

THIMBLE LITERARY MAGAZINE

Established in 2018



www.thimblelitmag.com



Vol. 3 • No. 1
Spring 2020

Thimble Literary Magazine

Volume 3 · Number 1 · Summer 2020

Thimble Literary Magazine

Volume 3 · Number 1 · Summer 2020

Copyright © 2020 by Thimble Literary Group

Nadia Wolnisty Editor in Chief	Phil Cerroni Managing Editor	Paul Koniecki Associate Editor
Justice Ferguson Associate Editor	Caitlin Cowan Associate Editor	Colleen Ahern Associate Editor
Emily Hart Associate Editor		

The *Thimble Literary Magazine* is based on the belief that poetry is like armor. Like a thimble, it may be small and seem insignificant, but it will protect us when we are most vulnerable.

The authors of this volume have asserted their rights in accordance with Copyright, Designs, and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the authors of their respective works.

Brief Guidelines for Submission

The *Thimble Literary Magazine* is primarily a poetry journal but invites submissions on related topics such as artwork, stories, and interviews. We are not looking for anything in particular in terms of form or style, but that it speaks to the reader or writer in some way. When selecting your poems or prose, please ask yourself, did this poem help me create shelter? Simultaneous submissions are accepted, but please notify us if the work is accepted elsewhere. All material must be original and cannot have appeared in another publication.

Poetry: Please send us three to five of your poems.

Short Stories: Please send a single work or around 1,000 words. It can be fiction, creative non-fiction, or somewhere in between.

Art: Please send us three to five examples of your art, which can include photographs and photographs of three-dimensional pieces.

Please send submissions to Nadia Wolnisty, Editor-in-Chief, Thimble Literary Magazine, thimblelitmag@gmail.com The author's biography should be included in the body of the email and the submission as a single attachment.

Cover art
Amy Donnelly, *Not Just a Pond*,
acrylic, 2020.

CONTENTS

Untitled (1)	6
<i>Mario Loprete</i>	
Editor's Note	7
An Olive Curves Like Space	9
<i>Lynn Cox</i>	
Luck That Never Came	10
<i>Selina Whiteley</i>	
Warhol Runs from the Platipi	10
<i>Olaf Tollefsen</i>	
Quiz on the Commercialization of Worship	11
<i>J. Marcus Weekley</i>	
Provincial Potion	14
<i>Karlo Sevilla</i>	
Asleep in the Grass	15
<i>Amy Donnelly</i>	
The Evolution of Fishing on Lake Enterprise	16
<i>Melissa Rendlen</i>	
Summer Music	17
<i>Juan Pablo Mobili</i>	
The Moving Shelter	18
<i>Jeri Frederickson</i>	
Untitled (2)	19
<i>Mario Loprete</i>	
About My Life ...	20
<i>Sheila Wellehan</i>	

A Love Letter Thirty-Three Years in the Writing	21
<i>Michelle Ladwig</i>	
Untitled (3)	24
<i>Mario Loprete</i>	
The Secret Goldfish	25
<i>Howie Good</i>	
How to Fail	26
<i>Jennifer Battisti</i>	
Red Clay Portraiture	27
<i>Malik Morton</i>	
Head-On Collision	28
<i>Brian Baumgart</i>	
Moro Reflex	29
<i>Nicholas Reiner</i>	
Dreamscape	30
<i>Jeffrey Haskey-Valerius</i>	
Zippers	31
<i>Barbara Dahlberg</i>	
Blackbird Gallery	32
<i>Ally Chua</i>	
Writing Yourself Out	33
<i>Romana Iorga</i>	
Red Doors	35
<i>Amy Donnelley</i>	
What Happens to First Loves When You Get Conscripted into the Korean Army	36
<i>June Son</i>	

Detail of Icarus and Daedalus Fresco from Villa Imperiale, Pompeii, AD 1 <i>Alina Melnik</i>	38
Corsicana Blue <i>James Rodehaver</i>	39
View from the Window, July <i>Patricia Caspers</i>	40
The Astronomy of Losing <i>Donna Vorreyer</i>	41
Untitled (4) <i>Mario Loprete</i>	42



Mario Loprete, untitled,
concrete sculpture, 2018.

Editor's Note

Lately I've been thinking of that quote from *The Sound and the Fury*: "I wasn't crying but I couldn't stop." That's how it feels of late. Our journal requires much planning, being run by a thimble-sized staff, so there are often months between selecting poems, writing letters from the editor—whatever that is for anyways—and the release. I don't know what the world will look like at the end of June.

I'm writing this in the middle of May. I am grateful. My income is okay, I am safe, I am healthy, I prefer my own company. And yet every day I just want to weep. For myself; for my friends, losing people they love; for people who will not listen; for the world.

If I were not the editor in chief—and did not have to keep up some level of decorum—I would have done away with the Faulkner quote and gone straight to telling you what it feels like: cry-constipation. You want to let it out. Keeping it in feels unhealthy, like it's going to come out badly anyways. You're so uncomfortable and anxious. You want it on your own terms, damnit. You try and you try, but still nothing. You're afraid right now to be vulnerable. You feel like an ungrateful fool. So you think, What are the things that help? (With crying, I mean, not the other thing; we're not that kind of journal.) You think of the time your therapist said he used to have a patient come in two times a month and weep because his dog had died. This went on for a year. And your therapist added that all he could tell the patient was that the mourning is not inordinate; all it means is he must have loved his dog a lot.

And then it's okay somehow, what you are feeling. You can mourn something (even as big and impossible as the world changing). All it means is you must have loved it a lot. It was full of things big and small.

And how you loved the small things—grabbing coffee without a second thought, going to the store like it wasn't a game of Tetris, touching every book in a bookstore.

Here is a journal with a few small things. It's okay if you want to mourn them. It's okay if you're not crying and can't stop.

Best,

NADIA ARIOLI

An Olive Curves Like Space

by Lynn Cox

I took pictures of him at the Golden
Gate Bridge and he took them of me we
didn't do them together though. Made him

listen to Lorde on the drive home, told him
You'll have to learn what I like eventually.

Never been to California til that weekend
my body learned the shape of palms, splayed-
out rib tailing splayed-out rib. Didn't

know that I could become this, each
node of the spine another spine, each

window another eye. Read yesterday that
the universe might be a loop, and I thought of
the coiling hallways of our tiny spaceship

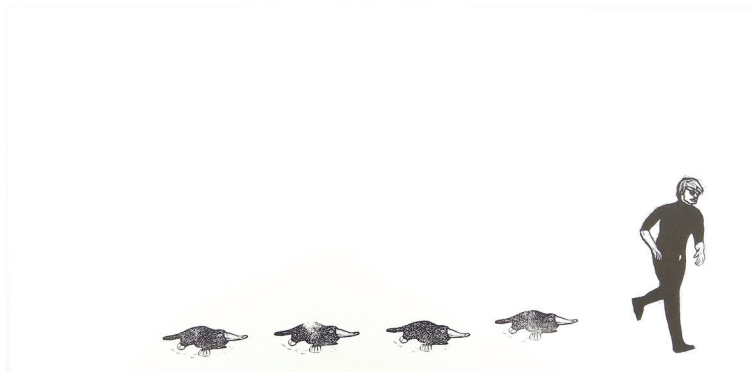
Vancouver hotel room, and a manzanilla
olive he fed me in his summer apartment

kitchen with a spoon, salty and fat and pitted.
It is the universe bent back,
filled with sweet pimiento.

Luck That Never Came

by Selina Whiteley

The ocean was heavy, white ridged,
like the malachite stone charm
I kept in my jeans pocket for luck
that never came. I glimpsed that fallen foal,
contorted like the branches of a willow
weeping into charcoal clouds.
Wild-eyed and crazy as any Picasso horse,
it was curled on that outcrop of cliff,
writhing, eyes sorrowful in the wet morning,



Olaf Tollefsen, *Warhol Runs from the Platipi*,
linoleum print, 2019.

Quiz on the Commercialization of Worship

by J. Marcus Weekley

Name _____

Religious Preference _____

New Name _____

- 7). If all days are holy, and today is a day, then _____.
- a). today is holy.
 - b). you're an idiot.
 - c). (do you really believe all days are holy?) give thanks with a grateful heart.
 - d). mac 'n' cheese is the best comfort food. EVER! But, especially at weddings, funerals, and family gatherings. Or, after a breakup. Or, when your cat dies. Or, if you're a dog person, when your dog gets poisoned by a neighbor who hates dogs. Or, if you're not a pet person, when you watch Lifetime movies about a soldier falling in love with a girl who mails Christmas cards to overseas military personnel fighting in wars the news doesn't talk about anymore.
- 6). The chart on page 13 presents the incorporation of over three hundred religions into the United States (are they?), designating when each was first introduced into the timeline of Amurikan herstory, which includes indigenou peoples' beliefs. From this information, it can be inferred that _____.

- a). you're an idiot. My god is the only true god.
 - b). spiritual beliefs are like assholes: everybody shits.
 - c). merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily, life is but a dream.
 - d). today is holy though, what does holiness mean?
- 5). Upon observing evening light reflecting on a turned-off lamp, one writer said, "Wow, that's pretty!" Respond using only one of the following court-approved answers:
- a). How much do you know about religions from which your beliefs differ?
 - b). Why is holiness important? Do you revere each day's light? Where does light come from?
 - c). You're an idiot. My gods are the only true gods.
 - d). Santa Claus isn't real. Vishnu isn't real. Jesus isn't real. Allah isn't real. Money is real. Hamburgers are real.
- 4). A witch and a valentine walk into a bar. They're greeted by a lesbian, an Irishman, a Latina, and Martin Luther King Jr. _____.
- a). Today is holy, and you will recognize its holiness. (i've got to get out of this place, if it's the last thing i ever do)
 - b). Oh, my, god, did you see *The Notebook*? I know, right? Favorite. Movie. EVER!
 - c). Four is the number for humanity, for incompleteness. Seven, the number of completeness. Three is a number of stability. What day were you born?
 - d). You're still an idiot because I don't believe in anything. I'm god. But, if there was another god, she wouldn't want to have anything to do with us because people suck.
- 3). If Capitalism, Humanism, Darwinism, Socialism, any other Ism you can think of, all walk into a zoo, where does that leave one human being?
- a). Anarchy is the answer. Dictators are the answer. Matriarchal democracy is the answer.

- b). Nobody knows (the trouble you've seen?). Does that make you an idiot?
 - c). Today is Saturday. It can be holy and profane. It can be neither. The sun shines. Clouds cover the sun. It rains. The moon shines. Clouds cover the moon. Stars shine. A new day.
 - d). How do we celebrate one thing without excluding something else? What's wrong with exclusion? What's right about exclusion?
- 2). In the Beginning, some people did some shit and now other people do more shit. Things don't change much. Do you:
- a). I remember some Christmas mornings, at Grandpa Newby's, all the kids, cousins usually, who had been sleeping on the living room floor, would barely be able to hold all of their excitement in until the parents woke up, usually because the kids kept making noise. The Christmas tree sparkled with tons of tinsel and lights, wrapped presents under the tree crackled as kids poked and shook them, and, as adults gradually woke, somebody started coffee and smoking. Those times, for brief moments, I felt some sense of harmony within my extended family.
 - b). What is the correlation between food and worship? sacrifice and food? sacrifice and worship? Do you like ice cream? What is your favorite food?
 - c). I'm an idiot. You're an idiot. We're all idiots trying to figure things out.
 - d). What do you love? What do you fear? What do you celebrate?
- 1). The end?

Provincial Potion

by Karlo Sevilla

Grandmother tells of a summer morning
in the mid-forties—just after
the Second World War.
She was newlywed.
An Aeta tribesman descends
to her town of Oton in Iloilo
and knocks on her door.
He peddles death and desire
in one vial for one peso.
She haggles to fifty centavos.
He replies,
“But that’s too little, *Inday*,
as this is already too much
of a good thing. Or things.”

Mumbling, he leaves
with his merchandise
for other prospects,
and she returns
to her chores.

At dusk, another rapping:
No takers in town
for a little bottle
of strange bedfellows—
even if it’s only one peso.

And so, fifty centavos
settles the day-long match.
She carries her peculiar trophy
to the medicine cabinet,
but it slips her hand,
scatters into pieces on the floor.
She sweeps shards, wipes spill.
Tells herself she needs no potions,
and smiles for she is newlywed.



Amy Donnelly, *Asleep in the Grass*,
acrylic, 2020.

The Evolution of Fishing on Lake Enterprise

by Melissa Rendlen

He came north to fish
before I was born,
built a cabin lakeside,
burned kerosene lamps.
In green fisherman's hat,
canvas and mesh vest festooned with lures,
my grandfather rowed a heavy wooden boat,
caught forty-inch muskie, stringers of northerns.

Boats changed from wooden to aluminum.
As a child I heard the early morning chug of their motors.
Afternoons the old couple next door
would emerge from their cabin,
putter out to panfish beds, catch dinner.

Now glossy trucks pull slick boats
on mechanized trailers. Streamlined,
each races from the public landing
to one weed patch after another.
Alone they cast, rarely catch,
release if they do.
Once around the lake,
then full-throttle
race back to their trailers,
load and go.

Summer Music

by Juan Pablo Mobili

the breeze this summer is more austerely rationed than wartime bread
thank God for the crickets' generosity, filling stale air with music

July has been uncertain, filled with rumors of mortality, and
August has not helped,
and my wife carries the worrying for our son like a shroud

the porch is a church tonight as we respect the dark and
choose to light no candles;
we have been speaking without a single word as the sauce simmers
promising the solace of a meal prepared with volunteer tomatoes

and the music tonight comes from small creatures
scraping their legs on their bellies like guitars

The Moving Shelter

by Jeri Frederickson

The yellow cab driver looked back
when I said, *I'm going*
to get my ID and credit card,
then I want you to drive

me home. Those quiet hands
turned the wheel toward me
as my friend's lip curled
and left the dark blood

on my chest. Halloween broke
into all souls'. One hand on the wheel,
one rubbing his face, the driver
moved all the pieces of me

away from that curled lip,
those teeth with my blood.
His feet slowed the wheels
at every house I puzzled over.

Not this one or that one,
but on this street of light-up ghosts.
I couldn't offer the truth: I'd only had
one drink the whole night.

He nodded as I opened
the car door. *I'm going
to come back, and then I want you
to take me home.* The driver

waited as I found my body
on the boards of someone's deck
and my ID with the host who asked if
I was okay and where my friend I won't name

was as I left to find the driver
waiting for my body to return
just as my ID returned
just as my credit card returned.

The whites of his eyes steadied
a road behind me as he drove me
to a home I couldn't lock the cold
out of. But for a while I was warm.



Mario Loprete, untitled,
concrete sculpture, 2018.

About My Life ...

by Sheila Wellehan

I sewed a shirt about my life
from red silk, with buttons of ice.
It looked sexy and stylish and smashing,
but it gave me a bad case of lice.

I baked a cake about my life
with absinthe and chocolate ganache.
Crushed glass was one ingredient too much, though.
My confection went out with the trash.

I painted a book about my life—
images that mesmerized and mystified.
No one ever saw my work because
the colors rained up to the sky.

I sang a song about my life,
but I was Patsy Cline,
with a midnight voice, crazy and certain—
my plane crashed, but heaven was fine.

A Love Letter Thirty-Three Years in the Writing

by Michelle A. Ladwig

It was a cold night in February; I had gone to my parents' house to pick something up, but I remember clearly that as I walked out of the house, a haze around my heart, my whole body and my knowledge of all things good and true, my mother pushed open the screen door at the kitchen, leaned out from it and said, "Don't you dare skip class to go to some funeral."

But before I share this story with you, I need your trust. I need you to know this has been locked in my heart for thirty-one years. I want you to know this is about a girl who has been gone for thirty-one years. She has now been dead longer than she was alive. I want you to know I loved her.

Death is simple. It is finished. It is complete.

Love, my friends, is complicated.

In August of 1985 I enrolled for my fall classes at the local university, which was either thirteen miles away or maybe a million miles away from my parents' home. I was a very young eighteen.

To give you an idea of what eighteen looked like for me, our one, avocado-green landline phone hung on the kitchen wall. The TV turned by a dial you had to *get up and turn*. The microwave oven was as big as a Buick. We had a Buick. I had never seen the ocean or a meal that didn't get cooked in a black iron pot with a mirepoix base.

Before that day, signing up for fall classes, I had also never seen a woman who looked like that.

My best friend, Todd, and I were walking to the registrar's office to write our largest checks ever. She was a friend of his and he introduced us.

Let me set the scene: If this were a montage in a movie, the film would slow down, and our uber-poetic, geeky, over-achieving, eager-to-please, Molly Ringwald look-a-like heroine—me—would find her heart beating quicker than a Van Halen drum solo.

See, she had on a long, soft, billowing paisley-printed skirt with mahogany combat boots. She had on a grey tee. Her hair was pixie short and a deep brown. Her eyes were brown, but sometimes green when she flirted. Her voice was a rasp file on raw silk. Her lips were red. She wore a single Tahitian pearl in the suprasternal notch. I wanted to be that grey pearl. I wanted to nest like Thumbelina in that space.

She and I never kissed. But she was known as the Lothario of Lesbians. Drunk and blissed-out girls would tumble out of bathroom stalls with red lipstick stains on their collars and necks and smeared across their soft faces.

She and I never dated. But I valued every morning before English or math or history, when we sat at the picnic tables in the quad and talked with the rest of our friends. Her cigarettes and Styrofoam cups filled with black coffee were kissed red. We danced on the weekends in the best bars in the French Quarter. On Thursdays we drank lemon pledges. On Sundays, we huffed poppers and went to tea dance. One August night we got stranded in a hurricane and watched as the rain pelted the warped glass of the French doors. After class one day she spilt / we spilt / a blue Hawaiian was spilt all over me / us at Flanagan's. I blushed in the bathroom where she blotted me dry. I never even kissed her except . . .

One night, hanging out at Chaps on St. Charles, the rain was coming down soft like it does in New Orleans, just enough to shake the scent off the magnolias and into your hair. I had on a long black-velvet pencil skirt, a white silk shirt and my favorite studded patent leather shoes. She danced around me at the foot of the one-hundred-year-old stairwell in the club, singing "Book of Love" and kissed me, square on the cheek, red lip prints for all to see. I could not see straight. For one and a half years I hung on every breath she exhaled. For one and a half years, give or take thirty-one, I cherished her lips on my cheek.

As an adult I have had partners—and dates that didn't get too far—who have questioned my attachment to her, my love for her. They've questioned how I could love someone I never even slept with. Well, because love is not a tinder match. Love is complicated.

My own parents, Christmas of 1985, threw me out of the house for loving a girl. She was a girl and so was I. In hindsight, I assume my parents were reading my diary. And I *know* that kiss was in that little white book between the mattresses. If you ask me why I hate Christmas, now you know.

After leaving my parents' home, shit went down and it went down fast.

I did what I did to stay alive. I dropped out of college. I slept pillar to post. I made some bad choices. I drank too much. I fucked too much. I stayed out too late. Maybe I shouldn't have.

But that's not the story.

On a cold night in February, I went to my parents' house to pick something up, the phone rang and my mother told me it was for me.

It was my best friend's mother. She said, "Baby, Todd wanted you to know Nan died," and I heard *aunt* and I thought, why does this matter to me, what aunt? And she said again, "Baby, did you hear me? Nan was in a car crash. She's gone." I dropped to the floor. There was an unfamiliar buzzing in my head. I felt untethered, unmoored. I felt exactly like I feel right now. It hurts the same.

And I remember clearly that as I walked out of the house, a haze around my heart, my whole body, my mother pushed open the screen door at the kitchen, leaned out from it and said, "Don't you dare skip class to go to some funeral."

I went to the funeral. I don't remember crying.

I'd like to tell you what happened in the crash, but my friends kept it from me. I only know it was bad and quick.

I remember the casket was pearlescent pink and arranged at an angle to the room. There were white roses on top of the closed casket. I didn't know she liked white roses.

I know where she is buried, but I've never been. Sometimes, around her birthday, I'll toast to her. I thought I saw her once sitting on my porch swing. I don't know. If love is complicated, the heart-brain relationship is a fucked-up mother fucker.

Now that I'm nearing the end of our story, I'm not sure what I meant to tell you. Can love be both complicated and simple? Yes.

Can you one day, maybe thirty-one years later, be a woman far from her heart of New Orleans, living in Omaha? Maybe you'll share your bed with a man with long legs who likes to tangle them into yours. You may have beautiful friends who make you want to be better. You may have danced and gotten drunk and fucked up some shit and swam in the sea and seen guitar solos that shook the rafters and loved truly and deeply, and all of that does not heal all wounds. I want you to know that no matter who you love, you should love fiercely. That if you ever meet your girl with the single Tahitian pearl in her suprasternal notch, you should love her. You should love her.



Mario Loprete, untitled,
concrete sculpture, 2018.

The Secret Goldfish

by Howie Good

My mother during one of her fits flushed my goldfish down the toilet while I was at school. This was long before computers ever challenged the supremacy of print. I had won the goldfish at a carnival by tossing a Ping-Pong ball into the fish's bowl. A hostile public was creeping down a white sand beach the whole time. I have memories of a star-like crack in a windshield, stick figures drawn on toilet paper, floors overflowing with blood. If it weren't for these things, I might have grown up to be many people talking all at once about love.

How to Fail

by Jennifer Battisti

Rescue the wrong dog at the right time, or the right dog at the wrong time. Press the accelerator like you're smashing a scorpion, don't let up. Just sign the paper, take the free bag of kibble. The moon is full or it is a crescent; he has freckles or else he is most certainly a Sagittarius, your weakness. Ignore your obligations. Fill the shopping cart with rawhide, Kongs, ThunderShirts The Furmanator. Contemplate the Chuck It! A quality ball flinger makes for an agile pup. Raise the dead. Blow the cobwebs from the Tempurpedic dog bed, expired glucosamine, peanut butter toothpaste, let your pheromones lead the way. If the peanut gallery tries to reason with you, desensitize them with a sweaty ham roll until your boyfriend, your mother, your boss, heel.

It will only make sense at 2 a.m., when your PTSD is lulled to sleep by his watchful drooling. You're retuning somewhere, to something, unruptured. Fuck it all up. Put the brown mutt on the school bus, your daughter in the harness. Find comfort in irony. He lifts his leg to every fire hydrant—*don't be so predictable you silly hoot!* If he snarls, bites or triggers, you're getting closer. Google *muzzle*. It is too adorable a word to rattle your delusion. You are not alarmed. Perform voice-overs for the dog. He sounds like Chris Tucker with slobbery vowels. When your daughter asks if he could be her stepdad, crack up at that kid's wit! Tell her no, sorry, he doesn't wear pants.

Roll all the windows down. You remember this is what you're good at, forgetting the lint brush, canceling dates, dog park small talk, tummy rubs. When he finally remembers his new name it will fall apart. You'll skin both knees, sustain a puncture wound while prying his jaws off of

a toy poodle. There are seventeen different collars in your virtual basket: the Prong, the Choke, the Martingale, Zinger 2000. You square your hips. Peacock your chest, you're the alpha. A pack is growing up around you. At the manicure place, the technician looks at your filthy, scabbed up hands, he asks if you're in charge of the handiwork. The world flaps through your doggie-door heart. Nothing adds up anymore: his webbed feet, those sheltered eyes, the fitful dreaming you called "sleep grieving" where he whimpered and twitched, bunched the covers into a wad.

There are no bad dogs. No bad girls. Only broken skin, a broken system, a quarantined knot in your gut. Fail by hiding his empty dog bowls. Bury his milk bones in the bottom of the junk drawer. Roll all the windows up. Cry. Lean into fetchy theories: Albert Einstein once called quantum entanglement "spooky action at a distance," but you believe your particles howled together in the same cage for six weeks, so you are leashed together forever. Look up the words *chomp*, *sting*, *weak*, *terrible*, *people*, *return*, *break*, *break*, *break*. Bandage your hand. Don't send letters. Avoid ads that end in *Pawsitively* and *Who Rescued Who*. Sit. Stay. Ice your grief.



Malik Morton, *Red Clay Portraiture*,
two-dimensional digital illustration, 2019.

Head-On Collision

by Brian Baumgart

Sometimes you arrive at the party too late, and everyone already packed up, kissed cheeks goodbye, vanished into tomorrow, and you have only begun to disappear.

Sometimes you swallow the entire existence of earth, billions of years to digest, and the dinosaurs look like eels from this distance, small wriggly things.

Sometimes you paint the ceiling to look like a head-on collision.

But don't stop there. You know we've only just started by the way the mariachi music is all guitar, low horns; you know that skin is only the surface, that we are all fine

bones and lace. Falling from grace is more than just cliché. The tumors, all benign. The porch steps rot right below your feet. You can smell the wet wood like mushrooms

growing between skin and bone, and no one is here anymore. They've left, packed up, kissed our ghosts goodbye, watched them swim, palm to palm.

Moro Reflex

Nicholas Reiner

the Moro reflex
is the only unlearned
fear in human newborns,
how the body startles
when it's dropped back

 sweet angel, we lay you
gently on your back
& your arms
lift up & out
like an umbrella
opening into rain

the Moro reflex is my life—
you're falling with your arms out
so I'll catch you so
you'll never fall so you'll
never learn a fear

Dreamscape

by Jeffrey Haskey-Valerius

i

When the birch trees slough
their shells in the night, it is
quietly, and it is without me.
Tucked behind my eyelids,
I'm a cyclone, earthbound,
only to have dried out

by morning: starved of
moonlight, parched for water.
As soon as I look down,
there are itsy-bitsy spider
carcasses under my tiptoes,
crunching like gravel.

ii

In the bathtub my ankles swell.
Tendrils of purple ink coil
around my lungs like curlicue
calligraphy, and yank me
into the undertow. I had
forgotten the bitter taste of

suicide, like molding
potatoes. Static static static
in my ears, until the splitting
bang of a cymbal, falling
from a steep cliff; stiffened
daylight crushes my eyes.



Barbara Dahlberg, *Zippers*,
mixed media, 2018.

Blackbird Gallery

by Ally Chua

On the lacquered shelves
all the curios plucked from my body

the leviathan, the lithopedion, the tar birds
in a row. To see a wild beast up close
you'll have to kill it, stuff it with stone. Mount it,
pin its wings onto cork. Come in; for a token fee,
this freakshow.

What good is shame
if it can't be spun into a fable—
here, this girl let the
wolf in and it tore her straw throat.

Babe,
babe. I never asked for this. You stole from me
what was worth keeping
and in the corner
all that I hold sacred
hung from a twine rope.

Writing Yourself Out

by Romana Iorga

First you grab your leg
and hoist it on the table, the white
cast around it a hot, itchy heft.

Sit on the edge, pull up
your other leg, set it beside
the white cast.

Start scribbling on both,
cutting deep. You want to draw
blood, not raise welts.

Flesh and gypsum don't matter.
When legs disappear, prop
yourself up on your hand.

Cut out the half-moons
of your nails for the dark nights
of this journey.

Fingers and palms are the best
to write on: phone numbers,
directions, arrows

to a lover's heart, poems,
like now, when you've run
out of paper, tablecloth, napkins.

Wave good-bye
to your vanishing hand
with your writing one.

Scrawl around your navel
dark inkblots of initiation,
the unseen umbilicus

a fragile rope to a newborn
body. The pubis, squiggly
with words, is already gone.

You're sitting in midair,
arm unhooked from its joint,
carving your back,

which by now should be only
a memory of a spine, shoulder
blades, coccyx, and buns.

Your hand hovers over
that face you rarely liked,
making sure to write off

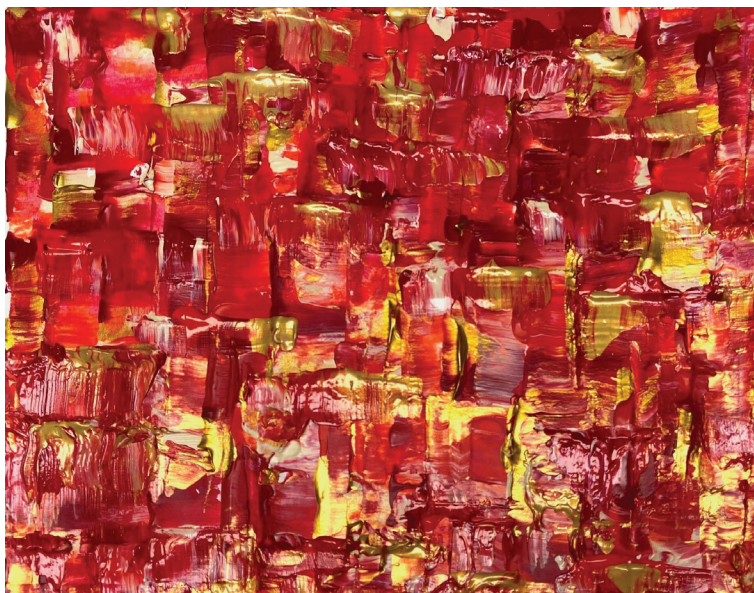
its belligerent mouth,
squirting ink where the eyes
must have been.

After a short-term
blindness, you see again,
better, the outline

of your written-away husk
almost completed, minus
one hand, now high

in the air, performing feats
of contortion, a juggler
with words, a tightrope

walker, a tamer of hungry
dry spells, soon to join you and be
whole again.



Amy Donnelly, *Red Doors*,
acrylic, 2020.

*What Happens to First Loves
When You Get Conscripted
into the Korean Army*

by June Son

Write about luck bilingually
like it's covered in a film, sticky residue
that'll freeze, be solid in no time.

Negative twelve at o-three
and I'll be here a long time,
shivering with a purple foot
and a tactical vest, all
while you contemplate
in perfume aisles of warm,
warm rooms that smell
like unfamiliar women and leather
in department stores.

I thought I hated it,
I was wrong again, it's not—
so bad being here; please help—
me, no, I'm great.

I wrote to you bilingually
and I'm not so good
at either language,
I guess bad grammar
is my forte. Reply—

tell me about the time
you snuck out, met me,
we were children of late
night whispers, low registers
not picked up by
metal detectors, security guards,
white pickups, black sedans,
how I ended up in
a forest green Korando,
how I never even
think of you these days.

I don't live bilingually,
it's more like one point five. And
it was all no loss, it was transparent
that years would roll and cave
continuing to continue to be
how natural science shows me
self-identity in three states,
as fungus, a gunner, an employee
a solvent of dead material,
dissolving all my thoughts of you.

*Detail of Icarus and Daedalus Fresco
from Villa Imperiale, Pompeii, AD 1*

by Alina Melnik

someone will remember us / I say / even in another time

—SAPPHO

We rumble in
walls. Chipping frescoes
clip us raw. Skin and hair
fall with paint.

Time did us dirty.
We live in a standstill:
Venus sits sedated,
Aries's tanned hand
down her torn sandalwood robe.
Three naked
babies play a lyre.
Two thousand centuries and
they still can't pluck
strings into songs. I
crumble on a fading
beach, waxwings
sting my eyes and mouth.
Daedalus follows,
whistling puns about my love
affair with the sun.

We ate oil paint. We
touched silk and humid air. We
got the stuff grapes grow into
between our lips.
Cheese? Grapes? Wine? Olives? Meat?
We taught them to
eat, fuck, sleep. We
watched them dance and drink,
draw us into walls,
tiles, ceilings, vases. We
felt glass break and
the ground shake. A mountain
hollowed then creamed out
lava. Their
flesh wrapped
in ashen plaster, we
saw them
become
screaming
statues.



James Rodehaver, *Corsicana Blue*,
digital photograph, 2018.

View from the Window, July

by Patricia Caspers

Again our children run the dock—
clatter, thunk, splash.

I watch from the house,
unpack boxes, hang my western

life on New England walls,
fold myself into pine drawers.

There's the flash of bright swimsuit
through a maze of green-leafed oaks,

the dash and leap, like an Olympic
long jumper, as far

as speed, thrust, and body allow.

Just before fear grabs their ankles
they fling themselves over the threshold

and shriek with falling joy.

The Astronomy of Losing

by Donna Vorreyer

for my brothers

Three moons revolving around
dying planets, we spun
unmoored at the same rate,
each showing only one
face in our synchronous
rotations, hiding our dark
sides from view. We locked
into the tides of each labored
breath, each confused diatribe,
were illuminated not by the sun
but by hospital fluorescents
and dim bedside lamps,
waxing and waning with
each hopeful smile,
each panicked hurt,
a year of phases from first
ambulance's full moon to
the second funeral.
Now we revolve inside these
black absences, excavate
the craters, bag artifacts
for further study or posterity,
uncover elements

previously unknown.
Love exerts a most powerful
gravity, so we will circle infinite
in this orbit, grateful to have
learned its potency.
We will draw our own moons
closer, teach them how
to swing out to the stars.



Mario Loprete, untitled,
concrete sculpture, 2018.