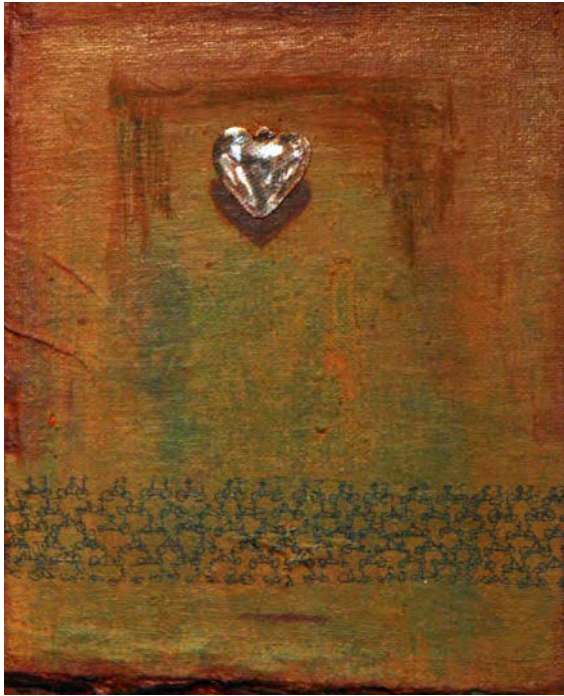


Branches
volume seventeen



Chris Phillips
Shadow
acrylic

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To view previous editions of *Branches* or to find out more information about submitting works of art or literature to the 18th edition of *Branches*, please visit our website at www.cccti.edu/branches.

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Kendra Reese

Spider

Digital Photography

Awarded first place by the visual arts editors of *Branches*.
(2-D Category)

He Galahad

By Matt McGuire

This story was awarded first place by the literary editors of *Branches*.

The old man and the boy set out from the house at first light. The old man crawled into the driver's side of his blue Jeep truck while the boy strapped down the heavy, orange Husqvarna saw, two mauls, a double bladed axe, and a Thermos containing heavily creamed coffee. The heavy steel door of the Jeep snapped to with a clang as the boy slid leftways on the terrycloth cover and fished in his pocket for a cigarette.

The truck smelled of sweet old work sweat, rock dust, mason tools, and tobacco. The old man ground his false teeth on a peppermint as the road grass ticked by on the way to the wood lot.

You ought not to be smoking.

I know.

I quit before you was born. My uncle Claude died from it. He drowned in his own bed.

I know.

You ought not to be smoking.

The Jeep climbed a bare rock hill through two black mud tracks. The boy leaned forward, rolling up the window after tossing his butt into the muck. At the top the old man killed the throttle. It took a few seconds for the engine to die, but the boy was already out the back unstrapping the saw and one of the mauls, clambering through the mud split by the truck and hurrying with his load over to the first of several piles of logs.

I gotta pee. Go ahead and start in on that bunch of cherry.

Okay.

The boy started the saw, making sure to kick back the guard so the blade would run and tore into the nearest five hand log, young muscles rippling in his arms with the vibration of the saw. The old man pulled his pants up and picked up the hickory handled maul, raising it over his head and dropping it onto the upturned stumps the boy sawed and then sat up for him.

After an hour the two traded trades and the old man sawed while the boy split. The sun was up good and hot now. The boy's sweat soaked through his cotton tee while the old man kept his blue poly long sleeve on without even bringing a lather. The boy mauled viciously the stumps the old man sawed, as if they were dragon necks and he Galahad.

When the two had accumulated a large run of stove wood, the old man killed the throttle on the saw and stood up with his hands against the small of his back, the sun on his face. The rays tinted his shopworn spectacles and he spat against the ground, proclaiming,

That's about a cord.

I figured.

Let's load up and take it slow. I don't wanna lose nary a piece.

Okay.

The old man and the boy stacked the cut wood onto the back of the Jeep methodically, placing each piece as if it were a stone in the tomb of a pharaoh. The old man gently chided the boy for his lack of skill in the art of stove wood building, but the boy just laughed. When they were done they sat together on a large oak stump and drank coffee from the Thermos.

The boy lit up, and the old man looked off into the morning as if the day held all the sustenance he would ever require.

What did the doctor say the other day? You never did tell me.

The old man spat against the earth and continued staring off into the trees ringing the high bald.

The boy stubbed out his cigarette on the oak and said,
Well?

It ain't good.

How bad is it? It cain't be that bad...

The old man doused his cup on the ground and stood slowly, painfully, and placed his hands against the small of his back.

We're burning daylight. Let's go.

The boy sat on the oak, immovable, a crest of terror crashing over the barriers of his common sense, of his memory, of the very earth upon which he strove with truth. Come on, son. Your momma is gonna be worried.

The boy picked his nauseous frame up off the oak and walked slowly to the truck, where his grandfather was tying down the tools and the worn steel Thermos. The doors clanged shut and the old man cranked up the truck, the scent of goldenrod and saw gas strong on the September air.

I bet your momma has something good for us when we get home.

The road slid by as the boy peered off into the valley; a brown ribbon of water wound round gray boulders and scrubs on its way to the sea.

He lifted a crumpled cigarette to his lips slowly, bar oil and wood dust coloring the scent of the white paper, but he didn't light it. He just let it hang from his lip, and then he began to cry.

The boy heaved in hard swells against the dash and pounded it with his fist while the old man drove, never speaking, sphinxlike, a bent haggard stone on the seat while the boy had his fit with hard fate.

They pulled up the drive towards the old shipboard house, and the old man killed the throttle. While the Jeep sputtered the boy sat in his fury. His grandfather creaked open the driver's side door and stepped around back to unharness the saw.

You gonna help me unload this or are you laying down on the job?

The boy swung open the blue and silver door and slammed it behind him. He ran around to where the old man was beginning to stack the stove wood carefully, methodically, onto the winter's store and said,

Lemme do that for you.

The old man stepped back, propped his foot on the rusty chrome rear bumper and looked off towards the house.

You know, if a man took a notion, he might have a run of blueberry bushes along that drive. For pies and such.

I reckon.

You don't need to worry, son. Everything is gonna be okay.

The boy said nothing and continued off bearing stove wood.

Look at me.

He said it slowly: Everything is going to be okay.

The boy looked up for a moment, and then turned back to his work.

You're as fine a man as I could have ever hoped for.

The boy paused for a moment, just long enough to absorb the words, to feel them resonate within his bones, to engrave them upon the very foundations of his life, and then finished the job while his grandfather put away the saw, the mauls, and the axe. They walked up to the house together, the old man leaning slightly on his grandson, not because he needed to, but because the leaning lent strength to the firmness of his line, as an oak rests upon its roots in the storm, or a mountain defies time by the granite at its core.



Cody Harrell

Fascia

Soapstone

Awarded first place by the visual arts editors of *Branches*.
(3-D Category)



homeless hopes

By Philip Davis

This poem was awarded first place by the literary editors of *Branches*.

amazing grace
crying from the mouths of violins
atop the brush of wind
and angelic fountains.
crossed by unmet wandering feet
beneath craned necks,
searching through the streets
of America's peak of dreams.

and all finding the same things,
keeping the same upbeat speed,
curiously drawn from place to place.
to weeping willows and Spanish tangos.
snapping a shot from every fucking angle,
stepping over filled clothes,
dirty and mangled, torn by
broken overpasses
and empty change cups.



Christine Bolick
Ladders
Mixed Media
Awarded Honorable Mention by the
visual arts editors of *Branches*.
(3-D Category)

Family Ties

By Sigrid Hice

She never suspected
Her scissors would sharpen
Memories in my mind
When at five
I sat beside her
Watching her arthritic fingers
Weave the darning needle
Up and down
The tension thread
She had spread
Across the hole
In grandpa's sock
Until the hole was closed
And her scissors snipped
The darning yarn

When I was six
Her life was snipped
From mine
But like the darning yarn
Across the hole
In grandpa's sock
My memories of grandma
Stretch across
Years and miles
To my arthritic fingers
Guiding cuts and
Shaving paper edges
With grandma's scissors
While I sculpt
My artist books



Joe Hollar
Untitled
Gesso, Pen and Ink



Michael Howell
Minority
Mixed Media

The Biggest Lie I Ever Told

By Alyce P. Nadeau

You're kidding. Right?
You're asking me?
Me who has had three cardio versions
a Pace Maker replaced three times
Six husbands
(Three of them were my own)
Three children
more friends than I can count

What category are we in?
Education, travel, food, fun, career,
Lovers, orgasms, money, politics, belief system

"Tell the truth as fast as you can"
"Forgive as you wish to be forgiven"
"Keep it simple, stupid!"

Shoot a monkey!
I can't even recall phone numbers
Names of teachers and professors
Plots of books and movies
Chemical formulas
Latin names of herbs and flowers
Where I had lunch last Tuesday

You're asking a lot
Of a seventy-four year old

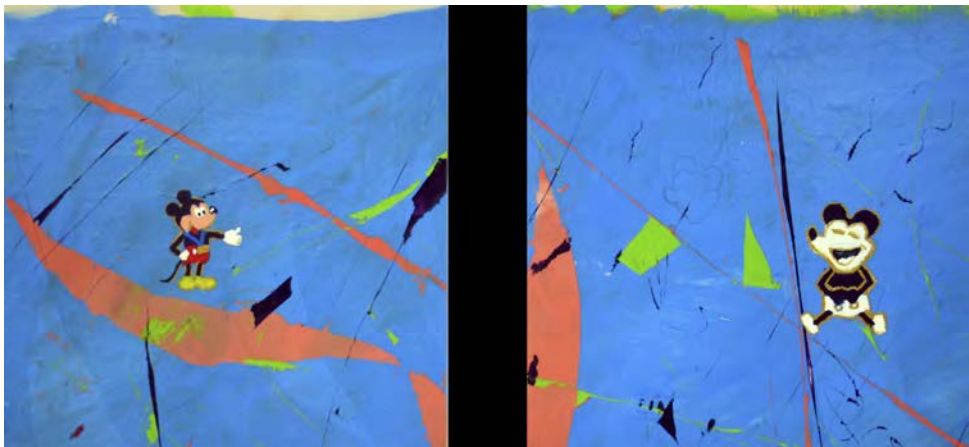
Really!
I mean
I have NEVER told a lie

Except to spare feelings
Save face
Expedite forward progress
Cover my tracks
Enhance my image

SO
I'll have to sit this one out



James Roosevelt Greene
Floyd
Collage



Bobby W. Stalnaker
Generations
Acrylic

Embracing Darkness

By Cornell Glover

As a small child I had a fear of the dark
Not a fear of monsters or killers or dead people standing near my bed at night after an
unforwarded text message
I feared the unknown
The cold uncomfortableness of not being able to see the world around me
I slept with a light on not remembering that nothing is darker than world behind my eyelids

At the age of 12 the shadows became my friends
The boogeyman would come out of my closet with his checkerboard ready to play
I would always lose because it was too dark to see where to move
When it got too late a shadow from a jacket on a vacuum that looked like a person would
tuck me in and read me a bedtime story
Then the monster under my bed would hold my hand while it rocked me to sleep.

As a teenager when I was in the dark I never reached out for something to hold onto
I sat comfortably in my own blissful ignorance
I marinated in the quiet of the dark
I didn't fear the dark, I embraced the unknown because I learned there were things in this
world darker than the world behind my eyelids and that the shadows hurt
I didn't fear the dark because only in the dark was I unsure I was completely alone



Amanda Jackson
Something Hidden
Ink and Acrylic Wash



Megan Miller
Versailles (2012)
Ink

Fourth and Forever

By Zach Adams

Fourth and forever on the third of December.
The holding of hands for a time to remember.
As time stood still I could hear all the whispers.
Through all the blood, the sweat, and the blisters.

We played as a team, through thick and thin,
Through every loss and every win.
We know for sure that this chance is sacred.
We're almost there, I can already taste it.

"Miracles happen" I heard someone say,
As we walked to the line for that one last play.
One last shot at defying the odds.
One last chance of becoming the Gods.

Here it was, our one last chance.
Hand to the ground for one last stance.
I could smell the stench from the bodies that clattered.
At this moment, this time, none of it mattered.

The ball was hiked and thrown to the air.
Blocking my man, I looked in despair.
Three guys jumping, only one was for me.
Swatting the ball as it afraid of a bee.

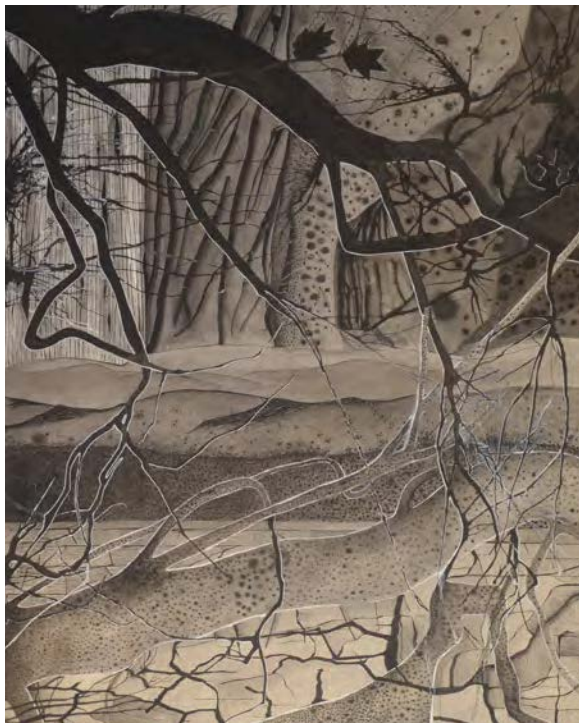
Battled down and called no reception.
Time ran out, no chance for redemption.
All is finished, my career is over.
No miracle here, no four leaf clover.

"What could have been?" runs through my mind,
As I look back in time and try to rewind.
The events of that day cause me to shudder.
We dropped the ball with hands made of butter.

No chance to rethink this or even get clever.
It'll always be fourth and forever,
Forever.



Miranda Beard
Cryomaneer
Green Tea, Coffee, Charcoal, White Pastel, Gesso



Joe Hollar
Twisting Landscape
Pen and Ink

West – A Haiku

By Jesse Barber

The west, it calls me
Holocene is on repeat
I am going home.

The white capped mountains,
Towering, old, and restless,
Preserving the wild.

Miles of wilderness
Swallowed by the big blue sky
Lost in serenity.

Home and peace live here
Where you find yourself, and God
Standing in stillness

Gazing at wonder
Together calling it good
Holy Father and child

Unrequited

By Nancy Posey

So rare the fifty-fifty proposition:
We post our letters without weighing
our hopes for reply. We mete out love
for the gift's intrinsic pleasure; all love
returned we count as double blessing.
The bird's mating call may fail to fill
his temporary need, but he sings for
pleasure all the same. The poet's
verses, tiny gifts of words set down
to last, so rarely return to their maker,
the alphabet restrung by others,
small thank you's. When they do,
the pleasure's doubled by the beauty
of the unexpected gift, yours for keeps.

The River

By Mandy Ford

Looking down,
The water is alive!
Dark and without a name,
It beckons my presence.

I plunge into the depths,
sinking into the mud.

The air abhorred.
The river rejoiced.



Dawn Hertzog
King Henry XIII
Acrylic



Ethan Walsh
Trenches
Acrylic

Significant Genealogy

By Alyce P. Nadeau

Beneath the belly of the sky
I observe small things:

First birdsong awakening morning,
Deer, like brown mounds,
lying in wait for corn
Mist rising above creek
filling valley with whiteness,
The awesome cape of spread feathers
shining reflected glory
as Crow monopolizes bird feeder.

Lively, lovely
Mother Nature's peaceful offerings
Mine.

They're dead:
the late great husbands,
sisters, teachers, friends.

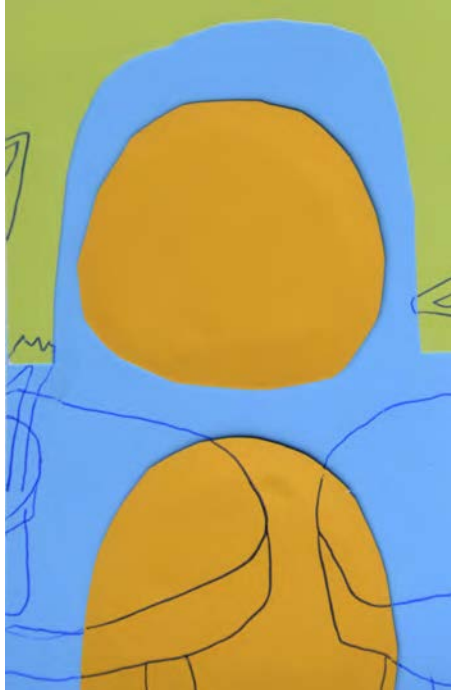
They're gone:
the children now adults
to far-flung metropolitan areas
to homes, careers, new loves
No excitement for them on mountain ridges.

So hard:
This holding with an open hand
this waiting
infrequent calls and visits
while they make their way
in this, their new world.

Does family matter?

Indeed:
As I hold in my heart
those beloveds gone from life
precious ancestors
whose talents and creativity shaped my own life
those now bearing my genes
among humankind
those who take parts of me into the future

under this same sky
unseen by my eye



Forest Bolick
Untitled 1
Collage and Ink



Kendra Reese
Iris
Digital Photography

Carnival

By Robert Harold (Bobby) Hamby

Prisms are whirring
off-center
under sky dresses
made faded
and taut.

Everything is altogether
dusty
with fine cool grains
keeping watch
in many footsteps.
There's a spindly barker
 a madman
 a mesmerist
 a thin Victorian
crouched on a dais
with a crooked cap
and sagacious
broad-lipped smile.

There is a crowd
nickel-less.

An attraction is upended
with stomachs full
of copper knots.

Time is kaleidoscopic.

A child's laughter
is innocence in circles.

The sounds born
and devoured
through creaking rusted metal
under ancient bright
and some
blown bulbs.



Laura Price

Grimm Cinderella

Watercolor, Coffee, Salt, India Ink, Graphite and Color Pencil



Kayla Tharrington

Serenity

Collage

Tick Tock

By Katie Queen

Drip drip drip
the faucet reminds
me of a time
not so distant
not so pleasant
not so

Tick tock tick
the clock reminds
me of a time
ever so frigid
ever so broken
ever so

Whir whir whir
the fan reminds
me of a time
not so simple
not so quiet
not so

Yip yap yip
the dog reminds
me of a time
ever so anxious
ever so impatient
ever so

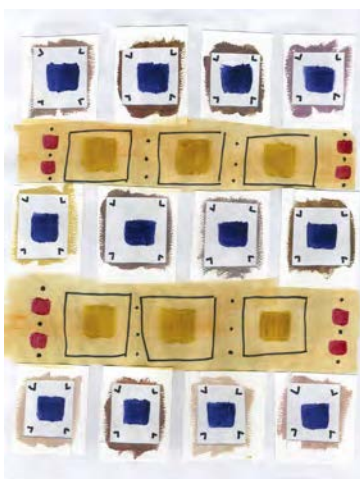
Tick tock tick
time never rewinds

Poems

By Robert Harold (Bobby) Hamby

My favorites leave me
numb
sprawled in warm mud
gut-shot,
squinting into the weather
with my gun cocked
and half-drawn,
the sight snagged
by frayed leather
in its holster

but the best
I can manage
are a bite
of ripe fruit
or a desultory
sigh
into opened
orange flowers.



Shannon Lang
Grid Work
Acrylic, Collage

The Hate and the Hurt

By Brent Tomberlin

Oceans separate the past – it is another country – a far away place
Although not make believe
If water could speak it would tell of death upon deaths
Free crossing to slave – citizens, turned soldiers, going to war
Bodies on bodies – eaten by history – only to wash up
On the shores of memory

Forgotten is a space – although not make believe
Where tears well up from unknown places – where the blackness of hate
Rushes in anew
Standing in Harlem only to feel hurt
There are no shouts heard in Manzanar
The music of memory leaves only pain

One feels it crossing the Pettis Bridge down in the black belt
Where chains and rivers intersect
If water could speak it would shout of death upon deaths
Way down in the Delta the tears well up with Jazz
Accented by the riot pounding of clubs over there in Oxford
Bodies are the witnesses of the hate and the hurt

Ask the ghosts of history about the hate and the hurt
Take in the gas – breathe it in to understand
Put a machete in your hand and chant a tribal sneer
Learn the vocabulary of a bully only to see the other side of the coin
And ask – Why? Why? Why?

Violence breeds like a planter's rape
Hate hurts like a name-caller's worst phrases
Ignorance wastes itself on every wall if the paint dries properly
Man is like a tribe running alongside the bulls instead of in front
Where is the end?

Give me a dose of pepper spray – put it in my nose, ears, and eyes
Disperse it evenly over me like a farmer exterminates insects
Try to kill my insides when I am standing defiant,
Asking for the brakes to be stepped on the 'group think' before we all go down
Let the world see how free people are treated
And ask – Why? Why? Why?

Put me somewhere so I do not have to see this hurt
A plot of ground six feet by six
Some say the answer is in the earth but there are other broken places
For Billie, it was in the strange fruit growing on southern leaves
For the little black boy bullied in the school, it was in his closet

No one escapes the hate and the hurt
Emmett, Martin, Ryan, James, and Matthew –
The whistle and the photo,
The speaker and the shot,
The kid bullied with AIDS,

The man dragged behind a truck because of color,
The killed youth put on a fence

Beyond them, there are many heroes of history's fears and hopes
I wish I could tell them things are better than worse
They know too well of human blood in human veins drained too soon
If their tears could talk
They would tell us of deaths upon deaths

Too many. Too much. An ocean of suffering.

Where were you when decency became timidity?
When did you pick up your blind eye?
Which cheek did you practice turning?
What will you do with the hate and the hurt?

Give it to me
Let it sink in with the weight of history
Let it burn like a pepper's spray of seething anger
Until it makes me say something

Give me the hurt
To hope again



Joshua Surret
Untitled
Low-Fire Ceramics

Comet in Elegy

By Dustin Bass

I am a piece of yesterday's world
(The shattered remains of Eden)
A soft glow of ice against the black
Alien taint of cosmic seasons.

Alone I fly in circles eternal
(In search of my lost home)
Enticed by heavenly bodies,
Who sing their stardust groans.

And I remember the familial choir
With Its silvery sigh of chance
(The rain of super nova fire)
Whose memory is my last.

Missed Dances

By Philip Davis

feeling all new.
brightened by the color blue:

checking again.
from behind
and across
the street,
a liar to me,
so far from me.
rush of the first sip.
first touch of the lip.
awaking the wisp
of the butterfly.
you send them
in panic,
working their
way out,
making me
silly.

we could have danced.
stuck between comforters
and coffee mugs,
but you ignored my leg's hugs.

oh, and thank you.
for feeding the hidden leaves,
and for pruning
over and outgrown trees.
and for all the rest.

just like us,
trying to see out.
keep sipping
for the light
of the seen sun,
without a
dry doubt.



Mary McHone
It is Finished
India Ink, Watercolors, Salt



Christine Bolick
Landscape
Ink and Prisma Pencil

Eye Witness

By Alyce P. Nadeau

There's an old woman
Living in my mirrors.
She's losing her sharp edges
And begins to resemble
My own grandmother.

How can this be?

I will admit she looks kind,
Like someone I would want to know.
Her hair is white,
Her skin is soft
And she is moving
Toward pleasant roundness.

She has been greatly blessed
By tragedy and delights:
The men she's loved
Have loved her back,
She's traveled far
By books, by trains, by planes,
And studied much
With more to come.

So many friends have graced her life
And three fine children
Proudly grown and gone.
One grandchild crowns
The family crest
(From all of us, this child the best).

She lives alone, but not alone
For love abides
And the air, most fragrant,
Is filled with spirits once beloved
Now gone to God.

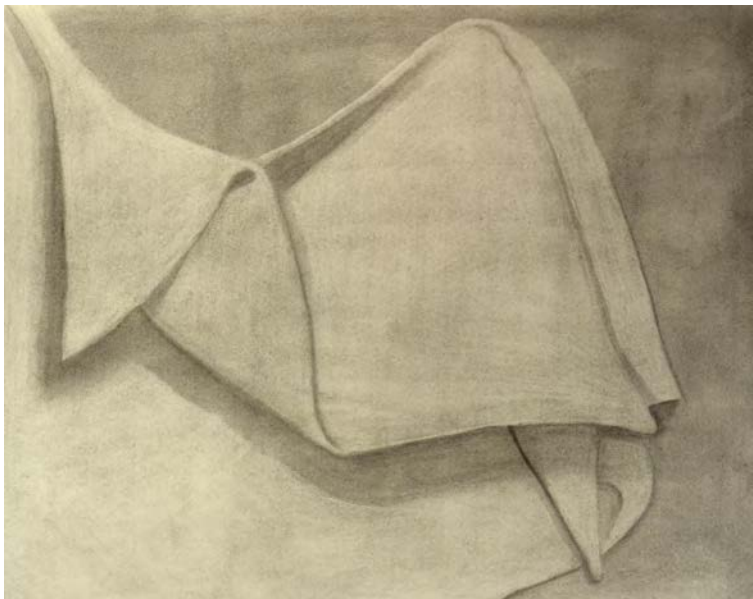
Does she have stories,
This woman now
Passed three score and ten?
You may rest assured
And she will share them
Over coffee or tea, along with cake or pie,
But must have yours first
Before she makes reply.

She's what her children
Used to call
"A Codger."
She has, somehow-
In an unobserved twinkling-
Become "Nana,"
Everybody's grandmother

(But only on the outside.)
Inside she is forever young,
Her spirit soars,
Her curiosity remains engaged,
Her future is eagerly anticipated-
This female image
Briefly glimpsed.



Michelle Bingham
Swirl
Digial Photography



Lizzie Coke
Softness
Reductive Charcoal

Fear Nothing

By Amber Brown

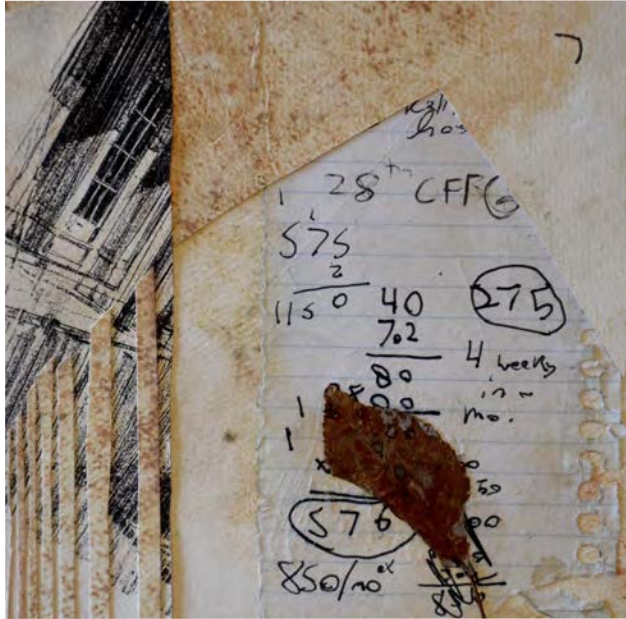
nothingness revealed
through hole punched night;
expectation of form
is sourly denied,
the mind implants
into the void
an agenda.

vagueness,
loss of contrast,
provokes
the object obsessed
primitive.
the way of
shamans
and business men.

Rhetorical Question

By Nancy Posey

“You want something to cry about?
I’ll give you something to cry about.”
He must have read those words
in some sadistic childrearing manual,
passed around in secret by fathers
who chose to stay, to stick around
until all the damage was done.
Before we knew the term rhetorical
question we knew he wanted no answer,
would, in fact, backhand any offender
who dared reply. Lisa learned the hard
way, just home from Sunday school
when she summoned the nerve to say,
“You know you’ll go to hell. I read it
In the Bible today: Fathers, provoke
not your children to wrath.” In one day,
we learned two new words:
provoke
and
wrath.



Chris Phillips
 275 Backwards
 Mixed Media



Lee Anna Gill
 The Pickle
 Linoleum Print

Hardly Speakable

By Philip Davis

how long will I be made to ask,
how long?
til when, I fret,
I will not know.
til what, and that I regret,
neither do I know.

neither will I wait
or strive
for what I am wanting.
For it is coming,
but the sun has sunk
out of sight,
and my light only shows so far.

until then, I will find what there is
to be had in this town,
inside these walls,
and out on these streets.
what you have is between
you and me,
I thought.

I wish you could see the rising of the swell,
and feel the weight of its push
against the bones of your soul.
stand where you are,
and watch the fear pour over you,
forced into the veins of your heart.
smell the spray of sovereignty
as you are washed by the impenetrable
breathe of eternity,
trembling, before the hands of it walls take hold,
and bury you beneath the weight
of its merciful fist,
swept away in its heavenly arms.
Shut your eyes,
for you cannot bear to see.
it's coming,
God said.



Tom Nail
Mirrors on Grayscale
Digital Photography
Dress Designer: Kevin Vain
Model: Bridgette Ochoa



Chris Phillips
Virginia
Digital Photography

Reflections from Cotton Row

By Randell Fleming

He could still see him hanging there. The rope was so tight that it cut into his neck. A darkened red trickle of blood drew a line from his nose to his boney chin. The rope cried with a small squeak, seemingly weeping over what it had to do. Billy was only eight at the time, but the memory was so clear, the horror, the sick feeling as he heard his neck crack. The world was very different then. Life didn't have as much meaning, at least not the life of a poor black man. That is all they were to the other side, poor dirt farmers, not even that, for many they weren't even human. Even the animals that worked the fields were treated with more dignity.

Billy lived on a small farm just outside of Greenwood, Mississippi. His family had lived there for a couple of generations. His granddad had been a sharecropper his whole life but Billy's daddy had managed to get a job in one of the cotton mills along Cotton Row that ran along the Yazoo River in town. His daddy told him once that a man had to better himself on his own; nothing in this world was free. "The only way to move up is with hard work and sweat," he would say.

Billy's daddy, Ruben, was a hard man. He had to be; that was the only way to survive. His mama had died young giving birth and it was just Billy and his father after his granddad died. Billy had to be hard too. In those days there wasn't much chance to go to school. Blacks still weren't allowed into white schools and the only black school was too far away. While his father was working Billy tended the house and helped his granddad on the farm until he died. Sometimes it seemed like his life was surrounded by death in one way or another. However, nothing had affected him as much as what happened that summer day in June.

It was a typical summer in Mississippi, hot and humid. The sun was just starting to dip below the horizon, splashing red across the sky. Billy peered out the dingy window of the shack, looking for the familiar lights of the old truck that his father drove. The countryside would be dark soon and dinner would be getting cold, he thought. His father always got off work late, so Billy wasn't surprised that he still wasn't home yet. For some reason, though, he had an ache in the pit of his stomach, that uneasy feeling that something bad was going to happen. He didn't realize just how bad it would be.

As darkness set in he looked off in the direction of town. The dusty dirt road wound back and forth like a great brown snake and disappeared into the blackness of the night. Suddenly he saw what he had been waiting for. The lights of the old truck were bouncing up the pitted road, but something was different. They swerved and jumped like dancing fireflies on a summer breeze. Something was wrong and he knew it. With a loud thud the truck swerved and hit one of the trees that lined the right side of the road. Billy ran out across the field, not paying attention to the cotton plants cutting into his bare legs. From the distance he could hear men cursing and yelling. His father's voice squeaked as the air was punched from his lungs. As he got nearer Billy could see several white men glowing in the faint beam of the truck's headlights. Arms and feet were flying and thumping against his father's body, each one causing him to convulse. Trying to stay out of sight, Billy crouched behind the row of plants and waited. "It has to end soon," he whispered to himself.

This wasn't the first beating Billy's daddy had gotten through the years. Not long ago he had taken a beating for telling one of the local spoiled brats to stop throwing rocks at the mangy dog that roamed town. The boy's father came to the mill after work was over with three of his friends and beat his daddy senseless. Beatings in Greenwood weren't that uncommon. Even the occasional lynching wasn't unheard of. Back in

August of '55 poor Emmett Till had been murdered by a white store owner named Roy Bryant who accused him of flirting with his wife. In those days, the whites didn't need much of an excuse to beat someone. Emmett's beaten and cut up body was found in the Tallahatchie River the following Sunday morning. Everyone knew that those things happened, but most never expected to have to face it in their own family.

Billy realized that his life would never be at peace the moment he saw the tall fat man pull the rope from the back of the pickup. There are times when you know that you are past the point of salvation, and the look in his daddy's eyes told him that he knew what was coming. "Here's a good one, boys" the fat man shouted as he tossed the rope over the thick branch growing out over the road. The noose swayed lightly from side to side like an old clock pendulum tick-tocking the final seconds away. In one quick motion a short man with a long beard dropped the noose around his daddy's neck and tightened the knot. Without another single word the four men jerked the rope and pulled his feet off the ground. The sickening "crack" seemed to echo in the night. A groan, the shuffle of feet, and it was over. From the darkness someone muttered, "Dirty nigger."

As tears filled his eyes, Billy didn't even realize that he had groaned out loud. From out of nowhere, a large hand clamped on his arm like a vice. "What you doin down there, boy?" the fat man sneered. Billy was frozen with fear. He could almost hear his own neck cracking, thinking he was next. The fat man let him drop and he hit the ground with a thud. Billy's mind was a blur and he just ran like a scared rabbit not heading in any particular direction. In the distance he heard the fat man scream, "Run nigger, you won't get far! You'll just end up just like your old man! You can't escape what you are!"

Billy never found out why his father died that night. All he knew is that they were black and, for the whites of Mississippi, that was reason enough. For many years that event molded who he was. For a long time he just accepted the idea that because he was black he was doomed to be the poor little black boy, grandson of a dirt poor sharecropper, son of a murdered mill worker. But like so many things in life, what you are or what you become is more about what you choose to be. That may be where he started but it isn't where he wanted to end up.

After eight years of college he finally stood in the corner office where he worked. Billy thought often about his early life. His current life and the world he lived in were very different from where he grew up. The ghosts of his past still haunted his dreams, but have become now more his friends than his enemies. Sometimes he can still hear the words that held him down for so long, "You can't escape who you are." Now he realizes that the past does not define who you are. Through conscious action and effort you can redefine yourself, reinvent who you want to be. The world in general may never see anything other than the color of your skin, but sometimes it's not the world that holds you down the most. You must be able to see yourself differently. Perhaps real success isn't measured in how you are educated or the money or position you are able to gain. Maybe real success is finding out who you are individually and then respecting the person you become.

Mountain Morning

By April V. Perry-Bartlett

From blacks to grays to purple haze
the early dawn arising
Comes salmon streaks and brush stroked clouds
trumpeting a newborn day
The trough between twin mountain peaks
glows like a cauldron of flame.
And from that fiery bowl of color,
the sun sings forth his praise
It lights the sky with golden glows
that bounces form cumulus to cumulus
And tells the world of a Holy God
Whose artistry none surpasses
Look to the hills where strength is renewed
and faith is given life
And praise our Father whose hand does paint
the flaming sun's arising

Early Light

By Brent Tomberlin

I awake to your head on my shoulder - the heat of your life covering my skin
Is sweet to know these arms will greet me again at the end of this hard day

In the early light our youths come to mind - the pool, the lake, the beach,
the hike, the cabin – the long and short journeys taken

If truth be known, you are the unfettered and open road
And I am the vehicle stuck at the caution light

Your energy lying on my shoulder keeps me safe
I want to breathe you down deep and exhale slowly over a lifetime. . . .

Light is beginning to win the battle through the blinds which teases me
I think more about the mysteries, still, in your revealing outline

This helps me to remember our shared timeline and ponder things yet
To be experienced

We have walked old ones to the grave and I have watched you work to help
Children arrive – we have felt the joy and pain in both cycles of time

If truth be told, I need to get out of this bed
Have plenty of things to accomplish and complete

But I cannot help to linger a few minutes longer while I watch you sleep
And breathe you down deep



Jocelyn Hope Splawn
Untitled
Soapstone



Kathy Stine
Music Man
Paper Mache

In Solitude

By Vivian Hague Satterwhite

I watch the way this shy light enters in
my room to banish midnight tones with grey:
erasing shadows from deep corners, then
dawn brightens into morning, and this day
unveils with soft sunrise above the grass--
suffusing dew with spectrum's pastel glow.
Across the field, the fish pond gleams like glass,
and morning glories open up below
the clovered hill brown bunnies scamper down,
while traffic rolls along the valley road.
As people pass through countryside to town,
some find their worries less, their hurry slowed...
To move amidst the beauty of this land
is like a moment held within God's hand.

I Shot Cupid

By Cornell Glover

I shot cupid
took his arrows, clipped his wings and left him for dead
I shot him because the little bastard tried to make me love you again
it's not my fault, though. I told him love don't live here anymore
told him it got evicted long ago and it was one horrible tenant
but he kept muttering about how love could move in again

I wasn't about to let that happen
wasn't about to let love live here in my heart
and wreck the place like it had so many times before
I told him about his past mistakes
he told me he makes none
that I was meant to love you and I will again

so I shot cupid
took his arrows clipped his wings and left him for dead
I shot him because the little bastard tried to make me love you again
I wasn't about to let that happen



Ethan Walsh
Ladders
Wood and Sticks



Kayla Tharrington
Stacked Sgraffito
Ceramics

Her

By Kimberly Pierre-Schaller

You smile...
half here,
part not;
looking at me,
with empty eyes,
unaware of the heart I carry,
around like an anchor...
a slip knot.
Memories...like mosaic tile litter the space of what if's and whys;
bolted shut,
inside,
beneath,
your skull tight prison,
a dervish of words and what's.
Half here,
and part not;
with blank goodbyes,
all inside me is worry,
tangled in the tears I blot.
To a burn pile,
I tarry...
fanning the flame high,
as realty splinters the winter air.
I hold on to all I have left...
of you,
Empty eyes, sad goodbyes, cruel mind lies,
no sense makes your nonsense safer.
Can you hear me with your heart?
I will talk loud,
and louder still.
Until you hear the I that misses you.
Speaking with my tears,
and love for you.
No defense can this disease have,
against love and truth.
You smile...,
half here,
more not;
looking at me with empty eyes...



Catheryn Latham
Untitled
Low-Fire Ceramics

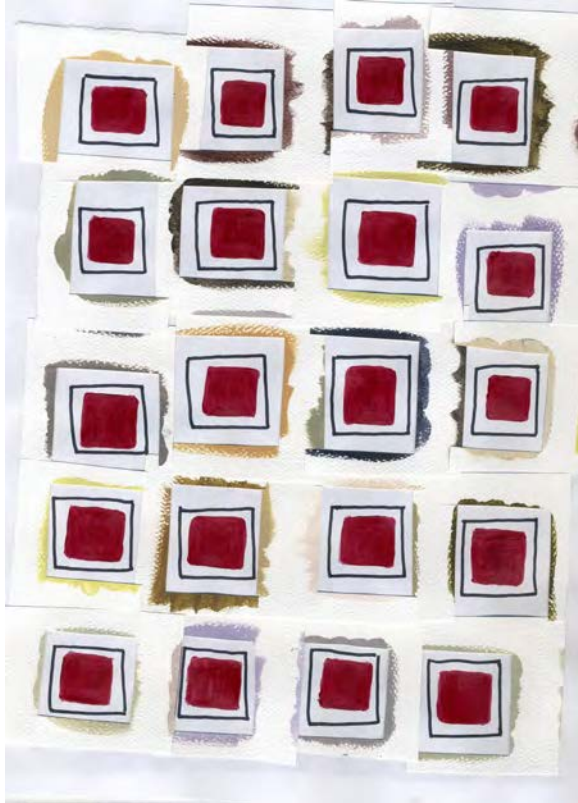


Willow Warner
Cherry Blossom Dish
Majolica, Low-Fire Ceramics

Nouning Verbs

By Nancy Posey

She insisted on using words
that made them flinch—
exacerbation, mastication--
all perfectly harmless
yet ripe for mishearing.
While others her age rifled
through Roget and Webster
for naughty potty words,
anatomical parts, she showed
a delectation for words
more subtle, relying
more on connotation
than denotation, fully aware
that conjugation should not
but might evoke images
of conjugal visits and that
titillation could provoke
an easy giggle
at almost any age.



Shannon Lang

Grid 010

Acrylic, Collage

Awarded cover art for *Branches*, Volume 18