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A Fresh Dog

Mackinley Greenlaw

Tyler ruined the dog, so now we're off to pick up a fresh one. He didn't mean to do it, probably. It was a golden retriever type thing—shiny yellow hair and deep black eyes that always seemed happy. I don't claim to know what dogs feel. All the wagging and panting and doleful looks might just be careful fabrications; thin veils to cover a deep, yawning blankness. But those eyes *seemed* happy. Laser focused, and wet with interest.

When I found them, Tyler was standing across the yard, hovering stoic over the limp animal, looking burned. His face was blanched with a mild mask of surprise, like he had touched an exposed wire. The dog wasn't quite dead, but it's eyes were no longer happy. It was making a high frequency sound through its nose, squealing across my ears like treads on asphalt. I lifted it up and carried it into the woods out back, past the tree line, to a place I could privately snuff it—A nice quiet clearing where I'd hit it with a rock, like they do to road kill in movies.

The brush crackling underfoot made the dog seem softer, its piss deepening the brown of my jacket. When I was far enough, when Tyler was just a red dot by the house squawking *daddy*, I laid the dog down in a patch of moss. The dog's breathing was quick and shallow, the whine oozing out in all directions from its core. It was begging. I scanned the ground for a bludgeon, but all I found were little sticks and leaves—no weapons of kindness.

For a moment, I flashed on my wife, bound up on a gurney like one hundred pounds of butcher scrap. I needed to leave. I needed to back far away from that sharp nose whistle, out of the tree line and out toward the center of downtown, into a basement of maybe a grocery store and sit there, smelling banana peels and Freon, until I petrified into the cement. I was not built for mercy.

I abandoned the dog there in the soft circle of brush, left to the elements, shivering despite the tepid air. When I returned to the house, I found Tyler with the oven open, spelunking with the gas turned on. He spotted me in the doorway and smiled, showing his teeth. Unpunishable, I took him upstairs and shaved his head.

At the Humane Society, a little blonde teenager, hair knotted back in a frayed bun, blasts Tyler with a generous dose of hand sanitizer. Maybe too much. It drips through his fingers onto the floor, and he wipes most of it on his shirt. The girl trembles, unsure whether she should waste any more on him. She can tell he's going to touch everything. Hands to fur, hands to mouth to eyes, mouth to fur, hands to eyes to mouth. The girl offers me a cold squirt. I accept.

I walk past rows of caged up dogs, slow-rising sides and backs pressed against piss-soaked newspaper. The breeds are different, but their faces are the same. Tyler is stuck on a short one he keeps calling *Sausage*. The card on the pen says *Bitsy, 3 yrs, Corgi mix*. It's stumpy and black, with a round, low-hanging belly like a silverback gorilla. Tyler has jammed his fingers through the mesh, and the dog eases up to sniff them, taking a small taste of each digit as if auditioning a caterer. It puffs out its cheeks and gives a low woof. A volunteer watches on as Tyler mashes his face against the wire, extending his lips toward Bitsy in solicitation. The teen, a scrappy looking kid in an oversized sweatshirt caked in hair, looks plaintive. *Please don't kiss the dog on the mouth. Please don't.* The dog moves forward and licks Tyler once in the eye, then cleans out my kid's mouth with a flurry of ravenous shots. Tyler squeals.

A few signatures and fifty dollars later, Bitsy ne Sausage is puking in the back of my car as my child hangs his head out the window to escape the acid smell. Yellow strings of bile line Tyler's leg. The dog licks endlessly at the residue glued to the rim of its maw, and the rhythm pulses waves of nausea from my throat to my ankles in perfect time. I swallow to the beat.

We pull into a gas station called Pumps. The name makes my skin crawl, but they have free air. Maybe the vacuum is also free. I idle the car next to

the machines and see the vacuum costs eight quarters I don't have. Tyler is rouging circles of dog vomit onto his kneecaps and looking out the window toward the dumpster. There's a wild turkey strutting slowly around the bin, pecking at scraps. Sausage's ears go erect, then back, and his cheeks puff, letting out a guttural *ooooooob*. He wants to shake that turkey so bad. Shake it straight to turkey heaven. The bird is skinny and feral, potentially scrappy, its black eyes glinting. It might be a fair fight.

I tell Tyler to stay in the car. Making him look at me in the eyes, I tell him again. He says *ok Daddy*. Holding his gaze for a second more, I watch his pupils contract as the glint of windshields strobe by. I tell him to make sure Sausage doesn't go anywhere, it's important. Watch the turkey and stay in the car. He says *ok daddy*.

That's good enough. Checking my wallet, I head to the mini-mart for change, entering into a din of slick, autotuned country music. The man behind the counter shoots me an extended glance, but remains stoic. The worst possible offense to clerks are customers. I don't want to engage him yet, so I slip into an aisle lined with energy bars. The brands stretch on for ages, every wrapper splashed with cleverly misspelled words meant to evoke potency. I pick one at random and try to decipher the ingredient list, mashing the contents with my thumbs. My lip rears back in an equine grimace, and I peer over the rack at the man behind the counter. He has taken to a bow hunting magazine, aggregating a wish list.

I pop open the wrapper and jam the whole pale slab into my mouth. It's mealy and bland. A candy bar, minus the pleasure and immediate shame. The label says *SURRGE*, which is a lie. There is no surge. Just a low, numbing sweetness, and a total lack of advertised well-being. I open my mouth and let the wet ball plop into my palm, where I pat it back into a crude rectangle. I shroud it in the wrapper and return it to the box, where it looks sad and deformed set against its brothers. I walk up to the counter and grab a bar of pure dark chocolate with almonds. I pay and make change.

Something in the recess of my gut is elated to find the car door open. I see it instantly from the threshold of the mini-mart. The rear-passenger

door is swung fully ajar, the air around it frozen in time. There is no movement, no sound, and I know my kid is gone. I don't even have to check. I walk slowly over; no rush. There's a sense of calm when a thing has already happened. You don't have to worry *if* it happened or run down a list of myriad consequences. You're spared the anticipation and are thrust directly toward action. No sense in wallowing.

I lean in and scan the back seat. The wall of barf stings my throat, and my eyes water just a touch. No Tyler, no Sausage. I look to the dumpster, and the turkey is gone, likely headed back into the small patch of woods behind Pumps. Likely leading my fresh dog on a bloodlust adventure with my son in tow. I imagine them trouncing through the brush in a hungry little line, claws outstretched, single file like a perverse evolutionary chart. Animals following animals to the edge of a rocky crag, spilling over and pummeling the sea with their hard, stupid bodies. But, first things first.

I fill the vacuum slot with quarters and it bellows. The hose jerks a bit in my hand, and my heart panics for one Mississippi, two Mississippis. The deafening whirr talks me down. He can't have gone far. I scramble into the back on my knees and start sucking up the dog puke from the upholstery. Lumps of damp kibble knock against the tube. Much of it has dried, which makes the job easier and harder. The bile will need to be wet-vacced. The smell is never coming out.

My hand slips on a moist patch, and I lunge forward a few inches, dooming one of Tyler's toys to the bowels of the vacuum. I don't know which one; a blur of red and white is whisked into the nozzle, maybe a Mario Kart. Again, I feel my heart knock for a second, and adrenaline makes my face hot. He is going to notice this. He is going to hop back in this car and immediately notice his Mario whatever is gone, and that I cleaned the car for ten minutes before coming to find him. He is going to notice daddy had climbed out of the back seat and sat behind the wheel, holding his fingers against the keys dangling in the ignition for a full sixty seconds, contemplating the illusion of choice. He is going to notice that I pumped the brakes in soft intervals, watching them flash the snarling vacuum in the rearview until the machine finally shut off, encasing me in cold silence. He is going to notice. And he is going to freak the fuck out.

I take my hand off the keys. I jump out of the car and walk over toward the dumpster, leaving the doors open, the smell still radiating. I'll let it air out. I'll be right back.

The woods behind Pumps is really just a shallow strip of undeveloped land that separates subdivisions. It's not a goddamn jungle. I don't bother calling out Tyler's name—he won't answer. So I call for Sausage. He can't possibly know his new name, but it might work anyway. I bark for the dog and stand quiet for a moment, straining to hear a rustle or a snap. Nothing. My feet waffle at the edge of the tree line, kicking at tufts. The burden only gets heavier as I take a step through the veil of brambles and bark again.

Sausage!

I have no idea what Alice would've done. She never got a shot at doing anything. Tyler was ripped out of her screaming, clinging to giblets, and taking her life along with him.

She wasn't that healthy to begin with. She peaked on our wedding day—her hair thin, and hanging in bundles, her hips narrow like a willow switch—too wan to handle something that immense, that potent. My shitty sense of retrospect likes to chide me, tell me I saw it coming. (I didn't.) Her whole third trimester was an anemic nightmare of wet mattresses and dry mouths. Tyler was more like a tumor gestating, devouring her from the inside. She did not have a pregnant glow. Just a wan, shivering frailty, and an inability to fight. It's no wonder Tyler was so successful, right off the bat. Right before he snuffed her out, she looked like another fold in the bed sheets. I'd never cried so hard; her final portrait of me was one of grotesque embarrassment. Alice hadn't been that robust, but she had been present and eternally willing. Now, those components are gone. From me, and from the world.

Something snorts behind me. I turn around, and there's Sausage—stamping his idiot feet in the leaves and looking like he might know who I am.

Butting up against the woods is the rear-end of a shoddy little middle-class neighborhood. Every house is ranch-style. Chain link quarters off

scrubby, over-mown back yards littered with vinyl play sets. Trees and brambles have overtaken my side of the path, and I scrape against fences barbed by time and disuse. The dog tucked under one arm, I hold back thin branches, only to get whipped in the eye again and again. Sausage licks the air. He has that sleepy look, indifferent to my struggle.

Edging by the first house, I spy a woman through her open drapes, going about her ranch-style business. She doesn't see me. Looking down at her hands, cut off at the pelvis by a window pane, she sucks in and lets out a violent sneeze. Reflexively lifting her hands to catch it, she stops just short of her face. She's gotten something on her fingers and is crippled with indecision. She sneezes again. Juggling the dog, I ease past, slowly squeezing her out of view. In an embarrassment of sympathy, my own nose drips and I catch it with my tongue.

In the adjacent yard, large glass sculptures sit cracked and exposed on concrete pedestals like baroque litter. A brown lump by the back of the house unfurls, and wanders up toward the fence. It's a very old hound. Her eyes sag with slick, gooey flesh dripping from the skull, long tendrils of slobber hanging from her ridiculous jowls. She wags and prances lightly, parading for us. Just beyond her nesting patch, I see a snake suspended—a horizontal *S* attached to the white stucco base of the house, waiting. The dog rears up and slaps its paws on the chain link, her long, spent nipples wagging at the ground. Sausage yips, and I recoil into a pointy crop of branches, perforating my jacket. *There's a snake*, I say. The dog is unblinking, retaining total eye contact as we scrape by. *There's a snake*, I say, again, to no one.

I search another back garden, and another. Five houses deep, there's a break in the perpetual suburban fence. The homeowner installed a gate which had long since rusted, and now sits agape, inviting in all manner of rabble. This is what they call an attractive hazard. Like an uncovered pool, or a trampoline. You catch more kids with honey than you do with etcetera. I reposition Sausage in my armpit, who kicks a foot into my coat pocket. We enter the yawning gate, keen on results, both sporting that sleepy look now.

My son is immediately visible—the only ornament on an otherwise barren patch of crew-cut grass. He is lying face down on the ground, an image that slices me with a barrage of wafer-thin feelings. I drop Sausage a bit too deliberately, and he yelps. *Tyler*, I yell. A part of me hopes a nuke will erupt right where I stand, preventing me from ever hearing a response, or the deafening lack of one. Just a one hundred-year-crater, punctuating a rhetorical question: *What the fuck?*

Tyler lifts his face off the ground and grins at me. He has never been upset in his life. Everything is a continuous pleasure. Clippings of dried lawn cling to his brows and lashes. His shirt has come up around his belly, his skin pocked with indentations. He's lying on sticks and jutting earth, bugs and rocks, every uncomfortable thing in the world. His smile is blazing. Breath whistles through his loose teeth in clean notes.

Hi daddy, he says, and I notice his arm is wrapped around something. I walk up closer and see it's the turkey. There was no fair fight. The bird's milky eye gazes up at the clouds that streak the softening sky—legs stiff, beak parted in wonderment. It got to see what we all yearn to see. Tyler gives its cool breast a smack. It jerks reflexively. Something inside gives way and deflates like a bagpipe.

Sausage approaches, sniffs, and retreats. He's beginning to get the picture.

My son sits on one side of the car, his new dog on the other. The smells have loosened, and I can think crisp, clear thoughts. Tyler has one hand jammed out the window, allowing it to swoop and swing against the rush of air. He chuckles and coos. Sausage has begun to make soft whistling noises through his nose, his chest contracting with worry. My muscles have gone buttery and tired. The sun begins to dip below the visor, and I crane my neck up, catching a suggestion of myself in the mirror. I think about jerking the wheel and banking the car over the shoulder, where we'd pike off the embankment and be hurled skyward—passing through a thin vein of sky into the deep expanse of space.

A Penchant for Vitriol:
A Featured Interview with
Mackinley Greenlaw

*The following interview was conducted by managing fiction editor
James McNulty on December 19th, 2017.*

James: Hello, Mackinley! Thanks for taking the time to do this interview with us. I'm excited to start the first conducted interview of Volume Five!

Mackinley: Believe me, it's my pleasure!

James: Let's start at the beginning. Walk us through the inception and creation of "A Fresh Dog."

Mackinley: I was just coming off a long stretch of nothing, cannibalizing old ideas and generally going nowhere, when I became very angry with myself. I was literally just writing about trees over and over again, it was morose. So, I challenged myself to do something a little dangerous. My first thought: What if a mother hated her child? The bond between mother and child is so revered and remains so unquestioned in American (and arguably global) culture, so I thought it might be interesting to play the contrarian. Long story short, I changed the mother to a father for authenticity purposes and pumped out "A Fresh Dog" in about three feverish sittings. The story really shook me out of my funk, and I'm very grateful for it! Though a little nasty, it's a story very near and dear to my heart.

James: Three sittings? Sounds like a good amount. The story is about 2,000 words. Do you tend to write quickly or slowly? There seems to be a good amount of attention to the sentence level, so I wonder what you mean by "feverish" writing. Did the story come to you as you wrote it, or did you have a sort of mental outline going in?

Mackinley: I very rarely have a story figured out before the halfway point. I wouldn't say my work is improvisational, but I'm pretty informal when it comes to structuring narrative. One sitting for me is usually about two hours, so I feel like three sittings is pretty quick! Usually, I tend to let thoughts gestate for a couple weeks before focusing up and banging them out relatively quickly. With "A Fresh Dog" however, there wasn't much of a gestation period. I was desperate to write something cathartic, so I just went for it. I don't know, it felt feverish! But then, my definition might be particular to me.

James: No, that makes sense. How does "A Fresh Dog" change your writing method going forward? Are you going to keep giving stories time to "gestate" (which I think is similar to my idea of "mental outlining"), or will you tackle them quickly?

Mackinley: I really like the process of seeding my brain with a concept and discovering what kind of first lines pop out. "A Fresh Dog" started with a first line, the bit about Tyler ruining the dog, and the rest just flowed from there. So, yes, I'm definitely on board with the gestation process, but it's more about creating initial imagery than sussing out plot or character. Those are handled as I go. I feel the "quickness" of the writing is on a case-by-case basis.

James: You mentioned before that the story was very "near and dear" to you. The theme of an individual struggling to have agency is a timeless one, and it's even more relevant today given our political and social landscape. Could you talk a little bit about why this theme has become important in your own life?

Mackinley: I write primarily about alienation and the horrors of living in the human body, which are two subjects I confront daily. I'm constantly reminded that "we're all in this together," yet I rarely find that to be true. Since the election, things have gotten particularly glum, and people are becoming more polarized, so I like to write about characters stuck in a solitude of their own design. Demoralized characters toppling over the edge make my own feelings of detachment seem more justified. The narrator of "A Fresh Dog," with his flippancy and parental disregard, is a sort of validation of my own increasingly nihilistic tendencies.

James: What an interesting idea—that a writer may create characters to

validate his own changes or tenancies. Do you find it difficult at all to channel political or social anger into productive writing? I think many writers right now are struggling through similar dry spells to the one you mentioned in your opening answer. It's an interesting time to be a writer. What advice do you have for those writers to help them create something productive--yet not too angry, polarizing, or choir-preaching?

Mackinley: Me giving advice to anyone is deeply hilarious, but I will say this: Embrace what you are. It sounds glib, almost a “write what you know” throwaway, but I’ve found it to be game-changing. As a white, cis-gender male, I spent a long time worrying that my voice is no longer relevant or valuable. There’s certainly an argument for white men to step back and let more diverse voices step forward, and I am one hundred percent supportive of that shift (please, god!), but I’ve also realized there’s still a lot for me to say. In the present political climate, I’m essentially the villain. Literally, “the man.” And who doesn’t love a good villain? Against my own personal politics, I’ve begun to explore the vile side of whiteness and maleness. It’s led to some pretty great satire. My point being: Whatever you are, strip mine the hell out of it. Don’t cripple yourself apologizing.

James: I'd like to hope our community argues for equality: a world where every voice—regardless of race, sexuality, gender, or economic status—is heard. Keep writing, Mackinley. What are you working on now?

Mackinley: Agreed! I'm about two-thirds finished with my first collection of short stories, tentatively titled *Non-Binary*. “A Fresh Dog” is, of course, included, as well as many other tales of moral and ethical failure. It’ll be a hard sell, but I’ve found banging my head against a wall to be romantic in my old age.

James: Did any other writers or specific stories inspire “A Fresh Dog”? Do other mediums influence your work?

Mackinley: I’m bonkers over George Saunders, particularly *Civilwarland in Bad Decline*. He has such a refreshing take on human behavior, and I aspire to be as insightful. (Though I’ll never be as kind.) I think my penchant for vitriol comes from authors like Harry Crews, who’s *Feast of Snakes* really knocked me out of my seat. I’m also highly influenced by cinema, particularly 70s-era cult and experimental films. I love creating a sharp, distressing image, and movies like *The Holy Mountain*, *Female Trouble*,

and *Even Dwarfs Started Small* really help me get there.

James: I finally got around to reading *Lincoln in the Bardo* a few months ago. As fun as that book is, it's hard to deny that it gives into quirk too often; I remember a great article that *The Atlantic* published years ago called "Quirked Around," and I think the use of quirk in contemporary fiction has only grown since. I remember you mentioned during revision that you were editing out a lot of quirk. Could you talk to us a little about quirk? What's the value, and when does it become dangerous?

Mackinley: I love quirk dearly. I think, if you have a head for it, quirkiness is essential to establishing the ever-elusive, all-important "voice" we writers are so obsessed with. But yes, quirk is a shaky tightrope. To paraphrase Gardner, writers are responsible for an unbroken fictional dream, and that dream is easily shattered by silly, arbitrary, or self-indulgent idiosyncrasies. It's such a fine line! I love stopping to marvel over a cleverly constructed sentence (I find Lorrie Moore particularly guilty of these), yet am aware that halting the reader is a brand of failure. I have a terrible time with this myself and constantly struggle with killing my "darlings."

James: You and I talked a lot about this subject while revising. For anyone reading Driftwood now for the first time, we're a little different from most other presses in that we work through two to five revisions of every work of fiction we publish. So, for "A Fresh Dog," I gave three rounds of recommended line edits (two significant; one minor) and we debated one or two sticking points. We believe in polishing our contributing fiction to its utmost potential, both as a way to help the author learn and grow and to give our readers the very best reading experience we can. Could you talk a bit about the process of working through revisions with *Driftwood Press*?

Mackinley: It was a wonderful experience, and I'm extremely grateful. When I initially pumped out "A Fresh Dog," I was under the impression it was "done" after just one minor revision. Because I felt so strongly about it and about how satisfying it was to write, I placed it on a high shelf in my mind, refusing to revisit it for over a year. *Driftwood* confronted me with the story's various (and now obvious) imperfections, while still maintaining its inherent value as a respectable piece of fiction. I believe the result is a much improved product.

James: Great to hear, Mackinley. It was a pleasure working with you too,

and I don't think you're alone in initially feeling that one small revision is enough. I often tell submitters that Raymond Carver rewrote his stories over twenty times, and I think this usually comes as a shock to them. Drafting, redrafting, rewriting are all necessary parts of being a writer. Hell, Leo Tolstoy rewrote *Anna Karenina* five times; D.H. Lawrence wrote *Lady Chatterly's Lover* from scratch three times; and Gustave Flaubert wrote 4,549 pages in the process of writing his 370-page novel *Madame Bovary*. Great writers always rewrite. I think we're out of time, but before we sign off, is there anything else you'd like to tell or share with readers?

Mackinley: Nothing I can think of! Keep on truckin'? Seriously, it's been such a pleasure. Thank you for whiling away the better part of two and a half hours with me! And, for the record, nothing about Raymond Carver surprises me. That guy, am I right?

Love In Three Parts

Kate Schmitt

i.

leaves / the rest of my life / falling
outside the window / you waving / a butterfly / white
paper folded / then open

ii.

did you think I wouldn't lean over the pit / the dead /
looking to see how you'd gone / where

the dead mill around / you / still
in that garage / eating blue air / right now

on television / six men are out in space / expecting to break
the atmosphere / come home

iii.

rain uncurls the jasmine / green with white stars
once I found my teeth / old bone / my mother saved
me / in pieces / a tiny jewel box

Because we all know loneliness -

Ayla Goktan

I will slip my empty body over
A vision of the universe's farmer, who plows and hums
A hum that fills me, one way or another.

In her fields I stoop to pick winter
Agate, speckled with a black rain that also runs
Through me. Thus I slip inside my hollow body. Over

And over, I know to be small as a stone is, like water,
A pleasure we all deserve. Silence like a drum
Wherever there is fire, and nothing fills me. One way or another,

I learn faithlessness is a flashlight on these embers,
Orange stars that ash beneath the beam's thumb.
In this loss of mystery, I slip my empty body over

And under the thought of God. All hunters
Comprehend: before He was a man, He was the thrum
Of fear that filled us thinly, one way or another.

Small wants that pass with the getting; this hunger
Is not that. My default is desire, a third and withered lung.
Thus I meet a nameless man and slip my empty body under
his, which fills me wetly, one way or another.

Interview

Ayla Goktan

What inspired the poem?

I often start a poem with just a few images or phrases that have stuck with me. In this case, I went to Dave's Rock Shop in Evanston, IL to browse, and I saw the stone winter agate for the first time. I fell in love with its beauty, and, on top of that, I had been intrigued by agate—the idea of it and the sound of the word itself—since reading Lorine Niedecker's poem "Lake Superior." I have also been fascinated by hums since I took a class on the history of sound and learned that, while today God is often conceptualized visually, S/He was conceived in some earlier times and cultures as a humming sound. Also, I must credit my friend with the idea that became "Silence like a drum / wherever there is fire." He and I and some other friends spent a September weekend in a cabin in the woods near the Wisconsin Dells, and as we sat around the fire pit in a quiet moment one night, he said, "Where there is fire, there is silence."

What was the hardest part about writing it? What was the easiest?

The hardest part was creating something that did not sound forced within the villanelle form. Once I focused in on the sound "hum," the easiest part—or at least the most pleasurable part—was creating a soundscape that, itself, hummed.

Was there anything in your original conception that did not make it in?

When writing a villanelle, or any strict form, I think most people go through many iterations and end up leaving a lot of material out. I had a phrase I was stuck on for a while: "present beauty promises none / of good things that may come." While it contributed to the humming soundscape and was in line with the somewhat hopeless tone of the piece, I ultimately decided it was not impactful enough, especially since it lacked concrete visuals. I also used the phrase, "There is silence like a drum / wherever there

is fire” in several drafts, but finally decided to take out “there is” and break free of traditional syntax in that moment.

Is this poem categorical of your work? Why or why not?

No. Many of my poems are more grounded in concrete experiences, such as crocheting a blanket, riding a train, the 1842 discovery of gold in California, etc. However, I am trying to write more abstract works that build less literal worlds (as in this poem) while still speaking to lived experience.

What is your favorite line from the poem or the line you are most proud of?

I think my favorite phrase is “speckled with a black rain that also runs / through me.” Obviously, I am still obsessed with winter agate!

Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?

I like to do freewriting and the first few drafts of a poem on paper, but in order to start finalizing a poem, it helps me to move to a Word document. There’s something about seeing my words typed that starts to focus and motivate my brain to work toward the finish line.

Who are some of your favorite poets?

Here are some, listed with a poem of theirs I especially love: Robert Creeley (“The Rain”), Robert Pinsky (“Antique”), Aracelis Girmay (“Consider the Hands that Write this Letter”), and Norman Dubie (“The Pennacese Leper Colony for Women, Cape Cod: 1922”).

How long have you been writing poetry? Do you work in any other artistic mediums?

I’ve found poems in old elementary school journals that I didn’t even remember I had written! But I got out of touch with that part of myself in high school, when I focused more on my flute-playing. I started college majoring in psychology and flute performance (giving little thought to poetry), but somehow I found my way back to it and got a minor in creative writing (in addition to my two original majors!). Now I work on my writing more than my flute playing, but I still play the flute as often as I can.

How would you personally define poetry?

The poetry I like best is structured language in the service of sonic and emotional resonances.

Based on your personal experience, what advice would you give to other writers?

I know common advice is to write every day, but I must admit I don't always do that. I recently read an encouraging interview with Carmen Maria Machado where she said that she is not the type of person who writes every day, either. However, if it works for you to write every day, great! But if it doesn't, please don't wait until you really "feel like it." Art comes from hard work as much as from unsolicited inspiration.

Where can readers find more of your work?

I am an emerging poet with few publications, but I have been published in the anthology *The Best Emerging Poets of Illinois* and in a great Northwestern student publication, *Slant Magazine* (<https://www.slantnu.com/past-issues/>). Some of my early work is in Issue 9. I'm also thinking of starting my own website soon.

What drew you to *Driftwood Press*?

I heard about *Driftwood Press* through the Submittable Submishmash Weekly email newsletter (which all artists interested in submitting their work should subscribe to!). After reading some of the poems *Driftwood Press* has published, I was drawn to their compactness (and their quality, of course!). Normally, I write more sprawling poems—in terms of both line length and number—and I wanted to challenge myself to write more concisely. Some of the lines in "Because we all know loneliness –" are still long, especially for the villanelle form, but it is more compact than many of my poems.

The Mountain I Might Be

Stacy Boe Miller

I've drawn my skin in
close to bone,
white knuckled my breath
in lung's deep hands,

carved round calves
with tiptoe steps,
dammed
my wildest rivers.

If I rip words
from stomach walls
string them out
in the sun

would they dry
fire
orange or soften
camas blue?

A bath with my daughter
her hand on my spine.
Mama she says
You're a canyon.

A canyon, dark
water, a flicker's
fierce song breaking
the morning in two.

Interview

Stacy Boe Miller

What inspired the poem?

I was going through a hard time a few years ago. One night I took a bath, and my daughter, who was eight or nine at the time, was comforting me by pouring water down my back. She said, “Your back is like a canyon.” For some reason this felt really profound and somehow comforting in the moment. I didn’t write the poem until at least a year later, but I held that memory as something I wanted to visit in a poem.

When I wrote the poem, I was studying women in the history of poetry under one of my mentors, writer Alexandra Teague. I was thinking a lot about the way women were silenced in the literary cannon, and in particular poetry. I grew up in a pretty patriarchal church and community in the sense that men were to be the head of the household. I haven’t lived in that culture for a long time, but as I was studying woman and poetry, I was thinking of the women I come from and the way they had to carefully contain themselves to be accepted in this culture. I suppose I was thinking of the way that upbringing shaped my life too. Going to grad school to write in my late thirties feels like a breaking of this unhealthy legacy in which women were encouraged to put everyone else’s dreams ahead of theirs. In fact, my mother encouraged me to do it for all the women I come from who didn’t necessarily have a chance to pursue their own passions. Believe it or not, I was thinking of all of that when I wrote this poem.

What was the hardest part about writing it? What was the easiest?

I have learned to sit on ideas until I have a clue where they might fit in my work. I had pocketed that memory with my daughter, and it all came together when thinking of my decision to give so much of my life to writing and what that would mean to the women I come from who didn’t get to do such a thing. The idea for the structure of the poem came to me when I was on a run. I just kept running until I had the bones of the poem.

Is this poem categorical of your work? Why or why not?

Yes. I write a lot about nature and the body, mostly the female body. It gives me a distance, I guess, to explore the things I've experienced while making them somehow more universal. Growing up in the country in rural Wyoming, a lot of my time was spent outside. Perhaps that is why nature tends to find its way into my poems, especially when I explore my upbringing. The lens I have as a mother often comes in too. I've been a mother for sixteen years, so it's been a large part of my life.

Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?

Only that I operate pretty well within a general state of chaos. I am in grad school, run a small business, and have three kids. Right now as I type this I am helping my daughter wrap a birthday present and listening to a story she's telling. My dog is also bugging me for dinner. I try to keep a notebook with me all the time. I use my phone a lot, including Google Docs to edit and work on poetry. I think about poems while doing other things. I usually have one poem rolling around in my mind at a time. I will think about one poem for days and then when I get somewhere on it, move on to another. It might sound burdensome, but I absolutely love it.

Who are some of your favorite poets?

Dorianne Laux, Marie Howe, Natalie Diaz, Gabrielle Calvocoressi, Terrence Hayes, Mary Szybist, Donika Kelly, and Sharon Olds, to name a few. I'm always finding new poets I love. And I'm so lucky to work with two of my favorite poets: Alexandra Teague and Michael McGriff.

How long have you been writing poetry? Do you work in any other artistic mediums?

I've always loved poetry. I've been writing bad poetry (and songs) since I was a kid. My dad used to buy used poetry anthologies and have me read them out loud to him. I wrote a lot of ballad-type stanzas. They were filled with exact rhymes, a lot of "true and blue, love and above," that kind of thing. I took a modern poetry college class in my twenties. I loved it. That was when I really started trying to write poetry on a more serious level. I still had a lot to learn though. I guess I've been writing poetry in some capacity my whole life. I finally feel like I have some of the tools necessary for the craft, though I still have so much to learn.

As far as other artistic mediums, I have a small business in which I make mostly metal jewelry. I do a lot of cutting, shaping, hammering, and a little bit of metal smithing. It is a different kind of creating than writing, and I enjoy it very much as a break from the more heady stuff. Also, I recently

read Lynda Barry's *Syllabus* and have started a journal with drawings. They look about the same as my drawings did in elementary school, but I am really enjoying it.

Based on your personal experience, what advice would you give to other writers?

My writing didn't grow for a lot of years because I was afraid to show it to people. There is a huge amount of vulnerability involved when you are first learning a craft. I look back at some of the poems I wrote in that first poetry class I took in college. I am embarrassed by them, but my professor saw a spark of possibility and spent time with me each week working on them. I think that led me to where I am today, still working on my writing. You have to be willing to be uncomfortable to grow. I have grown so much and am still growing because of writing groups, workshops, and friends who have critiqued my work honestly. It's painful at times, but so necessary if you want to get better. I still feel vulnerable when sharing my work. You just have to be willing to step into that space.

Also, read read read. There is so much amazing poetry out there. When you find poems you love or poets who are doing work you admire, study that work and try to make some of the same moves. Reading also inspires me to write more. It's amazing how the same stories can be explored over and over and be represented differently in each poem.

Where can readers find more of your work?

Mothers Always Write, Frontier Poetry, The Ekphrastic Review, West Texas Literary Review, Mary Jane's Farm Magazine, and The Examined Life Journal.

>

Brooke June

She hums.
The desert breathes low
a little too dry.
Her air a sheath of old grass
desolate “haw” “haw” shaken through
skeletal bush.
And she shakes.
Turning over a crack in the stiff
unraveling the moon.
Both orange and blue earth have made
themselves here weep.
She swells cold at night as water shaped her
littered skin.
Ancestors fit inside
dried river beds.

Interview

Brooke June

What inspired the poem?

It was inspired by a hike at a place called Devil's Punch Bowl close to where I grew up in Palmdale, CA. It's a deep canyon in the Mojave Desert along the San Andres fault line. The bowl is filled with massive uplifted rock formations and a river bed that fills occasionally from the surrounding San Gabriel Mountains water runoff.

What was the hardest part about writing it? What was the easiest?

I feel like the hardest and easiest part of writing anything are two sides of the same coin. So much of it is an act of listening and carving out whatever that experience is. I only write what *needs* to be said and *how* I need to say it. I can't predict what that process is. Some poems come easy, some don't. This one in particular was an easier collaboration. It felt more natural I think, coming from a familiar landscape.

Was there anything in your original conception that did not make it in?

No. With the exception of a few word or format changes, the final poem stayed close to the drafts.

Is this poem categorical of your work? Why or why not?

No. Each poem I write calls for its own structure. I try to pay attention to that; I feel like it's a delicate balance—sort of like music. The lyrics and sound should really be on par with one another. I'm not sure if I can place my writing into a particular category.

What is your favorite line from the poem or the line you are most proud of?

It's not my favorite (none of them are), but I will say the poem originated with the line "Turning over a crack in the stiff / unraveling the moon."

Who are some of your favorite poets?

Some of my biggest influences aren't necessarily "poets" at all, though I certainly define them as such. Some are writers and songwriters: Bob Dylan, John Ashbery, Jack Kerouac, Cormac McCarthy, Gregory Alan Isakov, Walt Whitman, John Steinbeck, Hunter S. Thompson, F. Scot Fitzgerald, Sylvia Plath, Neil Young, The Beatles, Arthur Rimbaud, Emily Dickinson, T.S. Eliot, Mark Waldron (Also gonna throw in Andrew Wyeth — came across *The Helga Pictures* the other day. If that's not poetry, I don't know what is).

How long have you been writing poetry? Do you work in any other artistic mediums?

I've been writing poetry for about ten years, comfortably within my poetic voice for about four. I have also been a musician for most of my life (violin, twenty-three years), and I paint on occasion.

How would you personally define poetry?

There's poetry in everything—it defines itself. My favorite thing about it is its apparent marriage between the arts; its rhythmic qualities of music; its kinship with the visual arts; and its gravity of varied picture with every new reader.

Based on your personal experience, what advice would you give to other writers?

Beware of asking too much and try listening more. (PS—artists are weird, no one is *you*, and advice can be cheap).

Where can readers find more of your work?

On my website (brookejune.com). I will also be featured in the Third Street Writers' 2018 Spring Anthology, titled *Lost and Found*.

Amphisbaenic*: Vacation Destination

Jack Stewart

A gift for your cousin, these posh
colors, flawless shells in a tourist shop—
a large scallop, purple and veined as meat
(a diver in the depths, the bubbles teem
around his ankles, he reaches . . .) or this one, a cap
of yellow like a doll's—you could pack
it in tissue, no smell to pursue
your sweaters, blouses, usurp
the perfume on the t-shirt you stuffed in
after a last-minute change, the sun pale, knit
with wispy clouds.

Now that you live here, the sag
of telephone wires, the shell a gas
station. Mornings, you pass a shopping list
of pawn shops, fast food, banks, all still.
Sunglasses not yet needed. A pill
of moon dissolves on the lip
of the horizon. Can you still say the days sail
on their reflections, the waves tipped with lace?

But you do have the knack
of neighborhoods, new restaurants, can
broker shortcuts. If she visited, you could make
an inland day of it, with palms that came
beach- and bikini-free, never take a cab,
the scent of salt in the air, and send her back
with the mundane exotic: coconuts
in lotion and backpack, a swimsuit to stun
her boyfriend, a cookbook with lime
in everything. And you'd turn back to mile
on mile of ugliness erased, the rest

(no stanza break)

of the day familiar but new, stare
at the iguanas lazy and tame
in the sun, a cloud trailing its mate,
and in the rearview mirror, your face,
relaxed in its lines, and safe.

**An amphisbaenic rhyme is one in which the second rhyming word is the sound of the first word run backwards.*

Interview

Jack Stewart

What inspired the poem?

I moved with my family to south Florida in the fall of 2016, so that environment was finding its way into my poems. I had vacationed down here as a boy, also, so the rough material for the poem was easy.

I have always been interested in different kinds of rhyme, but I had never done anything that was completely in amphisbaenic, where the second rhyming word is the sound of the first word run backwards. I thought it might be a fun challenge. Couplets made sense because I wouldn't have to write really long sentences in between rhymes, and it's such a subtle rhyme it wouldn't jump off the page and be a distraction. Once I got about eight to ten lines into it, I really got going. I am particularly proud of "pursue"/"usurp" and "sail"/"lace."

Is this poem categorical of your work? Why or why not?

It's fairly representative. I like working with formal structures, although they're not in all of my poems. In working with couplets—or any rhyme—the rhyming word controls what sentence you write leading up to it, so you end up coming up with a lot of sentences you never would have thought of, and that can send the poem in some interesting directions. For some reason, this one kept wanting to have a female speaker, so I just went with it.

Who are some of your favorite poets?

Early in my career, I was most influenced by Elizabeth Bishop and James Merrill. I now read a lot of James Wright, Philip Levine, and W.S. Merwin. Whenever Linda Pastan brings out a new book, I buy it. Right now, I'm reading some Georg Trakl.

How would you personally define poetry?

For me, poetry is a way to see things, to help others see the world in a way they hadn't understood it before, to express that view, if you will, or

point of view in language that clarifies and focuses their emotions. The best poems do that in lines and images they take with them for a long time.

Based on your personal experience, what advice would you give to other writers?

Open your eyes. Really look at things. In one way, every poem is a simile of some kind, making equations, so starting with small comparisons helps build that. I tell students, description is never just description. In everyday life, we always attach meaning to physical things, so it's good to focus on those and describe them in ways that are clear and original. Someone said about Elizabeth Bishop that you always believed she had really been to wherever she was describing.

Where can readers find more of your work?

This year, some of my poems have appeared in *A New Ulster* in Northern Ireland, the *Medical Literary Messenger*, and *Military Experience and the Arts*. *Poetry* did some poems a while back. My work has been in some unusual places. *The Journal of the American Medical Association* publishes poetry, and I was published there.

What is Born From the Parietal Eye

Lisa Favicchia

I swallowed several teeth
which sank into my belly, nestled
in the lining where they grew
into my calcified tooth children.
Every day they pressed
their loud, calcitrated fingers
against my belly, I thought
maybe they still needed more time—
I knew I should let them
out but didn't know how and didn't want
them to become changelings
if they did not yet
have my features.

On the day they grew teeth
of their own and could gnaw
through my belly lining, I let them
out through the part in my hair.
They crawled to the floor
where they slipped through cracks
so small I didn't know they were there;
never believe what lies in a wood grain.
They may be overly hard,
may have too many teeth, may even
be patched with fur, but never believe
that what knocks on oak
are not your own children.

Laying by the Lake

John Wojtowicz

A grapefruit moon
subtly reminds him
of the solar neighborhood
as he straps a hammock
around dense pines
locally grown on Earth.
He settles a goose-down
sleeping bag into it
and pulls a harmonica
out of somewhere, humming
Mr. Tambourine Man
after a long day
of hopping south-bound trains.
It's his father's birthday
who helped him
come out of this world
so he thinks about a fireplace,
scratchy Dylan records.
An underwater orange orb
seems about to surface,
pummeled to perfection
by other-worldly asteroids.
He nestles near one of its craters
and sings the trees to sleep.

Interview

John Wojtowicz

What inspired the poem?

I traded in my tent for a hammock and it's made all the difference.

What was the hardest part about writing it? What was the easiest?

The hardest part was not straying from the poem's core to explore things better left to the reader's imagination.

Was there anything in your original conception that did not make it in?

I was once told revision is like a keg party. At first, you let everyone in the door. As the night goes on, you start kicking people out: an underage girl, a thief, the guy who pukes on your shoes. The character in this poem had a number of co-conspirators, but they eventually were asked to leave. Maybe they'll have their own poem one day.

Is this poem categorical of your work? Why or why not?

My writing is often character driven and somewhat narrative. This poem is different because it is more about the character's relation to the moment and what happens next is unimportant to that moment.

What is your favorite line from the poem or the line you are most proud of?

I like the idea of a solar neighborhood.

Who are some of your favorite poets?

Stephen Dunn, Stephen Dobyns, Tony Hoagland, and BJ Ward.

How long have you been writing poetry? Do you work in any other artistic mediums?

I started writing poetry in high school and stepped out of my major to get some formal training in college. I now use it as a method of self-care and stress relief. I also dance at Grateful Dead shows.

How would you personally define poetry?

It's my way of lusting after the universe. It's a booty call whose sister answers the phone.

Based on your personal experience, what advice would you give to other writers?

Discovery is the common denominator for writers and readers. Write and revise with discovery in mind.

Where can readers find more of your work?

My poem "Gypsy Moth" is in the most recent issue of *Paterson Literary Review*. *Stone Boat* featured my poem, "Silver Lining," in their latest "Red, White, and Blue: Voices of America" issue. I also have a poem, "Mr. Moon," forthcoming in *More Challenges for the Delusional: Peter Murphy's Prompts and the Writing They Inspired*.

What drew you to *Driftwood Press*?

Driftwood is a great name for a literary magazine and the cover art called me to crack open an issue.

Lay's chips, hot dogs, and Coke. Last words?
I stuck my finger in that rainbow puddle of petrol
And swirled. (Copper evening
impossibly still.)

Interview

Joshua Hamilton

What inspired the poem?

In this poem, the images of consumed fruit and sensuality, the intrusion of robot or random phone calls, and an article I read about prisoners' requests for last meals were at the heart of the composition. The impulse to try to capture certain moments of strangeness within the most familiar and grounded modes of relationship moved the composition of the different images within this poem. Disparate and fleeting moods, pieces of information, or ideas sometimes interrupt a more solid narrative created in the identity of a relationship with one or more people—friends and family—and usually disappear in the normal day's accumulation of thoughts. I like to try to capture those dissipating trails when I can and anchor them more to the central story of my or other people's lives and, if I can, attempt to take various unrelated images and destabilize the definitions and narratives I take for granted in the course of a normal day.

What was the hardest part about writing it? What was the easiest?

The hardest part was trying to take the initial images that inspired me and develop them into a longer chain of connections. The easiest part entailed the formal parameters: I took 3x5 notecards and wrote the texts on them, restricting myself to stanzas of nine to ten verses playing off an initial word (the notecard titles within the poem).

Was there anything in your original conception that did not make it in?

I revised each stanza several times, reworking phrasings and word choices; but overall, each stanza remained with its basic format and content.

Is this poem categorical of your work? Why or why not?

This poem represents, I would say, one side of the spectrum of writing I try to compose: the more experimental and lyrically oriented type. Here,

I try to approach the page with a loose mind and let the flow of images control the writing more than trying to compose an integrally formed poetic narrative, searching in the process for the interesting or surprising juxtapositions of language. On the other side of the spectrum, I try to compose more narratively coherent poems that attempt to search out and represent the possible deeper meanings in more mundane situations in life, resituating the value of the daily as something much more important than what it appears to be on the surface.

What is your favorite line from the poem or the line you are most proud of?

I would have to say the lines from the first stanza that work out the image of orange and lemon rinds (and their double meaning as both the promise and remains of sensual pleasure) rank as my favorite lines.

Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?

I have some quirks: I like to write everything out by hand first, preferably with fountain pens or woodcase pencils. The tactile sensation helps to ground me in the moment of composition. Then I move to a typewriter for revision—my favorite is a Remington portable #1 from the 1920s. These affinities are somewhat fetishistic, I believe, but they keep me away from the Internet while writing, which is important because I have very little willpower and focus when it comes to working on the computer while connected online.

Who are some of your favorite poets?

At the moment, I have been reading the Draft poems of Rachel Blau DuPlessis, and I find them beautiful, mesmerizing, and profoundly suggestive. Ocean Vuong's *Night Sky with Exit Wounds* blew me away. Federico García Lorca stays in my perennial rotation; I'm just finishing up the *Poesía completa* edition published by *Vintage Español*; his *Poeta en Nueva York* is, at the moment, my favorite book. Dylan Thomas' poetry started me out as a driving inspiration many years ago, and I go back to his work frequently. I am also in awe of Tracy Smith's *Life on Mars*. Another poet from Spain, Leopoldo María Panero, has a grotesque, lyrical, and wildly multi-dimensional body of work that engrosses me.

How long have you been writing poetry? Do you work in any other artistic mediums?

I wrote the first thing that could be called a poem when I was thirteen. I had always found great inspiration, freedom, and meaning in the literary worlds I explored at that age, but writing poems in that period of my life became the natural way for me to process, reinterpret, and contribute to the construction of reality. I do not work actively in other mediums, though I dabble in combining photographs with text at times. My wife, Leticia Bajuyo, is a visual artist, and I have been involved in helping with her installations and sculptures, and this experience gives me added insight into visual aesthetics and how they play into writing.

How would you personally define poetry?

Poetry, for me, condenses experience into a very thick, powerful revelation of our lives in their infinite variability and profundity. It opens the most iron-clad and dominant impositions of our communities to the individual meanings and life stories, giving us a way to augment or take apart the communal fabric and weave in our own perceptions and interpretations.

Based on your personal experience, what advice would you give to other writers?

I know this has been repeated ad infinitum, but I think that the best advice that I know of at the moment is to write as much as one can, each day if possible, and know that the finished product may never be absolutely finished. One needs community, readers, and collaborators. It is very important to be a part of this community; working with other people's writing, taking their comments into consideration, and being open to viewing one's own writing from different perspectives not only adds objectivity and insight, but brings the support and dialogue that fosters creativity.

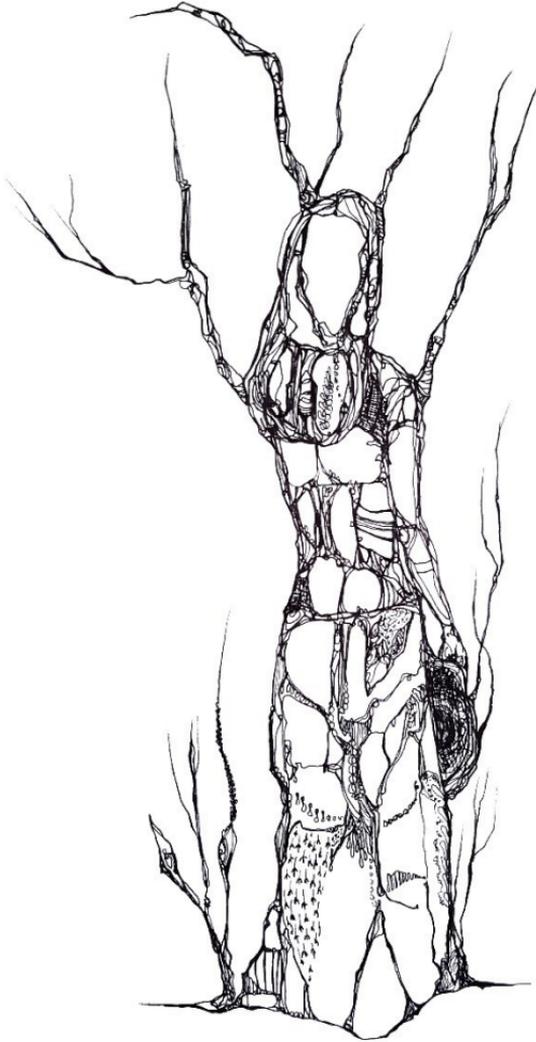
Where can readers find more of your work?

I have a chapbook out, published by *Finishing Line Press* (<https://www.finishinglinepress.com/product/slow-wind-by-joshua-hamilton/>).

What drew you to *Driftwood Press*?

I value the consistent inclusion of a spectrum of arts within the journal: prose, poetry, and visual arts. I also appreciate the format of providing pdfs to the public for free while maintaining a print version of the journal itself. I find having the material artifact of writing in hand to be of utmost importance when creating that close, personal connection to the writing and one's own life.

Hysterical
Aimee Bungard



Interview

Aimee Bungard

How would you describe your aesthetic?

I consider my work Ecological Expressionism.

Did you have a difficult time deciding on whether to add a title to your work?

Actually, naming the piece is one of my favorite bits of creating. Do you lead the audience into seeing where the piece resides for you, the artist? Do you play with the audience? Or do you opt out all together with a good, sturdy 'Untitled 1'?

When did you create "Hysterical"?

I created 'Hysterical' the summer of 2017.

What inspired "Hysterical"?

This has been for me a year of self-reflection, growth, and healing. My mother passed a few years go and I have just become comfortable investigating my sense of self, my being without her and having known her. My art, although typically botanical in nature, I consider as soul portraiture... The representation of essence through mark making. The piece is self-reflective *and* universal—exclusive and inclusive.

What was the hardest part of crafting the piece?

The mining of self.

How did you conceive of "Hysterical"?

I began the piece free drawing, allowing the line to go where it pleased until I saw the figure forming.

Was there any theme or idea you hoped to address with this work?

It's very much a reflection on the feminine.

What is your creative process?

It truly depends on the purpose. I draw or paint almost every day; however, the seed of any piece is cerebral. If I'm steeped in a certain subject mentally, that will undoubtedly find itself in a new project. The working process for my ink pieces is pretty straight forward in terms of traditional drawing. Although I consider my botanical drawings as portraiture, I very rarely work directly from my subject, instead spending time outside in my gardens studying and working the earth; absorbing the energy of the plants, I then return to my studio and begin working, recalling my hands-on experience as well as the overall feeling the plant was exuding. My paintings have much more of a classic 'process' in the overall execution. I begin with a Conte drawing on a prepped surface done in a looser style than my ink's but with the same feel. I then come in with Acrylic to work in the body of the subject. Next comes the Ink layer, where I reapproach the Conte shape with a pen, defining the shape and readjusting based on the color addition. I then come through with several layers of coffee.

Who are some of your favorite artists? Do you have any recommendations for others who enjoyed your work?

My oldest inspirations are Giacometti, Rodin, Van Gogh, Shel Silverstein, Frida Khalo, and Theo Geisel.

Where can our readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

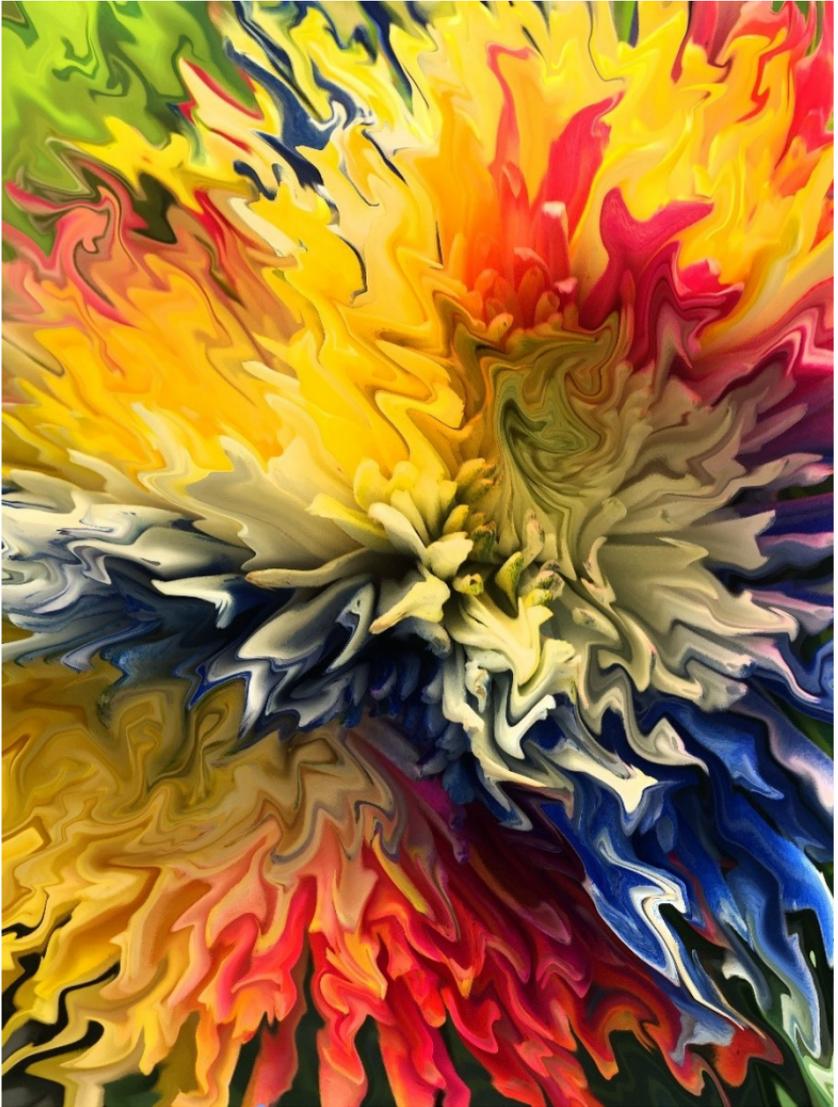
You can find more work on my website (AimeeBungardArt.com), my Facebook ([/AimeeBungardArt](https://www.facebook.com/AimeeBungardArt)), around Pittsburgh, and in your local Art-o-Mat machine! I've been included in publications of *Hot Metal Bridge*, *Lab-letters Monthly notes*, *December Magazine*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *The Tishman Review*, *Gravel*, *Foliate Oak*, *Temenos*, *Almagre*, *Essential Herbal Magazine*, *Big Muddy*, and upcoming issues of *Hayden's Review* and *Lumina*.

What drew you to *Driftwood Press*?

I was recommended by my author friend Prof Michael Gerhard Martin.

Molten Chrysanthemums

John Chavers



Interview

John Chavers

How would you describe your aesthetic?

I look to the light and the shadow, to both the bold and the muted, to all points of the spectrum, really, but I believe beauty is captured in a visceral reaction to something—a natural language we can understand once we let our eyes listen to what touches our hearts.

Did you have a difficult time deciding on whether to add a title to your work?

Once I name a piece I consider it completed, taking it from something like "Untitled1.png" or "IMAGE_1216.jpg" to something more descriptive and definitive, but I always struggle with titles. I have numerous untitled pieces at the moment. "Molten Chrysanthemums" came to me during the creative process, but I didn't change the title on the file until I felt the piece was completed.

When did you create "Molten Chrysanthemums"?

I started on December 7, 2017 and completed it the next day, working both days during my lunch hour.

Do you digitally manipulate photographs? If so, how much did you edit this one?

I used one technique on this image, but I had to repeat the one technique over and over again.

What inspired "Molten Chrysanthemums"?

I wanted to see how far I could manipulate the initial image; I took it from its natural state to something that was more plastic, rendering it into a more liquid form and giving a little motion to the piece.

What was the hardest part of crafting the piece?

I applied the same technique hundreds of times to the manipulate the image until I was happy with the form and composition.

What camera was this image taken with?

An iPhone 6.

How did you conceive of "Molten Chrysanthemums"?

I was drawn to the colors and shadows in the original photograph, which I made at a flower shop where the owner had dyed the tips of white chrysanthemums in vibrant colors. I took several shots of the floral arrangement but ended up cropping to this one section before enhancing it.

Did you have any goal in taking the image?

I wanted to take the initial image beyond its natural beauty—to somewhere beyond itself—going from something solid to something more liquid; a transition of states.

Is photography the medium that you're most invested in?

At the moment, yes. I'm always taking photographs and tinkering with them. I tend to classify myself as a general creator, working as an artist and photographer mostly. I also write some fiction.

Are your other photos similar in subject or focus?

No other is quite like this one, but there are many that have similar features. Some of my work will be featured in two upcoming shows (early 2018)—one at the Mary Cosgrove Dolphin Gallery at Worcester State University in MA, and the other at Purdue University Galleries in IN. This past summer my work was featured in the AMoA Biennial—600: Architecture exhibition in Amarillo, TX.

What is your creative process?

Tony Feher's art influences me as I look to make art from mostly non-traditional sources. He says to look at things with no intent to make art; rather, let these things influence your senses in such a way that you have to capture it, interpret it, and present it in your own language. That is what I try to do. Often I find the most beautiful elements in the most mundane things as I combine, re-arrange, and rework. I look for ways to use everyday technology to create my art. I'm currently working on a series of images that include photographs made into abstract art as well as making collages and superimposed composites.

Where can our readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

My work has been accepted or is forthcoming for publication at *Cream City Review*, *Glass Mountain*, *Permafrost Magazine*, *The Nassau Review*, *Whitefish Review*, *Stonecoast Review*, and *Azahares Literary Magazine*, among others. This coming April I will be a guest artist with The Association of Icelandic Visual Artists (SiM) at Korpúlfsstaðir in Reykjavík.

What drew you to *Driftwood Press*?

About two years ago I was perusing *The Review Review* website researching literary journals and magazines that accept photographs and artwork. *Driftwood Press* Volume Two, Issue Two featured an image by Iryna Lialko on the cover. I loved it and thought perhaps my work would make a good fit at *Driftwood*.

Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about this work in particular?

I hope you enjoy “Molten Chrysanthemums” as much as I enjoyed making it.

Anticipation in Gold
Ekaterina Abramova



Interview

Ekaterina Abramova

How would you describe your aesthetic?

I combine different symbols and mythologies from all over the world and often use combinations of two main colors: blue and gold. This is called a royal combination—a very old one that originated in Byzantium. I show that we all are unique and royal by our birth—that we are a part of eternal family of souls. I love Art Nouveau, and my diptych “Anticipation in Gold” was created in that style.

Did you have a difficult time deciding on whether to add a title to your work?

Yes, sometimes. Different paintings are like different personalities, and some of them just appear already with the name, but others need time to get the title they deserve. One of my recent paintings was without name for some time, and I felt like asking my friends to come up with name suggestions. I got many different titles and finally chose the one suggested by my UK/Indian friend. But that was very unusual, for most of the time the name comes when it's ready to come. I just need to wait a day or two.

When did you create "Anticipation in Gold"?

I created it in the beginning of summer 2017. It was based on one of my own favorite paintings—“Anticipation in Love,” which was a colorful one. After some time I felt like coming back to this subject and making a new version of it using my new style, my new conception with symbols, and the gold leaf technique.

What inspired "Anticipation in Gold"?

Feelings. My feelings as a woman and as a spiritual soul. It's the same woman surrounded by her different emotions and thoughts.

What was the hardest part of crafting the piece?

It was a real pleasure to create this work. I was enjoying each minute, even though technically it was very difficult. I had to be very focused and concentrated, because once it was on canvas I couldn't change or repaint anything. Especially my detailed drawings—if I make a mistake and need to paint it over, then the background in that spot will be darker than the rest of it. So every drawings/symbols on these canvases are rendered in freehand drawing style—with no corrections.

How did you conceive of "Anticipation in Gold"?

Maybe it sounds unusual and even crazy, but this particular painting just asked me to paint her.

Was there any theme or idea you hoped to address with this work?

As I mentioned before, my idea is to remind people of their true nature—especially women. Both to know yourself and love yourself, to allow yourself to be the way you feel you should be.

Is art the medium that you're most invested in?

I've been artist-painter my whole life. Acrylic, oil, gold leaf and gold, and silver ink. I dedicated my life to art. In the near future I also want to try different mediums, especially collages.

What is your creative process?

I need to be connected with my inner self and stop thinking about all worries, just concentrate on the present moment and information that's coming to me and wants me to pay attention to it. Then I start 'recording' it on paper or canvas itself. I love to make a lot of sketches before touching the canvas, but sometimes I feel a desperate need to paint directly on canvas and I follow my feelings.

Who are some of your favorite artists? Do you have any recommendations for others who enjoyed your work?

My favorite artists are Gustav Klimt, Georgia O’Keeffe, Frida Kahlo, and many others as well.

I love folk art, traditional crafts, primitivism, and, of course, icons.

Recommendations could be: stay in touch, and let’s collaborate; I have many ideas of collaboration—fashion, prints, events, life paintings, and others. With your support, I can do much more because I feel useful and I feel my art life has meaning.

Where can our readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

I have two websites. One new one dedicated to my new life after moving to New York (www.artabramova.info) and the other one that now has much more of my previous works and serves as well as the archive of many years of my art practice (www.artabramova.com). You can also google my name for more info about my art and me.

I have been published many times in Russia, India, Switzerland, Germany, as well as here in the U.S. Recently, I had an interview with Radio Uncovered host Kimberly Ruth in NYC. The interview was dedicated to my art and my curating Russian Art Month in Abu Dhabi, UAE, in February 2017.

Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about this work in particular?

I think I can say this about any of my works: Look at my art with open heart and learn about yourself.

“On the path of Love we are neither masters nor the owners of our lives. We are only a brush in the hand of the Master Painter.” —Rumi

Winter 2017

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