

Spring 2011

SEEDS - 2011

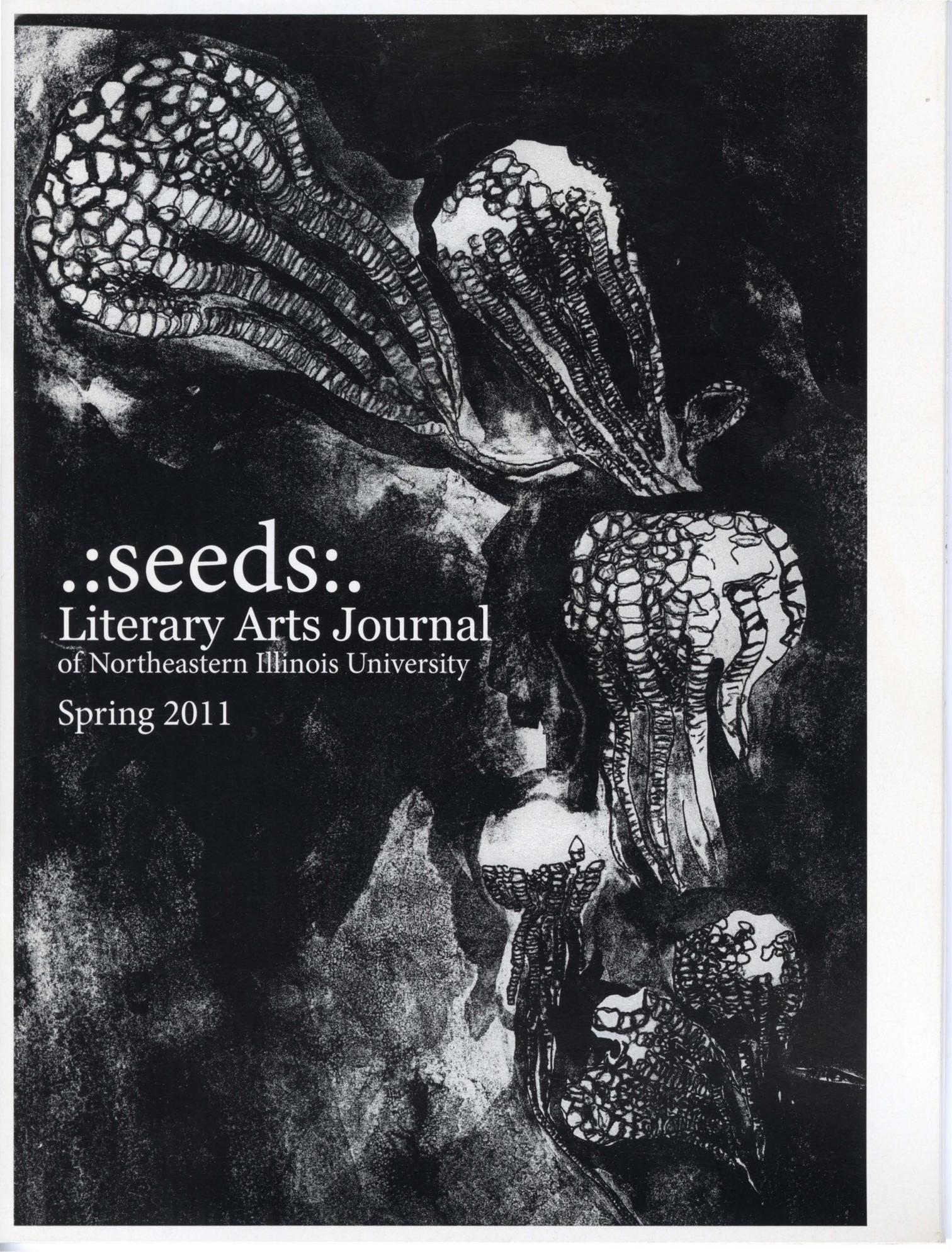
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Literary Arts Journal
of Northeastern Illinois University
Spring 2011

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

STARTING THIS JOURNAL HAS BEEN A LONG, WINDING ROAD. BUT WE FELT THAT THERE WAS TOO MUCH TALENT ON OUR CAMPUS – AND WITHIN THIS CITY – WHICH HAD GONE UNRECOGNIZED. WE FEEL FORTUNATE TO HAVE FOUND SUPPORT AMONG THE MEMBERS OF NEIU, AS WELL AS, THE BROADER COMMUNITY.

WE HOPE THAT WE HAVE DONE JUSTICE TO THE HARD WORK AND CREATIVITY OF THE ARTISTS AND WRITERS WITHIN THESE PAGES. WE ASPIRE FOR THIS JOURNAL TO BE THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG AS WE MOVE FORWARD. IT IS OUR MISSION TO PRODUCE AN ANTHOLOGY OF WORK THAT IS RELEVANT, POIGNANT, AND REAL – WITH A *HINT* OF ATTITUDE.

PLEASE SHARE THIS WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY. BE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR OUR CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS AT: WWW.NEIU.EDU/~SEEDS. THANK YOU, WE TRULY HOPE YOU ENJOY THE OEUVRE OF OUR EFFORTS.

- JANEAN L. WATKINS, EDITOR IN CHIEF

*We would like to dedicate this journal to Dr. Sheena L. Warren
Sister Sheena, it was your light that shined the way for us. Ashe!*

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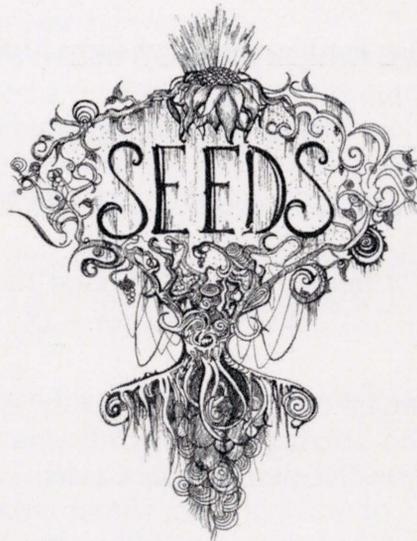


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Education of Nothing

By Nergal Melham

Part of me has always wondered if my father was ever bothered with the fact that he was the only man in the family. My mother, my two sisters, and myself. Women, women, women.

Not to say that they didn't try. Their first attempt, George, would have been only a year younger than me. The umbilical cord decided against that. But he plays no part in my life. No, what could a brother whom I've never met possibly do to impact my life? It was when my mother became pregnant for the fifth time that counted, six years after my little sister had been born. Sitting away in the womb, he became the doll of the family. We already decided upon a name. Neesha.

Then the test results came in.

It's a memory littered with gaps and blurs. My mother and father coming home from a check-up at the hospital. My sisters sitting in the living room, me sitting at the computer on the other side of the house in solitude. The door opens, signaling my parents' return. I stand in the threshold of the living room watching my mother cry, my father sitting awkwardly, and my sisters comforting my mother. The awkwardness weighed heavily on me and I left the room. I ended up looking up the condition. It required heart surgery. *Heart surgery*. I was in the seventh grade. I wasn't stupid. *Heart surgery on a newborn?*

Months before his birth, I accepted the thought that Neesha would die.

Immediately after his birth, Neesha spent his day covered in tubes. My mother spent her day sleeping on the couch in the same room. I met Neesha twice and he was the cutest thing I had ever seen. My uncle pointed to the bag attached to Neesha's catheter and would joke on how much of a 'pisser' he was. My little sister put her bunny plushie next to him. It was purple, as was the color of his room and it was decided that that would be his color.

And yet, I felt detached from him.

The day of the surgery came and my family prayed diligently. As a Christian Middle Eastern family, much of my family was devout. My family asked for a few priests as well. The day of the surgery passed. Neesha made it through the surgery.

I knew something was wrong the moment I woke up.

Usually, I would be woken up by my aunt for school and yet, this day, I had woken up on my own. The house was deadly silent. I got up and found my aunts sitting on my parents' bed. The moment they spotted me, their conversation stopped. I asked what happened. Neesha's lungs had collapsed and my parents, along with a couple other family members, ran to the hospital. My older sister had left for school beforehand and would be unaware of this incident until it was too late.

The hours ticked away and I can never recall what I did in that time. Was it even hours? Wasn't it only fifteen minutes? The memory is as distorted as the day when we first received news of his condition. I can only remember sitting on the couch in the living room, staring blankly at the floor, drowning in the feeling of apathy and guilt. With a passing thought, I realized it was Valentine's Day.

The arrival of my mother was obvious. I could hear her cries from the staircase outside the door. My aunts took her into the bedroom. One of them stayed to give me the news. He was on life support. Even if he were to live, he would more than likely be a vegetable.

The guilt over not feeling anything bothered me more than not feeling anything. My father had remained at the hospital with a few other family members. My mother eventually returned to the hospital. When she had returned, it was obvious what had transpired.. Her cries rang through the stairway. *I let him go. I let him go.*

The day of the funeral was overcast and chilly.

My parents buried two sons at that cemetery. The chilling wind distracted me from the service and I eventually took shelter within my father's car watching everyone move from Neesha's grave to George's, which weren't very far from each other. Now alone, I stepped out of the car to stand in front of his car, hoping for some emotion to make its appearance. My aunt's voice from behind me spoke: *He's in Heaven now.* She walked away, leaving me wallowing in a completely foreign feeling.

And the feeling was *liberating*.

I had never even noticed. It never crossed my mind, not even for one second. Not when my mother's cries seemed to be the only thing in my ears, not when I drowned in the guilt, and not even when everyone stood around praying for his survival. It seemed like something that should have been so simple, so natural. But it never happened. While my family reverently prayed, I did nothing. I never clasped my hands with them, never cried to God for giving my mother these trials, never asked Him why He took Neesha and George. Why hadn't it ever happened?

The answer was so *simple*.

From the very beginning, there was nothing I could do. What good would prayer do me? Would prayer strengthen the surgeon's hand? Would prayer make a newborn's chance at surviving heart surgery better? Of course it wouldn't, I knew this from the very start. This was no Godly trial, this was *nothing*. This was chance. A sad occasion that had no holy meaning. Stripped away from God, I felt free. Standing on that grave, enduring the cold winds, I had never felt so at peace with everything.

It was nothing short of euphoria.

Neesha was gone and there was nothing I could do. There was no point in mourning him, all I could do was continue to live. I could only control what was already within my control and he was not one of them.

I spent the rest of the funeral in the car. Shielded from the wind.

After The Bell

By Matt Von Moss

The bell signaled the end
and lifted the burden of everlasting
boredom. We quickly clocked in and out
from our lockers and retreated to the grounds.

Athletes stayed and trained.
Pot-heads lingered taking long drags,
holding lengthy conversations about nothing, and
never looking each other in the eye.

After the bell, the air surely was cleaner and crisp,
deeply refined from all unwanted pollutants.
The sun gained exuberance, and
the grass was tender and raw in hand.

The cars sparkled, even the rusty ones.
Walking involved festive smiles, even alone, and
every breeze was relished and wrapped in awe
and held tightly in a single breathe.

After the bell, all was righteous
and real, exceptionally enchanted,
and oblivious to misfortune.

Tilting, tipping

Stars sashaying

Shaggy shadows

Prancing posies

Sunset sonata

Random ramble

Ca-clang, ca-clang

Mangled monaural

O heavenly heady

So simple and saintly

Worriless worries

Farewell! Farewell!

To time the time

Passé I pray

Of mural mirroring

That time takes time

O what a waste

Gathering grief

Still wasting away

towards the sun

sliding across

shunning the light

parading their past

so sparingly sang

rambunctiously planned

creation chorale

marauding the mind

the haven of youth

it startles the souls

what really are those?

Fanfare of woes

spent timing time

propose a past

memorial of such

to tarry or stall

to worry amiss

and greedy relief

and waiting to wane

Not toting the time

till time ticks away

Passage of Time

By Tinu Thompson

I have trudged upon this winter's day.
Seen the slopes of white glimmer with red
Weariness setting into my bones...

I have waded upon this evening shine
Seen the serenity grasp the ray of light
Fatigue cataloguing my limbs...

I have hiked upon shores of the setting sun
Seen the forest blacken with the night owl
Exhaustion claiming my limber frame....

I have seen this act of God displayed
Seen the mysticism of the hearty crescent
Time has come to reap my body....

I have walked in search of the Gold
I still wish to see the end of the rainbow
Yearning to meet the pretty colors
And the riches that were foretold.

Colors

Pretty

By Rachel L. Deahl

I give sticky grapefruit juice permission
to run comfortably down my chin
drip onto my neck

I give charcoal smoke permission
to fill loopholes in my lungs
eat away all tissue

I give royal ocean waves permission
to softly enclose around me
crush high in the sky above

I give black ants permission
to tangle in my resting head
march through tunnels of hair

I give violent wind permission
to abuse my hairdo
rush in through an open window

I give sour tears permission
to linger on my tongue
turn into sweet droplets of dew

Permission

By Aleksandra Wyrazik

I wish I could be a lesbian
But the vagina scares me
(Even my own)
Unattractive
Unappealing
Unacceptable
Taught that female sexuality
Has to be hidden
I fear orgasm and independence
Regarded as the "other"
Stigmatized
Street harassment
Rape
"The Yellow Wallpaper"
"The Madwoman in the Attic"
The Madonna/Whore dichotomy...
All these fears plague me as I uneasily
sleep
Trimmed pubic hair
Botox
Competition with trophy wives
The potential my nanny will queer my
children
The constant battle uphill against
patriarchy
Menstruation is dirty,
Shameful,
just like my voice
it doesn't exist.
I am Woman
Hear me weep
Casually consumed

I Am Woman

By Amanda Owens

Overtly objectified
Do I throw up my food
Or just not eat?
These questions
These concerns
Are dressed up with makeup,
Fake tans
Fake nails
And new clothes, shoes, and handbags
Expected to listen to Celine Dion
Crying
Blowing kisses to Elliot Smith
Cutting
Then pick a cat-fight with my BFF
And marry the quarterback
Forced to smile
Forced to compromise
This all while being compassionate,
nurturing,
beautiful and pure
This is all while cooking dinner,
Cleaning house,
And raising well-mannered children
But my kids are bratty,
I complain...
But I don't want to procreate,
I maintain...
Then, burned as a witch!

Institutionally recognized
and real.

Call

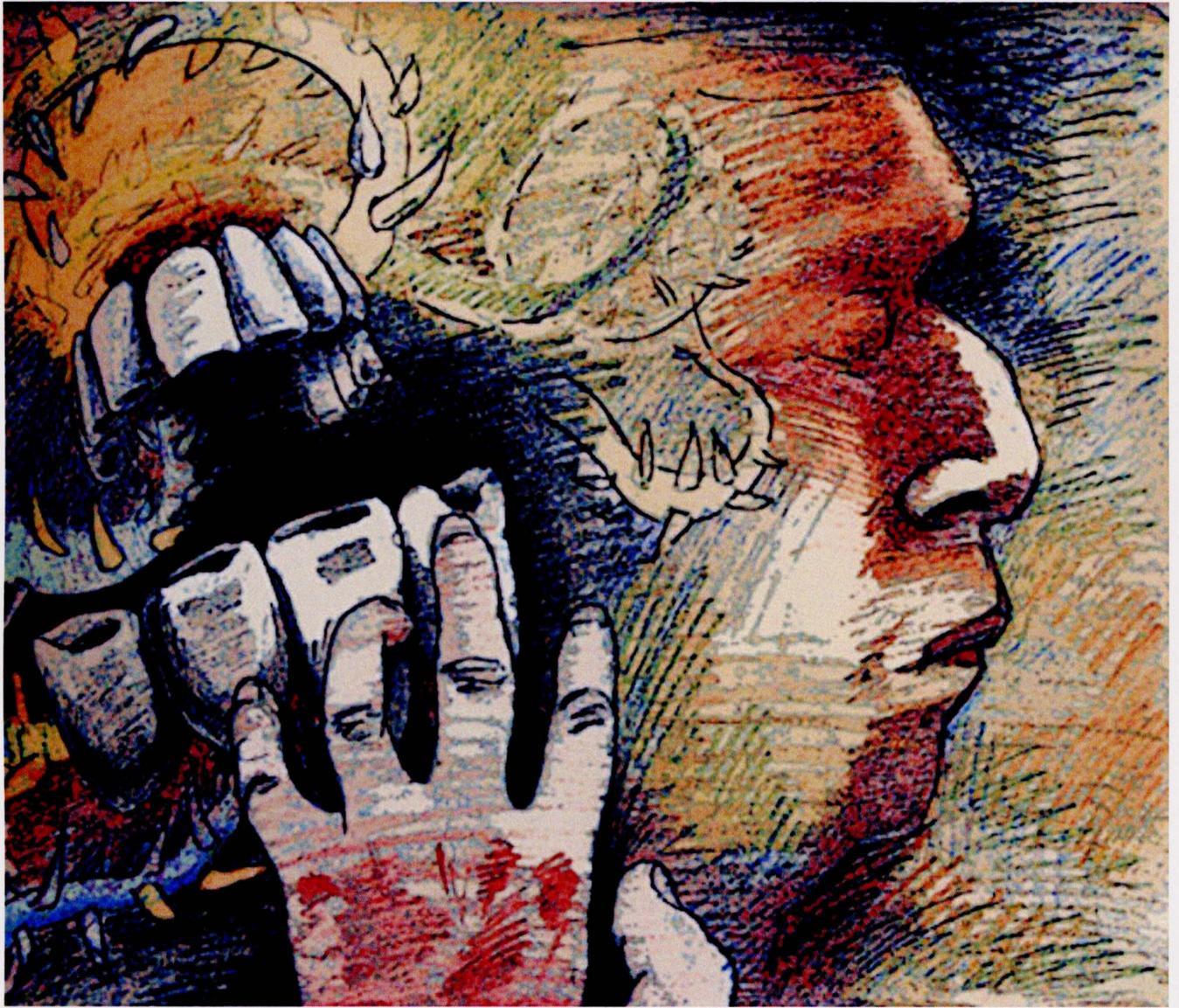
She's a high class hoochie
Pretty pennied prostitute
She's got top notch slots
For big shots to shoot
She rocks that secret lingerie
Gucci, Prada
Boots don't walk corner streets
They sit back in high class hotels
Where high class hoes dwell
While some John feeds them well
Cause he's got secrets to tell
Most folks damn her to hell
She just giggles at that
Cause her purse is versace
In sits her Coach wallet – fat
Hooker says she don't do love
She's just got some for sale
Hooker says she's bout money
Not bullshit and fairytales
So her sweet heart sits lonely
When sugar daddies all done
Hooker says she's free chillin
Till they call Girl and she runs.

Girl

By Jacob Grossman



Brian Nolan
Cheeseburger
Acrylic on Canvas



Antonio "Luca" Luciano Pop-Vasai
Ce Te Fremata

*We are
afraid to
care too
much,
for fear
that the
other
person
does not
care at
all.*

*-Eleanor
Roosevelt*

I'm waiting for some courageous woman to take a giant leap, and land on the ground with everyday people.

I don't want to criticize anyone's contributions to the American people, however I'm looking for Eleanor Roosevelt. I'm looking for her in my neighborhood, in the church, at school and in the White House.

I'm looking for some woman who is not afraid to look in another woman's eyes and tell them they are more than the 20 dollar pack of hair weave they buy from the neighborhood beauty supply. They are more than the tax refund check spent on last years clothes.

I'm looking for a woman to sit with at lunch time and tell me to be patient with love, to fight when it's time to fight and to be silent when it's

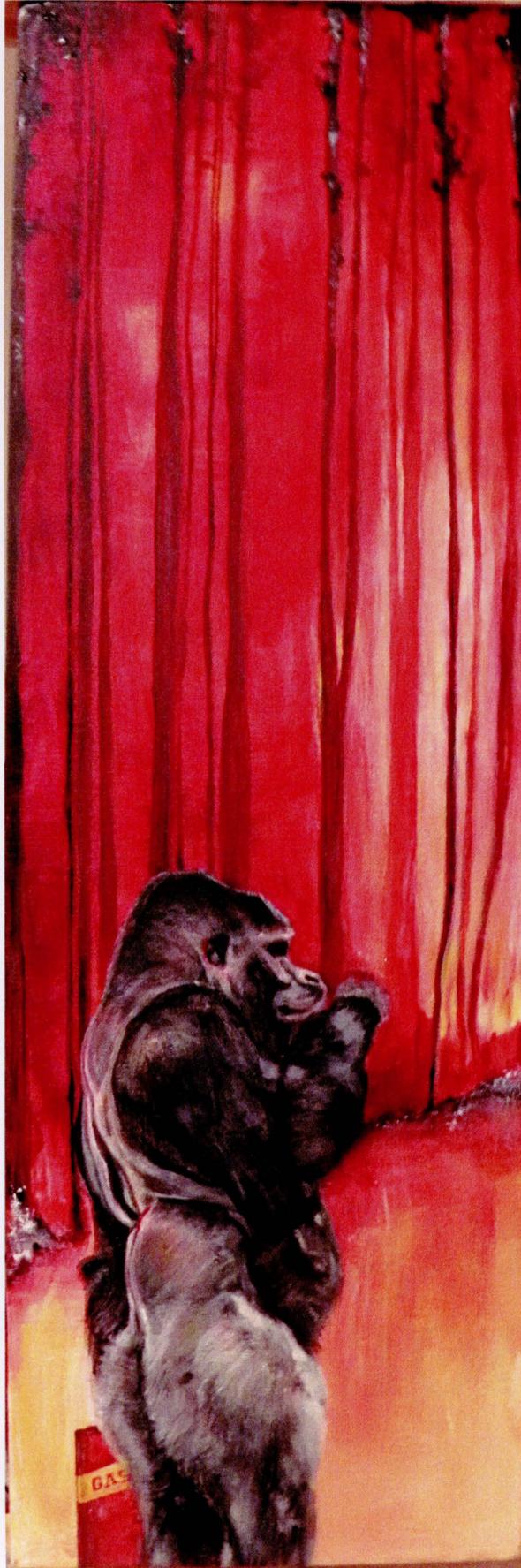
time to be quiet.

I'm waiting for Eleanor who may often disagree with her husband but returns to the dinner table.

I'm waiting for a dedicated servant of the people. A woman who represents a poise and confidence, yet humble interior and exterior. I'm looking for Eleanor- doesn't matter what color but it would be nice if she reflected what I see everyday when I comb my hair.

Waiting For Eleanor

By Bethsheba McGruder



Jody Casden
Evolution

A Secluded Community

By Summer Ghanayem

Declaring the “rare” opportunity that we have maintained such a community, as
though there was a disease that killed off other cultures, and only we have the
immunity

Building upon past traditions, superstitions, and destiny, “norms” and rules are
increasing with intensity, all the while unappreciative manners are repeated and
others slandered

Worthless whispers about those who are unfit, and the unselected choices being
far more equipped, subsist, spreading from mouth to ear, said loud enough for
many to hear

Lies that mask mistakes are heavily applied by the women, similar to the
pigment-filled cover up and mascara that elongates lashes of their eyes, so many
try to hide

Behind fictional tales that take away from the truth and exude a falsely skewed
reality, instead of revealing a weakness, a human need, because it “might” be
seen as a deformity

Parents indubitably protect their offspring, slinging comments of how honest
they are, boasting about their successes and accomplishments, what a charade
Villains in suits rebuke their daughters for being too “Americanized” and at the
same time cheat on their wives with women in short skirts while they are at
“work”

Going against nature, love, and the most important thing, truth, legitimacy is
hidden while synthetic notions become the focus and topic of daily discussion
Being ashamed of ones own veracity is harmful and can be unhealthy, physically
and mentally, multiplying waves of negative energy that flow through the body

Damaging images of others while candidly concealing personal demons
diminishes sincerity, fleeing actuality, replacing it with a constant alibi, I only
ask why?

Why the lies, the cover ups, the narratives and excuses? They surface when one
feels worthless, inadequate and lack genuine purpose to make a positive change

To rearrange the erroneous priorities of one’s existence and reroute the
downward winding of said life, to take responsibilities into the hands of the
owner

Narrow in and listen, pay personal attention and do not mind what the rest are
stressing, this is the lesson I present and presume, once I bury the pessimism I
will not exhume.

Children Say The Darndest Things

By Ra Perre Shelton

“Grandma,
why ‘yo hands so ugly?”

“Well baby,
I never did have much
time to wait
on polish to dry.”

The beauty of my hands
Gotta be

in the babies they have held
in the blankets they have sewn
in the prayers they have prayed
in the backsides they have beaten
in the celebrations they have clapped for
in the fists they have had to make
in the freedom those fists fought for

The beauty of my hands
gotta be

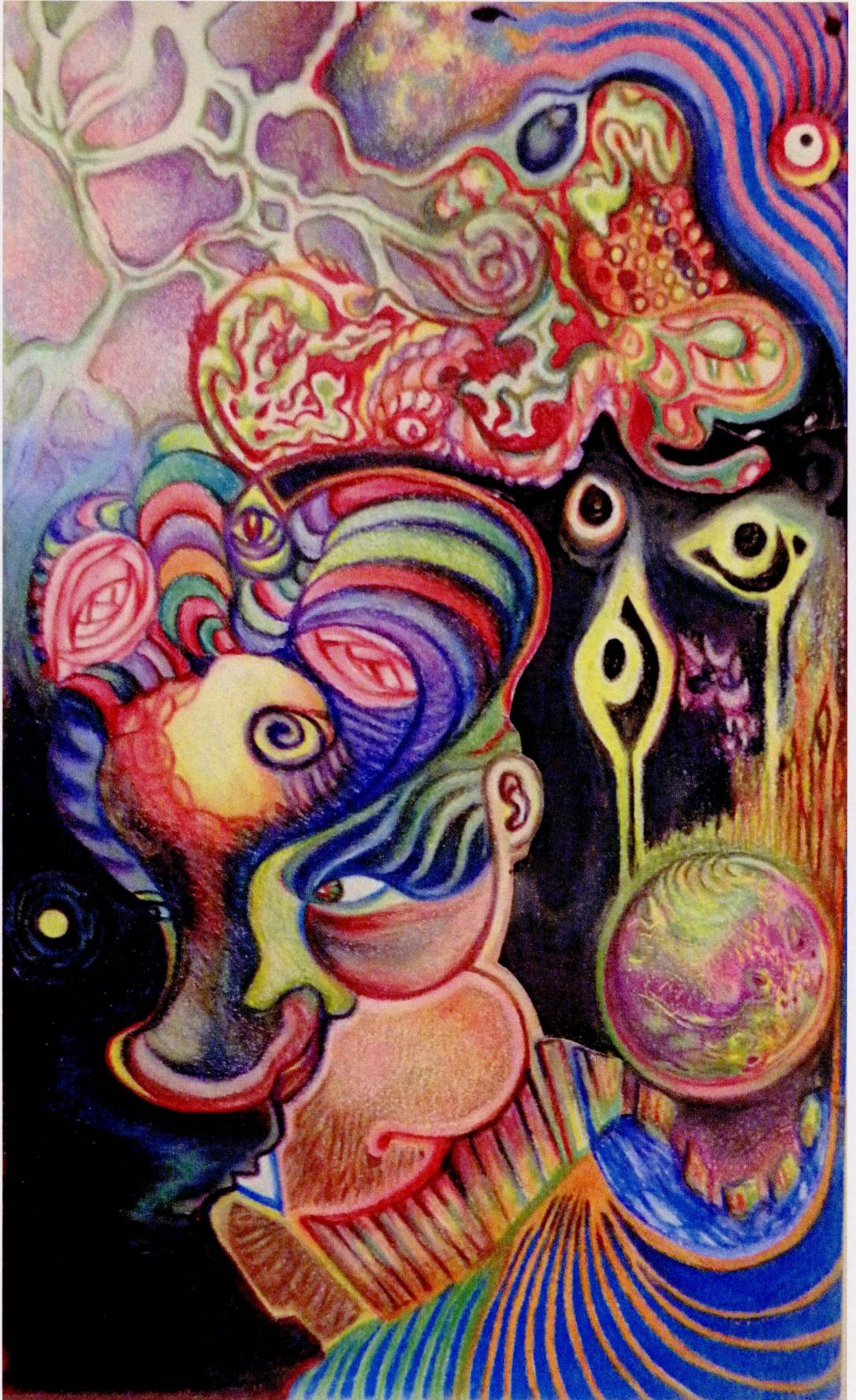
in the hammers they have swung
in the house they have built
in the indigo-water they have soaked in
in the peas they have snapped
in the black the sun has turned them
in the gardens they have planted
in the catfish they have scaled
in the chickens they have strangled
in the bellies they have cooked for
in the chocolate cheeks they have pinched

“Baby, my hands
are only ugly
when they are
no longer beautiful
to my grandchildren.”



Depleting Ur River
Vincent Bartels

Jody Casden
Nawleans



If I fell
I could fall
down, down, where
no one could find me.
Not even the ones who love me.

If I fell
I could keep falling
but only if I allow myself
to never be caught
by the ones I love.

If I fell
I could cry
but only if
I hurt myself
but I would stop if
someone came and wiped
my tears away.

If I fell
I could fly
but only after
I caught myself
and stopped, considered
how I fell.
Then I could
fly
after
falling.

If I fell,
I could fall.

What if I lose my grip

and fall?

If I Fell By Elizabeth Hall

BEYOND THE CELL WALLS

THE FOLLOWING PIECES ARE WRITTEN BY TWO YOUNG MEN WHO ARE INCARCERATED IN COOK COUNTY TEMPORARY DETENTION CENTER (CCTDC). THEY ARE PARTICIPANTS IN THE *FREE WRITE JAIL ARTS* PROGRAM, A NOT-FOR-PROFIT ART/LITERACY PROGRAM HOUSED INSIDE THE FACILITY. THEIR DEDICATION TO THE PROGRAM BECOMES APPARENT AFTER REVIEWING THEIR RAW, EMOTION EVOKING PIECES. THESE YOUNG MEN ARE UNDER THE AGE OF 18, AND BECAUSE OF THEIR CURRENT PLACEMENT, THEIR NAMES COULD NOT BE USED IN THE JOURNAL.

THEIR WORK WAS SUBMITTED BY NEIU STUDENT TRUSTEE, CHERYL DEVENNY, WHO ALSO SERVES AS THEIR TEACHER IN THE AFOREMENTIONED PROGRAM. WE ARE HONORED TO BE ABLE TO PUBLISH THEIR WORK WITHIN THIS JOURNAL.

Open your eyes one and all or we'll continue to fall

because we have been walking blind so it's my duty to speak
my mind and open your eyes young and old,

And listen to this poem as it unfolds, so that you can see that
how we are living is a tragedy.

Open your eyes my sistas and brothas because I really do love
you,

Remember to contract HIV it takes two, so be cautious with
what you all do,

Open your eyes hustlers, that bag up that coke for the
costumers to smoke, and maybe even choke.

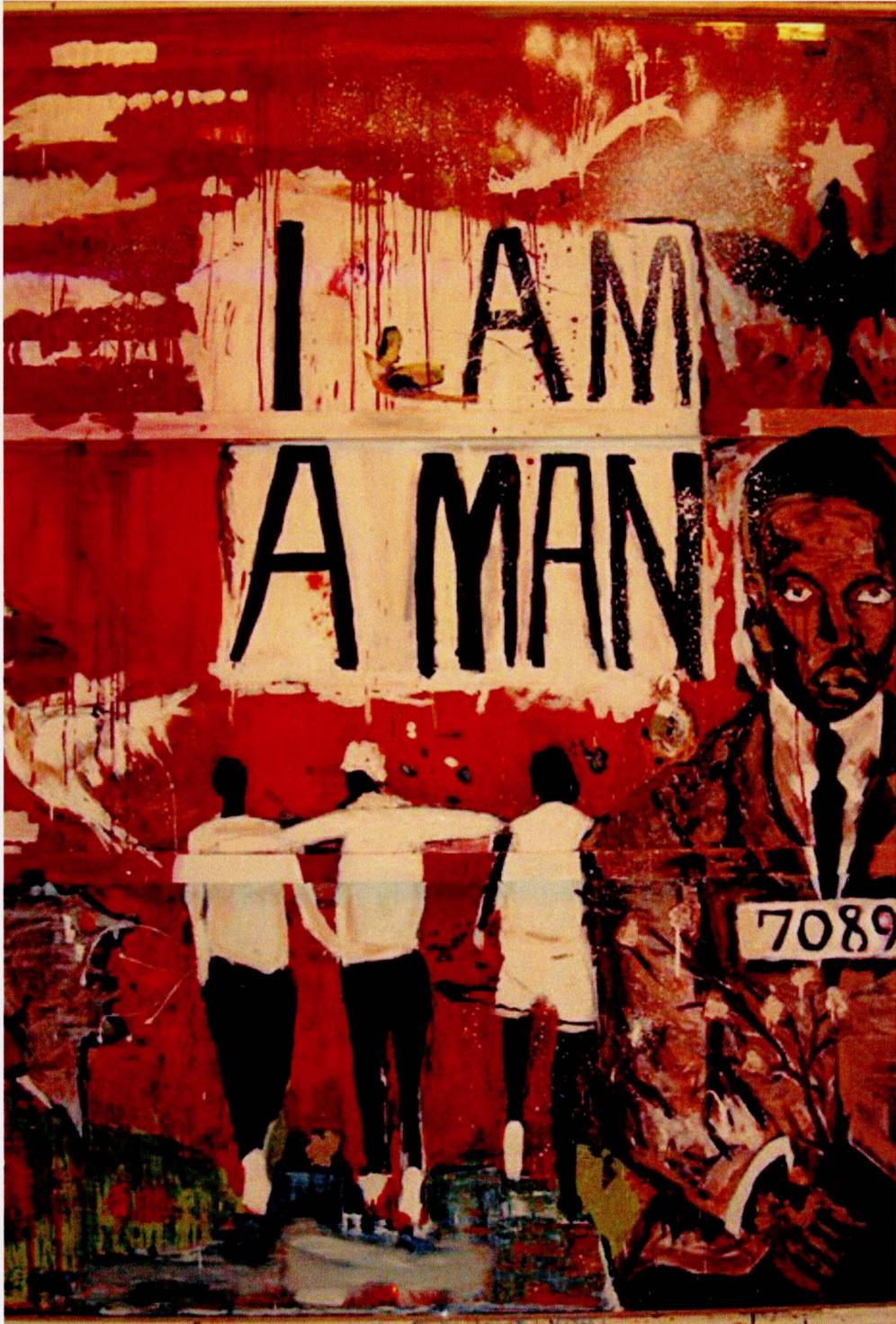
Open your eyes prosecutors and judges that have personal
grudges, and are giving people life,

How do you all sleep at night?

Open your eyes and open them wide so you can see the
things they try to hide,
'cause if we continue to act so dumb then tomorrow may
never come.

Open Your Eyes

By Vincent

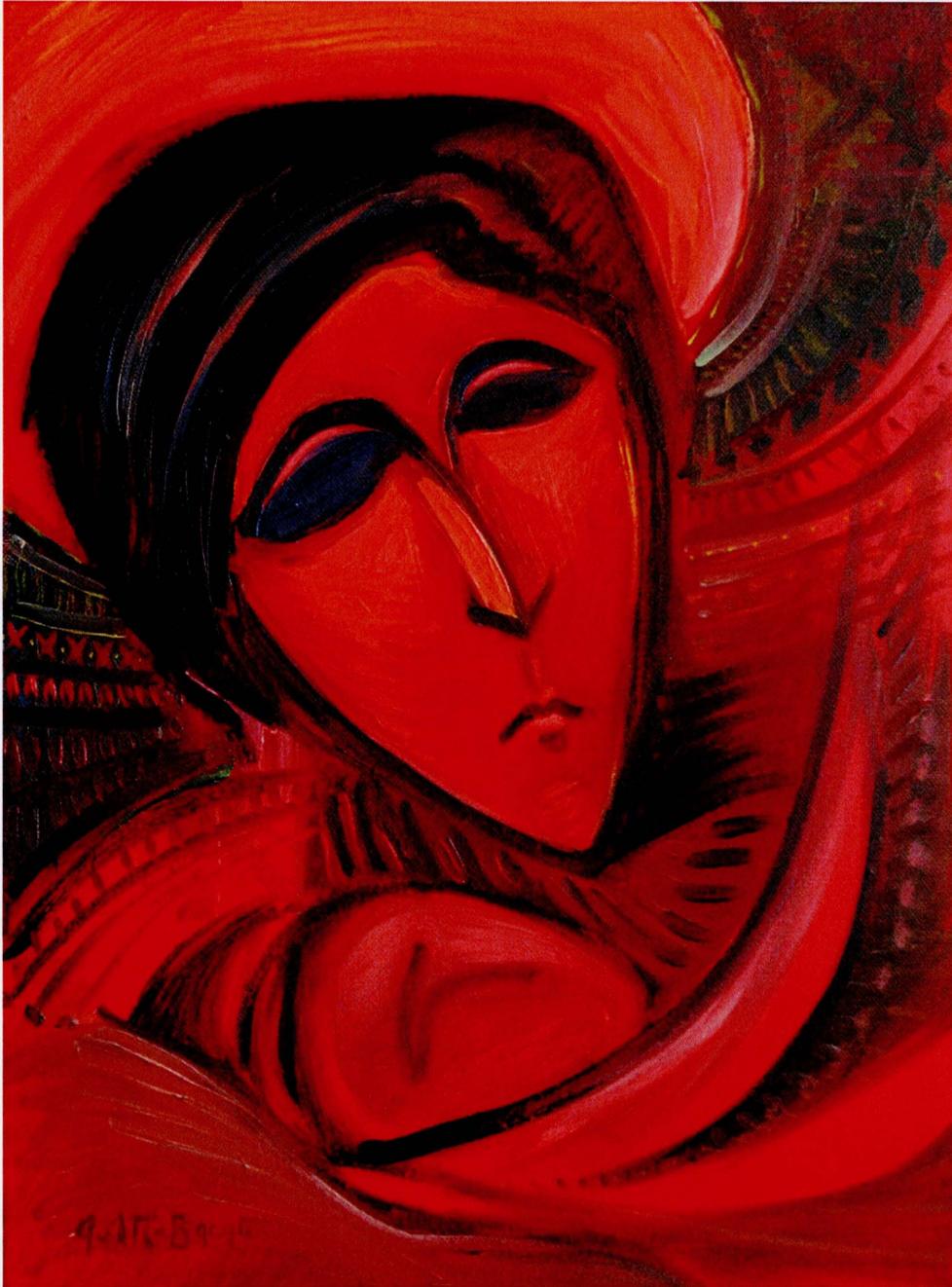


Artiss
I Am A Man

Crooked Court System

By Marcus

Judges don't care about me
But they are quick to let a white man free.
They find me guilty in every case,
Because of the color of my face.
Family's leave courtrooms in lots of tears
Because their relatives have some years.
Another life gone behind a fence,
Because jury believes we have no common sense.
And the system is set up for us to fail,
That's why they don't hesitate to throw our lives in jail.



Antonio "Luca" Luciano Pop-Vasai
Expressionist Icon - Flight of Maria

We are the smile of happiness
We are the face of life
for the forsaken blessings of heaven
We'll soon be delighted
How come that disaster
What worse it could be
It let the darkness prevail
Now, sacrifices of love will be lighted
For the children who
Lost their parents' tenderness
For the mothers who
Lost their
Hopes of survival
For all sisters and brothers
Who lost everything
Only for those
Who now have nothing to live for
Only for them
Yes, only for them
For the rest of our lives
Til this heart beats
Til this love
Is taking breaths
We are
The smile of happiness
We are the face of life

The 2010 Pakistan floods, since this past July, have claimed lives of approximately 2.2 million people. It is the worst disaster that has happened to the country in 80 years. This is my voice, this is my message of love, and this is dedicated to all those who have lost everything due to the floods.

We Are The Smile

By Syed Ahad Hussain

We Carry Our Stories On Cradleboards

Dr. Dorene Wiese - White Earth Ojibwe

We bring our stories with us
Like babies in beautiful beaded cradleboards
Hard to ignore
Those stories...that laugh...cry...and sleep
Just like those little beings, we hold so precious

I know you don't believe in God
But when your relatives told me how
They removed you from the reservation
Because bad spirits overtook you
One night while they prayed
I realized your story was much sadder
Then I could imagine

You lack compassion for others
I knew that when you blamed the Choctaw mother
For her problems..Never considering the hard tragic road
She and her relatives had walked

I knew it when you
Snickered and made fun of those
Who prayed and cared for you
As if, you were their own daughter

Thank you for the places and people
We experienced
I will carry those stories on my cradleboard
Where ever I go
And you will hear them laugh and cry and sleep
When I am gone

Sinister
His evil smile
Clearly, he wishes for battle
His eyes reflect bloodlust of a wolf
A deep, crimson color, still retaining certain, eerie calmness
His hair is everywhere, I have never seen such long locks
The wind allows it to flow with such perfection
Gold buttons glisten in the full moon
Green uniform torn to shreds
Embodiment of warfare
Run

Alto Itlace

By Nausheen Syed

For the split second I turn around, the stove flickers on. The blue flames quickly shoot up, then retracts back into the burner as fast as it came on. I know he's here.

During the holidays- Christmas, New Years, Easter- he graces us with his presence at the table. He loves to gather during family discussions even though he doesn't understand one darn word we speak.

During the quiet seasons we can hear him going from room to room by a few footsteps or a flicker of his bright shadow. He never goes upstairs because children are supposed to have their own privacy. I guess that's his philosophy. He very much enjoys watching good detective shows with my dad.

Whatever Mr. Michealson's reason to stay here may be, I'll never know. I don't think his family will either. Nor do I think they know he lives with us, if you can even say he has residence here.

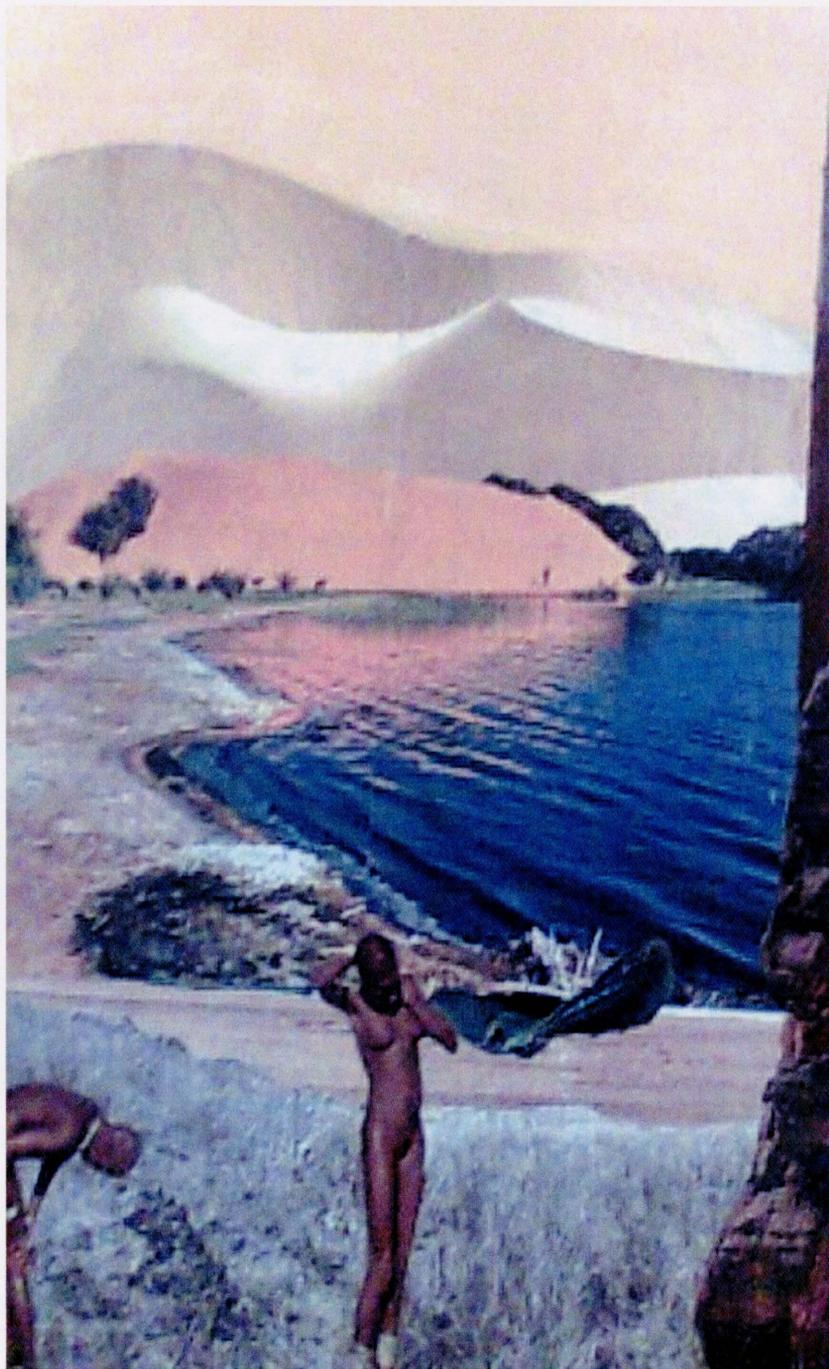
Right now, I know he's watching me from around the corner as I am writing this. Mr. Michaelson is smiling - I know this for sure, even if his face is too dark to tell. I only wonder - why this place, why us?

He's Here

By Urszula Wudarczyk



Alison Greer
Left In A Ditch



Artiss
"Untitled"

Metamorphosis

I view pollen
under microscope lenses-
most obscure to the eye of nakedness.
Dropped by their heavenly Creators
of butterflies and honeybees.

They will soak into the earth,
and if nurtured accordingly,
by sun rays and suckling at the breast of rain,
will burgeon into beautiful arrays of blossoms.

I will then have the pleasure of a field
illuminated in metamorphosis,
in which, I will drop to my knees and pray
for the continued existence of -

pollen, butterflies, honeybees
and cycles of germination.

By Lakeesha J. Harris

The Gift: It Was Empowerment

By Donna Pecore

We graze upon the petite bagels
Tiny muffins and sweets
The fruit plate covered with melon
Pineapple and kiwi
Hot coffee and juices
A day for us to be empowered
To feel the inner Goddess
To take the patriarchal bull by the horns
And tame it, or at least know
That we too could take a ride on it
If we chose
A tall elegant woman strides
To the podium
In respect we move
Forward
We are welcomed with music
And the keynote speaker
Wakes us up
The groups were small
Better to be personal
The sisters shared
A line was erased
Almost
All the anger gone
Almost
At least the anger
Understood
All our needs were met
And hearts filled
In our own backyard
So, we too could rewrite
And edit the past
Seen through a new lens
Turning the focus
Onto the art of the vagina
Onto our passion
Pain and pleasure
Guilt released
A baby lost
Love seen in a mirror
Her energy radiates
Her anger grappled with
In sculpted shapes

and in the blood red
House paint
Which suggests
Madonna was a whore
And that's beautiful
And then the ugly
Exposed
Abuse, bigotry, and war collected in collages
Hugs go round and lunch is served
Women know
That the body needs fuel
Needs cared for
There is a comfortable energy
An electric sense
In the air while we feed
We feed on each other
Growing confidence
House painter had faith
New Year New life
3000 miles to prove
Her art crackles with passion
She paints her life story
We too want to jump off that cliff
Then comes a question of balance
Life, work, family, education
All rolled up in one
Sometimes overwhelms
How do we do it
How do we handle it
The support needed
Is not available
Women caring
Women loving
Women Activists
The change so slow
Becomes more than an academic endeavor
A commitment to change

Is a lifetime commitment
A Goddess' raiment
Is a heavy gossamer
Draped in the transparency of love
Frustration voiced
Know one thing
It must be done
And If you don't try
Who will
The day is nearly done
And the patriarchal bull
Is dehorned and castigated
By a masculine embodied feminist
The difference between feminist
And womanist explained
History of patriarchal thought explained
And defrocked
He almost does it for me
He allows the she in he
And he in she
All allowed in different degrees
But
I still see lines drawn
Color, sex, and gender choices
Who we love is who we love
I think of Edward Said and his "other"
This thing of the other is what has allowed
In His-story
The patriarchal act of colonization
The Domination of a sex of a people
I think the only way to achieve
A real liberation
Is to remove the "other "
And see to the needs
Of all humanity
Treating both Wo/Man with respect
Today starts

Being Chased

By Janean L. Watkins

Thump, Thump...
Thump, Thump

My heart beat wildly in my chest. The landing from each leap into the air jars my slender frame. Branches whip my face and torso. I tear through the underbrush. My lungs burn and my chest cavity heave for blessed oxygen; I desperately attempt to put space between myself and my pursuer. I pump my fist, knees raised – my stride wide and purposeful as I try to reign in my breathing. Bounding over bushes and sprinting through the leave-strewn forest floor it occurs to me...I can't stop. I don't plan to become a slave again.

The date was August 20th, and I had been planning my escape for months. I'd contemplated, researched, and drew a plan. The box with the number "20" in it on the August page of the calendar was highlighted in yellow and circled five times with a red marker. I had no choice, I had to flee.

There are times, even now, when I'm on the run that I could feel the over-whelming urge to conform. To just relax and let things be as they were obviously meant to be... "slave" and "Master". Times when even though the Master wasn't nearby, I knew what's expected of me, and I caved. I hated myself for those times of weakness. I should have fought. I should have resisted. I should never have put myself in this position.

I - could - just - SLAP myself!! Even though I'm a leader, I followed others to this beast. I knew that this Master was one who'd killed hundreds of thousands of people; I was still curious; curious to find out if its power could be thwarted by me. There are times where being fool-hardy and ingenious aren't a great combination. I was trapped; branded as yet another slave. The brands were everywhere; in my hair, on my skin, even internally. Yes, this master was that cruel.

But, the 20th of August has come. I am running for my life on mere oxygen and bands of tissues wrapped around ligaments and bone. I am only human, yet I must escape. I must find my way out of this torturous hell that I; either through bravery or naiveté, walked into. Just ahead of me, I find shelter. I haven't heard the master's chase for a few miles, so I think it will be safe to hide inside.

The small one story structure sat in the middle of the dense forest. Rotting floorboards creaked under my weight as I walked up the rickety steps to the door. I turn the knob and

slowly push it open. The stench of decaying wood and mildewed textile is nearly unbearable. The putrid blended with the scent of nature to create an eerie combination. There is *something* else too. It is very familiar, but I can't place the scent. I close the door and reach into my parka for a snack.

While planning my escape, I'd stock-piled tons of energy bars and gum. I thought they would be light to avoid slowing me down, yet nutritious enough to keep me moving. I knew this would be difficult. But, this is ridiculous, the Master is relentless. I'd been running all day, and still, I only managed to maintain a very small lead. I sighed at the thought as I looked around at everything in the shack. The dirt addled windows barely let in the light that shines outside. The place is virtually empty; except for a worn armchair sitting in the corner with its innards exposed. It looks as if animals have torn away at it in search of food. The mud-caked floor and broken mantel are testimony to the fact that nobody had lived here for quite some time. I walked around the shack until I found a door. I push it open slowly, being careful not to push it completely off of its already hanging hinges. I cross the few small steps to the cot on the far side of the room. Darkness engulfs the space inside the shack quickly. Before I had even completely settled in my makeshift sleeping area, I'd fallen asleep. My dreams are haunted by an unknown assailant.

The shadows stretch out over the forest floor; dark images loom taller than the trees. I attempt to run, but my legs are treading heavily in a dark murky substance. I make very slow progress, turning my head on every third tread. Looking behind me, I fearfully notice the shadows that are giving chase. They lurk, seeking me out, a fireball of flame shoots out toward me, engulfing me – until finally I am incinerated alive.

I awaken with a start; my eyes are stretched wide, attempting to make out the shapes in the darkness. Foggy memories of heat and exhaustion slowly slip away from me, and then I remembered. I am on the run.

I check the pockets of my parka for my safety tools and equipment. It was all there; my flashlight, lighter, switchblade, container of butane, first aid kit, and rations. It was then that I smell the scent that I couldn't place earlier. It was pungent, and woodsy with a hint of vanilla. The sweet scent frightens me to my core – I know then that I have been found.

I jump up and sprint out of the room just in time to see the all too familiar plastic cap rounding the corner. It permeates the space, seeming larger than life. The Master was here; I latch on to a stray thought, thinking, *how could I have been found so easily?* I burst through the front door of the shack, sending it crashing onto the dilapidated stairs. I bound into the trees, dipping between the shadows that were created by the first light of day. Sparkling streams of sunlight are beginning to descend to the ground.

Some insane sense deep inside of me made me want to go back. Go back into captivity never to return. The urge is so strong that my legs buckle; I kneel on the dirt grasping my head in anguish. I can feel the cold damp earth staining the knees of my jeans. My mind races frantically. I have roughly forty hours to make it to the crossing point. If I can make it there, I'll be safe. My physical self will forever be free. I stand on wobbly legs, shaking my head to rid myself of the cloudiness that has taken over. The world tilts and twirls slightly until I regain composure.

Then, I'm off again. I make steady progress, only stopping twice along the stream I'd found. Wild birds chattered overhead as I take a moment to peer down the length of it. This is the stream that will lead me to the crossing. I make more progress only stopping for a quick bite to eat and to refill my canteen with fresh water. Twilight is upon me again, and I'm getting pretty tired. I kneel, staring up through the tree canopy at the approaching cloud littered dusk. Before I can stand, I felt a nervous energy pass through me. I whip around and find that the Master is standing before me. All five foot nine inches of it taunts me with its cream-colored plastic cap, long brown frame, and orange shoes of fire that burned the leaves beneath it to a crisp. Coils of grayish-white smoke curl through the slit in the top of its cap. That woody-vanilla concoction makes me loose all willpower.

Without one word from the arrogant bastard, I find myself sidle up to it, wrap my arms around it, and take that one infernal drag of its intoxicating stench. The light, warm smoke fills my mouth and nostrils. The headiness of it makes for a feeling of euphoria that one only gets after not smoking for so long. My mind curses me a million ways from Sunday, but my psyche shouts in glee. The constriction of my lungs begins again, and I begin to submit to the raw power held in this one habitual act.

It is my Master, and I am its slave.

Upon waking, I find myself being dragged by the Master. I am attached to its shortened, frame by a rope. We're passing the shack that I'd slept in the night before. It's happening again. I'm being enslaved! I can't let this happen! I'm so sick of this. In just that moment, I learned how far determination can go. My heart, forcibly pumping blood into my brain, helps me to see things for what they really are. I'm being destroyed from the inside out. My chest aches and my throat is beyond parched. This is one battle that I can't afford to lose. Vivid images of my loved-ones back home waiting for me become the catalyst for my next actions. I reach into the pocket of my parka, and pull out the butane fluid and the lighter. Stealthily, I squirt the butane fluid up the length of the rope and onto the back of my oppressor. Then, I pull out the knife and prepare myself for the end.

I cut the rope, which gets the Master's attention. Before it could come back to assail me, I

light the rope on fire. The flame travels quickly and ignites. The blaze makes a straight line up the Master's back. I stand with my switchblade at the ready. I can hear the shrill wails of its telepathic torment. I stand there, ready to slice it into pieces if need be. But there is no need. Ash begins to gather at my feet, some of the white flakes drifting off into the wind. The cream-colored plastic cap melts on the ash and bleeds over onto the leaves that are scattered about. As the fire begins to dwindle, I unceremoniously kick leaves and dirt onto the thing that has held me captive for the past sixteen years. Tears of joy slide silently down my cheeks as I stomp and pound the earth; a smile begins to form on my lips as the sun breaks through the overcast sky for the first time in ages.

Dancing around the ruins of my former oppressor, I begin to giggle, and then a great limerick comes to mind:

*"Here lie the ashes of Black-n-Mild,
A torturous master was it.
It had to die,
To save some lives –
All from my courage to quit!"*

I walk with purpose in the direction of the crossing. I know full well that there are more battles to win before I win the war. But I feel stronger and much more assured. I'm filled with new resolve in my heart and firm pride in my chest. Never again will I fall victim to slavery. I am, and will always remain, the captain of my ship.

Insomnia - state of complete agony for an over-active mind, a mind that keeps replaying the same forsaken memories, keeps returning to the same forbidden places of the past, into moments that should be long forgotten and burned to ashes, and yet with every passing minute, they become alive again with feelings that act out their torturous performance all over again like wound up puppets in a theatre of terror. It's a journey that is doomed to spiral downward, before it even begins. It leads nowhere, and there are no glorious moments of self-discovery at its ends. No goals, no break-through moments, no critical points that uncover golden threads of potential that would motivate this miserable sack of shit human being to defend herself and rise. There's no beating it.

So, as I fully submerge myself into a tub full of decomposing toxic waste of memories, I already know I won't be winning. There is someone who wins though. She's not listening to my frantic begging to be left alone, and she stares me down coldly, waiting. I have a neurotic fear that she's about to shoot a bullet through my head as some sort of preventative action to stop me from causing more damage. If I'm gone, nothing else could go wrong.

Before she does anything though, she's got to make sure nothing will ruin the show. The show is priceless to her, because she has worked very hard to get me here, to this exact point in time, where my choices are limited to a leading role in her production, a performance that she believes to be her masterpiece. She wants me to watch too.

That's really what gets her off the most - to see me sink underneath a pile of my very own, very personal, and very lousy choices. To see me relive them in the most natural way as an outsider, who finally gets to see the whole perspective of all who are involved? Well, I saw it coming. I mean, I can almost say I prepared for this. So, bring it on, bitch.

Insomnia

By Aleksandra Wyrzik

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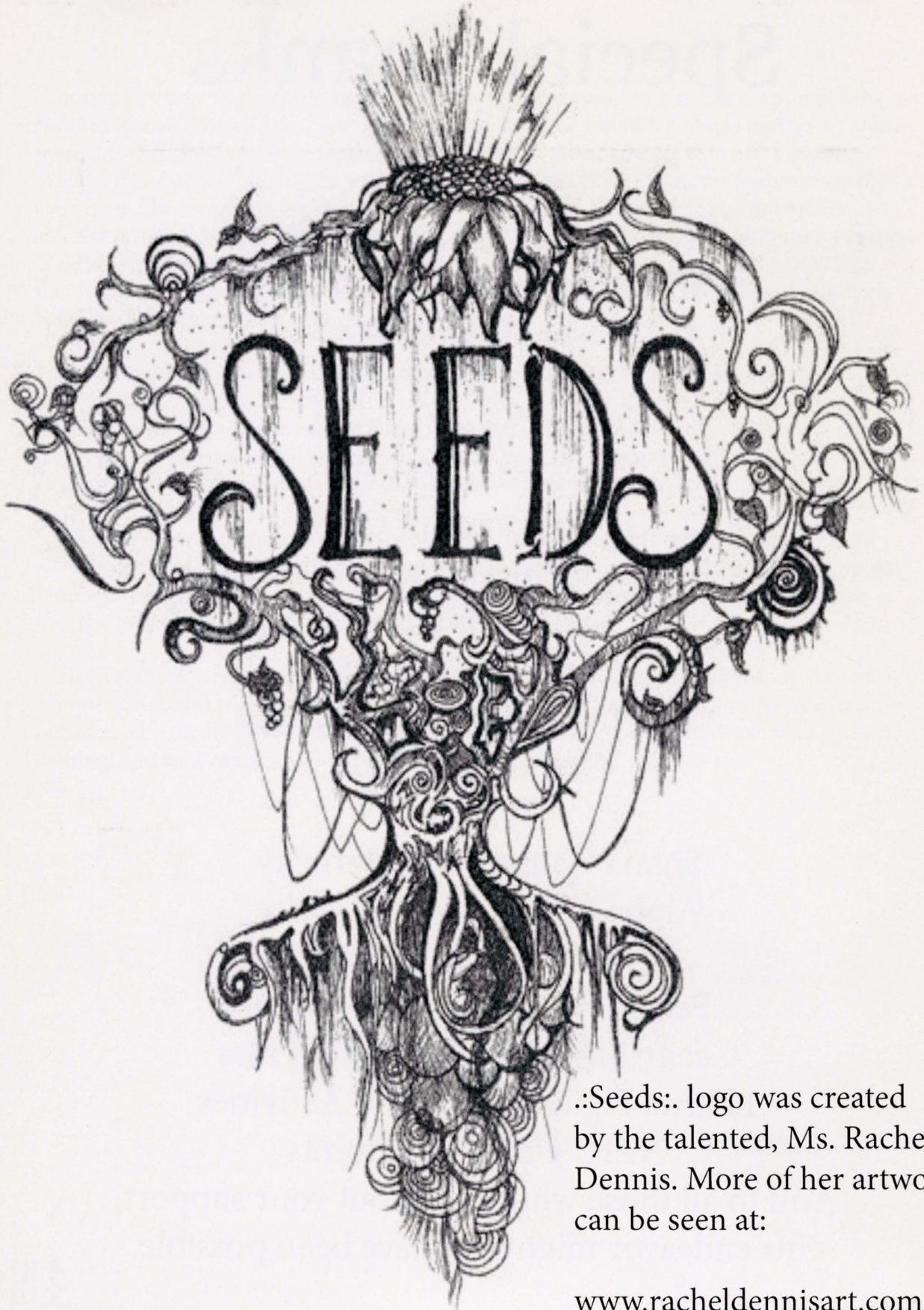
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www.racheldennisart.com