



COMPASS ROSE
South

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COMPASS ROSE
south

EDITOR: Kelly Easton
ART EDITOR: Lauren Rapp

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September 2023

Following our journeys “North” and “East” earlier this year, we’re delighted to bring you this foray into “South”.

The writers and artists appearing herein bring multi-dimensional perspectives to this broad theme, with a majority contemplating the American South through the rich lens of its history, culture, and current events. Others reflect on life, or circumstances, “going south,” and the resulting emotional experiences. All provide fresh perspective rich in language and visual appeal.

The visual art in this issue passes from joyful to dark, to joyful again, with the artists’ examinations into such varied topics as radical extremism, popular unrest, and the heroes of the Grand Ol’ Opry. Each piece constitutes a facet of “South” and we’re excited to bring them to you.

We hope you enjoy the journey in these pages.



Kelly Easton
Editor



Lauren Rapp
Art Editor

CAMDEN STUBER



Kentucky Flooding
relief printing in hand-bound book
2022, 18" x 11"

Elegy for Gene

While he was working in a manhole a snarling concrete saw
kicked a pipe
kicked up and back to chew the throat out of young Gene.
He was killed at once the telephone said
but I don't believe it.

I have run chainsaws and circular saws & yes,
diamond tipped concrete saws &
they never cut clean,
never cut all at once.
They chew & gouge,
make sparks in the dirt,
jump to maybe rough a shoe or
tear the loose threads from your toughest work pants.

So when the saw climbed,
burrowed beneath his chin,
did Gene have time to think,
time to raise a forearm,
time to do more than marvel
at the red cloud of himself in the poor light?

He was a father of two by separate mothers,
so when the call came from Houston
which of these got the call first
& did it matter?

He died at once.
Maybe a lie is a comfort
if said
often enough.

TRAVIS STEPHENS

Oh Honey

bee poop
my mother said, a laugh
for it is bee spit
or bee vomit, having been
through a bee's stomach
then passed around
fanned dry &
socked away.
Sweet honey
tupelo honey
lilacs & rose gardens.
Dark honey of
misunderstanding.
Aphid honey
second hand spread
on day old bread
two days of toast.
Honey doesn't rot
or mold or go bad.
Outlasted my mother &
her memory.

Future Imperfect

To do this would
be nothing more
than taking one
more sugar cube
from the blue bowl
on the table,

crumbling it
to grit between
fingers and thumb
into a sweet
glitter of nothing.

This possible
future at its
best would be like
plucking the day
lily, that flares,
blazing open
one day only.

And the only
questions moving forward:
how long must we
put up with this dying
perfume? and who
is going to
clean up this mess?

Grace Period

In the time of putting
things by, in the harvest,
in the bold idea
of planning ahead,

where do I factor in
this rolling up of light
compacting the year with
the comings and goings
of the birds on highways
invisible in blue?

In this season of grace
where do I tally up
magnificence of flamed
jazz hands of maple trees,
beautyberry's purple,
the sassafras gold hung
with jewels of dew in
spider webs.

For all of us critters
who are late bloomers, this
is our season without
prejudice, this grace
time of harvest when I
do not perish but am
changed and gathered in.

Undiscovered Star

He's got his music. He hopes
it's bound some day for the radio,
right now it's caught in the guitar
on the taxi's front seat.

He wants his songs to be
everyone's music, the tunes they hum
and just can't get out of their heads –
the mental itch yearning for a scratch.

We speed from the airport
and listen to Patsy Cline sing
"Sweet Dreams" from the dash.

Wheeling out my driveway,
he dreams of success enough
to leave the cab behind.
In the dark house, I can't get

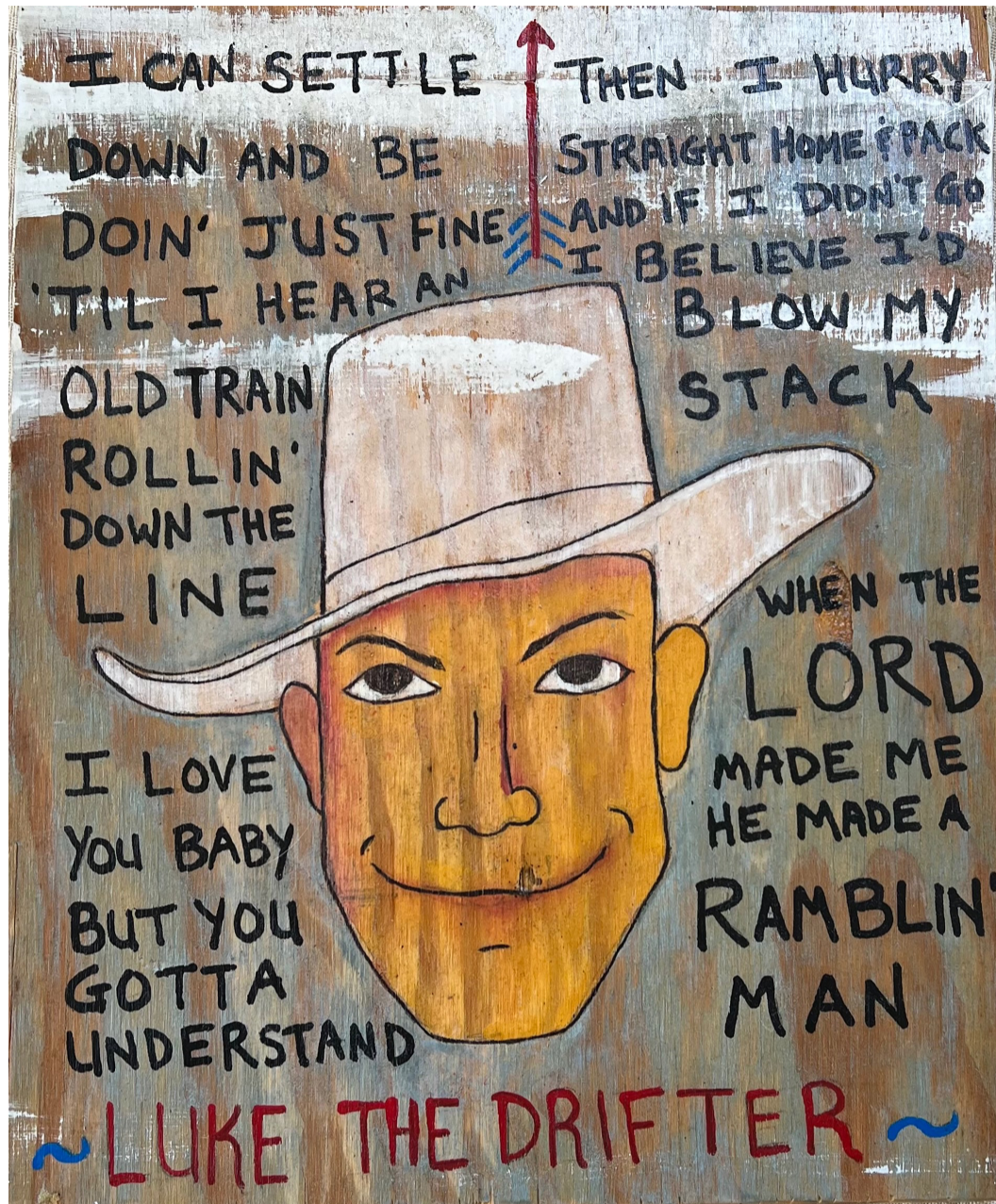
Patsy's voice off my mind
as I fall off toward sleep
and whatever dream comes next.

Chances

What are the chances that I would be reading some prose poem about Jazz and that I would be thinking, however unclearly, about writing one myself, and that in thinking about this writing, I would think to myself— but say out loud— the date of this day, Tuesday, *April 12, 2022*, in this evening cooling down a warm afternoon, then reading along in that New Orleans Jazz poem, I would see the date, *April 12, 1954*, and wonder was that a Tuesday as well? It was not. I discovered it was a Monday. And I would have been in Kindergarten eating my lunch at home and then, right back in the afternoon at school learning how to share crayons, how to tell time on a clock with hands, how to pretend to nap, moving only a little bit, how to color inside all the lines with my fingers.



Man in Black
Acrylic and marker on salvaged wood
5 1/2" x 9 1/4"



Luke the Drifter

Acrylic, watercolor and marker on salvaged wood

10 1/2" x 12 3/4"



Heroes of the Opry: Minnie Pearl

Acrylic and marker on salvaged wood

4 1/2" x 6 1/8"



Heroes of the Opry: Grandpa Jones

Acrylic and marker on salvaged wood

4 1/2" x 6 1/8"

MIKE WILSON

Wayne County Sonnet

The school of realism says describe what
the eye falls upon, like that used condom
atop trash in little sister's bedroom
or Mother reaching for one more Winston,
her Mountain Dew gone flat, Granny passing
gas, Papaw on the porch, whittling a stick,
no one hearing the frog splash in the pond,
Uncle Luther peeing out the window.
All that's new is old, self-evident.
You best not doll it up with metaphors.
Life's like taking heavy drugs and wishing
you hadn't – I know, I just broke the rule,
but realists don't see we need an extra
"m" to change a coma to a comma.

MIKE WILSON

Church Life Sonnet

The brown cork bulletin board chronicles
in photographs and announcements
triumphs and tribulations of a chosen family
wearing off rough edges in a tempered way.

The rules of the road are practiced here,
golden rules that sometimes are elusive
at home, where intimacies open doors for
devils.

Casseroles and Christmas carols,
prayer at least on Sunday is enough
to dumb the rumble of apocalypse, delay
Judgment Day, enough to settle the dust.

It's easier to loosen the knot of temptation,
easier to love, where everybody's trying.

There's a Soundtrack to This Walk

She pushes the stroller slowly, strolling
early morning as the river steams.
Where she's going, I don't know, just as
I can't guess in what ways the river cut
through this driftless space or will alter
its path over the years, as I've heard
all rivers do. We hear her before seeing
her, wonder about what counts as classic
rock, as we wonder about what vintage
entails. How old is old? How old
are we, sitting here as she passes by—
the baby dressed in fuchsia, the boombox
strapped to the bottom basket, blaring.
She walks as if being filmed, as if starring
in some movie, and this is the scene
serving as transition, the tune we'll catch
looping later in the day as we make
our way back to where we call home.
Everything seems more everything
with accompaniment—whether of
tenderness or rage or that fleeting
feeling I once had of being immortal,
or loved, I think. So, why not, we ask?
We watch her until she rounds a curve
and is gone and nothing is heard
but the lumbering of trucks over
the bridge and, just underneath that,
if we listen for it, the conveyance of water.

Malic

I have come to them again
after having picked them as a girl
from the ground where they were
rotting so that my mother could turn
them into sauce. I could not tell you
what kind—the trees long gone
even in pictures. Never what we ate
whole. No bowl filled to the brim
on the counter, like now. He confessed
he had become addicted to the newest—
the one of stars, though when I tried
them, they paled to the honey-
crisp. Too soft. Too red, of the red
delicious the popular girls brought
in their bright and tidy lunch packs
those days of my fraught youth
when I could not refuse the tepid, slightly
sour milk always served. Green was
my envy watching them bite clean
into the skin with their white, white teeth.
The orchard that once was only miles
from where I lived is no longer there
on any map. How many years
has it been since no one cared
what the deer strove to devour?



Southern Belle Salute
glazed terra cotta, pine base with acrylic
21" x 13" x 9"



Southern Belle Salute
glazed terra cotta, pine base with acrylic
21" x 13" x 9"

abecedarian for spring

Azaleas. I can't actually identify them,
but they feel like indicators that spring has finally
come—nature's way of saying seasonal
depression can take a hike because color
exists in the world again. I wish I knew more about
flowers, since they bring me so much joy.
Gardening sounds fun in theory—
how beautiful to know you've nursed a plant to life?
Irises. Lilies. Carnations. Marigold. Dahlia.
Jasmine. Daisies. Chrysanthemum. Buttercups. I only
know what maybe half of those look like, but I
love knowing that someone, somewhere, is
making them all grow, reminding me winter will
no longer be plaguing me. Maybe it's a little
overdramatic, to hate winter so much. But life feels so
pointless when everything is grey and dark and cold and
quiet. In summer, there are so many animals, rushing
rivers, people unafraid to stay outside... And it starts with
spring, the awkward transition, where the days are coin
tosses: chilly or comfortable; overcast or sunny;
umbrella necessary for rain or for sun cover. I have an empty
vase I say I'm going to fill every year,
with fresh flowers from the farmer's market,
except I never actually go. How can I say
your beauty belongs to me—as if I deserve to cut off their
zest for life just when the sun reminds me of my own?

Orchards in the Mind

So where does this, a family tree, lead—
or does it? To snapshots? Ripe plums? Bitter limes?

It spreads its branches in boisterous disarray,
rebellious opposition to the central core.
We should look instead at the tree upside down,
or reflected in a mirror held at the base. Let it show
how branches grow backwards into a single trunk.

Grand tree, grand orchard: uncles, aunts, grand-
parents, the parents of grandparents, their parents—
when you are needed, let weary hands harvest.
Before the sun, eclipsed by the cold-shouldering earth,
is sunk in darkness, let this intermingling scaffold
of connecting limbs tell us who we are
and what we should become.

Midday Demon

High noon and the demon is here. Perched on a rock,
picking sand from its claws, it clears its throat
and assures us the world is a grave.
But we're not afraid when it spreads its wings
and announces time is an arrow. We shrug
when it looks at us sideways and says death is a blade.
We know we're done for, we've known for ages.
Still, we let it hang around. We throw it scraps, fill its water bowl,
stroke it when it lets us. We let it mutter on
of the impossibility of paradise, of how to abide
this scorched ground, this burning wind, this terminal sun.



Extremists: The Partisan Divide:
Unite the Right Rally
C-Print, Variable
2018

“I am interested in the increasingly mainstream nature of extremist groups and what contributes to their rise. With names like Moms for Liberty, Parents Involved in Education, Proud Boys, Sovereignty Education and Defense Ministry and the Freedom Coalition, these groups play semantic games with who they are and what they do.

In these images, I connect the idea of emerging from the shadows of extremism to the emergence of mainstream violence in MMA. The figures in my photographs are in submission poses and tread the line between intimacy and violence. The white ties are also symbolic.”

- Corey J. Willis



Extremists: The Partisan Divide:
Unite the Right Rally
C-Print, Variable
2018

Goliad Hanging Tree

Massive courthouse oak, felled.
Trunk that three could not encompass
hand in hand in hand.
Nodes and burls,
limbs greater than my waist,
knobbed knees
and bunioned toes buckling sidewalks
fifteen feet beyond.

What shaped this squat and stolid growth?
Deformed tortuous limbs?
Hardened heart? Was it complicit?
This evil tree, mocking justice
just outside courthouse doors?
Did it remember whimpers, groans,
silence as ropes snapped?

Freak storm, trumpet of thunder,
and crackling electricity struck
as though fired by sharpshooter,
prized grasping roots
from blood-soaked Texas soil,
exposed them to daylight.

Did it remember terrible fruit
bending branches low, creaking
to bear the weight?
Now limbs scrabble heavenward,
beseech forgiveness,
but cannot shake dirt that clings,
dark history too large to bury.
It cast its shadow large,
no consecration can erase its past.

ANN HOWELLS

Holland Street - Alpine, Texas

Davis Mountains' brown work-calloused hands
cup train whistle and distant barking.

Mardi Gras still clings in July – purple, green,
gold – on rails of the little iron bridge.

A uniformed workman steps from his van,
checks his shave in the rearview mirror.

Squash blossom in fecund exuberance,
scale cedars in headlong verdant rush.

Residents, students, and tourists raise chins,
twitch noses at pungent aromas,

as they note the gas station's boastful sign:
World's Best Homemade Beef Burrito.

With unabashed enthusiasm a desert wren
performs his own arrangement of *Ode to Joy*.

Lower County

Berry-brown we clambered jetties.
jumped rope to the chant learned at Papa's knee –

*Point Lookout, Point Look In
Point No Point & Point Again*

-- geography of a bay that sleeps restlessly.
Folks arrived by back doors,
drove for groceries, medicine, gasoline,
on roads domed as turtlebacks,
past marshes where periwinkles lived entire lives
on a single blade of grass.
Holding one upside down we coaxed –

*Pennywinkle, Pennywinkle, poke out yer horn
Give ya barrel a' wheat fer a barrel a' corn.*

The little snail never appeared,
and we were too young to know *barrel a' corn*
was corn liquor, a common commodity.
When evening suffused sea and sky, crimson faded
to rose, cooled to lavender, deepened to indigo.
Pine spires, tassels in bas-relief, flattened to silhouette,
vanished with whitewashed craft blushing pink.
We lay in furrows on cots pulled to the porch
in mid-August. No sequined light overflowed sills,
encircled streetlamps. No headlights
travelled willy-nilly across bedroom walls.
Night was blind, deaf but for heartbeat waves,
haunting tonal drip as tide drained through rock.

Mockingbirds woke us, swell of cicadas already begun.
Papa measured dimples between forefinger and thumb,
enfolded us in bear hugs, sang—

*She's ma darlin', she's ma daisy,
she's knock-kneed & she's lazy,
She's my freckle-faced, consumptive Liza Jane.*

Childhood flowed in amber swirls, sweetened iced tea
in heavy-bottom glasses slick with condensation,
glided on double-sailed skipjacks dredging oysters
in months with an R, woke
to parchment-colored honeysuckle scent.
Every person I knew was aunt, uncle, or cousin.



Loretta
Acrylic on Canvas
2023, 16"x20"

Drag Queen Leaning Against the Wall Outside *Just Us Lounge*

- Biloxi, Mississippi

One more night of off-season stragglers. I want to hail them in their passing, invite them inside, but my greetings stay submersed. The longer I sit, the more easily I get shook by sudden footsteps, a flung cigarette. Nordstrom perfume I sprayed on a bit too thick thins in the feral salt air. What I want now is more applause, more greenbacks in my garters, but I've surpassed my quota in the blood-scarlet neon room behind me. I go back inside, rejoin the festive voices, light bouncing off a sister queen assuming center stage in time-lapse glitter. Some oaf who thought me a whore he could take home — just before saying he was sorry, now sits asleep on a corner stool. I pull up a gin & tonic, feel it roll through me like a French kiss to sugar my breath, letting time crawl like a wounded shadow through this bar that can't ever close. I consider our paltry lighthouse — a mere mile south, glossing the surf, its dash of light sweeping dark tides, brushing the silhouette of a stranger we will never know, one more soul in need of forgiveness.

Before You Abandon Life Here

Step out of the bright tide of a backlit window.
It is already a mere memory of light.

Know it as what the drowned left behind,
like shanties only they could give voice to.

Think of the world you tried to un-stranger,
how you'd cross this ground out of breath.

Check the forecast: weather's a wayward promise —
hits like scorn, impeding travel.

Quickly search everywhere for what is worth taking.
Enter every room.

JC ALFIER

Sleeping with the Tin Man

They woke with the hour a digital blur,
the redness of an out-of-focus clock.
The night so quiet it seemed to listen.

When he said he'd heard *Blue Velvet* twice
on the radio as they fell asleep, her eyes
were fixed on lightning outside the window.

She stepped softly around the broken
place inside him as if it were ground
they bury children in:

*What was it your mother didn't say
when your father stood up
to give you the back of his hand?*

On her face, the shadowy flutter of a ceiling fan,
like footfalls through a vacant room.
Like nightbirds dancing in trees along the river.

Wildwood Nearing Winter

The season's reduced to this: my clock dragging
like a bad marriage, a wayward tide,
the day arriving so pallid it's a paraphrase of itself.

Wind cuts in from the sea — brine hangs in a rumor of snow.
Pavilions shelter none but a few errant gulls.

A breakwater's chunks of stone shoulder seaward,
luring a far-gone memory of my father's hands crumbling bread
into soup, frost-burn on his knuckles from morning chores,
his table in the shadowplay of a low winter sun.

The boardwalk's an unsent invitation. It groans under me
in the tattered colors of shuttered concessions.
Just offshore, shipwrecks are perched atop sandbars, the only harbors
they'd gain. Do they see us out here as those
who'd farewelled them from foreign piers?

Turning inland toward my motel now, its lurid Vegas name,
streetlights stand in wait for dusk

their unlit amber anxious to announce a corner,
someone walking my way, somewhere light should live.

Decomposition

We could go there to collect driftwood?
No. I was taught never to walk on sand
along the river because the river
might cut under and I'd fall, lost forever.
Anyone raised here with a lick of sense
would know this. Anyone who knew
the river. I knew her and kept away
from her pulling. I only stared at sunset

at her body and then for what she wasn't.
She could kill me without thinking
like a mother rolling over in her sleep.
But me, I was no little baby.
Dredges pumped out the channel
for traffic, low barges of grain, chemicals,
soft and hard coal, stone and sand itself.
You could hear them churning

from far away. No need to get closer.
Even under sand revealed by drought
might be water, silt that would take me,
sand the seed in the mouth
and my own weight taking me under, daughter
a ruby, in women's names here, an opal,
grain of wheat, seed of blood, and a god
so patient, even deeper, waiting.

Scenic Overlook

Venture: Fascinating Game of Finance and Big Business,
Sid Sackson; 3M Gamette, 1969

I left behind a life of certainty
full of helpless nights
and sorrows that come with silence
and too much wine
I came here
and she took me in

this afternoon our boy
plays in storm puddles filled
with petals knocked down
from the first blooms of spring

I have taken lessons from flowers
the searching grasp of clematis
the early exuberance of daisies
the trillium's patient rooting
and here the damaged laurel blossoms
rushing back to the boy

I can start over

it's one of those lessons
I learn and re-learn
from West Virginia to Alaska
to South Carolina and tomorrow
we will venture to Paris Mountain
where the land falls away
flatter and more flat down to the sea

and all the fat flowers and all the skies
open into what we all decide is blue
and we will stand on that edge
breathing new perfume until we rise
with stars aligned beneath our feet

Responding to the Halloween Sermon

The Game of Mythology
Peter G. Thomson, 1884

You think I don't understand grace?
Decades ago in a friend's meadow
five of us sat in the warm Carolina night
and smoked and ate and drank until
all of us had left communion behind.

That night I crumbled. Dissolved. And grace
saved not just me but all of us. Grace
the drum beats of our hearts on earth. Grace
the lion's roar of fire before us, around us, and grace
the reach of trees driving down to water
stretching up to a sky
of satellites and planes crossing somewhere between
the hallowed field and stars,
and Charon watching as each of us by grace
spoke to those deep wells, our fathers.

Was grace that goddess holding us?
I felt her breath bring us back
to a night that held every city we needed,
songs we could not abandon, wives
we would one day have, and children
who would rise up to replace
our strange, graceless stories
with their own wonders in a world
that we will leave to them.

This is myth, I tell you—the pagan wonder
of living in this astonishing world
that is in every way filling us with love.

From a Certain Angle

Sometimes I'm a catfish
sunk into the riverbank's muck
waiting

for what wriggles through the mud.
Other times, I'm the strawberry plant
suspended

from a sixteen-penny nail
driven into the side of my garage,
I am how

it searches for water and light
but never moves from its store-bought,
plastic pot,

how the leaves wilt over
the side, pigment lost, gone to crisp
in the wind.

And yeah, you can find me as an 18-wheeler
droning down the interstate's right-hand side
freighting

unseen wares, the coyote yipping
in the ravine with the pack, yearning
for a housecat,

the weed-eater sputtering
oil mix, as a chrysalis with wings too wet
to eclose,

children's toys washed up in the flood
behind your subdivision, a faded steel
beer can

full of shot, pull tabs on the floor
of a smoker's dive bar, or as the gas station pavilion
phosphorescence

bleeding into the darkness, humming
its siren call of brief mooring
in the night

but there are times where I'm the hawk,
talons sunk into a rotten fence post, witnessing the vast
acreage

of cornstalks teeming with rabbits
and fieldmice and I've got faith that I'll soar further
than Icarus

before I dive outta the sun like a Zero
in an old war film, shattering small mammal
bones,

but the moss grown over dead timber
will be cool under my leather feet and the afternoon
heat haze

will play across my feathers
till they shimmer like bottle glass or some rare
stone.

Infrared

I never knew the right way to be pardoned
by a fresh-eyed lover
until you swatted away the heaps of due guilt
I proffered from the dirt beneath my nails

Though you might recall:
At the time my head was a nest of magpies
in a hall of mirrors
Writing every thought in tobacco ash

I couldn't wake up for months at a time.
My shoulders were feathers in the places where
they once bore the world
Each morning I swallowed my mantra,
an orchestra of promises that
reached crescendo every time I looked at you

And yet here I am, approaching the equinox,
naked and sexless in the living room
The spinster of all the dead things I hide in the pantry
The odes I write to you in the walls
Scrawling gibberish like theses
waiting to be read

And in your sight I'm refracted
Prisming out my best-kept secrets:
the faces I paint on and
the false wounds I lap at
when I lie
awake at night and
the half-truths I locket
against my chest
 I let
 you lay me bare

I promise I wear these hands to the bone,
so I can wring them neatly
inside the shape of all your sins

Which is to say I'm keeping the time in mind
when I find your eyes falling on me



Floating Equestrian
ink, gesso, graphite and colored pencil, pastel on watercolor paper
2023, 30" x 23"

“I began the Anna Pierrepont Series as plein-air drawings of mostly forgotten figurative monuments near my long-term home in Brooklyn, New York. The series has since evolved into a broader inquiry into the afterlife of monuments and their function in the whitewashing of public and private memory explored in standalone images and pictorial essays.

The past few years has forced these mostly inert sentries into the spotlight as monuments have become palimpsests for popular discontent and eventual removal. My practice has principally become studio works on paper documenting monumental surfaces embroidered with skeins of graffiti.”

- Howard Skrill



Lee (Better Than That)

ink, gesso, graphite and colored pencil, pastel on watercolor paper

2023, 30" x 23"

HOWARD SKRILL



TR drippp
ink, gesso, graphite and colored pencil, pastel on watercolor paper
2023, 30" x 23"



Lee (Swings) Mor...

ink, gesso, graphite and colored pencil, pastel on watercolor paper

2023, 30" x 23"

HOWARD SKRILL



Stonewall(tilt)

ink, gesso, graphite and colored pencil, pastel on watercolor paper

2023, 30" x 23"

Because It Falls

To be loved as much as I have loved
 would be the cup spilling like a fountain,
the pole star that sparks then blinds
 and wheels the earth, turning the year.
A child, safe from the thunderstorm,
 relishing the rain. From seed to plum,
the miracle of birth and ripening –
 tart and sweet between the teeth.
But what I have given, I have not reaped:
 glue that gums but never sticks.
White-hot anger flares then flees,
 sorrow sinking like marshy ground.
And the sun rises, the sun sets,
 rumor of wind sighing through a broken cup.

Dust Grows Deep

These last long days of August
dawn's texture shifts
from melody into a clamor
of crickets in the muggy air.
Fields the color of bleached oatmeal,
lush-green tints leached sere
and brittle, blanch the horizon.
Gone the torrents of spring,
everything wallowing in dew and puddle,
voice of the river slapping by.
We scorned the mask of clouds –
if only we had them now.
Crows gruff from sharp shadows,
cave canem, beware the dog,
beware the dog days that growl on and on.

As Light Dissolves

A fist of wind curves the branches where crows laugh
in a fringe of beeches. Twilight detaches from the sagging sun,
silhouettes braiding the yard. Across the neighborhood,
a plainsong of light vibrates through windows,
but I prefer to sit in darkness, think of my uncle losing his sight,
following his mother's lead. What becomes of us
in the dark that is ours alone? When only shadows severing
our light tells us something has changed? The stir of air
that wasn't there before. Will I sour in silence, in blindness?
Will I think of maples blazing the autumn woods and seafoam on sand,
a fox darting across the backyard, bluebirds ruffling in the birdbath?
Or will I open myself to sound and taste and touch that are still mine –
children giggling next door, honey swirled into tea, your lips
whispering my cheek, guiding me home.

STEPHANIE L. HARPER

Epitaph for a Sun

- for JPM

The scarce last words you sealed
with waxy scorn
wrought a silence known
only to the forsaken—

for too long

i too fully believed in
your spurned river's obliteration
in the dusk's ruby mouth
of loss of chaos
darker than my tear-starved blood

more barren than dust...

Waiting in my loneliness
for daylight's return

i fitfully slept beside a hieroglyph
etched in red granite...

Then: the name i used to know
whom i could barely fathom
spelled in the cyphers of first light
from the morning's easternmost crest
filtering in

*In the shadows
beneath the artifice called death*

*amidst the lapis & diorite figurines
i dreamed i was looking for you
but i lost my way
even as Anubis the ubiquitous jackal
ushered my vague corpse
past intemperate Horus' hawk-eyes—
their brackish fire—*

You were shards

*the Curator's censure had rent
from the heavens
& recast in the twilit bronze
of fledgling recklessness...*

*i leaned against a granite sunk relief
of a long-forgotten pharaoh—*

*until my sarcophagus opened
&
you
were there*

kissing my cheek...

"Epitaph for a Sun" first appeared in *The Polaris Trilogy - Poems for the Moon* (Brick Street Poetry, Inc., 2023).

New Milk

Talking as a boy—on milk crates at the post office loading dock, or nestled in the buttress of a railroad bridge—you raked the stars and sweeping distances with your tongue and warmed the absolute zero and accelerated ageless, unreachable particles. The stars didn't burn your mouth when you spoke them. Now, you clear your throat a bit—a fist full of grackle feathers. Talking, you note the weather, trash pick-up around the holidays, the new color of the neighbor's vinyl siding and you yawn, covering your mouth with a scarred hand, imperfect clay that recklessly juggled stars and put them down on the milk crate, beneath the bridge, under the leaves and rot of many autumns and a calendar blitz of jack-o'-lantern guts, dry rotted by new moon, new moon, new moon. You note the idle boys kicking at the phosphorescent balls, eyeing their glow beneath the leaves. You beg them to pick up just one as you close the mailbox, as the storm door shuts and the chair cushion swells beneath with your weight, belly bloated with the weight of a partially digested neutron star.

Footprint

Praise the rising temperature and the desert that awaits, for there are good poets who don't know the scientific names of the delicate things—remember the idiotic faces of the allium? Now, writing with peace of barrel lengths and high-grain cartridges—of field mice, darkling beetles and myiasis—there is solitude enough, dusty journals thirsting, rheumy-eyed editors scraping the cans of expired dog food, rid now of moist abbey walls and *Acantholimon glumaceum*. A rabbit! This century sees more meteorites than rabbits—more coughs of lightning than rabbits. Trace the frenzied pat across the green sunset. The blowflies beat the boot crunches to the still-smoking mass. A fine feast.

Intimations

But the most beautiful thing about my burrow is the stillness.

Franz Kafka

There it is again.
Did you hear?
No, wait. Just then!
It's like the tick
or scratch of some quite
awful thing, or maybe
just something awfully,
something somehow
absolutely, near.

But why should it be
here again, and why
so near again?
though I've come so far
from where it seemed
to first appear,
to a place far south
of that incessant
scrabbling in the wall,
from the unsettling
of the tidy domicile
I'd spent my time
securing, the place
from which I'd sent
my wary apprehensions out
to murder that intruder
and shore my plastered
bastions up and sleep
once more and see
my drowsy dreaming
solitude at last restored?

Why must I awake again
to the old familiar tick

or scratch of it, and why
for heaven's sake
in this remote hotel,
in this far tropic place,
do I still lie alert, alone,
in anticipation of this flight,
this heat, this persistent
drawing near,
of absence?



Cloud Series 04
oil on canvas
63" x 73"

Murmurings

The lungs as bellows the need
to blow air into a fire to watch it skitter
art propaganda the anvil, the metal, the ore

the Beluga whale for sounds' sake
in a hot ocean
 the sparks from the strike
 hammer and metal
the rhythm the whale an echocardiogram

 the blurred night photo
of stooped crabbers in the sea
 that looks somehow like

a sonogram the sun growing growing
as it attempts to hold us, pull us
nearer and nearer the hurricane that

threatens to be the worst since 1850, has
made landfall in the same locale as Katrina
 the interstices that are fusing

all the spaces narrowing between our cells
 between atoms the buildings
and houses to be touched an arm apart
a Styrofoam cup/string phone apart
are we all touched

a breezeway with no air
a back alley that can't be maneuvered
the cicadas too loud
the space between the ears no matter
the bomb shelter in the backyard closed and sealed
with concrete the sun
the brain, skin sloughing to make enough room.

DANUTA E. KOSK-KOSICKA

Sinbad, the Dog in Salamanca

He digs with his paws and squeezes
his big beige body in the hollow
of bare earth in the clasp
of banana trees; their stems
peel into dry rust, arched blades
comb the cold, tearing
through horns beeping
and hammers pummeling.

In the night he runs between shadows
of roses and poinsettia bush,
tells his stories and howls in the choir
of neighbors guarding the dreaming homes.
How does he take the first strains

of a daybreak? The *basso profundo*
that rolls the night
away on the train, the calls of sirens
that suck people into
the refinery with its dragon breath
hung over the town, the chimneys
spilling hot orange flowers
of flame trees.

Now in the hollow of the day
Sinbad's chains hold him
in the shadow of banana trees.

Originally published (as "In Salamanca: Sinbad, the Dog") in *Dogs Singing, A Tribute Anthology*
(ed. Jessie Lendennie, Salmon Poetry Ltd., County Clare, Ireland, 2010)

At Walnut Canyon

Two days after our sojourn in and out
of the Grand, we land at the white-dusted rim
of buff sandstone and singing jays—

a catalogue of vertical trails and flashes
of parents who taught their children
how to scout the furrows between corn

and beans, how to tan the hides
of deer and bighorn sheep.
High desert wind gnaws at our hands

and heads. November slush dampens
socks and shoes. Hardly anyone there
but still we nod at prickly pear cacti

poking out of three inches of snow. You pause
at a ledge, thumbs up under charging,
low lying clouds. Even a mask can't cover

your smile that says, "Dad, I could have lived
here a thousand years ago, I could have
wielded a stone axe and made a cave

my home." Your eyes reflect the slats
of blue sky and tribal zeal, a romantic
for Gambel oak and pinyon pines. Your life

moving toward woods and wildness,
embracing the Sinagua who left their images
for us to interpret, mull over, and share.

Their spirits whisper to our 19 years
of father / daughter longitude, revealing how
to live near the edge of a cliff, wait for the first

rivulets of water, trust the wind to carve
the full length of the canyon. They tell us,
too, when to leave it all behind and let go.

Liminal Space

Once again, the mountains are beckoning,
calling you with their silent timbres,
conifer needlework, snowmelt roaring.
They invite you to traipse, surmise,
and carol like birds at ease or in flight.
And yes, the deserts, too,—the Mojave
and Sonoran—request an audience
with your inner child, your Arizonan feet
that once knew the heat of Casa Grande stone.
Dry, the washes wait for javelina and gila,
for your description of the prickly pear
and your *Rah, rah, rah* like the cactus
wren. But then, there are waterfalls,
a long fjord, the baptism of a glacial valley:
the 8th wonder, Milford Sound, summoning
you back to the South Island, to the galactic
views from Mitre and Pembroke Peaks.
An upwelling shivers in your bones,
loosens your fingers and wrists, begins to taste
like shepherd's pie, the wind-swept
jargon of rural life and early morning
ritual of *what to do now?* You are both here
and there, a coming and going between
spartan necessity and wild places
calling. At your feet is the Welcome mat
pointing in all directions, you set out

MARK BENNION

like John Muir with notebook in hand, your mind
rippling with memory and imagination.



Cloud Series 01
chalk on wood panel
48" x 72"

Contributor Bios

JC Alfier's (they/them) most recent book, *The Shadow Field*, was published by Louisiana Literature Press (2020). Journal credits include *The Emerson Review*, *Faultline*, *New York Quarterly*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Penn Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, and *Vassar Review*. They are also an artist doing collage and double-exposure work.

KB Ballentine received her MFA in Creative Writing, Poetry, from Lesley University, Cambridge, MA. Ballentine's eighth collection, *Spirit of Wild*, launched in March with Blue Light Press. Her earlier books can be found with Iris Press, Blue Light Press, Middle Creek Publishing, and Celtic Cat Publishing. Ballentine resides in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and teaches composition, creative writing, theatre arts, and literature to high school and college students in addition to conducting writing workshops throughout the United States.

John Peter Beck is a professor in the labor education program at Michigan State University where he co-directs a program that focuses on labor history and the culture of the workplace, *Our Daily Work/Our Daily Lives*. His poetry has been published in a number of journals including *The Seattle Review*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, *The Louisville Review* and *Passages North* among others.

Mark D. Bennion's poems have recently appeared or will appear in *Aethlon*, *Christianity & Literature*, *Ghost City Review*, *San Pedro River Review*, *U.S. Catholic Magazine*, and other journals. For several years he has taught writing and literature courses at Ricks College/Brigham Young University-Idaho. He and his wife, Kristine, are raising their children in the Upper Snake River Valley. His most recent book is *Beneath the Falls: poems* (Resource Publications, 2020).

Retired children's librarian **Alan Bern** has published three books of poetry and has a hybrid fictionalized memoir, *IN THE PACE OF THE PATH*, forthcoming from UnCollected Press. Recent awards include: Winner, Saw Palm Poetry Contest (2022); Honorable Mention, Littoral Press Poetry Prize (2021). Recent and upcoming writing and photo work include: *CERASUS*, *Thanatos*, *The Hyacinth Review*, *DarkWinter*, and *Mercurius*. Alan is a published/exhibited photographer, and he performs with dancer/choreographer Lucinda Weaver as *PACES: dance & poetry fit the space* and with musicians from *Composing Together*. *Lines & Faces*, his press with artist/printer Robert Woods: linesandfaces.com. Instagram: @abobern, Twitter: @alanbern1, Facebook: @alan.bern1

Chuck Billingsley is a documentary photographer, writer, and self-taught visual artist. His paintings are heavily influenced by classic country music, the spiritual world, and 1980s era professional wrestling. His work has been featured in *Looking at Appalachia*, *Pine Mountain Sand and Gravel*, and other publications over the years. His art is held in private collections everywhere from Atlanta to Chicago. Despite this, Chuck considers his greatest accomplishment winning a blue ribbon for his photography in the 1998 Putnam County Fair. Chuck currently lives in the suburbs of Nashville and shares his work through his blog, *The Low Gravy* www.TheLowGravy.com

Jade Driscoll (she/her) is a Michigan-based poet. Her debut chapbook, *Awaken*, was published by And Then Publishing in 2023, and her work has previously appeared in *Atlas and Alice*, *Plainsongs*, *Remington Review*, and more. When she's not writing, Jade enjoys reading, listening to music, learning Korean, and walking in local parks. You can find her online @thepoetjade.

John Elliott has published poems in *Acorn*, *The Comstock Review*, *Southwestern American Literature*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review*, *Tanka Journal*, *The Fourth River*, and three anthologies: *Buzz*; *Rare Feathers*; *To Give Life a Shape*. He has lived in desert, mountain and coastal environments and considers mountains his spiritual home.

James Engelhardt's poems have appeared in the *North American Review*, *Hawk and Handsaw*, *ACM: Another Chicago Magazine*, Terrain.org, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *Fourth River*, and many others. His ecopoetry manifesto is "The Language Habitat," and his book, *Bone Willows*, is available from Boreal Books, an imprint of Red Hen Press. He lives in the South Carolina Upstate and is a lecturer in the English Department at Furman University.

Stacey Johnson Hardy is a multi-media visual artist exploring the human figure. She spent her childhood in the Mississippi Delta, a land of diverse culture and intense history. Her work draws from this upbringing and is a nod towards storytelling, an embrace of the vernacular and landscape of the South. She is interested in creating emotional figures that are layered in painterly surfaces filled with marks and moments of botanical and cosmic references. Her work is self reflective and meant to be investigated. Stacey holds an MFA in ceramic sculpture from The University of Georgia and a BFA from Loyola University.

Stephanie L. Harper grew up in Northern California, earned a BA in English and German from Grinnell College in Iowa, an MA in German from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and an MFA from Butler University in Indianapolis. She is the proud mom of two extraordinary humans whom she raised to adulthood in Oregon, and she now lives in Indiana with the world's most adorable husband and cat. Her poems appear or are forthcoming in *Red Wheelbarrow*, *Vox Populi*, *The Night Heron Barks*, *The Dodge*, *Laurel Review*, *Crab Creek Review*, *Taos Journal of Poetry*, and elsewhere.

Anne Howells edited *Illya's Honey* for eighteen years. Recent books: *So Long As We Speak Their Names* (Kelsay Books, 2019) and *Painting the Pinwheel Sky* (Assure Press, 2020). Chapbooks *Black Crow in Flight* and *Softly Beating Wings* were published through contests. Her work appears in small press and university journals.

K.L. Johnston's poetry has appeared in numerous literary magazines, and anthologies since the 1970s. She holds a degree in English and Communications from the University of South Carolina and her wide-ranging interests contribute to her writing. Her work explores the connections of humanity with the physical, spiritual, and liminal places she has stumbled into in her travels and in her own back yard. She devotes her unscheduled time to writing and satisfying her curiosity about people and this planet. You can find out more by visiting her Facebook page "A Written World".

DB Jonas is an orchardist living in the Sangre de Cristo mountains of northern New Mexico. His work has recently appeared in many journals throughout the US, UK, Europe and Israel. His first collection of poetry, *Tarantula Season*, is scheduled for release in November of this year (<https://www.finishinglinepress.com/product/tarantula-season-and-other-poems-by-db-jonas/>)

Danuta E. Kosk-Kosicka is the author of two collections: *Face Half-Illuminated* (Apprentice House, 2014) and *Oblige the Light* (CityLit Press, 2015), winner of the Clarinda Harriss Poetry Prize. She is also the translator for four books by Lidia Kosk. Her work has appeared in *Notre Dame Review*, *Spillway*, *Tar River Poetry*, and elsewhere. Danuta serves as the Poetry Translations Editor for *Loch Raven Review*. Interviewed by Maryland Poet Laureate, Grace Cavalieri, for the Library of Congress "The Poet and the Poem 2020-21 Series." She grew up in Poland and now lives in Maryland, USA. Visit: danutakk.wordpress.com

Ryan R. Latini is the author of *Love Notes for Modest Young Men: A Short Story Collection*. His fiction and non-fiction have appeared in *50-Word Stories*, *Monolith Medium*, *Red Savina Review*, *Blink Ink*, *The Schuylkill Valley Journal* and are featured in a print anthology published by *Brilliant Flash Fiction*, *Crossroads: The Best of Brilliant Flash Fiction and Beyond*, 2014-2019. He is a father and husband living in southern New Jersey where he teaches high school English.

Huaqi Liu, a Chinese-born, Maryland-based painter, explores destiny from a Chinese perspective through captivating cloud images. His art vividly depicts cloud diversity, reflecting a deep understanding of nature and philosophy. Liu holds a B.F.A. in Painting and Drawing from SUNY New Paltz and an M.F.A. from Maryland Institute College of Art, where he received the 2021 merit scholarship. He showcased his impressive portfolio in group exhibitions across Baltimore, Chicago, and New York. His art intertwines nature's wonders and contemplation of destiny, captivating viewers.

Angie Macri is the author of *Sunset Cue (Bordighera)*, winner of the *Lauria/Frasca Poetry Prize*, and *Underwater Panther (Southeast Missouri State University)*, winner of the *Cowles Poetry Book Prize*. An Arkansas Arts Council fellow, she lives in Hot Springs and teaches at Hendrix College.

Terri McCord has won awards from journals, the Vermont Studio Center, and the South Carolina Arts Commission. Her work has been included in several anthologies. Her latest collection is *The Beauts* from *Finishing Line Press*. She is a *Pushcart Prize* and *Best of the Net* nominee, and she teaches design and art, as well as composition and writing.

Grace McGuire is a nonbinary poet, editor, and essayist born and raised in San Diego, California. They began performing spoken word poetry at age sixteen and carried their passion for the English language into adulthood, focusing their work on the exploration of gender identity and the trials growing up in the digital age. Their *Substack, Dog-Fearing Man*, features bi-weekly essays about the ways that online subcultures impact our real-life relationships.

Ena Mork is a thirty-year-old artist, a political immigrant from Russia, who received her secondary education in the direction of the ancient folk art and craft of Russia. Her work is a reflection of political themes, relations between people, relations between men and women, the role of women in society, inner emotions, crises and endless questions about how difficult it is to feel like just a small grain of sand in this world. She performs her works in such styles as Figurative and Modern painting, Symbolism and Minimalism working only in acrylic medium.

Kelly R. Samuels is the author of the full-length collection *All the Time in the World* (Kelsay Books, 2021) and three chapbooks: *Words Some of Us Rarely Use*, *To Marie Antoinette, from and Zeena/Zenobia Speaks*. She is a Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominee with work appearing in *The Massachusetts Review*, *RHINO*, and *Court Green*. She lives in the Upper Midwest.

Rachelle Scott's poetry and fiction appear in *Rock and Sling*, *Mudlark*, *RiverSedge*, *Crack the Spine*, *The Lyric*, *Shot Glass Journal*, *Anima*, *r.cv.ry*, *Adanna*, *The Wayfarer*, *Panther City Review*, *Gravel*, and others, and in the upcoming issue of *Southwestern American Literature*. She is an editor of the anthology *Her Texas* (Wings Press 2015) and a poetry editor of *A Fire to Light Our Tongues* (TCU Press 2022). She is currently a doctoral candidate in Arts and Humanities at the University of Texas at Dallas.

Howard Skrill is an artist/educator and long-term resident of Brooklyn, New York, where he lives with his wife. He created his art project, the Anna Pierrepont Series (howardskrill.blogspot.com) in 2011 as an exploration in plein-air drawings, pictorial essays and studio works on paper, the afterlife of figurative public monuments and their role in the erasure of public and private memory, that have been widely published and exhibited.

Kelly Glen Stacy is a poet living in Indianapolis. His work has also appeared in *Red Noise Collective* and *Dream Noir*.

Travis Stephens is a tugboat captain who resides with his family in California. Recent credits include: *Gyroscope Review*, *2River*, *Sheila-Na-Gig*, *GRIFFEL*, *Offcourse*, *Crosswinds Poetry Journal*, *Gravitas* and *The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature*. Visit him at: zolothstephenswriters.com

Camden (Emma) Stuber is a visual artist from Louisville, Kentucky. She is currently studying Printmaking at the Rhode Island School of Design and will finish her undergraduate degree in the spring. Much of her work is inspired by her Kentucky upbringing including the visual motifs of horses, caves, and quilts/textiles. She is learning to appreciate New England while missing the South.

Corey J. Willis is an American artist who currently resides in the Deep South with his wife Sohee and their young daughter Yuni. He teaches in Foundation Studies at the preeminent college for Art and Design in Savannah. He is a former participant at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine. Professor Willis has an MS degree in Education from Bank Street College of Education with Parsons School of Design in the Leadership in the Arts program. While in NYC, Willis was awarded the New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship in Photography. <https://www.coreyjwillis.com/>

Mike Wilson's work has appeared in magazines including *Amsterdam Quarterly*, *Mud Season Review*, *The Petigru Review*, *Still: The Journal*, *The Coachella Review*, and in Mike's book, *Arranging Deck Chairs on the Titanic*, (Rabbit House Press, 2020), political poetry for a post-truth world. He resides in Lexington, Kentucky, and can be found at mikewilsonwriter.com



COVER ART: "Gatlinburg, Tennessee"
by Chuck Billingsley | *photograph*