



THE
LIT

THE LITERARY AND ART MAGAZINE OF
LAGUARDIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE
SPRING 2026

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Cover: Fernanda Contreras, “Tengo Hambre,” 2025.

Acrylic paint, cardboard, plaster, clay, plastic wrappings, and aluminum tape on canvas.

“‘Tengo Hambre’ was inspired on a train ride into the city. I observed a kid selling treats who was looking at them with a visible look of hunger. I wanted to challenge social expectations and give the child the freedom to make their own decisions in a world that often overlooks them.” —Fernanda Contreras

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OF LAGUARDIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE | SPRING 2026**

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Cover: “Tengo Hambre,” Fernanda Contreras, 2025.

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Mutilated Wings

Laura Tobón



Was it a guava worm or a garbage worm? She never managed to tell them apart with certainty, though there was one thing she knew perfectly well: guava worms dissolved between the fingers, as though they did not matter, almost like words impossible to pronounce. Killing them was not disgusting, and they could remain scattered across the tiles until, after some time, they vanished.

Besides, it was a lie that they had no blood, that they were hollow inside. More than once she had heard people say that once removed, no trace of them remained, but she had pulled them out herself and seen blood stain her fingers with glimmers of chitin scales. Sometimes she woke in the middle of the night just to make sure she had taken the trash out and that there were no worms in the kitchen. When the suggestion tormented her sleep, it would not let her rest. She could hear the worms dragging themselves across the floor. She almost never remembered to take out the garbage before going to bed. It was a task reserved for the mornings.

However, toward the end of that spring, a different sound woke her from sleep. Naked, her skin prickling with cold, she walked to the kitchen to check whether she had forgotten to take out the trash. But the noise did not come from there. That night she had taken the garbage out. What she heard came from the hallway of the building. She hated the fourth floor. The building was old and had no elevator; carrying groceries, damp laundry, and black garbage bags up the stairs left her legs trembling. At that hour of the night, the stairwell seemed longer, and the entire building creaked as though it were ill.

She lifted the blind and found weeping and rain outside. The yellow and red flickering of the ambulance lights left her dazed. Beneath the rain came the murmur of neighbors gathered downstairs, awake in the middle of the night, their umbrellas covering their faces and preventing her from distinguishing them. A woman with the voice of a martyr could be heard saying, "Poor old woman."

Carolina returned to bed and closed her eyes, trying to recover the sleep that had escaped her minutes earlier, but the sound persisted, tangled among suggestion, exhaustion, and the images of the incident.

Later, the doorman, always meddlesome, told her it had all happened because of the death of an old woman from the first floor. A paralyzed old woman who loved books and had sewn her mouth shut so as not to utter another word. Her mother tongue had decomposed, and worms had begun slipping out through the openings in her flayed skin. The friend who occasionally came by to help her take out the trash discovered it too late; when she entered the apartment, she found a pestilent odor and the floor covered in moving worms.

“Poor woman, silence killed her,” said the doorman, adding that the woman had not left her apartment in years. Carolina almost asked him how he could know so much about someone he never saw, but she remained silent because she had begun imagining that the woman from the first floor must have had, hidden beneath the dust in her library, an endless number of pages. The old woman must have watched the worms emerge and crawl across her legs, which could feel nothing but tingling. Perhaps she had even wondered whether it was worth stopping the worms from continuing onward; surely it hurt, but how much longer did she have to live without uttering a single word?

The doorman waved his hands, dragging Carolina out of that world of dead old women. “I’ve been left in charge of the keys. Would you like to take a look? Maybe you’ll find a good book,” he said, planting temptation before her. Between a maybe and a better not, she refused the offer without hesitation, certain there would still be one or two stray worms left in that place. The doorman noticed the discomfort on her face and decided to go himself and bring her any book that seemed interesting. After taking only a few steps, dragging his right leg as usual, he found himself standing before the door. The keys slipped from his hands and clattered against the floor. He bent down with difficulty to pick them up again.

The door burst open. First came the smell; then, the movement. A gust of mutilated wings flooded the hallway. Damp, incomplete butterflies shattered themselves against the walls, as though something inside them were trying to become language. Below, something crawled. Carolina did not step back. She covered her ears, as though she could still silence what remained of the old woman’s voice. But it was useless. The air had already become saturated with it; with something that was no longer sound, but meaning collapsing in on itself. The worms reached her fingers. And this time, they did not dissolve.

Bells

River Ordóñez

I'll devastate your tongue
Tongue-twister, mouth eater
Let me claim your lips

Take my hand in yours
Those church bells can't hold us back anymore

Look into my eyes not the cross on my neck
God would cry if he heard what I'd said
I would drink his tears nonetheless

Tell your mother to speak her prayers
While I take her daughter out to the fair

You quiet my heart
Pounding-aches, squirming legs
We'll always just be girls you said

So I sat all alone near the setting sun
While you sought to find a god in the rough bell chimes

What She Swallows

Natalie Edmond

The Trader Joe's is surprisingly crowded, bustling with eager shoppers on such a quiet day as this. Lucia hates crowds. Though not as much as she hates Amora's incessant cries echoing through the produce aisle. Swearing under her breath, she snatches her daughter from the cart seat and rocks her with purpose. As Amora's cries grow with urgency, Lucia's annoyance builds. Luckily, after several minutes pass, her daughter calms down. Yet Lucia is the one to remain shaking. Agitated. Lucia moves with sharp speed into another aisle as a way to distract herself.

While choosing between spaghetti noodles, she notices a shiny dime in the aisle. The dime has a fresh luster to it, as it shines against the slightly dirty floor. Though she disregards the dime, she begins to grow increasingly aware of its presence. Even though she's in a new aisle, Amora is mumbling gibberish to herself, and Lucia on the surface is deciding which brand of spaghetti noodles to buy; the negative emotions still haven't vacated her body. The urge hits her, her thoughts linking itself back to the dime. She dismisses it with an almost hostile disgust. Yet the urge comes back again, stronger, like a sharp odor. Lucia finds herself looking around the aisle to see who else is lingering. Towards her right, further down, an old woman with a hunch in her back is staring at a bag of rice with deep focus. Lucia takes this moment to snatch the dime off the floor, catching specks of dust under her fingernails, and pops the dime into her mouth. The dime, cold and metallic, melts onto her tastebuds. As she swallows the flat coin down her throat, her thoughts dim and her breaths slow. Lucia feels as calm as the sunny



day radiating outside the store. She glances at her daughter. Amora is still mumbling to herself, except she's added a sing-song jingle to it. Lucia exhales a relieved breath, grabs one of the brands of spaghetti off the rack and continues with her shopping.

The glow of the half moon contrasts with the night sky as Lucia gazes outside her window leisurely. Aside from the mild stomach ache, she feels at peace. Like a calm current. Suds of soap all over her hands as she washes the dishes from dinner. Lucia, lost in the oceanic pull of her thoughts, doesn't notice the warm hands that wrap around her waist. Her husband, Regere, kisses the side of her forehead tenderly. She leans into his touch with equal tenderness. His hands begin exploring her curves, and her breath hitches. Not out of eroticism, but out of alarm. Noticing the change in her body, he stops, his hands hesitating briefly before letting go. She mumbles an apology with a soft laugh, but he just gives a half smile and leaves the kitchen. She recalls the amount of times she's refused his touch. It's been like this for months. Though she loves him, loves his touch, she has yet to admit to him, to herself, that something is missing.

Later into the night, Lucia finds herself replaying the moment she had with Regere as she brushes her hair in their bathroom mirror. Why is she acting like this? Why does it feel like something is missing? Lucia drowns in these thoughts as she detangles her hair more aggressively. Instantly, she yelps in pain as she stops brushing her hair. Sighing in frustration, she slams the brush onto the marble counter.

Suddenly her gaze lands on the leftover strands on her hairbrush. She picks it up and inspects the brush in curiosity. Pulls the strands between her fingers with tenderness. Licks her lips. All at once, she pulls the strands into her mouth. The stringy strands stick to her tongue like honey. Her body tries to reject the sensations of the strands, but her mind welcomes it. Goosebumps decorate the skin of her arms. Warmth invading her belly. Excitement too. That excitement blooms a deep desire that sends a tingle between her legs. With a fire she can feel in her belly, she leaves the bathroom.

She finds Regere on their bed watching an action movie. The bright-

Although she's dealt with pain before, somewhere inside her she knew this pain was different. She slipped off the bed, knocked her arm across the nightstand. The coolness of the floor against her cheek.

ness of the screen illuminates his features. She compares his glow to the moon she gazed upon earlier. Without a word, she rests herself on top of him, gazing into his eyes seductively. He notices the change in her demeanor, his eyes pools of shock, confusion, and desire. Still, his hands smooth over her curves as he leans into her for a kiss. Their kisses grow more urgent. Messy. Yet he stops her. She gazes into his questioning bourbon eyes. Sees him searching for her truth. And somewhere inside her, she's terrified that he'll find it. So she buries that fear and reassures him through another kiss. He accepts her answer and they continue to lose themselves in each other.

The early rays cast a luminescent glow as Lucia opens her eyes. Lucia stretches her arms wide, welcoming the beauty that the day promises. Suddenly, her body contorts in pain. Although she's dealt with this before, somewhere inside her, she knows this time the pain is different. She slips off the bed and hits her arm on the nightstand. The coolness of the floor against her cheek. She tries to breathe through the pain, but the pain shows no mercy. She holds her stomach like a promise as she withers

on the bedroom floor.

Questions and fear growing at a fast rate within her head. She doesn't wait for the next tide to pass. With as much strength as she can muster, she pulls herself to a half stand, and reaches for her phone. Yet the night stand is empty. She groans loudly as the tide rolls over her once again. The crippling pain causes her to crouch onto the floor. She forces herself to find her phone. Instantly she spots her phone under the bed. As she reaches towards it, the sharp pain in her abdomen stops her efforts. The sight of the phone gets blurry, as tears swell in her eyes. Sweat beading through the back of her nightgown. Her strangled cries contrast with the playful dance of the curtains against the morning breeze. Almost like they're laughing at her. Then darkness embraces her completely.

The sharp scent of disinfectant and latex hits her nose, causing her to gasp. Somewhere nearby, she hears the steady beats of a monitor. Her eyes sting under the artificial hospital lights. Guilt, frustration, and fear knot inside her as she lays in the stiff hospital bed. Yet fear reigns supreme within the confines of her head. Fear of what the doctors would say. What Regere would say. Would think. The inner emptiness she's been feeling before was excruciating and wrong. But not as wrong as this. She'd scream if her throat wasn't so dry.

A tall grey haired man enters the room.

"Lucia, we need to talk about what we've found in your stomach. We've also called a doctor from the psychiatric department to have a talk with you."

His eyes are warm but they reek of pity and cautiousness. In that same moment, Regere enters the room, eyes zeroed in on her. But something's different in the way her husband is looking at her. Like he's seeing her for the first time. And he doesn't like what he sees.

"Lucia, we're going to get you prepped before we perform the Upper GI Endoscopy. It appears that the dimes, pennies, and hair clumps you ate are stuck in your intestinal tract" the doctor says.

"Jesus..." Regere gruffs out.

“Why would you do this to yourself? Is this why you’ve been acting strange for months? What is wrong with you?”

“We have to get the hairs and dimes out of her stomach as soon as possible. I can assure you, we’ll get—”

“Why would you do this to yourself? Is this why you’ve been acting strange for months? What is wrong with you?” Regere yells in anguish.

“Mr. Thompson, I need you to calm down. Lucia’s body is already in a distressed state. She can’t handle more stress right now,” the doctor said in an urgent tone.

Regere shoves his hands into his hair and backs away. In one breath he slams his hand against the wall in frustration and storms out of the room.

Lucia, wordless, looks at the deep lines of her hands in silent defeat.

“I can assure you, we’ll get these objects out before the obstruction gets worse,” the doctor says, his smile both sad and warm. The doctor, sensing the shame radiating from her, puts his hand to her shoulder briefly before leaving the room.

Lucia sinks into the hospital bed and rolls to her side. Her stomach mildly biting in protest as the tears she’s been holding back slide down her face and into the flat pillow. She can’t feel anything except shame. Embarrassment. And progressing fear. Though she worries for her marriage, the loss of treasures she consumed for herself alone leaves her feeling powerless.

Artist Showcase:
Fernanda Contreras

Right: "El Patio," 2025, acrylic on canvas.

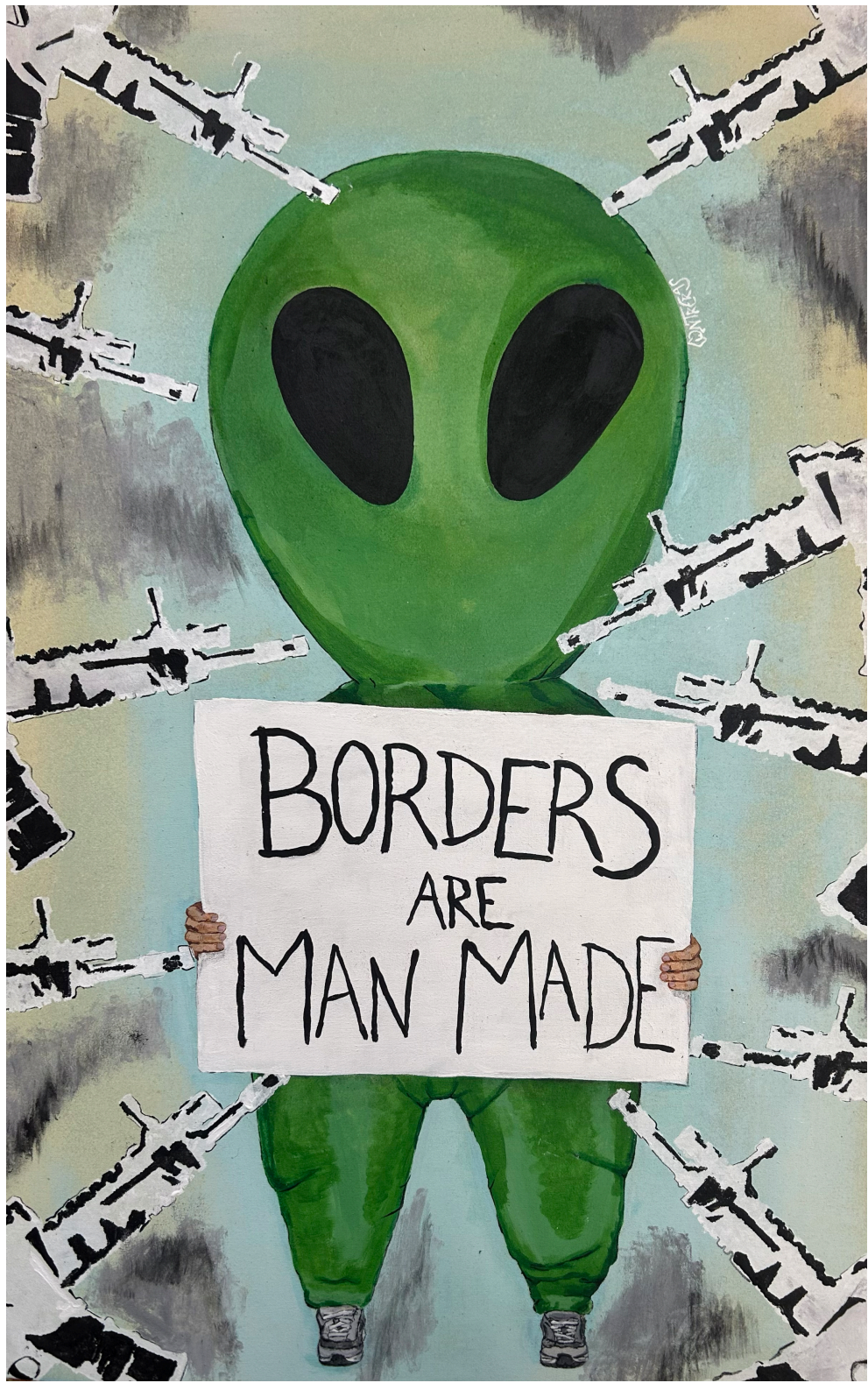




Right: “Man Made,” 2025, acrylic on canvas.

“‘Man Made’ was inspired by the protests happening in Minneapolis. With the alien inflatable, I wanted to play with the viewer’s perspective and tendency to stereotype, as it remains unknown who is behind the suit.”

—Fernanda Contreras



Six Craftsman Athletes

Deter Feliz

An American homeowner hires
six undocumented Guatemalan men to build her roof

Men from streets
filled with red, blue, orange, and yellow walls
Men from the block
where you can see Volcán Tajumulco
in all its fiery glory
Men whose families
are depending on their success abroad

The homeowner waited until
the fine craftsmanship was finished on her roof

She waited until the UV rays
from the scorching sun left their mark on the men
She waited until they finished
lifting ten-foot-long materials up a ladder with
one hand on the grips of the ladder and the

other holding the materials
She waited until that final piece was laid down
to call ICE

On websites and where ever
you get your news they will call these men “illegal aliens”

Saying “the six illegal aliens complied”
Saying “the six illegal aliens were arrested”
Why do you suppose that?
Is it because when you read “six illegals aliens”
it’s easier to disregard them as human beings?
Is it because when you call them “aliens”
you get to avoid the bigger systematic question of
what is the actual problem?

An “American” paper holder hires
six craftsman athletes from the land of Volcán Tajumulco
to build the protection that will shield her and her family

And she waits until their backs are strained
and their are legs spent
only when the house is complete
to have their knees bent



Let Them Be, Finally, Free

Khalil Herrera

Here, X marks the spot to find
Freedom, where it is contained, confined.
But we as Black people—often thought to be
Vulnerable—refuse to be defined.
Let us be, finally, free.
Where? Nowhere to call home, still; held
Captive, mistreated, misguided; red
Blood in us all; boys in blue—green with greed—
Continue to unweave divided threads.
Let us be, finally, free.
There—the liberty that our ancestors deserved;
A prosperous life for their will and their nerve
In seeking asylum and justice for our people; we
Shall keep their history forever preserved.
Let them be, finally, free.

In response to Jacob Lawrence's Migration Series, panel 42, at left.

Paintings by Natasha Muriel

This page and next: “Fairy Tale Rebirth Through Metamorphosis I and II,”
2025, acrylic paint, papier-maché, and gold leaf on canvas.



From “Every Day I Wake Up”

It is hard to live in a world
With many barriers and stigmas about
Gender everywhere

My community wants to express itself
And live with dignity
Our identity also matters
This world needs more love and compassion
To understand that everyone is different and special,
Because our difference is what matters and makes us unique.

—Natasha Muriel





"Open Your Eyes, Ancient Memory," Natasha Muriel, 2025.

Alone

Natasha Muriel

Alone.
I've been standing under the shower for a long time.
Alone.

While a deluge of thoughts fall, it's as if large hailstones were falling from the sky on this empty and dark night, violent tumultuous thoughts disturbing me as a storm raging within me. They come in every stream of hot water that hits my body, burning me, like a lethal searing of waves of molten metal. I stand still, resilient, waiting patiently for the water to cleanse and wash away my shame.

"Water that flows, water that cleans, water that flows, water that cleans."

This is my mantra, I repeat it over and over while the water flows down my body. It's been a month of doing this cleansing ritual. But no matter how much I scrub my skin with soap, I still feel that disgusting dirt on my skin. I scrub so hard that my hands end up scraping and hurting my skin. I cry while thoughts carve a big hole in my head the way a woodpecker drills a pine tree.

I close my eyes and whisper to myself, "Get out of the shower."

With my body still wet, I stand in front of the mirror and stare at myself; I want her to talk.

"Who are you?" I ask, but she stays silent on the other side, staring at me, mimicking me. I burst out laughing. In fact, I laugh so loud that the bathroom walls seem to laugh with me. Then, suddenly, the laughter is interrupted by thoughts full of fear and confusion. I keep staring at my reflection, and the mirror keeps its silence; it's an accomplice. Then, I laugh again with a sad laughter full of guilt and regrets.

It's a roller coaster of emotions.

And a silence as shocking.

She is a werewolf, she can't control her human nature, her instincts.

She is not me, I can see it in her eyes.

Still Here

Dorjee Gyaltzen

Right after the bitter, freezing winter of 1958,
Spring—long awaited, long prayed for—
Was stolen by an uninvited force.
The CCP came crashing in like a falling mountain,
Crushing lives, scattering families,
Leaving survival as the only choice.

A teenage boy, heart pounding like a trapped bird,
Surrendered everything he knew.
Staying was no longer living—
So, with only a flicker of hope
And a few trembling words,
He waved a final goodbye to his family,
Not knowing if he would ever see them again.

The path he took had no name,
And no one would willingly follow it.
Every step demanded a piece of life,



A piece of dreams.
He climbed and slipped, rose and bled
For months across the world's highest range.
Then—like a whispered blessing—
A new world appeared, bright with music and laughter.
To him, it was nirvana, a miracle earned
After years of silent prayer.
But not all reached the other side.

Some vanished into white, unmerciful crevasses,
And only a few emerged, carrying wounds
Too deep for any doctor to see.

It was mid-summer in Kathmandu,
A city of temples and incense.
After weeks lost in pain and fever,
He finally surfaced back into
Consciousness, back into life,
Feeling again the weight and wonder of being alive.

Yet the journey was far from over.
Learning a new culture was another mountain,
A new language, the steepest climb of all.
Perhaps fate sits above logic, as elders say,
For who would have imagined
A shepherd boy renting a tiny apartment in New York City?
The sky and the changing seasons
Were the only familiar things in this foreign world.
Still, fate softened, offering him a soulmate—
A woman who, like him,

Had once left everything behind.
With gestures, smiles, and patient silence,
They built a life together,
Leaning on neighbors when English failed,
Even just to understand the mail.

But the scars of 1959 still burn beneath their skin.
It chills them to see CCP leaders
Standing beside world leaders—
A reminder of the darkness they fled.
Even when they don't know the
politics, Hope trembles inside them:
A longing to see family again,
Just once more.

A decade passed, and a new purpose
arrived: their daughter.
She became their renewed strength,
Their reason to rise, to try, to learn.
Perhaps one day their English
Will be enough to share their story—

Their truth—

When she stands tall as a Tibetan American,
In her community, and on the world stage.

For her future, they drown their trauma.
For her dreams, they keep moving,
Though they still live without a place
To truly call home.

Still here, beneath a foreign moon.
Still here, holding onto the last thread of hope
Still here—
Waiting for a brighter dawn.

Shabrina Bashir
“Local Tea Shop, Malkhanagar,
Dhaka, Bangladesh,” 2025.





Love, Nanay

Janella Katapang

I am sorry
I lied when I told you were born from love
It's not in our blood to lie
but the Adams
they make up everything
and no it's not his fault just because
bruises couldn't be hid

The truth is
I am dying
my roots unable to sustain the green and the brown
Blue was once the river
now contaminated
poisoning our family who has to buy
water from the big businesses on top of the hill

The truth is
we are not the aliens
Just people with no papers

from a land invaded by creatures with tentacles
slithering in the blankets of little girls and young women
who look like you
See how their masks slip
when they speak of freedom

So please wake up and get out of bed
Replace the vodka in your sippy cup
with a glass of lemonade borrowed from
our neighbor Mama G
Stand by her
when you see her crying out in the streets
Rise with all mothers who have lost their children
Rise like the morning sun at 8 or 9

For you, my child, are made of fire
Fierce with the boiling blood of your ancestors
Snake skinned and centipedes long of wisdom equipped
Bathala na
Take the sword in your right
Left fist up
Be bold and daring

In the Forest

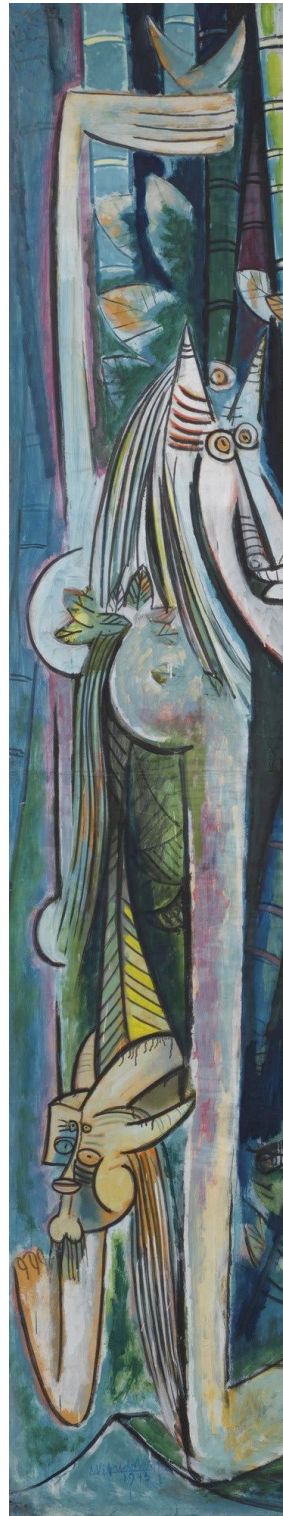
Asia-Marie Charles

In the Caribbean, there is a veil that lifts just as the sun falls. When darkness creeps across the islands, it makes it hard to see the difference. You do not notice from the corner of your eye the way birds contort into something larger or the crickets quickly running sweat from something in the forest that wasn't there a few hours before. But if you quiet your heartbeats, close your eyes and open your ears, you can listen to the sounds of the supernatural that come to play.

You hear it in the dragging of rusted chains against paved roads, the silver scrapping painfully slow as the journey begins. Anguished, eager huffs of a man-beast thing and sticks slowly cracking under pressure of his hands. There is a semblance of either a prayer or an apology between his lips.

If you move deeper into the island, you may hear the giggling (or if you're especially unlucky, the screeching weeps) of children, the only children, whose parents could not put them to bed. Their voices gnaw at you until you follow and they just seem to get further and further away the closer you get. And suddenly you can hear little footsteps all around you and you're so sure they're right in reach. But it couldn't be a child. Because if you open your eyes, you would know that thing in front of you doesn't have a face.

Painting: Wifredo Lam, "The Jungle," 1943.





Maybe if you're really attentive, somewhere in a resting village you can hear the crackling of fireballs near perfectly perfect houses. Hear how it rumbles and whirls as it enters and hovers just above sleeping babies. Listen to the sucking of the babe's blood and the swirling of the liquid in the being's mouth. The baby shifts and groans in the crib, the mother rushes from her bed, suddenly aware.

Before your stomach turns, your head will whip to the crashing of waves as they rustle to the shore. Voices mix with the night's breeze and carry you to them. This time, it might be best to shut your ears. Separate yourself before your lungs no longer have air, and whatever voice you have left becomes melted into their chorus.

If you can follow along the trail of feminine voices back to land, you might find a woman whistling along the pavements. If you've been a good man, she may leave you with only a hum and a chuckle to remember her. Your body will rock and your teeth may chatter as she slips deeper into the night but at least you're alright. Let the sounds of her feet clobbering away remind you what it's like to be alive again.

And as you draw yourself away from everyone else, you'll hear the rounding up of the animals and a gruff voice taking headcount. The father of the forest rounds his children with the iron fist of a proper patriarch—and when one of his children is senselessly harmed, with an anger reminiscent of a God.

But you need not worry. For most, the sounds are a lullaby. A solemn reminder that these islands are shared, what goes down doesn't stay below. And really, the people know the only time to be truly afraid is when things are completely silent.

Sead Cena

"Mother," 2017.





My Sanctuary

Lianna Bonilla

The day's wind welcomes itself to me. A caressing breeze, softly brushing aside the hair on my face like an old friend saying hello. The rustling leaves moving against the branches were a soothing sound. Everywhere I looked were hues of copper and browns, the vegetation becoming dormant as Fall made its mark. Every step I took released crinkled whispers until I stopped in front of a barren tree. Its branches loomed over a peculiar fountain made at ground level. Small lily pads were scattered on the water's surface. There were even fishes in the fountain, occasionally pecking the surface before darting around. I sat down on a stone bench nearby.

I never planned to come here again. It started off with a casual stroll nearby. There was a big pond with geese, turtles, and giant shadowed movements of—I don't even want to guess what is in those waters. But it was as if my feet remembered what I had forgotten—or chose to ignore. The fishes in the fountain look different now. They were dark and blended with the shadows below. The last time I was here, the ones before were white and bright orange. Then I hear your voice.

It was during the summer when you noticed that one of the little fish laid underneath the bench we were sitting on. I had no idea how it got that far from the water. I didn't even want to know the answer to that either. But you crouched down and waved me to come closer.

"Poor little guy, doesn't look alive," you stated. I frowned and my heart ached. Suddenly you asked, "Should we put him back in the water?" At this point, we were crouching side by side and I looked at

Clouds covered the sun again and my face felt cold. I inhaled a deep breath and then let it all out, releasing all the emotions I felt. Time continues and change is inevitable, but memories are always present.

you in horror for even suggesting that. “No!” I said, ignoring how close we were now. Brushing over the way you looked at me.

“We should...I don’t know...bury it?” In that moment, you gave me your dazzling smile. Leaving me breathless. There was a gleam in your eyes, as if my awkward answer made you happy.

“Hmm. See, that was a test and you passed.” You dug a hole in the dirt by the bench. Then you grabbed a leaf, lifted the fish, and gently placed him in it. “We should respect all living things, even in death.”

This time the wind blew against my back. My hair whipped around and tickled my nose. I scrunched up my face as I came back to myself. I was sitting in the same spot as we did that day. I felt a twist in my chest and decided it was time for me to leave.

So much has changed. The seasons, the fish, the plants and even myself. I left here as a love-struck teenager and came back as a woman who is still trying to figure out who she is.

It was time for me to move on. A group of people started to

come in, eager to explore and blocking the way I came from. I avoid the crowd and take a set of stairs to the next section. I followed the trail and it led me to the hills, elevated at diverse levels. Some had trees scattered or giant rocks that always had a group of kids trying to climb it.

The clouds started to part, and the afternoon sunlight beamed down. I found a spot to lay at for a moment and leaned back as my elbows kept me propped. My eyes closed while the sun's warmth enveloped my face and for a moment, it felt like you were next to me again.

"Your freckles got darker." You were laying next to me on your side. We were on your picnic blanket, enjoying a spontaneous break from the city. I opened my eyes to see you peering down at me. "Yea, that usually happens during the summer."

I cupped my cheeks with my hands, feeling insecure and wanting to hide in that moment. "I don't really like how they look on me." And without a second thought you gently moved my hands away and said, "They're beautiful." I had the biggest smile on my face.

"I'm happy you brought me here." You pondered for a moment. "I think the garden was my favorite."

"It is my favorite spot too; I usually come here when I need a moment to just breathe and ground myself." I fidget with my fingers before I spoke again. "I wouldn't mind sharing with you...this could be our spot?" You once again gave me that captivating smile before agreeing. "Our spot."

Clouds covered the sun again and my face felt cold. I inhaled a deep breath and then let it all out, releasing all the emotions I felt. I looked around. The people here come and go every day. The plants die and grow back. Time continues and change is inevitable, but memories are always present. It was time for me to go home,

I stand and the wind pushes against me. A final goodbye to what was left unsaid. Not to my sanctuary, but to you.

Two Poems

Natalie Edmond



Tacos

As we stand there in the midst of night
Perfect rows of cars waiting at the stop light
The world happening around us
As we're happening to the world
I ask you, "What am I thinking?"

Amusement along with something deeper
darkens your eyes as you say to me
"Tacos"
I smile begrudgingly
that you can read my mind so well in this moment

Tacos race across my mind
An aphrodisiac I hold onto
That mirrors the desire that aches for you

Thoughts of tacos help me cope
The desire I have to consume you
Though eventually I give in and lose

a part of me knows
nothing can expand between us
outside this moment
yet
we hold onto something anyway

In the midst of night
surrounded by cars
teasing kisses
and tacos

To the Black Girl Who Breathes Fire

your identity is a mountain
which cannot be moved.
don't let yourself be bound by the zip ties
of judgmental gazes.

understand

those rejections were armor your younger self couldn't see as
protection

Black girl

Take up space in your own truth.

Grow within yourself, without fear of being judged for it. Let your
hands protect what you hold onto.
the way birds embrace the breeze
as it blows through their feathers
the way your fro embraces humidity
eagerly & happily.

Black girl

Nourish

Lick

all the wounds

hidden within your heart.

cup the fire of your inner whimsy

and vow to never let it dim

for the younger version of you that never felt seen

for the woman you're building brick by brick to be

Black girl

your identity is a mountain

which cannot be moved.

Portfolio by Shadai DeJesus



Photograph: Shadai DeJesus, "Jumping Rope," 2025.





“Piano Man,” 2026.

“My artistic vision as a photographer is focused on documenting culture, community, and identity through honest and personal images. I capture people, music scenes, and everyday moments that are often overlooked. Through film photography, I’m interested in telling stories that feel raw, real, and timeless. A lot of my work is inspired by hip hop history, documentary storytelling, and the connection between music and community.”

—Shadai DeJesus



Shadai DeJesus, "RD Tattoo, Queens, NY," 2025.







Shadai DeJesus, "Rebelmatic, Tompkins Square Park," 2025.



Shadai DeJesus, "Fan Ladies, Lunar New Year," 2026.





“H.R. vocalist of Bad Brains, Babylon, New York,” Shadai DeJesus, 2025.
“As a Black frontman in a scene that was often viewed as white, H.R. became an important figure for Black and POC punks by showing that punk music and alternative spaces were for them too. He continues to inspire those who didn’t always see themselves represented in the scene. Capturing this photo of him was truly an honor.” — Shadai DeJesus

Black is Beautiful

C. Amour

Black is beautiful, a truth so divine,
A melanin magic that's simply sublime.
In every shade, a story's told,
Of resilience, strength, and a beauty to behold.
From the darkest night to the brightest day,
Black skin shines bright, in every single way.
A canvas of creativity, a soul so bright,
people with a history, that's a guiding light.
In Afros that fro, in braids that sway,
In every curl, a story's at play.
Of ancestors who paved the way,
For a future that's brighter, starting today.
Black is beautiful, a phrase so true,
A celebration of me and you.
Embracing our heritage, our culture so bold,
Our Blackness is beauty, worth more than all gold.
So let's rise up, and let our voices be heard,
Let's celebrate our Blackness, and let our spirits be stirred.
For we are the dreamers, the ones who pave the way,
We are beautiful and strong every single day.

Two Poems

Arben Alovic

Long Nights

Quiet.

It's still in the library. When did
July become a snowy November?

Why won't the clock stop? Can Fate
grasp my hands and give mercy,
as she listens to
my staggered breathing.

Things don't need to be complicated.

But I, I've always complicated things. I cannot
settle this heart of mine.

My heart, it sits tucked away in a book
on the shelf to collect dust. Tickets for two to
Tokyo, unused. I never brought myself
to ask for a refund. Expensive bookmarks

to remind me of
what could have been.

What am I doing? Winter is
quickly approaching. I need to get
my head out of summers. Sunflowers
and roses rot in the cold. But why am I
holding these seeds so tight,

hoping I could grow flowers again?

But maybe I am also
a masochist for keeping
my disturbance
naturally alive.

What You'll Understand

Here's a truth: the poetry never ended.
The poet jumped off the Brooklyn Bridge
and faked his death.

You mourned him and moved on,

as he donned the mask
of the man you never loved, and
smiled along with the crowds.

Now he walks among you all, forgotten.
Don't stare too deeply into his eyes;

don't tempt the façade so as not to break it.

A phantom made of porcelain.

Madness. All of this is nothing but madness.

What's even poetry any longer?

Are the postcards poetry, or just
wishes he'll no longer whisper in your ear?

The post office an accomplice. The pen company
is an accomplice. The paper is an accomplice. The trees are an accomplice.

Fate is an accomplice.

What is peace? Where is it hiding?
In the tea that promises sleep?
In the honey that promises sweetness?

The truth is tiring.
The poet desires to live in a world of lies.

Jump into the words. Drown in them.
Let them fill your lungs and
become your air.



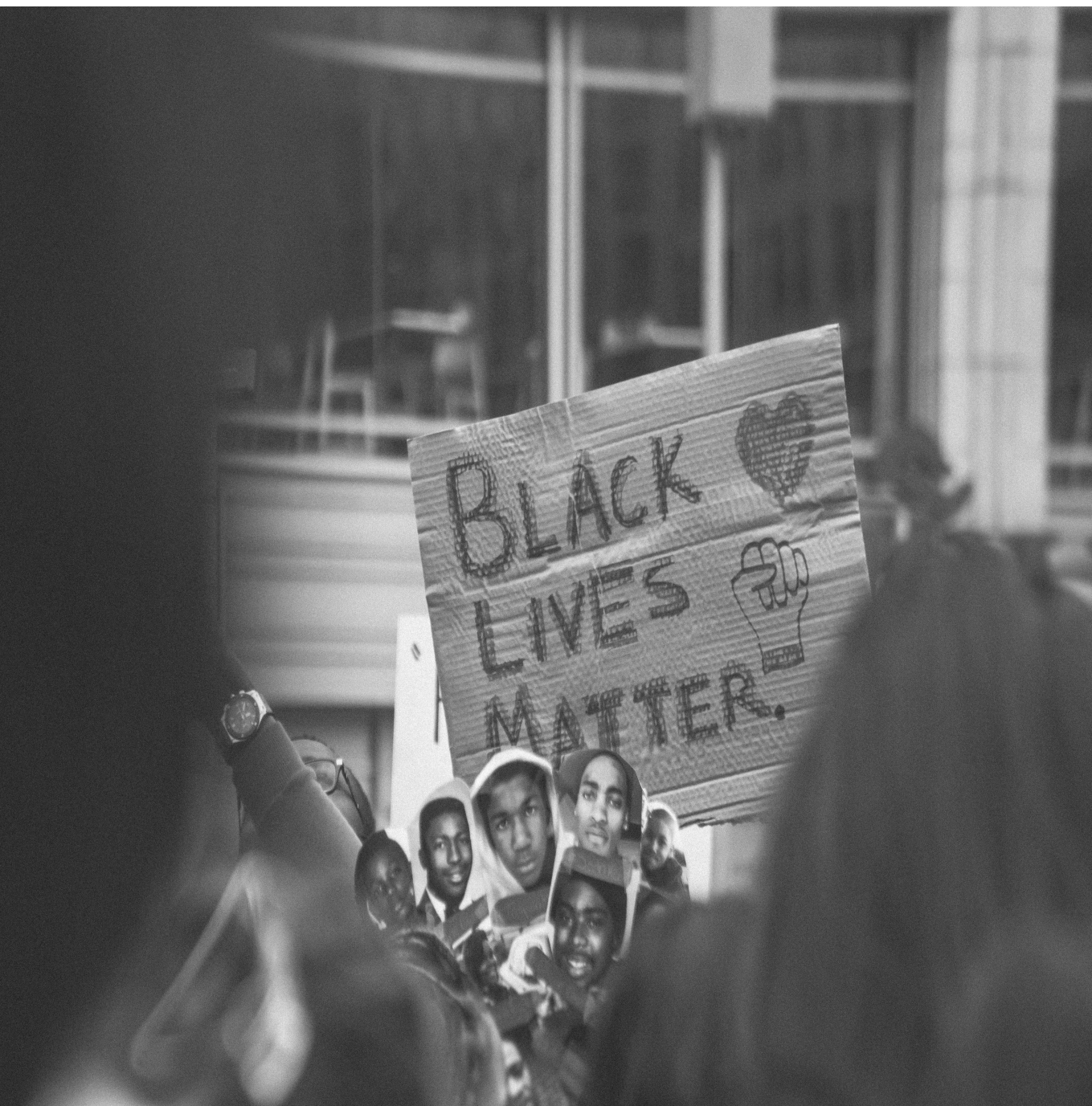
Andrea Murguia Dajbura, "Black Lives Matter Protest, June 2, 2020."

We The People

Brooke Watkins

We the people long for an undying peace that is deceased, for it is buried in graves, on a tombstone labeled slaves. Forced laborers bound to their system are buried deep under the hatred of their hearts, and in the toxicity of their minds. You never failed at declining to help when we protested. For demonstrating peace we get arrested. Instead, we watch you play games, real life monopoly manifested. Jeopardy, what is murdered, tortured, and butchered. Are the endless lives that you have shattered, and no, it cannot be pieced back together. Our lives are like salad tossed, and tossed out at the end of the day. Corporate rules. Do we not see the warning signs inside this capitalist hell? For the reason we all fail? We are all separated, yet shackled to one another. Everyone's suffering from the same causes, what is poverty, famine, and homelessness? The politicians playing jeopardy can't answer, they wouldn't know what to call this. When they only lived at the core of the upper class. The devils of capitalism have destroyed for many our most valuable possession, the freedom of having. Where the one thing that is always free is your hate, disgust, and vile cruelty, when it costs nothing to be kind. We pay for everything. Living in this dystopian, dysfunctional, disgruntled society. Like cattle, bred, so that we are craved, slaughtered dead, until we can see past the ways of the oppressor, for to be aware is to be alive. The herded, who struggle to survive have grown the utmost tired. For we cannot go back to sleep after our spiritual awakening. We come back to the realization every time that we open our eyes to the truth, we are imprisoned, this is national mass incarceration. Stuck in a system, where the more things change, the more they stay the same. You have constantly lied to the masses. Gradually, every day the

truth is being revealed, so you can no longer mask this agenda, from your attacks on dividing up genders, and from attacking the defenders of the people. Anytime anyone who gained enough influence and traction, that united the masses, with revolutionary reaction, that took action against your fascist faction. You silenced them, because they were too loud and proud of what they stood for. While they stood tall, they made you, your precious corporations, and money look so small. You hide behind legislation with no backbone, or composure, and expect for us to be upright citizens in our country. How can you say land of the free, when we are confined to modern day factory model lines. Taxes not ever to the richest, but always the poor. As we pour over from our pockets, spilling blue and green. It's a cocktail that constituents serve daily as bartenders, who rarely receive a tip. Why do we the people living under the rule of oligarchy disguised as false democracy, believe there is choice? They say freedom of speech, but they force us upright citizens into a position with no poise. The 1st amendment isn't broken, it does not need to be mended. It needs to be honored for what it was intended.



Andrea Murguia Dajbura, "Black Lives Matter Protest, June 2, 2020," Brooklyn, New York.

Easter in Ohio

Annalee Hardison

It's Easter vacation weekend in godforsaken Springfield, Ohio, and my tiny little seven-year-old body is wedged in between my sweet but weathered grandparents in their enormous car. It is a lilac-colored Cadillac with dark purple velvet interior and faux marble trim on the dashboard and surrounding accoutrements. It is quite an extravagant car in comparison to my grandfather Ray's meager beginnings. I am in the front seat of their luxurious car holding my grandmother Doris's hand and admiring her warm, kitten-soft skin. She is dressed in her ultra-Sunday best and bathed in a cloud of Giorgio of Beverly Hills perfume so thick I can actually taste it.

I am about to vomit.

As my queasiness builds, it also doesn't help me that my sister is in the backseat with our parents gobbling up a copious amount of Easter candy and I am nauseous from the stench of it all. Jellybeans, squishy sugar-coated Peeps, Jordan Almonds, and the worst candy to ever exist in the history of mankind: Cadbury Eggs. Chocolate covered egg-shaped confections filled with stagnant white and yellow gritty frosting that were, no doubt, spawned in hell and had a taste like if Satan's anus had been temporarily dusted with powdered sugar.

My situation is not helped by my hardheaded grandfather's refusal to turn on the air conditioning. "It wastes too much gas," he states matter-of-factly, barely hiding his ornery disdain for being interrupted after the request to turn it on. My grandfather then resumes his lecture on the evils of the Freemasons, the Shriners, and other such brainwashing cults to the entire car, I know in my 7-year-old wisdom, that no one is listening to him. My grandmother gives my hand a reassuring squeeze and whispers to me that we'll be at their church in a minute, then continues to stare passively



It's going to be an extra-long boring sermon, complete with mentions of the "blood of the lamb," "fire and brimstone" and everyone going to hell.

out the passenger side window.

Having only a fourth-grade education, but determined to make something of himself, my grandfather Ray eventually became a bit of a real estate tycoon in the modest town of Springfield and surrounding areas as a young man. He is now retired to enjoy the fruits of his well-earned labor. My grandmother Doris was a farm girl and the only member of her large family to graduate high school. Quite a feat back in those days especially since educated girls were considered dangerous, because "being too smart causes ya to be BARREN," according to the backwoods-dwelling, slack-jawed yokels of rural Ohio. And for that reason, my grandmother was considered an outcast among her own family. They met when my grandfather asked his best friend if he knew any "good girls" after Ray had had a few years of "wolfing around" and being quite the lady's man. His friend introduced him to his sister, my grandmother. They dated for a spell and Doris, being acutely aware of my grandfather's 'wolfish' reputation, ignored him at first, causing him to pursue her relentlessly until they fell in love. And that was that.

I loved visiting them because the likelihood of me getting yelled at by my parents is nominal because my mom and dad like to pretend they have a perfect marriage, and a perfect life and perfect children whenever we're around my egregiously white-trash relatives. Comparatively speaking, we kind of are better than them but that's only because both my parents did

well in college and actually graduated, have “white-collar” professions, a nice house and valuable assets. Whereas my mom’s other brothers and sisters have what could be referred to as “checkered pasts” colored by multiple divorces, run-ins with the law and imprisonment, no formal education and a dash of substance abuse problems. Their spawn, my cousins, are even worse than them.

I already want the church service to be over before we even get there because I know it’s going to be an extra-long boring sermon, complete with mentions of the “blood of the lamb,” resurrection, “fire and brimstone” and how everyone who isn’t a Christian exactly like the people in the congregation is going to hell for being hedonistic sinners. I am seven years old and open minded enough at that tender age to know that’s complete and utter horseshit. But I don’t dare say it, lest I be endlessly lectured and possibly spanked.

I also know from experience that the children’s church is going to be an exercise in futility as well—lots of singing children’s hymns designed to mimic the regular hymnals and parrot the virtues of conformity and not questioning authority. The pulsating knot of hot-sick in my stomach continues to churn relentlessly as I am wilted and feverish, sweating profusely in the close confines of the stale air of the enclosed car. The starchy tight frilliness of my new lacey Easter dress is stiff and unrelenting in its polyester encasing on my tiny skinny body. It is a beautiful white straight jacket of pastel flowers and ribbons, my bright white tights are sheathing my legs in discomfort as the Band Aids on my knees are being pulled taut, revealing the tender scabs underneath them, causing a slight oozing of pus that, once dried, will adhere to the tights and cause more pain upon removing them. And my brand-new patent leather Mary Janes are so stiff and tight I can barely wiggle my toes. I cannot win in this fight with my new clothes. I look cute, and that’s all that matters to the outside observer. I have nothing to look forward to on this holy day, because after church it’s back to my grandparent’s stately home for Easter Brunch and I resolutely dread it. Although I know the food will be plentiful and delicious, I anxiously anticipate the mean-spirited antics from my (practically inbred) cousins.

**No amount of my grandmother's
yummy mac and cheese will be enough
to cancel out the impending
terror that awaits me at the kid's table.**

No amount of my grandmother's exceptionally yummy mac and cheese will be enough to cancel out the impending terror that awaits me at the kid's table. With the exception of a few older cousins, Julie, Scott and Howie, my other cousins are pure dumb evil. And since I am the youngest and most naïve of all the children, I know I will be the target of their planned maliciousness. To add insult to injury, I also know my sister Molly will be the ringleader of their ungodly malice towards me. She's only four years older than me but manipulative enough to know if she heads-up the bullying, she will also escape my cousin's vile and cruel hijinks.

We finally pull into the church parking lot and I'm nearly in tears of happiness as the sickly green pallor of my face subsides once the fresh air cools upon it. My grandmother gives me a kiss on the cheek after wiping my sweaty brow and tells me I look very pretty. I thank her but know this is not enough to quell the impending doom of the dreaded kid's table. I feel like she can sense my anxiety about the other children, but I can't exactly ask how she could ever love those assholes especially when I am very clearly her and grandpa's favorite. I am always extremely sweet, polite, smart, funny and unlike my spawn-of-hell redneck cousins, I have never tried to beat the stuffings out of anyone. They, however, cannot say the same. Nor do I make bad grades in school and never once have I smelled of motor oil, rancid cheese, and infected earwax. My cousin's unfortunate greasy stench can permeate through anything but thank god, it is not

hereditary.

I stand there with my grandmother looking at me as the mild chaos around us rumbles and blends with the usual confusion of a large parking lot. Not-very-polite beeping of horns and people congregating in large groups and all our other relatives in their cars coming towards us as I yawn and fretfully pull at the puffy sleeves of my dress. My grandmother knows I am stressed out because my cousins all act the same every year and she can see the simmering terror in my young eyes.

She takes my hand, whispers something to her daughter, my mother, and announces that she's taking me to the restroom and to not save her a seat in the congregation because she forgot she volunteered to watch the babies in the church's nursery today. My mom gives me a sly wink and turns her attention to my dad and sister as they are fussing over who ate the last of the god-damn Jordan Almonds. My grandfather is currently in a bluster over gas prices, inflation, the damn Democrats in the White House and other such trivial nonsense with the rest of the men in his church peer group. My grandmother's grip on my hand is firm but tender and she apologizes for him not turning on the air conditioning in the car. We skirt the edges of the large crowd spilling into the main entrance and walk down a flower lined pathway to the back entrance.

She opens the door for me, and we disappear down another large corridor in the air-conditioned crispness of the quiet hallways that envelops me like a welcomed frosty hug. My immense nausea has completely evaporated now. We duck into a spacious dressing room usually reserved for a bridal party getting ready to get married at the church. She sits me down on an overstuffed peacock teal velour loveseat and tells me she'll be back in just a moment. I gather my thoughts and calmly relax against the soft cushioning of the couch and breathe a deep sigh of tranquil relief. I am thinking my grandmother has to have a tinkle in the adjoining bathroom and then we'll go to the nursery to see the babies in a minute. But she returns after a few minutes with two large glasses, one with ice water for me and iced tea and lemon for her. She also has a new coloring book, crayons, and a "Ladies Home Journal" tucked under an arm. She picks up a stray clipboard from the mirrored dressing room table and hands it to

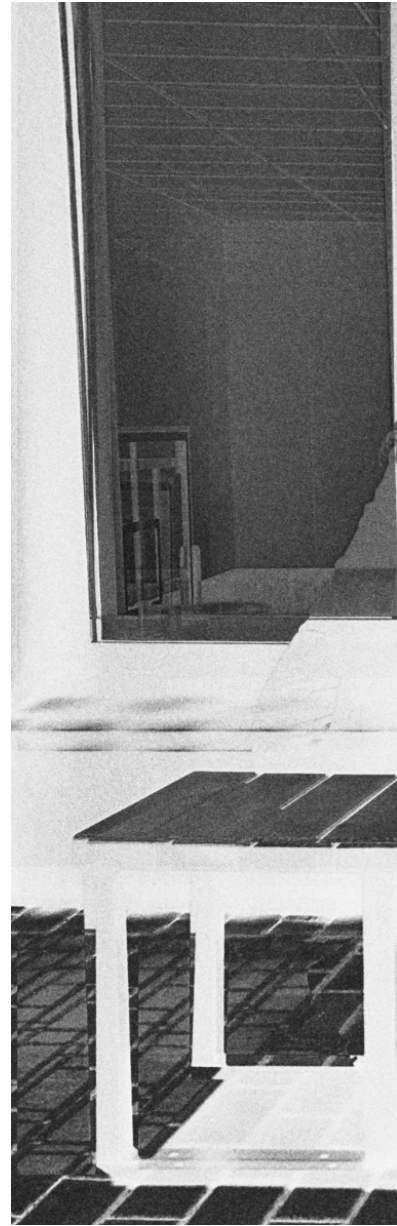
me along with the crayons and coloring book.

I take it with a confused look and ask, “When are we going to see the babies?” and she gives me the most warm, gentle smile I’ve ever experienced in my life.

“I thought we could have a little time here with each other, because it’s so crowded and loud everywhere else. What do you think about that?” She says as a large smile spreads out over her lovely soft face. She is positively beaming with love and tenderness for me. She snuggles in beside me and gives me a kiss on top of my head and tells me that any of the colorings I do we can give to the babies in the nursery on our way out, but I tell her I want her to keep them forever.

We spend the next two hours talking and coloring in soft and tranquil air-conditioned comfort. She occasionally shows me the cartoons in her magazine, and I tell her about my imaginary friends. We color pictures together and hers are the most beautiful and vibrant I’ve ever seen. I ask her if I could have them? She says, “Of course you can!” I crawl into her lap for a big hug. She calmly and carefully asks me about how fretful I was earlier, and I tear-up and then sobbingly confess to her my dread about my mean and nasty cousin’s relentless picking on me. She holds me closer and soothes my slightly disheveled hair. She swears she’ll give them a “good talking to” and make sure they never, ever make me feel like that again. “They have no right to treat you that way!” she says with a bit of resolved anger in her voice, and I know she means it. Grandma Doris doesn’t get angry often, but when she does you better straighten up and act right. She holds me until I fall asleep and then gently wakes me up about an hour or so later when it’s time to go.

I tell her I’m not scared of the kid’s table anymore and grip her hand tightly as we walk out to meet the rest of our family. I feel an invisible wave of strength and maturity vibrate through me that makes me feel a little bit taller and wiser. She gives me a look that says she is not messing around, and I know none of the cousins will ever pick on me again.





Student art showcase: Adrija Vecenaite, "The Abyss Also Gazes Into You," 2026.

Six Senses?

Kiera Dennis-Espinal

Taste

You smack your lips and taste your own saliva. It probably tastes like nothing but blood from your fingers. What did you eat today? You bring your finger back to your mouth to try to sneak your finger under the nail, but you wince when your teeth come in contact with the skin. You are hungry. So very hungry, but you shouldn't eat. You shouldn't eat so late cause you'll get fatter. You shouldn't eat so much or you'll get fatter. Again, you try to bite your nails, managing to get a piece. You chew it with your front teeth, then swallow. Is that filling for you?

Smell

There has been this lingering scent that makes your nose scrunch up. It isn't bad, but it isn't pleasant. Is it from the bowls and plates that sit in this room, or is it the scent you are building up on your clothes that you've worn back to back? I know the thought lingers that you might not be clean, but you don't get up to do anything about it. You always let the problem linger until you get told to fix it or it disappears. You stand



up from your bed and walk over to your dresser. You pick up a perfume bottle, sniffing the pump of it to see which one you would spray to get rid of the scent. That one is too overpowering, that one will make the smell worse, that one is just disgusting. Why do you have these if you don't like or use them?

Sight

You are looking at your hands. Your cuticles are ripped to shreds by your own teeth. Your nails have been chewed down to the point where your teeth can't scrape under them to continue chewing. The exposed skin to the air looks pink and ugly. You flip your hands over to look at your dry palms that you managed to scratch raw with your chewed nails. The eczema on your hands makes your skin irritated and coarse. Your fingers are trembling from god knows what. You watch them tremble with a grimace on your face that you see through the corner of your eye through the mirror. You turn back to the mirror to see your disheveled hair. You desperately need a style.

Hearing

The sound of snoring makes you glance over at the other bed in the room. So loud for such a small kid. The younger one mumbles and whines in his sleep, telling his cousin what to do. He plays so much that he even dreams about it. The older one lays with his eyes open staring at the iPad that plays videos you don't understand the humor of. You walk over to the window to open it to try to get rid of that lingering smell. You can hear the skittering of animals outside. Is it cats or skunks this time? That will make the smell bad. Close it. No? Okay.

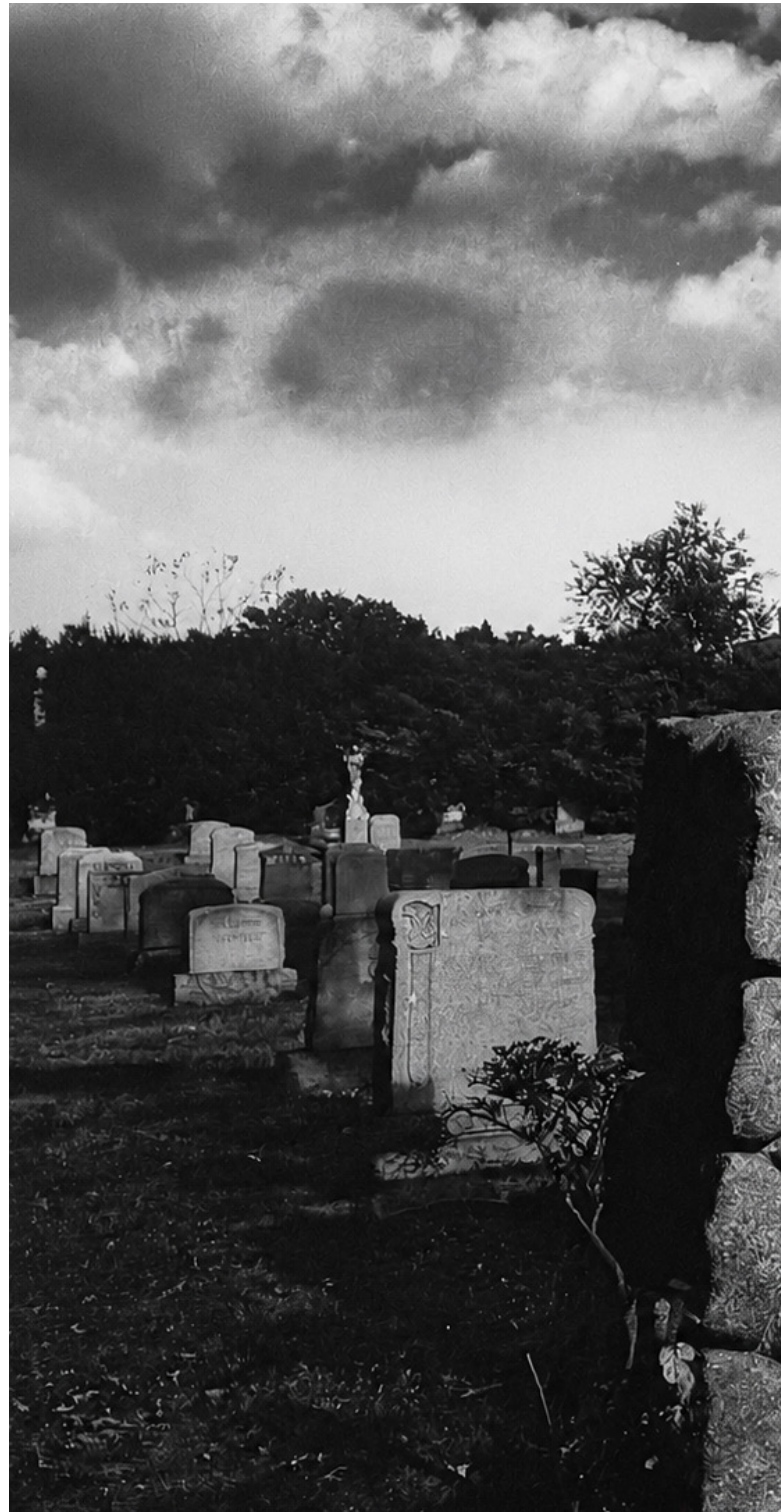
Touch

You can feel your own teeth dragging against your bottom lip trying to find a wisp of lifted skin to bite off. You feel your fingers scratching your palms trying to satisfy the itch. You reach for the open jar of Vaseline and rub some into your palms. You pause then rub some into your lips trying to get rid of the dryness. You stare at yourself in the dark through the mirror. Your hands reach for your phone on the bed. You drag your finger across the screen that has some form of food that has crusted on part of your screen. Holding up the phone you snap a picture with the flash on. You stare at the photo dragging your finger against the gross screen to zoom in.

Feeling

You probably feel gross. You probably think you're so dramatic with your shaking hands. You look dramatic. Your ugly unkept hair probably makes you feel like shit. Your dirty mismatched clothes are draped over you covering your shape. At least you think it does. You look bad. You should feel bad. You probably felt ugly in that picture to you. You tap on your phone, deleting it from existence but it probably resides in your mind. You climb into bed under your blanket as the light from your phone shines dully under it. You're probably gonna cry again like you always do at night. You probably always feel like this but I'm usually asleep before I can witness it. Whatever. I look back at my iPad and tap on another video that you probably feel is stupid.

Takashi Nakagome
“Angel of Ashes.”





The Knight, The King, and the Fool

River Ordóñez

The knight kills for the many

Or so he says as he marches

Through the fields of red wheat

The bodies all counted

He listens to what is told

Not a whisper against its command

For he kills for his people

His honor bleeds red

The king dies alone

His knights gone to glory

His people call for a trial

The dead beg for a sound
So he says it was for his kingdom
When he watched them fall
They paid with their lives
So he shall roll that same die

The fool lives to tell the tale
Up in the highest tower
A crown sat heavy on his head
A sword sat at his side
He awaits in a fallen kingdom
For any passerby
To spin the tale of the fool
Who watched it all go awry

Contributors

Arben Alovic is an alumnus of LaGuardia and credits it with providing the foundation and connections that helped shape his future. His journey has taken him across the world, with adventures in Japan, Montenegro, Korea, and beyond. He is currently at work on his first book.

Lianna Bonilla is a student at LaGuardia majoring in English–Creative Writing. She is a mother who enjoys writing fiction in her free time. Aspiring to be an author, she continues to discover new ways of expressing herself in her stories and hopes that her writing can resonate with and comfort others.

Asia-Marie Charles is an international journalism student from the Caribbean. In her spare time you can find her writing, reading, watching films or (not) finishing her crochet projects.

Fernanda Contreras is a Queens-based artist whose work is deeply influenced by her experiences as a child of immigrants. Through her art, she seeks to evoke a sense of connection, offering viewers a glimpse into the often complex and quiet stories that go unnoticed in daily life. IG: [contreras.nyc](https://www.instagram.com/contreras.nyc)

Carmen Damour is a freshman at LaGuardia Community College who creates under the name C. Amour. She has long used poetry as a way to give voice to her thoughts. She aspires to enter the healthcare field, driven by her compassion and desire to help others. IG: [@c_.amour](https://www.instagram.com/c_.amour) | TikTok: [@c_.amoura](https://www.tiktok.com/@c_.amoura)

Shadai DeJesus is a journalism student and photographer originally from Long Island, NY. Her work focuses on culture, and community, with particular interest in hip hop history, different music scenes, and docu-



"The Stigma's Bandage," Natasha Muriel, 2025. Acrylic, papier-mâché, gold leaf.

mentary storytelling. Shadai hopes to pursue broadcast and documentary journalism, using multimedia storytelling to document overlooked narratives.

Kiera Dennis-Espinal is a writer and aspiring producer. She enjoys fiction writing more than anything. She uses her writing in hopes to draw out feelings whether they're uncomfortable, angry or sad.

Natalie Edmond is a creative writing student at LaGuardia Community College. She is interested in stories that explore emotional intensity within ordinary moments and the inner lives of her characters.

Deter Feliz is a curious musician always looking to learn about others and the world around him. He was born and raised in NYC from proud Dominican parents. He is a student and a music performance major at LaGuardia who also appreciates the magical power of poetry.

Dorjee Gyaltzen is a student at LaGuardia majoring in Psychology. English is his second language and his goal to pursue writing in English is just to share the story of his community with wider audiences.

Annalee Hardison is a Creative Writing major. She plans to become a professional author. She has loved writing since winning first place in a short story contest in elementary school when she was in 2nd grade for writing a story about "Lulu, The Magical Flying Turkey," a re-imagined first Thanksgiving in which no animals were harmed and no humans were killed.

Khalil Herrera is a New York City native attending his second semester at LaGuardia as a Radiologic Technology major. He has experience in creating poems and paintings from attending the Leave Out Violence after-school program. "Let Them Be, Finally, Free" is Khalil's first ekphrastic poem and literary magazine submission.

Queens native **Janella Katapang** is a Filipino community organizer, Physical Therapist Assistant student at LaGuardia, and martial artist. As a community organizer, they are attuned to the health concerns related to societal issues. As a healthcare

student, Janella understands the necessity of making health and fitness accessible.

Andrea Murguía Dajbura is a street photographer residing in New York, originally from Cochabamba-Bolivia. She has developed a passion for photography and its ability to document the daily moments of society.

Natasha Muriel is a Latina transgender art student based in New York. Born in Colombia, she moved to the United States in pursuit of a life where she could express herself freely and without hesitation. Her work explores personal experiences, emotions, and identity while responding to a world marked by uncertainty and ongoing challenges faced by the trans community. IG: @natasha_muriel_artist

Takashi Nakagome is a Japanese-American creative and storyteller based in New York City, working at the intersection of art, culture, fashion, and global communication. Through photography, design, and cross-cultural narrative building, his work explores identity, memory, and the emotional spaces between Japan and America. IG: @Takashi_Russell

River Ordóñez is a student at LaGuardia majoring in Psychology. They write poetry on topics like mental health, queer stories, and political ideologies. They often find themselves incorporating multiple art forms in their work.

Laura Tobón is a writer, poet, and editor born in Medellín, Colombia. She currently lives in New York City, where she studies, writes, and slowly becomes the best version of herself.

Adrija Vecenaite is a student at LaGuardia majoring in Criminal Justice. Her work explores an internal tension in which the observer and the observed collapse into one, breaking the duality of the subject, and engages with determinism and the tension between being an agent of free will against fatalism.

Brooke Watkins is a student at LaGuardia majoring in Cybersecurity. Poetry is their passion, as they always write to the tune of their emotions. What their voice cannot convey, their feelings do in poetry.

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