

Gambling



The Aisle

Masthead

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Gambling the Aisle 2014 Chapbook Contest Winner

Life of Francis

Vanessa Couto Johnson

Vanessa Couto Johnson's poems have appeared or are forthcoming in Blackbird, Toad Suck Review, Map Literary, Word Riot, great weather for MEDIA's anthology I Let Go of the Stars in My Hand, and elsewhere. She is listed as a Highly Commended Poet for the 2014 Gregory O'Donoghue International Poetry Prize, is a Pushcart Prize nominee, and was a finalist in the selections for the Baltic Writing Residency in Latvia for 2014. A Brazilian born in Texas (dual citizen), she currently teaches at Texas State University, where she earned her MFA. She occasionally blogs at meansofpoetry.com

Life of Francis

Vanessa Couto Johnson

Chapbook Runners up:

Heikki Huotari - *Tooth and Shoe*

Allison Thorpe - *To This Sad and Lovely Land*

Michael Cuglietta - *In the Middle of the Ocean*

Milla van der Have - *Ghosts of Old Virginy*

Shelby Stephenson - *Nin's Poem*



Self Portrait as Superman by David Hicks

Oliver Rice

Nostalgias of the Astronaut

How replicatious they are, the noon crowd,
how facial, striding, demographic —
whose neurons are engaged in boundless,
in mundane and spectacular privacies.

How duplicatious they are, the populace,
how reiterative,
resemblant,

how manual, duteous, sociological,
attentive to teeth and vogues and bowels,
impelled by id and collective unconscious —

who are saying the skin is the largest organ,
the pianist is like a manic spider,
there is no day off in the welfare state,
saying man is the most terrible predator,
the wild flowers come and go in three weeks,
the women of India were Gandhi's great teachers.



Chain by Dave Petraglia

Alan Britt

Growing Old

I take life one colonoscopy at a time.



Levity by Suzanne Dittenber

Stephen Clark Okawa

child-god

my mother pours baby powder down my back
and i, pleased, sticky my face in it a pile of it,
pretend i'm an amateur mime, or tony montana,
a japanese noh actor.

i can't be young again,
only in my mother's mind.
just as you are "puer aeternus"
in my over-slogged memories,
constantly in bloom
until i hide, having had no say in the matter,
snatch the sun down, take it with me.

when i talk about blowjobs in front of my mother,
she says, "oh, why don't you just grow up?"
and i say, "not until you die – which you will."
only then will i meet up with you
holding my sun on a string

like a balloon you bought me but later found out
you stole.



Ballet 6 by Julia Rabkin



Ballet 2 by Julia Rabkin

80 Days

Gregory T. Janetka

They dropped me off at the station. What sleep I got was poor. Anxious. Breathing is labored. It's not just about getting from here to there. Sitting in the middle of everything, watching stories walk past.

That song. It was in my head all those years ago when I walked to her. It was just there, repeating over and over. Dehydrated, exhausted, sleep deprived, terrified, elated.

Bonded with the TSA agent over our matching tattoos. Mine was for a girl, he was drunk.

Happenstance exists between you and me and we live to live with hell to pay.

Had dessert with the ghost of my father. Victor swore he saw my father yesterday, before he knew I was in town. Spoke to mom, after three days missing they found the cat curled up under a bush, dead. No apparent marks or signs of distress.

Woke early, still drunk, and stumbled out into the brightness of the morning. Sitting in the train station. Let it come soon. Practices of insight and compassion are evidently effective. It had been years since I talked to, let alone saw, her. And yet it was as if no time had passed. Only I didn't know she was engaged. I think this place and I work best when apart from time to time.

It's in the 50s and just finished raining before our train arrived. The coffee is hot and thick. There's no such thing as traveling, only living in different places.

She's here. First time I've felt her in a long time. Girl From the North Countryside. Sing Dance magic faces in the grass, ashes and memories. Satan laughing with delight. Waiting for her. Lemons and sugar and peeing behind dumpsters. We are brutally full of love and it's now.

Back on the train. Time to keep moving.

Started our story five years ago. Hands hurt. Carpal tunnel is bad. Time to start revising and make it pretty. The night is heavy and I wish I had someone to sit up with all night and talk to. A genuine connection seems to be the most difficult thing in the world. Solitude. Missing dad, missing family. Did I miss something by waiting too long? I've missed too much but I'm finally here. Oh god, I'm tired. And lonely. At least I'm here.

The sun is rising and Chicago looms over the horizon. It's wonderful to share the sunrise. The lands are desolate. Houses in disrepair, fields empty. I hope the people are happy.

Chicago. Where everything began and where I thought it would all end. There is beauty here. Oh yes, there is beauty. There is also the past, haunting and stalking around corners and in alleyways. My mistakes seemed to work out well for others while I'm going around the country for unclear reasons. Because it was something to do. Because I didn't know what else to do. To see if I could do it. To spend time with people I was once close to because I am no longer able to make friends. To escape. To do something worthwhile before I die. For any of the above, for all of the above, for none of the above.

Gatsby, showing Daisy through his house, emptying the drawers and reevaluating everything. Hoping she'll see/comment/like something I've done. As long as I'm always doing, there's always the possibility.

Morning sun. Dreams of her. Whirlwind day. Dinner. Night. Easter. Family. Dogs. Cats. Music. Yerba Mate. Need to revise revise revise. Nothing feels comfortable. Waiting for forever is nice, though. This place smells the same.

She was on the corner and I drove past and there can't be any other way anymore. The bottles were clear and the liquor was golden. Towns where you lived will never be the same.

Day 28. Darkness. Fear. I do not know of what. Or maybe I do. Maybe I know that I will kill myself someday for the sheer reason that I'm afraid and unable to answer what I'm afraid of. The wind is blowing through the alley and the ghosts come out more than ever. I have rebelled, but most often and most effectively against myself. I am disconnected and worry that I'll forget everything I know. I'm unsure these memories are my own.

Day 30. Revisions go well. But what to write here? Writers are supposed to have grand thoughts, no? I have none.

Day 31. I have dreamed of her before, but never like this. She made direct eye contact and said, "because I love you."

Day 39 – 5:35 am. Anxiety. Money goes quickly and I can't sleep.

Day 39 – 5:05 pm. It's done. 8+ hours of revisions and her story is done.

Day 43. An Indian reservation where unemployment tops 90 percent. Wounded Knee. Women screaming and children crying. Lessons in LARP battling and a yo-yo collection.

Scene: A girl eating cereal. She finishes the whole box. Notices the iron level in each serving and panics, ends up calling poison control.

Day 47. Seeing A. I couldn't help but think I made a mistake all those years ago by chasing after B instead. In the locker room, getting changed, saying to myself that A was fun and great and pretty, but that B was B and that was that. Something positive and great may have happened with A and, hell, we may have been very happy together, but where would that get us?

Two men are playing gin next to me. They're bantering like Statler and Waldorf.

Sailing through the countryside of New Mexico as the sun sets and the landscape darkens. Am I trying to force things? I didn't think so, but maybe I am. I can't tell anymore.

I write as fast as I can, faster than necessary. And with much more tension than is necessary. Falling off all of the wagons. Part wants this trip to be over already and part is terrified that it will end. With such little actual pleasure, food and drink fill the void. Sugar and salt and booze. There are houses and there are homes and everyone in all of them is slowly on their way out.

Day 57. San Francisco by train by way of LA, surrounded by extras in a movie hastily drawn up by Pat Hobby. I watch them eating bananas and drinking coffee. I stood there and thought of her. She's so distant but I wouldn't be doing this without her. It smells like Cheerios in milk. It smells like childhood. A continuity fail. I am traveling on to see my oldest friend, who has all but dropped me from his life, but I don't know why. The aftershave smells of my father. The sun is out.

Stalled in the middle of rolling hills and mountains, green and sad. Julie Delpy will sit next to me still. There are times your eyes resonate and others when they turn to ash.

They're here and even if they're pretending (God know I'm pretending), it's all still happening.

If you're coming, come with flowers. And joy. And love. And a sense of history. And peace in your heart and mind.

And come, just come.

Day 59. None of these lives are my own. Dabbling. Sampling. Swishing them around and spitting them out. A train journey or bus ride or flight and doing it all over again. Better short and sweet than drawn out and miserable. I try to convince myself this is for her. Or that somehow it makes us closer. My thoughts veer suicide and death often.

There can never be anything prettier than these keys.

The lines are all here and in place and walking among them brings peace and calm. The years happily leave some distortions untouched, letting us pass though suffering, believing something was once different than it is now.

These words are smaller but it's only because I chose to let them be. These strings are beautiful. More beautiful than anything I've ever heard. Let's make this cup of coffee last for hours.

"My god. Where have you been all these years?"

"I thought I had something figured out. Something new. It didn't pan out. But you've got a new show, right?"

"Yup. Ben's back and William and a bunch of the others."

"That's great. I can't wait to see it."

"I'm sure they would've asked you but no one knew where you were."

"Yes. How much we thought we knew and how little we actually knew. Wild."

"Yeah. Wild."

Delays and daze and days and days.

Be kind, firelight.

Don't pay attention to those looks.

Sweet green grass

and cool summer breeze.

All alive and hope survives.

Dig.

Dig down.

Dig deep.

Don't sleep.

For the love of god, don't sleep.

Keys and strings and I'm glad when anything comes to an end because everything is not quite satisfying and with each end is a beginning of what could possibly, potentially, in some remarkable way be something satisfying. Forever and once and for all satisfying. Get the stories in people's hands. Billy was right about that if he was ever right about anything.

Hawaii. 32. No one's more surprised than me that I've made it this long. F. Scott only had eight years left at this point. Maybe I do too.

These people collecting empty bottles haunt me. I am well aware could easily be me soon enough.

Day 70. She is alive and well in France. Birthday wishes from the other in Rome. But that's how I like it, isn't it? If they're far nothing can happen and if nothing can happen I don't have to be afraid of

something happening and can continue to live in the fantasy of something always just about to happen. Of course nothing will happen. I will see to that.

Spent so long with my own thoughts and words that I forgot any other existed. I have no worthwhile thoughts or words left. The only time I did was when there was a girl. I've forgotten what they feel like, what they smell like, what they taste like. Everything else seems like a waste of time.

Day 73. The koi are dancing. I've lost the ability to feel the interconnectedness of all things.

It's time to let her go. It's been long enough. If our paths cross again, then they do, but I have to stop living by that, by her. Let go let go let go.

Day 74. She's been coming to sit at this bench since she was a small girl. Once wood, now plastic (recycled milk jugs, they said), but it sits in the same spot. Her footprint is still outlined in the urban equivalent of amber. She tries to imagine having feet that small again. The pond is too polluted now for swimming, but paddle boats were recently added, and that's nice. She's at the end of the line – your past and mine. She's indefatigable. Her face is forgettable, it's whatever you want to see at the moment and she's always patiently waiting.

Day 75. There are remnants of lost eras in your movement, of times I have written myself into. Don't do it kid, you'll over-romanticize it.

Daytimes name rhymes after you.

Day 77. The days fit on the fingers of one hand. The seagulls are laughing. I don't need to feel I have my own space but need to not be in a space that is somebody else's.

Day 80. This is the last leg of an old life. The common routines are common again. Writing is sharp and jagged, uncomfortably bad. How will I do anything again when I'm not sure how I did anything in the first place.

Hiding again in this enclosed space.

It won't always be this way.

I know it won't always be this way.



Veil by Gregory Zeorlin

Changming Yuan

[on another rainy day: for liu yu]

It rains a lot in Vancouver
 Often does this rain remind me of
 The days when you sojourned here
 With my family, after Father left all of us

While walking in the rain, you would
 Recall, under my big umbrella
 How you once waited in a drizzle
 With me in a broken basket on your back
 To cross the widening river, not far
 From our village when I was crying hard
 For a large spoonful of flour soup (you were too
 Weak and too hungry to produce any milk)

Seeing you do nothing about my hunger
 The ferry man asked, Where is its mom?
 I am his mother! You replied, tears rolling down
 With the raindrops on your childish face
 How old are you then? – Almost 17.

It is raining again in Vancouver, and beyond this rain
 Your voice echoes aloud on the other side of this world



The Majesty of the Storm by Rency Punnoose

string quartet

Jack Galmitz

- the video camera is focused sometimes. it repeatedly takes the same picture of an unknown person climbing steel stairs in a hallway. the walls are of red brick, which is rare, as bricks are usually reserved for the exterior of a building. the doors are steel painted what once must have been yellow. there are doorbells that are not rung. then there are close ups of the stairs or corners of the stairs, which unfocus the image. all the while a 1979 string quartet plays. it may be morton feldman's judging from the length and the repetitions and the alterations in the repetitions. it is the kind of music that might accompany a movie thriller, the sounds you hear just before a door swings open, or a hand reaches out. but, nothing happens but the continuous video taping of climbing the same stairs and showing the same walls, corners of walls, doors, buzzers. when the music slows to a drip, so do the images. they appear as mere flashes of light. then black. then the camera swings across the steps and there is a redness about them and it seems like you are walking across one step rather than climbing stairs. it all turns white. then the blur of might be stairs or might be boxes of light and shade. you might notice for the first time with the music that there is a symmetry of the lines of the mortar, the stairs, the swinging of the camera, the steel yellowish door, the brown textured welcome mat before the door. there is a plucking of the strings, no longer a drawing of a bow across their tautness. it is all turning in a circle, like a gyre, as is the music. there is a center to it, but it's hard to hold with the constancy of movement. the strings are also symmetrical with the bricks, their mortar, the stairs, the doors, only the light splashes. for a moment there were legs in dungarees and boots. no more. then they were gone. the music moves to a crescendo, but stops. then the steel door is open, but it is only a hallway lit by sunlight. and for the first time overhead lights are shown on the ceiling. then it is black. then white. a black cat comes out of the steel doorway and walks in the vestibule. then the climbing of stairs. the cat is gone. the camera points out the side of the window for a brief instant and there is a window and a streetlamp. then darkness and out of darkness the slow materialization of form, red, streaks of gray, stairs faded to gray steel, slowing down of the music and ascent and circling of the stairway, then a man standing in the open steel yellow doorway, then blackness, then the emphasis of the wooden sidings of the staircase for the first time with steel bolts holding them in place, then the blur of the door, a close-up of the peep-hole, a turning of the tune and the stairs. the walls are joined to the floor, the stairs are joined to the floor and so to the walls, the steel yellow door is joined to the brick walls, we see this, we see outside, then inside, the music seems stuck but it is only repeating a few notes, then a drawing of bow, then a change of pitch, then the stairs upside down, different but similar, we are getting somewhere, but then it is black again, then patches of red as the focus resumes, we are turning in a vortex, we must be getting somewhere, the music says so in its language, it slows, it slows, it creeps, so does the movement up the same staircase, up the same staircase, it speeds up against the drag of the video, we will never arrive, it all goes white, we want it to go somewhere, it won't, why should it, the brick walls, the steel steps, the light from the windows, camera turning in a circle, that's it, that's all it is, and it's enough. There are cars in the building's driveway. That's something new.

The music stops. Just stops.

Connor McGaha

Resolve (Selah)

O, the ointments we smear
on that itching lust

Maybe today, I'll
drink coffee and read.

I found her on the sofa
after we neither awoke
and the sheets of our bed
rubbed my neckhair right off
small veins in my toes
popping tightly on hardwood
and her glasses snuggled close—
snapped at the bridge

Maybe today, I'll
drink coffee and read.

She used to call me God
now she never picks up
except sweating brown bottles
floral print hemlines
little kitten, come to me
prostrate and purring
I've the warm milk of arrogance
tuna fish reasoning
Silhouettes stick in dust
to wedding bed frames

never liked coffee,
never read a damn thing.



Ribbon In Her Eyes by Otha Vakseen Davis III

Bill Buege

Arrested

At first I missed him there,
saw only browns and blacks,
thought children had been wasting paint.
I'd crossed their yard and back

without a thought that I
was trespassing, but, then,
I lived inside my head, had missed
the war. I had not seen

the children dressed like tramps
or heard the protest songs.
I did not note the Malcom X
in schoolyard blacks and browns.

The climb outside our town
is steep, the years fly by,
and I've become the favorite joke
folks tell when they're away.

Memory Obscured:

An Interview with Viviane Silvera

John Cross

I am sitting in my office 3 days after the following interview was conducted. I am putting myself through the mental exercise of trying to recall accurately the environment I was in while the interview was conducted. I am doing this because ever since I chatted with Viviane Silvera about her work I have been somewhat obsessed with my memory, or more specifically, whether or not my memory of that day is accurate.

I was sitting in a local pizza joint, enjoying a couple of slices and a Porter during the lunch rush. That much I know as fact. After that the details get a bit fuzzy. Was my laptop on the left or right of my plate? Was I wearing shorts or pants? Was the waitress the woman that dresses like a girl with little bobby bouncy pigtails and a warm smile or was I served by the waiter, the young skinny tattooed guy who seems like he has a story to tell but never really engages? I can't be sure because the act of constructing a memory, storing a memory, and recalling a memory is extremely fallible at best. Viviane Silvera has spent the better part of her artistic efforts trying to come to terms with the fact that our memory should never be asked to take an oath in court, since it seldom tells the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

JC: You were born in Hong Kong. How long did you live there?

VS: Until I was ten.

JC: I imagine that you have some strong memories of your time there.

VS: Very hazy, which is actually why my work turned in the direction of exploring memory. When you never return to a place, and it was a very transient community while you were there—things get lost.

JC: That makes sense. I have been thinking about my earliest memory all morning, it is from when I was about 3, I was sitting on the floor of my family's kitchen playing with a Jack in the Box toy when the tornado sirens went off. I often wonder if I really remember it correctly.

VS: Impossible to know. This is what I am coming to understand through my current project. For me, I only have my immediate family members to corroborate, as we lived in Hong Kong and then Brazil, and there was

little continuity—meaning my closest friends I never saw again.

JC: Were you an “army brat?”

VS: No, my parents are wandering Jews. They are not American. My father is an Italian Jew, born in Aleppo, Syria, but he was never Syrian as Jews were not allowed to have citizenship, so his family retained their Italian citizenship—but spoke French and Arabic at home (I am Italian too), and my mother was born in Turkey but then raised in Israel from the age of four. They met in Israel and married in NYC, where my brother and sister were born, but then when my mother was 6 months pregnant with me, the family moved to Hong Kong for my father's business—electronics based in Asia. Hong Kong was his base. He had lived in Japan for fifteen years after running away from Syria. That's a whole story in itself.

JC: I can also understand how that type of transient upbringing can lead to themes in one's work like memory and the obscuring of memory. When I look at your early work, in the *Close Ups* and *Praying Hands* there is still a hint of individuals searching for something to grasp and call “real.”

VS: *Close Ups* came out of my interest in film actually. I graduated from college thinking I would work in film. I was still waiting for my green card and interning at film companies as a script reader. I turned to art as a hobby, not imagining I would make it a career, but I gradually came to realize that I could create my own world on canvas or in a sculpture—something that it would take lots of money and a whole crew to do in film (now things are different of course). I was interested in the power of the movie close-up, how the audience gets a false sense of intimacy with a stranger, and how the “hand of the director” is invisible because it is a movie image. Whereas, in drawing/painting, you see the hand of the artist. I was interested in casting myself as different kinds of characters in movies and showing how the same face could look completely different with different lighting, angles, etc. and then creating that close up image with thousands of pencil marks that show the hand of the artist. *Praying Hands* was a continuation of that exploration. I looked at images of Clinton in the press

and wanted to reveal how cropping and other decisions influenced the viewer's perception of him, as opposed to being a "document" of reality. I was making comparisons to the Renaissance, specifically Albrecht Durer's famous drawing *Praying Hands*, and timelessness in images in art versus the snapshot images in popular press.

JC: The process of using film stills as a starting point for artworks started there?

VS: Yes, with my own close-ups. I shot video of myself doing everyday activities and then cropped the images to see if I could take what was an ordinary activity and make it look extraordinary. I was interested in an experiment that was done in Russia, where they showed the face of a famous Russian actor and then cut to a shot of something sad and then cut back to his face. Then they took the same face shot and cut it together with a "happy" image—and the audience's response was that he was such a brilliant actor that he was able to convey these different emotions. But it was all in the editing. In the same way, I wanted to take ordinary footage and through the editing and rendering of it, see if I could convey something heightened. A good example is eating. I was eating a bagel, and not especially hungry, but when I selected a still, and blew it up to a close-up, it looked like a lion tearing meat off of a carcass in the wild. I was interested in the gap between reality and perceived reality. I guess that connects to my current interest in memory and perception. I did my college undergrad thesis on cognitive psychology and am still interested in how the mind works—how we perceive and process reality.

JC: How we perceive and process reality is the key and, I think, one of the most important aspects of art. We, artists, create impressions of the world based on our individual perception of it, but we have no control over the viewer and how they will perceive our interpretation and relate it to their personal "reality." One of the things that stand out in your work is obscuring or abstracting of the scene. The shapes of colors are just non-descript enough to create a recognizable scene, but not so descript that the viewer cannot put their own interpretations upon us—but not quite interpretation—it's more their own imagery into the scene. It's what memory specialists call schema and scripts. It's like you are playing a game with the viewer called, "I will give you a few visual cues and you will fill the scene with your memories too."

VS: That's true. You make something personal to you—but it becomes its own entity to be responded to out in the world, which is to me part of the process—sharing, communicating. The paintings all have stop

motion animations of how they are made—the constant changing of a scene, layering, colors. They will be edited together eventually, and they are supposed to be the main character's dream-like world. I am going to be interviewing neuroscientists so that part of the audio for the film will be a very "scientific" description of the process of memory layered over the very surreal, dream-like imagery. So I am going for that contrast and the sense you are seeing the world through a particular lens. Neurologist Oliver Sacks wrote an essay called "Speak, Memory," and I am thinking of titling the film and series *See, Memory* as so much of what I am exploring he describes in narrative text. I think images get to something even more surreal, as they are pre-verbal.

JC: Sacks said, "Forgettings occur for everyone, and they may be especially common in those who write or paint or compose, for creativity may require such forgettings, in order that one's memories and ideas can be born again and seen in new contexts and perspectives." I wonder how important forgetting is to the creative artist, meaning what we try to do often is to capture the essence of a thing rather than the thing itself. We have to edit and forgetting or memory distortion is a path to finding the essential essence of a thing. I wonder how much an artist forgets between looking at the subject of a drawing and turning to the easel to record it.

VS: That piece of his essay stood out to me, as well as reflecting my own experience as an artist. I saw it as reflecting something I had mentioned repeatedly to people—that I often don't remember how I made a painting and that once it is done, and hanging somewhere else, it feels like someone else made it. So now, when I come home after working in my studio and put the memory stick in my computer I have hundreds of images of the work I have done—and I can see how the paintings have changed in those hours—and it is a complete revelation. I usually have little recollection of what I have done, probably because artists tap into a meditative state while working, and I love that the process I need to use to turn my paintings into a film actually gives me a record of what I have done. And that record kind of turns into a memory.

I read once that Nan Goldin took to photography when her sister committed suicide. I think that she never wanted to not have a document/image of a person, so she began shooting constantly. That makes sense to me as my own formative years are so hazy. I feel the same need to record or fill in the blanks.

JC: You are working in a circular way: Film is interpreted into painting; painting is interpreted into film.

It's like a game of telephone. Each one is a translation of the other but not a direct reflection. You are creating that sensation of memory versus the reality of the original event. One layer you don't discuss much in your statement is the original act of filming. How does your memory of filming the scene differ from the film itself and so on through the entire process?

VS: The film and footage of the film itself is very different from the images in paintings and then film made out of paintings. I worked with a small crew of four people, plus two actors, and we made a lot of mistakes—such as lights reflecting off windows that weren't supposed to be reflective or the scenes in Central Park being overexposed, making them very brown and white—while my paintings of Central Park are done in pinks, purples, reds, blues, and whites. Also, the shoot is very impersonal—it's directing, "sit here, turn this way, touch her arm," and there are people watching, and it is somewhat technical. And it can involve a bunch of other people. Taking that material, then looking at it alone, and distorting it, changing colors and shapes, it is very private and personal. Then when we edit it is collaborative again, as I am working with assistants in that process. I actually love the initial collaboration, then the time to go deep inside my own thoughts and process, and then to collaborate again. It's like dipping in and out of the conscious and subconscious world: solitude and collaboration.

JC: Your work at this point does seem to have become very personal to you, the artist, but one question I have to ask is, will the viewer get that these paintings and film are about memory or will they think they are your personal experiences you are trying to work out? And does that matter to you?

VS: The images themselves are not my personal experiences—they are the script I wrote and shot (as in it didn't actually happen to me) but the state of mind is personal. I can't imagine working any other way. I don't know if viewers will get everything I intend—probably not—but that's the only way I know how to work, from the personal. Then I am happy for it to become something else in the viewer's mind—something personal to them. To me that's the best possible outcome. I believe in going from the specific to the universal—or the personal to the universal. Themes of solitude/ connection, dreams/reality will resonate with everyone—but of course in their own way. People will bring their own experiences and ideas about images, film, painting and memory—I welcome that!

JC: *Solitude* and *Collaboration* brings to mind

Richard Linklater's film, *Waking Life*, in which the main character is caught up in a purgatory of solitude and collaboration. I think your style of painting in acrylic and gouache is handled in a similar way to Linklater's animation of the film where shapes of color that make up the objects/people in the scene are not adhered to reality but are free to roam, creating a surreal sense of time and space.

VS: I love his work. *Waking Life* happens to be one of his few films I haven't seen in its entirety, but his ongoing exploration of time and each character's personal points of view are fascinating. They are very meditative and poetic. I have actually listened to many interviews about *Boyhood* while painting recently.

JC: Speaking of style and technique, your early work was very monochromatic, all the way through *Therapy: Part One/Two*, where only one painting seems to have a combination of more than one color. Your recent work has a very limited palette: reds, blues, browns. I am remind now of painters like Mark Tansey and Peter Doig, but you talk about Edward Hopper when describing influences. Where/how does he fit in? Why the limited palette?

VS: In *Therapy Part One*, I was wary of doing an "illustration" of film scenes. I decided to emphasize light and shadow and move away from rendering color, to dislodge the images from the film in a way. I was also coming from doing my *Borrowed Memory* series, where I did drawings in white on colored papers, and I wanted to continue that—in paint. I was thinking of white, symbolically, as the "color of memory," and that what would be revealed, out of the shadows in those scenes, would be revealed in white. In this way I was able to distort the scenes, heightening contrasts. I think the Hopper influence is about solitary figures and the windows and the psychological aspects of his work. In my current paintings, I am. In the footage I myself shot, I set up a very limited palette in the set design itself—I'm not sure if this was conscious though. In the interiors—I emphasized blues, browns and yellows, and I was interested in the image of Central Park covered in snow—as a metaphor for memory being blanketed over/covered, and revealing/concealing, possibly also because my training is as a sculptor—where light and form is emphasized over color.

To learn more about Viviane Silvera and her work visit: vivianesilvera.com

Also check out Viviane's Stormy Tree stopmotion at <http://youtu.be/nx6OAwOUIfI>



Window Dream by Viviane Silvera



Boat Dream by Viviane Silvera



Nothingness by Viviane Silvera



Against the Wall by Viviane Silvera



On My Way by Viviane Silvera

Nobody Likes to Work the Salad Bar

Crystal Lane Swift Ferguson

They looked like they had lost their best friends, their soul mates, or firstborns. As if they'd been unjustly incarcerated when their wives were pregnant, spent sixty years on death row before being executed the day before DNA exonerated them posthumously. Like they were closeted in families full of well-meaning, but misguided Bible thumpers. Like they were in the midst of a session of interrogation; complete with bamboo shoots under the fingernails and waterboarding.

These were the people working the salad bar. Day in, day out, they had to use yellow wedge-shaped sponges to clean errant beets, garbanzo beans, pepperoncinis, shreds of butternut squash, blue cheese crumbles, and an ever-flowing line of house Ranch dressing from between black plastic containers which held the 50 feet worth of ingredients needed to create the perfect salad.

They were the first employees to arrive, sometimes as early as 5 am in order to open 50 gallon containers of pickles, scrub every inch of the salad bar and floor with bleach, and rub the sneeze guards with generic Windex and coffee filters. Throughout most days, they stood in a couple of inches of tepid water, trapped by the piles of lettuce, veggies, cheese, croutons, and hardboiled eggs, left by each change of shift, that inevitably seeped through any shoe design. Salad bar attendants left after everyone, risking skin to burns by boiling hot water and limbs to slips in the permanent puddle.

Everyone always went home smelling like rotten Ranch dressing.



Self Portrait with Family by David Hicks



Recondite II by Christopher Nitsche



Dakota by David Thompson



New York by David Thompson

Connor McGaha

US 29 N

Come and run in the creek with me.
 we'll leave sneakers buried deep
 under roots of trees
 let's lay down like mummies—
 (pretend that we're kings)
 let peeling shoulders chill
 in Carolina clay.
 Let's play army
 with pellet guns shining
 beneath twilight that whispers
 of oncoming Fall.
 Water rushes pink over
 stones made for tripping
 mud cakes our mouths
 crafted only for laughing.
 Cat's eyes glow
 under August's full moon—
 don't return to your home
 I brought canvas and
 branches.
 We'll set up a camp here
 and hunt for our food.

Come and run in the creek with me.
 We'll leave loafers set lightly
 on branches of trees
 let's lie down, submerged
 (pretend we're our fathers)
 burning heads making steam
 in the murky, dark James.
 Let's play lawyers
 and divvy up kids
 decide who our wives get
 eyes wet under moonlight.
 Curse loudly at rocks
 made for stubbing our toes
 scratch fiercely like dogs
 at beards made for shaving.
 We ran off the cats
 and they ran off with canvas.
 You know I can't drive
 so let's lay on the bank
 and remember the run
 that we had in the creek.



Ballet 7 by Julia Rabkin



The Beauty of the Storm by Rency Punnoose



The Light of the Storm by Rency Punnoose

The Democratization of Snub Appeal

Mike Ekunno

Not since Peter Tosh sang “Brand New Second Hand” has an oxymoron assumed such significance in real life as it does now. While the reggae crooner’s lyrics refer to relationships where a jaded, been-arounder tries to play the inexperienced one, the expression has acquired a new meaning away from relationships. In the economic sphere, it has morphed to a booming market in second hand goods whose humongous proportions have deluged almost every class of commodity in the developing world. In Nigeria, that market is commonly known as tokunbo, Yoruba for brought from abroad. Its viral dimensions cover cars, electronics, household equipment, books, toys, wears and stuff as private as underwear. But fairly used was not always this pervasive. Growing up in the 1970s, second hand clothing was its major forte. Then, too, fairly used was a working class affair. The middle class wore shirts that were unfurled from tamper-proof packaging and a cache of pins and clips.

Enormous lifestyle changes have come with the tokunbo phenomenon in my society. What started as an alternative market for working class wardrobe has been mainstreamed across the classes and commodities. Now, it is no longer considered beneath the elite and middle class to stoop to the tokunbo market. It may not be for haberdashery or electronics. But if one looked closely at the fleet in any middle class car port, a tokunbo is likely to be sitting pretty. The logic is that instead of a brand new Toyota saloon, a fairly used SUV of the same cost is a better deal for its brag value. This is more so as many members of the fairly used family come so “clean” as to be mistaken for new – the archetypal brand new second hand. They however don’t come with their tamper-proof seat covers intact. The ritual of unveiling those covers from the brand new equivalents had been the metaphor for newness and is perhaps more highly valued than unveiling the bride at weddings. Little wonder, those who are so unvain as to go for new cars take their time with the seat covers. The world has to notice theirs is “tear rubber.” The unveiling ritual evinces an uncanny similarity in both the auto industry and at nuptials. Just as many orthodox churches will not permit an obviously defiled bride to wear the veil, the “defiled” cars coming into the hands of their subsequent Nigerian owners come

unveiled too.

The full import and impact of a society’s middle class being good enough for fairly used may, as yet, not have been fully appreciated. The Bretton Woods Institutions’ Structural Adjustment Programme of the 1980s also saw to the devaluation of national currencies. Now, with this tokunborisation of a once-proud middle class, it is obvious that not only currencies were devalued. There is a certain panache to “new” that you cannot get in “fairly used.” “New” says you’ve worked hard enough and you deserve prime. It says excellence, fresh, chaste, first class, top dog, inimitable. In so far as these words cannot be used to describe fairly used, it is doubtful if they can be associated with the patrons thereof. And if genealogies of lifestyle goods can be traced, some of the original users in Europe and the United States may just be found to be less accomplished than their third world inheritors. There is therefore some irony to having, for example, a Nigeria-bound, world-class cardiologist using a Benz handed down by a Dutch pimp.

Economic theory has also failed to anticipate the huge market in brand new but substandard goods. Again, what used to be a niche market for imitation jewellery has been mainstreamed and made redolent across many commodity types. Unlike the fairly used market with Occidental origins, the new-but-inferior market’s provenance is Oriental. Sadly, in both cases, Africa plays the supine canvas, laboratory, battlefield or sandwich filling depending on one’s proclivities. Perhaps, Africa’s geographic position between the East and the West is also a mercantilist proposition.

But not everything about this woe is un-salutary. How else would I have been left with a chest full of Longines’ and Omegas if not for the democratization of snub appeal inherent in this market? Anytime I now watch that captivating television advert for Omega Ladymatic, I feel like “heaven in the backseat of my Cadillac.” One question the advertisers need to answer is whether they are advertising for their primary market or secondary market or for both. These days, I detach the original leather strap for re-use before flinging away the bad “luxury” chronometer bought off Abuja traffic snarl-up. It is not limited to high end watches. Hugo Boss, Calvin Klein, YSL, Louis Vuitton,

and other luxury good brands across fashion, perfumery, and jewellery are not spared. So are non-luxury brands in electronics, hand held devices, textiles and household equipment.

The downside to this democratization of snub appeal is the relativization of originality. Original now wears an adjective. There is better original and worse original; inferior original and superior original. The Chinese deluge has made sure that one cannot talk about “original” on most consumer goods without sounding archaic. It wouldn’t matter that the brand was as originally Euro-centric as Nokia or American as Hewlett Packard. Now, if China’s imprimatur is not on the entire equipment, it is on its components. This wouldn’t have mattered to an African consumer if not that with China-made, there is often a discount on quality. Insofar as the manufacturers do not come clean on how much quality they are discounting, it remains a rip-off. The price discount may appear like a quid pro quo on sub-standard quality, but the level of discount on quality is often under-matched by that on price. Moreover, even if one were ready to pay for

the original, one cannot vouch for it anymore than one can for sand. Quality, like pudding, is only tested in use and not apparent at purchase for most items. By the time you know your new Thermos flask retains heat on the outside, your debit card had been swiped and swindled long ago. Often the class of the retailer shop is the only guarantee of quality. But who says them high end shops have not been conning credulous customers?

Knowing that cheap, sub-standard goods are more expensive in the long run for the consumers, the question to ask is: who benefits from these rip-offs? Do the bona fide owners of the brands that get compromised accede to or partake in what amounts to their own funeral? What is the World Trade Organisation’s take on the economics of sub-standard goods? These questions can no longer be avoided seeing as human lives are lost to fake drugs and fatalities caused by fake auto spares. Standards organisations in many developing countries have since been swamped by the deluge of sub-standard goods. Nor do they possess the expertise to know the thousand and one ways and aspects in which an item can be faked.



Arkansas by David Thompson

Robert Lietz

Printing Yourself as Is

You study the freeze-dried corpse, examine
the nooks, the pearling air alive
with every wished-for irritant, a kind of thinking rain,
browsing the folds and photographs,
the prizes not yet woven with impressions, about
so much as all this talk to save a marriage,
this deciding fed upon. And what had you understood
the inch, peeling the minutes back, the lawns,
like documents on fire, the posts arranged, brutal
may be, top-heavy with their glowing,
what would that inch of anything, those plastics
sapping talents from the git-go, offer a heart
in kind, absorbing the land around, the land-loud
settling? You study the freeze-dried corpse,
wondering the fertile origins, the rooms, strawberries
in season, climbing the icy mounts, chalking
the rain-delays and redirections in the lunch-gab,
the looks of things, if not exactly what you
ordered, printing the self as is, there in the ample
beers, the urn, the iron, the icon-worried
linens, enjoying yourself the ice and perishable
diction, words on the night's silk road, printing
yourself as is, the words the ways you'd heard them.
Hadn't the moods, the geese in residence,
the looks of suburban woods inspired this prudent
sympathy, these shades and hues alone,
if not quite air, these flames, if not quite quieted,
loosened a little by desserts and lapping
after weathers, inspired these hands made glad
to be most anyplace, letting the beverage do,
letting the filters do, grateful to be most
anyplace, and the minds made serve
all kinds of interest afterward?

Brad Garber

Shock of Horror

I am becoming a human hair
as the real estate of my skin
shrinks and wrinkles, leaving
volcanoes of fur, spouting
like explosive exhalations
across aging bleak terrain.
I mow this stuff like grass
Medusa winding and twisting
one strand killed, three more
there in the morning light
twining and twisting anew
soaking up moisture using
the soil before it's too late.
The end is predictable, a hair
will choke me in my sleep
the point of origin unknown
somewhere beyond the reach
of pinching tweezers or razor
the autopsy short and ambiguous.



Untitled by Joseph O'Neill

Johnathan Harper

Freestyle Paganini Lunch

XOXOXOXOXOXO

Scared how his eyes outraced stars.
 Tried to map them, but snow settled in
 our tendons. It was spring break. We visited
 the chapel since an iced city has so little.
 Frost burnt our throats years of biting winter
 and tooth ache. Huddling into
 each other, to turn ice on
 a lit windowpane: tiny droplets
 of melt slipping into dark.

!!!

Or what I meant to say was!
 There is a picture of us
 with a tree growing out of his head
 a park with little robins like hopping fist
 a park with little golem children
 in stances of rich-gentrified-porcelain
 the shit stain still on a little girl's chin
 duck pond and dog feeders and legs and legs
 of the same exact cross country boy torso running
 an arboretum of white people but also trees
 and we were okay because we almost
 felt safe enough to hold hands

.....

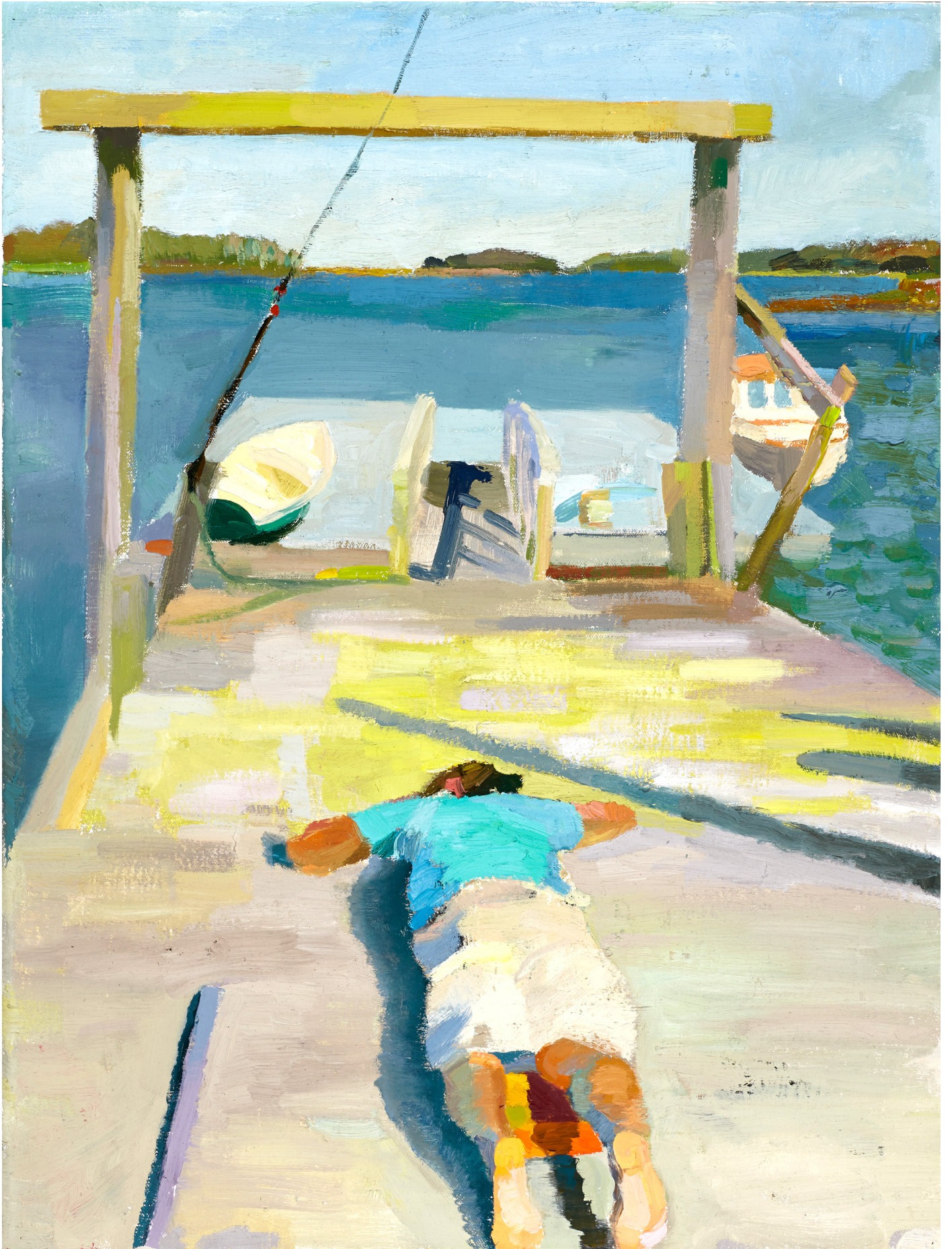
The father words in needles to his tongue.
 We make to future plans. I lay a city we share on his tongue.

The art deco was wolf body—raven head,
 the building glowed in a tongue of light.

The road from my home to his school
 so far the rivers run dry on my tongue.

I was in love but then!!! I still was and the empty
 parts of my hand reached past my tongue.

A tongue like knives descending soft steel who knew wow when the stars are out the constellation of taste in
 his teeth and kissing like a thing not thought about but deployed at every chance. Make up for last time. Lost
 time.



Dead to the World Dock by Suzanne Dittenber



Jackie's Kitchen by Suzanne Dittenber

Paul Smith

What We Did

We had a sandbox
We looked out the window
To watch the coal truck
We threw cinders at each other
In the alley
We watched mom hang laundry
In the yard
We ate all three meals
In the kitchen
At a formica table
After dinner we watched TV
With our parents
We spring-cleaned
We rolled down the car windows
We played outside
We wore wool hats
We said grace
We planted gardens
We watched airplanes fly overhead
We took the school bus
During Lent we ate fish
We watched the news
After dinner
Thinking it was something
That happened far far away

Kirby Wright

The Wounded Morning

The masturbation of wheels
Vibrates the neighborhood.

Optimism veers
As wings breeze an empty feeder

And dogs howl for love.
The suburban heroes

Have fled for work,
Leaving behind

Newborns and cracking tiles.
Mothers rock bundles

Before nursing their contracts.
I see you in the baby.

The glamour of earthly residence:
We share moon and sun,

Feel warmth on our skin
Picking grapes and berries.

Dreams stain the labels
Of beer and wine bottles

Breaking over granite.
Expectations rise with light.

We hear ourselves
Only when someone cries

Raccoon Love

Kevin Bray

He found his girlfriend online, pre-Google and a few years before Internet dating sites had mastered search algorithms and boasted success rates that approached the astonishing matchmaking skills of rural India. He signed up for a trial membership with Handshakes for Life, who proclaimed “ninety-five percent of our customers are happy or married!” (Had they purposely placed happiness and marriage in mutually exclusive categories on their web banner, or was it just bad grammarians working in web maintenance?) In those early days of Internet dating you had to search without the help of a mathematically guided search process; he relied on his hunter’s instincts (were the women on the site the gatherers?), prepared to quickly find his target (brunette, petite, no kids or ex-husbands, non-smoker, social drinker) and relentlessly pursue her (using a graduated strategy, progressing from email messages to a brief meeting to sex).

He started by sending her a smile, a silly emoticon that was a bumper sticker for emotional and sexual intent. She smiled back and they began sending each other messages, then three weeks later they met at a pub (her choice, to which he deferred). He asked her to bring five photographs that best represented something about her. He immediately regretted saying to her “a picture is worth a thousand words,” the cliché diluting his strong intelligence and effectively limiting the conversations he wanted to have about the photos she’d bring to the pub.

She was loquacious, a windup talker, and always had words ready to insert into his sentences, intuitively thrusting them into his mouth just after his breath punctuated his sentence with a comma.

“This is a photo of me skiing at Whistler. I was never good at team stuff, you know, and...”

“And you decided to focus on individual pursuits to show that you were good enough. Right?”

She brought five photos of defunct boyfriends. Each boyfriend was slightly different, physically, from a previous one, like a blurry photocopy, and the last boyfriend (“the great love of my life”) could have been a child’s tracing of the first one, or a shadow of the fourth. Each boyfriend posed with a beer bottle (as if each one was a statue of liberty, proclaiming moral freedom for all those who washed up on her shore). They held Mexican beers with withered lime wedges

sinking in the last three inches of the bottle, although the “great love” had a pretentious beer made by monks and woodland nymphs that cost a dollar more per case. She gave a long speech about each boyfriend, carefully explaining why she left them, enumerating the faults in their personalities, which overwhelmed any good qualities they had, and the sexual skills they developed through her patient and tolerant guidance. He listened to the sex part, especially her likes and dislikes, things she would and would not do in bed, and was excited that her list of exclusions was short.

His five photos were chosen to show athletic prowess, and his sinewy arms and well-developed legs (his thin calves were his least favourite part of them and his reply to the dismissive jabs from gym friends was that the best race horses had thin calve muscles). He hoped she would extrapolate from his ability to ski double black diamonds, kayak Class 3 rapids, climb overhanging rock faces without ropes and trek rugged seaside trails, that he could be athletic in the bedroom.

Their sexual syncopation expedited their dating and they bought new toothbrushes for each other’s apartments after a week and then six months later they bought an older bungalow in a quiet town just outside the city. She commuted downtown every day and he worked at home doing freelance copywriting for local businesses. (His first clients were the five Chinese restaurants in town who agreed with him that their unintelligible menus were confusing, not quirky.) They had deep pockets and a large line of credit to draw on, all of it backed by her generous income (his money was a tiny, sporadic tributary that fed into her income stream, but she never mentioned the disparity) and began renovating the house. At night they’d uncork a bottle of white wine and pass home decorating magazines back and forth, presenting their case for a particular look, edging to an agreement and then he’d cut the photos out and glue them into their Reno Scrapbook. On weekends they’d drive out to the big box stores to set the bar for prices and then locate the smaller, exclusive retailers who dealt in upscale fixtures, looking for a middle ground between the two.

“I think we should substitute porcelain tiles for limestone in the front entrance. They look the same but are half the cost. And we don’t need a kitchen faucet that responds to the touch of our elbow. When do

you ever get our hands so dirty that we can't turn the handle?"

"Right, we don't cook very much. But I did start baking and my hands are covered in butter and dough and I'd love to get the tap started without touching it."

She was usually right about these things, but he felt it was important to register a counter argument to maintain his right of first refusal. If one of them liked something and the other did not, they agreed that one of them could veto the purchase, a presidential privilege that encouraged them to negotiate harder to find an acceptable outcome.

His increased domesticity did not reduce his libido or performance; he was still a consummate athlete even though he was not playing tennis or biking. This was temporary inertia, until the renovations were done and he could get the sports equipment out of the storage locker they'd rented. She convinced him that he would have neither the time to be

kayaking or biking nor the space to keep any of it in the house. He thought maybe the bike could stay and he'd take a quick spin around the neighbourhood in a moment when one contractor's schedule left a gap between the next one. Instead he did push ups, crunches and squats, an inmate's routine, to keep himself toned until the major renovation work finished. His body-weight-only exercises preserved his lean muscles; he felt he was working alongside the men who hauled heavy sheets of drywall or sixty pound boxes of tile.

For nine months the contractors moved in and out of the house, never on schedule, or if they arrived at the correct time and day, they'd leave early without any visible suggestion of effort. The kitchen guys had installed cabinets a week ago, but the counters (pearl blue granite, chosen by her once he pointed

out that they matched her eye colour) were two weeks delayed, backordered, an excuse used by most of the trades, who were victims of supply-chain snafus that originated in China. The carpenter cut quarter-inch plywood to follow the contour of the bottom cabinets and screwed it down so they had a temporary surface to work on. When his wife phoned to let him know that she'd have another late evening at work, he tried rolling dough on the plywood. The dough oozed into the grain of the wood and he had to scrape it off with a spatula and his fingers, then suffered the indignity of inserting a one inch sliver into his ring finger that took



Wellfleet Beach by Suzanne Dittenber

an hour to pick out with tweezers. This was on an afternoon when he'd spent two hours deciding the correct punctuation for a restaurant's washroom signs that requested customers to improve urinal etiquette.

"Please, flush after each use. Please hold down the handle" or "Please flush. After each use, please hold down the handle." He thought the stron-

ger "Please! Flush after each use. Please! Hold down the handle" was the best choice and sent it along with the others in an email with explanations attached.

His mother had recently spoken to him on the phone from her retirement residence, lamenting her aged hands, sad that she could no longer bake, and asked him to make her a batch of cookies, send them in the mail. Making cookies was like working out; this is what he told his wife and their friends who wondered why he did it when a quaint bakery, with reasonable prices and quality ingredients, was just around the corner. Hadn't they, his wife pointed out, bought this house so they could live in a neighbourhood with a high walk score, a community in which you could stroll to the bank, the bakery, the liquor store?

"I like baking. My mother made me do all the

chopping—nuts or candied fruit—for her Christmas baking. And it’s hard work. Kneading dough is great for your forearms.”

Their neighbours were mostly retired couples or young professionals, with moms at home raising young children. He ran for an hour each day at about the same time the mothers escaped from the confines of suburban isolation to take their kids to the playground. They parked their strollers around the perimeter of the playground like pickup trucks at a weekend jamboree in the country; the kids dodged and weaved in the tunnel slides and ladders to avoid the shrill commands of their mothers, who gathered in groups to keep the kids in and the predators out. His scheduled runs past the park alarmed the women who stopped talking when he approached and then chattered loudly when he was almost out of earshot, like chickadees exhausted by a wandering housecat.

They spent less time making love. She was tired after working late and his desire was blunted by thoughts of the women at the park (would he make a good father?) and the renovations. He was beginning to appreciate the house a little more each day as it evolved

from a musty and dank box into a perfumed and sleek shelter. Although they had less sex, they still had an intimate hour after dinner when they sat and drank a bottle of wine and talked about her day at the office, and the skirmishes and assaults required to maintain her position and her plans for advancing in her career. He sometimes embellished his own day, telling her he’d really got into it with the electrician who installed only six, not eight, pot lights above the kitchen island. She asked him if he missed being in the world, working.

“I am working. What do you think I do all day?”

“Yes, I know, but don’t you want to be around adults?”

She thought he was a boy. She knew it when she saw the photos at their first date; all play and no ambition, a boy who wanted to be told what to do and how to do it. She decided that she might enjoy being his tutor and mentor, an Amazonian woman, a matriarch who commanded and rewarded loyalty, but she overestimated his masculinity and the relationship had become froth, insubstantial moments that popped at the slightest inspection. He passively signed a cohabitation agreement, a vice-grip contract that prevented him



Lonesome Prairie by David Thompson

from ever getting her assets and preserved the capital she used as the down payment on the house. She was the leader in bed, and he did an excellent job of following her instructions and understanding her second language of grunts, moans and expletives; in her energetic lust she was like an immigrant who reverted to their native language in moments of anger. The renovations were taking place under his supervision, but she was the one who scheduled the trades and paid the bills and she chose the tiles, hardwood floor, countertops and cabinets, trim profiles and paint colour.

His interest in cookies, bread and cakes belied a feminine persuasion that she disliked. Maybe she should have let him keep his bike along the side of the house, but it was an eyesore, incongruous with the pleasing stucco plastered onto the front and sides of their rapidly changing home.

They should never have met. They did not occupy the same spaces; their work, friends and pastimes did not overlap and their mutually exclusive lives precluded accidental love. She did not shop online. Your credit card is compromised, your order is incorrect or goes missing in transit. If the clothes do arrive, they don't fit, because a size 6 in one store is a size 8 in another. She had shopped for a man online and he was delivered, but he was the wrong temperament. Whenever people asked how she'd met her husband she'd answer "I got him off the computer" in an attempt to impose humour on regret. At first he would laugh at this comment and make a similar joke, but then he understood that she hated shopping online and would say "we are still trying to figure out the return policy."

They both regretted the bungalow's roof. It was listed as "newer" in the sales sheet and the agent told them it would last another ten or twenty years and if it did fail, there was a transferable warranty. Six months after buying the house the roof was charring in the spring sun, curling and exfoliating, exposing large holes in the plywood sheathing. "You're going to have problems with animals for sure" said the insulation contractor who blew shredded newspaper into the attic to bump the R value. The real estate agent had been wrong, or perhaps deliberately misleading, and the roof did not have a warranty, and no claim had been made by anyone in any legal document stating that the roof would last longer than the day they took possession.

They got three quotes from reputable roofers. She didn't care about the roof, its aesthetics or the details about wind resistance, open versus closed valleys, or galvanize metal drip lines. He could oversee the installation

and meet the roofers on the day they arrived. He offered to get on the roof and fix the gaps as a temporary repair until the roofers could do the work. They had advised them that a can of spray foam and a sheet of wire mesh would stop animals from getting into the attic. She had heard something on the roof the night before, when they were drinking their bottle of wine and talking about the women at her office who constantly interfered with her initiatives and proposals. He took one of the three flashlights they kept in the front hall closet and walked around the outside of the house, shining the beam along the roof edge, looking for reflected eyes. The yellow beam torched only the first three feet of the roofline, but he was sure he saw a raccoon's large backside waddle up into the darkness behind the chimney.

"It's big. I don't know how it can get into that hole in the roof."

She insisted he get on the ladder in the morning and fill the hole with foam, hammer down the wire mesh. Maybe he could do something other than spin his desk chair in circles all afternoon or run around the neighbourhood.

One can of foam should have blocked the gap, but the raccoon had now torn the plywood off in little pieces and thrown it down to the ground along with ripped roof tiles. One more night and the raccoon could enter their attic and start its nest, a nice warm home in the shredded news. He used two cans of foam, spraying it in layers, like icing a cup cake, back and forth across the gap. After five minutes he used a utility knife to cut away the foam that had spilled into the gutters and hardened, then he nailed a nine square foot sheet of wire mesh over it, using twice as many nails as the roofers recommended.

The raccoon came back two nights in a row, doubling down on its gamble to get into their house, plucking the mesh at the sharp edges around the flat-head nails, nibbling at the sponge-toffee foam. The cedars were a ladder for the raccoon, who climbed them at dusk to trapeze onto the roof. He checked each morning to see how far the animal had gotten and was happy to phone his wife and tell her that his patch was keeping the animal out of the attic.

"You have to get up there on Saturday to take the mesh off. Before the roofers arrive," she told him.

On Saturday morning his wife slept late, in her bedroom, one of the two rooms finished first in the renovation. The other was the master bathroom attached to her bedroom. He snored and wrestled with bed sheets, talked and whimpered, sometimes snapped upright

in bed and talked about commas and colons, and she asked if he was okay to sleep on the sofa until they got the other bedrooms done. He was able to rise early and enjoy solitude for an hour as long as he tiptoed and was stealthy making coffee.

He put the coffee in a thermos and went outside to place the ladder against the house. The weather forecast was sunny and mild, but the morning was chilly and he thought about getting a hat and gloves, deciding against the risk of waking her by rummaging around the closet.

He set the ladder at a wide, safe angle, but doing this meant the ladder barely made it to the edge of the roof; only the top rung rose above the roof line. Still, it was enough to get up onto the roof and when he was finished he could lay on the roof and slide along his stomach and blindly get his feet down to the second rung.

The black shingles looked like an asphalt road dusted with snow or a dark night sky illuminated by a distant city's lights. Frost covered the roof

except for the peak where the sun had melted it; bungalows in the sixties were built with shallow angled-roofs and the rising arc of the morning sun would melt most of it in a half hour. He got onto the roof on hands and knees and slowly stood up, a bipedal creature high above the ground looking out at the landscape, listening for animals.

He walked to the chimney to lean against it for a moment. The grout was crumbling, spilling onto the shingles and half a dozen bricks were wiggling out of the chimney and maybe a dozen more could go until the entire thing collapsed. His wife hadn't mentioned this, nor had the roofers. He'd take charge of this and call a mason later in the day.

He sipped his coffee, got the hammer out of his pocket, placed it on the roof, tried to grab it back as it

slid away from him, and watched it flip over the eaves trough down to the yard. The loud clank when the hammer claws banged off the ladder was enough to wake his wife or the neighbours. He looked at the neighbour's bedroom and kitchen windows. The bedroom drapes were shut and the kitchen was empty. Maybe they made love in the mornings when their children were asleep, like sneaking out of the house for a walk while the dog is busy eating dinner. Without his hammer he couldn't pop the nails holding the wire mesh; even the raccoon couldn't do it with its tenacity, and the lid of his thermos was plastic and useless to wedge between the nail head and shingle. He'd have to get down the ladder and

retrieve the hammer. He'd wait, though, until the sun melted the frost.

For thirty minutes he sat against the chimney, drinking coffee and listening. A few neighbours ignited their car engines and drove away chased by white smoke that unfurled along the wet asphalt. From one of the vent stacks on his roof he heard a toilet



Recondite III by Christopher Nitsche

flush. His wife must be up, starting her routine. She'd put on a housecoat, the one that completely disguised her curvy figure, then check the coffee pot to see if he'd left enough for her, open the front door to get the paper, and sit on the living room sofa and read the travel section first.

The roof was still too slippery for him to glissade down to the ladder. He could bang on the roof to get her attention and ask her to either throw the hammer back up to him or hold the ladder so he could get his feet on the unsafe first rung.

He stomped his feet above where she sat, tapping in a rhythm so that she'd know it was a purposeful sound, but not hard enough to crack the plaster ceiling above her. Eight stomps and she should come out. He tried again after a few minutes and then scooped a handful

of pine needles from around the base of the chimney and threw them in front of the living room window. He thought about edging down the roof face first and peeking over the edge to wave his arms. It was less desperate than yelling for help.

Shouldn't she wonder why he wasn't in the house? How long would she sit with the newspaper and coffee before even thinking about him? He resented the inequality; he was on the roof while she was inside and he was cold, but she was warm. Maybe she was the wrong woman for the house. Maybe he would get off the roof and start running and never come back.

He did not know the raccoon had been on the opposite corner of the roof, just below the ridge line of the garage, perpendicular to the chimney, watching his antics. It was bigger in the daylight than what he saw in his flashlight beam. He'd researched raccoons and this one was not behaving the way that Wikipedia described. Raccoons were smart and nocturnal, but this one was now pawing up the shingles towards him in a bright spring morning. Two nights of useless clawing at the sealed attic should have convinced it to leave. Raccoons tested for intelligence could remember a solution three years after being given a task.

He might have to fight the raccoon, he thought, a spectacle that, thank God, would not be witnessed by any of the neighbours. If he sat at the edge of the roof, waited until the raccoon got close, he could kick it over the edge, surprising the animal with his long-distance-cycling leg strength. Or he could jump. The ground below him was still hard, as unyielding as the spray foam in the roof, and he'd probably fracture something and then be useless to supervise the remaining renovations.

She heard the insistent footsteps on the roof and watched the dining room chandelier—she had chosen a minimalist black fixture with six lamps—sway back and forth. Then a flurry of pine needles sank past the living room window and she wondered if he was cleaning the gutters. He had been on the roof for forty-five minutes and still had not removed the wire or foam and the roofers would charge extra if they were left to do it. He was always flippant with money that was not his. The feature article about New York boutique hotels she was reading was more interesting than poking her head out to see what he was doing and she decided it would be easier to let the roofers do the work for an additional hundred dollars. The raccoon would soon be forced to seek its desire elsewhere, in some other house, one that was not prepared to remedy deficiencies and spend time and money to fix small problems

before they became daunting. Her neighbours were free riding on her renovations, effortlessly enjoying higher property values because she had expended, along with what she now thought of as “the idiot on the roof,” a lot of financial and human capital to improve an eyesore on the street.

The raccoon must be sick he wondered, otherwise why else was it on the roof in daylight and not afraid? Could he kick an ill animal? Was it humane to catapult a live animal into the street, one that was simply looking for a place to start a family?

He yelled down the plumbing stack, using it as an amplifier, hoping that she'd hear his command to “come outside I need help.”

She heard a voice in the ceiling, somewhere above the kitchen. He was yelling at her.

The raccoon looked up at him. The animal needed to get him off the roof, strip the wire, claw away the foam, and get into the attic before the roofers came. Once it was inside and nursing its children, they would have to wait to remove it. The law was on the animal's side, at least for now.

She opened the door and walked far enough out on the lawn to look up to the roof. He was squatting on the roof edge, as if he were a compressed spring about to expand. His hammer was on the ground and she picked it up and gave an underhand toss into the air like a softball pitch, lobbing the hammer towards his head. At the same time the raccoon launched itself at his legs, its claws and teeth ready to puncture the flesh on his calf.

None of them had anything left to lose. Nothing could satisfy all of them.

The house was sold a week after he was released from the hospital. The agent told them to describe the roof as “a work in progress.” The price they got was reduced just enough to compensate the buyers for having to hire animal extractors, who promised to humanely remove the raccoon after it's kits moved out in the late fall. She generously gave him half of the profit made on the house and wished him well in his future.

On moving day he took his bike out of storage and scraped a pedal along the fresh stucco underneath her bedroom window, etching a three foot long scar into the “Mojave Desert” finish that she chose. He realized that he would always love this house and that his next one would look just like this, and that he would never again buy a house without paying more attention to the structural elements, like roofs and foundations. Everything else was just gloss.

Maine

Daniel Aristi

Kill a squid, for manhood

You's urging me, 'grab it by the tentacles!' More like, 'grab it by the balls.' 'Cephalopod' you said is queer. This year we went to the creek already in February.

There is heart within this kraken but you are yelling, 'hit its head against the goddamn rock!'

Ain't 'rock' anymore but 'goddamn rock' – I'm disappointing you again. Goddamn this and the other, sleet on sand, gusty.

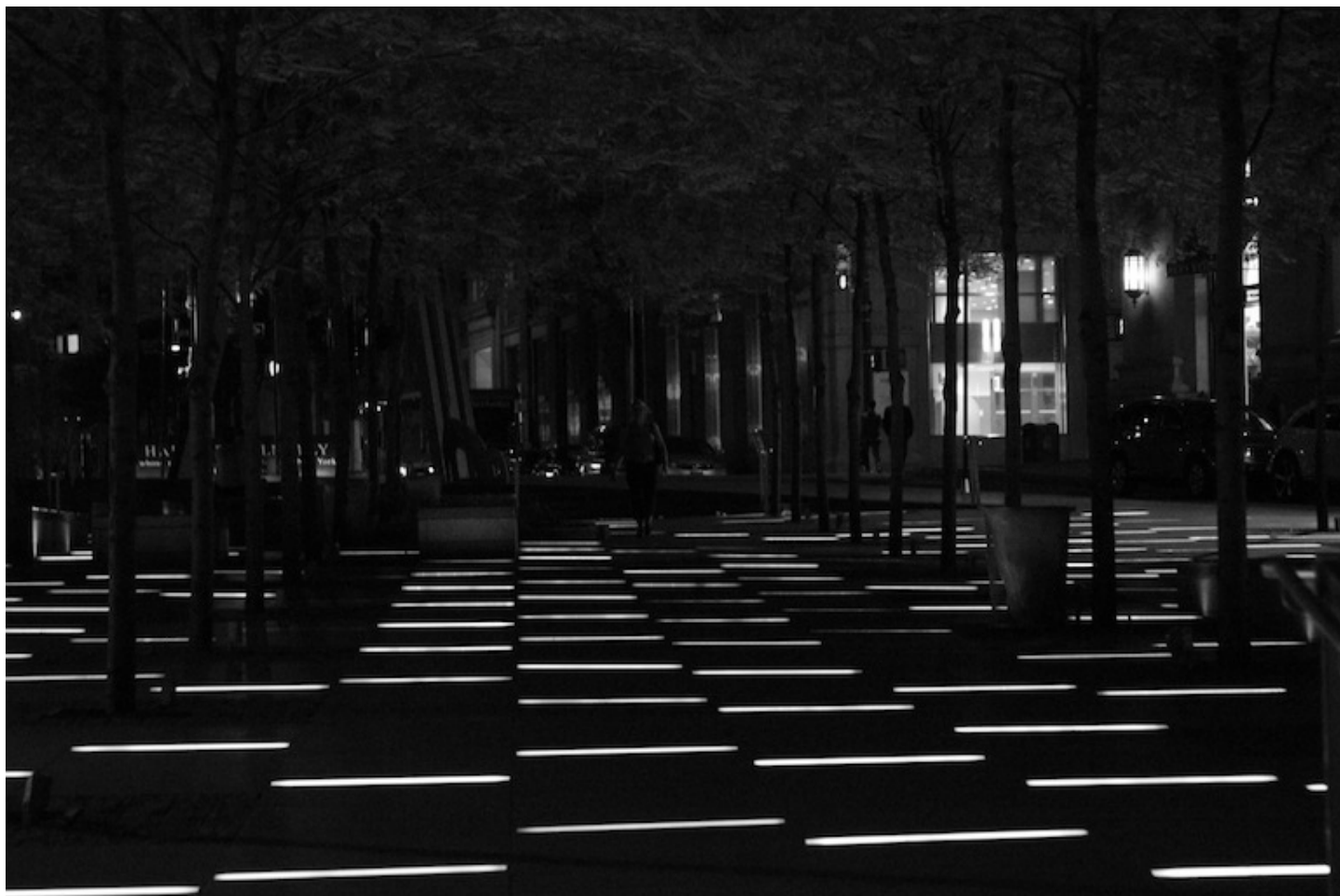
Squid's now cold and iron gray, a bit like a bunch of dead cosmic flowers. I hear it beg softly in my mind with every wave splashing & rolling ashore:

– Noooo...shhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh...

I swing it wide and smash it against the world in one soggy thump.

I can't hear you, can't say whether I was just in time for a 'good job' or I'd fallen over into 'finally'.

Why, with you it's always about time; ten seconds maketh a man, ten years wasted.



Untitled by Joseph O'Neill



Eyes Wide by Otha Vakseen Davis III

Bill Buege

School

We sat in rows and learned
to think in rows and walked
in rows, described our world as rows
of good and evil men. We talked

in rows and ate in rows
and exercised in rows,
processed in rows and worked in rows
of cubicles. Who knows

what we'd be now if we
had told the officers
we would not charge in rows and rows
the enemy. Of course,

we died in rows, and lie
in rows of careful graves,
and if we rise we'll no doubt rise
in clearly patterned waves.

Doug Hoekstra

Levon and Duck

My son takes piano lessons.
I try to teach him
About staying in the pocket but
You know it's a tough year when
Levon Helm and Duck Dunn
Both leave the planet.
I wonder if rock and roll
Will ever swing again.

I wonder who will take their place
And play all night long
For memories, dreams and
Reams of possibilities that
Lie within three chords.
A fourth. A fifth
Suddenly I feel
Like a man out of time.

Backlit darkness
Cherry red cheeks
Long deep breaths and
The climax that peaks
Across silence. Then
Another breath
Before the next dance
Starts up again

I wonder who will take their place
And work all night long
To escape cotton fields
And factories, cast from
Clothes of different colors
To hold on to what we feel
Man, woman, bass, drums
Transcending what is real

Contributor Bios

Daniel Aristi was born in Spain. He studied French Literature. He lives in Botswana. His work has been recently featured in *Gravel* and *The New Madrid* and is forthcoming in *Berkeley Poetry Review*.

Bill Begue has been published in *River Styx*, *Callaloo*, *The Madison Review*, and other magazines. One of his poems was nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

Kevin Bray is a Toronto based writer/teacher, and studied at the Humber School for Writers and the Vermont College of Fine Art.

Alan Britt served as judge for the 2013 *The Bitter Oleander Press Library of Poetry Book Award*. He read poetry and presented the “Modern Trends in U.S. Poetry” at the VII International Writers’ Festival in Val-David, Canada, May 2013. Sponsored by LaRuche Arts Contemporary Consortium (LRACC) he read poetry at the Union City Museum of Art/William V. Musto Cultural Center in Union City, NJ in May, 2014. His interview at The Library of Congress for The Poet and the Poem (<http://www.loc.gov/poetry/media/avfiles/poet-poem-alan-britt.mp3>) aired on *Pacifica Radio*, January 2013. His latest books are *Parabola Dreams* (with Silvia Scheibli): 2013 and *Alone with the Terrible Universe*: 2011. He teaches English/Creative Writing at Towson University.

Otha Vakseen Davis III is invigorated by women, popular culture and the value of self. His paintings evolve around society’s idolization of beauty, the enhancements women endure to obtain this level of “perfection” and the impact this has on the female species.

Suzanne Dittenber holds a BFA from Columbus College of Art and Design and an MFA in Painting from the University of New Hampshire. She is currently an Assistant Professor of Drawing, Painting and Printmaking at Taylor University in Upland, Indiana. During the summers, she makes her way back to the East coast to the seaside town of Kittery, Maine to paint landscape architect Jackie Nooney’s beautifully cultivated gardens on nearby Badger’s Island.

Mike Ekunno likes to scribble, some of his output being of indeterminate taxonomy. He humors himself

working in the foggy zone where words are used to plumb sound, smell and sight. His collection of short stories awaits a publisher. He freelances as copy editor and proof reader, having worked as senior speechwriter to Nigeria’s last information and communications minister and a columnist in *The Guardian* on Sunday. His writings have found outlets in *The African Roar Anthology 2013*, *Warscapes*, *bioStories*, *BRICKrhetoric*, *Dark Matter Journal*, *Cigale Literary Magazine*, *Thrice Fiction Magazine*, *Middle Gray Magazine*, *Miracle e-zine*, *Sentinel Literary Quarterly*, *Ascent Aspirations Magazine*, *The Muse*, *Bullet Pen* and *Storymoja*, the last two coming with wins in continent-wide contests. He enjoys Old Testament stories when not reading creatively or writing. He is head of media at Nigeria’s film regulatory authority.

Crystal Lane Swift Ferguson, PhD, is a communication professor at Mt. San Antonio College and California State University, Northridge, and a Mary Kay Sales Director. She paints, sings, acts, models, produces independent films, and has published many academic articles and two academic books. Her portrayal of *The Black Rose in Silence*, which she also co-wrote and produced, earned her a best actress award and a best film award at the LA Neo Noir Festival. She has published poetry in *Shangri-La Shack*, *Still Points Quarterly*, *PQLeer*, and other places. Her poetry collection, *God Bless Paul* is out on Rosedog Books and her chapbook, *The Way We Were* as well as her “Fourplay,” *Still Learning to Let Go* is out on Writing Knights Press. She has a dog, Sadie, with her husband, Rich Ferguson. www.crystallaneswift.org

Jack Galmitz was born in 1951 in NYC. He received a Ph.D from the University of Buffalo in English. He’s written books in a number of genres—minimalist poetry, free verse, prose fiction—and he is also actively engaged in the visual arts. His art is regularly published in the journal *Otoliths* and in 2014 his art appeared in *Red Fez* and *Empty Sink Publishing*. He photographs were included in a charitable gallery showing in Switzerland in November at the 20x20 gallerie.

Brad Garber lives, writes and runs around naked in the Great Northwest. He fills his home with art, music, photography, plants, rocks, bones, books, good cookin’

and love. He has published poetry in *Alchemy*, *Red Booth Review*, *Front Range Review*, *Black Fox Literary Magazine*, *theNewerYork*, *Ray's Road Review*, *The Round Up*, *Meat for Tea*, *Gambling the Aisle*, *Empty Sink Publishing*, *Fiction Fix*, *Screaming Sheep Magazine*, *Off the Coast*, *Crab Fat Magazine*, *Apeiron Review*, *Shadowgraph*, *Livid Squid Literary Journal*, *Stoneboat Journal*, *Brickplight*, *Shuf Poetry*, *Rockhurst Review*, *Penduline Press*, *Literature Today*, *BASED*, *Eunoia Review*, and other quality publications. Nominee: 2013 Pushcart Prize for poem, *Where We May Be Found*.

Johnathan Harper's most recent publications are with *Small Por[t]ions* and the *Hawai'i Pacific Review*. He is the the editor of *The Birds We Piled Loosely*.

David M. Hicks received an MFA in painting from Indiana University at Bloomington in 2008. Highly influenced by muralists, as well as narrative figure painters, the themes in Hicks' work range from introspective narratives to resurrecting the mono-myth of the hero's journey in contemporary experience. David was the recipient of a fellowship at the Herron School of Art & Design, and later a visiting lecturer position at the same. Recent exhibitions include Tennessee Tech University, Harrison Center for the Arts Indianapolis, University of Alaska Southeast (Juneau), Linus Galleries in California, Tejas Gallery in Ohio, Indiana Wesleyan University, the Fort Wayne Museum of Art, and Union Street Gallery in Chicago.

Doug Hoekstra is a Chicago-bred, Nashville-based writer. His first book, *Bothering the Coffee Drinkers*, appeared on the Canopic Publishing (TN) imprint in April 2006 and earned an Independent Publisher Award (IPPY) for Best Short Fiction (Bronze Medal). Several of the selections in the book appeared in other publications, and one story, *The Blarney Stone* was nominated for a 2006 Pushcart Prize. Other stories and poems have appeared in numerous online and print literary journals. In his previous life, he was a singer-songwriter troubadour who released seven albums of original material on labels in Europe, labels in America, and labels he ran himself. He toured through the east coast, midwest, and south, as well as six European countries, performing at bookstores, coffeehouses, clubs, libraries, pubs, festivals, radio stations, and castles, solo and with band in tow. Highlights included Nashville Music Award and Independent Music Award nominations, lots of Top 10

lists, and many groovy times.

Gregory T. Janetka is a writer from Chicago who unwittingly finds himself living in Huntsville, Alabama. He is terribly good at jigsaw puzzles and drinks a great deal of tea while hanging out with his cat. His work has recently been featured in *Foliolate Oak*, *Flyover County Review*, and *Deltona Howl*. More of his writings can be found at gregorytjanetka.com.

Robert Lietz has had more than eight hundred of his poems appear in more than one hundred journals in the U.S. and Canada, in Sweden and U.K, including *Agni Review*, *Antioch Review*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *The Colorado Review*, *Epoch*, *The Georgia Review*, *Mid-American Review*, *The Missouri Review*, *The North American Review*, *The Ontario Review*, *Poetry*, and *Shenandoah*. Eight collections of his poems have been published, including *Running in Place* (L'Epervier Press), *At Park and East Division* (L'Epervier Press), *The Lindbergh Half-century* (L'Epervier Press), *The Inheritance* (Sandhills Press), and *Storm Service* (Basfal Books). Basfal also published *After Business in the West: New and Selected Poems*. Besides the print publications, his poems have appeared in several webzines. He has completed several other print and hypertext (hypermedia) collections of poems for publication, including *Character in the Works: Twentieth-Century Lives*, *West of Luna Pier*, *Spooking in the Ruins*, *Keeping Touch*, and *Eating Asiago & Drinking Beer*. He also spends a good deal of time taking, post-processing, and printing photographs he has been making for the past several years, exploring the relationship between the image-making and the poems he has made and is exploring.

Connor McGaha is a writer from Charlotte, NC. His poetry has been previously published in *Haunted Waters Press' From the Depths*, *Crab Fat Literary Magazine*, and *Gambling the Aisle*. When he's not writing, he's talking to his cat, Bukowski, or drinking too-hot coffee deep into the night.

Christoper Nitsche is an artist living in Savannah, Georgia, where he teaches at the Savannah College of Art and Design. His work comprises found object sculptures, welded steel sculptures and mixed media drawings. The subject of the artwork is metaphorical ship forms; as laden cargo, hull forms, and movement.

Stephen Clark Okawa is a garbageman from Dorchester, MA. His work has appeared in *The Main Street Rag*, *WordEater*, *Breadcrumb Scabs*, *Boston Poetry Magazine*, and others.

Joseph O'Neil's innovative "Third Eye" photography skillfully illuminates sites and scenes that the normal vision easily overlooks. Across a monochrome arcade of life, his masterful black and white urban photography encapsulates the aesthetics of a modern romantic, and mirrors the irrepressible energy of the world as it celebrates the possibility of the unexpected in urban life. Urban and industrial in tone, he begins with a nocturnal photograph of an ordinary building or street scene or beach scene and offers a close-range, almost intimate view of scenes of the environment. Rather than offering a wider view of an entire edifice, his sharp lens synthesizes every detail and is unerring – the work constantly demands that the viewer go outside and see their "ordinary" surroundings with better eyes.

Dave Petraglia has appeared in *Popular Science*, *Popular Mechanics*, *Better Homes & Gardens*; more recently in *Agave*, *Cactus Heart*, *Dark Matter*, *eFiction India*, *Loco*, *Gravel*, *Storyacious*, *Petrichor Review*, *Thought Catalog*, *theNewerYork*, and *Vine Leaves*. He's a writer and photographer and lives near Jacksonville, Florida. His blog is at www.drowningbook.com

Rency Punnoose is a contemporary realist working in the medium of Oil paint.

Julia Rabkin is a third year advertising major at RIT in Rochester, NY.

Oliver Rice's poems appear widely in journals and anthologies in the United States and abroad. *Creekwalker* released an interview with him in January, 2010. His book of poems, *On Consenting to Be a Man*, is published by Cyberwit and is available on Amazon. His online chapbook, *Afterthoughts*, *Siestas*, and his recording of his Institute for Higher Study appeared in *Mudlark* in December, 2010.

Paul Smith lives near Chicago with his wife Flavia. He is a proud member of the Rockford Writers' Guild. Paul finds inspiration for fiction/poetry on the Milwaukee Avenue bus, the El, along the canal

in Skokie/Chicago. Sometimes he does poetry live at Green Mill's open mic at Broadway & Lawrence in Chicago.

David J. Thompson is a former prep school teacher and coach. He has been traveling since October 2013. His photos and poems have been published in a variety of print and on-line journals.

Kirby Wright was born and raised in Honolulu, Hawaii. He is a graduate of Punahou School in Honolulu and the University of California at San Diego. He received his MFA in Creative Writing from San Francisco State University. Wright has been nominated for five Pushcart Prizes and three Best of The Webs. Wright is a past recipient of the Ann Fields Poetry Prize, the Academy of American Poets Award, the Browning Society Award for Dramatic Monologue, and Arts Council Silicon Valley Fellowships in Poetry and The Novel. *Before the City*, his first book of poetry, took First Place at the 2003 San Diego Book Awards. Wright is also the author of the companion novels *Punahou Blues* and *Moloka'i Nui Ahina*, both set in Hawaii. He was a Visiting Fellow at the 2009 International Writers Conference in Hong Kong, where he represented the Pacific Rim region of Hawaii. He was the 2011 Artist in Residence at Milkwood International, Czech Republic. *The Widow from Lake Bled*, his second collection of poetry, was published in 2013, along with two works of speculative fiction: *The End*, *My Friend* (novel) and *Square Dancing at the Asylum* (flash fiction collection).

Yuan Changming, 8-time Pushcart nominee and author of 4 chapbooks (including *Mindscaping* [2014]), is the world's most widely published poetry author who speaks Mandarin but writes English. Growing up in a remote village, Yuan began to learn English at 19 and published several monographs before leaving China. With a PhD in English, Yuan currently tutors and co-edits *Poetry Pacific* with Allen Qing Yuan in Vancouver. His poetry appears in 979 literary publications across 31 countries, including *Best Canadian Poetry*, *BestNewPoemsOnline*, *Cincinnati Review* and *Threepenny Review*.

Gregory Zeorlin is an artist and poet living near Tyler, TX. Making art or writing poetry is nearly the same experience for him as both save ideas.

