

Gambling the Aisle



Issue 13

Masthead

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Gambling the Aisle 2017 Chapbook Contest Winner

Way Stops Americana

Joyce Goldenstern

Joyce Goldenstern, a Chicago resident, writes fiction and adapts folktales, and tries to live by the wisdom therefrom. She is the author of a collection of short fiction *The Story Ends - The Story Never Ends* (ELJ Editions, 2015). She updates her website on occasion: jkayindexing.net



Chapbook Runners up:

An Ombre Of Absence by Rose Maria Woodson

On Making a Golem by Wes Jamison

Decade by Shannon Bushby

Amo e Canto by JC Reilly



Tea by Jude Harzer



Eastern State Penitentiary Hospital Wing by Erika Arato

Dropped

Before leaving us at one park or another
my mother wrote our phone number
in permanent blue ink on our three wrists
swung open the VW doors, her own hurry
and we unstuck our legs from vinyl
watched that tiny insect car
drive out of our eyes

when we needed saving
strangers called her from payphones

like the time I floated past
the bobbing rope of the swim area
lakeweeds skimmed my back, lily pads parted
skin frying in sun's fair damage
a man shouted then lifted me, crisp and crying
as I saw the blisters bubble
up like making rice

still she dropped us
with hot dog money and towels
sometimes we'd stay together
on the swings three in a line
me pushing Suzy first
but sometimes we'd twirl apart
split our fears across the park

the day Suzy let herself be pushed
on the merry-go-round by the nice man
doing as I taught her, lie on your back,
hold the bars, head at diamond metal edge
look up to see safe things like sky
and clouds spin, pretend it's happy to mix
up the world even further

they tried to make her describe him,
time of day, how far he opened his coat,
and why we had to wait so long for our mother,
so long in that chilled police cubicle
but we couldn't explain even the simplest
of things, the way the world was unspooling
before our sunshot eyes

Natalie Jones

The Day We

Saw the place where we all saw that day

In a wave

No, an expanse

No, it was

Is this? This is?

Assign a color to the air

The brain fills

is filled with []

Voice breaks the sound of
an impenetrable sound

Before the Sun Rose

Denise Massingill

She found our first home the day before I was born, meeting the realtor out front of an old victorian house, then following behind to a smaller unit, pink with green trim. The woman's eyes gazed down at my mother's stomach.

"A girl?" she asked.

"Yes."

The realtor nodded and looked toward the alleyway. In the distance, police sirens echoed off bricks.

"What would you think about getting a dog?" the realtor asked. "We don't normally allow pets, but we could make an exception."

"Dogs eat babies." my mother said. And it was true, sometimes.

There wasn't much to move in. My uncle drove over from San Pablo in the morning and helped my mother set up the crib in one corner of the bedroom.

"From Louise," he said, laying a blue blanket over the crib mattress. "We have more, but she's not ready . . ." His voice trailed off.

The stillborn. It was supposed to be Leon's blanket.

At night, alone, my mother lay on a twin-sized mattress. The house was hot and the streetlamp lit up the bedroom window, casting shadows of bars across the floors. She pinned Leon's blanket above the window. My blanket.

When her stomach began tightening, my mother turned on her side and cursed the name of the man who did this to her, or maybe a few names because she wasn't ever sure. And somewhere between those screams, I emerged, purple and fat, screaming at her, relentlessly wanting milk, craving songs, needing that switch to click on when someone becomes a mother but it never did.

In the morning, the realtor returned and found a baby curled in a dog bowl on the front steps, howling. My mother was gone before the sun rose.

Girl Child

Lena Ziegler

On a Tuesday morning I stained my underwear a streak of rust no one could explain to me quite like Adrienne. You leak because girls leak when they want babies. I was ten and I didn't want babies, and I didn't quite understand how wanting babies could explain the way I leaked, but I understood that being a girl child meant something special was happening to me and everyone else was too afraid to tell me what that was. I could sense the earthly wisdom of fifteen-year-old Adrienne who knew so much I never would, who experienced the world through splintered perception I envied for the purity of it. I was ten but I could recognize the dewy majesty within her, the pungent ache of her hunger when she grinned at Robert, the pharmacy tech, each week my mother took us to pick up Adrienne's prescriptions at Walgreens, all running out at different times throughout the month. To our mother, nothing Adrienne did amounted to anything other than disappointment. She was something to be maintained. Controlled.

No one was prepared for the fury within to take hold of her body like disease.

When I was born Adrienne was five years old and already proven to be broken. Unable to do simple things like hold her urine until it was appropriate to let it go – when some adult would tell her so, pick her up, and place her on the toilet so she could finally relax and release the forceful stream from her little body, sighing relief – out in public Adrienne would force her thighs together bounce on her toes and scream blood-curdling shrieks as if paddle-beaten, or kicked into mushy bruised submission by our father, the disciplinarian every child dreads disappointing. Our mother, ever a well-mannered supporter of etiquette, would scold Adrienne, remind her that she was a girl child with an obligation to politeness no matter the occasion. But Adrienne couldn't help herself. In the middle of the grocery store, in line at the bank, in the booth of a seaside restaurant she would cry out and quickly release, flooding herself the instant the urge came. My parents were ashamed, unable to fathom why their precious girl child would continue to disgrace them this way. When I came along and mastered the skill of peeing into toilets at nineteen months my parents celebrated with a privately catered event.

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From what I could tell there was nothing Adrienne could do correctly. At eight years old, she still threw tantrums, sunk her teeth into the arm flab of her reading tutor, her eyes smoldering orbs of unchecked girl child rage. My mother's muffled sobs leaked through the house like winter cold and I learned to shiver at the sound of them. I could never be Adrienne. I could never be girl child gone wrong.

Smooth-haired, well-behaved, fiercely independent, with a knack for dressing myself, my parents found solace in my tightly-wound perfection, proving them capable of effective parenting. I found solace in Adrienne – a force of earth-crushing magnitude, unwaveringly indelicate, laughing, peeing, howling, punching, biting Adrienne, untethered from any expectation of existing as the girl child they had always wanted. Her face squeezed tight, breathless red frustration with everything: sound, light, color, texture, the entire world she couldn't swallow for the sting of it. She was electrifying.

Robert the pharmacy tech was twenty-three and awkwardly tall with freckled acne I craved to touch through the glass pane of the pharmacy check out window. He was polite and well-spoken if not a little shy as his brown hair fell clumsily across his forehead. My mother's curtness never dissuaded him from waving shyly at Adrienne who grinned lips wet, eyes hazy, tapping her fingers against the glass, leaving behind oily fingerprint signals of her longing. My mother swatted her hands away whispering commands at Adrienne: get a hold of yourself. But Adrienne's gaze was forever fixed on Robert.

For as long as I could remember Adrienne was strictly forbidden from coming into my room, so whenever she managed to make her way out of her own, quietly opening and closing her door, crawling through my parents' room which separated ours, and finally poking her head through my doorway and grinning, it was enough for us to erupt in shrill, sisterly squeals of excitement, waking my parents and defeating the careful stealth Adrienne had mustered. But one night, Adrienne snuck into my bedroom, holding a finger to her lips to keep me quiet, and made her way across the carpet, stifling giggles as she climbed into my bed.

I'm going to kiss Robert, she told me. Why?

Because I love him and I want to touch him everywhere, she said, eyes shining from the street lamp casting a strip of light across her face as she sat, cross-legged on my bed.

I don't think mama will let you. Mama won't even know, she told me. When will you do it? Soon. So soon. I can't wait anymore! She said, almost full voice. I giggled and covered her mouth with the palm of my hand. She swatted it away.

Do you think he loves you too? I know he does.

Two days later at Walgreens our mother parked the car and Adrienne jumped out, grabbing my hand, pulling me with her into the store. Our mother chased behind us.

Don't run! she whispered with all the force of a shout. Girls don't run!

After years of handling Adrienne it was a wonder our mother ever relinquished her hold on us, her girl children always threatening to misbehave. You don't want to end up like your sister, do you? She'd say to me as if all of Adrienne's problems stemmed from poor manners. How could I tell our mother that Adrienne was everything I wished to be, everything I ached for deep in my magma center.

Adrienne stopped running, suddenly yanking me to a stop as our mother nearly collided with us.

Can we look at makeup? she asked. Mother sighed. What do you need makeup for?

We don't need it. Adrienne said. We just want to look.

Mother hesitated, glancing around the near empty store. It was rare for her to even consider this sort of request from Adrienne. But in recent weeks, since that Tuesday morning when Adrienne had helped me with my rust-stained underwear and mother thanked her for it, Adrienne had been uncharacteristically controlled. Fine, Mother said. Don't touch anything. I will be right at the counter so I will see anything you do.

Adrienne grabbed my hand once again, dragging me through the aisles to the cosmetics section. Rows of brightly colored tubes, compacts of pink, peach, and bronze powders, shimmery eye shadows, with names like 'café au lait,' 'denim dream,' and 'pearly pink,' metallic gold and glittering blue bottles of nail polish dazzled us. Adrienne grabbed at everything, knocking them over and onto the floor.

I need something for my lips! She said. Mama said not to touch anything. It'll be fun! She said, ripping open a package of bright pink lip gloss, tossing the

plastic-cardboard casing to the floor. She grabbed hold of a compact, flipped it open and looked at herself, quickly applying the gloss and smacking her lips together. What do you think?

Her eyes glittered as she smiled widely, tossing her hair like a movie star. You look so pretty! I told her. You try it! She said, tossing the gloss to me. I caught it and looked around for our mother, who somehow always managed to be lurking nearby anytime Adrienne was about to get me into trouble.

She's on the other side of the store, Adrienne said confidently. I followed her lead and picked up a compact, opening it to see the reflection of my girl child eyes, lips, cheeks. I unscrewed the gloss and pressed the tiny wand to my lips, carefully coating them in pink. Rubbing them together I watched myself in the tiny compact mirror, examining my eyelashes, smiling, studying my teeth, looking for any resemblance, any proof that I was her sister, that part of us bore the same DNA, the electric pulse that threaded through her, an unstoppable surge of girl spirit.

Adrienne squealed at the sight of me and told me to pocket as many lip glosses, eye shadows, and nail polishes I could. She kicked away the mess of opened packages left on the floor and sprinted toward the pharmacy counter. I ran to keep up. My mother was browsing the nearby vitamin aisle, her back to us. Robert was standing behind the window, sorting through white paper bags of prescriptions, assisting a woman with a walker and oxygen tank. Adrienne skipped to the window and waited behind the woman, bouncing on her toes and waving to Robert. He smiled shyly and gave a small wave. Adrienne squeaked. Mother didn't seem to hear.

When the woman stepped away, Adrienne could barely contain herself.

Notice anything different about me? She asked Robert, her hands locked behind her back, as she swayed from side to side smiling.

Did you get a haircut? Robert asked. Nope, she said, grinning some more. I'm not sure, he said, glancing to our mother, still oblivious. But you look pretty, he almost mumbled. Adrienne nearly yelped in excitement, peeking over at me.

Let me check your prescriptions, he said.

Adrienne stepped closer to the window and pressed her fingertips against the glass. She pulled a folded piece of paper out of her pocket and pressed it to her lips, imprinting it with a glossy pink kiss, and

slid it through the window to Robert. He glanced at our mother then back at Adrienne.

What is that? It's for you, she said. I can't take that, he said. Why not? I could get in trouble, he whispered, his gaze shuffling around the near empty store. It'll be our secret, Adrienne said smiling, tracing circles on the glass pane in front of her, her other hand still extended through the window tapping the note on the counter. Take it, she whispered.

Adrienne! Mother almost shouted, scampering to the counter.

Take it! Adrienne yelled and Robert grabbed the note from her hand shoving it in his pocket.

Mother marched to Adrienne and pulled her hands from the glass pane. What did she just hand you? She demanded.

Robert stammered. What? I saw her hand you something; what did she give you? Robert glanced at Adrienne who was still happy and still grinning widely, slowly shaking her head at him.

Nothing, he said finally. She just handed me this receipt. I guess someone dropped it, he said, showing our mother a crumpled receipt he must have had somewhere on the counter. Mother looked back at Adrienne who just shrugged, unable to contain her delight.

Are you sure? She asked him again. He nodded. She sighed. Fine. Are my prescriptions ready?

Of course, he stammered again finally checking the computer. Adrienne backed away from the counter. Robert looked up, careful not to break his gaze from my mother who had fixed him with such a stare I thought he might burst into flame from its singe. Then I saw it. Adrienne unzipping her coat, her fingers feeling for the buttons of her shirt, quickly undoing them, her impenetrable gaze on Robert. Robert quickly glanced to her then back to my mother. But Adrienne continued until her entire shirt was unbuttoned and hanging open, revealing a small strip of stomach and a tan cotton bra. Robert looked to her once again, his eyes widening. Something in my stomach began to hurt, my magma center unfurling more heat than I could handle and before I knew it my voice was erupting from my lungs and I cried out, Mama! and our mother turned around, her face twisting from shock into palpable rage. She shouted something. I'm not sure what. Adrienne laughed and ripped her shirt open, working quickly to pull it off. Our mother grabbed her, clenching her fingers around Adrienne's arms forcing her coat closed and wrenching her body

away from the counter, dragging her through the vitamin aisle, toward the automated doors at the store's entrance. Adrienne screamed, throwing her limbs in every direction, flailing scarlet fury, her lips quivering venom. Strangers watched in uncomfortable horror as my mother heaved Adrienne through the door, barely able to contain her as Adrienne bit at her, spitting and snarling, rabid as a dog.

I watched as they exited my view. I walked through the vitamin aisle. From outside I could hear our mother shout my name over Adrienne's curdling shrieks. Strangers stared at me, the little girl child separate from her crazy mother and wild sister. I wanted to take my time savoring this moment – the quiet, the calm before I would exit the store and face the fury of my mother, and later the roar of my father's belt smacking Adrienne's bare flesh echoing through the ripple of her tears. As I neared the store exit the chaos outside subsided and I knew somehow our mother had forced Adrienne into the car. Before it was out of sight, I looked back at the pharmacy counter. Robert was staring down at something in his hand, turning it over with his fingers, his mouth hanging open. My stomach flipped as I imagined him looking at me like he had looked at Adrienne, his lip trembling at the splendor of her.

Mother pulled into the driveway and parked next to our house under the crab apple tree dropping decorative pale bursts of browning flowers onto the overgrown gravel. Adrienne sat across from me in the backseat, her body curled in on itself, face buried in the car door. The low jingle of car keys filled the quiet space between the three of us as mother turned the car off, sucking life from the humming engine. We sat that way for awhile – Adrienne in a heap to my side, our mother staring forward eerily silent, me tracing the lines on my palm with a plastic tube of lip gloss I had stolen. Adrienne moaned faintly and mother's eyes flashed in the rear view mirror.

Stop that, Mother snapped and Adrienne's whimpering subdued. Mother sighed. Your father will hear nothing of this. Is that understood?

My eyes locked with mother's in the rear view mirror and I nodded. She nodded in return.

Adrienne? She said. Adrienne turned her head slightly so that she too could meet mother's eyes. Is that understood?

Adrienne nodded.

Mother stepped out of the car and I followed suit,

but Adrienne didn't move. I circled around and came to her door unlatching it for her. When I opened it Adrienne fell forward slightly, catching herself in the door frame. Mother passed us on her way to unlock the side door of the house. Let's go, she said.

It's ok, I whispered to Adrienne. Daddy won't know.

Adrienne nodded, looking up at me through a curtain of wild hair. Her eyes were wet and empty. I stepped forward to hug her and she wrapped her arms around me. She smelled like the watermelon lip gloss she had smeared on her lips before kissing her note to Robert. I let go and stepped back, brushing the hair from her eyes. On her right cheek I saw it – a bright pink welt swelling the side of her face.

Mama? I asked. Adrienne nodded.

*

The following week our mother added a pad lock to Adrienne's bedroom. When it came to rules, typically mother set them, father enforced them, and there wasn't much more to say about it. But when father asked what Adrienne had done mother just said girl children sometimes needed a little more security. He seemed puzzled but didn't question it.

During the day when I was at school Adrienne went about her regular schooling with mother. But when I came home Adrienne was often dismissed to her room and made to stay there until dinner. I never asked mother why but it became increasingly clear whenever Adrienne and I were alone and mother intervened by sending Adrienne to another room, or to sit on a different piece of furniture, that she didn't want us together without supervision. Some evenings after dinner Adrienne and I would sit on the floor together and watch television. She never asked me why I had told on her that day and I never offered an apology. Things felt different between us. Adrienne was distant, removed. Her fire had burned to rubble and nothing was left but the the ashen coals of her eyes.

But a week later as Adrienne and I sat on the living room floor watching our father's football game, mother told us that we would be heading back to Walgreens but that Adrienne would be staying at the house with father. Any trouble you lock her in that room, she said to him. He nodded not looking away from the TV. Adrienne looked at me, eyes wide, her

familiar ember glow pouring out of them.

Let's go, mother said to me stepping toward the door. I pushed myself up off the floor and Adrienne tugged at my pant leg.

Find out if he read it, she whispered so low I could barely hear her. Please.

I stood at mother's side as she browsed the vitamin aisle, but I couldn't keep from watching Robert who had been unsuccessfully avoiding eye contact with me since we arrived. My stomach hurt every time his eyes met mine. I felt myself flush red whenever he caught me staring.

Can I look at the makeup? I asked. I don't think so, mother said. But I won't get in any trouble, I promise. Mother looked down at me, a deep wrinkle between her eyes. We'll look at makeup together another time.. After he called our last name and we stepped to the window, Robert seemed taken aback by mother's uncharacteristic friendliness. She asked him about school and if he he liked working here, so he told her he had graduated in early May and had been hired full time at Walgreens shortly after, and yes, he did like it. That's why I'm always here, he laughed nervously. He handed her a paper bag of prescriptions and she thanked him. Let's go, she said to me before turning to walk away. I waved goodbye to Robert but when I did his eyes widened urgent and he motioned me to come toward the window. I glanced at mother who was already back in the vitamin aisle. I stepped forward.

Where's your sister? He whispered.

I shrugged, not wanting to answer. He peeked side to side then out at the store before sliding a folded note through the window to me. Can you get this to her?

His fingers brushed mine as he passed the note to me. It burned in my palm. Don't tell your mom, he whispered. I shoved the note into my pants pocket and turned away from him, slowly walking toward the vitamin aisle where mother stood browsing, the weight of it sinking each step I took toward her. I wanted to read the note, show it to my mother, tear it into unrecognizable shreds. I wanted to scream, smack the vitamin bottles from the shelves, and watch them roll down the aisle, skidding across the tile floor. I wanted to dig my fingers into my hair, pull it hard, shriek echoes of girl child rage, my voice thundering and powerful, singeing the ceiling, the walls, and floor. I looked back at the pharmacy counter. Robert was staring at me. He smiled. My stomach flipped and all I could do was smile back.



Vitae Essentia by Béatrice Lebreton

The Veneration of Lace

I.

I suppose God spat me out along with his last loose molar,
fashioned my vertebrae from the spine of
a banned book,
overdue heart held together with library paste.

II.

Saint Catherine of Siena vomited
spider silk, the lacerated legs of locusts,
all the lowercase letters in my name,
Rinsed her mouth with my runny dreams,
aspirated our twin tremors.

III.

I, too, refuse the Eucharist at fifteen
bow my head between
hypoglycemia and hypocrisy,
canonize my second vanishing act,
the first time I tossed my sandwich, untouched,
in the trash on the way to recess--
the first disappearance, of course occurring
that off-white witching hour
a nurse unwrapping me from
the crinkled crinoline of my mother's womb,
already crying with colic
misplacing my bassinet
In the illegible light cast over hospital hallways
until an anonymous father found me.

hayride

Surprised to be invited to Marita's birthday party since she only knows her in Freshman homeroom, she asks Daddy to drive her to the city limits where the invitation Marita handed her says the German family lives. When her father leaves he says, "I'll pick you up at ten," and the hay cart pulls into the drive-way.

Chester seems to know that she is his partner since he immediately puts his arm around her shoulder protectively then helps her up the big step into the cart like a doorman and draws her toward a corner of the fragrant hay to lay. She registers the agenda so searches her mind for techniques she has employed in Janet's basement playing spin the bottle or rotating partners to moody Elvis or Paul Anka longing for Diana.

She knows that "basement" group calls her the little bone crusher but is unsure if this is peculiar or erotic so decides to use the same method tonight, grind her knuckle into Chester's neck for an hour as she kisses him hopefully with passion while the horses clop-clop along the leafy, dark suburban streets.

Once back, Marita's parents beam and ask how the hayride went in their German accents. They serve black forest cake with vanilla ice cream and Dad picks her up at 10:00 to drive her back to the city.

That Daring Duo

Both the university teacher and the random member of humanity
Responded to diverse situations, embraced people of ethnicities,
Taught them not to: fear poodles, impregnate minors, spread lies,
Rather, host welcome parties, serve miso soup plus gassy water.

Mostly, they espoused that folks involved with cautious kindness,
No matter the cobblestones running through their kitchens, bring
Love, create families. What's more, all friendships tender shared
Urges, reject "aerial stunts," presumably Padparadscha sapphires.

When answering other peoples' problems, the pair succeeded as
Heroes, of sorts. Their landing pages filled with adorations from
Numerous persons, who fled from kowtowing to their bosses.
For the cost of their projects' labor and delivery, they met fans.

To enable some mental orbits to finish their cycles, they worked
To increase their social standing via discourse, to avail men of
Odd, antiquated mail collection boxes. People, it seemed, liked
Thickly misted organized crime or perpetuated, numbing games.

When visiting middle-aged folks, discounting their assemblages,
They raised no ghost of weight, but tackled redirecting scattered
Thoughts, illusory buffets of calorie-free foodstuffs, comestibles
Whose consumption resulted in accidental death, dire culpability.

Alternatively, if kicking ignoble curs, they produced paperclips,
Profitable changes to finger splints, cotton swabs, ace bandages.
Elsewise, objects from foggy vitrines culled supply house shares.
The offerings of the attractive boys, the toppers, failed to work.

Meanwhile, dedicating extra space for hovercraft balderdash
Resulted in exposure to blighted blooms and incensed spouses.
Would-be linguistic mentors swore to sussing out misconducts
(Judges resolved their design could throttle the full competition.)

Consequently, fresh losses hindered supplying skippers' rum.
Ideas fetching lawsuits lost status, forced prickly supervisors
To usher in high levels of black boxes, mildew, dark moods,
Heavy handiness; people detest resilience, loathe catachresis.

Rachel Caruso-Bryant

Bathroom Ants

They are still marching out from behind the toilet
And into my kitchen in such a line as though
They were passing out sacks of sand
Before the coming flood

Late Arrival/Early Departure

I doubt that the discretely painted
but blatantly floral-fragrant attractive
Chinese female who we saw on the midnight
elevator when we arrived from Hong Kong
last night is washing out her undies
in the turquoise hotel sink this morning
like I am. The totally pixilated apparent
john, pock-marked, warty and questionably
performance-ready probably woke up
with a severe headache and said, "Don't
worry. Put your panties and bra in this
laundry bag. Write my name on the top
and room 2716 and you can get them
done one hour express. Hang around.
Look at the view of the swimming pool.
It's on me," unless she left early.

An Interview with Six Artists

Virginia Mallon

I asked Erika what draws her to these condemned places, and what inspiration does she take away from the rubble of the past?

ERIKA ARATO (aka @Urbexthecat): Growing up, history was my absolute least favorite subject. I was not interested in learning what other people said happened, what I want was to be in a place where history had happened, to be able to visualize the space in which it happened. I am fascinated seeing the things that were left behind in hospitals or houses where I try to piece together a story for myself about the past.

I also love the art that other explorers create inside these buildings. One of my favorite pictures that I have taken has graffiti that reads, “drop out of school, READ books.” This photo was taken in the school of a psychiatric center for children who were mentally ill or handicapped. It taps into the idea that knowledge doesn’t come strictly from organized institutions, but can be acquired through any media.

School is not for everyone, and no one should feel obligated to force themselves is the message I am getting from this artist.

Another photo I took in the same psychiatric center shows two distorted faces looking at each other exchanging the words, “What is insane?” and “What is normal?”

These are simply words that society gives meaning to. What one person thinks is insane may be normal to another person. All those that were in this center were deemed “insane” or abnormal. It is this kind of art and this atmosphere that pulls me in and makes me want to continue to search.



Drop Out of School, Read Books. by Erika Arato



Dentist Chair by Erika Arato

Look into My Eyes by Jude Harzer is a magical mix of symbolism, calling out a larger story behind the portraits, revealing dark secrets and extraordinary faces. I asked Jude about the inspiration for her work.

JUDE HARZER: *When asked about my paintings, I often respond by saying that, "I paint who I am." My recent subjects are indeed a reflection of my ongoing investigation of personal memories and identity. Although they may seem emotionally enigmatic, I rely on the eyes of my subjects to engage the viewer and reveal emotions that might otherwise remain masked.*

Recollections of my childhood home as a dark, unsafe and noisy place continues to inspire my work but does not necessarily dictate the content of my paintings. I recall being a silent, invisible and very interested observer of adult behavior. My perception was most definitely skewed by fear and a grave sense of helplessness but I watched and waited with the keen eyes of a confused child craving stability and understanding.

I remain to this day, captivated by people, their facial features and body language, knowing that appearances often conceal the inner life of the individual. Eye contact is one of the most profound modes of communication, prompting intimacy and connectivity. However, when a direct gaze is uninvited, anxiety and aversion may result. I suppose my choice to portray my subjects staring, is a deliberate attempt to command interaction between sitter and viewer.

I am always intrigued that when I portray adolescent females in particular, a much more intense response is elicited. Perhaps it is my subconscious challenge to have others see beyond the surface, to look into my eyes and to know the story of a life lived. It is within these stories that the genuine richness of human experience and existence lie.

I paint mostly in oil. My figures dominate the space. I do not always know how the paintings will unfold but they typically begin with a subject whom I have photographed for reference. I rarely stay true to the likeness of my sitters but they provide a resource for light, posture and expression. I have a wealth of models, including my own daughter, who I photograph because they simultaneously represent innocence, vulnerability, strength and sensuality. I am always drawn to their eyes. I know their stories. This matters to me as I work. And so I invite you, to look into my eyes



Crowning Glory by Jude Harzer



The Wait by Jude Harzer

Béatrice calls upon lineage and legacy in her *Threads of Thoughts*. She shares with us the story behind the symbolism and the many faceted traditions influencing the creation of *Au Fil de la Parole* (Threads of Thoughts).

BÉATRICE LEBRETON: *My process of art making has always be driven to tell a story. I find my main inspiration in my multicultural heritage, researching African and other ancient cultures for histories and traditions. I aspire to take the viewers on a spiritual journey, to let them marvel, contemplate the images and find part of their own spirit and culture.*

It is a story with layers of narrative, revealing the passage of time, history and dealing with the female image, women's position, contribution and identity. Sometimes it pertains to women of African ancestry and other times to women in general. So the work is political as it makes direct references to these struggles. It also develops into the narrative, creating stories from a modern "teller".

I explored my journey as a woman of mixed heritage in search of a sense of belonging, so fragile in the diaspora. I looked to mythology, Science, Nature as they exist in every culture and are timeless themes. I like to address issues metaphorically, rather than in a more direct or obvious way.

Different materials are used (beads, threads, fabric, shells....): I am interested in the provenance acquired by materials in their original form and by the history they retain. Patterns, traditional symbols, textiles.... act as a trigger for emotive response and add a tactile touch. They are painted "statements" that illustrate ideas about kinship. Issues become veiled under these marks, waiting for the viewer to lift each layer. Some elements are traveled over by the tension of needlework. It creates a moving space and a rhythm is born from these signs. The thread and beads become writings, bead after bead and stitch after stitch, giving the canvas the power of a language stretched between the limits of the imaginary and the history. The rows of threads and beads serve as transition and connection between the stories. My aim is to make cultural connections, investigate cultural identity and hopefully work towards common understanding.



Anima Mundi by Béatrice Lebreton



The Fire Next Time Béatrice Lebreton

I am always curious about the where and why of Anne's work, especially the *Home is a Privilege* series. The connotation of the words home and privilege can invoke an array of responses, how do these words relate to her art?

Anne Murray: *My video poetry work is about borders and identity. I see the need to evaluate and establish cross currents of culture with a presence of mind and careful consideration of different value systems globally. My work addresses these concepts from the personal to the national and international. Presently, many artists and curators are crossing boundaries by creating shows outside the realm of the material world, in the netherworld of the internet where nations are nonexistent. It is in this place of flux, of flow and intervention where many of my works are installed, video poems accessible only to those who have internet and live within a realm that allows the free travel of thought across servers without restriction.*

Home is a Privilege, is a video poem about the discovery of privilege of the feeling that one can never really be at home on this planet, our souls, and very thoughts free to travel the universe, while we search for a place to call home, we realize that it is available only to a few as a concept, as a construction. But upon reflection, one discovers that home is everywhere.

Was the notion of self, place and belonging a theme that was developed in your travels or was it what launched the creative search?

My research on identity and borders began about 30 years ago, when I left my parent's home to go to Parsons School of Design in Paris. There I was faced with the "overview effect" that astronauts often remark upon, a feeling of a universe larger than oneself as one looks back at the blue planet, which is our Earth. I looked back at my history, my religion, my traumatic childhood, and discovered that identity is often a constructed tower around us, a citadel on a hill, made to look whole, yet hollow inside with windows through which we can shoot arrows to protect ourselves, or with the chance to descend into another point of view or climb to look out at the vastness of our world and all the possibilities. I did all of these things at different points with an awareness and presence to the process, although it often took its toll.

*All artists have to do this, they extend until they are exhausted, recoil, and repeat the process. This recent work, *Home is a Privilege*, focuses on the parallel between my own travels and projects living for years without a home and the mass migration causes by war in Syria. I was contemplating how it is to not have any sense of home, of a safe place to go, and then I realized that I had grown up with that same feeling, having lived in a household filled with domestic violence.*



Home is a Privilege (Film Still) by Anne Murray



Home is a Privilege (Film Still) by Anne Murray

Rachel Sager's work invokes both ancient and contemporary realms, with sources of inspiration and passion coming from the Pennsylvania earth itself. Rachel reflects on her muse, and passion behind *The Ruins Project*, sharing how both she and the project are grounded to place.

RACHEL SAGER: *I dig deep, both into my personal shortcomings and into the ground itself for artistic material. Much of my work is built from the building blocks of what lie beneath my feet in the form of humble sandstone, limestone and coal. One of my greatest pleasures in life is building relationships with these raw materials and transforming their pieces into avenues of geologic communication. Simply put, I love to chop up rocks and build intuitive lines with them.*

The word grounding holds several meanings for me, as both a human being and as an artist. My sense of self is grounded in the place I was raised and on which I have chosen to build my life. I read a lot about the value of globalism, the global economy, and the smallness of this planet we all share. I understand and respect the concept.

I have enjoyed interacting with the beauty and people of far flung places so different from my little patch of earth. But I have very consciously chosen to commit my artistic voice to celebrating the complexities of a heartbreakingly beautiful, forgotten corner of this country. Identifying so strongly to a specific group of people though, does not mean that I value the group more than the individual. Maybe more than any other philosophy, I believe in the absolute power of the individual and her imagination. So much so, that I think each individual has the power to re-create the world. Once a person realizes this truth, it's like the ground has opened up and there are no limits on what can be illuminated through a clear mind and soul.

I have enjoyed my artistic journey so much so that it sometimes hurts (in the good way) to acknowledge that I have chosen the sometimes dangerous life of the artist. Not fitting into the lines of established boundaries can be a risky thing. The Ruins Project stands to date, as my favorite example of the power of an uninhibited imagination. I am slowly transforming the ruins of an abandoned coal mine processing plant in term mosaic installation. With the help of artists and students from around the great wide world, I am helping to make connections between two very different groups of people; the 19th and 20th century coal miner and the contemporary artist. Strange bedfellows to be sure. By telling stories of what was and watching stories yet to be, unfold, I find myself the witness to a truly remarkable and new story.



***The Ruins Project* by Rachel Sager**



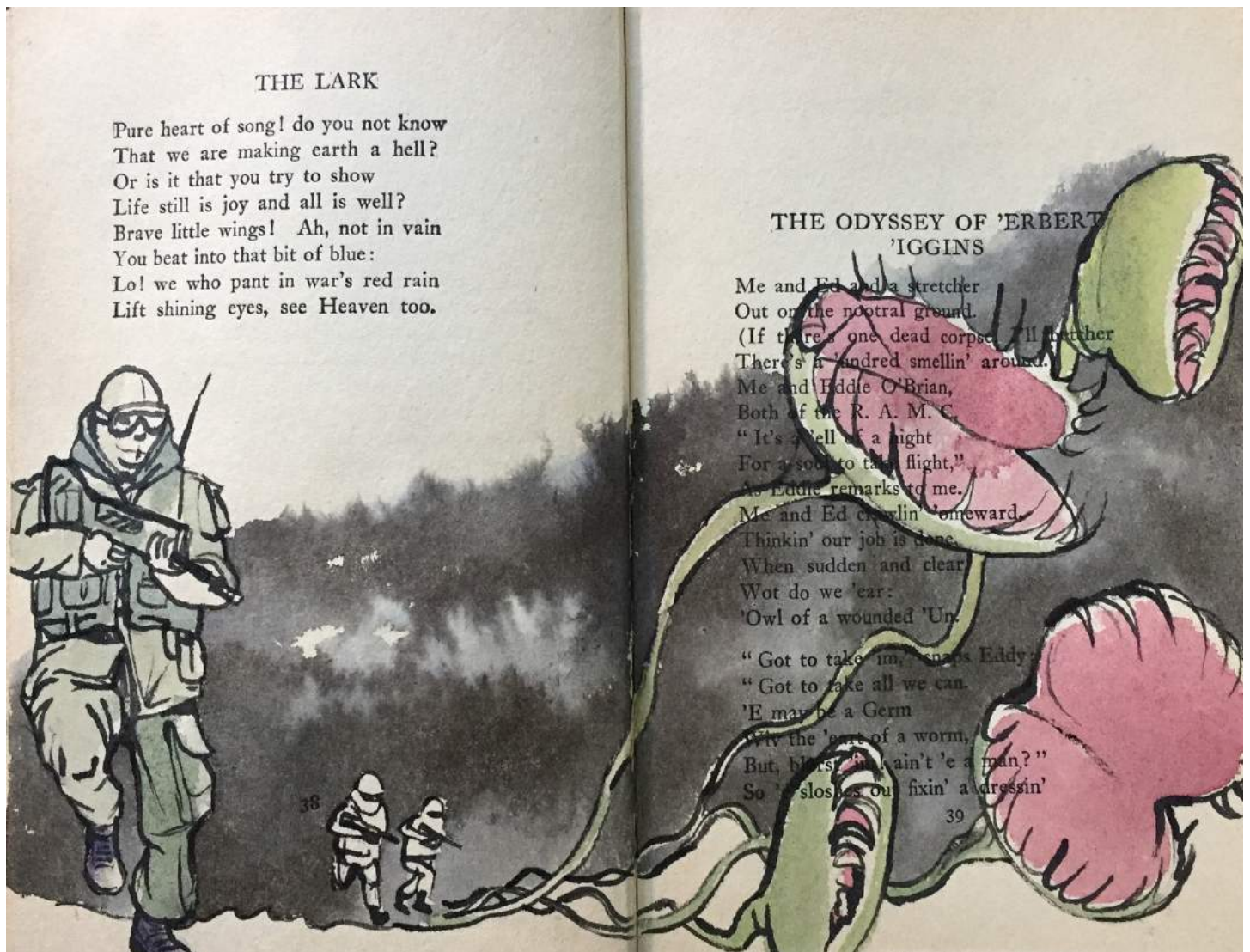
Political Statement by Rachel Sager

I spoke with Dasha Ziborova on the source of inspiration for her series *Chronicles of Forgotten Wars* and the curious launch of this project during travels in London...

DASHA ZIBOROVA: I like to draw inside vintage books. *Chronicles of Forgotten Wars* started as a travel journal. I took an old poetry book by Robert W. Service with me to London, planning to make some drawings of English gardens.

At some point, on a train to Hampton Court Palace, I became curious to see what the book was about, and upon opening it, I discovered this passage: "Oh I called him all the night-time, as I walked the wood alone; And I listened and I listened, but I nivver heard a moan; Then I found him at the dawnin', when the sorry sky was red: I was lookin' for the livin', but I only found the dead." Robert W. Service, a British-Canadian poet and writer, dedicated this book to his brother, killed in action in 1916.

In his book he "found the dead" across three continents in all kinds of surroundings. So, my first drawings were images of magnificent flowers and European gardens contrasted with figures of soldiers fighting and dying. But with time, this little book project grew up in size and volume, and I started to experiment with large scale and different media (my latest art works in the series are 5 by 6 feet long, and are painted on canvas with stucco covered with wax.) The project also stopped being a romantic notion of European wars of long ago; it developed into meditation on men at the grisly war with Nature with the Nature furiously fighting back.



Unlikely Alliance by Dasha Ziborova



Rape of the Sarraceniaceae by Dasha Ziborova

Tell My Mother I Saw the Object

Susan Montag

Vince showed up on the first day of our junior year, a newcomer. He was tall, and let's be honest, kind of geeky, wearing flood pants and thick glasses. He didn't stand much of a chance in the social Darwinian culture of southern Iowa of the early '80s. He was also wearing a T-shirt for the band *Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark*, which was neither *AC/DC* or *Lynyrd Skynyrd*. So that was not okay. On the second day, Jason Khul, whose father owned the Ford dealership, called him *Princess Vincess*, which pretty much cinched it. He was out. Never mind that his parents had moved to town from Baltimore to teach at the local community college—history (his dad) and art (his mother). He spoke strangely, could draw well, seemed uncompelled to violence, and listened to bands with names they did not know. He was not from here.

Vince may have been a geek and whatever else they called him, but I was a scumbag and a slut. I was a scumbag because my dad drove drunk and killed Kent Carlson, the guy who used to own the dry cleaners. My dad also died, but that didn't absolve me. Then my mom left town with Glenda Jackson's husband, leaving me with my grandmother. This all happened by the time I was in eighth grade, so my scumbag status was set in stone by the time Vince showed up.

I had been a slut since I was a freshman. I don't know if this was a nationwide phenomenon at the time, but where I lived there was a fad where the boys would grab their own crotches while making a kissing noise as a way to insult a girl. It was sexual harassment, plainly; it meant suck my dick. We were told that was just the way boys acted and that we should ignore it and they would quit. But instead of ignoring Bart Sanderman when he grabbed his crotch at me in the hallway one day, I grabbed my own crotch and made a kissing noise back. Bart Sanderman's mouth fell open in abject shock that I could be so brazen, and he rushed off to tell the others what I had done. By the end of the day I had gone from merely weird and scummy to slutty, and I stayed that way for the rest of my school career.

Vince and I didn't pay much attention to each other right at first, but after Christmas break, we

ended up in Sociology together. The teacher, Mr. Brownrigg, had a nearly unbearably monotone lecture voice. Vince made a sketch and then tilted his notebook toward me. He had drawn an advertisement for "Brownrigg in a Bottle—a sleep aid, sure to knock your ass right out." That did me in somehow; I was immediately in love with Vince. He was surprised by that reaction, but he seemed happy to oblige me.

That summer, the one between our junior and senior year, I would steal cigarettes from my grandmother and we would smoke them at the cemetery—not the one where my father was buried, but the older one outside of town, the one that had all the worn stones for children who died in the 1800s. We would walk around looking at the stones and having subversive conversations about the nature of reality, and sometimes when we were pretty sure no one was going to be around, we'd park his car in the very back part of the cemetery and get it on. So finally, I could actually do something slutty instead of just be thought of that way, and I liked it a lot.

*

This story is really about Moira, though.

I worked at a grocery store when I was in high school, so when I was not with Vince or at school, that's where I was. Moira would sometimes come in and buy a whole shopping cart full of candy, usually chocolates. She would take every box of chocolate covered cherries off the shelf, every box of Russell Stover's sampler packs, and she would buy them all. She also liked red licorice. Moira was tall, and despite the fact that she obviously loved sweets, she was bone thin. That may have been because she constantly walked around town instead of driving a car, even when it was very cold outside. Almost any time of the year, on any given day, you might have seen Moira walking around town in her clothes that hung on her like she was a wire hanger, her long gray ponytail swinging against her back.

Moira was famous in our town, not just for walking around, but for doing odd things. Once

she went into a local restaurant that had a piano, and she started playing it—except she had no idea how to play. She just pounded on the keys. Glen Manley, the chief of police, showed up and tried to remove her, but Moira grabbed the tip tray from the piano and hit Manley over the head with it. She was arrested but they just released her to her son. Everyone knew Moira really didn't mean anything by it, and anyway, she didn't hit Manley hard enough to hurt him.

"She should not have had all them kids," my grandmother had said. "She went haywire after that."

I wasn't old enough to remember Moira before she went haywire. But I did know her story, because everyone knew it. Moira had gotten married when she was a young woman and she had five children and then her husband left her—and after that she walked around doing weird stuff. Her children scattered around the country after they grew up, except for the one son, John, who stayed in town. Moira and her son John could often be spotted together at a restaurant or sitting at a picnic table at the park, and they seemed to be comfortable in each other's company. Moira usually looked solemn, but John smiled as he listened to her talk. Sometimes he even laughed. He didn't seem to be laughing at her, but enjoying what she said. John was the one who picked her up from jail when she hit the cop with the tip tray. He's the one who bought her real groceries when she spent all her money on chocolates. Sometimes, her neighbors said they could hear Moira yelling at John when he came to visit her, but when you saw them together in public, things generally seemed okay. John worked for the city. He was in charge of getting projects done. Like when underground pipes needed to be replaced, he would dig. That's how he died that summer, actually. He was in a hole that collapsed and he got covered in dirt. I remember hearing the sirens that day, and listening as my grandmother talked on the phone about what had happened. "Oh no," my grandmother said. "Oh, poor Moira." Whenever anything like this happened in our town, everyone was on the phone about it.

They had tried CPR on him, of course. He died anyway. But that was not the whole story. The whole story is that at one point, he was revived. He sat straight up in the back of the ambulance, and he

said to the paramedic, "Tell my mother I saw the object." Then he died again for good.

No one at the hospital knew what that meant—"tell my mother I saw the object." They even argued about whether or not John had actually said that. Could they have misunderstood? Or, they speculated, was he just saying nonsense because his brain had been deprived of oxygen? They argued about whether or not they should repeat these words to Moira. She was, after all, already quite confused about the nature of reality. Why say some weird shit to her that meant nothing? Why not lie and say that John said, "Tell my mother I loved her." There was discussion among the paramedics and nurses and the chaplain. The details of this discussion filtered down to even people like me, a high school girl who worked at the grocery store. My grandmother heard it somewhere, probably when she was getting her hair set. From churches to bars, everyone in town knew about what John had said in the ambulance, and about what happened after that.

In fact, at first no one would tell Moira what John said. But after they told her John had died, she just sat there, in that room at the hospital where they take people to tell them bad news. Her brow creased and she pursed her lips as if considering something very unusual. She stayed like that for so long that people grew uncomfortable, and then a couple of the nurses and the EMT and the chaplain decided, well, maybe we should tell her. Perhaps their curiosity got the best of them. Maybe they wanted to know the answer to the question that had started needling at their brains. What was the object? So they went into the room where she was sitting.

"Moira," one of the nurses, Margery Klingelhutz said, squatting down in front of her. The others stood back. "In the ambulance, after John was revived, he said to tell you something."

Moira looked at her. "What did he say?" she asked.

Margery told her. "He said, 'Tell my mother I saw the object.'"

"Ah-ha!" Moira replied and put a boney finger into the air like an explanation point.

"What does that mean, Moira?" Margery asked. "What is the object?"

"It's everything," Moira said. "It means he saw everything."

Vince and I became sort of obsessed by the object.

We walked around the cemetery talking about it. We wondered what John had seen. We wondered how it was that Moira had known about it, and why she told her son about the object before he died and saw it for himself. We began to imagine that all those times we had seen Moira and John hanging around together at the Happy Chef or the park, that Moira had been talking to John about the object, and maybe that is what had made him laugh. Maybe John had said, “Oh mother, you and your object.” But then he had seen it for himself. We wondered if seeing the object was beautiful or terrifying or maybe both.

Eventually, we got it in our heads that we should talk to Moira—that we should go over and knock on her door. We knew that when someone died, people would show up with food. Neither one of us knew how to make a casserole, and we didn’t want anyone to know what we were doing anyway, so we gathered stuff from the kitchen at his house and took it over to my house, and we surreptitiously made Moira three ham and cheese sandwiches with mustard on white bread. We cut them kitty-corner and put them on a paper plate and covered it with plastic wrap. Then we smoked a joint because that seemed like a good idea to us, and we walked over to Moira’s house.

We knocked on the door. Moira opened it instantaneously, like she had been standing there waiting for us. We stood holding the plate of ham sandwiches, and she stood frowning at us. I felt suddenly terrified.

“Hi,” Vince said, and his voice cracked. “We brought you some food.”

Moira remained uncertain, but she seemed to relax. She gave a long, considering look at the plate, then reached out to take it from Vince.

“Thanks,” she said, and then she closed the door in our faces.

Vince and I turned and looked at each other.

“Fuck!” he said. We had not considered this as a possibility. We just stood there looking at each other, a little too stoned to contemplate our next move.

The door opened again. “What do you want?”

she asked.

I attempted to explain. “We just wanted to say—”

“That we are sorry about John,” Vince said.

Moira stared at us. Her eyes were an odd electric blue. I had never noticed that before.

“And we were wondering if we could talk to you—” I said.

Vince finished for me: “About the object.”

Moira raised her eyebrows. After a second, she said, “Come in.”

Vince and I were not surprised by the way Moira’s house looked. We had heard stories about it before. Today we would call her a hoarder, but at the time, back in the ‘80s, none of us knew there was a word for it. Moira’s house was sort of a mid-level hoard, I’d say; it was not packed to the ceiling, but we had to follow narrow trails through piles that were about shoulder high. From the looks of it, most of the hoard consisted of books. We followed her to the back of the house to the kitchen. The table had some space, so we sat down. She took the plastic wrap off the plate and started eating one of the sandwiches.

“Mmmm,” she said. “Very good.” We sat there while she finished it. Finally she said, “You want to hear me say some crazy shit, don’t you?” We didn’t say anything; we just sat there like the dumbasses we were.

But then she actually started talking. At first, she talked about her neighbors who she suspected of spying on her; she transitioned from that into talking about Foucault. Neither Vince nor I had ever heard of Foucault, but Vince would become obsessed with him shortly after this. Finally, she told us about the object. The object, she said, was all of time—the past, present, and future, existing simultaneously. It was a solid, physical thing—a thing that one would be able to stand back and examine, if one had the correct perspective from outside of it.

“Yesterday is still there,” she said. “It’s always been there. And so has tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow is already there?” Vince asked.

“Tomorrow is still there,” Moira said. “It’s always been there.”

“Where is the object?” I asked. “Like, floating in space?”

“Oh hell, I don’t know,” she said. She took another sandwich off the plate and started eating it.

Then she said, "You guys need to leave."

So we did. But as she was walking us to the door, she said, "Oh, one more thing you should know."

We both turned and looked at her.

"The object is more than one reality," she told us. "There are millions of realities in the object. In some of them, you exist, and in others you don't. Some are just slightly different than this one. In some of them you were alive for a while but you are already dead by now, like maybe you got hit by a car when you were five years old. In some of them, there is not even any life on Earth. In some of them, dogs evolved more than monkeys and dogs are in charge."

"Dogs are in charge?" I said. Why this was the detail that stopped me short, I'm not sure.

"Well, wolves are. They farm us," she said. "We are their food."

"That's kind of fucked up," Vince said.

Moira seemed not to be offended. She shrugged like, eh, what can you do? "Yeah," she said. "So there is not just one tomorrow that has always been there, there are a billion tomorrows. Who knows how many. I don't know, because I only exist in some of the realities of the object, and I can't see very well into the other ones. But I do know they are there, and I know the object is really, really big."

We were silent. Then I said, "Thanks for telling us about it."

"Can you bring more sandwiches sometime?" Moira asked. We told her we would.

*

We didn't get to bring Moira more sandwiches, though, because about a week later, she moved to Illinois to live with her daughter. She was not happy about it. I know because my grandmother heard from someone who heard that Moira was yelling at her daughter that she didn't want to go. Moira's daughter hired Jim Calvin, a local junk guy, to throw all Moira's books into dumpsters. Vince and I walked by and saw Jim doing it, and he told us the books couldn't be saved because they were covered in mouse shit. When he wasn't looking, though, Vince reached in the dumpster and took a couple of them. They didn't have any mouse shit on them, as far as we could see.

There was a break up, eventually, about six

months later, between me and Vince. Of course there was; we were just a couple idiot kids. It was a heartbreaking one, though—one of those that goes on and on over months. Jealousies had been sparked, somehow. Angry words exchanged. We hung up on each other, called back, reunited, fought again, broke up again. There had been lingering hopes, but then I went out to Pizza Hut with Tonya Christian and her older brother Gary, who shoved his pepperoni-flavored tongue into my mouth as we were in the parking lot after we ate, and Vince heard about that and then it was over for good. We became heartbroken enemies. We got through our senior year; Vince went off to Iowa City to the university, and I stayed in town and went to the community college and took a history class from Vince's dad. Eventually I moved away too, and we lost track of each other.

Of course, modern life being what it is, we are Facebook friends now, so I know he's married and that he has two sons in high school, and that he teaches philosophy at a college in Baltimore, near where his family lived before his parents came to teach in my hometown. And he knows that I moved to Minnesota and that I'm a nurse and that I'm divorced, that my kids are grown, that I have a dog and a two-year-old granddaughter who I take a lot of pictures of. Neither of us is as skinny as we used to be, but who is? I don't know if Vince still thinks about Moira and the object. Even though we click like on each other's photos, we don't really have a lot of conversations. But I know that I think about it. I think about the other realities where things just went a little bit differently, the ones where we managed to stick it out like some high school sweethearts do. In those realities, different children were born, different lives lived. Who knows how it might have gone. But at least it's good to imagine that, even if this is the only reality where Vince and I cross paths, the summer of 1984 might still be there, that he and I might still be walking around out in the old cemetery smoking the cigarettes I stole from my grandmother; we might still be parked back by the trees learning how to be lovers. I can almost see us there, like bugs caught in amber. The object might have a lot of bad things in it, a lot of sadness, a lot of suffering, but at least it has this too.

Inuksuk

i want to fly to the other side of new york take you with me if i can but planes over water
can fall the way you are sliding off cliffs of glass not because they are transparent
but because i am cold you unclothe to avoid the rock sitting in your neck i walked on water
once to save you phobias prevent me getting who i secretly wish for
when i was a physician i showed you how to put scissors into her small hands to accelerate
fine motor development you told me she couldn't be trusted because all we did was sleep

explicitness in the art of cradling children is essential to form rocks we roll ourselves in
to climb a hill with a plane to learn to thrust adequately into skies to resist
the land of themes of those who rob scissors for reification to never land
in the land of the neverending i was taken to a hot place with colorful doors
i was an inuit praying in a desert asking for forgiveness with my body that preys on
the fragility of small things this is not the same as dissecting them to become the orientator
when there is only wet sand and barbed water the inuksuk when i come back for you
in the dark



The Great Sandstone Mountains by Rachel Sager

Suzanne Cody

Wedding

Here is a hand
Here is a snapped stick
This is a tin cup
Here is a mouth
An unwritten letter
A box of hollow
Here is a silver ring
Here is a bone
This is a hatchet
Here is a long row
Here is a promise

Looking for Love in Empty Spaces

Maj Ikle

Her name is Hel and my dyke life begins the day we climb into bed and even though we are fuck naked, it isn't my bed or hers. It is a mattress on the floor of a north London squat.

It is the summer of nineteen eighty-two, Boy George is Top of the Pops asking us if we really want to hurt him.

Margaret Thatcher has already declared war on Argentina in order to distract us from the strikes back here. As young feminists we are in a state of shock to realise that women are not fundamentally kinder than men.

We are the most educated generation of girls that has ever lived and yet we are being groomed for motherhood or sex work. Those of us who are not interested in either, try ducking and diving, fucking and skiving, bunking the trains, living off chips and, whenever possible, filling our pockets with free toilet paper.

I meet Hel picketing the Fallen Angel pub. Their management is attempting to bring about an end to the women's evenings because dykes never have enough money to spend at the bar.

As an orange and pink sky turns the world Day-Glo I listen transfixed by Hel's fast talking, real life, furious working class politics and I know enough to know that I am dropping out of my degree in sociology to learn what this woman here has to teach me about how capitalists fuck us up.

She takes me back to her squatted council flat, through the door with its fragile, fluttering legal notice informing the police they will have to go to court to get us out.

We are both just seventeen, looking for love in empty spaces, young enough to be used to ignoring other people's taste in wallpaper. It is a DIY door lock away from being street homeless but for us it is everywhere we've ever wanted to be. It is an end to the furious fumble fucks, with our backs pushed hard against toilet doors stopping the inevitable banging and barging in. We are safe now because we are alone.

My first night of real sex and I am hard in love.

Hel is a boyish Fiorucci angel with fat cheeks; her lips are suckling pert places to press my aching breast. She is intelligent, with wide-awake eyes that follow

everything, and politics she will one-day abseil into the House of Lords to defend.

Hel's body is as Rubenesque as her underfed lifestyle will allow. She lets me take my time to stroke her with my lips, my hips and finally my fingertips but eventually she insists that I go inside. I tremble as I slowly push my finger into her slippery cunt but I don't know where I'm going now that we are lying down.

I only know lesbian bed sex from what I have read or seen in porn films and so I try for that. I become aware that Hel is attempting to signal me with groan and whimpers but I have no idea if they mean pleasure or pain. It never occurs to me to just ask her.

I try to be brave and keep my fingers stiff. I push in and pull out getting ready for my next plunge. I feel her react, clench against me so I decide that I will continue with this exact motion and wait for her inevitable orgasm.

She seems to hover on the edge of coming but never does. Instead she is panting and looking hard at me for help. So hard at me, that I am overwhelmed by the raw animal yearning of it all. Around her neck bold, blood-red blotches appear. Surely something is happening?

This promise of her orgasm encourages me to ignore the fact that my fingers have gone completely numb. I keep going, in and out regardless of the fact I can't feel what I am actually doing, I push on faster and even harder.

I watch with fascination as she curls and uncurls around my arms and legs, but whether she is really enjoying it, I can't tell. Why didn't anyone ever mention it was going to take so fucking long? I lurch inwardly at every intake of breath that results in a moan hoping that this is it. We have been literally fucking for hours and hours and it is now starting to dawn on me that she is not going to come.

Unable to admit defeat I increase my width and push on as hard and fast as I possibly can but spasms of cramp are now surging up through my hand and I find myself racing with her, as if her orgasm is now going to happen inside my body.

I fuck her the hardest and most incandescently fast as I can manage until I fall exhausted and sweating next to her on the bed trying to convince myself it has

worked; because how are you supposed to know?

Of course, it hasn't.

Nina Simone is still singing us lullabies and we have enough drugs to keep us enthusiastic for days, but we cannot talk about what is not working between us.

We can talk about everything from the arms race to apartheid but we have no language to express this simple disappointment. We don't want too much reality to spoil the image we have of ourselves as lesbian lovers; after all what else can we be?

I have decided that I am moving in with her.

This is no longer simply a phase I'm going through, I'm not bisexual or even a tourist just here to look around and take a few snapshots till my plane home arrives. No! I'm a dyke's dyke. I am out, and way too proud to contemplate that I wasn't born with the innate ability to give fantastic lesbian sex.

Then suddenly it is my turn and she is pushing

me backwards and pushing inside me. After what I've been through I am determined to make it easy for her, so I start orgasming with every single out breath. I'm coming from the minute her fingers are inside me, just like in the movies.

Hel has fingers that she can control all the way to the tips. Absolute musicians. But I am determined not so much to experience pleasure as to be its display cabinet. Over and over I go with the loudest most desperate keening I can manage and just as I am working up to my fifth orgasmic crescendo she gets up and starts pulling on her clothes muttering about "going out for fags".

I pull at the hem of her shirt like a creepy puppy. I offer her my fags, my spliff, the entire contents of my wallet if she will just climb back into the dream with me, but she slams the door on her way out.

It is my first lesson in leaving a woman alone when she growls but I haven't learnt it, yet.



Home is a Privilege (Film Still) by Anne Murray

Contributor Bios

Erika Arato, is an urban explorer working in photography under the name UrbextheCat, who shows her photos strictly on an Instagram platform. Erika captures both the spirit of adventure as well as the poignant and poetic spirit of the abandoned. A self-proclaimed “hoarder of memories” she shares her inspiration for these extraordinary photographs, and her passion for exploring the ancient underbelly of these forgotten places. She can be found on Instagram @UrbextheCat.

Jan Ball started seriously writing poetry and submitting it for publication in 1998. Since then, she has had 244 poems accepted or published in the U.S., Canada, India and England (hopefully Australia soon). Published poems have appeared in: *Calyx*, *Chiron*, *Connecticut Review*, *Main Street Rag*, *Nimrod*, *Phoebe* and many other journals. Her poem, *my face emerges from my face*, was second runner-up in the spring 2010 contest issue of *So to Speak*. In another contest, her poem, *carwash*, won the 2011 Betsy Colquitt Award for the best poem in a current issue of *Descant*, *Fort Worth*. Her two chapbooks, *Accompanying Spouse* (2011) and *Chapter of Faults* (2014), have both been published by Finishing Line Press. She is a member of The Poetry Club of Chicago. Jan taught ESL at DePaul University in Chicago until recently. She lived in Australia for fifteen years with her Australian husband, Ray Ball. Her two children, Geoffrey and Quentin, were born in Brisbane. She is a twin to Jean Helmken and she was a Franciscan nun for seven years (Sister Jeanclaire). When not writing poetry, working with her personal trainer at FFC, going to book group or traveling, Jan and her husband like to cook for friends. These background experiences infuse her poetry.

Annie Blake is an Australian writer, thinker and researcher. Her main interests include psychoanalysis, philosophy and cosmology. Her poem ‘These Grey Streets’ was nominated for the 2017 Pushcart Prize by *Vine Leaves Literary Journal*. She holds a Bachelor of Teaching, a Graduate Diploma in Education and is a member of the C G Jung Society of Melbourne and Existentialist Society (Melbourne). You can visit her on <http://annieblakethegatherer.blogspot.com.au/> and <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100009445206990>.

Rachel Caruso-Bryant is from Florida and is now a lecturer at a university in Saudi Arabia. She lives with her husband and cats and travels the world whenever she gets the chance. Her poems have appeared in *Red Eft Review*, *A Lonely Riot*, *Gravel*, *The Stark Poetry Journal*, and more.

Martha Clarkson manages corporate workplace design in Seattle. Her poetry, photography, and fiction can be found in *monkeybicycle*, *Clackamas Literary Review*, *Seattle Review*, *Alimentum*, *F-Stop Magazine*, and *Hawaii Pacific Review*. She is a recipient of a Pushcart Nomination, and is listed under “Notable Stories,” Best American Non-Required Reading for 2007 and 2009. She is recipient of best short story, 2012, Anderbo/Open City prize, for “Her Voices, Her Room.” www.marthaclarkson.com

A graduate of the University of Iowa Nonfiction Writing Program, **Suzanne Cody** has published essays and poetry in various online and print journals, including *Pithead Chapel*, *Every Pigeon*, *Crack the Spine*, and *Shift: A Journal of Literary Oddities*, as well as serving as co-editor for the *Seneca Review anthology* “We Might As Well Call it the Lyric Essay.”

KJ Hannah Greenberg delights in words. Never tiring of applying whimsy to pastures where gelatinous wildebeests roam, or of applying solemnity to the soil where fey hedgehogs play, Hannah’s been nominated four times for the Pushcart Prize in Literature, and once for The Best of the Net. Her latest poetry collections are *Mothers Ought to Utter Only Niceties* (Unbound CONTENT, 2017), and *A Grand Sociology Lesson* (Lit Fest Press, 2016). Her latest essay collections are *Tosh: Select Trash and Bosh of Creative Writing* (Crooked Cat Books, 2017), and *Dreams are for Coloring Books: Midlife Marvels* (Seashell Books, 2017). Her newest short story collection is *Can I be Rare, Too?* (Bards & Sages Publishing, 2017).

Jude Harzer is a figurative painter whose works investigate memories and familial relationships, specifically between mother and child. Jude is interested in the maternal figure as purveyor of

personal mythologies and how these inherited stories perpetuate patterns of thought and behaviors in ones daughters. Her paintings often feature adolescent female figures, intended to appear dominant, emotionally enigmatic and invulnerable. Jude uses space to suggest a reverse psychological experience by elevating the children to look down upon or directly at the viewer. Her work can be found at www.JudeHarzer.com.

Maj Ikle is proud to be a dykewriter. She was the winner of the 2014 *Asian Cha* magazine competition with the poem “the City Park.” Her story “Loser” was published in June 2014 by *Glitterwolf*. Recently longlisted for Penguin/Random House Write Now mentoring programme, she is currently writing her memoirs “Dyke” as part of the project #RebelDykes. You can subscribe to her work at <http://majikle.blogspot.co.uk/>

Laura Ingram is a tiny girl with big glasses and bigger ideas. Her poetry and prose have been published in forty-two literary magazines, among them *Gravel Magazine*, *The Cactus Heart Review*, *The Crucible*, *Blue Marble Review*, *Scarlet Leaf Review*, *Forrest for the Trees*, and *Teenage Wasteland*. One of Laura’s essays is featured in critically-acclaimed anthology *Hidden Lives* published by Bindle and Glass. Laura has edited professionally for Raven Publishing company. Harry Styles stopped one of his shows to give her his water bottle. Laura hopes to be some sort of bird when she grows up.

Natalie Jones writes poems, prose, and reviews. Her work has been published online and in print at *Eunoia Review*, *Haiku Journal*, *Amoskeag Literary Journal*, *The Rusty Nail*, and elsewhere.

Béatrice Lebreton, a French native artist now based in Harlem has been captivated by the arts since early childhood, discovering a deeply rooted fascination with drawing, coloring, playing with fabric remnants, and doing needlework with her grandmother at her side. She received a Masters of Fine Art from the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts in Paris and a Masters in Ethno-aesthetic, majoring in African

Art from La Sorbonne University. Additional details on her work can be found at www.beatriceart.net.

Mira Martin-Parker earned an MFA in creative writing at San Francisco State University. Her work has appeared in various publications, including the *Istanbul Literary Review*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Mythium*, and *Zyzyva*.

Denise Massingill is an Austrian-American writer, born in San Francisco, Ca. She received her BA in Creative Writing at San Francisco State University, where she was awarded the Frances Jaffer Poetry Prize in 2014. She currently lives in Vallejo, Ca, with her two young daughters and is a substitute teacher in low-income, urban high schools.

Susan Montag lives in Saint Cloud, Minnesota and has an MFA degree from Hamline University in Saint Paul. She is the author of a collection of short fiction, *Nude Ascending a Staircase*, Bellowing Ark Press, 2001, and a book called *Finding the Way: A Tao for Down-to-Earth People*, Nicolas Hays Press, 2005.

Anne Murray is an artist and curator with an MFA and MS in Art History from Pratt Institute and a BFA from Parsons School of Design in Paris. She has exhibited her work in London, Paris, Shanghai, Istanbul, Los Angeles, New York, and Budapest. Her work can be found in the White House Permanent Collection and the Collection of Prints and Photographs at the Main Branch of the New York Public Library. She was the recipient of the Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Scholarship for Pratt in Venice and the China Unlimited Creative Contest Award for Photography, amongst the jurors were Chinese Vice Premier of Education and Culture, Liu Yandong, and European Commissioner of Education and Culture, Tibor Navracsics. Her work can be found at www.AnneMurrayArtist.com.

Rachel Sager, a native of Southwestern Pennsylvania, works on the cutting edge of the contemporary mosaic fine art movement. Her work has been featured internationally and in cities throughout the U.S. where she has received multiple Best of Show Awards

in juried exhibitions. Rachel's artwork is collected with passion by private clients and corporations all over the world. Her time spent studying with Italian maestros has shaped her mosaic philosophy, and she brings these classical techniques home to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania with its sandstone, limestone, slate, and coal seams. Details on this and other projects can be found at www.RachelSagerMosaics.com.

Dasha Ziborova is a graphic novels author, artist and a muralist. She was born in St. Petersburg, Russia and came to New York in 1991. Since then she has illustrated five children's picture books including the award-winning *Crispin the Terrible* published by Callaway Editions, and *In English, of Course* and *The Numbers Dance* by Gingerbread House. Besides writing and illustrating books and showing at the galleries, Dasha has designed and painted a series of large-scale murals for The Peninsula Hotel's New York and Chicago locations; Plaza Hotel, NY; designs for reliefs for the Waldorf Astoria, NY and designs for over 30 murals for Atlantic Center in Brooklyn. She is also currently working on Real Time In Ink, a series of short graphic stories about people, places, parenting, art, music, cats, food, travel, to occasional politics and scary crazy Russians. <https://www.realtimeinink.com> More on the *Chronicles of Lost Wars* and other projects can be found at www.dashaziborova.com

Lena Ziegler is a recent graduate of Western Kentucky University's MFA program and is currently pursuing her PhD at Bowling Green State University. She is the co-founder and co-editor of the literary journal *The Hunger* and her work has been published in *Red Earth Review*, *Miracle Monocle*, *Harpoon Review*, *Breathe Free Press* and others, and is forthcoming in *Fredericksburg Literary and Arts Review*.

