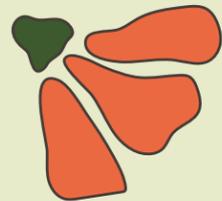




COLLAGE

A JOURNAL OF CREATIVE EXPRESSION

FALL 2023



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 submissions are reviewed anonymously and selected by a student editorial staff.

Collage accepts submissions year-round. Online submissions can be made through our website, 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 the physical world slowly shifts into a virtual reality, we must not let go of the charge to create. What is precious and valuable is becoming translucent and can no longer be measured by weight in pounds or by flipping a page. As you peruse the many facets of *Collage's* first digital issue, I implore that you never forget the smell of freshly printed ink or the sensation of holding a book in your hands. But as change engulfs us in every season, though our appearance may differ, we will continue to persevere, create, and exist.

As the Editor-in-chief of *Collage*, I extend my gratitude to all who have continued to pour their energies and time into the formation of this magazine. To the staff, the students, the faculty, and the alumni who continue to support us in our efforts—thank you for your willingness and generosity. The wealth of talent, experience, and humanity that is contained within this journal only further reflects the diversity of a global campus. We would not be able to display such rich culture and art without your help.

From the time when I first became part of *Collage* staff in the Fall of 2020, I have received constant streams of knowledge and perspective, compromise and firm beliefs, late nights and coffee breaks, and journeys into the subliminal minds of hundreds of students. The impact has shaken me to my core, leaving me in awe and forever changed. Looking to the future may be daunting, especially with the state of the world and the conflicts that seem to endure. Nevertheless, may *Collage* become a creative symbol of solidarity, diversity, and a representation of peace. While visiting Hiroshima, I will never forget what my Japanese friend, Mayako, said to me, "Peace isn't something we can give; it's created. Except we all want it, so we all feel the same. We are the same, all human, but peace looks different to everyone. What does your peace look like?" I am still searching for that answer, but I pray that the peace that we all seek will also be something that, like *Collage*, together we can create.

With gratitude,

RACHEL BOOHER



STAFF

EDITOR IN CHIEF

Rachel Booher

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Emma Jones

LEAD DESIGNERS

Mo Marler

Blue Gallegos

ASSISTANT DESIGNERS

Sarah Whitley

Kera Reynolds

PR/SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGER

Hannah Antrican

LITERATURE EDITOR

Angela Benninghoff

ASSISTANT LITERATURE EDITOR

Brynlee Wolfe

LITERATURE REVIEW STAFF

Kaleia Branch

Emma Oxford

Isabella Barlow

Weston LaRue

Angelina Bofenkamp

VISUAL EDITOR

Kaleigh Young

VISUAL REVIEW STAFF

Lena Eccles

Autumn McCleskey

Chloe Dye

Kaitlyn Thomas

Sierra Williams

ADVISOR

Robin E. Lee

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Creative Expression
Award Winner 

ART

- 5** Fool on the Hill
Daisy Gonzalez
- 7** The Fall (Greed)
Tyler Fitts
- 7** Executive Dysfunction
Jillian DeGrie
- 8** Bear in a Chair Reading a Book
McKenzie Anderson
- 9** Nitpicking 
Ansleigh Britain
- 11** Glass Pumpkin
Elizabeth Kowalczyk
- 15** A Fey-ted Meeting
Mars Alcantar
- 16** Self-Control
Kera Reynolds
- 16** Remi Wolf Concert Poster
Jillian DeGrie
- 17** Subconscious Mind
Charlie Elwell
- 18** From Death
Kayleigh Messler
- 26** Sweet Tooth
Ansleigh Britain
- 29** Still-Life: Motherhood
La'Asia Harris
- 29** The Sage
Tyler Fitts
- 32** Untitled Lithograph
Mercer Powell

- 32** Risk
Daisy Gonzalez
- 34** Lovers
Selah Burton
- 37** Untitled
Kayleigh Messler
- 38** Freckles
Jillian DeGrie
- 38** Katze
Elizabeth Kowalczyk

POETRY

- 5** Where Are We in the Milky Way
Angela Benninghoff
- 6** good coffee, sandcastles
Jai Wilson
- 8** The Labyrinth
Angela Benninghoff
- 10** Swan Song 
Brynlee Wolfe
- 12** The Paths of Apollo and Diana
Charlotte Daigle
- 17** Ephemeral
Megan Crowe
- 18** Leaving
Mitzi Cross
- 21** Anti-Alchemist
Jessica Pruitt
- 22** It's December 26th,
Brynlee Wolfe

- 25** *The Jilted Lover: An Archaeological Display*
Brynlee Wolf
- 26** Thursday, in some other universe
Megan Crowe
- 33** heimarménē: an allotted (portion), Fate
Angela Benninghoff
- 34** vampire
Colene Belmont
- 35** Serenade No. 1, "Mon Écho"
Aviree Lain
- 37** tides of grief
Colene Belmont
- 38** in the absence of the dog
Cadee Havard
- 39** re-creation myth
Jai Wilson

PROSE

- 19** Atomic Requiem 
Rachel Booher
- 27** The Chant
Rachel Booher
- 30** The Garden
Angela Benninghoff

AUDIO

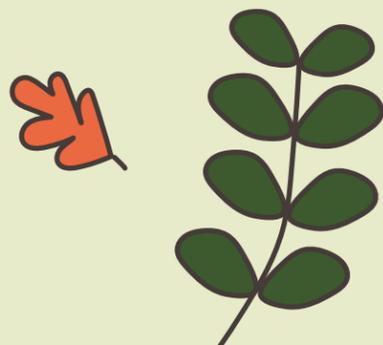
- 25** No Surprises 
Cassie Sistoso

FEATURE

- 20** The Cyclical Tradition
Angelina Bofenkamp

PHOTOGRAPHY

- 9** Mr. Milley
Cadee Havard
- 11** Reaching Majeska 
Cadee Havard
- 14** Opposites
Eve Bennett
- 20** Triplets
Breanna Sanders
- 22** Eat
Jenna Anderson
- 28** Windows From Listopadu: They Rest in Twelve Layers
Cadee Havard
- 36** The Basement
Sarah St. John
- 37** Honor the Fallen
Nate Tiuseco



Where Are We in the Milky Way

ANGELA BENNINGHOFF

Spray of milk
from Hera's breast
ripping free
from suckling lips
of Heracles,

the Milky Way
spins into an intergalactic space,
the space between and beyond you and me
formed from centuries
of gas and dust finding and coming
together, almost synthesis.

A black hole maintains the invention
towards the center
some form of physics and chemistry
force of gravity pulling the world together—
foundation to the pillars of a home,
as two galaxies clash into constellations.
An outer-reaching band,
Orion nestled in-between Sagittarius and Perseus,
where we reside,
bodies and hands and hearts intertwined, our
Earth orbits around a lone star,
alone but not quite with a little satellite
you to me, me to you

its perspective in dust and time:
creation, graphic and redolent newness
present outweighing past,
future almost non-existent,
impending but not yet reaching us—
marriage and baby-carriages and divorce
in its vessel,

a place where we,
creatures called humans
in a pliable exhibit, a cardboard diorama,
believe ourselves
to be at the center
of all that was,
our chatoyant sky a canvas
of only the closest band to our system,
of only what we could see,
of only what we could know, then and now.
One galaxy spinning alongside another
in the endless sheet of billions—



Fool on the Hill
DAISY GONZALEZ



good coffee, sandcastles

JAI WILSON

she asked if I had ever loved before
and I told her,
I have loved a million times.

I told her
once a stranger held the door,
and I swore I would've married him
if he hadn't had a wife.

I told her I steal glances at the women on the streets, I catch their eyes,
and wait for them to call to me,
but the call never comes.

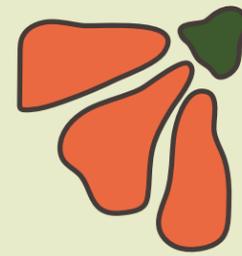
we're in the park with my favorite view of the city and we've both forgotten it's
meant to be a date. we'd gotten coffee earlier,
the best cupp'a joe she'd ever had.

she drank it all and got another,
and then drank that one, too.

I told her,
I have loved a million times,
loved a million people.

I told her I gave them each a part of me,
they may never know,
but they have me all the same.

I told her,
that if I am a puzzle then most of my pieces are
missing,
that I am a backwards beggar on the street,

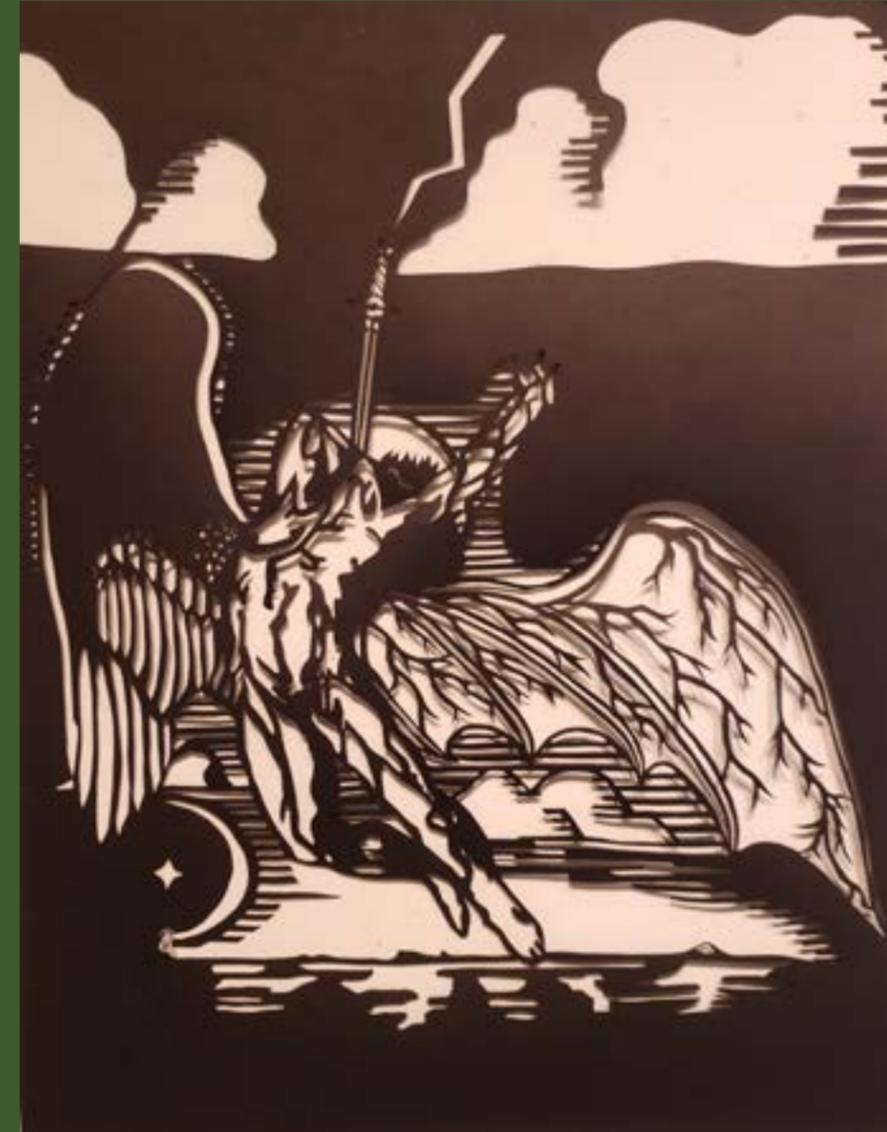


giving my soul to every stranger that I meet.
yes, I give and give and ache to receive,
but I told her,
do not pity me.
I'm tired of feeling sorry for myself;
I used to build castle walls out of sand
as if they would save me from the woes of the world, but the sea came and
washed them away.
I know
and she knows
that she will not be the one to love me,
and I know
and she knows
that that's okay;
good coffee,
sandcastles,
some things aren't meant to last.



The Fall (Greed)

TYLER FITS



Executive Dysfunction

JILLIAN DEGRÉ



The Labyrinth ANGELA BENNINGHOFF

if I die first, you can still bear my bones.

—Ariadne’s Letter to Theseus, Ovid’s
Heroides, translated by A.S. Kline

The prison smells like mildew,
water seeping somewhere it shouldn’t be—
wet and stale above the linger of death,
the crackle of Thanatos’s chains
still ringing in the dark.

The prison holds sacrifices,
mortals seeping somewhere they shouldn’t be—
bronze and chitons, bodies long decomposed
to the fungal-filled space,
to gnawed bones.

Walls and columns create rooms within rooms—
bending

and meandering,
curling
and curving,
turning
and twisting
twining

galleries always shifting and winding,
but never crossing.

Stifling, the darkness
crowds around its visitors,
ever-constricting and ever-suffocating
for a swifter death, only

if you were lucky.

The labyrinth now betrayed,
abandoned.

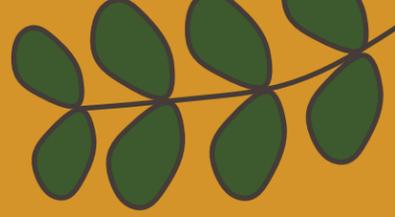
Still living and breathing,
waiting, always waiting

I am a thing to be discovered, to be used—
ruins in columns and pillars cracking and tumbling
with each new tremble in each new age,
spilled blood still staining the bowels of Crete—

still staining me,
still waiting, always waiting



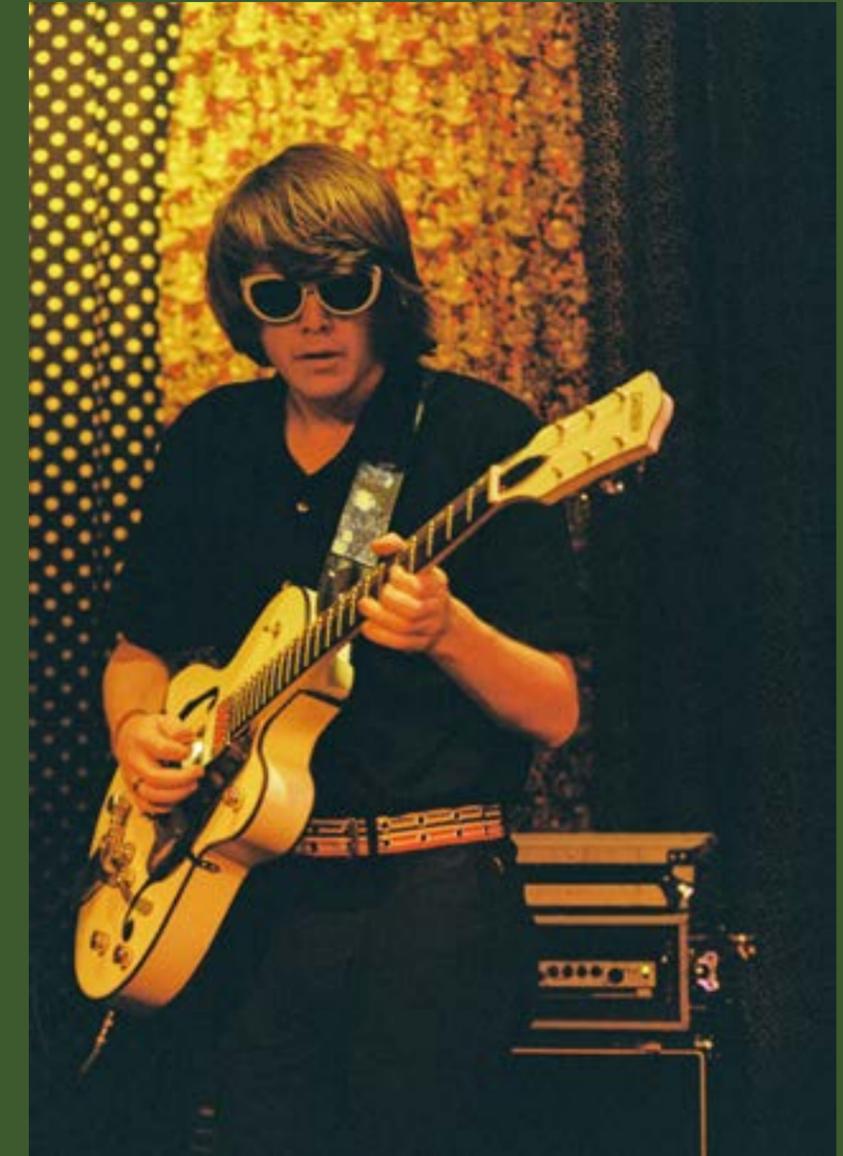
Bear in a Chair Reading a Book
MCKENZIE ANDERSON



Nitpicking
ANSLEIGH BRITAIN



Mr. Milley CADEE HAVARD



Swan Song 
BRYNLEE WOLEE

Long grass seeded with wildflowers
towers over the side of the bank,
waterlogged, with the rippling water
disturbed only by the waterfowls—
the graceful creatures bathe, delighted
by the blush of the day's dawning.

An emerald marsh, a river of grass—
one of the flock, a pen, plucks
at the delicate fringe of her wings,
troubled by a blade sitting snug
in the gaps between her soiled feathers.

She shudders in the sun's gentle rays,
a spasm that has her thrashing, writhing,
against her wings, as if she has forgotten
her feet or relinquished her control of them.
A faint whistle exhales with her final breath
as she plunges into the shallow water—
a cry for help mistaken for a caterpillar.

The sun glitters against the surface above her
as she sinks deeper, deeper into the depths.
Webbed feet that once dragged in the mud
struggle to find purchase, and she imagines
an iron chain anchored to the thin of her leg.



Blown pupils gawk at the sight below her:
hidden deep within the bowels of earth,
a sunless kingdom sits at a river's bank,
crossed only by a ferryman cloaked in drab.
His pockets jingle with a fresh toll.
It is the afterworld, she knows,
and the croon of the river Styx calls
to her as if it is beckoning her home.

The limb of her neck breaches the surface,
a gulp of air swirling, expanding in her lungs
and she gazes to the sky, reaches for the sun—
for her consecrator, Apollo, in faith. Devotion.
The fingers of her impending fate play
at the edges of her vision, and her heart
throbs against the confines of her chest—
it knows, only wishing for her mind to catch up.

The sun-god plucks at the strings of his lyre:
a tortoise shell embellished with two arms
reminiscent of a bull's horns, well worn.
A somber track trembles in the air—
nightingales sing their midnight music,
under the cloak of darkness, for sorrow,
but swans sing only once, at the dawn
of their death, a tune meant for a funeral.



The mud-soaked reeds murmur along to the swan,
for nature honors her more than noble and good men.
She coos her haunting melody, alone,
spreading her pallid wings in the quiet morning air—
a grand gesture of her life before taking a final bow.



Glass Pumpkin
ELIZABETH KOWALCZYK



Reaching Majeska 
CADEE HAVARD



The Paths of Apollo and Diana

CHARLOTTE DAIGLE

A Beetle, A Spider, and A Nightingale

A small black beetle crawls its way up the house. It struggles to stretch across the cracks' canyons. Just before it reaches the windowsill, the spider catches it in her web. She opens her beady eyes to the struggling beetle. Chelicerae clacking. Abdomen vibrating. The shelob slowly crawls down to the insect. Four legs strutting in front and behind the other four. The beetle's wings flutter frantically. Lessen. Still. Venom paralyzes it and the spider wraps her meal up to save for later. To let the blood brew like a mulled wine. Sweet and tart. Thick and luscious.

Before she can enjoy her feast, the nightingale scoops her off her web. Broken fibers dangling from her spinnerets. Struggling in the bird's beak. Desperately trying to bite her. Poison her. Paralyze her. Another meal for her feast. She died overly-confident. Small. Insignificant.

The nightingale, but a mere shadow, flits up to the top of the tallest tree. Her throat bobs as she swallows her triumphant meal. An occasional leg sticks out from the side of her beak. While preening herself, a small light catches. Cuts through the darkness of the horizon. Illuminates the rough bark of the trees.

Moonrise

The ice-cold light reaches into the forest causing the night creatures to shiver. The bugs and moles and chipmunks churn the leaves. The owls'

hoots echo through the trees. The coyotes yip from their dens.

Diana is here.

The goddess floats high into the sky, ascending to her celestial throne. The Queen of the Night. Nothing below hides from her sight. Not the deer under the canopies munching on the English ivy; not the fawn taking its first shaky step; not the mother, half-off the side of the bed, trying to fall asleep. Her eye watches the fawn and mother especially. Her light warms at the sight of this new life reaching a new milestone while her heart saddens at the sight of an unappreciated, overworked woman.

At her zenith, Diana sits on her icy throne, inspecting her kingdom below with her bow and arrow resting by her side. A crescent moon necklaces her throat. Her hunting dogs, Sirius and Phocion, lay at her feet.

A Rat

The house lay bathed in Diana's light. Through the crack in the curtains, Diana looks upon the family, smiling at the children, pitying the mother, and glowering at the useless father. Her attention turns to the innocent baby sucking her thumb in the crib. Then, a movement nearby catches her eye.

A rat.

It wiggles its way through a hole in the wall. Its matted fur riddled with disease. It shuffles forward. The mother-figure jolts from her seat in the sky. The baby is unaware of the danger. Her hands turn

white from grasping the chair's arms so hard. Her dogs sit up, alert. Their eyes follow hers, staring at the rat move closer to the cradle. A growl emits from deep within their chests.

The creature of sickness, the weapon of her brother, would not take another step. Sirius snaps at it with his startling white teeth. Phocion sits guard next to the sleeping babe. The rat scuttles back toward the hole from whence it came to no avail. A silver arrow blocked its path. Up above, Diana's bow sits empty in her hand, the other grabbing another arrow from her quiver. Sirius growls. The rat hisses and swipes at the hound. Its greatest mistake. Its last mistake. The rat squeals as the dog's teeth sink into its flesh piercing its heart. Phocion and Sirius look at the cradle as the baby stirs.

Sirius removes the rat from the house while Phocion pushes his nose against the crib, rocking it slowly. The baby awakens and stares at Phocion with her curious eyes. He licks her drool-covered hand and returns to his master. Through the crack in the curtain, the baby sees a sliver of moonlight. She lifts her hand to grab it, giggling at the smiling face of Diana. She yawns deeply and falls back into her slumber.

Diana's gaze moves to the house's foundations to find there are cracks between the wood and mortar. A trail of ants climbs up the wall carrying small balls of mud on their backs. A natural mortar. At Diana's command, they fill up all the cracks, patting down the mud with their legs. No more nighttime creatures will enter the house; not under her watchful eye.



Moonset

The goddess shifts closer to the west as the night progresses. The house rests in silence, but the forest rings with the songs of the night. Mice squeak as owls scoop them up in their sharp talons. The coyotes howl as they venture through the forest. The leaves rustle and crunch as the centipedes crawl their way from rotten log to rotten log.

Restless from the long night, Sirius and Phocion race the wolves by the mountain side. Alpha males wrestle. The cubs yip in excitement. Diana fires off an arrow far into the forest for them to hunt. Sometimes Sirius brings it back, other times, Phocion. Lastly, a wolf-cub proudly trots to her side, the long silver arrow in its mouth. The goddess's praise rings in its ears as it returns to its pack.

A Dream

The moonlight no longer illuminates through the whole crack in the curtain but through the bottom-half of the curtain. Rests right on the little boy sleeping close to his father. Shadows take shape around the boy. At his head. His feet. His sides. One pokes his left side. Another pokes his right. They all look at the doorway. A large black shadow with beady red eyes walks forward. It has claws growing out the tip of its fingers. Its smile has a thousand teeth.

The shadow floats right above the boy. Places one claw right above his heart. The boy opens his eyes. A weight settled on his chest. He could not breathe. Could not see. The darkness consumes him. Pulls him out from his bed. He cannot grab

the bed frame. He cannot scream. All he feels is that pressure suffocating him. He vomits. Cannot turn his head. Chokes on it. He starts losing consciousness.

But the weight lifts.

Diana stands by the boy's side, her hand on his forehead. He still lays in the bed beside his father and sister. The shadows are gone, and there is not any vomit. It was just a dream. Just a dream. She soothes the boy, wiping away his tears. She moves him closer to his father, and places him in his father's embrace. He needs a good father; at the very least, he can hold the boy at night. Diana closes his eyes and pulls the covers back up to his chin. And he sleeps.

A Descent into Darkness

At the horizon in the west, Diana knows her time has come. Her duty is complete. Daytime will be coming soon, her descent into darkness. The slight moonlight fades softly into the background. Uncomplaining. Sirius and Phocion return to their kennels below the horizon, curling up next to each other. Their snores echo in through the air as the goddess gathers her belongings. Her silver bow and arrows dim, the shine taken out of them. Her crescent necklace turns black, and Diana herself no longer emits any radiant light. Once again, her brother sucks all the light from her, casting her aside into the darkness.

Dawn falls over the forest. Diana's time is up.



Dawn

The house sits surrounded by the morning fog. The thick mists cover the grass with sticky dew, the haze in the east warns all the nighttime critters. He is coming. Diana's followers retreat into the forest floor. Into their burrowed dens and their hollowed-out trees, as far away from the sight of the sun as possible. As the last vole digs deep into the earth, silence reigns over the land. The leaves still and there is not a whisper in the wind.

Apollo is here.

Sunrise

The ball of fire rises from beneath the earth. Barely above the horizon, the rays lengthen as he rises higher into the sky. Apollo desires to shine, is impatient to shine. His colors encompass the grove of evergreens; reflect in the lakewater; create shadows of all shapes and sizes. The cicadas' tymbals flex and click as the mating songs echo with erotic fervor.

His rays push any memory of Diana away. Shoves her presence off the celestial throne. His light forces her further into her receding darkness. The throne is enveloped by the sunlight. Glowing gold. Glimmering glitter. Glistening gems. Apollo sits on his throne for a king. Overlooks his domain. Awaiting the people's adulations. Each word of veneration invigorating.

The rays consume the house. Warm it up for the waking inhabitants. They shine through the mist. Through the windows. Apollo demands attention. He illuminates her naked celestial body bathed in his glory.



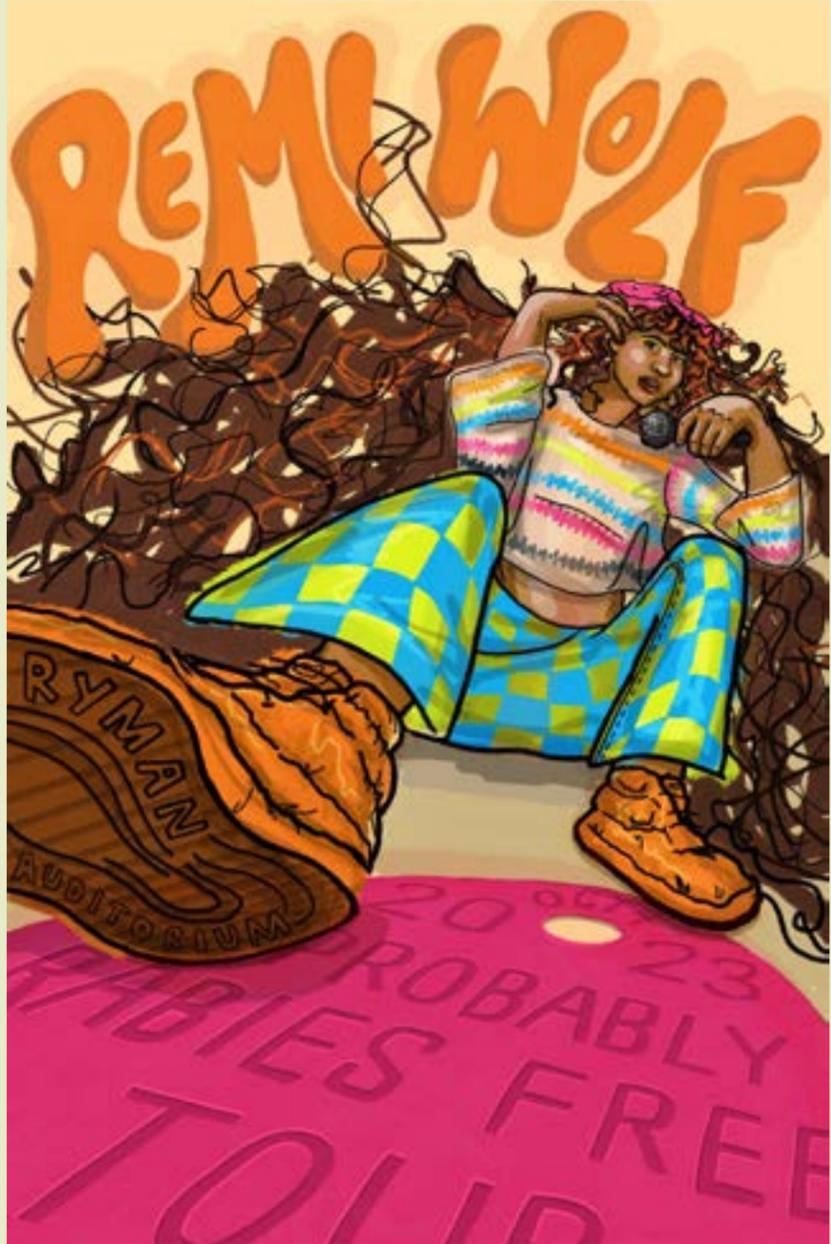
Opposites
EVE BENNETT



A Fey-ted Meeting
MARS ALCANTAR



Remi Wolf Concert Poster
JILLIAN DEGRIE



Self-Control
KERA REYNOLDS

Ephemeral
MEGAN GROWE

If I were a mayfly on the Mississippi,
I'd fit all my joys and pleasures in one single day.
I'd have the chance at a rare childhood.
A nine-year-old nymph eating algae
not knowing or fearing the future
and living under rocks in clear river water.

Only when I was ready would I fill my tiny lungs with air
and become a delicate, perfectly ugly creature of evolution
with wings of glass and compound, ultraviolet eyes.
There would be no question about my purpose,
just millions of years' worth of evolutionary expertise.

Loneliness would be a foreign word to me,
and each decade-long hour would have a defined meaning.
I'd dance and swarm alongside my three-thousand siblings,
and by the blessing of animal instinct,
I'd finally get laid.

I would float on the wind of the summer air
living literally every second to its fullest,
being blissfully unaware of what it means to be alive.
And when I die, I'd relish the twin sunrise of my birth
with no one to miss me and no ability to care.

Subconscious Mind
CHARLIE ELWELL





Empty echoes and fossilized sounds, ringing their verberation against the chasms of light—a flash in the silence of rolling surf and scorching heat, overexcited stars exploding in the city center. Silenced, the gods reel in the torrents of nausea and sorrow, muted by the Sicilian opening: pawn to e4, knight to f3—B-29, the siren blows, tuck your heads, take shelter. Little Boy, crouching low, Fat Man, falling fast. while helpless hands watch the chessboard blister, the paint bubbles and simmers. Forges of flesh and blood churn endlessly in the mires of *Ōta*, blending corporeal existence with death. Tame your fires, *Kōjin*—cool your hearth and quiet the raging tempest of flames. Rags of sagging skin ebb and flow in a dance, frantic maws open, waiting, for the refreshing rains of *Ōkami*, soaring low and shore bound. Quench the undying thirst of the mangled and torn, who quietly whisper their pleas to their neighbor, still as stone. Alas, the foreign powers have bribed the skies to withhold their bounty. Out from Revelation, black rain rides swift on the steed of apocalypse, brandishing the poison-laced lance.

Pungent swarms of flies and decay surround the still-living corpses. Pus and pieces, strewn, torn, infected, pin-drop calm in the desperate eyes of those still open, thousands never to close. The contortion of steel, iron, and sand, cauterized into shiny diamond mines, winking their splendor in a deceptive glance. There are no fortunes here. Where are my children? Where is my mother? My father? Where am I? Is this the shadow of the abyss, held in the palms of *Enma*? Running crazed and naked with skinless feet, kimono branding on blackened shoulders, clinging to memories of morning dew and baby fat. The human shapes blur tirelessly into shades upon the stone staircase leading to nowhere. Some climb searching for the pathway into the sky, ladder rungs and low-born haze touching nothing but a silhouette. I wonder if the stone-stair man and the lookout met at the top of nirvana, their charred shadows standing side by side next to the one-legged tori. Two cities, two souls, hundreds of thousands of cranes for each, carrying breaths of a gentle sigh into *rakuen*, a paradise lost.

Paper wings and starlight races raise the stakes, shimmering distorted images within the cellophane medicine wrappers, as the cranes get smaller and smaller. Hairless, gums bleeding, spider lilies blooming under skin tinged with the yellow glow of organ failure. Limbs weighed down by empty bones, sucked dry of their white cells, hollow, lymphatic plague, yet these tiny hearts still beat. Thump—drums inside the birdcage, slamming frayed wings against the bars of a familiar sunset. Uranium twilight twinkles and glows in the fluorescence of an x-ray and darkens every physician's brow. Another *hibakusha*, another stigma, born alone, unknowing into the world of sneers and pity. A curse without the pentagram, etched with invisible ink into memories and keloids, lingering putridly and hanging on soft murky scars. One, two, twenty scalpels attempt to sew along the lines of a lopsided smile, beautiful between the brief glimpses of snow-white teeth.

Blank seconds knock around inside the gears of a wall clock forever set at 11:02, grumbling synchronously with the stomach of a child still waiting for lunch. The nameless have names, the soundless bell tolls, the eyes of the past stare relentlessly rigid: Tsutomu's stopwatch, a letter from Daisuke, Satoko's uneaten rice. Ogino's sister, Yoji's father, and Tsujimoto's mother, their faces still floating in the cremated charcoal, buried beneath the city streets. The skeletal remains of the Dome, looming with allusions of regret, echoing the call for reverence into the glass castle. Unimpressive and shoddy, a backstreet building in Hiroshima obscures the hypocenter. How utterly surreal. Nagasaki didn't make the first cut on a list of cities for the bomb. How bitterly ironic.

Cushy chairs plush with leather cracks supported backs too weak to carry this burden of war. I resent the clouds that cleared that day. My words, plinking glass chips against a wall of volcanic steel—lab mice chasing an obsidian void, muffling tiny objections in this scramble for dominance. I gaze through the telescope between the pillars of the cenotaph, searching the spaces between nimbus forms, outstretched hands suspended on stardust tails, every sinew taut and straining. Through everlasting darkness may our souls trudge forth, guided by Virgil through fire and ice. Let us not abandon all hope, drifting in the seas of lament with anguish, strung, tied on leafless trees, cracking under the pressure of wishes and whispers of haunted dreams. Soundless screams persist in their pleas for peace, trapped between the waking world

and purgatory, my jaw aching and numb.

Naive, slippery fingers grasp the melted blue, evaporating into cotton candy clouds and humidity, brilliant orbs of love and ignorance creating shapes in their milky way.

“お母さん、平和は何?”¹

“何だろうね?多分...”²

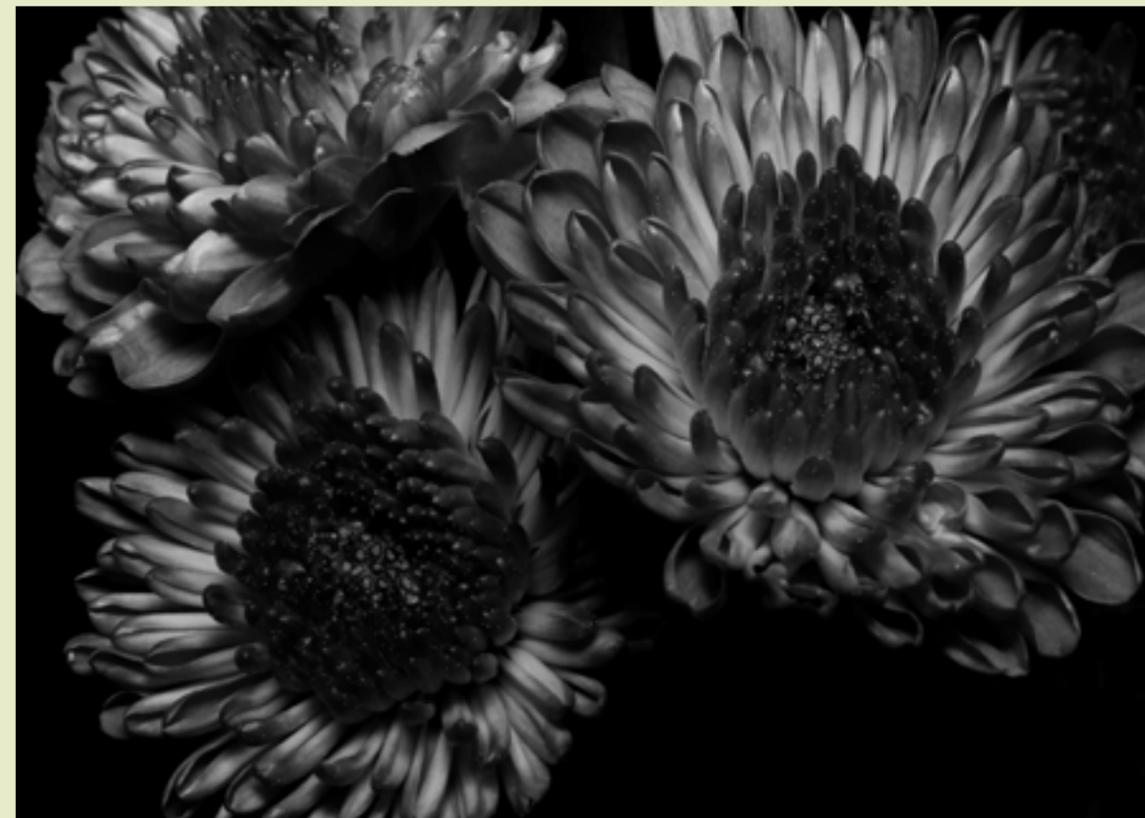
Half-eaten rice cakes and sticky dango, silk flowers woven into sleeves, festival lanterns, and *hanabi*. Too-tight handshakes, wet kisses from grandparents, vibrant candies in a glass jar. A mother's smile, highlighting crow's feet and

1 Mama, what is peace?

2 I wonder huh? Maybe...

flicker, flicker of a candle, hunched shoulders, brass thimbles, and needlework. Old, sunken tatami beneath father's knees, cigarette ash, and newspaper ink smudges—a familiar place. Summer windchimes, first snows, full moons, New Year's greetings, and sweat dripping onto freshly harvested taro. Late night laughter and love stories hidden between the futons, nail polish, and cheeky youth. A long day, finished, sighs wafting through the smells of rice, a tender *okaeri*, welcome home...

In the season, when they bloom, the bluets and feverfew always look a little sad when children pluck their petals. Transient, reluctant, yet their persistence regaled by unfettered growth and radiation. Perhaps, clandestine conviction and solemnity sleep within the dormant buds... I wonder if, among their branches and tiny fingers, they too still look for family and closure beneath their greedy roots.



Triplets
BREANNA SANDERS

Leaving
MIZI CROSS

for B

If I could I would
saw you
out of me.

I would
if I could
call the surgeons in
to lay me
wet on white sheets
and bleed you
from me slowly,
filling porcelain
bowls, until they over-
flowed and seeped from
the table.

If I could
I would mix you
deep into me
like paints, swirled
into a new color.

If I could
I would close your eyes
and open you with my lips,
circling you with my tongue
until you left your body
and moved against mine.

If I could
I would drain the ink
of you from me,

like a love-letter
blotched wet,
words blooming like a Rorschach.



From Death
KAYLEIGH MESSIER

Anti-Alchemist
JESSICA PRUITT

I am the anecdote to the riddle
of his longing
The story of his plight,
forever unfolding

He does not know this power,
that I'm in debt to carry

Clutching tightly to the grief,
enduring
trying hard to bury

For I took on his pain as my own,
forced it deep beneath
my skin
Tough, translucent, barriers of time
with secret layers
I dare not look in

Even just a glance
will bleed
indeed,
profusely

Powdered with profound pain
and clotted knots of cobwebbed, anchors of shame—

Thinking I could carry the weight,
pass it on,
shake
and tame
I even birthed a star for him
while he was secretly
slaying my name

But he lives in a world
of self-induced weary,
Barely lifting eyelids,
so gloomy on his pillow
And dreams in half-false memories
of satisfying, nostalgic accusations—
Hugs onto stories he's convinced as truth
to feed and quench his delusions

I thought my strength could save him
from his own afflictions

But his mind turns gold
into deceit





has four degrees from various universities in the biological sciences, and a man who has worked tirelessly over the years in writing various essays, guides, books, and manuals related to his field. So, it might come as a surprise to find out this individual with a doctorate of science is writing poems about Native American life and traditions. Well before he became Dr. Mathis at the University of Georgia, he was a young boy growing up in Graves County, Kentucky, very close, in fact, to a Native American grave site. There, he found many arrowheads and other Native American artifacts. With these discoveries, his interest was piqued. He wanted to know more about the history that took place only a couple of miles from his home. His learning and findings culminated in many books of poetry about Native American heritage.

This original curiosity though, turned into a deep respect and appreciation for Native American traditions as he learned more about the culture. As Mathis remarks, “Readers will encounter Indian ideas of beauty, freedom, religion, Mother Earth, silence and solitude, and nature as a source of wisdom,” (Mathis 15). The two main ways that Mathis conveys his respect is through circles and an acknowledgment of history.

Circles have always been an important part of Native American tradition and belief. They are sacred symbols because they represent the patterns of time and life. For instance, the seasons change from winter to spring to summer to fall and back to winter. The animals migrate over the seasons and eventually end up back where they started. People are born from the Earth and end in the Earth. It is a beautiful way to view life and Mathis reflects this in his poems by showing the world through the lens of a Native American. The whole book is actually a cyclical pattern with the book starting in the past with the first section “Remembrance,” and ending full circle with a reflection on how America has placed Native Americans in the present

in the section “Progress and Paradox” (Mathis 17–28, 73–83).

Through his poems, Mathis not only shows Native American life and beliefs, though that alone is captivating, but also his deep respect for Native American traditions, beliefs, and lifestyles. Throughout the book, readers get a sense of nostalgia and grief for the past, for what colonists took away and destroyed. He mourns over what his ancestors have done to a beautiful way of life. It is not just his own sorrow he communicates; he shows Native Americans’ grief for a lost culture. Through his poem “We Remember,” Mathis, from the perspective of a Native American, crafts a memorial to those who have died at the hands of white colonizers:

{ How long have the winds embraced these age-worn mounds where
immortal spirits lie
'neath earthen berm and ethereal sky?

How many sunsets have cast shadows over these sacred swells of soil
stained Indian Red by blood of the dead?

How many moons have risen: quietly ruled the night, delayed deep darkness
and evening shade?

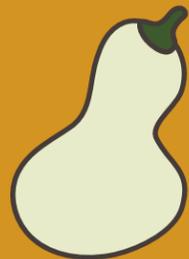
How long since dance drum and Chickasaw chant fell silent? How long
since spear and arrow came to rest beneath the sod? How long? and yet,
we remember. }
(Mathis 19)

This poem shows that even as nature continues, even as the sun sets and the moon rises, the lives of those under the sun and moon do not continue. It shows how the death of generations of Native Americans caused the knowledge and stories of their history to disappear, the dances to be forgotten, and for their culture to become buried in the dirt. Although this poem is full of remorse for what’s been lost, here are many others that are full of pride for what has not been lost. Some of the best poems are from section two “Living in Circles” (Mathis 29–50). Many of these reflect the spiritual and emotional connection between nature and humans, the harmony that is central to Native American belief. His vivid imagery and linguistic style give a sense of peace as readers read about the gurgling spring and whispering trees.

Mathis bridges the gap between two different cultures. He gives readers an introduction into Native American culture and fosters a lingering curiosity and appreciation for those traditions. He demonstrates that it is possible to show respect and honor to a civilization that may be completely different from one’s own. He also does not shy away from the devastating effects of colonialism and ethnocentrism to Native American cultures as many white people have done in the past. Instead, Mathis laments the history, yet hopes for a better future. He teaches that to fix the past, humans must admit to the atrocities of the past, no matter how uncomfortable it makes them feel. In pursuance of living together in harmony, we must appreciate each other and our separate beliefs. He shows that beauty can dwell within difference. By doing a quick online search, Dr. Mathis’ book of poems, Drumbeats, can be purchased from multiple retailers, such as Amazon, Target, or Barnes & Noble.

It's December 26th,
BRYNLEE WOLEE

and the house is quiet: dust settles in the far corners of the hall, the fireplace glows with last night's embers, and the pillows rest against the arm of the couch. Bits of wrapping paper litter the floors, leftover from the previous day's festivities. The door to the guest bedroom is shut and no one is waiting on the other side. Steam rises out of the cup, curling up into the air beneath my nose. The aroma of peppermint bark coffee leaves a sour taste in my mouth. I pour it down the drain. The blinds are sealed and yet stubborn rays of early morning sunlight leak between their thin cracks, igniting the wood floor in a rosy hue. My sister prefers them open. It won't matter. The beam of her taillights tinted the siding of the house in cherry red hours ago.



Eat
JENNA ANDERSON

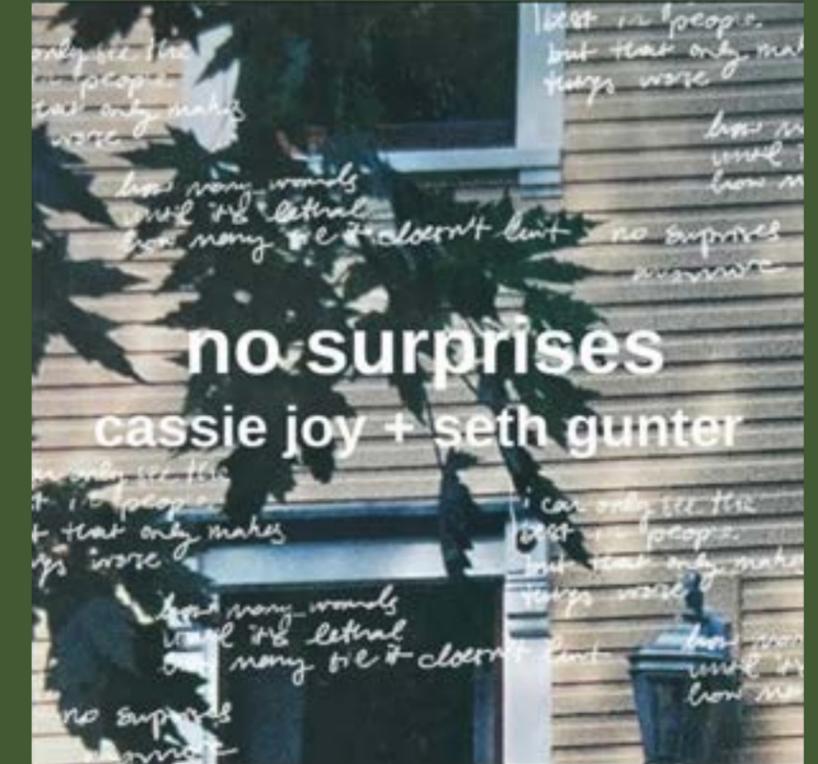
The Jilted Lover: An Archaeological Display
BRYNLEE WOLEE

It was a midnight drive. My forehead pressed against the cool glass of the window, eyes chasing the full moon through the pine trees. You hummed an unfamiliar tune under your breath. The trees became sparse, and the car cleared a path through them. You rolled to a stop in a clearing. The engine cut off. We bumped shoulders as we walked: a thin blanket in my arms, a cassette player in yours. I laid beside you in the clearing and nestled my head in the crook of your shoulder. Our bellies were turned to the sky. My fingertips reached for the flickering stars, tracing the outline of Orion. I told you about the constellations, how the belt points to—"the dog star." You finished my sentence. My pointer finger wavered. You swore we'd never grow out of this. I swore I could stay here forever. (And stay there forever, I did.)

The cushion of your shoulder retreats. My head lands with a thump. You turn to your side, first, before you sit up, gather your cassette player, and eject the tape. The blanket tugs beneath my weight, and you abandon it with an unfamiliar impatience. The hum of a different tune starts, then fades, and fades, until there is only quiet. (And stay there forever, you didn't.)

The bulk of my body fuses with the thin blanket and burrows into the sunken earth. Thick clusters of prairie grass bloom between my wilted fingertips. My belly is still turned to that starry night sky. When the archaeologists stumble upon me, they carve a careful outline. I am lifted from the crumbling ground without protest. They stuff me in a clear case, atop that bed of dirt. The body is preserved just as it was found. My limbs—the bones—are half-buried. The skull—my forehead—presses against the cool glass. The sockets of my eyes are hollow under the shine of fluorescent lights; I imagine Orion among the fly carcasses trapped in the cover of the light fixture. The bone of my finger points to the belt. (I can't grow out of it.)

no surprises ✨
CASSIE SISTOSO, SETH GUNTHER



The Chant

RACHEL BOOHER

Prologue: Do you believe in memories? Do you know them all to be true? Or, do you doubt the things you know and wonder if it's truly you? What do you pray for when no one is listening? Who can you turn to when the gods disappear? Will you place your faith in the magic chants or let yourself fall into madness and fear?

The magic slipped to the forefront of my mind, and I relished the embrace of its feathery fingers. I stretched forth my hand, eyes closed, visualizing the glow and warmth of a roaring flame. I opened my mouth and the chant naturally fell from my lips, "*Ingreid de ascente, Hikari braze!*" Violet drops of molten gems flew into the stone circle and set the logs ablaze with a gentle hiss. Pleased with the display, I set about to finishing my nightly preparations. The shadows would not encroach upon my mind this day, not until the magic failed me.

With my fire alight, I lined my camp with a barrier of dingweed and lorlite leaves. "Those *Ravier* beasts never did like the smell..." I snarked to the darkness. That same darkness has been my closest companion for the last two hundred and fifty-seven moons, ever since the Ascension Massacre. I always wondered why it garnered that name. I would have called it the "Abysmal Massacre." After all, that was when the entire *Ningen* race sank into despair.

The land had been ruined and twisted with the disappearance of the gods, and the animals went mad without spiritual guidance. The plague had been silent, preying upon the kinetic veins wherein the magic flowed. Spells failed, memories erased, and minor symptoms, like the appearance of sleep monsters, staged the world for the death of magic...at least, magic as it used to be. I sighed and cast away my reminiscing thoughts, pulling my rations from my pack. "Dried earnroot and dried buckboar again...aaahh, at least I have food," I gripe as I tear off the little pieces and throw them into the warming water. I talk to myself to prevent the silence from gnawing at my sanity.

As I stare into the flames, I return to the past again, wondering if I could have done something to save them...my people, my family, my *Deran lai*. They were my home among many and my refuge, my only place to belong. Everyone has a haven, a *Deran lai*, and mine was within the tribe. I miss them terribly, but I dare not dwell too long on their faces. I grimace as the memories begin to twist in pain, the warning signal of the madness that turned many into the *Ravier*.

Shaking the images from my mind, I begin my ritual chants. "*Faire gi lore, Kiseki ao,*" I whisper, and three small, blue orbs softly floated from my eyes. Every day since the loss of my tribe, I send memories into the crystals. The clear, true memories. The reality of the life that existed before and after the massacre. I do this so that even when the magic fails me, when the day comes and I greet my heavenly dream or become a *Ravier* beast, the record of a better life will be built into the earth.

I swirl the crystals around in the air, bouncing them in psychedelic patterns. "It is hard to believe that something so small will birth a new god to rule the lands..." The pondering words leave my mouth before I can stop them. I became complacent. Gasping, I cover my mouth and fearfully glance into the darkness. Silence. Rustle. Rustle. Silence. Chirp. I wait a few more seconds and breathe my relief. If the *Ravier* ever heard me, they would surely capture me and force me into madness or kill me. My turning would be the end of hope and allow the continued existence of the beasts.

Hanging my head, I look through my ragged bangs at the crystals once more. The requirement for the birth of a new god is life, death, and time. There must be all three, and the caster cannot die in the time it takes to conclude the chant. I cannot succumb to the shadows either, for that would alter the purity of the god. A *Wrythe deos*, a false god, would purge the world and destroy any chance for a new beginning. My people always said that the road to divinity is paved with insanity. I sigh again and begin to pour my spirit into the crystals, "Forty-three more moons...and then I can sleep."

I don't know whether I should be grateful or terrified, but ever since the beginning of this chant, the need for sleep has left me. I guess it's a side effect of the death requirement, taking on the consciousnesses of my people when they passed. Their sacrifices rushing into my body still bring twinges of agony as I remember the internal struggles of hundreds of minds fighting to make room. I shudder and continue to fill the orbs with memories.

Once the last drop of light escapes my body, I allow the orbs to recede into my eyes. "*Korve cien laos, Lotus bind,*" I whisper, and the lights tie themselves once more to my soul. Closing my eyes, I feel another hole form as one more consciousness disappears. This emptiness, once unbearably sad, has become my lonely normal. My eyes return to their normal hazy blue, and I look into the sky, searching for the stars.

Just beyond the glimmer of the Kingfisher's wings, I see the cluster of twinkling symbols. I wait, watching closely as another blue crystal joins the fray. The third pendulum is almost complete, and I lay back on the dewy grass, taking one more minute to mourn the new hollow in my memories. They're not really mine, but they've been part of me for so long that I can't help but cling to them. They are my stars. My tribe.

I stretch my hand out once more and speak to the lights, "Soon, I will join you all. Once the last moon comes, I will become the final piece of the pendulums and time will swing once more. I will finally return to you, my people, my *Deran lai*, and dream my heavenly dream."

As the only hope of survival dwindles once more into the background of the sky, my solemn prayer reaches into the looming abyss. I sigh again, wondering why I even bother to pray. Snorting to myself, I realize that I, too, have put all my faith into the ritual chants. Magic drove the gods away, but only magic can preserve the future of this land. Grateful for this irony, I laugh aloud. The voices within me eerily overlap, clamoring for dominance, echoing with the hundreds of consciousnesses that remain within me. "Only a god can help what I leave behind," I state with a final laugh, returning my attention to my meal. Once again, it fell tasteless on my tongue, too bland and bloated to fill a vessel that's already full.



Windows From Listopadu:
They Rest in Twelve Layers
GADEE HAVARD

Thursday, in some other universe
MEGAN GROWE

Dad and I are still baking cookies in the kitchen—
Tollhouse Chocolate Chip Lovers slice ‘n bake—
and arranging them on the old pizza stone.
There’s only three of us, but we bake six,
and he sneaks me a chunk of raw dough
when my mother isn’t looking.

He watches football on the big screen,
and I sit in his warm lap reading a book,
watching the clock tick,
rolling my eyes as he teases me.
His bald head is just a sign of age,
his bruises are just another hard day’s work.

When the smell of sugar and warmth hits,
I leap out of the leather recliner
and pour two big glasses of milk.
We eat them too hot, falling apart
like we’re afraid of running out of time,
and he wipes the chocolate from my nose.



Sweet Tooth
ANSLEIGH BRITAIN



The Sage
TYLER FITTS



Still-Life: Motherhood
LAASIA HARRIS





The Garden

ANGELINA BOFENKAMP

The flowers are so vibrant. There's so much happiness in the bright orange Marigolds, the pink Roses that sway in the wind, the Poppies and Chrysanthemums. The baby-blue Forget-Me-Nots peeking out of the corner that hold too many memories, not forgotten no matter how she wants to forget them. She looks out the kitchen window at them now. The view is slightly distorted because the window is cracked. Every time the wind blows through, it whistles. She looks at the UV lights that give her beloved Garden artificial sunlight. She watches how they stretch toward the light. So obviously alive, it's a desecration of reality. Of her heart. Of her grief.

She has to water them. Her fingers turn white as she grips the counter tightly. The daily water supply is never enough. They always want more and more and there's barely any water left for her and her daughter. She glances at the sky, as if the cloud-like smoke blocking the sun will ever produce rain. A deep sigh, she misses the rain, can barely remember what it felt like on her skin. All she remembers is being annoyed at being wet, she remembers the coolness, the sound.

She remembers that it was calming, the rhythm, but what that rhythm was she can't remember. The feeling too, is missing, she can't remember how it felt to have individual droplets hitting her skin. She can't remember what it felt like to have her hair plastered to her skin, nor what it tasted like on her tongue. Her daughter doesn't even have a vague memory of rain to console her as she gives her blood.

"Shiyanah!" She calls, "It's time!"

"Already?" Her nine-year-old asks as she stomps into the room, dreading the feeling she gets when the blood leaves her body. When she feels like she's floating, but that at any moment she will fall, and fall, and fall with nothing to catch her.

"Yes, already. You know what happens if the plants die. If they die—"

"We die, I know because if they die we'll be producing more carbon dioxide than the atmosphere can handle and so they'll shoot us—yeah, I know." She rolls her eyes and sighs heavily. As if this isn't the most important lesson in the world. She grabs Shiyanah's shoulders and shakes her a little. She can't lose her too.

"You need to take this seriously, Shiyanah, our garden is the only reason we are alive today. Do you think that the government will care about us if faced with either preserving the human race or letting it die? This isn't a game. They will shoot us if these plants die, both as a punishment and as a way to preserve the balance. You see that line down the middle of the garden?" She's not yelling, but every word is punctuated by her anger and fear toward that garden. Her prison and her salvation and her grief all rolled into a beautiful garden. Her fingers dig into her daughter's thin shoulders.

Shiyanah's eyes are wide with fear. She looks toward the garden and nods. "That line indicates our lives. The right side is mine and the left is yours." She doesn't mention the third line section. The dead section. She doesn't have to. "When you were conceived, I was given all the plants you see to store in the Earth. Those plants take all your carbon dioxide and turn it into oxygen, without those plants, you wouldn't be allowed to exist. So yes, it's time already because we've lost enough people don't you agree?"

"I miss Dad," Shiyanah whispers, looking down at the ground now. The Dead section seems to glare at her, yellow and brown, withered. Blight or whatever disease that ravaged her husband's plants. At the first sign of disease, when one brown leaf became two became three became whole plants. He went out and ripped up the yellowing and wilting leaves and flowers. He had called the police beforehand without her knowledge to tell them what he planned to do.

If she knew his plan she would have stopped him, claiming that section as hers or something. She doesn't know, and she didn't know. So, the police came as witnesses and executioners. Holding her back as she screamed and tried to stop him from condemning himself to death while saving theirs. As she watched him rip his life out, dig his hands into it and yank and rip and yank. Over and over. One memory after another. She watched as his life burned. Then she watched as the blood leaked out of him from the shot she didn't hear. She watched as they hooked him up to a machine. They looked at her and shrugged, "Wouldn't want to waste that blood." Before they left they told her to bury him, the rest of the garden looked like it could use some nutrients anyway.

I miss Dad echoes in her head. Those three words make her fall to her knees and pull her daughter to her chest. "I do too. I miss him so much, but he was so brave. He loved us so, so much. So let's honor that love by living all right?" Shiyanah nods into her chest and sticks out her arm where the needle insert had been placed. She gets up to grab the machine that would turn their blood into water. It has two tubes sticking out of it. At the ends is a self-sterilizing needle that she now inserts first into her daughter and then into herself. She sets the limit on how much water to make and hits the green button. She can't really feel anything. You would think it would be excruciating, having the very thing that gives you life sucked out of you. All you feel at the end is a dizziness. A hollowness that needs to be filled with sugar and cookies and comfort food. All of which they don't have. Instead, the blood leaving their body leaves an emptiness. It leaves a feeling as if at any moment she might fall. Her feet at the edge of a cliff and sometimes she wants to jump, just to see what's at the bottom of her mind, her soul. Because right now the world is spinning too fast, everything is too fast. She can barely think straight with all the colors crowding her vision. Why'd she plant so many colors? She's so dizzy... The machine dings, the flow from their body to the machine stops.

"Where'd you go?" Her daughter asks as she plucks the needles out of their arms. "Nowhere you want to go." She grabs the jug she had placed beneath the nozzle. "You

want to help water? We're watering your side today." Shiyanah wrinkles her nose. "It smells."

"I know, I don't like the smell either, but at some point you'll have to do this yourself." She wishes that they never had to go in the garden. Never had to face the flowers or walk over the dirt with their bare feet. Their shoes had worn out a long time ago.

She shrugs, "Fine." She lifts the jug gently from her Mom's hands and heads out the door. She takes a deep breath before following. The smell hits her as soon as she walks through the door. The flowers smell like corpses. Her garden has become a graveyard because all the graveyards became full a long time ago. All her loved ones rot under her feet along with people she doesn't even know. Roots twisting with bones. This garden is her family. Her Mother is the Gladiolus' that grows in the corner. Her husband is the Roses. Her mother the Daffodils with their soft petals. Her daughter doesn't know that though. She thinks they were buried in a beautiful spot on the hillside somewhere. Not under all these flowers of death. She doesn't know she's stepping on decomposed bodies. She doesn't understand why her Mother sometimes goes out and talks to them. It's bad enough that the garden is eating them slowly.

"Mom?"

"Yes?"

"What's a Sun?"

She'd never seen the Sun.

Serenade No. 1, “Mon Écho”

AVRÉE IAIN

Composed by Bastien Couvreu and Performed by Albertus Rémy

In early December, 1870, newborn Bastien Remon Couvreu was found on the doorstep of Aix Saint-Sauveur Cathedral, in Aix-en-Provence, France. The exact date and place of his birth remains unknown. A note was found on his blankets, presumably authored by his mother, stating that he was the result of an adulterous affair and couldn't be looked after. By the age of five, he had gained a wildly troublesome personality, where even the Sister who named him believed that Couvreu was possessed by some demonic evil and refused to nurture him further. He was then sent to Madame Devereux's Foundling Home in Paris, where he spent the remainder of his mischievous childhood, often running away and getting into conflicts with law enforcement. Couvreu, although later confirmed to be intellectually blessed, never excelled in academia. He was renowned for getting into altercations and blacking out in front of the Opéra Garnier. There, he would happen to meet master composer Albertus Rémy and the rest is history. Couvreu, in recent years, has been earmarked as the composer Bach could only dream of becoming, writing five symphonies, twelve concertos, twenty sonatas, seven adantes, and one ballet, Mon Écho, all resounding with euphonious genius. He never married and lived out his 52 years alone, upon his countryside estate in Aix. Serenade No. 1, “Mon Écho” was performed posthumously by Couvreu's sole friend, Albertus Rémy, where he found the original draft in Couvreu's safe after acquiring it from his final Will and Testament.

The identity of the young woman, who presumably inspired the piece Mon Écho, remains unknown.

You declared: plump lips in a half heart, head lulled on my chest and eyes dipped in ivory,

That you would reincarnate as a music note, to feel in abstraction, without limits of flesh.

Mon Écho, I named you, for you had to always follow lead, blissful of my seclusions ruin;

A wayward outcast in the Foundling Home, and as Misery dictates, your company was adored.

Atop stones walls, on shadowed corners, in dim alleyways you waltzed as a feline of Paris;

If not for me, your iridescent soul would've never tasted the ambrosia of defiance.

Most brand us in blasphemy, rarely whispered, but a perfect discordance wove the tale of our youth,

And oh, Mon Écho, I bled out for you, pillaged bare as bone, and spat my first prayers to God: Amen.

Everyone, in unwelcome delight, deemed you found when your long-lost father appeared;

They were all sightless: we were never lost, separated, until the demon came to collect his due.

Hollowed, a reflection of the nightly chasm, Morningstars plummeted and left the heavens vile,

I sought to fill myself whole again, with phrenic matches and crystalline liquors—ignite remembrance.

Saving graces are chance encounters, happenstances that takes form of either gift or curse;

My redemption came not from a deity, as told, over exalted majesty, but of humanity's melodic genesis.

Days disguised as eternity seemed to pass, when I received your tattered Will in the Post,

My whip cracked as lightning against the steeds, barreling to your venue, at last known.

I saw you, lying there, lithe fingers at ease, still shackled to the Brothel's dilapidated bed;

Caustic tempests couldn't compare how I wept, Death unable to steal your ethereal form.

Holding you, Mon Écho, in the same manner as I once did, head lulled on my chest and now idle eyes,

I promised you reincarnation, within my stories of harmonia, the final note, everlasting, of you.



the basement
SARAH ST. JOHN

vampire
COLENE BELMONT

i didn't know how to feel
when talking to my childhood friends
i asked
if we were creatures
from legend and myth what would we each be you see
i did that thing
where i felt one way
and wanted the reassurance
i thought myself a selkie
a beautiful woman
whose skin belonged to herself
a foundation of trust
yet i found myself nowhere near that vampire
they said
seventeen years of friendship culminated then
at first
i was lost
how could i
squeamish, clumsy, less than eternal me
be that
but i realized
i too crave the warmth
i miss the sun
relegated to shadows craving the pulse
of those i should not in many origins,

vampires never turn willingly
but it marks them for life
no longer human, but more and less
and i felt seen.
i too live in the in-between and maybe
if i were a vampire
i would have the strength
to not be afraid
of you.



Lovers
SELAH BURTON



Untitled
KAYLEIGH MESSIER

honor the fallen
NATE TIJUSECO



tides of grief
COLENE BELMONT

they say
grief
is a process
but i say
it's much like the ocean with
its ebb and flow
my grief is a tide
so tied to the moon
much like me and you
sometimes
i am low tide
full of life
and pools
and in those moments
i live
but much like the tide
my grief rises
and drowns me
and i am caught in it
a year later
it still sweeps me off my feet
these tides of grief





Freckles
JILLIAN DEGRIE



in the absence of the dog
GADEE HAVARD

I watch her stretch out over your favorite blanket,
her white fur the same light, creamy shade,
the soft chenille stitches the velvet of her ears.
she's purring again, her belly catching the sunlight,
napping in the bed, cold and unmade,
gray-yellow fur I can't wash away
on the afghan she knew was yours
six weeks ago.



Katze
ELIZABETH KOWALCZYK

re-creation myth
JAI WILSON

*Change is the new,
improved
word for god*
-Wendy Videlock

once
surely so long ago,
i was crafted,
exquisitely
(and perhaps divinely) designed.
limbs woven from soft shadow,
heart molded from the space between spaces,
face—a mask
of memories long forgotten.
whichever Being built this body
(i know her well, i know her well)
made me to be Phantom,
made me to be Doppelgänger,
made me to be Skinchanger,
this body which was made for me.



once
not so long ago,
i was used,
exquisitely
(and perhaps divinely) wielded.
limbs which are tools of creation,
heart which seeks only to fill what is empty,
face—a mask
and yet aching to be removed.
whichever Being built this body
(i know her well, i know her well)
made me to be Creator,
made me to be Lover,
made me to be Desirer,
this body which was made for me.

and then,
in blinding light,
i was unmade,
exquisitely
(and certainly divinely) dismantled.
limbs held in soft embrace,
heart caressed by loving words,
face—a face
and nothing more.
whichever Being broke this body
(i love her so, i love her so)
left me Wanted,
left me Cared,
left me Known.



CREATIVE EXPRESSION AWARDS



Each semester, six submissions receive Creative Expression Awards, one from each major category: art, photography, poetry, prose, video, and audio. The winner from each category receives a \$75 award.



ART

Nitpicking
ANSLEIGH BRITAIN



POETRY

Swan Song
BRYNLEE WOLFE

PHOTOGRAPHY

Reaching Majeska
CADEE HAVARD



PROSE

Atomic Requiem
RACHEL BOOHER



AUDIO

No Surprises
CASSIE SISTOSO



ABOUT COLLAGE: A JOURNAL OF CREATIVE EXPRESSION



Collage is a semi-annual publication of the Middle Tennessee State University Honors College. All submissions were reviewed anonymously and selected by a student editorial staff. The materials published by *Collage* do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the *Collage* staff, Honors College, MTSU student body, staff, or administrators. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or utilized in any form without written permission from the editor or adviser of *Collage*. Inquiries should be addressed as follows:

Collage
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 year-round. Online submissions may be made through our website, mtsu.edu/collage/submit.php. Creative work, such as art, photography, design, short stories, creative nonfiction, short plays, song lyrics, poetry, videos/films, and audios, may be submitted online or at the *Collage* office, Honors 224, between the hours of 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m.

PRODUCTION

Technology
Adobe Illustrator CC
Adobe InDesign CC

Typography
Filmotype Maxwell
Poppins



POLICY STATEMENT

Collage: A Journal of Creative Expression is a creative magazine featuring submitted work chosen by a volunteer staff in a blind grading process. The staff attempts to choose the best work without regard for theme or authorship. Although *Collage* is sponsored by the University Honors College, staff members and submitters are not required to be Honors students. Staff members are selected each semester from a pool of applicants and must have at least a 3.0 GPA and two references. Go to mtsu.edu/collage/staff.php to complete a staff application.

0922-1155/Middle Tennessee State University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, ethnic or national origin, sex, disability, age, religion, veteran status, sexual orientation or gender identity, in its programs and activities. See full policy at mtsu.edu/titleix.

COLUMBIA SCHOLASTIC PRESS ASSOCIATION AWARDS

Gold Medalist Certificates: 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022
Silver Crown Awards: 2007, 2008, 2011, 2019, 2021 and 2022
Gold Crown Awards: 2012, 2013, and 2015



Collage

**MIDDLE
TENNESSEE**
STATE UNIVERSITY