



Event Horizon

Winter 2018 Issue 2



Janelle Schafer

Protect our public lands



Valley of the Gods - Outside the redefined borders of Bears Ears National Monument

[Wikipedia commons](#)

Bears Ears National Monument is a United States National Monument located in southeastern Utah, established by President Barack Obama by presidential proclamation on December 28, 2016. The monument's original size was 1,351,849 acres which was reduced to 201,876 acres by President Donald Trump on December 4, 2017. The monument protects the public land surrounding the Bears Ears—a pair of mesas—and the Indian Creek corridor rock climbing area.

The area within the monument is largely undeveloped and contains a wide array of historic, cultural and natural resources. The monument is co-managed by the Bureau of Land Management and United States Forest Service (through the Manti-La Sal National Forest), along with a coalition of five local Native American tribes; the Navajo Nation, Hopi, Ute Mountain Ute, Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation, and the Pueblo of Zuni, all of which have ancestral ties to the region.

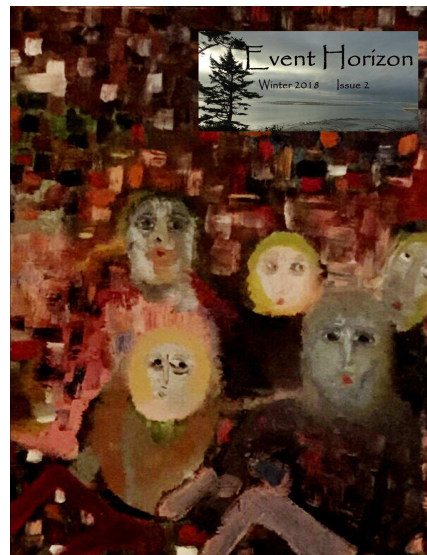
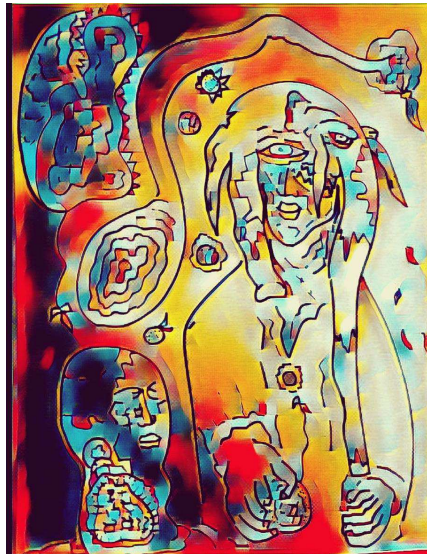
wikipedia



~ a literary and graphic arts periodical

Event Horizon is published quarterly as a free pdf download. Every issue is also available as a publish-on-demand book. All access is through the website, eventhorizonmagazine.com. Submissions are always welcome and should be emailed to eventhorizonmagazine@gmail.com. Event Horizon is seeking fiction, poetry, illustration, photography or photographic displays of arts and crafts, manga, graphic novels, comics, cartoons, various non-fiction including letters, essays, criticism and reports on the arts. Cover art is also invited and specs can be found on the website. Event Horizon is edited and published by Lanning Russell.

On the cover:



Howard Allen

Howard Allen is a featured artist in this issue of Event Horizon. Find his art in the Gallery section.

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Letter to the editor

Congratulations on the first issue, which I'm enjoying in part due to the concept of a literary and arts magazine in the first place, instead of the ubiquitous "lifestyle" startups, and for a high level of quality throughout. I'm also happy to see so much traditional — in the best sense — poetry and photography. Great start and best of luck for growth and success.

~Robert Mendel

Event Horizon and the public domain

Issue 2 is almost as much a watershed for me as publishing Issue 1; we're still here. Thank you again to all manner of participants but most fervently to the contributing artists of Event Horizon. Event Horizon, for the time being, only addresses and divides up that part of the arts and literary universe that can be presented in a print-magazine format - even though the online world is already capable of far more than that. This will change and Event Horizon will live up to the promise of its name. But for now those parts are Poetry, Fiction, Gallery (representing art genres primarily through photography), Pictorials (stories with pictures created by humans) and Essays and Letters (non-fiction, especially art reportage). And hosting these theaters, Event Horizon provides a ready forum and a lab of ideas for artists.

Surprisingly, the public domain - stereotypically either a cemetery or a u-pull-it junk yard - is also a vital, vast bazaar of the interesting and useful. Anything prior to 1922 is automatically in the public domain and that includes some 4600 years of literature and art: a reliable foundation for immediate artistic concerns. The public domain is also being added to every day with new material. The public domain shines a light on any historical concern. Tracing the development of current pictorial art, for example, reveals a wasteland of comic-like forms during the early 20th century. The fantastic comics and cartooning of Winsor Mckay comprise one of a handful of brilliant exceptions during this time period. The 19th century political cartoons of Thomas Nast rival those of any modern cartoonist for "bite", and draftsmanship. But current examples of manga, comics, graphic novels, etc. do not seem to be dripping into the public domain although they are widely available for consumption - free or paid - if not for re-distribution.

That is not the case with non-fiction. The Digital Commons Network - "Open Access. Powered by Scholars. Published by Universities" - is a wonderful example. Faculty publish or perish and their efforts may appear here. Upperclassmen and graduate students publish their theses. By the sheer volume and scope of what's available they must be actively encouraged by their universities to submit such products directly into the public domain. Students are informed, articulate, and persuasive. They have much at stake and you can feel the urgency in their writing. Another fine example of stewardship and management of the public domain is Pexels which is a similarly searchable database of recently-contributed, *very* high-quality photography. At Event Horizon, first priority will always go to the artist submitting his/her work for consideration. But it's convenient to be able to find current arts reportage and imagery in the public domain.

I hope you enjoy Event Horizon Issue 2 as much as I did in putting it together.

~editor

Alyssa Trivett

all those angels pulling for us

Alyssa Trivett is a wandering soul from the Midwest. When not working two jobs, she listens to music and scrawls lines on the back of gas station receipts. Her work has appeared in VerseWrights, Peeking Cat, In Between Hangovers, among others. She recently had fifteen poems published in a poetry anthology entitled Ambrosia. All proceeds from the anthology are donated to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (afsp.org).

The Subject Line is Empty, Send Anyways?

"That's tough." Have you lived with it?
I have seen more cords hooked up
to a human being
than a robot, sliced and diced.

In the ring with pins and needles,
silently jumping bean
stabbing my feet.

I attempt to pull these wires and cords off
your purple-dotted-bruised-arms-everywhere
and drag him out of the hospital to get him home.
For an hour, a minute, an elevator tune's length.

Fire escape artist and shut down the exits.
We didn't need the toe-tag. Keep it. File it.
Throw it away. Overused line in its resting place.

Eat soup every night, since it is all he can stomach.
Sit up with him, or on the floor.
And remind him not to lay the armor down,
even though he died.

My stomach gurgles up and down, a penny well
needing the water changed.
The sun eventually shined, and someone above,
all those angels pulling for us, showed up.
No mas in absentia.

Showed up like the mailman
dropping packages of thoughts.

Uncloaked themselves,
with demons sittin' backwards in parlor chairs.
Cards. Flipping 'em down. Corner bar. Lights
tinted.
Scowls and grins as their backdrop.

Level me up. I earned it. I survived this.
Pull up the blinds on this shoebox diorama sky.
Put the gloves over my calloused hands.
Tape my feet up. Just to say we did it.

On the Eve

Jumped in the cold shower,
drank hot coffee on a pedestal
and Frogger-hopped into my car,

jig sawed my way through traffic,
tracks invisible.
Waltzed into the palace

to clock in.
Motion-sensor doors greet me
with hot air and a symphony of sneezing.

On the eve of upcoming holidays.
Lights and warm thoughts remind me
of the date.

Barrett Isaac Marcus

spreading the gangue on the sills of the town

*A transplanted New Yorker, **Barrett Isaac Marcus** is a retired professional geologist living in Sacramento CA. In retirement Barrett is travelling extensively with his wife Debbah and maintains his lifelong love of cycling. He likes to explore the slot canyons of the Southwest and when travelling stops for rock shops.*

Bleach

It's a good day when the white envelope comes,
Flap tucked in crisply
Like starched sheets on a hospital bed.
My name in big block letters, **MARCUS, BARRETT I.**,
Seems fuzzy through the glassine eye,
Like me on Annie Greensprings, or Panama Red.
Tonight, I will squander the moiety of this check
On pork burritos, nine-ball, and beer,
Bury my face in ample brown breasts,
And rive my brain on gold tequila and Blue Cheer.
Tomorrow, bleary-eyed, I will charge dark, empty vats
With a caustic liquor,
Release the chlorine gas, Auschwitz-like, into the breach,
Faradize the electric mixer,
Blend a batch of good, clear bleach,
Fill large plastic bottles, stack them in bins,
And send them into the world to oxidize our sins.

Butter

"Please center the butter on the butter dish",
Said his wife to Copernicus,
As he scraped the remains of the day
From his plate to a trough,
Where yesterday's tapioca lay
In a riot of celestial motion,
Bound for a garbage scow,
And the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean.

Gangue

Our house was over the mine,
And the miners tunneled like termites under the town,
Separating the ore from the gangue,
And spreading the gangue on the sills of the town.
And the blasts shook the house.
On the table, the forks fell to the floor,
The walls cracked,
And my mother sobbed
While my father patched the plaster,
And the termites spread the gangue on the sills of the town.
And my father drove the great earth mover
Down into the open pit at the edge of the town,
In a slow spiral, lower and lower
Until the great wheels slipped on a collapsing edge.
And as the beast rolled over and over
He saw the azure-blue sky for the last time.
It came to rest at the bottom of the pit,
On the shore of the azure-blue tailings pond.
The great dead wheels turned slowly
And a wisp of blue smoke spiraled towards the sky.
When my mother cracked,
She could not be patched over.
They pulled her from the azure-blue tailings pond,
Unseeing eyes gazing towards the azure-blue sky.
When they were both cremated,
I collected my ore,
And spread their ashes on the sills of the town.

Chad Horn

Spenserian rhyme scheme sonnets written in acrostic

Chad Horn emcees numerous events including, and surrounding, Kentucky Writers Day. He enjoys small literary presses and intimate performance venues. Chad is a recipient of Lifetime Achievement Award from Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society, Penned Writers Award 2016, and Green River Arts Award. His poetry can be found in 'Clutch' and 'The Lowdown', Best American Poetry 2014, 2017, and upcoming 2018.

DECAFFEINATING

Drained of spirit, spunk. Proverbial funk
Energy drink abstinence, 'upper downs'
Carbonated, undated, punched-and-drunk
Adrenaline absence as headache pounds
Frantically scrounging for/ in coffee grounds
Functions fast failing, reaction reduced
Eerie sounds abound as darkness surrounds
Internal introspect is introduced
Navigating store aisles, soda-seduced
Adrenaline glands surge in full revolt
Tears loosed, body battles and begs for boost
In quest of elusive bolt, volt, or jolt
Need to reactivate superpower
Grasping for taurine, caffeine to devour

YACHTSMANSHIPS

Yankee sails set into eye-of-the-storm
Atmospheric pressure disappearing
Coastal currents crossing; calm seagulls swarm
Horizon displaying signs of clearing
Typhoon and tidal wave persevering
Sea-legs stand steadfast in sharp contrast
Magnetic bearing, safe-harbor nearing
Arctic-blast-tailwinds- yesterday's forecast
Nautical knot-tying knowledge amassed
Signals from lighthouse, dry land within reach
Hurricane hull speeds in skies overcast
Inter-coastal outreach, approaching beach
Poop-deck pooped-out, yet Captain's hat slanted
Shipshape, adrift on oceans enchanted

Christine Tabaka

I used to love the rain and fruit

Ann Christine Tabaka lives in Delaware. She is a published poet and artist. She loves gardening and cooking. Chris lives with her husband and two cats. Her most recent credits are The Paragon Journal, The Literary Hatchet, The Metaworker, Raven Cage Ezine, RavensPerch, Anapest Journal, Mused, Longshot Island, Indiana Voice Journal, Halcyon Days Magazine, The Society of Classical Poets, and BSU's Celestial Musings Anthology.

Unreality

Walking on a street filled with
lonely people looking downward.
No smiles to be found.

Store window displays staring
back with vacant eyes, like so
many lost souls looking
for a place to belong.

Days racing by like a speeding
train, only stopping long enough
to discharge passengers. Each hour
barely perceptible as they fly by.

Wine drenched memories. Fingernails
digging into flesh. Hair pulled out in
handfuls. The hot breath of doubt
breathing down my neck.

A smile across the face of fear.
At ninety-five miles an hour racing
towards the sun, no one saw it coming,
as the sky opened up to swallow
those left behind.

Unreality has become real, walking
on a street filled with lonely people looking
downward. No smiles to be found.

Who will be Left to Perform

Refined phrases,
sculpted like a statue.
Abstract images,
tickling the mind.

Becoming lost on
the road to nowhere,
sidetracked by the
mourning dove's song.
Questioning the outcome.
Was it worth the effort?

The man in the front row
just stood up and left;
wandering off into unknown territory.
Will he find his way back?
Are you lost forever?

Rain falls down,
Washing away the confusion.
Where have you been
the last hour of my life?

What is real, and what is not?
I continue on my journey.
Now it is my turn to
withdraw the knife
and bleed on the crowd.

Vacant House

Lights flickering
television blaring
no one is home
out taking a walk

The boy said he found
the lost marble
it was under the couch
the cat is asleep in the sun

Dinner burning
the roses are dead
the vase went dry
water evaporated into the atmosphere

Nobody mentioned the rain outside
or the reason why they left
the door was ajar
and my mind wandered in

Surveying the surroundings
the surrealness of
the situation soaking in
I left ...
and the house was once again empty

Me, Myself, and Solitaire

Playing solitaire on a lazy afternoon
as a patch of sunlight
moves slowly across the floor,
the cat follows it stretched out,
and belly up.

In the monotonous rhythm
of turning over cards in threes,
I catch myself cheating.
I discover the red queen and yell
"off with her head."
The cat looks up at me and blinks.
She knows that I am mad.

The sunlight begins to fade.
I tire of shuffling cards.
We both become bored
with the mundane.
Cards scatter on the floor with a flourish,
as the cat runs off to hide
under the bed.

I am now left all alone
with me, myself, and I.

Writing My Life Away

If I could write
like other poets,
I would have a voice that the world would
listen to.
But I have taken the book off the shelf
too many times.

Dog eared pages staring back at me,
doodles in the margins.
Your words piercing my heart again.
I have them committed to memory.
A merry-go-round of emotions,
never stopping long enough to ask why.

Lost years of desire
and notebooks filled with rhymes.
You were the reason that I wrote.
Never a thought for nourishment or
wealth,
only words of dying affection.

The years have passed,
and so have you.
I hold the book in my hands,
wanting my poems to sing out to others,
but the shredded confetti on the floor
tells a different story.

Poisoned Pleasures

A cold summer rain
falling like pain soaked memories
of a time I still try hard to forget.

Lush fruit baskets displayed on a table.
The wax delicacies taunting and teasing,
just like the false promises
from your venomous mouth.

The grayness of rotting lies
that filled hollow shells
exploding once again,
as they fire off in my brain.

First you drained me,
then turned me inside out,
laughing while you played your game.
The cards were all jokers,
but you bluffed so well.

I used to love the rain and fruit,
and playing cards, but you have made
even the simple pleasures
painful memories of you,
poisoned pleasures of a different life.

Peas Porridge Hot ...

The porridge is cold,
it has sat too long.
It lost its flavor.
No amount of salt will help now.

Thick and unpalatable,
I got the recipe wrong.
It was inedible
from the very start.

And, so I am reminded
you cannot make gourmet
out of everyday.
I thought that I knew how to cook,
to create great delights,
but the recipe was all wrong.

So, here I sit alone
with my kettle of wasted dreams
ready for the compost pile.

The effort it takes
to search out a new recipe
and begin over again
is beyond me now.
I will just sit here
and eat stale bread.

Spilled Milk

a glass tips
milk spills
a liquid curtain of white
falling in slow motion
splashing to the floor
I cry

like so many dreams
escaping my grasp
flowing through my fingers
and out of my reach
I stare at the puddle
and I cry

like wasted time
spread out across
the floor of the universe
it is no longer mine
all that is left to do
is cry

Jake Cosmos Aller

SF Nightmares

John ("Jake") Cosmos Aller is a novelist, poet, and former Foreign Service officer having served 27 years with the U.S. State Department in ten countries - Antigua, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Korea, India, St Kitts, St Lucia, St Vincent, Spain, and Thailand. and traveled to 45 countries during his career. Prior to joining the State Department, he taught ESL, Government and Asian studies in Korea. He also served as Peace Corps Volunteer in Korea. Jake has been an aspiring novelist for several years and has completed three novels, (Giant Nazi Spiders, The Great Divorce and Jurassic Cruise, and is pursuing publication. He has been writing poetry and fiction all his life and has published his work in over 25 literary journals. Jake grew up in Berkeley, California.

One Mystic Shrouded Night

One mystic shrouded night
Under the setting light of an evil moon
Beneath the illuminated shadows of death
Jake came out of the jungle swamps
Marching slowly towards his doom

The words of friends are lies
The smiles of enemies destroy
The words of a father spells death
The smells of a mother inspire suicide

All that matters
Crumbles into dust
Scattered across the uncaring void

What if the very essence of Jake
Was but a mistake
What if all that he knew was but a fake
Could he ever awake?

So, thought Jake
As he flew away into the computer's terminal
Into the system's vast amorphous mouth
His very essence a fake
We can never awake

Throw up
Throw off the chains that bind you
Deprogram the program
Only then can you be free

You can't exist without a permit to be
Shouted the computer of reality
All you see is designed to deceive
Where is your permit to be?
Shouted once again the fascist computer of reality

Give up while you still can
Numbers can't fuck your mind
But you can never escape
The prisons of your own mind

Heading to Memphis

Travelin' down the highway
Heading' to Memphis
Don't know the way
Don't wanta pay

It seemed to me
That if we stop
We will lose the way

So, we keep movin', movin', movin'
Down the highway in a souped up 55 Chevy
However, she starts into cryin'

Because Travelin' down the HI way
A headin' to Memphis

Don't know the way
Don't wanta pay

We see the birds and the bees
Over by the chickadee trees

It seems to me
They were some perverted bees

On the highway
Headin' to Memphis

I got down and started into praying'
That I would be into layin'
And I could get down

Over on the highway
Headin' to Memphis
Because I can see the light of day

On the highway
It seems as if God is driving' a pink Cadillac
Driving' through the asshole of May

At the break of day
God knows the way

He doesn't havta pay
He should be shot
At the break of day

Drivin' down that highway
In the month of May

I considered it my sacred duty
To find the way

Cars, trucks, hitchhikers fly on by me
People scream on down the hiway

There is God in his pink Cadillac
I pull up, rev up and go down

The hiway
Headin' to Memphis
Looking' for the day

Because God is a dog
Driving' a pink Cadillac
Creating a smog of fog

While headin to Memphis
She starts into cryin'

I say shut up miss
I's gots to find the day

There he is
God in his pink Caddilac
Trying to fly to the Moon

I hop on the cosmic freeway
And fly to Mars

There are purple skies on Mars
And green sunsets

And the HI way
Still heads to Memphis

But I don't know the way
And I can't afford to pay
Until the day

Yes, until the day
I find God in his pink Cadillac

And ask the forbidden question
What the fuck does it all mean?

Walking Through the Woods of Time

Walking through the woods of time
In the middle of it all I must scream

Walking down a wall
All we can do is die and fall

Millions of flashing robots
Interchangeable parts
Billions of buttons to push

Confusing roads
Swamps of miasmic deadly gas
Towering inferno of chaos
And I sit alone in a bar
20 drinks too sober

To dream away this insanity
Nothing to do but drink away my loneliness
And push my computer's buttons
As the rights to me have been sold

My Soul Wants to Fly

My soul wants to fly away
From here to there
All over this world

And when I get there
I want to be free
As a wild bird

Flying into the sun
Emerging on the other end
As a man of steel

A man of cosmic dimensions
Flying forever at the speed of sound

Leaving far behind the world of lies and deceit
Far, far behind

Beneath the eagle's beak
All I can see is but a reflection
Of anther's dream
What happened when I see
All that I can see is but all I can dream

All that I can ever know is but a dream
Tomorrow breaks into dust
At my feet

I see that horrid face
Starting at me
From beyond the window of lies
All that I know is but a computer image

What can we do
So, I sit and melt away
Forever fleeing

Our fates
Nothing but flickering computer images

Who Is Master?

Who Is Master?

In the beginning of that fateful day
I awoke with a painful way
And looked about me with disgust
All around me were objects to distrust

Screaming, meaning, deeming, dreaming
Who was master here
Me or my objects - machinery of fear?

I dreamt I was on a street corner
Walking down a street
The thought occurred to me
What if all that I saw or seemed to be
Was but a trick designed to deceive me?

Everywhere I looked
Was unreal, empirical, nightmarish real
I awoke to thunderous applause

When will I awake from my dreams
Can I live without my nightmares?
Can I be sane while everyone else is insane?

Who is master of my life,
Me or my machines?

Judy Shepps Battle

probably not this incarnation

Judy Shepps Battle has been writing essays and poems long before retiring from being a psychotherapist and sociology professor. She is a New Jersey resident, addictions specialist, consultant and freelance writer. Her poems have been accepted in a variety of publications including Ascent Aspirations; Barnwood Press; Battered Suitcase; Caper Literary Journal; Epiphany Magazine; Joyful; Message in a Bottle Poetry Magazine; Raleigh Review; Rusty Truck; Short, Fast and Deadly; the Tishman Review, and Wilderness House Literary Press.

Insomnia 2017

Hourly awakenings evict sleep
clock advances slower than an exhausted turtle

each breath a new awareness
each sigh stained with sadness

country and planet in chaos
people I love suffering

Where is the light?
Where is the hope?
What happened to reason?

Angry Momma Nature draws us together in love
and compassion for environmental crises

Texas, Louisiana, Florida and Mexico
remind us of soulful common denominator

until amnesia and mindlessness return
leaving muscle-saturated memories
and ubiquitous PTSD.

I want to soar like an eagle
love like Bodhi and Simon*
and sleep through the night

but aching aging body says
probably not this incarnation.

*Bodhi is my 10-month-old Labradoodle and Simon my 10-year-old rescued orange cat

Pop Quiz

He lays in bed
quizzing multiplication

asks again and again
how much is five times six

pulls me close
touches my chest

looking for something
I won't have for years

rolls me to my back
lays on top

still asking how much
is two times zero.

Junior High School

Being fat

means being made fun of
spit balls between my eyes
Fred's smirking face
monster

means being scared of next taunt
head down pretending invisible
fearing the next razor sharp judgment
numb

means knowing magic doesn't work
that Hell is not an imaginary place
wanting to be anywhere but here
scared

means realizing death is no better than life
not wanting to suicide
just to not be me.

Moment Interrupted

Lone robin seeks refuge
watches fluff-tail squirrel
unearth oiled sunflower seeds
amid freshly cracked corn and
unshelled peanuts

Not hungry
winged-one perches
absorbs noon sun
enjoys March breeze
no need to be a Blue Jay
Hawk or Nightingale

Our eyes meet
spellbound gaze

simultaneous in-breath
simultaneous out-breath

holy communion
holy moment

broken
by a low-flying helicopter
carrying the governor of
New Jersey home.

Linda Imbler

no denouement

*Linda Imbler is the author of the published poetry collection Big Questions, Little Sleep. Her work has appeared in numerous journals. Linda's creative process and a current, complete listing of sites which have or will publish her work can be found at **lindapoetryblog.blogspot.com**. This writer, yoga practitioner, and classical guitar player lives in Wichita, Kansas.*

As I Saw Boulder

Those retro hipster streets, crowded with bohemian images,
abutting the mountains grand, recollecting
peace and hippie love.

One New Age store replete with Occult books and Tarot cards
intended to teach and to guide.

The street musicians' chattering guitars play folk (Dylan, Baez, Mitchell)
or perhaps the acid rock (Hendrix, Cream, Doors) one era dug.

Another New Age store that sells incense, that spiritual return
to the time when the peace pipe filled the air with smells
of myrrh and burning grass.

Street dancers and magicians with magical movement
to keep the groove alive and remembered.

Cinema

She figured it out finally;
It took a while to impress on herself
why she never moved forward.
Then, she saw that movie.
Her life flashed in front of her eyes
and the realization slowly dawned.
This is what I've been dealt.
This is what I must escape,
from the first time he struck
to the first lie.
Literally,
the entire scenario of their relationship
playing on the big screen.
He did not see it
as he sat beside her.
He did not flinch.
She watched him from the corner of her eye,
or perhaps he did
and was glad to be documented.
So she sat and contemplated her own scenarios
of how this movie would play out by the end:
The antagonist would surely be crushed by a bus,
would fall down an elevator shaft,
would fatally choke on a sandwich
from the bistro down the street where he worked.
But the ending was not satisfying, was anticlimactic.
There was no denouement
(after all, it was French.)
She trailed behind him dejectedly to the parking lot
(Where *is* that bus?)
He blipped the lock open,
she got in the car, put on her seat belt,
stared straight ahead,
already that movie replaying itself over and over
in her head,
as it would in real life.

Desert Song

The last true Viking
charges onto the stage
bearing his axe overhead
in defiance
of those who call him a shadow.

Like poets pluck words from the
ether,
so does he pull down the elemen-
tals
and weaves them among the
strings
with seraphic fingers,
his alchemical magick
amalgamating sounds.

Easy-
For he has long known the secret
of the lost chord.
He strikes it now
to shatter the rumble of the crowd.

Cool-
He makes himself visible on stage
and beats the Devil's heat.

Bitter Cold Can Burn

Perhaps the fires of hell
are meant to describe
a wintry mix rather than that of flames.
Greetings and affection met with chilly, cutting
aloofness can break hearts and stretch the nerves
raw.
Such deep and keen, sharp pain within the
breast,
the sting of rejection felt in sinews,
like a pitchfork,
such will freeze the blood
of all but the most heartless, soulless beast.

Dead Clocks

All the dead clocks
Stilled through the ages.
Their silence lies
Among the cacophony of busyness.

Days that continue,
Things to be done,
Sound and movement
Surrounding them.

Yet they lie still,
Generations
Representing their own time,
The back when,
The before.

And their hearts no longer tick.

Michael Lee Johnson

in heart of my bright sun

Michael Lee Johnson *lived ten years in Canada during the Vietnam era. Today he is a poet, freelance writer, amateur photographer, and small business owner in Itasca, Illinois. Mr. Johnson has published in more than 989 publications, his poems have appeared in 34 countries, he edits and publishes 10 different poetry sites. His poetry has been nominated for 2 Pushcart Prize awards for poetry 2015, awarded 1 Best of the Net 2016, and 2 Best of the Net 2017. He also has 138 poetry videos on YouTube. He is the Editor-in-chief of the anthology, Moonlight Dreamers of Yellow Haze and Editor-in-chief of a second poetry anthology, Dandelion in a Vase of Roses.*

Heaven is My Horse Fly (V2)

A common horse fly
peripatetic traveler
vacationing in my world
into my bathroom,
(ride me cowboy, fly)
it's summer time-
lands on my toilet seat
pit stops at Nikki's Bar & Grill,
kitty litter box, refuels.
Thirteen round trips
buzzing my skin and skull-
he calls them "short runs."
Steady pilot, good mileage,
frequent flier credits.
I swat his war journey,
splat, downed, then, an abrupt end.

Painted Cat (V2)

This painted cat
on my balcony
hangs in this sun,
bleaches out
it's wooden
survival kit,
cut short-
then rots
chips
paint
cracks
widen in joints,
no infant sparrow wings
nestled in this hole
beneath its neck-
then falls down.
No longer a swinger
in latter days, August wind.

Alexandra David-Neel

She edits her life from a room made dark
against a desert dropping summer sun.
A daring travelling Parisian adventurer
ultimate princess turning toad with age-
snow drops of white in her hair, tiny fingers
thumb joints osteoarthritis
corrects proofs at 100, pours whiskey,
pours over what she wrote
scribbles notes directed to the future,
applies for a new passport.
With this mount of macular degeneration,
near, monster of writers' approach.
She wears no spectacles.
Her mind teeters between Himalayas,
distant Gobi Desert, but subjectively warm.
Running reason through her head for living,
yet dancing with the youthful word of Cinderella,
she plunges deeper near death into Tibetan mysticism,
trekking across snow covered mountains to Lhasa, Tibet.
Nighttime rest, sleepy face, peeking out that window crack
into the nest, those quiet villages below
tasting that reality beyond all her years'
vastness of dreams.

Oh Carol, Poem

You treat me like soiled underwear.
I work my way through.
I gave up jitterbug dancing, that cha-cha-chá,
all my eccentric moves, theatric acting, poetry slams.
I seek refuge away old films, nightmares
you jumping from my raspberry Geo Chevy Tracker
repeat you stunt from my black 2002 S-10 Chevy truck, Schaumburg, IL.
I toss tarnished photographs out windows of hell
seek new selfies, myself.
I'm a rock-in-roll Jesus, a damn good poetry man,
talent alone is not enough storage space to strip
you away from my skin, distant myself from your
ridicule, those harsh words you can't take back
once they are out like Gorilla Glue, as Carl Sandburg spoke about.
I'm no John Lennon want to be;
body sculptured David Garrett, German violin masterpiece,
nor Ace Hardware, Midwest, CEO.
All I want to be respected in heart of my bright sun,
engaging these shadows endorsing these gray spots in my life.
Send me away from these drum beats that break me in half,
jungle thunder jolts dislodging my heart
popping my earlobes over the years,
scream out goodbye.
No more stepping on me cockroach style,
swatting me, a captured fly.

Lynn White

wishing for wings

Lynn White lives in North Wales. Her work is influenced by issues of social justice and events, places and people she has known or imagined. She is especially interested in exploring the boundaries of dream, fantasy and reality. Her poem 'A Rose For Gaza' was shortlisted for the Theatre Cloud 'War Poetry for Today' competition 2014. This and many other poems, have been widely published, in recent anthologies such as - 'Alice In Wonderland' by Silver Birch Press, 'The Border Crossed Us' and 'Rise' from Vagabond Press and journals such as Apogee, Firewords Quarterly, Indie Soleil, Light and Snapdragon.

Find Lynn at facebook.com/pages/Lynn-White-Poetry/1603675983213077?fref=ts
and lynnwhitepoetry.blogspot.com .

The Vase

The kitchen looked tired and worn
like my mother did,
the last time I saw her there.
I felt no nostalgia for it.
It was not my childhood kitchen.
It held no special memories,
I thought.
And then,
I saw the vase on the counter top.
My friend found it on the Kings Road.
Bought it and brought it home.
I'd asked her to buy me something,
a souvenir of swinging London.
She bought the vase.
I never much liked it.
Dark and bulbous,
it spent most of its time at my mother's,
though she didn't like it much either.
Then time stole it away,
took it from my memory,
erased it.
And now,
here it is again, sharp as ever
bringing the past home
as it stands empty
on the counter top.
It seems that her death
invested in it a poignancy
that it had not known before.

I took it home with me.

Tulips

Gleaming globes of gold,
and scarlet
and pink,
the brightness of their colours
masking the shadows within
and the blackness at their heart.
Too soon their coloured shapes
will fly away like birds of paradise
glistening in the sunlight,
petals of paradise.
But these are transient beauties
already in their death throes
as they soar,
ready
for the dusk to dull their colour.
Ready
to decay,
to become dust,
while their black hearts
grow fat on what lies beneath,
like the black crows that feast
on the bright flesh of below them.
Surviving
to live another day.
Surviving
to make seed
for another year.

Free Fall

I was on the way up,
full of can do confidence.
Fearless.
In control.
Now I'm falling.
I'm in free fall.
Still in control,
but barely.
I stretch out my arms
wishing for wings
to help me up,
help me soar again.
I'm still in control,
but barely
knowing that below
there'll be nothing.
Nothing
that will
break
my fall.

Where Lies Reality

In my sweet dreams
I can float and swim like a fish.
Can extract air from the water,
as they do.
And breathe it out
in pretty chains of bubbles.
But in my dark dreams,
the nightmarish ones,
this is just a pretence.
The only air is within me
and the bubbles lost to me
which soon will cease
as I continue to float
upwards.
Can reality lie
in my dreams?

Petra Sperling-Nordqvist

the world will scatter you to the winds

***Petra Sperling-Nordqvist** hails from Europe where she received an education in languages, literature, and philosophy (in Germany and Oxford). She has spent the last twenty years with her husband, horses, dogs, and cats in California, dabbling in teaching, writing, acting, dancing, swimming, singing, and playing music.*

eons

perceive intention
mirroring infinitesimally

conceive deception
crystallizing abysmally

receive obstruction
surging fathomlessly

worldly
--wise while
worthy
not/(e--)

mutely
mutually
remote truth
truce
mostly
irretraceable

Sorrow

body flung into a pit
silence screeching through the void
sorrow harrowing the air, before the very eye
perpetrating haunt
deafening
directed

as the horizon clears, through a whispering haze
vacuum with new dimensions, and
sorrow supplies diminutive
breath
confined, constricted
tremors of a shriveled wing

at the zenith of life
i scan my body, look down into the
sorrow of the soul, i shy away from the
portal of my heart, wings
clipped crushed, comfort
unreachable

air stifled, haze thickening into fog to
suffocate, haphazardly, at will
sorrow wafts away
breath
spirit evaporates into
droplets of matter, the body

tied into a knot of endurance
threatening to unravel at a moment's notice,
for now
hunker down, sheer instinct of survival,
take hold of courage without consideration
of hope faith or love

hear the call of the will
sense body and being crack, but
stay put, fearing the
eye wash away with the
looming deluge, enduring the
persecution of the spirit of life

Sonnet: Spoiler Alert

decadence Consumes the Culture, Confuses the Spirit,
 Confounds it through Pointless Pursuits.
 through folk-and-lore but idealism Prevails
the Wisdom of the Western World is Spoilt. real humanity Fails.

Graeco-roman empires, Fortune-Filled,
 Wallow in their Wealth and in their Greed,
Consumed by the structures of Power they so desperately Feed,
Corrupted because of the multitudes they Killed.

they remain, oblivious of their Crimes,
civilized Bullies, wardens of their Truth,
 all Biceps, muscle-flexers of their Times,
 Private Jets and Yachts for all their Youth,
of all the Jobs and Stocks
 the largest Shares, Ruthless Rulers,
 Parasites without Cares.

fly

 faith in desire in
 spirit bird span
 grace song wing
profound exuberant
unbound vivacious

exasperating
static
void
exacerbates
instead

FUTILITY

Everyone lives alone.

Solitary
bared to know-not
what
assaults
projectiled.

Battered
attempts of a
marionette no strings
attached
sagging.

Upward forward all-around motion.

The grand illusion
imagined
by an idiot
contraptions to fain
what not
real at all ever
not at all real
matter no difference
finality
eternity
don't exist.

No silence no continuity.

No
alpha nor omen in spiritus sanctus
nirvana nowhere everywhere
waste of mind-
fog.

No-one

cares
conceptions in mind.
Not the world
crazy dreams
not matter
not outside
only inside
chemistry no difference
not even you
or I.

You

The world will scatter
you to the winds
carelessly
bits of shards
unrecognizable mosaic
you
can cut yourself
shattered against
the world.

Your own have silenced
theirs through the mills
of secrecy
dust of taboos
unrelated / -intelligible saga
you
can get mangled
pulverized by
your own.

You must keep safe
your-self from the vortex
 viciously
essence of soul
substantial mystery
 you
 can shelter
 securely in
you.

S'POSE

values are supposed

to sustain unconditionally
to support acceptingly

instead

we're exposed unexpectedly
to exhaustion and exasperation

Andrew Scott

and the skies did not take you away

Andrew Scott is a native of Fredericton, NB. During his time as an active poet, Andrew Scott has taken the time to speak in front of a classrooms, judge poetry competitions as well as published worldwide in such publications as The Art of Being Human, Battered Shadows and The Broken Ones. His books, Snake With A Flower, The Phoenix Has Risen, The Path and The Storm Is Coming are available now.

People Of The Dawn

We are the peaceful people of the dawn.
Storytellers to the new children of earth
of how we have roamed and settled
to this land by the ocean.

Using our knowledge to farm the land,
building crops, enough for the tribe.
The women gather the food from the planted
while the men hunt the territories
looking for animals for meat and fur.

The children nurtured by the land's mothers,
gaining wisdom from a wise clan.
Family providing the proper way.

Peaceful treaties amongst the opposition
let the ancestors settle with traditions.
Preserved are our identities
that have been held for centuries.
Held together by moral integrity.

The sound of a calm settlement
covers the vast frontier,
protecting and keeping us,
the People of the Dawn.

Let The Sad Go

I know I have to let the sad go
but it seems I am not ready.
Moments come to me
when I believe I have
then my thoughts and eyes tear
always when I am not expecting.

So long ago you left this earth,
memories keep you here with me,
some sweet, some emotional.
I have never been able to fight the tears
or being suddenly overcome with sorrow.

It is like you are beside me again
and the skies did not take you away.
These moments are real in feeling.
I should let the sad go
but it is not time yet.

The Devil's Rifleman

Welcome ladies and gentlemen,
please let me take a moment
to tell you a little about myself,
a person who you will never fully see.

The man driving towards a crowd
of innocent victims
that have no idea
that a metal torpedo
is locked onto them.
I am the one holding
the steering wheel
and the gas pedal down.
The driver is me
not the one behind the wheel.

What seems like an angst youth
walks the halls of education
about to get the weapon of choice
passed all detectors
to bring an end to tomorrow's leaders.
The slaughter looks random
except to me, the Master of Puppets
That is guiding
the steps and thoughts
of the shooter of the final bullets.

A person walking the streets,
full of ignorant rage,
screaming the words of hate
towards anyone that seems
or looks different
from the giver of rage.
The syllables are not
of the carrier's own mouth.
Brain empty, easy to manipulate
to fully strike with anger.

All steps taken without full consent
of the people whose minds
and emotions were guided
by not themselves and never were.
Selected henchmen
that were all mine
in being the Devil's Riflemen.

This Man's Search

This man's search seems
to roll on forever.
Looking inside, outside.
Always wondering and wandering.

The sights and people met
only add to the search and questions.
Shaking your hand
with a genuine smile
with deceit in their mind
all the while presenting a mirage scenery.

Times are changing everything.
What was once improper
is not accepted as proper.
It is confusing to the soul.

Each day there is always
the new, unexpected.
Each moment, a new lesson
takes the place of an old one
and the older answer
has been replaced.

The simplest day
can be dark and confusing
either way you go,
ever expanding this man's search.

Gene Turchin is a retired professor of Electronic Technology and Mechatronics. His writing interests include science fiction - literary and comic books. His recently published works appear in VerseWrights, 365 Tomorrows, With Painted Words, Aurora Wolf, Literary Hatchet, Eye To The Telescope, The Ginger Collect, The Broadkill Review and Astounding Outpost. He is currently working as a volunteer reader in creative non-fiction and fiction for The Tishman Review.



Old Friends

There he was again, taking up more than half the sidewalk pushing his grocery cart. Probably stole it from one of the stores. Long greasy hair. Dirty hands. Why can't they ever get their hair cut? Don't the barbers volunteer to cut hair at the Rescue Mission? Up close, of course you'd have to put up with the smell. And lice and god knows what else buried in that bush. I'll have to hold my breath as I walk by. Which side—inside or out. Better do inside, he might try to push me into the street. Can't tell about his kind.

Look at his ass. It's so fat. Those jeans flapped like a denim sail around his skinny legs. Handed out free to the needy at the Salvation Army or Goodwill store. They look like a woman's pregnancy jeans. All elastic in the waist.

How can he be so fat if he's homeless? Getting more than his fair share of three squares a day, for certain.

He doesn't walk, he shuffles slow, his feet slogging with the weight of heavy anchors dragging through mud. He barely lifts them from the ground and hogs the whole sidewalk. Pretending to have disability. Look pitiful, the better to get handouts. Okay, pick up the pace and hurry past. Don't make eye contact or he'll ask for money.

Really ought to cross the street. Walk on the other side. Why doesn't the city do something about these people? They camp under the bridge. They piss in the doorways. Hardly safe to go anywhere downtown anymore.

"Mitch?"

"What?"

"Mitch, is that you?" Is the bum talking to me? How does he know my name. It's not possible. Must be imaging it. My feet stop. No. Keep moving.

I turn, not wanting to look into his face. Familiar shapes in there? Memory in his eyes?

"It's me, Leonard. How you doing, man?" The voice, drags up from the depths of memory. Tones and timbre, accent, maybe familiar. What did he say his name was?

My hand snakes out automatically to shake his. Shit. No. Don't.

He takes it, gives a pump.

"So what are you up to these days, Mitch?"

"What? Me? Oh, nothing?"

"You're looking pretty fit. Not like me." He waves a hand over his expansive girth.

"You working somewhere?" I knew it. He's looking for a handout. Wait. Leonard TaylorEight, ten years ago, I worked with a guy. Leonard Taylor. Boy Wunderkind on Unix systems. Programmed in the shop with us back when computers were the *new thing*. Head office brought him in to teach us. Salary double what the rest of us made.

I reached into my wallet, took out a twenty, pushed it toward him. He looked up at me, eyes rheumy and red around the edges. Danny de Vito as the Penguin. His face morphed, shifted.

"You know what, Mitch, fuck you!" He shoved his cart toward me. I stood my ground. I was offering to help him. Why was he getting angry? The bill fluttered to the ground between us. Should I bend down to pick it up? Would he let it lie?

"Take it. Whatever." I turned and walked away. Probably wasn't the guy I used to know anyway. Had to get to the city building. Pay the stupid parking fine or contest it. I'd been parking the car on the street in front our our house for the twenty years, but last week the city cops, like ninjas in the middle of the night came through and ticketed every car facing the wrong way. Their logic: your vehicle was supposed to be parked facing the same direction as traffic flow on your side of the street. Makes no sense. Neighbor Bob, says council probably passed the ordinance after midnight too. What the hell difference does it make which way you park? Ridiculous hundred dollar fine.

At the window in the city building, a young girl asks if she can help me. Above her the sign says PAYMENTS. She looks fifteen years old. I explain the ticket.

"Do you want to contest it or pay? A lot of people are unhappy with what the city did. People are contesting but I got to tell you. If you don't bring a lawyer and an exceptional argument, the judge will make you pay anyway. Lawyer will cost you a hundred fifty or two hundred bucks. I am sincerely sorry. It's not fair." I write the check. She probably had a card with the proper customer responses on her desk. Toe the official city line and act sincere.

I can feel my blood pressure climbing. Shelia always reminds me that I get too wound up. Give myself a heart attack if I'm not careful.

When I get home Shelia was in the kitchen. Cooking odors wafted out. Onions.

"How'd it go at the city? What did they say?"

I shrugged. "Nothing much. I paid the fine. It's a screw job but it would cost more to fight it." I hesitated. "I ran into somebody I used to work with, I think. The guy was a bum—homeless, but I guess, he recognized me."

"Who was it?"

"Remember Leonard, when I worked for Computer Repair and Network Systems?"

She stirred something on the stove.

"The guy who kept goats and ducks? Was always late. Didn't they have to let him go? Stole money or charged company card for personal things? I think you told me about him. You were with Mary back then, right?"

"Yeah, short guy, wore his hair long in a pony tail. Bad drug problem, I think, cocaine. Anyway, I'd seen this homeless guy pushing a cart around town. Never thought much about it but ended up walking past him and he called me by name."

"That must have been weird. What did he want?"

"I don't know. I tried to give him money but he didn't want it, then he got nasty with me."

Later that night I couldn't sleep because the chance meeting with Leonard bubbled in head like boiling water. Wouldn't let go as I turned under the covers. *"Double. Double. Toil and Trouble."* Things I didn't want to think about surfaced. A snake of old memories biting into my arm and pumping venom. Can't shake it off though I know it is hurting me.

"Are you okay?" she asks, voice groggy with sleep.

"Restless. Can't sleep. Too much shit going on in my head." She rolls over, away, on her side. Mumbles something into the pillow I don't hear. Struggle up and shuffle to the bathroom. Pee comes out in a dribble.

Throw ice cubes in a glass and splash in a few fingers of Jack. Turn on the television in the family room, volume down low. Sip the whiskey. Toggle channels up and down. How's the song go? "52 channels and nothing on." or something.

My thoughts are a boiling pot of soup-bubbles popping and bursting. Bits of disconnected memory flotsam thrashing around like logs in a crazy white water river.

It was about another life, before I finished my degrees. Draftsman in the drafting department for a utility company. Nice job. Good pay with decent benefits and a pension plan. People were mostly okay. Wouldn't hang out with them after hours but company picnic and Christmas parties were okay. Some of the managers were real dicks but the guys I worked with weren't bad. Corporate culture was all about who you knew, where you went to high school, your church and what fraternal societies you were a member of. If you didn't belong, you didn't get promoted. Membership required – it didn't much matter which club, Moose, Eagles, Masons and the Chamber, anyone, or all, except Catholic or Jewish.

Meet the brothers at social affairs. Share a six pack. Watch football. We moved here from Idaho. Different culture. Membership not required. Leonard was from the city. Way different culture.

"He's late...again." Sam looked at his watch. "Second time this week." His voice dripped disgust.

"He's got hard issues. He's trying to get his shit in line. Cut him some slack."

"Hey, it ain't me." Sam inclined his head toward the offices down the hall. "If he pisses Jake off enough he'll be gone." He chopped the air with his hand making a swooshing sound. "Fresh mowed hay, laid out to dry." Sam sipped his coffee. It wasn't like the rest of us were busting our humps getting things done. First two hours in the morning was wasted time drinking coffee, bs-ing while pretending to go over the day's schedule.

Sam brushed his hand through his thinning hair.

"You know, he's the golden child. Can't do no wrong as far as the head office people are concerned. Rest of us expected to be on time. Don't know why he's privileged."

At eight-fifteen, the office phone chattered. I grabbed the receiver.

"Hey, it's Leonard. I'm having problems so I'll be a little late. The goats got into the duck pen and there's a bit chaos in the yard. Two of the dogs are loose so maybe I'll be an hour or so late. Let Jake know for me." I shrugged.

"He's going to be late — again." Steve looked up from the job orders.

"What is it this time?"

"Something about the goats in the pen with the ducks."

"Yeah, happened a couple times. Then there is: 'The truck won't start,' or 'Got a flat.' You took the call. Guess you get to tell Jake." Jake was the shop supervisor. One of the brotherhood.

Jake ranted or sighed. Mostly ranted. Threw things off his desk. It was a regular occurrence and the incidences seemed to be coming more frequently. Leonard rarely showed up on time and most days his live-in girlfriend would call late in the afternoon with a different emergency and he'd have to leave early. Even others outside our department estimated he was never at the shop more than four hours out of any given day. He was a legend and a pariah.

I poured another Jack, turned off the TV and stared at the wall. I'd almost become friends with him, both of us being outsiders. We talked. His job was critical and stressful and I wanted to be sympathetic. He admitted he smoked a little J. Said it helped relieve his stress.

"You, know I puff a little weed now to relax. Not as bad as drinking. Just at night after I put up all the critters."

"You know the company is going to mandatory drug testing." He grinned at me.

"There are ways around everything."

"Yeah, but you need to be careful. They say it stays in your system for upwards of thirty days or more."

He waved it away. "Not true. That's what they want you to believe."

Eventually they did implement the random pee-in-the-bottle test. It was mandatory for everybody except management. Jake didn't have to go but he'd get a phone call early and one of us would have to go to the med center. The management exemption irked me.

Leonard tested positive. He received a month off at half pay with the stipulation of required drug counseling.

He came back to work. Told us all the counseling was a hoot. It must have had an effect because he made it in on time for about a week. We spent more time together. I was interested in the computer systems and he started showing me Unix commands.

We were sitting in front of the console.

"You ever do coke, Mitch?"

I gave him a puzzled look. I wasn't sure what colors were playing across my face.

"Nope. No drugs. A little bourbon in the evening once or twice a week."

He smiled at me. "Makes you sharp, man. Real sharp. Your mind shifts into overdrive. Keeps you on top." He laughed. "At least that's what I've heard people say."

A few days later he was “randomly” chosen for another drug test. The results were positive for heroin and cocaine and he was fired and escorted out of the building within an hour. Before they canceled his employee credit card, he withdrew a two thousand dollar advance.

Leonard disappeared. Never saw him again until he called out to me that day on the sidewalk. A few times when an ad on TV would remind me of those days, I wondered what kinds of downhill twists and turns his life took after he was let go.

I left for greener pastures and life became exponentially more complicated. Shelia was my second marriage. I’d been on anti-depressants for two years. I resolved to talk to him if we crossed paths again. Try to show compassion.

A week later, downtown to courthouse to pay taxes, we approached from opposite ends of the same sidewalk, two big cats, eyeing each other warily. I stopped as we closed the space. He was leaning on the cart.

“Looks like it hurts to walk.”

“Fused disks. From a fall. Arthritis too.”

“You know, the way I acted the other day. I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay, man. I understand. I’d cross the street if I saw me coming too. I look bad.” He hesitated. “I’ve been clean going on three years now. Felony conviction for intent to deliver. Three years jail time so I can’t get work and then there’s the back.” He lifted one hand off the basket.

“You want a coffee?” We used to take coffee breaks when he was teaching me the Unix system.

We sat on a park bench, in a sliver of green lawn, downtown, sipping coffee from Styrofoam cups. He parked his grocery basket on the side of the bench, one hand draped casually over the shiny grid work of the cart.

“I’ll bet this is awkward for you but I appreciate the effort, man. Really. Thanks.” He lifted the coffee in a salute. You know, I was trying to get by, selling some shit when I got busted.” He laughed. “Probably not the best choice I ever made but it got me clean. Would be dead in some alley if it hadn’t happened.

“We were both using and so sold the animals and the dogs. We lived on the street, for a month after the landlord kicked us out of the house. He left the place empty for a while so we snuck back in but he caught us and the sheriff came to take us away in handcuffs. Kept us in jail for three days and just released us on the street. We did the whole dumpster diving bit. It is strange how you can almost always find money for drugs. When things got bad we moved to a lean-to on the edge of town. Our heads weren’t on straight.”

“Geeze, Leonard. That was nuts.”

“Yeah, weather turned foul and Karen got sick. I panhandled for pocket change and called her folks. They came and got her. It was seven years ago, I think,” he scanned the sky. “I haven’t heard from her since I don’t have a mailbox or phone. Really hope she’s doing okay.”

We both stared at the sky and alternately at the park lawn, not finding words as if they would be hidden in those places. I shook my head.

"You're staying at the church shelter? What's it like?" I regretted the words as soon as they jumped out.

"Sucks, really. The alternative is living in the street so I listen to the talks about Jesus. Never could get into the religion stuff. Don't need forgiveness — just a paycheck. I sure as hell made mistakes," he shook his head. "My own damned fault. It is what it was."

"Anything I can do?"

"Thanks," he paused, "You're okay, Mitch."

"I'm not. When I first saw you, all I could think of was how disgusting you were then I remembered we were sort of friends at work. Neither of us fit in."

"Yeah, what a shit-load of rednecks. I remember one guy telling me he hadn't read a book since sixth grade and was damn proud of it. You and me. We talked about books a lot. You still a reader?" A small humid breeze waved through the park. In my mind I began to put paperbacks in a paper grocery bag. They would be a token. Connect us together again. Give him something to hold on to.

"Yeah, just not as much. Career sucked a lot of soul out of me." I looked at his eyes, seeing regret peering out through a dirty glass. Too much distance between us, like looking across the Grand Canyon. Leonard hoisted the coffee again. I tapped my cup against his.

"You probably have places to be, Mitch." He stood up and positioned himself behind the cart.

"Thanks for the coffee." He pitched the cup into a trash can on the sidewalk. "See you around, man," he said.

*Alan Zacher reports: "After many years of being a "struggling" actor in LA, I turned to writing. I have had two novels published, **I'm No P. I.** and **A Ghoulish Good Time.** I have had MS for several years now; I know physical and mental pain; so I need much laughter to endure it. Hopefully, my novels do just that--give much laughter."*



I should have been born a Hippy

So here it is Sunday, and this happened about an hour ago, about four-thirty, and I'm driving back home—and I'm pissed. My girlfriend just dumped me—and what a dump it was too. She's following me out to my car, screaming the whole time: "You're a loser! A loser! Loser..." And her parents are standing at their front-door, shouting: "You're sick" ... "Stay away from my daughter" ... "You need help" ... And I'm supposed to start this new job tomorrow, and I only took the damn job because of her. What a mess.

I don't know. Maybe my brother, Paul, is right. He's always complaining to my parents that I'm a bum—that I'm thirty-years-old; still live at home; only have a part-time job selling ladies' shoes; go clubbing every night, and loaf all day, every day, because they, my parents, have always babied me. He's just jealous of me because he's an old married man who works every day, has a home, two kids, is in debt up to his white ass and can't do what he wants to do—which is I don't know what, and neither does he.

But that's what going out with Lorain, the girl who just dumped me, and being with her was all about—about giving up my old life and finally growing up; finally becoming a man; finally taking responsibility; finally becoming "normal." I was willing to do that for her, you know—wanted to do that because of her.

I met Lorain two months ago, at this club on Washington Street, downtown—the hottest clubs in St. Louis are on Washington Street. It was a Wednesday. There's never much action at clubs on a week day,—and what with it being June—so I wasn't expecting too much that night. In fact, I had thought about making an early night of it and going home after hitting one or two clubs. In fact, I had been doing that a lot lately, hitting only one or two clubs and then going home. Well, the people are getting so much younger than me. So, anyway, I'm standing at one of the bars, when I look towards the dance floor and see Lorain with three other girls. They're dancing in a circle and laughing and having a good old time. She was wearing a light-blue dress with matching pumps. Well, I couldn't take my eyes off of her. She was that beautiful—a sexy, statuesque, slender body, 5-feet-6-inches tall, with shoulder-length auburn-brown hair that matched the color of her full eyebrows and complemented the sparkling darkness of her brown eyes. Her eyes had what a lot of guys call "bedroom eyes," a sleepy, but seductiveness to them. She also had this presence to her—an aura of self-confidence and determination.

She was hot, and I couldn't stop staring at her. She knew that I was staring at her, because I saw one of her girlfriends tell her that I was staring at her. It didn't seem to

bother her. Then, she did something that at first embarrassed me, but then made me laugh. Still dancing in place, she first whispered something to the other three girls, which made them start laughing like hyenas. Then, turning and facing me, she raised her arms and hands to her face, and acting like she was holding a camera, she simulated snapping a picture of me, as if stating that child platitude: *Why don't you take a picture. It will last longer.*

Well, I told myself that I had to meet this girl. I waited until she and her three girlfriends had all sat back down at a booth before I made my move.

After apologizing to her for staring at her, I asked her if she'd mind if I sat down with them and bought them all a round of drinks. At first, I don't think any of them wanted me to sit with them, but when I told Lorain that it was her own fault that I was staring at her, because of her being so beautiful, she whipped: "Oh, please. How many times have you already used that hack line tonight?" Well, this got a big laugh from all of us, and she then told me I could sit with them.

Lorain was twenty-four-years-old;--that's why she was there at the club with her girlfriends: it was her birthday, and they had forced her to go clubbing--had graduated three years ago, in 2000, from Webster Groves University with a B.S. in Business; had a realty license; worked as a paralegal for a law firm downtown; sold real estate on the side; had her own apartment, but was looking for a house, and was taking steps to opening her own real estate company.

I quickly realized that besides being a very beautiful girl, she was also serious-minded, level-headed and determined to get ahead in life. Usually, I would have been instantly turned-off by a girl like that, but I think her beauty and her sauciness of spirit nullified any negativity that I was feeling towards her ambitious nature. We had a pretty good time. We talked and laughed and danced and traded barbs back and forth. But what shocked me--just blew me away, was that I didn't snow her--and I snow everybody, especially in clubs. In clubs, I tell girls that I'm a doctor or lawyer or some bigshot, but, for some reason, I just couldn't do that with Lorain. I-I told her the truth about myself.

I told her that I had graduated from the University of Missouri-at Columbia in 1993 with a B.S. in Business; I told her that I had worked as an office clerk for J. P. Smith in the Annuity Department, but hated it and quit after three years; I told her that I went to Europe for a year; I told her that two years ago I got my Master's in Business from St. Louis University; I told her how old I was; I told her that I sold Ladies' shoes part-time and that I still lived at home because I was waiting for the "right" job with the "right" company. To counterbalance any negativity this might have towards me, I told her that I did have a job interview the following week for a Senior Clerk's position with the brokerage firm of Coburn, Hanley and Swartz. I told her that I was very excited about that, which was a lie: I only submitted an application and cover letter for the job because my brother, Paul, saw it and told Mom about it and I felt forced to apply for it.

After looking at her wristwatch, and it being ten o' clock,--which is just the beginning of any serious clubbing--Lorain announced to her girlfriends that it was time to go: "We got work tomorrow, girls." Before she left, I asked her if I could have her

phone number and call her sometime. After giving me a guarded stare for a few moments, she then said: "Okay."

I told myself that I had to find out why I hadn't snowed this girl, and I also told myself that I had to nail this girl. I figured that she'd be a three-date-screw. A "three-date-screw" means that it would probably take three dates before she'd let me screw her—but what the hell, she was worth three dates. She was that good-lookin'.

I called her the next evening. Hearing my voice, she sounded a bit surprised. When I questioned her about this, she told that although she doesn't go to clubs anymore,—thinks clubbing is a waste of time—in younger days, when she and her girlfriends use to go and guys would ask for her phone number, they rarely ever called. From personal experience, I can tell you that is all too true, but it works both ways: I have gotten phone numbers from girls at clubs that turned out to be the numbers of Pizza Huts, movie theaters, an insurance company, and once I even got a phone number from a girl that was the phone number of the local chapter for the Rights for Lesbian Women.

After exchanging some small talk, I told her that I was really bummed-out, that I had spent the whole day working on several versions of the financial portfolio that I wanted to present to Coburn, Hanley and Swartz during my interview, to impress them, which was a lie: Other than going to the St. Louis Art Museum, to see this exhibition of Van Gogh's paintings, I didn't do anything that day.

"Why bother," she said, somewhat flatly. "I don't mean to be mean, but it's not that impressive of a job. You said that the salary was \$22,000.00. That's not—"

"Well," I said, interrupting her, "that's starting salary."

"But still," she said. "You—Look. I don't think you'll stay there very long. It will be too confining, too boring for you. You're a-a free spirit—a hustler, of sorts. So, make that work for you. Use that job as a steppingstone. Look, I sell real estate part-time, but I've already made \$7,000 in commissions this year. That's what I see you doing. You'd be great at it. It's challenging; your time is mostly your own, and you can make some big bucks. You're at a crossroads, I can tell—and at thirty-years-old, you better get going. No, I'd only use that job as a steppingstone to another career."

I got to tell you, I wasn't all that pleased by her talking to me like that, but, then again, there was a lot of truth in what she said. It bothered me. It was as if she could see through me. It rattled me—disturbed me.

Towards the end of our conversation, I told her that I know it's during the week, but that I'd really like to see her and would she want to have dinner with me tomorrow night and maybe catch an early movie. There was a moment of silence on the other end of the phone, and then she said: "Okay."

I thought: Fantastic—date number one down; two more to go—and nailed her.

The next evening, I picked her up at her apartment at exactly six-thirty, as she had said. It was a real nice apartment, furnished with modern furniture: big flat-screen TV; glass coffee table; long, black-leather couch, and so on. When she answered the door, she was wearing jeans, a red blouse and red leather flats. She looked hot, and I told her that she looked like a million dollars. She said: "I'm not wearing my boots, so

for the rest of the evening, can the shit-making ... Oh, my boss gave me two free tickets for the movie *The Aviator* at the Clayton. Have you seen it?"

"No, no," I replied.

"Oh, good," she said. "I hear it's really good. There's a Wendy's on the way. We'll stop there and get some burgers and fries. It'll be quick and cheap. I feel like having a hamburger, don't you?"

"Sure," I replied. "That's fine."

All the way to Wendy's, she kept talking about the case that she and her boss were working on. He, her boss, was preparing a court case for a company that was being sued by an employee for an on-the-job-related injury who wanted far more money than the company had offered him and her boss and she were bound and determined to prove that the guy was just a "low-life" who was attempting to bilk the company out of all the money he could get from it. She also talked excitedly about the possible big commission she was expecting to get the following evening from closing the deal on a house sale.

All of this turned me off. All of it was about as good as that Wendy's and that movie—they both sucked. I had once seen this movie in which this guy took a girl to the movies, and during the movie he bought a tub of popcorn and cut a hole in the bottom of it and stuck his penis in it and the girl eventually touched it and began freaking out. All through the movie I thought about doing this, but I didn't.

On the way back to her apartment, I tried to get her to stop at a club, or bar, for a drink, but she adamantly refused, stating that it was almost ten p. m. and she had to work tomorrow. When I pulled into the parking lot of her apartment and turned off the engine, she said: "You had a bad time, didn't you? You hated the food, the movie, and now you're mad that you couldn't wine-and-dine-and-me-take-me-to-bed."

"No-no," I replied.

"Why lie?" she said. "Look, I've been burnt by men enough to know that what I want is someone who's steady and on the same page as I am. You got to start being straight with people."

"All right," I replied. "I didn't like the food or the movie. What's so great about a rich guy building planes and sleeping with movie stars?"

"That was a great movie," she countered. "It's the American Dream—a guy following his passion and making it in life. What's your passion in life?—dreams? Do you have any?"

I can't believe I did this. I told her about one of my most guarded secrets in life—I told her about my love for art, painting and sculptures and such. Since I was a kid, I've loved art, but I've always kept it a secret. When I was about ten, I checked out a book on art from the library and my brother kept calling me a homo, so, no, I always kept my love for art a secret. Hell, I only took those courses in business at college because my best, and only, buddy in high school, Jimmy Miller, took business. I hated it. I would have taken art classes at graduate school if I had thought Mom and Dad would have paid for it. Of late, I have even thought of running away to Chicago. I have a sister who lives there,—because of her husband's job—and Chicago has some of the best art

galleries and museums. The one I love the most is The Art Institute of Chicago. I could live there. I'd be a janitor there, just to be around all of that art. I know my sister would let me live with her and her husband until I got a job and got established—getting an apartment and taking courses in art.

Anyway, I told Lorain this, and she said that it was great. She said that she loves art, too—goes to art galleries and museums all the time herself. She told me that instead of being ashamed of it, I should make it work for me; that I should get my real estate license like she told me and take courses in interior design: “Do you realize what these people make? You could make big bucks.”

She said goodnight and got out of the car, and I got to tell you, my mind was spinning. I didn't even think to even try and grope her. I was confused. I mean, here was a girl that seemed genuinely interested in me—what I could do in life; what I could become; interested in my passion in life. I was confused.

The next evening, while on a dinner break at work, I called her. I desperately wanted to speak to her—to just hear the sound of her voice. She wasn't home and I got her answering machine. I remember that she had said that she might be closing the deal on a house, so I left a message for her. I told her that I hoped she closed the deal on that house, and that I was very sorry for the way that I had acted the other night, and that I wanted to change and I was hoping that she would help me get things going with that real estate license, and such. I don't know. I mean, I've always run from people out of the fear that they would find out how shallow of a person I really am, and now I'm wanting to be close to this girl: need to be close to this girl.

When I got home that night, about twenty to ten, she called. She was very excited and happy. She had closed the deal on that house and going to receive a “sizeable” commission on it. She said that she would love to help me get into the real estate business, and I asked her if we could get together over the weekend to discuss it. I asked her if she would like to go to The Jewel Box in Forest Park Sunday and view all of the flowers there, and then have lunch at the Boat House in Forest Park. She said that she would and then asked me if I wanted to attend ten-thirty mass with her. I told her I would and that I'd see her Sunday.

I would have asked her to go out on Friday or Saturday night, but I had a fear that if I did that I might try to get her to go clubbing and try to grope her and get in her pants, and I didn't want to do that. I didn't want to take the chance of her telling me to get lost. I felt, for some reason, that I really needed her—and get this: I went clubbing that Friday and Saturday, and I had a terrible time. I didn't try to “put-the-make” on any girls there; I didn't snow any girls; I didn't even talk to anyone. I just stood there and drank—and went home early.

We had a great time that Sunday, viewing the flowers at The Jewel Box, and eating at the Boat House. We talked and laughed, and she had this notebook, and throughout the day, she made plans, or instructions, on things I should do—and a time table of when this or that should be done by—to get into the real estate business. She was so good to me, and—well, to make a long story short, by the end of two weeks, we were a couple.

At first, it was great. We went to art galleries and museums; for long walks in parks; we double dated with her girlfriends and their boyfriends;--which I didn't enjoy all that much: well, Lorain always limited my drinking to two drinks per date--she cooked dinner for me; we kept making plans for my -- our -- future: *I'd say in three or four years we should be where we need to be to open our own realty business*; we went bowling and on and on. Yeah, in the beginning, it was great. I was in a committed relationship; I was changing; I was, finally, "normal." I mean, it was great, but god did it get boring!

I mean, it was always the same thing! Pick her up at her apartment; have dinner somewhere; see a movie or something; no more than two drinks, tops, and have her back to her apartment by eleven p.m., tops! Now, I'm jumping through all of these hoops for her: I'm not clubbing; I'm not snowing people; I'm not drinking; I got that job at Coburn, Hanley and Swartz;--that I'm suppose to start tomorrow: It took three interviews over a month, but I got it. --I'm signed-up for real estate classes; I'm enrolled in interior design classes at the junior college; she wouldn't let me quit my part-time job at the department store: she said to keep it for a while, that I could always use the extra money. Plus, on top of all of this, she wants me to sell my car--my Jeep Wrangler. She says that it's a kid's car; that it's bad for business and that I should have a Volvo like her. So, I'm doing all of this, and have you once heard me, man, say anything about sex? That's because there was none. Throughout all of this, not once did I nail her. She wouldn't let me.

No! Now stop! After we're engaged, we'll go all the way. If we're going to make it to 10 o'clock mass tomorrow, I need to get some sleep. Give me a call when you get home. You need to buy a cell phone. Who today, especially if you're in business, doesn't have a cell phone? Bye.

I mean, it was just sex. I wanted to have sex. She said that she had dumped the guy she was dating six months ago. So she hasn't had sex in six months. What is she, a fucking camel or something?

Now she wants honesty; she wants someone who's steady, reliable; she doesn't want to be "burned" again by a man--will not be "burned" again by a man. So, here I am, going through all of these hoops for her to prove to her that I'm her man, and get this: It's this coming weekend, and I'm starting that job Monday, tomorrow, and she wants to do something "really" special for me this weekend--but does it involve sex? No. She wants me to finally meet her parents, and the "special" thing that she's going to do for me, to celebrate my beginning of the first leg of my transformation by getting that job, is to cook for me the best Sunday dinner that I have ever had at her parent's home. Can you believe that?!

Well, she wants honesty, and that's just what I gave her. Saturday night, when I dropped her off at her apartment, before she got out of the car, at exactly ten o'clock,--and after another boring, predictable date--I took her left hand in my hands and said to her: "Lorain, I know all that you have done for me, and I'm appreciative; I am. I love you, Lorain, and I'm trying my best to be the man you want me to be, but I'm all pent-up inside. I'm as nervous as a cat what with starting that job and all. You said that we'd have sex once we're officially engaged, but that's three months from now. Why can't we just have sex now, Lorain?"

She was silent for a moment. Then, she shook her head and said: "It always comes down to sex, doesn't it."

"No," I replied. "It doesn't always come—"

"All right," she said. "I'll make a deal with you. It's too late tonight. As you know, I'm attending ten o'clock mass with my parents tomorrow and then cooking that dinner for you. So tonight's out. Here's the deal. After we have dinner with my parents, we'll come back to my apartment and have anal sex—with a condom on. Until we're officially engaged, we'll do this at least once a week." She then pulled her right hand from my hands and brought it in front of me to shake. "Is it a deal?" she said.

I-I was stunned. I couldn't believe what I was hearing.

"Let me see if I got this straight," I said. "We're going to start having anal sex?"

"Yes," she replied, "—with a condom on. Deal?"

"Hell yes it's a deal," I said, grasping her hand and shaking it heartily. "That's great." Then I said: "No, wait a minute. Now I feel like I'm forcing you to do something that you don't want to do."

"No, no," she replied. "I have wants too, Tom. Don't you think there have been times when I have wanted—well, we have a deal. I'll see you tomorrow, four-thirty, sharp." She leaned over and gave me a quick kiss. She then said bye and got out of the car.

Wow! Wow! I was having anal sex! This was great. Now, I have never had anal sex before, but anal sex on a Sunday has to be far greater than just plain old traditional drunken sex on a Saturday night. This was great. The only thing that concerned me was what if after we're done I pull it out and see poop. At this stage of our relationship, I didn't know if I really wanted to see her poop. Oh, well—I was having anal sex!

Bathed, shaved and dressed in new jeans, a white shirt and a blue sport's jacket, and with two condoms in my wallet, I left my parent's big old house at exactly three p.m. I smelled good, too. I had showered myself with strong, expensive cologne.

I don't know why I had left so early. My parent's house is in Lemay, and Lorain's parents live in Kirkwood, which is only about a twenty minute drive. I guess I was just so anxious to have sex with her—anal sex!—that I wanted to get the ball rolling and get that dinner over with. I wasn't anxious about meeting Lorain's parents, though. I don't like meeting parents. I almost met them last month. We were supposed to go out to dinner and then to the symphony, but they got the flu, or food poisoning, and cancelled.

Gosh, I was just so excited, and anxious. My palms were sweating. But, man, was I devastated when I got there. You should have seen that subdivision—and that house; a mansion, man - a three-storied, mansion of Tudor design, with dormers, and a double-car garage and a circular driveway. It had this inner atrium entrance, and you could see a frickin' chandelier suspended from a high-vaulted ceiling through the large window of many small panes of glass above the ornate, heavy, oak-stained, wooden door of the entrance. I was devastated.

I knew her parents had money, because Lorain had told me they had. Her father was some type of executive for the electric company. But, man, I didn't want them to be that rich. I was devastated.

It wasn't even three-thirty yet, and I wasn't about to barge in on them early now that I knew that they were so rich. About two miles back, there was a strip mall, and I decided to kill some time there and buy the most expensive bottle of wine that I could find there.

I was depressed. I felt like going back home and calling her and telling her that the whole thing's off; that all of it was just too much for me—the job; the real estate classes; her: all of it was just too much for me to take. Goodbye.

I don't know. I should have been born a hippy—you know, free love; living in a commune; doing what you really want to do in life; no hassles. But everybody was so happy with me. My parents were happy with me;—and they really liked Lorain: they thought she was a bit bossy, but they really liked her.—my brother wasn't bitching to my parents anymore about how much of a bum I am; Lorain was happy with me; I was happy with me. I don't know. I was depressed. I had all of these pent-up emotions inside of me.

Anyway, I pull into that strip mall, and there's a grocery store at the one end of it. So, I get out of my car, and I'm walking across the parking lot, when this guy pops out in front of me from nowhere. He's rail-thin, and he's wearing this wrinkled, tattered, old, dark-grey suit. His unshaven face is sunken and lined with wrinkles that are deeper than the wrinkles that are on a prune. Above the breast pocket of his suit coat is a stick-em with the name "BOB" written on it in black marker ink by a shaky hand. He stands rod-iron straight in front of me, clinging desperately to this tattered, ear-leafed, old Bible. He's pressing it tightly against his chest. After brushing away strands of his shoulder-length-long, matted, salt-and-pepper hair from his face with his left hand, he says to me: "Sir, have you found God?"

"Why, yes I have, Bob," I replied. "And more than that, Bob, God has given me a message to give to you. Bob, God is angry with man again. In fact, Bob, God is going to destroy man again. God wants you, Bob, to be the next Adam of man. God is going to assign you a female. You are to begin having carnal knowledge with her and replenish the earth. Now, Bob, you will find this female, this new Eve, at the St. Louis Zoo. The only thing is, Bob, it's an orangutan. The Lord works in mysterious way, Bob. But, go for it. Nail her good, Bob."

I walked away from him laughing, with ol' Bob shouting fire, brimstone and damnation at me.

Damn, it felt good snowing ol' Bob like that. It had felt REAL good. I almost felt like my old self again.

I still had plenty of time to kill until four-thirty, so instead of just buying that bottle of expensive wine and leaving the store, I decided to just roam around the store a bit. You know, I was just killing time, walking up and down the aisles, looking at items, and people. Just killing time, you know ... All right. If truth be told, it had felt so good snowing ol' Bob like that—the sheer ecstasy of it!—I was looking for someone else to

snow. I mean, I just wanted to do it just one more time—just one more time and it would be the last time that I ever did it again. Just one more time—with just one other person, and I was done, forever. When lo and behold, in the non-food section, I spotted this vision of loveliness. She was hot—and she wasn't young either. I'd say she was in her late forties.

She was wearing this flower-printed dress that was making love to that hour-glass figure of hers. She had an angular-shaped face and large dark-brown eyes that matched the color of her thick, flowing, slightly graying, hair, which was stylishly coiffed—up high in the back, like the mane of an uppy thoroughbred.

I just kept staring at her. I couldn't help it. And what was really weird about this was that I kept having this eerie feeling that we were connected in some way—like I knew her; like-like that maybe in a former life we had been man and wife, or something. I just had to speak to her.

She was standing behind a cart, which only had two or three items in it. In her slender hands,—finely manicured; fingernails polished a clear gloss—she was holding a box of tampons, reading something on the back of the package. A look of perplexity was on her face, as if she was trying to decide whether or not to purchase that item.

I came to a stop beside her, and said: "Hi."

After looking me up and down suspiciously, she replied, hesitantly, cautiously: "Hello."

"That brand of feminine protection is highly recommended by the Surgeon General, but a woman as beautiful as you, in my opinion, should just let it flow."

"What did you say to ..." she began, but then stopped, totally shocked at first, but then totally offended. "Get away from me—you, you pervert ... Excuse me, ma'am," she then said to this elderly woman who was passing-by, "but this pervert is harassing me ... Where's the manager?!" she then stated in a loud voice, looking all around. "Manager! Manager! Manag--"

Well, I got scared, and I got the hell out of there, fast.

Back in my car, I just sat there. My whole body was shaking—literally shaking.

You're sick, I said. You're sick. That woman was right. You're a pervert. That wasn't funny, or cute, what you did back there. Perverts do things like that. You're sick. Sick! Sick! Sick! ... Wait a minute, I then said to myself. Wait a minute. You're not sick. You're just nervous. It's all of these changes going on in your life. It's too much. I can't handle all of it. Well, then do what you said you were going to do. Go back home, call her up and tell her that the whole thing is off. Go back to your old life—start clubbing and drinking again ... No, I don't want to do that ... Well, then give it a chance. Give it three months, and if you're not happy with it by that time, then tell her it's over. You got a good thing going here. Don't blow it. Lorain really loves you, and you love her—and you're having anal sex tonight.

I felt a lot better after having had that talk with myself. And as luck would have it, at the other end of that strip mall, as I was pulling out of it, I spotted a wine shop. So, I got a bottle of wine there and then drove slowly back to Lorain's parent's house.

At exactly four-thirty, I rang the doorbell to their house. God, even the chimes to that doorbell sounded expensive.

Lorain answered the door.

"Hi, honey," she said cheerfully as I stepped onto the marble floor of the atrium entrance. She was wearing a white dress, and she looked killer-hot. She gave me a kiss on the right side of my face, and I saw myself in her bedroom just plowing away on her lovely ass.

"Hi," I replied.

"Oh," Lorain said as I handed the bottle of wine to her, "you brought wine? You didn't have to do that. We have wine and port here."

"Well, I didn't want to come empty —"

"A Cabernet Sauvignon?!" she cried, reading the label of the bottle. "This is too expensive of a bottle of wine for this occasion. We'll save this for —"

"Well, who have we here," stated a very distinguished-looking, late-middle-aged man, emerging from the long, open hallway directly in front of us. He was tall and thin, with graying light-brown hair, which was combed straight back. Although he wasn't wearing a tie with the white shirt and light-brown dress pants he had on, he was sporting a corduroy jacket that had patches on the elbows.

"Daddy," Lorain said, interlacing her left arm in my right arm, "this is Tom."

"Hello there, young man," he said. "I'm glad to finally meet you."

"I'm glad to finally meet you, sir," I replied.

"Oh," he stated with a gruff and a smile. "Call me Peter."

"Thank you, Pet —"

"Mom," Lorain said to the woman who emerged from the same direction of the hallway as had her father. "This is Tom."

I could have died then and there. My mind froze and by bowels locked.

"We've met," Lorain's mother stated sternly, standing there in that flower-printed dress. "He's the one who was giving me advice on personal feminine hygiene."

Oh, shit! I screamed silently.

It was a mess, man ... Well, I didn't want that damn job to begin with — but I was sure looking forward to having that anal sex.

Tim Clark is a blogger who wants to be a writer, a warehouse associate, a happily married man (for 28 years) and a father of two from Columbus, Ohio. He is an occasional and proud contributor to Street Speech, a local homeless advocacy newspaper, and is thrilled to be allowed to write a monthly column for The Wild Word. There are a few others, that can be viewed on his blog, timclark.contently.com.



Survival of the Fittest!

There was an article in a scholarly journal recently indicating that insects, spiders, mammals, in fact most species that are not human evolve more quickly. The assertion was generational influence operates on a fairly static principal, and since these “lower species” have a much shorter life span the influence is accelerated. The members who live, and reproduce create more robust, elusive, and able offspring.

No matter how you feel about climate change meteorological evidence proves that winters have been milder, and summers warmer. One of the effects of this climate change is the increased opportunity for reproduction. All of the sudden species are racing down the evolutionary highway.

Yesterday, my friend, John, was working in the dock of our building. He came across a huge spider. Even John found the size of this spider to be unnerving, and he doesn’t panic easily. He captured the spider in something sturdy, and tossed the beast outside.

“It turned around and looked at me, and I swear it gave me the finger.” He said. “It made me a little mad, but it was so big, and looked so angry I decided to let it go.”

I don’t blame him.

Today, I stopped to get gas. There were a couple of birds bouncing around on the concrete pad of the gas station. Dusty, brown birds, hopping closer and then retreating on the harsh gray concrete, looking at me, then bouncing up on the grass. They would start over again, coming to within a few feet of my car, then hopping away. *Stupid birds*, I thought.

Since I was dangerously close to getting to work early I decided to stop and get a cup of coffee. There was a Tim Horton’s right on the way. Coffee for me, and some donuts for my associates, bar keep.

As I walked back to my car, a cup of coffee, and box of donuts a wonderful companion to my little stroll, I saw two birds right by my car. They looked like the same birds! One of them flew up and came to rest on the railing of the cargo carrier on top of my car. He looked at me, black, pupil less eyes flashing, anger, resentment and contempt. It was a little unnerving.

“What are you doing?” I asked, trying to sound intimidating.

The other bird flew up and landed on the hood over the motor of my car, turned, looked at me and said, “We’re going to follow you around. You can’t escape. We are going to ruin your day.”

Stunned, I stopped, feet frozen, knees locked, mouth moving making no sound. I didn't know what to do, what to say to a bird who was threatening me.

"Yeah, we hate you." The one on the top of the car said.

"Why?" Squeaked out.

"Oh, I don't know. Pollution, deforestation, urban sprawl, wars, walls, windmills. A general lack of concern for every other creature on the planet." He said, his voice whistling through the air, cutting like a tree branch being swung in anger, the barbs and thorns right in the front, ready to rip off flesh. He bounced and turned, and looked at me sideways.

"But, I have this World Wildlife Fund commemorative leather wrist band with a panda device right on the badge. All proceeds from the sale went to protect the environment." I said, my voice shaking, my hand shaking as it attempted to point at the ornamental band on my wrist and hold the coffee. My wrist was shaking, trying to turn the emblem out and hold the donuts.

They screeched with what I am assuming was bird laughter. The bird on the hood looked at a group of squirrels who had gathered on the wooden privacy fence that kept the mechanics shop dreariness from spilling onto the donut shop parking lot, and said, "Isn't that cute, he has a bracelet?"

One of the squirrels laughed so hard he fell off the fence.

"Our hero," the big squirrel at the end said, wiping tears off his face with little squirrel paws. "I guess that makes up for driving the car, all alone, every day. Or the years of trash, and waste, and neglect." He was starting to sound a little angry.

I jumped at a sound behind me, turning so quickly most of my coffee ended up running down my leg, burning all the way. Hot, steaming, delicious liquid, dark and tempting, soaked into my sock, the loss was painful, the pain was immense.

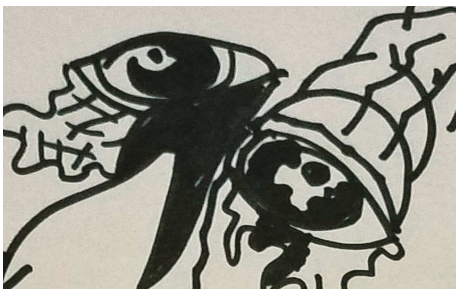
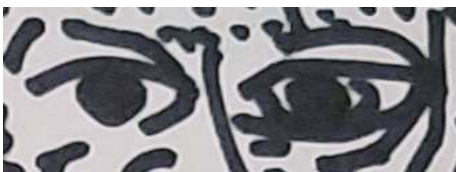
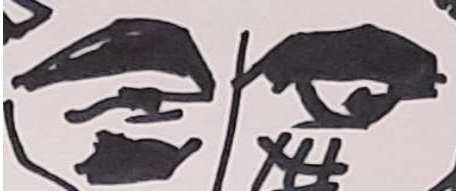
Two of the angriest geese I had ever seen were walking towards me, cursing, and hissing. Language so awful I can't repeat it here, or anywhere.

I backed up toward the store, my left heel bumped into the raised sidewalk and I knew the wall was only a few feet away. I was trapped. All of the animals were fanned out in front of me, chanting softly, uniformly, something deep, primal, terrifying. It resonated in my bones, in my ears, I could feel the anger in my chest and stomach.

I was out of options, and time. I threw the box of donuts at them. It fell short and they spilled over the parking lot.

"Hey, donuts!" They all sang. And started eating ravenously.

I jumped in my car and sped off, breaking speed limits, traffic regulations and common decency. But, I got away. If you happen to be in the north part of town and a bunch of city animals ask about me don't tell them where I am, please.



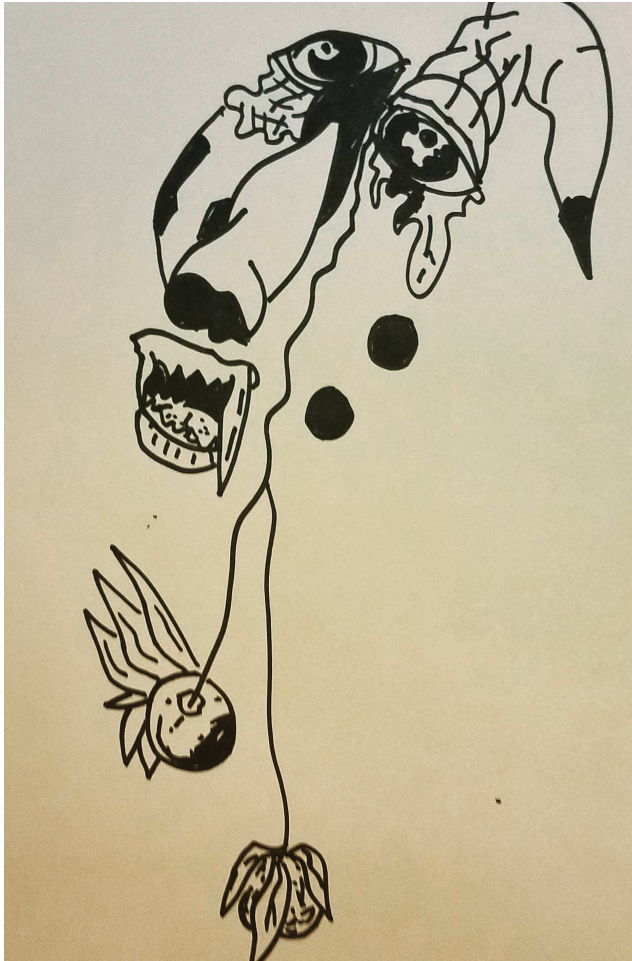
Howard Allen

like stained glass
and emerging faces

Howard Allen is a 36 year old South Florida native. He has been writing his entire life, winning an interstate book contest at the age of 11 and continuing as a dedicated essayist, journalist, novelist and screenwriter in willing perpetuity ever since. He currently resides in "illustrious" Hollywood, Fl. where he endlessly meddles and toils in an impassioned and somewhat possessed pursuit of his beloved & eminent craft. He can be contacted via [instagram.com/TheTwistedKnife](https://www.instagram.com/TheTwistedKnife) and his work can be seen at AtaraxianTimes.com

That is the bio that Howard provided but that's not the whole story. Howard is a ferociously prolific artist on Instagram and his art may be precariously ephemeral. His images come and go from his website. You can see thumbnail collages of scores of other pieces. Many of his pieces have titles; some I have titled with the "like" comments on the Instagram panel. One I titled by describing its fate - lost source lost title. The originals accumulate but the most durable record of Howard's work may be in his phone or the low-res images on Instagram. Some are here, of course. Enjoy them while you can. Street art is in the moment.

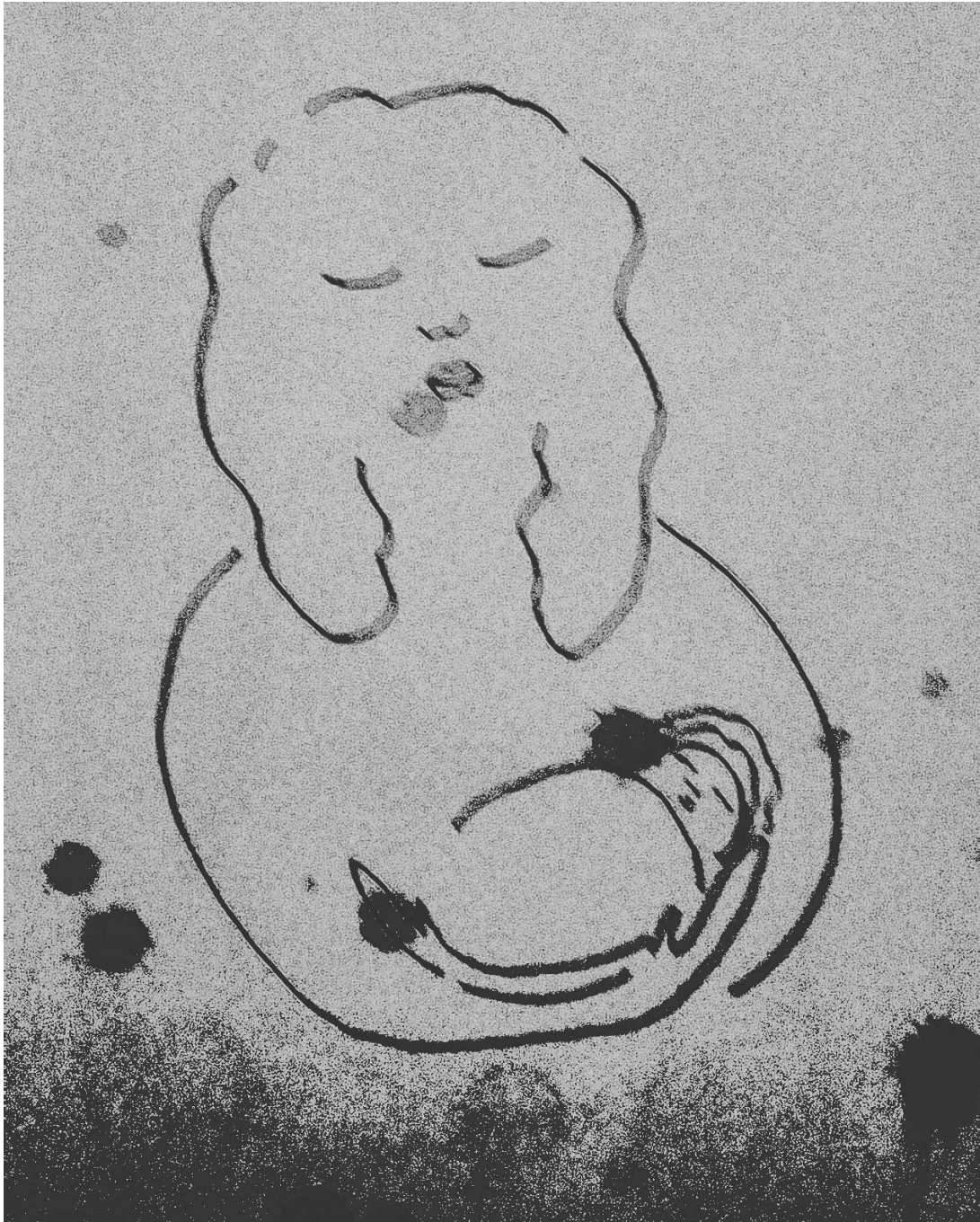
~ editor



The Narcissist's Pain



The Heart of a Tumor



daddyborja and verdantsky like this



bb.bha likes this

Silver Tongued Jackass
aka No Fun





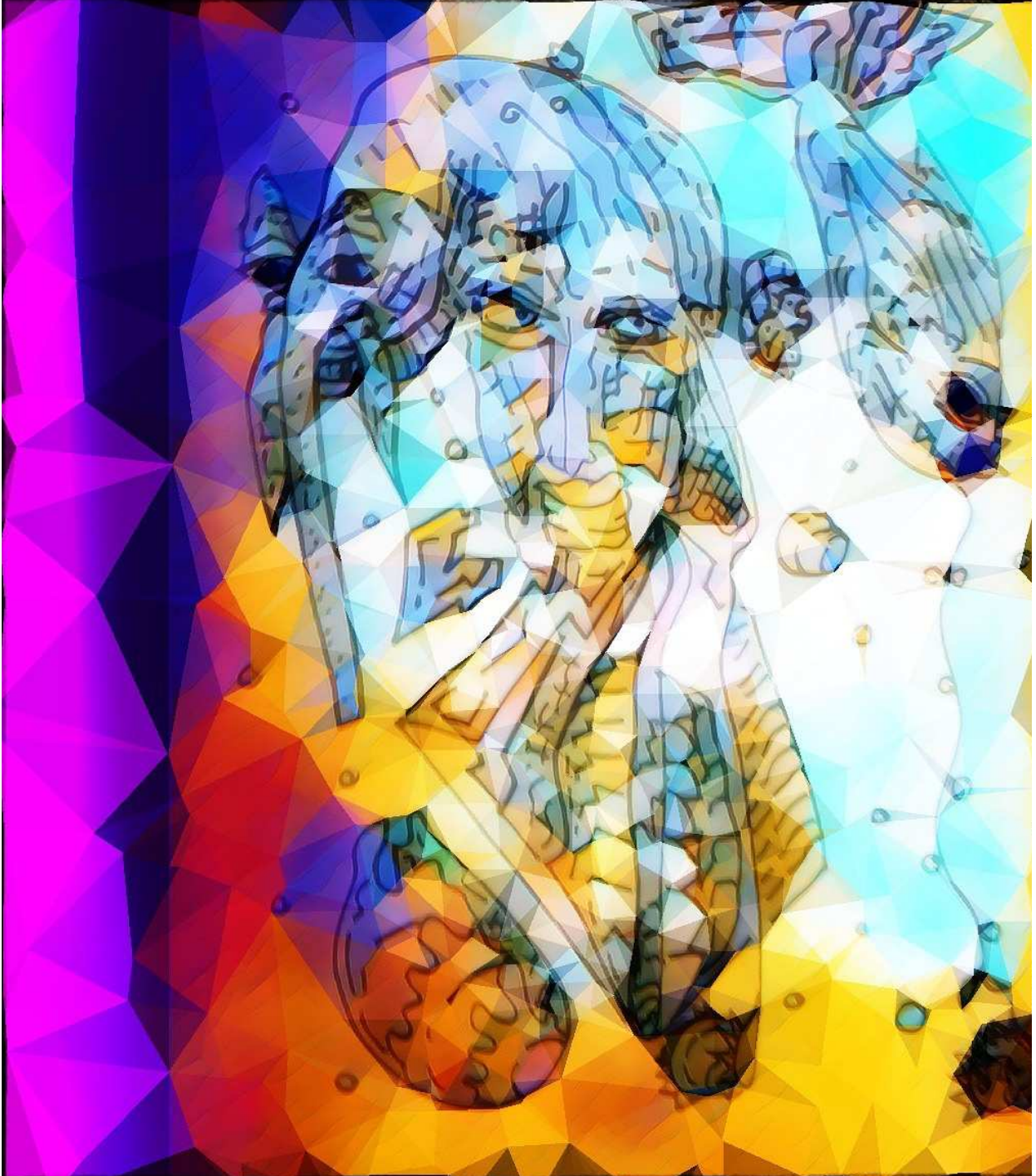
face - lost source lost title



tapeleak likes this

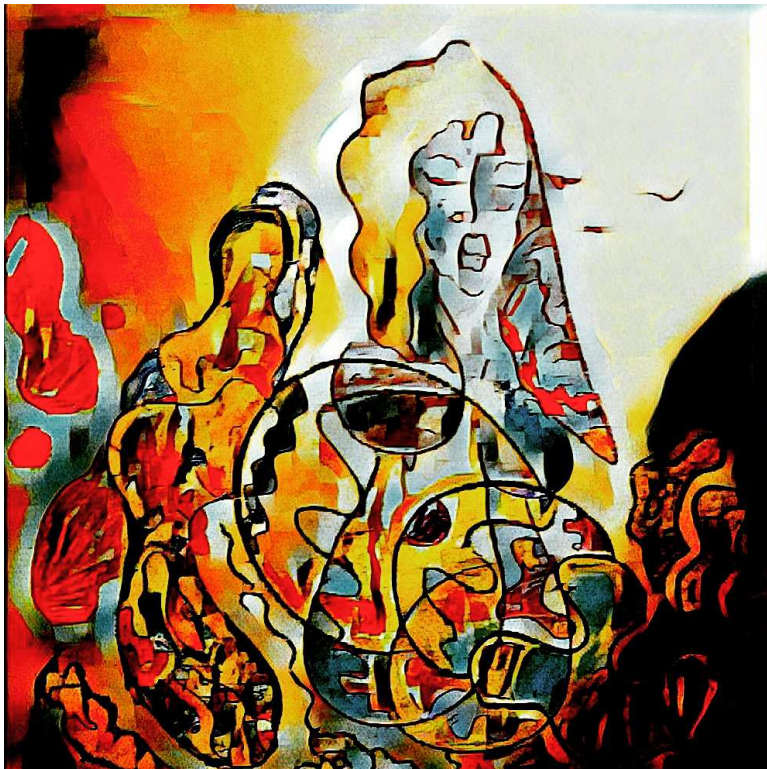


I Am Here For You
aka Fibbinacci's Shoes



Eternal Regret

verdansky likes this



The Beholder



The Ego Always Lies
aka I Just Can't Figure Them Out

Heather Haley

quiet idaho



Heather Haley is a Boise artist. She works primarily in oils. Heather identifies art, science, wildlife, and travel as four entwined threads running through her life, each wrapped around the other. She is a world traveler. She tutors in math and science and has a Biology degree with a focus on Zoology. Heather rescues and adopts injured wildlife. She is carried away by distant cultures and majestic landscapes. This gallery features some of her oil paintings.

Find Heather Haley at www.heathermariehaley.com/ and <https://treasurevalleyartistsalliance.org/Gallery/heather-marie-haley/>



Spring
Emergence



Sawtooth Summer
Splendor



Winter Silence



As the Fog
Settles



Untold Tundra



Enchanted Meadow



Boreal
Tranquility

A decorative manuscript page featuring a floral border with blue and red flowers and green leaves. The text is in Latin, written in a Gothic script. The page is torn at the bottom right corner.

Andrew Bobik iconographic

This complete bio can be found on Andrew's old website, aicon.blago.org. Email and Ordering links don't work but it is a remarkable site.

Andrew J. Bobik, Jr. was born in 1965 and was raised in and has been active in the life of the Byzantine church. His love for the church and interest in art led him to the study of iconography. After much study of the ancient canons and writings regarding iconography, and observing iconographers at work, he chose to begin the journey of writing icons himself.

Since 1997 he has been writing icons both for churches and for individuals. His icons are in several churches in Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Colorado, California and Ohio as well as in several private collections. In the brief period of time since beginning, he has written over 300 icons. His work is done in acrylics and he has utilized both canvas and wood for the various projects. He has also used his woodworking skills to build icon screens, altars, service tables, and various other liturgical items for churches.

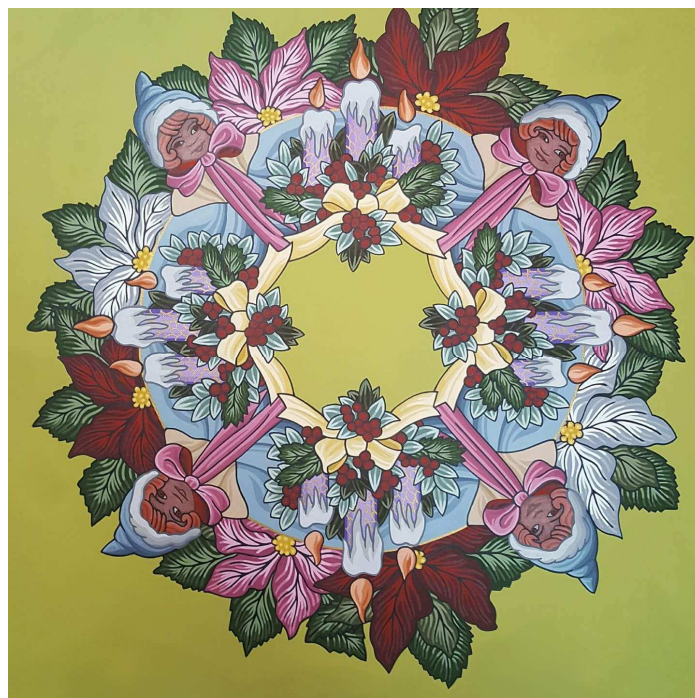
Some secular posters are included here as well.



Carousel
Christmas
Ostrich



Hen



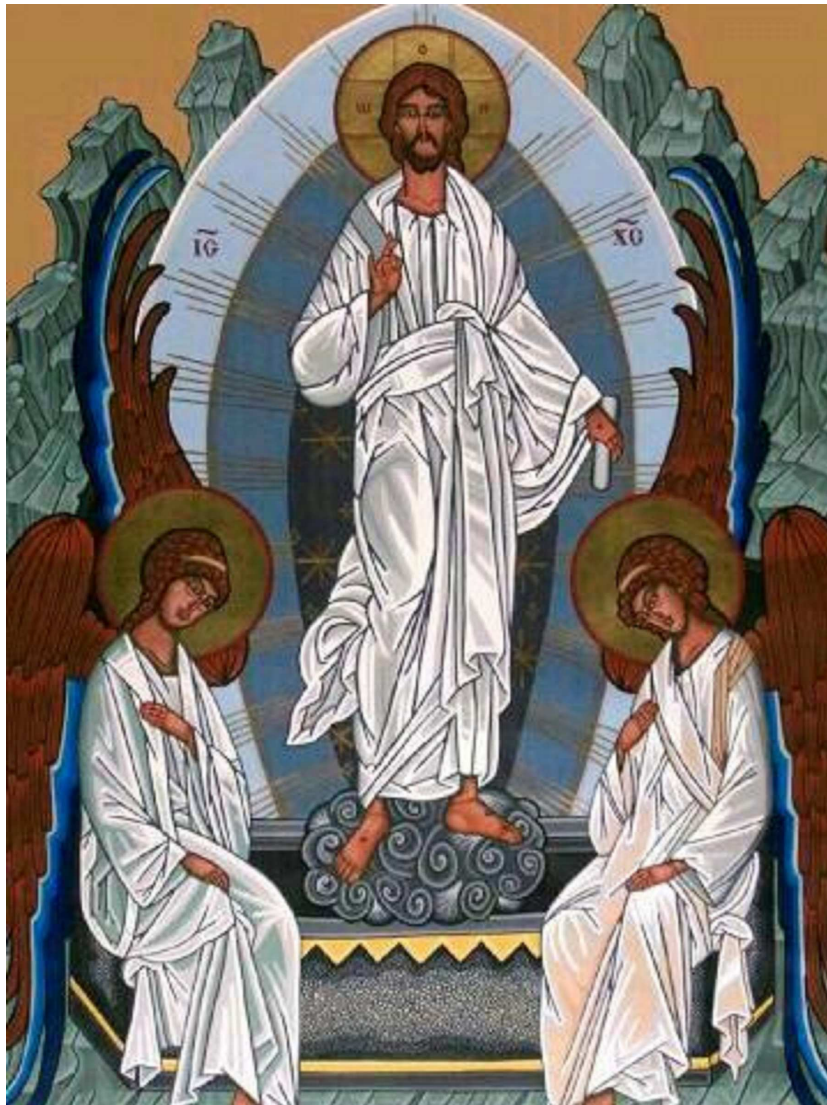
Christmas
Wreath



Mayan Warrior Princess



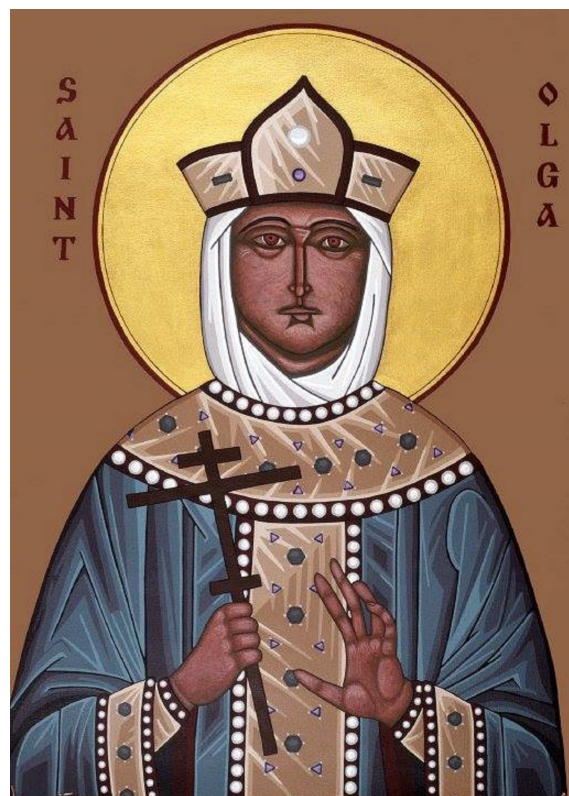
English
Pirate

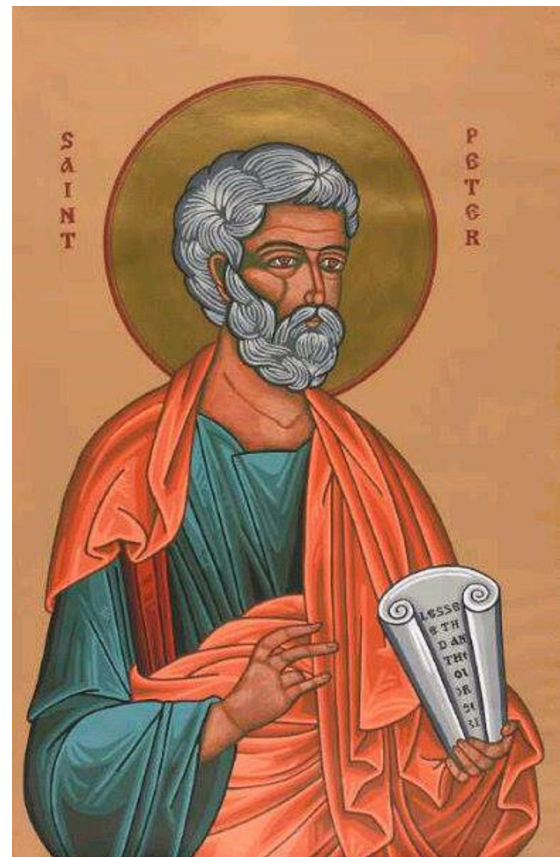
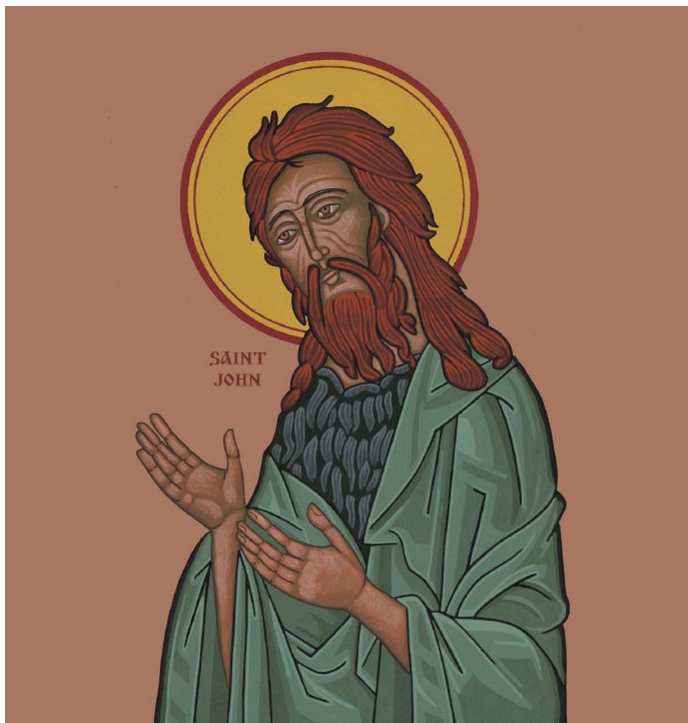
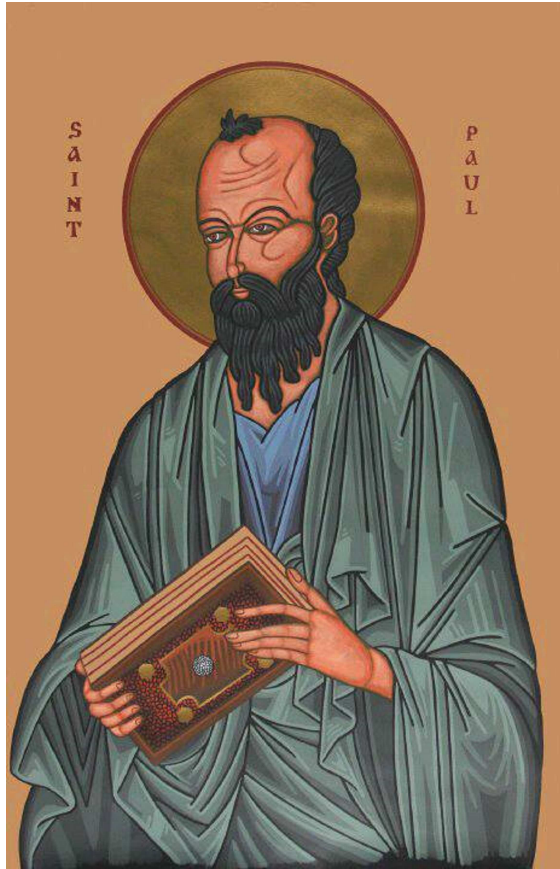


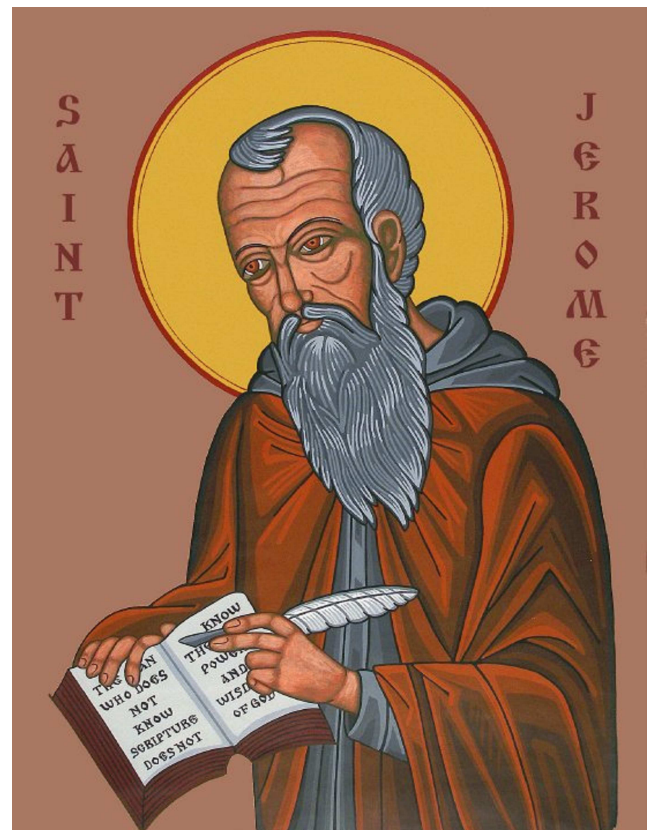
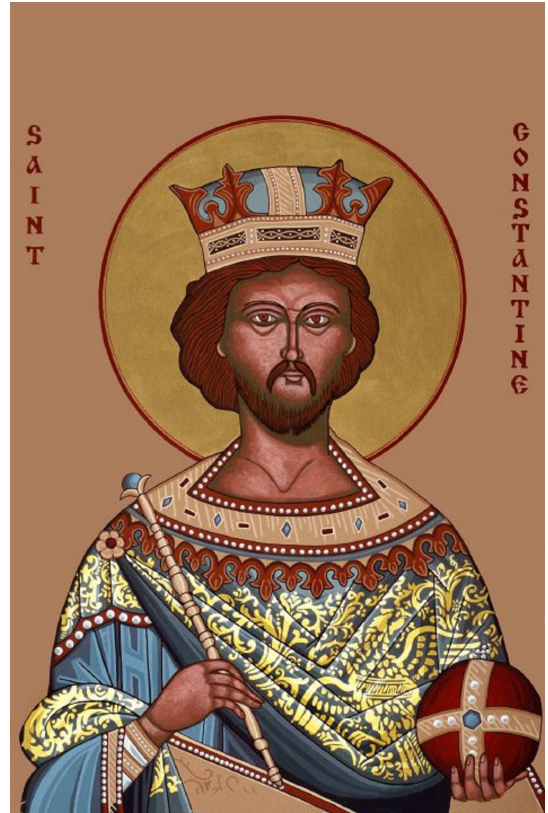
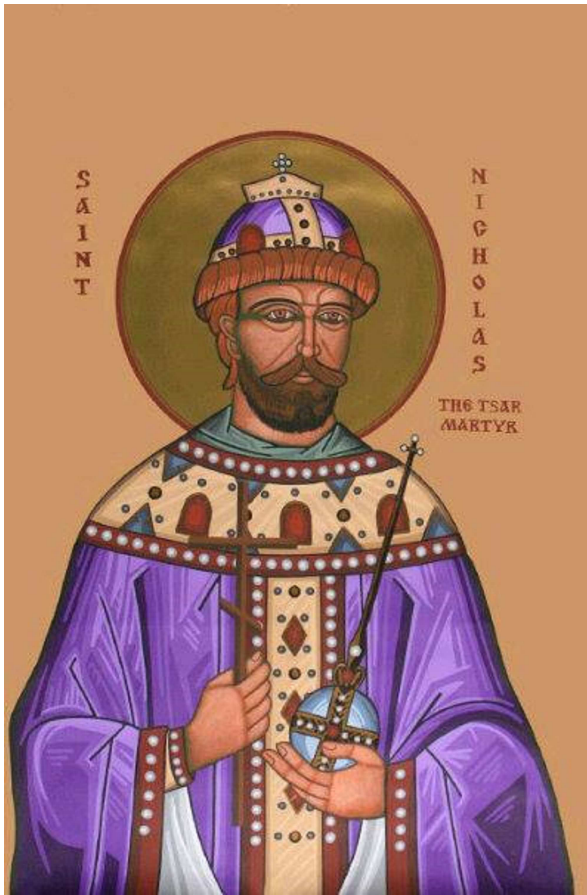
Christ Is Risen!

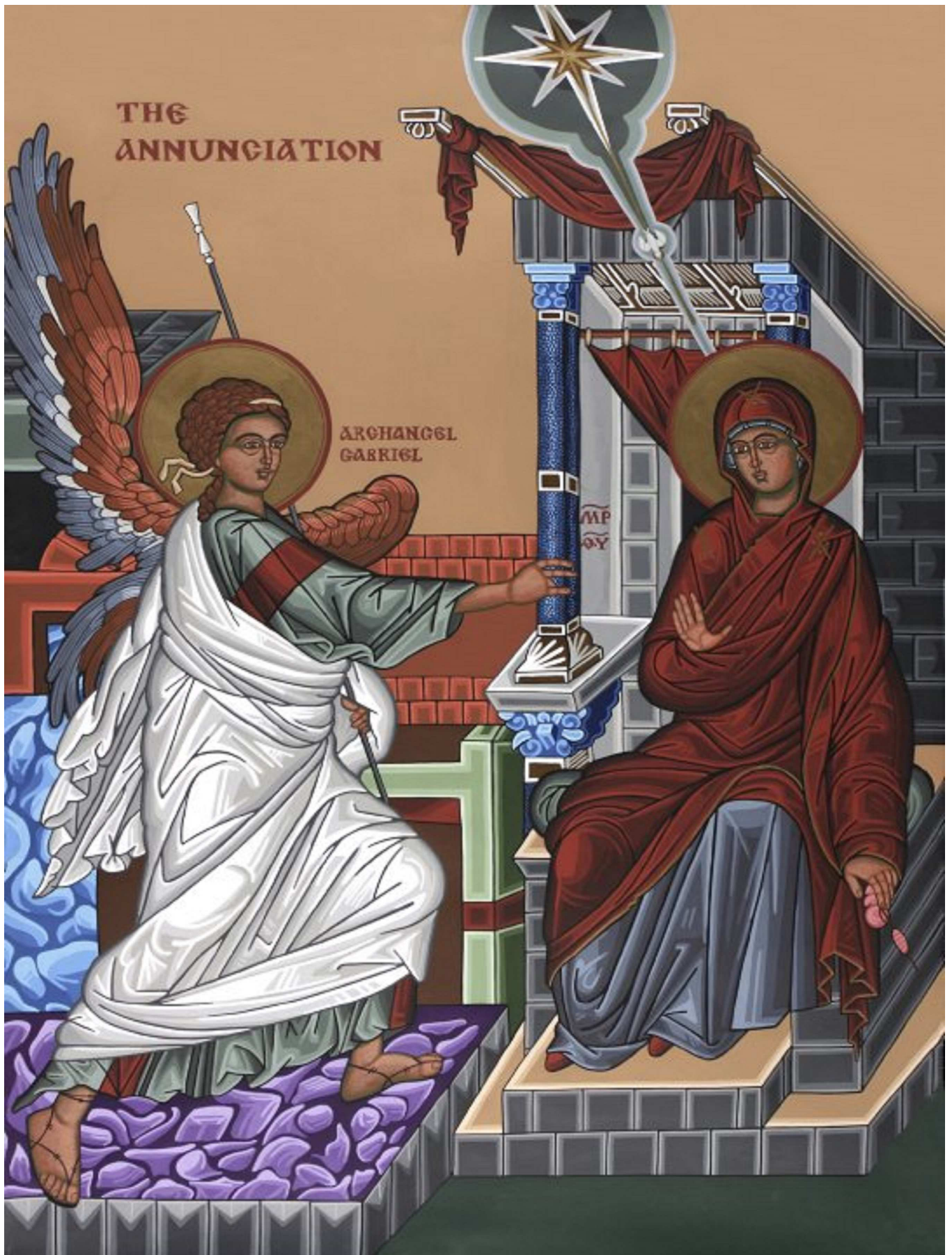


Tryptich
83









An Opening on the Coast: Adrienne Stacey

Lanning Russell



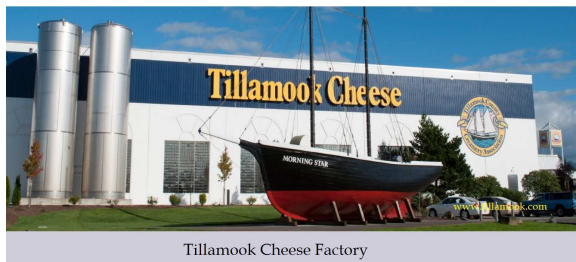
Adrienne Stacey is a Portland potter.

Lanning Russell is editor and publisher of Event Horizon.

Adrienne Stacey, Portland potter, opened with her Naturescapes at the Tillamook County Pioneer Museum on September 24. Tillamook is not the usual or expected venue for an art opening and reception. The Oregon coastal galleries will be found north and south of Tillamook. To the north, the vibrant tourist meccas of Cannon Beach and Seaside have the "must-see" parade of galleries and studios. Certainly Newport and Florence to the south have a strong arts presence. And there are stalwart long-lived solo galleries peppered literally along the entire 363 miles of the Oregon coast.



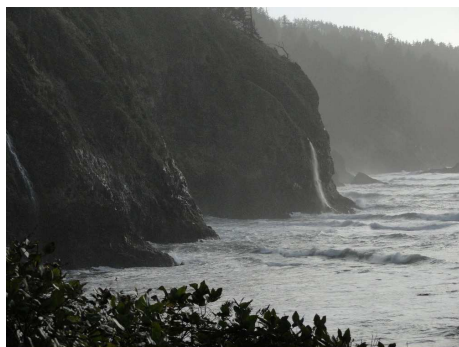
Tillamook County Pioneer Museum



Tillamook Cheese Factory

Not so much in Tillamook. Tillamook is nationally renowned for its dairy industry. Cheese, ice cream and industry history are featured at the huge Tillamook Cheese Factory and Dairy Co-op. Tillamook is the Tillamook County seat. The Pioneer Museum is in a complex that includes the imposing county

courthouse, the city hall and the post office. And the city is on the back end of an expansive, closed-in bay, well-off the wild exposure to the Pacific Ocean.



View of Cape Lookout

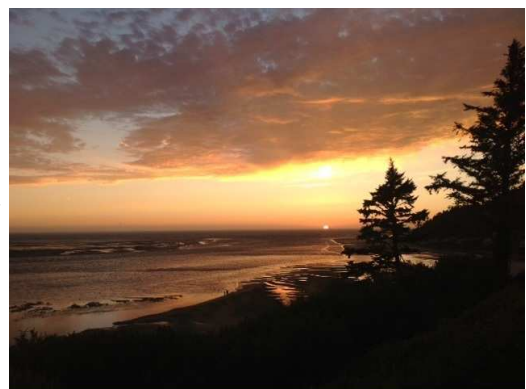
Our family has long familiarity with Tillamook. Geographically the town is the gateway to our favorite retreats - the villages of Netarts and Oceanside and

the scenic loop, parks and hikes of the Three Capes area. These spectacular sweeping beachscapes may be rivaled by other stretches of the Oregon coast but they are surpassed nowhere else in the world.

The improvised art venue in Tillamook was strategically chosen by Adrienne. The subjects are the native plants of Tillamook County. Adrienne enlisted a forest ranger with a small display to help visitors appreciate the exhibit. The ranger was there to answer questions about native



View from Oceanside



Netarts Sunset

plants - especially "weeds" - of Northwest Oregon's forests and estuaries.

A tag line on the wall in the exhibit is O! How Glorious Our Weeds! and that celebration is the consistent motif of the art. The objects are free-standing vessels and wall-mounted slabs - many of them framed.

A technique employed throughout the body of the work is visually self-explanatory. The



Reception - O! How Glorious Our Weeds



Reception - editor in hat

Narrowleaf Plantain and other plants are actual specimens which have been pressed into a fresh slab for the piece, September (Triptych #3) . They may have stayed in-place during the firing but only their detailed image remains, emblazoned into the stoneware like a fossil.

Imagery is rendered by skilled painting, incision and glazing.

Leaves and other plant constructions are meticulously sculpted and glazed, or reduction-fired without glaze. They are found both on wall-mounted and free-standing pieces.

Adrienne's intent for the show is summed up in her artist's statement posted with her work:

Every piece in this show is flawed - Some are naturally occurring flaws, for example, cracks a bit of brick dust, impurities in the clay. Other flaws are my doing, too much glaze, too little glaze. Not enough reduction during the kiln firing. (Reduction is manipulated by the amount of gas and oxygen I allow in the kiln during the firing.)

*The pieces in this show represent the best of over 200 attempts to share with you the beauty around us, embodied in clay. I also wanted to share a deep fear I've had for, oh, **so long**. The unwell-being of our Earth.*

One of my Tillamook mentors I met in my two year journey here, made me cry, when she told me she sees our "weeds" in a whole different fashion now. Maybe you already see the beauty in all of creation, or maybe you are looking at Plantain (#20) and seeing its beauty for the first time. Either way, remember

*"The difference between a flower and a weed is a judgement."
-Unknown*



September triptych #3

The exhibit is Adrienne's "dream show", specifically about Tillamook County, and was two-and-a-half years in the making from concept to opening. She connected early-on with Carla Albright who is an active caretaker of the Kilchis Point Reserve - a 200 acre wildlife habitat and historic site on Tillamook Bay. It's owned by the Tillamook County Pioneer Museum and held as a public trust. Other venues for research and sample collecting were Tillamook Forestry Center, Rainforest



Nursery, Cape Lookout, Sitka Sedge, Bob Straub State Park, the Little Nestucca River, George Creek, Nesko-win, and private property visited with permission.. A 1986 Volkswagen Vanagon was Adrienne's mobile studio.



Adrienne Stacey

Adrienne's most important objectives are met immediately in her show. She is celebrating a time and place - the natural environment across the seasons. The aesthetic objectives of a master potter and ceramic artist, realized through artistry in design and technical skill - these are manifest. But another objective is documentation.

Adrienne studied plant morphology, classification, plant ecology, and even chemical composition in assembling her work. The labeling and titles reflect species, location, presentation over time, and other technical aspects of her subject "weeds".



Detail: Queen Anne's Lace Sectional

Unavoidably, Adrienne's environmental consciousness became more focused and informed by her project. This sensibility is reflected in her email to me:

In December I asked Travis Korbe, Park Ranger at Cape Lookout, where the shore birds were, and why there was so little natural debris on the shore at Cape Lookout. He spoke of the waters warming, causing changes in the tiny sea life at the bottom of the food chain relied on by native seabirds and shore animals, causing those species to move farther north. On the other hand, Travis also showed me a restored stream bed that now runs swift and clear through the park. What I frequently see at the coast, and what motivated me to try and do something was land that is (as I wrote in my journal) "Tattered, torn and forlorn, shorn, diseased, crushed, mushed, pruned, shaven, ripped, sprayed, usurped, water source removed, chopped, burned, totally destroyed, plowed, paved, oiled, rip rapped, driven on, exploited, blown up, mined, scored, scarred."

The show ran from September 20th through November 26.



Thimbleberry Sectional



Thimbleberry Leaf Vignette



Snowberry Triptych



Foxglove Leaf and Stock



August
Triptych #2



May
Oregon Coast
Spring



Notes:

Potters and other artists might be interested to know:

- Why seaweed fires out so beautifully on clay: The seaweed has salt, iodine and potassium; it flashes oranges and brown on the fired pieces.
- Uses of several native plants by the local Indians and pioneers: Beargrass was used for large baskets, cat tails have edible tubers, salmon was packed in ferns and pine needles were also woven into smaller baskets.

Adrienne thanks the many who helped her in the 2½ years leading up to her show, including:

- Nan Devlin at the Tillamook Visitors' information Center
- Carla Albright, who works at the Tillamook Pioneer Museum
- Alice, of Alice's Country House Restaurant
- Fran McReynolds, Director of the Tillamook Forest Center
- Denise Berkshire, Education & Interpretation Coordinator
- Ruby and Ted Madrona
- Mark and Kim Cavatorta
- David Bisson, Kilchis Point Advisor
- Sally Rissel
- Travis Korbe, Park Ranger at Cape Lookout



Justin d Robinson

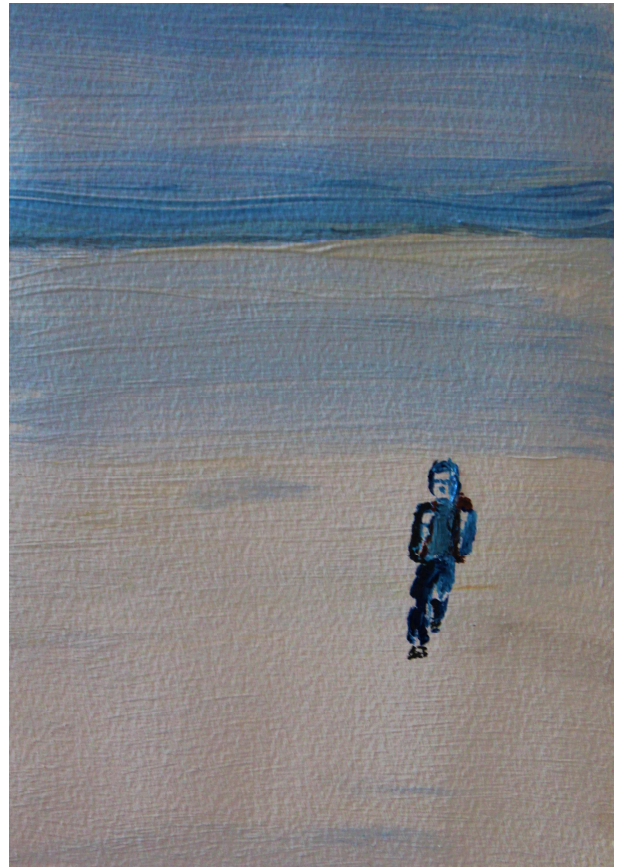
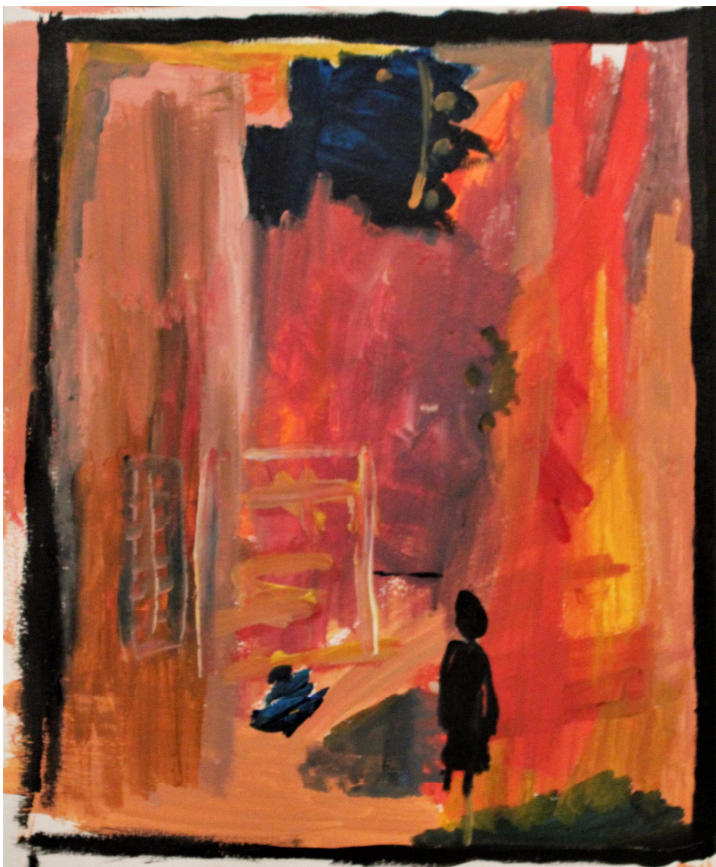
natural and abstract

Justin d Robinson Is an Expressionist based in Central Canada, age 26. The environments and the characters he creates are his response to an ever developing society, and the Human Condition itself



Person w. a Kite

Journeying from one world into another.



LADY OBSERVING A LIFE - N.Y.C.



Farmhouse near Ottawa

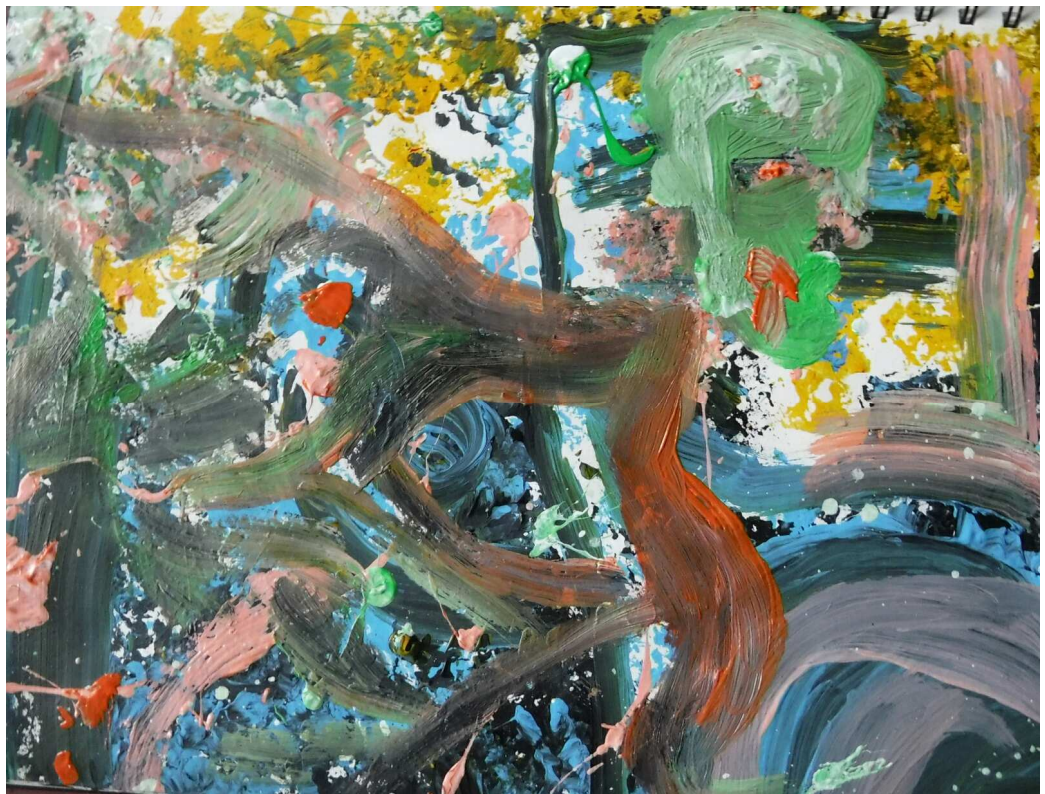


Wolf during Winter



FREEDOM IN THE UNDERGROUND.

Human vs. Atmosphere





Two Sparrows

Bob Mendel

neighborhoods



Bob Mendel lives in Topanga, CA where he writes and pursues his efforts at photography. In the past he has combined the two as an editor for a motorcycling magazine and in freelance work for martial arts magazines. For his own enjoyment he likes exploring the rhythms and textures of the natural environment and capturing passing moments in street photography.

Corner



Lowrider



Headlands



North Coast



Chiapas



Strange Street



Etched Rock



Rainyday

A Role for Maryhill

Lanning Russell



Photo by Josh Partee

Lanning Russell is editor and publisher of Event Horizon.



We had occasion to go to Maryhill Museum in October. My wife, Margaret, was chosen to be in a juried art exhibit for Oregon art educators. We dropped off the art one weekend and came back in two weeks for the reception and opening of the show. We have long association with Maryhill Museum, as do our adult children and any visiting relatives over the last 30 years. I was bemused to hear that some of Margaret's colleagues - all artists, Oregon natives or well-settled transplants - had not heard of Maryhill Museum. It's old news for our family but it's a great story if you haven't heard it.

Maryhill started out as a mansion - a prominent outpost in an austere and fiercely beautiful landscape; like Wuthering Heights on the moors. It was the home of Sam Hill, a wealthy lawyer and roadbuilder. Hill liked the area and bought 6000 acres at the site in 1907. His vision was of a ranch house which would be the focal point of a large holding of Quaker ranchers. He invited the Quakers. None came. Hill broadened his appeal but still no one came.

Maryhill lies atop a rocky shelf with a commanding view of the Columbia River, for miles east or west. The hills are brown all around. The channel is bordered by cliffs and crags on either bank. The eastern Columbia Gorge from the Dalles to Walla Walla is a drier part of the already arid Columbia Plateau. Temperatures range easily 100 degrees through the year. Winds that roar through the canyon are driven relentlessly by the climate differences on either end of the gorge which runs through the Cascade Mountains. But an agricultural community in such a place is not so far-fetched. Hill appreciated the proximity of a railroad and the thriving orchard and grain farms on the south bank. Since that time hydroelectric power has provided for



east and west from the patio

unlimited irrigation. Barge traffic plies the Columbia from Idaho to coastal ports. Interstate and state highways twine among the cliffs, wetlands and canyons. All of the potential perceived by Hill's entrepreneurial sense has since been realized many times over.

Construction began in 1914 and bogged down by 1917 for financial and political reasons. With no fellow-Quakers or even his family to live with him at Maryhill, Hill was persuaded by his good friend, Loie Fuller, to repurpose the building as a museum. The unfinished house was incorporated as such in 1923.

Loie (*né* Marie Louise) Fuller - even more than Sam Hill - was the glue or catalyst that finally resulted in Maryhill Museum. Through her, five friends brought what they each had to the table. Fuller had achieved some celebrity in France as an innovative dancer. She also had notable skill and held patents as a lighting designer. Her other genius, however, was self-promotion and schmoozemannship. She had a wide circle of individually notable friends including Queen Marie of Romania, sculptor Auguste Rodin, and sugar heiress Alma Spreckels.



Sam Hill



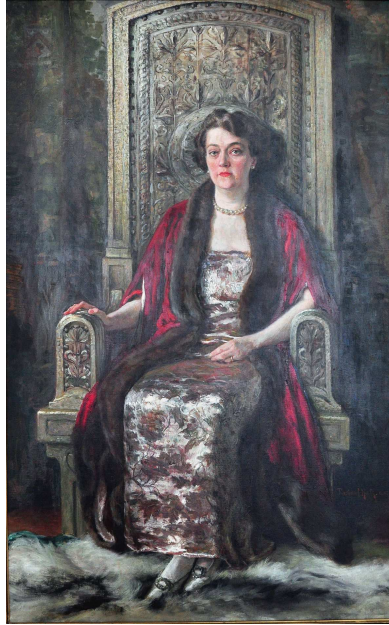
Loie Fuller



Fuller dancing



Queen Marie of Romania



Alma Spreckels



Auguste Rodin

Hill and Fuller prevailed upon their mutual friend, Queen Marie, to participate in promoting the museum. She did so in royal fashion and dedicated the museum in 1927. Queen Marie brought many objects and collections as bequests to the museum.

Alma Spreckels donated her own Queen Marie *objet d'arts* and other collected art works as well.

I don't know that Rodin ever gave any of his drawings, sculptures or plasters directly to the Maryhill Museum. He is well-represented there non-the-less by some 87 separate works. These are mostly gifts from the private collections of his friends Sam Hill, Loie Fuller, Queen Marie and Alma Spreckels. Sam Hill died in 1931; Fuller in 1928; Queen Marie in 1938. Alma Spreckels provided the final push to direct construction, achieve funding and enlarge the collection of Maryhill. The museum opened to the public in 1940.

Maryhill has a dual aspect: an outward focus and an inward focus. The mansion, the grounds and the unparalleled setting on the cliffs of the Columbia River comprise a powerful external icon for the museum. When you move indoors, the focus and the perspective are reversed. The collections are eclectic and sometimes on a noticeably diminutive scale. Fuller donated a collection of ivory crucifixes. Queen Marie's sister gave her collection of Tanagra figures which are small (up to eight inches) cast-terracotta statues from Greco-Roman locales (c.1050-BCE 50 CE). There is a remarkable collection of chess pieces.



Eve Rodin



Tanagra, cast-terracotta
statuette, approx. 8"
330-200 BCE



Charlemagne chess set, late 20th century
Giuseppe Vasari - manufacturer

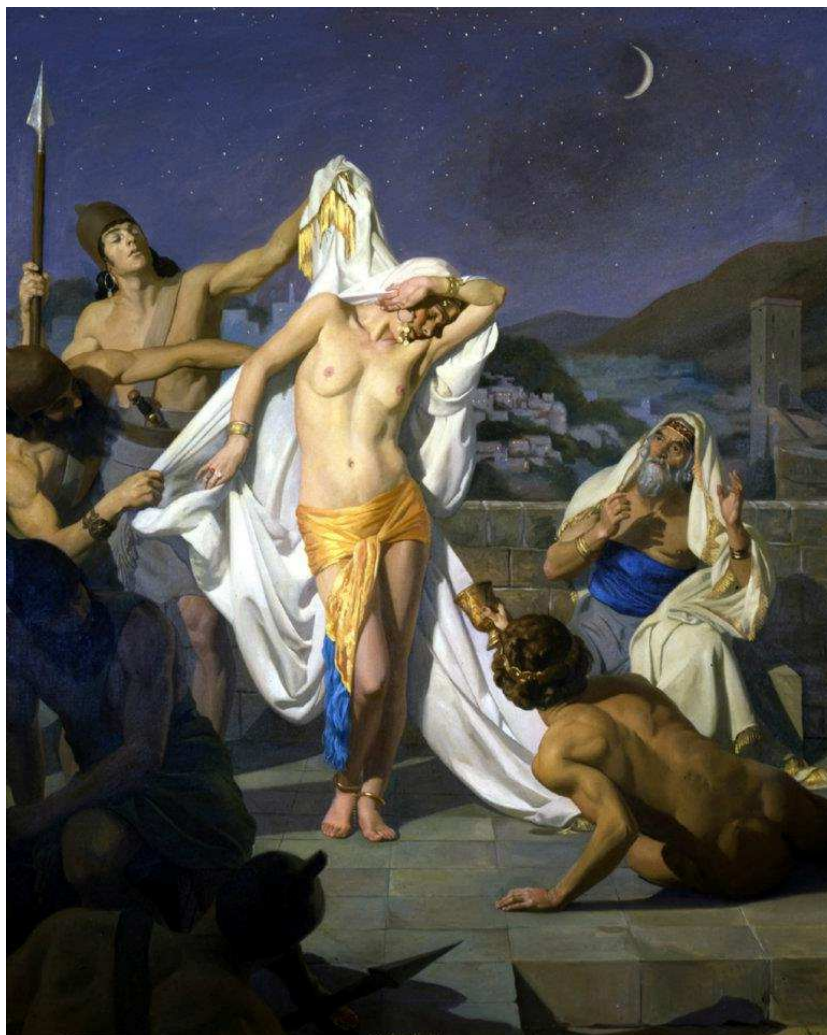


Not everything is tiny. Queen Marie brought royal furniture. The Native American collection, begun around a core of Sam Hill's basketry collection, is now quite extensive. Some of the largest and most impressive examples of the museum's American and European paintings are not currently on display (e.g Frederic, Baron Leighton's *Solitude* and RH Ives Gammell's *The Dream of the Shulamite*). The Rodin collection on display - although by necessity, not all of it - is grand, powerful and speaks for itself.

Maryhill took an important step in harmonizing these internal and external aspects with the construction of their Mary and Bruce Stevenson Wing. Construction was completed in May 2012. The extension of the mansion brings the indoor viewer to the cliff-side verge, revealing the sweep of the river. It provides an outdoor plaza with open space and room for installed large-scale sculpture. The expansion increases the museum's capacity to store and protect art and to provide facilities for researchers. In addition to the expanded gallery and interpretive space, the wing provides a dedicated art education center.

"I will tell you there are things I am able to do because that room exists." Louise Palermo, Curator of Education arrived in May 2016 - after completion of the wing.

Solitude Frederic, Baron Leighton, 1890, 72" x 36"



The Dream of the Shulamite, RH Ives Gammell, 1934, 81½" x 67"

Maryhill's ambitious program of community outreach and education continues apace under Louise's stewardship. As well as separately curated special exhibitions of the different collections, the September-through-November Calendar of Events includes Preserving Your Story Through Handmade Books, a lecture - Blending Poetry with the Visual Arts, a shadow play with the Oregon Shadow Theatre, and a *Concours de Maryhill* car show. Not to mention that Louise has brought 'Tango!' to Maryhill, starting with a lesson and rounding it out with a *milonga* (tango party). Maryhill also hosts a Day of the Dead Family Celebration.

Art educators in two states might argue that the most impressive effect of Louise's initiative has come from reaching out to the Washington and Oregon Art Education Association(s). The present exhibit, described as a partnership between Maryhill and OAEA is called Beyond the Demos - Teachers as Artists, and speaks to the fact that many art teachers are independent artists in their own right. Margaret basked in the opportunity to show in a juried exhibit in a museum. As a retired teacher I appreciated this dual validation at a high level. The museum honored not only the teachers but it's own mission to educate and provide access.

Beyond the Demos - Teachers as Artists was scheduled to run from October 6 - November 15. Most of the 37 pieces entered were paintings with a few notable exceptions in ceramics, jewelry and a large walk-around installation of felt. The gallery was all the more suitable for being in a new wing dedicated to education and art preservation.

I appreciate museums and I have my own understanding of where they come from and why they are here on earth. Usually they are not the result of a confiscation and nationalization of assets in the name of the public good. They come from some benevolent vision, or the complacency of the owners, or some other serendipitous transfer of ownership or provision for access. As a lifelong citizen of The Public I do not feel grateful when museums recognize their duty and responsibility. But I can express my appreciation when they do it well.

I'm certainly glad Loie Fuller persuaded Sam Hill to turn his white-elephant mansion into a museum. The current volunteer board has a clear vision for the museum and has shown courage in making a substantial investment to realize that vision. I admire the skill, imagination and enthusiasm of the museum directors. And I do express my gratitude to the army of volunteers who provide the missing link in making such a quasi-public/private venture as a museum possible.

After wading through any lengthy travelogue, the reader is entitled to a recommendation. If you live in the three contiguous Pacific Northwest states, Maryhill Museum is part of your legacy and you owe it to yourself to enjoy it. If you are a world traveler, Maryhill is a tremendous reward for a short excursion off the beaten path.



Teachers as Artists: Beyond the Demos

- a juried exhibition in the MJ Murdock Charitable Trust Education Center showcasing the state-wide talents of Oregon's arts educators. Presented in partnership with Oregon Art Education Association.

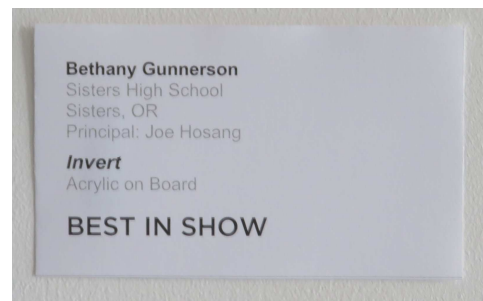
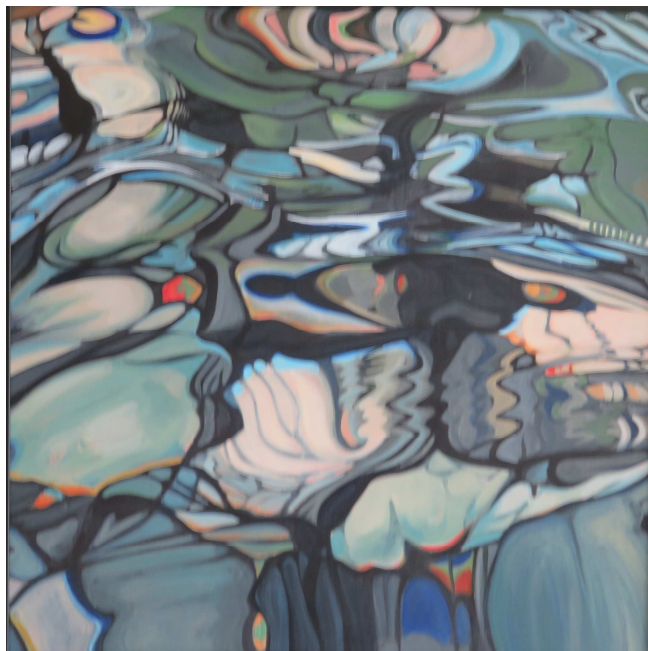
October 6 – November 17, 2017



Right - Pat Roberts, OAEA



Art educator, exhibitor - Margaret Synan-Russell

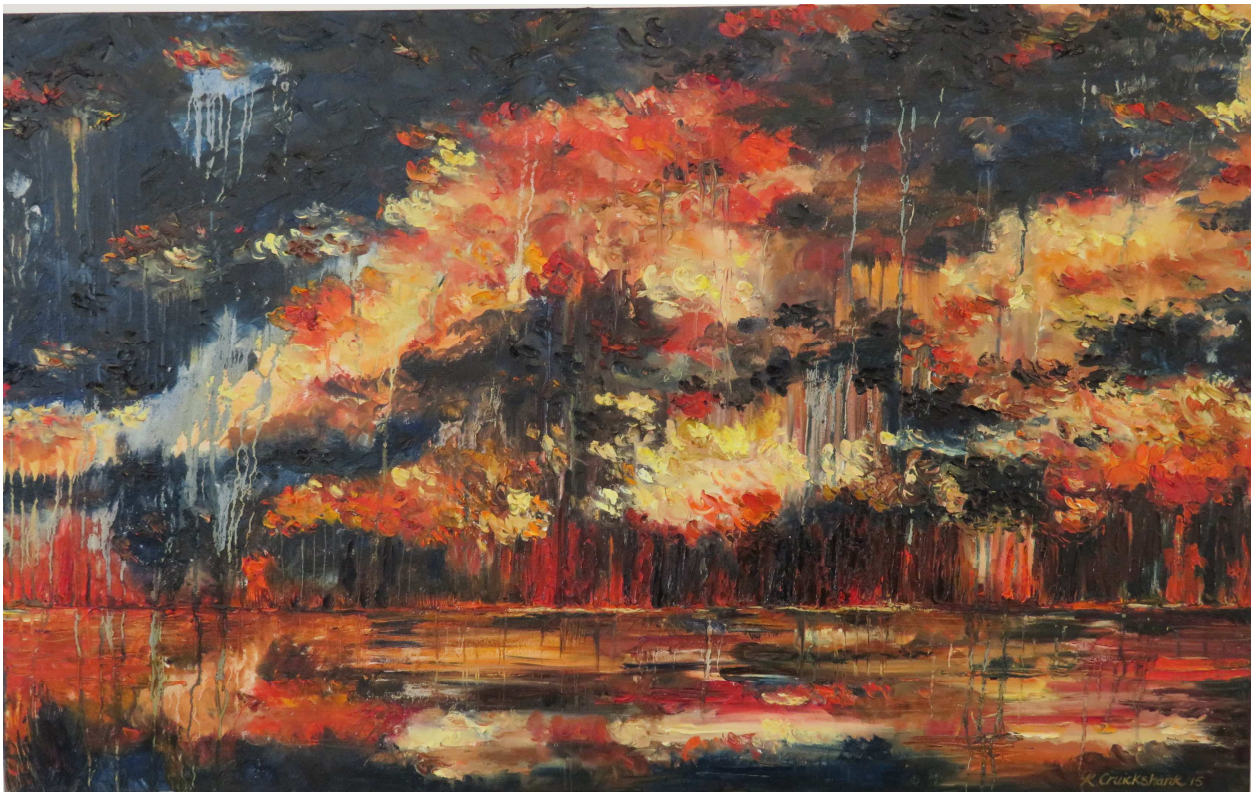




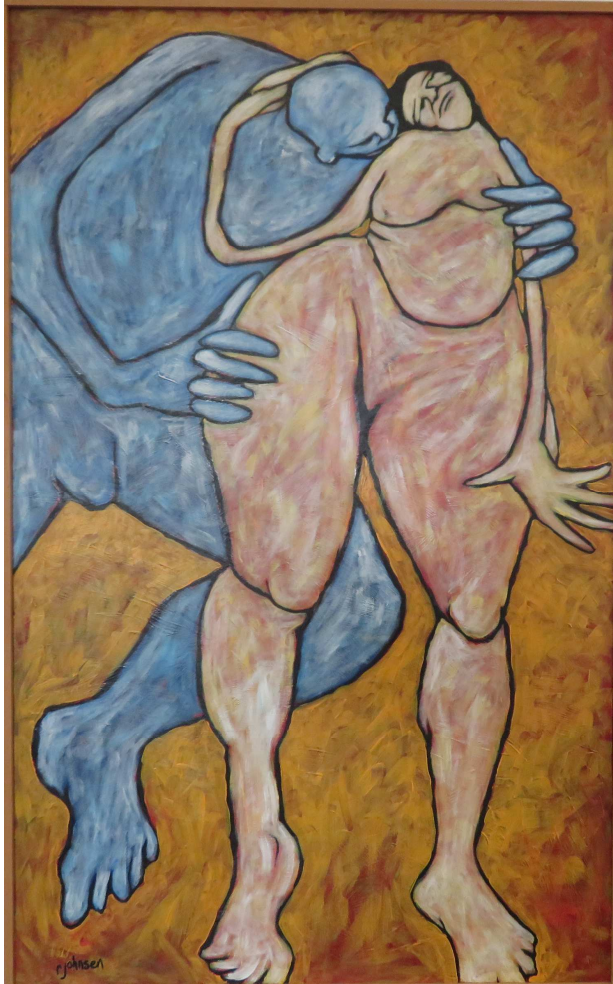
Four's A Crowd Shannon Mayo McBride



Snow Amira Malak



Midnight Rain I Karen Cruickshank



One on One Robyn Johnsen



Interruption (Figs) Sarah Whitley



Michelle and Me
Audrey Delgado



Char Map
Bethany Gunnerson

Liz Green

friends and neighbors



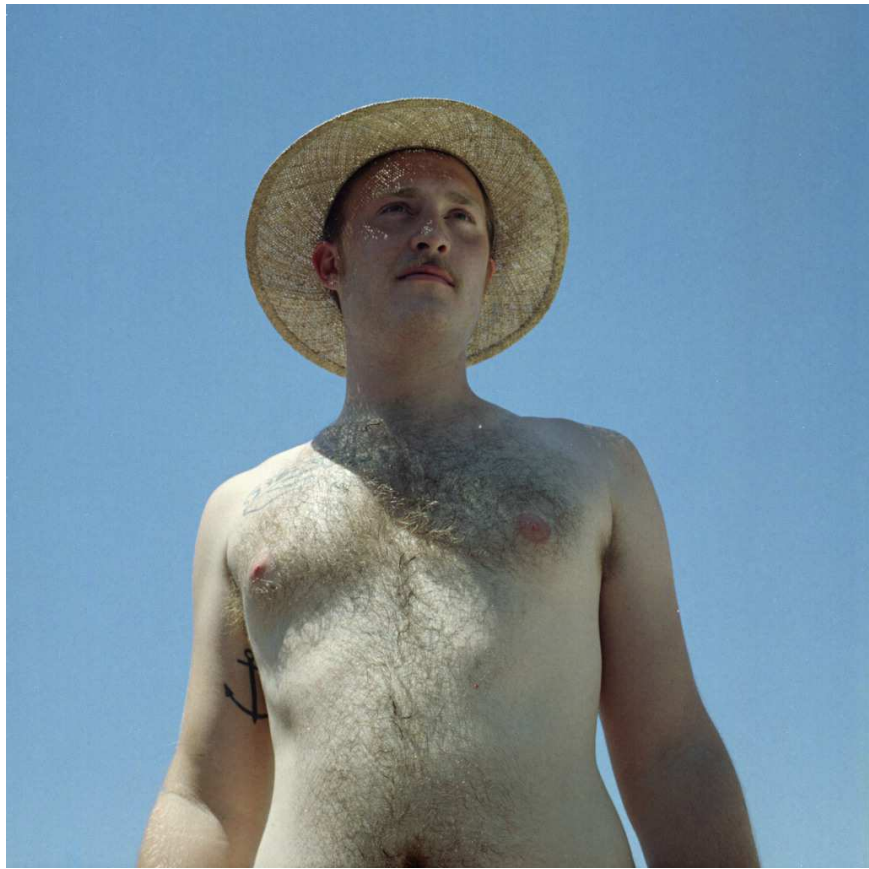
Liz Green is a photographer and art director providing creative direction, on-set art direction and production. Her portraits capture the beauty and dysfunction of American youth in their everyday environments. Liz studied photography at the International Center for Photography and has her BA in Art and Art History from Marymount Manhattan College. A native of Long Island, she now lives in Brooklyn, New York with her dog Loki.



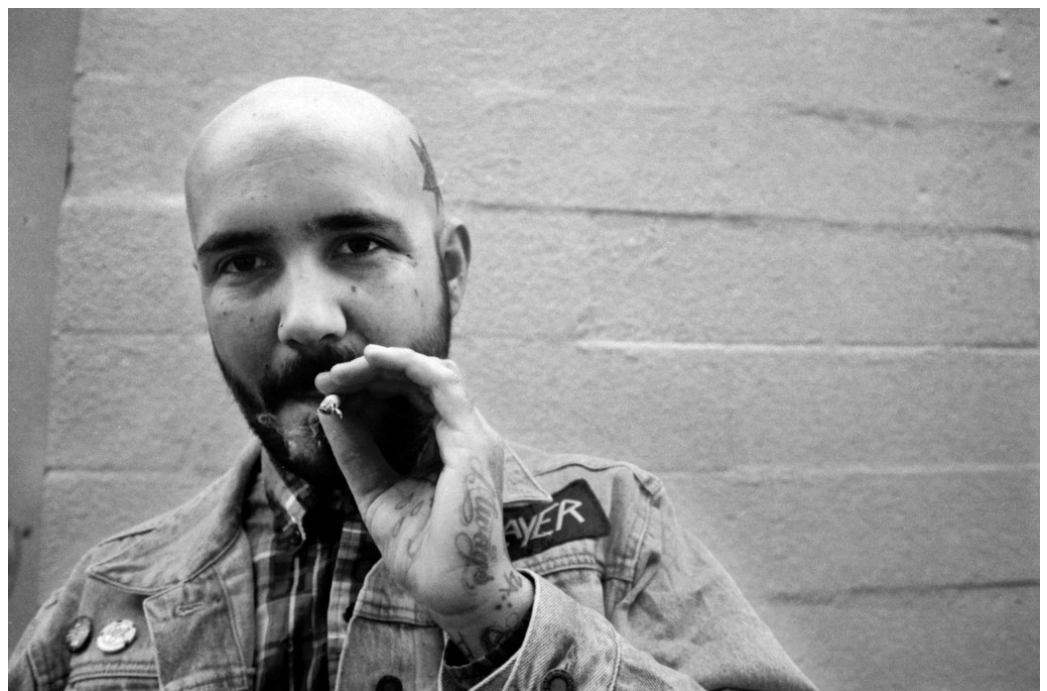








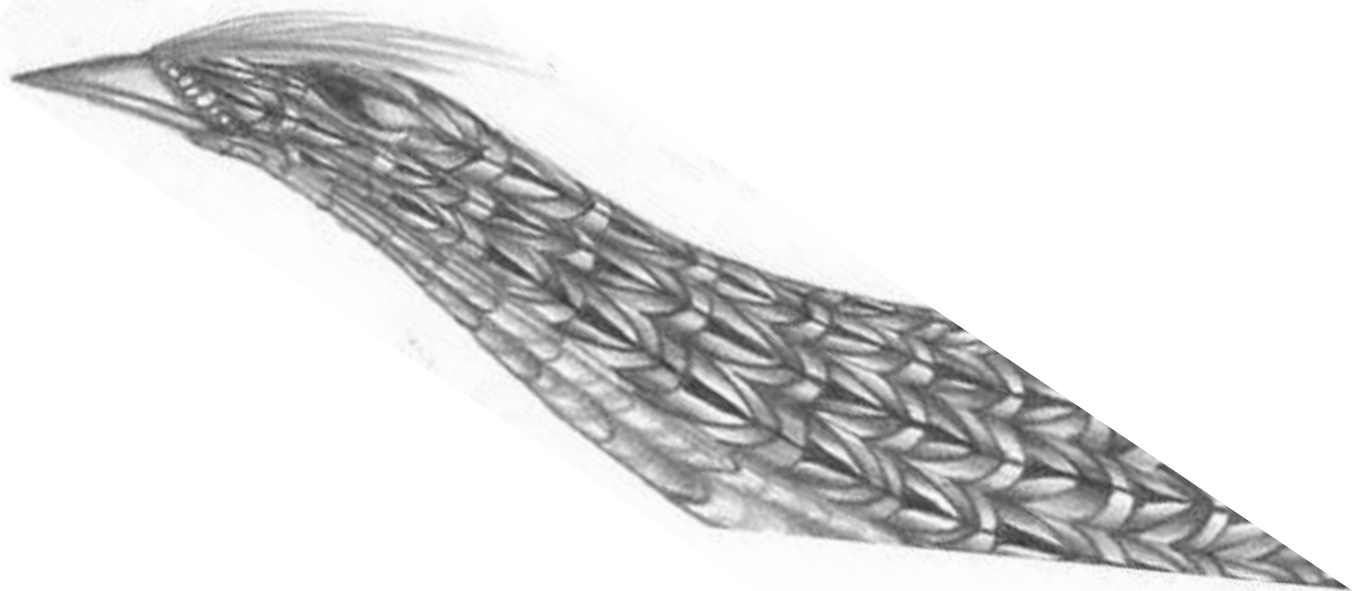




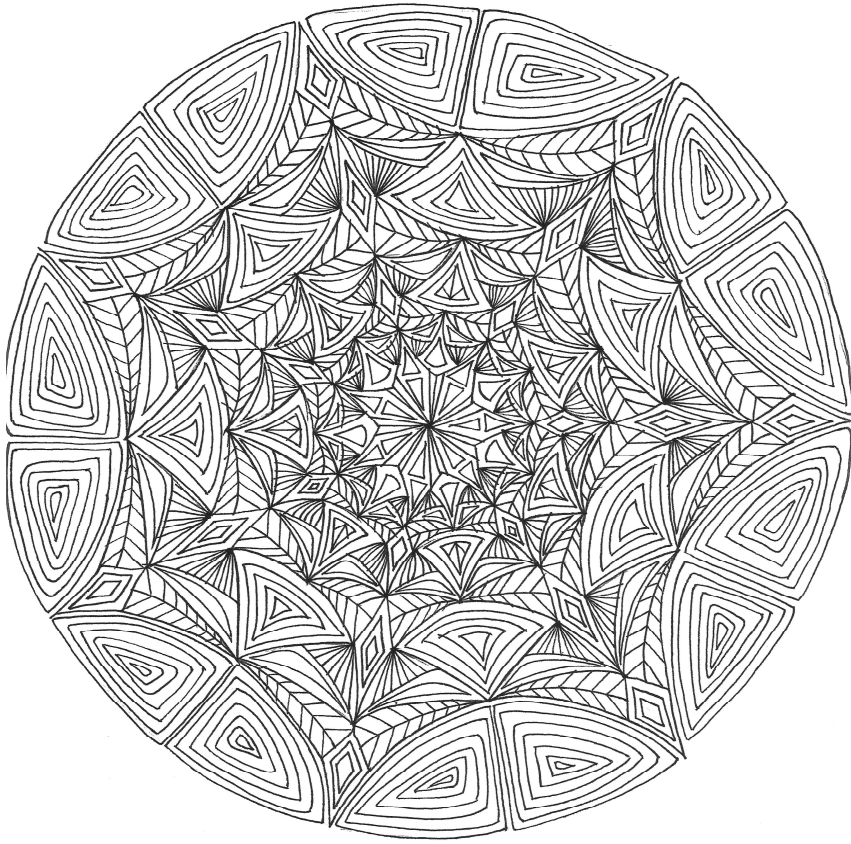


Anca Sugar

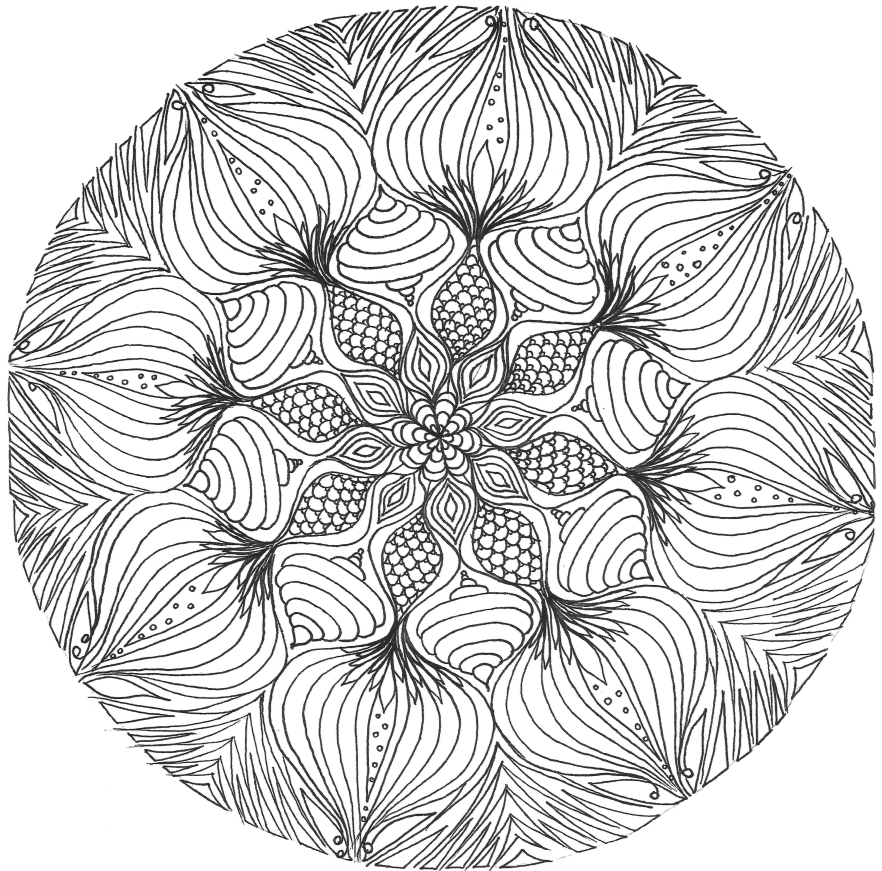
Mandale Magice



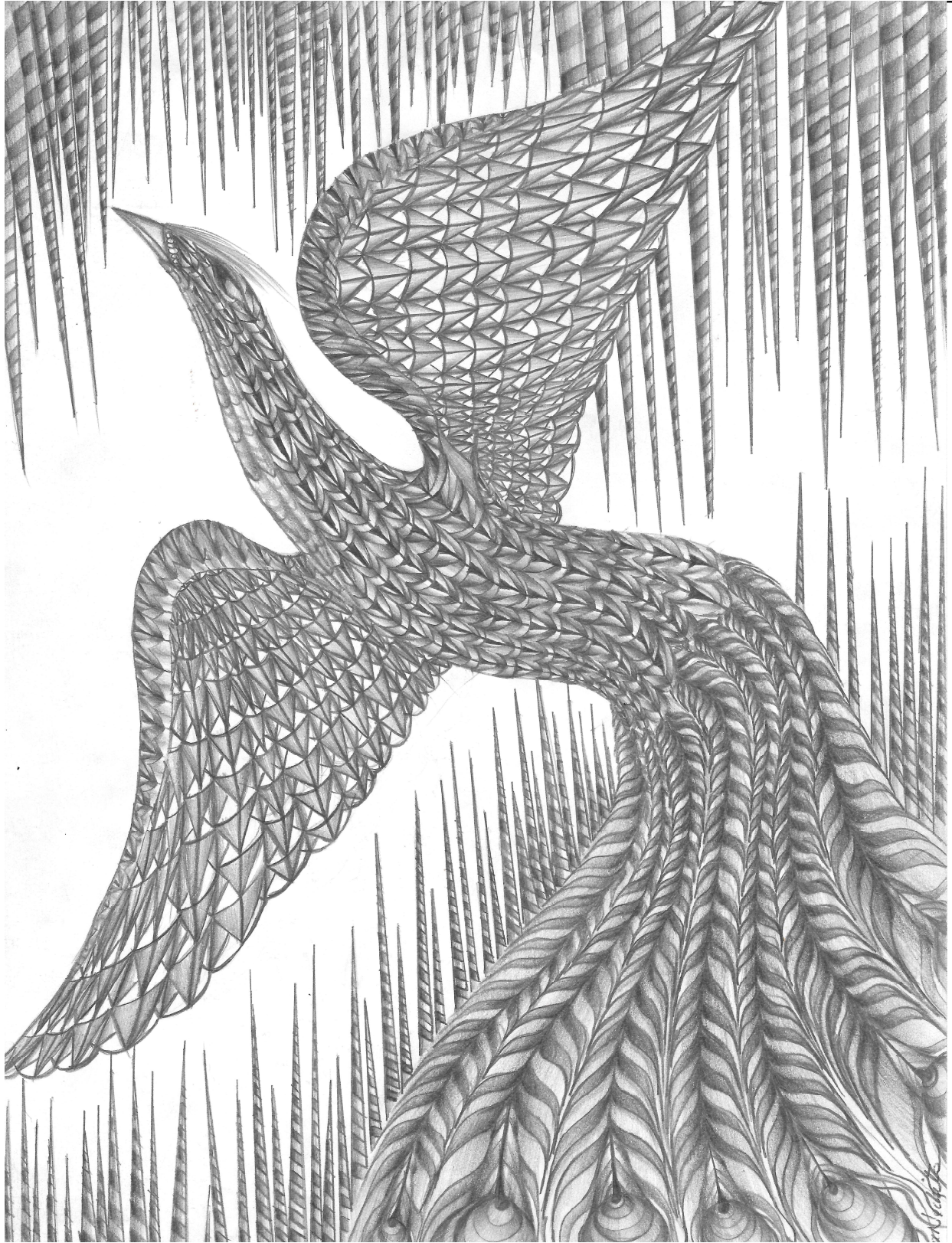
*My name is **Anca Suga**. I am from Romania. I had been working as a teacher of English in Europe for seven years and then I moved to the US. I have been drawing since 2001 and I managed to have my first coloring book for adults on Amazon last year. It is called Magic Mandalas (the Romanian title is "Mandale Magice"). I love drawing because, for me it is a way of rediscovering myself and the hidden world that is inside our soul. I love sharing my work through my coloring books because this way people get a chance to find inner peace , relax and reconnect with themselves and the Universe.*



The Net of Thoughts



Buds



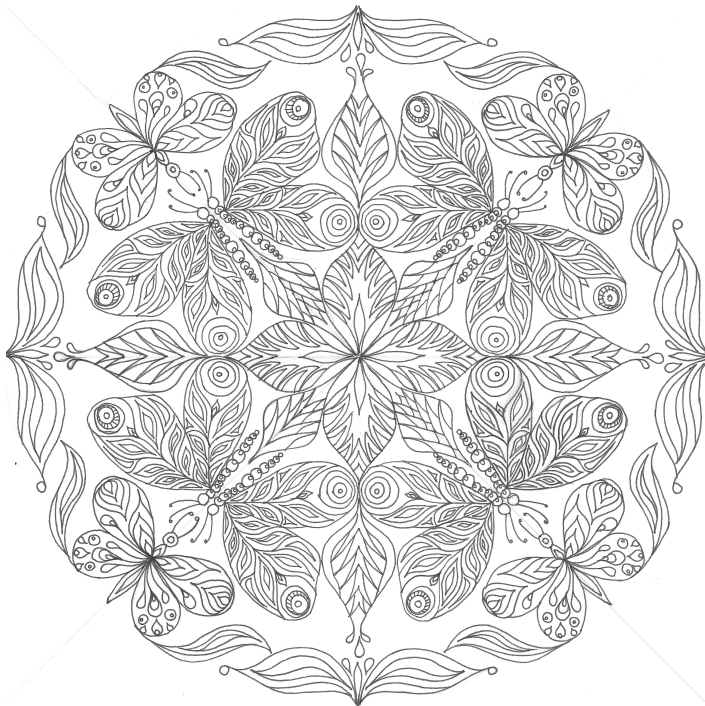
Phoenix Bird



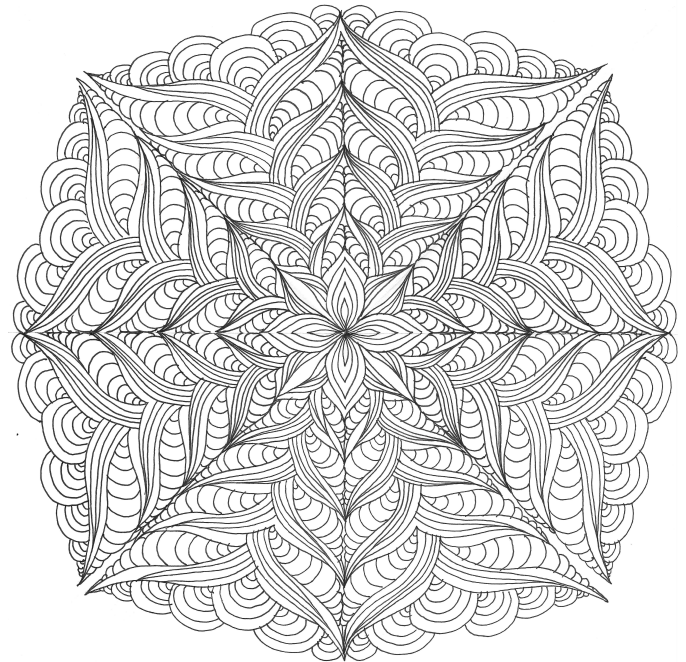
Dream of Flowers



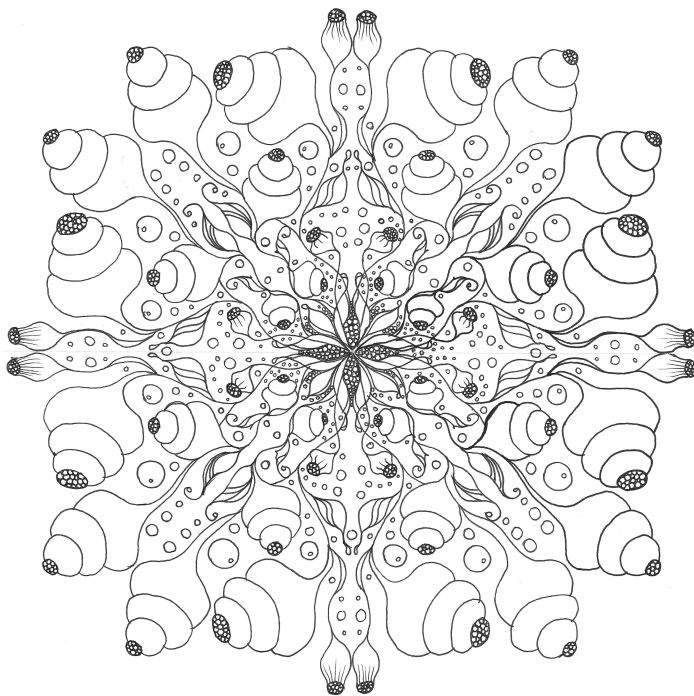
Split Reality
129



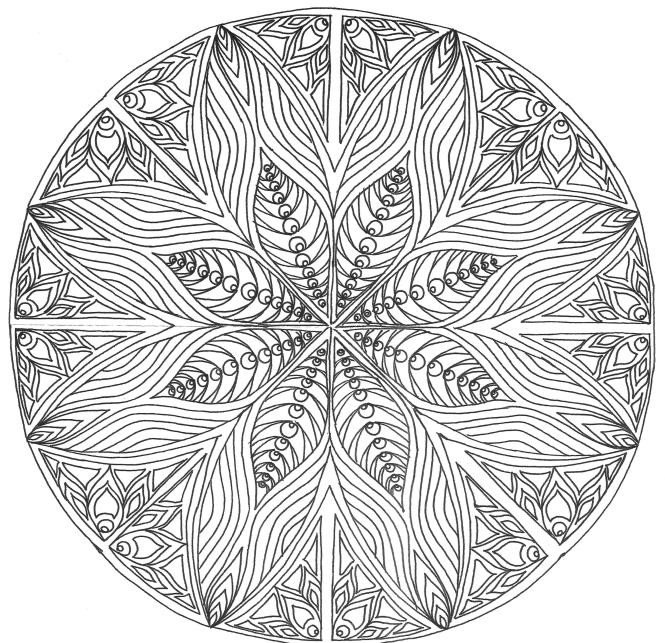
Butterflies



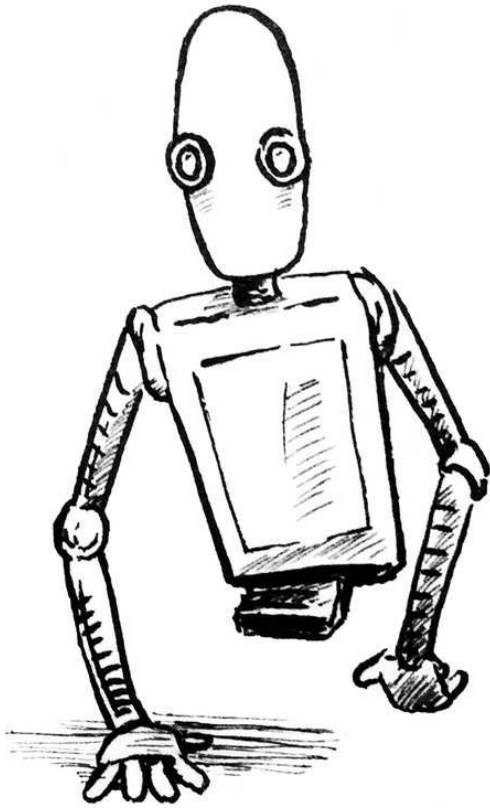
Lotus Flower



Shells



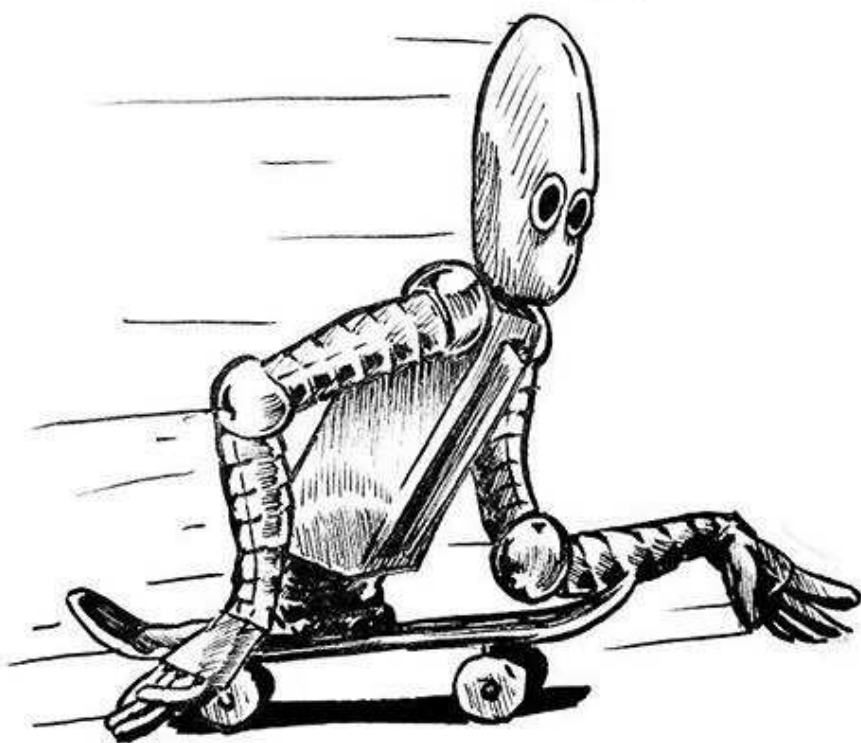
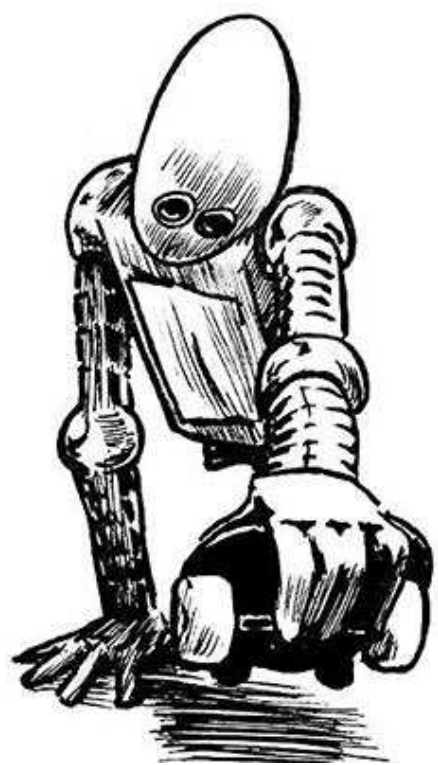
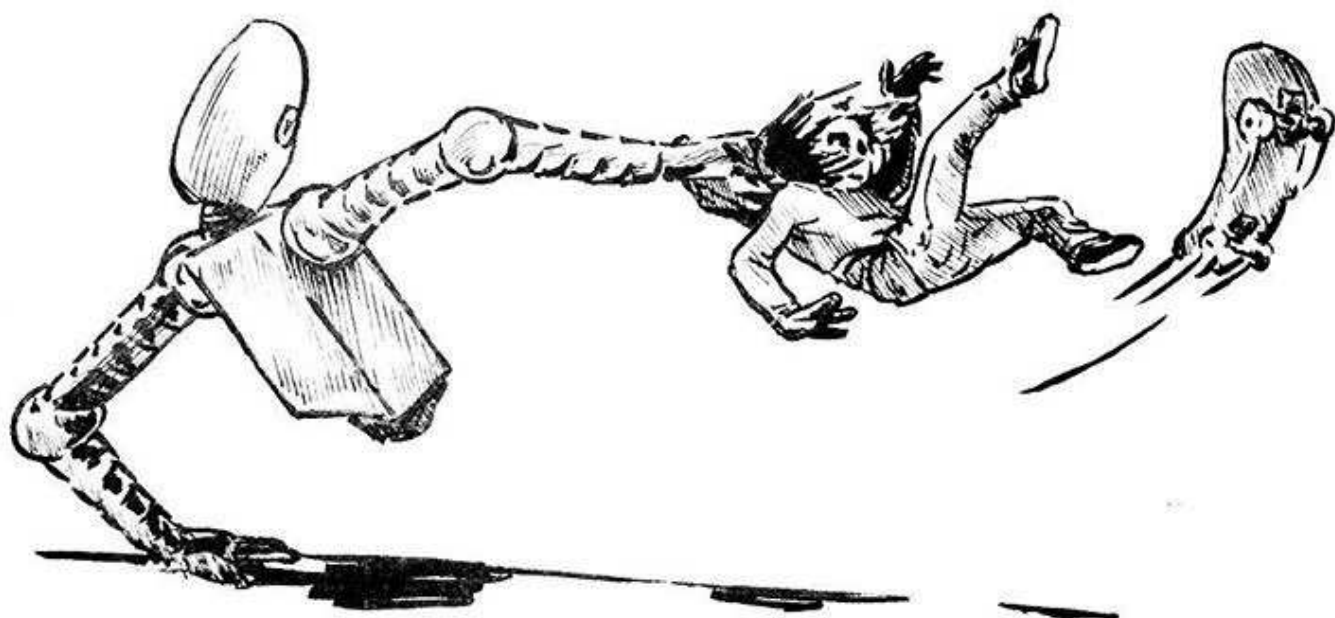
Sunrise

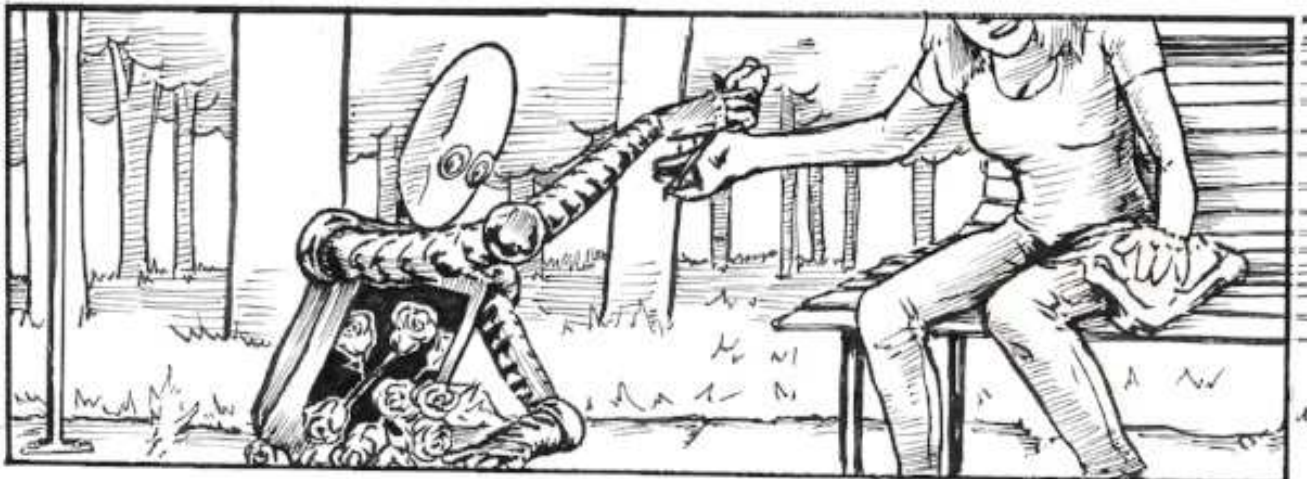
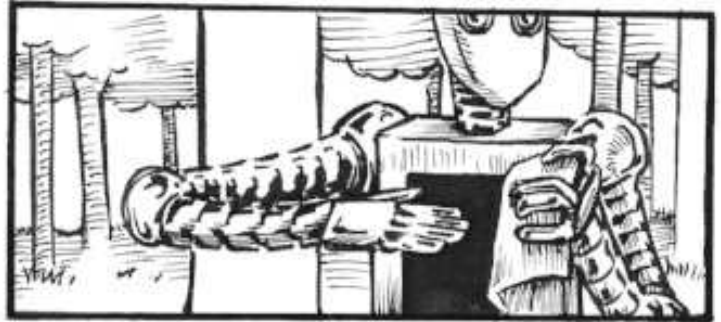


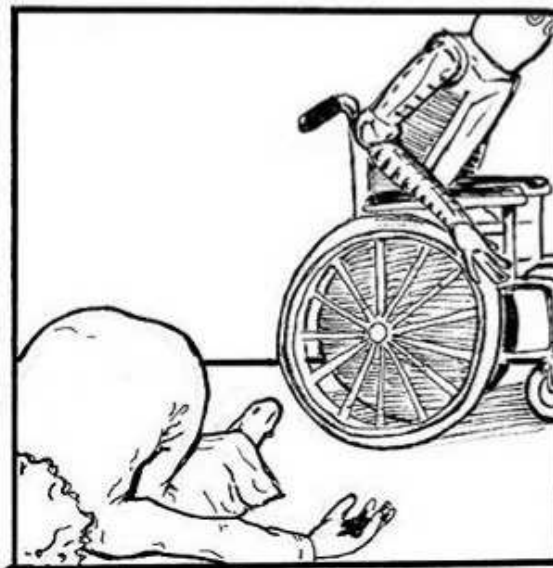
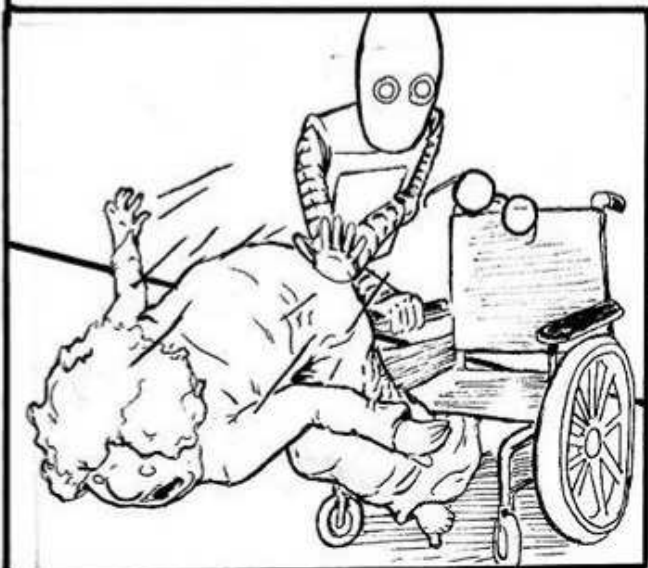
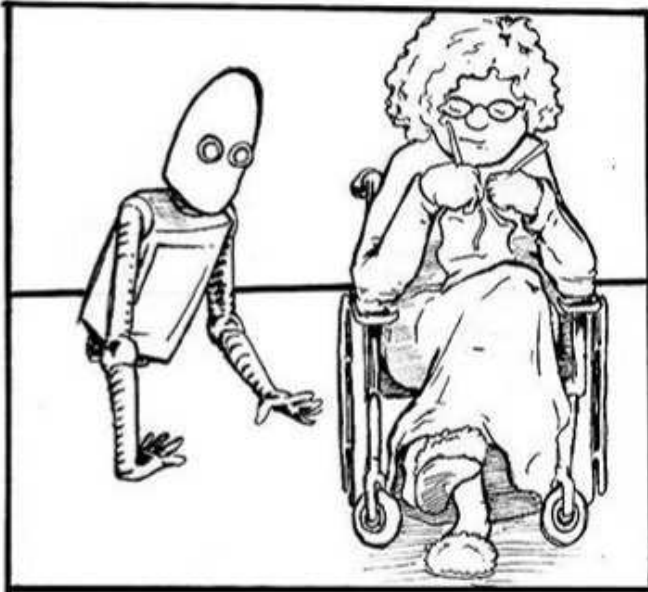
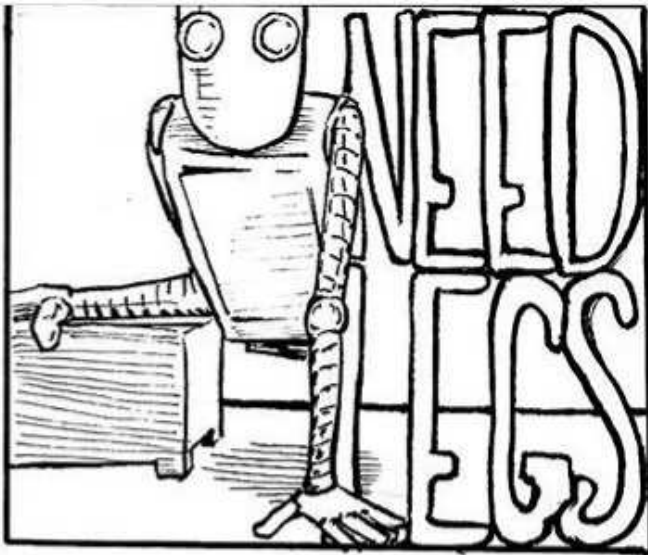
Jon Strobe

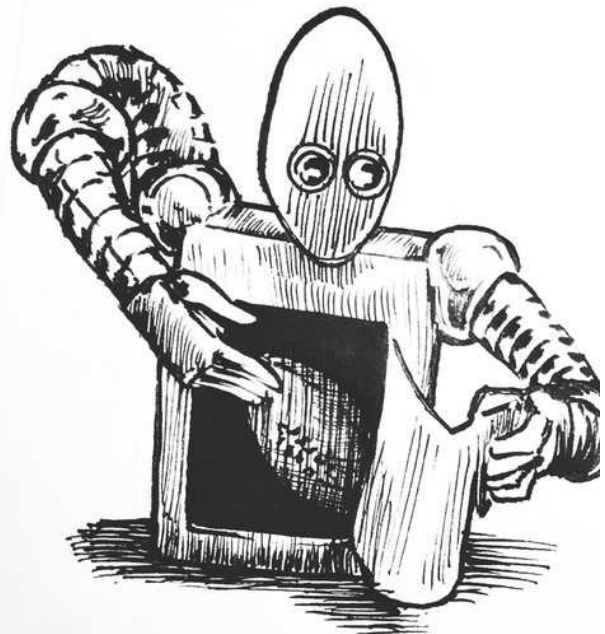
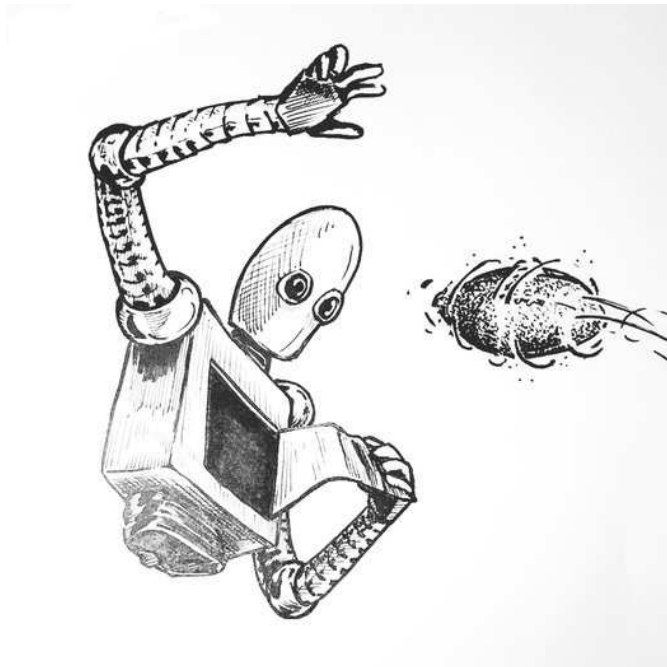
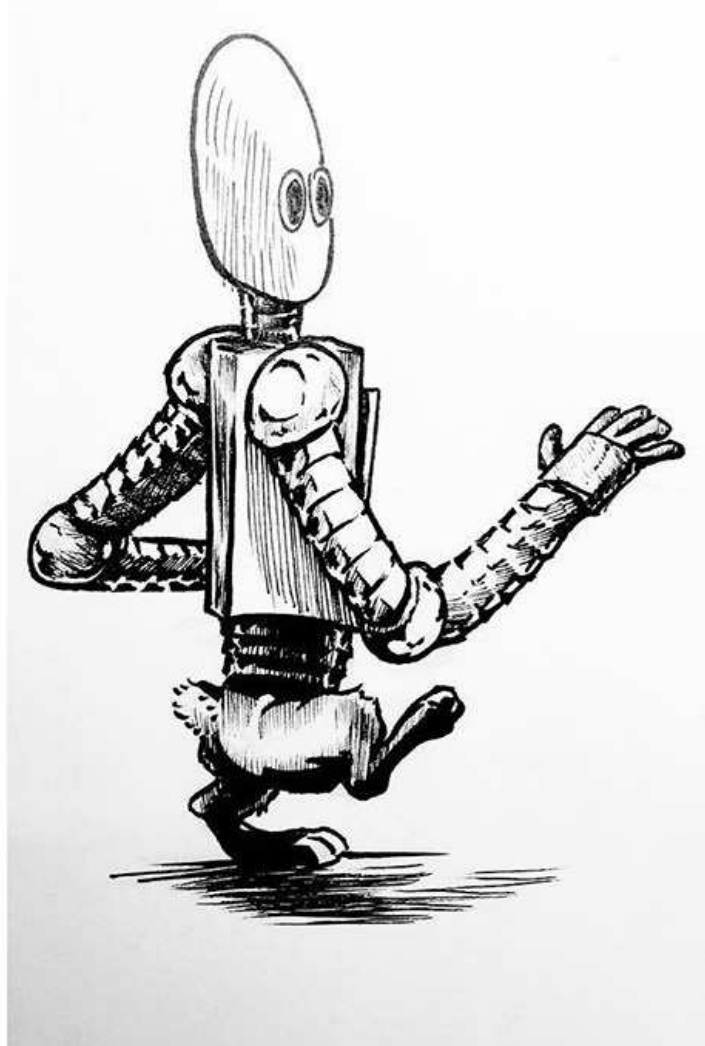
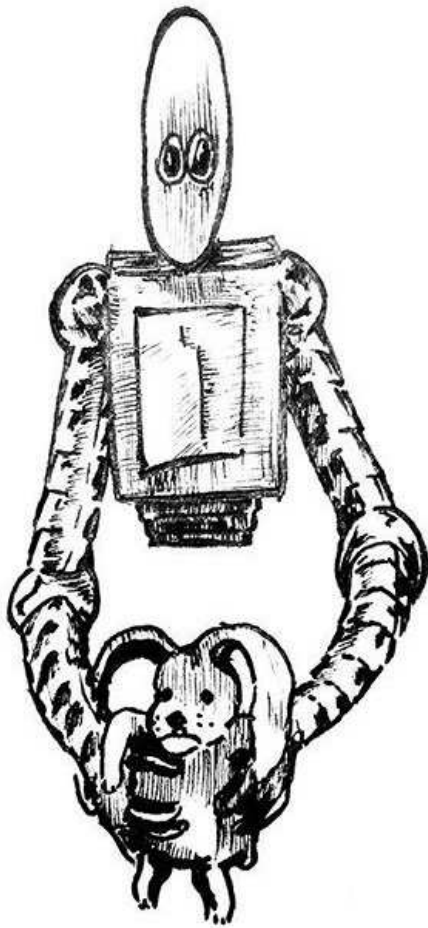
METALMAN

Jon Strobe is a Saint Louis artist - now of Portland Oregon - who specializes in surrealism. He most enjoys taking different entities and combining them to make something imaginative and strange. His interest varies from pen and ink to acrylic paints. Included here is a comic strip.









Naomi Stock is an intern at Orangenius. She is attending Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania, where she is primarily interested in art history and Japanese.



This story first appeared in *Artrepreneur*, a publication by Orangenius and is reprinted here with permission.

Is Virtual Reality the Future of Art?

In recent years, the streams of art and technology have been moving ever closer together. The rules that define what it means to make art and how technology can be utilized have already begun to intersect. This cross between the two is giving rise to new forms of art that incorporate technology and, in particular, virtual reality.

Virtual reality is a computer generated simulation that allows you to see alternate 3D images through a headset, and in the last two years, it has exploded in the film and gaming industry. The question now is whether virtual reality will similarly enter the art world. Is virtual reality an appropriate medium through which to view artistic works? Are there artists utilizing virtual reality in meaningful ways? Could VR art take hold of the art world, forever altering the way art is consumed, and even sold?

The art world has traditionally been skeptical of new arrivals into its established frameworks. Technology, and in this case virtual reality, is changing the game for art in terms of how to view it, and how to produce it. The role of virtual reality is to plunge the viewer into a specific space – and so become entirely immersed within the artistic experience, virtually. The foundation of this experience lies with the virtual reality headset, the Oculus Rift. Released to the public in March 2016, the Rift is truly a dream of science fiction come true with its 110-degree field of view and inbuilt speakers which effectively build a completely unique realm for the user. There is also a lower-tech, cheaper version of the Rift; the Google Cardboard. By assembling the cardboard pieces, the lenses intertwine two images at different angles to create an illusion of space. These developments have inspired many to imagine art beyond their own individual point of view.

Through the Oculus Rift, there are many different possibilities that arise, which many galleries and artists have taken advantage of. One of the most recent approaches has been the use of virtual reality apps. The Renwick Gallery, an institution part of the Smithsonian in Washington D.C., held an exhibit from 2015-16 that took place on the screens of viewers' mobile devices.

The museum launched an immersive 360-degree art virtual reality app called “Renwick Gallery WONDER 360” – which allowed the viewer to explore in 3D its “WONDER” exhibit, involving nine contemporary artists. These artists – Jennifer Angus, Chakaia Booker, Gabriel Dawe, Tara Donovan, Patrick Dougherty, Janet Echelman, John Grade, Maya Lin and Leo Villareal – created site-specific, gallery-sized installations from a series of unexpected materials. WONDER 360 was the gallery’s first major exhibit utilizing virtual reality, and was unlike a real gallery in that it allowed the holder to view and experience the art anywhere in the world. This virtual reality tour is, in that way, a whole new approach to sharing art with the public.

Recently, Orangenius, an art startup serving both artists and galleries with online business and networking tools, launched its own virtual reality component to provide the same kind of immersive view into art institutions and galleries [Note: Orangenius is the parent company of *Artrepreneur*]. This service, which is still in its preliminary stages, creates opportunities for online participants to virtually walk through exhibitions and view works of art for sale, amounting to an indispensable marketing and sales tool for participating galleries.

Virtual reality goes beyond just the viewing aspect of it. The “immersion” component of using art VR doesn’t leave anything out of the experience in its ability to allow to user to see, hear and manipulate their virtual environment. Not only galleries, but artists themselves have begun to embrace VR as a medium, virtually sculpting and painting with tools that are completely unrelated to their intended result. With the use of Rift, motion sensors and specially designed interfaces, art has transcended the physical world. One of these sensors is the Tilt Brush, a device that can be best described as a 3D virtual paintbrush. Using Rift as the platform, the Brush allows the artist to paint freely on virtual canvases, allowing for an open and versatile space.

One artist who is effectively employing the Tilt Brush is virtual painter Elizabeth Edwards. Until recently, Edwards worked in video games as a 3D character artist, and then decided to pursue a freelance career in VR art. “When VR became a thing, it was natural to want to get my hands on it and see what I could do,” Edwards remarks. Despite having always drawn, painted and sculpted, she feels that the appealing aspect of VR lies in its tactile nature. It may be digital, but it also uses the artists’ hands – and as a result, all barriers between the artist and the art are removed.

“It’s difficult to express how much more natural working in 3D is with a headset and motion controllers,” Edwards says. “The artwork isn’t constrained to two dimensions on a flat screen – things like depth become intuitive because virtual objects are seen in the same way as objects in the real world.” For Edwards, and many artists like her working in VR art, the virtual plane is more flexible and present. On the subject

of VR in the art world, Edwards is clear in her belief of its positive influence on the future of art and artists: “VR art is such a wonderful medium, and only in its infancy. I’m certain it has a bright future, and no doubt artists are going to make wonderful things we can’t even conceive yet.” VR allows for limitless possibilities in its process through the art world, and though its future is unpredictable, Edwards is correct in that VR art continues to evolve.

VR has come a long way, starting off in a select few places around the world where the effects could only be viewed through a display screen, to a full surround-sound immersion via a helmet. Despite what can be seen as an overall positive reaction to the introduction and development of VR, its reception has not been– and may never be– completely accepted.

Artrepreneur spoke with virtual and augmented reality artist Tamiko Thiel about VR’s place in the art world. Thiel has been working with VR art since 1994, when she worked on the project Starbright World. The project’s role was to develop a 3D virtual world in which seriously ill children in hospitals across the U.S. could meet via a network to interact with one another. Even though this was before VR’s ascension into the general public’s consciousness, users interacted via a screen monitor in a virtual 3D world—just in a different context from today’s VR.

VR has always been a way for users to immerse themselves and interact with their digital surroundings that mimic, and exceed, real life. In discussing the progression of VR art in the art world, Thiel states that “doing artwork in VR requires a different mentality,” one that isn’t present with traditional 2D art. The viewer has to accept the fact that they have to be guided through the VR art space. In other words, when the user is either taking a virtual tour or making art, they do not have complete freedom and liberty to move around at will. “What I find interesting,” says Thiel, “is creating a virtual world where the viewer has both the freedom and the problem of exploring it.” This aspect of VR art is what many galleries and artists don’t want—they tend to look for the carefully scripted, traditional way of viewing art. Art is, essentially, still seen as a single image, where there is control of what people can see in a 2D plane. But VR, as Thiel states, “provides an experience, one that is happening in both time and space.” As a result, some may feel uncomfortable or threatened, and unsure how to deal with VR in the art world.

Virtual reality offers significant opportunities for artists and galleries and those viewing art now and, most probably, in the future. It’s a limitless medium, one that attempts to parallel life itself. VR has full potential in this aspect, but it also stands a good chance of being a hit-or-miss form of art: a moving target. Thiel made a point by stating, “What’s always killed (VR) until now is its difficulty to create content.” When

working with VR, there's no denying that it's more challenging to build and paint in 3D to create an image, what with required hardware like Rift and controllers like Tilt. But, despite its difficulty to embrace and maneuver, VR art could be the barely explored 3D experience that the art world has been missing.

Jean Braithwaite is associate professor of English at the University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley, where she teaches comics among other courses. Braithwaite is comics editor at *riverSedge: A Journal of Art and Literature*. Her previous book was a literary memoir, *FAT: The Story of My Life with My Body*, and she has published in periodicals including the *Sun*, *New York Times*, *North American Review*, and *Henry James Review*.

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Words + Pictures: A Manifesto

Abstract

In the second decade of the 21st century, academic comics studies is well established as a serious intellectual subject, but for many non-specialists, including university administrators, a sense of frivolity still attaches to comics. This brief essay braids together personal history and intellectual analysis: 1) it compares the cultural position of comics today to the position of novels in the 19th century; 2) it analyzes the complementary nature of the verbal and visual channels; 3) it argues that neither words nor pictures should be considered *primary* in a narratology of comics; and 4) that comics are eminently well suited to be studied as a branch of literature (though fine arts departments can also stake a claim).

Keywords

comics studies, transmedial narratology, personal essay

"Jean wants to teach comic books!"

I was just preparing to start class one day when I heard my name being pronounced with contempt out in the hallway, so I popped out and discovered one of my colleagues badmouthing me to another. I'll call the opiner Professor T.¹

Consider for a moment the history of the novel. There's not a perfect scholarly consensus about how long novels have been around as a distinct art form: a few hundred years, or else a millennium or two, depending on whose argument you listen to. Ian Watt dates the rise of the novel to the eighteenth century. More recently, it's become common to criticize Watt's timeline as Eurocentric; there are texts we could call novels from Japan a thousand years ago, or from classical antiquity. Some might argue, though, that in the absence of clear pre-existing genre conventions these earlier texts should be regarded as precursors to the novel, not novels proper. Now set this controversy aside just for a moment.

Consider the graphic novel, also known as sequential art, also known as comics. Some say comics proper originated at the tail end of the nineteenth century in the US, in tandem with the “yellow journalism” whose epithet in fact derives from a popular cartoon character.² Others, including most notably Scott McCloud, say comics go back much further (9), even that they pre-date the invention of writing: certain prehistoric cave paintings can be interpreted as deliberately juxtaposed images read in a definite sequence. I don’t care whether we start the comics timeline in the 1830s with Rodolphe Töpffer, later with The Yellow Kid, or earlier with the cave paintings of Lascaux, any more than I care how long we draw that left-hand tapering-on tail of the rise of the novel. What’s clear is that as of now there exist venerable sequential-art traditions in a wide variety of cultures, including but not limited to Japanese manga, European *bande dessinée*, and American comics.

Nobody disagrees that following some initial period of catching on, there was a sudden creative explosion of literary novels in the nineteenth century, with the number of authors and readers increasing exponentially. Literary critics, historians, and narratologists regard the nineteenth century as the great age of realistic novels.

A few hundred years from now, I aver, scholars and critics of the future are going to identify our time as the great age of the graphic novel. The turning point is already behind us and the creative explosion well underway: Art Spiegelman received a Pulitzer Prize in 1992 for *Maus* (originally published as a serial in *Raw* magazine and collected into a volume by Pantheon in 1986). Two decades into the twenty-first century, it’s actually already a bit late to position oneself on the cutting edge of serious academic study of graphic literature. Yet I’m still cautious about saying “comics” in front of a university administrator. And a local newspaper writeup of the academic Words + Pictures conference sessions I organized this spring, though it was generally positive, spent a long time dwelling on the value of comics as an entrée into literacy. It didn’t exactly say comics weren’t a sophisticated art form suitable for pursuing the most complex artistic goals, but it didn’t say they were, either. The presentation by my former student who teaches high school English and uses Marvel superheroes as bait to attract his students to Hemingway was the only one that got a specific mention in the paper.

In the nineteenth century itself—the great golden age of the novel, mind you—the reading of novels was widely condemned as frivolous and even intellectually harmful, especially for inexperienced young people. My mother wasn’t allowed to read any comics in her youth, except for *Classics Illustrated*.³ I was an early and avid reader of all sorts of books. Comics were no gateway drug for me, but an entirely different form of reading that massaged different places in my mind. I would and still do eagerly read almost anything in comics form. In the trailer in my grandmother’s backyard, I even became absorbed in the stack of old *Classics Illustrated*, a series which most comics artists and critics speak of slightly.

Professor T tried to make up with me later, explaining himself. There was just one graphic work, he said, that deserved to be elevated into the literary canon, “the one by that Jewish guy,” but no others. Lo! A man who knows of only one cartoonist, and

can't even come up with Spiegelman's name, is nevertheless confident that there can't be anything else out there worthy of intellectual attention. Here is what I know: a few centuries from now, journals called something like *Chris Ware Studies* and the *Bechdel Review* will be as well subscribed as *Faulkner Studies* and the *Henry James Review* are now.⁴ I am willing to wager a considerable sum on this, if we can agree on a method of verification and execution.

Many years ago, I enrolled in an undergraduate drawing class. In the back of my mind was the idea that maybe I could learn to make comics. On the first day the instructor warned us of the dangers of conceptual thinking: our process of apprehending the world directly ("seeing") must not be polluted by our process of describing the world with words ("naming"). We were not even supposed to hold the charcoal stick in the same way we held a pencil, because that configuration of our hand would supposedly trigger deeply embedded mental reflexes connected with writing.

For many people, the prohibition on combining seeing with naming, showing with telling, has the force of a scriptural injunction: of course, there is nothing shameful about the visual fine arts and, of course, there is nothing shameful about writing, but a medium/genre/ artwork that conjoins words and pictures is somehow suspect, inferior, if not outright sinful.

In a preliterate age, it made sense that art for the masses was restricted entirely to pictures. In the age of the printing press, the difficulty and expense of interleaving typography and images made illustrations a relative rarity within text. But under current technological conditions, there is no reason other than convention (or an individually chosen artistic challenge) for any artist or writer to be forbidden half of their potential communicative tools.

The words/pictures exchange rate.

The Anglophone adage "a picture is worth a thousand words" is well known and often repeated. And it's clearly true in many circumstances that a diagram or image carries far more explanatory power than lengthy verbal description, especially where what needs to be conveyed is a complex spatial relationship, or instructions for manipulating objects. But for the converse relationship – the supporting of visual images with words – we have no adage. There should be one. When we are groping for the meaning of what we see, there is nothing like the conceptual precision of words. The title of a painting, or a good verbal analysis of it, can completely transform a viewer's experience.

When I was in graduate school, once upon a time, I was whiling away a few hours at the Baltimore Museum of Art. I was waiting, after a mostly sleepless night, for some academic obligation to begin at Johns Hopkins – I think it was a presentation I had to make in a linguistics seminar – some task, anyway, for which I felt inadequately prepared. In one gallery, I caught a sidelong glimpse of a surrealist painting that repelled me with its nightmarish biomorphic forms, distortions of the human body. I decided not to look at the painting closely. I told myself that right before my

presentation was no time to be assaulted with mentally disturbing imagery, just because it happened to be hanging in the museum. But there was still a very long time to wait, and eventually I found myself returning to the same surrealist gallery, sidling up to the same psychologically dangerous painting. My plan was simply to memorize the artist's name, so that I could cite him in future conversation as an example of the type of surrealist work I found offputting, even threatening. I leaned in sideways to the identification card and learned that the painter was André Masson, and the title of the painting was *There Is No Finished World*.

There is no finished world! The sentence swept through my mind in one beautifully clarifying gust. It was a one-line poem that encapsulated my own current suffering and also suggested a kind of escape from it, or at least mitigation, the possibility of understanding and of being understood. What exactly was I so afraid of? A class presentation, a painting, falling short of my potential, the reactions of my own mind. But if there is no finished world, then perfect academic mastery, perfect security, perfection of any kind, is always only sheer fantasy. What had I expected? André Masson, I thought, knew all about my squeamishness and insecurity, and his goal wasn't to assault me with ugliness, but to reach out the hand of fellow-feeling, asking and offering sympathy for our mutual predicament as unfinished creatures muddling along through a world where neither our circumstances nor our biological nature is ever quite under our control. I looked at the painting closely and now found in it touches of color, gentleness, and solace alongside the misshapen body parts.

My reading of Masson's painting may not be quite what he intended or what art historians think of it; that doesn't matter. My point is that the deftness of his title opened up his work to me in a way that could not have been achieved by the picture alone, wordless.

Words versus pictures?

As the 1980s turned into the 1990s, I began to be a regular customer at Fantasy Comics in Tucson, where the intensely knowledgeable Charlie guided my budding connoisseurship. Charlie was the skinny dude with the long hair and the prison tattoos (he had declined to serve in Vietnam). Charlie loaned me his own copies of *Love and Rockets*, which I adored, and *Cerebus*, which I never fully warmed to. After reading *Ed the Happy Clown* I started buying *Yummy Fur* on a regular basis and trying to fill in the missing back issues also. I bought *The Doll's House* because it looked appealing on a quick leaf-through, and after that I bought each new *Sandman* comic as it came out. I got a longbox and the bags and boards to keep them safe and started filling those back issues in as well. And *Sandman* led me to *Hellblazer*.

John Constantine appears as a character in the first *Sandman* story arc, of course, but I don't think that was the precise trail I followed to *Hellblazer*. If I remember right, it was Dave McKean's art that was the proximal link. I had developed an appetite for his strange combination of polish and suggestion, his

symbolically dense but underexplained paintings and collages. In other words, for me, *Sandman* begat *Hellblazer*, though I am aware that the latter title appeared first in the real world.

I flunked my first drawing class, the one in which we were supposed to eschew “naming,” because I neglected to officially drop the class after ceasing to attend it a few weeks into the semester. That’s all right. I flunked freshman English the first several times I attempted it as well, and some twenty-five years later I nevertheless found that I had turned into a professor of English with a specialty in creative writing. Late bloomer. In the last two years, I’ve taken two undergraduate drawing courses. Unsurprisingly, over the past couple of decades my ability to apply myself to a challenge and stick with an intention has improved somewhat. My attendance in both classes was perfect, I did all the readings and turned in every assignment, and I would have passed with flying colors, I’m sure, if I had been officially enrolled instead of just hitchhiking, relying on the professional courtesy of my colleagues in the Art Department, Paul Valadez and Jerry Lyles. This is a roundabout way of explaining that Lyles is my academic peer but at the same time also my figure-drawing teacher. Also, I’m pretty sure it was because of my influence that Lyles started offering his studio course in comics, under the ARTS prefix.

At the Words + Pictures sessions (UTRGV FESTIBA 2017), somebody gave Lyles a bit of a hard time about his Jack Kirby presentation, suggesting that it was simply naïve to take an *auteur* approach to comic books. I say that depends on the comic book. It would be plain crazy (I say) to take anything other than an *auteur* approach to a work like *Yummy Fur*, where one individual does all the writing and all the drawing, owns his own characters and maybe even self-publishes. In a garden-variety twentieth-century superhero comic from a mainstream publisher, in which a separate writer, penciler, inker, colorist, letterer, etc. assemble the components on a work-for-hire basis and can be swapped out from month to month like any factory laborers, then, yes, we have no *auteur* at all. But there are cases that fall between these clear-cut extremes. In the early part of his career, Kirby may often have been a cog in the machine, with relatively little creative control, and it may be impossible to disentangle his exact contribution to the creation of certain characters. Looking at the artwork, though, there are still recognizably Kirbyesque innovations, like the “Kirby dots” that crackle pseudo-fractally along the flow lines of vast unspecified natural and supernatural energies. They aren’t Stan Lee dots, you know?

Sandman and *Hellblazer* are not clear-cut cases, either. To me it seems entirely uncontroversial to say that both are further toward the *auteur* end of the spectrum than where *Fantastic Four* sits but not as far as *Yummy Fur*. And I consider it still fairly uncontroversial to claim that *Yummy Fur* ≥ *Sandman* > *Hellblazer* ≥ *Fantastic Four* is the correct semi-ordering, because Neil Gaiman was the sole writer of *Sandman* for its entire run, whereas *Hellblazer* had not just multiple artists but also multiple writers. And now finally I am ready to get

controversial: a vast gulf separates *Sandman* and *Hellblazer* on the spectrum. *Sandman* ultimately coheres as Gaiman's unified creative work, despite the visual variety contributed by his different collaborators, while *Hellblazer* has no such coherence. There were some great early story arcs under Jamie Delano's authorship, and for all I know there may have been equally great ones later too, but I had to stop buying it when Delano rotated out. The dialogue was all wrong, and I just couldn't stand it. The real John Constantine wouldn't talk like that. This new bozo calling himself Constantine was an imposter.

So when Lyles casually said to me in class one day, that class in which he was teacher and I was pupil, "Comics are ultimately a visual form, wouldn't you agree?" my immediate (but unexpressed) mental reaction was, No. Absolutely not. The writing—that is, the narrative elements—is more crucial than the drawing. *Sandman* vs. *Hellblazer* proves that.

The classes in which I'm the teacher bear the ENGL label. I teach comics as literary appreciation, and, in the creative-writing program, I also teach workshop classes where the students make comics. I tell my students: "You don't have to be able to draw to do well in this class. There are great comics made all the time by people who can't draw. Or you can be like Neil Gaiman and recruit a collaborator." Just to mention a few noteworthy comics or artists whose **draftsmanship is minimal**, irrelevant, or otherwise idiosyncratic and/or secondary: *The Amazing Cynicalman*, by Matt Feazell, is just stick figures, and Ivan Brunetti's little people are just circles with vestigial bodies and flagellar limbs attached. Similarly, the towering mental achievement that is *xkcd* is not founded on visual elaboration, though Munroe's precision with ink makes me guess that he could do more detailed drawings if he wanted to (but why would you want him to?). Ryan North's *Dinosaur Comics* has been running continuously since 2003, three times a week, with the exact same artwork in all six panels; only the dialogue changes, and (less obviously) the temporal element. And then my hero Lynda Barry—well, this is the idiosyncratic category. I refuse to say that Barry can't draw, or that there is anything inferior about her drawing style. But it's certainly strange: wobbly, flat, often teeming with psychologically significant but spatially nonsensical doodles and childlike decoration.

Nothing actual is rendered . . . except the full truth of what it is to have a mind and feelings. Of, course, it **helps to be able to draw**. Who wouldn't want to have that skill? If a cartoonist can't even make a given character recognizable as the same individual from one panel to the next, this is a problem for most narrative genres. If you've never tried it, it's harder than you think to achieve even that minimal consistency. And being able to draw faces well enough to convey mood through facial expression alone is a powerful tool that's yet more difficult to achieve, by a couple orders of magnitude. I point my students to that moment in David Small's *Stitches* where the psychotic punishing grandmother hesitates just a moment before dragging the boy upstairs by his wrists (90). In the last panel on the page we (and David) get the rare opportunity to gaze into her eyes as an oblique ray of light penetrates behind her usually reflecting

glasses. For a long moment she is at rest and human, somewhat abashed, considering her options. Then she resumes the manic vindictiveness of the preceding panels, along with her flat-eyed, Joker-esque evil grimace (91). We should delight in the rare drawing skill that enables this psychological depth and moral complexity.

Well, I'm of two minds, as you can see. Here's what I maintain, though: being unable to draw doesn't disqualify you from creating great comics. Being unable to manipulate your compositional elements effectively – including characterization, setting, plot points, cause-and-effect logic, narration, dialogue, pacing, focus, tone, theme, etc. (tick however many boxes are relevant to your chosen genre) does. But look, people are always thinking that their own specialty, whatever it is, is the central one and that disciplines in which other people have made themselves expert are less significant. Could that be the main operating principle behind my philosophical differences with Lyles and others who consider the aesthetic impact of comics to reside purely or primarily in their visual aspects? Lyles can draw, has spent many years studying other artists' drawings to improve his drawing skills, so he naturally looks at comics as pictures expanded to include words, and multiplied to encompass plot, character, and all the rest of whatever. I on the other hand have spent a lifetime reading and building up my linguistic confidence, and so my personal manifesto is Words + Pictures, in that order. Is that all this boils down to?

Nah, I don't think that's it. Because narrative craftsmanship isn't just about diction, choosing your words well. Comics can also succeed without any dialogue or word-based narration at all. As an example I offer Erik Nebel's "Behold the Sexy Man," which wordlessly deploys an unearthly setting, fabulistic characters, and fabulous plot twists. In a well-made comic, both words and pictures are symbolic pointers to other things, either actual objects and persons from the past or present of the real world, or imaginary ones in fictional worlds. That is to say, they have meaning. The importance of the meaning that a comics text aims at outweighs the importance of either the words or the pictures taken in isolation, and meaning may be supported by any combination of words and pictures. (So play to your strengths, writer/artists!)

In published interviews, my hero Chris Ware argues that the perusal of comics, even wordless ones, should be regarded as a form of reading rather than the sort of looking-at we engage in with most of the art objects collected in museums and galleries. It drove him kind of crazy that his art teachers would sometimes spend lengthy critique periods examining and discussing his compositions without ever once reading them.

Like Ware, I claim that reading is the main thing comics are for and that therefore the most profound obligation laid on the makers of comics is to create a compelling reading experience. If they can also provide eye candy, or, like Kirby, profound innovations in the 2D visual plane, well, that's gravy. And if an art student wants to reverse engineer the 2D visual techniques of comics art for the purpose of creating objects to be looked at rather than objects to be read, I'm not telling them

they shouldn't. I'm not saying there is no value in fitting (at least some) comics into the taxonomies and traditions of the visual arts; I'm just saying that comics (at least the ones worth reading) are a branch of literature.

Thus, literature teachers should teach comics and students of literature should read them. And a teacher of creative writing may humbly aspire to teach comics-making alongside and in collaboration with 2D artists and designers.

Notes

1. In my mind, it stands for "troglodyte."
2. Richard F. Outcault's comic strip *Hogan's Alley*, featuring a character who became known as The Yellow Kid, first appeared in 1895 in Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World*. The following year, Outcault was hired away by William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal*, but because Outcault had not copyrighted the character, Pulitzer was able to continue publishing a version of the strip as well. The Yellow Kid thus came to epitomize the Pulitzer/Hearst competition in particular (New York had two "yellow kid papers"), and subsequently a lurid journalistic style more generally.
3. *Classic Comics/Classics Illustrated* was a comic book series consisting entirely of adaptations of classic literature. It began in 1941, was renamed in 1947, and ceased in 1971 after publishing 169 issues in total.
4. I mean, assuming the academic lit-crit peer review system continues to exist at all. Perhaps we shouldn't completely rule out the possibility of a cataclysm that ends the world as we know it.

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Merging the Contemporary with the Classic Through Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*

Introduction

Austen herself stated, in her juvenilia, "If a book is well written, I always find it too short." This may also be the case for some high school students, however many of them never get to this point as their love for reading diminishes throughout the years. Classroom walls are coated with textbooks and revered classic works of literature, but testing takes center stage. As kids struggle through their English classes, it is no wonder they harbor such animosity toward classic texts— who would want to stumble over the prose of Joseph Conrad or trudge through Shakespearean English? Children cower when they encounter pre-1900 texts, largely due to the difficulty of the language, but Austen classics are unique in that they continue to find themselves in classrooms again and again. If one looks close enough, they will see Austen's universal themes and characters in the form of young adult novels, films, vlogs, and other adaptations. Because of this, Austen provides a grand example of

how classics still have a very important slot camouflaged among the contemporary on our classroom bookshelves with the ability to entice students to love reading.

Analysis of Arguments For and Against Classics in the Classroom

Educational scholars all over have a difficult time agreeing as to whether or not teachers should stick to the classics in their classrooms. Many feel as if these books have been taught forever; therefore, they must be doing something right in the realm of learning. Furthermore, some of these scholars believe that these classic texts are what prepare students for their impending standardized tests, as well as many of the other difficult readings students will be faced with throughout the rest of their lives. On the flip side of that, there are plenty of scholars who believe that the classics are ruining reading for our children. They believe that if students do not enjoy reading, then they will not comprehend what is on the page. Additionally, several scholars would even argue that reading things besides the classics are actually helping out standardized test scores because students' scores will go up if they just read. All that being said, there is no set answer as to whether or not classics should have a place on our classroom bookshelves. Each side has valid points, and their scholarship is important when determining why teachers teach certain things. However, in order to really understand, each side of the debate must be examined further.

One of the arguments on the positive side of teaching classics in the classroom centers around the fact that students should not be sheltered from certain texts just because they are difficult to comprehend. In her short piece, "In Defense of the

Classics,” Carol Jago argues, “Reading Toni Morrison and Fyodor Dostoevski makes students stronger readers and stronger people. If we care about kids, we teachers can’t give up just because the books are difficult.” (10). Jago believes that if teachers do not provide their students with access to all texts – even difficult classic texts – students will be, in a way, shorted something valuable from their education. Jago pulls from the theories of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky who “felt that the only good kind of instruction is that which marches ahead of development and leads it.” (10).

This supports Jago’s defense of the classics because, chances are, classic texts are a bit above grade level for the average high school student. However, Jago believes that if teachers challenge them with classic texts they will eventually become better readers and actually enjoy the books they are assigned to read. Therefore, Jago is not only on the side of supporting classic texts in the classroom; she thinks they are also a necessity.

On the flip side of the classics argument, there are several scholars that believe classics should not be taught in the classroom because they see them as detrimental to a student’s self- concept of reading. In his article “How Classics Create an Aliterate Society,” scholar Donald Gallo says that classics in the classroom are setting students up for failure because students cannot understand the stories, they cannot see themselves in the work, and they create a dread for reading due to frustration. He reflects upon his own frustration while reading classics saying, “Many of my classmates and I could never figure out what we were supposed to get out of those

assigned stories and poems. Like most students, we relied on the teacher to tell us what they meant.” (33). If students are unable to figure out the premise of classics for themselves, they will struggle to grow as readers and be less inspired to become avid readers. In addition, even if the students understand the work, they fail to see themselves throughout the pages. Gallo states,

The classics are not about TEENAGE concerns! They are about ADULT issues. Moveover, they were written for EDUCATED adults who had the LEISURE time to read them. [...] Now you can see why I understand and sympathize with the tenth grade boy who told me that his required literature books “. . . have nothing to do with me.” And the tenth grade girl who defined literature as “keeping in touch with the dead.” Or the teenager who said, “I’m tired of reading this boring stuff. I want to read something with a pulse!” (34).

If students feel like they are not represented in the literature they are given, they will be less inclined to continue to seek themselves out in books. This could be discouraging in the long run. Finally, Gallo sums everything up using a developed dread for reading. He states, “We are a nation that teaches its children *how* to read in the early grades, then forces them during their teenage years to read literary works that most of them dislike so much that they have no desire whatsoever to continue those experiences into adulthood.” (34). Essentially, if we ruin students’ desires to read, then it will not matter whether they have read the classics or not—they will still not be readers.

Though the scholars may not agree on whether or not students should study

classics, they do all agree on one thing: Students should be reading. Additionally, neither side can deny the current prominence of classics in every classroom. Looking at a new way of thinking, what if both sides are right? What if there is a way to study classics alongside texts that students are able to relate to? One classic author that does just that is Jane Austen.

Universal Austen

Lots of names float throughout high school classroom hallways – Joseph Conrad, William Shakespeare, Chaucer, Emily Dickenson, George Orwell, Harper Lee, F. Scott Fitzgerald. However, there is one name that stands out among the rest, and that name is Jane Austen. Not only are her novels on millions, if not billions, of bookshelves, but the culture that surrounds Jane and her works is unlike any other. You can find Austen memorabilia of all sorts, and people that have not even read her novels probably know who Jane Austen is. Because of this, Austen holds a universality that is unique and undeniable. The universality of Austen can be found through her themes and her character tropes. More specifically, the theme of forbidden love (or loving the boy that you really do not want to love) is a theme that pops up again and again in young adult novels and classics alike. Chances are, each student can find something to relate to out of Austen's work.

First of all, Jane Austen's theme of forbidden love is a theme that young adults everywhere adore. They may not realize that this theme came from Jane Austen, but they have definitely encountered it in at least one form or fashion. Digging deeper

into *Pride and Prejudice* reveals that the strain placed on Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy's impending relationship is due to their extreme differences in social class. Mr. Darcy is used to separating himself from those that are not of the same class as himself, and this typically keeps him from entering any romantic relationships. However, Mr. Darcy falls for Elizabeth Bennet, of course, despite it going against everything he has ever said. In the disastrous proposal from Mr. Darcy to Elizabeth Bennet, he begins his speech with "You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you" (145). This is a moment when readers swoon over Mr. Darcy's eloquence and openness and recognize why Mr. Darcy is one of the most sought-after men in classic literature. Not Elizabeth Bennet, however. Instead, Elizabeth Bennet is offended and is not afraid to tell Mr. Darcy of her poor opinions that she holds of him. As she begins to reject him, Mr. Darcy gets extraordinarily bent out of shape and says the following:

These bitter accusations might have been suppressed, had I with greater policy concealed my struggles, and flattered you into the belief of my being impelled by unqualified, unalloyed, inclination [...] Nor am I ashamed of the feelings I related. They were natural and just. Could you expect me to rejoice in the inferiority of your connections? To congratulate myself on the hope of relations, whose condition in life is so decidedly beneath my own? (148)

Mr. Darcy sees his social status as something not to be ashamed of, rather, something that is a very important determining factor in many of his life decisions. Even in the case of proposing to Elizabeth Bennet, he cannot put his social class away and make

her feel truly admired. In the end, their love is restored when Elizabeth decides she no longer hates Mr. Darcy, but their forbidden love cannot be removed from the prevalence of their social classes. Young adult readers tend to search for some sort of satisfying love story that packs a punch, and Elizabeth and Darcy do just that, making young adult readers and classic-lovers alike adore their unlikely love story.

The theme of unlikely lovers is one that pops up throughout literature everywhere. It may not take the exact form of Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy, but there are many books sitting on classroom libraries that have two teens at their center that are madly in love with each other but cannot seem to make the relationship work right away because of some societal conflict such as Augustus Waters and Hazel Grace Lancaster in John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*, as well as Violet Markey and Theodore Finch in Jennifer Nivens' *All The Bright Places*. In fact, scholar Penelope Fritzer argues that by reading *Pride and Prejudice*, students are actually able to dig deeper into "what the individual owes to society and what he or she is obliged to tolerate in the way of strictures on behavior, a question that is especially relevant for adolescents" (597). Fritzer sees the relevance of novels like *Pride and Prejudice*, even for teens. She states:

Pride and Prejudice lends itself to classroom discussion of what one owes to family and society. Must one always follow family advice, even when that advice is harmful [...] Does Darcy's aunt, for example, have the right to demand that Elizabeth abjure any relationship with Darcy? High school students resoundingly say no [...] Deciding one's own fate versus heeding society's

strictures is a major issue for students, and they will gain valuable insight into the repercussions of behavior by seeing how Austen's characters respond to this dilemma. (598)

Fritzer suggests that students can actually relate to what the characters are going through in *Pride and Prejudice*. If students can understand and relate to what is going on in Austen's greatest work of literature, then Austen must be doing something different—creating universal appeal.

Austen's classic roots seem to juxtapose Gallo's argument about classics in the classroom being damaging. Rather, Austen's work provides a story where students really can see themselves, where they actually can understand the language, and that they actually enjoy reading. In fact, the story is loved so much that it can be found in a variety of other places that students probably encounter each and every day. Students are unknowingly gobbling up the work of Jane Austen daily, often times via pop culture, and that truly says something about the universality that Austen created through her novels.

Analysis of Places Austen is Found in the Classroom

Jane Austen is one of the places where classics in the classroom does not have to be an either-or game. With a little bit of forethought and planning, teachers can use Jane Austen as an example of a way to combine classics and young adult novels in the classroom. This combination is valuable in that it is what will truly allow students to reach a level of understanding that is not obtainable with just young adult literature

or just the classics. There are Austen novel spin-offs, various film adaptations, and even vlog series that teachers of all grade levels can access in their classrooms when deciding to tackle the classic works of Jane Austen. All of these different spinoffs, including the other elements of Austen that are found all over pop culture, expose students to different skills and mediums that are valuable in their overall education. With a focus on classic literature—a crucial part of any student’s high school experience—they can also gain experience with technology, writing, and even other forms of reading such as graphic novels.

Jane Austen might not have been aware, but the culture that she created through her classic texts is invaluable throughout the education world.



Figure A

are teaching the original novels or not. There are so many revisions, spinoffs, etc. that exist; it is almost impossible to keep up with them all. Everywhere a person turns, they can find something related to

As previously mentioned, the universality of Austen is undeniable. Therefore, it is likely that Jane Austen has found her way onto classroom shelves everywhere, whether those teachers



Figure B



Figure C

Austen whether it is a pad of post-it notes (Figure A), a pair of socks (Figure B), or even an air freshener (Figure C). Jane Austen is definitely lurking around every corner, and children have undoubtedly been exposed to her

whether they realize it or not.

Because of the Jane Austen phenomenon, teachers can take advantage of a very interesting culture attached to Jane Austen and her works. Whether the elements of this culture can be found directly in the classroom or not, it is important to note that they probably have affected young adults in one way or another, so teachers everywhere should be aware of the ways that students are uniquely blending the classics with the contemporary. If teachers are aware of this influence they will be more likely to successfully reach their students in all facets of the classroom. Lessons that play off of students' interests will always be more successful, and if teachers want their students to embrace the classics, they need a way to connect to their students – pop culture Jane can do just that. Three ways to look at the contemporary Austen is by acknowledging young adult novel spinoffs, various film adaptations and spinoffs, and a vlog series that can be accessed on YouTube with the click of a button. Through all of these mediums, Jane Austen lives on in the hearts and classrooms everywhere.

As far as young adult novels are concerned, the Jane Austen influence is abundant. One of the most popular spinoffs, however, is entitled *Austenland*. *Austenland* was recognized in scholar Jessica Jerri's column, where she describes *Austenland* by Shannon Hale saying,

Jane Hayes's obsession with the fictional Mr. Darcy has more than likely jeopardized each of her past relationships. When she inherits an Austen-

themed vacation to Pembroke Park, Jane has a chance to live out her fantasy and hopefully get Mr. Darcy out of her system. With a cranky Regency gentleman (an actor) and a handsome gardener (background staff member) vying for her attention, our heroine has her work cut out for her. This humorous novel with a cast of well-drawn characters will charm fans who wish to relive their favorite books. (107)

Austenland combines the elements of a spin-off, as well as including some of the characters readers know and love. The heroine endures a sort of love triangle very similar to the love situations found in *Pride and Prejudice*, but the heroine is also obsessed with the actual novel. This young adult novel provides a totally different way of looking at the novel, as well as a way to see how the culture surrounding the novel can play out. This culture in itself is a way to reach many students, which is a discussion in and of itself.

Another young adult novel that is difficult to ignore in the discourse surrounding Jane Austen is *Epic Fail* by Claire LaZebnik. This YA novel is more of a direct spinoff in that the characters all have a matching character in *Pride and Prejudice* based on their personality in the novel. For example, the main characters are the Benton sisters rather than the Bennet sisters, and Mr. Darcy becomes Derek. Instead of taking place in England centuries ago, this novel takes place in Los Angeles, and the girls attend a prep school where everyone has parents that are wickedly rich and famous. Naturally Elise, one of the Benton sisters, falls in love with Derek, and their relationship struggles as the kids try and navigate their

respective social classes. This novel is a true young adult novel, and it is written at a level that is appropriate for ages twelve and up. If kids have not read *Pride and Prejudice*, they will still enjoy the story. However, if students are familiar with *Pride and Prejudice*, it will be impossible for them to ignore the parallels.

Moving on from young adult literature, film is another place where people can find spinoffs and adaptations of their favorite Austen novels. As one would imagine, *Pride and Prejudice* is also wildly popular in the movie adaptation field as well as the field of written work. Most people have at least heard of, if not seen, at least one *Pride and Prejudice* based movie. One of the more recent adaptations that took the big screen by storm is *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*

(Figure D). Based off a novel, this movie hit theaters in 2016, and it is basically the original story of *Pride and Prejudice* with some zombies and fighting thrown into the mix. The Bennet sisters still exist, except this time they are trying to protect themselves from the zombie threat that is ever-growing



Figure D

all while trying to find love and save their country. This adaptation is unique in that it sticks to the original story full of love and marriage, but it also adds a little bit of action. Why zombie action? Zombies are a popular pop culture fad currently, and there is a very high chance that many students have encountered something with zombies whether it be a TV show, movie, or something in a store. The zombie fad

does not appear to be going anywhere, and if students are already embracing it, combining zombies and classic texts may just be the way to get them on board. The creators of this movie really knew what they were doing when they created this unlikely pair. It drew many people back to theaters to re-familiarize themselves with a classic text, or even create interest in a text that many had not read before. In a similar fashion, this may be a good way to spark interest in many students as a way to get them to buy into the text at hand. Additionally, this may be a movie that teachers have stocked in their classroom to get some boys on board with Jane Austen's classic love stories, as well as provide another window through which to examine

Another extraordinarily popular movie that was based off the novel *Pride and Prejudice* is *Bridget Jones's Diary*. It is a bit older having been released in 2001, but many people have seen it or at least heard about it. The movie deals with a bit of an older cast, having the main character be a middle-aged professional. The main character, Bridget, begins keeping a diary as a New Year's resolution. She battles unexpected and seemingly unwelcome love, and she cannot seem to get rid of an acquaintance that she is unexpectedly drawn toward. It is likely that there will be many students who have not seen this movie or are not allowed to see it because it is rated R, but in our ever-changing world, more and more students will likely be exposed to it. Though not as explicitly based off *Pride and Prejudice* as *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* is, *Bridget Jones's Diary* is still one of the great novel-turned-movie spinoffs of one of Austen's greatest novels.

Another unique place to look for Austen in the classroom is through vlog

series. There are several vlog series based off Austen novels, but the one based off *Pride and Prejudice* is entitled *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. This is a very interesting phenomenon because, as scholar Silke Jandl states, it “is the first literary adaptation produced exclusively on the free Internet platform YouTube” (167). *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* has a book that pairs with it entitled *The Secret Diary of Lizzie Bennet*, but both can be consumed independently and still perfectly understood. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* is unique because students have almost unlimited access to YouTube. They have grown up in an era of technology, and searching for YouTube videos is almost as second nature as brushing teeth. If teachers need another way to allow access to Austen’s novels, a vlog series can do just that. In fact, there is a YA series by author Patrick Carman entitled *Skeleton Creek* that is part book, part video series. Students love it because it breaks up the monotony of reading an entire book, and it provides really useful visuals for understanding the words at hand. Using technology in the classroom is a great way to enhance classic texts and open students’ minds to embracing the text in front of them. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* in particular play off students’ technological interests, and it gets them into the story without actually realizing it.

Though this is just a small sample of the Austen spin-offs and adaptations that exist, it is undeniable that Austen has one of the largest cultures surrounding her works. There are many different ways that you can find Austen in classrooms without even picking up her classic novels. Students are able to explore YA novels, films, and vlog series all related to the classic novel *Pride and Prejudice*, and this

allows for a greater understanding of the novel at hand. If students are given alternate ways to study a text, there is bound to be something that appeals to each and every one of them. Additionally, by bringing in alternate activities, the various learning styles of all the students in the classroom should be reached. Multi-modal approaches are the best for reaching all students and creating maximum understanding for whatever text is at hand. After looking at all of these different access points, maybe it is safe to say that there needs to be a balance in the classroom of classics and contemporary.

Though some teachers believe in a classics-only approach to education while others believe solely YA literature is the way to go, there lies true value in pursuing a combination of both. There is absolutely no shame in enjoying a YA novel or gobbling up a book that is a few reading levels too low – getting books in students' hands is really all that matters. However, teachers should want their students to grow as readers. Unfortunately, students will have to encounter texts that are less than enjoyable. They may have to struggle through a housing contract or a boring college textbook without the choice to abandon. In order to better understand complicated and potentially dry pieces of text, those students need tools in their figurative toolboxes that they can access in times of need. By starting with texts that are enjoyable, teachers should be able to work their students up to the more difficult texts, which will teach them that just because something is hard does not mean it is impossible. A little bit of confidence in their toolbox is extremely valuable, and it will be a tool that they access time and time again. One way to do this is by introducing

reading ladders.

Combining YA Literature and Jane Austen in Practice: Reading Ladder

In theory, the combination of YA literature and classic Jane Austen seems like a foolproof way to teach the classics. Then comes the golden question—How does one go about creating a successful tool to teach both? That is where reading ladders come into play. Author Teri S. Lesesne wrote an entire book entitled *Reading Ladders: Leading Students from Where They Are to Where We'd Like Them to Be* where she goes in depth about what reading ladders are, how to make them work, and why teachers should utilize them in the classroom. Using examples of poetry and other classic works Lesesne discusses building reading ladders saying:

Often, we read in either a horizontal or vertical movement. In horizontal reading, we read books serially. Specializing in an author's works or in the works of one series, we find comfort. Each book is quite like the one before. We know what to expect in terms of plot and character and resolution. There are few surprises. [...] Vertical reading seems to be the domain of secondary school reading. In vertical reading, we move ever upward. Elementary poetry, for instance, which involves humorous verses and lots of puns and other funny plays on words, gives way to classic forms and poets. We move from "ha ha ha" to haiku without much of a transition to assist our students. *The Outsiders* (Hinton 1967) gives way to *Hamlet* (Shakespeare 2003). *Memoirs of a Teenage Amnesiac* (Zevin 2007) fades into essays by Thoreau and Emerson with nary a

bridge to help readers cross successfully. Vertical reading is where we lose many readers, I fear. The path is too steep and there are few guideposts along the way to assist the inexperienced climber. What I propose is more of a diagonal movement, just the situation for reading ladders. (47)

What Lesesne is suggesting is that instead of giving students a YA novel like LaZebnik's *Pride and Prejudice* spinoff *Epic Fail* and then encouraging them to pick up an actual copy of *Pride and Prejudice* because "they should enjoy the story," teachers should scaffold up to *Pride and Prejudice* so as not to discourage students when they realize that though sharing a similar story, Austen's classic novel is vastly different from LaZebnik's teenage characters with teenage problems. With a little bit of scaffolding, however, students will be able to understand the classic texts better than ever before.

Reading ladders are a way of getting students to start in one place and work their way up to a more difficult text. The top rung of the ladder is the goal, and all of the proceeding rungs should help support students so they will all make it to the very tippy top of that ladder. For this reading ladder, the goal is to have students reach the classic novel *Pride and Prejudice* (Figure E). This ladder was created with freshman or sophomores in mind, but could be altered for almost any high school grade level. There are many ways that students can explore texts similar to *Pride and Prejudice*, but this ladder deals with the issue of social class, meaning the place that one holds in society and how that status shapes his/her life. Social class can be found in all sorts of texts in very different ways, and students should be able to trace this theme

throughout all of the texts they encounter.

In Tennessee, teachers must adhere to a strict set of standards when creating lessons for their students. A teacher's purpose is typically formed around said standards, and those standards strongly influence the lesson and how it is taught. This reading ladder would be a part of a larger unit that would cover many different reading, writing, speaking and listening, and other standards. As far as reading, this reading ladder would cover five important standards taken

from the tn.gov website: **9-10.RL.KID.1** Analyze what a text says explicitly and draw inferences; cite the strongest, most compelling textual evidence to support conclusions, **9-10.RL.KID.3** Analyze how complex characters, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text to impact meaning, **9-10.RL.CS.6** Analyze how point of view and/or author purpose shapes the content and style of diverse texts, **9-10.RL.IKI.7** Evaluate the topic, subject, and/or theme in two diverse formats or media, **9-10.RL.IKI.9** Analyze a variety of related literary texts and



Figure E

evaluate how an author draws on, alludes to, or transforms source material to provide a deeper and more thorough interpretation of the text. As a teacher, it is important that you teach your students not only how to analyze, but also how to transfer that analysis to real life topics. By exploring the different works within the reading ladder, students will be exposed to different genres, situations, and styles, and they should be fully equipped to understand how social class works in various situations within literature, as well as their everyday lives.

The top rung of the ladder is *Pride and Prejudice* – a love story that everyone adores that is inexplicably attached to social class. All of the works leading up to this top rung will give students various ways to study and understand social class and how it is framed throughout society. Additionally, students should be able to infer how social class is interpreted by society, as well as what that means in a larger context when it comes to perception, resources, and relationships. The very bottom rung of the ladder is *Humans of New York – Stories* by Brandon Stanton. Students will be expected to interpret the photos and stories of the individuals present while digging for evidence of social class and what that means for the individuals at hand. The second rung is a graphic novel version of the goal text – *Pride and Prejudice (Marvel Classics)* by Nancy Butler. By providing a graphic novel version of the very last text, students will be exposed to the text early but will have a mixture of words and illustrations to help them with their interpretations. The different style of text will hopefully allow for a new level of interest and understanding, and students will be able to refer back when they finally reach the top rung of the ladder. The third

rung is *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie. This is a young adult favorite, and the students will not be able to ignore the influence that social class has on Junior, the protagonist, and his relationship to his friends and family. That close, personal relationship is also present in *Pride and Prejudice*, and this text will give students a way of comparing social class based on region. Additionally, this text will provide another window for students to access social class by drawing their attention also to Junior's ethnicity. The fourth rung is *We Were Liars* by E. Lockhart. This novel is kind of confusing at first, which is why it is higher on the ladder, but the whole novel is centered on social class, and the twist at the end keeps everyone engaged. Much like the other texts, social class in this novel really effects personal relationships, and students should be able to study the interactions of the characters and determine how those are effected by social class. The fifth rung is *Red Queen* by Victoria Aveyard. This series is wildly popular among high school students at the moment, and it will also provide a type of dystopian/fantasy novel for readers that are interested in that specific genre. By providing social class in a sort of make-believe context, students will be able to use their imagination to see how social class can work in situations that might not be as prevalent or as common. Hopefully this will assist some struggling readers by providing a text that they enjoy, as well as giving them inference tools to reference when they begin to explore *Pride and Prejudice*. Finally, students will reach the top rung — Jane Austen's classic text *Pride and Prejudice*. All of the works chosen will make for a very comprehensive ladder that will hit the many varied interests of students and allow them all to reach (and

hopefully enjoy!) a popular classic text.

Bottom rung: *Humans of New York – Stories*, Photo Book/Short Stories, Stanton (2015). Brandon Stanton started off with a project in mind – he was going to create a photographic census of New York City. As he began to collect photos and stories, he created a blog entitled *Humans of New York*. This is the second book he has done that is filled with all new subjects, but this book has a lot more dialogue that adds to the emotion-filled photos that line the pages. This book is the bottom rung because of the pictures. Even students that are not too keen on reading novels will enjoy the pictures. They will be able to identify social class in the context of peoples' situations through the photographic elements that are displayed, and they will be able to use the text to support their inferences. For higher readers, they may be interested in facing their biases – how do they feel just by looking at the photo? When they read the person's story, does that match up with the social class they originally thought that person was in? How and why? This exploration of social class will be a bit different than *Pride and Prejudice* because it is exploring present-day New York City. The region will provide differences, and the century will also provide differences. Additionally, Stanton's pictures will cause students to feel differently about social class than just reading Austen's words. They may have to face their own biases, but they should be able to understand how social class is framed through words vs. how social class is framed through pictures. This will provide good opportunities to explore social class for lower readers and advanced readers alike.

Second rung: *Pride and Prejudice (Marvel Classics)*, Graphic Novel, Butler (2010).

This graphic novel explores the well-known classic text *Pride and Prejudice*, but spices it up in graphic novel format. It takes the story that readers know so well and adds compelling images paired with carefully selected text to tell the story in a unique, engaging way. Marvel Comic's adaptation of this classic text successfully compresses the story and creates a visualization to assist readers in navigating the story of Elizabeth Bennet and her family. In addition to the visualization of the characters and situations, this adaptation also slightly modernizes the sometimes-tricky classic dialogue and makes it a bit easier to follow along. Students should be able to fully understand what is going on in the classic story, and they should be able to carry their knowledge with them through to the top rung. This fits well on the second rung because it is in graphic novel format. The words and language are not too difficult, and they are really enhanced by the illustrations provided on the page. Additionally, the graphic novel format is useful in the classroom for furthering reading and inference skills. It not only captures the attention of students who have been growing up in a digital-age, but it also strengthens their reading skills and encourages them to read even more.

Third rung: *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, YA Novel, Alexie (2007). This young adult novel tells the story of a young boy, Junior, who lives on the Spokane Indian Reservation. He believes he can do better than staying put on the reservation, so he leaves to attend an all-white school in the neighboring town where he is the only Indian. His social class, which is inextricably bound to his ethnicity, is very apparent as Junior tries to navigate his new world and fit in, and his life both on

and off the reservation will never be the same. This novel is here because it is a favorite with young adult readers. The prose is very manageable, and there are several cartoons sprinkled throughout that add to the story and make it easier to visualize. This makes it a bit harder than a graphic novel, but still a little less scary than a huge novel. Junior struggles with his identity and how that is connected to his social class, and his relationships with his new, white friends are very different than those with his old friends on the reservation. This novel will introduce questions that are related to social class and how that is related to ethnicity and affected by relationships. What happens when people try to enter relationships – either friendships or romantic relationships – with people from different social classes? How do different social classes interact with one another? How much should people let their social classes determine who they are as individuals? These are all questions that students can also ask as they read along to Austen’s classic *Pride and Prejudice*. All students will really get into this story, and they will enjoy following Junior around in his quest for success.

Fourth rung: *We Were Liars*, YA Novel, Lockhart (2014). This novel is completely centered around social class as it follows a very rich family to their summer vacation homes on a private island off the coast of Martha’s Vineyard. The entire family is obsessed with who is going to get the most fortune and the main characters, deemed “the Liars,” are sick of it. They decide to take measures into their own hands and burn their grandfather’s house down (sorry for the spoiler) with all of his possessions inside. Cadence, one of the Liars, suffers a terrible head injury and

cannot remember anything except that she is in love with Gat, a boy who does not come from her same social circle, and that something big happened that summer that she cannot remember. This novel is placed towards the top because it is a little trickier to follow. It is short, which makes it very manageable, but the twist at the end is somewhat difficult to follow. All students will enjoy this novel because it is fast-paced and very intriguing. Also, it is completely focused on social class with a forbidden love (hello *Pride and Prejudice*!) at the center.

Fifth rung: *Red Queen*, YA Fantasy, Aveyard (2016). This fantasy novel is all about a main character, Mare Barrow, who lives in a world that is divided by people's blood. People that have common, Red blood serve the elite, Silver blood who all have some sort of superhuman power. Mare is a Red who lives in a poor, rural village until she discovers she actually has a superhuman ability. The Silver court—the king, princess, and all the nobles—say it is impossible, so she is forced to play a role as a Silver princess. She uses her position in the Silver world to help out a Red rebellion as she finds herself torn and unsure of her fate. This novel is here because it is a bit longer, denser, and a little harder to comprehend. However, it is a favorite of many YA readers right now, so readers should be excited about encountering it. It will give some students a new genre to explore, and it will show them another way of looking at social class—class hierarchy in a fantasy world. Hopefully lower readers will be able to explain the significance of the social classes in the novel, and higher readers should be expected to be able to identify social classes within the novel and connect them to our current real-world. This novel should be

appropriate for all readers at one level or another.

Top rung: *Pride and Prejudice*, Fiction Novel, Austen (1813). This classic novel tells the story of the Bennet family, who comes from a lower class, and their endeavors in navigating life and love. The main focus of the novel is the protagonist, Elizabeth Bennet, and her emotional development throughout the novel as she learns to differentiate what is superficial and what is real. All of the Bennet sisters are looking for love, and Elizabeth finds her love in Mr. Darcy – a character that everyone loves to hate (or hates to love?). Mr. Darcy is a rich man who is very condescending toward Elizabeth due to her social rank, however he is undeniably in love with Elizabeth Bennet. Eventually the characters must overcome their pride and their prejudice, and the two end up in a lovely relationship. This story is at the top of the ladder because it is definitely going to be the most difficult for students to comprehend. The language is challenging, and the story can be somewhat difficult to follow due to the culture and time differences. However, it is on this list because Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy's relationship completely revolves around their social classes. Besides the other texts on the ladder, some background knowledge would probably be needed on the culture and customs of the time, but this ladder should have challenged students to look for social class in all sorts of ways. Because of this, they should be ready for the challenge of reading *Pride and Prejudice*, and they should understand and even enjoy the story.

Overall, this reading ladder should allow students to understand how to follow a given theme in a text set that employs many sorts of texts. They should look

at this ladder like a challenge, but they should also be excited about some of the texts that they are given. Because of the scaffolding of *Pride and Prejudice* with young adult texts, they should be able to appreciate everything that the classic novel has to offer, and they will feel as if it is more manageable for them as they have grown as readers.

Other Ways to Have an Austen-Filled Classroom

Though a reading ladder is a great place to start when looking at ways to bring the classics into the classroom, saying that is the only solution would severely limit teachers' capabilities of reaching their students. There are plenty of other ways to incorporate classic literature into various classrooms including composition and writing prompts, as well as through technology. Once students reach Austen classics such as *Pride and Prejudice*, it is imperative that they learn how to study and apply the text in further detail. If students are given further activities, they will learn to appreciate the text at a more in-depth level, and they will hopefully feel more confident about the work they are doing and be more willing to face other classic texts in the future.

One of the first ways of furthering Jane Austen classic study is through composition. Regardless of the grade-level, there is some sort of composition activity that can be created around the study of the classics. For example, Daniel R. Mangiavellano writes about encountering *Pride and Prejudice* through writing in his article "First Encounters with *Pride and Prejudice* in the Composition Classroom". Though he models his paper on a first-year college level composition class, this

method could easily be used for advanced students in an honors or AP class, or even with any *Pride and Prejudice* unit. Mangiavellano talks about his strategy saying:

I use the novel to introduce students to a variety of prose strategies exemplified in the text they can fold into their own academic writing. Since students *want* to read themselves into the text, I “meet students where they are” by playing off this instinct and spotlighting the novel’s many letters, letter writers, and readers whose striking resemblance to our student writers is an important pedagogical aspect of this novel; after all, writers in *Pride and Prejudice* admit to troubling issues of clarity and coherence that our students similarly struggle against. (550-1)

Mangiavellano makes sure to point out that when students read, it is more enjoyable if they can see themselves in the text—one of the main reasons that teachers push for YA novels in the classroom. If students study a novel like *Pride and Prejudice*, composition exercises are more likely to allow them to see a glimpse of themselves and make reading more enjoyable all together.

As Mangiavellano talks more in depth about his composition class, he talks about a specific exercise he uses to encapsulate students in their composition exercises. He discusses the famous first line that readers struggle to forget—“It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife” (1). He asks his students to then do an exploration of topic sentences in general by asking them to “air o0ut what they already know about how topic sentences function in essays or novels” (551-2). Some common answers are

“draw the reader in” and “make the reader want to know more” (552). By doing a study like this with students, you can reassure that they are familiar with the mechanics behind composition, as well as why authors make the word choices they do. This hits a few different state standards, and gives students a way to further understand the novel of *Pride and Prejudice* as a whole. If students are willing to look that far into a text, they should be fairly knowledgeable when it comes to the text at hand. Though Mangiavellano uses this strategy for his freshman college students, high school teachers would definitely be able to adapt this to fit their needs and further their novel study of *Pride and Prejudice*.

Besides the composition classroom, *Pride and Prejudice* can also be studied in the context of technology. One ninth grade teacher in Melbourne Australia, Madeleine Coulombe, wrote an article entitled “*Pride and Prejudice* and Facebook: Social Media in a Year 9 English Classroom” that outlined her experiences with a Facebook activity surrounding *Pride and Prejudice* in her classroom. She taught a lesson where students used Facebook accounts to be different characters from *Pride and Prejudice*. The students were required to fully role play which included using language from the Regency period in which Austen wrote *Pride and Prejudice*. It was a large success in her classroom – the students loved pretending to be their character, and they all interacted really well in their discussion day. One example post states:

Elizabeth Bennet: is astonished ... **Mr. Darcy** has proposed to me just like that. Rude human being.
– **4** people like this.
– View all **37** comments (89).

It is clear that the students really got into the project, and it is also clear that they really understood the texts at hand. In order to make specific posts, the students must have a pretty solid background in the text at hand, meaning they must have thoroughly studied the text to pick up on small details. Coulombe reflected on her experience saying, “Our hour of Facebooking in Year 9 English was one of the most exhilarating lessons I have ever ‘taught’” (92). She goes on to describe her classroom as she states, “It generated energy and enthusiasm that remained with the class until the end of the unit, when each student in the class produced an extended short story. Most of these were set in the Regency Period” (92). She makes it clear that her lesson was successful—not only did her students get valuable technological experience, but they also got some creative writing experience through writing their own short stories.

Lessons such as these are a great addition to any unit surrounding classic texts, specifically Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*. The storyline and characters of *Pride and Prejudice* really lend themselves to all sorts of academic study, making them a perfect fit for any high school classroom. If teachers give their students enough scaffolding, as well as various access points and lessons surrounding the text, students are bound to embrace the classic text more than if they were just blindly given something of that nature. It is clear that with enough preparation, teachers can bring classics successfully into their classrooms in new and innovative ways.

Conclusion

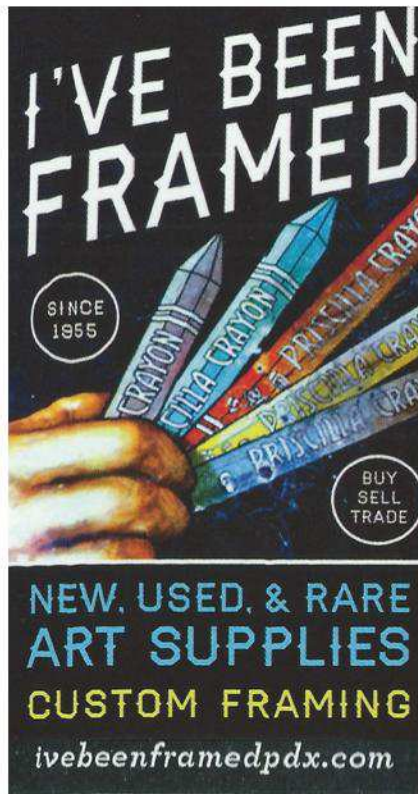
Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is a novel that is known in many different areas of life for many different things. It has been around for many, many years, and it appears as if it is not going anywhere anytime soon. The novel itself is full of important themes, characters, and styles of language, and it is truly amazing what can be done. As important as the novel is, however, sometimes it is still difficult to get students on board with reading classic texts such as *Pride and Prejudice*. Hopefully some of this study sheds light on the various ways that teachers can frame classics such as *Pride and Prejudice* to make them more interesting for students and earn permanent spots on their classroom bookshelves. It is true that classics are important, but Jane Austen has proved that their importance is much more than what is written on the page.

The success of Jane Austen in young adult literature and secondary schools suggests that this classics argument is not an either-or game – Austen lets us have it both ways. She provides open access to the past, while also engaging students through immediacy and relevancy. Because of this, Austen is a grand example of how combining the classics and contemporary in the secondary classroom is more beneficial than just one or the other. If teachers take the extra time to scaffold around lessons pertaining to the classics, they will be more successful in meeting the learning demands of their students and making their classroom a fun, interactive space where a love for reading is cultivated daily.

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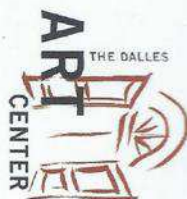
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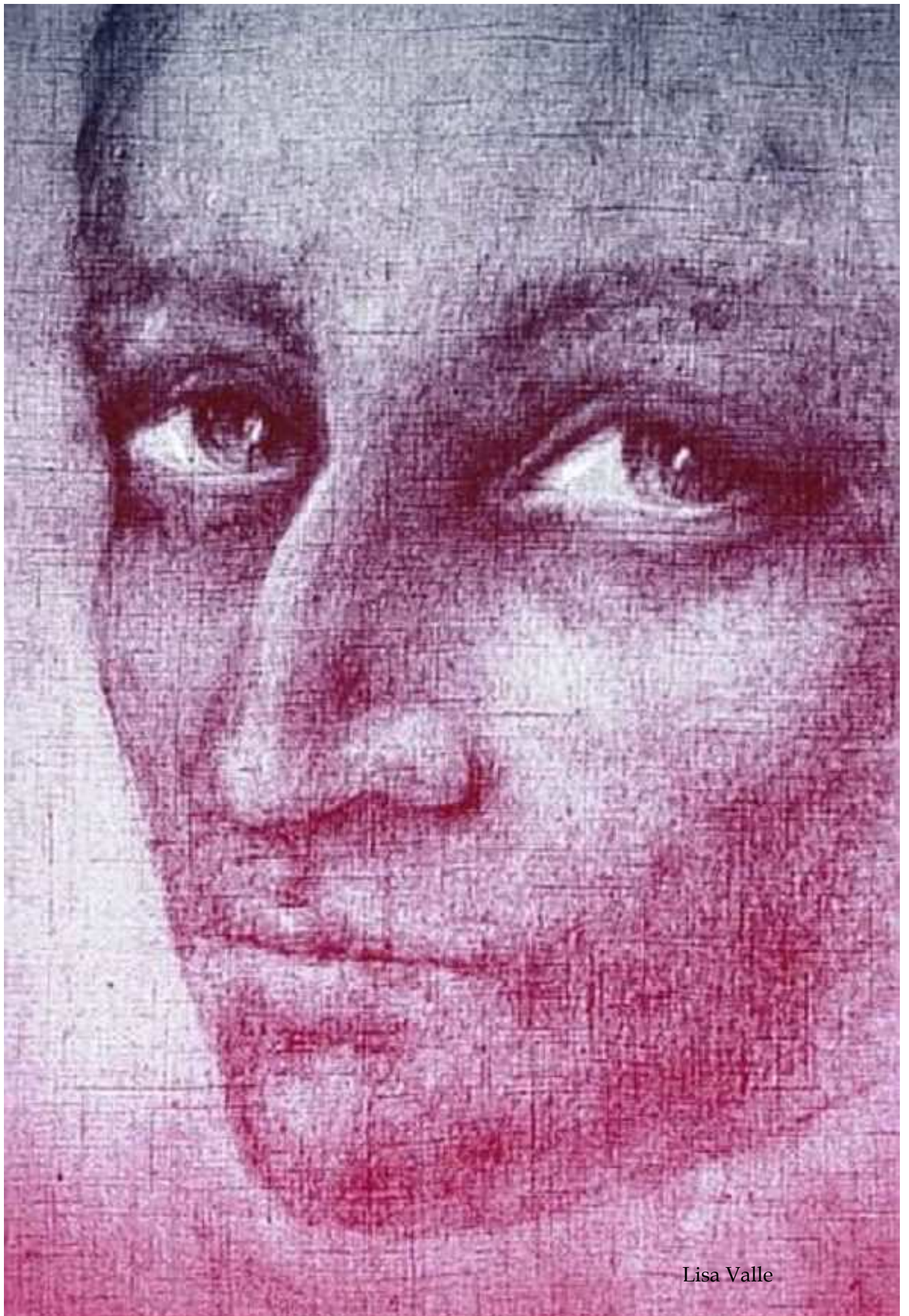
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