Collage

A Journal of Creative Expression

SPRING 2022

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In memory of Amanda (Amy) Jones Foster Gray, editor in chief of the spring 2005 issue of *Collage.*



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Letter
from the Editor

I applaud all of those who make this journal possible. It is important to reflect on the past few years and to thank each person who continues to work hard and give their best every day despite the uncertainty and collective loss that has gripped our lives. To all the faculty, students, and alumni who support our education in these trying times, thank you for all your help and encouragement; it has not gone unnoticed. This journal would not have been possible without your efforts.

I would also like to take a moment to recognize the struggle that many are facing in the world right now. To those who seek equality, to those who do not have a voice, and to those who continue to fight against the systemic transgressions that have boiled up into the world, such as the conflict in Ukraine, and even right in our own neighborhoods here in America, I stand in solidarity with you.

Art is the most collaborative expression that humanity has to offer, and it has been a privilege to serve for four semesters and to be the editor in chief for a journal that allows such a diversity of voices to be heard. *Collage* has persisted through many world crises and will continue to do so for many more years, giving an outlet of expression to students of all backgrounds. It gives me great hope that we have so many creative and diverse alumni who will, together, go on to make this country and world a better, more collaborative place.

Steven Gavel

To a brighter future,
Steven Gavel





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Because of the Clovers

Nick Poe - fiction

Every town has that house, I guess. The house of legend. The one that births stories and fairytales passed on from one brother to his miniature. Nestled at the end of a forested road sat my town's house.

I just so happened to live in it.

For a while, I fought the stereotype. I was determined to make my home a welcoming place to explore nature and meet someone friendly. I kept lights shining in the windows and a fire on the hearth. I cleaned the walls until they sparkled. I waved at anyone who ventured near enough through the woods.

Maybe it was the trees that towered over the skinny path, casting everything in darkness. Maybe it was the way the moon seemed to hang over my chimney. Maybe it was the animals who crept in the dark, just past the edges of sight, close enough to sense, but far enough removed to question yourself. Whatever the cause, the stories started all the same.

Eventually, I tired of the countless trespassers and children throwing rocks at my windows. At all times of the night, they'd crawl through my bushes, knock on my door, and shout abuses at my home. I tell you, no one can stand that without turning into a bit of a monster. Certainly, I couldn't be expected to.

I extinguished the fire and turned off the light. I let moss grow on the walls and encouraged the trees to tower ever higher. If they wanted a house of horrors, well, by God, they'd get it!

An axe always leaned against a tree near the front door, I made sure of it. I adopted a large dog who would never even chase a chicken, but the kids didn't know that. They saw his eyes - glowing yellow through the trees - and imagined him as some kind of monster from myths. Whatever they thought, it kept them from my home.

I knew peace.

When I ventured into town - rarely these days - I'd hear the stories they told. Down the next aisle, when they thought I couldn't hear, they'd whisper conversations about the crazy old man who the law should investigate.

Until I returned one day from cutting a tree that hung dangerously over the outhouse and saw a child, no older than eight, sitting cross-legged against the foundation of my house, picking at the weeds like a rabbit.

I made as much noise as any man has a right to make as I walked toward my house, hoping to scare the girl away. When she saw me, she waved. I stopped. I shifted the axe to my other shoulder and squinted at the strange girl. I walked closer.

"What you doin' here?" I asked.

"Sittin'," she answered.

"You ain't heard the tales of this place?"

"'Course I have."

"Ya ain't 'fraid of 'em?"

"I reckon they ain't true."

"How come?"

"'Cause of the clovers." She pointed to her feet at a patch of dark green weeds I meant to uproot that weekend. She reached down and plucked a clover with four leaves, raising it as if asking for inspection. "Nowhere bad's got four leaf clovers."

Don't Let the Dog In

Ox Zante - Digital Art



"That so?"

She nodded.

I sank to the earth next to her and watched her scan through the rest of the patch. She found one more, slid it into her pocket, and then stood up. She held out her hand and I shook it.

"It's nice to meet ya, mister."

She bounded down the path and rounded the corner.

So, I put the axe in the shed and lit a fire. The smoke billowed out of the chimney and curled like a baby's finger. I grabbed a bucket and started to scrub the walls. This was a house of peace and, because of the clovers, it couldn't be bad. ●



The Windy Sea

Madalynn Whitten - 35mm Film

An Ode to Orange, Named in 1502

Sage Andrews - Poetry

The orange sunset sky turns
those few minutes which linger
between day and night
into the most beautiful minutes of all.

How radiant is your color,
that of tangerines and tiger lilies,
of goldfish, pumpkins, and smoky chili,
so warm in the dead of winter?

Five hundred years ago,
they wouldn't have had a name
with which to color the upholstery
of my favorite coffee shop's couch.

We are so lucky to have a word
by which to call the arches in Utah,
the leaves on the trees, the lifebuoys
tossed out at sea, the Golden Gate Bridge
that stands clear through the fog.

The sun that lies just beyond the horizon,
never quite within reach.

Impermanence

Rachel Booher - Creative Nonfiction

Muddy imprints decorate my spine, their numbers unknown. How many lines are drawn? How many boundaries are breached? How many patches of empty skin are filled with the tasteless memories of salted insults? Laced with just a hint of aphrodisiac to numb each individual paper cut, the wounds burn through the flaky layers of tasteless pastries.

How many glass pieces of my reflection lay hidden beneath the Sculptor's hands, lathered in grey mud? Not black, not white, not cold, not light, thick and phat, like crumpled ideas tossed into the nearest wastebasket with yesterday's Cosmo trends. Add water, minus gluten, to the recipe of shame-filled cookies, iced with ethylene glycol and colored green for festive appeal. The floor, once clean, now littered with Post-It Notes and nosebleeds from self- study, calorie counting, and sleepless nights on an empty stomach.

Paleo reminds me of my skin color after looking at the scale. Weight Watchers are the eyes of every passerby's knowing looks. Jenny Craig is that brand of clothing I can't afford and can't fit into ... Atkins sounds like the aching in my hollowed intestines, and I think Keto is the last planet in a far-away, empty universe. I am jealous of that planet.

Vegan is a language I don't understand, and Dr. Oz still lives with Dorothy and her red shoes, leaving me without a way home. Victoria and Lane constantly compete for my attention, choking me on my own runway, playing tug-of-war with my love handles. Belly blasters and fat burners and DIEt pills all become nuclear warfare waged against the vessel that's supposed to carry me through each day.

Gyms harbor psychological trauma, and so I hide cake in my locker room, hoping that the sugar high gives me enough courage to face the fear of the dread-mill. All uphill, I struggle to breathe under the fluorescent lights and FBI stares with no breaks anywhere in sight. But this whole time, unaware to me, every break has always been on my back. I push to the extremes, packing on the pressures, and carrying the weight of everyone's expectations along with the extra pain in my knees. And ankles. And hips. I take ibuprofen, one for every pant size.

I choke on the clay-filled muddy imprints, covering paper cuts laced with salted insults from last year's Cosmo trends. But I am grateful for the sting of disinfection, the exfoliation of the earth, washing away the self-hate and strangulation bruising. I think I'll travel a bit, love myself a little more, and allow society's fingerprints and expectations to be cleansed from my naked sculpture. Taking the flowing silk and oversized cloth from my curves, I begin my search for a dry-cleaning service to steam out the toxins, iron the wounds, and purify the burns. But I must be gentle, careful, soft ... After all, my cleansing instructions are meticulously precise, with my self-inscribed label reading, "Hand-wash warm, air dry. 100% Genuine."



Non-Toxic

Sarah Comer - Sculpture



Worst Enemy

Laura Scully - Stoneware

Now Combine Your Ingredients

Courtney Anderson - Poetry

I was made to marinate—
A slow roast for Sunday supper,
Bathing in a thick broth of butter and shame.
He's a cold cut—
Packaged and sealed,
Thinly sliced lean protein
Ready to eat.

We make dinner.

I'm oil and pepper and fat
Heat from the brick oven, heat from the cheeks
Laden in a dirty apron
Sweating and hungering, bustling kitchen.
He's a walk-in fridge—
Crisp, cold, lightly smudged stainless steel
Steeling his face, looking away
He cuts his finger on the blade and packs it with ice.

I'm seeds and pits and piths
Stringy, fleshy,
Juicy, messy,
I leave a slick stick on your counter and a mess to clean up.
He's bay leaves, bone broth, root vegetables
Not the star ingredient but an undeniable addition that
Leaves a certain kind of taste on the tongue.



An All-Natural Look

Sierra Hart - Oil on Canvas



Adam and Eve

Jernicya McCrackin - Drawing, Painting

New Age Girl

Rachel Anderson - Poetry

Open your eyes
For one thousand white women have gone by
Feminist title given to one group
By society
Counterproductive to the cause

What about those *hidden figures*
Who threw the first brick?
When you know come back

Femininity so defined as thin noses
And blonde hair
Soft doe eyes

Go anywhere else in the world
Beauty is only bound by the pockets it lines
Take it back

Because not even all the white ones
Live up to that standard

Please love your nose
Don't stay quiet when you're in pain
You're allowed to be angry
You should be
They stole your babies

Equal to the men on the hill
That's the kind of freedom to strive for
Because not all men
Have the same rights
In this mirage of freedom

Analogue

Madalynn Whitten - 35mm film



20 Years' Time | Madalynn Whitten - Poetry

A lost day
many long years ago,
glimpsing into a first cup of tea and
seeing a face that did not belong to me.

Reflections were reminders:
grocery store freezer aisles,
car door mirrors,
reflections in my own eyes.

A stranger I did not know met my stare.
A woman whose look held purpose
with cheeks defined
and lips of rose tint.

Shoe stores replaced playgrounds.
Heels hugged my feet
with legs unfamiliar to my downward gaze.
The world grew smaller.

Music caressed my mind,
not only my ears.
Hips swaying a bit more to this song,
arms reaching out into the open air.

Lace seemed more than fabric.
Dreams filled with desire.
Fingers gripping
a hand holding my own.

Curls over shoulders,
curves of fruit—
tastes which are now
much more passionate than before.

The nature of growth—
longing for it my whole life.
Familiar feelings
changing through reflections seen in cups of tea.

Lepidopterology

Sage Andrews - Poetry

Under fluorescent lights,
pinned
to a stainless steel table,
Relax, relax your muscles.
limbs spread
(insides spread)
We apologize
by medical jargon.
for the inconvenience,
the cold discomfort,
Open-backed gown,
Spread wings
With kitschy bright dots,
the pain,
hands beneath,
just relax,
relax.
pressing my chest
lightly.
The pin
*goes in **here** and—*

[1] *Lepidopterology: noun, the scientific study of the bodies of moths and butterflies*



Eclosion

Valkyrie Rutledge - Digital



Beauty Peaks Before Decay

Jillian DeGrie - Digital

Stolen Flesh and Mirrored Memory

Harley Mercadal - Poetry

This body is a vibrating, visceral thing.
Charlotte Pence says, *DNA is memory,*
which I thought was nice until life decided
Truth isn't given, it's earned, and I see
blood meridians flow like the darkest filigree.

A stranger walks into my job, freezes
like I'm a specter when I appear, and says,
God almighty, you look just like your Daddy standing there.
What a strange feeling to echo the dead so strongly,
a man who has never met me knows this fleshy fragment.

Schnumn leads me to ask again if
I'm a *menagerie of stolen things*
which, I think, *that sounds true.*
My mamaw would say something more gentle:
a patchwork quilt, maybe, or a good recipe.

Slate-blue circles for eyes—perhaps blueberries—
dark gold thread or lemon zest traded for blondeness,
ivory backing to milk and flour for this fleshy clay.
Mamaw might tell me *and that's not even half—*
use your wrist, girl, and fold in the rest. I stir, wondering.

The City of Death | Sydney Robertson - fiction

It has taken years to get here. Years of research, study, and preparation. At last, I stand at the feet of stoic, silent concrete and glass giants that crumble in slow motion around me. I am headed for a specific place, but it won't hurt to explore as I make my way there.

Usually, a team of professionals would attend to these kinds of things, but not today. Not here, not with the dangers that lie in wait. My team cowers safely in a bunker miles away, supposedly with direct connection to the device in my ear. When they stopped speaking a mile back, I figured we'd lost the connection. I stand completely alone in the center of the City of Death.

After overcoming my awe at finally being here, my mind goes into analysis mode. Of all the ruined cities I've seen, this one is the most lifeless. I nearly shout when something runs over my boot, but jumping and looking down, I find that it is simply a cockroach. Those don't count if you're looking for life. Settling back into my skin after the scare, I adjust the air filter covering my face, ensuring its security. I trek on. The concrete and asphalt are riddled with cracks, and I hardly avoid tripping over them because I can't stop looking up. The buildings are so tall, the imprint of a civilization full of ambition and reckless, detrimental abandon. I can't even imagine something like this rising from the world I know.

I've studied maps of this city for years. I could list street names and buildings and discrepancies in the layout, but it is completely different in person. All I heard as I was growing up were the horrors of what happened here, but as I studied and eventually prepared to make the trip, I unearthed the stories of beauties that happened here, too. Records broken and tremendous power and lavish parties and so, so many people. More people on one block than I've seen in my entire lifetime.

The Freedom Tower. I know it when I see it. It's not my destination, but I'm delighted to come upon it. The skyscraper is the tallest in the city. I can hardly conceptualize that it was once home to thousands of offices that people worked in every day. There is significant history to this building: patriotism and loss and hope all at once. I check my watch. I still have several hours. I step inside the building. It is supposedly the most structurally sound skyscraper in the area. Old blueprints say it could withstand a direct plane hit. I climb hundreds of flights of stairs. And once I reach the top, well, if anything can make a ruined land beautiful, it's a view like this. Up here, above the darkness of the buildings, the sun shines bright upon a lifeless city. I can see the harbor, and I can see the layout I have memorized. I can see the Empire State Building that has, against all odds, failed to topple. I can see the space where my destination is supposed to be, though it's hard to tell from this distance.

With a deep breath of the fresh air available to me up here, I descend the stairs and head in that direction. My research partner will probably tell me how many steps I walked today when I get back, but I don't bother to look now. People who lived here must have walked thousands of steps every day due to the limited transportation I've read about. Many cars are still jammed into the streets; I can almost hear the honking, and I can picture the subway system beneath my feet. Again, my brain finds it impossible to understand how many people there were, or how this society worked. They used to call it the city that never sleeps and, maybe even now, that is accurate. It lived and worked and moved and ran until one day it died.

I've seen old photos of my destination, the few surviving images. I know it used to be full of life and color, but that is far from the case now. In the silence of a lifeless city, I begin to hear things. My attention jerks to the left when I think I hear the rush of a subway train through the grates in the concrete. A few blocks up, I'm whipping my head to the right because the ghost of music floats down an alleyway. As more and more of the sounds I know used to be here echo in my ears, I rationalize it away with my knowledge of how the contaminated air can affect the brain. I walk faster.

At a jog with the phantom sounds of a street full of people around me, at last, I find myself in the right place. Hauntingly empty and silent billboards stare down at me from high above. Wind pushes trash through the street. I turn in a slow circle, taking it all in. Everything matches the images I've seen, but in those images, everything was life. This is death. I sink my tired body into a rusty red chair at the center of the square. The counterfeit sounds of life had stopped when I entered this place, but now, as I look around, my perception of reality changes.

Light dances before my very eyes, neon across the billboards. Music enters my ears, and the chatter of people crushes around me. Honking horns and shouting follow, filling me with an underlying sense of dread, but covering it: awe. The city takes up life again all around me; whether I'm hallucinating or seeing it for real, I do not know. My rationalizations about the polluted air are long gone. A scientist and historian remains entranced where she sits, the desperate radio transmissions of her team unable to reach her. Perhaps she never could have researched, studied, or prepared enough anyway. The sun sets as the city that never sleeps awakens from the dead. ●

Jazz Combo

Kenneth Bean - Digital



Disassociate

Faith Edwards - Oil & Acrylic



Exploring the World

Hunter Hoffman - Video



Philophobia

Emily Hagan - Poetry

I'm worried that I've drunk the last of milk and honey,
that I've become accustomed to once astonishing rays of sunlight.
I worry I no longer fall in love with how birds sing behind my window,
or waking to the first snow of winter on a Sunday morning.

I don't know how I take the light from these things.
I've always had a knack for making the lunar mother feel like a common occurrence.
I remember when I used to compose ballads
about the spark when you touched my cheek.
Now I write about the silence in our bedroom
and how it's become more comforting than your voice.
If I can't stay in love with someone who makes me feel whole,
will I ever stop feeling empty?

Everyone Watching Me

Faith Edwards - Ceramic



The Effects of Capitalism on the Modern American Family

Anthony Czelusniak - Poetry

Loose bills scattered around the oak table,
thrown about after harsh words
with an unfair banker.

A mortgage is left unpaid;
still they try to collect
the rent they feel is due.

Pops stormed off to the garage.
Vulgarities sneak through the walls
into the dining room

where ma, holding her face
in her damp palms, wonders,
"Why does it always come to this?"

The oldest son thumbs through a rule book,
still going on about free parking,
as the youngest pleads for some quiet.

At the center of this mess is
a single word of red and white,
accompanied by a pewter thimble:

Monopoly.™

Receipt

Percy Verret - Poetry

you are asleep
your heels are propped up
on the further arm
of the lounge
your head ranged
somewhere amongst
my lap and chest and
arms
I am unable to reach
a book or empty
notepad
and the evil demon
of lost time whispers
to me to slide myself
out from under your
precious head so that
I may bend myself to
my work—immortalizing
my life by splattering
my name on the
spine of hallowed art
for all to know that
I once lived—
I once breathed—
I once signified—
but I realize
I know
as I pause thus in
temptation's clutch
beneath your sprawled form
in fate-weighted, panicked
sense of need
to shift you to the side
and expend my Life in
producing a
receipt of its existence
that this is the moment
the moment in which my
Life existed—here quiet with
you: the moment I shall think of
when, after an unimpressive
parade of years I ask myself
"where did the time go?"
this is where all time went:
It was poured out—an
anointing—upon this moment;
this is the moment that I lived—
and silencing taunts of history
I cradle your slumbering
consciousness ever closer.



The Four Brown Women B&W

Jernicya McCrackin - Drawing

Old Friends

Zoe Naylor - Poetry

There's a certain grace that comes with old friendships.

A love that has sprung from the ground,
grown buds,
bloomed,
shriveled,
died,
and now holds steadfast to its quiet beauty:
that of a dried flower.

There is age in the beauty.
Dark spots,
wrinkles,
and crinkled edges.

An old friend is not one you get dressed up to see,
jittery with the buzz of anticipation.

An old friend is someone you are relieved to see—
like coming home to yourself after a long day,
resting in the familiar companionship,
loving how you lean into it.

An old friend isn't someone you're excited to see,
but someone who relaxes you
and says,

"Welcome back.
It's been a while.
Come sit a spell?"

Pink

Jillian DeGrie - Oil paint



The Lady Adia of Lagos

Jernicya McCrackin - Ceramic



Summertime Unspooling | Abigail Wells - Poetry

The sun is hanging low—
like a ripe lemon bending on the branch
almost kissing the ground—
like a peach being sliced on the veranda,
juice dripping from your lips,
flesh falling from in between your fingers
and onto the cool cement.

The summer always seems to slip away like this.

The sun is hanging low.
While we paddle downstream,
the warm breeze blows your hair about
your face, so I brush it from your eyes.
Afternoon light envelopes your skin.
Not a single cloud.
Not a single tree.
Head back, eyes closed, mouth wide open—
laughing—
so placid I no longer question if this is it.

If this is what love is.

The sun is hanging low,
but we unspool time
and ride our bicycles into town,
collect quarters from the parking lots,
then hop into sauna-like phone booths
and make long distance calls in which
I beg my mother to let me stay,

and you beg your parents
to stay married.

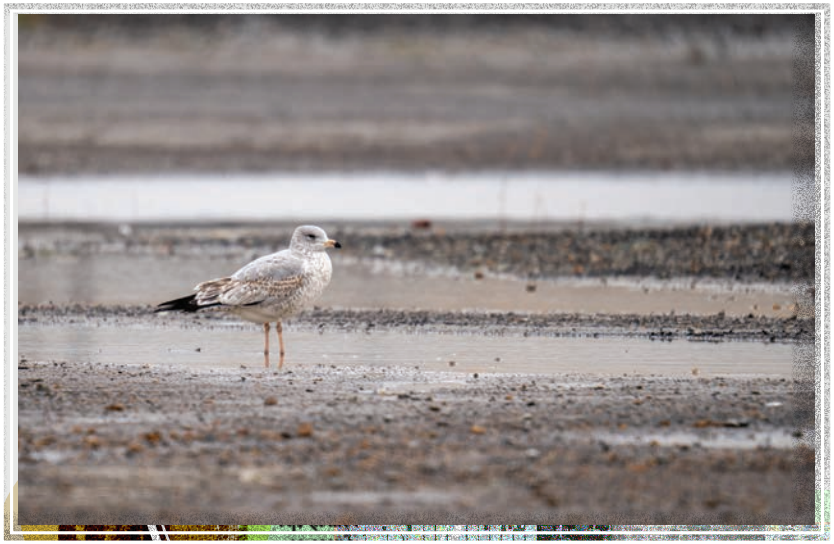
Lying on an old duvet, we
eat raspberries off each other's fingertips
and shield our eyes from the sun—
hanging low.
I breathe promises into the nape of your neck.
Your face is wet, and I do not ask why.

The summer always seems to slip away like this.

Hat's Off!
Devin Spivey - Digital



Last Vestiges of the Sea
Anthony Czelusniak - Digital



Repeat After Me

Chelsea Gardiner - *Collage, Pencil on Paper*



Quiet Compression | Harley Mercadal - *Poetry*

I used to be the open type:
open to speaking of my truth,
open to letting others speak theirs.
But nowadays, I keep my truth pressed
tight into a shell that I keep tucked
under my ribcage like a vital secret.

I dig the shell out often enough,
my fingernails scraping the slick
bloody casing of my body—but
only in private, in silence, in *alone*—
press the shell to my ear and listen
for the waves echoing this or that.

Rushes of sound hurt my ears,
each echo a crescendo of tinnitus.
I wonder if other people hear it, too:
pounding, wet slaps against the viscera,
wave after wave after wave of emotional
memory unknown and undealt with–

Owl Cat | Ox Zante - Digital Art



Angora Nightmares

Lisa Hardie - Poetry

I didn't see the waning rabbit at first,
underneath and through the dense bramble.
I heard a noise and found myself there,
leaning over the circle of wilted grass.
I saw its smooth, heathered fur barely rising
out of hushed breaths, uncaring that I joined it
in this dark, hidden space behind the leaves.

I scooped it up,
I didn't know better.

I hadn't seen the pale tendrils of mushrooms,
miniscule caps curling from its underbelly, thriving
off an animal still alive but half-asleep, shifting
through shades of indefinite dreams. While its
heart stayed steady against my palms, my own
began to thud heavily, and in answer,
the fungus bloomed along my inner wrist,
veins of mycelium running beneath my skin,
its branched pathways not spread but awakened.

I dropped it back,
I didn't know better.

Moonlight

Molly Stegall - Poetry

The light from that which is pure
reveals so much, making the ugly
enchantingly sweet.

It makes the hard shell of a
black beetle glisten as its strong jaws
decapitate its opponent.

The beams escape from the leaves
to catch a grey owl as its talons sink into the
soft flesh of a mouse.

It awakens a barely asleep
insomniac, whose sunken-in eyes
look at nothing.

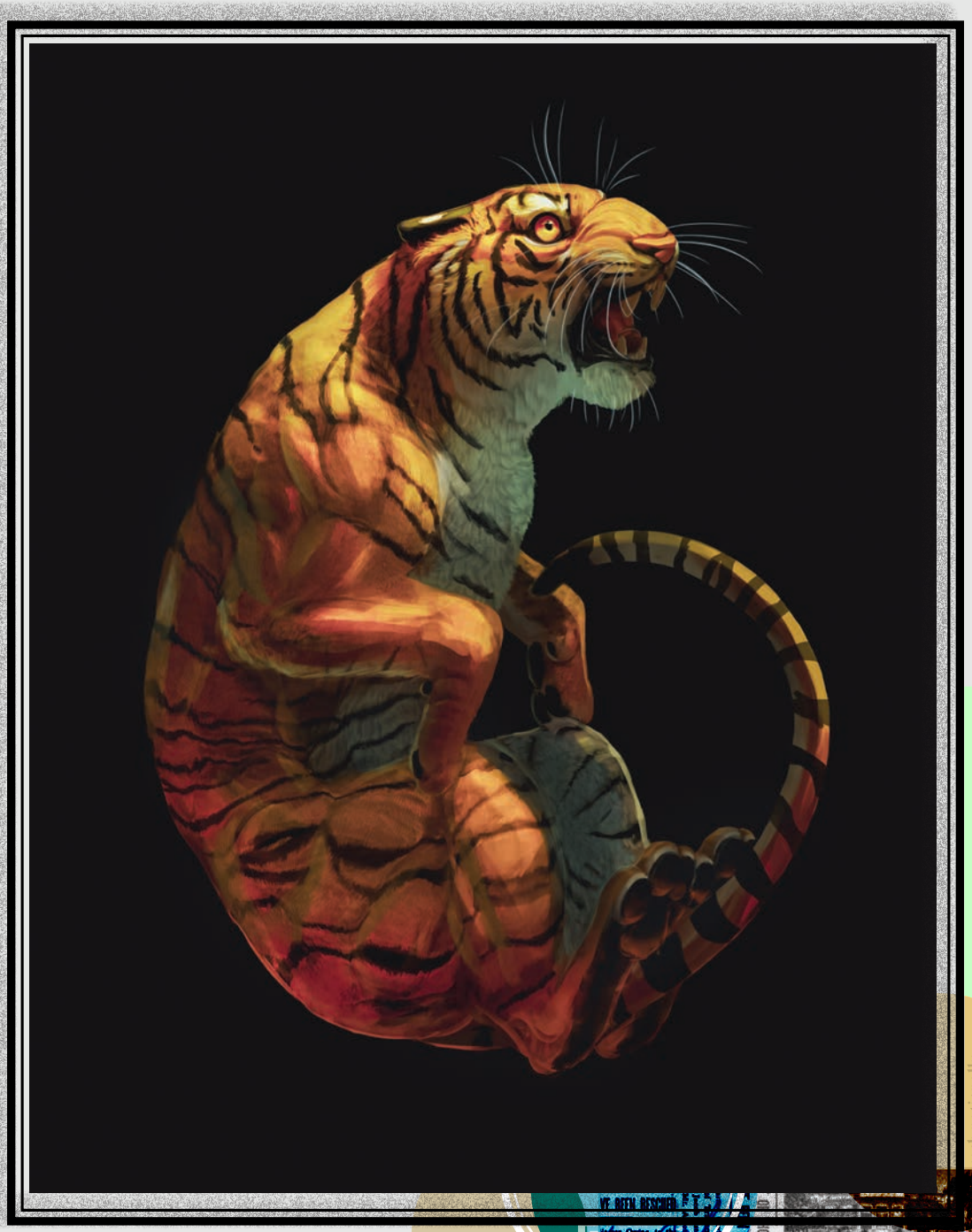
A green glass bottle reflects the pale glint,
clutched in the loose grip of a lonely
old man in his car.

Pale skin sharply glistens off a couple
wrestling in the grass, sweat
coating them.

The red shine against
the swollen, pale, once-beautiful
woman on the dirt.

A thick cloud shrouds the moon,
capturing the light for itself.

Tiger | Ox Zante - Digital Art





Autonomous Ann

Laura Scully - Sculpture

Ghazal of Celestial Shine

Caroline Bailey - Poetry

Driving down a dilapidated country road,
My mother, with her freckled cheeks and crow's feet, tells me—look up, and see the stars.

When they wink at the mini people below, their dotted eyes glisten.
The people lift their gazes to stare in awe at the stars.

Hidden when smog smothers, or through the lens of a grotty camera;
In the city, you can't see the stars.

Skin sometimes shines. Scars and freckles.
They bedizen the body like stars.

Starshine is braided with burgundies. Inside smooth ceruleans, liquid magentas swirl
(Beauty may differ, but all the stars shine).

We pluck, inject, laser, reduct, rejuvenate, erase—
And stretch into the sky, so that we might lustre and fluoresce like those incandescent stars.

The dancers with bruised toes, singers and their fatigued throats;
All desire a place among the stars.

My mother curls a strand of flaxen hair behind my ear and smiles into the mirror.
Her skin crinkles at the corners: "What a beautiful little star."

Beauty is thick brows, hooked noses, love-handles.
It is Mother's stocky fingers, her wizened eyes like stars.

Andromeda, Cassiopeia, Sirius, Orion—names of celestial beauty. Everyone—look up and see!
Mine, and *all* our beautiful names, written in stars.



Masked Vigilante

Devin Spivey - film

Patience

Rosemarie Kuenn - Poetry

Time after time,
I wait for you.
Wait for your call,
Wait for your shift to end.
I use up my time
Waiting for you to use some of yours on me.
It is not a very rewarding experience
By any stretch of the imagination.
But since I do not see you as I would like to,
I look for you in everything I meet.
The night sky is your hair and your eyes.
The wind is you and I in my car.
The swirling insects are you pulling my hair.
This makeup is for you,
Though you may not see it.
Every composition of music is tainted by you.
And most importantly,
Every man reflects a piece of you.
You are not all too different.
I have learned this with difficulty.
So though I may not see you much,
I also see you everywhere.
And maybe you see me too.
Maybe that's why seeing me in actuality
Isn't all too necessary for you.
Still, I pray for more.
It is unlikely I will be able to
Grieve my own death.
Maybe that will be the one thing
You bother to do for me.

Great Blue Heron

Daniel Schafer - Digital



Ely, Minnesota | Abigail Wells - Poetry

The water looks like crude oil
this time of night.
The deer come out and
overturn lily pads with the tips of their noses.
Dew clings to cattails
then drips onto my flowing skirt when
I brush against the overgrown plants.

I run barefoot across the endless lawn,
the fireflies like fallen stars
floating around on earth.
They are tired of the darkness, the distance
between themselves and us.

But I am tired of Ely—
the empty swimming pools
and mosquitos the size of vultures.
Sweaters in summer and the blinding reflection
of the sun bouncing off the water.
Blueberry lemonade
that keeps me wanting more.

The floorboards creak under my feet
when I restlessly sneak outside.

From my kayak—
bright red like a sunburn—
I watch bald eagles feed their children.
I wonder how long it would take me
to sink to the bottom.

The water looks like crude oil
this time of night.
I sit on the bank and strike a match.
I watch it burn up in my hands.

in books
they point out the foreshadowing
and the irony
and yet when it happens
to you
in Real Life
you rarely notice
we are our own narrators
yet we are not omnipotent
so
when your father hurts you
but wishes he had a son
that is a cruel form of irony
that goes unnoticed
and when he wishes for you to be silent
that is foreshadowing
that there will be a day
when your voice will be the loudest sound in the room
and you do not yet know but
when he says he does not like your partner
it is both irony and foreshadowing
because "no other man is ever good enough"
morphs into "i don't trust him"
as you find your voice
it becomes a frenetic pace
of running when you feel like walking
and shouting when you feel like dying
because your voice is the sharpest weapon you possess
and for once
you know what is going to happen
but you don't
and in books at least there is some guarantee
that the protagonist sees the end of the novel
so you keep going
keep narrating
keep being.

Understanding Eternity

Donavon King - Clay Sculpture





Duplicity

Sai Clayton - Oil on Canvas

Those Bodies Buried Beneath

Nash Meade - Poetry

People always speak about forever,
About that fulfilling feeling
Of love everlasting.
Golden rings become permanent pieces
Of heaven—shards from the bricks
That pave that city in the clouds—
As though earth-bound hearts can ascend.

People never talk about the sorrows,
Those bodies buried beneath
The bedposts—boogeymen
Coiled to spring, bored
Of haunting the shadows.

Those shed skins never die;
They only sink deeper into the earth.
We buried them together each night,
Peeling them off each other
With words and actions—
Sometimes a kiss, sometimes a shout.

Little rings aren't charms to protect
Us from the dead; instead, they
Only highlight that untarnished gold
Comes at the price of dirty hands
And dirty hearts, cleansed over and over
'Til the wishing and washing leaves
Behind that self buried by the buried,
The self whose heartbeat you heard
The first night you laid your head on
My worm-eaten heart and felt the dirt
Already beneath my fingers.

Canopies

Micaela Anderson - Poetry

To exist quietly,
a moment in motion.
To inhale breaths of pine and sunlight,
exhaling body and soul
under a canopy of sage, olive, vermillion.

To be 19 and to not know the now comfortably
because millions of them stretch behind and before.
To strike the earth,
pounding down and kicking up
chocolate, sienna, coffee.
Golden definitions at the edge of each branch,
each dip of muscle meeting bone.

It is everything and more
to be content.

Homme

Ross Sibley - Digital



Minzy

Morgan Ruth - Video



No Shame in My Game

Kenneth Bean - Digital



The Waffle House Morning

Livi Goodgame - Poetry

The warm feeling grows like the dawn
on the autumn leaves
on the tips of the trees—
blazing brighter every minute.
Their hues drown out the dark
and drowsiness in my heart
as I drive home through the grey.
My eyes are weary and wide—
what just happened?
How did it go so right?

It wasn't a scene in a romance
with a dramatic slow dance
or a song in the rain.
There are no love anthems to blast in
the car,
no sparks to light my heart on fire,
but everything is warm
and I can't stop looking at
the dawn on the autumn leaves.



Lifting as We Grow

Neely Jordan - Ceramic

Homeward Bound

Madalynn Whitten - Poetry

Brooklynites who head to northern Queens
take the G train up past
Prospect Park, switching
to the Flushing local—7,
up under Calvary Cemetery.

A stench rests in the empty seats
as the 7 train makes its 5th stop
on 52nd street.
Homebound commuters file in
wearing the reek on their clothes.

The doors stay open the full 21.15,
though no passenger is heard hustling
down the stairs, yelling
to hold the doors even just a crack
so that he can make it home as well.

The train waits for more to board.
Those coming from Calvary Cemetery
fight their way for a spot in the car,
hanging from the handlebars, lying in the air,
longing to get home, too.

The warm, with their fingers
plugging their noses from the stink
The dead, with their hands
pressed against the windows
look out at nothing but molded concrete tombs.



An April Monday

Harley Mercadal - Poetry

I.

The day starts off busy. I find myself at work,
caught between a heat press and a worktable
where one is four hundred degrees at my back,
one coldly reflects the white light at my belly.
The problem with working the family business
is that everything, every job, every argument,
is personal, and the bad news cannot leave you.

II.

My stepfather holds up the tape measurer, his
thumb marking the line at six centimeters.
That's about the size of it, he says calmly,
about the size of a chicken egg, I'd reckon.
The world does not stop spinning; I do not
go cold or numb with the fear I imagined.
Instead, I say, *Well, I think that's manageable.*

III.

We go to work printing t-shirts, as we always do.
Comfortable silence stretches between intervals
of the air compressor roaring and the press hissing.
When my mother comes in, we know to switch
to playful banter, conversations about other things.
No one wants the heart-pounding silence, the welling
of tears, nor the continuation plans of whatever is after.



Colorful Day

Pau Mung - Digital

Scribe

Emily Hagan - Poetry

I carefully catalog each catastrophe
and time-stamp every single trauma.
I could write for years about transgressions
and desperate admissions of your guilt.
I never write about our good days,
and how I wish I could still call them my favorite days.
Each sun spot showing through the tinted window;
I can count those I remember on one hand.

I know I had to have been happy;
I'm sure there must be so much more than I can recall.
I've blocked them out in the name of self-preservation,
because to me remembering well means forgiveness.
I wish I could remember why I loved you,
then I could remember why I stayed.
Did I waste my youth for nothing?
Did I forsake you on a shaky memory?

I know this couldn't be the case;
I may have been a child, but I was smart.
My working model was a child's understanding of war:
an intangible goliath of necessity.
I can still remember writing in those hidden notebooks,
shoving them in between my bed and the wall before you came home.

I wonder when I'll stop discovering new ones on my visits home.



Fairy Woman

Adriana Pomatto - Digital Illustration

Audio

Skyline Drive

Maya Ronick

Going Dark Again

Shelby Rehberger

Mountain's Plea

Maya Ronick

Black-Eyed Susan

Maya Ronick

Garden

Cassie Sistoso

Satisfied

Michael Barham

In Between

Cassie Sistoso

About Collage

A Journal of Creative Expression

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, Honors College, MTSU student body, staff, or administrators. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or utilized in any form without written permission from the editor or adviser of *Collage*. Inquiries should be addressed as follows:

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Submit to Collage

Collage accepts submissions of original student creative work year-round, including art, photography, design, short stories, creative nonfiction, short plays, song lyrics, poetry, videos/films, and audios. Online submissions may be made through our website, http://www.mtsucollage.com.

Policy Statement

Collage: A Journal of Creative Expression is an MTSU creative magazine featuring submitted work chosen by a volunteer staff in a blind grading process. The staff attempts to choose the best work without regard for theme or authorship.

Although *Collage* is sponsored by the University Honors College, staff members and submitters are not required to be Honors students. Staff members are selected each semester from a pool of applicants. Go to http://www.mtsucollage.com or mtsu.edu/collage to complete an online staff application.

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

Gold Crown Awards: 2012, 2013, and 2015

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Collage

Creative Expression Awards

Each semester, the *Collage* staff selects Creative Expression Awards from among the highest-rated submissions. Winners receive $75 awards.

Disassociate
Faith Edwards - Art

Receipt
Percy Verret - Poetry

Because of the Clovers
Nick Poe - Prose

Eclosion
Valkyrie Rutledge - Photo

Mimzy
Morgan Ruth - Video

Skyline Drive
Maya Ronick - Audio

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