



COLLAGE

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A Journal of Creative Expression

Spring 2016




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A Journal of Creative Expression Spring 2016

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



Many assume that, as Editor in Chief, I can take credit for *Collage* and its remarkable quality. That, however, is far from reality. In truth, most of my role involves basic administrative duties, which I have chosen to supplement by taking on the task of making valuable relationships with other organizations on our campus. It is only logical that such precious connections occur between those organizations that promote the creative process and *Collage*, whose main purpose is to document and recognize these breakthroughs of creativity. Down the road, it is my hope that these relationships continue to grow, as I believe they will aid in the building of a secure foundation for not only our journal, but a bright future for our community as well.

Being a part of *Collage* for the past two years, I continue to be amazed by the quality of work that our students produce. Semester after semester, I thought I had seen it all, and yet again our submitters would send in work that would leave me spellbound.

And of course, when our extremely talented and detail-oriented staff members are provided with such exceptional work, magic is made in the form of a terrific issue. This semester has been no different, and I am proud to have served such a wonderful group of individuals in this worthy endeavor as Editor in Chief.

With that being said, I would like to thank our distinguished adviser Marsha Powers, our relentless staff members, and of course, our brilliant submitters for all their efforts in the production of yet another outstanding issue.

And to our dedicated readers, it is my pleasure to present the Spring 2016 issue of *Collage*.

Nausheen Qureshi
Editor in Chief

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Une Petite Fille

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You are right.
It's stupid to want sugar
when there is meat and bread –
but our banquet is silent.
Adjust the garters,
Tighten the bodice,
I have dressed for no one.

Hungry – we are hungry; jaws fall
apart like broken
hinges.
We eat for hours, weeks –

and we are bursting,
and there is silence,
and the process feeds itself.

Heavy white linens for the table
Muting all – it is the thickest snow.

Please,
rip the stockings,
chew through the seams,
gnaw off the buttons,
then toss them away like
chicken bones – I have dressed for no one.

There is Cornish hen,
bound and filled with cloves, orange rind.
There is pork loin, bathed in apple and scallions.
Grainy loaves, crust bleeding butter,
send steam skyward – desire as prayer.

This table stretches miles,
each inch covered.
Your bitten lips are smacking,
silver cutlery stabs air.



Watermelon

Erin Potter
lithography

Upon Reflection: The Anniversary of My Father's Death

Joseph Quarles
creative nonfiction

Every year at this time, when the chilly nights send leaves into patches of brilliant orange and scarlet – a burst of color before winter turns them into tiny, crackling shrouds – a gradual darkness creeps into my heart. Twenty-one years ago on an early fall day, my father died suddenly of a heart attack while sitting in front of a paint store at opening time.

The injury of that day is certainly a scar, one among many, but the wound opens anew when the anniversary is upon me, causing me to stop and think. I look at my son now and see how much he has grown and how much he looks like me, with the shadow of my father in his features. I remember my father telling me how excited he was when I was born. He finally had a son, his only son. He said he had marveled at my tiny structure, my little hands and feet, barely able to believe I was finally in his arms.

As I grew into adolescence, my father became a giant to me. I could never imagine filling his shoes, leaving an impressive mark as he did with his intellect and accomplishments, despite life's continued attempts at crushing him into obscurity. Eventually as time passed, I began to see him differently. He had the beginnings of a stooped back, graying hair and hands knotted with arthritis. Yet, he was

still an all-encompassing force in my life. He was still my father, and he was still a giant.

He once told me that when you reach a certain age, you realize so many things that you were told are important in life end in disillusionment and disappointment. He stressed one thing as being vital above all things in the end: family. He told me that no matter how old I was, I would always be his little boy. Then one day, he was gone, swept away in a moment as brief as a summer breeze. I saw his face one more time at the funeral – my own death stamped in his image – a moment I pushed down deep inside to be dealt with much later, a mark on a calendar.

Now, I feel winter coming again, and I see an end to my life. I know more now with each minute that ticks away; each passing moment, my clock is winding down. Each day with my family is measured far more important than any precious metal or stone. My son is grown with his own family now, yet he is still my little boy. I remember my son's birth, how pink and tiny he was, his face turning purple when he cried, his long, deep sleeps, and his funny little baby smile. Someday, most certainly, he will have a date for me on the calendar. He will collect others like them, little markers of scars and memories.



Portrait of a January Baby

Kiki Kixmiller
digital photography



Unlit

Kiki Kixmiller
digital photography

Musings in the Dead of Night

Leah Bailey
poetry

There is nothing, nothing in the world quite as sad
As returning to old haunts, once frequented by friends
Where their faces reappear for an instant
Ghostly images that fade, rattled loose with time
To float softly away like dead leaves on the wind
Their echoing laughter the last to go.

It's most disturbing, I find, when drifting off to sleep.
It seems memories find an easier way home at this time
And little incidences long forgotten
Due to their unimportance to daily life,
Their habitual practice of giving way to meaningless tasks,
These memories reappear and take the forefront.

It starts as one stirred from the depths
while slipping away to peaceful rest
And the mad rush of memory
Washes over, enveloping, like a flood of waters
Rising swiftly through the night,
To present the ebbing shadows once more.

And you wonder why you ever left.
And how did it ever change? But it did.
And that time is gone
And those friends are gone.
And those haunts are empty of the past
Bearing only the busy present.

But the laughter, the echoing, laughter, remains.
To haunt dreams and fill thoughts
As you muse sleepily on a chilly February night
With the pattering rain on the roof fading into silence.
Of times past, but not forgotten,
Musings in the dead of night.



Vulnerability

Aly Booker
oil on birch wood



Sexual Lies

Courtney Lee
digital photography

Plainsong

William Brown
poetry

When you rise up from bed with a whistle
on your lips, a little tune out of Disney for
its hint of glee, the day looks bright.

It could have gone another way. Down
into the valley of trials. Doubt and fear
making sounds in your mouth. Tears.

But this—this nods to some break
out of sleep. Some rearrangement
of coils. Some quake below the crust.

You move from point to point
hardly aware of what has crashed in—
let go its music with your tongue.

I'm not sad to see you relieved
of whatever burden that was.
The one with all the knives in it.



Parts of Your World

Megan Starling
scanography

The Water Babies

Shannon Keller

fiction

As she watched their headlights cut through the darkness, Bobbi Jo couldn't believe they were doing this. The night had started boring enough, hanging out with a few friends at her parents' house, but now they were driving through the dark under the light of a full moon.

Since her parents were out of town for the weekend, she'd invited her boyfriend Tony and their friends Eric and Kelli over to watch some movies and drink some beer, and Tony's little brother Jeff had tagged along. Sometime during the course of the evening, they'd switched gears and started sharing ghost stories. When Eric told his rendition of the Water Babies Legend from the local Native American tribe, no one had believed him – no one but Bobbi Jo, that is. Having lived on the reservation until she was ten, she knew the story of how the ghosts of babies drowned in the river still haunted a stretch of water and pulled other small children to their death if they waded too far out. She had almost become a victim of those waters herself when she was five. Though her father had managed to save her from the current, the cries of babies she'd heard below the surface still haunted her.

Hearing her first-hand account had sparked a sense of adventure in her friends. They had loaded some camp chairs and a cooler full of beer into the back of Tony's Blazer and were on their way to the River Bottoms with the hopes of experiencing the supernatural. They left the asphalt of the main highway and continued on the gravel road that Bobbi Jo remembered from her childhood. She'd begun to have second thoughts when they reached the fence that marked the edge of the River Bottoms and saw the sign that read, "No Trespassing! Only Registered Tribal Members Allowed

Beyond This Point. All Others Will Be Prosecuted." The sign made the others feel rebellious, so they ignored Bobbi Jo when she'd asked them to turn back. Where the others got a new sense of excitement, Bobbi Jo had an ominous feeling.

They drove along the gravel road for what felt like an eternity. The farther they went, the more she could tell that this was not a well-traveled road. Looking out the window, she had to admit that it was a beautiful night. Being so far away from the lights of the city, the moon was amazingly bright, and the stars sparkled like diamonds. *It's so amazing out here*, Bobbi Jo thought, and for a moment, she forgot her fears.

Was the voice right? Was I supposed to die that day?

The field of tall grass began to close in on the road until that was all they could see; the gravel road had become a single lane through the field. Hearing the grass scrape against the sides of the car brought back Bobbi Jo's trepidation. Suddenly, a small wooden bridge appeared on the road before them. Tony drove across slowly, hoping that it wouldn't collapse under the weight of the car. They made it across without incident and found a small clearing that ran right up to the river. After parking near the center, they could walk about ten feet in each direction before they ran into the tall grass surrounding them. While the others pulled the chairs and cooler out of the Blazer, Bobbi Jo walked to the edge of the water. The surface of the river was still and reflected the sky above like a mirror. She could hear the others behind her drinking and laughing, but it sounded like they were far away; she was hypnotized by the view and the gurgling sound of the river.

"What the hell is that!" she heard Eric shout behind her. "Do you guys hear that?" It was enough to snap her out of

her trance, and she listened. Everything had gone quiet; all she could hear was the river. She could hear bubbles popping up in the water, as if something was swimming just below the surface. As the sound got closer to her on the bank, it started to come faster, and she could see the bubbles coming across the water toward her. She took a few steps back and bumped into Kelli; she hadn't noticed the others join her on the bank of the river.

"What is it?" Kelli whispered, and the bubbles stopped. The surface of the water stilled into glass again, and the night went completely silent. All she could hear was her breathing and her heart pounding away in her chest. The sound of rhythmic chanting carried over the water, and Bobbi Jo realized that it wasn't her heart she was hearing, but drums. They froze in place and listened to the ghostly chorus of voices chanting and singing in time with the beat. As a group, they began to sway with the music. Bobbi Jo began walking toward the sound. *Stop*, she told herself. *Don't go near the water*. But her body didn't listen.

"Bobbi?" Tony called after her, his voice tinged with fear.

When her foot touched the water, there was a loud shriek, and the music was soon drowned out by the sound of thousands of babies crying. The urge to keep walking was so powerful that Bobbi Jo began to cry. *This is where you belong*. She heard a strange voice in her head. *You belong to us. They stole you from us many years ago*. It's time to come home. She shook her head and cried out as she took another step into the water; it was now up to her knees. Something grabbed her ankle and urged her forward. Her friends were yelling at her from the bank, begging for her to come back, but she couldn't make herself stop.

The water was up to her thighs when she felt something wrap around her waist, and she was lifted out of the water.

When her feet were back on dry ground, she realized that it was Tony. He had picked her up and carried her out. The crying had stopped, and the silence that replaced it was deafening.

"What the hell was that?" he asked her as he wiped the tears from her cheeks.

"I," she stuttered, "I don't know."

She hugged him tightly and cried into his shoulder. She knew that if he hadn't stopped her, she would have kept walking and surely drowned.

"It's okay," he whispered to her. "Let's just get you home."

She nodded. They all headed to the car, but as soon as their backs were to the river, they heard a war cry shatter the silence. The ground trembled with the sound of hundreds of feet racing through the grass toward them. Everyone jumped into the Blazer and quickly locked the doors. Tony turned the key in the ignition, but nothing happened; the battery was dead. "Start the car!" Eric yelled from the back seat. "Get us the hell out of here!"

Bobbi Jo heard the voice again. *We won't lose you again. Come back to us, and we will spare your friends.* The tears began to flow as she listened to Kelli pray for salvation, and Jeff whimper in fear. Eric and Tony were screaming at each other, but she couldn't make out their words. *You know it's true.* She shook her head. *You were not meant to live this life.*

"No!" Bobbi Jo screamed, reached over, and turned the key in the ignition. This time the car started. Tony threw the car into gear and raced out on the road they had taken in. As they crossed the bridge, the tension lifted, and everyone breathed a sigh of relief; they were free.



Alien Auction

Courtney Lee
film photography

Bobbi Jo hugged herself in the passenger seat as she gazed out the window. She could see a herd of horses running in the field alongside them – their hides and manes glistening in the moonlight. She watched them in awe of their beauty for several minutes before she noticed something odd. Their eyes were glowing as if they were reflecting light, but there was nothing to reflect. She sat upright and looked closer. Each horse was covered in the painted handprints and lines of a war party. The horses were keeping perfect pace with the car; no matter how far the needle crept up on the speedometer, they were still there. Another war cry echoed through the night, and Bobbi Jo felt it ring through her entire body. The drums started beating again in time with her heartbeat. *You can't leave.* The voice whispered.

"No. No. No." Bobbi Jo began to repeat, shaking her head.

Tony could see the fence marking the edge of the River Bottoms ahead, and he pushed the pedal to the floor. As the car raced through the opening in the fence, the horses disappeared, and the drums stopped. They drove in silence until they reached Bobbi Jo's house and quickly went their separate ways. Bobbi Jo was left to sit alone in her silent house and wonder what it all meant. *Was the voice right? Was I supposed to die that day?* She took a deep breath to calm herself and heard a voice whisper behind her.

"Yes."



Watermelon #2

Erin Potter
acrylic, oil, pastel on panel

Sermo

Anna Houser
poetry

There's a plastic husk dressed in workman's
clothing at the end of my street,
holding a red baton
and raising its plastic hand
up and down
and up again,
dutifully warning midnight drunks
of a gaping rip in the weak Korean asphalt.

Surely he of all things can comprehend
being fettered to circumstance.
His every night's the same –
summer heat serenade from cicada,
gentle embrace from mosquito and gnat,
perfume gifted by pine tree and compost,
and all of us shaded by the night sky
as America borrows
our sun for a while.

And so we sit together, him and me,
down there by the pit. It's muggy.
Moth joins us, humming.
He doesn't like Moscato,
but I silently raise a toast up for us both.
Sweet citrus flower and
cinnamon, sparkling
and aromatic
in the evening heat.

I draw my knees up to my chest
and mumble against the breaking dawn,
that unwelcome houseguest in the winter
holidays who eats up all the turkey
but never brings a single dish.
I'm nowhere close to finished,
there's three bottles left,
and dessert wine's never meant
to be consumed in daylight.

The husk waves on, unmoved
and dutiful, satisfied that he'll win
employee of the year in his company of one.
I stare at him, reproachful.
Another day conscripted on us both,
two twin husks
fettered to unyielding circumstance.
Moscato closes my eyes,
tucks me in and builds a pillow for me.
The light waves on.

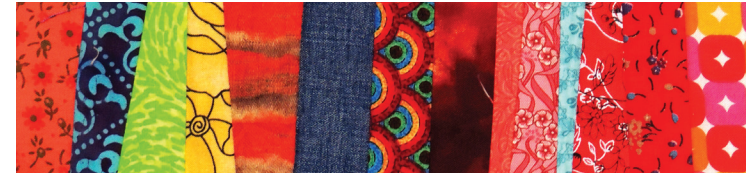


Please Ask

Cody Miller
film photography

VOICES FOR SURVIVORS

The Healing Power of Art and Community



A Writers Corps group reading with Mohammed Ghazi, who is currently starting a Writers Corps organization in Saudi Arabia.



Southern Festival of Books journal signing with Pat Rich, left, Spencer Johnson, and Dr. Matt Brown

When I first saw the cover of *DMZ*, a publication of MTSU's Writers Corps, I appreciated that our campus had a creative outlet for veterans; however, I had no intention of being anything other than an admirer from afar. In my mind, I felt I had no place amongst these men and women who have experienced things I'll never understand. Even as the granddaughter of two veterans, I did not expect to connect to the group, but after speaking directly with members of the Writers Corps and other creative communities, both on and off campus, I've come to realize that the healing nature of the arts isn't exclusive. We can all benefit from creative expression no matter who we are.

Writers Corps, founded by English faculty member Dr. Matthew Brown in the fall of 2009, provides a community that allows students who are veterans to speak for themselves and reconcile their military experiences with their lives as civilians. I recently heard the story of Corps member Brian Crow, an MTSU physics major, who wrote a symbolic piece for *DMZ* about his transition from the Navy to civilian life. His story of his last active day on duty represented the "bridge between that part of [his] life and the future at the time, which was an uncharted territory." Consistently, what I hear from people like Brian is that the experience

of becoming a part of such a community is transformative and that the "pay it forward" approach to social issues helps develop and cultivate voices that are often lost.

Another new creative community, The Lavinia Project, led by Molly Blankenship with Dr. Brown's aid, is designed to help give survivors of abuse a much-needed voice, since the rhetoric of today in regards to sexual violence often blames victims for not preventing their own assault and promotes prevention tips and courses, ultimately downplaying the responsibility of those who commit these crimes. While most campuses certainly offer assault prevention and recovery services, many of the resources fail to include the real perpetrators in the conversation.

MTSU Art student Shelby Rehberger, whose memoir-esque prose piece "Room 214" was published in *Collage*, is a part of this new project. She volunteers her time to teach art to clients at the Domestic Violence Shelter in Rutherford County. But these endeavors of Rehberger and others, which provide outlets to a variety of communities and effect social change, are neither therapy groups nor do they regurgitate the vitriolic perspectives commonly known to these issues.

Blankenship founded The Lavinia Project after the success of another group she co-created, Reclaim Ourselves, which publishes quarterly e-zines and printed versions with paintings, photography, prose, and other types of art, each highlighting a different social issue, this September's being on the subject of violence. Reclaim Ourselves is a mode by which the arts can trigger social change and promote connections among populations affected by trauma and violence.

Both survivors of domestic violence and veterans often must face one of two outsider mindsets: those who merely provide lip service, verbal support with no real action, or those, often academics, who may attempt to diagnose or propose to 'fix' them. But students at MTSU are fortunate enough to have community literacy programs willing to legitimize individuals' extreme experiences, whether good or bad, in a way that outsiders can understand and support them.

I have always considered myself an outsider, listening to stories of my grandfather's service without truly comprehending what he went through. While my paternal grandfather was open about his service in the Navy, my mother's father had an illustrious military career in the Air Force and Special Forces that he never alluded to beyond stories of Vietnam jungles. Since learning more about Writers Corps and speaking to veterans directly, I often wonder how different things

“Students at MTSU are fortunate enough to have community literacy programs willing to legitimize individuals' extreme experiences, whether good or bad, in a way that outsiders can understand and support them.”

might have been for my grandfather had he been a part of such a community. And although his passing is still painful, this learning process has begun to heal some of my own sadness.

Until recently, I felt like my desire to be a part of a community like Writers Corps, simply for the sake of feeling closer to military family members I have lost, was selfish. Now with a different perspective, I can see that this mindset keeps some people from reaching out to different communities. Like Dr. Brown, I, too, believe writing offers some of the “deepest and most profound cognitive effects of anything you could ever be a part of,” and that the healing nature of art is an absolute truth. Looking to the future, my only hope is that we continue to provide outlets for a diverse chorus of voices — both for those individuals who suffer social injustice and trauma and for those who love them.

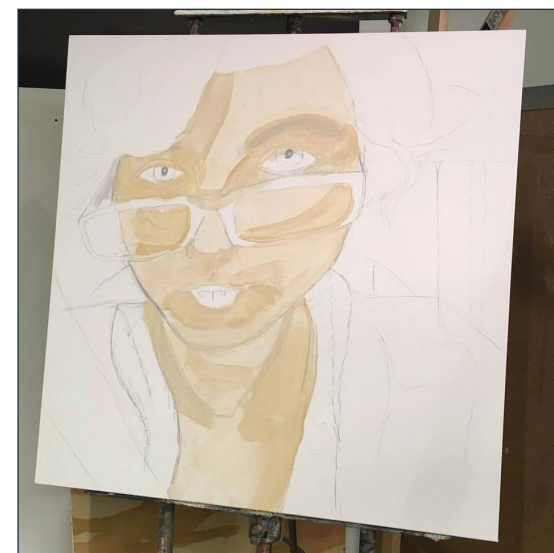
Feature story by
Sara Snoddy



A Writers Corps reading



Reclaim Ourselves' next submission period is in August.
(Design by Olivia Throckmorton)



A painting by artist Shelby Rehberger

Fading Light

Leah Bailey

fiction

The afternoon sun streamed through the blinds, casting alternating lines of light and shadow over the women sitting before them. Claire tilted the old photograph, squinting at the picture – the face of the girl in the photograph glowed in the pale light.

“She’s beautiful, isn’t she?” Claire smiled.

The young woman facing her raised her eyebrows in surprise, and quick laughter bubbled to the surface before dying away. She sniffed and drew a ragged breath. “Yes, she is.”

“She looks familiar,” Claire began, and the woman’s head jerked sharply in response. She stared at Claire, her eyes penetrating, and Claire shifted uncomfortably.

“Does she?” The young woman pressed. She leaned forward eagerly. “Do you know who she is?”

“No,” Claire said slowly. “Should I?”

The woman hesitated and then bit her lower lip, chewing on the ragged edges of flesh she herself had created.

“You really shouldn’t do that,” Claire said. “If you keep on like that, you won’t have a lip left.”

“Are you sure you don’t recognize anything?” the young woman asked, ignoring her advice as she resumed her habit.

“Well, let me look again,” Claire said. She was doubtful she could help, but she didn’t know what else she could do. “What did you say your name was?” The woman’s eyes filled with tears. “Tracy. Please, just look.”

The picture was ancient, black and white, and curling at the edges. Two women, one young and the other older, stood in front of a drugstore. The young woman had caught Claire’s eyes initially. The way in which she stood, confidently laughing at the camera with one arm raised as if waving or beckoning someone over, appealed to Claire somehow.

Yes, she must be waving them over. Or warning them away.

If Claire were being truthful, the girl did look familiar. She seemed like someone Claire would like to be friends with, as she paused before the camera, filled with the enticing combination of happiness, life, and hope. But try as she might, Claire couldn’t quite place her. Instead, she shifted her attention to the blurrier image of the older woman, studying the way she held her gloved hands clasped in front of her. Her purse hung from the crook of her elbow, and her coat looked warm and comfortable. She was serious. . . .

Claire gasped, and the picture fluttered through the air to the green and beige-speckled linoleum below. She leaned forward, reaching for it, but Tracy beat her to it. She paused, staring at the picture for a moment, and then she raised her serious brown eyes to meet Claire’s gaze before handing it back.

“What did you see?”

Claire hesitated. The woman seemed nice enough, but, well, she didn’t know her. And this was all so strange.

The way she had insisted on talking to her, acting as if she knew something Claire didn’t. Even the old woman sitting in the corner opposite them seemed to agree with her. Every time Claire glanced at her, the old woman met her eyes, a confused expression shadowing her own.

“I saw, well, you see,” Claire began, and she wet her dry lips with her tongue, unsure if she should continue.

Tracy leaned forward, her brown bob brushing her cheeks as she grasped Claire’s hands in her own. Her grip was tight, and Claire felt the beginning tingles of numbing fear come over her.

“I wouldn’t ask,” Tracy said, “but you have to believe me. It’s very important. Please.” The last word was barely comprehensible as Tracy choked it out, ragged and hard, almost desperate.

“You look a lot like the girl in the picture.”

“The other lady, the older one,” Claire said. “She’s . . . well, she’s my mother.”

“Your mother?”

“Yes,” Claire nodded. “But I don’t know who she’s with. You have to believe me.”

The shadow of a smile lightened Tracy’s expression, and, seeing Claire’s alarm, she forced a fake, friendly grin that was almost painful to witness. “I believe you.”

“You know,” Claire hesitated, “you look a lot like the girl in the picture.” She held it up beside Tracy. “You even have the same bob. You could be twins.” Claire’s gaze traveled between the girl in the photo and the woman facing her.

Tracy nodded, tucking the dark strands of hair behind one ear as she plucked the photo from Claire's hand and opened her purse. "Everyone says that. She's a relative." Tracy sighed as she ducked her head, her eyes falling into the shadowed line of the blinds.

"Younger sister?" Claire nodded knowingly. Tracy glanced up, surprised. "No offense, dear, but you do look quite a bit older."

For once, the worried lines etched deep on the woman's face disappeared. The air in the room seemed to grow lighter as she leaned back in her chair, closing her eyes as she giggled. Claire couldn't help but laugh along with her. Even the old woman in the corner joined in.

"You certainly have a way with words," Tracy said as she sat up, her eyes bright. Her anxious posture eased as the tension in her shoulders relaxed.

"Wait. Let me look at it again," Claire said as the woman closed the clasp on her purse and sat still, staring at it. The worry lines became faintly discernable once more as she slowly clicked open the clasp and withdrew the photograph. She hesitated a moment before handing it to Claire.

A deep feeling of concern and unease wrenched tightly in Claire's chest, and she laid one hand on Tracy's arm. Though she wasn't sure why she felt so, Claire knew she had to do something to help this young woman on her mission.

"Isn't it funny?" Claire began as she studied the photograph in the failing light. "We just see this moment frozen in time. Where did their feet lead them next? They had to take another step, but where?"

Claire closed her eyes and leaned back in her chair. "Where did they end up?" She heard the woman shift

beside her in the seat, but she ignored the muffled noise, concentrating instead on the photograph. *If I were her, where would I go next?* she thought.

The sunbeams sliding through the dusty blinds felt warm on her face, and she began to grow drowsy as the waves of light flickered across her closed eyelids. She relaxed, allowing her mind to drift, and a succession of idle thoughts crowded her mind.

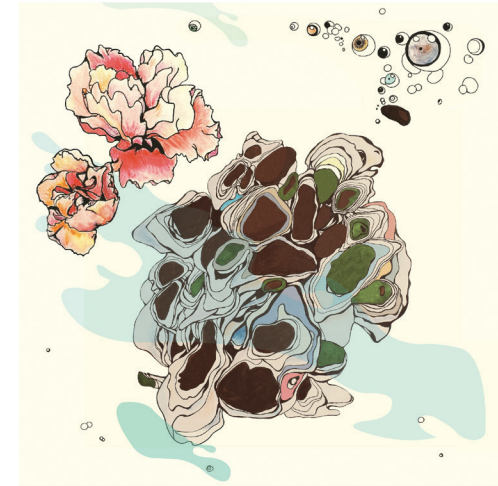
The kitchen at home and Mama standing at the stove, wooden spoon in hand. The old trees leaning across each other, barely supporting a hammock between their crumbling trunks. The movie theater. The movie theater! Why, she and Mama had gone to one the day of her graduation, when she had worn her best hat pulled low over her brown bob and that new velvet dress set. Oh, how she had admired it!

She smiled as she remembered Mama's compliments and Daddy saying how pretty she looked and that he had to have a photograph to remember it. Mama had complained. Claire could hear her voice now, as clearly as if she stood beside her. "We're going to be late if we don't hurry."

"The theater," Claire said. She was sure she was right, and her firm tone confirmed it. "That's what happens next."

A low chuckle escaped her lips, and in the chair next to her, Tracy dropped her purse. Her voice trembled when she spoke. "Mama? Are you here?"

Claire opened her eyes and sat up. She had almost had it. It had been right there, at the edge of her mind, before Tracy interrupted her thoughts. The light was waning quickly now and the room was growing dim with the approach of night. Claire turned to the door, expecting to find Tracy's mother waiting there, but it was empty.



The Dreaming Turtle

Inhae Kim
mixed media

Only the old lady in the corner met Claire's gaze, and they turned towards Tracy in unison.

"I'm sorry. She's not here," Claire said softly. This woman was confusing her. "Sweetie, are you in some sort of trouble?"

A sob escaped the woman's lips, and she pressed trembling fingers to them as if to quiet their mournful cry. She shook her head, unable to speak, and Claire handed her a tissue.

"There, there. Don't worry. I'm sure she'll be back soon." Claire's fear was apparent as her voice trembled, and she tried in vain to steady it. Something is wrong.

(continued...)

(continued from pg. 19)

After a moment, Tracy took a deep breath and covered Claire's hand with her own. "Don't worry. You're right. I'm sure she will." She spoke as if she was certain, but the trembling notes in her own voice betrayed her.

Claire's eye twitched in anger. She knew what was wrong now. What had caused that terrible feeling that had been bothering her all day. Tracy needed her help finding her mother. No wonder she hadn't explained who the woman in the photograph was. She was probably embarrassed. What kind of a mother went off and left her child? Why, she would never leave. . . .

"I just hope it isn't long," Tracy continued. Her eyes searched Claire's face as if seeking something, and Claire glanced away, confused. This woman's gaze said she wanted something from her, but Claire wasn't sure what.

"She can take her time," Claire spoke slowly as she struggled to think of what to say. "We have plenty."

"I just want to talk to her again." The sharp pain of Tracy's grip on Claire's hand attested to the strength of her distress as Tracy's words dropped to a whisper. "I just want her to know I love her."

"Now, how could she ever doubt that?" Claire asked. Tracy's penetrating gaze broke as her eyes welled with fresh tears, and Claire sighed with relief as her grip slackened. "Listen, sweetie, I don't know where your mama is, but she'll be back soon. I'm sure of it. Meanwhile, you can stay here with me."

The light spilling through the slats of the blinds turned gray and weak as misty clouds enveloped the sinking sun.

Tracy seemed younger to Claire somehow as night fell, softening her features and erasing the scars of burden 'till she resembled a girl once more.

"We'll wait for her together."

Tracy sniffed as she dried her eyes, her quick gasps slowing to regular breathing as she calmed. Then she took Claire's hands in her own, gentle this time, and, as the last of the light failed, they sat quietly, waiting, in the growing darkness.



Imaginary/ Mixed Creatures

Inhae Kim
mixed media



Engulfed by Nature

Hannah Allen
composed digitally



The Lesser Light

Christopher Hamrick
digital photography

She Sings Sad in February

Amy Harris-Aber
poetry

I almost forgot
that rivers and knives
reflect light in the same ways
before you start drowning.

Those eyes were Wakarusa-blue,
and I was at the bottom,
counting all the stones
he'd put in my pockets.

I can, like spells or curses,
summon perfect tableaux.

For a dime –
for the pain,
I can think of his neck in a scarf
tied just the way he'd shown me –
wrapped tight.

Two Starlings sat,
heads turned in the same direction,
but perching on different branches.

At last, there was a loosely-made fist
without even the care,
– the *consideration*,
of force.

And I know
that threats are wet sheets,
but with enough friction,
even they can burn.

Neurotic Self-Loather

Megan Smith

poetry

Neurotic self-loather
Wallows through the streets
Like a doorbell
Skin screaming –
PUSH ME
PUSH ME
PUSH ME
Come inside,
Remove your flesh jacket
Let me see if we all look the same steeped in blood and marrow.

Yes

We all look the same steeped in blood and marrow.
But our distaste
For letting go
Makes it difficult to turn off our
color blinders
like a frantic panic foxtrot across
the ghosts we never quite shook off
we stuff ourselves so full
of reasons
to drop bombs in our own self worth.

Neurotic self-loather

Flicks spit wads with his
Stagger tongue
Every time he hears the word love.
He hasn't seen a sidewalk in seven years
For fear of jumping off
When it ends. The goal
Is simply falling back asleep

Which is more like the weight of wet
Leather on his forehead
In a desert sun he cannot
Actually remove his dreams

Spewing tauntingly across the bed sheets
When he thinks
He is finally consumed.

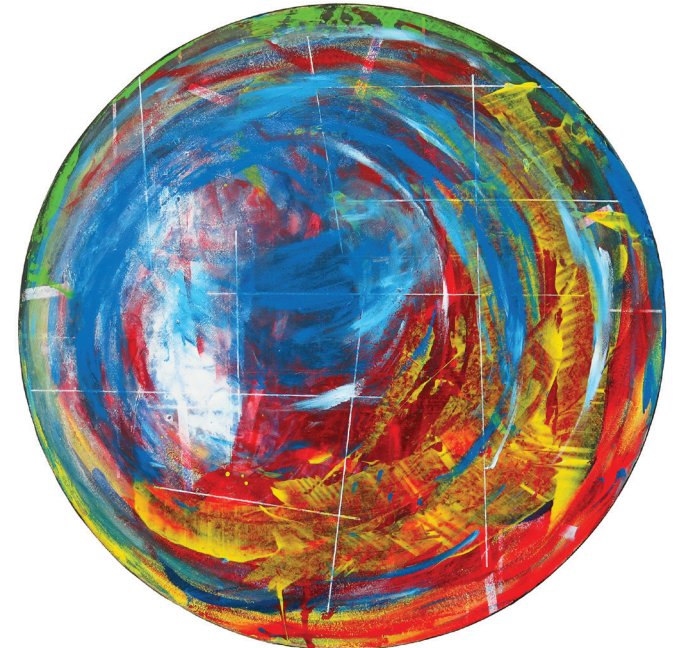
He walks
Like a dampened match
With a winning smile. Do not tell him
He has a winning smile.
He has mastered deflection
His anger is a trampoline target board
But still screams
PUSH ME
With his madness cap.

People are so attractive
When they have nothing to offer but
Unlearned body parts
And unloved pleas
For second chances.

Makes me think of the night
I stood in the rain
Layered in wool sweaters
To see if I could understand
The gravity of sadness
And it poured like

A damn heartbreak

And I fought to stay
Standing even though pain
Looks a lot more comfortable
When we have risen above it.



One Piece

Lou Aguilar
acrylic on hardwood



Untitled 2

Romerus Greer
oil painting



Tyler

Romerus Greer
oil painting

Cryptomania

Linda Gale Rose
poetry

Rainbow-footed caravan
keeps us running, on the lam
we wonder at the destination
thunder aiding dissipation
the mind's creation open wide
to see what sticks when worlds collide

To tiptoe through a tidal wave
what's the use in being brave?
so many uses, so many ways
to contemplate how we spend our days

Drink to the shadow,
drink to the phase
wink at the endless,
improbable maze

A cryptomantic curtain gave
formal structure to the stave
would that I could sing out in praise
for now I'm soaking in the rays

Drink to the sun
that shines through the moon
sink into something
that's sounding in tune

Catalytic thought began
this version of the magic man
we create the correlations
we are but an imitation
in isolation, purified
in holy union, verified

The Smell of Cigarettes

Loren Bebensee
poetry

The smell of cigarettes . . . It clings to me.
It's on my skin . . . in my hair.
And years from now, when I draw in a breath
as I pass someone smoking on the cobblestone street,
the way that smoke lingers in the air will bring me back to here.
To my eyes closed, your hand over my heartbeat.
To the heat between your chest and my cheek.
I can still feel your fingertips over mine,
Sticky in the summer heat, but nice.
I wish now, as I sit in the aching of our loss, that we would have stopped
But there was too much comfort, too much peace.
I loved you, and you loved me.
We can't run from the past, no matter how hard we try
We lost such a love, yet woke up to find the world still turning
With the same sunset and sunrise.
Our hearts call out in agony
And our bodies fit together,
telling us we can go back to a place where heartbreak isn't real
Oh . . . but it is.
So please darling, let's keep pretending.
Let's submerge ourselves in this nostalgic lie.
Kid me like you would any other time.
Let's whisper empty "I love you's" and indulge in unforgotten passions.
Let's sit in the breeze without letting it slip between us.
I know we can convince ourselves of this perfect lie.
Love me like I will love you for the rest of our lives.



Tennessean at the State Fair

AJ Holmes
film photography



The Image of God

Justin Farr
fiction

It's Wednesday, so me and Mama are walkin' in town to the grocery store. I'm happy 'cause I can almost taste the honey bun I'm gonna put in my Mama's basket while we shoppin'. I'm walkin' close to Mama, but she lettin' me walk without holdin' her hand.

I'm hoppin' and skippin' while we goin' along. Every time I see a crack in the sidewalk, I'm jumpin' over it so Mama's back don't get broke. We probably not gonna go to the playground or the store for a long time, if *that* happens. I need my hidey-spot at the playground and my honey buns, so I can't be steppin' on any cracks.

Soon, I start to get a little tired from hoppin' over every crack that come up. We start comin' up on some water fountains standin' up 'gainst the long building of stores we passin' to the right of us.

"Can I get a drink of water?" I ask my Mama.

"Yeah, you can when we get to that fountain, baby."

We comin' up to the fountains. They only two or three store doors ahead of us when somebody come out of one them shops, and it's someone my Mama knows. Ms. Teresa from down the street. They recognize each other and say "hi" and start talkin', so we stop. *Man*, even when there ain't hardly anybody outside like today, Mama always gotta bump into somebody she know. And they *always* gotta get to talkin'. I like Ms. Teresa, but she holdin' up me gettin' my honey bun. My mind shift back to them water fountains. I'm still thirsty.

I ask my Mama could I still go get a sip of water since it not that far away from where we standin' and she says yeah. I walk over to them. I'm still in sight of my Mama, so I'm not too far away. I get to 'em, and there are two water fountains, and they the same size and look the same 'cept one has a sign that says WHITE above it, and the other one has COLORED, even though it ain't got no colors on it. I go to the one that says COLORED 'cause that's the one my Mama says I always gotta go to. They both got a wooden step in front of them, so I step on the one I'm s'posed to and get a drink.

I'm kinda hot after hoppin' 'round so much, so the water that comin' out of the spout taste real good. Even better than normal. It feel nice and cool goin' down. I start thinkin' 'bout how good it would be if they make a fountain that has juice or Kool-Aid comin' out of the spout instead of water. I'd be praisin' like Granny in church and never stop gettin' a sip.

I get my fill and start playin' 'round with the water. I'm lettin' it spurt out and make the little curve it does comin' down and lookin' at it splash and watchin' the little drops fly. I start thinkin' of more water games I could play. I start seein' if I could make a tunnel with one of my hands for the water to go through without gettin' my hand wet. Then, I try to let it pass through the gaps of my fingers. Since my hands keep gettin' wet anyway, I start flickin' at the flow of water. Then, I see how fast little drops of water take to spurt out and splash. Then, I get a good idea.

I wanna race the water fountains to see which one is faster. So, I step over the gap between the two fountains with my left foot and put it on the other wooden step to balance. They close enough so I can reach out and turn both of the little handles on each. I have my hand on the two fountains and start racin' them.

I got both fountains squirtin' out at the same time. The white one vs. the colored one for the world title of water.

On the first go, the white one wins.

Best two outta three.

On the second go, the colored one wins.

Now here's for *all* the honey buns.

I start to turn the little handles, when all of a sudden I get pulled away from the fountains in one jerk.

Next thing you know, I see my Mama's mad face starin' at me dead. I wanna crawl away.

"What did I tell you 'bout them fountains, boy!"

I look at the ground.

"Look at your clothes. I said you can get a sip of water, and you hose yourself down?"

I'm not that wet, Mama, I wanna say, but I know better than to talk back. I look around, and I spot a man that's a couple feet away lookin' at me. His face is turnt-up and givin' an ugly look.

"Look at me, boy!"

Mama not done with me.

"We almost to the store . . . dry you off there."

My Mama pulls me, and we start walkin' down the sidewalk again. This time Mama got me by the hand.

I feel bad.

While we walkin' away, I get a little look at my Mama's face. She look mad. She look a little scared, too.



Falling Atmosphere

Lydia Shattuck
acrylic collage



Walking to Work

Lydia Shattuck
oil & acrylic paint

Home

Krysta Lee Frost
poetry

When the guava tree dipped
toward the earth, heavy with
fruit,

we knew to avoid the golden ones
that fell into our waiting hands, too ripe,
and the taut skin of the green ones
hard as a full moon in the rinsed sky.

The kids would climb palm trees
and peer over the cinder block walls
as we sunk our teeth into the pink
flesh of the newly-plucked fruit,
rubbed clean against our t-shirts,
the tiny seeds smooth against our tongues.

We didn't wonder then
if they had homes — not until
we discovered, years later,
the word *home* slipped out
of our own pockets like a lost key,

or know that they had spent hours bent
beneath the sun, running across the
ledges of sea walls while we were
at school —

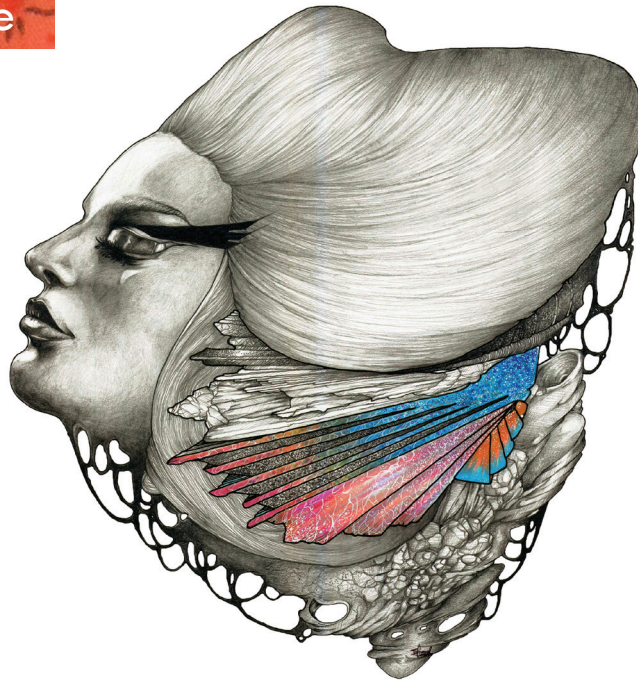
just that, walking home from a *sari-sari*
store with a bottle of vinegar,
we saw them all crowded around
a single television, the sound
soft and warm as water into their
impatient ears,

their heads black against the blue light
of the screen,

hazy, the silhouette of their bodies
in the dying sunlight.

**Resolving in
Dissonance**

Ian Cooper
mixed media



**Sexual Fluidity:
Cognizance of
One's Self**

Ian Cooper
screenprint



Audrey Monroe

Katherine McGrath
collage

Manna

StarShield Lortie

poetry

How do we weigh what we want
against the instinct to survive?
To dream of something more

than we think we deserve
illuminates the tools of survival:
breath, bread, embodiment.

When we dream of something more –
more life, more love, more breath and bread –
we remember we are more

than simple embodiment, made of more
than flesh and fornication and foul breath
and one hundred fifteen thousand, two hundred

heartbeats a day. Survival then becomes
the desire for more measured out in breaths
and blinks and the wisdom of whatever observes us.



Floating Rock

Kyle Brown
digital photography



The Ghost of James Bell

Dean Hall
song lyric

One late night down in Georgia
It was dark and wet and cold
I was driving my old pickup
Down a backwoods country road
Up ahead in the distance
What it was I couldn't tell
Then I soon remembered
The story of old James Bell

They said James came home one evening
With whiskey on his breath
He shot his lovely wife Marie
And with the same gun he met his death
The law found them that morning
In a bloody crimson stain
The sheriff said, "What has happened here
Y'all can see is very plain."

He said, "I stand for justice
Some folks just won't run."
He said, "I stand for justice,
Justice will be done."

Some folks never knew it
Some folks couldn't tell
What had really happened
On that night of living hell
But twenty years ago today
When I was just thirteen
A little boy had seen it all
And that little boy was me

You see James came home that evening
Marie was lying on the floor
The sheriff had his way with her
Then he aimed his forty-four
I watched him as he shot James down
Like no one would ever know
As I'm driving down this road tonight
The truth still untold.

When I drove by the sheriff's house
I swerved off of the road
There was someone by the mailbox
In a ragged overcoat
I got out and walked up closer
Though I was scared as hell
And there he was before me
The ghost of old James Bell

He must have walked right through me
As he staggered up the drive
I got back in my truck
Just glad to be alive
James knocked on the sheriff's door
With a pickaxe by his side
You could hear the screams a mile away
As I drove off through the night

He said, "I stand for justice
Some folks just won't run."
He said, "I stand for justice,
Justice will be done."

The morning paper came
The headlines there it read
The sheriff had been murdered
They found him lying on his steps
They said he died a vicious death

No suspect could be found
No one had seen a single thing
No one had heard a sound

I leaned back in my chair
I felt a bit relieved
I could put the past behind me
Forget what I had seen
I put down the morning paper
But as I began to leave
I couldn't help but notice
The blood stains on my sleeve

He said, "I stand for justice
Some folks just won't run."
He said, "I stand for justice,
Justice will be done."



Polaroid Land Camera

Aly Booker
oil paint



Haint

William Brown
poetry

You were there on our mother's lips
though it seemed she hardly spoke
of anything but trifles. The dark
weather. Her grandchildren's tooth
decay. We ate without your name
at all. It was so clear, though,
how you sat in the middle
of the table. How you shook salt
in our tea. Pushed napkins onto
the floor. It's so clear now
what the dog was barking at
when we stood around the Christmas
tree, laughing. When we sang the old
songs. You're there now
tossing through the mess
as mom shuffles to bed
alone. As another year speaks
from the walls. Keeping suicide
so far back in the throat
it almost growls.

Kansas, Anymore

Amy Leu
spray paint





Ground Zero

Nick Lampers
digital photography



Grand Canyon in Wind & Rain

AJ Holmes
medium format film photography

Off-Kilter

Megan Smith
poetry

Feeling a little off-kilter.
Couldn't fall asleep again
Last night been very
Conscious of my pain.

Hangs on me
Sucker-skinned to my
Breathing in
Vastly significant in my
Swagger waltz.

I lie there
In the bed
Swaddled in the reasons without
Reasoning.
Reasoning is the trickle of nourishment
Mountain river water
My body is so dehydrated.

I want to breathe deeper than this.
My lungs were made to breathe deeper than this.
My lungs were made to breathe
Deeper.

A man sits cross-tabled from my ego
Devours my stumbly-tongued excuses
I watch him
Nervous as a raindrop
Smashed desperate against the lining of a storm cloud.
What happens if I puncture the pores
Fall free into the atmosphere?

I would release into this Earth
This body
In legatos
Expanded in the moment my lungs
Were made
To breathe.

I couldn't sleep last night.
Been very conscious of my off-kilter.
I bet everyone's
Off-kilter
Has a nail in the back left tire
Keeps pulling the cargo a little behind
Always in the same direction.

Horizontal Climbing

Grace Tipton
poetry

This is Tennessee.
Unless dreadful war is made,
Underbrush fills dirt's attic and covers its roof.
Even graveled paths have grass sprouting at the edges
Its vines trailing over onto the rocks,
Like disobedient children
Smirking at their parents
While touching the forbidden object.

Wading through waist-high water —
Easy.
Unlike wading through underbrush,
Water doesn't scratch,
Tickle,
Provide boarding ramps for insects,
Smear skin with the oil of poison ivy,
Make blots of red pop up from holes thorns had recently
filled.
Saplings:
Thought by so many to be baby trees.
Really, they're the flagpoles for the
United Arachnid Clans.

Their patriotism is stretched across my face.

Though little traveled
(The pain of the journey scares the faint of heart,
The squeamish with tender limbs),
My legs are already scarred by my everyday clumsiness —
They don't mind.
Walking is not merely walking,
It's bending, dodging, stepping over, around,
Sometimes jumping, ducking,
Arms and brain involved:
Horizontal climbing.



Nashville

Kelsey Massey
digital photography



**Snow at
Stones River**

Kelsey Massey
digital photography

Those moments in the woods,
On a spot of ground perhaps no one ever has stood —
Loveliness. Penetrating breath.
This is not symbolic,
To say
Choosing a path unheard of is the best aim.
Frequently a thing is done often by most
because it is good (eating, sleeping, reading).
Refraining, limited to the trail:
Simply Inadequate.



Delirium

Trevor Scruggs
pointillism



Tea Time

Haley Overby
watercolor on basswood

Petrichor

Bell Doski
poetry

Sometimes she gets angry
And wrecks everything around her
Like the high tide,
A great wall of water.
Crashing onto the strongest demeanors
Utterly defiant.

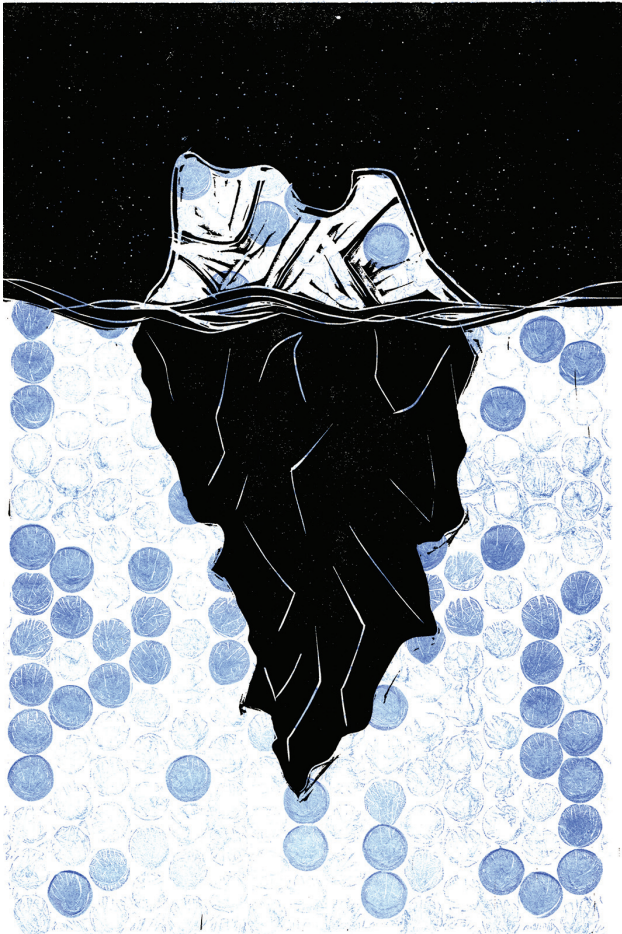
Sometimes she gets sad
And cries for days
Like a wretched river crashing
Through the heart of a city eroding
All of the details and leaving
Nothing behind.

Sometimes she gets happy
And plays with the sweet children
Dancing at their feet and singing
That sweet song they grew up loving.
Lulling them to sleep with her
Gentle motion.

To be a body of water and have no form
Is a scary thought.
They never told her it was okay to feel afraid

Ignore their incessant questions and assumptions
They are like the nauseating ringing
After a bitter storm, Bells of conformity
Bells of "acceptance" Bells of belonging
The Bell is never angry.
She is never sad.
She is never happy.

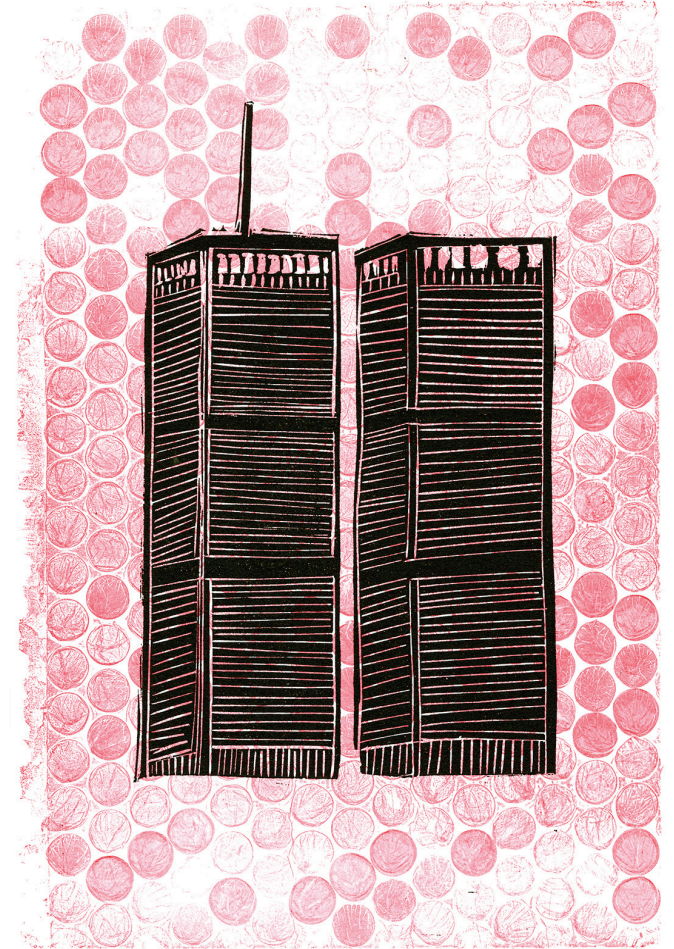
The Bell belongs
And that's all that Bell wants.



April 15, 1912



December 7, 1941



September 11, 2001



Melody Tang
*linoleum blocks printed
with bubble wrap*



COLLAGE

A Journal of Creative Expression Spring 2016

Middle Tennessee State University

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About Collage

Collage is a biannual 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, University 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 to *Collage*, Middle Tennessee State University, 1301 East Main Street, Box 267, Murfreesboro, TN 37132

Submit to Collage

Collage accepts submissions year-round. Submission guidelines are available at mtsu.edu/collage. Creative work, such as art, photography, short stories, essays, short plays, song lyrics, and poetry, may be submitted digitally from the website or may be turned in at the *Collage* office, Honors 224, between the hours of 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Submissions are accepted from MTSU students and recent graduates.

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Policy Statement

Collage: A Journal of Creative Expression is an arts and literary 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 a publication of 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 letters of recommendation.

Creative Expression Awards

Each semester four submissions receive Creative Expression Awards, one from each major category: art, photography, poetry, and prose. Literature winners receive the Martha Hixon Creative Expression Award, and visual winners receive the Lon Nuell Creative Expression Award. Winners receive \$50 awards.



Floating Rock

Kyle Brown
photography



Haint

William Brown
poetry



Vulnerability

Aly Booker
art



The Image of God

Justin Farr
prose

Columbia Scholastic Press Association Awards

Gold Medalist Certificates – 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 & 2015

Silver Crown Awards – 2007, 2008, & 2011

Gold Crown Awards – 2012, 2013 & 2015

Southern Literary Festival Writing Contest

Third Place Literary Magazine - 2016

Production Notes

Technology

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

Typography

Rockwell, various weights
Futura PT, various weights

Paper

100 lb. Athens Silk Cover
80 lb. Athens Silk Text

Binding

Saddle Stitch

Printing

Lithographics, Inc. of Nashville, Tennessee printed approximately 2,000 copies of *Collage*.



**MIDDLE
TENNESSEE**

STATE UNIVERSITY.

