

# THE AGATHIST

FALL 2020

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# The Agathist

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*ISSUE #7*

*FALL 2020*

*GERMANTOWN HIGH SCHOOL  
409 CALHOUN PARKWAY*

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## Advisor's Note

MR. DICKSON

The Japanese poet Kobayashi Issa (1763-1828) wrote this observation: "In this world, we walk on the roof of hell, gazing at the flowers." Think about how true these centuries-old words are. We are surrounded by evil and beauty, destruction and creation. A "finite infinity," to steal from another poet.

No one would argue that most of the year 2020 was exceptionally weird: televised murders, global pandemics, exceedingly odd layers of our presidential election. Tiger King was one of the most popular Netflix series this past year, and I think people flocked to it in order for their own lives to seem ordinary. Yeah, life is strange right now, but check out these weirdos! We had to learn how to be in school without being in a school, how to manage being around our families more and our friends less. Loved ones died. Statistics soared. Fires raged.

Yet flowers bloomed. We got a chance to look at the clouds during the mild early days of summer. People learned to bake their own bread. Air pollution dipped. While literal breathing became a bit more risky, metaphorical breathing did become easier in places. Flowers bloomed.

Look at this issue of *The Agathist* as some of those flowers, too. The art and writing contained here deals with heavy stuff—national and personal pain, the different ways we isolate ourselves and ways we are isolated—yet even in the midst of the pain, I see hope. Creating something is a divine act, for sure, and these texts are evidence of that.

The phrase *dumpster fire* has been popularized lately as a way of describing something that is totally falling apart, a complete failure. I decline to describe 2020 as one, though. It was a fire, but maybe one that will give us warmth. Maybe it was a fire from which a phoenix will rise. Maybe 2020 is the fire that will burn away dead undergrowth whose ashes will enrich the soil and prime the flowers that we will walk among, gazing at. I hope you enjoy the bouquet in this semester's *Agathist*.

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# Geometry

LOGAN RIDDLE

I tried,  
God did I try.  
For 3 straight years I tried.  
Tried to be something I'm not.  
Fit some mold that didn't suit me.  
Though, I was never really good  
at shapes.

I wanted to be with the circles,  
the triangles, and the pentagons.  
The circles wouldn't let me have a  
slice of the pi.  
The triangles were too sharp,  
and quick witted for their own good  
The pentagons told me I was too square.  
They told me I was  
almost a square.

I fit the mold,  
but squares don't fit the circle.

No matter what they said,  
Continued pushing.  
Draining to a lonely shape  
like me. Till some  
other unnamable shapes began  
to take me in, cherish me.  
Understand me.  
I'd never felt like this before.  
They help me see that I was nothing  
like a square.



## A Fragile Man

SOPHIA GUERIERI - INK



# Are Rubber Bands Supposed to Last?

JOHN MURRY MCCULLOUGH

Are rubber bands supposed to last?  
Like quarters handed by the cashier,  
Smoothed by the rubs of thousands of fidgety fingers,  
Improbably Immortal?  
It's unlikely, all that  
"Hey, it's time to go!"  
All that stretching and twisting, pushing and  
"We're gonna be late, come on!!"  
What was I thinking?  
I'll finish you later, Tomorrow?

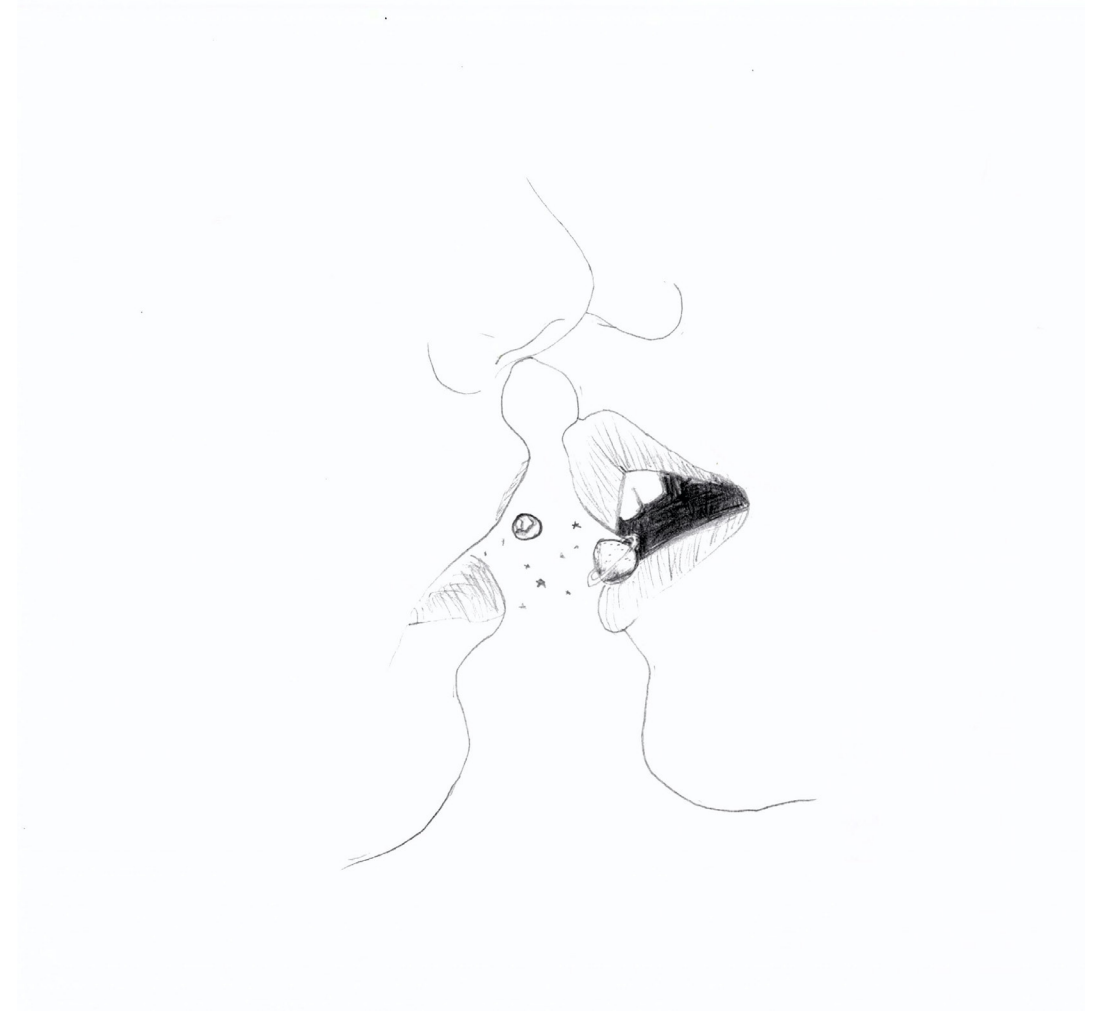
Where was I? It's been so long,  
I'm so tired  
But if I was a rubber band,  
Would I still be strong?  
The bands seem invincible  
Wrapped around a multitude of pencils.  
So I add more to the multitude, one by one,  
Till "Snap!"  
The bond is broken, and the warning of  
"Hey you're ride is here!"  
I promise I'll get back to you... sometime.  
I've joined a new club,  
And I'm trying out for that swim team after

I've been lying in bed for weeks,  
This feeling inevitable, separation from being invincible,  
Being stretched so thin.  
The breaking  
Was destined to come.  
Now I know –  
When a rubber band snaps  
It actually stretches much more than it could before,  
Deceiving me into believing  
The snap meant to make me stop  
Was the green light to accelerate harder.  
But really, once the snap happens,  
The rubber band loses its purpose  
Of holding and wrapping and containing.  
A sign of rupture, of changing forever,  
Of infinite circles ending.

## The Pebble

ERIK HERRING

A small stone,  
Weathered by the crisp flows of streams,  
Or the rush of rivers;  
On a rail it can cause unrest in the heaviest  
Machines that breathe diesel,  
Or among its brothers it can make  
Impenetrable fortresses at sea  
Gasp for air as the depths consume indiscriminately.



## I Give the World to You

DAWN MUNRO - PENCIL

## **Static Voices**

ANONYMOUS

In nothing but an empty room  
I hear the voices  
I try to block them out  
But they're louder than all my thoughts

I can hear the words they say  
But I hate the way they were said  
I think of a way to fix the broken  
But to fix it — is all part of a fallacy

Stages of continuously being aware  
It became never-ending  
Morning, Day, Evening, and Night  
Those words suddenly began to steal my time

Those voices soon betray me  
They try to steal me from my empty room  
Excessively seeking to drown them out  
Putting me in a ceaseless war with myself

Pondering constantly 'How do I mend the fractured?'  
Demanding how the endearment disappeared  
With all my endeavors to bring back the separated  
I can't retrieve the sentiment that was once there

In my mind I envision the times of contentment  
Every time the clock would tick — it would put me at ease  
Now it seems those times have vanished  
And at the ticking of a clock I'm reminded of what is lost

Struggling to put the shattered back together  
Fighting to reconnect the severed  
Why must two hearts be torn  
What causes two souls to be pulled apart

The voices overlapping one another  
They try to get me entangled  
Forced to decide between two sides of a war  
Like two magnets pulling me to each side

Why is there a chance to choose given  
Must I have to forget and be imposed to listen  
Can we just put the voices to rest  
And put an end to all the resentment

# Ballerina

AVY AKIN

The heat from the spotlight causes me to start sweating. My makeup is going to get ruined if I keep sweating. All I know is that I have perform this routine even if on the inside I am dying inside. The wooden block in my pointe shoe hits against the stage as I walk out onto the stage. I take my starting pose, and the music starts. It's so soft and sweet and all my body is wanting me to do is dance but my brain won't let me dance with a smile on my face. All I wanted to do on the stage was cry and scream and punch anything that came near me. As I kept turning, all I could do was try not to cry. The tears were trying with everything they had to push their way out of my eyes, but I knew I couldn't shed a single tear, or I would ruin the entire routine. Round and round my body kept going, my leg going in and out making the turns I was executing look like it was second nature.

I felt as though my life was circling around me and laughing in my face. *Ha ha ha, you hate this but you're too weak to leave it because you know that ballet is the only thing you have any talent in.* All I wanted was for my mind to stop terrorizing me and let me just get through this dance.

Finally, the curtain reaches the floor and I can get that fake smile off my powdered, blushed, contoured face that I worked so hard on. I go back to the dressing room and all of the other girls in the company tell me how great I did and all I can think is *y'all would break my leg if y'all could get my solo.* I change out of my leotard and tutu as fast as I could and headed back to my apartment.

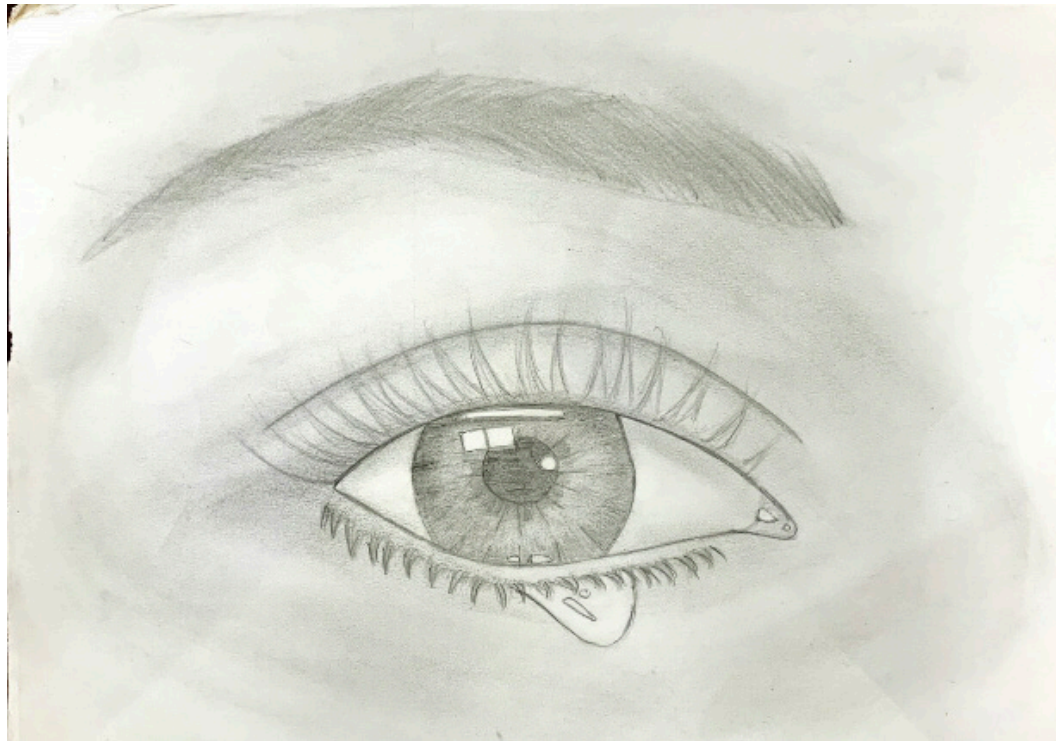
The smell of Chinese food from Mr. Chen's consumes the hallway that my apartment lies in. I grab my keys out of

my purse and open the door and my life and problems are there waiting for me. I throw my purse on the inn table and cruise into my kitchen, put my hands onto my island and slowly breathe. My legs start to carry me to my room. I see my posters on my wall and my hands start to rip them down. I rip and rip, my heart starts to pump faster and faster, sweat drips down my forehead and those tears break through.

I want it to stop. The pressure, the expectations, the weight, everything. My parents want me to keep doing ballet and pursue that as a career, my ballet company wants me to go on tour with them and continue my solo but all I want is to stop. To be able to breathe without everyone watching.

The pressure, it just won't stop.





## **Tears of Love**

CHHOUNG LIM - PENCIL

## **Farmer's Market**

SHAYLA DRZYCIMSKI

I was almost four days clean, but the lines became too enticing. I wish I could say they dance and delicately stitch together the parts that are broken. But instead they march; single file and tapering at the ends. They wore away their grounds; not looking back at what was left behind. I always think it helps, and it does for a moment, but their boots are fire on my skin. They leave behind scarring trails and sow seeds of shame into the cracks. Its just a bad habit; no cause for concern.

They've claimed me; created a farm out of their tracks. It doesn't take long for their crops to prosper, so they stay. They used to hide behind me, but they keep expanding and now long sleeves is no longer enough.

I regret letting them settle themselves and encouraging their farm but I'm theirs now; bearing the burden of looks and judgements at the farmer's market.



## Rapunzel

RYAN HARPER - COLORED PENCIL & INK

## Crooked Nostrils

MOLLY REED

I never really knew who he was,  
Or who he'd be that day.

Hollowed-out bottles.

Paper-thin lips.

Once,  
he told me I had my mother's nose,  
and that she had hated it.

But I couldn't bring myself to care,  
or stop caring altogether.

# Burnt Orange and Cerulean

GRACIA ODEN

The colors of the sky looked new. Instead of being a redundant background, it was now like a beautifully chaotic canvas. Deep oranges and fluorescent blues spilled like ink across the universe, fading to black and the stars Clarke could not see.

Clarke himself wasn't a man well-versed in color anymore, dressed in black jeans, boots, and a gloomy leather jacket. The hood now was drawn up, obscuring his eyes. Piecing together a new perspective.

A blaring horn and a long exhale.

Clarke's breath blossomed from parted lips as he stared at the lights on the skyscrapers. As he ignored the disgruntled comments and shoves from the people trying to get past his still form, all Clarke could think about was the lights.

Glass orbs with fairies inside, in all the colors of the rainbow.

He shook his head, rubbing tired eyes. Fairies weren't real. His thoughts were nothing but tired drambles. Strange, fantastical thinking of an exhausted mind, of a mind too tired to cope with reality. Clarke's fingers brushed against each other in his pocket, instead of a cool metal band. A band that would have meant love. Eternally. Forever. Gone.

Now it sat back in a shiny case, on a white cushion, Clarke's purpose for it removed.

An angry sigh and numb fingers.

Earlier in the afternoon, Clarke's anger had warmed him from the inside out. Now, however, now he was a hollow car-

tridge of a man. Just shivering from the cold. Tired in the heart. Red in the eyes. Blue in the heart. Thundercloud mind. Shot down.

A loud groan and aching knees.

Neon lights burned Clarke's retinas, imprinting themselves when he blinked, their afterimage like a lucid dream. He had never noticed these things before. Seen these things. Thought these things. Life as he knew it, routine as he knew it, had been turned upside down with one simple, complicated admission. He could stand here all night, at the corner of Fifth and Main, and nobody back home would miss him. He could already feel the cold blue sheets. The cold tile floors. The cold stove. The cold food. His own cold hands.

For what felt like the first time, Clarke looked at the buildings around him, square and stiff and tall grey metal. Huge windows pressed into their vertical walls reflected red and blue and yellow and green lights hypnotically. Taxis and cars sped by in droves, all full of yelling people, apparently not accustomed to the traffic they'd driven in for years. It was a free-for-all, even this late, for people to get across the street. Angry shouts and strings of curses were directed in Clarke's direction, but he was too busy observing this new universe.

A thin mandarin blanket had been pulled over everything, people were rosy colored as the cerulean ink seeped off the edge of the paper sky. All of this was beautiful. All of this was new. How had Clarke never seen the world like this? He didn't know but he felt new colors bloom across his skin as people's shoulders bumped into him, passed by him, ran on without a second thought.

His new bare apartment.

Clarke could paint. Clarke could hang plants. His lover had hated the dirt that plants tracked in, hated the messiness of paint, how it always used to coat Clarke's fingers. Pastel red,



lavender, baby blue all underneath his fingernails, in his eyebrows. Blood orange watercolor smeared across his eyelids. The bridge of his nose. Beautiful next to his golden eyes. She hated it and told him to stop so he stopped.

Freedom?

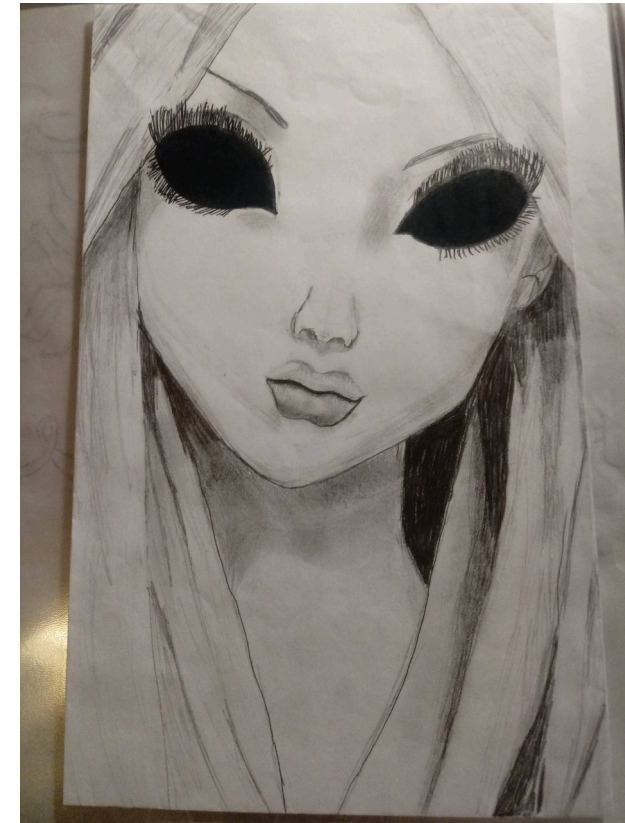
Clarke could cultivate. He could put lavender, basil, and mint on the windowsill. He could hang herbs from the corners of his room and even drape ivy on the rails of the loft. He could press daisy petals and rose petals and three-leaf clovers between glass and put it on the walls. He wouldn't have to clean up the dirt unless he felt like it. He wouldn't have to throw out the chrysanthemums when they got too large. He could throw open the windows every day and there would be nobody to complain. Nobody to yell at him about the noise. The city smells.

Fairy lights and neon nights.

Clarke was running now. Shoving though people. His breath clouded blue in the mandarin air, his aching, echoing footsteps. Everything was so achingly clear now! His eyes ached from the colors that swirled around him. His lungs ached from the fluorescent blue air. His heart ached, full of bullets and not enough blood. The weight of that blood orange watercolor already graced his eyelids, adorned the bridge of his nose once again, caressed the sides of his face, ran down his cheekbones. Gladiolus flowers sprang from the wounds inside of him, growing rapidly, rapidly, until they burst out of his skin like thunderclouds.

Bare feet on cold tile floor. Two paint cans were in front of him. Two paintbrushes. Two softly shaking hands. The two colors spread before him, swirling and mixing until they were all he could see.

Burnt orange and cerulean.



## **The Demon in Her Eyes**

RYAN HARPER - MARKER

# Medium is a Dumb Word

JOHN MURRY MCCULLOUGH

---

Medium is a dumb word.  
It was probably first written by someone  
Who did just enough to never disappoint,  
Only slightly underwhelm.  
How can medium convey  
The middle between the polar opposites of everything?  
I will concede –  
Medium has its place as a Big Gulp size  
And in kid's clothes measurements;  
Where life is in simple groups of 3s:  
small, medium, large.

Medium shouldn't be the turkey  
sandwiched between easy and hard.  
It's hard to work to get to college and get enough money  
For life to be easy.  
It's easy to do lay in bed all day, drinking that big gulp,  
Making life hard for everyone else.  
Where does medium fit in?  
What is the word for when  
The hairs on your hands are tickled,

Brushed by the joy of the fair  
As you drive past it?  
Is it the same word that almost catches you  
As you fall off your bike  
The first time the training wheels are taken off?  
Is it when  
The love people have for you  
Is finally revealed  
In the audience arriving at mother's funeral?

Maybe medium was never meant to be those things,  
Just a placeholder for the inexpressible.  
Maybe this dumb word  
Is the only medium  
To say what I only feel,  
When there are no other words,  
When small, large, easy, and hard no longer work.  
Maybe medium is an empty, cracked vessel  
Meant to catch  
The overflow of one's soul.





## Reppin'

EMMORY BRIDGES - WATERCOLOR & INK

## Sweet American Home

TAYLOR HERRON

Is this the society we live in?  
Where people only care about their opinions,  
America where we are supposed to be proud,  
More like the place we're forced to stay quiet and be held down

Nothing is better than home sweet home  
At least when home doesn't make you feel like you're on your own,  
People judged immediately by the color of their skin  
Not even given a chance to show the traits within,

Most people expect to hear the morning birds tweeting,  
While I only hear the family of another killed innocent black mans' folks weeping,  
And all people do is endless chatter,  
On how that man's life did or did not matter

As many people riot to say what's right  
Other people shoot their guns and think they won the fight,  
So this is our home?  
Sweet American Home,

No sympathy for others,  
No love for one another,  
It's just unnecessary hate from both sides  
Each filled with corrupted minds,

Is this how it's supposed to be?  
Innocent people getting beat  
Murder in the streets,  
A hopeless society is what I see

So grab your racist friend  
And grab your flag and wave it with pride until the end  
Because this is our home,  
Our sweet American home

# Independence Day, 2018

JADYN ANTHONY

Bleeding backs of black boys  
Hugging the concrete ground  
Heads bowed and eyes low,  
and a white man treating these killings like  
another comedy show

Stars and stripes forever  
*'Land of the free  
Home of the brave'*

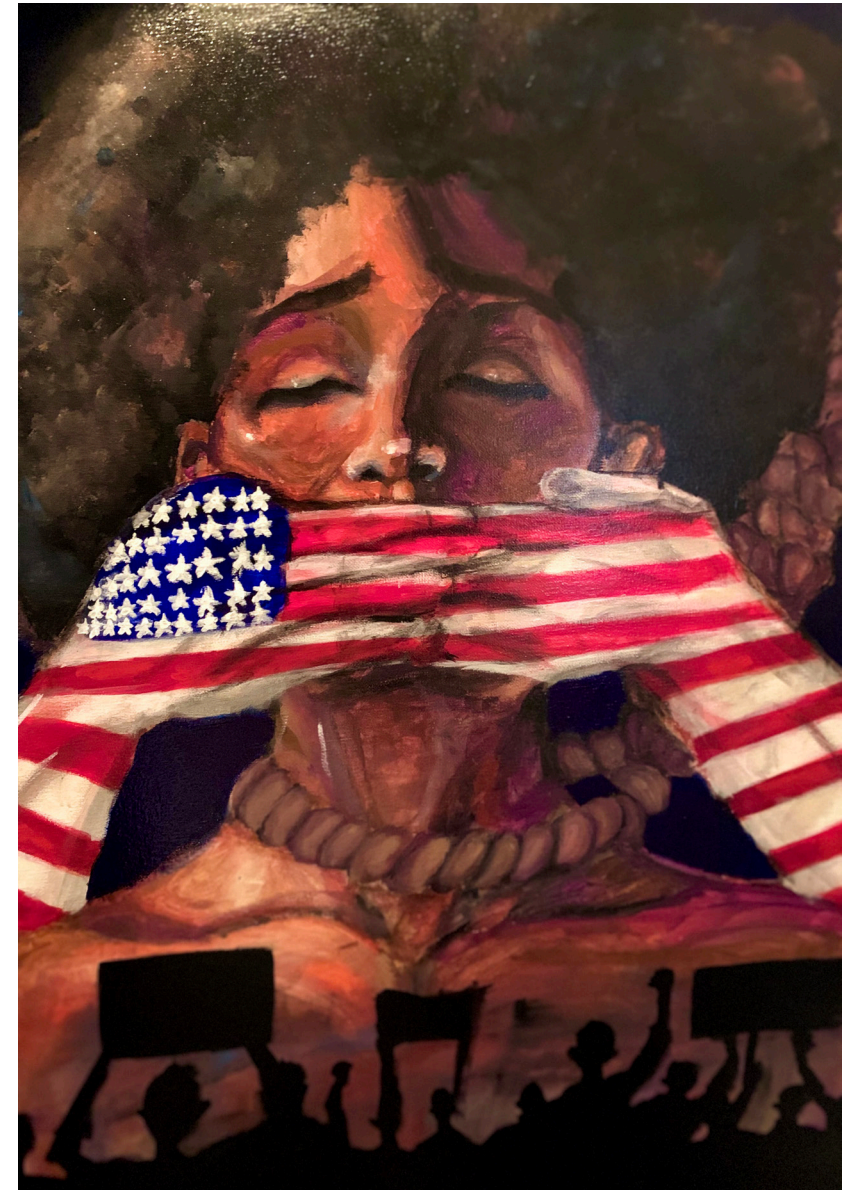
A lie we constantly repeat  
to deem true

Land of the rich, white, and powerful  
Home of the oppressed

They don't hear us when we're  
screaming

A few days later, it'll be all over the news

A white man killed me,  
got a million views



## Injustice

TAYLOR HERRON - ACRYLIC





## Old Jazz

TAYLOR HERRON - ACRYLIC

## here

EMMA ELLARD

Mom grew up in Jackson, Mississippi.  
She lived on Dairy Queen change  
between cigarette smoke couch cushions,  
went to college with grasshoppers  
and left a semester short.  
Dad lived in Kosciusko,  
dug ditches, heaved ice  
into the back of a refrigerated truck  
every steaming summer.  
Their lives were clothespinned  
to the laundry line in the yard.  
Were they scared, too,  
of being here their whole lives?

## Fall

ASHLEY LOFTIN

Swallows sink among indigo skies,  
riding, like copper bicycles  
atop the gentle summer breeze.  
The one which slowly melts-  
puddling like tricolor popsicles.

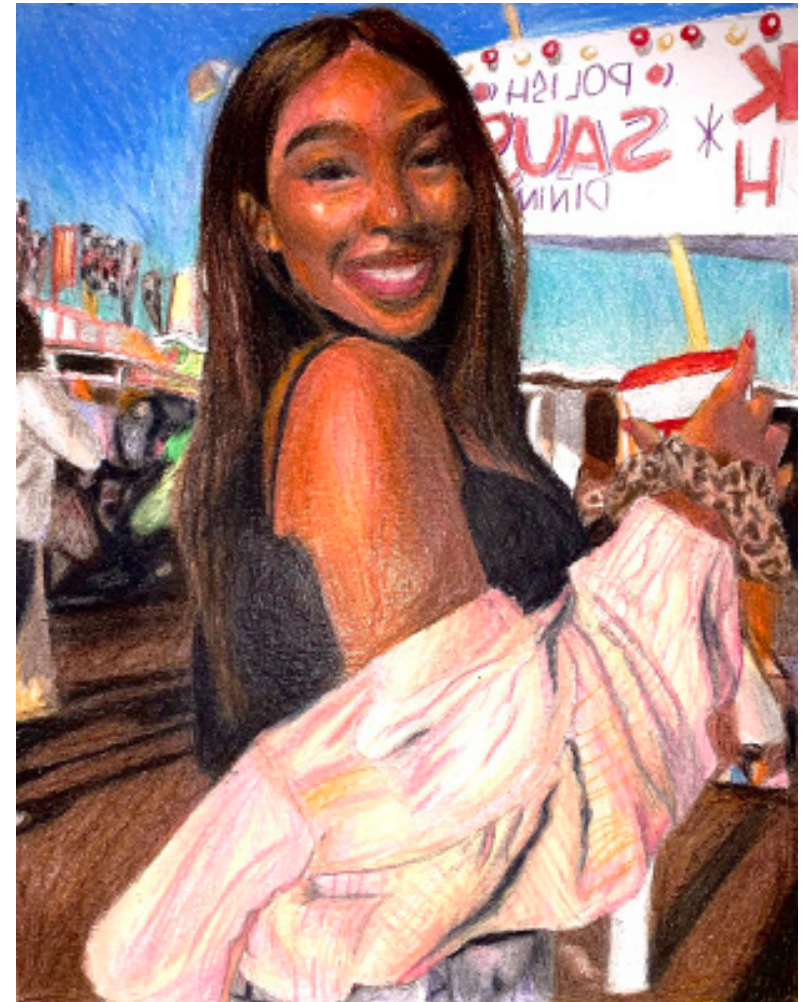
The chartreuse leaves swaying,  
above our freckled noses--  
happily turning a scarlet hue,  
reminiscent of young lovers  
--sharing their first, embarrassing kiss.

Cold yet comforting- warm;  
but foreign in a way.  
Earth bundles up, with boots  
of dark, dusty leather.  
Like women, walking, harvested patches.

Nutmeg, cinnamon, and sugar,  
swirling in overpriced coffee cups--  
pies of every flavor.  
Dwindling dirt roads, covered with  
crunchy leaves, colored-five:

The glimpse of northern cardinals,  
pumpkin-like afternoon skies,  
the glow of jack-o-lanterns,  
emerald stems, grass alike,  
and hazel; of loves eyes.

The screams of children,  
mouths filled with sugar galore.  
Costumes of terrible quality-  
witches, goblins, and ghostly ghouls,  
a wonderful sight- the  
purity of youth, something I  
forever and endlessly implore.



## Fair Days

TAYLOR HERRON - COLORED PENCIL



## Shed in a Forest of Birch

NATHAN MICHAEL SMITH

Down the old broken path  
Through a patch of old birch  
The rotten wood stands out  
Like a silver coin in a brown satchel  
The roof a misshapen triangle  
No smoke from the chimney  
Completely void of any life  
But remnants of what remains  
The rusted wheelbarrows  
The dull knives  
They remind me,  
Whenever life comes and leaves  
The shed still lives.



## Man's Best Friend

TAYLOR HERRON - OIL





## After a Shower

SYDNEY SLAUGHTER - PHOTOGRAPHY

## Rain

GUY RAYNER

Everything stops for a moment.  
Everyone stops and looks up,  
We all come together at once  
To notice what is falling.  
Then we forget what we just did,  
We all continue.  
We all go back to whatever bias we have,  
We go back to the arguments we have.  
We all forget that for but a moment,  
We came together  
No one saying a word,  
We were one.



## **Blooming Somewhere Strange**

SYDNEY SLAUGHTER - PHOTOGRAPHY

## **The Puddle**

COOPER WORD

The puddle sits, content.  
It is tiny, but it is still.  
Nature formed it, and Nature will destroy it.  
The puddle does not care.  
It does not take, it does not give.  
It swells with the rain,  
ripples with the breeze,  
And dries with the sun.  
The puddle shapes itself as Nature demands.



## Chickadee

EMMORY BRIDGES

Chickadee child,  
your boots are grass-caked  
and heavy at the soles.  
What do you find  
while your teeth are  
falling out?

Chickadee child,  
your name was misspelled  
so you clear it  
with a pink eraser.  
Gut it like a falling house;  
swing free  
against the walls  
until you can spread  
your arms out wide  
as a mussel shell  
cracked open  
with a butterknife.  
Three pearls  
spill from your gums  
and land on a pillowcase.  
You shut your eyes  
and hold the hands  
of trees and creatures  
no one else will see.



## Breakdown Bumble

SOPHIA GUERIERI - ACRYLIC



## Love in the Midst of it All

ARISA WASHINGTON - ACRYLIC

# Observations from an Outsider

GEORGIA PITCOCK

Time passes me by as  
I sit on the bench and  
watch the clouds breeze through  
The sky.  
The wind pushing them along  
To the edge of the world.

I watch.  
The trees reaching for the heavens above,  
Stretching to get closer.  
So close,  
But not close enough.

I watch as the people around me  
Go home to their families.  
The playground overflowing  
With life.  
Little kids running to their mamas  
And older kids running away.  
What are you running from?  
Is it the game of kickball?  
Or is it something else?

Maybe your mother is the one  
Standing near the swings,  
Yelling for you to get in the car,  
You're going to be late.  
Late for what?

Or, possibly, your father is the one  
Waiting for the baseball game to finish.  
He has important work to do  
Back at the office.  
He can't afford to waste time.

Their chaos fills my mind.  
Until all I can see is their lives,  
Rather than my own.  
I close my eyes, still wondering  
Where are you going?  
Should I follow you?

I run towards the horizon  
Leaving the chaos behind me.  
Watching as the trees that reached  
For the sky, pass by me.  
The thoughts in my head dissolve  
Into nothing  
As I reach the ridge.

My heart thudding against my chest  
my lungs burning  
my legs aching

And when I finally stop  
At the edge of the universe  
The world is quiet,  
Calm.  
The chaos that once surrounded me,  
Gone.

# A Step Outside

CANNON WILLIAMS

I am sent home from school on a Thursday afternoon  
With one assignment from my teacher  
Go outside and write a poem  
Simple, right?  
Having neglected it until then  
I step outside after lunch on Sunday  
Hoping to finish the assignment quick  
And move on to other things  
But, after focusing on it  
I am pulled in by nature  
And have to take a while  
To truly acknowledge its beauty  
Past the porch that I write this on  
A grassy hill descends downwards  
Giving way to a small forest  
Littered with little things I can appreciate  
The trees extend far into the sky  
Like skyscrapers in their own city  
The ground is made up of pine straw  
Slightly indented from the dozens of bikes that ride over it  
Multicolored flowers adorn the woods  
A colorful symphony of different flora  
Gentle wind blows softly from my right  
Carrying with it the sounds of the forest  
A bird chirps a high soprano note  
And a distant dog barks a rhythm of sounds  
All of this lies just beyond my house  
I don't remember that nearly enough



# Marriage Counseling

COOPER WORD - PHOTOGRAPHY