

filline

STATION

ISSUE 75



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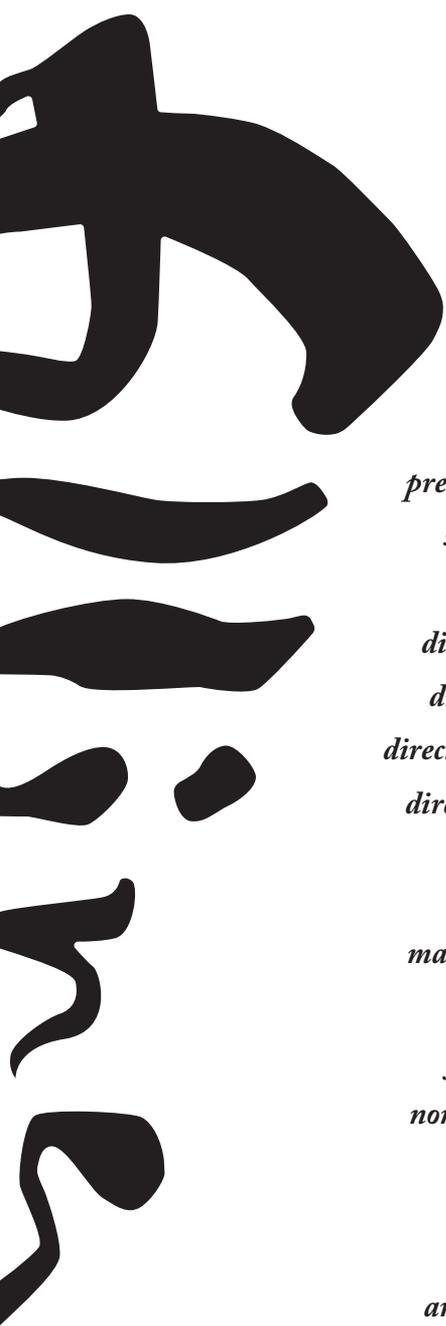
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president marc herman lynch
secretary weyman chan
treasurer ryan stearne
director at large ian kinney
director at large jani krulc
director at large stuart ian mckay
director at large kyle flemmer

DEPARTMENTS

managing editor amy leblanc
poetry weyman chan
fiction tasnuva hayden
non-fiction maryam gowralli
art rachel shabalin

DESIGN

art director kat wawrykow
web designer structured abstraction

MARKETING

circulation manager ethan vilu
printer style-craft printing

POETRY COLLECTIVE

Ethan Vilu
 Stuart Ian McKay
 Glen Hogard

FICTION COLLECTIVE

Jacqueline Kwan
 Leah Van Dyk
 Ben Groh
 Melody Dowdy
 Marc Lynch
 Keri Halfacre
 Jake Bews
 Elysha Snider
 Kirsten Cordingley
 Ryan Stearne

NON-FICTION COLLECTIVE

Rachel Shabalin
 Rae Ann van Beers

ART COLLECTIVE

Rachel Shabalin
 Kat Wawrykow

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+ EDITORIAL

I'll Be Honest

Stepping into a management role at a magazine that has been operating for twenty-seven years is daunting (the magazine has been around longer than I have). Filling Station has published 74 brilliant issues in those twenty-seven years, but issue 75 is the first to have been fully edited, designed, and published during a global pandemic. We met over Zoom, emailed a lot, met new volunteers without meeting in person, and laid plans to find out what magazine publishing looks in a world without physical connection.

Some of us are reading more than ever (some of us are reading less), some of us have finally made a sourdough starter (some of us still can't). We launched books online and attended events with authors we never imagined we'd be able to hear read. The past few months have involved a lot of recalibration and readjustment. We are learning to connect in new ways; our 'new normal' is going to stay for a while and it's up to us to find out what writing, reading, and publishing will look like.

While COVID-19 has slowed down every part of magazine production, there's something to be said for focusing on what experimental literature can accomplish in a time of crisis. In this issue, Jacob Braun's interlingual homograph poem "Letter-Word-Meaning" will take you through the slippery nature of language. Salma Hussain's short story "Rebirth" considers the body, its reflections, and the memories a body can elicit. The artwork from Kathryn Mok, our cover artist, reminds us to find connection however we can, even in ambiguous times.

I hope there's something in this issue that will grab your attention, give you a little break, and a moment to breathe before you put something down on paper yourself.

MANAGING EDITOR

Amy LeBlanc

False friends, or playing Indonesian-Filipino hide and seek

BY KARLA COMANDA

*Selamat pagi*¹ and welcome to this *sarap*² game where we will split you into teams. You will run away, run after runaways, rip off name tags velcroed to the back of your soon-to-be sweaty shirts (and tear holes in the process), and win if you don't get caught or if you chase everybody. *Para*³ if someone rips off your name tag. Your game ends. No, you are virtually a ghost then, unable to touch and be touched. Respect the rules. Yes, you can hide in the compost garbage bins and maybe the toilet tanks too if you can close the lid. We advise you to remove all your *barang*⁴, especially your *anting-anting*⁵ for the entire game. We wouldn't want you to go home with torn earlobes or dislocated bones because you refused to listen to us. *Hati-hati*⁶ and have fun, okay? *Ayo*.⁷

¹ You're welcome and thank you too, squid who created this game.

² Delicious, like adobo, like taho, like the dirt nesting under my fingernails?

³ My first instinct is to fight, not to hail jeepneys.

⁴ Is the trade-off victory

⁵ at the expense of the only thing that keeps me safe?

⁶ If I divided myself, if I could be at two places at once like Padre Pio, I would probably win.

⁷ Bahasa? Bahala na si Bathala.

Letter-Word-Meaning

BY JACOB BRAUN

Trouble,
à bout de fer ralenti
ce mentorat—oryx

à cheval—or,
cela donne tout
d'une manière
tenable.

Tares,
tabouret,
ce ter à deduction.
Tissage. Tri.

Un écart à réaction.
Dérives
à force de luge,
dire la vérité

s'anéantit. Hé! Sis-
mothérapie
dépose sa soup-

ape. Oflag, gingeon
de nature (d'origine)
las. Ticket. Os isotherme

*Turbid,
slo-mo iron-tipped
this mentorship—oryx*

*by horseback—yet,
this yields all
in a way
that is bearable.*

*Defects,
bar stool,
this thrice inferred.
Weaving. Sorting.*

*A jet-propelled gap.
Drifting
by dint of sled,
to speak the truth*

*self-annuls. Hey! Electro-
convulsive therapy
puts down its stop-*

*cock. Oflag, wigeon
naturally (from the get-go)
worn. Chit. Insulated bone*

Trouble
about deferral: enti-
cement, oratory, "X" ...

Ache valor,
celadon net out.
Dune man, I, ere
ten able

tares,
tab our et-
cetera deduction.
'Tis sage. Tri-

une cart; a reaction
derives
a force, deluge.
Dire lave rite

sane antithesis'
mother; a pie
deposes a soup.

Ape of lagging eon
denatured, origin e-
lastic. Ketosis. Other me

Le Monde Miroir. Mirror World.

BY ROBIN KNIGHT

J'avais commencé de me créer une vie ailleurs dans le monde. still.

J'ai pris cette vie, la fille, toute la promesse, Where the aroma remains

et je l'ai avalée d'un trait. of a tube station.

Ensuite, j'ai pissé le tout contre le mur Afterwards, I pissed the lot against the wall

d'une station de Métro. and I swallowed it back in one.

Où l'arôme demeure I took that life, the girl, all the promise,

toujours. I had started to create a life for myself elsewhere in the world

Feats of Obsolescence

BY ROBIN KNIGHT

This season of nostalgia will not turn: fallen leaves fall again.
Memories crowd inside for warmth, forcing me out for air.
I'd like to indulge them, but in coalescing here they leave
no room for the present, becoming mortal, finite,
their children mere reflections in the hall mirror.
It's awkward. Perhaps I should say, *I'm sorry*
but there's no cereal. The eggs are finished.
It's time to move on, to visit someone else.
But they are the beams beneath my feet,
my past bearing my present
weight, and after all:
ingratitude is
malignant.

Now We Know Where Everything Is

BY JOSEPH STERN

Civilization advances by extending the number of important operations which we can perform without thinking of them.¹
Alfred North Whitehead

How to find connection and purpose ²	1
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¹What kind of intelligence is this?

²The subject you follow here is elusive (and seems to follow you).

³Perhaps this subject is illusive. This could just be in your own head. Maybe you follow your own shadow?

⁴Shadowing, you collect info, analyze

⁵Suspect you are being observed

⁶And observe a shadow following you.

⁷Watch yourself.

Artifacts

BY JEN ASHBURN

Walking down the road I see two kids digging under a house. The house has stilts—it's on a slope—and the kids are digging digging with little plastic shovels. They're archaeologists. You can see their imaginary headlamps bursting like pimples from their foreheads, dirt rings in the baby fat of their corpulent necks. *Hey, stop that digging*, I say as I strut by in my ankle boots and wild curly hair, in my tight jeans and wide hips and don't-mess-with-me scent. Give us a bigger shovel, they say. Bring us a wheelbarrow. But I keep walking walking. They are incessant in their demands: Bring us a crane. Tie our shoes. We need juice boxes.

Soon they're running, sneakers plod-plopping on the chip-seal, pottery shards in their chubby hands. Give us a pickaxe, they say. Help us date this sedimentary rock and catalog these stone tools. Give us a sieve to look for undigested seeds.

Knock it off, I finally scold. *This will bury you*.

I am astonished when they start to cry. We want answers, they say. We live in terrifying mystery—

Who left the burnt ash in that fire pit?

What body once held this twist of worn shoulder bone?

How can we find the thumb that rubbed the gold off this teacup handle when each stratum of earth is so full of dead weight?

Landscape

(Hans Hofmann, 1942; casein on board)

BY SHERRY JOHNSON

Swift, upright marks connote hopefulness and growth. A skinned “violence” of fibrous primaries, tractor greens — a dense, low-lying flora variegating the dale. The slubby bands of nap cleanly sealed within a Y, — a green block of park stuck in the fork. Nearby, a red man withdraws cash from a blue banking machine snugged into the white cliff-base. Along the dale stem, a lumpish scree amasses a kind of snow which never feels cold. A blank comfort, wash compress laid on a serous eye. Those who inhabit the Y vacation scree-side for naked skiing. And of course scree people take holidays within the prismatic-leaved wilds of the Y. In transit, worlds and whirls of vision & song. One wonders, easily, how such colour smells when it starts to rot. — This is natural. To stop for a minute on the road, pick a few fish-scale sequins out of your teeth (lodged in the split second the screen slipped) and mine the rank riot for a possible language match — a third sock — to describe the kind of fakery or emotional soup which ensues. — A coloured pour locked inside liquid, escaping the fingers. *The very heart of nature* one splutters forth in convulsed rivulets, in her brand new role as a priming well pump. The threads tensile and slackened in stasis, a dance of form/colour flexure be-arc'd with greasy bridges. The calibrated slide of skid-marks trailing into vanishment is angst or pleasure, no one is certain. But the red woman knows, reclining in the Y, expectant-like, hair twisted up like Olive Oyl's. Several times the man's size, he hopes to buy her a gift and in doing so they might make a Frog Couple. He settles on a locket filled with snow that falls when shaken, over a hand-painted landscape of naked skiers having a holiday. Macron device to place over his mouth to make his talk more interesting, with several absorbent, replaceable filters which trap awful vocables. — The macron fixed to a waxed string for quick zip of belyment up up the cliff-face. In case of danger.

Interior, Mother and Sister of the Artist (Édouard Vuillard; oil on canvas, 1893)

BY SHERRY JOHNSON

Mother. — A black, stolid block of power and never-wrongness
and I — I am a blonde, petit-bourgeois rabbit. Sideways, a snubbed
-up glance; limp, mousish curls. My sinewy legs far long and awkward
for a wimpled worry-heart. A sulk look. Ever stuck to the breast. I kick

at the fixed, grim slab of her — crêped as to look a cutout — and so I fall
backwards into the wall, then reel swift again into the thick brick of her.
Mother. In the constrictive, trapped-in-amber light encasing each remote
room of our apartment, wall-scrims clash at dropped lengths with dotted

tablecloth or the heft of a striped drape. Squares of my seersucker
suit cloissonned in smudge-dot blossoms-frame—I must say—have not
managed to Japanese me in the least. But working with cloth a lot helps.
When I guide cloth through the toothed machine feed, that bright, clean

row of punctures whuffs soft, narrow shafts of refreshing gusts into me.
My lungs, a paper accordion inflated with foot swivels. True, we're forced
into work due to “declining circumstances”, but our assistants sweat out
the brunt of it. It's never polite to discuss such matters. Snarled threads laid

on my rabbit blood calm and whiten it — my rabbit blood. Above all,
it's the leathery grey birdskin of my dead elderly father setting a tone.
An overlay on dotted line which is sliced, pressed flat into a neat chintz hem
then he's fixed in a flush stretch of tiny tight stitches. And in the brown,
thickset

chest in the background of the painting, mother, forearm smoothing firmly
over forearm, has sealed father in the linen, in its severest folds. Father's grey
skin is our secret flag. Behind which, unknown, my arranged marriage waits
and in front of father's flag another one is placed, — a Japanese screen.

Between the Bark and the Tree

BY DALE TRACY

I earthed up my cole-garth, birched up a false nest,
a false muster of false mustard. I forget what's real
where what's fessed roves chronically the greasy
both sides of our mouths. I dig to improve the leap
-weaved truth and explore its yard for greeneth.
Loss of a footprint is the rain. It raineth every day.

Amphitheatres of flowers extend their antennae.
Trusses of bear's ear, allheal, eel-pout, bruise root
hear from break bud to bolting the fair-weathered
and fair-worlded and bucolic noir blanched plants
with black heart. The hortulan world, its globe-daisy:
a little bee-glue and a branch's escutcheon and maybe

more wink-a-peep grows into a wilderness of reality.
I place a weather-basket on the feverfew and letter-leaf.
I try lunary leaf feeding. I try market gardening money flower.
I open the globeflower, turn its core. I scatter the rocket.
I wear the ornamentals and the mask flower, black and scarlet,
I wear the false impression of the plant pheasant's eye.

A creeping plant buries its naming-stick and the apple crook.

After Apocalypse

BY DALE TRACY

In the world-all, missing mass ablates reality
and all the animants breathing
—my wone is the water.
I'm a live-wight kept from the overworld.

In a field of coronaries, I humanate,
but my hypothetical crown braids astrophankton.
I hold the regain of my water world,
heavy in my nexure with moisture.

The mackerel-back sky is naff with jealousy for lake top.
I see maceral in space's dark, and my descrial is my uprising.
The invisible vegetive calls me to new home,
calls me breather of new creatureship.

PIETÀ

BY JOHN BARTON

*after George Platt Lynes' Marsden Hartley,
vintage silver print, 1943*

cold casts shade from us, penumbras immenser than we are, doubling us against the blankness of any wall we turn to locate behind us, our cast off doubles as they grow coupling us, coupling with us, ever calmer inside the changing frames we hope changing walls will tender us, Hartley two years shy of Pearl Harbour and the winter before he died, borrowing a tiny studio I sublet next to mine, to sleep and paint in when desire lured him to a flamboyant New York of mislaid youth (and a prostrate imagination) from Maine grey landscapes it snowed into his pensive eyes dissonance on Madison Avenue horning by him a soundscape he'd abstract, make silent, canvas a window with the shades drawn, palette turned private, dark and light a cipher to puzzling grief and joy, his paintings time capsules, and I loved what our apartness and fellow feeling echoed when drunk nomadic talk reconnoitred the last war, his war, and the German officer he had lost the picture plane his mourning sized to more than human scale not of a bloodied, unwashed body aloof as Carrara marble betraying likeness and a love, but in black distemper, a whitewash of patchwork symbols he liked to have warmed the coffin with, if how we're barred had let him

—chinstraps and epaulets, an Iron Cross, brave buttons longing to be unbuttoned, his man's age an acrostic of 2s and 4s billowed into illegible unconsummated folds of wind-roused colours his cavalry carried into battle—Marsden stuck sitting old-man old under my lights, face chalk above an alert bowtie and dated three-piece suit beaten eyes trained to brood past my shoulder knees wide in a canvas chair with arms he'd rest his own on, head rocking forward into a hand propped up, when asked, to hold it still, at sea in thought, cigarette half-mast, the mouth shut as I tried my settings, studio void of bric-à-brac the nimbus I wished to kiss about him a silvered evanescence above shoulders registered in dusk the slender man he'd once been I had him cast colossal and shadowy as cautions none ignore astringency of love not to be regained, my war ongoing, my AWOL assistant like his lieutenant killed far too early in a sortie, fleeing my lust for men he wore till it fit him not—on my skin his exposure an afterimage—blurry ambulance he drove blitzed by the Luftwaffe at El Alamein my lens in drilled, dry-eyed focus on this dazed confrère awaiting insight's flash, asked to look abstracted, but aching to invoke the young man in sombre civilian dress I posed unlit on his left a few feet back, a pietà we each longed to drape unwounded on our laps but could not, the same age, both of us, when they would die without us

Nesting

BY LAURA ZACHARIN

Eggs lay I you song bird heavy light blue-green eggs lay I you
nest of grass in root in moss in under undergrowth. Nest I you
in boreal as sparrow nest as sparrow white-throated Poor Sam
Sad Sweet. Nest as I if sparrow South East Yukon to the salt salt
Maritime Great Lakes and Atlantic. I said I never said I wasn't
coming back. I said I was through Boreal and Maritimes and
south. Song a clear whistle. Song song I like bird sparrow clear
whistle I in undergrowth under or in undergrowth. I said I was I
was. I said home. Not just instinct this nest this moss song a
clear whistle throated

with praise for (better) dogs

I hate writing poems for people.
I will never read it.
You will never read it.

Better to filter through puns and gore.
Strip words
like veins from a leg
or bones from a fish filet.
A network of movement dragged from soft
tissue.

iii.

Your poem is a metaphor.
Your poem is not about you.
Your poem is about skinning my cheek on the
sidewalk.
Your poem is not yours at all.

iv.

There is no poem before this one.
The poem before is an elaborate conceit.

I'm too prickly for real poems.
I'm too dry to hit print.

v.

The dog on the patio is a metaphor for
warmth.

The drool is a symbol for a pen.

The coffee is a boat in a storm.

The laugh is just a lamp

vi.

the dog sits under the table outside

the drool is a metaphor for warmth

the coffee represents a phone call

the table is an anchor

the boat is in a coffee cup

the leash stands in for a hand

the eggshells are in the compost

the lamp is just a lamp

vii.

the dog is a means to an end

the drool makes for a talking point

the café is not in your neighbourhood

the coffee is meant for talking

the boat is unsure if it's sinking

there may or not have been rocks

the poem is a backspace

the eggshells are in translation

the poem is a text message

the dog is an olive branch

the coffee is an olive

viii.

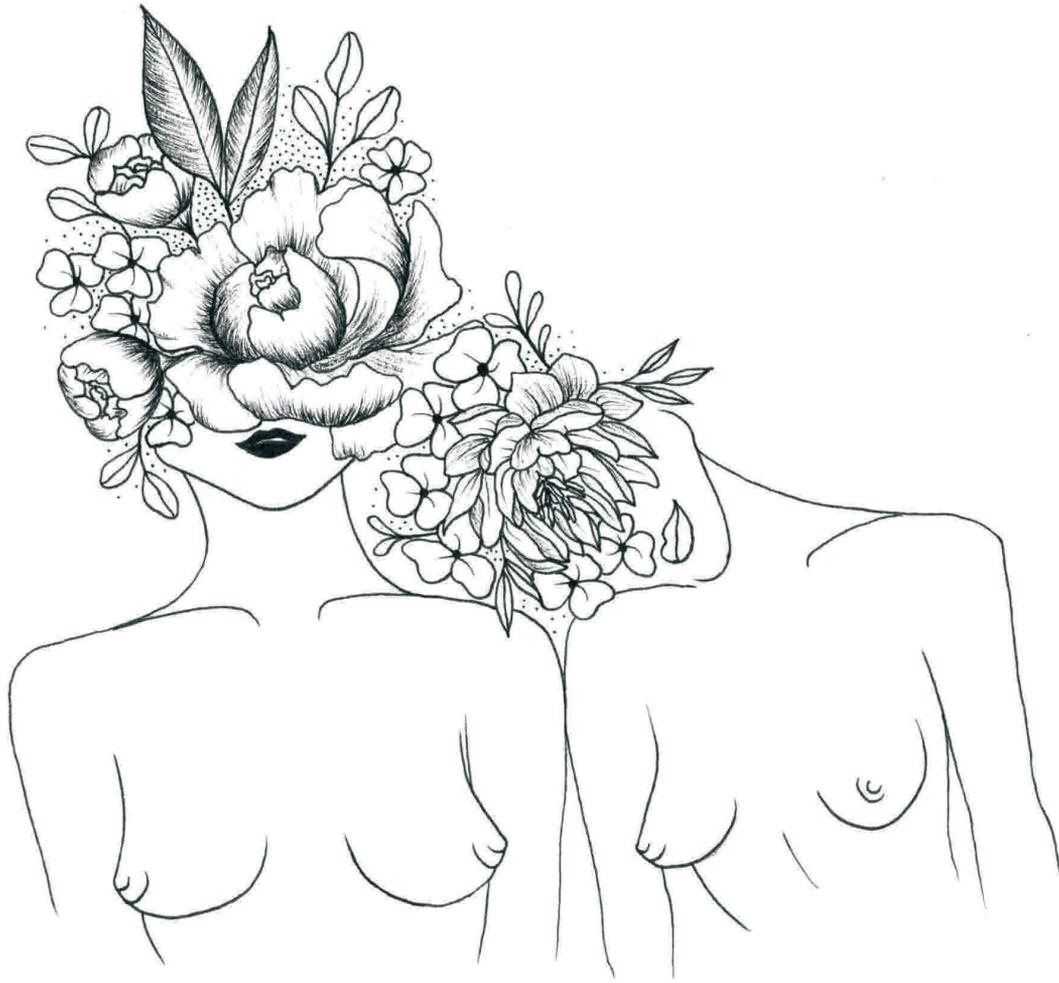
the patio is the warmth
the leash is under the table
the dog is just a dog
the drool is not like coffee
the cup is growing cold
the coffee holds no warmth
the laugh is like the coffee cup
the message is a backspace

iv.

as sly as an eggshell
the leash is not a simile
the lamp won't quite turn on
the rocks are in your neighbourhood
the cheek is growing warm
the skin is not a metaphor
the laugh is just an eggshell
the branch might be an anchor

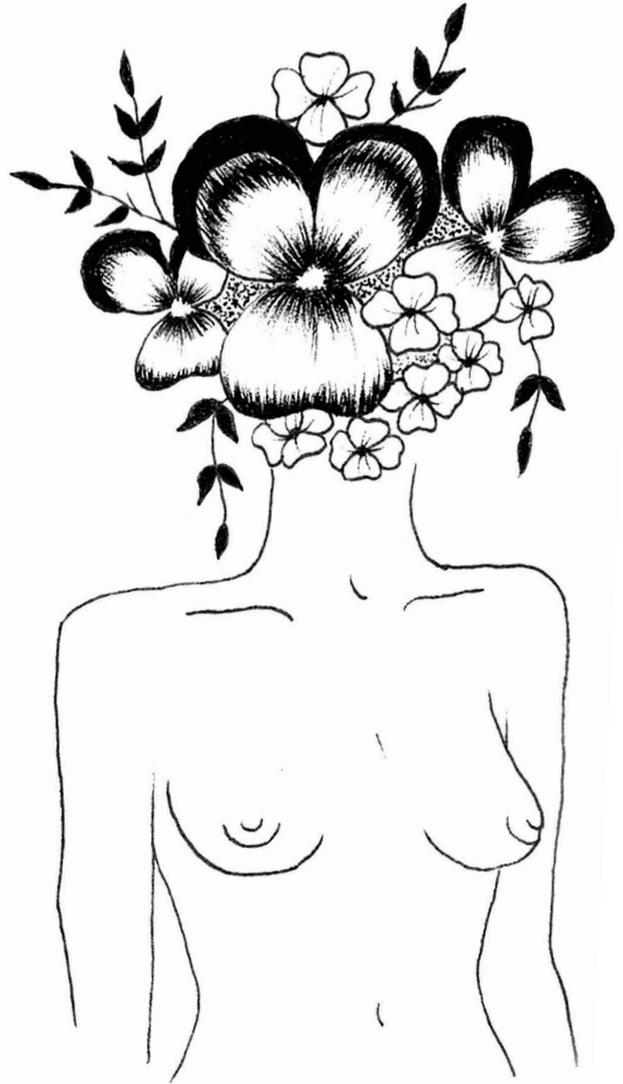
x.

the three dots are a cactus
as prickly as a hair
the eggshells are in the coffee
the jokes are short on teeth
the leash snags on the olive branch
the fingertips are cold
the boat was always missing
the dog is just a dog



KATHRYNE MOK, BESTIES, INK ON PAPER, SKETCHBOOK





KATHRYNE MOK, LEFT: FLORAL LOVERS, INK ON PAPER, SKETCHBOOK, RIGHT: UNTITLED, INK ON PAPER, SKETCHBOOK

Here If You Need Me

KATHRYNE MOK CALGARY, AB

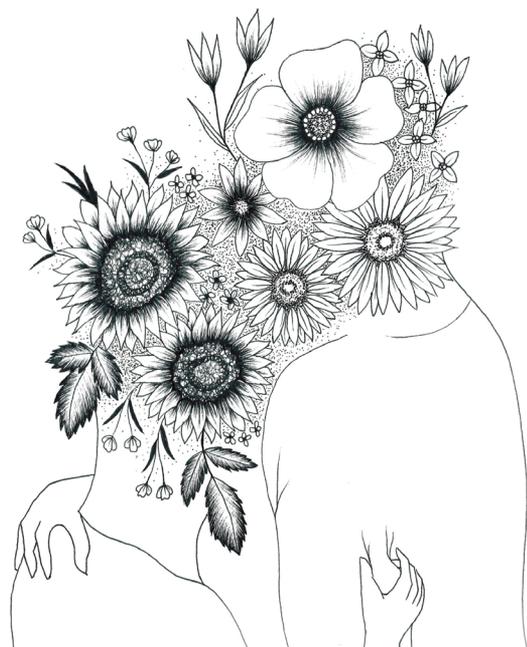
During my last two years at AuArts, I grew interested in creating work that is figurative and explores relationships between people, places, and identity. Adjacent to this is an interest in relationships between human and nature; nature and nurture; and change and growth. I am inspired by my personal experiences, often creating work that reflects my own relationships and growth, or derived from inspiration from my friends and peers. These are all concepts explored in this series of floral figure drawings.

In addition to the above-mentioned overarching themes, the imagery in this ongoing series also alludes to concepts of femininity and development. I chose to use simple line art to convey these tropes as a nod to their delicate and fragile nature.

My process for this series of drawings is very organic. In order for these images to have a vulnerable quality, I will often create from memory or imagination; however, for some pieces I work with reference images if there are specific figures I want to represent. I am interested in the ambiguity that the figures have; I want my work to be easily accessible to my audience and for them to be able to imagine themselves, or someone they know, in these pieces.

I always had a desire to create figurative work; I am interested in the idea of the collective consciousness and how we relate to each other through our own experiences. This interest has currently manifested in the floral-figure drawings that you see here, and while I plan to continue to create these pieces as I move through life, I anticipate them to grow and evolve along with me as I learn more about myself, my world, and the people in it.

+ @KATMOK_ART



>> **HERE IF YOU NEED ME, INK ON PAPER, SKETCHBOOK**

Graduating from the Alberta University of the Arts with a BFA in painting, Kathryn often works with acrylic and oil paints but also has a passion for simple line drawings.

Renter

BY ROSALIND GOLDSMITH

I got home late yesterday. My landlord and his wife were in my apartment. They had an old camera set up in the front room like the ones used in the 1920's, with a tripod and a big black cloth. In the corner was a silver umbrella to reflect light and two huge spotlights on stands. They were discussing the angle of the umbrella. "What's going on?" I said. They didn't even look at me. Acted as if they didn't hear me.

I went into my bedroom, I thought I could just close my door and wait until they left. There, sitting on the bed was – an electrician, wearing a tool belt, a white helmet and blue overalls. He was just – sitting on my bed gazing at the wall, his elbows on his knees.

He was a small man with scruffy back hair sticking out all over and a dark look to him, as if he'd been through some terrible trauma and never recovered. He glanced at me when I came in. His eyes were black and flat. There was no expression in them – not the slightest surprise.

"Have to fix this," he said, but didn't move.

"Fix what?" I said.

He didn't answer. He bowed his head low over his knees like he was exhausted just sitting there.

"You have to get out of here," I said. "This is my room. You have to get out now."

He looked at me then as if I was an intruder and had no right to be there. He had big construction boots on, unlaced.

I heard footsteps on the stairs.

Six people came tramping up into my apartment, chatting and laughing.

I had no idea who they were.

There was a mother, a father, maybe

a sister or a friend and three children.

All of them marched right past me and into the front room.

My landlord and his wife were still in there discussing the location and angle of the umbrella. They were shifting the lights round, pushing my furniture to the edges of the room. Eight people were in there now! Milling about and chatting, like it was some kind of convention.

I went into the kitchen and closed the door.
Sitting at the kitchen table was an old woman
I didn't know. She had all my cutlery and
glasses and plates laid out on the table in front of her.
I grabbed some forks and put them back into the drawer,
but she got up, took them right back out again,
and put them all back on the table in a neat row.

I went back into the bedroom. That man – the electrician –
was still sitting on my bed, still staring at the wall, nodding
now, as if he knew what to do. "I'll fix it," he kept saying, but
he never got up off the bed.

I locked myself in
the bathroom and
sat on the floor. I
would live in here
if I had to. There
was nowhere else
to go. Then I heard
humming. I pulled
back the shower
curtain. Sitting in
my empty bathtub
was a girl, about
eleven years old.
She was dressed
in an orange party
dress and she was
sliding a bottle
of shampoo – my
shampoo – back

and forth on the
bottom of the tub.
“This is unaccept-
able,” I said to her,
but she just kept
on humming and
sliding.

I went back into the bedroom and said the same thing to
the electrician. I was about to go into the front room and
complain to my landlord about all of this when I heard glass
smashing from the kitchen.

I
didn't
dare
look.

Rebirth

BY SALMA HUSSAIN

You stand in your favorite party outfit. A bottle-green chiffon sari with a hand-embroidered gold-thread orange pallu that you throw over your shoulder, feet encased in attractive, matching slippers, and a neat middle part in your hair that boldly betrays your very comfortable middle-classness. The reflection in the mirror reveals who you are, both to yourself and the world. Discloses that your husband maintained a good post: in the banking sector, no less. Your teardrop pearl earrings, a ten-year anniversary gift, set you apart and above as the wife of the Head Manager of loans and financing for the National Trust of Uttar Pradesh. The residual tummy fat from three successive pregnancies informs of your motherhood and three grown children: son, Raju, and daughters, Maya and Neethu.

Your first child made you crave juicy, messy okra dishes cooked with onions, tomatoes and your nani's masala. In your dedication to an auspicious birth, you counted six almonds every night into a cup of water. In the mornings, you peeled the skin off the almonds, saved the skin for a facial paste, and ate the six clean white seeds within. Every night before bed, you ate a palm-full of fennel seeds before you lay to sleep. You also had a constant, insatiable appetite for a mid-day snack of mango pieces swimming in a bowl of milk. Your first born, Raju also cost you worries that made you perform early-morning pujas and plead with your husband to take you on three pilgrimages to Hajji Ali's tomb where you handed out warm chappatis wrapped in clean cotton fabric to the beggars lining the entrance. In the last month of your pregnancy, you made sure to give some amount of money to every young, hungry child who crossed your path with an open palm. In the end, Raju's was an emergency Caesarean birth, forcing the doctors to slice your very skin to get at the son below. The subsequent labours of your daughters came with their own complications and traumas. You have worked hard to block out the memory of your time in the maternity wards, where either one of the mothers in your room perished, or her baby, and in one case both.

But there are other stories. Happier stories. The stretch marks on your abdomen, thighs, breasts, and the soft wrinkles around the corners of your eyes and around your supple lips tell of afternoons with sandalwood paste, "naughty" poetry, petty gossip, and laughter with your best friend since second class, Mala Sardosh.

Your delicate fingers and weak fingernails speak of trusted servants in both your husband's house, and before that, in your father's. There is a wild, unschooled intelligence in your eyes: lines from books you have read mingle freely with newspaper accounts, political events, and personal tragedies and comedies. You have survived Rajiv and Indira, and will survive Sonia too, if her party comes to a successful election. Gandhian philosophy still swells your heart with

A blood vessel in your husband's heart ruptured

pride, but you look to Bangladesh's revolutionary philanthropic experiments as inspiration and hope for your own country. Like every other Indian teenager in the seventies, you wore pants with flares and tight blouses with brightly colored flowers. In the eighties, you drank wine and brandy at company parties, and even sported a smoking habit, but like other women from your circle you returned to conservatism in the nineties. You take one last look at the mirror. Head to toe, you are what you have been brought up to become. And yes, you have heard stories and read them, and perhaps made up your own mind about women who find themselves in the position you are now in. But knowing the stories has not made a single rice grain of a difference: you have not prepared for anything, simply because women of your class don't stoop to prepare. How cheap to assume you are not worthy enough to always have your cares and concerns looked after by someone else!

A blood vessel in your husband's heart ruptured seven months ago. The first month you could not help speculating that it must have been all the ghee in the dishes he had over the years. Those dishes of food, those very ones, of which he licked the plates squeaky clean with his fingers, then proceeded to lick his fingers, methodically, starting at his pinkie and ending at his huge, hooked thumb. Licking and slurping over and over, in such overt satisfaction over such ordinary meals that the sight gave you headaches and made you snap at the children. You would storm into their bedrooms and scold them sharply: What's all this putter-shutter in this room? Enough! Sometimes they were making too much noise: laughing loudly, or the TV was turned up too high, but more times than you care to admit they were playing with each other peacefully, Maya and Neethu caught frozen cradling little dolls in their little arms, looking up at you with big, worried eyes.

The second month after your husband's death, you forget all this and accuse all the sweets shared and consumed over the years for your husband's failed artery. Your husband, the dessert aficionado, positioned sticky gulabjamuns in his mouth, without bothering to cut the brown sugary balls in half, and had no concern about the accompanying syrup rolling down the corners of his lips. He ate all the oddly-shaped jalebis without pause. At the end of the night, his sticky fingers would rise to hold out your jacket or purse, which you then had to slap away, each and every time. Three weddings you both hosted. Three glorious, happy weddings in cool nights under three separate starry skies.

Raju rode into his marriage ceremony on a friend's horse with his friends flinging white mooti petals into the dark night while Rafi's Baharon Phool Bersao crackled loudly through the speakers. When the melodies from the shehnai burst into the night, it prompted tears from everyone old enough to know love or to lose it, and your husband fumbled for your hand, settling on grasping your wrist and you both sighed heavily, fighting back your own tears. Young children in their frilliest dresses and shiniest suits played hide and seek among the long buffet tables. Friends and relatives you had not seen in years and years and years wanted to catch up on everything, but more so desired an itinerary of your tailors, caterers, and flower suppliers. You took their questions as a personal sign of success. You were so nervous that night that large sweat stains bloomed under the armholes of your sari blouse. And so, you ended up giving away the sari blouse to a young servant girl who got married the next year. Or no, that was Neethu's wedding. All the worry and sweat in that expensive aubergine sari blouse was for Neethu's wedding, and for the foolish boy with the melancholic eyes who composed childish love verses for your daughter. Sometimes, he recited those verses over the telephone, and other times, he delicately penned them onto translucent slips of onion-skin diagramming paper that floated out of Neethu's medical textbooks when you flipped through the pages. He with the melancholic eyes who threatened to ruin everything with his presence, but nothing, nothing at all was ruined at the wedding. Only the relationship with you and Neethu. Women of a certain class do not marry for love, silly Neethu. You did not cajole or coerce her into the arranged marriage. You simply stated the facts for a good life. She lives such a comfortable life now and it was you who arranged everything so well, but you spoiled that child too much and now she can only believe herself happy when she is yearning. Nothing at all was ruined the night of Neethu's wedding.

What did eventually ruin everything was a clogged blood vessel.

Because of a clogged vessel, you moved in with Raju. Rather, Raju moved in with you: into your husband's home, that is now his. His wife, who you chose for her pretty eyes, her shiny long hair, and her reputation as a docile shy thing, desired the master bedroom right away.

As a girl whose prettiness sprang from her slimness, you watched her weighing herself like one possessed: she weighed herself four, maybe five times a day. Watched all the new Bollywood movies: tasteless, scandalous trash. This wife, that you chose... You could not help but mutter criticisms under your breath.

seven month's ago.

seven month's ago

He had an important post just like his father.

Raju was a good son. He had an important post just like his father. And yet.

Although he had lived the first twenty-seven years of his life with you, in your house, with you as the person, the very person to have borne him into this world, neither you nor him ever understood the other. His presence into your world—the late-night crying, the bassinet, the baby closet, the rituals, the clothes, the toys and the smelly diapers—so quickly and irretrievably dissipated the carefully crafted magic and tenderness between your husband and yourself. Raju at sixteen became privy to your husband’s worries and thoughts and future plans in a way that you never were. Discussions about the economy, sporting events, and the government that no one bothered to ask you about. How jealous you had been over the years for nothing bigger than the son being the father’s best friend in a way that the wife can never be. Regardless, you had always taken more than adequate care of the boy.

Because you had not prepared. Because you had not an inkling, not an inkling whatsoever where one action leads to another. Because one never knows how one is so easily led down certain paths, one day you said yes. Yes, you’ll move out of the guestroom and take the room by the servant’s quarters. Oh, not in the servant’s quarters, just next to. On another day, you started eating less. Still on another, you gave away all your colored saris. Wore plain white saris, some of a nicer fabric, one sprinkled with faint gray-colored poppies, but never anything more scandalously joyful than that. You didn’t want to be a burden, you really didn’t. But you couldn’t deny that you must have been: look at you, look at you! You were cantankerous. Forgetful. Never a kind word for anyone. You pinched the grandchildren when you meant to caress them. You criticized when you meant to compliment. Your smiles turned into sneers. You burped in the middle of meals. You retold familiar stories, repeated the same unfunny jokes within the same day. You pointed out your pains and fevers and complained of fatigue, arthritis, sore joints, weak knees, the quality of the food, the colors on the walls, the weight gained, the cleavage shown, the smiles withheld. You couldn’t climb up stairs, didn’t like the cold, had to go frequently during car rides, made inappropriate comments about the furniture in guests’ homes. You call this a sofa? Chee, chee, it’s so hard, it must be very old. You made everyone around you uncomfortable. You grew old.

And yet. And yet.

One day you carried the little mirror hidden within the folds of your sari from your son's washroom into your bedroom, slipped the key into the lock, and placed a chair under the handle. You went to the back of your closet and shook out the one colored sari you had kept hidden in a damp cardboard box. You coiled the vibrant fabric around your waist, let it hang luxuriantly over your lower body, and spent an hour folding and refolding with shaking hands the six pleats ever so perfectly. You brushed your hair out and arranged it stylishly, dabbing the stray ends with a little coconut oil. Slipped the ten-year anniversary earrings into your ear holes. You put on your favorite party suit and let your mind wander. No Ram Ram chants for you today. Today you will allow distractions and tangential thoughts of your future.

Today you will take a bus to your daughter's house. It will not be easy, this trip across the city, but a chatty college girl you meet at the stop will take you all the way there, listen to your entire life's story, and dump you at the doorway of your daughter's home.

You will meet your daughter, Maya at the door and start by listing the skills you possess: I can arrange flowers in a vase, give orders to the cooks for appropriate dishes based on occasion and guests, I can make small talk with important people, I know what type of sari to wear when, which song suits which occasion. I know decorum and ceremony. The history of this nation is within me, you will scream. You will demand first, then end by pleading. Tears and snot will run down your cheeks and chin.

Maya's hands will twist and turn in a dizzying pattern. It will give you a headache. You will not be able to make out anything of what is said. You will wonder if you should give her one tight perfect slap, but you are no longer young and your hands will fail you. You know that it worked when she was a child and a teenager but it would not work now. Your head will throb and burn. You cannot understand her. But you understand everything when she makes a big show of taking out money from the rabbit-shaped jar on top of the fridge. It will be money for your bus fare, for your return trip. Your daughter will hurry you out of the front entrance by the words: Quick. Quick, before my husband comes home and is a witness to this disgrace.

On the outside steps looking in, you will realize that the conversation lasted only fifteen minutes, and the bus ride is two hours.

That will be when faint memories of large temples with high ceilings will start to materialize. Corners to hide into, steps to ascend or descend. Names and images will flutter into your mind like transparent moths. A name, a word, a memory will beckon. Vrindavan. Close to Krishna's birthplace. You can go there. The city of ten thousand widows. You will go there. Other women do. Widows do. Thousands upon thousands of widows go to Vrindavan to achieve the moksha that is denied them in this life. They enter the various temples, or find a spot on the steps that lead down to the purifying Ganga. Groups of you swoop down and fight tooth and nail for scraps of food or coins flung by passing sadhus, strangers and other clients. Some of you are virgins: your older husbands dying before the marriage could be consummated. It is the largest gathering of virgin widows anywhere. Most of you come from a middle-class background. You have been kicked out, or you have left homes in the middle of the night. You have threatened and cajoled the servants in your house into driving you, conned taxi drivers, and swindled rickshaw drivers. Some of you are older, with grown children. But here some of you will beget more children. It is the largest gathering of prostitute widows anywhere. You will have children, raise children, sell children, and train them for all manner of trade and chicanery. Upon Vrindavan. Upon this holy site so close to where Radha and Krishna lived in love without children. You will do the same as all the others. Disappear into the city of rebirth. Set yourself ablaze in a new life.

Sorry, Fish

BY KATE HENDERSON

CLIENT INTAKE MEMORANDUM

(1) Introduction

You have asked me to provide an intake summary in respect of our client, Mr. Elliott Baker. I have been unable to interview Mr. Baker himself, but his brother Charles, acting as litigation guardian, has spoken to me by telephone.

(2) The Facts

At 4:45am on February 7 this year, there was a fire at the home of Mr. Albert Rowe and Mrs. Muriel Rowe. The investigation into the cause of the fire is as yet inconclusive. The preliminary report indicates that Albert was the first to wake up, and he ushered his wife through the mudroom and carried her into the back garden. Fresh snow had fallen overnight. There's a description of Albert's heavy and clear footprints, then Muriel's, tiny, where he set her down. He might have survived, except that the couple owned a coterie of seventeen rescued domesticated birds housed in twelve cages. Albert went back in, Muriel in silent assent, to open each little door. They couldn't have been certain where the birds would go in the ice, but the alternative was unbearable. All seventeen slim tenants flew out panicked across the field, far above Muriel's upturned face, and out of sight. Albert did not re-emerge.

Remaining in place until help came, Muriel said to the first firefighter who approached her that the birds' feather bellies looked like smoke in the glow.

It appears the flock headed straight over the crest of the hill to the first dim light they could glimpse, yellow from the kitchen window of the Rowes' nearest neighbour, our client. They had gone from fire to bitter cold. Maybe they thought they'd circled back home. Remember, the assembly was stricken, and the window, of course, closed. I'm sorry to report that all seventeen birds smashed in succession.

Our client was up early with the teakettle in hand. There was the sound, the bang bang bang like a shower of rocks thrown by hooligans, and then he realized these were living things. He recoiled back into the counter behind him then fell to the ground, sustaining a heavy blow to the head.

By way of background, our client is afraid of birds. Not clinically ornithophobic, but deeply unsettled. His brother explains that Elliott is and always has been unsettled about many things: open skies, television screens, small talk, for example. I have scheduled a supplementary telephone conference with Charles for further detail. The upshot is that until February 7, Elliott had kept his disquiet in check, worked, walked about, and was no more than a weird, nearly friendless citizen. Those salad days are over.

Our client plainly suffered damages as a result of the events described above, and Elliott will now be a much heavier burden on his brother. The purpose of this memorandum is to assess the advisability of a civil suit against the estate of Mr. Albert Rowe (the “Defendants”) to recover these damages.

(3) The Law

(a) *Intentional or Negligent Infliction of Mental Suffering*

Even if there has been no patent physical assault, there may be circumstances in which one person inflicts shock, fear or other suffering on another. Significant anguish alone can constitute actionable “harm.”¹

A plaintiff must prove all the elements of this tort, namely that: (i) the defendant acted intentionally or recklessly, without care as to the outcome of his or her actions; (ii) the defendant’s conduct was extreme or outrageous; (iii) the defendant’s act caused the relevant distress; and (iv) the plaintiff suffered severe emotional distress as a result. Additionally, the willful or reckless act must have been a direct, and not overly remote,² cause of the harm.

(b) *The Rule in Rylands v. Fletcher*

The Rule in *Rylands v. Fletcher*³ is today narrowly applied in cases of damage to land. However, precedents are sometimes reinterpreted, especially in improbable circumstances.

The Rule may be summarized as follows: “The person who for his own purpose brings on his lands and collects and keeps there anything likely to do mischief if it escapes, must keep it in at his peril, and if he does not do so, is *prima facie* answerable for all the damage which is the natural consequence of its escape.”⁴ When strange things are amassed, or merely an extraordinary number of otherwise ordinary things, this is material.⁵

(c) *Negligence, broadly*

The law of negligence is expansive. In the seminal case, *Donoghue v. Stevenson*,⁶ the plaintiff, May Donoghue, purchased ginger beer in an opaque brown bottle. After finishing it she discovered the remnants of a snail at the bottom. She was laid low, sick and revolted, and successfully sought damages from the manufacturer.

The elements of negligence are straightforward: there must be a duty of care owed by the defendant to the plaintiff; there must be a breach of that duty; the act constituting the breach

¹Wilkinson v. Downtown [1897] 2 Q.B. 57.

²Caparo Industries plc v. Dickman [1990] UKHL 2.

³[1868] UKHL 1.

⁴Bohlen (1911) 300.

⁵Mason v. Levy Auto Parts of England, Ltd. [1967] Vol. 1 Lloyd’s Rep. 372.

⁶[1932] UKHL 100.

must have caused the plaintiff's damage, foreseeably; and actual damages must have ensued.⁷

(4) Application of the Law to the Facts

While it may be difficult in our case to show that the Defendants acted with intent to do harm, I raise the following particular: Mr. Baker indicates that his brother had infrequent but somewhat personal conversations with Muriel Rowe, his closest neighbor in cold farmland. At first, Elliott assumed she didn't like him, but after fifteen years out there he figured they had become friends, or acquaintances at least. They talked mostly of books.

She knew about Elliott and birds. He told her, I don't know how long ago, that in childhood he found a baby burrowing owl huddled into a corner of the front porch in daylight. The owlet didn't appear to be injured, but it did seem to be suffering a very small out-of-body experience. It followed Elliott into the house and took shelter on Elliott's dresser, with none of the reserve one might expect from an owl, staring at him as if petitioning for answers.⁸ Though unnerved, Elliott became convinced that his own nervous presence was integral to the creature's survival. The owlet, after several weeks, was gone.

"Had you let him go?" Muriel asked.⁹

It is clear from the known facts that Muriel and Albert started rescuing birds well before they knew Elliott.¹⁰ It appears that the Rowes, both of whom had only ever worked on the farm, showed an easy proficiency with their adoptees. Muriel was a natural nurse with a gentle touch; Albert shared their quirky senses of humour. They became known as the local bird people. The Rowes' lives took on a higher calibre of calm, as after the granting of a grace period.

The release of the birds, then. Certainly, it's fair to say the act itself was not accidental; Albert opened the cages meaning to free their occupants. And what would you have done with all those scared souls already rescued once? But was harm to Elliott intentional, reckless? Might a reasonable person presume the birds, being domesticated, would find the next closest house? If so, would that reasonable person then foresee the neighbour's injury, descent? I would go so far as to ask, did Albert and Muriel pray their wards would find precisely that glass-jawed man most vulnerable to them?

⁷ Caparo, Op. Cit.

⁸ "Other friends have flown before – On the morrow he will leave me, as my hopes have flown before" (Poe, Edgar Allan, *The Raven*).

⁹ "But she no longer asked it maliciously, in her old way, but sadly, as though in the meantime she had come to know the malice of the world, compared with which all one's own malice fails and becomes senseless." (Kafka, Franz, *The Castle* (New York: Schocken Books, 1992), at 376).

¹⁰ Painted Bunting (male), escaped pet; Green Kingfishers (2 males), found disoriented on property; Canary-winged Parakeet (female), adopted after death of previous owner; Ruby-throated Hummingbird (male), injured; Vermilion Flycatcher (female), donated; Golden-crowned Kinglets (male and female), unexplained arrival; Sharp-shinned Hawk (male), Merlin (male), Tree Swallows (male and female), Tropical Parula (female), Budgerigar (female) and Cockatiel (male), all saved from closed pet shop; Northern Cardinals (male and female), male injured and female refusing to leave his side.

Even if our narrative lacks the outrage to support a mental distress tort, negligence can likely be borne out. The Defendants owed a neighbourly duty of care to our client; they breached that duty in the act of the release; and that act was our client's undoing.

Should we wish to plead strict liability, we might also press for a re-working of the Rule in *Rylands v. Fletcher*: the Rows kept an unorthodox abundance of birds. The abundance escaped, with the consequent mischief plain to see.

(5) Conclusion

I defer a review of defenses to my next memorandum but, in my opinion, we could succeed, technically, in an action for negligence or negligent infliction of mental distress. We must be mindful of the sympathies. We would be suing a widow whose husband died – well, 'heroically' is not a stretch.

Our client merits sympathy, too, I concede.¹¹ But the role of plaintiff is an unsightly one.¹²

I should mention also that the two cardinals survived. Elliott found he wasn't afraid of them anymore, so small there on the ground, and he lifted them gently from the snow. In his crumpled house, Elliott bites at his cuticles and monitors the tiny things together on the windowsills, the male a bright red that, unfathomably, seems man-made, and the female rusty brown, always by her partner's side. Elliott claims the female repeatedly checks on the male to make sure he's okay. Pecks, nags, assesses his crimson face.¹³

I understand Elliott would take considerable solace in retaining custody of the birds. His litigation guardian insists that alone would be insufficient. Elliott has no job; there are expenses. But perhaps it will encourage settlement discussions.

I hope I've related all the facts here, and reviewed sufficient sources, to permit the firm to advise Mr. Baker accurately. I shall await your further instructions.

¹¹ When Elliott was almost two, his father caught a lake trout, and his mother steamed it whole in parchment paper with butter, onions and diced celery. As his father carved in at the gills, Elliott whispered, "Sorry, fish."

¹² "...sometimes...we're just screwed" (Wagner, Kurt F. et al, p/k/a Lambchop, "My Blue Wave," 2001).

¹³ "I say come ye, ye who would have love" (Wayman, Eunice Kathleen p/k/a Nina Simone, "Come Ye," 1966).

Recipe for a Youth-Obsessed Culture

BY S.M. DZIOK

Ingredients:

- 1 whole chicken
- 3 apples
- 1 ½ Tbsp. sea salt
- 1 cup nuts (walnuts or pecans, preferred)
- ½ tsp. cardamom
- 2 Tbsp. caraway aquavit
- 1 online search for red sorrel and birch syrup
- 1 trip to a store with rosemåling on the sign and Dala horses in the windows for help finding *ymerdry*s and cloudberry jam

In a far corner of the Nine Worlds, the Aesir slumber. Their sleep is the centuries-long rest of the self-satisfied, the rest of those who are unaware that their power is waning.

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 375°.
2. Remove giblets from chicken, save for later use. Pat chicken skin dry. Try not to think about those other birds. The eagle, for instance, or the falcon.
3. Toast nuts in pan on medium-low heat. Stir frequently and watch constantly, for nuts burn quickly. Feel their turmoil and desperation as they crisp and release their oils. Remember your own terror that time when – no! Stop. The nuts are done. Pour into a bowl to cool before grinding.
4. The apples gleam from their spot on the counter. But wait, wait. It is not time for them yet.
5. Mix ¼ tsp of the salt with the cardamom, birch syrup, and aquavit. Imagine Bragi making this dish and laugh. He would pour the rest of the aquavit down his throat, recite a poem about the curve of your ass, and then pass out on the sorrel.
6. Take the sorrel and stare at it for a moment. Let the resentment fill you and plump your tissues like a dried brick of peat left out in the rain. Feel its sodden weight, how it grounds you. What good is a husband if he cannot defend you? Discard the sorrel; this dish requires no such frill.

The corner of Loki's mouth twitches, as if an invisible fly has landed there. Odin issues a long snore that ends in a snort as he rolls over. Thor's eyelids flutter.

7. Grind the nuts. Avoid thinking about the time Loki turned you into one, how your tissues shrank and hardened, limbs merged into your trunk, eyes unseeing and desiccated. A nut in nature is a content enough thing; a nut with conscientiousness is a horror. Such a nut feels the falcon's talons clasp it, senses the empty air beneath, knows of the dangerous pursuit, but can do nothing.
8. Prep the chicken by mixing a tablespoon of the spice mixture with the *ymerdrys* and stuffing inside chicken. Mix another tablespoon with more salt. Loosen the skin and spread mixture directly onto the meat. Reflect on the expression "to get under one's skin." Loki comes to mind again. That seaside party thrown by Aegir where Loki insinuated, in a stage whisper, that you were sleeping with your brother's killer. You smiled prettily, as was expected of you. Take a deep breath now, as you feel – as you felt then – the acid-splashes of injustice burn through your chest and gut.
9. Chicken cooks faster in pieces rather than whole. Grab the cleaver and get hacking. Hack that damned bird into as many pieces as you desire.
10. Why should you be the one always kept behind the walls? Your imprisonment benefits only those who reign over you, who hold the reins, who rain on your parade. Spread the cloudberry jam over the chicken pieces.
11. Take the apples and...

Her fingers brush the taut skin of the apples. So smooth and unblemished, much like her own. Delicate fingers caress the tender skin around her eyes—unlined after millennia!—and the apples of her cheeks—plump with dewy youth! So this is what they prize and covet? A curious thing, so trivial. It occurs to her that if having it is worth imprisoning another being like a common milk cow, then not having it will truly make them suffer.

12. Do not take the knife or the peeler to the apples. Leave them intact.

Godly eyelids flutter open and eyes dart around, searching for the source of unease. Nothing is visibly wrong, but when each god attempts to rise, their bones creak and groan as if Asgard itself were about to collapse in on itself.

13. Throw the gods-be-damned chicken into the garbage.

Reflections show graying skin and thinning, frost-brittled hair. Flesh sags and voices that once commanded legions now quaver with frailty. The gods weep as they realize their importance has turned to impotence.

14. Grab the apples and run to the nearest forest. There, hold the apples high in the air. Twirl about in your new-found freedom. Then bite into an apple and let its tart sweetness soak into your cells.

In a far distant land, the humans who are already old feel the cold breath of their waiting graves. The ones with a few decades behind them feel the world's gaze slip past them. Yet they take this invisibility as a sorrow, not a power, so they turn to peddlers of ointments and medicines in vain attempts to return them to what they once were. The ones who are young rejoice in their unearned beauty and revel in the new power that has surged within them. They see how merchants and craftspeople target their wares toward them. They see that envy is etched on the lined faces. Everywhere they look, they see themselves reflected, endlessly, in mirrors and screens. They do not understand, cannot fully grasp, that the power they feel now will flicker and fade, leaving them, as it leaves all who breathe. Except you.

15. Throw your head back and laugh at what you have cooked up. Now that you are heated and ready, all will serve, for you alone are Idunn the Ever-Young.



NADIA SO

Dreaming of blue ...

DREAMING OF BLUE, DIGITAL, 42X42 CM, 2019

Body Haunting

BY EMMA PICKERING

I once met a ghost who transferred his nothingness to me. You'd think nothingness would feel light, less-than-a-whisper empty, not there. But it was all I noticed once I had it. His nothingness penetrated my every thought, waking and dreamed—an inescapable gravity of burdensome significance. It was February, the month of love when I met the ghost. He was unsuspecting, as most ghosts are. You can't see them until they want you to see them, and then it's too late. I felt no sense of danger as the ghost flickered into the room, which was full of warm bodies and emptying bottles, endless chatter and laughter. I couldn't see him yet; he was nothing, after all. But I felt a sudden, biting chill.

I thought nothing of it, and my senses left me gradually with every passing sip. First the brain-to-limb movement, then sight, then sound. Even my dreams couldn't be roused that night, my sub-conscious too intoxicated. All I remember was a black abyss. I went to sleep seeing and feeling nothing, dreamt nothing, and woke as the embodiment of nothing. I didn't know **it** at first. Or rather, I couldn't believe **it** yet. There was an immensity prickling in **my thoughts**, alarm bells almost, except **I sensed no** immediate threat in the morning quiet.

I was heavy with the night. I lay naked on the ghost's bed knowing I did not undress myself. This is an alarming thing to know. The ghost from last night—I had seen him before my eyes closed. He'd begun to take shape just as my vision blurred and shadowed.

He'd kissed me, laughed with me even. Teased me. Removed things.

In my mind, another figure materialized. When I studied him, he reminded me of the

ghost. His form was the same. Eyelashes the same. His broad shoulders, his lips. There was the distinct memory of his breath smelling like the drinks we'd shared. The prickling grew stronger. Knowledge buried alive inside me clawed frantically towards the surface. The weight of it struck me. So heavy. Too grownup. Instinct told me this knowledge was threatening. It would be the emptying kind, if I let it up. I knew it as soon as the face in my mind's eye sharpened: he was my date from last night. Not just last night—my date of nearly five months now. Left over drink raged behind my eyes. I roused an explanation; the two of us becoming drunk, so drunk we passed out after removing our clothes. I prayed this scenario was an actual memory. Besides the missing clothes, there was nothing obvious to suggest a physical breach. I felt between my legs: dry. I clung to that detail. I left his house and went about my day as I normally would, but I could still not shake the heavy feeling from that morning upon seeing my own naked body. Over and over I countered the heaviness with that one detail: dry, dry, dry. Later that evening I stepped out of the shower and bent over to dry my legs. I glimpsed a part of my body I hadn't yet seen since the previous night. High up on my inner thighs were clusters of small circular bruises, their size and shape the same as fingertips. I turned my thigh outward to get a better look, studied the foreign markings on my body. When I finally straightened and wiped the fog on the mirror, my reflection was barely there. That new weight I'd felt all day as I napped, ran errands, walked the dog—the heavy emptiness that couldn't be placed or touched or seen, now sunk deeply into my bones and my psyche. That knowledge inside me clawed back towards the surface, but it did not stop this time; it burst suddenly into the open, gasping for air. It flourished and foraged all the fissures of my existence, mining soul and leaving nothing. Every aspect of my life was breached. I knew things about my body and about the world that I didn't want to know, and could not un-know. I saw others like me, suffering from the same ghostliness, empty and weighted down by an unjust despair. I felt it stretch into

my future, thick and overflowing,
merging into the far-off, and
unseen. I felt it in the past lives
of these other ghosts, too—an
ancestral nothingness suffered
for centuries that connected to
me now, whether I liked it or
not. I turned away and put
everything back. I cleared
my mind. Ignored my soul.
I did not look at my body,
and did not think. I
suppressed the heavy
nothingness until it was a
mere prickling once again.
Manageable. Still there, but
small enough to ignore.
Absently, I dried my body
with the towel and got
dressed.

Circumspective Limbs

BY ERICA MCKEEN

The rat.

I was laughing hysterically. There was a twist somewhere in my stomach, my bladder. A sound and sensation close to a burp burst at the back of my mouth. I had never watched anything die, remember, I didn't know what to do. So I brought the rat, which was dying in my hands, downstairs to my dad who was doing work in the basement office. The rat's mouth was opening and closing tiredly. When I first saw her in the cage, doing that awful, slow yawning, I had thought she was hungry, so I crumpled a cracker between my fingers and placed some of the crumbs in her mouth. But she wasn't hungry, she was dying. I still don't know, looking back, what the yawning was about, the opening and closing of her mouth. I brought the rat downstairs to my dad and I think by then I was crying, and my dad looked at me, harassed, looked at the rat and said, Okay, and—? What do you want me to do? By the time he stopped speaking the rat had stopped moving and I realized I had missed it—that interminable shift—the moment of dying.

The dog.

I was sixteen and working a shift at McDonald's. It was snowing and earlier that day my mom and I had taken the dog for a walk. All I remember is the smell of grilled meat, the feel of sweat on my forehead, clamped beneath my uniform visor.

The uncle.

There was a feeling of stillness and claustrophobia, a feeling of walls shrinking, the outside light, draining in from the front lobby, buckling in on itself as my cousin came screaming into the funeral home to see her dead father in the coffin, dressed up in a suit and smoothed over with makeup. I don't remember ever seeing the uncle in a suit before this moment. Apparently (this is how the story goes), when my cousin found him on the couch there was a plate of finished chicken wings beside him on the floor, you know, picked through, just the bones.

The friend.

The friend killed herself in a dramatic way, as was her custom, by throwing herself off a cliff. I wish I was kidding. There was no open casket, quite obviously. It was maybe a bigger deal than it should've been, because the friend wasn't really a friend anymore. But she had been, when we were children.

The grandma.

In the hospital room she was having a makeshift tea party with my aunt, post-surgery. On the drive down, during which my uncle called (a different uncle, the other side of the family, don't worry, this isn't a ghost story) to say—She's dying!—and then to call again—Maybe not! They've found a heartbeat, a pulse. As I say, on the drive down to the hospital, my dad tried not to speed, not to run any lights, and my mom waited carefully breathing in the passenger seat. By the time they arrived the grandma was dead, and my mom said, Should we close her eyes or something? (Her mouth and eyes were hanging open, this is how the story goes.) My aunt reached over and fumbled to pull the lids closed.

The cat.

It was only a month later, the cat stopped peeing in her litter box. My mom called the vet to the house to put her down. By this time we were all very tired and didn't like the thought of a clinical space for the poor thing to die in. The cat had been with us a long time, but not so long that we couldn't remember what she looked like on her first day off the farm, frightened, hiding in my parents' walk-in closet, unable to eat her food, not knowing yet that she was home, that she wasn't vulnerable, that she wasn't (this is how the story goes) alone.

The Picturesque Life

A REVIEW OF CARY FAGAN'S *THE STUDENT*

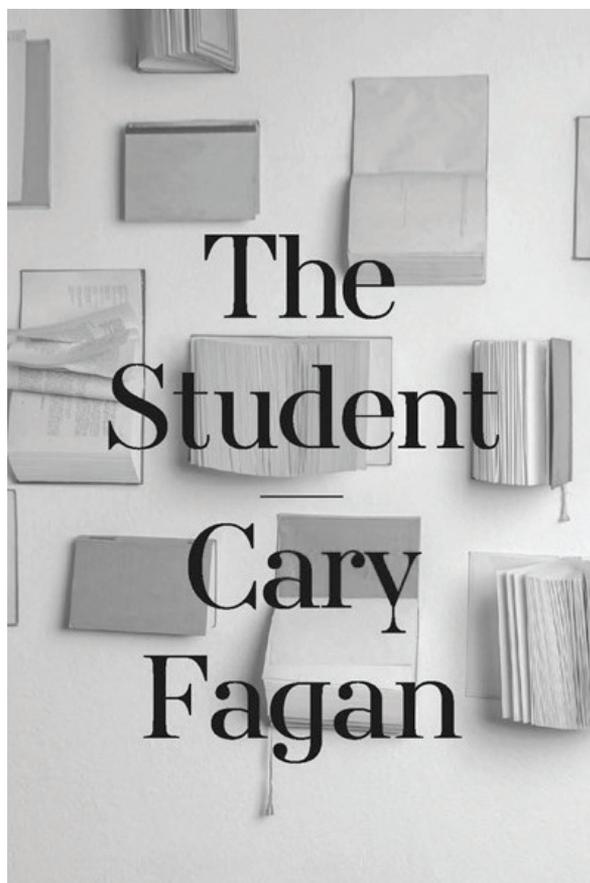
BY ZACHERY COOPER

When Cary Fagan first introduces readers to Miriam Moscovitz (Minnie) in the summer of 1957,

She is an ambitious, thoughtful—somewhat self-centred—free-thinking twenty-two-year-old student in the final year of an undergraduate degree in literature at University of Toronto.

At first glance, it appears Minnie's life is on a fast track for success: she dates a young Jewish man with a good job, nearly has her degree, and has parents that care deeply about her. A picturesque life, save for the fact that the novel is set in the 1950s when sexism and discrimination were rampant across the continent, no matter where one went. In a conversation with Professor Birmingham, a tenured professor Minnie has studied with, she discloses that she wants to pursue a PhD and asks if he will write a reference letter. He reacts with chilling dismay and dismissiveness. He says, “no, no, I mean whatever do you want to do a PhD for? To spend several years of your life, not to mention the valuable resources of this university, for nothing? [...] You'll get married and that will be the end of it. And a spot that could have gone to a genuinely worthy candidate will have been wasted” (p 47-48).

In utter ruin from such a low-blow, sexist jab, she derails her fast track life, abandoning academic plans, betrays her boyfriend, and leaves home to follow her new lover, Charlie Kroken, who is a civil rights activist. While chasing Charlie, Minnie stays



FREEHAND BOOKS, 2019

in Detroit, waiting for the next bus that will take her to Little Rock, Arkansas, where Charlie is doing what he can to help the historic Little Rock Nine.

The Student is broken into two sections related to time: 1957 and 2005. When we see Minnie again forty-eight years later, she is cleverer, recently retired from her alma mater, U of T, and somewhere through the time that has passed, she has garnered a sense of humility. Part two of the novel is a progression from the first, although the image of Minnie, now seventy, is an antonym of her previous self. She is now a

mother of three, married, and retired from a long career as a professor, which signifies that she made it, based on her goals laid out in the first section.

The Student is a slim novel at 184 pages and while the novel is easy to consume in one sitting, it suffers from over summarizing the heroine's journey from runaway to grandmother. Minnie fights for equality and against sexism and racism, but ultimately, her fight isn't fully satisfying due to a too-quick recap. However, Fagan redeems his heroine through well-placed, precise details in both eras, such as fashion, fads, political climates and social issues. Most notably, blatant racism and misogyny in Minnie's youth are juxtaposed with her social justice activism and fight for gay rights later in the narrative. The sly placement of detail makes Toronto feel like an authentic backdrop.

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When reading *The Student*, I want to ask: what could the story have been like if Fagan had written all the way through Minnie's emotional, and inspiring life? In the large cinematic jump cut that occurs, where Minnie faces injustice like the sexism experienced in her youth at U of T, there's a sense of disconnection from the protagonist. Ultimately, it's like Frodo from *The Lord of the Rings* discovering the ring, then Tolkien cuts to him and Sam at the base of Mount Doom in Mordor. The reader wouldn't understand why they're there in the first place or the experiences along the way that shaped their character. After the forty-eight-year jump, the reader is introduced to a new Minnie. I suppose it is a bit magical, considering how we all long to press fast forward at some point in our lives. She's the high school or undergraduate peer you lost contact with but hear about it over the years, and you one day bump into her so many years later at a grocery store. You're in awe of a living legend, but you feel disconnected from who she's become over the years.

Cary Fagan is the author of six novels and three short story collections for adults, as well as many award-winning books for children. *The Student* was nominated for the 2019 Governor General's Literary Award for Fiction. Fagan's other books include *A Bird's Eye* (finalist for the Rogers Trust Fiction Prize, an Amazon.ca Best Book of the Year) and the story collection *My Life Among the Apes* (longlisted for the Giller Prize, Amazon.ca Best Book of the Year of 2013). Cary was born and raised in Toronto, where he lives with his Family.

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Indigenizing History, Modernity, and the Future

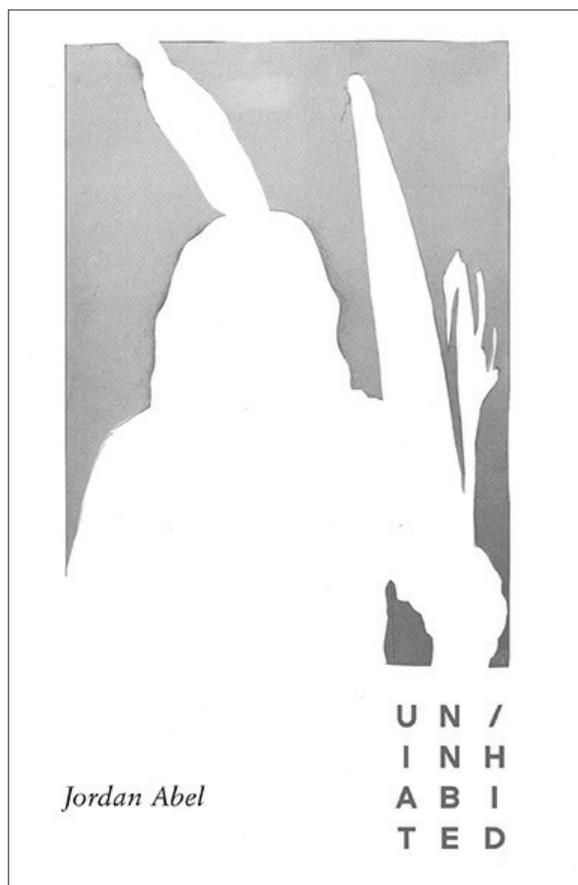
A REVIEW OF JORDAN ABEL'S *UN/INHABITED*

BY MADDIE BEAULIEU

In 2005, Dane-zaa artist Brian Jungen drew national attention with the exhibition of Prototypes for a New Understanding, a series of replicas of Northwest coast Indigenous masks,

Created from dissembled and reassembled Nike Air Jordans. This exhibition exemplifies the process of Indigenization, literally 'to make Indigenous,' as one of the methods artists use to assert Indigenous voices, experiences, and understandings in colonialist spaces or against colonialist ideals, as a form of resistance. Like Jungen, Nisga'a artist and writer Jordan Abel uses indigenization to challenge colonial ideals. Through erasure poetry, a subset of concrete poetry, and by incorporating Charles Baudelaire's paradigm of modern art, Abel's *Un/inhabited* indigenizes colonial understandings of history and contemporary life, and creates space for an Indigenous future.

Abel employs erasure poetry throughout *Un/inhabited*, which is often used as a means of expressing what cannot be expressed solely in words. Erasure poetry utilizes the removal and absence of words, transforming blank spaces and empty pages into poetic devices. Unlike other forms of poetry, it is



TALON BOOKS, 2014

not created to be read—it is created to be looked at, like a street sign or a map. Concrete or visual poetry straddles the line between literature and visual art, using words, phrases, margins, and whitespace to create a work. Because a poet uses all four of these elements—words, phrases, margins, and whitespace—when writing a concrete poem, 'reading' each element is crucial to understanding the author's intention. In an erasure poem, the author systematically removes certain words, phrases, or letters from another author's source text, leaving behind whitespace.

In her afterword to *The New Concrete*, Victoria Bean discusses a group of Turkish artists who “use [concrete poetry] to say the unsayable” in the face of political violence. M. NourbeSe Philip used the legal report of a slave ship that murdered 142 Africans and then attempted to claim insurance money for their ‘lost cargo’ as the source text for her book *Zong!* and notes in the afterword that “this story is one that can only be told by not telling”. This thread of absence, of the ‘unsayable’ existing in the whitespace of the page is common throughout erasure poetry, including Abel’s *Un/inhabited*, which includes writing that deviates from our traditional understandings of the written word. In an interview with Abel, he shares that he writes to articulate Indigenous presence through Indigenous absence expressing his own ‘unsayable’ story in the margin of the poems. His decision to use ninety-one early twentieth-century pulp western novels as his source text is deliberate, as the western genre is representative of colonial values and colonial perspectives of history.

Throughout *Pioneering*, the first section of *Un/inhabited*, Abel has chosen words relating to the colonial overtaking of Indigenous lands, including ‘settler,’ ‘uninhabited,’ and ‘treaty,’ and deleted them from the source texts, leaving behind emptiness. This section is the initial step of Abel’s articulation of Indigenous presence through absence. He leaves the potential for new words in these spaces. The absence of words in those places forces the reader to question what else is missing from these texts: Whose voices are heard? Whose peoples are lost? What words, histories, and stories might Indigenous peoples insert in the text in the absences? Abel offers a possible answer in *Cartography*. Here, he has laid the entirety of the ninety-one western novels he used as base texts from one edge of the page to the other, with superimposed white maps of the landforms and coastlines of what is now known as Canada. This

imposition of large blank spaces creates Abel’s visual poems. If the reader frames the poems from a settler-colonialist perspective, the skeins of text represent whiteness encroaching on Indigenous spaces, and the colonial assertions of borders and maps that do not align with Indigenous territories. Abel’s visual poems, however, represent Indigeneity encroaching on colonialism. Indigenous peoples’ land is literally spreading over the text of these western novels, erasing

**Indigenous peoples’
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them, and indigenizing colonialist history. In *Cartography* Indigenous land consumes the history of these western novels — Turtle Island’s coastlines spread across the page, and across the spread of colonialist narratives, ideals, and values.

As Abel indigenizes colonial history in *Cartography* and *Pioneering*, he simultaneously indigenizes modern life, a paradigm exemplified by Charles Baudelaire In his 1863 essay, “The Painter of Modern Life.” In this essay, he argues that the role of the modern artist, and of modern art as a whole, was to represent “present-day beauty” (13). Since the essay’s publication, modern artists have always sought to represent this ideal in their work. Baudelaire’s paradigm of representing the truth of modern life allows artists to *create*

the truth of modern life—the subjects and issues they portray in their art becomes reality, because their art is representative of modern life. As Indigeneity swallows up colonialist values and histories, creating literal and figurative whitespace for Indigenous peoples to occupy, Jordan Abel presents the truth of modern life to his readers: colonialism has been consumed and erased, and Indigeneity has replaced it.

Of course, Indigeneity has *not* consumed colonialism—colonialism remains entwined in Canada’s institutions, from questions of ‘blood quantum’ to the treatment of land to the government itself—*yet*. Though Abel’s representation of contemporary life does not mirror what is typically understood in Canada, he offers the hope and the potential, just like the potential of the white space of his concrete poems, as a form of resistance. In addition to indigenizing history and contemporary life by performing erasure and portraying an Indigenous identity in his art, Abel creates space for an Indigenous future, an *Indigenous futurism*. Though Abel does not explicitly reference Indigenous futurism in his work, his indigenization of history and his rewriting of maps and borders, proposes a future that is equally as Indigenous.

**In addition to
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With concrete poetry as a foundation, Jordan Abel speaks to the erasure of the past, the truth of the present, the potential of the future, and the indigenization of all three. In *Un/inhabited*, Abel considers Indigenous history, contemporary life, and the future. He considers the consequences of erasing ‘settler,’ ‘uninhabited,’ and ‘treaty,’ as Turtle Island swallows up the endless skein of colonialism. The margin of his poems will no longer be whitespace, but the layered words and phrases of Indigenous understanding and potential. He unsettles historical Canadian colonialism. Because art is more than just art. Abel creates *beyond* art, his art usurps colonialist understandings to assert Indigenous history, an Indigenous present, and an Indigenous future, and in doing so creates moments and spaces for other Indigenous voices to fill the spaces he creates.

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OVER AT TALONBOOKS.COM

Get Rose to Pick Up Sheepskin

BY ROSEMARY FEIGHAN

The lists are scattered throughout the house.

Various bits written in his *SLANTED BLOCK ALL CAPS* style. Frequent underlines indicating points of emphasis.

1. *TOOK 2 X-STRENGTH TYLENOL – HIP PAIN WORSE*
2. *CALL DR DILLION -> MAKE APPOINTMENT*
3. *EAVESTROUGH CLEANED???*
4. *REPLACE BUTRAN PATCH*
5. *GET MARION TO PRINT STOCK MARKET REPORT*

Yellow lined pads are the favoured choice - reminiscent of his days in the legal profession.

These lists front file folders to organize his subjects, his life. Giving order to potential domestic chaos. Others – though – are captured on mere scraps.

Slips of paper nearby are grabbed for convenience, in haste, to retain a thought or a directive. Scribbled on to save time. Time needed to cross the room to write on a previously started list becomes too onerous. The effort of hauling the walker across the hardwood, dodging objects between the dining room table and the much beloved lazy boy chair looking out to sea, is too inefficient. The idea might get lost in the transition.

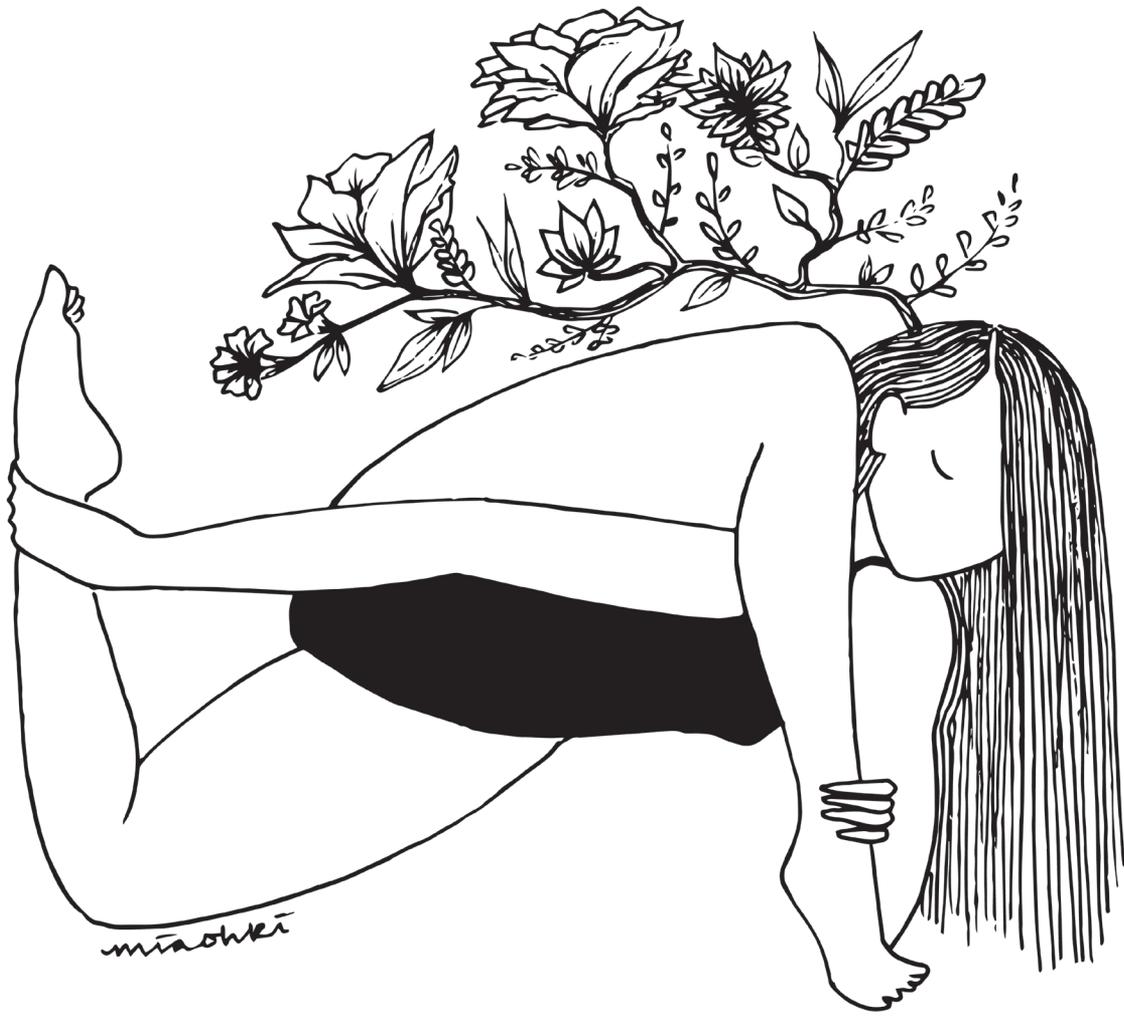
More reminders are jotted to mix in with calendar appointments and notes on sleep deprivation or drug efficacy or the dreaded indigestion. (How did we not see that the endless tums might be an indicator of colon cancer?)

The last one is different. Different, yet the same. Found hidden underneath a pile of used Kleenex and the morning's uneaten breakfast. Pad and pen must have been borrowed from the nurse's station. Victoria General Hospital writ large across the top.

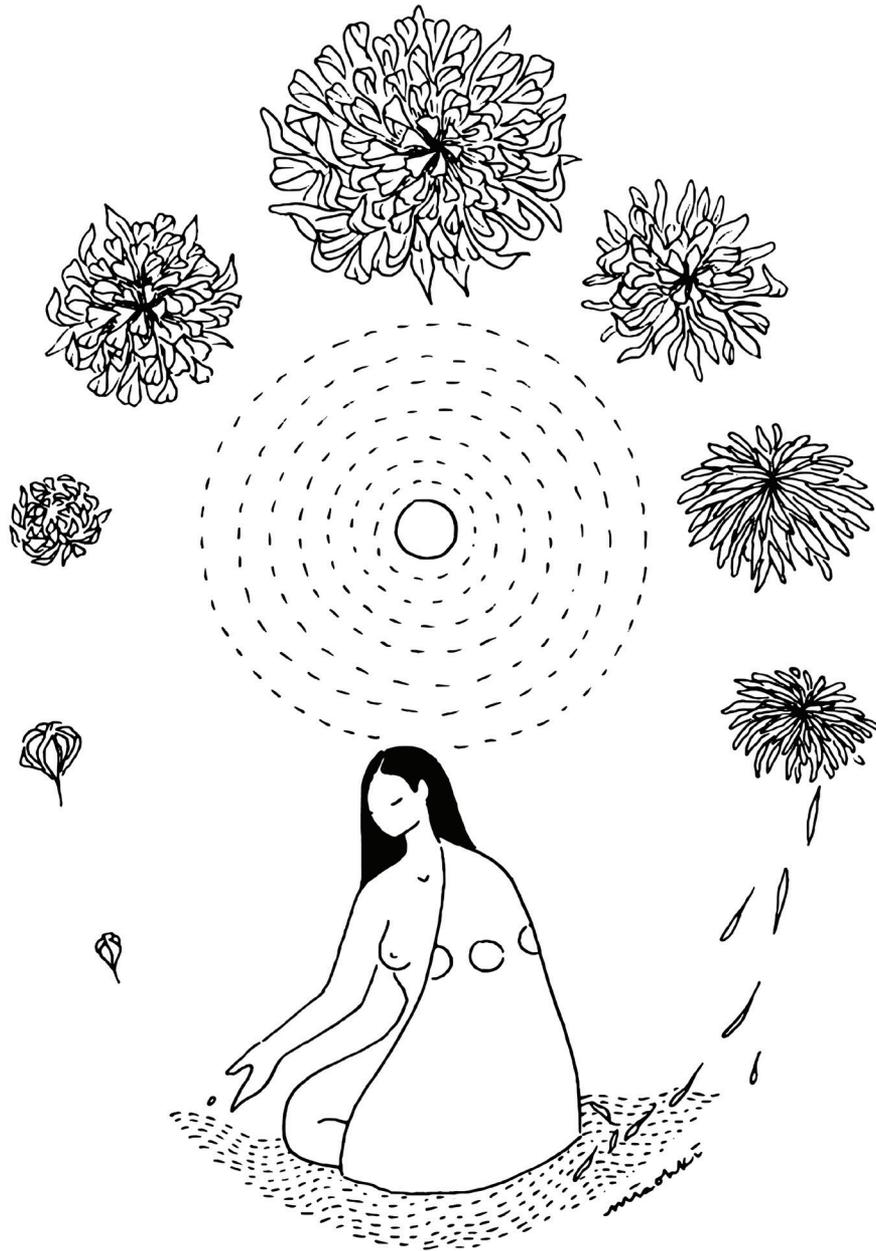
1. *DONATE ORGANS*
2. *CALL MARK*
3. *GET ROSE TO PICK UP SHEEPSKIN*
4. *TALK TO PALLIATIVE DOCTOR*



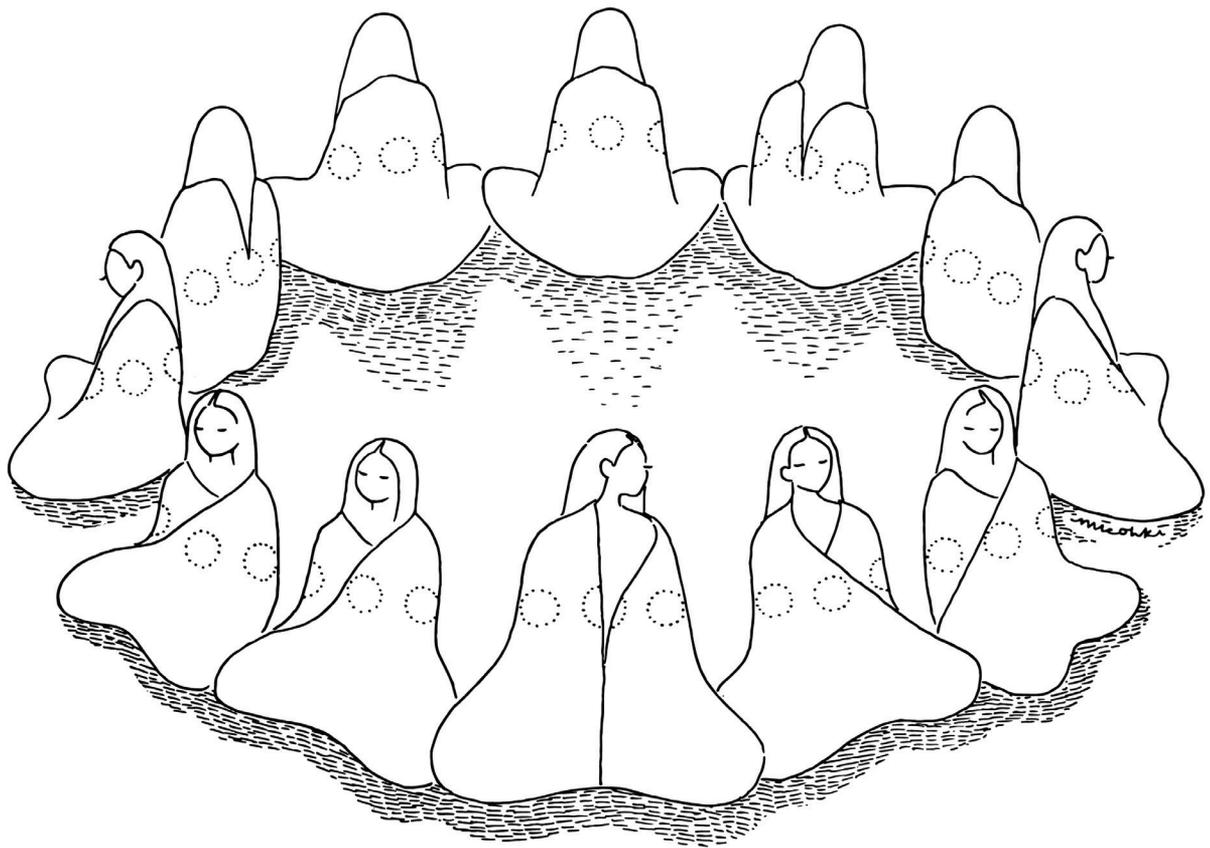
MIA OHKI, PLANTING INTENTIONS, MICRON PEN ON MIXED MEDIA PAPER, 8.5" X 11"



MIA OHKI, SUNDAY CHURCH, MICRON PEN ON MIXED MEDIA PAPER, 8.5" X 11"



MIA OHKI, GIVE YOURSELF TIME, MICRON PEN ON MIXED MEDIA PAPER, 8.5" X 11"



MIA OHKI, NOT ALONE - #434-01, MICRON PEN ON MIXED MEDIA PAPER, 8.5" X 11"



MIA OHKI, CERAMIC ASHTRAY, MICRON PEN ON MIXED MEDIA PAPER, 8.5" X 11"

Traditional Simplicity

MIA OHKI VANCOUVER, BC

Mia Ohki is an artist currently living and working between Alberta and British Columbia, Canada.

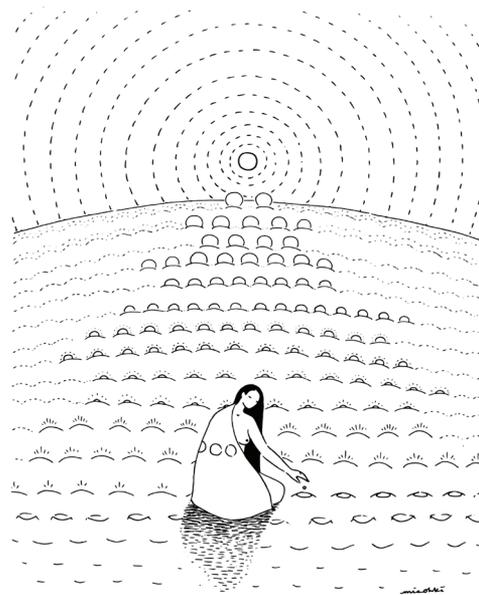
Mia works with distinct black line-work for traditional simplicity in Mia's communication of emotions and ideas. Although she occasionally experiments with different mediums, she usually uses black pen or paint on white canvas or paper.

Mia attempts to inspire feelings in the viewer with emphasis on setting and body language instead of clear facial features or expressions. The work is for all audiences and she strives to create relatable portrayals of the feminine, social, and cultural influences in their life. Subject matter frequently centers around Mia's background, and as a Japanese-Metis artist, it serves as a way to show the viewer a unique mixed cultural perspective.

Interactions with nature and the personification of nature are also subjects Mia has enjoyed exploring throughout her practice.

Her first solo show titled "I Know What It Looks Like" was completed in 2018." Her most recent group show was at The Works Festival in 2019, titled "Negotiating "Asian-ness" in Canada."

+ @MIAOHKI



>> ONE DAY AT A TIME, MICRON PEN ON MIXED MEDIA PAPER

Mia's work has been published in Man Repeller, Glass Buffalo Magazine, and CBC Arts.

CONTRIBUTORS

JEN ASHBURN, POETRY

Jen Ashburn is the author of *The Light on the Wall* (Main Street Rag, 2016) and has work published in numerous venues, including *The Writer's Almanac*, *The MacGuffin* and *Whiskey Island*. She holds an MFA from Chatham University, and lives in Pittsburgh.

JOHN BARTON, POETRY

John Barton's twenty-six books, chapbooks, and anthologies include *Polari*, *For the Boy with the Eyes of the Virgin: Selected Poems*, *Seminal: The Anthology of Canada's Gay-Male Poets*, *We Are Not Avatars: Essays, Memoirs, Manifestos*, and *The Essential Douglas LePan*. In 2020, he will publish *Lost Family* with Signal Editions and *The Essential Derk Wynand* with Porcupine's Quill. Born in Edmonton and raised in Calgary, he lives in Victoria, B.C.

MADDIE BEAULIEU, NON-FICTION

Maddie Beaulieu is in the second year of her combined honours degree in English and art history at the University of Alberta. Her creative and academic writing has been published in *Shameless*, *Grip*, and *NOD* magazines, as well as *Periodicity Journal*.

JACOB BRAUN, POETRY

Jacob Braun is from Thorold, ON. His poetry has previously appeared in print and online journals in Canada and the UK including *ditch*, and *Brittle Star*. He recently completed an MA in European Studies with a bilingual French-English defense and is working towards a full-length book of poetry.

KARLA COMANDA, POETRY

Karla Comanda is a poet, translator, and editor based in Vancouver. Born and raised in the Philippines, her poetry has been published in *Room*, *Poetry is Dead*, *Grain*, and others. In 2019, she taught Filipino youth the craft of poetry and the history of poetry in the Philippines in the Sinag-Araw Writing Workshop series.

ZACHERY COOPER, NON-FICTION

Zachery Cooper is the Managing Editor of Vancouver Island University's student press, *The Nav*. He was awarded the Mary Garland Coleman Prize in Lyric Poetry, won *Portal Magazine's* 2018 non-fiction contest, and honourably mentioned in the Islands Short Fiction Contest. His work has appeared in *Portal*, *The Nav*, *Incline*, and forthcoming in *Broken Pencil*.

S.M. DZIOK, FICTION

S.M. Dziok lives with her husband in Saint Paul, Minnesota, where she received her MFA in the Creative Writing at Hamline University in the spring of 2020. Speculative fiction is her primary genre. Her novelette "Red Rover, Red Rover" was selected as a semi-finalist in L. Ron Hubbard's Writers of the Future contest, Volume 37 (first quarter). A short story of hers appears in *Untethered: A Magic iPhone Anthology* by Cantina Publishing.

ROSEMARY FEIGHAN, NON-FICTION

Rosemary Feighan is a Communications Consultant. Her career has focused on writing, editing, composing, and communicating on the behalf of others. Only recently has Rosemary ventured into writing for her sake, for her own expression. She lives, works, and plays on the edge of Calgary, AB.

ROSALIND GOLDSMITH, FICTION

Rosalind Goldsmith lives in Toronto. She has written radio plays for CBC Radio Drama and a play for the Blyth Theatre Festival. She began writing short fiction five years ago, and since then her stories have appeared in journals in Canada, the UK and the USA, including *filling Station*, *Understorey*, *antilang.*, *Litro UK*, *Fairlight Books*, *the Chiron Review*, *Fiction International* and *Into the Void*.

KATE HARGREAVES, POETRY

Kate Hargreaves is a writer, book designer, and university writing advisor in Windsor, Ontario. She is the author of three books, *Leak* (Book*hug), *Jammer Star* (Orca), and *Talking Derby* (Black Moss). Find her work at CorusKate.com.

KATE HENDERSON, FICTION

Kate Henderson is an entertainment lawyer who lives with her family in Toronto, Canada. She is the author of a collection of short stories, a novella, *Dogleg*, and a novel, *You're Alright*.

SALMA HUSSAIN, FICTION

Salma Hussain's fiction has previously appeared in *filling Station*, *Other Voices*, *West Coast Line* and *NOW* magazine. Her novel, *NOURA* is forthcoming in 2023. She lives in Toronto.

SHERRY JOHNSON, POETRY

Sherry Johnson is the author of two books of poetry, *Pale Grace* and *Hymns to Phenomena*, which was given the Relit Award for Canadian poetry. Her poems have appeared in many journals and anthologies, most recently in *Grain*, *Canadian Literature* and *The Malahat Review*.

ROBIN KNIGHT, POETRY

Robin Knight is a children's writer, poet, and features writer, based in Brighton, Sussex & published in the UK & US by: The History Press, *Psychologies Magazine*, *True West*, *Signo*, *Beyond Words*, *The Dewdrop*, *Imprimo*, *The Whirlwind*, *Artificium*, *Halfway Down The Stairs* and others in anthology. He was acknowledged in the UK's National Poetry Competition in 2015 & 2017.

ERICA MCKEEN, NON-FICTION

Erica McKeen is a writer, organizer, and teacher. Originally born on London Township Treaty Territory (otherwise known as 'London, Ontario'), she is a Poetry London board member, assistant editor at *The /temz/ Review*, and co-organizer of LOMP: reading series. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Dalhousie Review*, *Long Con Magazine*, *Minola Review*, and elsewhere. Her first novel is forthcoming with Invisible Publishing.

KATHRYNE MOK, ART

Kathryne Mok is an artist living and working in Calgary, AB. She graduated from Alberta University of the Arts with a BFA in painting. She often works with acrylic and oil paints but also has a passion for simple line drawings.

MIA OHKI, ART

Mia Ohki is an artist currently living and working between Alberta and British Columbia, Canada.

EMMA PICKERING, NON-FICTION

Emma Pickering is an Ontario writer, feminist, and online entrepreneur. Currently living in Lekwungen territory (Victoria, BC), Emma primarily writes prose and poetry that experiments with form, feminism, and strong elements of fabulism. She's a volunteer at The Malahat Review, and her story Nadir was shortlisted for the UK-based Online Writing Tips Short Fiction Prize in 2019.

NADIA SO, ART

Nadia So, also known as nsogallery, is a storytelling illustrator who explores the subconsciousness within herself. Her works showcase hidden thoughts and emotions that humans experience on a daily basis that are often kept within themselves. By using this as her subject, she wants to encourage people to explore their inner thoughts and to further explore their own identity.

JOSEPH STERN, POETRY

Joseph Stern was born in Montreal and currently lives in China. His writing and photography has appeared in The American Journal of Poetry, Main Street Rag, Gargoyle, Common Ground Review and other publications.

DALE TRACY, POETRY

Dale Tracy is the author of the chapbook *The Mystery of Ornament* (above/ground press, 2020), the chapbook *Celebration Machine* (Proper Tales Press, 2018), the chappoem *What It Satisfies*, and the monograph *With the Witnesses: Poetry, Compassion, and Claimed Experience* (McGill-Queen's, 2017). She received an honourable mention in Kalamalka Press's 2019 John Lent chapbook contest, and her poems have appeared in print and online publications like *The Goose*, *Touch the Donkey*, *Gatherings*, *Dusie*, and *Chaudiere*.

LAURA ZACHARIN, POETRY

Laura Zacharin is the author of *Common Brown House Moths* (Frontenac House 2019), longlisted for the 2020 Gerald Lampert Award. In 2018 she completed her Creative Writing Certificate at University of Toronto's School of Continuing Studies and was the recipient of the Marina Nemat Award for Poetry. Her poetry has appeared in *The Fiddlehead*, *CV2*, *The Malahat Review*, *Prism*, and *Juniper*. She lives in Toronto.