



COLLAGE

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Letter from the Editor

From the moment I was selected editor in chief of *Collage*, I wanted to find out who the first editor in chief was. A short time later, I found myself face to face with a copy of the 1969 MTSU yearbook and a black and white photograph of *Collage's* first editor in chief, Bill Peters. He wore a blazer, left hand tucked in his pocket, and he possessed the look of a self-assured and free-spirited individual.

Collage began as a part of *Sidelines*, MTSU's newspaper and separated from the newspaper, becoming an independent student publication in 1969. After reading Peters' first editor's letter, I was inspired by how fearless he was in voicing his thoughts. He believed that while *Collage* is a platform meant to entertain and showcase the works of students and faculty, it should also provide helpful information for the whole student body. Peters saw *Collage*

as more than a creative journal; he also saw it as a place where students and faculty could have a direct dialogue with each other and the rest of the campus population.

Fast forward to today when fake news and lies dominate the media, speaking up and telling the truth is becoming more and more a necessity. Speaking up is more than audible speech; it is doing whatever you can to make sure your voice is heard. We speak up when we refuse to allow injustice to happen; we speak up when we write; we speak up when we create art and take photographs; and we speak up when we walk away from toxic people and situations.

In this issue of *Collage*, I challenge you to look at its contents differently. Look past the surface. Read between the lines of stories and poems and dig deeper through the artworks and photography. Unravel the hidden messages that the

artists deliver. Each contributor speaks up in his or her own way. It takes great courage for contributors to submit the works they have poured their hearts and souls into to a publication where their work may be freely criticized.

I am grateful to the Fall 2019 staff and to the contributors. This journey has been full of fun and surprises, and I wouldn't trade this experience for anything in the world.

To the reader holding this copy, this is for you. I hope you enjoy what you see and read.

Signing off,



Beatriz Marie R. Dedicataria
Editor in Chief, Fall 2019

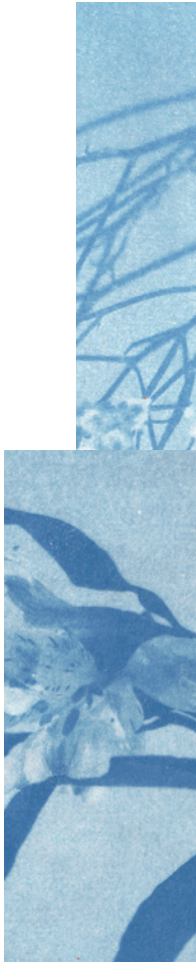


Table of Contents

Art

- 06. **Duck Soup** | Tiffany Brady
- 06. **Duck TV** | Tiffany Brady
- 08. **Growth** | Lizzy Simpson
- 09. **It's Okay to Shed a Tear** | Virginia Holmes
- 11. **Cosmos** | Morgan Westerbeck
- 12. **Sprouts from a Tilled Garden** | Marynn Robinson
- 13. **How Children Play Chess** | Ariana Chilvers
- 15. **Low Battery** | Marynn Robinson
- 16. **Muses of Destruction** | Madison Pitts
- 19. **Crocodile** | Ox Zante
- 24. **The Unicorn** | Sydney Ray
- 24. **Felicity** | Maggie Strahle
- 26. **Cocoon** | Madison Pitts
- 27. **A Look into the Void** | Conor Lumley
- 29. **Ophelia** | Sai Clayton
- 30. 🐣 **Boys Will Be Boys** | Lucy Crow
- 30. **Never Had Much Luck** | Kaitlyn Chaffin
- 30. **Thanksgiving Leftovers** | Morgan Westerbeck
- 31. **Shark City** | Ox Zante
- 32. **Space Oasis** | Morgan Ruth

Audio

- 34. 🐣 **The Suburbs** | Ashley Johnson

Photography

- 07. **Regan** | Darwin Alberto
- 07. **Dreamy** | Courtney Gilliam
- 09. **Something Borrowed** | Beatriz Dedicatoria
- 10. **Kalliope** | Zachery Wright
- 10. **McSleese** | Zachery Wright
- 12. **Mood** | Luke Oakley
- 14. **Memories of Home** | Robert Clary
- 18. **Mermaid** | Robert Clary
- 19. **Firefall** | Elizabeth Hoffecker
- 20. 🐣 **All Knowing Mother** | Adriana Klika
- 21. **Tread Lightly** | Adriana Klika
- 21. **An Eye on Work** | Jackson Gibson
- 22. **Kampung Warna Warning** | Destiny Seaton
- 22. **Hunkered Down to View the World** | Jackson Gibson
- 22. **My Perspective** | Leah Patton
- 23. **Queen in Her Element** | Ani Woodard
- 28. **Tanah Lot** | Destiny Seaton
- 33. **The Long Jump** | Sergio Villa
- 33. **Hereafter** | Madison Pitts

Video

- 34. **Cherry** | Sequoya Yardley
- 34. 🐣 **Outside** | Shelby Stewart
- 34. **Panic** | Emily McTyre
- 34. **Unguarded** | Emily McTyre

Poetry

- 06. **the emporium of eternal bargains** | Kate Carter
- 07. **Made to Steep** | Mia Kuhnle
- 09. **Edgewater** | George Boktor
- 11. **Boots** | Livi Goodgame
- 13. **That One Summer Night** | Beatriz Dedicatoria
- 14. **Restore** | Clark Wilson
- 19. 🐣 **Three in the Morning on the Fourth of July** | Addison Gentry
- 20. **If Trees Could Talk** | Hannah Tybor
- 21. **Coded Confessions** | Pel Doski
- 22. **Poem, I Command Thee** | Livi Goodgame
- 23. **Born from Loss** | Rachel Lingerfelt
- 24. **Morning Mystery** | Morgan Fipps
- 25. **Astray** | Valerie Phillips
- 31. **Cheshire Cat** | Addison Gentry
- 32. **He & I** | Hailey Clark
- 33. **Fall(ing) is for Learning** | Marisa Graham

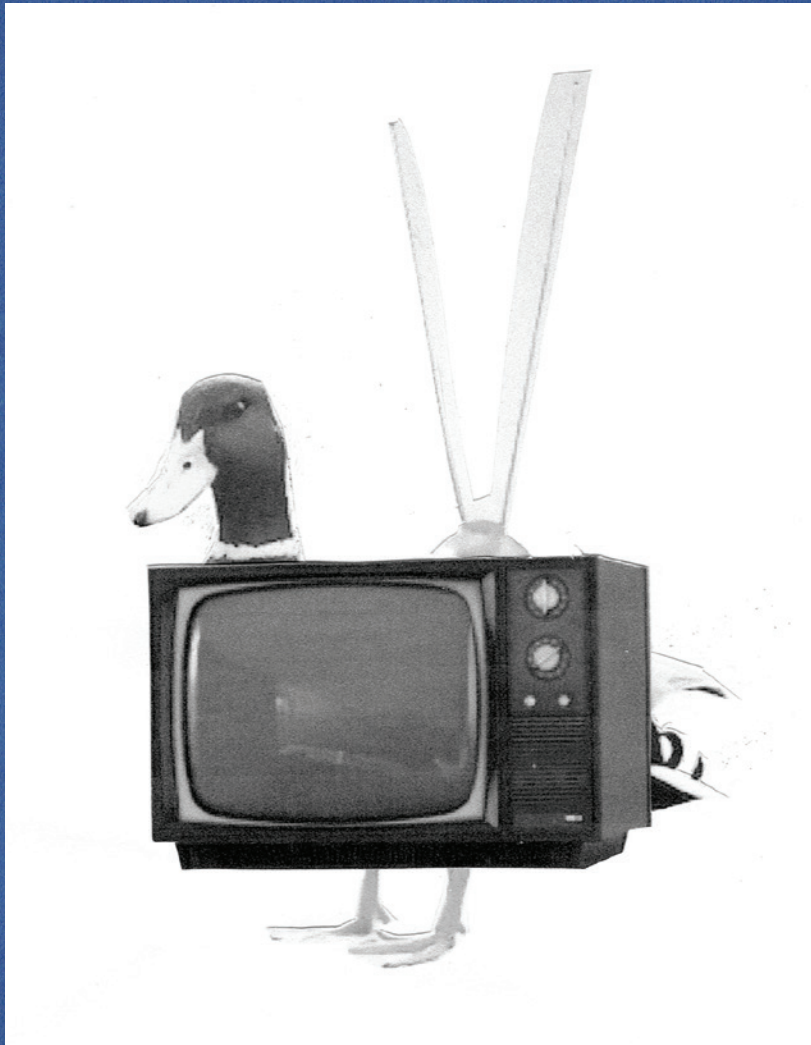
Prose

- 08. **A Mix of the Three** | Ivy Torbett
- 15. 🐣 **Charcoal Figures** | Matthew Parris
- 26. **Scream** | Katelin MacVey



Duck TV

Tiffany Brady | Collage



the emporium of eternal bargains

Kate Carter | Poetry

everything is 100% off today
Forgiveness not included
and the next and the next and the next
and every unthreaded soul
would stand in black friday lines
to unearth sales and tangled meaning
from Shelves they don't know
with no need nor desire
of such unwonted barter
before you would even think
about the Store

Duck Soup

Tiffany Brady | Collage



Regan

Darwin Alberto | *Digital Photography*



Dreamy
Courtney Gilliam | *Digital Photography*



Made to Steep

Mia Kuhnie | *Poetry*

Our affections are resinous
By the grindstone, made
Confections.

Our patience tasteful impressions
By words, sweet turpeny made
Ever-growing since.

Our laughter like camphor
Sowed by thyme, made
Love, after.

Your love is unwashed
Grown and ground, made to steep
Cherry beans, grown in their burgundy glove.



A Mix of the Three

Ivy Torbett | *Nonfiction*

The day my father passed away, I wept. I did so in a way I had never experienced before, only read of and seen dramatized in film. It was the type of weeping in which air fights against your body, refusing to follow its normal, natural path—in through the nose, back through the throat, down to the trachea, and then finally, reaching and filling the lungs in the sweetest success. On that day, in that moment, everything stopped in the throat. It could move no further than that. The noise my body conjured up in that moment of knowledge

was a culmination of everything that was stuck in my throat, a noise that was unnatural, seemingly nonhuman, and caused bystanders to run and ask me, “Have you been hurt?” I had, but not in the way they expected, not in a way I could explain.

It has been over a year now and this moment still stands alone in my mind, for I am still unsure of what fueled the flood of tears I cried and lack of air I experienced on that dry summer day as I collapsed into a pile in the middle of the department store parking lot in a scene out of a

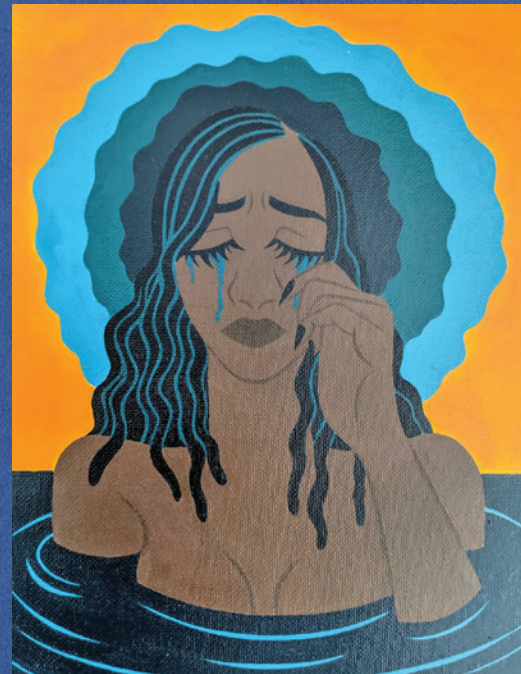
blockbuster hit circa 2012. Were they tears of anguish at the loss of a parent? Of outrage at the immediate and jarring loss of the opportunity of a real, genuine relationship, the one that I had always entertained as possibility in my own head? Or were they of relief from the escape of a fear that always haunted—a heavy hand that evoked terror and fear. Maybe, probably, it was a mix of the three.

I guess that is what happens when you love the one who brings you pain. •



Something Borrowed

Beatriz Dedicatoria | *Digital Photography*



It's Okay to Shed a Tear

Virginia Holmes | *Acrylic on Canvas*

Edgewater

George Boktor | *Poetry*

On the first day,
I came to the quarry, gassed,
like someone had poured cement
into my skull
I found her there, hazed up
sort of like she had planned
for this moment
she threw off her blouse
and we talked about moon rocks
she slept on my lap

The second day
she told me she loved me
we lounged near a bed
of clematis
I wanted to see
softly, carefully
her mind unraveled
on a jamb block
so I could pluck out
what made her
so human

The third day
we stacked rocks on
a flat beach
and watched the waves
seep up to our toes
I told her I loved her
the sun sank red, red
on white sand
spilled out over the water
like a plume of smoke
I floundered like a fish
I bunched my feathers then flew
on flax paper wings
and landed in a cypress tree
I left her there in the morning



Kalliope

Zachery Wright | *Digital Photography*



McSleese

Zachery Wright | *Digital Photography*

Boots

Livi Goodgame | Poetry

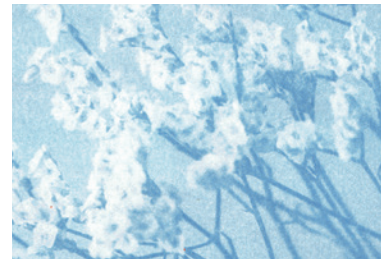
I once was a flying jackoby who
In a pinch would cinch and stitch up a shoe.
The prairie wind would whistle and whirl,
When one day there came a small little girl.
Her jacket was red, and so were her boots,
Her hair as tangled as a gurdy tree's roots.
"How come?" said I, "How come you here?
To my sewing and stitching place I have here?"
Not a word she said but took off her red
Little coat with a hot brazen look, and her head
Sank low and dropped tears from her shiny blue eyes,
Her gaze on her boots, which were too big a size.
"Come come," I said. "No shame to be sad.
Why I need some work, and your boots make me glad.
Big boots they are now, for your wee little feet,
Lucky for you, it is I you should meet."
I work and hum as my feathers drum
On the bramble-busted boots, and some
Crickets came and made it a game
To hide and chirp the little girl's name.
"Crystil, Crystil, come find our wings,
No need for shoes and silly things!
Listen, follow, and we shall make fun
In lazy seed grass under the sun."
I turned and took her hand, "No no!
Do not follow them, though light they seem so.
Their minds do not know where their legs are going,
And soon you might be lonely and roaming
Away without boots!" I said and she stopped,



Cosmos

Morgan Westerbeck | Collaged Mixed Media

And turning away from the crickets who hopped,
Looked at my hands, filled with red little shoes
Smaller than ones she once had to use.
She gave me a smile, stroked a grey feather,
And danced out with her boots in the bright sunny weather.





Mood

Luke Oakley | *Digital Photography*



Sprouts from a Tilled Garden

Marynn Robinson | *Marker on Board*

That One Summer Night

Beatriz Dedicatoria | *Poetry*

I think
That if I were really to look back
And retrace my steps
I don't think
That it would lead me back
To you

Why
Am I only saying this now
You ask
Better late than never
I replied
Not thinking too much about it

You got up and left
Silent as the sun gives way to the moon
Lips pressed thin and fists curled tight
Not knowing
About the reasons
I don't plan to look back

I only said it
To get it off my chest
But also as a farewell
To what used to be
Not just for me
But also for you

Do you remember now
That one summer night
A promise between two brothers
Was all you said
But he never woke up
and you never looked back



How Children Play Chess

Ariana Chilvers | *Scratch Board*

Restore

Clark Wilson | *Poetry*

Clank clank up on those steps, as that man *clank clanks* his hammer to save some aging door, a testament to beautiful restores and halls and corridors.

Or as some would call it, a painting slying out as a coincidental building that shakes the fragile man to the core—just too grand for those practicals to withstand.

I see them scoff: terra cotta and stucco skinned, insulated bones bearing as off-white columns—stretching and contorting and testing the tissue's will, just a balcony resting—somehow—on two little legs.

Yet here it prospers. The men still walk and the trees still grow. Yet here it stays. Men go out of their way just to save this home—

And we are the audience to this house daring one's heart to beat inside art. So *clank clank*. That door can stand for a few more.



Memories of Home

Robert Clary | *35mm Film*

Charcoal Figures

Matthew Parris | *Fiction*

Hardly anyone rides the bus this late at night. The ones who do look like they're barely there at all. They sit slumped in their chairs, half-dead, with translucent skin and discolored patches of flesh hanging lazily under their eyes, staring blankly at their phones, or the ground, or nothing at all. No one ever talks to each other. Sometimes, two people will walk inside the bus together. They don't talk either. One will look outside the window, the other in some other direction. Sometimes, I feel tempted to smash my head into the window until it looks like an abstract mosaic of broken glass and blood, just to see if they'll notice. Instead, I settle for drawing them. They never notice. They never mind.

Right now, I'm drawing a man who sits across from me, several seats to the left. He wears a baggy brown coat covered in grease stains, underneath is a t-shirt faded with years of hard toil. His hands are large, calloused, with dirt underneath his short ragged nails—he bites them, probably—and right now, those hands guard a plastic bag from a hardware store on his lap as if it were some great treasure. His head is tilted back against the window, but his eyes, I can see, are wide open, bloodshot. There's a slight ridge of purple skin that runs along his nose, like a carpet that's been bunched up. It's a scar, one that never quite healed right. I try to imagine how he got such a scar. Maybe it's from a fight over



Low Battery
Marynn Robinson | Watercolor and Colored Pencil on Paper

something or the other: a girl, his honor, nothing at all. Maybe he served in the military, and a piece of shrapnel just barely missed his brain. Maybe he was born with it, and it's some sick mark assigned to him by a cruel roll of the cosmic dice.



**“They never notice.
They never mind.”**

More likely, it's some construction accident. That's probably why his fingernails are dirty,

his hands calloused, carrying a hardware store bag. I'll never know for sure, though. I'll never ask. This is the closest I'll get to knowing him, or anybody on this godforsaken bus. The only things I know about them are the things I ascribe, the details I pencil in.

I finish shading him with my charcoal pencil as I hear the door open and the bus creak as someone else steps on. I hear, but I don't look. I'm too involved in the sketch, adding the rich details to the man's figure. I see a shadow loom over my work as the person nears. I wait for the

(Continued on page 16)



(Continued from page 15)

shadow to pass over, for the person to walk to the back of the bus, to one of the empty seats, and sit down. But the shadow stays. I look up at the source, indignantly. It's a woman, tall and thin, wearing jeans and a black hoodie a little too large for her. Her hair is cut short, practically shaved on one side, with the blonde top forming a little arch that hangs slightly over the side of her face. The strangest thing about her, however, is that she's looking directly at me.

"That's very good," she says, gesturing towards my notepad with some asinine smile. "Thanks," I grunt halfheartedly, and look back towards my work, expecting her to leave. But she doesn't, oh no. Nothing like that. Nothing a normal person would do. She plops down in the seat right next to me, and now I can feel her eyes heating up the paper. My hands start to shake. People don't usually make eye contact with me, much less sit near me. I'm an ugly man, with a square head and thin, bleached blond hair that hangs over my bugged out, red eyes. Some of it is intentional. It's why I wear dingy clothes and don't shave. I take great care to ensure that I look like the kind of guy you wouldn't want to look at twice, and yet this girl has the *audacity* to ignore all that. I realize, with a sinking feeling, that she's going to try and make conversation with me.

"I'm Jenny," she says, smiling brightly still and reaching her hand towards me. I raise mine slightly, showing her that it's oh-so-inconveniently covered in charcoal dust. She shakes her head and says, "I don't care." Defeated, I reach out my hand and shake hers.



Muses of Destruction

Madison Pitts | Woodblock Relief Printmaking



“What’s your name?” she asks.

“Brian,” I say, lying. I’m not quite sure why. Sometimes I just can’t help myself.

Her face lights up. “That’s my brother’s name,” she says. “He’s an artist, too. In school and everything.”

I can tell she’s waiting for me to ask about him, her brother. What medium he works with, how old he is, that kind of stuff. I don’t. If I wanted, I could tell her about the time I went to art school. I could talk about my experiences there, the people I met, the things I did. I could even tell her why I was kicked out. I don’t do that either, just sit there silently. Finally, she frowns. “I’m not bothering you, am I?”

“No,” I say. Lying again. Why do I do that?

She sighs with relief. “Cool,” she says dully.

“So, where are you off to?”

“Excuse me?”

She chuckles at herself. “Sorry, I don’t mean to pry. I just . . . I don’t know, I like talking to people. It’s so boring riding the bus alone, you know? Sometimes I look around at all these people and I just . . . it depresses me. It makes me feel alone.”

I put my pencil down for the first time. “I know what you mean,” I say, truthfully this time. “I’m going home.”

“Right,” she says. “I guess most people are, this late. Do you mind if I ask where you’re coming from?”

It’s a good question. I almost wish I had an answer for her. This is what I do, most nights. I ride the bus, going nowhere in particular. I go in a giant loop around the city, draw people that I’ll never see again, and at the end of it all, step out exactly where I got in. I almost consider telling her that.

“Nowhere in particular.”

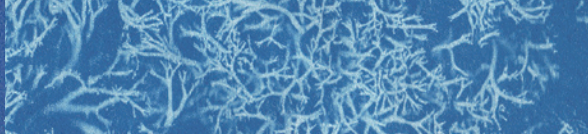
She nods. “I get that,” she says, and I begin to wonder now if she’s lying when she continues, “Sometimes I’m just desperate to get out of my apartment. Even if I don’t know where else to go. I’m new to the city, and I don’t really know anyone. Even my roommates are kind of a mystery. I found them on Craigslist and, if I’m being honest, I’m struggling to connect with them. Sometimes it all just gets a little . . .” She trails off.



“It’s a good question. I almost wish I had an answer for her.”

“Overwhelming?”

“Yes,” she says softly, looking over at me. For the first time, I notice that her eyes are blue: a rich, deep blue, like there’s an entire ocean behind them. I almost want to draw them, and I don’t usually draw pretty people. They’re boring, clean, safe. It’s the ugly ones, the ones with warts and



scars and calloused hands, who limp and hunch over, that strike me. But there’s something about her eyes, the way they look into mine like she knows me. Maybe she does. Why does she know me? *Why does she know me?* I realize my hand is shaking again and wonder if she notices when I feel the bus slow to a halt.

“This is my stop,” I blurt out.

“Oh,” she says. She frowns for a bit, then smiles, and gestures towards my notepad again. “Can you hand me a little bit of paper? Just a piece will do.” I tear off a small piece and give it to her, and watch as she pulls a pen out of her pocket and quickly scribbles something in exquisite characters. Folding it, she hands it to me. “Here,” she says. “You should call me sometime, we could meet-up or something. Maybe it’ll all be a little less overwhelming with someone else, if that makes sense?”

I look at her one last time and nod politely. “It makes sense.”

I pinch the slip of paper with my pointer and middle finger and walk down the aisle towards the door. As I get to the front, the bus driver looks at me with a cocked eyebrow. “Leaving a little early,” he points out, cleverly.

“I could use the walk,” I respond and step into the brisk night air. As I begin to trudge through the snow, the bus starts again, and as I look over I see Jenny waving at me through the window.

(Continued on page 18)

(Continued from page 17)

I give her a quick wave with my black, charcoal-covered hand and shove it back in my pocket. As I walk, I realize that, out here, in the empty air, it's even quieter than the bus, quiet enough to hear my own thoughts. And I begin to think about those eyes. Those ocean eyes. Those kind eyes.



“She didn’t want to be alone, like she said. She just wanted someone—anyone—to talk to.”

All-seeing eyes.

I pull the slip of paper out of my pocket and let it fall gently to the ground. I don’t pick it up. I don’t even turn back; I just keep walking. She didn’t want to be alone, like she said. She just wanted someone—anyone—to talk to. If not me, it would’ve been someone else. I didn’t mean anything to her anymore than the man with the scar on his nose meant to me. That’s all I was to her: a charcoal figure.

I pull my hood up and keep walking to nowhere in particular, as the neon lights on the buildings around me project their crude likeness onto the snow-covered cobblestone beneath my feet. •



Mermaid

Robert Clary | *Digital Photography*



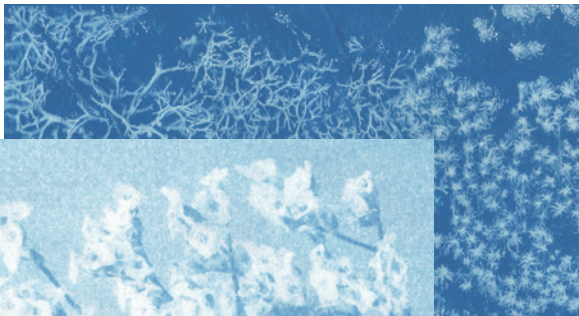


Three in the Morning on the Fourth of July

Addison Gentry | *Poetry*

I remember
every little laugh
you gave me that night,
the way each one
burst like firecrackers
between quiet breaths,
muffled behind one hand
while the other fumbled
for mine. Your laugh
bounced off the
kitchen walls, filled the
room, and shook the
cracked, fragile
walls I had tried to build
around my heart,
so that each one shattered.

Standing in the broken glass of
my kitchen window,
you laughed until you cried,
and I was in love.



Firefall
Elizabeth Hoffecker | *Digital Photography*



Crocodile
Ox Zante | *Digital Painting*



If Trees Could Talk

Hannah Tybor | *Poetry*

It was a simple question, one without much thought of its magnitude,
asked in passing, yet entirely captivating.

“If trees could talk, what would they say,” you whispered gently,
dried leaves crinkling on a well-worn path beneath your weary feet.

Wind whirled through the old Maple’s bright orange leaves, a rainfall of splendor.
“Love,” he passionately declared. “If I could talk, I would tell you of past love—
a promise of protection among the leaves and the men, caring for even the smallest
creatures, a means of saving all. Love, so great and pure, unscathed by selfishness.”

“I would not speak of love,” drowsily scoffed the Oak. “For pain is of the present.”
His large trunk reaching toward the sky, trying to escape the worries of today.
“The earth is crying out; can’t you hear it? Forests burn, animals disappear, never to return,
plastic floats, for there is no one who sees Nature’s pain, and past love matters not.”

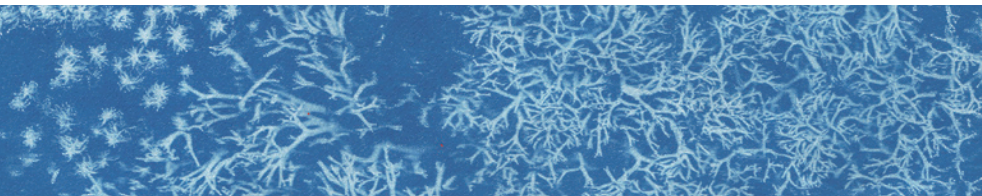
Then the Pine ominously spoke, his voice, dark and deep, quieting the woods.
“Yes, love is past and pain is present, but my children, is there hope for the future?
Will you care about your promise of old? Let go of your waste, surrender your laziness?
Act quickly, for you are hope—my hope—of Nature valued once again, of Nature saved.”

We stood still, among the wisdom of the trees, on sacred ground.
And though their whispers faded, we vowed to carry their voices loud.



All Knowing Mother

Adriana Klika | *Digital Photography*



Tread Lightly

Adriana Klika | *Digital Photography*



An Eye on Work

Jackson Gibson | *Digital Photography*



Coded Confessions

Pel Doski | *Poetry*

Let me be coward

And say something I need to say,
But don't expect to understand it,
Because it's only through coded

Means unexposed to everyone I know
That I am able to be what I authentically am.
There are some

Words that I can speak to you

That might just make you leave and
I've never done well with rejection so
Let's just keep it to poetry

Like this. So I wanted to say

So many things and maybe

One day I will but only after I
Have gotten over the fact that
I've never known what it was to love.

I still firmly believe it doesn't

Exist and I don't intend on changing.
These days I don't find joy in living
And maybe I never will,

So let me expose these secrets

Only with you because
I've never felt safe before
But I feel it with you.



Hunkered Down to View the World

Jackson Gibson | *Digital Photography*



Kampung Warna Warning

Destiny Seaton | *Digital Photography*



Poem, I Command Thee

Livi Goodgame | *Poetry*

Poem, I command thee
To waft into my thoughts.
Fill my mind and soul
Like the smell of hot breakfast.
Make yourself as clear and bright
As the warm winter sun,
Shining on conversations
Of promises to prosper.
Make me feel as light as those
Who enjoy the morning in friendship,
On a day so rare and radiant
As the one I call today.



My Perspective

Leah Patton | *Digital Photography*





Queen in Her Element

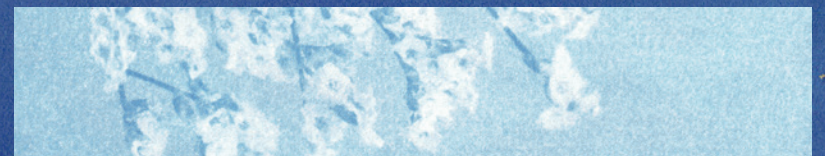
Ani Woodward | *Digital Photography*



Born from Loss

Rachel Lingerfelt | *Poetry*

I imagine holding you,
The quiet of a waiting room and soft voices.
We know each other in a way that is rare and perfect.
The world is so overwhelming for you that sometimes,
I cry too.
I never fault you for feeling so much.
Sometimes I wonder if I am capable of holding your life,
An entire world, in two hands
And still doing good by you.
I want all the best in the world for you,
All the ice cream trucks on your block have your favorite flavor,
Every time you scrape your knee, it is kissed better,
Any time you feel scared, you remember the lullabies sung to you.
I wish I could do good by you,
But maybe this is what doing good by you is.
Doing what aches to give you a lifetime of
Strawberry ice cream kisses before bed.



The Unicorn

Sydney Ray | Watercolor



Felicity

Maggie Strahle | Acrylic Painting



Morning Mystery

Morgan Fipps | Poetry

I announce the rising sun
With a shrill voice
Telling everyone that the day has begun.
I pierce the blissful, delicate silence
Disturbing the temporary dreams of the
Peaceful sleeping residents
Who drowsily obey my command
To start their day.
I travel with them
Throughout their hectic routine of
Something they call "life."
I remind them of appointments
Or call to them that dinner is done.
I sneak up on them when they least expect it
And gently say, "It's time for bed."
Then, once again they fall into their temporary state of bliss
Until I sing my song and begin our dance all over again.

Astray

Valerie Phillips | *Poetry*

Perhaps the glimmer of your ring in the sunlight caught her eye
Or maybe she saw you diligently writing in the corner
And observed the way you wiped a tear off your cheek without missing a beat
Her tail flicked, rustling the leaves as she fixated on your furrowed brow
She caught your attention too, but for fear of scaring her away
You pretend that you don't see those pale eyes
Observing you from behind the leaves
She is stunning.

After a time, you glance and make eye contact
She is still 'cept for her eyes frantically scanning you
But after a time, she begins to circle you, flicking her tail cautiously
She has lived and it shows
Her eyes crave a companion
But her feet are restless
Taking her time
She inches closer
Meowing now she falls to the ground
Exposing her stomach in the sunlight.

But you know if you move too fast
She'll run away never to trust you again
So you sit on the cold concrete shivering
And wait
You can tell she appreciates it.

She is skinny. Not starving by any means
Certainly self-sufficient
But never gluttonous
You consider giving her food
But then she would depend on you
And you can never provide for her like she can.



Almost instantly
As if she can read your mind
Or is it possible that she saw the glint of sadness cross your eyes?

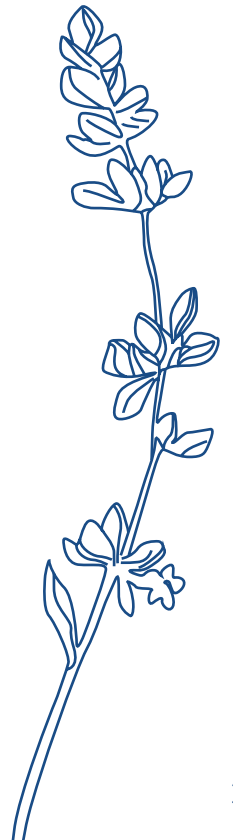
Your time is up. She knows it
And so do you
She stands up without acknowledging you
Returning to the hole in the fence.

You hope that she will look back
Another look at her knowing eyes
To give you closure
One last glance at her mesmerizing gaze
But she is gone
And it is for the best.

If she returns, it will be her own decision
And it will be only for a time
But she has surviving to do
Your help would've only been a hindrance
She is free.

Her tenderness is a strength in her hard world
And a blessing in yours
She is not and never was yours to hold.

She is hers
And will continue to be.



Scream

Katelin MacVey | Fiction

Dead leaves scattered across the still-damp pavement, propelled by the brisk wind. The passing rainstorm had left behind a thick scent of vegetative decay. Spatter's leash hung limp from my wrist, my fingers stiff and uncompliant. Today was the warmest day of the week, but the icy wind still cut through my gloves and severed what little functioning blood supply I had. My toes ached in my boots, despite clothing my feet in two pairs of socks.

Spatter loped ahead of me, nosing this pile of dead leaves, smelling that wet branch, then pausing to turn her head, ears pricked, to make sure I was still walking behind her. I'd named her Spatter because of the white spots decorating her face, going up far enough to grace her eyebrows. Satisfied that I was still present, Spatter resumed her explorations. The recent storm front had been unusually violent, bringing in wind gusts that took down branches, trees, and the occasional power line across the city. I'd felt it approaching before the meteorologists even warned of it. The cracking in my joints every time I got up, like a pressure valve momentarily releasing. The uneasiness at night, when the barometric pressure dipped, and I tossed and turned. The pills—the endless cycle of pills. Spatter watched it all, her deep brown eyes absorbing and reflecting everything she saw, everything I felt. How she felt about it all, I could only guess.

We picked our way through fallen debris, stepping over broken branches, discarded twigs,

decaying clusters of once-colorful leaves, now muted to the dull brown, gray, and black of death. An image surfaced in my mind—murky—more an indistinct feeling than a clear picture.

The debris cleared as we approached the neighborhood park, the trees thinning and the piles appearing more self-contained, as if hiding the sharp acidic scent of decomposition from the children would spare them a few blissful years. Up ahead, the shouts and cries of the local kids echoed in the air. A great mass congregated around the playground, running, jumping, skipping—its own organism. The parents had spread themselves out around the picnic tables with food and blankets. It looked like three kids had already put themselves in time-out.



“Who knew there were so many different kinds of pain?”

Away from the throng stood two girls, heads bent together as if whispering solemn secrets to one another. Their pale hair shone stark against the overcast sky, illuminated by an internal glow. They broke into giggles, clasping hands and facing one another. Then, they started to turn. The girls quickly gained momentum. I watched, growing ever more entranced as the two girls, with their hands locked, spun each other in circles of greater and greater diameters, gaining speed with each rotation. All of these little circles

Cocoon

Madison Pitts | Woodblock Relief Printing



blended together to make one great big circle, so that they were spinning endlessly in a ring of their own creation. They kept going, around and around, dizzying, until the force was too much for their little hands and they careened to the dirt, breathless with laughter. I found myself laughing with them, my reaction so sudden, so unexpected, that it pulled me short, my joy wilting in my throat as soon as it had bloomed.

I wish I could do that.

Envy—fierce, naked. It filled my chest, weighing me down like a mountain of stones. Quicker than a snake, my chest tightened,

my throat swelling. Incurable. Like a magnet, irresistible, I focused on the pain. My foot. My knee. My hip. My hands. Incurable.

My hands. Who knew there were so many different kinds of pain? They were building blocks, one on top of the other, how long can I last? Bone-deep aches tight as a corset, crushing me with a pressure that could only come from some demon, some damned spirit, reaching through me and gripping my very marrow. Lightning strikes. Voltage deadly enough to make me wish I were dead, or dead enough not to feel anything. Storms brewed in my nerves, breaking without the slightest warning, eeny meeny miny moe, which nerve is next?



“Paint smeared, wet and cold, clumping my eyelashes, blinding me.”

My hands. I could ignore everything—survive anything—that my body put me through, the future joint replacements, the physical therapy, and the unbroken, unending pain cycle for months on end now, but my hands . . . not my hands. Why did they have to be taken from me, too?

Incurable.

“No!” My cry echoed through the trees and down the street. Birds scattered, and the two girls turned to look at me, frozen, until, without a sound, they turned and sprinted away. Away from me. I sunk to the ground, trembling.

There was a whine. A wet nose was in my face,

hot, humid breath overwhelming my senses. I leaned into Spatter, sliding my fingers into her fur, feeling her breathing, her heartbeat. I buried my nose in her neck, inhaling her scent. She smelled like home—like play fights and dirty laundry, like flowers and dirt when she tried to dig in the garden, like the springy detergent from my bed sheets where she kept me company during restless nights. I rested like this until the trembling subsided, and the world stopped spinning beneath me. My body longed for a nap, but something itched in the back of my mind, digging in, not letting me settle. There was no image yet, but a feeling, an itch under my skin, was urging me.

.....

I was alone. A canvas was propped before me, wild with bright colors: pink, purple, yellow, blue, green. I didn’t know what I was making, but the need, the desire, to make something was writhing in its own torment.

My hands hurt. My fingers curled around my paintbrush like a claw, unable to properly grip the slim wood. Lightning zig-zagged along my dysfunctional nerves, producing tremors that threatened to release the paintbrush from my desperate grip.

The colors on the canvas swam before my eyes, blurring. They were so bright. Why had I chosen pastels to work with? I tossed my paintbrush onto the battered tarp, out of sight. I couldn’t look at my painting—I couldn’t look anywhere. Useless. You’re fucking useless.

The smear of pastel was all I could see, the smell of wet paint wedging itself up my

nose, a knife in my skull. It stunk, permeating everything—the air, invading my lungs, sinking into my skin, into my pores. Ants crawled beneath my flesh. My hands lashed out, toppling the canvas and easel. The paintings, the sketches, all of it was too much. When had I made so much stuff? I reached up, scrubbing at my eyes, trying to erase the colors from my vision. Paint smeared, wet and cold, clumping my eyelashes, blinding me. A cry rang out, torn from my lips by pain. Tears flowed, an unholy fire spreading beneath my clenched eyelids. I lurched forward, the heels of my hands pressed into my sockets as if that

(Continued on page 28)

A Look into the Void

Conor Lumley | *Colored Pencil & Acrylic*



Tanah Lot

Destiny Seaton | *Digital Photography*



could drive away the pain, as if they could absorb the paint and, with it, the misery.

My stomach hit something heavy. My breath escaped me in a violent heave, pain sprouting through my abdomen. Something exploded, splintering into thousands of tiny, jagged pieces against the floor. Small chunks assaulting my legs and feet like a tiny army of plastic soldiers. A sob wrenched itself from my throat. I started to scratch at the paint, at my eyes, at my hands. Get it off. My nails did nothing, I couldn't feel anything. I wanted it off. It felt like my

eyes were bleeding, but I scrubbed at them anyway. Why wouldn't it come off? Get it off—getitoffgetitoffgetitoffgetitoffgetitoff—

I screamed—a deep, wretched sound that tore open my chest, freeing itself from the cage I'd kept it in for so long. I screamed until there was no more air, until my head pulsed violently and spots danced behind my swollen eyelids. I retched, dry heaving, my hands groping blindly for something solid to hold on to. I found nothing but the shattered pieces of ceramic. The last remnants of whatever strength I'd had died,

crumpling alongside me to the tarp.

.....

I cut the engine, letting the silence of the night wrap around me like a bubble. Birds sang and chirped in the trees beyond my small car, without a care about the approaching storm. Crickets belted out familiar lullabies, undisturbed by the sudden intrusion of this metallic mass.

I looked down at my hands, pale against the black Velcro of the braces the doctor had ordered. Delicate. They looked so delicate. But yet . . . they weren't. These hands lifted, gripped, punched, pushed, pulled, held, touched, loved, crafted. How could they be considered delicate? No. They were sturdy. Strong. Such a small part of my body held so much pain—I didn't know how it was possible.

My arms, hands, and face were covered in lacerations from my nails. I had a scratched cornea and a serious case of dry eye from the chemicals in the paint. My doctor claimed I got off easy. That I was lucky. And well, I believed him. There's no telling for sure how long I'd been there before my neighbor had finally come investigating, trying to figure out why Spatter was suddenly causing "such a fuss." She kept offering to help me straighten up my studio, but I politely declined every time she brought it up. The physical damage hadn't been bad—just a few pieces of artwork needed to be thrown out—but the emotional toll had been much greater. I hadn't stepped foot in there since that day.

Lightning flashed, and I lifted my gaze to the blackened sky. *One . . . two . . . three . . . four . . . five . . . six.* Thunder rumbled in the distance. The first drops of rain splattered on my windshield,

slow and sporadic at first, but quickly picking up speed. I could hear the wind whistling through the cracks of my car, louder and louder.

I quickly tugged on my gloves and opened the door. A gust of wind rushed at me, greeting me with a spray of rain as I stepped out onto the grassy field. Lightning flashed again, lighting up the sky with a brilliance that left me temporarily blinded. *One . . . two . . . three . . . four.* My windows rattled. I walked further out into the field, feeling the icy rain beat against my skin. It was cold tonight, but I was better prepared this time. I had two pairs of gloves, two pairs of socks with my feet shoved in my warmest boots, earmuffs, and several layers underneath my coat. I was slowly learning that I could never be too prepared. A heating blanket was in the backseat, along with some pain pills that I now always carried with me. I tilted my head back, letting the rain wash over my face, run over the cuts and bruises I'd given myself in my fear, my panic, my desperation. It was like being dunked in a bucket of ice water, but I didn't move. I let the water run down my head, my face, my neck, my chest, but I kept my hands safe in my coat pockets, warm, protected. Behind my closed eyelids, light flashed once more. *One . . . two . . . three . . . four . . . five . . . six . . . seven.* This time, when the thunder struck, I struck with it. I let it out. All of the anger, pain, grief, hatred, envy, sorrow—everything I felt I'd lost, every emotion I'd turned my back on, ignored, I gave it its voice. I gave myself my voice, growing louder and more powerful with every passing second. And so, I screamed and screamed, unleashing my storm among the birds and crickets, the lightning and thunder. •



Ophelia

Sai Clayton | *Mixed Media*



 **Boys Will Be Boys, There's No Other Choice**

Lucy Crow | Collage, 48" x 72"



Thanksgiving Leftovers
Morgan Westerbeck | Oil on Board



Never Had Much Luck
Kaitlyn Chaffin | Painting

Cheshire Cat

Addison Gentry | Poetry

Smile, kid,
because that ancient stare
makes grown men
flinch as if your eyes were
bullets and we know
you wish they were.

Show your teeth
in something softer than a snarl.
No one cares about a rage
too big for the small
battered body that wants to
burst at every self-sewn
seam and scream *why* to a
world that does not dare
answer.

You are too young
for such ghosts, little girl.
You are too mad for untruths
so bold or tears so loud.
I'll stitch the corners of
your mouth up;
I'll staple the mask to
your bruised skin because
everything disappears behind
a smile.



Ox Zante | Digital Painting
Shark City



He & I

Hailey Clark | *Poetry*

He knows my name, and I know his, for I once pursued him,
and he pursued me, like a cat stalking a sparrow on dewy blades.
He tells me he loves me, his favorite untruth.

He analyzes me through a loupe, looking at my slovenly facets.
He pokes and prods at my achievements, and asks me how I could've done better,
rhetorically, mockingly.

When I work my fingers raw and my aching bones groan, he tells me ever so slyly,
"You haven't finished and you're so close, why not go on a little longer?"

When I am alone, he slinks behind me like an unwelcome shadow,
he susurrates underfoot.

He cries his crocodile tears with me, for my cheeks burn from salt,
whereas his grow plump with satisfaction.

He leaves purple hyacinths at my doorstep, I return the favor with daffodils,
invoking his return into my chambers once more.

I know him, and he knows me,
and we will continue to dance until I drop to the barren earth from which I stood,
unable to stand again.



Space Oasis

Morgan Ruth | *Clay Board & Scratch Pens*



The Long Jump
Sergio Villa | Digital Photography



Hereafter
Madison Pitts | Film



Fall(ing) is for Learning

Marisa Graham | Poetry

The hardest lesson:
how to fall

Raised, discolored tissue
just to the right of my kneecap
tells me I once knew

Summers of running down stairs
“Be careful!”
“careful” did not give me more time
catching fireflies in dim twilight

Clumsy, bubbling laughter was scintillation
saline drops on my cheeks, absent of rainfall
wiped gently away by calloused hands
when the stairs caught my body
before my hand caught the rail

I hover at the zenith of that gateway now
Persephone’s descent grinding—Cacophonous
symphony seeping into porous marrow
I force mine to make the trek down: 13 Steps

Careful treads before
footfalls following fearfully
precipice of pretense approaching

Perfection painted in shades of unattainability
wistful Hunger for days where mistakes taught me how to rise

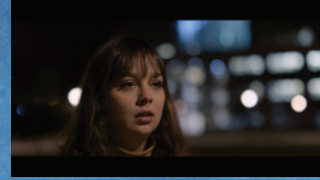
i miss falling

Video



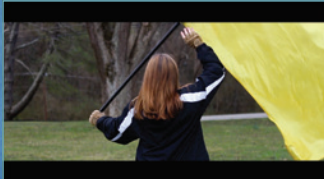
Panic

Emily McTyre | Digital Video



Outside

Shelby Stewart | Digital Video



Unguarded

Emily McTyre | Digital Video



Cherry

Sequoya Yardley | 16mm Film



Audio



The Suburbs

Ashley Johnson



A Note from the Designer

The covers and most of the elements throughout this journal were made using a photographic printing technique called cyanotype. It involves coating paper with light-sensitive chemicals and exposing it to the sun's UV rays, turning the paper a deep cyan color. A process once used solely by engineers to make blueprints, the cyanotype eventually emerged into the world of photographic art thanks to the prolific work of the first female photographer, Anna Atkins. The cyanotype, with its many scientific and artistic uses, represents the vast academic backgrounds of the students who submit to *Collage*. From science to art majors, creativity connects us all and can be found in the most unlikely of places.

Special thanks to Professor Leslie Haines for lending her time and exceptional eye for design to this project.



About Collage

Collage is a biannual publication of the Middle Tennessee State University Honors College. All submissions were reviewed anonymously and selected by a student editorial staff. The materials published by *Collage* do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the *Collage* staff, Honors College, MTSU student body, staff, or administrators. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or utilized in any form without written permission from the editor or adviser of *Collage*. Inquiries should be addressed to, *Collage*, Middle Tennessee State University, 1301 East Main Street, Box 267, Murfreesboro, TN 37132.

Policy Statement

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

Although *Collage* is a publication of the University Honors College, staff members and submitters are not required to be Honors students. Staff members are selected each semester from a pool of applicants and must have at least a 3.0 GPA.

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Submit to Collage

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

Creative Expression Awards

Each semester, six submissions receive Creative Expression Awards, one from each major category: art, photography, poetry, prose, video, and audio. Winners receive \$75 awards.

Winners

-  **Charcoal Figures**
Matthew Parris | Prose
-  **Three in the Morning on the Fourth of July**
Addison Gentry | Poetry
-  **Boys Will Be Boys, There's No Other Choice**
Lucy Crow | Art
-  **All Knowing Mother**
Adriana Klika | Photography
-  **The Suburbs**
Ashley Johnson | Audio
-  **Outside**
Shelby Stewart | Video

Columbia Scholastic Press Association Awards

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2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019

Silver Crown Awards

2007, 2008, 2011, and 2019

Gold Crown Awards

2012, 2013, and 2015

Production

Technology

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

Typography

Optima | Palatino

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80 lb. Athens Silk Text

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Collage

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