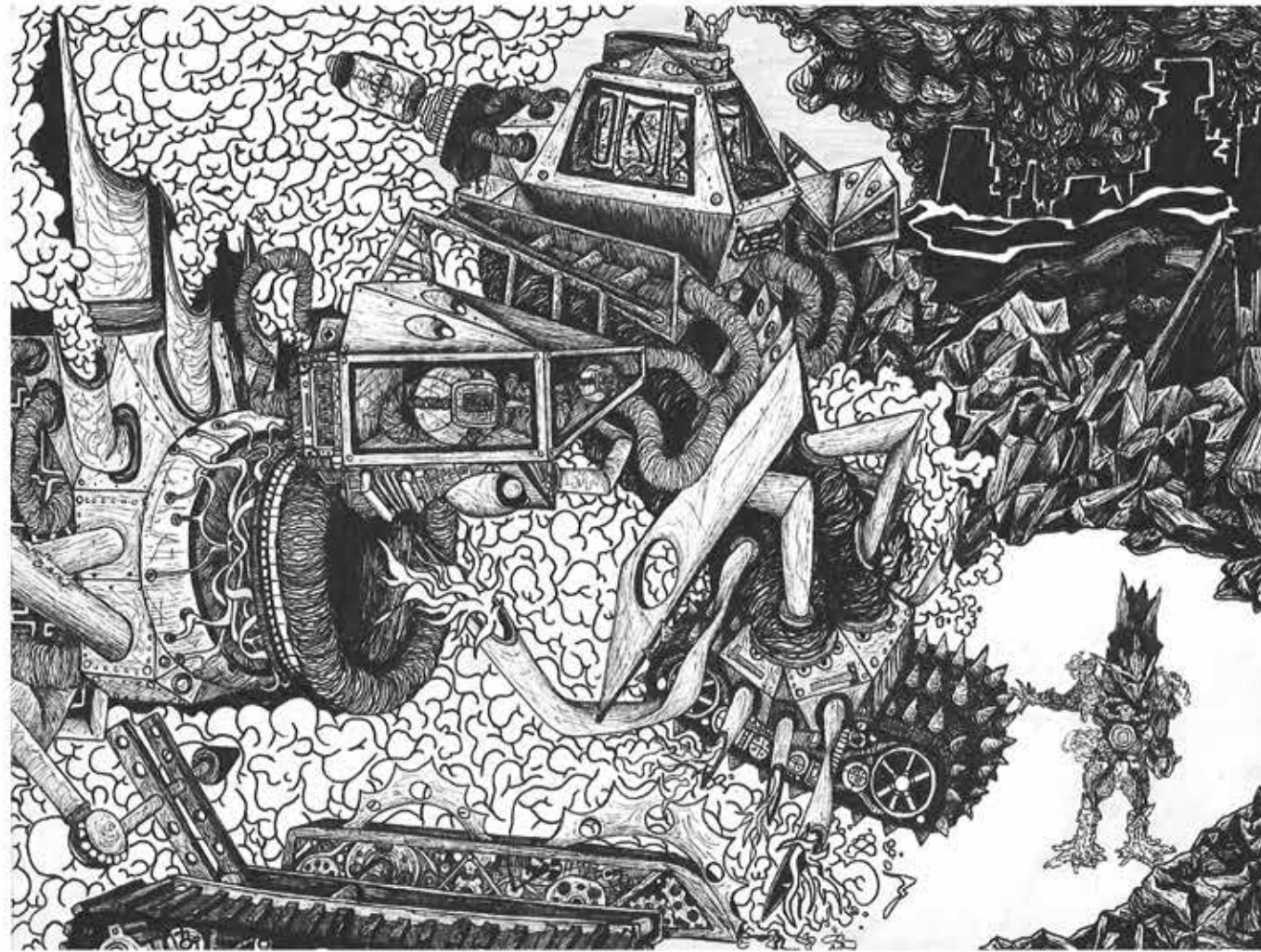
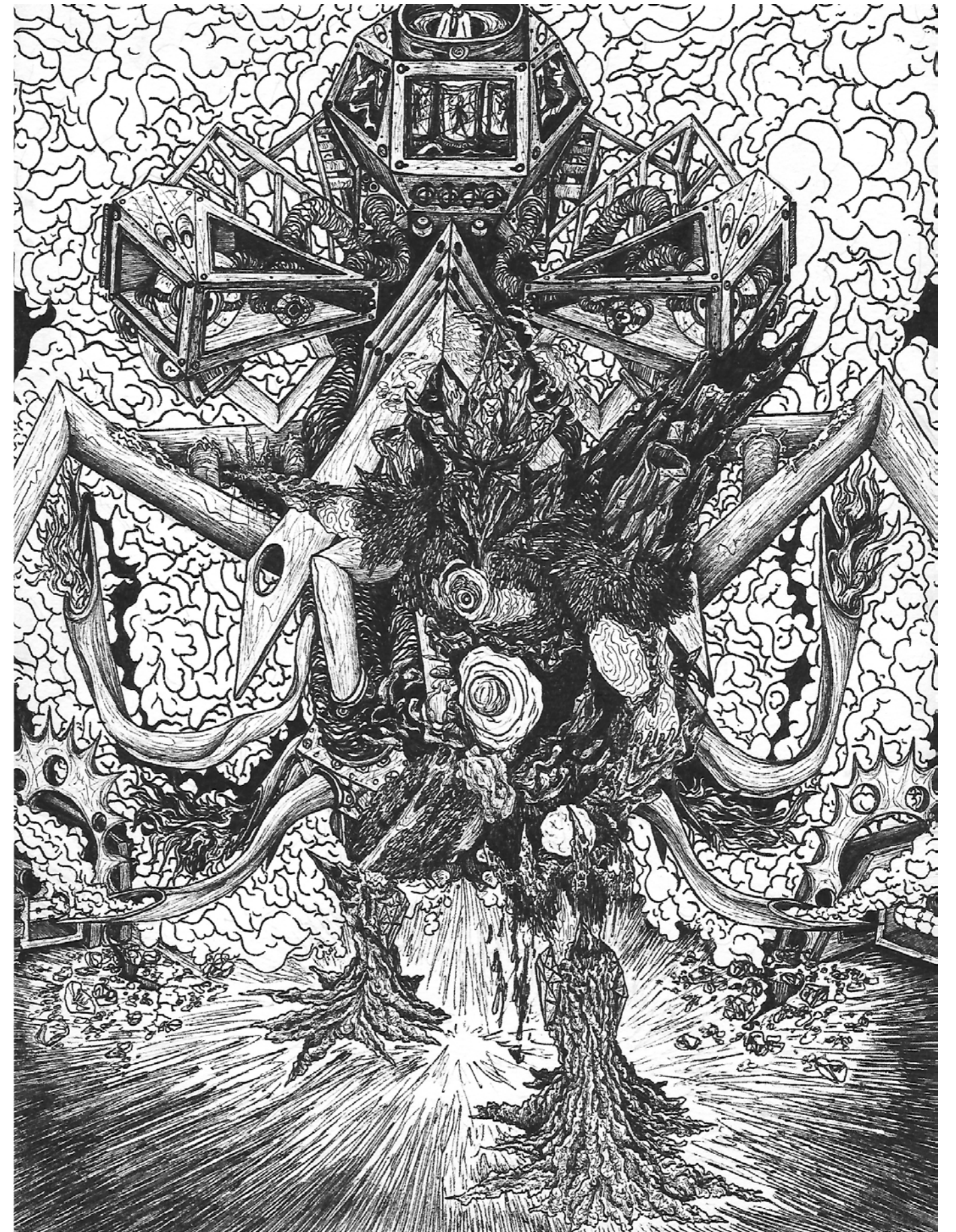


# For A 2022 Better World



POEMS BY AZAZA AND DRAWINGS ON  
PEACE BY JUSTICE BY  
Greater Cincinnati Artists



cover art by Ni-Run Daum

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**“For a Better World”  
2022**

Poems and Drawings  
on  
Peace and Justice

by  
Greater Cincinnati Artists

Editor:  
Saad Ghosn

## Foreword

*"I am a prisoner of the Light/both day and night./My crime is to love:/I am burnt golden bright"* writes Carol Feiser Laque in one of her poems. Carol passed away unexpectedly January 2, 2022, but her Light and her Love remain vividly alive in all of us who knew her and whom she touched in her life. Carol was a faithful supporter of SOS ART and of its mission and a regular uninterrupted contributor to the yearly "For a Better World" since its inception in 2004, including this last edition. Her voice was always clear and loud and will be missed. But as she says in another of her poems *"Death occurs in life and beyond/in eternity which may never be destroyed,"* Carol's spirit is eternal and rightly so will never be destroyed.

This book is dedicated to you Carol. We will miss you but we know that you will always be with us with your powerful and lucid voice and with your big heart.

This 19th edition of "For a Better World" received the largest number of poetry submissions ever since the start of the publication. 106 poets used their voice and their words to reflect on their life, on our societal problems, our values, and of what is really at stake for being human. Due to their large number, poems by only 93 of them were able to be included in this book. Some of these poems addressed the still ongoing Covid pandemic effects, the distressing feeling of isolation and separation, our vulnerability face to suffering and death... but also many others addressed the many issues our world faces increasingly, greed, violence, racial and gender discrimination, prejudice, social and economic disparity, abuse of human rights, destruction of the environment, to name only the few.

The ninety three poets were joined by forty visual artists and using their poetic voice and their artistic power they all contributed, in their own way, to peace and social justice. They fight for everyone's rights, for the discriminated against, the oppressed, the weak and the poor; they combat darkness, violence and evil; and they spread compassion, love, and tolerance. These artists speak for a world after their heart and values, a beautiful and equal world of hope, fraternity and unity, a rich and diverse world where peace is based on truth, justice, and kindness, and on the empowering and unique contribution of every individual. Of all ages and backgrounds, these artists use their art as their voice to state their concerns and affirm their beliefs and values. By doing so they also strengthen each other's diverse voices and give life to their hopes and dreams. With their lucid song, they also confront the evil in this world and promise to stand up for the fight. Their song is an appeal to each of us to join in and make a change; it seeks to eliminate our isolation and loneliness and invites us to hold hands and share in the same well of strength and energy for a better world.

To every participating poet and visual artist, and to everyone who directly or indirectly joined in the making of this book and in the spread of its message, my heartfelt thanks and gratitude. My appreciation also goes to Jerry Judge, Mike Olson, Eileen Trauth, and Kathy Wade who kindly and generously reviewed all the submitted poems and provided their editorial advice.

For a better world, always, a world of love, peace and justice.

Saad Ghosn, Book editor and organizer  
May 2022

*ps. This book is also dedicated to all those who suffered, died, felt isolated and neglected during the ongoing pandemic crisis. Also, to all those who, courageously and unselfishly, donated of themselves, their time, their energy, their skills, their wealth, their love... to combat the crisis and plant seeds for a better world.*

*"Socialism is a scareword they have hurled at every advance the people have made in the last 20 years.*

*Socialism is what they called public power.*

*Socialism is what they called Social Security.*

*Socialism is what they called farm price supports.*

*Socialism is what they called bank deposit insurance.*

*Socialism is what they called the growth of free and independent labor organizations.*

*Socialism is their name for almost anything that helps all the people."*

**Harry S. Truman, 1952**

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Sebastian Chironi

## ***POEMS:***

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Farron Allen ran and taught the Sculpture Foundry class at the University of Cincinnati for 32 years. Currently running his business, making art, and writing, life continuing to challenge and fulfill him.

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### **MARK FLANIGAN**

Mark Flanigan (Cincinnati, OH) is a poet, performer, columnist and writer of fiction. After an 11 year run, his "Exiled" column is now archived at [semantikon.com](http://semantikon.com) and [citybeat.com](http://citybeat.com). Mark recently edited Aralee Strange's posthumous poetry collection, *The Road Itself* (Dos Madres Press).

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### **HEIDI JOFFE**

Heidi Joffe (M.Ed) lives between the West Coast and Cincinnati. Her appreciation and love of nature, literature and art informs and converses within her poetry.

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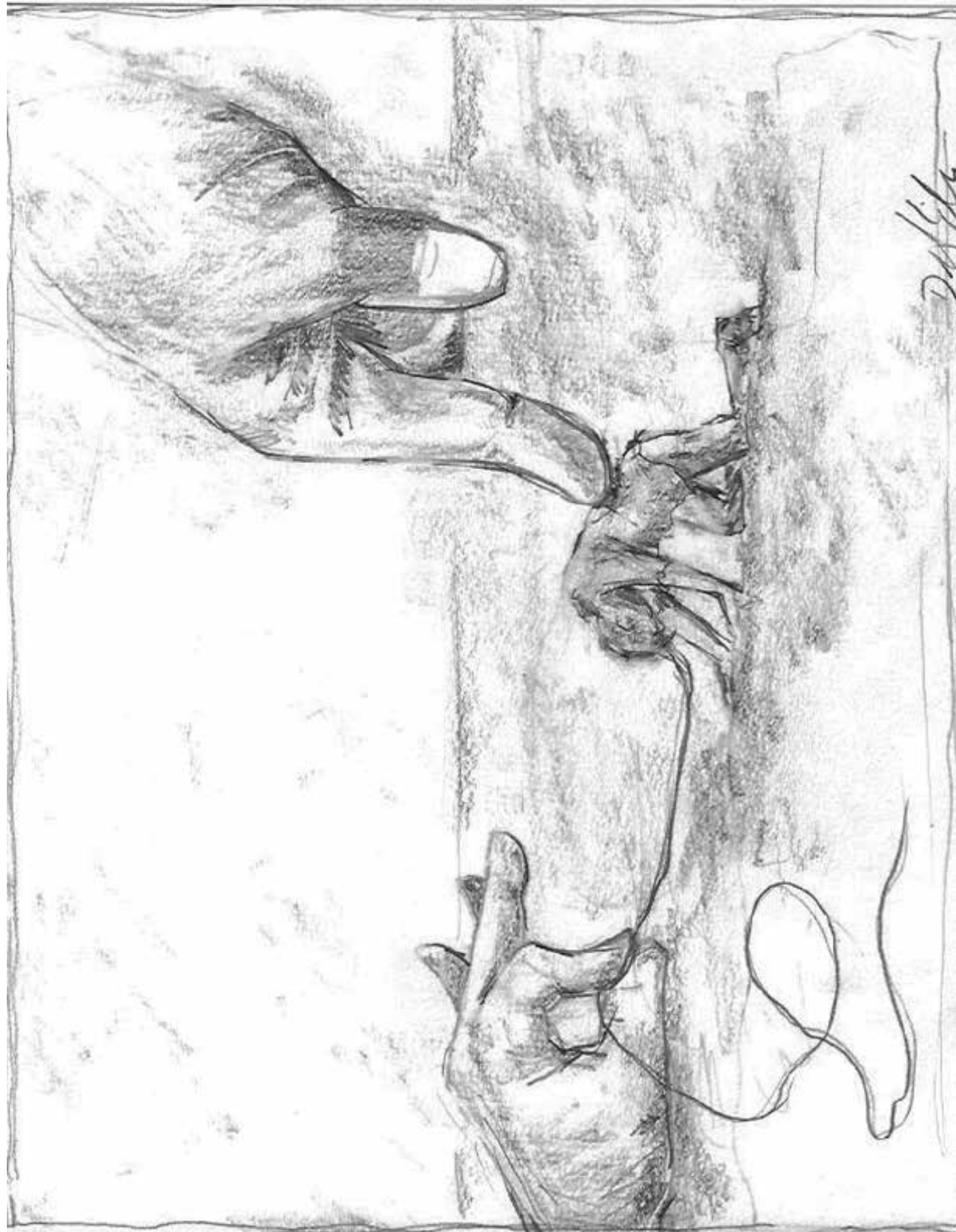
## ***DRAWING:***

### **DANA TINDALL**

Dana Tindall graduated from Austin College in Sherman Texas with a BA in Art, received his MA in Art from the University of Dallas, and holds an EdD from the University of Cincinnati. He has exhibited his work nationally and internationally, and his work is included in several private and corporate collections. Dana currently teaches art courses at Xavier University.

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## Hosting

(by *Mark Flanigan*)

Comrade, you will not catch me:

I have been able  
to rely upon my ability  
to instill trust  
in the Indians, trusting  
in turn  
that you cannot.

as the Chief said,  
the long plain is just that,  
long and plain.

and when you come  
to this crossroad  
and consult the map  
that until now  
has served you so well,  
you will see, in fact, who has  
signed it.

it is my art—  
*I am here—*

you will look up  
with time enough to watch  
the hand that led you here  
take you away.

## Elephants

(by *Farron Allen*)

I never thought I was beautiful  
at this point  
knowing better  
I put myself up there with  
elephants  
that never stopped  
all the shots  
pushing over  
to ground  
and cut  
any remaining parts of me  
tossed to piles of tusks  
sell them off  
white ivory  
pass bills and legislation  
but many want to render fat to heat  
let us make all this extinct  
a congress of white dinosaurs  
obliged to standby

I never thought I was beautiful  
at this point  
knowing better  
but elephants  
correct course  
and step on you

## The Log Boom

(by *Heidi Joffe*)

A long distance to that door;  
Took the stairs on my back,

On the floor, the stupor  
Knocked out of me.

In a spouted  
Urn, unearthed, belly

Shaped in my hands,  
Lipped between my fingers,

Slick on the handle.  
The skin absorbs and resists;

Despite its flimsy appearance,  
Ribbs grate into it, shape it

With a pinch and slap, until  
Only a finger, delicately

Embraces a burnished  
Sheen, worn on the rocks.

Until I cradle bones.

## Vote

(by *Farron Allen*)

I use terrible words  
when writing  
my face turns red  
embarrassment  
these words tossed  
at me for a lifetime  
now lay at my feet  
picking them up  
ready to toss back  
sharp as I can shine

let the silver of blades  
disappear in you  
I am not the evil one

why can't I write pretty  
I loved you

you loved me  
lifetime movie  
but in Kentucky we have  
turtle man and broken rib  
honest names for crazy people

Mitch and Rand meet one night  
and make someone else have a baby  
they smile and laugh  
let us not forget  
fundraise

millions made  
Rand gets caught in the foreskin  
of Mitch's neck  
as these tiny white people  
destroy America

## Depends

(by *Farron Allen*)

I pound my chest  
call me ape or buffalo  
depends which culture  
to overtake  
control and destroy

mountain boy  
barefoot in hills  
running stupid in coal  
no bathroom or Kroger  
only company store

you will buy  
everything from me  
I said scrip not strip  
stupid boy  
you will make a fine coal miner

putting you underground  
for generations  
starve the drive out of you  
when you die, we will take your children  
and give you Manchin

I pound my chest  
Joe builds a big fine house  
with a pure clean water source  
on the graves  
depends

## POEMS:

### LAURI ANN AULTMAN

Since 2006, Lauri Ann Aultman has been a mixed media Artist Activist with SOS ART. In 2021, her poetry was in FABW & Global Water Dances. She is working on children books and also works as a Community Center Director for CRC.

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### LINDSEY POTZICK

Lindsey Potzick is by day a brand strategist, by evening a soccer coach, and by the middle of the night a poet. She believes love is felt in the details, so everything she writes is built on nuance.

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### MIKE WILSON

Mike Wilson's work has appeared in magazines including *Amsterdam Quarterly*, *The London Reader*, *The Ocotillo Review*, and in his book, *Arranging Deck Chairs on the Titanic*, (Rabbit House Press, 2020). He resides in Lexington, KY.

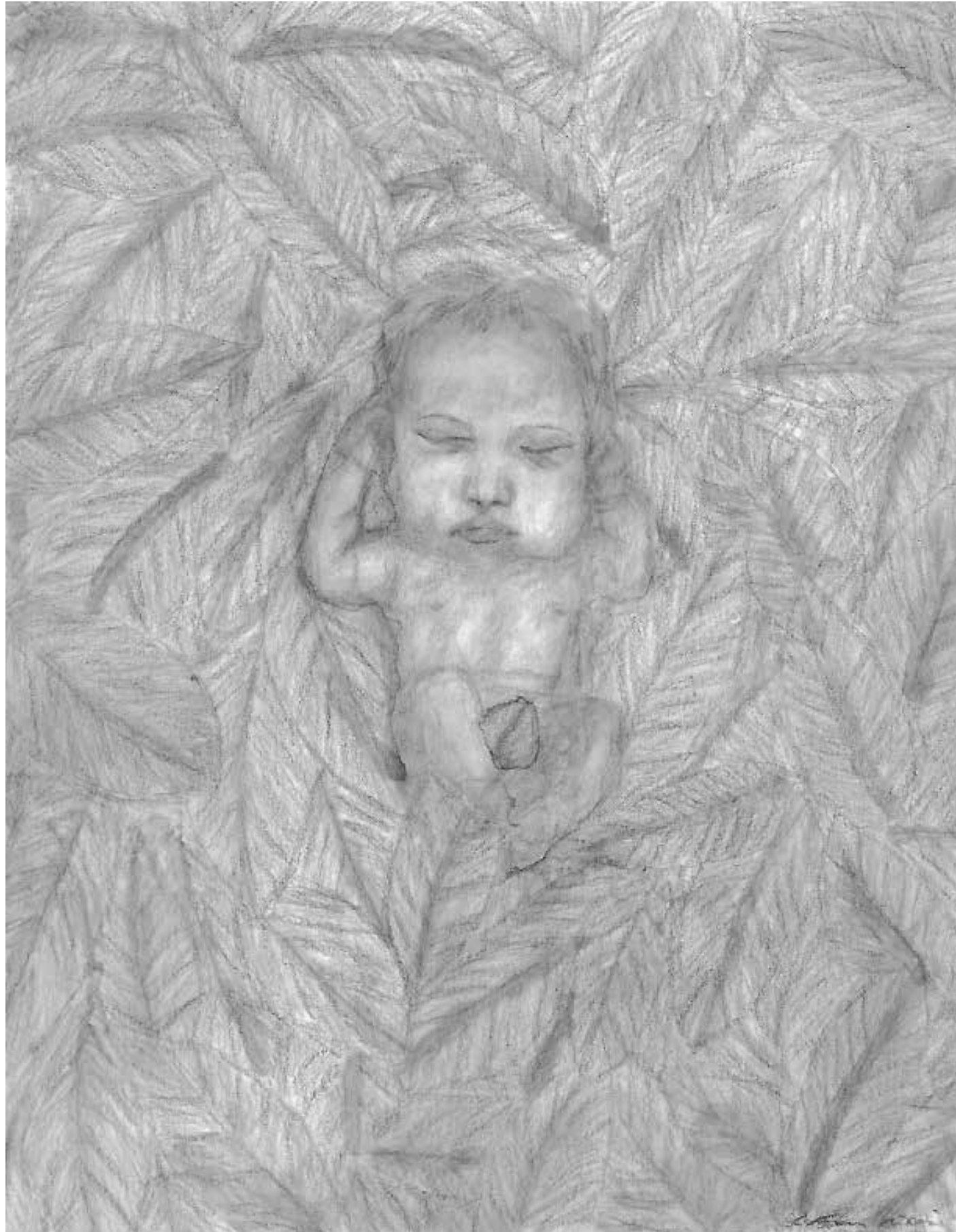
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## DRAWING:

### SEBASTIAN CHIRONI

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## We Are Not from Here

(by *Lauri Ann Aultman*)

(for *Global Water Dances*)

We are not from here.  
Did we fall gently from the clouds like a spring rain?  
Or did we crash onto the land like ocean waves in a winter storm?  
Or maybe we simply floated down the creek on an oak leaf.  
We do not know where we came from,  
but we know that we are here now.

And now we begin...  
to move, to grow, to dance.  
One tear of grief waters the potted plants, making life from death.  
A watering can full of hope tickles the young seeds to dance with  
new life,  
And then the hose is brought out from the garage or the fire truck  
and it brings screams of joy on a hot summer day.

We are not from here,  
But they were.  
Our ancestors took their water and their land, but they could not  
take the sky.  
Now they look up. We look down.  
They see potential for the future. We see current needs met.  
Macetewah will always flow for them, long after we drain the creek.  
They do not need a boat to float with the water.  
They know how it turns, how it hides life beneath every rock.  
They still dance.  
We may not hear the drum, but the heartbeat continues...

We are not from here, but here is where we are now.  
Here is hope.  
Here is life.  
And here the water flows freely.

## Love's Manifesto

(by *Mike Wilson*)

Life is co-operation.  
When we are that, consciously,  
shackles of selfishness will break.

Neighbor, God and me  
are the Holy Three,  
the trio jamming justice with joy.

Democracy is more than votes –

## To the Fish in the Ocean

(by *Lyndsey Potzick*)

Adjust your focus  
away from your locus  
and fix it on your anatomy.

Do your gills let you breathe?  
Do your eyes let you see?

Do your scales help you swim  
and your fins act like limbs?

Do your bones perform like a  
boat,  
be dynamic and float?  
Write it down in a note;

You belong here.

Despite feelings of fear,  
Despite the size of your peers,  
Despite feeling insincere,

You belong here.

democracy is the music of socialism.  
Democracy is reason holding hands.

Each species is every species.  
Each life is infinitely important.  
Even atoms sing!

Truth is not a noun of property,  
it's a verb, a motion before clarity,  
an adjective, chameleonic beauty.

Life is co-operation.  
When we are that, consciously,  
shackles of selfishness will break.

## I Can't Hear Your Words

(by *Lauri Ann Aultman*)

You chose silence.  
But silence is not an option anymore.  
When people were hurt by words & actions, you offered to stand up for them.  
You saw the pictures.  
You heard the words.  
You even felt the pain.  
But you chose silence.

It is easier to try to ignore what's going on. It feels safer behind the walls,  
but Jericho is crumbling.

So play your drum, your flute, your shofar, and your trumpet.  
The time has come for the walls to tumble.

Ironically, peace must be fought for,  
Our weapons are love, music, and His word.  
So I will speak, sing, dance, and play my glad tambourine.  
Will you join me?  
Speak up please.  
I can't hear your words.

## The Dream in the Night

(by *Lyndsey Potzick*)

The dream lifted me into the night  
From my window I took flight  
The sky was cool and clear  
And felt something like soft tears  
I could cruise at hyper-speed  
As if something was pulling me

I went up and up in the atmosphere  
Between the stars and my biggest fears  
and there I could breathe easily  
and there I could think peacefully  
and there I could see things evenly

Anything inanimate was in black and grey  
Every living thing was a full array  
of color, every person was on display:  
My family holding hands to pray,  
Strangers reading what their love letters say,  
Children running and laughing in play,  
The sunrise dawning over every new day

## SOS

(by *Lauri Ann Aultman*)

Will you join us?  
Can you hear the Earth crying out for help?  
The waters rise.  
The sound of rapid fire sings our ears.  
And trash pollutes the land & sea.

We hear the cries for help.  
We hear the Earth's SOS.

So we create...  
more music, more pictures, more love, more peace.  
Our creations chisel beauty into rough stone walls.  
Our imaginations reach for- not utopia, but for a better world.

Our music starts with the pitter patter of toddler feet and the heartbeats of Elders.  
Then as drums resonate through the people, a gentle toe tap becomes a new dance.  
Soon, there's ballet, samba, salsa & hip hop-  
All rhythms for peace...  
And the harmony is social justice.

**POEMS:**

**T. BARTLETT**

T. Bartlett is a photographer and writer who lives in the Greater Cincinnati area. She's had poetry published by The Voices Project, Pegasus, and For a Better World 2020 and 2021. In her free time, she enjoys cooking and watching movies

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**MATT BIRKENHAUER**

Matt Birkenhauer teaches English at Northern Kentucky University, with an emphasis on Composition and Rhetoric. In addition to *Pegasus*, his poetry has appeared in *The Licking River Review*, *Trajectory: Writing That Illuminates*, *Tobacco: A Literary Anthology*, *Words*, *Parody Poetry*,...

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**MICHAEL WHITNEY**

Michael Whitney is a lifelong resident of Cincinnati where he currently resides with his wife and two sons. He is a 1994 graduate of UC's English program and hopes his contribution helps people realize how much we all have in common.

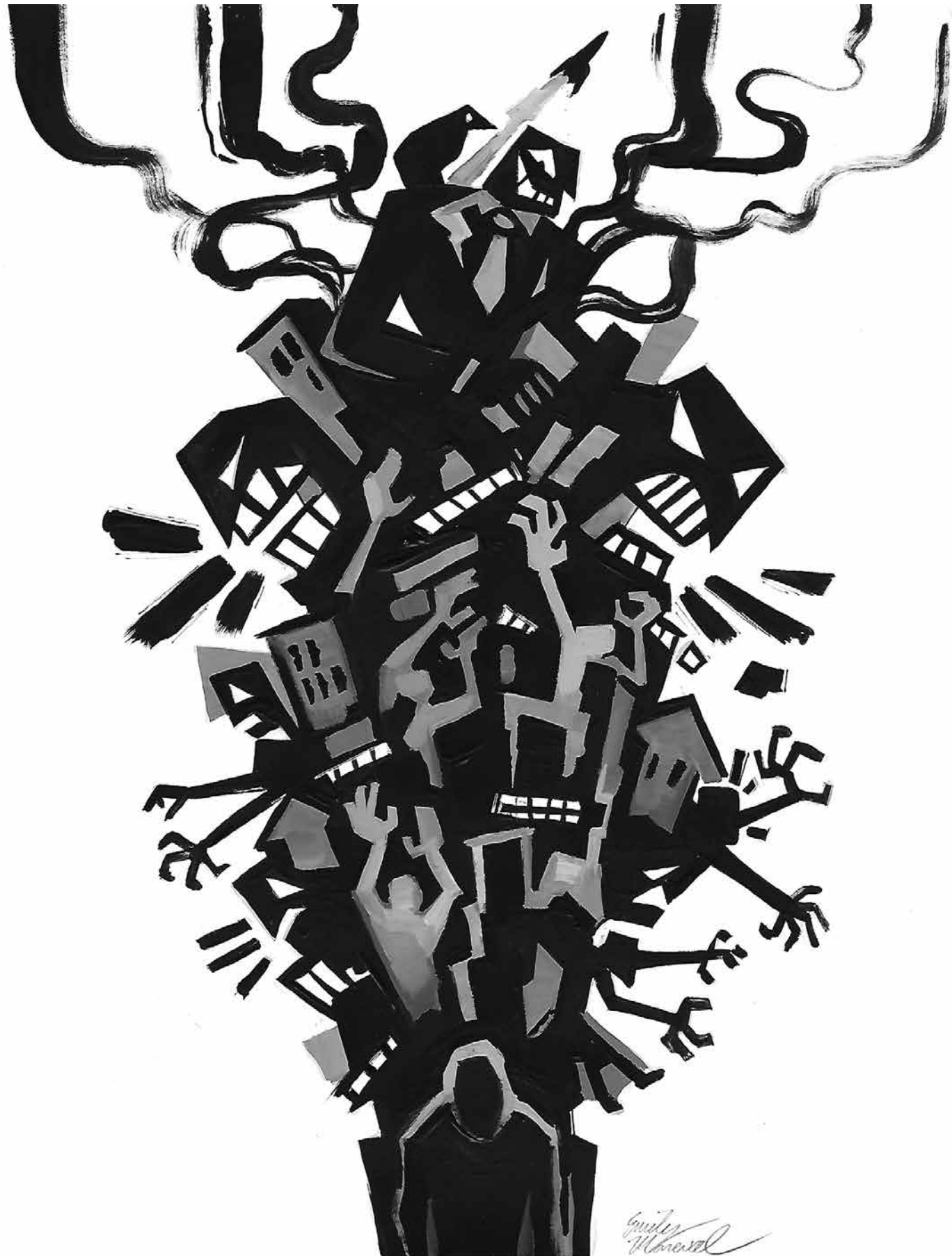
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**DRAWING:**

**EMILY MANEVAL**

Emily Maneval is an illustration student at The Art Academy of Cincinnati. While focused on illustration, she is fascinated by artwork of all kinds and is always striving to improve and grow as an artist.

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## A Flag or a Cloak?

(by *T. Bartlett*)

Patriots love their symbolic drops of dye,  
upon seamless threads that weave and wind.  
Seen tame and still on windless days  
or wild and unruly when storms enrage.  
Symbolic of freedom, emblematic of unity,  
the stars, the stripes, the rise of democracy.  
But beware the flag as it flies over statesmen,  
for it can double as a cloak for snake-oil salesmen.  
A Declaration, a Constitution, mere empty words  
to lifeless eagles in the mouths of buzzards.

## I'll Just Leave This Here

(by *Michael Whitney*)

Stop the fighting, erase the divisions I scream  
in my head.  
But no amount of bitching could make them  
understand each other.  
Conservatives and liberals speak to one another  
in codes.  
The ephemeral nature of our lives is lost.  
We cannot feel the bonds tethering us.  
Both sides, digging in the stratum of our shared  
past, interpret the artifacts differently.  
Our lives crisscross.  
We hunger for love, mourn what is lost.

I'm not an outlier here.  
Our skin is vulnerable to the same viruses.  
To save ourselves we need the maple tree and  
the ocelot

But I'm too shy to be a showstopper.  
I dream of being a daredevil, spraying truth from  
my pen like graffiti.

However, when I try to speak, my voice chirps.

## One Tin Astronaut

(by *Matt Birkenhauer*)

*To be sung to the melody of "One Tin Soldier"*

Listen children to a story  
That was told not long ago  
'Bout a rich guy on a mountain  
And his workers far below.  
On the mountain was a treasure  
Where the white guy paid no tax  
'Cause our tax laws favor rich fucks--  
Workers pay it with their backs.

Go ahead and build that rocket,  
Blast it off into the blue.  
Bring along two or three others  
To represent the privileged few.  
There will be lots of pundits blowing  
Come the lift-off day.  
On the sunny morning after  
One tin astronaut rides away.

So the workers in the valley  
Sent a message up the hill  
Asking for a share of profits  
And to unionize at will.  
Came an answer from the rich guy,  
"With our brothers we will share  
A small percentage of my profits  
But not the riches buried there."

Now the workers cried with anger,  
"Let's form unions and raise hell!"  
And, like Amazons, they fought  
And thought they won, for just a spell.  
Now they stood beside the treasure  
Which the rich guy had amassed--  
Opened his vault and looked inside,  
"Sorry, folks"--was all it said.

Go ahead and build that rocket  
Blast it off into the blue.  
Bring along two or three others  
To represent the privileged few.  
There will be lots of pundits blowing  
Come the lift-off day.  
On the sunny morning after  
One rich white guy sails away.

***POEMS:***

**ANDREA BECK**

A Cincinnati native, Andrea Beck earned a Ph.D. in English Rhetoric. When she isn't over-mothering her exceptional daughter, two dogs, and husband, or working in the family business, Andrea carves out time to write.

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**NATASHA FRASCH**

Natasha Frasch is the Norwoodian mother of three sweet girls. She has recently published her first children's book, *Love Comes Down*, a song about humble love. She prays for comfort for all those who have gone through great loss.

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**NOELE GRACE WILLIAMS**

Noele Grace Williams lives in southern Ohio and has been passionate about writing and music since the age of 9. Her published works include *Going Where You Don't Belong...Studies in Identity* and *The Little Red Frog*. Her latest album release, called "Seasons", is available on most streaming services.

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***DRAWING:***

**ABIGAIL WEBSTER**

Abigail Webster is a small artist in Okeana who specializes in illustration and ceramics. She is currently majoring in Psychology and Art Therapy. Abbie runs out of her basement a small ceramics business on Etsy: [AmaeCreationsStudio](https://www.etsy.com/shop/AmaeCreationsStudio).

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[etsy.com/shop/AmaeCreationsStudio?ref=search\\_shop\\_redirect](https://www.etsy.com/shop/AmaeCreationsStudio?ref=search_shop_redirect)



## Epigenetic

(by *Andrea Beck*)

Our Bodies Remember  
what our minds have chosen to soften.  
The anniversary of death, an illness, a shock-  
injuries physical and emotional.

The trauma goes into our cells and hides there  
waiting to creep out in new forms-  
Pain, anxiety, remorse, and longing  
or maybe rage.

The litanies of loss-said or unsaid become  
maps written in the flesh and synapses.  
Passed to the next generation are instincts  
that may have served in the need to take flight.

We are left hyper aware of a new threat:  
A hawk, a light at night, the settling of the house  
all signs to be on alert.  
Our bodies know there is danger.

With anxiety and dread inherited,  
we burn on instinct.  
Like a dog running in its sleep,  
the body responds.

Told to push through and live for tomorrow.  
Survival is the goal.  
But bodies demand we reflect on what they know  
beyond our memories.

They tried to kill us, we survived, let's eat.  
Its shorthand for each holiday.  
Is it a celebration, or an attempt to soothe a  
collective wound-  
a communal memory seared in flesh  
to be succored by food?

We are told to heal the world and fight hatred.  
In the fun house mirror of the body politic,  
We are tasked to be a light in among the nations.  
A light among the nations is easy to shoot.

## Unbidden

(by *Natasha Frasca*)

I.  
It comes uncalled for, nameless  
as it is, the dark clawing  
at your heart which you cannot  
bring back home within your chest  
where now the ache resides,  
a careless, cruel houseguest  
who will not leave and pays  
rent with memories indiscriminate.

II.  
Worse the numb. Worse the anger.  
Worse the stranger's sobbing stare.  
Worse the words. Worse the silence.

III.  
What is time and what does it mean  
the rushing forward backwards  
arms outstretched and losing and who  
can see that void but God pulling off  
the cover hand over hand, hour  
after hour, revealing more of its cold  
shape and we do not (how could we?)  
like what we see and what we do not

IV.  
Who is time and where can I find her?  
Perhaps she left something in her drawers  
of mine when she took everything.

V.  
I have not found even  
an egg.

VI.  
Peace too,  
comes unbidden, some friend's  
thought or prayer nesting  
if only for a moment  
in the burnt out mind's tree,  
leaving a magpie's trinket to turn  
over and over in our hands,  
tarnished but Real.



## We Were Not Made for This

(by Noele Grace Williams)

We were not made for this

This corner-crouching  
couch-sitting  
mindless Watching

As everything falls apart  
instead of falling into place.

We were not made for this

Running for our lives  
Surrounded by a growing evil  
too blank to name  
And too dark to face.

We were not made for this

all this noise and nonsense  
and all these  
frenetic spasms of fear

taking us back to the cave.

the cave  
where we can sit  
in the dark  
and all alone  
and pretend we feel calm –

pretend we are ok for one second.

Until we start screaming at ourselves or at the cave and then the cave –  
the cave - screams back –

what am I *doing here?*

And all we hear is our own echo –

what am I doing here?

So tell me, if you weren't here, I wouldn't have found you would I

tried to escape in you  
tried to feel safe in you

but let's be real

there are caves everywhere

and if we choose to go in, well then that's our own damn fault now isn't it?

We were not made for this  
to stand back

to stand stock-still

being blinded by all

Those who choose to look right through us and say  
you were never really here at all, were you?

And no, that's not what we were made for.

We were made to stand up.

To be heard.

To be here.

And to be sure of it.

The words in the song – Get down. Nobody move nobody make a sound

Payable On Death and if I don't start making a sound I will be dead soon anyway. they are

We were made to stand up

for here,

for now,

for all the forgotten clutter around our feet  
that we can no longer name because we threw it away one day  
when we were angry or tired or stupid.

We were made to stop and pay attention.

To make each piece

of the dusty mess in our lives

mean something.

Even for a second.

Because this is

how we get out of the cave.

Because this is

how we can be sure we are standing

and that we are not alone.

And this is how we stay alive.

because any other choice

is not life at all

and that is not what we were made for.

***POEMS:***

**DIANA BECKET**

Diana Becket was born in Manchester, England, and moved to Cincinnati with her family for work. Her working life focused on teaching college composition courses. Diana began to write poetry when she retired.

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**ELLA CATHER-DAVIS**

Ella Cather-Davis writes poetry, essays and children's stories to amuse her grandchildren. She holds an Associates of Arts degree in English Literature from the University of Cincinnati and loves Choral singing.

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**ELLE LANE**

Elle Lane is an internationally published trans-woman writer and poet. She received her BFA from the University of Cincinnati and her work has appeared or is forthcoming in the literary journals: *¡Pa'lante!*, *LUPERCALIA Press*, and *The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature*.

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***DRAWING:***

**KATE ROWEKAMP**

Kate Rowekamp, a printmaker & illustrator from Covington, KY, earned her MFA in Two-Dimensional studio with a concentration in printmaking from Miami University (2015) and her BA in studio art and an AA in Art History from Thomas More College (2012). She lives in Cincinnati, OH with her husband and two cats.

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## The Cost of Love

(by *Ella Cather-Davis*)

In the Veterinarian's waiting room  
an elderly woman sat with her cat,  
a captive in his carrier on the floor.  
'He's a stray' she shares, clutching  
her coat more closely to her,  
hands fidgeting.

I nod. I am here for our dog's  
annual vaccinations and I am  
anticipating a huge bill.  
It is a busy morning for staff  
and all waiting in the room.  
Settling in, I no longer notice her.

I concentrate on social distancing  
and breathing in the pandemic mask.  
My eyes begin to scan around me,  
but I am drawn back to the woman  
who has begun to rock and is  
whispering desperately to herself.

Concerned, I ask what is wrong with her cat.  
"He won't eat." she says, her voice breaking,  
"He chokes." To reassure her, I say  
that I am sure the Vet will be able to help.  
Absently, she pats the cat's crate.  
Again we wait.

She begins to rock again clutching her purse  
closer to her body as if it were a lifeline.  
I now understand that along with her concern  
for the stray cat's fate, she may not have  
enough money required to treat him.  
She has brought the cat for help anyway.

I look closely at her. She is very thin, a  
knitted hat pulled low about her drawn face.  
How she shines in her nobleness.  
We all need something to love,  
even if it costs us everything.

## Hunger

(by *Diana Becket*)

is a pit  
in his belly,  
a hole that echoes  
through his bones,  
blocks channels  
to his brain.

He remembers  
pictures from social  
studies books. Babies'  
eyes, hollow pits  
in small skulls,  
ribs, fences  
with connecting  
skin wrapped  
round bone  
posts.

On the flyer  
he reads: school  
breakfast suspended  
during lockdown.

## A Prayer for Couches

(by *Elle Lane*)

Dear Lord,  
A lady in my building today,  
With brow, furrowed with effort, bade.  
A prayer for the used couch,  
Her nephew gave.

She lives on the fifth floor,  
Yet could not, through elevator door,  
With the couch in tow.

She turned to me,  
Voice soaked with nicotine,  
"Even though I never paid,  
Nothing in life is free."

Oh Lord, five stories is such a long way,  
And she's been moving her stuff all day.  
Please let her fit through.

## Pushed over the Edge

(by *Diana Becket*)

Students stand in a glare of school lockers,  
but she has to leave her coat and hear  
her classmates' taunts and threats  
to spread rumors of sex  
with boys she fears.

Scornful eyes dismiss her, noses in the air  
suggest she smells. Bodies move away—  
no one wants to sit near her.  
She avoids their faces  
and finds a back  
wall chair.

The barrier of voices protects her. She hides  
behind the jeers, invisible among glares  
of students and teacher, safe  
from interaction,  
and complaint.

She can't use the girls' bathroom, a meeting  
place for gossip, where peers jostle, push,  
threaten and twist skinny arms.  
She doesn't drink water  
until the day's end.

Newspapers don't recount how she's taken  
to the club. Video records she leaves  
at 1am and strangers patrol  
the parking lot. Her body  
is found too late  
to survive.

## The Siege of Troy

(by *Elle Cather-Davis*)

The high school campus wound  
long up the hill to the front gates.  
As we all crowded our way out,  
once again my heart would sink.  
Yes once again, a gang of boys  
would began to taunt Troy.

Troy had the stature of a large bear,  
his black hair swarthy and profuse.  
Then the boys began the ridicule game,  
whose goal was to so enrage Troy  
that he would foam at the mouth.

He would start off grinning amicably,  
but as the taunting boys encircled him  
gesturing, each competing to strut his  
insult prowess, Troy would morph into  
a wounded, inexpressibly sad boy and  
the light behind his eyes would extinguish.

Troy, whose understanding was limited  
would lunge, to escape his tormenters.  
He would howl in grief as they laughed  
and pointed to the flecks of white saliva  
appearing at the corners of the wounded  
giant's lips.

As this played out, over and over again  
no one intervened on behalf of Troy. Ever.  
How I hated those boys!  
How I hated myself.

## “Active Shooter”

(by *Diana Becket*)

echoes through loudspeakers, frantic students  
seize scissors off work benches, push bookcases  
against doors, spin in panic to hide under tables and sinks,  
crouch in closets or corner shadows, bodies  
pressed out of window view.

Past practice drills, controlled by rifle wielding  
fighters, are seared in their memories—terrorist  
figures march school corridors, faces masked, shoulders  
tense, searching for victims in spaces where students  
cringe, frozen in fear that the door will open.

No one in the room knows  
this is a drill.

(“Teachers say students were ‘terrified,’ ”  
*Cincinnati Enquirer*, Feb 12, 2020)

## Chosen Family

(by *Elle Lane*)

My chosen family is rats under the floorboards,  
In lost corridors.  
The room down the hall, full of telephone cords.

The laundry room that smells like weed.  
By heat-cracked streets,  
And all the dust covered places, no one sees.

My chosen family, we're there for each other,  
Star crossed lovers,  
With bed bugs under our duvet covers.

***POEMS:***

**BLAU**

Blau is hoping that the darkness will eventually lead to the light. Struggling to release the inner voices so that they may be heard above the cacophony of life. Creations of surreal/abstract art and stream of subconsciousness poetry.

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**REGINA FORD-FOWLER (1957-2022)**

Ms. Regina Ford-Fowler was a spoken word artist in the Greater Cincinnati area, and a featured artist in a variety of venues. She wrote and performed poetry for more than 25 years, and her work was published in various journals.

**MARY LENNARD**

Mary Lennard, a life-long Cincinnati, looks to find inner goodness and hope where it is not always apparent. This serves her well in family life, teaching, community work and imagining the better world we want to live in.

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***DRAWING:***

**BILL OLSEN**

Bill Olsen lives in Kentucky, works in Cincinnati, and doodles at Jessamine Street Studios in Camp Washington.

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### Insullen

(by *Blau*)

Abandoned by the Hippocratic Oath  
Gouged by the one percent  
Engorged with lies and apathy  
Oath of Asaph has been broken  
Strike down the life suckers  
with the Rod of Asclepius

Primum non nocere written in blood  
upon the effigy of the forgotten  
After all essence of life has been  
bled from the souls of the afflicted

Blankets of patents smother the needy  
Playing Russian roulette with your life  
Food, house or diabetic coma

### Winds of Change

(by *Mary Lennard*)

The winds of change are blowing fiercely.  
What will they bring?  
What will they take?  
We must be ready in an instant  
To ride the wind or resist it.  
Nothing will be left unchanged.  
Resolutely know your purpose,  
For what you love will be your compass  
To find your path in an unfamiliar land.

### Droning On

(by *Mary Lennard*)

The "Eye in the Sky"  
Is an unfortunate attempt  
To grasp equality with God.  
Omniscient, omnipresent and all powerful  
Are the counterfeit claims  
Made for drones and their remote  
controllers.  
The fatal flaw in the copy  
Was forgetting to program for love.

### Money to Make and Money to Spend

(by *Regina Ford-Fowler*)

a sad song whispers in the background  
a mournful cry wafting on the breeze  
winters wind howling shivering, a sneeze  
but we cannot hear it as we rush on our way to work  
we have money to make and money to spend  
over and over and over again...

heartache emanates from the bus stop bench  
someone asleep, wrapped in a moth eaten blanket,  
a stench  
he is homeless and mentally ill  
Exercising his right to be hungry, helpless  
and to die of a chill  
in the land of the free, home of the afraid  
the heaviness of despair  
tears drifting in the winter winds  
freezing in the cold crisp air  
he is invisible, but he is there  
however, we cannot feel it and we do not care  
as we rush on our way to work  
we have money to make and money to spend  
over and over and over again...

child standing outside, frost bitten hands  
she hides inside an oversized sweater  
but we cannot see her  
as we call on our cell phones from our plush heated cars  
in our warm winter coats  
to turn in her parents  
judgment is rampant  
mercy is absent  
we believe our lies  
even if the parents try, the child cries  
we cannot let her enter our lives  
as we rush on our way to work  
we have money to make and money to spend  
over and over and over again...

preoccupied with credit cards, bills and our things  
we weave through traffic wanting a drink  
afraid to examine  
afraid to think what would God have us do  
we cannot even ponder if God is true  
as we rush on our way to work  
we have money to make and money to spend  
over and over and over again...

## Getting Smarter

(by *Mary Lennard*)

Robber Barons are back with a different M.O.  
As corporate “persons” so that few will know  
Just who is behind the curtain of wealth  
By buying new laws to legalize stealth.  
“What’s being stolen?” you ask in surprise.  
“We pay lower taxes when we privatize.”  
For pennies on the dollar our assets are sold  
“To be run more efficiently,” is the story we’re told  
But who gets the savings and who has to pay  
When public ownership is taken away?  
Who makes a profit and who makes the rules  
When we let corporations take charge of our schools?  
All children are assets of infinite worth  
We’ll not let them be stolen away.  
Be gone robber barons! We’re onto your game  
And we’re no longer letting you play.

## POEMS:

### NANCY SUSANNA BREEN

Nancy Susanna Breen writes and lives in Loveland, OH. Her publication credits include *Moving Images: Poetry Inspired by Film*, *The Strategic Poet*, and *I Thought I Heard a Cardinal Sing: Ohio’s Appalachian Voices*. The latest of her four chapbooks is *Closing My Father’s Mouth* (New Dawn Publications, (c) 2021).

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### JOHN CRUZE & SUZANNE GLADE

John Cruze, a local poet, and Suzanne Glade, a Chicago poet, began in 2020 a “call and response” poetry project. Their poems here included continue from 2021 that ongoing collaboration and speak to the themes of Peace and Justice in our times.

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## DRAWING:

### MATT REED

Matt Reed is an artist, educator, and radical leftist currently living in Cincinnati, OH. His work has appeared in galleries in Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, Louisville, Los Angeles, and Munich. His illustrations have appeared on magazines, comic books, t-shirts, and music album covers.

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IG: @crazymattreed



Matt Reed

## Poem I Border Physics

(by Suzanne Glade)

Light is invisible  
we see only  
what it illuminates  
reflected back to  
our eyes

Even in the sun's presence  
light skirts the borders  
blind shadows  
blanket those  
pressed against  
barbed wired governments  
treated like lowing cattle  
seeking water  
caught on the wrong side  
of an invisible line  
where nothing is  
reflected back

Sound leaving a mouth  
is invisible  
unless it moves  
bodies that catch  
our eyes

From just beyond arbitrary  
longitudes and latitudes  
wails whispered songs  
footfalls of flight  
fences gripped shaken  
by the nameless  
with lips frozen open  
strain to amplify  
waves of sound  
that evaporate  
unseen

unreflected border light  
motionless sound  
pain  
invisible

## Poem II\* Exhibition at Nogales

(by John Cruze)

If you like pictures  
with patterns and shading,  
and surreal meets real,  
you should see this one,  
or maybe you have.  
Maybe you carry it with you.

In the foreground,  
interlocking diamond shapes,  
replicated across rigid standards,  
thrust upright as flag poles  
anchored to concrete slabs, and  
no tolerance for error –  
evoking the gospel –  
we're not in the business  
of taking chances.

In the background,  
the faces of children,  
nearly lifeless  
as the foreground,  
except for the eyes  
and the small fingers  
bent towards what's left  
of yearning to be free.

And lurking in the detail  
the one desperate  
three-legged myth -  
goodness and glory  
and darkness mocking  
what passes for light  
in the vision given  
the wide-eyed believer.

*\*Poem II, response to Poem I*

## A Chunk of Wood

(by Nancy Susanna Breen)

In the battlefield museum  
there's a simple chunk of wood,  
easy to overlook with so many  
sabers and saddles. A chunk  
of wood, rough and plain,  
with a ragged hole the size  
of a farmer's fingertip, homely  
and unimpressive among the  
tintypes,  
spyglasses, and butternut  
jackets.

Simpler yet, a small typed label:  
*A piece of doorframe from a  
local home--  
a bullet is still embedded in the  
wood.*

Also embedded are the untold  
stories:  
the boy who felt his cowlick  
grazed  
when the lead pierced the  
doorframe;  
the grandma who heard the  
whistle,  
then the thud as she gathered  
blankets  
for the wounded in the parlor.

In the battlefield museum,  
visitors craving drama  
are drawn to the muskets  
and side arms, the surgical  
instruments and battle flags,  
not a mere chunk of wood  
from a doorframe,  
from a bedroom,  
from a house on a farm  
where the cows trailed home  
for the children to milk  
and cannon wheels dug ruts  
in the emptied pasture.



## Our Lady of Succor, Help Thyself

(by *Nancy Susanna Breen*)

Our Lady of Perpetual Help  
hung in gilded splendor on the wall  
of my grandmother's bedroom.  
It was just another holy picture  
until I climbed up on the cedar chest  
for a closer look. That infant  
in Mary's arms was terrified, eyes  
fixed on a hovering angel bearing  
an instrument of torture instead of  
protection. He nestled close to his mother,  
his hand clasped in hers, she with  
supportive, comforting arms.  
She wore an expression of such sadness  
I wanted to hug my own mother,  
praying she would never suffer  
that kind of heartache. Our Lady's eyes  
were flat, still pools of regret  
that she had to choose obedience  
to the harsh will of the Lord.  
I thought of all the silly things  
I'd asked her for, this pierced woman  
who knew she couldn't save her own son.  
It's still searing, that image, but now  
in Mary's face I see the devastated  
mothers who know they can't  
spare their sons the traffic stop  
or drive-by shooting. And in the young  
Savior's eyes is the terror  
of the immigrant child  
about to be torn from his mother's arms,  
recoiling not from angels  
but ICE agents and a vision  
of the future that is no future.

## POEMS:

### HOLLY BRIANS RAGUSA

Holly Brians Ragusa ( She/her/hers) of Cincinnati is a writer and poet who bends convention and pushes boundaries. Known for crossing genres, her writing and activism also serves nonprofit boards and creates community solutions.

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### LINDA KLEINSCHMIDT

Having previously taught writing, Linda Kleinschmidt is currently a technical editor and writing consultant worldwide for books, research papers, etc. She has published two children's picture books, articles on the craft of writing and editing, and has won several awards for her poetry and other writings.

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### RHONDA PETTIT

Rhonda Pettit, PhD, is the author of *Riding the Wave Train* and *The Global Lovers*, and has worked with H. Michael Sanders on collaborations using poetry and visual media. She is a professor of English at UC Blue Ash College.

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## DRAWING:

### TRACY FEATHERSTONE

Tracy Featherstone is a Professor of Art and Head of printmaking at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. She earned a BFA from the University of Cincinnati and a MFA from the University of Arizona. Her creative practice spans multiple media including sculpture, printmaking, textile, and clay. Her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally.

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## Diamonds

(by *Linda Kleinschmidt*)

The Gods lay out a distinct ration of happiness,  
 So why do some get a full share,  
 And others mere persimmons?  
 Strangely, those who have so much  
 Never stay golden. They flee  
 From the true gift of their powerful ration.  
 While those who receive mere morsels  
 Recognize that seeds like diamonds are indeed  
 Extraordinary

## Begin

(by *Holly Brians Ragusa*)

I have seen a better world  
                   and it lives in me  
 My hands shape this clay  
 Mold that I am molded  
 Into a sight I see a view I choose  
 Vessel of what pours forth  
                   Spewed  
                   Chewed  
 your bits are worse for my wear  
                   where will I go  
 When cruelty finds us  
 Chained inside me  
 Clamoring for top dog  
 Clawing to get out  
                   Eaten  
                   Beaten  
 Look to no one other  
                   wise ones spoke  
 See the reflection  
 Staring into righteous eyes  
 Blinding our brightness  
 Covered in star dust as we blow  
                   Away  
                   Away  
 I have seen a better world  
 and it begins here with me

## Citadels

(by *Linda Kleinschmidt*)

Sadness is deepest when watching  
 Another's dream dissolve and break.  
 When it's yours, you're prepared,  
 Already hardened.

A dream for another, one you love, respect,  
 Crashes and disrupts like a rogue wave at sea  
 Or a boulder taking down a redwood  
 In a massive silent wood.

You gather the pieces of another's dreams,  
 Their life fragments closer, as your own,  
 Rebuild them as a citadel,  
 Twice thicker, thrice heartier,  
 Protecting their boughs as your own

## Ah!

(by *Rhonda Pettit*)

Recently I set free a small sunflower plant  
 meandering through a forest of spearmint.

I watered and propped, waited and wondered  
 if its tiny head would grow to blossom

(as I wonder about all tiny heads).

Its meanders remained and thickened.  
 Its stalk rose and branched into wildness

and wisdom, its multiple points of bloom  
 not thick enough to break down the All.

Its heart-shaped leaves bobbed up and down  
 like old church fans, but without the bank

advertisements. This morning their saw-  
 toothed edges are rimmed with water-

droplet rhinestones shining in the sun,  
 clarity at each fine point. Ah, sunflower!

You are where I wish all of us  
 would go.





## At Michael's on Colerain Avenue

(by *Mary Pierce Brosmer*)

In the bewildering-to-me bead aisle  
I meet a beautiful brown couple.

The woman's roundness speaks of  
pregnancy, the man's hands of day labor.  
She says, *you like make?* I am sheepish.

*Yes, but not good at make*, and then  
*Where're you from?* She looks down.  
He holds my gaze for one, two, beats  
before adding a brave, *Guatemala*  
to the fragile thread of our connection.

Reaching into my stash of Spanish,  
I produce *bienvenida aquí ustedes*,  
feeling sheepish about syntax and  
pronunciation, but only briefly  
because of what comes next:  
the three of us hugging fiercely  
right there in the bead aisle  
at Michael's on Colerain Avenue.

## Drive-Up Window

(by *Don Fleming*)

Rushed through traffic;  
Six cars already in the queue!  
At least my rear-view mirror shows  
I just beat out two more!  
Making sure my bagel's right  
I present my card.  
The clerk waves me off:  
"It's already paid."  
"Huh?"  
"The person in front of you."  
My eyes flash forward but  
That car and its person are gone.  
Above the clerk's mask  
I see a girl's eyes squint in smile,  
And I feel my eyes squint too.  
My spirit is renewed!

## The L-Virus

(by *Zohreh Zand*)

The virus spreads like a wildfire  
It doesn't care who you are  
Why should it?

I wish for a virus  
That kills only one thing  
Hate  
I wish for a virus  
that infects people with  
Love and respect

Creating a world  
Without fear

I would proudly say  
I'm infected with the L-virus  
Come, let's have a party

On the news we would see  
the spread of the L-virus  
And we would cheer

Scientists would create L-virus vaccines  
For those immune to the L-infection

There will be people doubting  
Love and respect  
Talking of what it could do to you  
Creating doubt and fear

Even with that I will have patience  
As love is the best infection.

## In the Melting Time

(by **Mary Pierce Brosmer**)

We are vulnerable  
in our distractedness  
even the best of us  
hopelessly tangled.

Everything is managed,  
measured. Feeling itself  
is a function distorted.

How shall we tell children  
whose souls lie  
in the way of this week's  
lies, lurid banners  
flown by armies of locusts?

I cannot see the melting  
happening but, tell me,  
how long will it be until  
the rich move their mansions  
inland, and the poor are  
allowed to live in the ruins?

## Vocation Reflection

(by **Mary Pierce Brosmer**)

*"Find structures for collective work which  
allow the heart to come forward."* Paul Uhlig

Yes, sir, I have and still  
work to create such structures  
(having no luck finding them).

Heart-soul-body homes  
for working-toward-goodness.

Doing so still feels  
(after all these years)  
something like what I see from  
my window today: in the distance  
two trees, white-blooming for all their worth

circumscribed by acres of brown tower-trees  
refusing bloom: theirs and everyone's.

## Our Representatives (by **Don Fleming**)

We vote for them for what they know;  
We trust they're fair of word to show  
Our nation's welfare is their goal;  
To leave us free to tend the foal  
Secure in mind we're safe in tow.

Now shocked we find when bullies crow  
Some silent shrink, some overthrow,  
Trade power for public trust they stole.  
We voted for them?

Some, when ordered, their conscience stow,  
Despite it's us their jobs they owe!  
Time's too short for the victim's role,  
We ought unseat the two-faced whole,  
And find true public servants so,  
We can vote for them.

## Note Well the Morals of Them You Befriend (by **Don Fleming**)

Note well the morals of them you befriend.  
Motives are simple to hide in the sedge.  
Choose poorly and risk a disturbing end.

Harsh words can stir till emotions ascend.  
They'll pass litmus tests with their strongest pledge.  
Note well the morals of them you befriend.

Actions will show what they really intend.  
Don't ignore deeds at morality's ledge.  
Choose poorly and risk a disturbing end.

Some say: The rules I can artfully bend,  
since my cause is worthy a winner's edge.  
Note well the morals of them you befriend.

Be not surprised at the depths they'll descend:  
Peace and justice smashed by the strongman's  
sledge.  
Choose poorly and risk a disturbing end.

To foment hate between you and a friend  
Honest difference they'll drive like a wedge.  
Note well the morals of them you befriend.  
Choose poorly and risk a disturbing end.

## POEMS:

### DESMOND BROWN

Desmond Brown is a native of Cincinnati, Ohio, adopted by his late mother, Anna Elizabeth Brown. With the help of her six biological children, Desmond "GhettoKry" Brown has gathered a wealth of knowledge and agape love and will and drive to make a difference wherever he roams speaking the kryz of the ghetto.

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### FRESH THE POET

Fresh The Poet is a female writer from Cincinnati, Ohio. She uses poetry and songwriting as a form of therapy to express her personal outlook on life and letting the words be her resistance to adversity.

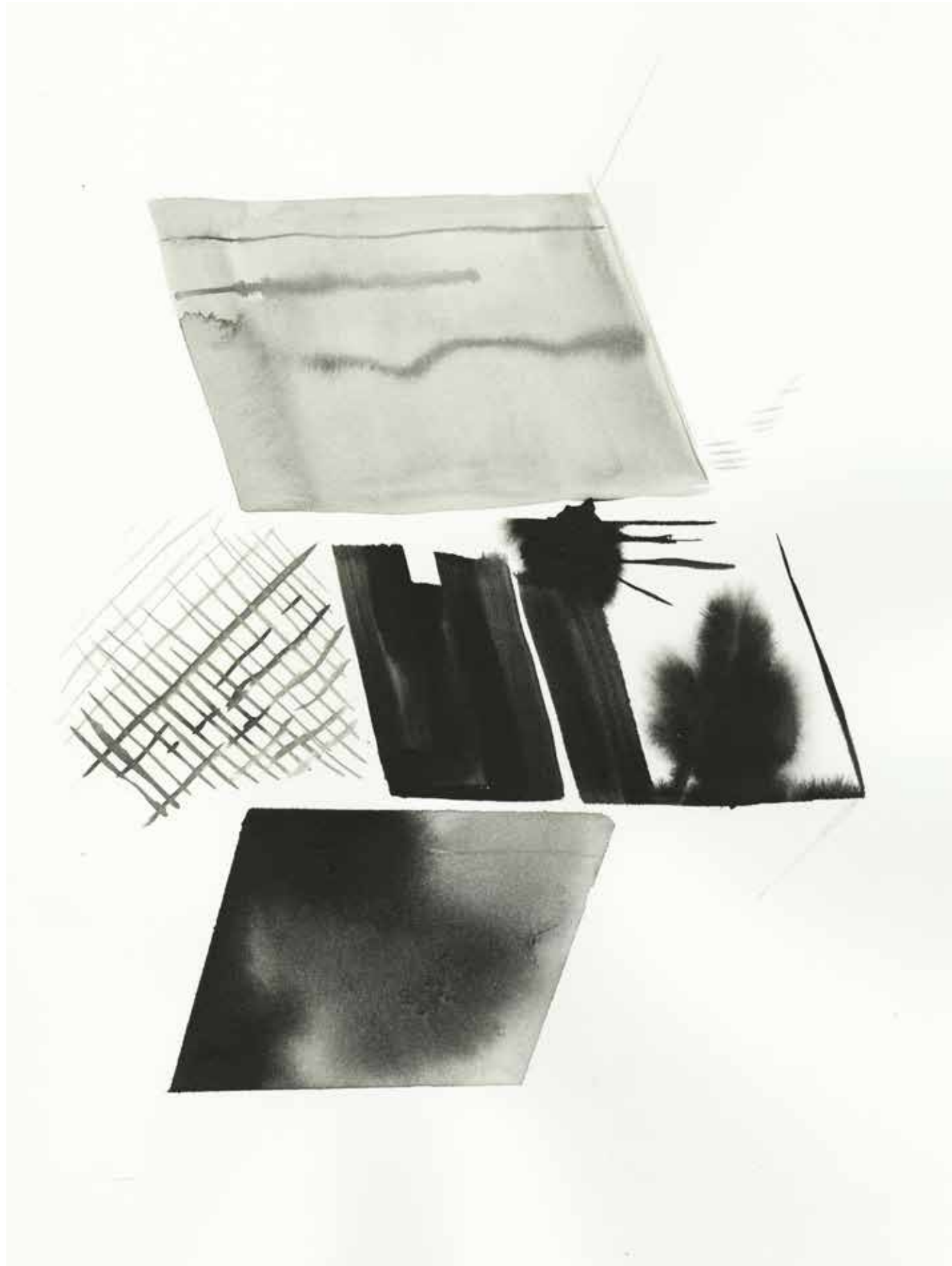
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## DRAWING:

### GOLD BRISTOW

Gold Bristow is a queer illustrator working out of Cincinnati, Ohio. He primarily works with ink and watercolor, and when he is not making art he is usually cooking or petting his dog. Gold specializes in narrative and editorial illustration, mainly on the subject of gender and queer culture, but also works in other areas of social justice.

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## HELL WALLZ

(by *Desmond Brown*)

The gates were shut for 1000 and 55 days.  
 There were no females on my block. And all my jewelry was made of chain.  
 Niggas was telling stories of been theres and done thats.  
 I heard the songs of boss-players, big-ballers and cool-cats.  
 The old school was trying to penetrate the head of the new school.  
 New school was stressing they're one and only rule: no rules.  
 Money sources went up in smoke like cigarette packs.  
 While the nigga hide the green, they openly smoke the blacks.  
 Beware of all attacks! Homemade knives meant to be stuck in the back.  
 White boys in here claiming sets and thinking they're black.  
 My home has no welcome mat. Four walls, no incoming calls.  
 The only thing I own is two shirts, three pants and six pairs of drawls.  
 Sixty nigga sharing two showers and four stalls.  
 Teardrops falling over pictures of maw-maw and paw-paws.  
 The niggas that was in debt, relied on incoming bets.  
 Everyone has an account. But nobody can write a check.  
 The Blue-geese was dropping niggas off like babies.  
 Eighty-five-percent-law-crazy.  
 Jody is at home fucking our ladies.  
 This shit was getting real shady.  
 Because nobody wants to sleep here,  
 Nobody wants to eat here.  
 Cause nobody wants to be here.  
 Half these niggas done been here for years.  
 Separated. Never to get back to their family, friends or peers.  
 Discrimination. Confused. Labeled as a "queer".  
 Drinking up another nigga nutshake like beer.  
 Holidays were feasted over noodles and jack-mac.  
 Signs on the walls told me the phones were tapped.  
 Keeping it real, you know a lot of niggas going to come back.  
 They rather be herded like cows and doped up off prozac.  
 I came to understand that my good-times were their bad-times.  
 While they were running from one-time I was listening to 2-Pac and Biggie rhyme.  
 See, they rather be in the chow lines.  
 Then on the streets sniffing up the coke lines.  
 Running to the dope man. Using their broken lines.  
 I have seen the same type of niggas get split with an Olympic plate.  
 Revenge is the best while he is lifting weights...  
 So I congratulate niggas that been there and done that  
 and never step back into them... HELL WALLZ!!!!

## Life Matters

(by *Fresh The Poet*)

They tried to say that racism is dead  
They lied  
Cost of being black?  
Some people paying with their lives.  
If I vow for peace  
will it make a difference when I die?  
Probably not if I ain't rich  
cause they don't listen to deprived.  
You gotta open up ya eyes  
To see, these are the times.  
Never wanted us to read  
Now we can read between the lines.  
More than they can define.  
Cause who are YOU to decide  
That Being black is not easy.  
Well I wear this skin with pride.  
Still, tears in our eyes.  
But Don't let that be deceptive.  
My culture acting crazy cause  
We tired of the rejection.  
And we fight for our rights,  
They try and alter our perception.  
Well, get on the ground with us  
So you can see from our perspective.  
That we in a world of judgement.  
By society or judges.  
Black. White. Gay. Ugly.  
Try to dictate who we loving.  
We should try to stick together  
Put it out there in the public  
And educate ourselves  
Cause what they tell us can't be trusted.  
My life matters.

## Fed Up

(by *Desmond Brown*)

I'm faced with the same drama everyday  
With not enough money to pay my way  
The invisible chain since the early days  
Is holding my people down til we decay  
I'm tired of being slapped  
I'm out of cheeks to turn  
Made too many mistakes  
I'm out of lessons to learn  
But why should I steadily blame the white man?  
When I'm slipping in my own blood  
and being held down by black hands  
Help me Father which way do I go  
When I only see one road  
And it points to the ghetto  
Where my people is down and out  
dusted and disgusted  
Can't pay their rent because their pockets are busted  
They encourage us to open the door to opportunity  
But opportunity is killing people in my community  
That's why I said shit this nigga is fed up  
I was faced with 30 years but a nigga still ain't gave up  
Your honor you ever heard about that black life  
Where you only got one choice between a gun and a pocket knife  
The judge asked me was it the struggle  
Or the greed in your eyes that made your ass hustle?  
See you give a nigga a gun and he will show you his greed  
Give him pen and paper  
He'll roll him some weed  
But they don't see the bad luck in our situation  
Curse with single parent, drug addiction, high blood pressure, aids and  
No education  
We know the problems but what is the solution  
We blaze our grenadier and swishers to help the pollution  
The biggest word we know is  
Millimeter, penitentiary and cemetery  
And teenage pregnancy is on the rise  
Every January  
And these niggas leaving their sons behind without showing them the game  
Then their mothers are getting stressed out and depend on mr cocaine  
So what is that nigga to do?  
When his stomach is touching his back and his feet are too big for his shoes  
He puts the burden in his own backpack and thinks it's cool  
Commence in selling dope and drop out of school  
Nobody showed him the way

So he tried one on his own  
Made the wrong turn  
He's just a long way from home  
See where was his daddy at?  
He wasn't there to show him a plan  
Where one race was the target  
And we were on the wrong end  
I'm tired of my young ones' faces on my shirt  
My dream was to stop marching  
So many callouses My feet hurt  
Here ye Here ye!!!!  
The system don't work  
If you are against the pixie army  
Hiding the zip code of your birth  
Hello I'm GhettoKry  
Speaking the tears of the ghetto  
My truth hurts

***POEM:***

**MICHAEL BURNHAM**

Once, to protest the closure of public restrooms during Washington Park's "renovation", Michael Burnham read the book *Everyone Poops* while he sat on a toilet outside 3CDC's office. Some say he's the grandpa of our alt-theatre scene but that ain't true. It's grand-uncle? Maybe.

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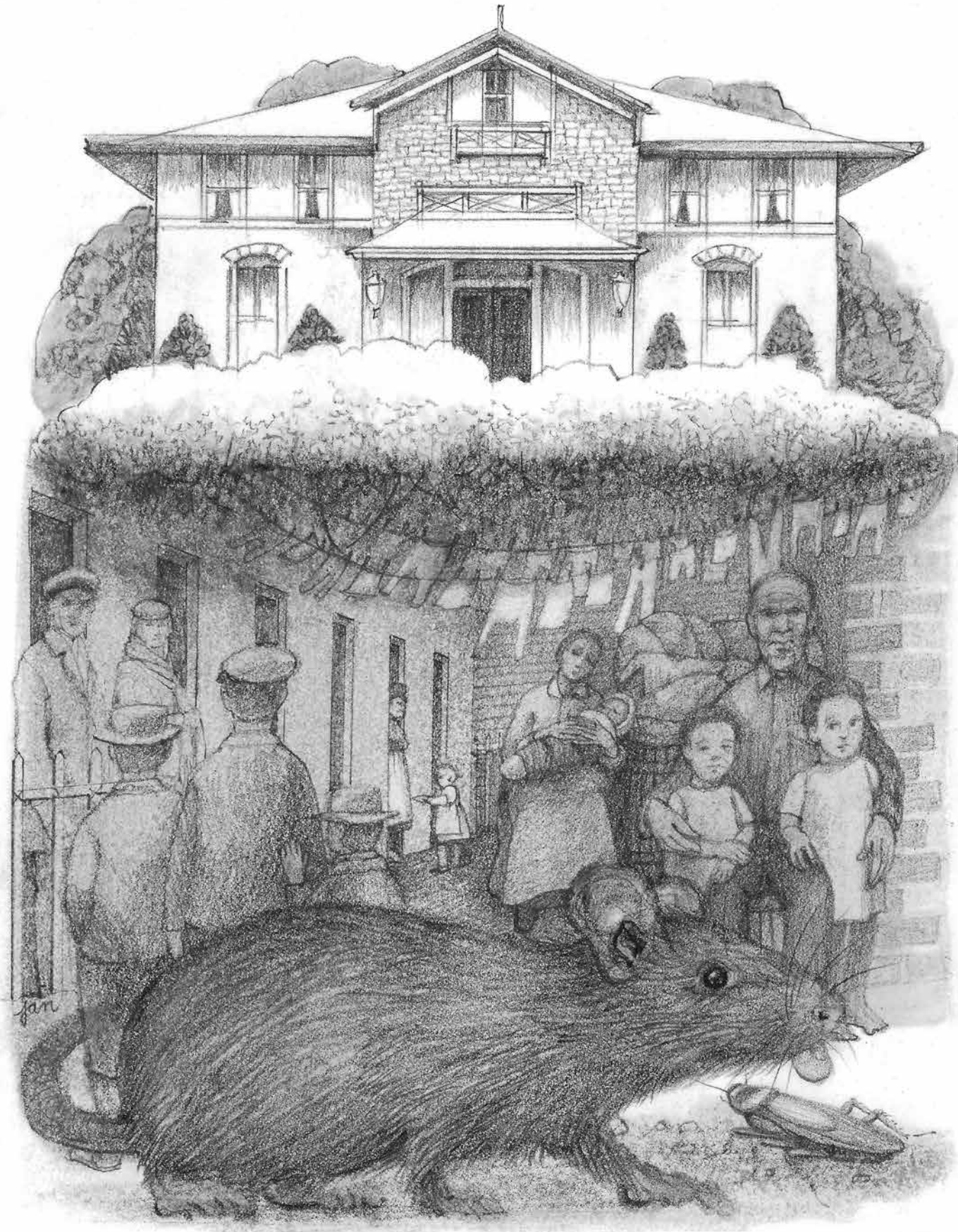
***DRAWING:***

**JAN BROWN CHECCO**

Jan Brown Checco works in her Clifton studio, choosing from a variety of mediums, depending on the specifications and needs of the commission. Paint or pencils, clay or glass, computer or paper, cloth or found objects - it's all on the creative palette for her artwork. She's organized and directed international artists exchange projects, designed and managed public art installations, and has worked as a resident artist at a variety of schools and organizations.

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Jan Brown Checco

## Chapter 7, Footnote 5: How the Park Was Named \*

So she says,  
“Wanna have a picnic, honey?”  
And he says,  
“Sure. Sounds good. Let’s go.”  
And she says,  
“Got any particular place in mind, because I don’t really care.”  
And he replies,  
“Maybe some place with a good long view.  
Wait.  
Ok.  
Stop there  
and before I tell it  
let me explain my own joke.”

*Really?*

Yeah, really.

*Ok, I guess.*

Ok then.  
Back up a hundred years  
and know this:

He owned it all  
or most of it,  
that nice white man from Covington,  
William P. Devou. Jr.,  
he owned it all  
or at least enough  
that you could hardly buy or sell any of it  
without him.

*Wait.*  
*What is it we’re talking here?*

Well, you could visit it  
if the interstate highway hadn’t swallowed it all  
or almost it all,  
not to mention you could see it  
from the hill by his family’s palace...

*Palace?*

Ok, ok, it was just a house – alright?–  
but a big house

and you could see the world he owned from there  
except,  
of course,  
he didn't live there,  
in that house,  
that big house.

Nope,  
he lived in another kind of palace,  
across the river and away downtown,  
deep in the tenderloin.

Yep,  
he'd much rather live  
among things  
that he could own alone.  
You know how it is,  
some firstborn sons just won't go home.

Turns out  
that  
what he owned  
were tenements  
and a bunch of whorehouses, too.  
The brothels were fancy, thanks to their madams,  
but the tenements?  
Well,  
I guess the word would be squalid.

*As in...*

As in  
no indoor plumbing,  
as in  
raw sewage puddling  
out there  
in the place you could call a yard.

But hey,  
he did all the repair work all by himself  
and you can't ask for more than that,  
or at least you can't if you're redlined or poor  
and by the lack of a choice you live there.  
And just so you know,  
they always paid what they owed him.

*Because?*

Because if they didn't they were gone,  
evicted,  
and good luck to them then  
'cause there wasn't anyplace else they could live.

*But squalor?*

Look,  
I'm sure he'd have fixed those tenements up  
if there was any way in white-people hell  
that a man like him could afford to.  
And even if he'd done it,  
which I admit  
most said he could've,  
it wouldn't have done any good.

*I beg your pardon?*

Excuse me.  
I'm talking.  
Have a little patience here,  
please.

I mean  
by the time he'd have passed those costs on to his tenants,  
which everyone knows is how this thing works,  
his tenants could not have begun to pay him to live there,  
and where else is a black man to go  
with a wife and some kids in tow!

See it now?  
By not fixing things up and thus adding expenses,  
he was doing those poor folks a favor.  
And when that kindly man finally died  
in nineteen hundred and thirty seven  
he took his two hundred and forty pieces of property  
worth  
nine hundred sixty three thousand six hundred and thirty dollars  
and another  
one hundred five thousand nine hundred and sixty one dollars  
which was all of his personal wealth  
and willed it south to Kentucky  
so his brother  
could stay  
in the family home  
'til he died...

*Wait! Wait just a minute.  
Didn't you call it a palace?*

Well, now I'm calling it what it was  
and what it was was their home.  
And when the brother died  
what it became after that was a park.

*Ok. My turn. Hold on for a second.  
Let's update that number a little.  
Today we'd be talking  
twenty one million two hundred ninety five thousand five hundred dollars and  
eighty one cents, give or take a dime or two...*

You sound like you think that's real money  
but it's really not.  
Hell, the CEO of Kroger makes more than that in a year,  
and I mean year in year out forever.

*No. Wait.*

And he gave it all for a park.

*That's what I'm saying.  
See?  
What if he had willed,  
say,  
the two hundred and forty pieces of property  
to the people who lived there  
and  
maybe  
willed,  
too,  
the one million nine hundred sixty two thousand three hundred ninety seven dollars and  
seventy two cents, give or take a quarter or two –  
because that's what it was in today's money –  
to those same people, too?*

Oh, please, child, it's time you grew up.  
Didn't I tell you who lived there?  
Hookers,  
and madams,  
and a huge lot of –  
to use the preferred phraseology  
of your former president LBJ –  
hookers  
and madams and "negras"

I mean c'mon  
god and satan  
both of them know  
none of those three  
not hookers  
not madams  
not negras  
are good at arithmetic  
let alone math.  
And as for running a business,  
well, maybe the madams,  
but no hookers or negras could do it,  
at least not back then, ok?  
So get off our guy's case and know this,  
the man used his money  
to give his hometown  
a hillside with flowers  
and trees  
and a good long view forever.

Now,  
if you don't mind,  
let's return to the place where we started  
and quit going on about what you could see if it were still there  
from the park that bears our guy's name  
and let me finish my dad joke,  
my bad joke,  
ok?

*Yeah.  
Sure,  
I guess.  
Ok.*

So she says, "Where do you wanna go picnic, hon?"  
And he says, "I don't care, baby. Devou?"

*(Note: Poem written in response to a chapter from the "Race and the City: Work, Community, and Protest in Cincinnati, 1820-1970", edited by Henry Louis Taylor, Jr.)*

***POEMS:***

**MICHEL CASSIR**

Michel Cassir is a French-Lebanese poet and a scientist by profession. Author of 27 literary works, he is translated in about fifteen languages. He created in 2001 and still directs a collection of poetry “Levée d’Ancre”, including more than 140 publications. He has translated several Latino American and Spanish poets. In 2008, Michel received “Le Jasmin d’Argent” prize for his entire poetical work.

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**CAROL FEISER LAQUE (1944-2022)**

Carol Feiser Laque, PhD, was an English professor, writer, poet, mentor, publisher, patron of the arts. Born in San Francisco, she earned her B.A. and M.A. from Wittenberg University in Springfield, OH, and her PhD from the University of Cincinnati (UC). For 36 years she taught comparative literature at UC and led their poetry workshop. She also taught English at Xavier University, founded Circumference Press, published new poets, and founded a writers’ workshop at Cincinnati’s Lighthouse Youth and Family Services for two decades. “Everyone, no matter who they are, is a poem in progress.”

***DRAWING:***

**AMANDA CHECCO**

Amanda Checco is a French-American artist whose interactive, publicly accessible work is expressed through a wide range of media including set design, printed publication, murals, and video production. Travel and gaining new perspectives through cultural exchange inspire her work.

Amanda lives in Paris working as an artist, designer, and decorator.

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## In Reverse

(by *Michel Cassir*)

walk in Beirut  
in lunar disorder  
towards miraculous fishing  
in the starry garbage  
walk through the debris  
of exalted fireworks  
by gods never seen  
walk in equivocal mirrors  
of casinos  
migrating from Switzerland to this country  
and from it to the stain  
walk with one eye  
bumping into unreality  
and the other that resurrects  
the traces of exploded bodies  
walk into a dream catcher  
woven in the fusion  
of cement and epidermis  
continue walking blindly  
in the memory of footsteps  
that persist releasing  
your lost breath  
your brain detects one by one  
the workings of the lure that  
celebrated  
in every intonation  
reverse so as not to cry  
the loose substance of your eye  
which has seen so much that it no longer sees  
anything but that involuntary dance  
Beirut would be a mask  
that walks all over you  
that you will have crushed  
that suffocates you saves you  
will it disappear?

(Translated from French)

## Arrière

(by *Michel Cassir*)

*marche dans Beyrouth  
sur le trouble lunaire  
vers la pêche miraculeuse  
aux ordures étoilées  
marche dans les débris  
de feux d'artifice exaltés  
par des dieux jamais vus  
marche dans les miroirs  
équivoques de casinos  
migrant de Suisse à ce pays  
de celui-ci à la souillure  
marche avec un œil  
qui se cogne à l'irréalité  
et l'autre qui ressuscite  
les traces de corps explosés  
marche en attrape-rêve  
tissé dans la fusion  
de ciment et d'épidermes  
marche encore à l'aveuglette  
dans le souvenir de pas  
qui persistent déroulant  
ton souffle perdu  
ton cerveau décèle un à un  
les rouages du leurre  
que l'on célèbre  
sous toutes les intonations  
arrière pour ne pas pleurer  
la substance lâche de ton œil  
qui en a tant vu qu'il ne voit plus  
que la danse involontaire  
Beyrouth serait un masque  
qui te marche dessus  
que tu écrases qui t'étouffe  
te sauve disparaît-il ?*

(French original version)

## Pearl Harbor

(by *Carol Feiser Laque*)

A harbor full of pearls  
as beautiful as ships  
sink from bombs as  
beautiful as pearls falling  
as men die into a deep  
memory echoing a  
nightmare from pearls  
dropped as bombs.

How can I wear  
my pearls unstrung  
dropped as bombs  
lost in salty, bloody  
water oblivious destroyed  
a living beauty  
to a forever death  
around my empty neck

## Kulture Klub 2021

(by *Carol Feiser Laque*)

They have just fed me up!  
My hands hold angels; my feet in the dirt.  
People are orgasmic, frantic, hostile.  
The crowd is thrilled by fear.

My hands hold angels; my feet in the dirt.  
The lonely, bullied by certainty, bully.  
The crowd is thrilled by fear.  
Destroying culture is the fashion.

The lonely, bullied by certainty, bully.  
People are orgasmic, frantic, hostile.  
Destroying culture is the fashion.  
They have just fed me up!

## Told by Agnes Hamos (1928 – 2021) at Seder 2018 held in Chicago at The Clare in the Oxford Room

(by *Carol Feiser Laque*)

When the Nazi soldiers  
came with the flour,  
my mother hid me in the  
cellar where I was  
to be totally quiet.

My mother baked the best  
Bread. The German soldiers  
suspected her truth, but  
they brought the ingredients  
for the bread anyway.

As soon as the smell  
of fresh bread went into  
the streets, the soldiers  
returned for what was  
a war time feast.

We survived the Holocaust  
in Budapest through my mother's  
courage, bravery, cleverness,  
and her wonderful bread. Now  
85 years later, I tell our story.

## POEMS:

### STELLA CHILDRESS

Stella Childress was born and raised in Northern Kentucky and draws inspiration for her writing from nature. She works at a local library, helping connect the community to more than just books. When she is not at work or outside you can find her admiring farm animals or curled up on her green velvet chair with her two cats Moss and Margaret.

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### LARRY SIMPSON

Larry Simpson spends most of his time writing, hiking, doing photography, and visiting his four daughters and twelve grandkids. Coming soon is his next book of poems and photos, *The Dinosaur Manifesto*.

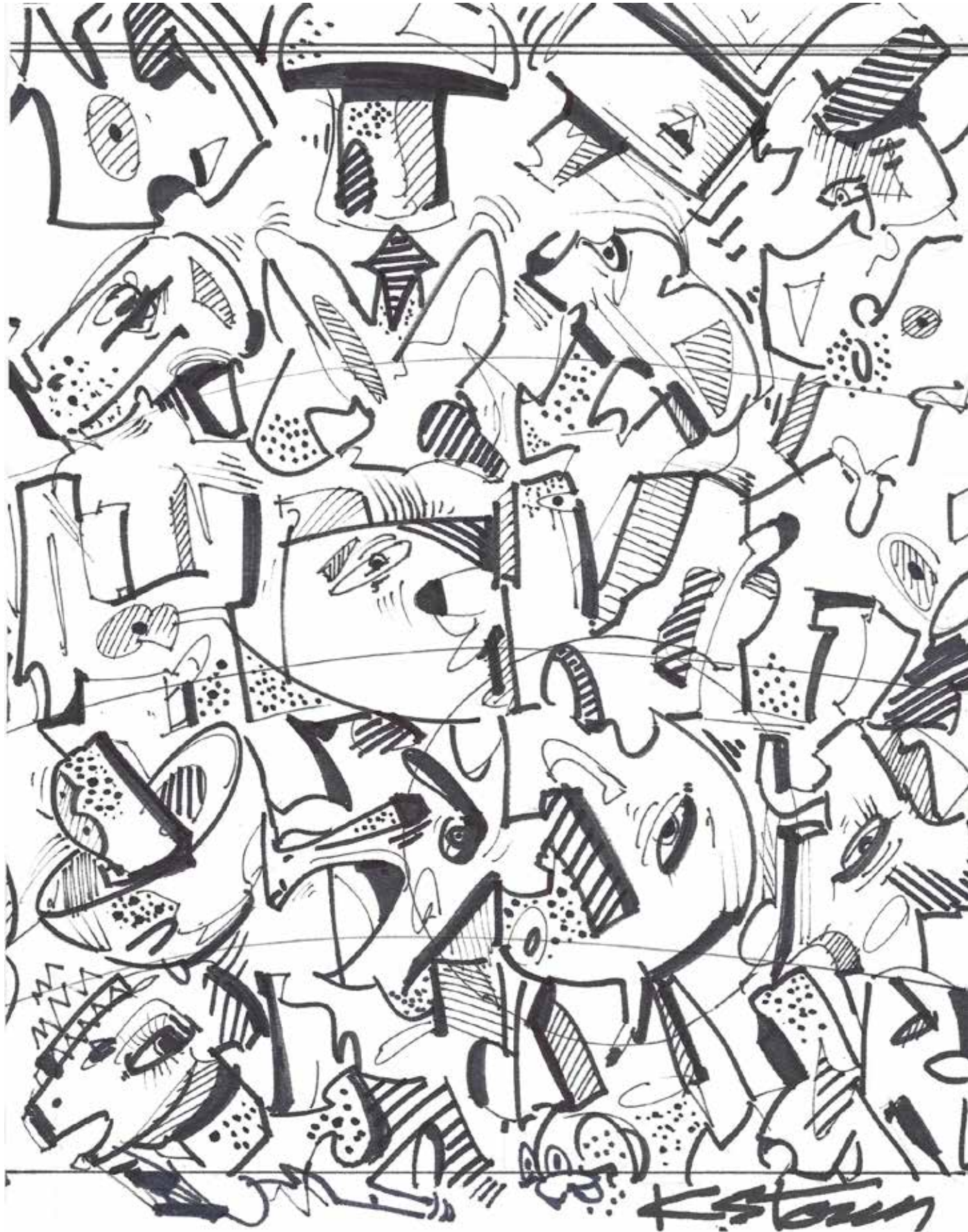
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## DRAWING:

### KURT W. STORCH

Cincinnati artist Kurt W. Storch lives and works in the Camp Washington area. His wide range of works reflect creative process over outcome.

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## Jurassic Car Parts

(by *Larry Simpson*)

This metal monster was made in man's image  
by a steady hand, and determined vision,  
his face concealed behind an isinglass mask,  
he assembled steel bones and chrome and glass.

The tableau tells of terrible creatures  
not found in science nor myth nor nature.  
From an iron mountain, they were born and forged  
by anthracite fires into primeval hordes.

It tells of battles between giants, eye for an eye,  
tooth for a tooth, lie for a lie and distrust for truth,  
lust for power, lust for fuel, lust for fame, the proof of a fool,  
smoke and mirrors, ice to rain, sea to sea, hurricanes.

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, boom to bust, steel to rust.  
Too big to fail, too heavy to stand, all fall down, cities to sand.

It's a dream of a future hidden in the past,  
written in sand like a serpent's tracks  
read by the light of a crescent moon,  
a dust devil whispers, it may come true too soon.

## Nomad Is an Island

(by *Larry Simpson*)

It's hard when you went somewhere  
and you just had to leave  
but there's nowhere to go and no one to be,  
so, you come back to look, and everyone's gone,  
lost in the shuffle like a bad poker song  
and you find yourself on an island that feels like a home.  
You wave at the people with a sign that says help  
but no one sees you and you're sinking in silt,  
hanging from a bridge with no safety belt.  
They throw you a nickel and throw you a dime  
but don't pay no attention any damn time.  
Cars keep going faster running through lights,  
And you feel a disaster coming with night.  
So you melt into the mushrooms and sleep in the weeds  
waking up to noon sun and a mouth full of seeds.  
You dreamed a dusk moon that tastes like cream cheese,  
But the hunger inside you leaves no room to smile,  
And the thick waves of traffic are too choppy to sail.

## Freeing the Mess Inside

(by *Stella Childress*)

She smells like rosemary  
sharp, earthy, and tree-like  
with a touch of remembrance;

And when she walks it's like the  
ground is breathing her  
feeling her  
lifting her;

But in her middle  
is a charcoal blackness  
and sometimes it spills out  
onto pages  
in jagged lines  
and splotchy shadows

And she lets it;

When it rises to her lips  
and fingertips  
she does not keep it  
trapped with  
no room to fade  
she lets it free to be  
what it needs to be.

## Safe People

(by *Stella Childress*)

I was hugged into hugging,  
innumerably, by fire night and  
day light

with steadied arms,  
their words wrapped around me

and in the ember of embrace,  
I could feel again.

## When the Black Moths Come to Visit

(by *Stella Childress*)

Seven  
hundred  
and two  
moons ago,  
the black moths  
first bloomed in my belly.  
With their whispery wings they  
flooded me. My spark dimmed, and  
I became a shadow, with so little life left  
in me. They somersaulted my body, turning  
my stomach, their residency down to bones, made  
my limbs weak and heavy with grief. I thought they would  
never leave. But they did. One day they fluttered away, if only  
for a moment, it was a relief for my person not to be in their  
twirling blackness, but in a fresh glowing light. Through  
the many moons they have come back sometimes,  
and I open wide to let them rest, leaving me  
pressed like poppies, but in my  
care, is when they  
take to the  
sky.

## Lincoln's Chair

(by *Larry Simpson*)

Lincoln has fallen asleep in his chair.  
It is not an easy chair.  
It's as hard to sit on as a split-rail fence.  
It is not an easy sleep.  
It is as hard as a pillow made of rock.  
It is not an easy war, and not an easy life.  
He dreams of an equation.  
On one side there is division, on the other, is addition.  
On one side there is black, on the other side there is white.  
On one side there is truth, on the other, lies.  
On one side there is blood, on the other, water.  
The equation is like a split rail fence,  
hard to build, easy to knock down, like a border.  
He dreams of a man behind a curtain.  
When Lincoln wakes, he says to himself,  
"Plenty of time to sleep, when this job is done."

## POEMS:

### VICKIE CIMPRICH

Recent poems and comments by Vickie Cimprich -- and by other contributors to  
this FABW 2022 -- can be seen at [www.lexpomo.com](http://www.lexpomo.com).

Vickie's collections *Pretty Mother's Home - A Shakeress Daybook* and *Contrary  
Wise* are available at [www.broadstonemedia.com](http://www.broadstonemedia.com) or [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com).

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### CHELI REUTTER

Cheli Reutter is a naturalized Cincinnati after having lived in greater Cincinnati  
for 23 years, 5 years longer than her native Detroit. She teaches literature and  
writing courses at the University of Cincinnati, where she is also director of the  
medical humanities and disability and society certificates and a prize-winning  
professor. She publishes prose writing on race, access, and social justice topics,  
but has only recently begun to send her poetry out into the world.

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## DRAWING:

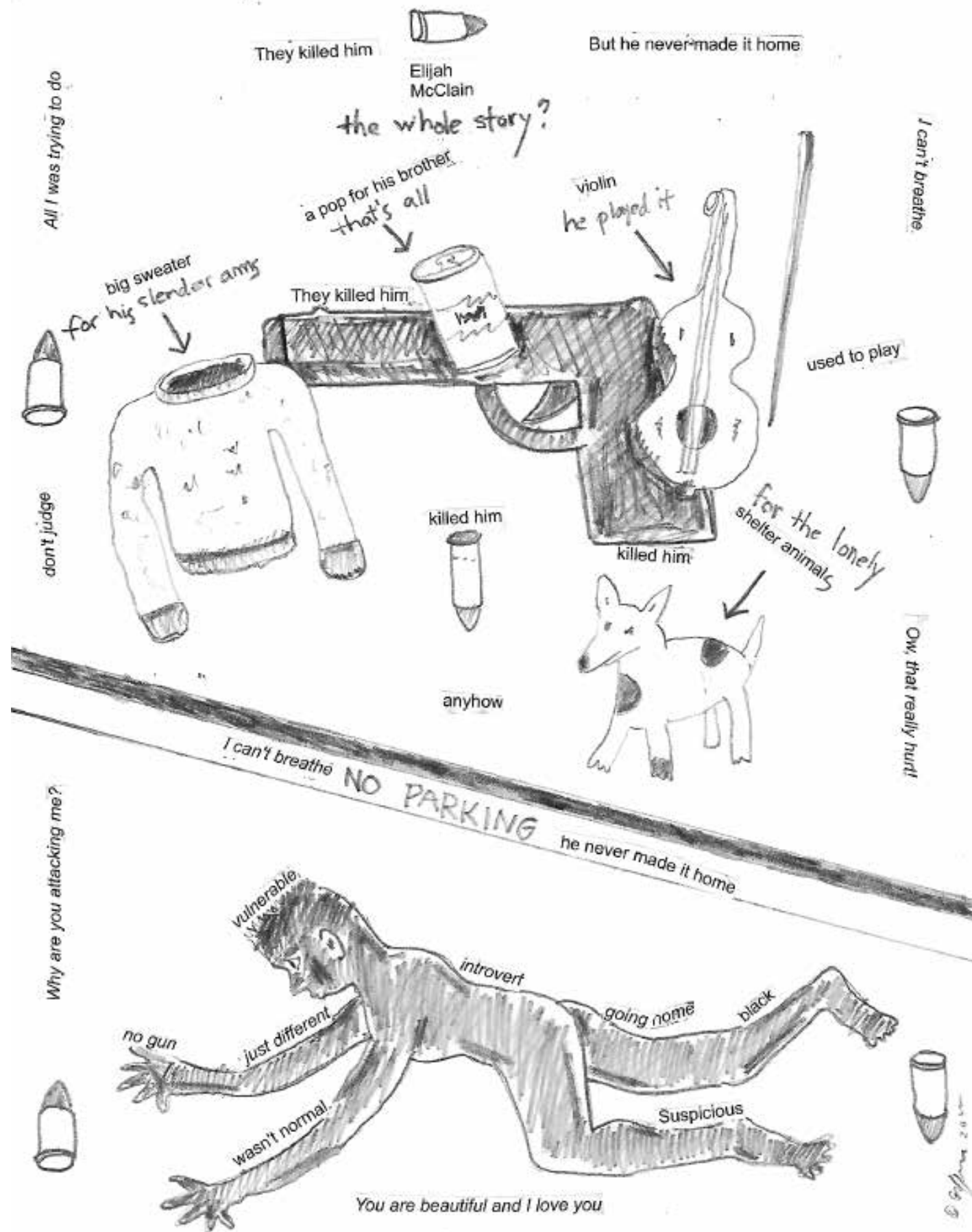
### GARY GAFFNEY

Gary Gaffney is a native of New Orleans, LA. He is Professor Emeritus, Art  
Academy of Cincinnati and has worked in a range of visual media.

Gary's current focus is on writing.

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## “I’m So Sorry…”

(by **Cheli Reutter**)

*I can't breathe.  
I have my ID right here.  
My name is Elijah McClain.  
That's my house.  
I was just going home.*

*I'm an introvert.  
I'm just different. That's all.  
I'm so sorry.  
I have no gun.  
I don't do that stuff.  
I don't do any fighting.*

*Why are you attacking me?  
I don't even kill flies!  
I don't eat meat!  
But I don't judge people.  
I don't judge people who  
Do eat meat. Forgive me.*

*All I was trying to do  
Was become better. I will  
Do it. I will do anything.  
Sacrifice my identity, I'll do it.*

*You all are phenomenal.  
You are beautiful and I love you.  
Try to forgive me.  
I'm a mood Gemini.  
I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.*

*Ow, that really hurt!  
You are all very strong.  
Teamwork makes the dream work.*

*Oh, I'm sorry,  
I wasn't trying to do that.  
I just can't breathe correctly.*

*These were Elijah's words.  
They killed him anyhow.  
He used to play violin  
For the animals at the shelter,  
So they wouldn't feel lonely.*

One night he went to the store  
To buy a pop for his brother--  
But he never made it home.  
He wore big sweaters and swung  
His slender arms when he walked.

He was black  
And he wasn't normal.  
They said he  
Looked  
Suspicious.

He said he was  
Sorry.  
They killed him  
Any  
(No officers were convicted of his  
murder)  
How.

*(Poem dedicated to Elijah McClain, his family, and all neuro-divergent, vulnerable, or multiply marginalized people who have experienced deep and state sanctioned harm.)*

From Aurora  
To New York City,  
And Cincinnati  
To Ferguson,

In December  
Of '21,  
Case still pending  
For his killers,  
We wonder if we'll  
Breathe again.

Elijah  
McClain,  
I'm so  
Sorry.

## Thinking of Henry Louis Gates, Jr. During Black History Month

(by **Vickie Cimprich**)

The ice may be just melting today, Dr. Gates,  
so I use my hiking stick as a cane  
for steadiness. I think of us both,  
the ways we walk, accommodating with finesse  
our different mobility issues.

As I hazard my way across one risky path,  
I picture you swaying, happy and dignified,  
alongside the animated lady playing gospel piano,  
in an episode of “The Black Church,”

and I hope no one will mistake me for a menace  
when I get back home, as the police once did you,  
on the sidewalk near your own front door.

## You Were Beloved

--For M. F.

I swear, mom liked Tara  
Better than me  
Cute and tan  
In corduroy jumpers  
And perfectly cuffed  
White bobby socks

And always soft spoken  
But giggly with kittens  
She called my mom  
"Mithis Gorton"  
Because she lisped  
And her d's were "t's"

She loved our piano  
And played tunes by ear  
Two years younger,  
She beat me at rummy  
Every single  
Time we played

I swear, dad loved Tara  
As much as me  
And how could I blame him  
Actually?  
I loved Tara  
Better than me

From the time she was six  
And wanted to teach  
All my stuffed animals  
How to read  
She'd place them all  
In a line on my pillow

Bear and Cat and  
Bunny and Gorilla  
She once taught Koala  
Geometry  
It's hard, years later  
When I finally see

The folks were kind of  
Racist, maybe  
Something in the

Tone when they  
Would say that "blacks were  
Moving in"

And "whites were moving  
Out in droves"  
"It's not the same  
Any more," they'd say  
But it wasn't that way  
That terrible day

When Tara got stopped  
By the five and ten  
She'd bought a poster  
For fifty-nine cents.  
I just got me  
A Baby Ruth bar

And some stickers for her—  
Puppies and stars  
(She loved scrapbooking  
And I loved her—  
Maybe like a  
Little Sister)

Out in the parking lot  
A man grabbed her arm  
"You're coming with me"  
He screamed at her  
He dragged her inside  
And I trotted behind

Bear-man said he  
Saw her steal it--  
But I coaxed her to open  
Her tan shaking hand  
And screamed back at bear-man  
To check her receipt

"Just get out of  
Here," he wheezed  
I don't remember  
Much but her wailing  
And crying all the way  
Home to my house

I lived closer  
And she was spending  
The night with me

Got to a play  
While her parents finally  
At the Fox Theater

Dad was livid  
"We're going back"  
Mom came too—  
With Tara in hand  
"How dare you accuse her?"  
Dad thundered at bear-man

"You are so big and  
Scary and mean--  
And she's a tiny  
Girl of ten  
By now, white clerk lady  
Came out from the counter

"I told him do it"  
She confessed  
"He's really just  
A teddy bear"  
Bear-man looked sheepish  
"How do you *both* dare?"

Dad thundered again,  
Alarmingly—  
And clerk lady  
Started to cry  
But then the lady  
Apologized

And dad said he hoped  
She really meant it  
And would never, ever  
Do it again  
Tara called her  
Parents that night

And cuddled Koala  
And Bunny tight  
Before bed  
She beat me again  
Three times  
At gin rummy

I remembered, my parents  
Would roll their eyes  
And say "that's not music"  
Of any kind"

Or "Black is not an  
Actual culture"

And now, I wonder-  
Why did they fight  
To make a tan child's  
Nightmare all right?  
How do I take this  
Into the night?

Tara, I hope  
You knew you were loved  
Though, I am certain,  
You figured out  
That we were not  
Not – racist

***POEMS:***

**CYNTHIA COLEBROOK**

Cynthia Perry Colebrook is a writer, poet, consultant to non-profit organizations. With her husband of 50 years they live in the mountains of Colorado. They have two daughters, five grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

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**MIKE ECK**

Brother, husband, father and grampa, Mike Eck has been married to Denise for 45 years and loves life. In 2010 he fell into volunteering in the local food justice movement, building bridges between people and between communities. His retirement includes journaling, writing essays and poetry.

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**MARILYN KREBS**

Marilyn Krebs has a Bachelor and a Master's degree in Music Education from CCM. Until 2020 she taught private piano and guitar lessons and preschool music. Marilyn loves poetry and sharing her poems is important to her.

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***DRAWING:***

**CARRIE PATE**

Carrie Pate's current work uses mixed media to explore the mystery of the soul's growth from interaction with life and death. Her work has been exhibited widely and has been in publications such as *Ceramics Ireland*, and *Art Forum*. Carrie holds a BFA from Miami University and an MFA from the University of Cincinnati/DAAP. She currently lives and works in Hamilton, Ohio.

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## Be the Calm

(by *Mike Eck*)

There is one Spirit  
called Peace  
it is like the calm  
eye of a hurricane

in the sea of life  
can you see the Spirit  
see the calm  
see Peace

We can feel hurricanes  
their anger, violence, destruction  
the power of hurricanes moves  
they lose power as they cross

borders of sea and land  
slowly time melts  
the hurricanes when  
the source of its power gone

We could not see hurricanes  
until We could lift ourselves  
above the storm above the  
land above the sea

We look down from above and see  
the border of the eye of the storm  
so look at life in a new way  
from above the storms of the day

Rise up  
feel the Spirit  
be the Peace be the Calm  
be the eye in the hurricane

(Poem inspired by *VITALITY* buzz,  
bliss + books)

## Yes, Onions Grow in the Ground

(by *Cynthia Colebrook*)

"Yes, onions grow in the ground"  
She thought, "You do astound.  
How many years you've been around?  
This simple fact, you've just now found?"

The Garden Club ladies, not just a few  
Had come to visit, with cameras, too  
They smiled and hugged, some kisses blew  
She had to wonder if they were being true.

The cucumber flowers were cheery yellow  
The group by now had begun to mellow  
A bull nearby started to bellow  
A grandchild along was a happy fellow.

Broccoli, beans and every beet  
Were standing up to the summer heat  
"Taste these tomatoes, they're really sweet!"  
She hoped they would not begin to compete.

The okra, of course, was not recognized  
The basil appreciated, way over-sized  
The slugs and the rain were oft criticized  
As gardeners all, they soon empathized.

"The cabbages next will be cut into slaw,"  
She said as a crow let out a loud caw  
The ladies continued to verbalize awe  
At each and every thing that they saw.

"And what's that?" one pointing said  
"I've never seen vegetables, only read"  
Several thoughts sped through her head  
She felt inside a rising dread

To think that women who garden with glee  
Don't recognize vegetables, how can it be?  
This disconnect with Earth must be taken  
seriously  
If we are ever again to live harmoniously.

## Supply Chain

(by *Marilyn Krebs*)

In the early morning I hear the jets crisscrossing the sky,  
Carrying mostly cargo to the airport nearby.  
Sometimes there's the deep, haunting foghorn sound,  
Of barges on their Ohio River run.  
More often, the long blast of a train splits the sleepy stillness  
Warning all to clear the tracks as it passes beneath the hills.

With the light comes the sounds of trucks on the roads,  
Bumping over pavement with their heavy loads.  
Carrying fresh food for the supermarket  
Blinking stop lights can't dispel their racket.  
All of this to bring our food and fancy  
More than we need but to boost the economy.

Once in backyard gardens our vegetables were grown  
Satisfaction from the work of our hands, crafting at home.  
We bought from our local family store  
Instead of goods from a far off shore.  
Once we could walk to buy all we would need.  
Before we were chained to advertising greed.

## Peace Puzzle

(by *Mike Eck*)

Life is like a thousand  
piece jigsaw puzzle  
we come in shapes and  
colors and sizes

join with others  
to make beautiful  
and whole what  
began as just ice

that make no sense  
until you put one  
together with another  
and another

became you and me and us  
we all fit together  
one piece at a time to  
make peace forever more

start at the edge  
meet me at the  
corner the clusters  
come together and

(*Poem inspired by  
VITALITY Cincinnati*)

## Gleaners

(by *Mike Eck*)

Reduce food waste  
get a big tax deduction  
bigger than Zero  
should we feed people  
food going to Waste?

help feed hungry people  
farm fresh food  
come and see  
the Gleaners clean  
the field fill

hearts with joy  
fill empty bellies  
with farm fresh food  
for all that makes no  
sense as you

measure fruit in pounds  
gleaners in hours wagons  
and wheels in miles and  
it makes no  
sense until you

measure the fruit of the  
Spirit in buckets of tears  
and joy and rings  
of smiles and laughter  
and signs of Peace

when the Gleaners go  
home to measure  
what closed the gap  
from sunrise to sunset  
with love

(*Poem inspired by Sister Judy  
and the Book of Ruth*)

## Balance on the Shore

(by *Cynthia Colebrook*)

Here we sit  
by the shore  
on vacation  
when less is more

Scads of people  
color galore  
"beware the riptide"  
lifeguards implore

For shells and pebbles  
the children explore  
others build castles  
like Elsinore

Swimming and walking  
with those they adore  
building an appetite  
for picnics in store

This human commotion  
is never a bore  
kept in check  
on the National Seashore

For once, it's in balance  
the ocean is more  
the humans are humbled  
waves pound the shore.

## The Lifeguard's Whistle

(by *Cynthia Colebrook*)

The lifeguard's  
sharp, shrill whistle  
distinct and occasional  
in the steady, incessant  
roll of the waves  
is a rude intrusion  
a siren sound of warning

While it may be required  
an important signal for safety  
it's about as welcome  
as one's own conscience  
calling for moderation

This proclivity for excess  
this all-American way  
of having more and doing more  
consequences be damned  
is tamed on the beach  
by the wind  
and the waves  
by the tides  
and the sand  
and the lifeguard's whistle.

***POEMS:***

**RITA COLEMAN**

Rita Coleman writes in rural Greene County in Southwest Ohio. She has two books of poetry, *Mystic Connections* (2009) and *And Yet* (2017). Rita holds degrees in English Literature and in Creative Writing and is a long-time student of Cincinnati Poet Laureate Emerita Pauletta Hansel.

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**BARBARA GRIMSLEY**

Barbara Grimsley a local poet, works as a Senior Writer for Shattles Communications, a Cincinnati-based full-service marketing communications agency. She lives with her husband and two daughters, a constant inspiration and source of hope for a better world.

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**TIM REISERT**

Tim Reisert lives and teaches in Cincinnati, Ohio. He participates with the Ohio Writing Project. His poems have appeared in *Root & Star*.

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***DRAWING:***

**APRIL HUERTA**

April Huerta is a Mexican American bisexual woman who is a first generation graduate from the Art Academy of Cincinnati. She is an artist, public service worker for Fairfield Lane Library, and an activist. She strives to create an inclusive space for LGBTQ+ Latinx people in the Butler County area.

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April Huerta

## For My Daughters

(by *Barbara Grimsley*)

I hope you have the courage to ask,  
and I hope someone has the courage to listen.  
I hope if you have the need to speak, you can  
say it loudly  
so someone hears, cares and believes.  
I hope you have the patience to accept others  
as they are  
and have the strength to accept yourself.  
I hope you can see yourself for who you are.  
It's often quite prettier than you imagine  
or at least stronger than you may believe today.  
I hope you will always try.

## Powers

(by *Tim Reisert*)

My daughter, who has made  
her own amulet of cloth cord  
tied around a playground rock dusted  
with purple chalk, requests my help,  
holds her hair up as I measure  
and knot, criss-cross-and-through.

This bestowal of powers  
as wished, those skills  
of running kick, flash  
of flame from palms,  
acrobatic flair,

do not compare  
to what she already possesses:

healing to others  
on rays of light and laughter.

## My Daughter and Me

(by *Rita Coleman*)

I told her I subscribed to Ms. when it came  
out—her father putting that down with a smirk and a  
stink-eye.

I told her I swore off bras for seven years,  
support for the women's movement.

I did not tell her I had an abortion, gasping  
in a breathless marriage to her father.

A few years ago she told me she wanted  
to stomp on the necks of all the feminists

responsible for the working mother. She  
was a feminist. She was a working mother.

She was also the only child of a single working  
mother. Hers was the voice that spoke that day.

I'd worked hard to take her away from spaghetti  
thrown against the wall, from drug deals,

from stolen stereos. She learned how  
to eat left-overs, to finagle a carburetor,

to live a wanted life. All the while, I juggled dollars,  
hours. Forty years ago, we almost had it all.

\* \* \*

Decades later, when it was time to march  
on Washington we shuffle-walked with a million

sisters, our tribe. We gripped coattails, our pink  
cat ears alert for more betrayal beyond the fence.

Already there, it galvanized us to push past  
the borders of real time, to keep holding

up the sky, to watch, as finally, it began to split  
a little more in its own slow way.

## My Common Life

(by *Rita Coleman*)

(Inspired by *W.S. Merwin*)

Thank you, my common life,  
this season of advanced time,  
when words claim me in sweet  
afternoons, when I listen  
at the window, look  
out into the deep pine forest.

Thank you for the good man who  
came when I was ready, spice  
and balm these many days,  
for smooth voices of friends,  
for good dogs who found me,  
for a life greater than expected.

Thank you for pastel canyons,  
cloud-draped skyscrapers,  
for the roll of a big ship, white  
sands stretched along a curve  
of earth, all of these sights mine  
to keep in this life of travel and stops.

Thank you for mangled metal,  
going broke, turned backs,  
closed caskets, for the forward  
trudge from black holes deep  
enough to suck me in, always  
within view, to survive so many.

Thank you for sturdy legs,  
one good hand, one good  
eye, for this string of bones  
held together by nature  
and will, long enough to reap  
the harvest of this common life.

## POEMS:

### MARK CRAWFORD

Actor, Writer, Poet, Director, Illustrator and Editor, Mark Crawford was born in Cincinnati, OH. He studied Audio Video Production at Cincinnati State Technical College and later at Ohio Media School.

Mark currently lives in Las Vegas, NV. pursuing a career in film.

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### KATHY WADE

Kathy Wade has enjoyed a long career teaching English, creative writing, drama and speech. Her poems have appeared in many anthologies, including several years in the Cincinnati *Poets Laureate Anthology*. A full-length novel, *Perfection*, was published in 2018. Kathy served for ten years as Executive Director of Women Writing for (a) Change, a writing community in Cincinnati. Most recently she was Director of a leadership-development program for women religious.

She and her husband reside in Cincinnati.

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## DRAWING:

### POLLY HART

Polly Hart is a graduate of the University of Cincinnati/DAAP Graphic Design. She has been an active member of the Manifest Drawing Center for over 15 years. Polly maintains a studio in Camp Washington with a group of talented artists.

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## I Cannot Fail

(by *Mark Crawford*)

I Cannot Fail, I Cannot Fail...  
Even if I were to feel our souls were destined for hell,  
I Cannot Fail, I Cannot Fail...  
There has to be hope for our young black males,  
I Cannot Fail, I Cannot Fail...  
If life pushes you off a cliff, the only thing to do is excel,  
I Cannot Fail, I Cannot Fail...  
You have to believe to achieve, so on my paper I spell,  
I Will Succeed, I Will Succeed!  
I have a goal to uphold and a family to feed,  
I Will Succeed, I Will Succeed...  
To build an empire for my family, that'll be my greatest deed,  
I Will Succeed, I Will Succeed...  
If I don't make it I'll die, but there's more for me,  
Love, Success and Happiness, that's my only need...  
I shall not fail... I Will Succeed

## Mildred Bascoe: True Leadership

(by *Kathy Wade*)

I had been hanging wash and tending to teaching my boys how to scribble letters into words on the writing slates their Daddy'd made for them, even though he couldn't read himself, when our friend and neighbor John Liverpool, the mulatto barber, knocked on my door. John, who'd traveled with us from Virginia and made a name for himself in the Bucktown bottoms where we colored shared our tiny plots with Irish and German laborers, stood in my doorway, shoulders hunched, hat in his hand.

Behind him three other colored men carried my Thomas, limp and lifeless. "It must've been his heart," John spoke, then ushered the others in. I sprung into action, told them to lay his body on our cot, closed his dark eyes, crossed one muscled hand on the other, backed out, closed the door, gathered my boys and hugged them close to me.

Last week I buried my husband, our three sons standing tall at his graveside, while the preacher praised his too-short life of service as a boatman on the Ohio, the very river we'd paddled up after leaving Virginia seeking freedom from a life as former slaves. Thomas single-handedly built our little bungalow – a shanty,

some might say – just two blocks from the river, where he'd made his living hauling everything from pigs to cotton to tobacco to nails, sunup to sundown.

John Liverpool and his wife Frances (who opposed the whites' campaign to ship colored folks to Africa), had become what amounted to leaders for blacks in Cincinnati, had even established a fund for colored widows and orphans, the thing I never expected I'd be. Nor did I expect to find a stack of debts I couldn't pay – bills for everything from lumber to lamp oil. John knew I risked losing everything, so he knocked again at my door, this time handing me a bond of surety for all the debts on our modest estate. "That's what a leader does," he humbly told me, when I fell on him, sobbing in gratitude. No one had elected John Liverpool, still, a leader he became. Soon after, I learned that the bond, a godsend, wasn't enough to prevent me from having to take in the washing of white folks up the hills, just to feed and clothe my growing boys, just to make ends meet.

## Victoria Ball: We the Ladies

(by *Kathy Wade*)

*Whereas... we the ladies, as wives and mothers, have been invited to attend and support this Ohio State Convention of Free Blacks, in the city of Columbus, in the year of our Lord eighteen-hundred-fifty-eight, and Whereas... we have been deprived of a voice, which we, the ladies, deem wrong and shameful... Therefore, Be It Resolved, that we the ladies will attend no more conventions after tonight, unless the privilege of an equal voice is granted.*

Be it known to all, that I, Victoria Ball, Chair of the Colored Ladies' Anti-slavery Sewing Circle of Cincinnati, who has also served this Convention on countless committees, do hereby request this Resolution be entered into official record.

I lead the women, straight-backed, out of the hall, the bang of the gavel echoing in our ears, as we huddle in the hallway, excited we've spoken, stood up for ourselves, wait breathless to hear how our husbands will react, how they'll likely consider

they'll have to prepare the meeting rooms themselves, set the tables, fold the programs, press the lemons into lemonade, bake the pies, and stand over sinks scrubbing the dishes and silver into the night, if their wives walk away from their husbands' refusal to give us the voice and recognition we've earned.

We wait less than fifteen minutes before the door swings open, as Mr. Ball, my husband, approaches, a sheepish grin on his bearded face, eager to say our resolution demanding women's participation was brought to the floor with speed. Only two of the free colored men delegates opposed, but the rest of our men were favorably disposed to pass our Resolution, inviting the ladies to equally share in the doings of this Convention. We'll congratulate our husbands with an embrace, then seek out the names of those two dissenters who will rue the day they ever voted *Nay*.

## Jane Jackson: The Anti-Slavery Fair

(by *Kathy Wade*)

Mary Gibson and I had it in our heads to raise more than money for the benefit of the Ohio Anti-Slavery Society. In the Anti-Slavery Sewing Circle we stitched together a plan to hold a fair in the two patches of yard that connected us. Mary spent a handful of afternoons convincing Eveline Cooper and her sister Emma, along with Victoria Ball and Amelia Williams to join our committee. In our part of Bucktown bordering the River, the packed-tight section we coloreds called home, we knew our news would circulate, so Sarah Ernst and Elizabeth Coleman soon signed on, and since they led the Sewing Circle dedicated to assisting fugitive slaves, that became the fair's crusade, gathering clothing and shoes for runaways, winter jackets and scarves, since these black brothers and sisters were fleeing from warmer weather of the south and might be traveling clear into Canada. You would have loved our Sunday afternoon Anti-Slavery Fair. We lured the men and

emptied their pockets of coins with  
lemonade and custard pies, kept the young'uns  
busy with games and taffy, and filled up  
burlap sacks with shoes and shirts, packed  
knapsacks with nourishing seeds, nuts  
and dried fruits. We sunk into our beds  
that evening with the reassurance that we,  
the ladies, were leaders in our own right,  
whether we saw our names on a plaque or not.

*(Note: All three poems of Kathy Wade were written in response to a  
chapter from the "Race and the City: Work, Community, and Protest in  
Cincinnati, 1820-1970", edited by Henry Louis Taylor, Jr.)*

## **POEMS:**

### **CATHERINE DEFOOR**

Catherine DeFoor is a practicing pediatrician in northern Kentucky. She is currently pursuing her interest in writing and visual art as a form of healing for both the individual and the community. She is an active member of the Women Writing for (a)Change community in Silverton, The Hive community in Northside, and the Knox Presbyterian Church Community in Hyde Park.

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### **CAROLE STOKES-BREWER**

Carole Stokes-Brewer is a psychotherapist in Cincinnati, OH. Her newfound love of poetry began when she and her mother wrote a book on African American culture, neighborhoods in Louisville, Kentucky, nature, and celebrations. They did it all through haiku. Their book *Mother and Daughter's Haiku Journey: You Can Do Haiku Too* began her interest in creative expressions through poetry.

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## **DRAWING:**

### **WEIZHEN WANG**

Weizhen Wang is a junior studio art major student at Miami University. She currently concentrates mainly on printmaking and mix media to create art.

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Weizhen. H.

## No One Was Listening

(by *Carole Stokes-Brewer*)

*No one was listening*  
Maybe my whisper was too quiet to hear  
As they went along their merry way  
Be aware that the untold is near.

*No one was listening*  
Could it be the sound of my voice?  
And that made them stay away  
To hear me - is their choice.

*No one was listening*  
I shouted for them to know  
The world is struggling  
Should I just let it go?

*No one was listening*  
To the desperate pleas  
I wrote the words  
For all to see.

## Peace

(by *Catherine DeFoor*)

(In response to Howard Thurman's "Meditations of the Heart")

Some say peace is the end of war, but I say NO.  
Fatigue ends war.  
Grief ends war.  
Some say peace is quiet, but I say No.  
Oppression owns quiet. Fear creates quiet.  
Peace is a settling,  
a settling of the pieces of the soul into place  
until a whole human form is visible.  
Each of us is born this way.  
Complete.

Cells of creativity, hunger, and strength held together by the balancing bonds of amor and animosity,  
compassion and callousness, graciousness and greed, despair and hope.

But we are born into THIS world,  
And in all its beauty it does hold winds of evil,  
winds that fragment and fractionate the soul into countless swirling specks of sand until we no longer  
see the whole of each other.

The only path for peace is for us to create space for the sands of the soul to settle back into their  
rightful place.

You can feel it when a sand settles. You feel stronger.

You feel bigger.

You feel full.

With compassion and respect I endeavor to create space for my settling. With compassion and  
respect I listen

and protect space for yours too.

And then we stand, together,

in our unique forms,

and marvel at their majesty.

## Reversing the Entangled Web of Injustice

(by *Carole Stokes-Brewer*)

Entangled in a web of injustice  
I will not be in the sticky residue  
Knowing that all deserve to taste the enchantment of peace.  
I refuse to believe that fairness can't be for all  
As sticky nets trap those perceived to be disadvantaged.  
I refuse to allow my inadequacies to control the rights of others,  
As there is nothing more tranquil than the sacred silence that speaks of giving.  
All should Believe that Justice is for everyone  
Some are stripped of the ability to attack their inadequacies.  
Who would know that what you hate reflects the hate that's within?  
Only an olive branch can capture the unity of peace.  
It is bestowed upon those with ability to connect with others.  
It's not for those whose insides scream to suppress others.  
It's for those who reach within.  
Find it in real time  
The most peaceful place to be.  
**Reversing the Entangled Web of Injustice**  
The most peaceful place to be  
Find it in real time  
It's for those who reach within.  
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Knowing that all deserve to taste the enchantment of peace.  
I will not be in the sticky residue  
Entangled in a web of injustice.

## Silent Solidarity

(by *Catherine DeFoor*)

It is a humid day in downtown Cincinnati.  
Everything is hot- the sun, the air, the asphalt, the people.  
I stand in a crowd, a crowd in front of the tall stone courthouse protected by a line of shielded uniforms.  
The crowd is yelling and shaking fists and brandishing signs.  
I've been here before, in a crowd in front of a courthouse, Shouting and brandishing against injustice.  
But this time, I stand and watch.

**"NO JUSTICE! NO PEACE!"**  
"NO JUSTICE! NO PEACE!"  
"No justice! No Peace!"  
"NO JUSTICE! NO PEACE!"

Behind me a woman swaddles a baby around her waist, A man wanders around taking pictures with his zoom lens.

"SAY THEIR NAME!"  
"SAY THEIR NAME!" "Say their name!"  
"SAY THEIR NAME!"  
"No Justice! No Peace!" "NO JUSTICE! NO PEACE!"  
"NO JUSTICE! NO PEACE!"  
**"SAY THEIR NAME!"**  
"SAY THEIR NAME!"

In front, are a group of high schoolers holding up signs and shouting through megaphones.  
"BLACK LIVES MATTER!" "BLACK LIVES MATTER!" "BLACK LIVES MATTER!" "BLACK LIVES MATTER!" "BLACK LIVES MATTER!" "BLACK LIVES MATTER!" "BLACK LIVES MATTER!"

To my left, a national guardsman yells at a woman, "MA'AM GET OFF THE TANK!"  
A man walks among the crowd, "ANYONE WANT WATER?"  
A man walks among the crowd, "TSHIRTS FOR \$10!"  
A woman shouts, "UNCLE TOM!"  
Someone shouts, "WHY AREN'T YOU SHOUTING?!"  
A child tugs at his mother, "I'M HUNGRY!"  
My head shouts, "DOES THIS EVEN MAKE A DIFFERENCE?!"  
"SAY THEIR NAME!" Some people stand around looking bored.  
I am doubtful.  
All we do is shout.  
Shout at each other.  
SHOUT at the rigid line of shielded uniforms in front.  
SHOUT!!! at the cold stone courthouse with its closed windows.  
**"I CAN'T BREATHE!"**

Simultaneously the crowd kneels with fisted arms outstretched. Silence...  
for 9 minutes and 29 seconds...  
the time it takes for a police officer to suffocate an innocent unarmed man.

In the silence the message is clear.

## The Curve

(by **Carole Stokes-Brewer**)

*long is the drive  
on a straight road.  
here comes a curve  
so smooth in its form.  
discovering a peace  
in a divine scenery  
where bowed trees  
welcome all voices.  
stories are shared,  
secrets protected.  
like themes arise:  
tripping on cracks  
reliving old scars  
parades of conflict  
pain of burning sun  
silences worn tensions  
opens new beginnings  
to energy of new ideals.*

*spinning movements  
waves of ribbons  
twist a straight line  
into the letter J  
feeling the Joy.  
swirls of songs  
fuels acceptance  
for peaceful adventures  
to stir the enchantment  
and form an arch over  
those who realize  
that peace  
is the curve in the line.*

## POEMS:

### WESLEY DUREN

Wesley Duren, born and raised in the Greater Cincinnati area, currently lives in the countryside of Oregonia, Ohio with his loving wife Diantha and their son Zoriah. They collectively own and operate an ecologically-minded landscape company, Marvin's Organic Gardens. A nature lover and organic gardener, Wesley has fallen in love with making music on hand pan and writing poetry.

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### GREG FRIEDMAN

Greg Friedman is a Franciscan priest, serving in the Southwestern US. He has been a video producer and radio host, magazine editor and author of many articles and several books of reflections. His poetry has been honored by the Kentucky State Poetry Society, and has appeared in several online journals and in the recent anthology, *Fixed and Free 2021*.

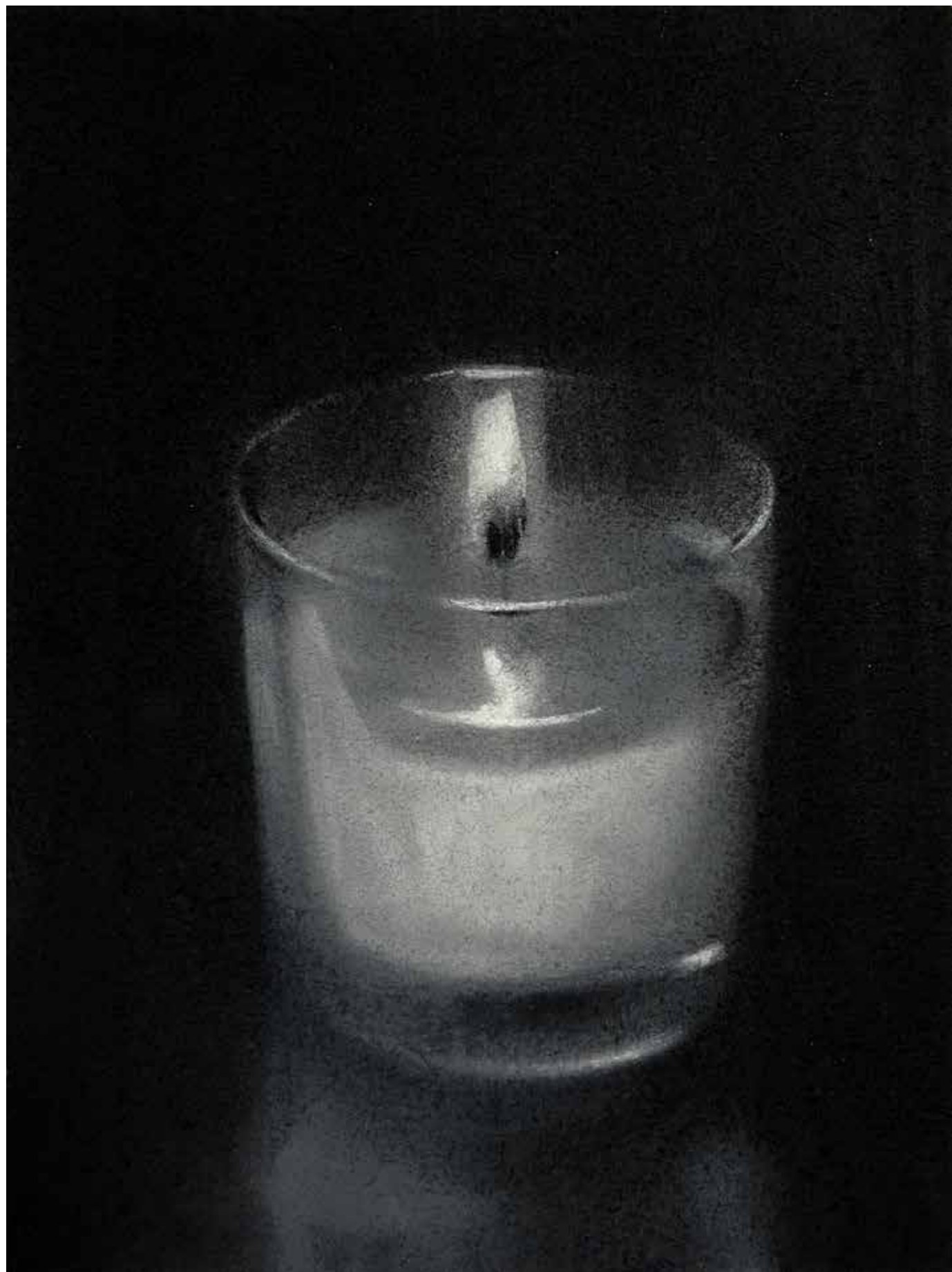
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## DRAWING:

### SAMANTHA HARING

Samantha Haring is an artist and educator from Des Plaines, Illinois. She earned her MFA from Northern Illinois University and her BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She was an Artist-in-Residence at Manifest Gallery. She teaches drawing and design courses at UC/DAAP, and has been a Resident Instructor at the Manifest Drawing Center since 2016. Haring is represented by Gallery 19 in Chicago. Her studio practice is currently based in Cincinnati.

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Samantha Haring

## A Litany of Breath

(by **Greg Friedman**)

Breath creates  
Over primal chaos  
*Respirare Spiritus\**

Breath enlivens  
Dry bones in the desert  
*Respirare Spiritus*

Breath whispers  
Outside Elijah's cave  
*Respirare Spiritus*

Breath expires  
As all is finished  
*Respirare Spiritus*

Breath is pressed out  
Next to the patrol car  
*Respirare Spiritus*

Breath explodes  
As the virus seeks a home  
*Respirare Spiritus*

Breath fails  
Despite the respirator  
*Respirare Spiritus*

Breath strangles  
At the hands of the overseer  
*Respirare Spiritus*

Breath chokes  
From the lynching noose  
*Respirare Spiritus*

Breath sighs  
As a mother waits alone  
*Respirare Spiritus*

Breath stirs  
In a room locked in fear  
As I struggle to pray  
As the breath continues  
*Respirare Spiritus*  
*Respirare Spiritus Domine*

*\*Respirare Spiritus = Breathe on us, O Spirit!*

## Honoring all People

(by **Wesley Duren**)

Ancient Tree People  
Growing our Sacred Steeple  
Wisdom for Seekers

Life Water People  
Quench our thirst, inside and out  
Cleanse and Purify

Honored Soil People  
Ground our thoughts, nourish our roots  
Alchemize and Heal

Breezy Sky People  
Sowing Seeds of Truth on Wind  
Blows Old, Reveals New

Bright Fire People  
Shine your Light so We May See  
Burn all Illusion

Thine Spirit People  
Witness, Guide, Protect, Patient  
Silently Awaken

Winged Bird People  
Forever watchful, soaring  
Connect to Spirit

To All The People  
Coming together as one  
Attainable Peace

## What Was Bitter Then Sweet

(by Greg Friedman)

*“While I was in sin, it seemed very bitter to me to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led me among them and I had mercy upon them. And when I left them that which seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness of soul and body; and afterward I lingered a little and left the world.” -- Francis of Assisi, The Testament*

I’ve never met a leper. But I follow  
A man from the 13<sup>th</sup> century who did and who wrote  
How bitter became sweet. What he could not love  
Changed soul and body. I was led to this parking lot  
In an Albuquerque neighborhood of abandoned strip malls  
Where a giant of a man slowly dresses and undresses,  
And wanders a tangle of thoughts to tell me  
Whether he wants the chili or the chicken noodle soup  
And ponders the kind of sandwich I will pack  
Into a paper bag for his lunch.

I won’t insult him with the label *leper*. He is a man,  
Like the woman huddled in the hoodie and leather jacket  
Is a woman. But face it, friend, I would rather be home  
This Saturday. I wouldn’t be doing anything important,  
Maybe napping or decluttering my room. I wouldn’t be  
Snapping to attention when Glen orders me out front  
Because people are waiting, or corrects my resistance  
To mercy. Here I bury the ego which burgeons  
And armors me with privilege—the smug  
Cleric’s authority. I try to look into eyes,  
Struggle to understand what brings each  
Here to ask for two rolls of toilet paper  
Which I wrap in plastic dignity  
To hand over along with lunch and a drink.

Can I love what is bitter? Segment it into Saturday?  
Can I brown-bag it so that it is sweet on Sunday,  
Back in my safe space on the mesa,  
My *convento* of comforts where bitter  
Blossoms like the blisters I got  
Weeding my mother’s garden long ago—  
Not worth worrying over. They were gone  
In a day or so and why bother except  
They were right there on my fingers to remind me  
Of a love I might have found if I let myself be led.

## Endangered Species

(by Greg Friedman)

*Once ranging throughout the Southwest, today the only breeding population of ocelots in the U.S. is in Texas...near the Mexican border. — Defenders of Wildlife website*

*Rescue workers arriving at a road accident in southern Mexico [found a]tractor trailer jammed with as many as 200 migrants crashed into the base of a steel pedestrian bridge, killing 55 and injuring dozens. — Associated Press*

Urbanization. A bitch. A showstopper for ocelots and other migrating species risking roads and liquified gas plants along our South Texas border. These shy outliers disperse. Daredevils dash in darkened arroyos, risk encounters with the chirp of the walkie-talkie, Kevlar-vested guardians tethered to our crisscrossed convenience. Dispersing species seek a vital habitat. The demolished truck was a closed freight module used to carry perishable goods. Two hundred migrants were perishable goods. Better to be Salvador Dali’s pet ocelot passed off as a cat in a painted coat. Ephemeral codes betray a secret stratum. Graffiti splatters the wrong side of walls: *Del otro lado también matan a nuestros hijos. On the other side they also kill our children.*

## POEMS:

### PENELOPE EPPLÉ

Penelope Epple (Pronouns: [in writing] \*e/h\*/h\*s, [in speech] they/them, e/em, one/ones) has previously had h\*s work published in *The Aze Journal*, *X Marks the Spot*, *For a Better World*, and *Lions-on-Line*. \*E is currently working on some books of poetry with themes of queerness, Catholicism, exclusion and erasure...

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### WENDY JETT

Wendy Jett grew up in the Cincinnati area. She attempts to be brave and honest everyday. Some days she achieves it, and some days she writes about it.

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### BARBARA MARIE MINNEY

Barbara Marie Minney is a transgender woman, poet, writer, quiet activist. Her work has appeared in numerous publications and her first collection of poetry, *If There’s No Heaven*, was the winner of the 2020 Poetry Is Life Book Award. Barbara is a retired attorney and lives in Tallmadge, OH with her wife of 40 years.

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## DRAWING:

### JEFF CASTO

Jeff Casto has been creating art for over 40 years. He is a graduate of the Art Academy of Cincinnati (1987) and has an MFA from UC (1989). Jeff’s constructed assemblages incorporate a variety of media and found objects. His art often addresses socio-political concerns with pathos and humor.

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## We Don't Live in a Binary Star System

(by *Penelope Epple*)

Because as we all know,  
gender is a galaxy,  
and the nebula in which I rest is so distant  
from male, female, woman, man, boy, girl,  
masculine, feminine, androgynous,  
that they are not even stars within my sky.  
I do not exist  
in those binary and tertiary star systems.  
I cannot exist  
within such systems as those.

I understand that those stars make  
up all the constellations in your skies;  
they are all you have ever known to guide you.  
But nine stars do not a galaxy make,  
and your skies are not the only ones.  
Your nine stars have never shown  
their light upon me.

I am guided by different constellations;  
my path is lit with different stars.  
And just because you have never seen  
the stars that rest in my skies,  
that does not mean my stars do not exist  
or that my skies are not full of magnificence  
and awe.

## T r a n s parent

(by *Wendy Jett*)

i would dance  
with the devil on  
the head of a pin

brush his hair  
caress his cheeks  
smooth the wrinkles  
from his bed

if it would make  
your life's journey  
easier, my child

## Transgender Christian

(by *Barbara Marie Minney*)

Niebuhr said "Only a poet can do justice to the  
Christmas and Easter Stories  
and there are not many poets in the pulpit."

i do not speak from a pulpit  
but maybe as a trans poet i can  
do it justice  
better than others

i do not presume to proclaim  
myself to be a Messiah  
or even a modern-day prophet

i am far from perfect

i'm not a bad person either  
but i could be a better one  
falling down like a wet blanket  
only to be washed, dried, and put back on the bed

born at this place in this expanse of time  
reconciling the boy child i was raised to be  
with the woman i have become  
God most certainly had a hand in that

the church was created by man  
to control other men  
heretics were tortured and burned at the stake

i could have been one of them

"Let every heart prepare Him room"  
not just heterosexual hearts  
my queer heart has room as well  
brimming with unrecognized holiness

my stigmata is the crossfire of words of those  
who practice their bigotry, hatred, and selfishness  
piercing my soul like a knife through hot butter  
both sides proclaiming to save it

"Hate the sin, but love the sinner"  
means nothing to me  
i am not a sin nor is who i love  
there are things beyond my understanding

in this fractured world  
that's what faith is

as Dylan sang,  
"You're gonna have to serve somebody  
It may be the devil or it may be the Lord  
But you're gonna have to serve somebody."

i've made my choice

i choose to be a light  
shining forth

representing, presenting, proclaiming, consecrating

you may take my humanity  
you may take my friends  
one-by-one

you may even take my life

but you will never ever take my God

## Disappointment

(by **Barbara Marie Minney**)

Vivid inky images of pewter  
roar through in undreamlike fashion  
like a depression cloud tornado  
extinguishing the rationality luminance  
in its path.

Fingers grasping heavy distortion  
convulsing lies suffocating  
like a necktie garotte  
aftertaste of foaming rejection  
drowning the mouth.

Iridescent acceptance rainbow  
reflected in the nerve center  
like a disco ball  
vibrating promising confetti  
over the dancefloor.

## Brave New Normal

(by **Barbara Marie Minney**)

Three months of self-isolation.  
I don't even know what day it is  
or what to wear  
the blue or green pajamas?

There is a new normal  
but I'm not sure about the brave.

Some of our humanity  
has been lost.

In rural Ohio, the gale carries the spittle  
brimming with bitterness and hate  
toward FedEx driver, Brandon Brackins,  
bringing him to tears.

In Akron, a young woman, Na'Kia Crawford,  
just beginning her life,  
fatally shot while running errands with her  
grandmother,  
a case of mistaken identity,  
poignantly entombed in her prom dress.

The howl of the beast  
comes through the sound soother.

It is hard to interact  
when we have our heads in different games.  
I recognize that I was birthed by white privilege,  
suckling at its tits  
for sixty years as a white male,  
the most privileged of all,  
before changing teams.

I live with the angst of saying  
or doing the wrong things,  
carrying an awful big hammer  
to beat myself up for past transgressions,  
stumbling over my doubts,  
never raising my voice above a whisper.

What happened to embracing  
the inclusive passion of the Shepherd  
welcoming into the flock all the sheep,

the white sheep,  
the black sheep,  
the red sheep,  
the brown sheep,  
the yellow sheep,  
the rainbow sheep.

It is not about republicans or democrats,  
police or anti-police,  
Christians or non-Christians,  
or even black or white.

It is about honesty, integrity, and truth,

a confirmation that **all** men  
and women  
are created equal,  
deserving of respect and a voice,  
deserving of equality and justice.

Death just a chokehold away,  
now, it is me who can't breathe,

and there are a lot of cowards hiding  
behind those masks.

***POEMS:***

**MATT FARLEY**

Matt Farley is a poet and independent researcher who is a member of the Urban Appalachian Community Coalition. He is currently a candidate for the MFA in Creative Writing - Poetry at Miami University.

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**BILL MC CORMICK**

Bill Mc Cormick is a former high school teacher of German and English. At age 90, he is tired of hearing of people who want to disparage the honest presentation of facts and to use children to promote a political point of view.

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**ROBIN SHORT**

Robin Short, a native Cincinnati, graduated from UC with a BA in English Literature. She is embracing more creativity in her life; creative expressions through words, baking, music, fashion and gardening. She loves the potential of words and story, and is both eager and nervous to share her written work.

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***DRAWING:***

**FRED DANIELL**

Fred Daniell's prints and drawings are characterized by their subtle narrative undertones and are inspired by the master printmakers of Japan (Ukiyo-e and Shin-hanga) and the Golden Age illustrators of the 19th and 20th centuries. Fred graduated from the Art Academy of Cincinnati with a BFA in 2003. After graduating he worked as a graphic designer and photographer for many years before turning his focus to printmaking and studying figurative and narrative art.

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## What Did They Dream?

(by *Robin Short*)

We've all heard the stories  
And stories we'll never hear  
The unimaginable horror that endured too long  
But when they slept what was their very best dream?  
That dream you ask God in your bedtime prayers to dream again  
What did they dream?

Not the sun up to sun down labor  
Not the auctioning  
But freedom of course  
No, not the endless hours of soul-wrenching sun burning hope from their souls  
But freedom of course  
Did the hope to never be subjected to another beating cause a smile on their sleeping faces?  
Not the deprivation, separation, degradation or humiliation  
Or was their dream as simple as a sincere thank you from the master?  
Mystery, but what did they dream?

Did a father dream of his daughters' innocence to never be snatched by the master?  
Did the mother dream for her husband to truly be the head of her family?  
Did the child dream of the chance to showcase her God given talent?  
Did the unborn baby dream to change the fate that'd soon be delivered to him?  
Did the North Star shine on the undersides of their eyes?  
Did they dream of total disappearance every waking and sleeping moment?  
Were they startled from a dream of their 2nd foot about to cross into the free state of New York?  
Only to rub their eyes and see they were right where they had always been  
Did they all dream to be disturbed from a dream with the shouting of freedom?  
"Mama, mama, wake up we're free. Mama, we're free!!"  
What did they dream?

It's probably bold to even think they could dare dream  
Like the lived through nightmares took up too much space  
Maybe no space left to dream  
Our biggest worry all too trivial to their incessant hardship  
Truly their dream deferred for us  
Did they dream of being awakened by Emmanuel?  
Wiping their eyes twice to see him blowing new life into the trumpet to start the parade  
With Michael and Gabriel flying above  
Leading them in singing loud, boisterous spirituals  
Marching with high steps, radiance and abounding pride  
Out of the cotton fields of Georgia to the glorious golden gates of heaven  
What did they dream?

## John Doe

(by **Matt Farley**)

Snatched him out of the Ohio  
they found fish had eaten his eyes  
john doe was found Corpse black eyes  
A non-person fit for nothing.  
the forgotten are never truly found  
He would have been better off left  
sticky June in the pale  
sun Corpse bloated black  
bodies to the field  
where all non-persons rest  
who through no fault of their own  
or through fault of their owned  
became a non-person all the same  
he would have been better off  
in the Ohio bloated Corpse black.

## Beyond Theory

(by **Bill Mc Cormick**)

*After reading Clint Smith's "How the Word Is Passed" and viewing Kara Walker's "Cut to the Quick."*

So much vitriol! Spouted by agitated  
white parents at public school board  
meetings. Incensed that a, so-called,  
Critical Race Theory taught their kids  
would be a biased lesson, unfair to their  
greatly respected forbears.

White American children shouldn't give  
too much thought to a past in which  
slavery was a mark of white privilege and  
being black an invitation for abuse. They  
should focus their attention on those  
white men who made American great.

On August 2, 1776, members of  
our Continental Congress signed a  
Declaration of Independence, stating  
that all men are created equal and that  
they are owed life, liberty and the pursuit  
of happiness.

Of those signers-- white men all--  
forty-one were owners of slaves, of  
black women, men and children  
who would never know a life  
of security nor freedom of choice; only  
drudgery and lifelong deprivation.

Proud behind, or within, their grand  
manor houses, slave owners  
might exercise any cruelty they chose--  
grueling field labor;  
frequent use of the whip;  
subjecting women to rape or sexual  
exploitation, even setting some off  
as "good breeders;"  
withholding of food;  
selling off family members --  
toward the black beings they saw as none  
other than their property, by law.

Many, like Thomas Jefferson, writer of  
those fine words of the Declaration  
"...all men are created equal..." and "...are  
endowed with Life, Liberty and the pursuit  
of Happiness..." sapped the life forces of  
hundreds of slaves to finance their own  
welfare and foster their political ambitions.

And many now-revered members of  
our early government—the esteemed  
*founding fathers*—kept numerous blacks  
in bondage on their estates. Even our  
first president, George Washington--  
fighter for freedom from oppression--  
could not allow his blacks any measure  
of freedom from a like injustice.

Showing the shameful history of white  
on black treatment, both in Early  
America and the following decades,  
is the legacy of trusted historians,  
black and white. Calling it theory makes  
a mockery of their honest reporting.  
Denying their work to innocent  
schoolchildren is to say, "Kids, you're  
not worth being told the truth."

## POEMS:

### TERI FOLTZ

Teri Foltz is a former high school teacher who began her career as a poet and playwright after she retired. She has two books of poetry- *Green and Dying* and *The Trouble with Thinking*. Her plays can be seen on her YouTube channel, Teri's Play Date.

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### SUE NEUFARTH HOWARD

Sue Neufarth Howard, a poet and visual artist, is a former Cincinnati now residing in Long Beach, CA. She is a past member of Greater Cincinnati Writers League and of Linton Street Writers, has participated in Ohio Poetry Day Contests and was previously published. Sue's poetry can be found at Facebook/ DanceOf WordsPoetryPage-Poems BySueNeufarth Howard.

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## DRAWING:

### MARY VISCO

Mary Visco is an Ohio-based artist currently attending Miami University studying studio art, art history, and museology, with the goal of working in museum curation. Focusing mainly in printmaking and painting, Mary keeps an illustrative quality to her artistic endeavors. Utilizing figures, personally symbolic objects, and abstracted shapes, she composes the subjects of her art pieces so that they relate to each other like in stories of her favorite children's books.

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## The Box

(by *Teri Foltz*)

There has always been suffering in the world.  
I used to put it in a box on a high shelf.  
Occasionally, I took it down  
mostly on Sundays when the minister  
would ask for prayers for the families of the victims in the  
nightclub  
synagogue  
movie theater  
spa  
grocery  
school  
Columbine  
SantaFe  
SandyHook  
Parkland.

That box is in the middle of the floor of my  
living room now.  
It grows larger every day  
harder to ignore  
harder to step around  
harder to clean around  
harder to keep securely closed.

My morbid curiosity wants to know  
what hides inside.  
I yearn to upend it,  
to dump the contents  
just to shake the last of it.  
I tell myself the contents must be finite.  
But I'm not convinced, so  
I try not to be Pandora.

## Freedom

(by *Sue Neufarth Howard*)

In America  
I am free to choose  
in whom to believe,  
in God or not,  
to vote, and  
for whom I choose,  
to go wherever  
my heart desires,  
morning, noon,  
or night; to fly  
like a butterfly  
near or far;  
to love whomever  
I fancy, black, white,  
or in between;  
to be single or not.

Because I am white,  
can afford  
food, shelter,  
and more,  
in our country,  
where freedom  
isn't always fair,  
pretty, kind, or  
free for all.

Where  
anyone is free to  
spew hatred  
on every corner  
for media glee;  
with a loaded gun,  
free to take others  
along on a  
suicide spree.

Where cop-  
inflicted capital  
punishment,  
the norm.  
Where politicians  
finagle who  
gets to cast  
a vote.

Where wealthy  
are free to hide  
money off shore.

In our country,  
the dream of  
white settlers,  
freedom for all,  
boils down to  
the richest  
and white-est  
are free-est.

## I am Privileged

(by *Teri Foltz*)

I am privileged.  
If you had asked me  
when I was a teen,  
I would have disagreed.  
My parents didn't let me  
stay out late, they didn't hand  
me money anytime I asked.  
But I was privileged.  
The only black people I saw  
in my small town  
were waiting for the bus  
after a long day of  
cleaning houses.  
I had no black friends  
the year I graduated -1971.  
I watched the news though.  
My parents supported  
equal rights for all, but  
they were also privileged.  
They paid for four years  
of college for me, my sister  
and my brothers. When I ran  
into trouble with my credit card,  
they helped me out.  
When I applied for a job,  
they knew the man  
interviewing me.  
I never heard a racial slur  
come out of their mouths,

but I heard them all when  
we went to my grandparents  
for Thanksgiving and Christmas.  
We were told to ignore them,  
not to correct or to challenge them.  
We were told to respect our elders.  
They were Republicans but  
nothing like the ones I know now.  
They taught me to tithe  
to the white church  
of white people. They cared  
for their neighbors.

I grew up without knowing  
the rage or the fear or the hurt  
of being turned away.  
I never had to find the right  
water fountain. I sat anywhere  
I wanted on the bus.  
No one looked at my face  
and feared me. Or my brother.  
I rage inside without  
the courage  
to rage on the outside.  
I want change, but I  
am embarrassed to ask  
my black friends what I  
should do. It isn't their job  
to show me. To teach me.  
I need to read more history.  
Open my eyes. And my ears.  
Open my wallet. Be unselfish.  
Stand. Walk. Protest. Speak.  
You ask me if I'm woke  
and I must be honest.  
The alarm has gone off,  
I'm crawling out of my bed  
and I'm sorry  
I'm still groggy.  
But I'm up.  
And I'm ready.

## What I Learned from Visiting Normandy

(by *Teri Foltz*)

People vacation at Omaha Beach.  
Tanks once leveled the land  
where sunbathers erect cabanas  
to shelter themselves  
from the burn of war.  
They gaze at the blue ocean  
that once was red with blood.

## Recharging in Peace

(by *Sue Neufarth Howard*)

How to find stillness  
amid this pandemic year,  
stifled with fear.

Corona Virus could be in the air  
everywhere people share.  
Those at most risk must come to grips,  
staying apart, learning mask wearing art.

I still myself in silence  
and think of all I'm grateful for  
remembering the precious  
then and now.

The memory of a lover's smile,  
a touch, an embrace.  
The joyous first sight  
of my babies' first born.

The endearing words of a grandchild...  
You're the best grandma, I hope you won't die.  
Camp ground tenting, moonlight campfires.  
Zoom smiles of grandchildren miles away.

The haiku words that come to me  
walking in woods, in the shower.  
The chance sight of a rainbow, an egret.  
The eyes of a near deer on a forest trail.

The scent of lilac, soft kissing wind  
bright flower smiles.  
The rippling of water,  
watching a kitten asleep.

Dark chocolate candy  
and cherry flavored anything.  
Soothing coffee with hazelnut.  
Surprise in a crème filled doughnut.

Hand written letter from a friend.  
Hearing a favorite song,  
I Love You Just the Way You Are.  
Notes played on a harpsicord.

The escape into a thrilling book.  
An out of body experience,  
just brain, paint, and canvas  
in the depth of creating art.

Remembering all  
of the laboring work  
that daily enables  
my continuing life.

There's not enough time  
in the rest of my life  
to list all my gratitudes.  
Enough to fill a book.

In stillness  
and remembrance  
I am recharged  
with peace.

***POEMS:***

**GARY GAFFNEY**

Gary Gaffney is a native of New Orleans, LA. He is Professor Emeritus, Art Academy of Cincinnati and has worked in a range of visual media. Gary's current focus is on writing.

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**MICHAEL THOMPSON**

Michael Thompson, a Multimedia Artist, Poet, Designer, and Educator, actively works to create a living ecosystem around his art by emphasizing community relationships and education. He is currently Artist-in-Residence at the Cincinnati Art Museum and Contemporary Arts Center.

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**TYRONE WILLIAMS**

Tyrone Williams teaches in the English and RIGS (Race, Intersectionality and Gender Studies) departments at Xavier U. and in the Philosophy, Politics and Public honors program. He is the author of several books & chapbooks of poetry.

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***DRAWING:***

**BRAD DAVIS**

Brad Davis, a painter from Cincinnati, OH, earned his BFA from the Art Academy of Cincinnati (AAC) (2016), and his MFA from the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts (2018). His paintings center around the urban environment and seek to transform its banality through careful and personal reconstruction. Brad teaches at Manifest Drawing Center, and at UC/DAAP and the AAC. His work is currently being shown with Sugarlift Gallery (New York, NY) & Abend Gallery (Denver, CO).

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Brad Davis

## Avondale, 1959

(by *Tyrone Williams*)

Hawk means business tonight, cold  
gusts cutting around these big ol' buildings,  
cutting through my thin coat  
as I wait in line to pay my taxes  
for the schools my Georgia can't attend,  
for the trolley splashing mud on my shoes  
as it passes me by.

Do the best I can  
by Georgia, learn her a little script,  
memory her numbers before I head  
out to walk to work.

Hope for more  
than just this little freedom for my little girl  
watching her father get up every morning,  
free to look for work  
long as he don't look too hard.  
And the three of us free to live where we  
please  
long as we don't stray too far from the black  
bottom.

We's lucky, the papers say,  
livin' on the right side of this river.  
Reckon so, though  
sometimes it's hard to see  
just how.

## Are You Ready for Your Lesson?

(by *Gary Gaffney*)

A river is a boundary that laps both sides  
Blindly, unless it flows between  
Abolition and Negrophobia  
Pushing pigmentation to one side  
Or the other, carrying the oppressor  
Forward, the slave is drowning

The law is a boundary, Black Laws  
Walling out black voices  
But walls surround white suburbia  
And keep in fear and privilege  
Negroes may have the tenements  
As their place to search for hope

The highway is a boundary, pushing aside  
Where folks dwell and build community  
White roads shatter neighborhoods  
Where black human beings make life  
Then black folks scattering, them gone  
Is all that really counts

The mind makes boundaries that wall in  
All the delusions that make racism  
Invisible in every visible way, racism  
Wearing every mask racism can invent  
How is black skin so impenetrable  
They couldn't see that humans were inside

Whites stood on the shoulders of blacks  
To crush black hope, believing wealth was worth it  
The factory floor was a boundary  
Only a few blacks could ever cross  
On backs of blacks was white prosperity  
But none for blacks, their arms and legs  
Were saved for menial servitude

Black spirit--human spirit--resisted  
Any boundaries, any walls, couldn't be crushed  
Always a spark or fire, always burning  
With its own songs and dances, and churches  
In defiance, reform, and personal courage,  
In holding together, schooling one another  
Holding fast to dignity, despite

## Communion Prayer

(by *Michael Thompson*)

In those days we were all very separated  
So much so, that a *we* almost never existed

Trapped in the burrows of our own lives.  
Occupation, Shade, Family Structure  
and all the other words I looked up in the thesaurus,  
ways for them to define and separate us  
like cuts of meat,  
incarnate in the names which I'd placed so much  
worth in.

We were not afforded the intimacy of proximity,  
nor the milieu of access to each other that must  
be necessary for building this tower  
that so many people called community.

My father said we'd been scattered like chicken feed,  
renamed like strangers at the Tower of Babel,  
by some invisible white god so high up,  
that my neck hurt when I tried to talk to him.

But when we all came together,  
I looked to my left and right and stood  
and sat, and dropped to my knees  
like everyone else around me.

I didn't know if it was for my parents or the holy spirit,  
but when I closed my eyes to pray, all I knew was  
that I couldn't see the color  
of my own hands in front of my face,

And when I was standing and sitting and kneeling  
like everyone else,  
I felt very much that we weren't scattered as far  
as I knew we must be.

Inside my head, I prayed my own communion prayer  
for a community I was sure I could call my own.  
And with my voice,  
I prayed like everyone else,  
Our eyes facing the same direction,  
and our lips forming the same words.

But no one said jinx.  
This wasn't a trick.  
And I kept my eyes forward,  
As we said our communion prayer.

*(Note: All three poems written in response to chapters from the "Race and the City: Work, Community, and Protest in Cincinnati, 1820-1970", edited by Henry Louis Taylor, Jr.)*

## **POEMS:**

### **PATRICIA GARRY**

Patricia Garry, a housing and community development advocate in Cincinnati, has advocated for social justice for many years. She is also an intuitive and psychic.

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### **DIANE GERMAINE**

Diane Germaine, writer/choreographer/photographer, has had poetry in *For a Better World* since 2008. She has presented work in Cincinnati and New York venues, has been recipient of choreography grants, and received New York Times acclaim for many roles danced.

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### **MICHAEL GEYER**

Michael Geyer, a Cincinnati native and graduate of the U.C. School of Engineering, currently teaches high school chemistry. He lives in Montgomery with his wife and son, and writes poetry in his spare time.

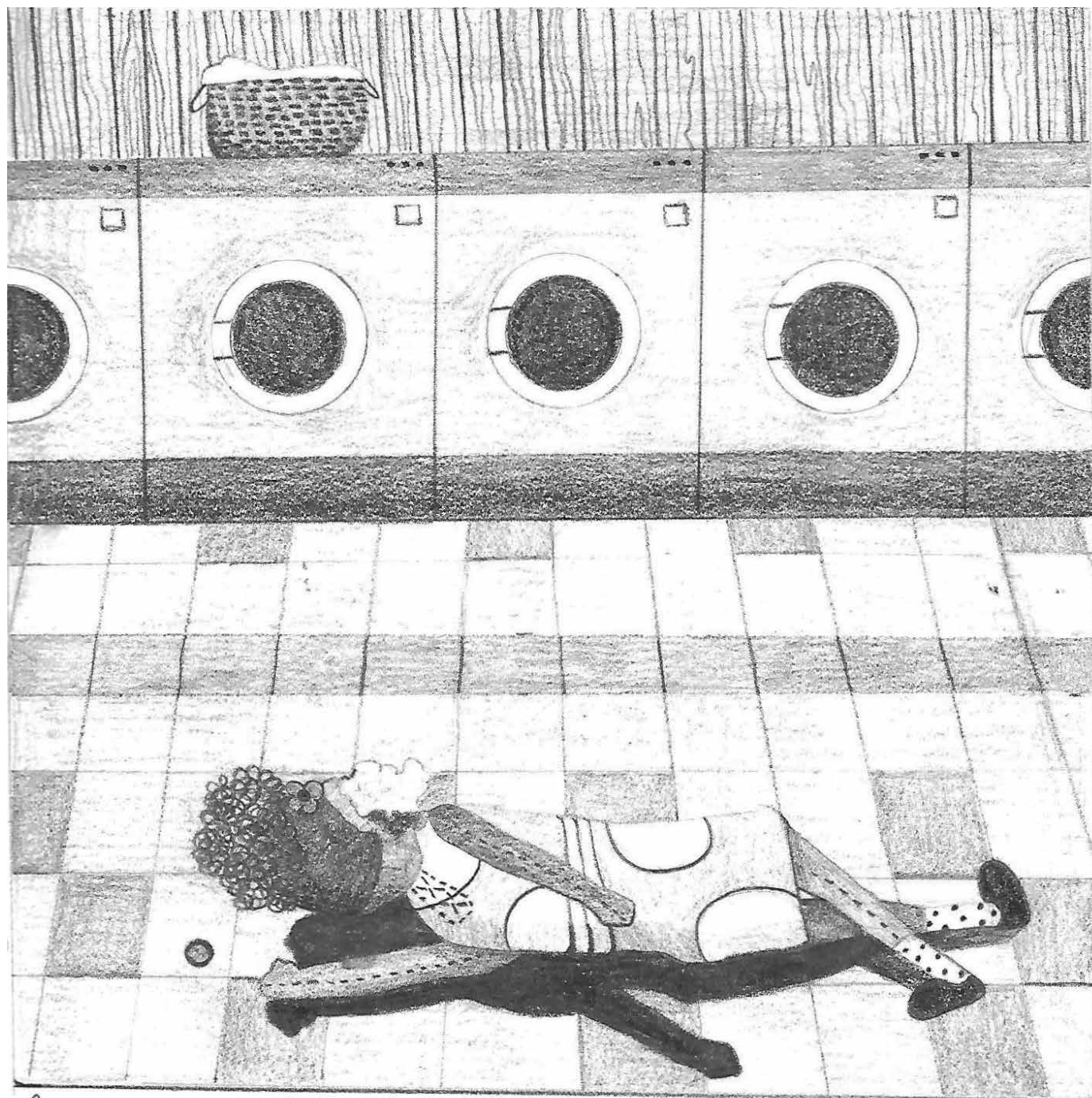
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## **DRAWING:**

### **GABRIELLE ROACH**

Gabrielle Roach was born in 1990 in St. Louis, MO and was raised in Terre Haute, IN. She received her BFA in painting and printmaking from Indiana State University in 2014 and was awarded her Master's in Fine Arts in 2017. Gabi has been included in various group and solo exhibitions including *Somewhere in Space-time*, 2021 and *Out of the Basement*, 2019.

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Laundromat Ragdoll

Habi Roach

## Laundromat Ragdoll

(by *Diane Germaine*)

Little black boy all you wanted  
was to climb in her lap  
to be hugged, to be wrapped.

How many times did she  
send you sprawling,  
shoved off, falling...  
and you trying,

crying to get up  
but with each attempt  
less smooth your arms  
were not working.

I froze when her last throw  
sent you flying twenty feet,  
a ragdoll, almost thwacking  
machines tossing clothes  
in oblivious swirls of suds.

I wanted to kill her,  
to wrench her out of  
her seat but indeed

I was only eleven.  
I was the only other  
human there, half her size.

There was no 911 then,  
no cellphones, not even  
a public telephone.

I had to head home  
never knowing if you  
made it to tomorrow

## And the Mother

(by *Michael Geyer*)

for *Jailand Adams*

*'Then Pharaoh gave this  
order to all his people: "Every  
Hebrew boy that is born you  
must throw into the Nile, but let  
every girl live."*

- *Exodus 1:22 (NIV)*

The midwives  
however  
feared God

and the mother  
of Moses  
saw that he

was a fine child,  
hid him  
for three months

then placed him  
in papyrus  
coated with tar and pitch

for Pharaoh's daughter  
to find;  
his sister watching.

But now you  
have betrayed  
them all

pitched your son,  
three months old,  
inside a clothes dryer  
turned it on.

I have imagined his  
tumbling about  
in there  
the sound of  
his body

caught between  
the upward spin  
and the tug  
of gravity,

all of those  
dark collisions  
and his cry  
carried outside  
with the heat.

How long  
before the moment  
when the first darkness  
became the permanent  
second darkness,

and the mother  
heard the sound  
of finality.

## Peace and Justice in Housing

(by *Patricia Garry*)

Think about each of Cincinnati's  
children having safe and warm  
housing,  
Being able to attend the same  
school and learn in the same  
stable environment.

See those smiles, see those  
relaxed eyes, not fearing what  
tomorrow will bring.  
Those children will look forward  
to their futures, will be able to see  
big possibilities in coming days.

Providing that housing, feeding  
and caring for those children will  
cost us much less  
Than ignoring their needs; treating  
them as throwaways, will cost us  
over their life spans.

Let's act from love, not dollar  
signs.

## Old Silk Anemones

(by *Diane Germaine*)

In an old African-American  
cemetery forgotten  
down the hill  
old silk anemones  
are strewn by the wind  
their petals magenta,  
fuchsia, purple - cast  
among gravestones  
bearing few  
names.

No designer stones.  
Few graves  
vertical.

Two small ones  
lying flat beneath  
a gnarled tree,  
inscribed  
"Here they were  
to be buried  
by the father."

A sole  
visitor sits here;  
in the distance  
one other person  
rides uphill  
digging up  
earth.

Magenta,  
fuchsia, purple...  
torn from their center  
blowing softly  
in summer  
haze...

Out in the street  
whine of tires  
on the roadway,  
White Castle  
carcasses,  
yelping dogs  
penned in  
yards....

## In the Center Ring

(by *Diane Germaine*)

Dear Aggressor:  
While my back was turned preparing,  
contemplating our exchange –

and not knowing you I sensed  
I should be cautious, maintain  
some distance -

you came from behind shouting  
vile metaphors and innuendos  
and shoved me to the ropes.

Laughing, you stomped back  
to Center Ring, raised your arms  
rotating this way, that way -  
salute to an imagined throng.

I slowly turned to watch you gloat.  
I did not pounce, did not approach.  
I hovered in the above surround.

I could see you clearly without  
illusion, and floodlights blaring  
and your jeering gone wild,  
you were unaware I chose my path.

As you strut oblivious boxing  
empty air, I arrived quietly  
like the panther I am.

Resolute and calling you softly,  
you did not hear and I carefully  
closed distance.

When you turned 'round –  
eye to eye for one brief second,  
light reflecting as flash in your  
inner eye – I took you down.

## POEMS:

### MARGARET GRAY-DAVIS

Margaret Gray-Davis is a woman of faith, a poet, a romanticist, and a writer who loves words. A firm believer in the value of equality, her poetry is centered around social justice for everyone. Margaret's intent is that the reader of her poems will become inspired to challenge life's issues and make a difference.

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### JEROLD LONDON

Jerold London, Cincinnati poet, playwright, blogger: To him poetry and theatre are to travel other planes of consciousness. To ring bells others have not heard that way before. To kick-start imagination. To celebrate the personal freedom of journeying the unfamiliar.

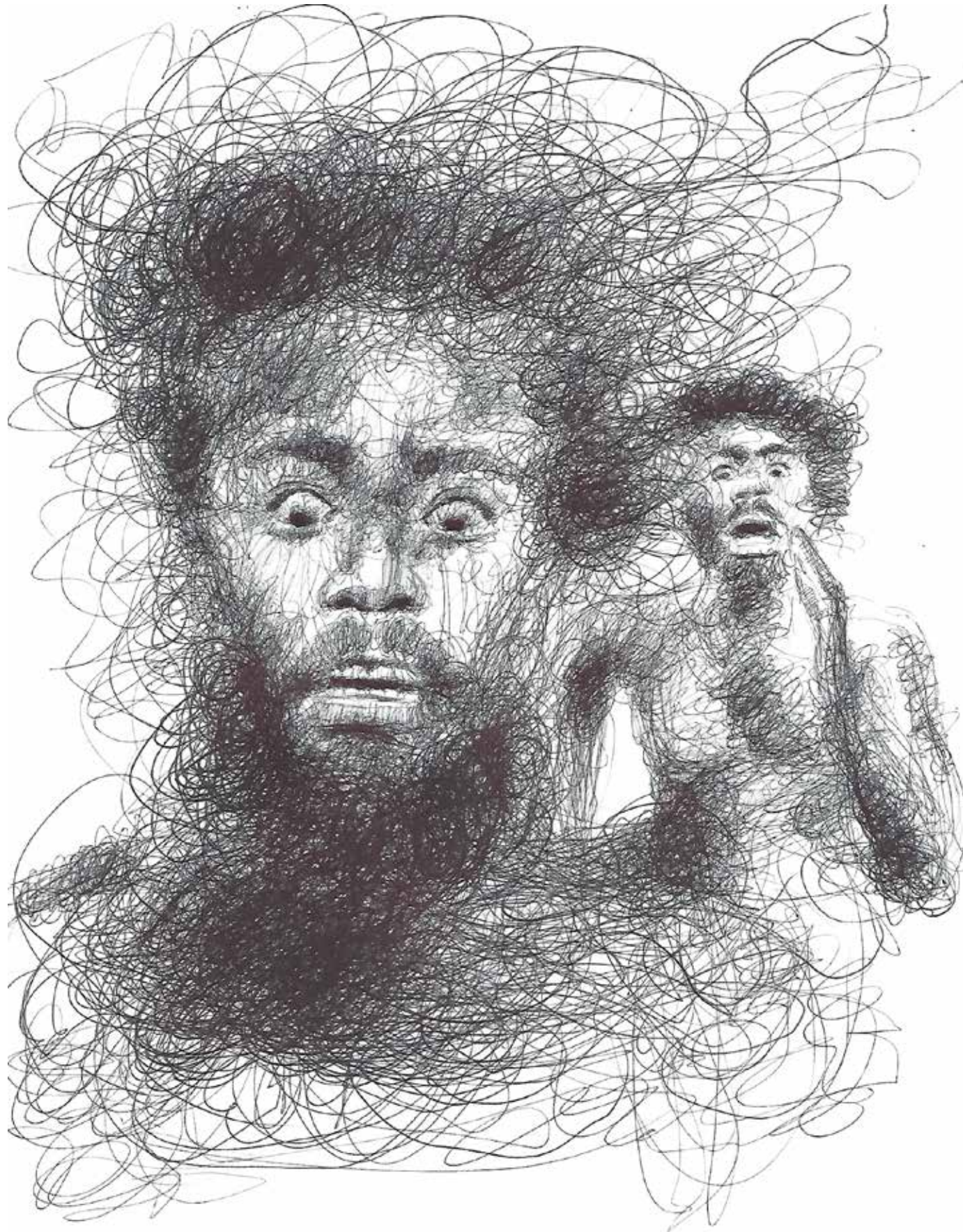
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## DRAWING:

### GIFT MAYAMBI

Gift Mayambi is originally from the Congo (DRC). He graduated from Aiken New Tech high school and is currently a fourth-year student at the University of Cincinnati (DAAP) going for a bachelor's of Science in Industrial Design. Gift's hobbies are playing instruments and learning languages.

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Gift Mayambi

## Bla Bla Blah

(by **Jerold London**)

*“It is always futile to want to dissociate oneself even from the stupidity and cruelty of others.”  
Albert Camus*

Don't need a lot more Bla Bla Blah around me anymore  
A Hell it must have sounded like before the Civil War  
The War Between the States, informs a Southern gentleman  
Or Self War of America, my friends say in Japan  
Which testifies more truly to our headaches now and there  
That we're the Selves to fear the most on land and in the air  
From COVID and old statues to defunding and the Pile  
“Peace, Justice, and Community.” And can it for a while.

## He Had a Cell Phone

(by **Margaret Gray-Davis**)

As I look out of the window, I see a 6'1" young black male running, panting not looking where he was going  
Running track in school is what he taught to do, he could run so fast it was mind blowing

As he was running he could hear his grandma's voice say “stop running boy, look both ways before you cross the street”  
His grandma also reminded him to wash his hands before he would eat

Grandma said “Stop child before you get hurt didn't I tell you to get out of the dirt”  
“Hurry up boy don't miss the bus  
ump..that boy is going to be the death of us”  
“Boy didn't I tell you to turn that music down it's too loud  
“You got all “A's on your report card? Come give grandma a hug, I am so proud”

“Grandma my phone is not acting right, could you buy me a new cell phone?  
She said she would see what she could do; he decided to go over to his Grandma's house before he went home”

All of sudden he heard someone say “Stop running Boy and show your hands, stop Boy, I need to see your face”  
He thought to himself what is this about, how in the world did I get in this place?  
He was wearing a hoodie and dark pants at least that's what the police report said  
Can you imagine what kind of thoughts were going through this young man's head

Police officers got a report about someone breaking in cars and hiding in the backyard of a home

This young man was just going to his grandma's to get a new phone

The helicopter tracked him running through backyards, he immediately jumped over a fence  
He was running, high and hard, running in self-defense

Father of two children who would have loved to have seen his children another day took a  
different path to his grandma's and decided to go a different way  
when he heard the words of a police officer say  
"Gun, gun, gun"  
The young father's first instincts was to run, run, run  
The officers thought he had a weapon, they feared for their lives  
and their safety, and they had to decide who was going to be dead and who was going to be alive

The officers fired a total of 20 rounds into this 6'1" young black man  
Hearing gun shots is common in this community, another death, another young man gone, and  
no one will take a stand!  
Stand up and speak up for what is right in order to bring about a change  
Does this request sound so strange?

After shooting him they handcuffed him and tried to save his life  
It was too late for this young man who left this world filled with turmoil and strife  
No weapon was found on the young man..... he had a cell phone  
Lord have mercy on us, he got killed trying just to get to his grandma's home

## The Saying

(by *Margaret Gray-Davis*)

I grew up with this saying "If you are white you're all right"  
"If you are brown stick around"  
"If you are black get back"

"Black get back" to the back of the bus  
We don't want you sitting by us

"Black get back" don't you whistle at our women  
Cause if you do, you won't whistle no more  
And they hung a rope around his neck to make sure

"Black get back" you can't sit next to me and eat my food  
You can't eat with me until I get in the mood  
Because I'm white and I'm all right  
I won't let you eat with me morning or night!

You still look at me and judge me by the color of my skin  
But did you know we are really kin  
Scientists have proven the mother of us all is black  
So when you look at me you're looking at you  
I know it's hard to believe but it is true

The brown did stick around and you call them Hispanic  
They stuck so hard they are taking over the planet  
They don't care what you think about  
Because they're here to stay and you can't even kick them out

Black, white, brown folks elected a black President for 2 terms  
After he was elected I know some of yall secretly said "Burn baby burn"  
He was elected in 2009  
We celebrated by laughing, crying, hugging, and toasting with a glass of wine

Black get back, but color didn't matter when we went to war  
We fought side by side and shed the same blood, color just didn't matter any more  
We have had heroes that fought to save each other, black, white, brown  
And at that moment we were glad to be alive and we wanted to all stay around

It is right to love my white, brown, or black brother  
It is wrong to hate each other even though you are my brother from another mother  
After all the years of turmoil and struggles due to the color of my skin  
There will be one day an end!!!!

200 plus years to survive a fight  
We're going to realize black, brown, or white  
With God "WE WILL BE ALRIGHT"

**POEMS:**

**RICHARD HAGUE**

Richard Hague is author or editor of 20 volumes, the most recent being *Earnest Occupations: Teaching, Writing, Gardening, & Other Local Work* and *Studied Days: Poems Early & Late in Appalachia*. He is Artist-in-Residence at Thomas More University and 2021-22 President of the Literary Club of Cincinnati.

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**BRIAN J. SHIRCLIFF**

Brian J. Shircliff is long-time fan of words and the pauses between them. He is the author/translator of *The Naked Path of Prophet* series of biblical translations revealing the clever poetry-rap that most Bible translations ignore or even cover over. Director of VITALITY Cincinnati's donation-based holistic self-care programs and avid meditation/movement sharer, Brian writes for [vitalitybuzz.org](http://vitalitybuzz.org)

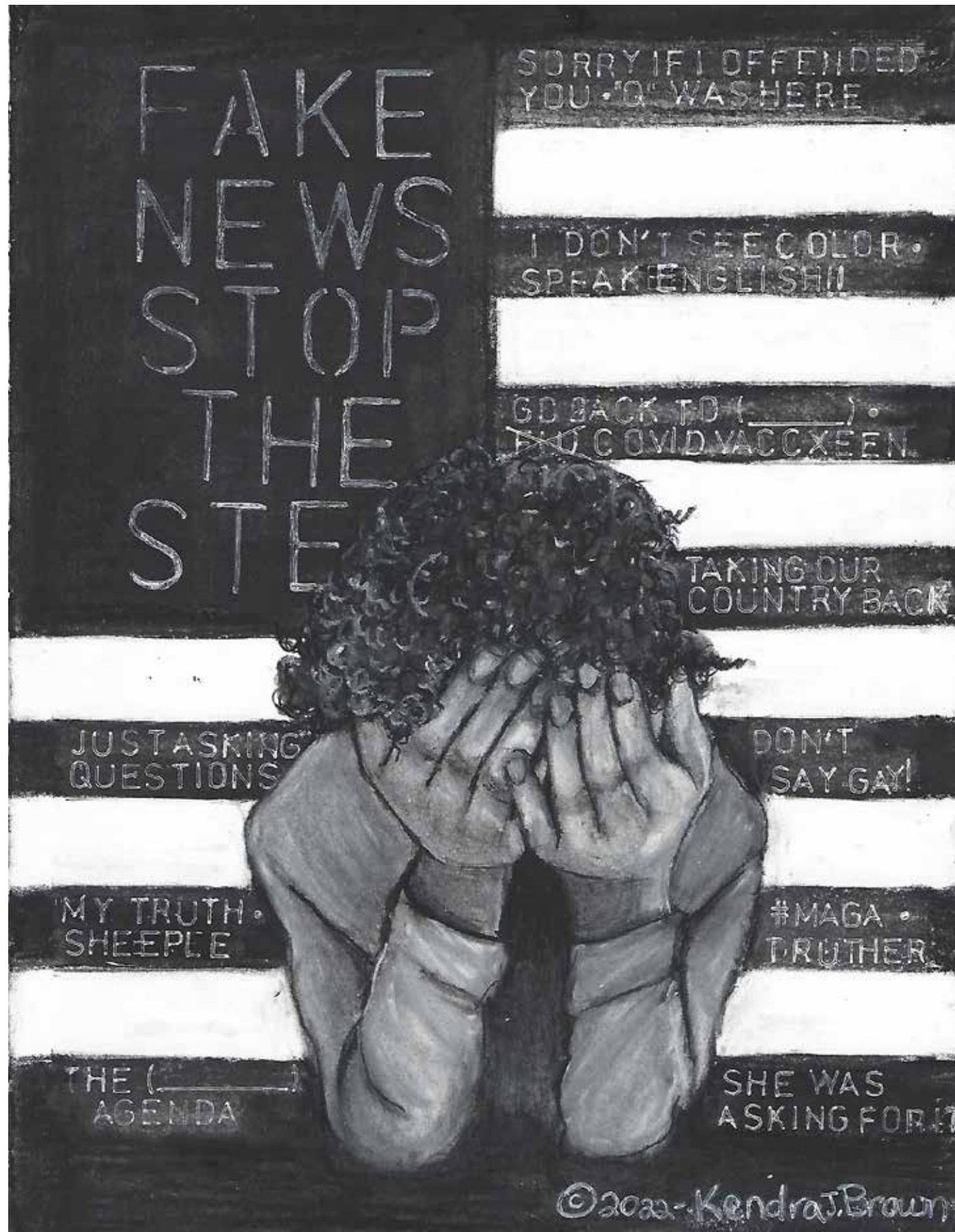
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**DRAWING:**

**KENDRA BROWN**

A Toledo native, Kendra Brown spent her childhood drawing, reading, and creating her own books. She has an extensive publishing background and currently lives in Cincinnati, where she is a design coordinator at a clinical research organization. She also has her own freelance company (Kendra J. Brown Visual Art), and is a member of Urban Sketchers. In her free time, she draws, listens to romance audiobooks, cooks, and travels whenever possible,

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## Limitless

(by *Richard Hague*)

after reading C.K. Williams' "The Nail"

Having recently recovered  
from Carolyn Forché's "The Colonel"—  
that sack of human ears,  
that casual inhumanity—  
I trip now over this,  
headlong into pain and  
brutality, the "grief  
that is limitless."

And I imagine that grief,  
need to speak and name it,  
and it spews out of me, out of us,  
beyond all saving edges,  
past the tiny counties  
of empathy and sorrow,  
past the civil precincts of cities,  
past the peaceful borders of peace  
and love,  
past even the now hopeless  
atmosphere.

It is pandemic,  
a rocket of grief  
with unlimited fuel  
whose target is everywhere,  
everyone,  
its guidance  
the code of our own DNA.

## Family Therapy: To The Members of My Family Who

(by *Brian J. Shircliff*)

To the members of my family  
who drove to our nation's capital to bring about death  
and who thought about it  
and who were angry about Uncle Donald no longer ruling and being in charge of the family  
and who like or don't like Uncle Joe or Aunt Kamala  
and all who love or get angry with Uncle Mitch and Uncle Chuck and Aunt Nancy and Uncle  
Bernie and all



who loved Uncle Barack  
who hated Uncle Barack  
who once loved Uncle Barack until they learned of his 26,171 bombs dropped on guilty and innocent alike — and on their neighbors who had nothing to do with it — in 2016

and all who know Black Lives Matter  
and all who bake cookies for Blue Lives  
and all who think all lives matter  
and all who just want the killings to stop no matter who and no matter what

To the members of my family  
who wear masks and who don't and who still haven't figured out why

To the members of my family  
who are shareholders for justice  
and who are shareholders for slavery  
and who support businesses and regimes that enslave us all  
where we're all shareholders for an economy built upon slavery, once built by slaves, still built by three-job slaves and you and me unwittingly

To the members of my family

who'd rather watch violent shows on TV than hold each other's hand in the dark nights of our soul

who'd rather watch the game than take a knee for much longer than it takes to sing a silly old song about killing

who'd rather we didn't have to face the harsher realities (messes) we've created and let fester in our bedrooms and family rooms and dining rooms and back yards and front yards and across the street at the neighbor's and across the pond at another neighbor's and and and and

as we sing 'love is the answer' and 'it's easy if you try' and all our modern hymns and songs  
as we feel good about it for a minute  
and then forget

To the members of my family  
the members of my family  
members of my family  
my family  
family  
f - - -

*(Written January 10, 2021, the Sunday following the Capitol insurrection; an invitation for a family therapy approach to moving forward)*

## **Pandemics, A Revolution, A Coming Around Again**

*(by Brian J. Shircliff)*

i grieve

i grieve the ill  
the dead  
those who care for them  
for those who wish they did

i grieve for ones who have not yet awakened that this is a brand new day

but most of all i grieve my life, for what  
i missed  
in living  
long before the outbreak made us revisit mortality

(how stupid could we be to forget)

i grieve my old life, embarrassed by the clutchingness, the grabbiness, the overindulginess  
...all of it having so little to do with life

something in me knew it was false, though i played right along...

i mean, Gautama gave us the experiment to know it:  
sit  
watch how each sensation comes, goes  
nothing lasts

yet how i ever wanted it to last...  
so little to do with life

i grieve

tears do come for it, being lost and apart from what 'was'

i grieve

which is to say,  
i let my sail unfurl and take up a new wind  
away from what was known, comfortable, always

i set sail for some place else  
inside me

a birth (berth)

to leave behind the old dance forms for awhile — (square, flamenco, ball, etc.)  
and free-form it  
no-form it

not to any old/recorded music  
not to any live music either  
but the rhythms in the air, the wind, the murmurs of neighbors, fellow creatures  
the oldest music of time

to Joseph Campbell it in the woods (a new verb)  
to read three chunks of the day and do whatever i want for the fourth —  
allow the old patterns present in everything to announce themselves  
(how the hero's journey made foolish heroes of us all)  
so i can choose a fresh, untrod path  
a true adventure  
a sensation

yes

it's time to take up my life again  
to take up living  
even when all around us is death  
— the ill, old structures, dependencies —  
and be washed in new waters, dreams  
where inner sails can finally sleep

## ***POEMS:***

### **TIFFANY RENEE HARMON**

Tiffany Renee Harmon is a poet and artist based out of Cincinnati, OH. She has an MFA from Lindenwood University, and her work has appeared in a variety of publications, including *Poetry Quarterly*, *Page&Spine*, and *Third Wednesday*. Her first novel, *Suburban Secrets*, debuted in 2020.

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### **TORRI KING**

Torri King, born and raised in Cincinnati, is 21 years old and studies communication at Thomas More University in Kentucky.

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### **JOSIE SMITH**

Born and raised in Cincinnati, Josie Smith is currently earning a dual degree in English and Spanish in Alabama. When not trying to catch up on homework, she interns for a literary agent and writes every chance she can get.

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## ***DRAWING:***

### **HALENA V. CLINE**

Halena V. Cline is a Cincinnati studio artist who has exhibited her work locally, nationally and internationally, including in Ohio, Kentucky, Alabama and Germany. In her work she expresses concepts of her experiences and perceptions. Her paintings reflect her personal points of view of current or historical events.

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Halena Cline

## The Male Gaze

(by *Tiffany Renee Harmon*)

The eyes are always watching  
policing every curve  
as if my body is public property  
something to be explored  
without consent.

I hear the appraisals,  
you'd be prettier if you smiled  
because they're entitled to more.  
My face is just a decoration  
the bow on top of the total package  
with no regard to the possibility  
that I'm not happy enough to smile  
when men are making me uncomfortable.

## Missing, Presumed Dead

(by *Josie Smith*)

At 12, they tell you  
girlhood is death  
and that truth,  
that rite of passage,  
has never been any comfort.

The clothes they sell you  
will be what they blame  
when you're attacked and  
left for dead on the street.

And when he puts his hand  
on your leg and shoves  
your dress higher, higher,  
you're supposed to keep quiet.

I still haven't scrubbed off that feeling.

We were each born into this war,  
our bodies a battlefield  
of peace and autonomy.  
It's a fight we  
don't (can't) win.

But Lord, I want to.

I don't think winning  
is no hands,  
no dead in streets,  
no owning.

Instead, it's a girl  
in a red dress  
walking home alone  
in the dark,  
not looking  
over her shoulder.  
Not even once.

## stained

(by *Torri King*)

Fingertips traced across her hips  
soft touch gets boring  
His parents will be home soon  
Persistent convincing  
"Okay fine"  
Impatient & callused hand on her cheek  
She changes her mind  
but he's made up his  
He can't bear to hear her cries  
Hand moves over her mouth  
gentle tears are caught by the top of his index finger  
That will make him feel her fear  
He can't handle that accountability  
now rough hands scrape her soft wrists  
This can't be happening to her

She escapes  
shame weighing her down  
his rough touch following her forever  
Scrub in hot water  
She can't even wash it off

She will never tell her story  
Only to a few trusted ears  
Not that it's a rare occurrence but that no one will  
believe her  
Praying every night God brings her peace  
but brings him justice

He will never know the burden he laid on her  
walking free and clean  
No memory of the damage he's done  
but she is forever stained

## Alone

(by *Tiffany Renee Harmon*)

Why are you thirty and still single?  
they ask, eyes wide in anticipation  
as if my answer will be interesting  
enough to explain my unorthodox ending.  
Thirty and unmarried, oh the pity  
you're not even fat anymore, one says  
helpfully - as if the extra mounds of flesh  
were a barrier and not armor.  
They see the surface  
and that's the problem  
I'm all surface, red lips, and hip bones  
I'm one yoga pose away from perfection  
and inside I'm empty  
afraid to let people see the real me  
for fear it's no longer there.

## Invisible

(by *Tiffany Renee Harmon*)

My smile hides the truth  
of what's lurking underneath  
between the empty space  
among the bones, it sits  
the invisible disability  
chains suffocating my lungs  
panic always ready to strike  
well-meaning friends in disbelief  
tell me not to think about it  
just be positive  
be nice to yourself -  
I'd like to see them try  
remaining calm when  
your body is a shark-infested sea  
a volcano ready to explode  
as reliable as an unsalted ice storm  
a real natural disaster.

## POEMS:

### CAROL IGOE

Carol Igoe has been encouraged by SOS ART to write poetry and to value her work on the rights of people with disabilities. She enjoys every year joining other poets from the anthology and the sharing of their poems with each other. The annual "For a Better World" books take up almost a whole shelf on her bookcase.

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### GIFTED JOHNSON-WILKINSON

Gifted Johnson-Wilkinson is a native Cincinnati whose artistic creations started about 18 years ago. She has been a part of hosting a poetry vibe, known as *SpokenWord Soul* for 15 years, at the legendary Greenwich and has used her talents to become a catalyst to expand interest and access to poetry; through reading, writing, speaking, and overall fostering the love of language. Gifted has participated in several poetic events and educational programs.

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## DRAWING:

### LIBBY SLAUENWHITE

Libby Slauenwhite is a multi-disciplinary artist from Dayton, Ohio. She received her BFA in printmaking and sculpture from Wright State University and is currently pursuing her MFA in printmaking at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio.

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Libby Slauenwhite

## Home of the Brave

(by *Carol Igoe*)

Snow forecast!  
heavy, freezing us  
into our homes.

Pandemic still stalks us,  
haunts the world -  
captures our days,  
death toll climbing.

Nature's ominous threat  
fractures our brotherhood,  
ignites hatred, not care,  
reveals our country broken.

Still, this morning,  
at the bird feeder,  
one small sparrow,  
one woodpecker  
find breakfast,  
last visit before the storm.

## Every Day I FEED

(by *Gifted Johnson-Wilkinson*)

Every day I Feed  
Raise the red flag  
Against the wrongs

Shake tied knots  
Loose  
Dance upon the grave  
Of misery's bitch stew

Glory  
Released

Crumbled thoughts  
Fall from their left  
Behind tables

No longer need that  
Seat  
Roads less traveled  
Need me

Bare feet upon the ground  
Leads me  
My walk reflective of  
The sun as I glow

Every day I FEED

**FEEL** the possibilities  
**ENRICH** my stride  
**ENHANCE** the beauty that surrounds  
**DIMINISH** the need to fit my round into square

Every day I feed  
My soul  
With the prosperity  
Of me  
Knowing there's  
Enough for  
All of Us to EAT

Because I believe  
In better tomorrows

## Cancelled

(by *Gifted Johnson-Wilkinson*)

As we journey on these uncharted  
Grounds  
Illusions of its span  
Quickly disband  
Our faces begin to frown  
Activities  
Events  
Friends and family gatherings  
Adjust  
Or not even take place  
I can't digest

**Cancelled**  
Exploring a myriad  
Of ways to connect  
And grow  
Exhausted labors  
Waver

**Cancelled**  
Reverb in my head  
Echo in my  
Sleep  
My peeps

I truly miss  
My peeps  
**Cancelled**  
Yet the deficit of these  
Actions will never  
Offset  
And certainly doesn't  
Negate  
The power  
Of Hope  
**Cancelled**  
Social distancing  
Does not mean  
Disconnect  
[#PeopleCanStillJoinTogether](#)  
Disparity isn't  
Forever  
Because Hope  
Will never  
Be **Cancelled**

We're All in this  
Together

## Camouflage

(by *Gifted Johnson-Wilkinson*)

You took Cover  
In the name of our Country

Disguised the pain of fire Collapsing  
Around your Command

Honored your Commitment  
To seize the framework of our Civil

Shielded the obscurity of Cause  
Withheld the hold of your Cradle  
Masked your Calmness  
Peace surrendered in the Cloak  
Of Chivalry

But you're Home to Claim  
The sane of our freedom, Cleansed  
No more Concealing  
The struggles of your Care

Withdraw your  
Camouflage  
Soldier we salute  
You

## POEMS:

### ANN C. JAMES

Ann C. James was born and raised on the south side of Chicago, Illinois and now resides in Cincinnati, Ohio. For the last 50 years of her life she has been immersed in community theatre, dance, visual art, creative writing, and peace and justice causes. Ann enjoys her family, traveling, kayaking, swimming, hiking, camping, biking, roller blading, ice skating, cross country skiing, long walks, listening to audiobooks, and working on social justice projects.

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### LAUREN STANTON

Lauren Stanton is originally from Cincinnati, but moved to Greendale with her family. An English Graduate from Northern Kentucky University, she enjoys writing poetry and letting the words just come to her.

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## DRAWING:

### MAYA RUSWINKLE

Maya Ruswinkle is an artist and educator from Toledo, Ohio. She is a 2022 graduate from Miami University majoring in Art Education and Art Therapy. Maya loves both writing and illustrating.

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## Real Capital

(by *Ann C. James*)

They planned their trip to the capitol.  
The most important real estate,  
In this democratic republic.  
To support their leader, the emperor,  
They armed themselves to the teeth.  
The target, The Real real estate.

They thought it was a capital idea,  
To gather around their leader,  
The first president who wouldn't,  
And did not admit his defeat.  
They readied themselves for battle,  
The prize, The Real, real estate.

They marched toward the capitol,  
Americans pristine precious symbol.  
Feeling empowered by their emperor,  
Flanked in fatigues, misinformed and malicious,  
They trespassed, violated, and murdered  
To take, The Real, real estate.

The nation watched these acts of treason unfold,  
Heard the threatening shouts of death,  
Saw the weapons of civil war, yes civil war,  
On the west front of the capitol a gallow with a noose  
intended for the neck of the emperor's Vice President  
On the Real, real estate.

The world watched, as we watched, in real time,  
An attempted coup of the birthplace of democracy.  
The self proclaimed emperor continued coaxing his cult,  
The middle aged, middle class, white male militias,  
Moving to the emperor's methodical manipulations,  
Pawns in the Real, real estate.

Courageous Capitol police, defending the democracy.  
Corrupt capitol cops were accomplices, conspirators.  
Terrorized legislators, cowering in underground spaces.  
Treasonous legislators, empowering the insurrectionists.  
The capitol halls and chambers, invaded and desecrated.  
The rape of the Real, real estate.

Thousands of acts of criminal behavior.  
Twelve thousand incriminating pictures,  
Taken by the insurrectionists of themselves,

Hours of video from hundreds of  
Capitol cameras,  
As the world looked on and witnessed  
with us.  
The riot in the Real, real estate

On the first year anniversary  
of the attempted coup  
of the United States of America,  
These Insurrectionists are viewed  
with rose colored glasses.  
Committing treasonous acts,  
when committed by  
A United States citizen  
who is  
middle aged,  
From the  
middle class,  
Is a white male,  
And a  
white supremacist  
Is not a Capital offense!

## POEMS:

### KAREN JAQUISH

Karen Jaquish has been a writer since before she could write. She used to dictate stories and songs to her grandmother. Her chapbook *What Remains* is available from Finishing Line Press.

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### LONNA D. KINGSBURY

Lonna D. Kingsbury is grateful to everyone who shares their stories of peace and justice through whatever art forms they so choose. From the musical dancing, drumming, dramas and vocalizations through the visual artists who partner with the story-telling poets and writers to each and every cinematic and physical artistic offering. Together - We are one!

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## DRAWING:

### BAYLEE SCHMITT

Baylee Schmitt is an emerging artist currently based in the Midwest. She primarily works within textiles and fiber, exploring the intersection of identity and family through a psychological and artistic lens. Baylee received her Bachelor of Arts from the University of Saint Francis in Fort Wayne, Indiana and is currently pursuing her Master of Fine Arts at Miami University in Ohio.

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## War Games

(by *Lonna D. Klingsbury*)

Fall in  
Fall out  
Standfast  
Dismissed

begins the old harangue

Left / Right Dress  
Right / Left Dress

the cadence of proved chaos  
stands perfectly intact

Eyes Right  
Eyes Left  
Forward  
March

Halt for those above

Standfast  
Salute  
submit  
combat

all norms to take at hand

Left Foot - Right  
Right Foot - Left

Twister thoughts creep in

PRESENT

ARMS

Circle  
Back

to playing war again.

## Wars

(by *Karen Jaquish*)

It was the end of the Korean War. I was listening to the radio in the basement as I pretended to iron cotton sundresses on my pretend ironing board and bright red iron.

I heard the soldiers who said they wanted to stay in Korea, not go back home. I started to cry because I couldn't fathom anyone not wanting to go back home.

When I asked my Mother, she said it probably wasn't true. We learned within weeks, they were returning to the U.S.A. hurray!

I don't remember any follow up interviews. Dad said they must have been brainwashed. I could only imagine a pot of warm soapy water and a tube

pushing water through the brain from one ear and out the other ear with a plastic cable like a fish tank device.

Years passed and Korea disappeared from my nicely washed brain.  
Of course World War Two lingered in our thoughts and prayers.  
The boys who didn't come home were buried

in the dirt of a foreign country: France, Germany, Japan.  
Uncle Ken returned (like so many others) into someone  
confused, sad and angry at the same time.

He wouldn't talk of his war but often woke  
hollering curse words and punching his pillow.  
He claimed he didn't remember his dreams.

Vietnam arrived all mysterious and murky. We used the draft  
to pick our soldiers. These boys were my age, innocent or wary.  
So it was my war too. I didn't like it. There was no flag waving

or pride in our actions. Half of us didn't support this war effort  
because it made no sense. Slaughter after slaughter. Why?  
Were we becoming the evil combatants?

Half of us, young civilians, didn't support the war effort because  
we didn't believe we should be torching small villages while  
smoking weed pretending to be brave and strong.

It was my war & I didn't like it. What if, instead of killing,  
we showered the land with sweet rice and tea leaves?  
We have more than enough to share, don't we?

After all we are from the land of milk and honey  
where the streets are paved with gold and there  
a horse for every wagon, a chicken in every pot.

## Old Wars

(by **Lonna D. Kingsbury**)

The old one's altered musings  
recalled her life as thus:

identities evolving  
rather than each stage  
yet characters must take each stage  
must stand alone and view  
her / his world (at staging)  
and how each self has lived

Did he or she choose war or peace?

How would they choose again?

What and Who was worth the cost?

Reflecting, were they then?

When did they take each action?

Would they act again?

Where on earth did they decide who should die or live?

How would they seek Forgiveness?

How did they make amends?

Why do we choose continually to grace that stage again?

## POEMS:

### JERRY JUDGE

Jerry Judge's eighth poetry collection, *The Cold Moon* (Seven Kitchens Press) was published in 2021. Jerry lives in the Cincy suburb of Finneytown with two royal felines and an earnest canine who tries to walk him twice daily.

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### EILEEN TRAUTH

Eileen Trauth is an author, poet, playwright, and inclusion advocate. Her poems have appeared in *The Boston Poet*, *Common Threads*, *Conversations*, *Inside-Out*, *Loch Raven Review*, *PoetryXHunger*, *Sheila-Na-Gig*, and *Within Us*. She is a member of the Greater Cincinnati Writers League, and the Ohio Poetry Association.

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## DRAWING:

### M. VELEZ

Hailing from the suburbs of Greater Cincinnati, M. Velez is an interdisciplinary artist working toward a BFA in illustration at the Art Academy of Cincinnati. They use their experiences as an outsider and connections to pop culture to inform their work and themselves.

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## Doughnut Hole

(by *Eileen Trauth*)

She sprawled across the sidewalk  
disrupting  
customers' comfortable stroll  
from the intersection  
to the upscale bakery.

She held a sign in her lap  
asking for a dollar  
to buy some food,  
less than the dollar twenty-five  
they'd give for a basic glazed,  
one third what they'd spend  
on the crème brûlée specialty.

Patrons awkwardly assembled  
in a line, outside the entrance,  
forming around her,  
encircling her request,  
averting their eyes.

She did not yield  
to their discomfort,  
kept her gaze fixed  
on each departing shopper  
eager to escape  
into sweet oblivion.

## The Veteran

(by *Jerry Judge*)

There's an explosion of body parts.  
The dream continues during your long day.  
Just being awake doesn't protect you  
as you try to follow a routine.

The dream continues during your long day  
no matter what your conscious mind will say  
as you try to follow a routine  
failing badly and everybody sees.

No matter what your conscious mind will say,  
you put on a mask and try to hide

failing badly and everybody sees.  
You, most of all, know death can't be fooled.

You put on a mask and try to hide.  
Just being awake doesn't protect you.  
You, most of all, know death can't be fooled.  
There's an explosion of body parts.

## Eeny, Meeny, Miny, Mo

(by *Jerry Judge*)

Perhaps it was a babysitter,  
Susie White or Betsy Meyers,  
who first sang or melodically spoke it  
while tugging and tickling mine –

*catch a nigger by his toes,  
if he hollers let him go,  
eeny, meeny, miny, mo.*

My mother while bathing me  
in the kitchen sink – safety, warmth and  
smell of lavender while she tickled me  
going for those toes – *eeny, meeny,  
miny, mo* and so it goes.

My father, surely, while playing cards  
with the guys and supposedly watching me.  
Each card you picked was important –  
*Eeny, meeny, miny, mo.* What do you think  
son? Should we let him go and take this one?

I remember, being good in sports at a young age,  
picking a team in the neighborhood.  
Once I got past the obvious jocks,  
it became *eeny, meeny, miny, mo.*

Eventually my sister and I felt the wrongness,  
gave hell to our parents for using the N-word.  
In polite society, a tiger replaced the bad word  
in an abruptly revised Eeny, Meeny, Miny, Mo.

Decades later, to my horror,  
I watched George Floyd's lynching on TV.  
Underneath the policeman's apparent smirk,  
I imagine him humming *eeny, meeny, miny, mo.*

## Midnight to Noon in an Urban Hospital Emergency Waiting Room

(by **Jerry Judge**)

The woman in blue next to me repeats and repeats  
*Jangle, jangle, jangle. Chirp, chirp, chirp.*  
However, she doesn't just say chirp. She actually chirps  
like the sparrows in the big bush outside my home.  
The chirping is melodious, but the jangles are jarring.  
It's December, but the sparrows are staying in Cincinnati.  
Will they stay all year? I can't remember.  
To my other side, a tattered and bloody couple.  
The woman, young, melts into his arms except  
for her left arm which hangs limp, probably broken.  
Her loud crying turns to soft sobs as stark florescent night lengthens.  
I think of football and whether our local college will make playoffs.  
Security guards march through and abruptly remind people  
to wait in cars or wherever they choose unless they are the patient.  
A group of thirty- to forty-year-olds, male and female, white and black,  
don't want to hear it. One yells, *I am wearing a mask, goddammit.*  
*I'm not going to take all this other fucking Jesus Christ shitting bullshit.*  
*Call the real cops! They'll have to arrest us. We stay with our friend!*  
From the group's aroma, I figure they met their friend in a bourbon bar.  
Real cops don't come and the group, after much cussing,  
blustering and posturing disperse to their cars.  
A sort of calm settles except for coughing and moaning  
and a young man cussing God for killing his sister with Covid.  
The pandemic was unspoken until this shattered man spoke.  
Soon an ambulance comes surrounded by several flashing police cars.  
Paramedics burst in with a shooting victim accompanied by four cops  
taking the man to the back rooms for treatment. Apparently, this victim  
was the perpetrator, first shooter, who started the violence.  
The maybe broken arm lady is pushed ahead of us for treatment.  
This made me happy, but many others were pissed off.  
A little later a probable homeless person, short Black man with freshly battered  
face and half-closed swollen eye, ambles in pushing a small cart  
filled with clothes and what nots in plastic and paper bags.  
He drops papers as he walks which I scoop up for him.  
At the front desk, he declares his name is Elvis, and he wants a doctor  
right now! After he was told that he would have to wait, Elvis erupts,  
*I just can't get no goddam help here because I'm Black. This whole fucking place is racist.*  
He looks at me and shouts, *You're a racist, too!* I say, *Jesus, Elvis! I just helped you!*  
Elvis erupts every 15 minutes or so and security guards take turns settling him down  
The weary waiting crowd gets impatient with him. A couple of sleepy big guys want  
to permanently quiet him. Eventually, two grandmotherly looking Black ladies walk to him.  
They shake their fingers while telling him he's acting like a fool and embarrassing  
every Black person in the room. They end saying "*Just shut the fuck up!*" He does  
Daylight kicked out night a few hours ago, and I'm worrying about my hungry animals at home.

I visit the men's room and a man behind a locked stall is singing *America the Beautiful*.  
His voice is good, and he sincerely sings all the verses.  
As I walk away, I think about how much I hate America, but please God forgive me  
because I love her, too, even as She hurls us toward extinction.  
I need to go home. I am so tired now.

## Innocence

(by **Eileen Trauth**)

A little boy pauses at a parking spot,  
can't move forward, he was taught,  
until his face is covered.  
His mother patiently looks over.

*He must learn, she tells herself,*  
*before he goes to school.*

Not the monsters under his bed,  
hiding in his closet, or in books she read  
to him. Before he kneels to say his prayers  
*they're in the air, she warns him, everywhere.*

*He must learn, she tells herself,*  
*before he goes to school.*

Fearing others isn't what  
she thought his little life would be. Shut  
inside or masking smiles gives a lie  
to all her hopes. He knows only anxious eyes.

*He must learn, she tells herself,*  
*before he goes to school.*

**POEMS:**

**BLANCHE SAFFRON KABENGELE**

Blanche Saffron Kabengele is the author of *Conjugal Relationships of Africans and African Americans: A Socio-Cultural Analysis*, and *Quiet as It's Kept, Me Too, and Other Poetic Expressions of Life!* Blanche believes poetry allows to expose the many injustices society so thoughtlessly bestowed on those who are different. She is retired and lives in Cincinnati with her husband Peter.

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**MOPOETRY PHILLIPS**

MoPoetry Phillips is the co-founder of Regal Rhythms Poetry Slam and Feature Event, founder of Hit the Mic Cincy, and Organizational Officer for the Regal Collective. She is a contracted poetry and workshop facilitator, and event curator. She served as Artist-in-Residence for Woodford Academy; hosted the Juneteenth "Voices of Freedom Project" and performed at various corporate events through Artswave.

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**DRAWING:**

**MICHAEL THOMPSON**

Michael Thompson is a Multimedia Artist, Poet, Designer, and Educator who actively works to create a living ecosystem around his art by fostering community relationships and education. He is currently Artist-in-Residence at both the Cincinnati Art Museum and Contemporary Arts Center and is 2022 TEDx Mainstage Speaker. His current work, "Sanctuaries" is part of a multidisciplinary book wanting to give an authentic and nuanced view of black and brown art in America.

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Michael Thompson

## an oracle of words meant for purposes beyond reason

(by *Blanche Saffron Kabengele*)

there are many today who loudly say,

*Let's make America great again!*

while others say,  
when was she not?

perhaps when she allowed  
some but not others  
to live well living comfortably  
off the anguish of others?

perhaps when stock markets  
crashed, and some believed  
learning to fly solo  
was their only way out.

while others learned how to roll  
their pain into wizard ways  
stirring grits tight by night  
living and laughing  
the same as before.

and yes, I agree let us all say,

*Let us all make America great again!*

but first do tell  
when was she not?

## Beautiful Black Joy

(by *MoPoetry Phillips*)

We were divided, carried over, and brought down  
That makes slavery long division  
Reunifying your family algebra  
Several variables missing-  
But you accomplished the mission,  
Beautiful black joy, black woman, black girl, black man, black boy.

Some people want tokens more than change  
False symbols that things are different,



## Missing

(by *Blanche Saffron Kabengele*)

*Although we teach them that slavery happened,  
we fail to provide the detail or historical context  
they need to make sense of its origin, evolution,  
demise and legacy.*

*Hasan Kwame Jeffries*

American history books buried  
from omission

the significance of Black history  
packed deep forgotten memories

like what made Bart,  
besides his hat black,

like the demise of Reconstruction  
and Black Wall Street,

like memories stored in the cellars  
of history books

flung Black homage towards  
making America great again,

found *missing* pages paged  
uneventfully between jazz

and peanuts void significance  
of the many contributions

toward building the riches  
of this land,

like babies snatched  
off mother's nipples  
to suckle free  
sweet land less liberty,

like Black history  
barred from omission

the truth—Black history—is American history!

## POEMS:

### REBECCA S. LINDSAY

Rebecca Suter Lindsay's award-winning historical fiction novel, *The Peacemakers*, the story of Mennonite pacifists and Unionists in Virginia during the Civil War, is available from Shadelandhouse Modern Press. She has had poems and short stories published in various journals and anthologies.

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### ROBERTA SCHULTZ

Roberta Schultz writes songs, poems and the occasional book review when she's not leading wellness drum circles or walking her beagle pup, Piper.

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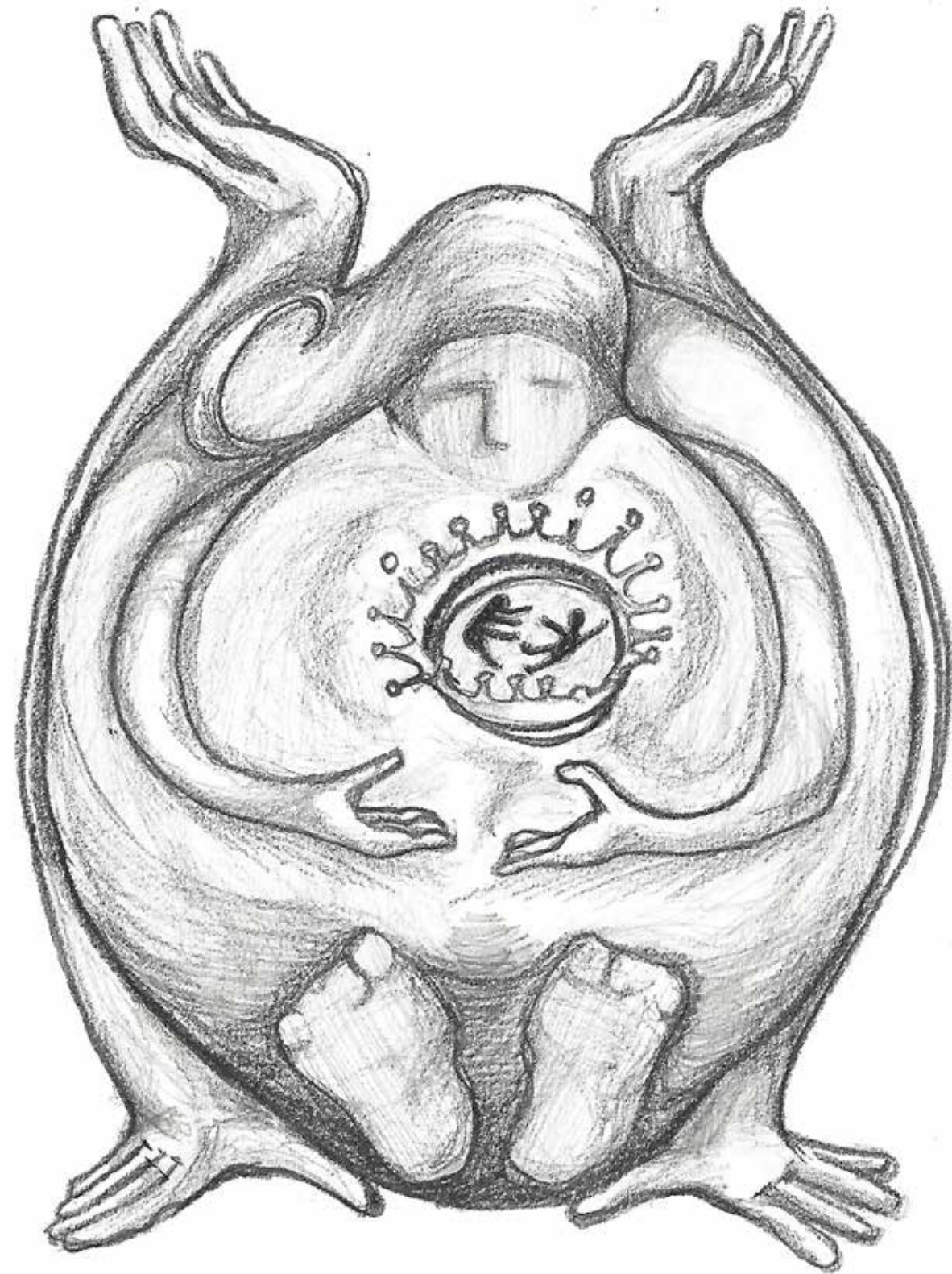
## DRAWING:

### KAREN PROPHET TINDALL

Karen Prophet Tindall is a Northern Kentucky artist working primarily as a painter with an interest in record keeping and exploration of painting techniques. Her drive to document through art is likely driven by her medical career which hinged on her accurate representation of events. Karen holds degrees in art, graphic design and occupational therapy and feels elements of each of these fields of study is reflected in her work.

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*Karen Propper-Fordall*

## Transformation

(by **Roberta Schultz**)

What if border walls  
become welcome portals  
into new world discovery  
and cure?

What if children crossing  
are welcomed as recruits  
into brave understanding  
and forgiveness?

What if we call on parents  
to design this liminal space,  
to build safe infrastructure  
of acceptance?

What if we pool our passions,  
to drink from deeper waters  
where re-imagined prisons  
offer refuge?

What if we look at crisis up close  
and in first person? What if we  
throw our Mylar arms around  
each trembling change?

## Save the Children

(by **Rebecca S. Lindsay**)

On the Internet news a video runs;  
parents protest a mask mandate.  
Chaos reigns: men shout,  
women yell, fingers point.  
The governor of the state,  
there to speak,  
is the object of their ire.

Their message for the governor's ear  
is loud and clear:  
"The mask will traumatize.  
Papa knows best,  
and Mama does, too.  
Parents should decide."

Off to one side,  
mouth agape,  
a boy stands and stares  
at his angry dad,  
questions written across his brow.

An older girl circles,  
surveys the scene,  
takes mental notes.

A baby clutched high,  
his face smothered  
by a paper mask plastered  
in place by his father's hand,  
dangles and kicks  
While Dad's bellows beat  
against his infant ears.

And a tender-aged girl,  
dressed pretty in pink,  
sits on her mother's lap,  
fingers stuffed into her ears.

## Qualified

(by **Rebecca S. Lindsay**)

I read on the Internet news  
where a Congressman  
questioned whether there was  
such a thing as a Black woman  
qualified to serve on the Supreme Court,  
as if all Black women  
are of lesser worth;  
and where another said  
the position would be hers  
only through affirmative action.

Well, let me tell you about  
some Black women I know.

I know a Black woman  
who has spent her Friday nights  
sitting in her lawn chair  
on the corner  
under the streetlight,  
radio playing,  
reclaiming her street  
from the dealers of death.

I know a Black woman  
who has a “D-r-period”  
in front of her name and  
a “P-h and D” after.  
Those aren’t honorary letters;  
she earned them with midnight oil.

I know another Black woman  
who can do stand-up  
while she’s teaching,  
and when she has the floor,  
I shut up and listen.

I know a good number of Black women  
who have studied those rules  
that Robert wrote.

They know how to bring order  
Out of chaos,  
And they could tell those justices  
—sitting solemn  
in their long, black robes—  
tell them a thing or two  
about a woman’s rights.

I know a Black woman  
who is crusty as toast,  
who dared to stand  
on the shoulders of four generations  
and represent a national church.  
That same woman  
can kick off her shoes,  
stand in the pulpit,  
and preach with power,  
barefoot, so she can feel  
the Spirit coming up  
through her soles.

I know Black women  
who paid no attention  
to those privileged nay-sayers  
who imagine themselves self-made,  
who say Black women only got where they are  
because someone let them in line.  
Those women didn’t wait for permission;  
they just went ahead and did.

I know some Black women,  
and they are as wise as they are smart;  
they are serious and funny,  
gifted and degreed,  
brave, with backbones of steel,  
and they are qualified.

## Travelogue

(by **Rebecca S. Lindsay**)

Since you asked me straight, I’ll tell you plain  
Just what I saw when I went to Spain.

A small lad in a matador suit,  
As proud as a kid in cowboy boots.

Six señoritas drinking Coke  
While filling their lungs with New World smoke.

A cathedral of enormous size.  
A maiden on the bus with Mayan eyes.

Matrons who chatted and chocolate sipped.  
A bishop’s bones laid in a marble crypt.

Like a blazing sun, a silver rood;  
An altar gilded with Aztec blood.

Bejeweled crowns and solid gold plates,  
Treasures that sealed the Incas’ fate.

A king and queen with a masterplan  
To build an empire on foreign sand.

The tomb of the man who sailed the seas  
And set in motion scenes such as these.

That’s what I saw when I went to Spain,  
And all of it done in the Almighty’s name.

## Normal Distribution

(by **Roberta Schultz**)

Teachers grade themselves hard,  
without a curve.  
Curves wind the road to Independence  
where you first meet that John Birch Society sign.  
Signs emerge over time like white hoods  
in the back of a pickup.  
Pick up what’s broken, and move on.  
On you move, to a two-year stint  
at parochial school.

School yourself there on 33 classic novels,  
five preps a day, and yearbook.  
Years book too much  
of your only gift.  
Gift yourself with teaching AP Literature  
more, more, and more.  
More becomes enough.  
Enough turns out to be all  
you ever hoped to teach.

## Code Talkers\*

(by **Roberta Schultz**)

Unspoken tongues lick silence,  
transmit secret  
wounds.

Unquiet words tug  
grins from history’s  
grimace.

Canyons swell dry  
breath inside red  
valleys.

Seven generations open  
mouths like window  
rock.

*\*During two world wars, the United States  
called on Native American servicemen to  
pass military secrets in codes based on  
their tribal languages.*

**POEMS:**

**MARY-JANE NEWBORN**

Mary-Jane Newborn is a native Cincinnati who practices and promotes liberation veganism, volunteering for VeganEarth. Certified by Hamilton County Environmental Services as a Master Recycler, she also maintains a registered Little Free Library, practices extreme composting, and her yard is a National Wildlife Federation Certified Natural Wildlife Habitat. A Reiki Master, Mary-Jane has also done stand up comedy and modeled for 26 years for art classes.

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**CHUCK STRINGER**

Chuck Stringer is grateful to be entering year nine of writing together with students and regional poets in the Thomas More University Creative Writing Vision Program. His work has been published in *For a Better World*, *Literary Accents*, *Pine Mountain Sand & Gravel*, *Riparian*, *The Licking River Review*, and *Words*. He lives with his wife Susan and cat Bella near Fowlers Fork in Union, Kentucky.

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**DRAWING:**

**ROSCOE WILSON**

Roscoe Wilson was born and raised in the Mid-West where his environmental values were shaped. He received a BA from Wabash College in Indiana, a MA in Painting/Printmaking from Purdue University in West Lafayette Indiana, and a MFA from the University of Wisconsin – Madison where he studied Printmaking, Sculptural Installation, and Painting. Since 2003 he has taught at Miami University Regionals in Ohio where he is currently a Professor of Art.

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## In Gaia We Trust

(by *Mary-Jane Newborn*)

Human supremacy will be the last icon of the dominator tradition to go, but it is already beginning seriously to rock on its pedestal.

If not removed by official decree - an unlikely prospect - it will be thrown down, rolled gleefully through the streets, and dumped off the edge of the flat Earth to shatter completely in the vastness.

It could be at the root of the refusal to accept the hegemony of the coronavirus. While positing the existence of an invisible, inaudible, intangible almighty deity which is also infinite, eternal, infallible, omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent, provides comfort that we obviously do not claim these attributes for ourselves, a microorganism unseeable to our mere eyes, which challenges our god-given dominion, is intolerable.

Indignant that some infinitesimal being dares interrupt our lemming-like march toward total conquest and extraction of every last drop of profit from our beleaguered planet, we tremble at the brink of a plunge into full participation in the community of life on Earth, where we are simultaneously equal to every other species - no more, no less - and also inseparably engaged in a superorganism with seemingly mythical powers.

The phenomenon of a living Earth has persisted for billions of years, overcome nearly insurmountable obstacles, and found its way to flourishing from miles deep in the ocean to miles high in the air. Yet the biosphere is proportionally thin as the skin of a bubble, vulnerable but a proven survivor.

To surrender imagined dominion, and accept full equality is to join the actual pantheon already in progress. In saving the world from ourselves we save ourselves. In saving ourselves, we save the world and become indivisibly divine.

## NO

(by **Chuck Stringer**)

NO VEHICLES reads the sign at the entrance to Orleans Trail  
as I step aside to let a motorcycle pass.

NO DUMPING reads the sign that lies broken in the leaves, half-  
hidden by limbs a neighbor trimmed from his wind-torn trees.

NO DUMPING reads the sign up the hill to Woodcreek Pond  
where I know a neighbor walked the past seven days  
by the seven bags of dog shit I retrieve beneath this great white oak.

NO TRESPASSING reads the sign that hangs rusty on a gate  
barring the way to a missing bridge, torn down to stop 4-wheeler  
growls.

NO DUMPING reads the sign near the end of Orleans Trail,  
the one that still stands above a smelly green smear  
left by a man who tosses here his freshly mown grass.

NO WILDNESS reads the sign in the back of my mind as I turn  
and slip into thicket, pick up a deer path down to the creek.

## Buy Gones

(by **Mary-Jane Newborn**)

On Wednesday, November 10th, first one household,  
then another, and another, and another, put out  
their trash carts, so that throughout  
Veterans Day, Thursday 11/11,  
the street was adorned with overflowing  
festive tributes to those who fought,  
even died, to preserve the right of all USers  
to acquire and discard the extracted labor,  
the resources, even the very bodies  
of billions of once-living beings from  
all over the planet.

The offerings were placed at the curbside with care,  
to be collected the following day,  
for the continuing construction of that monument  
which constitutes already the highest point  
in Hamilton County.

The trucks crawl up to dump their cultic cargos,  
echoing the involuntary toil of those thousands  
forced to erect the pyramids of Egypt,  
and reminiscent of the mound builders  
whose land this once was.

The diesel exhausts mingle with the stray  
methane emissions from the skyfill,  
helping to ensure that this proud flesh  
swelling from the earth  
will never be a ski slope.

And to the eyes of those who fly over  
on wings grown or fabricated,  
the Stars and Stripes atop the peak  
defiantly declare a proclamation  
of our sound conquest of nature.  
Read it, and weep.

## So

(by **Chuck Stringer**)

The Florence forecast this morning says *haze*,  
so I won't see a waxing crescent moon  
rising in the east-northeast (now, says my app  
at an altitude of 4 degrees). No matter.  
I take it on faith it'll still be there, shining  
in a blanket gray sky. Why wouldn't I?  
A trained astronomer has carefully performed  
her calculations. I don't need to question  
them. I trust that they are right, just as I trust  
that the high today will be around 90 degrees  
because the app on my smart phone says so.  
But I do wonder how so many people  
can believe in online conspiracies, or choose  
*not* to get a vaccination, or continue  
to back a man who believes in nothing  
but himself, himself and the power to do anything  
his darkened heartandwillandmind desires.  
So I take a moment, say a little prayer, hope  
that my weather app's right and about 2 pm  
a June sun will cut through this haze and we'll  
all see a crescent together in this afternoon sky.

## Bemusement Park

(by *Mary-Jane Newborn*)

When the company where my father worked  
had an annual picnic at Coney Island,  
it was an exciting time to go on rides,  
to eat carnival foods and laugh in glee.  
I did not know that there were children  
who were not allowed this joy.  
I did not know to ask.  
Nobody told me.

Later, when I worked there at the Haunted House,  
marveling at the shrieks and screams  
of young Black women venturing inside,  
I wondered why,  
but did not know to ask.  
Nobody told me that Coney Island  
had been segregated, then integrated,  
and these young women now had a safe place  
to release a little of the terror  
that had been haunting them.

On Orphans' Day I saw a boy with albinism,  
who had pale hair and eyes and skin,  
and pondered that he was Black,  
and yet his color was like cream, a paradox.

Working elsewhere in a crew of women temps,  
our Black supervisor wore overalls,  
and his boss, who was Lebanese, wore a suit,  
and would be considered white.  
But both of them were the same color.

These puzzles remained unanswered.  
Maybe teaching children what really happened  
in this country, on this globe,  
would not make them uncomfortable,  
because they are curious and want to know reality.  
Ignorance is painful and dangerous.

Our culture has been teaching  
hypocritical race theory for 400 years,  
and children continue to die.  
If they cannot remember the past  
because no one told them what really happened,  
what choice will they have  
but to repeat it?

*(Note: Poem written in response to  
a chapter from the "Race and the  
City: Work, Community, and Protest  
in Cincinnati, 1820-1970", edited by  
Henry Louis Taylor, Jr.)*

## POEMS:

### BILL OLSEN

Bill Olsen lives in Kentucky, works in Cincinnati, and doodles at Jessamine Street Studios in Camp Washington.

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### MIKE OLSON

Mike Olson is a local Cincinnati Poet. He is a member of the Greater Cincinnati Writer's League and Cincinnati Writer's Project and has been published in multiple anthologies and literary journals.

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## DRAWING:

### ESRA KANISICAK

Esra Kanisicak, a Turkish artist living in Cincinnati, works in abstract painting and sculpture. She is an ocean conservationist and a neurodiversity activist. Esra's dynamic and lyrical art aims to bring about awareness by evoking feelings of celebration and beauty.

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## Redux

(by *Mike Olson*)

*"When I coughed, she looked at me over the apples as though I had pointed a bazooka at her head and then went into cover behind the bananas. 'Allergies', I said... 'Allergic to you', I said before going on to hunt down frozen peas."*

*- Piggly Wiggly shopper January 12<sup>th</sup>, 2021.*

A year of searching.  
A year of imperfect vision.

A year of seeing the wolverine world pacing its cage,  
a year of clawing back, clawing out —

of life now lived in lines, scrawled lines  
snaking breathlessly for hours for a meal or a needle.

A year of hoping  
there will be a period at the end of each line.

A year of taking last breaths remotely,  
of loving through unbreachable bubbles.

A year of living life through the looking glass  
like bees bumbled in a jar dreaming of escape.

From the rooftops – streets washed of their people,  
a balcony song becomes a battle cry.

Razed landscapes in the Piggly Wiggly.  
Aisles empty like the broken streets of Kabul —

bombed out shelves of pasta and paper,  
bombed out soaps and creams, hopes and dreams

In the market – a call for war.  
A sneeze becomes advanced weaponry.

God sends us to our rooms without our supper.  
With a warning, God puts us to bed to wake us up—

*This world is not yours,  
This world will no longer run from you.  
This wolverine world, cornered, will shred you.*

## What Season Is It

(by *Bill Olsen*)

There must be a name for this season  
when the dragon curls around its pile  
and squeezes so tight that furniture cracks  
and families shoot out mangled and broken.

## X and Y

(by *Mike Olson*)

it was the chemistry of living that eluded me  
I could never find the boiling point of love  
or the freezing point of hate  
but its math I could master

I would teach my children this —  
 $x$  (a smile) +  $y$  (a kind word) could =  
 $a$  (a happiness)

but the new math they learned on the news  
would show them—

$x$  (a victim's tears) +  $y$  (a loud cry) could =  
 $a$  (celebrity and gold)

I would teach my children  
that  $x$  (hard work) +  $y$  (persistence) could =  
 $a$  (a success)

but the new math they saw online  
would show them—  
 $x$  (clicks) +  $y$  (bizarre) could =  
 $a$  (celebrity and gold)

the world wants to show them that  $x + y =$   
 $a$  (all the pain in the universe) but what then  
are  $x$  and  $y$ ?

I would teach my children the answer =  
 $x$  (fear) and  $y$  (ignorance)

but what if  $x + y = a$  (all the light in the  
universe)

what then must  $x$  and  $y$  be?

I would teach my children this answer =  
 $x$  (a laugh) and  $y$  (a kiss)

the answer to their life's equations  
as simple as learning its algebra  
and calculating true values

## And the Meek Will Inherit

(by *Mike Olson*)

We have been warned —  
our common enemy is patient,  
waiting in the innocent green of rainforest moss,  
hiding in the insidious bomb of bat guano

All our shiny things will be taken  
they will take our diamonds, our polished red  
Corvette's,  
our Amish built furniture  
back to where we found them in the maw of earth

And the meek shall inherit our pandemic,  
our gasping ozone, cancerous coral reefs,  
our plastic islands in the heaving seas  
and take them back to where they were found

The world burns  
and we are released from our religions, our color.  
We marvel at our own nakedness, our sameness,  
the simple solitary wonder of our souls.

We have been warned —  
only a thing with soul will be harmed.  
They will take our wonder and our awe  
back to where they were found

The world burns  
and the faceless ones become our gods.  
The lesser, that bring us things  
the invisible, that make us things — are gods

## POEMS:

### TERRY PETERSEN

Terry Petersen is the author of *The Star League Chronicles*, a middle-grade fantasy where good triumphs over evil. This is her goal for the world. She writes a blog on positive thinking at <https://terrypetersen.wordpress.com/>, and contributes poems and stories to Piker Press, an online magazine. She is the facilitator of the Hamilton Writers Group.

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### AYANA SLOAN

Ayana Sloan has practiced law for over thirty years. Throughout her career, she has worked to be a voice for those who have been marginalized or felt disempowered. In recent years, Ayana has begun using her poetry to promote our shared humanity and to breakdown barriers to creating a more just and equitable world

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## DRAWING:

### RACHEL SINGEL

Rachel Singel is an Associate Professor at the University of Louisville. She grew up on a small farm in Charlottesville, Virginia and received a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Virginia in 2009 and a Masters of Fine Arts in Printmaking from the University of Iowa in 2013. Her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally and represented in private, public and museum collections.

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## Pain Heals with Hope

(by *Ayana Sloan*)

We have two eyes, so we can see how the other is hurting.  
We have two ears, so we can listen to each other's concerns and anguish.  
We have two hands, so we can reach out and lift each other up.  
We have two legs, so we can walk beside one another in peace and solidarity.  
We have a voice, so we can speak words of life and hope to combat our growing despair.  
We have a heart, so we can feel one another's pain and confusion.  
We have a mind, so we can figure out a way forward together.

## Just a Moment

(by *Ayana Sloan*)

If there were a moment when you really looked at me, would you see my pain?  
If there were a moment when you really listened to me, would you hear my despair?  
If there were a moment when you touched my wounds, would you help me heal?  
If there were a moment when you walked in my shoes, would you show me compassion?  
If there were a moment when you buried someone you love because of the color of his or her skin, would you grieve with me?  
If there were a moment when you lost all hope, would you give me a reason to believe?  
If there were a moment when you saw my humanity, would you understand why I yearn to be free?

## Peace Recipe

(by *Terry Petersen*)

Set spirit temperature at warm.

Forgive. Inside and outside  
the home receptacle. Sprinkle awareness.  
Listen for minor changes and slow cook.

Watch the product, not the clock.  
Peace can be both served and recreated  
as ingredients intermix.

Add truth and blend it with patience,  
an uneven, unpredictable process.

The mixture is as necessary  
for an effective final product  
as oxygen for breathing.  
Water for life.

Allow contents to simmer, open-lidded.  
Take care. Hate enters and boils  
when placed in a closed pot on high flames.

When the recipe is  
denied by someone or something,  
begin again. Vent excess heat  
in a safe environment.

Practice the recipe and serve daily  
without expecting instant satisfaction.

Peace development can take many forms.  
It can be the yeast in bread dough  
in another family's house.

Let it rise where it can.  
And know you are part of the core  
of world change.

## Legos and Building Understanding

(by *Terry Petersen*)

My granddaughter and I  
click bright-rainbow blocks together  
on an old shag rug.  
We share imaginary playgrounds,  
houses, restaurants, theaters, roads.

I made a factory, she says.  
My pieces become a simple  
chair and table outside a fast-food shop.

And our tiny pieces develop into  
more than plastic stacks  
could suggest. My creations  
require a semblance of reality.

She reaches into the mother lode  
of possibilities and announces she's  
making a canyon and a sunset.

My granddaughter has Down syndrome.  
Special needs. More accurate, she is  
a special, unique individual.

A canyon offers depth. A sunset provides  
color, defying darkness.

Thank you, Ella. I will follow you  
through the next game.

## Letter to Tony Written Last January as the Pandemic Exploded

(by *Terry Petersen*)

Dear Tony,

You died before masks and isolation,  
when funeral guests could sip coffee  
and hug, say goodbye, stay or leave  
when tears flowed. The obituary page

in this Sunday's paper listed  
one-hundred-plus heavenly spirits  
qualified to enter the next sphere.  
Would you mind greeting them?

You were a professor, a teacher,  
before Lewy's Body Syndrome  
claimed your body and mind.  
You told a nervous young student

with Down syndrome she could give  
her speech to you privately,  
a kindness. It is what you did.  
And who you were.

A new class begins now.  
The spirits freshly arrived  
on a nearby cloud  
will be grateful to meet you.

## POEMS:

### POETICWISDOM

Poeticwisdom, a young aspiring writer, is an Ohio native. She has been writing poetry since the age of 12, her inspiration coming from her own struggles with mental health and her unique view of society. She enjoys creating in any medium from poetry, braiding hair, painting, or even drawing to singing. Poeticwisdom's goal is to inspire and empower others that they are not alone.

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### GARY WALTON

Gary Walton has published seven books of poetry, his latest *Waiting For Insanity Clause* (Finishing Line Press, 2017). His novel about Newport, Kentucky in its heyday as a gambling Mecca: *Prince of Sin City* was published by Finishing Line Press in 2009. He has been nominated for the Pushcart prize twice and in 2010, was voted Third Place: "Best Local Author" Best of Cincinnati 2010 issue in *City Beat* magazine. Gary is also editor of the *Journal of Kentucky Studies* a professional journal of critical and creative work.

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## DRAWING:

### FARRON ALLEN

Farron Allen ran and taught the Sculpture Foundry class at the University of Cincinnati for 32 years. Currently running his business, making art, and writing, life continuing to challenge and fulfill him.

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## You Are Me and I Am You

(by *Poeticwisdom*)

You are me and I am you you see the tragedy is that your eyes are closed and you have no clue...

Words deeper than you knew knowledge more hidden than 1000 piece puzzle set...

Currents of deep programming decades of secret lost in the dead souls that walk this flesh earth...  
Promises voided and empty gesture noted struggles that reach the elite and then seemly something  
needs to be addressed...

Wars exploding erupting becoming the norm of the narrative...

Darkness sick and twist agendas being manipulative programmed into your subconscious psyche...  
Self hate family secrets people picking and choosing learning that being a fly on the wall has its  
perks...

Worlds colliding when poverty problem reach elite families and standing for justice becomes more of a  
passion than just a word...

Winds of disaster cries going un-noticed and mass disruption is becoming the new pollution...

You are me and I am you just open up and see through...

## The Cost of Freedom

(by *Gary Walton*)

*"Find the cost of freedom, buried in the ground...."*

*--Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young*

Anonymous America has a friend,

Well, former friend, that is, former lover,

If truth be told, whom she misses occasionally,

Often sometimes, though she doubts that he

Misses her—but maybe—once in a great while—

They still exchange Christmas cards, that quite

Quaint erstwhile custom bled over into the digital age—

He is stubborn as a toothache and believes

In freedom the way a child believes in Santa or

Easter angels—an absolutist at times—at others

Not so much—he was (and is) so hard to predict.

These days he seems to want to be free of the laws

Of science itself, denying global warming, for example,

Because he *can* in this age of relativity and abundance,

And because believing so is convenient at garden

Parties and golf foursomes where many player

Make their living off of fossil fuel, banking or armaments.  
Last year, as a group, they decided to deny the  
Plague sweeping the planet, calling it a fiction  
Concocted by the Chinese or perhaps the North Koreans

Or maybe it was Bill Gates or Warren Buffett. Then,  
They decided to resist the call for vaccinations as  
Something to do with microchips in the serum, tracking  
Devices (ignoring the GPS, heart monitors, and data uplinks)

Ubiquitous in their phones—where every keystroke is stored,  
Then sold to information brokers around the world.)  
Yet, this defiance he called “freedom from tyranny.”  
Perhaps he is right—his choice is certainly freedom from reason.

This fall he spent ten days in a COVID ward, almost  
Dying twice. She heard at times he was almost as blue  
As a sapphire or Lapis Lazuli. Better now, he brags he  
Is a veteran in the fight for liberty—an Idealist of the

Strongest stripe. This year, as she reads his name under the  
Words “Merry Christmas,” she hopes that he does not choose  
To be free of gravity itself, and jump off a roof,  
Trying to prove, once and for all, that he can fly.

## **Zeitgeist Daddy-o**

*(the Variations)*

*(by Gary Walton)*

I

Chinese supply chain disruptions have caused a dearth in new pithy witticisms.

Working class Americans learn their history from algorithms concocted in boiler rooms in the Balkans.

Deep fake videos are promoting panic in the various traditionally placid celebrity pornography industries.

Freedom is not only a breakfast food and a new hybrid 4 by 4, these days it manifests in the virgin tattooed arms of heroin addicts resisting COVID vaccinations.

II

The young have found their certainty in Block Chain technology (as long as Electromagnetic Pulse weapons don't proliferate like Vape pens).

Actresses are selling their farts in glass jars and artists are flipping non-fungible tokens of digital frippery in a new commerce in ephemera.

Holograms of dead rock 'n' rollers and rappers continue to release new recordings and receive awards from digital influencers.

Freudians have been pondering the significance of the fact that during recent world wide emergencies, Americans in full panic began hoarding toilet paper and bullets.

III

Currently, fame is being measured by active pupil dilation and notoriety in petabytes recorded on billions of video screens, yet users are lonelier than ever.

CAPTCHA: examine the following list (cybernetics, eugenics, dianetics, aesthetics, saluretics, luetics, and poetics.) Have your web bot pick out the problematic words and report back with a QR Code.

Anthropologists have determined that Facebook is approaching an extinction level event.

Physicists have discovered that Americans not only do not understand String Theory, they are utterly disinterested in the concept (as well as, in many cases, basic arithmetic and/or bicameral government).

IV

The Hubble telescope has spotted a blue star nicknamed Icarus, surrounded by what some have called “dark matter,” some 5 billion light years from Earth.

Grant County, Kentucky is home to an amusement park that features a fabricated Noah's Ark and teaches that the universe is 6 thousand years old and humans rode dinosaurs.

Billionaires fire penis shaped rockets into space for kicks and famous ball players have their heads cryogenically frozen, proving that hope, like hubris, springs eternal (or vice versa).

Indeed, economists and ethicists tell us that despair can be sold in golden terabytes but hope, that most precious of commodities, needs to be doled out like sacks of flour from the back of flat bed trucks until everyone has at least a promise of a bit to nibble.

## **New Year's Eve: the Video Uploading Soon!**

*(by Gary Walton)*

The day is warm as toast;  
Global warming has seen to that;  
The sky is the color of margarine,

Whipped in curds of a charcoal Pinad;  
My head aches once again from  
The mold in the air chafing by

A weak and aching sun, shamed  
By its own feeble seasonal anachronism;  
I finger the pills prescribed to ward

Off despair (but are probably just placebo);  
I can't help but wonder if it is true  
That the ancients wrote better poetry

Than those of us mired in the mélange  
And mechanism of modernity;  
Were they closer to the truth, the

Existential *ding an sich*? Was the air  
Fresher? The wine sweeter? Was love  
Deeper, more intense because it was new?

It seems that our words are being culled and  
Flattened into pictograms, logograms  
And Emojis; those that remain feel

So washed out, used up, tainted and tacky;  
After the vicarious thrill of millions of murders,  
Zillions of sexual assignations and melodramatic

Suicides, trillions of fawned heroics or struggles  
In vainglorious battle plus all manner of human  
Catastrophe again and again in our incessant media,

Even emotion itself lies thread bare and clichéd;  
With eight billion people on the planet,  
Must we not assume that any thought, feeling,

Inspiration or invention is viscerally occurring  
Dozens of times, simultaneously in a myriad of tongues?  
Yet, we press on--each consciousness

Experiencing the moment as if it were unique,  
All the while being curried into one hive,  
One virtual, universal polyglot mind;

(Should I check WebMD for the health of my heart?  
Or with Google for a video on how to resist the  
Seduction of my phone?) Are my personal

Algorithms as singular as a finger print,  
As definitive as blood type, or a strand of DNA?  
Can such technology create a map of the soul

And, if so, in the end, will it even need a poetic form?  
Or has even the impulse already been replaced,  
Recorded and digitized into brittle binary code.

## **POEMS:**

### **DEXTER SIMPSON**

Dexter Simpson is a writer in Cincinnati where he remains passionate about our common humanity, good beer, his wife and four children, and his pleasant dachshund.

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### **NOEL ZEISER**

Noel Zeiser has published two books, *The Pearl Street Flood* and *Salute to the Moon*, the first telling of her father's devastating experience of the 1938 Ohio River flood, the second, a collection of her poems, essays and short stories.

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## **DRAWING:**

### **TOM TOWHEY**

Tom Towhey, a native Cincinnati, works in several mediums at a time. A narrative of rather dark humor represents a common thread to his paintings and sculptures. Tom's work can be found in many private collections as well as in galleries throughout the world.

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## King of the Hill

(by *Dexter Simpson*)

When I was a child, I thought like a child,  
I reasoned like a child, and stood upon  
a pile of mulch or dirt higher than four  
inches off the sod, like a child, and taunted  
my brother, our friends to fight like gladiators,  
conquer a mountain, the elevated,  
best piece of land, using the advantage  
of strength, higher ground, and push each other  
down, claiming a sweaty, sweet victory.

Come on up if you dare!  
We're kings of the hill and don't care!  
Come on and take it if you can!  
We'll throw you down or be damned!

But when I became a man, I put away  
this childish game, even while grownups still  
love to play, as their nations place ships in  
the South China Sea bathtub, army men  
on the ground in Yemen, push protesters  
in Hong Kong with toxic gas, build forts in  
undisclosed places, ignoring the cries  
of the needy, kneeling at the bottom  
of the hill, asking for equality.

Come on up if you dare!  
We're kings of the hill and don't care!  
Come on and take it if you can!  
We'll throw you down or be damned!

America enjoys a conquest,  
taking hills upon which others stand,  
believing it is some god-given right  
to bestow upon the singing people  
the land no one wants, lynching those  
who dare disagree, while stealing their  
gospel beat, bloodying hands so that no  
one new can see the top and know the secret:  
that there is plenty of room up there.

Come on up if you dare!  
We're kings of the hill and don't care!  
Come on and take it if you can!  
We'll throw you down or be damned!

By birth and race, the blood is thick and  
unwanted on my boots, as the never-  
ending game continues with or without  
me, through country clubbing, gerrymandering,  
purging, redistricting, policing,  
arresting, imprisoning, stopping, frisking,  
recruiting, fear mongering, abusing,  
silencing, on and on to suppress and  
press and compress those entitled to more.

Come on up if you dare.  
Don't want to be king. I don't care.  
Come on and take it if you can.  
Please throw me down, for I am damned.

## Who Rules?

(by *Noel Zeiser*)

We sit slumped on the couch  
ignoring the wicked ones  
who thirst for riches and power.  
Lazily we roll over,  
burying ourselves under the quilt,  
sighing at a smell in the room  
stemming from our addictions,  
our sweet, comfortable habits.

Why do we ignore what the  
power-seekers swipe from us?  
It squeezes our souls,  
smothers truth,  
denies striving,  
rips neighborly concern,  
clutches selfish desires,  
spreads rumors and slander.  
How do we deny the bullies, the  
ones who squander our worth?

Cringing at making sacrifices,  
we slide deep down the cushions  
allowing evil to flourish  
in our cities and countryside,  
along the restful rivers,  
smoothing our vague regrets.  
We snore away for another hour.

These “kings” are master manipulators.  
Cleverly they spray and poison.  
We become withered green grass, soon  
baked brown,  
    unrecognizable.  
Like zombies we watch braggarts  
    raise their fists,  
    shout falsity and blasphemy  
while justice gulps for air.

You and I yearn for change  
yet allow politicians to  
    slime the truth.  
But unity is strength.  
I think we must encourage each  
    other to shout the truth.  
Strong as a marching battalion,  
we can rescue the lost  
    pearls of sisterhood,  
    brotherhood, community.  
If not, we are dozers on the couch,  
    letting our addictions  
    set us into slavery.  
George Washington sobs.  
John Adams weeps.

## Sundown

(by *Dexter Simpson*)

A small, suburban village,  
outside of an American  
city was once labeled a  
Sundown Town, where tradition

states a white Protestant person  
can buy a house and enjoy  
the convenience of walking  
children to school, or saving

room for real buttered popcorn  
at a quaint movie theater  
or a single scoop cone at  
the ice cream parlor after

dining at one of the table-  
clothed restaurants, where you can still  
walk today, right by a tree  
where a black teenager died in

a car accident a couple  
years ago, but, of course, the  
memorial to the child  
has long since been removed by

the village’s maintenance  
crew, because the youth’s marker  
may damage their lawnmowers,  
but also because the driver,

young and black, stole the car,  
and locals around here prefer  
to forget that part of the story,  
and of course they don’t seem to

want to act like a dog that  
rolls around just to refresh  
the stench of death that still haunts  
the ground where they go to bed.

## Commas

(by *Dexter Simpson*)

The pause heralds for a listener,  
to hold on,

emphasizes the melody notes,  
in a song,

thickens the starches with flavor,  
in a soup,

gives a longer prepositional phrase,  
in the sentence,

allows time to fetch a drink for a lover,  
in bed,

but unnecessarily blocks the flow,  
of justice,

and builds a dam in a mighty stream,  
righteousness,

while wanderers thirst for new growth,  
in this garden,

and equal hope on all the streets,  
of our city,

*This “Wait” has almost always meant “Never,”*  
says the Dreamer,

so let us not look for convenient seasons,  
to speak up,

or lay down our tired bodies needed,  
in the fight,

and refuse to disrupt the way, the path,  
to freedom

***POEMS:***

**JEAN SYED**

Jean Syed spent thirty-six years in England and thirty-seven years in Loveland, OH. With her husband, they moved to Washington State to be near their son, although she is a widow now.

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**SIDNEY TRASSER**

Sidney Trasser is a Cincinnati-based graphic designer, photographer, artist and poet. Her work aims to tackle social and societal stigmas in an effort to debunk the misinformed stereotypes and biases of today. While she has a background in classic fine art training, she prefers to use her camera, design, and words to draw her audience in and challenge her viewer to think critically and deeply about the world around them, and their own tendencies to mislabel and judge minorities, mental health, and injustices.

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***DRAWING:***

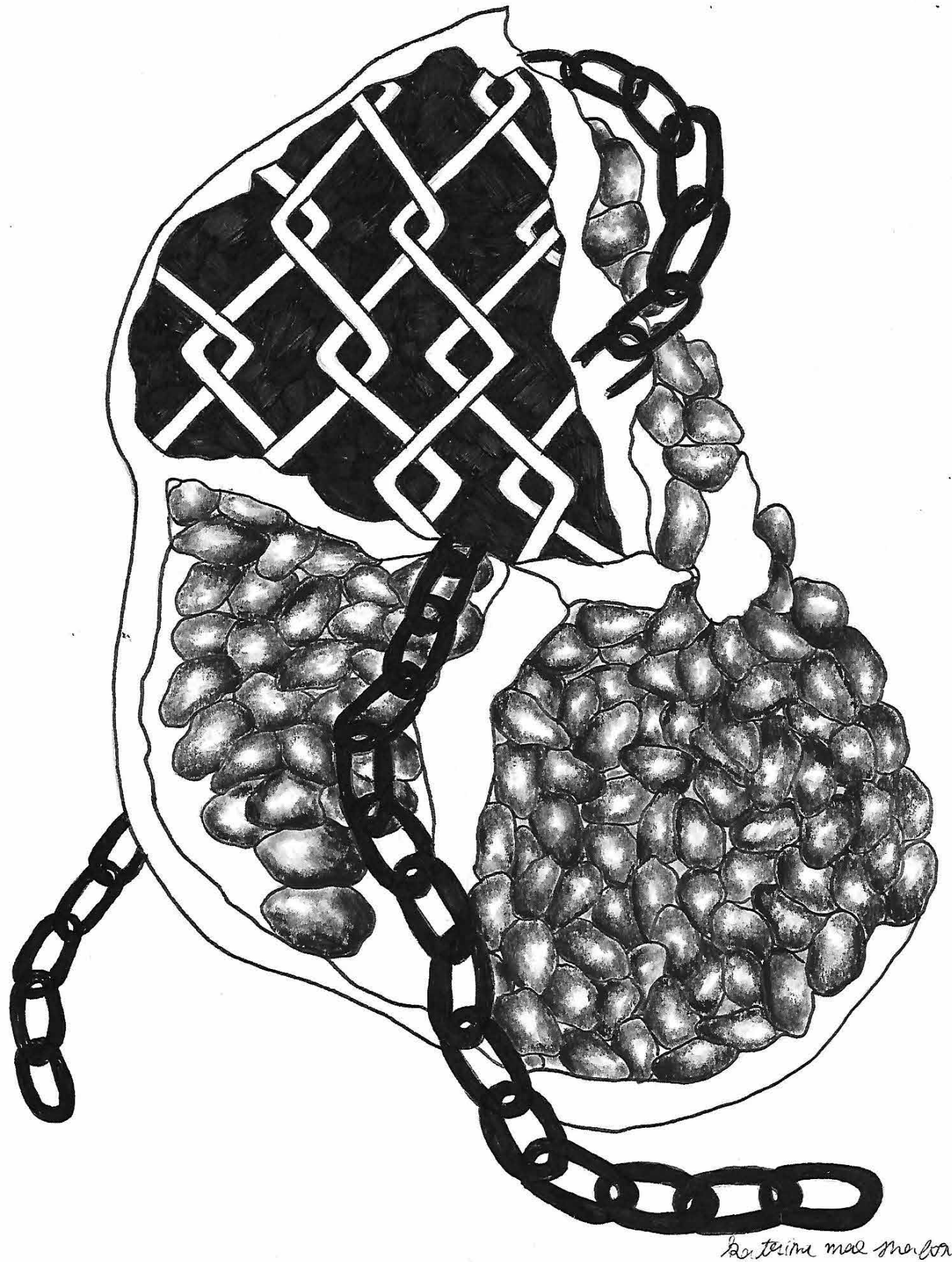
**KATRINA SHAFOR**

Katrina Shafor (she/her) is a recent graduate of Miami University in Oxford, Ohio where she studied Art Education and Community Arts. She is an educator, artist, and advocate for recognition and equality in the art world.

Katrina creates art to promote positivity and love, confidence of the being, and acceptance of one's true form.

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*Art by me me me*

## Men

(by *Jean Syed*)

"It's PMS." They frock us  
In feminine distress  
Twirl us about and mock us  
Owning such a dress.

"Caprice," they say, "allures  
But grievance suits you ill.  
Closet it, find cures  
For recalcitrance with a pill.

That with bouquets of roses  
We may honor your pain  
Lest anyone supposes  
Our love is but disdain.

Then your aberrant nature  
We may absolve from guilt,  
When we confirm your stature  
In the house WE built.

## Cages Can Protect Us, Too

(by *Sidney Trasser*)

Men rape me with their eyes  
and impregnate me with their thoughts,  
that I feel deep inside me when they stare too long,  
shooting lasers that etch into my flesh, this one's mines,  
to him, I am his.

He didn't ask me,  
but that is the way it is.  
Challenged only by another toxic *alpha* man that's come to possess me.

To them, I am property and possession,  
a vessel to fill, use and deplete, fully consumed, as they desire.  
In their mind I was created for all the things I could be and give to them,  
and I have nothing to give, no other purpose, other than to be *his*.

And from this, she is running constantly, as I told her to, many times before.  
When they get too close I melt her down and hold her within me, safest there in the unknown.  
To save her, I take all of their gaze, let it weigh upon me for days.

If I scream, it will not make it past the property line,  
so I clench my toes, close my eyes,  
taught to focus on the nice things he might have said...  
and that he was only mean because he liked me, after all.

I know I must protect her at all costs,  
and so I do.

Doesn't matter anyway,  
they're going to own me either way.

Because I am a woman, and they are men,  
these are the constructs of a society I am forced to live in.  
Always too fat, always too thin.  
Too opinionated, too outspoken.  
Breaching the construct of my gender,  
they constantly tell me I need to learn to surrender.

So, I do.  
Barricaded in my home, safe from things like walking alone.  
My house a cage, where I must stay,  
because wearing short sleeves makes me a prey.

Cages can protect us, too

## **Pandemics, Racism and Social Media Science**

(by *Sidney Trasser*)

Microscopic particle pollution,  
originating at the heart of cruelty to animals,  
and poor sanitation.

Brought on by a massive population,  
who've grown into cocky *immortals*,  
atop a chain of other things,  
all of which...hate them.

Causing the quarantine,  
that became an untimely guillotine,  
to all the things,  
with brains,  
that expand, and shrink.

Like the lungs of every living being.  
Oh the *irony*.

Disease, racism and scientific conspiracies,  
planted in children,  
undetected, unharmed.  
Walking amongst others,  
as hidden atomic bombs.  
Touching everything with their  
sticky, slobbered up, unwashed palms.  
Regurgitating hate and lies,  
from adults who learned these "facts" online.  
Everyone's an expert on topics they've never studied.

Sent in, the first wave, well armed,  
to segregate the future and relive our past.

2019? Have we all lost track of time?  
Two years in, I'm still stuck inside.  
Trusting science has become a societal crime.  
Even the sunlight I enjoy is contained.  
Negative chemicals begin  
mass production in our brains.

"Don't worry, only a certain few will die"  
the issue is, that leaves so many vulnerable people in line to die.  
Young people going to beaches and bars in packs,  
doing things that prevent us from stopping a virus in its tracks.

COVID-19, the prime minister of our time,  
reminding us how humans behave when everyone's life is on the line.

Boasting and bursting from their seems,  
with sanitizer, mask and other necessary things.  
Oh what a time to be alive, when we would rather hoard things,  
more than we need to survive,  
and turn blind eyes as the poor, elderly and less fortunate die.

Oh, America, the land of the free,  
opportunity lurking, if you have the right name, fortune and fame.  
And I'm left to wonder how long this will take,  
before one side finally breaks.  
Because COVID-19 keeps the outside world hostile and vile.

Things feel off, but the standards of the world are still normal.

## I Don't Like Christmas

(by *Jean Syed*)

I don't like Christmas, it's a scandal,  
I don't like the commercialism  
I do like "Messiah" by Handel.

Santa, presents, all the caboodle  
It's just so much consumerism.  
Cut off Christmas trees, a scandal.

Yule log, holly, are not biblical,  
In fact, they are paganism  
Not like "Messiah" by Handel.

Christmas dinner is that so special  
When forgotten folk eat pessimism.  
I don't like Christmas. Am I the scoundrel?

The singers sounding in the cathedral,  
Do they vent forth with cynicism?  
Or do they believe "Messiah" by Handel.

Overture to the amen, a marvel  
And I say this strong atheism,  
I don't like Christmas, it's a scandal,  
I do like "Messiah" by Handel.