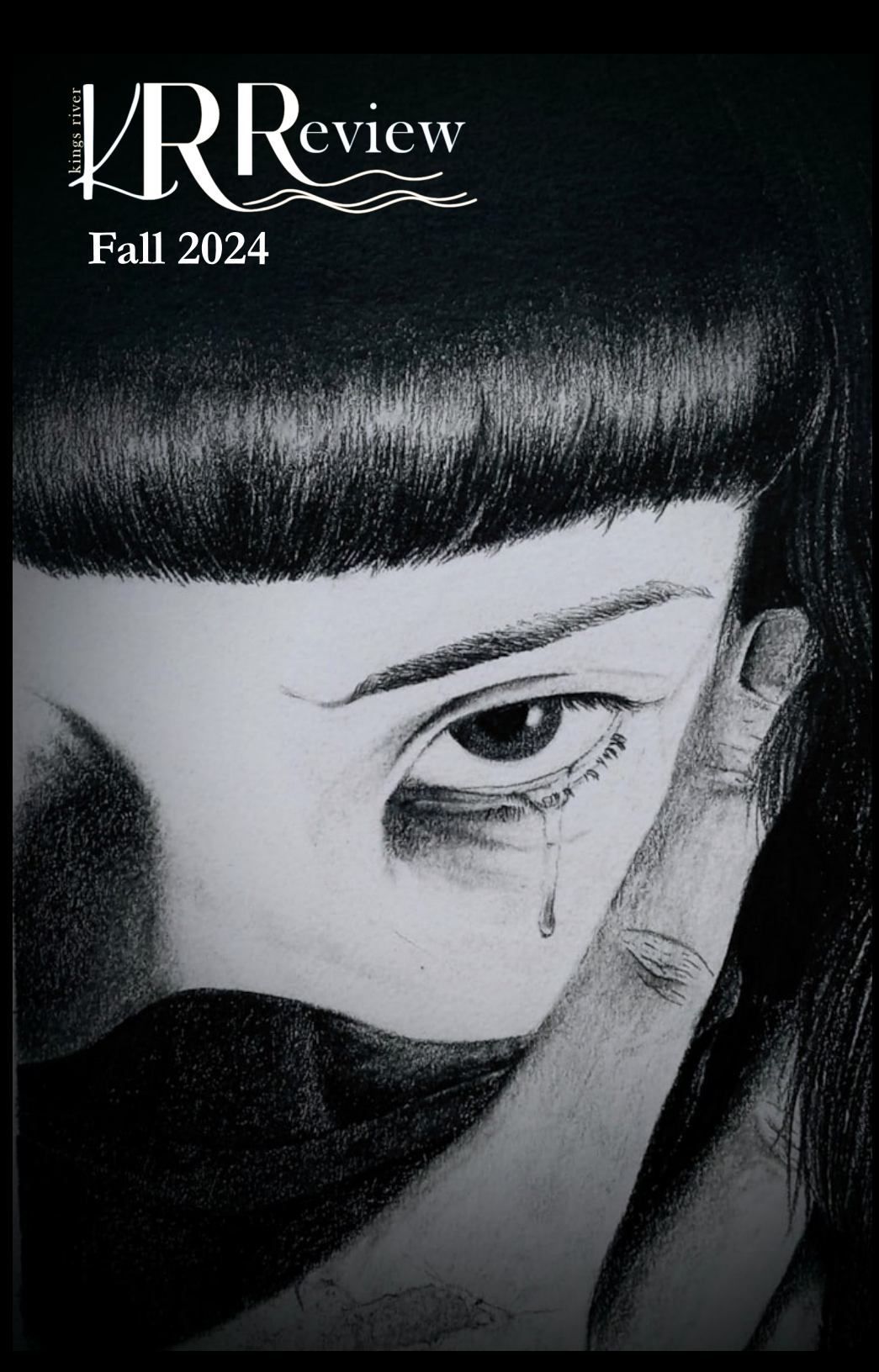


kings river
KR Review

Fall 2024





Fall 2024

The *Kings River Review* is published each fall and spring semester by the students in English 15J, Literary Journal Publication. Our desire is to produce a journal that reflects the emerging voices and visions of community college students, designing a space for their creative expression. The journal is named for the Kings River which runs along the western boundary of Reedley College.

The *Kings River Review* is made possible by the support of Dean of Instruction, Dr. Todd Davis.

We welcome submissions from two-year college students from across the United States. Please visit our website (kingsriverreview.com) for submission guidelines:

Kings River Review
995 North Reed Avenue
Reedley, California 93654
kingsriverreview.com



Number 7

Fall 2024

Editors

Daniel Echeverria Lopez

Hannah Kleinkramer

Conner McFall

Cover Art

Gracie Arciga, Into the Depths (Hate)

Eileen Apperson, Instructor

Kings River Review logo courtesy of Steve Norton.

Printing by Dumont Printing, Fresno, California.

Letter from the Editors

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the latest edition of the *Kings River Review*, a literary journal that celebrates and provides a platform for the voices, stories, and creativity of community college students from across the country. Each piece in this issue embodies the passion, resilience, and diversity of perspectives that make up the community college experience.

We believe that everyone has a unique story to tell and particularly community college students bring a fresh and important voice to the literary world. From poetry and short fiction to creative non-fiction and visual art, the works in this journal explore an everlasting amount of themes with an infinite amount of possibilities depending on the day in which you pick up this journal. These works challenge, inspire, and connect us all, reminding us of the power of storytelling to bridge distances and bring us together.

We are immensely proud of our contributors, who have taken the bold risk of sharing their talents with the world. Their work is a testament to the creative spirit found on community college campuses, and we are honored to provide a platform for these voices to be heard. We hope that as you turn these pages, you will find pieces that resonate with you, surprise you, make you laugh and cry, or even perhaps change the way you see the world.

Thank you for joining us in celebrating the stories that define our time and a generation of community college students.

With gratitude and a love for art and literature,
The Editors of the *Kings River Review*





Daniel Echeverria Lopez
Hannah Kleinkramer
Conner McFall

Table of Contents

The Beetle	2	<i>Julie Calvert, Reedley College</i> Featured Writer
Pit Stop	4	<i>Kianna Cooper</i>
Little Monster	7	<i>Hailey Huber</i>
Turncoat	13	<i>Gavin Krantz</i>
It's Not Over Till the Fat Lady Sings	20	<i>Kevin McKenna</i>
March, April, May	23	<i>William Nemeč</i>
Monday Morning Blues	28	<i>John Beery</i>
Cramond Island	34	<i>Devi Staudte</i>
Making Tea	38	<i>Julie Calvert, Reedley College</i> Featured Writer
Fate, Reincarnated	39	<i>Maya Caus</i>
Graphite	41	<i>Connor DiMartino</i>
Snowdance	43	<i>Connor DiMartino</i>
Please Leave the TV On	44	<i>Isabel Fitzgerald</i>
We Never Even Kissed	46	<i>Isabel Fitzgerald</i>
The Shoebox	47	<i>Lucia Gherardini</i>
Forever	49	<i>Harper Hansard</i>
Porcelain Doll	51	<i>Harper Hansard</i>
Capturing Memories	53	<i>Sarah Jeon</i>
The Great LA	55	<i>Katherine Preza Leonor</i>
Hullabaloo	56	<i>Hajer Maaž</i>
What is Gained from War	57	<i>Hajer Maaž</i>
Without Boundaries	58	<i>Hajer Maaž</i>
Statue in the Park	59	<i>Kevin McKenna</i>
Psalms 139	60	<i>Mirajb Mullins</i>
In Through Your Nose . . .	61	<i>Mirajb Mullins</i>
Haaaa		
Sour Punch	62	<i>Mia Lanae Rendon</i>
On Spam Musubi	63	<i>Mia Lanae Rendon</i>
To the Girl That Leaves	66	<i>Nicole Rendon</i>
Post-Its in My Notebook		
Grandpa	67	<i>Nicole Rendon</i>

Reset	68	<i>Nicole Rendon</i>	Dream Sequence	105	<i>Gracie Arciga</i>
The Unfinished Sculpture	70	<i>Devi Staudte</i>	Pine Flat Sunset	106	<i>Benjamin Mitchell, Reedley</i>
Eclipses and Evolutions	71	<i>Sabina Thai</i>			College Featured Artist
The Fruit of Labor	72	<i>Raquel Vasquez</i>	Almond Trees	107	<i>Prameswari Ramachandran</i>
A Summer in LA	74	<i>Ashley Velasquez</i>	Truck by the Glowing Sunset	108	<i>Tommy Vo</i>
Widow's Epitaph	75	<i>Madelyn Veyette</i>	Sunset by the Pier	109	<i>Tommy Vo</i>
Statue of Venus at Caesar's Palace	76	<i>Madelyn Veyette</i>	The Distant Moon Crossing the Railroad	110	<i>Tommy Vo</i>
Lost Color, Self Portrait	78	<i>Rosa Alvarado</i>	Contributors	111	
A Kiss from a Pen	79	<i>Rosa Alvarado</i>			
Memento Mori	80	<i>Gracie Arciga</i>			
Bones	81	<i>Maria Gricelda Sanchez</i>			
Heart Break	82	<i>Maria Gricelda Sanchez</i>			
Feel the Sun	83	<i>Maria Gricelda Sanchez</i>			
Chester & Winter	84	<i>Rosa Alvarado</i>			
Old Pair of Nikes	85	<i>Rosa Alvarado</i>			
Self Portrait	86	<i>Benjamin Mitchell, Reedley</i>			
		College Featured Artist			
Eye Love to Stipple	87	<i>Rosa Alvarado</i>			
Delineation	88	<i>Nadia Tomoney</i>			
Self-Cast	89	<i>Nadia Tomoney</i>			
Ruber Ducky	90	<i>Sydney Butler</i>			
Frogs Wanna Have Fun	91	<i>Sydney Butler</i>			
Colorful Chaos	92	<i>Tayonna Coles</i>			
Wisdom	93	<i>Benjamin Mitchell, Reedley</i>			
		College Featured Artist			
Consideration	94	<i>Benjamin Mitchell, Reedley</i>			
		College Featured Artist			
Warm Glow	95	<i>Benjamin Mitchell, Reedley</i>			
		College Featured Artist			
Warmth	96	<i>Aime Villagomez</i>			
Gold Soul	97	<i>Karina Rodriguez</i>			
Oceanid Reverie	98	<i>Nadia Tomoney</i>			
Nature Still Life	99	<i>Nadia Tomoney</i>			
Calling	100	<i>John Paul Bacasen</i>			
Break	101	<i>John Paul Bacasen</i>			
Ascent	102	<i>John Paul Bacasen</i>			
Still	103	<i>John Paul Bacasen</i>			
Imprint	104	<i>John Paul Bacasen</i>			

FICTION

The Beetle

Julie Calvert

Reedley College Featured Writer

Oh, what a pitiful thing I am! How sullen and morose... I have found myself amongst the leaves, stranded on my back. I am unsure if my leg is broken, or if perhaps I have nerve damage... Or maybe I am poisoned. Alas, it does not matter now. There is a large tube looming above me. It was not always there, perhaps that is why I am on my back! Well if the damned thing were not there, maybe then I would not be in this situation.

Lord Almighty! Heavens be! A hand descends upon me and it pokes and prods me. What's this? I am on my legs again, well now I cannot see the dastardly silver tube... Let me just carry on my merry little way.

I am on my back again. How loathsome. I see the cruel silver tube once more. This time, it rumbles ever so frighteningly... The hand is back! And I am held! I should let out a stink about this but oh! I am on smooth ground now... Let me just carry on my merry little way.

I tumble off the smooth ground, my bum leg or... nerve damage... or poisoned mind must have done me in! Curses! I see the silver tube once again, how unfortunate. I do not like this thing, I feel as if it may have been the cause of all this demise. Oh. The hand is back, well I can expect nothing good to come of this, no not at all. I find myself in a shaded smooth region now, ah! Let me carry on my merry little way.

I flip back over. Oh, well I suppose this is all life is. At least the silver tube isn't looming ever so close. Perhaps though, the hand

might return to flip me over once more or so... I shall just wait a merry little while...

The hand has not returned. And the ground rumbles ever so terribly... I miss the hand, I miss the wretched silver tube even... Just then something new occurred; droplets fell from the sky at a peculiar angle, and something much like joy occurred.

Pit Stop

Kianna Cooper

The sterile light flickered obnoxiously, the faint buzz like an incessant beetle. Tinkle. Nearly deaf to the rusting doorbell, Noah hardly noticed the customers who entered. A sweet scent of gasoline followed the customers from the gas pumps, and Noah couldn't help but breathe it in. The convenience store was small, made even smaller with the aisles stuffed full while he remained trapped behind the counter.

"You have fluid for the brakes?" The customer's Bengali accent tickled through her broken English.

Noah didn't look up from his book, elbows red from leaning on the bullet proof glass of the counter. "Back left, across from the soda." A purple lighter tussled between his fingers, eagerly awaiting his next smoke.

Her feet shuffled, tapping along the tile floor to the sodas, the lady looking for brake fluid. Another pair of feet lumbered to the chips, the man debating, sour cream and onion or salt and vinegar? A pause, then the sound of the bottle of brake fluid clunking to the ground, a soft gasp when he shoved her out the way.

"Damn Foreigners," he muttered, shouldering past her for a soda.

Noah still didn't look up from his book, recognizing the man's nasally voice and the stink of cigarettes accompanying his words.

"Newports," he set his snacks on the counter.

Noah held in a sigh. He hated almost everyone, but he especially hated this customer. The patron who scared away the others with his small minded, bigoted mouth, referring to immigrants as dirty

workers and blacks as thicklips, calling every man with a sway in his walk a twinkie, or shoving past a Muslim woman and knocking the items from her hand.

“Newports,” dirty fingernails tapped the counter impatiently. “Hurry up.”

Though you couldn’t tell through Noah’s icy gaze, he was more than bothered to pull away from his book. Not a word exchanged as he clicked the archaic register’s buttons, exchanging his goods for cash.

The customer took his items with a grunt, hanging a cigarette from the corner of his mouth as the lady approached the counter with her dented bottle of brake fluid. In an assertive motion, he knocked shoulders with the lady, facing the register again.

“Got a light?”

Noah frowned at him, waving the lady forward with skinny fingers.

“I asked a damn question,” he stepped in front her.

Yet Noah didn’t grace him with even a glare, snatching the brake fluid from her. The buttons of the register popped, the drawer sliding open. Brake fluid for cash.

She walked around the man as if he were a murky puddle on the floor, and he responded by lobbing a glob of spit at her feet.

“Got a lighter or what?”

Noah glanced at the purple lighter between his fingers, a heavy smoker since his dishonorable discharge and purple was always his favorite.

“Let me borrow your lighter,” he approached the counter.

“No.”

“What do you mean no?”

“No, means no,” a snarky smile crossed his face, “doesn’t it?”

“I’ll be quick,” the customer reached a hand over the counter.

But Noah snatched the lighter tight as his fingers brushed it. “No.”

He threw back his shoulders, enlarging his frame though he wasn’t nearly the height of Noah. “Give me the damn lighter!”

With the same stony expression and flat tone, “no.”

The convenience store was silent, even the buzzing lamp stalled under the weight of their exchange. The customer swiped a Ruger LCP from his hip, aiming the muzzle at Noah’s chest. Surely

the state didn’t allow wear and carry permits for the sake of taking lighters.

“Give me the fucking lighter.”

Noah leaned an elbow on the counter, stifling the pretentious smile spreading across his face. “Would you like to buy one?”

“Now,” he held out a hand, voice hard so he knew he was serious.

But so was Noah. He grabbed the customer’s wrist, pressing the muzzle of the gun into his own chest, eyes bright. “Or what?”

Silence persisted, thundering. Noah’s stone-cold eyes locked with his, swearing he heard the customer’s heartbeat through his chest. Noah—he was still, his heart near silent, shallow breath but steady.

“Or what,” he flatly reiterated.

The gun trembled in his grip, a polite smile finding its way on Noah’s face again as he set a shiny green lighter on the counter. “\$2.99.”

A second passed, then another, then sweaty hands holstered the gun and the buzzing lamp returned to its obnoxious state. A fleeting glance over the lighter, and the customer set a five-dollar bill on the counter, snatching it without a word. The bell tinkled softly at his exit, only the maddening buzz filling the shop as Noah returned to his book.

Little Monster

Hailey Huber

Moonlight flows through the window panes and illuminates the artist's desk in a yellow hue. Decades of use have worn down the wood. It is impossible to tell that now due to the scattered papers spilling over on top. The only visible sign of use is a small dent in one of the legs from where the artist's chair hits it when they scooch in.

On the left corner of the desk, a small marker sits uncapped. The cap fell off the desk over an hour ago when the artist shifted everything around. It now sits in a shadow on the ground. The marker and cap will be lucky if they meet again that night. The seconds that pass by start to dry the marker out, but do nothing in comparison with the damage of repeated use.

The rest of the markers are scattered throughout the room. Some sit in their respective drawers and bins—the ones that are of little use to the artists. Colors they would describe as ‘unnatural yellow’ and ‘the poop of the sea’. Other markers lay on the desk, plucked for the artist's latest project. They sit, waiting to make sketches come to life.

A sketchbook sits open in the center of the desk. A centimeter of clean space surrounds it from where the artists pushed everything aside to lay the pages flat. The spine of the book carries many creases. Each flip open while sitting on a train or in a park has left its mark. The book's spine aches from use.

A breeze filters in through the window, causing the pages to shift. The current half-finished drawing is replaced by one done a

few weeks ago.

A well-loved pack of sticky notes sits propped up against a pencil case. Its brothers and sisters sit in a drawer next to the desk, ready to come out once this one runs out of use. The brightly colored notes sit scattered around the room. They contain the ink marks of what was once an important thought. Many are buried between stacks of paper, long ago forgotten. A few sit within the eyesight of the artist, but they have all blended into the environment, making their reminders useless decor.

A single note sits next to a cup of pens. However, it was written in haste when the artist woke up the morning before. In the hours since the artist tried to understand what they meant by the writing. It has not been deciphered yet. As another gust of wind enters the room, it falls to the floor. Its fate decided as it left the desk. It was not important enough to understand, so it will not be important enough to remember.

A second note sits atop a mountain of papers. It is stacked with a bit more order than the mess that is on the rest of the desk. The note contains the context of a single date, underlined and circled multiple times.

Underneath the note sits a collection of drawings, some mere scribbles, others could be considered works of art. Their bright colors dance from page to page as the doodles meet together to display a story.

It has been what the artist has been pouring all of their time at the desk into over the past few months. Something that started with small drawings has turned into late-night sessions, with the artist struggling to put everything together.

The desk, in its wooden glory, does what it can to help move the artist along in its journey. So when the artists started caring for this project, the desk would help nudge its creativity. Suddenly, a drawer full of brightly colored markers that were deemed unusable came to the artist's mind. And the color palette for the project was born.

While new stories are common, the desk isn't used to unfamiliar objects. Most things that are set down on its wooden surface never leave. Instead, they get piled over until their shape morphs into the existing structure. And most new things set down are iterations of things the desk already knows.

That was the case, at least, until a few weeks ago. After days of little use, the desk welcomed a new addition. It has its own space carved out between the sketchbooks and the erasers. At first, the wood welcomed it, enjoying the cool metal exterior, a stark contrast to the usual soft paper. But then it started to make this horrible sound, high-pitched and piercing. The type of sound that would disrupt the artist's flow and steal their attention. The desk hated that.

What was once days turned into nights spent together — the long hours flying by as inspiration ran wild — became an inconsistent mess. The desk would grow lonely during the day only to see the artist sporadically at night. They would run in and out, their mind preoccupied.

After leaving over an hour ago, the artist now rushes back into the room with quick but quiet steps. They sit down in their chairs and swivel toward the desk. As they pull themselves closer, they bump the outer leg and curse at the noise it makes. They search the desk to find their pen and click it a few times before looking at their sketchbook.

They let out a sound of confusion as they furrow their brows. The artist comments on how they did this sketch last week and questions if they are losing their mind.

Unfortunately, the desk is unable to answer, and the question gets left in the air.

The artist flips the sketchbook and is relieved when they find the pages they were working on. They stare at the unfinished drawing, comprised of hash marks and random streaks of color. The artist buries their face in their hands and grumbles something about it being 'a mess'. They laugh as they sit back up, their pen ready to work.

The artist pushes the sketchbook out of the way, clearing space for them to set down a blank sheet of paper. The white space intimidates them, so without thinking, they move their pen across the page to make a mark.

However, in the artist's constant fidgeting, they clicked the pen one too many times. As the pen flies across the page, they are met with nothing but a rough scratching sound.

They click their pen once more, so the ink can flow, and laugh at their mistake. The desk can tell the laugh does not ease the artist's tension. They hold their pen with too much force before they bring

it down to the page.

The line produced is straight but uninspiring. The artist looks back to the sketch made earlier before making another mark across the page. As they work, their tension begins to fade, and the drawing starts to form.

After a few more minutes, the small creature has been transferred from the sketchbook to the bigger page. Some of the lines are still slightly messy, in the desk's opinion, but either the artist doesn't care or doesn't notice because they smile as they grab their markers.

Their hand reaches over to the uncapped tool on the edge of the desk. Doing so without looking results in the marker coloring the artist's hand. The artist looks down in surprise before swiveling their head in question. Their hand floats over the desk as if doing so will act as a magnet for the misplaced cap.

When their wild search on their desk doesn't come up fruitful, they turn their eyes to the ground. They don't see it there at first glance and let out a sound of frustration. They stand and search the top of their desk again, hoping a change in perspective helps. Next, they pull out drawers and lift papers, looking in spots that would be impossible for the cap to find itself in.

After they still end up with nothing, they sigh again and drop onto the floor, running their hands along the wood surface. As they shuffle around in the dark, the little metal on the desk starts screaming.

The noise shocks the artist, and as they try to stand, they smack their head into the underside of the desk. They let out a quiet curse as they bound out of the room. The screaming doesn't quiet until the artist's voice comes through from the other side. The desk listens to the voices as they move from the device back into the room.

The artist enters again with their arms preoccupied. As they walk in, their eyes catch the small gray cap, and they scoop down to pick it up before sitting.

When they slide their chair in and hit the leg against the wood, the creature in their arms lets out a small cry. The artist quickly tries to soothe the sound. Once the crying is subdued, the artist sets down the cap in a place where they will never lose it again and picks up the marker.

With their non-dominant hand bouncing the creature, they go to make a mark on the page. The line comes out wobbly, and they

try to settle before making the next move. But the creature starts crying again, causing the artist to set the marker down and focus their full attention on the little bundle.

The desk wishes that the artist would set the thing atop its wood and let it become a part of the clutter, no longer a distraction. But unlike everything else in the artist's life that gets lost in the mess, they seem to treat this thing differently.

In the artist's arms, the creature turns, and its little hands reach out to try and grasp the markers within reach. The artist pushes them away, but the little hands keep reaching. The creature makes a noise that causes the artist to smile. They say something before reaching down to their desk and holding up their sketchbook for the creature to see.

The artist shows off each of their sketches to the bundle and introduces them all. They share each of their names and go through how they would act and sound. Now the creature laughs at the artist. The artist's eyes soften as they flip through page after page of sketches, causing the laughter to build. The artists hold up their last drawing, with both the thought and coloring unfinished.

As they showcase the last drawn monster, the monster in the artist's arms makes a noise. The little babble lights up something in the artist's eyes. They grab a pen and quickly scribble something at the top of the page.

A name.

The new little drawing has a name.

The artist places a kiss on top of the bundle's forehead. They then smile at it, with a type of smile the desk only sees used on their brilliant works of art.

The artist walks through the adventure of the new monster. As they talk, the noises from the creature become more infrequent until its eyes close. The room quiets as the artist stops talking.

They stand up from their chair with more care and consideration than the desk has ever seen. They walk across the room on the tops of their toes, careful to avoid the many squeaky floorboards lining the room.

The desk sits in silence, waiting to see if the artist will come to finish their work for the night. A few minutes later, the artist's chair bumps into the leg of the desk. They don't notice the noise as they pick up their pen and a blank sheet of paper, setting the new one

over the ones they were working on earlier.

Their pen glides across the white abyss with more grace than the desk is used to. The artist starts to build the journey of the monsters page by page. The ideas flow as color is added.

The desk welcomes the inspiration and helps move the artist along. Old pages drawn weeks ago, buried under stacks of others, come to the artist's mind. They pull them out with one hand, the other holding the sacks up so they all don't fall. The old sketches and ideas are incorporated into the new story.

After an hour of nonstop work, the artist leans back in their chair and yawns. They stare down at the drawing of the little monster that started it all and run their fingers over the page. They smile as their blinking slows. As they leave for the night, they set the drawing on top of all the others.

The desk reflects on the night, feeling proud of what they were able to accomplish. The metal monitor has become a little less cold to the touch.

The metal engrains itself in the desk's history. Becoming as much of a part of it as all of the papers and pens stacked around it. Perhaps in time, the desk can get used to its constant interruptions as a way of finding creativity. It is open to the idea.

Turncoat

Gavin Krantz

The sun was fiercely burning in the sky like the world was ending, and there was nary a breeze to accompany it. To be fair, one could argue that the world was ending. Well, our own little world, at any rate. I sighed and sipped the bitter ale which occupied my tankard, now half-empty.

At the bar not twenty feet from me, a pack of mangy dogs sang their scurvy-ridden hearts out about a cuck killing his wife and her lover or some such. I would know more, but I was trying my damndest to drown their grating voices out. Their sweaty, musty scent wafted its way to my nose, suffocating me. In an attempt to lift my mood, I turned from them and to the bay.

From the constructed wooden platform that jutted from the slanted landscape of the island for patrons of the open tavern, I could look down and see the rows of dilapidated wooden structures leading all the way to the shore a mile or two down. The sea, formerly kind to me, was still, reflecting the blazing sun back up to the sky in protest. I leaned my head against the tree beside me, which the platform was built around when the building was constructed by whichever amateurs did the job about a decade ago. I had hoped its shade would protect me from the day's heat, but the lack of a breeze rendered my efforts fruitless.

I sighed and chugged the remainder of my ale in two big gulps. Wiping my mouth with my sleeve, I stood and felt a wave of dizziness hit me like a cannonball. Before I knew it I was back in my chair, letting out a sour chuckle. On my way down, my pistol bumped me in the knee and reminded me of that bastard Teach.

That scoundrel who rallied my own people against me. The ingrate who, after years under my tutelage, stabbed me in the back with my own blade. The scourge whose heart would feel my bullet. I shook the dizziness off and stood again, turning toward the road and glimpsing the modest and abandoned spired church on the other side. Personally, I always found its proximity to the tavern telling of the scum that lived here. I smiled to myself and staggered to the road, taking a left toward the beach. My feet sunk into the sand as I took my first steps onto it. The sound of the singing faded as I grew further from it.

To my disdain, I caught myself humming along to the end of the tune. I smacked myself, half for punishment and half to shock the drunken daze out of my head. My brain wasn't quite swimming, though I'd say it was wading. Maybe sinking.

What was once a well-populated haven for thieves and rebels alike was now a near desolate ghost town. In its heyday, Nassau crawled with skilled sailors, experienced officers, ambitious young blood, and suave businessmen. Men of all types and backgrounds were welcome here, as long as they had the stomach for it. Their insatiable appetites invited women, too, some of whom were similarly ambitious but most of whom were desperate to make any sort of living, no matter how undesirable the profession.

Now, as I walked the nearly empty road, I couldn't help but laugh to myself and shake my head, rubbing my sweaty forehead. Of course this happened, when people like him took control. Rows of old wooden buildings stood on each side of me. Most of these buildings had raised foundations and porches, as if the island's own residents were trying to avoid the land they lived on.

I passed an entire thirteen people as I walked, compared to the hundreds it might've been before. Ahead of me, the once busy port of Nassau was occupied by but two lonely ships, hardly swaying in the unusually still day. I kept hoping a breeze would pick up, or it would be present on the beach, but it was not so.

On the beach were various setups and tarps made of canvas, made by those who couldn't afford room and board in town, or for the purposes of temporarily storing cargo. Many tarps had sleeping mats in them, with unlit fire pits and pots prepared for meals. I stumbled to a nearby tarp and lied under it, happy at the peace and quiet. Despite my best efforts my mind drifted to the captain of the

Queen Anne's Revenge. A silly name for a vessel if you ask me; too political. Too narcissistic.

Some time after I drifted to sleep I suddenly heard shouting from the town and bolted upright. Bells started going off, one after the other, until the bells in the fort to the northwest (approximately the direction of the church) were going off and warning the entire port. Without delay I jumped to my feet and stepped out from under the tarp, wiping my greying hair behind my ears. Then my heart dropped.

In the distance was a fleet of three Royal Navy ships, heading straight toward us. Based on their size and rate of growth, I estimated they'd be at the beach within ten minutes. They should've been spotted far sooner. I turned and started to run for the fort, but stopped and reminded myself that I wasn't their leader anymore. I couldn't take command of the incapable sods anymore. Besides, I didn't have any reason to.

I shrugged and sat back under the tarp, enjoying the show. Serves them right for not preparing for this sooner. Vane had called for such action, but, of course, it was rejected and ignored. He was wise to abandon this wasteland when he did. Most everyone on the island, which was an *impressive* five hundred or so at this point, was scrambling about, either taking up arms or retreating to the fort. I spotted quite a few familiar faces, though none I cared to assist.

My estimation was off; they arrived in eight minutes. I knew because I checked my pocket watch; a staple of any good sailor. Most on Nassau lacked one, believe it or not. The fleet slowed and anchored. The obvious flagship, apparently named the *HMS Phoenix*, was a 24-gun frigate, probably manned by around 300 men. The remaining ships were both smaller than that, though still formidable at eight guns and crews of around 100-150. They were an obvious match for the island, even with its formidable pentagonal fortress. At the very least they could blockade and starve us out.

Then they did something interesting: a jolly boat was lowered from the *HMS Phoenix* and began being rowed to shore. On it I could see eight men rowing, two near the front aiming rifles toward the beach, and an eleventh at the front, his foot up on the boat's stern in a confident pose. They were all dressed in Royal Naval uniforms as British officers. After a few minutes the boat reached the beach and two men jumped out and dragged it ashore. Every single

man aboard the vessel was armed with a bayoneted rifle and sharpened blades at their hips. Looking around, I saw our own people armed with pistols and dull blades scattered around the beach. We outnumbered them three-to-one, but they easily outgunned us.

The man who was clearly in charge stepped off the boat and pointed to it, and two others nodded and pulled out a collapsible table from somewhere under them. I tilted my head as they set it up and a third officer put a stool behind it. Their leader, a captain by the looks of his uniform, drew and unraveled a scroll and cleared his throat.

"Attention, venerable citizens of our gracious King's noble country: the generous King George has ordained to bestow upon you an opportunity he has named his Act of Grace. All those who agree to surrender to your governor Woodes Rogers and abandon their life of piracy and crime shall be awarded with a pardon from all past criminal offenses and forgiven for any crimes committed before the Fifth of September," he cried in a clear manner. He nodded to himself in a satisfied manner and sat on the stool.

A slight breeze picked up for a moment, bringing with it a hint of salt from the sea. I blinked and looked around at my fellow rogues, who were doing the same. Then one of them, who I recognized as the fool Billy Stout, gawked and aimed his pistol at the officers, who were at least a good thirty feet from him. Two of them immediately aimed right back at him. He shouted, "Yeah, right! Get your asslicking boots off our island before we fill you with holes!"

Rolling my eyes, I walked toward the officers with my hands up and a smile. Though one of them aimed steadily at me, I kept an even stride right up to the table. The captain looked at me with a smile, eye-level with me as the stool was quite tall.

"Ah, a wise man, then," he said.

Before I could respond, Stout and three other men stomped up behind me and several others were tentatively watching from a nearer distance. His pistol still aimed at the officers, he glared at me and said, "What're you doing, you old dog?"

I cleared my throat. "I was about to learn more about this man's—"

"Captain Vincent Pearse of the Royal Navy," the captain interrupted.

Stout and I stared at him for a moment before looking back at

each other. “Captain Pearse’s offer,” I continued, “before you did something irrevocably stupid.”

Stout raised an eyebrow, probably confused at my vocabulary, then shook his head and said, “Just leave this to me, Hornigold. Or did you forget? You don’t speak for us anymore.” He grinned to himself and his three buddies laughed.

In a flash my gun was out and pointed at Stout’s fat face, and he quickly turned his gun in return. His friends did the same, leaving me surrounded by both pirate and officer. The breeze picked up again and I let out a giggle. The smell of the sea was abnormally pleasant; the salt was fresher and the water was cleaner.

“One shot fired and everyone on this beach dies,” I said, staring into Stout’s dark brown eyes. They were the same color as Teach’s, though not nearly as sharp.

Stout seemed to falter, then resolved and responded, “I reckon we can take ‘em.”

But all I could see was the fear in his eyes. He may have lost some respect for me since last year, but not his fear. My reputation wasn’t completely destroyed, after all. A smile crept onto my face as I slowly turned my gun toward Captain Pearse. Without hesitation every officer present turned their guns to me, but out of the corner of my eye I could see Pearse’s blurry hand raise to halt them. Stout’s face quickly distorted into confusion; he was clearly unsure of what to make of it. His gun wobbled side-to-side, as if he couldn’t decide if he wanted to change his aim in suit. He swiftly landed on me, though there was doubt in his eyes.

“If that’s so, then allow me on one condition: any punishment I might receive for the act, I bring down on you tenfold,” I said in a cool voice. I had dropped the smile now in favor of my old reliable poker face.

Stout knitted his eyebrows as I cocked the pistol, my finger on the trigger. My left arm was behind my back in a formal manner, and I looked at Stout expectantly, awaiting permission. I was fully ready to pull the trigger the moment he so much as nodded. In response, every one of the ten officers around us cocked their own rifles, yet Pearse’s hand raised even higher.

After an agonizing twenty seconds of indecision and looking around frantically, Stout lowered his pistol and scoffed. “It’s your own funeral, Hornigold,” he said in a defeated voice. He turned, his

friends following in his steps.

With a grin I decocked my pistol, and the naval officers relaxed a little. Turning to Captain Pearse I saw a massive grin on his face. He clapped and said, “Well done, sir! Did my ears deceive me? Are you *the* Benjamin Hornigold?”

I set my pistol on the table between us and leaned forward on it. “Aye, that’s me, but you knew that.”

He laughed and nodded. “Indeed. Your reputation is not unfounded.” He leaned forward and spoke in a low murmur, “In truth, I hoped to meet you here.”

I raised an eyebrow. “Is that so?”

He nodded again and leaned back. “You’re well-known for your refusal to attack British ships. A respectable rule, I must say.” He pointed at me in an approving gesture as he spoke, then pulled a blank piece of paper and pen from his coat and laid it on the table. He gestured to it with a smile. “That’s how I was sure you wouldn’t shoot me; you’re too honorable.”

I looked at the paper quizzically and said, “To be frank, I’m unsure how true that is.”

He shrugged. “Well, if you sign the paper then we’ll know, won’t we?”

It dawned on me what he meant: sign the paper and I officially accept the pardon. Looking around, I could see a crowd growing around me and realized his hopes: if I signed then they might follow suit. Many of them *did* still hold respect for me, even after the mutiny.

I smiled and turned back to Captain Pearse. I could feel the breeze kicking up, and hear the ocean begin to stir behind him. “I wonder how honorable *you* are? Are you a gentleman?”

He tilted his head, though maintained his smile. “Of course. I’m as honorable as they come.”

“Then you’d honor the wondrous concept of agreement? Of concord?”

He nodded gravely. “Indeed, sir, I would. I’ll admit you’ve intrigued me; state your premise.”

I leaned further forward, and he leaned in. “Give me the chance to go after Teach, and I’ll sign the pardon. Name me a pirate hunter.”

He seemed to think, looking down at the empty paper below

us. After some time he looked back up at me and said, "I'm sure I can convince your governor to send the order. When you sign the paper the deal is struck."

I smiled and grabbed the pen without hesitation. In seconds my name was on the paper and we were shaking hands. "Welcome to the Royal Navy, Captain Hornigold," he said, eyeing the growing line behind me greedily. "Your orders should arrive within two weeks."

I nodded and said, "Brilliant."

I left him and went to the beach, taking off my boots and standing in the tide with my eyes closed. The breeze was consistent now, bringing the smells of distant lands and deeper waters with it. It was cool, and the ocean spray on my face was the best thing I had ever felt. I opened my eyes and looked at the horizon, imagining myself sailing over it to finally bring Teach to justice. With a sigh I turned and began back toward Nassau. There was a lot of preparation to be done.

It's Not Over Till the Fat Lady Sings

Kevin McKenna

We arrive early to do our sound check. Four bands are playing today. This being our first gig, we open for everyone. Unloading our equipment, I smell pot coming from behind the scaffold. As we walk on stage to set up, a black cat runs right in front of us. After our sound check is over, the Grateful Dead show up to do their run through. These guys are cool. You'd never guess, they're rock stars.

The stage crew's busy setting everything up. It's a groovy day for a concert. The sun is shining down like a warm spotlight. And the park is teeming with: bikers, boozers, school kids, college students, and a load of stoned-out hippies. Mixed in together with a few undercover cops. Holy s***! There must be three or maybe four thousand kids here. This is better than Disneyland on Christmas.

Life is strange... A year ago, I was playing music in my bedroom. Today, I'm about to play to an audience of thousands. After all our practice, we're tight as a guitar string - before it snaps.

All of a sudden, someone shouts at us, "Get ready! It's almost time for you guys to go on."

At long last, my dream has come true. I grab my guitar, and head for the stage. Freddy grabs his drumsticks, and gives me a big smile.

"They're waiting for us," he says.

"This is too much!" I say.

"You wanted to be a star?" Freddy says. "Let's go do it, man."

Wavy Gravy signals for us to get ready.

"I've heard cool things about this band," Wavy says. "Let's give them a warm welcome. Put your hands together, for Colorblind!"

They do clap - but not too hard. We rush up on stage. and. Acting like a rock star, I wave to the crowd. Then I plug in my guitar, and look at the audience. A sea of faces stares back. This is it...

Freddy counts out the time, "A one, and a two, and a three..."

The music roars from the amplifiers. When I sing the re-verb makes my voice sound like I'm inside a tunnel. As we play, our guitars interweave with a passionate energy. We sound better than we ever have. Caught up in the music, Jack never misses a beat. He's playing lick I never heard in rehearsal, and strutting around the stage like James Brown on speed.

After we finish our set, a wave of applause washes over us. Hearing it, I feel like a bona fide rock star. As we exit the stage, people keep clapping and whistling. When we get backstage, Wavy-Gravy pats me on the shoulder. "You were great," he says. "I hope you get signed soon."

The applause continues for so long, Wavy-Gravy calls us back for an encore. We kick off the next song... The path to stardom appears to be right in front of me.

When we exit the stage, Jerry Garcia walks up and hugs me.

"You guys were dynamite," he says. "Did you have fun?"

"I had a blast!" I reply.

He pulls a guitar pick from his pocket, and hands it to me.

"Keep this pick for good luck," he says.

"Wow!" I say, "I'll treasure it always."

When the next band performs, I hang around backstage. As I'm watching them rock-out, a chick walks up behind me.

"You got a great voice and a cute ass," she says in a gravelly voice.

After that, she slaps me on the butt. When I turn around, to my utter amazement, Janis Joplin is standing in front of me. She takes a huge swig from a bottle concealed in a paper bag.

"Have a drink," she says. "It's Southern Comfort."

I don't really want a drink; but to be cool, I take one.

With a seductive smile, she hands me a piece of paper.

"Call me," she giggles. "Maybe, we could sing a duet."

After she leaves, Rowdy runs up and hugs all of us.

"You guys were amazing," he says, "I'll use you again."

"Anyone from a record company ask about us?" Freddy says.

With a smile, Rowdy says, "No! Didn't hear anything. But the Diggers took up a collection; all the bands get \$25, except The Dead. They won't take a penny."

He hands us ten ones, and three five-dollar bills.

"Here's your cut," he says.

Well! Our big day is over...

Over the next few weeks, everyone's talking about us. Walking to the store this morning, I heard some chick say, "He's in Colorblind."

I wait eagerly for a record company to call.

But the phone never rings.

Only eighteen, I'm already a has-been...

Maybe, I should call Janis...

March, April, May

William Nemeč

It's an imaginary place but it's sprawling, vast, loud and chaotic. A real city. I've spent a lot of time riding the sunrise/sunset bus and the all-night-subway train; where I'd sit and watch the world go by through windows that shake like medicine cabinets. I was conceived in the heart of a public park and stayed there for what felt like forever. Ballerinas would tiptoe into the lake and pretend to be flamingos. Memories of being swept up in the wake of rose peddle parades and trashcan marching bands rioting down main street. I use to go to the bars, climb drainpipes and fire escapes with new-found siblings, cousins, best friends and lovers. We'd empty our pockets off of rooftops and watch strangers in their hotel windows. We'd watch them as they watched television in their underwear and smoked cigarettes in coin operated rent-a-beds.

The last thing Sarah ever said to me was, "There's only three places in the whole world...over here and over there."

I pointed out that that's only two, "What's the third place?" She just smiled through her tears, and kissed my eyelids before she was swallowed up in the swarm of a crowd.

Now-a-days, I like to sneak into movie theatres and try to fall asleep, because the buses and trains, fairies and airplanes all go in endless figure eights. The silver screens play old stuff, new stuff, memories, fantasies that come with 3-D glasses, other people's hopes, dreams, and nightmares. I was watching a documentary on brain tumors when the projector broke and the house-lights came on. An older woman in a champagne-colored nightgown with a

dark blue feather boa around her neck, was sitting right next to me. She was looking up, watching the smoke from the projector move across the ceiling like seafoam on a hightide. I was about to get up and leave when she spoke to me, her voice sounded like a spatula separating a casserole into squares.

"Is that your face, or did your neck throw up?" I could tell she was just trying to make me smile. She told me about her husband, a Hungarian dentist named Viktor. How he was insanely jealous and had convinced himself that she was stepping out on their marriage, which she wasn't. Then one night she woke up with his hands around her neck. Their bedroom was pitch-black, but she could see the rage boiling over in his eyes and how that was the last thing she ever saw. She loosened the blue feather boa and showed me the bruises. "He was so painfully serious and intense. He was handsome, smart enough, and rich, but he was the most insecure person I've ever met." Her eyes fell to the shadows at our feet, as if she were watching the past reflecting up at her in a puddle. I felt uncomfortable, and I didn't know what to say. As though she could read my thoughts, "It's okay honey, there's nothing to say and it was a *long* time ago...you don't have to say anything, not around me. You can put a hat on a parking meter and I'll talk to it for an hour." An usher came by with his flashlight and told us we had to leave. She immediately started telling him how her father had invented the flashlight, and I jumped at the opportunity to get as far away from her as possible. The usher looked at me knowingly as I passed him.

Outside had a 'June gloom' written all over it. Junkies curled up in the fetal position, slept on the sidewalks with dishrags covering their faces. The air smelt like hotdogs and gasoline; every block has its own distinct smell. An eight-foot-tall man, dressed in a dingy Santa costume played 'We'll Meet Again' on a saxophone that looked like a toy in his giant hands. I could still hear the music as I descended down to the subway platform. At the bottom of the stairs sat a homeless man with no legs, talking out loud to himself or arguing with someone only he could see. "I was just a kid. Most of the time I was just confused and I was embarrassed of that. Like I wasn't smart enough to understand. I wasn't old enough; I wasn't tall enough to ride the rollercoaster with my brothers. I wasn't *good enough*..." As I walked past him, I could feel him looking at me, but I pretended to not notice him. "...That's what it felt like! It's not

true. No, but that feeling never really leaves you.”

Security guards with hamburger meat for faces, held back rabid dogs on short leashes. The platform was packed with strangers waiting for their connections. I hung back by the payphones and eavesdropped on the one-sided conversations. I thought about Sarah and what she said, “...Over here and over there...” And I wondered again about the third place she never named. Sometimes I feel like I know the answer, like it’s standing right in front of me.

CREATIVE NONFICTION

Monday Morning Blues

John Beery

It's six thirty a.m. on a cold midwest morning. The sky is black aside from the glow of the city street lamps and a lone pair of headlights approaching you. The howl of mud tires in harmony with the whir of the heater fan creates a soothing soundtrack for your morning commute. Your thoughts slowly drift from the lukewarm gas station coffee to the glow of your morning cigarette, and finally settle in on the day ahead of you. The thoughts of cold steel, road salt, and rusty bolts send a rightful shiver down your arms. Your hands finally gain some semblance of feeling as the pain of the week before re-enters the tips of your swollen fingers. It's believed that a mechanic has the strongest grip of anyone out there; however, you can barely squeeze the steering wheel to keep your truck straight down the nearly empty city street.

Your thoughts fill with tenths of an hour. Every six minutes matters in the world of the automotive mechanic. You wonder how much work awaits you; whether there are enough repair orders to feed the hungry wolves that surround you in the shop. The flat rate pay system pits you against a dozen other hungry techs, all fighting for that extra tenth that will bump them into the next bonus scale. You are paid only for the work you produce; sitting around and waiting on parts, jobs, and approvals equals zero hours. Tear through a five hour job in two hours and you're in the money, but spending five hours on a two hour job means you've lost your ass. Fifteen minutes into your thirty minute commute and your flag sheet is still empty, zero point zero hours to begin your week. A clean slate awaits you, the potential to flag a record week, but the

drive is not without its anxiety. Reflecting back to your youth, you wonder if this is what your six-year-old self had in mind as he raced his Hot Wheels cars and tore pages from *Hot Rod* magazine to plaster on his wall.

As you finish your morning smoke, you can't help but wonder how much work can really be sitting there on a cold January morning. It's been almost a month since Christmas, and credit card bills should be overwhelming nearly everyone any day now. The customer base is tightening up, clutching their wallets and preparing to ride out the depressing, quiet months that fill the gap between Christmas time and the first day of shorts season, which seems out of reach at the current moment. You wonder if the only work sitting there is recall and warranty work, which pays little compared to the money that a customer would shell out on an older car. You wonder when it happened that the auto companies decided they held the high ground. At what point in time was it ok for THEM to decide what you got paid to fix THEIR mistakes? Who folded and let THEM dictate how many measly tenths you got to add to your flag sheet?

Sucking down the last drop of your stale gas station coffee, now nearly ice cold, you round the corner into the dealership. You peer into the dimly lit sales floor, resting idle awaiting the coke-heads and shysters that enhance its cheesy aura with their presence. The sales staff doesn't hit the floor until nearly ten a.m. *Banker's hours* you tell yourself as your clock reads six fifty five am. On a good day, you've already done nearly a half day's work by the time the sales floor comes to life.

Your gaze shifts to the service drop area, looking for a few cars of the right age. Five years old means it's off warranty, but should still be young enough to not be totally encapsulated in rust. You spot one, and hurry to park your truck and race to the service desk. You spot a coworker leaving his car and know you've been beat. If only you had gotten up ten minutes earlier, if only you didn't have a vice that required a daily gas station stop.

You throw the door shut on your old pickup and scurry toward the shop. You look over the back lot at all of the cars you had to push outside. Money sitting there waiting in the wings. Parts backorders and customer indecision means push it outside and open your stall up for the next one. Meanwhile, you realize the time you've put in on those cars, and the fact that you have not flagged a

single tenth on any of them. Somehow, you manage to catch up to your coworker, who is stopped at the back door, looking back over the same lot.

"If they paid those bastards at the parts plants flat rate, we would have parts coming out our asses" he says with a shared irritation.

"Tell me about it. Shit's ridiculous, I got cars out there that have been waiting on parts for over a month" you respond.

"Wonder if they scheduled anything good for the week."

"Probably recalls and used car inspections again. 'Tis the season."

He cracks the back door to the shop. You follow with the same enthusiasm that the gas station employee had when she brewed that half-assed pot of coffee. The hum of the fluorescent lighting and the steps of two pairs of workboots are the only sounds in the shop this early. It's the quietest this place will be all day. You head to your toolbox, which should be paid off within two years, assuming this profession doesn't dictate you needing *even more* specialized tools, requiring yet more storage. You slide the wrench shaped key into its tubular lock and turn. The tool chest responds with a metallic clunk. A turn of your wrist means the week has begun. The race against the clock starts now.

Lucky for you, the service department has left three sets of keys with accompanying repair orders. The first, a used car inspection. *Easy enough, a quick one point five* you think to yourself. The next, a shift linkage recall. *Oh good, another car that gets to wait on backordered parts.* Lastly, the key that appears to match the older model you saw in the service drop row.

"CUSTOMER STATES VEHICLE HAS A SEWING MACHINE NOISE. CHECK AND ADVISE" the first line on the repair order reads.

Who the hell wrote THIS up? A sewing machine? You grab the keys, an ice scraper, and your jacket. Shivering as you head for the lot, you anticipate your first road test of the day.

You hope for wheel bearings, maybe an air conditioning compressor, or perhaps you'll luck out and the car has transmission issues. But really, you just hope the parts room has parts in stock. Parts in stock, combined with a customer who actually answers the phone might equal a few dollars in your pocket, and hopefully some

easy hours on the flag sheet. Observing the thick layer of frost cooing the car, you think *fuck the ice scraper*. Climbing in and quickly closing the door, you start the car and run the heat for a few minutes to melt a hole through the frosted windshield. You shove your hands into your coat pocket in an effort to retain what little feeling you have in them, and wonder why you aren't wearing gloves in the single digit weather.

A few minutes later the windshield has cleared enough to see. You pull the car into gear and slowly enter the street, which is beginning to fill with the traffic of civilians on their way to climate controlled jobs. You reach a speed fast enough to hear the so-called "sewing machine". *Wheel bearings!* you think as you swerve side to side and listen to the changing hum of the front wheels. You have gotten the info you needed, since the service team was unable to do so. You brake, ready to turn around and hoist the car for an inspection. Upon braking, you notice a shake and some noise from the rear rear wheels. *Hmm, they didn't mention that on the R.O.* You make a mental note, turn the car around, and head for the shop.

You press the button on your lift, raising the car to a decent working height. You perform a quick inspection, finding that the car in fact needs both front bearings, and brakes all the way around. You note the mileage and recommend maintenance you don't see in the customer history on your service system. Moments later, the parts department reports back that everything is in stock, and you pass it along to the service department in hopes of a sale. The Monday morning blues begin to fade, just for a moment, as you tally the hours and tenths in your head and envision filling your flag sheet for the day.

"Randy, your hours were a little light last week. Forty two is hardly 100 percent efficient." The shop manager interrupts your newly gained enthusiasm.

"Well, I only had about twelve cars last week. It's not my fault service can't keep us busy."

"Let's just make sure we are doing everything we need to do to sell as many services as we can, ok? I'd like to see at least forty seven hours this week, understand?"

You respond with a simple irritated "K". *What's to understand?* You can't help but wonder how 42 hours off of only twelve cars in five days is your fault. How parts on intergalactic backorder is some-

thing you have control of. How spending day after day waiting on nervous service advisors to make phone calls has anything to do with your perceived lack of efficiency and care. You wonder if any of this has ever been worth it. The tens of thousands of dollars in tools. The anxious morning drives. The late nights moonlighting to make ends meet. Was it ever worth the pain? The wear and tear on your body? *Maybe I ought to move to sales* you suggest to yourself, thinking that rolling in at nine thirty a.m. might not be all that bad. Hell, sales even has climate controlled bathrooms, and nice desks with leather chairs. *I bet those bastards up front even get the nice three ply toilet paper.*

"Alright Randy, I sold the whole thing. Bearings, brakes, a tune up, and a coolant flush. Also, that used car inspection needs done today, and a handful of pieces came in for the shift linkage recall, I got three more cars for those if you want 'em."

Finally, things fall into place, at least for today.

"Jesus, about time. Yeah, I'll take 'em."

"You got it. The R.O.'s are on my desk."

It's eight thirty and for once, things seem to be working out. It's a rarity, typically your days are filled with warranty transmission and engine issues. That means tear downs, waiting for parts, waiting on decisions about whether the customer pays or the manufacturer pays. You can have a transmission from most of the models you service on the bench in an hour flat, torn down, repaired, and reassembled in another two, back in the car and burning gas within forty five more minutes. But, when that four hours of effort spreads out over a month's time, you are constantly playing catch up. Not today though, you have customer pay work sold, parts on the shelf, and tools in hand. Today, for once, you can throw down and make a little money.

Fighting through a layer of road salt, you find rusty, stuck wheel bearing bolts. *They don't build 'em like they used to* you think as you fire the oxy-acetylene torch, a normal part of your days in the rust belt. On a hot, humid July afternoon, the torches only add to the misery. But this morning, you welcome the heat from the torch's vicious blue flame as the bolts begin to glow orange. In a quick moment, the intense heat of the blue wrench frees the stuck bolts, and you're off to the races.

"Can't be stuck if it's a liquid!" the tech a stall over shouts as

you zing the bolts out with your air impact.

“Fuckin’ right bro! Them bolts gonna learn today!”

For the remainder of the day, its elbows and assholes. Most of the guys in the shop are busy doing whatever work it is they do. The diesel mechanic is busy with two trucks for injectors, the quick service guys are slinging tires and dropping oil, the electrical specialists are knee deep in wiring schematics. You are knee deep in your own work, lost in the “silence” of air tools, hammer blows, as the boom of Angus Young’s guitar playing “Dirty deeds, done dirt cheap” fights for airspace via the shop stereo. Everyone is too busy for small talk, too concerned with tenths of an hour to worry about what the guy next to them did over the weekend. You finish the day out with 11.3 hours, a decent day considering you only put in ten. You leave tired, dirty and sore, however equally satisfied with your production given the time of year. You chased away the Monday morning blues, at least for today, and you’re far too tired to consider Tuesday on your drive home.

Your old pickup pulls into the driveway to your humble home about six p.m. The sky is dark, just as it was almost twelve hours ago when you began your commute. Your feet are frozen from standing on cool concrete all day, and the chill in your toes continues up your legs all the way to the grayed hairs on your head. You head inside and strip down, slipping into some long johns and a clean sweatshirt. You crack a cold beer and take a handful of Tylenol. You spend a little time with your family, the whole reason you chase the almighty dollar to begin with. You enjoy a warm meal, and slip into a slumber in your worn out recliner watching reruns. Tuesday morning hits and the routine begins again, but it's the same shit, different day. The Monday morning blues never leaves, it's just temporarily chased away, a tenth at a time.

Cramond Island

Devi Staudte

We made our way down the long wooden boardwalk—so unlike the vomit-covered and spray-tan-infested ones I’d seen during my summers on the East Coast—silently absorbing the vast, green Scottish ocean as we shivered in our measly jackets. This, we thought, would be his official resting place.

It was my mother’s idea to visit Scotland that summer in my grandfather’s honor. His ancestry had repeatedly called him to the highlands while he was alive. We’d never traveled outside the country, but we felt our grief pulling us toward my grandfather’s favorite destination.

We wanted to set up a memorial for him somewhere, to leave something of his behind and grieve together. My mother and I found a small beach near our hotel and felt strangely drawn to it. We were woefully ill-prepared for the weather, both of us layering all our jackets and my mother wearing open-toed shoes. The rain was a light mist that came and went, never staying long enough to get to know us but refusing to remain a stranger. I wandered along the rocky shore, observing a seabird plucking at the water for fish. My mother searched for the perfect skipping stone, a lengthy process my grandfather had taught her in her youth.

“It’s gotta be smooth and flat and roundish,” she explained, “and the key is flicking your wrist just right.” I watched as she demonstrated, her practice stone hopping three times on the water before sinking. The salty seaside air seemed to move through us like a spirit.

When we reached the end of the boardwalk and climbed the slightly elevated rocky terrain on the other side, we were met with a glorious outlook over the rest of the sea. The day was cloudy, like always, but sun rays showed down through the clouds as if heaven were trying to reach into the ocean. My mother retrieved my grandfather's Browning hunting cap from her bag and held it alongside her perfect skipping stone and a bundle of sun-yellow wildflowers. With tears in her eyes, she sighed deeply and asked me where we should set up his memorial.

"Here," I said, running my hand along the wet, rough surface of a large boulder in front of us. I realized then that he was actually gone, that we were really letting him go.

She placed his cap on the boulder, situating the offerings of the stone and wildflowers alongside it. Tears and phlegm threatened to win the battle over composure as she whispered, "I miss him. I wish he was still here... but this spot will always be his. I can almost feel him here."

I rested my head on her shoulder, and she put her arm around me as we stared into the endless horizon. *We're so small, I thought, the sea goes on forever.* "I know."

POETRY

Making Tea

Julie Calvert

Reedley College Featured Writer

The best water sits in the fridge; ice cold and refreshing.

The teapot on the counter, so that it doesn't get splattered with pierogi grease, or sunflower oil.

You must pour this ice water into the teapot, for a fair cup of tea.

This water must go from ice cold, to what is probably room temperature for a brief moment before it becomes boiling water for tea.

You must choose your tea carefully. Pick the Right tool for the job, after all.

Milford Sea Buckthorn Wild Berry, for a call to your home that isn't your home.

Or *Republic of Tea* green tea with black currant for clarity of your foggy mind.

Or *Bigelow Whispering Wildflowers* to placate your overworked mind.

Or nothing at all. For you forgot to light the gas burner.

Fate, Reincarnated

Maya Caus

I tread against a current
through a sea
of lost souls,
hungry to pull me in
and absorb my flesh.
I wear the face
of my ancient ghosts,
I preserve their lives
in my current existence,
and in this fleshy vessel
we have the same fate.

In my past lives,
this one,
and the next;
I have tired eyes,
smile lines,
and childlike hands.
They reach out,
ready for someone's grasp,
only for the wind to brush against
those miniature hands.

I tie myself to those
I beg to love me,
they all seem to have blades

and desperately slice away
before given the chance.

My time will come, and
I will be gone for longer
than I have breathed.
But please,
preserve my words on paper,
so if I were to find myself again
in 300 years
I would know
my fate remains the same.

Graphite

Connor DiMartino

I write these words
in the graphite of a pink mechanical pencil,
fearful of desecrating your pretty pages
with the performance of ink.

Nothing of this Earth is truly permanent—
not these words, not your pages,
not my thoughts, and certainly not these graphite scribbles.

I have a lesson to learn from this graphite:
to appreciate the blink in which I exist.
Maybe someday,
I'll use that time to find the confidence
to let ink spill its stories onto your skin,
not today—
though.
Then when? Tomorrow? Who knows?

Is true permanence a possibility?
Perhaps permanence will be kinder
than the graphite that sketches our fleeting lives,
the graphite that traces the contours of our being,
the graphite that captures our ephemeral existence.
As I approach the bottom of this page,
the pencil's tip growing duller,
again I'm reminded it can all be swept away,

erased and rewritten,
never quite the same,
peppered in metallic gray smudges.

Wisps of graphite,
unaffected by the green eraser's friction,
reveal a semblance of permanence.
Perhaps the graphite that is me
can leave a mark
on the pages of this world.
Perhaps I too
can not quite be erased entirely.

Snowdance

Connor DiMartino

Last night, graphite gently rained across my page—
I caught you dancing in the rain.
Today, a murky snow of chalky black charcoal falls,
Obscuring you in its thick, dusty blankets.

I spend my summer digging you out of the snow,
Not with a shovel, but a pink pearl.
My frostbitten fingers search for your dance;
It's not quite as smooth or energetic,
Yet my tired wrists and aching back have found you dancing once
again.

Please Leave the TV On

Isabel Fitzgerald

My grandmother placed a maroon blanket over my small body
Engulfing my fears and swallowing my worries
Even tucking in the corners and fluffing the pillow
It showed a love purer than holy water
In a sea of red fabric and a room full of light
the television flashed images of cat and mouse rivalry
Television sung lullabies that no person could
I could also hear my grandmother doing the dishes

Enveloped by the warm blanket, I sprawled on the carpet
and laughed at the childish cartoon
As tranquil as can be, my grandmother would watch with me
From a distance at first Without warmth and riddled with paranoia
She could have been annoyed at me
For spilling a juice box or being a messy eater
Instead she cleaned up what I left behind
And loved me in spite of my mistakes

Pointing at the exaggerated graphics and
laughing at the silly characters who slip and fall
My grandmother and I would laugh until we couldn't breathe
An episode would pass in the blink of an eye and I was floating
On a cloud of dizziness and whimsy
When I would finally wear down and adrenaline no longer flooded
my veins
I would flop onto the couch and fall into slumber

Dreaming of puppies and kittens and playgrounds
After the episode ended, my grandmother would go back to cleaning
Dreaming of tranquility and certainty

We Never Even Kissed

Isabel Fitzgerald

At the senior prom you wore a blue dress and your hair cascaded
over your shoulders
My dress couldn't hold a candle to the ensemble you wore
You made sure to wear your locket that matched your sister's
I thought of your lips crashing into my neck and marking the flesh
My blood capsules would burst for you and only you
It only happens in forbidden daydreams or manipulated memories
I would hold onto you so tight that your arm would turn shades of
violet
Instead, we just stood there while a slow dance song played
and I never touched your hand
I thought of asking you to dance, as a joke of course
It was just our type of humor to mock the over-the-top couples
After all, we were seventeen and unashamed
You were authentic and mine was a façade
With my sloppy footwork and your delicate, angelic presence
We would have bewilder the masses and lived life to the fullest
Instead, we just stood under the disco lights
and I never touched your waist
On the day when I said you look perfect
With angel's skin and sparking eyes
I wanted to hold your hand in the car
I tried joking that you looked like a princess
Instead, we listened to the radio in silence
and I never kissed your lips

The Shoebox

Lucia Gherardini

My youth is a shoebox,
Coated in orange branding
Upon weathered down cardboard.

There are worn craters in the dusty corners
From being tossed around carelessly
In the grasp of my own, not yet calloused hands.
From a time when boundaries were
Not yet known.

And there are dents on the sides
From being tumbled down hills.
Like the aftermath of rolling in the grass
While smiling bright and jovial
Beneath the summer sun.

Because at that age,
I did not understand
The value of a shoebox
Or of the shiny new shoes
That were once inside.

All that I knew then was that in my hands
was a small box.
One which held a thousand possibilities
For how it could be used

In future school projects
Or in the childish games I played.

But now the box is worn down.
The shoes have long since been
Five sizes too small
And are now worn by the feet of another child.

Meanwhile, the old faded-orange box has been
Carried out to the garden to sit.
Patiently waiting while someone digs its grave in the Earth
To bury it in hopes that someday
Someone will dig it up.
Then maybe, they will uncover the treasures
That have been hidden away by
The tangle of roots and worms.

Forever

Harper Hansard

I swaddled you in my arms,
 A brisk January morning.
 At thirteen, I felt immensely apprehensive.
 "Everything's about to change forever"
 I despised change,
 So how could I ever learn to love you?

But quickly you won me over,
 Gummy smiles and baby coos,
 Laying in my arms and falling asleep.
 How could I ever hate you?

Five years later, I think I may love you more than ever.
 It's January again.
 But today the sun is shining.
 We drive to the park,
 Walk around the pond.

You reach up to put your small hand in mine.
 "Harper, are you my older sister?"
 "Yes, babe." I reply.
 "Will you always be my sister?" you ask.
 "Forever" I say.

When you were born, I was scared of forever.
 Forever was incomprehensible for me.
 But it's five years later,
 And I'm certain,
 You're forever my baby brother.
 And for now,
 I cherish that you want to hold my hand,
 As we walk around the pond.
 Because soon,
 I'll move out,
 And you'll be grown.
 And forever won't feel so long anymore.

Porcelain Doll

Harper Hansard

“I love you”
 You said,
 Over and over again,
 Until I almost believed you.

But you only said it in my sweet moments,
 When I etched a heart into your empty soul,
 The only mark left inside
 A person filled with jealousy and greed.

I walked out of your house that day,
 Tears freezing to my face.
 Another girl you loved in her sweet moments.
 A girl shorter than me,
 Prettier than me,
 A girl that treated you like you were the best thing,
 Since sliced bread.

Leaving a note on my car
 The day I turned eighteen
 A flower bouquet
 “I’m sorry, I love you.”
 Wiped the tears from my eyes,
 Stop trying to ruin my birthday.

Months pass,
 More notes pop up on my car.
 Messages in my Facebook inbox.
 I throw away the notes,
 Block the messages.
 You still have that heart etched in your soul.
 “She loved me once, she must love me forever.”
 But I don’t.

I bet you wish I was a porcelain doll.
 You could change all the less favorable parts of me.
 Paint my nails,
 Throw away the heels I was “too tall for.”
 Change my lipstick color,
 Maybe if I was a porcelain doll,
 You would have loved me right.

Colorful photos
Frame the snippets of my life
Telling a story
With my name as the title

Capturing Memories

Sarah Jeon

A white camera, adorned
With pink polka dots and
Silver details
Never leaves my side

Each click, flash, pose
Captures the beauty in what I see

At the Missouri Botanical Garden
Where the golden rays of a setting sun
Found the caramel hues in my eyes
Kindling an appreciation for forests of green

At the New Year's party
Capturing toothy smiles, silly faces, and
Records of pure, unfiltered interactions,
Something we all wish to share once again
After we graduate high school

My first time trick-or-treating,
When fall leaves decorated the earth
And other masked children ran
From house to house
Creating memories for themselves

The Great LA

Katherine Preza Leonor

At night when I feel lonely in thought,
I look outside to see the headlights of Mulholland writing names in
the wind.

Hearing the blasting reggaeton on the beach,
Santa Monica coaster, my truer love, wild wind.

People think it's as beautiful as it seems in postcards,
Hollywood wants you to be tired & hungry (blinding, smoggy wind)

I come to you when I don't know what to do,
I find everything that comforts as a whispering wind.

That sweet kiss of summer sets a freckled tan,
Eccentric voices of children scream for ice cream (I scream in the
wind)

Embrace the toxic arms with joy, hungry for status
While scared of losing my taste in shivering wind.

No angels in the City of Angels,
Just a charismatic, conniving devil that turns you like a leaf in the
wind.

That traffic we hate when we're stuck & in a hurry
Is the angels telling us to listen to what's hidden in the wind.

Hullabaloo

Hajer Maaz

Scintillating air holds
secrets

The wind has suddenly stopped
The street is desolate
Like a scene from a horror
movie

A car passes by so silently
that
Even the leaves don't rustle
Rays of light scatter in the fog
Coating the rooftops in sheets of
gold

The sun is waving goodbye for the millionth
Time
The clouds are chasing the sun
Toward the
horizon

The storm clouds are gathering east
Hush
the baby birds are about to sleep
Lightening winks at the setting sun
The show is about to
begin

What is Gained from War

Hajer Maaz

Hearts beat, beat with the waves of the sea
 Grains of sand, they march unrecognized
 Heal the wounded souls in victory
 Blue skies bring effervescent stories, history
 Whispers the delicate songs of the immortalized
 Hearts beat, beat with the waves of the sea

Black skies wear nothing but a journey
 Of gems in flight, captured in dreams, paralyzed
 Heal the wounded souls in victory

Smoldering skies conceal feathers of tragedy
 The pulse of the land drowns, death is rationalized
 Hearts beat, beat with the waves of the sea

Blood-red skies kiss the sea with a serene melody
 And absorb into the sand of the shore, fossilized
 Heal the wounded souls in victory

Battles will continue to battle each other, out of envy
 Flames will continue to sculpt traumatized
 Hearts beat, beat with the waves of the sea
 Heal the wounded souls in victory

Without Boundaries

Hajer Maaz

دود _____ لا _____
 An impediment of dirt and sweat of those
 over there, terra firma on one side, the breaths of
 cedars and pines on another, cook with
 a pencil, a paper, a mind, divide
 each into equal parts, mix well, add in a bit
 of whiskey or wine, maps on a century-old desk, fill in the
 bubbles with a #2 pencil, all the way in, no space
 for the exotic, plant oaks to cover the gyri
 of the memories from over there, laughter has no place
 in the tangled fabric of the stars, make Cupid shoot his bow
 Upward, the reflection of an alien's soul in the eyes
 of the oppressed. An old can of Pepsi on the
 curb accused of the murder of millions
 of human souls. No limitations. No exceptions.

دود _____ لا _____
 A pencil, a paper, a mind, divide
 and fantasize about establishment and harmony.
 Unbending minds bend the waters and the wind
 in their direction, meteors playing tag chasing
 Lyra, oneiros fuse at the horizon of luminescence
 at dawn, countless wavelengths of light converge,
 drawing the line with glowing charcoal
 on wood, kindle a flame, drift above the barriers of the
 atmosphere, fueled by the hearts of the determined, rise
 together, we can surpass the frontiers

دود _____ لا _____

Statue in a Park

Kevin McKenna

What the passing of time does to us all...
Spring always comes; so does the fall...
A tattered old suit, a frayed filthy shirt,
Worn by a bent-over man, counting cans...
Lost ambition, misplaced ability,
All the possibilities, gone astray.
Daunted pipedreams, broken promises,
Hands folded in a weary pledge.
A forsaken statue in the park.
An abandoned memorial,
To a life that passed him by...

Psalms 139

Mirajh Mullins

The most beautiful thing about the wind is that you can never hide from it. Unlike beaming rays of sun and falling drops of rain, there is nowhere you can go that the wind will not find you. You may run inside, seeming to have found a warm place to hide, thinking you've escaped the chill.

But even then, it finds you again and begins to sweep across your skin. Slipping in through the cracks of closed windows, and the unplugged sockets in the wall.

Whether it be a soft breeze or strong gust, if the wind wishes for You to feel it blow, You most certainly will.

On Spam Musubi

Mia Lanae Rendon

Must everything remind me I am a blank canvas?

It's a simple meal,
Some people consider it a savory snack,
Sometimes sweet.

Depends the people you get it from,
The people that like it are crispy, more tender
Or somewhere in between.

I'm more in the appearance of rice
With added furikake
No sesame seeds, they get stuck in my teeth.
But I don't mind either, as long as
You sprinkle it with intention.

But I enjoy the spam by itself fresh off the pan
Like how my dad makes it offering
A piece before breakfast.

But that's the most essential part,
How could anyone forget?

13 minutes away from home is a cafe
It has musubi on the menu
It's the only reason I went.

Behind the cash register is a Korean women
And several Korean customers
The ambience is pleasant.

I'm used to the glances.
I look like the loon
That parked right in front of the store.
I look like hazel eyes
Pale skin and Hispanic features
I look like rice was enough to fill my pride,
I look like Spam eaten by itself.

I want to tell them I like my spam musubi simply when it's offered.
I want to tell them I speak Spanish even though I don't look it
I want to tell them my English vernacular is proficient.

I want to tell them I got friends who like Spam musubi sweet and
tender
The way the cafe makes it
I want to tell them I'd buy everything off the menu

"Do you allow people to study here?"

"Yes... but..."

But it's crowded, but you should get a spam musubi and find a place
elsewhere.

I can't decipher.

I only know that people believe me to be bought separately.

I wait 15 minutes for the small, four dollar fifty cent spam musubi
to be ready.

I don't mind,

I don't mind as long as I can eat.

The smell of Spam reaches my nose from the kitchen and
I am stolen by the many kitchens of houses
Of my father

Asking so desperately

To taste for the millionth time in my life.

I thank her when she brings the small wrapped package out with a smile.

I race out the door into my car,
Feeling the relief exit with me.

I open it while driving to another cafe,
Stopped at a red light trying to find the ledge
Of plastic wrap.

I peel it off, careful to not let it fall apart in my lap.
One hand on the wheel,
One glance at the road.

The first bite:
“Ah,”
This makes sense.

To the Girl That Leaves Post-Its in My Notebooks

Nicole Rendon

Benignant misspelled words of affirmation,
Wingless angel, tiny kindness crusader,
You leave your notes with quiet dedication.

“bast mom devr” your gentle inclination,
A smile scrawled out by an errant creator
Benignant misspelled words of affirmation.

In pink Crayola you trace a fragile liberation,
Your scribbled care becomes my soft persuader.
You leave your notes with quiet dedication.

These slips of paper, secret conversations,
A tender truth from an unseen translator
Benignant misspelled words of affirmation.

In your mindful understanding, I find my restoration,
A kindness that could not be any braver.
You leave your notes with quiet dedication.

Through your sweet flaws, a perfect transformation
Wingless angel, tiny kindness crusader,
Benignant misspelled words of affirmation,
You leave your notes with quiet dedication.

Grandpa

Nicole Rendon

You are my joy,
 My peace, my hero.
 The sun blinds my eyes
 As I gaze up at you,
 Perched on your old ladder,
 Reaching the ripest orange—
 Just for me, your little Chilindrina
 Your hands peel the skin,
 The zest tickles my nose.
 My best friend:
 An old man in a tank top,
 Overalls rolled to the knee,
 Black Walmart rain boots,
 White hair wild beneath a sun hat,
 A blue hankie catching your sweat.
 “Eat some chili,” you grin,
 “It’ll put hair on your chest.”
 I laugh, shaking my head,
 “Grandpa, I’m a girl.”
 You in your dusty recliner,
 Me cross-legged on the floor,
 Both of us cracking up at Speedy Gonzales—
 Until the Dodger game comes on.
 You were my joy,
 My peace, my hero.

Reset

Nicole Rendon

Every day, I put you to sleep,
 Loving you with all I have,
 Knowing I will never see you again.

The 2,922nd version of you went to bed Rosie—
 2,923 woke up McKenna and **I miss you.**

I caress your sandy brown hair,
 Woven with threads of gold,
 As if Rumpelstiltskin himself
 Spun silk into your locks.

I trace the arch of your brows,
 Fingers desperate to memorize your face,
 Singing my own gentle version
 Of your favorite Evanescence song,
 "Bring Me to Life," just like every night.

As you drift away—never to return—
 The muscles in my chest spasm,
 Sending a quiver down the sides of my ribs
 And I’m certain my heart
 Is fracturing inside me.

Your fingers, wrapped tight around mine,
 Loosen, and I kiss your forehead
 For the last time.
 “Goodnight, princess, go find your castle,”
 I whisper, my voice cracking
 With the brokenness that only tomorrow’s you can heal.
 Every mourning, a new you awakens,
 And I get —**86,400**—fleeting seconds
 To know this radiant child,
 Before we say goodbye again.
 I hope you find your castle little princess,
 And I hope one day,
 I’ll reunite with all of the yous
 I’ve had to say goodbye to.

The Unfinished Sculpture

Devi Staudte

I am a mound of clay.
 Not a pile of wet, unshapen clay
 With endless possibilities thus far unexplored.
 But rather a sculpture that began taking shape
 At the will of a skilled artisan.

A project with promise abandoned halfway,
 Left to crudely harden without a kiln.
 The artisan moved on to other projects; I am collecting dust.
 Dry, half-realized, beginning to crack,
 Bursting with potential yet discarded.

But I know I am salvageable—
 Artisan, be inspired: add water to my cracked structure,
 Keep shaping me with skilled, stained hands.
 Bring your vision to life within me.
 When I am perfect, mark me with your signature
 And fire me in your unforgiving kiln,
 So I may retain my shape for eternity.

Time will heal me as I will heal me.
 My potential has not disappeared, has not diminished.
 Today I lay half-finished, half-forgotten,
 But tomorrow the artisan will remember me,
 Choose to play God and sculpt me once again.

Eclipses and Evolutions

Sabina Thai

As it approaches,
we stare into the blinding light,
peeping behind highways of wispy clouds,
shades of grey cover more than just a scalp.
Even in children's drawings, rays of yellow and orange
burst from a circle of life.

Sadly, we learn too soon that the moon
isn't made from cheese.
But it does chase the sun
like grandpa running ahead to open the door for mom.
The moon's illumination shows craters and all,
there's no hiding from getting grey, wrinkles included.

For only a moment,
they cross paths, reaching totality.
Maybe they'll cross again
(the star-crossed lovers, the sun and moon, me and my ex)
and leave or stay for longer,
But to cherish that moment is what will last.

The Fruit of Labor

Raquel Vasquez

This land is tilled with blood
backs broken into bridges
and fingers blistered into orange branches.
Roots will grow beneath fertile soil
and limbs will emerge extended to the heavens.
Save us God! They cry
He does not respond.
Cause, bridges are made to walk on
and fruit still bears from their blisters.
Fruit taken and eaten
by an insatiable evil.
An evil that hides behind red lines and walls.
Devils draped in red.
Demons with pointing fingers
and anger in their eyes
gathered to extend their rancor.
animals, they're animals.
And so those wretched creatures
satisfy Satan's starvation with suffering.
They vomit tears of tyranny and unkept promises.
Their leather labored bodies
will be left to return to the dust
for which they were created.
It's their fault.
they've come to steal,
they've come to take!

but no,
They've come *to live*.
So let us pray for their sin.

A Summer in LA

Ashley Velasquez

Last year's summer
I moved to South Central
I don't miss the heat strokes, but it did take a turn
I ended up losing my mental
Driving down LA
It's a sight to see, all day
They don't talk about Skid Row
Now I see why so many lost hope
Junkies, they were once someone's loved one
You see them using dope
Just to cope, they're lost souls
It's easier to live on the streets
The people out in LA don't want to see you succeed
Living in my car, bouncing around sober livings
I am surprised I didn't end up permanently on the streets
In a tent, sitting next to someone's auntie
I'm grateful for the experience just lost my mind, not completely
South Central, Los Angeles
Land of the not so righteousness

Widow's Epitaph

Madelyn Veyette

Bury me with my husband, in the same casket with our arms wrapped around each other, let there be no mistake we love each other till death does us part, but death cannot separate our souls, only bodies, so bury me in his arms, keep our vows true even when I am not breathing, make it gothic like something written by Faulkner or a beautiful tragedy directed by Burton, let my skin deteriorate and mix with his, to hold onto him permanently, tie our wrist together so that even as our bodies melt into the Earth the string that binds us will remain knotted, intertwined like our souls, position us like a statue sculpted by the Greeks for grave-diggers to marvel at, make us an anomaly, make Death question his actions. Bury me with my husband, for my vows stand true at the sight of Death.

Statue of Venus at Caesars Palace

Madelyn Veyette

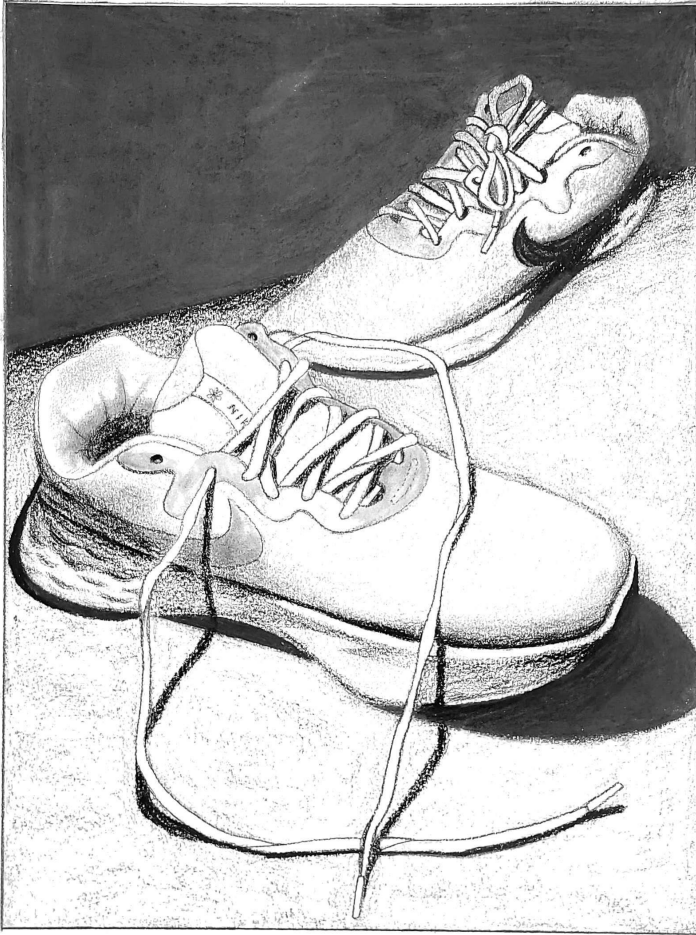
I live to love someone. Unfortunate: I have not lived. I want to give and receive flowers; Not simply to be adored for the stone I am made of. To wear rose-colored glasses. I'd risk the heartbreak that follows coffee dates and staying up late. I want to gamble for more than at a Vegas wedding, and I can see love all around me— As I stand preserved, I longed to be told “hi” instead of men standing idly by. People who have lived. I think I would be okay not living, standing still so long as I can see life all around me. People so painted by blush, my marble pales in comparison. I live to love someone. Unfortunate: I have not loved.

ARTWORK



Rosa Alvarado

Lost Color, Self-Portrait



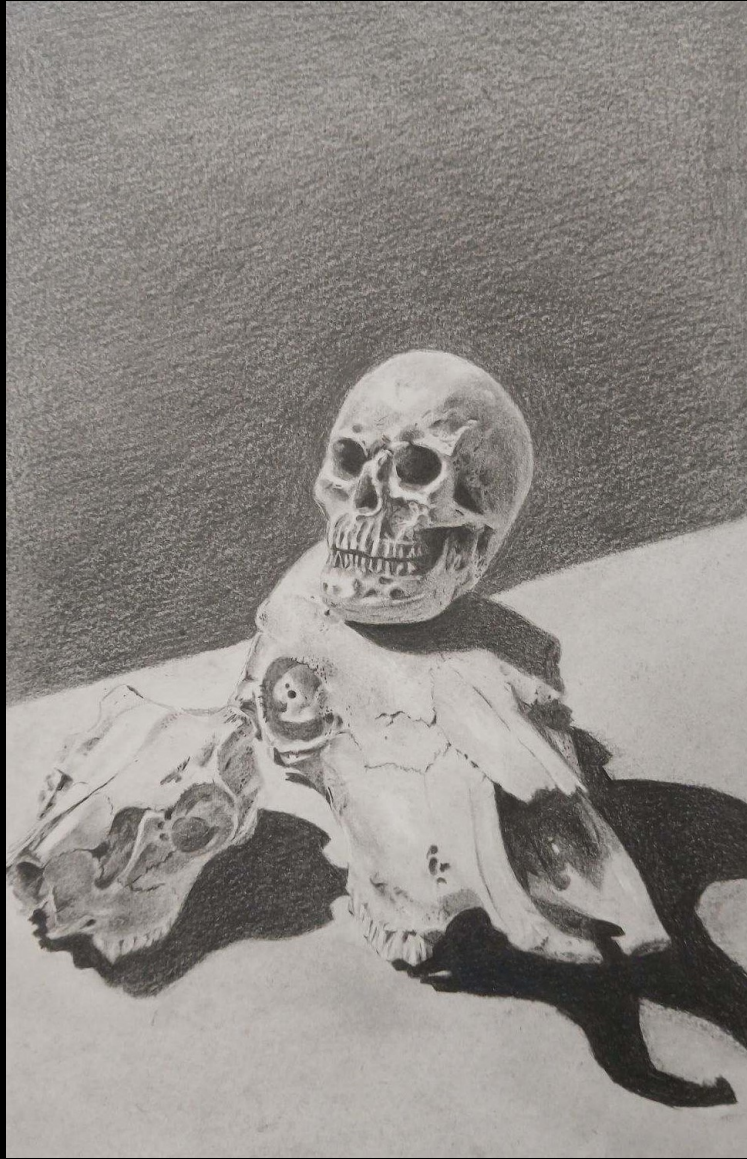
Rosa Alvarado

Old Pair of Nikes



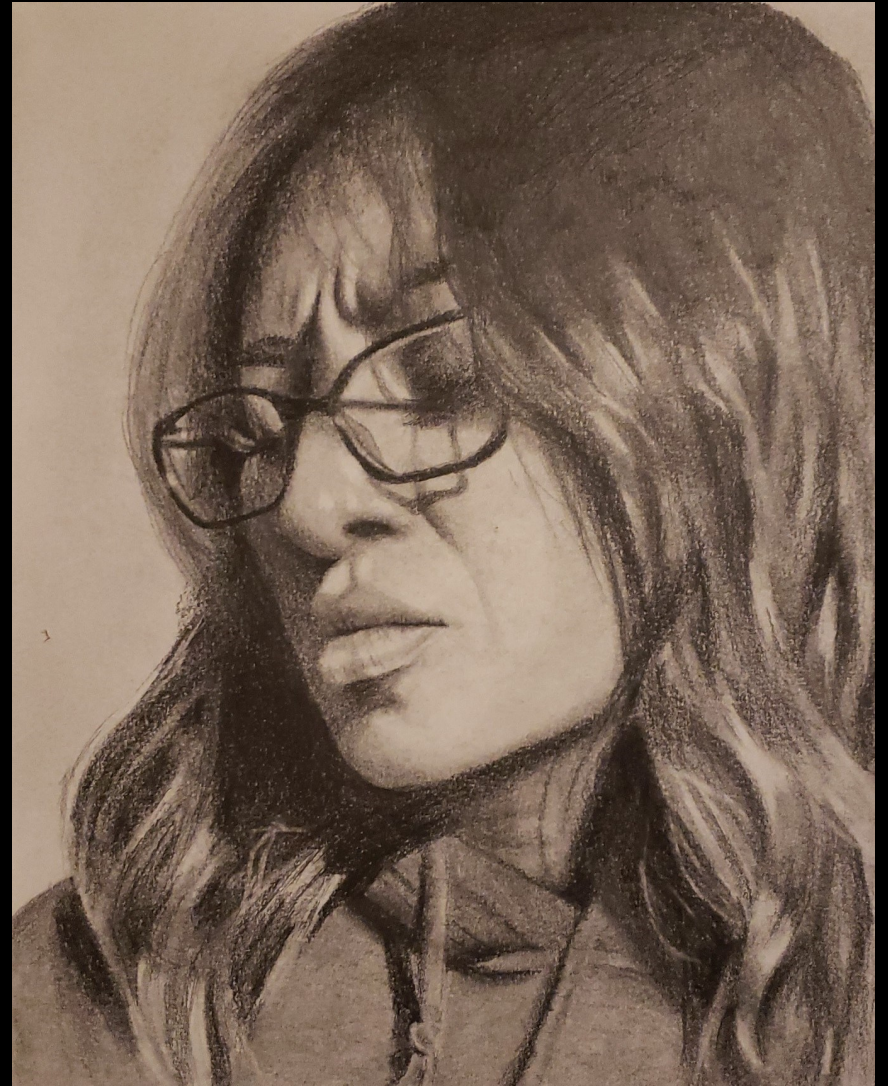
Gracie Arciga

Memento Mori



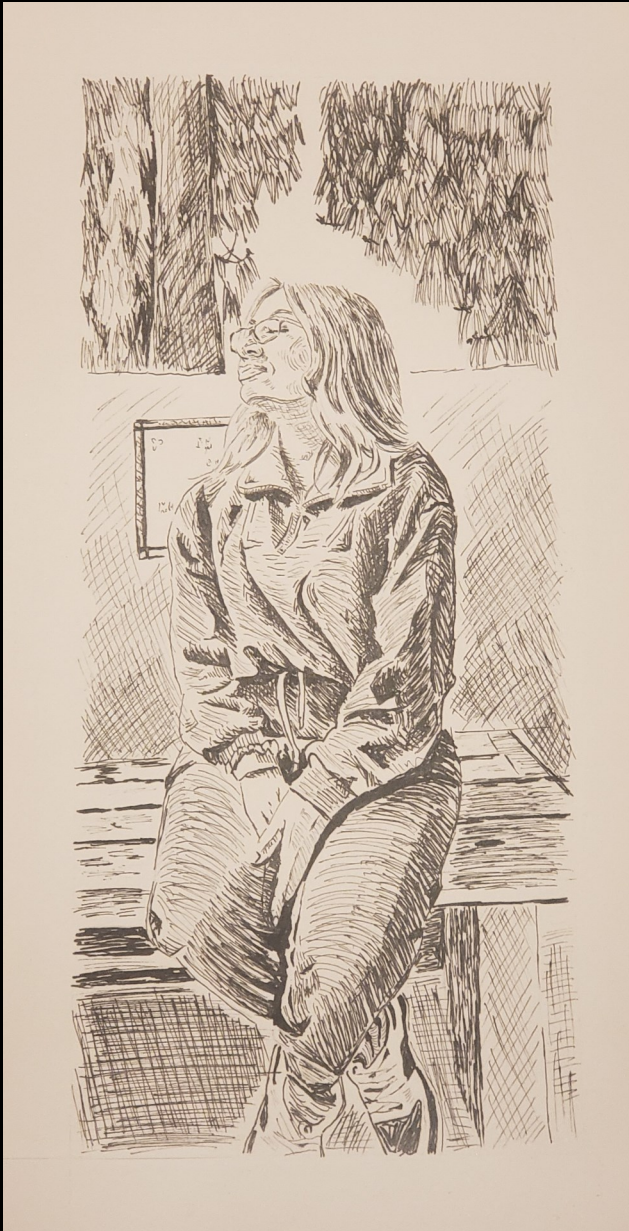
Maria Gricelda Sanchez

Bones



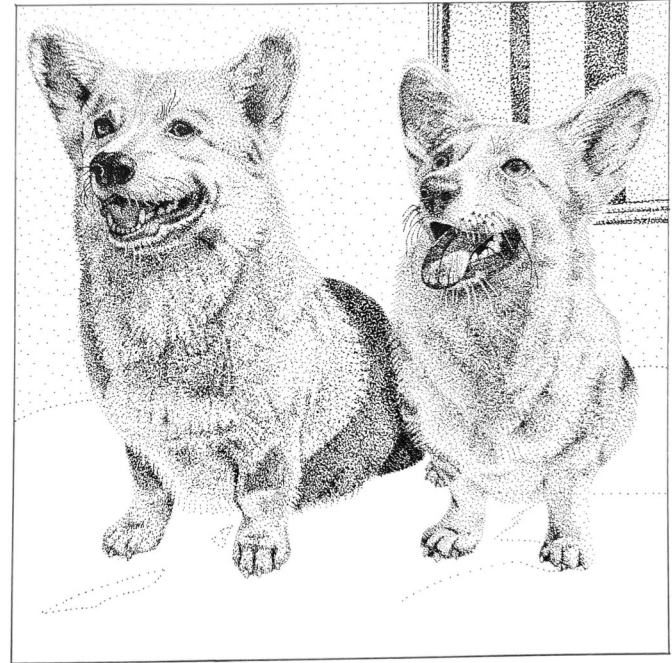
Maria Gricelda Sanchez

Heart Break



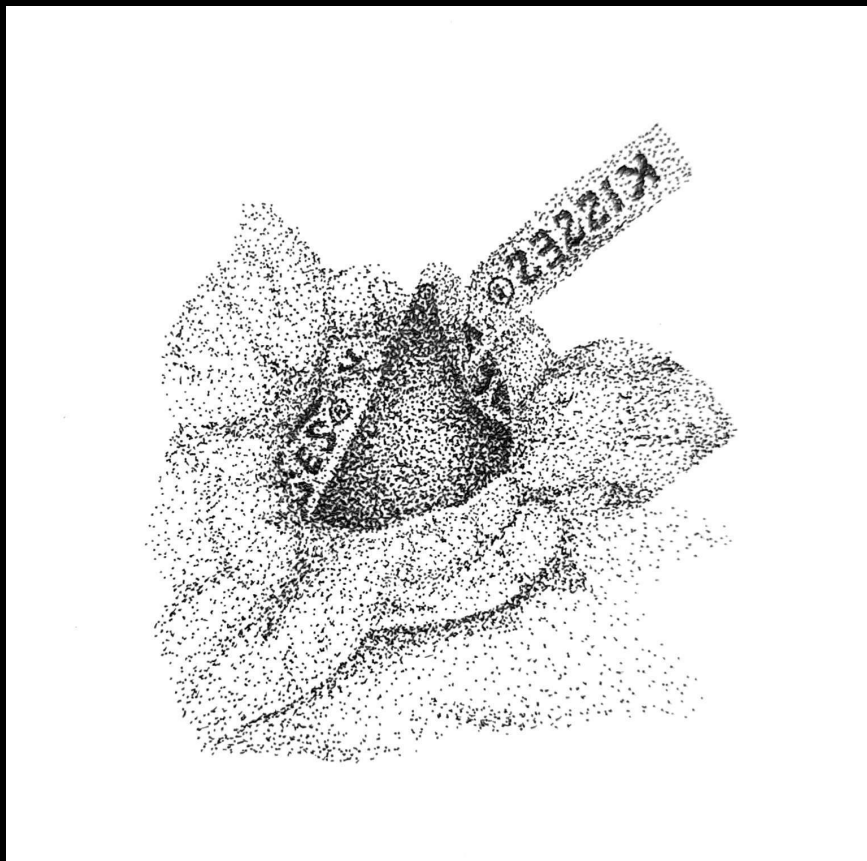
Maria Gricelda Sanchez

Feel the Sun



Rosa Alvarado

Chester and Winter



Rosa Alvarado

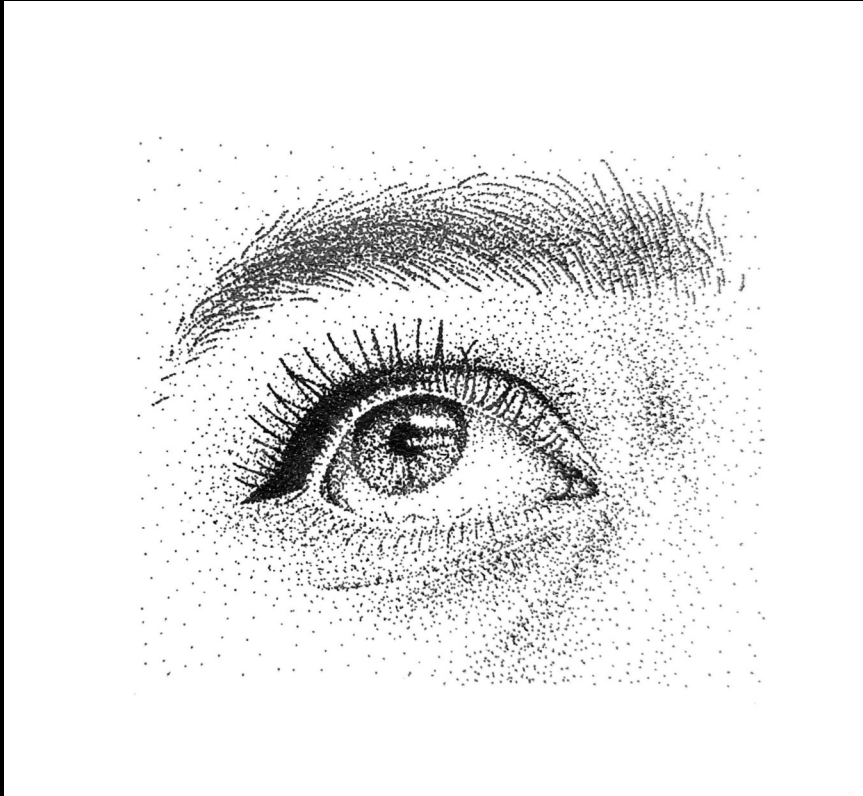
A Kiss from a Pen



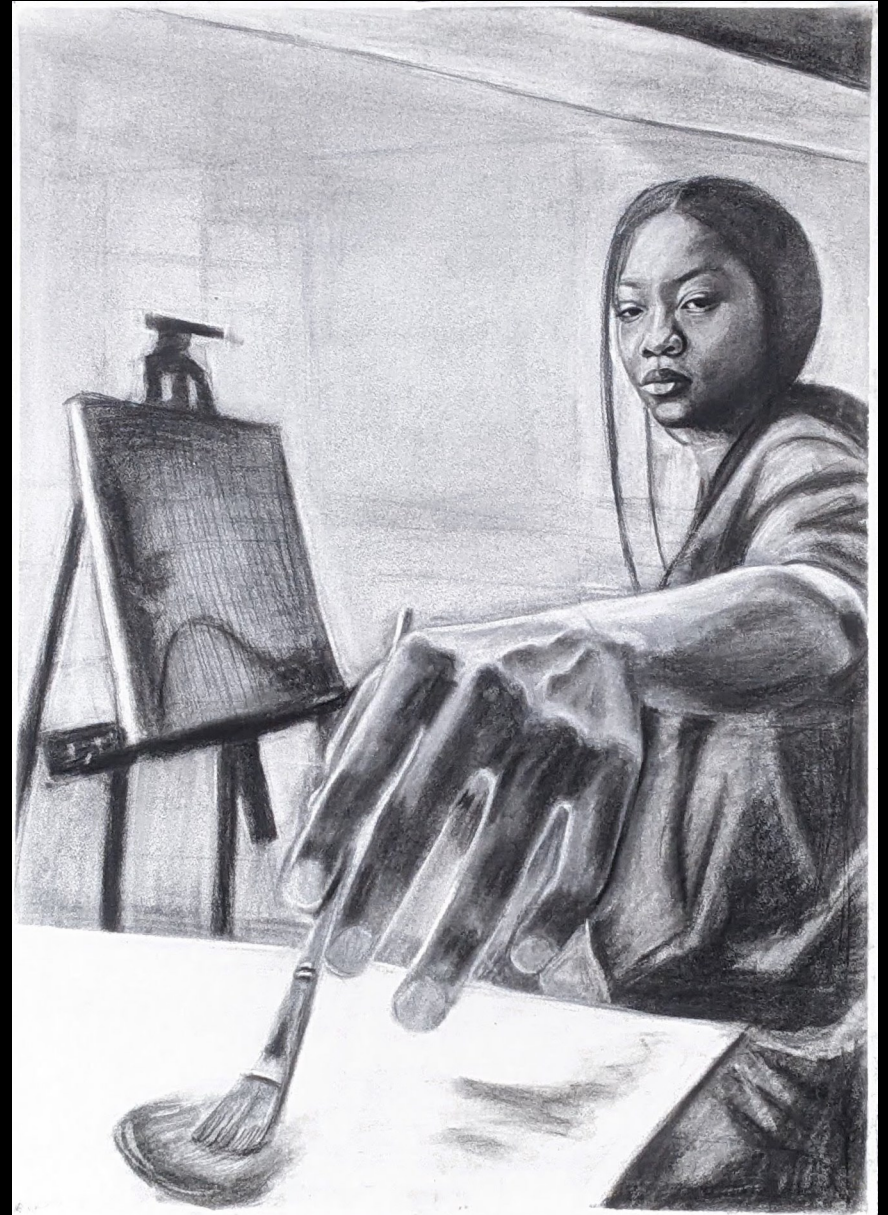
Benjamin Mitchell

Reedley College Featured Artist

Self Portrait, Ink on Paper 2023



Rosa Alvarado
Eye Love to Stipple



Nadia Tomoney
Delineation



Nadia Tomoney

Self-Cast



Sydney Butler

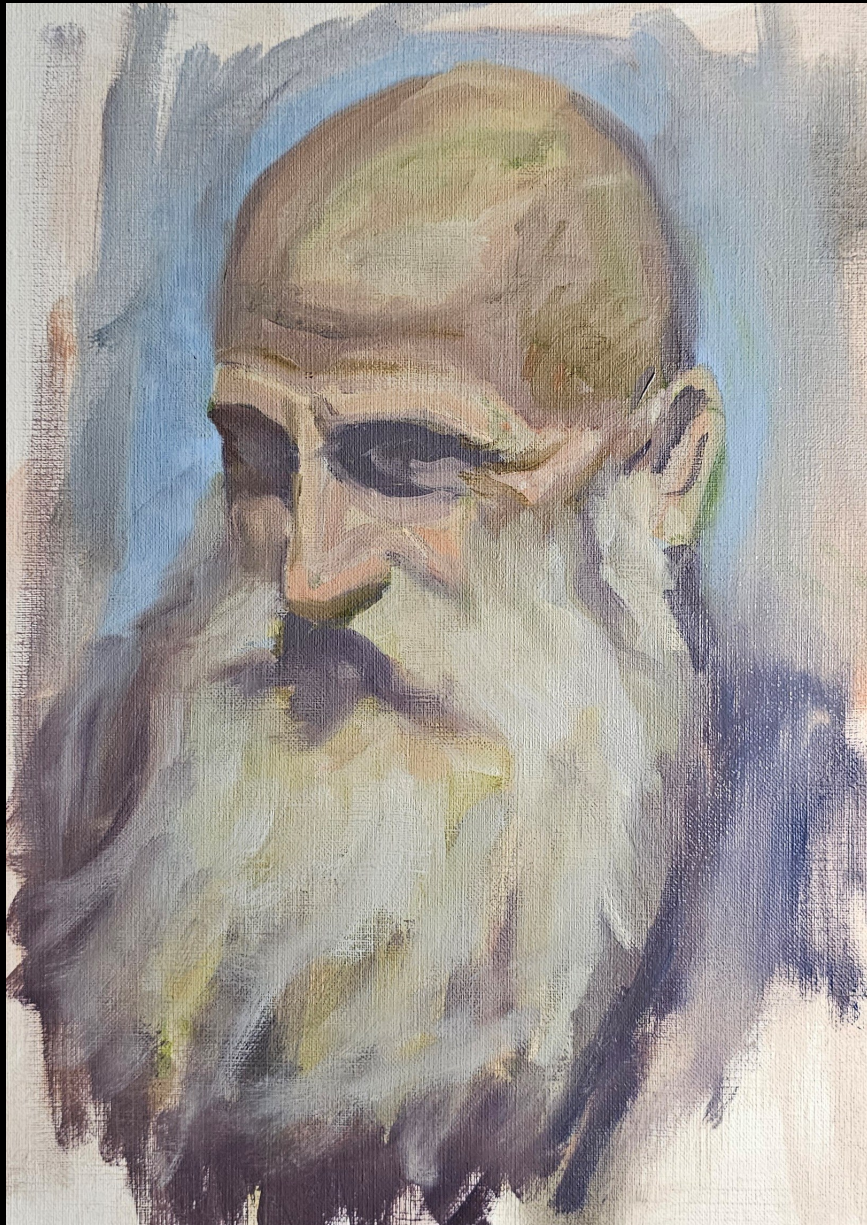
Rubber Ducky



Sydney Butler
Frogs Wanna Have Fun



Tayonna Coles
Colorful Chaos



Benjamin Mitchell

Reedley College Featured Artist

Wisdom, Oil on Canvas 2024



Benjamin Mitchell

Reedley College Featured Artist

Consideration, Oil on Canvas 2024



Benjamin Mitchell

Reedley College Featured Artist

Warm Glow, Oil on Canvas 2024



Aime Villagomez

Warmth



Karina Rodriguez

Gold Soul



Nadia Tomoney

Oceanid Reverie



Nadia Tomoney

Nature Still Life



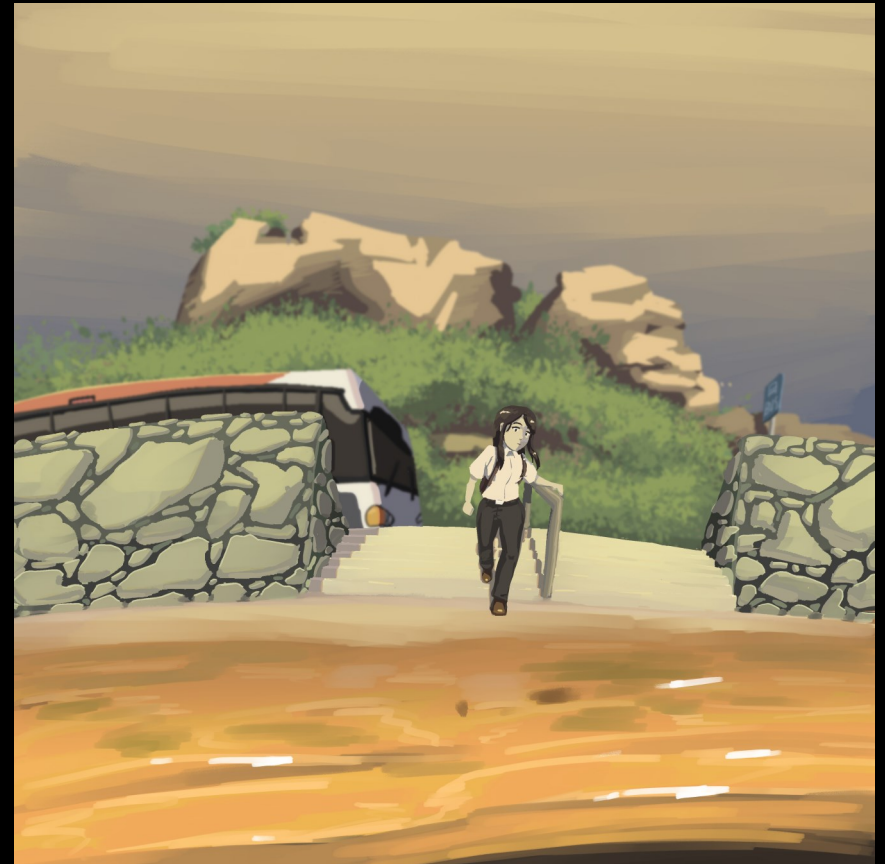
Paul John Bacasen

1. Calling



Paul John Bacasen

2. Break



Paul John Bacasen

3. Ascent



Paul John Bacasen

4. Still



Paul John Bacasen

5. Imprint



Gracie Arciga

Dream Sequence



Benjamin Mitchell

Reedley College Featured Artist

Pine Flat Sunset, Oil on Canvas 2024



Prameswari Ramachandran

Almond Trees



Tommy Vo

Truck by the Glowing Sunset



Tommy Vo

Sunset by the Pier



Tommy Vo

The Distant Moon Crossing the Railroad

CONTRIBUTORS

Rosa Alvarado: Rosa Alvarado is a self-taught artist attending Reedley College who explores various mediums, with a special passion for ink, particularly Micron pens for stippling. Rosa loves creating depth and texture through detailed marks, embracing the meticulous process that brings intricate artwork to life.

Gracie Arciga: A Studio Arts major, this is Gracie Arciga's last semester at Reedley College, Gracie will transfer to CSU Long Beach next fall for a BFA in Illustration.

Paul John Bacasen: Paul John Bacasen is an animator and illustrator attending Southwestern College. Socials can be found under @blockasen

John Berry: A creative writing student at Lansing Community College, John Berry is in his mid-30s and made the decision to focus on the next phase of life by pursuing a love for the written word. With nearly twenty years of experience in a career as a mechanic, John writes from a unique perspective.

Sydney Butler: Currently a Studio Arts major at Reedley College, Sydney is planning to go on to get a BFA in Studio Art and eventually a Masters. Sydney's long-term goal is to be either a professor of Drawing and Painting or Art History.

Julie Calvert: Julie Calvert is an English literature major at Reedley College. She enjoys writing poetry and reading classical literature.

Maya Caus: A soon-to-be graduate from St. Louis Community College, Maya Caus is eager to explore a passion for writing poetry. The goal is to use creativity to touch the hearts of those who feel unheard.

Tayonna Coles: Tayonna Coles, a Junior at the Alamo Colleges District, uses her work to navigate the challenges of a chronic illness. Her artwork is a testament to her unwavering spirit and her ability to find beauty in even the most difficult circumstances.

Kianna Cooper: A disabled, LGBTQ+ woman of color who grew up in a small town, Kianna Cooper faced many challenges, with people often saying Kianna would fail. Despite being the only Black woman in class, Kianna kept persevering. Kianna is currently a student at Frederick Community College.

Connor DiMartino: An Art and Design major student and member of the Creative Writing Club at the Community College of Philadelphia.

Isabel Fitzgerald: Isabel Fitzgerald is studying Medical Coding at Fresno City College and has been a writer for the past few years. She writes mainly about grief, trauma, family, and regret. Isabel views writing as both the best outlet and a beautiful art form.

Lucia Gherardini: Lucia Gherardini resides in St. Louis, Missouri, where she is a student at Saint Louis Community College. Lucia has previously published works in literary magazines for her high school and has submitted work for *Empowered*, the 2023 Poetry Collection by the American Library of Poetry.

Harper Hansard: Harper Hansard is a student at St. Louis Community College.

Hailey Huber: Hailey Huber is currently a student at the Community College of Philadelphia. When not writing, Hailey enjoys reading, baking, or volunteering at a local cat shelter.

Sarah Jeon: Sarah Jeon was born and raised in St. Louis, Missouri. She has always been an avid reader with a creative mind for writing. Sarah is currently an emerging poet as both a high school senior and a poetry writing student at St. Louis Community College.

Gavin Krantz: A student at Fresno City College, Gavin Krantz majors in History with hopes of transferring to UCLA next year. Gavin has been creatively writing for around four years but has yet to be published.

Katherine Preza Leonor: Katherine Preza Leonor is a multilingual poet, songwriter, and short story writer. She has a completed poetry collection, *Russeting Fruit*, which she hopes to publish within the year. Katherine enjoys horror, comedy, and drama and is currently a student at Los Angeles Valley College.

Hajer Maaz: Hajer Maaz is a creative writer residing in Santa Fe, New Mexico. A senior at the MASTERS Program High School and a full-time student at Santa Fe Community College, Hajer considers poetry an experimental hobby and plans to continue writing for as long as possible.

Kevin McKenna: Kevin McKenna is currently studying creative writing at Los Angeles Valley College. He recently completed his debut novel and is working on getting it published.

Benjamin Mitchell: Benjamin Mitchell grew up in Reedley, California and has always been interested in storytelling, the outdoors, and art. Benjamin is attending Reedley College for art.

Mirajh Mullins: An Art major at Golden West College in Huntington Beach, Mirajh Mullins is passionate about creative expression through art and writing.

William Nemeç: William Nemeç, born and raised in San Diego, is a student at Grossmont Community College. Majoring in psychology, William enjoys writing short fiction.

Prameswari Ramachandran: Parameswari Ramachandran is from India and very passionate about arts and photography. Parameswari is earning a Studio Arts associate degree at Bakersfield College, California. Parameswari loves arts and crafts and sees art as another language, putting heart and soul into each piece.

Mia Lanae Rendon: Mia Lanae Rendon is 19-years-old and a student at Golden West Community College.

Nicole Rendon: Nikki Rendon is a mother of four and a student of English at Fresno City College, with plans to transfer. She aims to teach middle school English and is passionate about storytelling, with the goal of building a writing career and publishing young adult fiction.

Karina Rodriguez: Karina Rodriguez attends Reedley Community College and plans to get a Bachelor's degree in studio art and eventually become a tattoo artist. Art is Karina's life and sees it everywhere and plans to inspire others to do the same.

Maria Gricelda Sanchez: Maria Gricelda Sanchez is a 40-year-old Latina who grew up loving art. Maria loves getting lost in what she is creating and feels happy seeing the end results. Maria is currently enrolled in Reedley College to receive an AA in Psychology with a goal of becoming an art therapist.

Devi Staudte: Devi Staudte is currently enrolled at St. Louis Community College and will transfer to Webster University in the fall of 2024. Devi has found immense joy and catharsis in writing over the years.

Sabina Thai: Sabina Thai is a student at Saint Louis Community College. In the final year of studies, Sabina plans to transfer to a four-year university for Finance in the fall.

Nadia Tomoney: Nadia Tomoney is an Art & Design major at Community College of Philadelphia who plans on going into Fine arts and illustration after graduation.

Raquel Vasquez: Raquel Vasquez is in her third and final year at Fresno City College, where she is studying English and Philosophy. Raquel began writing at the age of eighteen and is currently the president of FCC's Creative Writing Club.

Madelyn Veyette: Madelyn Veyette is 18-years-old and is in her sophomore year at Golden West College.

Ashley Velasquez: Ashley Velasquez is a student at Golden West College, majoring in English. Ashley has always been interested in writing, giving this submission a try and getting some poems published in hopes of an opportunity that would help a future career.

Aime Villagomez: Aime Villagomez is a student at St. Philips College, Texas currently studying Baking & Pastry Arts, but has always loved doing art as a way to express themselves and hopes for everyone to enjoy art and their work.

Tommy Vo: Tommy Vo is in the second year at Golden West College and an aspiring photographer who loves taking pictures of flowers and the sunset.

Rosa Alvarado	Kevin McKenna
Gracie Arciga	Benjamin Mitchell
Paul John Bacasen	Mirajh Mullins
John Beery	William Nemeč
Sydney Butler	Prameswari Ramachandran
Julie Calvert	Mia Lanae Rendon
Maya Caus	Nicole Rendon
Tayonna Coles	Karina Rodriguez
Kianna Cooper	Maria Gricelda Sanchez
Connor DiMartino	Devi Staudte
Isabel Fitzgerald	Sabina Thai
Lucia Gherardini	Nadia Tomoney
Harper Hansard	Raquel Vasquez
Hailey Huber	Ashley Velasquez
Sarah Jeon	Madelyn Veyette
Gavin Krantz	Aime Villagomez
Katherine Preza Leonor	Tommy Vo
Hajer Maaz	