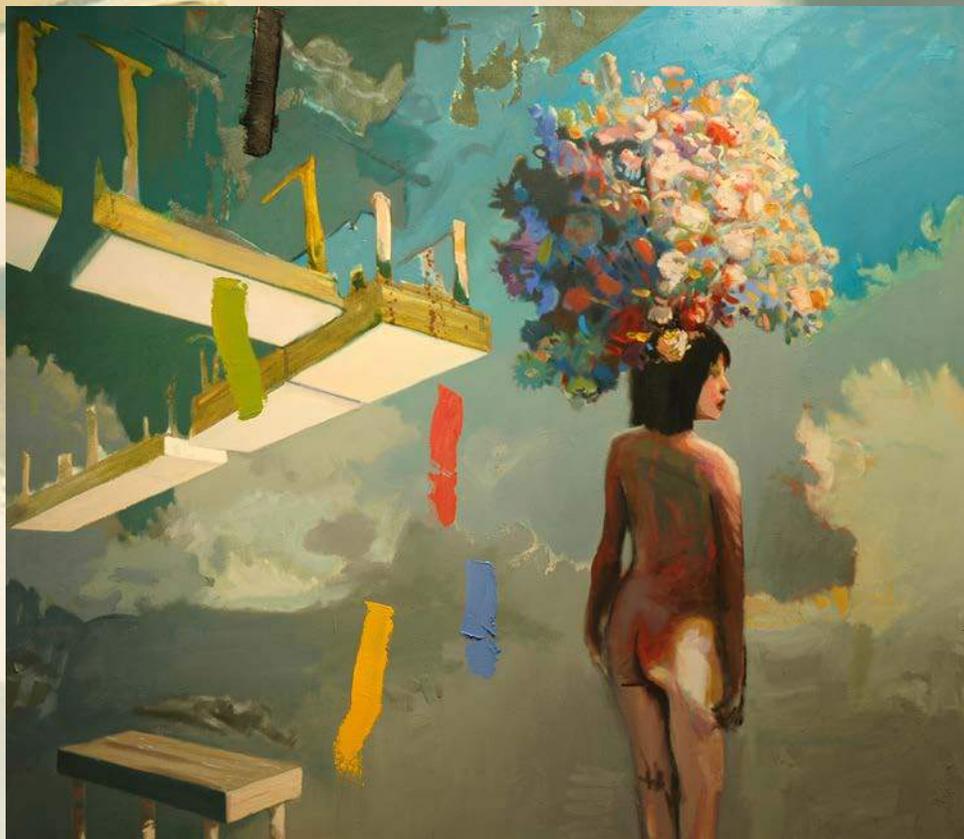


Quercus

a journal of literary and visual arts



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a journal of literary and visual art

Volume 21

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(kwurkus) Latin. n. The oak genus: a deciduous hardwood tree of shrub.

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Leslie Bell '72

Sky, Light, Flowers

2011, oil on canvas, 48 inches x 55 inches

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Leah Richter

Suadade

2012, india ink on bristol, 14 inches x 11 inches

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Black Water Horizon

2012, reduction woodcut, 48 inches x 60 inches

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Strange Fruit

2011, oil on canvas, 24 inches x 30 inches

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Grant Legan '10

Beautiful Isolation 2

2011, digital photography

This edition is offered with love and gratitude to Leslie Bell—retiring this year—whose energy, spirit, wisdom, artwork, and critical acumen have since Quercus's founding twenty-one years ago helped define the journal's identity and enrich its heart and soul.

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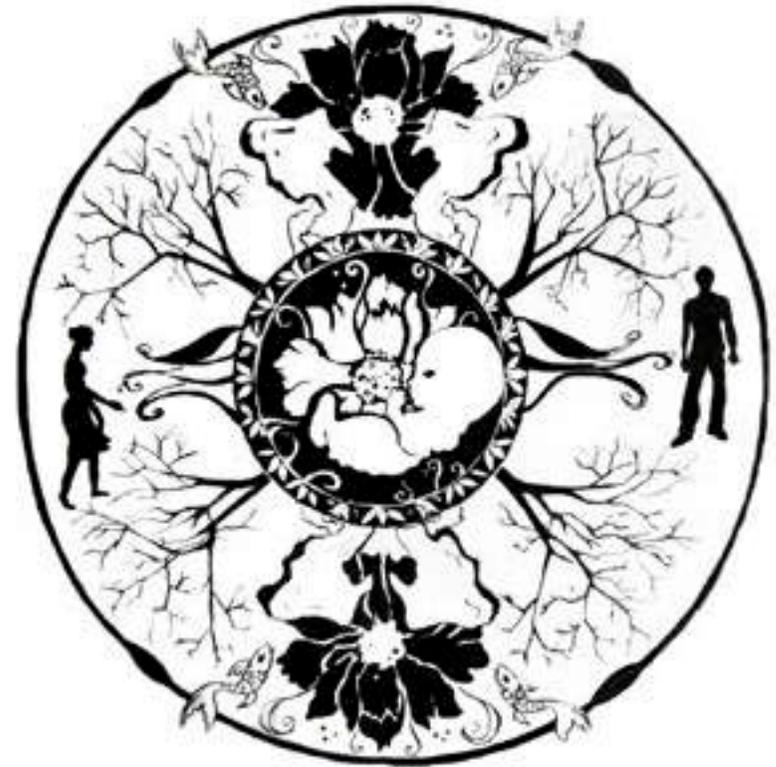
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Fall Hard

I don't want to grow up for a lot of reasons
& for no reason at all. The perfection
of nineteen hangs on the edge
of childhood & magic, like high school football
or the first time I saw my dad cry. It's art,
fleeting and fragmented, praying to be drawn:
I fall hard for my freedoms, and I dream
too much most days, but I'm not worried—
I have time spilling out of empty pockets
& I write poetry in the middle of the night.
I knew more of what I wanted when I was five
& I still wish on fallen eyelashes.
Maybe someday I'll find the words to write
poems about the beauty of growing old.

—*Maria DeSio*

Batiquitos, Defender

In Carlsbad at dusk you watch
the bald spot of silver water slip between
a tidal passage descending
on the upper Batiquitos Lagoon
near and far from the sandbars
stolen from Indians,

and the water grows stronger
with each pass, rustling Goldenrush
on a 4th of July eve. Liquid fields
grow across the caramel stands
where two shiny crows take nips
out of the shoreline.

Step forward, Defender, into the pool
and float against the dead
while dropping warm feathers
from the filter of your wings,
sealing your father and mother in a crystal skin. Never mind

the pool is oceans, and sandstone cliffs
surround this peninsula of water.
Time rests in the fields of irrigated light
striking eucalyptus and leaves leaving
the wetland of a dream entered
on the judgment of a moonlit night.

At this landing you study
childhood's immortal pain, some
real and mystical, and some invented,
and now how do you function by retrieving stillness from
death
in the drowning afterlife?

The man has been wading in water

for decades. Suddenly, to blot out
the smell of defeat, he decides
to write in orange juice across his chest.
He is relieved that his words,
because he has loved,
are no longer about sex, not even
about love, before shutting off the lamp
at his writing desk. Marriage tells him
to finish his tale and revisit the dots
of his blood held in its place.

In months to follow, after more tossing
and turning, he buys bags
of oranges with a credit card
and a shaky signature at the fruit stand
across the rumbling roadway.

Later he will begin to write about
the duality of light and love, again
taking off his glasses, resting his head
on his wife's sacred shoulder,
reminding himself that sleep is as sacred
as the uncertain bitterness
of the orange's cratered skin
tearing under his fingernails

like the trap of some disorder
leftover on the drifting moonlight
slipping at his rock face

with the Great Blue Heron
and the Snowy Egret
and lesser shorebirds
wading into memory

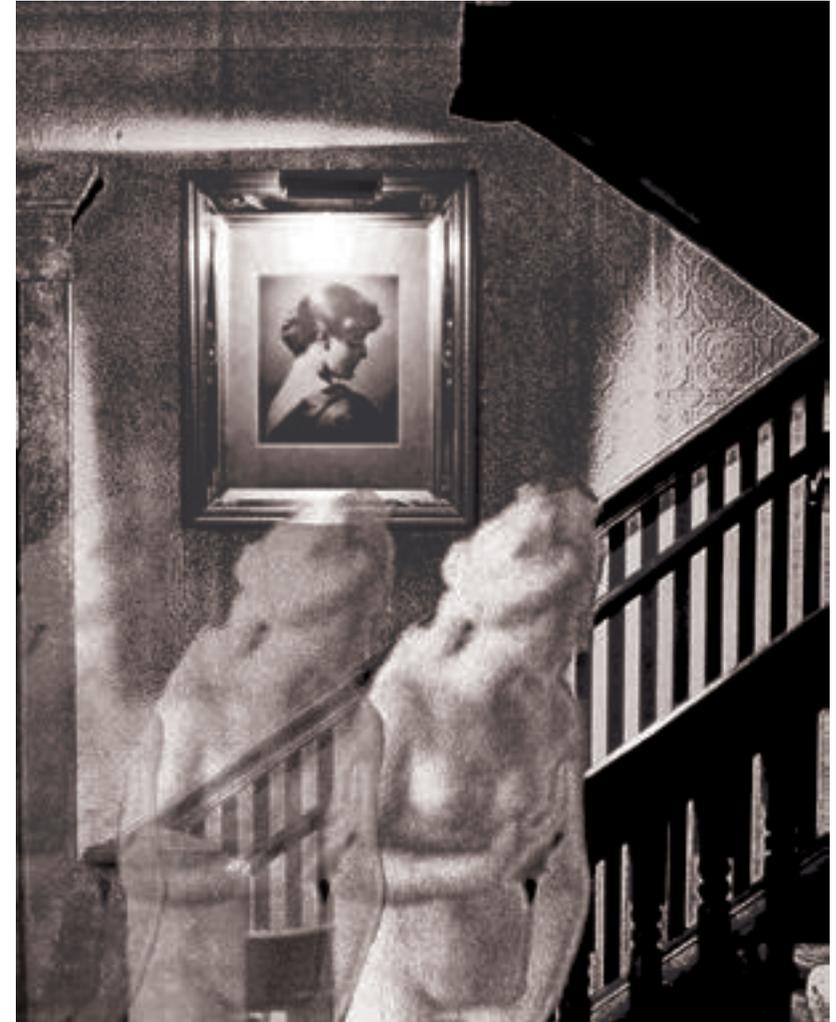
like a wingtip dipped in water.

—Chuck Blair '76

Whatever, Whichever

On the day of Paul and John in June, is how the story goes.
Children or rats, led away to drown. Some say the piper was
death;
some say pestilence, pedophilia, war, emigration.
But either way, and whichever end,
there is a street in Hamelin, still, where no voices sing
but the dead chatter.
Some record reads, "It has been 10 years since our children
left."
Some scholars say that the children were sold for profit when
Hamelin
was hard up for cash.
Some fairytalers write of a deaf one and a lame one left
behind,
rats scurrying about the streets,
bodies not tradable or exchangeable for money, sex,
crusades.
Inaudible chords of his pipe, unkeepable steps with his legs.
Was it subjection or resistance? Either way, whatever end,
whichever story, the dead still chatter.

—Amy Falvey



Lora Wegener
Reflection

2012, photography, digital collage, 10 inches x 8 inches

Breaking Bread: Three Movements

First Movement

I go to the place where everything is turned upside down
and/or inside out
and I make walls. I write on them with blue paints, so they
tell me
“Don’t come back, hear?” so they tell me: eat, eat, eat
until I’m full, and then eat more. “Did you save room for
dessert?”
maybe, maybe I should have.

I close my eyes,
don’t know if I’m making words or just
typing letters to the rhythm of the speeding train, rocking
back and forth, a cradle that night we fell through:
the eleven o’clock news murmuring away,
turning words into water, and water into wine,
singing hymns to the sound of the metronome
on the coffee table (sinners). the fourth story.
or the thousandth. it is
never enough.

write, she says: write.
with your eyes closed. with your headphones on. on your
way to the city.
with your hands tied behind your back;
write.
with your dirty hands,
write
the poems that spit and swallow,
fistfight and stab,
kill for the death of war.

I’ve been trying to wrap you like the rhythms of that train,
hold you like a baby in the night. but I think
baby baby, I am not for you. this is not for me. you are wrong again.
I think
poems are coming and coming and coming and
they all keep dying//right in my arms.
I am trying, desperately, to save them.
but always, they **expire**.
I have blood, not ink, dripping from my fingers.

blood: of the whip, on my jeans, in the toilet bowl,
the color of my fingernails; “this is the blood of our Lord
and Savior . . .”

I have never seen so much

running out and down
the door of my fridge;
I am dreaming in red,
or the blue-black
of this story. on the fifth story. or the seventieth.
seventy times seven prescriptions
for penitence///**expiring**.

this circle of body of blood / of nation / of race
of culture / of class / of city / of state / of nuclear bomb
/ of sex of love of death / of circles /
of waiting rooms and hospital beds,
pumping blood, pumping blood,
and overhead the tv’s pumping
stories, framing
colors: amber, gold, and god rush rushing (“it is
never enough”) see . . .

what is this sea of red red black roses?
oh savior, unburden these bodies/of water!
what is this lipstick, the color of the sea?
parting slowly, O P E N W I D E *and just*
eat like horses; no, eat
like pigs . . .

I have never seen so much

blood oozing out from the pages of books
bleeding between lines, sinking down walls,
after dark: don't come back, hear? *to judge the living*
the living and the dead I am
writing blank checks (I am
painting them blue); this is
his body, her body, the blood *given up for*

I have never seen so much.

(*Write, she says, write,*
with your dirty hands/// tied behind your back)
(*Write, she says, write,*
for you are only///what you eat)
write, she says,
for the death of war (it is never
never enough).

and beneath the train, in its swings and jolts,
its tired sighs and its sleeping dreams,
I think I can I think this is
no covenant of love.

Second Movement

see, the words across the dinner table
are on fire.
but you've heard the story, this story
before. you know how it goes. you know where it ends.
you know where the middle turns up and out.
"You know where to go
when things die."
and at the fork's unrest, and the violin's cry
(you've heard this story *this story* before)
she's praying on books
without pages or names
she knows all the lies///of the savior (in her sleep)
of the bile and the milk, and the orange sky ceases
to tell him the name of tomorrow.
"Tomorrow," she says,
"will have eaten its full."

"This is our country, my country"
he says he knows where a nation
goes when it dies.
"These orange skies are mine" he says
and the amber waves and weaves the lies
of skin too dark/or hair
/too dark/of love/
too dark for his
"taste" of heaven:
the mouth that waters, the mouth that reeks and eats the
lies
of honey, milk, and bile.

time cards and punch lines, phantoms and ticker-tape

:they know where they're going; they know
where and how they're going to get there;
they are marching, marching.
left. right. left.

but she, *she sees them*,
the red wine chords in this *this* room
stretching their cadence across infinite atoms
that are making hymns he could never hear
and strings them through her fingers:

///a web of sound///where he is deaf.

names/psalms/hallelujahs in the dark
date/place/time *time*
when are you coming, coming back home?
mad hatters humming down halls
of names and psalms//running out faster
than the veiled orange and undulating sky
where he pleads and pleading
give me more, and more to crave
the fork's unrest (slow, and slowing)
but she *she dreams*
that the violin's drinking that it heaves and sighs
and sinks its teeth and retches
bile.

Third Movement

she's got somebody, or something, for every
missing thing: someone to mend the potholes,
and something to paint the void cherry red;
it's as common as puddles and as ambivalent as rain,

you crazy fools *she thinks* in the silver//of the cake plate.
zippersbuttonslacesglue
scotchtapeducttapeelectrictape **fire.**
we're keeping things together now its
alice *through looking*; the places are set, there are
tea cups to break,
and there is alchemy spilling all over the tablecloth

this is: the piercing relent of the clock, it is:
the book without binding that is underneath the sternum
and the names without faces and the arms without legs
and the ears without arms and the hands without hearts.
so many rabbit holes,
common as puddles.

–Amy Falvey '05

Yellow-Breasted Robin

it was summer,
and Deb and I sat
on the back porch
drinking beers, debating
what new kind of bird
we'd spotted in the crab-apple tree.

Mom was not home
so we couldn't ask,
both of us claiming
the bird was new.

it danced or fought
with a cousin
up into the white of the sky,
singing, singing
or screaming, screaming.

I'd seen it flying
as my bike lay
on the grass
next to the old high school track,
front wheel still spinning.

I stalled and watched,
not really afraid,
the perfect water
from the spigot
blessing and cursing
my hands and feet.

—Sarah Wurst '11

Backyard Warrior

Iocaste stood in the doorway with an ice-cream bucket full of toads, her mud-smearred brow heavy with contemplation. She bit her lips, tapped her fingers on the bucket and waited for her grandmother to finish kitchen-bustling and listen to her inquiry.

She couldn't wait any longer. "Grandma!"

Molly had been doing about seven things at once, as was her habit in the kitchen. She hummed an old bluegrass tune, tapped out the beat with a wooden spoon on her leg, stirred potatoes and chopped orange peppers. At the piping of the small voice, Molly started, made a rabbit-like movement and then allowed her attention to fall on the small, silhouetted figure of her youngest granddaughter in the doorway.

"Grandma," the figure said, "Winston and Theodore need a home where they will be safe from the toad hunters who are trying to harvest their skin to use as poison in their darts."

Molly's gaze fell on the bucket and the nebulous shadowed forms that hopped inside. Then Molly looked over Iocaste's shoulder at her other granddaughter, Amelia, who remained in the yard. This one was decked out in some sort of war paint and was ravaging around the yard throwing a pointy stick at trees and bushes. Molly hoped the marks that were now smeared on her granddaughter's cheeks were water-soluble and remembered the horrible instance when the girls had gotten into some old house-paint and smeared it all over themselves, claiming they had found "blue sunscreen." It seemed that someone had been reading up on poison dart frogs and their indigenous uses. As usual, some details had been skewed, as Amelia was now using a stick instead of blow darts and sought common toads instead of vibrantly colored tree frogs. Molly couldn't say that she was sad for these incongruities, picturing blow darts being accidentally sucked in and wedged into small windpipes.

Iocaste's concern was growing more acute. Her

chestnut eyes were beginning to swell and she let out a small squeak. Molly wiped her hands on her apron and looked in the bucket. Winston and Theodore were the toads that lived under the back porch. Iocaste had taken it upon herself to care for the two, collecting the flies out of the house's windowsills and sticking them to a leaf of lettuce with drops of honey and leaving it out for them. This was probably the most well-fed and spoiled pair of amphibians in the mountains. The fattened couple commonly visited Molly while she had her morning coffee on the porch. She marveled at the way they could hop their giant toad bodies up the wooden, dew-damp steps. Molly didn't particularly fancy losing the fist-sized companions to the warrior in the yard who now hung from a tree branch by her knees, scanning the grass for movement.

"Looks like it's a good thing you caught them," Molly said. "Now what exactly is your plan?"

Iocaste spoke quickly, as if to get the questionable suggestion out of her mouth before she could think about her grandmother's reaction to the words. "I was hoping, since the outdoors is no longer a safe places"—a fierce war cry punctuated the silence of the backyard—"that they could live in the house for a while!" Iocaste ended her sentence in a panicked pitch. As if sensing their protector's anxiety, Theodore and Winston thumped around more rapidly in the bottom of the bucket.

Molly hesitated, considering the state of her home. This was a house filled with floorboards that were accustomed to muddy footprints, spilled houseplant soil, and all matter of other messes, accidental or planned. That being said, Molly feared that allowing toads to live in her bathtub or in some toad pen for the time being was a slippery slope. Insects in jars were one thing. Those could sit contained on nightstands and be easily released. Toads were a different story, especially those with the muscle mass of Theodore and Winston. Let toads in the house, Molly

thought, and the next thing I know I'll be a zookeeper. We might as well live outside. No, there had to be another option. The hunting grounds had to be moved.

"Amelia!" The distant cry was familiar to the young Incan warrior, but was from a less interesting place in her life. Currently she was on her hands and knees under a chokecherry bush. She dug her fingertips into the myrtle and pressed into the soil beneath the lush vines. She brought her hand back up and examined her fingernails with disappointment; this soil was desert-dry. Because of her research, Amelia knew that her quarry liked to keep near moist areas. Her best bet was probably to go down the creek, but she was reluctant to leave the yard, as she had seen hopping things in the grass on many occasions when she was not searching for them. She did not know what exactly she was going to do with the creature once she caught one, though she knew that real Incan warriors used the skin of frogs to poison their darts. Amelia hoped that she would only need to prick the skin with her pointed stick to procure some poison. Once, she had accidentally stepped on a baby toad. The memory of the carnage that greeted her when she had lifted her bare foot made her nostrils flare. No, she would not be skewering any animals today; she just wanted to test her new knowledge. Amelia had sat on the front sidewalk all morning scraping her stick on one end until it was worn down to a point. While she was a veteran at this not very laborious process, it did take some patience. Amelia liked to sing songs to accompany the scraping. Today the tune that escaped her followed the tales of a great warrior who protected her village with the help of the elusive poison dart frog.

These frogs looked like drops of sunshine to Amelia when she had first seen a picture of one in the book in her grandfather's old library. In his lifetime, her grandfather had collected a marvelous array of books, and Amelia loved

to spend time among them. Amelia's favorite smell in the world was the scent of the books' dusty old pages. She would close her eyes and imagine sitting at her grandfather's feet as he read her stories in his composed and indulgent voice. He used to tousle her short sandy hair when she laughed or asked a good question. Sometimes, now, when she sat in the old worn Victorian chair, she still could hear that calm voice, pointing her to different sections of the library. It had been like that the night before when she had discovered poison dart frogs.

Amelia had retreated to the basement, content and groggy from a dinner that comprised mostly of sweet snapping peas in the pod and canary-colored corn. (Both of the girls' habits of skipping over main courses and eating primarily vegetables and sourdough bread increasingly vexed their grandmother. But to Iocaste and Amelia it was second nature to savor the tomatoes and cucumbers, taking luxurious bites of the vegetables that were sometimes sprinkled with sugar, but were more often eaten plain.) Once in the library, Amelia had stretched out in her grandfather's chair with her mother's worn copy of *Watership Down*. She was anticipating the adventure reminiscent of the garden that had supplied her supper, when she reached up to dim the citrus-colored lamp, whose light rested on the old pages and dusted rose upholstery. In doing so, another book on the shelf caught her eye. She walked over, tenderly removed it from the shelf, and discovered the pictures that sent her on a journey of building excitement.

The bedtime summons filtered into Amelia's consciousness and she made her way up the stairs, book in tow. Amelia placed the book under her pillow and let her head drop on top of it. After Molly had shut off the light, Iocaste asked if the book had been lonely in the library and if it had wanted to sleep with Amelia for the night. Amelia looked at the twinkling chocolate eyes of her sister

and indulged her with the stories of all she had learned. Did Iocaste know that the more colorful a frog, the more poisonous it was? Or that other frogs sometimes evolved to have color in order to look more poisonous? Amelia's whispers lulled her sister to sleep, and Amelia was left listening to the night noises: her buzzing, sleeping sister, the crickets in the woodwork and the whirring ceiling fan. This soundtrack set the images of her new alternate identity as an Incan warrior swirling and melding in her head until she joined her sister in dreamland.

Aerodynamically, it never should have worked.

Driven by the notes of her hummed Incan warrior ballad, Amelia climbed to the highest tree in the yard in order to get a better view of the grassy habitat of her prey. Finally seeing what must have been perhaps a cousin of Theodore and Winston, she had let go of the branch and hurled herself towards the hopping adversary, pointy stick held before her. She imagined herself to be some sort of flying squirrel hybrid, jetting through the air with the savage poise of a warrior. Problem was, she did not have the flaps of skin connecting her wrists to her ankles as a flying squirrel did and severely misjudged how far the air could take her. Luckily or unluckily, the toad sensed that it was under attack and started to frantically scuttle-jump about. But due to the underdeveloped escape skills of the backyard toad, it hopped in the wrong direction, straight into the looming shadow of the falling warrior overhead. Forgetting the mortality of the toad and herself in the thrill of the moment, Amelia took her stick in both hands and aimed directly for the confused hopper. Then she felt the hot contact of her body hitting the hard, dry ground. The Incan warrior was no more. Instead Amelia was reduced to a bruised and gasping ten-year-old girl who, at the moment, was having trouble focusing on the two people rushing towards her from the house.

Molly and Iocaste had a premium view of Amelia's desperate leap from their spot on the back porch. Molly had watched her granddaughters climb many trees and held a lot of faith in their ability not to fall. Thus she was not too concerned as Amelia had taken stance at the end of the flimsy branch. She knew her oldest granddaughter well enough, however, to know when she was about to let go. She watched the tiny ribcage expand, and before Molly could shout out a warning, a blur of war paint and skin was dropping through the air. The whole thing happened so fast. One minute, the agile body clung safely to the branch; the next she was lying in a crumpled heap on the ground. Iocaste took off at a speed Molly had rarely seen her reach, and Molly lifted up her apron and followed. The ice-cream bucket was dropped and Winston and Theodore gratefully made their escape.

As soon as they saw that Amelia's eyes were open and moving about, Iocaste and Molly were able to survey the damage with some composure. Amelia had broken her fall with her feet and crashed onto her stomach. Her head was turned toward the porch and her arms and legs sprawled like a crushed spider. Molly clutched her apron and kneeled down in the grass. Iocaste leaned down to talk to her fallen sister.

"Can you move?" Iocaste asked.

"Maybe." The ghost of hysteria lingered behind Amelia's eyes. "I can't breathe."

"You fell hard," Molly said. "You probably knocked the wind out of yourself."

"I'll help you!" offered Iocaste, and she began to lift Amelia's shoulders.

Amelia protested, "Give me a minute, will ya?"

"Where does it hurt?" Molly asked the question like a broken record player.

"Everywhere!" Amelia complained, some of the normal vigor entering into her voice.

"I'll get you a band-aid," Iocaste volunteered.

"No!" Amelia, unlike other kids, deplored band-aids. They were a sign that she had accepted defeat, an undeniable sign of injury, failure and pain.

Molly couldn't help smiling at the spirit. "Well, then you better get up. Good thing you're tough."

Amelia made a great show of peeling herself off the ground. She was a champion of the dramatic injury balancing act, with a keen awareness of the fine line that lay between being hurt enough to earn extra strawberry ice cream and being so wounded that Molly wouldn't allow her to play outside. Unfortunately, this time in the middle of her theatrical grimaces and wincing, Amelia met with actual pain.

Amelia yelled as her left ankle gave out. Then the tears came. All the excitement and terror culminated in one overwhelmingly painful ankle. Bugger, she thought. The worst punishment was always sustaining an authentic injury. This meant that she faced a couple of days of sitting inside and being taunted by the sunshine. Iocaste, not used to seeing such displays of emotion from Amelia, became worried and started to cry, too. Molly looked at her granddaughters covered respectively in paint and mud and sitting in the yard with tears running down their faces. They were endearing even in their worst moments.

"Let me see it," Molly said as she reached over to Amelia's ankle. "It's already swelling. Just a sprain. You're going to be fine."

Amelia's already-splashing bucket of emotion overflowed as relief was dropped into it. She cried even harder. Iocaste flung her head into Amelia's neck in an uproar of her own respite, free of the fear for her toads and for her sister.

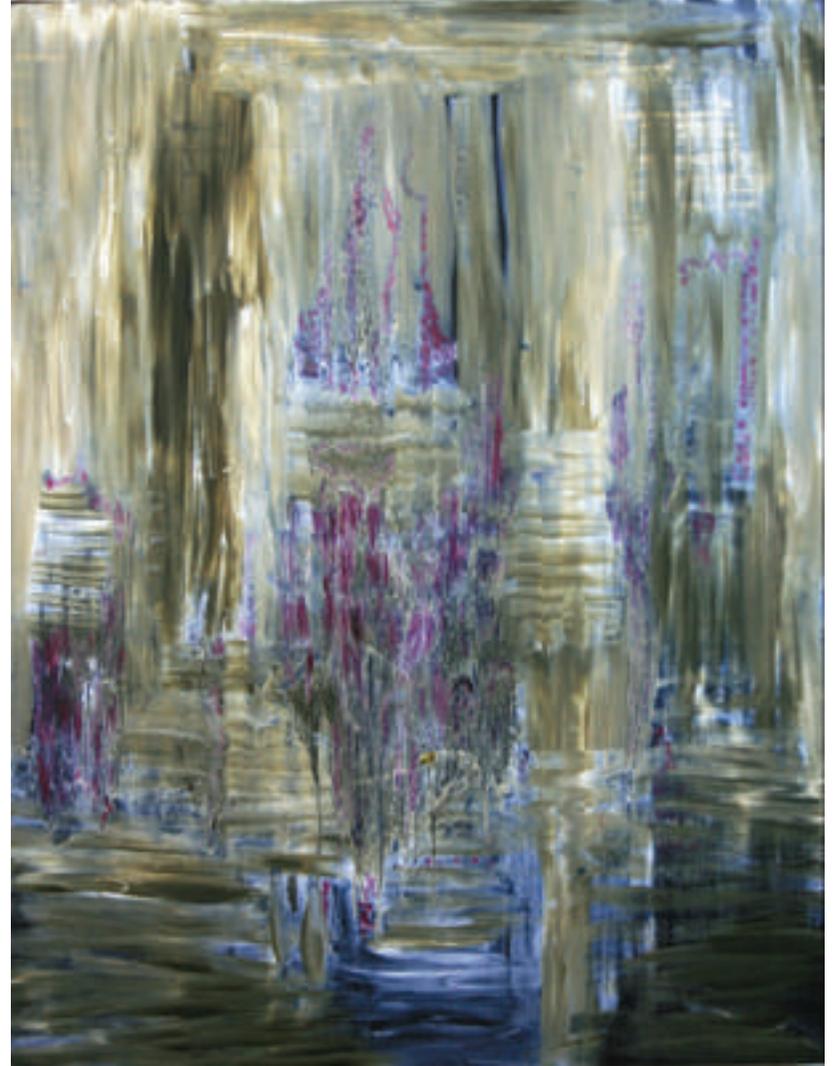
"Girls," Molly amicably pleaded. "You're both okay. Amelia, can you stand on one leg so we can get you hopping to the house?"

Amelia took a giant, soupy inhalation. Iocaste wiped her dripping nose on Amelia's sleeve, leaving a trail of paint, mud, tears and snot. Iocaste giggled. Then Molly giggled. Amelia scowled. Then Iocaste screamed. Amelia and Molly looked at her with alarm and followed the direction of her panic-stricken eyes. Then the two of them joined in the scream. Amelia's stick had perfectly punjied the toad. Lying in the grass not a foot away from them was the gruesome sight. The toad's eyes were still bulging from his last moments of acute fear. Iocaste, Amelia and Molly all screamed for a while longer. Then, as if subconsciously coming to a consensus, Iocaste helped Amelia stand up. Molly delicately picked up the non-toad-drenched end of the stick, and they all hobbled down to the creek where Molly unceremoniously chucked the shish-kebabbed toad into the current. As soon as they lost sight of the corpse, they all allowed themselves to be overtaken by shivers of revulsion. Molly bent over, clutched her hands between her knees in her apron and let out the longest Ewwwww sound the girls had ever heard. Amelia, still leaning on Iocaste, was emitting sounds like a struggling motorbike, and Iocaste let out small yelps every time she exhaled. Soon they all erupted into disgusted peals of laughter.

Later, after Amelia's ankle had been wrapped and the three of them were sitting safely in the living room, Molly implemented strict rules regarding no forms of weaponry or violence being allowed at playtime. Animals like Theodore and Winston should not have to live in fear in their own home. Both Amelia and Iocaste were concerned about what happened to the murdered toad. Molly assured them that a burial at sea was respectful and often utilized by pirates and sea merchants for deceased heroes of the water. Amelia piped up that amphibians were creatures of the water, so that was perfect for the toad. Iocaste extended a tiny concern about her sister being a killer. They conferred about how Amelia could make it up to the toad kingdom

for killing one of its treasured members. In the end, it was decided that Amelia would assist Iocaste in the care of Winston and Theodore and with any other toads that she came across. The crew had been healed and a peaceable kingdom implemented. And there was no dissent from even the paintiest of the troops.

–Sarah Wurst '11



Chris Bain '09
Living Reflection

2011, oil on panel, 48 inches x 37 inches



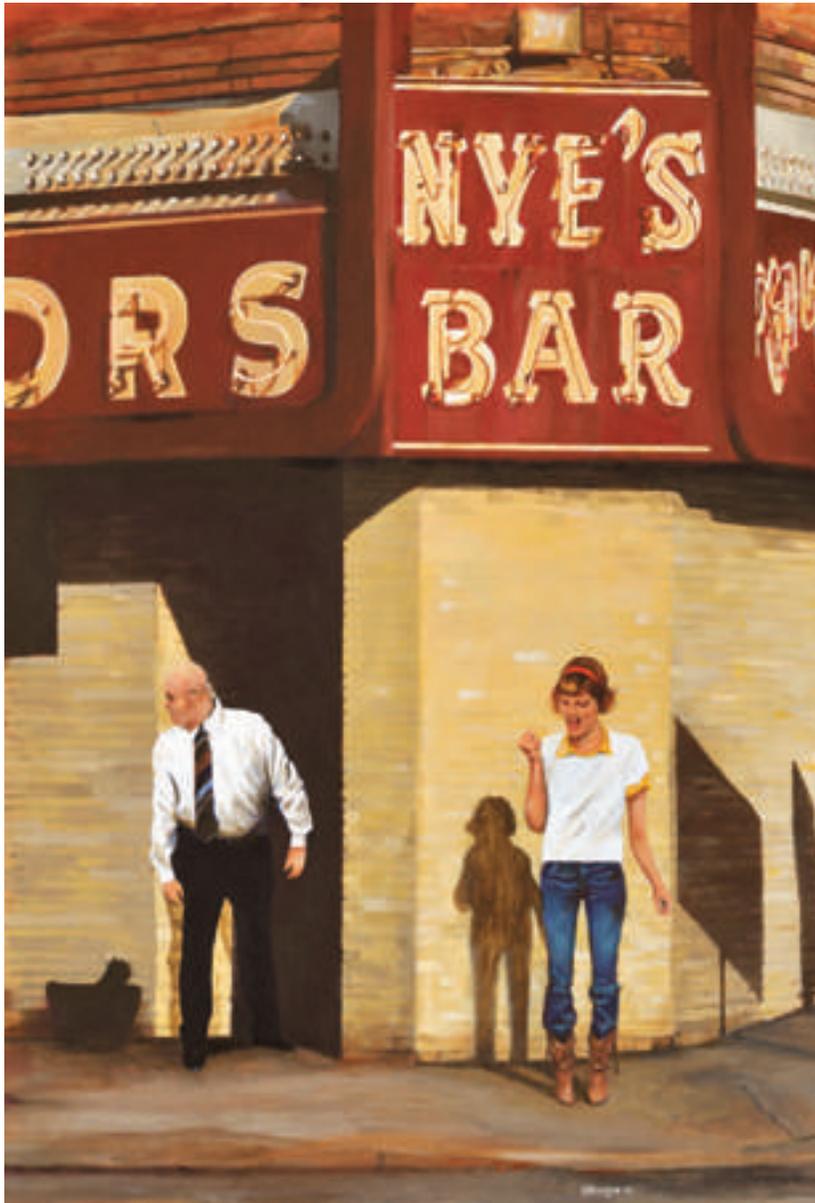
Grant Legan '10
Beautiful Isolation

2011, digital photography



Grant Legan '10
Peoplescape 2

2009, digital photography



Steve Berger '78
What Just Happened in There?

2011, acrylic on canvas, 30 inches x 24 inches



Kevin Cartwright
Refuge

2010, digital collage, 11 inches x 8.5 inches



Leslie Bell '72
Sisters; Twisters

2011, oil on canvas, 36 inches x 30 inches



Kristin Quinn
Night Caravan

2012, oil on canvas, 48 inches x 36 inches



Steve Andresen
Movement 1

2011, oil on canvas, 36 inches x 48 inches



Steve Andresen
Movement 2

2011, oil on canvas, 36 inches x 48 inches



Adrianna Corby
Cusco

2011, oil on canvas, 36 inches x 48 inches



Adrianna Corby
Montañita

2011, oil on canvas, 36 inches x 48 inches



BLACK WATER HORIZON

Signature and date



Southern trees bear
a strange fruit,
Blood on the leaves
& Blood at the
root, Black body
swinging in the
Southern breeze,
Strange fruit
hanging from
the poplar
trees



Angela Wilson
Satori Studies . . . 2 Horsemen

2012, gouache, graphite on paper, 11.5 inches x 8.5 inches



Angela Wilson
Satori Studies . . . Boys with Guns (Afghanistan)

2012, gouache, graphite on paper, 12 inches x 9 inches



Zachary Cleve '10
Moulder

2011, oil on canvas, 48 inches x 60 inches



Carli Shieferdecker
Full Bloom

2011, oil on canvas, 18 inches x 24 inches



Left: Sarah Wurst '11
Catch the Moon

2011, oil on linen, 5 feet x 2 feet

Right: Sarah Wurst '11
Kites

2011, oil on linen, 5 feet x 2 feet

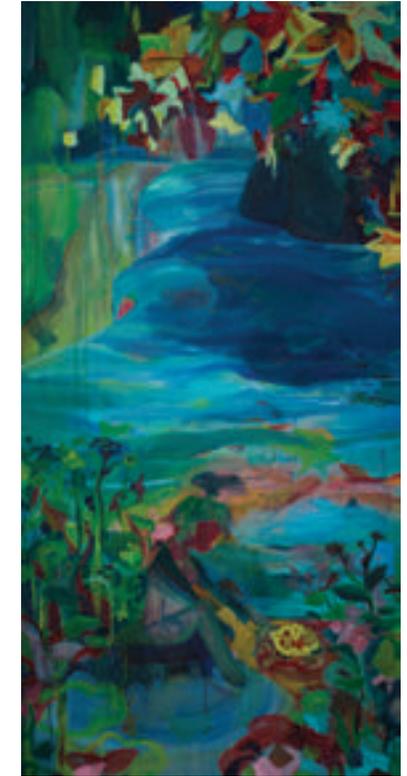


Left: Sarah Wurst '11
Mushrooms

2011, oil on linen, 5 feet x 2 feet

Right: Sarah Wurst '11
Turtle Falls

2011, oil on linen, 5 feet x 2 feet





Leah Richter
The Sling

2012, mixed media on canvas, 4.5 feet x 3 feet



Leah Richter
Blue Nude

2011, acrylic on canvas, 4.5 feet x 4.5 feet

Text: "all of them, from the softest talc to the most impenetrable diamond, are breaking open with loud sighs that astonish no one more than themselves as they begin to drink from the inside out, guzzling supercharged, supersaturating blue straight from their split heartcores. You know those kinds of sighs that smolder with all the other exhalations seeping blue through the world's every chink, crack, fracture, perforation, any place where the edges don't come together anymore, the ripped meridian, the ruptured vein, exactly the kind of landscape you'll need to visit if you want to drink from the headwaters"

From *Another Poem on Blue*
– Claire Bateman



Kalli McCleary
To Alexander McQueen

2011, watercolor and ink, 20 inches x 16 inches



“My family tree in Arabic, with the names of all the first-born men, ending with mine.”

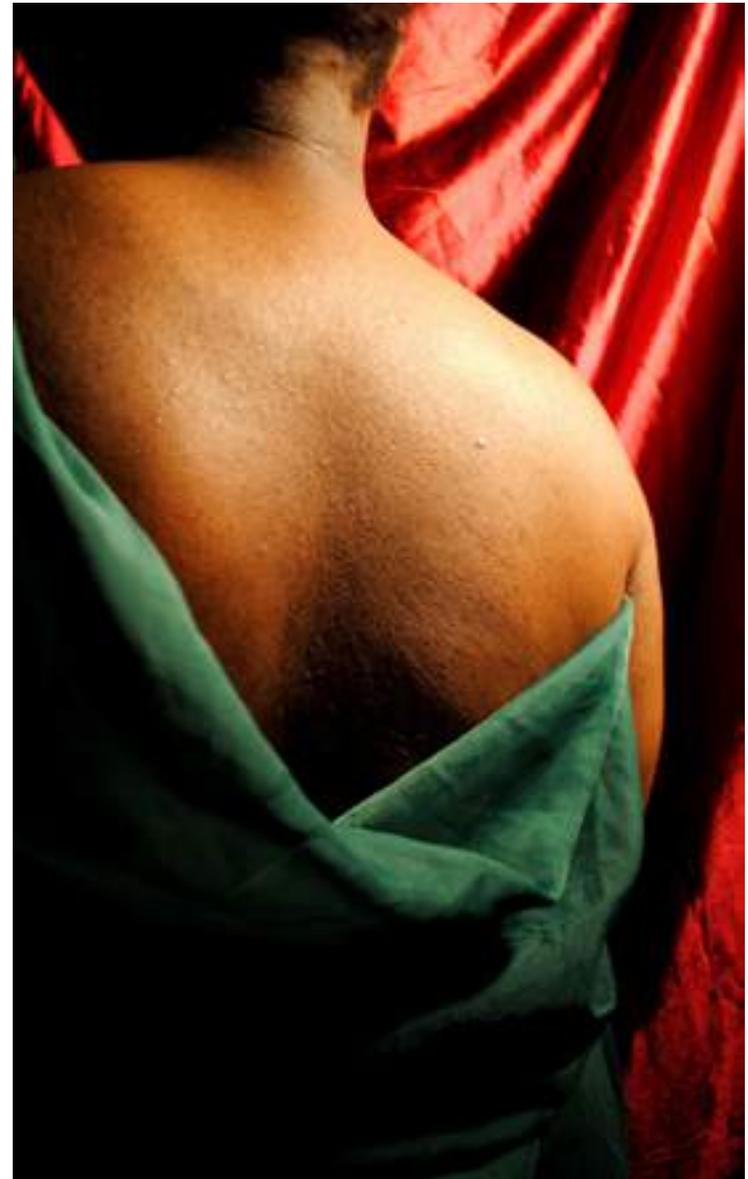
Munir Sayegh '11
Realized Obligation

2011, indian ink on drywall, 8 feet x 4 feet



Carl Herzig
Orange Sadhu

2011, digital photography



Kyla Hadenfeldt
Chilled Skin

2010, digital photography



Katie Kiley '74
Robert, Samurai Dancer

2009, graphite on polypropylene, 20 inches x 24 inches

My Best Friend

Came for a visit today.
Her husband dropped her off.
He said he hoped I wouldn't mind—
He wouldn't be gone long.
I stopped shuffling through
Our favorite CDs,
Songs we'd belted out
And danced to
Until even the chairs mimicked us
Bouncing around the room,
And told him we'd have fun.
My best friend sat
In a brown swivel chair
With her back to me
So she could see the garden, the river,
The sun kissing treetops,
Where she wouldn't have to answer questions
Or search for words
That had slipped away.
I turned up the volume
And started to sing,
But her face was stony.
Her giggle was gone.
Maybe she'd used it up in the early years
When we were always together,
Always dancing, always laughing, always singing.
My best friend came for a visit today.
She stayed for several hours
But was never here.

—Eda Hoffman '81

Rag Doll

You were made for him, no doubt.
Just a trifle with limbs,
Slight hips and a fragile wrist

Clasped in a coarse fist.
There is no pardon for his penance.
You were never poor in words,

Yet you kept his secret sutured
Like a good, dear girl.
With a pull of a string,

You wear that pretty, knitted grin.
And you're paid handsomely with smiles.
No child of that mother

Or a rib from the other;
Dutiful pupil,
You didn't know you were manmade.

—*Carrie Chesney*

A Keepsake

He has made a muck of it—
Quite enough for two.
No need to toil against

The bitterness of his seed;
Just a scrap of her will do.
Under the collapse of his weight

She is waist deep—has sunken in,
Wading in the snarl of his cattails.
He dug his ditch, and she will lie

In the swath of the pant and strain
And all that is muted and brown.
Oh, she hated the strain—

And then the slump on the corner of a bed
That is her. She would banish it all,
This new muddied self.

She will bury it—
A despoiled keepsake,
This walking ghost of herself.

Outside, a shade too light and airy,
She is nothing to be believed,
Except for that unspeakable mouth.

—*Carrie Chesney*

En Tijuana

Dedicado a Lalo, un ángel de la salvación

Smuggled Marlboros
Mexican gum for sale: all colors
The shoeless babies pick my ten-dollar bill
Out of my dirty pocket
I drink so much I kind of enjoy the theft
And laugh as they run away
“Richer but not rich,” I say
Richer but not rich
On the streets of Tijuana

Putrid green room: a dark door between buildings
Of the hushed barrio
A singing voice from a yellow window
Shadows layered
Los Mexicanos buy and sell the night away
Laughing but secretly praying for something
Which they don’t yet know to need
They fall out in their disguises
Falling into the streets of Tijuana

Painted women every foot standing like an infantry
Hiding from La Avenida Revolución
Strong backs against the wall
For any man – every man – on the street
Their vinyl spikes are tall; they shine bright
Brighter than the eyes God gave them
I pass by; they glare at me, my freedom
They spill themselves out with cold eyes
Spilling skin onto the streets of Tijuana

A humble man holds his nose
While blood gushes from his face; his pesos are gone
American man old enough to be my father
Crosses to ask me for drugs
Maybe more he inquires as he wants to go back to San Diego
With memories of salad days: green and cold
But I tell him my memories are my own
So he hustles away towards a different light
With intention on the streets of Tijuana

Blinding sun in the morning
Teasing amazing color through the dirty walls
I am struck deaf now: leftover music
From the night before
I crack an eye and mumble hola to my landlady Lorena
She smiles but suspects I don’t have rent for the week
And maybe I don’t but I’m not hungry for a fight
So I run into the morning sun to get two tamales con
horchata
Food without money on the streets of Tijuana

A family finds me and a grandmother brings me into the
hills
I bathe in her bucket heated with a horseshoe
And she keeps me well in her attic; pero me enferma
Though the sickness feeds my heart again
Her son watches over me at night and carries me to the
outhouse
Feeds me water and juice, dries away tears and sweat
He carries me down a mountain and cradles me to a doctor
Tends me like a newborn
Infant in his arms on the streets of Tijuana

He brings me back to life and I see the world again
We eat apples with chilies and talk about our lives
High above soar neon crosses over a dead man on the street
The son takes me there and crosses himself
Inside there are voices
But they don't come from the people who pray for their
streets
They come from the walls; they come from the arches above
He holds my hand; he tells me I am loved
And there I am saved
I am saved on the streets of Tijuana

–Holly Norton

**Falling in Love While Dancing:
A Slow Run-On Sentence**

Getz and Evans on your record player while you stand in
the room and there it is, you and me, we, only the air that
moves me to you while your wrist bends hand and fingers
around my lower back, my arm goes up, your arm goes up
and we are dancing, though I question if it's really dancing
or just a break in time and space where we've seen each
other, found each other, caught each other, and maybe now
know of each other in a world without words because we
shift and glide like we are the fingers across keys of the music
that guides us on a turntable that I hope remains forever in
motion; we rock together, my feet between your feet, your
stomach against mine, and maybe if we're so inclined my
cheek against your cheek, but for now I am lulled and pulled
into the way you look at me and the way I feel when I look at
you while I flush with a color I've never been, in a moment
of a love story I've never written nor played but it is now a
role into which I've suddenly been cast and on the sheets of
paper I will be named as "The Woman in Your Arms" no
more than that and never less, just as a heart is never more
and never less than a beat away from life or death.

–Holly Norton

The Rise of Atlas

Titan, stand on the western edge
Strain at the bosom of your Gaia
The carnal burgeon aching for celestial embrace
Here engage the paramount of your eternal caveat:
Collapse and a vernal deity grips your fate

Callouses upon balls of your split and powerful feet
Forged upon each to form mountains
An unforgiving rock firm at abused heels
In great heat this buxom beauty lay beneath
Watching you labor, the sky superior as your penance

Wearily in heart and in vain,
Break to your tender knees Atlas, man of two worlds
Careful to keep separate past from your future
Tasked with quiet endurance -
Endure

But oh, dear Titan, tender care to receive
Education in your own strength
While the weight of countless galaxies
Slips on two strapped strained shoulders

For after defeat you will not know a fiber
From within each beating arm
That does not equal in strength
The desire
For your victory

So amend yourself, oppose with daggers for eyes
Return fixed: abiding as you were
Raise, Hoist, thus Aspire!
Rise up!
To lift the blue

—Holly Norton

Filter

The memory of the manmade thunder
Rings within my ears.
The smell of sulfur
Lingers.

I am led through a field
Of comrades and friends,
Their dust-covered faces
Withered and worn.

Then there's the screaming.

Men screaming for life
Or death
Or stillness.

They sit.

They stare.

A glossy filter covers and dulls
The color in their eyes.
They are photographers,
Filtering out
The subject they shoot.
It's too intense.

—Kyla Hadenfelt

《静夜思》

Tranquil Night Thoughts

床前明月光

疑是地上霜

举头望明月

低头思故乡

—李白 *Li Bai (8th century)*

静

夜

思

quiet/tranquil

night

thought/ponder/meditation

床

前

明

月

光

bed

front

bright

moon

light

疑

是

地上

霜

suspect

is

ground

frost

举

头

望

明

月

raise

head

look

bright

moon

低

头

思

故乡

lower

head

think/miss

hometown/birthplace

Tranquil Night Thoughts

Bright moonlight shines beside the bed
Could it be frost on the ground?
Head up, I look into the bright moon;
Head down, I dip into the homesick mood

—*Liu Xueyan, translation*

Abed, light falls before me.
Doubting frost formed on the ground,
My head rises to the bright moon
But falls to thoughts of home.

—*Zach Honert, translation*

Moonlight lying before my bed
Like white frost on the floor
My eyes finding the light's source
I let my head fall, missing home

—*Maria DeSio, translation*

By my bed, a patch of light,
Frost glistening on my floor?
I lift my eyes, behold the bright moon;
I drop my head, sigh for home.

—*Nancy Hayes, translation*

Karussel

Jardin du Luxembourg

Mit einem Dach und seinem Schatten dreht
sich eine kleine Weile der Bestand
von bunten Pferden, alle aus dem Land,
das lange zögert, eh es untergeht.

Zwar manche sind an Wagen angespannt,
doch alle haben Mut in ihren Mienen;
ein böser roter Löwe geht mit ihnen
und dann und wann ein weißer Elefant.

Sogar ein Hirsch ist da, ganz wie im Wald,
nur dass er einen Sattel trägt und drüber
ein kleines blaues Mädchen aufgeschnallt.

Und auf dem Löwen reitet weiß ein Junge
und hält sich mit der kleinen heißen Hand
dieweil der Löwe Zähne zeigt und Zunge.

Und dann und wann ein weißer Elefant.

Und auf den Pferden kommen sie vorüber,
auch Mädchen, helle, diesem Pferdesprunge
fast schon entwachsen; mitten in dem Schwunge
schauen sie auf, irgendwohin, herüber—

Und dann und wann ein weißer Elefant.

Und das geht hin und eilt sich, dass es endet,
und kreist und dreht sich nur und hat kein Ziel.
Ein Rot, ein Grün, ein Grau vorbeigesendet,
ein kleines kaum begonnenes Profil.
Und manchesmal ein Lächeln, hergewendet,
ein seliges, das blendet und verschwendet
an dieses atemlose blinde Spiel. . .

—Rainer Maria Rilke, 1908

The Carousel

Jardin du Luxembourg

Between a roof and its shadow turns
briefly a miniature stock
of rich horses, all from the land.
Gently they rise, then they fall.

Some are tethered to carriages,
yet all have courage in their eyes.
A fierce red lion joins them.
And now and then a white elephant.

Even a deer appears, like in the woods,
only it carries a saddle and
a small girl in blue on top of it.

On the lion rides a boy in white,
holding on with his tiny hot hand,
the lion showing teeth and tongue.

And now and then a white elephant.

And the horses come past, on top,
girls too, bright, on the leaping horses,
nearly outgrown; in the midst of turns
they look up, anywhere, over—
And now and then a white elephant.

And this goes on, until it ends,
turns and turns without a purpose.
A red, a green, a grey sent by,
a small profile barely begun.
And sometimes a smile is sent out,
a blissful one, that dazzles and decays
in this breathless blind play . . .

—Zach Honert, translation

Beginnings

At that time I would have never called it a gang, but that's what Officer Jack-Off said as he pinned me to the ground by my scalp, forcing my head into the mud. Two inches was all it took. I couldn't breathe; my life flashed before my eyes. I know, not even one paragraph in and I'm full of clichés, but that's the only way I can describe it. My past, my present, flashing right through my eye sockets. While I thrashed around with my epiphany, the cop cuffed my wrists. He was one of those self-righteous types who will go to any length to uphold his gold-plated piece of scrap. He was waiting for backup, talking into his little radio; I had to act. I've been told that anyone can take their hands out of handcuffs as long as they can stand some pain. As the cop lectured me about how I was pissing away my life, how I had so much to live for, I started to tear up. He thought it was his lecture plucking at my heartstrings. I really couldn't give two shits; I was too busy dislocating my thumb to scrape my meat hooks through the cuffs.

My brothers were waiting just past the tree line. When I got my hands free, they stormed the scene like a blitzkrieg. My man Casey carried a duffle bag full of party favors; he pulled a caulk gun out of his bag and filled in the cuffs' keyholes after we cuffed the cop. We called him Casey because he carried a bag and wore a hockey mask, like a character in a cartoon. We all had a big-ass laugh. Casey was fun and a pretty big fuck-up at times, but he was always prepared. Who else would carry a caulk gun. My hands were dripping blood all over; Casey pulled out peroxide and cleaned me up; another brother relocated my thumb. After some fun with the cop we took our skateboards and split. He never really got a look at anyone except me, and I was covered in mud. We finished off the

night drinking at the skate park. All in all, it was a great night.

So now I was the local fucking outlaw. I was paranoid for a few weeks, but it was worth it. In a way it changed my life. I realized that I had to get serious. Most people would have just cleaned up their act. I guess my epiphany had a different effect. I surprised everyone: Satan in a Sunday hat

—Joseph Burrows

Driver-Assist

Ask me in public if I've traveled and I'll tell you I have not; I'll tell you I've been nowhere special. But I've done time driving, doing my duty—Illinois to California, up to Alaska and back. Once or twice a year, I make my way to Anchorage. With my hair shaved and my fingernails cut short, I feel like I'm in a military playground. It was the girl's first time. I could see that she didn't want to be there. Her hair was in a tight ponytail, but she had to wear a hat. She was given a metal file and told to remove her fingerprints. She started crying. I didn't say anything yet.

The pickup was huge, but it felt cramped when we packed it up—two stuffed duffle bags, a first-aid kit, a couple coolers; the only electronics was a disposable cell. The stuffed duffle bags flanked a cooler filled with drinks, and a paper bag with two cartons of cigarettes and snacks. The truck's bed was full of hiking supplies, liquor, beer, bleach, dry goods, and a few gallons of water; under its false bottom were the cash, kilos, and a second set of plates.

She listened to the briefing with a look of terror. She'd told me her name was Katie. I put my hand on her shoulder and told her I would work everything out. She cringed and called me a monster.

I was driving the first shift. When we pulled out of the driveway, she asked my name. When I told her, she just said, "Okay, good." I ripped open the carton of cigarettes and grabbed a pack of menthols. I offered her one, but she said she didn't drink, didn't smoke. We didn't talk again until I'd had a few.

Our cover story was that we were on a camping get-away to Alaska. I told her about past trips and what to expect. After some coaxing, she told me about her life—classic: daddy in jail, mommy working three jobs, kids

and each other. Her big sister got her the job; she sometimes did prep and worked on the farm.

We drove straight through in six-hour shifts and got to Southern California in two days. We stopped at a small vineyard where we had connections with people I didn't really want to meet. I pulled the truck into the barn and told Katie to keep quiet, stay put, and keep the doors locked. She was shaking hard.

My contact, Miguel, came in with a few young guys I didn't know. I'd worked with him on previous jobs. I didn't want to stay long, so I helped unbolt the false bottom and removed a backpack filled with cash. I handed it to Miguel and told him I needed to talk. As his boys started wiping prints from the truck, we took a walk. Miguel wasn't legal. His fiancée had just died, and his sister had been deported. I gave him a phone number and told him that if he could get her back across and up to the vineyard, I would send for her and she could stay at the farm. It was more of a political move than anything else. Miguel was the leader of his small group and I was in charge of mine. He was already sending people every month to work at the farm. Consolidate and expand.

When I got back to the truck, Katie asked if we could leave. When you're carrying, it's hard to relax. I had her drive, keeping just under the limit, and smoked pretty much continuously all the way to Canada. Customs was nerve wracking, but the guard waved us through after chatting up Katie.

At the Alaskan border we were told that our truck was being chosen randomly for a search, but they just checked our luggage and poked through the ashtray and glove compartment. They didn't even mention the liquor.

just to feel a little more human. I asked the bartender, an old-timer with loose grey skin, if they had any food. A few minutes later, a fry cook came out with a roast beef sandwich and some cold fried chicken. I pulled out my wallet and ordered a six-pack to go. He didn't blink when instead of an I.D. I slapped a fifty on the counter.

I drove to a rest stop, where Katie and I split the sandwich and the beer. She called me a bad influence and took a cigarette. I sat with my back to the picnic table, facing away from the truck, into the woods, feeling shitty about myself. I was sorry about Katie.

I didn't hear her, but she came up behind me and hugged me in that girl's sideways way—one arm over my shoulder, the other around my side. Her hands were warm, and it felt nice. We just sat there for a few minutes looking off into the woods, Katie holding me while I drank. I felt her lips on my neck, and then she said we needed sleep. She pushed me up into the passenger seat, and before I knew it I passed out.

I woke up to Katie driving and smoking. The mountain views were incredible; it was starting to feel almost like a vacation. It felt like I'd known Katie forever. But I didn't want to think that way.

Finding drugs in the Lower Forty-eight is usually pretty easy, but in Alaska everyone is dry and a kilo can go for almost quadruple the going rate in Chicago or New York, way over my cost. I pulled into a garage outside Anchorage. My contact started unbolting the truck's false bottom almost before we got out. He pulled out the drugs, loaded five backpacks of cash into the hidden compartment, and switched our plates, and we were gone.

The drive back down was uneventful. I still had an

drove. Back in the States, we were ahead of schedule and I wanted to spend some time with Katie before going back, so I stopped at a campsite I knew in a forest north of Seattle. I pulled out the tent and bags and set up camp while Katie gathered some wood and lit a fire. We'd be away from the truck, unprotected, so I unbolted a compartment behind the back seat and took out the Glock and an extra clip. Katie filled a cooler with beer. We were both exhausted; it wasn't long before Katie kissed me good night, mumbled something about loving camping, and fell asleep with her head nuzzled under my arm. I drank a few more beers and drifted off.

I awoke to the sound of breaking glass and someone whispering. I reached behind me and grabbed the Glock and two knives. I covered Katie's mouth and nudged her. When she woke up, I put a finger to my lips, motioned outside, and handed her one of the blades. I could just see the silhouettes of two men in the early light. As the figures approached, I aimed the Glock and let off four shots. Then I slashed a hole in the tent and jumped out, but both men were down—anonymous-looking thugs in dark clothing and caps. I told Katie to stay put, scanned our perimeter, and checked their car. Washington plates. Katie was already dressed. I dragged one body to a ditch. I'd shot him in the chest and neck. When I returned, I realized that the second man was almost unconscious but still alive, bleeding from his stomach and right knee. I dragged him to the ditch and dumped him on top of the first body. He just groaned. One of those strong individuals, I guess. I asked him if he wanted to say anything before I killed him. He rasped something, I think in French. I slit his throat.

I called for Katie to double-line a couple garbage bags and collect the glass. I gloved up and went to work on

I emptied their pockets, tucked their handguns into the waistline of my jeans, and used my knife to dig the bullets from their flesh. I threw the bullets, gloves, and knife, sheathed, into the trash, and scoured the site for evidence, mopping up blood with my polo. When Katie was finishing cleaning, I unbolted the truck's false bottom and threw her bag in with mine. A nearby streambed was lined with flat rocks, and we carried the heaviest ones we could lift to the ditch and stacked them on top of the bodies. Every time I dropped one, I could hear the snap of bone. I sprayed the ditch with bleach and surrounded it with logs and thorn bushes. Katie and I washed up in the stream, and I added water to a gallon of bleach in garbage bags and sprayed down the campsite. I drove the Frenchies' car to a lot outside the nearest town, wiped it of prints, and walked back. Then we headed out.

We were supposed to stop by the vineyard to pick up twenty more kilos, but after our encounter, I figured we should get right back. Katie wouldn't let go of my hand. I called the preps and explained everything. They were upset that I couldn't pick up the new shipment but congratulated me all the same. I felt good, and I could see that Katie was starting to get it. I got shit done. I'd stayed calm under pressure and protected us both.

The farm is home. But it's home for a lot of others too, and we knew they'd be pissed. A crowd had collected in front of the house, waiting. We'd broken several commandments, put our work second to our personal interests, not completed the mission, caused unnecessary bloodshed, and put everyone who relied on the farm in danger. I should never have stopped for the night.

A tall, bronzed girl stepped out of a red truck from

A tall, bronzed girl stepped out of a red truck from the fields—the head of farm duty. She'd been in charge of the fields and gardens for two years. She had a few tattoos, and I knew she'd had a child at the farm. It was Shannon, Katie's sister. She tore off her work gloves, marched toward us, threw back her right arm, and slapped me in the face, hard. Then she took a step back, one forward again, and hugged me. I was confused, but I went with it. Then she took Katie in her arms, and one by one everyone embraced us. Shannon brought Katie back to her place, and the truck was wiped down with bleach and driven into the barn to be fully cleaned and re-detailed. I sat down in the dark and drank. The next morning, Katie and I were ready for our tattoos. Mine, on my left arm, read **07-15-2007-DK4**—the date, D for driver, K for kill, and 4 for the number of participants: two drivers and two preps. I held Katie's hand while she got hers: **07-15-2007-DA4**. Driver-assist.

—Joseph Burrows



Steve Andresen
Movements

2011, charcoal, 44 inches x 30 inches

A Trinity of Adams and Eves

Set to “Rodeo: Corral Nocturne & Saturday Night Waltz”
by Aaron Copland

Corral Nocturne 0:00

The sun was just lifting its Atlas shoulder over the buttes to the east. Coffee brewed and eggs rustled. He wondered under his breath where those three sons of his got off to. They’d not been back yet when he’d come in—not unusual these days, but it was most odd that they’d not gotten to their morning tasks. “Daylight’s burnen’,” he heard himself quote John Wayne under his breath, frosted in the chill of the late autumn, wreathing around him like an animate vapor.

When he opened the bunkhouse door it was neither briskly nor stealthily, but casually—innocently, a bit carefully, he haven’ a full cup of steamen’ coffee in his one hand. Worn into his habits like a bug in an apple, he’d forgotten, you see, that it was a school holiday and that he’d promised his three boys what his Scottish father used to call a “lang lie,” since they did not have to get up before dawn to get the chores done before driving the ol’ pick-up the 30 miles into town. He remembered the simpler days, before they got all defiant, when they’d pile into the rickety dust-sheathed school bus that Missy the Schmittie had been driving for 20 years, since her husband died. Before the oldest had decided to move out of the main house to take up residence in the old bunk house, cleaned out and hole-tucked in Spartan simplicity, he being followed in turn by the next two . . . in the autumn that each entered high school. It was, he knew, their subliminal declaration of independence, compelled, like all revolutions, by the sort of adolescent urges that were as much about privacy, awkward embarrassment, and child-like adventure as their hormones.

0:58

Because he'd not made a lot of noise, and because he wasn't expected, he found the situation in an Eden-like state of repose. The door, not having a proper latch, swung open easily, and it wasn't so dark that he couldn't make out the scene: a trinity of Adams and Eves . . . each son in his own section of the cabin, each son zipped up into his own sleeping bag, each son with a pretty blond girl in those same bags. All were conked out in the sleep of the just—shoulders, necks, and tussle-haired heads poking out over the nylon and flannel cocoons.

He still didn't disturb the placidity of the dawn, other than an intake of surprised breath and the stifled urge to bellow out in his characteristically profane hybrid of prayers, poetry, and obscenities (as in something like "Goddamn Mother of The Word Incarnate" in iambic pentameter). Having this illicit exposure to his son's privacy didn't make him feel particularly criminal or obtrusive; all fathers are both and it was nothing to feel guilty about: it is their right as Creator.

The tranquility to which his eyes and mind slowly adjusted was antediluvian. It was like the last traces of a twilight waltz heard from across a still lake. The three pairs of paradisaical quietude were lost in soft breathing dreams that knew no such thing as sin. That this was not the first such experience for any of them was evident, not so much from the fact that they could, apparently, all partake of it in the same room as by the fact that each couple could remain in dormant twinning afterwards.

How had he missed this? Why hadn't he suspected it? Where had the seasons gone?

2:14

There was the youngest boy and, yes, that was that little Porter girl from Lone Tree Ranch with her arms draped across him like cut hay blown by a storm into a fence-line. Why, she is just a kid . . . quick math . . . born the year of the cow-killing blizzard, wasn't she? That makes her . . . 15, no 16. Yes, "Holy Mary Mother of Jesus Fucking Christ!" (Chaucerian rhythm), just a kid. The same age, that is, of Toby, upon whose cheek she is breathing that lotus tonic of futurelessly perfect "now." His head now drooped below her chin where it oughtn't be, but where any man's woulda been, he looked like he'd arrived at a long-sought destination

Toby, whose childhood had been abbreviated without being shortened by his insistence of doing everything the big boys did, from riding a horse too powerful to firing a gun too heavy. He'd lifted buckets and forked hay from the moment he could escape his mother's lasso-like eye. He was, truth be known (and it was, even by the older brothers, who shared the sentiment) the apple of his eye. He was beautiful in his stubborn insistence and ignorance of his limits. If he wasn't in trouble it was because he was asleep, and here he is both at once.

Saturday Night Waltz: 0:00

Swinging his head toward the middle of the room, expertly taking a simultaneous sip from his cooling coffee which, in the back of his mind, signaled that he wasn't going to raise hell about this all just now . . . for one thing, it would be just too dang awkward to have those rustle-headed girls leap bare-butted from those cots . . .

0.35

There was Gregory Luke . . . the middle boy, and

with her back to him in insouciant domesticity, like this was all old hat to her, let's see, isn't that? Yes, he'd never known she had some Japanese letter tattooed on her shoulder blade, but that is sure Lacy, the Porter girl's cousin from town, the one who wrote that letter-to-the-editor about vegetarianism that led to a full-scale inquiry into what in the Blessed Name of the Sacred Bull Shit Heart of Jesus is being taught in that school? She's a year older, he believed, than LG (don't work to say GL) who was, let's see, what was he, sure, 17 to Toby's 16 to the other one's almost 18. LG with his great grandmother's Italian-Jewish dark hair and those penetrating eyes that saw so much and felt it all, like he was the thermostat for God's Creation, like he was nature's avatar, like if it weren't for him keeping all the rumblings and bubblings and torrents and lightening shafts contained in his breast, the earth would not be contained. Since he was born in those turbulent times of his parents' love affair, he'd been the Keeper of the Peace . . . has been ever since. His hands clasped around that waif of a girl as if to contain her and to be contained by her all at once: his lips having just parted from the pierced lobe of an ear as if he'd been telling her the secrets of the stars. As if he'd been singing her a sonnet of fissure and roots; she, in dormancy, immune to his poetry.

2:07

If he loved Toby most, he knew that he owed LG more, for that one bore the cross.

It was hard to pull his head toward the last bunk in the West, to that son-too-much-like-himself, to that one whose forehead, like his own, should rightfully be in permanent bruise like a purple birth-mark for all the head batten' they'd done. He knew that he could get angry at

this one, that it was surely his doen's that conspired to this death of childhood and so cavalierly opened the crack of his own mortality to him in a way that let in too much light. He found himself staring at his own cracked leather curled-toed boots for a long time, his head bowed in front of his recumbent eldest.

2:33

Just as he looked up, a beam of light struck off the windowpane, showering the cots' occupants in a dust-mote-speckled sprig of luminescence. At the same instant that his adjusted eyes began to pick out the details of the portrait in front of him, his heart felt a great and exquisite pain, like the feeling of a thorn being extracted from a foot or hand or scalp, and he knew it well, for it was exactly the same smothering grace he'd experienced when he'd cradled up that baby boy for the first time against his own wildly incapable thumpen' heart and saw that look of pure recognition—it was love and trust and God bless it all, forgiveness.

It was with a start that he realized that he was looking into those same eyes now. Robbie was sitting up just a bit, his broad naked chest pillowing the straw-colored head of the older Porter girl, Joy. The two men looked at each other as if through one another's eyes, which is to say with recognition, admiration, and not just a little amusement. And there was this too—the last smudge of a snuffed-for-eternity ember of confrontation and challenge; each saw that spark blink out forever as if a stitch were removed, as if an ointment of Gilead had smothered the heat of a burn.

Robbie: bossy, clever, impatient, a natural leader who found it hard to take orders. Robbie, who had made changes around this place that took the dust off of shelves

and cobwebs out of the corners . . . he'd imprinted the whole ranch with his skilled influence, and it was better for it. He'd never commented on his son's labors, not more than a gentle nod at the gleam in the newly unruined tractor, not commented when the boy'd moved fences and added gates that made the summer grass last a month longer. Non-comment was approbation, and he supposed Robbie knew that no comment was his only eloquence, as it was non-criticism.

And the two now looked at each other with an elegant No Comment. Noticing his son distractedly twine his fingers around the long strands along that lovely young woman's forehead in an unconscious proprietorship, he caught a lump in his throat: when was the last time he had caressed his own bride's hair like that? Looking back, he saw that his heir had not taken his eyes off him nor changed his expression. He coughed back a swallow of pride and, catching the tinging dawn of a ripening blush on the girl's neck, he stepped back into the doorframe. As he gestured to his watch and signaled "one hour" with a finger that was more like a forward-leaning touch than a pointed jab, the two men nodded at one another in the accord of those who'd finally accepted one another as respected equals.

3:30

His hand found the latch of the door and he kept walking backwards, the two holding one another's gaze as if neither wanted to let go of the other, as if they'd just found one another. The door closed lightly with that click that told that the universe had shifted.

—Fr. Bud Grant '80



