



Gambling the Aisle

Winter 2013

Masthead

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Gambling the Aisle 2013 Chapbook Contest Winners

Chapbook Winner

Jamey Gallagher-Crumblehead

Jamey Gallagher lives in Baltimore, where he teaches at the Community College of Baltimore County. He has had more than thirty pieces of writing published in small journals, online, and in print. Three of his stories have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize.

Art Winner

Patrick Shambeck-Death Turned

Patrick Shambeck came from humble beginnings in Greenville, Alabama. He moved to Los Angeles, California where he found artistic inspiration in the crashing waves and sandy bikinis.



Chapbook Runners up:

Christina Elaine Collins - *Antiheroines of America*

Alyssa Yankwitt - *The Displacement*

Susan Charkes - *Averted Vision*

Howie Good - *A Danger to Self or Others*

Laura Johnson - *To Let the Water Run*

Cover Art Runners up:

Rand Smith - *Under Her Hat*

Erin Hinz - *Sparkle Motion in Liquid Form*

Emerson Myers - *Generation Gap*

The Art of Looking

Bruce Hinrichs

What are you looking at?

Yeah, I mean you.

Sitting there staring at these black scratchings on white, smugly making your quick judgments, and even worse, hoping for, maybe expecting, something entertaining or engrossing or even sage... oh, oh, or maybe truly captivating, or at least something time-consuming and not objectionable. Oh no, nothing objectionable for you. And, certainly not anything boring or unusual or insulting. No, not for you. You sit there staring at these little black symbols, piled up one after another with spaces between them, wanting something awe-inspiring, surprising, edifying, absorbing, or at least mildly satisfying to emerge from them.

Well, what are you looking at?

Staring at these black letters, scanning them, as if there was some miracle to be found in them, some answer, some insight, some entertainment for you just sitting there doing nothing, just looking, just gazing on these abstract, obtuse scratchings and trying to find meaning and ideas and feelings and even inspiration in them, or at the minimum some entertainment and distraction from your tiring life.

But, I know what you're thinking – you're thinking that you don't want to do all the work, you don't want to find meaning on your own, in your own mind, no, you need some scratchings, something to stimulate the process, you want someone to arrange these words and sentences, someone different from you, someone creative and smart and clever and wise, someone to arrange these black letters and words in a manner that will create a story, a tall tale with characters and a plot and dialogue and action and surprises and suspense and coincidences and a nice, happy ending, a story that ties together all nice and neat, but oh, no, nothing too out of the ordinary, nothing too strange or upsetting, you want a story that's normal, just normal, a story that makes you smile and think, but not too deeply – no, not too deeply – something realistic, but not too realistic, certainly not anything grotesque or odd or weird or unnatural or unsettling, no, not for good old normal you,

no, you want a nice little happy story that will be wise and cute and witty and surprising and different, but not too different, no, not too different.

Oh, I know what you want – you want these words and sentences to form a nice little story, a story you could probably make up for yourself with a little effort, but, I know you, you don't want to make the effort, you want someone else to do the hard work while you just sit there staring at these black symbols on white all lined up ever so properly, words and sentences not causing any disgust or anger or chagrin, simply unfolding a proper little tale, a tale perhaps of love or intrigue or sentiment or warmth or poignancy or, of course, I know what you want, a story about redemption and justice, yeah, a nice little story about redemption and justice.

Well, what are you still looking at? You're still here? You want a story, do you? All right, let's start with some characters. I suppose you want a man and a woman. And some kids. A house in the suburbs. And a dog. A nice, modern, dysfunctional family – so normal and sweet on the surface, but horrifically screwed up deep down inside. Perhaps they have incompatibility issues or personality clashes. Let's see... I suppose the teenage boy could be doing drugs. And I guess the wife could have a gambling addiction. That would be good. Maybe the husband should be an alcoholic. You'd enjoy that, I'll bet.

Now, what do they do, this man and woman? Do they have jobs? I'll bet the man works downtown, something with computers. And the wife has a part-time job at an art gallery. Yeah, you'd like that, computers and art, that's nice. A nice gender cliché.

And I suppose you want some sex in this story, something steamy and lurid. Of course you want sex. Every good story must have sex. Oh, and of course you want an affair. Is that what you want? Yes, that's what you would like. An affair. Okay, then, let's say that the man is seeing a woman. Someone at work, I imagine, someone much younger. They've been going at it hot and heavy for months, but the man, the husband, he is uncertain

about the affair and thinks maybe he should break it off. However, he keeps telling this woman, this woman from the office at work, this young, thin, dark-haired woman, this sexy woman, he keeps telling her that he will leave his wife, that he will leave her soon, that he is only staying with her because of the kids and that he is just waiting for the right moment to leave, and he tells this young, dark-haired sexy woman from the office that he will run away with her, will run away and get married in some nice, warm vacation spot, maybe in the Caribbean, would you like that, maybe Jamaica. Is that what you're wanting, is that why you're looking at these small black marks? Is that why you're staring and scanning? I mean really, what are you looking at?

Oh, but certainly you want some suspense, some conflict. This little story needs drama. Okay, how about this, maybe one of the kids, the sensitive little girl I suppose, the innocent 10-year-old, maybe she finds out about the affair, maybe she even sees her father and the woman from the office in bed together. What will the girl do? Will she tell her mother? Will she confront her father? Then what will happen? What? You want me to tell you? You can't write your own story?

Well, okay, perhaps the man finds out that his daughter knows about the affair, perhaps his daughter tells him (wouldn't that be a choice scene to read? – gripping dialogue, very entertaining), or maybe he overhears his daughter telling a friend on the phone about her father's affair, or, even better, maybe the man sees his daughter standing there in the bedroom door staring at him and the sexy woman from the office (just as you are staring at these words now), she sees the two of them lying

there all naked, kissing and rubbing and touching each other. Is that what you want? Yes, the daughter sees the cheating couple in bed having sex. Are you happy now, or is that too much for you, has this little story gone too far outside your nice little boundaries, your nice little morals, the sensible morals you have, the nice little notions that you have about what should and shouldn't happen in a story, a nice little story that will make you smile, that will make you feel contented, a story that will pass your time and amuse you?



No? Well, let's continue then. I suppose the man now is very upset, is excruciatingly upset now that his daughter, his sensitive little daughter, knows about his affair with the beautiful, striking, dark-haired woman from the office. The man is terribly confused about what he should do. He needs advice. He needs to talk things out, to get his head straight. Isn't that what you want in a story like this, some psychological crap? Maybe some Freudian mumbo jumbo, or better yet, some New Age psychobabble or Jungian gobbledegook. Maybe some Buddhist hogwash. It's quite popular now. Yes,

Vivarium by Casey Snyder I could write you some platitudes, some clichés, some smarmy dialogue full of selfish, sophomoric, and shortsighted aphorisms about insecurity, self-esteem, archetypes, superegos, narcissism, and such, all disguised as philosophy or depth psychology. Would that make you happy? Huh? Would you like that?

So all right, I'll play along some more. Let's see, I suppose you want the man to talk to his best friend, to confide in him, to ask for advice, ask what to do, and so on. Isn't that how a nice little story is supposed to go? The man is in quite a tough spot and should ask for advice from his best

friend.

Well, what advice do you think the best friend should give to the man? Do you want this little story to be realistic, to be happy, to be funny, or what? What sort of dialogue do you want? You want short and crisp, or long and involved? You want educated, back-alley, or what? Should they talk like men, macho and hard, or do you want sensitive talk? Who is this man, anyway? Is the man an insensitive, unrepentant brute, or is he a gentle, misunderstood victim? What do you want from this man and his friend? Who are they? Do you know them? Is one of them you or someone you know?

Well, do I have to do everything? I suppose I do. You just sit there judging me, smug and content, staring at these words, scanning and thinking. Reading and thinking. And judging. Is this a good story? Should I keep reading or should I put it down? Is that what you're looking at, something to judge? You say you just want to be entertained, to be engrossed. Well, is that what you want, what you really want? Is that it? Don't you have something better to do? Why do you keep staring? If you know what you want in a story, then why don't you create one for yourself?

Do you really need someone to write stories for you, cute little stories with all the right ingredients, the right format – a sentence here, a sentence there, paragraphs, indentations, commas, quotation marks, periods, a plotline, a climax, a denouement – and, of course, the right philosophies and morals and language and style, nothing too far out, something realistic and normal, but at the same time different and exciting, something smart and funny, but poignant and sublime, something so, so, so *something*, but what is it? How about: based on a true story, but dramatized and embellished? Is that what you would

like? That's what most people want. Is that why you are staring? Is that what you are hoping for here? Well, just what are you looking at?

You know what I think? I think you want a story with elements and morals exactly as already in your own head! If that's so, then what do you want of me? You want me to continue the story, to do the hard work, to do the creating, is that it? You just want to look, just to look; you want me to do all the work?



Collages 8 by Wayne Bertola

So, okay, I'll humor you. Let's suppose the man, the cheating husband, confides in his best friend, and suppose his best friend tells him that he has to decide for himself. His friend says to the man, "Do you want your girlfriend, do you love her that much, enough to give up your comfortable life? Or, do you want your wife and kids? Only you can decide. Only you know what you want and how much you want it. It's up to you. It's purely up to you. It's your decision." Kind of a Dr. Phil deal. Wouldn't that be nice?

Right – the best friend tells the man that he has to either quit the affair and come clean with his wife, try to build a decent life, at least for the sake of the kids, to be a good husband and be loyal to his wife, or, if he loves this woman from work so much, this very young, dark-haired, striking woman, if he loves her so much and if his life with his wife and kids is so, so horrible, then what he has to do is tell his wife the truth and run off with the woman from work. It's up to him. Only up to him. That's what his best friend tells him. That's his only advice. What else could he say?

What do you think? Isn't that what you want the friend to say? You sit there so relaxed, so confident of yourself. You just sit and read. Sure, if you're just the reader, it's easy. You don't have to do any of the hard work, you just read and judge. All you do is

look. But what are you looking at, anyway? Couldn't you simply finish the story in your head in a much more satisfying way than it can be finished here? Why not?

Now, think about it – isn't it obvious, the best friend's advice is of no use. It's totally useless. It's just a simple cliché that everyone believes and wants to hear. A simple, useless cliché. Of course, the man doesn't know what to do. I already told you he's confused. Weren't you paying attention? Why am I writing all this if you're not even going to pay attention? What good does some Dr. Phil advice about choosing do for someone who doesn't know what to choose? Why doesn't someone tell him *how* to go about making such a choice? Telling someone to choose but not telling them how to go about choosing doesn't help much. Okay, so what would you like to happen next?

I think I know what you want. I'll humor you some more and continue. Okay, what does the man do? What would you like him to do, expect him to do? I think I know. Perhaps the man goes on a drinking binge. He is an alcoholic, after all. Yeah, he goes to a bar and really ties one on. That kind of thing is big in stories. Is that what you wanted? Okay, let's suppose the man gets really drunk, totally wasted, drowns his sorrows in booze, hoping for an answer, for some resolution to his problem. You like that? Good. The man really ties one on. Okay, then what?

Well, here's an idea, maybe he has an accident with his car – drinking and driving, that's very modern, very exciting – messy, but gritty and realistic – you'd like that. I can see the movie rights – good visuals, lots of exciting action. Yeah, the man has a car accident while drunk. But, what sort of an ac-

cident? What happens? What would you like?

Maybe the man hits a dog with his car. Would that be good? Would that be engrossing? But, oh boy, the dog mustn't die, you wouldn't like that at all, not at all, then the story would be far too sad for you. *Why did the dog have to die? That poor dog!* So, okay, the dog doesn't die. He's not even badly injured. The man will take the dog to the vet and he'll be fine. Are you happy now? The dog is fine. The

people are a mess, but the dog is fine. Just what everyone likes.

And now, finally, what about an ending? This isn't a novel; it's just a short story. We need to wrap this thing up. How would you like this cute little story to end? What would be satisfying and edifying and, most of all, entertaining? What are you looking for? Do you even know? You want me to do everything, don't you? I even have to tell you what to want. Sure, I do everything and then what? You don't like it. I know you – you won't like it at all. Isn't that just the way it always goes? You do nothing but sit and stare and then you don't like it.



Collages 9 by Wayne Bertola

You want a good ending? Okay, fine – here's one: The man gets home and finds a note. His wife has left him. She's run off with – guess who – that's right, his best friend. Turns out they've been having an affair for months and now that she knows about her husband's infidelity (the irony: she heard it from her lover, her husband's best friend), she has decided to leave her husband. Tit for tat. It's nearly perfect. It'd be better if the husband would die. I could easily tack that on: Upon hearing the news, the man blurts out, "But darling, I love you, I've always loved you and I always will love you 'til the end of time," then drops dead of a heart attack. It's precious. You will love that ending.

No, really, I've seen *Casablanca*, *The English Patient*, and the rest. You like it, don't you? But wait, I've another idea.

Here's a better ending: The drunken man doesn't hit a dog with his car, he hits his wife! Oh, that's good. After getting drunk, the man decides to go home and tell his wife about his affair with the young, dark-haired woman from work. Meanwhile, his wife has been worried about her missing husband and she is outside, in the dark, pacing near their driveway. The man, in his drunken state, doesn't see his wife in front of the driveway and strikes her with his car. A tragedy! You'll like that, that's a good one. Then, this is really good, while the wife is in the hospital, maybe dying, the husband realizes how much he loves her and wants her. Yes, he sees the light and ends his affair. His wife recovers. They live happily ever after. The end.

Do you like that? No? Why not – too pat, too common, too manipulative? Well, just what in the world are you looking at then? What is it that you want?

Okay, okay, I've an idea; how about this for an ending: The man comes home after drinking, still confused, he admits the affair to his wife and, holy cow, he discovers that his wife is also having an affair – and here's the good part, it's an affair with the same dark-haired woman from the office that he's having an affair with! Yes, that's clever, that's a twist. You'll like that. It turns out that the women are bisexual and the wife is having an affair with the very same woman from work that her husband has been seeing. One of the women, or – wait – both of them together tell the man about their affair. Or, better still, perhaps he finds them in bed together when he gets home. Yes, this is good. The man gets his daughter's perspective of things. He is devastated. The women tell the man that they are leaving him to be with each other. He gets what he deserves,



the dirty, cheating rat. The end. Oh, wait. Maybe he dies. Yeah, the heart attack thing. That was good – he drops over dead of a heart attack. Oh, oh, but wait, I've got an even better one, a beaut of an ending. See if you like this.

Here it is: The man comes home and tells his wife that he has something important to tell her. But his wife is upset and insists that she needs to tell him something first. She's held it in for so long. She says that when she was young, years ago, long before she met her husband, when she was just a teenager, she got pregnant and had a baby – a baby girl. She tells the man that she gave her daughter up for adoption. Now that daughter has sought out her birth mother and has found her, she has contacted her.

And, the woman says, her first daughter that she has recently reunited with after all these years, that daughter lives right here in this very city. The wife then tells her husband the girl's name, the name of the daughter that she gave up for adoption so many years ago. And – did you see it coming? – it's the same name as the young, dark-haired sexy woman from the office! That's right – the man is having an affair with his wife's daughter. Good one, don't you think?

You don't like it? You know, I kinda suspected that you wouldn't. You are so picky! You sit there so smug, so judgmental, so glib. Just staring and thinking. You make me do all the work, all the hard work, and all you do is look. And judge. I arrange these little black scratchings to make a story, a nice little story, so normal, so realistic – but not too realistic – so clever, so ironic, so savvy and surprising, and what do I get out of it – nothing but criticism! You just sit there, quiet and smug, and, of course, judging. I do all the work, you do nothing. Nothing. Well, nothing except look. Just look. All you do is look.

Well, what are you looking at?

Connor McGaha

Something.

We sat there
on the porch
wooden and creaking,
bending under the weight
of five male writers
and their egos
and the twenty foot drop
that gravity threatened to
initiate
at any given second.
Our lives were one
and our wines were many
and we sat there,
smoking our cigarettes,
with their ruby red tips,
and drinking our wines,
with their ruby red bodies,
and we sat there.
And it was the best day
I can remember
as of late.
Except for the night that
I stayed up
way past my bedtime,
looking at the blips in the sky
like they were God's radar,
searching for him
(or her)
over a bottle of rum
and Bukowski,
and I sat there.
I found nothing.



Remnants 1 by Tom Berenz



Remnants 4 by Tom Berenz

Brian Clifton

An Indecisive Sonnet About The Moon

The parking lot shared its smoke
with the moon –passing between lung
and lung until it was not smoke,
until it had sublimed from smoke to song,
to pupil, to laugh, to kiss, and to ash
–pavement against the moon’s eyelash.

And the parking lot was lost to the moon
with its bottlenecks hickeyed clean
and hair roughed up with song of sand,
of coin, of shattered CD, of dried condom.
The moon poured its love through ukulele
over the last gin-pint drunken gay man.
So, how should I begin to rehash these facts?

In the parking lot, I was the moon focused
on women sublimed to smoke –open car
doors soaked with rust. I fell as smoke falls
–to myself ungraceful, to the world as wafting
into a wide, empty grin. And the wind,
only the wind would clean my guts of tears.
So, how should I begin to rehash these facts?
Like pavement against the moon’s eyelash?

And how do I reverse to erase this collage
of parking lot and moon back into the single
photograph in which I am the only one
still living, in which I can point out the tan
stains between teeth I had loved once,
in which one face is reconstructed and one
face is not bloated with rat poison and vodka?

So how, how, how do I erase the indecisions,
how do I hammer the nails until their heads
sink below flush, how do I heap hospital gowns
and fists curled in suffocation on a woman
who sits on a curb frosted in moonlight?

How do I revert? How do I sit still?
How do I survive on coffee and detuned
ukulele songs? How do I turn moonlight
into ash as if it were always ash? And how
do I sow the parking lot’s pavement with ash
when the moon has dusted it with its own ash?

Dear Cricket,

In the last four years, I've learned to eat raspberries one by one, to pluck them from my walls where their skins yield tart-mark ghosts. There is no comfort pulling them from their pins. The laugh of a new love's ex-love. I've pushed raspberries past incisor, bicuspid, past the teeth whose names I have forgotten, but, Cricket, I have not once forgotten the raspberry.

When you learn to pile ripe raspberries on your palm, you will find them sprouting from the ridges of a horse's lopped off ear. They will hang from the eyelids of musicians and pulse between strands of knotted hair, but a raspberry is no comfort. Never a pillow, a jacket, a plaster wall paid with a minimum wage check. I have tried, as you will try, blackberries, strawberries, pomegranates—

their seeds can float upstream in spring. But once you've tasted them, let them mold in their metal bowls. They are what can be destroyed and so must be. Nothing but raspberries, dear Cricket, nothing.

An American Story: An Interview with Brian Cirimo

John Cross

"I cannot be awake for nothing looks to me as it did before, Or else I am awake for the first time, and all before has been a mean sleep." These words from Walt Whitman seem apropos on this warming winter morning as I sit down to chat with Brian Cirimo about his life and work and his expression of the American story. Cirimo's work seems to dream itself awake only to discover itself dreaming again. The featured artwork, from his new series called Black, is dark and personal and yet instantly relatable to the everyman in all of us."

John Cross: How are you doing?

Brian Cirimo: I'm doing well.

JC: Tell me a little about your background.

BC: I grew up in East Utica, New York, a pretty simple town and was raised by my mother. When I turned 20 I left for college and moved to Albany, NY where I received my BFA and MFA in art. I'm now an artist and adjunct professor of art living in Albany. That's I in a nut shell!

JC: Sounds familiar! What was it like to work with Mark Greenwald?

BC: Mark was that professor that you dreaded but yearned for. He was a huge influence on both my work and the way I looked at the world. He was blunt and never made things easy but it's exactly what made him a great mentor.

JC: I find that those are the best kind. I think one learns a lot from getting kicked in the ass and not so much from getting patted on the back repeatedly.

BC: That's for sure, but a nice pat on the back would have been nice from time to time!

JC: Looking at your work I would not have immediately put the two of you together but I can see the connection. Did you find it difficult to find your own voice with that big of a personality's influence hanging in the air?

BC: The opposite actually. The work I was doing when I entered grad school was arbitrary and left both me and the viewer wanting. Mark forced me to think more profoundly about my life and experiences and fold them into the fabric of the world around me. Bob Dylan's music, Philip Guston's paintings, and Philip Roth's writing were also an intricate part of my development. Mark was a connoisseur on all of the above so our conversations were never dull or one sided.

JC: Your life experiences seem to be what your work is all about, are they meant to be strictly autobiographical or is there something bigger going on?

BC: I think there's something bigger going on. Like all the great protagonists in American writing and painting there is part of the creator in them. But ultimately it is the desire to transcend and build a greater story and world than my average American life can provide.

JC: In the majority of your earlier work, your protagonist is either shown from behind or does not have facial features. It seems you wanted him to be anonymous while instantly recognizable. Kind of an average Joe

BC: Yes, the everyman. Also, this idea of the lost American Identity and the search to what it means to be American. I don't know if the average Joe can figure out such a large and overwhelming question but he's going to give it his best shot.

JC: Well he seems to be in good company, you mention Bob Dylan, Walt Whitman, Kerouac, Woody Guthrie and Woody Allen, just to name a few. These characters are all from a time when America was really trying to find itself, and each one of these artists had his part in telling that story. It seems though, that that yearning for the open road, that sense of discovery in one's own backyard is part of the past. Or are we still searching?

BC: I think maybe we've become lazy. But I also believe that the need for that open road, our national wanderlust is ingrained in us, part of our American DNA. It's there, we just have to arouse it, and to do that we have to reach to our great American artist. Whitman, I feel, is more important today than during his own time. His work is a small light in a very bleak time. When I read

Kerouac's "On the Road" I realized that I had been asleep and lazy for too long. I hoped in the car and I drove across the country and learned that what I thought "American" meant was a total abstraction than what I was witnessing and experiencing. That is the larger picture that I want my Protagonist to live in and be defined by.

JC: Did you set out hoping to find Kerouac and Whitman's America, meaning what their stories related, the images they conjured? And did you find that America had a new face that they might not recognize? For example, Kerouac was all about hitch hiking, but today you wouldn't get very far if you relied on the kindness of strangers.

BC: Yes, the face has changed a bit and the hitchhiking traveler is out of my realm of experience for sure; my brain is too poisoned with five o'clock news stories of murdered hitchhikers to take on that practice. What surprised me most was when I discovered the dark side of America, the run down industrial towns of America's underbelly. Growing up in a small declining industrial American town is one thing but when you spend thousands of miles and dozens of hours driving through replicas of your hometown it awakens you to the hypocrisy of the so called "American Dream".

JC: Right, but there is a positive side too, isn't there. Your work while often dark and even violent also has whimsy and fun. Were you able to find a balance in your experience?

BC: Oh yes, you have to pass through the American rust belt but when you hit those majestic Rockies, or the enigmatic Yellowstone National Park, or the God Like hole of the Grand Canyon your heart beats for America. And the people, the people are wonderful, kind, tremendously interesting, and full to the brim with American stories. We are, as Americans, a dichotomy; one part hopeful optimist and one part shrugging realist.

JC: When I look at "Black," the artwork featured in this issue, I get the feeling that you, or your protagonist, have returned from the road only to hole up in isolation. These are lonely pieces, devoid of color.

BC: I had been doing a lot of colored pen drawings for the past six or seven years, then I sat down and read William Kennedy's trilogy of Albany, NY novels. One of his main protagonists, Francis Phelan, an ex-ballplayer and now hobo struck me hard. This is the American underbelly I was talking about before. Kennedy's protagonist reminded me of Gregor

Samsa from Kafka's "Metamorphosis" and from there I wanted to do a series of drawings that went to a darker, blacker side of the equation. I started with colored pens and that didn't feel right so I moved to just black ink but they still felt too polished. When I decided to use graphite the mood I was searching for came to life. They are black, dark, and not very hopeful I suppose.

JC: Also, very confined. The violence of the head shot paintings and drawings is more subdued yet more haunting. The image of the protagonist's head in a hole underwater is striking. It makes me feel the sadness of someone drowning all alone, like a tree falling in a forest with no one around to hear it.

BC: Yes, thank you for such an honest and open reaction to the work. It is our greatest fear to be isolated, ostracized, and left to die alone. I myself am very claustrophobic, so I feel the confinement of these "heads" quite literally.

JC: That is interesting because the other difference I notice in these drawings is that you are now showing us his facial features, albeit distorted. He has become more you and as a result this work seems to be the most personal. What made you decide to include the facial features finally?

BC: The face just emerged one day. I had tried to draw the facial features many times before and it just felt and looked contrived. And then when I started this "Black" series of drawings the face just came. I think you could be onto something with your statement, it may be the most personal work I've ever done. Sometimes you have to stop the journey you're on with your work, and life, and look at yourself in the mirror, maybe that's what's happening with the new drawings.

JC: Sometimes that is the only thing to do. That being said, is this series finished or is there more "Black" to come?

BC: It's just getting started, in all I have around twenty five drawings and 10 paintings and I'm currently working on a large scale painting and drawings that I'm hoping to have finished for a show in March.

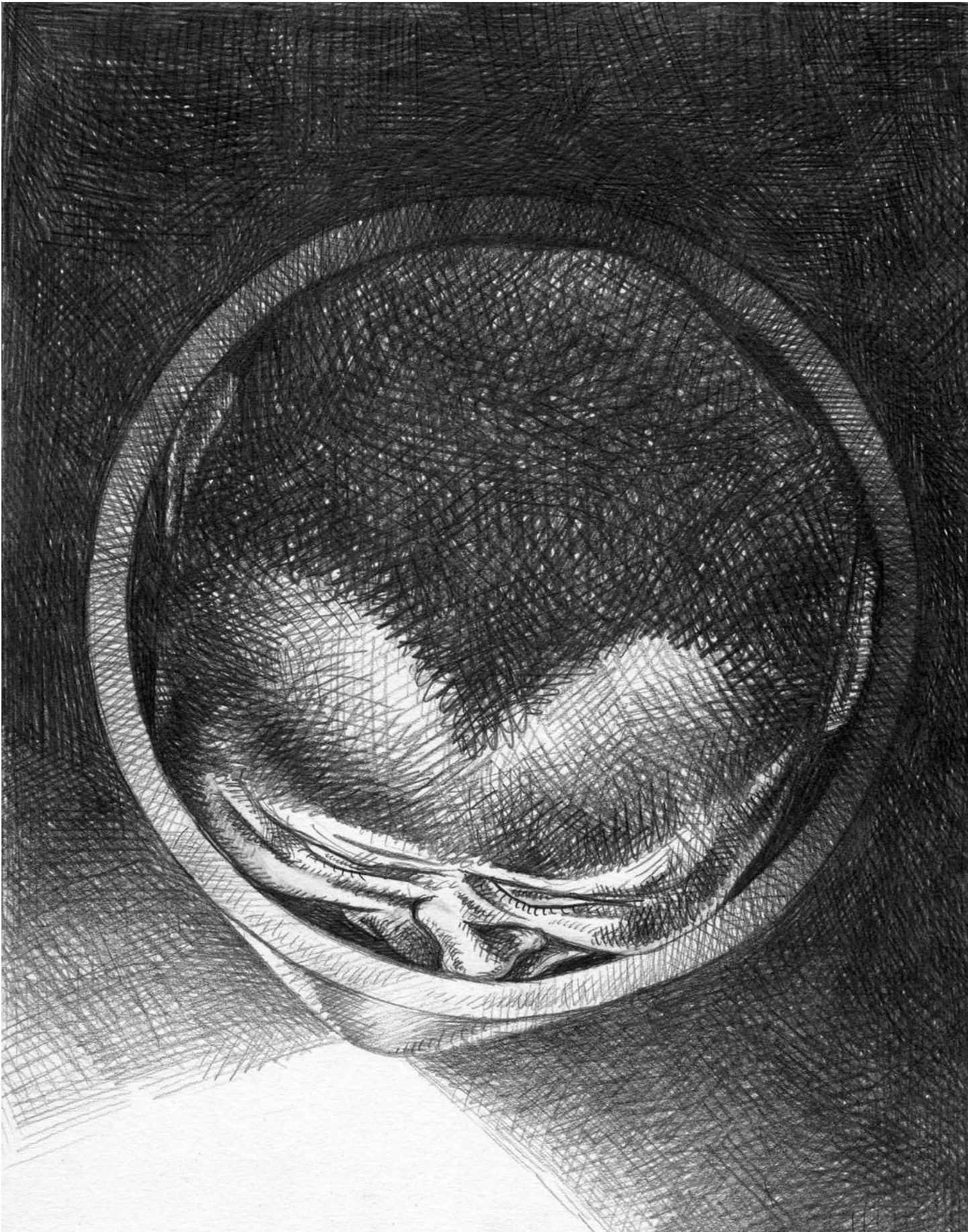
JC: Well, it is a pleasure to look at and even though the facial features make the work more personal for you I think your viewer's will have no difficulty in relating to your protagonist's inner probing. Thank you for sharing your work and story with us.

BC: Thank you, John. It has been a pleasure.

To see more of Brian Cirimo's work visit: www.brian-cirimo.com



Angle by Brian Cirimo



Circle by Brian Cirimo



Weight of the World by Brian Cirimo



Hole by Brian Cirimo



Trickle Down by Brian Cirimo

Albert Einstein Had A Depressive Cat

Kate LaDew

Albert Einstein's cat was depressed. Einstein's friend, Ernst Strauss, said the cat was just pensive, but Albert Einstein knew it was suffering from much more than pensiveness. 'Pensiveness' was but a phase, a passing feeling. A moment. Albert Einstein's cat was not pensive. Albert Einstein's cat was depressed.

And he knew why. Albert Einstein knew why. The rain. It had been raining three days now. Albert Einstein's cat did not like the rain. It would sit by the parlor window and watch the rain pitter-patter against the glass. Pitter-patter like the cat's own feet. The cat would sit and watch the rain pitter-patter against the parlor window and sigh.

The last three evenings Albert Einstein and Ernst Strauss sat in the parlor and smoked their pipes, watching the cat watch the rain. Ernst Strauss said he had never heard a cat sigh before.

Albert Einstein said, "That is why I know it is depression, Ernst. This cat needs an analyst."

"An analyst? And where do you propose to find an analyst for a cat, Albert?"

"A cat is not so different from a man, Ernst. It feels."

"It sleeps and eats. If that is feeling--"

"You have just described every wife I've ever had."

"You mean the two?"

"More than enough."

"It is just pensive."

"It is not."

"Then it is melancholy."

"Yes," Albert Einstein said, nodding. "It is melancholy. And melancholia is much more than pensiveness. My cat is depressed, Ernst."

Ernst Strauss blew a puff of smoke. "Perhaps. Perhaps," he looked down. "It is a sad thing to hear a cat sigh, Albert."

"Yes. There is nothing sadder." Albert Einstein also looked down. "Ernst," he said, a slight tremor tangling his voice, "I do not wish the dear fellow to suffer. I do not wish him to remain in this depressive state. For I know what the trouble is," Albert Einstein looked at the rain pitter-pattering against the glass. "But I do not know how to turn it off."

to the girls who took monogamy out to dinner and never came back

i still slip like shod with your ghost, you know
 a shoe like almost on
 a hat tried on too many times
 but maybe one more
 eyes closed, i like to ghost with your sideways cackle down some highway
 streetlights clacking
 skipping past open windows
 bright in front now bright in back
 their laugh like
 future now past future now past
 their laugh like
 whatever the radio drums up
 i still stretch impatiently lanky all across your stoop
 the door always full
 always closed
 brimming like just before open
 lit from behind by bliss and long hours

 but i can't open my lips around you anymore, teeth tight, tongue taut
 words mangled in throat
 broken before limping past my gums
 these days i catch mostly your breeze, the scent of just-washed hair
 the stone of your back
 the arm on yours heavy not light
 the redundant arm on yours
 not for decoration, not for decoration
 blinking with neon
 on thick nights we kick the pedal down, drop each other off quickly
 driving home we watch the sidewalk
 for someone else walking aimlessly under stars
 bite back questions like
 how do i get back to your streets
 i know what it's like to swim in other veins, you know
 arched back
 heavy rain falling on a tin ear
 i've spun rooms like cocoon and thrust open windows
 feet walking by down below
 as if they existed too
 me leaving the room only in body
 daydream, nightlife
 yet in the midst and at the cusp i always stood up quick, hot
 spoke the bodies my heart also beats for
 looked sharp, demanded room
 for the hands i also held

sleep is static dream- rest- wake-, repeat: dream- rest- wake-, repeat:
life is static too like sparks on hot shirts
jumping tv screens
static like how hearts are built
for more than one guest
sleep is where i'm putting you now, putting you down, dreaming you gone
bruised mouth unclenching
chest like open
unlocked ribs still a cage but with breeze
storms promise this: light then sound, and promise this: heat then space
really though life is reverse
thunder love first, then lightning strike



Collages 3 by Wayne Bertola



Three Little Pigs by Ronald Walker



Escape from the Suburbs by Ronald Walker

Interlude

Adam Gnuse

The hurricane rages on outside our apartment. It's the third one this year. The power's out, and through the darkness outside our window I can see the cypress tree uprooting and falling into the street. I don't bother checking to see whether it fell on her car—no point since its carburetor flooded out two weeks ago.

It's hot and humid in the apartment. No showers—the bathtub's filled with water we have to conserve. My shirt sticks, and my back's broken out from sweat. She's stopped shaving her legs.

We gave in two months ago and moved in with each other. After each storm, it's almost a week before any stores open and most streets are clear enough to drive on.

We used to drink to pass the time. We'd lie awake in the heat, our mouths tasting like the warm beer, feeling the headache come. Everything in the apartment seems like it's sweating. There's nowhere else to go. There's no one else to see.

The wind blows the rain into billows. I step away from the window and listen to the sticks and trash and roof tiles rattle and rap against the windowpane.

She sits across the room from me. Like usual, it's a long time before either one of us talks. We sit in the darkness, our only flashlight on the table, pointed up at the ceiling.

"I had a dream this morning," she tells me. "It felt real. Important."

Even with the hurricane outside, the sound of her voice fills the room.

"Really," I say.

"Yeah." She squirms on the sofa.

She tells me that in her dream she wakes up in an apartment complex. There's a storm outside, but there's no doors or windows. She goes from apartment to apartment, and there's no one there. But then there's this noise, and there's someone there.

It's this tall guy, he's huge, and he's coming after her. He kills her—he picks her up and he smashes her head against the wall over and over until—

"I get it," I say. My throat feels scraped out.

And then she wakes up again. Same place. And there's no one there but that man who again comes after her, who beats her over and over until she dies. And she wakes up again.

"Is that supposed to be me?" I say.

"What?" she says. "Who?"

"It's only been us here. There's no one else."

Thunder shakes the apartment. The windows rattle in their frames. The flashlight on the table falls over and rolls back and forth, its beam shifting between the window and her. She's pulling loose threads from the sofa. I go over and sit the flashlight up again towards the ceiling. I'm tired of seeing this room.

In the dream, she tells me, she starts to fight back. She hits the man and scratches him before he closes a closet door on her head, or throws her against the counter, or drowns her in the tub. But eventually, when she wakes up in the dream, she notices he still has the scratches on him from the times before.

So every time she fights him. She kicks, she punches his groin, she gouges his eyes. And eventually the guy's too beat up to come after her. She finds a loose brick in the wall, and she smashes him with it until he's broken bones and mush.

I watch her in the darkness. She's looking right at me.

"I don't hit you," I say.

"I know," she says.

Then in the dream, things get disjointed. She's living in the apartment—there are no doors and windows—but there's food and water. The dream jumps forward, nothing's happened, and she's been living there for years. She's alone, she tries to sleep. Feels raw and dizzy and splayed out all over the place. The sounds of the storm outside. The walls rattle like it's going to break in. The dream isn't ending. There's no schedule, no routine. It just keeps going.

Sometimes she finds herself in the room with the guy's corpse, and sometimes she drives herself crazy questioning who the hell the guy was, and why it was she did him in. She realizes she's old. The storm keeps going. She finally dies.

And then she wakes up again.

"I don't hit you," I say. "Why the hell did you tell me that? What are you trying to say?"

"I don't know." Her arms are folded. She's quiet for a long time.

The storm's raging outside. Something crashes against the windowpane, and I wonder if it's going to break.

"I didn't know what else to say."



Rabbit Wisdom by Jane Zich

Alex Saunders

The Ruminations Are Mine

I begin to wonder if I can understand
 all she is saying in her absence
 The leaves are turning
 a golden shade of dreams
 and waking nightmares
 Lancaster distant

Time already
 but hands and cogs
 will not make the hummingbird fly backward
 Nor the candid beauty of clouds
 in efflorescent trails
 of chemicals
 smog
 and smoke and smoke and smoke

I've already seen you take a drag
 red-eyed in the morning
 The sun shining warmly on your face
 Will it still shine well
 even in Oregon
 Will your lips
 still taste the bittersweet romance of the century
 once the cog pushes the hand passed one years time
 Will you see then
 what I see now?

I can only idealize the dancers backstage
 Sitting on the country side
 the green in grass
 yellowing leaf and blade
 shadow of this blossoming willow
 lilac
 and wine
 I lost my mind here
 it's nearly spring

The modern dancers
 forgetting everything and everyone
 lying
 on a roof-top in hollow thoughts
 contemplating dreams of Colorado Avenue
 lilac
 and high
 I've lost my mind here

O' grandeur the oak!
Lovers
will come in Denver
Lovers
will die in Denver
Perchance
just my eyes

Time of present
tripping
on hands of clockwork
beckoning
I made a bed of a grave
of which
you never belonged

Goodbye is all too good a word
and hand in hand with only time
I'll be traveling on
through the window
and in the wind
It's nearly fall
and the sky looks different
Will you see then
what I see now?

A Girl's Hands

Arya F. Jenkins

There was an old man from Canada examining my hands on the beach. No one had examined my hands like that before, with such intensity and curiosity. I was 14 years old, and I let the man, whom I had just met, caress my fingers and smooth my palms and turn my hands. Once, he raised them up. Removing his wire-rim sunglasses and settling them on his sketchy, freckled, balding dome, he informed me my hands were the hands of a surgeon. He was a designer of stamps, he said. He had designed all the stamps we knew. He was a master who recognized art when he saw it. His eyes were sharp and sure and blue.

No man had ever complimented me like this. And no boy either.

My hair was long and dark, and my limbs, lithe and tan, and I switched my brightest smile on him when he told me my hands were a work of art.

"They are?"

"Truly," he said. "I'd like to meet your parents." He gazed at me, turning his head a little. "Are they nice?"

"Yes," I said, a little doubtfully. Not sure of my doubt.

"Are they home?"

"I think so."

It was midday of a holiday weekday. My father had already gone fishing.

"What does he do?" the designer of stamps asked me.

"He is president of a plastics company."

"Will you take me to your parents? I want to talk with them about you."

I got up immediately, and he followed me up the long climb of wooden steps alongside the incline of scrub grass to the outermost cottage of a group of cottages that overlooked the bay. It was where we stayed every August.

Indeed, my parents were home, both seated in the living room, their bare feet up on wicker ottomans, reading.

"This is John, a nice man I met on the beach. He designs stamps. He wanted to meet you," I

said coming into the room.

"I'm entranced by your daughter." He shook my father's hand, then took hold of my mother's in both his hands, bowing a little. My father's eyes were pale blue and steely and they fixed on him for a moment before he shut his book.

"Sit down. Let me fix you a drink. Gin and tonic?"

"That's fine."

My father glanced at my mother, who was still immersed in her book. "Nothing for me, dear."

Presently, my father returned with two iced drinks, one for the man with the name like his. My father asked him, "What sort of work do you do?"

The two men sat holding their tall drinks between their bare legs, knee to knee. They seemed very familiar with each other and presently were discussing fishing, my father patting the designer of stamps on the back like an old chum. At this point, I left the room.

A year or so later, when I was finally allowed to date, I thought of the designer of stamps whenever a boyfriend took my hand, or played with it or kissed it, or brought it down below to touch him. For a long time I felt very free and confident with my hands, believing, as the stranger on the beach had told me, that my hands were a gift. No one had ever said anything of the sort to me.

I never saw the designer of stamps again, although I did look for him. On some days, searching from my towel on the beach, I would squint to see if I could see him somewhere nearby. I wondered if he continued his friendship with my father, who was essentially a solitary man driven by duties. Sometimes, when my father took long walks along the beach at night, disappearing down by the jetty, away from us and the setting sun, I imagined he went to meet the designer of stamps and that the two paused there together at the end of day, lit up as if by an idea, to discuss my hands, my special gift.



Collages 5 by Wayne Bertola

Jim Richards

A Lesson

The purpose of this is to teach me
a lesson. True story: Father Poverty
delivered no electricity or water
to a billion people last holiday. No
surprise. Same gift every year. Honey,
let's get that for the kids next Christmas.

True story: Last night I complained
that the dull rumble of the furnace
firing up was disturbing me as I slept
beneath down, on a memory foam
mattress and contoured pillow.

My progenitors—some of them at least—
sang to keep their bare feet warm
as they walked across frozen plains,
lost newborns, and ate boiled rawhide
they tore from the wagons' wheels.

True story. This morning I complained
that the water pressure in our kitchen
was too low as I rinsed a pound
of purple grapes then plucked them one
by one from the bunch with my teeth.
Kill the king. Put him out of his misery.



Pink Elephants by Abraham Ferraro

Conor McNamara

Sticks

we pitched a tent in some woods by the creek--we whittled sticks for s'mores and brought a cooler full of juice boxes and potato chips. i cut off the bottom half of my pinky with your pocketknife trying to open the ballpark franks. you were speechless, the nub of finger on the picnic table like a forgotten nickel. but i didn't cry. you healed my wounds then, why should it be so different now?

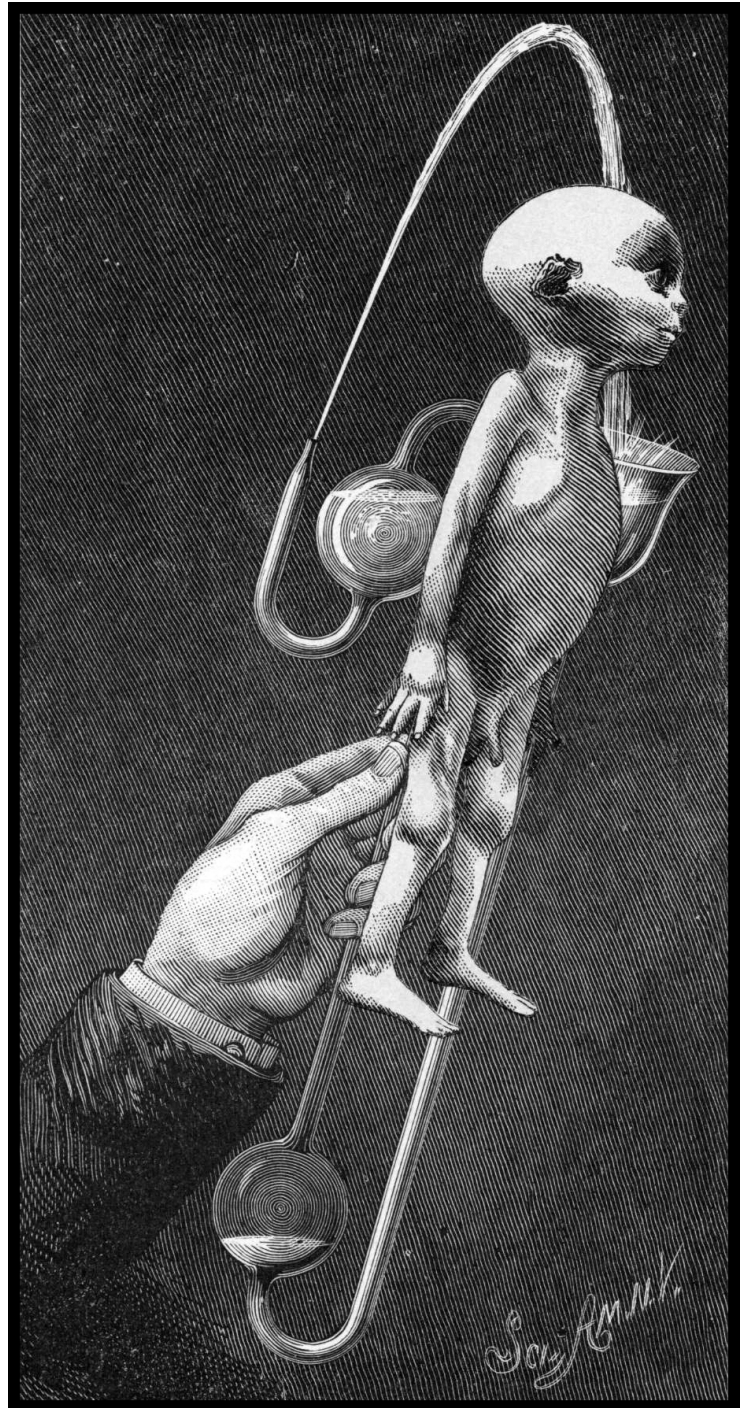


In Waiting by Casey Snyder

Howard Winn

Listening to Robert Creeley

His voice was low,
barely above a whisper,
and one-eyed,
so that depth
perception is flawed.
How near or far
is that object
for which he reaches?
The light pull
is not quite where
he perceives it,
and his hand grasps
empty air at first.
We strain to hear
and he does not
make it easy.
Forgetting that there
are no ideas
except in things,
he listens to the thoughts
in his own head
or on the roof.



Collages 7 by Wayne Bertola

Astoria Saudade

André M. Zucker

Katelyn left Mike one day before the refrigerator broke. They never thought much about the refrigerator during their 3 year relationship. When all that need to be cold turned room temperature Mike decided to throw out the refrigerator. Mike wrapped his body around it and attempted to move it. Katelyn never considered its age or how it got into their five story Astoria walk-up. The refrigerator clung to the sticky residue that haloed its base. Mike pressed his entire weight down to move the monolith. A crackling sound erupted as the refrigerator was ripped from its crusted comfort zone. Mike shimmied it towards himself and saw a thick residue spot where the refrigerator once stood. Inside the layer was old food, Q-Tips, dead roaches and dust bunnies; all those things that build up over the years.

Mike called in sick, he could not imagine eight hours of sitting in his cubicle. Katelyn went to her East Side legal services office. Her first night alone she fed squirrels in Astoria Park while he lay in what used to be their bed. Mike worked at a nonprofit company which he found meaningful but underwhelming. Katelyn was visibly disheveled when she walked in but her colleagues were too polite to comment. Mike continued to push the refrigerator out of the apartment. Neither of them had been willing to clean while they dismantled their life. Mike barely noticed how much junk accumulated until he started to move the refrigerator. Katelyn booked a hotel just before her lunch break and immediately dreaded an evening alone. Mike cleaned up with each of the refrigerator's movements. Katelyn would have liked to come home to an orderly living space.

Not knowing where to go Katelyn crossed the 59th Street Bridge. She wandered Astoria until she arrived a falafel restaurant. They both loved Astoria's gritty boulevards and quaint side streets. They frequented the neighborhood's Greek and Turkish eateries and shopped at the local supermarkets. Katelyn moved into his

apartment on 37th Avenue one year after they met. They often ran home in the rain together. Katelyn approached the counter and looked at the signs above the cash register. The two turned 30. Eventually Mike got angry at Katelyn for talking down to him and Katelyn became furious at Mike's disorganization. No major life changes or financial problems arrested the relationship's trajectory. They were an unremarkable Queens couple; young, in love, and together... until they were not. "I'll have the baklava with Türk kahvesi special." she exhaled.

Mike struggled the refrigerator into his hallway. When he cleared the doorway the refrigerator ripped off years of paint and showed some awful aesthetic choices that had been committed. Mike looked at the stairs and then at the refrigerator and for the first sober moment in his life wished he did not live in a walk-up. "Broken fridge?" an old voice asked. Mike turned around to see an elderly neighbor whose name he did not know. "5J, right?" Mike nodded. "5P." The man looked at the refrigerator. "I've been through three refrigerators and two wives in this building." Mike raised his eyebrows hoping for useful advice. "Tip her over and slide her down on her side," 5P shrugged. "And if you don't believe in God... start."

Katelyn's coffee went cold while her thoughts flooded. A black ring of stagnation formed in her coffee cup. The waiter approached to ask if she was done with her untouched coffee.

"Another Türk kahvesi?"

"I left Mike yesterday." she blurted out. "I came to Astoria because it's New York's attempt at normalcy!" She looked up and realized she was speaking out loud. "Turning 30 made me restless and Mike lethargic. Watching TV, ordering Thai food and sex lost it's flare. I don't want to go back to Manhattan after breaking up in Queens."

"More coffee?" the waiter asked in a Turkish accent.

"I walk Ditmars Boulevard and see other couples talking in bars or kissing on stoops.

Mike was always waiting for me at home. He never wanted to do anything... he never wanted anything." Katelyn looked at the waiter. "More Coffee? Türk kahvesi. Türk kahvesi all around. My life is a mess... I'm buying Turkish Coffee for anyone in Queens willing to listen."

The refrigerator rested on its side balancing on the edge of the stairs about to descend. Mike went a few stairs below it and slowly slid it towards him. The burden got heavier. Life is going to be harder

alone. He let more weight fall onto him as he planted his feet firmly. Costs will not be split with Katelyn anymore. He took a step down. Any unexpected expense, and paying rent alone will force him out of the neighborhood. He took another step. Each of Mike's future plans was gradually dis-

mantled by disappointments and the high cost of rent in New York City. More weight compressed onto Mike's chest. In the past few months Astoria's prices started to rise. He took three more steps. He never planned a life without Katelyn. All of the weight of the refrigerator was pushing hard against him. He remembered some of her birthmarks. A hard step down and he was on the fourth floor.

"Mike had a stable job, a full head of hair, and only mild love handles." The waiter was still making coffee for everyone. "Men who looked like this are either married, gay or serial killers." Katelyn said. "He works for a charity and is acceptable at best. I would force Mike to watch obscure foreign films and do trendy exercise routines in attempts to make domesticity more interesting." Katelyn paused. "Isn't a life at home

what I want? It's normal... it's what I am supposed to want." The restaurant silently hung on her words. "I experimented with religion, philosophy, drugs and kinky sex. When those went belly up I left Mike." Katelyn looked at the couples in the restaurant and then out the window at gathering clouds. She remembered Mike's deodorant. The waiter placed cups of coffee on a large tray to pass out.

The refrigerator slipped out of Mike's hand

and avalanched down the stairs. It crashed into the third floor landing making a huge bang. Three men ran up the stairs to find Mike and his smashed burden.

"Katelyn left me yesterday." Silence. "I could have been more for her. If I had cleaned or been more



The Deep End by Ronald Walker

ambitious." The men looked at each other and formed a silent agreement to help move the weight. "Life is hard." Each person got to one corner of the refrigerator and nodded at each other. "We were together for three years... do any of you have ex girlfriends, wives, ex-wives, special ladies?" They slowly glided the refrigerator down the stairs. "I have to get this thing out." No one responded.

"It was kind of cute to be heartsick in my 20's, but now it's just annoying." The waiter was passing out fresh cups of coffee. "I want a man to hold my hand on Steinway Street. The Türk kahvesi smells great." The waiter placed a coffee and a bill in Katelyn's hand. "I'm an adult I should have a lover who can go to the supermarket and the a museum with. A domestic Astoria existence." She looked at the bill and

just dropped a credit card on top of it. "I need to fight the monotony and figure out how to be stable." One falafel patron thrust a fist in the air. "I want to remain interesting without relocating to Brooklyn!" She downed her coffee. "They don't have Türk kahvesi in Brooklyn... well they do but it's Brooklyn style." Another fist in the air. "I don't know if I'm still an adult without Mike. How much longer do I have to put up with this, with me, with all of it?" She looked out the restaurant window to see a system of grey clouds approaching. "I don't want to keep falling back into this feeling... I want to be more... Does anyone understand me?" The restaurant broke into applause.

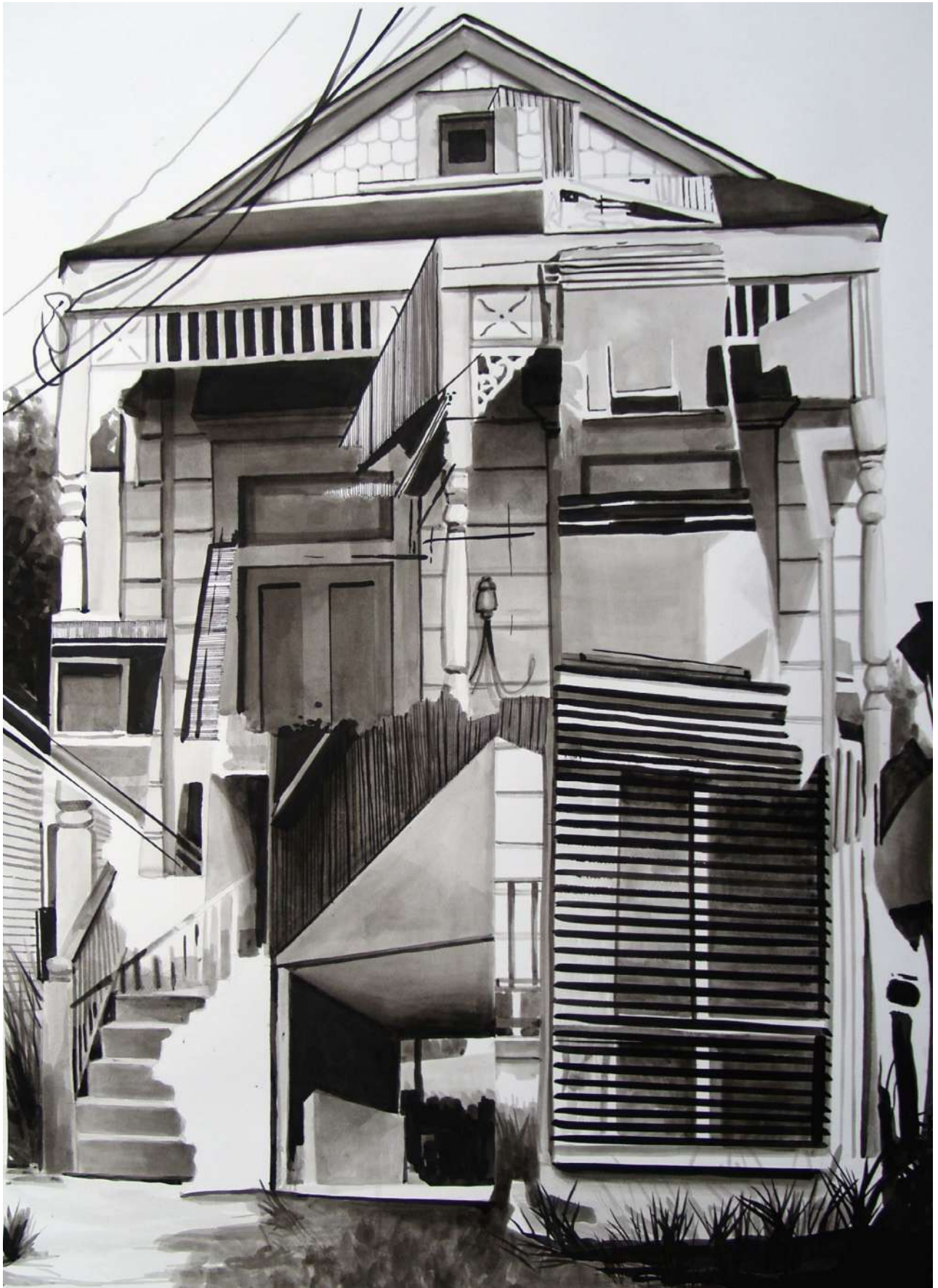
The refrigerator descended to the second story with ease. "It happened last night. It started with a disagreement and then Katelyn is out the door." One of the men nodded to pick up the refrigerator. "People don't break up for no reason. Nobody just realizes they're with the wrong person. Right? Life decays around you until the mistakes can't be undone." They moved to the last staircase. "I wasn't interesting enough. Never tried to do more than I had to. I never wanted to run for the cliffs." Mike thought about Katelyn on his fingertips and submitted to regret. "I have a frightened passion. It's time not to be scared... I'm over 30, life won't wait for me to catch up."

Katelyn remembered that they had met at a job interview. She had forgotten the accident that started them talking. They spoke like they had always known each other. Neither of them got the position. They interviewed separately and Mike waited for her after his session was over. She smiled and laughed when she saw him still in the waiting room. He took her for a drink after the interview, then a walk, then dinner and finally they kissed near the Triborough Bridge. They stood over the East River looking from Manhattan into Queens, ignorant that a whole life was on the other side. Holding each other they watched the sun go down the city lite up. They stayed for hours, heavy clouds formed. They talked minimally, touched and looked at Astoria's domestic lights. The clouds burst rain. Katelyn had to laugh. The rain became heavier; a wall of water grew between Mike and Katelyn. He closed his eyes as the rain grew denser.

Katelyn's hands reached through the water and found Mike's face. Her hands held him not slipping away. This is how they learned to love each other. Katelyn in the restaurant and Mike in his lobby asked themselves: 'what ever happened to those beautiful children.'

The refrigerator arrived in the lobby with a thud. "Katelyn's not coming back." The men remained silent. "I know she's gone... What do I do now? Do I go back to mine or do I try to reach out again?" Mike looked up to see heavy grey clouds ready to rain. "Will I repeat this?" Mike remembered Katelyn's breath. "I should have thought out loud more... I should have told her what I was feeling."

A rain storm held over the borough. Katelyn looked out the window of the falafel restaurant to see the first heavy drops fall from the sky. Mike and his help carried the refrigerator through the building's main entrance. Katelyn signed the credit card receipt and tipped the waiter. The rain got heavier. "Thanks for listening," Katelyn and Mike both said. The waiter kissed her on both cheeks. Sheets of rain. The men nodded and quietly wished Mike well with this new season. Katelyn walked into the sheets of rain. Mike let it come down. No umbrellas no protection. Each of them thought of the first rainstorm they had shared. They each had rushes of sparse memories and raw emotions. Neither could see their familiar territory through the buckets of rain. Another failed attempt at normalcy. Perhaps they would die of old age without another brush of contact. The two of them alone on the rain-soaked asphalt while cars had to pull over and sidewalks cleared. They did not yield. Astoria's residents ran under shelters and awnings to avoid the unpredicted storm. Mike and Katelyn could not see through the walls of water. Katelyn ran her fingers through her dripping blond hair. Mike asked himself where she was in the labyrinth. She had the exact same thoughts. Their dreams of Astoria has washed away in the nothingness. Mike and Katelyn desperately remain in the rain, in Astoria and New York City's decline. They become storm walkers, each hoping a hand will reach through the rain and let them feel a familiarity again. The steady hand never comes, the rain continues and they each dissolve into their separate lives.



Shotgun with Spindles by Melissa Wilkinson



Round 1 by Melissa Wilkinson



Fractures 17 by Melissa Wilkinson

1984

In 1984
To grow up blind
To end in oblivion
In the middle of gray
It was everyday
Oceania's struggle for life
From Eurasia to Eastasia
The party always slayed
But London remained the same and cried
DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER
Backs turned to the telescreens bellowed
A wave of silent screams
Waiting to betray
Those forced under the ministries' requiem
War as peace kept
Freedom as slavery and
Ignorance as strength
Reality was corrupted
They would never be free
What peace did they see?
For the proles were kept ignorant
And their eyes were empty
Their children were seized
As puppets of Svengali
Who were they?
With thoughtless brains
Of joyless faces
Of lifeless souls
Abandoned identities lied trapped in an anomoly
In 1984



Remnants 3 by Tom Berenz



Six Ways From Sunday by Abraham Ferraro

Well I've sat here

Well I've sat here for three thousand years and
 nine thousand dreams
 and after and before and in between
 I've always seemed to find the lines of undefined
 the masterful moments that linger and lie
 all the thoughts and think-thoughts that sit under the rug
 that grow with interest and disinterest and
 develop old teeth, hot lungs and ferocious ideas
 of worlds yet to be
 of children to scream
 to shout out to the stars with the great rubber tongues
 sufficing and dicing and lacing up love
 to a great web-ed hand
 a great net that could wrap round and round
 to the earth tones and birth tones
 and sweet tones that sing
 to the river of recreation, rebirth and release
 to the tune of the top of the song of great grief
 all of us, all of them, all the nuances and names
 that have grappled with grace and have groaned with God's
 whispers and winds
 all the insides and outsides, between-sides and upsides
 the throughways and mindways and my-ways and yours
 just the touch of a hand on a 1 stringed guitar
 strumming life song and soul song and wind song alike
 saying this way and this way
 is the way down
 to life.

the way to rebirth and the way to rehash
 all the sorrows and silences that surrender to time
 all the subjects and objects that sit pronouncing themselves
 back and forth
 to and fro
 to the flow
 of

Contributors

Tom Berenz's paintings are about his relationship to the world around him; cerebral and physical, intellectual and visceral. He uses the disaster motif as a metaphor to discuss personal, sociopolitical, environmental and ideological issues. He explores the existential self and examines personal narratives, with some being more literal and others more enigmatic. Notions of loss, place, memory, space and time are central as he reexamines personal experiences from his past and present. He is interested in blurring the lines between realism and abstraction, life and death, beauty and horror, devastation and sublime.

Wayne Bertola is, for lack of a better term, self-taught. Influences have ranged from the visual detritus and marginalia of the antiquated and the obsolete to the collages of Max Ernst, the constructions of Joseph Cornell and the visionary art of Henry Darger. He prefers that the work in question speaks for itself in its own voice without being burdened with autobiographical and or didactic references. If the work in question has any meaning in the accepted sense it is in its ability to engage the view in a creative dialogue where the outmoded, the ephemeral, and the commonplace are gathered together and transformed by the recognition they generate into symbols of the ambiguous nature of our being.

Brian Cirno has spent the past decade traveling throughout the country visiting museums, large cities, small towns, national parks, civil war battlefields, assassination sites, graveyards, and national monuments. He is a lifelong student of the vast profundity of American music as well as a glutton for American history, literature, western painting, film, comic strips, and cartoons. These interests and practices have influenced and inspired him to make American images and tell American stories. From Woody Guthrie to Woody Allen straight through to Jack Kerouac and Bob Dylan, he's fascinated by the American story and committed to joining the conversation of American artists and raconteurs.

Abraham Ferraro's Directions is an ever growing series of Mail-able Sculptures. Every time the Directions piece is shown new pieces are added and mailed individually to the new venue while the older Directions are delivered by the artist, so process is evident and traceable by the viewer to the extent that the viewer may figure out exactly when and where the piece traveled. Directions is not only about how Art gets from A to B, but also about the conceptual process that takes place in Art as ideas or bodies of work change over time. Each piece is made from recycled cardboard boxes that were previously mailed.

Bruce H. Hinrichs is a professor, artist, musician, and author who lives in Minneapolis, MN. His work is often wryly humorous.

Arya F. Jenkins is a poet and writer whose work has appeared in various literary journals and magazines, most recently, Solstice Literary Review, Mandala Journal, Scissors and Spackle and Brilliant Corners. Jerry Jazz Musician, an online jazz journal that awarded her first prize in a short story contest in 2012, recently commissioned her to write jazz fiction.

Kate LaDew is a graduate from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro with a BA in Studio Art.

Connor McGaha is an essayist from Charlotte, North Carolina. After being transplanted to Lynchburg, Virginia, to study a Bachelor of Arts in English, he discovered writing with the help of older friends and writers, and has been writing ever since. With a cup of black coffee, a bottle of wine, a pint of Imperial Pale Ale, and a cigarette by his side, he writes about the day-to-day and the days to come.

Conor McNamara currently studies writing at the Otis College of Art and Design in Los Angeles. Other than reading and writing, he is passionate about sports and hip-hop. His favorite book, as of now, is Maggie Nelson's *Bluets*. He

is fascinated by the prose poem, and works that challenge its form.

Jim Richards completed a Ph.D. in creative writing and literature at the University of Houston in 2003 and now teaches at Brigham Young University–Idaho. His poems have appeared recently in *Prairie Schooner*, *Poet Lore*, *Comstock Review*, *Texas Review*, and online in *The Fertile Source* and *Contemporary American Voices*. His work was recently nominated for a Pushcart Prize. He is currently serving as the poetry editor of *Irreantum*.

Alex Saunders is from St. Louis. He is nothing but a rambler with a pen.

Casey Snyder has exhibited at Galleries and Institutions extensively throughout the Midwest and East coast as well as overseas. Recent exhibitions include Fountain Art Fair in New York, Academy of Fine Arts Annual National Juried Art Exhibition, as well as *Suspended in Time* with Converge Gallery in Williamsport Pennsylvania. Snyder earned her MFA in painting from Kendall College of Art and Design, and graduated with honors. Snyder's dedication to her work is shown through a diligent exploration in materials. As a mixed media painter she explores the relationship of painting and collage. A dialogue between opposites occurs within her work, such as real and unreal, significant and insignificant along with the exciting and banal.

Lauren Suchenski's poetry has previously been included in a variety of magazines, including *The Barnwood Review*, *Vine Leaves Literary Journal* and *The Hun Review*.

Ronald Walker is an artist living in the Sacramento area of California.

Melissa Wilkinson's current body of work focuses on the aftermath of both man made and natural disasters. She archives, appropriates, then digitally manipulates found photographs. She situates these images somewhere in between abstraction and representation in order to create a dialogue with modernist painting through postmodern practice. She chooses to focus on

moments of reprieve; quiet moments following a climax, where one can assess the physical and emotional damage created by previous events. She is both drawn to these images and repelled by them.

Howard Winn has had poems and fiction published in *Dalhousie Review*, *Descant* (Canada), *Cactus Heart*, *Crack the Spine*, *Hiram Poetry Review*, *Main Street Rag*, *Caduceus*, *Burning Word*, *Pennsylvania Literary Journal*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Cutting Edgz*, *Borderlands*, *Iodine Poetry Journal*, *Chaffin Journal*, and *The Broad River Review*. His B. A. is from Vassar College, and his graduate creative writing degree is from the Writing Program at Stanford University. His doctoral work was done at New York University and University of California San Francisco. He is currently a State University of New York faculty member.

Jane Zich's painting process begins by connecting with the unconscious in an effort to bring something of its hidden wisdom to consciousness. She begins with watercolor paper primed with black acrylic and then applies colored pencils as if they were dim lights gradually illuminating previously unseen forms. Secondly, she uses gouache and acrylic to accentuate key forms and features. Her paintings, like images from dreams, tend to be fluid with amorphous boundaries, suggesting an interplay between two or more worlds or perspectives. Mixed media paintings from her "Vision Journey" series have been juried into international, national, and San Francisco Bay Area art shows and have been featured in solo exhibitions and in the international publication "Jung Journal: Culture and Psyche." "Shadow: Touching the Darkness Within," a 2003 collection of archetypal art and literature published by Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam (with an introduction by Robert Bly), includes three of her mixed media paintings and two of her pen-and-ink drawings.

André M. Zucker was born in the Bronx. His works have appeared in *And/or*, *The Associative Press*, *Blaze Vox*, *South Jersey Underground*, *Structo* and many others. He lives and works in New York City.

