

Fall 2020

COLLAGE

A Journal of Creative Expression



Published By

**Middle Tennessee State University
Honors College**

Letter from the Editor

When our magazine began in 1968, our nation was facing many grim and formative realities. I fear this year will be remembered similarly. Yet what gives me peace is knowing that *Collage* demonstrates the prevalence of art through turmoil. As we reckon with our global and national struggles, we are also doing our best to remain whole ourselves. It's no small feat to take care of oneself these days, but I am proud that in the midst of such great tragedy, we have continued to create. Here we have a magazine that is eclectic in the works it showcases, brought to fruition by the adaptable and incredibly talented students of our university.

I am so grateful to have been able to serve this magazine alongside a resilient and hardworking staff under the guidance of our heroic advisor, Marsha Powers. I am also grateful to all the folks who submitted, for without you, there is no *Collage*. As I have been since my first semester on staff in 2017, I am endlessly inspired by the talent that we see each year. This semester has been no exception. I hope that one day, when this edition is old and our memories have grown fuzzy, our magazine will serve as a testament to this year. We are cementing ourselves in the literature and arts of these pandemic-stricken times, and our successors will look to us to see how we created something beautiful while humanity and morale were at terrible lows.

Though there are few who will leave this year unscathed, I hope that in these pages you feel safe to seek refuge and vulnerable enough to be seen. And please take care of yourselves and your neighbors.

With love,

Kelsey Keith

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★ **Stressed**
Jillian DeGrie • Drawing
(Prismacolor pencils on black paper)

★ Svalbard

Lisa Hardie • Poetry

The earth is frozen, the distant mountains imposing and jagged, stark in the night. The vault is buried deep within the chilled ground, where patient seeds hope for heat, water, growth.

The sturdiest people of the town appear in the cold shadows to crack open the door. Their shoulders strain beneath woven sacks, and they gather loose seeds into gripped aprons. Flurries of snow fill the now empty vault.

I've used up the canned food from Summer's harvest meant for my growing children, who once skipped along the clear rivers of my mind. Now the ice rises to meet the sky and pierce the shimmering fabric above.

These travelers are my last resort, the waiting inhabitants of the town are frost-bitten, their hands locked into prayer for a thawed Spring morning. Those carrying the seeds go as quickly as their stiff joints allow.

But no, the cloth tears near a loose thread, the seeds spill across the bitter landscape, and

my thoughts escape me.



★ King of the Landfill

Matthew Parris • Prose

Sometimes I forget I wasn't born here—in the land of broken and forgotten things. It's hard to remember what my life was like before this. I was so young then. I don't know how old I am now, although that probably doesn't matter. All I know is that my beard now grows past where my neck meets my shoulders. That's how old I am. I am "shoulder-length beard" years old.

I remember when I first came here as a child. I was old enough to remember, but not so old that I can remember clearly. I don't remember the images so much as the feeling of it all. I remember crying endlessly, my salty tears stinging my eyes and running down my soft cheeks into my blubbing mouth. I remember the cold wind slicing my skin like it was fragile white tissue paper. I remember feeling so alone that I couldn't breathe, like the emptiness of the air was suffocating me. Like space. I think I remember learning about space in school: what would happen were you to find yourself there unprotected. It's like drowning in freezing water, but without the water. Something like that. It's so hard to remember.

★ The Fall

Ross Sibley • Photography



★ Resisting Nihilism

Catelyn Woody • Audio

Back then I was sure that He would come back for me. He would realize that some grave error had been made and come rushing back to me. He would embrace me and pick me up and carry me home in His strong arms. He would say He's sorry and treat me like a king until I forgave Him, which I eventually would. For days that hope was my sustenance; I could live off it and it alone. Then the hunger overpowered me. No matter, for while I scavenged that hope became my coat, keeping me warm in the long nights. Then the cold overpowered me, so the hope became my light, guiding my way through the landfill. Then I finally realized that it led me nowhere. That hope became a weight, slowing me down and straining my back. I knew

this, yet I carried it still, for I thought it would be a shame if I lost that hope right before He finally came back.

You have to be careful when traveling here, especially without shoes. I grew out of my last pair and haven't been able to find ones my size, so I tiptoe around the rocks trying to avoid shards of broken glass or sharpened plastic. If I can only find shoes, then I'll be okay. I can walk freely, without fear. All I need is a pair of shoes. Give me shoes, and I can make this wasteland my kingdom. It wouldn't be so bad then. In the daylight, it looks less than it is: mounds of washed-out, broken down things. Bags of toys and bottles and shirts and empty containers. But every day there's a brief period of time, toward the end of the day, where the sun descends between two of the tall mounds, washing the sky in glorious shades of pink and orange. The clouds become soft purple streaks in the sky, and the last light glimmers off the reflective surface of discarded aluminum, and for a moment this place becomes beautiful. It becomes a kingdom I can be proud of.

I have made a shelter here out of metal sheets and tarp. It is so humble, the trucks that come to deliver more of mankind's decadent waste don't even notice it, for it blends in with the mound so well. During the day, I go out and collect things: random artifacts from a faraway land. At first, I tried to make beautiful things out of them. I'm most proud of a dragon made of screws and rods tied with strings, and wings of shredded newspaper. After a while I had to give this childish hobby up. I had more immediate concerns. Who has time to be a lowly artisan when they are destined to become a king?

I have found that I am not the only one here. This spot of land is littered with lost and broken souls like me. If you don't pay attention, they look just like their surroundings: pale and lifeless, dirtied and damaged. I missed them too, at first. But the longer I stayed here, the more I was able to make out their shapes, eventually even their weathered faces. What a fool I was, to not see my peers, for they are the only true peers I've had in my miserable life.

I think they're afraid of me. They don't respond when I talk to them. They must not trust me. As long as I've been here, I think they've been here longer. Maybe even before the trash came. Perhaps this landfill was built around them, and they have adapted to it, learned to camouflage themselves. I think I will try and win myself over to them, for I have much to learn from them. However, they have been here so long, I may be able to teach them, too. Perhaps they need a leader. Why not me? I would not be an evil, tyrannical king, like the ones from the stories He told me—indeed, like He himself was—I will be a benevolent and kind ruler. When I become king of this landfill I will organize them all and lead them out of here into the land of the living to take back what is ours.

I am not a child anymore. I understand that He is never coming back. I have abandoned my hope—my delusion—and in that abandonment I have found power. Somehow, I will find Him, and I will lead my army straight to Him. He will try and apologize, to explain Himself, to ask for my forgiveness. I will not listen. I will punish Him. If He will not come to the landfill, then I will bring the landfill to Him, to everyone. Everyone who discarded us and abandoned us, neglected us and forgot us will stand trial for their crimes. They will be put to a swift and just death, and I will build a new landfill around their homes. The bodies of the traitors will be piled up into the heavens. When the sun sets over my empire, the sky will become a bloody shade of red, and it will be beautiful.

All I need is a pair of shoes. 🍄

Elements of Nature

Elizabeth Kowalczyk • Ceramic sculpture



The End

Constants Jones • Poetry

Sometimes I wonder,
If your thoughts sit heavy
with a canyon between them.
If a river carves out the spaces between your ribs.
If your sighs act like
hurricanes spiraling till they're set free.
I didn't realize what it meant when your body sang to me.

Sometimes I wonder,
If your fingers are spread
so they can pluck at every drop of rain.
If your eyes ebb and swell with an icy tide.
If your lips, spit-slick,
could water the cracked desert of mine?
That's what I meant when I stopped saying it's fine.

Sometimes I wonder,
If your hands still know my shape,
the ghost of my body coiled and splayed.
If you knew before I did what I was going to do.
If your heart broke too,
quieted by footsteps as I walked away.
I still don't know what I meant when I left that day.

Groovy Gal

Diana LaFever • Photography



Sonder

Camrin Owens • Poetry

I lie in bed, covers smooth, pillow soft.
As for Sleep, she flutters about
But refuses to rest; I am left
With my thoughts—my thoughts
And my neighbor overhead.

They are troubled tonight.
They do not know, but those ceiling creaks
Tell a finer story than words.
Yes, they've been pacing fifteen minutes now,
Even

Steady

Rhythmic

I wonder what concerns them,
My neighbor overhead.

Are they, perhaps, like the woman
Weeping at the doctor
From news too heavy to hold
And smothering under the weight,
Fighting for each gasp of air.
Do they, like her, have no one
To whisper, "I'm here. I'm with you."
I love you."

Perhaps they pace in the dark
Scared

Worried

Alone

And my heart aches for them,
My neighbor overhead.

My clock reads one fifty-three;
The hour and creaks above beg:
Why are they yet awake,
My neighbor overhead?

Perhaps they are like my banker,
Just dismissed from their job;
Three children to feed,
Gas bill to pay and—
And the smallest has outgrown her shoes.
Perhaps they pace to cope with
Fear

Agony

Anger

And my heart breaks for
My neighbor overhead.

My clock reads two seventeen;
Sleep drifts closer,
Yet the nighttime vigil continues
For my neighbor overhead.

Do they, like me, find
The burden of school
Too fierce a monster for Sleep to fight?
Its claws are sharp, its teeth are bared
But its voice is smooth as silk—
Are its same words, those agonizing doubts,
Caressing their anxious mind:
Can I do it?

Am I enough?

Will they be proud?

And my heart reaches out to
My neighbor overhead.

My clock reads two thirty-nine;
Sleep comes to rest at last.
The pacing continues, an even cadence,
And I fall asleep to this
Strange lullaby
Of my neighbor overhead.

American Geisha

Sai Clayton • Screen print



Negotiating Time

Sarah Garris • Poetry

I trade my life to others.
Weeks at a time are bargained for help, love, approval.
It's the only currency I have.
Once a shining, golden coin,
My time shows the tarnish of trade.
Each week of myself, sold for a piece of nothing,
Is slowly eating my life.

When I was younger I couldn't haggle.
Instead of a trade, my time was just taken.
A whole summer gone.
Shuttled from person to person, home to home.
And each person, each state, demanded a different me.
The consumption of time ate my being.
Degradation from solid to liquid.

Even when my time is asked of, hours of my life,
I seem an unwanted burden.
Cheap to purchase and perched on a dusty shelf.
Pieces of my person are taken for show.
The pomp and air of a complete set.
That's all I am.
A piece in a matching display.
My only value isn't even held in myself.
My cost, my price, is what people believe it to be.
Spoken in quiet audiences,
When the doors close to hold their murmurs.

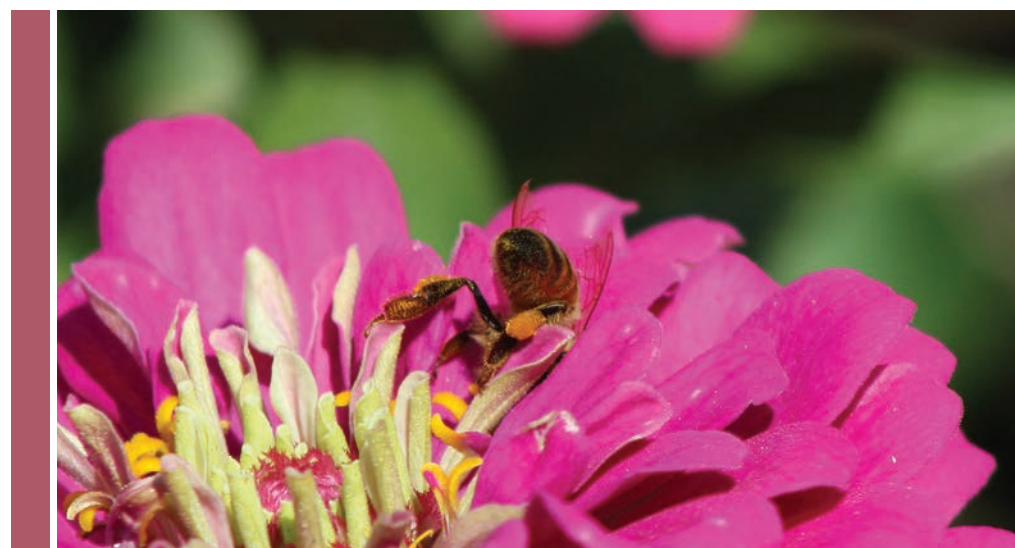


An Unlikely Visitor

Aemily Culpepper • Photography

Bee Butt

Elizabeth Crouse • Photography



This Summer

Livi Goodgame • Poetry

Quarters are saved for the lemonade stand
Up the street in the shade—
An excuse to stretch my legs.
Red, plastic lawn chairs set in a circle
Await conversations of uncertainty.
Neighbors wave and leave out gifts:
Tomatoes from the garden, water bowls for the dogs.
Inside, we cook, clean, and count the days.
No comings, no goings, but
Everyone takes a walk.



The Last Sunset

Celeste Maas • Audio

Lavender Fields

Tashina Fugate • Acrylic and oil
paint on canvas

Dawn of Incandescence

Timothy White • Photography





Man of the People

Timothy White • Photography

Worlds Away

Hailey Clark • Poetry

Do you ever wonder what we could've been?
Not constantly, but consistently
Do you lie awake at night as I do, looking out silvery paned oriels
Thinking about me,
as I think about you?

Do you still look for me on dewy Sunday mornings
Beneath leafy oaks where we used to meet?
Do you wait for me as I wait for you,
Under the undulating eiderdowns,
Moving ivory chessmen to pass the time?

As time subsides, we grow apart.
Time brings all things to pass
You no longer wait for me,
And I say I do not wait for you.

Though I cannot begin to count the minutes and hours in your passing,
I still see you, ever so often.
I see you in sidestreet puddles on rainy midsummer evenings,
And in the grass that grows in between the stone stairsteps.

Just every once in a while,
If the moment allows,
I wonder if you're looking back at me,
Worlds away.

Dawn

Emily McTyre • Prose

I never close my blinds all the way at night. I keep them pulled up, just a tad, floating about five inches above the windowsill.

It's perfect because with the celestial alignment of my bed and window, Dawn has just enough space—in that five-inch gap—to greet me each morning. She is quiet about it, first waking herself, I guess. She yawns and stretches her arms and slowly stands on the horizon.

She lifts herself on the lowest rung of my windowpane, peeking over it like a curious child trying to catch a glimpse of what's on the kitchen counter. Too short. She taps on the glass of my window, and her golden honey color spreads over the backs of my eyelids—a gentle alarm that she has arrived. The day has begun.

Some days, Dawn is playful. She throws rainbows dancing over my sheets to tickle me awake. Other days, Dawn is only just there. She doesn't come knocking on the window but pulls the clouds over her head like a dense, gray duvet, reluctant to wake. Most days, I follow her lead.

On her brighter days, though, after she's gently brushed back my eyelids, we will lie there, Dawn and I, wrapped in each other's warmth like a pair of lovers. Tangled in the sheets. Content. Flooded with hope for a new day. 🍂



Ubered Lift

Daryl Hickman Jr. • Video



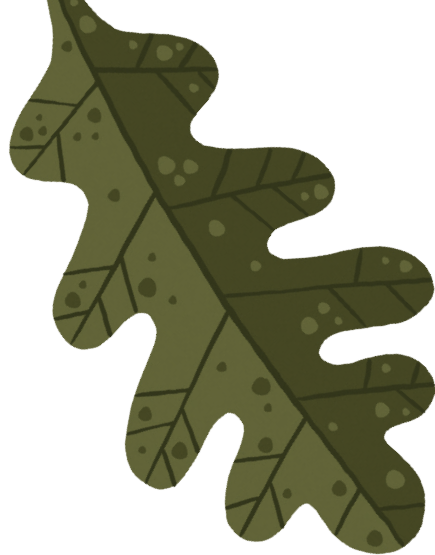
The Last Piece

Kierra Colquitt • Illustration

Orange and Blue

Bae Dedicatoria • Poetry

I get out of my 7 p.m. class
begging my feet to move faster
I pass other students
their laughter warming the crisp, autumn air
Lamp posts dot the sidewalk
casting a sharp metallic glow on the fallen leaves
scattered all over, pushing me to the side
Way down the path, car headlights
mirror the stars up in the sky
They twinkle against a dark velvety backdrop
as if they have never been touched by pain
My mouth moves, envious
they are the same stars I saw that night with you
A sharp gust of wind ruffles my hair and I think
of how you used to mess it up the same way
I pause, pinching my cheeks
Stop, a voice inside screams
but an image of you in your burnt orange T-shirt
and your best blue jeans resurfaces
pulling me back to the moment you winced
as I pinched your cheeks with my cold fingers
I waited for a burst of anger
but you pulled me closer instead
I feel a familiar tug and I blink once, twice
a stranger in blue jeans passes by
He steps on the dead leaves
I have been carefully avoiding
and I wonder how easy it must be for him.



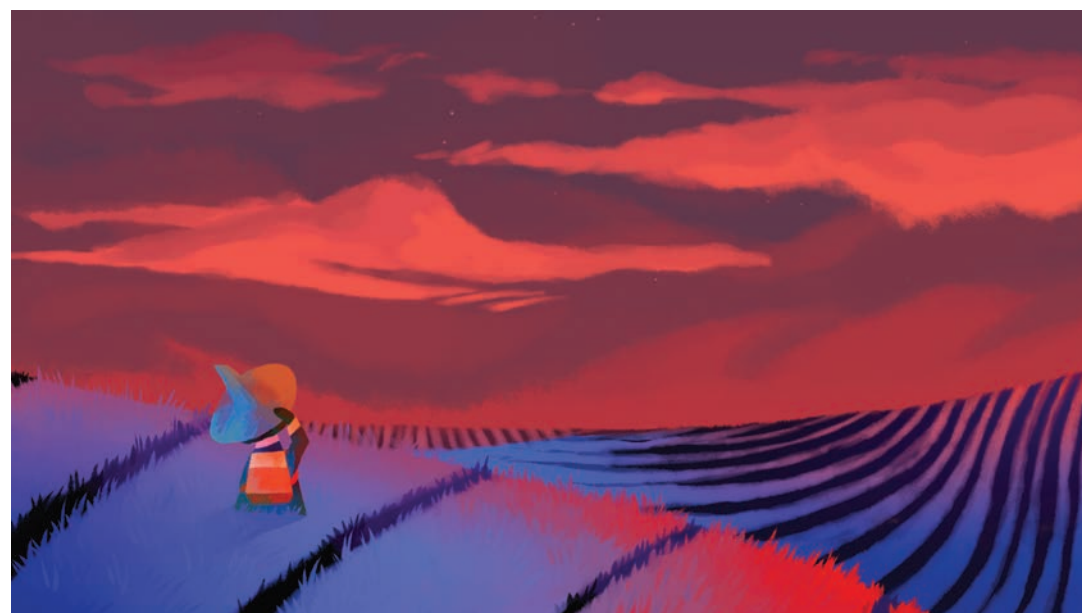
Sock Puppet

Morgan Westerbeck • Oil on board



Red Skies at Night Traveler's Delight

Leo Bedsole • Digital art



Skinks

Brandy Warren • Prose

Deep beneath the Greek oregano, the onion chives, the star jasmine, and the yew live my skinks. Midday they climb up onto the patio bricks to lie in the sun, warming themselves.

They are five-lined skinks, the young of which have blue tails. If I'm still, I can watch them on patrol. Did I gasp, and then smile, when an adolescent threw itself off the brick's edge into the jasmine roots. It was a flying leap, legs splayed, what I hadn't expected; and, as silly as it might seem, I believe the skink relished the maneuver. Perhaps after a worm, this member of the infantry unit landed in the combat zone ready to devour the invader.

I've yet to see one of my skinks eat a slug or a fly or a grasshopper, but I know they do, handfuls every day. So, not only are they entertainment, they're also pest control.

Lying in the sun, the skinks' smooth, flat scales make their gray-brown bodies and their silver stripes shimmer. Skinks are lizards, small ones, their bodies five inches, their tails six. What makes them unique lizards is that the female stays for six weeks under a rock or log with her eggs until they hatch out as one-inch babies. On the young, the five lines and the blue tail are distinct, fading with maturity to brown.

And mama skink hasn't to worry for her eggs or for her babies, for I've spread no "agent orange, mustard gas, or napalm" to disable my new, little recruits.

Five-lined skinks are sometimes thought to have poisonous stingers. They don't.

It's said that they taste vile. Oh, I hope that's so.

For their assailants will then sample the full measure of their noble name—*Eumeces inexpectatus*—the unexpected.

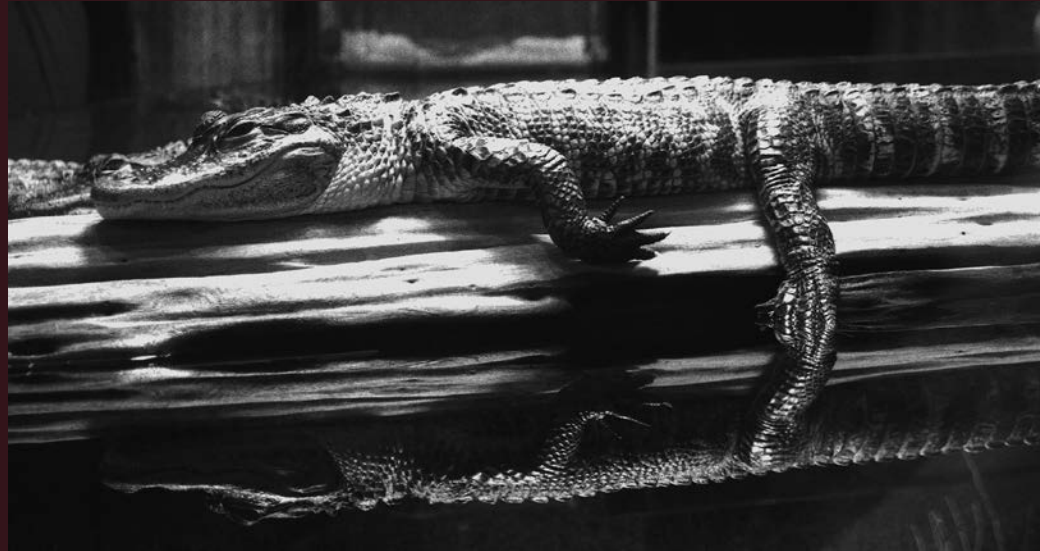
Warm days, brown veterans, and blue rookies defend my garden from aphid, whitefly, and mealybug assault. But when chasing after and landing on foe in 90-degree heat leaves my troopers fatigued, they take their leave in the shade of lemon verbenas in their clay pots. Troopers sip from a low pan of water. And like their allies—spiders, toads and ladybirds—they secure respite in the cool green I've preserved for them.

Come winter, my regulars hibernate in the earth beneath my rosemary, jasmine, and yew, their services wrapped and appreciated until heat and bugs bring them out once again to active duty. 🐸



Closer Look

Morgan Westerbeck • Oil on board



See You Later

Justine Clifford • Photography



Light

Bailey Wrenne • Photography

Phantom's Playground

Alexis Wiley • Poetry

The hollow echoes of years remembered
The empty sounds of a forgotten place
No more shouts, cheers, or songs
An empty graveyard made of this thriving land

Tiny phantoms of children roam through the woods
Their ghostly voices pull at my ears
Small hands grabbing at me
I can almost see their bright eyes again

I reach out my hand and see at its tip
The wavering, shimmering, foggy shore
Where no longer shouts are heard, nor splashes made
Just the ghosts of children splashing forevermore

Across that shore in the distant wood
A fawn's head peeks through the grass
Her ears perk, eyes sparkle
She hears the children's deathly play

The sky grows dim as evening fades
The light in their eyes burns out
This place, once so happy and free
Now their resting place for eternity



N95

Mary Burst • Poetry

How much time has passed?
How many days did I lie paralyzed in my bed?
How do I stay connected to my humanity
With no one around?

Bake bread, binge-watch, better yourself
They say.
But motivation has evaporated into a thin mist
That cannot penetrate my mask.

Complaints fill the air,
But anxiety constricts my breathing
More than a piece of cloth ever could.

I see people hoping, praying, pleading
For "normal,"
But even normal wasn't okay.
We just have something new to blame.

Burning Sunrise

Adriana Klike • Photography



Meru, Kenya

Makayla Wiley • Photography



Summer With Her

Bailey Chavarria • Poetry

A mirage trembled and shook
over the blacktop
while I watched my shoes melt,
white rubber dripping,
Sweat slicked my back,
your glasses foggy like a bathroom mirror.
The neighbor's dog,
a grayed little beagle who loved to howl,
combusted into dust and char.
My car was a blasting furnace,
the seatbelt buckle branding my bare hand
as I start to liquefy and the AC chokes
and sputters,
drowning in the waves of heat.
But you look at me,
my gray hoodie loose on your frame,
and ask,
"Is it cold in here to you?"



Dapper Productions

Julian Brown • Video

Artist Mary Watkins: From MTSU Student to Community Icon

By Hanan Beyene

As the child of sharecroppers, Mary Watkins didn't even have a TV growing up, so from a young age, she found her entertainment in a person's face, in their expressions and looks. Growing up with an artistic family, becoming an artist was inevitable for Watkins. She started drawing at the age of seven, originally with portraits. She would look at magazines and newspapers to try to duplicate the image on paper. Watkins never received any art training or took art classes in high school. It wasn't until 1966 when Watkins majored in Art at MTSU that she learned specific techniques, histories, and appreciations. After graduation, Rutherford County lacked opportunities for art teachers, and Watkins would go on to teach special needs post-graduation. Yet, she still incorporated art into her classes and found outlets working with seniors, art camps, and other places to share her knowledge.

When speaking with Watkins, her passion for art is crystal clear. She believes that people relate strongly to portraits specifically, and she has an urge to draw people's faces to capture their essence. She's even been known to stop strangers and ask for a photograph, in hopes of later putting their portrait on canvas. Watkins also draws portraits of iconic figures like Nelson Mandela, Barack Obama, and John Lewis. Real life serves as a place of abundant inspiration for her, and Watkins seeks to bring awareness with her artwork. When asked what people should take away from her art, she talks of how she wants her audience to "be able to see the message," whether it is through her portraits, poems, plays, etc.

Being a Black woman, Watkins' race greatly affects her art, and Black Empowerment is a central theme in her work. Watkins proudly displays natural Black hairstyles and culture. In her piece "My Roots Run Deep," Black natural hair is displayed prominently as a response to the notion that Black natural hair is "unprofessional" or "ugly." She specifically cites several stories of Black people who were discriminated against for their natural hairstyles. Likewise,



when John Lewis passed, Watkins painted a tribute piece to him, honoring his work for civil rights. To Watkins, her art is meant to serve as a message to the community and as a stand in her identity.

Growing up in the Jim Crow era, Mary Watkins attended segregated schools. Even by the time she attended college, Watkins was one of few Black students at MTSU. She



describes the experience as "intimidating" and isolating at times. For Watkins, her race was—and still is—something that seeped into every aspect of her life. Despite the negativity she endured, Watkins always took the high road. She emphasized that her parents taught her to not hold prejudice towards other people. She carried this logic throughout her life and taught her children the same. Through representation and awareness, Watkins' work seeks to validate the Black Experience and empower Black people through artwork and multimodal works with genealogy.

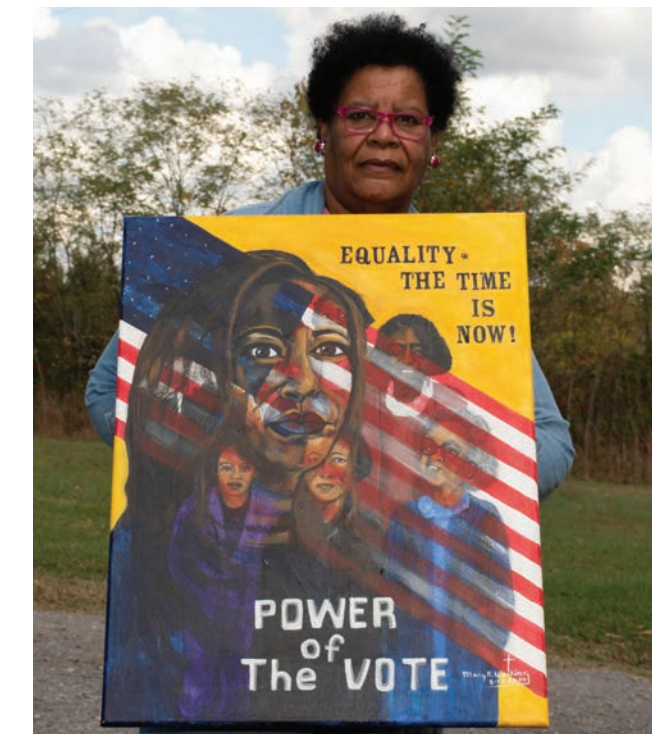
Genealogy has fascinated Watkins for a long time, specifically her interest in Black family histories that have been lost. Watkins began her interest in genealogy when she went to her great-aunt's house and found a painting signed "L. Murfree," dated 1893. "[I want] to preserve history for the younger generation so they know from which they came," she says.

As part of the African American Heritage Society of Rutherford County, Mary Watkins engages with histories and genealogies of Black families and leadership. Watkins creates booklets, tracing back to prominent figures and compiling family histories. Currently, Watkins is working on a "Hidden Figures" calendar that highlights the lost stories of Black people who contributed greatly to the Rutherford County area. "It's important the young people know these histories," she says, because these histories counteract the common narratives of the past. She also writes plays and is currently working on one that involves the story of twelve women from different races and backgrounds who fought for women's and Black rights. Like all her work, the play seeks to uplift people's stories and achievements.

At one point in our talk, Watkins put me on the spot, asking me if I was familiar with some of the "Hidden Figures." She asked if I knew who Sampson Keeble was. When I shook my head to say no, she explained he was the first Black Tennessean to serve in the state legislature. Watkins then asked me if I knew Callie House. When I answered no, she told me how House fought for reparations for formerly enslaved African Americans. Despite growing up in the area, I realized I'd never heard any of these stories, which is precisely her motivation for creating "Hidden Figures."

"Stuff like the [Hidden Figures] I feel is important so that the young people know. Because for me, all I knew was [Black people] being enslaved," she said as I started to tear up. To Watkins, her art, genealogy, and teaching all illuminate the unheard stories of the Black community and empower the youth, so that they can move forward with a stronger sense of heritage and identity. 🍌

“I want to preserve history for the younger generation so they know from which they came.”





Mantis

Ox Zante • Photoshop



Hell Hath No Fury

Katrina Scott • Oil paint, cold wax medium, paper collage

Different Love

George Boktor • Poetry

My father is a tall man
lean-limbed and a little
out of reach

He pulls a sweater over me
shakes his head
pinches his lips
pulls over a different sweater or
a button-up
some knee-long khaki shorts
Velcro lace sneakers
navy down jacket
this goes on

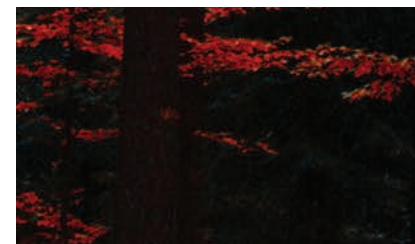
I see the tremor in his fingers when
on our scrappy little balcony
he smokes and sits and rakes
his nails through his hair
I don't know if he's praying
or laughing
at the sorry misery
that is our kitchen sink
crusted and clogged
from when we wash our hair out
with old dish soap
he rinses my scalp
and the water trickles down
my forehead
onto my knuckles
and I remember him
humming
so I hum

Back inside he tosses the tags
his fingertips are red-raw from
clothing me

We are in church now
dressed and clean and the fluorescents
white-hot in the lobby
my father wipes his forehead
with the Ross receipt
and stalks a tray
of holy oil capsules
rubs one into his palm
and puts it up for me to see

The linework grooved
glistening
the Lord's work

I stare at his hand and imagine
what it would look like
with mine in it



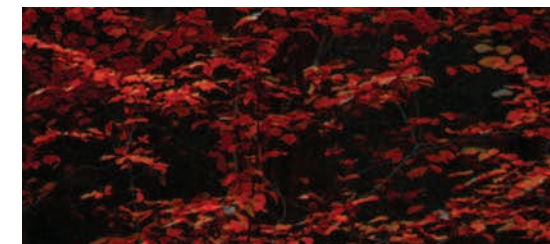
Incandescent

Ashley Keasling • Photography



Waves of Distant Bluffs

Jake Yandle • Oil painting



Faceless

Anna Alexander • Gum bichromate over cyanotype



Don't Lie

Abigail Wells • Poetry

Incessant appeals to heaven gone unheard
Continual confessions yet still unclear
We abstain from vices and
We lament about our hollow hearts, hiking down these narrow halls
We want to live a thousand lives at once
Wading through waist-high prairie grass and reed
Or ride the train and talk about the war
And how we both want something more
than This

But we do not know what we deserve
Or if we even deserve each other—
What will it cost us both to get to where we're going?
When you decide to leave—
I will not ask to come with you

I refuse to profess the words I know you can't say back

Safe from Chaos and Collapse, you say time moves slower in Cape Cod
But until then we are forced to yomp through battlefields, dodging bullets
Bruises still healing, we pick ourselves up like ripe peaches
The Fall lends itself to new life—

You: a freshly reborn phoenix, Saint Lazarus
Keeping vigil in a Chinese restaurant, waiting for a miracle
Dowdy in sweatshirts, but soon draped in Ivy
Memorizing bird calls like theologians pour over holy scripture—
Will you, years from now, be able to recognize my voice too?

Me: yearning for reciprocated stolen glances
I grow, like kudzu vine, all the more maudlin over you
I study your face like star maps, or a missing child's photograph—
For I know one day I'll have to describe your skin from memory
(Suntanned from harsh summers, soft despite scars, smooth like Bittersweet flesh)

I refuse to profess the words I know you can't say back
Yet now, in my defiance, I confess:
I love you as best as I know how to



Oxymoron

Rachel Booher • Poetry

A single petal disconnects, softly floating from her home.
I watch you journey upon the wind, kissing the breeze with a tender embrace.
A golden light shifts and shines, illuminating the flow of your silk.
Swirling and swishing through a dance,
Twirling the ruffles with every curve,
Each vein of lace profoundly enhanced, twining throughout your bodice.
Oh, how exquisite!
Suddenly, a gust shatters your dance, as you chaotically twist and flee
Far, far away from me
But I know, deep in my soul, your voyage continues.
Because you and the wind are lovers at heart, the black and white,
Your day and his night, the mixture of clear and bright.
And through your soft, embellished dance,
I see a golden light reveal a union, vibrant and flawless,
As the silken petal glides on forever, dancing with her storm.

The Earth is a Woman

Keisha Lambert • Acrylic,
oils, pastel, handwoven
canvas, gesso

Sweet as Honey

Savanna Cucchiara •
Digital painting



Canadian Rockies

Rylee Campbell • Photography





Wanderer
John Lane • Photography



My Grandpa Gary
Maggie Strahle (top right) • Oil paint



Flower Girl
Marcus Khamsyvoravong
• Photography



Hair Like Mine
Jordyn Hall • Painting (bottom)



An Ode to Icarus
Sydney Robertson • Poetry

In the corridors of the Minotaur
Your wings hid their luster
Your father breathed into them life
Two steps off that cliff
You saw for the first time
That freedom made your wings into wings
More than your father's wax and feathers
All your father could give you were limits to freedom
The sun called louder than your father
The wind felt better than his coarse hands
The light gave you shivers that the cold never did
You walked between stone walls
Beneath a palace full of gold
Now the palace is below you
The heavens above you
The sun promises to hold you

More than your father ever did
They call you foolish
For grabbing hold of the sky
Because they will never fly
You couldn't spend your life surrounded by rock
Your father is the foolish one
For showing a trapped boy his wings
The sky's arms were open
When you stepped off that cliff
But the sun didn't tell you she'd burn you
The wax didn't tell you it'd hurt
Rivers burned through your bones
Numbing malnourished muscles
Softening your fall into the sea
Still they call you foolish
Because you laughed on your way down

Laughed because you knew
It is better to fly once than to never fly at all
You blew a kiss to the sun on the way to your marbled grave
Beholding something so magnificent is worth the burn
The ocean caught you in your glorious fall
She froze you
Ripping up your wings
But you loved her
Just as much as you loved the sun
You preferred your grave be beneath crashing waves
Than those deadly cold corridors
Below that wretched palace of gold
You shone brighter than the gold ever will
Though they call you fool
O' Icarus
You Flew

Dépaysement

Emily McTyre • Poetry

How can you find a single word,
only one that describes such a feeling?
“Lovely,” “comfort,” “home,”

none of them do justice.

It’s the encompassing warmth of the sun on your back,
rays stretching through the window

on a chilly autumn morning.

It’s the color of parchment and used tea bags,
the smell of roses,

their petals glittering with dawn dew.

It’s the sound of a full orchestra,

the rich wooden instruments sharing a melody in the
dark. The chord swells.

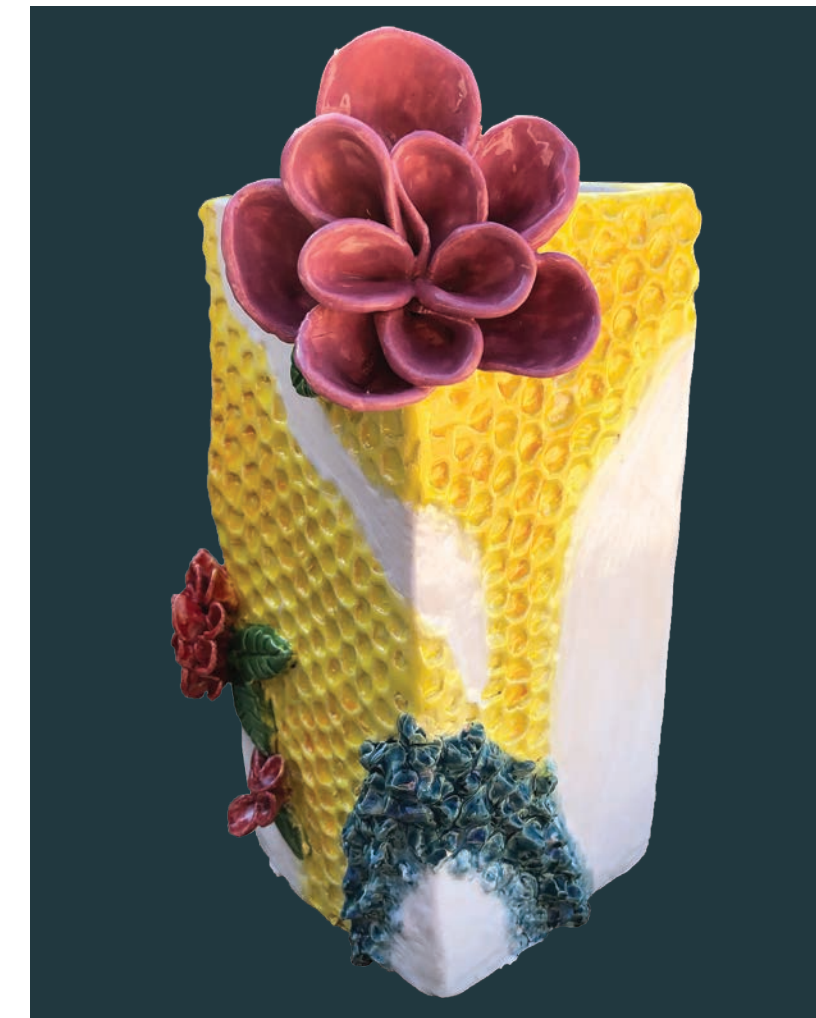
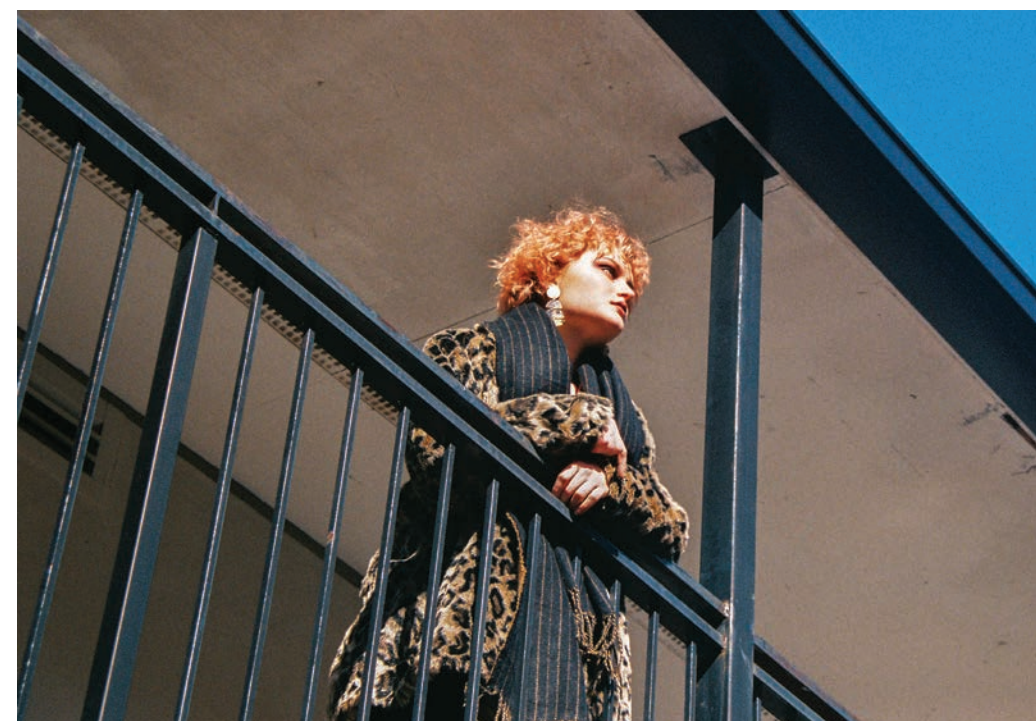
I feel at home in this new place,
comforted and loved.

If only you could understand,
we could define the feeling
and bask in it as one.



An Innocent Victim

Katrina Scott • Oil, paint, cold wax medium, paper collage



Life

Elizabeth Kowalczyk • Ceramic sculpture (right)

Burning Cities

Kaitlyn Hungerford • Photography (top left)

Overlook

John Lane • Photography (bottom left)

The House

Camrin Owens • Poetry

Dust riots in the stagnant air
As I wander
The cold, empty, forlorn
House.

Creaking floors, complaining
Under my weight, keep me a
Sad sort of company.
It's been a while, they seem to say
And I—
I can only agree.

My fingers can just distinguish traces
Of wood grain in the handrail
Worn—almost—smooth from three decades of use.
The stairs murmur
Kinder greetings and lead me
Slowly, slowly
To my old bedroom.

Stale and silent. Cobwebs
Decorate in morbid triumph
The corners
The ceilings
The comforter—

I flee in heated anguish
Damming the scream
Clawing my throat for Mama to come
Save me.
My foot slips; I tumble; I crash
On the dulled cedar floors below.
What did you expect? they ask.

28 • Collage

A moan from deep within
Escapes my throat but not
From the fall.
I can feel them now, the tears.
They are coming, coming like
A hurricane, a wild storm,
A force uncontrollable.

Picture frames smile as I make my way
To my feet
And down the dim hall;
You shouldn't, whisper the floors.

I must.

The ghosts of familiar scents
Bombard me as I—cruelly—step foot
Into the kitchen.
The hurricane breaks landfall.
The tears of grief are bitter on my tongue.

Mama should come now, my soul wails.
She should be here beside me.
But the beating heart
Of this home
Sleeps in the graveyard
And this place of life, of laughter, of love
Is now
Just a cold, empty, forlorn
House.



Untitled

Rachel Henley • Scratch art



James

Jillian DeGrie • Pyrography



No Means No

Savanna Cucchiara • Oil painting

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The Joy Hoodie

Jania Boddie • Drawing, graphic design, fashion (top)

Precision Among Chaos

Julian Brown • Ink painting (bottom left)

Siphoning Thoughts

Amy Csaki • Graphic design with photography (bottom right)



Be Still, Wanderer

Nicholas Krause • Prose

The human brain weighs as much as six human hearts. But sometimes the heart feels so heavy there might as well be no brain at all. Looking at a picture of Katie—the person who, for the past five years, I've variously known as My Love, Freckles, and Starmate—I use my finger to trace the outline of her face. Our past life together flickers in my thoughts. Tears and laughter and pain and joy, I see it all playing out in my brain, I feel it all in my heart. Things are over between us now, our relationship ending right along with our twenties. Good things must come to an end, that's what a refrigerator magnet told me once. Why should my relationship be any exception? It's all for the better, I tell myself. But I don't believe it. Instead, I just feel frozen. I stare at her picture, the room motionless, my memories alive. The freeze is interrupted only by my heartbeat. Someone tapping from inside, awakening me, reminding me I'm not dead, pounding out the old Plathian brag: 'I am, I am, I am.' The room is still, apparently serene—but here's my heart pattering away, indifferent to the stillness of its surroundings.

My mind feels overwhelmed with thoughts of loss. I want to think about something else—anything else. I decide to think about my thoughts. I have thoughts. Here they are, there they go, zipping around inside me. Here, like every other human, I have this three-pound mass of wrinkly, electrified meat trapped inside my skull, and it is busy. Busy sending signals throughout my nervous system—more signals than all the phones in the world combined—busy serving as the organic epicenter of my thoughts and actions, busy making me. My thoughts, the result of innumerable neurons and more synaptic connections than stars in the universe, coming together to create a self, an identity. I want to reach inside and pluck out one of these mysterious thoughts, but they are too elusive. The entire brain—no, the whole damn system—is at work, the brain just a bulbous gob situated at the top of a spinal cord that stretches and connects through all of me. I have a nerve—the vagus nerve—coupled to my hindbrain that snakes its way through my heart, lungs, and gut, never taking a break from its role as bodily regulator. 'Vagus' is Latin for 'wanderer,' and it's largely thanks to this wandering nerve and its detours through my digestive tract that I felt butterflies in my stomach as I fell in love, and that I felt aches in my stomach as I fell out of love. (Continued on page 32)



Green Day Tour Gig Poster

Brittni Herrin • Digital painting

(Continued from page 31) And it's not just the tortuous nerves and blood vessels that are hard at work. Here, like every other human, I have within me an entire ecosystem of living creatures. There are more bacterial cells in my body than human cells, which means I am more alien than me. My gut alone acts as the home for enough bacteria that if each one were a human being they could populate 15,000 planet Earths. Flowering flora, alive and wriggling and eating and farting and breathing, none of them able to exist without me, and me unable to exist without them. Most are helpers, some enemies, generations living out their lives within me, subsisting on my existence. I am the God of a microbial cosmos. So much life and motion inside, and so much motion inside of that motion. All of them, all of me, and all that's around me, everything that makes up this frozen tableau, is at its most basic level utterly dynamic. The subatomic scaffolding of these stolid and solid walls, if we could look close enough, would be jittering and jiggling and racing, particles with all sorts of exotic names—bosons, gluons, charm quarks, and muons—popping in and out of actuality, moving at incredible and erratic speeds, blurry and vibrant and empty, abstract entities not even existing in the way we like things to exist, but as probabilities, as potential thing-like things, ghostly and ever-moving, never stopping, forever in an ethereal dance that is, starting now, called the quantum shuffle.

All this invisible motion around me, I decide I need to move as well.

I stand.

Everything still seems so still.

I take a deep breath.

My feet are firmly planted, but the ground underneath—not so much.

Again, I don't notice it, I don't feel it, but it's happening. Here, like every other human, the terrain below, and me along with it, is spinning around the Earth's iron nucleus at more than the speed of sound. Spinning and spinning, each and every day we travel the circumference of our globe. As Earth rotates on its axis, it also careens toward the blazing locus of our solar system. The sun, a massive million-degree bubble of unbound particles, warps the cosmic fabric, taking us on a supersonic ride down a gravitational toboggan slide. Our fiery deaths prevented only by inertia, the never-ending quantum shuffle perfectly complemented by this stellar waltz, a waltz moving at 90,000 feet per second. Wanderlust still not satisfied, we spin and plummet along with the sun and moons and meteoroids and asteroid belts and Oort clouds and comets and planets all tracing the edge of the Milky Way. Faster still, our plasma deity, a cache of rainbows, blazing white, forging

32 • Collage



The Performance

Chelsea Gardiner • Oil and acrylic on canvas

elements, engendering life, falls toward a supermassive event horizon, and, ultimately, the darkest of darks, a darkness that eats the darkness, a blackness that sucks us around its invisible teeth hundreds of times faster than the fastest bullet, itself carving a path through the cosmos at incomprehensible velocities, more than a million miles per hour—all at once, speeding, plunging, sinking, circling, whirling, reeling, turning, spinning, spinning, spinning—

Stop.

I feel dizzy and sit back down on the stagnant, motionless bed.

Breathe.

I lean over and yank on the shutters and light pours in. I close my eyes and, despite trying to wrangle my thoughts, I see her face. I remember when we first met. It was a blind date. Katie was wearing a blue dress dotted with yellow flowers. A warm smile stretched across both of our faces as we walked toward each other, sharing that awkward

moment of deciding whether to hug or shake hands. We hugged.

That first night we spent a lot of time looking into each other's smiling eyes. The light would have reflected from her, coming at me as fast as anything in the universe possibly can; the light from her eyes would have embraced the cells in mine, my pupils expanding to take more of her in, sending information to whirl around my occipital lobe while I reveled; the light would have engraved itself into my grey matter like lovers engrave their love into the skin of a tree, the photons' odyssey now forever altered by us, interlocked with our existence. Forever in motion, forever changed. No matter what happened or happens our thumbprints eternally pressed into the cosmos. Yet time hurtles forward toward an unknown ending, wholly dismissive of anyone's protests. Human lives so full of meaning and significance, pain and suffering, laughter and friendship—we are still swallowed in time, immense and immersive and relentless. We are snowflakes fallen on the hearth fire.

But here I am, alive and conscious. The room is still, but only in appearance.

Nothing on pause, nothing waiting, it is all happening, all at once, right now. My attempts to stay neutral in a moving universe will always be in vain. Dynamic.

Be still, wanderer, to see how much you stir.

I stand again, feeling sturdier. I pull out my phone and see my reflection in the black mirror. There's a crack in the screen that traces the contours of my face without fracturing the image. I want to call someone and make sure the world still exists. As I stand there, looking in on myself, trying to decide who to call, the screen suddenly lights up and gentle vibrations reverberate through my hand.

I thumb a button and put the phone to my ear. 'Hey, mom,' I say.

'Hey, honey! Just calling to say hi!'

'It's good to hear from you.' I head out the door, listening to a familiar voice, feeling the ground beneath my feet. 🍂



Hailey Moro • Collage and acrylic paint
Nigerian Boy

Living in the Breeze

Julian Brown • Photoshop composite



Freedom

Elise Sandlin • Poetry

I am still this body
And I am still this soul
And knowing I will always be so
—No matter what wind blows around me or earth shakes beneath my feet—
Has become a consistent answer in this world of consistent change
Knowing I can never leave myself
Has become my freedom
Not my cage.

Things + Feelings

Emma Bradley • Poetry

There is a lone crow sitting on the wire outside my house,
And I'm sure he has not noticed me the way I have noticed him.
There is a leaky faucet crying out into silence,
And I'm sure there is no one to turn it off.
Do you ever think of it all?
The sound of someone you love,
Walking down the stairs in slippers.
You know it is them before you see them.
Think of it all,
The crow, the faucet, the floor, the slippers, the sound on the stairs.
Some things are alone, and some things are broken,
And some things are warm, warm, warm like hot chocolate,
And as sweet, too.
The crow is only ever a crow, but I still think it is lonely.
The faucet is only ever a faucet, but I still think its heart aches.
The stairs are only ever stairs, but sometimes they are excited by
The sound of you coming home.
When I think of it all, I feel it all.



Bearded Vulture

Ox Zante • Photoshop

Wonder

Chelsea Gardiner • Oil on masonite



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Gold Crown Awards: 2012, 2013, and 2015

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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.

★ **King of the Landfill**
Matthew Parris • Prose

★ **Svalbard**
Lisa Hardie • Poetry

★ **Stressed**
Jillian DeGrie • Art

★ **The Fall**
Ross Sibley • Photography

★ **Resisting Nihilism**
Catelyn Woody • Audio

★ **Ubered Lift**
Daryl Hickman Jr. • Video

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