

INSIDEOUT

An Affirming Epiphany



SAAD GHOSN, Editor

SOS ART Cincinnati

sosartcincinnati.com

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INSIDEOUT

An Affirming Epiphany

*Self-Portraits and statements by
28 transgender individuals and responsive
poems by 28 Greater Cincinnati poets*

A book project of SOS ART in collaboration with
Jay DeFazio, “Inside Out: Greater Cincinnati”

Saad Ghosn, *Editor*

A Publication of SOS (Save Our Souls) ART

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Special thanks and heartfelt gratitude to:

All the transgender artists included in this book who share themselves through their self-portrait and statement and help us discover their beauty

All the poets included in this book who by their responsive poems help us affirm and celebrate the rich and beautiful diversity of the human

Jay DeFazio who initiated the InsideOut transgender self-portraiture project, who is a great supporter of SOS ART and a wonderful friend

SOS ART is a 501c3 Organization whose Mission is to:

Encourage, promote and provide opportunities for the arts as dynamic vehicles for peace and justice

Encourage artists to use their art as their voice on issues of peace and justice that concern them, their community and the world

Facilitate the creation of a local community of artists who network and collaborate together using art as a means to impact issues of peace and justice in the community where they live

Use the arts to speak about, inform, educate and create a dialogue on issues of peace and justice and thus to bring about positive change

Use the arts to introduce basic values of peace and justice in the youth

SOS ART is very grateful to the Dater Foundation and to the McLane Foundation for all their support



To all transgender individuals and to all individuals who search for their truth in order to affirm themselves and add beauty to this world

To all artists and poets who use their art as their voice for peace and justice and for a better world

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FOREWORD

This book project is a collaboration between “Inside Out: Greater Cincinnati” and SOS ART. The artwork and themes in this book carry a personal value to me: as a trans man who transitioned later in life, I have struggled to find self-love and acceptance when I look into the mirror. As you look through the portraits, I hope you see the beauty in our many-faceted identities. The goal with Inside Out is to create a space where trans people feel safe to be their authentic selves, and to highlight the perfection, strength, and resiliency of their being. Each self-portrait, created in an intimate, three-hour workshop, has been paired with one or more poems authored by a Greater Cincinnati poet invited by SOS ART. The interplay between poet and artist creates the opportunity for new dialogues as the writers interact with the self-portraits. Their poems demonstrate empathy and recognition of “Other,” and the collaboration offers visibility and voice to a community living in a predominantly cisgender world. It has been amazing to see these new interactions take shape. I hope you appreciate the beauty of this journey and I encourage you to spend some time reading both the artist statements and poems that accompany each piece.

I am especially grateful to Saad Ghosn, Founder and President of SOS ART; ArtWorks; and all our artists and authors, for this incredible opportunity, and look forward to the continuing evolution of this project in the future.

Jay DeFazio

Creator, “Inside Out: Greater Cincinnati”

INTRODUCTION

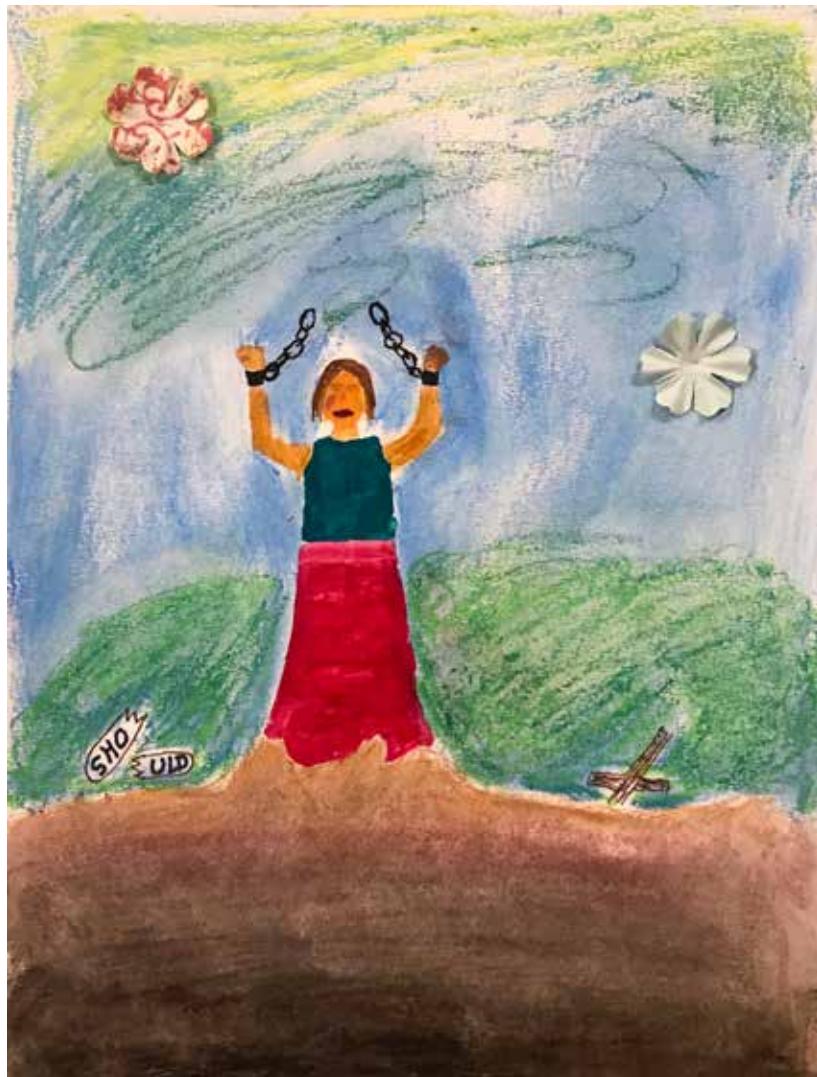
This book project stemmed from my friendship with Jay DeFazio, a transgender activist and a board member of SOS ART. Jay, supported by ArtWorks, had started “Inside Out”, a series of workshops for transgender individuals asking them to create their self-portrait reflecting on their arduous journey of self-acceptance, transitioning into their new unfolding identity. When Jay told me of his project I thought right away of expanding it to include the overall community of both trans and cis individuals by specifically adding to it the voice of our local poet community. Invited poets would respond to the trans artists self-portraits and their accompanying statements by creating poems with a focus of their choice but which hopefully would connect to our universal humanity. This would be an SOS ART project in line with the non-profit organization’s mission to promote and provide opportunities for the arts as vehicles for peace and justice and for a better world.

Twenty eight invited greater Cincinnati poets, including two trans poets, answered the call. They were each assigned a trans self-portrait with its statement and were asked to create one or more poems in response. For some of the poets, it was their first encounter with the transgender community behind which they could put a human face; for others it was an added opportunity to expand the transgender reality and to address its intimate and deep human ground. The self-portraits of the trans artists and their responsive poems by the participating poets fill the pages of this book. They take each of us on a journey of discovery and understanding. They open at the same time horizons for our own reality, putting us in deeper touch with the “Other”, with the complexity, diversity and richness of the human, of which we are all a part.

My many thanks to Jay DeFazio who has made this personal encounter possible; also to all the included participating artists and poets who have taken us to a new expansive realm, the realm of our rich, enriching, and connecting human identity. With deep gratitude,

Saad Ghosn, Editor

Founder and President, SOS ART



Age: 63; Pronouns: She/Her

"A few years ago, soon after my transition, I drew a picture of me walking away from the viewer, with a target on my back.

Today I no longer feel a target. I feel free. I have broken free from society's expectations, from a rule-bound life, and stepped into the light of freedom.

What a relief it is when you find you can finally love yourself!"

Self-Portrait of Aimee

Should
you feel shackled
to the eye
of those beholden
to the chains
of who
you
(or we
or they)

should
be, I suggest
you look at me,
bound only
to the endless sky.
Don't speak to me
of margins. I am
spilling all my colors
on the page,
never large enough
to hold the joy
of who I
am.



Age: 22; Pronouns: They/Them

"This portrait was inspired by Bowie's "Moonage Daydream", namely the line, "I'm the space invader, I'll be a rock 'n' rollin' bitch for you". I've often depicted myself as a space alien or some other sort of otherworldly creature as it feels more comfortable than depicting myself as say, a girl or a boy. My gender expression is colorful, over the top, and a blend of feminine and masculine elements. It's important for me to show off the version of me I feel most comfortable in. And in art, I can be whoever I want, so that's why I'm a blue-skinned alien creature."

They to Them

We are not the only ones.
 Our pronouns have been dancing over people's tongues
 for hundreds of years now.
 There is nothing new about them,
 about us.
 We have a history,
 long and many storied.
 Our pronouns graced the pens of
 Chaucer, Shakespeare, Jane Austen,
 and many, many other writers whose works
 we had to read for school.
 "They" is not wrong.
 We are not wrong.
 (No, not even grammatically.)
 And anyone who prioritizes a made-up rule
 over the wondrous-ness of your being
 is not worth your time at all.
 It's not our fault that they can't comprehend
 how marvelous us theys are.

A Collection of Stardust to a Blue Skinned Alien

I understand what it's like to feel not-quite human.
 After all, "humans are only male or female,"
 and with that short statement
 humanity rejects us.
 But that's okay, my extra-stellar friend.
 We can build a home for ourselves
 here among the stars, and find that
 we are not the first to do this.
 We are not the only ones who left humanity behind.
 All of us celestial beings who never quite fit in
 down on Earth's surface.
 There is nothing wrong with Earth of course;

PENELOPE EPPLE

it's just that
we were meant for more than that.
All of us
theys, he/shes, xes, ones, they/hes, she/theys, es, thons, pers,
and more than I could ever finish naming,
finding where we belong in these heavenly spheres.
And here beyond the boys and girls,
the men and women,
we write our own definition of
what it means to be human.





Age: 34; Pronouns: He/Him

"Growing up, I did not have a support system. I was taught that my weight, hair, and basically everything about me was something to be ashamed of. Self-esteem issues, loneliness, and struggles with mental health were walls to happiness for most of my life. When looking in the mirror, even as a child, my eyes were the one thing I saw that I genuinely loved. It took a long time for me to grow up and gain the confidence to get to know my true self. Four years ago I discovered I was genderfluid, and came out as a trans man earlier this year. Seeing how many people were willing to stand by me through this has been surprising and wonderful. Being opened a door to happiness that I didn't have before. It's been a journey, and one that I'm excited to continue. During my time as a professional photographer, I found a love of using gels to create color in images. I use them when I can and they help me unleash creativity and see the world differently."

My Pronouns, He/Him

Swathed in blood-stained amniotic fluid
 Your encrusted head,
 Your newborn smell,
 Your flailing limbs,
 Survived on their own.

Your eyes saw the truth in a world of lies,
 saw your beauty over hatred,
 security over danger,
 wisdom over stupidity,
 and saw light over darkness.

Your body became a sanctuary,
 Your hair an extension of your innermost self,
 Your soul and spirit stayed genuine,
 Your self esteem grew unnurtured,
 Your mind moved you forward.

Out of the depths of isolation
 You bring the promise of color and images,
 turning sorrow to joy,
 depression to connection,
 despair to hope,
 and hate to love.

Refraction of a Prism Hanging in the Window

One tiny segment of the prism

upheld itself to you,

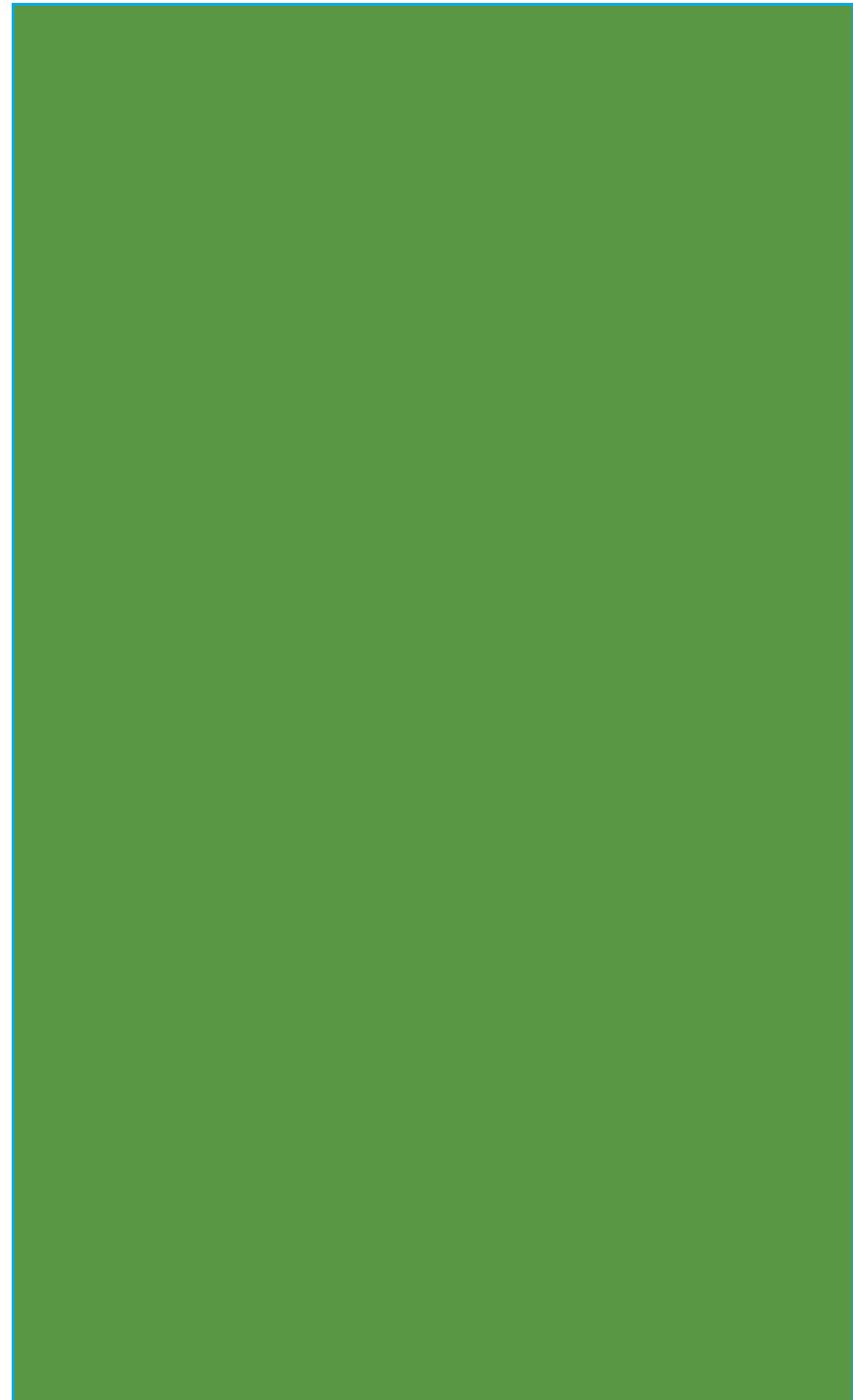
sprayed dust on your cleanliness,

found warmth

in your color.

NANCY WELCH D'AQUILA

One mingled particle
scanted your thoughts
trace
by
trace
feeling frightened and
false fore when
the curtain
crowded
around
the
pain
It
was
gone.





Age: 35; Pronouns: He/Him

"This painting represents resurrection. This was the first time I took a picture and saw myself. I saw who I've always known myself to be."

Resurrection, A Self-Portrait

~ *"But still, like air, I'll rise"* –
from Maya Angelou's poem "Still I Rise"

You wear vivid green, swaddled
by soft moss color—fragrant juniper, sweet basil.

Your skin the tint of richest earth
from which all life swells.

Your glass frames coral like the sea's diverse reef—
through these circles you see deeply.

Your dark hair and light shirt, duality
you embrace, one arm clasping the other.

You are the Phoenix, fabled, fabulous bird devoured
by flames. You rise, transform ashes into your whole, holy self.



Age: 67; Pronouns: She/Her

"I am struggling with trying to wrap my head around the thought that the absolute best year of my life has been immediately followed by one of the absolute worst years of my life. Sometimes, I even wonder if last year really happened or was it all just a dream? I know that I'm not alone, and I am fighting the depression and the anxiety so that I can emerge from the darkness and be an even bigger light."

Beacon

Barbara
you were there
when my sister dressed me up in her clothes with care
my cheeks rouged proud as she
paraded me down the staircase
to our red-faced father
who quickly turned me around
without a word

You were there
when I fell asleep on my aunt's bed
splayed about a pile of silk bras
to be awakened by her shrieks and jeers

You were there then,
Barbara

But the other night
driving in my car
stockings and garter on
under my jeans
feeling the sadness of
Lana Del Rey on the radio
singing

*You get ready, you get all dressed up
To go nowhere in particular*

you weren't there

you were somewhere else
on the other side
where courage and truth led you

a beacon of light
cutting a swath
creating a berth

MARK FLANIGAN

Barbara
in the darkness of my room
I hang your self-portrait

In it
your arms float above you
stars lighting the way
hands that reach out
touch mine

remind one
what matters most
is not where you *were*
but where you *are*,
what matters most
is not who we *were*,
but who we *are*

Barbara
in the darkness of my room
I hang your self-portrait
next to
my work-in-progress,

and because of it
my own darkness breaks
a bit.





Age: 46; Pronouns: She/Her

"My experience as a trans woman has been a challenge every day of my life."

Her Portrait-Self

Her portrait-self gazes out with regal dark opulence, dripping jewel tones, Bordeaux-stained, punk-laced, the smooth curves of her expression are hard and delicate shades, an aching swirl of contrasts.

Proud. Defiant. Shy. Coy.

Wary. Wounded. Brave.

To the world that has made
every day of her life a challenge, her eyes
seem to throw the challenge right back. See?

This is who I am. This is me.

Sister, Mona Lisa has nothing on you.

Still, a body is a conundrum.

Skin and limbs and heartbeats.

To be looked at, to look out from, to live in.

We are all piecemeal.

Fluid, shifting, tenuously, webbed
systems, and organs, nerve endings
and electrical wiring;

a glorious collection of congregating cells,
muscles knit to joints;
sinews and synapses

shooting sparks, sending signals—feeling, pain,
movement—the whole damn thing;
conducting a mechanical, 200,000-year-old orchestra,
breaking, and healing;

fragmented, yet still, whole;
solid, and still transcendent.

Her self-portrait is composed

of make-up, applied in layers and textures,

cross-stitched skull

and bones embroidered,

swoops and swirls, damask—

woven, wavy, papered-over;

BEA WISSEL

even within sharp lines
and the edged borders,
a woman's spirit is an impossible thing
to contain.

It begins before you are born—

the world assigns you a frame, and a place
on the gallery wall where your canvas
will hang, where you are meant to grow
into the gendered image of you, preordained.

Boxes to tick. Taco Tuesdays. Church and football
on Sundays. 2.5 kids to bare.

Entertainment genres, calculated by algorithms
believed to have us pegged.

Ladies' room on the right, gentlemen on the left.

Weight to lose. Balls to bust. Bacon to bring.

Screw all that.

There is a space between what life gives
and what we create of ourselves.

It is free and blank and anyone's to claim.

May it be yours—whatever you are, whoever you want to be.

Step into yourself with ease.

Becoming. Being. Knowing
the light and darkness that is all your own,
and worthy of all good things.

You are the artist: the only one
who can say what's true.





Age: 23; Pronouns: He/Him

"Through growing into myself I've let the judgement I assumed others had affect how I treated myself, and in turn, my battle with internalized transphobia and homophobia had led me to a corner of the world where I tried to not associate with my community. It took a lot of loss and agony to become comfortable with myself and with my brothers, sisters, and siblings. Being as we are, not according to expectation."

Brycelyn's Self-Portrait

We asked you to apply paint to your skin
the way Van Gogh painted *Starry Nights*,
Impasto—visible, with thickly textured strokes

but you were bold and found your own form.
Absorbed in calibrating each identity to fit tight,
we blindly offer you a perfectly constructed puzzle,
the kind we laminate and hang on the wall
as we would your self-portrait.

Your self-portrait, a calling-card of flesh and bone
scrapped with a palette knife's precision
to leave only one hungry, impassioned eye open.
We can see how pain and passion grow like a vine
climbing past conventional doctrine
that commands you to conform.

You've taken our command and refuse to conform,
standing with your vine, allowing yourself to grow
beyond the brush's embrace, letting go
all you inherit, all we impose in favor of shaping your own
mystery. Let us know you alone own
this story, the experience of brush strokes
left visible on your skin, as time wakes
you to understanding and growth within
yourself. Celebrate living inside a body
that doesn't dictate who you are or what you desire,
how you should feel and how you should attire
perception of your humanness—or community.
Hold strong dear friend, dear brave human, lovely soul,
Make us take notice of you, yourself who is unique and
individual.



Age: 33; Pronouns: They/Them

Block Pattern

To chip and cut
each block
stocked
directives break away
remove
take
shade
gray
bright thoughts of students
yet betrayed

Carefully
instructors bray
as we carve
great lumps - engaged
potato
apple
fibrous blanks

originally resistant

molding each - they train

each
tiny
set
of
hands

Each Brain

tout leaders

Will Be Trained!

The eager wards attack their slates
and chosen few
will somehow show

LONNA D KINGSBURY

some semblance of conformity

over those assailed

by questions
doubts
stark images
mirroring their group
reversed
inverted
juxtaposed

too young to know such terms exist
but old enough to feel their truth

and pray their shapes will form
display
adhesion as their proof

while inwardly the blunted soul
rebuffs such pristine flawless plots
negates each strike to preassign
distinctiveness confined

yet by rote they emulate
tendered patterns charting ways
striking hard at curvatures
confronted every day

Inside Out - The Vision

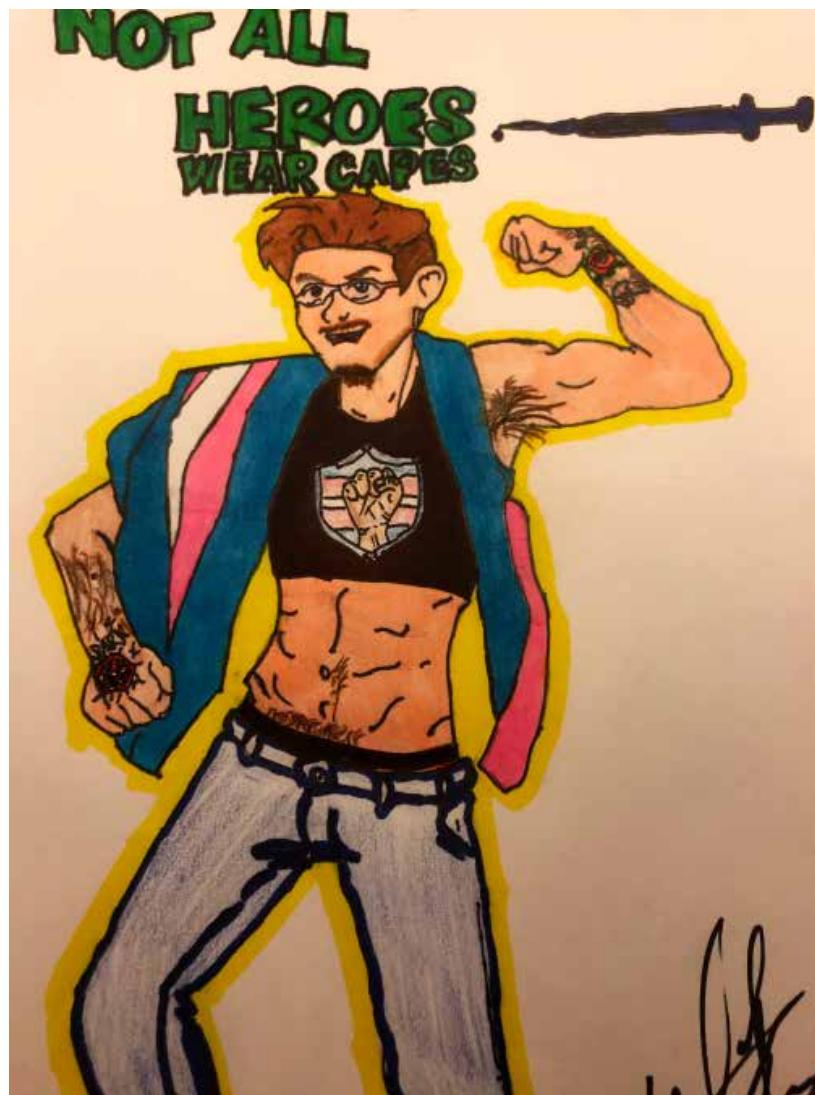
Inside out
outside in
grey on black
as posed
disposed to coloration
objectified
unknown
deduces who
from how and when
why and what
we know
betwixt
between
each rendering
quartering the whole
surrendered up
as offered proof
unveiling who we seek

strikingly -
the eyes entreat . . .

are us

and them

not we?



Age: 29; Pronouns: He/Him

"I decided to articulate the inside of how I see myself as well as a part of how I really look. My journey has started but isn't finished."

Imagine: there was a time when you were held protected in the safe womb and had no gender. Bipotential, the scientists call it. You were neither boy nor girl, and you were loved. Seven weeks of free-floating potential as your cells divided and multiplied - tethered to the umbilical of love. The world around you loved the idea of you, whoever you might become. The legislators passed laws to protect you, genderless being that you were. The point is, you were loved, unseen and unmet. The world around you celebrated your life.

Reflections

To be complete is to need nothing outside oneself. Everything Is here within. The cells that multiplied from that initial one to a vast multitude, a collective whole. It was all there at the start, in the floating potential. Out of that multitude, I am - not a single monolith, nor a simple set of divisible parts, like the medieval perfection of the Trinity, nor binary, like a star and its lesser partner held together by strong forces, but from many, one - complete. To be whole, one, indivisible and yet complex. A diamond valued for its many facets, each reflecting one aspect of truth. The gemstone guides the jeweler's hand, shows where to cut and shape. Here is what I am. I emerge sparkling with an inner light. What is being revealed was here all along.

KAREN ARNETT

Superhero

What was the tipping point, what urgent call at inconvenient time broke them free from Clark Kent's street clothes? What strength to overcome the krypton of self-doubt, of society's denial of their truth? Now, after all the years in disguise, no one the wiser to what lay below, the costume's shed, the rescue: he, she, they, saving themself, their own one precious life, the life that contains multitudes, the voice that could no longer pretend. If we want to know what courage looks like, here, see the body become itself anew.





Age: 32; Pronouns: They/Them

*"Caterpillars don't have genders, they simply show up looking fabulous... And so do I!
 "Trans" as a verb... to transgressively resist the seduction of the binary...
 "Queer" as a verb... to queer who you love... to queer how you love... to queer the ways in which you love yourself... I feel most correct being understood as "Queer" in all expressions...
 In gender, in neurology, in my very way of being... Agender... GenderFluid... AutGender Autistic & NeuroDivergent folks are far more likely to be gender non-conforming, trans & queer.
 The intersection between my gender & my neurology cannot be separated, inexorably linked within the beauty & brilliance of my being.
 To put it simply... I am an alien sent here to Love."*

Set Among the Stars

Your eyes focused,
 Your image set among the stars
 Something so immortal
 Has to be this colorful.

A never-ending rainbow
 A caterpillar shapes themself
 Into a broken
 Line of infinity.

The broken people
 The ones that grow and learn from their pain
 Transform into undeniable beauty.
 They wear their heart on the outside
 For all to see.

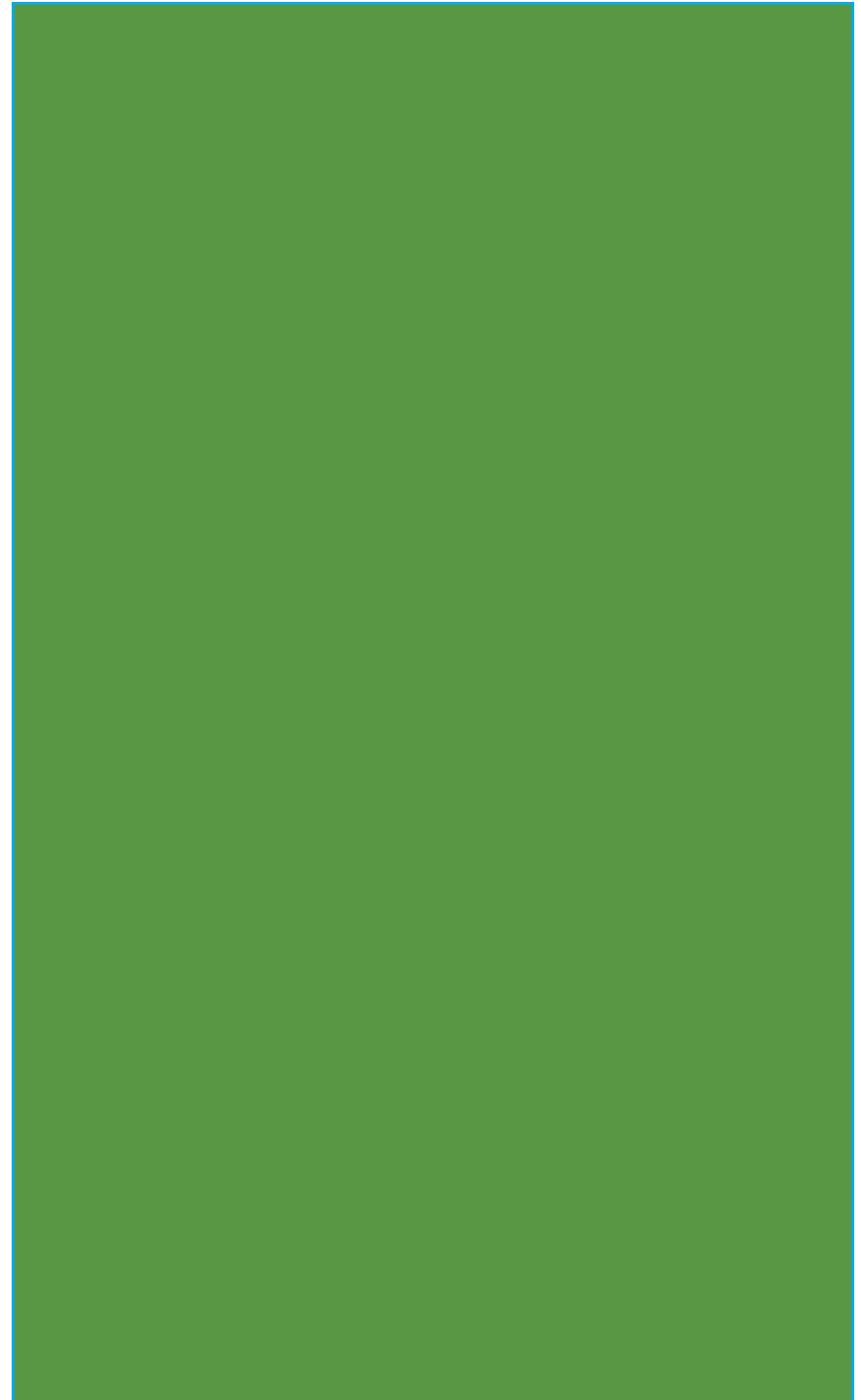
How does it feel to rival
 The most brilliant constellation?
 To be out and unafraid?

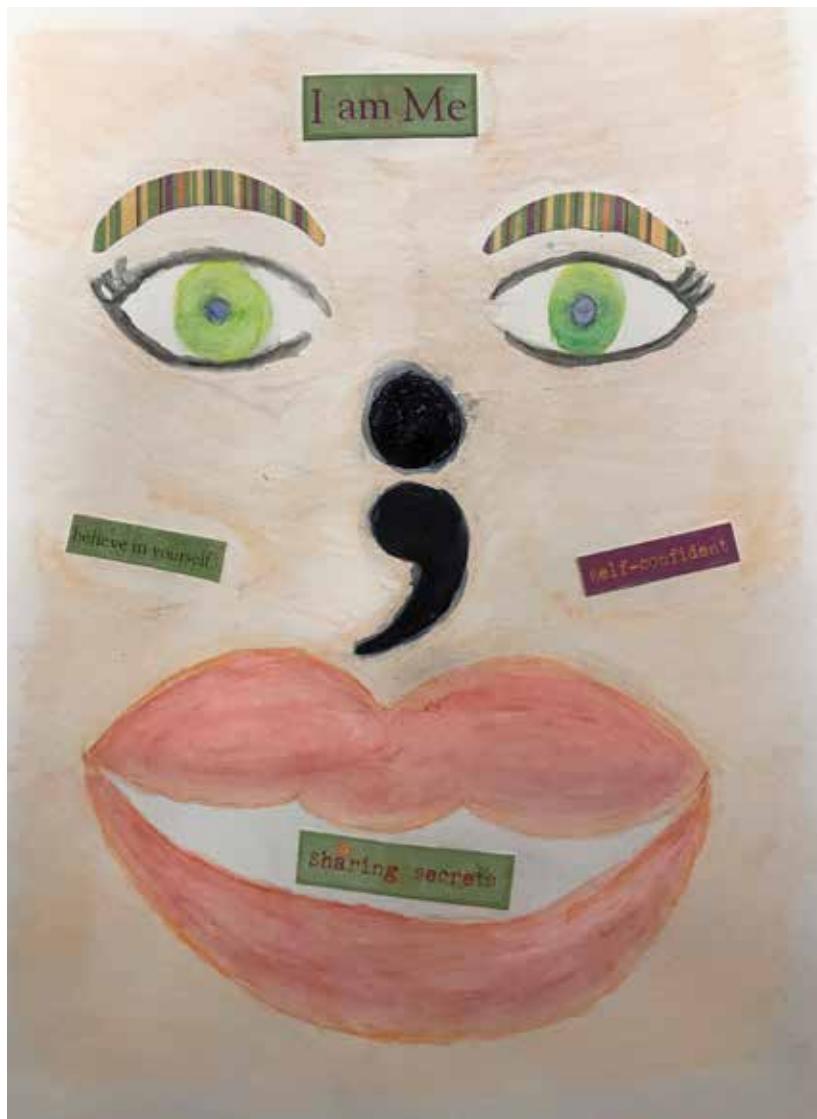
No longer pleading for acceptance
 But lovely for who you are.
 Many hide or try to pass
 Their stars dimmed
 By fear & violence.
 They: the unlucky ones
 We want to help.

Unfurl your wings
 An archetype
 For the ages.
 A beacon for others
 To be fully themselves.

ELENA ESTELLA **GREEN**

Free to love
In a world
So often
Closed
& suspicious
Of the differences
That make them Butterfly
And Brave,
Willing to cover hatred
With a gossamer
Of Love.





Age: 40; Pronouns: They/Them

"Unfinished.

Secrets never did me any good. Now I share my story. Once I was able to be myself everything changed. I'm still working on myself. And always will. Constantly becoming more me."

Secret Silence

when i shut my bleary eyes
 colors swirl by
 like a rapidly moving film
 on the silver screen of my eyelids
 rainbow eyebrows whirlpooling
 through the celestial sphere
 liberating impregnable vaults
 shrouded in the terminus of the psyche
 images indecipherable
 propelled across the endless wasteland
 vanishing in the far-off horizon
 of gender distinctions and limitations
 trains of thoughts
 chugging up the precipitous incline
 belching dense smoke of uncertainty
 fluttering off into murkiness
 hushed soliloquy running internally
 mind mapping like
 a pathfinder probing the hinterlands
 seeking a new secrecy peace
 eyes wide open now
 secret silence roaring in the ears
 like a tumult of fervor forcing
 rose lips apart into an impish grin

BARBARA MARIE **MINNEY**

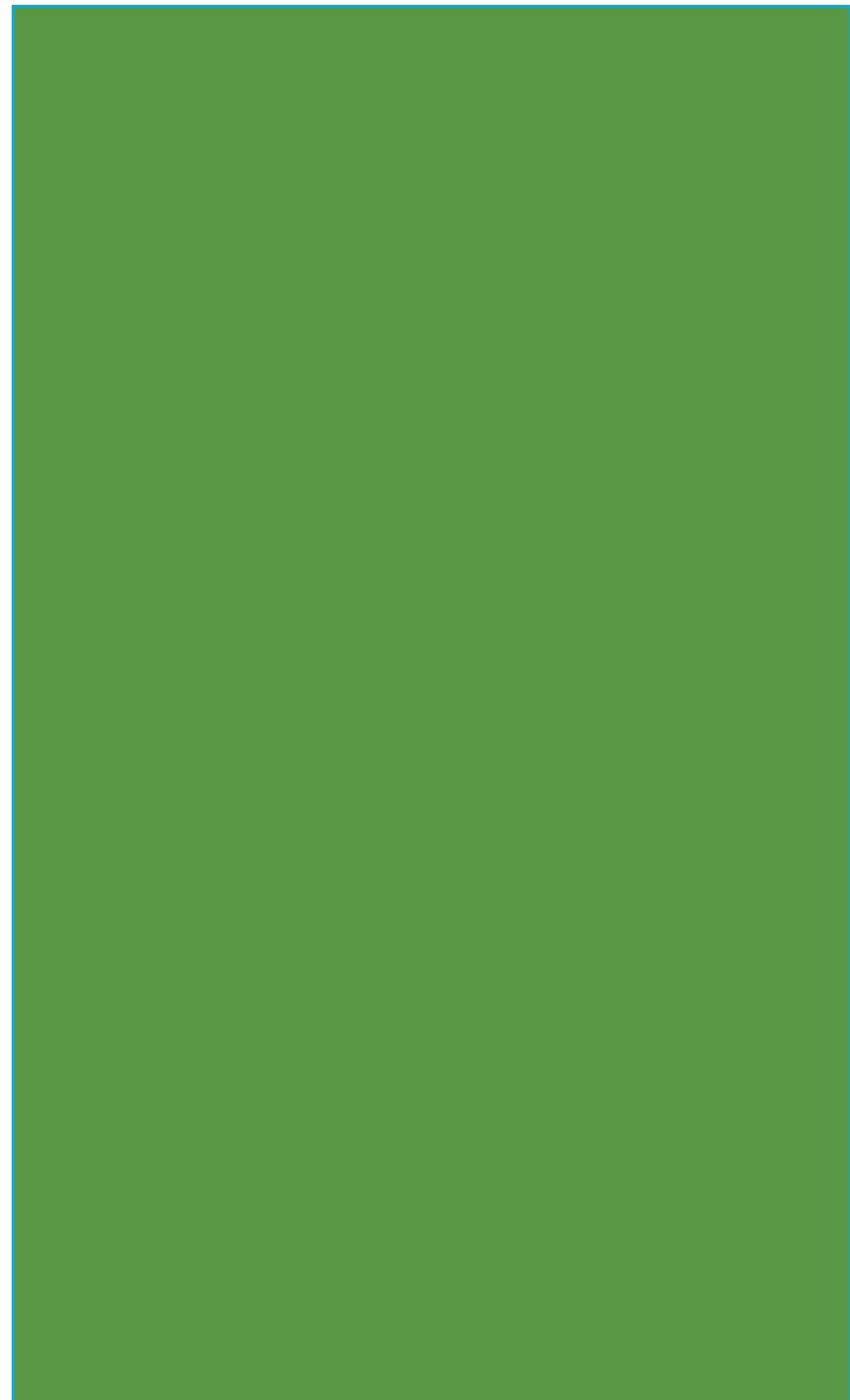
the words silent

secrets gurgling in the throat
like hot lava
waiting to erupt

from the volcano of the mouth

believing and accepting
working and striving
fearlessly proclaiming

I am Me





Age: 20; Pronouns: They/Them

"My brain, like many in this community, tried to sabotage me. My depression became a problem right as puberty did, and came hand and hand with what I now recognize as dysphoria. I struggled a long time with my body, and with a motivation to live. The experience has left me tired and worn, but I've come out of it better than I could've ever imagined. Now, I can finally express who I really am. I have a vigorous love of the simple things in life: Rain drops on the roof, a good book, cats, and most of all, the people I love. I feel a brightness when I experience these things that simply can't hold up to the darkness that's been dragging me down all these years."

Trans Support 101

Tell me you understand my brain's betrayal,
claim that you know the struggle forced on me
when puberty split me in two, sabotaged my
hopes and dreams and pulled me into darkness –
and I will ask you politely to save your sympathy,
admit your shallow labels, acknowledge the hidden
judgments, curious stares and probing questions
you dare not ask.

Maybe you mean well, but here is what I need:
Be quiet, sit here and share with me the deep-seated love
I have for all things simple: listen to the rain with me,
read a good book alongside me reading mine.
Show me you love my cats. Reassure me I'm not
an exhibit, a science project you feel compelled
to dissect. Take however long you need to discover
the person I really am.

The Finish Line

Walk a mile in my shoes, the saying goes,
lace up your Nikes and run but stay in your lane,
don't cross over, someone will surely trip you,
call you names, disqualify you from the race.

Walk a mile in those high-heeled shoes and feel
for the first time really real – but don't let them
see you laugh or dance or touch – they'll label you
names you thought you'd never ever hear.

Those heels will either cramp and constrict
or click and clash in the spotlight you've been
craving to stand in – a searchlight that found you
before you knew what you were searching for.

KATHLEEN WADE

Walk a mile in those Birkenstocks, but know it isn't the shoes that will give you away, it's your eyes, your hips, your truthful heart tempting even sideliners to look your way.

What I'm trying to say is take off your shoes, get to the Finish Line, stand still, while we tell one another our stories, barefoot, baring our bodies, barely breathing, bearing it all together.

Trans Formation

Mystics have written books on the dark night of the soul, how the God they thought they loved abandoned them, how the years in prayerful glow turned dusky, leading through tunnels of loneliness until finally lovelight burned through an opening at the other end like a pinprick, body and soul emerging eventually whole. *Transformation*, mystics call it.

But who understands the dark night of the body – the sure stark betrayal that same good god played out in me – in every mystic who knows but cannot trans-late, knows even as the saints know all is not as it seems?

Mirrors and measuring tapes were the way I chronicled how betrayal of the body told its tale – how this body – mine and not mine - worked its mysterious hold on me – with dolls and dresses I cast aside as if they were laced with poison. I cast off names and games, labels that toppled me into spaces where I was not wanted, into attractions dark as night I tried but could not escape.

Call the darkness what it is: an era of denial, disowning, despair, that dissolves at last in a shimmering light of understanding. I must give thanks in part to those

who held more than my hand: You in your clinical coat promising healing, not betrayal. You who gave me a name but now call me by another. You who weep for me, you who wait. And even those of you who don't.

Trans-formational mystics survive by owning the darkness, hoping to expose a body whose light we're gradually becoming willing and able to see. Instead of daylight we'll take the shadowy shades of acceptance, enough light and love to keep us moving toward total transformation.



Age: 34; Pronouns: She/Her

"I love myself and my dog Areeya, my little sweet furry friend and the love of my life. I am a beautiful trans woman who needs to take more time to love myself and just have fun!"

Areeya

You are wearing pink in your self-portrait.
Not a color to hide in.
Both you and your dog, Areeya are smiling.
Not subtle smiles like Mona Lisa,
but big toothy smiles and Areeya with her tongue out.

I can only imagine
what it might be like to become the sex that you already are.

You wanted to be Ariel,
not Prince Eric in the Little Mermaid,

Your parents wanted you to act like a boy,
so they got you involved in sports.
Lousy at baseball,
teammates said you threw like a girl.

You wondered why you were different
from your siblings and classmates.

Because of your Adam's apple and five o'clock shadow.
People may know you're a trans woman.
You are afraid of prejudice, hate.

Being who you are outweighs the risks.

The dog Areeya
sees, saw, everything.
Areeya stretches out on the floor,
rolls, scratching her back.
She knows nothing about human gender.
For Areeya, you have always been Emily.



Age: 21; Pronouns: He/Him

"I've always loved those sad clown paintings, and thought I'd make my own. Sometimes I feel like people don't take me very seriously, which is alright sometimes, so I can sort of identify with the idea of a clown. But I guess with so many people acting silly and saying stupid things, being a clown isn't too bad at all."

Rosy Clown Blues

Red nose
Rose whiskers
Over
White-face
Mystery

False
Or true

Rosy
Or blue

Rose frame
Washes
Blue hat
Covers
Pink hair
Matches
Nails
And mustaches

False
Pink brows
But eyes are true
With gaze so sad
And heart so blue



Age: 19; Pronouns: He/Him

"Christmas is my favorite holiday because it's so beautiful! I love to make a snowman and make gingerbread houses. I love getting together with family to watch movies and drink hot chocolate with marshmallows. I love shopping during the Christmas season because it smells good and there are lots of sparkly things! My bedroom is decorated in a Christmas theme with three Christmas trees year-round. Looking at Christmas stuff makes me happy! I don't care if anyone else thinks it is weird. I say "Why not?" It keeps me from feeling sad. Every year at Christmas, my family eats Guatemalan tamales because that's a big part of my culture. They are so delicious!"

Unbound

From the far reaches of the city
the clapper in a church bell
clangs in protest
against its metal shell.

The weight of Christmas
bears down on the happy and
the lonely—
holly pierces rigid hands
bright berries are pressed
for sauce someone will spill
and beloved fir trees are hooked
like fish, blinded by light.

In cold and sleet, we're
saddled by fur,
hampered by hats that toast a head
and bodies buckled into
crimson Santa suits.

—all these shroud
our best elf self—

But one eve
teetering on the edge of joy,
we untie husks
that have wrapped the harvest
and see ourselves
in this yield from the heart.



Age: 22; Pronouns: She/Her

"I have always loved being outdoors and practically grew up in the Red River Gorge. Hiking through the woods underneath the tree canopy taking in the sounds makes me feel alive and free. I chose to render myself in black and white surrounded by trees underneath a dense canopy. It is my place of safety without judgement from my day-to-day life. Living in the city is exhausting at times. Fitting in and expressing my gender identity can be anxiety inducing, but deep in the Kentucky mountains I no longer fear my perceptions. Within the colors and sounds of the cool dense ridge my identity fades into a comfortable obscurity free from scrutiny."

Red River Song

for Ivy

Dusk falls, shifting shadows settle,
Warm as sun-loved ridges;
Singing wild ginger, yellow trout lily, foamflower—
Huckleberry June-moon lullabies

Warm as sun-loved ridges
I belong here, woven into the understory
Huckleberry June-moon lullabies
Sing me safe into alluvial dreams—

I belong here, woven into the understory
Soft ferns lace snaking streams
Sing me safe into alluvial dreams
I'm a sycamore, sprung from limestone split

Soft ferns lace snaking streams
I belong here—water, blood or sap, here I am—
I'm a sycamore, sprung from limestone split
My voice meanders along—

I belong here—water, blood or sap, here I am—
Dusk falls, shifting shadows settle,
My voice meanders along—
Singing wild ginger, yellow trout lily, foamflower—

Singing Red River Song.



Age: 47; Pronouns: He/Him

"I started my transition about 10.5 years ago – thinking it would finally bring me into balance after a lifetime struggle with gender dysphoria, depression, PTSD, anxiety, codependency, addiction, negative behavior and thinking patterns, etc. Indeed it triggered a long journey of inner healing - which is what led me to kundalini yoga. My self-portrait represents that journey. It took me turning myself into a man to embrace the feminine in me and accepting that I would not be the man I am today if I had not been a woman first. My path taught me what self-love really means, the difference between surrendering and giving up and that healing is a process and a practice that you must surrender to and the keys are - forgiveness, gratitude, compassion and unconditional love."

Infinitely We Be

Rooted
Between paradise and earth's core
A mighty spirit lives
Merida channeling Nirvana
Seated inside a frame
painted unlike themselves

Portrayed
In a draft at first
Barely able to capture
The universe housed within
Practice painted a new artwork
Where the broad strokes of beauty

Remained
Aligning all stars of the crown
Infinitely we be

Enlightened
Poured into gender too narrow
A path to travel
Practice achieved breath
Inhaled patience exhaled pain
Gift of moments received

Awakened
Conjuring Eye
Becoming the truth
Constructs cannot hold
Worlds of thought living here
Containment cannot confine me

Transformed
That which serves must serve
Infinitely we be

HOLLY BRIANS RAGUSA

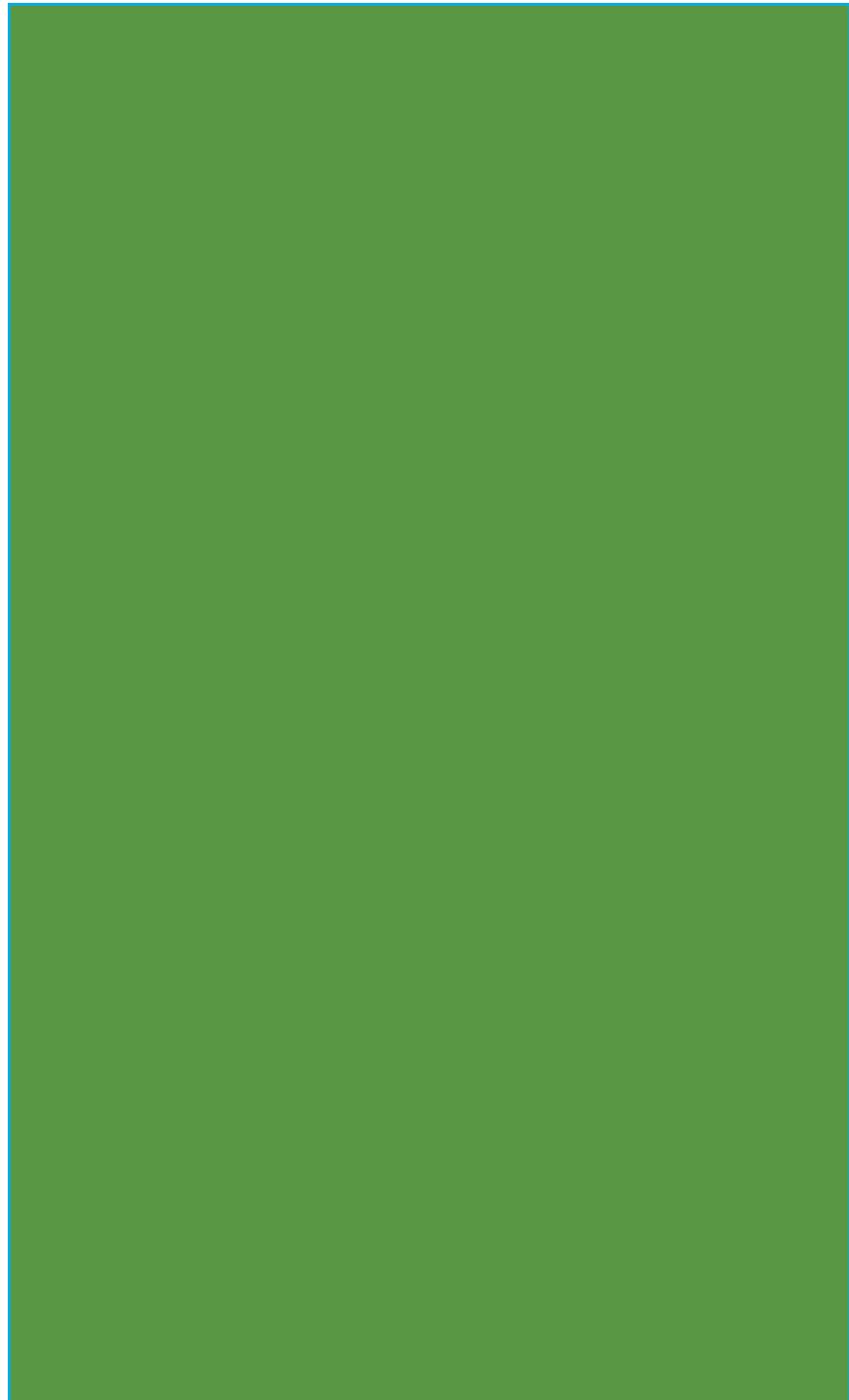
Learned
Life hinges on otherness
Itinerant we travel
Sinew and synapse
Transporting outside of self
Returning home whole

Balanced
Within and out
Becoming the who
Often unseen by others
Otherworldly, built to bridge
That final journey to love of self

Consummated
Seated inside my remade frame
Infinitely we be

Infinite

Spirit triumphs all
Self is made and unmade
Destinations that none can certify
Worn through in body and breath
Our footing lives in our past and our next step
The curve of the earth is found in our eye
Our stars speak to the heavens





Age: 49; Pronouns: He/Him

"For the first 41 years of my life, whenever I would look at myself in a mirror, my image would trigger a complex overwhelming mixture of shock, disappointment, disgust, and the word "UGLY". One day of the summer of 2012, mesmerized by the world of drag performance, I gathered several shades of brown and black powder and worked on my face to see what I would look like as a male impersonator. The experience was life-changing as, looking at a mirror, in a fraction of a second my brain shouted "THAT'S me!" I couldn't stop staring. "That is me. That's the face of who I am inside." I grabbed my phone and snapped the photo you see in this self-portrait. The surrounding shards of glass reflect some of the major experiences-- both good and bad -- of the 41-year journey to that precise moment of integration."

Becoming

we become, in the swirl of time
 in the limits of a way of life
 in an ancient wind and clay
 shaped by invisible currents
 electric messengers, wanting...wanting...wanting
 what has always been wanted
 by all things
 to thrive through a time of transition
 into something holier – closer to the source
 something more perfect in its truth and reality

Transformation

Songs of sirens
 echo down the sleeping streets
 as we lie in beads of sweat
 caught in the twisted sheets
 Where and how can we belong
 when split between body and soul
 How do we find our self
 How do we come to fit and feel whole
 Vast and utter aloneness
 feeds the war we fight
 Form unaligned with mind won't give us peace
 or let us rest at night
 We moan, the world doesn't care
 and begin to wish to die
 to end the one who's looking back
 from the mirror, wanting to quit the lie
 Days and nights of drug and drink
 can blur the world we meet
 and cushion us from
 the life we hide and seek and cheat

RL SCHOEFF

Our life's been fed on fantasies
 that leave us sad and weak
 empty angry and confused
 wondering what it is we should seek
 while sad siren songs
 rise and fall
 sweeping down
 the bleak and empty streets
 We hate our image in the glass
 the compromises made to fit
 the uneasy sense we feel from people
 the looks of yes or no we get
 The mirror lies as we look at it
 angry at the painful split
 between our body and our soul
 wanting nothing more than feeling whole

The role, the tone the game
 is nothing more than a hollow name
 you're this, they say, but it's never real
 not close at all to the way we feel

The teachers of god shook their heads and said
 you don't fit the plan in the book we read
 And then some thought they had the right
 to touch us when we couldn't fight
 In innocence we met the world
 crying awake to the earth and air
 needing someone to hold us and care
 enough to keep us there
 while echoes of sirens
 sweep the gray uncaring streets
 to remind us of suffering
 we're likely to meet

and we're judged on scales of beauty
 to images we're taught are best
 of body shape and mind
 and finally of how we're dressed

but the challenge through the ages
 from all the wisest sages
 is that to get life's main wealth
 is to clearly know your self

Each day we're pushed here and there
 others telling us who we are and where
 It's hard to listen to our own voice
 and believe we have a choice

to figure what is true
 and what we've got to do
 about who we are and where to go
 and what we really know

Then somehow in a shocking moment of clarity
 we can mesh the body with the soul
 and shatter into shards the image that isn't whole
 and in that instant feel transformed and that we have
 control

With overarching pleasure in finding what's true and real
 we realize our pure beauty from surface to our core
 and relax in this knowledge and existence
 and smile deeply broadly and long, as never before



Age: 31; Pronouns: She/Her

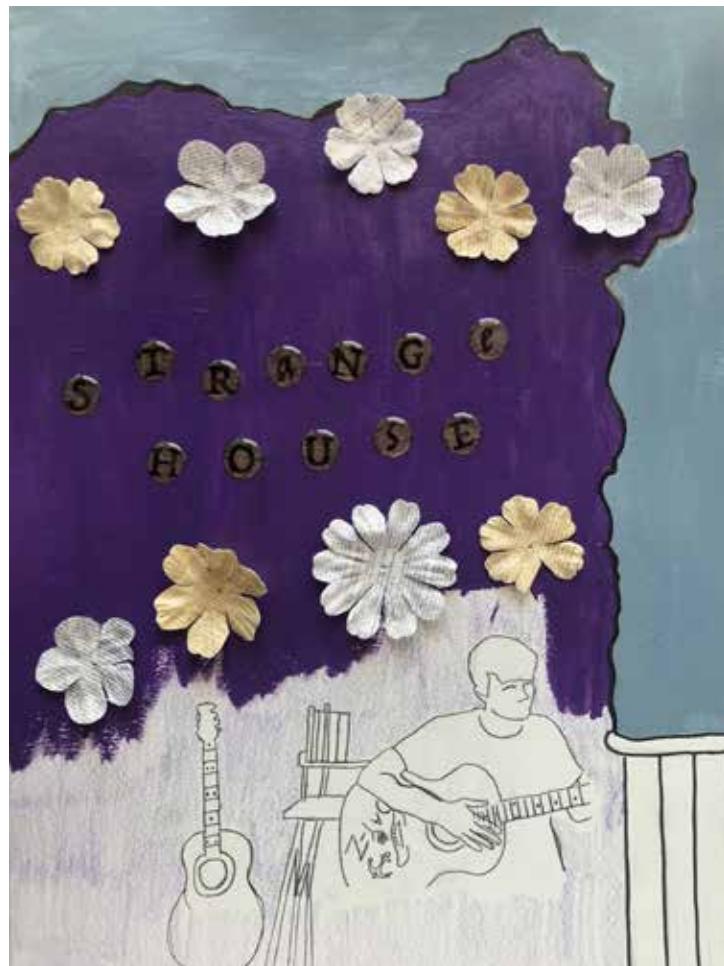
*"My vision of my future and the past self.
The right side is how I saw myself: cold, bland, persevering. He built my previous life, and kept myself safe for the future.
The left side is what I want of my future, with vision, energy, and courage to change."*

Name: ETA

Long the unpronounced syllable
The underlining
Of a normal word
Marching in the blank
Verse of other stories

I go bold
Unclench my letters
Utter me
Free
Version back to back

With the person
And the personal
Pronoun I was meant to place
In the stead
Of the name
I am still
Giving myself.



Age: 25; Pronouns: They/Them

"One of the most challenging parts of being non-binary for me has been finding a sense of being 'at home' in my body. There are moments of dysphoria that make me want to jump out of my skin, ecstatic and often fleeting moments of euphoria when I feel affirmed, grounded, and embodied, and all of the 'gray area' moments in between when I'm not sure how I feel in my body. Those 'gray area' moments are where I tend to live more often than not. I've had to find a way to get comfortable there. I've come to appreciate that my non-binary body and identity are strange houses to live in that also give me lots of unfinished space to create my own sense of home in this body and in this world."

Strange Houses

I wander a road of painted houses
to find the one more perfect than.
I tell myself there is one out there
where I would be more happy than.

There are black houses wanting to be seen
and white houses pretending to reflect the sun.
I see shuttered houses waiting for their fix of light
and houses strangled by their nature
waiting for a gentle gardener.

none alike but all perfect in their imperfection -
some things missing, some things masked,
strange houses sheltering many strangers
but they are not the ones more perfect than.

all these houses painted to hide their true brick
and in their midst – my house,
unfinished, not unlike the others,
a grey house waiting to be lived in,
not needing color from an imperfect world

my grey house, trying to tell me:
you are home, you could be happy here.
there could be none more beautiful,
there could be none more perfect than.

Distant Things

All my life
I've tried to learn the names of distant things

of frightened hours past the darkness, hours yet to be born,
of hours left unlived

MICHAEL OLSON

of fetal light waiting past the horizon, light yet to be born,
the shine of loves yet to breathe

of tiny hands not yet held
and far away as senile memory

of songs just beyond the singing
songs that lay fallow without their orchestral rain

of fields of yellow yet to come into focus
as the wildflower they want to be

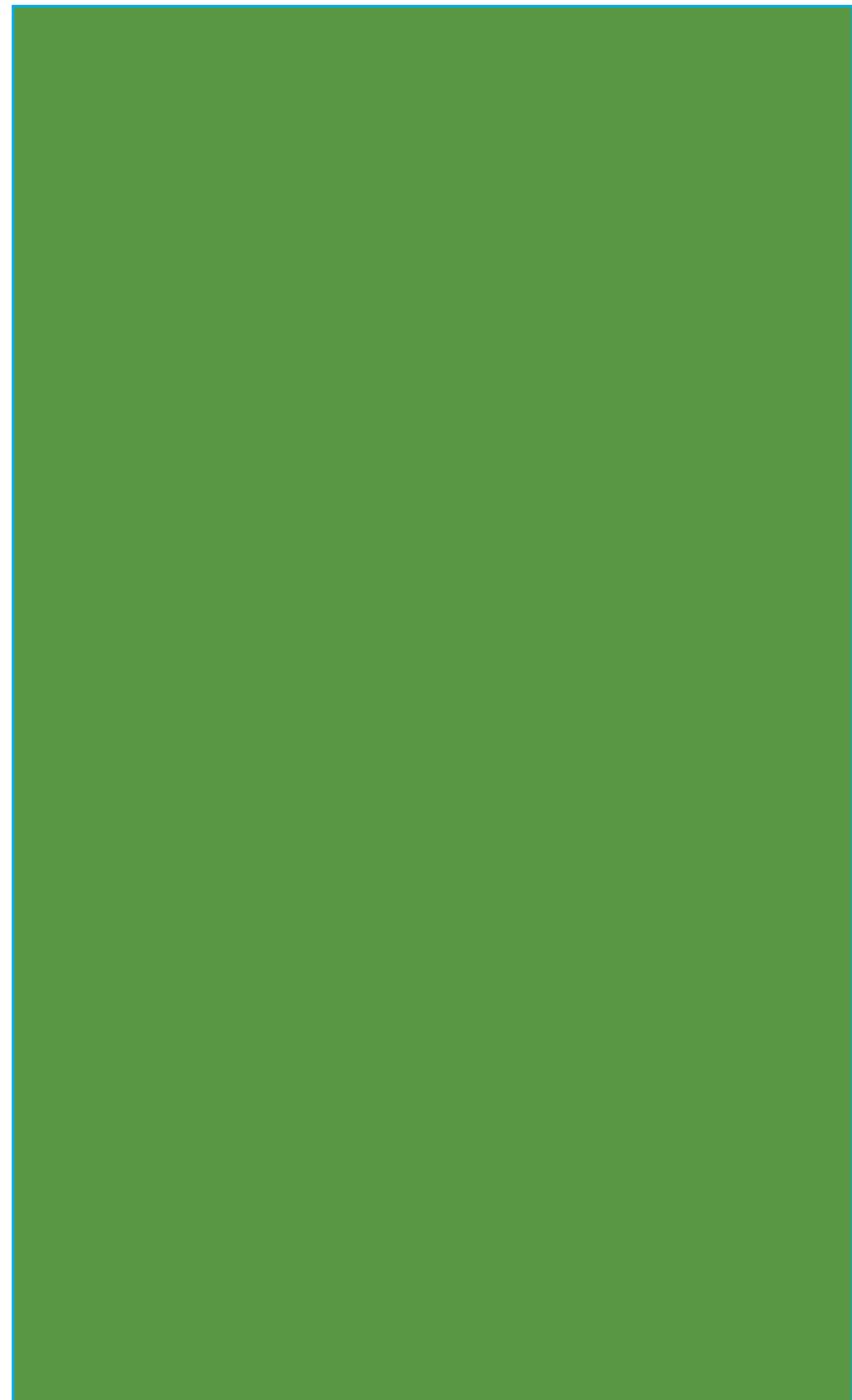
I've tried to learn the names
of these things and others
as if I were to gain wisdom in the knowing
and the knowing would bring them close

I've tried to learn the names—true names
not the man-given names
but names given by themselves
or their world

what does the flower call another flower
whose sole purpose is beauty
or the shy hours call tomorrow
whose sole purpose to be unknown?

and what would I be called
if others had not named me?
I have been man, been woman, been both and neither
but what really, what purpose and what worth?

what would I name myself,
what would a blind world name me?
my true name hidden between my doubt, its ignorance
yet another distant thing to want to hold





Age: 21; Pronouns: He/Him

"I am a proud trans man, but I live as "stealth" meaning that I am not openly trans to most people and most people in my life just assume that I am a cisgender man. Though many people may think that me living as stealth means that I am not proud to be transgender, this is not the case. In this piece I am covering part of my face with the American sign language sign for "I love you" to tell the community that even though I may be an invisible member of the trans community that I still love them and am proud to be transgender."

Just Letting You Know

who I am, I mean really –
you put me in a category?
mind invents categories

light passes through a prism
splits into a rainbow
each of us is that light

On the far side of the prism
a color displays, then another
over time and lifetimes

On the near side is love
light undivided, all united
inside every heart



Age: 34; Pronouns: He/Him

"I am a parent, spouse, educator, lover of literature, cooking and stomping out the patriarchy. My cultural inheritance is Mexican, Ecuadorian, French, Spanish, and Irish. I hold a BFA, and am finishing my MHUM degree in Women, Gender, and Sexuality. I want to become a counselor, so that I can give back to my trans community. I finally know myself. No more hiding - I am Monix."

MONIX (MYSELF)

SUSAN F GLASSMEYER

POET SUSAN F GLASSMEYER

Who Are We?

for Monix

Who are
we anyway?
We think we know because
our mother and our father told
us so.

Options
in utero.
Safe from he-and-she names,
we were loved undefined by pink
or blue.

Who are
we anyway?
We think we know because
the doctors and the nurses told
us so.

At birth
the naming game
begins when sexual
assignment maligns embodied
wholeness.

Who are
we anyway?
We think we know because
the catechism teacher told
us so.

Made in
Jesus' likeness
those Bible writers got
the Transfiguration only
partly true.

SUSAN F **GLASSMEYER**

Who are
we anyway?
We think we know because
our husband, wife, or partner told
us so.

You wear
trousers, I wear
skirts. But does it matter
who rocks the baby or harvests
the earth?

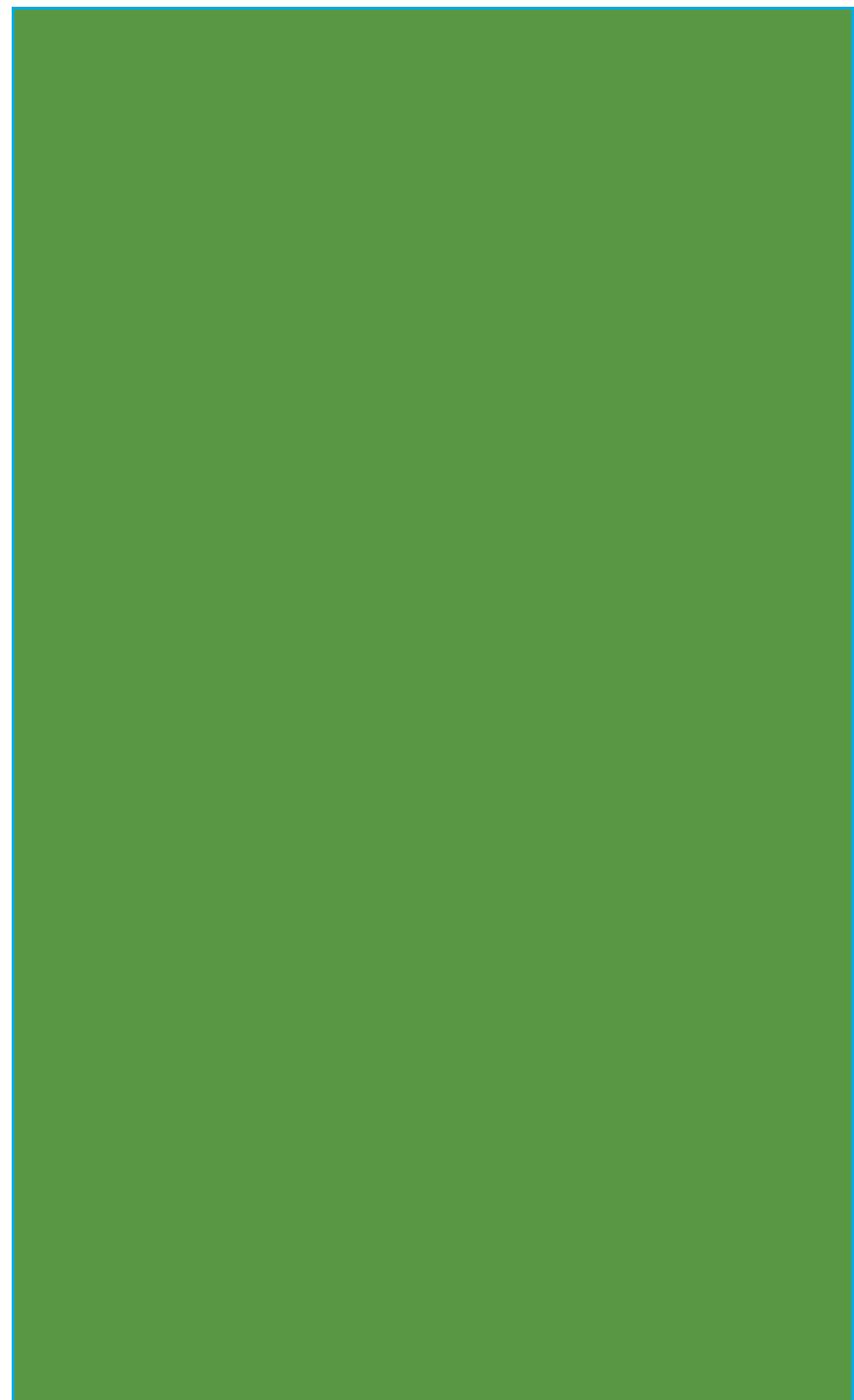
Who are
we anyway?
We think we know because
an insurance company tells
us so.

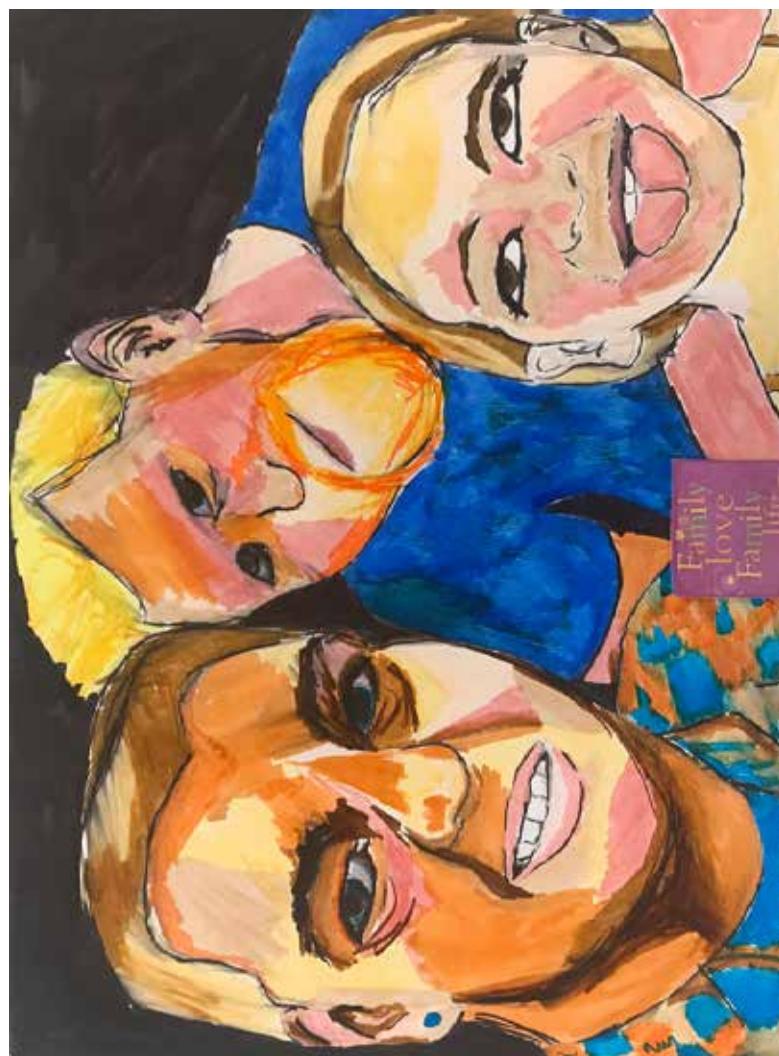
Why should
our anatomy
determine dignity,
the quality of care granted,
or not?

Who are
we anyway?
We think we know because
our culture and the courthouse tell
us so.

But I
claim humanness—
just like you! Loyal to
myself, I need no approval
from you.

*(NOTE: Poem comprised of twelve American cinquains,
a form developed by Adelaide Crapsey (1878-1914).)*





Age: 34; Pronouns: He/Him

"I am a parent, spouse, educator, lover of literature, cooking and stomping out the patriarchy. My cultural inheritance is Mexican, Ecuadorian, French, Spanish, and Irish. I hold a BFA, and am finishing my MHUM degree in Women, Gender, and Sexuality. I want to become a counselor, so that I can give back to my trans community. I want you to see my spouse, my daughter, mi familia. We have families, lovers, dreams, aspirations. We have always been here; human, just like you."

Definitions

Man: Someone who loves.

Woman: Someone who loves.

Person: Someone who loves.

Love: Measure of all things.

Family: Everything that love encompasses. People who love each other. Asking *are you hungry?* Saying *come with me*. Saying *I'm here*. The three people smiling in the portrait, the love that unites them. The sound of laughter that will forever be inside that image.

We.

We are the definition of family.

Of love.

Definiciones

Hombre: Alguien que ama.

Mujer: Alguien que ama.

Persona: Alguien que ama.

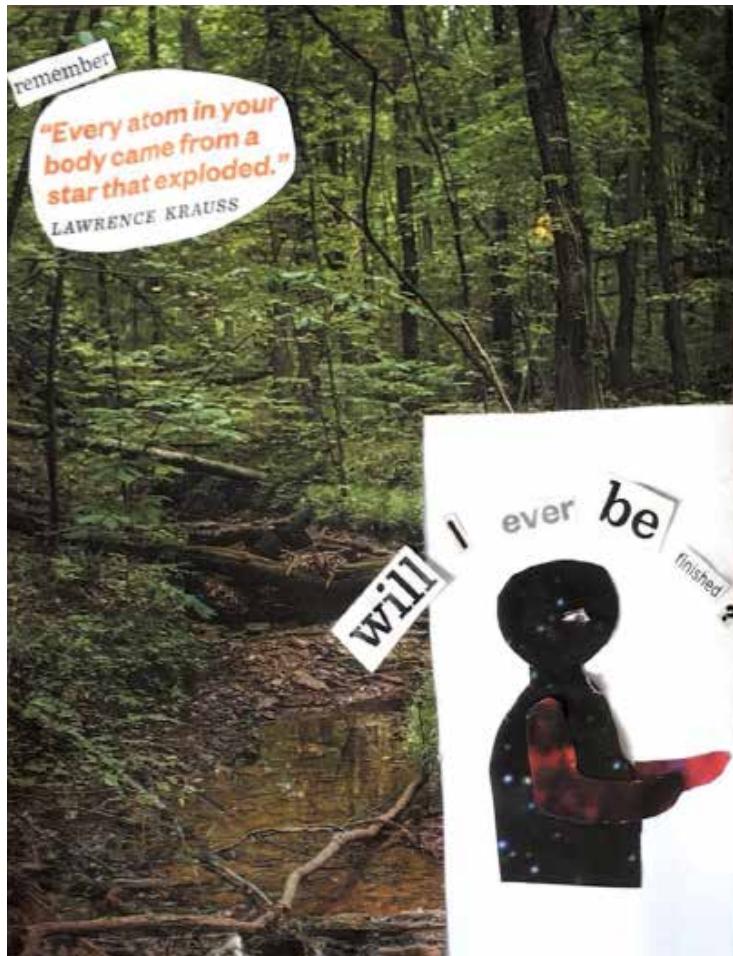
Amor: Medida de todas las cosas.

Familia: Lo que abarca el amor. Personas que se aman. Preguntar ¿tienes hambre? Decir ven conmigo. Decir estoy aquí. Las tres personas sonriendo en el retrato, el amor que las une. El sonido de la risa que, para siempre, se encuentra en esa imagen.

Nosotros.

Nosotros somos la definición de familia.

Del amor.



Age: 24; Pronouns: They/Them

“The words over my head show my grief and worry that, as a nonbinary person in a very binary world, I will never be able to finish transitioning, that I will always be forced back into the binary. The space and plant themes, including the quote in the top left, show the sort of disconnect from humanity that I experience not just as a neutrois person, but also as an aromantic asexual neurodivergent person. Our culture tells us that humans have to think a certain way, have to be male or female, have to want romance and sex, and none of those are true for me. But the quote is also comforting. It reminds me that even if I don’t belong among that which is considered human, I still have a place I belong.”

Luminescence

And yesterday I woke up in indigo night
with another pounding in my chest,

Do you know the feeling? No?

It's when you just forget for a minute about the way
you're still part of the explosion of a star and therefore,
moving so swiftly that you don't realize you're plainly in motion
until that moment in the dream when you slip off the train
of knowing *for sure* and that makes the whole damn star try to
halt.

Then, I recognized myself as the friend in my dream who was
afraid.

I will not leave you, I said, even though I was afraid, too.
Consider this then: I can hold the light with you, illuminate your
steps
while you tell me your story.



Age: 58; Pronouns: She/Her

"Rayalight springs from the muck and mire
 Sludgeup no more
 Blew that box up"

"Clap along if you feel like happiness is the truth" - Pharrell Williams

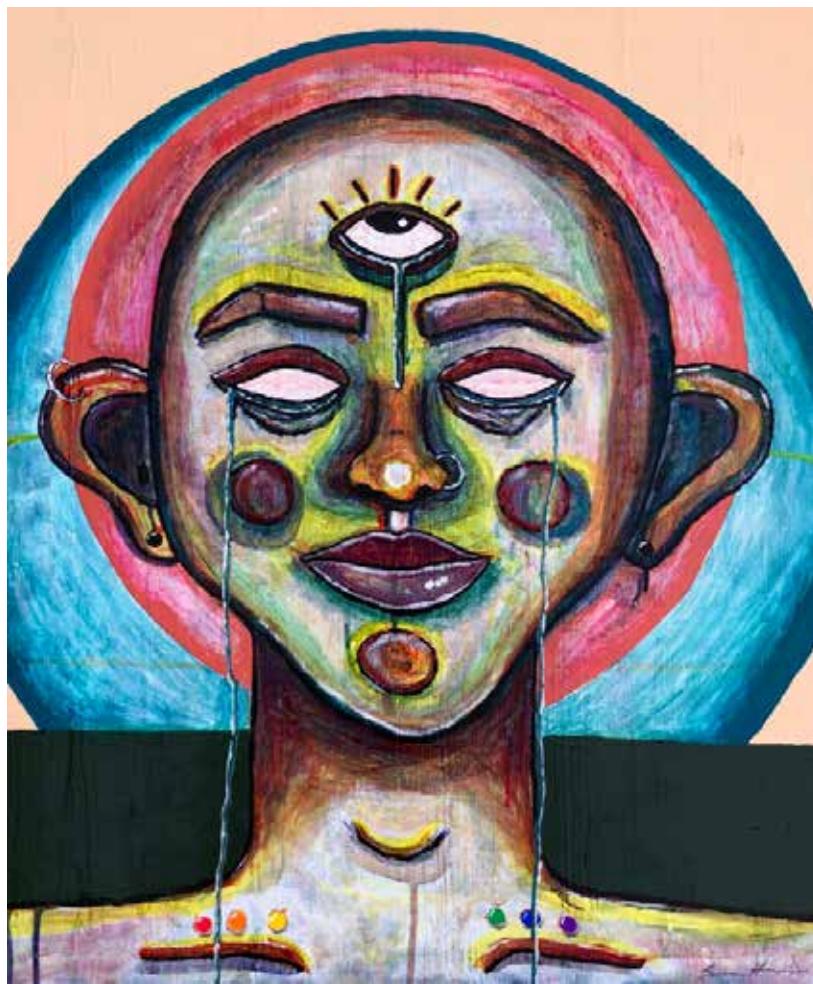
Reach

Think in ways you've never thought before.
 If there's a knock on the door, it may be
 your father come to complete his song
 richer now in scope, broadened by death.

The bat in the attic may be your first cat
 given wings of an angel and wanting still to be near.
 Perhaps your heart during sleep steps out
 to touch hearts in other dimensions.

Next time you're in the Blue Ridge Mountains,
 reach for the door that exists not just in fantasy,
 myth or legend. Once imagined—fairies, elves
 dragons become as real as us in God's dream.

*(first line taken from Robert Bly's poem,
 "Things to Think")*



Age: 23; **Pronouns:** They/Them

"This self-portrait represents the duality of my experience of being non-binary, both in terms of gender expression and the emotional aspects that come with my gender identity. My brain is like a constant war zone, both sides desperately trying to win. I sometimes feel masculine and sometimes feminine, yet both and neither simultaneously. I have felt pain trying to navigate what it means to be trans, yet I have felt more gender euphoria than ever before. Being non-binary is a winding path, full of moments of calm and others of change, but through it all I must trust the universe that I am on the right path. I am queer, I am non-binary, I Am Me."

You Are You

to Sam Hoover, with love

Cherub, cherry cheeks
 Like my granddaughter's after an afternoon
 at the snowy park
 Rings and circles within and without
 Cycles of life
 Emotions going round and round
 Decorative and poignantly personal
 Rainbow colors merging and emerging
 The third eye says it all for me, for everyone
 Remembering to turn inward
 To trust one's inner self
 To love oneself fully
 And still, there are those long tears
 Long years, of longing, looking
 I have known, trite but true:
 All pains are growing pains
 This face, so exposed and beautiful
 Eyes, ready to absorb
 Receptive orbs
 Ears to hear
 Trust and fear
 Nose to smell
 Truth felt well
 Full mouth to express
 Love and distress
 Both masculine and feminine
 You are you
 And that's what's important.



Age: 30; Pronouns: They/Them

"I am Sea Dax. I use 'they' pronouns. I moved to Cincinnati in 2008 for schooling and never left. I use a variety of mediums to create my work, focusing on keeping the handmade quality visible. I don't create work digitally, almost on principle. My work focused on themes of trans identity, fatness, mental health, queerness, and loneliness. I created this mixed media painting on paper in 2016 when I was first delving into my past relationships to better understand my realization that I was trans, and how it held truths for me about my gender that I couldn't see at the time. It was created through images of polaroids of the start of a friendship that is strongly linked to my gender discovery, paint samples left in an apartment I moved into as I was first realizing my identity, and a painting referenced from a self portrait I had taken that made me actually see myself as androgynous. My piece is titled 'Remembering.'"

Mixed Media

I am certain

it is only the world
that is uncertain

as it mutes nuance
in the overshadow of hard lines
debate and righteous god speak
interpretation absolute
methodical
systemic

parsing all
into us and them

We are born whole and haloed
then unraveled from there
as though life is a cat
claws extended, teeth eager
chewing and batting us about
balls of yarn undone

It is work to
gather ourselves again
winding who we are
into sense and substance
until we are certain

and it is only the world
that is uncertain.

LISA PRANTL

Poinsettia

Gifted wildly
assertive red on modified leaves
misperceived as flowers, mostly.
True blooms tucked in the centers
not considered, mostly.
Look closer.

Tossed at season's end
abandoned
when color fades
and foliage falls.

Saved, it is muted greens
that toil in growing light
doing the work
of beginnings.

Weariness and Opportunity 2020

Three pine cones kicked to the curb
form two eyes and a wry smile
as I walk in survival silence.
The corners of my lips almost curl
but not quite
at this unexpected find
icon of happiness.

I am alone
maskless, wordless
not quite hopeless.
In the quiet
I hear hearts cracking
all over the world
like antarctic ice shelf breaks
calving new icebergs
singing songs of
becoming less
becoming more.



Age: 17; Pronouns: They/Them

"My name is Tay and I'm 17 years old. I created this piece showing the hardest journey in my life and this was just the beginning. It is based on the tarot card "the hermit". I used this card because it depicts how I was isolating myself from everyone and drowning in loneliness while not wanting to be around anybody. It's a very meaningful piece to me but it also brings out my vulnerability."

Marginal

I sit
on the sidelines
at the border
in the intersection
near the edges.

I see others' visions
unbroken by my presence
untroubled by my protest
unaware of my angst.

I view them and vicariously
avoid problems
correct mistakes
clean up messes
do it right.

I am seen
by neither side.

SELF-PORTRAIT ARTIST BIOS

Aimee

Aimee Krug is a professor at NKU where she has been teaching since the late 1980's. In 2015 she corrected her gender presentation while continuing to teach and work on campus. While she still enjoys teaching mathematics, Aimee also likes her work rehabbing her home in College Hill (Cincinnati) and helping the public to better understand and accept the transgender community.

Ally Cat Bachman

Ally Cat Bachman is an illustration grad who loves to make zines. He is a non-binary artist and writer working on self-publishing media with his friends.

contact: doneybat@gmail.com; doneybat.com; @doneybat

Ari Pitman

Ari Pitman has been a creative person since childhood. Starting with crafts from cross stitch to basket weaving, led to a love of art including photography and printmaking. He's currently working to help share the therapeutic qualities that creating art can provide to LGBTQ+ people in need.

Ashton Michael Lee

Ashton Michael Lee is a poet, storyteller, and content creator residing in Dayton, OH. Ashton created a healing tool called *The Student of Life*, to teach folks ways to think independently. It targets critical life lessons through a power thought and storytelling.

contact: @_thestudentoflife

ARTIST BIOS

Barbara Marie Minney

Barbara Marie Minney writes personal and emotional poetry that describes her feelings, thoughts, and passions while struggling to live her truth as a transgender woman. She began her transition to living authentically as the woman she now knows she was meant to be at the age of 63 after repressing her true gender identity for over 60 years. Barbara's first book of poetry, *If There's No Heaven*, published in May of 2020 by Poetry Is Life Publishing, was the winner of the 2020 'Poetry Is Life Book Award,' and was named as one of the best Northeast Ohio books in 2020 by the *Akron Beacon Journal*.

contact: ronzel334@gmail.com; barbaramarieminneypoetry.com

Bree Orlock

Bree Orlock is from Cincinnati, Ohio. She is 46 years old, a single mom to a 19 years old son. Bree has been writing poetry since before high school. She is the writer and publisher of a role playing game called *"Dark Aeons The Atlantean Chronicles"* (Stardust Publications) as well as her first book of poetry called *Coming into the Light* by Bree Orlock. Bree has been an artist all her life as well as a photographer.

contact: facebook.com/gothicprincess1974

Brycelyn

Brycelyn (he/him/his) is a gay transgender man who, for a long time, wasn't okay with that. He projected his frustration with his circumstances onto those around him. Today he is proud to be who he is and he lives every day with the purpose of being of service to those around him to the best of his ability. Brycelyn's hope is to live in a way that makes some of the ghosts of his past rest in peace.

Carmine B

Carmine B: 33, Cancer, Neurodivergent Queerdo, Lover of cats, pineapple, and Angela Davis. They appreciate their family, friends, and therapist; they wouldn't be here without the care, support, and love from all of them.

Christopher Andrew Nyx

Christopher Andrew Nyx is a small town father and husband from Henderson, Kentucky. His best friend Ace was a huge inspiration (R.I.P Ace) as is his wife and forever love, Elizabeth.

contact: [@proudwolfydaddy \(tiktok\)](https://www.tiktok.com/@proudwolfydaddy)

Eeny Meeny Miny Moni

Moni is a Queer, Autistic body & energy worker from Chicago. They are a flow artist, fire spinner & perpetual learner. Their goal is to empower others with kindness, love & understanding.

Elliot Kesse

Elliot is a white, fat, atheist, agender, disabled person who came out later in life. They live with several chronic physical and mental illnesses including autoimmune conditions, depression, anxiety, PTSD, and suicidal thoughts. When their body cooperates, they are a yoga and meditation teacher, a wannabe baker, and a master short-distance hiker. They are the proud human companion to the feline known as #AssholeCat.

Em Sanning

Em Sanning is a Kentucky based artist and designer living in Pendleton county and currently attending Northern Kentucky University for Visual Communication Design with an estimated graduation date of fall 2023. Em were valedictorian of the class of 2018 and have made the dean's list every semester so far. Their design work is inspired by their experimental illustrations, photography and poetry. Em focuses on nostalgia and introspection as a key theme through-out their works. They delve into the inner psyche and how it would look in a physical space.

Emily Wheeler

On February 10th, 2019, Emily Wheeler was on vacation with her brother and his son. As she layed in the hotel bed fighting sleep, fighting herself, she was begging the Lord for peace. That night she simply heard a voice that said, "Get up go be." She has been two years now living as her true authentic self. While there have been some struggles, she can without a doubt say that she is finally living a life worth living. Being Emily is definitely the best decision she has ever made.

Hiro Lerman

Hiro Lerman, born in Guatemala, moved to the US in 2011, at age 10. He attended St. Rita School for the Deaf, Fairfield Schools, Indiana School for the Deaf and Hamilton Southeastern High School. Hiro lives with his mom and their huge white Shepherd-Husky dog, Thor. He loves animals and enjoys Asian films, anime, and video games. He makes animated character portraits of "Pets as People" at his Etsy store.

contact: [etsy.com/shop/wolffamilycreations](https://www.etsy.com/shop/wolffamilycreations)

Ivy Rin

Ivy Rin is a post hardcore musician, streamer and artist based in Cincinnati. She takes a lot of inspiration from post hardcore album art aesthetics which has allowed her to express her trans experience through both music and 2D art.

contact: [@pxiequeen_ivy \(twitter\); \[ivyonfire \\(twitch\\)\]\(https://twitch.tv/ivyonfire\)](https://twitter.com/pxiequeen_ivy)

Jacob R Merida

Jacob R. Merida, 47 years old, has a Bachelor of Fine Art's degree from the Academy of Cincinnati (1996). He is currently a freelance artist and kundalini yoga instructor.

contact: facebook.com/scratch1234; instagram.com/jacobmerida; etsy.com/shop/jrmeridaart

Jay DeFazio

Jay DeFazio is an artist, writer, and licensed educator from Northern Kentucky. He started the Inside Out project with the help of Artworks Cincinnati's *Jump Start Emerging Artist Award* in August 2020. The project is ongoing as Jay hopes to add portraits from trans individuals across the globe. More in-person portrait workshops will be scheduled in the spring of 2021 but Jay continues to work with individuals via Zoom and email when an in-person interaction is not possible. Jay welcomes any individual who identifies under the trans umbrella and who would like to contribute their self-portrait to Inside Out ([@insideout_transgender_art](http://insideout-transart.org))

contact: mrjdefazio@gmail.com; [@jaysartstagram](https://www.instagram.com/jaysartstagram)

ML

M.L. is a 21 year-old trans man from Independence, Kentucky. He has been creating art for over 10 years with various mediums. Besides art, M.L. loves camping, hiking, and good music.

Monix

Monix just wants to enjoy his family, make his community safer for all, and make art. He is not a threat to anyone, to anyone's family, or to anyone's way of life. Monix just exists here.

Penelope Epple

Penelope Epple (Pronouns: [in writing] *e/h*/h*s, [in speech] they/them, e/em, one/ones) is a Queer AroAce Neutrois poet originally from Ft. Wayne, IN who is in the process of moving back to Cincinnati. *E is currently working on some books of poetry with themes of queerness, Catholicism, exclusion and erasure, aroace love, and space. *E likes to knit and read in h* spare time.

contact: penelopeepple@gmail.com; [@poetpenelopee](https://www.instagram.com/poetpenelope)

Raya

Raya is a transwoman who, at 58, is finally letting her creative light shine. For her life has proven dramatically better out of the box! The Inside Out project has been her first bit of visual art, but since transition she has also earned a degree in A/V production, joined the amazing Fluidity chorus, started voice lessons, and most recently started with a pipe and drum band. Raya is planning a future filled with music with her partner.

Sam Hoover

Sam Hoover is a queer, non-binary mixed media artist from Ontario, Canada. They are a self-taught artist that focuses on LGBTQ+ experiences, human connection, mental health & evoking emotional responses from the viewer through color.

contact: samhoover.art@gmail.com; [samhooverart.etsy.com](https://www.etsy.com/shop/samhooverart); [@samhoover.art](https://www.instagram.com/samhoover.art)

Sea O. Dax

Sea Dax (they, them, their) moved to Cincinnati in 2008 for schooling and never left. They use a variety of mediums to create their work, focusing on keeping the handmade quality visible. They don't create work digitally, almost by principle. Their work focuses on themes of trans identity, fatness, mental health, queerness, and loneliness.

Tay

Tay is a 17 year-old, nonbinary person and an aspiring fashion designer. They love all kinds of art, particularly clothes making. They also enjoy music, witchcraft, anime and video games.

contact: tz1144tz@gmail.com

POET BIOS

Karen Arnett

Karen Arnett enjoys creative self-expression through writing, playing music, planting trees, and co-gardening with Nature. Apart from that, she hugs her friends and pets her dog and cats and try to be grateful every day for this life.

contact: karenarnett@gmail.com

Holly Brians Ragusa

Holly Brians Ragusa (she/her/hers) poet, author, family ringleader, querent of life, sees reason in the senseless, writes to better map it, holds hope in kindness, dips into the sauce of life and trusts the seasons, science and stories of this complicated world. Holly's poetry was recently selected in the national Jessie Butler Women's Poetry Contest June 2020, the anthology *She Speaks Up!*, recognizing 100 years passage of the 19th Amendment. Her hybrid true crime/memoir is currently in submission, and she has published Op-Eds in the *Cincinnati Enquirer* as well as poetry in *Tiny Seeds Journal* (Aug 2020) and *La Piccioletta Barca* (2020).

contact: hbragusa.com; @hbrag

Kristina Nichole Brodbeck

Kristina Nichole Brodbeck's first poetry book, *Play*, was published in 2018 with Finishing Line Press. Her poetry has also been published in several magazines, including *Cape Rock* and *Calliope*. She is currently working toward her Ph.D. in English and Comparative Literature at the University of Cincinnati. Kristina is a member of Mount St. Joseph University's adjunct faculty where she teaches composition and literature.

contact: kristina.brodbeck@gmail.com

POET BIOS

Cynthia Perry Colebrook

Cynthia Perry Colebrook is a poet, writer, and consultant to non-profit organizations. She lives in the mountains of Colorado, and still loves the man she married 49 years ago. They have two daughters, four grandchildren, a great-grandchild, horses, chickens, and gardens

contact: cynthiacolebrook@aol.com

Nancy Welch D'Aquila

Nancy Welch D'Aquila is a first-generation Italian who retired recently as a project manager and who practiced as a RN in her youth. Nancy is happily married since June, 1980 and has 2 children. She resides in Newport, KY, and enjoys writing, walking, and being outdoors.

contact: nancydaquila1@gmail.com

Penelope Epple

Penelope Epple (Pronouns: [in writing] *e/h*/h*s, [in speech] they/them, e/em, one/ones) is a Queer AroAce Neutrois poet originally from Ft. Wayne, IN who is in the process of moving back to Cincinnati. *E has previously had h*s work published in *The Aze Journal*, *X Marks the Spot, For a Better World* 2019 and 2020, and *Lions-on-Line*. *E is currently working on some books of poetry with themes of queerness, Catholicism, exclusion and erasure, aroace love, and space.

contact: penelopeepple@gmail.com; @poetpenelope

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 and citybeat.com, while a compilation, *Exiled on Main Street: Dispatches, Diatribes, Stories and More from the Urban Core* is forthcoming. Previously, his volume of poetry, *Journeyman's Lament*, appeared in the Aurore Press publication, *Versus*, and his free e-book, *Minute Poems*, is available online from Three Fools Press. Most recently, Flanigan was the editor of Aralee Strange's posthumous poetry collection, *The Road Itself* (Dos Madres Press).

contact: mf@markflanigan.com

Karen George

Karen George is author of five chapbooks, and two poetry collections from Dos Madres Press: *Swim Your Way Back* (2014) and *A Map and One Year* (2018). Her work has appeared in *Adirondack Review*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Salamander*, and *SWWIM*. She reviews poetry at *Poetry Matters*: readwritepoetry.blogspot.com

contact: karenlgeorge.blogspot.com

Susan F Glassmeyer

Susan F. Glassmeyer is honored to be a part of *Inside Out: Greater Cincinnati*. She is the author of three books of poetry and is preparing a forthcoming collection of American cinquains. Susan is co-director of the Holistic Health Center of Cincinnati where she helps people restore the poetry of presence and movement in their bodies. In addition to her books, an extensive archive of "April Gifts" (a ten-year poetry project) can be found on her website.

contact: susannaglass@yahoo.com; susanglassmeyer.com

Elena Estella Green

Elena Estella Green is a Poet from New York City now living in Cincinnati, OH. She had several poems published in various journals and was selected twice for Poetry of the Month by The Cincinnati Public Library. Elena is an active participant of Women Writing for (a) Change based in Silverton, OH and on Zoom.

contact: eegpoet@aol.com

Anne Greenfeld

Anne Greenfeld lives in Cincinnati with her husband and cat, and spends her days reading, exercising, writing, reading, and reading. Yes, she is retired. Anne loves music, art, nature, conversation, and reading. She used to be a French professor, then a high school French teacher, and now is a senior citizen. But spry.

contact: annemiriam@fuse.net

Chris Gutjahr

Chris Gutjahr has been involved in classes at Women Writing for (a) Change. She is interested in poetry.

contact: clgutjahr@gmail.com

Paulette Hansel

Paulette Hansel's eighth poetry collection is *Friend* (Dos Madres Press, 2020), epistolary poems written in the early days of the pandemic. Her writing has been featured in *Oxford American*, *Rattle*, and *Verse Daily*, among others. Paulette was Cincinnati's first Poet Laureate (2016-2018) and is past managing editor of *Pine Mountain Sand & Gravel*, the literary publication of Southern Appalachian Writers Cooperative (2010-2020).

contact: paulettahansel.wordpress.com

Manuel Iris

Manuel Iris (Mexico, 1983), Poet Laureate Emeritus of the City of Cincinnati, Ohio (2018-2020), received the “Merida” National award of poetry (Mexico, 2009) for his book *Notebook of dreams*, and the Rodulfo Figueroa Regional award of poetry for his book *The disguises of fire*. His first bilingual book, *Traducir el silencio/Translating silence*, was published in New York, and won two different awards in the International Latino Book Awards in Los Angeles, California, in 2018.

contact: manueliris65@gmail.com; manueliris.com

Jerry Judge

Jerry Judge is a retired social worker living out his days working with cats and dogs at no kill shelters and attempting to write the perfect poem or, at least, some damn good ones.

contact: jerryj871@aol.com

Lonna D Kingsbury

Lonna D. Kingsbury has long been a student of juxtaposition, contrast, comparison and placement. Her lifelong pursuit of truth through visual art, stagecraft and poetry explores the effect of connection through each personal offering. One of her most memorable connections can now be seen on video, *Yearning to Breathe Free* on Hamanworld.com where Cathleen Schandlmeier-Bartels offers a platform for Chicago migrants to share their truths. Lonna’s poem, *I Am Migrant* was originally inspired and penned for the I AM MIGRANT Project of Chicago artist Miroslav Rogala.

contact: lonna@kingsburyproductions.com

Barbara Marie Minney

Barbara Marie Minney writes personal and emotional poetry that describes her feelings, thoughts, and passions while struggling to live her truth as a transgender woman. She began her transition to living authentically as the woman she now knows she was meant to be at the age of 63 after repressing her true gender identity for over 60 years. Barbara’s first book of poetry, *If There’s No Heaven*, published in May of 2020 by Poetry Is Life Publishing, was the winner of the 2020 Poetry Is Life Book Award, and was named as one of the best Northeast Ohio books in 2020 by the *Akron Beacon Journal*.

contact: ronzel334@gmail.com; barbaramarieminneypoetry.com

Elaine Olund

Elaine Olund is a writer, poet, artist and designer living and working in Cincinnati. Her first chapbook, *The Invisible Suitcase*, was released in December 2020 by Finishing Line Press. Sanity practices include yoga, meditation, lots of walking and journaling.

contact: elaineolund.com

Michael Olson

Michael Olson is a retired business executive from the Cincinnati area. He studied writing and literature at the University of Arizona and his poems have been published in numerous anthologies.

contact: mo45069@yahoo.com

Lisa Prantl

Lisa Prantl is a Cincinnati-based writer, gardener, and death midwife. Her poetry has appeared in the anthology *grief becomes you*—a compilation of narratives and photographs surrounding loss, edited by Maya Stein, The Sycamore, and For a Better World - Poems and Drawings on Peace and Justice. She is a periodic facilitator at Women Writing for (a) Change. Lisa is associated with the Cincinnati End of Life Collaborative and is part of the funeral and burial group for Heritage Acres Memorial Sanctuary, the first and only dedicated natural burial ground in the Cincinnati area.

contact: peace.lap@gmail.com

RL Schoeff

RL Schoeff is in agreement with William Carlos Williams who said, “It is difficult/ to get the news from poems/ yet men die miserably every day/ for lack/ of what is found there.” He lives in Cincinnati in an old house on a hillside that seems to bend and billow as it sails slowly down toward the river.

contact: schoeffrl@gmail.com

Sarah J Stephens

S.J. Stephens lives and writes in the coastal town of Wilmington, North Carolina. She is an MFA candidate in Poetry at the University of North Carolina, Wilmington and was recently awarded the position of Managing Editor of *Chautauqua*, a literary Journal. S.J. has been published in the *Garfield Lake Review*, *Licking River Review*, and *Adelaide Literary Magazine*, etc., and her chapbook *Where All the Birds are Dancing*, was released in October 2020 by Finishing Line Press.

contact: ajs6131@uncw.edu

Eileen Trauth

Eileen Trauth is an author, inclusion advocate and Emeritus Professor of Information Sciences, and Women’s, Gender & Sexuality Studies at Pennsylvania State University. Her scholarly writing includes several books, numerous research articles and one play. Her creative writing includes poetry, historical fiction, memoir, and screen writing. Eileen lives in Cincinnati, Ohio.

contact: eileen@eileentrauth.com; eileentrauth.com

Kathleen Wade

Kathy Wade began writing poetry when she inherited her father’s Olympia typewriter at age eleven. Her poems have appeared in a number of anthologies, and for several years in the Cincinnati *Poets Laureate Anthology*. Her full-length debut novel, *Perfection*, was published in 2018. Kathy has enjoyed a 30-year teaching career and served for ten years as Executive Director of Women Writing for (a) Change, a writing community in Cincinnati. Most recently she has consulted as Director of a leadership-development program for women religious. She resides in Cincinnati with her husband and a tabby named Oscar.

contact: kwade42@gmail.com; kathleenwadeperfection.com; medium.com/@kwade42

Annette Januzzi Wick

Annette Januzzi Wick is a writer, teacher and community connector who believes creating links, rooting people to place, through words and work, will bring us closer to the core of humanity.

contact: annettejwick.com

POET BIOS

Tyrone Williams

Tyrone Williams teaches at Xavier University and is the author of several books of poetry, most recently *As Iz* (2018).

contact: williamt@xavier.edu

Mike Wilson

Mike Wilson's work has appeared in magazines including *Cagibi Literary Journal*, *Stoneboat*, *The Auorean*, and *The Ocotillo Review*, and in his book, *Arranging Deck Chairs on the Titanic* (Rabbit House Press, 2020), political poetry for a post-truth world. Mike resides in Central Kentucky.

contact: mikewilsonwriter.com

Bea Wissel

Bea Wissel is a poet, playwright, creative, and writer-at-large. Technically she has a degree in gender studies/identity politics from Boston University. She is a person of far too many passions to list them all, so here are just a few: social justice, reading and watching murder mysteries with a strong female protagonist, trees, humans, bourbon, and swishy skirts. You can even hire her to whip-up some tasty copy, content, concepts or other various wordsmithy, creative needs you may have.

contact: beawissel.com