Table of Contents

Fissure, sean hurley ........................................... 6
Michigan Cycle, peter kosloski ......................... 16
Curses, joel w. coggins .................................. 20
Mangoes, camiele white .................................. 22
Pennsylvania Game Lands, matt robinson .......... 25
Two Accountns of Abandonment, danielle roost ... 27
Lover, kate litterer ........................................ 29
A Union Leader to His Chairs, kelly forsythe .... 30
Faking it: or Bellini's Use of Optics, jacob spears 31
Self-Portrait, rimma hussain ............................. 36
Forgiving My Father, hannah gibson ................. 37
The Joy Dormant in Skin, laura portko ............... 40
The Departing Infantry, ryan rydzewski ............ 41

Photos

pg. 47 - 54
alex burkat, charity sperringer, danielle roost,
mark rawlings,brian markwood and ross ruffing.

Staff Submissions

Gene, ross rader ............................................. 55
Driving Through Kent, colin c. post .................. 57
This Poem is not About Weather, nicola pioppi .... 58
from the Editor

Dear Readers,

It has been quite an exciting semester for the staff at Collision! We have had the opportunity to read some beautiful pieces, written by students around the world and I'm sure the staff would agree when I say this is one of our strongest issues yet. I would like to personally thank all of the talented writers who submitted to this fall’s issue, as well as congratulate those of you featured this semester. Special thanks to Collision’s Editorial staff, for being wonderfully clever and light-hearted; Nicola Pioppi, for being endlessly helpful; Jona Dumbleton, for drawing our cover sketches; Braque Hershberger, for his vision and time, and of course, each and every reader. We hope you enjoy this semester’s issue, and thank you so very much for your support.

Graciously,

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first place

Fissure

by

Sean Hurley
Fissure

Preface to Fissure

I used to fake heart attacks. Just to see how I would react. During my later teens I was convinced I was a heart attack waiting to happen. While no one was around I would sit on the floor, clutch my chest and collapse to the ground, holding my breath in the process. Sometimes I would clutch my left shoulder and open my mouth wide without making a sound before falling to the ground. This went on for about two years until I was satisfied with my performance, and when the event struck, I would be poised to perform. Like a highly trained dancer mastering a choreographed dance, I knew how to have a heart attack.

I wake up slow. I’m still alive. A dull pain flows from my shoulder to the thumb on my left hand. My head is floating above my neck; my eyes are light and float idly in their sockets. With two fingers on my right hand I check my pulse at the neck. Sixty-two beats per minute, it’s safe to stand up. The carpet swims from beneath me as I drift into the bathroom. In the mirror I scrape dry blood from my front teeth, spit blood stained saliva into the sink, swallow 160mg of Sotolol and prepare to brush my teeth. My toothbrush has copper bristles, a white spine and blue padding for my fingers covered with spots of dried toothpaste. The toothpaste is frozen steel to my gums. A rogue bristle pierces my gums between my two front teeth and I bleed excessively; deep red, almost violet. Mint flavored Listerine corrodes my vulnerable gums for thirty seconds before I spit the grey mass into the
sink; remnants of the liquid drips from my orange, patchy beard.

I am shirtless. With my right hand I press down over my heart and wince. My body is defec-
tion. A nine inch vertical scar splits my breast bone. My chest caves, swallowing itself. My stomach pours from the pulled elastic on the waist-
band of my underwear, chasing my limp penis to the floor. Stretch marks are fissures in my hips.

I am aware of every heartbeat. No motion goes unnoticed. Every second of every waking day I concentrate on one sound. Normally it runs at sixty to seventy beats per minute, oftentimes, if only for a few seconds, it will speed up to 200. Other times it will stop completely for a beat or two then restart with a thud to my ribcage; a pain I can feel in my eyelids. Sometimes my heart pumps lava. With my finger I can trace the path of the mol-
ten liquid as it explodes from my heart, coursing through my arteries. Usually when I lay on my back my heart rubs against an artery, sound-
ing like a set of teeth grinding on each other.

Numb fingers are routine for me. I’ve forgotten how to completely feel something with my left hand. I live for the moments my limbs go numb and my head detaches.

I sit down to take a shit. The mirror reflects blue veins that cradle yellow eyes as they sink into their sockets. Thick, orange hair sits atop my head, sweating like hay in the rain. My ears are delicate and red at the lobes. My cheeks are red and dry. Skin flakes at the base of my nose. My lips are thin and purple, starving for oxygen. A thin moustache connects a spotty, orange beard, sticky at the chin with Listerine. I wipe my ass and traces of blood show on the white toilet paper mixed with grey feces. I wipe again to confirm this. I let out a deep breath in the mirror before I stagger to my bed and sit down.

* * *

I want to excavate my father’s corpse. Sometimes at night I lie on my back, close my eyes and envision my father’s corpse resting in its casket. It’s always a side view, as if the side wall of the casket was peeled back and I could look straight in. After fifteen years of decomposition, his fingers are grainy and pale, the background of sepia photos, dust becoming the fingernails. I imagine his mouth open and
toothless, skull empty and fragile, arms at his sides. The blue collared shirt he was buried in becoming his new skin, littered with worm dug holes, bits of fabric stuck to the bone like stubborn pieces of meat.

Then I picture the cemetery covered in darkness. A half moon casts itself onto the black sea, illuminating headstones. I look out the window and wonder if my father could see this if his vision weren’t obstructed by a pine box and layers of soil. Though he cannot see the sky, his head is tilted towards it, as if he attempts to.

I was asked if I wanted to go to his funeral. I said no. I was six years old and unable to comprehend death so I avoided it. My older brother David later told me that my father’s eyes were sewn shut, that he wished he hadn’t seen them.

* * *

My mother sits in a bar in Plum Borough. The denim in her jeans sticks to the black leather barstool like skin sticks to a wheelchair in time. From the ground up she wears black leather, pointed shoes with one inch heels. No socks. Her feet are numb because her legs haven’t stretched in fifteen years.

Her legs are covered in dark blue denim. She wears a sleeveless black t-shirt, allowing her exposed stomach to fold over her waist. Leaning on the bar she rests her heavy breasts and calmly orders another drink, her breath smells of vodka.

Gravity drags her face to the ground. Her cheeks are swollen. They sag under the weight of her deep, brown eyes. All the features of her face attempt to carry each other, about to collapse at any time, falling in folds like cloth. Her skin in tanned, except for the purple rings that hold her eyes. She does little to hide all of this. Dark mascara sparingly bolsters eyelashes; red lipstick covers her thirsty lips. At home, she pulls clumps of her hair from the bathtub every morning, tonight her hair is teased, volumized. Her hair is brown with pale highlights and falls at her shoulders.

She is drinking a bottle of Miller Black and Tan between gulps from her vodka filled water bottle. Whether she speaks or not, is irrelevant, everyone knows her voice. To her left, a man named Brian Barr takes a shot of Ancient Aged Whiskey.

***

Friday, January 13th 1992 was the last time I had a family.
It was the last night my mother wasn’t at the bar. On Friday, June 13th 1992, my father was shot and killed while getting doughnuts for a group of boy scouts he and his brother were taking camping that weekend. At 1:30am my father was sideswiped off of Route 22 in Monroeville. When he got out of his white 1984 cargo van to exchange insurance information he was shot in the chest, arm and stomach. As he turned to run to his van another bullet sailed through his liver. He then drove approximately three miles to our apartment in Turtle Creek, woke up his wife and told her what had happened. My mother removed his shirt revealing a blood soaked upper torso that throbbed with each breath he took. Not knowing what to do, she handed her husband a dishcloth to use while she called Turtle Creek Police. He sat patiently, dabbing at his wounded body.

He was taken to the Woodland Hills High School football stadium where he was transported by Life Flight to Presbyterian University Hospital in Oakland. The deposit was quick, a good sign. Usually if the time between getting to the helicopter and getting the helicopter off the ground is long, the outcome is bleak. But the outcome didn’t seem bleak. He was in no pain, coherent and cooperative. He gave the police a description of the assailant and his vehicle: a black male, mid twenties, driving a champagne colored Honda Prelude.

6:13am, my father lay dead on the operating table. His head tilted towards the fluorescent light hovering above the table. Cause of death: cardiac arrest. My father suffered from a left ventricle defect that went undetected until that night. The trauma of the bullet wounds, especially the one that tore through his liver proved too great. Doctors said his heart was so bad that even if he were never shot he would’ve died the next time he cut the grass. For years I have accepted that as comfort. For years I haven’t been comfortable.

* * *

I am alone in my room. Face down deep in a pillow – alone. It is 1995, I am ten years old. My brother is spending the night over my grandparents’ house. When my dad was alive my brother and I never split up, we never wanted to leave home. Lately it’s been so bad around here even my dog wants to
kill herself.

It is 2:30am, my mom and Brian came home about twenty minutes ago and have since locked themselves in her room.

“Don’t touch me you fucking cunt.” I hear Brian yell.

One year ago I found Brian sleeping on the living room couch while I was getting ready for school. He was shirtless; he rubbed his eyes and asked me my name.

“I have to go to school.” I replied.

I was not ready for a new man to be in my mom’s life. My father’s image still burned hot in my mind.

Brian let the blue, fleece blanket fall from his chest after he sat up. His chest was pale and had freckles peppered sporadically on his upper torso. No chest hair. My dad’s chest had always been so dark and hairy. Brian had a child’s chest. He also had a round face filled with itchy looking craters from years of acne. His eyes were brown, small and round. His left eye hung lower than his right. My dad’s eyes were blue and changed hazel changed with the seasons. Brian’s nose was wide and blunt and his nostrils were loose. His thick goatee and short hair were the color of a wet matchstick. His arms were pale and thinner than my dad’s. On his right bicep was a small, prison made tattoo of a green cross. I later found out that his tattoo meant, “I hate niggers.”

He smacked his lips like he tasted the air and said, “My name is Brian.”

That was one year ago. Since then, everything my father stood for has been pissed on, month, by stagnant month.

Back in my room in 1995, I am crying and slobbering into my pillow so heavily that it sinks. Judging from the bits of argument I picked up, Brian hit my mom in the head with the phone two times. Mostly what I hear though is stomping; sometimes slow, deliberate, sometimes charging. Noise assures me that he hasn’t killed her. The argument eventually spills into the kitchen where I can hear what’s being said more clearly.

“Why don’t you tell your faggot son how many pills you snorted tonight? Let him know how his mom is a whore! Hey Sean, your mom wants to tell you how many dicks she’s sucked!”

My heart is racing. No one should hear this.

Somehow I get on my feet,
open my bedroom door and walk timidly down the hall, letting every hateful word from his mouth collect in my mind to use as ammunition.

"Listen you fucking piece of shit, if you don’t leave my mom alone and get out of here, I’m going to kill you!" I didn’t even know what fuck meant, except that it was a newly discovered bullet for me to shoot.

"You gonna’ let your son talk to me like that?"

"Sean, go to bed." My mom’s eyes were red and swollen.

"My mom doesn’t need you, you doped up fuck."

At that, Brian chases me down the hall, into my bedroom and punches me in the ribs or legs while I’m on my bed, huddled in a ball, absorbing the blows until my mom pulls him off of me. My heart is in my throat and it hurts to breathe. I can feel my heartbeat in my eyelids.

* * *

On Wednesday, August 23rd 1985, I was born with Hypoplastic Left Heart Syndrome. Hypoplastic Left Heart Syndrome (HLHS for short) is a heart defect that robs you of your left ventricle.

Until my birth, no one born with HLHS survived past a couple weeks; all surgeries were unsuccessful.

I was born blue. Immediately the doctors were concerned. I was taken to Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh for further testing. World renowned cardiologists ran various tests and deliberated a while before telling my mother, "We’re sorry, take your son home with you and let him die in peace. There’s nothing we can do. You’re young, you can have another kid."

When my mother returned home she collapsed into her mother’s arms, begging “You have to do something mom, they’re going to let Sean die. They’re going to let him go!” The next day, during a visit to the hospital, a nurse told my grandmother about a doctor in Philadelphia who had recently developed a new procedure for treating babies with HLHS called the Norwood Procedure. It was a long shot but my grandmother decided to give Dr. James Norwood a call.

Dr. Norwood agreed to do the surgery if they could get me to Philadelphia as soon as possible. A helicopter cost $12,000 dollars to fly from Pittsburgh to Philadelphia and neither of my parents or grandparents had that kind of
money. However, my father's insurance paid for half and Children's Hospital of Philadelphia footed the rest of the bill. Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh refused to donate any money, and disagreed with the decision wholly, saying that the slither of hope would only be more painful when I finally died. However, on my forth day on Earth I was in a helicopter on my way to Philadelphia to have my life saved. My parents flew to Philadelphia a day later by plane. My grandmother stayed in Pittsburgh to watch my brother and my grandfather stayed in Pittsburgh to plan the funeral arrangements. A coroner's toe tag was designed for me while I was in Philadelphia. I had to wear it momentarily to see if it fit. It did.

I am the oldest living person with Hypoplastic Left Heart Syndrome. I am the prognosis. I take medication for high blood pressure, and arrhythmia and the anti-coagulant Coumadin. I have a dilated aorta, a heart murmur and two stents in my pulmonary artery. I am a medical miracle, a benchmark, a footnote in medical journals all over the world. At Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh I am known by everyone; from the cardiothoracic surgeon to the janitor, everyone knows me. I am a legend.

I can die at any moment.

* * *

From my bed I grab the phone and call a nurse at Children's Hospital.

"Heart Center, this is Jill."
"Hey Jill, it's Sean."
"Hi Sean, how are you doing?"
"Well, you?"
"Good, good, thanks. What's up?"
"Well I just got out of the bathroom, I wiped my butt and there were traces of blood on the toilet paper. Do you think it's the Coumadin or what?"
"Were you constipated?"
"No, but it wasn't soft."
"Yeah, you should try some stool softener, or maybe change your diet. The Coumadin shouldn't be doing that to you, but just to be safe why don't you come in today for a blood test, we'll see where your levels are at.

"Ok sounds good, I'll be in."
"Ok Sean, have a good day."
"You too."
I don't want to get dressed
today. It is the fifteen year anniversary of my father’s death. I call my mom to see if she remembers.

“Hey…Brian?”
“Seany, how you doing?”
“Can I talk to my mom?”
“Sure, how’s school?”

“Hello?”
“Mom, you know what day it is today?”
“Yes, I do.”
“Where you at?” I ask rhetorically.
“The club.”
“Oh alright, I just wanted to remind you. I think I’m going to stop by the cemetery today.”
“That’s nice, tell him I said hi.”
“I will.”
I pull myself out of bed, reluctantly get dressed and head for the cemetery.

I’ve visited my father’s grave numerous times as a child with my mother but never alone. I always thought about visiting him alone. It was like my Mecca. What would I say? What is there to say? How am I supposed to think? How do I walk away afterwards? These thoughts fester in my head like the bullet in my father’s liver, and will kill me too if I don’t remove them.

Churchill Cemetery is easy to find; after Churchill Road it’s a straight shot until you see the green, iron gate. I drive slowly down the cemetery’s path, remembering landmarks from my childhood; various war memorials, two stone cannons, a water fountain. My memory stops the car. I walk down a small, snow covered hill, sure of where I am. From the car I singled out a grey, marble tombstone peeking from beneath the snow that I believed to be my father’s. I trudge through the ankle high snow with think sneakers that swim towards the stone marker.

Kneeling in front of the snow trapped headstone, I wipe off the face with my bare left hand, and the sudden cold excites my blood.

Carla Lintelman
1950 – 1995

Memory can change the color of a wall, the shape of a table, a person’s name, and can rearrange tombstones. I scurry to every grave nearby, digging for my father’s name. Jeff Sciullo 1905-1983, Charity Jones 1970-2000 Shaun Maraldo, I remember her name. Her faded amber tombstone catches my eye like a dress. My father’s tombstone must be right…

Carol Martin
1911-1998
After about thirty tombstone dustings my hands begin to shiver; snow melts from my purple limbs. My head sweats but my mouth is as dry as those of the dead I stand on. I’ve sworn on my father’s grave before. I have told lies and sworn them as truths on my father’s grave; sewn fallacy on an honest man’s stone collared shirt. Now these lies hide from me; the protection and warmth I need from my father hides from me. Skeleton trees wearing thin snow coats laugh with their windy voices as they point me to various graves and I excavate. A woman filing her children into a minivan watches from a hundred yards away. Finally, I close my eyes and listen for my father’s voice to call me. He has been kidnapped, stolen, I tell myself. Hearing not a word, I turn around and climb to my car. I am too ashamed to call my mother and tell her that her son couldn’t find his father. At the thought of her reaction, my heart begins to race. In the rearview mirror I see red cheek bones, purple lips, and wild eyes. I breathe heavily and often. I feel my heart at my neck to time the pulse. One hundred sixty beats per minute. From the cemetery I make the half hour drive back to my apartment and my heart still flies. I am not dizzy, so I am not particularly worried, but I am uneasy. I have read all about heart attacks, even faked a few; I’m pretty sure this isn’t a heart attack. I go to the bathroom, swallow an Aspirin with a small glass of water, and walk back to my bed to lie down. One hundred sixty beats a minute; I use a stopwatch. I can see my heart in my stomach, through my shirt, and feel it pulsate behind my earlobes and in my eyelids. Without much more thought I leave my apartment and head for Children’s Hospital. Children’s Hospital is only a block or so up the street from my apartment, but I opt to drive around the block first to see if my heart will kick itself into a normal rhythm. Yet it doesn’t work. On my way into the hospital parking garage I call my mother.

“Hello?”

“Mom, don’t be worried or anything, but I’m going to the emergency room. My heart is being funny.”

“Where at? Children’s Hospital? I’ll be right over.”

“Mom.”

“Yeah?”

“Leave Brian.”
second place

Michigan Cycle

by
Peter Kosloski
MICHIGAN CYCLE

i

Each river has an eye that closes when
The other wakes—it lifts its delta to
The sea, the mouth runs in jawless circuits.
I've seen this one before: Black Hats and White
Hats downing brewskis on the state line, car
Lights fading as a phosphine bloom takes form,
Pale primrose planted in the churchyard.
I've seen it in dreams, I think, felt a straw
Horse splitting my thighs, stalking rented back
Rooms, nosing at narrow doors. I want
To understand this vision, have the black
Smoke inside me, reek sulfur and straw, say:
Drop your Motown babies, men, old bells disguise
Their vowels, some flint of arsenic stokes their eyes.
And matches were called lucifers, a name
At once belonging to an angel and
A devil, all things bound in the same book.
We should know by now how these things happen:
White phosphorus, red phosphorus—the dread
Jaw flooding with the bone’s blood, glowing like
A ghost lamp. Coxcombs strung on charcoaled thread,
We walked through father’s attic, wondering
Who owned these things, which son could claim to know
Their hidden histories. The names of shells
Come to mind—periwinkle, cameo,
Whelk, murex, nautilus. Carbuncle sounds
Like a shell when it isn’t, conch a round
Blow to the head, a dream of drowning.
Our final Michigan thaw, we drape each
Chair in old canvas, mow the lucerne, now
Infesting the dunes like kingfisher, beach
Vermin, Maw called them, drive away the guests.
It comes like AM, Bobby Vinton hits,
Young Elvis crooning as we thread the lakes,
This Venetian trope on the forty-fifth
Parallel. We're deep in the palm now, land
Of quarries—it's coming faster now, I think.
It's hard not to get crushed, right where you stand,
To dumbly bear the two hands, the slow wink
When dreams come. At a bridge, mountain of
Slate, we fall asleep. Aniline, spat out
From the tar, glistens, schools of rainbow trout.
third place

Curses

by

Joel W. Coggins
CURSES

My family sits at the dinner table and my older sister interprets the joke we heard on the radio, coming home from shopping with mother. We chorus out the punchline, and giggle the word nipples. My father slams his fist on the table and goes outside.

My mother folds laundry before the company arrives and screams. "I don’t want my house filthy with dog shit all over the place!" I scrape every last turd into the basement garbage can and lock myself in my room.

My family sits at the dinner table and I tell my father that the Yankees clinched a playoff spot. He asks me if I know what that means and I do not know. He tells me I need to watch what I say. I lose my first tooth that weekend at Three Rivers Stadium, the wild root writhes to death in five minutes. It clots and I almost catch a foul ball.

My mother tells me I need to be home for dinner at six. Casey’s older brother smokes a menthol cigarette, and plays basketball with me at the city elementary. He tells me to say nigger and I will not; he claims some Eden theory of eugenics, holds me to the ground and makes me repeat him. After, he insists that I said it. My mother screams a block away for dinner. I’m afraid she heard him; I’m afraid she won’t love me anymore.
honorable mention

Mangoes

by Camiele White
Mangoes
~to the troubadour

I wanna be born again in your melody. Want to be transformed into noises your tongue makes so that my skin rhymes with the words that you form with your teeth and lips. Splay my eyelashes like the way you play guitar, Papi, yes! Make me purr once more and again like the almighty G7. Put me in places only your penchant for melancholy can allow me to escape, yes!

Baby, put me in the cowry shell around your neck. Siphon me to the lyrical content of your brown eyes until my brown eyes are blue with the ocean in your smile.

I want to feel this emotion…
no I want to puncture my lungs

with the jagged
sigh you
slip deep into my ears.
Want to taste the same ecstasy as you when the lights are low, but hot, everything is thick deep satin sweat.
What does it feel like to drip as mangoes from the trees in South Asia?

Have you been there?

I wonder those times when you close your eyes, do you smell the nectar of each female that wants you as much as I have you in my palm? Does it ripen with every howl you plant in the microphone?

How yummy is it to be excited by the mystery of your Telecaster? To be transported in the rays of half notes to the world where I kiss you goodnight? I wonder, do you walk half naked in a daze when the stage releases you? Do you melt into the wind waiting for your lover to walk you home?

My dear, tell me how I can give you everything you need; I’ll start the oven crisping mango slices that surround us

in rapture. We’ll sip and rock away to lullabies on your guitar (you in my lap, me stroking your hair).
In the heart of these Pennsylvania Game Lands, he's held up in the branches intent upon a body brushing by a baby tree, a hoof through the leaves, the crack of a branch; the quiet beating by the heart of these Pennsylvania Game Lands.

Twang, and the arrow vanishes from his fingertips and plunges into the heart of a buck lunging, dripping a short trail that he'll follow when the sun breaks.

The buck hangs skinless, red and raw in the garage, cleaned, to be cut up and eaten, cured, and eventually nothing at home but the bone of his antlers.
A taste of the wild, the natural, the breathing and eating, some bark rubbed white, the huffing, the bounding, the amazing something, being, being.

2

To tame those Pennsylvania Game Lands is too hard for him now, to crowd the thorns along a trail-less bramble, a cold and wet tangle, to hike up a tree and listen to the beating heart of those Pennsylvania Game Lands.

Or maybe it's just too hard to hear the blood flow—rustle through with some hops and a song—to send a wound on the wind and stifle a quiet beat in the heart of the Game Lands.
TWO ACCOUNTS OF ABANDONMENT
BY DANIELLE ROOST, UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

1
Notorious for failure, I know this battle well. Outside my window is a street full of shadows that glide gracefully over brick and occasional outburst of weeds. Three days ago Morgan and I awoke to the sound of gunshots outside our window. It is something I will never get used to. I do not want to feel numb in its presence.

Jeanette, Morgan, Sarah and I were on our way home from the pub around 1:00 a.m. a few nights ago. The corners between Cedar and Brighton are all scantily dressed in orange dim light. If you were Saint Augustine standing on the sidewalk along these roads you would still somehow look like a predator. Lurking around each corner is a story of unfortunate events. We had to stop suddenly when a man stumbled out into the road; he looped in circles and finally collided into the cement. I can’t get the way he looked at us out of my mind. He picked himself up off the cement and turned his head towards us, blood covered his face. He looked directly into our car, the headlights made everything seem like a production. We were the audience sitting in our box seats from inside the little blue vehicle. Then came the grand finale, from the side of the street came another man, obviously he had memorized his lines thoroughly. With everything in him he came crashing down into the bleeding victim. A man bewildered and badly beaten was the conclusion, the end.

These are only streets, but they hold identity of the people who live on them.
Squashed out like an orange, pulpy and sticky on the dirt floor, his insides were out and all of him was entirely unnatural. He, still gasping for air was hoping there might be one person hearing his prayer. Sacred death? Where is the dignity here? There are 20 boys galloping outside by an old building with incredibly sharp edges resembling teeth that desire to scar and tear. The shorter of them falls in the muddy center of their playground. His shirt is covered in filth and shame takes its place. A frantic attempt to remove the stains only leads to his bleeding chest and stomach as he presses himself against the house and rubs back and forth. He is graded like cheese, and the hungry building finds its meal. The soldiers laugh at the stories they share and reach out boney fingers to the young girls in the night. These are the children of their nation, both their sisters and their daughters, and also their objects of impure desire.

The stars are glorious tonight, bursting their splendor like spotlights on beasts devouring their prey. There are stories told by the children about the nights in the bush after being abducted. Rows of the young set up like corpses, the requiem of the dead sung by crickets and the quiet summer wind. Lying next to each other with their backs flat to the ground, their eyes are open watching the very heavens that host the glorious stars spoken of above. Some have recently killed their brothers, or their sisters. Some have been raped, while others walked into the unknown night with lips, hands, breasts, and ears cut off.
Bees and fists fell on you
like iron pots jumping from a cupboards.
I slap bees off of you and feel myself
remember to hate the bees.
In my hands I crush them
for you again must watch this.
I plant
dead bees on your open palms
and shut
your swollen fingers.

And carry you
in front of me like a baby held
under the arms
extending from my arms
are your arms, because, you see
I cannot drive thorns into bruises
and drain them.
I cannot renew you.
So I will kill the bees that
swarm around you like a dress.
I will clothe myself in bees and
wait in your father's bed.

In a different time
you passed like a girl child
by a shuttered window
with a young boy's haircut and fingers still
stunted from your falls
out of bed, tripping up stairs,
not down.
Fighting through your own skin.
I need to bleed all bees.
A UNION LEADER TO HIS CHAIRS

BY KELLY FORSYTHE, UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

The kitchen has kept him up nights, waged its war on his eyes and hands, dry little fires of fluorescence lighting the way for his pen to paper, no help from the orange flowers that link upwards on the wall, clinging to each other like shivering petals of flames. He campaigns to the vinyl chairs, pretends they are shiny with sweat instead of plastic gloss, men eager to rub their eyes with clean light.

He tells them:
I have heaved breath,
I have curled the knuckles of an iron stronger than bone,
Of rock, of fire, of
a blood that melts steel,
tell me this year, how many judgments will pass to burn unfair,
to brand the seal of occupation,
that I have swallowed like tar,
a machinery, thick, slow.

I have this passion,
for occupation,
Of fire, of stone, of clean light, let me rub your eyes.
Faking it: or Bellini’s Use of Optics

by Jacob Spears, University of Pittsburgh

Chris called asking me to go to a lecture with him on the use of optics in 15th century art. I felt a bit skeptical about the idea of going out on a chilly Monday night for a lecture, but I allowed him to convince me. His selling point was the possibility of free food at a reception beforehand. I went there determined to make a meal out of hors d’oeuvres. Stacking my four inch plate with crackers, cheeses and slices of salami, I knew this would take more than one trip.

The room was typically grandiose. It had all the makings of an extravagant hall, but in its attempt it failed to ever achieve any individuality. It’s as if it was marking off a checklist for lavishness: the high ceiling with chandeliers hanging down, along with the gold and red trim along the woodwork, seemed as if they were only meeting some standard requirements in order to pass as elegance. Nonetheless, the enormity of the room was impressive.

“I bit Rachel’s nipple off,” Chris said.

He said she asked him to bite harder and he did and she ended up bleeding from the breast. He showed me text messages from her. The one he just received: *My tits feel better*. Then he pressed some buttons in his cell phone and produced an earlier message from his archives: *My titties hurt*.

“Why don’t you get that guy’s autograph for me?” Chris asked me. He pointed to the speaker, Charles Falco, standing across the room.

“How do you know it’s him?” I asked and Chris pointed to the picture on the back of our programs.

I couldn’t decide if he thought it would be amusing if I asked for an autograph or if he secretly really wanted it. I turned him down, but recalled for him the days of my youth when I’d go up to police officers and ask them for their autographs.

I did this randomly. I almost always lost them immedi-
ately. I don’t think I managed to save one, but I did it all the time. I’d run after cops in gas stations or catch them going into their patrol cars in parking lots in first and second grade.

Chris declared himself an outlaw at that age: “I was already playing ring and run when I was seven.”

When one of us would go up for another helping we’d come back to our chairs and recant — with commentary — the conversations we heard while we were going through the mini-buffet line. Chris told me of the “stuffed-shirt, pretentious liberals who discussed articles in the New Yorker.”

“I’ve thought about starting to read the New Yorker,” I said.

“That’s how they get you,” he said. Chris still believed liberalism meant something. I told Chris about the old man with long gray hair and big thick-rimmed, thick-lensed glasses wearing a worn-out plaid overcoat. His conversation was in a string that went like this: “Well I used to teach political science — not that that’s really a science. I’m not afraid to admit that. But I’m retired now anyway, so I don’t pay any attention to that stuff. Now I just try and learn more about things that really move me — which is, of course, life, music and the arts...”

I bet Chris that he just came for the food and wouldn’t show up to the lecture.

As we talked a boy who was no older than nine walked up to us, sat down while drinking a glass of lemonade, crossed his legs and looked us right in the eye with a smile. I was blown away — intimidated actually — by the child’s demeanor; he obviously expected us to talk to him like you would any high-brow student socialite who attends these things. The little dark-haired, brown-eyed child seemed to be swallowed by the immensity of the room that was behind him.

Chris engaged himself in a conversation with him, asking how he liked the lemonade.

“It’s good.”

“I thought it was too sweet,” Chris replied.

“I like sweet things.”

“You like sweet things — are you a sweet boy?”

He held back from
blushing better than I could have if the question were directed to me.

"Who are you here with?" Chris asked.

"My mom," he said. "And my dad," he added after a pause. "He's speaking."

"Oh, so you're from Arizona."

"No."

"Isn't that where you're dad is from?"

"I think he's from New York...."

"You think?"

I was beginning to not believe him. I doubted everyone in the room.

Chris pulled out his program again and pointed to a picture of Falco. "Is this him?"

"No. I think he's speaking before...him..."

"Oh."

"You wanna do me a favor?" Chris asked him.

"What?"

"Can you get his autograph?" He handed the kid his program and pointed to Falco on the other side of the room.

"Okay..." he pondered. "I'll have my dad do it."

"Why can't you do it?" Chris persisted. I couldn't understand what Chris saw in his autograph.

"I think he's heading downstairs now," the kid keenly observed.

Chris looked at the time on his cell phone. "Yeah. Never mind." He took back his program.

"... I'm gonna go find my mom."

"It was nice meeting you," Chris said.

The little kid strolled off to his mother and the room started to empty out. We decided me might as well go find a seat.

We made our way downstairs to the lecture room and were surprised to find a packed room. There were maybe fifty people total who made their way in and out of the reception lobby upstairs, but there was probably a more than 200 people in that room. I couldn't fathom why these people skipped out on the free food.

Chris and I made our way up the steps to the middle of seating area and shuffled sideways across about a dozen people to get to two seats that
were next to each other. The audience pretty much filled the auditorium. Chris wanted to sit there though, because he spotted an old chemistry professor of his. I don’t know what they talked about. I looked about the room, wondering if there would be anyone I knew. I don’t know why I always think I’m going to see people I know, no matter where I am – even if it’s a lecture on the use of optics in 15th century art.

As I was scanning the room without a familiar face in sight I guess Chris must have picked up on it and decided to do the same.

He spotted this girl he had a crush on last semester. Supposedly they were in some class together and he really liked her. Then there was a run in he had with her a few weeks ago and he called her and she didn’t call back. I think her name was Jessica. Anyway, he saw her and he told me this little story. I turned around to my left, in the direction he was looking, and asked which one.

“Don’t look at her!”

I turned back around and laughed. “What do you mean don’t look at her?”

“I don’t want her to see us looking at her; it might be awkward.”

“Oh, c’mon” I turned my head again and asked which girl she was.

“She’s wearing the red coat,’ Chris muttered.

“Oh...” I looked for a moment.

“Turn around!”

I thought about it for a minute then looked back again. I spun my head around to him, gave a knowing smile then looked back at her. I sat on it for a minute.

“She looks just like Lindsey; ya know that, right?” And she did.

“Kinda,” he replied.

I thought it was hilarious. Here was Chris obsessing over this girl he hardly knew. Lindsey, his ex-girlfriend of a few months, a girl he admitted he was still in love with. Lindsey keyed his car shortly after they broke up. He still loves her. That’s love.

“What about Rachel?”

“I don’t care about Rachel; not for this girl.”

The only reason was be
cause she looked just like Lindsey. I think he knew this, too. I think that’s what made it funnier for me. He’d get so pissed whenever I’d looked back at her, afraid I’d draw attention to him. So I kept doing it anyway.

I found this probably too funny and continued to drag the joke out longer than I needed to. He kept asking me if I thought he should call her or maybe talk to her after the lecture. Of course, I didn’t know what he should do.

At some point the grey-haired, flannel blazer man came in and found a seat. He stayed the whole time too. I was a bit surprised.

Falco, middle-aged with a big mustache, liked to point out the fact that he was from Arizona. He thought this made it okay to make fun of the weather here in Pittsburgh and at several points during his talk felt the need to remind us of how much warmer it was in Tucson. He made other jokes too, that he expected us to find funny. Naturally, at these sorts of things, everybody does. It amused me for awhile, but I got pretty tired of it.

Falco carried himself as if he knew something that nobody else did. This is justifiable, because he did. The lecture was a lot of math that I understood only because of the visual diagrams in his PowerPoint presentation. He used these really intricate formulas and a lot of foresight to show how, with the use of concave mirrors, it’s more than likely that artists such as Jan van Eyck and Giovanni Bellini used optics to help create precision in the subjects they rendered.

It doesn’t change the world, but it changes something. I was more impressed by his ability to come up with the numbers he used to make such a claim than by the actual claim itself.

After the lecture ended Falco opened it up for questions. Usually the people that ask questions at these things are academics who attempt these really intangible ideas about what it all means or something. I didn’t feel like sticking around and, besides, I didn’t want to get in the way of Chris’ plans to approach Jessica. As I was leaving someone started to phrase a question. I was glad to hear his voice trail off before I could hear what he was asking.
SELF-PORTRAIT
BY RIMMA HUSSAIN, UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

Again and again a deer stands by the highway. She looks up with her whole body at the fast metal cars only to return to the grass. I too can pass an entire day watching ants make their way over a mole hill. Bits of green leaf trail their abdominal segments. It is something else to watch creatures without lungs or hearts match their scent to the onion-bulb of the earth, whereas I can only remember as far back as the womb of my mother.
Forgiving My Father
By Hannah Gibson, University of Pittsburgh

My father’s face is always towards his work, his hands examining this or that rare Chinese stamp. It is an occupation called philately, the word “philo” which, in Greek, means “love”. And if Dad doesn’t have a love for stamps, then I don’t know what it is he loves. He holds his chestnut desk in a wide, all-encompassing embrace, examining his work, blue ink scrawled across wax paper envelopes; a businessman’s calligraphy of numbers and check marks. He stretches his long fingers over the rounded edges of the desk the way a bird of prey surrounds its territory with wide, lazy circles. My father is not lazy, although his body may want him to be.

But then I realized that my father does not have such a great passion for stamps. I had said to him once, after a difficult business trip to Hong Kong “...but at least you like the stamps.” I could sense his head shaking from over the phone as he said, “it’s more about the business.” Until then, I had pictured my father collecting stamps as a child in thick maroon binders with golden bamboo and Chinese characters embossed along the cover. Inside, stamps spilled from the pockets, their muddy colors analyzed under a harsh desk lamp. “Yep, this one’s been licked,” he would say.

In my house, I remember the smell of musty stamps traveling from their cardboard boxes, always tempted to see what was inside, to run my fingers over the fine ridges of a stamp’s cream border under a magnifying glass, to make assumptions about its production date. I would write wavy lines on sheets of lined paper and pretend my improvised cursive was legible and profound. When I visited my dad’s office on the 20th block of Walnut Street, the stamps came to life. They littered his floor like abandoned sheets of newspaper.
on the street, as though a fan in his small office room would send thousands of stamps into the air like a snowstorm. The only time he smiled was when I came to see him for lunch. It was perfunctory. Then, he would crack open sunflower seeds between his teeth as I admired the walls of his office, studying the newspaper cutout that read: “quality is a lot like oats. If you want clean, fresh oats, you pay the price. But if you’re willing to settle for oats that have already been through the horse, well, that comes a little cheaper!”

In preschool, Dad came to my Father’s Day celebration and dug his hands into the sand table that I had been eager to show him. He loosened his fist over a plastic windmill and allowed the sand to trickle out. While I was learning the alphabet in kindergarten, Dad came into my classroom on “S Day” and taught my classmates about stamps. Each of us received a pouch of stamps from foreign countries, and I looked up into his round face, admiring his generosity, proud at the age of five to have my dad as part of my classroom. He hadn’t brought frightening hunting gear and a skinned bear like Whitney’s dad. He gave me a set of stamps with Hermes on them when we studied Ancient Greece in fourth grade. I showed them to my teacher as if they were a gift from the Greek god himself. After I had read The Call of the Wild and The Sea Wolf, he gave me a packet of stamps decorated with Jack London’s face.

But then I remember: Dad pounding his fist on the table during dinner like a judge’s gavel, Dad eating his dinner at the bar, me, riding in circles on my bike at the top of our street, waiting for him to come home.

Dad took my sister and me on tours of Florida and its islands during our weeklong stays there. Many nights were spent sitting on the balconies of low-budget St. Augustine or Key West hotel rooms, spitting sunflower seeds over the railing. We would make fun of the tourists stumbling, drunk, to their rooms and he would categorize the men and
women, calling them “tourons” because of their wild floral print shirts and wrinkled khaki shorts. He would point them out to us as if he was a learned bird-watcher who had observed and studied his subjects. The rental car sticker on their cars, he said, was an indication that they would make quick turns in a frantic attempt to reach their exit, or ask for directions to the nearest tourist trap, their car-full of kids wailing impatiently.

In the morning, we would fall asleep on the beach, the sound of enthusiastic fishermen carrying over the rush of the ocean’s waves like ghosts.
THE JOY DORMANT IN SKIN
BY LAURA PORTKO, MICHIGAN STATE

The joy dormant in skin
is not easily coaxed forth
fleshy and frayed
fickle first as lightning
Comes what before woman or
world was bound
to Exist

rippling, rippling, ripening
into through within us we find
we are made of cosmos
dusty halos
the ruins of light
If your heart beats in time to
Polaris’ glow
then the rise and fall of my chest
is fueled equally so
for the desire that flames in our
tinderbox brains
is born of the blood in celestial
veins
Eternal, original, primordial
Even Nothing, with his sensa-
tional woes
knew we would be before we
knew how
to Be

The chaos dormant in skin
strips color from cheeks and the
want from our eyes
leaving eyes wanting and we pale
with
the cold sweat terror of infinity
But chaos cowers at the joy that
sleeps within
so let us sleep lightly on predest-
tined skin
Knowing where we began, set
again
to Begin.
"You tell Han I cut his dick off!" This is our landlord. Janet Wang, the four-and-a-half-foot tall elderly woman from Taiwan screaming at my roommate and I from the top of the stairs. Her spit is mixing with dust in the fading beams of windowlight. "You tell Han that Janet is coming to cut! We gon’ videotape!"

She’s wearing what looks like the last surviving towel of the 80’s, devastated by patterns of neon and faux paint. The old man behind her—her landscaper, plumber, electrician, cleaner and painter—shrugs his shoulders; he is used to this. "Hans pant will come down and Janet will slice!"

This is my roommate, John. I can tell by the look on John’s face that he’s surprised at Janet’s sudden grasp of English slang. He looks up and smiles. "Hi, Janet. Is there a problem?" She’s quiet for a second, then launches into an epic tirade: performing in a bizarre mix of languages, she stomps her feet and screams, points in every direction. Her thinning hair stands straight up and she pounds on the railing. Janet’s tantrums rival those of even the most evil two-year-olds, and as she shrieks and spits, I’m reminded of Kim Jong Il or Chairman Mao.

I don’t know whether to laugh or to feel bad. Chances are we didn’t do anything wrong. It’s probably best to walk away, to let her tire herself out, but the demonstration at the top of the stairs is too strange and too sadistic to ignore. She hurls her address book at the wall. I hear her say "sue" and "money", her two favorite words. Five minutes pass and her plans for my roommate’s castration only get more detailed. "I bring a saw. We hold him down and I cut!"

The unlucky roommate is Hans. Of seven tenants, he’s the only one Janet remembers after the first day. She is convinced that Hans is Chinese and that his name is actually "Han", and she will hear no argument otherwise. Because Hans’ existence is the only one of which Janet is cer-
tain, he is blamed for everything. His phone rings five to ten times a day the first week we move in, and every night we listen to Janet’s voice-mail grievances and drink warm beer from a broken fridge.

... 8.15.06
We’re finally moved in. The basement was flooded and there was mold crawling up the wall. John couldn’t even move into his room. The water heater is rusted through at the bottom and we’re taking cold showers. A window fell out in the kitchen and shattered while I was making dinner. I found a pile of someone else’s laundry in the pantry. I love this place.

... It sounds like thunder; a distant rumbling. But when I open my eyes the windowshades glow yellow and the noise sharpens. Maybe Hans is taking out some garbage. I try to sleep, but it gets louder and I hear yelling. God dammit. Who the fuck is—oh. This is our neighbor, Mr. DePau-lo. I recognize his Italian-American-Pittsburgh accent and crawl out of bed. From my window, I can see him holding our grill, looking upward and shaking.

He lifts it over his head and slams it into the side of our house. He kicks it, swears and picks it up again. “Hey! What the hell are you doing?” I hear from somewhere below. DePaulo looks up and throws the grill at our kitchen window. He misses, but now parts of it are falling out and the frame is disfigured.

“I told you to keep this shit off of my house!”
“What?” This is my roommate, Britz. He is yelling from his bedroom window.

“I told you fucks to keep your fucking grill away from my house! My family is in there. We could’ve fucking died!”

“But the grill wasn’t even on. Actually, it’s never on—it’s charcoal. And it’s empty. I really don’t think it was going to explode anytime soon...”

“You got a fuckin’ problem, son? You got a fucking problem? Why don’t you come down here? Why don’t all you fuckers come down here? I’ll fight you pieces of shit right-
fucking-now!”

It takes a moment for me to realize what I’m seeing: a forty-something father of two, screaming at a brick wall and wrestling a piece of metal. He throws what’s left of the grill into our back yard, spits on the sidewalk and marches around our house toward the front door. I run down to lock it, passing the house weapons (a nine-iron and John). Britz is already on the front porch.

“I’m calling the fucking fire department!” DePaulo wails.

“To say what?”

“Violation! We could’ve died. We. Could. Have. Died. Your fucking house already burned down once. Violation!”

“Right. Well make sure you tell the fire department to bring the police, too. That way you can tell them you just came onto our property and destroyed a two-hundred dollar grill.”

DePaulo stops. “Fuck you.” He turns to go inside. “My fucking family is in there. We could’ve died.”

...

The fire was three years ago. A propane explosion sent a fireball through what is now my room, and the third story of the house was destroyed. What remains of the upper deck is now the roof outside my window. The window used to be a door and tonight I imagine it blowing apart, spreading glass and flame across my bed. I don’t know if anyone was hurt.

...

Except for the white paint, the patched-up hole in the wall is the only evidence of my room’s second history. It started with the person who lived here before me:

He was fighting with his girlfriend one night. He punched through the wall and then through the window. There was blood all over the floor. The house was surrounded by cops and he was leaning out the window screaming. They thought he was going to jump. We kind of did, too. The neighbors watched from windows and back yards and Janet was running around apologizing to them.

One of his roommates tells me this as we look down over the roof. I imagine Janet running through the line of police and
announcing that she’s suing for the broken window. If that kid had jumped, Janet would’ve walked over his body and taken his wallet.

... “I think we should leave it up. It’ll look good if the cops ever come.” This is my roommate, Hans. He’s looking at the Jesus fish painted above our front door.

“Yeah, but still,” I say, without intending to finish. I know that Hans is right and that my grandmother will like it if she comes to visit. I have no reason for wanting to paint over it except that it feels wrong. God did not bless this house.

... There’s a mural on the back wall, partially covered by vines. Two gray hands stretch from the clouds to cradle a red Pittsburgh skyline. It was probably painted by the same person who did the front door, the same person who carved a Jesus fish above every bedroom. Underneath the mural are stairs that lead to the basement and there’s a crash from inside. Shane is covered in blood and has no look in his eyes. He’s punching a pile of broken glass, the remnants of a lamp he just shattered. There is glass in his fist and he smears the blood under his eyes like war paint. It’s on the walls and carpet and it mixes with the music pounding through the ceiling. I don’t say anything; John holds a bottle of Old Crow and dances the glass into the floor. This isn’t normal, but it’s not out of the ordinary. I go back upstairs and it’s my twentieth birthday, my twentieth attempt to resolve the question of “When I grow up…”

1.10.07
Our gas bill is $900 this month and I still can’t get warm.

... Janet is giving a tour of the house to possible tenants, a group of girls. She opens Travis’ door without knocking—he’s having sex. He stops and sixteen eyes are staring at him.
“What... the fuck...”

“Just get under your cover,” says Janet as she walks into the room. She turns to the shocked faces in the doorway. “This used to be fireplace. This nice big bedroom—very big. Come, I show you next room.”

The next room is connected to Travis’, and the girls have to file past his bed one at a time.

“We’re really sorry,” one of them whispers.

... 3.2.07

Sitting on the roof. It’s three in the morning and starting to snow, but it’s still better than being inside. A brick came through the window earlier and there are people sleeping in the bathrooms and hallways. The light fixtures are dangling from the ceiling by wires and I’ve memorized a nighttime path to the bathroom that avoids most of the broken class. What’s happening to this place?

... Hans and I are in Janet’s car. We’re parked outside Hillman Library and she’s collecting our rent money. No screaming yet. “You boy want fruit? I have under seat.” She picks a rotting apple off of the muddy floor. There are leaves stuck to the side and it looks like it’s been stomped on.

“Uh, no, I’m good,” says Hans. “Thanks though.”

Janet takes a bite and counts our money again.

... Janet thinks we’re out of town when she calls. I set my phone to speaker and don’t tell her that we’re just down the street, parking.

“There hole in your ceiling. Five hundred dollah from deposit.”

“That’s impossible, Janet. Nobody’s even there. Where’s the hole?”

“In kitchen. My worker is fixing now—I already take your money.”

“He’s fixing it now?”

“Yes.”

“Right now?”

“Yes.”

“As in, this second?”
“Yes.”
“That’s great. We’re on the porch. See you soon.”
I hang up and look at John. He shakes his head as we go upstairs. Janet is sitting in the kitchen, her hands folded on her lap. There is no hole and there is no worker. She stares at me.
“Five hundred dollars, huh?”
No answer.
“Janet, where’s the hole?”
“This house...there is trash everywhere. This is not India. You boy do not throw your trash out window. This is not India. I will sue.”
“Janet, you said someone was here fixing a hole.”
“Which one are you?”
“Ryan.”
“Brian? Okay. You are the one will I take to court.”

... 5.2.07
There’s a tree on the boulevard with no leaves on its left side, straddling winter and spring. The sky is partitioned by power lines and the clouds want war. There’s an eviction notice hanging from the mailbox, a Wet Paint sign hanging from the bow of a sunken ship.

... I walk through the front door in June and July. The mirror in the living room is shattered and the floor speaks of the ceiling. Getting upstairs is an obstacle course. The walls are slippery and the stairs are dust. Garbage hums at the top. The windows are still broken and an army of flies make their homes in the trash. Hundreds of the departing infantry flood the kitchen; a daytime universe that explodes when someone touches the can.
BY ALEX BURKAT
The first time I saw Gene paint I was fifteen and driving without a license in a black and red pickup with the windows down, wind exploding through our hair. Sometimes, he screamed into the air, this thirty-seven year old man, cussing, throwing his fists wildly out the window, not because he wanted to, but because he couldn’t control what he described as “demons itchin at his nerves.” Gene was the first and only person I knew with Tourettes and a family friend who begged me to take him out to the horses so that he could paint. So I drove 45 minutes out into the middle of nowhere where cows dotted the hillsides and corn grew above the truck. I stopped beside a wire fence, in a spot behind an oak whose roots had burrowed beneath the road, causing tiny hills and valleys to grow within the asphalt, rifts running back to the epici-
ter. Gene tore open the door, wailed Motherfucker! Motherfucker! and slammed the door, opened the door, and slammed the door again. He placed his canvas onto the ground, flattening it as best he could over the tall grass and small stones and then he brought out his large brush and can of black paint. I watched as he popped open the lid, dipped his brush, and slowly stirred the thick beetle black paint. He stared a hundred yards beyond the fence into the field where half a dozen horses stood. He took a breath and suddenly hurled Bitch! into the air. His scream startled the horses, caused them to gallop wildly across the horizon. Then, his body moved as if he had lost all his bones, like spilled liquid, wanting to seep into every crack. His brush strokes were unpredictable and violent; horses appeared on his canvas and looked as if they were running, moving with Gene. The brush became useless; it moved too slowly, its bristles hanging onto the canvas too long—wrong for this kind of energy. Gene threw the brush to the side and plunged his fingers into the can of paint. He tossed his fingers onto the canvas, his body fully involved, moving with the horses. I watched as he started to pant, as sweat began to fall from his forehead onto the image, as he slowed and finally stopped, his hands black. Then it happened, his body began to stiffen, he was losing his freewill, his state as a liquid. I stood there, quiet, as Gene closed his eyes and listened as the horses ran wildly, circling the farm.
Driving through Kent at night
with our borrowed car,
we rolled down the windows
to find God
a gardener —
planting white roses
across the sky;
to find the wind
a shepherd —
directing lost signals
to the radio;
to find trees
as august arms —
shooting towards heaven's
guarded border;
to find our eyes
as rye fields —
cliffing off at each end,
and bearing our autumnal lives.
STAFF SUBMISSION

THIS POEM IS NOT ABOUT WEATHER
BY NICOLA PIOPPI

We have suffered one month of heart-wrenching
rain—great buckets of wet and cold pour from the sky.
The walls and floor, the pillows and bed sheets are stained.
Water beats brutally against the sidewalks,
wind flows through the trees, our hair, our mouths--
The roses and shrubberies bow submissively
Soon enough our saturated bones will sag,
the curves of our bodies collapsing inwards.
Our soggy tongues are already slowing
words slip out sloppily like fish from a basket.
The naked air hangs empty and silent, cold and unlit.
MUSIC AND RECORDINGS
BY LOCAL ARTISTS AND WRITERS