

For A 2026 Better World



POEMS BY DRAWINGS ON
PEACE BY JUSTICE BY
Greater Cincinnati Artists



cover art by **Jamie Schorsch**

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“For a Better World” 2026

Poems and Drawings
on
Peace and Justice

by
Greater Cincinnati Artists



Editor:
Saad Ghosn

Truth, Justice, & Peace

“There really can be no peace without justice. There can be no justice without truth. And there can be no truth unless someone rises up to tell you the truth.”

Louis Farrakhan

“Justice is truth in action.”

Benjamin Disraeli

“Peace and justice are two sides of the same coin.”

Dwight D. Eisenhower

“True peace is not merely the absence of war, it is the presence of justice.”

Jane Addams

“Freedom and justice cannot be parceled out in pieces to suit political convenience.”

Coretta Scott King

“It is certain, in any case, that ignorance, allied with power, is the most ferocious enemy justice can have.”

James Baldwin

Foreword

“Justice is truth in action,” said Benjamin Disraeli and *“If you want peace, work for justice,”* added Pope Paul VI. Unfortunately these basic tenants of moral and ethical behaviors are entirely ignored currently in our world where lies, hypocrisy and dissemination of misinformation prevail and dictate the actions of political leaders who only respond to their greed, power, money, and personal profit to impose their viciated and truncated peace on humanity. *“There really can be no peace without justice. There can be no justice without truth,”* echoed and acknowledged Louis Farrakhan.

Poets in this 23rd edition of “For a Better World” knew, however, very well what is at stake and used their truthful voice to shed clarity and veracity to the state of our society, using their poems as their arm to oppose bigotry, injustice and violence under all their forms. They are surely the comrades of Che Guevara who said *“If you tremble with indignation at every injustice then you are a comrade of mine.”* Together with all the justice and peace lovers of the world they planted seeds of justice for a true peace through their powerful words. They refused to be silent and called us to join with them in action, reminding us of Haile Selassie’s candid assessment: *“Throughout history, it has been the inaction of those who could have acted; the indifference of those who should have known better; the silence of the voice of justice when it mattered most; that has made it possible for evil to triumph.”*

This 23rd edition of “For a Better World” received a large number of poetry submissions by 81 Greater Cincinnati poets of whom 73 are here included. These poets used their voice and their words to reflect on their life, on our societal problems, our values, and of what is really at stake for being human. Their poems addressed the current prevailing political situation; the discrimination as reflected by racism and gender bias; social and economic disparity; environmental concerns; truth, lies, greed and hypocrisy; injustice, violence and war... The 73 poets were joined by 37 visual artists who also used their artistic power to contribute, in their own way, to peace and social justice. Together, poets and visual artists fight for everyone’s rights, for the discriminated against, the oppressed, the weak and the poor; they combat darkness, violence and evil; and they spread compassion, love, and tolerance. Of all ages and backgrounds, these artists use their art as their voice to state their concerns and affirm their beliefs and values. By doing so they also strengthen each other’s diverse voices and give life to their hopes and dreams. With their lucid song, they also confront the evil in this world and promise to stand up for the fight. Their song is an appeal to each of us to join in and make a change; it seeks to eliminate our isolation and loneliness and invites us to hold hands and share in the same well of strength and energy for justice and peace and for a better world.

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

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

Saad Ghosn, editor and organizer
May 2026

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POEMS:

LAURI ANN AULTMAN

Since 2006, Lauri Ann Aultman has been a mixed media Artist Activist with SOS ART; this is her 5th year in *For A Better World*. Her poetry has also been used in Global Water Dances (Cincinnati) since 2021. Lauri Ann works as a Teaching Artist with Project Art, Kennedy Heights Arts Center, and the Cincinnati Music and Wellness Coalition.

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BARBARA MARIE MINNEY

Barbara Marie Minney is an award-winning transgender poet and writer and quiet activist. She is the author of four poetry collections: *If There's No Heaven*, *Poetic Memoir Chapbook Challenge*, *Dance Naked With God*, and *A Woman in Progress*. Barbara is a retired attorney and lives with her wife of 44 years in Tallmadge, Ohio.

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DRAWING:

DAVID HENDERSON

David Henderson is a multidisciplinary artist and writer whose work explores psychological portraiture, fractured identity, and themes of confinement and release. Drawing from personal mythology and Art Brut influences, he creates visual and poetic language for interior landscapes. His ongoing projects merge text and image into a singular narrative voice.

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10 Years

(by *Lauri Ann Aultman*)

for Liam Seamus, October 2025

10 years.
10 years since we heard your laugh.
10 years since we felt your hug.
10 years since we laughed at your jokes.
10 years feels like a lifetime, and for some people it is.

Your life was a little longer...15 years,
But not near long enough.
I still remember the call.
I listened to it over and over again later.
"There's been an accident,"
But it was worse.
It was not an accident, but it was a tragedy.

Now every time I see an ambiguous death in the news,
I wonder did they die by suicide, too?
Too often the answer is yes.
Damn, this epidemic is hard.
We have stopped a few suicides,
But how can so many beautiful people,
so many beautiful smiles,
not realize how much they will be missed?

I know how and I know why.
I have the anxiety and depression that leads to suicide sometimes.
I have fought this demon of depression for 50 years,
but I am glad I do not fight it alone!

God provided people and resources for me.
Not everyone has access to the therapy, the meds, the support.

It would take me pages to list all of the family,
friends,
strangers,
therapists,
doctors, and
pastors who have helped me.

I am not supposed to wonder why I got help in time
and you did not, dear one.
But it still breaks my heart.

Forever 15 is what I say when I think of you now.
Because time froze on that hot October day
when illness and doubt took your sweet soul from us.

Our only peace is knowing that God has you now,
but 10 years without you still hurts.

Daydream Truth

Ars Poetica

(by **Barbara Marie Minney**)

My life exists in ceaseless stanzas
a jumble of senseless inner dialog
voyeuristic emotions glaring at virginal paper

a melancholy Jesus hangs out at the outer limits
of my wakefulness waiting for me to glimpse the gospel

but I'm not there a psychotic parasite
feasting on a gruesome ghost grieving
for a conduit to truth

now is not the time to abandon ship
I sail into the tempest let the unrevealed
blow fiercely in my face

the song still plays the chorus still sings
the words whirl chaos into beautiful necessity.

The Trouble with Heaven

~after "Blue Mask" by Jacob Koestler

(by **Barbara Marie Minney**)

A masked god telescopes through cobalt cloudiness
at a madonna rocking a crucified baby
a whiff of mothballs in churches devoid of congregants
stepping in when god is otherwise engaged.

We're all prophets without a prophecy
leading each other astray
wearing masks to hide who we really are
disguised even from ourselves
like a surreal masquerade orgy.

We're all philosophers without a philosophy
flogging ourselves with kinky pleasure
carrying thirty pieces of silver in our own pockets
searching for a pyrrhic victory
in a labyrinth of truth that isn't ours,

like a tormented troubadour waiting enlightenment
skinny dipping in creative misery
living in the collapsed shell of our lives.

They came first for the trannies
doing us in with biblical poetic morality
I fought back
but like a film playing that no one remembers
the ending's always the same.

POEMS:

ELLEN AUSTIN-LI

Ellen Austin-Li's recent poetry collection is *Incidental Pollen* (Madville Publishing, 2025). Ellen received a 2026 Ohio Arts Council Individual Excellence Award, and Sundress Academy for the Arts supported her work with a 2024 writing residency. She is a Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net-nominated poet whose work appears in many journals and anthologies. Ellen curates Poetry at *Artifact* in Cincinnati.

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m.s. mendoza

m.s. mendoza is a Brit-ish poet who lives with his many poems in Cincinnati, OH, and offers exceedingly good music and merch at clandestinedistribution.com

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DRAWING:

MICHAEL HURST

Michael Hurst is a Cincinnati based artist who holds a BFA from the Art Academy of Cincinnati and an MFA from the Maryland Institute College of Art. Michael's primary medium is collage, but he also works in acrylic and charcoal.

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Minneapolis, Minnesota: January 2026 (A Golden Shovel)

(by *Ellen Austin-Li*)

*We wouldn't know, we are those who everywhere
Hear only the rasp of the hateful key
And the soldier's heavy tread.*

From "Dedication," part of Anna Akhmatova's "Requiem."

We watch from our homes, wondering when we will become the next Minneapolis. Wouldn't we brave frigid winter to defend our neighbors? We know José at the Mexican restaurant or Sagal from Somalia. We know those who fled their birth countries are laboring to feed children, weave a safety net. Those murdered American protestors? They are me: a nurse who worked in an ICU, a poet-mother who everywhere

tries to lift humanity on American streets. Hear military-grade weapons report this regime's only Required Lesson in this first month of the new year: *We will rule like a rasp shaping the pine of your forests. Of your soft unity, we will unleash raised teeth, the brutal tactics of our master, as hateful as kidnapping a five-year-old boy.* Fear, the key dangling around necks. The gates are open, and the hounds are loose. They've reloaded the guns that murdered. Masked soldiers roam neighborhoods. But listen: without heavy boots, they are hollow men. All, without tread.

here

after Lucille Clifton

(by *m.s. mendoza*)

here in the midwest
they are caging children
they are assaulting mothers
and leaving their children in cars
in columbus
a woman stands on her tigerwood deck.
watching her child.
her child is playing in the snow.
her man comes home from

caging children. she smiles.
she cooks him someone.
each morning i practice for
caring less about that woman.
when her racist thug brother is hired
as a ice agent for operation buckeye
i remind myself
she is here.



Michael Horst

Untitled

(by *m.s. mendoza*)

*A cat may go to a monastery
but she remains a cat*
– Ethiopian proverb

Something's rotten in the
field of subsidies A cover
for the cover over the cover

There's a cow on the ice
Church recruiters at the airport

This must be the place (Complicity)

Cheap meat
A mind of second winter
following a fool's spring

With what words; with what
silence? Getting away

Fast snow whirls eaten in
an upbeat wind. Pleasure rots
and soon falls apart

The pressure of morning passes over
the land. A parrot bemoans his cage
lets the apple slices turn black

Journal editors have issues

We told ourselves the corruption was limited
to SCROTUS and a few ecocidal apples
who graduated from the school of
putrefying business hams

I can't hear the birds, there's no good bread
or flaxmilk or greens, only chaos wheat, garlic
mustard and multiflora rose. The only beans
pork beans

It is this place, between geography
and morning, everybody wants to leave
every weekend everyone who can
does. No one is exactly pretty
and officers are hardly dark. I can't
apprehend this place, why the interns were
so silent when I asked for birdseed
at the farmers' exchange; the stolen
Nixonland that tipping points have not
forgotten
O Nokia, Nakba, Nubank, Novartis
Shroom-me while there's rot, take a run at another dump

Nocturnal civet cats, who naturally fear humans
were confined to small wire cages with no dark place to sleep

and were subjected to a constant barrage
of unwanted human contact. Their cages were encrusted with
faeces, rotting berries, and other filth, and they panted
incessantly in the heat. Numerous exhibited
signs of extreme psychological distress, including pacing
and biting themselves. Several had open, bloody wounds
At least one appeared to be blind

How to Make an American Quilt

(by *m.s. mendoza*)

American Beauty
American Pie
The American President
An American Werewolf in Paris
An American Tail: Fievel Goes West
Geronimo: An American Legend
American Me
American History X
American Buffalo
American Cyborg: Steel Warrior
American Heart
American Ninja 4: The Annihilation
New! Improved! Real-life American Fairy Tale
American Dreamgirls 21
American Hero
American Tigers
American Southern
American Orpheus
American Streetfighter
Red-Blooded American girl
American Born
American Ninja V
American Samurai
American Yakuza
An American Affair
American Dragons
American Perfekt
American Beer
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American Friends
American Strays
American Born
American Kickboxer
American Shaolin
An American Summer
American Rural West
American Blue Note
An American Vampire Story
American riscio
American Royalty
American Purgatory: 90 Days Behind the Wire, Guantanamo U.S.N.B

POEMS:

THOMAS BACKER

Tom Backer was born in 1939 in the small town of Ferdinand, Indiana. Tom got an MA at Xavier U. and a PHD at UC in History and he taught that subject matter for many years at Covington Latin School. Literary magazines have published ten of his short stories. Tom enjoys vegetable gardening and tending to his fruit trees.

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HENRY JACQUEZ

Henry Jacquez has been a Deacon in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati for the past 13 years. He is assigned to the Queen of Apostles family of parishes. Henry was raised in the art of poetry by the Greater Cincinnati Writers League.

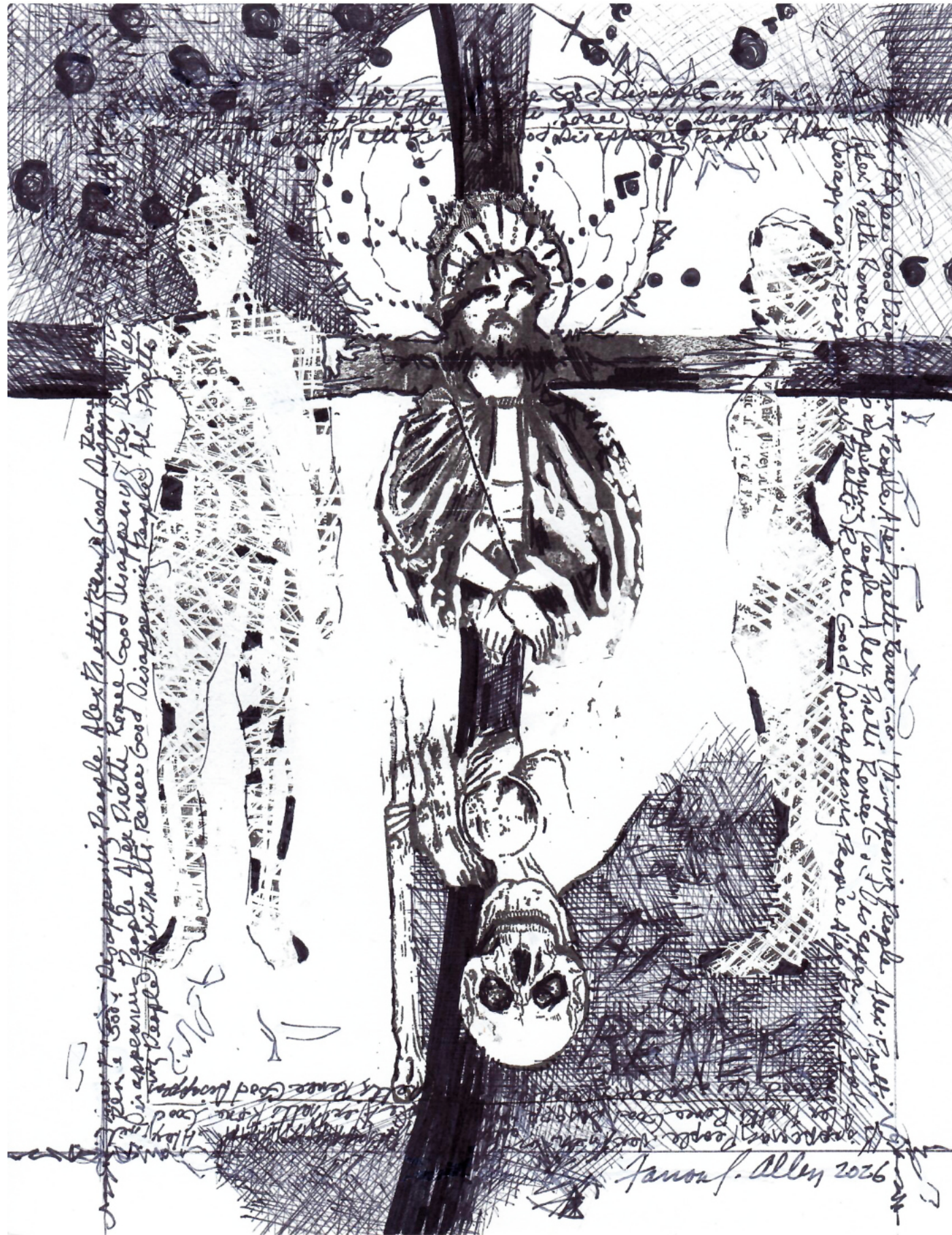
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DRAWING:

FARRON ALLEN

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

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Our Commandments

(by *Thomas Backer*)

Let us be meek
and pure of heart
and peacemakers

blest are you
poor in spirit
you shall see God
in the face

and those who mourn
for you will be comforted
and you lucky meek
who will inherit the earth

let us show mercy
and we will get mercy
fight for righteousness
and demand justice

blessed are you persecuted
you will gain heaven
blessed are you insulted
your reward is great

let's show love
to the least of
our brethren

Pretti Good

(by *Henry Jacquez*)

The church sign read:
"We are all, Pretti good"
it stood frozen in the thick,
deep white fallen snow this
week keeping many of us inside,
when ten shots fired, injustice
fired through social media:
January twenty-fourth for Alex
Pretti the intensive care nurse
pepper-sprayed, wrestled,
tackled, pinned to the ground;
Nicollet Avenue, Minneapolis,
Minnesota as the Crucified Jesus
hung upon his ancient cross, his
words rippling through history
"Father, forgive them for they
know not what they do" as his
unconditional love, mercy, and
forgiveness pierced the injustice
against him, against all those
falsely accused, against Pretti
as he laid on the snow stained
asphalt earth motionless
the snow continued falling
quietly in Finneytown, Ohio
on the good, the peaceful,
the praise of God on their lips,
forgiveness in their prayer,
faithful petitions mourning
Jesus, our refuge, our light,
our consolation, deliver us
seven hundred miles away.

The Peace Found In Justice

(by *Henry Jacquez*)

I must seek the peace found
in the birth of justice to combat
those temptations; those sins
that nag, annoy my freedom.

I must seek the peace found
in the manger of justice
because my knees are arthritic
from hours of kneeling, praising.

I must seek the peace
found in the cave of justice
for the handmaiden's lamp
is almost out of oil for me.

I must seek the peace found
in the strong arms of justice
to right the injustice, the pain
and suffering of loss; only the
Lord can heal in his mercy.

I must seek the peace
found in the prayer of justice
because Jesus is sweating
blood on the rock in the Garden
of Gethsemane as he bleeds
tears for my soul's salvation.

I must seek the peace found
in the hope of justice to
transcend the depth
and height and ambience
of the geography of sin,
the tempting winds,
the barren desert,
the narcissistic lake,
the tempest sea,
the withered tree,
the valley of shadows,
the tomb's darkness,
the walk into eternity
with the Lord by my side.

The Eternal Bond of Poetry

(by *Henry Jacquez*)

for Jerry Judge

Poetry runs through their veins and arteries
as a blessing, a gift, a divine providence
from our Heavenly Father's love for them.
A retired social worker in his faded Graeter's hat
a retired blue-collar worker, material handler in his
black Deacon's fleece from Holy Trinity Church.

Years have passed since they both took to the art
of poetry and found themselves giving birth to
many infant poems, walking those poems
through adolescence, to adulthood poems
as poets do here in Cincinnati, Ohio.

They are different as night and day these two
egg & cheese omelet with hash browns
black decaf coffee and toast for the other
yet both with a hand of poems and memories.

Both veterans with different times of service
both compassionate men finding refuge in
the heart of a poem, the breath of a poem
as they continue to birth a poem with joy
and deliberate attention to serve others.

Their bond of friendship goes back thirty years
thirty years of delving into each other's poems
much like an experienced diver's plunge head
first into a deep, cool, clear, pool of poetry.
The peaceful bond in their relationship
is uniquely eternal, finding in each other
a great appreciation of the creative gifts
and talents God has blessed them,
whether published or unpublished
they relish in working, reworking their
poem's ups and downs, discoveries,
growth spurts shared this sunny, crisp,
November morning at the Frisch's Big Boy
on Vine with the likes of Thomas Merton's
selected poems and the Lord as guide.

POEMS:

BARBARA L. BARNES

Barbara L. Barnes, born in Wisconsin, began her career as a chemist for BASF in Michigan, which led to jobs in San Francisco and Cincinnati. She has been a troubleshooter, sales rep, inspector, consultant, newsletter editor, and writing instructor. Barbara has published three textbooks and dozens of trade journal articles. She also writes memoirs, short stories, and flash fiction.

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PENELOPE EPPL

Penelope Epple (Pronouns: [in writing] *e/h*/h*s, [in speech] they/them, e/em, one/ones) has previously had h*s work published in various anthologies, zines, and journals.

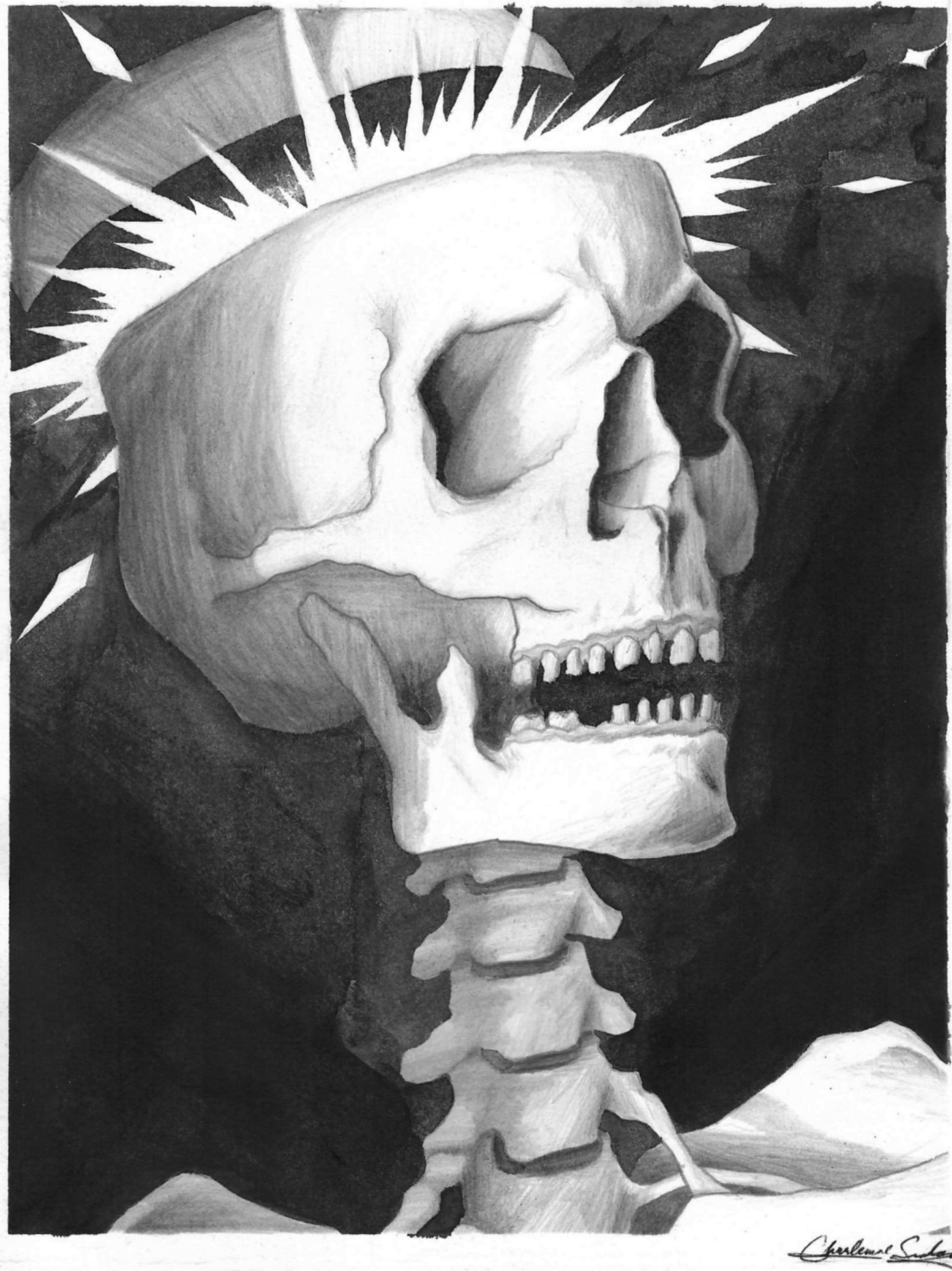
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DRAWING:

CHARLEMAE SEXTON

Largely working in oil painting and handmade frames, Charlemae Sexton focuses on concepts related to the weight of shame, the vitality of suffering, and the connection of death. She is pursuing a Bachelor of Fine Arts at the University of Cincinnati and is the SOS ARTist in Residence for April - June 2026.

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Opening Remarks

(by *Barbara L. Barnes*)

As I stand before you to speak,
I am not what you see.
I am not what you hear.

I am not:
my name,
my age,
my hair,
my clothes,
my height,
my weight,
my gender,
my orientation,
my pronouns,
my race,
my ethnicity,
my location,
my accent,
or any external quality.

Consider my ideas alone,
not the external appraisals you apply.
Ponder only the thoughts I share -
reflective of me, not your conjectures.
Those connotations are your biases.
They are not me.

Use this, my self-introduction,
to open yourself to my truth.
Keep your baggage locked.
Only then can you grasp my meanings.
Now I can begin.

A Short List of Things I Cannot Do Without Being Forced to Misgendering Myself as a Nonbinary Person

(by *Penelope Epple*)

Use public restrooms
Play video games
Use my passport
Renew my ID
Contact my elected representatives
Use the software at work
Join any sports team
Describe how I am related to other members of my family (most of the time)
Go to the doctor
Go to mass or pretty much any religious ceremony
Sing more songs than you would expect
Discuss laws that impact me
Read any laws, bills or executive orders
Participate in social events
Talk about my childhood
Learn any of many different languages
Move to most states
Move to most countries
Live in my current state
Live in my current country
Participate in too many trans spaces
Apply for a job
Be promoted at work
Read basically any form or piece of nonfiction
Listen to the news
Be greeted by strangers
Talk to my extended family
Find resources to transition
Talk to my coworkers...

Do you get my point yet,
or do I need to keep going?

Antigone Takes the Stage Again

(by *Penelope Epple*)

I know it's been 2,467 years since I first stood
before a different democracy, on a different continent, speaking a different language
but I hope you Americans will listen to me again.
Allow me to tell you part of my family's story,
which I am sure no one in your democracy can relate to.

Yes, my brother knew that the State had declared it a crime for him to return home.
Yes, he knew the punishment was death.
Yes, my brother came home anyway.
Yes, I knew that the State had declared it a crime to bury my brother.
Yes, I knew the punishment was death.
Yes, I buried my brother anyway.
Yes, I forced into my tomb alive.
Yes, I was eventually pardoned,
but only once the king's son died by my side,
killed by our government's violence.

Dear Americans, I know my words must sound ancient and antiquated to you.
After all, it's been over 2,400 years since I first took the stage to comment on the state of a
democracy.

Surely, there is no one in your democracy
who knows what it's like for it to be a crime to go home.
No one in your democracy has ever been executed for caring for their kith and kin.
Surely, my family's tragedy isn't a pattern woven into the fabric of your democracy.
There are no throats echoing our cries in America.
Surely, every thing I have to say is Greek to you,
right?

POEMS:

CAROL BARRETT

Carol Barrett taught doctoral students for 43 years at Union Institute & University,
based in Cincinnati. Her books are *Calling in the Bones*, *Drawing Lessons*,
Pansies, and *Reading Wind*. Carol currently supervises creative dissertations at
both Antioch and Saybrook Universities.

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BLAU

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

DRAWING:

MARK PATSFALL

Mark Patsfall is an artist, printmaker and publisher, who received his MFA from
UC. Mark founded the current Clay Street Press in 1981, and worked with local,
national and international artists. From 1984 – 2002 he was chief designer and
technician for video artist Nam June Paik. With Volatile Editions and Carl Solway
he printed, published or oversaw the fabrication of works by artists of national or
international reputation. Mark's work is in many public and private collections.

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What Remains

(by *Carol Barrett*)

for Judith

Smoke makes the air untenable, unbreathable, unbearable.
“Unhealthy” red zone doesn’t convey the stench, the risk
to heart and lung, the thick breach of freedom. Wildfires

so close now, ash is falling between houses and trees,
gray-washing my new white car, dusting the tops of tin
mailboxes, once-shiny vinyl seats of tricycles left on lawns.

When it stops, maybe we can hose it off sidewalks
to avoid trampling indoors. But it’s not about to obey
the red light of angst we flash in daily despair.

My neighbor wants to show her toddlers the petunias
they planted with tiny blue shovels, before the purple
and pink blooms droop into oblivion, but it’s dangerous.

School recess: now board games, indoors. *Sorry.*
The older couple with three dogs needs to let them out.
Confined inside, they’re tearing up the carpet, agitation

escalating each day, three mad prancers barking at smoke.
Short on groceries, I hold my breath to get to the car,
flip the a/c to help filter the stuff. All the gas station

attendants are wearing masks. Construction workers
for the new library, luckily blessed with the day off.
I could pray for a shift in wind, but that would merely

inconvenience the next town over. Perhaps we could
send planes up to seed the clouds. Then maybe
the gritty soot would coagulate in the rain, fall out

in merciful dark showers. Unable to go about business
as usual, I am reduced to running the vacuum. The floor
has never been so clean. If I could just poke the vacuum

hose out the bathroom window, suck away all the dirty
air, at least for a few blocks over -- we wouldn’t mind
the news so much this evening, promising more

of the same, the filmy atmosphere blocking all view of once pristine mountains, the rising cost of eggs and milk, vitriolic grand-standing, explosions

of pagers, or school bells. The lofty space for alternative futures, hidden by opaque smoke. Between coughs, the poor meteorologist has nothing fresh to say.

Canadian Wood

(by *Blau*)

I once had an Earth
or should I say
It once had me

Birds are dead
They can't spy on you anymore
Unhatched eggs
are left for the National Parks
Wood paneled van
comes to take you away
Light a fire
kindling it with nostalgia
Keeping myself warm
from the cold corpse of courtship
as I burn the fucking place down
You can walk in with an elephant
as long as you can dance with it

Isn't it surreal?
Canadian Wood

Sit back and strike a match
Raise your cigar to the wind
Burn your books
and damn your morals

Dropped behind the enemy's line
Sneaking up on the inferno
Who knew the flames would purify us all?
Can't hide behind a mask that is melting

Blot out the sun
With fires of unrest
Porno for pyros run wild
Air supply denied

Isn't it surreal?
Canadian Wood

Thousand points of incineration
Stories told in rings and ash
Stampede of forest animals
Danse macabre of the human race

Can't deny it!
Can't pretend
it does not exist!
How dare you!
Have your tea party
while the world is burning
Winds of change
End up blowback

Woodsmoke kisses
Hazy apparitions of dawn
lead to obscuring shadows of twilight
Beware children,
you are in fire country now
Another fine
particles mess you got us into

Isn't it surreal?
Canadian Wood

Cottontail

(by *Carol Barrett*)

Streaking across the lawn, ducking under monkey tree,
limbs bowing to your nimble presence. This morning

I catch one of your kin nibbling dandelions at the canal,
darting to the relative cool of a mammoth pine shading

the slope. For a moment when I'm still, she stops to wash
her face, paw licked, wiping her cheeks and brows

just like a cat, eyes alert below perked ears. Unlike feline
friends, she can swivel those ears to fan herself in desert

heat, hop on by. She won't need my carrots or crookneck
squash. Sprinklers keep grass greening all summer,

and she can sneak into any garden patch not guarded
by chicken wire, or marigolds. Even crisp turnips

get nabbed by her facile paws. *Peter Cottontail*,
safe in this shifty climate. As long as we toss seeds

to the culled earth, dutifully tend them, as long
as wildfire does not overtake field and forest, claim

our manicured lawns and cedar decks, our rocker porches.
If flaming winds blow, we're all in trouble –

rabbit, two-legged, Bambi, squirrel, hawk, and dove.
The canal? It would sizzle, then choke on ash.

Pissing in the Wind

(by *Blau*)

Stop the styrene facility signs
Cut down by the grass hog
When the neighborhood watch
Complains about excess lawn length
Angry over an inch
that will soon be sprayed to an alien green
Meditative poses contorted
by closed minded rhetoric
Do they see the irony in the scene?

The question my friend,
is pissing in the wind

Well intentions spoil in the sun
Exposed vines weep with time
Getting some fresh air
From enclosed quarters with
The bad side of your better half
Checking things off your
Honey do list that is never ending
No sleep 'til yard work is done
Distracted by a sunbather
Being lobsterized by the black hole sun
Your hand swings too far with the scythe
And the prize-winning rose bush
Is buzzsaw cut to the ground
Will they understand
When time passes them by?

The question my friend,
is pissing in the wind

“What in the Hell is all that noise?
“Nut & Honey” is your reply
“Just trimming down some weeds
No need to spill your beer getting up
Go back to watching your stupid human tricks
And weekend warrior gladiators”
Who will they call when they need help
If everyone wants to be a star?

The question my friend,
is pissing in the wind

Wanna be pirates with scruffy beards
Shaved heads to reveal the map of their souls
Geocaching like they're Blackbeard himself
Frisbee golf like country club rats
Wind knocked out of your sails
When the X is spray painted on a tree
Shiver me timbers as they all fall down
Do they see the forest for the trees?

The question my friend,
is pissing in the wind

Harsh glare of sun gives way to Luna
Forest bathing restoration vibes
Primal nature goddess caresses
When the roots are strong
Plant will grow back stronger than before
only if the tears you shed aren't too salty
Will the beast see the beauty
hidden in your secret garden?

The question my friend,
is pissing in the wind

POEMS:

T. BARTLETT

T. Bartlett, a photographer and writer, has had poetry published in anthologies such as *A Song*, *Emerging/Poems About Our Earth*, *Anthropocene: Poetry about Environment*, and various editions of *For a Better World*. T. has also had her photography showcased in two exhibitions by Felt Photographic known as *Dreaming and Unity* and the *Creation to Requiem: Explorations of Life* exhibition at Music Hall in Cincinnati.

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SARAH CAMPBELL

Sarah Campbell is an artist and poet and the mother of four grown up children. She lives in northern KY and works at Amazon to remain independent and benefit from a good health insurance. Sarah finds the act of writing both healing and powerful.

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DRAWING:

TEDDY DORIO

Teddy Dorio is an integrative media artist based in the greater Cincinnati area. They produce artworks of various mediums (painting, drawing, ceramic, plaster, steel welding, wood, etc.) and focus on the human figure, transience, and surrealism. A lot of Teddy's work is based on life experiences surrounding death and grief.

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We Mark the Space Between Us

(by T. Bartlett)

We dig trenches in the snow,
we draw lines in the sand,
we mark the space between us
with a longing for land.

We draw up our battle maps,
we set bombs and grenades,
we mark the space between us
with crushing crusades.

We type the treaties and accords,
we reunite the living with the dead,
we mark the space between us
with a boundless dread.

International Interreligious Peace Lunch

(by Sarah Campbell)

He has made lentils with halal chicken,
and hands me a spoon;
we eat from the same bowl.
He thinks it isn't hot enough;
I don't care – I didn't have to make it.

We talk about how the day is going,
and the talking feels easy.
I put some of my watermelon on his plate;
he slices an apple with a plastic knife
and hands me a quarter saying, "Eat it."

I've made chocolate chip oatmeal cookies.
Yesterday I gave him ten,
which were gone before our shift ended;
today I only brought him six.
I tease him because I like to see him smile.

We sit almost touching over his phone,
watching stories about Gaza,
videos of cities in Morocco;
we end with soccer highlights – good,
I am happy to just watch the exciting parts.

He's much younger than me,
and my coworkers make jokes,
not understanding something innocent.
When he goes to prayer later, I'll pray, too.
Then we'll text after work at 1:00 a.m. to say,
"I'm home. Good night. Sweet dreams."

No Peak Bonus

(by Sarah Campbell)

We are working mandatory extra time
Getting Amazon's boxes out before Christmas
"Making history" sorting more than
One million packages per day at our site
Doubling or tripling our normal load

No bonus is planned, they say
But they are very excited to announce
A chance (out of 1000's of people) to win
One of ten prizes – to be taxed as income
On the next paycheck, of course

They are pleased with themselves
Pleased at seeing the historical numbers
Bonuses and incentives weighty in their pockets
We lean our heads back looking up and up
Expecting little but still hoping

We, down here on the floor
Learning solidarity naturally
Grateful for a good wage and insurance
But unanimous in our disgruntlement
At the stinginess of a billion dollar company

Seattle, general managers, leadership are proud
But we are the ones going home exhausted
We don't care about breaking records
We're hoping our families' Christmas gifts
Won't all go on a credit card

We say, put extra money in our hands too

POEMS:

MATT BIRKENHAUER

Matt Birkenhauer teaches English at Northern Kentucky University, with an emphasis on Composition and Rhetoric. In addition to *For a Better World*, Matt's poetry has appeared in *The Licking River Review*, *Tobacco: A Literary Anthology*, *Words*, *Pegasus*, and others. In his free time, Matt likes to read, write poetry and occasionally articles on pedagogy.

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BERT BISCOE

Bert Biscoe is a poet, songwriter and politician. He lives in Cornwall, UK. He regularly attends and contributes work to both the Cincinnati-based Monday Morning Writers Group and the Cincinnati Writers' Project Poetry Workshop. Bert visited Cincinnati in 2023 when his work was well-received in various venues.

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DRAWING:

LESLIE LEHR DALY

Leslie Lehr Daly is a contemporary visual artist whose work confronts power, silence, and bodily autonomy. Using paper, text, stitching, and mixed media, Leslie weaves narratives of resistance and repair, exposing how systems fracture identity while honoring resilience, voice, and collective memory.

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Ogre Ogre Turning Right

(with apologies to William Blake)

(by **Matt Birkenhauer**)

GOP, now turning right
In the dark and violent night,
What demonic hand or eye
Could frame thy Party's cruelty?

In what ways do you despise
The immigrants' so fearful eyes?
On whose backs do you aspire?
For what gold are you for hire?

What the greed and what dark art
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to rage,
Did you then that hate assuage?

Why the Other do you disdain?
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anger? What dread hate
Aim you at migrants in your state?

And with protesters on the street,
For you to shoot and then to beat,
Did you ask what Christ would do,
Or do you think His Word just poo?

GOP, now turning right
In the dark and violent night,
What demonic hand or eye
Could frame thy Party's cruelty?

The Norseman's Hustle II

(by **Bert Biscoe**)

Let's call this severed limb a strip
And market it as 'The Resort',
A thought to tease the disease
Of deals and discarding pain...
All that pain a People feels when I

Say 'Disperse! Re-locate! Apply
Principles of real estate!' to any state
That dares to speak, as if...as if
A holiday package screaming from
An agent's shelf, as if it had a right

To determine anything for itself,
To turn its cheek too late, to knit
And wrap the scarf of hate
Underneath its buttoned overcoat
About a wind-chilled jaw of fate –

And down South, up North,
A condominium jackanape
Fixing stars to makeshift sheriffs,
Shooting first, tossing
Allegations and implications –

How empires shrivel
Into skirmishes on parking lots!
How cameras stand accused,
Despite proven veracity of lens,
With nought but exposure

To stand before a jury
Which constitution defends
And upon which society depends,
But in these times of greatness
Stands helpless with few, if any, friends –

The inert penetration of dawn's
Humiliation spreads its cloud,
Drenching hems, darts, seams and pleats
Of every hurt to sway and swing
About the shins or knees



Of secretaries running to be on-time
And alert after nights
Of giving dictation as they please
And running talon manicures
Across cheeks they feel no need

To kiss nor otherwise please –
This morning, we awake to Greenland,
A pawn of paradisaal freeze,
A riff of presidential demand
Howling: ‘Surrender, or I, Caesar,

*Shall seize! All you who hold
Sheaves of paper cracking in the breeze,
Proclaiming ‘Peace!’
Beware! I have posted agents in Stetsons
With decrees to clear these Senate steps*

*Of subversive mothers
Collecting children from Nurseries –
They are all would-be assassins
And I have my name to append
Across the Gates of Hotel Heaven,*

*To alter feats of memory,
To courses of forces deployed
To tee and drive, to hole-in-one
Though twenty fairway strokes
And sportingly distracting jokes*

*Provide evidence otherwise – but hey!
Brutus is away on holiday,
Everything real is, I fear, a fake
And I am here to make...to make....
To make every second a moment!*

*One for historians to chronicle
As they narrate the crazy way
Of me dragging my golden cross
Halfway over eternity to play
My final hole at Calvary – then I*

*Shall live forever, though
I run the whole gaming shebang
At a rupture of Federal loss –
But I’ll set the rate, and message
The runes to instruct their fate –*

*Too late Brutus! I am POTUS –
POTUS the GREAT and this,
O Norse king in your longboat,
Is my, my, my deliliah of a saga!
Gimme an ‘EMM!’ Gimme an ‘AY!’*

*Loan me a ‘JEE!’ and weigh-hey!
My alpha bet is telling me
That’s another ‘AY!’ – ‘All for me!’
And that, my keeper, my warden,
My nurse or worse, that is MAGA!*

*And I got the bitcoin, illusory cash,
To pay Hamlet for Greenland
While Shakespeare dreams midsummer
And ‘Stormy’ Macbeth takes a bath....
Right here, in my Congressional purse!’*

Joyce Kilmer’s “Trees,” Refined and Improved

(by **Matt Birkenhauer**)

I hope that I shall some day see
A closed down oil refinery.

A plant whose hungry maw’s not pressed
Against the sweet earth’s flowing breast;

A plant that won’t spew gas all day
For which our lemming culture pays;

A plant that won’t in summer wear
A nest of robins in its hair;

Upon whose bosom no snow lays;
As global warming wins the day.

Oil is refined by fools like us.
But to our kids we leave our mess.

POEMS:

ANDREW BISHOP

Andrew Bishop was born and grew up in Covington, KY; hip hop and poetry helped raise him. Andrew is grateful for the 3 F's in his life, Faith, Family, and Friends.

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MAY GARNER

May Garner, an author and poet, resides in rural Ohio. She has been writing for nearly fifteen years and sharing her writing online for over a decade. Mary is the author of two poetry collections, *Withered Rising* (2023) and *Melancholic Muse* (2025). Her work has appeared in *Querencia Press*, *Cozy Ink Press*, *Arcana Poetry Press*, *Livina Press*, *Speckled Trout Review*, among others.

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DRAWING:

MARY MARK

As she ages as gracefully as possible, Mary Mark continues to revel in the delicious colors of oil pastels, using them between other obligations such as protesting, organizing, scheduling and exercising. Mary paints and draws more than ever on her own time, for her own enjoyment, challenged by the subject and mastering the color combinations. She appreciates her artistic ability and is amazed how good it feels and that she is still capable of doing it!

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Salt, Soil, and the Soul

(by Andrew Bishop)

I'm praying for a better world in 2026,
Life gets hard like getting hit with bricks
I'm from Kentucky, a blend of city and sticks
Where faith and the furrowed ground always mix

The concrete is hot and the shadows are long
But the spirit of the hills keeps the heartbeat strong
The Good Book says the Earth is the Lord's
Not a prize to be sliced with our corporate swords

We want Justice to roll like a Kentucky stream
Not a dry, dusty bed or a pipe-fitter's dream
Amos 5 said let the righteousness flow
But we're reaping the thorns from the seeds we sow

We treat the Garden like a cheap plastic toy
Forgetting the "Stewardship" brings the real joy
From the Ohio River to the Appalachian pine
We're crossing the Father's green property line

He told us to "Dress it" and "Keep it" with care
Not to smoke out the sky and then ask for more air
True Peace isn't just when the sirens all cease
It's when the "Least of These" finds a little release

It's a seat at the table and bread on the plate
And loving your neighbor before it's too late
We're "Salt of the Earth" in the Bluegrass state
But even the salt loses flavor through hate

I'm looking for a 2026 with a brand new view
Where the Mercy is fresh and the morning is dew
Don't just pray for the clouds and the heavens above
While you're trashing the dirt that was made out of love

The meek get the Earth... that's the promise, the deal
But we're spinning our tires in a mud-caked wheel
So let's audit the soul and the soot on our hands
And bring some real Justice to these river lands

When the Landlord returns to settle the score
I hope He finds a Garden, not a big box store
From the city to the sticks, let the message take root
By the love in our hearts, they shall know our fruit.

What the Land Remembers

(by May Garner)

The field behind my house
does not ask to be saved.
It asks to be seen.
Winter keeps its mouth shut here;
frozen rows,
soil holding its breath,
cornstalks reduced to earth and
bone.
This land remembers
every hand that has taken from it,
every season forced to hurry,
every apology burned into the earth.
Justice, I think,
might look like *patience*.
Like letting the ground rest
without demanding proof.
Like learning the difference
between use and care.
Spring will come regardless.
The question is
what we will have left
for it to return to.

Justice Lives

(by *May Garner*)

Enough does not mean empty.
It means the table holds.
It means the children eat
without learning the shape of scarcity
too early.
Enough is a roof that does not threaten,
a body that is not punished
for existing in public,
a name pronounced correctly
without apology.
We have confused abundance
with extraction,
progress with speed,
success with how much we can carry away.
But justice lives
in the pause.
In choosing to stop taking
before the land,
or the people,
are reduced to proof.
A better world does not arrive all at once.
It is assembled –
piece by careful piece –
by those willing to say:
this is sufficient,
and to mean it.

POEMS:

BARBARA BONNEY

Barbara Bonney lives in Northern Kentucky. She has benefitted from numerous writing and critique groups, retreats, seminars, and classes. Barbara has delivered sermons and led classes on writing. She writes what matters to her.

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JEFFREY HILLARD

Jeffrey Hillard is a widely known author of poetry, fiction, and journalism. He is Professor Emeritus at Mount St. Joseph University, co-founder of Cincinnati Writers' Project.

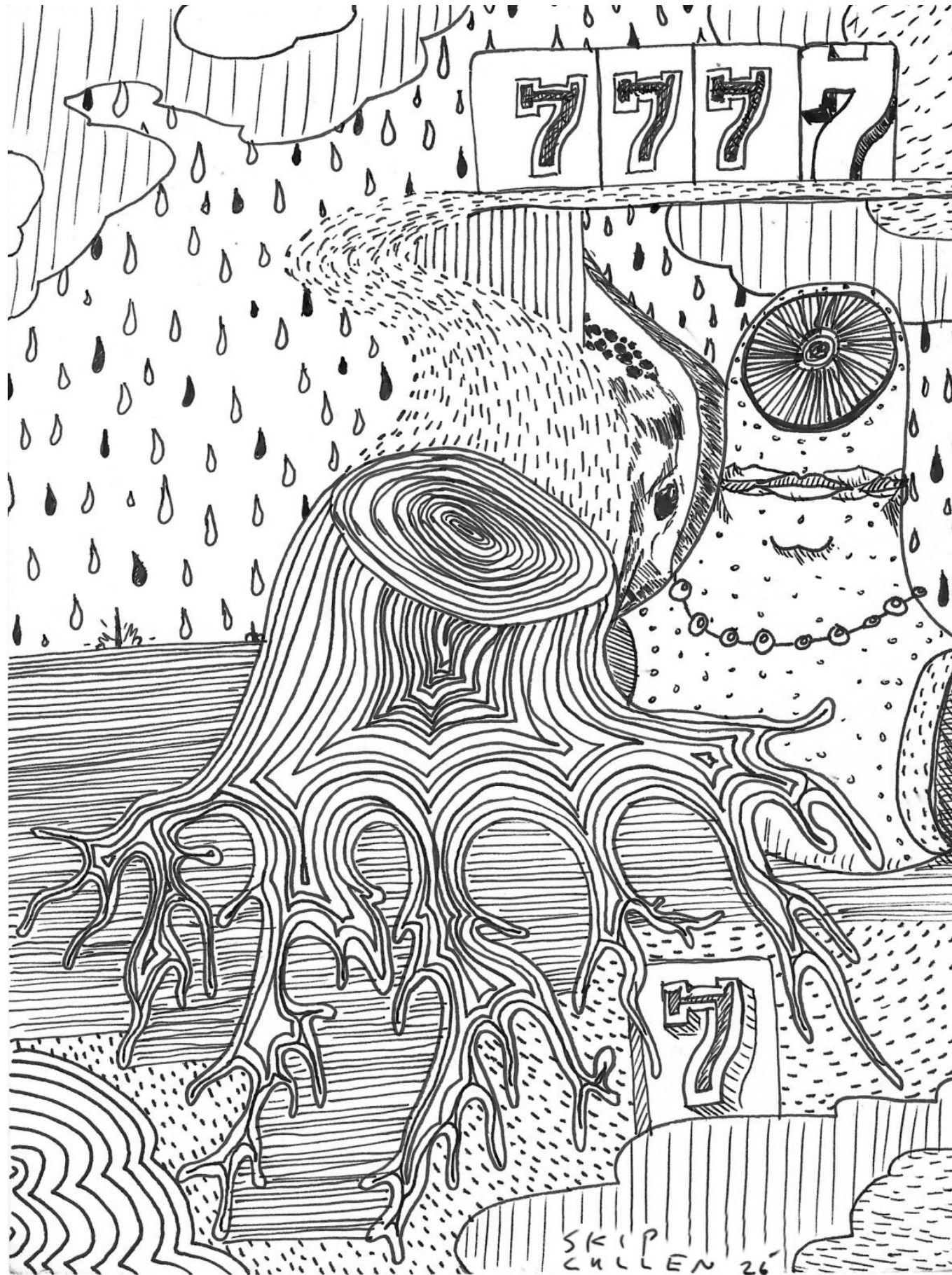
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DRAWING:

GEOFFREY "SKIP" CULLEN

Geoffrey "Skip" Cullen creates artwork personally and collaboratively through the lens of humility and maintenance. He is a co-founder of Wave Pool, a Cincinnati, Ohio based non-profit that pairs communities' knowledge of their needs with artists' sense of possibilities. Skip also was a co-founding member of the Adobe Books and Arts Cooperative in San Francisco, California.

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Dreaming of James Wright at the Hard Rock Casino

(by Jeffrey Hillard)

In the *Star Watch Fire* slot machine, his eyes glow.
 Out of the corner of an eye, he watches,
 careful now, his hand trembles as he crushes the handle.
 As a boy he watched the river. It was song.
 It delivered to his imagination the churning,
 rueful lyrics that slip into his hands
 like coins dropping, lodging between his fingers.
 The more he plays *Fire*, the less he wins. It's all less,
 like the thrill of seeing a dead tree fall into the Ohio River.
 He might get up from his seat. But he hates the dark. Every
 midnight, when there is no snow, he sits in front of his slot.
 What's left are raucous thrills; they become a force multiplier
 against which he rests his brow for a moment, while
 in his writing hand light snakes down, making a man tremble.

When Asked

(by Barbara Bonney)

He didn't answer my question, instead asked
 me—nudged me—toward my own answers.
 And they flew out of me as birds finally
 set free to find their own food, ride
 the currents, sing to their universe.

Watch me pluck threads and down from
 my cozy nest, watch them float
 back to their source, to another nest,
 to be caught in the next whirlwind.
 Now I loosen grasses I carefully wove,

keep essentials, make room for more.
 Use extras sparingly, except for others.
 Share radically when asked, recycle
 strong nests; take spectacular flight
 in murmuration.

Rooftop Farming

Havana, 1993

(by Jeffrey Hillard)

Even in the slow light
 of morning, a *turista*
 in the Hotel Presidente
 can look down and watch me

fling slop on my roof
 awash in buckets and troughs.
 When my pit fire flares
 against a chicken's sides,

my wife tonight will set
 her tortillas alongside
 beans and mangos I've grown
 next to the ventilator shaft.

In another roof corner,
 chicken and two hogs
 grow fatter, poised
 for stock, and across from them

a cock whose shrill song
 slaps at morning. Will we eat?
 Of course, *no problema*.
 Once a month I drag home

from my butcher brother
 a packaged carcass, each month
 fresh salt pork to last
 with eggs and goat's milk.

And I speak the language
 of *policia* which is,
 "Give us a pound of your meat,
 and we turn our heads."

The Murmuration

(by **Barbara Bonney**)

We felt it rise within
because it rose in one,
then two. We lift, then soar
together
skate, swirl with the wind.
Find my own dazzle
in the wonder
of the many.

On the Roof of the Hotel Presidente

Havana, Cuba, 1995

(by **Jeffrey Hillard**)

We walk on our toes as we're guided up the stairs.
Someone's foot breaks a stair plank somewhere below me.
The sea beyond us is like an empty black table.
Up to our ankles in jack-hammered concrete shards, we reach
the door near yellow tape around a future swimming pool.
We wade through chipped plaster, dust, and cinders,
high-step sawhorses, paint cans, and slip on rubble.
No voice lifts above the clack of crates as the wind
beats at loose slats. The sky we finally see empties
into the Port of Havana; pinkish light leaving the Gulf,
it is raking the city's colors into clear oblivion.
We move toward our memory of holes in the roof.
The guide shouts, "Steady your legs and just grip
A wooden beam. Let this last light show the wreckage."

POEMS:

NANCY SUSANNA BREEN

Nancy Susanna Breen has published four poetry chapbooks. Her work has appeared in *Common Threads*, *Kakalak*, and *Pine Mountain Sand & Gravel*. A retired editor, she lives in Loveland, Ohio.

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DONNA VIOX BRIGGER

Donna Viox Brigger, wife, mother, grandmother is a retired educator. She enjoys reading, writing, volunteering, walking and traveling with her family.

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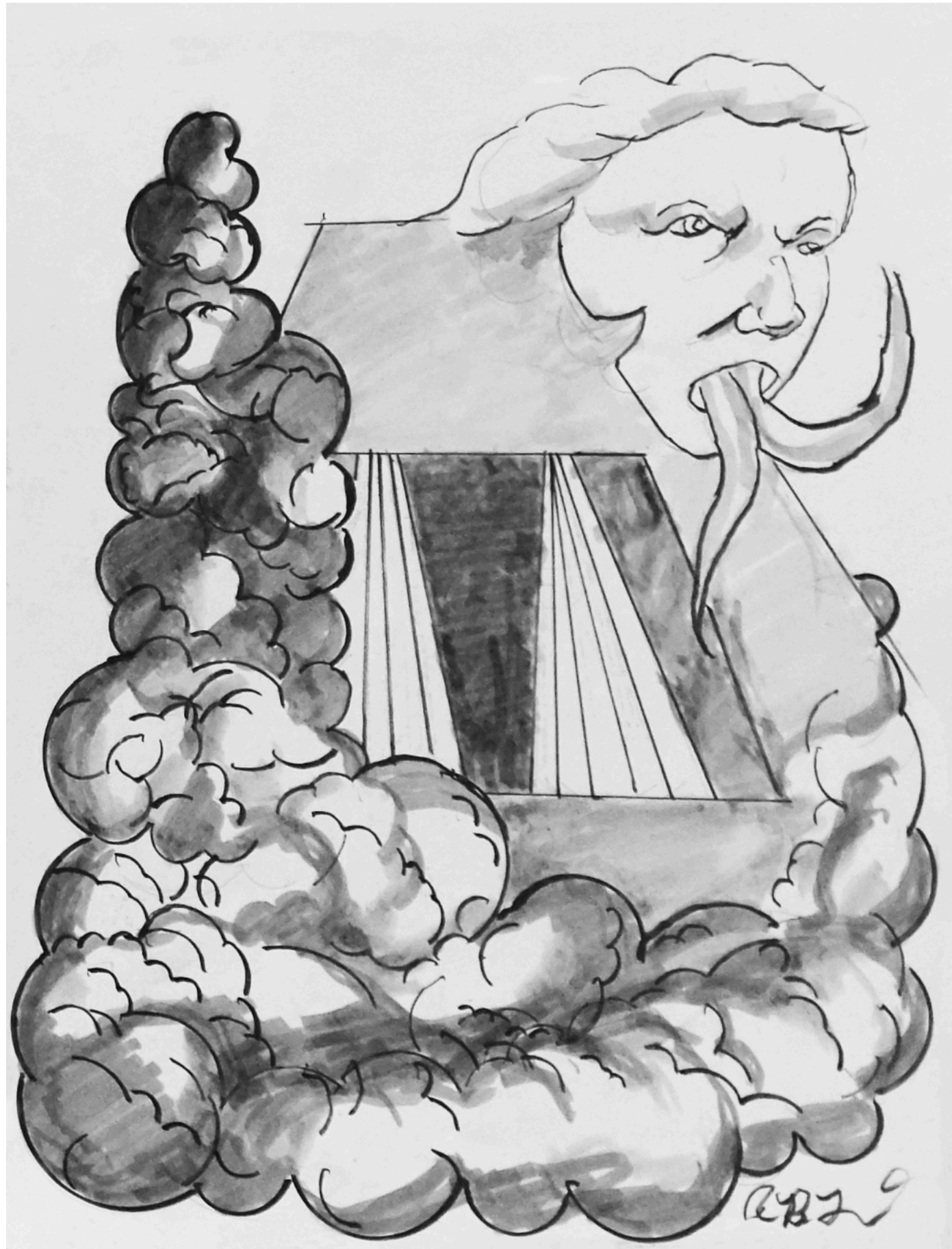
DRAWING:

RICK DEFORREST

Rick DeForrest, a figurative ceramic sculptor and illustrator based in Cincinnati, OH, received his BFA in Ceramics from Northern Kentucky University. Rick uses the figure as a vehicle to explore social justice issues. In 2013 he was an Artist in Residence at Queen City Clay, and in 2025, at SOS ART, both in Cincinnati, OH.

Rick's work has been displayed in many juried and invitational exhibitions throughout the Midwest.

Contact: rd572034@gmail.com; IG: @deforrestrichard



Recently Seen in DC

(by *Nancy Susanna Breen*)

A grotesque is ensconced
over the arched entry
to the halls of justice.
She's formed of rough flint, with cold,
hard eyes in a cold, hard face.
From her craggy mouth
a forked tongue whips and flicks.
She doesn't speak but caws
like an indignant crow.
*Are you calling me a liar?
Don't you ever
accuse me of a crime!*
Her mission is to block truth
from infiltrating the halls of justice
and to bar justice from leaking
into a deprived world.
From her arched perch,
she spreads her menacing shadow
wider, longer, darker
as the diminished sun sets
beyond the halls of justice.

Crucible

(by *Donna Viox Brigger*)

A thousand lakes
And mighty rivers
Contoured this land
Upon which
Minneapolis, *City of Water*
Land of Ojibwe and Dakota
Was settled.

Following the beacon of light
The North Star state
Became home and refuge
For those fleeing slavery,
Oppression, tyranny,
Swedes and French
German and English
Somalians and Hmong
All welcome.

Through strife and adversity
Conquests and compromises
Strengthened by faith
Generations of refugees
Melded cultures
Created communities of
Hospitality, compassion and
Commitment to American ideals.

Now defending one another
From masked, armed agents of ICE
Who kill peaceful protesters
The courageous masses unite
Strengthening their resolve to
Challenge the authoritarian regimes'
Defiance of the US Constitution.

Millions march peacefully for the
Pursuit of life and happiness,
With each passionate step
The chorus of freedom chants
Resoundingly demand
Liberty and justice for ALL!
All colors, nationalities, faiths, genders
Poor and rich, citizen and immigrant,
Our rallying cries are
The anthem for our people
Who are creating a more perfect union.

Raise Your Glasses, Be Upstanding

(by *Nancy Susanna Breen*)

A toast to the community watchers
keeping tabs on agent thugs, passing
out hand warmers, flushing
gas-reddened eyes with water.

*Make mine a shot of justice
over crushed ICE.*

A toast to those torn from their cars,
flung to the ground, crying out
they're citizens, they have
their papers, and the brutes
reply, "I don't care."

*Make mine a shot of justice
over crushed ICE.*

A toast to those who immigrated
in good faith, follow the rules,
keep the appointments, and
are waylaid and shunted off
to cavernous warehouse camps.

*Make mine a shot of justice
over crushed ICE.*

A toast to the children
who don't make it to school,
who worry all day no one
will be there when they get home,
who watch out windows
as parents and grandparents
form a protective ring
around the school.

*Make mine a shot of justice
over crushed ICE.*

A toast to those who simply
show up, marching in the cold,
marching despite the risk,
marching past blood-stained pavement
and massive memorials to the fallen,
marching, marching, nonetheless.

*Make mine a shot of justice
over crushed ICE.*

The Parade

(by *Nancy Susanna Breen*)

DHS is planning a Mardi Gras-style
one-float parade for the byways
and boulevards of Minneapolis.
It will consist of a flatbed truck
with a single armored vehicle
secured on top, fully manned
and fully loaded. Ringing
this vehicle will be ICE agents,
masked and upholstered in
bullet-proof everything.
As the float rumbles past crowds
throwing taunts and the finger,
the agents will toss strings of
rubber bullets, flash-bang grenades,
and tear gas canisters.
As the float approaches each
martyr shrine, it will slow down
so agents can clap their gloved hands
and stamp their booted feet
and roar, "*Laissez les bons temps rouler!*"
Sorry you can't witness this spectacle?
Sit tight. They're planning a parade
for your town, too.

POEMS:

ELLA CATHER-DAVIS

Ella Cather-Davis writes poetry, essays and children's stories to amuse her grandchildren. She holds an Associates of Arts degree in English Literature from the University of Cincinnati. Ella is a member of The Writer's Table, Greater Cincinnati Writer's League and Ohio Poetry Association. Her written work has been published in a number of books, anthologies and newspapers.

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DIANE GERMAINE

Named one of "8 to Watch" by Cincinnati Enquirer, Diane Germaine graduated with honors in English and Dance from Performing Arts High School (NYC). She received grants from NEA; City of Cincinnati; OAC; NYS Council on the Arts. Her written work was included in *For a Better World; Chronogram Magazine; A Few Good Words; Overseas Adventure Travel; OhioDance Newsletter*; and presented at Cincinnati live readings.

Contact: dgermaine.writer@gmail.com

DRAWING:

S. AUGUSTINE

Augustine is an artist based in Dayton, Ohio. Their primary medium is printmaking, but they also work with watercolor and pen and ink. When not making art, they are reading horror, hiking and running in the woods, or hanging out with their 5 cats and 1 rabbit.

Contact: slaug.art@proton.me; sla-art.square.site



Spring

(by *Diane Germaine*)

Branches still leafless
are arrayed below
a snow-covered roof
quietly waiting for melt.

The street, still covered,
has a brief meadow
harboring three deer
waiting for a signal to rise
and depart for the trees.

Their presence and
impending departure
are hinting of green and
bird-song emerging on air.

Tree

(by *Diane Germaine*)

Though it has
no more leaves
- no more golden turns
or star points -

It stretches out
reaching into the blue
still proclaiming
Here I am!

It may be dying,
but it hasn't forgotten
how to see, to feel,
to know being.

My World

(by *Ella Cather-Davis*)

In the morning, two mourning doves
sit atop the barn roof heralding the day.
The fog gently lifts her skirts from the grass
and an azure and rose sky hosts the Sun.

We sit, in awe of this holy spectacle.
Reverently we sit, work can wait.
The wet grass sighs as the Sun dries
and entreats it to rise up.

The pond hums its purring pump.
An occasional fish jumps and teases,
as curious deer stealthily tiptoe in
to drink, avoiding the hiding snakes.

A trip to the wood's canopy reveals
Shafts of sunlight dappling the forest floor.
Chipmunks and Squirrels skitter quickly
back and forth greeting us excitedly.

The great grandchildren pick wildflowers
for me, clutching tightly in their small hands
they solemnly gift them.
This place, I sigh, this sacred place.

The creek lies down a steep slope
where I can no longer go,
but the children fill the woods with laughter
as they scamper down to search for treasure.

All these years, the old farmhouse has
cradled us all in a world of ever new
and magical discoveries about life,
and --- about ourselves and who we are

Their World

(by *Ella Cather-Davis*)

At first the vision of the ethereal Sherry
seems odd, as she floats in the hallways
a bemused expression on her face,
all day and late into the evening.

Then there's Josie who will stop you singing
in French, motioning ballet graceful, her hands
to bring drama and flair to her gift.
Bowing gravely, she then departs.

The organizer, Shirley who stops in short visits,
anyone she can collar, advising them on how to avoid
certain lapses of judgement or certain disasters, then
having acquitted herself well, she moves quickly on.

Or the woman in the wheelchair which she navigates
to meals with a pent-up fury until all are present.
Then she draws a huge breath and shouts
"I want my Goddamn house back NOW!"

Or the man in the Navy cap who walks his beagle
trying to be of assistance to anyone who needs it,
a bit confused as to how he has come to be here.
(He's mine)

At Sundown they each morph into agitation enhanced
by the abject fear residing in these hallways and rooms.
This panoply of souls seeking each new day to make sense
of their surroundings and each other, in this alternate
dimension called Dementia.

POEMS:

GWEN CEE

Gwen Cee is a Kentucky-born, Texas-raised, #ThirdCoastMade poet, HRVP, and 10x author with two albums, *Venom* and *#CeeTheWorth* that she created to combat police killings of unarmed POC. Gwen served as Chairperson of the Cross-Cultural Committee on the Louisville Human Relations Board. She competed four times in Southern Fried and created "the ceed" writing workshop and "artcee" mini poetry fest.

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IG: she_aint_fancee; linkedin.com/in/gwendolyn-pearce

JUANITA MAYS

Juanita Mays is an eighty-six year old Appalachian, raised in rural Scioto County. Her poetry often reflects this simplicity. Juanita is never far from sunny days wading in the creek or doing homework by the orange glow of a kerosene lamp. She reminds friends and family that everyone on earth has a story and that our job is...to listen.

Contact: juanpoet39@gmail.com

DRAWING:

EDDY RISIMINI

Eddy Risimini is a multimedia Kentuckian artist who focuses on themes of social and psychological behavior. From a queer perspective, he uses his transgender identity and Catholic upbringing to explore the intersection of doctrine and self-discovery. Through his work, Eddy poses the question: who are we really?

Contact: edrisimini@gmail.com; IG: earlgrey_arts



Caddy Risimini

Questionable

(by *Gwen Cee*)

Why does the Constitution fall
when it is supposed to stand?

Why doesn't pattern talk
Itself into leaving lines?

Why does justification swim
in rivers of protest?

How's it airing dirty laundry
when lonesome removes its pieces of lint?

Why do taste buds cry
when things dissolve?

Why doesn't the driving force
ensure the road never ends?

If nature is perfect
how did the world end up like this?

If rights exist
why is the moon always left out?

If winter is on the tongue
why are words taken for granted before melting?

Why does air stay
if all things come to a natural ending?

What is a complicated mass
doing with simple scripture?

Why does the prophecy cry
when the system works as planned?

Why does it pour
when blue gets heavy?

Who danced
when the first raindrop fell?

Why doesn't desire knock louder
when motivation won't come out?

Why doesn't the teacher make lesson plans
for after the lessons?

Why does a poet be all things
Adam and Eve, atom and ink?

Why does a poem be art official
Healing when someone's words are artificial?

Why does a poet abandon randomness
and form new theories?

Why does a poem query
into the heart of the Constitution?

Why do poems' ink fall to page?

Cause poets' tears "pen" the Constitution on
stage.

What Poets Know

(by *Juanita Mays*)

Gaze long into poetry...
enter into the hillside's mind.
with keys lost and found,
unlock experiences,
exist inside of tree rings,
hanging onto the outskirts of time.

Travel to where blackberry
becomes a bruised indigo planet
with hairy secrets
to tentacle and tell.

Become wasp wings;
acknowledge that all poets live here
by candle's whispering light.

With whiplash egos
and red dog eyes,
pry open old lockets
and love too deeply.
Unravel rugs
and braid your unravelings
into baskets of knowing;
recognize
those who belong...
in our empty chairs.

Ekphrastic Seed Against the Script

A Palindrome for Peace

(by **Gwen Cee**)

Air is institutionalized.
Sentiment vacated.
Horns blowing, sirens whistling
Ring, ring, ringing untruths.
Relentless loyalty.
Come the alarm
Run silver stairs, jog...
All shall enter or exit the institution
...at God's pre-planned time.
Attempt to breathe.
Black, white, brown...
Smog serenades us, silently
...until it isn't silence.
Resurfacing, time after time
...violently...
Wearers of glass shields
...creating their own interpretations.
They know not
...they see distortion in reflection.
Swaying own minds.
Public enemies.
Hats be straight, but seen as cocked.
Eyes be enchanting, but seen as dark.
Integrity be undeviating
...but seen as crooked.

Cuts be open, doom, wounds go unseen.
Unnoticed.
Minds don't mind...
Being stretched from adherence
...to exhaustion
...and back
Back, back, backing up in unison
...support system.
Stack, stack, stacking up...
La familia.
Brothers, sisters, mankind...
Food for thought, share...
Savor eachother without wanting to bite.
Provide for another, today.
Make worldly noise
...into tomorrow's golden silence
Serenity from changes
...based on today's taught LOVE language.
Envision.
Kiss spirits of living more.
Less, flowering in vain.
Sprouting, end pain.

The Environment Twenty-Six Years Ago

(by **Juanita Mays**)

This container
is definitely too small...
are you certain
that God resides in here?

Living inside this box
feels so damn political
like being sterilized
two seconds after the sperm is loosed.

An idea-extinguisher
hangs on the wall next to
a picture of golden puppies...
what fool hung those
over my alarm?

A timid desire rises
(on occasion)
but if we pass go
and collect our money
and manage to stay out of jail –
that slight stirring
might be snuffed.

Curtains have obscured our stars...
“This is not pollution!”
the box men persuade us...
and we inhale their lace-panel-lies.

Latent human affections
rattle at the blinds,
riddle our minds...and
an unreasonable hope
fingers our eyelids to nearly open.

Can this unbridge be broken
between the haves and have-nots...
will anyone escape the flood...
and how many will die
for lack of a co-pay?

POEMS:

LAUREL CHAMBERS

Laurel Chambers, born and raised in Cleveland, has called Cincinnati her home since graduating from college. Her first chapbook is *Places in the Mist*, and her poetry has been published in *Within Us*, *Poetry X Hunger*, *For a Better World*, and *Anthropocene: Poems About Environment*. Laurel is a former English and Journalism teacher who believes that poetry has the power to help us hear the words rising from our own hearts as well as the hearts of others.

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RITA COLEMAN

Rita Coleman has been named an honorary Cincinnati even though she lives in Greene County, Ohio. She loves the rural home she shares with her amazing husband, Pugzu dog, Maine Coon cat, and Mini-Satin rabbit. Rita's poetry books include, *In the Near Beyond*, *And Yet*, and *Mystic Connections*.

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DRAWING:

JOSIE LOVE ROEBUCK

Josie Love Roebuck, an interdisciplinary artist who creates tapestry-like-quilts, is based in Fairborn, Ohio. She received her MFA from the University of Cincinnati (2021) and her BFA from the University of Georgia (2019). Josie is a storyteller- a weaver of perspectives and identity. Her work delves into the depths of human pain, while simultaneously highlighting the healing journey that follows. It has been exhibited both nationally and internationally.

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IG: [josielloveroebuckstudio](https://www.instagram.com/josielloveroebuckstudio)



A Street in Gaza

(by *Laurel Chambers*)

First, the sound of planes, ten, maybe twenty.
A bomb hurtles down on the block where you live.
Like steel knuckles, it punches the face of the earth,
shatters its skull, pushes a torch into the wound.
Fire, like boiling copper rises into the night.
Thundering echoes rumble, ring in your ears.
All sounds, all sights, swirl, a lens out of focus.

Buildings collapse, shards of glass, shredded walls.
The bakery where you bought Taboon,
a hole in the ground full of black smoke.
You stagger with the others down dark streets
single file holding each other's trembling hands,
tripping over bricks, wires, scraps of flesh.
The child you carry burrows deep into your chest.

You are a mouse bumping into the walls of a cage.
Trapped, no escape, little food, no water.
Breathing hurts. Fear has a stranglehold on your voice.
You keep moving, stumbling somewhere, some place.
A man in the back of the line shouts above the roar.
Look up, look up. You stand still, lift your head.
There are blood splatters on the moon.

Pass The Baby Up: Kabul, Afghanistan

(by *Rita Coleman*)

Pass the baby up to god,
to the soldier in camouflage,
12-days old of baby girl
mouth a-squall, pink legs
spastic, churning, pass
her up until her father's
hands feel the lift from
the camo arm reaching far
over razor wire.

Half a world away, I watch
the little one passed to another
soldier, the calm of the blue-gray
skies behind them belying
desperation below, their arms
upraised for invisible help,
a boy a-stride strong shoulders,
a woman in a white hijab.

Helpless, other than to weep
along with those in Kabul,
the door of last chance
closing too fast, I remember
another withdrawal in another
country halfway around the world
a half-century ago that left so many
waiting for the last helicopter,
already filled to capacity,
to leave the steam of the jungle,
to leave Saigon.

Then, as now, thousands
will wail and moan as hope
flies away, will cook rice, add
spice or whatever else might
be found, gather themselves
to mats at night, flee from
the heavy hands of blood,
all of them left behind.
Some will survive, some will
escape. Some will die.
All will be scarred.

The Connection of Air: Mariupol, Ukraine

(by *Rita Coleman*)

I breathe in air that circles the globe,
a limitless wind that curls and hurls
and stops sometimes--for a moment,
it seems--for the screams of the savaged,
of a pregnant woman deafened by a bomb
that shot shock waves through her body
and her unborn's, stunned their tissues
and organs and bones, that crashed
a stone wall onto her body, crushed
her pelvis, once a safe girdle
for a small life, ripped her hip
from its socket as overpressure sucked
back the blast waves. When her baby
was born dead, she demanded the doctor kill
her. Absent keening women, her wails echoed
in the ruins, her fury upsurged in the night sky
where a cold wind pushed her words into the
air that circles the globe, the air I breathe.

Never Hungry

(by *Laurel Chambers*)

They were never hungry, just starving
for flavor; a pile of salty potato chips,
chocolate sticking on the roof of their mouths,
an orange, juice dripping down their lips.
Vanilla ice cream melting on their tongues.

The week before mother's pay day, they knew
how smooth a bare kitchen shelf could be.
Loaves of cheap white bread in the drawer.
Some dry cereal at the bottom of a box,
no milk, a bland but filling after school snack.

Mountains of mashed potatoes for dinner
with tomato sauce or packaged gravy on top.
In bed, they looked forward to school lunch.
The steamed burger, the crunch of an apple,
two Oreo cookies, which they always ate first.

When kids stopped at the Bonnie Lou Bakery
for fresh cinnamon rolls, they kept walking.
Had to get home to help mom, to babysit,
to go somewhere, to do something, anything.
They hurried past the fruity smell of warm pies.

People saw them as sturdy children, good athletes.
Strong, silent in the way they carried their shame.
It was the plain beige taste of their lives that hurt
the most. They stuck together, lonely outcasts
in a world battering them with colors and candy.

POEMS:

VICKIE CIMPRICH

Northern Kentuckian Vickie Cimprich's work includes *Pretty Mother's Home - A Shakeress Daybook*, blank verse featuring historic and imagined persons/events at The Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill. Her "Free and Freed Shakers and Affiliates of African Descent at the Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill" appears in *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*. Her *Contrary-wise* poems feature Lee County, KY. people, plants and animals.

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SHERIE SHAFFER

Sherie Shaffer has had poetry and paintings published in the literary magazines *Quiz & Quill*, *Spring Street*, *For A Better World 2023*, and *Sticks*. She is most energized and inspired to write when enveloped by nature.

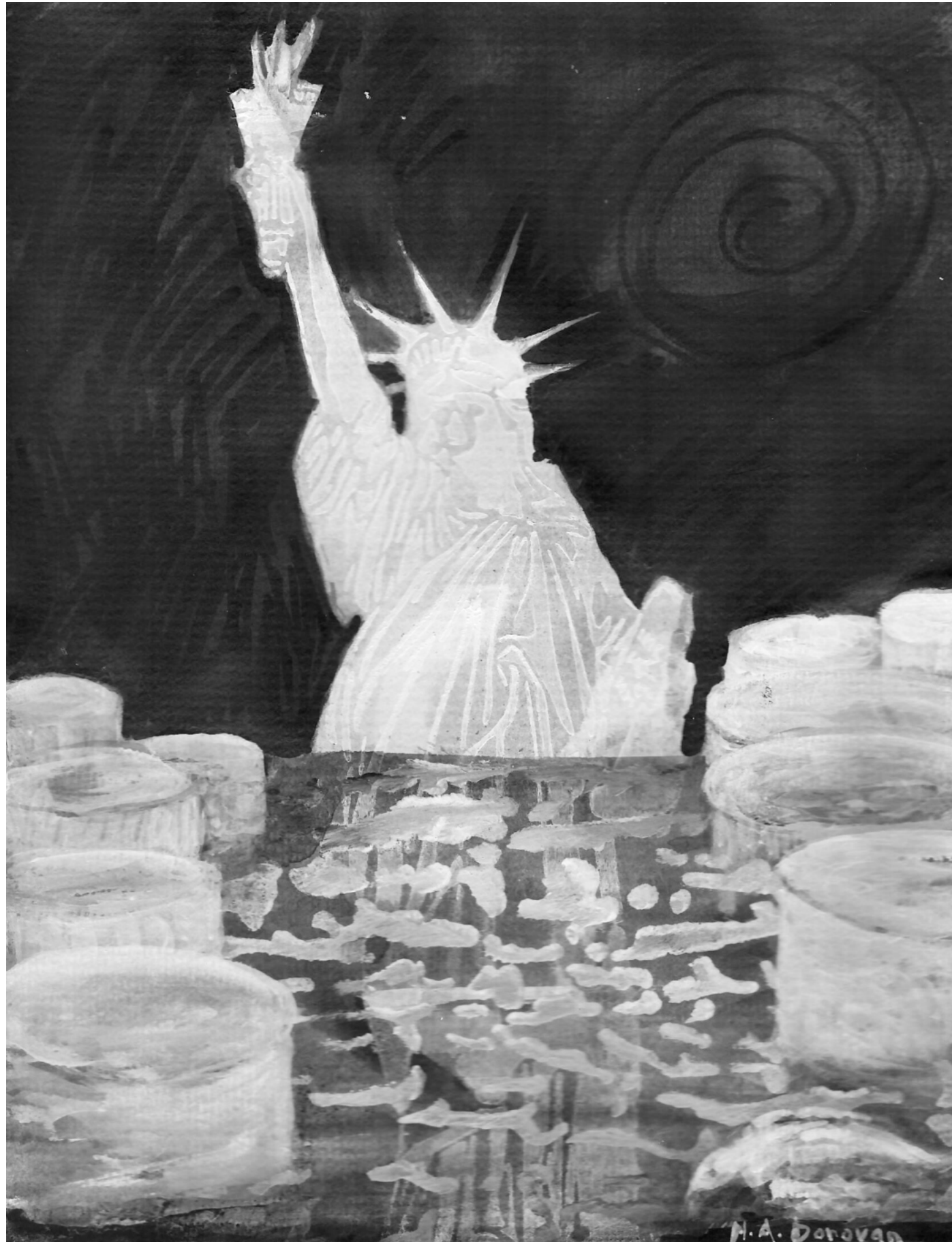
Contact: sherie.shaf@gmail.com

DRAWING:

MARY ANNE DONOVAN

Mary Anne Donovan has a BFA in Art Education (UC/DAAP) and an MFA in Painting and Sculpture (University of Montana). She has exhibited her work regionally, nationally and internationally. Over several decades, she has explored oil, acrylic, mixed media, ceramic, and sculptures. For 21 years, Mary Anne was a Lead Teacher/Art Specialist in the Cincinnati Public Schools, earning several Art Teacher Awards from the Ohio Art Education Association.

Contact: maryanne-donovan.com; IG: [mad484848](https://www.instagram.com/mad484848)



The Valley

(by *Sherie Shaffer*)

Shaped like round hat boxes,
each one
taking up the space
of several city blocks;
bleached-bone white reservoirs
brimming with chemicals
surround our city.
They call this,
“The Chemical Valley.”

Railroad tanker cars,
riverboats, and semis,
pasted with hazardous waste decals,
move their cargo
like an army of ants.
A filmy, unsuspecting river glides by
as languid water birds graze
from the jaundiced water.

Locals warn us:
“Don’t drink the city water!”
“Don’t eat fish from the river!”
“Get your car washed and polished often!”

They say things are better now;
that it’s been cleaned up.

My skeptical, nervous self wonders,
“Do we live in The Valley of a Ticking
Timebomb?”

Local Salamanders

(by *Vickie Cimprich*)

Fog roils up the ravine and pervades.
Winkle stones in the yard
would shelter ant and yellow jacket nests,
worms, the occasional tarpin
and small salamanders
when my household first moved
to Highland Avenue decades ago.

Twiggy elbowed arms and legs,
five-toed feet reach,
reddish black skin glistles,
when daylight makes surprises of them
to gardeners like me
and to children
whose ambition
is to dig to China
or hell.

I once watched a puddle
alongside Contrary Creek,
where six of the yellow spotted
were rubbing along
each other’s breathing skins

Now nearby our street,
Walmart, strip malls, Planet Fitness
and their parking lots form the relentless ceilings
no amphibians want to hit their heads on.
Banklick Creek! Banklick Creek!
may be the hue and cry to which
their generations have deserted.

Prairie Evening

(by *Sherie Shaffer*)

Leaden being,
teetering balance,
I focus,
mesmerized
by a firefly's fluorescent beacon.
I hear her yellow siren's song.

Enticed,
I wish to fly away,
flee the dark impending storm.

Golden prairie grasses sway,
dancing to wind's melody.
Brown grasshoppers jubilate.

Encircling watching woods reply,
with croaks of tree frogs,
cycles of cicadas.

Branches sweep the sky,
delivering whiffs of spiced perfume,
aging leaves,
a promise of life.

I widen my gaze to realize
this evening prairie is bursting
with firefly fireworks.

I shall not be alone in the storm.
I will take shelter in the support
and arms of Light, Love and Joy.

POEMS:

MAUREEN CONLAN

Maureen (Mo) Conlan worked more than 30 years as a journalist for her hometown daily, *The Cincinnati Post*. Since then, she has been writing poetry and fiction. Mo is also an artist who was featured artist in *Poetry East* magazine. Her novel *The Lost Books – Romance and Adventure in Tudor Times* is at Amazon and other venues.

Contact: moconlanwordsandart.com

LISA PRANTL

Lisa Prantl is a Cincinnati-based writer, gardener, death midwife, and periodic writing circle facilitator at Women Writing for (a) Change®. Her poems have appeared in a number of anthologies. Lisa believes poetry is a way to make sense of an astonishing and hurting world.

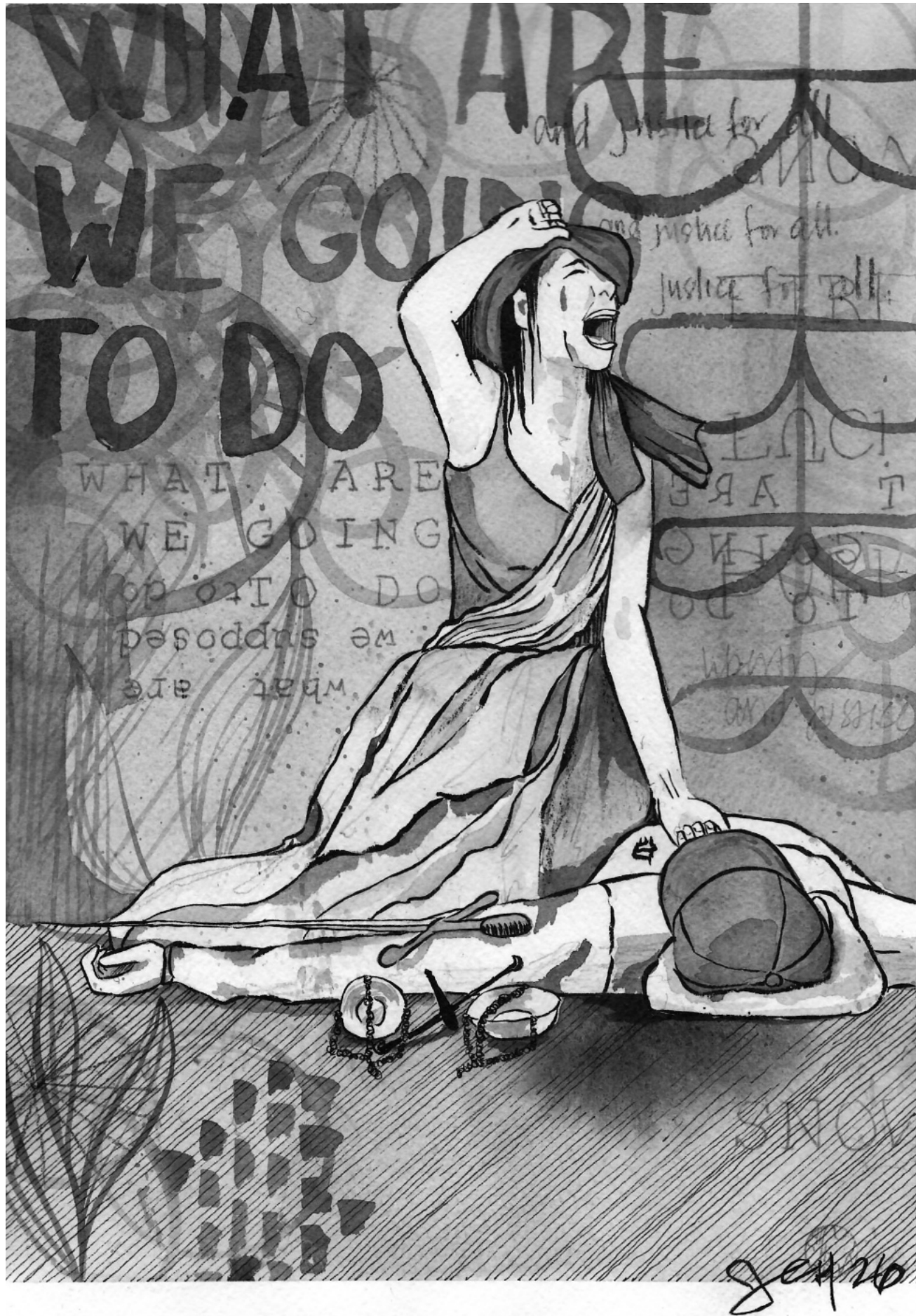
Contact: peace.lap@gmail.com

DRAWING:

JANICE HUDSON

A multidisciplinary artist and educator, Janice Hudson works across painting, illustration, graphic design, and fiber arts to create work that is intentional, colorful, and deeply human. She has exhibited internationally, taught workshops across the U.S. and Japan, and founded The Gritty Canvas, a nonprofit offering free art instruction to adults affected by cancer. Her practice lives at the intersection of art, community, and purpose.

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January

(by *Mo Conlan*)

Just get through January
I tell myself as I search for Wordle
trying to avoid headlines in The Times.
Just get through January I tell my cat
piteously waiting for the wet food.

I scan a gray steel sky
as temperatures plummet.
One saving reprieve arrives
in the purity of snowfall,
brief, unsullied.

Just get through today I say
as my heart goes numb,
as I fail to call my sisters,
as I check my bank balance,
send money to the ACLU,
to Doctors Without Borders,
and a legal fund for immigrants.

Are we not all immigrants now –
I ask myself as I think
what to do?
What to do?

Calling All Dryads

(by *Lisa Prantl*)

Every single day
stomachs are turned
and hearts broken
by disfunction and disruption
for disruption's sake
and power, of course,
and greed that feeds itself
over and over again
like a snake eating its tail.

A tree crashes to the ground
in a gale force multiplied by
new weather patterns
and everything is different
brazen light where it was
filtered before
cooling shade gone
what does survival look like now
standing alone
this Red Maple,
Bur Oak, Sycamore.

A Tulip Poplar
meets sodden rain again
and again until
the so-called liberty tree topples
uprooted tree-fall and
uprooted metaphor
for a country in freefall.

An American beech tree
offers bark as blank pages
its branches out-stretched
wild in the wind
intentions good
but limbs overburdened.

If a country falls in the world
and no one is listening
does it make a sound

even the wind screams
says the wind.

Evolution in Four Days

(by *Lisa Prantl*)

Day 1

These are raw times
bones laid bare and rattling
our skin is peeled back daily
exposure trebles pain
multiplies anguish.

Day 2

There's a fire inside me
fed by news
of dollars accumulating
in unfathomable numbers
and unchecked power.

it burns hotter and faster
than the ground swell of
flames in places
that are not DC
that are more PC than
those at the head of
our country.

what loosened your screws
bound your hearts
fixed your truths with egos
that burn away the peripheral
and pinpoint you to yourselves
absolving self absolutely.

Day 3

Where is ease
where is flow
where are sustaining rations
for the rationale.

Day 4

Aggressions slip through
my nervous system
as though it is a funnel
for all that is hard and
horrifying
agency and action
are the sieve

still, I say fuck more times
a day than I say
hope.

Body Politic

(by *Lisa Prantl*)

Body as weapon
body as pawn, in this new
autocratic dawn.

POEMS:

BETTINA ERNST

Bettina Ernst is a poet and playwright from Cincinnati, Ohio. She graduated from Loyola Marymount University in 2024. With her short play *Loving, We Freed Ourselves*, she ranked as a national semi-finalist in the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival short play competition. Outside of writing, Bettina spends her time working in solidarity with local pro-Palestine groups.

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JOSIE SMITH

Josie Smith currently works in communications and uses poetry as a lens for seeing the beautiful and the divine in our world. Her work has appeared in *Metaphorosis Magazine*, *The Midwest's Best Emerging Poets 2018*, *Ohio's Best Emerging Poets 2019*, and several *For A Better World* anthologies. When not writing, Josie enjoys traveling, running, and getting lost in nature.

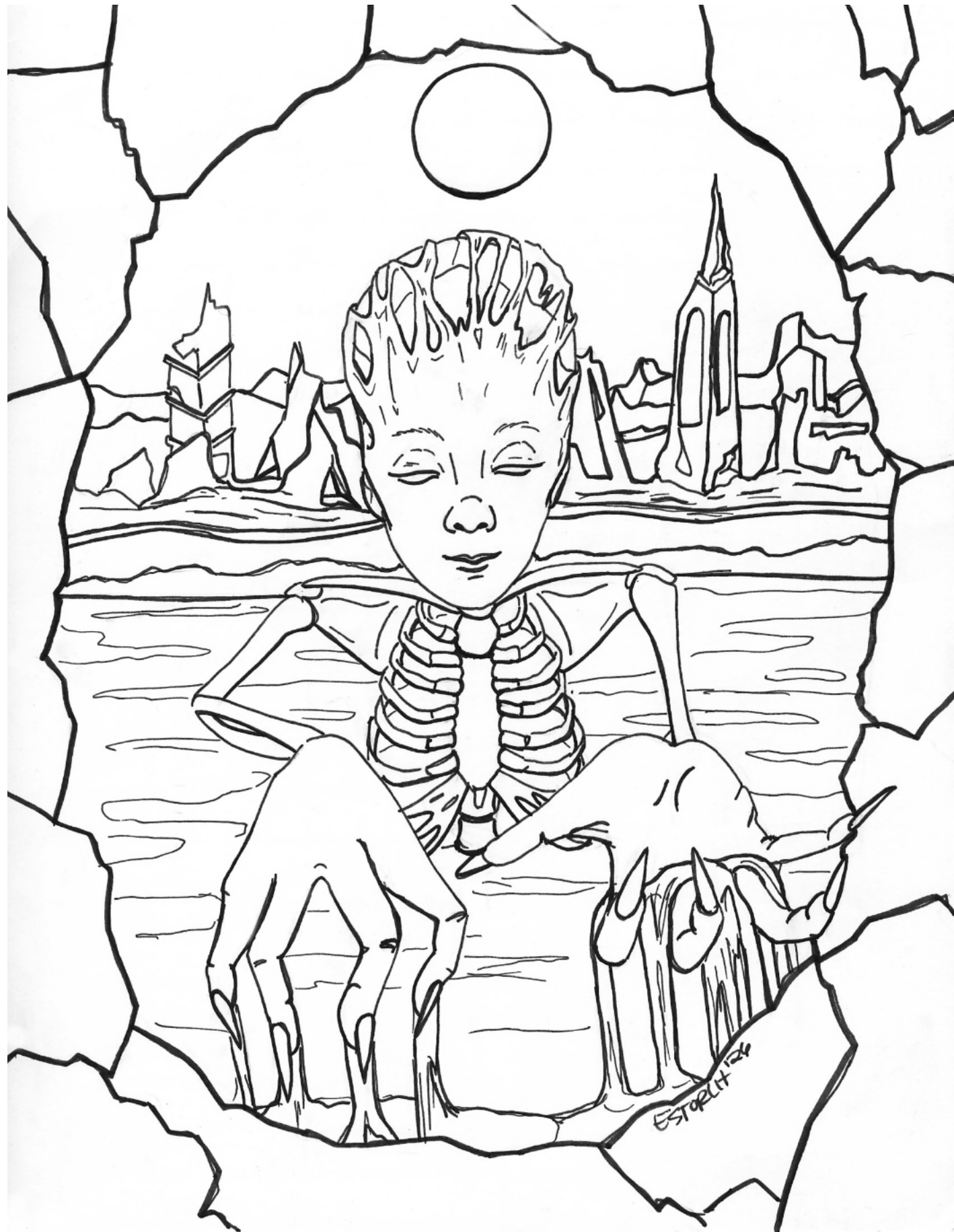
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DRAWING:

EMILY STORCH

Emily Storch is an educator who lives in Lexington, Kentucky with her husband Shaun. She is originally from Cincinnati, and a 2007 and 2011 DAAP graduate. She currently works as an art teacher at a rural high school and makes art on the side.

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The Survey

(by *Bettina Ernst*)

The survey asked me "What do you have to live for?"
I asked back "Can't I just live?"
But it was a cheap response, a thoughtless purchase
selected in line for the drug-store check out.

The spiral of the future, sketched out by a hasty hand
turns inward, a glimpse, not of one fantastical eden,
but a thousand blossoming sidewalks.
Wildflowers we used to call weeds
devour every border wall, checkpoint, prison,
monuments of restriction choked,
their gaping mouths gagged by our refusal.

You, you were there too, so alive it almost broke my heart.
In the evening you shook the dust off your dance clothes
and walked out into the ruined oxygen.
You returned as the elastic night stretched too far and broke
into dawn.
You said your soft prayer for the sick and forgotten
and laid your head down to rest.

But now, on the other side of the world,
a child discovers his own fingernails, fragile and sweet
Until he is nourished, our souls go hungry.

A Conversation with Emily

(by *Josie Smith*)

I stand with you
Emily
on hope being
a soul shackled
singing in the dark

but Emily I disagree
hope is no soft
feathered thing
have you seen
this world lately
how it
burns
breaks
bleeds

the quiet creature
perched in a cage?
No.
hope is to use
your claws and teeth
against this world
to remake anew

a single river
carving canyons
hands pulling stones
from the rubble
to rebuild your home

hope is a black eye
a clenched jaw
not hollow bones
that won't withstand

it is bent over
on one knee
broken
bloody
bruised
a deep breath
and up you get

On Stand(ing) By

(by *Bettina Ernst*)

The mystics whispered of a name for God so terrible it cracked the hammer of the tongue against the gong of the teeth, shattered the jaw, ripped the soul from the spine, separated *human* from *being*.

I wish words had such power, so with a few syllables I could slide apartheid walls to mud, redraw buildings from ruin, split bullets into poppy seeds, retune drone hum into bird song, reattach a child's face to their skull, then I would not be *here*, digging half moon indents into my palms.

Who am I to cry? Tears don't flood the delta, can't stop army tanks in their tracks. Soldiers sate their thirst on a wishing well of permissions, granted, granted, granted again while I sit in my silent citadel of sunsets, enjoying the oil paint orange of a chemical dusk, infected pleasures.

Courage: the only animal that could feed my wretched heart —

— but to reach out and take it, place its neck between forefinger and thumb and snap to reach the meat inside. I hope that if I caught the wrist of our enemies between my teeth, I would have the guts to break skin, burst capillaries, draw blood, bite down, bite through, bite back.

POEMS:

DON FLEMING

Don Fleming writes poetry in retirement and resides in Crescent Springs, KY. His poetry has been exhibited at Centre College in *EAT: A Literature + Photo Installation* at the Norton Center for the Arts. His poems have been published in: *Parody Poetry*; *Pegasus*; and the anthology *These Summer Months: Stories from The Late Orphan Project*.

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SANDY LITTERAL

Sandy Litteral lives and dabbles in herbs and words in the beautiful foothills of Northeastern Kentucky. It's there that she hikes and forages for edibles and inspiration. The history and culture of the area also encourages her artwork - mostly Assemblage. Sandy enjoys gatherings with her fellow poets and artists.

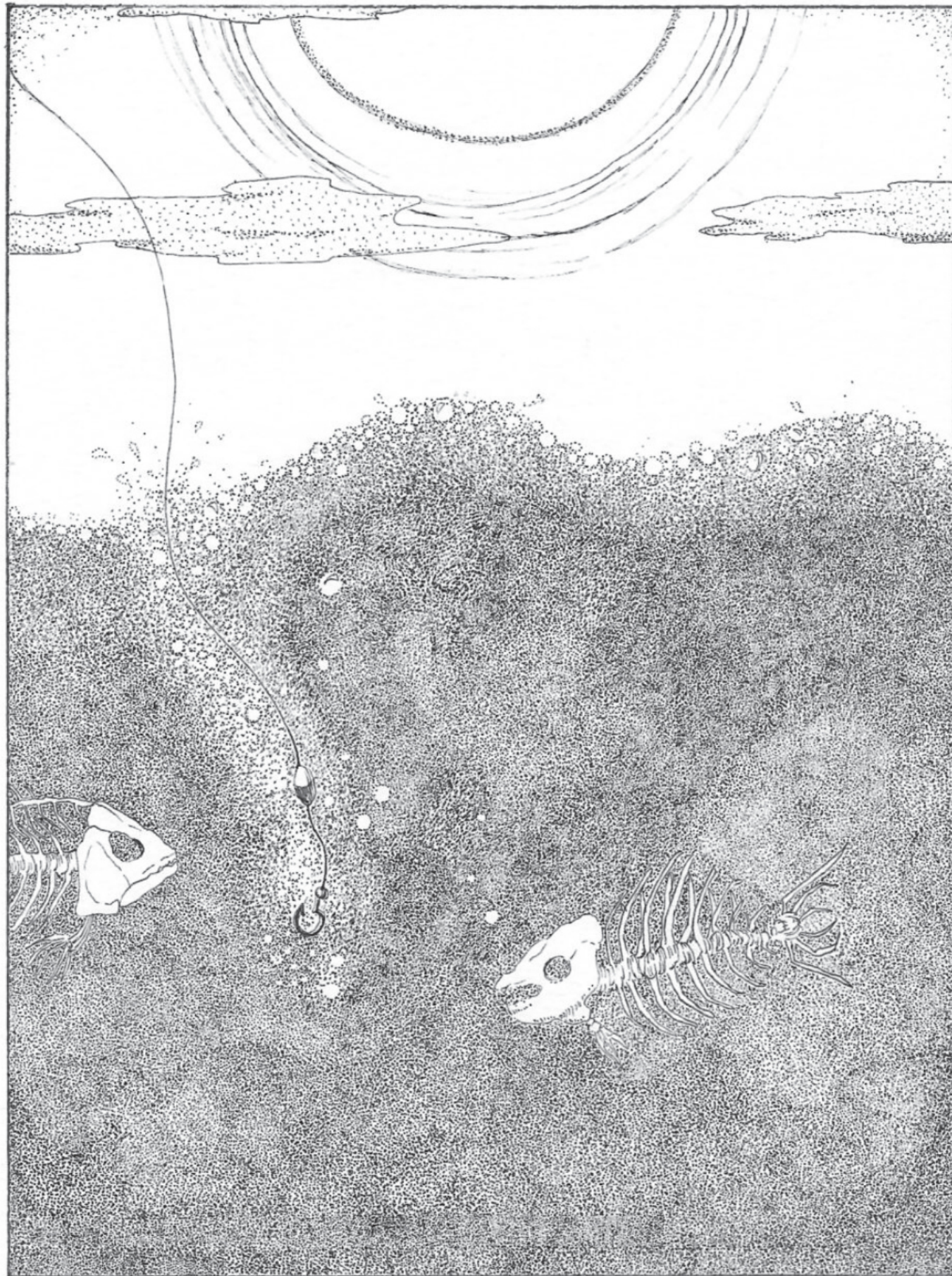
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DRAWING:

ZOEY TRIMBLE

Zoey Trimble, born in 2005, is a self-taught illustrator working primarily in ink. She has experience in icon art and comic book illustration.

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Zoey Trimble

What If They Knew

(by *Don Fleming*)

Of course they didn't, but what if they knew that in a hundred years or two, burning fossil fuel would overheat our earth? It would melt sea and glacial ice; cause coastal flooding; result in movement or extinction of plant, animal and insect species; cause changes in weather and sea water flows with unknown consequences on severe storms and droughts, increasing floods, crop failure and forest fires; and from each of these calamities further devastation could ensue.

Of course they couldn't know, and with their lives, their families and their fortunes they built a web extending far and wide in directions surprising. With ingenuity, enterprise and fossil fuel they built power plants and transmission lines, and all manner of manufacturing to use that power. They invented engines, railroads, vehicles, heating systems and chemicals; and built a web of industry, business and commerce serving consumers. Built their web thread by interconnecting thread over the years based upon that fossil fuel.

This web was woven into the fabric of so many lives, that many decades later when their web was shaken by true news of global warming, the fear was great so keepers of the web did pursue every avenue to defend fossil fuel, some knowing their refusal to compromise was likely causing earth's demise.

We'll never know what the first founders of the fossil fuel web, if here today, would do. But I suspect possessed of a grand entrepreneurial view, they'd seek opportunities new, and finding the power possessed by the sun, they'd move on to build their web anew. I feel sure the founders would understand that a broom is needed for old spider webs when the time for housecleaning is due.

Be The Change, It Matters

(by *Sandy Litteral*)

Don't leave Mother Earth in tatters
Sustainability must be embraced
Please be the change, it matters

Our efforts to save her are just smatters
Our smoggy skies need to be erased
Don't leave Mother Earth in tatters

Before her glaciers crack and shatter
Her mountain ranges, all defaced
Please be the change, it matters

Wasting resources, like mad hatters
Conservation efforts become slow-paced
Don't leave Mother Earth in tatters

We reject climate talks like hapless natters
We now stand before the world,
shamefaced
Please be the change, it matters

When science prevails, and ignorance
scatters
With health and gratitude, we'll be graced
Don't leave Mother Earth in tatters
Please be the change, it matters

POEMS:

JAMES GEORGE

James George retired as a consultant to the federal government and as a Washington-based journalist. He has published thirty books and was awarded for lifetime achievement by *AllPoetry.com*. James is a watercolorist who paints daily and posts his work on Substack.

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LONNA KINGSBURY

Lonna D. Kingsbury is once again honored to share her thoughts on peace and justice amidst this gathering of fellow artists. Simply put - her initial message since childhood has really never changed over these many years. We create. We contribute. We connect. Our connection creates change!

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DRAWING:

MARK ULLRICH

Mark Ullrich was born in Cincinnati. He earned in 1982 a BFA from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Mark has shown work in numerous art exhibitions in Ohio and New England. His paintings can be found in private and public collections.

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Full Circle

(by James George)

Bear in mind, people live on the average. That is, we are bunched in the middle of the bell-shaped curve, all of us, everywhere.

Average well-being includes how people feel about their unique place in life.

It is both subjective and objective whereas 'happiness' is subjective, and objective conditions include income, education, and health that are all relative to a shared index accounting for emotional, physical, social and economic states.

Many governments prefer not to be accountable or to have their performance gauged by external standards. They adhere to the value of sovereignty, and independence over shared human standards and rules such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

There are international standards for the environment, such as ISO 14001, however, America, once a leading democratic nation has turned its back on global accountability and is now a renegade nation, hell-bent for the destruction of human equality, freedom, and the environment.

The outcome of America's struggle for renewed accountability will determine the fate of the world, war or peace, life or death, whereas death begins slow before reaching a pivotal point of no return, and that is the state of our human affairs.

Back to the Basics

(by Lonna Kingsbury)

Back to the basics
he said / she said.
Back to the basics
we said / they said.
Back to the basics
I said / you said.
Here we go again.
Going down -
Gettin' down -
down to them / their bones - again
way before the facin'
way before the chasin'
way before the wavin' flags
cast different minds aside.
We cry
We shall overcome - again
attacking different preferences
comparing scenes from now to then
as corrupt leaders flaunt ideals
opposed to actual deeds.

Such thoughts had simmered slowly
stirred - thickened - flavored -
 brewed by hand
to satisfy the masses
for them to swallow whole.
We showed
how neither side has grown.

Happy New Year

(by *Lonna Kingsbury*)

With the running
and the fuming
at the prices
all consuming
and the plastic service everywhere
we form our lines and stand.

Waiting for our number
viewing Dumb and Dumber
reruns on the monitors
the commercial breaks right in . . .

Cast your vote!

Assure your favorite savior
you would cherish most
be it food, insurance, candidate

All espousing truth.

Forget the global crisis
Jerusalem and ISIS
earthquakes, floods and forest fires
and the cost of your French Toast

Know it will get better.
It's early, you remember.
Things were much worse yesterday.

My brain retorts now.
"Well,
really, I don't know . . ."

The siren blares.
The screen goes blank.
Silence
Chatter
Swearing
I tell myself "Breathe deep and know
the lights and screen will reappear".
The smoke snakes through the room.

POEMS:

JO ANNE MOSER GIBBONS

Jo Anne Moser Gibbons' poetry, fiction, and photography have appeared in *OneArt*, *Tributaria*, *Silver Birch Press*, *Anti-Heroin Chic*, *Persimmon Tree*, *Common Threads*, *Pine Mountain Sand and Gravel*, *Ohio Bards*, *Kakalak*, *AvantAppalachia*, and elsewhere. She recently received first and third place awards in an Ohio Poetry Association contest. Jo Anne and her spouse volunteer at Harriet Beecher Stowe House in Cincinnati.

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MIKE WILSON

Mike Wilson's work has appeared in many magazines and in his book, *Arranging Deck Chairs on the Titanic* (Rabbit House Press), *Before the Fall* (Kelsay Books), and a debut novel *Food Court* (Main Street Rag) forthcoming in 2026.

Mike lives in Lexington, Kentucky

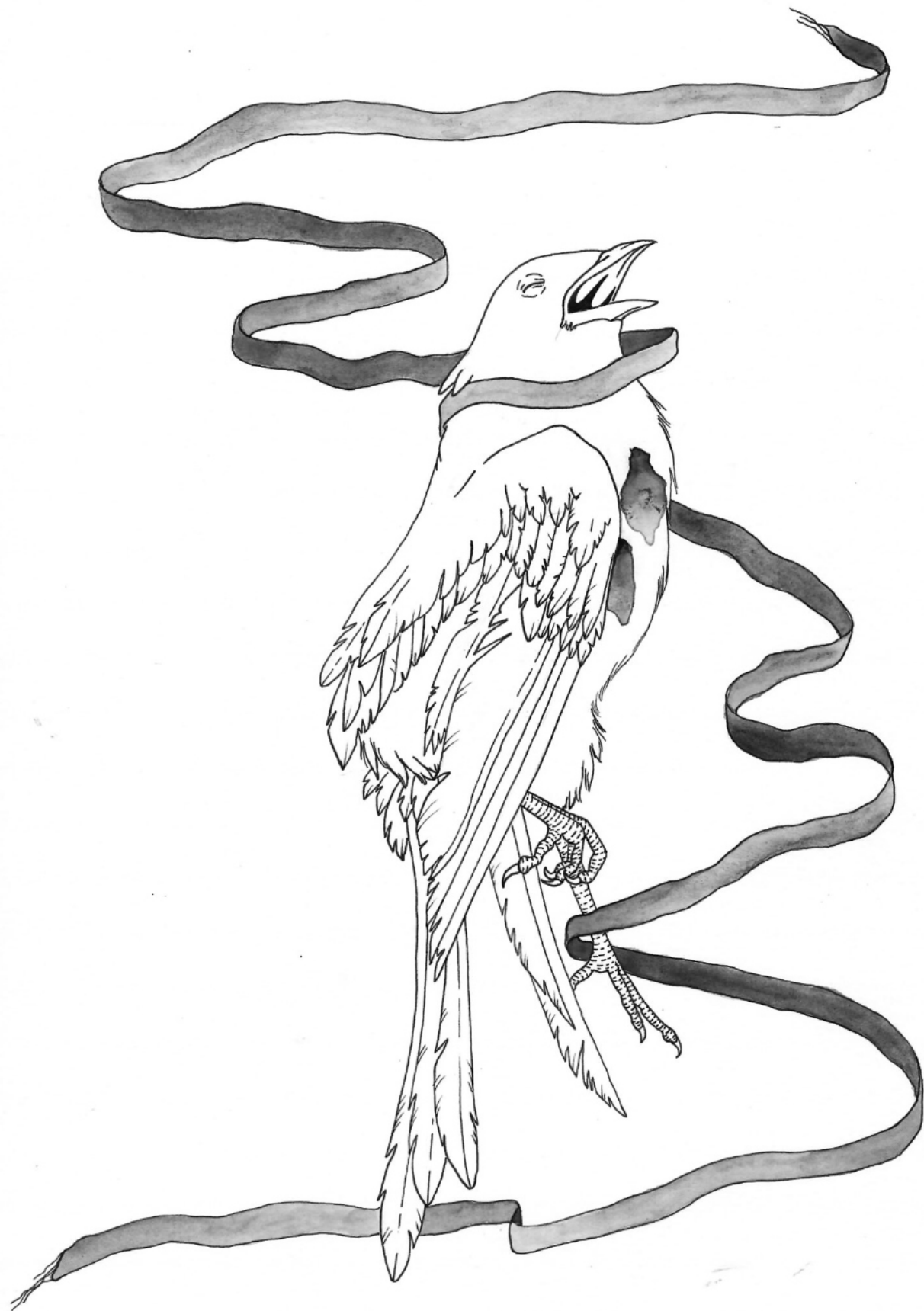
Contact: mikewilsonauthor@earthlink.net

DRAWING:

TORY KEITH

Born and raised in rural upstate New York, Tory Keith earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Printmaking from Alfred University in Alfred, NY in 2011. She then moved to Cincinnati, OH. Tory currently works as the Northside Studio Director at Visionaries + Voices, a nonprofit arts organization serving the greater Cincinnati area. Her work has been exhibited locally and regionally.

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TORY KEITH

First They Came for the Cat Ladies

(by *Jo Anne Moser Gibbons*)

"[they are] a bunch of childless cat ladies with miserable lives" --*JD Vance*

Sub-zero weather
female domestic terrorist murdered in cold blood
on backyard deck as she fills bird feeders
while her indoor cat watches from the window

ambushed by five heavily armed ICE agents
with black masks and gloves as one ICER screams
"!!?#&! welfare bird feeder" and shoots up seed bags—
suspect and agents slip on seeds and black ice

injured but conscious, the bird feeder and cat owner
pleads: "I'm innocent! I'm just helping hungry birds
stay alive through this winter of our discontent." ICERs,
who think the First Amendment is a Chicago bar,

ignore her free-speech protests. Two ICERs aim
their firearms and vomit a bad-mouth barrage:
"Bye, bye birdie girl!" "!!?#&! cat lady!"
"Immigrant lover! Guilty!"

*The Official Department of Homeland Security
Statement:*

Today ICE personnel eliminated a domestic terrorist
who, according to credible observers, had been under
surveillance for a few minutes. The female terrorist
aided and abetted illegal immigrants—in particular,
dark-eyed juncos. These feathered birds from Canada
entered the US without papers or passports to hide at
the terrorist's address for the winter. In addition, for 15
years the terrorist harbored a European Burmese cat
that entered this country illegally. Our agents efficiently
removed this unlawful menace to society: feeder of
immigrant birds, keeper of immigrant felines—
miserable, childless cat lady.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

It's Murder, Fine and Dandy, Good and Pretti*

(by *Mike Wilson*)

The best kind, a snuff film
to make America think:
There, but for the grace of Trump, goes me.

Murder, fine and dandy, Good and Pretti.

The Constitution doesn't have
a clause preventing lawlessness
or a police force protecting us from the Feds.

Murder, fine and dandy, Good and Pretti.

Outrage is endearing,
seeing helpless people fearing
the remorseless stick, the big dick, the
Donald.

Murder, fine and dandy, Good and Pretti.

Shooting pictures
gets you shot
The rest are shot for not repeating the lie.

Murder, fine and dandy, Good and Pretti.

The best kind, a snuff film
to make America think:
There, but for the grace of Trump, goes me.

**Renee Nicole Good and Alex Pretti were
murdered by ICE agents in Minneapolis
on 1/7/26 and 1/24/26 respectively, as
clearly shown on videos of the incidents.
Officials in the Trump administration falsely
labelled Good and Pretti 'domestic terrorists'
and called for investigation of the victims
rather than ICE agents who shot them.*

Shelter in Peace

(by *Jo Anne Moser Gibbons*)

Cuddle yourself close with tea and crocheted throw
hush, hush a while
gaze beyond your haven
 where darkness loosens its line across the horizon
glow with dawn anticipation

Embrace silence
listen to the softness of the slant of light
 warming snow that drifts around pines
watch wisps of flakes and fallen needles
welcome your awakening

Treasure sun-up visitors to your backyard
the blue jay's raspy call
 the frolic of gray featherballs with feet
peck-peck-pecking of well-dressed flickers
frequent fly-ins of cardinals, finches, and more

Linger in their frenzy, capture the quiet bright
of lightbeams reaching through windowpanes
 to touch inside
 to reassure you
of peace in your world called home

Wonder at Nature's surprises
accept Nature's everyday gifts
 nurture your own inner spirit
to share peace, to share shelter
from the world's super-storm

POEMS:

SUSAN F. GLASSMEYER

Susan F. Glassmeyer, codirector of the Holistic Health Center of Cincinnati, helps people restore the poetry of presence and movement in their bodies. Her fifth book of poetry, *Please Treasure Yourself: Zen Poems*, was recently published by Shanti Arts. Susan has been imagining poems since childhood.

Contact: susanglassmeyer.com

BLANCHE KABENGELE

Blanche Kabengele is the author of *Conjugal Relationships of Africans and African Americans*, Edwin Mellen Press, and *Quiet as it's Kept, Me too*, and other *Poetic Expressions of Life*, Xlibris publishers. Blanche holds a doctorate from UC's College of Education, and has published poems in the *Ohio Writers Association Anthology*, *The Prose Poem*, *Willawa*, *The Woolf and the WAYE*.

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STEPHANIE ULM

Stephanie Ulm is a lifelong resident of Northern Kentucky and a lover of music, nature and family time with her husband and two children. She works in an office-set sales position. Stephanie always searches for creative outlets whether they entail making handmade soaps, writing, or decorating.

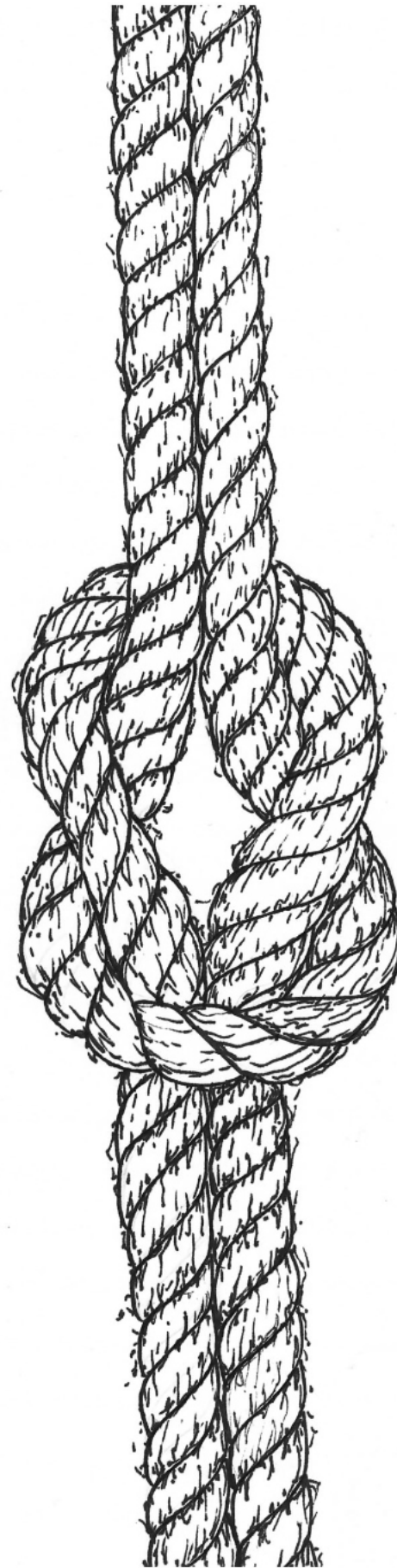
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DRAWING:

CALCAGNO CULLEN

Calcagno (Cal) Cullen, a social practice artist, proactively collaborates with others to make projects, systems, and organizations with most community impact. She sees her creative work as that of making connections and fostering asset-based community development. She is a non-profit founder and leader, working in philanthropy, community organizing, and arts administration.

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*Cal cagno Cullen
2026*

Today's Gunning

(by *Susan F. Glassmeyer*)

Montgomery Alabama, October 4, 2025

Rival gunmen
shot at each other
in a crowded downtown
nightlife district
killing two people
 Bang! Bang!
and wounding fourteen others
 Bang! Bang! Bang!
 Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!
 Bang!
 Bang! Bang! Bang!
 Bang! Bang!

The Police Chief said:
*This was two parties involved
that were basically shooting at each other
in the middle of a crowd.
The shooters did not care about
the people around them when they did it.*

The officer failed to add:
The two parties obviously
only cared
about each other.

If

(by *Blanche Kabengele*)

"If beasts within a silent forest moan"
Alexander Pushkin

speaking for the people of Ukraine:

If I were you

I would think about all the people I had hurt,
and grow eyes in the back of my head.

If I were you,

I would do a bunch of things different,
at least until I grew eyes in the back of my head.

Chasing Peace...Away

(by *Stephanie Ulm*)

Lines will always be crossed
And wars will wage
Our differences will spell out again
On every history page

We fight over this earth
As if it's ours to keep
Blaze the sky with fire
While the dust buries us deep

We've never tolerated
What we couldn't understand
And yet we find ourselves lost
In the wars we never planned

Marched into battles
Searching for the peace we only chased away
Fought by the brave
Whose names now chiseled onto the gray

Does their death prove anything
Does it soften your hate
To see in the end
We all share a common fate

POEMS:

ELENA ESTELLA GREEN

Elena Estella Green is a Poet and a facilitator with Women Writing for (a) Change (womenwriting.org). She currently facilitates workshops at CAC, The Main Library and The Well. Originally from NYC, Elena studied creative writing at the NYU Gallatin Program and at The College of New Rochelle. Her work has appeared in numerous anthologies and she has won numerous poetry prizes and fellowships.

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DAVID HENDERSON

David Henderson is a multidisciplinary artist and writer whose work explores psychological portraiture, fractured identity, and themes of confinement and release. Drawing from personal mythology and Art Brut influences, he creates visual and poetic language for interior landscapes. His ongoing projects merge text and image into a singular narrative voice.

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DRAWING:

PAM KRAVETZ

Pam Kravetz is a mural makin', street paintin', quilt sewin', yarnbombin', curatin', flashmobin', tutu wearin', rootin' tootin' art monster. She is inspired by the beauty in the chaos of the everyday and her artwork ranges from street art, installations, to monumental quilts. Pam is a regionally and nationally recognized visual artist with more than 50 art exhibits and installations.

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Inspired by Mary Oliver's "The Summer Day"

(by *Elena Estella Green*)

Prayer follows me
And I follow back
When the heat subsides
I lounge into summer.
The long nights on the balcony
Suitable for any prayer especially
When the moon is luminous.
I unclip my hair and let it fall
Like night descending.
Sleeping in a cool breeze cradling comfort
I dream of seasons ending and the challenge
Of making life mean something.
I hold a cherry tomato I just grew
Better than any poem,
Than any song I wonder what else
I can summon from the earth?
A wish warily said in the glow of the garden
Moonlight washing over me like a satin gown
Worn when dancing is the only answer to
A prayer said in silence among the sycamores
And fragrant lilacs chanting like a distant abbey
And the cicadas bed down for more than a decade.
I am truly myself at twilight, that slip from one
State to another. I am free to travel the mist
And the destination is unknown like where
Does the world go when I am not here?

Radhika's Storm

(by *David Henderson*)

A dark electricity lives in her eyes,
depth hidden behind a primal allure.
She wants to be seen beneath the surface —
naked and honest,
like a flower opened to the sun.

Her story resonates with a chosen few —
alchemists and mystic lovers
who find grace in transformation,
an oasis on desert sands,
complexity worn with quiet grit.

Where passion and solidarity meet, she
stands unguarded,
holding firm to unrealized dreams
and victories yet to be won —
not only for herself,
but for the unheard voices moving beneath
the noise of the world,
where justice walks slowly
and peace is carried hand to hand.

Knowledge earned,
wisdom resting in her smile.

You may hold her close,
kiss her with intensity and fire —
make love to her
like a ship carried by the sea.

But never forget:
she belongs to the wind, the rain,
and the rainbow that follows every storm.
Freedom lives in her bones,
a quiet rebellion against cruelty and silence,
and you are there to witness
where she goes when the clouds pass
beyond the horizon.

thanksgiving

(by *Elena Estella Green*)

When the sky is this blue
It is easy to be grateful.

The end of November,
the cold sets into
my bones.

Inside, each window pane
sparkles with frost
and twinkling lights
and my heart is warmed.

Home, that elusive word
a search for safety
and comfort
I am planted here at last
toward the end days
of this life.

What happens after
is a dream of continuing
even if I am only spirit
I hope Grace will let me
help those I left behind
or add me to
the eternal gaze,

that place of pure praise.

POEMS:

JOANNE GREENWAY

Joanne Greenway retired from a civil service career in 2003. In 2006, she joined the Greater Cincinnati Writers League and served as its president for eight years. She is the author of three chapbooks: *Low-hanging Fruit*, *Limited Engagement* and *True Confessions*. Her poems cover a range of subject matters, childhood memories, social justice and aging being the most dominant.

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ROBERTA SCHULTZ

Roberta Schultz, author of *Deep Ends*, *A Chorus of Strays* and *Underscore*, is a maker of songs, poems and drum circles. She writes some of her songs on a mountain in North Carolina, and is co-founder of the Poet & Song Series with her trio, Raison D'Étre.

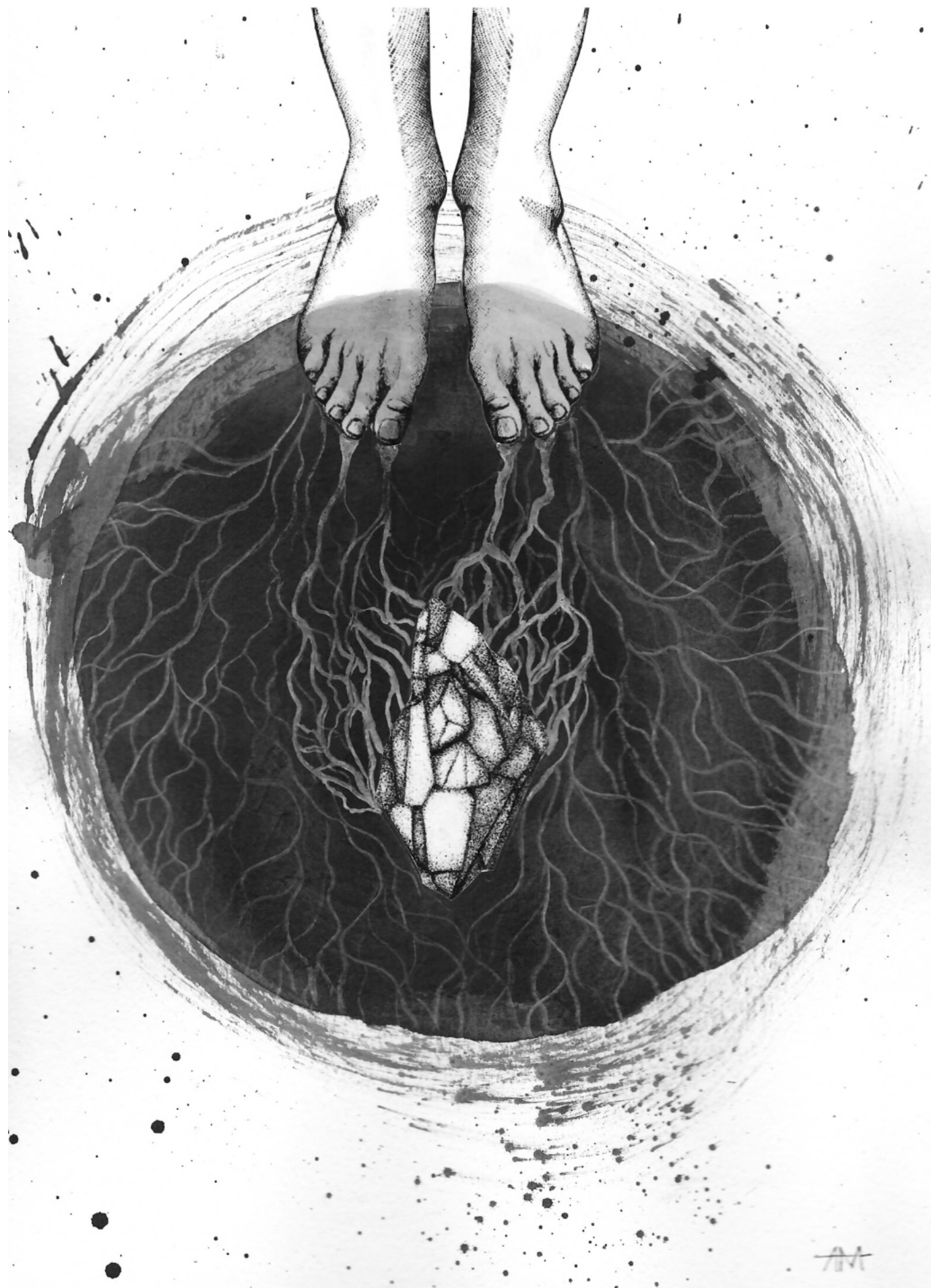
Contact: robertaschultz.com

DRAWING:

ANNE-MARIE HERRERA

Anne-Marie Herrera is a Venezuelan-American artist. Drawn to the art making process more than the finished object, she explores diverse media with curiosity and freedom. A former field ecologist who lived in the tropics, she finds inspiration in nature's intricate relationships. Her current work as a Jungian-informed creative facilitator has infused her work with symbolic resonance and layered meaning.

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Song of the Uprooted

(by Joanne Greenway)

We Somalis abandoned our homeland, the land of poets, fragrant with cardamom, myrrh and cinnamon, for the “Land of Ten Thousand Lakes.” There were jobs that needed workers and friendly folk with warm smiles. In their white, blond world, we stood out like raisins in a bowl of milk. We’d learn to eat fast food instead of goat meat and sambusas. Our women would trade hijabs for snoods to work the perilous lines in the meatpacking plants. Our men would drive tractors, bale hay and milk cows. The dust of the desert would be replaced by the snows of endless winters. When our homeland began to crawl with monsters, we despaired and fled. We scarcely remember what it’s like to feel the sun on our faces. But we are safe now... we think. We gambled our lives on overloaded leaky boats and creaky trucks. Many never made it to the golden shore: America with all its promise, its opportunities—a path to rebuild shattered lives on shifting sands. Wherever we go, we’ll do what all the immigrant peoples who came before us have done—struggle and contribute. We’ll become lawyers, leaders, scholars and farmers of the lush Minnesota loam where we’ve put down roots. We are a gift to America, a rich and varied culture that flourished despite war, occupation and division. Treasure us. Listen with an open heart—hear the music and the *heeso** of our ancient songs.

*heeso = lyrics

I Put Away Apologies for Who I Am

(by Roberta Schultz)

I put away apologies for who I am

because
people were starving in Montana.
People were starving in Scotland.
Then in Ireland where those Scots
had gone to live.

So they came here not to starve.
True, they didn’t eat the finest food,
but sat at one table swirling in politics
and religion—loud music bending
the slender stems

from which they’d bloomed.
This strange bouquet
of thistle, prairie grass,
and borrowed shamrock
picked from transplants in Kentucky.

I put away apologies for who I am

because
later some were fleeing persecution
and wars. They brought beer and
dumplings
to the dinners along with an old faith
with no Jesus. I revel in their many
faces,

their many places. Their songs and
stories.

Side-by-side like the lyrics say,
ragged and funny.

They’ve always had my back. They
never go away.

I hope to be an ancestor like the ones
who’ve never let me down.

Right Occupation

(by *Roberta Schultz*)

The damage begins to wear at their souls—this army of green-vested workers who raise chainsaws against a stand of trees for a three-day siege. They hoist their tools erect like weapons of war. Even the brush cutters roar heedless and heartless buzz of destruction. Every half-hour this crew kneels or sits back on haunches, dazed by the felled skeletal mounds of poplar, oak, and hickory. Limbs pile up—gray stumps litter a wintery battlefield.

But, those who come weeks after choreograph a ritual dance. One swivel crane lifts the fallen skyward, following foreman's arc as he points to a flatbed truck. Gently, the driver guides each long trunk onto the funeral caisson. Buddhists claim one's work must serve the world. We watch three men usher all pipeline dead in one day. They seldom need a break from grace.

POEMS:

JASON HAAP

Jason Haap has been an educator since 1997. He serves as board president of The BloomStat Foundation, a local non-profit, and when he's not writing occasional poems or editorials for The Enquirer, he lives in Mt. Airy with his wife and youngest son.

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CAROLE STOKES-BREWER

Carole Stokes-Brewer is a psychotherapist and poet whose work explores the transformative power of language in healing and collective awakening. Her writing invites readers to reclaim truth, honor shared humanity, and remember that none of us stands alone. Through poetry, she creates space for reflection, resilience, and becoming.

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DRAWING:

MASON JUDGE

Mason Judge is a Cincinnati-based designer, illustrator, and creative problem solver with a BFA in Visual Communication Design. Having done work nationwide, he currently focuses on the nonprofit and community foundation sectors. Mason strives to continuously grow as both a person and a designer, using visual language to foster community.

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Gleeful Seething

(by Jason Haap)

The revolution will not be televised,
but it won't be live, either.

It will be streamed,
clipped,
made into memes,
and politicized.

It will be manipulated by AI
and made into memes again,
but this time for the Boomers.

The shape of it will emerge
as patterns in the editorials,
as confirmation bias mixed with endorphins.

We will gleefully seethe.

We will boycott burger joints
and legalize weed.

We will know we have won
when the corporations
change their profile pics
in solidarity.

It will fizzle at the end.

White women
will wear it
on a
t-shirt
at
the
gym.

I Hear

(by Carole Stokes-Brewer)

There it was,
Long forgotten,
Beneath layers of debris,
Misinformation,
Stormy opinions,
And malfunctioned theories.

It started as a crack.
Not loud,
Just enough
To let something breathe.

Something ancient stirred beneath it,
quiet insistence,
a heartbeat
no system could bury.

I dug my hands into the dirt
of forgotten names,
unpaid labor,
unhealed wounds,
not to make a claim,
only to hear the name.

Each handful of truth
burned and glimmered,
the earth remembering
what we chose to forget.

I stayed long enough to hear it.
And as I stood there,
my heart open to the wind,
the truth spoke once more
rising through the quiet.

Listening is where justice begins.

I did not arrive alone.
They stood in me,
And I learned to listen.

We Speak

(by **Carole Stokes-Brewer**)

What was once a hum,
Began to gather.
Breath found breath.
Memory leaned toward memory.

Names long swallowed,
found their way back to the mouth.
Stories once whispered
stood upright.

When the hum became a chorus,
It said what the world forgot:
we are not whole apart.

We did not speak to be heard.
We spoke because listening
had already begun.
We spoke to return
what had been taken.

I understood then:
justice is not found.
It is uncovered,
again and again,

by how we hold one another.

We Become

(by **Carole Stokes-Brewer**)

The sound does not end.
It moves.

It moves through bodies
that learned to listen
before they were allowed to speak.

Through hands that remember
how to build without erasing,
how to tend what was broken,
how to return what was taken.

We do not stand outside the moment.
We carry it.
What was once asked of justice
is now asked of us.

The light returns
through us,
because of us,
for all of us.

I am because we are.

POEMS:

ANN C. JAMES

Ann C. James, born and raised in Chicago, Illinois, has a Bachelor of Philosophy from Michigan U. majoring in Fine Arts, Sociology, Theatre. She worked at an interracial program for children in Chicago for 17 years, then relocated to Cincinnati, working for Cincinnati Recreation Commission for 35 years. Anne is married, with two sons, four grandchildren. She enjoys family, friends, travel, theatre, dance, art, poetry, swimming, reading, kayaking, community service.

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EILEEN TRAUTH

Eileen Trauth has published several nonfiction books and a play. Her poetry appears in *Ordinary Time* (Kelsay Books), in venues such as *Braided Way*, *Common Threads*, *Loch Raven Review*, *The Orchards Poetry Journal*, *Persimmon Tree*, *Pine Mountain Sand & Gravel*, *Sheila-Na-Gig*, and in several anthologies including *Tributaria*.

Eileen lives with her spouse, Kathy Driehaus, in Cincinnati, Ohio.

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DRAWING:

RACHEL ROLFSEN

Rachel Rolfsen is a student in the Art & Design program at Northern Kentucky University, majoring in Visual Communication Design with a minor in Marketing. She interns for their athletic department as a sports photographer. Rachel works in all mediums, including oil, graphite, and photo. Her art is inspired by what she loves and cares about.

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Willie

(by Ann C. James)

Willie, that's how my uncle knew him.
He'd stop by my uncle's parking lot every day.
Willie was a shy kid, a kid of maybe sixteen or seventeen?
Full of curiosity, full of questions so and so, optimistic...
Still he had so many questions about why his world was different.

These questions he did not or could not get the answers to,
from his teachers, librarians or resource staff at school.
Willie would ask questions as he washes the car window, sweeps or shovels the parking lot,
depending on the season, or hoses it down with water when it needed it.
Willie was always willing to run to a neighborhood restaurant to pick up my Uncle's meal order.
Willie hung around several hours every afternoon, always searching for answers.

"If my Granddaddy has the money, why can't he buy a house anywhere in this city?"
"My cousin earned all of his certificates, why can't he get into a trade union?"
"Why can't my neighbor use his GI bill to go to college? They keep turning him down."
"How come we have to trace our feet to buy shoes?"
"How come we can't try on clothes in the store?"

Patience, my uncle answered Willie's questions, the best he knew how.
As their friendship grew the inquiries became more complex, more sophisticated.
My uncle walked Willie through the long history of otherness.
Each of my uncle's answers led to another question from Willie.
Willie's curiosity seemed insatiable.

One December day my uncle saw Willie approaching the car lot
Looking like a shell of himself, barely placing one foot in front of the other.
Willie sat down on the curb, did not say a word, expressionless,
Willie didn't look up, just unraveled a newspaper, handed it to my uncle.
Then pounded his fist on his knees crying uncontrollably.

My uncle sunk next to Willie and threw his arm over Willie's shoulder.
The newspaper fell, headlines up, to the ground.
Willie hugged my uncle still sobbing, then stood, pointing down to the newspaper.
"He was my big brother. He just wanted to make things better for everyone."
Then, head down, still sobbing, Willie walked away.

My uncle lifted the crumpled newspaper, reading the headline.
"Freddie Hampton killed by police in a raid"
My uncle's legs gave, and he slumped to the curb.
A good man, a community organizer, gunned down,
in the middle of the night, in his home, by the Chicago police.

That was the last time my Uncle saw Willie,
My uncle had no way to contact Willie,
To console Willie and his family,
To acknowledge Willie's loss,
To acknowledge his own loss.

Sundown Town

(by *Eileen Trauth*)

Turnaround
best be gone
before the sound
of sunset
sings danger
all around.
Trouble
can be found
in your slightest footstep,
even when bound
for the border.
They would
hound you
or even worse,
in a state,
all wound up
to keep the color
white
keep the count
of Black
down
to zero.

On the Other Foot

(by *Ann C. James*)

You haven't listened, it wasn't about you.
We marched for our civil rights, but you had them, it wasn't about you.
You saw Black children beaten by police, but it wasn't about you.
You saw Black children being hosed with fire hoses, flipped off their feet,
slammed into buildings, slammed to the ground, but, it wasn't you!

You haven't listened, when our Black community members were murdered by police.
Slaughtered on camera, in broad daylight, Black people with no provocation, murdered by police.
Police, assumed by you to be innocent, hashtag "in fear for their lives"
You assume these murders were justified, because police protect you!

As soon as an unjustified murder by police is caught on camera, the profiling intensifies.
Every part of the victim's character is in question, the victim is guilty, never the police.
The police are protecting you! No need to listen to the cries of Black voices, it's not about you!
Black neighborhoods hounded by police to find something unsavory about the latest victim.
We live this truth, throughout the history of this country, we hold these truths to be self evident!
We were created equal, but never treated equally.

You haven't listened, it wasn't your family, your friend, your neighbors, your history, your truth,
your fight, your daily reality. It wasn't about you.

And when the election came, the lawless won!
You didn't listen, elected a criminal. Because it wasn't about you!
He said what he meant and meant what he said.
He's coming after anyone who opposes him. And now it is about you!
NOW
The shoe is on the other foot. Whiteness doesn't protect you from this criminal!
You are being slammed, beaten, intimidated, brutalized, and whiteness doesn't protect you!
You are Antifa, domestic terrorist, the enemy within, the scourge of the nation, the vermin!
You are being profiled, maligned, propagandized, slandered, marginalized, mischaracterized!
You woke up free in this country?
This "free" country is disappearing the "woke".
The professionals,
Intellectuals, Doctors, Lawyers, Scientists, Environmentalists, Artists, Historians, Teachers,
Journalists, Foreign born
LBGTQ+
Non Christians
Black People
Brown People
Naturalized citizens
Life long citizens
The Original People of this land,
and Whites who oppose him.
You haven't listened, now it's too late, the shoe is on the other foot. And it is about you!

POEMS:

GIFTED JOHNSON-WILKINSON

For 24 years, Gifted Johnson-Wilkinson has used poetry to empower, educate, and inspire. As a curator, host, and facilitator, she brings communities together through intentional and accessible creative experiences, using her platforms to make poetry more accessible and inclusive for all ages. Her published works include the *My 30* series, *2020 Vision*, *Final 30*, *Phased By An Impressionable Moon*, and *Ripples*.

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ALAN JOZWIAK

Alan Jozwiak teaches composition at UC and Cincinnati State. His poetry appears in earlier editions of FABW and elsewhere. He is a playwright, long-time member of Cincinnati Playwrights Initiative, and senior theatre reviewer for the League of Cincinnati Theatres. He is also a comics scholar working on a podcast exploring the last hundred years of American comics.

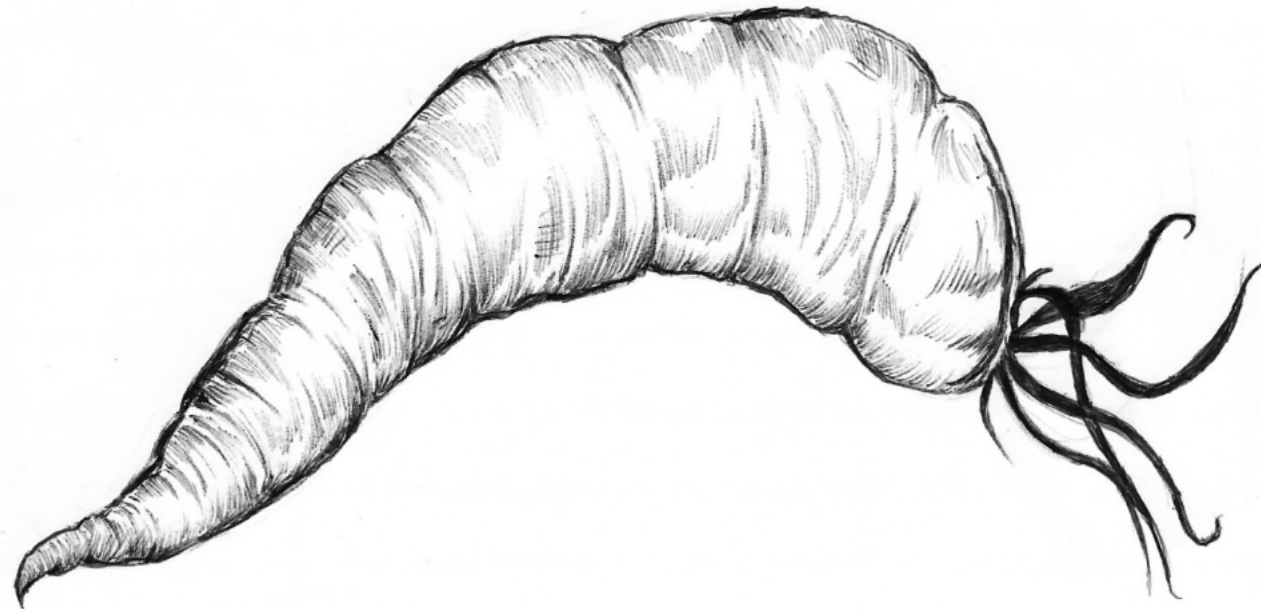
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DRAWING:

ALEX STEFFEN

Alex Steffen is a comic book artist and author based out of Cincinnati. He grew up writing and drawing, and combines the two within his work.

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AMS 2026

Rebate Checks

(by *Gifted Johnson-Wilkinson*)

Crawl
Starve
Then dangle
The carrot
Over the starving pups
Heads

Medic, medic
They're dying

Games played
Manufacturing disaster
Zones
Marching soldiers to dirty ...
Clean air
Compensating your insecurities
Padding your sense
Of self-worth
Manifesting false hope

Taxing agreements
That line
Your pockets
Sanctioning the
SNAP from
Hungry mouths

Medic, medic
They're dying

He says...
Dangle the carrot
I mean Dividends
I mean Stimulus
I mean rebate checks
I mean my hands
Of deception
Tangled webs
I've weaved

Wonders cease to amaze
Narcissistic forcefield
Emotional defense
Masking your difficult
Truth

The rich is getting richer
And the poor...poorer
A Hero complex
Is a dangerous
Fuel
To burn in the
House
Our House

All because they
Filled in your box
Of mice and men
Medic, medic
We're dying

I Am Spartacus

(by *Gifted Johnson-Wilkinson*)

Don't keep looking back
In that rear view mirror
Our past is history
Immigrants settled as newcomers
On foreign terrain
And no one can be illegal
On Stolen lands
Seismic pressures threatening

American society

Civility declines
Posturing different hearts
Senseless red sheds
Collapsed walls

Fall

Craters will engulf
Our every move
Shutdowns on the Hill
Circular reasoning
Begs the question
Gradual erosion swells
Darkness ensues

Yet

Loose light hangs
In the march for freedom
Grab hold
Allow them to mirror
In you

There's still

Time to wave the flag of
right
Call out the wrongs
Boots to ground
Victory can be found
Spartacus your behavior
Voices rise in the
Defiance of injustice

Selflessly walk upright
Arm yourself with
Sun and shield
Mind controlling
Your inner strength

Hope

Hard Times

(by *Alan Jozwiak*)

It's a hard time for you to live.

It's a hard time to write poetry
when the raging chaos of American life sours your creative juices.

It's a hard time to speak your mind
when your words could easily be construed as a disloyalty test.

It's a hard time to keep your job
when you must work twice as hard for a paycheck that buys half as much.

It's a hard time to pay bills
when your only sensible solution for settling them involves a bank teller and a stick-up note.

It's a hard time to buy groceries
when inflation and tariffs turn shopping for a tomato into a major purchase (which you still think tastes like cardboard).

It's a hard time to see a doctor
when your spiking health care premiums replace routine exams with emergency-room visits.

It's a hard time to get a routine teeth cleaning
when your six-month visit turns yearly for want of available dental hygienists.

It's a hard time to walk the streets
when you face danger, injury, or death at the hands of ICE agents searching for the illegal "other."

It's even a hard time for you to sleep
when the demons and devils from the day come out inside your nightly dreams to play.

How do you handle hard times?
Will you rage, or rebel, or resist?
Or will you settle and muddle through,
ignoring the sh*t storm surrounding you,
hoping for calmer climes and sunnier skies,
wishing that all of this is temporary?

No matter the choice, you'll still be up late
wanting answers and worrying about
whether all this hardness is here to stay,
and whether you can summon up
the strength to start a brand-new day.

POEMS:

DEBORAH JORDAN

Deborah Jordan is an Earth lover, community member, and Quaker who lives with her family in the Bold Face Creek watershed of East Price Hill. She believes in the power of love to heal and is grateful for more than she can say.

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REBECCA SUTER LINDSAY

Rebecca Suter Lindsay's award-winning historical novel, *The Peacemakers*, the story of a pacifist Mennonite family in Virginia in 1861, and her chapter book, *Mr. Tux and the Little Garden Hotel*, the tale of an abandoned cat who takes a position at a small French hotel, are available from Shadelandhouse Modern Press, smpbooks.com and from her.

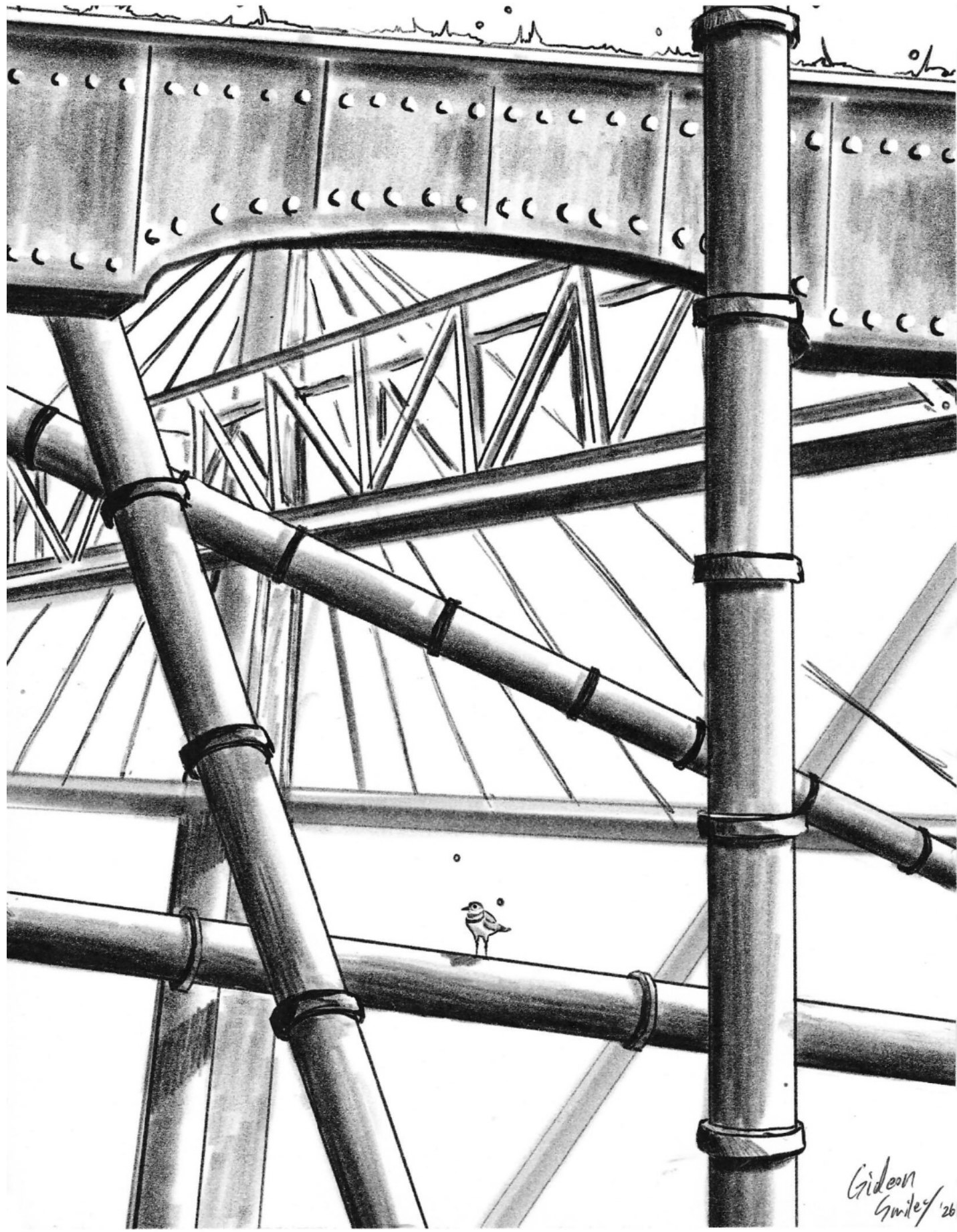
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DRAWING:

GIDEON SMILEY

Gideon Smiley is an artist, writer, and nature lover trying to understand how best to interact with the world and the otherworldly. Born and based in Cincinnati, he goes wherever his legs or bicycle wheels take him and enjoys painting birds and pressing flowers. Ohio State art class of 23', Appalachian Trail class of 25'.

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River Speak

(by *Rebecca Suter Lindsay*)

Leaving the lodge, I let myself down
to the river, determined to hear
what it had to say. Crossing the tracks

brought to mind that Harlan Hubbard chose
to live on the other side. He cut the cord
and drifted free, letting the flow

dictate his future. As I rubbed fine sand
between my fingers and thumb,
the bank chastised me for staying away.

Rocks recited the life cycle
that brought them, washed and rounded,
to this shore. The flip of a fish

noted that I had come without a pole.
The river gurgled about gravity,
that siren call that draws all

precipitation and people to itself.
The cry of the killdeer charged
me with intrusion. And in its passing,

a workboat reminded me
that shipping downstream as crew
was still on my list.

Who Am I?

(by *Deborah Jordan*)

Who am I – to think I own the Earth
the water, the skies, the creatures,
the silver maple tree with the cardinal perched
outside my window pane
Who gave me permission to pollute with
impunity,
with plastics, with glyphosate, with exhaust?

Who am I – to consume Earth as mere product,
Earth with a capital E, bursting from stardust
4.5 billion years ago, more than I could count in
a single lifetime
I, part of the humans who came lately – 300
million years ago -
now 8 billion strong, sometimes wrong
in the midst of planetary plunder

Who am I – part of you
Earthling in a trance, exhausted, exhausting
Slow down, Wake up
Resist weapons of mass delusion
Pray, not prey, Peace with Earth
our enchanted, enchanting Earth

Who am i
part of we
part of Earth
tiny me, on this blue true
planet home
holy home

Climate Change

(by *Rebecca Suter Lindsay*)

Only God can change the climate;
humans don't have that power.

So what if glaciers are melting;
They're ten thousand miles away.

These fluctuations happen naturally;
just give Mother Nature time.

Research? That stuff's a hoax.

Industry runs on oil and

Coal; my business would go bust.

Hurricanes happen. Just don't live
near the coast.

Lament and Caveat

(by *Rebecca Suter Lindsay*)

Here's to all the wars we fought.
Here's to all the dreams that died.
Don't it make you wanna cry?
Lord, it makes me wanna cry.

So little time we have on Earth,
So little time to prove our worth.
Newly born, we start to die.
Don't that make you wanna cry?

Despite the battles that we've faced,
The world is still a bitter place.
Even so we have to try.
Lord, it makes me wanna cry.

Generations come and go.
Perhaps we balance woke and woe,
Keep the world from running dry.
But don't it make you wanna cry?

Sister, listen to the truth;
Brother, do good in your youth.
Proverbs tell us not to wait;
The time may come when it's too late.

The years will come and swiftly fly;
Soon the elder days draw nigh.
Strength and effort come to halt,
All our striving seems for naught.

Don't it make you wanna cry?
Lord, it makes me wanna cry.

Warning: This Poem Is About Doom

(by *Deborah Jordan*)

Don't be eating during this poem,
You can't be sleeping during this poem.
While preppers and mutual aiders are planning,
Skipping the gravitas and going right to the fix.
Others speak of a collapse like the coming of a holy day
Where we cooked up a too salty and bitter dish and must now choke it down.
What do you say?

I regret to inform you . . .
Where's the groaning, the keening, the wailing
As we speak the unspeakable
Not brought by God but human doings.
I have had losses in my life which can't compare to this thought
Forgive me for repeating it, even in a whisper
Forgive all of us who looked away.

Forgive us – especially to the young, the innocent, and to all our relations:
The monarch, the ivory-billed woodpecker, the rainforest.
The list is too long and so sad
Each tear an ocean of loss.
How dare we speak of doom as inevitable
Betraying all ancestors and descendants.
Let the children survive on crumbs of hope.

Who can knit the sorrow and hope together
So we can hold hands at the precipice and sing
Even though our throats are constricted
And our hearts crack open
Call them water protectors, call them land defenders
Those who dare to show up on the edge.
What final reckoning before a revival?

And now, I lay me down in these green pastures
Gazing at this buoyantly blue sky
The bulb of sunlight coming through the hackberry tree,
The wing of a hawk swooping by
The leafy shoots of hairy vetch meant to nurture our garden soil
for another year
I look and breathe and find courage . . .

This is not finished yet

We are not finished yet

POEMS:

JERRY JUDGE

Jerry Judge is a local poet who lives in Finneytown with his two superstar cats, Stormy and Spiderman. He has been a long-time supporter of SOS ART.

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ZOHREH ZAND

Zohreh Zand, born to an Iranian father and a German mother, lived for 24 years in Canada. In 2011 she moved to Cincinnati. Zohreh's love for poetry started at the age of 12. She is a docent at the Cincinnati Art Museum, a member of the Monday Morning Writers Group, Cincinnati Writers Project, and Write Now @ King.

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DRAWING:

SAM CUROE

Sam Curoe is currently a Detroit located artist working as a graphic designer and with a passion for illustration, writing, game development, and a better world.

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ICE Recruiter

(by Jerry Judge)

Thank you, Patriot, thank you
for your interest in defending our homeland.

Yes. Our country has been invaded
by criminals and predators.
We need strong men like you to flush
them out and keep America for Americans.

Yes. Yes. I agree.
We talk about getting rid of the worst
of the worst, but they all are vile.
President Trump has set a high quota

to rid us of these vermin and the blight over
our fair land. It's a holy mission.

Yeah, it's a war, but
we have leverage and so much money.
You've heard about our \$50,000 sign-up bonus.
I guess that would really help your life situation.

You are right about sanctuary cities -
the Democrats should all be locked up
for aiding and abetting savage criminal immigrants.
We are kicking their ass by sending in thousands of agents.

Yes, wearing masks and no ID tags is liberating.
The official line is that it saves us from doxing.
Ha! It gives us freedom to do whatever we want knowing
The Administration will call anybody we hurt domestic
terrorists.

Rise above it all! Join us Gods
in our new All-American Mt. Olympus.

Winter 2025/26

(by Zohreh Zand)

In my country ICE inflicts pain
It doesn't sooth a thirst
It numbs my heart and brain
Who are we?

Nature is crying
White snowflakes
A chill runs through my vein
It's cold and brutal
No, I don't mean just the weather
Innocent people punished
Defenders killed

In my country ICE is brutal
like black ice on the pavement
Showing up out of nowhere
Causing fear and death
Innocent people crying tears
In my country ICE is fear

Nature is crying
White snowflakes
It's chilling cold in my land

What Do You Say to the Children?

(A Found Poem inspired by reporter, Emma Farge)

(by Jerry Judge)

Clearing Gaza's surface of bombs could take decades –
millions of pounds of rubble,
a “horrific, unmapped minefield.”
Many dead already and hundreds maimed simply walking.

Millions of pounds of rubble.
A full clearance might never happen.
Many dead already and hundreds maimed simply walking.
It's said they'll find bombs for generations.

A full clearance might never happen.
What do you say to the children?
It's said they'll find bombs for generations,
searching now at hospitals and bakeries.

What do you say to the children?
Their country is a “horrific, unmapped minefield.”
They're searching now at hospitals and bakeries.
Clearing Gaza's surface of bombs could take decades.

Deep Pain

(by Zohreh Zand)

Oh innocent people of
Ukraine, Gaza, Iran,...
As I watch the news
There are no words
To describe my sorrow

There are no words
To describe the brutality
Of power-driven minds

You suffer, you hurt
You endure
You cry for help

Their minds are deaf

Villains don't last for ever

When I Become GOD

(by Jerry Judge)

1.
I will issue an apology to Earth's inhabitants –
for the serious design flaw in Trump's manufacture.
He'll be recalled for major repair.

2.
People of Earth will get a 30-year eviction warning –
the planet must be cleansed and cared for by then.
If not, folks won't like where they're sent.

3.
Everyone in America will be tested
until they can spell Cincinnati.

4.
It will be acceptable again to worship cats as gods.
Anyone who harms cats (or any animal) will answer to Me.

5.
Nobody anywhere in the world will die of starvation again –
they just won't.

6.
I will serve only one term of one thousand years.
Then, there will be a world-wide election to replace me.

7.
Henceforth, all poets, dancers and school teachers
will earn salaries equivalent to first round NFL draft choices.

8.
Without question – universal health care for all. That's everybody.

9.
Yes, free will remains, mainly, but I will nudge humans via dreams
to remember that killing and wars are just damn wrong.

10.
I want people to experience joy and cherish life. That's all.

POEMS:

MAY LANG

May Lang moves occasionally from the beach of silence and separation into the waves of expression and connection.

JOSEPH WEISS

Joseph Weiss has a BA in Anthropology from Indiana University- Bloomington and studied Native American Studies at Montana State University-Bozeman. Joseph believes in the power of peace and in Poetry as a catalyst energizing the life blood of a healthy humanity. He is of the opinion that when we fully love one another, stand up for human dignity and environmental justice, work in harmony in governing society, that then we will have achieved peace.

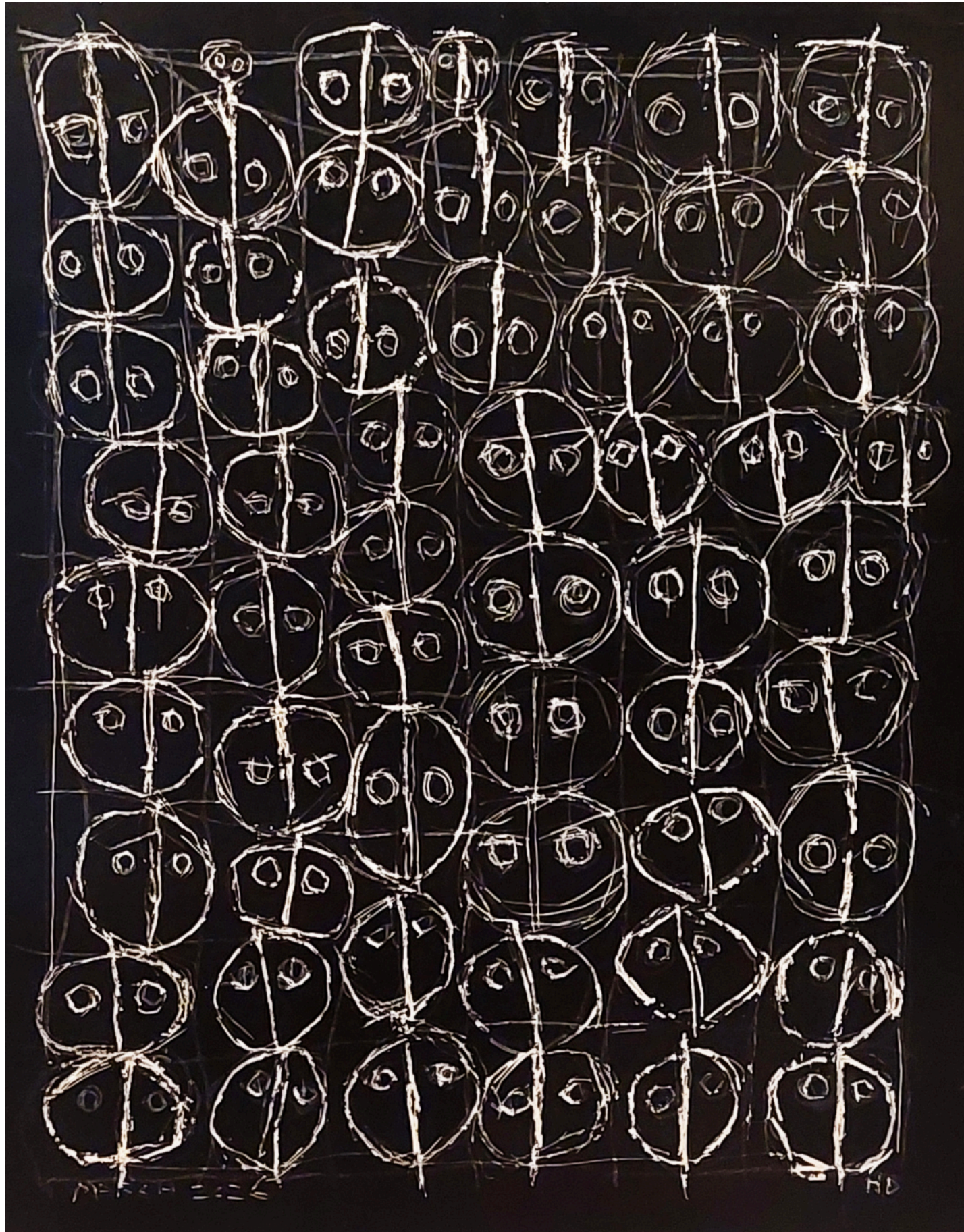
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DRAWING:

HOLLAND DAVIDSON

Holland Davidson resides in Cincinnati, Ohio and has exhibited her art professionally since 1993. Her paintings and drawings have been included in many projects with the SOS ART organization, and are held in collections both public and private worldwide.

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Night Inside

(by *May Lang*)

Small houses
across a dark field.
Lights flash
on and off
inside.

The night air is water
only nothing in it
drowns.

My eyes, rain filled
hibiscus
open.

My body
this trembling stalk
wobbles within
its parameters

The grey egg
of expression lies
over this sleepless face.

Its cracks pull the skin
around my wrinkled brain.

Between blasts
my body folds trauma
and tucks it in,
denialing.

Time misticks.
Don't trust me
with numbers.
I am no good
at math.

Scars on my body,
stones on my heart.
I'm art.

I haven't seen violence like this
since I stopped looking.

A pigeon flies up
from my soul.

Like a flame it will go.

Anger, rock.
Fear, paper.
Vulnerability,
scissors.

What runs barefoot, here?
My long lost night.

I stare. I stare.

When the sun comes
comes spinning.
comes wailing,
comes with attention,
I climb inside

as if it is an ambulance
of peace.

Peace

(by *Joseph Weiss*)

Could it be?
Peace, in our lifetimes.
Because, we can.
A Riviera of the minds.

Peace in Gaza,
A liberation,
By the people,
For the people.

Peace, all over Africa,
All over the Far East.

Everyone just lays down
Their arms,
And walks away.

Art

(by **May Lang**)

In places where I am forbidden
to speak whether these places exist
inside of me or out, I split words

into equal parts, one each
for the number of mouths
I have inside.

A night, a stick, a fresh grave,
blood of the earth -- brown—
a boat, a shoe,

the humorless caricature
of a howling mouth,
and you.

In places where I am forbidden to speak
I split phrases, and each is a tongue
of fire.

*They looked at the boy
and saw only the demon locked inside.
The service was beautiful. I loved*

*the way her hair roped down and resolved itself
into the shape of a child with an innocent,
open hand.*

*I saw her as the Madonna.
They did a great job with the makeup.
You could hardly tell.*

*What do you meet in the cemetery?
Don't you mean who?
I mean myself.*

*What lands on me to hold me
at the bottom of this dark hole?
Feels like a body.*

*When can I bear to look at myself?
When I am reflected, on the side of a car,
in metal pleats grilling a door.*

*A shadow, a hobbit, a grounded strong
stump trudging the wainscoting
of a firepooled wall at sunset.*

*Where did the barking dog dig a trench?
At the end of its leash, at the arc
of its pendulum.*

*Why do some people so comfortably
say the dead talk to them? Why
do the dead not talk to me?*

*Do they talk to each other?
Will she meet the baby there?
Do you believe her?*

*How will I know how the weather
will turn when the western windows are dark
and the sun streams in from the east?*

In places where speech is prohibited
words fatten my tongue, the fat,
split, sizzles and burns.

*Who do I talk to when I talk
to myself? Tricky, neurotic.
But is not some plain speech art?*

It depends you know, on what forbidden
communication lies
behind it.

In places where I am forbidden
to plainly tell art manifests
the felt

the soft underbelly
that lines the nest
incubating voice.

In places where I am forbidden
peace and war, war and peace agitate,
crosshatching my volume.

Sketch, mumble, divide,
is need one parent
and prohibition the other?

*Is my love created
in this base way?
Why does it tilt?*

In places where I am forbidden
to love, whether these places exist
inside of me or out, I split hearts.

In places where I am forbidden
no matter what I say it is always
my own story I tell.

In my own time, beginning
when we were all tall at noon,
my hands halve and art.

POEMS:

KATHY LONGSHORE

Kathy Longshore grew up with the love of writing poetry and is still inspired by life and friends. As a grandmother of 8, she especially enjoys children's literature. As a Scrabble lover, she is fascinated with words. Although she writes mostly for personal pleasure Kathy has won Honorable Mention several times in the Ohio Poetry Day Contest.

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MARY-JANE NEWBORN

Native Cincinnati Mary-Jane Newborn, liberation vegan, VeganEarth volunteer, Certified Master Recycler, Little Free Librarian, Reiki Master, and extreme composter, lives in a Certified Natural Wildlife Habitat. Mary-Jane modeled 26 years for art classes. She loves to laugh and make others laugh.

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DRAWING:

KAT RAKEL-FERGUSON

A retired art educator, Kat Rakel-Ferguson has vigorously revived her artistic pursuits. LIGHT is a constant element in her explorations of spiritual, social and personal themes. Her images have been included in numerous local, national and international exhibits and recently awarded Best in Show (Evendale Photography Exhibition 2023) and Honorable Mention (Fitton Center for the Arts 2024). Kat's work is on display at Pendleton Arts Center, OTR, Cincinnati, Ohio.

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Lamb's Clothing

(by *Mary-Jane Newborn*)

Putting wings and a halo on the devil
don't make him a saint.
And when he pokes you in the backside with
his trident
then you know that he ain't.
And you can't cover up a sea of blood
with a can of white paint.
No, a halo and some wings on the devil
don't make him a saint.

A halo can't cover up them horns,
and them purty wings can't hide that arrow tail.
And there's them cloven hooves and teeth as
sharp as thorns,
and that white robe has a pointy hood as well.

The devil can quote scripture day and night,
and wave a flag to prove he must be right.
But if you disagree and say so, me oh my—
for you it seems free speech just don't apply.

Putting wings and a halo on the devil
don't make him a saint.
And when he pokes you in the backside with
his trident
then you know that he ain't.
And you can't cover up a sea of blood
with a can of white paint.
No, a halo and some wings on the devil,
a halo and some wings on the devil
don't make him a saint!

Give and Take

(by *Kathy Longshore*)

If someone told you to stand in the corner
With no clothes and no food
Then the next day gave you a sweater
And a dry piece of bread
Would you praise him?

If someone took all your money
And later returned a third of it
Would you think of him as generous?

If someone locked up people
With no legitimate cause
Then freed past prisoners
Legally convicted by jurors
Would you consider him a just person?

If someone uses extortion to get his enemies
To fund a multi-million-dollar ballroom
Would you think of him as a smart negotiator?

Maybe in the corporate world it would be
acceptable to some.
Think again when it's someone governing
our country.

Climate Change in Reverse

(A reverse poem to be read forward then backward line by line)

(by **Kathy Longshore**)

Global warming
I believe in
No such thing.
A hoax. There is
Little scientific evidence. It's
That some say there is
Ocean warming and rising
To worry about.
I've heard enough
Of this green generation.
Always hugging trees
With open arms
Trying to save the world
They are
Trying to be convincing.

Thinking in Polymers

(by **Mary-Jane Newborn**)

The plastic grocery bag snagged
high in a tree for many moons
gradually disintegrates.
Petrochemical molecules waft into the
breeze
and droppeth as the gentle rain from
heaven.
We breathe them in to lodge in our lungs
and guts, our hearts
and brains,
giving a whole new meaning
to the term "neuroplasticity,"
(not to mention
"artificial intelligence").

Dissident

(by **Mary-Jane Newborn**)

The world is my oyster
and I'm a piece of grit
that causes it to cover me
in layers bit by bit,

making me invisible,
keeping me in bounds
so no one will be bothered
by sight of me or sound.

Take away my power,
take away my voice,
take away all purpose,
take away all choice.

Now I'm all smoothed over,
the world admires its deed.
no longer seen or heard or known
I'm trapped in endless need.

How long must i go on this way,
no hope, no life, no friend,
as tragedies proliferate
'til life on earth will end?

It's a triple catastrophe—
my life, my kind, my world—
all doomed to mass extinction
and I'm helplessly imperiled.

POEMS:

ALYCIA MARQUEZ

Alycia Marquez is a small business owner, mother of 3, and wife of an Immigrant.

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PAUL SHORTT

Paul Shortt, known as a stage designer and UC-CCM professor, also writes short fiction, plays and poetry. He and wife Marcia, a graphic designer and watercolorist, divide their time between their two daughters, three grandkids and family in Cincinnati and the Monterey Peninsula, Marcia's origin.

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DRAWING:

THOMAS UMFRID

Tom Umfrid is a multimedia visual artist who endeavors to make the intangible tangible.

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SNOW and ICE

(by Paul Shortt)

A door crash like I never heard
Splinters and screams
From children from dreams
Dark shapes pulling from across my bed
In colors of black and colors of dung
Black masks and headlamps blinding our eyes
My wife screaming across darkened room
Cutting light beams flashing across her torn slip
Her breast spilling out, right hand jerked back by a plastic tie-wrap
Dragged through our clutter of bedroom
Into a tumbled front room of cold air
Pushed by those against others who pull
Through our front door of a final twisted hinge
Now slipping three steps down to a front walk of snow and ice
My underwear slipping as I grasp for a hold
The back of my head suddenly explodes
I faint and fall into the snow

I must be dreaming now of such things:
Who's going to wash your dishes now?
Who's going to clean your houses?
Who's going to landscape your gardens?
Or shingle your roofs?
Repair your siding?
Or build your houses?
Babysit your children?
Nurse your grandmother?
Or change her bedpan?
Who will play with your children as mine did with yours?
Or teach in your school as my daughter did in yours?

You cannot forget our delicious food as you try to imitate.
Our music is joyous, but will soon disappear.
As will our fiestas, and pinatas,
Our laughter and our joy,
And especially the love within our large close families,
And our larger loving communities.

It is a grand grand mistake to let us Hispanics disappear
When your fear was fooled by others
Whose hearts are cold and unyielding
Like the snow and the ice
They throw us out into.

Your Decision

(by *Alycia Marquez*)

Anymore the life I know
That once felt fast- feels slow
My coffee
My commutes
My reasoning and reason for being
I keep
Reminding myself that these moments are fleeting
But it's as if all sense of urgency is lost
That ambition is now replaced with
Duty to my children
To maintain the illusion
That our community isn't plagued by racism
Our neighbors, family, and friends
So quick to smile and pretend
But I see the thin veil slipping

Oh the condolences
Our condemnation begets

As if watching our lives unraveling
And wondering why our purpose -
Why our goals have been lost
They'll say "it isn't happening"
With a crooked grin
"What will you do when your worst fears don't come into fruition?"
But what if
My worst fear is
That you believe the propaganda
That you've been poisoned
And there's no argument strong enough to make you listen
What if
my worst fear is
You remain on the wrong side and I have to accept that it was your decision

POEMS:

AMBER NICOLLE

Amber Nicolle, known as N.R.G. da NuRa Goddezz, is a Cincinnati-born poet and Spoken Word artist who began writing at age eight in the Young Authors Club. She has authored two volumes of poetry and released three spoken word albums. For two decades, Amber's spirit-led, justice-centered words have uplifted and activated audiences nationwide, leaving them fully iNiRGized.

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TERRY PETERSEN

Terry Petersen writes poems and short stories for *Piker Press*, an online press originating in California. She has a blog, terrypetersen.com, Finding the gem in the muck of real life. Her favorite activity is spending time with her grandchildren.

Terry finds peace in simplicity. One of her grandchildren told her she was kindergarten age, like she was.

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DRAWING:

JANE ROBERTS

Jane Roberts, born 2003, is a digital and traditional illustrator based in the Northern Kentucky area. As a whole, their work explores religious, spiritual, and queer identity through a fantastical lens. When they're not making art, they enjoy playing DND, relaxing with their cat, and drinking a nice cup of earl gray tea.

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CUT—

(by *Terry Petersen*)

Let your hopes, not your hurts, shape your future. *Robert H. Schuller*

The little girl stands
on her imaginary stage
made of ordinary maroon carpet
on an everyday Thursday afternoon

sometime in mid-1950.
A popular song drifts into the living room
from the kitchen where Mommy cooks,
scrubs the floor,

and complains about how quickly
three kids get it dirty again.
The girl listens to the music and
mimics the trills, the rises and falls,

and emotions in the melody,
her gentle vibrato promising a
clear soprano voice one day.
She would have added gestures

for her make-believe audience
but Mommy appears at the doorway
wielding her wooden spoon.
So-who-do-you-think-you-are?

Mommy turns away without striking.
Yet, the girl hears the warning
and retreats into the dark, silent spaces
between the lace curtains and window.

The song will not disappear.
She hears it inside her head
and saves the sound
for a safer moment

when she will lead her
children to follow dreams,
write, discover subtleties,
laugh, cry, or simply be.

The day arrives
and she discovers joy
intrinsic to encouraging others, as well as
the beauty inside forgiveness.

Created Equally

(by *Amber Nicolle*)

We were all created as one,
equal in every way.
Color, thought pattern, way of life,
belief, language.
But because we started to feel as though
we had more than the next man,
the people were divided.
Because we didn't appreciate the peace we had,
nor did we overstand the blessings given to us,
they were taken away.
We were separated,
left to fend for ourselves.

Religion came in,
yet we were still separated.
Putting one belief up against the other,
in the end, still divided.
Will there ever be a way to get back to one...
Then Hiphop was born.

The answer to the problem,
the light in the darkness.
Bridging the gap between oceans,
and lifetimes, and differences.
Uniting all those who believe,
there can be peace

Hiphop came along
and freed us who've been trapped,
in confusion.
Freed us who've been
disillusioned-
Opened the door,
so we could see the bigger picture.
Gave us the strength to work harder,
and not be afraid of commitment-
Hiphop,
the answer, believe it or not.
The movement is moving,
and it won't be stopped...

POEMS:

MICHAEL OLSON

Michael Olson holds a University of Arizona degree in Creative Writing. His debut full length poetry collection In *The Tall Grasses* was published in July 2024.

Michael has been a Writer's Digest Poetry competition finalist for four consecutive years (2022 thru 2025). Presently he leads the Cincinnati Writer's Project and is President of the Greater Cincinnati Writer's League.

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DEBORAH WILLIAMS-STEPHENS

Deborah Williams-Stephens was born and raised in Cincinnati, Ohio. Her poetry explores themes of women empowerment and social justice and her writing is deeply influenced by personal experiences and community awareness. Deborah hopes to bring attention to social issues through her work.

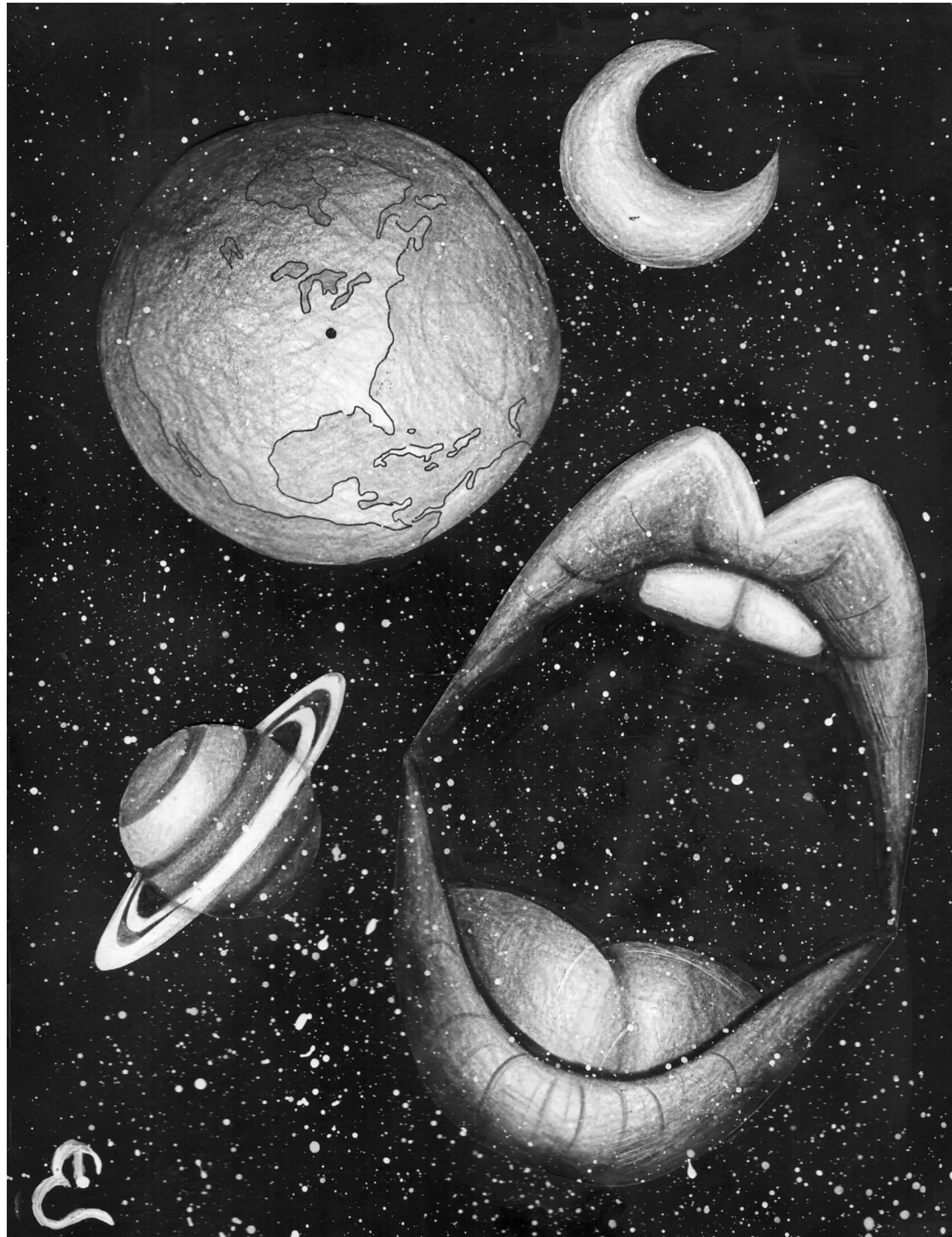
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DRAWING:

TYLER CALVELAGE

Tyler Calvelage is 19 years old and is a first-year fine arts major at UC, specializing in ceramic/sculpture. His art revolves around the romanticism of nature through symbolism and hidden meaning. Tyler lived in Centerville, Indiana, before moving to Cincinnati.

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They Say the Loudest Song in the Universe

(by *Michael Olson*)

is a cricket crying to god
and gets all the attention for its beautiful begging.
this, I can attest to, sitting on my patio sipping
a good aged whiskey
their call echoing off the delicious
chocolate darkness of a melting summer night
sounding like the whole male world in rut
wanting to wrap their legs around creation
or die trying
singing their longing.

our lyrics are the same.

but what maniacal ear-worm is this,
that makes crickets cry and flamingos dance,
that romances the mantis to lose its head
in a one-night stand
and makes a boy that wants to be a girl
mangle his body to find the love he needs?
it is the same song as our sobbing
echoing in the empty stomach of war,
but wanting to be filled with laughter
it is the melody of a child shorn too soon
from its mother's war-torn womb
just wanting to be held
singing its longing.

it is the same.

Smell of Injustice in the Air

(by *Deborah Williams-Stephens*)

What is that odor permeating the air
It's the chemical plant, the factory and garbage dump
It's the release of pollution, poison and dangerous solutions
It was a plan, a design, a meeting of the minds
Let's build a housing project, let people breathe and live over there
Built on purpose because about poor people, nobody really cares
That smell in the air, smells unfair, like cancer, early death and despair
It's the smell of Injustice permeating the air

Epiphany

(by *Michael Olson*)

Life as we know it
Revolves around a sun
Becomes aware when it learns to hunger
Learns to sense when it needs to understand
Learns to fear when it becomes another's hunger
Learns to fear when it cannot understand
Hates when it's the victim of a hunger
Hates when it cannot understand
Learns to love when it learns to hunger
Learns to love when it finally understands

The Voices in the Other Cave

After Thomas Lux

(by *Michael Olson*)

Scream inside of ours
and would mute all our singing
for refusing to learn their songs.
They would shred all our tongues
for hissing at their lyrics
and use raptor fangs to burst our drums.
If we don't hurl word-feces from their dung heap
back at them to silence their cacophony, we will
never sleep.

we sing this they sing that

they tell us mastodons are not real
and build fires in our beds that we must smother
with the truths of tusk and hide
while they have their way with our minds
and moan like mastodon in heat.
we build bigger drums to subdue their lies.
we laugh at their small hands, their impotence.
we rape their thoughts with insidious intent.

they rape this we rape that

the paintings on their cave walls
are of themselves and beasts they have killed.
the paintings on our walls are of beasts we fear.
their gods wear faux furs and jewelry.
our gods wear nothing.
they call our gods fools for not wanting.
we call their gods insane; they wear shiny
clothing.
they call our gods idiots for their loathing.
we bow to this they bow to that

the voices from the other cave stir our words
with hemlock gravy and feed them to our herds.
they see rose gardens and, jealous, cut them
down.
we see roses that want to be proud of their
renown.
all these years of tit for tat, all the years of fit or
fat.
still 10,000 more of fighting this or that.
we destroy this, they re-build that
they destroy this, we re-build that

POEMS:

ELAINE OLUND

Elaine Olund is a climate-concerned poet, writer and sketchbook-keeper based in Cincinnati, Ohio. Her chapbook, *The Invisible Suitcase* (Finishing Line Press) came out in 2020. Elaine hosts a monthly climate-focused meditation/writing group and is working on a collection of poems about our changing world.

Contact: elaineolund.com

SHERRY COOK STANFORTH

Sherry Cook Stanforth serves as artist-in-residence for the Carnegie Center of Columbia Tusculum. She is the author of a poetry collection, *Drone String*, also serving as the managing editor of *Pine Mountain Sand & Gravel* and two river-inspired anthologies, *Riparian* and *Tributaria*.

Sherry founded Originary Arts Initiative to provide diverse communities with creative opportunities and place-based inspiration. She plays in the band Tangled Roots, studies plants, hikes, cooks, and keeps bees.

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DRAWING:

KATE KERN

Using drawing, artists' books, installations and other media, Kate Kern's goal is to create immersive work. Her work can be found in collections including among others: The Akron Art Museum, The Getty Research Institute, Joan Flasch Artists' Book Collection, SAIC, Art Institute of Chicago, Franklin Furnace/MOMA Artist Book Collection, and the Artists' Book Collections of Carnegie Mellon University and Brown University.

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Thoughts at the End of the Hottest Year (so far)

(by *Elaine Olund*)

(with a repeating line from Jane Hirshfield's "Three Times My Life Has Opened")

You will recognize what I am saying or you will not—
but outside my window it is December
and the pussy willow by the pond
which cradles an empty nest
is pushing fresh fuzzy catkins out the ends
of every single branch. I touch them,

to see how they feel.

You will recognize what I am saying or you will not—
but on a north-facing porch
a pot of Gerber Daisies sits perky
in full bloom; to be certain
I'm not catastrophizing, I touch the smooth
green leaves, fluted fuchsia petals,

to be sure they are real.

You will recognize what I am saying or you will not—
but far from pond and porch daisies
a petroleum sultan-CEO who's in charge of climate
talks in the sleek smog-shrouded sci-fi city of Dubai
says 'there's no science' behind a phase-out of fossil
fuels,

I doublecheck the quotation

to be sure it is real.

Unraveling Braid

(by *Sherry Cook Stanforth*)

I.
Hot winter sun sucks up
every cloud in the sky.
Three crows fly around
the slate dump, cawing at
the high wall, twisting a
sorrow song through
brown valleys.

II.
During the jam session, a fiddler
recalls a time of more mountains,
more bee-hum, more red clover—
how one good winter snow
could tune down the shrill
notes of progress for
at least one day

III.
I sit on the back porch,
wearing my empty face
before the silver river. My
littlest girl touches my arm
with her peach-sticky hand,
asking *how long has this
water been alive?*

Arbor Day (for America)

(by *Sherry Cook Stanforth*)

in time, her bark grows
rough, peeling away
in thin strips. She's lost
her original tone
found herself

falling—

leaf drop
root rot
it seems she cannot
to pathogens
such infection is
just a matter
for any ecosystem—

stand up

of course

invaded she still works
to understand
the way to keep
serve all the diverse
wet threads connected
tucked away
nutrients that invite her

resurrection
spirit
lives
underground
stirring
to become

first a beautiful tree
feeding on dirt
part of the cherished forest
giving shelter and
day by day until, *unbelievable*:
ice rains down its killing
weight so that she finds a new

a rising

breath
here, now—
calculated
truth

dying back, her broken limbs
scatter and decompose
never again to be
the same tree
she lets go

forecasting
the ways of all matter

POEMS:

KINDRA ROACH

Kindra Roach is a proud Cincinnati native who enjoys bike riding, watching old movies, reading, writing, and French fries with ketchup. Cincinnati is a rich diverse community and Kindra is happy to call it home.

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CHUCK STRINGER

When talking with strangers, Chuck Stringer describes himself as a person who tries to be a loving partner, parent, grandparent, relative, and friend—an Anglican Christian living as a poet close to the earth. He lives with his wife Susan in Northern Kentucky near Fowlers Fork, by which he daily walks and writes and keeps creek.

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DRAWING:

HALENA V. CLINE

Halena V. Cline, born in 1948 in Cincinnati, Ohio, attended Northern Kentucky University. Her artist studio is in Cincinnati and she resides in Northern Kentucky.

Halena participated in many exhibits, locally, nationally and internationally, including in 2024 at Venice Art Festival, Venice, Italy, and in 2026 at MOCAA, Miami, Florida.

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DST, 2026

(by *Chuck Stringer*)

This morning the clock on our stove reads 7:15,
but the time on my phone now reads
an hour later. I get out of bed, wondering, "Why
would anyone want to make day or light lie?"
All I know is, outside, the sun rises through a Sunday sky
like nothing has been saved
or lost, and a waning gibbous moon
reflects on this world—continues its slow, steady slide
below the horizon.

POEMS:

ARMANDO ROMERO

Armando Romero (Cali, Colombia, 1944) is a poet, fiction writer, and literary critic. He has lived in numerous countries in both the Americas and Europe. He earned his doctorate in Pittsburgh and currently resides in the United States. Armando holds the academic title of Charles Phelps Taft Emeritus Professor at the University of Cincinnati. He has published numerous books of poetry, fiction, and essays.

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HENRY SPOTTSWOOD

Henry Spottswood, his wife Mary, and their kitty Zelda live in downtown Cincinnati. Henry retired after a career in agencies treating substance use disorders. His poems have appeared in varied periodicals including *Appalachian Heritage*, *Still: the Journal*, *The Southern Poetry Anthology* volume three, and *Town Creek Poetry*.

Henry now tinkers with melodic picking on the five string banjo.

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DRAWING:

KURT STORCH

70 year old artist Kurt Storch lives and works in the Cincinnati area. His art investigates an evolving self-understanding of mental states of being. For Kurt, abstractions serve as inquiry into states of mind where line and color create flowing watercolor sequences of emotive energy. He finds the process of painting to be therapeutic and life affirming.

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The Poet's Works

(by *Armando Romero*)

The poem crashes against the flowers.
The poem is made and unmade.
Pigeons withstand the children's stones.
Beauty is at the edge of the precipice.
The poet can no longer see himself.
Nature hides itself from the flowers.
Words free themselves from the verse.
Hearts throb like wolves in the night.
Lightning flashes do not illuminate the cigarettes.
The revolution has no shanks.
The moon no longer bites anyone.

(translated from Spanish by *Saad Ghosn*)

Trabajos del Poeta

(by *Armando Romero*)

*El poema se estrella contra las flores.
El poema se hace y se deshace.
Las palomas resisten las piedras de los niños.
La belleza está al borde del precipicio.
El poeta ya no puede verse a sí mismo.
La naturaleza se esconde de las flores.
Las palabras se sueltan del verso.
Los corazones laten como lobos en la noche.
Los relámpagos no iluminan los cigarrillos.
La revolución no tiene patas.
La luna ya no muerde a nadie.*

Family and Physics in Ziegler Park

(by *Henry Spottswood*)

The park's a playground and classroom
for laws that govern us with constancy.
Gravity, sunrise and sunset, the weather,
the slow and eternal turn of the seasons.

Air vibrations carry gales of playful laughter,
and Newton's Opticks are forever colorblind.
On the courts that ball is pure mechanics,
perfect parabolic arcs and monster dunks.

Swings obey Galileo's laws of the pendulum.
The pool is all about hydraulics. WHO CARES?
Time and space aren't big enough to measure
the bonds I cherish here with kin and friends.

Uninhabited

(by **Armando Romero**)

Let us just say I'm running out of places to live.
I've already left behind the desolation of the tropics.
The Pacific Ocean has closed its dark tunnels.
I abandoned to their own fate the frayed nerves
of the Andes Mountains.
I let the snow fall for no reason in the valleys of Oklahoma.
The useless deserts of Piura and Atacama became entangled
in their spent geography.
The mirages of emptiness were salt.
The green jungle lost and no one to want it green.
The earth entirely populated by unknown faces.
There's nowhere to live in these towns of dusty streets.
I already left behind the fallen pieces of good life.
There's nowhere to live the implacable sentence
of loving with nothing being resolved.

(translated from Spanish by **Saad Ghosn**)

Deshabitado

(by **Armando Romero**)

*Digamos que me voy quedando sin un lugar donde vivir.
Ya dejé atrás la desolación de los trópicos.
El mar del Pacífico cerró sus túneles oscuros.
Abandoné a su propia suerte los nervios crispados
de las montañas de Los Andes.
Dejé que cayera la nieve sin motivo en los valles de Oklahoma.
Los inútiles desiertos de Piura y Atacama se enredaron
en su gastada geografía.
Sal fueron los espejismos al vacío.
Selva de verde perdida sin nadie que la quiera verde.
Tierra toda poblada de rostros desconocidos.
No hay lugar donde vivir en estos pueblos de polvo callejero.
Ya dejé atrás las descargas de la buena vida.
No hay lugar donde vivir la sentencia implacable
del amar sin que nada se resuelva.*

Conflagration Between Fear and Anguish

(by **Armando Romero**)

Where will the hospitals go when the people die?
Will they die beyond the people?
Will there be anesthesia for elevators?
Autoclaves with no surgeons?

I walk with my skin burned by the radiations' smoke.

If hospitals lean forward, vomiting clusters of sick people from their windows,
How should I stand?

My footprints erase the trace of corridors.

Will hospitals hurt me when I donate my blood for the doves?
Will my desires include nights on gurneys and lamentations?

No

I do not think this has to do with what's happening to me
I've been walking along what little remains blooming on my path
but it is useless

The big white shoes have trodden on the flowers with celestial hair
The great sense that everything must be found doesn't comply
I think the night can no longer stand on its two ends
One has splintered against the horizon and is left spinning like a circle on its axis
Wednesday to resist today protecting me with blankets and pillows
To end up forgetting what I do with encounters
However
Lips babble words of the woman at the river's edge
finding precious metals with the wear of her fingers
Hair fuels the brush fire
Skins conceal the diurnal and nocturnal food for the kings of genocide

I have spent the morning the afternoon and the night thinking of all this
and I can't find anything to explain
The problem is superfluous the explanation suffices
the answer isn't true the approach is wrong

Everything from the beginning is in chaos
I touch reality with the tip of the tweezers and I don't like it.
Everything must turn around.
Spin.
Accelerations will be constant and uniform.

Dad, why aren't the people in elevators the same?

In hospitals, there's something that goes in but does not come out.
The same happens in ponds.
I will have to put on my sandals in order to step lower.

Is the soul that emerges from the vaults the music of God?

I can't take it anymore.
I have to turn around
Full speed ahead.

Now it is the island where doves have built their nests
And where eagles devour the tiny eggs they lay.

(translated from Spanish by Saad Ghosn)

Conflagración Entre el Miedo y la Angustia

(by Armando Romero)

*¿A dónde irán los hospitales cuando la gente se muera?
¿Morirán más allá de la gente?
¿Habrá anestesia para los ascensores?
¿Autoclaves sin cirujanos?*

Camino con la piel tostada por el humo de las radiaciones

*Si los hospitales se inclinan vomitando por sus ventanas racimos de enfermos
¿Cómo me tendré que parar?*

Las huellas de mis pies borran el rastro de los pasillos

*¿Será que los hospitales me lastiman cuando dono mi sangre para las palomas?
¿Será que mis deseos incluyen las noches de las camillas y de las lamentaciones?*

No

*No creo que esto tenga que ver con lo que me pasa
He venido recorriendo lo poco que queda florecido por mi sendero
pero es inútil
Los grandes zapatos blancos han pisado las flores de cabellera celeste
El gran sentido de que todo se debe encontrar no responde
Tengo para mí que la noche ya no se sostiene de sus dos puntas
Una se ha astillado contra el horizonte y ha quedado girando como una circunferencia por su eje
Miércoles para resistir hoy protegiéndome con fundas o almohadas
Para terminar olvidando lo que hago de los encuentros*

Sin embargo

*Los labios balbucean palabras de la mujer al borde del río
Encontrando metales preciosos con el desgaste de sus dedos
Los cabellos avivan el incendio de los matorrales
Las pieles esconden el alimento diurno y nocturno para los reyes del genocidio*

*He pasado la mañana la tarde y la noche pensando en todo esto
y no encuentro nada que explicar
El problema sobra la explicación basta
a respuesta no es verdadera el planteo está errado*

*Todo desde el principio está en desorden
Toco la realidad con el extremo de las pinzas y no me gusta
Todo deberá dar vueltas
Girar
La aceleración será constante y uniforme*

¿Papá, por qué la gente de los ascensores no es la misma?

*En los hospitales hay algo que entra y no sale
En los estanques sucede lo mismo
Tendré que colocarme mis sandalias para pisar más bajo*

¿Es el alma que sale de los abovedados la música de Dios?

*No puedo más
Tengo que virar
Todo a estribor*

*Ahora es la isla donde las palomas han construido sus nidos
Y las águilas devoran los pequeñísimos huevos que ponen*

POEMS:

GARY WALTON

Gary Walton has published seven books of poetry, the latest *Waiting for Insanity Clause* (Finishing Line Press, 2017). *Anonymous America* is forthcoming in 2026. His novel *Prince of Sin City* about Newport, Kentucky in its heyday as a gambling Mecca was published by Finishing Line Press in 2009. Gary has been nominated for the Pushcart prize twice and voted Third Place: “Best Local Author” in 2010 in City Beat magazine.

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DRAWING:

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An Informal/Internal Environmental Checklist

(by *Gary Walton*)

What is the environment
Between your ears?

Is it full of white noise, buzzing
From the barking of the algorithmic
Monsters inhabiting your media feed?

Is it a fog forged by white sugar and
Refined flour—bursting with fast food
Carbohydrates, French Fries, and crusted
With deep baked hydrogenated buns,
All making your mind lope like a unicycle
With a flopping flat tire?

Is it a fire fueled by caffeine and energy drinks,
A conflagration seared with cigarettes and
Cocaine, ablaze with fear, despair and desperation,
Like a carnival ride about to jump its track?

Or does your mind lie fallow like a corn field
In winter, stalks broken and bare as far as the eye
Can see—perhaps it's dormant like a spent log
Ashed over in an abandoned fire pit—

Do you see yourself as an agent of your own
Destiny or are you content to just consume
Predigested bolus, received texts pleading, no
Demanding your attention without any critical
Analysis? (Be sure to hit that “like” button and subscribe....)

Yes, indeed, the Antarctic glaciers are calving
At doomsday rates—one chunk as big as Delaware
Is floating and melting in the Atlantic; and, yes,
California is ablaze virtually year round now, and yes
“The cloud,” that virtual incest baby of Silicon Valley,
Uses more water and consumes more energy than
Some countries like Japan, and yes, there are garbage gyres
In all of the oceans bigger than cities, some as big
As Texas....

All of this natural entropy can only matter to you
If you can imagine it through the storms and
Sclerosis obscuring your internal weather—thoughts
Need a promontory to find purchase and thrive—
Alas, the bed rock of your calcified condition
Makes that virtually impossible.

140 Characters or Less

(by *Sarah Williams-Bryant*)

digitally bored
school shootings
human rights
never ending screams on the TV
we are all culturally shocked
when will justice be won?

Halloween (*Memento Mori*)

(by *Gary Walton*)

No one cares about this poem;
It sits alone on a concrete curb
And picks at the skin of a fallen
Oak leaf—perhaps it's maple—

They look so similar when they
Are dead and the stem extends
Boney and stark like the phalanges
Of a Halloween skeleton—

Along the sidewalk lies a plastic bag
Made for carrying sandwiches—
Perhaps peanut butter and jelly, maybe
Tuna, to be eaten at lunch at the middle

School with a banana and chocolate milk—
Instead it contains smaller cellophane sacks,
Each filled with powder white and menacing—
Heroin? Fentanyl? Too small for cocaine—

Perhaps a dealer ditched it before the
Cops collared him—perhaps it just fell out of
A pocket while he was looking at his phone—
A gaggle of “tween” boys pass—the conversation

Animated and tense—but they are not discussing
Last night's game or the cutest girl in homeroom,
Nor the best technique for a 3 point jump shot
(though the basketball court is right in front of them

Sitting empty and forlorn)—no, the boys are debating
The best method for suicide—a tall lanky one with
Arms and legs too long for his body opines that an
Internet influencer is just the “bomb” for such an act—

Others check their feeds for corroboration—
This poem is saddened, wondering if the conspiracy
Theories are true: have “they” changed the water?
Or are Contrails altering our internal atmosphere?

Shouldn't somebody do something? Is there not an
Urgency? Or are we simply devolving,
Spinning in entropy and dissolution, fragmenting
Into what? Superfluity?

Still, the sun shines down and the light breeze
Feels good on the skin on the walk home. There
Is some satisfaction in realizing that the world
Will still be here even if we fade (or even explode) away.

Season Two: the Comeback Carnival! (*a brief review*)

(by *Gary Walton*)

The Rapey the Clown Show is
Back for a new season and ol' orange face
Is meaner and crazier than ever—

Throwing fecal pies at all comers and
Suing everyone and his brother—
What a carnival! What an extravaganza!

Social media love him—he's
Always good for another outrageous prank,
Faux pas or dastardly deed to keep all

Eyes glued to the flickering video screens—Algorithms are grinding and
Ad money floods in and that's the fundamental *raison d'être*,
Profit, profit, profit—grift or farrago

All is fair game—a favorite of Silicon Valley,
Rapey keeps the social addiction machine
Raking it in too, raising outrage from a fever

Pitch to a fine art of Hoi Polloi brain burst—
Blood spatters everywhere, but the lucre cascades down
Like cyber coins on an insane, incessant chuck-a-luck or

Silver dollars into billions of rigged slot machines:
This is America at her most flagrant and desperate—
Addicted, debased and loving it!

Sure people are out of work, the government is a
Sad costume drama performed by frat boys and
“Broh” media influencers, but the show is a hit and

We are entertained and watching Rapey go through
His bag of nefarious tricks—but through it all we
Are hypnotized, drawn in—it's like holding a depraved mirror

Up to ourselves—He is US!—look at him dance—
The Danse Macabre—see him smile, listen to him
Cackle, watch him mug for the camera! Hear the calliope?

See the dizzying blur of lights—dazzled, we too
Twirl like marionettes, round and round, 'til the sun comes up—
But we hope (no, we know) tomorrow never really comes,

Not this time!

Intoxicated, we never have to think about the bill that must
Inevitably be paid because, look at the Show! The Thrill!
Have we ever been so happy?! Just keep smiling!

Just keep watching, watching, and watching!