

GARLAND COURT

Review 2023



2023

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| Katia Jackson | Madeline Walsh |
| Mark Kruekenpet | Cass Waters |
| John K. Kugler | Talia Masada White |
| Trang Le | Raine Yung |
| Vivian Liu | Li Zhang |
| Leshondra Locke-Marsh | |



Garland Court Review

HAROLD WASHINGTON COLLEGE

2023

A curated assembly

of

Literature

&

Art

Garland Court Review Est. 1962 by Prof. Carolyn Rodgers.

The Garland Court Review is published in the Spring Semester of each year by the English and Art departments of Harold Washington College, 30 E. Lake St., Chicago, IL 60601.

Call for Submissions is announced in the Fall Semester. Both literary and art works are accepted for consideration. Please contact the **Garland Court Review Committee Coordinators** with further inquiries:

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Past GCR coordinator **Prof. Adam Webster;**

Long-time GCR editor **Prof. Jeffrey Daniels;**

All of the amazing artists and writers who submitted work for consideration in this issue!

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Front Cover: **Jessie Yi Sun** American Dream (watercolor on paper)

Inner Front Cover: **Osciel Franco** Hugs! (graphite on paper)

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Garland Court Review

HAROLD WASHINGTON COLLEGE

2023

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GCR Art Coordinator & Design Director: Galina Shevchenko

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Diane Williams

David Scheier

Student Members:

June Gudukoglu

Laura Marquez

Brian Noonan

Shula Rivera

Jocelyn Romero

Alex Sepulveda

Letter

from the

Editors

This is the fourth issue of the *Garland Court Review* since the English and Art Departments joined forces in 2019 to help showcase the wide range of works from the literary and visual artists at Harold Washington College. We are already looking forward to celebrating the fifth anniversary of this thrilling venture in 2024 with some special events already in the making.

The works compiled in this year's issue appear to continue examining our continued efforts to rejoin and redesign the world on the heels of the Covid-19 pandemic's waning. The works chosen still reflect a great deal of anxiety about the state of affairs, ponder again the meaning behind the human experience, our time on Earth, the weight of history across centuries, how to keep going despite a great deal of heartache (as evidenced again by numerous poems), the health of the planet and of course, how Chicago is doing now. Such reflections stem from events ranging from an atrocious workday at a fast-food restaurant resulting in a resignation to an encounter between two different species by way of a musical instrument—prompting the speaker to wonder who the actual invader is.

There are, of course, CTA stories. Street stories. Reflections on the light of winter radiating inside our homes as Lake Michigan looks on--whether it is frozen by the cold, or diving and jumping in triple-digit temperatures.

A number of our visual arts offerings interrogate our relationship to space, the intimacy of the self-portrait, the intersection between the digital and the real, between what is possible and what is imagined.

As you will see, in art, anything is possible.

Yours,

Ukaisha Al-Amin
J-L Deher-Lesaint
June Gudukoglu
Laura Marquez
Brian Noonan
Shula Rivera
Jocelyn Romero
David Scheier
Galina Shevchenko
Alex Sepulveda
Diane Williams.

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Literary
Works

Poetry

Kayla Carney

Tiny Snake Fist

I've been holding onto a tattered self
One I know who stopped existing long ago
Sometimes it's like she's a ghost
Others, it's like I'm watching her fade away from my face
Who I was is not who I am.

I understand why snakes don't have hands
If they did, would they weep at the sight of their shedding skin?
Hold their molt in little snake hands
Without seeing their reflection, would they assume something is
wrong with them?
Grasping their outer layer in tiny snake fists, dramatically shaking it
towards the air.

But they don't have hands,
The same way I don't physically molt
The snake sheds as nature intends
Unbothered by his tattered skin
Because he knows
Releasing the old
Brings about a better way to live.

And like the snake's many layers of skin, there are many layers of me
Many who I have not released
And it's not because she isn't me
But it's because I no longer desire
The same things she took long strides towards.

And much like the slithering snakes existing without hands,
I exist without the weight of old commands
That demand I be a snake with hands

Untitled

Dina Dwyer

Thoughts tumbling in my brain
Panicking, I don't know what to say
To help, or to explain
The words fall down my throat again
Deep, slow breaths, count to four
Close your eyes and shake no more
Hug your knees, you'll be alright
Ball your fists, hold them tight
"Just breathe, babe, this will pass"
Yeah, and how am I supposed to last?
The walls crumble around me
I feel my heart break
Destruction all around is all I see
And always with me, a constant ache
I'm so tired of being strong
I feel every decision I make ends up being wrong
I second guess everything I say and do
And still end up telling myself "I should've thought that through..."
My mind makes up things that aren't there
I mutter "I'm going crazy", running a hand through my thinning hair
"You have nothing to be stressed about, you have it easy!"
I'm sorry, you're right, I'm just being lazy
I've had bad experiences, but there are worse sufferings
"Your feelings are valid, you deserve to get better"
It's so much easier to say that to another person rather than a mirror
Hiding my worries down below
Silly girl, has life taught you nothing?
They always regrow
"There are people that care, you'll be fine"
I don't want the people love to get caught up in this landmine
I want to believe things will get better
But every single day
I feel my heart shatter

Dina Dwyer

I Don't Want You To Be Special To Me Anymore

Midnight Strikes

The clock introduces the new day
I'm in my room, thinking about the same things
I have for months
Months turn into years, and I'm still here
Thinking of you
Nothing has changed
That girl in the mirror
I still don't recognize her
She stares back
I see her confusion, I guess she doesn't recognize me either
We turn away from each other
I can't help noticing
The similarities between our faces
When you turned away from me
And when I turn away from her
Her and I both have tears in our eyes
The difference is hers flow freely
Down her cheeks as her eyes glisten
My tears were blinked back
Imprisoned for the sake of saving face
Hiding my heartbreak behind hazy eyes as you turned
And faded
Into the mist as mysteriously as you came
As I lift my head and feel the wind whip my hair
The wetness on my cheeks a mixture of tears and rain
As your back fades into the distance
And I finally realize
You're not coming back

Nothing has changed
It's been years
And I'm still here
Picturing you
Your voice plays like a record on repeat in my mind
I see your face in my dreams
You're gone, but you haven't left
And I can only hope
Someday,
You won't be special to me anymore

F. Ffrench

I Thought I Would Live

I let all the people walk by without notice
I let all the singers perform without watching
I left all the dead birds without any burial
I thought I would live
I thought I would live

I let all the friendships slip by without fanfare
I let all the kind people down with my silence
I let myself sink in my bed without trying
I turned them all down
Cause I thought I would live

I let myself die in a big garbage castle
Each treasure was given by a friend I don't know
I told myself always "I'll seek them tomorrow"
I thought I would live
I thought I would live

So many sunsets passed by without watching
So much music unplayed
And dancing undanced
So many trails I have passed without walking
And writing unwritten and talking untalked
I let go of everything
Coming my way
I let it all go
Cause I thought I would live

Nathaniel Gee

The Impossible Burden of Starting Any Task

The dishes, piled atop the countertop: A mound of old dirty dragon's gold
Forks and sporks, Plates and peas

Daunting

haunting in the moonlight

It's 12:30 am and I have to wash the dishes but I want to sleep and
it's so late

The stars' winks are ever present reminder, Reflecting a thousand
times on the surface of each plate, smirking,

The broken dishwasher is no confidant, no cheerful companion.

Instead, a burden:

Full and dry from the day before,

unemptied. Another task aboard my list of problems

Slinking over the countertop, arms brimming not with hope but with
ceramic, the rattle as

I put them down causes a sheepish blush to cross my face as I worry,
waking my parents who have already gone to bed at a reasonable hour
"shit," I whisper to no one but myself and the shelf.

Full of plates like a sated pig, the cupboard door closes with a squeal.

I return and turn to the sink:

Sleeves rolled back, hair tied in the bun from this morning's run, the
radio turned on at the lowest possible volume, so quiet I can't even

make out any words, I begin the clack

and clink

of washing dishes.

Nathaniel Gee

My Hands Won't Work Because My Mom Has Raynaud's Syndrome And I Do Too

Outside, it makes
sense. There's
snow and wind.

Delicate icy
figures, fingers refuse
to curl together.

Inside, it should be
impossible. Oil
heaters slowly smolder.

But my veins refuse
to pump the blood
to my fingertips.

My hands still
motionless. Too stiff to
write or to type.

Mark Kruekenpet

Old Flames

i see ghosts in the middle of the night
every now and then
but i've never really been into the paranormal
at least i wasn't
until my first heartbreak
then they flocked to me like flies

but ghosts can't hurt me
not if i don't believe in them
but i see them circling around
beckoning my hoarse heart over
and so my shirt slips over my arms
and my pants over my legs
and my heart is hurrying
pacing pulses full of fear
as they caress my body
the white wisp whispers
of what was

it signs the infidelity to my rationality
and turns the key to my heart
my rib cage unlatching
the stench of rubbing alcohol runs out my chest
their gentle lips peel back the bandaids
off across my glass heart
and lays a soft kiss
on each crack

Mark Kruekenpet

Dear Mister Roach

I had touched your musical home
ran my fingers across
its long round brown barrel
a wooden bridge so smooth
to the touch
I ached to hear it play
for its very shape was melodic

But as my lips pursed your door
I had felt a sensation like never before
tingly, tiny tips like tendrils
pitter-pattering across my tongue
a feeling so foreign, it was
wrong -
an intruder!
and so I spit
and there you were, Mister Roach
dazed and glazed in my saliva
a disgusting and shameful sight!
how dare you enter my body without permission
not a warning, not a message and -
oh wait
I see now
maybe I'm the intruder
after all

My apologies,
Mister Roach.

John K. Kugler

The Frog in the Well

The frog in the well

Does not know of the great sea

Yet he knows the well

And knows it well for he cares

Not for the distant great sea

John K. Kugler

Winds Blow

Cold winds blow softly

Brushing reeds as they pass

Peace falls in their wake

John K. Kugler

Silence

The guns fall silent

A young man can take a breath

Resting amongst trees

He feels restless and anxious

Awaiting his new orders

Vivian Liu
So This is Heart

Your smile liquifies my soul,
turns my blood to ichor.

How am I supposed to deal with this? With this onslaught
of brilliant warmth like the
sidewalk on a summer day? With the touch of your fingers
on my face like a thousand
butterflies? I'm running into the sun, running after you,
Running after your laugh, your eyes.
I love you as the ocean loves the shore
And as the moon loves the ocean.
I love you in the fact that I'll leave you,
As the ocean leaves the shore at low tide
And as the moon never meets the ocean.

I love you with all my scarred heart has.
I love you in the knowledge that I must break yours
Before the scars on mine grow.
Before I end up on my knees in the cold.

It's blurry, this life. I'm stumbling out your door,
Spilling our memories onto the steps
Like golden birds fluttering into the night.
I'm going,
Going away from you, knowing the distance between us grows
with the cracks in your heart.
I'm breaking too. I had hoped I wouldn't,
But life has answered my hopes only once before.
That's enough for me. That I lived alongside you,
Our clocks and our heartbeats ticking together
Even for such a short time.

I'm somewhere where the sky is opening its arms to me,
And I'm alone again.
It's the better way for me,
To be like this. I've never been a good liar.
Maybe that's why it's all like this. I'm lying on the grass
Somewhere, maybe miles from you, maybe two blocks,
But it isn't important how far I am
When our lives are infinitely far now.
You can blame it all on me, because it is me that did this.
I'm sorry I had to.
Please find someone else. Please be happy, please get married
And grow old with someone and love them with your everything.
Please don't remember my face. Remember only that
I broke your heart once.

You are a rainbow and I am a stormcloud.
Find another rainbow and love them.

I'm going to sleep here.
It's soft and I can see the stars in the palm of my hand.

Nathaniel Gee

What Did You Have for Lunch?

The giant ballroom held no secrets.

Less of a ballroom and more of a gym
A wide caramel hardwood floor and
twenty folding tables held
a hundred people milling around
the comic convention

My brother sat across the table. He was only
twelve and the camera approached him

It was a simple question

He was only twelve and his lisp
betrayed his age

"Shubway shandwich"

The murmured words barely
reached the vlogger before dissolving

It was a ballroom with a stoned ceiling with voracious
acoustics
that devoured everything

My brother was only
twelve and his laughter
was taken

Laughter so nervous; inexperienced.
Its attempt to lighten the mood
just made everything more awkward.

It was carried with the other children's voices,
swallowed in the ballroom's giant stomach.

His lisp didn't betray anything.
It was his lips.

His cheeks, his forehead, his nose,
still clinging to precious the baby fat
that made his face so friendly.

He would grow up and learn
a relaxed confident casual laugh.

Develop an edge. Sharp
teen cheekbones; jawline.

He would grow up faster
than his laughs were stolen.

That was no secret.
Those weren't allowed in the ballroom.

Leshondra Locke-Marsh
talez from the streetz

Blood on her palms
from clutching sanity.
She picks away at anxiety born
of tortured pavements.
An image of perfection
with tourists desperate to
explore the depths of glorified violence.
Lights glistening
but the weed smoke only
amplified the torturous sirens.
A high rise of youth yearning
to conceal the pain that they
carry.
She didn't keep her heat tucked
but with her demeanor
it was convincing to men harassing the block
that it could get scary.
They wanted to get to know the treasures of her
body.
Even if they had a chance
she feared that her endless complexities
would keep her entwined in a cycle of abandonment.

Jules Marshall
Solitaire

Alone

I sit in my room

And shuffle, and cut, and deal

Sipping my wine till its rich maroon

A flame in my cheeks I feel

a face like mine reflects in the glass

it glares through the smoke

and smiles at me.

I take a pass.

It's our inside joke

The ashes fall from my lips

and half asleep in my chair

I shuffle and think

What fools we are

To sit

and play solitaire

Jules Marshall
old Soup

I felt weights on my feet
As I dragged them on the pavement
a bond broken
a razor blade through a crochet sweater
Like the ones I wore when I was sick
But this was a different sick
The kind of sick a crochet sweater can't fix.
A bowl of soup sits
Cool to the touch
A blue pigment takes over
my third day sitting in the dark
three days
six bowls of soup
countless thoughts racing each other
like the rabbit and the hare
but the only one losing this race
was me.
I sat for hours
Soaking my pillow with saltwater tears
That were nowhere near as beautiful as I wished them to be
I'll sprint through the alley behind my house
Racing the train at 10:53 p.m.
Watching the people gaze at the graffitied windows
Sparks fly from third rail
And it's happening again,

that saltwater flow
I think
This is not the ocean
I clutch the sweater and smell the soup
And suddenly I am not home
I have taken my house and built a moat around it
Filled with these saltwater tears and cold bowls of soup
Completed with a bridge of crochet sweaters
Now I am home
I built my home for me-
For you
And you left
The door wide open
Taking your razor blade feet
through my crochet sweater bridge.

P

Diego Orozco

Pass Me

The Dust Cleaner

The Day rippled away
It came but didn't stay
okay.

so let's pray
that today
Your plants don't die away
for the sun has changed
in the same way Your feet stray

Estranged

by the reason It came
and You touched my mane
like the Lion sent You
and You said through
a blade, I am.

The Day rippled away
It came but didn't stay
why?

yearning the scent
of Your Mother's care
i swear You fend like the Lion's growl
powered by the sound
lost children sway
You monsters obey!

a bigger predator is amongst Us
hunt for Him or be prey

it's not His his way.
and monday will come
and The Sun will say
remarkable things but only You will obey
and tuesday and wednesday
at school some will say
who heard The Sun that day?
You will say
nothing.

...
Until The Day comes
You aren't who other people say
despite how much
Your hands may do
no rest for me and You
So You stay.

let's pray
You dropped the egg
Your hair screams
all over the place
Pain.

It overtakes

and that's why
The Day rippled away
It came but You stayed.

F Luka Perez Frenetic

Crackling leaves underfoot
Lend a syncopated rhythm
To my corybantic thoughts
That dwell on topics like:

The grains of glass stuck in my eye
Or the slivers of platinum piercing my heart
Or how the world seems awash in fire
but I'm too exhausted to care

Nostalgia floods my senses
Desperate for simple things
Like the innocence of rosy tints
and the smell of butter on grilled cheese
and my old uncertainty which cannot hold a candle
to this new strain of unknown

The ache in me doesn't seem to fade anymore
Not like the color in my hair
Or this cold, winter light
Or our future monarch migrations

Messy, messy bunny trails
Ah, but what is entropy
Except for time's arrow?
So on I forge
One foot in front of the other
The crackle of dead leaves underfoot

Luka Perez
Kermadec

Is there a vessel big enough
For the sea I hold inside of me?
Waters of fathomless depth
Submerging a sable abyss
And the threat of leviathans
Hungry for the world

I wish I could introduce them
To the concept of drowning
So they would know
The pain of mortality
And how it hurts
Not to thrive
In the dark void of a space
Waiting to be filled

Luka Perez

Still

The rain feels pleasant on my face
I smile at the howling wind
The birdsong is especially vivid today
Then I realize
None of this matters to you
The smell of wet earth
Soothes my frayed nerves
I craft a game
Of trying not to soak my feet
In the huge lake puddles
I always lose and I laugh at this
But when the laughter dies down
Your silence remains
Suddenly I notice too well
How the vulnerable on the street
Struggle to stay warm
How children too young
Unfairly grow sick
And how we all
Inevitably pass
Just as you already have
I wish you could feel the rain with me...

Mili Rodriguez

Una falta de composición

The melting pot now is full of contently fractured individuals.
Chastity is not so sought after
and I won't be the one to fight it.

But many never had that freedom.
Centuries of survival and thriving
only to be taken away by a pale god atop a dragon.

No conozco mi idioma verdadero.

And me? Where does that place me?
I've lost any maleku ihaíca, more maíca maráma.
No chibcha, more coquiva surrendering to the newcomer.

An afterthought mixture of
the mountains and the new language
of a singular God.

¿Dónde está el pasado?

I am neither the conquered
nor the conquistador. Look
what they've done. Left us all incomplete, shunning
forced ancestry.

I'll spit on the words of anyone
telling me I am Spanish.
But I hate more that they'd be right.

Me falta alguna integridad. Nos falta.

Europhiles irk me with their pretention and I
curse the Spaniard but more than anything
I'd like to feel whole.

Madeline Walsh

My Shoulders Aren't Like My City

The city of broad shoulders.
The city of hard workers, musicians, civil rights activists.
The city carries it all on its shoulders.
This city - my city - is strong.
My shoulders aren't like my city.
If I carry too much weight on them,
I might fall over.

My shoulders are small,
Not broad in any sense yet,
I am grateful for them.
They keep my head attached
To my body,
And therefore,
My brain attached to my soul.

My shoulders are not as strong as my city
My back can't carry
Blizzards, rainstorms, and floods,
And everybody's political differences and opinions,
and so on, and so on, and so on.
It must be exhausting for my city
To have to carry everything on its back and yet,
It does it so well.

Not once was I afraid
That this city would fall over.

I am strong like my city.

I've been through a lot.
Multiple surgeries, family issues, major insecurities as a teenager.
It gets difficult to carry all my pain.
All my past trauma.
On my back.
It gives me a headache.
Multiples traumatic events hidden away knowing if
I ever think about them again,
I'd collapse.
Some events, here to stay in my mind.

My city has its struggles, too.
Its tragedies,
Its beauties,

Its wins and losses.
One thing I know nobody can ever take away from my city:
Its beautiful, beautiful soul,
Igniting fire inside everyone living in it.
A fire in my soul.
Every one of our souls.

Chicago: I am not as strong as you.

No one can deny
We both have souls.

S poken
w ord

Jahari Scott-Childress

Alluring Sentiment

{Verse}

You might find this text quick as a god's eye This line was written
as the stars fly
The Mood colors change like moon pies.
And your the best fit, and your spirit is electric
You was spilling tea and it was the best spit then as you leave the text hits
You glad that you opened it because you would have never wrote this.
This is my life without a price this is my board without rolling the dice
This is the key for the door, without jamming it with a knife
I Go home hear her heartbeat and holding her tight
She doesn't want me to leave she's afraid of the night
She cannot be replaced and I can see it on her face
To see me In the same place I wrote these and gonna drown
I know I'm loving her, speaking to her in vowels
Waking up to the sunset, and she already up in a sundress
Making breakfast and what she's making? I can only guess
The day goes on everything the same and we grown so close.
You have became the blood in my veins, And the cell in my brains
My life will never be the same and I'm too young to be stuck in the rain
I can see the sky is limitless as it drops tears on my wet wrist
People throw shade on her name still doesn't change nothing
Later In our moments the wedding ring will be the forthcoming
I want a little baby and her mother can hold her
Tell her how crazy In love I am With her tears coming from her face
All the mistakes was made but erased as this gift
In her hands take place In our hearts that's the feeling I want
And how I want to start this world has music all you have to do
is listen to the art
This how I will start form the perfect paint she's my canvas
Until I woke up from my dream and It all Vanish.

L
yric
E
ssays

Nathaniel Gee

Not Even a Place,
Just
a Time

The exact location isn't particularly important; it's on the North side of the City. Chicago. There's a library behind me, not quite yet across the street. I just left, headed home, using it not for the wealth of words, but for its high-speed internet to upload YouTube videos.

The place isn't what's important. Standing in the middle of the road, I'm halfway through a step, barefoot for no other reason than I felt like it that day. Feeling the grit of the city, the dirt of the jungle between my toes. My sandals are laced through my belt, digging into my thigh. A rude reminder to use them in case I encounter any glass. I'll bear the pain.

There aren't any cars on the road and I'm walking through the middle. No cars allowed. I timed my crossing with the red lights on both ends of the street. There are vehicles stationed along the curb, but they aren't cars; cars move. Perhaps in the morning they'll be cars again, but for now, in this moment, myself occupying center stage with a sunlight spotlight, they are merely a theater set. No more than a backdrop. Nothing more than a branch in my jungle.

None of that is important; it's the end of July and nothing is happening. Everything is frozen, everything is still. This is what is important, this snapshot. The 5:00 PM sunbaked asphalt is warm to the touch, almost soft,

as if the tar melted under the pressure of the afternoon. Unlike the present winter, this summer's sun is still alive, dancing just above the horizon. The road is gripping the soles of my feet as my toes dig in, not actually making a dent but at least letting me feel as if I'm connecting to the world. A jungle path and this asphalt is my dirt. The gasoline and oil residue on the road reflects back up almost as much light as the glass bottles and storefront windows. The oil is tracking on my feet a lot more than the jungle's dirt.

Patrianna Scales

Coming Home

“Home. What is a home anyway?”

I don't remember much about my childhood, but all of my treasured memories were created in solitude. Not physical solitude but inner peace during the chaos at home. Before I could understand its value, I found my identity in not being afraid to be alone. From 1st grade to 3rd grade, no one's voice was inside my head. Not the voice of my mom telling me to fix my careless mistakes and do better, not the voice of my absent dad shaming me for not reaching out to talk to him, not the voice of other family members telling me that my interests were too “white,” and not the voice of my friends leaving me without saying goodbye. I don't remember much before their voices came.

I grew up trying to prove myself worthy of being called a black girl (whatever that means). My fists were never as tight as my 4c hair, and my grammar was too “white” for a kid raised by a single black woman from the West Side of Chicago. My hips were wide, and my butt was big, but my lips were too thin for any black boy to wanna kiss. Honestly, I didn't want anyone's kiss, but it was just what I was taught black girls did at my age. I never noticed the way my hips swayed until I felt a hand grab my “fat ass” in the back of the class. Not long after that, I found myself running to women, hoping I'd be respected and safe in their arms instead of rejected and disrespected. I didn't see myself as beautiful for a long time, but my melanin wasn't the issue. My nickname was chocolate chip cookie, but not because I was sweet. It was because my skin was covered in dark spots and acne that I couldn't scrub away.

I hated the color pink, but I was wearing high heels at six. My shoes weren't the latest Jordans because I never cared for them. I preferred the light-up Sketchers

with purple glitter and wedge heels. I knew all the songs from Hamilton instead of Lil Durk lyrics, so none of my cousins gave me the aux cord. I bit my tongue and held back my tears, timidity, and submission in the face of conflict; I was the soft sensitive cousin who could never take a joke. And when the depression hit, my parents said, "that's white people's shit." It wasn't until I put a blade to my wrists and talked to that middle school therapist, whom I had no business talking to in the first place, that I got the help I cried out for desperately. In my family, we played "hush-hush" about depression and addiction, so when I picked up a blunt and a bottle to ease my anxiety, I knew I was becoming a part of a generational legacy I didn't want to be in anymore.

Living with my family's voices inside my head, telling me what I should and shouldn't do, felt like getting ready to skydive. I was scared in that plane; we were all scared, but I know I'd regret not flying to wait around for support and encouragement. Every time I got ready to jump, my parachute turned invisible, and they said I'd die if I took my chance and didn't stay on the plane with them. No matter how invisible my parachute is to my family, I know it's there. I am scared and excited, but I know I'm doing the right thing.

That same inner peace I had as a child is slowly settling in the cracks of my broken heart, and I realize I'm exactly where I need to be. Things don't change overnight, but with every step I take towards embracing my God-given identity, I feel the pressures of being the perfect daughter being lifted off my chest. To heal my inner childhood wounds, I looked into the eyes of the people I love with empathy in my heart and let go. Let go of the expectations, welcome the reality of growing up in an imperfect world full of imperfect people, and step into the freedom of forgiveness.

"All these years, I've searched for a place where I belong, but I've learned home is not physical. It's spiritual. And I've found a home in Jesus."

Li Zhang

Homeland

Farmland, my dear homeland!

How long is it since I was in your hug last time? I must confess I have lost track of time since I gave birth to my son. You saw that boy only a couple of times. A couple, literally, I mean! One was when he was three years old, and the other one was when he was seven.

It feels like ages. He is a twelve-year-old boy now. How time flies. AH! I have missed you for five years. I age and forget things, though my memory about you is forever fresh, like we met yesterday. You are super. You are immortal. You are old but never ever age. Have you ever felt left behind as people come and go without saying a proper goodbye?

Last time, I wandered in your territory. My farmer uncle frowned and shook as I insisted on going outside. He passed me a straw hat: an elusive fragrance mixed of sweat and hay. I should have sunscreen on that day. The sun in August is scorching, working relentlessly to ripen rice in the wide-open field. No wisp of wind, no sign of humankind. It was completely quiet. Not exactly. Water trickled through somewhere. Dragonflies buzzed in the air, pollinating sizzled rice. Sweat kept welling up around my forehead, dripping and stinging my eyes. It quickly crystalized and hurt. I dared not to move my neck. All the water in my mouth evaporated. I was stuck, holding my neck stiff and upright like a zombie. Then I was hit. What a view! The sky was so purely blue. The air was so thinly clear. I was struck. I could not move my footsteps at all. The patches of land intervened so spontaneously but orderly. How rich the colors were. My eyes were so absorbed in taking in the colors, a gradual spectrum of color from yellow to green. No way could my words describe a fraction of its greatness and saturation. My

eyes moistened. Awe sprung up in my heart. What a speechless sensation and sublimation! I cooled down and took photos. I saw corn stems. Some were gleaned, pale and grey. Some were vigorous, fresh and green. Reminiscent of a familiar taste of sweetness in my mouth. My mouthwater regenerated. Further into the dry field, more colors revealed. Green melons, red peppers, purple eggplants, yellow squash, hanging on the stem, or rotten in the soil. Were they forgotten? Has anyone except me seen when they flourished? It was a secret between us, it was a mystery for others.

Non-
Fiction

Jacquelia Porter

Night Shift

"You ever had a job that you really hated? That job that you get disappointed when you see it didn't burn down since you last clocked out. The job that before you walk through the threshold you give that heavy sad sigh. That job for me was at White Castle. I wanted to quit ten minutes into my first shift. But somehow, I worked at this job I hated for over three years. Until I worked one horrible night shift.

My shift was from 11 PM to 7 AM. I only lived three blocks away, so I would leave as late as possible and walk slowly. I didn't want get there too early. The closer I got to the building, the worst I felt. I really hated this place. The restaurant was a perfect little square that barely had enough space for the equipment and the crew. We would work bunched together. I would have crewmates on the side and back of me. With the grill, fryers, and body heat it was always stifling hot in there. Usually if there was a good crew, time would fly by because we would joke around. Not tonight though. Tonight, I worked with the mean manager and the older man who made me feel uncomfortable.

I glanced over at this man who was ten years my senior and just felt repulsion. He was standing too close to me. I could feel his breath on my neck every time he whispered inappropriate words in my ear. Every time he walked past me, I cringed as he placed one of his hands on my waist. I suddenly heard my name being called from the manager's office. I walked back towards the office with hope forming that I was being saved from this man. "Jacquelia, you need to watch your behavior; that man is married," my manager says. My behavior! He was the one harassing me, yet I was the one being talked to about workplace behavior in the manager's office. I just walked back to the grill and hoped this night ended soon.

It was so hot in there. It was that thick suffocating heat. I made burgers. I felt the heat engulfing me. I kept making burgers. I felt the heat in my lungs. I

continued to make burgers. My chest felt tight. I forced myself to make burgers. I can't breathe. I couldn't make any more burgers. I felt drained and dizzy. I needed to go home. I walked over to my manager. "I think I'm having an asthma attack; I need to go home," I told her. She looked up at me from her desk, rolling her eyes as she said, "Jacquelia, if you can't breathe that bad, go stand in the freezer for a minute or two. You'll be fine. We're busy and I need you here." I honestly couldn't believe what I was hearing, but I kept quiet. The last time I said something to a manager I got written up and my hours were cut.

I walked angrily back to my grill for a second time that night. For three years I worked there. I'm a hard worker. They told me that all the time. Yet, they would risk my health like this. I should've said more. I should've just left. But I just went back to my position. I didn't make burgers this time. I just stood there thinking. If I walk out right now, they will fire me. I can't afford to lose my job, but this job isn't worth my health.

I heard my manager walking towards us from the office. "It's getting slow," she announced "I'm going to send one of you home early." Please pick me to go home. My lungs felt constricted, and I could hear myself starting to wheeze. She looked past me and told the old pervert he could leave early. What about me? I was struggling to breathe, and I was not the first person to be sent home. He grabbed his things, but before he left, he whispered in my ear that he'd come back at seven for me. Disgusted, I moved away from him, but he just laughed and winked at me.

I couldn't do this anymore. Just when I made up my mind to walk out, the heat overcame me and I threw up in a garbage can. I vaguely heard a coworker pleading with my manager to let me leave. My chest hurt. My stomach hurt. I can't breathe. I'm hot. I'm angry. I'm disgusted. I just want to go home. My manager walked up to me and said, "Since you want to throw up, I guess you can clock out."

I didn't even say anything to her. I grabbed my things and left. I walked home quietly thinking about how I would never go back there again.

Fiction

John K. Kugler

The Decision

Eyes open - confusion blossoms on a face.

Short rattling gasps break the silence, as he fails to catch his breath.

A look of despair chases away the disorientation as he remembers everything: the unending firefights, the deaths of his friends, and a failed retreat away from the last, disastrous encounter with the enemy.

Everything aches.

A body drained from days of constant fighting - now laying in the crater it had been blown into.

His face twitches in bewilderment as he fails to get his legs to move.

Well fuck, that's not good.

He tilts his head towards the distant rumbling of metal on asphalt.

Thith-thith-thith...

The sound that creeps closer every second, bringing with it the knowledge of the horrors that befall those who end up captured by the enemy.

His eyes drift down towards the mercurial pistol that hangs from his waist.

His fingers curl around a worn handle as he draws the handgun from his belt.

His eyes trace over her gentle curves and scars.

Sorry old gal, I never wanted to make you do this.

He relives memories of her faithful service before bringing the pistol up to eye level as he comes to the decision.

A few moments pass... click, bang - the report of a pistol rings out in the air.

Several soldiers take long strides to keep up with the tank beside them.

The tank angrily rumbles to a stop, a crater impedes their path down the street.

Two of their number are sent down into the crater to guide the path forward and check for mines.

Upon descending into the crater, they discover a body with a weathered pistol in hand and a hole in its head.

"Dumb bastard musta shot himself."

"Looks like it, sure is a waste of a nice pistol though."

"Sure is, I call dibs."

As they check the body for hidden explosives; one of them picks up the pistol, carelessly brushing away the viscera on the barrel before slipping it into his waistband.

They climb out of the crater and begin advancing with the tank; abandoning the macabre scene that they encountered, leaving the body where it lay.

Petrichor

Victoria Gama

The lush forest braced behind her under the forceful torrents of rain. The storm clouds were barely visible through the trees. Plump bushes shadowed her, growing as tall as stop signs. She remained on the green glade, a bed of daffodils lying below her feet. It's almost as if she emerged from the dark grass, a nymph or an other-worldly creature coming to survey the rain, a curse across the land.

But she's just standing there across the street with her umbrella, a blank expression, groggy eyes, and a firm line on her mouth that invited no business. Her black hair fell straight, choppy above her shoulders.

I wonder if she stood there just to taunt me.

My throat closes as I consider calling out her name. It might be odd to wave her over, so I keep to myself on the stone bench, surveying from the other side of the street. A shroud of moss, grown between the crevices of the concrete back, scratches my yellow sleeve. Everything around me grows, yet I'm the only sulking thing under the damned downpour.

The bus heaves in front of me, crawling and creaking, dragging on the wet asphalt. I keep my head down as I haul myself onto the steps, watching my shoes in a careful routine. I pick an empty seat in the middle of the aisle, even though there's no one else inside. My breath fogs up the window, covering her face in mist. I erase the cloud with my hand. Her gaze cuts through me, her laxen expression unchanging.

As lightning strikes, I wish she sat next to me.

The rain followed me to school and back again coming home. I missed my bus. Time often wanted me to take a step back when it seemed like I was finally moving forward. I walked through the rainfall. I pulled my hood up so far, I almost bumped into her.

She wore the same face, her hair drenched despite the umbrella. She held it in the same hand, as if she never moved from that spot. Of course, she'd be

here, with her downcast eyes and heavy lashes. I approached apprehensively, each step dragging as if the sidewalk turned to mud.

"Are you cold?" I asked if she'd respond.

Her eyes still remain fixed on the gray road, slick with rolling rainwater.

"It's not as heavy anymore," I continue. "The rain, I mean. Today was decent."

I miss you. I bit my tongue before the words slipped out.

She's turning away, interested in the leaves washing away below the curb.

I want to kiss her cheek. I shivered, muttered an apology, and sprinted the rest of the way home.

The next morning, the sun peeked through the clouds like a speck of gold in the ashes. The rain descended into a soft drizzle over the bus stop benches, letting the moss drink from the sky. This time, I locked eyes with her. She wore her usual rain boots, yellow, to match her tattered umbrella, and her sullen frown, just as firm and unrelaxed as yesterday's. She didn't look away and neither did I.

The bus crawls forward. I pick the same empty seat and clear the mist on the window. I peered out, but she was gone.

Something tugs at my sleeve. Thin, frail fingers trail along the fabric, like water trickling down tree trunks. Her fingernails tap me with curiosity, as if I was the one who just materialized out of thin air. Her face didn't show any fascination. We weren't strangers.

She picks at a hangnail instead. The bus pulls forward into the morning fog.

"I haven't seen you in a while," she mumbles, her voice brittle and thin.

"I know," I say, my own voice laden with guilt.

"You don't talk to me anymore." She pulls her backpack around. "But I have something for you."

My face twists into a grimace. I bite my nails and decide to tune into the window, hoping when I turn around, she'll be gone. Something presses up my sleeve again; though this time, I know what it is when I look back.

Yellow lilies flood my eyes. A delicately bound golden ribbon held them together. I sigh into my knuckles, my throat caught in a whorl. A tear slides down

my face, but she doesn't call me out on it. Instead she looks at me, waiting for me to reach out.

She looks at me like it hasn't happened yet, like this was just another day in the rain.

I can't keep repeating myself.

I grab the flowers and trace a petal. "They're pretty," I choke.

"I knew you'd like them."

When I look back, I flinch. Her face is pale, eyes milky-white and soulless. Water rolls down her hair, dripping onto the bouquet. Her clothes dampen my sleeve and pant leg.

I grind my teeth and grip against the inevitable.

"I can't do this," I tell her. "Let the day be over. Please."

"It hurts, doesn't it?" she whispers in a voice I don't recognize.

I nod. My throat tightens as if lodged by a stone.

"I want to forget."

"That's the worst part," she says, returning to her soft face and normal cadence. She slumps back into her seat. "You can't. I'm not easy to forget."

I keep the lilies close to my chest, hugging them like they were about to walk away.

"The rain is stopping." Her voice raises to a lilt I've never heard before.

That's impossible. The world has never stopped raining.

"Can you smell the earth? The dirt and the dew?" There's a chill in her breath.

I see my reflection in the window. Sprawling woods fade across my sunken face.

"Can you remember?"

As soon as I find a patch of blue sky, thunder snaps against the concrete. The world tipped over, caved in and carried on. The rain - the relentless rain - pummeled down on us.

It flashes before me. A white hospital bed. Rain tapping the glass

windows. Blinding light and bad news. The unsettling disbelief followed by the sinking grief.

My black suit and your black dress. A slate sky is the color of your pallid skin. Dirt, dew, and tears. From now on, the seat has been reserved for a ghost.

I've relived this day over and over. How can I forget?

I pushed you away rather than held onto the memories, even though it brought along beatings of remorse. It was better than realizing you were gone every time I remembered your face. Better than sinking in the absence before realizing that a part of us was lost too. That you were never going to sit next to me, fight for the window seat, or exchange gifts and kisses.

All of that was gone too.

The flood of anguish pours back into me during the brief lull of rainfall. I look around but I'm alone with the burden of remembrance. The rest of the day blurs like time had kept its distance from me, or I had been too preoccupied with the past to even notice the return of the rain. I find myself at home with the smoldering memories - stones weighing me down to the seafloor - the last remnants of her.

The next morning passes and she's already saved my spot on the rubber seats. Lightning doesn't strike and the bus doesn't stray. I grab her face and pull her in. She smells like earth and dewdrops. I can taste the sky on her lips. My fingers press along her wet cheek, a brew of our tears. When I leaned back, she was gone. The lilies take her seat.

Then I find her, standing at the corner ahead, down the slippery slope. The bus rushes past her. She fades from my view like the passing forests, shrinking down on the line of time.

The scent of earth joins me on my way home. In bed, she's buried under the covers, sullied in soil and weeds. The sheets pull back to reveal her stone-set face, white maggots crawling in the hollows of her eyes. I ignore her, pushing away the sight, and get into bed. As I turn over, I'm met with a golden face and amber eyes. I drift off into her yellow saturated dayglow.

Brian Noonan

Hell of a View

The escalator from the Metra platform at the LaSalle Station was always, without exception, completely broken. Peter had seen them working once, back when Tommy's arm was still in a sling from some summer escapade. Every morning the escalator from the station was broken, and every afternoon the escalator to the station was broken. You'd sometimes see men in yellow hats and reflective vests in the weeds trying to get it up and running. But when the autumn rains came in it seemed as though they'd given up completely, and attached a sad green-yellow caution tape to the entrance, which now drifted somberly in the January breeze.

Tommy and Peter climbed the stairs next to it, whitened with footprints of hundreds of inconvenienced commuters. "Come on Pete," Tommy would always say as he mounted the stairs, though no one else called him Pete. "We're able-bodied young men."

The stairs led through a dark enclosed tunnel that crossed over the street to the station proper, a collection of six or seven platforms and tracks hosting giant silver trains that whined and creaked like rusty doorhinges. Above, a particularly passive aggressive sign touted, "WE'RE ON TIME. ARE YOU?" They reached Platform 4, and Tommy took out a shiny red pack of cigarettes; the two would stand side by side. There was a heated interior, but Peter never liked it. It felt too public, too claustrophobic for his taste. He preferred the wind too, it kept him awake at the end of the day. Peter guessed Tommy also liked it because he could smoke.

"Damn 5:20's probably delayed again," Tommy said as the wisps escaped his mouth. "You'd think they'd stay on top of this with all those stupid ads everywhere." he said, glancing up.

Peter smiled and watched the flakes of snow sprinkle Tommy's curly hair.

"I suppose it's not quite as on time as they claim."

"Easy for you man. Yours always seems to be on time." Tommy never looked at Peter when he spoke, but ahead. West, towards the sunset.

"And how would you know, then? You leave before me."

"Nah, it's intuition." He tapped the side of his head, cigarette still between his fingers. "I've got a mental tracker on your ass."

The wind blew for a moment, and Peter hid deeper into his canvas jacket. He glanced to his side, crowds absent from the wide foyer, empty, besides the handful of puddles that littered the ground and some uncomfortable benches. He turned to look at Tommy, the end of his cigarette brightening like a volcano waking from dormancy. Peter followed his gaze west, beyond the maroon wall that blocked their view to the street to the sinking sun. The sky was an amalgamation of oranges, reds and purples. The sun glowed a deep red on the horizon like a finger against a flashlight.

"It's funny isn't it," Tommy said, slowly around his cigarette like a priest parading to the altar with incense, swinging back and forth, "that the sky is most pretty in the ugliest places?"

Peter sat with this for a moment. "Poetic. What do you consider an ugly place? I think there must be beauty everywhere in some form or another?" He smirked.

"Always the smartass, aren't ya Pete?" His face betrayed a smile. "I just think it's wild ya know? We're all out there on our day-to-day, and the sky's always rolling on without us. Like when was the last time you saw a sunrise? They're every day man, got this whole light show every day without fail."

"You think it gets tired of it?"

"No, I don't think so. That's its purpose, ya know? Gotta keep that cosmic order or this whole place is in the shit." He took another drag and watched as the ribbons of smoke rose in the air. For the first time, Tommy turned his head to look at Peter, his eyes gray and almost smiling. "Besides, it's one hell of a view."

As he said this Peter spotted the blinking lights of the front of the train

coming toward them. When the train rolled in it stopped all conversation. It rang out its bell like a chapel under siege, its wheels squealing along the rails. As it slowed, Tommy crushed the cigarette beneath his heel.

"This is me. Alright boss, see you tomorrow." He gave a hard pat on the back of Peter's thin jacket and disappeared past a sliding door. Peter watched as the train pulled away, into the far distance - only its red back lights could be made out. He stood there for a few moments, and about-faced began walking away from the station.

It was a victimless, perhaps even a noble lie Peter had kept up. It started at the beginning of the semester, when the two had first met. Tommy struck up a conversation in class, and had kept it going as they left the building and walked south. He asked if Peter caught the train there, and Peter said yes. It seemed like the right thing to say at the time. Since then, he had met Tommy every morning and saw him off every day. He didn't mind the inconvenience.

As Peter went back through the enclosed tunnel to those whitened steps, his head was somewhere else entirely. He was making a list of that evening's tasks, calculating the time in his head: 30 minutes on the bus, 2 hours for homework, 1 hour of reading. It was so routine it barely felt like thinking.

But as Peter walked back to the stairs and his breath escaped his chest as he lost his balance on the grime. He tried to grab hold of the railing but moved fast and went flying down the flight of stairs- they passed him too quickly to take stock of. Then a loud metallic thud rang as he hit the ground - pain blasting and cold searing through him. There, before the grime-covered stairs, Peter's skull cracked against the andesite floor. The crumpled body began to morph into something far from human. The brain rapidly dissolved within and hot blood seeped into the cracks of the cement. The last thing he saw was the simmering red sun on a canvas sky, and green-yellow caution tape blowing in the wind.

Almost an ocean away, a pair of paled eyes in a passing train lingered over a longfamiliar rusty blue sign.

WE'RE ON TIME. ARE YOU?

Gallery



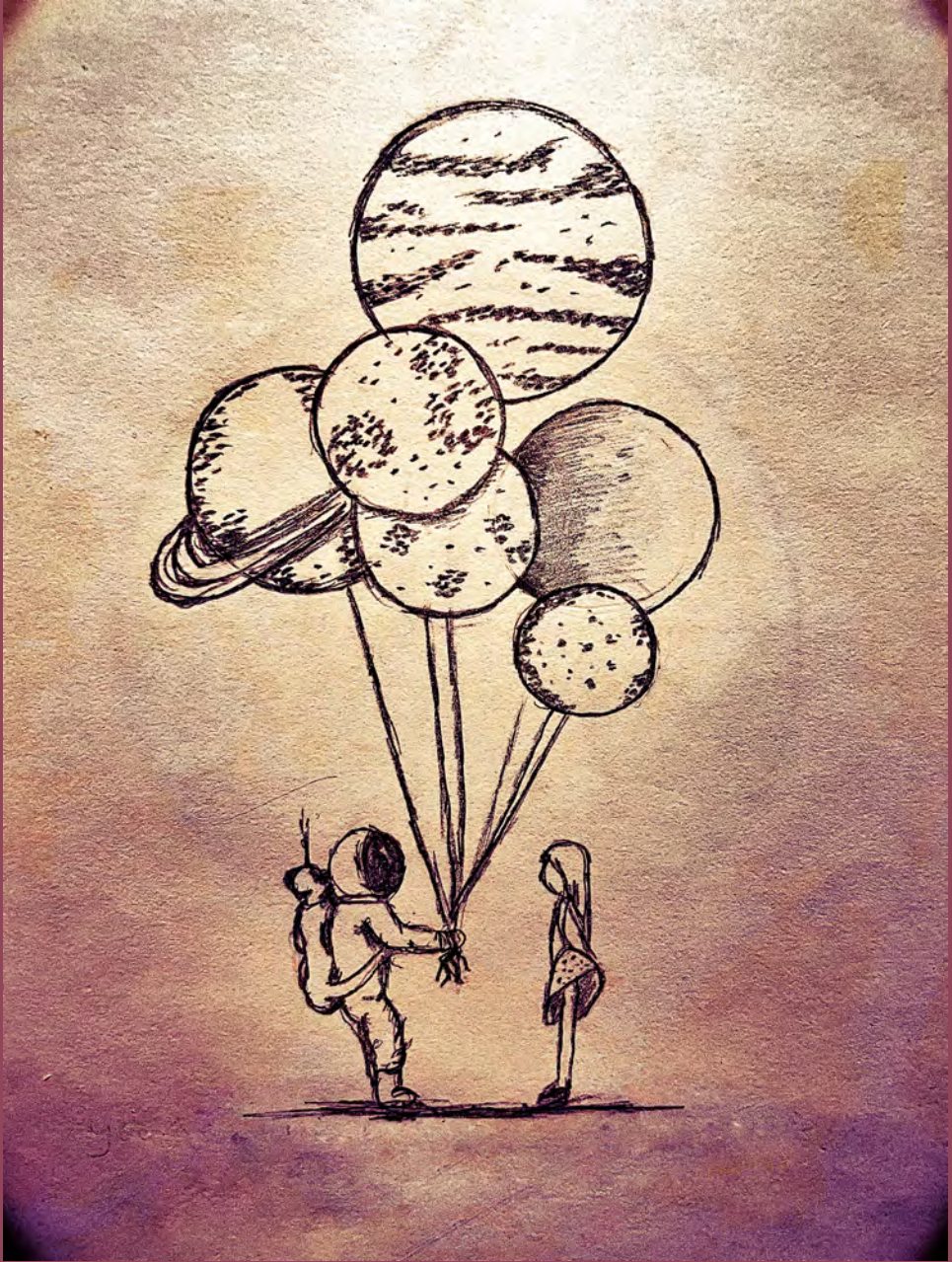


Amanda Cervantes queer hands. tenderness. (silver gelatin print)





Diego Orozco What I Saw On My Way To See You (acrylic on canvas)





Jocelyn Romero Get You (digital)





Carmen Ordonez Lowrider Blanco (inkjet archival print)

Jocelyn Romero Remi Wolf (digital)



Katia Jackson Justice For Tyre (digital photograph)





Yousef Fakharpour (Syren) Just Hair (digital)



Jeannette Albert Black Buddha Floyd (acrylic on paper)

Luis Aguilar "9/11" (acrylic & mixed media on canvas)



Katia Jackson Peace Not Police (digital photograph)





G. Jevon Covington Harold Series 1 (digital)

Devona Middleton Endorphins (acrylic on canvas)



Lasone Nathan Racing Spirits (digital)



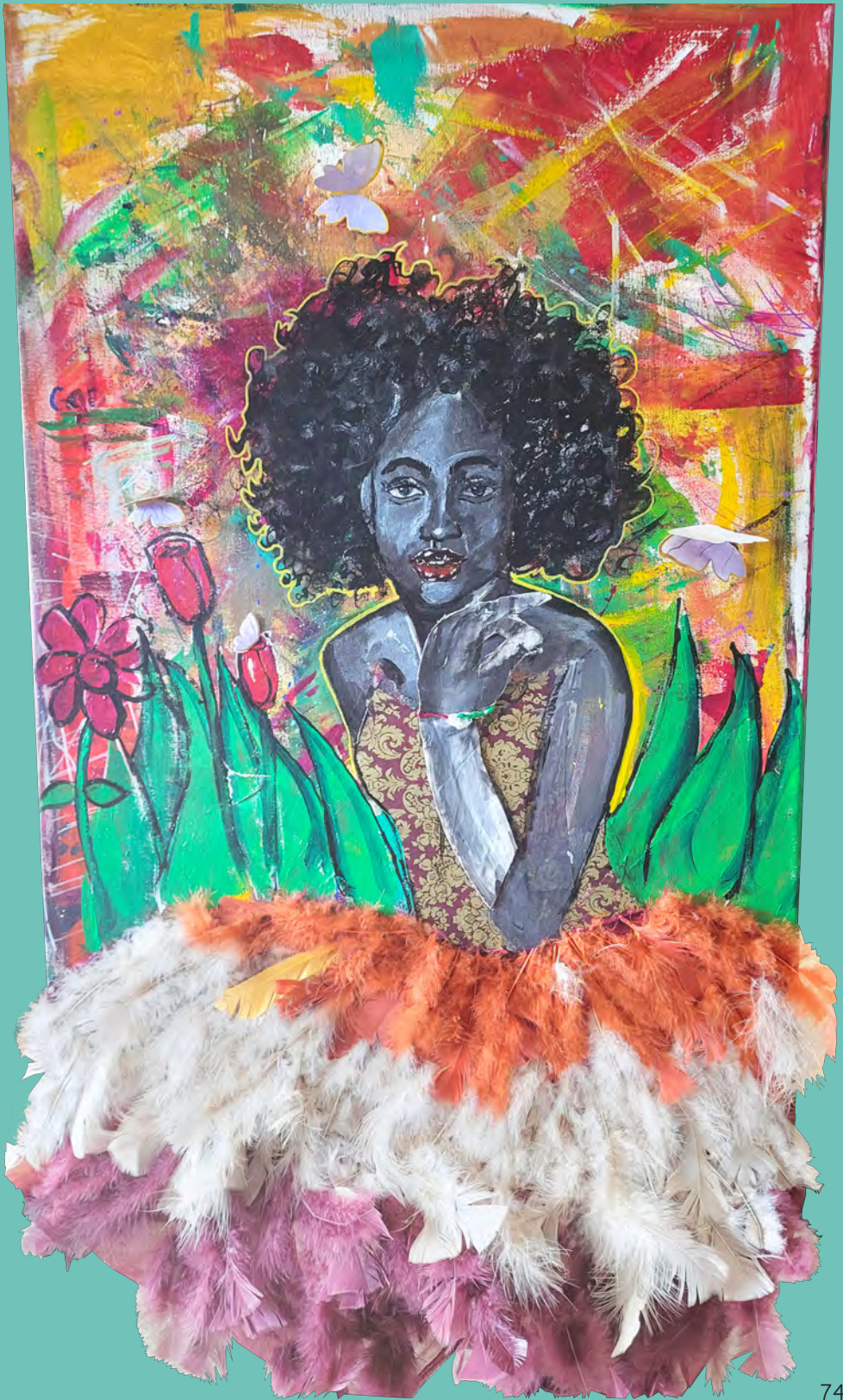
CHICAGO

Explore Chicago, Take the "L"



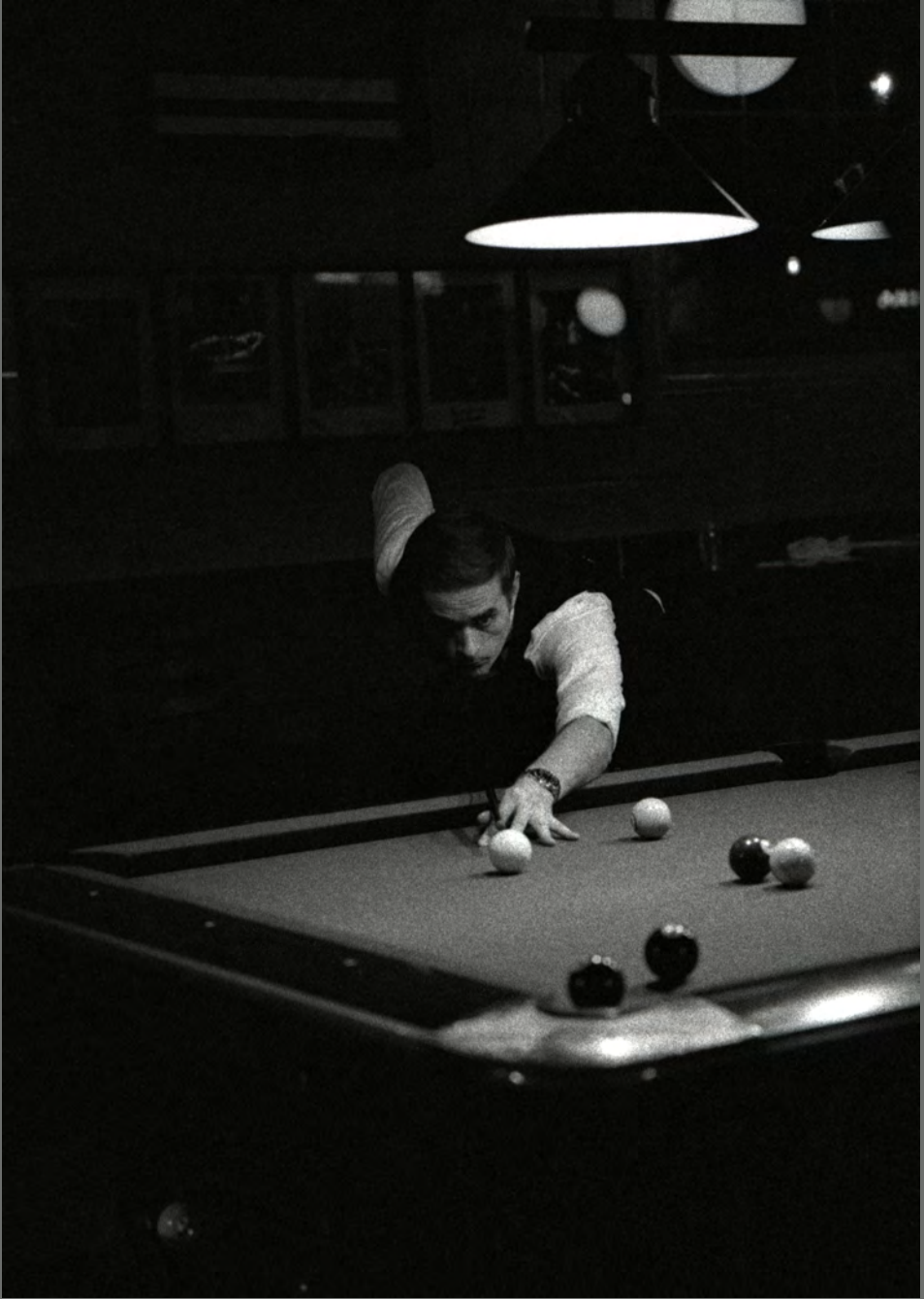
 Chicago Transit Authority





Andrea Cole Esther (acrylic, fabric, mixed media on canvas)

Mark Hawk High Life (silver gelatin print)





Carmen Ordóñez The Blue Devil (ink jet archival print)





Cass Waters Pink Line (oil on canvas)





Manuela Scolaro Coonce Contemplating (charcoal on paper)



Raine Yung All (digital photograph)





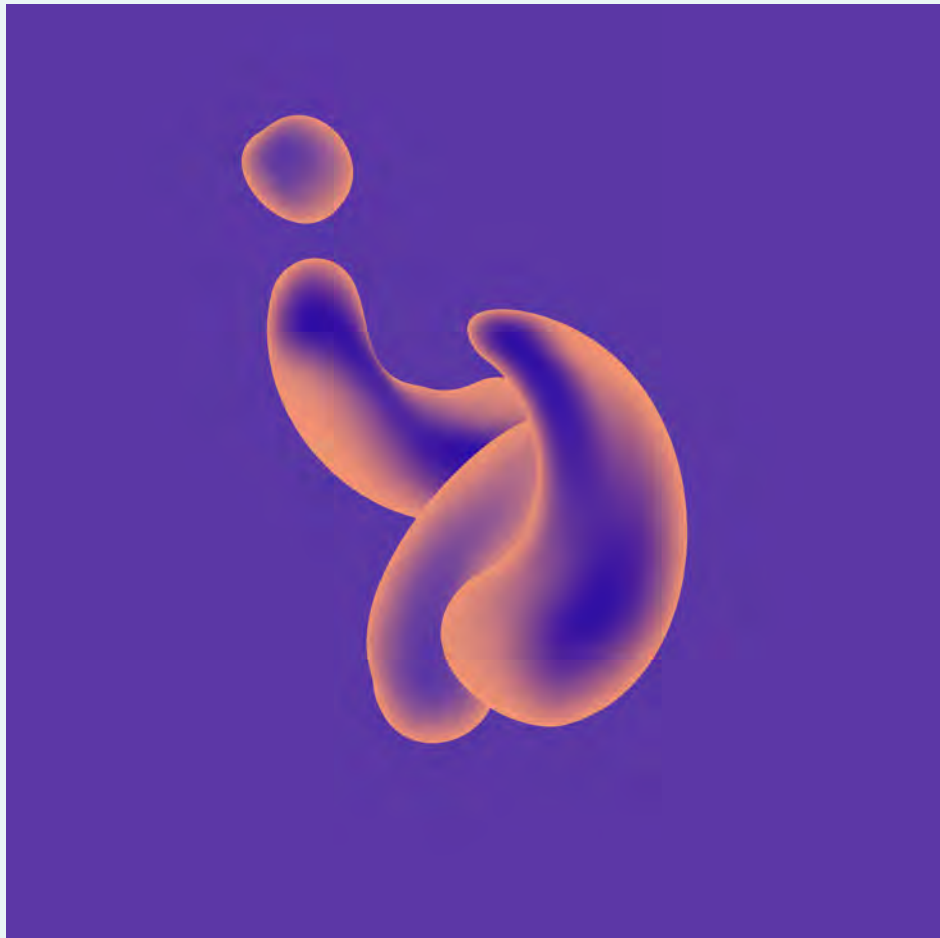
Shane Michelle Cabanero Sock VS Shoe (digital)



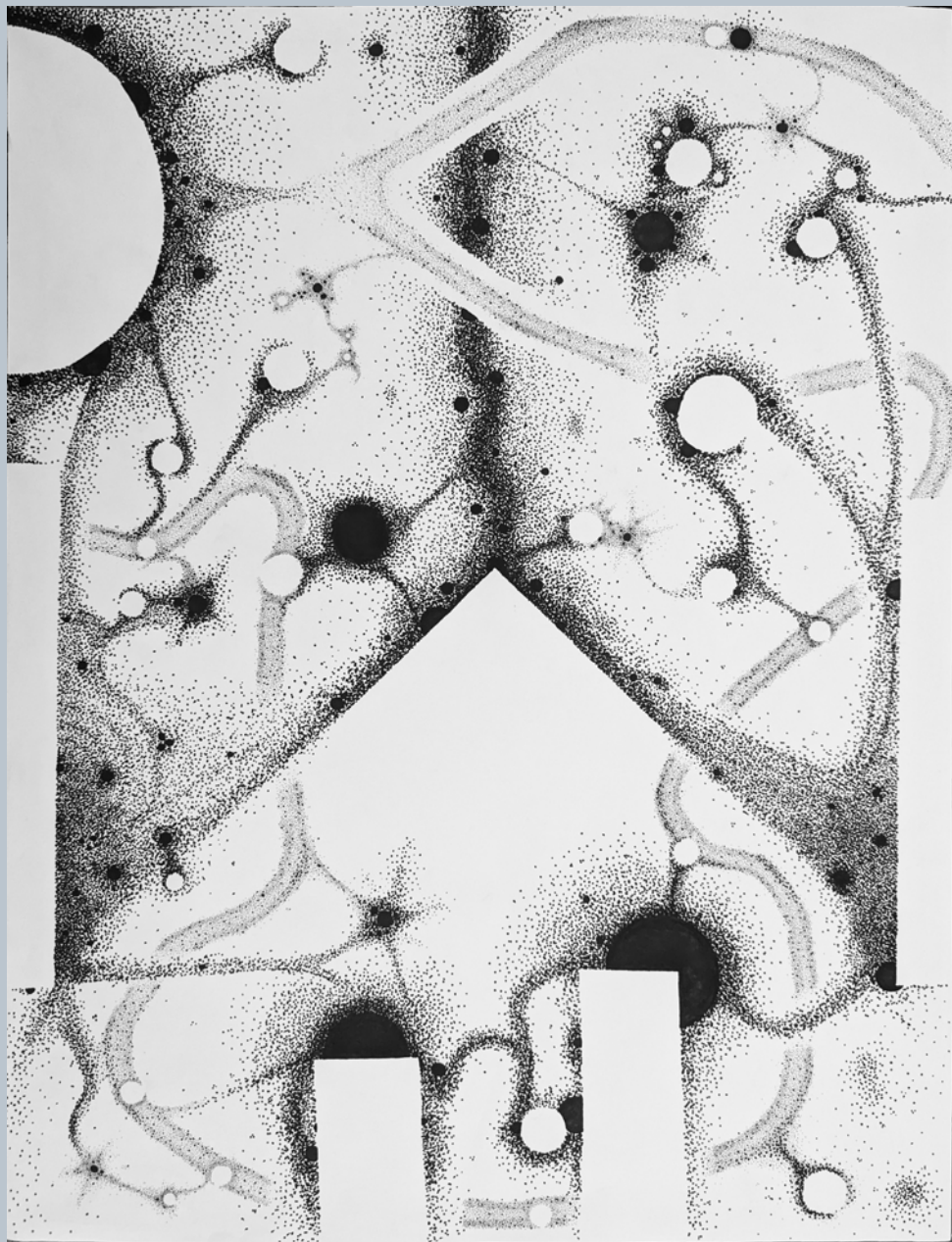


Andrea Cole Dancing in my Dreams (acrylic on canvas)





Marteen Martinez Flower Sun (digital abstract)





Jade Groble Waking Dream (ballpoint pen on paper)



Fatima Aldana Laying in Flowers (digital)



Anitsie Lopez Lacquer Series Part 1 (digital)





Cass Waters Meditation (oil on canvas)

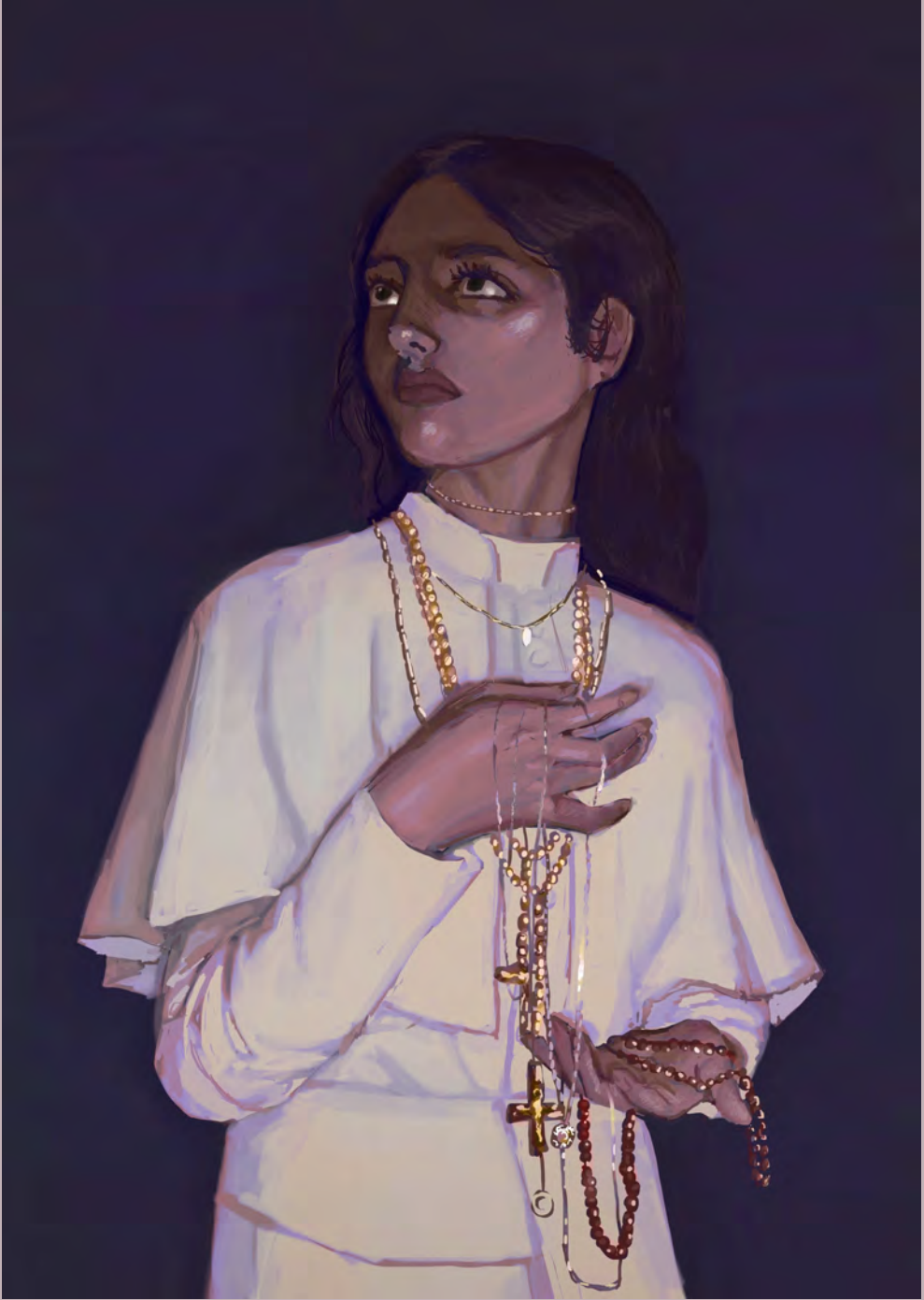




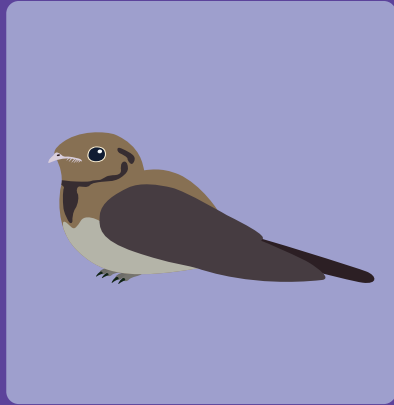
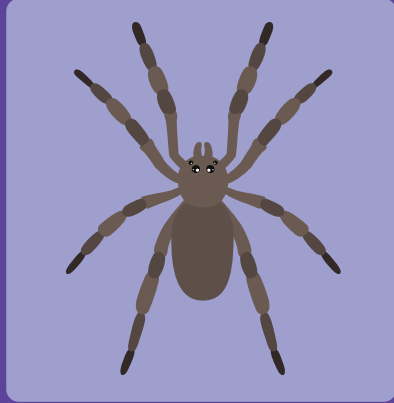
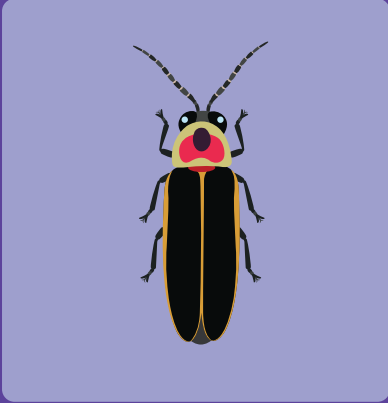
Manuela Scolaro Coonce Memory (charcoal & oil pastel on paper)

Carlos Garcia Jr. Keep Myself In Mind (digital video still)





Fatima Aldana Atonelement (digital)





Lasone Nathan Mouse and the Maned Wolf (digital)

A. Cavell Pieces (oil on canvas)





Laura Marquez Infiltration (acrylic on canvas)





Trang Le Moon Bunny Cafe (3D rendering: Autodesk Maya)





F. Ffrench Bug Eater (digital)





Cass Waters Figure in Corner (oil on canvas)





Mauricio Quiroz Welcome To Hell (digital)

Alyssa Owens Hades (digital)



Lasone Nathan Renata past and present (digital)

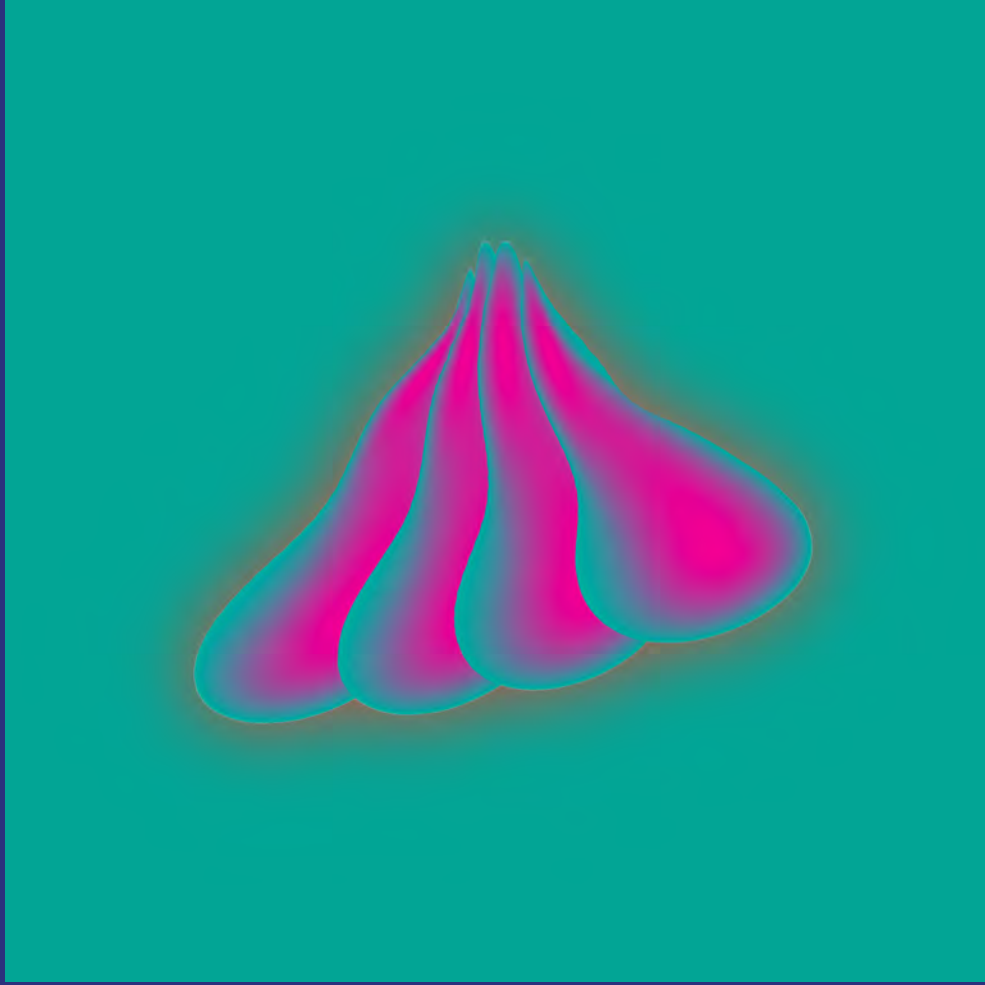




Alyssa Owens Zeus (digital)



Diego Orozco As The Days Rippled Away (acrylic on canvas)





Osciel Franco How Jack made me feel the day before (digital)