching, empowering, and uplifting individuals and communities through decolonized and anti-racist pedagogy and practice. Visit her website to learn more.

**Jasmina Kuenzli** is an author of poetry, creative nonfiction, and fiction and has been published with *Capsule Stories*, *Pidgeonholes*, and *Literati Magazine*, to name a few! When she isn't writing, Jasmina can be found weightlifting, running, and holding impromptu dance parties in her car. Her life goals include landing a back flip, getting legally adopted by Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, and being a contributor on *Drunk History*. She would like to thank Brenna and Sarah, who hear all these stories first, and Harry Styles, who is sunshine distilled in a human being.

**Anna Maria Morris** is a local multidisciplinary artist currently based in Houston, TX. Despite being a writer for most of her life, Anna Maria didn't start performance poetry until May 2017 after a college professor suggested reading her work at a guest lecture. Since then, she has performed at various open mics, slams, and features. Her most recent performances have been at *Slam Mania II* and *Black Excellence Open Mic* both events hosted by *Write About Now Poetry*. In addition to poetry, Anna Maria is a proud AEA actor with a background in live theater performance. While in undergrad she published an introduction and devising for new play adaptation *Woyzeck, On and On* by Nick Lantz in 2016. More of her work can be found on Instagram @TheArtAnnaMaria and her website <https://www.annamariamorris.com/>

**Simra Sadaf** has finished her Masters in English Literature from University Of Madras. She writes short stories and poems for magazines. She pursued her bachelors in Sociology and has an abundant knowledge about the workings of a society which she incorporates in most of her writings. She reads books of all genre and likes to review them on Goodreads and other social media platforms. She loves the art of storytelling and someday hopes to write something that will leave a lasting impact on the readers. Literature drives her spirit and words churn her soul.



**Elizabeth Train-Brown** is a circus performer and award-winning journalist, studying English Literature and Creative Writing at Lancaster University. She is the Marketing Director for MPN Magazine, Section Editor at SCAN Newspaper, Developmental Editor for Flash Literary Magazine and has delivered talks on LGBTQ+ health at NHS conferences and to Gender Psychology courses for the last five years. In 2020, she won the Literary Lancashire Award for short form poetry and has been shortlisted in competitions by Creative Writing Ink, Voices, and Beyond Borders Scotland, for which she was invited to their Edinburgh festival to perform. Her poetry and short stories have been published in Fly on the Wall's anthology, Planet in Peril, as well as SKYE Magazine, Tastzine, the Qutub Minar Review, Cake Magazine, Horla Horror, Wax Poetry & Art, and Crossways Magazine.

**Kyle Wright** (he/him/his) is a Chicago-based writer, musician and visual artist. His short chapbook Videodrome was featured in Really Serious Literature's Disappearing Chapbook Series, and his first novella, In Control, is forthcoming from Bizarro Pulp Press. His work has appeared most recently in After Hours Press, New Feathers Anthology, and Subterranean Blue Poetry. He has surfed couches across Europe, lived on a mountain in Colorado, worked as a wedding DJ, and played folk music at old folks' homes. He lives with his partner and their cat, Chickpea.





**Still Life**  
Candace Meredith



## Prose Contributors

**Tanya Kelley** has been a Criminal Defense Attorney for 25 years, first in California and Florida and now in Houston. Originally from Kansas City, Missouri, she lives in the Houston area with her daughter and husband and co-parents their blended family of four other amazing children. She is currently completing a memoir; this is her first published piece.

**Nadja Maril** is a former magazine editor and journalist living in Annapolis, Maryland, USA. She has an MFA in Creative Writing from the Stonecoast Program at the University of Southern Maine and her short stories and essays have been or will be published in several literary journals and anthologies including Scarlet Leaf Review, Change Seven, Lunch Ticket, Raconteur, Thin Air, Lumiere Review and Burning Love and Bleeding Hearts. She blogs weekly about writing and life at [Nadjamaril.com](http://Nadjamaril.com) and is close to completing her first novel *Diogo's Garden*. Additional credits include two reference books on American Antique Lighting and two children's books.

**Lupe Mendez**, originally from Galveston, TX, is the author of the poetry collection *Why I Am Like Tequila* (Willow Books, 2019), winner of the 2019 John A. Robertson Prize for Best First Book of Poetry (Texas Institute of Letters). He earned an MFA in creative writing from the University of Texas at El Paso. His prose work has appeared in Norton's *Anthology of Latino Sudden Fiction*, *Aster(ix) Journal*, and *Kenyon Review* as well as poetry that appears in *Tinderbox Poetry*, *Kenyon Review*, *Gulf Coast* and *Poetry Magazine*. He has received fellowships from CantoMundo, Macondo, and the Crescendo Literary/Poetry Foundation's Poetry Incubator. He is a co-founder of the Librotraficante Movement and the founder of Tintero Projects, a grassroots organization that provides a platform for writers of color, especially in the Latinx community, along the Texas Gulf Coast and beyond.

**Miranda Ramírez** is an activist/artist residing in Houston, Texas. You may find her publications in *Ripples in Space*, *Glass Mountain*, *Shards*, *The Bayou Review*, *Coffin Bell*, and *Puro Chicanx Writers of the 21st Century*. She is a founder and contributing editor for *Defunkt Magazine*, an international publication that seeks to uplift marginalized voices. Her visual works have exhibited at Williams Tower Gallery, Tea+Art Gallery, and Insomnia Gallery. She is currently drafting her first novel. Instagram: [@ramirez.miranda.n](https://www.instagram.com/ramirez.miranda.n), Twitter: [tellme\\_to\\_smile](https://twitter.com/tellme_to_smile)

**LeChell "The Shootah" Rush Honorat (R. H.)** is a black queer poet, photographer and filmmaker from Brooklyn, New York, by way of Houston, Tx. She is a 2020 Women of the World Poetry Slam Finalist and author of the chapbook *"Cause Therapy Ain't For Black Folks."* Raw and honest, her work is rooted in telling the stories of blackness, queerness, womanhood and mental health advocacy. Her work can be found on Write About Now Poetry.



