Spring 2007

ICON Spring 2007

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is student-produced since 1965 at Kent State University Trumbull campus and published twice yearly at the end of Fall and Spring semesters.

**Poetry, fiction, and nonfiction:** We accept all forms, themes, styles, and genres of 700 words or less; we limit the number of submissions to six (poetry) and three (fiction and nonfiction) per author per issue. Submissions must be typed. Fiction and nonfiction should be submitted in standard, double-spaced format. Send submissions to: Dr. Michael Lynch/ ICON/ Department of English/ Kent State University/ 4314 Mahoning Ave. NW/ Warren, OH 44483 (mlynch@kent.edu). Enclose SASE (self-addressed, stamped envelope) if you want submissions returned; disposable submissions are preferred. Include e-mail address. Pays one copy. Deadlines October 15 (Fall issue), March 5 (Spring issue).

**Artwork and photography:** Submit copies, not originals, in black and white or color; limit of six submissions. High quality photocopies accepted. Best size for reproduction is 5 x 7 inches. Pays one copy.

**Hart Crane Memorial Poetry Contest:** Annual award of $100 for best poem. Submit a maximum of two poems to Dr. Gary Ciuba at ICON’s mailing address c/o Hart Crane Memorial Poetry Contest by February 6. The winning poem is published in ICON.

**Subscriptions:** ICON is available free to Kent State University Trumbull campus students, staff, and faculty. Those off campus may purchase individual copies for $4.00 or subscribe for $8.00/year (2 issues).

http://www.trumbull.kent.edu/Arts/ICON/index.cfm

**Special thanks** to Dr. Gary Ciuba, who coordinates the Hart Crane Poetry contest, and to Marion Woofter and Arlene Rosemond of the campus copy center, who take special care in preparing ICON each semester.

The views expressed herein are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the editors or Kent State University Trumbull campus.
ICON

magazine for literature and art

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Contents

Hart Crane Memorial Poetry Contest Winner:
Maureen A. Sherbondy  Laundry Rant  1

Hart Crane Memorial Poetry Contest
Honorable Mention:
Jerry Williams  Expectancy  2
Maureen Fry  I Forget You  4

Kent State Trumbull Campus Student Poetry Award:
Angel Dewolfe  mo-not-o-nous  5

Shari O’Brien  Dancing with Cancer  6
Sand Castles Tides Can’t
Wash Away  7

Allan D. Coleman  On Hold  8
Whatever Happens  9

Lauren Barnett  Holly Tree Lane  10
James Doyle  Orchestra Pit  13
Beet Harvest  14
The Gardener  15

Andrew Rihn  Babylon  16
Caitlin Dwight  Rip  19
Robert Cooperman  The Urge to Travel  20
Not Related to Genghis Khan  21

Phillip B. Crosby  Remembering a Hero  22
Thoughts of a Farm Supplier  22

Emily Krachman  Waiting for My Sunset  23
Lyn Lifshin  Moonrise, Hernandez, NM 1941  24
A Wet Cold Winter to Come,
the Paper Says  25
If This Was a Movie Run
Backward  26

Simon Perchik  L 24  29
Contents

Hart Crane Memorial Poetry Contest Winner:
Maureen A. Sherbondy Laundry Rant 1

Hart Crane Memorial Poetry Contest Honorable Mention:
Jerry Williams Expectancy 2
Maureen Fry I Forget You 4

Kent State Trumbull Campus Student Poetry Award:
Angel Dewolfe mo-not-o-nous 5

Shari O’Brien Dancing with Cancer 6
Sand Castles Tides Can’t Wash Away 7

Allan D. Coleman On Hold 8
Whatever Happens 9

Lauren Barnett Holly Tree Lane 10
James Doyle Orchestra Pit 13
Beet Harvest 14
The Gardener 15

Andrew Rihn Babylon 16
Caitlin Dwight Rip 19
Robert Cooperman The Urge to Travel 20
Not Related to Genghis Khan 21

Phillip B. Crosby Remembering a Hero 22
Thoughts of a Farm Supplier 22

Emily Krachman Waiting for My Sunset 23

Lyn Lifshin Moonrise, Hernandez, NM 1941 24
A Wet Cold Winter to Come, the Paper Says 25
If This Was a Movie Run Backward 26

Simon Perchik L 24 29
December Nap 30
My Appetite 31
Regensburg 32
Water Wrap 35
Unlike Moonlight 35
The Muse 36
Art Survey 37
Imitation of Art 38
Brief Clarity 39
A Public Service Announcement 40
Symbiosis Nocturnal 41
Children’s Museum 42
Separate Conventions 43
"7, 8, lay them straight...” 43
January Blues 44
Panic Attacks 45
Morning of the Red Bird 46
In a Green Shade 47
Simple Pleasures 48

Hart Crane Memorial Poetry Contest
2007 Selection

Maureen A. Sherbondy

Laundry Rant

On the way to do yet another load of laundry you see a lone shoe and hat in the middle of the room and fear your kids will fall, topple towards danger so you stoop down and lift the items from the path, then ponder garden paths, that arboretum in Arcadia, California and wonder why you have not visited a single garden in twenty years. Imaginary flowers dry up and die on the carpet path and you can’t recall where you were going so you busy your hands and tidy up—plump the pillows, tuck in couch covers, bury thoughts in coverings, in hats on cold heads, hats on that boy in college, who looked like Richard Gere merged with David Byrne, and wore hats in winter in Jersey and you wonder where is he now? You recall how he removed that hat in bed, and said

You are dRing me ab so lute ly cra ny
in that slow, low voice. Beneath the swirling scent of floral laundry softener and tolling music of loud rolling dryer drum you feel warm, tingly suddenly twenty years later and you can’t recall why you broke up and wonder where is he now and if he’s married and if so, does his wife forget where she was going and get lost on the way to the laundry room the gardens of the past vine-winding their way into the present.

Artwork:

Kent State Trumbull Campus Student Artwork Award:
Zach Stephenson  front cover
Erica Strohmeyer  back cover
John Jordan 11
Allyson Hibbard 12, 27
Wayne Dennis 17, 34
Michael Ciferno 18, 33
April Dunn 28
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dennis Saleh</td>
<td>December Nap</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew Powell</td>
<td>My Appetite</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lorraine Tolliver</td>
<td>Regensburg</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane Webster</td>
<td>Water Wrap</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unlike Moonlight</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Fitzpatrick</td>
<td>The Muse</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allyson Hibbard</td>
<td>Art Survey</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nathaniel Fincham</td>
<td>Imitation of Art</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brief Clarity</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew Butler</td>
<td>A Public Service Announcement</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Symbiosis Nocturnal</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phyllis I.T. Harris</td>
<td>Children’s Museum</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Separate Conventions</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“7, 8, lay them straight...”</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.Z. Niditch</td>
<td>January Blues</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Panic Attacks</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romare Beardon</td>
<td>Morning of the Red Bird</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In a Green Shade</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian C. Felder</td>
<td>Simple Pleasures</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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- Wayne Dennis: 17, 34
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**Hart Crane Memorial Poetry Contest 2007 Selection**

**Maureen A. Sherbondy**

**Laundry Rant**

On the way to do yet another load of laundry you see a lone shoe and hat in the middle of the room and fear your kids will fall, topple towards danger so you stoop down and lift the items from the path, then ponder garden paths, that arboretum in Arcadia, California and wonder why you have not visited a single garden in twenty years. Imaginary flowers dry up and die on the carpet path and you can’t recall where you were going so you busy your hands and tidy up—plump the pillows, tuck in couch covers, bury thoughts in coverings, in hats on cold heads, hats on that boy in college, who looked like Richard Gere merged with David Byrne, and wore hats in winter in Jersey and you wonder where is he now? You recall how he removed that hat in bed, and said *You are dряving me ab so lute ly cra za* in that slow, low voice. Beneath the swirling scent of floral laundry softener and tolling music of loud rolling dryer drum you feel warm, tingly suddenly twenty years later and you can’t recall why you broke up and wonder where is he now and if he’s married and if so, does his wife forget where she was going and get lost on the way to the laundry room the gardens of the past vine-winding their way into the present.
Hart Crane Memorial Poetry Contest
Honorable Mention

Jerry Williams

Expectancy
I sometimes happen upon your kind
browsing through the produce section
or waiting in line at the post office,
your skin so pale,
your stride surprisingly athletic,
an inextinguishable skit of womanliness
in all your parts.
But it's not the breasts or the hips
or the protuberance that burns,
it's the rhetoric of your looming--
suburban and reckless,
lurid and luminescent.
At such times, I am so overcome
with longing that I look away.
Poets have no access to the gene pool.

Now here you are,
someone I once lucked into loving,
hoisting creation up a flight of steps,
five months gone with another man's work.
This could be the only chance I ever get
to be my own redeemer
so please do me this kindness
before a continent of bad-timing
clears its throat and turns to news.
Give me your shallow, draining breath
that smells of vitamins and oranges.
Give me your lips free of wine
yet moist with possibility.
Give me your tongue when it's slow and heavy
like an hour of island sleep.

Jerry Williams

Give me your commissure
and your apex and your median lingual sulcus.
Give me your saliva as a palliative,
and let me pretend
you recline in our own bath
with that white watermelon rising out of sudsy water,
all pristine and friendly.
In case the apologetic truth
takes my entire life hostage,
let me pretend.
Hart Crane Memorial Poetry Contest
Honorable Mention

Jerry Williams

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browsing through the produce section
or waiting in line at the post office,
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In case the apologetic truth
takes my entire life hostage,
let me pretend.
Maureen Fry

I Forget You

the way a fastidious woman
removes her gloves--deliberately

(a firm tug at each fingertip,
the pull of release, the hands' impulsive
wriggle and stretch)---and lays them neatly

on the little table by the door;
the way she straightens her underwear
drawer, discarding what’s just a shade
too small, what pinches and restricts,
what’s grayed or slightly worn; the way
she vacuums in the corners with first

the oval brush, then the crevice tool.
I forget you the way she saves mementos
in a shoe box, clearly labeled, tucked away

on the top shelf of the linen closet
beside the hand-embroidered guest towels
no one ever uses.

Still, your presence slips
across the threshold, ransacks the room,
scatters my belongings.

I am so tired
of cleaning up after you.

Angel Dewolfe

mo-not-o-nous

I lust after your smile and all that is boring

You delve into my body’s vulnerability and
I am born again
Your spirit disintegrates as you enclose me

Your gentle mind loses itself
Out in the dark and melancholy
Jealous me
My smile seduces you

Into this windstorm

I lust after your hands that
My body finds boring
I need you inside me

To dissolve my weak spirit

Your lifeless words float
Through the air
As you shrink from my mind

Frustration, nonchalance
Swelling brain

Dilating pupils
I exit this body
Above you, looking down

I ache for you and all that’s dull
Maureen Fry

I Forget You

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Shari O'Brien

Dancing with Cancer

It was his tall lankiness, the way that lean body angled across the dance floor that turned a first glance into a gaze that's been maintained for half a lifetime. Now he's become a poster boy for aid to some famished third world country, his ribs pushing hungrily against his parchment-like skin. The ripened stench of foul brown urine staggering through a catheter into a pouch hanging wearily against the bed. This smell mingles with the rot of roses on the sill, nauseating me each time I slump into the room, a step-down from ICU. Today he rips the IV like a paratrooper releasing himself into the wild blue yonder. His eyes are the color of hard-boiled eggs. They bulge from their sockets as he demands I fetch a cookie and a cup of coffee or face the firing squad he thinks he's commissioning. In the plain English he no longer speaks nor grasps I patiently mouth again the order of this God-forsaken no man's land: nothing by mouth, no food, no water, no not even an ice chip yet. He lunges, cursing, towards me-- I am the messenger, he the crazed, cancer-stricken despot with the bloated ankles who abducted my dancing partner last winter.

Shari O'Brien

Sand Castles Tides Can't Wash Away

And when you heard me pound my fist in rage against my desk, you sensed I couldn't hear the pounding surf in that final landlocked verse.

And when I studied empty shells while the other women swam and sunned, you guessed perhaps I sought to grasp how pearls are formed from grains of sand.

And when I nearly drowned beneath a wave of polite slips, you stuffed despair and envelopes and taught me love buoys hope.

And when I tried to build from ink sand castles tides can’t wash away, when shadows prowled around my eyes, when I had sunstroke once again, you touched my hand and trusted still and never thought I’d lost my mind.
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Allan Douglass Coleman

On Hold
(for Samuel Beckett)

He's still not here. I hope he's well. I hope that nothing's happened.

Looks like it's up to you and me, some letters on a page.

Hard to make even those work out. Here's what I know: when the right words have all got said, is silence. Just the best next space for awhile. And then the distant barking of some dogs, or children's voices calling from the street.

Allan Douglass Coleman

Whatever Happens
(for Keith McElroy)

Deluge of sunlight on the big empty; sharp hills wear shades of cloud like mourning garb.

In the dark theater a teacher draws Ganesh again and again, keeping in touch with his dear dead son.

I sit behind him hoarding no answers, holding no questions, expecting only whatever happens.
**Allan Douglass Coleman**

**On Hold**

(for Samuel Beckett)

He's still not here.
well. I hope that
Looks like it's up
some letters
Hard to make even
Here's what I know:
have all got said,
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whatever happens.
Lauren Barnett

Holly Tree Lane

I fit pennies inside my mouth
Choke on the rust;
Suck in the copper
so the words I want cannot escape.

I press stamps against my eyelids
And walk in circles
Around you.
The days turn and smooth me over.

I shut myself down
Press pine needles into the carpet
And adorn myself in fine pearls
that have not yet met my mouth.

Gingerbreads lie upon my counter
Fingers fumble their red gumdrops.
I swallow matches
And light candlesticks for you.

It's me and you:
I give butterfly kisses with eyelashes;
Inhale coffee grinds to pour you a cup.
Tie a ribbon around the two of us.

This is the sound of breathing.
It's all I can offer you
With my mouth tied up
And my eyes locked.

James Doyle

Orchestra Pit

They were playing the "Birdbath
For the Two of Us" sonata
when the curtain went up.

The violinist believed she
was losing her fingers, though
in actuality they were growing
plumper with each solo. Nothing
was on stage--the entire cast
had taken a sick day, but

perhaps all was not lost.
The audience joined the orchestra
in a sing-along without

words. From that day on,
music alone sufficed. For
anybody wandering into one

particular theater, plot had
disappeared from the this-or-that life anybody had

been leading. Music that
no longer needed articulation.
A curtain always remaining up.
Lauren Barnett

_Holly Tree Lane_

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A curtain always remaining up.
Beet Harvest

The residue from three days of rain is an overdose
of primary color, a shaved brightness that bobs
my headache until it is sharp enough to blur
my hands on the beet field.
Beet ligaments
swollen with dead soil, smell of beet-tangle
under my fingernails another decade. The barn
bends over the great tubs, sluggish with juice, burnt
orange, stalls full of animal beets, broken
sun through the wall-cracks like a tongue
with nothing better to lick, beet sores
graphing my touch, slippery with skin,
bumpy along my lips when I talk
at the mirror, rusted glass, pores
tough as the weed knotted around eyes.

The Gardener

He pulls wily fur from the nearest dead skin.

It is a rose bush spackled with last Spring’s rain.

He cups his palms around the freeze-dried humming.

He is the last in his family line. A connoisseur of leftovers.

The tree begins to emerge through its thinning leaves.

His green thumb is white with snow

and next year’s cottonwoods, but he is too weary

of it all starting over so soon. He wishes

each season were years long like the time it takes

to pull headstones from the cemetery with his tractor

and wrap fresh corpses in lily pads

for ballast when the land starts getting away from him again.
**James Doyle**

**Beet Harvest**

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Andrew Rihn

Babylon

Holding fast to roots planted in the idea of a homeland, parents give birth to progress as a safeguard for their future.

Like saplings in a great forest, more children will be born today than I could ever count.

I would first count the surrendering leaves of oak trees or the drops of maple syrup filling the buckets of our mouths.

In every country, on every continent, the children will learn to speak every language,

spilling their words onto the street like branches of a bonsai tree, their expressions absorbing rusted barbs into the thickness of bark.

And the parents, snug in their sense of invulnerability, will drop their leaves in surprise

upon seeing their children clamor for sunlight amongst the overbearing shadows of history.
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Caitlin Dwight

Rip

Carve me a hole
So I can pretend
My heart that never was
Was

Tear me a smile
So I can pretend
Joy that never will be
Is

Cut me a voice
So I can pretend
Anger that hasn’t raged
Sang

Rip me apart
So I can pretend
Sorrow that wasn’t there
Did it

Sew me together
So I can pretend
That I was once
Complete
Caitlin Dwight

Rip

Carve me a hole
So I can pretend
My heart that never was
Was

Tear me a smile
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Complete
Robert Cooperman

The Urge to Travel

"I want to travel," his mother shocked him: closer to ninety than eighty, and tottering on a walker. "I'll pay for both of us, you make the arrangements."

In a sweat, he dialed his aunt, asked if she'd noticed anything strange about his mother of late. "No," though Becky's voice quavered with doubt: a butterfly caught in the air stream of a window fan.

A week later, his mother demanded, "What about those reservations?" a duchess losing patience with a dim-witted stable boy.

The next day, his aunt called, "She's gone, Donny, gone!" "Oh God," he groaned, "I'm leaving for the funeral."

"Funeral?" Aunt Becky shrieked, as if at scandalous gossip. "Oh dear me, no: your mother booked a flight out of Kennedy. Her note accused if she had to wait for you, she'd be dead first.

"Besides," Becky's voice hushed with even worse news, "she said, you were no fun to travel with."

Robert Cooperman

Not Related to Genghis Khan

"DNA tests have furnished a double surprise for Thomas Robinson, an associate professor of accounting at the University of Miami. The first was being told he was descended from Genghis Khan. The second was learning that the first test was wrong." --The New York Times

I knew right away the news was too good to be true, so underwent a second test to prove I possessed no emperor's blood, no conqueror, who instead of earth, stood on the skulls of men he swatted like pests, so though I was flattered, the news was good

I wasn't kin to that overblown hood, that horseback gangster who gave the world no rest, and drowned Asia red with innocent blood.

Though some like to claim their ancestors should have been Billy the Kid of the Wild West, I knew the news, right off, was none too good, and dreaded the weight that knowledge would put on my shoulders, accustomed to be dressed in patched scholar's suits, not tunics of blood.

I had the second test, quick as I could: better harmless, than morally distressed; I knew right away the news was no good that proved I possessed an emperor's blood.
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**Philip B. Crosby**

*Remembering a Hero*  
(for Leo Nomellini)

Fingers like bloody fish on ice,  
your helmet a partial eclipse,  
we were allowed on the sidelines  
for the final minute of certain victory  
and when the gun sounded  
we watched you rise,  
pulling the ocean over your shoulders,  
and we followed the wake of your cape  
like sea birds.

*Thoughts of a Farm Supplier*  
(for Ralph)

I can't leave my tools.  
They're on my shelves stark as bones  
some kept under glass like historical display.  
These idle, unwanted, unbought tools  
all facing a winter river's flowing ice  
like a mute herd fording a dream.  
The Amish prosper; we're in recession  
and I'd like to go to Florida,  
but I can’t leave my tools  
filling the emptiness for my customers' visits.  
They drink coffee, but never buy.  
The ashtray is more filled with matches  
than cigarettes  
and though my tractor tires  
have been replaced by horse shoes  
we still smile at the sight of each other.  
We are old wrinkled men  
surrounded by smooth metal.  
All these tools are comforting as memories  
but still new as hope.

**Emily Krachman**

*Waiting for My Sunset*

Drowning out the sound from below with my sweet solemn hum  
Tapping on the window pane  
Staring at myself  
Staring back  
I can't see much with these lights dimmed low  
Just trying to stay up to watch the sun rise  
Pushing around pencil lead with swollen finger tips  
Scratchin' down what's left up there  
Time ticking timely and slow  
Turning off the phone to get a demo of life without it  
Turn it back on  
Wait for it to buzz  
Then turn it off  
Decided to disconnect myself from the outside of my silent oasis  
A lighter night than my day  
Just waiting for the sun to lick a fiery love across the sky  
Waiting for a new day  
Full of second chances  
Waiting for my sunset
Philip B. Crosby

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Full of second chances
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Lyn Lifshin

Moonrise, Hernandez, New Mexico 1941

(Ansel Adams)

past adobe, deep behind tumbleweed
someone shuts off a radio, as if news
of war would come over the sage, slither thru
dust and locusts. Under a pale moon
crosses gleam. In streaked light

a young girl unbuttons a hand-me-down
blouse, lets it fall to the linoleum,
thinks of her brother crawling on his belly
in the South Pacific. Her breasts swell, her
hair smells of pinyon and agave.

She hears her father playing banjo on the front porch,
thinks of her mother's leathery skin, lank hair,
swears it won't always be like this: nights with
nothing but the wind in the mesquite,
vows to escape, make it to a place where there is more
than sky and mountains, where women dress in high heels
and smell of roses like in movie magazines

maybe get all the way to
Albuquerque

Lyn Lifshin

A Wet Cold Winter to Come, the Paper Says

The geraniums hang on, the
oak leaves are copper. The

news on the phone is never
easy. Comfort is my cat in the
cove of my knees. One minute
it was fall then sky went lead,
spit ice crystals.

The news on the phone is never easy,
full of warning. In the driveway,
something without a head, a clump
that looked like lint from the
dryer but with tiny pink feet.
I want someone to tuck
me in, rub my back. Instead, I
put the geraniums to bed under
quilts like babies.

Something without a head but
with tiny pink feet. I think of the
crows circling the crumbs,
swooping down to the squirrel's
nest. My cat, 20, is on insulin.
Yesterday when the sky went
lead like the news she followed
me from room to room. I think

of the crows how often the dark
birds in films are metaphors for
what no one wants to say
Lyn Lifshin

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what no one wants to say
in the first frame, Alma Karmina in a cove of her new mother’s skin, an almond shape rocking her, long hair in small braids. The Hudson in the distance, music of street noise, guitars until she seems smaller, huge eyes looking around the inside of a room that’s moving over oceans, lights on the ground, a string of beads. It is years before Alma knows the word airplane, has any idea what leaving her city in Guatemala means. Toucans and quetzal birds iridescent on the ground below, too far to see. A feather in her blanket, woven into her blanket as Alma shrinks, is less than a month suddenly in a slope near a rainforest listening to spider monkeys in the lily wind, parrots, macaws, jaguars and crocodiles. Move quickly and you might catch a coati, even a few exotic snakes. It’s the magic hour, the ambience the film director focuses on to make the world a playground of animals talking a language Alma knows as the camera pans off into a gauzy still, a freeze frame where those longing for her are remodeling their house, their lives, their dreams to make her real
Lyn Lifshin

*If This Was a Movie Run Backward*

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Simon Perchik

L 24

Under your tongue these stones
the dead leave empty
--what you warm

basks next to words
no longer side by side
sung the way evenings

still turn back
--it's an old love song
buried then buried again

needs more air than the others
--you breathe for two
though there's no breeze

only a birthmark taking hold
the way a single song
began as a few stones

and a fresh start--you inhale
as if this thirst needs you
wants mountains, backhoes, a mouth.
**Simon Perchik**

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**Dennis Saleh**

*December Nap*

The cat rubs his body on the floor and makes electricity

The little snaps flick off his body in a line

and I trace a Z of static with my finger

in the smudged air of hours in the room

Where the sea is grey minutes come in off it

and slide up the hill with no sound like the waves

Each wave says again nothing to say

The sea will always go on like this wearing itself out

like an endless month tidying its hem preparing

It will be in church when the year is swallowed and gone

All day the moon is in the sky customary fragile

like balsa a coal in the ceremony of sky

It sees all the way into January in its vigil

but looks faint constellation of one The Sleepwalker

A gull drops to where a jellyfish smiles on the beach

a faint scarf a silver trail dissolving leading to nothing

**Dennis Saleh**

like the afternoon leading to sleep at the year's end

I take my shadow by the hand to rest

**Matthew Powell**

*My Appetite*

As I sit here and digest the evening I am left with a feeling of indigestion, My metabolism and I are left to question Why I find myself here At a deserted table After dessert With feelings of confusion and hurt.

Compassion was the appetizer, Betrayal the main course. I devoured each dish, Pieces cut with my knife and fork. I know what to blame For my meal of pain, My appetite.
Dennis Saleh

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Lorraine Tolliver

Regensburg

Regensburg, Germany,
where bubble the headwaters
of the Danube River,
you are a womb
of world and women,
slipping into harbors
between sunrise and sunset,
sending generations out
over Europe, Asia, America.
You merge the soil of continents
and mix genes of nations.
You are the alpha and omega
of nomadic wanderings,
the silent companion
of noisy quest and conquest
from west to east and east to west.
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**Diane Webster**

**Water Wrap**

The girl kneels in water and covers her face with her hands as tiny droplets slide down wrists and join the mother liquid below as she enjoys the amniotic caressing of her body in a protective wrap of rippling, jiggling sense of awareness that her body changes, grows, matures until she stands and removes her hands from her face knowing her body arouses from within and from without like water shedding down skin to dry in sunshine's sparkling admiration.

**Unlike Moonlight**

She lies naked on her bed--curtains closed to the twilight and crickets outside even though she fears a peeping tom might sneak a peek through a woven thread stretched far enough apart from its neighbor to catch a startled vision of a naked woman caressing her nipples hard under the stark overhead light fixture so unlike moonlight flickering between shy maple leaves in a whisper of wind as she dresses as quietly as always and pulls the light switch down until darkness snaps across the room like a child leaping into bed before the night ogre snatches at her legs.
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John Fitzpatrick

The Muse

She sits in corner on lone chair in empty white painted studio. A muse of ninety-five. Perhaps more. Hair aged and coiled in twin strands. Sight going. Hearing leaving as well. She watches with smile the goings on, the movement of possessions her daughter and she owns, mostly paintings. They are brought into this room, leaned against three walls, like wood stacked to meet definition of a cord. All sizes. Shapes same, rectangular. Colors brilliant and subdued.

Characters. Scenes. Calligraphy of ancient Chinese verse learned in last Emperor’s reign.

Some of her life’s work, not the best ones, her daughter states. Most of other paintings her daughter’s entire life’s work. All meant to be hung in others’ homes to give joy and musing. Instead, they are stacked like cord wood now transferred from studio walls to darker closet. Sarcophagus-like. “I do not have much time left,” the muse says to me the few moments we have together from my helping effect this transfer. I would like

John Fitzpatrick

more of her warmth, more of her spirit painted on my own inner walls, to take with me, but I am hastened away by another’s intent to complete this move, preserve these works, and deal with own future after muse is gone still sitting with smile in corner watching all, speaking as much by her silence as could ever be said in voice and on canvas.

Allyson Hibbard

Art Survey

I sit in my class listening to his voice Transfixed by flashing images Yet enveloped in darkness And transported to another era That is not Ohio Immersed in this atmosphere I’m nearly drunk with the history And the reason behind the art My brain is swimming while Imagining the fantasies my fingers could create I am itching to leave To be alone with my media But I’m deprived with obligations That I cannot escape Because I have a conscience
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Nathaniel Fincham

Imitation of Art

Another stroke of crisp blue
across the stale dusty clouds
transforming a claustrophic sky
into new and appreciated air.
A forest altering through death,
familiar green growth brushed over by change,
fallen to a graveyard of red, orange, and brown.

An unfinished oil-based highway forms
a handmade path through natural woodland;
I choose the absence of lanes
and have no use of edge lines.

To complete my imitation of art
I finally etch myself upon the empty road,
ready to join the picture.

Constant passionate renewal,
struggling with content
for the colors I'm given,
but always creating to the best of my ability.

Nathaniel Fincham

Brief Clarity

After
the friction has ceased
leaving sweat
and smoke
to linger,
I am allowed
brief clarity.

A fleeting moment
without
distracting lust,
wondrous thoughts
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Matthew Butler

A Public Service Announcement

In the dark comes the
thump-rattle-creak,
then silence.
And I know that it's here.
Listening.

Your stupid parents won't believe you,
no matter how much you beg
and cry and wail.
They might turn on the hall light,
but when they're gone
It always comes back.

It won't kill you.
If it chewed out actual children's
brains--guts--livers
the parents would believe too.
No, I think it eats fear.
Fear, loneliness, then despair (my parents don't even care)
eats them all, and leaves
your dirty, shaking shell.

If you want to make it through
tonight, tomorrow night, or whatever
night it actually comes for you,
laugh. Laugh until your throat gets sore.
Laugh until it leaves
and goes to find another new
powder-fresh kid.
Laugh--maybe you'll still be human, then
when your body
turns ten.

Matthew Butler

Symbiosis Nocturnal

It's dark here, and loud.
Between throngs of strangers shoving other strangers,
a thick pall of greasy smoke
insinuates its way into our hair, clothes, skin.

When he slips through the red curtain
a spark, the wave of recognition
jumps from him to each of us,
everyone in the crowd knows he's here.

The sound shreds from his silver guitar,
bouncing off our supplicating faces and
waving, shaking clumps of arms,
stabbing us all in one
silver second.

When he's done with us, he slinks
behind the old, grimy curtain--satiated yet again.
Lights blink on, we masses squeeze out the red door,
and we all go wherever we all go
waking from his feeding dream.
Matthew Butler

A Public Service Announcement

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Children's Museum

Across the street
the orchard beckons.
Come. Climb. Spend time
with monarchs, swallowtails,
viceroy—really.

Cumulus clouds fashion
fairy kingdom come.
Forget for a moment the maggot-infested
squirrel's tail Mr. Keasey waved. Brute.
Why did you ride bikes
up his driveway anyway?

Consider the fruit trees,
how they grow. They taunt not,
neither do they nag.
Inhale the mingled scents.
Impale the picture on the spindle
of your yet green mind.

Separate Conventions

While owners of gleaming Harleys
vroom-vroom their pipes in Milwaukee,
Painted Ladies
in orange and black matte finish
flutter silently
in my neighbor's garden,
drinking from lavender salvia,
joined by a hummingbird, spurning
sugar water from an aluminum tube.

"... 7, 8, lay them straight"

Just as I pull the obligatory comb
through my hair every morning,
I depend on the beat of Ella or Tony or Artie
to realign my psyche.

The subconscious nudges until Cole Porter
or Gershwin or Count Basie leads the way
through lost thought or buried schemes
and gets me in tune for another day.
Phyllis I. T. Harris

Children’s Museum

Across the street
the orchard beckons.
Come. Climb. Spend time
with monarchs, swallowtails,
viceroys—really.

Cumulus clouds fashion
fairy kingdom come.
Forget for a moment the maggot-infested
squirrel’s tail Mr. Keasey waved. Brute.
Why did you ride bikes
up his driveway anyway?

Consider the fruit trees,
how they grow. They taunt not,
neither do they nag.
Inhale the mingled scents.
Impale the picture on the spindle
of your yet green mind.

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January Blues

A handful of grace notes
lost in your blue note eyes
still echo through these years
of listening to old Coltrane;
I'm moonstruck by the fear
that you might suspect
how I forever hear
the tenor of your charms;
ashamed of my own voice,
especially when it breaks
in the soundproofed corridor
of some offbeat bar;
life orchestrates us
somewhere in the middle
of an A flat,
reverberating through nightclubs
of our future,
which never fail to arrive.

Panic Attacks

She calls them
"blitzkrieg raids,"
when near sundown
and losing it all
in a swarmy motion,
left without verbal advice
yet stalking every faint moment,
she telephones to tell me
how time is sheeted,
riddled with flayed messages,
sirens, flashbacks, stigmata,
overtures, and racing tongues;
and every catechized expression
tries to make this cold phantom
disappear from her damp foreign body.

Suggesting pink pills
or an herbal cupped tea
feeling for that first communion,
an old Little Lulu strip
or a comic TV cartoon,
wishing for some cosmic clue
for this rational subversion,
putting on holiday candelabra,
imagining a salient sea,
a beach full of hygienic kids,
she waters her Brazilian rubber plants,
hums that diminished Beethoven chord,
stuffs a chocolate bear inside out,
tries to meditate on cherubim
seeking some stop of red light
that could calm her
from iced swollen masks
of the next begotten moment.
B.Z. Niditch

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Romare Beardon

Morning of the Red Bird

a jewel box of color,
glistening ebony skin.
The reddest birds,
roosters in the yard
behind dripping catalpa
and roses. Let the blues
go to sleep, light be
like that whale, a
lover or swimmer
with its mouth open,
swimming, swallowing.
The morning like the
whale, notes building
into phrases, singing
under water thru sea
quince and light javelins,
crooning, nose to nose,
dreaming journeys

Romare Beardon

In a Green Shade

“The artist has to be something like a whale swimming with his mouth open to everything until he has what he needs.”

The artist is like
what is singing under
the waves of green.
Green wind, green
petals, green all light
grows greener in.
Dream frogs, iridescent
insects, a pipe organ
under leaves where
you can only imagine,
underwater balloons
you can stretch the
necks of taut, play in
day dreams that take
you on a journey
long as the sea is
Romare Bearden

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Brian C. Felder

Simple Pleasures

The day is done
and, from the sound of your breathing,
it has already been forgotten.
We have gone to bed to watch TV
and you have laid your head upon my chest,
as you so often do,
and have fallen asleep,
feeling safe there.
This is my favorite part of the day,
when it has ended without harm to us
and you nest quietly in my arms.
It is good, this,
so very, very good.
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