

The background of the page is an abstract composition of dark, textured shapes on the left and right, with a lighter, mottled central area. The dark shapes have irregular, organic edges, resembling ink blots or organic forms. The central area is a lighter, brownish-tan color with a grainy texture.

Signatures 2009



*signatures*



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# Letter from the Editors

*Signatures* is an interesting project to be in charge of, even as co-editors.

I, Sarai Oviedo, a third-year graphic media student, can say that it's quite rewarding to have two people at the top. It relieves the stress. I do everything Rob doesn't, and everything I forget to do, Rob does. It works, I promise.

I'm Rob Witko, a third-year software engineer, and am responsible for keeping contact with our many contributors and everything for our website. I also do most of the technical details of setting up meetings and events that Sarai creates.

This year, we debated for a good while about having a theme at all. We didn't want to influence what our peers submit in any way. Thus, after several months of shoveling concepts and snow, we found a concept that fits: *Beyond Identity*.

*Beyond Identity* seems to be something different for different generations. For our advisors, it's meant an evolution of certainties and starting new experi-

ments. For some of us students, it's been about building something larger than the individual. Rather than debate something in between, we decided to let the different ideas exist together.

Unfortunately, we can't fit everything into the print issue, but the web lets us give attention to other exceptional creative works. This year we're implementing special features on the website, including a flash application with some of this year's submissions and various other class projects throughout RIT. Visit us:

[www.rit.edu/sg/signatures](http://www.rit.edu/sg/signatures)

We hope that you'll enjoy *Signatures* 2009, the product of a team of unique and dedicated RIT students. We couldn't be happier to share the fruits of our labor with you and want to thank everyone, including our fellow peers, submitters, and staff.

*Signatures* has been published by RIT students for about twenty-five years. We search for the best works that represent the community as a whole, aiming to design a magazine that accents all works. Whether or not we succeed is ultimately up to you, our dear readers.

Sarai Oviedo & Rob Witko



## ***Lithofication***

Joy Jerome

He asks me how rocks are made, and explains to me that  
They don't have feelings so we can break them,  
With blue-green eyes that are uncharacteristic for a caramel boy  
With a white mother and a black father.  
He's only 7, but I can see the wheels turning  
And his too-big-for-his-age hands are already clutching stone.  
I watch him smash rocks with small fingers,  
Watch them chip and erode with the friction of stone against the world  
And I explain that sedimentary rocks are made from pressure,  
Layer upon layer forming underwater,  
Clay and sand and leaves and ice cementing  
In a process called lithofication,  
And I can tell he doesn't understand.  
The chunk of stone in his right hand  
Strikes the rocks at his feet  
And he crouches protectively to examine the damage.  
See, Aunt Joy, I didn't break it,  
But he's left a scar  
On the shale surface still hot from the strike,  
And he goes to throw another stone.  
Jed, I say, sedimentary rocks, rocks like this,  
They're made when water washes the  
Dirt and ice and sand and leaves out to the ocean.  
They sit at the bottom of the sea, and  
After thousands of years the layers pile up,  
And there's more I want to say as I watch his  
Skin and heart and eyes and smile  
Harden under the pressure—  
And it somehow doesn't matter anymore.





***Sea Turtle***

Blaire Moskowitz



## ***Snow Day***

Gloria Wilner

Like appropriate concert behavior  
Snow models audience silence  
Falling gravely in perfectly straight lines  
Attentive trees cannot resist its rhythm  
So with decorum some will dare  
Conducting motions with their branches  
The fir trees are best at that  
Assisted by the winds that know  
Their places too where to come in  
And where to cede a turn to skirted  
Pines and solos to adolescent twigs  
An all-day stop and start rehearsal  
Till light begins to tiptoe off  
Then as we pull the curtains closed  
We're treated to one final act  
A balancing feat of flake on flake  
No limb too small to hold them  
For the seconds they exist in  
  
Someone must have shouted  
Freeze





*Preparing for Winter*  
Megan Stewart



## ***Enumerate***

Kevin Kuchta

This bullet's name is Jeff  
The only one chambered  
In a barrel gleaming  
When you enumerate ammo  
It gives targets meaning

One hundred hands built it  
Ten thousand steps moved it  
And one finger will connect me  
In an eleven millimeter tunnel  
To my fellow man

Two people built me  
One hundred million steps moved me  
And one sliver of time will remove me  
In the space of one stride  
From the company of man

Just another violent fluid  
Flung carelessly over dirt and gravel  
Groaning under the weight  
Of kids and commanders.



## **Icebird**

Cyprian Corwin

A dream is an azure icicle  
From the cold, dark depths of night  
It's cool and relaxing at first, and then,  
It coalesces and takes flight

Still wet with the liquid from which it formed  
In the river of memories and thoughts  
It flaps its wings and ascends into view  
But elusive, a bird that won't be caught

When it hits a ray of invisible light  
From the sleeping mind-sun above  
The ray takes on a color like  
Hope or Curiosity or Love

Until finally, the entire river that surges  
In the chasm far below  
Is illuminated brilliantly  
With a multicolored glow

Not tangible, not visible,  
Not even made of light  
But something brighter that could only come  
From the sleeping mind at night.





**Raptor BBQ**  
Brian Thuringer



## *Inner Workings*

Madigan Burke

Yellow coat  
Blue paper  
Jungle

Cartoons and  
Comic strips  
Draw em

This is my  
Brain working  
Fungle

Firemen  
Police  
Call em

Watch as I  
Puke my thoughts  
Blank tree

Train of thought is  
Off the track  
Ka Boom

Foreign place  
Lots of space  
Take three

Seems it's a  
Mind attack  
No room

Never know  
What they'll say  
Ask me

Head's more like  
An airplane  
Aloof

There's not a  
Different way  
Pyro

Stop thinking  
So I go

Little elves  
Working hard  
Hi- ho

Poof.





**Offering**  
Michael Wedge





*Bench*  
*Jacob Levek*



## *Luna*

Andrew Knight

By blanket of night,  
you always join me  
at my lonesome bed,  
naked to my eye. And  
though your mood shifts  
through your monthly  
cycle, you always face  
me in bright splendor,  
never revealing your far  
dark side. By twilight,  
as I feel you beam on me,  
the passion flows, and  
by morning sunrise, you  
retire to pale repose.  
Only the sun eclipses  
your serene beauty,  
but is your realm  
not quite like his?  
Rest easy, my love.



## ***Hunting***

Ryan Burst

Excuse me,  
I just saw you on the corner  
And it just so happens  
I'm looking for a certain,  
Special kind of apartment -  
Just like you.

Not too big,  
Not too small -  
Gotta have all the right things  
In the right places -  
If you know what I mean.

Are you clean  
And accessible?  
I'm looking for a place  
Where I can park my car  
And not get jumped -  
A place that doesn't have  
Too many people  
Always going in and out.

I would prefer it  
If you had a nice landlord,  
So if I miss a payment or two  
I won't be kicked out on my ass.  
I'd also prefer  
That there was running water  
And the heating bill  
Wasn't half bad.

Do you have any openings?  
I'd like to make a down payment.  
And is there any chance  
You can call my cell phone  
Instead of the landline?  
My wife doesn't know  
I'm out apartment hunting.





***Wild is the Wind***  
Abhinit Khanna



## ***Another Fix, America***

Claire Acquilano

I am the shiny plastic politician.  
I am the chipper newscaster.  
I am the humble janitor.  
I am the junkie out back.  
I am the slick shoed drug dealer.

I am the shiny plastic politician  
with a smile made of sunshine.  
I am the chipper newscaster  
with aqua net hair, covering the election.  
I am the humble janitor  
sweeping the studio silently.  
I am the junkie out back  
twitching and illing, waiting for his dealer.  
I am the slick-shoed drug dealer,  
skimming skag for a cut of his own.

I am the shiny plastic politician  
with a smile made of sunshine  
and tracks between his toes.  
I am the chipper newscaster  
with aqua net hair, covering the election  
and crying over a draft for her final sign-off.  
I am the humble janitor  
sweeping the studio silently  
who finds a tear stained  
*"goodbye, cruel world"* in the trash.  
I am the junkie out back  
twitching and illing, waiting for his dealer

and another fix.

I am the slick-shoed drug dealer,  
skimming skag for a cut of his own,  
and getting numb in his living room.

I am the shiny plastic politician  
with a smile made of sunshine,  
tracks between his toes,  
sweating as the teleprompter blinks on.  
I am the chipper newscaster  
with aqua net hair, covering the election,  
crying over a draft for her final signoff,  
and finishing the bottle.  
I am the humble janitor,  
sweeping the studio silently,  
finding a tear stained,  
*"goodbye, cruel world,"* in the trash,  
and her body on the bathroom floor.  
I am the junkie out back,  
twitching and illing, waiting for his dealer  
and another fix,  
and another fix, and another fix...  
I am the slick-shoed drug dealer  
skimming skag for a cut of his own,  
getting numb in his living room,  
and turning on tonight's news.

I am just another fix, America.





***Love and Murder***  
Megan Stewart



## **Life**

Jane Emil

Life

Is what falls in the gaps between  
The porn features you  
Download off your high-speed Cox  
Internet, fucking your bandwidth

Brazilian sluts dildogging  
Gangbangs and twincest  
Nothing depresses you  
Like a censored pussy  
Despite your seasoned imagination

TV dinner in front of high definition  
Triple-X channels and DVD collections  
Rented from your local adult store  
One hand on the fork and  
The other working hard

Your flatmate rarely sees you  
Without your hand down your trousers  
Your Playboys are the  
Coffee table décor

The smell of your musk  
Serves as your room's built-in security system  
Your neighbors occasionally complain  
About the noises their children hear  
Through the walls during the night

This is what's expected  
From a young bachelor  
Fresh from his college years

But, girl,  
You're an 18-year old virgin.





***Broken***

Jen Beauchesne



## *Jazz Sestina*

Will Dollinger

It's the best of dives, it's the worst of dives.  
Come, walk a number  
Of blocks from Time  
Square, through all the jive and sidewalk smoke,  
This time of night, no cop on the beat.  
Neon beckoning "Josephine's, Live Jazz."

And what jazz  
It is, the trumpet flies, dives  
And teases the beat,  
Number after number  
The drums smoke.  
Slick brushes syncopate time.

In short time  
These jazz  
Cats break to smoke  
In the alley, between all these dives.  
Roll another number,  
No cop on the beat.

Chicky says "Kerouac can't be beat,  
The best of all time!  
Beating any number  
Of poets who jazz,  
Every word dives  
through fire and smoke."

"Pass me that smoke,  
Don't make me beat  
You boy," Chicky faking some punches, Ray faking some dives.  
All played in time,  
Just another jazz  
Number.

Sylvie steps out in a slinky red number  
Singing "Smoke  
Gets in Your Eyes" and "All That Jazz"  
And the beat  
Of her heart matches yours in time  
Transcending the rooftops, rising above this row of dives.





***Blind Faith***

Jessica Slover





***The Bermuda Pyramid***  
Nick Tassone



## ***Sonnet #5***

Robert Witko

With so much information, I can't pause  
To think about what I truly do know.  
Such facts and figures! And with quite good cause,  
As wisdom does your education show.  
And show! A measure of most modest claim  
That genius earns a higher rank within  
The files of those who work along their name,  
A force I'm proud to say I never was in.  
But oh, ill fortune to be a fool now,  
Blind to concern. To look at sky on fire,  
Care not the who, the why, the when, the how,  
But just to work their days, collapse, and tire.  
With all wisdom the world imparts on me,  
Much easier to seem the fool than be.





*Camilla*

Madigan Burke



## *Time Passed*

Andrew Knight

Oh, time, ticking that tock  
on a tick-tock clock.  
Were your passage not so mechanical,  
I would take you, hand-in-hand,  
and wind back to a time before.  
But even in a time  
before the engineers  
could wind those gears,  
would it make a difference?  
Trapped in the hourglass,  
the granules are too similar:  
I can scarce pick out  
the flavorful specks of salt  
from the coarse sand that covers it  
as they slip through my hands,  
scratching my fingers in passing.  
Reverse it all:  
Let all be recalled to fall back  
by turning upside-down the hourglass.  
Yet how pointless  
to retry the past.  
Would the result be any different?  
Were it all to pass a second time,  
the salt would be just as hard  
to separate from the sand.  
The granules picked out  
might be different,  
but the flavor is unchanged.  
To wash my hands of it all  
would only dissolve the goodness,  
disseminating it sourly  
amidst a rough, sandy mess  
of scratchy memories.  
Let time pass on its own;  
let them engineer gears  
for a tick-tock clock.  
Hand-in-hand, it will pass me on  
in mechanical routine,  
those hands that replace the sands.  
No going back quick,  
tick-tock, tock-tick.





*Compelling Memory #6*  
Carter Rowley



# ***The Abandoned Forest***

Amy D'Amico

There is no gauging  
your direction. The forest stands on a gorge, so you can't see  
the horizon. The sun is dim, the pines are the purple of a canyon  
standing in a faded dress.

Patches of snow dot the ground.  
I know the tree roots to hold, how to test my feet  
as each one finds another spot. I could go on taking tender steps  
longer than the light. We always did.

This year I find I have lost the ability to walk in a forest  
that offers peace in a hesitant way. I wouldn't walk past Posted signs.  
I don't have my sisters on the slope with me.  
I have not found the ceramic head

of a doll filled with pounded dirt today and there is no plastic sled  
dragging behind me on a rope.

It was an ordinary place we got to on foot.  
We left it the way it was, and turned back many times

squinting in the white gray purple, to see each other, bright life  
in that sleeping place. The pale orange needles bound to me now  
because it was just an afternoon and we lived nearby. This February I'm lost  
again and call, "Remember?" But for what?

I should tell you instead that I stand up all of a sudden in my kitchen  
looking around at what is there and I worry for the future that I must plan,  
conceive of, carry out, live inside, fill up, and in which I must earn  
something from strangers that no one ever gets—their good, specific opinion.

Maybe I want to be a tree and be cut down for paper.  
Tonight there are deer standing in the brown cords of snow-rumpled orchards  
by the gorge where my abandoned forest is. Raccoon and rabbit might stray  
to the slope and stand where we did. In the morning, grackles in the trees

Will call out their strange songs. I won't go back; won't put up photos  
in the kitchen where I cannot sit still. I am heedless! I give you every photo  
I can find of it! Look, I tell you that the pines turn purple at dusk!  
That there were other trees but pines, young saplings I held the roots of

Trying to move forward! I tell you because we are each as abandoned,  
as overlooked. Only the serious eyes of children take us in.



## **Daydreaming**

Julie Zepke

Daydreaming

catcalls echo down the halls  
as a girl struts her stuff and strikes a pose  
with a flowing skirt tickling her knees  
and dainty heels lengthening her legs

The daydreaming boy wakes up to a poke in the arm  
from a girl by his side staring him right in the eye,  
the girl from his dream?

It just didn't seem like one could be found on a campus like this,  
but yes they exist between the bricks and the books  
he'll find far more than good looks;  
with a mind full of wit and a soul of pure gold,  
despite what he's been told.

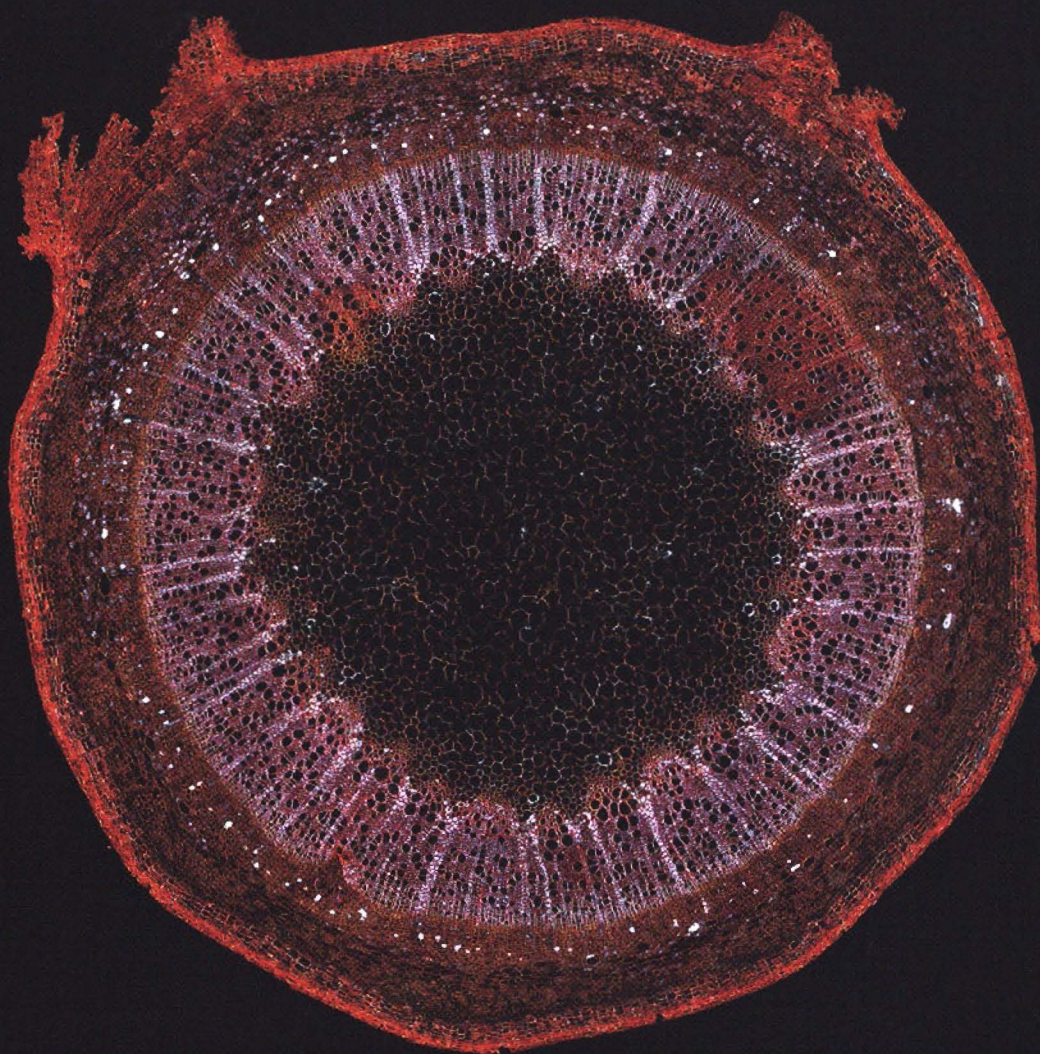
Some girls are actually quite bold  
and not afraid to show  
who they are deep within.

After all we all know if you're here  
you're a geek in some way or another.

So fear shouldn't dissuade him from a glance or advance  
toward a future female friend who is bursting to share  
a love for physics and math.

Girls like these can be found;  
Those in doubt just need to look around.





*To the Core*  
Jocelyn Cheng



The Current Extinction Rates Are  
**1000 Times**  
Higher than Before





They are among the latest trends. They are fashionable; come in a variety of colors; all the trendy celebrities wear them; they make your legs look skinny with a great pair of heels and your behind nice and round with one of those tunics they are so popularly paired with; and they are stretchy so even after one of those gut-busting meals, you don't have to discreetly unbutton or unzip anything. What's not to love about them?

"They make women look like they have horse legs," my boyfriend snifted. "Their knees are all knobby and their asses look huge."

"Leggings are okay for thin girls," I said, popping a grape into his mouth. "Chubby girls can't wear them."

"Can't? But they do! And I don't want you wearing them neither!"

"Me? You calling me fat?"

"No!" he said impatiently. "You're skinny! Too skinny! I keep telling you need to eat more! But they'll make your legs look like they belong on a draft horse!"

"I think I'd look fine." I leaned in to kiss him. He held me back. "Don't wear them!" he insisted.

"I won't, I promise!"

"Okay, gimme kiss."

I kept my promise. I didn't buy leggings even though every other girl that walked by wore them, even in the chill of winter, and I wondered how they could possibly be warm in such inadequate outfitting. And at Christmas, I positively drooled over my aunt's shiny purple leggings.

"Where did you get them?" I asked, panting with lust.

"Deb's. Great deal! Three for \$9! Get 'em when they're hot."

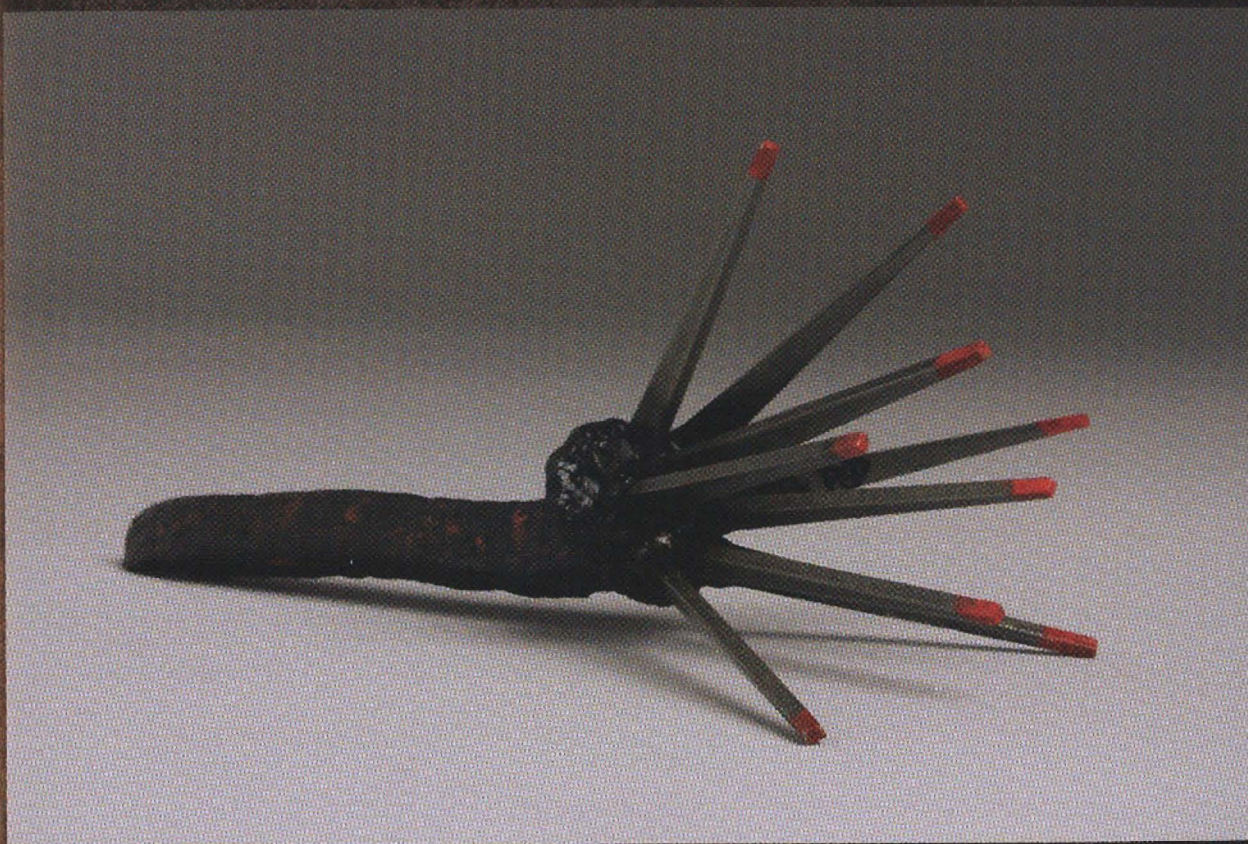
I regretted making such a grievous promise to my boyfriend. Damn him! And damn his illogical hatred for leggings. Horse legs? Surely he was insulting the whole of womenfolk and had broken more codes of feminism than I had knowledge of.

I wanted leggings, damn it! I decided not to speak to my boyfriend ever again. That lasted about three minutes before my resolve broke down and I threw myself into his arms and kissed him, apologizing for being such a terrible girlfriend. Bemused, he petted my head and told me he would always love me no matter what.

He had been blissfully watching the latest episode of CSI Miami and had no idea of my attempt to give him the silent treatment.

And so it went. Then, the week after Christmas, my always-late-for-everything-sister finally got around to handing out presents.





***Untitled Object 387***

Whiskey



## *The Sweetheart*

Amy D'Amico

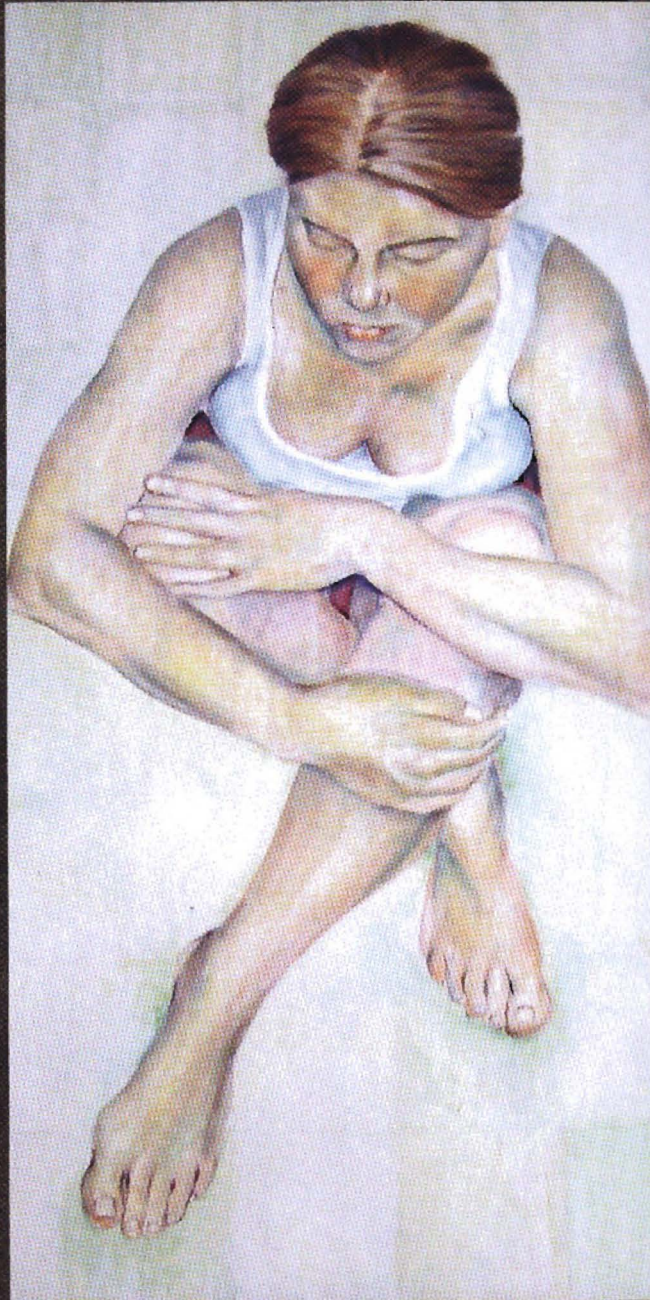
She's got sweetheart ethics.  
She will watch you with every sense  
Locked on your demeanor.  
Your back, the way it's bent a little.  
Your mouth, the way you lick your lips before you speak.  
Your fingers, tense and thin in your lap.  
She will watch, and react to you.  
She will make you feel better.  
She knows how  
From years of watching, of adjusting who she is.

In return,  
Give her everything she wants.  
Put some money in her pocket,  
Pay her rent for her and lend her your car.  
After all, she is twisted up almost in half,  
Whining a little under her breath when she catches your unhappiness  
Or even your exasperation.

She is a sweetheart like that.  
It is her whole moral system: pleasing you.  
She has developed nothing else:  
She is slothful and undisciplined.  
She is sloppy when she tries her hand at anything.  
Her cigarette ash surrounds her.  
When you aren't around her,  
All of this is crystal clear and you can't believe  
She has anything to do with you.  
But when she sits on your porch,  
Her attentiveness soothes you, and the afternoon is gone  
Over lemonade and listening  
And the easy way she makes you as big as you tell yourself  
That you must be, not because she picked you,  
Or anything lame like something to do with her,

But because you could give up a girl like her  
Just as quick as lemonade's sipped and gone.





***Self-Portrait***  
Teresa Hughes



## ***Birthright***

Mary Housel-Demanchick

I am invisible  
to you  
the filial philanthropists  
weaning, rearing, sacrificing.  
I am  
otherness by definition.  
Communication in secret, symbolic signs  
scripted by the  
collective unconscious.  
My soul is growing.  
All your names are Genesis.  
But I  
I am the gems of the queen  
dear and demanding  
the kingdom.  
I am the gold of the Alchemist  
transmuted and taking  
the inheritance.  
I am the myrrh of the Magi  
redolent and reclaiming  
the birthright.  
I am ready to exit the chifferobe.





***From the Encounter Series***

Masa Bajc



## Relief

Sean McManus

Listening to Belle and Sebastian  
On the way to undergo  
A painful procedure  
The wisdom teeth must come out  
How wise can they be?  
Coming in at all the wrong angles  
Pushing, shoving, crowding  
Scottish indie pop band  
Versus twitching nerves and pounding heart  
Not a fair fight  
*Oh, if I could make sense of it all!*

The highway driving is maddeningly slow  
I fidget in my seat  
As the drums and bass bounce  
The guitars jingle-jangle  
And my muscles tense and flex  
I grind my jaw as Stuart Murdoch sings  
*What happened to all of the feeling?*  
Arrival

My mind takes a moment  
To convince my legs to exit the car  
An ordinary office  
Beige plastic siding  
Black-shingled roof  
No hint of horror

Finally in the chair  
A clean white room with instruments  
That are decidedly not musical  
Surgical steel  
The IV drips  
And the nurse tells me

To count back from one hundred  
I don't even remember starting  
No drug-addled dreams  
No violins singing  
No pianos plodding  
No swirling colors  
No bursting flowers  
No gaudy parades  
*The beauty of the moment  
Is the beauty sadly lost  
Sadly lost*  
Awakening  
My teeth on the tray  
Everything slightly blurry  
Disoriented, stumbling along  
Tired like the beggar  
With the cold inside his bones  
My mother and the nurse steady me  
On the way to the car

Ignition  
The journey starts again  
*I put on my headphones  
And I tune out*  
Belle and Sebastian  
Pick up right where they left off  
And I hum through a mouthful of cotton  
On the way home  
Comfortably numb, my panic gone  
Vaguely warm, fuzzy, and foggy  
Gratefully distracted  
Drifting away  
On the sweet sounds





***The Poetics of Space***

Yeon Hee Choi



## ***Collarbone***

Alexandra Johnson

How attractive the play of light and shadow  
Organic ridges, a frame where your salty essence  
Might slowly trickle over your taut canvas  
Soft hollows, a reservoir to fill with  
The hot memory of your love whispers

How nicely they complement your unbuttoned shirt,  
Or frames of my hair, freshly undone  
Always drawing the eye to the best features  
A Shore where the sea of my breast  
Heaves in and out in a sensual tide

How marvelously yours overlays with mine  
The gravity of your hungry brawn, drowning  
Sounding rods echoing the beating  
Of our frantic drums  
At this early hour





**Aless**

Arthur Wang



## ***Burning Bright***

Anjali Parasnis-Samar

I looked into the snarling yellow eyes of the creature sitting before me and knew a little of what it felt like to be a primitive man, long before the time when we had guns to shoot these things and zoos to cage them. Beneath long whiskers, its lips were cleaved into a menacing smile that left no doubt about how far it was prepared to go to get what it wanted. But what did it want?

"I want fur," it told me, in a deep but distinctly feminine growl. "Everywhere."

I lowered my gaze to the paper clip I was flicking back and forth on my desk.

"That would be a difficult procedure," I said.

"I know," it said.

"This kind of surgery has been legal only for a few years, and it's never been done before over the whole body," I said.

"I know," it said.

"It would be painful, and I don't know how long it would take to heal or if it's even possible," I said.

"I know," it said.

For a few moments, the only sound was the slight rattle of the paper clip on the table. And then the creature said in a gently resonating voice, "I've heard about your research using synthetic fibers to create hair on people. Can't you adapt it to this?"

I forced myself to look it in the eyes, even though the black and orange stripes ornamenting its face distracted and disturbed me. "Yes. But this will be very expensive, you know. And there may be legal difficulties."

The eyes and mouth made a graceful gesture of dismissal. "I have money," it said. "Enough to pay you and all the lawyers I need."

That was true enough. I knew it had money, or it never would have made it into my office. And I'd known something of what it wanted, too, before it came in the door. The only real reason for this conversation was to buy me time. I hadn't decided what I wanted to do yet. Sure, it was a strange request, but there was something poetic about the Tigress. And besides, I'd gotten plenty of strange requests in my time. A woman had walked into my office one day with a baby doll and said, "Make my face look like this." I had no idea why a woman would want to look like a baby, but I'd done it and it had made her happy, or so she said.

Would this make the Tigress happy? The Tigress was no kid out trying to make a statement. It was nearly 50, an experienced and self-confident—woman. Yes, it was a woman, though it was hard for me to think of it having a gender. I tried to imagine it—her—as a mother, a daughter, a wife, a girlfriend, but I just couldn't see it. The thought of the Tigress at a parent-teacher conference made me suppress a smile, and then a shudder.

No, it was—she was—a woman, a human, and I would see her as a person. I would empathize. That was my job, and that was the only way I was going to be able to decide what I wanted to do.

The operation was well within my grasp, and would probably get me a lot of publicity, which was never a bad thing. But what if I gave the Tigress what she wanted and then she found out she didn't want it? Like that kid Cheetah Boy who'd been all over the news a few years back.



Cheetah Boy had gone to another surgeon with what he said was his innermost wish, to have fur on his face. He was something of a cult phenomenon, and he traveled everywhere with two or three buddies with spotted markings on their faces, though never as many as on his. He was the charismatic son of rich and troubled parents, and a beacon of self-expression for misunderstood youth everywhere. Charmed by his bizarre, impulsive idea, the doctor had adapted some research similar to what I was doing and figured out how to give him fur. Of course, the doctor had questioned him extensively, but in the end, Cheetah Boy had gotten his wish.

Then Cheetah Boy went home with his newly applied fur and found his girlfriend wasn't able to sleep next to him at night. She wouldn't even kiss him. He'd always liked being stared at in the street but there was something different about the stares he received now, something hostile and frightening. He found he had crossed an invisible line between weird and unacceptable. His gaggle of teenage followers began to drop off.

Eventually, even Cheetah Boy couldn't look at himself in a mirror without several different drugs in him. He'd been in and out of rehab facilities ever since. I heard the doctor had retired shortly after the operation, unable to deal with the media's attacks on his integrity.

What if I did the procedure and then the Tigris found she'd crossed the same line, and what if she didn't like it? What would that mean for me?

I took a breath but let it out without saying anything. Instead, I picked up a pen and tapped it against the pad of paper in front of me. I fixed my gaze on her pointed ears. I knew the man who had reshaped them, and I assumed she had gotten my name from him.

"Tell me about the work you've had done already," I finally said.

In response, she smiled, and purred, "I'll show you." She stood and took a few steps back, and I kicked my rolling chair away from my desk so that I could see her full body. She was wearing a skintight tiger print leotard, and she spread out her arms and lifted her chin so I could see how the orange and black tattoos on her legs, arms, and neck passed seamlessly into the striped cloth. "It was made to perfectly match the tattoos underneath," she explained. "99% of my body is tattooed." She turned slowly to show me the animatronic tail which had been surgically attached to her tailbone. She shifted her weight and the tail began to twitch.

I was used to women displaying their bodies to me with a measure of embarrassment, even reluctance, one undesirable segment at a time. A little disconcerted by her easy exhibitionism, I tapped my foot awkwardly. Seized by a moment of playfulness, perhaps, or maybe because she'd spent so many years as a performer that showing off had become instinctual, she crouched on all fours and stalked my tapping foot. Her front legs—no, her arms—stepped gracefully over each other until she was ideally positioned. Then she arched her back to bring her face closer to the ground. Her eyes locked on my black shoe in an alert, unblinking stare. I immediately stopped tapping it and laughed nervously, unsure what to do. I felt distinctly uncomfortable. Her whiskers twitched slightly, like an involuntary movement of anticipation, and she flicked an ear forward as if listening. I could see her tail swishing from side to side in concentration, and I suddenly felt unaccountably alarmed by this creature on my office floor. It was hard to remember that everything she was doing was calculated to produce an effect—it was all so seamless that it was almost as if she had been born knowing how to hunt.



Some deeply hidden instinctual terror of the predator took over and I yanked my foot back, knowing as I did it that I had just given her the signal to pounce. She lunged forward and grabbed my foot, letting out a deep guttural roar that set my heart pounding. In that moment, despite all evidence to the contrary, I believed she was a tiger. Paws—no, hands—on my feet, she snapped her triumphant face upward to look me in the eye. I knew she had seen the horror and revulsion that passed over my expression before I was able to hide it, but she did not react and I couldn't help thinking that she'd been expecting it, hoping for it. From this close, I could see tiny scars where silicone implants had been inserted into her cheeks and forehead to reshape them into a more feline facial structure. Whoever did it, did it well. Her lips were slightly parted, and underneath the upper lip, which had been split in the middle to create a triangular shape, I could see where she had replaced her canines with fangs.

We stayed like that for just a moment, me looking down at her face, trying to make medical sense of what I was seeing. Then I laughed again nervously and she smiled and resumed her seat in front of my desk. I was torn between wanting to throw her out and feeling silly for falling for her act. Rolling my chair back to its original place, I compromised by pretending it hadn't happened. My voice was almost steady as I asked, "Do the whiskers come off?"

"Oh, yes," she said, drawing out the "yes" in a satisfied hiss, "they screw into metal sockets that have been surgically implanted into my upper lip."

"And now you want fur," I said, and she nodded, even though it wasn't really a question.

The question I really wanted to ask, of course, was why? Why have you done this to yourself? The circus is dead; it's been replaced by Hol-

lywood. You can turn yourself into a Barbie or a princess, like the other women who come to my office. Why on earth would you turn yourself into a freak?

But it was not my place to judge. Human being, I reminded myself again. As long as I could determine that she was sane and that this was what she really wanted, my services were at her disposal. So instead of asking why, I asked, "Are you sure you're committed to this? It will be difficult to reverse the procedure."

She flicked her eyebrows at me in disdain. "I've been changing myself for more than twenty years. Would I be here if I weren't committed? Fur is the only thing left. It's all I need."

I cleared my throat and tried again. Thinking of Cheetah Boy's girlfriend, I said, "Do you have a husband, a boyfriend? It's just that if you do, he may find it—difficult to cope with your new appearance. Tattoos are one thing. Full body fur—"

"I've had enough boyfriends," she said, rolling the R and lingering on the S. "And enough girlfriends. It seems everyone is attracted to cats. I'm finished with all that."

"All the same," I insisted, "You may find that people will react very negatively to your choice. Are you sure you're prepared to—"

She cut me off again, and this time her voice was harsher, impatient. "I'm not Cheetah Boy, if that's what you're worried about. Do you think I'm going to hurt your reputation by going crazy? Do I seem like I would do that?"

I considered. "No. You don't. But how can I know for sure?"

"Because," she said, "I'm retiring. I've had enough of human society. I'm a bit—different



from most people." She acknowledged my slight smile but continued, "It can be fun to be around people and perform and be watched. But I've never really needed people. They only make me feel more alone. The only place I don't feel lonely is in nature."

Keeping my voice neutral, I asked, "So you're going to go live in the jungle with the other tigers, where you belong?" I tried to ask the question as if I was just curious about her plans, not trying to find out if she was delusional, but I didn't quite succeed.

She bristled, and I stopped talking, startled. I could have sworn she'd just become larger, like my daughter's cat, Popcorn, did when he was offended by something. The Tigress snapped, "You don't know me. You think I'm one of those crazy too rich women who come to your office because they think their appearance is just another thing they can buy and return and exchange until they get it just right. I don't need a community. All I need," and she stretched out the syllables in "need," "is fur."

"Don't get upset," I said, refusing to look like I could be intimidated, though her single-mindedness was beginning to wear me down. "It was just a question."

She sat back and pulled her legs up in front of her, laying her arms across her knees in a dignified and nonchalant manner. Any moment, I expected her to start licking her paws—hands, but maybe she only did that when she was alone, because she finally uncurled herself and said calmly, "I am not going to try to join a community of tigers. I have no illusions that they would accept me. I've bought a cabin in the woods—I won't tell you where, I'm not telling anyone where—and I plan to live there and provide for myself."

I believed her. And I believed she could do it. Everyone knew that The Tigress sometimes disappeared on camping trips for months at a

time, presumably sustaining herself by hunting. As she sat there practically baring her fangs it occurred to me to wonder if she used a gun or simply hunted with her claws—hands. No, I thought—claws. This was not like Cheetah Boy's situation—something about this was—well, if not right, not wrong.

"I am a tiger." The Tigress leaned forward, like she, no—like it—was going in for the kill. "You have the power to make me look like what I really am. Please. I never say please but please. Make me a tiger."

Its face was only a foot away from mine now and I couldn't look away from its bright yellow eyes. It watched me with the kind of frozen attentiveness that Popcorn sometimes bestowed on me, when I felt like that cat was trying to stare through my head into my brain. The Tigress kept its eyes fixed open until I started to blink enough for the both of us, wondering how long it had taken to perfect whatever frighteningly effective art it was practicing on me. Empathize, I thought distractedly.

"Please," it said again, and I rubbed my stinging eyes, trying to think. It was crazy, but it wasn't. Who was I to judge? This was what the creature wanted.

The yellow eyes, still burning bright, blinked once, ever so slowly, and I said finally, "Yes. Yes, I'll give you fur. Make an appointment with my secretary. We'll get started right away."

"Thank you." It smiled widely and for just a second, I saw the beauty of its fangs. I could imagine looking in the mirror and being proud to see such powerful teeth jutting out of my own mouth. Then it stood and walked toward the door. It moved with an elegance and a confidence perfected by few human beings. The last thing I glimpsed as it closed the door behind it was a lively orange tail swishing out of sight.





## ***Bathroom Venus***

Gayle Himmelstein



## **Checkmate**

Zachary Smith

She is a Queen who deserves a King  
A King who can give her what she desires  
I am a King  
But not really a King  
Not a King who can catch her traveling eye  
As she graces and frolics and loves and beholds  
As I sit here and ponder and wonder and think  
Not a step closer  
Not one step closer  
Or fear  
Or rejection  
Or a tad bit of both  
Will throw me in a place of one or another  
As she is a queen, and she is with her king  
The King with some power, awe and wealth  
She has the beauty for his satisfaction  
As I sit here and ponder and wonder and think  
She'll rule and abide and be loved by all  
By all and by me  
Especially by me  
One single chance  
Perhaps some tea  
Some tea with the likes of little old me  
Little old me  
Surely a King  
But not really a King  
For this mesmerizing Queen  
As she graces and frolics and loves and beholds  
As I sit here and ponder and wonder and think  
She is a Queen who deserves a King  
But a King who is more  
Than little old me





***Acquiescence, Untitled #3***  
Carly Miller



## **Lady**

Sarai Oviedo

I got class; I'm a lady  
My pants drag  
And I sleep with whomever  
I desire

But I got class; I'm a lady  
My hair is short  
And has yet to reach shoulder length  
I wear a men's style hat

But I have class; I am a lady  
I curl my eyelashes  
And believe in eyeliner, mascara,  
Lip liner, lipstick, eye shadow and

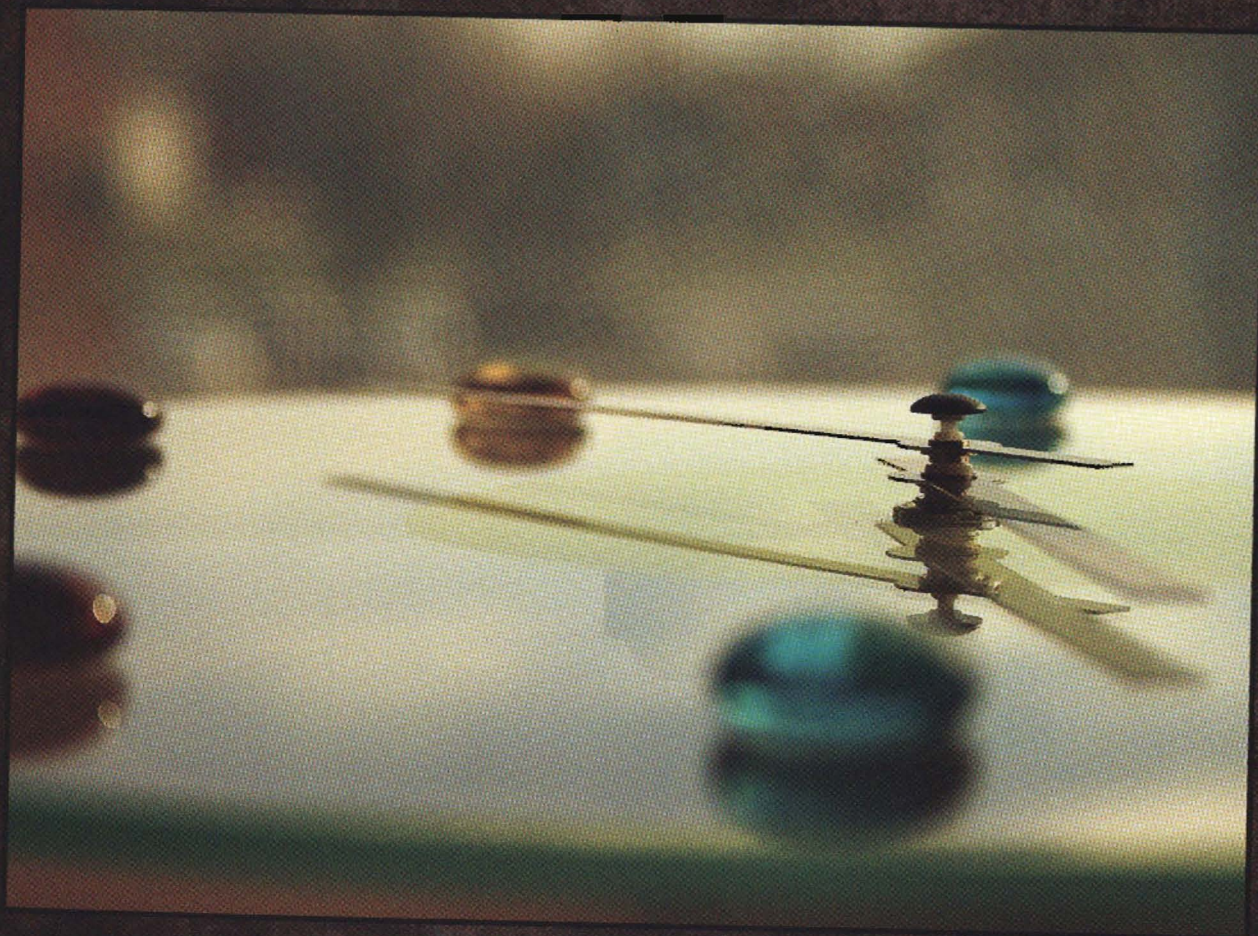
Nail polish because I am female  
And dress in distress to impress  
I wear my sleeveless shirt and tank  
With my dress pants and sneakers

I am lady, I have manners  
My tone has turned heads up  
And I dance with life  
I can be mean

But I'm a lady; I have manners  
Sweet and sincere  
I'll compliment and hug you  
No need for a *Please. Why, thank you.*

I'm a lady; I have manners  
I'll count the nickels to pay bills  
And believe in helping others





**1:30**

Francine Sorrentino



## Tea

Joi Ong

I drank it quietly by your side  
Never did I complain  
Of the loose ends of your sweater  
And the shoes so tightly laced  
Chamomile so sweet  
Grey, dark, and bitter  
Ceylon of tropical reefs  
Prince of Oriental flavors  
Words are uttered with no sense  
The drum dies in mechanical speakers  
You mutely speak of a princess again-  
The one you consume on red platters  
Sharing, I talk like photographs,  
In a world lacking absence  
I change the topic to politics  
And still you do not listen  
I became your set in the distance  
Farther from where you stand  
Forgotten like your biscuit's crumbs,  
An insignificant victim of chance  
Your thoughts trek closer to the cat  
Grinning at you so coyly  
Deeper towards the tempting bird trap

And here I remain,  
Drinking quietly.



## ***The Salesman***

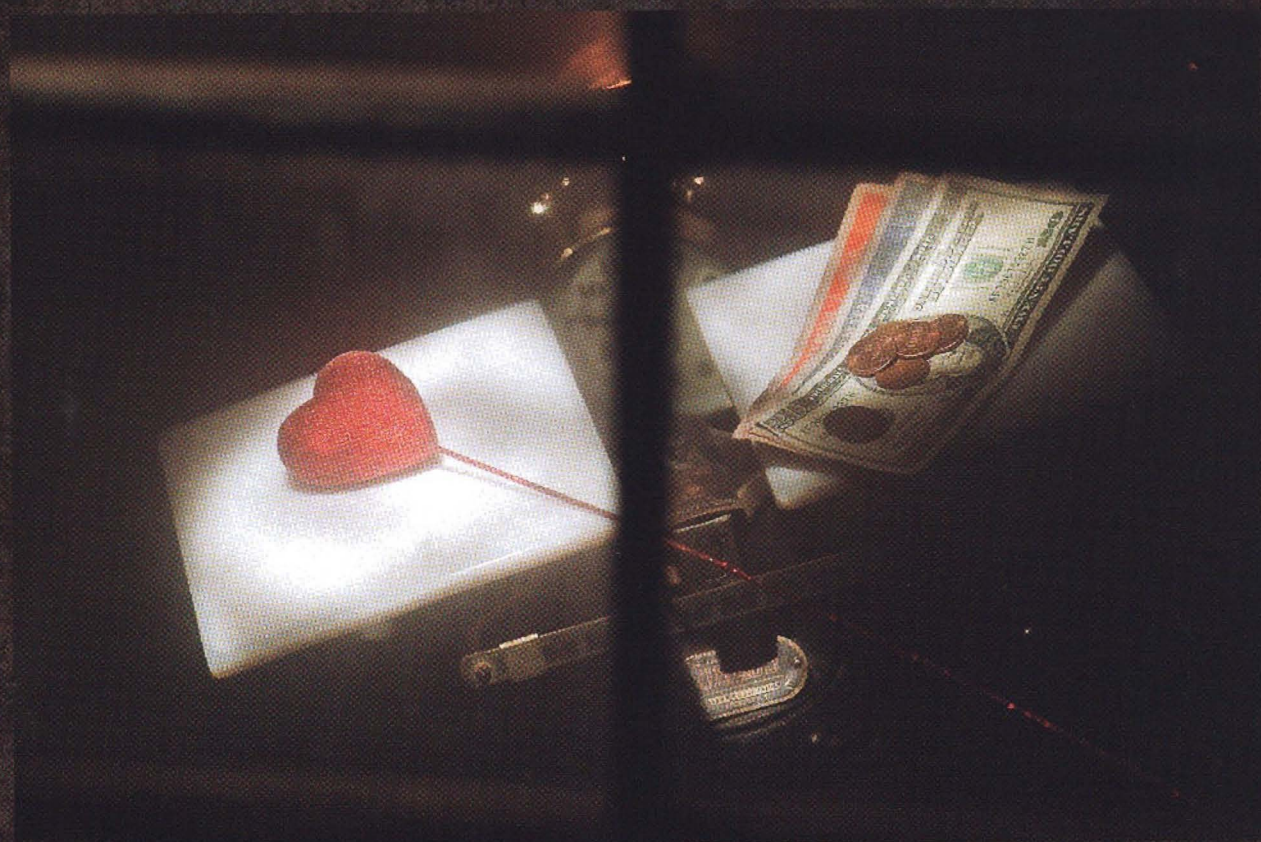
Andrew Rutkove

Her mother lays out fresh fabricated fashion  
For her fifteen year old daughter Francis  
Who today finally blossomed out of her training bra  
Victoria sure did have a secret for that gal  
A womb full of laxatives and hair full of pins  
Oh, how those pricks stung!

That bratty bitch spends her afternoons under branches  
Her part-time partner is late for his shift today  
Will I be counting freckles this morning?  
Better stick to triads or perfect squares  
“Two packs of spearmint and a kitty litter scooper please!”  
I’m afraid I’m just a size too small

Rinse, lather, repeat; wipe the grin from your teeth  
Do my toenails scare you and your little friend?  
Boy! Do my arches hurt tonight!  
I’d hate to leave you with only three hours of sleep and your rocking horse  
Jesus! You’re the queen of candles  
And only a few bulbs short of a full Christmas tree





## *Scale of Importance*

Jordan Bell





HEY! THAT IS A SERIOUSLY  
UNFAIR GENERALIZATION,  
DUDE!



## Issues

Kory Merritt



## ***The Veteran in the Living Room, 4 am***

Noelle Evans

It wasn't until I closed my eyes I felt how painful it was to watch the explosions.  
My eyes burned under my lids and I could still see it through them—so it was all,  
everything. Reddened by the capillaries under my skin.

Which makes me think of blood pumping  
which makes me think of life and  
I am seeing the explosion and I am  
twenty years old and you are  
on the ground 30, 40, 55 feet away  
because you are in pieces and I can't fix you

- \* because you are unrecognizable.
- \* because there is not enough blood to fill you up.
- \* because your heart and brain are both carbonized.

And I am sorry.

I am 57, tired, overweight  
and my eyes are burning.





**Cow**

Gayle Himmelstein



## ***For Clyde: A Dot's Last Will and Testament***

Ryan Burst

Hello  
My name is Dot  
Dot #46 to be exact  
And among all other things  
I – do not want – to die

I cannot move, you see  
I'm stuck here  
In a long corridor  
With others like me  
(But only in looks and peril)  
For I dream

If ever a dot dared to dream  
Of days destined  
And duties not done  
It is I

Oh what I could do!  
To be a dot on the cheek  
Of a red-haired boy  
Or a spot on the shoe  
Of a salsa-dancing beauty!

We'd tip-tap  
And drag back  
Sliding along to the  
*Échale salsita*  
They'd say,  
"That Dot has class"

But, here I am, stuck  
Dreading the day when yellow doom  
Rounds the corner, chompers chomping  
Shrieking the reaper's call  
Of "Wucka-wucka-wucka"





*Pigcada*

Lee Fitzgerald



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R·I·T



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