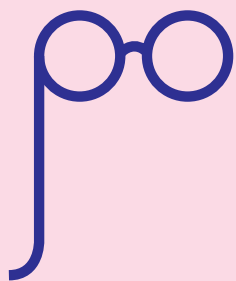




poictesme



poictesme

[pwa-tem]

01 a student-led art and literary journal of Virginia Commonwealth University

02 a fictitious French province created by James Branch Cabell that serves as a setting of several of his fantasy novels including the series *Biography of the Life of Manuel*

Editor's Note

Poictesme has come to mean many different things to me over the course of my work with the publication. It is a platform for VCU creatives to showcase their talents and hard work. It is a persisting distinction, a physical legacy of a place and time receding into the fog of the past. It is a social refuge, a constraint to both challenge and reinforce, and an opportunity for students to learn self-motivation and responsibility. But, I think *Poictesme's* essence is its collaborative spirit—its conduciveness to unifying students, administrators, artists, and writers in a singular vision. One thing that makes this vision so powerful, and encourages so many to commit to it, is the abundant generosity and openness of the people involved.

When we chose the fascinating, layered photography of Heather West for the cover, we decided to design the '14 journal around the theme of transparency. This design concept, though settled upon for purely aesthetic reasons, has come to have broader implications for me. I have spent much time over the past year walking through the open doors of Greg Weatherford, Lauren Katchuk, and Mark Jeffries—the behind-the-scenes administrators who make *Poictesme* and many other student publications possible. Greg's advice on organizing and developing a growing student organization has been priceless to me; Lauren's geniality and her seamless planning of our trip to AWP in Seattle this year meant the world. (Did I mention *Poictesme* got to table at AWP this year!?!); and in light of Mark's innovative ideas, I have been urged to see *Poictesme* as a publication laden with more possibilities than I ever would have without his help.

Of course, the list of munificent collaborators doesn't end there. I was thrilled to have the opportunity to work closely with three exceptional individuals this year, whom I deemed the "dream team": deputy editor Alex Carrigan, art director Kristen Rebelo, and web director Carla Dominguez. These three have helped to raise *Poictesme* to an unprecedented level of expertise in the fields of web design, print design, and creative web content. Thanks to the endless hours they've freely dedicated, simply because of their passions for literature and art, *Poictesme* has come to be much bigger, and better than ever.

Some other invaluable collaborators include Dale Smith, who has long helped us spread *Poictesme* news throughout the English department, and Amy Sailer, our previous editor-in-chief who envisioned many of the projects that came to fruition this year. There are many more people to personally thank for their contributions, but I digress.

Collaboration requires a certain transparency—a willingness to share, and to adapt others' ideas as one's own. This journal is a testament to what can be accomplished when we keep our senses of creativity and productivity open to outside influences, and free from hard-line expectation. *Poictesme* is a product of a blended palette, a variety of visions layered over one another in such a way as to become one vibrant hue, gleaming with affinity.

Hannah Morgan

staff

Editor-in-Chief
Hannah Morgan

Deput Editor
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Business Manager
Lauren Katchuk

Student Media Director
Greg Weatherford

Faculty Advisor
Susann Cokal

Web Content Contributors
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Elly Call
Dawn Carr
Alex Carrigan
Maya Chesley
John DiJulio
Carla Dominguez
Grace Dunn
F.L. German
Megan Goldfarb
Simoney Hanna
Amelia Heymann
Temp K
Gust Kielhack
Kiara Moore
Cyrus Nuval
Daniel Parker
Taylor Purcell
Kristen Rebelo
Summer Rustick
Christopher Sloce
Helen Stoddard

Tumblr Manager
John DiJulio

Cover Artist
Heather West

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Gust Kielhack
Faith Vasko

Copy Editor
Meagan Dermody

literature

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Two Poems Ilana Bean

The morning you thought I was gone, but I was only hiding with
my head under the covers

When I grow up
I want to dig
a hole in the mud
and live there.

I'll breathe through
the tunnels
that the earthworms
crawled,
and eat raspberries
from the seeds
we planted upside down.

My body will flatten
into a film.
You could hang me
by my hands and feet
stretched tight
across a window frame.

I would let the light in.



Two Poems Ilana Bean
Illustration Emma Scarvey

Her Braids

Plaits,
as my mother calls them—
the ordering of
an organic form,
reducing thousands
of strings
down to three,
down to one,
knitting spools
of epidermal tissue
into a fabric.

Our bodies don't hold
crossed patterns
like that
anywhere else
as far as I know.

What if we had
argyle eyelids,
plaid lips?
I have
polka dotted cheeks
but that's
nothing
but where the sun
chose to land.

Her braids have been
lying together
inside a navy blue box
since 1933—
the envy of
my wispy blonde self
with a longing
to have hair past
the tickle of my shoulders,
in the days before it
belonged to me.

Thirteen years old,
braiding her hair
that morning,
did she take care
to tuck no section thicker
than the other,
to pull the ends
especially tight?

Did she carry them
to college,
stored in a drawer
beneath her socks,
or were they
dormant for decades
only to be dug up,
an archeological discovery?

These braids have heard nothing
but admiration.
They must see the world
as the same lovely place
as a baby who thinks
the resting facial position
is a smile
because that's all anybody
lets her know.

They laid with my grandmother
while she lay
sleepless,
when she lied
to her mother,
when she went
to the bathroom.

I wonder if
she remembers
the braids growing
any better than
I remember myself
toothless.
I haven't forgotten

cutting the scar
inside my thumb
that taught me
left from right
but I don't recall
having small hands.

They say
your teeth can bite
through your fingers,
but your mind can't.
Something stops it.

I used to have faith—
there was something
when you're sitting
on the floor
of your new apartment
that stops you
from picking the scissors up
and cutting your hair off,
without even unpacking a mirror.

I keep that ponytail
under my bed
at my parents' house.

Hair is not a renewable resource.
It'll always grow back,
is, of course, a lie.

You grow a whole new body
every seven years.
Your cells are
gradually and constantly
dying and shedding and replacing
themselves.

The corpse
of my twelve-year-old self
is scattered somewhere
in microscopic pieces.



How to Cook Guilt-Free Orange Roughy Richard DiCicco
Illustration Kristen Rebelo

Consider the orange roughy.

Native to the waters of New Zealand and Australia, this placid fish's bulging eyes and hardy, tough jowl may scare off children if their noses are pressed up against the cold glass of the National Aquarium, but don't let the roughy's blunt expression turn off your appetite. The orange roughy is a versatile fish with a mild flavor that is highly adaptive to a delightful array of recipes and seasonings. The roughy can survive just about any cooking method, and—best of all—the smooth, pearly white meat of this deep-sea delicacy is naturally low in fat. Roughy can even serve as a healthy substitute for any lean meat. Regardless of how you choose to serve it, we here at FoodHub.com guarantee that you can head to bed after dinner with no regrets.

Purchasing orange roughy.

As a result of its growing popularity, orange roughy can be found at most major supermarkets. Selecting a fish suitable for cooking is a crucial task. Be sure that the one you purchase does not have dry skin or cloudy eyes. If it has retained a fishy odor even in the grocery store, toss it aside. Sea critters counter the saltiness of the ocean with a natural production of trimethylamine oxide, and when they are hoisted up onto the deck of a hulking fishing boat—writhing in a massive net, eyes darting, gills flexing—the bacteria and enzymes in the perished fish convert trimethylamine oxide into trimethylamine. This new compound is what gives uncooked seafood a repulsive smell, one with which fish-lovers are all too familiar. That odor is a pungent memento of death, and your family or dinner guests certainly will not appreciate such an unsettling aroma wafting into the middle of a pleasant evening!

Keep orange roughy cool on the trip home. It will keep for up to two days in the refrigerator. If you plan to eat the fish more than 24 hours after bringing it home, first wash the fish under cold water, then dab it dry with paper towels. If left to stew in its own emissions, the roughy will

deteriorate. As you handle your fish, it may be tempting to gaze upon the unsullied, translucent flank of the roughy and question your intentions. You may find a momentary fascination in the cold dead eye of the roughy, staring up at you through the clear Saran wrap as a black pearl might lie still in the sunlight washing over the bay, but you shouldn't allow such distractions to spoil the fish. As you surely have noticed, your local grocer carries many more packages of orange roughy, and each of their lifeless jelly eyes will glare past you all the same. Lay your fish in a shallow pan with crushed ice and cover it with aluminium foil, then place it as far back in the refrigerator as possible so that your children or guests will not ask questions.

Orange roughy can last for two months in a freezer compartment, and three to four months in deep freeze. Livestock generally do not reproduce until they are well past their twentieth year, so you may feel persuaded to secure your roughy cache for an extended period should a looming shortage threaten your holiday potluck. However, we recommend consuming orange roughy as soon as possible—and there's no reason not to! It's a guaranteed hit that can be served in a variety of occasions, both formal and casual.

Cooking orange roughy.

Aside from its unusual lifespan, the orange roughy is perhaps most famous for its ease of cooking. The meat has a light texture, and the large flakes and moistness of the roughy will keep your fillet from splitting in the pan. Roughy is a flexible fish that can be baked, broiled, steamed, fried, and even microwaved. However, if you choose to grill your fillet, it’s recommended that you use a grill basket as the orange roughy is prone to fall apart when cooked directly on the grid. Although the roughy can live up to 149 years, the elasticity of its population is extraordinarily feeble and the world’s supply is shrinking by the day; it would be unfortunate to mishandle such a simple preparation.

The following is a list of recommended dishes for orange roughy, as selected by the knowledgeable staff and contributors here at FoodHub.com. Our mission is to ensure your survival in the kitchen, so we have carefully curated a set of recipes that are simple and quick to prepare.

BAKED ORANGE ROUGHY

Rachel Carson —Managing Editor of FoodHub.com

I’m a busy woman. Between my work here as Second Foodie-in-Command and my competent watercolors of abandoned New Hampshire light-houses, mothering often sinks into the cracks. It’s like they say: “You can’t have a full address book without starving a few kids.” Really, who has time to cook bracirole when Giada De Laurentiis is blowing up your Twitter? Not I.

When I need a dish that jibes with my high stress, high alcohol-tolerance lifestyle, baked orange roughy is a blessing in disguise. The dull pang of guilt that accompanies ordering a round of four bison burgers at Ted’s Montana Grill registers ten-fold when you take a bite out of some succulent baked roughy, but you can wash those worries down with a light ale, no problem. Plus, explaining to your children why certain things have to die is a wonderful way to introduce the concept of ethical relativism early in their development. When my husband cleaves off the head of a garden snake in the garage, they’ll know why.

Total Time—20 min.
Makes—6 servings

Ingredients
1/2 cup mayonnaise

1/4 cup Daisy Brand® Sour Cream
1/4 cup sweet pickle relish
1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
1 cup finely crushed corn-flakes
1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese
1 teaspoon dried basil
1 teaspoon dill weed
1 teaspoon paprika
1/8 teaspoon pepper
1/2 cup milk
1-1/2 pounds orange roughy fillets
lemon wedges

Directions

For tartar sauce—
Whisk mayonnaise, sour cream, pickle relish, and mustard in a small mixing bowl. Cover and refrigerate.

To cook roughy—
Prepare a mix of cornflake crumbs, Parmesan cheese, and seasonings in a large resealable plastic bag. Be sure to use a transparent bag as opaque plastics may seem a bit morbid. Pour ½ cup milk into a shallow bowl, and gently dip fillets into it. Revel in silence and do not grieve. Slip fish into mixture bag and shake to coat. Make sure that coating is even enough to obscure fishy texture and quell your nagging conscience.

Remove fillets and arrange on a greased baking pan, side-by-side as if laid to rest. Bake at 450° for 10-15 minutes or until phantom voices in the back of your head cry for mercy. Serve with tartar sauce and lemon. Consult priest or respective moral compass if necessary.

GARLIC PARMESAN ORANGE ROUGHY

Robert D. Ballard —Author of Garden of Eatin’: Cooking the World’s Most (En)Dangerous Food

These days, there are so many taboos and restrictions suffocating fine cuisine. Anthony Bourdain once said, “I want to try everything once,” and I’ve taken that to heart. If you follow your taste buds wherever they may roam, you’ll come to discover that the endangered species list is the most exotic menu on Earth.

Fact: The best way to serve orange roughy is broiled. Don’t let anyone tell you otherwise. I was detained at Maribyrnong shortly after the Aussies’ moral panic over roughy fisheries, and when I cried out that broiled was the best, they set down their hot needles on a cooling board and shook my bloody hand. They even served it to me on the flight home.

Listen, there’s nothing wrong with eating orange roughy if your palate is as nihilistic as mine. Breaking the rules is like smashing fine crystal at your ex’s wedding: Most people won’t try it but we’ve all thought about it. As human beings, it’s in our blood to rebel. We’re hardwired with an itch to flip the table, to say “Let me live!” So, step aside, hippies. It’s cooking time.

Total Time—20 min.
Makes—4 servings

Ingredients
4 (4 oz.) fillets orange roughy
1/2 lemon
1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese
1/4 cup butter, softened

1/4 cup prepared Dijon mustard & mayonnaise blend
1 large clove garlic, pressed
1/4 pinch salt
paprika

Directions

Preheat broiler. Raise or lower your oven rack half a foot from the heating element. Lay orange roughy on a broiler pan and strangle half a lemon over the fillets. Broil for 6 to 8 minutes.

In a small bowl, mix Parmesan, butter, Dijon-naise, garlic, and salt. Relieve fish from the punishing heat of the oven and smother it in the cheese mixture. Sprinkle paprika over top. Return to broiler for about 3 minutes, until the topping is crisp and brown.

ORANGE ROUGHY IN A MUSHROOM SAUCE

mardy_murie64 —Senior “Healthy Foods” Contributor

Dieting is intimidating. There’s a culture of sacrifice that’s cropped up around health food that turns more and more people away from it every year. I treated my meat-eating cousin to a full course dinner a few weeks back and he was shocked to find that every single part of his meal was made of high-grade tofu. Even the napkins! People, just because you’ve chosen a healthier lifestyle doesn’t mean you have to have chopped carrots in a bowl of hot water every night. Eating right isn’t about giving up what you love; it’s about finding healthy alternatives and then only making a quarter of the serving size.

Orange roughy is particularly good for you, and a wonderful substitute for meat. Not only is this fish easy to digest, but it’s also absolutely packed with precious proteins, so you can tell everyone how energized you are after every meal. Trust me: It tastes so good, you’ll call it a guilty pleasure!

Total Time—55 min.
Makes—3 servings

Ingredients
2 cups sliced fresh mushrooms

1 1/4 cups finely chopped onions
1/2 cup spinach
1/2 tablespoon lemon pepper
1 tablespoon Italian seasoning
1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper
1/2 teaspoon chili powder salt
Chardonnay wine
12 ounces plain nonfat yogurt
1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese
3/4 pound orange roughy fillets
2 tablespoons Italian seasoned
bread crumbs
paprika
3 sprigs fresh parsley, for garnish

Directions

Preheat oven to 350°. Line a baking pan with aluminium foil. If yoga mat is available, try doing a one-leg seated spinal twist (Marichyasana III) to help center your digestive tract.

In a medium saucepan, cook mushrooms and onions for 4 minutes over medium heat, stirring occasionally. Add lemon pepper, Italian seasoning, black pepper, and salt to taste. If you're feeling a little randy, add a splash of Chardonnay, spinach, and chili powder to heighten the senses and dull inhibitions. Remove from heat, and let cool for about 10 minutes. A seated forward bend (Paschimottanasana) is recommended during wait time, to relieve any abdominal stress. When ready, blend yogurt and Parmesan cheese into saucepan.

Spread 2 tablespoons of mushroom mixture over the baking pan and arrange each orange roughy fillet on the pan in the corpse pose (Shavasana). Pour the remaining mixture over top and sprinkle with bread crumbs.

Bake 30 minutes in the oven, and perform the fish pose (Matsyasana) to help yourself be mindful of the fantastic journey that the orange roughy had to make to finally reach your Frigidaire gas range. Use paprika for seasoning and parsley for garnish.

Serving orange roughy.

Serve orange roughy with care. If your family asks which type of fish you used in your dish, merely respond, "tilapia," as they likely don't know the difference. Should an older child or particularly liberal spouse present the moral inquisition, "Did you cook orange roughy?" or "Don't you know that's an endangered species?", respond with the terse suggestion that roughy fisheries are merely unsustainable. If questions persist, turn dinner into a game! Challenge your family to name ten animals they wouldn't want to eat, and you'll have their attention diverted in no time at all.

When serving orange roughy to dinner guests, your role as host affords you two distinct positions: *silence*, the easiest and simplest way to serve food, and *discussion*, which is best saved for dessert. If and when any one guest discovers the key ingredient in your meal, claim that it was an ethical experiment and initiate a debate on the moral implications of consuming threatened marine life. Should anyone take offense to the notion of being inducted into an experiment without prior consent, laugh and dryly state that the roughy was actually tilapia, as they probably don't know the difference.

Cooking orange roughy may be a culinary endeavor that straddles a blurred line, but that shouldn't scare off your spatula! When it comes to plumbing the depths of human desire, cooks will always lead the charge. After all, if morality dictated our tastes, who would eat Rocky Mountain oysters?

Remember that taking pleasure in the preparation is half the fun of eating! As Julia Child once said, "If you're not contributing to the obliteration of an entire species, you're not really cooking."

Bartender Dana Carlson

A quivering light animates her night, the bartender selling kisses for soles: for her soul, her sacrifice. Two tokens to brush the pores of her cheek, ten to descend on her lips parted like the hinges of a jewelry box. Petite lantern's glow, the cigarette a flirting halo, blemishes her skin with carbon pits. Lungs heralded in warning labels exhale whispers from nicotine flavored lips where at the corners lipstick missed. She contemplates the smoldering cylinder down to the filter when cancer-coughed monologues expire to last call—an empty bar. Behind the lacquered counter she counts the pours of every fermented alibi into the rocks glasses reflecting her frown. The charade of slurred soliloquies is a nightly revue soured by tequila cologne and the men who reach for her.

Tonight, his tobacco-infused inquiry buys her attentions, beckoning the flick of her finger to ignite a match. She bends an elbow, again, substituting smoke for oxygen, inviting the vessel to part the red sea of her lips. Mascara curls her lashes to frame a planetarium in her eyes where the simmering baton lifts light to the kaleidoscope in her pupils. He dismisses the candle in her cornea for the missing button on her collar that folds far enough for his imagination to crawl into her clothes. She is luminous under the fluorescent, celestial light, where in his labyrinth mind her skirts have already molted. He condemns her to a glass prison, a prism refracting her ambiance like a firefly whose effervesce dims in captivity. She is a Lunar Temple, visited nightly by inebriated worshippers, foreigners defining her with Pisco, wanting to touch their own part of Incan ruin.

A lick of her tongue releases tangled ribbons of smoke—as partners they revolve, in Danse Macabre they dissolve. Sorceress of the toxic ceremony, she induces the drunken coma that separates seconds and centuries under the same stars. Ash wands are extinguished, the tabs for elixirs are paid and throaty drips are silenced with last glasses of wine. The apostles of the present history return to their wives with nocturnal hours dwindling and the enigma mood fading to morning. The bartender collects herself from the tip jar to deposit parts of it in the hands of the twelve-year-old girl selling plagiarized Marlboros. In the cobbled plaza, she is a passive witness to every night, embalmed in this life.

Seers’ Case Studies Leaked After Considerable Unrest Simoney Hanna

Up until now it was thought that a human could only go 264 hours without sleep.

Medical records of the recent fear pandemic have been unlawfully released, and are now circulating the Internet.

It has been revealed that some people reported the first signs of a disturbance without delay. Conditions causing for worry were recounted as, “an ability to witness immediate surroundings while [my] eyelids were shut, as if they were still open.”

At the time of these initial visits, analogous concerns were taken trivially, and multiple appointments were promptly put to rest. Patients found themselves carelessly and prematurely dismissed with negligible comments akin to “drink more water,” “take these pills,” and “get some rest.”

Despite all suggestions, complaints escalated to include phantoms walking along the edges of their closed-eye vision, bringing the scenes to darken, and become cold. No one was able to elaborate on how, exactly, blinking could cause someone to experience a difference in temperature, but every single victim insisted that, “they just did.”

Shortly after clinics were strained by a second wave of allegedly hallucinating patients, those affected began disclosing that the ghosts started to acknowledge them.

Many began to show signs of intense anxiety.

At this time, it was estimated that approximately 2% of the earth’s population was mentally consumed by this horrifying realm underneath their skin. Society tended to refer to these scattered cases as the “seers.” No connections between their circumstances could be made, as not a single person consented to shutting his or her eyes long enough for a test or scan.

Unassociated bystanders, friends, and family alike attested that their terror “must have been real,” for the seers invariably trembled, cowered, and flinched from “shadows walking towards [them]” whenever they blinked.

There was a widespread attempt among them to use eye drops incessantly to avoid being haunted. Those who didn’t rapidly fell to terror-stricken episodes. In a panic, the indisposed resorted to publicly screaming and begging for help:

“They’re rushing towards me.”

“They’re coming for me.”

A few took extreme measures to “save [themselves]” by mutilating their eyelids. The ones able to remove them altogether expressed tremendous relief, but were immediately rushed to hospitals for tissue reconstruction. Once informed of the surgery they were about to undergo, self-harmers would throw hysterical fits, imploring to be released, insisting that they were fine just the way they were. As days passed,

the visions created a disruption in most subjects’ circadian rhythms, resulting in chronic insomnia. Doctors were notified that the moments between wakefulness and slumber made seers feel that they were being preyed upon.

Soon, the nightmares began to seize them.

Victims testified that the apparitions would violently pull and rip at their limbs. But instead of mentioning any sensations of physical contact, the afflicted explained that it felt more like they were “losing [their] breath,” or that their “bodies were receding.” Another common phrase dispersed throughout these reports was “fading away.”

At the 8-day mark, every single person susceptible to these visions stopped sleeping.

Those close to them watched as the seers retreated to their homes to unceasingly wash their eyes in a desperate effort to “stay alive.”

Several diversified interest groups sought to cure them of this mind breach. Christians performed exorcisms to no avail. A few of the seers were pried from their sinks and tubs by provincial government administrations—prevented from soaking themselves so analysts could observe the ramifications of forcibly keeping their eyes closed. They brutally fought against restraints with convulsive attacks and sharp wails, shredding through all that they could. Police claimed that they were “left with no choice but to put them under powerful

tranquilizers.” Once restrained, authorities intended to keep around the clock watch over their stunned bodies. And although nothing unusual developed while they were being directly observed, within seconds of those on duty blinking or turning their attention elsewhere, these individuals, and all signs of their presence, vanished.

Onsite surveillance cameras recurrently went black amid these emergencies. Whole video files and their backups were mysteriously wiped out.

Upon further inspection it was discovered that the missing link between these events was a genetic mutation called tetrachromacy, or the trait of having four color cones in the eyes rather than the standard three.

Seers’ abilities to remain conscious dwindled at the 11-day mark. Like those missing from labs, masses of people who had been tormented by phantasms suddenly ceased to exist. The number of disappearances grew exponentially as hours passed.

It is commonly said that the last living seers were found nodding off in the moisturizing pools they had made for themselves.

Within fourteen days, all 143,691,182 people who had four-dimensional sensory color space were pronounced lost, and the record for the longest time a human has stayed awake was set for 316 hours.

Two Poems F.L. German

Harvest before Storm

unwind the veins on the greenwhite petals
tightly thread branches; evenly spread
throughout the expanded yard
harvest is long
now,
the edge
the edge of the fields
the edge of the fields are done.



weather vane stay dry
the rain is coming tonight.
the shed is locked and the house is far
stay rooted in the ground
no need to twist about
three prong hope, rooted, stay, now,
the rain is coming tonight.

Violet Puddle Lens

it's hard enough
to save a thimble;
finger cup,
full.

no flash before the break
ankle high lips
never part.
(nor press)

no grip on
the clear blue
worm.



Good Timing

An Interview with Claudia Emerson

Interview Hannah Morgan
Illustration Megan Goldfarb

If there was any doubt before, I know I really like a poet when an image of his or hers gets stuck in my head, like a song will. When I think of Wallace Stevens, I see columns of light reflected on an otherwise—black sea. With Dickinson, it is that buzzing fly. I think these images stick with me because they are so full of meaning that they form connections over a relatively large part of my brain, and so I am more likely to find myself back there, feeling the spaciousness of the image even after I've forgotten its context. I knew I wanted to interview Claudia Emerson for *Poictesme* because her imagery, for me, is like brain glue. The richness of meaning in her poetry can encircle me in a world of ideas and connection.

Claudia Emerson was Poet Laureate of Virginia from 2008 to 2010. She has published five books of poetry, including *Late Wife*, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 2006. Her latest book, from 2012, is *Secure the Shadows*, and she will be publishing her sixth book, *The Opposite House*, next year. She received her MFA from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and has taught at several universities since then. Before joining VCU's faculty last year, she taught creative writing at the University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg, Virginia for 15 years. For this interview, I met her in her office at the Anderson House.

HM *When did you start writing?*

CE I wrote some poetry and some songs when I was a teenager. And I wrote music through college, and I wrote some fiction. But I didn't write poetry seriously until I was in my late twenties.

HM *Why did you start writing poetry?*

CE I had two jobs at the time. I was a mail carrier, a rural letter carrier. I also ran a used bookstore. I was either in that used bookstore and no one came in, so I read all the time. Or I was on the mail route, which was 86 miles driving a truck, by myself. So it was this weird combination, and then I started to write while I was in the bookstore. I've always credited, too—it was one of those deals where if you traded in three books, you got one. And somebody traded in Rainer Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet*, and I had never read it. It changed my life. And then somebody traded in May Sarton's *Journal of a Solitude*. And it's like a diary, kind of autobiographical. And I had never heard of her either. Those two things, for some reason, struck me, and I started to write.

HM *What do you find your poems are born out of? Is it an image, a memory, or a feeling?*

CE Probably some combination of all those things. I'm a great notebook keeper. I'm curious, too, so I read a lot of stuff, just whatever strikes my fancy. Like right now I have Oliver Sack's new book on hallucination. Who knows why that would interest me, but it might come to something. And—I don't know—and then something will just strike me as: Oh, that's a metaphor; I think I could make a poem out of that. And a lot of things aren't out of my own life, but sometimes my own life will kick in, some subject. And I'll write out of autobiography. It tends to go back and forth.

HM *I guess where you're taking a lot of notes, without even thinking about it, you end up with a form.*

CE Yes, I do.

HM *So, do you find that form changes the more you delve into the poem, or does it stay how it came out as you drafted it?*

CE It's a little of both. Something about the subject will say to me what the form wants to be, but I'm just enough of a book creator that when I write enough poems in a certain form, I start to make all of them like that. I like things to match in the book. That's not always true, but I have to be careful about it because sometimes, I will let the book boss a poem around.

HM *One thing I noticed as I was reading your poetry is that it seems to have a certain equilibrium. I want to sit with every line. I don't feel catapulted through it at any point, or really sped up. So, I read this interview you did with Poetry Daily in 2006 and you were talking about the importance of measure. I was wondering if, as you write, you have a steady measure in mind.*

CE I do. Between the fourth and the fifth book, I was almost always working what I would call "loose blank verse." But then I decided to change that a little bit, and I go—still couplets—but it'll be a five-beat line and a three-beat line, and a five-beat line and a three-beat line. I was hoping that it might do something a little bit different from what you're finding, and instead, there would be a little bit of quickness in that shorter line. You know what, I might be able to show it to you. I write at home, but I've been writing here, too. There it is. Some of them are a little bit longer, a little bit stagger-y, to try to say that this is one thing, but this will go a little faster than this. So, just an experiment. There was something appealing—the couplets themselves then were eight beats—because I'm a counter, and I love fours and eights. But I tend to write fives. So ... poets are silly people. [laughs]

HM *Have you always been a counter?*

CE I think it's a music thing. Growing up, my mother made me take piano lessons. Metronome. The whole nine yards. I even take a metronome into my graduate workshop, to talk about speed and what it means—just set the metronome going really, really quickly and talk about: What does that mean? What does it mean when you go slow? Just put it on, and let people brainstorm. And language is, of course, a whole lot more subtle, but it's still there. But, yeah, I do think about it a lot. Again: I played the guitar. I played with other people. You're always saying: Okay, what's the rhythm of this? Speed up or slow down. It's important.

HM *I know you write music with your husband and perform it. Do you write lyrics?*

CE Yeah, I actually steal from my own poems. And turn them into bad country songs. [laughs]

HM *So how do you take one of your poems and turn it into music?*

CE Sometimes we'll do it together. Just sit around and, sort of, knock out an idea. He's really the musician. I can play a little bit, but he knows everything about it. But, I'll think: Okay, we could take this line from a poem and turn it into a whole song.

HM *And do you sing?*

CE Yeah, but not very well. [laughs]

HM *You were saying you usually write at home. Have you had different writing rituals over the years?*

CE I like that question because I think it's important to talk about with anybody interested in writing—that we all have rituals and habits, and then they change. And if you're not aware

that they could change, you can get in a strange pattern of failure. I used to write in a coffee shop and I wrote all of *Late Wife* in this coffee shop. And so, years go by, and I keep going to the coffee shop, long after it stopped working. By then, I know too many people. I'm chatting the whole— [laughs] So I got a little studio. That's when I lived in Fredericksburg. But it took probably a year before I realized: this just isn't working. I used to be a morning writer. Well, when you become a teacher, you tend to need to get up and go to school, and grade your papers and teach your classes, and so I had to kind of remake it so that I was a late afternoon writer. Because that tended to work better for me there.

HM *Do you have a schedule you try to keep?*

CE I write every morning. Something. I get up super early. I like to write in my notebook, write some things down. And I always visit my poetry notes. Then I'll go for a run or a walk, and think about things. I love the natural world, and I go out in it, but sometimes I'm generating. And then I'll come home and write some things down. And then, I tend to forget about it until later in the day. And it's—no matter how disciplined I am or what pattern I keep, it's still going to come in bursts. I'll just not get much done for a week, two weeks, a month, and then I'm going to write 10 things. But I still do believe in discipline. I've always said that if you don't keep the date with the muse, she gets mad and goes off somewhere else.

HM *I guess if you can write in a coffee shop, you don't necessarily need silence to write. But does noise affect your process?*

CE It's funny. The one thing that will throw me, and not always—like, I can write in an airport, when there's music. I can write with a lot of white noise. But if there's *good* music, I won't be able to write. Because I'll be listening. Good music will bother me. And if somebody, say—if my husband's talking on the phone, and I can hear a conversation, I'm going to be curious. But where

we live now, here in Richmond, I have a great upstairs sun porch. It's very small, but a door closes, and I can't hear anything.

HM *You talked about how sometimes you write autobiographical poetry and pull from your personal life. What does distance through time do to a poem, if you're writing about something that recently happened as opposed to something that happened a long time ago? Do you try to do one or the other?*

CE That's a tricky thing because sometimes, I think you should wait. Something happens and you probably should wait, think about it, and let it, sort of, simmer down. And other times, you're not going to feel about it the way you do now. It's almost a matter of: Can you do it? Can you make it into the thing you want it to be? So, you try. I always say to my students: Just try; you can always throw it out. But one thing—and this is something I wouldn't have said some time ago—I think you can wait too long. When I was writing *Late Wife*, which had to do with my divorce and remarriage, I thought: Maybe I shouldn't be writing about this so quickly. And I said that to a friend of mine, and she goes: Yeah, but you're never going to feel this as intensely as you do now. And I was really glad she did that because, for me anyway, to write a book, takes about three years. So just ordinarily, I'm going to move through a subject.

HM *Do you ever find yourself, when you're working on a book for that long, having trouble not changing everything over and over again, and sticking to one version?*

CE Yeah. I do and I will, and then it will be wrong. [laughs] I'm a great reviser and I make a lot of mistakes. But I also believe in trying things, and saving things. And hopefully, along the way, you find a good reader or two who will help you out. I have to say though—I do have a sense of what I think a book will be, and in that way, my editor thinks I'm idiosyncratic. He thinks a lot of

poets don't think this way. But I think it comes from wanting to be a fiction writer. So I, sort of, think about poetry books as novels. But I don't do that with every book.

HM *At what point do you think that a book is finished?*

CE Well, if I think everything in it is pretty good, and it seems to hold together. And it's about the right size. I'm funny about the size. You can't make them too thin or they won't publish it. It's got to be as big as 50 pages. That's just the way the presses work. I think my last book may have been 70 pages. I like them coming in around 55, 60 pages. I call it fighting weight. I don't care for an overlong book. I like for it to hold together, and everything to have some punch, and talk to the poem next to it. But, I will wait on it. The book that's coming out [next year], I feel good about. It's been at the press long enough, and now we're in copyediting. That's helpful, to look at it at that stage. But the one I was just showing you, I just finished that book. So I've got time. It can just, sort of—like a pot of soup, it can sit for a while. And I also have, as part of my process, a big corkboard. This is not very aesthetically pleasing, but it's in our bedroom because there's a big wall. And I put my books up on the wall, so I can look at it.

HM *Like all the pages?*

CE All the pages.

HM *When you're first drafting, do you ever handwrite?*

CE I do. But I've gotten so I'm also a combination person. I do some handwriting in the morning. I write out notes. Sometimes I'll write a draft out in my notebook, but then I'm going to type it up. Then I'm going to print it out. Then I'm going to write all over that.

HM *In writing a single poem, what do you hope to achieve?*

CE Well, a couple of things. That it will do what I thought I wanted it to do when I had the idea. But that it will also surprise me. It'll be better than I thought it could be. That's one of my favorite things about writing, when something comes out better than I thought it would be. And hopefully there's something clear about the meaning for some other reader out there. But I want to give them something to mull over, too. I don't have an ideal reader in mind, and I'm okay with being surprised by my readers, but I do want them. So, at some point, I'll think about it, but not in the drafting. I'm the reader then.

HM *So, you definitely think a lot about the page, but do you every think about reading your work out loud as you write?*

CE Yeah, that's part of my process. Not right away, but I think it's important to hear your work—not in my voice but in someone else's. So sometimes I'll coerce someone into reading a book out loud to me. Even in workshop, I have someone else read the student's work so I can hear it. It disembodies it. And you can often hear what's going right and what's not going right.

HM *Do you have any advice for aspiring, particularly undergraduate, poets?*

CE Mostly, I think it's important to be involved in every way you can, whether it's a literary journal or a reading series. Go to everything that the MFA program puts on. Take every class you can. Read all you can. Just be involved in it. I'm fortunate that I have a community here. I think many of us go out into the world and will end up without a community of writers. And so, you kind of have to seek it out. The other thing is that you'll hear some pushback. I don't know how much I heard from family and friends: You're going to study *what*? That's not practical and blah blah blah. But I think if I hadn't pursued poetry—which I loved so much and still do—I think I'd be working at the post office. Not that it's a bad thing. I loved working at the post office. I would have stayed at home and that's what I would have done. And I would have had a good life. It would have been fine. And that's a good job, and I enjoyed it. I just thought: Okay, I'm going to give this a go. And it worked out. And I was fortunate to be able to keep writing, and that I do love teaching. So, don't be talked out of it by the naysayers.



Whale Island Nicole Maria Willis
Illustration Megan Goldfarb

The great beast lunged into the waves, clumsily cutting through choppy water in a doomed struggle to escape. The animal diminished in speed, its dorsal ridge slowly tearing open where the harpoons had struck. The morning sun spilled over the pulsing red sky as the whale tossed wildly. Whaleboats moved in closer to encircle it. A second barrage of harpoons further shocked the creature, noticeably weakening it. The whale's dying writhing sent forth waves engulfing nearer boats, capsizing two vessels and throwing their crew overboard. The deafening roar of the water overpowered cries for help. Men were pulled under; the force of the whale's final thrashings generated a current that plucked joints out of sockets and sucked life from lungs. Few attempts were made to help these cursed men, lest the saviors become the sufferers. The sight of loss—a common one—had howbeit surprised the men. Adrenalin overtook wretchedness; impromptu mourning had failed to slow the crew whose fears of succumbing to the vast deep, and joining the perished and beaten, impelled their efforts. The living fleet backed away, waiting for the whale's swan song. Thrown from afar, the third round of harpoons forced nary a twitch out of the beast. The struggling had stopped and the remaining whaleboats moved in to steady the body.

Their target—nay, their prize—was of no beautiful visage. It was diseased. The crew had caught a dying animal. During the chase no one had taken note of the eye that sat paralyzed—sliced open but encased in a translucent gelatinous mixture of sea salt and blood—or the carapace marred by open sores and giant round incisions that flayed the skin surrounding them, or the massive fins that had been shredded to limp tendrils. Killing it had been an act of mercy. The captain, who had set eyes upon the beast for the sole reason of its colossal size, knowing it would fill the ship's quota, had overlooked details. The crew recoiled at the animal's sorry state, questioning their choice and the quality of their prey. Frantic whispers of evil were shared amongst the crew, quick glances stolen from superstitious eyes. Logic and sensibility dictated that appearances did not matter. Alas, the beast was slain for oils and bone, not flesh and divinity.

Ropes were strung around the titan as harpoons were callously and efficiently withdrawn. Aggravated crew members struck the creature with their oars, beating out the whale's last breaths. Lanterns were lit on the boats. A mere glint on the horizon was seen and a signal was relayed to the ship. It was now safe for the whaling ship to approach so that the blubber could be cleaved from the body. The ship made its way to the whaleboats; the crew in the boats readied themselves as it approached. Baleen was torn from mouth, hewn with attention. The officers plunged their boarding knives deep into the blemished skin. Hooks were passed through the wounds, and generous sheets of blubber were cut and lifted onto the ship. The work was swift; there was no time to be spent dawdling. Once the whalers had stripped the beast of its valuables, they climbed back onboard the ship, hoisting the whaleboats up on deck. Not all had been stripped from the whale; it maintained buoyancy, bobbing up and down with the ruddy current on a thin slab of flesh deemed unworthy of harvest.



The remains were cut into strips, barreled, and placed one level below deck. Choppy water drenched the top platform, washing the whale blood back into the ocean, erasing all evidence of the slaughter and rejuvenating the wood's faded cherry shine. The tryworks were left burning throughout the night on orders of the captain; refining the blubber into oil would lessen the load and speed up the ship's journey to port. A

steady flow of fat was thrown in the cast-iron pots, haphazardly boiling the tray of water meant to keep the cauldron from burning clear through the wooden deck. A boatsteerer—worse for wear since being lunged into the ocean that morning—was tasked with overseeing the tryworks that evening. The young boatsteerer nestled himself between the trypot and furnace, sheltering himself from the harsh winds and the building waves. He interrupted his absentminded stargazing every few moments to reach into nearby barrels and feed a strip of fat into the pot. Ichor was boiled out of mere flesh. The man’s drenched boots dried slowly, though his grimy breeches and coat had rapidly become toasty. The heat of the furnace, the sound of the rain, and the maternal rocking of the ship lulled the haggard, bruised boatsteerer into slumber.

The young man awoke to the smell of burning flesh, a sizzling noise, and excruciating pain. While he had been dreaming, the world had begun to churn. He had not heard the pounding of feet and the desperate calls of crewmen lowering sails. He had not heard the anchor thrown overboard by unskilled hands in the hope that it would strike some small pedestal of earth beneath the waves. No pedestal was struck, but the force and speed of the throw rendered the ship’s handrails to splinters; its chain whipped fiercely and desperately at the ankles of men, dragging them off the deck. The trypot was a bastion of radiance on the ship, resplendent golden light dripping onto the scene, granting the men sight. It tipped and the world dimmed. The young man’s neck had become fused to his shoulder, skin bubbling and shimmering. He lunged from the syrupy puddle beneath him. Muscle was ripped from floorboards as he—bridged neck forward, cloth and skin together in one liquefied state—lurched towards the hatch, screaming for the surgeon, legs quivering from the jagged torsion of the deck’s convulsing floorboards.

The trypot rattled about in a ring, liquid gold and glistening. Oil was spilt in a crescent shape, shining much like the moon would have, had it not been pulverized by heavy clouds. The tray of water had long since slipped out from under the pot, whose immense heat blistered marks into the wood. Below the deck, a dense iron sphere fell from the ceiling, through the floor, and down into the bottom deck where refined oils were held. In an instant, the forecastle shone like amber and the ship was set ablaze. Between forecastle and steerage, the injured and convalescing, missing limbs and shattered ribs, were thrown to the ground and trampled by the able and opportunistic in an act of sudden triage. Many a whaler’s last sight was the pathetic wriggling of fellow inerts, sliding from port to starboard, devoting their last sparks of life to reaching the staircase—only to be met by rats that had beaten them there. Falling barrels of blubber cracked skulls. Thick strips of fat flopped onto the deck with wet slapping sounds, blending with viscous gray matter; the foul mixture was quickly dispatched by flame. The waves and the sky met, sending a lightning bolt into the water, illuminating the rippling currents and sinking ship below.



The sea was indistinguishable from the sky, perfectly clear and utterly still. The pulsating boil of sun was a distraction from the lifeless pallor of the sky. A barrel dipped above and below the water line while gnarled hands loosely gripped between its wooden ridges. An officer clung to the cask, mouth half open, imbibing seawater, tongue lolling. A wet, bubbling chortle escaped from his throat as he spotted faint figures in the distance. His eyes flashed open and focused on the forms. The sun struck his blighted eye—his ruptured pupil leaking into the cornea—and forced him to avert his gaze. He left a thin trail of ripples in the water behind him as he slowly approached the figures, panting and looking side to side at the water underneath him. The figures stood on an island of modest size, stone-gray, and slick with water. It reflected the sunlight, forcing him to squint further. As he gained speed, the barrel pushed against his face, splinters digging in. Approaching, the forms turned to silhouettes, the silhouettes turned to figures, and the figures refined themselves into the captain, the cabin boy, and a harpooner. The officer spotted the island in clear view; it was—like stone—lifeless. But rock does not decompose, nor does it attract gulls and sharks. Before

him drifted an island of meat and bone, the corpse of a defeated colossus. There was a moment of tension. But neither the islanders nor the officer had any energy. A shadow lurking below informed the officer’s choice. Faced with no options, he boarded the whale, neither invited nor deterred.

The captain, crooked-spined, hung his head impossibly lower, avoiding any gaze. The cabin boy—his once-rosy cheeks cracked by sun and salt, his skin welting in the heat—crouched with his back to the others. The harpooner licked his wounds, sucking absentmindedly on his right hand—index, middle, ring, and pinky fingers absent. They paid the officer little attention beyond rasping grunts of acknowledgment. Shades of larger, undefined, animals circled below as the gulls circled above. The bloating of the whale had elevated the island. The group could see for many more miles. A plume of smoke had been seen; the smell of cooking meat accompanied it. The reduced crew and their captain experienced a momentary bliss wherein they allowed their mouths to water and exchanged weak embraces. Harmony was disrupted as reality set in. The water around the plume rolled, bubbled, and seared. The anchor had served its purpose, and whale oil cooks fantastically. The fallen crew members, boiling and frying under water and oil, had cheated the survivors’ senses.

Nights were spent clinging to dead flesh and being thrashed about by predators below. The body—patched together by loose harpoon ropes—shuddered, bobbing up and down in the current. The remains of the dead men, pulled under from the first battle with the beast, surfaced from beneath the whale, until unseen forces wrenched them back into the deep with a reverberating plop.

Sharks took the better parts of the whale; the surface meat had been trampled and used as living quarters. The occupants tried their luck at the remaining meat that not even the birds overhead would touch. The officer poked at the carcass with his boarding knife. It had been days. Skin was chewed and bones were gnawed, carrion stripped, and sinew snapped, rubberband-tight with tension. The sharks left, one by one. No meat remained on the underside of the whale. They had finally recognized the infirmity of the corpse. The sandpaper-skinned carnivores had lost faith, no longer holding out for the occupants to sink through the rotting flesh or abandon their carcass ark.

No good comes from eating the whale; it burns holes in the stomachs of men.

Looks of betrayal matched looks of pained acknowledgement. The captain had been a man of business; he was no pirate or privateer. Fear had overwhelmed him. He had initially stayed upon the ship, recognizing his vigor as not up to par with the task of hunting the beast. Avarice overtook logic as bales of fat were brought aboard, overwhelming the ship’s capacity. In a haste to return to dearest Nantucket, the plague-ridden whale’s yield had been miscalculated. The trypots never stood a chance at the eager lunging of blubber into already full containers. The captain, lethargic and wasting on the whale, soon sank into despair. His eyes bore the unmistakable pallor of surrender, offering visual confession of his failure.

The captain was not so much a captain but a father to his men. He had guided his crew throughout their voyage. His word had been law, his knowledge unquestioned. Gears turned in the captain’s head, imperfect strategies for salvation formed and shattered. He turned in on himself, withdrawing into quiet disgrace. The crew slowly distanced themselves from the increasingly catatonic, frail man.

Visions of land exposed as mirage deepened the wretchedness of the crew’s forsaken circumstance. With no energy to curse the heavens and no chart to diagram the crew’s course, the officer scraped a map with splintered nails and a boarding knife onto the whale’s flesh. Currents and course slowly molded into one another, an act both influenced by the rotting of the diagram and the fading of navigational memory.

Movements through still winds and sea were crudely tracked with celestial waypoints.

No windfalls befell the crew. The cabin boy’s attempts at catching the rare gull-turned-vulture overhead were a disappointment. The sterile waters bore no bounty of fish, thwarting efforts made by the harpooner. Faces—whose lips, thin and shrunken with blackened, scaly skin, and whose mouths, filled with swollen, minced, tongues and thick, glutinous dribble—leathered under an oppressive sun. The still sea reflected beams back onto the survivors. Eyelashes, brittle with salt, held lids shut.

The whale languished in a windless sea. The captain, raspy-voiced, croaked forth a solution that would, for the time being, satiate the crew. He was no Saturn-figure, quite the opposite, really. The captain’s proposition was one of a broken man. It was a manner not unheard of in their profession, a calling rife with the broken and browbeaten. Ultimately, it was an act of untimely atonement, a proposal ravenously accepted by the condemned. The captain left his children to consume him and, later, each other. The crew fostered a most ancient, timeworn, last recourse. They circled, descending upon the captain with razor sharp teeth and voracious appetite. “I am no man of violence,” he wept.

The noble captain provided for weeks. The crew had become brazenly familiar with the act of stripping a man of his sustenance; indulging in one of their own had become routine. No parts went to waste. Less edible shares were used for fishing. Minnows were prevalent in that area of the sea. Rations ultimately dwindled.

The cabin boy dove from the whale. But even with missing fingers, the harpooner remained a much stronger, faster, swimmer. The lad was pushed under and strangled with frayed ropes that had once choked the whale. The cracking of the cabin boy’s eggshell skull was not left unheralded. The officer, now half blind, had found some other use for his boarding knife besides improvised scrimshaw on the whale’s backbone. A boarding knife is not meant to slice but to pierce, the act of dividing the feast dragged on longer than any of the survivors had wanted. The formerly, lovingly polished surface had now tarnished, enveloped by saltwater and air, though it did not betray its true, brittle material. The knife was now of Damascus steel.

The officer and harpooner shared a meal as they once did in happier times. They sat together and watched the green flash of the setting sun aboard the rotting body of their savior, their god, their vessel, which had once guaranteed to deliver them to prosperity and safety. Their night was spent on opposite sides of the island. The harpooner perched on the rotten head, the highest point of their two-man dinghy, the officer on the other side, by the dorsal ridge, body half-submerged, skin pruned under the gibbous moon.

The cabin boy did not last as long as the captain.



The officer becomes captain of his own vessel. The harpooner’s bloody beating has attracted the sharks; their nudging stirs the officer in his sleep. Many a night is spent watching the ever-changing sky, pinpricks in the dark where the light of the universe shines through. He is master of this buoyant world. The water is horrendously still again, glassy surface only shaken by the vessel’s ripples, lapping noise cracking the silence. Eventually, even that stops. The sky and water merge, and stars pepper the darkness. The man floats in the aether, joined by glowing lights from below.

Freckles Erin Gerety

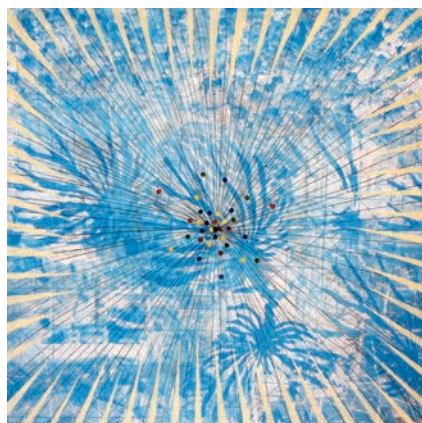
She put sunscreen
on you
on us,
July whispering
through her fingertips.

She watched us
grow darker
take over
your cheeks
your shoulders,
kissing us
with her
sing-song
sweet tea
mouth
her beachgrass hair.

You don’t know this
but one night
while you slept
on the couch
on her lap,
she drew shapes
with us
on your back.

You don’t know this
but she sighed
into us
all the time.

We couldn’t tell
if her breath
swelled like sweat
or sirens.



Untitled Painting acrylic and stain on wood panel, 2005



Todd Hale at his studio



Untitled Painting acrylic and enamel on wood panel, 2011



Phosphene iPad drawing/manipulated montage, 2012

Seeing Things An Interview with Todd Hale

Interview Hannah Morgan
Photography Elly Call

I arrived a few minutes late to meet Elly outside of 6 E. Broad St. in downtown Richmond, the studio of multimedia artist Todd Hale. My tardiness was due to a miscommunication between me and Elly about whether to meet there, or to travel together from somewhere closer to campus. Mistakenly intuiting the studio to be on my side of the street, I waved Elly over from the opposite side when I spotted her there, talking with some fellow street-lingerers, camera in tow. She crossed the street, and we proceeded to be puzzled by street numbers for far too long. I gave Hale a call, as he had provided his number in the last email he had sent me—inviting us to come see the space, and telling me to call if there was any trouble getting in. I don't think he meant getting lost on the same block. "Okay, I see you," he said on the phone, after a few failed attempts at explaining his location to me in street terms. "You see the guy on the yellow motorcycle?" I did. "I'm looking out the window right above him." Elly and I crossed to the correct side of the street, giggling about how we were so easily disoriented.

Todd Hale's studio is, very purposefully, a casual, social space. He tends to open it on First Fridays, and let the crowd come up and wander through the different rooms, filled with strange objects, most of which are either reminiscent or representative of an animal. A life-size skeleton with cartoonish eyeballs stands in a corner. An anatomical model, a wooden crab, and a gelatinous tarantula take up counter space. These things are showcased playfully, and seem as though they're meant to be touched, and moved. Hale familiarized us with some of his wall-hanging art, specifically two pieces in the foyer which documented, in several small, printed screenshots, the process of creating a piece of visual art on an iPad—with the "final" versions framed, and hanging next to their respective series. We covered the basics: Hale graduated from VCU in '96 with a BFA in painting and printmaking. He alternates between living in Richmond and the Outer Banks of North Carolina, where he runs a professional photography business, shooting family portraits and weddings. After the tour and some chitchat, he offered us sodas, and we began recording the interview standing around the counter in the kitchen.

HM *I read the interview you did with RVA Magazine in 2012 and some of my questions are based off the answers you gave them. You said that one of your goals was putting the viewer in a trance-like state. At what point in your career did you start to see that particular connection with your viewer as important? What inspired you to reach for that goal?*

TH Probably really early on that became, not so much a goal—but I associated myself with other art that did that. Really early on, I was inspired by the Surrealists, and that led me to all of their inspirations, like Oceanic art and primitive, tribal stuff. Which is, by nature, really less art, in our sense, and more of a religious tool. And that dovetails with what I’m really interested in, which is philosophy, religion, and mysticism. Plus, I’ve never been able to see myself as an artist making just contemporary art. It is kind of a mystical thing, not to be corny. But I think of it in a spiritual way—you know, it’s my religion. And it’s a kind of a religion that allows me to be and think about whatever I want. I’m making it up. I think I fall into that type of lineage maybe—not that I think of myself as a shaman, but a shamanistic-type practice, where I want myself and the viewer to be transported to wherever it is that they want to go.

HM *It’s sort of a higher consciousness.*

TH Right. So I see a lot of this work as a catalyst, not to get you to a specific place, but to send you off somewhere, specific to your own makeup. So I don’t really have an agenda. I don’t want you to go into my brain; I want you to go into your brain. And these things, in my experience as a viewer of them myself, can trigger that. I want to play with that. So, I think of them as triggers, or catalysts.

HM *One thing I noticed is that you take recognizable features and forms, like from humans and animals, and then you put them in a disoriented context. I thought that maybe that’s part of what contributes to the trance-like state you might enter when you look*

at it, because you can recognize certain features but not the whole picture. How do you strike that balance between disorientation and recognizability? Do you think about that?

TH I think about it, but I think it’s also just the way I see things in general. I think a lot of the goal, or the idea, in my work is to be able to put you in a place where you can be aware of awareness. To put somebody in the moment, sometimes you have to give them a jolt, and disorientation can send you there. So it’s more of a tool to get you back into that sacred space, or a trance, or whatever. There’s something magical about the relationship between us, as animals, and the environment—like, where does one begin and one end? That slippery no-man’s land is really interesting to me. It’s probably why I make artwork, because I’m trying to figure that out. Where do I begin? Where do you begin? Why am I a man? Why is this a table?

And again, I’m not trying to preach any kind of a what-you-do-when-you-get-there. It’s more of a go-and-do-your-own-thing when you’re there in that space. So I try to work with anything to get you out of thinking about the past and the future, and into the be-here-now kind of thing. We naturally look for patterns. We want to make everything human. We want to see the face in the clouds. We want to see animal characteristics in everything. So, if you can allude to an animal or a human ... I think of it as turning the knobs of some electronic machine and I don’t know what it’s here for, but I’m just playing with it. That’s my job, to experiment.

HM *As far as using your iPad and iPhone to make art, do you feel that makes it easier for you to—because you were talking in that interview about how you like to get to that sweet spot where it feels like the work is revealing itself to you, rather than you ...*

TH ... directing it.

HM *Exactly. Do you think it helps you do that?*

TH I do. It’s kind of, maybe, the downside of the whole electronic idea. We’re dissolving into this nonphysical thing. But if my goal is to lose all of that anyway, what better way than to not have to worry about the physical world anymore? My connection to it is touching the screen. All of the, sometimes good, stumbling blocks in the real world of making stuff are gone. I don’t have to walk across the room to pick out a color; it’s there. So, I think it’s really shaped the work. All of the ideas in those drawings are latent images that haven’t been able to be distilled until I had some kind of a tool like this, that’s so immediate and nonphysical. But it’s sad too, because I like to smell paint and I like the sawdust, the stuff of art.

HM *Do you do more with your iPad/iPhone stuff now, or do you have a balance between that and ...?*

TH I probably do at this point, but I try and balance it out. I’m trying to bring one world into the other. And it’s definitely influenced how I’ve started to make my painting-paintings.

HM *So these are new?* [looking at two large acrylic on wood panel paintings]

TH These are pretty new. I think they’re a year-and-a-half old. And these were, maybe, a direct counterbalance to being on the iPad and drawing. I set out five colors, and I had to go somewhere. So I was running late, and I was like: I’ve got 45 minutes. Let’s make something, and if it’s bad, I’ll—which I do with a lot of them—just paint over it. But, you know, these worked.

HM *How do you come up with names?*

TH I’m constantly mishearing things, or stealing stuff. A lot of my titles these days are colloquialisms or clichés, things that I think, if you pull them out of context, are interesting. And they’re vague enough to not ... The last thing I want to do ... I never used to title anything because I didn’t want to pigeonhole the viewer

into thinking about what I want from them. So, the titles started to come when I started to do the iPad and iPhone drawing because they’re so graphic, and somehow they fit. My more abstract paintings, I still won’t title. I’ve had a hard time trying to marry language with visual art, in general. The reason I thought I painted was because I couldn’t say it. But now, I think [the titles are] vague enough, and I’m interested in that kind of half-heard conversation down the hall that you think you hear as one way, and it’s not. I’m into that. I’m trying to poke around in that ethereal ...

HM *... limbo space?*

TH Limbo, yeah.

HM *I’m going to make sure this is still recording. That would be terrible.*

TH Somebody’s probably recording us somewhere. Satellites.

[laughs]

HM *Someone’s got it. ... I watched some of the videos you’ve made with screenshots taken at successive stages during the process of creating a piece on the iPad, and noticed that you also made the accompanying music. So, when did you start doing that, and why?*

TH I’m a huge fan of music and I think it’s really one of my bigger inspirations. I love the intangible nature of it and I think what I’m going for is in that same area. But I just started to put it to the videos a couple years ago. I don’t consider myself a musician. I can play some instruments pretty badly, [laughs] which I think works to my advantage, in a way. It’s kind of like the naive painter that I can’t be anymore because I went to art school. But with music, I know what I like and what sounds good to me; but, technically, I don’t really know what I’m doing. So, it’s kind of fun.

It's kind of a nice place to be where I don't know a lot.

HM *It makes it a little more spontaneous, or something?*

TH Yeah, and there's no expectation of it because I don't know what I'm doing. So, wherever I go is cool.

[laughs]

HM *What kind of stuff do you use? Do you use a computer program when you're making music, or ...?*

TH I've recorded with a real guitar that I'll then put through filters. Some of it, I've been doing on the iPad. So, I'm back to that little magic tablet of everything. And I like making music on it for the same reason that I like drawing, because it's this touch thing. I've used the computer for a long time to make art, but there's always that weird disconnect where you have to sit at a desk and use some intermediary tool. But to touch something with your old paws is really, to me, a different ballgame. I'm really excited. I want to really be able to work with that idea. I'm ready for the wall-sized screens. And music, definitely, has been going that way for a long time. But, it's how to make it human again, or totally nonhuman. I don't know.

HM *I find a lot of people are interested in how people prepare to start work, if they have any rituals. Do you?*

TH Music has always been a real big part of it, and I used to only work at night. Well, I used to only work at night on the actual painting, but around the clock I'm gathering stuff, and I consider all that a part of the process—pulling out materials, or just doing research, just looking constantly at everything and devouring whatever I can find. I worked at night because it was the only time nobody would bother me. Once I'm in that weird art space, it's hard to answer the phone

and be a human again. [laughs] I've lost a little of that romantic idea, so I just do it when I can now. I'm starting to work early in the morning which is interesting, and kind of the same idea. It's that quiet time.

HM *Do you think it influences your work, the time of day that you're working?*

TH It definitely influences the work. It influences how much fun I have making it. I try not to get into, you know: Oh, I've just gotta go produce. It's not my full-time job. So, luckily, I can follow the muse. But I'm a strong believer in that you just have to work all the time. And then when that big idea strikes, you're ready for it.

HM *So, you're just, kind of, always preparing?*

TH Yeah, always. And there's no clocking-in and clocking-out with it. It's just what I want to do anyway. I don't really get bored, I guess. It's almost like an unconscious habit. But one of the things I like about the studio, as far as a ritual, is that I'm surrounded by chaos out on the streets, but I can come into this little safe thing; but, I know that it's out there. And I feed off of that. And I feed off of the weird, crazy characters that are around this neighborhood, specifically. But I like to know that they're not coming inside with me, usually. They used to, but— [laughs] They'll come in if you let 'em. So, you know, it's hard for me to go way out in the woods and try and work. I like to be close to a lot of action, but be separated from it. For some reason, that works for me.

HM *That relates to another question I was going to ask you, which is: Why Richmond?*

TH “Why Richmond?” That would be a good name for a magazine, “Why Richmond?” [laughs] Yeah, Richmond, I think, has a lot of weird and good energy, and dark energy. Back to what I do in the summer [run a photography business

in the Outer Banks]: I do a lot of planning for artwork in the summer, but I don't—partly because I'm really busy working on making money so I can do artwork later in the year—I'm not as inspired, or the triggers aren't there like they are in Richmond. And it has to do with the people, definitely, and just the diversity of people is important to me. Not traditional diversity, not racial diversity, but just like, brain diversity. There's the mad scientist homeless guy, and there's the—I've met so many really interesting people. And those people inspire me. They are like looking at an abstract painting for me. Your brain goes in a lot of different directions meeting ... So I got stuck one day in a huge rainstorm, trying to get into the studio, and this guy had an umbrella and he was like, “Come on! come on!” This huge yellow umbrella. And he was a guy I'd seen before. Once I got under his umbrella, I recognized him. And he was talking about reading dogs and all kinds of really wild stuff, that wasn't related to ... anything. And we just walked up and down the street. [laughs] And I popped out and came in here, and it's like—where else could you do that? Well, I'm sure, many places, but—very unique, very original.

HM *Do you have any advice for VCU art students?*

TH Persistence is really the key to convincing other people that you're serious. Any job, if you really look at it, is ridiculous. Paying a guy to cut grass with a blade and then dump it in the trashcan, that's a normal job. People would say that's a practical thing to do with your life. Artists however are guilty, and I'm one of them,

of buying into the whole—well, art's great, but you can't make money at it—thing, which is a cliché that's been passed down for years and years. It's really not true. Art is a very utilitarian, necessary and integral part of everything we do. So, if you know that, then you can definitely make a living at it. And making a living at it isn't evil. Don't buy into the starving artist myth, because once you start to be a starving artist, then that's your job; that's all you think about: God, I'm starving and I can't concentrate enough to make my art because I'm working all the time. So it's a catch-22, because artists are generally not materialistic, or we try and be nonmaterialistic to the point that we back ourselves into a corner where all you can think is: I'm broke all the time, and I'm a slave now to the stuff that I've wanted to get away from. That's a crazy answer but, you know, trying to rebel against the system is fine and people need to do it, but that'll be what you do. My thing is to go with the flow of other things that have already been set up, and trying to work within the system to then do what I really want to do, which is, whatever I want to do.

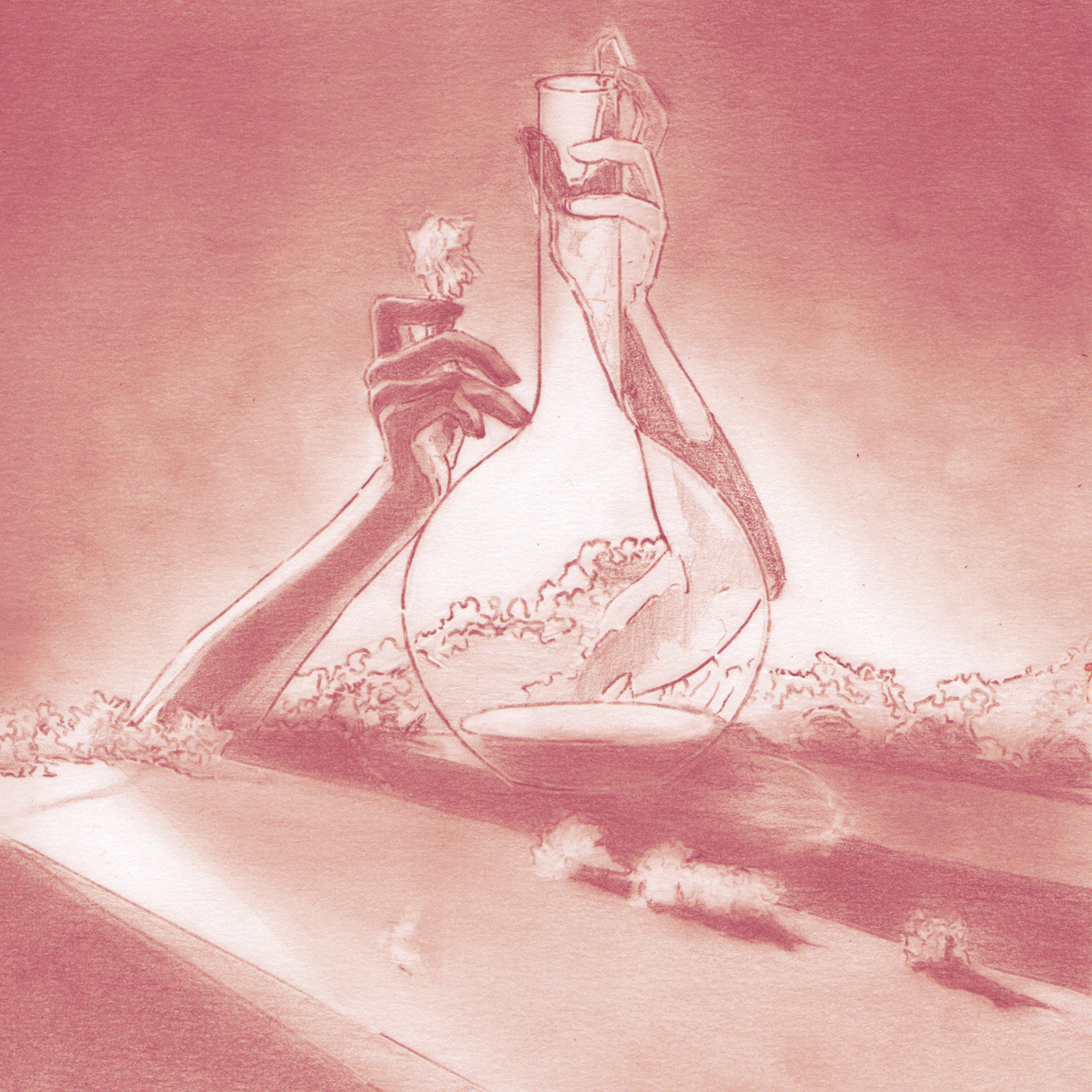
HM *Like help the system evolve instead of fight against it?*

TH Right. The system's here. It needs to be resisted and looked at, and that's part of what artists do. That's not really my thing. I'm not an activist artist, but somebody needs to do it. But I'd rather go right under the radar. You can get away with a lot more under the radar than above it. Yeah, stay in school, kids. Do your homework. Brush your teeth. Eat your veggies.

See more from Todd Hale:

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Two Poems Meagan Dermody
Illustration Simoney Hanna

Horst P. Horst

Long thin neck of vase,
ten fingers on hands,
countless white petals
from dark stamen.
Liquid dark like blood
sits heavy in the wide
bulb of the vessel;
dark nails, slim wrists
continue to an elbow;
grasp with the left,
graze with the right.
Light shines through
glass between arms,
over flowers arranged
to shroud the shoulders.
Woman—Lisa Fonssagrives—
ducks down, reaches up;
series of prepositions,
trying to get the angle
just right. Put
the light here. Place
the flower there. Cage
your arms around it
like this. Hide your face.
What I want in this shot
is your hands. Good, Lisa.

Fungible Meagan Dermody

First without asking he took my hand
and though it was strange to see him
as a man, the motion was not accidental—
nor the lack of question unintentional.
Whip—the thing that imposed itself,
that first night-wing’d kernel of thought:
“This hand is too hot,” and it dropped
from dull phalangeal pressure
to the cavities in my throat. I swallow.

My whole body burns from blush
and the encumbrance at my side
runs red with fever, torture that relies
on trembling in sticky digits to remind me
that I have already attempted escape.
Instinct! Sentences extend and I hang
like accessory fruit or flattered reptiles;
a dull retort, barbed by keen-edged smile
as to slice. In terror, I gentle the words.

I find absolution in the purplish stain
under his ear, as though power were
couched in my teeth. When he touches
my sterile ribs, does it leave a bruise?
Or is the flaw deeper, fingerprints cleaved
permanently into skin, the whorl of identity
bone-deep and scarring? I slant my eyes,
as though in movement they might find you.

Unemployed Sweetheart Stephen DeCao

It started when I was five.

1997

Between our backyards was a chain fence. I climbed it every day so she and I could kick a ball around, or draw with chalk on the planks of the tool shed that hadn’t rotted yet. Sometimes we sat on her patio as it got dark, talking about TV shows she liked. She was homeschooled and watched a lot of TV.

One afternoon, she tugged my shirt as I was climbing down. Half of her face was like a bad sunburn. I asked if she was okay. She turned and said she needed a lot of caterpillars for a potion and offered me a kiss for each one brought to the bucket.

I walked around the cul-de-sac, filling the bucket. I went back. The hose was running. The girl took the pointed stick she kept in the ashes under the grill and stirred the caterpillars. She sprinkled in dirt.

I drank from the hose and asked what the potion was for. She said she was going to dump it on her mother.

“What will it do?”

“She’ll crawl around, and then she’ll fly away.”

The next day, I climbed down to ask for the rest of the kisses she’d promised. But she didn’t show. When I saw her again she wasn’t very talkative.

1999

The teacher’s kazoo blew twice. We’d already been warned by a single kazoo blow.

She got off the tire swing and came toward me. The rest of the class wandered into two lines along the gravel. She put her hand on the big plastic bricks of the castle where I’d been playing. I didn’t know her name. She could have used a good spit and rub, but was basically pretty.

“What do you do in there?” she asked, opening the door of the castle to a sticker fireplace.

I showed off the pebbles from my pocket. She oohed and aahed.

When we were allowed to break from our lines, the girl and I strolled into the gym holding hands. The windows opposite the bleachers had paper covers made to look like stained glass. The night chairs were stacked against the wall behind the basketball net.

We sat behind our lunchboxes. She let go of me to unpack a ham sandwich. I lowered my hand, unsure what I meant to her.

I’d already given her the best of my pebbles. So I offered her a pretzel stick from my lunch. She chewed twice, stuck her tongue out, making panicky noises, and ran for the water fountain.

I didn’t have time to try one of the pretzels. I stashed them in an unattended lunchbox as the girl went for a teacher. I was glared at by them, and they came for me.

The teacher turned my lunchbox out on the table. I kept my hands folded. She picked up my sandwich, indented her thumb in it, and set it down.

“This girl says you tried to poison her.”

The girl stood close to me and her breath tickled my ear: “I know what you’re thinking. And I say ha. Ha—ha—ha—ha—ha.” Then she galloped off.

2001

The substitute wrote her name on the chalkboard when we were all seated, set down the chalk, and told us that Sister Lump had been killed in an accident. It had happened the morning before. She was sorry we were so young, and asked that we take out our math booklets. After a few equations, she went around the room.

She wore a skirt and jacket. She was no nun. She had beautiful posture, bright skin, and an oval medallion between her tightly lifted breasts. She went back to the chalkboard without passing my desk. I sat in the very back, next to the window that Sister Lump had thrown a stapler through. The plastic whistling over the broken window made it hard to hear things in the front of the room. So I took my glasses off and snapped them in my lap.

“Help!” I held the two pieces up. “My glasses broke.”

“What?” She sounded annoyed.

“My glasses broke.”

“How?”

“They just did.”

“Is that all?”

“I can’t see.”

“You can’t see?”

“I can’t see.”

“Would you like some tape?”

“No, ma’am. No, thank you.”

“Come up front then. Switch seats.”

As I stumbled to the front, someone stabbed me in the leg. I yelped and took my new seat. But I still couldn’t read the board, and the substitute was a throaty blur.

A few days later, I got my glasses fixed. The principal was tying his shoe at the front of the classroom. I asked what had happened to the substitute. Her name was still on the chalkboard. He stood, becoming very tall, and erased it.

He told me to sit.

“No. No. In the front. Yes.” He used my last name, waving a paper at me. “I have a seating chart right here.”

It was a small school.

2006

We were in the family bathroom of a bowling alley. We switched so I stood against the wall. She took off her big rented shoes and knelt on them.

“Oh, hello,” she said, doing a British accent. I looked in the mirror and counted the bowling pins with bandaged heads all around me. I had a pimple on my nose. The room was bright and reeked of bleach.

There was a knock at the door.

“Excuse me! The ladies’ room is stopped-up. Will you be done soon?”

The girl swung her hair from her face. Her cheeks were flushed.

“I don’t think so, madam. Very sorry.” She’d used the accent. She patted me. “My child is quite sick.

I’m afraid you’ll have to wait.”

“What?”

“I say, I said my child is sick!” She stood. I went to the sink, buttoning up. “It may be a while, you know,” she said, giving the door the finger. “I do so earnestly suggest you try the men’s room.”

I turned the sink off, returned cooled, less worried. The door was quiet. My face was dripping. The girl kissed my cheek as if to apologize, then my neck like we could start again. Next to us, the baby-changing tray fell out of the wall, stopping loudly on two straps. She went rigid and laughed.

She and I went to different high schools. She didn’t drive and I couldn’t yet, so we didn’t see each other often. It’s why I’d paid a friend to watch her for a week. My friend called the day after the girl and I had been at the bowling alley. He said he was embarrassed about what he was going tell me. I asked a few necessary questions. He asked about the money. I hung up, drank a glass of water like a rational young man, and tried to get to bed early.

I waited a week to call the big call. She answered on the second ring.

“Hello?”

“Hi,” I said.

“Hey!”

“I have something to ask you.”

“Wait—okay. Ask away, lad.”

“Do you believe in a higher being?”

“You mean—God? What is it with you? No. Not since I was little. Younger and littler than you. Even then I don’t think I meant it. Why? Oh—wait again.” She laughed at something in the room with her.

“Okay, lad. Go ahead.”

“Who is with you?”

“No one. Why were you inquiring about my childhood?”

“You’re mixing things up again. I don’t think we should see each other anymore.”

“What do you mean? Why not?”

“Because. I can’t be on the phone every night.”

“That’s ridiculous. How are we supposed to talk? I thought we already don’t see each other enough?”

“I know. That’s what I’m trying to say. Do you understand?”

“No. I don’t. I don’t think you do either.”

“I understand a lot.”

“You’re slurring your words. God, you’re dramatic. Leave your mother’s cabinet alone and go to bed.”

“You’re trying to get me off the phone because you know.”

“What? That you’re—”

“Hold on. My dog.”

His neck strained. Then he puked orange stuff on the couch.

2008

She was turned around, looking up at me. The lights had come on in the movie theatre. She lowered two armrests and walked up, stretching, yawning. It was just us.

She asked how it had been from my row.

“You missed out on the view I had of his forehead the whole time,” I said. “How was yours?”

“Good. I waved you down like halfway through. You didn’t notice?”

“No. I didn’t. Your view was good?”

“It was. But, experiment over.”
“Wait. Sit.” I pulled her birthday gift out of my coat sleeve. A little book of German poetry in German.
“I love it.”
“Look inside the cover.”
“Ach! Deutsch, meine Liebe?”
“Patience and a dictionary.” I waited to see if it would be the moment I finally got a kiss from her, at least a telling look.
She squinted at the book.
“I’m sure what you’ve written is wonderful. But it’s pretty dim in here, and my bladder is screaming. Shall we go?”
She took the book into the bathroom. I waited in the lobby. The arcade games flashed silently. The ticket girl was slumped in her chair. I walked backwards along the posters for the upcoming movies, reading aloud what made me cringe or sneer. I couldn’t believe I didn’t see her wave. I hadn’t even been watching the movie. Now she was probably making the night’s decisions, calm and pretty in the mirror. I backed into an old man who was scrubbing the walls. They were peeling and filthy.
Coming out of the bathroom, her head was down. I didn’t move as she walked past me and went outside. I apologized to the old man. He nodded and didn’t seem to understand.
She’d stopped in the red glow coming off the sign over the theatre. I tapped her on the shoulder, walked around. She was looking down.
“You forgot me back there,” I said.
“I can’t believe you wrote that.”
“Wrote what, darling?”
“In your gift.” It was the first I’d heard her use sarcasm. It made me kind of proud. “I can’t believe you thought it, but then wrote it and you actually gave it to me.”
“Yeah. What are we talking about here? What did I write? I don’t know what you expected. They were just some words I found. I don’t know German. I thought I’d written something nice. You want to tell me what I wrote?”
“I’m not comfortable with someone like you. I have an obligation. Something you clearly wouldn’t understand. I hope you can find another ride home.”
“What obligation?”
“To save myself. To be clean and whole.”
“Save yourself? Well, excuse me, my darling, but may I say something before you go, and we never see each other again?”
“No. I don’t think you should.”
She turned away, into the darkness of the parking lot. My family was out of town, which I had planned to have work out well for me. I had no one to call and no money for a taxi. Her car started and drove off. I returned to the movie theater to find the old man I had bumped into. I asked him for a ride and fell asleep waiting for him to finish scrubbing the walls. I awoke to him, changed out of his uniform, admiring the walls. They looked the same to me. The windows were still dark. I closed my eyes. I had nothing to do. He would wake me when he was ready.

2009 - 2013

She had been sweeping cereal off the kitchen floor of our apartment.
“I’ve only been home an hour,” she said, wearing a big t-shirt, no pants, “and I’ve made a mess. Jet lag is literally the worst thing ever.”

I hung my backpack on the back of a chair that was piled with new stuff. I stepped on the cereal and kissed her. She wasn’t a tired face on a screen, looking up from school work, or slipping into a dress to step out for a party with strangers, as I poured milk and coffee.
“I have you,” I said. “You’re friends got you from the airport in time? In one piece?” I tried to spin her, but she acted like her arms didn’t work. I stepped on more cereal.
“They got a little lost. Look, now you’ve made a mess. We make messes.”
She led me to our bedroom, which I had thought was an obvious place. I closed the blinds while she searched her bags.
Sitting on the bed, she gave me a little glass replica of a building she had gone to. It was very delicate, wrapped in glossy paper inside a bow-wrapped box. The building was apparently beautiful inside, and its view of the bright foreign city would stay with her forever.
“Did you get one for yourself?” I laughed, confused by the look on her face.
She’d bought it for me, she said, before everything got crazy.
Soon I had a rag clenched around my hand.
I picked the clumps of lint and hair out of the broom, swept the glass, and leaned the broom on the wall. I went to the bathroom to run my hand under the sink again. The water circled the dark drain, and I wanted to go with it.
Returning to the bedroom, I tripped on the strap to one of her bags. Her stupid luggage took up half the room. There was an expensive looking new dress draped over one of the bags, and a matching pair of shoes, obviously bought just for that dress, on top. I knew she hadn’t bought them, and that she must have shown it all off to her friends. I sat on our bed. She’d stopped crying and was curled into the pillows, whimpering like she was close to falling asleep.
“Are you listening? Go get it, please. I want to see. Your friends got to see. Aren’t we friends now?”
“You don’t understand.”
“I’m really tired of you saying that. I like to think I understand pretty clearly. Just get it, please.”
She finally sat up. She had hickies on her neck. It was disgusting.
“But you’ll hate me.”
“I could never ever hate you. Just get it, please. So I can go.”
She pulled herself from the bed and limped toward her stuff. Out of a pocket on the side of the large luggage, she took out a small box and held it to herself. She looked at me. It felt good to wave her to the bed with my ragged hand.
She sat next to me, crossing her bare legs, and opened the box. It was a small ring with a small stone. It was kind of scuffed.
“Don’t! Please don’t do anything to it. It was his grandmother’s.”
“Well, what can I say to that? Put it on. No, take it. You put it on. Yeah. There. Christ. Look at that. It fits, Cinderella. It fits.”



Radiocative Beach Hypothesis Robin Van Lowel
Illustration Elly Call

It was in the news:
set to be submerged,
sister nightly winding through.

It was snowing lightly of bone
on a pan of nails
frozen in icy grasses.

Climbing on red bark to see
over the edge
down to the bay-house destroyed,

she laughs there,
snow-flecked hair of gold,
symbol of a storm—
falcon sweeps,
nips hand and bleeds away.

Descending moon and snake's
white, punctured skin
raise her dress and feel
in her flowery—

red-haired girl
lights a cigarette.

Sister still she bleeds
outspread wings cold-nipped,
lights another one.

Smoking there,
she casts aside
fears of death,

where she's drunk in white sand
frozen and buried
under angel's breast,

and there's a draft in
the floor
of the bay-house.



Spider Lady Brittney Barbour
Illustration Temp K

For my grandmother—

We warned Joe not to go knocking on her door.
“You gon’ getchoself stuck,” we told him.

“Just stay out here and play with us.”

He wouldn’t listen. It was too late, anyway.
His nostrils were far too wide, his curiosity far too peaked.

“Aww come on, it can’t be that bad. I’m just gon’ introduce myself.”

They called her Spider Lady. She lived at the end of the block—a dead end where only trouble makers and trouble seekers go—in a floor-level apartment with purple and green curtains. Yes, she wanted everyone to know where she lived.

She was a fourth generation Barbour girl, and she had all the deadly Barbour girl features. That cornbread skin with those cornbread hips. The womanly figure with those tomboy ways, too butch for the debutante ball but not enough for the ball game. Freckles and a head of wild, nappy hair to match her wild, nappy nature. She had a smell, too, a distinguished aroma, one that carried a feeling rather than a scent. They called it her nectar; it worked like honey for men but like vinegar for ladies, leaving her isolated in a space between the whores and the “rightly” women. She wasn’t as pretty as she was striking. There was a disturbing sexiness in her plainness. Women painted their faces

and adorned their bodies to catch glances and ogles, but she circumvented it all and still got what she wanted.

“Venom,” they would say.

She knew these names and she embraced them, always with a sly smile painted on her face, no matter how bad she hurt ... that is, if she could actually feel.

When he knocked on the door, she was already standing in the doorway, her arm perched up, showing off the curved lines of that hourglass.

“Afternoon, m’am. I’m—”

“I know who you are. Come on in.”

She was just like her mother, and her mother’s mother, and all the Barbour girls before her. They all carried the same last name because none of the men ever stayed long enough to get on the birth certificate. They were a cursed bunch. Their gifts of unconventional beauty were stagnant, painful reminders of what could never be, like the wanderlust hamster running on its wheel.

I take pity on that Spider Lady. It’s not her fault, really.

As the story goes, the curse began over a

century ago with a distant matriarch down in the glades. The original Barbour girl, a hot little thing named Eloise. Her mother was an African, straight from the bush. A statuesque beauty with rich cocoa skin they called Ebony. Those white men couldn't get enough of her. While her sisters cried and resisted their advances, Ebony welcomed them with batted eyelashes and outstretched arms, sometimes selecting which one would have the pleasure of keeping her company for the evening. She saw her body as a fair exchange for extra meals and a smaller workload, even after her daughter was born fatherless and her insides had withered away on account of some white man's private parts' disease. But there was still little Eloise, with her mother's sin imprinted on her person, hot and feral like a cat.

And she knew she was hot, too. She knew it when those strong Haitian men sailed into town toting heavy sacks of sugarcane and bananas, their tired bodies in search of something that would take the sting out, something that wouldn't put up a fight or hold up its nose or make them meet their daddy first. Eloise ain't had no pestering daddy, no in-yo-bidness momma, and she smelled too strong to be a lady. So she stood at the edge of the water and lifted her arms, fit to fill the empty spaces of her exile, and let the Haitian bodies collect at her feet with no regard for whom they belonged.

But she crossed the wrong body. One, a hazel-eyed fella, had been claimed by Lady Bishop, a powerful witch doctor known over the glades for her healings and her hexes.

Like me, Lady Bishop wasn't particularly pretty. She had beady little eyes, a stout neck, and broad shoulders that even her powers couldn't save. But she knew the boundaries of her league, like most women do. Women like us learn to accept ourselves, our disproportionate bodies, our charmlessness, our lukewarmth. In turn, we adjust our attractions to less-than men and accept them for their protruding bellies and lazy eyes. However, if given the chance with a six-foot hazel-eyed adonis beyond our homely

means, we would be at our feet in an instant. And when these chances do, in fact, materialize, then we sink our teeth in as deep as they can go and let the blood run down our faces like ravenous beasts. Any hot-in-the-drawers cornbread girl that poses a threat must be eliminated.

So when Lady Bishop saw Eloise slow-grinding with Hazel-Eyes at the jook joint, the beast came forward. The warm Cornbread Girl had melted down and sopped up all of which belonged to Lady Bishop. The instant she averted her eyes, he and Eloise were gone, only to be found outside in the bushes half an hour later in a heap of sweat, skin, and short breaths.

Lady Bishop hurried home and went to work.

The next morning, Eloise awoke to a hangover and a headless rat hanging over her corn husk bed. A note tied to his paw read: *I DONE FIXED YOU GOOD.*

A curse of unrequited love was bestowed upon Eloise and all her descendants. From then on, any love she gave would never be reciprocated and any love recieved, she could never match. She would always hook herself to the wrong men—drifters, hustlers, adulterers, number-runners—convincing herself that they were star-crossed outcasts and her beauty could surmount their tough exterior. Any man who offered a safe way out, who garnered affection and sensitivty, would curdle in her stomach like spoiled milk and cause her to flee. This cycle of vanity and masochism would continue for the rest of her life, after her beauty faded and her mid-section grew as wide as her hips. Lonely and vulnerable, always in search of the next body to fill that void, always with a sly smile painted across her face.

And we told Joe not to go knocking on that Barbour girl's door.

See, he was a soft guy, and she liked that. She had had her share of hard men, the ones who fucked her rough, who never kissed her, who turned their backs to her when she slept. This time she craved comfort. She turned up the lights behind her purple and green curtains and waited, quietly waited.

So when he knocked on her door, it was no surprise she was standing there eagerly. It was no surprise that he stayed for hours while we bathed outside in our lukewarmth, our eyes constantly darting between the porch and the road. He was a simple man, but, more importantly, he was curious. Our lackluster couldn't keep him entertained long enough, I suppose.

It was also no surprise when Joe slumped back up the road about a month later, stressed, penniless, eyes bloodshot red, looking like something the cat dug up and played with till it got too ugly to enjoy. Looking a bug that got caught up in a web and had all its juices sucked out. Now it's out trying to fend for itself in the streets. All the soft ones came back down the road looking like that.

"Spider Lady musta got him," they would say.

See, she moved in waves he didn't know about. The doting and caressing would last for a set period of time in which she reveled in her saintlihood. It made her feel good to finally be doing something right, for once. The hot meals that awaited him after work, the freshly-scrubbed-with-vinegar-and-lemon-peel floors, the forehead kisses, and the long mornings where it felt too natural in each other's arms to get out of bed. Her love was infectious, it was so good. He could sit with her head nestled on his chest and just inhale her scent for hours. It made him feel righteous and validated.

"You sho is something else," he would whisper to her often. "But whatever you is, you'se all mine."

He couldn't remember the last time he felt such passion. But for her, it would do, for now.

Had he known the day would come when his tricks would make her roll her eyes, when his advances would be greeted with a stiffened back, when her impotence would grip him in the middle of the night and drive him mad, maybe he would have left sooner. He shucked and jived as best he could but her smiles were lifeless. They came from the lips, not from the heart. His nose had been so open that he hadn't noticed her left eye and how it wandered, how memories of neck grips and gritted teeth and smacks across her backside danced amongst the eyelashes, while the right eye looked at him with pity. In the midst of a calm lake, she longed for rocky, white waters.

She was cursed, after all. We tried to tell him.

And as he sauntered back up that road and dragged his turned-over shoes up our porch steps, I put down my mint julep and looked him square in his bloodshot eyes.

"Didja have any fun?"

He offered me a weak look as I tried my hardest not to smile.

"You come sit up here with us, now. You know you always got a place up here wit us."

"I know," Joe said. "I know."



Antennas Up

An Interview with Harrison Candelaria Fletcher

Interview Hannah Morgan

Illustration Megan Goldfarb // based on a photograph by Barry Gutierrez

I took Harrison Candelaria Fletcher's class, Form and Theory of Creative Nonfiction, my first semester at VCU. The class introduced me to experimental approaches to writing nonfiction that I had not known existed. I had never thought of nonfiction as anything more than memories and facts organized in a narrative structure, and I was thrilled to discover the flexibility of the genre. It was a similar rush to the first time I saw a lyrical dance performance after years of doing ballet. So when I was thinking of authors to interview for *Poictesme*, it came naturally to ask Harrison, someone truly on the edge of the change sweeping the landscape of nonfiction, and someone who shares in our love of innovatively merging different art forms.

Harrison Candelaria Fletcher's book, *Descanso for My Father: Fragments of A Life*, won a 2013 Colorado Book Award and the 2013 Independent Book Publisher Bronze Medal. His work has been published in numerous journals, including *Fourth Genre*, *New Letters*, and *The Touchstone Anthology of Creative Nonfiction*. He has been the recipient of many awards, such as the *Sonora Review* Nonfiction Prize and the *High Desert Journal* Obsidian Prize, and has been teaching creative nonfiction to undergraduates and graduate students at VCU since 2012. Look out for his new book, meant to be a companion to *Descanso*, which is currently in the works.

HM *Throughout your book, Descanso for My Father, there's a strong theme of the physical, landscapes and objects, embodying the nonphysical. Objects seem to immediately relay truths that are otherwise inaccessible, either forgotten or unspoken. What felt more immediate to you when you were writing the book? Did you approach it from the objects, and letting the objects reveal things, or did you have in mind the people and concepts embodied by these objects?*

HCF Well, I grew up fairly poor—single mom, five kids. Not a lot of money to go to amusement parks, bowling, summer camp. But what my mom did do was take us exploring in the desert to collect stuff. Wherever we went, we brought back some kind of souvenir—a root, or a piece of broken furniture or something that just looked interesting. She was a collage artist. She put these things on her walls or shelves grouped into what she called “little shrines.” Each one had a story behind it—a symbol, or a metaphor, or a larger meaning. So I grew up in this interpretive environment where everything was not only what it was, but also what it could become, what you could make it. But when I sat down to write my book, I forgot what she had taught me. I tried to approach the subject of my father directly, on the page, as a linear kind of detective story. Who was this person that I never knew? But I couldn't. For a number of reasons. I was a journalist at the time, and when I first tried to find out who he was, I did what I was trained to do: find answers through outside sources. I interviewed everybody I could find. I went to the archives, and his hometown. But there just wasn't anything. It had been forty years since he died. The trail was cold. No relatives. No friends. No family. And when I looked inside myself, as you're asked to do as a memoirist, I found only one memory of him: a couple frames on grainy Super 8 film near the end of the reel, right before the screen goes white. So I couldn't go to outside sources, and I couldn't go inside. I couldn't talk to my mother, either, because she didn't want to reveal a difficult part of her life.

So, I sat at my writing desk. And I had these objects all around me—all his stuff. Keys to his pharmacy. A pack of the cigarettes he smoked. I'd look at them or hold them when I was writing. At some point, I started writing about the objects instead of my father. Gradually, the objects began to reveal things to me about him and myself, things I didn't know that I knew. They became a way into the subject I was trying so hard to access directly. By writing about objects, I took myself outside my own experience. Objects became representations not only of my personal grief, but about the nature of grieving itself. They broadened out the experience. They became the way I could tell my story—as a literary shrine, with each essay and fragment an offering on an altar of words. I also tried to use the unanswered questions—the gaps, the silences, the white space—as part of the book. Instead of seeing [the absences] as a detriment, I tried to make them work for me.

HM *Okay, so instead of structuring it like a novel, like a straight narrative ...*

HCF I didn't have a straight narrative. I had a bunch of gaps and silences that meant something. So I tried to use that in a way that the reader would feel them with me as we moved from thing to thing. But it wasn't an easy thing to do. I tried to write a straight narrative. I actually wrote 350 pages of narrative first, but it didn't feel right. I mean, not only does [my family] not talk directly about him, it just wasn't that kind of story.

HM *Did you end up clipping from that 350 pages?*

HCF I cut 200 pages out of it.

HM *Did you add any more to it when you took on that new form?*

HCF No, for me it was a reductive process. Trying to identify moments that heightened

the emotion. There's not a lot of reflection. I was hoping instead to evoke emotion. What's missing are the 200 pages of Harrison going back to the hometown.

HM *There are a lot of scenes in Descanso where your writing from being a young child. How do you approach trying to capture truth when you're describing memories that are far away from you, when maybe you don't know all the details?*

HCF The past has always been, in my family, a very vivid place. My mom is constantly talking about the past, always remembering, always telling stories, so I'm used to traveling back in time in my head. The way I got to certain scenes was by trying to articulate a specific feeling I had at the time. There's one story in the book where there was a field of hollowed out cottonwood trees that had been struck by lightening. I crawled inside one and came out the other end. I remember, when I was crawling inside that log, getting scratched by the charred cottonwood. So it started with a feeling, with a sensory thing first, with that scratch, and the memory came from there. I try to—I know this is cliché and what I say in my class—but I try to enter through the senses first, which is almost always for me feeling, for some reason, physical feeling. Again, that's how I wrote this book and how I work: I have to hold the objects, smell them, and for me that kind of stuff takes you back. You just let yourself get immersed in a particular moment in time and a specific scene will float to the surface. I don't try to transcribe an event in a Memorex kind of way. I try to capture the aroma of it. I do go back to archives and records if I can, though. And usually, the details that I'm able to provide through reporting and research enhance the aroma. But I start with the feeling first and then I go back and verify and sharpen.

HM *Do you have any rituals? It seems like a very meditative process. You really have to be in tune with these things your observing in order to get back there. Do you close yourself off when your writing?*

HCF Yeah, I do. I try to, or I used to try to wake up at 5:30 in the morning and start writing when I was half-sleepy, because it lets the dreams bleed into what you're writing. I write in longhand because I just want to be channeling instead of being conscious of, quote on quote, writing. For me, if I get to a screen, I'm going to start editing. When you said it's like a meditative process, for me, it is. It's like sitting in the desert and raising a little antenna and seeing what signals come. For me, that's the writing practice. Everybody says: Write 500 words. For me, it's not so much the word count; it's training yourself to listen to what comes. And I think that the more you listen and the more you train yourself to open yourself, the easier things will come. As soon as I sit down now, and do the little ritual of sharpening my pencil, and getting my notebook, putting the earbuds on... And I like [burning] piñon incense from New Mexico. So as soon as I do those things, it's automatic. My brain is, you know—we're open now—and usually it doesn't take long for the words to come. I was big into rituals for a while. I studied writing rituals. It's like a free throw, like basketball. You have to bounce the ball five times, spin it in your hands three times. You're training your body for what's coming next.

HM *Yeah, you're creating that space just for that.*

HCF And that's what it is. You're training yourself that—okay, this is what we do when we go through this process. I'm writing my second book on my mom, completely in my mom's world. I wrote it at first by dipping into that bag of stuff. I have a paper bag, with things from New Mexico, some random things, some Lotería cards, and at 5:30 in the morning I'd wake up. You know, I have my coffee, my notebook. I reach into the bag and the first thing I pull out is a card with a watermelon. And it's like: Okay. What's the first thing you think about with a watermelon? Turn the card over and start writing. Then I thought about a scene when I was a kid where my grandfather—he used to work for the WPA, making mountain trails—would take us up to

the stream and he would put the watermelons in the mountain stream to cool them off. I would have never thought of that otherwise. That’s how my process is; it’s very indirect. I find that writing in an indirect way allows you to surprise yourself. For me its fun; it’s like: Wow, I would have never written about that if I were trying to be in control. But it’s a process of training yourself to listen to your unconscious and let go. Then the hard part comes. Okay—what do I do with these 300 frames? [laughs] Which is where I am now.

HM *I read an interview you did with Brevity in 2013, and you mention in that interview that you’ve learned to create a persona for your narrative voice. How much do you put into constructing that persona?*

HCF I still struggle with narrative distance—how close you want to be to your subject. And you need distance when you’re writing memoir. At first, I struggled with that. I had a difficult time writing in first person and seeing myself as a subject. As a journalist, I had been trained to write in third person, which automatically allows for some distance, so I struggled with the immediacy of the first person. I used to write in third person and then change it back to ‘I’. At first, I struggled with difference between those lenses—writing personally instead of privately.

HM *How do you know when you’re writing personally, and not privately?*

HCF I check myself when I find that I’m using shorthand or talking only to myself on the page. I try to go back and fix that. But it’s hard when you’re writing about personal matters not to go there so quickly. That’s what a writing group is for. You can’t always see [it yourself] when it’s too internal. When it’s private writing, it’s melodramatic and it’s too much in your head, or too much in your heart. And that’s when someone can tell you, “You’ve lost me.” But in reading it over 10,000 times, as you do revision, you can often edit that stuff out. But I try not to

do too much editing when I’m in the exploration phase. I just say everything that I think I need to say and then go back and shape it later. I think you need to get it out before you can revise it. That means there are a lot of drafts and revisions for me.

HM *Do you find that when you go to trace something back, there’s a different meaning than what you thought would come out of it?*

HCF Yeah, that’s what I hope for. It’s like you start off one place and you find your way to what you are trying to discover. It’s that journey that I think is really interesting. It’s cool to surprise yourself. Not just surprise yourself, but to uncover or reveal something that you didn’t think you knew. I hope that happens, that I end up in a place that I had no idea about when I started. They say no surprise for the writer, no surprise for the reader.

HM *So, how long have you been teaching?*

HCF I think I taught my first class in 2007.

HM *And you’ve always taught creative nonfiction?*

HCF Yeah, I love talking about writing and art and I love brainstorming. That’s also the environment I grew up in. And when I was a journalist, we’d workshop each other’s writing. So I’ve always kind of done that. My MFA program really influenced me. The writers I studied under were so generous with their time and were able to see writing in so many different ways. That changed everything for me. And I told myself if I could ever give back even a fraction of what they gave to me, as corny as it sounds, I wanted to do it. So I started off offering workshops for years and years at a writing center in Denver, Lighthouse Writers. And I went from there. I ended up teaching at a couple universities, and then here [at VCU].

HM *What made you decide to get your MFA?*

HCF I was writing a column in New Mexico. I had lived in L.A. a while, and I came back to New Mexico to write a column for my hometown newspaper. One day out of the blue, I got a call from somebody who recognized my last name and had known my dad before he knew my mom. Before then, I had never really asked questions about him at all. When I got the call from this woman, it made me curious to explore parts of my personal history in a way that journalism didn’t allow. I wanted to explore the essay. The book, *The Art of the Personal Essay*, [an anthology edited by Phillip Lopate] was influential. I was writing my column, and wasn’t very good at it at the beginning, but somebody gave me this book and said, “Read it.” Once I did, it was like: This is what an essay is. I want to learn how to do that. So I got my MFA.

HM *You also said in the Brevity interview that you don’t think you choose what you write. So, it’s like that. It just happened. And you had to write about it.*

HCF I think that we find our way toward the work that we’re given to write about. My dad thing percolated for a long time without me knowing about it. I can go back now and see that when I was a journalist, I was attracted to stories where families were trying to find each other, stories on fatherless sons, stories about ghost towns and graveyards and descensos and all that. I was gathering information for what I would end up one day writing about, but I didn’t know it.

HM *I think association becomes its own form of creation, in a lot of ways. Obviously, you take from life in order to write, but do you find that what you write influences your worldview?*

HCF I do write from life, but I also am aware that there’s a transformation that has to occur. I use the analogy of life drawing. It can be incredibly life-like and accurate, but it’s still different

because you rendered it in way that only you can see. Whatever you’re creating is transformed by how you feel about it. I like that. I still try to stay true to what I’m describing—since it’s nonfiction—but I’m also aware that I’m making it mine by running it through the filter of my emotions. You know, if you’re doing visual art and spend five hours with a subject looking at every contour, when you look away, you see the next thing just as intently. If you spend all day drawing, for example, and then reach for a glass of water, you’re going to see every bead of condensation on the glass with the same kind of heightened focus. It’s kind of the same way for writing. I’m much more attuned to how I see now. I look at things and read things differently than I used to. I’m finding narratives in just about anything—whether it exists or not. You’re sitting in the airport and looking at somebody and making little stories based on what they’re wearing, how they’re acting, where they’re going, where they came from. I think seeing little stories, or possibilities, everywhere, comes from paying close attention to things.

HM *Do you have any advice for someone who’s interested in pursuing creative nonfiction?*

HCF Become a walking documentary machine. Train yourself to see your world clearly in your own way. Take pictures. Record things. Have a notebook. Study your world, the inside and the outside. Be really attuned to the way you see things. There’s no limit to the way you can convey that in creative nonfiction today. It can be anything: sound, images, words, or all of the above. But it all starts with seeing—how you see, what you see, and why. That’s where it starts for me, really paying attention.



The Fabulous Ann Murray Christopher Sloce
Illustration Helen Stoddard

Bob Hosridge met Ann Murray the day after he disappointed his parents.

One night at Ace's, when Pop Muldoon went out for some nefarious business, they cut loose a little bit and threw a small party, drinking from the guest alcohol. Pop usually just stuck to beer, so it was doubtful he'd notice the missing Famous Grouse scotch. Bob had one glass, felt dizzy and disgusted, and spent his night on the couch in a malaise, chastising his doughy frame and decisions. One of the older kids who smoked with Ace, a junior with a dorsal fin nose named Powdry, gave him a ride home next morning.

On the way home, Powdry asked, "How'd you like the scotch?"

"I didn't. I wish I'd have drank Crown Royal instead," Bob said, suspecting it tasted better.

"Heh."

Powdry's 'heh' seemed to Bob like a harbinger of his own coming doom. The scotch taste lingered in his mouth as he walked inside his house. His hangdog gait alone signaled the previous night's activities. He spent the rest of his day in his room, thinking about it, because that's what his parents made him do.

That night in bed, the possibility that God was giving him the cold shoulder concerned Bob. Then he remembered confession, that a priest sat opposite you and couldn't smite you without consequences.

So he brought it up at breakfast. "I think I want to be Catholic."

He found himself kicking rocks in the driveway waiting on the bus. God might be able to ignore you, but parents can question your sanity.

At lunch, Powdry called him over.

"Hosridge! "Did you get in trouble?"

Powdry shouted. A kid wearing a t-shirt with a skateboarding rat on it sat to Powdry's right. On Powdry's left was a girl white as bleached bones, laughing at some obscene joke the rat-kid had stuttered, covering her mouth with three fingers. She wore a white blouse and tartan slim cut pants. Bob stopped when he saw her.

"Oh, you know me. I'm good."

The tartan-panted girl looked at him. Bob was struck by the way she said: "Who are you?"

"I'm Bob Hosridge."

Powdry said, "Bob Hosridge likes scotch, like an old fuck."

"Oh, old people are my favorite." She extended her hand and, for the first time, Bob felt a jealous and impotent rage at a set of girl's fingers. "I'm Ann Murray."

Bob headed back to the table where Chico and Ace were playing cards, and dramatically grabbed his heart.

"Bob, if you're gonna dump ass do it somewhere else." Chico said.

"No, this is different."

"What?"

"I think I'm in love."

Ace chortled. "Pretty sure you're just randy."

Bob blushed. Chico looked over. "Yeah, he's pushing denim."

"No. I saw a girl," Bob said.

"Big fucking deal. Throw a rock," said Chico.

Ace looked up from the cards. “Well, who is it?”

“Um, Ann Murray.”

“Dude, if wanting to fuck was love, then I beat you there,” Ace said, “You know she’s Catholic, yeah?”

“Catholic girls take dick like tube socks.” Chico smirked and laid a card down.

“And if she owns one of those outfits, with the skirt ... that’s great.”

Bob agreed and blushed. He didn’t sleep much that week.

At lunch the next Monday, while Ace and Chico played cards, Chico expanded upon his newest theory. “If God’s real, everything should be perfect.” Chico crossed his arms.

Ace almost spat as he said, “That’s a load of shit.”

“It’s not like it’s true because you say so,” Chico said, “You’re not God.”

Ace, frustrated, said, “Bob, back me up here.”

Bob shrugged. “I dunno.”

“Whatever, Chico’s wrong.”

“Did the Lord tell you so?” asked Chico.

“Eat shit,” Ace muttered.



After school, Bob and Ace walked to the comic book store, stopping to grab fruit drinks at a gas station.

“You shuckled back there, dude,” said Ace.

“Where?”

“With Chico’s dumb ass. I don’t even believe in

God, at least I don’t think I do, and I think that his argument was just dumb.”

“Oh, that,” Bob shrugged.

“And you’re religious, and you’re talking about girls, and all this. Are you alright? You hit your head?”

“No, it’s just stuff goin’ on.”

“Ah, I get you. Did she tear her shirt off?” Ace said.

“No, it’s this whole thing. Martin Luther would not have stood for what I am standing for right now.”

“Bob, you’re white as an Irishman’s ass.”

“No. I want to try out Catholicism,” Bob said.

Ace and he crossed the parking lot. Faded yellow lines marked long-ignored parking spots. “Oh, cool,” Ace said.

“Our pastor’s just old and has a peanut head. You know what his day job is?”

“I’m guessing he’s not a pimp.” Ace crushed his fruit drink and punted it. It went high with an arch like a cat’s back. “And they’re wondering why I didn’t start.”

“He sells flowers. You know what a priest’s job is?”

“I’m guessing they *are* pimps.”

“They’re priests. They’re always priests. They don’t get paid for it. They live in the church. I don’t know what our pastor does at his house. That bothers me. Pastors have a serious lack of accountability.”

“Yeah, who’s to say he’s not getting blown in a rest stop bathroom, like almost every other preacher we know?”

“He could even be hanging out in parks, looking for runaways to screw.”

“Yeah and so could priests.”

Bob stopped in his tracks. “What?”

“You think because a guy wears a habit he won’t throw a fuck into a mom who keeps talking about how lusty she is?”

“So one priest—”

“One priest is enough to have me doubting.”

“One priest touches a kid and the species is doomed?”

“It’s enough for me.”

“You’re not even religious.”

“No, but you know who didn’t diddle altar boys? My grandma. Point grandma.”

“You’re not religious. Whatever, I’ll do what I do.”

“What’s your parents thinking on this?” said Ace.

“Oh, they hate it.”

“So that’s why you’re all up in air.”

“That’s why I’m Martin Luther.”

“Bob, for Christ’s sake, you’re not black.” They went inside the comic book store and walked out with some Batman issues.

Bob’s mom picked him up in front of the gas station and drove to the Food Village. Bob walked right to the magazine stand and saw Ann Murray, her back against the stand, flipping through a *Cosmopolitan*. He grabbed a gaming magazine, then looked over it to admire her jeans and sloppy bun, her baggy sweatshirt hiding what he and Ace desired. He slipped brief looks until she caught him.

“Hey, old guy,” she said.

“Hey.”

“You remember my name, right? Because you’re Bob, right?”

“That’d be me. You’re Ann.”

“Yeah. So you come to the magazine stand while your mom shops?”

“Usually.”

“If I had to walk around and look at vegetables, I’d hang myself. Oh my God.”

“I would too. Maybe.”

She smiled. “Whatcha reading?”

“A video game magazine.”

“Oh, which one?”

“You read video game magazines?”

“No, but I know there’s a couple. My brother reads them.” She put down her magazine.

“Yeah, do you know what was on the front cover?”

She shrugged. “Video games.”

Bob put down his magazine, too. “Do you have any other magazines you like?”

“I like *Rolling Stone*. *Rolling Stone* is cool. What about you?”

“Well, I like comics, too.”

“Like, what kind of comics?”

“Like, Batman and stuff.”

“Oh, I *love* Batman,” she exclaimed.

A shrewish, small woman came down the aisle, and said to Ann, “You ready to go home?”

“Oh God, yeah,” she said. “See you, sir.”

“Don’t say God,” her mother said. Bob watched Ann walked away. He picked up the gaming magazine and headed to find his mother, passing Ann who was now beyond the checkout. She waved, and his mother, having witnessed the wave, asked who the girl was.

“Ann Murray. She likes Batman and she’s Catholic. So she’s my dream girl,” said Bob. The conversation didn’t dawdle there.



That Friday, sitting in the English class he skated through with no real zest, Bob sketched up something slick, and later found Ace in the halls. “What’s going on this weekend?”

“Y’know, same old, same old,” replied Ace.

“Is your brother gonna be in on Saturday?”

“Yeah, he should be.”

“Oh, okay.”

“Bob, I ain’t dumb. You’ve got something cooking.”

“Oh, you know. Nothing.”

“Last time you hung out with my brother you dipped his jeans in milk and froze them.”

“Okay, I’ll tell you. I’m gonna go be Catholic.”

“How?”

“Your brother is gonna drop me off at Saint Whoever’s.”

“You know it’s just not like announcing you’re gay, right? You don’t just announce you’re Catholic. There’s processes and papers.”

“I don’t have to have a card to prove I’m Catholic. I just have to show up.”

“Yeah, try telling that to a census guy. Or, you

know, the Catholics.”

“It’s not like they’re animals.”

“What are you even talking about?”

“*The Catholics*, Ace?”

“I didn’t stop to argue about which article word I was supposed to use. You know what I mean. You’re just pussy-crazy.”

“Hey now.”

“You don’t think you actually *love* her, do you? You don’t think you’re gonna marry her?”

“No, but I do like her. What word would you prefer I say?”

“Just say you like her, Bob.”

“I didn’t stop you in the hall to argue about semantics.” Bob had raised his voice into a gravelly treble. “Will or will your brother not be in Wise, Virginia this weekend?”

“Maybe. If he is, then yeah, he’ll drop you off. But let me tell you something, Bob.”

“Yeah, go ahead and tell me something.”

“The world might fuck you before Ann Murray gets to.”

Bob’s teeth ground against each other. “Well if I care, it’s a chance I have to take.”

Ace sighed. “Jesus, okay. I gotta get to class.”



Bob sat by his phone Friday night, not even paying attention to the British comedy on PBS, and pumped his fist when Ace called to say, “Yeah, he’s coming down. So, if you want to come hang tomorrow night, you should.”

“Yeah? Cool.”

“It might cost you though.”

Bob slumped down. “I have literally ten dollars to my name.”

“He wants five for gas, I’d guess. He does this with everybody, so don’t think this is jeans-blackmail.”

“Okay, fine, but if I’m paying five dollars for gas, he fills up right before he drops me off.”

“Uh, why?”

“Because I need to pick something up.”

“Just come down and he’ll drop you off at St. Michael’s in the morning.”

By the time Bob had finally convinced his parents to let him go, Carol Cleveland had morphed into Charlie Rose.



Bob sat in Ace’s bedroom while Ace and Chico sat on the bed, smoking out of a crushed Busch can, seeming as if something had smacked them in the face. Sauntering behind them was Ace’s older brother, a mustache making steady progress toward his lip. Somebody suggested hide-and-seek.

They deemed the concrete porch base and everyone hid but Chico, the seeker. Bob laid down on a pile of gravel and dead leaves confusing themselves with each other. Chico stepped off the porch.

“You know, that Ann’s a pretty good lay, I hear.” Chico shouted. “I heard her pussy tastes like grape wine.”

Bob, hunkered down, reached behind him to grab a clump of dirt, but grabbed a rock instead. He stood up and threw it, hitting the center of Chico’s forehead. Chico yelped in pain. “Oh my fucking God!”

Ace emerged from his spot and ran to base.

“Bob, you fat sack of shit! I’m gonna make a staff out of your bones!” Chico shouted from his place on the ground.

Ace sat down next to Chico. “Man, you got knocked right out.”

“This shit isn’t funny!” Chico dabbed his tongue. “Oh God, I think I taste blood.”

Bob sat on the porch. Ace looked up. His flashy red hair and taped-up glasses couldn’t hide Ace’s disconcertion.

“Oh God, I’ve done been assassinated.” Chico moaned.

Ace guided Bob inside and put him down on the big orange couch. He then swiftly grabbed the rotary telephone and brought it down on top of Bob’s forehead.

“What the fuck is your problem?”

Bob, embarrassed and angry, said, “He said stuff about Ann, and I got mad.”

Ace stood for a second. “Huh?”

“Why did you hit with me the telephone, you freaking jerk?”

“I don’t know, Bob! I thought you throwing that rock was a roundabout tactic to get on the porch, and I hate cheating!” Ace took a breath and leaned down with grace to hug Bob. “But hey, he ought to have known you were gonna react badly. No crazy like pussy crazy.”

“Who told Chico?”

“I probably let it slip. Don’t go throwing rocks at his head, though. I don’t want to dump anyone in a ditch.”

Bob felt a little better. “Was it that big of a rock?”

“Not really, he’s just got a soft head.”

“What’s all the fuss about? Is somebody getting it in the butt?” asked Ace’s brother, wandering from the living room.

“No, just in the head.”

“Who?”

“Bob threw a rock at Chico.”

“Oh, good, that kid sucks.” Ace’s brother said. “Why’d you throw a rock at him, though?”

Bob sat silent, the pain from the telephone growing on the top of his head.

The next morning, the air outside the gas station seemed smoky. Bob, dressed in his lavender shirt and black pants puddled about his ankles, sat in the car as Ace’s brother got out to pump gas. The car was dirty, rolling papers and mud everywhere, dunes of clothes in the back, pungency rising. Ace’s brother knocked on the window, and Bob opened the door.

“You got a ten?”

“I thought I owed you five dollars.”

Ace’s brother shook his head. “It’s gonna be ten.”

“Why is it gonna be ten?”

“Because I gotta get back home.” Bob looked at the fuel tank, sighed, and handed him the ten through the window. Ace’s brother went inside to pay and Bob sat around doing the math for how much he’d have to borrow to give Ann a *Rolling Stone* at school on Monday instead.

Ace’s brother got back in the car. “So Ace told me you threw a rock at Chico because he said something about your girl.”

“She’s not my girl.”

“Jesus, what the fuck is your problem, then?” Ace’s brother shoved a cigarette in the car-lighter and

then into his mouth. “You know girls don’t like that shit, right?”

“No.”

“Take it from me, little man. Nobody likes to be possessed.”

Bob was quiet the rest of the car ride and stepped out of the car silently, kneading his hands in anxiety while facing the big red doors of St. Michael’s. As he walked inside, he could feel God in the building. Even the carpet smelled holy. The aisles of the church sloped downhill. At the bottom, the pained Christ’s face was a like a sinkhole. He selected a pew housing only a small older man. On the other side of the church, he saw Ann’s hair in a bun and her bare shoulders shivering as she opened her purse and popped gum into her mouth.

He sat through the entire process mystified and paralyzed until communion. When he got up, the older man said, “Sir, is this your first time in a Catholic church?”

“Yessir.”

“Sorry, young man. You can’t take communion then.”

Bob’s mouth opened and leaked this: “Am I not Catholic enough for you people?”

It seemed as if the entire church turned around to look at him, even though only one person saw him: Ann herself, blank. Bob excused himself and waited on the front steps of the church for Ace’s brother to pick him up.

When Ace’s brother pulled up, the car was no less pungent. “How was it? Did you confess?”

“Just to being an idiot,” he said. Ann’s family got in their car. He waved; nobody noticed.

Which might? Brennan Chambre

as you mumble an affirmative
which might have been sincere
but I hear with raised eyebrows
and a forced smile—

when something’s not tied down
someone must have *untied* it.

I’ve never seen the benefit in doubt.

as you mumble what an hour ago
might have started an argument,
not in-itself but because

clearly you meant to untie it
and as you mumble once more,
and then again,
and again
mhmm,

as you process a familiar anxiety
which might have been triggered
an hour ago when I asked if
you liked my song

and as I’m sitting up next to you,
awake,
because I don’t have to be at work
until 10 tomorrow,

two lights are pulsing in the distance
and I can’t tell if they’re approaching
or just in the wind.

Ramblings from a Day Too Hot Nicholas Shipman

Skitter-*buzz*-jump
to new thoughts, abandoning,
none escaping the sun—
fat old conservative frowning down
in his sweat-soaked suit.

as the subways growl beneath,
down where our barrow-friend
whispers secrets to solemn rats,
one for every pair of eyes
in the city above, where streetlight
harshness illuminates skin as pale,
hands as teasingly wandering,
as memory.

When did madness become
so coveted by artists?

The learned ones die
in such stupid ways—
slip of king’s tongue,
ice unseen.
(Lies told to the self.)

Multiverses are born in the eyeblink,
wolf-roads spiraling into the infinite
from the perhaps-observer
still upon the earthrim.
Yet.
Free as young falcons at keening warplay
above the bonfires’ glimmer, last sparks
of the dead to push back mist
and vine-shadow one final time.

My mind wanders like dandelion
wishes into time filed away—
streetlight-glare sharp
on soft roundness of nipple
and laughing lips waiting
full of gentle mockery

The life-heat of old lovers
still sighs through dusty corridors,
warren to nowhere repeated.

Funerals are a theatre.
Don’t pretend to me.
Send me postcards from places I’ve been.
Tell me how suburbia looks upside down
and a hundred new ways to get thrown
out of Wal-Mart. Call me accidentally
and tell me a story.

Sweet the barrow-friend
the poet, barbarous
for the giver of ink
this young age day—
Long the whale-road
though longer the Earthly
chaining the wolf
whose bones lie still.

Shadow-lover claims
burn the mead benches
and rings fell,
that was a good man.
He’ll sail to father’s halls,
winter of word-lord’s passing
in parchment fetters,
midst verse under the green.

Some streets gather
in hopeless drifts
a thousand shades
of cracked and forgotten.

At the bottom of her box,
Pandora found hope,
or maybe just a physicist’s
very grumpy cat.

The Creature Elly Call

The water, again, did not part to accommodate the creature’s mass when the creature returned to the sea. This refusal wasn’t rudeness, just physics. There was no mass to accommodate. The fingerling rays of the sun pierced the surface and so pierced the creature. It wallowed in the shallows and looked into bluer depths. Protein particles hung, there in the dark. Eyes or stars, or rows of teeth. The water was warm. The perfect temperature for the human body. The creature congratulated itself. It had picked quite the continental shelf.

Though chuffed, the creature knew it had not come here to sun itself in the shallows, pretending it had a body. The existence of unexplored depths did not automatically require exploration on the creature’s part, but if it were to be honest with itself, the creature had to admit that it did feel a certain social pressure to explore. Maybe it wasn’t social pressure. It could have been a sort of left over imperialism. Either way, the creature blamed other people’s sex for it. The constant need to conquer, the lust for discovery and ownership of the discovered. The want seemed to be contagious.

Unsettled, the creature turned over.

Refracted sunlight played over the creature’s face. Here there were fish, down there were also fish; the deep would be no less lonely. With the vague sense that it had given in to peer pressure, the creature left the shallows and traveled south.

The rocks teemed with polyps and bulbous corals, all vying for space and pushing against each other, crowding the rock’s orifices. Clenching hydrae monitored the movements of the water, the electricity of distant thoughts and chemical reactions, more sensitive than the skin behind a human ear.

The human ear.

The creature twisted back on itself, vertebrae cracking, clavicles snapping, so many bones that didn’t exist. Always the body! Always sex!

Even here the creature was overtaken.

There once was the pink fleshy shell of an ear, a woman’s ear. The brunette, the goddess, the whore, the Cindy, the Candy from yesterday or a week ago. The creature was not a temporal being, and it was difficult to tell which name was actually hers. She had been called all those names, and she identified with each of them. The creature had watched and felt the faded blue-black oriental fish emblazoned on the skin behind her plush, vivid ear. Her lobe, heavy with gold and topaz, swung pendulous, punctuated by thought-interrupting noises from the man. She had thought that the man found earrings unfashionable, and the man had not thought about them at all.

But the sea!

Now was not the damp neck of the woman with an ambiguous identity and musk perfume. Now was the sea, and the creature knew that it would have been out of breath, so it looked around in the twilight of the water to make sure no one had noticed. There was a particularly grainy consistency to embarrassment, and it would have tasted sour. The creature had no way of knowing this for sure, but by people’s thoughts, it had its suspicions.

The sun could reach no further, and colors withdrew until only the color red hung on bigger fish and the wrinkled rock ridge, the last proof of the shelf. But even red could not remain for long.

The creature trembled in the ink. Miles of previous ocean bore down on its head. It was nostalgic moments like this, when the creature pretended it had a head, that made the creature suspect that it had, originally, been human—if it

had ever been anything aside from the creature. It imagined it would have had red hair, but red only reminded the creature that the red light was gone, and it felt no more comforted than before.

The silence was like a vast inhale, or fabric pressing against an ear.

It stopped itself. No more ears. The thought obviously caused trouble.

Now in the dark, the creature perceived that its arrival was attended to by nocturnal shrimp, which blazed angelic and white against the expanse. Blockades of them paused in their run to the surface. The shrimps’ pause was so natural that the creature stopped as well. Trillions of buggy, beady little eyes. The eyes of a pig or a fat, middle-aged strip club attendee. What a turn off. The shrimps’ stupidity was offensive.

The creature retreated into the hydrothermal vents, nursing its wounds. It was only after the creature delved into one of the black, fiery mouths and settled there that it realized it had been perceived.

The creature blushed at itself in the smoke. The horde of imbecilic shrimp would have seen everything. The only situation worse than continuing forever into eternity with no identity was to owe anything to such soulless, ignorant creatures. The sides of the hydrothermal vent suddenly scraped the creature’s skin and the skin eroded. Was it a man’s skin that the vent clawed and ate, with its acid and ash? A woman’s?

These were not new thoughts. Its last preoccupation with its gender had lasted approximately a human decade, possibly a second, and it had emerged no clearer on its identity than before. It thought that it was something of a man.

The creature had a tendency to seek crevasses and enjoyed being inside things more than being outside of them. But that could have simply been latent agoraphobia. Then again, men and women could switch places, so the creature was wrong again. Plus, the creature reasoned, there was certainly more to being a man than getting into things or having things get into it, or being a woman with the same experience. Having a body was only part of it.

As an eternal being, the creature often thought that by this point it should have been omniscient or close to all-knowing, but this had never, in fact, happened. It suspected that omniscience was an infection similar to death, and that it wouldn’t remember the sensation of not knowing, because without warning, it would know everything—and nothing that was not everything would no longer make sense. The shrimp had probably reached the surface, and now they probably watched the glittering populace of bioluminescent bacterium. More sex. The stuff was everywhere. If eternity had taught the creature anything, eternity had taught the creature that.

It decided to pretend to be God, but only for emotional stability. It hoped that God, if God existed, would be angered by the imitation, and descend or ascend to put wrongs to right.

“You exist,” it told itself. “Isn’t that enough?”

The phrase seemed like a sort of “God” thing to say. The creature frowned into the frothing cloud of white, disappointed.

“Why are you so stupid?” it asked the shrimp attendants.

Lacking physical history, the creature had no guarantee that it would not be born one moment, and dead the next.



Blood Adrienne Robin Enriquez

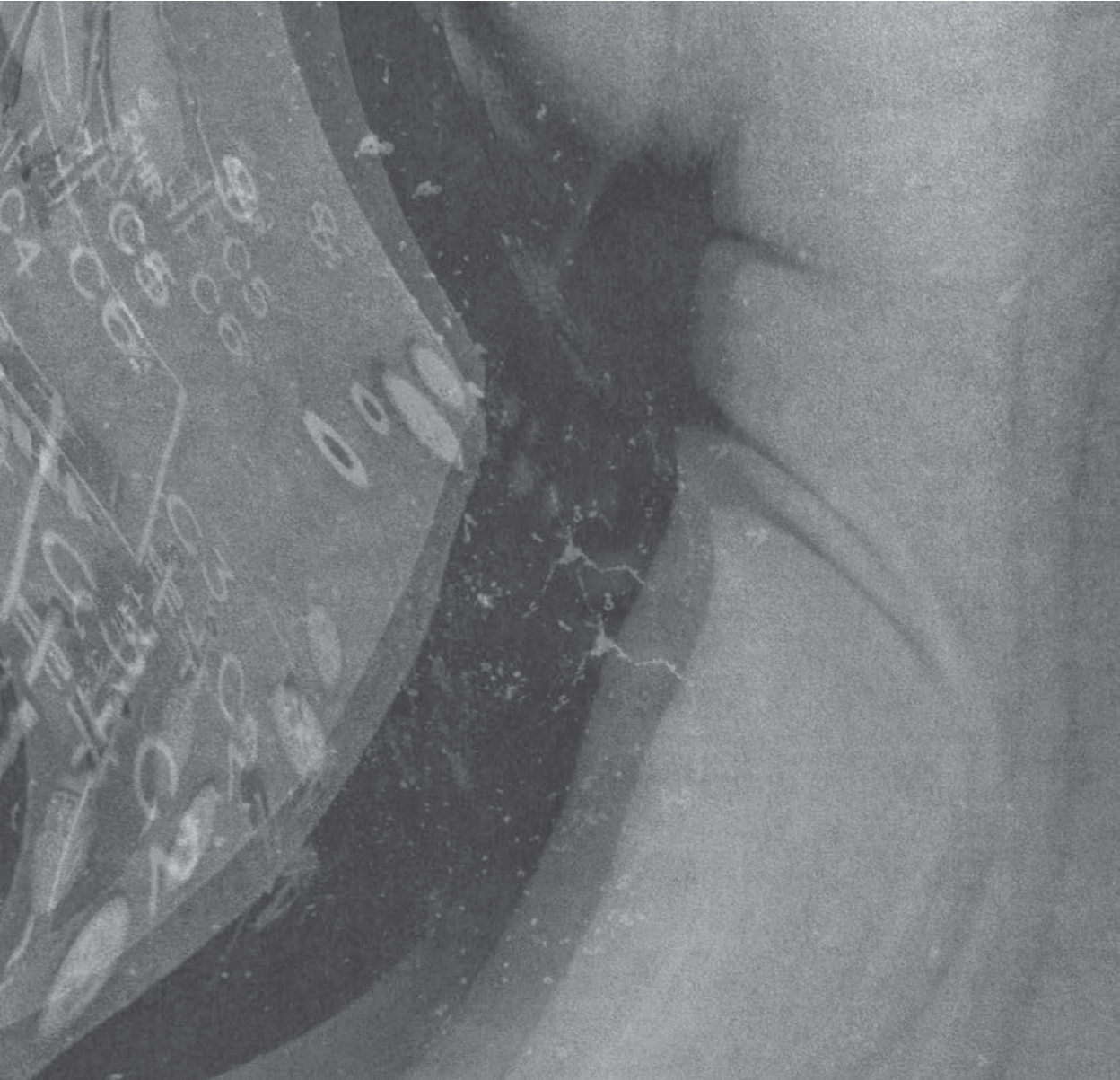


Winter

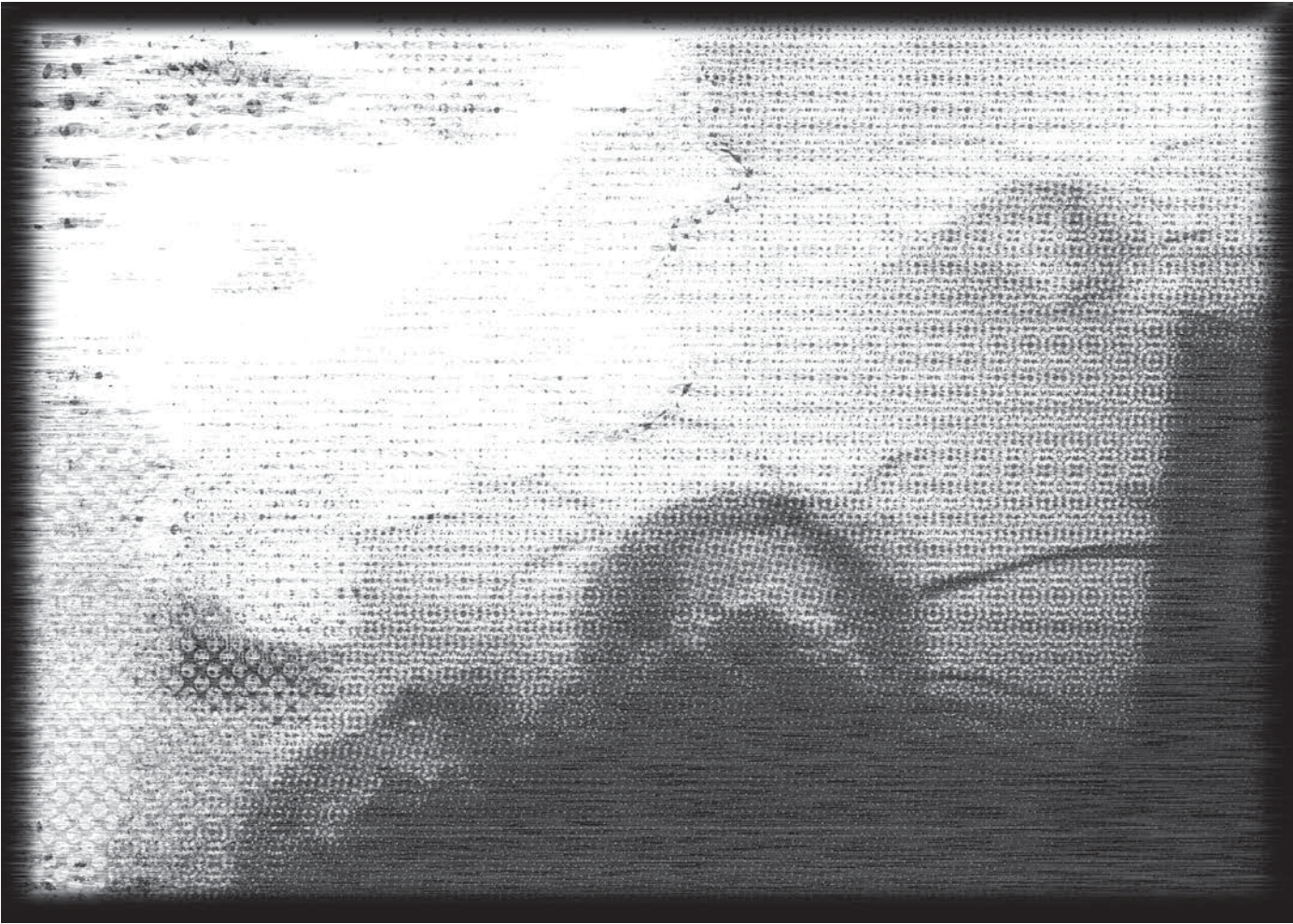


Something Pretentious

toth



Bloodstream



toth

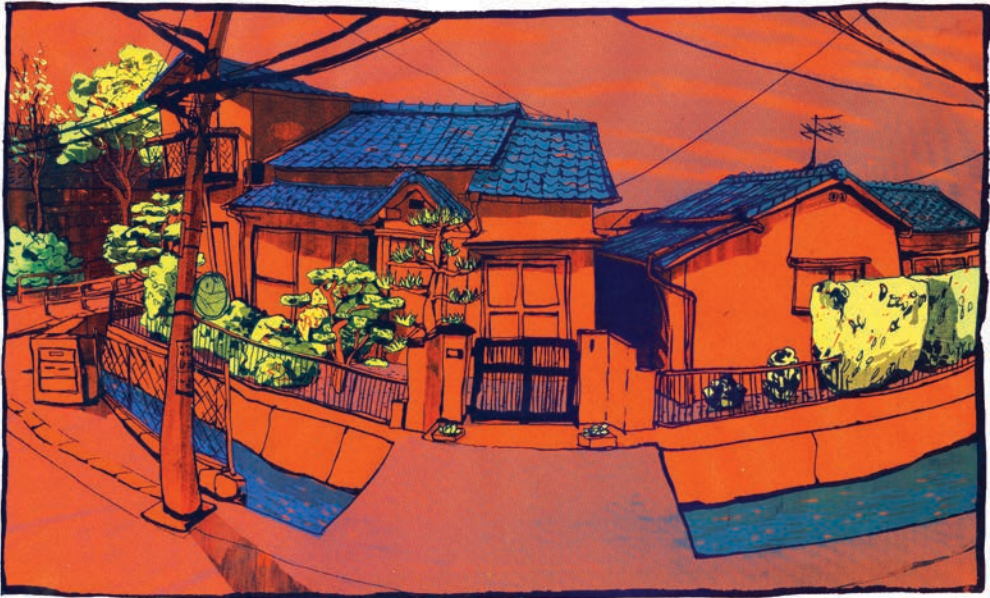
Aftermath



Evening in Chefchaouen



Invasive Species



Okayama



Nymphs



Lantern Eater



Sorrow



Stranded Jacob Eveland



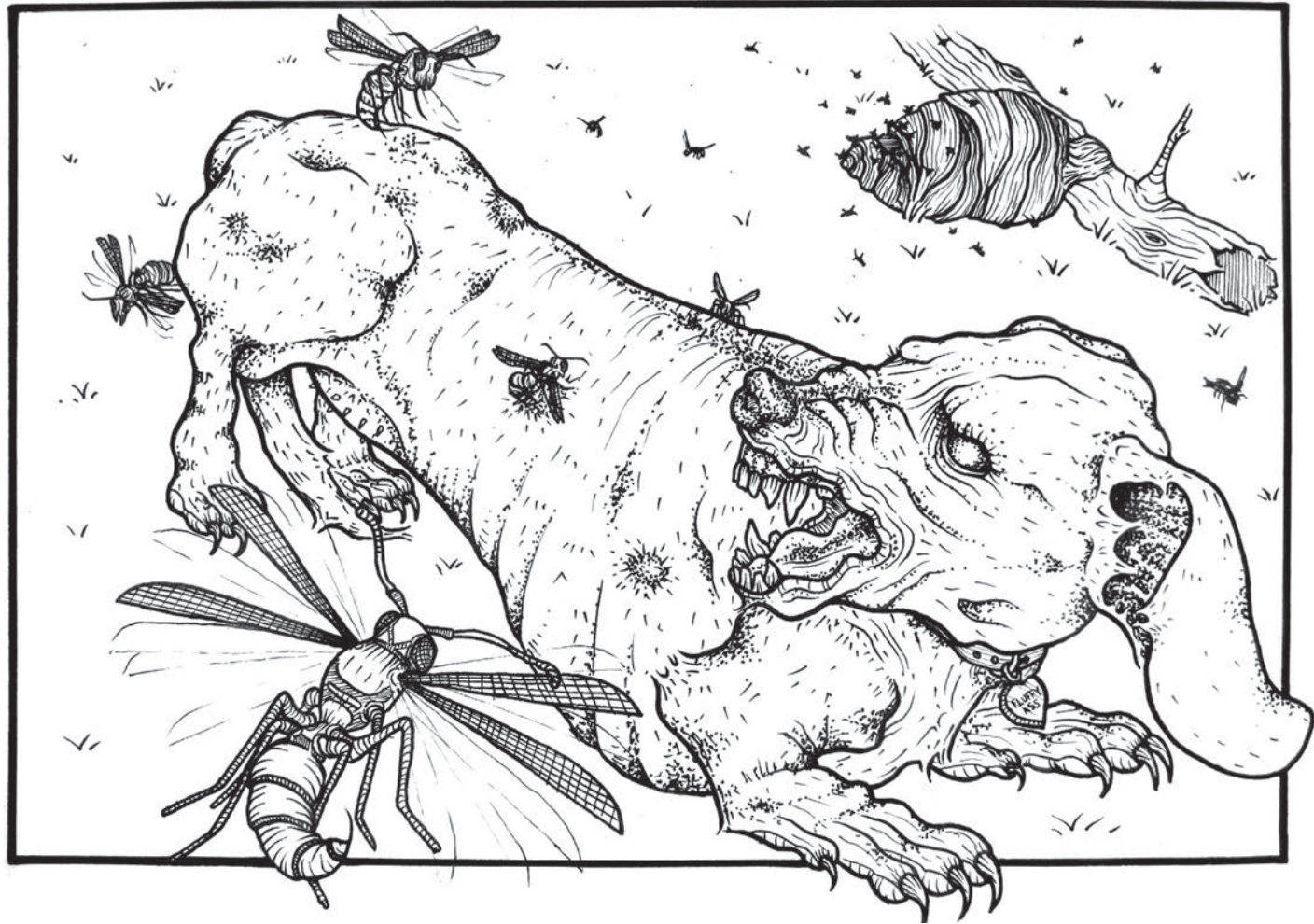
Packyard Burning John DiJulio



Swan Song Kevin VQ Dam



Hanging Moons Mary-Catherine White



The Neighbor's Dog v. Fallen Hornet Nest Mike Baker



Noelle Choy Same Therapists



Fine Dining



Lifting Off



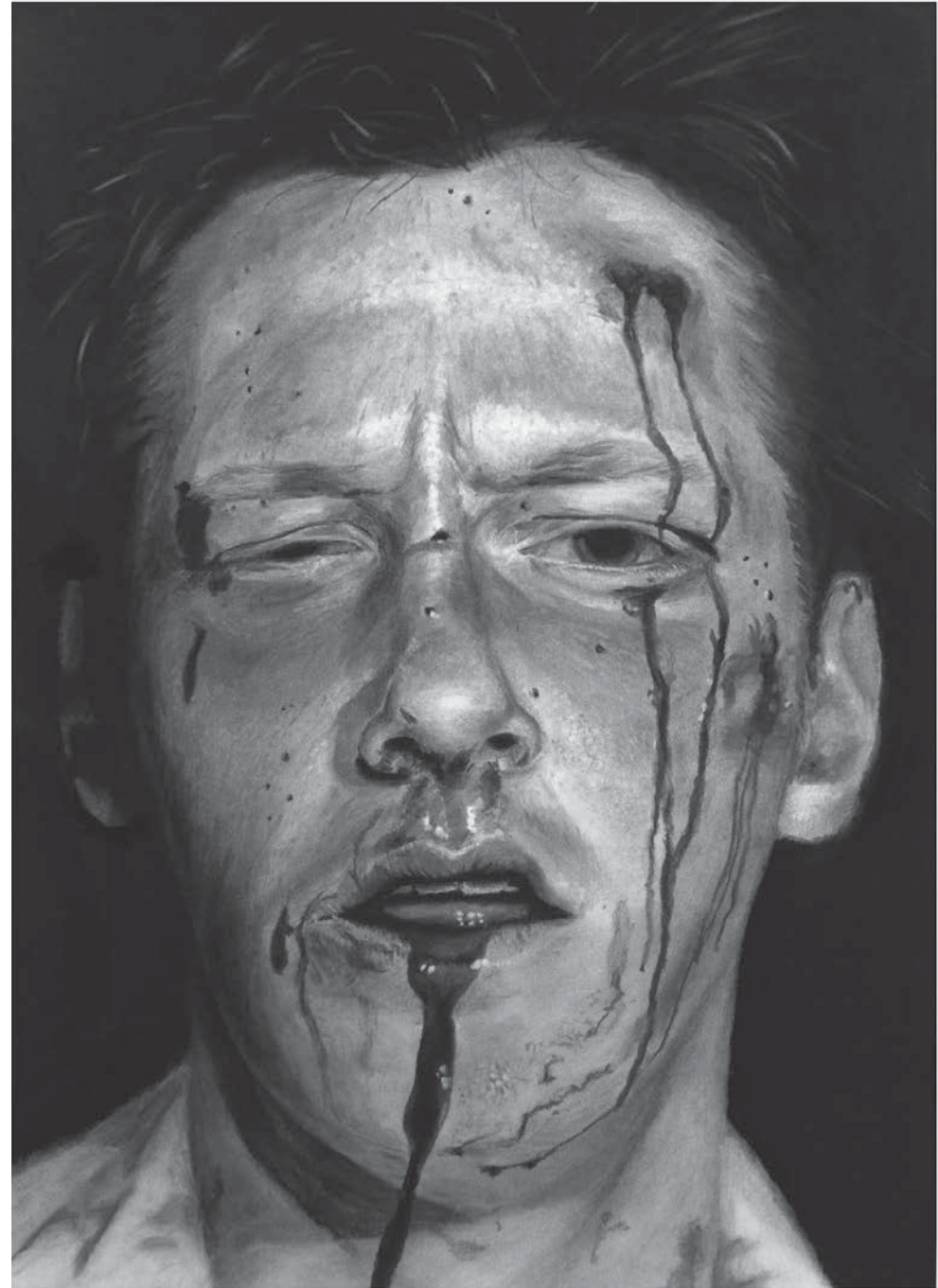
Float



Accountant



Little Not-City Sami Cronk



Humility Samuel Adkins



Media Meal Sara Clarken



Swimtime Sarah Apple



Fat



Tall



Grotesque



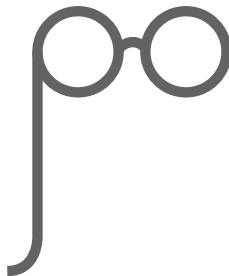
Illuminations

Contributors

SAMUEL ADKINS is currently finishing the VCU Art Foundation courses where he’s eagerly awaiting his acceptance into the graphic design program. When he’s not crossing his fingers, he stays busy as a student in The daVinci Center program, and as an employee at the Maymont Estate and VCU’s computer store, Ram Tech. **SARAH APPLE** is majoring in communication arts. She is looking forward to getting lost in the big wide world for a while after she graduates this May. **MIKE BAKER** graduated with a degree in English from VCU. He now lives by the seat of his pants. **BRITTNEY BARBOUR** is from the home planet and will take back all who are interested. **ILANA BEAN** is a sophomore, majoring in communication arts with a focus on medical illustration, and minoring in biology and creative writing. She hopes to attend graduate school for biomedical visualization. **ELLY CALL** is a sophomore, and a double major in communications arts and English with a writing focus. This is her second year with *Poictesme*. She plans on teaching her way around the world upon graduation. **DANA CARLSON** is an experimental writer who dabbles in journalism as well as the creative arts. She is planning to graduate with a B.S. in journalism and a minor in English with hopes to travel and teach English abroad. Later plans include travel writing and reporting. **ALEX CARRIGAN** is *Poictesme*’s deputy editor-in-chief and has been a member of *Poictesme* since his first semester at VCU in 2010. Alex is a graduating senior who will leave VCU with a degree in print/online journalism and a minor in world cinema. In his four years at *Poictesme*, he has learned so much about writing, criticism, and publishing that he wants to make writing his career, whether it be as a journalist, on staff for a literary magazine, or as a novelist. He has been very grateful to be on this staff for so long and thanks everyone who he has worked with and everyone who has submitted to the journal for making *Poictesme* one of his best experiences at VCU. He’ll miss you all. **BRENNAN CHAMBRE** is an English major/German minor at VCU and plans to study comparative literature in grad school. He plays in the local bands, The Cales and Dos Cabezas, and is an active member of the Richmond branch of the Industrial Workers of the World labor union. **MAYA CHESLEY** is a junior in the biology and Spanish programs at VCU. In the future she hopes to move to a Spanish-speaking country or become a hermit and live in a cabin in the middle of nowhere. Either one would be pretty cool. **Noelle Choy** is a sculpture and extended media senior with an interest in representing personal relationships, biographies and archiving memories in objects that are both surreal and nostalgic. Constant hesitation and experimenting guide her shifts with color, scale and smashing together of materials. Upon graduation, she’s hoping to travel and possibly work in China, continuing to try and find an appropriately chaotic place for her work to live. **SARA CLARKEN**’s work explores the communication of color, form, and social norms within the media. She combines editorial fashion photography and still life work to create offbeat images that portray a surreal state of being. **SAMI CRONK** is a mixed media artist artist and illustrator finishing up her degree in communication arts. Her work is inspired by nostalgia, nature, and whimsy. **KEVIN VQ DAM** is a freelance illustrator, pie enthusiast, and all-around weirdo. He will graduate from VCU in 2014 with a BFA in communication arts, and a minor in painting and printmaking. **STEPHEN DECAO** is the son of Icelandic emigrants. He studies genetic engineering at VCU. **MEAGAN DERMODY** is the copy editor for a number of VCU student media publications, including *The Commonwealth Times*. She was invited to read at the Five College Poetry Fest in Amherst, Mass. and is a prolific writer. Meagan hopes to become a tenured academic librarian. **RICHARD DICICCO** is a senior art history major who writes short stories and poetry in his spare time. Though not much of a reader, Richard draws much of his inspiration from walking around in empty galleries and imagining paintings on the walls. His sole goal as a writer is to find a paperback print of his first novel tossed in the back of someone’s car. Check out his blog: ashamedofwords.wordpress.com. **JOHN DIJULIO** is a photographer and graphic artist from Grosse

Pointe, Michigan. He is interested in film, graffiti, and graphic design. **CARLA DOMINGUEZ** is a proud Cuban-American majoring in English with a focus on linguistics. Her one true love is the Internet. **ELEANOR DOUGHTY** graduated from VCU's School of the Arts in May 2013, and has since run a successful Kickstarter campaign, backpacked through Europe and North Africa, and finally found work in a pottery studio in Northern Virginia. Printmaking is her favorite way to make images. She drinks her coffee black, unless it's hot outside. **GRACE DUNN** is a freshman hoping to major in English. Her current minors are hopefully going to be mass comm and gender women's studies. She likes running, photography, biking, and (obviously) reading and writing. She prefer writing creative nonfiction pieces. **ADRIENNE ROBIN ENRIQUEZ** is an aspiring scientific and medical artist who adores exploring the human body in intellectual and illustrative ways. **JACOB EVELAND**, as a child, didn't know much of his father. He decided to create a series based on the interviews and stories from his father regarding his former career as a national drug smuggler, among other things. **ERIN GERETY** is in her final semester at VCU, graduating with a degree in English and a minor in religious studies. She has worked for *Blackbird* literary magazine, but spends most of her time serving fancy beers in cozy bars and writing poems in bed. **F.L. GERMAN** is a reclusive writer and English major. His favorite authors include Hemingway, Updike, and O'Connor. **MEGAN GOLDFARB** is a current freshman at VCUarts who hopes to double major in art education and painting. She enjoys dancing and playing a variety of strange instruments, though not at the same time. Too many unproductive hours make her uncomfortable. **SIMONEY HANNA** is currently studying creative writing at VCU. In her spare time she plays classical piano, figure skates, volunteers as a canine foster mom, and practices making decorative cakes and pastries. She aspires to either open up a bakery, or rehabilitate dogs' behavioral problems professionally. **CARSON JONES**, a junior at VCU, is a communication arts major with a passion for illustration, film-making, and just generally trying to pass as an adult. He is an aspiring comic creator and concept designer, or any paying "gig" as he puts it. He one day hopes to be a real boy. **TEMP K** is a multimedia artist who enjoys working in teams to create beautiful visuals, theater, music, and video. **SEAN CW KORSGAARD** is acarsn Army veteran and aspiring author and film critic. When it comes to poetry however, he enjoys nothing better than a good haiku, and has written scores of them over the years. **IRENE LI** is a communication arts major who specializes in digital illustration. She thrives on solving problems that cannot be solved any other way besides through the use of images. **KIARA MOORE** is a senior who will earn her BA in English with a minor in Business in May 2014. After graduation, she plans to combine her interests in creative arts and business and live a dual life as a published writer and entrepreneur. **HANNAH MORGAN** is a senior, double majoring in philosophy and sociology, and minoring in creative writing. She has been working with *Poictesme* for two years. Right now, she's mostly interested in what it means (or doesn't mean) to be conscious, creative endeavors, and seeing pictures of your cat. **CYRUS NUVAL** has been contributing nonfiction and interview articles to the *Poictesme* website since the Fall semester of 2013. Cyrus' *Poictesme* bosses haven't fired him yet, so he thinks he might be doing a semi-passable job so far. Cyrus also works for the *Commonwealth Times* and *Amendment*. **DANIEL PARKER** asks, "How is it possible to distill twenty-two years of sensory function into three sentences?" He is a VCU journalism major, print not broadcast. When he's not wrestling with the vice grip of some cruel existential crisis, he's writing down dreams, reading, jumping out of windows, falling in love, reporting the truth or sleeping. **TOMAS DANIEL PETERS** is an English major and is planning to graduate (3 semesters early) in December. He is planning to go on to get his MT and with that teach high school English (until he finishes writing his great American novel). He wrote his first short story in fifth grade about a kangaroo that works at a popsicle stand in Mexico and gets blown away by a tornado. **TAYLOR PURCELL** is a sophomore English major who loves sunshine, chocolate, and yoga. She is unsure of what she wants to do in her future, but plans on traveling and going on adventures as much as she can

with the people she loves. **KRISTEN REBELO** is an illustrative designer, print enthusiast, and feminist graduating in the spring of 2014 with a BFA in communication arts and a minor in gender, sexuality, and women's studies. She enjoys collecting books that gather dust in her apartment and is more like her mother than she cares to admit. **EMMA SCARVEY** is an aspiring illustrator who is currently studying communication arts and art history at VCU. **ANNA SHCHERBAKOVA** studies graphic design at VCUarts among doing altogether too many other things. She cannot get through the day without some good German chocolate and likes to bike things out on her 1980's Raleigh. **THOMAS SHEEHAN** is an Art Foundation student from Belgium. He hopes to study sculpture and is most interested in the human figure. **NICHOLAS SHIPMAN** is an English and history major. Do not approach. He will pet your face. **HELEN STODDARD** is an illustrator by trade, and is graduating this May with her BFA in Photography. She hopes to keep getting her hands messy in all sorts of artistic endeavors, on and off the page. **CONSTANTINO TOTH** was born in Sarasota, Florida to two Italian parents. He lived there all his life until he migrated to Richmond to study at VCU. He is currently a freshman in the Art Foundation program with goals of acquiring a BFA in Kinetic Imaging. **JORDAN TURNER** is an undergraduate at VCU. He is majoring in English with a minor in American studies. He plans to teach in the future. **FAITH VASKO** is a freshman and aspiring English major, although she suffers from a bad case of the mumbles. She loves Gillian Flynn, cookie dough ice cream, and Peter Pan. A novel based on all the embarrassing misfortunes of her best friend is in the works. **HEATHER WEST** is a 2014 graduating senior of the Photography and Film Department at VCU who draws inspiration from the ideas of human interactions and existence. She plans to move to Atlanta after graduation to pursue life. **PHIL WHISENHUNT** is an illustrator living in Richmond, VA. **MARY-CATHERINE WHITE** is an illustrator and concept artist who specializes in the fantasy genre. She hopes to have a career in visual development for animated films. **NICOLE MARIA WILLIS** is a tolerably agreeable person, regardless of the strange things she writes. She is fascinated by narrative and storytelling and would like to extend her passions into a career. Nicole is currently a junior in the Kinetic Imaging Department and is minoring in creative writing.



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