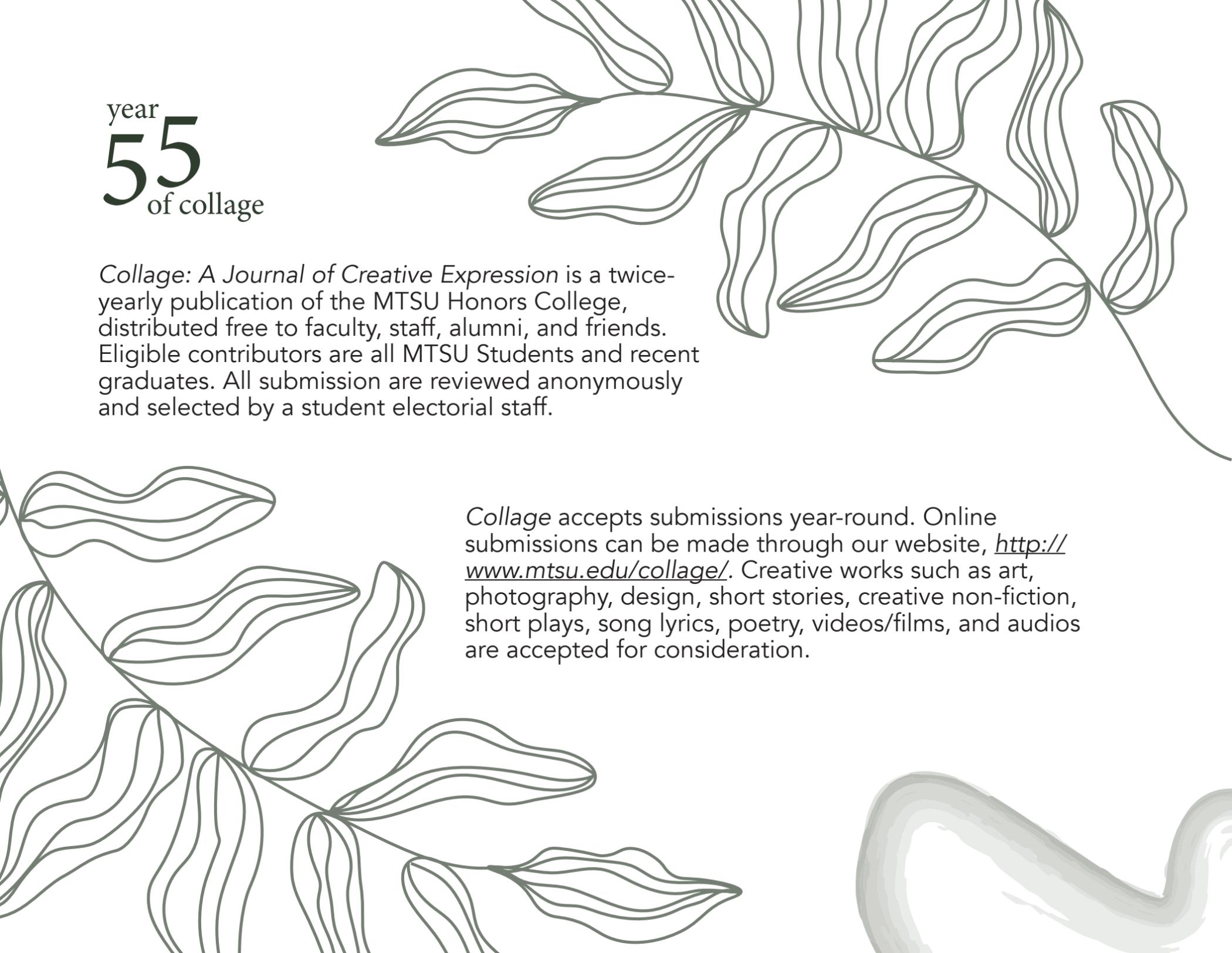


The background is a solid dark green. On the left side, there are several botanical illustrations. One is a light green branch with several leaves, some of which are filled with a lighter green color. Another is a dark green branch with many long, narrow, pointed leaves. In the top right corner, there is a thick, light grey, wavy line that resembles a root or a thick branch. In the bottom right corner, there is a dark green branch with several long, narrow, pointed leaves.

# COLLAGE

A Journal of Creative Expression | Spring 2023



year  
**55**  
of collage

*Collage: A Journal of Creative Expression* is a twice-yearly publication of the MTSU Honors College, distributed free to faculty, staff, alumni, and friends. Eligible contributors are all MTSU Students and recent graduates. All submission are reviewed anonymously and selected by a student electoral staff.

*Collage* accepts submissions year-round. Online submissions can be made through our website, <http://www.mtsu.edu/collage/>. Creative works such as art, photography, design, short stories, creative non-fiction, short plays, song lyrics, poetry, videos/films, and audios are accepted for consideration.

# Letter from the Editor

As I took upon the duties of the Editor-in-Chief of *Collage*, I could not help but notice all the changes our literary magazine has gone through. Fifty-five years ago, we published our first edition—a black and white publication—and here we are today with digitized effects from our amazing designers, and the possibility of publishing videos and audio recordings. Even *Collage* has changed behind-the-scenes. The last issue was dedicated to Marsha Powers whose role has been assumed by Robin E. Lee, to whom we would like to share a warm welcome!

With my last few days of being part of *Collage*, I can only think about the journey I have gone through while here. I started as a Literature Review staff member looking to every other staff member for guidance. I felt like an imposter amongst such creative and experienced individuals. I never once imagined that I would have these individuals consider my thoughts and opinions, or to have them encourage me the way they did. I also never imagined I would have the opportunity to become the Editor-in-Chief of such a prestigious literary magazine. These past few years at *Collage* have been full of excitement, enlightenment, and encouragement, and I cannot wait for what the future holds.

*Collage's* achievements in both the past and the future could not have been—and will not be—possible without all the efforts of the staff members, advisors, printers, and more. Celebrating 55 years, *Collage* hopes to continue its tradition of celebrating creative expression for many years to come!

It is my greatest honor to present the Spring 2023 issue of *Collage: A Journal of Creative Expression!*

Charlotte Daigle

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## LOVE IS A SUSHI BAKE AMONG

Abigail Wells | Poetry



this is what love is:

the way salmon smells in the oven—  
its bright pink flesh falling apart under eager forks.  
how vulnerable it feels to peel its skin back,  
like shedding our coats at the door  
after walking in the autumn wind.

furikake sprinkled over a bed of rice, and  
sheets of nori tucking us into sleep.  
tuna and crab mixed with kewpie mayo—  
the hot meat melting cream cheese into a soupy mixture.

green onion. in any form. in all its glory.

love is best at 400° for 20 minutes—  
and while it bakes—love is slicing  
fresh avocado and cucumber by hand.

love looks like sesame seeds scattered  
like freckles across hands and faces we know well.  
love looks like sriracha drizzled in diagonal lines  
like the paths we take to meet each other by the  
train.

this is what love is:  
cooking for friends.  
sharing a meal.

them                      cleaning up the dishes  
while you rest.  
the fish taking its last breath  
before sacrificing itself for you.

Bird lady  
Elizabeth Crouse | Art





The furthest mountain  
Gloria Newton | Photography



fall colors  
Daniel Schafer | Photography

## Among the ruins of caer Dannan

Aaron White | Prose

Upon a hill, beneath grey sky,  
the stones of old Caer Dannan lie.  
Once a fair and royal place,  
its tribe is gone without a trace.

I make the trek one afternoon in late October,  
searching for secrets that scholars glossed over.  
For many consider it haunted ground  
where otherworldly Things abound.  
As for me, I long to venture past its broken gates,  
beyond those walls the world of Fey awaits.

Broken stones lay scattered across broad thoroughfares  
what kind of kingly folk once trod upon the cobbles there?  
I wander through past and columns grand  
carved with runes none understand  
then find myself in a great domed room  
full of grave granite figures—Heroes of old, I presume.  
Their bodies are frozen as if from a spell,  
the only folk who there yet dwell.

I wander through vast antechambers and vacant halls,  
tattered tapestries often clothe the walls.  
One such drape captures my gaze, for it is clean,  
edges frayless, depictions pristine.  
Woven within is a shining city, with wondrous walls, an illustrious palace,  
a champion guards the gate from grotesque hordes of monstrous malice.  
A remarkable relic of the ancients, to be sure—  
but as I gawk, in eager Twilight creeps, and in the gloaming it is obscured.  
There's no more lore to learn today,  
Something keeps my curiosity at bay.

It must be a history not for mortal eyes to see,  
for, once returned upon the morrow, full of alacrity,  
I found it vanished  
fabric, hangings, and woven secrets.  
No sheltered outline did weathered walls exhibit.  
I searched for prints along dust-filled carpets,  
but found only my own.

Upon a hill, beneath grey sky,  
the stones of old Caer Dannan lie.  
Once a citadel of lordly hosts,  
more than simply sentinels of stone remain, tis suppos't.



Thick, green water splashes about my ankles as I take another step. The swampy marsh parts around me, and I trek through it, ever dutiful. I was born here. I will die here. I take another step. I sink a little further.

When I was young, my mother pranced and danced across the water. But time passed, and she grew older. Her dancing slowed, then stopped, and all she could do was step, step, just as I do now. Another step, I sink a little further. The muddy water pools just below my breasts.

The swamp is all I have ever known, all I will ever know. It stretches in all directions, horizon to horizon, unending, beautiful in that way that all timeless things are beautiful, terrifying in that way that all timeless things are terrifying. I cannot see the place where my mother finally sank below the surface; it looks like all the rest. Another step, a little further.

Another step, a little further. Another step, a little further. What else is there? I could stop, yes, stand still and sink in place, as if in one final protest to the swamp. But what is a stagnant life? Could I truly live while standing still, or merely survive? Why live at all if not to move forward? I am choking on marsh water. I am drowning in it. I take another step. I sink a little further.

I am almost under. I can feel it now. The top of my head is already wet from ripples on the surface. My instincts scream at me to fight, to raise my arms high into the air that I might have to sink a little further before I submerge, but I don't. The muddy water fills my ears, fills my eyes, my throat, my lungs. My time is coming, and I will not resist it. I don't even know that I have the strength to anymore.

I take another step. I sink.



## Ode to cobalt

Kera Reynolds | Poetry

Bike rides in the Nevada mountains and  
automobiles from Bugatti. Stained-glass windows  
and delicate book covers from pretentious authors. I praise you  
for your brilliance. Eighteenth-century teapots

from Persia, sitting in the window  
sill with time to spare. My palms,  
plastered in clay, lay on top of yours  
as the lathe spins gently.  
Blue and grey lines stroke  
the pot with the brush. Then, you  
let the bristles glide  
on me: soothing as goosebumps form.

Fancy ball gowns and handmade  
jewelry. He grabs my tender  
hand and locks me in his arms. You say  
you're insensible, but we watch the  
summer skies bleed with warm hues of orange, yellow,  
and red. And I praise you for your passion and patience, picturing  
us drinking champagne out of fancy bottles,  
eating black berries off your lips, deep conversations,  
and wrestling in the grass as I trace  
the freckles on your bare skin.

batman from printer's Alley  
Raegan McKay | Photography



ovum Landscape  
Matt Gates | Photography





Why in the night are the funeral pyres lit?  
Is it a final call for their loves to come and sit  
One last tryst in the darkness blazed with light  
Until the very embers are blackened in the night

Why in the night are doleful bells rung?  
Are they to tell old Father Time he's got another son  
Gather carefully your fold, old indelible one  
Don't let little stragglers sing songs meant to be unsung

Why in the night does the somber watchman walk?  
Does he tell the afterlife the living too keep stock  
Padded footsteps fall, gentle but not enough  
To keep the little dreamers from sometimes waking up

Why in the night, does the earth shift and spin?  
Is it the gash of dirt, to core just six feet in  
A shallow well alone and its rotten fruit decay  
Breathe shallow little planet not too long will it lay

Chorus:  
Speak to the darkness  
Will it speak back  
Behind your eyes a curtain  
A shroud just as black  
The lines of past and future  
Through clouds of memory  
The closest fear an enemy  
No bloodhound can track

Bridge:  
Ring the bells  
Ring the bells for this night  
Ring the bells  
Ring the bells for us



A little daffodil sitting  
on the riverbed,  
leans over the edge  
to look at its reflection.

Its six silver petals rustle  
in the gentle breeze,  
glistening in the  
eyes of all in attendance.

Together the cherry blossoms  
form a barrier,  
keeping away the  
vigorous banter—  
for the little daffodil had  
but one desire,  
to gaze upon his  
face. He rejected food for

fear he would lose sight of himself.  
His narcissism  
completely consumed  
him, and so leaving  
the daffodil oblivious  
to the nymph Echo's  
unwavering love  
for her Narcissus.

Even after the others left  
Echo stood by him—  
his shade from the sun,  
his cover from the wet rain,  
and his warmth in the cold snow.  
With each passing season, Echo  
watched her love wither  
and fade, and blossom and bloom.

Throughout this cycle of death and  
rebirth, Echo sat  
on the riverbed,  
for her lover Narcissus.  
She hoped for recognition but  
her sweet daffodil,  
oblivious, just  
gazed at his dear reflection.

## yellow door

Emma Oxford | Prose

Storm clouds brew in the distance as the young girl hurries home. Her pink rain boots pound against the concrete. Thunder ripples in the distance. She gulps, fighting against tears that threaten to spill. She stayed out late, letting time slip by. Her brother's words echo through her head as she runs. You should listen to mom.

Another distant roll of thunder. A flash of lightning. Billowing storm clouds steadily inching closer. Should have listened.

She imagines the yellow door of her home. The image pulls at her heart, beating in time with the fear of the approaching storm. For a moment, she wants to find shelter so she will not have to meet her mother's disappointed blue eyes. I told you so, they say.

Lightning zips through the clouds. They are overhead now. The sky roars. Rain pours from the black abyss. The girl yelps and runs faster, heart pounding. All she wants is to run home to her yellow door. Fat water droplets paint the dry dirt next to the road, creating mud that seemingly wants to swallow her whole. The water quickly soaks her clothes, making them drag heavily on her thin frame. Her boots drip with mud, pigtails a tangled mess from the wind. She wonders for a moment if this might be the end. If she will never make it home again. She sprints through the walls of crashing rain. Racing for dry clothes. A plate of steaming spaghetti. Ticking from the antique clock softly drumming in the background. The warmth of home—there! The yellow front door finally peering through the storm—tugs her close.

Thunder roars. Her shoes squish as she scrambles up the steps of her front porch, fingers wrapping around a bronze handle. The bronze handle to a yellow door that won't open. The girl whimpers and pulls at the handle again, eyes widening when it won't turn under her grasp.

Lightning flashes. It still won't budge. Slumping down in a pile of soggy clothes and muddy boots, she wipes at her eyes as tears start to gather again. Should have listened.

No sooner do tears begin to flow freely than she hears hurried footsteps. Getting louder. She looks up towards the top of the door frame, hope soaring in her chest. Yellow wood swings open to the sight of worried blue eyes looking down. Waiting to embrace.

sylvia, i know how you feel  
Cameo F. | Poetry

i miss myself  
i once had a memory  
bloody weeds and a steely sea  
mermaid me  
i walk on knives without a voice

smoke me out  
i buzz through the house  
a bothersome bee with infectious screams  
insect me  
i poison the clover

i have too many lovers  
who don't know i'm here

i used to be  
i once was  
my present is the past  
my eyes aren't real  
so what i see  
must not be reality  
i think i am a mushroom  
smooth on top with ruffled belly

i think i'm limbless venus  
so many states i cannot be in  
scratch my nose? oh no  
i cannot feel their sticky hands  
but i can feel their sticky hands

i miss me  
the me i see  
wandering in the sunny chasms of my fears  
missing me  
kiss this me until i corrode in your tears



womanhood  
Madison Eddins | Art





poetry  
Greta Miller | Art

## this hunger

Abigail Wells | Poetry

If I could love you any more and,  
in exchange, must make myself any smaller,  
I would choose to be a conch shell.  
For, if you ever got close enough, you would hear  
the crashing of waves,  
my crying my voice  
coming from some far-off place,  
a distant world where love wrestles into being.  
Or I would be a hollowed out  
chest, my ache for you resting  
somewhere cavernous—  
between the throat and the soft marrow  
of borrowed bones.

This gnawing need, this hunger—  
for proof, for signs of life and love—  
does not belong to me, or at the very least,  
it did not start here  
in the spaces between my ribs.  
Yet it is still mine.

If I could walk a tightrope—  
If I could hold myself up by a kite string—  
(and I've tried)

would surrender would servitude  
be the act of falling,  
crashing

back down to  
Earth?

Impaling myself on a stake  
only pulling it out when you allow me?  
Love has no name.

Yet I cry *daddy* under my breath, tossing  
and turning in my sleep.  
I whisper *mother* into the wind, as if I'm calling,  
begging for it to come home—  
begging for you to let me across the  
threshold.



freedome  
Angela Hollingsworth | Photography



## symphony in b minor

Rachel Peterson | Prose

my body is a symphony of sounds  
like the

snap

—crackle—

pop!

of my bones as i stretch and climb the stairs,  
the

thud.

thud.

thud.

of my heart, frantic in its rest.

a shrill ringing underpins it all

when my ears prick to a phantom sound,

the

\gasping\

lhuffingl

sighing

keeps the beat of uncooperative lungs.

my body, like an old house where teenagers throw a party,  
finding a way to keep it alive for one more night.



it's twins  
Pattie Belsky | Art



translucent  
Charlotte Daigle | Photography





Antidote Paint co.  
Morgan Ruth | Video



birthright  
Matthew Keo | Art



## socrates and plato: a cruel irony

Angela Benninghoff | Prose

On February 15, 399 B.C.E., the Athenians killed Socrates.

An algae, the strings like sage mistaken for parsley and carrots with white flowers.

A defense, the words of an argument and a condemnation as a gadfly to a horse.

An Apology, the bitterness and the weeping of his students. His final comfort.

The tingling began in his toes, the same feeling etching into the fold of his fingertips, a wrathful sea of red itching across my arms. The realization, the turning point of death—the moment Aristotle would christen as peripetia, the sudden realization of Oedipus' fate—settled over him as the shadowed colors of an artist, the shades of black and white rubbed to grey. Someone screamed—the sound of his students weeping for him, the sound of him begging me. The spark of rocks—a warmth, the licking of flames, burning over the numbness of frostbite, the hemlock followed its direction. A pick cut and carved into each nerve and bone, each strike preparing him for Hades, every tingle and prick sculpturing what would remain for what would come, a breath to admire my work. Fat tears fell, the men screaming and breaking, the desperate wails of a Greek chorus in a tragedy. The sound of the chaos dulled, a torture to simply watch—my fingers stilling over the frozen strain of his ice pick scars, the scream permanently etched where a smile should have been until the numbness wore it away. The slow paralysis consumed him, the world shattering and his body silencing.

A permanent whisper of philosophy. My voice hoarse.

Any pleasure was lost to the poison, and in its absence, the emptiness remained.

No blood had spilled across the scene. Only suffocation and a corpse told what happened.

It should have gone unpunished, an execution perfect in its mimicry. The resemblance, all too specific in detail to be an accident, a coincidence, the universe's desire for cruel irony—I had researched the death of Socrates before plucking the algae with welted fingers. A landfill of whiskey bottles, a wall of photos and memories, the red tape connecting each pushpin and the red ink scratching them away. Two men, each with the same name. A chance to repeat history. Me, the Fates. All I had to give was an apology, the shaky words written with trembling fingers, but the cameras found me, the words and photos my own damnation—a twist of the Fates, their furious revenge for my stealing of the thread of life and slicing it myself.

The police cornered me, my hands cuffed and secured to an interrogation—an unnecessary precaution, as I would tell them everything—with only a three-lettered word on their lips, the taste of history bleeding into me. "Why? Why would you kill your father?"

The white pressed into the crevices of my fingertips the evidence of the hemlock.

The confession and apology.

The jury condemned me to death, as the jury condemned him.

a wildflower's temporary splendor

Katelyn Parrish | Photography



tennessee

Gyllian Mullen | Poetry

Oregon has a monstrous quality to its beauty  
It's overtaking, grandiose  
The kind of beauty that makes a human feel small  
The kind of beauty that's a comforting reminder that we are less important than we think  
But Tennessee has a delicate beauty  
Tree limbs are lithe and waterfalls dance down rocks instead of roar  
The shadows the leaves make on the ground are a puppet show  
It's unlike the feeling of taking in an Oregon coast landscape  
With each element of the picture fighting for the spotlight  
"Me, me, me" from every direction  
Tennessee sunsets are an exhale after a long day  
And the forest scenes are cohesive paintings, each element talking to one another,  
Complimenting the way their colors blend  
Never looming over you  
It's a quiet song sung only for the joy of singing

A dream of an (un)familiar lover

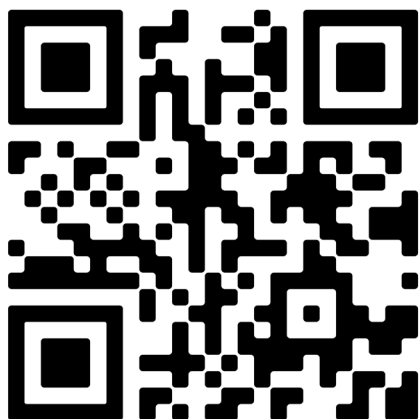
Megan Crowe | Poetry

The old library stretched out to the edges of my mind.  
Fireplaces, fiction, forgotten realities—feeling the pages  
graze my fingertips—I curled up with a foreign book,  
and I thought of you for a fleeting, unforgiving moment.

Your voice was just as clear as our last phone call,  
and you were laughing in a way that was too warm, so foreign.  
I knew if I looked up, I would see you in a way I never saw you—  
truly happy, perfect, in love—  
and then the delusion would snap, and my soul would break.

You whispered my name, and I hated the way  
I loved the sound of me on your lips again.  
I wanted to rip out the page, my heart, your memory.  
Even in my mind, you are still a liar.  
Even in my dreams, I am still weak.

I stayed in that foreign labyrinth of fairytale,  
wishing and wanting and ignoring the insistent,  
blaring alarms of self-respect and morning light.  
I stayed, and for the first time,  
you stayed, too.



i rotoscoped a thing  
Morgan Ruth | Video



mother sea  
Kalila Muhammad | Art

## An artist's Heart

William Bain | Song Lyrics



We broke in, my boys and me  
Killed a couple enemies  
Left no trace behind

We moved on to Tennessee  
Faked a love for whiskey  
Left no distillery declined

We left behind our Northern roots  
And posed as a Southern crew  
Millions screaming every word we said

But we knew that truth be told  
Nothing that we had was gold  
And if we kept it up, we'd wind up dead

Sometimes I think about the past  
A hopeless sonder, sometimes I wonder  
Could I be anything else  
Then just a poser, I'm never closer  
To finding myself, I once knew myself

Memories of that little boy  
Who knew it was more than a toy  
When he strummed that first G chord

Visions of the future days  
When masses would sing out his praise  
But artistry would be his true reward

For dollar signs his accent came  
And he traded his message for fame  
His heist began and he was on his way

But soon he learned the sorry truth  
You don't forget the joys of youth  
And he ran out of fake words to say

Sometimes I think he still exists  
Our thoughts colliding, forever hiding  
In those first simple chords  
A heart that's yearning, and I am learning  
To find myself, I've found myself

The wedding was ornamented in pale shades of blue, the palettes in splashing waters and galling winds, the fever of summer and the violence of winter. In the frills of nobility, the bulging meat of the men falling over the dyed gowns of the whitened women, the dripping scent of bloodied flesh, savory and sour, roasting in the kitchens a champagne to the pillow of perfumes, the guests had gathered. Grossly decorated portraits framed above the stolen relics and heirlooms, the ancient vases from Attica and the crowns of diamonds crested in familial emeralds, the family as artifacts to be seen and judged—the estate a museum, they had been dreaded to be welcomed, their arms outstretched in traditional submission. The joining of families, the metamorphosis of well won crests in armor and unicorns, titles and money.

A pageant of wealth.

A woman arranged into a marriage.

A mistress coming to terms with the household.

The veil tumbled down her spine in soft ringlets, the lacy fabric scratching against the satin and wool of her gown. The purity of her appearance cascading in a waterfall under the eyes of the princes and princesses, the dukes and the duchesses—the family to whom she'd inherit. The crown, the crown he had blessed her, settled upon her brow, one world traded for another. She angled her eyes at the crowds, watching and searching.

The world had gathered to glimpse the princess, the lady who would be queen. Televised history, the golden carriages and ruby drivers in dull palettes cracking with the filming cameras, those to whom royalty could only ever be admired from afar worshippers, their voices rising in unison, a hymn to an angel—they called her name as a goddess. In the wake of "The Raiders of the Lost Ark," the daughter of a Bulldog and a Steward stepped onto the steps of red in a chorus of white. A snow-white hare dragged across the forest, its purity in crimson—the predator a lion, where one never should have been.

The third. The divorcée. The affair.

The granddaughter of the favorite mistress to Edward VII, her smile in the crowd—the feeling of her always there, nudging into the scene and taking the right of her heritage.

Every noble family wants a queen.

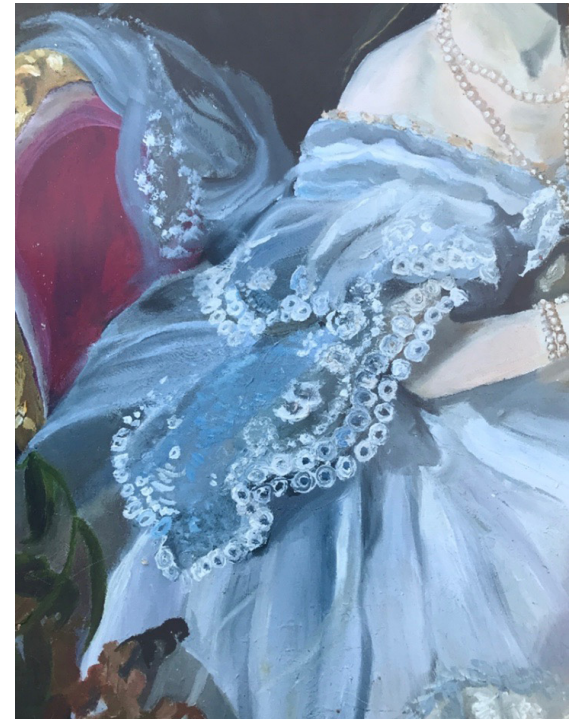
Every little girl wants to be a princess.

The symbol of the people, a representative of the commonwealth in an upheaval to the tradition that had cemented them in modernity, she was the figurehead: beauty and grace, a metamorphosis of peasantry kindness and generosity, with no throne. The eyes of a woman who always knew more than she portrayed, the eyes as sapphire as her engagement that searched for a third—I remember her then, a white angel, when the people prayed for a mother and leader. A bride and a wife, she binged and vomited her despair. She nearly drowned.

Fortuna blessed her in London.

Morta wrecked her in Paris, that beauty drowned and mistress made.

sit and look pretty  
Lauren Schwartz | Art





famished  
Lauren Schwarts | Art

## self portrait as seasons on a backyard apple tree

Gloria Newton | Poetry

Gnarly moss stained bark covering  
the years of memories  
Is your coat as warm as mine?  
Sweet white blossoms, velvet to fingertips  
A robin's nest filled  
with four speckled blue gems  
Does she know I will watch them as though they are my own?  
You and I will hold them safe.  
As always before  
From sapling to stronghold.  
Whether you are  
Fresh and viridian vibrant  
Ripening sickly sweet  
Skeletal and somber.  
Slippery with snow.  
Though she will have gone by then.  
Do you remember?  
We have seen this often.  
Her little ones will have grown  
Just as we did.

quilted southern  
Mason Covell | Art



Falling in love with a friend is completely different

Cassie Sistoso | Poetry

(after Shannon Barry)

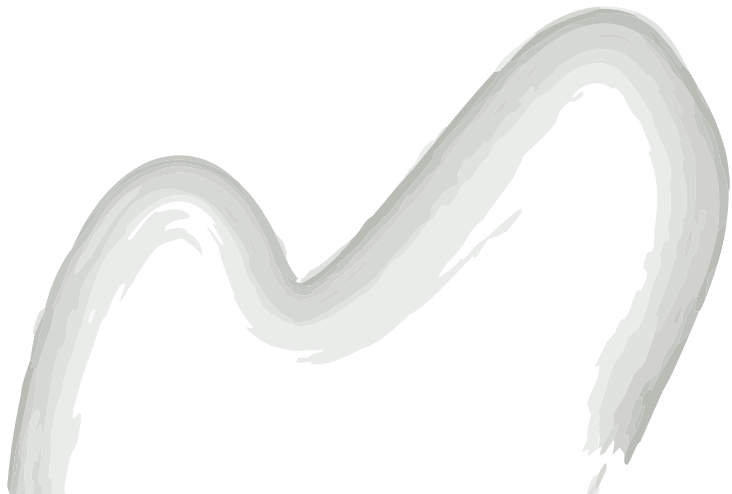
have your hands always looked like this?  
i have seen them so many times

reached for them during the swell of a song  
or in a crowd when we are tangled apart from  
perpetually standing shoulder to shoulder  
even then the space between us felt unnatural

but it never ached like this

not that this fell over me all at once, though  
loving you has always felt instinctual but now  
i play with our affection between my teeth  
run my tongue along its surface to satiate

the hunger i dare not name



Smokey mountain moonrise at sunset

William Lickman | Photography



many forms  
Sarah Leuthen | Art



# What We Can Learn from Chinese Watercolor

Haley Roberts | Feature

Most of us are immersed in western culture for the majority of our lives, familiar only with the works of Picasso, Van Gogh, Warhol, and the like. We are most accustomed to being moved by the beauty of *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte*, feeling the movement within *The Starry Night*, or pondering the context of *The Persistence of Memory*. What we often overlook is the marvel of the artistic brilliance within Chinese culture, specifically its unique art of watercolor.

The composition of Chinese watercolor paintings is much different than that of Western art. Traditionally, Chinese watercolor is done on Chinese rice paper that absorbs and spreads ink very well due to its thinness. Color is used sparsely in this art form, and objects are typically only given their natural color. Sometimes, Chinese calligraphers add poetry in collaboration with the original artist, and collectors or other owners add their own seals to pieces that become part of the art. This form thus embraces the concepts of collaboration and expansion, as one piece has an infinite ability to expand as it is passed down over time.

This brings us to the work of Dr. Quanping Zheng.

Dr. Zheng is the Director for Asian Studies at MTSU with an accomplished passion for Chinese watercolor paintings. There is much to be learned from his experiences in creating these brilliant pieces. Tradition largely influences Dr. Zheng's work, and he humbly credits much of his abilities to the artistic masters that came before him. "I often try to feel how they felt when they were painting or writing," Dr. Zheng said when asked about his influences, "I was drawn to the Chinese ink paintings as well as the poetry and literature aspect of the traditional art form." Additionally, the traditional medium has a great say in how he responds to his work. The rice paper "requires the artist to be thoughtful yet responsive to the ink's effect on paper," he explains, "your creativity is expressed by the state of your mind and the responsiveness of the rice paper to the ink strokes." He feels freedom in collaborating with the paper itself, as he must relinquish some of his control to it and trust the process that produces such moving art.



Nature also plays a large role in influencing Zheng's creativity. Chinese landscapes bring him peace and freedom when painting and allow him both to explore the country that he loves and to create a space that allows him to feel harmony. It is evident through the rich colors and lifelike landscapes of his paintings that his connection is strong with the world around him.

It is truly moving to behold one of these paintings in person, especially given the knowledge of the history and process that goes into each brushstroke, yet Dr. Zheng is incredibly humble about his work. It is easy to feel the passion radiating from each painting, which depicts a story equally unique as its creator. This process, from creating to viewing, holds dear the roots of creation – finding time to connect to one's surroundings and feeling peace through the process.



## soft

Anna Grace Gragg | Prose

Many words are used to describe people like me. Some words are less kind than others. But I like soft. It's like comfort. Like warmth. Not a stuffed thing, but something you still want to hold. There's no pressure to be the right size. Or the specific, correct type of fat body that society is only now "allowing" to be accepted.

Soft is a celebration.

I like being soft. With soft, there's less anxiety. There's less fear of change. I'm not too afraid of staying how I am or taking up more space because people will judge me even more. Or being terrified that if I lose weight, my experiences and feelings in my adolescence are null and void.

Soft is simple.

I want to be allowed to drop the nuance. To leave the labels and descriptors in the air and just be. I want the lack of perception or commentary. I want the luxury of offering to go get food without odd looks or comments. I want to not feel the need to justify my routine, or give a laundry list of reasons why I look the way I do. I want people to not need my reassurance that they don't look like me, as if that is their greatest fear. I want to want nothing.

Soft is warmth.

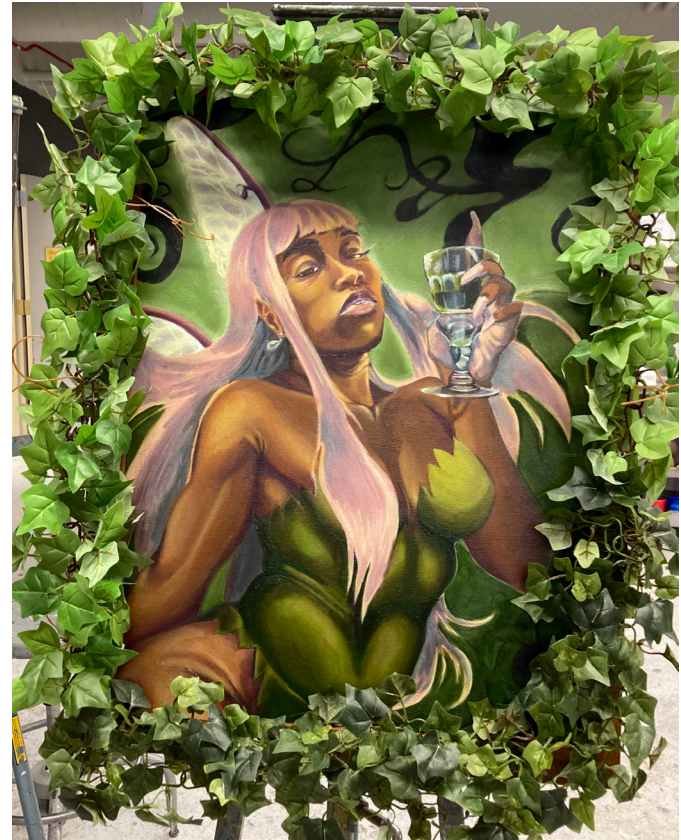
The world around me and other women is tightened with strings. They force us in place, cutting us when we attempt to exhale. When we try to move, we are ridiculed. When we resolve to survive in place, we are mocked.

Soft is gentle.

We must ignore the pandering phrases that feel empty and hollow. We have to armor ourselves in ways many will never understand. Words fly through the air and on screens like projectiles, but "soft" makes them glide off my skin like silk.

Soft is beautiful.

This one word holds weight for me. It is precious. While we take back other words for bodies like mine, soft is something I can hold close. I cradle it in my heart. But soft is not breakable or fragile. It offers reassurance, stability, and safety. It gives me a new lens to view myself with. Soft makes me feel the jagged edges blur and fade. It makes me loosen and shiver. It helps me breathe. Soft gives me peace.



green fairy  
Kalila Muhammad | Art

still life #6  
Chelsea Barranger | Art



Miniature Texttile study  
Jillian DeGrie | Art



## An excerpt from “Remember”

Charlotte Daigle | Prose

The churning waves under our feet. Boom. The crying women and children; begging for food, water, air. Bodies packed with chains bolting us to the floor. Our necks weighed down. Waste dripping down the legs, tears swelling the eyes, sweat spotting the face. Heads pounding for freedom, but our only freedom is to be forgotten.

Too much crowding. Too much wailing. Too much whipping. Beaten down. Kept from the sun. Oh, where is the sun! Where is its warm comfort! Our sun is far away. Under this sun, we bleed. We cry. We are nothing. Dead. Forgotten.

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The relentless pounding of our feet. Boom. We had cried. We had begged. We had fought. Our homes are far away behind our trail of tears. Exhausted from the forced march. Blisters under our feet. The sun beating down on our necks. Children strapped to our backs; wet clothes fused to our skin. The weight almost unbearable. Families huddling close at night to keep warm. The exhaustion incapacitating. They keep pushing us to live in desolation. They keep pushing us away from everything we know. They keep pushing us to relinquish our identities. They keep pushing us away to be forgotten.

Empty-handed fathers. Starving children. Despairing mothers. One-by-one, dying off. Sick. Hungry. Overcrowded. We demanded rights, pleaded for our families. Buried our language. Rejected our culture. Assimilated our children. Forgotten.

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The chugging wheels under our feet. Boom. Cowering. Shoved into train cars. Packed like dogs. Saturated by our own excrement, moldy hay clinging to our clothes, spoiled perspiration dripping down our faces. Dragged into lines. Families split apart. Stripped of all our belongings, our identities lost. Women and children screaming in the gas chambers. Men begging for their labor to end. The struggling fathers. The begging mothers. The screaming children. Piles of ash. Forgotten.

A number for a name. Skin and bone. Unrecognizable. Fists pounding. Cries echoing. Abandoned by our faith. We didn't matter. Starved. Shot. Burned. Hated by the world. Prayed. Shot. Burned. Dead. Forgotten.

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The Forgotten. Their pain and suffering left to History. Only a matter of time before that too is forgotten.

Every cracked whip.

Every relocated person.

Every murdered body.

Every cut.

Every sore.

Every assault.

The blood will wash away,

the cries will fade,

the gas will dissipate.

Rows lined up. Looked down upon. Unworthy. Still beaten. Still oppressed. Still unheard. They continue to fear. They stand in the back, truth invisible to the blind eye. Like their dead. Forgotten.

The survivors do not forget the whips. The cries. The dead. Bent double, they watch the world forget... But they will not be forgotten. They will die, but they will not let their story die. They will be heard. They will be remembered.



## knight of none

Cameo F. | Poetry

some foul creature of a lovely fen  
came pounding at my door  
i crawled upon the floor  
to answer the pounding at my door

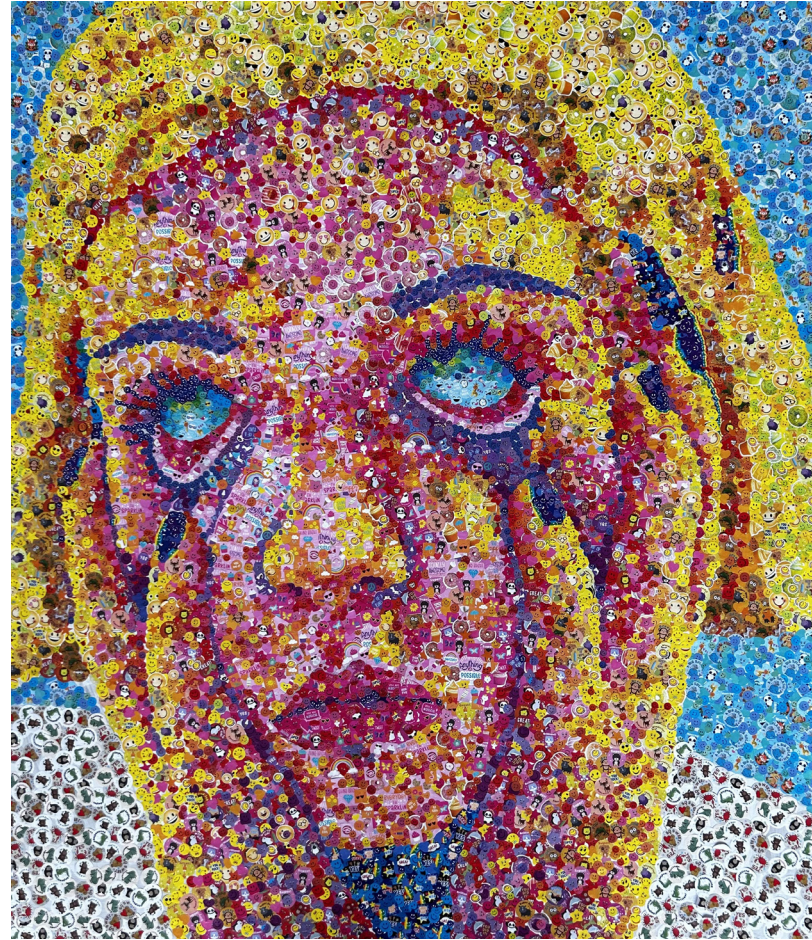
he wanted a heaping cup of sugar  
for a poison he would make  
a poisonous lavender cake  
was the thing that he would make

his voice pranced through my brain  
as i lay and could not creep  
for my dragon lover was just slain  
by a cruel knight  
in the cool night  
as she snored in a silken sleep

creature, creature, i call to thee  
if a poisonous batter you will stir  
send it to the murderous cur  
for my fiery lover will not stir

he hisses yessss through the floor trap  
and i can worry none  
he will bake and take a life—no one  
will miss that Knight of None

room for improvement  
Ansleigh Britain | Art



## the gift of magical realism

Anna Grace Gragg | Prose

The checkered linoleum squeaks under my footsteps, and I swear it sounds like distorted laughter. It's an odd notion to think that maniacal cackling is erupting from a sinister chess board beneath my feet, and not just the remnants of the rain outside tracking onto the record shop floors. In my mind, though, the sharp, high-pitched noises are like cruel voices that haunt your dreams and make the palm of your hands sweat. My hands take turns from gripping onto my record from home to dry off on my jeans.

The imagined insults wrap their claws around my shoulders and comb through my hair.

*You don't even have a good reason to be here.*

*They probably laughed at your application.*

*Do you really think you deserve this opportunity?*

I hold my record closer to my chest and shake my head. The soft thrum of an old rock album floats through the speakers above me as I pass through shelves and boxes of used records. Some sleeves are so worn the artist and title are a complete mystery. I want to reach out and touch each spine, as if the melodies trapped inside the cardboard sleeves could flow through my fingers alone. After months of waiting for my application to be chosen, it's funny that now when I finally have the chance to play the song, I want to stop on the way. Anything, really, to stretch out this afternoon.

I had paused too long by the shelves and barely notice when a shadow joins mine cast onto the floor.

"I believe you are looking for me, yes?" A short, old man stands before me. His white hair reaches in wisps to the tip of his ears. The lines by his eyes make them shine in the amber lighting. I can't tell if it is a trick of the sunlight through the windows behind him, but the man seems to have a soft, blue glow around him. I feel myself relax under his warm gaze as he reaches out a hand. I nod, but start as his skin feels like ice against mine. I jerk my hand back.

"I'm sorry, that was rude," I mutter and hold my record tighter. I want to avert my eyes, but his purple irises were so focused on me I couldn't move away.

He grins at me and tucks fly away strands of white behind both ears at once. "Not at all! I forget first timers don't necessarily know how this all works here. Welcome to Needle Point Records. You are number three hundred and thirteen, correct?"

"Yes, you can call me—"

The man holds up a palm to stop me, and I notice although he has wrinkles around his eyes and smile lines creasing his face, he has no fingerprints. I close my mouth as he interjects, "Names are not necessary.

Follow me." Without waiting to see if I heard his orders, the man begins walking through the rest of the store. We weave between climbing shelves and stacks of records. The man occasionally pauses to wipe dust from a shelf, then to pull out a record to inspect the shining vinyl. He judges his reflection in its surface, seems to collect himself, then sets off again.

We reach a corner of the shop and enter a chipped wooden door, reading "Employees Only" in silver letters. The hall before us stretches farther than the shop's foundations should allow, but as we travel through the corridor, the walls seem to elongate. I want to close my eyes, but keep my attention trained on the man in front of me. The pale blue and lavender shimmer around his form slowly pulses, glows, and spreads outward. Tendrils of color thread themselves through the floorboards below. They seep into the striped wallpaper surrounding me, making the atmosphere vibrate with life. A strange compliance makes my heartbeat slow as the ribbons of light and color approach me. They dance around my feet, then my legs. I expect my skin to go numb or freeze when touched, but the moment the colors make contact with my bare arms, I feel warm, as if I have been wrapped in a pillowy blanket.

A bright light emits from the other end of the hallway. As we approach, the old man's silhouette seems to shift in its rays. His form smudges and moves like heat waves over pavement. I know I should be more concerned, but each time I feel myself slip into familiar panic, the tightening in my chest eases and I feel like I am floating outside of my body. As if he is remembering I am still here, the old man glances behind himself, then starts walking faster. I find myself able to keep up, still immersed in the warm feeling of the colors as I am completely surrounded in cool shades of blue, lavender, and pink.

"Stop." His voice sounds light and airy as he commands me to halt at the source of light. Before us stands a doorway, shining a translucent blue. In my haze, it almost looks like a wall of clear water, shimmering, inviting me in. He speaks softly, "Go on inside." I nod as feeling begins returning to my limbs. I start to feel more tethered to the ground, the record against my chest, and the old man's hand on my shoulder. He looks into my eyes and waits for me to truly listen before saying, "I know you are nervous. But you should be here. I read your application. Everyone deserves a chance." Without allowing me a moment to respond, he shoves me through the shifting oceanic doorway.

Alone, I catch my breath as my body feels heavy again and look up. Tears burn in the back of my eyes as the man's ethereal voice echoes in my memory, resonating in my ears and simultaneously lifting a weight off my chest while placing a lump in my throat. I blink my thoughts away and find the

nearest chair to sit down. A small lounge boasting of three simple wooden chairs and a coffee table rests in the center of the waiting room. As I relax into the seat, I see the room is a mirror of Needle Point Records' storefront, lacking the rows of shelves and checkout counter. Opposite of the door I came through is another one just like it. In silver gilt lettering, it reads "Studio for Second Chances." My heart drops as my eyes study each letter over and over again.

*I want to be here.*

*I waited months to be here.*

*I poured my heart into the application and they chose me.*

*I deserve this.*

*I'm going to be okay.*

My body starts trembling like it always does when I feel this way. After years, I should be used to my heartbeat drumming a panicked anthem in my ribcage. My body going cold and chest aching is normal, but even still, I find myself clenching each muscle, desperate for a distraction. Some relief. A way to feel better.

I almost cry when the door before me opens and a sniffing woman staggers through the door, clutching a record to her chest in a similar way as me. The door closes behind her, and she slumps into the chair opposite mine. Her hand covers her smiling mouth. Tears trickle down her weathered face as she smooths back gray streaked hair after she sets her album neatly on her lap. I shrink farther into my chair when she looks up and sighs.

"Are, are you okay?" I whisper.

The woman beams, "Yes. Yes, I am perfect."

I can't stop myself from asking, "If it's okay to ask, how was it?"

"Oh, it was wonderful. After my husband died, I was afraid I would only have memories left. And memories fade." The woman paused to gather herself before continuing. "They played the song we heard on our first long car ride. It's a terrible song. God awful, really. But...playing it again, going back, it's my favorite song now." She laughs softly and wipes her eyes with her knuckles. "I was right there with Paul again. He was himself, before he began forgetting. Back when his hair was bright red and he didn't have those ridiculous glasses yet."

The woman, no longer crying, looks up at me. I can't help but envy the look of peace on her face, shaping her features into a welcoming smile. "He sang along even though he didn't know the words. I had forgotten that part." She shakes her head in disbelief. "All I knew walking into the studio was that was a perfect day. I got to relive it."

It feels like the woman is looking through me, lost in her memory she

was gifted with revisiting. After a moment, she remembers I am here and asks, "What song will you listen to for the first time again? When was it?"

Shame and insecurity claw at my edges and force me to hold my secret tighter. "Oh, it's just a song I heard when I was young. It was an important day."

As the door opens again, the woman smiles kindly again and stands with me. "Good luck," she offers, then we part to separate exits of the waiting room.

I am greeted with a similar warmth to the hallway as I cross the threshold into the studio. Layered carpets cover the floors, and a worn leather couch stands in the center of the room. Next to it, an old record player sits quietly on a wooden table. I blink, and instantly the old man from the hallway is standing at the record player. His eyes twinkle as he motions for me to hand him my record and lie on the couch.

He studies the record and his reflection for a moment, then says with a voice that seems to chime like a bell, "An interesting choice. Track Nine, correct?"

"Yes."

"Alrighty." As he placed the vinyl down gently and moved the needle to its surface, he breaks the light humming that seems to flood the room. "What memory of a first listen are you going back to, my friend?"

I clear my throat and answer, "It isn't special, really. I actually feel kind of bad, being here and taking a spot. It was just...it was just a nice day. I really liked the song and I remember feeling..." I trail off, unsure of how to describe it, my guilt catching in my throat. People like that woman come here to see loved ones again, or revisit an important milestone. What's my deeply emotional and significant reason?

As if he can read my thoughts, the old man speaks gently, as if the quiet is precious, "It isn't always the memory itself that matters, is it? Or even the song you wish you could hear for the first time again. Sometimes, my friend, it is the feeling that matters."

I ignore the sliver of saltwater creeping from my eyelashes into my hairline and stammer, "Yes. For me, it's hard to feel okay a lot of the times. And when I heard this song, I just felt..."

"You felt at peace?"

I nod and feel myself break open at his words. I hold my arms to my chest, missing the feeling of the square cardboard, and look at the old man.

He smiles and turns the volume up slowly. As the first chords of the song dance into the air and tendrils of color return around me, he says, "Well then, let's give you peace again my friend." —

beauty pressed  
Kera Reynolds | Art



the creation of eve  
Lauren Schwartz | Art



not a bottle  
Ariana Chilvers | Art



miniature Bottles  
Ariana Chilvers | Art



green teapot  
Ariana Chilvers | Art



## The fallout of silence

Angela Benninghoff | Prose



The world ended in 1969. It came slowly, as catastrophes often do: the pain of war, the naked suffering and the submarined devastation wracking Europe and Asia, ebbing to the panic of the forgotten islands too close to the shores of America with the Big Bear and her big bombs. Political assassinations and itchy fingers, the pads of forefingers and thumbs scratching over the barrels of semi-automatics and nuclear release, plagued the polluted cities already infested with the underground streams of the mafia. Newfound freedoms, the kind that came with speeches and bright colors, became intertwined with political propaganda, while Elvis Presley and Audrey Hepburn decorated the newspapers and the magazines in hip rocking suits with Chelsea collars and black dresses with cigarette holders. The headlines screamed, “Paul Is Dead,” when The Beatles carved their fame into the decade with skating rings and birth control, the kind of news that softened and distracted, easing the minds of its readers, with promises of a moon landing and an abounding universe.

The history of catastrophe in human normalcy. Our own routine and silence.

The end of the world was a train crashing into a mountain in slow-motion. The collapse of an empire, the oceans rising and falling with shattering cliffs of ice, white countries melted into the seas. The temperatures warming the cities in domes of wildfires and droughts—the fires scorching what was left of the forests and the radical droughts giving way to mudslides and rushes on wine in Europe. Ash dusted the plains in the Amazon, the barren stretches of the historic rainforest. Earthquakes and volcanoes sculptured the landscape, cracking and chipping at the crusted stone until all that remained was a marred depiction of the original, something wholly changed and made new in canyons and squishy stretches of obsidian.

The animals, the few that have survived—the doves and the alligators, are colored in hues of pollution, the smog and oils of our gasoline-fueled engines and carnivorous agriculture. Once beautiful and whole brutalized in scenes of red, the shades of an assembly-line murder, families have become separated and disjointed, heartbroken memories and necessary communication the only reminders of what was and should still be. People are as gods, figures to be called and worshipped, their hands casually bound in front of them in wishful prayer, wanting of something but never knowing what. The heavens fell, and I welcomed the woes of eternity. The end of the world colored in black and white, my paintbrush rubbing it into a storm.

The Inevitable, the Pressing Necessity, the Certainty of Retribution—they called me Fate.

Geography shifted with the sunsets. The globes and the maps were recalled and redrawn with the surges in the tides, whole cities and towns crumbling into the oceans like Atlantis—their columns, their foundations, and their homes with people still trapped inside. Hydras always followed, the multitude of hurricanes and tsunamis, each with a new category, tearing

through what was left of the coasts in places all too frequently ill-prepared. The disappearance of the stars speckled the subtitles of the news with concerns about the pollution of artificial light and one’s purpose in darkness. I remember when home became a furnace in bated devastation with lead paint and dried water hoses, the chords twisting and curling like green snakes through barren bushes and dead grass, perseverance and survival when the tipping points were reached and the world couldn’t turn back, the white of a dove with an olive branch crushed.

What does one do when there are no more tomorrows, when the end arrives—the urge to procrastinate, a sudden proclamation of devastation—we panic and cry and give up. The brave, those who fought to prevent the end, strapping themselves to businesses, screaming and crying, *begging*—they were right to be afraid. When Hope is forever trapped in her jar, the darkness in humanity leads us to suffering.

The taste of reality, the words burning in my throat: *we did this*.

The poor suffered yesterday, so the wealthy could suffer today, an eagle’s talons tearing into a dove’s tender flesh.

It wasn’t the aliens that ended the world, you see. It was us: you and me, our parents and theirs, watching and waiting as the ground quaked, the oceans rose, and the sky fell to meet us. The result of a climate crisis, a time bomb ticking and ticking until it exploded, and we weren’t fast enough to sully the attack. It was terrorism across the world, the kind that brings suffering and death—an apocalyptic end to everyone and everything with only ourselves to blame, or at least, that’s what my teacher says. She thinks it could have been avoided, but I’m not too sure.

A quarter spinning on its side, the watcher wondering which way it will fall.

Humanity always chooses death. We only rebuild after ruin.

The teacher—I cannot remember her name, as I always call her “Mary Jane”—wrote across the chalkboard once again, the silky texture of the white smearing across the oily surface of hunter green and down the stomach of her dark dress. It dripped from her fingertips to the tray, where half-used erasers were piled with the stench of cigarettes and weed. Her frizzy curls knotted on the crown of her head, the tendrils of sweaty carrot reaching the peaks of her shoulders with each shift of her arms, were the most colorful shades of my education: the place a Hell where students were held in electrical chairs and beaten with rulers when their parents allowed. A maroon floor complemented the creaking wooden desks that screeched across the tiles with the slightest movement, the colors in contrast to the walls of barred windows and black cubbies as if we were mere children. Mildewed yellow seeped wherever the bars ended, a faded color in a faded world. Uniforms and torn jackets hung over the chairs and across the desks, a shadowed reminder of our teacher who would die the same way.

*Suicide*. They said, the word crinkling on my lips in warning.

Middle schoolers in biology, too young for sex and too old for the list of newly extinct animals. I counted them on my fingers, one by one, and imagined a world with lions and tigers. Fate, my presence of shadowed expectancy, lies in the children as a monster in waiting. I have inhabited much: people, places, and things—the inevitable existence everywhere and nowhere, missed and mistaken, but I am always in the children. The future, the reality of what will be.

"The Climate Change Crisis is a landmark in our history. It is what has led us here."

"The Climate Change Crisis is why we're starving."

The young girl next to me shrugs, her scrawny shoulders careening down upon the desk and her body folding around the narrow flesh of her ribs. She is small with the body of a ten-year-old, much smaller than me, and watches with a confidence I have never replicated as the teacher turns, the crack of her lips cutting through the bated silence. Ignorance guides us.

"We are recovering." The voice of Mary Jane is never subtle, the prick of her smile never kind. "We have gained something new. Our government is kind."

"We have lost everything." It is the final words of the young girl—I can never remember any one's name, Susie or Rebekah maybe? A ruler strikes her bound knuckles, the flesh ripping upon impact, beads of crimson slipping down her fist and speckling the already bloodied desk. She falls silent with the heavy cusp of her breathing. Fate finds everyone, the inescapable.

The teacher straightens, the flick of the ruler disappearing under her arm.

The intercom blares, a crackle of static with our principal's recorded voice: "Turn off the water when you are brushing your teeth. Recycling saves the planet. Conserve energy now." The daily message crinkles and screeches like foil and a broken microphone, the sounds almost dismissed as the teacher draws the chalk across the board once more and our principal's voice returns. "There will be another test of the Fossil Fuel detector this afternoon. Thank you."

"Another test?" A copper haired boy leans back in his chair, the edges of the metal scraping against the desk of the girl with sapphire eyes. The leather of his jacket catching in the knots of the chair, wrapping around the basket beneath him. He claps his hands and howls with laughter, blissfully unaware of the tugging at his elbows until the feet of the chair slips.

The scream of his desk and the twisted crash of his body still tied to the chair.

Blood spills in a fountain, a sea of red marring the boy's tender features. He cries, cursing in his desperate attempts to sheathe his broken nose and untangle himself from the chair. His hands fling wily around him, as the teacher and the students watch—almost unamused. He stands and snarls before stomping to the nurse. "They're trying to kill us."

"Things are getting better." The girl with sapphire eyes admits, her head bobbing in rehearsed agreement. "My mom says you see the North Star when there's a blackout."

"Don't be an idiot, Lisa. No one has seen the stars in years." The girl to her left, farthest from me with silky locks of onyx and amber eyes, scolds, twisting her body around in the chair to better state her argument, the breath she inhales a strike of lightning. "I don't think there were ever any stars. We're alone here, you know. It's just us. Planets and stars, that thing they lie about called the Milky Way—they don't really exist. It's like chocolate and coffee, words a less intelligent race of humans used to mean something else."

"There are too many stories about the stars for them to not be real."

"Have you ever seen them? Do you know the stories?"

I know the stories. I know what happened, what will happen, the inevitable.

I know the past and the future, the present we have founded and built. Where the founding fathers of a distant and broken land crafted opportunity from ruin, each stroke of a quill cutting and carving the marble in capital with streets paved in passion and wisdom—the words of God and history, we crafted ruin from opportunity. A selfish talent, a sacrifice in beauty and humanity, I know how things will end, but I sit in silence, watching and waiting because my voice—the click of my tongue, the taste of my words—will not move their mountains. If it had, we would not be here now.

Her eyebrows knitting with confusion and concern, Lisa pauses. "Well, no."

She smiles and gestures to her onyx hair, a crown of victory. "I'm right."

No one asks me. No one ever speaks to me. They don't want to hear me.

I know the truth: the placement of every star, the constellations decorating the heavens and the stories behind each name, the bitterness of coffee in the morning, the sweet taste of milky chocolate in the afternoon. I remember when the sunrises and the sunsets were more than blurs of smoke, when palettes of red, orange, blue, and purple painted the night in a symphony of beauty and hope in the finality of today and the purpose of tomorrow. I remember when there were libraries of books to correct our foolish interpretations, when there were pictures of ancient cities like Boston and New York and animals in the rivers and oceans, and when health was a crown of glory, a natural expectation, and disabilities were ostracized for their rarity, the debate of such evil, where the opposite is true. I remember when the world was more than just coasts, and there was such a term as freedom in the streets of America and Europe.

And I remember when it was lost. —

## square one

Carter Elliott | Song Lyrics

Trying to find his way out of a long and winding maze  
The traveler's condition is belied upon his face  
It's way too dark to navigate, too black the night to see  
With several more days until he finds himself free  
When the sun has fully gone down  
When the last brief candle burns  
Square one is what he left  
And square one's where he returns  
Bleary-eyed but restless as the cold wind starts to blow  
He tries to plan a new path to see where it will go  
Twenty-seven dead ends, twenty-seven failures tracked  
No map to steer the way and every chance of going back  
He's sure that there's a way out  
There's a lesson he can learn  
But square one is what he left  
And square one's where he'll return  
Is there no way home? Is there no way home?  
Is there no way home? Is there no way back home?  
The weary traveler cries alone, thinking about the cost  
Remembering in the first place how he got himself so lost  
He screams out for comfort; only birds hear his prayer  
He screams himself unconscious, thinking no one will be there...  
There are saviors in the distance  
To which he can always turn  
But they have to find square one—  
That's where he always will return



smooth Reflections  
Dagan Billips | Photography



will i am will i might  
Selah Burton | Art



## time

Charlotte Daigle | Prose

Even after four years, things never changed. The pothole in front of the store and the number of tires it damaged. The cigarette butts littering the parking lot—remnants of lung cancer. The cracks in the sidewalk that catch women's heels. The line at Starbucks trickled out the door. The cars in the drive-thru sat bumper to bumper. Mr. Parker was giving mints to children as they passed. Mrs. Patterson sat next to him attempting to help him keep his pastry in his mouth instead of on his shirt. And Don stood behind the register, taking never-ending orders.

"How you doing, dear? You want your usual vanilla bean frapp with extra whipped cream?"

He held the plastic, cold-drink venti cup, black sharpie at the ready.

"That's alright, Don. I'll have a tall hot black coffee."

Don jokingly threw down the cold-drink cup, and grabbed a small hot-drink cup.

"Guess our girl has lost her sweet tooth."

I walk to the back of the shop, the cup strangely small in my average-sized hands. Hidden from sight, I sipped my drink. It tasted like ash. The bitterness flowed down my throat, settling deeper in my chest. An uncomfortable pressure. Ready to explode.

Outside the windows, the once-small oak tree hung high, branches reaching above the building's roof. A nest, home to newly hatched blue birds, sat on the branch closest to the ground. The bright green leaves showered the ground as the squirrels played tag together.

Before—many years before—I would play with my friends in that tree. Then, I could reach the lowest branches, and would compete to see who could climb the highest. I would call down to my mother, demanding she see how high I got. She would call me back down, adding in my middle name. Some years later, I would chat my way through three or four sugary drinks over the course of many hours with my friends and neighbors.

But now, in this packed Starbucks, busting out countless iced pineapple matchas and iced caramel macchiatos, I do not have that time. Or rather, I do not have enough time. Time is a collection of past memories and the collection of more. All of which will be lost over time.

But I did not want to forget my memories.

anger  
Cameo F. | Poetry

At dusk, the sun battles its death,  
Finally relinquishing a delicate light  
The sky becomes a violent red  
Then, with blue, a somber violet

In a quiet neighborhood, hidden away  
A canine incessantly begins its barks;  
Paws caked with dirt, bearing its teeth  
Covered in the blood of its insolent master,  
Who rightfully deserved a far worse bite

A small corner of the world turned to  
Such a crimson yet sallow color,  
Soaked in the bitter darkness  
Of a cold and restless shadow

pinball wizard  
Ethan Copps | Photography





# Creative Expression Awards



Each semester, six submissions receive Creative Expression Awards, one from each major category: art, photography, poetry, prose, video, and audio. Winners receive \$75 awards.

## art

**Room for Improvement** | Ansleigh Britain

## photography

**Freedom** | Angela Hollingsworth

## poetry

**Love is a sushi bake shared among friends** |  
Abigail wells

## prose

**The Marsh** | Jai Wilson

## song lyrics

**Why in the Night** | Gloria Newton

## video

**Antidote Paint Co.** | Morgan Ruth



# About Collage: A journal of Creative Expression

*Collage: A Journal of Creative Expression* is a creative magazine featuring submitted work chosen by a volunteer staff in a blind grading process. Staff members select the best work without regard for theme or authorship. The views and opinions expressed in this magazine are those of the submitting authors, photographers, and designers, and do not necessarily reflect the views or positions of any entities they represent.

Inquiries can be mailed to:  
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Middle Tennessee State University  
1301 East Main Street, Box 267  
Paul W. Martin Sr. Honors Building, room 224  
Murfreesboro, TN 37132

## Submit to Collage

*Collage* accepts submissions of original student creative work year-round, including art, photography, design, short stories, creative nonfiction, short plays, song lyrics, poetry, videos/films, and audios.

Online submissions may be made through our website, <https://www.mtsu.edu/collage/submit.php>

## Columbia Scholastic Press Association Awards

Gold Medalist Certificates – 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022

Silver Crown Awards – 2007, 2008, 2011, 2019, 2021 and 2022

Gold Crown Awards – 2012, 2013, and 2015

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Technology  
Adobe InDesign  
Adobe Illustrator  
Adobe Photoshop  
Apple Macintosh Platform  
Windows Platform

Typography  
Adorn Condensed Sans  
Avenir

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80 lb. Athens Silk Text

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