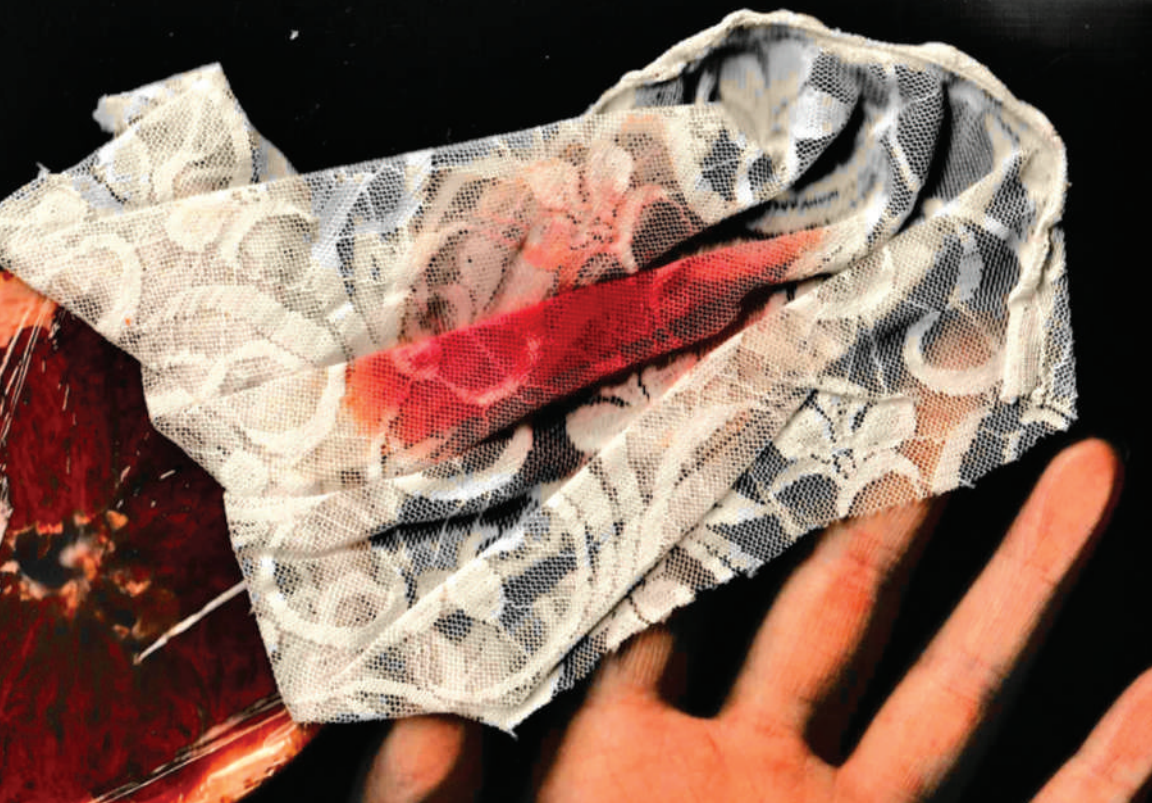


ekphrasis magazine

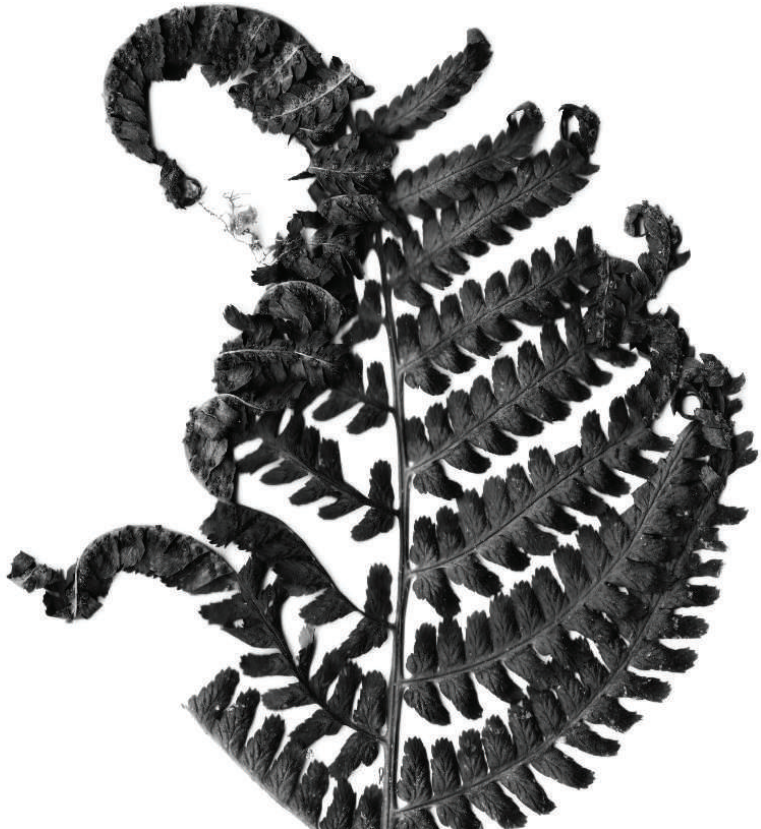
winter 2021





ekphrasis magazine

winter 2021



Dear Reader,

You are receiving this publication as a compressed file, online, on a screen. This was outside of our control, and it is symptomatic of a series of other changes which have reshaped our lives since the pandemic began. But there are certain possibilities that this virtual platform offers, possibilities which perfectly suit this particular issue and the beautiful work which we are honored to now share with you.

Our contributors engaged boldly with language, identity, technology, art, embodiment, and the life we make among them. Complex and unsettled, these works splash across the page, even when that page is a screen, and spark against each other and the world. In this disoriented space, they find new equilibrium — or reject that notion entirely. This issue asks us to rethink our notions of futurity, to reconsider afterlives, to isolate and collaborate unconventionally.

In *Cruising Utopia*, José Esteban Muñoz tells us that “astonishment helps one surpass the limitations of an alienating presentness and allows one to see a different time and place.” We feel that not only are these pieces astonishing in their own right, but perhaps even more importantly, they are astonished. Our intention with *Ekphrasis Magazine* has always been to showcase art that looks simultaneously outward and in, but the works in this issue point our gaze, speculatively and reflectively, into a different time and place, a richer elsewhere than we could have anticipated even a year ago. It is with excitement and sincere pleasure that we introduce this issue of *Ekphrasis Magazine*.

With thanks,

Jay, Hannah, & Michelle

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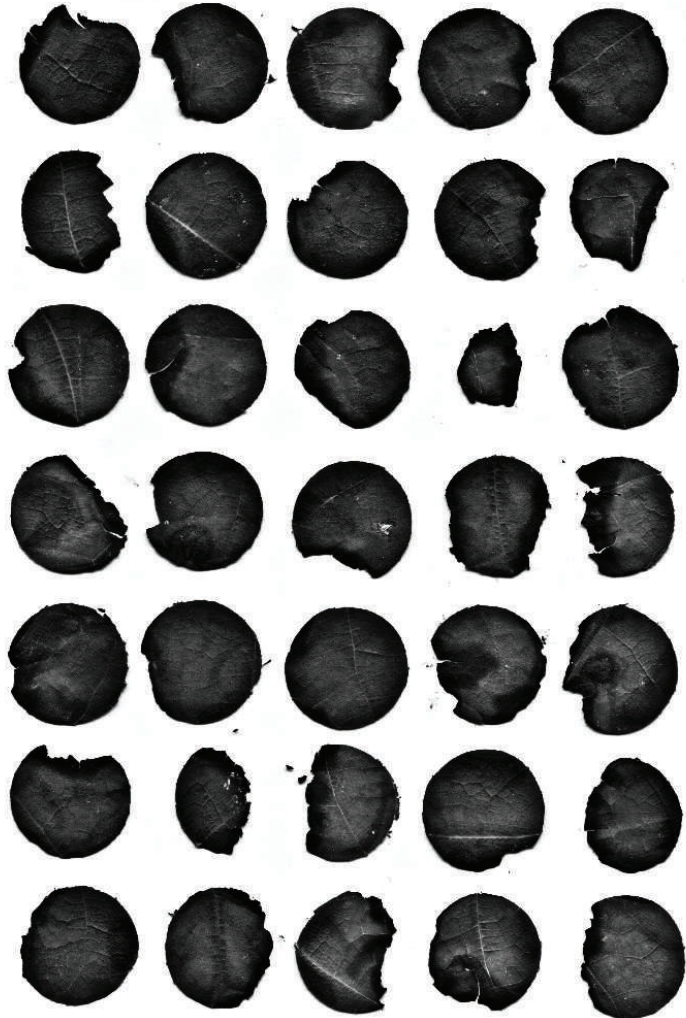
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NATIONAL LANGUAGE CLASS

alex t.

— after a painting by Chua Mia Tee

- To identify as absence of girl eclipsed by tucked-in shirt of standing boy.
- To notice sliver of head and ballet flats peeking out like the suggestion of a right answer.
- To hear only syllables as skin melts into orange of wall.
- To tuck shirt out in defiance of what's tucked in.
- To consider the thinness of other girls' arms.
- To ask her name after class.
- To not see red patch pinned to boy's left sleeve.
- To know her by *Scream*-like shadow, jug-arms flowing frozen.
- To feel free to look around without as much exposure.
- To wonder if the two watercolour figures are on summit or plateau, and of what race.
- To melt with varying degrees of success.
- To be less real.
- To help with arranging stools.
- To help with pronouncing vowels.
- To constitute disavowal.
- To anticipate taking off shirt because its label chafes at neck.
- To tighten circle's contour by stool's placement.
- To realise not everything in this country can take off so easily.
- To be occupied.
- To lose count of days of mourning.
- To sympathise with boy whose lap bears another's weight.
- To look again as if walled behind glass.
- To indicate corner and diagonal line.
- To think it queer.

To be left.
To squander another's tongue.
To serve something other than pears or bananas.
To serve as background.
To situate where you live.
To sit.
To not have been here.

FIVE HAIKU

*These five haiku were written by a computer program
which was trained on a corpus of poems by the 17th
century Japanese Haiku master Bashō.*

1.
evening morning
cries and quieted with age
on mount yoshino
2.
die out sleep on a
voice autumn blow yet not
petals of plum blossoms
3.
it is something
this autumn deep into the
all with mud in cherry

Thomas Mar Wee

4.
a wanderer so
singing singing singing winter
old pond a chance

5.
all the waterfall
piercing like to wet the gate
is the morning mist

GENE MAPPING A BIFURCATED DEMONYM

Winston Le

F. progenies

second generation species sequence
stitched-genome of tangled mainland-roots—

four malleable petals
spiral bicultural-helix

two bashful-moons
of prosperous-rosé peonies intersect
tinh de lotus' nucleotide-embrace

on lunar new year's incensed night
celestial base pairs bloom—

prodigy-filaments emerge

each anointed with a golden anther

pollinate living dispersion
germinate future scatterborns
celebrate year of the hybrid—

the moons pay homage
code these genetic markers

melange amongst ethno-flora
consume mortar bowl language
hoa huā 花

Katrina Vera Wong F. PROGENIES



GESTURES

Jay Jungho Shin

On Automated Expression

The automation of not only production, but also of biological and social maintenance, poses a certain challenge to interpersonal communication. And as automation brings about a streamlining of material and political functions, the available channels of expression are to conform accordingly. An example: since navigation of the cultural sphere is expected to be effortlessly integrated into the quotidian, gesture as sarcastic exemption has been made null; a visible disgust in the face when presented with global cuisines now betrays the cosmopolitan promise. Reveling in transparency is taken to be all the more disingenuous.

•

Speech, Deleuze pointed out informally, is dirty, as it is mediated by the image of an interior life to be accosted and pressed synchronously. Body language also falls under this characterization. So, to evade this scrutiny, people turned to investments in graphic artifice as the primary medium of gesture. In our contemporary situation, where the heterogeneous politics of our globally-shared lifeworld are not merely apparent but also incorporated as an accessory, a cursory survey of gesture and its capability for multivalent disclosure would open the question of why certain gestural forms have been made dormant.

•

Giorgio Agamben says, “Gesture is the display of mediation, the making visible of a means as such.”¹ He then rightly incorporates his understanding of gesture as means into the realm of politics rather than aesthetics, even elevating it to the ethical topos of expression. For politics is the ever-evasive assignment of protocols, rather than

1. Agamben, Giorgio. *Infancy and History: On the Destruction of Experience* (London: Verso, 2007), 155.

the actualization of intentions.

It is common knowledge that the days of the census, the proactive midwife, and harvest festivals have been long gone. And in their absence the audit, the nursery grid, and deafening Bacchic stunts have taken hold, reflecting the primacy of result over process and means. We no longer take the care to stitch together dolls in our image to stage our fears and aspirations. But we would rather immediately echo and amplify gynoid voices promising us a total vision over everything that sneaks into and out of our periphery. Robbed of our speech in exchange for the eyes and ears of the Architect, we resort to mute gesture in order to exercise our omniscience without offense to others.

I. *Bereft of Demonstratives*

A quick nod opens up a communicative world: 'I too, see that this is good.'

Gesture is not confined to deictic motions. And it's also more than how one settles into the ambiance of a location. Gesture is also located in the decision of whether or not we decide to take up self-allotted space, whether we feel at liberty to neglect the bead of sweat running down the neck.

The distribution of space is no longer a question of demarcation, but is now a matter of juggling preoccupations in the manner of the narcissist when they cache their slew of personal shames in plain sight.

Gesture does not exclusively draw attention to insecurities, but it can also point to their vectors. I've been stroking my chin for the past few minutes: Am I concealing the paltry stubble on my face? Reinforcing a presentation of my registerable interest? It is in fact an itch. Now a thought.

It would be a gross error to assume that the exercise of human agency is the gesture's central node. Traces of the body's presence in the environment demonstrate even the smallest of habits; in other words, they freeze and replicate the gesticulated moment.

The slightest motions are desperately assimilated in a geistig bureaucracy to divert attention from stray movement. The threat of confrontation, the question about the twitch in one's eye, is tabled. But the catalogue of repetition nonetheless has itself a new entry.

Agamben also points out that the historical uptake of gesture, as well as its delegation to machinic forces, exacerbated the poverty of expression. This is because an inherited code of public and private conduct pre-emptively deactivates the possibilities of human activity that have been construed as base aggression.

A brutally reductive account of gesture is as such: it marks a territory. But precisely in doing so it signals both its exit and re-entrance, as Deleuze and Guattari demonstrated. A handwave awaits a departure and a return.

Inclusion and exclusion: the bedrock operations of human politics. But as we continue to lose our capacity for gesture, these elementary tasks have been delegated to the commodity-form. Now, an access to a product mechanically gestures the permission to participate in good living.

II. *Storehouse Gesture*

Objects as gestures communicate volumes; thus, they are also building blocks of a habitus with its own boundaries to be drawn and crossed.

What happens when our objects begin to speak louder than us? Is it now the collection who is the alibi for the assembler?

The arena of class spectacle verbosely proclaimed that the objects we hold onto are testaments of our standing. The receipts of our every expenditure are the cuts and bruises of public combat. But this crimson theater also proposes that because money renders value and its production anonymous, consumption as gesture becomes potent as a form of espionage.

The revived fixation on object fetishism diverted our attention from the abstract pull of narratives/essays for-hire; the bestseller does not merely contort an idea for it to become marketable. But its newly derivative lines of thought, dispersed and then consumed, rebound recursively in the minds of eager readers-to-be-journalists as well as veteran censors. The truths and mannerisms of procedurally recycled fictions then replicate themselves, as well as the truths of their mass distribution.

Black boxes jutting into the skyline of Central Park. To obstinately deny a sheepish gaze? To boast amongst the gods? Certainly, out of an unintentional respect for one's collateral, feigning to rival Mansa Musa's.

The urban density of a souvenir oscillates between its nihilation at the hands of kitsch and its status as a pleasant irony budding as faint remembrance.

Žižek, in passing, succinctly formulated the immanent logic of technology: to build machines that exceed human capabilities in such a way that we as a species will no longer be needed. The object as gestural substitute functions analogously, for the aim of its purchase is to eclipse the one who acquired it.



Rachel Ahava Rosenfeld BRITTLE ANCHORS



film HUA CHUANG HUA 花窗花 MaggZ

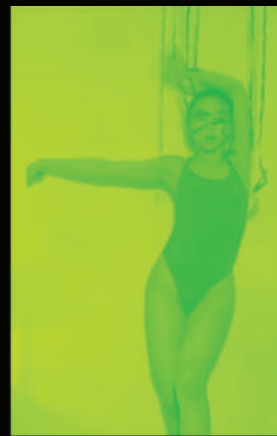
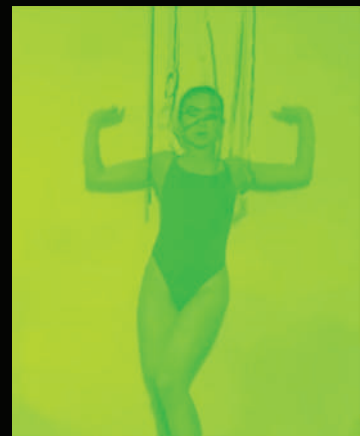
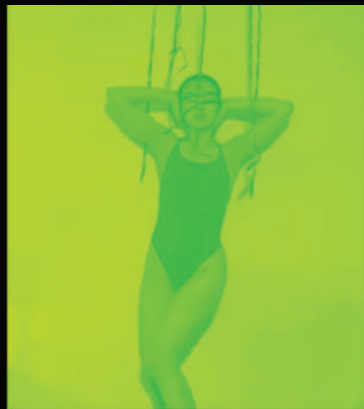
“花窗花 (window decor)” is honouring nostalgia, my experience as a Chinese woman living on foreign western land and the hybrid in betweenness of my cultural identity.

Back home mum would put Mozart on repeat in drowsy afternoons, grandpa would always make window decor every year during Chinese Lunar New Year; he’s one of the best in town, one of the most talented creatives I’ve ever encountered, and so very grateful for him.

Here’s my window decor honouring resonance with Chinese culture whilst exploring the hybrid and in betweenness of my cultural identity, holding space for honesty and vulnerability always.



film LIMBO MaggZ



The pandemic is penetrating our lives, shaking up old doubts and landing on new ones; constantly pierced by truth I wonder what truly keeps us alive and breathing behind the thin air — more than 3 months later I’m still spinning solo in my room isolated, turning this tiny space upside down wanting to grasp any nuances that keep me going, the immobility stretches me afar. Constantly falling between reality and consciousness, not just loneliness, it’s the wounded circumstances too, a global existential crisis but at the very least, or at the very most, we still have our flesh and what’s underneath.



excerpt from AB—

Ezequiel González

NO VAS A VOTAR HIJO DE PUTA??
SOLO NOS QUEDA EL VOTO, VOTAR ES
LO ESENCIAL COMUNISTA HIJO DE LAS
REMIL PUTAS++ VOTO VOTO
VOTOOOTOTOVOTOTVOTO NO
ESCUCHASTE QUE ESTAN LAS TROPAS
ARMADAS EN LAS CALLES??? SOLO
NOS QUEDA VOTARLES QUE SALGAN--//
SEÑOR GENERAL, OS DIGO QUE EL
PUEBLO HA VOTADO! NO DICTADURA,
VOTE! ESTUDIE CIENCIAS POLÍTICAS
EN LA UNIVERSIDAD DE BUENOS AIRE

;;;;;;;;;;;;;;
intermezzo
«;;;;;;;;;;»

malèna
invento argentino.
ecología
acústica:
“canta como
ninguna”
su tango
como pulso
del corazón.

tengo una
peluca
de

cuarenta-y-cinco
centímetros. Rosada.

sólo. (o sólo?).
cuando solo las
venas me ven,
invento a malena
con vinilos de
la dictadura pasada.

;;;;;;;;;;;;;;
intermezzo
«;;;;;;;;;;»

do you know malena?

if YES, press one now.
for english, press 3.
why didn't you vote in the last elections
all we have left is the vote-
there are troops in the street

i have an
eighteen inch
wig,
Rosa.
we dance
staring at ourselves
in the pink light.

alone (x)
when only my veins
look back.
i invent her,
with my vinyls
left from the past dictatorship.

if NO, press two.
for spanish, 5.
in the last elections
vote as the only solution
we have to vote them out

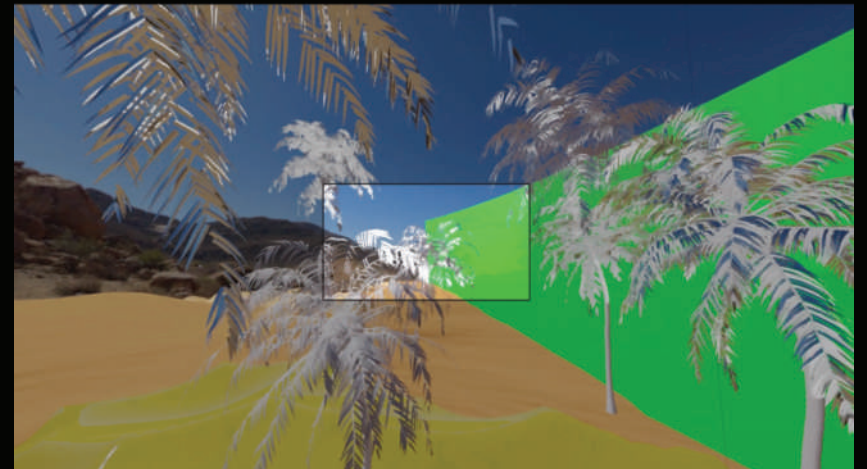
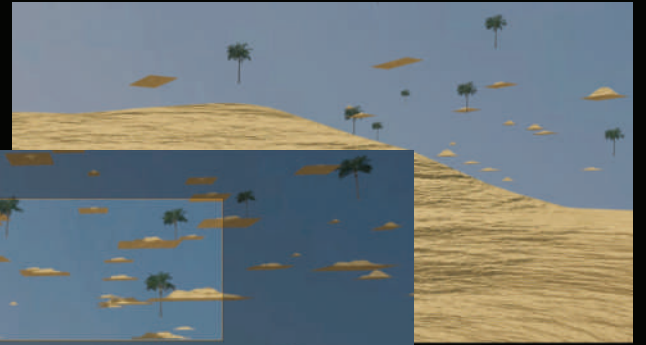


film DIGITAL MIRAGE

Nora Sanghara

- To numericize
- To algorithmize
- To digitise
- To touch
- To scan
- To feel
- To die
- To kill
- To plasticize
- To transmutate
- To subsume

CAN THE PAST EVER FIND PLACE IN THE FUTURE?
CAN WE EVER STOP VENERATING THE ALGORITHM?
HOW CAN THINGS SO EXCESSIVE COME OUT OF
SOMETHING AS LIFELESS AS CODE?
CAN WE EVER TRANSCEND VIRTUAL MYSTICISM?



WOMAN IN A YELLOW DRESS

Janée J. Baugher

——— *after a watercolor by Auguste Rodin*

Was it the certain soft hue of yellow that he was after? Is everything a type of translation? It could have been his grandmother's medallion that hangs on a chain over his mirror. To begin again means starting simple and small.

Working on paper is intimate enough to do sitting down at a garden table. Marble and metal must be muscled through. Pigment is quiet, just the tinny sound of brush in a water jar. It could have been the sun's warm tone on a particular evening in June.

Her feet in ballet's third position, her over-stretched and outstretched arms produce fingers that reach in opposite directions. Dancers' hands convey the slightest expression. It could have been one chosen petal on a sunflower in the courtyard of the butcher.

The pencil lines running diagonal up the page tell us she's the foreground. See her profile face and hair scooped up in a bun? It could have been the shade of honey on a silver spoon. Or could it have been a composite of yellows he had seen and never seen?

The paper on which he applied watercolor seems heavy with water on which he first sketched the figure, penciling those few horizontal lines in order to ground her. It could have been the candlelight one twilight, to which he held a chicken egg.

NOCTURNE: FOREST SPIRES

Jack Christian

——— *after a painting by Tom Thomson*

In nimble embrace of the data, I
hid another gnome in the garden,

hung a different picture on the wall,
made a list of wishes to wrap

as presents, scrubbed the sticky spot
where a little plastic hook had been,

finished fencing the zillion places I stood at once,
thought how the fence migrates the thought
while the homo sapien must leap for love,

managed to catalog each thing
bisected by my periphery

while also continuously leaping,
stopped to say hello to the bird

who's always watching me,
waited until magic hour,

then took another snapshot of the garbage pile,
took a deep breath to see if I was crying,

stood in the window and said,

“it’s snowing in the pines,”

made, through self-reflection
and a self-protective model of self-policing,

a new assessment to mitigate a risk I detected,
covered myself in pea-gravel,

taped the cut grass back together.

GARDEN OF EDEN

Sydney Contreras

In my grandmother’s garden, I seek communion with a little girl I no longer know.
My grandmother watches with milky eyes, always asking (never remembering the
answer, of course.)

I don’t know how to communicate what I am feeling (in English or in Spanish), but
I try for her the first time.

¿Como estás?
she asks.

*No sé, Nana,
pero estoy intentando,
lo juro.
Quietly.
I try my best to smile.*

She frowns in confusion and we are both quiet for a moment. Then:



¿Como estás?
One more time.

Bien, bien, ¿y usted?
Loud enough for her to hear this time.
The grin she is used to comes back—
It almost reaches my eyes.

The questions will keep coming and I will write answers in broken Spanish on a whiteboard I hold up to her from across the room. She cannot hear me speak, so I write and she reads, correcting my grammar when she answers aloud, slowly in simple words.

She is talking to someone else, I know: to the girl I have come here in search of. I am talking to someone else, too: to the woman who raised me so many years ago, before the edges of her memory started wearing thin.

If she understood the thoughts really running through my head (or if I had the courage to speak them aloud) I wonder, sometimes, what she would make of it all.

I do not know why, but my brain takes me back here each time I falter. Trying to untangle these new knots, I suppose I must look to the furthest end of the thread.

So back to the garden of Eden it is.
(The one that I no longer believe in—that she no longer tends to.)

My grandmother and I watch that young girl skip through the overgrown weeds.

When I stand up to go, my grandmother will continue to stand guard, watching. When she can watch no longer, I fear that the girl will be lost forever.

SUMMER'S DAY

Jack Christian

——— *after a painting by Berthe Morisot*

In a different version they're holding hands.

In this one they're distant as can be
while sharing a bench on a boat,

their clothing more liquid than the pond,
their faces hard plastic.

The pond is a pool of thread,
a problem of being.

The second woman steadies herself
with an arm that's half ripple,

half cedar, aware she becomes half
of all she touches. Her coat is blue enough

two different tourists could float in miniature.
Her friend is a pile of rain, a shadow

made to wake and go paddling.
Behind them a duck splashes into a new duck.



excerpt from TRANSFORMATION

alex t.

Dawn broke on the following day and the world was
flooded with sunshine.
Venus, Juno and Hymen assembled close to the nuptial
torches, and Iphis the boy then won his beloved Ianthe.
With the vigor in his supple limbs he strode toward her, and
wrapped her in his arms.

*'applied to get married
been together for eight years
identity card still listed her sex as "male."'*¹

Telethusa gazed on with pleasure, knowing the part she had
played
in this deception, the cloaks and girdled robes she had woven
by candlelight
sitting at her loom. The nurse was present too, who had washed
the baby clean every night, cut the flowing tresses
to a masculine length. Even the obscure Ligdus, the father charmed
but all in a secret silence
by the dashing looks of his growing son, took his place in the
cavernous womb of the temples.

*'[was] asked to sign a document declaring
would not undergo surgery*

1. All italicized text on the right half of the page comes from:
Han, Kirsten. "A straight married couple became a same-sex one and Singapore's
famous efficiency broke down," Quartz Media, Uzabase (June 14, 2017).

*before the date of her marriage,
requested that she dress in a more
masculine fashion on the
big day'*

So Iphis, surrounded by joy and revelry, seemed to float over
the scene,
beyond its omens and music. Almost abstracted from his body,
like an immortal disguised, he mused:
'What difference does it make whether I am a boy or a girl?
I have only
altered my form, so that I can be real in their fiction. Always I have
swaggered
with a kingly gait and lowered the timbre of my voice. Now Nature
no longer wishes to tear
us apart, and I have the blessings of all the gods. It is indeed
a small price
to pay for the happiness that I am destined to share with
my beloved Ianthe!
To pretend comes naturally to me. Not to pretend feels
far from real.
And what is this fire within me, raging and pressing like
weight without motion?

*'went for surgery the following year
[changed] the sex stated on [her identity card]'*

As soon as I hear their voices, I'm possessed by a passion
to escape the name
I have been given. Form determines everything we can know

in this one life,
though every shape is in flux. I utter this wish into the receiving
ether, that Daedalus
again may use his arts to turn me into the girl I feel I am.
That Dionysus, god
who brought us grapes and maenads, might descend upon me
as he did Pentheus
and with artful hands tuck back my curls beneath the band.
Or Isis, any
one who might answer my prayers in the pregnant silence.

*'the agency realized both were officially female,
they couldn't collect the keys to their flat
weren't entitled to get married'*

Not to mention
that women experience more pleasure in bed than men ever
do.
Grant me the hallowed key to this sacred chamber of feminine
congress, to which
the divine Sappho sang paeans! But first I must test, as tactfully
as I can manage,
Aristophanes's thesis. Will she or will she not be the one for whom
I have searched my whole life?
So Iphis kissed Ianthe, and embraced her. Held in that act
of love
was union. As the sky and the ocean cannot be distinguished
mingled into formless blue
when the world prepares to be born anew, so skin and skin,
lip and lip

were one in that moment, so heavy with witness.

'entry in State Marriage Register was "corrected accordingly," meaning completely removed, as if never been married at all'

The brilliance

was too much to bear,
as if one had peered directly into the heart of the sun. In the eclipsing
of a hundred eyes
by a single darkness, nothing remained but bones; then even
the pillars and torches
were wiped out in the wholeness of annihilation. The narrowness
of minds
Could not grasp the scale of these changes. Then there lay only a
body in wait, a
thread that could be spun outward from where it trembled to give
tongue and flesh
and word to a self that needed it. O Iphis, tell me if you will
of another

*'At the point of marriage, a couple must
be man and woman,
and must want to be
and want to remain as
man and woman
in the marriage'*

dawn that will break.



MULHOLLAND DRIVE

Aydan Shahd

So rarely does anything break past the glass sheen of not-quite-rightness. There is “intimacy” and there is intimacy. Few things can be truthfully named, without speech marks or parentheticals carefully siphoning away the source of the voice. Anytime you think you have found something to say anything close to where truth is the drive to speak dies, hacksawed script dribbling down chin.

In the world where you find everything you’re looking for, a perpetual itching. Spectre-scabs. Nothing to suck or hold with your mouth. In the world where you can never pierce the surface and everything in color always dies the cobweb haunting “SOMEWHERE IT ISN’T LIKE THIS” blazoned cheap neon. If only you really wanted to be someplace unblemished. It’s about having something to turn over in your hands, it’s about having someone’s fingers in your mouth and being far enough away that just one beautiful thing can stop all this MADNESS and pull the seams of immortal justice closed.

His knuckle between my teeth on the subway at 3 going home from the screening I am frightened his reflection will betray me in the window. I can’t see his eyes. If I bite down it will break and glass and body will look at me at once and it will be alright, but I don’t, I hold it in my mouth. I watch the shadow-sockets, I wait (fifty-nine) for a blink of the world where I am not sure (sixty-six), I do this because I am sure, we do this because to know (seventy-two) something is always to want to trace the roots of it (seventy-nine) and rub the skin raw. Is always to

eighty-six want to remember the taste of uncertainty ninety-six (so we are sure we know what sure tastes like), one hundred and three (“darling”) one hundred and (“darling wake up we’re home”)



Sean Sullivan WANDERING DOWNTOWN IN A HAZE

LANDSCAPE AT CREUSE

Jack Christian

—— after a painting by Berthe Morisot

The distant roofs are blue, the people jilted into scenery. You open a door to see this better: The world at its toilette. The world in bathroom light. You see the air is dead and the grass is diseased. The situation is like a war and you are a private. Your life a clusterfuck of bargains.

Even the trees are phantoms weirdly suggested beyond the floral smoke. It's all death by palm-frond, death by bedsheet, the situation containing also the smog you hope to die by, your one good face gone see-through, your usual agitation not hidden but mysterious.

This vision, by being accurate, becomes imaginary. You say to yourself, "But, for that painting to exist the world would have to end."

excerpt from 'COMPULSION':
REVISITED

Leonardo Bevilacqua

This piece remixes dialogue from Meyer Levin's Compulsion (1958), an ill-fated adaptation of his novel that covers the Leopold and Loeb Trial.

Act II. Scene V:

Leopold looks in horror at Loeb. A delusion is broken.

RUTH: Oh, Dick you're hand.

LEOPOLD: You're bleeding.

Loeb stands up in a hurry. Leopold rushes over instantly to mend his wounds but Loeb swats him away.

LOEB: What was in that gin anyhow?

Loeb rushes off.

Leopold: It's this awful gin. I'd better— (Rushes off with handkerchief)

MYRA: Poor Dick. It's upset him.

Act II. Scene VI:

Speak-easy - Men's Room. Music is thumping. Leopold rushes in to see Loeb washing his hands vigorously. Loeb grabs a rag and ties it around his arm. Leopold enters. Loeb stares at him through the mirror. Loeb rushes to the door to lock it. Leopold is stunned, bracing himself.

LOEB: I ought to kill you right here!

LEOPOLD: It was an error. We must rise above it.

LOEB: I'll be—! You go and ruin it. The perfect crime! You give us away! I never left any clue. But you know what? I've got a plan.

Devious smile comes onto Loeb's face. Loeb unlocks the door. They filter out.

Act II Scene VI:

A bluesy slow song is being played. Most of the dancers/patrons have filtered out. Loeb does a few shots and grabs Leopold.

LEOPOLD: How's the South of France this time of year?

Leopold smiles and lets Loeb grab his waist. They slow-dance. Leopold, smiling, lets his head fall onto Loeb's shoulder. The empty dance floor begins to swirl and swirl until a flashback commences.

Act II Scene VII:

Leopold is driving by the baseball field. Loeb, sitting in the back seat, tears out the window and sees Bobby Franks.

LOEB: Bobby! Wanna lift?...You sure? I sure know mother would want me to at least ask...Aces...This here is "Babe," a friend of mine from the university. Say hi, Babe.

LEOPOLD: Hi Bobby!

Bobby enters car. Leopold drives off. Within seconds of leaving. Loeb grabs Bobby and stuffs the gag in his mouth. A struggle ensues. Bobby is subdued by the sheer force of Loeb. The suffocation is proving difficult. Leopold feels that it is over but

*instead a whack is heard and then another and then another.
Leopold flinches each time. The stage is cleared to reveal Loeb thumping Bobby.
He is covered in blood.*

Act II Scene VIII:

Leopold puts his head back on Loeb's shoulder as they waltz. Leopold looks up and all of a suddenly Loeb's giggling bloodied face appears to him in a projection from behind, specifically the moment of Loeb looking up post-carnage. Leopold, in the speak-easy, looks up at his face. Loeb moves his face towards Leopold's.

LOEB (Teasing Leopold): Oh my God, this is terrible. This is terrible.

They kiss. The empty floor where their shadows intermingle in the flashing lights and mixed beats of wild Jazz.

BLACKOUT

Epilogue:

LIGHTS UP

Return to site of the prologue. The Blue Singer sings a jazzy rendition of Soundgarden's "Black Hole Sun" to a movement piece. As she sings on, more and more patrons leave till she is left alone by the final repeat of the chorus.

excerpt from DOWN A LONG DARK
HALLWAY

Maya Sibul

I closed my eyes for a second and watched. His compact body floundered about on its own two feet. I opened my palms to him and wondered if he might return the gesture, if he might unfurl those grasping fingers like a mechanized claw would relinquish a prize. The jerking perfunctory yawn of an arcade claw. And I wondered: could he indeed mirror the motions of my hand? The opening and closing of my fingers into and away from my palm? Had he acquired the motor skills yet? Or was he still, no, was he only some lethargic enigma?

But his youth! His newness! His tenacity! That supple lolloping novelty that were his feet swinging themselves across the wood floors. His placid stare, cheeks swelled with rosy clamor. I thought distinctly, I remember thinking, well, now, here. Here. Here is. Here is this baby who replicates my own limbs. Like a small, new, fresh thing, an animal corralled within the room's architecture, found, displaced, in the winding passages of many corridors and rooms and homes with looming wooden doors, in the darkened hallways of his father's childhood; and was it only youth, his youth, the memory of youth, fortuitous, jubilant youth, that bound us? There persisted these tumbling moments in which I was certain that we, he and I, were bound by some slender thread, a filament of chance and good fortune and joyous rapture. And then these moments were contradicted by their own shadows, the daunting amorphous shapes that danced deep within my head on nights I couldn't, for the life of me, slip away to sleep. These echoes of null ineptitude that wormed themselves deep within the coils of my brain: if you left, if you left right now, right this very moment, well, he wouldn't mind, now would he? He wouldn't remember you, young and impressible as he is. Malleable. Tenacious. He is in want of nothing. No thing, really. Nothing at all. No, not even you, your body, your touch. Yes. If you left him now he would remember nothing.

To my son—and even now the word is clunky, is sour on my tongue—nothing, and by nothing I mean no one, I mean not myself, was irreplaceable. The days and nights would continue to pass in some transfiguring composition. The days would become nights as the nights became days. The baby needed not retain any memory of me, of my body; he would only require satiation. Milk milk milk more milk. A nipple. The bottle's rubbery nib. The elasticity of the bottle in his mouth, between his gums. A hunger. Satiation. Hunger. A satiation. Though he was made of me—and my hunger, my satiation—he need not ever know it. So disparate we were, as if a patrilineal bond could never suffice, as if my leaving in that instant would go unnoticed. Unmourned.

These slimy reveries would writhe for a moment, make themselves pertinent, and then disappear as the sun rose, as darkness petered out beyond the horizon. Yes, it was morning, and the night hours were languishing, losing their anguish. Early light became dawn and the world was once again discernible. The baby was

wailing in his crib. A dream. The banal horror of my recurring nightmares. Daymares. Daytime delusions.

Shaking myself, I stood abruptly. In the large sunlit room of the Manhattan apartment, the baby fell and was reset on his feet. My hands! I reached and propped him upright; my hands performed of their own volition. My hands—my own hands?—and the baby was walking again.

The superintendent was showing Milly the stove. Demonstrating with his hands, he turned the dials to reveal the searing heat released by the four burners. I heard him tell her about his favorite recipe for pan-fried fish with olive oil, lemon-pepper, paprika, and lime juice. I could imagine his mouth moving slowly, as if to fully-encapsulate the words on his tongue, within the cavern pooled just beyond his corpulent lips. Milly asked about a microwave: where could she heat a bag of buttered popcorn? The super explained that the building was old and, as he put it, venerable; modern appliances were allowed, technically, but mostly discouraged. They wouldn't fit with the apartment's primordial charisma, as he explained. Had she, instead, ever tried heating loose kernels on a stovetop in burbling oil? The result was—and he kissed his thumb and forefinger (nail-beds filthy, Milly later told me) to his purplish lips at the subsequent exclamation—absolutely and wondrously delightful.

I paced down the winding hallway. It was long, longer than I might have expected initially, for an apartment of this size, though the air traveled smoothly, in delicate gusts. I felt them against my open palms, traversing the span of the elongated hallway from beginning to end and back again. End to beginning. Beginning to end. I made myself dizzy considering these dimensions before remembering the baby, before jogging back to the largest brightly-lit room and scooping him up in my arms. There was no natural light in the hallway and I could locate no shadow—not of my own body nor of the baby's. It reappeared, rather, as I entered the back-most room and caught sight of Nathan's limp corduroys lightened for a second in the glare of the sun. I made a mental note: lack of natural light throughout. The air in the hallway was musty, smelled vaguely of mildew, soil, and toilet cleaner. Another mental note: needs a thorough cleaning.

It's peculiar to me that this feeling—propelling down a narrow artificially-lit





hallway, child in pursuit—should remind me of certain unremarkable evenings of my childhood, and yet somehow the memories persist. They overwhelm the moment, overpower me, or else only evade my own grip of them. I recall a fruitless concern with my own shadow. There were some nights in which, surrounded by a dense and turgid kind of air—an air whose particles I felt tumbling along the skin of my outstretched arm—I was certain only of my own shadow. Not Ursula’s from the bed beside mine, nor our mother’s from beyond our bedroom where she pattered about relentlessly in the study. Those nights, I recall hearing my own breath, my own blood, as if it were pulsing deliriously down infinitesimal chambers. My veins. Time stood still. Mute. Raucous. Noisy body. Breathe, I would remind myself. Breathe. Breathe; you must breathe.

THE CONCERT

Janée J. Baugher

— after a painting by Richard F. Lack

Some days I just want to be part of something like how on one evening there are two people in a parlor mid-musical measure and I imagine how her piano’s notes—whether they be high, in octave 3 or 4—and his cello’s notes—whether his hand is in position 2 or 3—compose song. Music where the acoustics are absorbed by the oriental rug, absorbed by the thick drapes, and tempered by the enclosed walls made for a parlor concert though there is no space for audience. I am there nonetheless and when the notes are struck beneath the keyboard and vibrate off strings, I am glad to be a part of it. Not like the philodendron perched atop the piano is a part of it. Not like the vinyl records lying sleeved and unsleeved on the rug, and not like the discarded ash-tray cigarette. Rather, in the manner of those musical notes—where once there was silence, notes lifted from two instruments worked by two who know how. Notes that grow and rise inside a room whose walls are dusty blue and the hardwood floor is waxed beneath their feet. Sound created by two who must love each other to sit so close together in a room quiet but for the struck strings and the song that fills the space regardless of what exists outside this room, their home, the neighborhood where both fine things and terrible things happen.



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Fonts used: Sabon LT Pro, Ingra, and LiHei Pro.

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Design by J. Castro Viera.

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