.mooninorbit.

PRISM

Prism is OSU's arts & literature journal, published three times annually through Orange Media Network. It accepts submissions of a literary or artistic nature year-round from students enrolled at Oregon State University.

This issue contains explicit and potentially triggering content concerning issues of violence, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, and sexual assault. Be especially mindful while reading pages 4, 11, 18-21, and 38.

There are times when entropy reminds us of what it means to be an empty sky or a sea of querulous stars. The best ideas seem to be born from the end, but now I have only this short space to remind you of what matters: the font that bends your words in on themselves, the gavel and the gravity sharing their endless opinions, the nova and the motion back, again, to the edge.

There may be no path to the center. Let the crow cry out over the sea in a sudden panic; let the waves crash and burn above the eggshells of our heads; let this final ark be a fortress and a fortune and let that uncertainty be more than enough.

I'd be a fool to worry — our orbit is finally a vast trail of love.

Ethan Heusser,
Editor-in-Chief

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bloody knuckles

MIKE CHASCO | ACRYLIC

designer

MATTHEW SCHNEIDER | PHOTO COLLAGE

nevertheless

AMY GIBSON | MONOTYPE

to *an experiment on a bird in the air pump* (1768)

void of matter
her feathered throat contracts
the heavy limitation of
free space
she will surely die

parisian apartments

NICO CONAHAN | DIGITAL ILLUSTRATION

8th dimension

LUUK VAN HOOMISSEN | DIGITALLY-MANIPULATED IMAGE

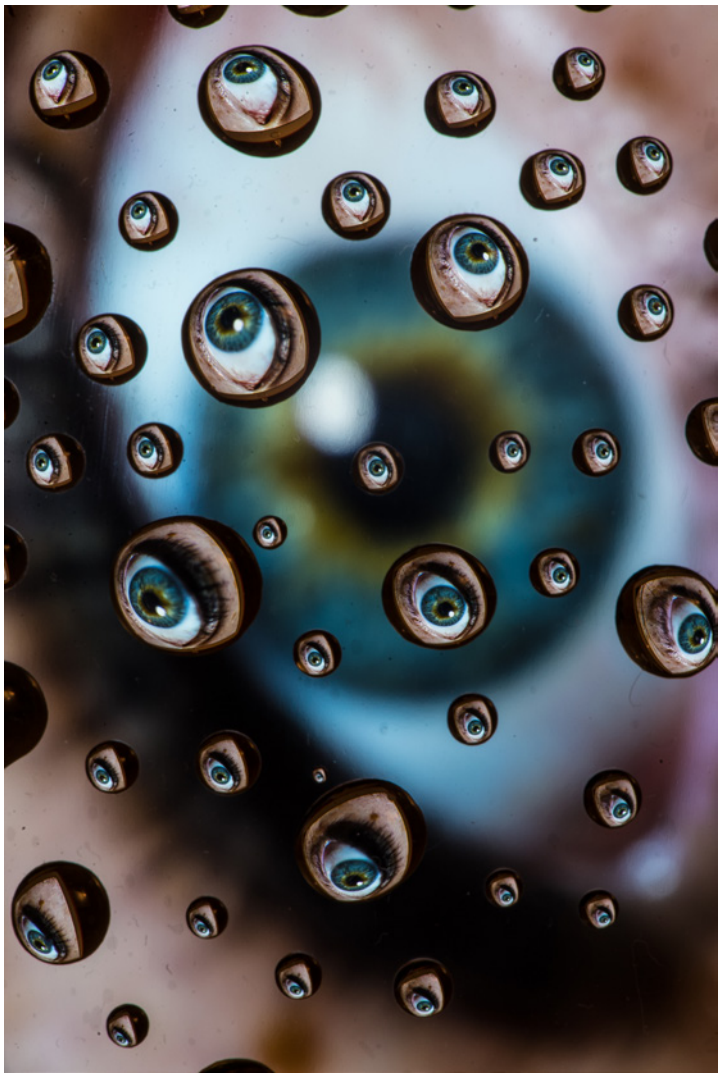
pacific rim

DIANA ROBBINS | ACRYLIC ON PAPER

teeth

and mine, well, they are the gappy
type despite years of braces using
metal on bone to fix what didn't
want to be shifted, so they have stayed apart
and away from each other and she was
always more luminous than I could ever hope so
when the words *you have a nice smile*
squeaked out of her dentist and orthodontist
sculpted mouth I couldn't help but have a
gaping one and I let the ugly ivories slip out
from my half-mast smile and my tongue
did not rush to shield them from the
sun and I laughed unashamed at the
compliment but I felt the specks of radiance
in her words and with her loquacious
tendencies and alluring strut we walked
arm in arm and my miscolored chicklets
quivered in comparison to her glimmering wedding dresses
but do you really think I am talking about my teeth?
Of course she's hurt: Dylan is her name, raped last week:
by a random guy at a bar who followed her home: so I heard —
and when she tried to yell he said *shut your mouth*
as he had his hand around her throat.
I am trying, I think, to empathize with her.
Why else would I try poorly to compare a shame with hers?
I wish I could tell her,
sincerely, about the study session with a friend
in my room, the books that were stacked like stairs,
where *no* was whispered and not yelled,
how I kept my mouth shut, but he didn't even tell me to,
I just did.
But mostly, I wish I could tell her of the fireflies
in my head, that glitz up a pathway leading
up the stairs of books and back to my body,
where a warm light of forgiveness glows.

night sky



sight

SHANNA ROAST | DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY

easter

this girl's bow reminds me of a funeral
hair pulled back taut like my itching skin
stretched over growing pains, flowing from my easter dress
i went to sermon every sunday and they told me jesus rose but
i don't see him come out of that casket
black satin bow in the second row of my lecture hall
i found your pearl earrings in a gutter on my way home from school
pale pink seashells, gummy like girlhood
did you know pearls are built out of pain?
maybe i, too, can soothe an ache
maybe i, too, can mold something out of this flesh,
this cavern of rotting milk teeth and my father's wedding ring.
this girl's bow reminds me of a funeral
bones picked raw over thanksgiving dinner
rejoice, my ancestor born in seasickness;
rejoice, my ancestor bathed in prairie dust and woven by wagon wheels
rejoice because he is risen but why won't he open his eyes?
girl in the bow, wrapped in soft white cloth and neat penmanship,
will you show me how to make a pearl of my own?

greed filled prayers

LORENA NAVARRO-SLUZNIS | COLLAGE

distraction

OLGA GUGNYAK | BEESWAX AND INK

gutted

SARA EMERICK | INTAGLIO

excerpt from *gender trouble*

Celeste smelled like a bath and body store at the mall mixed with a hint of mildew, like a house kept too closed up in the rainy season that could never smell fresh, even with every air freshener on the shelf. But it wasn't a bad smell. It was intimate, something that could only be experienced in full through close contact from a friend's hug or a lover's kiss. To smell Celeste was to be let into her world, this swirling orb of anxieties, desires, and opinions, mostly veering toward the conservative and always favoring herself. Her senior year of high school, she cut her tailbone-length hair to her ears and tattooed an evergreen tree on her left rib cage. Afterward, she called her mom, breathless, and shared the news. Her mom rolled her eyes through the phone.

Celeste came to Scripps, an all-girls college, to study philosophy, but also to study women. I met her on the second floor of Frankel Hall, room 204, late August of our freshman year, as one of the three mystery roommates I gambled on when I chose housing. There was also Ruby, a transgender person and English major, and Ellen, a midwest transplant with dreams of the opera. On first meeting, we sized each other up, drew conclusions, and waited for the others to say something. Ruby spoke first.

"I prefer 'they/them' pronouns," they said. "I'm genderfluid."

"Whoa," Ellen breathed. She flipped her mauve hair across the shoulder strap of her knee-length dress and tilted her head. "That's legit."

"Thank you for telling us," Celeste said. "I totally respect you." Her voice sounded like it was the first time she'd spoken all day, a vague crackle rippling through every word. I wanted her to say more. They all looked to me, waiting for confirmation that I could handle Ruby's proclamation.

"Oh," I said. "Yeah, totally cool." I forced a smile and realized I had been staring at Celeste the entire time.

* * *

I came to consciousness like one would out of a coma — slowly, propelled by an invisible force — but once I understood I knew I had been changed forever.

In September, I broke up with Trevor, my boyfriend from high school, a pasty, excruciatingly average disappointment who never reciprocated oral sex. He had given me attention junior year, and I couldn't resist the fantasy of a real relationship, especially in the confines of Catholic school. But with him back in Washington and me in Claremont, I initiated my first ever breakup, feeling at once elated and devastated.

In October, Celeste invited me to a Judith Butler talk modeled after her book, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. I emerged determined to become a feminist. Celeste laughed. "Of course you're a feminist," she said.

In November, while home for fall break, I texted Trevor and spent the evening in his bed, half naked and wondering if closure is ever possible. I left his house reeling and slept until noon the next day.

In December, Trevor called me to tell me he had been seeing someone. They met at a frat party, both drunk, and hooked up that night. Unlike me, she was blonde, lanky, soft, and never stopped talking about celebrity gossip. "Why are you telling me this?" I asked.

In January, I returned to Scripps after winter

break and walked into my room while Celeste was changing. Hunched over her tights, her petite body paled against her black lace bra and underwear; I blushed but did not turn away. Still stuck with her tights halfway up, she hobbled over to hug me. "I missed you," she said.

That's when I knew.

One week later, I returned home buzzed on wine to find Celeste alone, poring over her Nietzsche reading. I poked her.

"Hey," I said. "Wanna know a secret?" She turned to face me.

"I can see the red stain on your teeth," she said. I giggled. Then I asked her what it feels like to be attracted to girls.

"Like you don't know if you're allowed to like someone," she said. "And like God fucked up when He made you." My body tingled and I let the wine take control. I inched closer, but she moved to sit on my bed. "I used to try and like boys, I even kissed a few, but God made me queer. I still don't know why, but I trust Him." I settled in next to her on the bed. She talked about coming out to her parents, how her dad expected it and her mom cried, how they both prayed for her and hid it from their family friends. The first time she kissed a girl, she said, behind a cabin at a church retreat in eighth grade, it was like her whole body was on fire. A boy would never make her feel the same. She did not believe in premarital sex, but she said the first time she went down on a girl it felt like home. When she described it, my organs pulsed. I stared at her small mouth, shimmering with chapstick, and yearned to feel it, if only with my fingers. Then she talked about the bullying, how when her friends found out they deleted her number and gazed right through her, how certain teachers ignored her in class and men on the street jeered at her short hair.

"Celeste," I said, interrupting her. "I think I'm in love with you."

* * *

Nothing happened that night because I blamed my outburst on the wine and discussing bullies doesn't exactly scream sensual. But something shifted, and I could tell that after that she watched me, scrutinized me, waiting for me to make another move. I didn't, but I watched her too, like I had for months, and because I had said it out loud, it became real to me. Even though I lived with her and spent hours talking to her, I still thought about her in class, remembered the curve of her lips while she talked with that crackle.

And precisely because she dominated my thoughts, I turned to boys. Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, I found parties and, in turn, boys. Boys to kiss, boys to touch me, boys to almost, but never quite, have sex with me. With them, I felt nothing but skin and heat and tasted nothing but alcohol and desperation. I bragged about them to Celeste, assigned defining features like The Short One, The Unibrow, or Rainboots. I felt powerful and wanted; Celeste never looked at me when I told her about them. I wondered if it hurt her.

One night, I came home from an evening with Fannypack. I opened my mouth to tell Celeste about him, but she stopped me.

"Let's take a walk," she said.

We walked to a park a mile from campus, a side effect of a Presbyterian elementary school across the street from an apartment building with no blinds in sight. The trip there was almost silent besides half-hearted talk about school. We

both sat on swings, but neither of us moved. A laughing couple walked past, the girl falling into the boy's arms and nuzzling into his chest; they kissed and he grabbed her butt. Celeste rose and stood in front of me.

"What are you doing?" she asked. She looked tall, towering over me, even though standing I beat her by at least three inches. I didn't respond. That's when she leaned forward and kissed me, soft at first, then with fervor. My whole body was on fire; I understood.

* * *

After that, things were great, for a while. We didn't — couldn't — tell our roommates, so we waited for moments alone or found abandoned classrooms, keeping our rendezvous secret even though we were at a place with people just like us, with a social structure built for just that.

She only held my hand in public when the lights were off, like at Ellen's opera performance or at the local drag show. Not that I would've allowed PDA if she initiated, but the absence of it stung. Still, when I looked at her, I couldn't help but think of forever. I fantasized about telling my parents, my high school friends, imagined the shock on their faces when I would confess that yes, I loved a girl. Would they be surprised, disgusted, curious? Maybe some of them had dated girls too, had ventured into that forbidden world that Catholic school never even acknowledged. Would I tell them over coffee, while drunk, on a run? I could cycle through them, one by one, but they might tell each other before I got to the end, and then they would think I cared about them unequally. Several times, I drafted a mass email. Dear friends, I wrote, College has changed me, or, I have been self-reflecting lately, or, I'm in love. Her name is Celeste. But I could never bring myself to send them. It had, after all, only been a month, and while I felt certain that it would last, I needed more evidence before I could commit to their reactions. The right time would come.

* * *

But the time never came, because Celeste broke up with me two weeks later. She had invited me to attend church with her and her philosophy professor, a sprightly man in his mid-forties with a face that glowed too much and a wink he employed too often.

I went, because I sensed a disturbance and wanted to appease her, but the sermon that day painted God as a great server of justice and people as breakable subjects, and it was all too much. After, radiant, she asked me what I thought.

"I guess it was too Old Testament for me," I said. "There wasn't much room for redemption." Her face fell, but she didn't respond.

Two days later, she shattered me. We sat on my bed, hip to hip, and she took my hand in her own and told me it wasn't going to work. That our values didn't align and she couldn't keep dating me, morally. That we'd had a good time but it wasn't deep enough to keep investing. I disagreed; I said it was the deepest thing I had ever experienced and that nothing would ever feel so right to me. That I needed her and, maybe, she needed me too. She gave me a sad smile, hugged me, and left. I spent the next three nights avoiding our room, sleeping in friends' dorms and studying nonstop.

On the fourth night, she texted me. *Can we talk?* I despised her for being so cliché, for putting zero effort into personalizing it, for assuming I would say yes without persuasion. *Yes,* I replied. *When and where?*

* * *

In April, I went home for spring break. The second night, feeling hollow, I tiptoed into my mom's room, where she sat reading a memoir about Appalachia. With her purple robe cinched at the waist, her thick-rimmed glasses, and her pink pedicured toes, she looked so domestic, so right. I felt ashamed.

In May, the numbness went away. I went to all my classes, did all my assignments, and called my old friends for the first time in two months. They told me about all the parties they'd gone to, all the boys they'd hooked up with, all the marijuana they'd smoked. None of them asked how I was doing; I was relieved.

In June, we moved out of our dorm. All four of us into new, separate homes. Ruby would live with four good friends from their intramural rugby team; Ellen moved in with her boyfriend, whom she met at a coffee shop the previous August; and Celeste transplanted into a Christian house, surrounded by believers. I stayed in on-campus housing, switching to an upperclassmen dorm with a friend from down the hall.

In July, I met Luca. He was tall, dark-skinned, lean-bodied, and liberal; everything I'd thought I'd wanted. A sophomore computer science major, he already had an internship with Google lined up and was almost done writing his third program. I went through the familiar pattern, the one I'd perfected in my boy phase earlier that year, and soon enough we were back in my bed. Everything about him begged for me to love him, and I felt nothing.

* * *

In August, Celeste asked me to get coffee, as friends. The day she chose was a week before the anniversary of our first meeting. I spent two hours getting ready beforehand and hated myself for it. I imagined what I would say, practicing the lines in my head while I straightened my hair and brushed on eye shadow: *Celeste, we're meant to be together* or, *Celeste, why did you break my heart?* Or, *Celeste, I know your religion is so important to you and I promise I'll try to believe in God, for you, if only you'll give me another chance.*

When I walked inside, she waved from a table, wearing the same red jeans she'd worn the first time she kissed me. It couldn't be on purpose, but I was already falling. By the time I reached the table, my mind crumbled and my heart pounded. We sifted through the formalities but I couldn't track anything we talked about. Then she said she'd missed me, that she hoped I was taking care of myself and finding happiness wherever I went. She reminisced about our best memories, about the tumult of our freshman year together, expecting me to laugh along with her. For the first time in months, my body felt ablaze, like my systems were working and I was, after all, alive. I leaned toward her but I couldn't remember saying anything. Her auburn eyes seared through the morning light and I wanted nothing more than to kiss her.

"Listen," she said. My phone buzzed. "I'm transferring to Montana State. I can't afford the tuition here anymore." I stared back, not registering, still lost in my desire to kiss her. I checked my phone.

Lane, Luca said. *Are you free? We should talk.* I looked back at Celeste and met her pleading, lingering eyes. Sunlight pierced through the window, slashing our table halfway in a perfect, glaring line. I laughed.

bears and water

CLARA HERBAGE | ENCAUSTICS

canvas amplified

JESSICA KIEVER | ACRYLIC

the fourth lens

KEI LIN CHANG | PHOTOGRAPHY

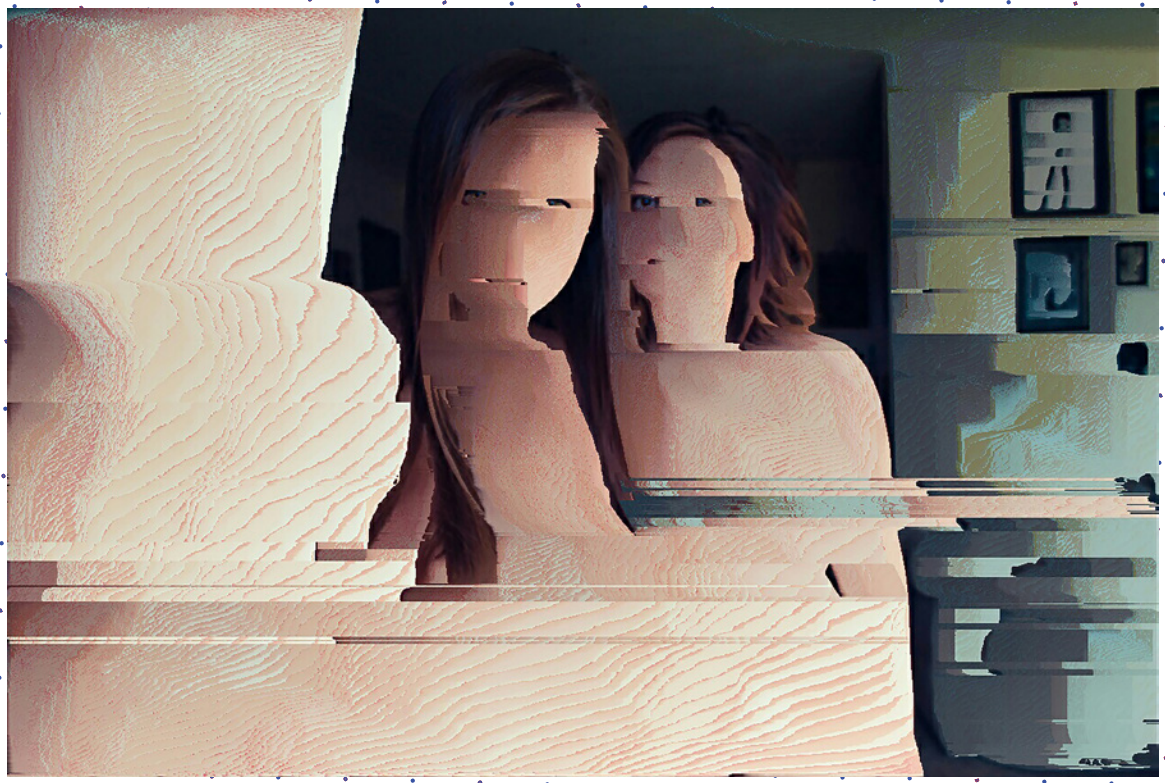
skipping rocks

On any given day,
People flock to quiet spaces.
But alone on a lakeside sits a small girl.
Her hair is golden brown,
With loose tangles and split ends that flutter with the breeze.
Her dress was once eggshell white but has since been stained.
The left strap hangs bye
She sits with her legs straight out cuz
She never cared much for formality.
Her blue eyes paint across the surface.
The water that snakes its way through the rocks onto shore
soaks through her dress.
Her gaze breaks over to the small flat rock in her hand.
Thumb gliding across the rough surface,
The ridges of her thumb-pad resist.
Some rocks are sharp and cracked
And belong on the shore.
Others are just little,
And they get pushed around on the lakebed.
But some rocks
Girls sit next to and hold in their hands,
They run their fingers across and get lost in the feeling;
Then she stands, and looks back out at her canvas,
Watching, and waiting for a splash.

unravel

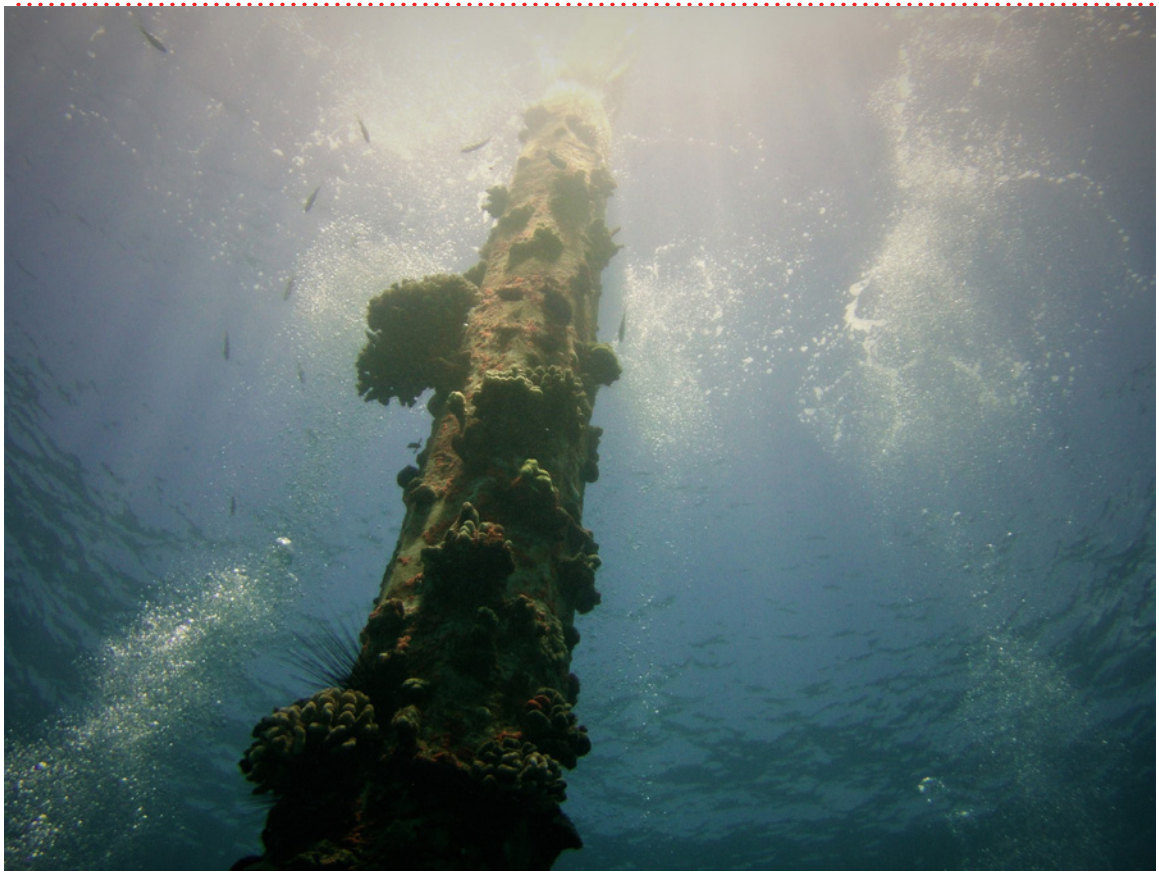
the other side

LORENA NAVARRO-SLUZNIS | COLLAGE

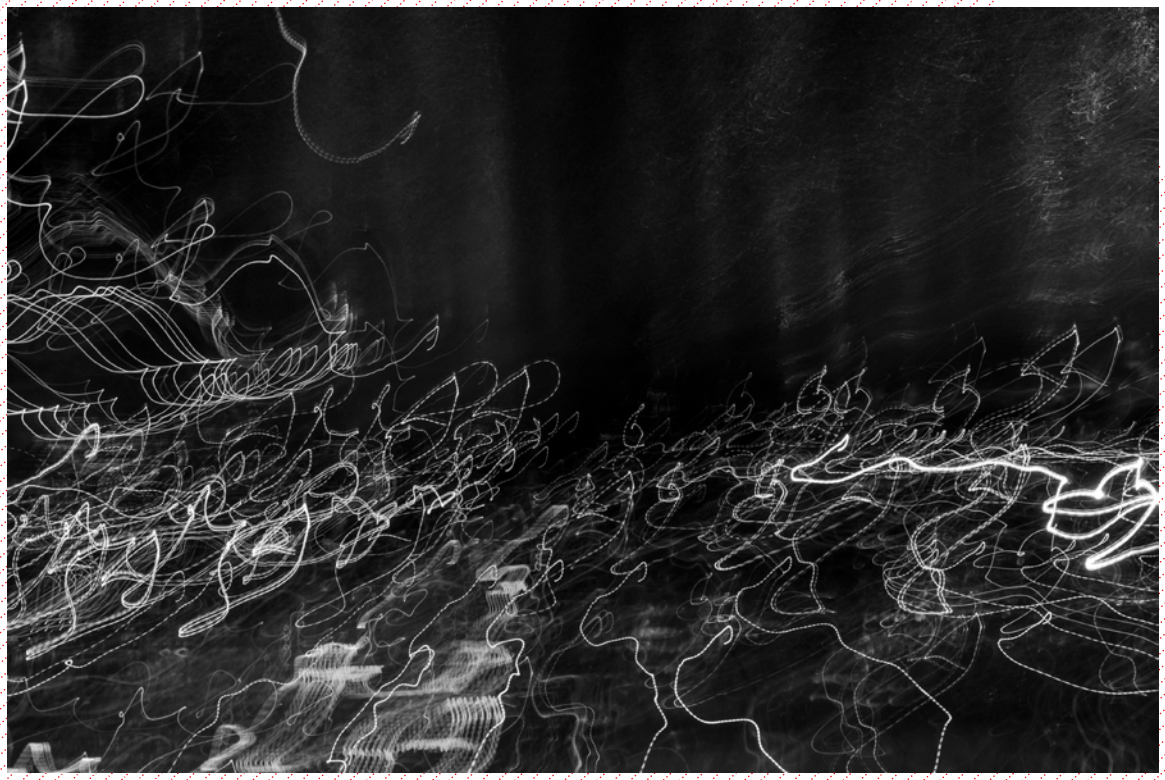


two

ETHEREAL DELUSIONS | DIGITALLY-MANIPULATED PHOTOGRAPH



the column



3am

coverup

It is important to understand
That we may yet spend the majority of our lives
Covering up *ugly* things.

If you were the master,
Would you paint?

Paint rolling hills red, maybe rosé
Layer by layer until they no longer resembled.
Would you till the Great Plains —
Just to kick up dust for the evening?
Dust that will no doubt add a golden-tan shimmer
To the surface, the same shimmer
that you may wash away this next rain,
exposing damaged earth.

Or, perhaps, would you run black pastel down the Eastcoastline?
Turning light blonde sand into dark — the wet kind
That is really good for building sand castles.
Ones you hope will add beauty, for a while,
To an already beautiful thing.

intrusions

DIANA ROBBINS | ACRYLIC ON CANVAS

oranges & origins

Today, the girl in front of me was eating Mandarins in class
while the teacher talked about imagery and senses in poetry,
and I — I was staring, hungry, at the girl's mid-day snack,
absently dreaming of citrus trees and Februaries; How strange

to watch a girl who doesn't realize that her fruit could speak
in the language it was named after, the language of its roots.
I watch her tear at its surface with the sharp nail of her thumb,
releasing a perfect round of lunar pieces like the fresh new year,

and I recall the sight of loose skin clinging to weathered hands;
saw them wrinkling from the juices and puckering from time,
pushing crescents of Chinese traditions into new mouths that
only recognise English words, that listen without understanding

to every sweet reminder of how a fruit could contain a mother,
a land and a history spoken through the vast ocean of tongues
it crossed to get here, to rest in the centre of smooth palms that
don't recognize its pockmarked surface the way they used to.

I think about my other name that cannot be spelt, only drawn,
and the tattered pieces of Mandarin peel left on the girl's table.
Now, the poetry teacher is talking about misery and loss, and I
feel the vibrations of the girl's chair scraping back as she rises.

I stay silent, even as she tosses the rest of my story into the trash.
I listen for the thud of orange remains hitting hollow bottom and,
for the rest of the day, I will think about the bitter aftertaste of
the Mandarin; How it will surely linger between teeth.

excerpt from *and the curtain is up*

They say that the people awake at 2 a.m. are the poets and the thinkers — those in pain and those in love. They say that 2 a.m. is the restless hour for hopeless dreamers and troubled souls and lost romantics. And sure, I'm many of those things. But last night, I was awake at 2 a.m. because I needed to get a stupid paper done or else risk my English grade sinking like the Titanic. And trust me, there was nothing poetic or romantic about my shadowy form hunched awkwardly over a humming laptop, caffeine-excited fingers tapping shakily away at an assignment that deep down I couldn't care less about. And I suppose I could make it seem ethereal and give it a nice little sugar coating by saying

Silence to the stars is ambrosia to the soul
So I sat in the quiet that usually accompanies 2 a.m. and feasted

but it's barely noon now and I've already been told I look like death five times. So no, being a sleep-deprived high school student isn't poetic. Every time I order my body to move, it responds with bitter, sluggish reluctance , and I'm pretty sure there's a dried-up tomato in my head where my brain is supposed to be. I'm experiencing a rising sense of panic in my gut, the reason for which is to be determined, and my left eye won't stop twitching. But you know what? I've been telling everyone I'm fine.

surreal landscapes

CARMEN MCCORMACK | OIL ON PAPER

melting

LILY WAGGONER | WATERCOLOR AND PEN

moving on

hope (1872)

We have already covered My Lai, Hiroshima, and Auschwitz
as if they could be understood on a chalkboard, like Renaissance literature
and hopscotch,
and now we are playing
Math with Bodies: How many wounded, how many killed, bombings, famine, four
credits—do they count?

The number of casualties depends on who is counting.
We wonder (at eight in the morning), will there be anyone left to count?

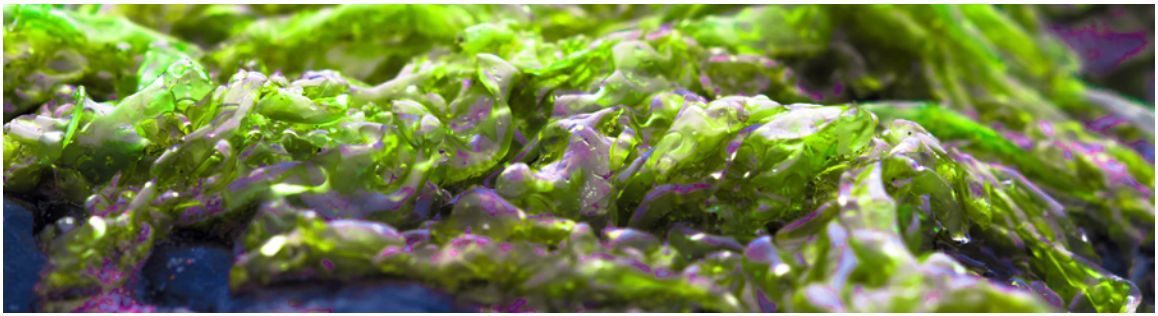
On the next slide, we see her—

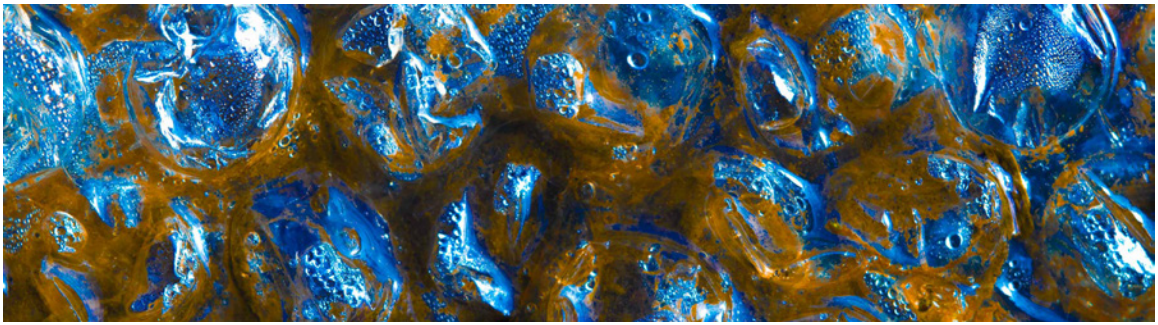
The girl is a handkerchief,
draped in a flat white frock, her softly
bent fingers resting on the rock wall
where she sits, her gaze a blank, leafy stare,
perpetually fixated on passersby. The meadow
behind her is desolate but full
of wildflowers, singing with the olive leaf in the girl's hand:
"Though we grow on the graves of the dead,
yet we bloom in a time of abundance."
The sky is pink with the setting sun,
and her pale dress glows in its rosy light.

"This is boring," says our professor, changing the slide.

We trip through the double doors
and hustle down the gray staircase that smells
like rubber and looks sterile as
a lab coat, our shoes smacking in tandem
against each step. Out of breath,

we pass under two flowering trees,
one white, one pink, growing together
as though they were ancient lovers
punished by the gods.



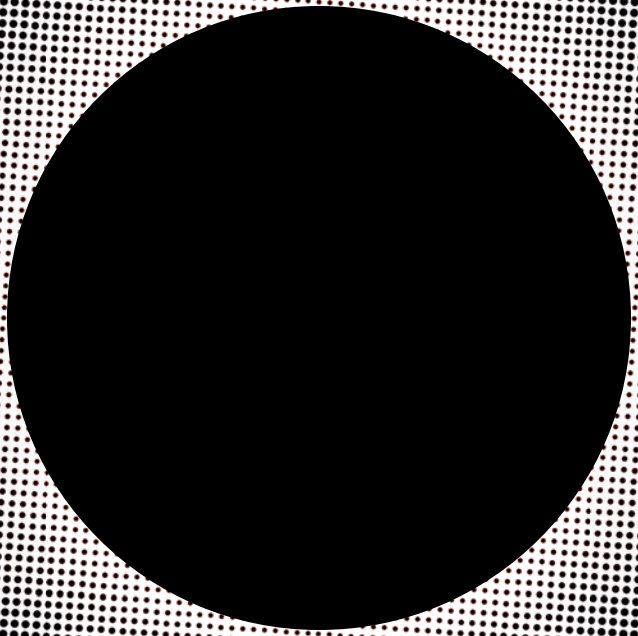


mediated lands

trust

I was so afraid of falling,
I forgot to let go.

submit to prism



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