

# Fjords

SPECIAL EDITION 2 GUEST EDITORS  
LITERATURE

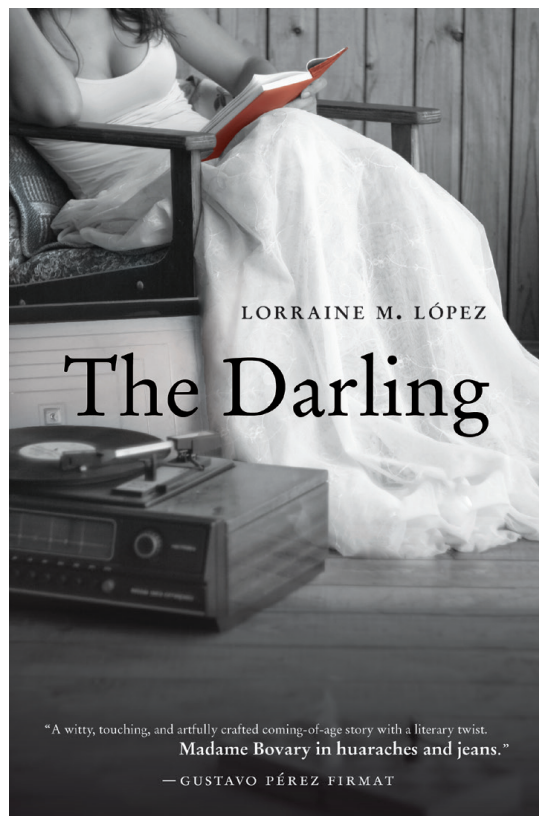
JOANNA DEMKIEWICZ

KAYLEN RALPH

ART

HEATHER ZISES





# The Darling

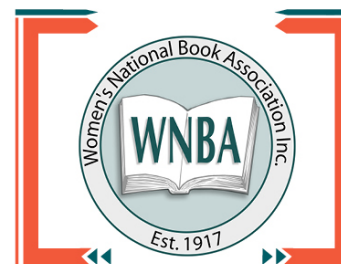
LORRAINE M. LÓPEZ

“López deftly weaves together her heroine’s personal quest and the female characters she is fascinated with to tell an enthralling story about sex, love, and literature in the compelling package of a well-written book.”

—Teresa Dovalpage



www.uapress.arizona.edu / (800) 621-2736



## Women's National Book Association

Supporting the world of books since 1917.

For one hundred years, the WNBA has promoted literacy, a love of reading, and women's roles in the community of the book through networking and professional development, awards and contests, and special initiatives.

We look to our next century to continue championing books in all their forms, for all their audiences. [Join us and be a part of history.](#)

### PROGRAMS OF NOTE

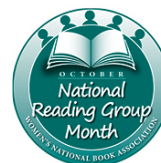
#### WNBA Award 2015

Every other year, the WNBA honors a bookwoman whose life and work is exemplary in promoting the importance of books and literature in our society.

This year, we salute poet **Amy King**, who helped to establish the VIDA Count, which draws attention to the gender gap in literary publications and review journals.

#### National Reading Group Month

October is National Reading Group Month (**NRGM**), an initiative launched by the WNBA in 2007, that celebrates the joy of shared reading through events nationwide and our Great Group Reads list. Good books bring people together and shared reading supports the creation and distribution of books.



## UPCOMING DEADLINES

- ▶ **WNBA Writing Contest**  
Our annual contest celebrates emerging writers in poetry, fiction, and memoir/creative nonfiction. Winners receive a \$250 cash prize and will be printed in our newsletter and centennial publication. Submissions (through Submittable) from September 15, 2015, to January 15, 2016. [See our Writing Contest page for more details.](#)

- ▶ **WNBA Pannell Award**  
Each year, the WNBA honors two booksellers who excel at connecting children with books. Winners receive \$1000 each, artwork from a children's book illustrator, and a travel stipend for BookExpo, where the winners are honored. [See the Pannell Award page for nominations and past winners.](#)

FJORDS Since 2010

On the Cover

Kate Gilmore



Wall Bearer  
C-print  
Edition of 10  
30" x 40"  
2011

Fjords Review is distributed to the United States and Canada  
by Ingram Periodicals, Media Solutions, Ubiquity and Disticor  
Indexed in the Humanities Index Complete  
**BIPAD** 26979

© **Fjords** All Rights Reserved. No portion of this journal may be reproduced by any process or technique, without the express written  
consent of the publisher, except for purposes of promotion in which excerpts, not to exceed three lines, may be reprinted. Please notify  
Fjords when reprinting any portion of text for our records and to reprint or cite a Fjords work email editors@fjordsreview.com

Fjords is an imprint of Mediumless, a multi-media group for fine arts and commercial productions.

Printed in the United States

Fjords Special Edition 2 Womens Edition

**ISSN:**2161-7511

## NOTE FROM THE GUEST EDITORS

**W**hen we were asked to guest edit this special Women's Edition of *Fjords*, we were excited to use our longform prowess in a literary sense. Our magazine, *The Riveter*, publishes longform journalism by women, for everyone, and we publish essays, book reviews, longform narratives, investigative pieces, research-driven analyses and writer interviews both online and in print. When we launched *The Riveter* in 2013, we did so because we were dismayed with the gender disparities in the magazine world, literary journals included. Referencing the research-driven online organization VIDA — which has been publishing annual statistics of gender byline breakdowns since 2009 — shows that the overall landscape of how often we value women's storytelling and women's work is indeed improving, but that there are still strides to be taken.

For every publication that has been called out by VIDA — *The New Republic*, for example, published a dismal 7 percent of book reviews written by women in 2013; in 2014, 29 percent of book reviews had female authors — widespread misogyny and sexism within the publishing industry still exists, in terms of mainstream influence and how we value storytelling by women. Why are mainstream women's magazines so synonymous with fluffy, recycled content and an editorial focus on the strictly aspirational? Why are fewer women nominated for national magazine awards — are they not producing quality work, or is it more difficult for women to sustain writing jobs due to archaic gender norms within newsrooms and in the freelance world?

We know women are producing quality work, and we're thrilled to be involved in this Women's Edition, which unites a variety of voices relaying essays and fiction about everything from the cliché — think love or marriage — to the underrepresented — think poverty or adolescence. Kinzy Janssen, who has worked as *The Riveter's* associate editor and copy editor — and who has a keen and intuitive eye for metaphor and meter — chose poems that tell stories of pleasure, religion and motherhood (and more). Author Julie Iromuanya spoke with us about her writing process, and *Mr. and Mrs. Doctor*, her 2015 release that contributes to the immigrant canon at large. Finally, we discussed the state of women in the magazine industry with three changemakers who each created their own women's mag as a direct response to the lack of diversity in the industry — Alana Levinson of STEVIE ZINE, Alisha Sommer of BLACKBERRY, and Gabi Barkho of Femsplain. In tandem with Heather Zises' art curation, we hope that this Women's Edition serves as a window into women's storytelling, as complex, dynamic, and varying as it can be.

## A NOTE FROM HEATHER ZISES, CURATOR AND FOUNDER OF (READ)art

When I first began curating artwork for the Women's Edition of Fjords, I felt a huge responsibility to represent gender in a truthful way. Instead of diving into art theory, I looked to a sacred book on my shelf: *Women Who Run with the Wolves— Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype*, by Clarissa Pinkola Estès, Ph.D. (1992). This epic tome dispenses many stories about archetypal motifs that set a woman's inner life into motion. The anthology focuses upon women who are powerful, wild, creative, and wise, but most of all brave. They are brave enough to find alternative paths when faced with obstacles, and brave enough to let the fire in their bellies blaze new trails.

Unfortunately, despite bravery, a large bias in the art world still exists, and statistics still speak volumes. According to a recent Artnet survey, in almost all group exhibitions, women represent less than 50 percent of the artists, unless the subject of the show is a feminist one. And although more than 50 percent of art school graduates are women, considerably less than half of monographic exhibition subjects are women. Gallery Tally (a collective that calls for gender equity in the arts) notes that the number of female artists represented by galleries in New York and Los Angeles is a measly 30 percent, and the highest-priced pieces of art continue to be produced exclusively by men. And yet, when interviewed, established female dealers, curators, collectors, advisors, and artists all give the same message of hope: women have a visionary approach to shaping culture, and are determined to carve alternative paths around the conventions of society and institutions.

As a female curator, I believe it is our duty to "give back" by nurturing the next generation of emerging artists. Therefore, in this special edition of Fjords, we proudly present trailblazers from the new guard: artists and authors, all of which are brave, and all of which are driven. Each of the artists I have selected for this issue does an exquisite job of dismantling assumptions about gender, race, identity and class. Whether it's Allie Pohl questioning the social construct of perfection with her *Ideal Women* chrome sculptures; or Danielle Mourning's self-portraits that convey metamorphosis by echoing the ascent and descent from traditional forces lying on women; or Kate Gilmore's (cover art) performance pieces that explore themes of displacement, struggle, and female identity through self-imposed restrictions; these women are fearless, and they harness original voices and ideas throughout their work and process. I am honored to have added so many new dialects of form into my curatorial scope and I am delighted to share them with the readership of Fjords.

# Fjords

FJORDSREVIEW.COM  
WOMENS EDITION

## STAFF

---

GUEST EDITOR	Joanna Demkiewicz
GUEST EDITOR	Kaylen Ralph
GUEST ART EDITOR	Heather Zises
EDITOR	John Gosslee
MANAGING EDITOR	Andrew Sullivan
ASSISTANT EDITOR	Alex Carpenter
ASSOCIATE EDITOR	Maura Lammers
REVIEWS EDITOR	Jennifer McCauley
EDITORIAL ASSISTANT	Emi Miller
WEB DESIGN	Aleksandra Marr
DESIGN ASSISTANT	Tiarra Gadsden



# CONTENTS

Poetry	<b>Lora Keller</b>
10	My First Orgasm
12	Snake Molting
Poetry	<b>Dana Crotwell</b>
13	Neruda Ate My Homework
Art	<b>Alyse Rosner</b>
14	Verge (blue)
15	Sway (red)
Fiction	<b>Jaimee Wriston Colbert</b>
16	Suicide Birds
Art	<b>Negar Behbahani</b>
27	Life Strand
28	Years of Numbness
Poetry	<b>Heather Dobbins</b>
29	The Shanty Preacher's Fiancee
30	Good Shanty Wife
Art	<b>Sandra Mack-Valencia</b>
31	Fruit of the Loom
32	Sugar Mom
Essay	<b>JoeAnn Hart</b>
33	The Week Elvis Died
Art	<b>Danielle Mourning</b>
42	Eight Feet & Forty Toes
43	#bestselfever
Poetry	<b>Anna Sutton</b>
44	Egg
Poetry	<b>Tammy Robacker</b>
45	Aliens
Poetry	<b>Evelyn Benvie</b>
46	Cosmic Latte Dream Girl
Art	<b>Gail Victoria Braddock Quagliata</b>
47	Cunt, Pansy Edition
48	Douche Bag feat. Bee

Poetry	<b>Cynthia Atkins</b>
49	My Password
50	My Persona
Art	<b>Michelle Hartney</b>
52	Anarcha
Short Fiction	<b>Natasha Tynes</b>
53	Under Contract
Interview	<b>Heather Zises</b>
62	Q&A with Kate Gilmore
Art	<b>Kate Gilmore</b>
63	Love 'em and Leave 'em
64	Through the Claw
65	Through the Claw
Poetry	<b>Sarah Gutowski</b>
66	The Woman in the Fairy Tale Sews Her Mouth Shut
68	A Woman, Tempted
Art	<b>Xin Song</b>
70	Lust/Caution 1
71	Life=Sex, Series 1
Poetry	<b>Ashley-Elizabeth Best</b>
72	To Know About The Fire
Poetry	<b>Kathleen Winter</b>
73	Projections: Maison du Général Baron Robert
Poetry	<b>R.K. Riley</b>
74	want
Art	<b>Amanda Browder</b>
75	Magic Chromacity
76	Magic Chromacity, Sewing Day
Interview	<b>Joanna Demkiewicz</b>
77	Roundtable of Women's Mag Editors

Art	<b>Lia Chavez</b>
84	The Octave of Visible Light: A Meditation Nightclub, No. 3
85	The Octave of Visible Light: A Meditation Nightclub, No. 4
Poetry	<b>Ann Howells</b>
86	Holes
Poetry	<b>Priscilla Frake</b>
87	You
88	Continuing the Argumen
90	Eve Talks Back
Art	<b>Allison L. Wade</b>
91	Break-Up Text Paintings: Hey Sorry, I'm in Costa Rica
92	Break-Up Text Paintings: On Xanax at the Airport
Poetry	<b>Deanna Ludwin</b>
93	Focus
Interview	<b>Joanna Demkiewicz</b>
95	Q&A with Julie Iromuanya
Art	<b>Allie Pohl</b>
100	Ideal Woman: Chrome
101	Ideal Woman: Caryatid
Poetry	<b>Shannon Quinn</b>
102	Hyper Vigilant
Poetry	<b>Joanne Clarkson</b>
103	Slaughterhouse Wife

Bios	106
Artist Statements	115

## Advertiser Index

Back Cover	Pen & Brush
Inside	University of Arizona Press
	Women's National Book Association
	Mercer University Press
	C&R Press

## My First Orgasm

---

With the heart of a gym teacher,  
our dance coach demanded  
one hundred sit ups before  
we tipped any vinyl albums  
from their cardboard sleeves.

I cradled my skull in my palms  
and heaved my knuckled spine  
with each grip of my gut. Basketballs  
tutted on the far side of the gym.  
Another coach bellowed.

I folded myself  
into myself,  
a gardener upending pot  
after pot of begonias  
into loamy earth.

But then,  
a tangled vine  
rooted belly-deep  
in me  
began to untwine.

First, there was a tug  
like a cat's paw

L o r a K e l l e r

on sandy soil.  
Then a brief tussle  
like the shock of wind.

Then petals seemed  
to spill  
from every  
thorny nerve  
inside me,

like the feather  
cloud  
sprung  
from a pillow  
fight.

With one lone lavish sigh,  
I bathed in the flush  
of all that secret color  
and all that suggestion  
of sin.

L o r a K e l l e r

## Snake Molting

---

The itch starts at her eyes  
and sweeps down the pulsing  
muscle of her body.

She swells and shimmies  
around fossil-pocked boulders,  
silvered driftwood.

When she can't find a bristled  
surface, she loops into her own  
strained and crusty flesh

and peels  
herself  
from herself.

She's a single-limbed ballerina  
tugging off her tights,  
a wrinkled pool

of inside-out skin  
coiled beside her,  
traces of grass and beetle grub

still etched in its grooves,  
her quaking spine sealed  
in the gauze of new skin.

Lora Keller

## Neruda Ate My Homework

---

He didn't even ask.  
He just grabbed it with his sweaty fingers  
and squeezed it, crumpled the words  
and paper and took a huge bite,  
ripped off a hunk and started chewing  
and he licked his lips  
said it tasted like grapes from a  
salty vineyard and he  
gnawed off another chunk  
bit it into parts, inhaled it piecemeal  
asked if there was a hint of cinnamon or chili  
I told him I liked it spicy  
he swallowed my similes like water  
his saliva broke down my thoughts  
I wondered aloud – maybe there  
are eatable sonnets.  
And he burped.

Dana Crotwell





# Verge

Verge (blue)  
Graphite and fluid acrylic on yupo  
60" x 54"  
2013

Alyse Rosner



# Sway

Sway (red)  
Graphite and fluid acrylic on yupo  
60" x 54"  
2013

Alyse Rosner



## SUICIDE BIRDS

Jaimee Wriston Colbert

When Teeny blew out her daddy's sliding glass door with Todd's AR-15 assault rifle she determined the lord was sending her a message: NO MORE METH, his cloud finger drifting through the shatter of glass, shaping the shards into letters that shimmered and shone in the new morning sun like mica. Her father's got ALS, Lou Gehrig's disease, and after he stopped being able to swallow and breathe on his own they put him in the convalescent home across from where Teeny works at the Quickstop. She won't tell him about his sliding door. It would just worry him; her dad liked a sense of order to things—used to natter at Teeny if she left that door ajar a quarter of an inch. But he won't be coming home again.

She meant to just crack the glass, a spider web, something obvious enough that the birds would stop hurling themselves into it, thinking it was their ticket to the other side. Four of them last month alone. Every time she came over to check on her daddy's house, water the plants, fetch his Sunday *Times*, it seemed another had flung itself against the glass out of some sort of birdy despair.

Teeny's real name is Martha, which has nothing to do with her nickname. It was her dad who started calling her that, *Teeny Tiny Lumpkin* he'd chant, the trench of his chin dimple gaping like lady-parts, and she isn't tiny at all. He meant it to be *ironical*, he said. Her back and shoulders muscled as a horse, harpsichord ripples of her chest and ribs, biceps prominent as a strongman's, a *really* strong man—she can bench press 200. As an infant she flipped herself onto her stomach twenty-four hours after she shot from her mother's birth canal, two days of hard labor her mom wailing like it was the apocalypse in there, her dad said, the four horsemen themselves trying to bust out, *then* Teeny decides she's ready to present. Her mother was never the same afterwards, just sort of drifted away until one day she's gone.

Her best friend Andrea said to try just a *snort* of meth, that it's a whole-body orgasm plugged into a socket, turned ON. Lord knows Teeny wasn't getting many of those unless she supplied them herself, so she thought why not? She'd made it a point to be game; just try things her daddy used to say, though that was more about eating her vegetables.

Ten months later Teeny quits cold turkey, gives her the shakes for days, burning inside like the white bitch (Todd called it that) had been frying her blood, its absence congealing into pockets of slimy grease, such that the AR-15 seemed like a reasonable solution. Can't have those little birdies committing suicide on Daddy's glass doors now, can we? she told Todd.

Well Christ almighty Teeny, you don't blast sliders with a weapon of war! You're lucky the whole damn house didn't implode, he'd said,

shaking his head, clumps of his hair thinning on top like leftover spaghetti stuck to a bowl—she's been noticing these things about her husband since he was laid-off from his job at the Giant, signposts of loss. Now when he wasn't mopping floors at the old folks home (his hours cut to part-time), he was hanging around the trailer park's garage, building a robot like some lunatic-savant, which Teeny herself was the model for. Not her *essence*, per say, but her arms and her torso, her muscular form. Figured if he could make a robot do what Teeny did, lift her father in and out of his bath, slip him back into bed as if her father's wasted body was light as a basket of fruit, he could make a fortune.

Yeah, she told him, they already have *that* robot, it's called a forklift! As if her husband graduated from MIT or something, she thinks now, heading off to work. Plus he's making it from scrap metal, PVC pipes, parts of this and that he finds at the Salvage Yard, even picking through the damn dumpsters at Sunshine Acres, the trailer park they manage. Last time she looked the thing had Budweiser cans for biceps! Todd just shrugged, figured if the robot didn't work he'd call it art.

The day is a wash of browns and blues, the sky, the cracked mud ground she's walking on, the Quickstop just a mile down the road from Sunshine Acres so she figured may as well hoof it, save on gas. A car full of teenage boys whizzes by honking and Teeny straightens her spine just a little. Not that she's at all interested, but Andrea said once your periods stop guys quit noticing you, the smell of your pheromones disappear; like hanging out the closed sign on your shop, you're no longer a viable mate. Teeny figures at 45 she must be draining the dregs far as her ovaries are concerned.

Merle who manages the Quickstop winks at her the moment she steps inside, a blast of frigid air, his eyelid cracked and horny as a lizard's. Think you can cover for me today? Thought I might visit my *laday*; she's got the afternoon off, get a bit of afternoon de-light.

Teeny pins the nametag to her tank top. Hi, I'm Martha! it says, but most folks know not to call her that. You got that air conditioner set at Arctic again, Merle, fifty- fricken degrees? Got to be out of here by 6:00, feed my dad.

Thought he on a feeding tube now?

He's not dead, hon. I like to give him at least a taste of something that reminds him of that you know.

Well close up if I'm not back. It's not like we due for a rush on business. Since the damn state's been dragging its tail on the gas leases the trucks all go down 81 to Pennsylvania where there's work. *Sheeeit*, this region poor as a bag of gizzards, like we don't need the prosperity new jobs could bring? We get the tourists who think if they're in upstate they should be seeing the Adirondacks. Where those mountains at? someone asks me the other day. Merle shakes his head. Jesus, don't anyone look at a map? Upstate could swallow New York, Adirondacks just the icing on that big-ass cake.

And still the government won't consider them leases.

Yeah, Teeny thinks, gas well explosions, poisoned water, air, what's not to consider? She won't say it. A landowner, Merle's whole life would change if he could lease his acreage to the gas companies for hydraulic fracturing. He's sitting on the shale mother-lode, and with *BP* in his pocket he won't be no Quickstop employee anymore, that's for damn sure! he said. She and Merle been round that block too many times, fracking and the jobs it *could* bring, Merle insists, versus land poisoned by waste and spills. Far as she can tell it's just a giant cocktail of the same kinds of toxins that went into her meth, only fracking chemicals crack rock whereas meth chews up teeth, and now she's got a dental problem to deal with.

That's Teeny's new goal, implants; have a financial goal, her daddy always said, and not breasts like Todd asked her—dirty old fart. Teeth. Sure she's 45, but that's the new 15, right? So sue me! she said when he told her they didn't have money for no implants. She might end up homeless but by god she'll live her remaining years with teeth. The dentist told her she'd need a bone graft, not enough jawbone left he said, and that it involved cadaver bone. You OK with that, the dentist asked? Teeny figured they'd be clean bones, from some good clean person who lived her life right, avoided toxins like crystal methamphetamines and in the name of philanthropy willed her bones to dentistry. Figured it must be a woman cadaver. Men don't give up bones or much of anything else, in her experience.

Teeny stares out the window over the cash register as Merle roars off, the tail pipe on his souped-up Ford Torino spewing a rope of exhaust, out the driveway to the merge in the roads. Jesus! she whispers. Of course he wouldn't worry about fracking waste, Merle whirls about in his own cloud of mess, Pigpen turned AARP. Above on the electric wires a muddle of blackbirds twitter and shuffle, natter at each other, rise then fall on the ground like ashes, then up again in a cloud-like swoop. She's been seeing this a lot lately, flocks of birds amassing. Not like they're planning evil, more like unease—they know something we don't and it's making them jittery. Take those suicide birds, four last month, two the month before, hurling themselves into her daddy's doors. Well at least they won't be expressing their bird-angst there any more, seeing as there's no more glass to speak of. Todd hammered plywood over the gap after yanking out the jagged edges, grumbling and cursing when the plywood didn't fit right and he had to do it again with a bigger piece. Damn it Teeny! he snarled. Like I don't have enough crap to fix around the trailer park so I've got to come to your daddy's for more.

From out of nowhere it seems a man appears in the Quickstop entranceway, no car, where did he come from? All hunched into his hoodie like the day is cold or he's bracing for wind or some sort of weather assault, never mind that it's summer the air sultry as a laundromat. She can't see his face until he opens the door, jingle of chimes and a swoosh of baked air, then

closing it carefully, even though it would shut automatically behind him. Then he doesn't seem to know what to do with himself, peering about, dazed, like he's surprised to find himself here.

Help you? she asks, in the casual voice she's perfected, letting customers know she's the one in charge, but not so eager they'd think she takes any of it seriously, or them for that matter. It's a paycheck, *ironical* her dad might've called it. She could've been more, the tone of her voice tells them, but she's here so let's get the show on the road.

Just looking, he mumbles, eyeing the shelves a little askance.

She sighs. Hon, this aint Macy's. I assume you don't need gas since you didn't bring a car, so we got milk, beer, coke, two kinds of bread, wheat or white, your usual assortment of artery-clogging snacks, aspirin for your headache and tobacco. I could put on the coffee pot if you want, but it's hot as a mother out there. That about does it for window-shopping. You a smoker?

He shakes his head.

OK, one option off the table. She steps out from behind the counter and peers at him closer, the dark eyes and eyebrows under a shortened forehead and hairline, decent enough jaw line. He has an odd smell, like disuse. She reaches out as if to touch him, then withdraws her hand as he steps back, alarmed. She shakes her head. Sorry, but you look familiar. Weren't you that guy used to live in our trailer park for a while? In fact, didn't you work with my husband Todd at the Giant?

He looks a little panicky at her identifying him, she thinks, what an odd duck—almost says this out loud, then he points randomly at the shelves. Women's products? he asks, stuttering a little on the s.

Teeny grins. Oh, I get it, you've got a girl.

No! he says, almost shouting.

She wrinkles her eyebrows. Sure, you use tampons for nosebleeds or something? Ha ha, she snorts. Just messing with you. We keep them behind the counter with the condoms. Kids get into these things, not enough for them to do around these parts apparently. Here, she says, slipping back behind the counter then handing him a box, which he takes from her gingerly like it's hot, glances at it and passes it back to her.

They're assorted sizes, all we got. That do?

He looks at her perplexed, like she's asked him to work out an equation. OK, he says.

What a piece of work, she thinks, ringing up his purchase, placing it in a small bag. He just stands there awkwardly like the proverbial square peg, not even his hand moves to pick up the bag.

She sighs again. You want anything else?

Do you have birdseed?

Birdseed! This isn't a pet shop, kiddo. Funny you should ask though. Have you noticed anything strange about the birds of late?

He looks suddenly alert, the dazed expression replaced by almost a keen interest. A crafty look, she thinks. There's a new one, he says.

She frowns. Well they're better be more than *one* new because I'm telling you... Then she stops as a couple blasts in, the girl grabbing a cold six-pack then slamming the refrigerator door, and the guy yanking a twenty out of his wallet for gas, clearly in a hurry. She figured he'd snatch his bag and slip out the door while she rang the couple up, then a beefy, red-faced man immediately after, but he just stands in the place they'd been conversing, like she'd pressed a pause button on him, not moving an inch, making the other customers maneuver around him.

Isn't your name Jones something or something Jones? she asks, after everyone has left.

He looks alarmed again and she laughs. You're a sly one, huh? Like to roam the world incognito? I could nail you in the old trailer park ledgers, you know, no going off the grid these days, we're all computerized. Walk down any street and some security camera's tagged you. They'll catch up with you sooner or later so if you're a drug lord or a serial killer time to start working the exit. If I was *interested* enough, that is, to look you up. She winks to let him know she's not. I'm Teeny. She likes to do that, introduce herself then stick up her biceps, show them her guns.

He glances at her nametag and she shakes her head. A decoy, makes people think I'm who I'm not. Where'd you move to?

Jones frowns, shuffling his feet. Teeny rolls her eyes. Wow, I'm not going to visit you or something. Just making conversation. When folks leave the trailer park it's usually for better digs, though honestly it isn't such a bad place—we do with what we got. So I was saying about the birds before, they've been flying into my daddy's glass doors in unusual numbers, like they're doing it on purpose, you know? He doesn't stay there anymore. He's in the Crawford Convalescent Home, up the street. Got ALS, a prisoner in his own body. The doctors say it's a miracle he's lived this long—he's 71.

Is he good? Jones asks.

Teeny pauses, considering the question. She stares at Jones, who lowers his eyes, but seems sincere enough. He's my dad and mom all rolled into one. The place is a little depressing, though. Some think the folks living there aren't people anymore, wards of the state since they can't afford private care, three meals if they still can eat and someone to visit them is the best it gets. Fricken Todd is always busy building his robot wife, so it's just me. It's damn depressing to tell you the truth, Heaven's waiting room, people whose bodies have turned on them, trapped in their own skin cells. Still, when my dad looks at me like he wants out I tell him none of that now, you hear? Then I let him taste what he'd be missing, chew up a chocolate chip cookie, his favorite, put a little in his mouth, or even steak when we have leftover from our barbeque. He can't swallow anymore though so I have to take it all

back out again.

You think... Jones hesitates, he might be ready to be free of it?

She shrugs. Well I'm not ready. I'm a *life* science kind of person. Would've gone to college and studied biology, but then my dad got sick and we didn't have health insurance, so guess where my education fund went. I'd have studied the animals other folks don't like, garter snakes for instance. You see them in the summer and they're lone wolves slithering about their business, but when it's cold they hibernate and come spring they emerge in a giant snake mating ball, a hundred of them sometimes, a snake orgy! Isn't that crazy?

His cheeks flame and he starts to stutter some response then quits before the sentence gets going. Teeny laughs. Did I offend your sensibilities? Sorry, I know I talk too much, like those machine parts Todd monkeys around with—once he gets them started they just keep on running. Guess I've got a battery-operated mouth sometimes. Anyway, I didn't resent it, not going to college. I could still read. My favorite book was *The Great Gatsby*, that surprise you? Sometimes I feel like the girlfriend, the one Karen Black played in the movie. She was my favorite. She lived over a gas station kind of like this one, a blip off the highway between industry and waste, but she was on a mission to get out of there. I imagine her sometimes when I'm working here, waiting for my rich lover to swoop me away for a weekend in the city. We'd have a nice apartment and he'd buy me a puppy. Oh screw the puppy, this is fantasy after all, I'll take the diamond necklace! What I'm saying is I wasn't supposed to be the gal behind the Quickmart counter. Before my dad was my daddy he was a sales rep for a textbook company, traveled all over the northeast, bookstores, companies, colleges, wherever people needed to learn about hotel management and business administration, that was his gig. Kind of clipped his wings when I was born and my mom checked out.

Jones lifts the bag with the tampons delicately off the counter using two fingers and his thumb, like he's afraid he'll injure its contents. What if I want to buy someone a treat...? he whispers, so softly it's like a breeze drifted in.

Teeny grins. You could try ice cream. Everyone loves ice cream.

I got to go, he says.

She nods. Yeah, didn't mean to bleed out my life story on you. You're almost like a friend removed, given that we used to live in the same place and you worked with my husband.

Jones pushes open the door, then turns around and stares at her. Maybe... he starts, gazing outside at the sky for a moment, then turns back again peering at her intently with those dark eyes, eyes the color of nothing and everything, she thinks, no color and every color all soaked into one. Maybe your dad flies in his dreams. Ever think of that? Like a bird, since he can't move any more in real life.

She snorts, Sure, so long as he doesn't slam into some sliding glass



door!

Jones shakes his head slowly, almost like he has to figure out which side to go next, left or right. I don't think they do it on purpose. They're looking to what's beyond. Why would they do it on purpose, they've got the whole sky.

What, like the sky's the limit? she smirks.

But he just stares. No. No limit. That's what I mean.

That evening at the Crawford Home, a dull red sunset inching its way through the Captain's window over her dad's bed, the thickness of the glass cutting and reshaping the light like a fingerpaint smear, Teeny listens to the whoosh from her dad's oxygen mask, the gentle in and out hiss of ventilators from beds around his, clicks, clacks and clankings from all manner of machinery meant to keep people going, and thinks maybe Todd's not so out in left field making that robot. Maybe when Teeny dies it will be like she never even left, just plug her in, a squirt of W-D40 in the joints and she's good to go. The robot-wife wouldn't do things like snort crystal meth or blow out sliding doors with Todd's AR-15. She'd do whatever Todd programmed her to do. Yet again, as if she's been having the same conversation over and over with herself (which she has), Teeny confesses the crystal meth was dumb, the dumbest she's done in a very long time. For someone born smart, who could've been someone else, Teeny sure had been dumb. And now she's got the bad teeth and a tremor in her hand to remind her. But she'd blast out that door again if it saves even one bird. She recalls the feel of the last little corpse she picked up off her father's deck, a goldfinch, its glassy eyes, the softness of its feathers so yellow and final. She felt her betrayal, like she was to blame in some weird law of the universe where *big* trashes small; her dad might've called it evolution but she thought it sucked. Besides, damnit, she kept the birdfeeders full, couldn't that have been enough? Teeny buried it in the shoebox with the others, a mass grave sponsored by NIKE, under the planter on her daddy's deck.

Crawford Home smells like burnt meat tonight, along with the usual repertoire of bleach, urine, decaying bodily functions. The building is wooden and old, clinging to its bouquet of odors like a history. Teeny is the only visitor. She wrinkles her nose, then pushes her face closer to her father's, breathing his own acrid scent, the smell, she knows, of his organs slowly shutting off. The hospice worker pointed out his skin was breaking down, crops of bed sores blossoming into full on abscesses despite Teeny's faithful efforts, schlepping him in and out of the bath, dragging along his oxygen apparatus like a reluctant Siamese twin, and with most of his muscles frozen now, his lungs alternating between bad days with the bipap mask that blows air down his airways, and worse days when they threaten to hook him up to a ventilator, he couldn't have too much longer. No tracheotomy! he wrote on his advance directive, when he could still write. He had long since lost the

ability to speak, and yet with her ears this close Teeny could swear she heard him whisper something to her. She sits up and stares at him, his eyes beady as a reptile's hooked into hers.

Nope Daddy, she says, shaking her head, grabbing his hand and squeezing it, uh uh, we're not going down that path again. You can't talk with that mask over your mouth even if you *could* speak, so who we trying to kid, huh? Now she thinks she really is nuts, or maybe it's some sort of meth flashback, because she hears his words like he used to sound, that baritone voice with the chuckle just around the bend from everything he said to her. It's *ironical*, Teeny, his chin dimple flashing.

His one finger that still has some alive neurons firing to his brain, a miniscule amount of muscle control and maybe he's writing it into the palm of her hand, shaping the letters big and loopy like back when he taught her cursive, *LET GO*.... or maybe he's not, just those jerky, messy movements, the last hurrahs of a muscle. Teeny gazes out the small window, glass thick as a fist, like she really could see the shadows of trees, the dying rays of the sun through them. She thinks about Jones, what an odd duck! His unflagging optimism that despite a world where he doesn't seem to even own a car to drive to the Quickstop, where something in his spirit gets paralyzed holding a box of tampons, still the almost beatific look on his face when he told her there was no limit.

Last month as she was getting ready to leave after kissing her father goodbye, Donna, the night nurse, approached her. She's a youngish woman, a CNA with a face like a doughnut, dull and sweet, someone who would get by in the world doing for others, Teeny had pegged her, rather than on looks or brains. Donna had been kind to Teeny's dad, so Teeny tried to interpret her jumble of barely coherent words, and finally she had grabbed Teeny's arm, leading her to a bed where an old woman lay wheezing in and out of harsh, painful breaths.

Can you do something for her? Donna whispered. She's got a DNR on file but no matter how much morphine I give her I'm telling you she's hurting bad. Nobody comes to see her. She's got nobody.

What am I supposed to do? Teeny said, but she knew what Donna was getting at. It wasn't the first time she'd been asked, just the first time she didn't immediately say no. It was her strength, she figured, her muscles that set her apart, something repugnant (a daddy-word) yet needed for their tales, maybe, when they spoke of it later—angel of mercy they'd call her. She hunkered down on the bed, took hold of one of the old woman's hands, the skin cold and blue, scratchy like something imitating skin, a fiber for a belt maybe or gloves, and whispered, What do you want? Of course the woman didn't answer but Teeny gathered her in her arms, figured anyone who doesn't have family to visit might be glad for the contact, the human warmth, her struggling breaths pushed up against Teeny's ripped chest and she hugged

that dying old woman like a sonofabitch.

Now Teeny reaches into her purse, pulls out the fifth of whiskey, Jack Daniels, her father's favorite. His eyes get brighter, or she imagines they do anyway as she shows it to him. Just a taste, huh Daddy? A nightcap. She eases him down flat, removes the pillow from behind his head then lifts the mask off his mouth and nose. She knows it's only a matter of minutes without that oxygen forced inside before his lungs seize up. Hopefully enough time to determine her role, dutiful daughter? Angel of Mercy? At least not a meth-head, she thinks, but why is it she never gets to choose her own path? Then again her dad didn't get to choose in the end; his illness did it for him. I'm not the disease, Teeny, he used to tell her when he could still speak, I'm not ALS, I *have* ALS. She takes a q-tip off the nightstand, dips it into the whiskey and places it on her father's tongue. Then she pours a capful and dribbles that inside his mouth, holding his chin so it doesn't run out, so it slides down his throat, its fiery taste bringing his world back to him for the moment.

At Sunshine Acres after racing the mile back, the night alive with crickets and mosquitoes and all manner of things buzzing about her ears and nose, Teeny's rhythmic wheezing on a mindless continuum like some damn watch, she sees the lights blazing in the garage, Todd and his robot-wife. Screw that! she spits, rummaging in her purse for her car keys.

The Hideaway is two towns over in Pennsylvania, but the drive through the dark, hilly countryside is cleansing and Teeny takes it fast, plugging her iPod into the radio's speakers, the Stones wailing *give me shelter* and she's right along with Mick for that particular tune. Crossing the state line she sees the gas wells, tongues of blue and orange flames licking toward the sky, their neon glow flooding the darkness like some radioactive wasteland. How long will New York hold out? It's all about the profit margins, her dad would have said, when he could still say anything at all.

The usual assortment of pickups in the driveway, several Cabot Oil & Gas tankers and the fancier rentals for their workers up from Texas, plus a line of Harleys—old bikers' bar, as in only old bikers can afford motorcycles these days. Begley the bartender is a young prick though, who recently fired Andrea on the spot when she came to work high, not even a second chance. Wasn't halfway gone, Andrea said, just a couple Xanies to take the edge off quitting the meth. As if it took brains or even full consciousness to do what she did, tray perched on one arm trolling for orders, schlepping beers, picking up the empties.

Andrea is slumped over a barstool when Teeny breezes in. Fill me up, and another for your former bar slave! Teeny barks to Begley, sliding onto a stool beside her. You should apply for *his* job, Teeny says, how challenging is that, draining beer from a tap!

Begley slaps two glasses down on the polished wood surface. Wouldn't you like to know, Quickstop-girl! he grins, exposing a glare of bleached teeth,

probably brighter than his brain, Teeny thinks. Oh wait, Begley says, but *is* she a girl with those biceps? Teeny the Tranny? Muscles on top, but what's between the legs anyone's guess.

You'll never get to know, that's for sure, *Bage!* Andrea snaps her gum, blows a bubble then removes it from her mouth, sticking it on the bar in front of him. Awwwe what a shame, nobody to order for cleanup anymore, huh? To think I did that jerk-off once, Andrea whispers, as Begley swaggers to the other end of the bar, ignoring the gum. He's like a gift box, all wrapped up in pretty paper, Jack diddlysquat inside when you cut the ribbon.

Teeny nods. A coldness is inching through her veins, like someone dumped out an ice tray into a major artery and chunks are sluggishly drifting along, bits of ice not quite cold enough to freeze things, but maybe she wants that, for everything to just stop. *Then* maybe, she could think about the Crawford Home and what it will feel like when she doesn't go there anymore. She grabs her napkin, peels off the gum, tossing it behind the bar.

I hate my life, Andrea says.

Teeny shrugs, You got an alternative? Today I told this guy about snake mating balls, only I left out a critical detail. Up to one hundred snakes in those things, but here's the deal, 99 of them are male! Can you picture those odds, one female and the rest all trying to do her?

Probably it takes that many to have a shot, as in she's real picky, Andrea snorts. She sighs, chugs the last of her beer then smacks the glass down; *I* should've been more picky, that's for damn sure. The bar is all background noise, Motley Crue howling from ancient speakers, thwack of pool balls and a rumble of voices, mostly male punctuated here and there by the shriek of a woman's laughter. An odor of spilled beer and sweat permeates whenever the air conditioner blower cuts out. Andrea rubs her eyes. I'm losing it all, Teeny. Found out today. Bruce gets the house, kids, I don't even have a fuckin' job to *rent* a place to come home to. It's all about the drugs, just that *he* was never caught. What else I got, huh? I ask you, what else the hell I got!

Teeny stares at her, her dank blond hair twisted into a greasy bun, no makeup, her drenched, tired looking eyes, too old for the forty-odd years she's been using them. Then at Begley in his linen designer shirt, swiping a rag over the bar pretending to look busy, chatting up some well-fed biker encased in a body stocking's worth of leather, a belly hung so low it needs a sling, and two Cabot manager-types with their expensive company haircuts and their slow, Texas drawls. Like talking through a mouth full of jellybeans, she thinks. Her own face in the bar mirror stares back, solemn, not beautiful, but that glint behind her pale eyes—the thinking look her daddy called it—a face that by today's stats for women might be the dead-middle of its mortality curve (Teeny saw this in one of her dad's magazines, *Business Week* or *Fortune*, the hours spent reading to him, "Life Table" it's called), but she had a hunch



those figures were more about Cabot wives and female execs, their Teflon lives, not a Quickstop cashier whose husband is building her mechanical replacement out of Budweiser cans in the garage. She sees her hairline inch back and her chin slacken, boobs droop then soon enough the discs in her spine slide together like dominoes. Do they calculate *this*, a body shrinking from its own fricken facade? A vision of her dad's body stunted by disease, but still that spark in his eyes; he went out with the lights on.

You ever want to fly, Andrea?

What, like in a plane?

Teeny shakes her head. Nope, not a plane. She slips off her barstool then crouches down beside Andrea's stool. Climb onto my shoulders, kiddo.

Huh? You crazy?

Just do it, I can support your weight; I can bear anyone's damn weight. The room grows quiet as Teeny rises with Andrea perched upright on her shoulders like a human totem pole. Hey! Begley calls out, what the hell you two think you're doing?

Andrea giggles as Teeny swoops around the bar, knocking over chairs, slamming into tables, pushing aside anyone that gets in her way. Watch out, Bagel, bird-woman coming in for landing! Teeny shouts. You were wondering about my muscles, little prick? Check this out! Mugs crash off shelves in splinters of glass as Teeny hurdles the bar, Andrea grabbing and whacking at everything in her reach. The room erupts into a roar of commotion, but mostly laughter at the diversion they've created, Teeny figures, lives so boring a strongwoman with another one anchored to her shoulders has got to be a welcome sight.

You're *sure* you won't reconsider hiring me back? Andrea shrieks. Still want me to suck dick?

I'm calling the police! Begley snarls. You two chicks are cooked.

Teeny hesitates, knowing what she said to Jones earlier was true—this whole scene is being captured on security cameras and it'll be played over and over, just like she warned him. Maybe it'll even hit the news and Donna from the Crawford Home will call her the Angel of Mercy, and she won't mean it *ironically*. Then Jones sees it and maybe that encourages him to get his own shit together, whatever it is making him so jumpy and secretive. Though why she'd even think about that odd man while she's busy chalking up jail time for herself she couldn't say. Funny how some folks do that, just get under your skin somehow.

Duck your head! Teeny orders Andrea, riding atop her shoulders yelling *whoohoo*, *giddap*, and she flings open the Hideaway door, inhaling a huge breath of air because she can, because though the gas wells shimmer in the distance, right now this air is good. The darkness is alive with pulsing stars, as if even the sky is breathing; like there really *is* no limit, that space between breath and none.



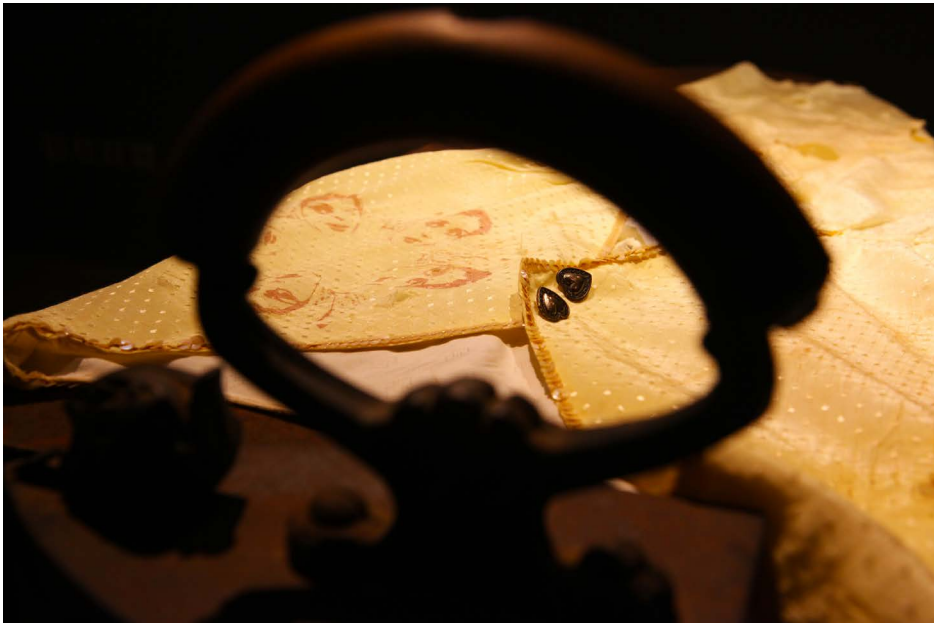
**Life Strand (Interactive installation)**

Gray hair: 27", wooden embroidery hoop: 30", cello bow: 4/4, 48"

2014

N e g a r B e h b a h a n i





### Years of Numbness (Interactive installation)

Rusted metal: 120" x 40" x 85"

Iron: 22.5" x 10" x 10"

Sheet iron: 60" x 35"

Printed clothes

Original voice track composed and arranged by the artist  
2011

N e g a r B e h b a h a n i

### The Shanty Preacher's Fiancee

I need something bigger than river—all it takes away. No sorry or account.  
Father, Father, open your hands to me.

My daddy swore on dignity, some place a circle of men couldn't lose.  
He farmed, said, *Land don't disappear*. But he was wrong about that, too.  
The worse whipping I ever got was when we went waterskiing over cotton fields,  
five feet under. *How you think Mr. Buck feel, you good-timing over his ruination?*

He made a fist around the switch I picked out, rain flicking the wall.  
How do you pretend not to hear helpless, a man undone by water  
or a white flower? A river's change in channel destroys or makes a family.  
I need someone more provident than river—all He gives. No unanswering or blight.

We met at the floating store on the fish dock. I was fetching razors  
for my father. Preacherman was laughing the loudest I ever heard,  
saying, *Some tourist's rowboat broke loose. I even got me a hat and coat!*  
The good Lord does not give more than we can take.

I had been taught to look by the banks for a hollow log. Maybe I'd find  
it full of fish. That was nothing to a man of miracles. Now I watch him  
behind the packing crate pulpit. Working up the Word, we clap faster  
and faster till he can leap with the spirit, almost tump the boat over.

Fervor is close to fever. I bide my time till I am his proper,  
when I can eat more than No. He asks, *Father, Father, won't you show us  
your grace today? We are in your hands*. There is always a reason now.  
Not a river rushing to gulf, claiming every season and child, covering  
crop, draining into debt. Cruel is no one to owe, no family.  
The Mississippi's only purpose is to empty out.

When the atheist lit up her six acres and barn, scouring, yelling she needed more  
and more to reach high enough to burn God, it was the church people come out  
to calm the fire. I was right when I told her their child was born blind  
because she could not see it was river drowned her husband.

H e a t h e r D o b b i n s

## Good Shanty Wife

They say never can a land girl make a true river wife. I prove them wrong. Mine ain't no doghouse man, setting us up on pieces of tin, rusted on a flatboat. Our furniture is lashed to wall, ropes plenty secure, the stove bound with a wire never heard of weak. I've learned a shantyman is all hands—working a lumberyard for scraps, the hardwood store for a strip of tarpaper, a run-down house for a windowpane, but mostly weaving willows that never run out on riverside. I said *I do* to busy and look out for. I could not have asked for a better man, but still I want for home.

I have tried. My four-o-clocks and morning glories growing up a lattice, sheltering our rear fishing porch, beehives so he will not lack for sweets come winter. What is ours is found, not abiding a machine's promise of wealth. We have the river's treasure, its freedoms. No mortgage. Fuel is brush from shoreline, and harvest is three rows of a cornfield and potato patch reserved for our kind. Hours and hours till we moor the craft between the cypresses, a forgotten cove. When I painted the shanty, he didn't say it was pointless, tore up the next season from wind, rain, and sun.

My mama ate up with sick, its appetite for gaunt, her splintering box. She can't keep no weight. Her bowels just turn sorghum round and round like a donkey. Won't stay on her. I cannot go to her, put spoon to her lips, for I said *I do* to river and patience. We hugged goodbye at port. I said I'd take care of her, that peace is someone not too scared to hold you as you leave. She spat at my feet. *Once left, you gone to your husband. Don't you shit on what I taught you.*

Like a good wife, I heed him when he tells me to grab the California orange boxes instead of the Florida ones because they make for better chairs. I hold them to my chest, river clammy on my arms after, like the sweat that chills Mama. The hard frame like her bones, the goodness used up and thrown out.

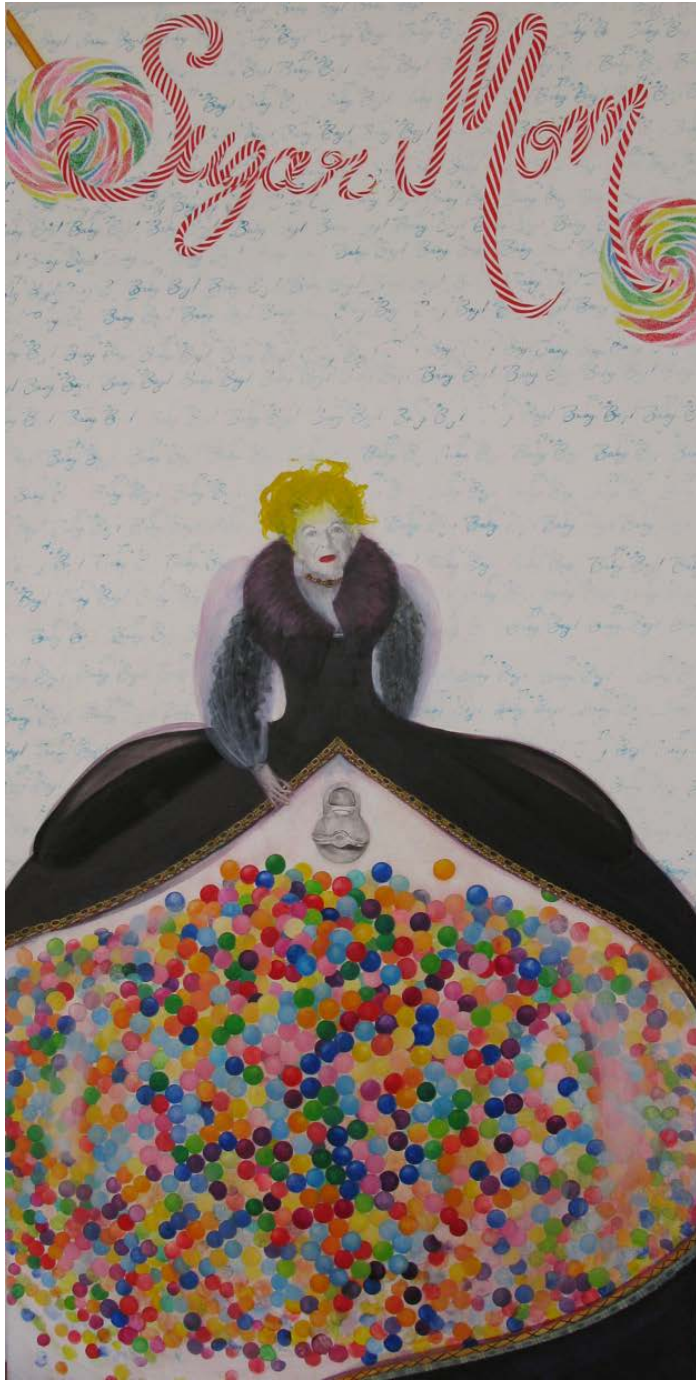
Heather Dobbins



## Fruit of the Loom

Fruit of the Loom  
Flashe paint, acrylic, and transfer on wood panel  
12" x 9"  
2010

Sandra Mack-Valencia



### Sugar Mom

Sugar Mom  
60" x 30"  
2013

Flashe paint, acrylic, crayola, and transfer on wood panel

Sandra Mack-Valencia

## THE WEEK ELVIS DIED

JoeAnn Hart

For every man who climbs a mountain, there's a woman who sleeps with a man her mother would not approve of.

After two years with Joe, the man I was living with in Stamford, Connecticut from 1975 to 1977, I chose the mountains and split for the Rockies. If Joe and I had something to teach one another, I felt I had learned just about enough. Which turned out not to be true. But at the time, I wanted distance between us, miles and miles of faceless American terrain. Geography would be my shield against him, in the same way the color of his skin had made for a powerful shield between me and my family and pretty much the rest of the world. No surprise there. Hate and isolation was just part of the territory that came from being with a black man in the 70's. It was the air we white girls breathed.

The decade of our coming of age -- our teens and early twenties -- not the one of our birth, makes for a generation, so that puts me in the 70's. I wanted to be a member of the 60's, but I was just a kid then, gazing up the road. The kingdom of Peace & Freedom was always one step ahead of me, and like other mythical lands, the closer I got, the more it seemed to fade away. I watched my older cousins live the dream. We, the younger ones, hid at the bottom of the basement stairwell at Aunt Ginny's and listened to my cousin Michael's teenage band play a few improvised licks of Woolly Bully, with the feedback louder than the words. The air smelled of pot, tobacco, and incense. We closed our eyes and imagined the future, not realizing that ours lay nearer to that of the girlfriends on the sofa, whose participation in this rock-and-roll idyll was to roll the joints, get the beers, and fuck the boys.

Even though Aunt Ginny had just the one child, who died at the tail end of the 70's in a motorcycle accident, the house was always full. It was where the town's 60's generation hung out, many of them loudly professing to divest themselves of a privileged life in order to pursue a truer path. It never sunk into my tie-dyed brain that they might only be playing at being rebels, or that there was something particularly privileged about the renunciation of privilege. Most of them only got as far as Aunt Ginny's couch.

Soon after I entered high school in 1970, where I thought my life was about to begin and I could start renouncing my own privilege, Janis Joplin died of a heroin overdose, and we held a vigil. A few weeks later there was another one for Jimi Hendrix. Throughout the year there were more vigils, as students died or became crippled from overdoses and drunk driving accidents, until at last, one more candle for Jim Morrison, who slipped silently under the suds in a Paris hotel bathtub. The bloom had come off



the flower child, and it was no longer possible to think I could grow up to be a hippie. The revolutionaries, such as they had been, were gone or worse, co-opted by the system. From then on, it was the 70's, and the world turned just a darker shade of pale.

That first year of high school was not all vigils. It was also culture shock. I had gone to St. Brendan's in the Bronx and then St. Thomas Aquinas in Pleasantville, New York, neither of which prepared me for public high school. I almost sank under the weight of algebra because I had never seen the likes of it before. And except for dodge ball, I had never even experienced school sports. Yet in the first few weeks of high school, someone talked me into girls track. The problem was, there was no girls track. In those pre-Title IX days in 1970, those of us who wanted to run were allowed -- after we had submitted a petition to the school board -- to practice with the boys. We were also permitted, if there was room on the bus, to go along with them to meets. Once at the meets, we would, or would not, encounter other girls to race against who found room on their boys' bus. The sports bra had not even been invented yet. A blushing Coach Geddes told us to wear tight bras to keep from -- he made some vague gesture with his hands, but could not say the word "bouncing." I gave up after one season, left prepared for a lifetime of feminism.

Academically, I got back on my feet by sophomore year (at graduation I got the back-handed complement of "Most Improved"). I was even the editor of the school paper for a while before the principal took it away from me for publishing a photo of students on the high school lawn smoking pot. One of those students was me, but it was staged. I never really took to altering my mind with anything other than books. In English class, I read Elizabeth Janeway's, *Man's World, Woman's Place*. It was not required reading, it was not even recommended, but somehow I got my hands on a copy and wrote a paper. My male English teacher trashed the paper and my praise, insisting that the book was all rhetoric and didn't really say anything. Janeway, one of the great critical minds of the time, was waved away as fluff. This was in the days before Women's Studies. The school did, however, offer an elective called Black Literature, where I read the canon from Frederick Douglass to Malcolm X. It was a big step for the schools, making up for past neglect, but with no people of color in the school, it was as if we were studying an ancient and vanished civilization with no context to our lives. The same with our youthful fascination with Native American garb, which bordered on fetishism. I wore headbands and beaded jewelry without ever thinking I was relegating someone else's culture -- a culture nearly obliterated by white hegemony -- to fashion.

Back to class. The Black Lit teacher, who was young, enthusiastic, and white, took us on a school trip to Harlem to visit the Schomburg Center

for Research on Black Culture. He also brought us to see the all-black musical *Purlie* on Broadway, which, by chance, I ended up seeing three times over its run, once with the Black Lit class, once with the theater class, and once with my parents, who are still kicking themselves. The show starred Cleavon Little of *Blazing Saddles* fame, who bore an uncanny likeness to Joe. Two good-looking black men with great smiles and winning ways. It also starred Sherman Helmsley, who went on to have his own TV show, *The Jeffersons*. After I was disowned when my parents found out I was engaged to Joe, my younger brother and sister were never allowed to watch the show again.

But that was later. In Black Lit, we read the books and agreed that we, the white race, were a bunch of bullies. When Malcolm X wrote about the white devil, that was us. We read *Soul on Ice*. It seems inconceivable that it was part of the syllabus, seeing as how Eldridge Cleaver had written about how he once condoned the raping of white women as a payback to slavery. But maybe it was. We were all in thrall to the culture, including the teacher, who might not have felt empowered to pass judgment on what a black man could and could not write about.

I wanted to help correct past errors, and was willing to help any disadvantaged group, so after school and Saturday mornings, I volunteered for the United Farm Workers grape boycott. Not that any immigrant workers lived in town, but I knew someone who organized for the boycott in the region. I stood in front of the local A&P handing out pamphlets asking shoppers to refuse to buy grapes. *La Huelga*. The UFW wanted not just money, but dignity, which meant toilets in the fields. Try explaining that to a suburban matron. Try keeping a straight face while doing it. Later, through the UFW, I held signs for George McGovern. At sixteen I understood what a union sweetheart deal meant and I considered a career in labor relations. I had a boyfriend, Jimmy, who had already graduated from high school and was piecing together proto-computers from Texas Instrument chips in his basement. I was always a sucker for smarts.

In my senior year I looked at colleges. Our school might have had a Black Lit course, but it had no guidance office to speak of. There was no attempt at figuring out what I might be good at and what might be a fit based on that. My social studies teacher suggested Bard, but my parents wouldn't even let me apply because of its liberal reputation. I got accepted to another teacher's suggestion, American University in Washington D.C. to major in Political Science. My parents put the kibosh on that as well. They had not moved us out of the Bronx for me to go to another dangerous city. That left Skidmore College in leafy upstate New York with a major in Art History. It had gone co-ed that year, clocking in at ten percent male, mostly dance majors.

To keep us from taking the train down the Hudson to New York City

on the weekends, the college tried to keep us entertained on campus. They showed the Jimmy Cliff cult classic "The Harder They Come," and we all fell hard for reggae. Dances were fueled with the sounds of my youth, Stevie Wonder, soul, and R&B. We knew who the Sex Pistols were, but did not know what to make of punk rock. We ridiculed disco. Disco was not "real," and yet, despite its orgasmic, dancing beat, the words were often fraught with despair and melancholy, and so we were pulled in none the less. There was a black bar in town called The Grill, and Thursdays were White Nights, when it seemed all the blacks split to leave us college girls to dance the Bump with white townies.

At Skidmore there was no organized grape boycott, but there were petitions. I signed one to free Joan Little, the young black woman in North Carolina who stabbed her white jailer/rapist to death with the ice pick he carried into her cell. When she was acquitted, it was the first time a court had agreed that a woman had the right to defend herself against sexual assault.

There were classes, but I don't remember them nearly as well as the social life. I could not focus. Nuns, priests or parents had always told me what I should feel and think, so college felt vaguely unsatisfying because it didn't assume to tell me what to do, it just displayed the menu. Being an art history major, that menu was filtered through a Renaissance painting, and I could not see what that had to do with my life. I do now, but I did not then. Instead of trying to figure it out, and tired of listening to my parents complain about how much college cost after my father was briefly without a job on Wall Street, I dropped out after a single year. I wanted answers to questions I didn't even know how to form, and I believed those answers were outside myself, somewhere. I wanted to step into an authentic life, although I had only a shadowy idea of what that might be.

Without much forethought, knowing only that I did not want to stay in my parent's house, I moved to Stamford, Connecticut in September with another Skidmore drop-out, Christie, who grew up in Greenwich, the next town over. It was 1975, International Women's Year and feminist milestones marked the calendar. Our post-Nixon president, Gerald Ford, had called for the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment (thank you, Betty), and the National Organization for Women had organized the first "Take Back the Night" to bring attention to sexual violence against women. Ella Grasso was the Governor of Connecticut, the first elected woman governor in America. Women were running for office all over the country, breaking barriers and assuming power in business as well as government. Feminism had expanded our notions of what was possible, and we wanted to see what those possibilities looked like in the real world. Why we thought that reality was to be found in Stamford, I cannot imagine.

In short time, I got a job as a cocktail waitress at the Blue Note Café,

a bar that catered to former high school jocks, bordering on redneck. This was before the drinking age rose to twenty-one, so it was perfectly legal for me, at eighteen, to serve alcohol. With unemployment over nine percent, I considered myself lucky to have a job at all. I had no car, or license for that matter, but I could walk to the Blue Note from the Maple Avenue condo rental Christie and I shared with three other people, a mixed bag of strangers found in the classifieds. The money at the Blue Note was not bad, even for a dive. Sometimes the tips were in drugs: a couple of Black Beauties, a joint, a hit of acid. I didn't do drugs myself, so I gave them to the bartender and he watched out for me, serving me before he served the crowd at the bar. My plan, if it could be called that, was to waitress at night to leave time for making art during the day. Skidmore had done that much, instilling in me a sense that women had as much right to create art as men. Thanks to my grandmother who had taught me to sew, and to my aunt who taught me how to crochet from a hot pants kit, I was clever with a needle and hook in a time when fiber sculptures were a rising art form. Female artists were incorporating traditional domestic skills, such as needlework, into mainstream art (think of Judy Chicago's Dinner Party), but it was a concept that soon lost traction. As did I. My shift at the Blue Note started work at four p.m. and often didn't get out until two a.m. I slept most of the day.

Joe was three years out of Columbia University when he walked into the Blue Note alone one night, a few weeks after I'd started work. Heads turned. He was the first black person I'd seen there, and for all I knew, the first anyone had. After a bad start when he tried to hustle me with deep eye-gazing, and I was having none of it, we got along. We talked about ourselves when I brought him beer, which was often. He had entered college on the heels of the 1968 student rebellion. Even though he now wore khakis and a white button-down, and his afro was clipped fairly short, he regaled me with tales of revolution, when he wore blacker than thou politics on dashiki sleeves. It was a heady time. He was proud of the fact that he didn't graduate with his class in 1972. He claimed he only had to make up a single course to get his diploma, but that it was worth nothing anyway, because street smarts were what mattered in this world. Yes, I nodded, yes. And then he told me about his guitar. Joe knew exactly what details of his life would appeal to me, as if he'd seen me sitting at the bottom of Aunt Ginny's stairs, hoping to get a toehold on the 60's.

What is more fun than a secret relationship? When I met Joe, I did not call home to tell my parents about this great guy I just met. I didn't call Jimmy who was four hours away at RPI, close to my recently abandoned Skidmore. I thought Joe and I would hang out for a while and the relationship would die a natural death, as these things do. What was the harm in a date, or two? But I fooled around and fell in love as Elvin Bishop used to say.

If I saw myself with Joe as a political act, I was not consciously aware of it. But now. Now if I were to perform an autopsy of my attraction to Joe, I'd find a mash-up of rebellion, repression and idealism under my skin. My eyes would be gazing at the smoldering embers of the 60's, the golden age. In my gut there would be a palpable sense of sitting solidly in history, with Joe and I lovingly integrated in the timeline of civil rights, as if being together in public without being shot at was the crowning glory of those times. At this imaginary autopsy, I look at my heart and on it I find the words Changing the World.

But beyond all that, I was simply charmed, a delightful sensation that I recognize now as a warning bell. It was a charm I was dangerously receptive to, the charm of a narcissist. Once narcissists, especially those with grandiosity mixed in, turn their attention on you, they pull you into the world they have created, and it is warm and intense. You feel so special, but it is a world built on their false reality. I had heard the theory that you are attracted to those with whom you can work out unresolved issues with one or both of your parents, but I never thought it had anything to do with me and my mother. I thought Joe was her complete and total opposite. Wouldn't you think? Black/white, male/female, college-educated/not. I prided myself on not judging people by appearances, then it turned out I still had to learn that lesson.

But just because I was in love with who he seemed to be and not who he was, only makes me one of the millions of people who fall in love everyday not knowing that that is the name of the game.

Joe was unemployed when we met, but in the mid-70's who wasn't? His resume, as impressive as his education was, was spottier than most. He had only briefly held a real job, and left in disgust. In his eyes, any work for a white boss -- whether in an office or flipping burgers -- meant being co-opted. There being few minority-owned businesses of any kind in those days, it also meant a severe narrowing of alternatives. This left politics as an option, a long shot in the best of circumstances, but a shot. Shirley Chisholm had stumped in Stamford during her run for president in 1971, and she personally inspired Joe to run for mayor by calling him up on the stage. He took her up on her challenge, but since he was a college student who wasn't even currently living in Stamford, he did not get the support of the local black democratic caucus, who backed the white democratic candidate who actually had a chance. To spite them, Joe left the race and threw his support to a white Republican. In his naiveté he thought he'd be appointed some plum, powerful post in the city government for his betrayal. He was given a job in the filing room. It lasted a few weeks. I didn't know about the Republican endorsement until years later, when it was far too late.

Not only did Joe not work, he didn't particularly care to have me

working either, certainly not at the Blue Note, where I was waiting on the white jocks he'd gone to school with. He called them the uneducated masses. Joe had been in a program at Stamford High where he was sent to a local prep school in the afternoons to get him ready for the Ivies, and that had made him a bit of a snob. He asked me to quit and find a better job, as if in that deep recession they were out there for the taking. Unlike Joe, who was crashing at a friend's apartment when he was not in my bed, I had rent to pay and said no.

So he executed an end run with a kiss. On my lips, in the bar, in front of everyone. Then he left. I didn't think anything of it. The mechanisms of racism were still a mystery to me but not to him. We hadn't been keeping our relationship a secret, although Joe rarely came by as he couldn't bear to see me serving the white riffraff.

While I was getting back to serving them, two guys started outside after him. Someone, I don't know who, tried to stop them, and then all drug and alcohol-fueled hell broke loose. A dozen men were suddenly fighting, men who certainly had no idea what or who they were fighting against or for, but in a crowded area, one bump or jostle quickly led to a fist. Joe was long gone. Make love not war was his motto, then run for cover. A chair flew through the air just like in a Western, and I was so amazed I just stood and watched. The bartender, who was not much older than I was, lifted me up and dropped me behind the bar until it was over, wondering at my inability to recognize approaching danger.

"You didn't even see that coming, did you?" he asked.

No. I didn't see the chair coming, and I didn't see that Joe was a manipulative troublemaker. The bartender kindly suggested that this was not the right place for me. He was not some awful bigot -- I don't even think he disapproved -- but he knew Joe was trouble. Which was more than I knew.

If real life was what I was after when I left college, then this, I assumed, was real life's fallout. Joe seemed to have something that could be borrowed in order to gain something -- say, soul -- that was lacking in my life. I walked out of the Blue Note door one step deeper into Joe's life and away from my own. Brilliant, handsome, and charming, he had already run for mayor of Stamford! I was dazzled. Never mind that he was actually homeless and had no job. Those were insignificant details at the time, easily overlooked. I was a master at over-looking details. I wasn't just color-blind, I was sight-less.

I, we, soon left the Maple Street condo. I'd hate to think it was because Joe was there so much, but tensions in the condo did seem to escalate when he showed up on the scene. Christie had no great fondness for Joe, not because of his color but because he was drifting and she was afraid I'd start drifting along with him. She was right. After she moved to Colorado, I didn't even have the money to pay the rent. With nowhere to go, and



no jobs, our lives became a chaotic blur. For the rest of the fall, starting when I turned nineteen in October, we slept on the floors and sofas of his friends. There were many sofas, many floors. Joe's friends, many of whom were racially mixed couples like ourselves, accepted homelessness to be a completely normal state, correctly assuming that I could not fall back on my family -- who was still not aware of Joe's existence -- for help. You are probably thinking, poor dear, of course her life is a mess, what with racism raining down upon the two love birds in those unenlightened times. There was certainly that -- the hostile stares, the muttered words, being ignored by waiters, or stopped by the police just for the hell of it -- but most of our troubles stemmed from having no jobs. I couldn't apply for one when I didn't even know where I'd wake up the next day. Joe liked to shake things up, as he always said. We slept on floors and sofas not just in Stamford, but in upstate New York and Boston, and on occasion at his mother's in Redding. Redding is north of Westport and looks modest, but is a wealthy community. Georgia lived next door to the proverbial Jones's, only these Jones's were of Dow Jones fame. She lived with Cal O'Keefe, a Cadillac salesman. He was older and white and had lured her away from a successful singing career so they could fight all the time.

Georgia. It was a cliché in those days to say that white girls were searching for the warmth and support that they did not get from their own mothers in the bosoms of black women. What was true and not a cliché was that a white girl couldn't have any interaction with a member of another race, male or female, without someone, somewhere, postulating why. I loved Georgia for herself.

Joe and I became engaged on Christmas Eve, and the next day Joe went behind my back and told my mother, hastening my independence along. I could no longer stop in Pleasantville to pick up clothes, or take a shower or even use the phone. The good news was that the first week of 1976 we had a real place to stay, taking over the room of a Vietnam vet Joe met at a bar. We would have had trouble renting directly from a landlord, black or white, since no one looked fondly on our color combo. With a real address, I was able to get a job as a lunch waitress at a nice restaurant. Once in a while Joe brokered a used card to pick up cash, so between us both we were able to make the modest rent. In this way, we lived a fairly stable life for a while, keeping our heads down and watching a lot of TV. Later in the year, Joe collected on insurance money from a car accident he'd been in from before we met, and we rented a house in Westport, where, in that liberal town, we were darlings rather than despised.

In this new accepting, social world, Joe began drinking heavily and staying out all night. Our poverty had been a binding force in the first year, but when he got his settlement money, he was intolerable. Heartbroken and

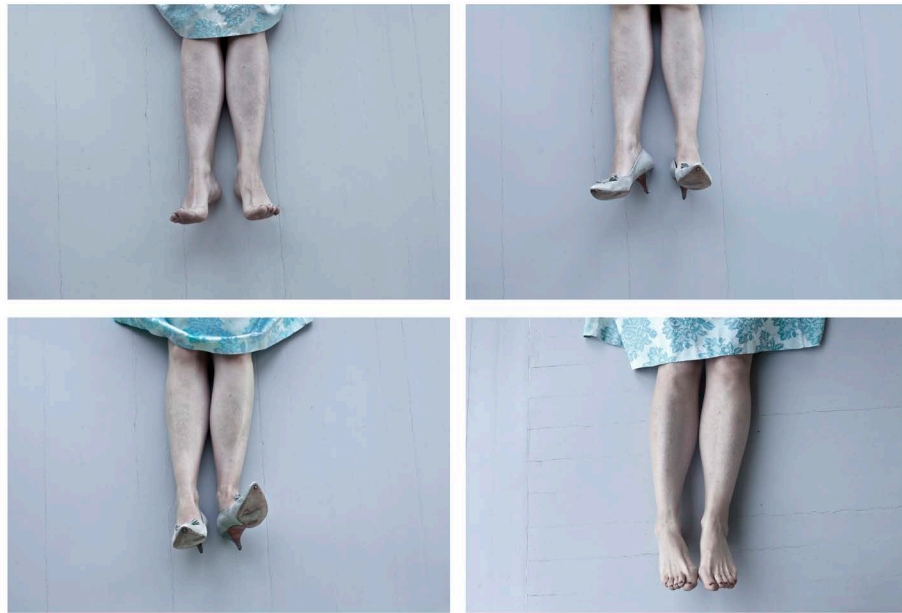
defeated, I soon realized I did not have to stay with him in the name of racial relations, but it would still be months until I finally got out. Figuring where to go was a problem, since I was not ever returning to Pleasantville with my parents. I could not have withstood the gloating. I did not want to have to argue my defense, that it had not worked out with Joe because he was black, but because he was a drunk. It was not easy to leave a man with so much potential for life. When Christie called and asked if I was ready to leave, I went to the Rockies, carrying away with me the pain of wasted possibilities. Joe was dead before he was fifty of cirrhosis of the liver, without ever having gotten a real job.

In ancient times, it was the liver, not the heart, that was thought to be the source of human emotion and spirit. Joe, with his over-sized spirit, could not seem to live with a reconciliation of paths in his life -- let's call one black, the other white -- and was constantly trying to blur the lines between them with drink. I left him in August 1976, the week Elvis died. It was also the week President Gerald Ford edged out Ronald Reagan to win the Republican Party presidential nomination. Reagan was put on hold, but he'd be back before the 70's were over, putting an end to them and any lingering visions of the 60's.

When Obama was elected in 2008, I called Georgia. "Who would have thought this would happen in our lifetimes?" I asked, amazed and pleased, although I was still carrying a flame for Hillary, still wondering why it couldn't have been a woman first. Wondering why it had come down to a black man and a white woman in the primary. Why did we have to choose between the two?

"I knew," said Georgia. "Joe knew. He said he was going to be president since he was in the 5th grade."

What happened to that kid who was going to be president? If Joe had been born a few years later, he might not have had the opportunity to piss away. In the tanked economy of the 70's, affirmative action was fueling the ugly head of hate, and quota became a dirty word. Columbia and Harvard might not have fought so hard over him. Scholarships might not have been dropped so easily in his lap. Joe had achieved what the civil rights movement had hoped for him, a golden education with all the connections and opportunities that go with it, but Joe wanted more. He wanted what the white kids had in the 60's, and it wasn't the privilege. What he wanted was the right to reject it. And so he did, renouncing privilege as loudly as any Pleasantville teenager once did at Aunt Ginny's. Like me, he didn't see that for them, it was all just a game.



## Eight Feet & Forty Toes

Eight Feet & Forty Toes  
Ink print  
20" x 24"  
2011

Danielle Mourning



#bestselfieever

Ink print, 30" x 40", 2011

Danielle Mourning

## Egg

---

Twin yolk trembling in the glass crater  
of my little mixing bowl, good luck

to some. Two marigold orbs, delicate  
as grief—to most, it is the happy herald

of pregnancy; elsewhere, a double ovum  
can be an omen of death. Looking down

at the pair—one couched in the other's  
soft flesh, membrane spread and narrowing—

I consider leaving them, setting the bowl  
in the cupboard until the twins sallow

and dry. Instead, I carry it to Jacob, trimming  
the overgrowth along our fence. He shrugs

and tells me it's no miracle—a young chicken  
learning to lay or an old girl in a hurry. Deflated,

I return to the kitchen and pierce the tender skin  
of the top yolk, watch it weep into its other.

A n n a S u t t o n

## Aliens

---

Laurie the cool babysitter offered me some coke  
at 12 years old when we went to see Spielberg's E.T.  
at the drive-in. I laid across the warm hood of her car  
and escaped into the big screen draping the night stars  
that splintered out from the backdrop like a windshield  
sucker punched. Like a broken family of constellations.  
When the spaceship left E.T. alone on earth he drank  
beer he found and got the poor boy he loved drunk.  
Sometimes childhood is an attachment to threatening  
life forms. A gravitation toward the ladies' room  
at intermission. A line of blow cut across a commode.  
The comet burn flaring up. I grew a tail and taller. I grew  
two heads. I flew too. My white hot spirit spinning out  
lost in space. Something better out there. I believed.

T a m m y R o b a c k e r



## COSMIC LATTE DREAM GIRL

Evelyn Benvie

I skipped work to go to the movies with you. It wasn't the movie I wanted to see, but you said you loved the book and the lead actor and I wanted to say I loved you. I couldn't, though, so I asked if you were free on Friday.

The theatre was almost empty when we got there. Two other couples sat in the seats below us. We both loved the seats up high in the back – we never fought about that. We could have been the third couple, all even sets, but we weren't dating anymore.

You leaned into my side and whispered plot points in my ear. I hadn't read the book yet. I bought it, though, so you would love me. I longed to run my fingers through your hair, so coarse like coffee grounds.

I wanted to tell you that I wrote you poetry. I tried to say I am a poet in search of a muse / and you / a dreamer in search of a dream. The consequences weighed heavy on my tongue, and I left poetry to the stars. Instead, I told you I liked the movie and you said the book was better.

Maybe next time I'll read the book first.



### Cunt, Pansy Edition

Cunt, Pansy Edition  
Pen on flower, Digital inkjet print  
12" x 18"  
2012

Gail Victoria Braddock Quagliata



### Douche Bag feat. Bee

Douche Bag feat. Bee  
 Pen on flower, Digital inkjet print  
 12" x 15"  
 2010

Gail Victoria Braddock Quagliata

## My Password

Fell out of your pocket, lost  
 between two grains of sand—  
 A phone number, a charm, a birth date.  
 Digits kept inside a code like the first  
 school locker of alone. Then later, it fell  
 into the seventh drawer on  
 the seventh floor, in a hotel  
 of man-whores—Lost with the earrings  
 and the snagged hose. It was unlocked  
 in a box someone left at a pot-luck  
 with a forest of bible-thumpers.  
 It was dumped on the out-skirts  
 of town, the old boyfriend, the kind  
 that left your bike in the rain—  
 Flitting like an eyelash, balancing act  
 on a pulpy tight-rope that is your flesh—  
 A transom, a guide, to the empty vault,  
 where an illusion is kept in  
 a thousand bits and bit and bits.  
 It took you for a ride, slapped you  
 back side the head—It stood In the middle  
 of a crowd and screamed  
 the digits so loud, your ancestors  
 shook out their rugs, burned  
 the paperwork—Not idle, it landed dead-pan  
 in the center of a dark room,  
 at the desk of a brown-suited  
 officer, licking his hairy fingers  
 of chop-suey, holding the greasy  
 key to your belonging.

Cynthia Atkins

## My Persona

---

I carried my persona  
 in a brown paper bag. It held  
 shreds of lint and one hair  
 that the comb forgot—My persona  
 has a pecking order. Its first name  
 rhymes with *self*—*Always* the last in line.  
 My persona is filled with  
 yearning. It shipped off on a garbage  
 of barge, and landed with a din in  
 the *Witness Protection Program*.  
 My persona hid under a shamrock  
 in DUMBO---My mural penned  
 by a black gloved hand. It lay chalk flat  
 on a red brick building,  
 mixed with saliva, turpentine,  
 and cheap wine. My persona is not  
*the marrying kind*. Stoked sleek  
 at the ready in leopard tights,  
 shaking up a winter snow toy  
 on a cold and stormy night.  
 My persona thrives on buyer's  
 remorse and loss. I bet *you* can't blush  
 and cry on command! My persona used to  
 skip the needle on a song when  
 no one was home. It unhooked my bra  
 in a photo booth in July, then sat numb,  
 pink nipple held on a teacup rim.  
 My persona was never a sound sleeper.  
 A dog barked in the distance  
 of my persona's longing. Naked

Cynthia Atkins

pet rock held my persona behind  
 the curtains where loneliness  
 dwells. My persona is filled with  
 bird song. It carries smiles in a jar,  
 gets so tired of my persona . Decides  
 to take matters into its own hands,  
 holding a pillow down firm over breathing,  
 until my persona goes very still.

Cynthia Atkins





### Anarcha

Grosgrain ribbon, metallic embroidery floss, velvet and  
vintage obstetrics textbook  
40" x 18"  
2014

Michelle Hartney

## UNDER CONTRACT

Natasha Tynes

Silly, silly thought, Kenda told herself as she was getting ready to leave her house in suburban Maryland. She was trying to brush off the idea of packing her bags and heading East. Her husband Issa was being as stubborn as always, and refused her request that morning to get a satellite subscription so that she can watch Egyptian soap operas, and maybe catch some news on Aljazeera or Alarabiya, or whatever Arabic news channel she could find.

"We don't need another bill, especially in this time," he said. Issa, who was always looking for ways to cut costs, worked as an accountant at an insurance company in Bethesda. He had always been good with money, and managed to buy a house before he met Kenda.

"I don't think it's *that* expensive. The Indians, next door have a satellite dish. It's planted right there in their front yard. I bet they watch Indian shows all the time. How come they can afford it and we can't? They don't have great jobs. One works at a hotel, and the other at a restaurant."

"Maybe they don't spend all their money on getting their parents expensive gifts."

"That's rude!"

Issa, who was born in Fairfax, Virginia, was more comfortable in English and he would rarely speak to Kenda in Arabic. Sometimes, he would throw Arabic words here and there like *habeebti* or *inshallah*, but he would rarely engage her in a conversation in the language she felt most comfortable with. "You'd never understand how much I miss hearing Arabic on TV."

"Kenda, *habeebti*, really, there's more to life than your silly Arabic shows."

Kenda locked the front door of her house. Only once, she kept reminding herself. Back home, locking your door just once was something only the fools would do for someone would definitely break in. *Americans can be so trusting sometimes*, she told herself. It was the time for her thirty-minute walk around the neighborhood. Kenda's walk was always at 5:00 PM, after she would finish preparing dinner, right before it would get dark, and right before the rapists would come out, as Issa used to say.

Kenda looked forward to her daily walk. It was her way of reminding herself that life was okay. She would observe the well-maintained brick houses and their manicured lawns and feel elated. Yes, she had made it. She was in America, a country she had been dreaming about since she was a little girl. Looking at her neighborhood made her feel like she was walking on the set of an American movie, where people mowed their lawns, walked their kids to school, talked with their neighbors over fences, and collected their dog poop with their own hands. The land that she had always dreamt about was her land, her daily existence.

Her daily walk was the highlight of her day. In fact, she arranged her schedule around it. She would wake up at 6:00 AM and rush to the kitchen to make Issa coffee and prepare his breakfast: cereal. That's what he liked. Kenda had tried to make something different for breakfast, like scrambled eggs, but Issa insisted on cereal.

"It's just quick," he would tell her.

"But it's like cat food," she would respond.

He also drank *American* coffee, which to Kenda was tasteless. Nothing beats the sweet potent taste of the Turkish coffee that her dad used to make every morning back home. Its smell was so strong and inviting early in the morning that she no longer needed an alarm clock to wake up. *Issa can be such the American sometimes.*

After handing Issa his bowl of cereal, and a glass of fresh orange juice (no pulp, per his request), she would start on his lunch: a turkey sandwich with fresh fruits cut in cubes and stacked neatly in a Tupperware, and freshly-brewed coffee in an Oxo travel mug.

When Issa would leave for work, Kenda would spend most of the morning on Skype chatting first with her mom back in Amman, Jordan and then with her friends. She would proceed to do the house chores, plan dinner, and then watch her favorite shows on cable TV – usually reruns on TBS.

Every day Kenda would change into her Adidas sweatpants and the Nike running shoes that Issa got her two months after she moved to the US, and would walk around her quiet Twinbrook neighborhood.

To Kenda, this walk was also a time for her to reassess her new life. She had a well-off husband who treated her decently, a beautiful home in a decent neighborhood and was on the path towards becoming an American citizen. She still needed a career and kids. She had been in the US for less than a year now. Both a full-time job and a child proved to be difficult tasks, but that was okay. She would keep trying, she would tell herself. Occasionally she would pick up translation gigs on Craigslist, and would only pursue them if they were home-based, as Issa was very suspicious of anything Craigslist. Her tasks would be mostly to translate media reports from Arabic to English for contractors for the Department of Defense. The pay was decent, but there were not enough jobs for non-US citizens like her. Soon, soon, she would tell herself.

Kenda had married Issa in Amman a year previous, in what could be best described as an arranged marriage. She hated to admit this, but there it was. Her friends were in disbelief when she told them that she had agreed to marry in that manner – the manner in which her parents and her grandparents married, the manner that she had rallied against until she hit thirty.

Forty-year old Issa Jarrar, who had lived all of his life in the US came to Jordan one summer to find himself a Jordanian bride that would understand him, following his failed marriage to a blue-eyed, blonde American. A few days after he landed in Amman, he was introduced to Kenda through an

underground, home-based matchmaking agency run by Kenda's cousin.

At first, Kenda fussed and yelled. "No way! I'll never marry in this way. I'm not that desperate," she told her mom when she first brought up the topic. Issa didn't give up. He kept trying to convince her to meet him. He called her four times at her parents' house until she agreed to go out with him for lunch at Romero's, an Italian restaurant in Amman known for its affluent clientele. Lunch was followed by dinner the next day, then drinks the following. Issa never showed up empty-handed. There were always gifts. First it was flowers, then perfume, then a necklace, then an Omega watch. Issa was always the perfect gentleman. He would open doors for Kenda, pull out dining chairs for her, and let her walk in front of him. They dated for twenty days until Issa convinced her that it was time to ask her father for her hand. She accepted.

"You of all people! What about all of your speeches about love and working on a relationship and all of that," said her friend Fairuz when she told her the news. "I'm shocked!"

"How long do you think I have to wait before Mr. Right comes along? Issa is a nice guy. He's successful, serious and a perfect gentleman. I even think he's cute."

"Cute! Since when do you like short men with mustaches and pot bellies?" asked Fairuz.

"Ah come on, you can be so superficial sometimes."

"Superficial? Give me a break! Are you losing it after thirty?"

"You know what? You're just jealous!"

*I'll get pregnant soon,* Kenda thought as she passed Mrs. Frye's house on the corner. *It will take more time because of my age. Women have a 30% less chance of conceiving after 30.*

Sex was a nightly occurrence (except for menstruation days because Issa found it unhygienic). Every night, Kenda and Issa would have dinner and watch TV, and then go upstairs to their bedroom at 11:00 PM. Issa was always the initiator, and the sex was always predictable. His first act would be placing a towel on the bed between them, then he would start tweaking her nipples, and then he would take off her nightgown and climb on top of her. Issa always smelled of fresh laundry. It turned her on. It was the scent of home. During their lovemaking, there was no kissing or words exchanged and his eyes would be closed the entire time. It usually took 20 minutes and always ended with Issa picking up the towel and tossing it into the laundry basket placed at the far corner of the bedroom. On their wedding night Issa brought a towel and put it on the bed right before he initiated their love-making, which was a first for Kenda who had been raised to believe that premarital sex could rip families apart. Issa did the same thing the next day. Before he climbed in bed, he went to the bathroom in the hotel room where they were spending their honeymoon and got a fresh towel. "No wet spots on the sheets," he said. His sheets were a holy shrine that should never be stained.

After a few weeks, and right after she moved to the US with him, Kenda took charge of this mission and started putting a fresh towel on Issa's bedside table before bedtime (except for five days of the month). Every once in a while, she would ask Issa to take her to Bed Bath and Beyond (She never got around to getting a US driver's license because she was scared of the big highways) to get a new collection of towels, or as she and Issa jokingly dubbed them "the love towels". Sometimes she would get towels with embroidered red hearts, other times she got olive green ones simply because they reminded her of the paint color in her sister's room, and other times she would get all-red towels.

Kenda enjoyed their intimate act most of the time, unless of course when she would get really sore, which she would keep to herself. No need to ruin the mood. She liked the feeling of constantly being wanted. When she would feel pain she would think about her friend Rana who always complained about her husband refusing her in bed. "He hasn't touched me in three months. I even tried to initiate it, but he would still say no," Rana once told her.

*My friends can fuss all they want about my traditional marriage and about me leaving my career behind. At least I have a solid sex life unlike the rest of them. Half of them are not even married and the other half live in sexless marriages.*

Kenda had climaxed a few times since they got married, maybe four or five times. It wasn't really intentional on Issa's part. It just happened. The infrequent orgasms didn't bother her much. One time she hinted at changing their usual position, but Issa got offended and started asking her all sorts of embarrassing questions about her past sexual encounters. "I just read about it," she told him. "In a novel." She lied.

Kenda never took her walks without some music. Her iPhone had a mix of favorites like Maroon Five and Jad Choueiri – a mélange of East and West, just like how she thought of her life. Issa objected once to her listening to music during her walks. "You need to be alert, music can be distracting, and you never know who's watching you or following you."

"You can be paranoid sometimes, Issa. Our neighborhood is very safe. No one bothers me," she said.

"You think the suburbs don't have their share of freaks?" asked Issa. "You're mistaken. You're too pretty for this neighborhood. Look at this gorgeous long black hair. It's a novelty around here," he said taking a long strand of her hair and twirling it between his thumb and index finger.

Kenda sometimes thought that Issa would probably lock her inside had she been a little bit meeker.

As the thirty-minute mark was about to arrive, Kenda started heading home. When she was about to reach her house at the far end of the cul-de-sac on Bradley Road she noticed a new sign stuck on a pole on the front porch of the green ranch house next door. The sign said "Under Contract." *Is this new?*

She remembered a previous sign that had said something about the house being for sale, and there was also another sign that said "Open House," but "Under Contract" was something she'd never seen since moving to the US.

While she and Issa were having dinner that night, she asked him about the sign.

"It means that someone had put an offer on the house and it was accepted," said Issa. "By the way, you're using too much salt. Remember what my doctor said about my high blood pressure."

"Does this mean the house is sold?"

"Well, in most cases, yes."

"Nice. So we're going to have new neighbors. You know, sometimes, I dream of having a neighborhood like Wisteria Lane in *Desperate Housewives*, where everyone hangs out with their neighbors, and throw dinner parties all the time."

"Before I forget, my mom is coming tomorrow to visit," said Issa.

"Really, why?"

"Why? She's my mother. She doesn't have to have a reason to visit. Is there a problem?"

"Not at all. I was just wondering."

"Just make sure to change the sheets in the guest room."

During sex that night, Kenda kept thinking about the new neighbors next door and the prospects they might bring. She dreamt of a young Arab family who had just moved to the area and were looking for company. She saw herself in the kitchen of an Arab woman exchanging recipes and sharing bedroom secrets. She imagined herself sitting in the neighbor's living room watching TV, and sipping coffee with cardamom.

The next morning, after Issa went to work, Kenda had one main task: clean the house in preparation for Um Issa's visit. She took a breather by calling her mom on Skype and telling her about the new neighbors and her mother-in-law's visit. Kenda's mom advised her to make *Bamya* instead of *Mujaddara* for her mother-in-law. "Forget about *Mujaddara*, you need to serve something with meat. You know the rules. Don't be cheap," Kenda then joked about how exhausted she was because she constantly had to accommodate Issa's needs in the bedroom.

"Don't ever turn your husband down. You know how Arab men are when they first get married. They always want to prove their manhood to their wives. He'll get tired pretty soon."

Her mom reminded her that her husband is the most important thing in her life. "Don't make him upset. He is *Taj Rasek*," said Kenda's mom referring to Issa as the crown on Kenda's head.

When Kenda's mother-in-law, Um Issa, arrived from Allentown, Pennsylvania, she gave Kenda two kisses on the cheek. "You gained weight," she told Kenda.

"Well, you know, it's the good life," she smiled.



Kenda made sure to give the overweight 65-year old woman the royal treatment. She took her to the guest room and allowed her to relax while she finished making *Bamya*. Although Kenda loved *Bamya*, she dreaded making it. It was always hard to find chopped lamb in Safeway so she often had to substitute it with veal. It was also hard to find fresh baby okra, so she had to use frozen okra instead, which diluted the taste.

After her nap, Um Isa watched TV with Kenda, and then they both took a walk around the neighborhood. Kenda told her mother-in-law about the house next door and showed her the “Under Contract” sign. She told her about her dream of having an Arab family next door.

“I hope your dream comes true *ya Kenda*, and you get the neighbors you want,” said Um Issa. “It’s hard to predict especially when it comes to *el Amerkan*. You know my sister Amal who lives in Asheville? The neighbors next door to her are two men living together. If it was me, I’d leave the neighborhood. I’m shocked how this is legal when all religions say it’s *haram*.”

As they passed house number 1511, the only house in the subdivision with a white-picket fence, Kenda’s mother-in-law, pulled a card from the purse that she had insisted on bringing along for the walk.

“Here you go Here is the name of the doctor that my niece Siham went to,” said Um Issa.

“What doctor?”

“You know, Siham couldn’t have kids for three years until she went to this doctor and he healed her. She got pregnant just two months after she visited him.”

“Ah, I see. It’s still too soon to get tested for this. We haven’t been trying for more than a year.”

“Well, I expected you to be pregnant right after the honeymoon. You know, because of your age, you can’t wait any longer.”

Kenda began to walk faster. She didn’t want the Asian-American family in house number 1513 to hear their conversation. The middle-aged couple with their young daughter were unloading groceries from the trunk of their car.

“Well, if I don’t get pregnant in a few months, Issa should be tested first,” said Kenda, who was trying to get to her house as fast as she could.

“Issa! What are you saying?”

“Well, you know, it’s easier to test the man first.”

“Issa isn’t the problem! All of his brother have kids. All of his cousins. The Jarrar family is packed with kids. Our men always produce,” said Um Issa while shaking her head.

“I know. Just to be extra sure. It’s easier to test the husband. You know with women, we have to go through all of these procedures that can be painful and costly.”

“Kenda, why don’t you focus on fixing yourself and leave my son out of this?”

When they got home, Issa was waiting for them. He had left work early to be with his mother. The evening was going well. The three of them talked about Issa’s job and shared some family gossip. Um Issa told them about Issa’s cousin, Inas, and how she came home to her parents’ house a week before wearing a diamond ring. “Just like that she was engaged to an *Amerkani* without even asking for her father’s permission,” said Um Issa. Kenda couldn’t fathom why Issa would speak with his mom in Arabic and not with her. Yes, his Arabic was accented and a bit outdated, but passable. Why would he exert this effort with his mom and not with her? Why was she the one that had to talk in English with him all day long to make him feel comfortable?

While Kenda was putting the dishes away, Issa and his mom were in the TV room talking about something that seemed important. She wasn’t sure if they were actually whispering, or if the TV was too loud.

When it was time for bed, Kenda was quick to notice that Issa was furious. It was always easy for her to detect his anger. He had a bulging vein on his forehead that became more visible whenever he got intense.

“How dare you suggest that the reason we’re not having kids is me?”

“What! I didn’t say that! All I said was that both the husband and the wife need to be tested, and it’s easier to test the husband first.”

“You know how traditional my mom is. You never talk about these issues with her,” said Issa.

“Don’t yell at me like this,” said Kenda.

“I’m not yelling.”

“I was just trying to bond with her.”

“You don’t bond with her over this. You bond with her over cooking, or waxing your legs or whatever you women talk about. You don’t suggest that her oldest son might be shooting blanks. Why do I have to teach you this? You should know this. That’s why I married you, because I thought I didn’t have to teach you how to talk with my mother.”

“You’re making a big deal out of this. I never suggested you were infertile.”

“I don’t want to talk about this anymore,” said Issa who looked at the towel on his bedside table, then rolled onto his side and closed his eyes.

“Don’t talk to me like this! No one has ever talked to me like this before.”

“Whatever, Kenda. You insulted me and my mother.”

“That’s just not fair!”

“Good night.”

Kenda couldn’t sleep that night and tried to calm herself by thinking about happy thoughts. She thought about her girlfriends in Amman, and how she missed smoking and drinking tea on Fairuz’s porch every night after work. She thought about her old job and, how excited she used to get whenever her boss would ask her to take a business trip in his place. She thought of her paycheck and the joy that it brought her every month. She had been happy.

The next day, Kenda spent most of the day watching TV with Um Issa. Very few words were exchanged. When Issa came from work, he drove Um Issa to her cousin's house in Silver Spring who had offered to give her a ride back to Allentown.

When it was time for bed that night, there was no towel to be found by the bedside table. Kenda wanted an apology, and thought the best way to get it was by showing her anger.

Issa climbed in bed and rolled onto his side. "You happy now? She cut her visit short because of what you did."

"Issa, you know I never meant to upset her!"

"Let's not discuss this now. I'm tired," he said as he turned off his bedside lamp.

That night Kenda contemplated leaving him. *What the hell am I doing with this guy?* She thought and planned and planned. She would go back to Amman and live with her parents. She would get her job back and hang out with her old friends. But shortly afterwards, she brushed off that thought. She found herself having to choose between two hells: the hell of being a divorcee in Amman living under the mercy of a society that would be hostile to her kinds, or the hell of being unhappily married in the US. The later seemed less painful.

Days passed slowly in the quiet neighborhood of Twinbrook. Kenda continued to take her daily walks and observe the unoccupied house next door. She kept hoping for a sign of the new neighbors, but there was none. There were no cars parked in the driveway, and there was no one to be seen inside or outside. The "Under Contract" sign remained.

Kenda avoided Issa during the day, and he avoided her during the night. She continued to apply for jobs, but nothing was working for her. Two standard rejection E-mails were all that she got. Every once in a while, she would think about her friend Rana and her sexless marriage. She thought of contacting her to see if they could exchange notes but changed her mind at the last minute.

Meanwhile, Kenda continued to monitor the "Under Contract" sign from afar, hoping for an update in status. The update came one Monday evening when Kenda realized that the sign was no longer there. *They should be here any moment.* Kenda couldn't sleep that night. She kept thinking about the new neighbors. She saw herself gardening in the backyard with an Arab woman, who was helping her plant mint, sage, and chamomile – the three ingredients that her dad would prescribe for her whenever she had indigestion. They always worked like magic, unlike that disgusting Maalox liquid that Issa kept wanting her to drink. *She might even show me some landscaping techniques, Kenda thought.*

When Kenda moved to the US, she found herself having to learn a whole new set of vocabulary that she'd never had to deal with when living

in her parents' apartment on the third floor. Having a backyard meant there was raking, mowing, tilling, potting, weeding, and fertilizing. All were foreign words. All were new skills to master. The more Issa became distant, the more she obsessed about the future neighbors. *They could as well be Arabs.* She remembered that she saw a couple that looked like they could be Lebanese on the day of the Open House? The woman had long black hair and the man had a potbelly and was smoking by the side of his black Mercedes. *Isn't this the telltale sign? Black hair and cigarettes? Didn't they have an evil eye necklace dangling from the front view mirror in their car? But they could be Turkish?*

And on that thought, Kenda embarked on a new mission: Preparing an Arab Survival Kit to give to the neighbors as soon as they moved in. That evening, Kenda dragged Issa to the Iranian store on Rockville Pike to buy essential items needed to complete the kit. She needed some pita bread, and *Tahini*. She supplemented the rest of the package by adding some spices that were stored in her pantry and were courtesy of her mom. She added sage, thyme, chamomile, mint, and sumac. She added some ground Turkish coffee beans that her dad brought her a few months when he came to visit with her mom. She also added some dry *Mloukhieyh* leaves, black olives and a bottle of Arak. She thought of adding *Jameed* but then changed her mind. *Only Jordanians would be excited about Jameed.* She packed everything neatly in a wicker basket, and wrapped it with a white ribbon. *They'll love it, even if they were not Arabs.*

Kenda never gave the basket to the neighbors. Instead, the next day she saw a "For Sale" sign replace "Under Contract."

At dinner that night she asked Issa about it. "It means the contract fell through," he said while adding plain yogurt to the rice and lentil dish that Kenda made for him earlier that day.

"What do you mean 'fell through'?"

"It means that the sale didn't go through. Something happened at the closing table; either the seller or the buyer changed their minds. It happens, especially these days."

"I can't believe it," Kenda said.

"Believe it! Who knows when that house will sell again! It might take a year. No one is buying houses these days. I was surprised it was put on the market in the first place."

Kenda got up and started gathering the dishes. She walked to the kitchen and turned on the sink. She rinsed the dishes and stacked them neatly in the dishwasher – cups on the upper shelf, plates on the lower shelf, just like how Issa taught her. She thought about the past month and what had become of her. She went to the bathroom upstairs and pulled out a new towel. This time she picked one that was all white – no dots, no hearts, no flowers, just a plain all-white one – and placed it on the bedside table. She went downstairs and sat next to Issa who was watching a talk show on CNN. She touched his hand. He squeezed hers back. That night, they made love.

## Q+A with Kate Gilmore conducted by Heather Zises

Kate Gilmore's work explores themes of displacement, struggle, and female identity. She shapes an aggregate of performance, video, sculpture and photography with self-imposed restrictions and challenging objectives that recall the absurdity of Dadaism, the hyperbole of political cartoons, and the rigidity of political correctness. As the sole protagonist in her performative videos, Gilmore not only animates the essences and suppositions of ego and ID, but also positions them in a duel for personal integrity. The artist lives and works in New York City where she is an Associate Professor of Art and Design at SUNY Purchase and MFA Faculty member at School of Visual Arts.

**HZ:** How did your relationship with art begin?

**KG:** I started making art when I was in college. I wasn't one of those artists, born with a pencil in their hand, making art from the beginning of their existences. I took some ceramic classes in school and fell in love with making. I then moved into wood, plaster, and found objects—very similar to the materials I use today. After this initial exposure, it became clear that art was what I wanted to do, and was the best way to express myself. And that was that!

**HZ:** Many of your works investigate autobiography and the “every woman”, with a twist of dark humor. What drives you to examine this realm?

**KG:** I am interested in having all different types of people enter my work. Whether someone is coming from a strong art historical background or stumbling upon it without any art information, I hope that what I do has the ability to communicate a message. In having this desire, it is important for me to make work that is somewhat universal and not entirely autobiographical, or reflective of solely the artist making the work. The focus on the “every woman” was a way for me to make it bigger than my experience, and myself, and speaks to a larger community of people. Furthermore my use of humor (as well as color), is a way of getting people invested in what is happening, making them feel comfortable, and then, hopefully, allowing information to seep through.

Continued on page 104



**Love 'em and Leave 'em**

Love 'em and Leave 'em  
Wood, acrylic paint, and ceramic pots  
10' x 28' x 8'  
2013

Kate Gilmore





## Through the Claw

Through the Claw  
C-print  
Edition of 10  
30" x 40"  
2011

Kate Gilmore



## Through the Claw

Through the Claw  
C-print  
Edition of 10  
30" x 40"  
2011

Kate Gilmore

## The Woman in the Fairy Tale Sews Her Mouth Shut

---

### I.

She misses her voice and its insect ring. The tower's emptiness tolls  
waves of quiet, to the point where even her thoughts are mute,

and a series of pictures, not sounds, move through her head.  
The world moves around her. Every tossed tree limb,

every detached cobweb, whatever the wind shifts, speaks,  
and it says to her: you were once this light, this moveable.

When she wakes from restless dreams and the stitches strain  
between her lips, she feels more fully the reach of her silence.

She cannot even click or tsk her tongue in shame.  
She has never felt so clumsy, so burdened and ungainly –

when she spoke with the black cricket's creak and whistle,  
she knew someone, somewhere, understood her,

no matter if he was very small, and very slight, and likely to be crushed  
between animal jaws or flattened under a human foot.

Even in her tower room, lying unencumbered on her bed, she sympathizes:  
she feels it looming in the air above her, the force of that sudden, obliterating weight.

### II.

The regret she feels turns to rage, and with it the tenor of her dreams  
changes, too: now she is a giant wave, an accumulation, a wet mouth

screaming toward the shore. She wants to devour it all,  
beaches, trees, and grassy dunes. They disappear

beneath her massive overbite: Small towns, long roads,  
the suburbs of cities and then the cities themselves.

She feeds the river and lake beds like a mother bird  
who has chewed and digested food for her young,

and then they rise up, too, to devour the land and its inhabitants.  
And then she is no longer water but a whale within it,

the detritus from felled and sea-scrubbed civilizations collecting  
in her spiny teeth. She eats and eats: less to be full, more to destroy.

When she wakes, her jaw aches in the place where her molars ground together,  
and her hunger is nothing but a nightmare: in daylight, less frightening, and gone.

## A Woman, Tempted

---

*But still they had to pass through dangerous and bewitched waters.  
-- D'Aulaires Book of Greek Myths*

I.

I lash myself to the mast. The siren sings  
and I would hear his light and sinewy notes.

The knot is meant to restrain. I need the knot  
because it keeps me safe. The air may shift  
between the coils wrapped around me, but  
the hitch is complex. It tightens when I move.

My faithless hands deny this undertaking.  
They chafe the rope, and the knot frays, but holds.

II.

We pass the island where dead women lie  
open-mouthed, as if struck mid-aria.

Around them stretch the bodies of their children,  
small, stiff arms and legs arranged at their sides  
as if they were planks of wood to walk across.

By them we know the measure and the cost  
of the siren's exquisite song. The husbands' entrails  
loop the shore like seaweed in red foam.

III.

O my husband, you are both seducer  
and faithful spouse, the one who urges me  
to danger, and then waits for me at home.

Sarah Gutowski

You know the risk and yet you chant and praise  
until I think I cannot fail this course  
I steer toward. The siren's melody  
is just as brash and full of adulation.  
You and he are brothers in this art.

IV.

I cannot trust that I will pass this test.  
I hear his song and parts of me respond.

He sings of lands I lived in long ago.  
He sings a language I thought I had forgotten.  
He reminds me of past glories, like stars  
I used to follow when skies were dark and clear.

That voice would ravish me; like splintered teeth  
each note and word delivered by that note  
tear wounds that will not close. They are that deep.

I want to lay my body down and bleed  
among the calcified remains – no thought  
for what and who and why it all will end.

V.

But then the seas change and I drift away,  
far from the operatic voice that churned  
the smaller sea within me. The drama ends.  
The ropes go slack and I can move about.

Most days, I float unfettered in the ocean,  
buoyed by silken waves that lap my skin  
because there is no ship or boat or voice.

You float there, too – our bodies side by side,  
like driftwood loosed on changeable water.

Sarah Gutowski





### Lust/Caution 1

Lust/Caution 1  
Papercut with magazine collage  
28" x 48"  
2008

Xin Song



### Life=Sex, Series 1

Life=Sex, Series 1  
Papercut with magazine collage  
24" x 24"  
2008

Xin Song

## To Know About The Fire

---

Truth is, she's a late in life oopsy-baby,  
proud of what her body can do, toes  
pointed to Jesus. She wants more than  
she gives, careful to keep her secrets  
to herself.

To know about the fire, the mock  
distinctions—everything saved will  
be lost.

That pugnacious presence, her belief  
you haven't lived until you've showered  
at a Husky Gas Station.

Everyone's heard rumours of her travels,  
the coloured strobing of a coastal sunset,  
yellow warblers dickering in the verdant  
mane of a tree.

She knows nothing of these vocalizations,  
instead wears out the crotch of her jeans,  
province by province.

&

later in the dark of the bus  
grieves the poetry of ancient  
place names, huddles in their  
sacrifice.

A final calving at her center.

Ashley-Elizabeth Best

## Projections: Maison du Général Baron Robert

---

The church bell next door keeps six hundred years of time.  
I paint a vase beside a clock, both flat as a dancer's chest, flat  
as my chosen tone of voice,  
a triumph over perspective.

Over cubist jive, passé as the conceit of him  
and me. Let him be a genius, bull  
in his striped shirt, the prison of his ego.

I have my desolated saints, collection of canvases,  
my portraits. Watch prices at the auction houses climb—  
how well his reputation ages.

My sweet blood compelled him when we met.  
Now it brings on insects in the infinitely tapering evening,  
worshippers  
that make their marks on my pale  
arms as he made his.

Kathleen Winter

## want

---

the want lays like a dying dog/across my lap/waiting  
heavy to be spanked/resigned to it so/it doesn't even  
breathe/hopeless helpless want/dangled dead/across  
my lap/my arms too worn/from holding up my life/to  
cradle it warm

R.K. Riley



## Magic Chromacity

---

University of Alabama in Birmingham, Sponsored by the Art and Art History Department and The Alys Stephens Center, Displayed on the Abroms Ingel Institute of Visual Art, Birmingham, AL. Photograph by Walt Stricklin. 2014

A m a n d a B r o w d e r



## A Roundtable of Women's Magazine Editors: Alana Levinson of STEVIE ZINE, Alisha Sommer of BLACKBERRY: a magazine, and Gabi Barkho of Femsplain by Joanna Demkiewicz

In which we discuss feminism, print vs. online, breaking away from aspirational journalism, and the state of women in the media.

In 2013, Kaylen Ralph and I launched a magazine to combat institutional bias within the magazine industry – an issue we noticed as students at The University of Missouri Journalism School, and an issue we felt was archaic and unproductive. Why were there so few women's bylines in mainstream publications that we loved, such as *The Atlantic* and *The New Yorker*? Why was there not a single women nominated for a national magazine award in 2012? Why were women's magazines not regarded with similar esteem to men's magazines, or mainstream publications, which are glaringly male-dominated? I pose these questions in the past tense, but of course these questions are still relevant today.

They are, indeed, perhaps even more relevant, as we see so many women in the industry take action. Three years ago, writer Alisha Sommer launched a print and online magazine – BLACKBERRY – in order to “expose readers to the diversity of the black woman's experience.” Last year, journalist Alana Levinson launched STEVIE ZINE, an online culture magazine by and for women. Why? “Down with the aspirational brand,” reads the magazine's mission statement. “We think women want to read journalism that illuminates their unique struggles, instead of adding to them.” Femsplain also launched in 2014 by former creative strategist at Tumblr Amber Gordon. Gordon brought journalist Gabriela (Gabi) Barkho on board to be Femsplain's founding editor, and together they curate and manage what they consider a movement: “We're a diverse collective of doers who have made it our mission to change the dialogue of what it's like to be a woman,” they write in Femsplain's mission statement. “In doing so, [we're] mak[ing] our world a better place.”



### Magic Chromacity, Sewing Day

University of Alabama in Birmingham, Sponsored by the Art and Art History Department and The Alys Stephens Center, Displayed on the Abrams Ingel Institute of Visual Art, Birmingham, AL. Photograph by Jared Ragland.

2014

Amanda Browder

Conducted by Joanna Demkiewicz

I brought these women together (albeit virtually) in order to discuss the catalyst behind each magazine's beginning, how online democracy has led to this beautiful surge in new women's magazines, and why diversity in storytelling is important for everyone.

**Joanna Demkiewicz:** Each of your magazines were essentially inspired by the lack of diversity in publishing – more specifically, the lack of women's storytelling and the fact that many women's magazines today focus on aspirational branding rather than actual women's experiences, which are varied and complex. Sometimes when I think about how long women's magazines have been synonymous with aspirational branding and simplifying women's stories (read: Gloria Steinem's 1972 quote: "Most women's magazines simply try to mold women into bigger and better consumers"), I wonder why it has taken so long for serious conversations about women's representation in media to come to fruition in actual projects, like STEVIE ZINE, BLACKBERRY, and Femsplain. Is there something in the air? Why do you think the conversation has hit real momentum in the last three years, respectively?

**Alana Levinson:** You are absolutely right that there's been more visibility around women in media throughout the last couple of years. The VIDA Count started getting recognition, and we saw the launch of multiple publications that focused on women writers, including *The Riveter* and STEVIE ZINE. Most importantly, these developments led women who work in media to feel more comfortable advocating for themselves and other female colleagues. But this didn't happen in a vacuum. Our culture at large has become more "accepting" of the concept of feminism (i.e. Beyoncé and the fact that every female celebrity is asked if she identifies as one in interviews).

**Alisha Sommer:** I think something has always been in the air and as digital media has expanded—as well as the ability to access digital media—it has become easier and easier to provide platforms for marginalized voices. It also seems to me that there is a segment of this newer generation of consumers and creators that are also activists. Art has always been a conversation about culture and we're seeing a lot of change in convention and standards for all people, and the Internet makes it easier for us to come together for a common goal. Women have always led the way in reformation and change, even when we haven't been given the credit. And we're continuing to fight for change and creating opportunities for women where they previously have not existed.

Conducted by Joanna Demkiewicz

**Gabi Barkho:** I can't say I have a concrete answer regarding the actual reason this issue has had such a huge surge in the past few years, however, personally I always chalk it up to social media. As silly as it sounds, myself and many young women have sort of stumbled upon this "online fem-powered" media movement, and it's no coincidence that pop culture is shifting toward it. On the other hand, for the past five years or so, many of my friends and I have been long complaining about the fact that women's publications are mostly geared toward fashion or beauty, and while those are fun and important to cover, it's my opinion that women have grown tired of being spoken down to. There's more to life than anti-wrinkle serum and the latest Céline collection.. At least for me. And evidently many other women feel the same way, considering the trend signaling the decline of women's magazine sales and the rise of girl-power education that young women are receiving via the Internet.

**JD:** There are also statistics (thanks to the amazing work at VIDA) to back up the claims that women are not fully represented in magazines and print media. In the organization's 2014 Count, they also included statistics about women of color. The fact that VIDA has grown to include research about other –isms (not just sexism) in the industry is obviously necessary. What do you think we should be on the lookout for next?

**AS:** I don't think the VIDA count has yet to include statistics about class. I think what we also need to seriously consider is how socio-economic status also impacts women in the industry with regard to ability and accessibility. I'll leave the debate about privilege out of this particular conversation, but I think it's definitely one that needs to be talked about in greater detail.

**AL:** The problem of white men dominating the media landscape affects every single minority group, not just women. I think we should all be working toward supporting writers of color and trans writers. I honestly wish that I had made this more of a focus in past issues of STEVIE ZINE. Recently, Durga Chew-Bose, Jazmine Hughes, Vijith Assar and Buster Bylander created this amazing database of WOC (writers of color) so editors can never say, "I can't find any" again. It's a great resource, and hopefully we'll see mainstream organizations take diversity more seriously.

**GB:** As far as what to look out for "next," I don't think we can necessarily move on from the current so-called trends (intersectionality, diversity in media, etc.). To me, we still have a lot of work to do regarding these issues, and we should keep building on them before tossing them to the side in favor of "issues of the month."

Conducted by Joanna Demkiewicz

**JD:** Speaking of writers of color – Alisha, talk to me about black women’s representation in the literary community, specifically. What literary journals offer diversity in their content, and what journals need to do a better job?

**AS:** This question makes me sigh because it’s still a pretty sad state of affairs. Last year, Last year, Writer’s Relief compiled a list of literary magazines that feature writers of color (“Literary Journals Featuring Writers of Color”). This is probably one of the best comprehensive lists I’ve seen in a while (read the comments, too) but only two or three are focused solely on women. When I started BLACKBERRY three years ago, what I found was that even when magazines seemed to focus on featuring writers of color, seldom did writing by black women seem to be represented. When the magazines were devoted to work by women, seldom were there women of color.. And forget scanning the contents of the standards. If you’re not Zadie Smith, Toni Morrison, or Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, you can forget it.

Thankfully there are many new and small lit mags that are really devoted to work by diverse voices. But what I think every magazine could do better, BLACKBERRY included, is soliciting work from those voices. It’s kind of a lame excuse to be like, “Well, black women aren’t submitting to us, so that’s why we don’t publish them.” There needs to be more encouragement from the literary community to underrepresented writers saying, “Hey! We want to read you. And even if you get rejected, please keep working and keep submitting because your work deserves to be read.”

**JD:** All of you work with a staff of all women. Alana – in an interview with Badass Lady Creatives, you say your contributors are your inspiration, and you describe your relationship with them as editorial as well as emotional. What do you think makes working so intimately with other women a unique, creative and valuable experience?

**AL:** In launching STEVIE ZINE, in addition to trying to mitigate the byline gap, I also wanted to build relationships with and between women writers. The gap itself has created a need for community and support. I still talk to my writers about advice, read drafts, pitches, and generally discuss issues we face in the industry. This isn’t something I ever really had until I sought it out. We are socialized to think other women are our competition, but the reality is, one woman doing great work only helps us all.

**AS:** Right. The general media wants us to believe that women are incapable

Conducted by Joanna Demkiewicz

of working together; we are bitchy, backstabbing, and insecure. Over the years I have collaborated with only women on several projects and what I experienced was overwhelming support. When you get down to it, women want to see each other succeed because in the end we all benefit from one another’s success. I also think that for BLACKBERRY and its very specific mission in sharing the stories of black women, it was necessary to have a group of women who truly understood its importance in order to be successful.

**GB:** Our “full-time” paid staff is actually just myself and Amber Gordon (both cis women) but we actually do have female-identified individuals along with male volunteer staffers who help run Femsplain. These include talented people such as our web-ops volunteer Stefan Pause and our visual editor Robyn Kanner.

To me, working with women is such a privilege when it comes to media, and I find it really brings out a different storytelling side of me after years of being trained in a fairly male-dominated industry.

**JD:** In your own words, why are women’s stories and storytelling by women important?

**AL:** On first thought, it seems that it’s only about equality for women writers, but it’s also about giving female sources a voice. Look at the *New York Times* for example, which has the fewest female bylines of any major paper. I don’t think it’s a coincidence that men were quoted three times more than women in page one stories (or that more women were quoted when there was a female byline).

Similarly, some story ideas are informed by gender, like my piece on frexting, for example (“Girl, Send Me A Frext,” Medium). I wonder if Sarah Maslin Nir, the incredible investigative journalist behind the exposé on nail salons, would have had the idea to investigate this story, let alone access to do so, if she was a man? I’m not saying that there are stories only women are interested in, but rather, that a writer’s gender – as well as their race or class – gives them a particular lens on the world.

**AS:** Storytelling has always been a way of supporting community. Through stories we gain compassion and insight. We find inspiration to live with more courage and wholeness. And there is also something about owning one’s story and being in control of your personal narrative that builds strength, character and power. With stories, we have the ability to shift perception and

Conducted by Joanna Demkiewicz



perspective, which affects our interaction with world.

**GB:** With so many mediums available for writers and journalists nowadays, it's been really amazing to watch how so many talented people have been able to find creative ways to tell stories. As a female journalist, I feel like I'm living in the golden age of online media and storytelling. The possibilities are endless!

**JD:** Alana and Gabi – talk to me about your relationship with storytelling and the online medium, and how you curate STEVIE ZINE and Femsplain as if they are print magazines.

**AL:** Print writers still get paid a lot more and often a magazine's best pieces are saved for the print edition. And there is definitely something beautiful about print – the careful editing a piece gets, the order of stories, the design. But I don't think these are qualities that can only exist on paper. Medium's Matter, where I work as a staff writer, has been able to achieve all of those things – including industry approval in the form of a national magazine award. And as a young writer that grew up on the web, I saw online journalism as a more penetrable medium, more open to new voices and styles. I still think that's true, and that's why it's one of the most exciting spaces to work.

**GB:** There are so many ways to shed light on issues and help tell other people's important stories, that there is no reason why good writing isn't overflowing on the Internet, you know?

As far as Femsplain goes, I curate our content based on the monthly theme. I tend to use a lot of gut feelings to eye what would and wouldn't make for a good post at any certain point in time. We definitely like to keep current trends and the news cycle in mind while we accept pitches, but Femsplain is more about personal storytelling and those tend to be more timeless. I like to think that reading a Femsplain piece from six months ago still has the same effect on the reader, which really says a lot about the quality and topics of discussion.

**JD:** Who are your current girl crushes in the magazine, online and publishing worlds, whether she's a writer, an editor, etc.?

**GB:** Funnily enough, I actually happen to hate the term “girl crush” because it tends to trivialize women's achievement and waters them down. But to answer your question, I've really been enjoying reading Anne Helen Petersen's

academic-meets-pop culture coverage on BuzzFeed. Writing crush, for sure!

**AL:** There are so many! But right now I'm very into the work of Scaachi Koul, managing editor at *Hazlitt*, Marian Bull, digital editor at *Saveur*, and Jamie Lauren Keiles, a freelance writer.

**AS:** Leesa Cross-Smith was a contributor to our very first issue and I've loved getting to know her more through her writing and her unabashed love for Taylor Swift and One Direction.

I recently became a fan of Alice Munro and simply get lost in her writing.

Really—and this probably sounds super cheesy and cliché—I'm always inspired and in awe of any woman who is living her life, in her own way and without apology.

**JD:** What's on your bedstand right now? (Don't omit the weird stuff, please.)

**GB:** I'm currently reading Nikolai Gogol. What can I say, I love me some Russian lit.

**AS:** My nightstand is mostly magazines: *Kinfolk*, *The Simple Things*, *Where Women Cook*, the latest issue of *Mosaic* with Saeed Jones, *Poets & Writers*, *Haven*, and *Study*. There's also a box set of Hemingway my husband gifted me for Mother's Day, *The Lady's Paradise* by Émile Zola, and *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* by Raymond Carver.

**AL:** My glasses, a little wooden box (with secrets inside), medical marijuana salve, a ring with a lion's head on it, Kiehl's lotion, sage, a crystal, a pen, a plant, and a candle.



**The Octave of Visible Light: A Meditation Nightclub, No. 3**

Pigmented ink print  
20" x 30"  
2015

L i a C h a v e z



**The Octave of Visible Light: A Meditation Nightclub, No. 4**

Pigmented ink print  
20" x 30"  
2015

L i a C h a v e z

## Holes

---

All day his lawn trembled,  
unruly with grasshoppers.  
Now, grackles  
crowd electric lines,  
grumble and curse  
evening's encroaching violet.

His porch light  
no longer spills gold  
onto my pathway.  
I shake my newspaper,  
settle in to read,  
but a friend-shaped hole

has burned through  
every page. Smell of char;  
scattering of ash.  
He is gone—  
life rattles down,  
seeds inside a rain stick.

Ann Howells

## You

---

came to me with iris-  
petal eyelids, all beautiful veins  
and pale translucence. You plunged  
against me and I flowed, a white river  
under the lamp of dawn.  
All those years we clapped together,  
my long hand against your small one,  
trying to make applause. Tell me  
how you are grown and gone; I must  
have been looking away. I still remember  
the lullaby I sang you, rocking;  
how you lay with your head  
on my shoulder, listening,  
not sleeping.

Priscilla Frake



## Continuing the Argument

---

You are paper and rock.  
 I am scissors.  
 Sometimes you crush me.  
 Sometimes I cut you.  
 Sometimes you cover  
 yourself. We agree  
 to renovations, but you want  
 a new roof, some protection  
 from the elements,  
 while I'd prefer a basement,  
 a place to keep the boiler.  
 You don't want to argue. Fine.  
 I'll just breed resentments  
 and bring them up on Sterno  
 and silence. Where do you think  
 that will lead?

Where logic meets fire,  
 where scissors kiss the white page  
 of your body, everything  
 goes up in flames, and then  
 the world is reconciled again—  
 made new—  
 as if we sat like Adam and Eve  
 naming the animals,  
 in a garden walled from time—

Priscilla Frake

but then it starts to rain.  
 The world is still  
 unnamed, unfathomed,  
 mysterious in the way  
 the shingles glisten  
 as you climb the roof  
 and a stairway appears,  
 leading down, and down.

Priscilla Frake

## Eve Talks Back

---

We haven't finished with the Fall.  
 We're still falling, still becoming God.  
 The flesh of the fruit is sweet  
 but its seeds are poison. We keep eating  
 and atoms are un-created,  
 genes are stripped from their beaded vine.

I keep telling Adam to face the rap  
 as I labor with children and thorns,  
 but he'd rather pave over the garden,  
 put pesticide on the trees. If only he would stop,  
 I'd be right there behind him, sweeping it up—  
 Iraq, global warming, the deficit—

I was always better at cleaning up messes.  
 At least he should pause in his mindless gorging  
 to taste the apple's rusty tang and blood-  
 warmed sweetness. At least he should talk  
 to the exiled snake to hear its reasons,  
 forked or straight, and ask its name. I have.

Priscilla Frake



Break-Up Text Paintings: Hey Sorry, I'm in Costa Rica

---

Acrylic on canvas  
 20" x 20"  
 2015

Allison L. Wade

ON ZANAX  
AT THE AIRPORT  
HAD A PANIC ATTACK  
PLEASE STOP CALLING

### Break-Up Text Paintings: On Xanax at the Airport

Acrylic on canvas  
20" x 20"  
2015

Allison L. Wade

### Focus

*Chiloé, Chile*

In Castro, the blue sea rises  
with the stench of naval ships  
and fish, erodes the stilts that hold  
the wind-scrubbed houses high  
above the tides and roosting  
chickens, above the shit  
surging through gray pipes  
and onto a shore of broken shells  
sharp enough  
to slit a child's feet.

At the seaside market  
venders pack away their postcards,  
carved spoons, the baskets  
we'll get cheaper in Temuco.  
A vender's baby peers  
from her stroller, parked  
near the stall where hooks  
pierce cows' raw  
bodies and the cow's head  
we saw yesterday  
has vanished.

The handsome soldiers  
who strolled the plaza earlier  
promenade the market now. Trade  
uniforms for wrinkled shirts—  
they could be tourists! *Don't  
take a picture*, my companion says.  
*Don't stare at the ships.*

Deanna Ludwin



Instead I frame the yellow  
fishing boats. They have no guns,  
they rock the sea so pleasantly  
Instead, I focus on the pink hotel,  
the cathedral's orange and purple  
spires. On the woman  
walking in front of us,  
arm around her lover's waist.

Focus  
on the good baby, cinched  
into her stroller.  
Only her eyes are moving.

Deanna Ludwin

## Q&A with Julie Iromuanya, author of *Mr. and Mrs. Doctor* by Joanna Demkiewicz

The author talks her first novel, the contemporary “American Dream,” and her favorite writers of the moment.

**Joanna Demkiewicz:** Your first book, *Mr. and Mrs. Doctor* is about a Nigerian couple – Job and Ifi – who immigrated to the United States (Job first; then Ifi) in search of a life where dreams are possible. Your parents are Nigerian immigrants who live in Nebraska. How much of the book – or rather, what aspects of the book – did you draw from your own family members, friends and those in the Nigerian community in the Midwest?

**Julie Iromuanya:** When I wrote *Mr. and Mrs. Doctor* I drew from that singular drive that I’ve seen time and again in family and friends from immigrant backgrounds: that need to prosper in America. It’s such a risk to go to a new place and start over. My parents, like many Nigerians, came to America to pursue their education. Both are alumni of the University of Nebraska and when they first arrived there were few people of color, let alone Nigerians, in Nebraska at that time. Somehow they survived what I imagined for a long time to be the loneliest period in their lives. Now, after so many of my own travels, I am so moved by their adventurous spirit—to go to a new place, to start over, to not know a single soul, to take those tentative first steps toward a new experience every single day. It’s astounding! And it’s made me really contemplate how the small things are actually great feats to the newcomer, so I looked for those kinds of moments for Job and Ifi: experiencing snow for the first time, going on a day trip, making and breaking friendships, becoming parents for the first time.

**JD:** I read in a Rumpus interview online that you began writing the book about 15 years ago. Can you talk to me about your writing process and how the novel ebbed and flowed over time?

**Ji:** *Mr. and Mrs. Doctor* really started as a character sketch in a fiction writing workshop. Job was a composite of bachelor family friends over the years,

Conducted by Joanna Demkiewicz

but I exaggerated the oppositions in his character to magnify his ambivalent nature—his simultaneous disgust and desire for everything American. From time to time I would write him into scenes where his oppositional ideas would disrupt the balance he kept trying to achieve. Over time, I really started to feel how these competing desires presented an interesting kind of incongruity that created a dark, yet comic tension.

However, the scenes didn't really come together as part of a "narrative" until Ifi showed up. She came to me later, a result of a trip to Nigeria where my well-intentioned aunt set me up on numerous blind dates with suitors. Blind dates are interesting on so many levels because of the kinds of assumptions and posturing that go into the interactions. Ifi and Job are two strong-willed characters in situations where their resolve is tested—their life as a couple (and with America) is essentially a long blind date.

**JD:** In a "Paste" review of the book, the reviewer, Steve Nathans-Kelly, describes *Mr. and Mrs. Doctor* as belonging to the "immigrant novel" category, along with Henry Roth's *Call it Sleep* and Julia Alvarez's *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*. If you indeed categorize it this way, what do you believe your novel adds to the continuing evolution of how we think about immigrants?

**JL:** I really love that review, especially for the ways that Nathans-Kelly highlights the distinctions between the "expat" and "immigrant" journeys. That feature really framed my approach to the American immigrant literary genre discourse. I read all sorts of immigrant narratives beginning with Willa Cather, Anzia Yezierska, Upton Sinclair and leading up to contemporary voices like Gish Jen and Edwidge Danticat, but in my research I found that very few novels had been written about the immigrant experience of Africans. (At least at that time!) So first I committed myself to finding out why the dearth existed and then I committed myself to writing that novel.

In my scholarly-critical work I began to theorize that African immigrants were mostly writing in an "exile/expatriate" stance—writing toward home rather than the new land. I used immigration studies scholar John Arthur's concept of the "invisible sojourner" as a theoretical lens. As "invisible sojourner" these people are deeply invested in maintaining their native identity; it makes them feel grounded in who they are, what they want out of life, and how to deal with unfortunate surprises. At the same time, they see America as a necessary stepping-stone. Further, they see their life in America as temporary.

Conducted by Joanna Demkiewicz

While my scholarly-critical writing dealt explicitly with the question of how this positionality is fostered in the literary tradition, in my creative writing, I thought it would be interesting to create a character who grapples with this paradoxical self-positioning. Job is very much an "invisible sojourner" while Ifi is his counterpoint.

**JD:** Readers are aware, from the beginning, that our main protagonist is lying about his true occupation. He dresses up and goes to work every day, pretending to be a doctor. Although the lie fades when he's quickly out of sight – he hasn't falsified records or his identity – his internal monologue of shamelessness is sometimes difficult in which to connect. Yet, at times, I felt that I understood how pride could cause such reckless behavior. What was your intention in creating such a difficult and contradictory character?

**JL:** I didn't want to write a character who always does the right things. I wanted to write a character who represents the ways in which positive attributes can become distorted if they are relied on too heavily. Job's self-confidence, pride, and big dreams are so big that they can cloud his vision. At the same time, because of how big his dreams and ego are, we can see how painful and corrosive his daily life must be to him. I thought it would be interesting to play his hubris in two ways—it both holds him up and brings him down; it weakens him while also giving him an irrepressible ability to survive the unconscionable indignities he faces.

**JD:** Job and Ifi have a best friend couple, Emeka and Gladys. The two couples are starkly opposite; Job and Ifi are, after all, living a lie, while Emeka and Gladys are happy, successful, and not above bragging. At one point, Job watches Emeka and Gladys in a loving exchange, and describes the moment as "The American Dream." What, in your opinion, is the contemporary American Dream? Is it real? How does The American Dream in the book influence its direction and characters' motivations?

**JL:** The classic notion of the American Dream is often centralized on the image of the house with the white picket fence, etc., but I find that the American Dream is often realized, not in the immigrants themselves, but in their children. For most immigrants, the tangible rewards of their sacrifices are evidenced through their children's comforts and accomplishments. Because of this, in the novel there is a competitive edge to Job and Ifi's interactions with Emeka and Gladys. In spite of their assumed success in America, Emeka and Gladys's success means nothing to them if it cannot be passed down through their lineage. Their lack of a suitable heir means that they cannot

Conducted by Joanna Demkiewicz

find solace in their accomplishments no matter how much they achieve; it means that, like Job and Ifi, they must continually put on a performance as they muscle their way toward their aspirations.

**JD:** Talk to me about the Midwest as a character. On Ifi's first night in Nebraska, she asks Job to pull over so she can feel snow for the first time: "She scooped it into her hands, pressed them together. She placed it in her mouth and tasted. It was cold and wet, like rain. That was all. She felt foolish." This is a sobering moment for Ifi, who has just realized that the Midwest disappoints her, and that her grand idea of America was naïve. How does the landscape and location influence the characters?

**JJ:** I've been greatly influenced by the Southern Gothic and its implementation of place. I wanted to peel back the layers of the so-called "Heartland" and in its crevices and dark corners explore the hidden hostility and alien nature of America's heart. I think what makes the landscape so vicious to the newcomer is its trickery. Ifi's "American Dream" has been shaped by media—sitcoms, films, literature—and in that instant on the snowy plain she realizes that she has been seduced under false pretense. It's a theme that carries throughout much of the book. At some point she must choose to succumb to the nightmare or create her own dream.

**JD:** To switch quickly to your everyday life: As a University professor of English and African American Studies, you discuss storytelling in both a historical sense and a personal sense. What is your favorite story to tell in this context? Do you have a favorite history or writing lesson?

**JJ:** One of the stories I sometimes tell my students is a story that my mother has passed down to me about my birth. My parents were thousands of miles away from home awaiting my delivery in a Nebraska hospital. A nurse called my father away from the delivery room because a woman claiming to be his in-law was in the waiting room. After much resistance, he finally followed the nurse, but when he arrived, the waiting room was empty. Who was this mysterious lady? Where had she gone? And how could it be? My grandmother had died suddenly exactly two years before to the day!

My parents have always believed that the lady was indeed my grandmother, crossing over one last time to visit her new grandchild. My middle name, Ogonnaya, "father's in-law," was given to me to honor her memory. I've been told that story so many times that I can see my grandmother in the waiting room, her back arched in anticipation as she awaited my delivery. The very

Conducted by Joanna Demkiewicz

act of telling the story has, in a way, given it life and created the memory for me. I love that about storytelling. I will often share that anecdote to help my students better understand how stories and storytelling are so crucial to our experience as humans.

**JD:** Who are some of your favorite writers? Who do you turn to for inspiration, whether or not she or he is in the publishing/literary world?

**JJ:** I love the sound of words read from the page; I love visual imagery; I'm a wannabe figures artist so I love watching characters live on the page, navigate the world through their bodies. I think of their posture, the way they sit, how steam sits on their upper lip as they breathe, how they crack their knuckles—so writers who—in the midst of telling compelling stories—can make me pause just to listen to the words or contemplate a thoroughly lived movement invigorate me. Of course Gabriel García Márquez is on that list, as are Toni Morrison, Edwidge Danticat, Louise Erdrich, Junot Díaz, J.M. Coetzee, Flannery O'Connor, Chinua Achebe, and Leo Tolstoy, among others.

**JD:** Even more personal (but it's *The Riveter's* signature question): What's on your bedstand right now?

**JJ:** I have scrawls of notebook paper covered in frantic descriptions of images and ideas that have kept me awake at night. I have my Igbo-English dictionary and a great stack of recently published books: *Now We Will Be Happy*, by Amina Gautier; *The Heaven of Animals*, by David James Poissant; *Fertile Ground*, by Penn Stewart; *A Cup of Water Under My Bed*, by Daisy Hernández; *Bad Feminist*, by Roxane Gay; *Easiest if I Had a Gun*, by Michael G. Martin; and *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed*, by Brad Greenburg. (Yes, this is also a shout-out list!) Over the course of the last year I've picked these books up at fairs and conferences hoping at every moment throughout the year to get a chance to dive into them.

**JD:** I read that you are working on a second novel. What can we expect from you in this next work, thematically? Are you planning to develop another immigrant narrative? Or something that touches on perception and pride?

**JJ:** I'm a little superstitious about talking about works in progress. I will say that I've been working on a new novel for the past three years, although it's still in a very messy state. Nonetheless, there are enough glimmers that make me see its possibilities.

Conducted by Joanna Demkiewicz





### Ideal Woman: Chrome (pink)

Resin, chrome, 19.5" x 9" x 12", 2010–2014

Allie Pohl



### Ideal Woman: Caryatid, Gold

Resin, chrome  
12" x 19.5" x 96"  
2011–2013

Allie Pohl

## Hyper Vigilant

---

In the age of miracles:  
stick insects will begin crawling  
towards campfires,  
eggshells will hire big booted men,  
there will be no such thing as a safe space  
for the mysterious  
and the unaccountable

The bookshelves will collectivize,  
dump everything worth knowing on the floor  
I will piss myself in the presence of all their yawning knowledge  
as they loom at the foot of the bed

You tell me to be mindful  
it's like a bone in my throat  
The universe was expanding  
long before we were aware of it  
but always  
always singing us a holy low road

I think the masters laugh at how we cheat our meditations  
taking each day hostage with story  
but what stories they are  
full of endurance, exhaustion  
our many blessings

I believe they marvel at our simple necessities  
all our free range distractions  
as the groundwater turns to bathtub gin  
and books drunk on their own wonders  
kite themselves  
page by page  
at open windows

Shannon Quinn

## Slaughterhouse Wife

---

When he comes home, his clothes are soaked  
with souls. I wash the bawling  
from his sleeves. Spatter laughs  
in shapes of faces: crooked ear, the long nose.

We never speak of it. He eats in front of  
sports. Men colliding with huge shoulders. He yells  
and yells with fists. His answers me  
with yawns. Morning

I hand him the hump of his lunchpail. Wonder  
if we will ever have children. His hands  
are huge, beefy at the bases. His arms a permanent  
swing. I know like a map, the back of his  
neck, the hairline. I send him off clean.

All day alone I hear wind bellowing. There's a stink  
in the leaves. I stop myself the small  
unkindnesses. Untwist my face from glances  
in the street. Nothing wrong with honest  
work. The whole town feeds. I wash  
vegetable legs, wincing as I trim them.

Often his porch-step is late, beer heavy. He  
stares past me into warm rooms of some unknown  
reckoning. I reach to take him in my  
arms. He hands me the bleeding meat.

Joanne Clarkson

## Cont.

### Q+A with Kate Gilmore

conducted by Heather Zises

**HZ:** Has your definition of feminine identity changed since you started to your practice to present day? If so, how?

**KG:** It hasn't, actually. I don't think I ever knew what feminine identity was and, quite honestly, I still don't. Perhaps it's indefinable. Maybe that's the point.

**HZ:** Given the complex nature and productive tension embedded in your works, it can't always be easy to deliver a performance that is both physically and emotionally draining. To date is there a particular work that left you feeling ultimately depleted or irrevocably changed by the experience?

**KG:** I am changed by every piece I do. I am always looking at what is happening and thinking about what is working and what is not, what it is communicating, and if it is successful in conveying an emotion or an idea. Every work beats me up and then I pull myself back in to start again...I think that is the process of most artists. My work just happens to be more directly referencing this process in an extreme physicality.

**HZ:** Do you think there is a big difference between your "on" and "off" camera personalities?

**KG:** Probably not. I think my "on" character might dress better—or at least try to!

**HZ:** Your piece *Wall Bearer*, 2011 is wonderfully provocative and conjures outlandish ideas of a hyperfeminine Judd installation or a human pink piano. Do you think this work has been successful in challenging heroic myths and gendered stereotypes of art making in general?

**KG:** I really hope so. While I'm a sucker for a fabulous Judd sculpture, a monumental Richard Serra piece, or an ejaculatory Pollock, the "heroic" language surrounding these male artists is complicated. Why do we create myths for these male artists and not for those who do not fit into this mold? Embedded in the history of these great artists is a gendered language of power. I am interested in exploring how this construction of power is a tool

for leaving large groups of individuals out of history, and social and political prominence.

**HZ:** Let's talk about the recurrence of pink in your practice! Many of your works are stained, smeared, and splattered with the hue. How do you define pink today? Do you think your works would create the same impact if you used a more subtle color like grey?

**KG:** Color is a huge part of my work, both formally and conceptually. I use color (like humor)—as I talked about earlier—as a way to bring people into the work and then, with time, hopefully say something. I have used black, white, and grey before...it can work, but usually there has to be some strong expressive moment where there is a pop of a bright color or something physically explosive occurs. I am interested in creating drama and suspense in my work and I have found that color is a good way to do that.

**HZ:** Every great artist influences the way we see things and in turn, the way we see life. Are there significant figures that have inspired you and your practice?

**KG:** Many different aspects of my life inspire me! Whether it is walking down the street and observing how people interact with each other, reading the newspaper, having intimate experiences with my family and loved ones, looking at art, feeling intense emotion, or engaging with my students, everything I encounter is inspiration for my work. Of course, art and politics are big focuses of what I do. Growing up in Washington D.C, political and social hierarchies were pretty blatant, and being in the art world in NYC, very similar power structures reveal themselves as well. So I look at the way things are constructed and try to expose issues beneath the surface. Within these systems, there are people that inspire me. Whether it is the flawed genius of Hillary Clinton or the macho dominance of a Richard Serra sculpture, I take from the skill of these figures, but also try to decipher their function and necessity to society.

**HZ:** Finally, what projects do you have on the horizon in the coming year?

**KG:** I am working on a solo show for David Castillo Gallery in Miami, Florida (February 2016), a large performance piece in New York for "MOVE!" (September 2015), and some smaller group projects as well.



## BIO STATEMENTS

In order of appearance

### Lora Keller

When Lora Keller is not writing poems, she runs three Milwaukee businesses. Before her entrepreneurial adventures, she was a scriptwriter, public relations executive and educator in Milwaukee, New York and Kansas City. Her poetry has been published in many literary venues including Blast Furnace, Midwest Quarterly, NPR's Tell Me More blog and Red River Review.

### Dana Beardsley Crotwell

Dana Beardsley Crotwell is a professor at El Camino College in Torrance, California, teaching literature, composition, critical thinking, and poetry. Her work has been featured in the journals Calliope and Earth's Daughters and in the anthologies Proposing on the Brooklyn Bridge, Between Worlds, and The Understanding Between Foxes and Light. Dana is currently working on a poetry collection and writing a cookbook.

### Alyse Rosner

Alyse Rosner earned her BFA from the University of Michigan and her MFA from The American University. Rosner's extensive exhibition history includes group and solo shows at The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum (Ridgefield, CT), Rick Wester Fine Art (New York, NY), Artspace (New Haven, CT), Kathryn Markel Fine Art, (New York, NY), Denise Bibro Fine Art (New York, NY), The Barbara Krakow Gallery (Boston, MA), Metaphor Contemporary Art (Brooklyn, NY), The Clark Gallery (Lincoln, MA) as well as various art fairs including Pulse Miami, PULSE New York, The Texas Contemporary and artMRKT Hamptons. Rosner has received awards and fellowships from The American University, The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, and the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism. Her work can be seen in the Connecticut Artist Collection, as well as numerous private collections. Rosner splits her time between Westport, CT and New York City, and is represented by Rick Wester Fine Art. [www.alyserosner.com](http://www.alyserosner.com).

### Jaimee Wriston Colbert

Jaimee Wriston Colbert is the author of four books: the novel Shark Girls, a finalist in the ForeWord Magazine Book of the Year Awards and the USA Book News Best Books of 2010 Awards; Dream Lives of Butterflies, awarded the gold medal in the Independent Publisher Awards; Climbing the God Tree, winner of the Willa Cather Fiction Prize, and Sex, Salvation, and the Automobile, winner of the Zephyr Prize. Her stories have appeared in a variety of journals, including TriQuarterly, New Letters and Prairie Schooner, and broadcast on "Selected Shorts." Originally from Hawaii, she is Professor of Creative Writing at SUNY, Binghamton University.

### Negar Behbahani

Born in Tehran, Iran, Negar Behbahani is a multidisciplinary artist who lives and works in Tehran and New York. She received her B.A. in Music in Tehran, after which she continued pursuing video art, sound installation, and photography. Behbahani has exhibited videos and installations in locations including #6 Berlinale Talent Campus, Berlin, Germany; Women's Film and Media Arts Festival, the National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington D.C.; Women's Voices from the Muslim World, Los Angeles; DUMBO Arts Festival, New York; Here Arts Center, New York. Featured in Art in America, The Huffington Post, Jadaliyya, and Theater of One World—she has collaborated with internationally known artists in Serbia, Germany, Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Iran. Behbahani also was part of the Global Groove, 1973/2012, highlighting artists from the Far East, Middle East, Africa, and Europe at The Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum. [www.negarbehbahani.com](http://www.negarbehbahani.com).

### Heather Dobbins

My poems and poetry reviews have appeared in Beloit Poetry Review, CutBank, Raleigh Review, The Southern Poetry Anthology (Tennessee), The Rumpus, and TriQuarterly Review, among others. After ten years of earning degrees in California and Vermont, I returned to my hometown of Memphis. My debut, In the Low Houses, was published in 2014. For more information, visit [heatherdobbins.com](http://heatherdobbins.com).

### Sandra Mack-Valencia

Sandra Mack-Valencia grew up in Medellin Colombia. As a young girl, she spent hours in her father's studio where the scent of paint, turpentine, and linseed oil fueled her passion for painting and drawing. After receiving her BFA from the Universidad de Antioquia, Mack-Valencia moved to New York and finished her MFA at Hunter College. The artist's work has been exhibited in museums and institutions in Colombia, Japan, and New York. Mack-Valencia is a recipient of the Nathalie Angles Award, the Sommerville Arts Prize, and was nominated for the Joan Mitchell Foundation grant for Painters and Sculptors. Additionally, her work was selected as part of the (S) Files Biennial at the El Museo del Barrio in New York. In 2014, Mack-Valencia was chosen as one of the Outstanding Antioquenos in the World, and she was featured in a documentary about her art practice. The artist lives and works in New York. [www.sandramackvalencia.com](http://www.sandramackvalencia.com).

### JoeAnn Hart

I am the author of the novels Float and Addled, and my short fiction, essays, and articles have been widely published.

### **Danielle Mourning**

Danielle Mourning (b. 1976) is a visual artist living and working in San Francisco, CA. Her primary mediums are photography and film moving into collage and sculpture. Mourning earned her BA from Wheaton College and her MA in Photography from the Royal College of Art in London, England. In addition to solo shows at Taylor De Cordoba Gallery (Los Angeles, CA), Mourning has exhibited at numerous national and international venues, including The Spartanburg Art Museum (Asheville, NC); Weston Gallery (Carmel, CA); The Space, Deutsche Bank (London, England); Headlands Center for the Arts (Sausalito, CA); National Theater (London, England); Tom Blau Gallery (London, England); and Fresh Film Festival, Karlovy Vary (Prague, Czech Republic). Additionally, Mourning has exhibited in various art fairs including Pulse (New York, NY) and AIPAD (New York, NY). Mourning has received the following grants and awards: The Deutsche Bank Pyramid Award, Hoopers Photography Prize, Bloomberg New Contemporaries, Shortlist and Mini International Photography Award. The artist has also participated in residencies at The Headlands Center for the Arts (Sausalito, CA) and Chalk Hill (Healdsburg, CA). [www.daniellemourning.com](http://www.daniellemourning.com).

### **Anna Sutton**

My work has appeared in or is forthcoming from Third Coast, Southeast Review, Quarterly West, DIAGRAM, Brevity, Tar River Poetry, Barrow Street, Weave, and other journals. I received the 2011 Pocatigo Poetry Prize and a 2013 James Merrill fellowship from Vermont Studio Center. I am the co-founder of The Porch Writers' Collective, web editor at One Pause Poetry, poetry editor at Dialogist, a reader at Gigantic Sequins, and a publisher in Winston-Salem, NC.

### **Tammy Robacker**

Tammy Robacker served as Poet Laureate of Tacoma, WA in 2010-11 and she is a 2011 Hedgebrook Writer-in-Residence award winner. In 2009, Ms. Robacker published her first collection of poetry, *The Vicissitudes*. Tammy's poetry has appeared in *Duende*, *So to Speak*, *Crab Creek Review*, *WomenArts*, *Comstock Review*, *Up the Staircase Quarterly*, *Floating Bridge Review*, *Pontoon*, and *Cascadia Review*. Currently enrolled in the MFA program in Creative Writing at Pacific Lutheran University, Tammy is currently working on a second poetry collection and lives in Oregon. Visit the poet at [tammyrobacker.com](http://tammyrobacker.com)

### **Evelyn Benvie**

As a poet and a writer, I have been submitting works to local contests and publications since elementary school. As both myself and my work have matured, I have begun to seek publication opportunities beyond the local

level. I am currently a senior in college, working towards my Bachelor's in English. I plan to take a year or two off to teach English abroad before pursuing my Master's degree and a further career in writing.

### **Gail Victoria Braddock Quagliata**

Gail Victoria Braddock Quagliata (b. Ogallala, NE) is a conceptual artist based in Brooklyn, NY. She has a BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in Film/Video Theory and Production, and an MFA from Pratt Institute in Photography. Quagliata has exhibited with numerous galleries, including Loft 594 (Brooklyn, NY); Launch Pad Brooklyn (Brooklyn, NY); SPACEWOMB Gallery (Queens, NY); White Box Gallery (New York, NY); Samson Projects (Boston, MA). Additionally, the artist has been featured in various art fairs, auctions and benefits, including Affordable Art Fair (Brooklyn, NY); BSO Benefit (Brooklyn, NY); NURTUREart Benefits, 2011-2013 (New York, NY); and Art for Music's Sake Auction (New York, NY). Recent projects include *Every Bodega* in Manhattan, in which the artist walked the entire borough of Manhattan to document the dwindling bodega culture. Quagliata also writes art criticism for publications like *The Brooklyn Rail*. [www.gvbq.org](http://www.gvbq.org).

### **Cynthia Atkins**

Cynthia Atkins' poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *American Letters & Commentary*, *BigCityLit*, *BOMB*, *Caketrain*, *Clementine*, *Del Sol Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Harpur Palate*, *Inertia*, *The Journal*, *North American Review*, *Sou'wester*, *Tampa Review*, *Valparaiso Review*, and *Verse Daily* among others. Her second collection, "In The Event of Full Disclosure" was recently featured on the Huffington Post and the Bill and Dave Cocktail Hour, and reviewed in [PANK] and the *North American Review*. She earned her MFA from Columbia University's School of the Arts and holds residencies from the VCCA and Breadloaf Writer's Conference and currently is an assistant professor of English at Virginia Western Community College, and lives in Rockbridge County, VA on the Maury River with her family.

### **Michelle Hartney**

Michelle Hartney is a Chicago based artist whose work addresses a broad range of topics, from women's health issues, to the concept of heroes, love, and the cosmos. She works in a variety of materials, including fiber, wood, found objects, and most recently, performance. Her interest in using art to address social issues began during her graduate studies at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where she earned her MAAT and was an Albert Schweitzer Fellow. Hartney has exhibited her work at venues nationwide, including *Woman Made Gallery* (Chicago, IL); *Bridgeport Art Center Gallery* (Chicago, IL); *Freeport Art Museum* (Chicago, IL); *AIR Gallery*

(Brooklyn, NY); New York Hall of Science (Corona, NY); and Brooklyn Waterfront Artists Coalition (Brooklyn, NY). <http://michellehartney.com>.

### **Natasha Tynes**

My name is Natasha Tynes, and I'm a published journalist based in the Washington, DC area. My non-fiction work has appeared in the Washington Post, the Huffington Post, Esquire magazine, among others. I'm sharing with you a short story about an Arab immigrant who settles in the suburbs, and struggles to maintain her traditional marriage to her American-born husband. She gets fixated on the potential arrival of the new neighbors, hoping that their presence would alleviate her loneliness. It is a story about the complexities of marriage in all its forms. It is also a story about the immigration journey, and the need to belong.

### **Kate Gilmore**

Kate Gilmore (b. Washington D.C.) earned her BA from Bates College and her MFA from School of Visual Arts. Gilmore's work is featured in several permanent museum collections, including Museum of Modern Art (New York, NY); Whitney Museum of American Art (New York, NY); Brooklyn Museum, (Brooklyn, NY); Museum of Contemporary Art (Chicago, IL); San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (San Francisco, CA); Museum of Fine Arts (Boston, MA); and Weatherspoon Art Museum (Greensboro, NC). Gilmore has exhibited at numerous national and international venues, including J. Paul Getty Museum (Los Angeles, CA); Brooklyn Museum (Brooklyn, NY); RISD Museum of Art (Providence, RI); MAK Museum of Applied Arts (Vienna, Austria); MoMA PS1 (Long Island City, Queens); Socrates Sculpture Park (Long Island City, Queens); The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum (Ridgefield, CT); Museum of Contemporary Art (Cleveland, OH); Sean Kelly Gallery (New York, NY); James Cohan Gallery (New York, NY); Pace Gallery (New York, NY); Pierogi Gallery (Brooklyn, NY); Invisible-Exports (New York, NY); and David Castillo Gallery (Miami, FL). Additionally, the artist has participated in various biennials worldwide, including 4th Moscow Biennale; 6th Curitiba Biennial; and 2010 Whitney Biennial. Gilmore is the recipient of multiple awards and residencies; distinctions include: Rauschenberg Residency Award; Mana Residency, Mana Contemporary; New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship; Lower Manhattan Cultural Council Award for Artistic Excellence; Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Award; Marie Walsh Sharpe, Space Program; and The Rome Prize, American Academy in Rome. [www.kategilmore.com](http://www.kategilmore.com).

### **Sarah Kain Gutowski**

Sarah Kain Gutowski is the author of *Fabulous Beast: The Sow*, a chapbook published by Hyacinth Girl Press, and an Associate Professor of English at Suffolk County Community College. Her full-length poetry manuscript,

*Fabulous Beast*, was a finalist for the 2014 May Swenson Poetry Award and the 2013-2014 Poets Out Loud Prize. Her work has been published in *Stirring: A Literary Collection*, *Verse Wisconsin Online*, *Verse Daily*, *The Gettysburg Review*, *The Southern Review*, *Epiphany*, *The Threepenny Review*, and *So to Speak: A Feminist Journal of Language and Art*. She keeps a record of her writing life, experience in academia, and motherhood at <http://mimsyandoutgrabe.blogspot.com>.

### **Xin Song**

Born in Beijing, Xin Song creates contemporary Chinese papercuts inspired by the traditional form she learned from studying with farmers in the Chinese countryside in her youth. Using her own photography, magazines, Mylar, rice and other papers, her large-scale site-specific installations use draping, hanging, glass lamination, and light. Xin's highly diverse themes range from venerable flower motifs and landscape studies to urban scenes that reflect her longtime residence in New York. Among her numerous public commissions for the Manhattan Borough are her *Five Elements* for the Fashion District's Broadway Boulevard Plaza, a permanent installation at the Bay Parkway Landmark Station, D Line in Brooklyn, NY and an installation for Grand Central's 100 Anniversary Celebration awarded by the MTA Arts for Transit. Xin is the recipient of multiple awards and grants, and her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally at museums, commercial galleries, and alternative spaces. Notable recent exhibitions include the Musée du Louvre, Paris, 2014; National Art Museum of China, 2013; Prow Art Space of the Flatiron Building, 2012; and Paper Art Biennial in Sophia, Bulgaria, 2011. As an art educator, Xin Song has been a guest lecturer at Hampshire College, Hunter college and has created Chinese papercut and shadow puppet workshops for cultural institutions and schools since 2001. [www.xinsong.com](http://www.xinsong.com).

### **Ashley-Elizabeth Best**

Ashley-Elizabeth Best is from Cobourg, ON. She was on the poetry shortlist for the 2011 and 2013 Matrix Litpop Awards and Prism's Poetry Prize 2012. Her work can be seen in *Fjords*, *Tampa Review*, *CV2*, *The Columbia Review*, *Berfrois*, *The Rusty Toque*, *The Battersea Review*, *The Puritan*, *Zouch Magazine*, *Union Station Magazine*, *Grist*, *Ambit Magazine*, *Poetry Salzburg Review* and *Branch Magazine* among other publications. She placed first for poetry in *This Magazine's* Great Canadian Literary Hunt 2012, and was the poetry runner-up for *subTerrain Magazine's* Lush Triumphant Literary Awards 2012. She has a chapbook published with Cactus Press called "Slow States of Collapse." She lives and writes in Kingston.



### **Kathleen Winter**

In July 2014 Brenda Hillman selected my current poetry book manuscript as the winner of the Marsh Hawk Press Rochelle Ratner Memorial Prize. In 2013 my collection *Nostalgia for the Criminal Past* won the Texas Institute of Letters Bob Bush Memorial Award for a first book of poems. The book won the Antivenom Prize and was published by Elixir Press in 2012. My poems have appeared in *The New Republic*, *Tin House*, *New American Writing*, *American Letters & Commentary*, *Volt*, *AGNI*, *Field*, *Barrow Street*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *Gulf Coast*, *Poetry London* and other journals. I've received fellowships from the James Merrill House, Stonington, CT; Dora Maar House, Provence; Cill Rialaig, Ireland; and Vermont Studio Center.

### **R.K. Riley**

R.K. Riley quietly writes herself real from a small Midwestern suburb. Her work has appeared in the *Apeiron Review*, the *Deep Water Journal*, and at the Awakenings Foundation and Gallery. Her debut poetry collection, "because...writings from a tainted life," was released last year.

### **Amanda Browder**

Born in Missoula, MT in 1976, Amanda Browder received an MFA/MA from the University of Wisconsin at Madison and taught at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She currently lives and works in Brooklyn, NY producing large-scale fabric installations for building exteriors and other public sites. She has shown on three continents including at the Nuit Blanche Public Art Festival/LEITMOTIF in Toronto; FAB Fest, New York City; The Dumbo Arts Festival, Brooklyn; UABAADH, Birmingham, AL; Mobinale, Prague; Allegra LaViola Gallery, NYC; Nakaochiai Gallery, Tokyo; White Columns, NYC; No Longer Empty, Brooklyn. Photos and reviews have appeared in *New York Times* to *Fibers Magazine* and she is a founder of the art podcast, [www.badatsports.com](http://www.badatsports.com). [www.amandabrowder.com](http://www.amandabrowder.com).

### **Lia Chavez**

Lia Chavez is a New York-based artist working in a wide range of media, including performance, photographic processes, painting, sculpture, installation, and scientific, technological, and theoretical innovations. Her art draws upon her fascination with the laws of the physical universe and investigates the astonishing mysteries of light, form, and interior space. She has been featured in a number of internationally-renowned venues, including the Venice Biennale, Istanbul Biennial, Frieze Art Fair, and The Armory Show. Chavez's recent solo exhibitions and performances include *The Octave of Visible Light: A Meditation Nightclub* (2015) presented in partnership with Art Production Fund at The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas; *Carceri* (2014) at

*Two Rams*, New York; *Tumult* performance (2014) presented by House of the Nobleman, London; and *Luminous Objects* performance, commissioned and presented by The Armory Show (2013) and exhibited at Spring/ Break Art Show (2014). She did her studies at Oxford and Goldsmiths College in London, where she was also an ORSAS scholar. She has been a visiting artist, lecturer, and critic at numerous institutions, including Tate, University of Oxford, and Savannah College of Art and Design. Chavez has been written about in publications as diverse as *Fast Company*, *The New York Times*, and *Purple Magazine*. Her photography monograph, *Lia Chavez: A Thousand Rainbows*, was recently released by Damiani. [www.liachavez.com](http://www.liachavez.com).

### **Ann Howells**

Ann Howells's poetry has recently appeared in *Calyx*, *Crannog* (Ire), *Free State Review*, and *Magma* (UK) as well as other small press and university journals. She serves on the board of Dallas Poets Community, a 501-c-3 non-profit, and has edited its journal, *Illya's Honey*, since 1999, recently taking it from print to digital. Her chapbook, *Black Crow in Flight*, was published by Main Street Rag Publishing (2007). A second chapbook, the *Rosebud Diaries*, was published in limited edition by Willet Press (2012).

### **Priscilla Frake**

I have published poetry in *Nimrod*, *The Midwest Quarterly*, *The Spoon River Review*, and *The Sow's Ear Poetry Review*, among others. In 2013, my book of poems, *Correspondence*, was published by Mutabilis Press. In 2013, I also won the Lorene Pouncey Award at the Houston Poetry Festival and was nominated for a Pushcart. I live in Sugar Land with my husband, where I am a studio jeweler.

### **Allison L. Wade**

Allison L. Wade (b.1978 in Mattoon, IL) earned her BFA from Iowa State University, College of Art and Design, her MA from University of New Mexico, College of Education, and her MFA in Photography from Cornell University, College of Architecture, Art and Planning. In addition to her recent solo show at Rick Wester Fine Art (New York, NY), Wade has exhibited at numerous institutions and venues, including OFFLINE at Central Booking (New York, NY); AIPAD (New York, NY); Fashion Institute Museum (New York, NY); Stroom Den Haag Museum (Hague, Netherlands); The Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art (Peekskill, NY); and Parsons The New School for Design (New York, NY). Additionally, Wade has exhibited at various art fairs including Pulse Miami and AIPAD. Wade has grants from Vermont Studio Center, FIT SUNY, William T. Hillman Foundation, Society for Photographic Education, and Cornell Council for Arts. Wade lives and

works in New York City and is an Associate Professor of Photography at The Fashion Institute of Technology, SUNY. Wade is represented by Rick Wester Fine Art. [www.allisonw.tv](http://www.allisonw.tv).

### **Deanna Ludwin**

I recently retired from Colorado State University's English Department/Creative Writing Program and live in Fort Collins, Colorado. My poems and flash fictions have appeared in *Cimarron Review*, *Copper Nickel*, *Flash*, *Green Mountains Review*, *The Normal School*, *Seattle Review*, *Water-Stone*, and elsewhere. In addition, I founded and coordinate the Fort Collins Books for Humanity program, and I hike, snowshoe, and travel every chance I get.

### **Allie Pohl**

Allie Pohl earned her BA from Hamilton College before attending Parsons, The New School for Design, where she received an Associates of Applied Science in Graphic Design. Pohl also has an MFA in Electronic Media Arts & Design from the University of Denver. Pohl's unique aesthetic has been widely exhibited with features in the Orlando Museum of Art, Context Miami, Dallas Art Fair and a public sculpture show curated by Olga Viso, in which she won the People's Choice Award. She is also in collections with Julian Opie, Nick Cave, Marilyn Minter, and Damien Hirst. [www.alliepohl.com](http://www.alliepohl.com).

### **Shannon Quinn**

Some of my previous work has been published in *The Literary Review* of Canada, *subTerrain*, *Thin Air* and *Ruminate*. My first poetry collection will be published in Canada by Thistledown Press in the fall of 2015.

### **Joanne M. Clarkson**

Joanne M. Clarkson's fourth poetry collection, "Believing the Body," was published in 2014 by Gribble Press. She was awarded a 2014 GAP grant from Artist Trust to complete her next full-length volume. Joanne's poems have appeared recently in *Rhino*, *The Baltimore Review* (first place contest winner), *Blood and Thunder: Musing on the Art of Medicine* and *Saranac Review*. She serves on the Board of the Olympia Poetry Network and is Poet-in-Residence for the Northwest Playwrights' Alliance. She has a Master's Degree in English and has taught but currently works as a Registered Nurse. See more at <http://JoanneClarkson.com>.

## ARTIST STATEMENTS

In order of appearance

### **Alyse Rosner**

My most recent body of work combines direct graphite rubbings of wood grain and leaves, areas of glowing transparency next to rich unexpected color and layers of sinuous trailing lines, gestural forms, graphic restrained geometry and obsessive mark making. Although there are obvious connections to photography and printmaking, these images are all one of a kind. Every line is drawn freehand and the wood grain and leaf patterns are rubbed individually onto each surface.

These pieces evolved following nine years of painting highly detailed abstract miniatures on raw pine boards. The accumulation of tiny mark making on wood created a raised surface and distinct texture, which naturally led to me to make rubbings of the miniature paintings. Later, I began to create more expansive rubbings taken from the deck behind my kitchen. On top of this layer of wood grain pattern, the organic dissemination of painted marks across the surface mutated into a more methodical system of painting and line drawing. Now, 14 years later, the otherworldly imagery of the miniatures has seeped back into my current paintings but the dramatic shift in scale from six inches to sixty inches compelled numerous adjustments in paint handling and mark making resulting in unanticipated variations of sensation and imagery.

It is significant that one of the natural elements in the work, the wood grain, is derived from pressure treated wood, infused with chemicals formulated to defy nature. This toxic impression is captured on Yupo, a synthetic Japanese paper made of polypropylene—which ironically, is a green material.

The work is largely driven by process and materials, however the selection of synthetic, natural and chemical elements in combination with textures directly lifted from my home lends the work personal resonance and at the same time harbors more universal concerns.

### Negar Behbahani | Artist Statement: Life Strand

Life Strand is a musical interactive sound installation based on my own experiences, upbringing, and background, told through the universal language of music. The sculpture resembles a stringed musical instrument consisting of human hair as its strings, and an embroidery hoop upon which an upside down image of my face is projected. To me, the embroidery hoop is not only a symbolic feminine object but also a memory portal: it reminds me of my childhood when my mom and grandma would embroider. This notion of memory is something I've always have been interested in and have pursued in all my works.

The installation's key features are the sound component, the embroidery screen, and the hair, each of which have played an important role in my life. My installation connects with the intimate experience of touching my hair, and offers a different and new experience by playing and hearing a poetic and feminine instrument. To help channel the creation of this piece, I asked myself the following series of questions: "If I were an instrument, what kind would I be? How would I be played? What are my tones? My moods? What would I reveal to a new player, or one who has played me many times?"

As a child, I always preferred the shape and sound of a cello. However, my older sister played piano, therefore my parents wanted me to play it too. Despite all the time and effort I dedicated to learning piano, I never fully enjoyed it, but felt obligated to keep playing. As a result, I ended up with a bachelor's degree and 18 years of playing an instrument I didn't like. Knowing it was impossible to forge a healthy relationship with any instrument for a while, I decided to make an interactive installation that functioned as a replica of a cello and also as a self-portrait.

In the process of making Life Strand, I searched my mind about which materials would be best to create this unique musical instrument. I found myself thinking about my hair, which has always played an important part in my life. At home in Iran, my hair had to be covered anytime I was outdoors. Furthermore, showing my hair in public, or letting it be touched was against Islamic Law; therefore my hair became a forgotten part of my body. Another reason my hair is important to me is how it was affected by the most painful event in my life: the death of my father when I was just 15. The shock and trauma I felt from the experience turned my hair white overnight. The sudden pigment change in my hair was a tangible reflection of the intense pain I felt from within. My hair remains ashen to this day. By incorporating hair into Life Strand, this piece is intended to be an extension of me, something to introduce me, and a symbol that reminds someone of me.

### Negar Behbahani | Artist Statement: Years of Numbness

Years of Numbness is about Shahla Jahed's case: an innocent civilian who was executed as a result of love gone wrong. This interactive installation was staged during a group exhibition at Aaran Art Gallery in Tehran.

Placed on top of a metal ironing board is a worn out dress with a portrait of Shahla printed on it (a portrait which is well known by the Iranian community and beyond), and an old, heavy iron next to it. Viewers are invited to activate the installation by ironing the garment on the board. By pressing the iron against the dress on the board, the sound of Shahla's distinctive voice is released like a ghostly vapor into the gallery space, cloaking the crowd with her mournful testimonies from various court appearances. The haunting voice ceases its laments when the iron stops moving.

The concept behind this piece is to demonstrate how the public reacts to social issues, especially when innocent people are wrongly accused of crimes and we choose to remain silent. By playing the role of a passive observer, our choice to bury the truth ultimately kills others.

About Shahla Jahed (1970 – 1 December 2010): Shahla Jahed was an intelligent, calm and present-minded defendant whose voice we hear sampled in the installation and whose face we see printed on the tattered dress. She fell in love with the famous Iranian footballer, Nasser Mohammadkhani and they had a secret affair for four years, even though he was married and had two children. One time when Nasser was traveling abroad for a football match, his wife was killed and Shahla was accused of the murder, and was arrested and detained. Shahla denied any involvement in the murder for a whole year until one night when Nasser came to visit her and he insisted she take responsibility for the murder so he could maintain his sports reputation. In return, he vowed he would help her to become free. Out of true love for Nasser, Shahla accepted his deal and even reconstructed the murder scene for the police. She spent the next eight years in prison. Meanwhile, Nasser did nothing to rescue Shahla, and broke all his promises to her, even though he knew she was innocent. Instead, Nasser continued to play the role of a grieving family man for the Media, and asked for nothing but justice for his beloved wife's murder. In the end, without the true murderer being relieved, Shahla was hanged in October 2010. Nasser attended the execution and watched her die in cold blood.

### **Sandra Mack-Valencia | Artist Statement**

My paintings often question social categorizations and learned ways of thinking. I feel the responsibility to create works that ignite a response from the audience to embrace their individuality, and to create awareness of the pre-judgments based on race, gender or social status. I nurture my paintings from many sources, including found images, old drawings from nature and anatomy, experiences, fashion, and movies. In my work, I combine photo transfer with drawing and painting. I believe that photography can reference both reality and memory, while drawing and painting allow me to bring an intuitive response to the materials and the process. I regularly bring the sharpness and boldness of illustration techniques, combined with a loose and emotional reaction to the materials.

I am a painter that loves stories. I grew up listening to fairy tales and urban legends, so it is not surprising that my work is infused with strong narratives. I was born and raised in Medellin, Colombia, and from a very young age I knew I wanted to become an artist. My father was a very talented and disciplined painter, and I was very inspired by him. I watched him follow the same routine day in and day out, sitting in front of his canvases and creating new compositions. My father was a very traditional painter in the sense that he had little interest in the business side of art. However, he got exactly what he wanted from painting: the plain and simple joy of creating beautiful things. I appreciate beauty too, but I believe that art should surpass the mere decorative state and be an activator of thoughts. I enjoy using humor as a device in my work, specifically sarcasm. My paintings are laced with subtle details and witty innuendos that bait the viewer and challenge their initial reading of the work. I believe in the power duo of images and words, therefore I often incorporate text into my paintings to add layers of meaning.

Over the years I have developed my own visual vocabulary, which includes elements like void spaces, patterns, photo transfers, and female characters. It feels natural to depict women in my paintings, considering almost all of my education took place in single sex schools and institutions. For fifteen years, all of my classmates and most of my teachers were women. I also grew up in a matriarchal environment, so I was accustomed to seeing women as the ones in charge. However, being an immigrant artist in New York challenges this construct; it has not been an easy path. Furthermore, the stereotypes I face as a Latina have made a deep impact on both my work and myself. Some of my characters are powerful queens wearing their cleaning gloves, such as “Reina Santa” who flips the world a double bird, or a proud Americana woman wearing a huge American flag-like dress while hiding her native city under her big skirt. In some ways, my paintings are ironic shields that simultaneously protect and expose me.

I am eager to explore new challenges and bring new aesthetics to my work while maintaining the core of my interest: The belief that art can bring us together. I can only smile when I think that my works have been exhibited in a sex shop, as well as in a church. That is the unifying power of art!

### **Danielle Mourning | Artist Statement**

My body is a vessel for portraiture of the female psyche relying on a notion of channeling and the ability to open a portal to the unseen energy that surrounds us. As I sense the paradigm-shift taking place on the psyche of the female and male energy of this planet, I work in an inwardly guided direction. I work to honor shamanism, meditation and connection to the richest resources nature has provided for my imagination. Within this inward journey I have begun to nurture an entirely new inner cinematographic system.

As if I am on a vision quest searching for the great soul of my work, I look to Native American wisdom that states that we must travel around the hoop and learn from all four directions before we can enter the center of the mandala and claim our power. Entering into womanhood is entirely linked to my trajectory as an artist. Choosing self-portraiture assisted this process as if I walked into a mirrored box to face each direction. I looked into the reflections of the North, South and East. This assisted the awakening of conscience. Each phase of this practice has led me through my childhood, education, death and religion and now the West; the wall, which I am told, holds the key to many dreams I might have let die.

My current practice feels like a fracturing kaleidoscope. I aspire to create images which contain intuitive content rich in observations of fantasy, disentangling the passage of time and story whereby leaving the viewer into their own reverie. As stated by Louise Bourgeois, “I am pursuing a more eccentric path giving form to the urging of my psyche....A disavowal of one criteria of consistency instead focusing on the similar lines of its focus on the spiritual question of origin.”

In psychological terms as discussed by Dr. Elizabeth Kubler Ross, “It is not the end of the physical body that should worry us. Rather, our concern must be to live while we are alive-to-release our inner selves from the spiritual death that comes with living behind a facade designed to conform to external definitions of who and what we are.”

My photographs echo the ascent and descent from traditional forces lying on women. There is a process of human metamorphosis and spiritual emergence happening. Psychosis and psychological suffering become a spiritual opportunity for emergence of one's soul. A metamorphosis and paradigm shift can be unveiled.

As I search a mysterious, ancestral and archetypal world, cinematic stutters



of movement delicately hover in a state of perpetual anticipation. I engage in a chronicle of transformation and awakening to the invisible yet life fueling umbilical cord of light within the universe. I crave a critical and loving connection.

### **Gail Victoria Braddock Quagliata | Artist Statement**

Gail Victoria Braddock Quagliata (b. Omaha, Nebraska) is a Brooklyn-based artist who works predominantly with photographic processes. Her artistic career began in high school, which was fueled by a Vocational Photography Level 1 class. Instantly hooked on the medium, Quagliata felt she had fled the perceived subjectivity of the studio art class and eagerly nurtured her acumen for executing technically perfect photograph. As a result, the artists' portfolio of documentary photographs granted her admittance into the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in Film and Video, where she earned her BFA. After a protracted stint in post-production for corporate television, Quagliata found herself unable to accept life removed from the art world, and quit her day job in order to earn an MFA in Photography from Pratt Institute.

Quagliata's work is conceptually driven and determinedly flippant; these qualities are the product of years of rigorous technical instruction combined with intensive studies in art history, theory, and criticism. As a natural contrarian, Quagliata maintains an overwhelming desire to subvert her many years of formal art education by any means necessary. Obscene Flowers is an ongoing photography project involving the use of randomly encountered live flowers as a canvas for offensive graffiti. The ephemeral nature of the written insult is dictated by the lifespan of the flower onto which it has been applied. Flowers are readily recognized as a twee metaphor for the female in experience, form, function, and psyche, whereas graffiti and coarse language are more stereotypically linked with the idea of the male as a primal being and active conqueror (of things, places, and people). However, the most crucial element of this series is the element of surprise: what a strange and ridiculous moment to glance at a beautiful flower, only to discover an obscene word tattooed upon a delicately hued petal.

### **Michelle Hartney | Artist Statement**

Our Past is the first chapter in Michelle Hartney's ongoing series Obstetrics in America—followed by Birth Words, text based canvases that reference verbal and physical abuse from doctors and nurses experienced by women during childbirth; and MOTHER'S RIGHT, an installation and performance piece that seeks to bring awareness to the high rate of maternal mortality in the United States, postpartum PTSD, and obstetric abuse.

Hartney's Obstetrics in America series was initially influenced by Hartney's own experiences giving birth to her daughter and son. While both births were empowering, there were aspects of each that were deeply

troubling. These feelings led the artist to research the history of obstetrics to better understand the birth process, and the delicate dynamic between doctors, nurses, and mothers. Hartney was shocked and disheartened to discover that the medical practice of contemporary American birth is rooted in a past riddled with misogyny, racism, and abuse.

In the Our Past series, Hartney investigates the practice of Dr. J. Marion Sims, the “father of modern gynecology,” who bought and rented female slaves to perform transvaginal procedures, in an attempt to find a cure for the vesico-vaginal fistula. Sims experimented on more than ten female slaves and willingly chose not to provide anesthesia to them, even though it had recently become available. In Sims' autobiography, he revealed the names of three women he experimented on: Anarcha, Lucy, and Betsey. Anarcha was seventeen years old when she gave birth to her first child and developed a fistula. Sims operated on her 30 different times without anesthesia.

The medical community has celebrated Sims' work for 170 years, but what is missing from most of the textbooks is the suffering through which he put female slaves in order to discover a cure for the vesico-vaginal fistula. Generations upon generation of medical students have learned about Sims without knowing the truth about Anarcha, Lucy, Betsey, or any of the other women on whom he experimented. In the Our Past series, Hartney seeks to give these women a voice and a presence in gratitude for their sacrifice and suffering. Hartney has created mixed-media diptych portraits for each, comprised of grosgrain ribbon, embroidery floss, and velvet—as well as vintage obstetrics books, in which the artist inserts information about their stories. An accompanying performative element to Our Past includes multiple library visits by the artist to review and borrow old obstetrics textbooks from medical schools. Hartney returns each book that fails to mention Anarcha, Lucy, or Betsey, with a typed “footnote” inserted into the publication that explains the truth about Sims' work.

### **Xin Song | Artist Statement**

In response to the cultural differences between Eastern and Western mores for expressing sexuality, my series of Chinese papercuts question what is “taboo” and why. Seducing the viewer first by what is unseen, as if lace against flesh, my Lust/Caution and Life=Sex? series use traditional Chinese papercut techniques and patterns combined with symbolic images of male/female, such as flowers, fish, tribal images and the “V” to create a counterpoint with pornographic magazine images and texts carefully chosen for color, shape and content. Transforming the explicit images into a Tantric-like meditation, these hanging filigrees interact with light and shadow, engaging the senses as well as the mind in a conversation about sex as commodity, marketing device, emotional connection, health issue, and the continued hypocrisy that

envelopes this subject in a seemingly open society.

Growing up in Beijing, sex was never discussed. There were no magazines, films or clinical information available at that time, except for a few hidden, underground books. In my native spiritual practice of Buddhism, the body represents all elements: fire, wind, earth and water, connected to all things. When I moved to the United States in 2000, I became aware of sex as a ubiquitous industry removed from sensuality and primarily for male consumption. Much like fast food, which provides instant gratification with unhealthy products and no substance, it replaces something natural with an artificial substitute, and often becomes addictive. Increased use of plastic surgery reflects how these unrealistic notions of body and sex are affecting society, especially women. Even with the recent shift towards more empowering health-related information, marketing is still primary with products promising guaranteed über-orgasms.

Examining the sexual violence promoted by pop culture, work combines images and dialog gleaned from comic books that portray women as highly stylized sexual objects and men as massively muscled villains and heroes with erotic excerpts from ancient Chinese underground Kama Sutra-like literature to form papercut limbs, leaves and trunks of trees, which symbolize and the dichotomy between simulated and natural passion.

#### **Amanda Browder | Artist Statement**

Amanda Browder describes her work as being soft sculpture/found object installation with an affinity for abstraction and minimalism. She uses forms that are similar to the images in a comic book: reduced, simplified, and reconfigured to be idealized and sensational. Browder appreciates the transformative nature of materials, and how the combination of familiar objects can create abstract relationships. These relationships generate open-ended narratives, and ambiguous situations that are defined by the choice of materials. Central to the psychedelic experience, Browder uses bright colors and familiar materials to recreate this subtle change in perception. The overarching goal is to engage individuals and groups in the mystery of creation. The volunteerism of local artists and citizens functions as a natural segue to creating familiarity in contemporary art as well as the individual nature of the neighborhood itself. From material collection to construction and exhibition, Browder hopes to encourage community volunteers to participate in ways that require collaboration and conversation...conversation about city, community, architecture and art.

Magic Chromacity (2014) is a large-scale fabric piece that was draped over the Abrams-Engel Institute for the Visual Arts building and Alys Stephens Center in Birmingham, AL on the campus of University of Alabama, Birmingham. Both The Art and Art History Department and The

Performing Arts Department of UAB sponsored this project. This site-specific piece was created, sewn, donated, and installed by the people of Birmingham, Alabama. The name of the project references the nickname "Magic City" and the metal that was forged at the Sloss Furnaces (Chrome / City).

Magic Chromacity is made out of 10,000 square feet of hand-sewn, donated fabric. The fabric was donated by the citizens of Birmingham, AL and was stitched, trimmed and pinned together by a collective of volunteers. Sections of the fabric were hand-dyed with Japanese indigo to connect with the exhibitions on view at the Birmingham Museum of Art. Local students, professors, and citizens all helped to make this project happen. Public sewing days were popular and highly attended, and held at spaces such as DISCO, AEIVA, and Art Play. A significant group that helped assemble Magic Chromacity was The Bib & Tucker Sewing Co-op of Birmingham, AL. They selflessly donated many hours of their time to the sewing process, and their generosity continues to give in their quest to help the community through sewing. Equally notable was The Art and Art History Department of UAB who helped organize and host numerous virtual and in-person sewing days. These efforts included bringing in students from the Woodlawn High School to sew and volunteer.

#### **Lia Chavez | Artist Statement**

Presented in partnership with Art Production Fund at The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas in early 2015, The Octave of Visible Light: A Meditation Nightclub is a pop-up nightclub through which Chavez envisaged a futuristic discotheque that comes alive through the phenomenon of biofeedback. This work is a step further into Chavez's investigation into the ephemeral wavelengths, impasto textures, and glimmering awareness corollary to what she calls "the art material of human consciousness." The Octave of Visible Light invites the viewer to plunge into the wondrous nature of oscillatory resonance throughout the universe by way of a unique fusion of performance art, neuroscience, and technological invention.

Chavez is known for work that explores the mysteries of light and emergent possibilities of utilizing consciousness as an art material. For The Octave of Visible Light, she invented a revolutionary digital-neurology system in collaboration with the creative technology company rehabstudio, which allows guests to observe the relationship between their neural oscillations and corresponding frequencies in both light and sound. Brainwaves are harnessed to orchestrate an atmosphere of chakra-healing music and hypnotic light sculptures, which envisage the mystical optics described in Dante's final vision of paradise in The Divine Comedy.

Featuring pre-recorded vocals by Au Revoir Simone front woman

Erika Spring, low frequency waveforms are noninvasively delivered to the body, resulting in profound synchronization of the brain's right and left hemispheres. Guests are invited to wear an EEG headset and Chavez guides them through a brief meditation session. The headset reads their brainwaves and, via Bluetooth, transmits a custom-coded signal to the audiovisual system. The signal's frequency and strength mirrors the participant's brainwave activity, which is reflected in the intensity and register of the color and sound emitted by the system. As a result, each audio-visual 'set' is unique to the person wearing the headset. The deeper the meditation, the more fully the viewer is able to traverse the spectra of visible light and audible sound.

### **Allison L. Wade | Artist Statement**

Much of Allison L. Wade's work deals with relationships and problems inherent in contemporary modes of communication. Her paintings and photographs show text messages that have ended the artist's own relationships, whether sent by her or received by her. Wade's practice has been influenced by Sophie Calle and Josef Albers and also by her graduate school advisor and professor at Cornell University, Carl Ostendarp.

The texts featured in Wade's work are an exposition of one-way communication and social distance. They critique problems inherent in contemporary forms of communication that span the answering machine to the text message. Disappointingly, it is easier in our postmodern world to leave a voice mail or a text message than speak face to face with other people. These new tools in communication inevitably place the sender even further away from the recipient. As an Associate Professor of Photography at FIT SUNY, the focus upon digital culture in Wade's artwork has become a particularly helpful tool for her students in regards to their own experiences of technology and digital immersion.

The Break-Up Texts series is intended to highlight a level of detachment present in modern-day communication. It demonstrates the inherent disconnect between break-up texts and the emotions that prompt them by pairing emotionally charged words with generic backgrounds. By taking text messages out of digital space and reformatting them into an analog space, Wade's process invites the viewer to confront these messages in a different way.

Wade's interest in tangled relationships and eavesdropping started at the early age of 11. The artist remembers how she and her childhood friend Suzanne would secretly listen in on phone calls made by her handsome neighbor who was in high school at the time. The girls achieved this game of interception by furtively switching the frequency of their neighbor's cordless phone. Then they would sit for hours monitoring their crush's conversation with his high school girlfriend. Wade posits that her amateur spying was the

genesis for her found answering machines and text message themed projects. "I still love to listen and eavesdrop on the conversations of strangers. About a year after I started spying on my neighbor's phone calls, my parents gave me my first camera and I would walk around my hometown taking photographs of kids outside. Photography filled my need to document things, I have not put the camera down ever since."

### **Allie Pohl | Artist Statement**

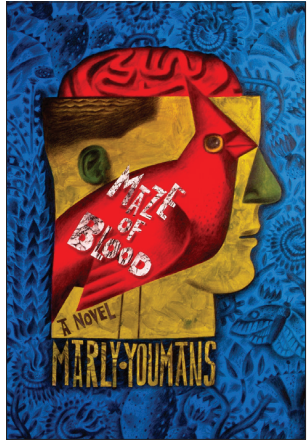
Allie Pohl is a Los Angeles-based conceptual artist whose work explores the social and cultural constructions of contemporary Western society. Questioning the social constructs of perfection, Pohl created the Ideal Woman by digitally enhancing Barbie to fit Western society's ideal female measurements of 36-24-36. This avatar symbolizes anti-perfection and is repeated throughout Pohl's work in sculpture, video, ceramic, installation, and neon.

By distorting Barbie's trademark shape, Pohl's Ideal Woman sculptures expose beauty and gender stereotypes too large to ignore. According to the artist, the notion of perfection affects us the day we enter the world, "Even as an infant you are compared to others through growth charts. This continues through adolescence. So at a very early age you know if you are below, average, or above." In an effort to continue the conversation outside of galleries and museums, Pohl has made her work more accessible through the Ideal Woman jewelry line and sticker packs.

Pohl's Ideal Woman series are executed in a variety of media and scale. "Since I am not a specific medium artist, medium and material are very important to me when conveying a message. With the Ideal Woman chromed series, I scanned Barbie's figure into the computer and enlarged her to Western society's idealized form of 36-24-36. Once printed out, I made a mold so it could be cast in fiberglass or resin. I specifically wanted the pieces to be made out of plastic because society is becoming increasingly more 'plastic.' The choice to finish pieces in chrome is so that viewers can see themselves reflected in the idealized form. Traditionally, pieces that are chromed are metal. However, it is a lot harder to chrome the surface of a plastic piece, so it deceives the viewer into thinking it is metal." This trompe l'oeil effect is particularly persuasive in Pohl's Ideal Woman: Caryatid series that directly reference ancient Greek sculptures of women as pillars holding the ceiling up from the floor. For extra irony, these totemic pieces also resemble chains, which nag the theme of perfection weighing heavily upon us.



Small press. *Impressive* authors.



*Maze of Blood*

by Marly Youmans

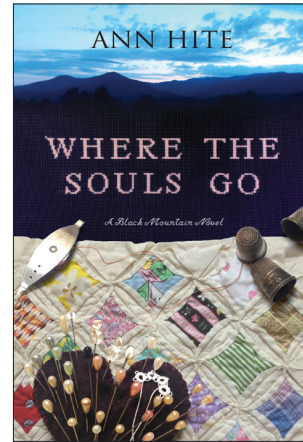
A haunting tale of dark obsession and transcendent creative fire—a novel inspired by the life of pulp writer Robert E. Howard



*Burdy*

by Karen Spears Zacharias

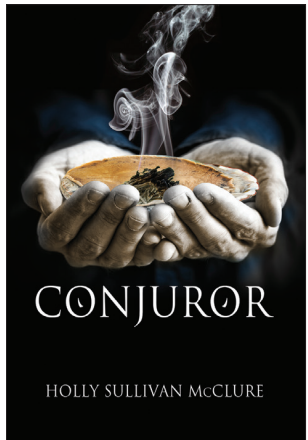
A mesmerizing novel of tragedy and transformation—a tenderhearted narrative of survivors and the battles they face



*Where the Souls Go*

by Ann Hite

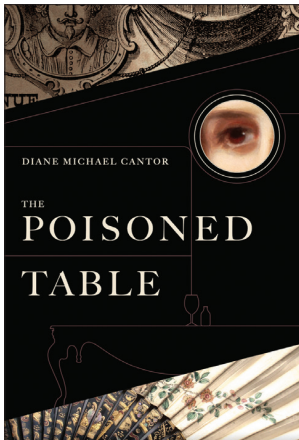
Hite's third novel set in Black Mountain, North Carolina—highlighting women's struggles in Appalachia



*Conjurer*

by Holly Sullivan McClure

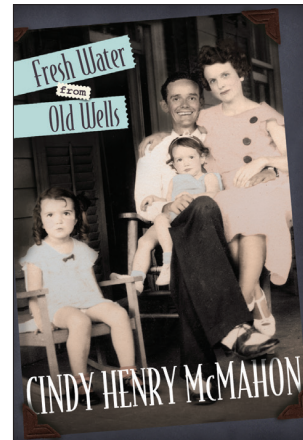
A novel based on a Cherokee legend of the *Ulunsu'ti*—hidden by the great conjuror—and the secret society protecting its power



*The Poisoned Table*

by Diane Michael Cantor

A novel based on the writings of renowned nineteenth-century British, Shakespearian actress, Frances Anne “Fanny” Kemble



*Fresh Water from Old Wells: A Memoir*

by Cindy Henry McMahon

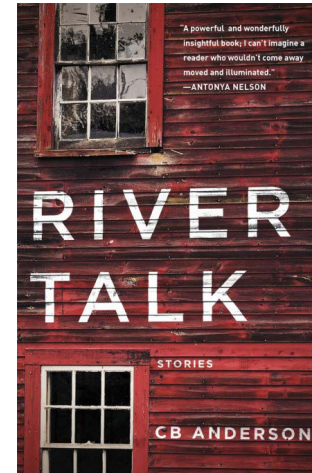
A family's saga during the volatile 1960s and 70s in the South—surviving domestic violence



[www.mupress.org](http://www.mupress.org)  
Macon, Georgia

MERCER  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

# Great Authors at C&R Press



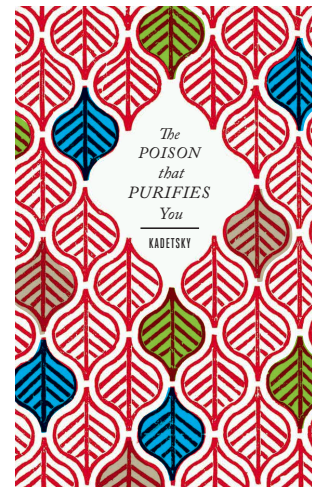
RIVER TALK

by CB ANDERSON

Softcover, eBook

“Brimming with life lived on the edge of insecurity, Anderson’s collection compels us with its sharply heard and imagined “river talk.” Listen in as the men and women of small towns in inland Maine steadily surprise not only us but themselves. There’s no surprise though in these stories having won already an impressive handful of individual awards.”

—David Hamilton, The Iowa Review



THE POISON THAT PURIFIES

by Elizabeth Kadetsky

Softcover, eBook

I was transfixed, awed, shocked, and transported, story after story. Kadetsky’s fiction is so brave and complex and beautifully written; it pushes the boundaries of comfort and makes your heart pound. Earthquakes, kidnappings, marauding monkeys; men who thief and menace and hurt; acts of love and God and shame—it’s all there, in Kadetsky’s bright and mesmerizing world.

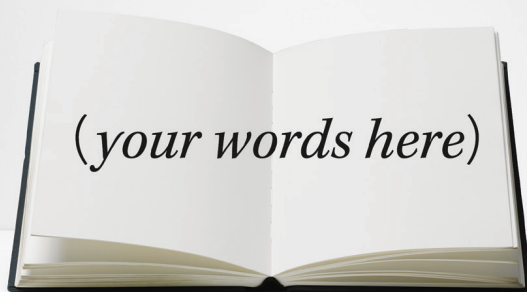
—Rachel Cantor, A Highly Unlikely Scenario



C&R Press is now accepting full length manuscript submissions in poetry, fiction, creative non-fiction and boundary pushing work.

Visit us at [CRPRESS.org](http://CRPRESS.org) and send us your best work.





There's a long history of writing women (*writers*) off. It's time to right that wrong, to get relevant not relegated.

**Visualizing** is for the work. **Galvanizing** is for getting the work out there. We can see your words here. So can publishers, agents + scholars. **Can you?**

Until it's just about the art.  
**Submit your literary work now.**



**PEN + BRUSH**  
[www.penandbrush.org](http://www.penandbrush.org)