

The Messenger


Volume 2010
Issue 1 *The Messenger*, 2010

Article 65

2010

The Messenger, 2010

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarship.richmond.edu/messenger>

 Part of the [Fiction Commons](#), [Fine Arts Commons](#), [Nonfiction Commons](#), [Photography Commons](#), and the [Poetry Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

(2010) "The Messenger, 2010," *The Messenger*: Vol. 2010 : Iss. 1 , Article 65.
Available at: <http://scholarship.richmond.edu/messenger/vol2010/iss1/65>

This Complete Issue is brought to you for free and open access by UR Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Messenger by an authorized editor of UR Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu.



the
m
e
s
s
e
n
g
e
r

20
10

THE UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND'S LITERARY AND ARTS MAGAZINE
ESTABLISHED 1876

Visit The Messenger online at
<http://www.student.richmond.edu/~messenger>

Printed by Worth Higgins & Associates

Contents

NONFICTION

Dawn Hackett	Compartmentalization	8
Jessie Pascarelli	Otis	11
Callie Dowdy	Queen of the Buzzards	16
Dawn Hackett	The Death Rattle of Lori McRae	65
	Off The Grid	70
	Saved by a Better Daughter	74

FICTION

Steve Minnich	Baptismal Rites	5
Will Yarbrough	Goodbye Louisiana	6
Julia Donaldson	Not Busy Being Born	10
Claire Franczyk	Today is Wednesday	12
Josh Huffines	A Man and A Tree	15
Dawn Hackett	Hochelaga	18
Victor Wasserman	An Examination of Habit	62
Julia Donaldson	Three	68
Josh Huffines	Algebra	72

POETRY

Julia Donaldson	Early Morning Ghazal	4
Adam Palumbo	Before the Beginning	7
Dawn Hackett	Preface to an August Dawn	14
Julia Donaldson	Two Dry Martinis and an Irish Coffee	19
Hayley Swinson	Stolen Verse	20
Amani Morrison	Villanelle	60
Dawn Hackett	The Poet's Bastard Children	61
Emily Nelson	apoptosis	64
Adam Palumbo	Turbidity	69
Julia Donaldson	Marked	73

ART

Alice Chaosurawong	untitled	21
	untitled	22
	untitled	23
Anthony Ferguson	Prayer	24
	Angst	25

Irena Stanisic	Jordania	26
	Untitled	27
	Underwater Outerspace	28
Bertrand Morin	Ghosts	29
Thomas Trail	untitled	30
	untitled	31
Nina Mondelli	untitled	32
Liz McAvoy	Red Light	33
	Electricity	34
	Iya Traore versus gravity	35
	Nostalgia	36
	Green Light	37
Kate Houck	untitled	38
	untitled	39
	untitled	40
Claire Franczyk	The Attack	41
Ali Eaves	Open Mic Night	42
	Bad Day	43
	New Best Friend	44
	Little	45
Laura Barry	Eddies	46
	Magnolia Seed Pod	47
	Contentment	48
	Discord	49
Jessie Pascarelli	untitled	50
	untitled	50
Ashley Graham	Lost	51
Alexander J.E. Szajko IV	the chance for love has passed me by	52
Carol Deluca	untitled	53
Lourdes Figueroa	Candlelight	54
Amy Mathis	Diptych 1	55
	Diptych 3	56
	Diptych 4	57
	untitled	58
	untitled	59



Early Morning Ghazal

Julia Donaldson

Roused by your roar in the morning
Your rapid rabid hum in the morning

Whole room imitating a fire in reverse
Mattress crackles greeting to the morning

4 Wondering how many mice can mange
Twisty latch turning during the morning

Peculiar paws pinching the edge of toes
Feet grasping floor for cover in the morning

Criss-crossed clutter clearing, calendar
Reminding, Julia, call doctor in the morning


Baptismal Rites

Steve Minnich

Smoke. Drifting under the door from the hall. The mesmerizing scent of burning, burnt wood – we are children, ratty blankets, bare knees and sweatshirt arms, around a bonfire outside the church. But! No church. No blankets. No bare knees no zombie sweatshirt arms – in class in a burning building. Limbo to the windows and take the escalator out of this second story classroom. Stop at the bottom of the hill to wait for – something – and none of us have shirts on. The girls in their white bras and memories of a kiss. Warm outside from the early morning sun. From the fire. Still standing at the bottom of the hill. Still waiting. Tired. Lie back on the hill to watch the show. You leave our waiting classmates. Come join me. An arm from behind my head so it might hold yours. I am a pillow and you are Cinderella. Your face close to mine. The world plays its vanishing act into a blue slate sky and we are left with: this carpet hill, your arm across my bare chest, your white bra, and this burning building. What spectacular fireworks these are!

Goodbye Louisiana

Will Yarbrough

 You are our swamp tonight. The Lord's put you here— like Noah— under the siege of never ending flood which hails from the mouth of your broken levees that could not withhold our coming doom. Abandoned by your dry governing hands that judged us unfit to be saved, we are not the lovechild of the French quarter or the tourist of Harrahs casino. Under this swimming ink sky we do not parade through the procession of Mardi Gras, but march in waist high tribulation, carrying children on our shoulders who are in need of drink, not from the green and black speckled ocean that burns at their feet, but clean water from which they first tasted upon birth. Trudging through erased streets, bonded in brotherhood by baptism of ill-tempered revelation, in search of forgotten rescue, in need of unseen hope, we are met at the gates of refuge by lowered and loaded rifles, gripped tightly by military faces whose battle cry snarls like a guard dog, "Take one more step and we will shoot," they shout in unison as they cock their dripping levers. Thrown by the wreckful wind, we are displaced amongst your misshapen bones to sleep noisily on your muddied arms and legs. We cannot sleep, and we shall not rest until we are free from your skeletal choke.

So goodbye to you, Louisiana. Even when the Lord swallows up his flood, even when the mud ceases to be wet, even when our houses are rebuilt, we will not return to you. For when the Lord is again filled with anger you will betray us with the same kiss you planted on our cheek this night. We will not return for we know that as we write, inside the shattered homes of our sunken neighborhood are the floating bodies of those who looked in terror upon the water as it slipped between their clenched lips, crawled across their tongues, scratched away at their teeth, and suffocated their coiled throats, and we cannot bear to look upon their forgotten faces for they were once your own.

Before the Beginning

Adam Palumbo

Before workflow, before the beginning,
Silence had already been beaten into the shadows,

themselves destroyed
by the metronomic utterances of the burning day.

Chaos came before, like the Greeks
guessed, in an undigested mass.

But Chaos, after all, is more than nothing
and from its confusion (somehow)

7

our benign sphere became a weighty thing,
fed by nothing but its own sinuosity, possibly.

The sea and the shore struck
their first and interminable war.

Mountains rose from the tangled heaps of earth,
wondrous guardians of their happy corms

of ore and their first sproutling garments.
The sea, more expansive and mysterious—

no myth could yet explain how its depth
plunged like unimagined chords.

Streams descended endless to it,
still young and flush in their beds.

And somewhere, a garden.

Compartmentalization

Dawn Hackett

He is on his dying recliner, dying on the recliner, thin skin, thin breath, wanting something, anything, wanting life. I am two feet away, twenty years away from him, waiting for his words to continue. He starts to tell me a story then loses himself inside one of his compartments. He wanders in and out of compartments and wonders who he has let into the one he is in now – does my daughter know about my lust, my wandering eye, my video tapes? He closes the door on it, that subject, opens it again. I'm right next to him willing to listen but he stops. His young third wife leaves the house again, speeding off toward a quiet parking space and anonymous cell phone conversations.

“She’s cheating on me,” he says. That compartment opens between us.

“Do you want me to confront her?” I ask.

“Hmmm.” He trails off again. The morphine has taken hold.

I watch him grab a moment of release. He said it, just one it. One fear is outside the compartment and lands on me. I take it gladly. I imagine her death at my hands. I plan it. She is small, my fingers would envelop her neck and I could watch the light drain from her eyes. Like my father’s eyes, they are flickering like a candle at the end of its wick, suffocated by wax. He wakes for a moment, sees me still two feet away. I want to grab him and crush him under my love but I don’t have enough of it. It is in a storage unit waiting. He is wanting again.

“The attic above the garage,” he says. “There’s a brown bag full of video tapes. Get rid of the tapes.”

I am back to wondering about the morphine, but I smile easily against his request. Espionage. I am in.

“OK,” I answer. I lie to myself. I lie to his morphine.

He pulls a small book of pictures out of his baggie pocket. “Take this. Don’t look at the pictures just burn it.” He slurs the last words “jish spurn nit”, fading out again to sleep. The compartment closes forever.

I hold the book of pictures in my hand and suddenly I am an alcoholic with an open bottle of bourbon, a shot of tequila in my fist, salt on my lips, a coke-head holding a white streaked mirror, a daughter with a secret window into her dying father’s soul. I find a quiet space in the hall and put the straw against the mirror, swill the liquor, swill my soul, take a crow bar to the compartment door. Old girlfriends. Sharon in the first sleeve, beside a pool, tanned nipples, tanned breasts. Carolyn in a hotel room beaver shot and no bra, nipples on alert under a cut-off t-shirt. I move more quickly – there’s Stance from Sweden ’78, Kirsten from Norway ’79. Last page final picture black and white 1960. Mom.

A side of her I hadn’t known, birthing position lots of hair big breasts huge nipples big smile, a mental picture falls into a compartment, obliterating all the others. I tear it to pieces first, all pieces in a bag now, all the pieces of every picture torn, unrecognizable, like my father. I return to my seat two feet away from him and wait for another compartment to open.



Not Busy Being Born

Julia Donaldson

Retirement meant a lot of things for Harold. It meant losing his house in exchange for an apartment above his son's garage, with rent better suited to his new soon-to-be-corpse status. It meant losing the days of the week, every week. Mondays were identical to Thursdays. They were now just hot heavy humid slabs of time. What he gained in return were his son's repeated urgings that he do something. Harold was now a cat sleeping too long in his son's favorite chair. He was lazy and he was a nuisance.

10 To combat this, Harold signed up for a class at the learning annex. Every Tuesday or possibly Thursday he showed up at a room filled with several other near-corpses and a single almost-corpse who was a good enough artist to earn this teaching job he had certainly never wanted. There, Harold would be instructed to draw an object. One day it was a pineapple, the next an apple, and the next class, since the instructor seemed to have forgotten his fruit, a set of car keys.

Everyday Harold started by drawing a single line lightly on the page, as he assumed most artists did. He would then sit back in his chair and examine his work. On the first day he realized the line looked more the trunk of an elephant. He erased it and started again. This one looked fiercer, with a slight curve on the bottom, like puma ready to pounce. He erased the line again; feeling the paper grain get rougher as his hand furiously deleted this mistake. He drew again, this line too fluid, looking like his Aunt Ayda dancing after too many cocktails. Again, erased. Every class was the same. Not always elephant, puma, Ayda. Sometimes it was desk lamp, seashell, or pinky toe, airplane. Usually, right before he got it right though, it was Ayda. Drunk, dancing, Ayda: the already-corpse.

Otis

Jessie Pascarelli

Otis is an ugly bird. At times during his long, tedious life, he has looked nearly presentable, but mostly, no. He is supposedly the smartest breed of parrot, which might be true. It didn't seem to take him long to figure out that his life was shit and to start acting accordingly. Grandma blames the ring of feather-less skin around his neck on stress and the carpet of red tail feathers at the bottom of his cage on the changing seasons. The glint of malevolence in his beady eye has never suggested "stress" to me. More like a pit bull in the wrong body. When he was younger, apparently he used to be quite the talker. Now, however, when he's perpetually at our house for "bird-sitting," he mainly whistles, clucks, and repeats his ironically sad catchphrase: "I can talk, can you fly?"



One day, my whole family gathered around his cage when he started making a noise like a Suburban going through a wood chipper. He seemed normal enough: the same predatory stare, the same defensive crouch on his perch. The only difference was that he wasn't imitating my Grandma's sneeze or my Grandpa's minute-long whistling symphonies. Now, when he opened his mottled black beak, he let out a deep rumble of internal organs putting up one, last fight. We pretended to be worried. One of us even mentioned taking him to the vet. But none of us could hide behind our downturned mouths the soar of hope in our bellies.

But, no. Otis continued to make the noise for weeks without any visible sign of deterioration. It turned out he was just imitating the garbage disposal.

The Margaret Owen Finck Award for Prose

Today is Wednesday

Claire Franczyk

Today, the Queen of Picket Fence is a brunette, with big, grey eyes and tiny feet. The crown she wears is made of things she finds and steals; 47 feathers and 24 shells, and one large stone that is as grey as her eyes and that appeared on her fence on Sunday, unbidden, without ceremony, and with no letter of introduction. That it breached such decorum is the reason she kept it: balancing on one foot with her other leg extended in a graceful line that reached behind her head, she looked like a dancer, or a particularly dexterous flamingo, as she scratched her ear absentmindedly with her toes while she set The Stone on a length of braided string, then wrapped it around her head so that now it hangs like a pendulum between her eyes.

12

Today is now Wednesday and the effect is remarkable. Those eyes, set wide apart in her face, are fringed with the darkest, densest foliage of lashes. When she blinks then opens them, the energy that generates from so small a motion grazes our faces, and blows back our hair. Invariably those eyes grow wider when she deigns to look at you, two shallow pools of opalescence that seem to swim in a saline solution that never appears anything but greasy, two oysters exposed and pulsating in their shells, shocked at the invasion of cold oxygen and the conviction of impending ruin.

Today being Wednesday, the Queen of Picket Fence's teeth are lovely to behold in their irregularity: when she smiles they are small and white with uneven spaces, and she wets her lips before she parts them. But she hardly ever smiles, and it is because of these things that we love her.

As of this moment, this being Wednesday, the Queen is sixteen years old, and she rules from on high, delicately tripping along the railing, raining down feathers and insults in her wake, performing her famous high wire act. Her crown of plume, shell and Stone flutters as she runs along that narrow path off of which to one side is only open air – for we have never

been to nor even seen the other side – and off the other, our side, the land of Picket Fence, called Yard, where we have continuous tea parties and play croquet in brightly colored sundresses and boater hats.

It is important to note that the Queen is always barefoot when she runs. She prefers the feel of the wood and chipped paint to shoes, and especially the sharp splinters that pierce her soles in their effort to be nearer to her. She has never stepped off that fence for which Picket Fence is named, nor has she ever allowed anyone or anything to touch her except for what she finds and steals, or what pierces her feet. The Queen often spends hours with her back to us, sitting cross-legged, balanced on a picket. When she does this, she holds a mirror in her hand and examines her face, crossing and uncrossing her eyes at herself and humming disjointedly as she ignores everyone around her. Mostly though, she just blows kisses at her reflection.

The Queen is not the only one of aristocratic legacy in the vicinity, although she likes to think so. Across Yard and in House, the Duke of Newel Post sits astride his banister, and surveys his subjects of Hall with an air of disdain and mahogany. Beneath his hard exterior lies a heart as warm as Cherry Oak that beats only for the Queen. The Duke's domain is indoors, hers out, but from his perch he can see beyond the curtains and out of the bay windows to Picket Fence, and the Queen whose eyes blink and lips blow kisses from high on the fence upon which he left the round grey stone that was as grey as her eyes and that he knew she would keep because of its lack of decorum. Catching sight of her, his face shines with Pine-Sol and floor wax, his body vibrating and humming under her gaze. But that is all they ever do, Blink and Blow, Vibrate and Hum, and we continue to play croquet, because it is Wednesday.

Preface to an August Dawn

Dawn Hackett

14

I did not live for a smile or some other rendered practiced reply, preferring spontaneous floods over fixed cautious gestures. I tended our small garden – taking only on occasion a clipping or a bloom fading. At times I lingered with a chair of good posture, feet resting in front of me, hand faintly touching thick growths of forearm brush.

To say, in that moment, things are good, they are unrehearsed, healing touch on his breath his mouth his masked chest followed to its conclusion, will keep what should not be lost.

A Man and a Tree

Josh Huffines

He planted the seed and waited, lying next to its resting place on the hard, cool earth. After a few hours rain fell from the sky, pelting the soil and his skin. He was cold and shivered, but did not leave.

The rain clouds rushed by, in a hurry for some reason, and the sun soon emerged in the drenched sky. It warmed the soil and drove the chill from his bones. He continued to wait. The moon rose, the stars wheeled and the sun appeared once again. He didn't just wait in idle desperation next to the seed. He pondered the meaning of life, he observed nature, he prayed and he read pleasant stories. He began to lead a simple life. On the 13th day, after a steady combination of rain, sunshine and starshine, the seedling broke the soil with a searching green curlicue, looking to the entire world like an Old English question mark.

He continued to wait next to the seedling. He nurtured it for days, months, decades. One day on his way to school, a young boy became distracted by a large black hawk, soaring high in flight. The bird landed on a branch and the young boy caught a glimpse of an old man situated atop a towering oak tree. Amazed, he yelled up to the man, asking why he had climbed the tree.

"I didn't," he replied.

Queen of the Buzzards: A Southern Woman's Legacy (Excerpt)

Callie Dowdy

For their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary, my father gave my mother a shotgun. My mother fussed over it as though it were a diamond necklace, and claimed she hadn't received such a precious gift since the coupon book she'd gotten for her first anniversary. I wasn't sure what was more absurd - Daddy giving her a shotgun on the most romantic of occasions, Mamma actually liking it, or my peaceful acceptance of the entire scenario as completely normal. Mamma actually preferred the shotgun over a fancy candlelit dinner or expensive jewelry - not because Daddy couldn't afford to give her the finer things, but because gold, silver and filet mignon won't keep the squirrels out of the tomato plants.

16

Mamma called me recently, for no reason in particular. It was the end of summer and therefore time to harvest our small family garden, so I thought to ask about her tomato plants. She exclaimed happily that she'd never had such a prosperous year. Apparently she was plucking dozens of grapefruit-sized tomatoes off the vine on a daily basis.

"The 'rodent repellent' Daddy got you is working, then?" I joked.

"Oh like you wouldn't believe!" Mamma said with pride. "I got about a dozen squirrels out of my tomatoes in the first week with that gun. Who knew your ol' Mamma was such a good shot?" I was neither surprised nor appalled. Mamma would've faced an army of rabid squirrels with nothing but her little 410 shotgun if it meant saving the tomatoes and giving her family a good meal. However, the conversation then took a turn I didn't entirely expect. "But that's not the best part," Mamma said. "The best part is the buzzards. Oh the buzzards like you wouldn't believe!"

She proceeded to tell me about the flock of buzzards - West Kentucky for vultures - that had decided to take up residence on our hill, our boat dock, and even the roof of our house. Anyone who has had the misfortune to encounter buzzards understands the vile

annoyance of having an entire flock of them on your property. Like any large bird, they are hardly tidy, forever leaving their feathers and foul droppings wherever they go. Unlike most birds, they survive on carrion alone, which means along with the feathers and excrement, they bring with them countless carcasses of anything they can get their talons on – hardly appealing houseguests. My mother, finally frustrated to action by the ugly birds and the horrible stench of rotting meat, grabbed her shotgun and went to battle. By the end of the afternoon, the score stood at Buzzards: 0, Mamma: 9. Mamma told me of the shrieking siren-like noises buzzards make in their final moments, apparently followed promptly by massive fits of vomiting.

“You wouldn’t have believed it,” Mamma said. “Those nasty things shrieking and throwing up that dead meat and dying all over the place!” I couldn’t hold back a huge, deep laugh. Images raced through my head, of my tiny Mamma defending her hill against the smelly invaders, traipsing through buzzard vomit, feathers and fetid buzzard-food to fire her shotgun into the afternoon Kentucky heat at the next challenger. Mamma, the warrior. Mamma, the buzzard slayer.

I am descended from Western Kentucky royalty. I am the daughter of great men and women, renowned, loved and feared throughout their small but beautiful kingdom, though they never sat on a throne. I am the child of warriors, Mason-Dixon samurai, defenders of Kentucky Lake and keepers of the way of Southern gentility. If one day I am asked where I come from, I will say I am the Duchess of Blood River, the Baroness of all the lands past Rex’s Worm farm. I already have Mamma’s spirit. One day, Mamma’s land, and her simple shotgun will become mine, and it will be my turn to lead. I am the heir to Buzzard Hill.

Hochelaga

Dawn Hackett

Journal Entry of Jacques Cartier

October 4, 1534

Good Haul of Miners and Diggers – One White Man Killed – Fifty-eight Bucks Killed

J. Cartier

18

In the gloaming, the women all weep with distress. Cartier has told many stories of our prejudices, so very many that we stand together in a web knowing no one will come for us. The river swells with violence; our husbands' mutilated bodies floated past the village yesterday with dead eyes watching but not seeing, faces bubbling and bursting, ears deaf to the screams of our children. Their small hands tomahawked, hearts knifed from their chests, Cartier's men slung them at us mothers until we were all against the great rock, forced to bow like poor little animals cringing on the earth. We turned away from the path, their hearts and hands in the dirt like grotesque gorges. They will lay the road to Hochelaga with the hands of children, dam the sundown river with the bodies of our men and axe the flaming maple until there are none. Corn fields will fall away from the river banks. Cartier will burn them and watch the nations starve. We are tied like burrows pulled by soldier ropes behind the wagons. They brim with hides and corn, the scalps of our children on spikes on the clapboard in front of us. It is too much to see with our hearts and many die. We are thirty now, we were forty-two at the village. We will stop soon and Cartier will tell his men to cut the dead ones away from their knots. They are the free ones now.

Journal Entry of Jacques Cartier

October 11, 1534

Good Haul of Diggers – Forty-two Squaws Taken – Band Exterminated

J. Cartier

Two Dry Martinis and an Irish Coffee

Julia Donaldson

Your Aunt Judith is an embarrassment. Made your Uncle Ron hold her hand at mass, up in the air like some god-forsaken receptor. Like he could hear her better. Like he'd want to. Kissed a small boy straight on the face by the door. Ronnie nearly gave out. You know, her and Louie have separate bank accounts. Like thieves. Or gypsies. Or gays. Why even bother getting married? Her wedding was the worst. She made me wear chartreuse. Chartreuse on my skin tone! Couldn't handle it. And when she gets on the phone. She'll go on and on for hours. Not saying a word.

Hayley Swinson

Stolen verse.

I sold my voice on the way to the city
so I could steal expensive phrases
and wear them like jewelry.

Still, my naked neck needs wringing;
Still, my naked ears are ringing;

you're just a blurted note
sung by students
never concerned with anything
since "here" became "there"
and I stopped reading in "we's"

I wonder who knows
I eat black pens like candy

and we've been outlawed from the
library
by turtle shell specs
and bad poetry.

I'm sorry for trying.
I'm sorry that the rain
made us hungry.



21

ALICE CHAOSURAWONG



ALICE CHAOSURAWONG



23

ALICE CHAOSURAWONG



24

ANTHONY FERGUSON **Prayer**



25

ANTHONY FERGUSON **Angst**



IRENA STANISIC

Jordania



27

IRENA STANISIC

28



IRENA STANISIC

Underwater Outerspace



BERTRAND MORIN

Ghosts



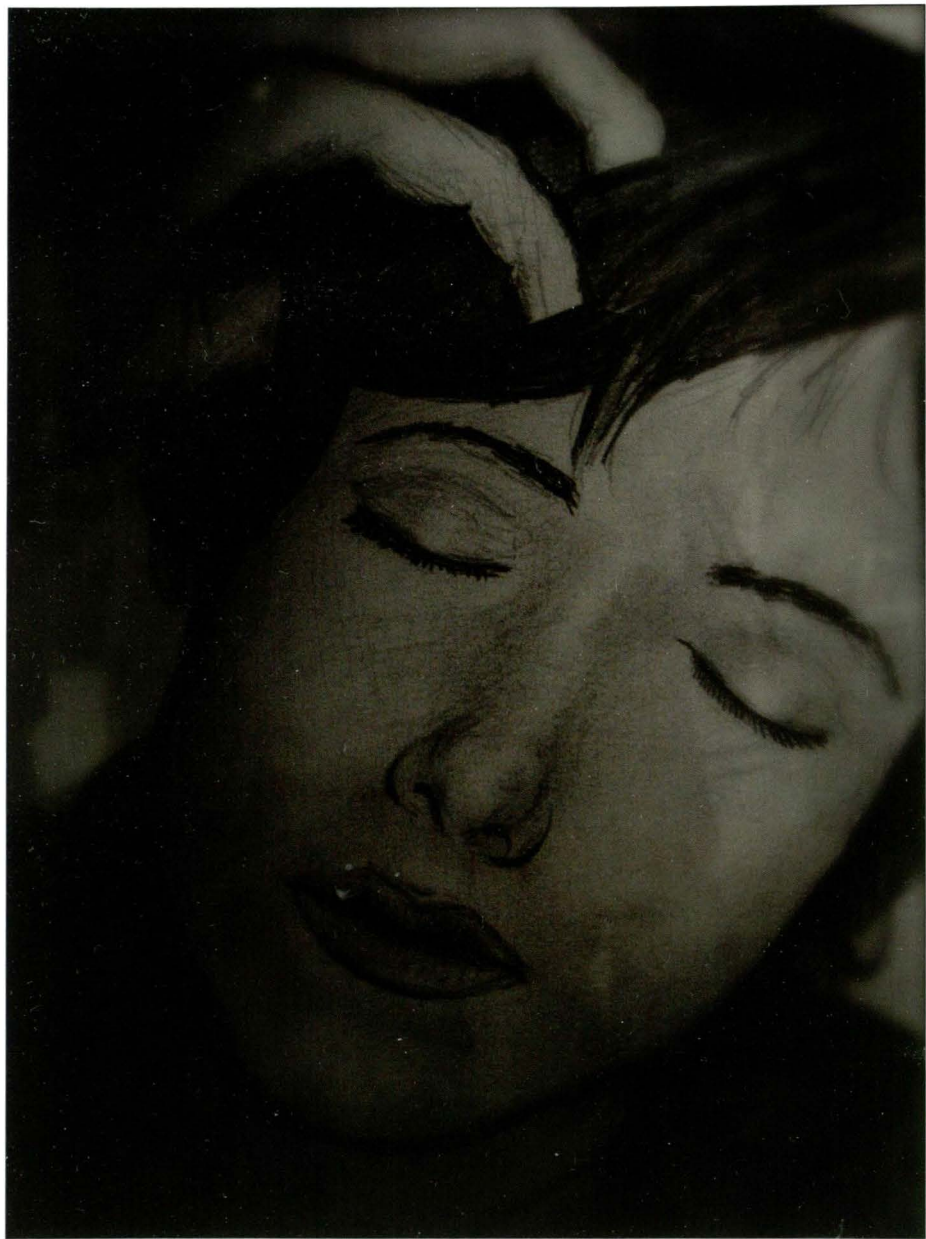
THOMAS TRAIL



31

THOMAS TRAIL

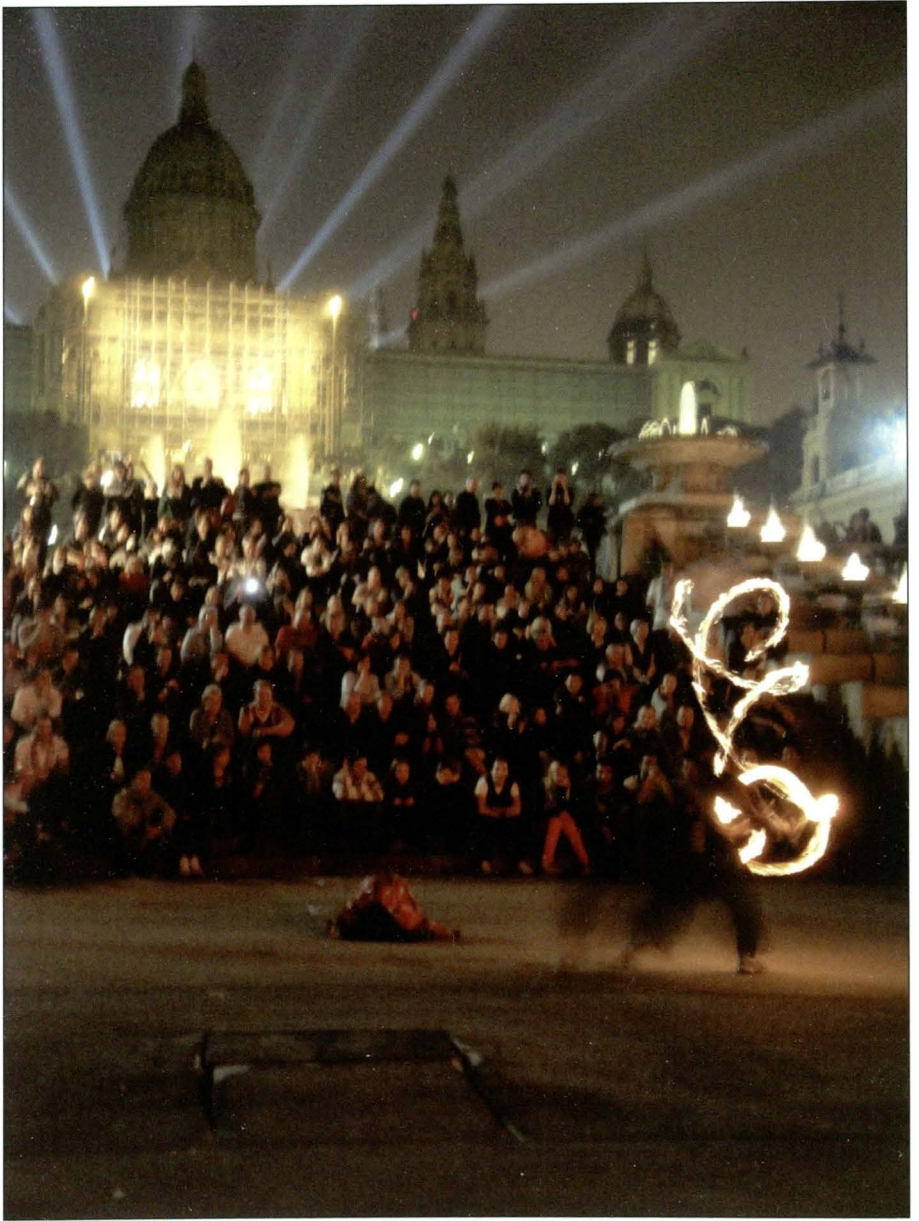
32



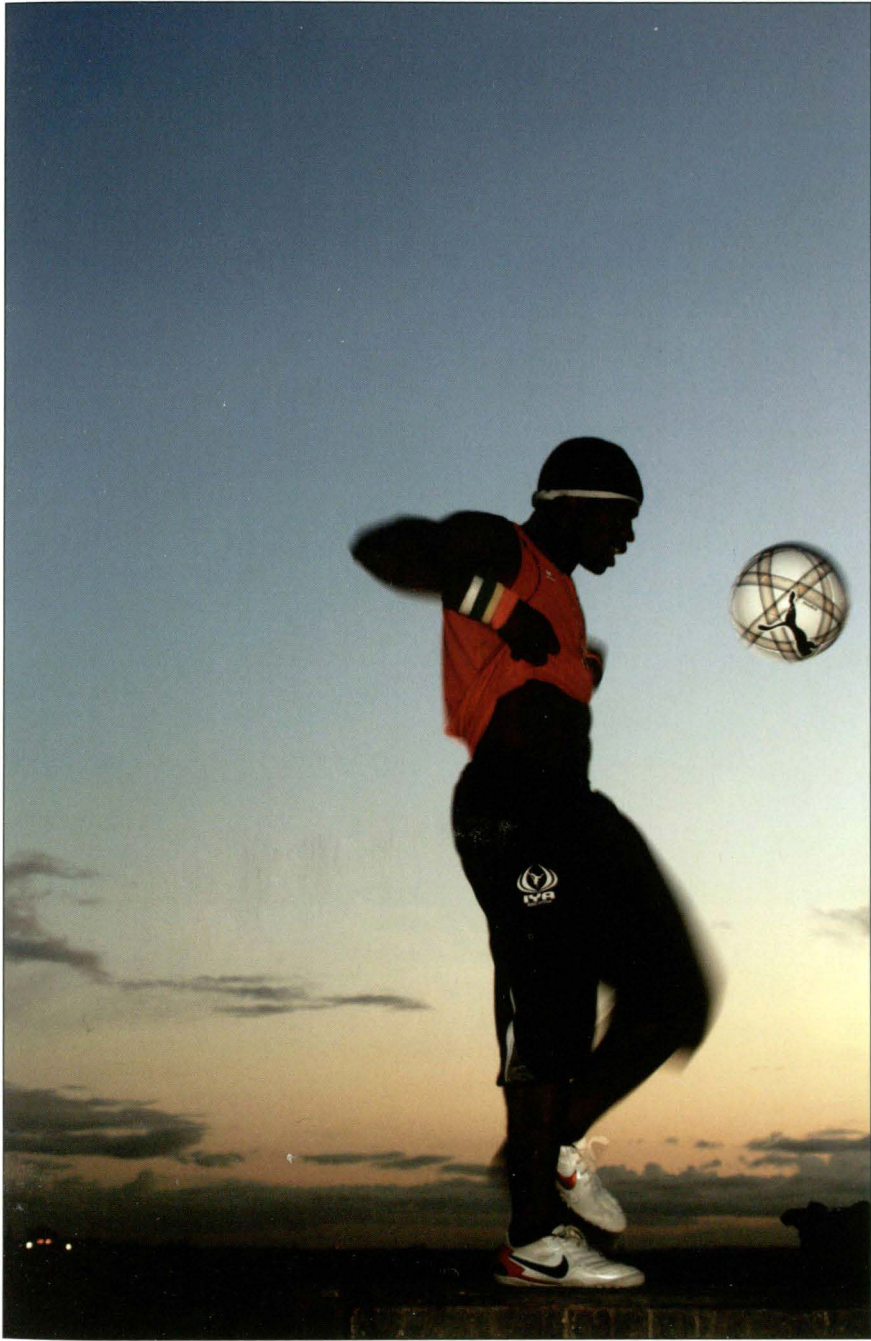
NINA MONDELLI



LIZ MCAVOY **Red Light**



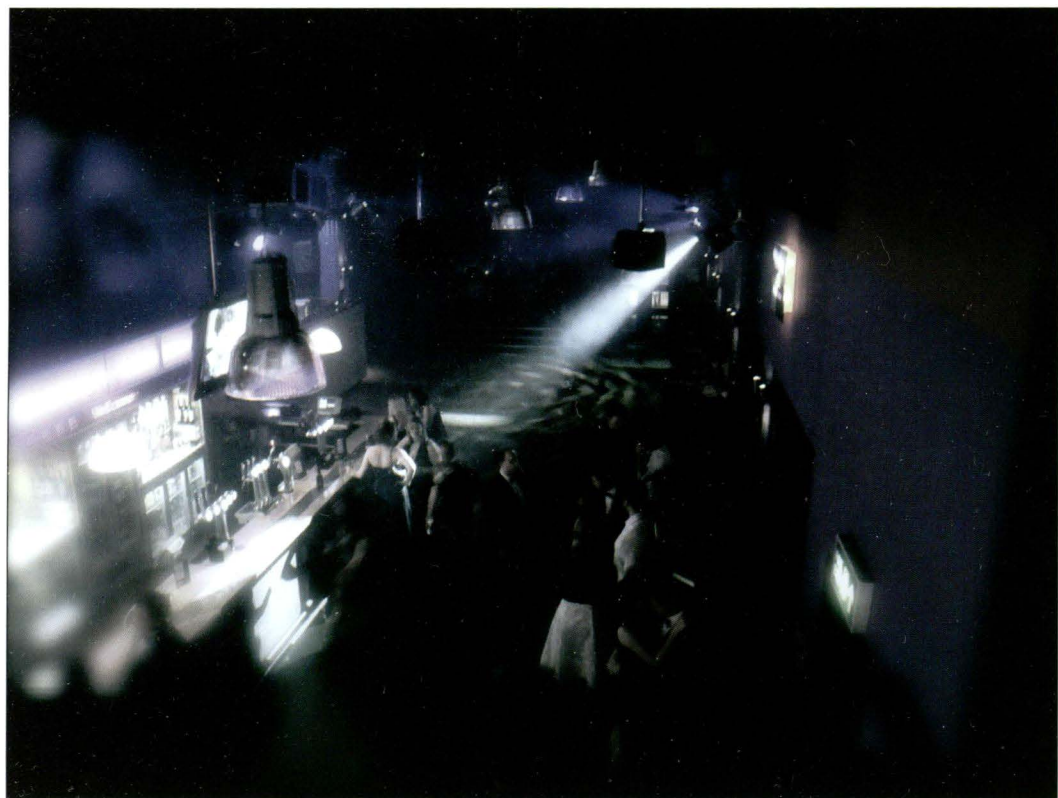
LIZ MCAVOY **electricity**



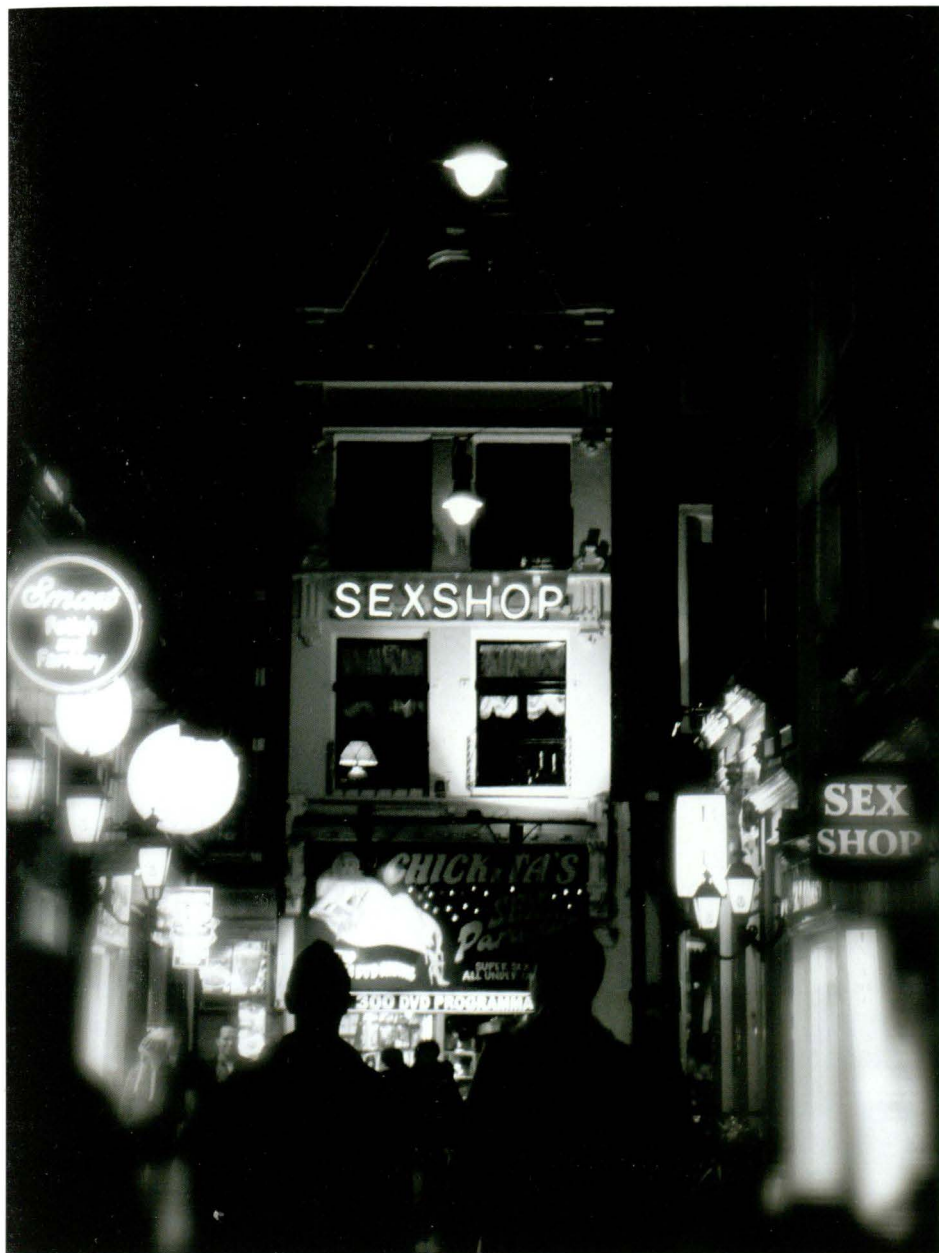
35

LIZ MCAVOY

Iya Traore vs gravity

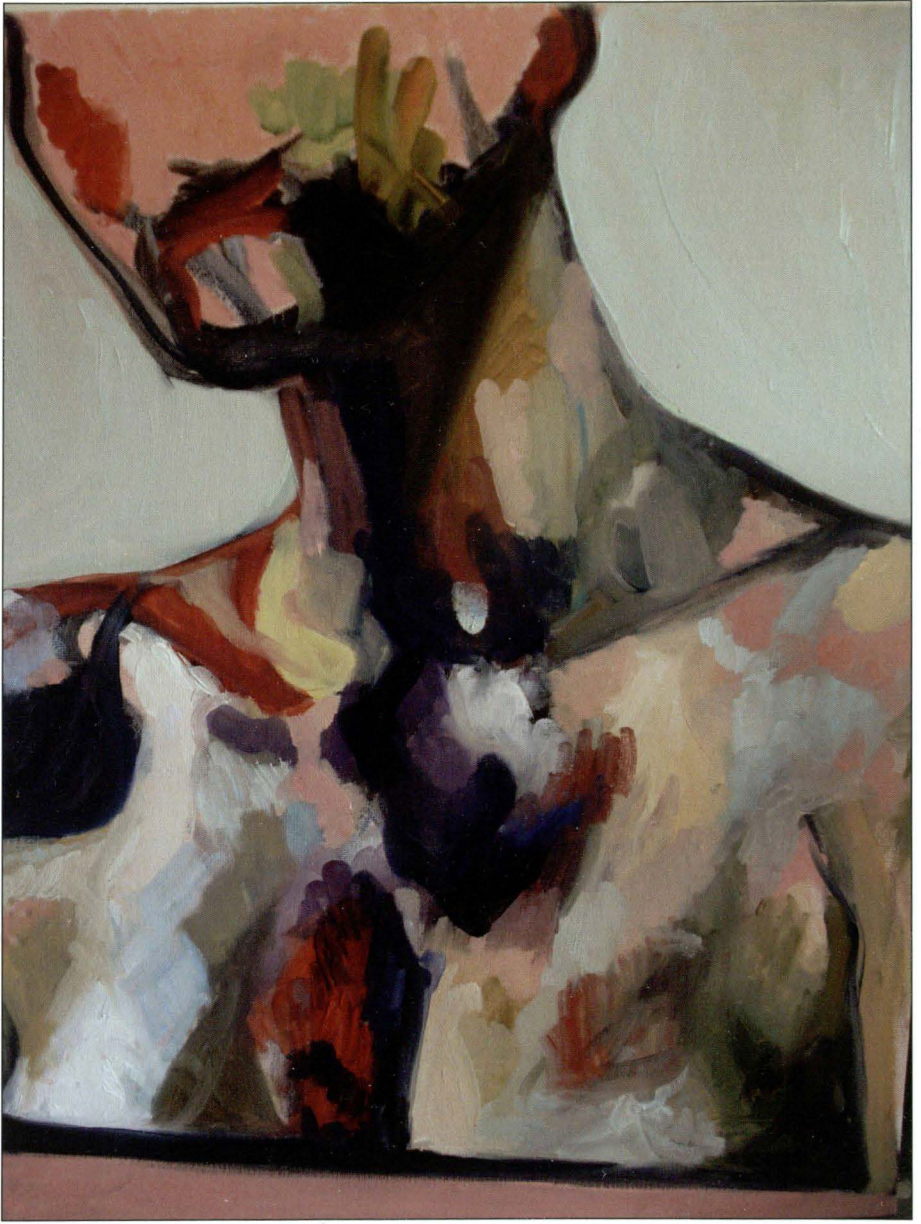


LIZ MCAVOY **Nostalgia**



37

LIZ MCAVOY **Green Light**



KATE HOUCK



39

KATE HOVCK

40



KATE HOUCK



41

CLAIRE FRANCYK **The Attack**



ALI EAVES

Open Mic Night



ALI EAVES

Bad Day



ALI EAVES

New Best Friend



ALI EAVES

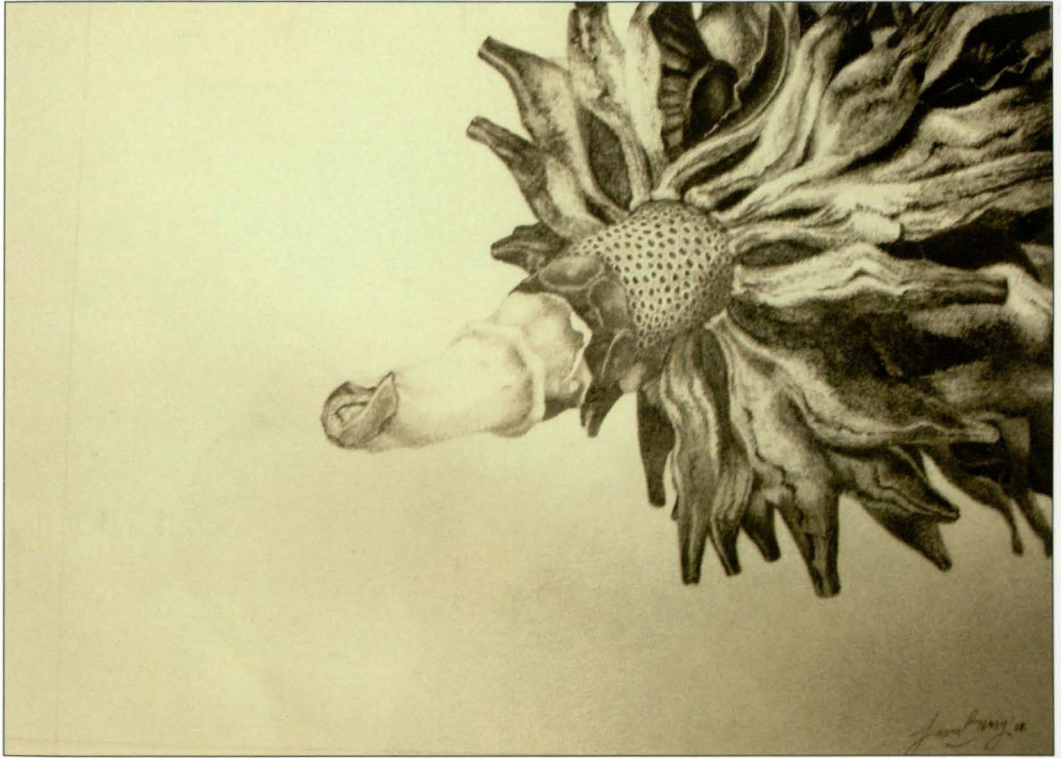
Little

46



Laura Barry

Eddies



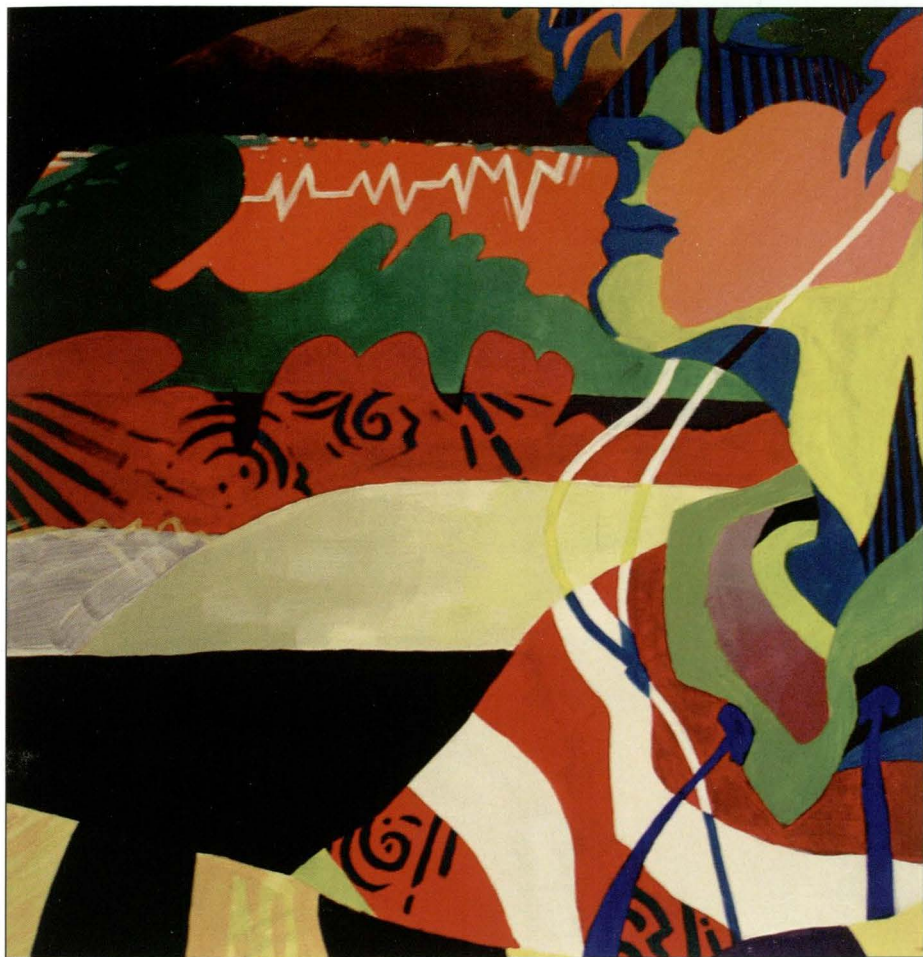
LAURA BARRY

Magnolia Seed Pod



Laura Barry

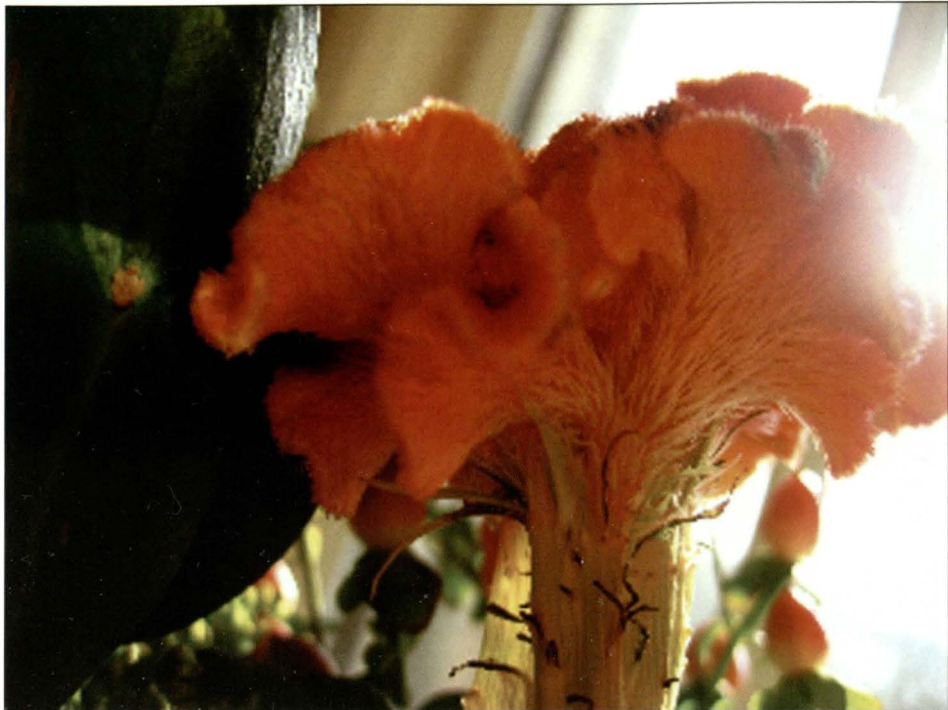
Contentment



49

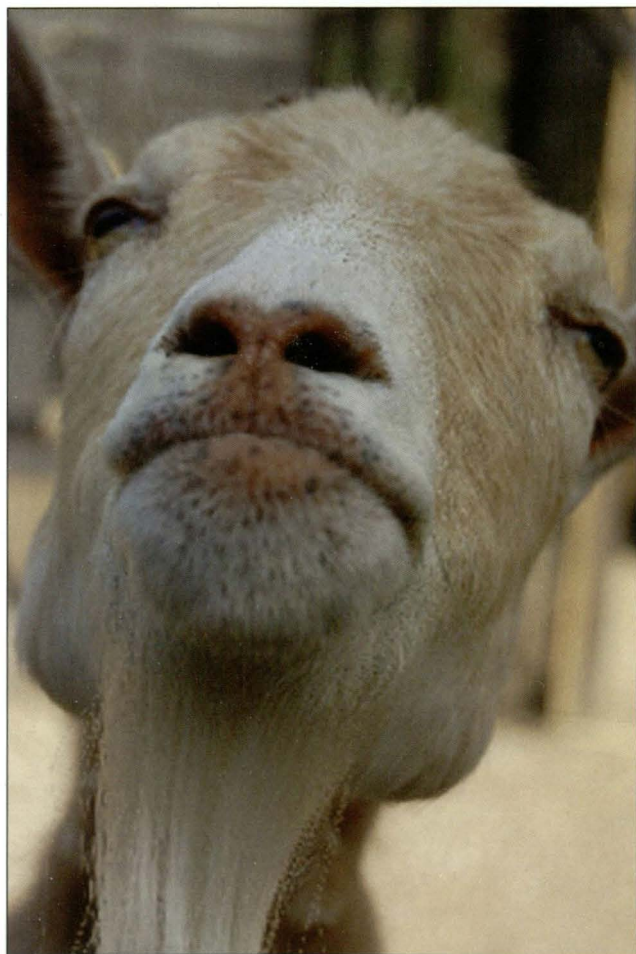
Laura Barry

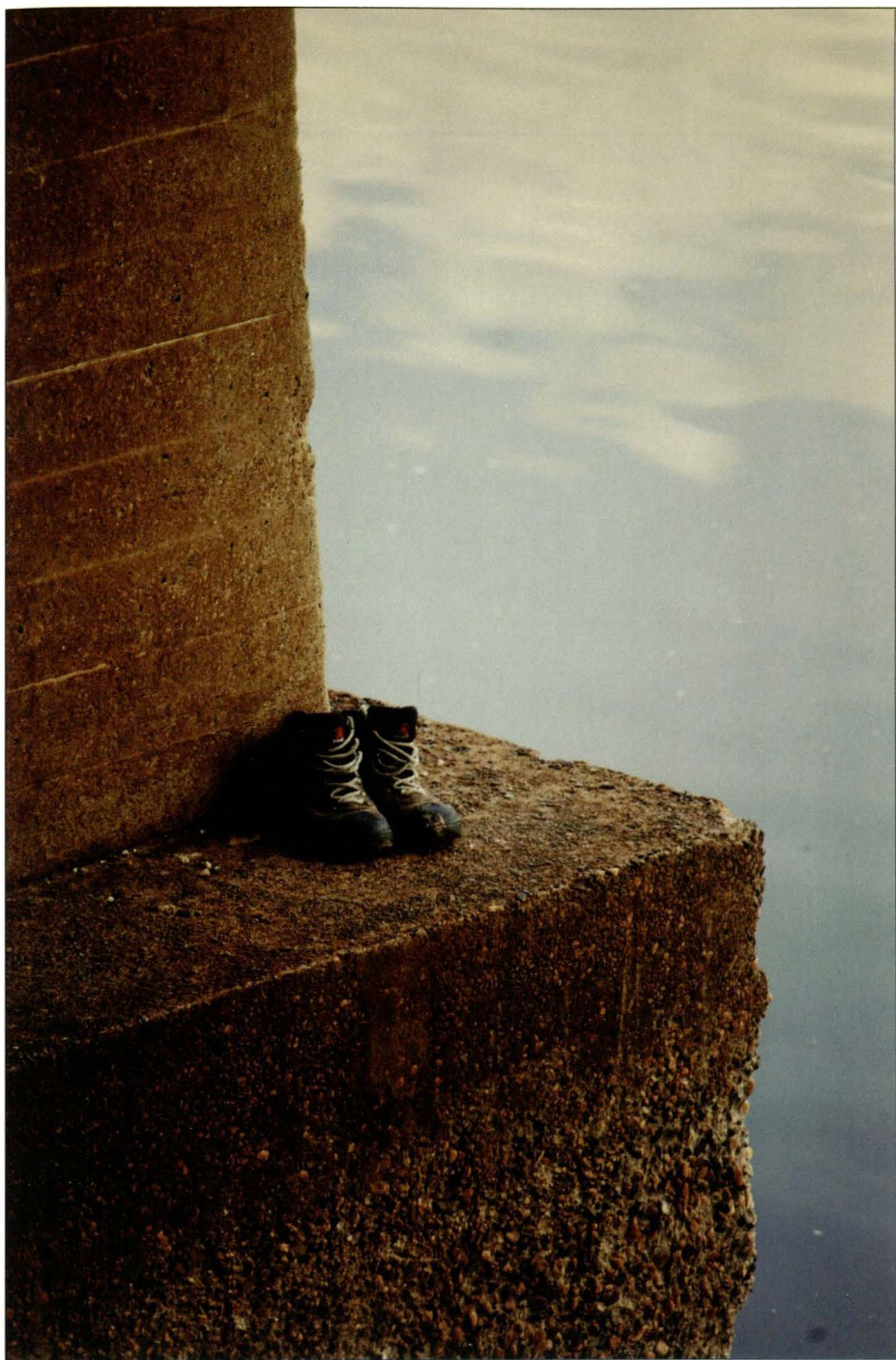
Discord



50

JESSIE
PASCARELLI





51

ASHLEY GRAHAM

Lost

52



ALEXANDER J.E. SZAJKO IV

**the chance for love has
passed me by**



CAROL DELUCA

54



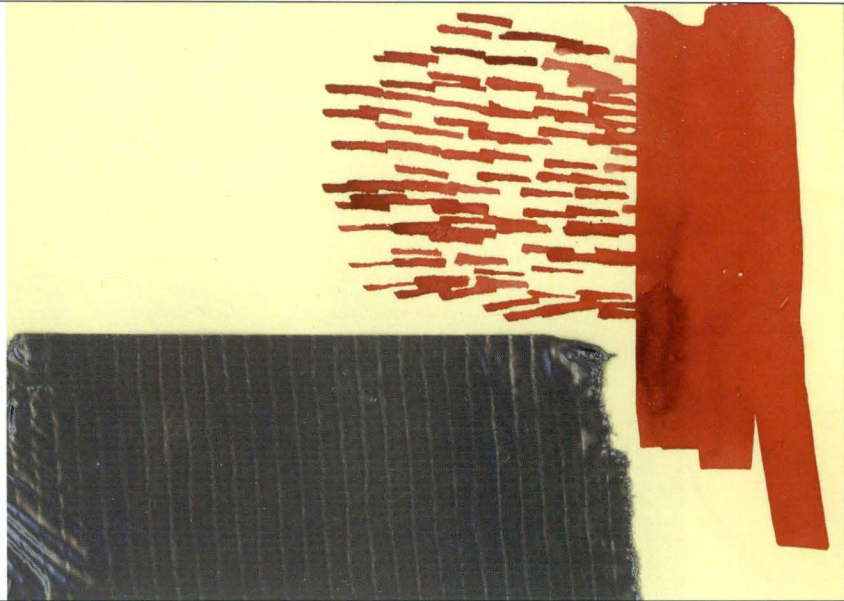
LOURDES FIGUEROA

Candlelight



AMY MATHIS

Diptych 1



AMY MATHIS

Dptych 3



SP

AMY MATHIS

Dptych 4

57



AMY MATHIS



59

AMY MATHIS

Villanelle

Amani Morrison

The scream you heard was a whisper in my head
Speaking a telling secret that I cannot keep
A lie that loves the loneliness bred



What do we do with the things left unsaid?
Sweeping sweet emotions into a heap
The scream you heard was a whisper in my head

Frolicking freely within the bed
Stoking the blaze for our love too steep
A lie that loves the loneliness bred

Days march on with no light tread
Our life together left to weep
The scream you heard was a whisper in my head
A lie that loves the loneliness bred

The Poet's Bastard Children

Dawn Hackett

He told her not to believe the rumors about his sperm. They were not as wayward as everyone was saying. And everyone knew those little devils had a way of sneaking up on people without the donor's knowledge. They have a life of their own. His wife did not believe him though she said it was all one big cosmic joke. She thought he was sterile. But he tried to get her pregnant every night all the same. He did not tell her how close he'd come to spilling some of his bastard children down the thigh of his biggest fan. She was a pert research assistant with close-set eyes and a perfectly undimpled ass. She changed from workout clothes to jeans in his tenured bathroom twice a week. The door was crooked and the building was ancient and the gap between the hinges never closed completely. He told his wife his love was never ending. She came to his readings anyway. When her husband began his first published poem she'd swooned so many years ago. Now she mused over the unwrinkled faces looking up at the stage. She'd watch their soft mouths get softer and open without their knowledge. Her husband never let her see his pondering, but she saw them chew his frothy odes and swallow up all his children.

An Examination of Habit

Victor Wasserman

A young man of a familiar type was sitting in an open-air café in Boulder. As he was hurriedly downing an oversized cheeseburger with all the toppings, including but not limited to American cheese, an additional meat patty, an additional square of cheese, lettuce, tomato, onion, olives, bacon and more mayonnaise than any one person has any right to even look at, much less consume, a young woman with a lettuce wrap sat down across from him at the little table.

As anyone does when confronted with a strange situation, he continued to eat, but had slowed down some: the universal sign of rumination. It is odd how important time can become when one is in a hurry, how little we do to conserve it when we need to think fast. Meanwhile, the young woman smiled simply at him.

62

He was still very confused when he put down his hamburger and swallowed, cleared his throat and said, "Can I help you?"

The lady replied sweetly, "No."

The fellow with the burger licked his lips here, and did the best he could to articulate politely that he wished to eat alone. "Oh?" she said, sounding neither surprised nor deeply moved by the young man's plea. Suddenly she twisted around in her chair, glancing first over one shoulder and then over the other, searching for something in the crowd of tables around them. Then she raised an arm high in the air and waved it quickly but powerfully about. Then, without warning, she returned peacefully to her original position at the table, considering the lettuce wrap sitting in front of her.

Agitated, perplexed, the young man asked what that was all about. The girl returned a gesture of no real descript form or meaning and took a bite of her food. "I mean all that waving!"

"Oh," again she was not surprised, only going through the

motions, "I was just looking for someone."

"Did you find them?" he stammered.

Slowly, intently, and with closed eyes, she slid her tongue back and forth across her teeth inside her closed lips, hunting out stray strands of green. After a pause, she nodded.

"Would you mind going to sit with them, then?"

She said, "Oh," as she always did, "but I am." And with that, her hands dropped below the table and deftly undid her button and fly. She raised her bottom slightly and whisked her jeans down to her ankles where she fumbled as skillfully as one can before stepping out of her bellbottoms completely. The young man's jaw fell open. She crossed her arms at her waist and had her tank top off in a flash; her long hair cascading down her back to her fanny and the delicate red cloth that hid it from the world.

63

Bewildered, the young man coughed out the obvious question, "What are you doing?!"

The young woman was reaching behind her back for her clasp when she paused. "Ted Bishop, right?" The young man jerked back in shock. The young woman nodded knowingly. "You really should pay your bills, Ted." She undid her bra, and the young man's head exploded.

A mile and a half away, in a high and hidden place, a grumbling and aging man was laying supine, staring down his rifle's sight in reflection, job done. He reached into his pocket, no easy task at his age in that position, and once more examined the folded yellow paper therein. "Objective: male sitting with naked woman, Boulder café, 2:40 p.m." He sighed deeply to himself, "This used to be fun."

apoptosis

Emily Nelson

paracrine words:

time to go.

like circus tents, membrane flaps

bloom up;

cold zinc fingers

package me,

in neat vesicles, a tatter

of soul in each.

in one, my hopes;

another, my dreams:

maybe some other can use them.

my heart, pale liver, twin

glistening kidneys

bob along, swathed in phosphorus glow.

and my blood, each burgeoning

drop I bled, I shed

in vain, poured molten,

still pulsing.

I sail, like reed boats on a river,

my likes and dislikes,

my irrational fears,

my habit of blinking when confused,

those thousand tricky puzzle pieces that,

scattered a certain way

and peered at squinting,

made up me.

sealed in watertight,

floating and nodding in vesicle safety,

so neat, so pert, like

gaily wrapped gifts addressed to no one.

gifts drifting without end,

tape crackled and yellowing,

cardboard soggy; bright colors

faded.

this the best way to go.

no mess, no fuss, nothing to bury in the mud;

death is chemical. ▾

The Death Rattle of Lori McBae

Dawn Hackett

October of 1983, parole, in existence since 1941, was eliminated in the State of Florida except for capital crimes. By the mid 1980's, at least 4000 new inmates entered the Florida Corrections System each month. As a result of the extreme overcrowding in Florida jails and the legislature's unwillingness to devote tightly budgeted funds to adding more beds to the system, the Florida Early Release System was created under Republican Gov. Bob Martinez and begun in 1987. By 1990, prisoners served only 33% of their sentences on average.

Jacksonville, Florida

January 31, 1995 Approximately 2:30 am

Cedar Hills Shopping Center

In the darkness of an enclave in front of J.C.Penney's main entrance stands an old fashioned window display case. It's formed as an island surrounded by glass and a walkway in a semi-circle. Bits of paper and Styrofoam cups are inevitably skirted by the wind into the area by virtue of the 12 inch abutment of the display case's front side. The shopping strip was old and fallen on hard times. Cloth World closed when making your own clothes became too time consuming. Morrison's Cafeteria, once swarming with Jacksonville's older citizens, could no longer afford to provide low cost meals to fixed income residents. The vast parking lots, once filled daily, were ragged. Only the light fixtures closest to the store fronts were maintained and the owners bypassed new building regulations to add additional lights based on occupancy, a neat loophole that deferred costs. There was still hope for the old center as long as J. C. Penney, Walgreens and Winn-Dixie at the northern end of the strip did not terminate their leases. The Walgreens was open 24 hours, a relatively rare but convenient option to people living anywhere near Cedar Hills. To help lower operating costs, J. C. Penney gained permission from Cedar Hills' owners to darken the front display cases after business hours. The scattered parking lot fixtures, though dated, would

shoved her against the side of the Bronco. They were facing away from the Walgreens. "Take out your ATM card, we're going inside to get some cash."

Lori spit in his face, bringing her knee up into his groin but her strength had left her when her breath did. He drew back his fist and punched her square below her heart. He put his hands around her throat. He could not leave her there, her wallet was empty of cash and she would run if he tried her card himself. When she refused to give him the PIN, he turned her toward the ATM machine inside the front of the Walgreens and slipped his knife hand under her sweater, holding it against her back. He put his other hand on her shoulder. A young man of about twenty walked down the sidewalk in front of the shopping center, stopped and looked at them, then moved on.

Their awkward dance began, two lovers, the man trying to make things up to the woman who was obviously tired and upset with him. Just inside the Walgreens entrance, he pressed the edge of the knife harder into Lori's shirt. 50 yards away, a bored cashier turned to see who had entered the store. Seeing a couple using the ATM she went back to a list on her counter, her back turned to the couple.

Lori passed out in his arms. The man bit the back of her neck. She came to. "Fuck you," she said, low, no breath to draw on, and brought her hand up into his face behind her shoulder, gouging his eye with the edge of the ATM card. He grunted. The clerk looked over again, he quickly smiled, kissing the back of her head. She reared her head backward then forward, vomited without much force, soaking her chin and the front of her sweater. He forced her back to standing straight.

The clerk looked over again, decided they must be arguing over money, and went back to the list.

"Get me as much cash as you can then I'll let you go back to your car. Just fucking do it now," he found the bottom of her shirt and put the blade underneath, running the sharp edge across the right side of her back. His left hand still rested near her shoulder. Lori fumbled with the card, finally getting the

remain lit to compensate.

On this chilly morning, crouching at the edge of the abutment, a man ran his hand over the handle of a sheathed knife in the shadows. He watched, fighting off powerful cravings, whispering to himself about a deep, dark need. Wearing only a long sleeved flannel shirt and greasy jeans, he shivered violently, wracking his elbow against the glass. He had the sallow, bony look of a fiend, his face pocked and scarred. The sound of a deep throaty engine took his attention to the parking lot where he saw a woman, short hair, slight shoulders, driving a Bronco through the lot. She passed in front of the J. C. Penney store-front and turned into the line of spaces near Walgreens.

Lori McRae's postal shift ended at 2:00 am and as she drove home, her husband called her cell phone. He was out of work due to a back injury and needed Tylenol and was craving ice cream. She slid her Bronco into a space near Walgreens. She shut off the ignition and gathered her purse, unlocking her door to get out.

Bam bam bam a man's fist against the driver side glass. "Hey. Sorry to scare you. Got any change? I'm freezing and I just want to get something to eat."

Lori reached for the lock, yelling at the stranger to go away. She was too late. The man pulled the handle and the door opened. He punched Lori several times in the ribs, shoved her over onto the passenger side of the bench seat, telling her to keep quiet.

"Shut the fuck up. I'm not going to hurt you anymore I just want you to get me some cash. Where's your ATM card?" He rifled through her purse and found her wallet. No cash. He shoved it into her hand. Lori couldn't breathe from the gut punch, couldn't scream, reaching for the other door lock. She curled into herself as he landed a blow to her side.

He showed her his knife. "I'll fucking gut you right now cunt if you don't do what I say." He punched her in the side again, unlocked her door, opened it and pushed her out. She hit the pavement groaning. He followed, pulled her to her feet and

full limit of her cash to come out. She only had two hundred and fifteen dollars in the account. Two hundred appeared in the tray. The disappointment he felt tightened his grip on her shoulder and slid the blade against her back again. He pressed her shirt into the wound to keep the blood from dripping onto the store's floor. Then he grabbed the receipt and saw the balance. He turned them toward the door as Becky tried to fight him not to leave. She was too weak. The clerk gave them one last glance then returned to her list.

He gut punched her as soon as he saw that no one outside was watching, taking the breath out of her screaming attempt to get someone's attention. She had barely recovered, now she returned to struggling to get air into her lungs. He opened the passenger door, propped her against the side of the seat, reared back and cuckolded her. She lost consciousness. He unzipped her pants with one hand, shoved them down then shoved her body onto the seat. His thirst was unreal now he said later. "I wanted to fuck her," but his crack habit murdered that skill years ago, so he settled for playing with her while he drove. A mile away from Cedar Hills down Blanding Blvd., he sat alone at a stop light. He turned her against the locked door on the passenger side and beat her face, stomach and legs, then fingered her until the light turned green. "I was out of control. I stabbed her legs for fun." He then drove to his dealer's house, tied Lori's hands with her shirt, now blood soaked and bit her nipples. She did not respond.

When he returned to the Bronco her eyes were open. He got in, punched her face several times and she passed out again. Two hours later he was on I-95 at the Florida Georgia line. Lori was still alive. 40 minutes later, down a dirt road in rural southern Georgia, the man stripped Lori of what was left of her bloody clothes, threw them into the backseat and molested her. She woke up, started screaming and he pummeled her alternately with his fist and the knife for several minutes. He dropped the knife, put both hands around her neck and strangled her, his head to her chest wanting to hear the death rattle, listening to

her heart surging at first then slowly stop beating.

For the two weeks before a man was stopped by Jacksonville police for driving the Bronco of a missing postal worker, mother of four named Lori McRae, her family held its breath. They missed work, felt helpless, tried to find her, vomited, cried, sat still over phones, prayed, cursed, and held onto hope. All was lost two weeks later.

Lori's first husband called his family to give them the news. His three children with Lori and her daughter with her second husband were now the children of a murdered mother. They were 18, 12, 8 and 2. The man driving her Bronco, Lori's bloody clothes in the backseat, denied he knew anything about a missing woman. He held onto his story for several days, then issued a full confession and led the police to her naked decomposing body, thrown in the woods at the end of a rural dirt road in southern Georgia. The knife was found as well. The man had been released 18 months before Lori McRae's murder after serving five years of a 20 year sentence for second degree murder of a 61 year old, central Florida man. He had robbed, stabbed and strangled the victim. He was pulled over for driving a car with stolen plates. Searching the trunk, the police had found the body of his first victim.

During the pretrial investigation for Lori McRae's murder, both the young man who walked by during the struggle and the clerk in the store assumed domestic trouble between the couple and were afraid to interfere. Neither attempted to intervene, neither called the police to report a dispute. At Lori McRae's murder trial, the son and daughter of the 61 year old man sat at the back of the courtroom, praying for justice after so many years. The killer was sentenced to death and awaits execution on Florida's Death Row.

As of October, 1995, legislation passed requiring all violent offenders in the Florida penal system to serve a minimum of 85% of their terms regardless of their behavior.

Three

Julia Donaldson

He retired from his years as a Radio DJ to shelf books in the public library in silence.

On his third day of work, he found that the rhythm made when he shelved the "Large Text" books in section 784 closely resembled the tune of "Knock Three Times" by Tony Orlando and Dawn. He soon became a double-retiree.

70

After raising three moderately-successful sons, she decided it was time they had a daughter. Over dinner, she presented her researched methods of in vitro fertilization after which her husband revealed his long-held favorite girl's name. A week later, they adopted tabby cat instead.

Upon discovering three of his neighbor's magazines accidentally jammed into his postbox, he promptly decided to return them. Once he reached her apartment door, he was greeted by the smell of Thai food and the blaring sound of a Maple Leaf's hockey match. He swiftly returned to his apartment and spent the remainder of the evening reading each magazine, page by page.

The Margaret Hayley Carpenter Prize for Poetry

Turbidity

Adam Palumbo

“The poem is always married to someone.” –René Char

I've been out of my mind twice in my life.
Sicilian uncles have no concept of this,
They are too strong in their weakmindedness.
I tell myself to relish the brief, queasy
Happiness, to hang on to the last now,
Simultaneity of human feeling.
But happiness comes as a snapshot,
Not in a quantifiable fashion
Not mechanically, but as a vision,
Something rich and strange. The Russians know that
Turbidity is a skittish hurricane
Off the coast, biting its fingernails.
They say perfect love drives out fear,
But where can I find perfect love? I thought
We found it in that tangy magic realism
In Maryland. Your meek mien spoke to me
O so singly and I drove you home
After we traced the outline of the soul.
I only wanted one thing—to be happy,
But, wanting that, I have wanted everything.
Like a child, I asked, “Why can't you see
The bitter end?” The heart is two-toned
And a cold silence froze its happy humming.
You would not speak a single word to me.
And turbidity's gales fell upon gray shores,
Churning happiness and washing it away.

Off the Grid

Dawn Hackett

Being a recovering alcoholic, I love a good bar.

Sitting in Staunton's Texas Steakhouse, parking lot recently plowed and slushed, there's a sort of freedom in the peanut ridden isolation of their saloon. The area is small, definitely not the Jefferson. I place myself on the map in my head, the white area between UVA and national forest and tap the foot rest for navigational grounding. It's a long strange trip from Ponce de Leon to snow brushed mountains near the western Virginia border, but the smell of sizzling cow diverts and represses. Duane Allman is stealing the show from Clapton, bleeding and whining above Layla's piano break. Scorcese flashes onto the map and my mind returns to its normal mode, endlessly repeating a broken search code.

72

I'm in town for a test.

Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center, room 38, has two spindly beds, no phone, no alarm clock, but the TV gets 72 channels. A fried Physical Therapy student promised to bang on my door at 7:00 am so I can begin 12 hours of a nifty set of tests called Neuro-Psych eval. I have no idea why I am here. Rehabilitative Services sent me – more appropriately, is sponsoring me because I am dick-in-the-dirt broke. They even gave me a WaWa gas card. But I'm here now, having driven past many crooked, moribund SUV's banked in the ice in a borrowed '98 Dodge Stratus blinking airbag and battery lights every two hours. I give it 5,000 miles before disability forces early retirement.

David Bowie is shouting rebel, rebel, your face is a mess.
I just ate gluten for the first time in over a month. Bowie confesses hot tramp, I love you so. My left foot is MIA again. There's 27.5 seconds left, Celtics hosting the Lakers on the middle TV above the bar, Celtics up by one with possession, turnover to Kobe – pulls a McHale, a long fade flatter than the back of my guitar but the ball gets net and the Lakers go up by one. Celtics doink. Game over. Same shit, different decade. I wonder which records Lin Bias would hold right now, his face immortalized in bronze under Auerbach's administration. I begin to long for what I cannot have.

I try to figure on why I can remember Lin but not the particulars of the meal I just finished. I feel the length of tomorrow along my spine and pay my bill.

Grace Slick is asking if I want somebody to love. The corner TV is turned to ESPN and I march out on the quick step thinking of all the NFL playoff games I've missed.

If I hurry, I can stop the world and slide into my creaky bed while meds take me under. I hope the game tonight has a Manning in it. Tomorrow I'll discern hieroglyphics and cry in front of a complete stranger over shit that can't be changed. For now, I'll muster the courage to change the channel and argue with the refs to no one whose there, knowing I've forgotten the wisdom to tell the difference between a bad call, and a good play.

Algebra

Josh Huffines

Let x equal the moment just after he tells her he is starting a Quidditch club at their middle school for people who want to pretend to be wizards.

It is late summer and this is the local playground. She is gently swaying on a swing over a patch of worn grass. He is standing slightly behind her, hand on the small of her back, gently pushing.

Let y equal her reaction, her laughter. Her laughter sounds like a fire alarm at 4am. It is annoying and slightly evil.

She tosses her head back to look at him while she swings. Even though he is hearing the y of her laughter in the wake of moment x , he cannot stop staring at her. She hops off the swing and turns, laughingly asking, "What in the world do you know about Quidditch? Can you even fly? I suppose I could let you borrow my broom."

74

Let z equal the face he makes. The face is in response to her laughter, not her mocking questions.

He was trying to impress her with the Quidditch club. He knows that she adores everything Harry Potter and thought the club would be a way of getting her to like him. They say the person who controls a relationship is the person who cares least. He apparently cares more.

He can't help the z of his face. He feels embarrassed and humiliated. He also feels queasy. Her hair and her eyes, both of which he finds gorgeous, are beginning to blur together. She stops laughing, suddenly aware of his discomfort.

In a moment she will step closer to him. Fearing further embarrassment he will make a rash decision. As she draws closer, his face will turn even redder and he will call her a "Bitch". As soon as the breath slips past his tongue he will regret this action. He knows the emotional pain caused by this word and her subsequent tears will be equal to the hurt caused by the y of her laughter. He feels terrible and immediately thinks back to x , the variable that started this equation.

Let x equal not the moment just after he tells her about the club, but the moment just before. Let x be him saying something tender and sweet.

Let y be her surprised and genuine reaction.

Let z be.

Marked

Julia Donaldson

The night before I left
You traced my blue veins
Purple.
And we laughed at how it
Shrank when I moved.
Skin bending, obscuring
The rest.
Three days, it faded.
Sweat off in the Virginia heat.
And you laughed
Pleased with its longevity.

Saved by a Better Daughter

Dawn Hackett

Fifteen with a thickly greased duck tail, my father arrived in St. Petersburg from New York with my Grandmother after his own father died of tuberculosis. He promptly fell in love with fishing the Gulf of Mexico and became entrenched in a sodden way of life. He would enter the Gulf in an old johnboat from the Bay, through John's Pass. He met a squatty, barrel-chested man named Calvin Wylie at a launch one day, a baitshop owner and fisherman extraordinaire. They were a perfect match; a fishing-teacher in need of a student-son, and a fatherless-son in need of a fishing buddy. Having left the Brooklyn Dodgers and a young Sandy Koufax for the move south, my father quickly filled the many gaps in his life with his new friend. My father's first Florida job was in Wylie's Baitshop and he eventually named my brother after him. Dad was never far from salt water after that, always able to sniff the rotten sweetness of a baitshop, hear the danger crash of a storm swell.

76

Forty years later on a muggy June day I sat in my car on a large patch of weeds where Wylie's Baitshop once stood, my father next to me on the passenger side, Calvin Wylie's ashes adrift in the Gulf for decades. A cancerous tumor snipped from my father's bladder, he was into his second month of non-radiated denial on his 60th birthday. The occasion was my treat – my sorrow, a tumor in the pit of my stomach. I charged tickets I couldn't afford three rows above the Devil Rays dugout, and a couple of decent hotel rooms in St. Pete. Like a sightseeing trip to Krakow, we braved the memories of past

events, tried pounding the unseen future into hopefulness while we went looking for signs of his youth. We had some time to kill before the game.

“Nothing but weeds,” Dad sighed.

“I see some gravel over there,” I said, pointing to our left. Slowly, he grinned. “Well, Koufax is still around. Love dem bums.” We sat for awhile with the windows down, holding hands.

At the stadium we walked through the gates and together took deep breaths, then turned, smiling at each other. Dank toilets, dogs, mustard and fly ridden onion, and just underneath it, a hint of freshly spread dirt and line chalk. An hour later, the Devil Rays were losing to the Dodgers. We had the best seats in the entire world while we sat in them. I was just in front of a guy who complained constantly and loudly that no one in Florida knew a goddamn thing about baseball. My father stretched his long legs into the aisle, grinning, melting into his seat. He leaned into me and said, “Must be from the Bronx.” There was no Koufax that day, just a Dodger grand slam top of the ninth. We stopped on the way out at John’s Pass where my father knelt in the sand. His arms stretched for the water. His hands touched down lightly as I watched from above him on the boardwalk. It seemed a sacred type of moment, one many would have turned away from, but I was a better daughter that day and stole quietly behind him while he said goodbye.

PRIZE WINNERS

The Margaret Owen Finck Award for Prose
Claire Franczyk, "Today is Wednesday"

The Margaret Hayley Carpenter Prize for Poetry
Adam Palumbo, "Turbidity"

78

Winners were anonymously chosen from
The Messenger's accepted submissions
by faculty judges Elisabeth Gruner, Brian Henry
and David Stevens

SUBMISSION POLICY

The Messenger accepts submissions on a rolling basis in the following categories: art, poetry and prose (for prose please specify fiction or non-fiction). Everyone in the University of Richmond Community is welcome to submit their work – students, faculty, staff and alumni – and to submit as many pieces as they wish.

79

All submissions should be emailed as attachments to messenger@richmond.edu. Submissions will be reviewed and selected anonymously by committee.

THE MESSENGER

2009-2010 Staff

Editor In Chief:

Schuyler Swartout

Design Editor:

Alice Chaosurawong

Section Editors:

Art

Ali Eaves

Fiction

Phil Opsasnick

Nonfiction

Sam Mitchell

Poetry

Timothy Henry

Web Designer:

Hayley Swinson

Faculty Advisors:

Brian Henry and David Stevens



Selection Committees:

Art

Julia Eldred

Kara Finzel

Lourdes Figueroa

Liz McAvoy

Steve Minnich

Jessie Pascarelli

Sarah Matheson

Fiction

Lourdes Figueroa

Aleah Ariella Serman Goldin

Dawn Hackett

Jessie Pascarelli

Amber Roudette

Victor Wasserman

Nonfiction

Dawn Hackett

Jessie Pascarelli

Poetry

Rianna DiBartolo-Cordovano

Julia Donaldson

Ray Fields

Starr Miyata

Elizabeth Moore

Carter Staub

Nadine Weiss

Sandra Zuniga

THE MESSENGER wishes the best of luck to its editor in chief
for 2010-2011, Alice Chaosurawong!