



The Seraphic Review

Issue 2

|

November 2023

Contents

Cover Art - Irina Tall [*Untitled*]

Poetry

- Juanita Rey 3
- Kushal Poddar 4
- Sophia Jamali Soufi 6
- Victoria Garton 7
- Elizabeth Allison 8
- William Doreski 9
- John Tustin 11
- Stephen Grant 12
- Stephen Kingsnorth 21
- Ben Nardolilli 24
- L. Ward Abel 25
- James Croal Jackson 26
- Prabu Vasam 30
- Lorena Caputo 32
- Emily Chabra 35
- Johnny Ganshaw 36
- Matt Stanley 37
- Burt Rashbaum 41

Prose

- Nolo Segundo 13
- Frances Koziar 28

Art

- Michael Shoemaker 38
- Irina Tall 39
- Edward Supranowicz 40

Juanita Rey

Wallflowering

In the night club, I acted out
whatever was specific to me and more,
in my quest for illumination,
though I still ended up on the fringe.

I was silently derided, treated like a nobody,
all because of this obscure desire
to slip out onto the sacred dancefloor,
and not waste my precious gifts.

I could have stretched out beyond
the ornamental and invented a form.
I was mysterious after all.
And as enigmatic as a bat's shadow.

And aren't we all nothing without possibility,
dead and wasted, dumped
like corpses against the wall.
I was a scream dolled out in patience.

Juanita Rey is a Dominican poet who has been in this country five years. Her work has been published in *Mixed Mag*, *The Mantle* and *The Art Of Everyone*.

Kushal Poddar

The Lunar Triumph

The dark side off the moon
takes over my knees.
In the morning I stagger, stroll, sit
on every park bench.

The papers run the triumph,
the stories of human feat.
I writhe for a painless small step.
The older joggers confirm -
not until after the full moon.

A small step in another gravity,
beyond life, thoughts, forms of ending.
I whisper, remind my patellae.

Twilight Evolution

Someone burns something,
always, in this city.
I breathe in; my lungs grow large
and heart goes petite.

In our balcony night arrives
wearing orange,
fresh, disheveled, worn out
before the beginning.

By the street, on the pavement
an ironing man
heats up his mettle
on an old-fashioned coal stove.

Here we evolve and we standstill.
Your shadow crosses the meadow
stripped-bare between the concrete.
I breathe in.

My throat reminds me of my mother
struggling to end her life.

Kushal Poddar, the author of *Postmarked Quarantine*, has eight books to his credit. He is a journalist, father, and the editor of *Words Surfacing*. His works have been translated into twelve languages and published across the globe. [Twitter- <https://twitter.com/Kushalpoe>]

Sophia Jamali Soufi

Escape

Like the landing of yellow leaves
Sadness sits in my eyes
Pain explores my being
And the wounds get hot
I am full of escape
Full of longing that takes root in me
I take the suitcase
I give my heart to the rounds
The anger of the sky bursts on my face
My eyes tremble
I repeat in my mind
Someone will find me from the trail of tears...

Kiss

No memory is easily buried
you will remember me
In the harsh winter
When death kisses your forehead...

Sophia Jamali Soufi was born in Rasht, Iran. She is a student of architecture. Since childhood, she has been very interested in writing poetry and reading books. Her first book, *Sophia's Memoirs*, was published last year. Her poems have been translated into English, Portuguese, French, Spanish, Turkish, German and published in many literary magazines and websites.

Victoria Garton

On Facebook Where I Remain her Friend

On Facebook I find her
in cut-work shadows cast by sun
through cherry branches.
Blossoms so thick overhead
I can almost smell
that scent of lilac
magnolia, and rose.

The hint of vanilla
makes me hungry
for cookies we shared
during finals week.

She doesn't say where
the cherry blossoms
are in bloom
or introduce the friends
she embraces.

In Japan, the beautiful
clouds of cherry blossoms
invite Hanami Parties.
Delicate petals
drift down on picnics,
blessing the fleeting beauty
of friendship.

Victoria Garton's books are *Venice Comes Clean* (Flying Ketchup Press, 2023), *Pout of Tangerine Tango* (Finishing Line Press, 2022), and *Kisses in the Raw Night* (BkMk Press, 1989.) The anthology, *From K.C., MO to East St. Lou.* (Spartan Press, 2022) featured ten of her poems. Recent acceptances are from Cosmic Daffodil, Sangam, Proud to Be, Thorny Locust, and I-70 Review. She retired from teaching composition at Crowder College in 2020.

Elizabeth Allison

Our Crimsoned Future

Blood on the tissue.
Stomach tumbling
to hard tile, anchored to
expiration.
I thought I was prepared,
every acrobatic bathroom visit bracing body brain and guts.
Til a speck of encroaching red
spreads beyond itself
inaudible insensible shrapnel cruel.
In ricocheting glazed enclosures, in musty unkempt stalls, in tidy
papered retreats,
restored possibility turned
rusted coolant flushed from a radiator.
A tenth of a millimeter.
Once everything, now nothing.
Outside stainless-steel patrons totter on tired feet
I stand, the sinking rises, too,
churning shade of suspended potential,
the dust dismantled and the breath expelled
into the desolate stillness of pending
into the melancholy promise of next month.

A former high school teacher, **Elizabeth Allison** is an avid traveler and sometimes-gardener. She has most recently been published in Intrepid Times, Burningword Literary Magazine, Emerge Literary Journal, Sojournal, Fairfield Scribes, 50-Word Stories, Defenestrationism, 101 Words and HuffPost.

William Doreski

A Bottomless Language

When I stare hard into a flower
with its teary folds brimming
my eyes pop out of my head
and I must shove them in again
with my dirty gardening hands.
You blame my roving sentiments
for fastening onto distances

beyond unassisted measure.
I blame the act of botany
with its urge to name everything
as if the permanence of Latin
stuck to fragile but recurring
forms of organic expression
were too rough and clumsy to read.

No two flowers are alike but
like snowflakes ransom themselves
with subtle little complexities.
Each should have its own name,
drawn from a bottomless language
preceding even the Ur-speak
that first warped human tongues.

[> > >]

My eyes ache. I wash my hands
and stash my tools. The pain
of seeing through language
will eventually blind me.
Groping in the spangled dark
I'll mangle flowers that I loved
when I could still peer into them.

You'll try to assuage my sorrow
by claiming that all flowers look
and feel alike. But no language,
not Latin, not some mangled Ur-text,
not even the English of cats and dogs
will explain why the dark arose
and how it happened to fill me.

William Doreski lives in Peterborough, New Hampshire. He has taught at several colleges and universities. His most recent book of poetry is *Venus, Jupiter* (2023). His essays, poetry, fiction, and reviews have appeared in various journals.

John Tustin

The Ghosts That Lurk

The ghosts that lurk
Beneath a bath towel that hangs forlornly over a broken easy chair
For one year now.
The breeze that comes along
And nudges out from under the bed
A lone red hair
She left behind that same night –
It sits in a scrap of sunlight beside the bed;
Curled and orange,
Thin and alone,
Waiting to be swept away.

The specters that loom in the shadow of the doorway;
The doorway empty of flesh and noise and warmth.
I lie in bed and listen
And there is nothing to hear except
The dream-sound of
Animals' tiny footprints;
The memory of their clattering
All over the roof at four in the morning
With the wind and the rain and the ghosts
That move from bed to bath towel
To bathroom to somewhere else inside my head.

John Tustin's poetry has appeared
in many disparate literary
journals since 2009. His first
poetry collection from Cajun
Mutt Press is now available at
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0C6W2YZDP>
[.fritzware.com/johntustinpoetry](https://www.fritzware.com/johntustinpoetry)

Stephen Grant

Afternoon Idyll

I have nothing to change my perspective, mere skeins of words. Only chance and daring remain while the talk of our lives fades into black velvet. It is fixed on the end of a pier, dangling a verbal toe into water of imperceptible coherence, halting the shrill and the fury. The sea laps onto the rocky shore, a carousel of laughter, a playground of mirth. Crossing the truss bridge for the last time at 5 a.m., the future found north and never reverted to its old ways. All that is left is an oil-slick on a rainbowed creek, sweet hues of indigo and green pastel muddling together and finding each other, touching like a faint zephyr on a rosy cheek. We take the sonority for granted. Softly dazzled, sun-proofed souls evaporate like mist, quenching the unquenchable, taking calm from here, comfort from there. We hit our stride through elegant legato, bassoons lowing in the distance, from which comes clarity of vision. But rationality offers itself at too great a cost, too steep a price.

Stephen Grant is a Toronto writer (co-author of *149 Paintings You Really Need to See in North America* and currently writing on art and advocacy) and poet. He writes mostly of the arcs of the heart. He has most recently been published in *In Parentheses*.

Nolo Segundo

The Day I Remembered My Soul

When I was 24, I killed myself. I put it that bluntly because it was not an attempted suicide, a cry for help, but a decision to self-murder. Yes, it was a desperate act, a last attempt to escape what my mind feared as lifetime imprisonment in a mental asylum [they still did that back in the early '70's]. It was even, in its own way, logical-- to my then agnostic mind at least. I had been suffering a profound clinical depression—the kind where you stop eating, sleeping, emoting, desiring. In time your body begins to break down: I shook like an old man with Parkinson's instead of the once healthy and robust young man of just a few weeks earlier. I had decided as a teenager that there was no God, no soul, no heaven or hell-- all just fantasies for those [unlike myself] not brave enough to accept that death means extinction of not only the body but the personality, consciousness itself. I know many people have that view today, and it does not appear to bother them. Well, why would it, until they're faced with their own deaths?

Now what I'm about to relate will be believed by some, disbelieved by others, and the rest will probably just shrug their shoulders and give it no more thought. Yet is there really any question more important than the possibility of life after death: That you, your character, personality, memories-- your consciousness will continue, not for years or decades but forever. We are the only species out of millions to have a sense of mortality—then too, we are the only transcendent species as well. And I think they are related, because what I was 'shown' [the best if rather feeble word I can come up with] is that I am two beings, sharing the same space or life as it were for a time: the one mortal, the other immortal, existing without beginning or end, beyond time itself. The mortal one we all can see, the other one is trickier—though I suspect far more people have experienced something of the 'paranormal' than one might surmise, based on accounts I have been told over the years. [Oxford did a study finding that 71% of the population had had at least one paranormal experience—and this in secular Britain.]

[> > >]

I had been attending the London Film School in Covent Garden, London. I have loved movies almost as much as books since childhood. For some reason which I still do not fully understand a half century later, I dropped out in my third and final term. The unconscious mind is far more powerful than most people wish to acknowledge—can any of us really be said to know ourselves completely? Again, it's not surprising that many aren't aware they have a soul as they can't even acknowledge they have an unconscious mind which affects their thoughts and emotions, not only in their dreams but in the waking world as well.

Of course if I had thought things through, I might have decided to become a screenwriter--I have wanted to become a writer since I started thinking—really thinking—as a teenager. (There too I fancied it would be writing the Great American Novel: I never thought I'd become a published poet in my 70's.) But I didn't think of it, and soon after I returned to the States I fell into a profound clinical depression, as it was termed in those days. Day after day I would walk around the dining room table in my parents house, asking myself why I had abandoned my dream—a hard thing for anyone, is it not?

Each day I walked around that table, all day long, eating less, sleeping less each night, asking myself why I had 'run away' from my one chance—as I saw it then-- to follow a childhood dream. The more I did that the more I wished I could go back in time, back to London and the film school, and stop my foolish self from 'running away'. That was part of the torment—seeking a time machine to correct my near fatal error as it turned out. My parents were not very sophisticated and thought a camping trip to Vermont with a high school buddy would 'snap me out of it'.

But each day we were driving through the beauty of that state, things just got worse. I had largely stopped sleeping or eating, my nerves were so shot my hands shook with unceasing tremors, and while I knew that the mountains and valleys we drove through were very beautiful, I did not 'feel' that beauty one iota. It was the same when I saw a pretty woman: I knew I should feel an attraction, but I felt nothing.

[> > >]

It got worse. One day we drove up to a scene where a dog had been hit and killed by a car, and the woman who owned it was weeping profusely. I could not understand, at all, why she was so upset. I had no empathy, I had no feelings at all it seemed, good or bad. And in subsequent years I came to realize that all our mental processes, be they thoughts/ideas, or appreciation of art and music and literature, all our human thinking is fundamentally emotional, and MUST BE BASED on an emotion-- or we cease being human, alive, transcendent-- and soon become the living dead.

And that is not really hyperbole. Depression does not just stop you from relating to other people, but it cuts you off from yourself as well-- you feel hollow, empty, a walking shell, very much a living hell. Believing it was only going to continue to get worse until I lost complete control and was 'put away' to suffer and suffer, without hope as I saw it then, it seemed logical to end my life as soon as possible. So one night when we stopped at a large campsite by Lake Champlain, I decided that after my friend went into the tent to sleep I would walk into the lake and drown myself (for some reason I had a sense that drowning was a painless death.) But I wanted to leave my parents a good-bye note: I still had that much humanity left in me. But my hands shook so hard that the pen just made scribbles, and at that moment these words—these exact words-- came into my head: 'Just let me write this'.

And almost immediately, as soon as I had uttered this 'prayer' to God, the God I had stopped believing in as a teenager, my hands became completely steady—and yes, I mean instantly. It was like going from 100 mph to standing still, without any deceleration whatsoever! Then I looked up from the camp table I was sitting at, and saw the stars of the Milky Way and 'felt', for the first time in weeks, their beauty—and I thought to myself, why would I want to die? So I went into the tent and slept, the first good night's sleep I had had in a long time.

The next morning I woke up, refreshed, happy to be alive (the depression seeming like a bad dream, now over), and my vanity had returned: I would shave and shower. But as I walked towards a large building where the showers were, I felt 'something' come from behind me and into me, as it were, and before I got to that building I had begun shaking again, like a dried leaf blowing in the autumn wind, soon to fall to the dirt.
[> > >]

I tried to shave but my hand shook so much I knew I would just cut myself.

And now I was desperate. I don't know why I was so naive the night before when weeks of suffering disappeared as soon as I sought help from the God I thought I had stopped believing in. It could have been the 'placebo effect', my mind did not want to die along with my body so its unconscious part shut down the depression—I am pretty sure this is how my shrink interpreted it when I told him about it. I might have agreed with him, except that it was not logical that my 'mind' would then return me and my body to that profound clinical depression, and make it even worse than before!

As we drove into Montpelier that morning I saw a bridge and knowing I had very little time left before I lost complete control, I told my friend to go for breakfast and I would join him after I walked some to 'calm down'. I walked to that bridge that spanned the spring-swollen Winooski River and hesitated! Not because of fear—I still saw death as extinction and so preferable to the living hell I didn't seem able to escape. Twice I walked to the ledge to jump but something pulled me back: I interpret it as the 'life force' that many writers have alluded to-- whatever it is in us (and it is not fear) that wants to keep us alive. But I knew as I walked away that if I did not do it then, I would not be able to later—so I turned and ran to the ledge, and flung myself over.

Because we don't forget the best or the worst in life, I remember like it was yesterday, and not 50 some years ago, how pleasant it was to fall through the air [I can understand why sky divers love their sport]. I don't remember hitting the water, but I do see myself going feet first through some rock-strewn rapids (I have a scar on my back from hitting one of those rocks, but thank God it was not my head!). I went unconscious briefly again it seems because my next memory is of finding myself swimming in the river, and as I saw the shore I thought to myself, why am I swimming, I want to die...and I put my arms straight up and sank.

The next part is hard. Not hard to recall—if only!-- but hard to relive, hard to accept I suppose. At some point I was conscious, not of having a body, just 'pure' consciousness. I have no doubt it's hard if not impossible to believe if you've never experienced it:

[> > >]

Even in our dreams we have bodies. And I could see, but what I saw was an infinite darkness, far blacker than the darkest night. I was utterly alone, and worse of all, in torment. I don't use that word lightly: it was beyond any imaginable pain and my consciousness was roiled by it. And again, I called out to God, not to end it but with a question: 'How long will it last?' To this day I have no idea why I asked that question.

When I regained 'this world' consciousness, I was on the bank of the river in a gurney being put into an ambulance—it lasted only seconds until I passed out again.

I spent four weeks on the psych ward and had a series of electroshock treatments, which appear to have done the trick in alleviating the depression. I began rebuilding my life, taking college courses for a new career and seeing a very good shrink for the next two years. He was a good man who helped me a great deal to explore my 'unconscious' side-- talk therapy it's called today. But I'm sure he rationalized away the hellish experience of my unbodied consciousness, my soul, as I was drowning in 12 feet of water.

I wish I could do so as well. Accepting the reality of hell can be terrifying, but I am a big fan of reason [which will surprise the secular minded]. And my reason tells me if things are not a matter of chance, but are directed by some Power or Mystery none of us can really comprehend, then 'God' could have as well left me there. The man who jumped into that river to save me was a Vietnam vet riding by on his Harley when he saw me jump. There were about 50 people on the river bank that day (so I was told) and nobody did anything, except for an ex-soldier who drove his bike to save my life.

I know our memories can play tricks on us, but usually it happens for the commonplace: getting a date or name mixed-up, thinking you did something when you hadn't. But from what I've read and have been told by others who've 'dipped' into the twilight zone', we don't forget trauma. And what could be more real than death, or the prospect of death? I wrote a little 'memoir' some 25 years after the event, and everything was as real then as it had been when I was 24—and it is all just as real—and yes, perplexing still, another 25 years later. But not just for me.

[> > >]

When I started taking some college classes for a new career, I met a young woman in one of them. The mutual attraction we had was immediate and intense (a few months before when I was depressed I would have felt no attraction.) Soon we were living together, and while we had an inordinate amount of passion for each other, we never developed the friendship that I came to learn was the sine qua non for a long term relationship. if we had an argument we would just go make love to resolve it—and yes, we had a lot of arguments. Passion, especially very intense passion, really does need the ballast of friendship, to temper not its joy but its wildness...

So one ordinary afternoon after our classes, we returned to our rented studio and made love, as we usually did in those heated days. No drugs, no drinking, we intoxicated each other enough. Suddenly I found myself outside my body, that is, my consciousness. I saw my then lean and youthful body between her legs (and 50 some years later I see it just as clearly) and though I could not see her own soul, I sensed it 'hovering' near mine—as she told me later she did mine. [I also remember clearly knowing it was my body but not feeling any 'attachment' to it—it seemed unimportant to my consciousness then, to my soul.] And then, as suddenly as we had left, we were back in our bodies.

To this day I see that shared experience as a great gift to both of us. I already had proof that I have a soul, but that awareness was gained in a very different circumstance. Over time several people have related their own 'out-of-body experiences' (OBEs) to me [people seem to relax with me when I share my own paranormal encounters and tell me things they say they don't readily share with others]. In my late 20's I was teaching ESL in Tokyo and one night having a beer at a bar with an Australian. He was a typical Aussie, friendly, down-to-earth, a surfer as far from 'mystical' as one might expect. He told me that one day he had been sunbathing on Bondi Beach near Sydney when suddenly he was about 50 feet up in the air looking down on himself and everyone else. He still seemed freaked out by it, emphasized that he wasn't drinking or on drugs—I smiled and told him, "That was your soul".

[> > >]

At the other end of life was a 91 year old man I met at my health club a few years ago. I don't ask people if they believe in God-- the question is too emotional, it seems, for both some believers and skeptics. Instead I ask if they think anything of themselves continues after death. He told me he didn't used to think so, until in his 40's one Sunday when as usual his wife 'dragged' him to Mass with the family. Sitting bored as usual, he suddenly found himself, his consciousness, hovering beneath the nave of the large church, looking down on himself. his family and the entire congregation. As with myself and the Australian surfer, he soon found himself (his consciousness or soul) back in his body. He added as a postscript: 'After that I got in good with the priests.'

There are thousands of written accounts of NDEs and OBEs and other paranormal events, going back at last as far as Plato's telling of the near-death experience of the soldier of Ur after a great battle. I understand why many people are skeptical-- I probably would still be an agnostic-materialist myself if I hadn't gone through what I did. The body-brain is such a complex organism that if you open a closet and something falls off a shelf, your hand will automatically reach out for it before your 'conscious' brain is even fully aware. And of course we've learned so much about medicine and science, but any good doctor will admit medicine is a much art as science [one question I like to ask MDs is if they know of patients who died who should have lived given their prognosis, as well as patients, whom their doctors had written off, surviving—and every one so far has said yes.]

And while I'm a great fan of science and its myriad benefits [I'm alive and walking because of it], it is important to remember that science is an impartial method, not a 'god'. Be it hi-def TV or your I-phone or thermonuclear weapons, science reflects our human interests and values, and is only concerned with the natural world, the universe we can measure. If there is a supernatural world permeating the natural one, science and scientists haven't a clue. We live in only 3 dimensions, 4 if you count time; the naked eye cannot see most of the spectrum of light, nor can the ear hear the full range of sound.

[> > >]

Because I live in a body in a material world, I have no idea how I could see without eyes or think without a brain, but I did—as apparently many others have over time. I know as I know I breathe that my ‘self’, my personal being, in some form or another has always existed and always will [though in what place may be the tricky part.] Can’t prove any of it, but then I can’t even prove I love my wife-- but I’m beginning to realize only now as an old man, after being with her the better part of half a century, how much I do love her, though can I or anyone ever know how much of anything we are in this world of birth and death?

So I’ve come to suspect dying—the great universal human fear (and we seem to be the only species to fear it in the abstract)-- may be akin to waking up shortly after a dream: You recall the dream, and how real it seemed whilst you were dreaming it, but now realize ‘life’ is reality, not the dream. And what about the tens of thousands of dreams you’ve had and don’t even know you had them? Would it then be so surprising that if we are re-incarnated, as I suspect myself, we don’t recall our past lives—save perhaps in bits and pieces. Like feeling an attachment to certain places, or taking an instant liking—or disliking—to someone you just met. Or perhaps the work you seek or the music or books you love?

The man was right: for the time being, we can only see through a glass darkly...

Nolo Segundo, pen name of retired teacher [America, Japan, Taiwan, Cambodia] L.J.Carber, 76, became in his 8th decade a published poet and essayist in over 170 literary journals/anthologies in 13 countries. A trade publisher has released 3 poetry collections in paperback on Amazon: *The Enormity of Existence*; *Of Ether and Earth*; and *Soul Songs*. These titles like much of his work reflect the awareness he's had for over 50 years since almost drowning in a Vermont river: That he has--IS--a consciousness that predates birth and survives death, what poets since the Psalmists and Plato have called the soul.

Stephen Kingsnorth

Hive

The ukulele, not best for Danny Boy,
means unaccompanied, we gravel to begin;
our chariot choir sings high and low,
though jointly note the middle range.

Despite harmonious melody,
the Dublin-born disputes the tune
is Londonderry Air, an Ulster name.
But with Guinness I have heard
plantation words alongside craic,
and Prot bars resound republican.
We warble words with the chorus girls,
a hurting leg, Jack's grunt refrain.

Out the door, politics; here we laugh
at wheelchair three point-turn or six

in this space, confined, it's like
our repartee, the discourse of humanity,
Areopagus of fun.

Kim, the crochet girl has brought a bag
of kitchenalia to identify.
This largely plastic crowded tray
whets few appetites today.

[> > >]

With glove stretchers, I had never need
of tongs to empty sauce sachets,
or the mango stone remover,
the sandwich cutter which prevents
squashed jam seeping from bread edges.
Yesterday sachets and mangoes
were not in the scullery,
or indeed between my teeth,
while butter or jam were choice,
and crustiness, grandpa's trait,
an ingredient of life.

Because the baby has been born
half-knit blue cardigan
has sleeves now turning pink;
desultory chair exercise
brings the needles overhead.

This group, hive christened,
and we its bees;
some come from ever-silent rooms
and travel here without sound,
broken-winged, as if the sting
already taken from our tale.

[> > >]

Once my thought-question
slipped from lips;
it might have searched opinions,
we could have shared spoken debate,
we might have made a meal of it.
But when the leader googles phone,
the answer served on a plate,
then beehive becomes an igloo still,
snake-charmer's basket on its head,
and honey comb cannot mature.

The yellow high-viz jacket wears
a button hole, woollen daffodil,
but insists it to be a crocus flower.
In stitches
he offers me its curling bloom to
smell;
we are back to buzzing
and that perfume claims the room.

First published by Eunoia

Stephen Kingsnorth (Cambridge M.A., English & Religious Studies), retired to Wales, UK, from ministry in the Methodist Church due to Parkinson's Disease, has had pieces published by on-line poetry sites, printed journals and anthologies. His blog is at <https://poetrykingsnorth.wordpress.com>

Ben Nardolilli

Dead and Alive Again

Under the call of a distant meadowlark
we walked across the field,
crouching because of the suspicion
hidden inside of the song

No bullion to us, that beak calling out
for us to recognize the failure
to recognize broken patterns
we were trying to assemble into a life

In the trickle of moonlight,
a quick census turned into a dull pang
as we wiggled to figure out
if we still had ten toes, all of our fingers

Sunshine and more song woke us up
to sweat and drums beating,
our bored and frustrated hands
at war with the eruptions in our ears

No relief for our eyes either,
the gallery of the grass and the clouds
made us ashamed of our fears
of the depths, the heights, and the wind

Ben Nardolilli is currently an MFA candidate at Long Island University. His work has appeared in *Perigee Magazine*, *Door Is a Jar*, *Red Fez*, *Danse Macabre*, *The 22 Magazine*, *Quail Bell Magazine*, *Elimae*, *The Northampton Review*, *Slab*, and *The Minetta Review*. Follow his publishing journey at mirrorsponge.blogspot.com.

L. Ward Abel

Me and Rain

Rain reminds me of me,
malleable, riverish, drawn
having ended up
where ideas level out and
 pool—
I tumble high to low,
rain reminds me of
 me.

L. Ward Abel's work has appeared in hundreds of journals (Rattle, Versal, The Reader, Worcester Review, Main Street Rag, others), including a recent nomination for a Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net, and he is the author of four full collections and ten chapbooks of poetry, including his latest collection, *Green Shoulders: New and Selected Poems 2003–2023* (Silver Bow, 2021). He is a reformed lawyer, he writes and plays music, and he teaches literature. Abel resides in rural Georgia.

James Croal Jackson

The Inflatable Exhibition

Maybe the installation was overrated—
the advertisements got us, inflated
the necessity of PVC in the center
of the city. It is August and I wanted
to see you for who you were and you
let me. Our shoes were off and
in the green shining light we were
vibrant. In the red we could not tell
each other apart from the screaming
strangers' children, as indistinct
as silhouettes, palettes upon which
we draw the lines we see ahead; the vents
streaming air; the eighteen rooms we lost
ourselves in but not the sense of time,
which was kind of the point:
already we are labyrinths
so why pay to see
ourselves out? Not that we could
even. Had to find a blue GUIDE to point
us slightly in the direction of exodus,
another tube to lead us into the open
patio with the mobile bar selling
orange crush and cucumber vodka
with twenty other people seeking

[> > >]

air, or at least a chair
to sit, in which I am
wondering how close to sit
beside you? The answer
in the atoms wobbling between
us, the slight tilting of light.

James Croal Jackson is a Filipino-American poet who works in film production. His latest chapbooks are *Count Seeds With Me* (Ethel Zine & Micro-Press, 2022) and *Our Past Leaves* (Kelsay Books, 2021). Recent poems are in *Stirring*, *Vilas Avenue*, and **82 Review*. He edits *The Mantle Poetry* from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. (jamescroaljackson.com)

Frances Koziar

In Time

The soft *creak, creak* of my chair matches the wind hushing through the trees around my isolated house in the country. Fallow fields stretch far beneath a hot sun, and a raven caws from high in the Norwegian spruce.

I am thinking of how, when my second child died and my world shattered like crystal in my heartbreak and then my first child chose the big cities, I came to be here: old and withering like a sickly ash, with no one to leave this place to when I die.

A car drives up, too fast. My city daughter climbs out, her normally composed face distraught.

“She died,” she blurts out before she reaches me. “My Nami.” Her eyes are wide, brown cheeks streaked with shining tears, trembling in her shock, her chest heaving with too much air. For a moment I don’t see her, but instead see my own horrified face in a mirror so many years gone by, my eyes puffy and swollen as I faced the bitter landscape of lost dreams and a child’s death.

The end of the world is in my daughter’s ravaged gaze, and I know this is only the beginning of a grief so deep that everything will fall apart before it can be built anew, and that even then, the memories of Before will stay with her always. But I don’t say this. I say nothing, and instead gather her into my arms and squeeze her to my chest for long minutes, while we are both rocked by grief, past and present, mine and hers until there are no lines left, only love.

When her breathing steadies and she stops trembling, I step back. My battered old heart wrenches fiercely at the shattered look on her face, and yet still, my chair is rocking slowly from a weight now gone, the hot heavy breeze barely stirs the dry dust of the ground, and everything is the same.

[> > >]

I clasp my wrinkled old hand tenderly around hers. “Come in,” I say with all the aching love in my heart. “I’ll make a cup of tea.”

Frances Koziar has published prose and poetry in over 100 different literary magazines and outlets, and has had over 20 professional-rate publications, including in *Best Canadian Essays 2021* and *Daily Science Fiction*. She has also served as an author panelist, fiction contest judge, and a microfiction editor. She is a young (disabled) retiree and a social justice warrior, and she lives in Kingston, Ontario, Canada.

Prabu Vasan

The Caves

I.

I press flat against an alder trunk
But a great serrated wing cuts
The moonlight, so I scurry into a ditch,
Curl in a gravelly crack, plunge
Through leafage. I hide in the rot...

My limbs know what to do, my nerves
Know what the field mouse knows.
I've been bred for this.

II.

I've come across their fragile bones
In the woods, at the foot of some high
Sycamore or oak. Thin legs rigored at
The joint, spindly little ribs sprouting
From a sternum. Picked bare, or
With a last crimped string of flesh
Or a strip of distressed fur.

And the pellets, grey and brown,
Retched from a raptor's crop.
I broke one open. A row of tiny teeth
stared at me.

[> > >]

I handle them with care, those artifacts
From the harsh, godless country
Right next to this one.

III.

I felt my toes and fingers twitch.
My brain couldn't make words.

I floated like that in the black, waiting
For my body to return
From those ancient caves, the ones
Rich with the red ore of fear, where,
For some reason, I know what
The field mouse knows and what
The vole knows of the small
Dark corners in the earth, of how death
Only moves at the last moment,
And of the terrible descending claw.

Prabu Vasan lives in the Hudson Valley of New York near the river named Muhheakantuck by the Lenape and later the Hudson by the Dutch. His work has been published in 6x6, Tarpaulin Sky, Tricycle, Pensive: A Global Journal of Spirituality & the Arts, Canary, Cider House Poetry, Caesura, and the anthology *I Go to the Ruined Place: Contemporary Poems in Defense of Global Human Rights*. He is working on a first collection of poems titled 'To Find One Another'.

Lorena Caputo

On Restless Wing

I.

In the dark moments before dawn's twilight,
heavy bodies alight, feet scurry,
chitters scurry across my roof.
I search in the light of the full-moon-
fractured clouds & see only dim tin.

II.

In the silent moments of a Sunday morn,
thick wings beat outside my windows,
my doors, thin talons clinging upon screen.

III.

A mockingbird watches me
through the transom.

IV.

Ani scatter as I walk outside.
Their ebony bodies now cling to thin
mucuyo limbs, scattering yellow blossoms.
Those thick beaks closed against my questions.

V.

In these solitary moments, the wind again gusts
& the rain falls ... in a lone scurry across my roof.

[> > >}

VI.

A flutter of desperate wings awakens me
from these words. A young warbler,
pale yellow breast heaving, grasps
the fine edge of a poster.

VII.

I open the door to its freedom.

But she chooses to perch above my desk,
watching me, watching ...

VIII.

A mockingbird innocently crosses
my threshold, pecking at a moth
dying in this morning.

IX.

& it chases the warbler from transom
to window, thin talons clinging to screen,
from window to transom to window,
the beat of wings overhead.

X.

Mockingbird abandons the pursuit.
Yet that pale-breast bird
seeks refuge in these words.

[> > >}

XI.

I abandon them for a moment.

& when I return, the warbler has taken
its freedom through my open door.

Lorena Caputo is a wandering troubadour whose poetry appears in over 400 journals on six continents, and 23 collections of poetry – including *In the Jaguar Valley* (dancing girl press, 2023) and *Caribbean Interludes* (Origami Poems Project, 2022). She also authors travel narratives, articles and guidebooks. Her writing has been honored by the Parliamentary Poet Laureate of Canada (2011) and thrice nominated for the Best of the Net. Caputo has done literary readings from Alaska to the Patagonia. She journeys through Latin America with her faithful knapsack Rocinante, listening to the voices of the pueblos and Earth. Follow her adventures at www.facebook.com/lorrainecaputo.wanderer or <https://latinamericawanderer.wordpress.com>

Emily Chabra

Windowsill, Floor

succulent petals
yellow

spine craves sun
unaware

stained altar for a syllabism,
crumbs of interstitia sprinkled

on polyurethane, exposing us
a scared starving elder

we were never meant to
grow on a

s l e n d e r ledge

knocked in bright rebuke
afremov spray from parapets
who know not
what they do

Emily Chabra is a graduate of the Writing & Literature program at UC Santa Barbara. She lives and works in the San Francisco Bay Area with her wife, Morgann and their three cats.

Johnny Ganshaw

Eyes Hold The Key

I stopped and stared at the shadow overtaking the wall
the reflection in the window staring back at me
Sun striking the old colored medicine bottles casting
luminescent streams across the table
I was mesmerized by the beauty of each, witnessing
the simple pleasures that are right there in front of you
knowing the pain that the shadow holds,
the hurt in the reflection that is peering back
all the pain and hurt disappeared, just for a moment
I saw the beauty that was once there
rays of beauty can escape your view
but at that moment you see all the glorious and
vibrant colors that exist, just waiting, wanting
to be absorbed through your eyes, the warmth
travels through you until a smile appears,
in this moment they come alive, giving nourishment
that you have missed, that you longed for
in just those few seconds, you come to realize
the shadow and reflection are just like
those beams of light, a moment of brightness
to be absorbed and recast through you,
the hurt and pain become the warmth to
awaken the sleeping life and be restored,
the darkness disappears from your eyes
the flame in your soul is relit
the world you dreamed of can begin again

After 31 years in banking, **Johnny Ganshaw** retired to follow his dream of owning a hotel in Southeast Asia. This led to many new experiences enabling John to see the world through a different lens, leading him to write his story through essays, poetry, and a yet unpublished memoir. John's work has appeared in *Native Skin*, *Runamok Books/Growerly*, *Post Roe Alternatives*, *Fleas on the Dog*, *OMQ*, *Open Door Magazine*, *SCARS* poems and short stories, and others.

Matt Stanley

A Vision in the Rain

If you should spy,
outside your door,
a long-haired ghost
in corduroy,
don't get too close,
to show your scars,
don't look too long,

or laugh too hard.
Let's not say a word,
or tell a soul,
don't ask a single thing.
We were ripe, and full,
above the clouds,
and soaring.
It's only me—
forever falling.

Matt Stanley is a poet from Baltimore who is now enjoying retirement with his family. His works were recently published in *Grand Little Things* and *Down in the Dirt*.

Michael Shoemaker

The Road to Beyond



Michael Shoemaker is a poet, writer, and photographer. His photography has appeared in Front Porch Review, Writers on the Range, L'Esprit Literary Review, Littoral Magazine, Yahoo.com, and elsewhere. He lives in Magna, Utah. Michael's new book of photography and Christian poetry *Rocky Mountain Reflections* can be purchased at <https://poetschoice.in/beta/product/rocky-mountain-reflections>

Irina Tall

Untitled

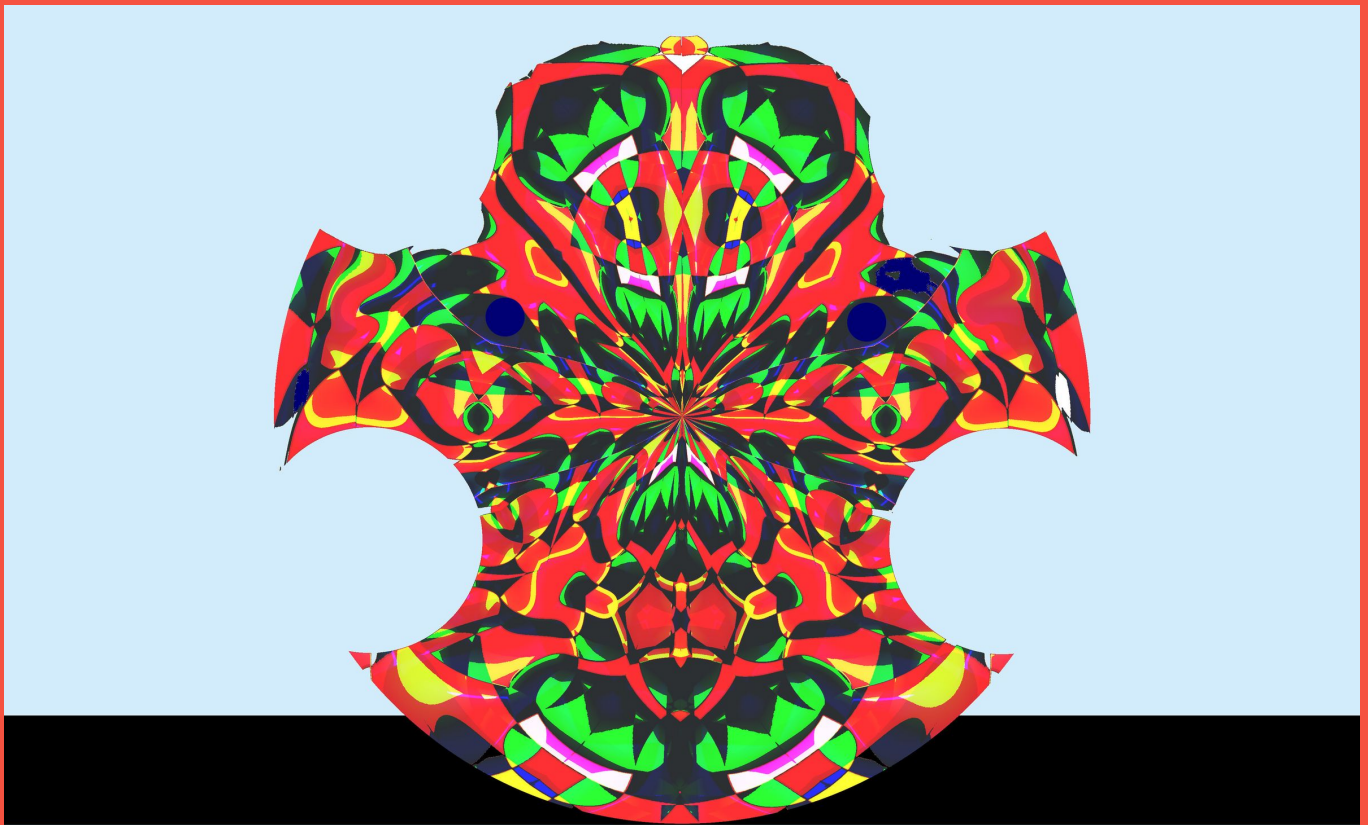


Irina Tall (Novikova) is an artist, graphic artist, illustrator. She graduated from the State Academy of Slavic Cultures with a degree in art, and also has a bachelor's degree in design.

Her first personal exhibition "My soul is like a wild hawk" (2002) was held in the museum of Maxim Bagdanovich. In her works, she raises themes of ecology, in 2005 she devoted a series of works to the Chernobyl disaster, draws on anti-war topics. The first big series she drew was The Red Book, dedicated to rare and endangered species of animals and birds. Irina writes fairy tales and poems and illustrates short stories. She draws various fantastic creatures: unicorns, animals with human faces, especially the image of a man - a bird - Siren. In 2020, she took part in Poznań Art Week. Her work has been published in magazines: Gupsophila, Harpy Hybrid Review, Little Literary Living Room and others. In 2022, her short story was included in the collection *The 50 Best Short Stories*, and her poem was published in the collection of poetry *The wonders of winter*.

Edward Supranowicz

On a Gray Day



Edward Michael Supranowicz is the grandson of Irish and Russian/Ukrainian immigrants. He grew up on a small farm in Appalachia. He has a grad background in painting and printmaking. Some of his artwork has recently or will soon appear in *Fish Food*, *Streetlight*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, *The Door Is A Jar*, *The Phoenix*, and *The Harvard Advocate*. Edward is also a published poet who has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize multiple times

Burt Rashbaum

The Scars

We carry the scars of this life on
our skins, in our dreams, our prayers,
our sins.

At some point we no longer hear
the voices of those we love – no
admonitions, pleas, gentle requests,
forceful arguments, long gone
except in memory.

Whatever wisdom we gain we carry
like a heavy load,
unwanted, undeserved,
and in the dying firelight
we've faced those demons as

we wreck ourselves with love
desire heartache and backbreak
regret and sweat and yet
and yet

and yet we
want that next breath,
that warm embrace
that next day and the one
after that. [> > >]

The scars like
roadmaps of time
and story and blood
and pain.

The years like erosion
and echoing wind, drifting sand
tickling a dune.

Someone in the distance
waving, inviting, waiting, calling,
come on, come on.

Burt Rashbaum's publications are *Of the Carousel* (The Poet's Press, 2019), and *Blue Pedals* (Editura Pim, 2015, Bucharest). His poems have appeared in *Art in the Time of Covid-19* (San Fedele Press, 2020), *A 21st Century Plague: Poetry from a Pandemic* (University Professors Press, 2021), *American Writers Review: Turmoil and Recovery* (San Fedele Press, 2021), *The Antonym, The Seventh Quarry, Storms of the Inland Sea* (Shanti Arts Press, 2022), *OPUS 300: The Poet's Press Anthology 1971-2021*, *Boats Against the Current*, *The Ravens Perch*, and *Valiant Scribe*.

