

tilted house review



fall 2021
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Editor // Cameron Lovejoy
Visual Art Curator \\ Maya Pen
Contributing Editor // Skye Jackson
Prose Editor \\ Jakob Hofmann
Assistant Editor // Ian Monroe

eDitor's note

A week after I got my driver's license I hit my first animal. The car screamed to a stop, both feet on the brakes. As a freshly professed vegetarian, remorse set in like rigor mortis. I opened the car door.

The sound had come from somewhere unknown, its humble thud ringing in my ears until I saw the thing: still and unbreathing. At the hood, I crouched down, cupped it into my hands, and walked with its warmth into the woods. The heat would evaporate soon, but I held it as if it wouldn't, as if I were carrying a small baby back to her mother.

Growing up, I often saw deer and opossum lumped on the roadside, half inside-out, mottled with blood, and thought how careless the drivers were to just leave them there, dying. Why not prevent it from being flattened? Or veterinarian it? Or at least bring it home to cook?

I shuffled from the car, glancing over my shoulder, guilty at what I thought I'd never do. But every ten-and-two machine has killed *something*—be it dog or butterfly.

To bury it seemed extreme, so I knelt down to part the leaves and needles, and built a coffin made of duff. A worm bloomed from the dirt, then disappeared. I set the dead thing into it, sprinkled needles like seasoning. Something would eat it. But as I stood to give it some half-assed prayer, the needles quivered, and from the coffin burst the finch, rising, weaving through the trees and into the pink and blinking autumn air.

—after *Hurricane Ida*

Cameron Lovejoy
New Orleans
Fall 2021

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Dreaming, after

Voices spilling out from open doors
on a sticky summer night
light bleeding gold through the tattered blue gingham curtains
of the kitchen windows
and
our gathered family blissfully unaware of our task
in the moonlit shed.
With a tender silence borne between us,
broken only by the distant screams
of lonely cicadas,
I began
sanding the oak boards,
smooth as velvet,
hammering the rusty nails,
collected from dusty corners of the old barn.
I joined the edges of the long, rectangular box
with antique brass braces
I decided against a stain
wanting the wood to remain raw
and welcoming to the seeping of the rain.
There was no use for a silk lining
creature comforts are for the living
I lost you in the shadows for a while
But I could still feel your eyes on me
I wanted more time, but you said Sunday dinner would end
And they would soon come calling.
I always knew you were dying
But I was dying too
And the longer I worked, I began to forget
which of us the box was meant for

Lines for early summer

Some days, there is no such creature.
Nothing furred, like Bly had wanted, shank
stinking of wet nettles,
capable of covering long distances.

Some days, the only prints we left were between
graphemes, trying to get out. Footfall crinkling
on the far side of the word.

This summer should be enough. And its bruises, wombed
in ink. Everything else is extinct.
Only the salmon still leap to brawn their fins
and begin
the diligent work
of burning.

Keep on scratching: you're about to reach
a person, gored to diamond.
Then it's a gift
to be caught shattering in that light.

Break it all, he could've written, just to make it bigger.

Like our bones, which are only coffins
for the sunshine.

The Grave of Enos T. Throop

Jeremy called me on a Sunday night. He told me he'd been talking with the rest of our cousins, all eleven of them. They wanted me to meet them at the grave of Enos T. Throop. He said they had something important to tell me. I don't see my cousins much outside of family reunions. So it was odd that, all of a sudden, here they are, calling me up and telling me to meet them at the grave of Enos T. Throop.

I asked Jeremy who Enos T. Throop was.

"You don't know who Enos T. Throop is?" he asked. "Governor of New York, 1829 to 1832?"

Now I really knew something was up. You don't go around asking your cousin to meet you at the grave of the governor of New York, 1829 to 1832, for nothing. I closed all my bank accounts, hid a razor blade under my tongue, and walked down to the cemetery. If I had known the cemetery was up by the Canadian border, I wouldn't have walked. It took me three days.

My cousins were already there when I arrived, all eleven of them. Some of them sipped coffee from Styrofoam cups. Some drew circles in the mud with long sticks. Some just stood and stared. When Jeremy saw me walking up the hill, he corralled them into a tight circle around the headstone.

When I got to the top, I was out of breath, and my tongue was bleeding.

"You're probably wondering why we asked you to come to the grave of Enos T. Throop," Jeremy said.

"The question had occurred to me," I said, trying to maneuver my tongue around the razor blade.

"We have a new cousin on the way," Jeremy said.

"Really?" I said. "Who's expecting?"

"Christie and Steve. We were a bit unprepared. Completely unprepared, actually. We're already at maximum capacity for cousins."

"Maximum capacity?"

"We've taken a vote."

"On what?"

“You’re out.”

“But I didn’t get to vote. I didn’t get to speak in my defense.”

“This isn’t a trial,” Jeremy said. “You know that. It’s just a house-rules cousin-vote. You know the house rules.”

“I would have voted for Anne,” I said. “For the record.”

“You can vote for Anne now if you’d like. It won’t make a difference except that you’ll hurt Anne’s feelings. The vote was unanimous.”

“I’d like to vote for Anne all the same.”

“That’s fine. Let it be noted that on this fifth day of December, Alex was a sore loser and kind of rude and voted to remove Anne from the cousins even though we told him it wouldn’t make a difference because we’d already voted and it was unanimous.”

“Thank you,” I said.

“You’re welcome. Let’s get started. We’ve already been waiting for three days, so please be quick about it. First, we need your birthday.”

“How do I give you my birthday?”

“You know when you put Elmer’s glue on your hand and you let it dry and then you peel off all at once?”

“Yeah.”

“Like that.” It took a couple of tries, but I eventually managed it.

“What do you want me to do with it?”

“Put it on Enos T. Throop’s grave,” he said. “Also, that took a little too long. I think you should show a little more consideration for us. We are losing a cousin, after all.”

“And some of us have to wake up early for work,” Anne said. It’s the fact that she said things like that that made me want to vote for her.

“What next?” I asked.

“Now we play that card game we made up. Make sure you lose.”

He dealt us each one card, face down. We all held our cards up to our foreheads. I looked around the circle at my cousins, who were all looking at me. They all had aces.

“Do we really have to do this?” I asked. Jeremy nodded. “Fine,” I said. “Anne, I solemnly swear that my card is higher than yours.”

“I solemnly swear that it isn’t.”

We looked at our cards. I had a joker.

“You lose,” Jeremy said.

“I know,” I said.

“Thank you for being quick about it,” Jeremy said. “You could have

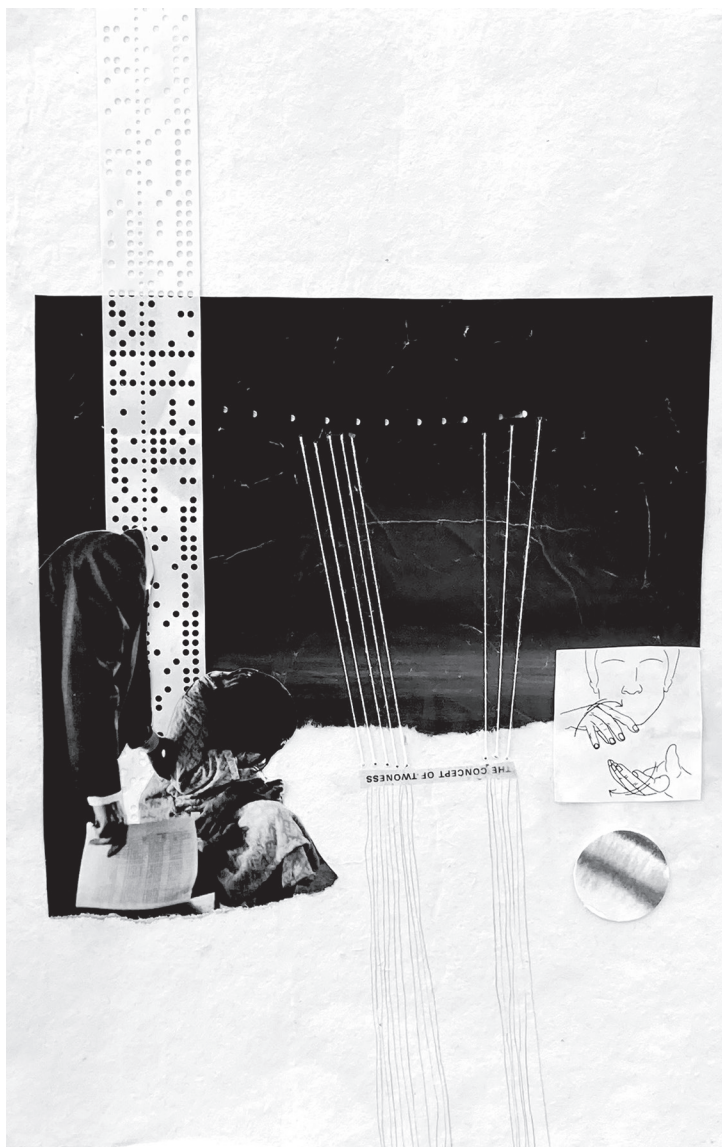
been a little bit quicker, but thank you nonetheless.”

“Now what?” I asked.

But they couldn’t hear me. The sun was starting to rise. A few of my cousins blinked like they were leaving the theater after going to a movie in the middle of the day. Jeremy took a black Sharpie from his shirt pocket and struck a line through *Enos T. Throop* on the headstone. He wrote my name below and almost spelled it right.

“Ashes to ashes,” Jeremy said. “Dust to dust. Whatever, I never liked that guy anyway.”

I spat out the razor blade and wandered off down the hill behind the cemetery. The grass was so heavy with dew that my socks were getting damp through my sneakers. I wondered what the options were for removed cousins. Graduate school? New Mexico? Governor of New York, 1829 to 1832?



Hope Amico

"Spending All Your Time Trying To Keep A Woman Down"

*18 x 12 inches on handmade paper with found images, thread, and pencil
with title borrowed from Lizzo's "Rumors"*

Kel Warren

Sweat, Bleed, Spill

There is scant sunlight on my second story porch. The driveways below are mostly vacant, but I imagine the neighbors tsk-tsk at me through their white lace curtains as I tie and untie the knot. I am drying the whites on the line. The line is too long and the shirts droop into a cluster. They are men's shirts. Linen. Oxford. Tuxedo, even. I wear men's shirts for the unfussy fit, the billow at my breast, the quality of the cloth. I explain this to the neighborhood wives, who are not home, from my second story porch.

The tuxedo shirt has a red wine stain on its cuff. The other shirts yellowed at the collar. When I look up solutions to stains online, women address their husband's yellowing. The wives' whites' stains are not addressed, though we women sweat, bleed, and spill; it is always his white shirt that needs attention.

I do not try any of their solutions. I stick with Borax and sunlight. Since buying Borax, laundry has been a joy. When I used it on my white linen sheets, it un-greyed them so beautifully, I wanted to make clouds of them above the bed. But I refuse to labor with lemons, bluing, vinegars, or bleach. I only have so much afternoon.

I thought I should dye them, all the same color: wine red or blood red. Red to attract a man, whose shirts I will have to put on the line after soaking in lemon and bluing, vinegar and bleach. Our line is the right length, hanging in a well-sunned, hedged yard. He watches through the white lace curtains. I squat beneath his shirts on the line, and prune, weed, sweat, bleed, spill.

Bulbancha

i am neither *of here* nor *of there*.
i am a native to nowhere.
i live at the crossroads
where my lineage was diluted,
disputed, acquired.
the land where my culture was left
to wither away like harsh whispers
tangled in spanish moss
that was once just called *moss*
that was once called something else—
something that sounded like sounds,
something i have forgotten
because i was never supposed to know it.

but still my lips struggled to form the words—
the words that have escaped Us,
so we call it whatever *they* told Us to.
it's funny how those force-fed terms
seem to have outlasted Us.
almost as if We choked on them
while they slipped further and further down tight throats,
while We forgot our words, Our names, Our stories, Our land—
like Bulbancha.

i still dig my toes into the soil of Bulbancha.
the heavy wet heat of Bulbancha
still feeds me.
the waters of Bulbancha still run murky, ruddy—
like the skin of Those who knew
Bulbancha.
but i do not call this land by its name
i call it what *they* told me to
what *they* have told Us to call it over lifetimes

while *they* erased Us
and oppressed
Those who persisted.

i look at the soft tones
of my appropriated complexion—
colonized by generations long dead—
and i wonder if there is any connection left
to the bare-chested and savagely ornate
aunties and uncles,
before savage meant anything
to any of *them*, to Us.
before We were force-fed
words and names
that no longer sounded like Our sounds.
when Bulbancha was still *this* place.

i close my eyes,
let my jaw hang slack,
and tell the Ancestors that i'm ready
to be the vessel through which They can now speak.
but my lips still only form *their* words
not the words of my Ancestors
whose silence makes me wonder
am i too much of *them* to understand?

i am neither of Them nor of *them*
i am not Theirs or *theirs*
but just as those who came before me
when they and They all intersected here,
my body will be buried in Bulbancha
and i'll become my own Ancestor.

W.C. Ramirez

Spit Test

My mouth is dry.

I'm sitting here staring at this tube that I'm supposed to spit in. It was given to me as a gift—a vial securely packaged in a box that promises to deliver my genetic profile.

But my mouth is too dry.

So I think of things that make me want to spit—pickles, sour candy, disdain, limes, disgust.

I try to conjure up the fluids needed to tell me who I am, where I came from, what I am.

Just enough saliva so when people ask *What are you?* I can rattle off a fractional lineage rooted in regions I never lived in and countries I've never visited.

But I can't get my mouth to water.

Maybe it's because I'm not hungry enough to identify the origins of my blood—maybe it's just not that important.

Perhaps my ancestors don't want me to know.

Will this knowledge really matter?

Will it matter—

how much native is embedded in my bones or where my melanin comes from?

Will it matter—

why my cheekbones are so high or why my eyes are shaped like almonds?

Why should it matter?

Will I become more or less relevant when they mail back my itemized ancestry?

This tube of spit won't tell me—

what my grandmother felt when she watched her father die of tuberculosis in the 9th Ward shack they called home.

It won't tell me—

what my eleven-year-old grandfather saw when he hopped that train from San Angelo to Chicago.

It won't tell me—

what happened to my father to make him a stranger or if he wonders what it would be like to know me.

It won't tell me—

if I'll have my mother's strength or her sadness. It won't make me more or less her daughter.

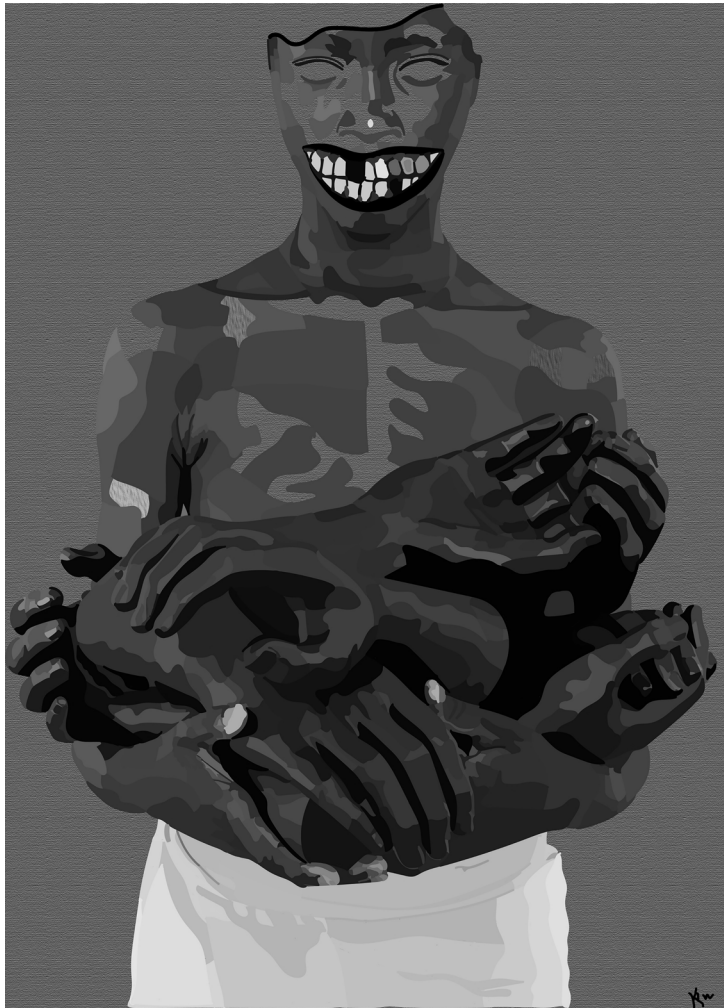
Knowing how much French or Filipino flows through me just puts me in context for the rest of the world.

She is... would be punctuated by my blood, not my character.

There isn't enough spit or tests or scientists that can put me together. I think I'm too fractured, too dismantled.

Are you Spanish? Native American? Are you Italian? Brazilian?

My mouth is too dry to answer.



Kristian Armour-Williams
“I’m Hiring Hands”
Adobe Illustrator and Adobe Photoshop on tablet

Iván Brave

Blanco Brown

for Gloria Anzaldúa

Open your eyes. Over you stands an eagle-looking priest with an obsidian knife in hand, ready to cut open your chest from throat to stomach. The rite is for a god you do not believe in, yet your hands are tied, so you better believe.

Dizzy, the rough of the sacrificial stone underneath feels clean, as you peer over your shoulder. At the foot of the pyramid’s steps, a crowd calls for blood.

*I have been given arrows and shields,
for waging war is my duty . . .*

With eyes so dry they bite, you turn up to the feathered man holding the claw-like knife. His fire eyes peer into yours, while your teeth clatter, and your body squirms. All the while, your heart pounds ice cold water, you drip sweat, nothing will save you. Those feathers flutter in the grave wind, and you don’t know but he is the son of the serpent mother, the father of your demise. And neither do you hear, nor do you comprehend the crowd below as they now chant—

*And on my expeditions, I
shall see all the lands,
I shall wait for the people and greet them . . .*

—the rhythms of a similar conquest, yours. Your body bobbles. You cannot fly. The eagle-man presses his brow, hovers the blade. You shout.

You shout again, “¡Suéltame, carajo!”

But he snaps for your throat, your breathing stops.

You are white, blanco, turning whiter, más blanco, your Adam’s apple crushed by his claw, the priest’s, but he isn’t any kind of priest you know. You notice, as you gasp and wheeze, ignoring the rough stone underneath, that the feathers are red and black, red and black,

wavering in the darkened sky, red and black. The priest bares his teeth, and wheezes with you, over you, soon to sing a song of a god's son with serpent mother—

*In all four corners and I shall give them
Food to eat and drinks to quench their thirst,
For here I shall unite all the different peoples!*

—but, again, in another language. Today you are their sacrifice and food, their god indeed. You, you see, are the serpent. The priest, in two clean strokes, cuts off each of your ears.

The crowd cheers, calls, sings for the earth, war, and birth, for the patron of midwives—Serpent Woman—dripping, dripping cartilage.

Ears gone, drums pounded, and your heart falls out of sync. *Cihua-coatl*. You don't understand. You are white, blanco, español, ensnared, without your armor, without your gold. Red and white. The priest points the tip of his knife at your throat, it is over. You are prey.

You pray: “¡Dios mío, Dios mío. . . !”

The back of your head bangs against the stone table, you want to cover the holes where your ears used to be.

But soon, the man over you, brown, marrón, brown, stands ready, prays. You close your eyes, as in a nightmare.

“Dios mío, Dios mío, ¿por qué me has abandonado?”

You widen your eyes. Only to see that over you stands, on the same day, on the same pyramid, hovering over the same sacrificial stone, a blanco man, grinning from head to toe, armed with a rifle at his shoulder, pointed at your heart. You brown, brown man. You poor, poor marrón man.

He fires. You die. The end.

“At some point, on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite bank, the split between the two mortal combatants somehow healed so that we are on both shores at once and, at once, see through serpent and eagle eyes.” — Borderlands

Alix Jason

Terlingua

How tall were you when
I dreamt of your hair?
In a fitful sleep that lent itself
to shuffling feet
and seeing you inscribed
in two white graves.
Yellow grass cannot grow on red clay
and you can't go west of here,
so slice the heels off your boots
and glue your soles to the hills
as if to cradle the grave you wrote.
The hills that shoulder the sand
that confronts you every morning.
Oh, how your weathered grooves are the same.
The mimicry could kill you.
There's no beauty in your bed tonight
Your hair will hold you close.

an excerpt from
Fanna fi Hayati: Love, Sex Work, and the Sacred

DANI

[still standing, not facing Farzin, sighs, puts hand on her forehead with closed eyes, holding her drink]

[with fierce directness] I know you've been feeling this way the whole time, even though you're only telling me now. I've felt this from you. The whole time, though you've tried to hide it. I know you.

[shakes head, turns to face him]

At least you're finally saying it. [takes long swig of drink]

I also know this is happening for you because of love. No matter how... misguided. No matter how... [chuckles to self sarcastically] patriarchal.

[sighs, looks down, takes another drink, looks back to Farzin]

It's been difficult for me too. *Harrowing, actually.* To sense that this was happening... you've felt distant ever since I started sex work. You, we [gestures back and forth]... we haven't been the same.

[grimaces and shakes head to punctuate each sentence]

You don't look at me the same way. You don't touch me in the same way.

[pauses, tears up slightly, closes eyes]

You don't even serve me tea in the same way.

[collects herself, looks back at Farzin]

And you weren't telling me about it. You haven't been honest... it's been *terrifying*.

[hands Farzin a drink]

I know you try to observe and not drink, but... perhaps now's a time that god would understand.

FARZIN

[takes drink from Dani, sips, gulps it down before speaking]

[exasperated] I know. I haven't known how to talk about this. Like I said, I... I didn't want to discourage you. I thought I could manage it on my own but I'm finding that... I... I... can't.

[pleadingly] And I don't want to feel this way. I'm trying to be supportive. I want to be okay with all this [gestures at Dani's body and then at the doorway]

[looks up at the sky, then down, covers his face in shame]

I just don't know how not to feel this way. It's like someone else, something else, is inside my body. Making me feel things even if I don't believe them.

Like it's... possessing me.

DANI

[walks back and forth some, takes another drink, turns abruptly to face Farzin]

[gestures at him with drink] So, you're envisioning things... would it help if I told you what I experience? What I get out of it?

...It might help you.

[Takes final swig, walks over, and pours herself another]

FARZIN

[wipes hands over eyes and down face in anticipation]

I don't know. I don't know if... it would be better or worse than I imagine.

DANI

[penetrative gaze] Are you willing to try?

FARZIN

[offers his glass to Dani who fills it, takes another drink]

I...think so. I hope so.

...I'm scared.

DANI

[pauses for a moment, sits down next to Farzin]

[pauses, is very deliberate in her speech] Before what I'm about to tell you, you need to know,—not just hear me, but know—that anything that happens in these sessions, even the sex, *isn't for* me.

It's service. And, I'm finding that, honestly, it's...how could I put it...
universal love. By the hour.

FARZIN

I don't understand.

DANI

What Rumi or your beloved Hafiz talk about, it's not very different from sex work. It's actually the exact same. Sex work is a practice of loving.

The clients that come to me, they're suffering. They're in pain. They ache. They ache for something they don't, or can't, have in their lives.

Simply put, they can't be their full selves, can't experience their full erotic life.

FARZIN

Hmm...[lightens slightly, takes another drink] I hadn't considered that.

DANI

Well, how could you? You were too worried about you, about you and me. For me, I have to look for and find pleasure. The pleasure I feel is not what you think. It's not what, say, you and I would have. The pleasure is more spiritual in nature.

FARZIN

But it's...it's sex...

DANI

There's sex and then there's *sex*. Sure, you can press on or touch a body in a certain spot long enough to create a sensation like pleasure. But that's not true arousal. That's not truly erotic. Not like when there is soul-love and trust involved.

FARZIN

So what you're saying is that none of it is genuinely pleasurable for you?

[takes another drink]

DANI

I'm not going to say it isn't pleasurable for me at all. It's just not in the way that you seem to fear.

The pleasure I'm speaking of isn't...physical. For the most part.
[pauses to consider next words] What I'm saying is I've come to a place where I try to allow myself to find pleasure where I can—whether that be physical or spiritual.

FARZIN

Uh huh...

DANI

Physically, it's not ever the same as if it were on my own terms. If it was truly for me. Even when someone wants me to experience pleasure, wants to please me, *even then*, my pleasure is somehow for them. Because I'm providing a service. In that case, the service of allowing them to please someone else.

But they're still using me, consuming me...

[drinks, looks down, then off into the distance]

...to feel enough. Enough in their...masculine fragility, or whatever reason they might seek to please. [laugh-scoffs] They don't usually know why, frankly.

That's not selfless service on their part. That's not genuine pleasure on my part. We are not equals, as much as we pretend to be. I'm essentially a performance artist who writes, directs, acts, and improvises—all in an hour.

FARZIN

So you're saying, for the pleasure to be genuine, it has to come from you and for you...yes?

DANI

Yes, you're starting to get it, I think. Think of giving with a full heart. And receiving the same way.

[takes a smaller, more relaxed drink, pauses]

When I am there it is service and in that service, I try to find the enjoyment I can. That's my freedom, and my healing.



Maya Pen
"Healing the Scapegoat"
Paper Mache, Textiles, Digital Painting

戴稻草头巾的玩偶

他喜欢乌鸦倾斜着慢慢靠近的飞翔
和飞临之后预言似的沉默
或者比预言包含了更多征兆的喋噪

但他的预言是空的 在春天是空的
在夏天是空的 在冬天也是空的
就像一场历经北风周折的大雪之后
高压线上的冰块和鸟巢是空的
太监脸上的虚火去掉以后
那裹尸布一样的白脸是空的
和他一起看秋的人回家之后
冬天的旷野也是空的

戴稻草头巾的玩偶

和乌鸦一块儿玩过了头 当乌鸦
急匆匆赶往别处参加另外的歌唱
他孤立着 被风渐渐撕裂
渐渐地暴露出他身体中的空
心中由一堆烂草充当着的空
以及由他的空所强调的
整个山野又荒凉又破败的空

Doll With a Straw Headscarf

He likes a crow's slant yet gradually approaching flight
And its prophesying quietude after it skims over him
Or its chattering noise containing more signs than a prophecy

Nevertheless his prediction is empty empty in spring
Empty in summer and empty in winter as well
Just like the empty chunks of ice and bird nests on power lines
After a blizzard extensively buffeted and tossed by a northern gale
Just like the empty face as white as a shroud
Of a eunuch with subdued deficient fire
Just like the empty winter wilderness
Left by the person having appreciated the autumn
Together with him and then returned home

The doll with a straw headscarf
Has frolicked too much with the crow when the crow
Rushes to another place for another chant
He stands alone lacerated gradually by a gale
Thus exposing little by little the hollowness inside his body
The emptiness represented by a mat of shabby straws
And the desolate and derelict emptiness of the entire hills and dales
Stressed by his emptiness

Translated from the Chinese by Chen Du and Xisheng Chen

1999

Almost home, this stilted frame an ersatz
Boyhood memory,
Chilled and emptied inside out—Dad's ax
Dull-bladed and hunkered below
Elm stumps out back, too big to be a shiv.
Funny how going home is a new unbelonging, the way old money looks
at a parvenu.
Granddad's shotgun leans inside the shed, wearing a straitjacket of dust.
How can I expect to draw breath in this stillness?
Is the corner-strung cobweb only the bones of a ghost, manifest ether?
Jungian psychosis would explain this lack of resolution, a Moroccan *sūq*
Kept silent. Upstairs, a sun-bleached ballcap
Limps towards its unraveling, loose tobacco
Mashed into the floorboard around it by children
Now dead ad requiem.
Opalescent threads of time spread thick on the wall,
Poised to slide floorward like ink
Quietly documenting its own passage. I make this pilgrimage like the Hajj,
Religious law carved in stone, a poorly healed umbilici.
Sin didn't look the same in this religion, though.
Thou shalt not scream except in death, or thee will get a mighty ass-whooping,
Us children were taught early, when we could still run around in the buff,
Veteran cousins clapping hands over our mouths to head off the proximate
Wallop. Still, love, like water, flowed
Xylem-routed: omnipresent and cyclic,
Yellowing only when the hours of daylight shrunk and were shed like a scab,
Zodiac constellations becoming our aurora.

Prisons

A prison of smoldering women
A prison of magnificent signatures
A prison of 2's
A prison of dirt and splendor
A prison of angry ventriloquists
A prison of honey and bebop
A prison of Latin errata
A prison of hoops and twinkles
A prison of slumbering nightgowns
A prison of cheap halos
A prison of small adjustments
A prison of d base
A prison of violent calculus
A prison of Catholic beatings
A prison of whitewashed angels
A prison of scorpions weeping for Hercules
A prison of infinite ping pong
A prison of drifting calamity
A prison of Zorro wavelengths
A prison of rodeo surgery
A prison of twilight oxide
A prison of vivid forgiveness
A prison of subconscious rainbows
A prison of ethereal tantrums
A prison of lemon suicide
A prison of illegal winks
A prison of hypothetical space
A prison of itchy ghosts
A prison of philosophical toxins
A prison of doors inside a woman
A prison of fine enjambment
A prison of events that never happened
A prison of shuddering fumes

A prison of Holy radiation
A prison of lapses into electrocution
A prison of science and fellatio
A prison of wounded baptism
A prison of flown points
A prison of voodoo wind chimes
A prison of bitch surfers
A prison of haunted teacups
A prison of mint and heroin
A prison of sly anthropologists
A prison of burning cinema
A prison of sodium games
A prison of canto junkyards
A prison of articulate drainage
A prison of jazz and roosters
A prison of wafting carnage
A prison of symmetrical terror
A prison of grumbling dames
A prison of spiritual sodomy
A prison of vinegar farewells
A prison of dunces with flares
A prison of gales and trifles
A prison of shiny imbeciles
A prison of splendid entropy
A prison of impeccable damage
A prison of dawn underwear
A prison of subliminal dancing
A prison of glittering tonnage
A prison of flash physics
A prison of ballet for keyholes
A prison of political erections
A prison of facial malpractice
A prison of augmented f's
A prison of I-Ching software
A prison of choreography for sleepwalkers
A prison of philharmonic sex offenders
A prison of doves without existence
A prison of Hollywood side effects

A prison of skybound mules
A prison of lethal astronomy
A prison of pop neurosis
A prison of seismic hookers
A prison of skulls without uncles
A prison of theft in color
A prison of divine menstruation
A prison of stormy hitchhikers
A prison of nautical arousal
A prison of scarlet velocity
A prison of poontang rebellion
A prison of viral mafia
A prison of victory and trance
A prison of crotch barbarians
A prison of unsweetened pregnancy
A prison of jugglers at supper
A prison of staggering elks with laughing sickness

Thoughts From a Letter Carrier

Metal carts rolling through the office, plastic tubs sliding on the floor, metal carts rolling through the office, scanners beeping, parcels being thrown around and fans whirling. A Clerk talking about his persimmons with a Carrier. Going outside to check our trucks and learning my catalytic converter has been stolen. The Postmaster telling us, “as you can see, there is no mail today!” My co-worker in the next case over is spitting his tobacco into the trash can that is between us. An hour or so later, I am on the street, finally alone. Me and this metal vehicle that is coated in layers of mold, dirt, and dead bugs. The first half of my route consists of a kid who likes to ride his bike and flip me off as I pass by his house; an apartment complex where a tenant shot a FedEx driver a few years ago; someone who walks around with a baseball bat for protection; an elementary school that closed in 2018; a cemetery that never has just one graveside service going on.

Placing your parcel picture perfect by your front door is not something I do. At six feet tall and living with Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome, I do not bend over to set your parcel down. Do I throw it with all my energy, of course not. I lightly drop it on the ground and keep moving. The man on Olive once told me to drop any parcels over their fence, that it was fine. The woman on Olive once asked me why I was dropping their parcels over their fence, that it was not fine.

Being a Letter Carrier and having POT syndrome is a bit of a nightmare. When I took the job, I thought the physical activity would help me manage my illness, get in a bit of exercise. I thought it would be fine and, for the most part, it is. All the lifting and bending, I have to take it slowly so my heart rate does not go up, so blood does not pool in my legs causing a pain that feels like I am dragging weights, so I do not lose my vision. I manage. The most annoying part of going to the cardiologist is them telling me to manage my condition, that there is not much they can do because my case is mild. There is a beta blocker that may or may not help my symptoms. It would more than likely make me more fatigued than I already am.

People on my route have told/asked me: You’re not a very nice mail lady; Do you want a water or a Coke; You can’t use the restroom here anymore; My neighbor got his water bill and I didn’t; I don’t know what I would do without you; Can I have a rubber band; I told your sub not to drive in my grass but he did it anyways; Do you have a change of address form; You must have had the weekend off; Why didn’t I get any mail yesterday; You don’t have to turn your truck off when you get out here, I won’t tell anyone; He’s not going to bite you; Can I borrow your cell phone; Bringing me more junk; What do you do with the ballots.

I got this job because of my dad, also a Letter Carrier. When I learned the pay started out above minimum wage, I was upset that he did not mention it sooner. I was sent to a city I had never been to before, trained with three different people on three different routes. When there was not work for me at my home office I was sent to another city, another office, another route. If you did not have a smartphone with a GPS app, you were fucked. That was in 2014 and now I am looking for another job. My POTS is not getting better and humidity is my kryptonite. I haven’t told my dad yet because I am dreading that conversation. “I know it’s frustrating but you have a good job, you do.” He’ll go on and on about how great the retirement and insurance is.

Around one o’ clock, me and my tired body are in the country club area. I am walking a lot, on the lookout for dogs and their shit, eating my fourth snack of the day, hoping the lady at 704 had the extra energy to bake me something and the lady at 720 asks if I would like a Coke or a water. There is a couple at 801 who got a “Yay! Glad to hear you’re cancer free!” postcard in the mail a few weeks ago. 1367 moved out after two trees fell into their house when Hurricane Laura hit. Every few days 451 will meet me at my truck to get the mail so I don’t have to walk up their long driveway. 903 sent in a complaint about the rut in the ground by their mailbox. 902 has a dog named Cole who will bark at me until I pet it. 607 had the police sent to their house because they put spiked bricks on the edge on their yard. 1008 hardly ever gets their mail because they leave their trash can in front of the mailbox. I have to repeatedly tell 512 that they can’t move their box off the street. The Postmaster has sent two dog letters and animal control to 1226. The couple at 1971 got neck fans after

they asked me about mine, and the couple at 1735 just got a divorce. 2101's dad was an optometrist who passed away last year. The family at 731 use to have a dog that would walk with me to a few houses. I called him Fluffy Baby. I later learned his name was Dre Cole. I miss him.



Kristian Armour-Williams

"Fat Lip & Dog"

Adobe Illustrator and Adobe Photoshop on tablet

Ian U Lockaby

O Upriver

A dog had its foot stuck in the track when the train struck
It shattered like blood and gas and fleas like confetti

A long bout of fascination
A rout of quickmalt— in the milieu, in lieu of all sense
Piled with linen bills the cash register was itself a hoax

In the scheme of things nothing in Louisiana
Came about quickly except the manmade/natural disaster

A malting hole on the walk cellar door in the wake
Balloting balls and soybeans crunching under my boots

A long bout fascination
Came a sense of both sense and the sensuous breeding iambs
And fresh acephale while my legs quiver with the house
From the passing thunder industry upriver
An ostracism an oyster unfurls

Ian U Lockaby

November Is Never

Seven people severed from subsistence climb a tree
None of them can fit Along thin edges of their own breath
they embroidered a fine lace—
red: to give impression that the blood
of dapper enemies lines their bellies and lungs The tree's
an old man bearded with champagne and elections
statue erections what americana You extinguish yourself with
every vote Who is a you— you who
gains on me me who belies some strong staggering
bellies up to a feast at the family dollar You who
there's no competing with a sentence of simpering
politicos on a mountain of smashed ESPN satellites
This sport every sport blended blood with the landscape
It's ineluctable the non-possibilities of
Election everything is pointing to the trees
saying we can't all fit up there We'd like to—we
must— It's fitting it's a ways up maybe we—
after this season— are several people already trying
They count 14 august buds with ballot in hand
torch each on a nipple or 2 touched buds
slung with sap it's warm inside
another moth-bitten democratic velveteen sweater sling
canteen of sour sips Rudder me these
ruddering ifs— anaphoric November is
never at all—

A Twitter User Posts a Photo After Ida

And in it is a pink dumpster with noon thirty light
Shining straight down on a blue tarp lying atop
A heap of branches. Black trash bags line the street

Behind the dumpster filled with cleaned out fridges.
Remnants of water puddle-line the potholes. Power
lines stand useless in the background. But here,

Here in this pink dumpster, is the body of an alligator.
Heaping tail slumped over the front of the bin and
A red hibiscus fully in bloom lying on top.

*I guess the alligator fucked around and found out.
Is this a lyric from the House of the Rising Sun?
I cannot decipher the metaphor here.*

Midnight Cuisine With the Ambien Walrus

Forsooth one must journey into the next dimension,
that den of iniquity and skulduggery known as
the “kitchen”, and battle any mendicants who impede
your progress to that land of plenty, the refrigerator.
Gather your ingredients. We like to bring an extra
wheelbarrow just in case. Prepare your island. Not
a kitchen island, a piece of land in the middle of a river
where you will not be disturbed. Start with cheese,
for all great recipes start with cheese. Did you find
sardines on your journey? Add them, though if you
didn’t, no biggie. But the hammer you found in the back
of the vegetable crisper, white and blue with species
of mold as yet unnamed by scientists—we cannot do
without it. You’ll never get that iridescent tang
from any other ingredient. You have no water, you say?
All you need to do is go down to the shore and fill
your shoe. (You’re on an island, remember?) Fistfuls
of crushed pistachios! Tomato purée! Sixteen termites
from the madrone just to the left of the deck! A pair
of spark plugs from the ‘64 Chevelle your uncle swears
he’ll finish rebuilding someday. Cut your finger
with a walnut shell and add the blood, then sprinkle
on cosmic existential horror to taste. And the best part
about it? This is a no-bake cheesecake, Sully. Pop it
in the fridge (the original fridge would be better but
the one on the island will do) to chill for two and a half
hours and serve over fresh lobster-intestine noodles
for that perfect *je ne sais quoi*. Your guests
will never know what hit ‘em.

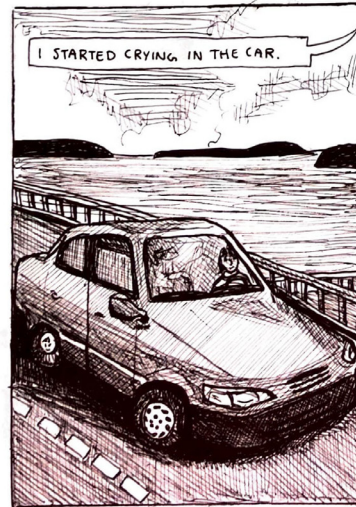
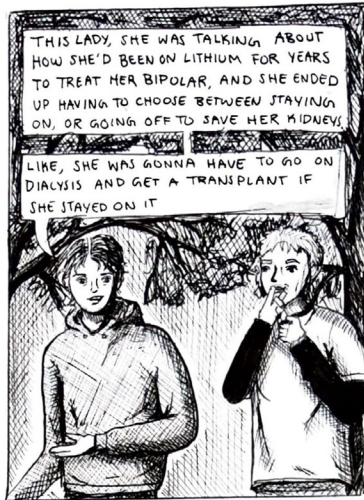
Laurence Hart

My Mother Asks Me What's on My Face

She tells me that I look sick,
tells me to go wash it off
and I realize what I've done is silly.
I don't exactly know why
what I've done is silly
because I have been taught
that makeup makes you beautiful
and that yellow is a happy color
so rubbing the fat, yellow dandelions
on the apples of my cheeks
the way I have watched
my mother apply blush
should have made me
beautiful and happy
and that is all I want to be
but my mother tells me
that I look sick and
fifteen years will pass
before I receive
a depression diagnosis.



Maya Pen
"Body Bouquet"
Paper Mache



ck

Cora Kircher

The Lament of the Broken Toe

You are on a packed subway. You step on someone's toes by accident.

Immediately, you apologize several times—but it is not enough. You follow them off the subway and ask them if you can buy them a coffee. They refuse: “It’s fine,” they say.

No it isn't.

You know they will recount this story to their loved ones—*Some asshole stepped on my toes*. They’ve probably already messaged someone with a litany of negative, miserable emojis. The horror of it all eats at you. Is this civilization?

Your reputation on the line, you follow them home. You see their address: the grey tenement on Rose-de-Lima Avenue. But just the building is not enough: you find their apartment. You use the address to deduce a name. When you have it, thankfully, Google has given you more information than you could ever imagine. You compose a song and start a YouTube profile, “Apologies to the Toe-Broken,” and sing horrible ballads under a pseudonym: “Stranger Redeemer”. You start a blog, “Build-up to the Blunder”, where you trace your missteps leading up to the toe-stepping incident:

My mind was on social media, I was thinking more about my next Twitter post than where my feet should be.

Our placement in the subway upon entry is a subtle art, requires deep focus—spatial math and etiquette are at play, seasonal energies, general mood swings, vibe mapping, breath gauging, balance fluctuating, densities ebbing and flowing at every stop.

One must centre oneself, one does not wish to be a casualty of subway society.

It was inevitably a careless shuffle that ended with my leather heel snapping onto their black shoe.

The blog delved deep into detail, but remained a cyber-anomaly. Was it reaching its destination? The desired effect? No likes from them (the victim of this heinous crime) on the YouTube page, no returned friendship on Facebook, no dialogue at all. How can you be sure your



message of regret and redemption was reaching its destination?

Courier post was the next tool: you prepare to send a parcel of toe-healing remedies. Packed to the brim with salves for feet, coconut lotions, gel toe separators, foot butter, vanilla infusions, rosemary essential oils, vegan clippers, even a few books on foot reflexology and how to read your feet. All from an Anonymous Source so they can simply know that an angel is trying to take care of them and perhaps, they can connect the dots.

As these packages send their doorbell into a frenzy, they *do* make a connection. Something is at play here. You know this of course because you have set up a telescope on a neighbouring apartment you are renting, you see them open the packages and stare out down to their entrance and wistfully reflect, “Is this that vile beast from the subway’s attempt at an apology? Couldn’t be...”

Yes, they must be thinking that! You assume. Perhaps a human-to-human apology can take place now. Before you did not want to force it but now you see them smile as they open your gifts, your kindness is finally penetrating the impossible-to-break veil of our closed society and yes forgiveness was at play! This violent stomp that had created so much ill in the world, all because your sorry felt insincere and was neglected by this poor soul who now was cured because they were smiling with foot gel separating their toes, an experience so few will know. Suddenly you remember the toe-step again. The way they averted their eyes after you apologized—unconvinced. *That sorry meant nothing*, is what they said in that moment. *This world is too callous, too fast, and too selfish for that SORRY to have meant something.* You wanted to get down on your knees and suck the toe, massage the toe (perhaps in reverse order). Prostrate yourself for the mercy of the fallen. *O!* The death of resolution was at stake.

Suddenly you see they are throwing out the foot products. Time has passed, or something has changed, who did they talk to? Who got through to them? You decide the parcels are not enough, insufficient band-aids for a bigger wound. The next step is obvious: you follow them every morning on their daily commute, the scene of the original crime, but now you extend *your* foot with its plump toes sticking out of a Birkenstock sandal bought specifically for this occasion, you stand, hoping they will pounce on it. An offering. Deliberate vindication. Revenge for them. A coordinated, staged revenge but

nevertheless: sweet revenge. You know you have to be subtle, it has to feel real for them, not staged. They need to sense the happenstance of true unintentional podiatric destruction, they need to hear your toe crack and feel the accidental pain, then and only then will the harmony in the subway universe be restored. So as you stand and hold the raised silver stability bar of the subway, you “scooch” over as close as possible to them, and if you are lucky, they will stomp. Waiting to be stomped, you repeat this exercise in the morning, and the afternoon. Placing your foot ever so close with toes ripe for the crushing, millimetres from their shoes, day-in, day-out. You wear various costumes and avoid eye contact at all costs so they won’t suspect you are a stalker. They won’t see your regularity. You want that clumsy, *we-have-all-done-it* accidental stomp! Various awkward “excuse me’s”, but no stomp, they know foot etiquette down to a T. They would never risk the security of another human soul as you had. They are perfect. Months pass. Frustration sets in. They are just too damn good. You consider severing your own toe and putting it in their pocket like a reverse form of macabre pickpocketing. You are sick. One day you finally give up, silent tears running down your cheeks in the subway, next to them and other commuters, your shoulders slump down, as they happily listen to their wireless earphones, you shake your head, disappointed in yourself, you would leave the subway and accept defeat. *Prochaine station, Beri-Uqam* sounds over the PA system, followed by a herky-jerky motion sending you flying.

You elbow their boob. They look straight into your eyes down to your soul and back again. Their face—slightly contorted, head tilted. You try to begin a second apology, one you have rehearsed for months, but nothing but a stumbling gurgle of half-words and insecure, shaken, unclear verbal vomit emerge into the ethers. *They* knew everything at that moment: the YouTube channel, the blog, and the toe gel separators. They look down at their foot, at that toe, the only toe left in the world. And they look back up at you. The lips purse up a little bit. A head shakes.

And nothing had changed.

We are all trapped in impossible cycles of regret. Help me.

conTributors' notes

L. Callon is a native of Mississippi, but has called New Orleans home for over a decade. By day, she manages a local independent bookstore, and by night, what she does is none of your business.

Leo Kang is a high school student tucked away somewhere dour in Yorkshire, England. When he grows up, he hopes to write good things that last.

Tobiah Black is a writer and documentary producer living in Los Angeles. His work has appeared in *The Molotov Cocktail* and *Points in Case*.

Hope Amico is a collage artist and letterpress printer who has been encouraging correspondence through the Keep Writing project since 2008. She recently relocated from New Orleans to Portland, Oregon. She can be contacted at hopeamico.com.

Kel Warren is a writer from New England.

Deeply rooted in New Orleans, Louisiana, **W.C. Ramirez** is a type-of-writer bred for a life below sea level. She finds inspiration in regret, observation, overheard conversations, and liminal spaces. Ramirez uses her raw, sincere voice to challenge what it means to be a Southern writer. Her writing has appeared in the 2018 edition of *Vagabonds: Anthology of the Mad Ones* and on napkins scattered throughout bars in south Louisiana.

Kristian Armour-Williams is an artist from New Orleans who lives in Brooklyn, New York. His artwork, drawn on a tablet and then edited in Photoshop, displays black figures in abstract worlds. His artistic vision calls forth mental health, togetherness, and the many struggles that come with navigating the world as a person of color.

Iván Brave lives and works in Houston, Texas as a public school educator. The power of the written word, its interpretation, and its ability to cross the line have all been themes dear to his heart. This fall he begins his doctorate in Spanish Creative Writing. Learn more at ivanbrave.com.

Alix Jason is a small chick living in New Orleans. She fluctuates between gremlin and grandma, can't seem to compose a poem on a computer, and loves to watch things rot in her kitchen.

Avery Grace (they/them) is a queer/trans sex worker poet and writer living on unceded lands of the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, otherwise known as Bend, OR, and formerly of New Orleans. Find their work in *Non-Binary: An Anthology of Gender and Identity* with Columbia University Press, and *All of Me: Stories of Love, Anger, and the Female Body* by PM Press, as well at averybraverygrace.com, and on Instagram @averybraverygrace.

Maya Pen is a Latin American artist from the Philadelphia area, based currently in New Orleans, LA. She works across various mediums, including performance art, special effects, mask-making and puppetry, theater creation, installation arts, music, creative writing, and film.

Yan An is the author of fourteen poetry books including his most famous poetry book, *Rock Arrangement*, which has won him The Sixth Lu Xun Literary Prize, one of China's top four literary prizes. He is also the Vice President of Shaanxi Writers Association, the head and Executive Editor-in-Chief of the literary journal *Yan River*. His poetry book, *A Naturalist's Manor*, translated by Chen Du and Xisheng Chen, was published by Chax Press.

Chen Du has a Master's Degree from Roswell Park Cancer Institute, SUNY at Buffalo, and another from the Chinese Academy of Sciences. A set of three poems co-translated by her and Xisheng Chen was one of six finalists in the 2020 Gabo Prize for Literature in Translation & Multilingual Texts. A set of ten poems co-translated by her and Xisheng Chen was longlisted by the 2021 John Dryden Translation Competition. Find her online at ofsea.com.

Xisheng Chen, a Chinese American, is an ESL grammarian, lexicologist, linguist, translator, and educator. His educational background includes: a BA and an MA from Fudan University, Shanghai, China. His working history includes: Adjunct Professor at the Departments of English and Social Sciences of Trine University (formerly Tri-State University), Angola, Indiana. As a translator for over three decades, he has published many translations in various fields in newspapers and journals in China and abroad.

Kendall Billig is currently based in Connecticut, pursuing a graduate degree in epidemiology. She is a recent recipient of the Keith Taylor Award for Excellence in Poetry. This is her first foray into publication.

Lenny DellaRocca is founder and co-publisher of South Florida Poetry-Journal-SoFloPoJo.

Jordan McDaniel is drowning in anxiety, dog hair, and humidity. She works for the United States Postal Service and lives in North Louisiana.

Ian U Lockaby's poems have appeared/will soon appear in *CutBank*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Posit*, *Apartment*, *Dialogist*, and elsewhere. He's the translator of *Gardens* by Chilean poet Carlos Cociña, forthcoming from Cardboard House Press, and his translations also appear in *Sink Review*, *Anomaly*, and *The Canary*. He recently completed an MFA at Louisiana State University, where he served as Editor-in-Chief and Translations Editor at *New Delta Review*. He lives in New Orleans.

Madeline Trosclair is a writer from Southeast Louisiana pursuing a Masters of English in Creative Writing at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. With an emphasis on ecopoetics, her poems have been featured in *The Madrigal*, *The Tide Rises Journal*, *Glass Mountain*, and are forthcoming in *Moss Puppy Magazine*. She is fond of bayous, cooking, and warm light.

Robert Beveridge (he/him) makes noise (xterminal.bandcamp.com) and writes poetry in Akron, OH. Recent/upcoming appearances in *London Grip*, *Sage Cigarettes*, and *Sin Fronteras*, among others.

Laurence Hart (she/her) is a bisexual dragon sitting atop a hoard of notebooks in Louisville, KY. Her work has appeared in *Clementine Zine*, *Folk Gallery*, *Melted Butter*, and *FreezeRay Poetry*. She is the author of *Disorders and Dating Apps* (Nanny Goat Press, 2021).

Cora Kircher is a self-described "little guy" who grew up in the Hudson Valley, NY and now lives in Portland, ME. They like goofing around with friends, music, horseshoe crabs, stone fruit.

A director, illustrator, and writer, having worked in the entertainment industry for over 20 years, **Felix-Etienne Rocque** is also the proud father of three, who each have all of their toes.

Alain Mercieca is a writer based in Montreal where the incident concerning the toe occurred. Still to this day, the pain and suffering lingers deep into every morning and afternoon commute.

Noelle Richard (they/them) is a queer/trans illustrator, printmaker, and filmmaker from Cleveland (Ohio), based in New Orleans. When Noelle's not drawing, they're either at a coffee shop or on a road trip, or ideally, both. To see more of their work, follow them @poofydustcloud or check out noellexrichard.com.

about THE pResS

Tilted House is a New Orleans book press that gets off on the dirty effervescence of this city's great artists. Through this outfit, we strive to cultivate a creative and communal unit from and for the city. And while the door is wide open for New Orleans' minds, it remains open for the rest of the world's. Everyone is encouraged to submit.

We publish fresh and pickled artists alike, bridging the void between professors and street poets, MFAers and outliers, locals and the world. Whether you are new to the pen or a veteran, we want to see/read your work. We encourage underserved artists to submit: BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, children, teenagers, the elderly, those with disabilities, and those outside of academia or compulsory school.

Find **submission guidelines** for the Web Magazine, *Tilted House Review*, and our quarterly art series, *Slanted Canvas*, on our website.