



Dear Reader,

When we envisioned this issue, we didn't anticipate the global chaos that would make an untimely entrance into our everyday lives; we never expected the fear and anxiety surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic; and never in our wildest dreams did we expect to celebrate our enriching community of artists, writers, and musicians from such a distance. Nonetheless, while compiling our first fully online edition of NOTA (None of the Above), we came to the realization that despite the fear of the unknown, despite our distance from one another, and the uncertainty of the future and what it holds, we had all pieced together something wonderful in the middle of a terrifying time in our lives. And that, dear reader, is worth celebrating. We are thankful for the safety of our team, the staff and students typically responsible for printing each edition at the University of Wisconsin-Stout, and we hope for the safety of our readers by presenting this issue online.

Featuring some of the best artwork, poetry and prose, and music from students of the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, this issue of NOTA informs us of much more than the talent of our student body; it informs us that we are stronger together, even when we are apart. We are proud to present the Spring 2020 edition of NOTA, the only award-winning student literary and fine arts publication of the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. We are honored to continue NOTA's tradition of artistic excellence for the 51st consecutive year.

We are grateful for the Student Senate Finance Commission and Student Senate for their continued support of NOTA, as well as for our faculty advisors who work tirelessly to support us. Most importantly, we are, at our core, indebted to the dozens of students who volunteer their time to serve on our selection committees, the hundreds of students who submit their work, and the thousands of readers who pick up our publication each semester. Without your dedication, NOTA would not exist.

Thank you, reader, for your devotion to the arts.

NOTA

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## **Grounded**

*Will Seward*

Taken near the base of Mount Esja, Iceland.  
Black & white photograph, 12" x 12"

# Half-love Hiccups and Burnt Sweet Potatoes

*Rian Drexler*

I want you to kiss me with mint leaves  
watering from my atmospheric concoction

I want you to take me to a half-eroded street  
Pad Thai in a dim restaurant coating my tongue

I want you to love me when the potatoes  
your hands warm

I want you to yell at me when we are collecting  
but when we get back to the world

I want you to touch me with flour on your skin  
white but never staining it in your

I want you to be crisp on my wrists but  
they remind me of starchy pasta-water

I want you to taste my mom's cheesecake  
nice things too delicious for my

I want you in my apartment baking Brussel sprouts  
at something you can't quite put your finger on

I want you to press me in aromas  
squeezing me dry forgetting my love

in your throat  
of garden herbs and tree fruits

corner to eat  
with salty lust

are seeping in the oven  
and fingers gentle

blackberries in the woods  
you are silent

painting my jaw  
misplaced desire

never my veins  
not to be tasted

and tell me  
fleeting movements

and being angry  
please put it on me

of sour limes  
is in the zest

I want you to imagine me  
who cooks you buttery salmon on the nights

I want you to dedicate several months of your life  
never getting it right not knowing it's me

I want you kiss me on my forehead the moment  
a perfectly ripe avocado

I want you to compost my banana peels  
and I am kissing a girl

as someone else  
you can't sleep

to my favorite recipe  
you can't get

I slice open  
in the morning light

when the flies buzz  
next to your favorite bakery



## **Lifelong**

*Daniel Reich*

A sermon is sustenance if your tongue is a snake. I pin my hands up every night before I fall asleep. There are two stars and then many more. Enough of splitting seas, tell me when you can push me far enough to find a door that has no handle. Take the form of a crystal and my neck is your hammock. I am willing to drink anything, as long as I wipe my lips with my forearms afterward. I found a few rotten potatoes in the back of the pantry, all rooted where they see nothing. It can be all dark, and still we feel for each other.

A boy is a servant when the snake comes out to play. My hands have so many uses. I shed my armor every night. There is not enough money to fill my gas tank. Split my thighs where they carve a forest out. This heat is enough to burn the whole house down, melt glass into spit. Don't fear the jewels that are on the dresser; I'm just waiting. Wine burns my throat but so does water. I can't even lift the glass anymore. I keep walking upon dead birds, each one bleaker than the next. I can't find satisfaction without using my mouth.



**Untitled: Electric Green**

*Jake Taylor*



## **Untitled: Electric Green**

*Jake Taylor*

This piece is part of a series based on the relationship of ceramic work and macro photographs that isolate intimate moments formed within the firing process. I have always been captivated by the complexity of ceramic glazes. In this body of work, I explore new perspectives with three-dimensional ceramic forms. By studying their surfaces and viewing them as a two-dimensional composition, a new dialogue is sparked between each piece and its viewer. Each piece holds thousands of individual moments of spontaneity and expression hidden within its surface. As a whole series, it allows the beautiful, fun, and spontaneous nature of glazes to shine for each of the individuals in the group. Allowing this opportunity for you to engage in a fresh and intimate dialogue fosters a further appreciation for the unexpected and beautiful nature of ceramic glazes.



## **Suspended Droplet**

*Will Seward*

Taken near the summit of Mount Esja, Iceland.  
Pink floral photograph, 12" x 16"



**Jessica**

*Kala Rehberger*



## **Jessica**

*Kala Rehberger*

This piece revolves around the idea of blending the unconscious mind with the conscious mind. The shapes and forms of the being are somewhat familiar, yet foreign.

# **Eruption, 2019**

*Anna Kroll*

That summer your grandmother read  
my palms, she said planets would fall and break  
my neck. She said my gardens would roll  
with weeds, but I was too busy laughing  
at your pants distorted in funhouse mirrors,  
blackberries bursting, dribbling down  
our chins, smoking cigars on fire escapes  
with hazy minds accompanied by tongues  
coated in gin, pupils of neon moons,  
overalls faded by dusty sun  
in choking humidity, me and you  
sweating on a bench, chartering landscapes  
on my thighs. She said I'd have to hold back  
an ocean with only my fingertips.

An ocean with only my fingertips,  
I heard the teakettle whistling outside  
my door, but it didn't sound like a tsunami.  
Vesuvius ash clogged the alleyways;  
you flicked your cigarette down toward  
my open mouth, Pompeii stirring in my throat.  
Some people aren't who they say they are.  
I perfected the delicate art of cursing  
out the car window, lips hanging  
over the edge of the glass, cracked  
and I wish I would have painted the word "lie"  
in a sunny yellow, plastered on my palms.  
"Do you have love for things that hurt you, dear?"



## **Untitled**

*Haley Asuma*

For this painting, I used acrylic paint on canvas. I tried to make this painting a more abstract and gloomy version of Edward Hopper's "Lighthouse Hill." I also tried to use the same four colors throughout the piece.





**Untitled: Brown Loopy Piece**

*Jake Taylor*



**Untitled:  
Brown Loopy Piece**

*Jake Taylor*

This sculpture, created from hollow thrown porcelain donuts, derives its three-dimensional expression from two-dimensional Persian text. Breaking down written language into its symbolic form helps foster a new awakening for these symbols into a three-dimensional space. My goal is to use this to grow our appreciation for the simplicity of complex written language and show how interregnal it is to our daily lives.

## **What You Do with Books is Up to You**

*Julia Kaeding*

To some bibliophiles, dog-eared books are sacrilege, pristine, polished hardcovers, black ink of pens graphite of pencils manuscript notes across margins would disgrace the printed pages. Dust jackets firmly folded along hard edges of covers, never to be removed. Arranged neatly with bindings kissing the precipice of bookshelves, but no love soaks the pages, books seemingly unread, unmoved, unmoving, but readers who respect books violate the paper with scribbles and lines and pen and pencil until corners are folded and smooth edges of pages hold rips of frenzied flipping to reach the end, when covers are closed, the book set down, readers can begin to breathe again, a vanilla scent of well-worn books piled and stacked and shelved and scattered, comforting the weary.



## **Untitled**

*Haley Asuma*

For this painting, I used acrylic paint on canvas. I wanted to practice landscape painting and chose to use warmer colors. A desert scene worked well for this, and I appreciated the aesthetic cactuses have and wanted to show that in this piece.

# **It is Not Wise to Kill in the Depths of Winter**

*Daniel Reich*

for your boot would show in the fallen snow.  
The blood would trickle from your hand, little  
red rhinestones on the weather's white tile.  
Nothing is as perfect as the knife before it sinks.  
Oh, and the snow crunches, how unfortunate that is,  
that sound precedes action sometimes.  
Although, this is common knowledge.  
Just don't kill a man in winter. Don't think about  
how much your hands weigh. Don't tend to the  
gardens in your eyes. Or how many eyes  
gorge on that fresh face of yours. I'm not thinking  
about blond hair or baggy jeans. I'm not thinking  
about the rituals I forge into fantasy.  
I'm not thinking about wringing my hands out  
over a bloated bathtub. Nothing would appear.  
My throat is suddenly quite dry.  
Was that the oven I just heard? Or the sky?

# **Kyrkogrim**

*Charlotte Gutzmer*

I.

The first bucket crumples my lungs.  
Black soil on white wool: hooves  
tied, burnt by rope and the cold of  
earth

bleeding into my eyes. Teeth clenched  
uselessly. Each breath tastes like death.  
Each is more shallow than the next. I sink  
deeper.

My cries. My screams. Men speak  
of a lamb's innocence and still slaughter  
for a taste of their flesh. My tongue  
is gritty

with soil. Each bucket of earth crushes  
me, stone bricks against my chest, eyelashes  
tangled together, ribs, legs, spine, and skull broken.

The priest's voice is a rock scraping  
against the altar I sleep below. How dare you  
ask me to protect you when your weight is  
the heaviest burden of them all?

II.

The children whisper about me at night:  
"The kyrkogrim haunts the halls," they say.  
They fear he who holds a still-beating heart  
in cracked and bloody hooves.

Harbinger, guardian, phantom, warning,  
wandering through stone passageways and  
staring from jagged clock towers. Carrying  
a heart is nothing like wearing it on your sleeve.

It pulses hollowly, heavily—to the beat of  
church hymns and yearning.

## **Everyday Tasks**

*Cassandra Hampshire*

i'm tired of running my hands  
through cold water,  
hunching my back,  
elbows on the sink,  
watching the thick, un-lathered soap  
drip between my numb fingers,  
waiting for the water to turn warm,  
scorch the roughness of my hands—  
let myself be done with it.

for a moment,  
they'll turn red. they'll go raw—  
a better feeling than the cold.  
time has a way of feeling  
infinitely like nothing  
when waiting for things to change.

peer into the eyes in the mirror.  
they're someone else's,  
colorless.  
they are grey against the mildew  
white of the plaster walls.  
it all blends together if you  
stare long enough.

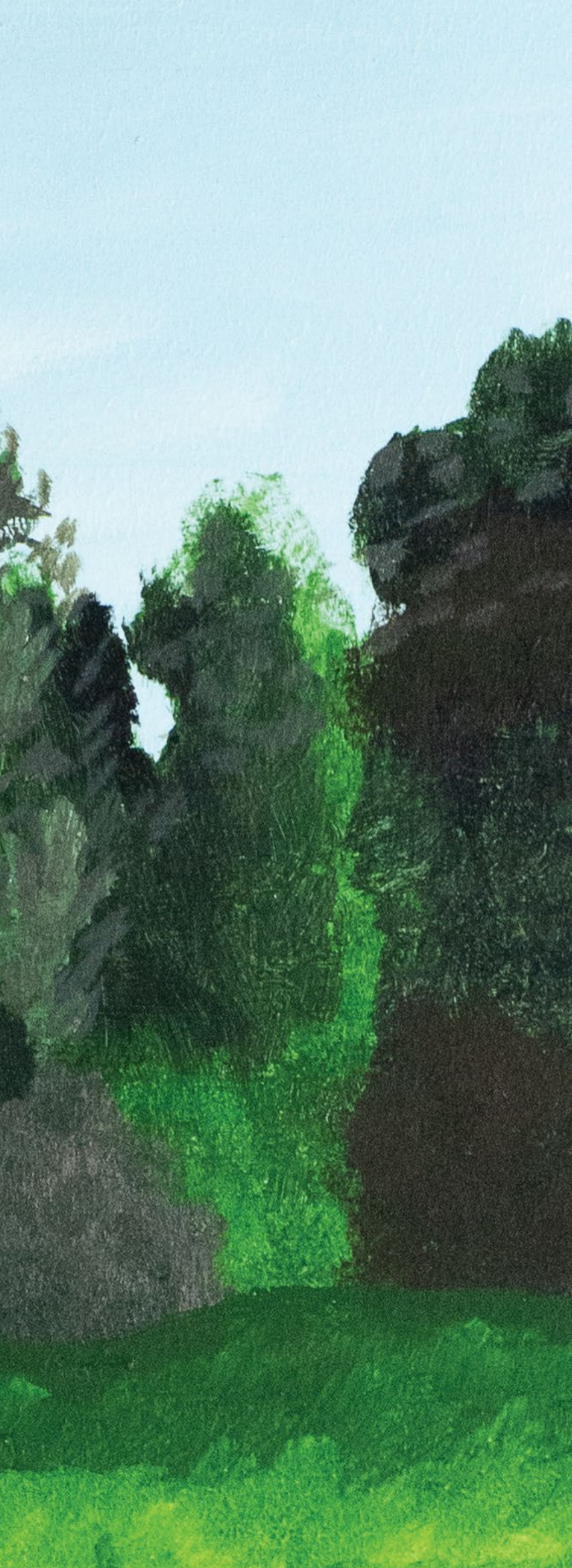
there is no happiness here  
because no one's home.  
no one's waiting for me to finish  
washing these hands free  
of soap.



**In The Park**

*Keri Ogden*





## **In The Park**

*Keri Ogden*

This is a painting of a photo I took a few years ago. It was taken while going for a walk through my hometown of McFarland, Wisconsin. This is a snapshot of a local park, and, in the original picture, there were three deer! This painting always reminds me of how close I am to some of the most beautiful nature.

## **The Hidden Art of Dismantling a Duck**

*Laura Wilson*

You're ready. Bone scissors, empty petri dishes, and blunt tools that can only be described as surgeon's instruments litter the table. Birds line the walls frozen in flight. The one before you is defeathered, with only soft down remaining. You catch sight of a stray feather floating among the feet of the tables on the slight wind of errant air. You make the first slice of skin and begin.

It's not as if you spent your childhood picking apart animals in the woods. No, no—only future serial killers do that. It's more like this ferocious curiosity for the inner cogs of the living crept up on you through the obligatory high school rat and frog dissections. Well, maybe there was one time. But it barely even counts. You know that.

You pull the trachea and esophagus away from the spinal cord resting in a cocoon of feathered flesh, slipping your fingers through the gaps of connective tissue and peeling, separating the webbing carefully up to the chin, noting the relative shortness of the neck. Red stains creep up your gloves, and you use your little surgeon's scissors to make a tiny severance.

Snip. You're in the woods, and the trees seem to echo back your inexperienced instrumental technique. It was dead—was it?—before you got there, but it's been longer than you thought, and the two flimsy tubes tracing a path along the spine have stiffened like licorice strings under the sun. You find yourself fascinated by the vocal chords, the hard, hollow holders of language. Of phrases like over here and hello, nice to see you again. You breathe in. And out. The air tastes of defrosting duck, an atmosphere of blood and thawing flesh. You slice the skin down the breast, tracing a straight line through the prime meridian of the duck.

"Bone scissors." Someone slides them toward you.

You position the jaws stage left of the sternum and apply enough pressure to snap a carrot. Crack. Crack. Crack. Crack. Down you go, the length of the abdomen opening, curtains sweeping aside toward a brilliant opening of the internal chest cavity. You continue to trace the esophagus, down, down, down, finding the stomach, intestines, and coccyx. You cut again, severing the digestive tract and slide it out from beneath the pile of organs, dirtying the first petri dish of the day.

There isn't anyone to help you, to bring you instruments, here in the woods. You doubt if anyone has noticed your absence at all. Somehow, you aren't bothered by the thought. You kneel beside the open carcass of this beautiful, long-necked creature and think how impossible it seems that all of life can be undone with the use of a single knife. You don't have anything stronger than that knife, so you search for something heavy. A rock, a log, anything. Finally, a hunk of granite the size of a softball catches your eye at the far side of the clearing. You tromp through mounds of decaying fall leaves, just now uncovered by the shifting of Earth's orbit around the sun. Perfect. Kneeling beside the carcass again, you break the ribs one by one with a carefully calculated amount of force, only raising your arms a few inches into the air before using the free momentum of gravity to help the job. You don't want to puncture the heart.

The petri dishes are full, and you hand them off to others to analyze while you focus on the remaining shell of a body. Liver, kidneys, air sacs, lungs, gizzard, stomach, intestines, all gone. You take a piece of glass in your hand, barely feeling the cold edge, and scrape along the inner cavity wall, dislodging parasites and ever-decreasing amounts of blood. You are efficient, organized, and, because of this, you finish in just under twenty minutes. The others are still struggling to effectively separate the organs and drain the body cavity fluid while you clean your station. In the end, you find five ectoparasites and twenty-eight endoparasites that were slowly siphoning, stealing, nutrients from the mallard.

The organs are lined up in the dirt, small mounds of bloodied flesh with jagged cuts and scrapes. The knife you brought with you rests beside the carcass and you pick it up again, taking care to clean the blade on a patch of grass nearby. This tiny line of tissues can't be all there is to keep something so magnificent alive, you think. Light pink feathers float through a shaft of sunlight making its way through the new leaves of the oak trees, blown by a wind you can't feel.

Back at home, you eat your dinner of ham with macaroni and cheese at the kitchen table, listening to the evening news on the TV behind you.

And finally, tonight, an update on our city's beloved flamingo, Gerald. Gerald was found in a section of woods tonight by a local hiker two miles out from County Road M, dead and dismembered. Gerald escaped from the Valley Zoo earlier this week and was last seen flying into the same woods where he was found. In a preliminary analysis, it is believed Gerald died from natural causes. There is no current explanation for the apparent dissection. Police urge anyone with information to call Crime Stoppers. Gerald was a favorite among community members who visited the zoo and will be missed.

This is Vicky Newman, reporting from KWZ News. Goodnight.

ANGEL RECORDS



**Angels**  
Jake Taylor

ANGEL RECORDS



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## **Angels**

*Jake Taylor*

This diptych reveals the embodiment of our internal angels and demons. Through the use of expressive figural gestures, the subjects in this work are externalizing the depth of their emotions.

# Sucker Tree

*Anna Kroll*

I haven't been here since I was twelve.  
I still know how to navigate the dirt paths and stony steps.  
You told me people who live by waterfalls don't hear the roar.  
I believed you then.  
I decide to sit under the mossy shade of that great big willow.  
How I wish I'd spent more dawns and dusks within its roots,  
nodding off in the wispy wind on a headrest of lilacs,  
washing off your feet in the riverbed.  
This is where we found all of our treasure:  
shiny buttons, fat blades of grass, skipping stones, rusty coins,  
a box of matches, tangled string, rabbit poop, faded baseball cards.  
We filled our backpacks, picked up, and ran.

I see the sucker tree,  
the hole in its trunk where you told me the "production chamber" was located.  
I thought it was sheer magic, that this tree could produce lollipops,  
and "only for you," you said.  
Shoving my hand into the frayed pocket of my jeans, grasping and digging,  
finally, I pull it out. It's a cherry one.  
Its taste recollects mud-caked shoelaces, scraped knees, begging butterflies  
to land on our fingers,  
daisies you'd put behind  
my ear, but mostly,  
your hand reaching out to me over the water.

The May breeze smells like birch, toxic fumes, a canopy of smoke,  
raspberry bushes, rotting logs, leafy lichens, dusty pages of neglected recipes,  
like ash falling, rain falling, sun pouring down.  
I follow the distant trickle of water over tired rocks to the nearby stream;  
kneeling, I cup my hands together, filling them with the brackish brew.  
Minnows dart, crayfish decay, bubbles of air balloon, pebbles

poke my fingertips as I bring the bowl to my mouth.  
This feels like a moment I've lived a thousand times, and it's true:  
I revisit it often.  
It used to be clear.

When it would rain, we would perch inside the shelter we constructed  
of fallen trees, dirty dish rags, smearing leaves with clay to patch up the holes.  
We filled it with bottles of sand and beer can mosaics.  
We would imagine it a lighthouse on a rocky shore,  
blessing the sailors and summoning the sea lords. We shined the lamp outward,  
blotting out the darkness in the night sky like a worn-out sponge.  
Or an ornate palace brimming with lavish chandeliers, crystal glasses, red plush  
carpet,  
granite spiral staircases, silver spoons, grandiose paintings of landscapes and  
portraits,  
and us,  
the sound of violins and timpani flourishing, filling the space with music that  
begged you to dance with it.

A few weeks from now, I will sit at the piano, willing my hands to play,  
staring at your photograph.  
Tributaries and floodplains made from my eyes, my fingers will tremble,  
water seeping through the shingles of our house like a cavern,  
stalagmites and stalactites pinning my palms to the keys,  
but nothing will come out.

Now I'm lying in a field, my nostrils filled with dusty sunlight,  
damp soils, and tire swings. Cottonwood blooms captivate the air.  
My fingers tighten around the note you gave me last spring:

Change.





**Molar**

*Kala Rehberger*



## **Molar**

*Kala Rehberger*

I made this giant molar in response to one of my recurring dreams. I often have dreams involving a few of my teeth falling or cracking out of my mouth. This dream can be interpreted as stress or anxiety within someone's life. By making this piece, I reminded myself that anxiety, just like dreams, may sometimes be just out of my control, but it could never physically hurt me.

# **Don't Stay the Night, I'm Not Making Breakfast Tomorrow**

Thomas Kunst

I dream of you at night without a choice  
and find disturbing thoughts tucked in the sheets  
of melatonin dream skies burning blue  
then olive, mustard, garnet, tuscan sun,  
and days of winter melted on your tongue  
before you spat them out into my hands—  
acidic sludge and crystallizing words  
that promised nothing worse before the spring.  
I turned myself to stone to save my skin  
from dripping off, revealing twisted bones  
and grotesque tissue neatly packed inside;  
but stone is made for sculpting monuments,  
so grab your chisel from its hanging place.  
I'm petrified to brace against your worst.

I'm petrified to brace against your worst—  
it changes shape; it grins and doubly frowns.  
You Rorschach test of love or lustful stares  
or sushi dinners always on the run  
from you to you to you, but which is which?  
From young to old and duck to rabbit ears  
from clouds to sun and wine to holy blood  
from rolling hips to abstinence because  
perspective shifts when I wake in your bed  
and realize that I'm the variance.  
I spend my nights alone in funhouse halls  
in curving mirrors practicing my lines,  
perfecting stage directions. [*Leans and bends  
his crooked neck to kiss her crooked hand.*]

# **Rage, Rage**

*Brooke Erickson*

There is a god who demands our worship.  
At the altar, I open my mouth to show the red coal  
that has burnt a hole through my tongue, and the god  
presses his hand over my mouth to keep it there.  
I am angry enough to spit, murderous  
enough to make myself a god-slayer.

And here is how I kill a god: I turn my worship sour.

I find the belief I once held and forge it into something sharper.

My parents planted a faith inside me; I find the weed  
and cut it out with a knife. With fingernails and bloody teeth.  
With callous-hearted savagery. With the broken entrails  
of my own story. Cut it out and cast it at his feet. Cut it out  
to make him bleed. Cut it out and grind it up and slip it  
into his wine like poison, into his ribs  
like a knife, like betrayal, like the gutting of an animal.

Here is how I kill a god: I hold a hand over his lips,  
and pretend I cannot hear him scream.



**A Bit Messy**

*Keri Ogden*



## **A Bit Messy**

*Keri Ogden*

My sculpture—and its shape and structure—happened completely by chance. I decided that the best way to create this project would be to let fate decide what it would look like. I made three distinct cuts into my original wood block, then placed them in an aesthetically-pleasing manner. I tried many different arrangements until I found the one that looked the best.

My choice of colors—yellow, blue, and pink—was inspired by the cover to a favorite album of mine. Those colors are the ones I felt were most dominant, as well as the most interesting. If I had not used that color scheme, I would have resorted to my other idea, which was to paint my sculpture blue, purple, and pink.

# Greenhouse

*Kaitlin Rikala*

Strawberry milk-colored sheets cover legs; the stubble there makes the faintest noise as it comes into contact with the slick material. I glance behind me and see Francis curled up next to me, her warmth cascading onto my body as she curls in closer.

I'm close enough to Francis that I can faintly smell her lilac perfume and the coconut lotion she's used religiously since I've known her.

She smells like the first step outside after a long winter, when the flowers are just starting to bloom and reinvigorating themselves in the mottled sunlight. Whenever I step foot into her room, I am enveloped by the scent, and a feeling of both security and freedom overwhelms me.

We both fell asleep without clothes on. I look around the room and see that my cornflower blue crop top is strewn over the yellow armchair, along with my favorite pair of blue jeans. I roll my eyes and decide that cleaning up the evidence of our intimacy can wait for the time being.

I stretch my arms above my head and feel the vertebrae in my back pop pop pop as the tension in my lumbar spine evaporates.

I let my legs spread languidly over the balmy sheets. My appendages are apart from me, their own entities, as my arms and legs are weighed down by exhaustion. Francis' room is illuminated by soft green lightbulbs that are strung from the ceiling. The light dyes human skin the color of freshly mowed grass.

Whenever I enter the room and look down at my freckled skin, I have the sensation of becoming a stained-glass window glazed the pale green of a meadow.

I always told Francis that when we were here, our bodies were gardens. Blooming, open, vulnerable. She always kissed me after I said stuff like that. I wondered if the gardens we were tending in each other would need tedious upkeep. I pushed the thought away as I sought to chase her honeysuckle mouth. I yearned to collect bluebells from the entanglement of our limbs.

In my mind, I trace the cultivated path we have built.

The first flower was planted the night we wandered the forest and found the beach. The leaves cowered as our reckless feet encroached on the damp floor.

Prior to this, we had been merely classmates until this fateful afternoon when she grabbed my hand and pulled me into her ivy green Buick. We had traversed the streets of our town until the tread of our tires beat down our path.

When we burst from the canopy of the forest, we stood on an eerily silent stretch of sand that we called a beach, even though it was a poor excuse for one. Francis dared me with her eyes to run into the water.

I didn't hesitate as I ran, Francis close behind me. Her loud, unpolished laugh rang through the night as our damp clothes stuck to our skin and our lips intertwined.

The first seedling sowed itself into my chest, and I knew she had me. I was entirely fucked.

The moon hid behind the limbs of the trees.

As for Francis and me? We were waiting for the sun.



Ever since I grazed her skin, felt her touch, intertwined with her, smelled the lilac, I have been afraid of losing. I have always had the paranoid expectation that if I don't eternally worry about losing who and what I love, it will be torn from me. Swiftly.

All it took was the seed, and then Francis germinated in my chest. She was my creeping ivy; I was her brick wall.

My eyelids slide shut as I listen to the sound of Francis' even breath as it goes in and out. Her body works as the lungs, aerating the room. The faint buzzing of the green lights is a hornet's nest hanging in the woods, several feet above my head.

My phone is plugged into the plastic black and yellow speakers, playing "Come On Petunia" by The Blow. I hum along gently and open my eyes to stare at the chipped popcorn ceiling.

I splay my fingers across my chest as I hum, the vibrations drops of honey dripping between my chest cavity and ribs.

Often when I lie here waiting for Francis to wake up, not wanting to disturb her, I attempt to count the miniscule goosebumps erupting above me. The highest I ever counted was 104 before I got dizzy and had to close my eyes again. The peeling paint on the white window across the room makes me picture the years passing in this space—glossy coats of Valspar deteriorating into a graying cracked eggshell. When Francis and I were falling in love, the essence of time seemed to become stagnant, but the bones of this house were still losing density as we planted ourselves in fresh soil.

Francis' charcoal hair tickles my leg as I lean into her warmth. I tentatively run my fingers through the strands, tediously working my fingers through so as not to snag or pull. I smell the lilac and realize her hair is the texture of flower petals.

Francis shifts in bed and my body locks up as I try not to wake her. Whenever she wakes, she leaves the bed to get water and leaves a crescent shape pressed into the sheets where she had once suspended her limbs.

My most consuming fear is that one day the castles I build for her to sojourn in will be abandoned. I fear to be roused by her absence. Broken at the lack of a crescent in pink sheets, tinted green by light.

If she left, I would be the stand-alone crumbling brick building—no ivy to cover the cracks.

I stick my thumb into a hole in the pink sheets, left behind by a rogue cigarette cherry. I wonder if one day I will be a little cigarette burn in Francis' brain, a reminder of a mistake made long ago but one that is more of a nuisance than anything worth remembering.



## **Life After Death**

*Ashley Carlson*



## **Life After Death**

*Ashley Carlson*

Life after death speaks to those who believe death is a sullen and narrow end. Life is a cycle. Where one may end, another begins.



**Anyone Want Orange Juice?**

*Katie Mattis*



## **Anyone Want Orange Juice?**

*Katie Mattis*

I became interested in the curious shapes and contours of juicers this last year and decided to make a juicer that not only was functional and easy to use, but also explored more experimentation with techniques and tools. Every juicer I made was tested with oranges or lemons and led to many late nights in the studio having a cup of orange juice and buying so many oranges I looked like someone out of a math problem. I still use this juicer in my kitchen frequently, and take pride in being able to use my own work in my daily life.

# Galatea

Charlotte Gutzmer

The first time I saw my wife this week, she was sprawled against the cobblestone beneath the balcony, skull shattered and leaking. The last time I saw her, she was back together again, a woman of stone, and I could swear her eyes were moving.

I had the statue commissioned the day after her death. I can't bear to imagine her in that state: drained, lifeless, pale. This sort of stillness suits her more, and beauty can't decay when it's carved out of marble.

"You're a work of art," I whispered to her one night. "A living, breathing work of art. I could look at you forever and still be lost for meaning."

She only looked away sadly and pulled her gossamer stole tightly around her shoulders. She had always been sensitive—a natural quality in a woman but frustrating when it obstructed our nights together. There were times when I felt she tried to hide her beauty, to use shyness as an excuse for modesty. But just as one cannot deny their faults, it is impossible to deny their gifts.

I feel the stone twitch once more beneath my fingertips. A pulse, perhaps. I press the spot just beneath its jaw. The marble is cold, colder than she ever was, but there's no denying the steady beat of what's either an artery or an impulse to see life where it's not. But it must be alive, for this morning, it had been on its pedestal in the bedroom, and it now stands alone on the stair landing.

"Are you real?" I wonder out loud, grazing my fingers across its cheek. There is no reply, no parting of the lips, but its eyes—its eyes!—for a moment, they seem to look away. I touch the carved hand resting on its waist in wonder.

The statue really does look like her. The sculptor took great measures to replicate the curve of her neck, the bow of her lip, the arch of her brow. Smooth stone skin as unmarred as hers was in life, curls pulled into an immaculate bun, even the dressing gown I had her wear in the evenings draped perfectly over her shoulders. It almost seems like I could pull the pin from her hairdo and watch the curls slip down her neck.

Almost. Instead, the statue's head turns to face the window. It moves smoothly, like flesh, but lacks the suppleness of her skin. I catch its chin.

"Don't look away," I say. I can't pull it back to me. I tug at the statue, but it's solid. It stares out the window now. She used to spend all her time here on the stair landing, gazing out at the gardens. "Don't. It doesn't have to be like this anymore. Enough with the humility. Enough with the distance. You belong to me."

It unfolds its hands from its waist and presses them against the window. Its lips move silently, and its eyes meet mine for the briefest moment before darting away again.

"What are you trying to say?" I ask.

It rests its forehead on the pane. The click of stone against glass makes me flinch. Its lips continue to move, spelling words that will never be heard.

"It's alright," I sigh. "You don't need to speak. You may be able to move, but you're still nothing more than a statue. Rest assured. You have everything you need here. I'll take care of you."



I snake my arm around its waist. As soon as I touch it, the statue jumps back and pushes my arm away. As it moves, its feet scrape the wooden floor. I look down at the scuffs and furrow my brow. There are scratches all down the mahogany stairs. Its feet are chipped.

"You don't want me to hold you?"

The statue shakes its head furiously, its lips pressed together into a thin line. This expression of anger that I see flash across its face was hers when she was alive.

"Is it really you?" The statue's anger melts away. It lifts its brows in that same sad expression she always wore when we were alone. Its eyes, however, are dead. Nothing more than glazed-over substitutions for the real thing.

"You have no right," I say through clenched teeth. "You have no right to deny me. You never have."

It doesn't bother to look at me before turning up the stairs.

"Wait!" I cry, grabbing its wrist. It continues up the stairs and pulls me with it. I stumble and hit my shin on the edge of a step, but I don't dare let go. "Without me, you wouldn't exist. You should be grateful!"

I stand again, shakily, and pull as hard as I can. It only seems to notice long enough to crush my hand in its grip and push me away. I tumble backwards into the landing and watch the statue turn the corner onto the balcony, closing the glass doors behind it. My blood runs cold. I scramble up the steps and throw the doors open. A gust of November wind blows right through me. The statue leans over the railing into the wind. My blazer snaps around my waist, but its dress is still. Can it even feel the cold?

I run up beside it and take its shoulders, trying to pull back. It doesn't notice, doesn't even care. All it does is look down at the cobblestone, still stained brown after this week's events. Its lips part, whispering something I'll never hear.

And then it climbs. It climbs over the railing, ignoring my protests, ignoring my hands clawing at its dress, which is as unbending as the rest of it. No matter how hard I try, the statue only moves when it wants to. I watch powerlessly as it steps off the railing.

The crack of marble against cobblestone is like a bone snapping in two.



**Untitled**  
*Haley Asuma*



## **Untitled**

*Hayley Asuma*

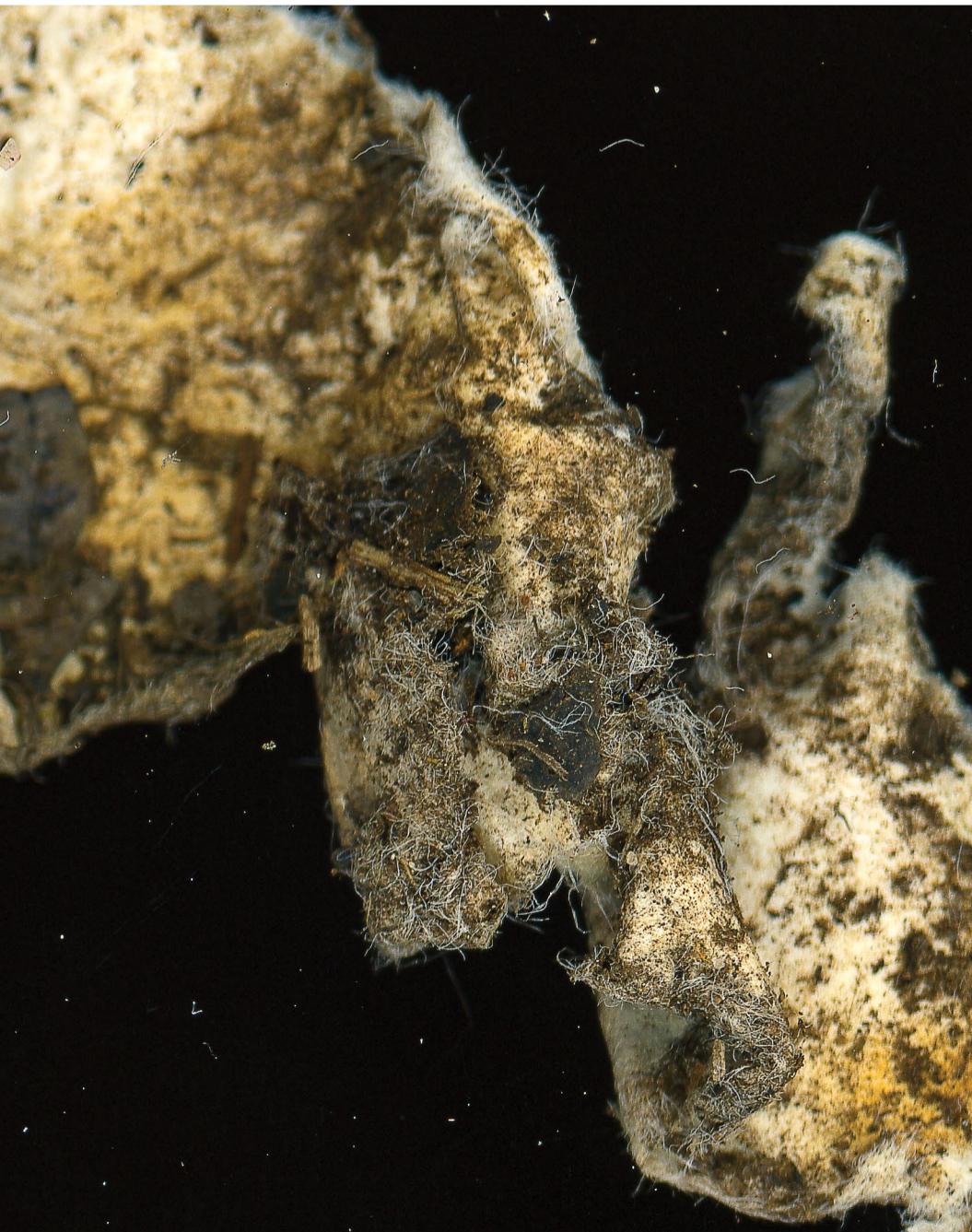
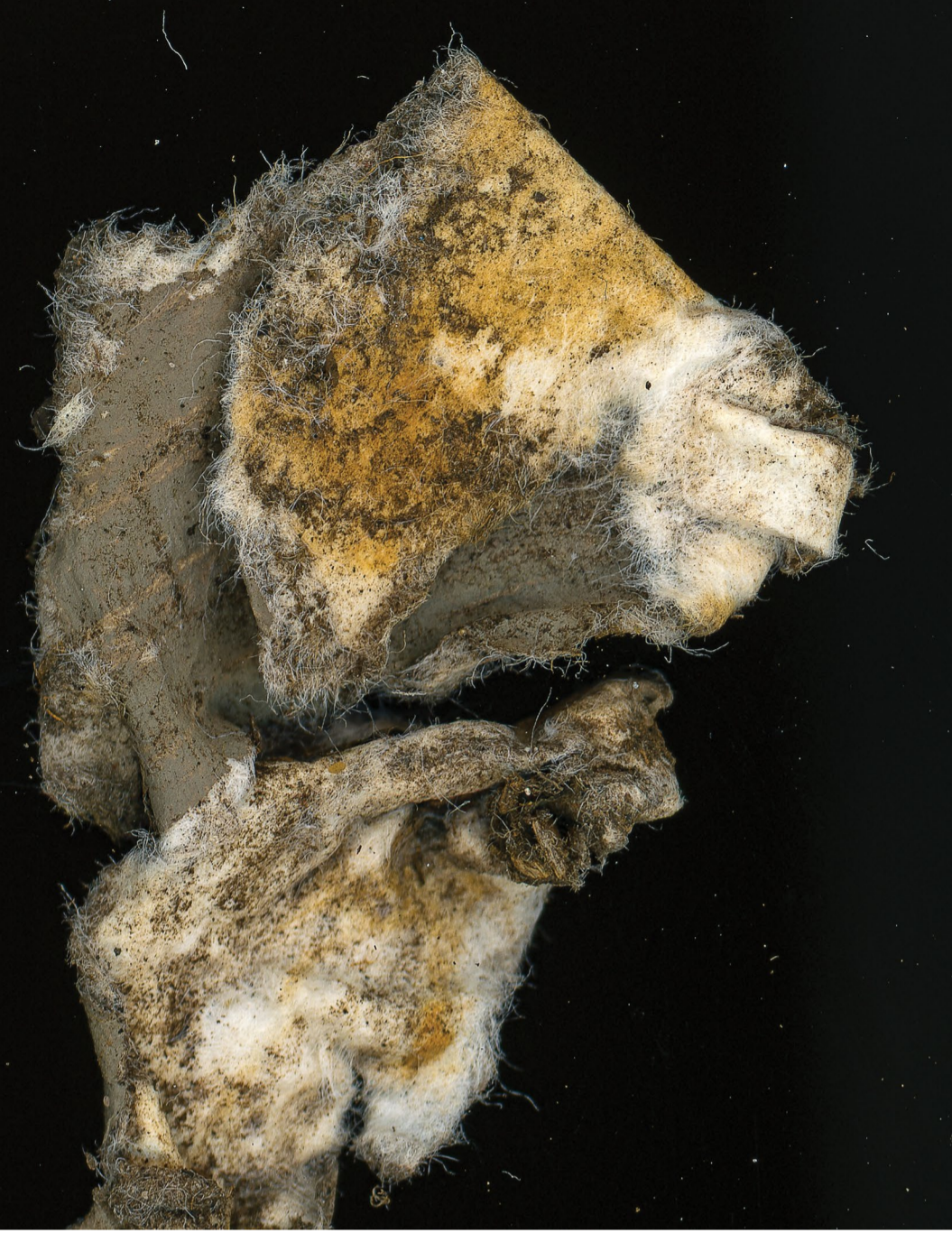
For this painting, I used acrylic paint. It is part of a series of five paintings of local Eau Claire restaurants' popular drinks. This one was painted at Dooley's Pub. I chose to paint this topic because of my background as a bartender. I tried to make the drinks look more realistic than the background to make them stand out more.



## **Fibers**

*Elizabeth Carey*

This series by Elizabeth Carey is influenced by ecofeminist theory, which describes a special connection women have to the planet due to the exploitation both have experienced at the hand of mankind. This translates to her belief in seeing the natural world as something to marvel at and not to take advantage of. Carey shows this through the physical process she uses to create her pieces. The "Fibers" series was created through the decomposition process of paper out in nature for a week. The elements became the artistic media through this process.



**Fibers** - cont.  
*Elizabeth Carey*



**Nike**

*Katie Mattis*



## **Nike**

*Katie Matttis*

The female form has been a source of fascination and inspiration for artists for thousands of years. Sculptures, paintings, and various other mediums have depicted the curves and contours of women time and time again. One of these sculptures, the Greek Nike, has always stood out to me as exemplary due to her powerful posture and the fierce aura she presents. I made this sculpture as my own interpretation of the Nike, hoping to capture even a portion of her fiery energy in my own art.



# Maintaining Buoyancy

*Laura Wilson*

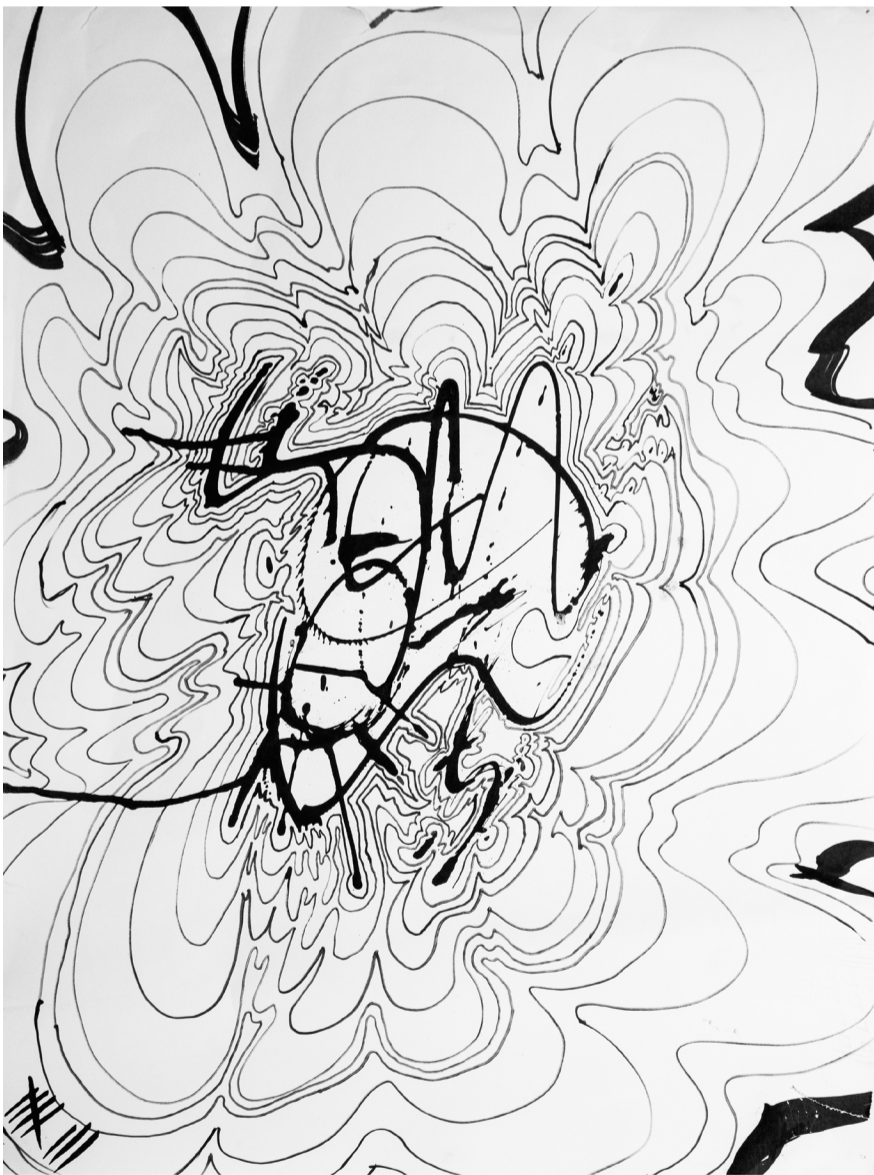
I know groups of monkeys are called barrels  
and there is a barrel of red monkeys  
streaming down the drain, shrinking as they slip  
beneath the silver stopper, like the small  
red plastic monkeys my brother and I  
would hook to each other to sling over  
the staircase railing, hoping they wouldn't  
let go of hands, each other. They always  
would, hitting the floorboards with tiny plink  
plinks, a sound so soft it was nearly lost  
between air molecules. I think about  
this when I stand over the white sink drain,  
watching my blood, drip and drip down and down  
because all these drains lead to the ocean.

All draining leads to the ocean, forming  
strong vortices that heave, and I don't need  
these monkeys, refusing to break their hold  
on each other for once in their endless  
plastic lives. Go, float in that wide ocean  
for all I care, form an island of blood  
red monkeys bobbing up but mostly down,  
let's be honest, we'll all drown soon enough.  
I could say goodbye, good luck, good riddance,  
but I like monkeys, the ocean, the smell  
of strong tea, cats curled into cinnamon  
rolls, French fries in all their anti-Frenchness,  
and microwaved dry rice pillows, held, always.  
Ducks form rafts on water, and now, I will too.

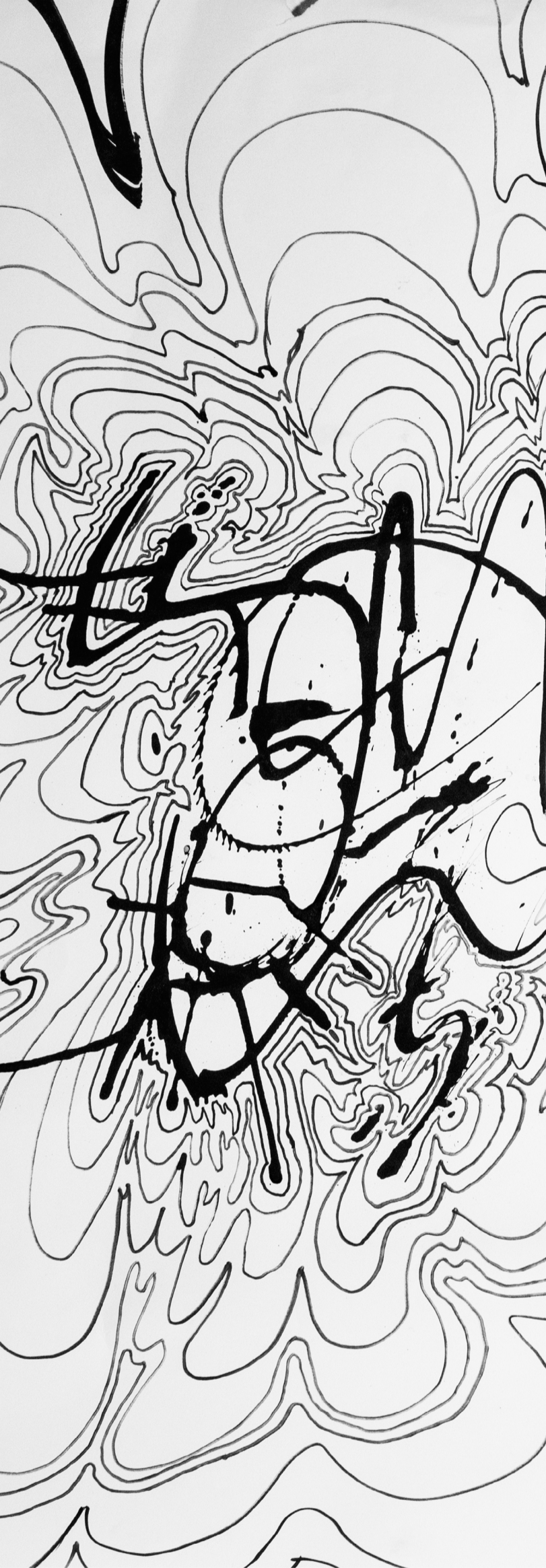
# **The Storm**

*Lars Atlas*

scented of sweet coltsfoot  
and cinder ash birds.  
stringing along harsh words,  
the ones that adhere.  
fleet-foot  
is a bolt of lightning,  
twice as frightening  
when striking near.



**You're Freaking Me Out**  
*Lukas Curtis*



## **You're Freaking Me Out**

*Lukas Curtis*

I had an assignment for an art class that I put off until the last moment. I can't even remember what the assignment was anymore. I just remember sitting in the art room with inks and a stack of paper, frantically going through them, numbering each attempt as I was trying to find something that made sense. Going from scribbles on a page to these wide, wild aimless strokes of panic. In that strung-out state of mind, I transformed the piece into what I often absentmindedly drew on the blank space of my notes—a series of echoing lines surrounding an abstract mess of a shape. That seemed to make sense. There's something about simple ideas that have a lot to them that I find the most enjoyable.

# **Triple Sonnet for The Landscapes My Sister and I Drew**

*Macey VanDenMeerendonk*

In the backyard we'd lay out a blanket,  
bring out our pencils to draw each other.  
It was hopeless trying to match the same  
yellow hue in your hair with the highlights  
from my charcoal lead. You drew noses best,  
but mine always turned out flat on the page.  
You said you can never match up the eyes  
and that mine always looked a little more real.  
I decided to make a landscape from  
your face. Your eyebrows became mountaintops,  
your mouth a pond. Flowers filled your cheeks,  
and your hair rained down making them bloom.  
I like to think our landscapes look the same—  
that our faces match but in different shades.

Our faces matched but in different shades.  
Mom said mine's like hers, and yours is like Dad's.  
But I can see them both in each of us.  
Yours is rounder, softer, dimpled, and young.  
You say mine is prettier and grown up.  
But who can compare the beauty of  
unyielding mountains and ambitious redwoods?  
There was no doubt that we could feel the sky—  
that our hands felt clouds, and we could taste rain.  
We breathed in sunshine and turned it into  
charcoal drawings and games of tic-tac-toe.  
Sometimes we would like each other's better  
and swap. Hers on my wall and mine on hers, and  
I wondered what day we would stop drawing landscapes.

I wondered what day we had stopped drawing landscapes,  
why we didn't lay out the blanket and  
put out our pencils. But the evidence  
of them still lined our walls, reminding us  
we are different shades of the same face.  
We grew up to be different, in the  
best way. Mountains rise differently than  
redwoods grow. Our landscapes were made from  
the pictures we drew, and we grew in them.  
We live in different cities now;  
mine has hills and rivers, and yours has big fields.  
I like to think we both set out a blanket  
and draw the landscape that we are now:  
both doing the same thing, in different places.



## **Ceasar Young**

Ceasar Young's last project had a pretty depressing vibe, but, honestly, he loved it. So, he made another sad-sounding project—sitting down at his keyboard and messing around until he created something he liked, which resulted in his project "The Aesthetic Pack." The project features Young, Omar Young, Sheryl Young, and Jordin Blachut. Young's favorite part of making music is expressing himself and developing the idea of the project as he creates the sounds and tracks he wants. The song he is most proud of is "Drop it like the NASDAQ." Young's advice for aspiring musicians: "This is gonna sound so cheesy but it worked for me—just do it. Just start workshopping and putting out things you love and you'll find an audience who loves it just as much."

Check out Ceasar's music by following the links below:

**[Spotify](#)**

**[Apple Music](#)**

**[Youtube](#)**

**[Google Play Music](#)**

**[Deezer](#)**

**[Amazon Music](#)**

**[Tidal](#)**

**[Napster](#)**



## Claire Parker

Claire Parker started a piece named “Back in 36” in the summer of 2018 after her grandparents passed away in a tragic accident. As a way to cope with her grief, Parker began writing songs as a means for healing. “Back in 36” is a bildungsroman-type story of the love between her grandparents. They demonstrated a loving marriage—from when they were 14 years old into their 80s—in which they always showed tender affection and joy. Her grandfather loved to share the story of the first time he saw his wife—in a red Jantzen swimming suit. This song serves as a tribute to them and the legacy of love they left for their family members.

This song was Parker’s first attempt at semi-professional recording. Her roommate has software that helped Parker out, but she doesn’t have any of her other music recorded. Now, she mostly focuses on crafting the songs themselves rather than recording. She really hopes to get into it in the future. The biggest reason Parker submitted the song to NOTA is because of the importance it holds to her family members—especially her mother, and she wanted to publish it for her.





## Will O'Brien

Will O'Brien is an independent singer, songwriter, and producer who creates eclectic, synth-driven music. Some might call him a Hypnagogic pop artist—a style focused on lo-fi and atmospheric soundscapes that try to capture the essence of a time gone by.

O'Brien has always had an interest in music, but he didn't get super involved in the music scene until about his freshman year of high school. Then, he began investing a lot of his time listening to a wide range of projects and learning how to create music of his own.

"Admittedly, it has been a difficult process," O'Brien said, "and I'm still learning new things about my craft every day."

O'Brien writes his own music and lyrics, sings, and he even mixes and masters his own tracks.

"Sometimes I sacrifice quality for individuality here, since it is a struggle to make polished products with such limited resources," O'Brien said, "yet I also feel this brings more of a human element to the art I'm creating. There's a sense of heat behind the flaws."

O'Brien's favorite part of making music is being able to connect with other human beings. He feels connected to his influences when he makes music that is inspired by people like John Maus, Ariel Pink, and Molly Nilsson and bands like The Smiths, The Cure, and Joy Division.

"I feel connected to the audience when I perform a piece and they vibe with it," O'Brien said. "I even feel more connected to myself through the whole process of creating a song, something in which I invest a lot of my personal experiences."

The song O'Brien is most proud of is probably "Love Ourselves." He wrote the piece during a time when he struggled with self-image and relationships with loved ones. After he threw everything together with the vocals and instrumentals, it all clicked into place. It was the first mix he felt resonated with people beyond his own small, artistic circle, he said.

O'Brien's advice for other musicians is this: "If you're an aspiring musician, just start making music and save everything you make. One of my biggest regrets is deleting tracks that I felt were terrible. Sure, they are terrible; you'll definitely know they are. However, you can always learn from those moments of failure, and - who knows - something may be salvageable from that thing you thought was a piece of shit. Nothing original you make is completely devoid of artistic merit."

Follow the links below to explore O'brien's work:

**[BandCamp](#)**

**[SoundCloud](#)**

**[Spotify](#)**

**[Apple Music](#)**

**[Youtube](#)**

## Editors' Notes

When we envisioned this issue of NOTA several months ago, we had no idea that the world would turn so chaotic, that our dreams of gathering a community of artists together to celebrate the release of our newest edition would be overshadowed by the looming threat of a frightening new virus — COVID-19. Now, perhaps more than ever, we are grateful for our friends, family, and colleagues who show, even amidst such global uncertainty, that we are stronger together — even when we have to be apart. At NOTA, we are thankful for our health and for the sense of community that made the creation of this issue possible. Our designers were inspired by a yellow color palette, hoping to convey the positivity that the world needs now, perhaps more than we have ever known. We are blown away by the depth and diversity of our poetry and prose, and we are enthralled by the music selections that appear in this issue.

We would like to thank our contributors, whose work makes this issue possible. We offer our sincerest thanks to the Student Senate Finance Commission and the faculty and staff of Learning and Technology Services who made this online version of NOTA possible. Thank you to Joanne Erickson, whose hard work and dedication keeps NOTA running smoothly. We would like to extend our greatest thanks to B. J. Hollars, our faculty advisor, who always supports NOTA—no matter his million-and-one other responsibilities. NOTA would not be what it is without B. J. And thank you, reader, for your support of NOTA. What we do is not possible without you.

Sincerely,



Rebecca Mennecke,  
Editor-in-Chief



Reed Rathbun,  
Art Director

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Editor in Chief ..... *Rebecca Mennecke*  
Art Director ..... *Reed Rathbun*

Graphic Designer ..... *Christopher Anema*  
Graphic Designer ..... *Kristina Tlusty*  
Graphic Designer ..... *Meghan Adlington*

Prose Editor ..... *Rome Alfonsas Balciunas*  
Prose Editor Intern ..... *Emma O'Shea*  
Poetry Editor ..... *Angela Hugunin*  
Poetry Editor Intern ..... *Elise Eystad*

Music Director ..... *Staš Hable*

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