

FLORA FICTION

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Entries for the seasonal Literary Magazine are done quarterly. Please visit florafiction.com/submit

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Festivals hold a special place in the hearts of artists and creative souls alike. They embody the essence of celebration and remembrance, drawing inspiration from the tapestry of human experiences. Whether it's a gathering of cultures, a commemoration of historical events, or a jubilant expression of life's abundant blessings, festivals bring communities together and ignite the spark of creativity within us all.

In this collection, we have been fortunate enough to witness the brilliance and diversity of artistic voices, woven seamlessly into the vibrant fabric of festival-themed pieces. Through their stories, poems, and artworks, our contributors have illuminated the multifaceted nature of festivals, encapsulating their essence in every stroke of the pen and brush.

For some, festivals serve as a joyful reunion with cherished traditions and customs passed down through generations. In their writings, they capture the palpable excitement, the tantalizing aromas, and the rhythmic beats that stir the soul. These creators invite us to partake in their festivities, allowing us to experience the magic firsthand, no matter where we may find ourselves.

Others delve into the more introspective aspects of festivals, exploring the layers of meaning that lie beneath the surface. They remind us that festivals are not merely occasions for revelry, but also opportunities for reflection and remembrance. Through their poignant words and evocative imagery, they invite us to contemplate the significance of these moments of collective jubilation, stirring emotions deep within our hearts.

We extend our deepest gratitude to all the artists and contributors who have shared their work in this collection. Your creativity, passion, and dedication have transformed this issue into a kaleidoscope of emotions, a testament to the power of festivals in our lives. Through your artistry, you have allowed us to revel in the beauty of celebration and remembrance.

May this volume be a source of inspiration, a reminder of the profound connections we forge during festivals, and a celebration of the countless stories waiting to be told. We invite you to immerse yourself in this world of festivities and savor the magic within its pages.

xoxo
Flora Ashe

we are all
just a bunch
of

STORY
TELLERS

"Storyteller"
MD Antidot is a self-taught independent artist. She experiments using various techniques that include stencils, collages, bold texts and colors, that come together to express a powerful message.

"Immortal" By: MD Antidot

in the SUMMER

WE ARE

immortal





"The Ultimate Car Festival"

Lois Villemaire resides in Annapolis, MD. She is retired and writes creative nonfiction, memoir, and poetry in her sunny kitchen. Her work has been published in a number of journals and anthologies.

The Carver County Fair

BY: KELLI J GAVIN

I used to judge the talent competition at the fair.
I had to stop offering my services when I realized that I couldn't be kind and pretend that
everyone had a future in show business.

No, you can not sing.
I learned to smile at adult dancers and cloggers.
Apparently, I shouldn't be a judge.

Kelli J Gavin is a writer, professional organizer, mom, wife and seeker of shenanigans





"Merry and Bright"

Sara Caporaletti is a multi-media visual artist living in Maryland. Caporaletti received her BA in studio art from McDaniel College and her MFA in interdisciplinary fine art from American University.



"Aoi Matsuri Festival 2"

Ellen Pliskin is a painter, printmaker and photographer. Her works are currently on view at the United States Embassy in Ouagadougou, Burkino-Faso.





"Golden Week" By: Ellen Pliskin



"Have a Happy! Fireworks"

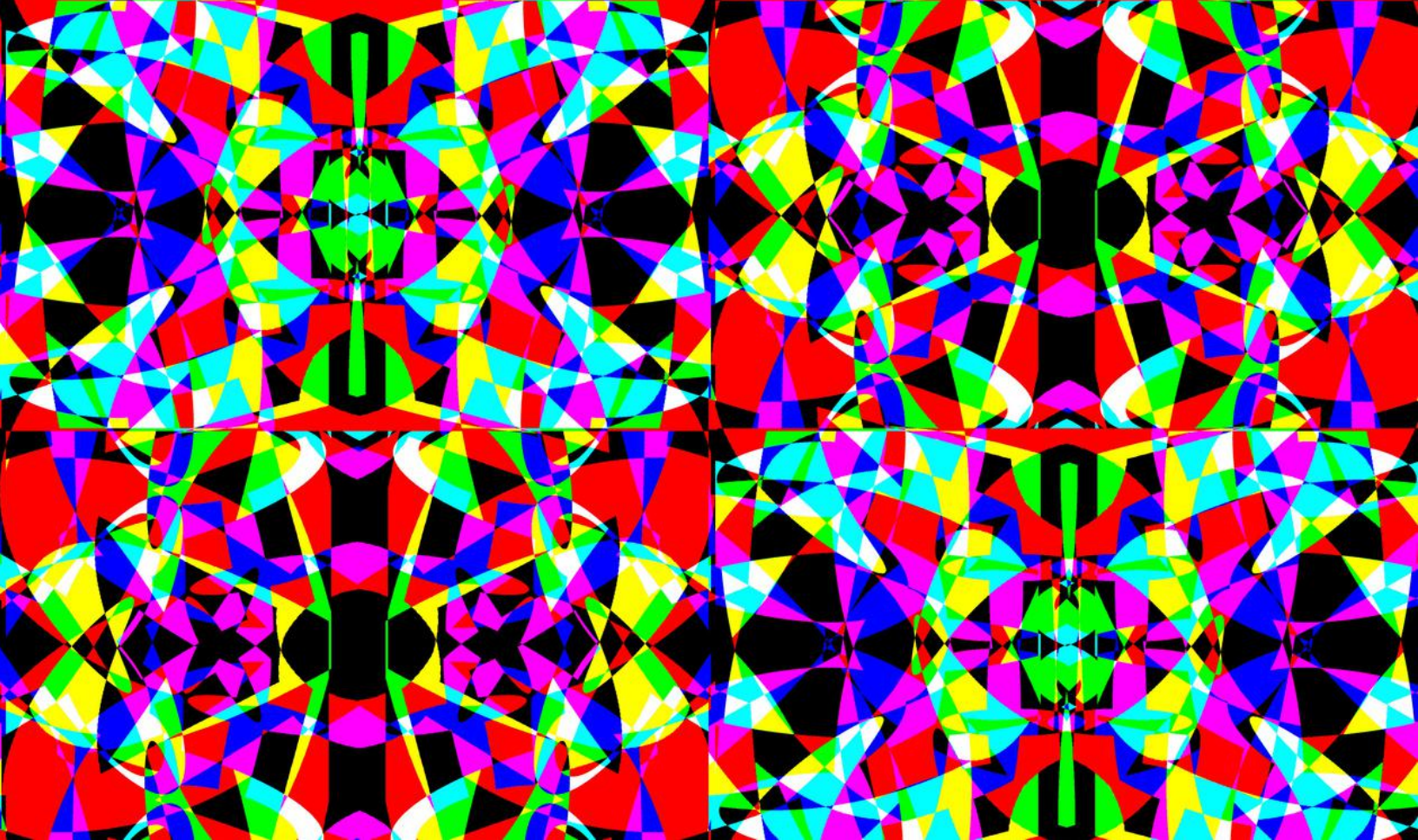


"Fireworks Fest"

Lois Bender holds an MFA from Boston University, and a B.A. (Hunter College, NY). Her art practice interprets nature in painting, mixed media, and printmaking. She is represented by Sara Nightingale Gallery, Sag Harbor, NY.

"French Bastille Day Fireworks"

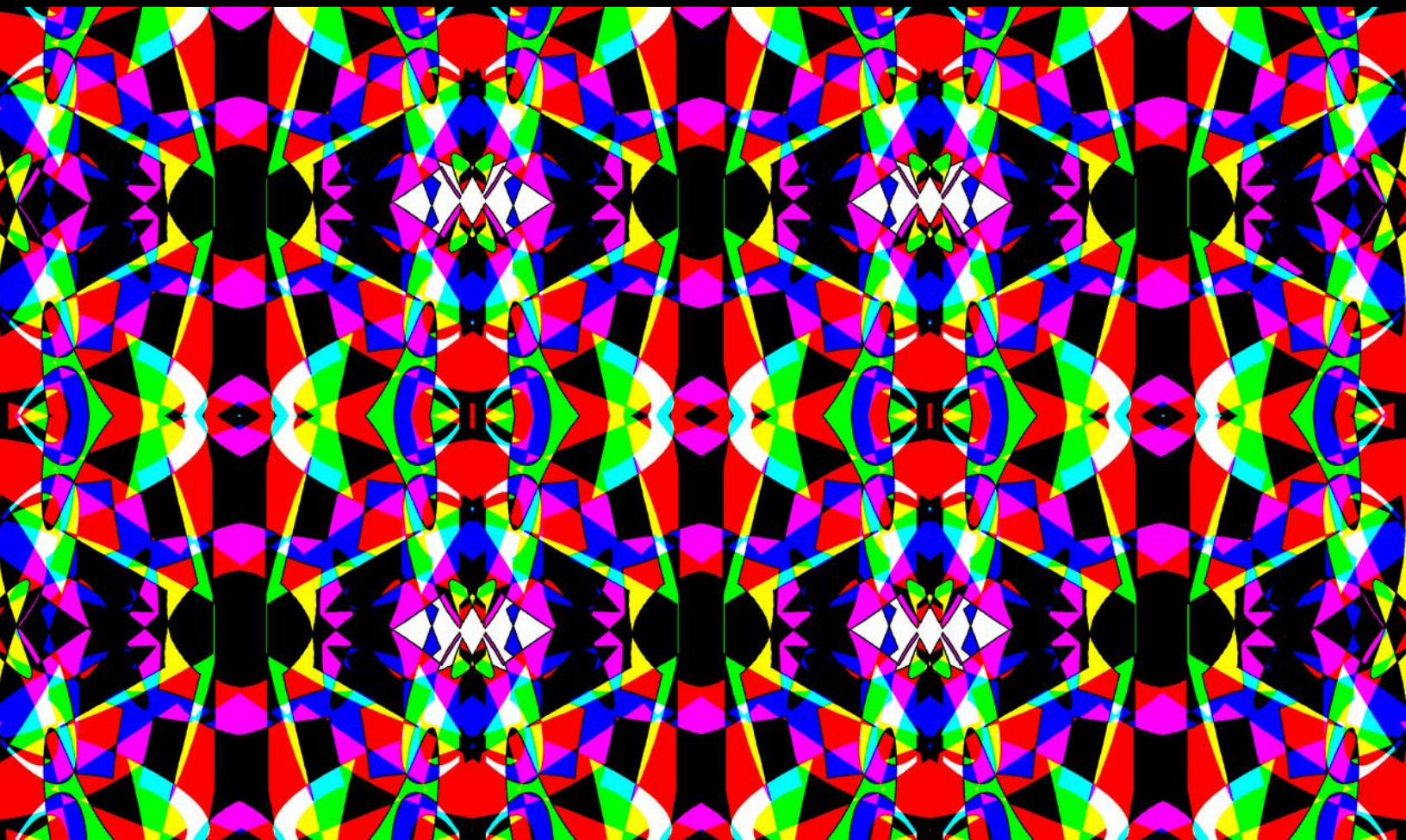




Above: "Spring Forward "

Edward Michael Supranowicz is an artist and poet who descends from Irish and Russian/Ukrainian immigrants. He grew up on a small farm in Appalachia. He's a grad background in painting and printmaking. Some work is featured in *Fish Food*, *Streetlight*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, *The Door Is A Jar*, *The Phoenix*, and *The Harvard Advocate*.

Below: "A Dance in the Sunlight"



"Purple is the Day"



"Rainbow Color"

Dr. Helge H. Paulsen's central research approach that is "The Essence of the Images." As a social scientist with a doctorate specializing in the sociology of art, the question of the effect of the image has always been of central importance. In the tradition of the best-known art sociologist, he worked from art to image to photography. Images are social and cultural symptoms of their field of origin.





Cotton Candy Sunset

BY: CARELLA KEIL

Dreams mingle with the porcelain of reality.

I wonder how many protoplanets were ground up to make my coffee, as the bangles I stole from Saturn cascade down my wrist.

You are what you eat. I'll take the yolks of universes, an event horizon, the frosting off an iced galaxy. I wait impatiently for the other guests to arrive, digesting meteorites and flossing stars from between my teeth.

Carella Keil is a writer and digital artist who splits her time between the ethereal world of dreams, and Toronto, Canada, depending on the weather.



The Baptism

BY: COCO OEI

I had never seen Mamá without the layers of makeup caked on her small face. She had a signature look: ultra-white face powder, plum-colored drugstore eyeshadow, and dark chocolate lipstick. And even as she went to bed, the dark shades still shadowed her features.

Oftentimes, she reminded me of the Wayang Golek puppets that lurked in the corners of our school's music room.

Every morning as we waited for my bus, the vagrants and bystanders would whistle at her. Mamá paid them no mind, which made me think that this was a normal way men greeted beautiful women 'good morning.'

It was only last June that I saw my mother's real face. That same summer a few days after Papa died.

Every 24th of June, our town of San Juan would celebrate the Feast of St. John the Baptist, the prophet who baptized Jesus Christ in the River Jordan.

It's my favorite day because it's time for the Wattah Wattah Festival. Mamá would never come along though. She still says it's too loud and "overwhelming," but I personally like the chaos. The vibrant colors, the music, the heterogenous smells, and all the people looking so happy amid the sadness. It also makes me happy. Amid my sadness. Because I know Papa's not here to take me anymore. Papa, who I believe, liked the chaos too.

Two years ago, Papa promised that when I was old enough, I could join the Hataw-Hataw - the yearly street dancing competition among the intermediate schools in town. Kids in ostentatious costumes flip around, do a bajillion cartwheels, stand on tall stilts, and all these other crazy stunts that a kid shouldn't be allowed to do. Then again, there is a fifty thousand peso cash prize from the Mayor. Can you imagine? You could buy eight hundred pieces of Jollibee Chickenjoy with that!

There's also what we call "Boodle Fight." Sadly, there isn't really any fighting involved. Except maybe fighting for your life on the toilet after. The Boodle Fight is a traditional Filipino style of dining where people eat at a very long table lined with large banana leaves and copious amounts of food. The mothers and grandmothers usually prepare a wonderful feast, putting together a banquet of fragrant jasmine rice, grilled pork belly, skewers of pork barbecue (glazed with banana ketchup), fresh galunggong with sea grapes, sliced green mangoes, and salted duck eggs dyed in a bright magenta color. The duck eggs used to remind me of Mamá.

During Boodle Fight, everyone stands over the table waiting for the Mayor to yell out, “KAIN!” This means “EAT!” in Tagalog. And when I say everyone, I mean everyone. You’ll see the affluent Mrs. Lisbon poking a piece of meat with a plastic fork while her maid stands beside her shoveling food with a hand. You’ll see my best friend Tin-Tin, the most mischievous student in Maharlika Elementary, gorging on liempo with vinegar-soaked fingers right across from our draconian homeroom teacher Ma’am Gatdula. It’s a hodge-podge of characters, but we all come together to celebrate.

Suddenly, a cloud of smoke appears followed by a series of cheers. I can imagine Papa’s face now, sniffing in the savory aroma. The hints of lemon grass and garlic wafting through the smoggy air. You know how Tom from Tom and Jerry starts levitating whenever he gets a whiff of a freshly baked pie? That’s what my dad looked like whenever the Lechon arrived.

The Lechon is the star of the feast. Its entrance is almost as supreme as the procession of the Black Nazareno. Picture this - a group of muscular men hustling in and hoisting a large bamboo pole. Pierced through it is a tender, juicy, crispy suckling pig. The Lechon’s skin is roasted to golden perfection and glistening under the scorching sun. Everyone starts cutting into it; shreds and pieces of its fatty flesh spilling out onto the banana leaves. Papa would always serve me the skin (even if he knew Mamá would kill me before the cholesterol did). It was our little secret.

But for me and Papa, the most magical part of Wattah Wattah was the “Basaan.” In literal translation, “the dousing of water.” It’s basically a city-wide water fight. And who doesn’t love water fights? All kinds of people – young and old, rich and poor – splashing and chasing each other with water balloons, buckets, water guns, bottles, anything to drench the other person. I do feel bad for the motorcyclists and innocent passersby who aren’t privy to Wattah Wattah, but that’s Wattah Wattah for you.

Just a few days before last year’s Wattah Wattah, Papa went away forever. It made me so angry. We were supposed to go together. We were supposed to eat the lechon skin in secret. We were supposed to get so dripping wet that our shirts would stick to our bodies. Then later on, Mamá would scream at us for the huge puddles we’d made. He promised that when I got older, I could finally perform and that he would be there to cheer me on.

I decided I wouldn’t go. I had a plan: I would lock myself in my room and stay miserable. Because not having my favorite person alive on my favorite day was something to be miserable about. But before I could lock the door, Mamá entered.

“What?” I wasn’t having it.

“I’m ready. Get dressed,” she said. “Or not. You’ll get wet anyway.”

That day, Mamá held my hand as splashes of water came from every which way, like violent ocean waves. I could barely open my eyes, and when I finally did, I saw a strange woman smiling sadly at me with colors of purple staining her face and neck. Tears in her eyes merged with the water. This time, like a soft stream.

That day, I saw my mother’s real face. I held her tight, letting the flood in.

In Vermont

BY: MARY PAULSON

We pick mushrooms out of cow shit.
Me, I can't tell one from the other,
but Brad, with his clever aptitude for everything,
can tell which will make you sick,
which will send you soaring.

Soaring is not my style. I'm earth-bound.
I think it's because I'm a girl. I want walls, fortification,
indoor plumbing, black stone double slipper soaking tub,
carerra marble floor set in herringbone pattern.
A vast, unfurled sky makes me edgy, nauseous—

Still, it's good to know how to fly, to know
the feeling of those loose, beating wings behind your ribs
is not for nothing. We sail back
to our friend's cabin with stars dripping from our eyes.

Twelve hours later, there are five of us laughing
so hard, tears stain our cool cotton shirts dark.
Jordan is blind, Brad is God, Dan is nursing his wounds,
Tim has learned to play guitar. I am busy preparing
a nest for all of us, circling my arms and legs into a giant O.

Mary Paulson's writing has appeared in multiple publications, most recently in *Sparks of Calliope*, *The Pomegranate London*, *Vita Brevis' ANTHOLOGY IV*, *Hare's Paw*, *VAINÉ Magazine* and *Cathexis Northwest Press*. Her debut chapbook, *Paint the Window Open* was published by Kelsay Publishing in 2021. She lives in Naples, Florida.

"The Charlestonian Pineapple Delight"
By: Lynn Dowless





"S.C. Paradise Oasis" By: Lynn Dowless

"The Healing"

Valerie Berry is a liver failure survivor and sober artist. Her paints are full of my emotions and imagination.



Paige B.

St. Stanislaus Festival

BY: DUANE ANDERSON

Tell me why I was standing in line holding
an umbrella during a downpour, for I really
didn't have a sane reason? Yes, the line

was a little shorter than the year before,
but still, it didn't make me feel any better
as I stood in a food line with hundreds

of others just like me, getting wet,
some holding umbrellas, some wearing rain
ponchos, while others with no extra protection

from the rain other than the clothes on their
backs that they were wearing.
There was no line at the ticket booth

for those wishing to purchase tickets
for any of the carnival rides, and besides,
only one carnival ride was in action,

the Ferris Wheel, and it had only one rider
braving the rain. All the other carnival workers
were sitting inside some of the dragons

from the Dizzy Dragon ride, not
wanting to get any wetter than they
already were. I stood in line for an hour

waiting to get my annual dosage of Polish foods
consisting of two of my favorites, Golabkis and Peroiges,
something my system tells me I need once a year.

I must have been crazy for standing in line
in the rain for an hour, so tomorrow,
I am making an appointment to see a psychiatrist.

DUANE ANDERSON currently lives in La Vista, NE. He has had poems
published in Fine Lines, Cholla Needles, and several other publications. He is
the author of 'Conquer the Mountains.'





"Flower"

Zoe Nikolopoulou is a self-taught watercolor illustrator from Athens, Greece. She is also a poet and translator watching inspiration taking shape into paper.

Happy Bird Day

BY: DOUG SMITH

"Mommy, there are red birds. Right?"

"Yes, Annie. There are red birds."

"Good. I'm going to draw a red bird." Annie then drew a red bird with a red crayon.

"Mommy, there are blue birds. Right?"

"Yes, Annie. There are blue birds." I

"Good. Because I'm going to draw a blue bird now." Annie then drew a blue bird with a blue crayon.

Every time she brought out her crayons, that was her routine: first red, then blue, then yellow, then brown, and then black. But she would often go on.

"Mommy, are there birds that are all orange?"

"I don't think so, Annie."

"Can I draw one?"

"Yes, Annie. You can draw one."

Then Annie drew an orange bird with her orange crayon.

"Mommy, are there birds that are all green?"

"I don't think so, Annie."

"Can I draw one?"

"Yes, Annie. You can draw one."

Then Annie drew a green bird with her green crayon.

When she didn't know the names of some of the other colors, she held up the crayon and said: "Mommy, are there birds this color?" Then, after her mom's response, Annie would draw a bird of that color.

Annie loved birds. In addition to coloring birds, she often pretended to be a bird. She would flap her arms, pretending she could fly. As she flapped her arms, she would say, "Tweet. Tweet. Tweet." She flapped her arms and ran into the kitchen, saying, "Tweet. Tweet. Tweet." She flapped her arms and ran up and down the hallway, saying, "Tweet. Tweet. Tweet." She flapped her arms and ran in circles in the living room, saying, "Tweet. Tweet. Tweet. Tweet."

Beverly, Annie's closest friend, who had just turned three, invited Annie to her birthday party. As the birthday cake was brought out in front of all the gathered guests—toddlers and parents—everyone sang the traditional birthday song. Annie, who must have been unfamiliar with the exact words to the song, started running around everyone, flapping her arms, singing, "Happy bird day to you. Happy bird day to you. Happy bird day, dear Beverly. Happy bird day to you."

Before Annie was able to celebrate her own fourth birthday, she died of pneumonia. For several years after her death, on the anniversary of her birth, parents of children who knew Annie gathered around her grave, along with Annie's own parents. All the parents danced around Annie's gravestone, flapping their arms, singing, "Happy bird day to you. Happy bird day to you. Happy bird day, dear Annie. Happy bird day to you."

Doug Smith is currently converting his patient stories into works of fiction, after training hospice workers in all fifty states and publishing four nonfiction books on care for the dying,



"unity with nature"
By: Irina Tall Novikova



An Uncommon Prayer

for the week of Juneteenth 2022 when the hearings began

BY: JAMES B. NICOLA

Late seventies. A report appears in the newspaper that, with all its sugar, caffeine, and chemicals, Coca-Cola® is not only bad for you, but one of the worst things you can possibly drink or eat. My dad, a college professor and brilliant in many ways, does not believe it. Will not. The report can't be true. His mom loved Coke.

I begin to form a new theory of the human race: that our greatest drive is not necessarily survival or procreation, nor fear of death, darkness, or loneliness, but rather the need to maintain our illusions. Superstitions. Beliefs, even when unfounded—or disproved.

It has held up for several decades.

One addendum to this view: oftentimes we need to believe that we cast our illusions successfully on others. Example: the human male acting so as to convince others that he is not (pardon the French) a “small-d--ked” wuss. Fearing failure in this aim, he overcompensates and becomes a locker-room braggart, a bully, a warlord, a dictator.

A week after 9/11/01, a Pakistani BBC journalist offers roughly the same observation in a classier way. It turns out the suicide hijackers were from rich and powerful families, but they were the younger sons, and thus not in line to inherit money, title, power, or anything. She suggested a susceptibility to suasion due to their feeling of social “impotence.”

I do not say this to call anyone names. But to help me, and maybe you, understand how, in a frustrated or tormented psyche, meanness might be misconstrued for maleness. The need for prowess can even be stronger than the desire—for want of a better expression—to save one's soul.

Fast forward to a book I read just a few years ago, its author a human genome scientist. For the most part, he analyzes ancient DNA to theorize the origins of homo sapiens, what with so many pre-hominid fossils excavated in recent decades. In an interesting aside, however, he mentions that some of those fossil remains show evidence, amazingly, of—tattoos! Long before the advent of agriculture, civilization, war, or even tribes. Now why, when you are so busy hunting and gathering to survive, would you take the time to figure out how to extract dyes from nature and then disfigure—or re-figure—your skin with them?

I imagined living a hundred thousand years ago, having to cope with predators, poisonous plants, storms, earthquakes, volcanoes, drought, floods, fires, famine—all reminding us that we were not in control. Nature was. It dawned on me, then, that maybe we inherited from those ancestors our most fundamental, universal trait: the intrinsic knowledge or feeling, deep in our gut, that we really have no

control, in the end, over anything.

How to propitiate those powers-that-be? Through symbolic gestures of humility? By arranging giant stones in patterns? Offering some sort of sacrifice? Religious rites? Superstitions? Perhaps even tattoos?

Notwithstanding the impossibility of parsing the purpose of the prehistoric tattoo, it was irrefutably a work of art, and one way in which we could make ourself, at least in part, a creation of our own, not just of Nature. A way to combat that lack of control. With creativity.

Do the destroyers, then, feel they cannot create? Does destroying make them feel in control of *something*, albeit through mayhem? Of course they then construct the false narrative, the fantasy, the superstition, the *illusion*—not unlike my dad's unflappable faith in Coca-Cola®—where they call themselves “good” people, “Christians,” or even—that “last refuge of the scoundrel”—“patriots.”

Such a view is no excuse, but perhaps begins to explain. What is more, it has helped me maintain a glimmer of hope, for I wonder if such destroyers might be turned into creators. Might they be able to learn how to feel ever-so-slightly in control, and truly “good” about themselves, through art and ingenuity? Helping and healing, not harming and hurting; adding, not subtracting; building, not breaking?

Anyway, this is the way I have been able to look at some of my fellow Americans and not hate them, but, rather, pray for them. For we are all works in progress, aren't we?

I also pray that I can find the strength to do what I can to help them see the light of truth: that a noose is a noose, a mob brandishing one is a lynch mob, treason is treason, and terrorism is terrorism, even if perpetrated by those who deny through the use of terms like “proud.” For they are still human beings; they just happen to have quite a bit of *progress* to work on. To save not only this country. But also their souls.



LATE NIGHT HALLOWEEN

BY: MAURA ATWOOD

do I call you
gossamer goblin
in the blood-spinning hours of the night
forth

will you stumble from your tower?

do I sing, as your
hands fumble on the slippery dial
regurgulate the sound of ill-gotten phantasms

do I push, push, push, push, hammer at the door
more?

I dance an incantation
I risk an offering
do you weep, as my
hands fumble on your red sinews
chantering the sound of antique transportations

an invisible kiss to the silence

hand
hovers

Maura Atwood is an actor, ghostwriter, teacher, and poet currently located in the Milwaukee area. Their poetry has been published in *Better than Starbucks*, *Cholla Needles*, *Centrique Magazine*, *Artifact Nouveau*, and *Assisi: An Online Journal of Arts and Letters*.





"Key West" By: Ashley Wilson



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Artificial Intelligence
By: Irina Tall Novikova

LOST PARADISE

BY: SOPHIA PACHE

I surrender when I enter a festival.
I drip euphoria,
Connecting with others
As if we merge into one.

Music invading my cells,
Alchemizing inner networks of bliss
Feel the hair on my arms rise,
With overflowing joy
harvested from laughter and play.

I become chemically charged in
The rush, the gliding of my feet over grass
Akin to walking on water

Eyelashes fluttering in ecstasy,
I sink into my beautiful mind
With awe and admiration
Stopping the passage of time,
Transporting to a planet where heaven no need exist.

I bloom full of life, full of purpose
Navigating a maze of free spirits,
With no walls or limitations
A garden of shimmer and sparkle,
A contagion of transcendence.

To festivals I say:
Infiltrate me, metamorphose me

Sophia Pache (she/her) is an avid traveler, a software engineer, festival fairy, and aspiring writer from Florida. As someone who has felt every corner of every emotion, her writings are raw, real, and help her connect to her soul.



"Key West" By: Ashley Wilson



Music at the Bottom of the Atlantic

BY: MIA AMORE DEL BANDO

Will you remember me
When you play for the world
At music festivals
For gorgeous strangers, gleaming in neon beams
Dancing for you in hurricanes of glitter
High and happy

The song you crafted me
In your two-bedroom apartment
Ordered in Thai food
Breaks in between
Intimate, you within me
Wrapping my brain
Drunk on your muse
Kissing all over you

Rapid love affairs
Burn violently, scarring my fingertips
I fled the room when you caught on fire

Weight at the soul of the Atlantic
Discovering you,
Mouth drowning in whiskey
Spinning further away from what I need you to be

Will you want to see me?
At the back of a hurried crowd
Timid with tears
Singing along to the words
That were once meant for me

Music at the bottom of the Atlantic

When you play, will you think of me?

MIA AMORE DEL BANDO was born and raised in Long Beach, California. She featured in *The Art of Everyone*, *Flora Fiction*, *Poets Choice*, and others. Her poetry book *Fragments of a Woman's Brain* published by Nymeria Publishing debuts in 2024. She is a faithful friend, difficult daughter, and selfish lover.

"Ferris Wheel" By: Carella Keil



LILAC FESTIVAL

BY: LOUIS FABER

It is not
a sign
of the apocalypse
or shouldn't be.

The park
is redolent
with the scent
of lilacs in blossom.

You can smell it
blocks away,
and they flock
under the watchful
eye of the crows
to the carny trailers

for kettle corn,
roasted coated nuts,
cotton candy
and the beer tent

waiting
for the music
as the lilacs sit
forlornly wondering
why they
ceased to matter.

Louis Faber is a poet living in Florida. His work has appeared widely in the U.S., Europe and Asia, including in *Glimpse*, *Atlanta Review*, *Rattle*, *Pearl*, *Dreich* (Scotland), *Alchemy Stone* (U.K.), and *Flora Fiction*.



"Carnivàle"
Carella Keil is a writer and digital artist who splits her time between the ethereal world of dreams, and Toronto, Canada, depending on the weather.

"Carnival Las Vegas"

Lorin Cary wrote *The Custer Conspiracy* and *California Dreaming*, numerous short stories and flash fiction pieces, and co-authored two historical studies. He also publishes photos.







Hulaween

BY: CONNIE HELENA

graveyard dash
festival smash
wear the pretty glitter
wash it off in the waterways
naked girl strolling early morning
meth face, still young
two men following in a golf cart
we scared them away
what about the music though?
I clear forgot.

Connie Helena moved to Florida over 20 years ago and finds inspiration in its nature most of all. She is a Generation X writer and artist who self-published her first collection of writing, *The Green Orchid*, only recently.



PHOTOGRAPHY

"Reunion 2"

Andie Dale is an artist and photographer from in Staffordshire, UK, who focuses mainly on alternative photography such as cyanotypes, anthotypes and photo weaves. Andi also paints and sketches, but loves taking candid pictures that really reflect the atmosphere of a place or event.



The third-night headliners

BY: CYNTHIA BERNARD

are more than an hour late,
and people are getting grumpy, cold, spaced-out, bored,
more than ready for the music, almost ready for a fight.

Way long line for the ladies' room,
tie dye hems dragging in the dust.
The only vendor still open is the you've got to be kidding
30-dollars-a-sandwich-and-fries.

Plastic cups, crushed, tossed not in but close enough,
almost float in the foamy beer-mud around the trash can
where somebody put a Jerry Garcia sticker,
his young smile peeking out
between raggedy pizza crust, folded paper plates, filthy French fries.

Don't want to stay any longer, have had enough,
don't want to leave, what if the set turns out to be awesome,
might be the best of the entire festival, who knows.

Meanwhile cars light up all over the parking lot;
some folks have decided, might be right.

We'll give the band 20 minutes, see if they show.

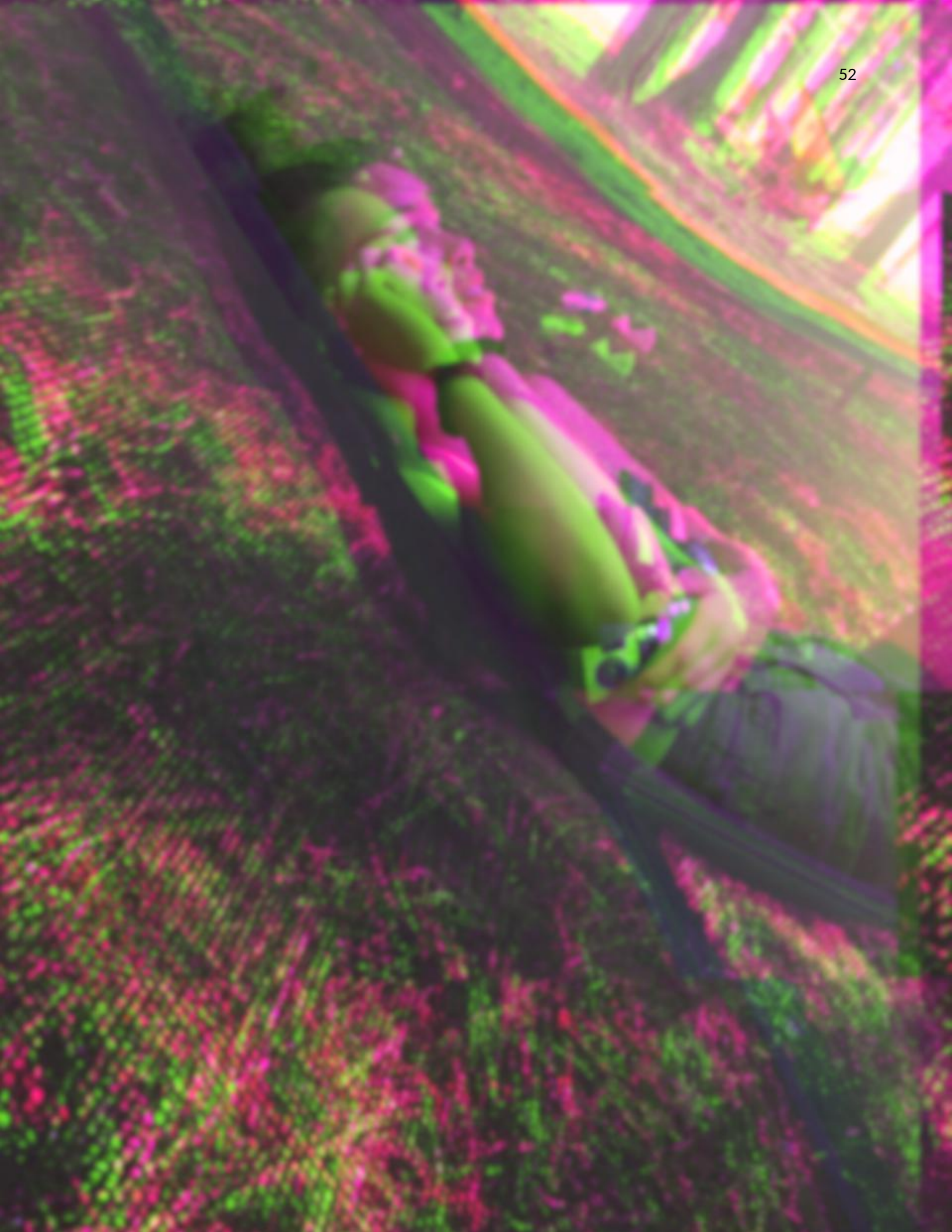
CYNTHIA BERNARD is a woman in her late sixties, finding her voice as a poet after decades of silence. She lives and writes on a hill overlooking the ocean, just south of San Francisco.



Mistakes were made

BY: ANONYMOUS

Spiraling out of control
at Bonnaroo. Tripping on shrooms
from a Canadian stranger.
"Eat the whole bag," he said.
At some point, it did feel good
and the clouds were changing shapes
to the music, melting into animals
of my imagination. But then I remembered
just earlier that day getting in trouble
because of molly we left in my car
I wasn't thinking about it
because I forgot I don't do that kind of thing.
What else was I supposed to do
but to take the fall?
Even though it was my silblings' idea
I was the oldest.
Then I had to hire a lawyer.
Then I had to get my record expunged.
Then I had to tell people that one mistake
followed me forever.
I haven't been to a music festival since.





Best in Show

BY: DON NOEL

There are not many occasions when a total fraud pleases a lot of people and does absolutely no harm. My friend Ellen carried out such a hoax for many years at the Tanglewood Music Festival. I refused to participate the first few years, but it seemed so much fun, and so innocent, that I eventually succumbed and joined in the mummery.

Background: Serge Koussevitzky, then conductor of the Boston Symphony, brought the orchestra to an open-air setting in the Berkshire Mountains of western Massachusetts in 1934. It may have been the very first summer music festival; in any case, it quickly became and remains today one of the best such musical events in the country, if not in the world.

It is a perfect setting: Days are warm, evenings pleasantly cool; rainy days are few. I suppose everyone sat on the lawn in the early years, but in 1938 a shed was built that underwent “major acoustical refurbishment” in 1959. It has since been named for the founder, and seats just shy of six thousand.

Folks in the shed, though, are a small part of the listening audience: As many as 12,000 can be seated on the huge lawn outside, where the music is, nowadays, amplified. “The music” originally meant the classics that the BSO played winters in Boston, but the offerings now include musical theater, jazz, pop, and works sung by a magnificent chorale.

Yet, the music at Tanglewood must compete with another great experience: outdoor dining. There may be a few who bring peanut butter and jelly sandwiches to sustain them for the auditory experience, but far more often the “picnics” involve fine wine, candelabras, and an approximation of the cuisine one might expect in five-star restaurants. The outdoor diners include many who pay for tickets inside the shed for the music, but begin the evening with an alfresco meal.

In fact, any impartial observer might reasonably wonder whether the pre-concert hours—with canapés and fancy appetizers, a glass or two of good vintage, elaborate main courses sometimes served cold and sometimes braised on portable stoves, plus desserts that might be the final step in a one-upmanship contest among friends—whether those hours are primarily a warm-up for the performance, or whether the music is for most a pleasant finishing touch to a gustatory main event.

Let me back up. Early in the 1960s, my wife and I bicycled from Hartford, Connecticut to our first Tanglewood concerts, a six-hour ride (sixty-plus miles), carrying a tent and the wherewithal of rather basic meals. We were young and fit; it was a pleasant and not unduly taxing ride, enough to whet our appetites for fine music even if fine cuisine was beyond us.

We were the immediate envy of friends; two couples joined us biking the next year, and then a few more. We were still packing tents, which limited our ability to bring much more than basic nourishment, although a bottle or two of wine may have found the way to our bike racks.

And then: A more prosperous couple in our circle rented a house with a yard big enough for campers not far from the Tanglewood complex. They and another couple drove up, carrying not only our tents and sleeping bags, but also the wherewithal for an impressive pre-concert dinner out on the Tanglewood lawn.

Ellen, one of the new additions to the group we called the T-woodies, seized the occasion to stroll around and eyeball a lot of others at their elaborate picnics. And that night, although she didn't share the secret with any of us, the seed of her scheme was planted in her mind.

She arrived the next summer prepared to award prizes: she had a half-dozen or so paper plates, each decorated with a stick-on dime store bow. Each plate was boldly but neatly magic-markered: "Best Appetizers"; "Best Main Course"; "Best Dessert"; "Best Wine Glasses"; "Best Candelabra". There were a couple of others I can't recall.

Before most of us finished our own dinners, Ellen sallied forth with maybe five people to reconnoiter the grounds. It could only have been a token survey: There were several thousand alfresco meals out on that lawn, and Ellen's co-conspirators reassembled in less than a half-hour for an informal canvass that amounted to a nominating committee.

Then—I declined to participate in the early years, so I must describe those efforts as told to me—they followed Ellen around like a panel of jurors, nodding solemnly as she announced to one group after another that they had won a paper plate-and-ribbon prize. They came back to report that everyone at every prize-winning picnic seemed thrilled. No one asked how they came to be an "official" panel of judges; they sometimes took a few moments of modesty to decide who should accept the honor on behalf of the group, and all the recipients treated their prizes as though they were gold-plated.

By the time I reluctantly joined the judging, word had gotten around: now and then someone would approach our picnic to encourage us to consider theirs for this dubious distinction. The number of paper plate prizes reached a dozen, including one or two blanks each year to be invented and labeled on the spot, like "Best Tablecloth."

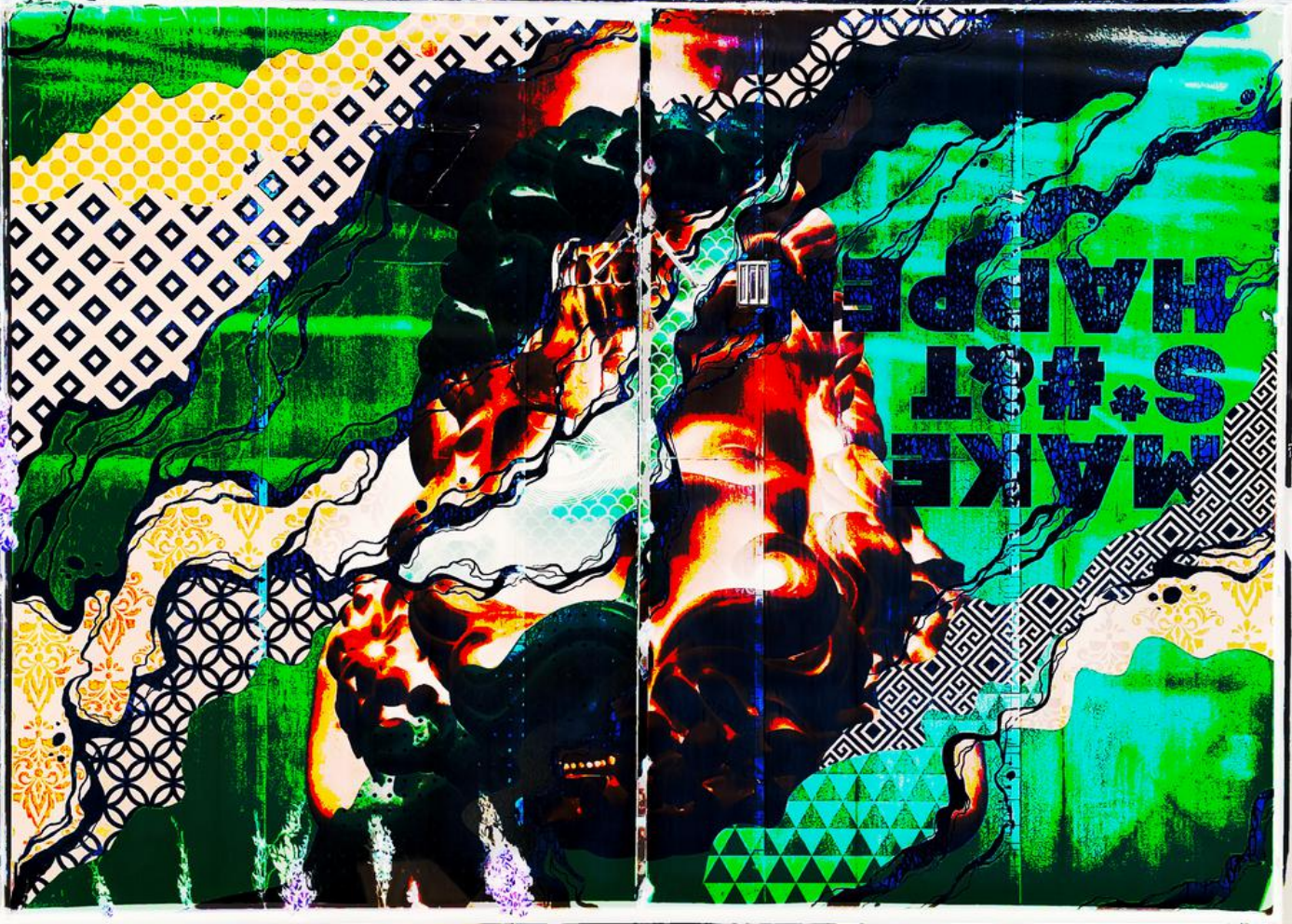
The music emanating later from the shed was always wonderful, and most of us fought off wine-induced naps to enjoy it. But the real highlight of the evening—for us as well as the winner—had been Ellen's spurious citations. If the winners went home and were suddenly embarrassed to brag to neighbors about improvised and insubstantial plaques, we would never know. We went home confident that we had made the evening at Tanglewood one that several dozen people would long cherish.

Fraud? Banish the thought! Ellen had invented a festive persiflage that deserved a prize of its own.

Don Noel is retired from four decades' prizewinning print and broadcast journalism. He took an MFA from Fairfield University at age 81, and in the decade since has published more than 100 short stories or other pieces.



PH_1 By: Lennox Lewis



5.04.2025

1 By: Emel Çevikcan

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"fire dancer"

Katharine Weinmann, introspective and contemplative, is a seeker whose travels and reading of mystics and poets shapes the container from which her words and images emerge, revealing beauty in her imperfect, sometimes broken, mostly well-lived and much loved life.



"beguiling eyes " By: Katharine Weinmann



"gloved and masked " By: Katharine Weinmann





"Roses" By: Zoe Nikolopoulou

The Best Mother's Day Ever

BY: ADELE GREENSPUN

In college, I learned that all great stories trace the narrative arc of at least one beloved character who eventually dies.

At the beginning of my junior year at the University of Pennsylvania, my brother Billy was a sophomore in high school in Philadelphia. My mother, 51, was admitted to Albert Einstein Hospital for heart surgery to open her mitral valve. My father had been dead for nine years. Throughout the year, my mother was in the hospital three times. I visited her after classes, then rushed home to make dinner for Billy and me.

In May, during finals week, when I went to visit my mother at the hospital and found her semi-private room empty. Before I could rush down the hall, Nurse Lois appeared.

"Your mother was sent to another room last night. Her roommate was discharged," she said. "Follow me."

I nodded and trailed her to the end of the corridor.

"Your mother had a hard time breathing, so we moved her here." Nurse Lois pushed the door open to another room. My mother was lying listless inside a clear oxygen tent that surrounded her bed like a bubble. She smiled weakly when she saw me. I walked to the side of the bed to be closer to her. I touched my lips with two fingers, then sent a kiss flying through the clear curtain to reach her.

"How are you, Mom?"

"Poor you," she said.

"Poor you," I repeated. Her eyes opened with alarm.

"I'm sorry you have to be in this tent," I said and motioned with my right arm.

A nurse knocked. "Please wait outside," she said and drew the curtain closed.

"I love you, Mom," I said and blew another kiss.

A vice gripped the muscles in my neck and throat. Was she going to die? Then I remembered. Tomorrow was going to be Mother's Day.

I ran to Pennock's Flower Shop and ordered a bouquet of red roses to be delivered to the hospital. My mother loved roses. Before Daddy died, he planted a dozen rose bushes of many colors on the lawn just for her; we could smell the petals opening through November.

The next day, in the early morning, my mother died, before the flowers could be delivered. Billy and I were taken by our aunts and uncles to Levine's funeral parlor to make the funeral arrangements. Mr. Levine, the director, told Billy and me to choose a coffin. We walked among rows of open coffins and stared at the yards of white satin that lined them. My head was spinning. I had no idea what kind of coffin my mother would have wanted to lie in for eternity.

After the funeral, Billy and I were driven to the cemetery. In front of our mother's freshly dug grave, I placed my arm around my brother's bony shoulder. Daddy's tombstone stood next to our mother's grave.

"Was Daddy underneath his tombstone?" Billy asked. "Or, was he in heaven? And if he was in heaven, would Mommy join him here?"

Grave diggers leaned on their shovels and then lowered my mother's coffin into the ground. Our nuclear family of four had shrunk to the two of us. I became a mother of sorts to my brother.

I finished college; so did Billy. Each year, anxiety rushed through my veins in anticipation of Mother's Day. A memory of red roses not delivered in time for my mother to enjoy them.

After college, I married and gave birth to two little girls who delighted in play-acting on Mother's Day. They directed me to stay in bed while they prepared open-faced peanut butter and strawberry jam sandwiches which they cut into triangles and served on a Spode plate.

Half-dressed, these little girls, balanced a tray between them and managed to reach my bed, the sandwiches still intact. As I licked the peanut butter and savored the jam, they showered me with homemade cards and drawings of our family of four.

Years passed. My daughters married and had their own children. Our family of four grew to a family of ten. Erica, my older daughter, had two girls and Joanie had two boys.

Decades later, children and adult grandchildren scattered to different states—California, Colorado, New Jersey, Pennsylvania—so a Mother's Day celebration with everyone in attendance was not possible.

One granddaughter, Ariel, who lived in New Jersey, remained my faithful Mother's Day companion when the rest of the family was a plane ride away.

This May, I decided to make a Mother's Day plan for two granddaughters and one boyfriend. I would take them to see Puccini's *La Boheme*, at The Metropolitan Opera House at Lincoln Center. I wanted my grandchildren to experience Zefferelli's magnificent sets and the glorious music that enhanced this grand production. I bought tickets for Ariel, Frances, Frances' boyfriend Vengun and me. My daughter Joanie and her husband Donnie, who are usually in

Telluride in May, asked if I could please buy two more tickets. They wanted to join us; Our seats were close to the stage. Donnie's tall head was in front of me.

"Don't worry," he said, "I'll be asleep." He hunched down to show me.

Fifteen minutes into the first act, Donnie turned around. "This is really wonderful," he whispered.

During the three intermissions, we walked around the Met's gold and red foyer.

My heart puffed with pleasure. One daughter, two granddaughters, one son-in-law, and a boyfriend loved this opera. They had seen "Rent" and knew the story of the poet, painter, musician, and philosopher living together in Paris. They chattered happily after Mimi arrived, looking for candlelight, and cried when she died. *La Boheme* is tragic and hopeful.

A woman dies before her time. People mourn their losses and celebrate being together.

I knew the story well.

Adele Greenspun is a Philadelphia-based writer and photographer and the author of four books, *Daddies*, *Bunny and Me*, *Ariel and Emily*, *Grandparents are the Greatest Because*. Her essays have been published in *Literary Journals*.

Festival

BY: TINA CATHLEEN MACNAUGHTON

feels fantastic
dancing as one
in a field full of strangers

ears drummed out
by sound
swayed
by rhythm
dazzled
by bright lights

smiles under starry skies
soaking up the holiday mood

breathing a happy oasis
in a fractured world

catch eyes with a stranger
chat, laugh, dance

a few beers later
wrong numbers
punched in drunkenly
with a solemn promise

to absolutely call.

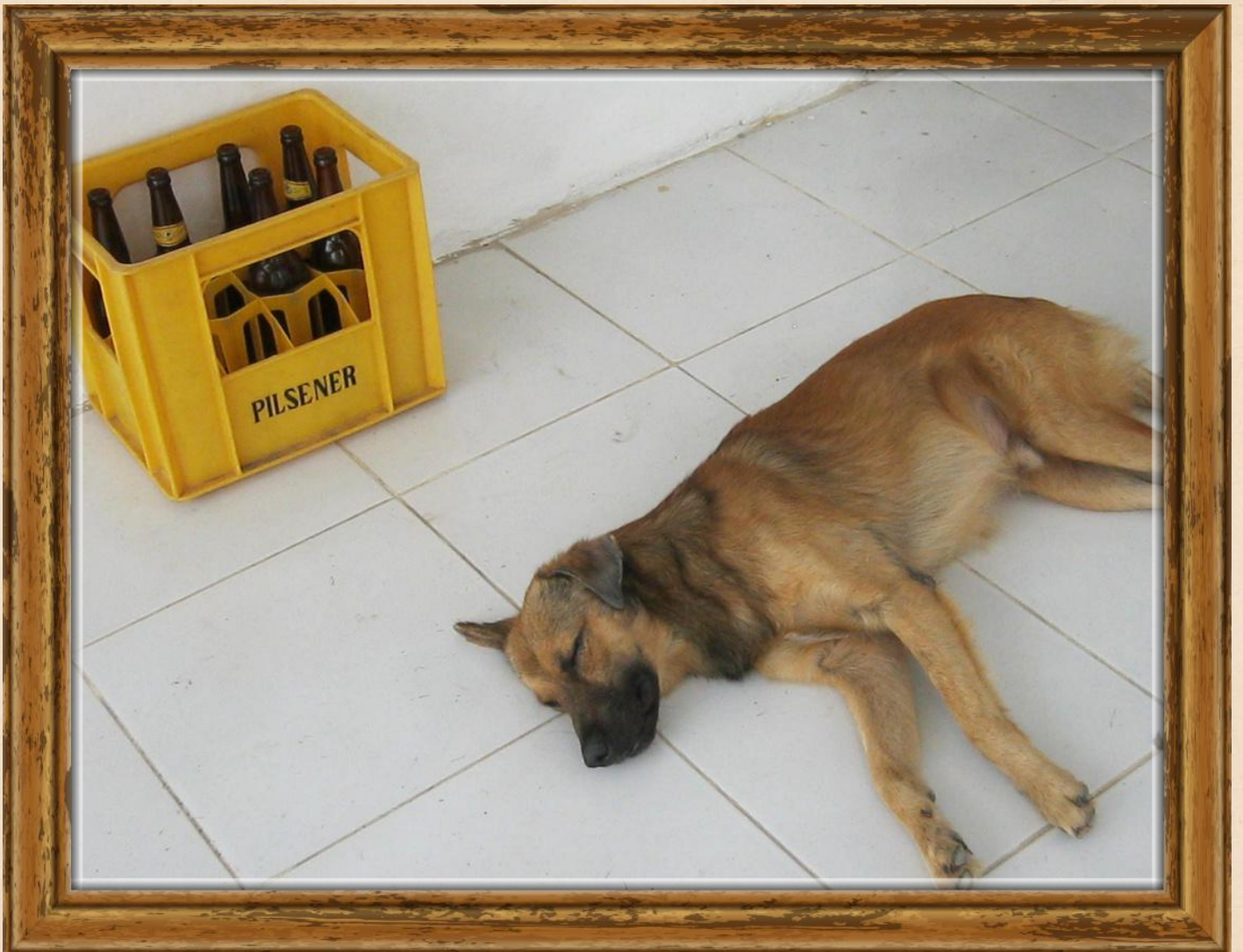
Tina Cathleen MacNaughton is a writer and a poet. Her novel, *Delphy Rose*, is written against a 1980s music backdrop and is a prose/poetry fusion.



👤 "Festival de Año Nuevo Chino en Usera"

Catalina Aranguren was born in Colombia, raised in Caracas, and studied at SAIC in Chicago. After 20 years in NY/NJ, she is currently living in Madrid with her family.





"The Ecuadorian Party Dog Who Loved Pilsener Beer"
Lynn Dowless is a creative with thirty-five years of experience.

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"Hope" By: Emel Çevikcan
Watercolor artist from Turkey, working
about nature and human.

Emel Çevikcan

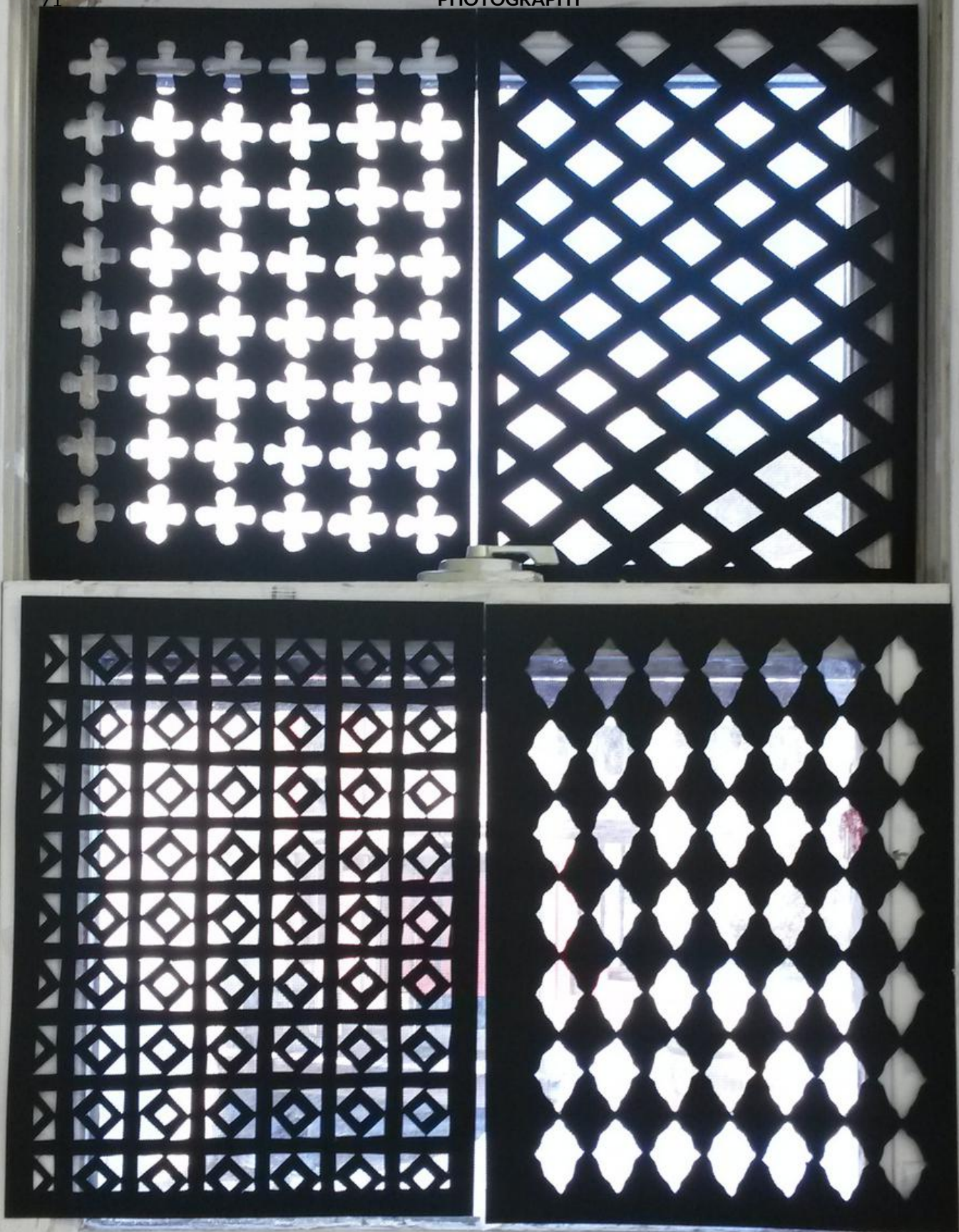


"Quartet"

Edward Lee is an artist and writer from Ireland. His paintings and photography have been exhibited widely, while his poetry, short stories, and non-fiction have been published in magazines in Ireland, England and America, including *The Stinging Fly*, *Skylight 47*, *Acumen* and *Smiths Knoll*.

"sousafon" By: Catalina Aranguren

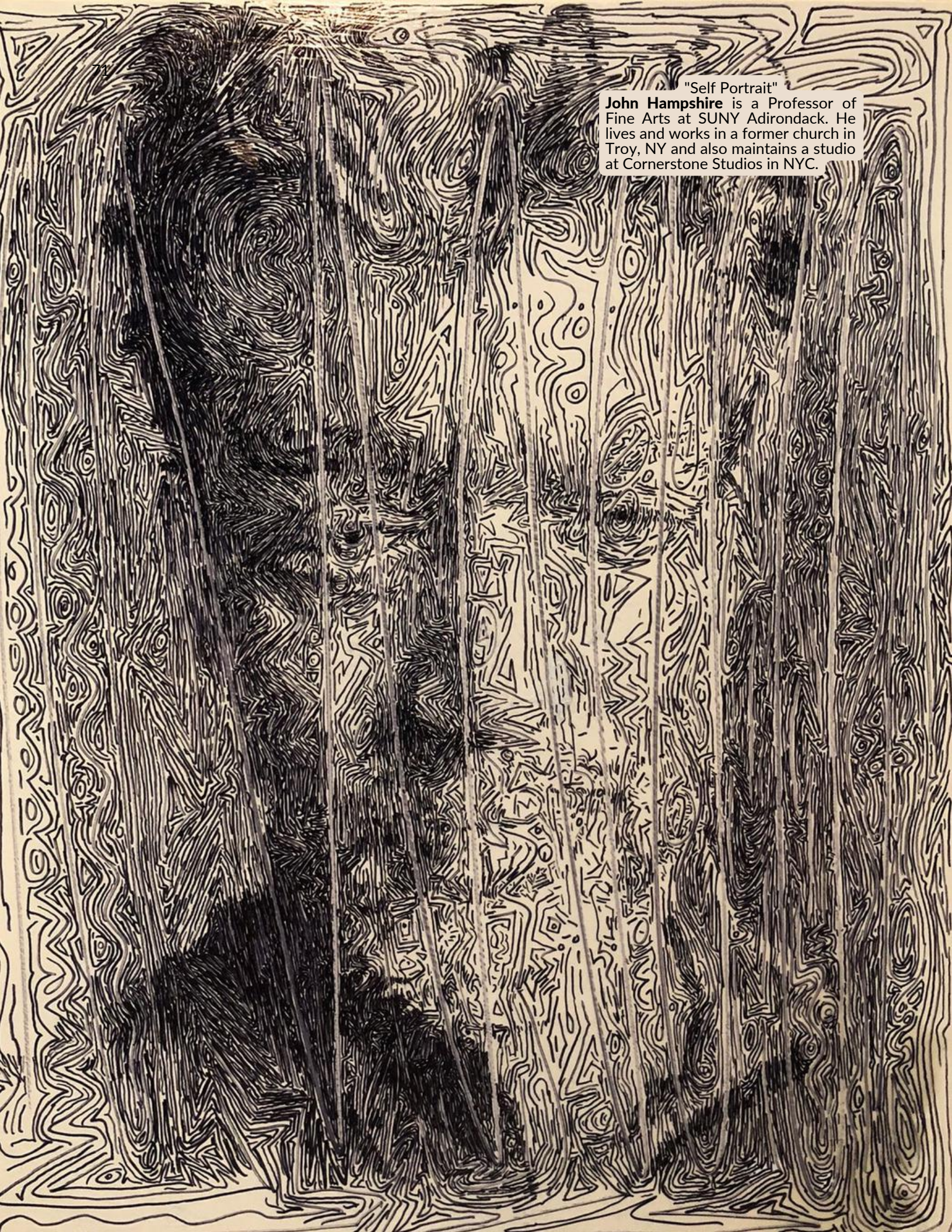




A Reason to Celebrate

By: Ashley Wilson

I remember thinking I loved you
Because I needed someone to love
Someone to call home.
But it wasn't you that I loved
It was the idea of you
And now I have what I've always dreamed.




"Self Portrait"

John Hampshire is a Professor of Fine Arts at SUNY Adirondack. He lives and works in a former church in Troy, NY and also maintains a studio at Cornerstone Studios in NYC.

Germination. Through Thorns
By: Irina Tall Novikova

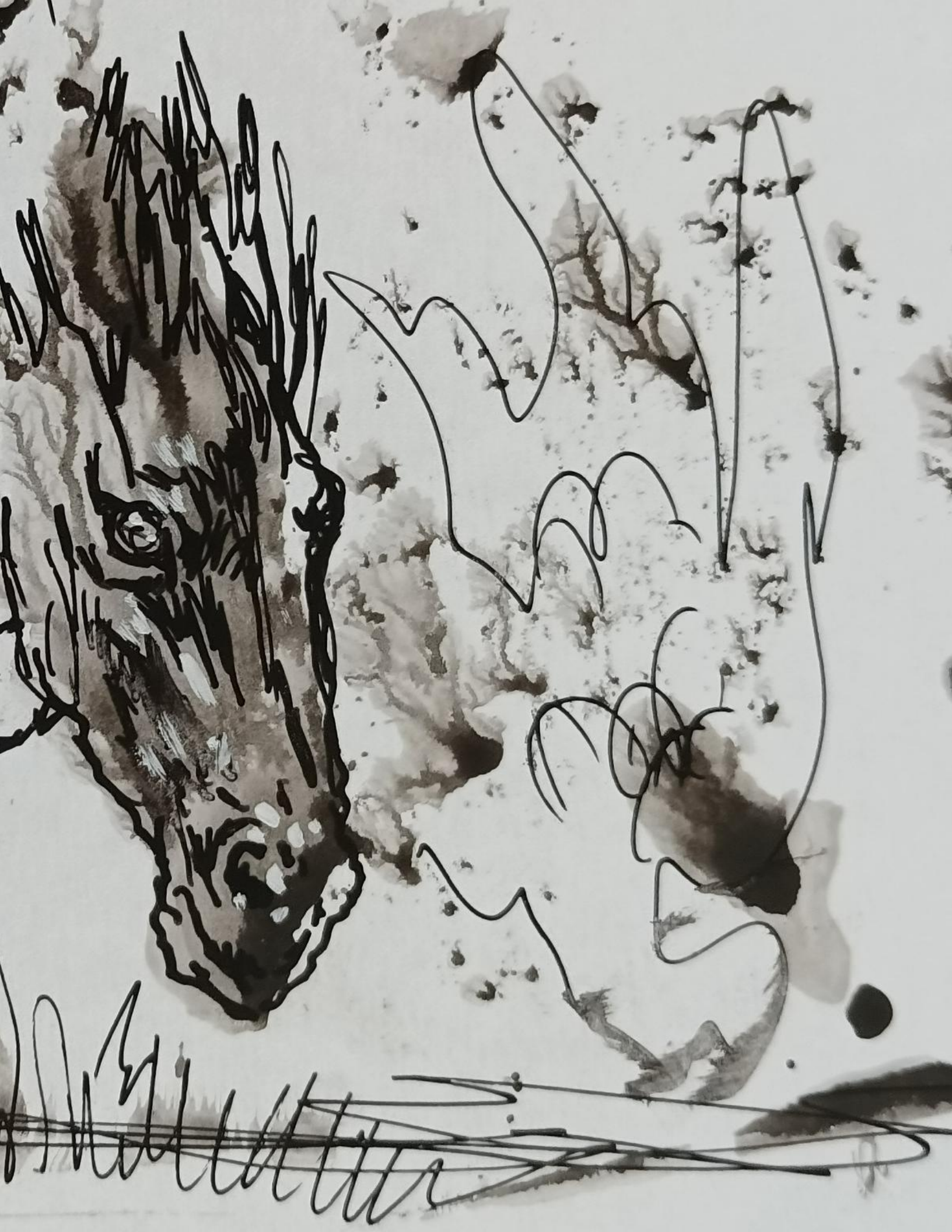



Irina Tall Novikova



"I remember that I had wings"
By: Irina Tall Novikova

27 Irina Tall Novikova 2012



"Procession of shiv temple"

Parsharam Sutaar was born in Ratnagiri was born in Maharashtra in June 1944. He completed his Education in the field of Visual Art G.D.Art (Drawing & Painting) from Sir J.J.School of Art ,Mumbai in 1975 .





West Indian Day Parade 1956

BY: CHRISTINA MAILE

I was twelve-and-a-half and unhappy. My grandmother, whom we called Ma, had not said a word from the moment we left Aunt Jessie's apartment laden with shopping bags. Not a word as we clambered down to the summer-liquid streets of Harlem that led to the subway and the long ride back to Bed-Stuy. Except for the sound of Ma hitting my head when I asked her what Aunt Jessie's parting words had meant, there was just the *thump thump* of a bad feeling in my heart.

Aunt Jessie wasn't our real aunt. Unlike my family with its mix of Malaysian Dayak and West Indian, she was small and round, her skin the color of the whitish-brownish-pinkish powder my mother dabbed on her face when my father returned from months at sea.

Aunt Jessie and Ma grew up in Trinidad. While Ma preferred images of the pale Jesus and Easter palms bent into crosses, Aunt Jessie's apartment smelled like cinnamon and was crammed with island pictures, fancy tea sets, intricate figurines, lace borders, and sea shells filled with candy. The afternoon we visited however, it was as if a tide had deposited a sunken treasure of fabrics and feathers, beads, pearls, bells, skins, straw hats, and ribbons twisting with armfuls of glittery things. Ma, tall and dark, a staunch member of the Ladies Auxiliary, and Aunt Jessie, short and round, spoke softly. Even sitting down, they looked like a number 10.

When Aunt Jessie turned and asked, "Can you sit straight and tall?" I automatically looked at Ma for permission.

Aunt Jessie bounced over and gently grabbed my arm.

"Wave. No! You must wave your hand like this. Nod your head at the same time. Good. Now to the right. Now to the left. And what about a smile?" She smiled.

"Do as she says," Ma said.

Which I did while Aunt Jessie wrangled my brother and sister to stand beside me.

"I think it will work," Aunt Jessie and Ma agreed, releasing us as they left the room. Alone and without candy, we fidgeted on the couch like addicts.

Later, while Ma clutched the bongazooa shopping bags filled with jewels and cloth, Aunt Jessie distributed three little bags of candy, calling out as the door closed behind us, "She'll be a wonderful Queen Elizabeth."

I wanted to kill Ma. Every day after school, I stood at the mercy of her needles, endlessly measuring, complaining about my scrawny body, so unlike my younger sister who, plump and good-natured, was too dark to be Queen Elizabeth. Ma was queen anyway. She demanded total obedience, faith in the lord, and lady-like behavior, especially in front of white people. I preferred my father's stories of murdered missionaries and bloody jungle floors—perfect punishments for their bossy attitude. As a result, I didn't want anything to do with West Indians.

Despite prayers and weeping and the nightly whirr of Ma's sewing machine, West Indian Day arrived. My parents were left to fend for themselves on the crowd-filling sidewalks, while up at Aunt Jessie's, she and Ma inched me into a heavy white dress studded with pearls, its cloth-filled bosom fitting delicately over my flat chest. Pearls around my neck, a glittering crown above my long black hair, I was the envy of my sister, whom Ma had dressed in striped fabric with a bandana around her head to portray a Trini village woman, and my little brother, the Queen's footman, who had been squeezed into a tight beaded suit and white stockings. A car waited at the curb, its top down, soft white seats, a driver in front, and a man in the backseat I had seen on TV a million times. Suddenly Ma stopped. She pulled from her wrist and slid onto mine one of her heavy silver bracelets. I was in total shock. She never removed them. Her lips were pressed together as if she would cry. We lived on a really bad block. All her West Indian friends at church lived on beautiful blocks with beautiful dishes of candy. But none of their children or grandchildren had ever been queen.

A whoop erupted from the crowd when Adam Clayton Powell Jr, the handsome Harlem Congressman, emerged from the car. He could tell I was nervous, helping me sit at the top of the back seat, arranging my red feathered cape, then sitting beside me followed by my sister and brother who sat on little jump seats. "You look very pretty," he said. He smelled like a flower.

The car moved forward, an island in an ocean of calypso, the beat and blare of saxophones and steel pans, and strange assemblies of mysterious objects pulsing high in the air in unison.

Everywhere lush patterns and colors, sharp straw hats, high heels, everyone dancing back-to-back, belly-to-belly, faces and limbs in every shade of day becoming beautiful night.

Women threw kisses at Mr. Powell and shook their bodies. He laughed, made jokes, made me giggle, made me forget the lessons of sitting nicely until he left the car some blocks later to stand at the viewing platform alongside Aunt Jessie and other important people.

"Your majesty," he bowed.

I bowed smiling as the car moved away, the cheers continuing from high atop windows and streets, hands clapping to the heartbeat of steel bands, a bacchanal of hips windmilling and long legs sashaying, the sweat glistening like pearls, the air grand with the aroma of patty cocos and spice while kids in beat-up shorts and grown-ups Sunday-sharp, wove through the strutting of feathered magical beings. And I in their midst became one of them, the spirit in secret guise discarding the dry stiff heart of the old queen and, replacing it with my own, in that afternoon filled with strength and beauty riding on a sea of joy carried along, in that car, setting sail for the new world.

Christina Maile is a printmaker and painter, co-founder of a feminist playwriting group, and former landscape architect. She grew up in Brooklyn long ago and currently builds houses for solitary bees.

"Blue Arch" By: Parsharam Sutaar



Coming Home in Eastern India

BY: SARAH DAS GUPTA

In the distance, the *pandal* glitters like a fairy palace, shining and shimmering in the dark as if floating above the end of the dusty road. This is Durga Puja, the largest Hindu festival in Kolkata and the state of West Bengal.

The gods are regally housed in a magnificent royal pavilion; its sides are draped in shiny blue silk, gleaming under the neon lighting, and jewels in the gods' crowns shine brilliantly in the reflected light. In the middle of the deities stands the magnificent figure of the celebrated goddess Durga. In her ten hands, she holds the divine weapons given to her by the gods: Shiva's trident, Vishnu's *chakra*, Brahma's *kamundalam* of holy water. . .

All through the Puja, thousands of families visit the pandals. Sweets and *dhoi* are offered to the gods to sustain them on their homeward journey. Everyone gets brand-new clothes for the occasion.

Every autumn, Durga returns from Mount Kailash to visit her parents. She is the ultimate female warrior. Astride her majestic lion, she slays the fierce demon king! Such is her fame and power, she has no less than one hundred eight names!

Clay sculptures of the gods are made by generations of skilled craftsmen at Kumartuli in North Kolkata. The name comes from the Bengali word for 'potter'. On the last day of the festival, Vijaya Dashami or Victory over Evil, the thousands of *pandals* in Kolkata and the surrounding districts are dismantled and the sculptures are immersed in rivers and lakes.

Significantly, the eyes are painted first. It is believed that at this moment the image is filled with the spirit of the goddess, no longer mere clay.

On the journey back to her parents, Durga is accompanied by her children standing on either side of her. Her two daughters wait dutifully: Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth has her wise owl perched next to her; her sister, Saraswati, goddess of music and learning, is accompanied by an elegant swan. On the far left is the portly figure of Lord Ganesh, bringer of good beginnings, with a tiny mouse at his feet. The family is completed by the handsome figure of Kartik, the God of War, and an equally handsome peacock!

In Kolkata, the lorries are loaded and the sculptures are taken with much ceremony and drumming to the river Hooghly. They are unloaded at one of the sixteen city *ghats* (steps). Durga and her children are immersed in the ebb tide. Gradually they float out into mid-stream; the many arms of the goddess seem to be raised in a final blessing as she is carried down to the Bay of Bengal. The clay from the images becomes part of the sea. In summer evaporated water will then fall as rain in the high mountains. So, Durga comes home, to return again next autumn, to renew her ancient battle against evil.

Sarah Das Gupta an English teacher from UK. Her work has been published in over thirty different magazines from US, UK, Canada, India, Mauritius, Croatia. Her interests include history, the environment and politics.







"Binod Dawadi, Hanuman's Performance"

Binod Dawadi, the author of *The Power of Words*, is a master's degree holder in Major English. He has worked on more than 1000 anthologies published in various renowned magazines. His vision is to change society through knowledge, so he wants to provide enlightenment to the people through his writing skills.

"of the same hue" By: Catalina Aranguren





"A place where we can" By: Dahlia Hosny
"Breaking through boundaries of imagination, Inspired by nature, its colors, forms, and textures."

Dahlia Hosny



""Tangled Eagle; Life of Secretary Bird"
By: Yula Kim



"Tangled Eagle; Life of Secretary Bird"
Yula Kim (born 1996, South Korea) is a London-based artist, who employs her Third Cultural identity of expression to portray the connection between human cultures and nature through birds and their histories.







VIVA LAS VEGAS

BY: ASHLEY WILSON

Neon signs. Techno pop. Sleek sidewalks. Cards with nude girls and shoe marks. Homeless. Heat. Foreigners. Fast cars. Traffic. Lights. Long plastic tubes containing slushied alcohol. Carpeted floors. Sex. Marriage at first sight. Slots. Chips. Tables. Cards. Shows. Money. Welcome to the fabulous Las Vegas.

Pole position is located across from Palms Place. Walk inside to a roaring purr. We never thought of coming here. I'm not dressed for the activity. My friend, Fox, and I walk up to the counter to buy two rounds each. Fox is a big man, too tall to walk through doorways without ducking and strong enough to lift three of me. We sit at metal tables on metal chairs that are cold against my back. I scan the crowd. Mostly men, presumable girlfriends, and the occasional family. I'm sweating. Fixed on the track ahead, the speed of the karts start to unnerve me.

Pole Position Raceway is an indoor Go-Karting company created by pro racer Casey Currie. The karts go up to 45mph. We wait for our names to be called. I watch intensely, following the leaders. Do they use the brake at corners? When do they release the pedal and turn the wheel?

Finally, we're summoned to watch a short informative video, then slip on a head sock and helmet, and venture to our designated karts. I do my best to tuck in my skirt under my legs. Deep breaths. It's slow at first as everyone enters the raceway. Once we're on track, the speed takes off. My skirt flutters violently against me. My mind attempts to keep up with the pace. I slow substantially on turns and accelerate furiously during open stretches. I look at the leaderboard. I'm third from being last. I look back ahead and slam instantly into my father who didn't make the turn. Now, I'm being followed. A lap of vicious nicking with a final slam against the wall. The race is over.

"I don't feel well."

"C'mon, one more time."

Adrenaline races through my veins. I think I'm prepared. I ask for help with the strap and seat adjustment. My father is right behind me. Once on the track, we battle for almost two laps until I win. I don't brake. I concentrate on maintaining speed. On sharp turns I pull the wheel hard, all the way, to make them. I feel it now. The track starts becoming instinctual. The flagman waves a checkered flag. One lap left. I look at the leaderboard. Third place.

Such rapid improvement. We exit the karts. I'm triumphant. We walk out and wait for the hotel shuttle. Fox sits on the step and takes out a cigarette.

"Thank you," I say giddily.

"I shouldn't have eaten that popcorn."

"Why not?"

"I feel like throwing up."





A Feast of Blessings

BY: ASHLEY WILSON

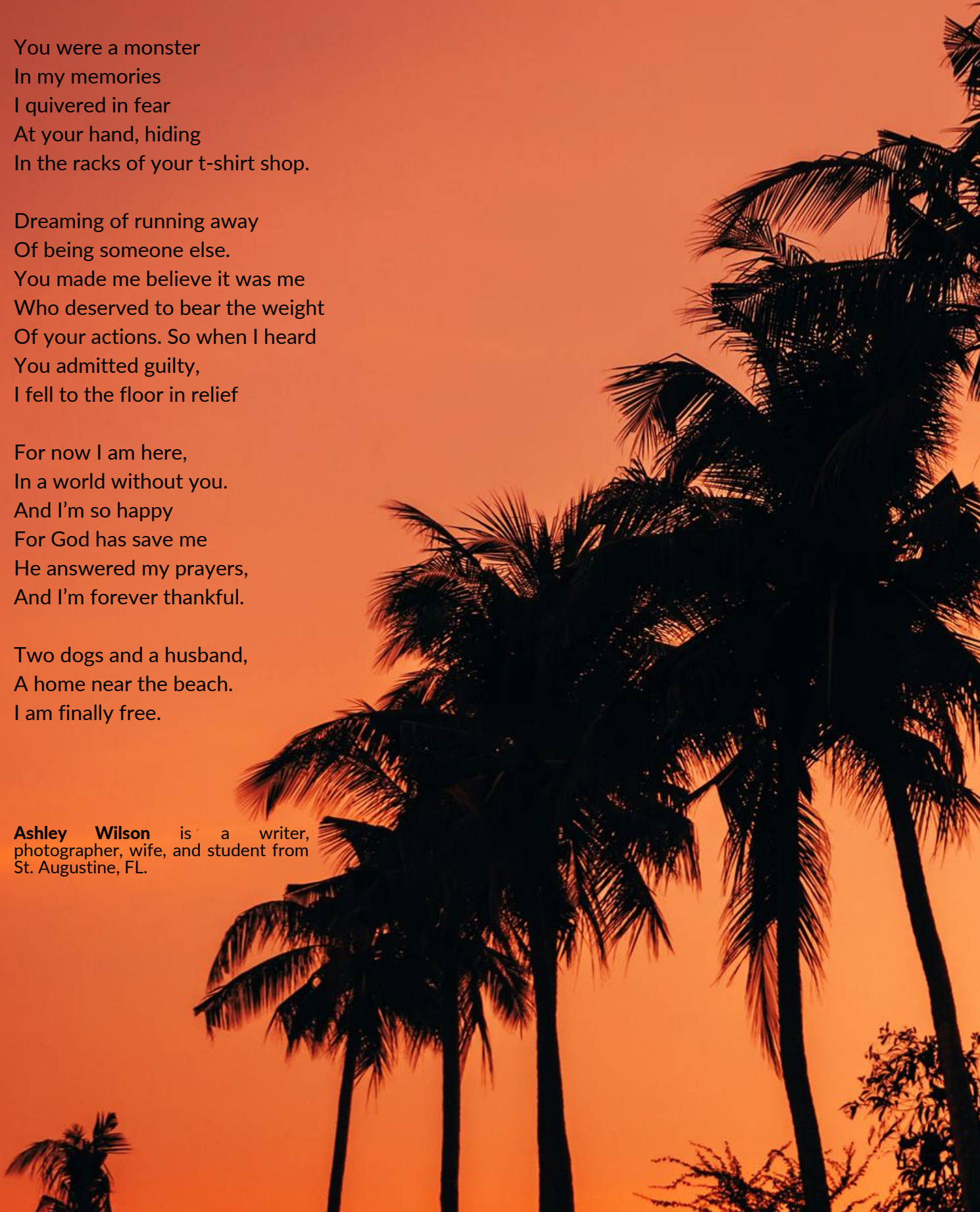
You were a monster
In my memories
I quivered in fear
At your hand, hiding
In the racks of your t-shirt shop.

Dreaming of running away
Of being someone else.
You made me believe it was me
Who deserved to bear the weight
Of your actions. So when I heard
You admitted guilty,
I fell to the floor in relief

For now I am here,
In a world without you.
And I'm so happy
For God has save me
He answered my prayers,
And I'm forever thankful.

Two dogs and a husband,
A home near the beach.
I am finally free.

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