

THE GIST
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Gist

THE GIST

Spring 2020

Volume XXII, Part One

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FRONT: Chloe Moulin BACK: Chris Soychak

TITLE: Poppies and WD-40

TITLE: Same

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

With a new decade cracking open this spring, this issue is special. We've curated a collection of exceptional student art and writing we believe will inspire, nourish, and challenge us as we plunge forward into these uncertain times.

We're also grateful to sustain another season of success, cultivating a creative community on campus via radio shows, poetry readings, and collaborative events with myriad groups at the University of Vermont.

More works from *The Gist* were selected for *plain china*—the national literary anthology for top-notch undergraduate art and writing. We're overjoyed to launch our own website, allowing readers to enjoy past issues online while enhancing our submissions process.

And as spring slides into summer, we hope these works excite your imagination, as they have for us and for so many readers of *The Gist*.

— THE EDITORS

“Don't you remember being young, when language was magic without meaning? When what you could say could not mean? When the invisible was what imagination strove to see? When questions and demands for answers burned so brightly you trembled with fury at not knowing?”

— Toni Morrison

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Undefined Alchemy

'Crusades will crusade on,'
even without you,
it reads.

Our ship swelters
in flames
sinking,
still dancing
with the rats,
rodent cabins
down beneath.

You're grinning,
'The evening has just begun.'

A rebirth from the ash
arise drenched
in silk poetry
'Crusades will crusade on,'
it reads.

The two of you,
dancing
with the rats
until dawn.

Mirror Image

I think you'd like him, with his cracked knuckles. His eyes are bright like that old buzzing light

we had on the back porch.

Do you remember? I am a mosquito, drawn time and time again back into that light, even when it blinds me.

Condensation blooms on the bathroom mirror. The tile is cold and slimy on my feet—

I should clean it.

It feels like the green scum from our neighbor's pond. I remember fishing with you there, although I'm not sure there were any fish.

I tie my towel around me, under my arms, the same space you used to place your hands when you lifted me up to twirl me

around the living room.

I cannot help but love what hurts me. I suppose I inherited that from you, along with the freckles

on my shoulders and the gap between my teeth that I notice as I apply my lipstick in the mirror.

Throwing Hands

Ink on paper



Aglaope's Suburbia

Bells scream
 And I fall in the middle
 Of elementary panic
And I don't yet have
 Glasses to break and dive and pull
 My hysteria with them
But I can see
 Hundreds of vengeful shoes
 Cleaner than mine--cleaner
Than my forehead
 Always bashing old brick wall
 Clean how they avoid me--
Chubby ankles inches from my
 Fingers outstretched straining
 A sirens limbs thrashing
To drag them down with me
 My song serrated and grisly
 against candy gloss couture
And little ears built only for praise
 With shrewd eyes alone
 To betray their sin
While I am trampled by my
 Own wails; my knee streams
 Tears and my eyelashes
Bleed, because
 There is nothing more pure
 Than the pain of a child.

Same

Digital photography



Ars Poetica: Undressing Feathers

To be a poet
trying to write a poem,
is trying to be as free
as a naked chicken—

you are undressing feathers
with similes and undulating
a pecking parade with
onomatopoeias—

trying to explain that there are pants
but also under-pants
and foot-pants
that are really just socks—

a poem meeting paper
is like trying to tell this
chicken that toes are puzzles
and man, does she not understand—

that fingers are meat
tubes holding rings
at weddings
where we dance instead of prancing—

where the poets try
to write vows full

of metaphors for a greener
side of the grass—

where only you, chicken, will always
be, standing still trying
to imagine holding hands
with Betty from one coop over—

as I write, that I am home,
naked, knees straddling him, I lean
to hover above his face, hair cascading
as a waterfall cave to protect us.

Flutter

Black and white film photography



Based on Your Credit Score You Qualify for the Following Subparhuman Abilities

Invisibility while screaming.

Telepathy with those who secretly hate you.

Future sight for spoilers.

Time travel while experiencing diarrhea.

Summon comfort bees when distressed.

The ability to shapeshift into sex offenders.

Super speed within elevators.

Teleportation while crying.

Continuous X-ray vision. You see only a world of bones.

The ability to smell ghosts around you.

Regeneration via seizure.

The ability to talk to plants. Turns out they're really racist.

Plastickinesis.

Buggie Boys

Gouache watercolors and ink



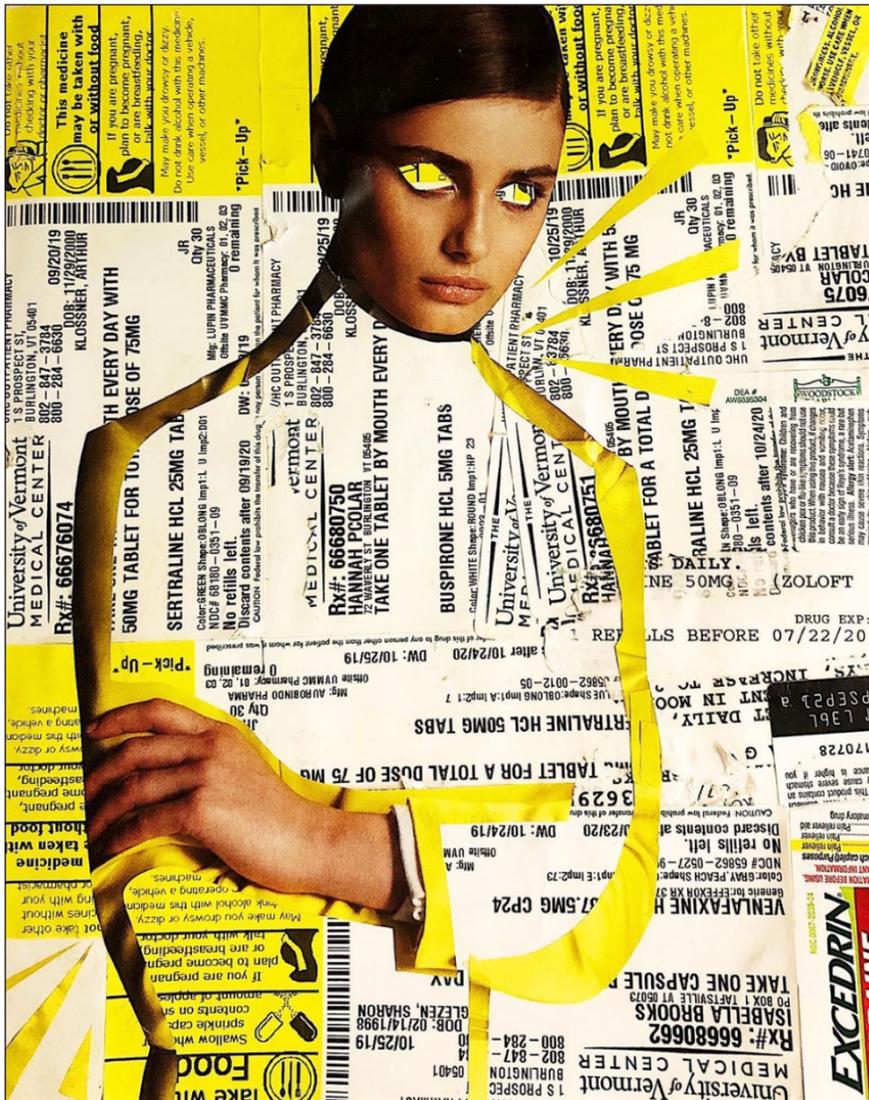
Roadkill

Roadkill
always makes her cry
Grits
her teeth as she drives by
Animated
as of late, a silent ode
To
gentle morning meadow dew
With
the stroke of steel
and
rubber screech
Reduced
to ragged bone,
seeping
flesh
and
bloated foreboding
Slender
nape arched
gracefully
over vertebrae
As
a gruesome ballerina
before
the final bow
A

ghastly reminder
of
her fleeting fate,
every
flickering breath
that
rattles her throat
Echoing
impermanence
Nail
scars like sickles on her thigh
Roadkill
always makes her cry

Self-Portrait

Collage



Burning Stranger

You, stranger, smell of rotting bananas but you smile like my mother
after she covers the dining room table in candles and closes the lights.
You stagger-step slow, like my father when he walks up the drive in the early
afternoon, after the night hospital shift, to his sun-lit room for sleep.
Let's think of lighter things together.
Your belongings—black tarp, dirty towel, bean tin can—flat and lone
on the shock-white sidewalks like a track of black candle-wicks awaiting your
rotting flame. Between your shoulders an incendiary mold, planted in you by
beasts a long time ago,
spoils your young, teasing years with its fuming body. It lights the pink pit of
your despair—
the home inside your mind. It burns through your body like a dark crime.
Your voice, rasped and tired, falls far from me like the alto choir boys at the
Christmas concert
who sang gospel from the dark balcony. Their white faces emerged from the
blackness in spheres,
reddened, as if they were reflections of the pews caught ablaze, glowing cherry
and mortal in God's dark home.
I think of the single candles we lit for their shadow, rainy voices. I think of this
while seeing you.

Video Killed the Radio Star and Facebook Killed my Family

Woodcut print series





Plouink-gugshk

Baby pacifier,
pressed to lips.
Wet boots,
dragged along a dusty hallway.
The sound of your favorite sweater,
twirled down my toilet.

Poppies and WD-40

Acrylic paint on canvas



Please live with me now so I can touch you when I think

of you and I sitting in the front seat, driving down the highway.
Those long silences felt like the deadly car wreck which you could have veered us into at any
moment—a simple distraction

The hum of the motor was a tattoo needle
purring into our ears the sundial's inscription
which says
it's later than you think and we were on our way back from frigid Montreal and in an
hour and a half you
would re-pack and leave for frigid London and I'd go to frigid New York.
It was so late
it felt like we'd already parted.

The window fogged up when we crossed the border I said oh god
discussing religion on the road had been my favorite because you had one and I didn't.
But when we talked politics in your black Volvo I cried
frustrated tears
because I believed in some shit and you believed in some other shittier shit. But I didn't
know
anything about it and you didn't know shit either because we were both
writers, it turned out. So damn it all, and we agreed on that.

So when you got back from London and met me in the country for just those few

weeks, you read me your poem about long distance relationships. Then we took the black Volvo down the interstate to your dad's new apartment and couldn't stop thinking it's later than you think so we turned up one-oh-seven-one The Wolf and sang to ourselves, loud enough to smile and laugh, because even with all this dismal talk I really was happy, and I know you weren't but I was trying my best and so were you with your hand on the wheel, you turned and closed your eyes and kissed me.

Moody

White charcoal pencil



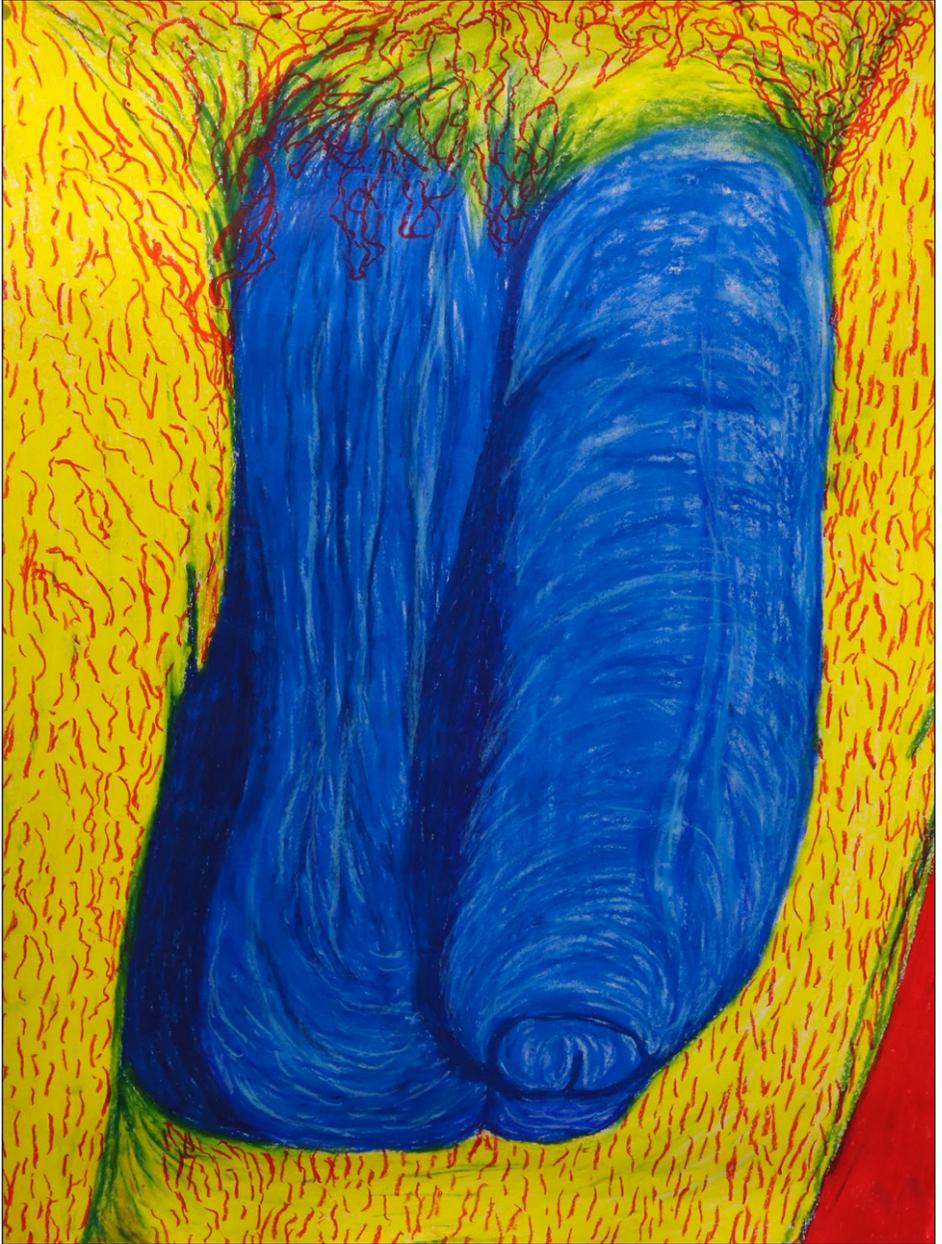
quiet cannibals

my *oh* my
this air is chilly
maybe these hands are brittle.
maybe b/c something's been amputated, or i forgot to pay for the gas?
brittle like winter milk chocolate
still, there's that passing tap and click on my doorstep
right b4 it melts sweet behind ur lips
the notices to clear the hell out
& below ur closed eyes
warnings deaf to
b4 u finally feel the cool mouths on our fingers, toes, and
2 ears like icing roses on some dairy queen cake.

Bad Taste

Oil pastel





Coffee Spoons

I tried to hear the water balancing
on lily pads while I kayak-coasted
through a swamp.

I tried to hear the beaver's claws
scraping cat-scratch-fever ten feet down
to build a dam with mud.

I tried to hear the perch shimmy fins
through weeds like a vacationer
wearing a grass skirt.

I tried to hear the echoes
of fisherman casting line—
of children squeezing toes into gritty sand.

I tried to hear to catalog
the sound of my door opening:
squeak, groan, gasp. And closing,
inhaling like a breaching turtle.

I tried to hear his yawn while I was 4am-asleep.
I tried to hear his silhouette move in morning shadows,
like a frog wriggling free from clay,
he was stretching into consciousness.

I tried to hear my breath catch in anticipation
to the sound of our coffee spoons
clinking in Earl's Blend

as I try to hear him whisper: good morning.

The Den

Digital photography



Memo from October Thots

So what if we wanna deepthroat the color orange—

let our jaws crack wide
like sliced-out smiles from gutted
gourds, let our eyes swell
like a fog-fuzzed dawn
in autumn, let our pulse spike
like night streetlight winking
off dew-glazed leaves?

Each thrust will reek
of cinnamon sticks stuck
in mugs of hot cider. We'll gag
in glee until, at last, orange slimes down
our throats like the last pulpy swig
from too many mimosas in the morning.

Blabber

Acrylic paint



How my mother cracks an egg

For scones with jam and the raw of day,
which cusps on the apex of noon,
she separates shell halves symmetrically. The slick membrane
cracks like dawn and the yellow marrow slips through
like a draft. She clasps the whisk to blur
the yellow and the white until the viscosity flows
like a languid pond. On the counter,
I sit, and watch her spill the beaten egg to soothe the dough.
She kneads with dry knuckles, the kind rubbed raw a hundred times from soap
and water while dad sings off key in the breakfast room.
Morning sunlight is a riddle when it pours like rose
quartz from the window above the sink, and still she thumbs
the dough as if the room were only lit by stove light.
I want to lick the whisk, but she empties the contents
from the metal mixing bowl into the aluminum pan right
before I reach over. I place my hand on the iron oven
rack. I watch the burnt skin bubble and rise like yeast,
like sunlight from the east, like my ribs inhaling flour and sugar.
She covers the cut with fragmented eggshells and bittersweet
vanilla extract, until the timer rings and the scones burn.

Flowers

Micron pen, marker, watercolor on drawing paper



Who's In Charge

Fused glass



The Other Side

The smell of smoke is familiar.
Cigarette? Yes.
But pot, mostly.

My uncle Bob.
He had long black hair down to his ass,
thought he was cool
because young nieces and nephews idolized his existence.

We sat at the bar in the kitchen
Friday nights.
I was pompous.
The queen of coolness as I sat on Bob's side,

two cousins on the other.

We ate pizza.
The highlight of naive, elementary years.

After dinner,
staged manhunt.
Guess who always seemed to win...

Behind grandpa's chipping shed I learned
to prop knees,
squat over a patch

of summer singed grass,
and developed fears of

the other side.

Of the towering fence,
daddy-long legged wallpaper webs,
and damp sheets dangling over ropes
strung by fingers of the setting sun.
Of plastic pool tubs contorted by nightfall,
and warm trickles
down shaky thighs,
too slow

to run home.

Of the bar in the kitchen.
He always seemed to win.

That smell of smoke is familiar now.
Cigarette? Yes.
But pot, mostly.

The Son Who Drowned (Walked Slowly Away)

Red wine, cigarette ash, grenadine, jello mix, bud light orange
beer, kahlua, pen and ink on paper



Madison and Grand Ave.

At night the homeless are drawn to the small spark of a lighter like hungry mosquitos.

A woman hobbles away on her bowed legs, two brown arcs scraping the ground.

On these nights, we wordlessly tip our cigarettes at each other.

Some busy nights at the bus stop, she is all skinny frizzy curls. We always light.

I pass the bars at night and watch the revolving lights on patios and girls in red dresses,

she has hair like the actresses had in the eighties—big on top but neck-length—

and hear their wild laughter echo loudly in the evening. I reach up for the bus stop overhang.

Her legs wobble slightly beneath and her square narrow hips point straight ahead.

I wait for the girls to come but they avoid this street. I glance at the homeless, peanut-crunching crowd as

she wobbles more violently than before. Broad night light,

here, the show! A woman draining the blood in her legs. Out through her big toe into cracks on the street.

Her whole body is in it. Her arm twitches back and knocks a coffee out of my hand.

The dark juice fills the cracked cement and drowns patches of gum and paper tickets.

Her heavy curls, laden with sweat, break into meek waves that reflect the silver streetlight.

We smell of oil, cream and plastic. We watch our woman, dancing with fright on pale legs,

colorless and blotchy with nerves and skin, shaking the way her

cigarette trembles in her mouth as she waits for us to light.

Cedar Waxwing

Watercolor and ink



Clutter in the Wind

Whiskey swirling smelt like a crisp air echo bouncing tree to boulder in the wind. Unlike wine, it sank amber on the coaster, only getting colder in the wind.

A grandfather's nightly watering while Barcalounge reading Orwell and whistling to Sinatra ride the fire's crackling beat; a shudder in the wind.

The gusts of air swept her hair like a Frisbee in the park, she stood with her back turned, throwing scarf tail in line, but leaving a bare shoulder in the wind.

Porch chair holding weight and rocking, the boards caught a pair of knitting needles, but left the grizzled yarn to become a frazzle of clutter in the wind.

The water is boiling. Leave the spaghetti to strain while an aromatic comfort of pesto releases green light, becoming bolder in the wind.

Outside the window a robin builds a nest for winter loitering, her wings beating bird is the word till spring when you hear chirping to all flutters in the wind.

Slipping on a robe and worn down slippers post-shower; skin streaked with weather you glide hands along thighs and inhale, finally catching your cocoa butter in the wind.

Take A Hike

Charcoal



Karina

Karina was fourteen the first time she met Death. It was Death who led her wrist as she held a knife and drove it through the wretched man's heart.

Death was a beautiful woman, whose blonde hair and white teeth resembled an angel. Her whispers could comfort a screaming child and wipe away her tears. Karina could almost see her as a mother. Almost. A mother held unconditional love for her children, but Death would only visit a person once.

Except for Karina, Death depended on her.

So when her house was filled with yelling and cursing, Karina was alone and Death began to watch.

Karina tensed as her mother yelled, her words muffled by the four walls. Straining to hear, the sounds formed words as the voices travelled into the hallway, right by Karina's door.

"You didn't pay me! When you make a deal you have to—"

The smack of the man's hand on her mother's face was clearer than all the other screams that night. It rang through the house like the chime of a bell, followed by the slam of a door and the woman's crying.

Death watched as Karina stood up, pushing the window open and climbing out. She had no shoes, no jacket. Just a t-shirt and flannel pajama pants. Death became infatuated by the look in her eyes; it was not that of a human begging for a second chance at life.

Karina was supposed to die in two minutes. But Death allowed her five.

Karina crossed the street, the corner of her eye catching the retreating figure of the man. She kept her pace up, not losing sight of the perpetrator.

She crossed another road, the one that was known in the town for hit-and-runs. Death visited here at least once a month, claiming the men and women who believed that they could make it across the pavement in the dead of night.

Karina's death was supposed to occur as she reached the second lane. Death

made sure that the truck driver was instead alert, swerving out of Karina's path a split second before the collision.

Death was expecting gratitude to pass through Karina's facial expression, but it was ever unchanging. Karina just continued her trek until she was on the other side, her bare feet stinging with the chill.

Death prepared for her reaping— three more minutes until Karina would be whisked away. Karina followed the man, until he stopped for a cigarette. Leaning against the wall of an old factory, his cold fingers lit the cigarette and took a drag.

Karina exhaled, too. She was still a distance away, not sure of what to do. Her mind screamed to kill him, but she had no weapon, no method, no plan.

She began to walk towards the man, no longer caring if she hid or not. Death was counting down the seconds until her demise, but Karina did not look to be afraid in the slightest. The idea baffled Death. Yes, many people were not prepared to die, didn't know when she would meet them to collect their soul. But this wasn't like the car accident that Karina had almost succumbed to. Rather, she was walking towards her murderer like she was walking into a shopping mall or school. Karina knew that this man was dangerous, that she was vulnerable, but continued to walk with her head up and shoulders back.

"Hey," the man called out, blowing out smoke. "What's a little girl like you doing out dressed like that? It's cold." Karina could smell his breath just by looking at his tobacco-ruined teeth.

Karina did not respond. She stopped walking and stood her ground. Death knew her time to act was within the next few seconds.

"You look familiar?" The man came closer, a cocky smile revealing missing teeth. He was soon in Karina's face, close enough that she could smell the alcohol that he had been bingeing. "Trying to fight me because I scammed your mother?"

He laughed. Karina didn't notice, but Death watched as the man slipped his free hand into his back pocket. Soon his hand gripped a knife, still hidden in the shadows of the night.

Karina spat in his face and in that very instant everything froze in the world. Everything except Karina and Death.

Karina looked surprised for a moment, looking at the man's arm that was outstretched in an arc, the point that was about to hit her in the face. Then, she looked at Death.

Death was prepared for begging. To hear all the reasons why she was too young to die, that this little girl still had so much to live for. It happened time and time again; no one was ever prepared for her.

But Karina's black eyes just looked at her, the same blankness that she had when hearing her mother fight. When following the man. When confronting the man.

"Aren't you afraid?"

Karina hesitated, "You're beautiful."

Death at that moment knew what she had to do. Her face softened and she relaxed her shoulders. "Do you want a second chance?"

"No." Karina said.

"And that's why I'm going to give you one." Death smiled and time resumed.

The man completed his arc, but instead of finding Karina's eye, it swept through the air with no target.

His confusion was clear, but only lasted a second as Karina used it as an opening. She was only fourteen, but she put all her strength into knocking the man over. He fell, not able to gain his bearings as Karina grappled for the knife. Time slowed once more, Karina sitting on top of the man's chest, raising the knife up to the city street lamp.

Karina's breathing was no longer calm, but quick and alive.

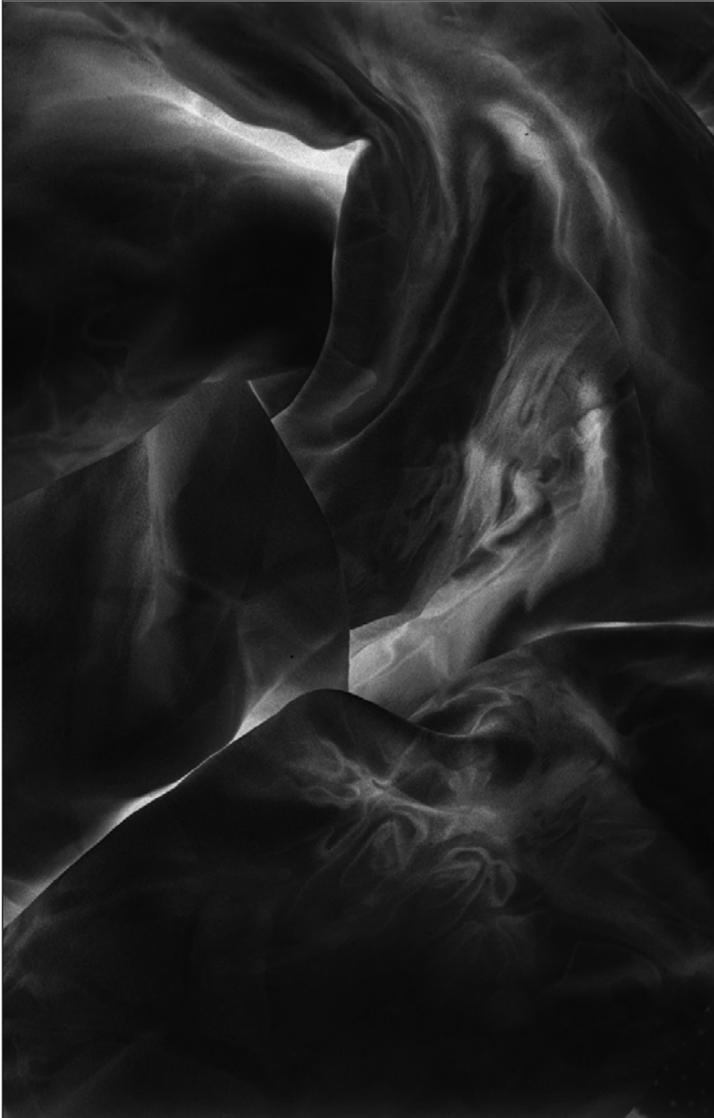
Death placed her hands over Karina's: both of them holding onto the knife.

"I can show you how."

And Death brought the knife down at the correct angle and placement, her new victim's clock changing from 50 years to 20 to 10 to 1 to all but 1 hour until it rested at zero.

Tempest

Black and white film photography



If Grindr Profiles Were Honest (About the Moon Landing)

[no profile pic]

Blow n' Go 57

Don't care if you're young, don't shoot your com-
mie chemicals in me!! #Nonvaxxed4nonvaxxed

[low resolution meme about probing]

420 Friendly 22

Looking for open minded souls storming Area 51.
Let's see them dick pics! Uncut is a + but extrater-
restrial is a +++

[torso in a mirror]



19

freshman poli sci major looking to explore his
wild side HMU for hot illuminati roleplay

[generic sunset at random lake]

Gentleman 31

More than just a hookup. Let's savor the humbler things in life: lazy Saturdays, cold beers, calling out crisis actors on social media after school shootings.

[shot of a shaded figure stretching across autumn leaves]

Marco 40

My body is my temple,   

[shining red convertible]

older4younger 67

Just a silver daddy wanting to spoil twinks who know what really happened on 9/11. Give it a try, you'll be glad you did.

[torso on a bed]

DISCRETE 20

Gaymer looking to deep throat bros working for the deep state.

[figure in a sleeveless shirt and sunglasses brooding against a tree]

Iron Wolf 26

Hosting rebels who expose the truth about the
holocaust HUNG ONLY

[torso aside another torso]

Fwb ? 23

Two chill tops seeking power bottoms who protect themselves. Our heads are wrapped, yours should be too! Always pack some tinfoil, my dudes.

[selfie with Snapchat dog filter]

INTP 33

I'm a hot mess of wine and silly puns wanting a cuddle buddy for these cold nights that we still have even with this global "warming"

[selfie at a low-lit bar]

FTM

48

No pic, no chat. Haters WILL be blocked. I am a Goddess and must be treated as such, so sorry boys but if you're not fluoride free you're not going in me.

[torso snuggling a kitten]

●●2niteonly

30

Verse jock visiting. What's there to do around here? Let's have some fun! Not all of us can live forever by drinking the blood of refugees like Queen Elizabeth #getwoke

[torso with chest tattoo of Bugs Bunny uppercutting Elmer Fudd]

NO FLAKES

37

Stop playin, let's link. Stocky guys to the front of the line. The earth may be flat but your ass don't have to be.

Jessica

Ink on paper



For Vincent

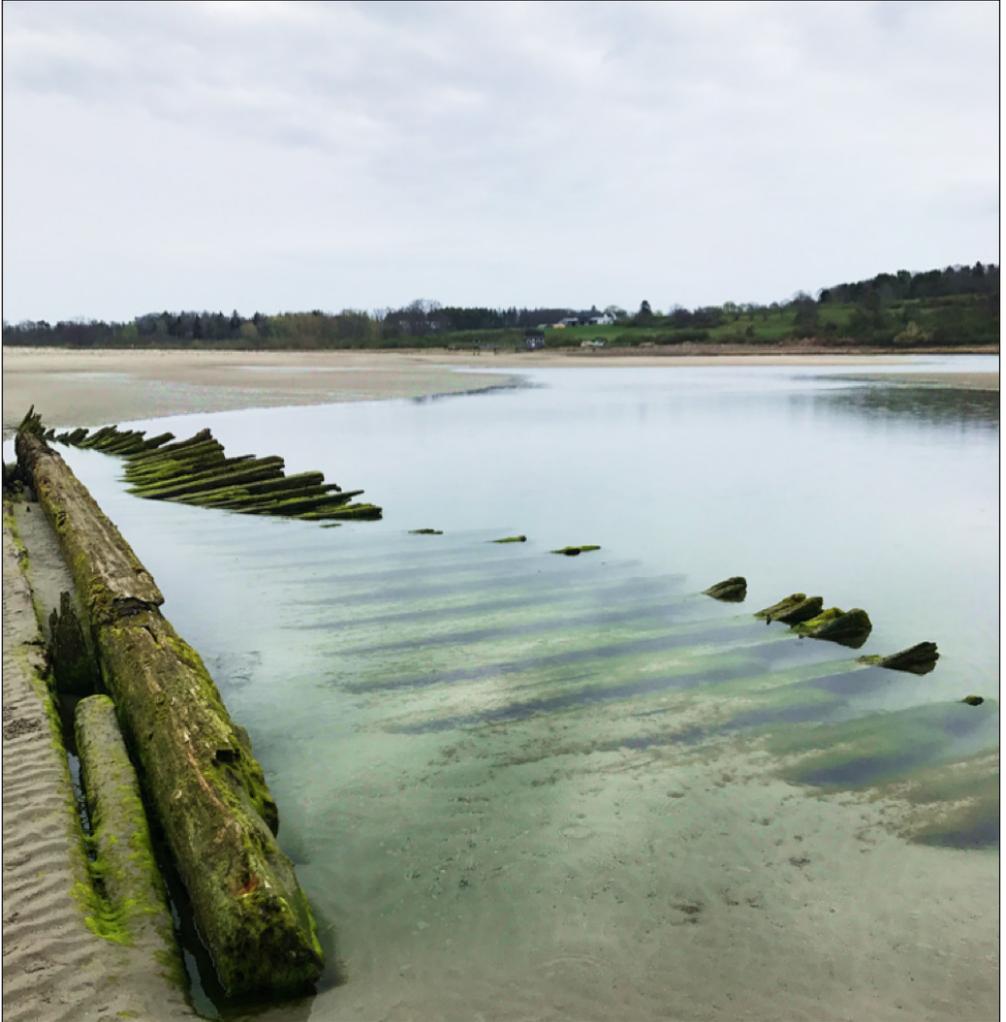
So, I returned to the open field off of route 7
that reminds me of you. Here, the tepid water's recession
twirls rocks into the patterns of gyres, and I too, feel twisted
by a lack. The silt has stripped the green clothing from the brush
and the brush has sucked the bog dry and I stand upright like a goosebump
in the aged skin of the soil.

The marsh collects clay, hoards the earth's residue,
and I collect the shape of things. By the shape of things
I mean: I try to make the abstract, palpable. I take off
my shoes, then my socks, walk into the grit and brine
--the ache is abstract but the salt is palpable.—
(I'm shin deep now, kneading the silt, kneading the clay, kneading the mud,
kneading the earth)

I heard you stole Atropos' shears to puncture your eardrum
so you could quiet the earth's hum, the jaw's clench.
I heard you used a Claude glass to paint the open field of Auberge Ravoux,
did you catch a glimpse, a reflection in the convex, of the sunflowers, irises,
roses, and poppies
acquiescing (that is, after the heap greeted the trigger) under your impact?

Memento

Digital photography



In Brevity

My Grandmother's diary entry for September 8, 1943 reads:

"Italy surrendered. Permed my hair."

Growing up, I spent most of my time with her, our houses only seventeen steps apart. I'd lay on the floor looking out her picture window and she'd teach me which birds you wanted at your birdfeeder (bluebirds) and which you absolutely didn't (blue jays). She baked cookies with Crisco, made applesauce when anyone was sick, and never wrote down every step in her recipes. She never said anything against anyone but instead mastered the subtle eye-roll.

She went to every one of my dad's swim meets and, later, every one of mine, never failing to express amazement at our achievements. "I swam in college," she told me once, "but my coach said I didn't have the competitive fire."

Later, we learned she'd held a national record.

By the time she died she was one of the people I knew best, and yet, flipping through her diaries, I clearly knew very little. I knew the grandmother who'd been a stay-at-home mother of six and loved any random science facts I could bring home, not the woman with a degree in biochemistry who had to keep rejecting persistent job offers.

When I think about my grandmother, I often get stuck on hollow cheeks and tight hospital corners.

Brief as they are, her diaries keep me from losing the little of her I have left. When my mind gets stuck in the ending, they remind me of well-worn

storybooks, muffins eaten bottom up, and sponge cake mischievously hidden in the drier. They bring the middle back to life.

Without her five-word summaries I wouldn't know that she raised my aunts in student housing, that she nearly chased a bear from the yard, that the first time my grandfather proposed she turned him down.

I wouldn't know that on the day Italy surrendered, she permed her hair.

Pay Up

Collage



*Your

after Sylvia Plath's "You're"

Stitched smile reminds me of glue,
sticky and submerged
under white—
white cliffs of ocean waves.

Paste lips are cold fish,
not playing anymore,
or plums or cherries
or peaches.

Cave mouth deafens mine,
well-like and pulling buckets
of webs—
webs wet with time.

Blobbed tongue is a sea skeleton,
not exploring anymore,
or Betta or curtains
or ballerinas.

Placement of my name, as it
breaks the thread—
warms like coal—
parts the lip—
twirls like gowns—
does not belong to you.

Love me, Love Me Not

Watercolor and washi tape



Reminiscing in the Land of Maple Syrup

I was scared, that day.

The last time I had been scared in that house was when I was seven, and my big sister and I were sleeping over; but a thunderstorm woke me up, and the ensuing hysterics summoned my parents to fetch me at one in the morning, and the next day my sister bragged to me about the delicious French toast I missed for breakfast.

But now I was eleven, and thunder still scared me but I was too old to say so. I was starting to think that maybe, I could sleep over for real, and maybe you would make me french toast too, with Challah and Auntie Anne's syrup and chocolate chips sprinkled on top, the way you taught my mom to make it. I thought about it every time I walked into that kitchen, so I must have thought about it that day, too.

We came to the house, and dad parked in the driveway, and mom dropped her purse on the beige leather couch, and I thought about French toast. Usually, I ran ahead of the others so I could be the first to see you, and usually, you would be standing there taller than I could hope to grow, always ready to bend down and give me a hug. That day, I was clinging to my mom with both hands, squeezing against her side in the narrow front hallway, and when we emerged into the kitchen, no one was there.

I dragged behind my mom as she strode to the couch, and put down her bag, and turned back towards my dad and sister. No one had set out any snacks for me. There were no deer outside of the windows and my sister didn't stop on the way in to pick flowers. I thought, Maybe we can make the French toast together.

Maybe you'll be tired 'cause you've been sick, but when you get better I'll make you French toast to celebrate, but I can't do it myself so you'll help me, and we'll make it together. And I'll put chocolate chips on mine and you won't put any on yours 'cause you're not supposed to have them, but I'll help you steal some from my plate anyway.

And I wasn't scared yet but the air felt like it does before a thunderstorm, like everything's loud without making any sound. Maybe we spoke to my grandma first. Maybe I dawdled around on the squeaky linoleum tiles. It was too loud to hear, so I don't remember. I think my dad probably said "You guys go ahead", and my mom probably sighed and my sister probably whispered "It's okay" in my ear before she grabbed my mom's free hand.

And then suddenly we were in your room, and I still couldn't hear anything, and I turned to ask my mom where you were, but she smiled at me with her mouth and nothing else so I didn't say anything. The three of us shuffled over to the corner near the window, and that's when I became scared.

I don't think I really knew what it meant that you were sick. I thought it'd be like when I had a cold, and you'd be all huddled up in blankets and I'd bring you juice with a squiggly straw and then you'd start to get better. I expected you to be sitting with your newspaper and a pen in your mouth and a couple of pills on your nightstand.

But when I looked at you I had to look away because I didn't think it was you. I looked at the hand that my mom pushed me towards—she told me to hold it so I did, but I was terrified. I didn't want to touch it. You could hold a soccer ball in just one of your warm, browning hands—this hand had all sorts of crisscrossing lines, and felt like a crumbled tissue. I thought that maybe I could just cling to it really tightly, like I always do with my mom when I'm scared, but as soon as I touched it I felt that even my normal mannerisms were too clumsy, too rough, too likely to make things worse. I focused all of my attention on holding that hand—I didn't want to send you back to the hospital by doing it wrong.

And suddenly, my ears flipped a switch and I could hear everything—the creak of the machine next to the bed when you moved, that soft way of breathing my sister used to do when she was nervous, and just how raspy your voice had gotten. You spoke in much shorter bursts than usual, so I did too. Mom smiled and nodded when I spoke, so I keep trying, but it felt like I was so loud, and that maybe my voice would hurt you too. And maybe I was a little worried that I would accidentally say that I was scared, because I was more scared than I'd ever been in my life so I didn't understand why my mom was making me do this.

When mom said, "I think that's enough for today", it echoed over and over so that I almost missed the next part. But I heard it. I heard it when she said, "Give him a kiss goodbye." I heard it, and I didn't, because I was scared and part of me didn't even think it was really you, so I just said goodbye and walked out.

It was the last time I ever saw you, but I didn't kiss you and I didn't look at you when I left.

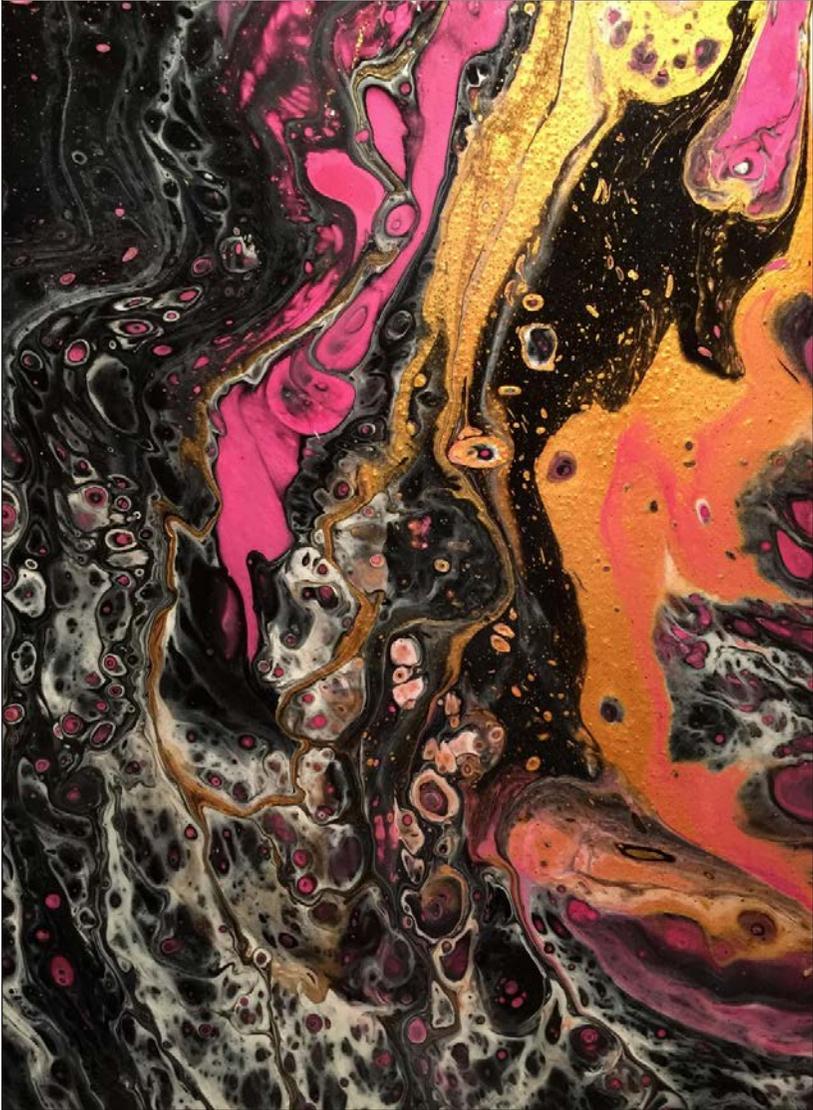
**** off

Digital media



Molten Medium

Acrylic on canvas



hey. new love

a toe pokes itself out of a shadow
leaving whatever else waiting
in the skin of an unborn image,
and because it's merely a toe
against the lifeless bathroom tile
you might briefly wonder
if an introduction is sensible
as you lay there fused in that cotton belly
unsure if this isn't the crust in your eyes;
and yet to gently press it into
your navel is special, indeed,
since the snip-snips
tossed the primordial
counterpart
in the
bin.

Four Ladies Going Out

Fused glass



The Sad Story of Corn Cob the Coot

Corn Cob was sometimes described as cantankerous. Other times he was described as “an old drunk”. Mostly he was described as both. Nobody really knew his past all that well, all they knew was that he was apparently in some war, though nobody was quite sure which one. They also knew he liked to smoke a corn cob pipe, which was where the name “Corn Cob” came from. His legacy through the town of Saltreed was something of a local interest, and he was often used as the butt of cruel jokes. None of this seemed to bother him all that much.

He was the first person that Jimmy Tyler met when he first came to town. When Jimmy rode past he muttered something about being a war veteran and how Jimmy reminded him of his old buddy. Jimmy paid no mind, he was more interested in getting settled into a saloon.

It was late afternoon when Jimmy arrived and he quickly hitched his horse in front of the local bar being careful to secure his goods, dried foods, rifles, and a little hand mirror he always had with him. It had been three days since he had even seen another person while on the trail and as soon as he entered the bar was overwhelming. He tried to go through the motions that the other travelers and cowboys did. Drink and gamble and drink some more and gamble some more and regret losing their earning through gambling more. He tried to do this, a routine that he had often seen through his travels but it never felt right. Never seemed to bring the satisfaction that he saw on the other men’s faces. Instead he had a drink and left the saloon behind and took to the streets.

It was a small town. Small enough to where the residents were starved for anything out of the norm. A few times he was stopped by some passersby that wanted to know a story or two about life on the trail. First he

was stopped by a young woman who wanted to know if he had ever seen a Comanche war party. Another, this time a boy, wanted to hear if he had been in a duel. He told them the truth, that he had never seen a Comanche war party or even heard of any around and that he had never seen a duel only a few gunfights of drunken gamblers, much to their dismay. No, rather he had different experiences on the trail.

At first he would sing or make up little poems in his head to pass the time, but that quickly grew old. At that point he would take time to ask questions and think. Sometimes small things like “Why do snakes have no legs?” and “How do they know where one state begins and another ends?” but also bigger, darker things. Things like “Why was I born”, “Why did my father leave me when I was a boy?”, “Why did cholera take my little sister?” and “Why is my mother drinking herself into an early grave?” but mostly just, “Why?”. It was these questions that scared and weighed on Jimmy Tyler’s mind more than any Comanche war party or gunslingers duel ever could. It was the questions that kept him moving on the trail and what made him look at the sky and stars for hours at night. And what drove him to peer into that hand mirror he had and look at his own heavy tired eyes so many times a day.

While all this bubbled inside him, night had fallen and he had reached the edge of town where old Corn Cob liked to set up. A small fire had been set up and Corn Cob gestured him to take a seat. Jimmy obliged. When he looked up out of the fire he saw Corn Cob’s eyes look right into his. They looked so much like his own reflection in the mirror that he couldn’t look away. In that moment he saw a flicker in the old coot’s eyes, one that burned through him. It was at that moment they both understood and they both stared at the fire. They said nothing, because there was nothing they needed to say.

Spadefoot

Gouache watercolors



to frank o'hara, on whom i have a
crush.

i'm in love with dead poets,
it's dead men in library books i long for.
i hide behind faux-mahogany desks
and from their words i get my fill

were you heartsick too? and very
modernly so, you can't but help and be admired,
i confess; the way you market your
neurotic narcissism is
very sexy.

the world is always ending, and our lovers always leaving,
but you and me, poet, have a confederacy of new age-rhythms.
i know what you wanted! i'll happily deliver
and aren't we a perfect pair,
you in your grayscale portraits and me,
imperfectly giving old lines new breath,
you say, "all i want is boundless love"
and i put that in my grindr profile after a picture of
tanned abdominals, pectorals, and
the swish of women's shorts.

dead poet i want
to be the object of your literary desires
for a month in paris we'd be in love,
which would age to
fighting in the new york parlors

of rich mahattenites and art collectors.
my god! i'd delight in causing a scene
trust me, as i read your biography now, a horrible reputation
will serve you better in the long run.

but, dead poet,
your elegant line breaks can't hold my hand
or french-braid my hair out of shifting eyes,
so i sit with your collections on my windowsill
and hope that a pretty boy walks by

St. Joe as the Patron Saint of Getting the F*ck Out of My Parking Spot

Coffee, dirt, cigarette ash, slush from the road, pen
and ink on paper



THE OURCRA(SHIT)CKS

Digital photography



Passion

An odd number of toes rest on the ground perpendicular and below match-
ing pairs
Cobblers fear repairs dingy coin thus
No one dares but caress with closed eyes
Smokey topaz soles chosen by wearer
Unnamed
For reason
Unknown
Jest not a lonely color for the sole shifts tones
A blend
When Chocolate and tree bark brown compose kin
Dines the daily news just breaking in
Tapping an exact spot on the floor with angst
Picturing the day he'll be cradling the head of a dead black twin
Floors bleed mahogany
Corner stores hoarders tragedy
Test strength of king and queen
Before bowing down to your majesty

Women Posing

Ink and watercolor on drawing paper



Split Button

after Claes Oldenburg's "Split Button"

I sit and sat, thought
cross-legged, heavy-headed
perplexed by a convex button;
I cannot enmesh the divide.

But I take refuge in the eye
of the needle, string strung
taut, spindle plunged through, with
two fingers to my sternum I realize;

The illusion of symmetry
collides, snaps, breaks
tides with reality and I grasp
no thread, no glue, will do.

I don't know intimacy
other than the cyclical fracture,
a fastener struck at its chord
and respooled continuously.

Self-Portrait

Ink on paper

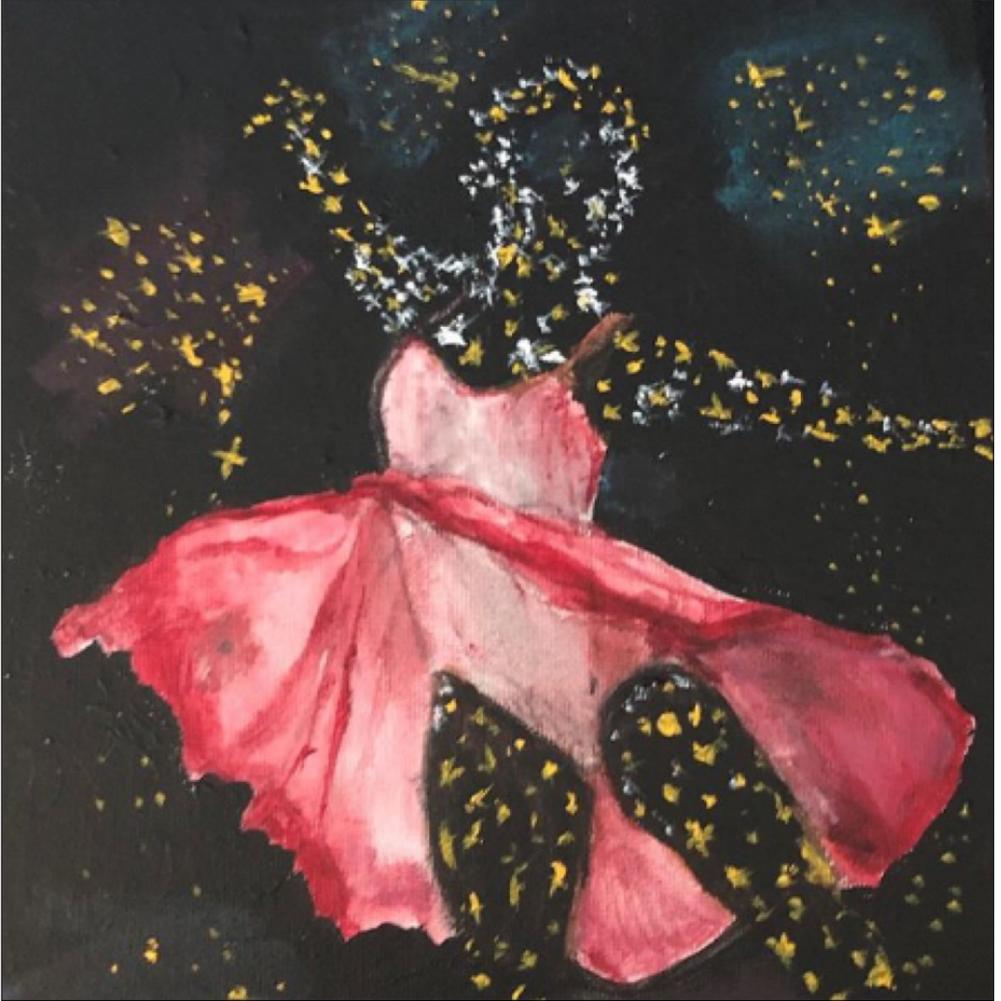


Mundane As Main

black currant syrup sticky cranberry juice brim
sour apple cider vinegar peach cobbler crisp crumble
warm ejaculate feminine saliva, wet tongue
salty lake water seaweed wrap broken shell smooth stone
meooooow! cachinnating weed smoke billow
urban white noise rickety rackety pavement *scrrrrape*
sticky, sweaty, vomit, bleach *so where are you headed next?*
throaty jazzy swing rock and roll blues, oh blue
click click click lemon poppyseed strawberry icing
hazelnut golden flicker si tu pourrais le boire!
electric cobalt dye sterilized needle hairy shins
zzztttzzz *BOARD!* dark mauve pigments

One Hit Wonder

Acrylic and watercolor on masonite



Just Know I Never Asked You to Feel Me

For Robert Nichols

Now that I'm high,
I say what they all say:
I want to go west I want to go west I want to go west I want to go west.
Big sky and shortgrass.

I want to be alone I want to be alone
with my guitar.
I only want friends for poker.
I only want cold concrete bedroom walls,
and sweat
marinating the sunny side
of my forearm at noon.
Hands dirty with man-hours,
toil and meditation.

I want to cruise dogface out the shotgun window
gush life out my mouth like a supersoaker jet
of decades of lyrics of lapis lazuli of visions of cody
of ride cymbal everything all come together
yes I'm wearing corduroys white canvas sneakers the wide collar bolo and sepia
sepia sepia sepia

But I don't want to find my home a hundred feet down in the ocean of infinite
irony—
where the fish with the bends in the cowboy shirts all gurgle proclamations of
Colorado birthright

I want Denver, true Denver, alone in Denver, burning sidewalks and frozen everything Denver.

No no, I don't ever want you to find me.

No no, I hope you do.

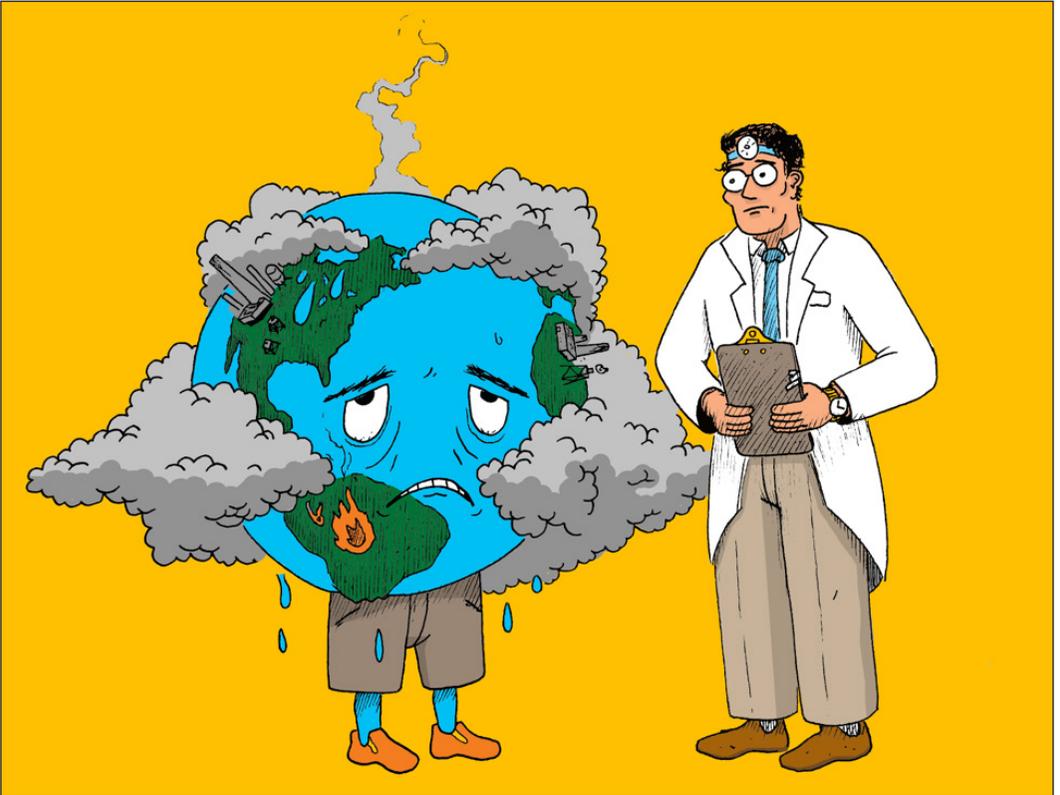
Illicit Living

Digital photography



Earth Doctor

Digital drawing



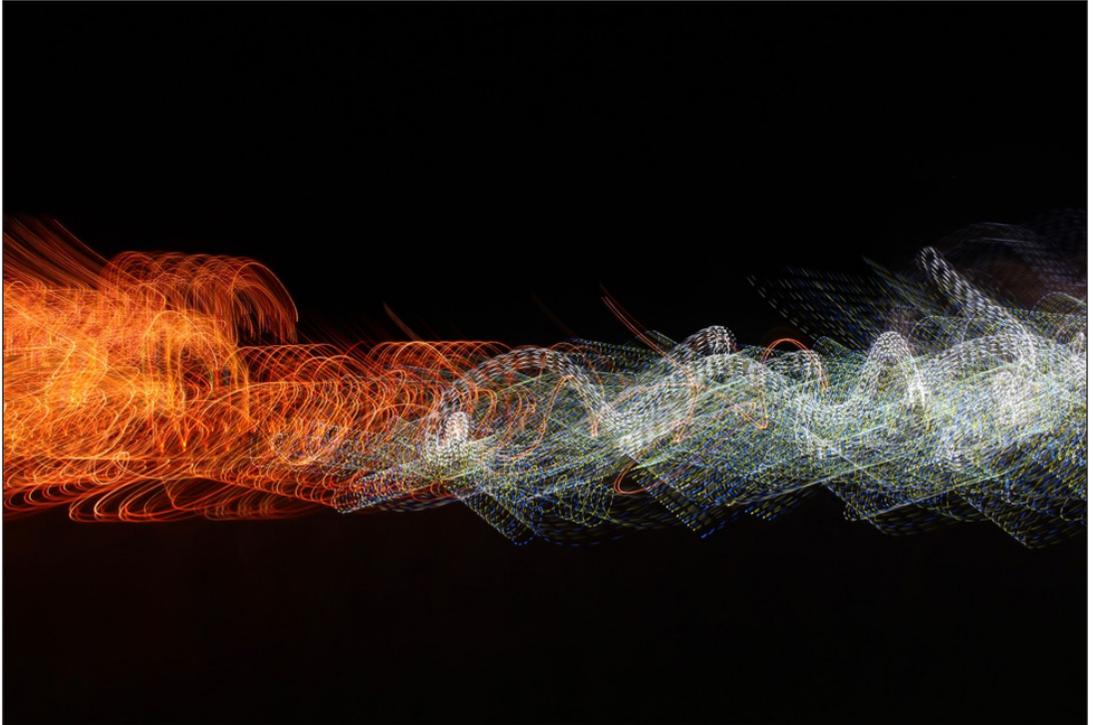
Anarchy

How beautiful and lonely and fragile and tragic and savory and ineffable and unpredictable is life at night. Between the late raunchy hours left over from the evening before and the shy early morning minutes of the next day, context and relativity get smudged and lost and shoved under the rug and tucked away into the subconscious and we are left with looming, outrageous, dangerous, temporary, daft yet clear thoughts that could only be entertained in an arena that is custom-manufactured by this perfect storm.

The daylight has long been falsely awarded the title, “The Swift Reality Kick-In-The-Ass We All Require to Function” but I would argue the light is counterproductive blindness, forcing us into muted and policed submission. At night, with privacy to roam and play and cry and dream and guiltlessly meander, we fall in love with each other and that which makes us one entity under the tyrannical rule of the human condition.

Long Exposure at the Annual Fireman's Carnival, Chester, NJ

Digital photography



Revelation

Your embrace reminds me
Of an empty church
At twilight,
In the solemn
And silent hour in which
Even the candles flicker
In disbelief—
A million
Doubting disciples
Ashamed as they hide their
Hesitancy from God.
Somehow,
In your arms,
My skin feels like that of a ghost's
And I long to sink
Into slumber—
What I can manage of it—
Recklessly,
Clinging to the dreams
That taste like honey
And freedom
And how it feels to be
Alive.
Here, I sense
Sadness
In the holy hollow between
Your neck and shoulder
And drink in the urge to

Take my index finger and
Carve my hundred
confessions,
A multitude of mad
Impulses,
On the sacred surface of your skin.
Would they wash away like rain?
My hands are raw
From prayer—still,
They stick together like sap,
Suctioned by shame and sorrow,
Flapping forward in conjunction like
The wings of a fallen angel.
Will you hug me a little tighter?
I don't understand how your arms could make
Me feel so cold.
But it is the hour
Of fickle flame,
Wax candles waning,
Apostles abandoning post,
And the cathedral
Of your comfort is still
The closest
Thing to
Home.

Reflection

Acrylic on canvas



Come & See

Digital photography



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All works must be titled. Art submissions should detail the medium. There is a 2,000 word limit for prose and a 150 line limit for poetry.

Any questions? Email us at submissions.gist@gmail.com.

Thank you to everyone who contributed. Our success is impossible without the creative talents of our contributors who continue to reawaken this journal's spirit.

And a special thanks to the English Department of the University of Vermont, who continue to support this journal when administrators underfund the liberal arts. *The Gist*, along with other UVM publications, stand with you.