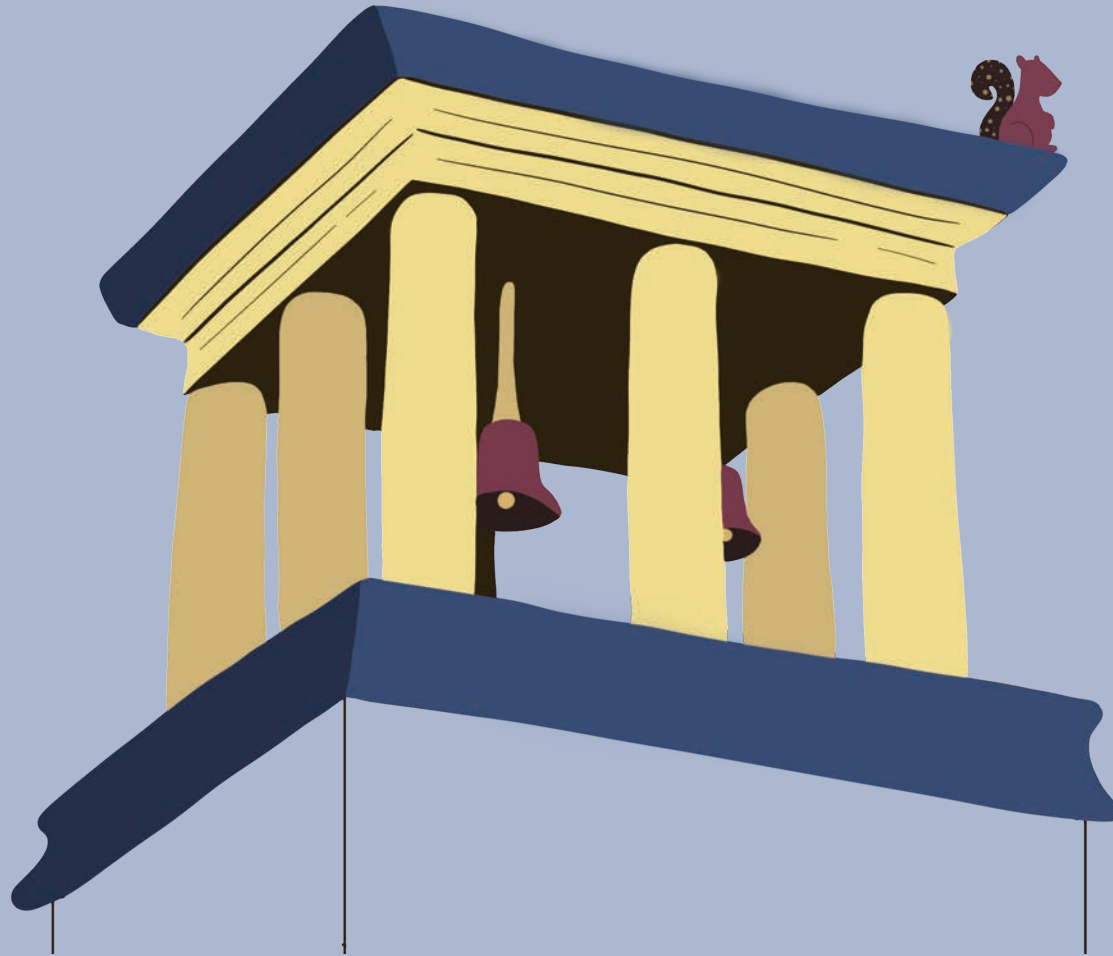


# COLLAGE

*A Journal of Creative Expression* 🍁 *Fall 2022*





Published By

Middle Tennessee State University Honors College

This issue is dedicated to Marsha Powers, the cornerstone of *Collage*.

Letter From

# THE EDITOR

I began my college career in the Fall of 2020 amid great uncertainty and change. When I began at MTSU, it was a much different campus—emptier, quieter. Many of my peers felt out of place, as if we had strolled into the wrong room, or arrived at an event an hour early. In spite of the strangeness, I joined *Collage*.

It was at *Collage* that I first discovered that elusive sense, belonging. Here, I found the lengths to which art and passion could shine.

*Collage* would not be the beacon that it is without its staff, faculty, and alumni support. I often allude to *Collage* as a garden, with the pieces of creative expression we publish as seeds being planted—seeds of confidence within their writers, of inspiration to others, of art. The dedication by my fellow staff members is not an easy dedication, but the work they put into watering and nurturing these seeds is a beautiful declaration of the importance of art for art's sake. Without Marsha Powers' guidance and expertise, *Collage* would not be the streamlined, inspired, journal that it is today. Her absence this semester was initially disconcerting to me and those who have also been lucky to work alongside her. Yet in the face of this change, Tatum Hochstetler has supported *Collage* with tremendous optimism and commitment, and she has truly been an inspiring and crucial aspect of *Collage's* success this semester. I am beyond grateful for Tatum's support amidst this period of change within *Collage*.

Though much has changed since Fall 2020, *Collage* has remained steadfast in its mission to provide students and their art with a platform—a voice—and it will continue to do so as we delve into the uncertain future, which is a testament to the power of art's impact. I thank *Collage* for all that it has taught me as a staff member, and now editor. This experience would not have been what it is without Marsha Powers, Tatum Hochstetler, and my fellow staff members.

Micaela Anderson

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# DO YOU KNOW

Colene Belmont · Poetry

i watch the flower petals  
on your funeral bouquet  
wither  
decay  
fall to my apartment floor  
and i am reminded  
what you told me  
all those years ago  
as we packed away  
memories  
like clothes into suitcases  
you told me  
that we never have forever  
and i was so young  
to think you were invincible  
but as i reflect  
now older  
i wonder  
did you feel  
time falling away from you  
like sand  
into the bottom half  
of your ever-ticking  
hourglass  
you gave me  
a lifetime  
of memory  
in my twenty  
short years  
did you know  
time was falling away from you  
did you know  
that forever ended so soon  
did you know  
that i unpack that suitcase  
of memories  
when i think of you  
daily.

# BOSTONIAN CONVERGENCE

Mak Johnson · Photography





AZ PRARIE DOGS

Emma Jones • Photography



CRITTERS

Biz Duff • Art





# THE FLOWER OF WORDS

Sophie Buck • Poetry

A cutting, a stinging, a singeing stray word  
Though spoken in jest, alas it is heard  
And taken to heart, a cankerous blight  
A flower struck down, a withered delight.

A word, like a seed, can flourish and grow  
Into billowing blossoms of fragrance and show  
Your words carry power to heal or destroy  
The poison of asps, or encouragement, or joy.

Take heed of your words, the wind does not lie.  
Uproot all the nettles and leave them to die.  
A flower is fragile, its life but a day  
So choke out the thistles and watch what you say.



SUMMER 2022

Jonathan Salazar • Photography

# MOUNTAIN LANGUAGE

Harley Mercadal • Poetry

Self-inflicted voice training started at eight—  
cruel children and ruthless television taught me  
many simple truths and more simple lies, but  
namely: *that Southern accent means you're stupid.*

I began to speak differently: careful syllables,  
proper English, smoothing my lispy lilt flat, and  
ridding myself of a drawl so completely people  
still ask me, *and where did you come from again?*

Desperation to hold onto the educated aura  
isolated me in more ways than one; I got above  
my raising in some eyes, and in others, I got too  
good to speak mountain language, too far from home.

I leave the safety of the hills infrequently, reluctantly,  
since flat places unsettle me, make my blood slow.  
Home invigorates me, brings Appalachian back up to  
identity, allows mountain folk language to surface anew.



FOX

Ox Zante • Art





# MY BROTHER

William Bain • Song Lyrics



Me and my brother, though from different mothers, we often were confused as twins  
Though his hair was brown and mine trickled down to my shoulders black as my sin  
In the same likeness, we got the same kindness from Daddy's soft affection  
But a push from our mothers to separate brothers made our lives a competition  
And I was determined to win

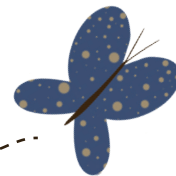
When you find yourself on the edge of darkness know that I will be a friend  
If forgiveness finds you then don't look behind you accept me as child again  
The lamb was slain the day you made the decision to pay for my sin  
So if you hear that voice reassuring your choice then maybe it's time to begin  
The kinship we're hiding within

The air was windy and ever so shifty, you grabbed my hand for our flight  
Our spirits flew high as we sailed through the sky, a symbol of power in sight  
Four long hours I held the fight  
Deeper you plunged into the night  
That courtyard was haunted and you knew it so  
Yet willingly you paid the debt that I owe  
Never have I seen a love so true  
But brother you gave it as my love withdrew  
The thought of it haunts me, the memory cold  
But fortune never favors the bold

How could I amuse all this pride  
When they ransacked your village a piece of me died  
But up from the ashes I will rise again  
Your legacy lives on through my pen  
Forever my brother, forever my friend

## COW HUG

Helen Grace Daniel • Photography





# GETTYSBURG Sofia Lynch · Song Lyrics

## VERSE 1

THAT OLD STEINWAY IN THE FOYER FELL APART AT AGE FIFTEEN  
I REMEMBER WHEN YOU PLAYED IT; HANDS CONNECTED AT THE KEYS  
I THOUGHT: HE MUST KNOW EVERYTHING  
JUST A SCHOLAR, NOT AN ARTIST, CAUSE IT DOESN'T PAY THE BILLS  
FRANK SINATRA, LOUIS ARMSTRONG, YOU LISTEN TO THEM STILL  
GUESS I NEVER HAD A CHANCE TO CLIMB UP ANOTHER HILL

## PRE-CHORUS

AND I THINK THAT IT'S ALRIGHT  
THAT THE PIECES FELL EXACTLY HOW THEY'RE MEANT TO LAY  
IT WASN'T LONG TO REALIZE  
THAT I NEVER HAD A CHANCE TURNING OUT SOME OTHER WAY

## CHORUS

EVERYTHING I DO, IS BECAUSE OF YOU, TAKING ALL YOUR CUES,  
YOU'RE MY MENTOR AND MY MUSE  
YOUNG AND UNAFRAID, ARMED WITH ONLY WORDS  
STEPPING OFF THE TRAIN, TOO NAIVE TO HURT  
AND I THANK GOD, YOU GOT OUT OF GETTYSBURG

## VERSE 2

GATHER SWIFTLY, AS A FAMILY, IN THE HOUSE YOU USED TO OWN  
AND MY MOTHER SWEARS IT'S HAUNTED, CAUSE IT SMELLS LIKE YOUR COLOGNE  
PENNSYLVANIA ALWAYS FELT LIKE HOME  
AND THE STEINWAY IN THE FOYER WAS CONVERTED TO A DESK  
NOW IT SITS THERE IN THE SHADOWS, ONLY DUST WILL PLAY IT NEXT  
YOU'D STILL CORRECT ITS FORM, CAUSE YOU KNOW BEST

## BRIDGE

PUT YOUR LIFE ON A MAP, SEE WHERE IT LEADS  
ALL PATHS GO BACK TO ME  
WISHING I COULD GO BACK, WATCHING YOU LIKE A SCREEN  
GOD WHY'D YOU HAVE TO LEAVE  
NOW I'M OBSESSED, COMPLETE YOUR REGRETS, YOUR UNFINISHED MELODIES

## CHORUS

EVERYTHING I DO, IS BECAUSE OF YOU, TAKING ALL YOUR CUES,  
YOU'RE MY MENTOR AND MY MUSE  
SEE YOU AS A KID, 1944, MUSIC IN YOUR VEINS, IGNITING IN YOUR SOUL  
ALL BECAUSE, YOU GOT OUT OF GETTYSBURG



CINEMA

Sarah St. John · Photography



# APPALACHIAN RECKONING

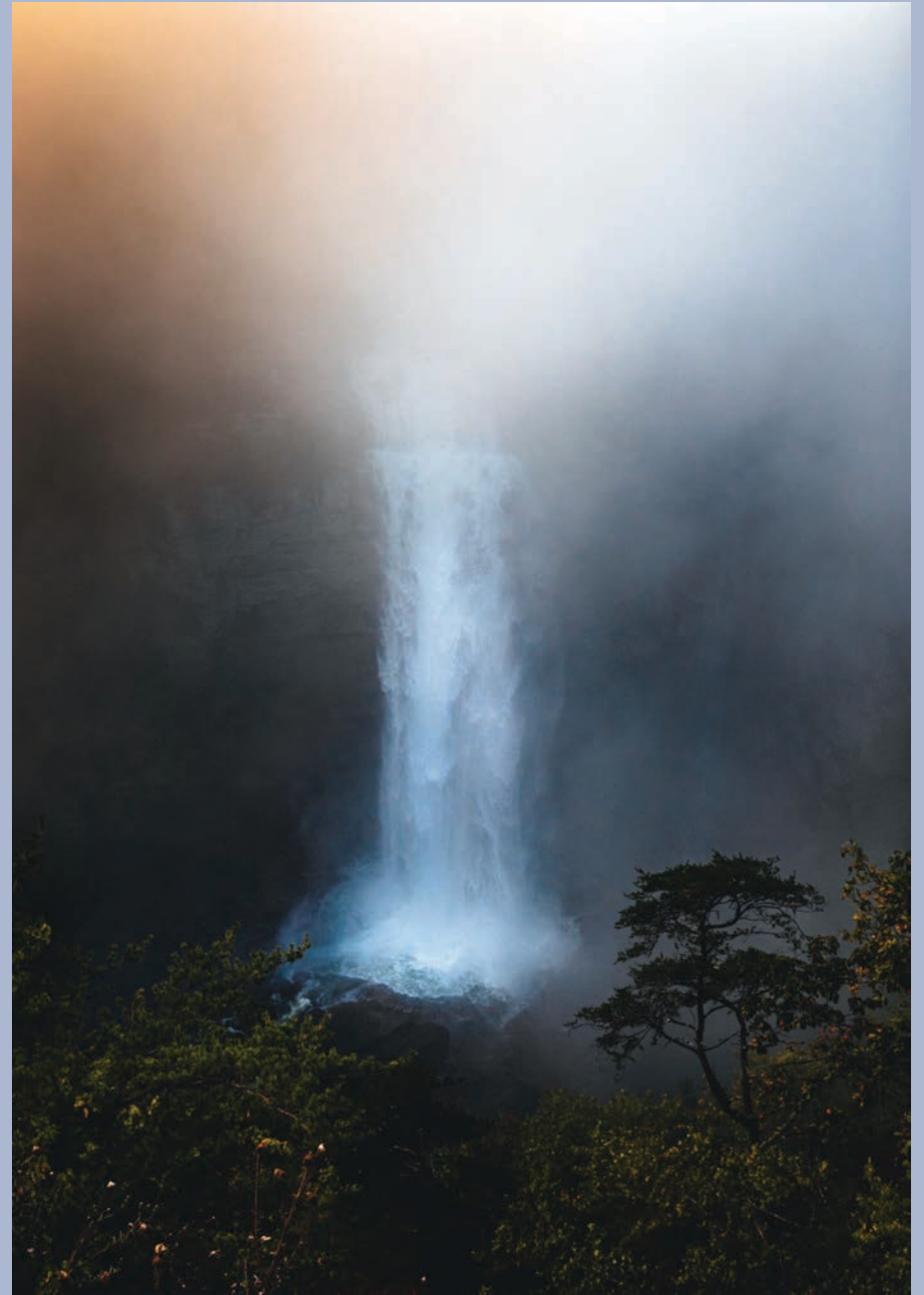
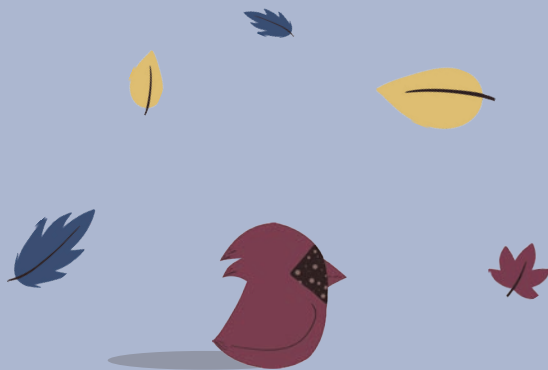
## Harley Mercadal • Poetry

Bringing gallons of peach sweet tea from Pal's  
used to be *that point in the semester, huh*, but  
it instead became a habit I don't want to break.  
Charissa asks me, *Are you okay? Really?*

I tell her, *I don't know*, but I guess I do.  
Insomnia checks me in—checks me out—  
another week passed, three classes taught,  
five classes taken, *tick-tock, time's sweet chariot*.

Traffic backs up while I speak with Silas House,  
air-conditioning streaming icy tears across our  
faces, engaging in memory's darkest reflections.  
We muse on growing up white trash and poor.

Memory sends us back to childhood poverty:  
eating ketchup-crackers, butter-sandwiches,  
playing with what we found and not much else.  
We speak of dogs, partners, and novels, too:  
McCarthy, Lee Smith, Appalachian Gothic,  
deep poverty in Dorothy Allison's *Bastard*.  
I've hated these mountains, this speech-lilt,  
for so long that my rush of gratitude chokes me.



# A LOOK THROUGH THE MIST

Ben Weaver • Photography







CALICO  
Ox Zante · Art

## A SANITARY PLACE MEETS A SWAMP FRIEND

Grace Holland · Poetry

I was filled to the brim with warm water  
Excitedly thinking it was time for someone to take a bath  
Of course, I had no idea that the someone in question  
would be so scaly and green

Oh yes, it's just me and Mr. Alligator in the small blue bathroom  
I am not the one that decided  
to put a creature of the swamps  
in this much too clean bathtub,  
but I pity him nonetheless  
Watching him swim around in circles,  
endlessly,  
hoping for something more

I have nothing more to offer him.  
I am only so large and only so deep  
I like to think of us as friends,  
but I know soon he will grow much too old  
and too big  
to find my depths interesting

I am sparkly and clean  
and filled with the most inviting water humans will ever see  
But for my alligator friend,  
I am nothing more than a too small cage  
I wish to set him free.



# CRAVINGS

Rachel Booher · Poetry

My inhibition sickens me with the forces  
of Newton's laws and draws  
me sweetly in for a kiss.  
Raspy lips cut into my tongue as the monster awakens and desire rages,  
driving the hunger echoed in my belly.  
Slamming fists and gnashing nails bite down into chalk,  
flinging powder and grime onto the  
cracked floors. The pain laced with euphoria  
reminds me of a summer day without sunscreen,  
scorched and blistered with smiling memories and white teeth.  
I look into eyes reflecting my own longing and I realize  
the end of this road is what we both desire.  
The end is the beginning,  
and for insatiable monsters like us, the worst type of craving comes  
when the dragon stops biting its own tail.  
Cries and groans later, smashed together with bruises and sore muscles,  
I sit and ponder which one of us will devour the other first...  
I glance at my partner,  
scale the wall,  
rub the dusty friction into my calluses,  
and climb.  
There's no telling how high we will reach until one of us lets go.

# WAR AND SMOKE

Iolanthe Klika · Video



# ABUSE

Elizabeth Kowalczyk · Art







SELF SCRATCH

G Haley · Art

TEETH

## Cassie Sistrosa · Song Lyrics

i'm growing sick of apartments  
sick of sleeping in bed that's not ours  
and i'm sick of the pretense  
that change isn't knocking on our door

i'm not the life of the party  
i'm not easy to love now that you can  
now i'm yours and you're sorry  
that i've given you all that i am

the world's pushing forward  
leaving us just behind  
it's like pulling out teeth  
it's like losing your mind

there's a change in your absence  
i try to fill it with time  
it's like speaking with silence  
it's like saying goodbye

i'm coming up empty  
reach for you with the soft of my hands  
jaded green with the envy  
that you're oblivious to pain i withstand

i'll fill you up with my worries  
then bleed you dry with the blade of my tongue  
going hungry for mercy  
i am afraid of what we have become

i would give you everything  
even if you never asked

i would give you everything  
even though you never

ask





# KISSED BY THE SUN

Holden Carter • Song Lyrics

No rain in sight  
No clouds to see  
Who is that  
Lying underneath the palm tree

Basking in the summer rays  
Can you tell me what you do for fun  
Besides setting my heart ablaze  
She's the one  
Oh, she's the one  
Who's been—  
Kissed by the sun  
Kissed by the sun

Laying there on the golden sand  
Making me sweat  
She's from a burning wonderland  
With a fiery silhouette

She's been kissed by the sun  
She's been kissed by the sun

Maybe I can't take the heat  
There's a fire in my soul  
I'm under her control  
Want to make her all mine  
She is the queen of the summertime

CHAOS SUNSET  
Keiko Terry • Art





# ACADEMIC VALIDATION

## Kera Reynolds · Poetry

Strawberry scented stickers  
and sparkly pens. Rubber stamps  
carved with smiley faces,  
ink pigmented in eggplant purple,  
pressed on all my tests.  
Pizza Hut certificates  
covered the refrigerator door,  
just for lying in bed with my tiny feet  
in the air and a book on my belly.  
Teachers praised me for  
taming dragons, riding horses, and befriending a mouse.

Receiving the highest average  
award in my classes, just for memorizing  
the periodic table and scribbling the  
quadratic formula like I write my name.  
Sitting at the lunch table alone  
with piles of assignments and study guides  
smothered in useless facts and tears from stress  
striving for perfection. Typing away  
formulas and spending hours  
balancing equations, just to get a perfect score  
on every exam and praise from my teachers and peers.  
Mascara smears on her cheek, brain on fire, and hair  
in a high bun, held together with ten bobby pins  
from staying up until three and waking up at seven.  
Letters from college recruiters constantly sliding  
under my bedroom door and spamming my inbox,  
while mama holds back tears  
from excitement.  
Worked constantly for thirteen years  
just to dress up like a walking grape  
for one night. Covered with stoles, cords,  
and a medallion carved with the number five.  
3.98 GPA nearly perfect.

And here I am  
living on scholarships but  
still working to pay for tuition.  
Transcript stamped with mostly "B's"  
and occasionally a "C,"  
getting by with minimum Honors requirements.  
Portfolio titled "Half-Assed Effort."  
Color guard, GPA plaques, and academic writing certificates  
mock me as they stand on my dorm shelf,  
collecting dust and waiting for more.



## Jillian DeGrie · Art DEREALIZATION



# ME AND THE LORD PLAY CATCH

Luke Cameron · Poetry

Me and the Lord play catch  
On an autumn afternoon  
The breeze is brisk  
And I wonder if  
I have stepped outside of time  
His throws are on-point  
Not a single one strays  
Every toss finds its home  
In the sweet spot of my glove  
His hair flaps wildly in the wind  
And the sun makes the gold-brown glint  
Under his ball cap  
He smiles and I smile  
And we toss back and forth  
We even work in some long toss  
We laugh and I ask him how life is treating him  
He says well  
I get a feeling of peace  
Throwing ball with him  
I've hit some kind of lottery  
Maybe

Or maybe it was meant to be  
I know that I feel calm, though,  
And well too  
When my throws are long or short  
As they will be  
He does not shrug  
When they are so  
And he has to walk them down  
I think he knows that I  
Am not as good as he  
And he accepts that about me  
I am who I am  
And he accepts me  
Some of my throws are thoughts  
Bad things I throw hard, so as to exorcise  
Good things I pleasantly toss, to enjoy  
He misses nothing that is close  
So comfortable in his space  
It's as though he has been where he has been the  
whole time  
To him it's simply a game of pitch and catch

# THE LIVLIC TREE

Sierra Hart · Video



# DEW DROP

Grace Pratt · Art



# EVOLUTION

Biz Duff · Art







## GIBSON GIRL

Monika Overholt · Art



## THE ASSIGNMENT

Cierra Kelso · Prose

As soon as I walked through the glass doors of the building, I knew there was something wrong. All eyes were on me as my silver heels met with the ornate marble of the first floor. Whenever I got too close to my coworkers, they acted as if we were strangers. They would stop talking mid-sentence and let me pass. Their tones reduced to hushed whispers once I was out of range. I thought it was my imagination, but their odd behavior continued to get worse.

I scaled up the building in the elevator mostly alone. Whenever the metal doors opened before my stop on the ninth floor, an unorganized cluster would wander aimlessly inside just to robotically stop once they met my gaze. Some would funnel out immediately, while others would get off on the floor above. They would put on an act, verbalizing some kind of excuse that they had business there.

And every single time they did, I knew they were lying.

This continued on from floors two to five. News of my arrival traveled fast, considering no one even tried to buzz in on floors six through eight. After a long silence, a ding sounded above. The elevator doors opened to floor nine and revealed a massive horde. It was the typical group either waiting to go to another floor or for a friend coming in for their shift.

But again, as soon as they made eye contact with my brown and usually welcoming eyes, they parted like the Red Sea, almost as if they didn't want to be in my path.

I started to feel some sort of sadness rise up in my heart from such blatant alienation from my peers.

Had I done something wrong?

Did I insult someone important without realizing it yesterday?

Even though I had been here for a year, I still considered myself too minor to be known by name or appearance, let alone become the main topic of the gossip reel.

That's when it dawned on me. Joan. A pit formed in my stomach so fast I thought I was going to be sick. I scanned the crowd, looking over each face more than once. Joan, my closest friend, was nowhere to be seen. She was usually a regular in the horde by the elevator, waiting for me to arrive.

She was always the first one to start our conversations. It ranged from sensible to downright outrageous in just a matter of a couple sentences, which never bothered me in the slightest. I stood there, my eyes panicked, before I stopped and took in a breath.

She could have been caught up with work, sick, or simply just late to the office today. I tried not to worry too much and turned down the corridor to where our offices were side by side.

Maybe our manager had finally given her that assignment she had been begging for for the last few months. 



# SECOND BEST

Cassie Sistoso · Audio



EYE OF WINTER  
G Haley · Photography



## 23

Cassie Sistoso · Poetry

you are twenty-three and beautiful and don't know it  
conventionally, yes, yes of course. walnut brown hair all short and  
pulled back by a baseball cap

*a real baseball cap, you'd say,*

and joke about the boy you met that didn't know the logo was a team  
but you never meant it meanly

*i don't think that you're capable of that*

tall and lanky like a cross country runner or a swimmer or like  
a boy who always looked good in prom pictures

*but never fit into the shoulders all the way*

you are twenty-three and beautiful and i love you

not in all the ways you're thinking, though, unless you're thinking like the  
way i wish we grew up together and the way it

*sort of feels like we did*

buying popsicles and skating on rocky asphalt in the summer  
trading middle names and secrets and playlists and never saying

*i love you in roundabout ways*

like the way any song you liked is just automatically good or like  
the way i want you at my graduation and my wedding and my funeral  
and this is me asking you to stay

you are twenty-three and beautiful and i miss you

in all the non-conventional ways, i mean. not the walnut hair and shoulders but  
like the softness of your hands though they always gripped so firmly as if to say

*i am holding on, i mean it*

like the way you weren't afraid to cry in front of me or tell me when it got bad  
the way i called you before i called my mother when i got so sick i couldn't stand  
and the way

*you always came*

the way it hurt to hurt you and the way i listed all the things to say to you at  
midnight

and erased all of the letters when twenty two passed you by and the way  
you have always been so beautiful to me



# DEATH AND DYING

Eryn Sorrells · Poetry

I had a class by the same name  
—Psychology 4630—  
my senior year of college.

I learned, from not this class alone,  
how tough a passing can be,  
so

I prepare this poem,  
in fear of a short life,  
knowing all too well,  
how short life can actually be.

Trinity,  
Angie,  
all the little stillborn babies  
and elders of 100.

No matter how long life is,  
it is still too short to someone.

Take the dog you grew up with,  
or the kitten you raised,  
their lifetime to them was a lifetime long  
but to you,  
it was mere years.

Take your great-grandmother and father,  
their lifetime outlived wars.  
But to you they didn't make it to your 20th birthday.  
How could they?

Take the stillborn baby,  
meant to greet its mother today.  
Its nine months to her,  
was a lifetime of nothing but love to it.  
Now,

Death and Dying,  
a class on how to prepare for my passing.  
Not that I plan to go soon.

But like a safety net of love,  
I wove this poem,  
in case of the fall of my hand.

But if I am not there,  
promise me this one,  
you will always overcome.

I refuse to let you tumble down,  
hitting your precious head  
against the cold hard ground.

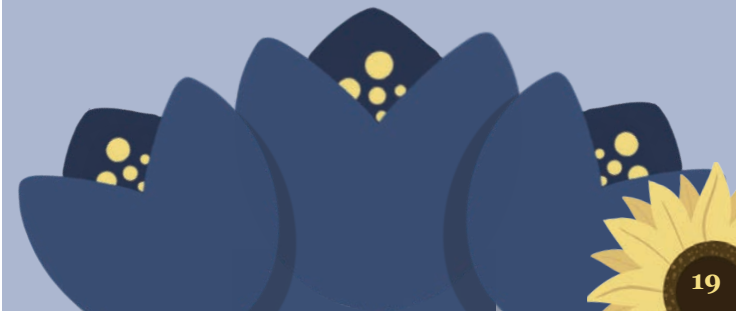
# AUTUMN ASHES

Ella Lancaster · Poetry

The trees are finally tired and considering sleep.  
The air itself seems to quiet. I, myself, am seeping  
into sadness. The quiet has made known the  
appearance of a hushed whispering: a long held  
seasonal sound. It rouses in the coolness of a  
setting sun, finds likeness in the rushing of leaves.

Unrest in this time of slumber.

I find I carry unease, discontentment, and  
dissatisfaction. Most of all, I face tangled  
frustration. Yet again, anger rises as red as  
the changing colors, hot as the wanting sun. I  
realized this is a familiar state that passes by each  
autumn. A fire slowly stoked, held at bay until  
the cold reveals its heat. It is powerful at first,  
overwhelming, until all that's left is a yawning,  
collapsing, breathing being. It sits in my belly: a  
heavy weight of sorrowed ashes, let loose by the  
goodbyes of a summer eve.







# OIZYS

## Colene Belmont · Poetry

i feel like Oizys  
deity of misery  
of misfortune  
these are my weeping years  
what use  
are my tears  
anymore  
grief sodden girl  
i feel like Oizys  
born of the night  
made painful  
and laid bare  
beneath the altar  
of my own grief  
weeping  
haunted  
by the weight  
of my own emotions  
yet a slave to them  
as they are but my second nature  
i was born  
shrouded in grief  
my bed made  
in the night  
of misery  
the frame wrought from misfortune  
for that is who i am  
i am miserable  
misfortunate  
and grieving  
i am Oizys

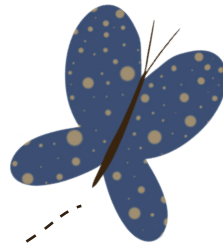
☀️ HELD AT BAY

Becky Carter · Photography



# CASTLE ON THE HILL

Helen Grace Daniel · Photography



# OCEAN TONES

Desmond Arias · Poetry

Fingers swim with keys gliding,  
Brass heart; the ocean of souls  
Imprints soft touch of pearls deep,  
Echoes of melody abyssal dreams

Nights gaze upon golden foam,  
Bell's ring; the eternal starlight  
From sweet brine the churn distant,  
Cries of submerged sunken songs

Waters breathe their soft murmur,  
Harmonic currents; the endless thought  
Felt by travelers through the depths,  
Strokes of salt and rain and mind

Beaches cradle symphony,  
Shells resonant; the old earth notes  
Heard by drinkers of sea rich tone,  
Sights of waves to soon be played

Divers search for life in dark,  
Lyrical reef; the rainbow sound  
Cradles chords hidden in blue,  
Gifts of ebb sonorous in tune

# SERENITY

Camryn Anderson · Art







## THE GATEWAY

Elizabeth Kowalczyk · Photography



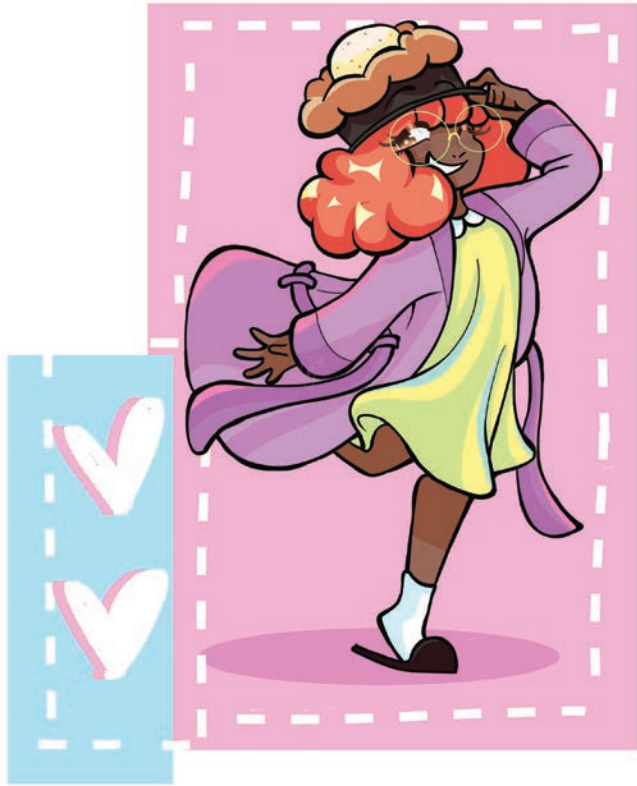
## TRASTEVERE

Ross Sibley · Photography



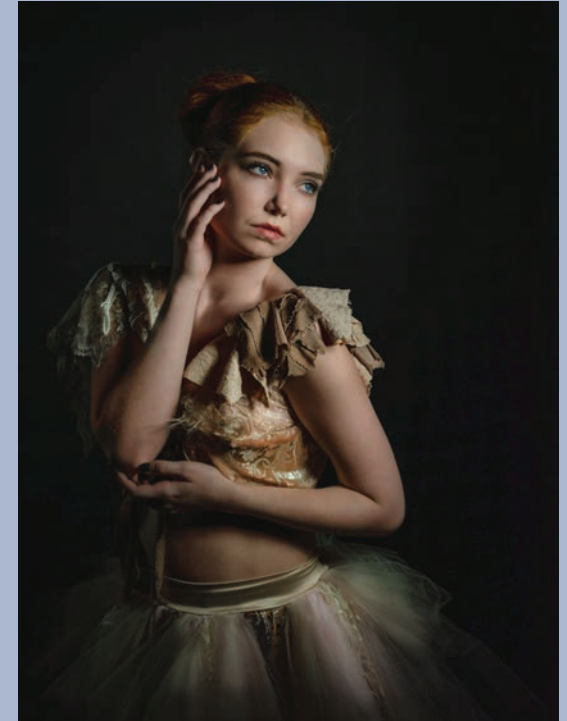
# THE NAME'S GWEN - GWEN

McKenzie Anderson · Art



# AGING PROCESS

Hunter Hoffman · Video



# LIMELIGHT

Darwin Alberto · Photography





# LIEGE

Jai Wilson · Prose


I sit upon a throne atop a ten story tower. I wear a crown of brilliant gold and studded jewels. My hall is grand and elegant. When I speak, my words boom and echo.

I sit upon a throne atop a ten story tower, and I am utterly alone. They call me king. They call me lord. They call me liege, but they don't visit anymore. I eat the finest foods and drink the finest wines and sing the finest songs to myself. When last did someone come to see me? I can't remember.

They call me liege, but they don't visit anymore, and I wonder if they can hear it when I scream. When I scream, my words boom and echo across my grand and elegant hall. I think myself mad, I scream myself madder.

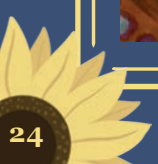
Below, so far below, I see my people go about their lives. My soldiers guard, my minstrels coo, and my advisors run my country well. I wonder if they can hear it when I scream. I watch my crown as it frees itself from my hand—when did I remove it from my head?—and falls below, so far below, until its studded gold and brilliant jewels disappear from view.

I eat the finest foods and drink the finest wines and scream the finest songs to myself as I sit upon a throne, overlooking a world that I once believed was mine. I watch my hall as it frees itself from my body and falls upwards towards the sky, until its grandness disappears from view.

For a moment, I think I hear somebody scream. Then, I hear nothing at all. 

# OCTOPUS

Jillian DeGrie · Art





You sat so still for me  
 that roaming eyes paid  
 deeds for my heart's debts  
 and winks for your mind's  
 quiet stares of  
 selfless musings, painting  
 innocent romance  
 as a spine lying flat  
 on a mattress  
 or a quaint confession  
 born under your breath.

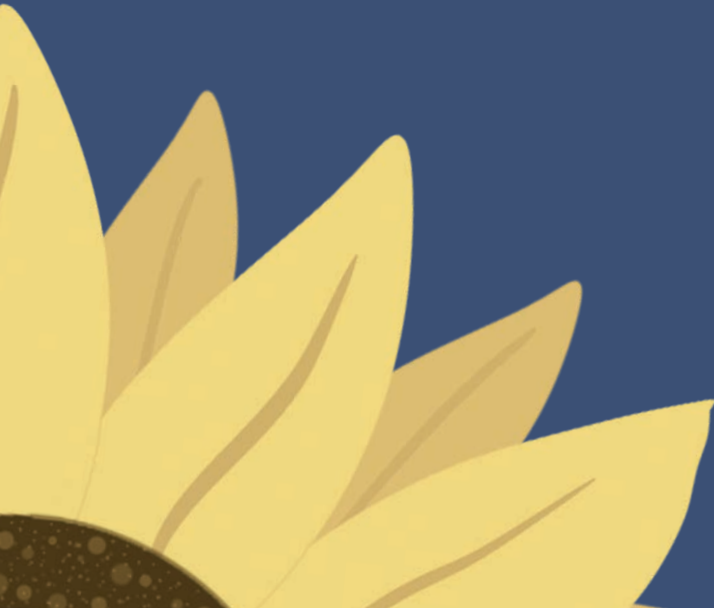
Any touch will linger  
 longer on my skin  
 than reason should permit  
 for I know not what  
 spring truly tastes like  
 in the palm of another  
 nor what this itching stirring  
 in me is to wipe the juice  
 of the mango  
 that cries so mournfully  
 down your neck.

Only, you came to my room  
 to talk about the moon?



MOON TALISMAN

Allison Rethi · Art





# SELF PORTRAIT IN A HAT

Jillian DeGrie · Art



## ANNABELLE

Jai Wilson · Poetry

Annabelle,  
Annabelle,  
Oh, how you come to me  
Each time I shut my eyes  
And follow that soft songbird into dreams.  
Oh again, how you come to me  
Each time with enchanting words:  
"Find me,  
Find me,  
And I will love you then,"  
And each time with sweet kisses  
And soft hands  
And a warm shoulder should I need to cry.

Annabelle,  
Annabelle,  
If I could scour this Earth and the next for you,  
If I could uncover every hiding place  
And check beneath for you  
I would.  
You, who speaks softly,  
Who speaks gently.  
You, who dances along my dreams  
As if they were clouds  
And you an angel.  
And if I could uncover every hiding place for you,  
I would.

Annabelle,  
Annabelle,  
I wish that I had never dreamt you,  
And I wish that I had dreamt you into being.  
I wish that I had never loved you,  
And I wish that I could have loved you enough  
To make you real.  
I wish that you would haunt elsewhere,  
And leave my dreams alone,  
And I wish that you would haunt my life,  
That next time I went out  
I would see you there by the riverfront:  
My angel made real.  
Oh, and how you sing the sweetest songs.



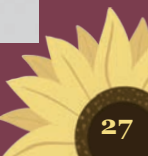
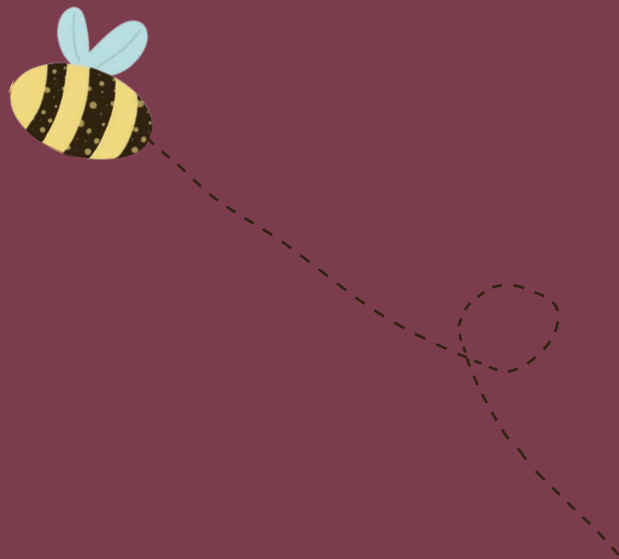
Whispers on the wind carry  
words that bear the weight of worlds  
and traversed turbulent times  
to reach my heavy heart

Whispers on the wind carry  
sirens' songs so sad and sweet  
they lull me like loves long lost  
and weigh my wilted wings

The wind, it whispers to me  
of dreams drifting toward dusk  
of rites that wrote me rifted  
of Ionian eyes—

I feel the wind on my skin  
pushing past petty pressures  
whisking away the worries  
nursing my nerves to life

Just like whispers on the wind  
I am and then I am not  
constant or in constant change  
I flow free where I choose



I enter a dark, endless portal  
filled with the everlasting promise of  
friendship, camaraderie, warmth  
people I once knew, once loved  
have slipped out of my fingers and  
turned into a snow globe  
frozen in time.

I'm reminded of the souvenir shop in  
Ruby Falls where I wanted to find  
a keychain with my name on it or  
something tangible to remember  
what it's like to feel something real.

The snow globe on the corner shelf, alone  
cast aside, solitary, beckoning for someone  
to notice it, to appreciate it, to acknowledge  
its presence with the way pieces of snow  
fly in its compact structure, up down up down  
without missing a beat, just like life, just like people

who learn the roadmap of your life, only for them to slip  
away when you aren't who they remember you to be,  
as if you're supposed to be a template through which  
all your human connections and interactions take place  
fraying at the seams like my dyed forest-green sweater.

I feel a sharp light coming through my peripheral  
vision burning away at the memories I want to bury  
deep within my consciousness of the people I once  
saw so much promise in, the people I thought saw  
so much promise in me dissipating into the air, becoming  
one with the air particles, interactions being part of the universe.

I notice the smiling caricatures of the green-sweatered people  
in the snow globe, the snow-capped mountains delicately placed  
in the background, snow covering the bare ground, covering it with a  
coating of lush translucent paint, a juxtaposition of being both  
vulnerable and keeping something to yourself  
without feeling the need to over explain  
to overcompensate, to overshare, to overcare,  
To overlove.



TYPE IGUANA

Emma Jones · Art





# THE ROOM FROM MY DREAMS

Zoe Vecchio • Photography



# WHEN WE HEAL

Zoe Talbot • Poetry

People are fragile, delicate things,  
Held together by intangible strings.  
We break so easily, each little part.  
The voice. The bones. Especially the heart.

Yet even if brittle, seemingly meek,  
People are anything, anything but weak.  
We're complex and cruel, some of us at least,  
Because we're made prey to our brain's very own beast.

We'll show you the things we know you want most;  
We'll smile, maybe laugh, no longer a ghost.  
But we'll trick you, fool you, to keep you in tow  
Every day it's the same: just put on a show.

For some of us, you see, those strings have been snapped  
And without them, broken, we're so easily trapped.  
Caught by the webs our minds can create,  
Fixating on every single thing that we hate.

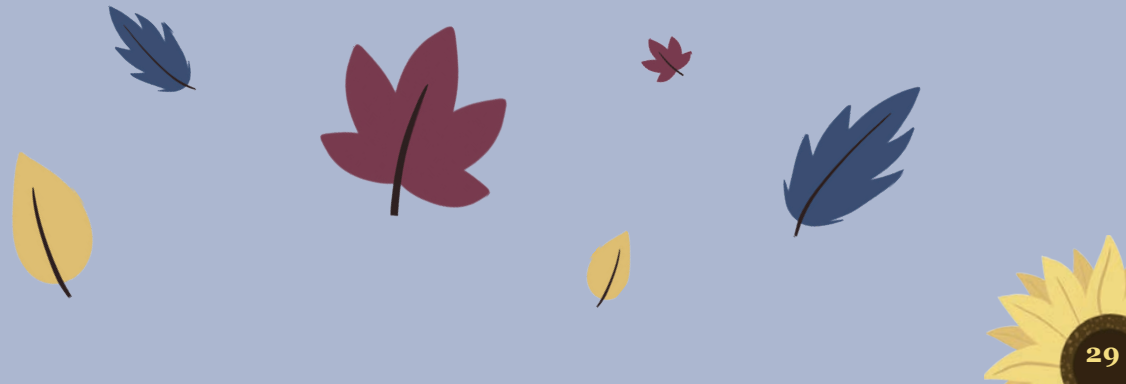
Whatever it is, it won't let us live;  
Whether it's hers or it's his, it just won't give.  
We run while we can, away from this thought,  
Desperate, pleading, not to be caught.

It wants and it wants until nothing's left.  
It haunts and it haunts till it's done with its theft.  
Stealing our soul, our joy, our love,  
With only one goal: to win from above.

Some of us really, really do try,  
Try to yell out and scream, sometimes to cry.  
We just need your patience, your time, your care,  
While we try to escape that stifling air.

But when those parts rearrange, perfectly neat,  
The same wavering voices can sound so sweet.  
Like they say broken bones sometimes heal stronger,  
And some shattered hearts can love for much longer.

When we heal, find that sought after cure,  
We'll no longer be tainted, no longer impure.  
For the fractured edges of broken glass may show  
The most ethereal ways in which light can glow.



# LOLA AND LUCIFER

Elizabeth Long · Art



# SHADOW

Ox Zante · Art



# PANDORA'S FOX

Dagan Billips · Photography







FORSYTH FOUNTAIN

Mak Johnson · Photography

## ☀️ PSALM 121

### Cassie Sistoso · Poetry

as a child  
when i'd wake in some terror with tears in my eyes  
i'd watch the gold of the bathroom, light in the hall cast a  
half triangle across my parents' bedspread as i opened their door

i'd press my cheek to my father's forearm  
and my mother would murmur

psalm one hundred and twenty-one  
(she kept every syllable intact)  
(i sometimes wonder if this is how i grew to love poetry)

i always fell back to sleep before it ended  
left to commit only the first eight lines to memory

i lift up my eyes to the hills,  
where does my help come from?  
(writes David)  
(some days this sounds earnest, some days it sounds hopeless)

at nineteen  
it is the first time in years we lay this way  
my limbs look gangly in the bathroom light  
and my nightmares have a clinical name

it is the first time i will show my parents  
what lives inside of me  
it is a darkness my father can't fit his arm around  
a voice too loud for my mother to murmur over  
so this time i listen for the end

the Lord will keep you from all harm  
the Lord will watch over your life  
(writes David)

but as i drift finally to sleep, i think not of the hand of God  
(unless his arm is like my father's)  
when i recite these words of safety, i think not of God's voice  
(forgive me, mother, i only think of you)



# THE PAINTINGS

Olivia Scott-Prose

I stepped cautiously through the open door, knocking once more on the dark stained cedar, "Hello? I'm here for the job application?"

I couldn't help but scan the room, telling myself that it wasn't snooping and that I was just checking to see if someone still lived here. The house did look lived in, and the foyer was meticulously decorated with delicate swirling designs and plush, comfortable looking furniture. Then again, anything was more comfortable than that bench at the train station in town. I gently massaged my still throbbing backside as I took a few steps onto the polished hardwood flooring. The house had a Victorian look, with the two large wooden staircases hugging the walls and a rich red carpet trailing them. My eyes were quickly drawn to the many portraits adorning the walls, framed paintings of stiff postured people with grim expressions interspersed with scone shaped wall fixtures that gave of a subtle golden glow.

The largest of the paintings sat directly across from the front door and was very clearly the centerpiece of the room. Surrounded by a delicate metalwork frame was the likeness of what must have been a beautiful woman. However, it is difficult to tell now- seeing as the painting has three large jagged horizontal tears across the main body of the work. Creeping further into the house, I reach my hand out towards the sagging fabric- hoping to push it back into place as to get a brief glimpse of what the artwork may have looked like.

"I would refrain from touching that, if I were you."

I snatch my hand back and pivot on my heel, eyes scanning the room for the speaker. My heart beats echo ever faster in my ears as I slowly uncurl from my defensive crouch, shuffling slowly towards the still open door.

"Hello? Am I in the right place?" I call out to the room once more, trying to hide the slight

tremble in my voice and hands, "Like I said before, I'm here for the, uh job?"

"Oh don't mind Thomas dear. He gets a bit finicky about people touching *her*. The interview room is up the left staircase and will be the third door on the right." A different voice answers, and this time it's coming from the left side of the room. Once again I look for a body to attach the voice to, but find nothing but the same paintings as before.

"Sarah, what did we say about talking to strangers?" Yet another voice scolded from the upper right staircase.

"Not to do it. But they're nice! And they look oh so lost. I couldn't help it!" Sarah pouted, letting out and indignant whine.

"You're such a child, Sarah."

"Well if I'm a child, then you're an old hag, Tommy-boy!"

"You know I hate it when people call me that!"

"Then maybe you shouldn't call me a child! I'm older than you!"

"Would you just SHUT UP!" I shouted, stomping my foot like a toddler during a tantrum. "Where even ARE you people?!"

Silence reigned for all of ten seconds before chaos erupted once more, this time what seemed like hundreds of voices joined the fray creating a cacophony of sound.

"How dare they-"

"See this is what you get when you talk to strangers-"

"Who do you think you are!"

"I swear, these younger generations have no manners-"

"I'm sure they're just stressed-"

"Why am I here?"

"What-?"

"How can they not see us, we're right here!"

Covering my ears did little to help quiet the noises and I almost ran out the door before something froze me in my tracks. The paintings- they were moving! The brushstrokes making up

their faces shifted and pulled as the paintings spoke, some even had their hands gesticulating wildly within the frames. My mouth dropped open as I watched one of the female portraits throw down their crown, only for it to fall past the frame and onto the head of the portrait below them. However, I was swiftly reminded of the discordant sonata about me with the chilling sound of metal on porcelain. Whimpers and grunts of discomfort echoed through the now significantly quieter room as the majority of the speakers directed accusing glares toward the source- an older heavysset man in a sunny yellow suit who just so happened to have been painted while enjoying a decadent assortment of fruits and desserts.

"Seems like *some people* are forgetting that talking paintings aren't exactly *normal*! I swear, it's as if none of you remember your first time in these halls. Thomas, I remember that you had an *especially* interesting reaction." Recognizing this voice as the one who scolded Sarah, I followed his gaze to another painting of a middle aged man who looked as if he could have been handsome, if he had tried. He had the high cheekbones of nobility and a defined chin, with thin, greasy strands of what must have at one time been a golden brown, but was now a washed out khaki color. The dark black mourning clothes clashed harshly with his deathly pale skin and his haunting dark gaze was nearly swallowed by the purple tones of his days-old eyebags. When his eyes meet yours, his slouched posture and melancholy aura shift to distant aloofness with a hint of barely concealed disgust.

"Now then," the man in the yellow suit began, drawing my attention away from the impromptu staring contest, "You best be on your way. Wouldn't want to be late, would you?"

With a quick glance at my watch, I confirmed that I was two minutes away from being late. Scrambling to pull myself together, I muttered a quick thank you towards Sarah and the yellow man before mounting the left set of stairs two at a time. As I counted the doors, I wondered what I had just signed up for. 🌻







DR. TRONCARELLI  
Ross Sibley · Photography

# CREATIVE EXPRESSION AWARDS

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

## ART

‘Derealization’ by Jillian DeGrie

## PHOTOGRAPHY

‘Held At Bay’ by Becky Carter

## POETRY

‘Psalm 121’ by Cassie Sistoso

## PROSE

‘Liege’ by Jai Wilson

## SONG LYRICS

‘Gettysburg’ by Sofia Lynch

## VIDEO

‘The Livlic Tree’ by Sierra Hart



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Murfreesboro, TN 37132

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

Gold Crown Awards: 2012, 2013, and 2015

## PRODUCTION

### Technology

Adobe InDesign CC

Adobe Illustrator CC

Adobe Photoshop CC

Apple Macintosh Platform

### Paper

100 lb. Athens Silk Cover

80 lb. Athens Silk Text

### Binding

Saddle Stitch

### Typography

Autumn Leaves

Georgia

Saithik

Avenir

### Printing

Allen Printing of Nashville,  
Tennessee printed approximately  
1,000 copies of *Collage*.

ISSN 2470-3451 (print)

ISSN 2470-3494 (online)

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