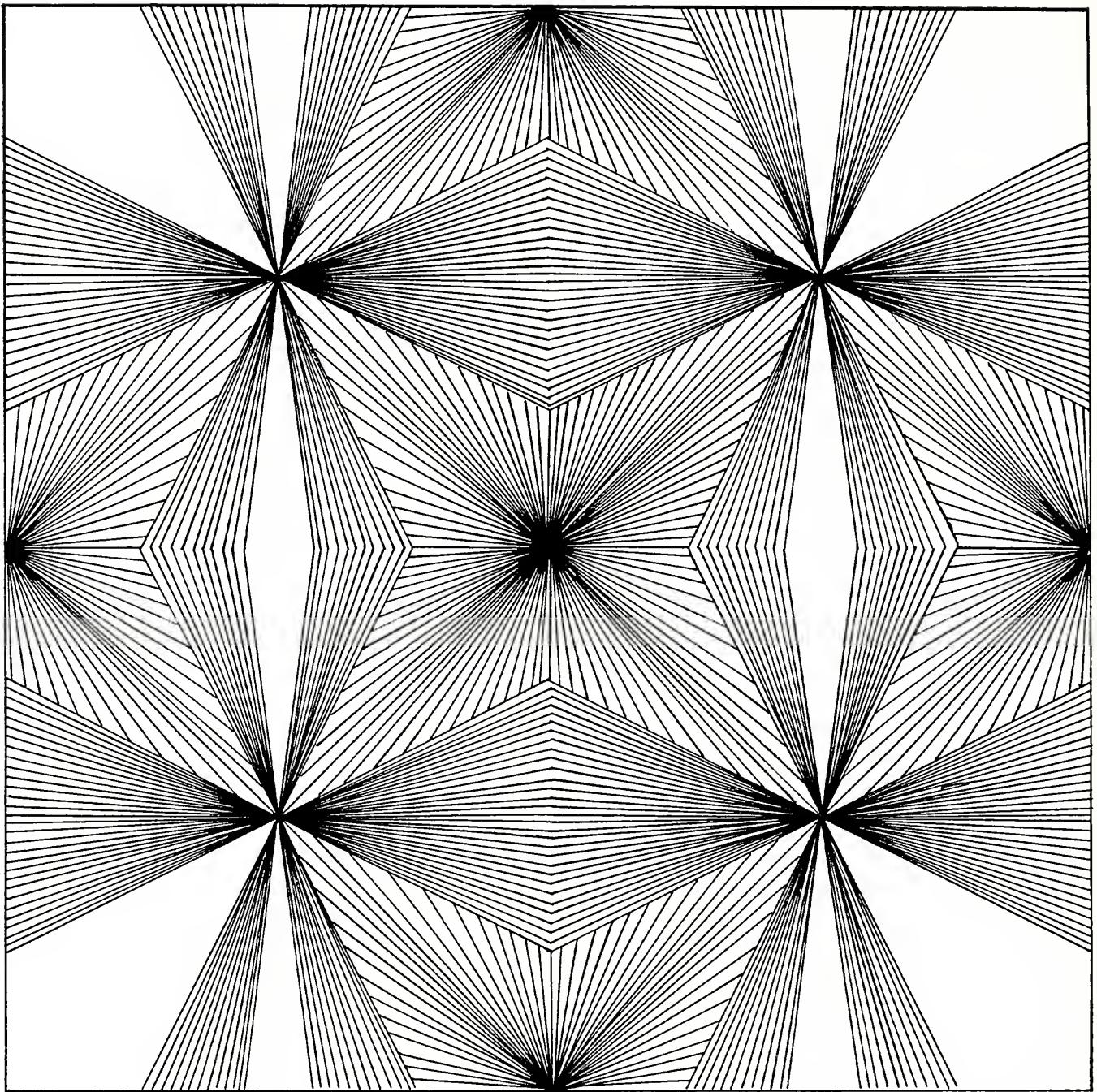


Renaissance 2000



Star Gazer

Mike Mah

RENAISSANCE

The Writers' and Artists' Magazine

of

Wayne Community College
Goldsboro, North Carolina
Volume 16, May 2000

DEDICATION

This sixteenth issue of

RENAISSANCE

is dedicated to

Alice Wadsworth

Comptroller

Wayne Community College

For her high standards and steadfast efficiency

For her quiet reassurance

For her spirit of cooperation

For her appreciation of *Renaissance* and kindness to the editors

For her magical solutions

STUDENT AWARDS

| | | |
|-----------------------|---|------------------------|
| Cover Design | ~ | Matt Kornegay |
| Art | ~ | Mike Mah |
| Poetry | ~ | Carrie Holkan |
| Short Story | ~ | Joy Victoria Whittaker |
| Essay | ~ | Martha Norris |
| Editors' Award | ~ | Sam Davis |

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The Artists and Writers

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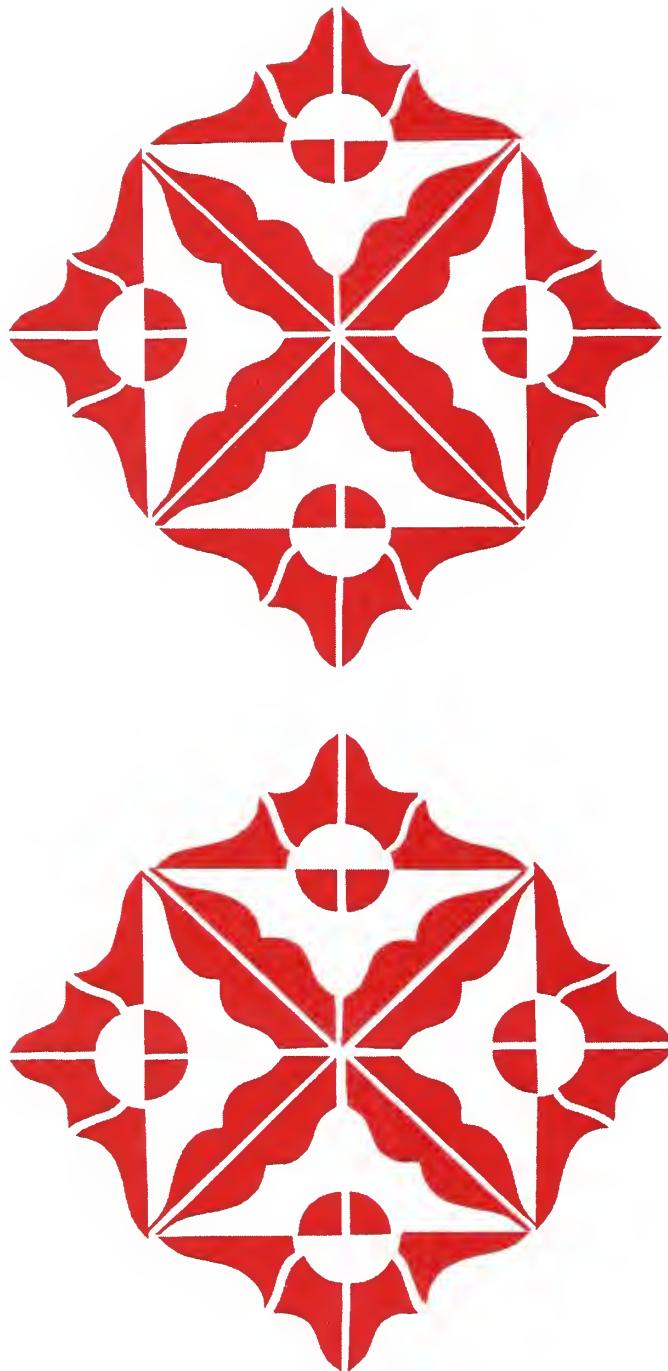
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Split Personality

Mike Mah



Rising Star

Mike Mah

Fate

Thrown by a careless hand
The cards lie still upon the table
Like hills of windblown sand

So intricately were they scattered and drifted
That when a chance wind blew
The hand heaved and the sculpture sifted

A careful arrangement of spades and hearts
Like settling beads of earth
Flipped, then turned, then rested.

New hand, new deal, new game
An aftermath of folly's breeze
A life changed—never again the same.

Kristin Davis

Winter's Eve

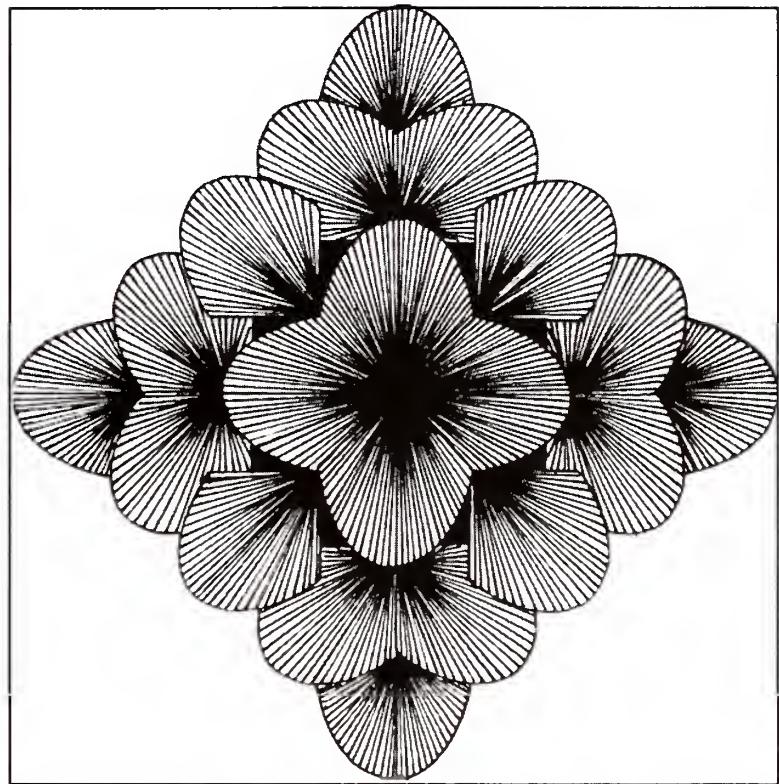
When the orange glow of summer
Slowly begins to fade
There is a sudden burst
Of loveliness short made

When the day begins to die
And the World's Light dims
Sunset's fierce madness sighs
And glory brims—

This is the end.
A glimpse of what is no more
A fleeting moment
And we are locked against a sturdy door

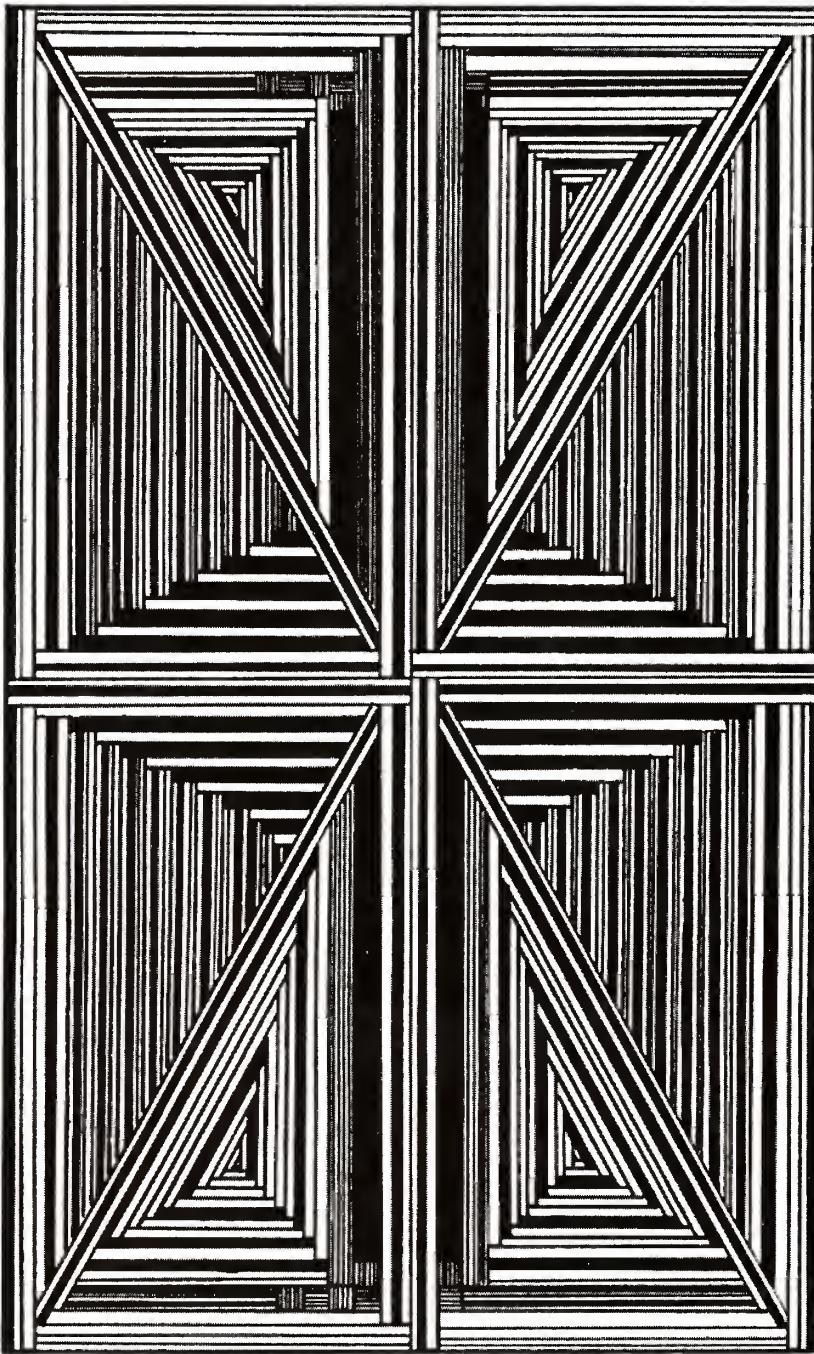
Senseless now makes perfect sense
In the clearness of the dark
And I am forced to resign myself
To Winter's unkind truths.

Kristin Davis



Sea Shells

Mike Mah



Every Little Step

Mike Mah

A Writer's Lament

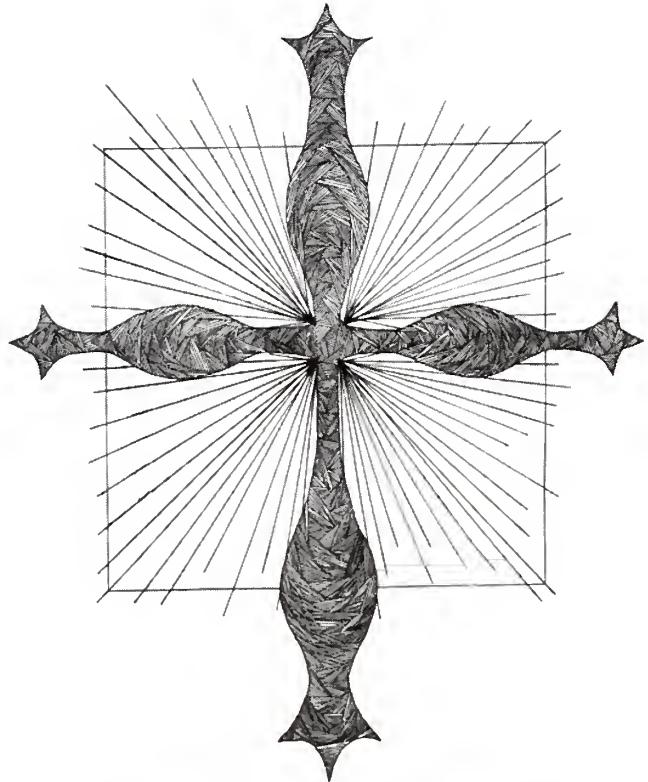
I offer each page
my heart and soul,
and with ink
I try to portray it.
But having it read
by a scholarly head
In my mind
seems to destroy it.

Sam Davis

The Ritual

The moon pulls the tides as if with a string
the moon stops to rest
and the tide runs away
almost breaking the chains that bind it
Suddenly, the moon realizes its loss
and pulls with fierce aggression
tugging the reluctant tide in again
The sun watches, smiling
like a parent, wondering
if the tide will ever learn who is in control
The ritual continues

Johnny Young



Thistle Cross

Rebecca Whitman

The Screaming Poet

He wears cold confidence like a tailored suit,
His face hard as sharp-edged steel,
His glare a shield for his soul, his scream camouflage for his heart.

What lurks in the shadowy depths of his mind?
What swims in the seas of his memories?
What so provokes rage yet fosters such love?

He lays his emotions on canvas and page,
He pens his feelings, paints his grief,
His heart is open to image and verse.

Some see only the screaming man,
Others read only the words of the poet,
The lucky few truly come to know...

the screaming poet.

Julie A. Aycock

Death of a House

Martha Norris

Tears ran down the woman's face as she stood in the drive. In front of her she saw the corpse of what had once been her anchor, her shelter, her haven. An aching pain settled on her heart as she gazed at what had once been her childhood home. Staring at the broken windows, cracked bricks, and fallen walls, she knew that these were the fatal wounds that had led to the demise of a once happy and lively home, and she knew that her home had suffered a slow and agonizing death.

Mice and snakes scurried and slithered where dancing feet had once stepped. Spiders built webs across windows through which eager faces had once peered, looking for the snowfall that had meant no school. As she walked slowly around the skeletal remains, she felt its bony fingers reach out into the recesses of her mind. And she could feel its memories.

The house remembered its first days, days filled with the sounds of hammers and saws. As the days progressed, so did the house, until finally it was completed with walls and a tin roof shining proudly in the spring sunshine. But it was empty. It lacked the element that would make it a home. It did not have a family.

Then came the day of life! A couple moved in with their young son, and the house was alive with peals of laughter from a young boy bursting with life. The house was filled with warmth, but most of all, it was filled with love. It was finally a home.

As time went on, the house saw three more children added to its family. It fiercely protected all against whatever nature threw its way. No rain nor wind penetrated this fortress. Through it all, the house withstood, its walls bursting with the love inside.

Years passed. The children grew until all but one had homes of their own. The youngest son stayed at home to care for his aging parents. The house missed the constant rumble of laughter, the smell of bread and cookies fresh from the oven. It adjusted itself to the quiet murmur of adult voices. Occasionally, the voices of children rang out as the grandchildren visited, but the quietness returned quickly as the youngsters left.

Then a new feeling invaded the walls. A hollow aching sadness came as death took the parents. Quiet sobbing could be heard late at night, and the house could feel the pain of the youngest son.

The house became accustomed to the peaceful quiet that followed. The son would rise in the morning, go about his day's work, and return at dusk. But the house and its human were lonely. An emptiness existed in both until a day, a few years later when joy and laughter returned, for the son married a widow with two young children. The walls once again vibrated with running feet and echoed with peals of laughter. The smell of fresh baked bread and homemade cookies permeated the inside of the house, and the house smiled. It was once again a home.

It watched the young children grow, and it protected them just as fiercely as it had their aunts and uncles, wrapping its warmth and love around them, sheltering them through broken bones and broken hearts, watching them grow into young adults.

History repeated itself; the children matured and moved away. The house became quiet and peaceful as the youngest son and his wife lived the sedate, tranquil life of the elderly. Sundays became the highlight of the house's days. Its rooms would once again ring with laughter, and its floors could feel the dancing, jumping feet of the visiting grandchildren. But quietness would descend quickly when they departed.

Then the house felt a heavy sadness as, once again, it could not protect its family from death. It could not prevent the silent fingers from snatching away the wife. The house again found itself empty but for the youngest son. They shared a lonely existence, both showing signs of the storms they had weathered. They felt the chill of approaching death. The house could feel the sadness in the son as he left for the hospital, both knowing he would not return.

The house sat empty and alone for weeks after the son's death. The children returned, but the sounds of tears falling on boxes replaced their laughter. Belongings were packed and furniture was removed. The house longed to bar its doors to stop the theft of its treasures, but it was powerless. It felt a key turn in the lock for the last time. Its walls and floors moaned and creaked as it heaved a sigh of resignation. Death had begun.

Slowly as a turtle plodding across a highway, nature moved in. She had won. Windows broke, letting in rain and wind. Animals slept in rooms that once had seen the dreams of sleeping children. Spiders spun webs across doors that no longer burst open as an excited child ran in. The final blow came from two old friends. Two huge oaks, planted as saplings on the day the original family had moved in, could not withstand the heavy winds nature sent, and they came crashing down. One snatched the chimney from the rooftop, bringing with it the walls of the living room. The other attacked the back of the house, destroying a bedroom and laying claim to the very core of the house, the kitchen. Leaves and branches lay atop a pile of broken wood that once had been the table.

Slowly, ever so slowly, the house accepted death, almost welcomed it. Its last memories were of smiling faces, laughing voices, dancing feet, and love—love that made it not just a house, but a home.

With these memories still vivid in her mind, the woman found herself once again in the drive. She could see that her home had died a slow, painful death, yet she knew that somehow the heart of the house lived on. It had reached beyond the darkness to remind her of something forgotten. Nature could reclaim the boards and bricks and take away the house itself, but nothing could erase what had made this not just a house but a home. Nothing could take the memories of love that once had filled each room. Walking back to her car, the woman smiled, remembering, with love, all the things that had made this house her home.



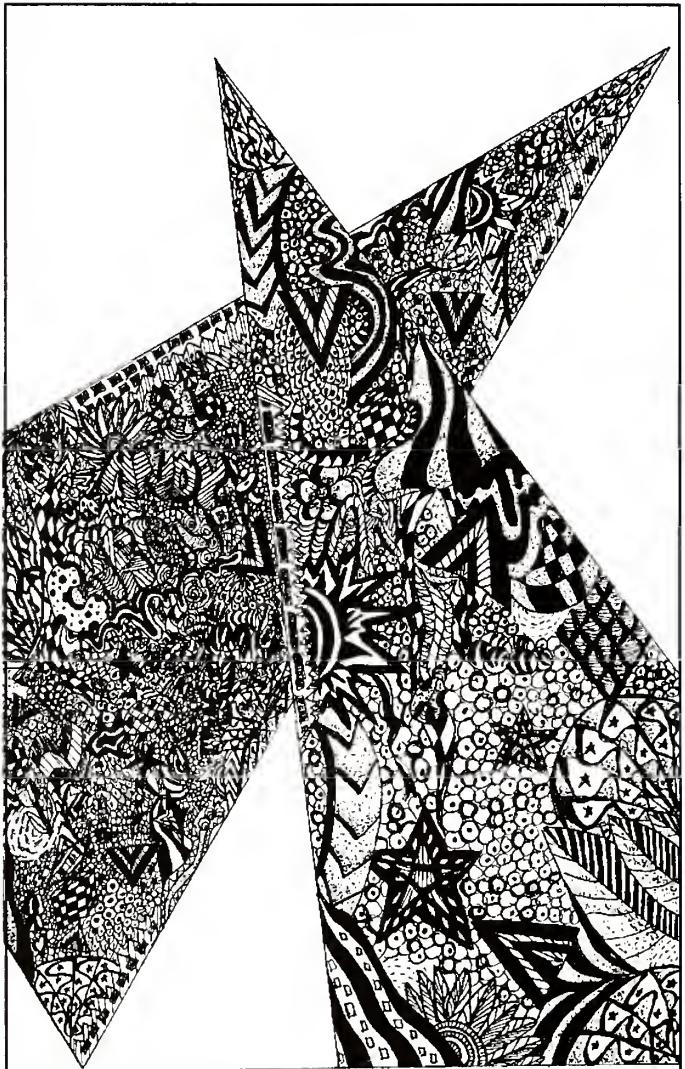
Into My Mind's Eye

Mike Mah

Remembering Butterflies

Sweet sister–
Do you remember
our old selves,
dreaming away
each day in our secret tree house?
Dreaming of
blue skies and butterflies–
I remember
how you could chase them for hours.
I wonder–
did you ever catch one, maybe
capture its powers?
for it seems to me that you
throughout our childhood
flew
so high, so far, so sweet
as I clumsily stumbled over my feet
to reach you—to touch
the most beautiful creature I'd seen.
Do you remember?
I can't see why
it was only I
who noticed, who heard.
You were the most magnificent—
more than any bird, more than the wind,
more than anything that could ever begin
to touch that sky.
It seems to me.
Do you remember, sweet sister?
because I can't forget
how much I miss her this night.

Carrie Holkan



Jeweled Bubbles

Christy Williams

Museum Moment

Love Untitled

Look! Do not turn away now
from this thing you have made!
What is wrong with the masterpiece?
Now that it is done?
Are you not proud of its beauty?
How can the artist lay waste in his work?

You chose its colors, patterns and form;
Your hands created its surfaces bright.
Was it not fair to you yesterday?
What has marred its enchantment to you?
Can you now pack up your tools and go,
Leaving it to the dust?

Close not your eyes to it, look at it now!
See the fruit of your toil and labor!
Has it escaped the scope of your vision?
Did it become more than you dared to take in?
How can the sculptor, stained from his work,
Leave it thus, untitled?

Julie A. Aycock

“Please do not touch,” says the sign.
What is your name?
“Aesehylus,” you whisper.
What tragedy is this, Aesehylus?
I saw her toueh your eheek.

Who are you, Aesehylus?
What is in a man’s face
To inspire such a tender touch?
Did you feel it, Aesehylus?
Are you lonely in your marble coldness?

No warmth do you receive
From lights shining down.
No happiness have you
From the children that pass you by.

How sad to have life beyond your years
In lifeless stone,
To evoke, with crumpled features,
The gentle caress of a woman
And yet you do not feel the warmth of her hand.
You elicit verse from a poet stranger
Over 2400 years your junior
And yet you will not see these words.
Are you there, Aesehylus?

“Please do not touch,” says the guard.
“Ma’am, you’re not allowed to toueh.”
“Please rebel!” you say in your silence,
“Toueh me here and now
And let me live as man again,
For a moment.”

Carolyn Hill



Solitaire

Ashley Barnes

What I Saw

Aaron Johnson

For years as a child, I would wander through the woods around my house. I searched relentlessly for hidden treasures under logs, rocks, and other such places that stir the minds of children and titillate the imagination to create wondrous visions of monsters and savage beasts with big, sharp teeth and a hunger for small kids. In such regions where few but hunters and hikers would go, I would find secret places no one knew how to reach but me. There I would find all manner of bugs and birds and small forest creatures that chattered at invasion before fleeing further into the brush. In the absence of time schedules, technology, and social order, the abundance of animals and trees always gives visitors a sense of the wild, a sense that the endless struggle for life and death is taking place all around them. This, to the average person, is the absolute epitome of nature, the way life has existed since the beginning of time. I have spent countless hours roaming the woods, exploring the trees, and viewing hundreds of species of wildlife. However, it was not until I witnessed the flight of a common household pest that I truly understood the meaning of nature.

During the time of year when winter and spring fight each other for supremacy, the day was mild overall, but the wind had a bite to it that stung cheeks and nose, giving them a rosy glow. The overcast sky gave the day an oppressive withdrawn feeling that the halfhearted chirping of the birds failed to relieve. Treetops swayed in the wind in a repetitive motion that made the forest seem a whole living entity. A light misting rain glazed spider webs and leaves alike with a crystal sheen. I was walking along a well-used path, lost in my own daydreams with the crunch of sand and rocks under my shoes. Then a break in the clouds suddenly released a single shaft of sunlight, which lit up the forest canopy giving the new spring leaves an eldritch glow. I turned my head to look, and a scene from the most imaginative story teller was right there in front of me. In a nameless place in the most ordinary group of unremarkable trees, I discovered the most remarkable experience I have ever had the honor to witness in the out-of-doors.

A ring of poplar trees formed a natural cul-de-sac out of the disorder of the forest. The wind reshuffled fallen brown leaves against the bowls of the trees around this odd hollow, and a carpet of rich, dark green moss lay across the forest floor contrasting against the grayish color of smooth poplar bark. Dumbfounded, I turned to stare at the thing before my eyes. Placed just askew of the center of the hollow was a small, brown stump. Surrounding this and breaking through the living Berber of moss was a congregation of dirty toadstools, all motionlessly bowing homage to the monolith before them. A tiny army of white soldiers spilled forth from a deep crevice to patrol the nooks and crannies of the stump. Emerging from the netherworld recesses of this forest temple, the convoy of small angels ascended into the air to float along with the wind until disappearing into the distance. Stunned to silence and frozen in shock, I stood and watched as these small forest fairies appeared and spread wings from atop the stump, before becoming airborne and floating away to unknown places. After a moment, I recognized what was before me. These were neither fairies nor angels; rather they were the termite elite. From the carcass of their wooden victim, they would fly to seek a new hardwood prey of a log, a stump, or even a house. There they would create new homes in wood and would spawn new armies. The sun began to fade after a few minutes, and I turned to continue through the woods, my childhood attention span already distracted.

I have always remembered that peculiar scene from the woods. The event wasn't spectacular because it exposed the life and death struggle of the wilderness. The event was extraordinary because it epitomized the essence, the very presence, of nature. Nature is more than the life and death struggle of the wilderness; nature embodies moments when everything seems to have a collective consciousness, the times when there is a miasma of life in the air. In times like these, the earth seems alive and its creatures in sync with it completely. In times like these, we are the outsiders, the wild, savage creatures. It is in times like this that nature becomes a tangible force that occasionally makes itself known.

Her Revenge

Wendy Lane

She thinks of her first husband and wishes that his car would crash on his trip back. She remembers all the times that he has put her down and focused all of his energy into ruining her life. Every three or four months, he comes around, just long enough to tilt her world a little more. Well, this time he has gone too far. He has hurt the children. She will stop him this time.

She remembers the things her sister said about her, such ugly and untrue lies! She thinks of how her sister has always been jealous of her for no reason at all. She knows she has been a good sister. Has she not always loved and tried to respect her sibling? And for what? To be treated this way? No. She will not stand for it anymore. This time she will put an end to it once and for all. Her sister must learn the value of her worth. She must pay for every ugly thing she has said.

She remembers the times her new husband cheated on her, all the pain and humiliation! She knows she has been a good wife. . . the perfect, loving little wife. Has she not cooked and cleaned for him all of these years? Defended him when everyone said he was no good? Catered to his every little whim? Lied for him and protected him? And for what? How does he show his appreciation for her? Why, he goes after every single little tramp that will give him the time of day! He, too, must pay for all the suffering that he has caused her. She will teach him to go running around on her and complicating her life.

That woman who lives down the street. . . the busybody with all the nerve, cutting her off on the road that day. Why, she almost wrecked her car! And just what was it with the finger gesture Miss Busybody made to her that day? She has lived in this neighborhood all of her life. She was here first! She thinks that she will just have to teach Miss Busybody a thing or two about respect. Yes, she wonders what kind of hand gestures will be made when Miss Busybody finds a little surprise awaiting her!

She is sick and tired of the world trampling on her. She is a fine, upstanding lady who has never harmed anyone or anything. But the world has crossed a line, and she is weary of being the perfect little person she is. It is time for her to take a stand, and they shall all suffer the consequences of their behaviors.

She sits back to watch the 5:30 First News. Her precious kitty Callie climbs up and settles on her knees. That news man, Karl something or other (she thinks he is too skinny and that his chin is too long), comes on to deliver the news.

"This just in. A tire blowout on I-95 has claimed the life of a Virginia man. Sam Cooper was traveling north on I-95 to Richmond when his left front tire blew, causing his car to veer off the shoulder where it rolled several times before stopping. Mr. Cooper had been visiting with relatives in Raleigh, and the family was notified just a short time ago. No other injuries have been reported in connection with this accident.

"In other news this evening, Ms. Allana Bowers of Wilson was admitted into the hospital this morning after she sustained some unusual injuries during a thunderstorm. Ms. Bowers was on the telephone when lightning struck the line. The heat from the surge seared her left ear and also her lips. Her doctors have reported that although she is in stable condition, she will need extensive surgery to both the left side of her face and her mouth. Ms. Bowers was rendered completely deaf in what was left of her ear and will need months of speech therapy once her lips have been reconstructed.

"A local woman is dead tonight after she entered her garage and encountered a snake. Mrs. Rose Head was apparently crushed to death by the ten-foot, 250-pound python. Responding to her screams, a fifteen-year-old neighbor ran to assist. He, along with a rescue team, arrived too late. The snake was subdued by the rescue team. No word yet on the snake's fate."

She strokes Callie's head and smiles. The phone rings.

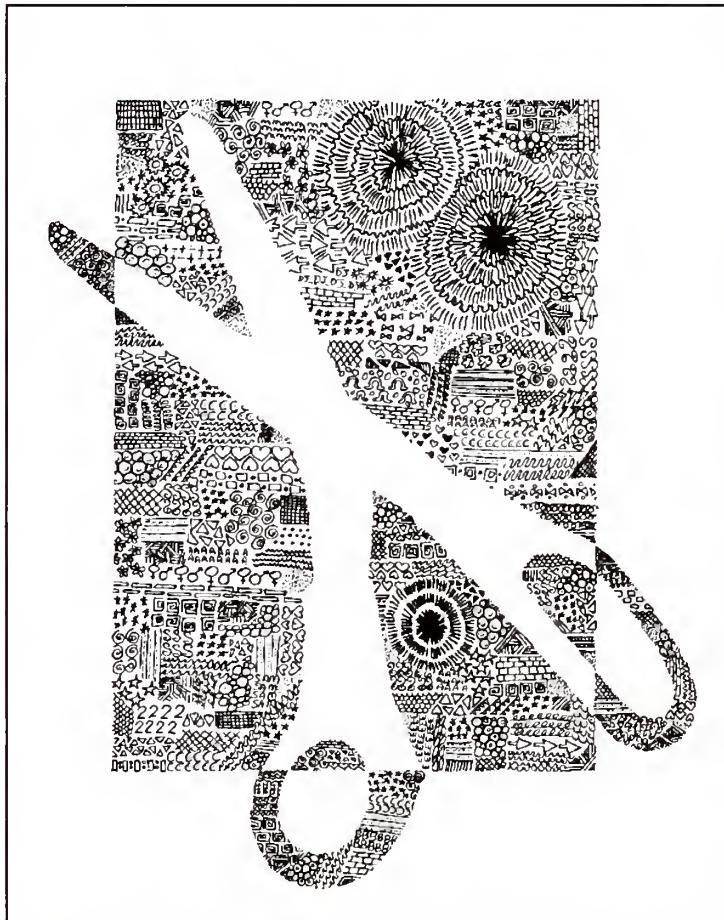
"Hello."

"Hello, Mrs. Jones?" asks a gruff voice.

"Yes, this is she."

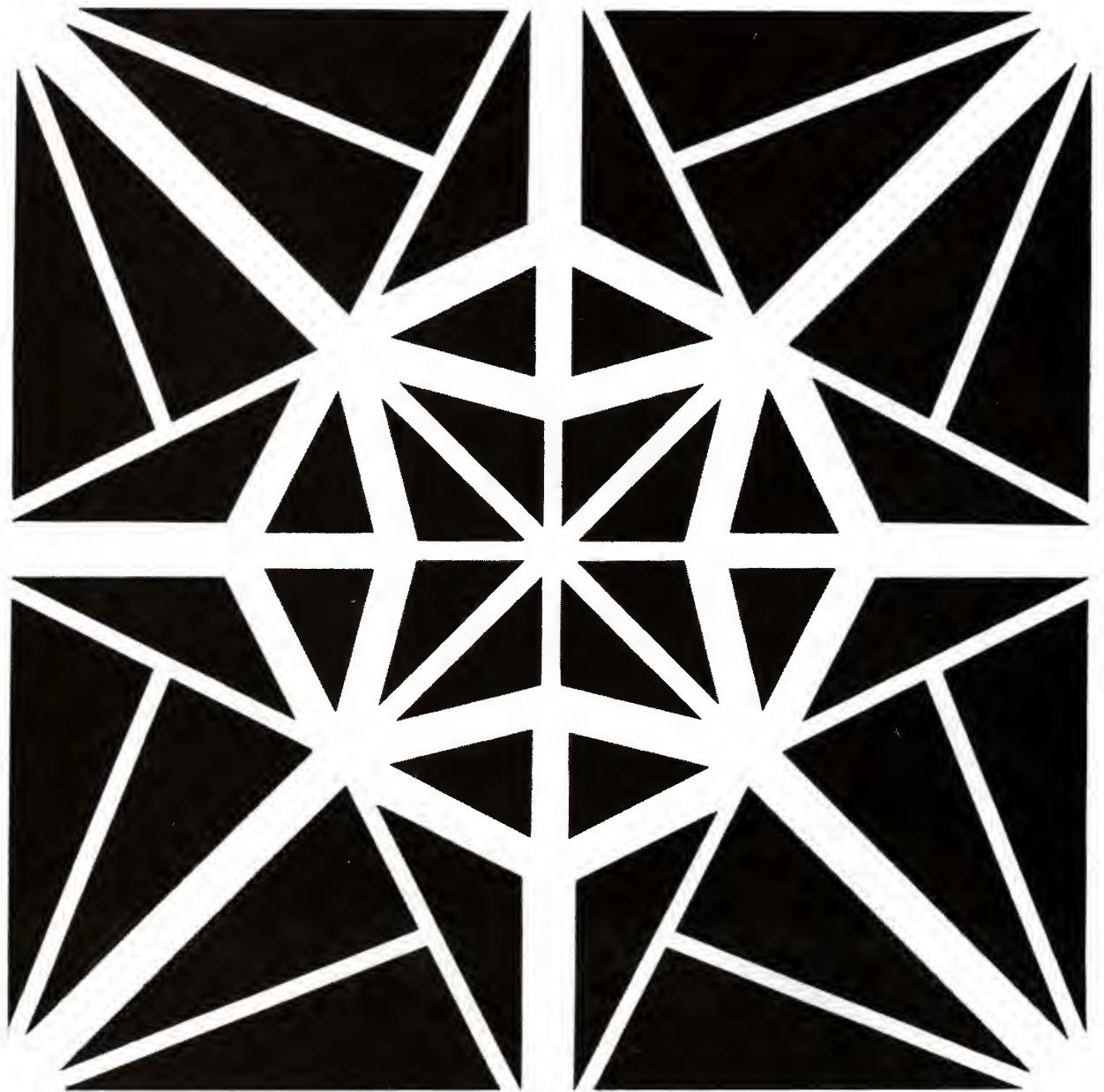
"Mrs. Jones, this is Deputy Carlson of the Johnston County Sheriff's Department. It seems that your husband has been in an accident. Can you meet me at the hospital?"

She looks down at Callie and smiles. The cat seems to smile with her.



Cut It Out!

Sam Davis



Starburst

Matt Kornegay

Autumn

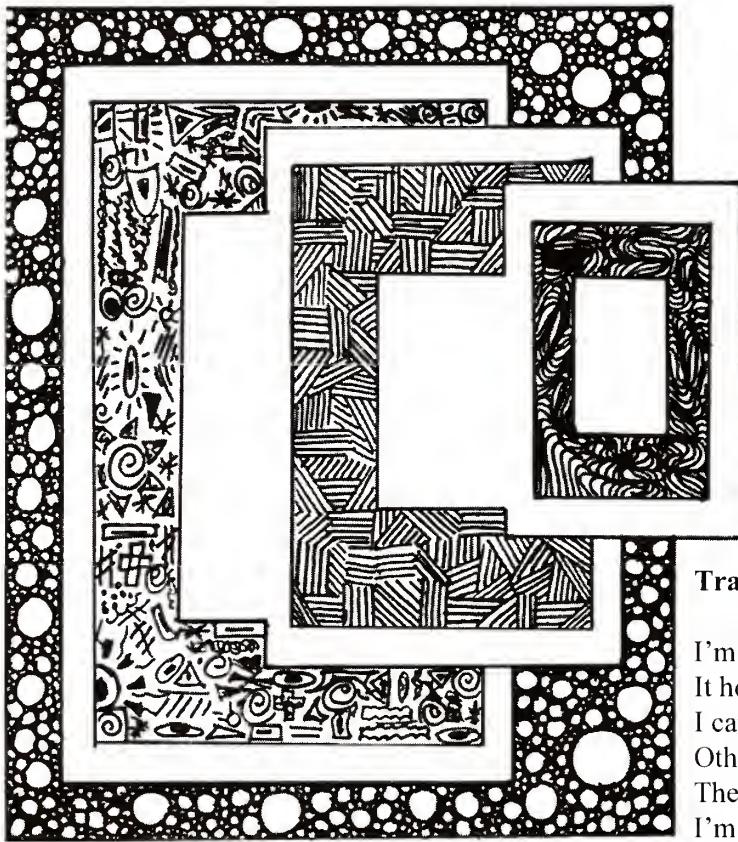
She dropped her drawers.
A pool of
Gold and orange
Spilled around her ankles—
almost a perfect circle.

No shy shielding of softness—
Naked fingers reach to Heaven.
No hiding the stretch marks,
the lumps and bumps
and wrinkles and sags
of spreading middle age,
the scars of the Living.

Ann Spicer



Fall
Crystal Hill



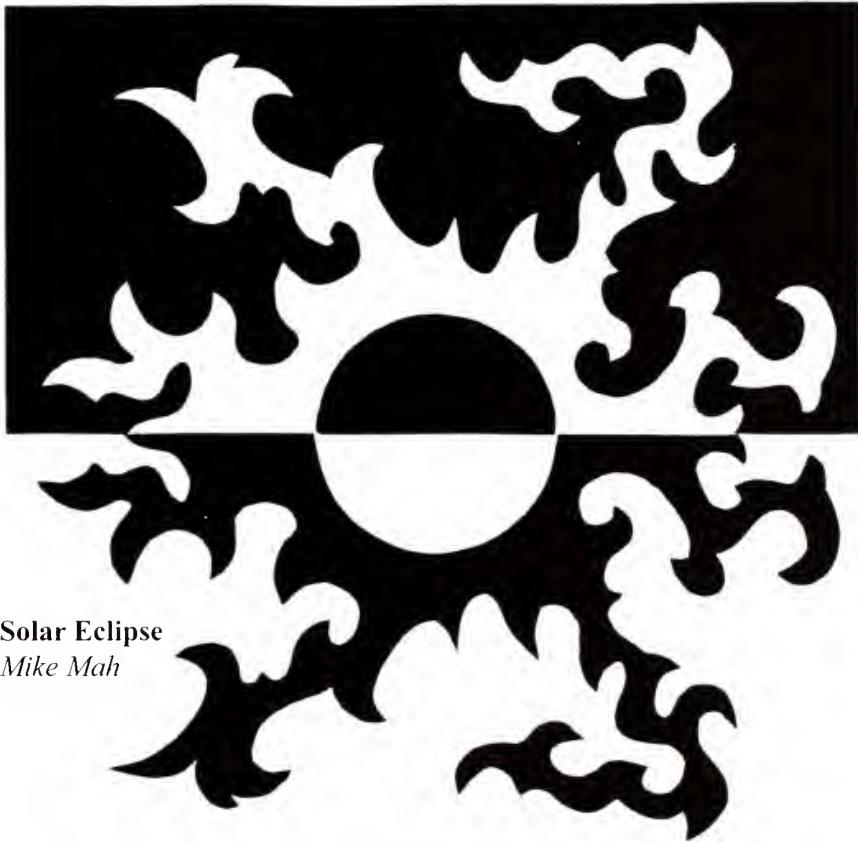
Trapped

I'm in a box.
It holds only darkness.
I can peer through the cracks and see the light.
Others are like me, but they are now free.
They laugh and love, why can't I?
I'm in a box.
Four walls grow closer every day.
My keepers like me here; they can control me here.
They want me to stay bound forever.
I will die if I do.
There is no escape.
I would lose the toys provided in my box.
My box.
Funny that I consider this prison mine.
After all,
I'm in a box.

Angela M. Turner

3-D

Leslie Vinson



Solar Eclipse

Mike Mah

October Mourning

The leaves seem to be in mourning
on this cool October day,
trading brilliant colors for a dreary brown,
leaving only memories of their glorious array,
and brittle bones beneath my feet
to break upon the ground.

Could they be in mourning
on this dry and bitter eve
for fading colors of the dying sun?
Are they filled with sorrow because they were deceived
by soothing promises that sweet
Sunrise had softly sung?

I feel I understand their pain—
for, in turn, I mourn their passing,
waiting for color's courage to rise above.
I suppose I've always known that nothing's everlasting,
But recall how far defeat
seemed those spring mornings
we found love.

Carrie Holkan



Self-Portrait

Christy Williams

Tell me what I need to hear

Tell me that I'll come out standing alive. And I'll walk among the dead.
Tell me that I'm dreaming. And not just a freak.
Tell me that I can make it. Don't doubt my talents.
Tell me that you have faith in me. And I'll rule the world.
Tell me that I can win this fight. And I'll win it for you.
Tell me that I'm your man. And I'll love you for a lifetime.
Tell me that you want to see the real me. And I'll take off my mask.
Tell me that I'm your one and only. And I'll tell you that you're right.
Tell me that you believe in God. And I'll show you the entrance into heaven.
Tell me that I can find inner peace. And we can find it together.
Tell me that I'm a gentleman.
And you, my lady, will be shown the lost art of chivalry.

Andrew "Dice" Petruolo

Between Whispers

Grasping at the Wind

Oh happy day
He turned my way
With a word to say
Or smile to pay
To linger on my mind
And cause me to go blind
Pressing play and rewind
On the memories I find
Holding like a kiss
Every thought like this
Grasping not to miss
A moment's careful bliss
Just grasping at the wind
Lingering to mend
Pausing to bend
Wishes I think you send

Rebecca Whitman

Do you feel you ever loved me?
ever even once?
Maybe in some insignificant incident
when a certain smile passed my lips,
or we shared a simple laugh
over some
careless coincidence?
Did you love for maybe a moment?
maybe one I missed?
or one in which you kissed
me softly
and whispered that you did?
Do you feel you ever loved me?
ever even once?
Perhaps when I proclaimed mine madly
(enough to make you blush!)
And you'd sigh
and hold me tightly,
urge me so to hush.

Carrie Holkan

Pop Culture

Surround us with sound.
Fill our brains with
Words
Images
Color
Noise
Anything to distract
From reality.
The greatest hell would be
To be left alone
Inside of me.

All That I Am

Is all that I am
merely what I seem to be?
Devoid of identity,
I have become
who I appear to be.

A paragon
of sanctimonious ties,
pursuing a life
founded on lies.
Deceit is bittersweet.

All that I am
he seems to see.
Yet all that he loves
is who I seem to be.
Superficial bliss.

Eternally branded
as part of us
I am cursed to mourn
all that I was.
A Faustian union in deed.

Oh, to be freed from
who I seem!
And then be free
to be
me
And all that I am.

Sam Davis

Rebekah McInnis

I Am

Flow in and flow out of me.
I, I am flux. . . I. . . am. . . flux.
I, I am static. . . I. . . am. . . static.
I. . . am. . . chaos.
I. . . create and recreate. . . mold me. . . to be.
Free me from me to be free.
I am vari- alter- and unmute-able.
I am unstable.
Absorb into and bleed out of. . . me.
I am complexity.
Watch me imitate, agitate, and resuscitate. . . me.
Palette of emotion I be.
Four-letter word for me. . . free.

Ty Higgins

Stairways
Kristin Davis

Could it be she'd had it all wrong? All these years, she'd had it all wrong? Or had she had it right once? Had there been a point in her life when she'd really had it right? She'd been right without knowing, and she had become wrong without knowing it, too. Tammy reached down to scratch her cat who begged for attention. It was Tammy and the cat. No one else. It had been that way for years. Years and years. Tammy and her cat. Tammy and her dog. Tammy and her goldfish. Tammy and herself. Tammy, whole and strong, independent. Tammy and her career. Tammy and her passions. Tammy and her painting. Tammy and her chocolate. Just Tammy. A complete soul.

But something had just questioned all that. Something had threatened her careful existence, her intricately built life, those meticulous blocks of her carefully constructed manner, a life she was sure had been built upon a strong and sturdy foundation. But the winds of doubt suddenly, and without a second thought, were shifting Tammy. She stood and stretched. She shivered as she peered out the window. The sky was thick and gray. She could feel the chill through the large glass windows that surrounded her studio. An ugly day.

Tammy glanced around her work area. Easels and canvases, paints, sketch pads, pencils, books—they were scattered everywhere. She'd been working all day, happy, content. She'd been whistling for a while and had then turned on the radio. Tammy was deep into her work, painting deliberate, vigorous strokes with a small brush onto a large canvas. She sang loudly and off-key, sometimes mixing up words as she painted, her mind wholly on the work at hand. It was mid-afternoon.

In the evening, as in every evening, Tammy would descend two flights of stairs and walk out the front door of her enormous and elegant home. She'd walk out the door, down two blocks, then a right through the woods until she came upon the river. And there she would sit every evening—rain, snow, sleet, or shine. It didn't matter. Tammy sat for at least an hour, sometimes with her eyes closed, sometimes with them open. Sometimes a breeze would blow through her long hair that now had more gray strands than she cared to think about. Sometimes the air would be thick and stagnant, and beads of sweat would trickle slowly down her neck. Sometimes the rain would pour down upon her in thick sheets, soaking her to the bone. But, always, ALWAYS Tammy would smile at the end of her meditation, whether it had been filled with tears or contented sighs. Tammy was a peaceful person. A quiet, happy, peaceful woman. Life had been good, very good. In her quiet hours of meditation, in her ecstatic moments of work, though alone—never alone.

Tammy walked around the room, her paces slow and steady. She stopped at the canvas she'd been so into a few moments ago. It was finished now. For weeks Tammy sat, contemplated, painted, then sat, stared, and thought some more, then picked up the brush again. There had been timid, soft strokes. Today it had been different. Today all those hours of sitting and thinking had come together. Tammy had painted it for herself. Tammy always painted for herself. She'd learned to do it years ago and had continued it. There had never been an intended audience. There had never been anyone to paint for. She'd picked up that first brush years ago because she had to, because if she didn't she would die. That's what artists did, right? Right?

Could she be broken so easily? Wasn't she at all like her paintings? Brush stroke after brush stroke after brush stroke, detail after detail, piled upon, one after the other, thick, strong, hardy. It would take ages to dissect her paintings. Ages to get to the plain, white canvas. It would take a lifetime. One could not simply destroy it in a day. Or could one? Could everything crumble in just moments?

Tammy flipped out the lights to her studio and closed the door tightly behind her. She would descend only one flight of stairs this evening.

Butterfly of my Lung

Yield to her enchanting witchery.
Author of my love, tamer of my fears.
Old souls raised her . . . child of light.
Forged from passion.
Polished in sensuality.
Filled with life.
Always . . . but never alone.
Sweet and gentle like snowflakes on my tongue.
Breathe only when she lets me . . .
Butterfly of my lung.

Ty Higgins

Love Breaker

I sit in the blinder waiting for that special someone.
I wait and I wait,
never really knowing when or why,
I just relax myself in the unknowing.
Heartache and pain is all I seem to suffer.
Love too early and that is what happens.
Give your heart and they try to take your soul.
Give them half and they try to take a whole.
Cry and wonder, never really understanding why.
Finding things out and wanting to die.
Men and women,
all over the place yearning
and wanting to see a familiar face.
Living for the day,
seizing the minute,
caring not whom they hurt,
as long as they get in it.
Crying and whining never solves a thing,
makes you dwell on the hell your love will bring.

Jessica LaShan Conway

Ode to Byron

Speak of beauty, speak of love
I ask for patience, I ask for trust
But find in you only lust
I find no virtue from above
Nothing is more tragic
Than unlocked lusts and passions
That work their way throughout the whole
And slowly rot away the soul
Working in their twisted fashions
They brew their dark, black magic
Till all that's left of beauty and love
Of respect and restraint
Is colored a bleak and melancholy paint
And never again spoken of

Rebecca Whitman

Three Things

At least three things
belong only to me,
for nobody can interfere
with my thoughts,
my feelings, and my dreams.

So nobody will ever know
I think only of you.
The minutes you are not in my thoughts
are just a very few.

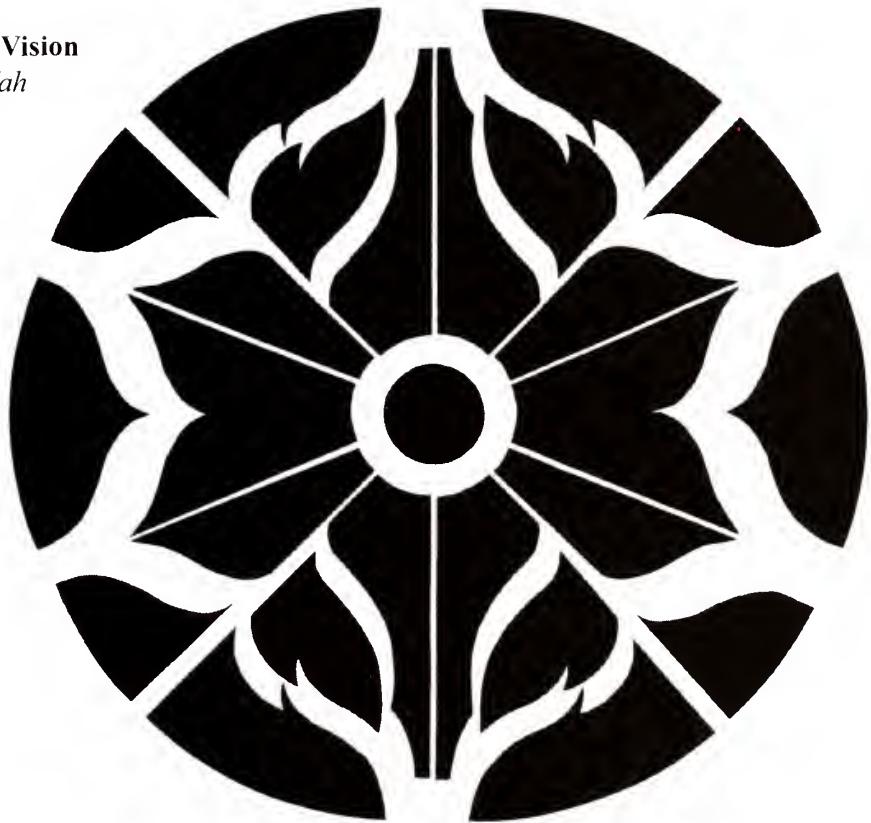
As for my feelings, I'll say,
Nobody will guess
my heart is shaking
and full of happiness.

In the most wonderful dreams
nobody could ever see,
where many times you have been,
with me and only for me.

Irene Capistran

Tunnel Vision

Mike Mah



Transformation

A memory burns in the depths of my mind.
An uncontrollable fire roars in my ears.
Should I embrace this memory or leave it behind?
The memory is of a life that is no more.
The struggle is not to think about what could have been,
But the mind is always changing.

As a sense of calm takes over,
Smoke fills the void turning day into night.
Its result is a deep coughing,
A choking,
A bringing forth of tears which cloud my sight,
But the mind is always changing.

Smoldering ashes and barely glowing embers,
The charred remains of a life left behind,
Thoughts about what will never be, a destiny not meant for me,
But the mind is always changing.
Like the phoenix, the mind can rise.

Angela Turner

Love's Lesson

Excitement transforms him
into a clumsy generous man.

He cleans the house
knocking over paintings and ornaments
once sacred to him.

Crystal dishes, only for show,
become eating plates.

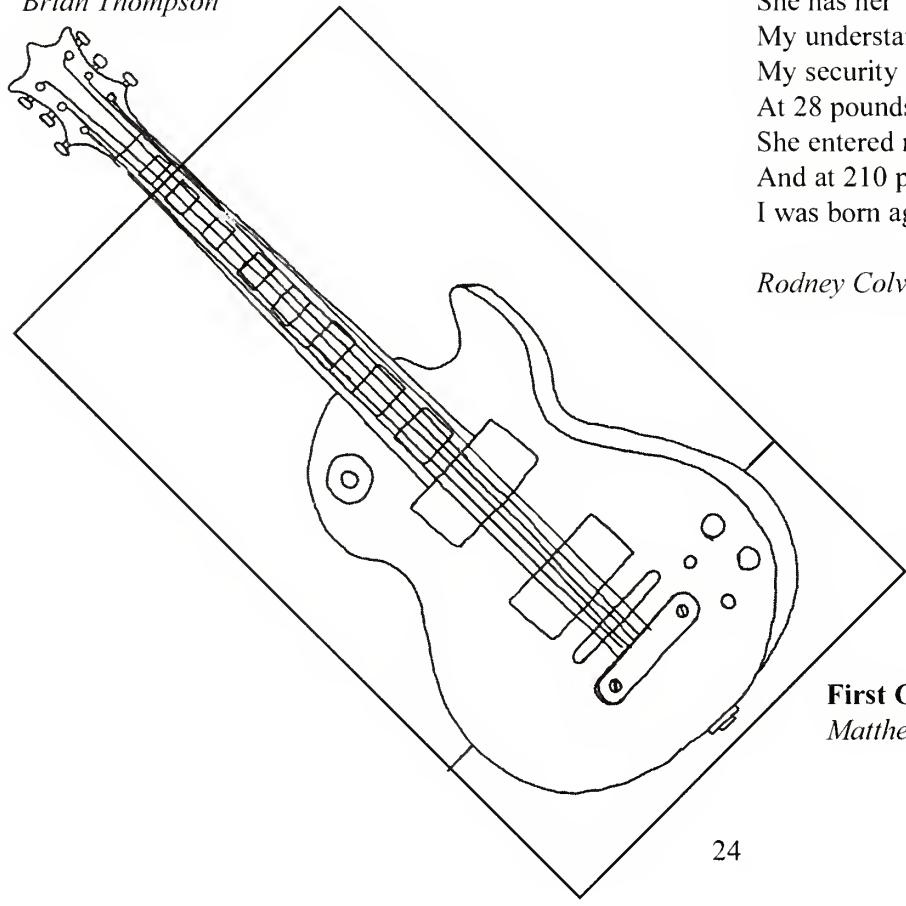
Pearl glasses, only for looks,
become instruments for toasts.

Conversations change,
from football and baseball,
to ice skating and dancing.

Music changes from rap to opera.

The big, bad tough guy-
now a sweet little angel.

Brian Thompson



Born Again

Daddy!
She lights up the room
And my heart
As she runs to the door
Looking in to her world
From my world filled with work and worry
It's cold out here
Can't wait to feel the warmth in there
Face pressed against the glass
She gives me a kiss
Have I mislead her?
Have I deceived her?
She has the shape of his eyes
His toes
His temper
Will she ever know?
She has her mother's love
Her mouth
Her eyelashes
Through the door to...
"Hold you! Hold you!"
I'm in her world
She has her "daddy's" love
My understanding
My security
At 28 pounds
She entered my life
And at 210 pounds
I was born again soon after

Rodney Colvin

First Guitar
Matthew Edwrds

Christmas Joy

Thomas Casey

Soon the sea - son will be ov - er, trees and an - gels
put a - way; but in our hearts let's keep a - live the
joy of Christ - mas Day! Let's keep the joy - ous
spir - it of Christ - mas a - live through - out the year. Let's
cher - ish our friends and our loved ones and share with all good
cheer. Just think of the won - der - ful feel - ings and the
laugh - ter of girls and boys; just re - mem - ber the car - ing, re -
mem - ber the shar - ing, and re - mem - ber that there - in lies Christ - - - mas
Joy. Just think of the bright eyes of child - ren and
all of the things that we love. Love and warm feel - ings sur -
round us just like a gift, a gift from a - bove. So
if we be - come sad and lone - ly and our spir - its seem al - most des -
stroyed, Let's re - mem - ber the car - ing, re - mem - ber the shar - ing, and re -
mem - ber that there - in lies - Christ - - - mas Joy!

¿Hablas Espanol? Thelma Ghigliotti Sarria

Gringos (and some Latinos alike) think that all Spanish-speaking individuals can easily understand one another. Sadly, this is not true. One would not know this just by consulting with Webster, which states that Spanish is the chief language of Spain and of many countries colonized by the Spanish. True, for the most part, Spanish-speaking individuals can communicate amongst one another regardless of their country of origin. However, a major breakdown may occur once a specific country's dialect or a specific region's dialect is used. To understand the concept, just imagine a Northerner, a Southerner, and a Westerner holding a conversation and the confusion that arises from the differences in words, idioms, phrases, and cliches! I, too, made the assumption that all Spanish is the same, only to learn that a Neuyorican, a Puerto Rican, and a Mexican all speak Spanish, but they will not be able to understand every word spoken by one another.

Having spent most of my life in New York City after migrating from Puerto Rico at the age of six, I had become accustomed to the Spanish most spoken throughout the hood, "Spanglish." To a Neuyorican, someone of Puerto Rican descent born and raised in New York City, "Spanglish" is what every kid on the block speaks and considers to be Spanish. Spanglish basically incorporates commonly used English words into the Spanish vocabulary with a "twist," of course! For example, roof became *rúfo*, carpet became *carpeta*, and a couch or a sofa became *cuacho*. In the Spanish dictionary, however, roof is *techo*, carpet is *alfombra*, and a couch or sofa is *sofa*. In English, we categorize the couch or sofa as furniture. In the Spanish category, furniture is *mueble*.

My Spanglish may have served me very well in the playgrounds and streets of New York City; however, after several trips back home to the Island, I learned from my horror-stricken Puerto Rican relatives that I was not speaking Spanish; the Spanish in Puerto Rico, though not spoken in its "pure" Castilian form, is still not as adulterated by the American influence. They told me it was not the *cuacho* I was getting comfortable on to watch television! For my information, I was getting comfortable on the *sofa* or *nueble*. "Que barbaridad! What a shame," my grandmother and aunt thought, "she has become a Neuyorican. Just a few years in New York and she loses her ability to speak Spanish." Spanglish, as I have learned, is not readily accepted back home on the Island because that acceptance would only signify that Puerto Rico has embraced the language of the gringo and has given up its identity as a Spanish-speaking country though until today it is a Commonwealth of the United States. Maintaining a language that is not influenced by outside forces is still important; a Puerto Rican keeps his identity and culture. This experience taught me that there is more to Spanish than I could have imagined.

Years have passed since those "information-filled" summers in Puerto Rico. Now I find myself in Wayne County, North Carolina. New York and Puerto Rico taught me a few things about the Spanish language; however, North Carolina has been the best teacher of all. Never would I have guessed that I would be required to learn Spanish—again! There I was, for the second time around, assuming that since I speak Spanish, I would be understood and would also understand those around me. This time I encountered the Mexican Spanish, which in the beginning was a foreign language to me. I had to learn that *mueble*, which to me meant furniture, now meant car to those of the Northern states of Mexico and that *camesal* is the Northern Mexican word used for sofa. In addition, I learned that *coche*, *carro*, and *auto*, to mention just a few, are also used for car, depending on where you are in Mexico. I was discovering that a majority of the words used by the associates at work are heavily influenced by the region's population because rural regions that did not have a lot of contact with the Spaniards incorporate their Indian dialects into the Spanish they learned. This, then, just creates another dialect used in that country since an entire populace is using it.

This life-long lesson has taught me that Spanish is not all one and the same throughout the world. So now when I sit on a *mueble* in the living room or hear about the individual who wrecked his *mueble* on the way to work, I am constantly reminded that a common language may link cultures to one another. However, other circumstances within that country such as the language of its original inhabitants and foreign influences due to migration will affect the language spoken. These differences, recognized by one who speaks the language, are indicators that a country continues to keep its culture alive, regardless of its colonizing influences.



Picante

Crystal Hill

Where have all the “U”s gone?

It seemed like only yesteryear
I saw you standing there.
Between the “o” and the “r” you were,
But now that place is bare.

So many of your former words
Have squeezed you out, I’ve found.
Your presence wasn’t needed
To finalize their sound.

Oh, you’re still around in many cases,
Creating “oo” and “ow” and sometimes “uh”s.
But I miss you in those certain places
Where now you’re just superfluous.

And so I’m left just wondering
Where all the “u”s have gone,
And why only England left you in
While America deemed you wrong.

Jacqueline Longwell

This Window

I sit alone in a room with one window
facing an empty, barren field
The broken glass and chipped paint in the sill
show its age while the shadows evoke memories
Are they memories or just strange ideas
running through my head?
I feel as though I've been here before
looking through this same window
with its broken glass and chipped paint
Was I here as a child?
No, I don't think so
my childhood memories are filled with color
while these new, strange memories are mostly
in black and white

It's as if time for this room has stopped
while everything else has continued to grow
and move with the changing times
I have been here before in this very room
the dust on the floor is but a reminder
of days past when I would cross the floor
to sit in this same chair
each time leaving tracks leading
to and from this chair

Through this window I see myself playing
but with children I don't remember
I blink my eyes and the vision disappears
like a dream when I wake
The wind blows the grass and riding along the breeze
are the sounds of children laughing
the sounds grow stronger but change, as if with age
I see myself again, yet older
The face is wrinkled, the body leans, but I know it's me
again with people I don't remember
as if I'm peering into a future
that still has yet to be written

In one vision I'm dressed like a Confederate soldier
my hair is lighter, my eyes darker, my face slightly longer
but I know it's me
I blink my eyes and see myself in the same field
with a beautiful woman in my arms
I know her name without thinking
but I can't place her face
she was my wife

I hold her close to me
as her life slips through my fingers
she was shot by a Union officer
I cling to her with all my strength
as if forcing her to hold on
but it's no use

Looking through this window is like looking
in on a life
I do not know, a life I do not remember
Is this my life being played before me
from a time long since passed,
or just strange ideas running through my
head?

I look down at the floor and look up again
to see myself crossing this field
fighting men in red coats
a shot rings out and I fall
a woman comes to me and tries
desperately to heal my wound
she holds me close and cries
as my candle goes out
her hair and dress are different
but she's the same woman I've seen before
through this window

I close my eyes in disbelief trying to make
sense
of this world I'm seeing but don't remember
How can this be?
Am I dreaming as I sit here in this room?

I open my eyes to find myself standing
in this lonely, barren field
a sheet of paper is rolled up in my right hand
these are orders to leave for Europe
to join my Allied Forces
how I know this, I can't explain
My uniform is neat, in order
my boots shine
I see my love come towards me
she hugs me one last time
I wipe a tear from her cheek and say good-
bye
it's the last time I'll ever see the blue in her
eyes

This woman I see each time
I know her but don't know her
as though her name, along with her appearance,
changes with each picture
played before me

If these are but my life's events
being played here for me
when shall I find myself in this field
and see my love once again?
But will I know her?

A breeze blows bringing with it
a cloud of dust
as the dust settles outside this broken window
I see a shadow forming
the shadow turns into a man
that man is me
A gun in my hand, a hat shades my tanned face
those heavy clothes make me itch and sweat
the wind moves the dust cloud on

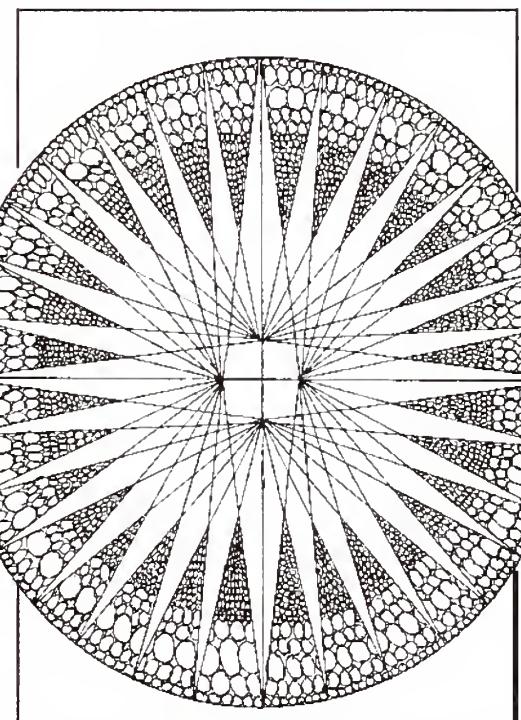
I find my love at my feet
her face wears a look of pain
her life flows around me
My glance falls on another man lying in this once
green, now dust-ritten field
I notice my gun smoking from the barrel
his gun is smoking, too
He was on the bad end of my gun
she was on the bad end of his

why does this window tease me
with love, only to lose it in the end
Surely my life was more than
wars fought and a love lost
Am I doomed to walk the ocean's edge
never to feel the cool water over my shoulders
the same as I can never truly
know a lasting love?

I curse this broken window
this barren field and this
dusty room in which I sit
were I fortunate enough to hold a match
I would burn this room
scar this barren field
and put an end to this broken window's
masquerade of visions
but I am not so lucky
this room will remain in the middle of this
lonely field
the broken window will continue
to roll the footage of my days before
and my days to come

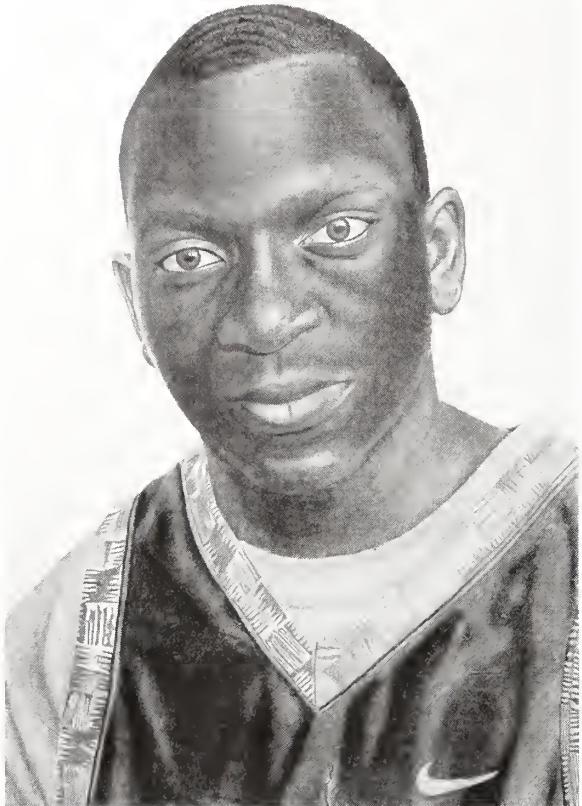
I get the feeling I'll be here again
having followed these tracks
in the dust to this chair
looking through this window
asking myself these same questions
about these strange ideas
and fond memories

Johnny Young



Compass Star

Rebecca Whitman



Andrew Cuthbertson, Jr.



Crystal Hill

Self-Portraits



Connie Lamb



Courtney Smith



Chanda Best



LaHoma McCardell

Self-Portraits



Rebecca Whitman



Mike Mah

A Boy and Nothing More

A boy and nothing more
Quit school
In the streets he explored
Gangs, guns, and drugs
High
Because he was a boy and nothing more

A boy and nothing more
Looking for the fix
In the night he explored
Prostitution, “B and E,” and insanity
Lost
Because he was a boy and nothing more

A boy and nothing more
In and out of prison
The system he explored
Warrants, public defendants, and false status
A number in society
Because he was a boy and nothing more

A boy and nothing more
A drive-by
The death of his brother he explored
Father figure, provider, the “good son”
Pray to God!
Because he was a boy and nothing more

A boy and nothing more
His mother
His family he explored
His son, his son’s mother, their love
Praise God!
Because he was to become a man and something more

Rodney Colvin

Searching

Traveling around the world
Searching for a meaning in life
From the guiltiness I was feeling
within
The life I was living was not right

Upon reaching one of my many stops
Unsure of my purpose or reason
A gentle voice whispered to me, be
patient
It is not your time or your season

The words were strength in my life
And I began to look around and see
That the difference wasn’t in where I
was
The difference had to start within me.

Kenneth Robinson

Irony of Name

She must have tempted Fate.
She had four sons.
When Number Three was born,
some well-intentioned soul
encouraged her to name him
John
in honor of a bachelor uncle
(who drank, to put it mildly).

“Never!” she insisted.
“I will not have a drunken John
to stumble through my house.”

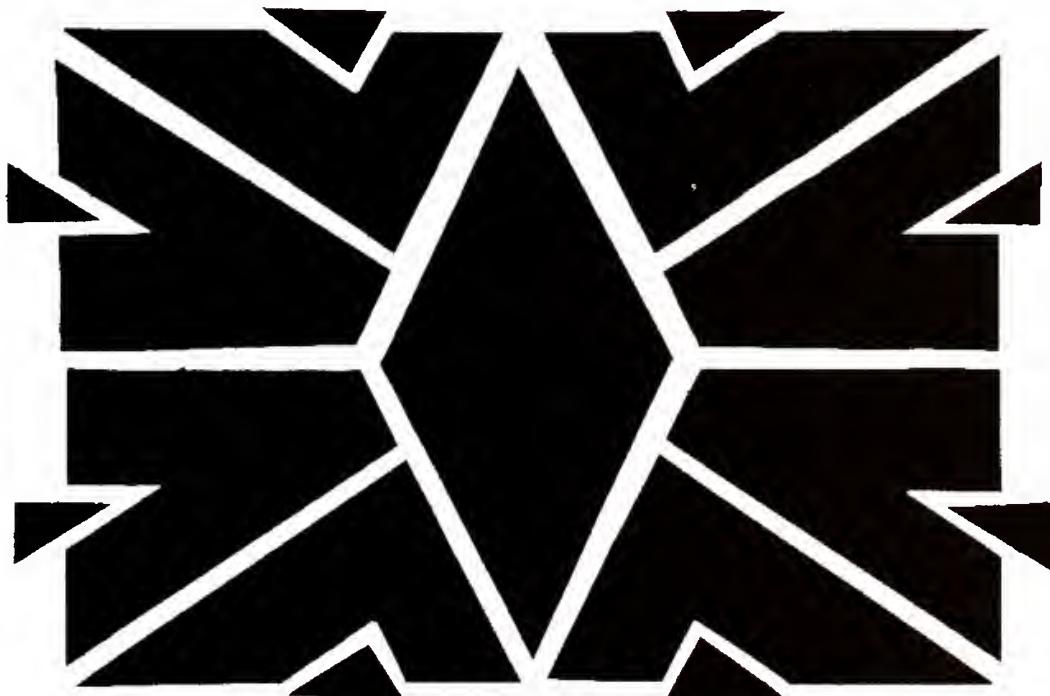
She must have tempted Fate,
for what became of that same son
she would not name for John?
Well, he became, of all her sons,
the only son who drank.

Rosalyn Lomax

Be A Man

The log struck the snake's tail making him move swiftly
I saw him stop and turn around as if to look at me
Fear filled my bones; my body froze up like ice
The snake hissed and slithered toward me
I knew he was poisonous by his head's shape
I could not make my legs move to run
Struggled within myself, fright wouldn't let me move
He crawled around my feet and reared his black head
With an angry strike he bit my leg
My body collapsed to the ground, pain filled my limbs
I could almost feel the poison circulating in my veins
Through my watery eyes I could not see the serpent around me
Suddenly I felt fangs penetrate my neck, he attacked again
Before I closed my eyes, I watched the snake coil himself on my breast
As if to look at me with evil, he sat on my crumbled torso
I could feel my soul leaving this poisoned temple
My last heartbeat, my final breath, the reaper was calling
I again heard the voices, "If you were not afraid, you would kill him"
Well, my attempt to kill has ended in my own death
A blink of an eye and my life will end
All because I refused to be a coward

Vernon Capps



Heritage

Andrew Cuthbertson, Jr.

One from the Knife

Jeff Williams

Students began filing into room 237 of the Gov. Jimmy S. Hartsfield Building on the campus of Theron University. It was the first day of class in the fall term, specifically the creative writing class taught by esteemed poet Mariah Renata-Sinclair, winner of more than a warehouse full of literary prizes and accolades. As such, students eager to learn as much as they could about their craft tended to flock to her to try to get as close as possible to the magic they assumed flowed like a fountain from the end of her pen.

Rhiannan Jones and Joey Marshburne were not two of these students, and they immediately stood out from the others in the room. Spreading her materials out on her side of the two-person desk, Rhiannan wordlessly motioned for Joey to move from his table to the empty seat next to her.

“I’m Joey,” he said as he sat down, his stained shirt and torn and faded oversized jeans once again miraculously surviving the strain of movement.

“I’m Rhiannan,” she said, strains of her red and green tinted blond hair blowing in the breeze from the air conditioner, the rest done up loosely in a pentangle hair pin. Her brown eyes, were hidden behind a pair of red glasses lenses.

As he placed his notebook and pen on the desk, Joey slowly observed Rhiannan as she set up her environment. To her left, she placed a cherry-wood box of watercolor paints and a series of brushes. Placed in front of her was a thick pad of ivory colored drawing paper with several sheets already detached from the rest. Finally, to her right was an old-fashioned black ink fountain pen and inkwell. In comparison, Joey felt his Mead notebook and erasable pens just didn’t seem adequate.

Even before the beginning of class, Renata-Sinclair was already being surrounded by students, some of them in their late teens and some in their early sixties, all trying to get the first word in with the eminent writer.

“Hey,” Joey said discreetly, keeping his eyes toward the congregation in the front, “so, like, why aren’t you up there?” You look like the artsy type who’d really go for someone like her.” From his left ear, he could hear the sound of Rhiannan laughing lightly.

“Do you usually stereotype right off the top, or do you give a person time to shatter your illusions?” she asked, still laughing, though Joey was certain he detected no notes of anger in the sounds. Joey smiled and turned to look at her.

“Kinda hard to stereotype when I’ve got a ton of evidence sitting beside me.”

“You’re talking about the paints, right,” she winked, “and not my weight?” It was all he could do to keep from breaking into an awkward, wheezing laugh, something he tried to hide from the general public.

“Yeah,” he stammered, his chest shaking as he barely held in the laughter. “So why aren’t you up there fawning all over her?” The poet, dressed resplendently in a dark velvety dress, talked to the front row. Her massive mop of black hair was held back by large reading glasses propped on the top of her head. She smiled, revealing rows of perfectly straight, perfectly white teeth. Someone managed to make the poet laugh. A cacophony designed to be heard on virtually every sound frequency in every building on campus, the laughter was guaranteed to be noticed as it grated against the more delicate nerves in the back of the head.

“Well, remember, I’m the artsy type,” she said as she poured a capful of bottled water into a small bowl. “I’m not really the poesy kind.” Taking a thin brush, she slowly dipped the bristles in the water and then touched it in a square of red water color. “So, Joey, why aren’t you up there drooling like the rest of the boys?” He looked forward, and it was true that the poet was not a bad looking person in the least bit. Renata-Sinclair’s face was striking in the same way as Greta Garbo’s face, which he’d once seen his grandfather mooning over in the garage workshop at home.

"Dunno," he said, shrugging his shoulders. "Just needed something to fill out my schedule, and I thought, 'Hey poetry, I can do that,' and I got lucky." Rhiannan smiled without taking her eyes from the drawing paper. "But, hey, I asked you first. If you're not into poetry, why are you in here?"

"Oh, I like poetry," she said, touching the red paint to the center of the page. "What I don't like is boredom, and that's about all my painting's inspired in me the last couple of months. I want to try something different. But, man, listen to this." She continued to move the paint in the center, creating what looked like a big, watery ketchup stain. "Couple of years ago a guy named Lech Merric came to speak to my senior art class. Now, this dude's a real hot shot in the art world, which is cool, and it was really neat having him there, but I didn't fawn all over him either. I'm not the hero-worshiping type." Rhiannan stopped the movement of her brush and leaned back in her chair. "You know, that jerk was ticked off at me because I wasn't obviously kneeling at his feet. He said my stuff was technically good but pedestrian. That's his word exactly. Meanwhile, Becky Caswell can't paint her way out of a corner, but she's practically hanging on his neck, so he calls her the best he's seen in years."

"Man," Joey said with disgust, "that's one from the knife." Rhiannan suddenly turned to look at Joey, her eyes, even behind the colored lenses, obviously wide with surprise.

"What did you say?" she stammered excitedly

"Um, I said that's one from the knife," Joey whispered, suddenly self-conscious. "Why? You don't like knives?"

"No no no," Rhiannan smiled, "I've just never heard that before! What's it mean?" Joey shrugged his shoulders, his mouth in a smile of relief.

"My crowd just always said it," he said, "I never really thought about it to tell you the truth." He leaned back in his chair and scratched his slightly stubbled chin. "I guess, you know, when you hear about something that's just wrong, just not right, well, we always said, 'That's one from the knife.'"

"Kind of like it hurts or cuts deep?" she asked. Joey nodded his head. "Wow! I like that!" She took her brush and began filling out the reddish section in the middle of the page.

"If I could have everyone's attention please," Renata-Sinclair said, her attention particularly focused on the two not surrounding her. "It's 10:30, now, so let's get started, shall we?" She smiled a full smile which was again aimed primarily at the front rows. "First off, there's one tiny thing I'd like all of you to do. There are enough tables here so that everyone can sit alone. I believe the poet should have room to work, so, if all of you would move off to your own tables, I'd very much appreciate it."

The sound of chairs sliding on linoleum began filling the room. A little saddened by the turn of events, Joey turned to look at Rhiannan. "I guess I'll talk to you later."

"Yeah, yeah," she said rapidly, smiling but somewhat distracted. Slowly and reluctantly, Joey pulled himself up and walked to an empty table, many times nearly tripping on his own pant legs. Once everyone had settled down, Mariah Renata-Sinclair reached onto her desk for a book. Then, regally, she walked to the front of the desk.

"I'd like to read something to you," she said, lowering her glasses onto her nose, flipping to a page identified with an ornate egret-shaped bookmark. "It's from my most recent book, False Gambits, and it's called 'Where the Scagulls Go to Die.'" With that, her eyes focused on the page. She inhaled deeply the air scented with various perfumes and colognes and the aroma of dry erase markers. Finally, after an appropriate pause, she began reading from the book. "Just over the horizon on the rolling ocean/I can see the place where the seagulls go to die. . ."

An hour and twenty minutes later, after the class had formally introduced themselves to each other, and after the poet had discussed her philosophies about writing and, especially, about what she felt should be the form of poetry in the new millennium, ENG 340 was dismissed. Almost immediately, the

occupants of the front tables began swarming around the teacher again, leaving Joey and Rhiannan as the only two people in the back of the room.

Periodically during the discussion, he'd looked over and seen Rhiannan hard at work on her drawing. Mariah had seen it too and had made occasional cryptic remarks seemingly aimed at the painter. Still, Rhiannan had persevered, stopping only long enough to introduce herself, by her first name only, of course. This had caused a brief side discussion on the poetry of Stevie Nicks, a discussion Rhiannan had completely failed to participate in as she continued drawing. Now freed from class by the teacher, Joey moved as quickly as his pants would allow.

"S'up?" he asked. Rhiannan dipped her brush into the water, rinsing it off, and then she closed the top of the paint box.

"Take a look," she said with something of a smile. Leaning over her shoulder, Joey looked at the painting Rhiannan had worked so hard to finish.

The painting was a little rough, but the images were striking nonetheless, at least to Joey. The indefinite red smudge at the center of the page had, during the class period, transformed itself into a red bird shaped like a sparrow. It sat on a rudimentary branch, its right wing draped down towards the wood. Its head was cocked towards the left, black eyes wide open and flecked with hints of reflected light. The body was remarkably detailed with feathers and features on the beak and face very clearly identified. To the left of the bird, however, was an object Joey didn't expect to see. It was a silvery-gray dagger, its point dug into the branch, its ornate handle seemingly waiting for the touch of a hand. The bird's left wing threaded its way behind and around the knife so that it appeared to be hugging the blade.

"Wow," Joey said, though he wished he could've thought of something more profound to say.

"Yeah," Rhiannan quietly said, "that's kind of what I thought, too." She looked up. "What I want to do is this." She pointed with her right hand at the empty spaces on the painting. "I want to write poetry in the white spaces." Rhiannan smiled a big smile in response to Joey's somewhat embarrassed look. "Well, I told you my paintings weren't inspiring me anymore, at least not by themselves, and I think you gave me my first good idea in a long time." She looked down again as Joey found himself dreamily floating in the air behind her.

Rhiannan stood up, her supplies and her canvas purse in hand. "Listen, I'm going to lunch now. You want to come help me with the words?" Joey's face lit up like a strobe light on a TV tower.

"Sure," he stammered eloquently, and the two of them threaded their way through the desks and out the door, leaving the classroom to the poet and her obedient flock.

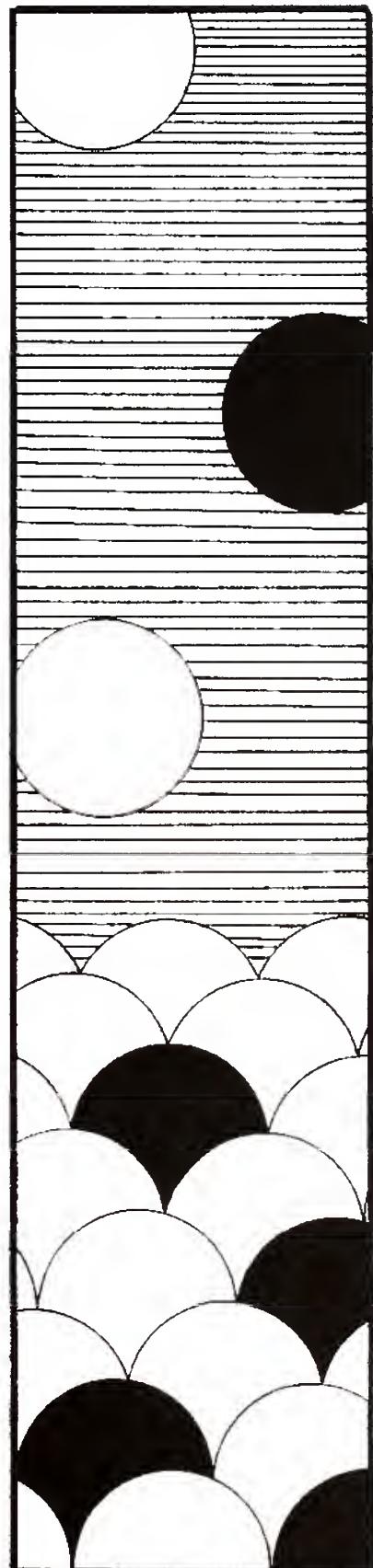
Believing in Dreams

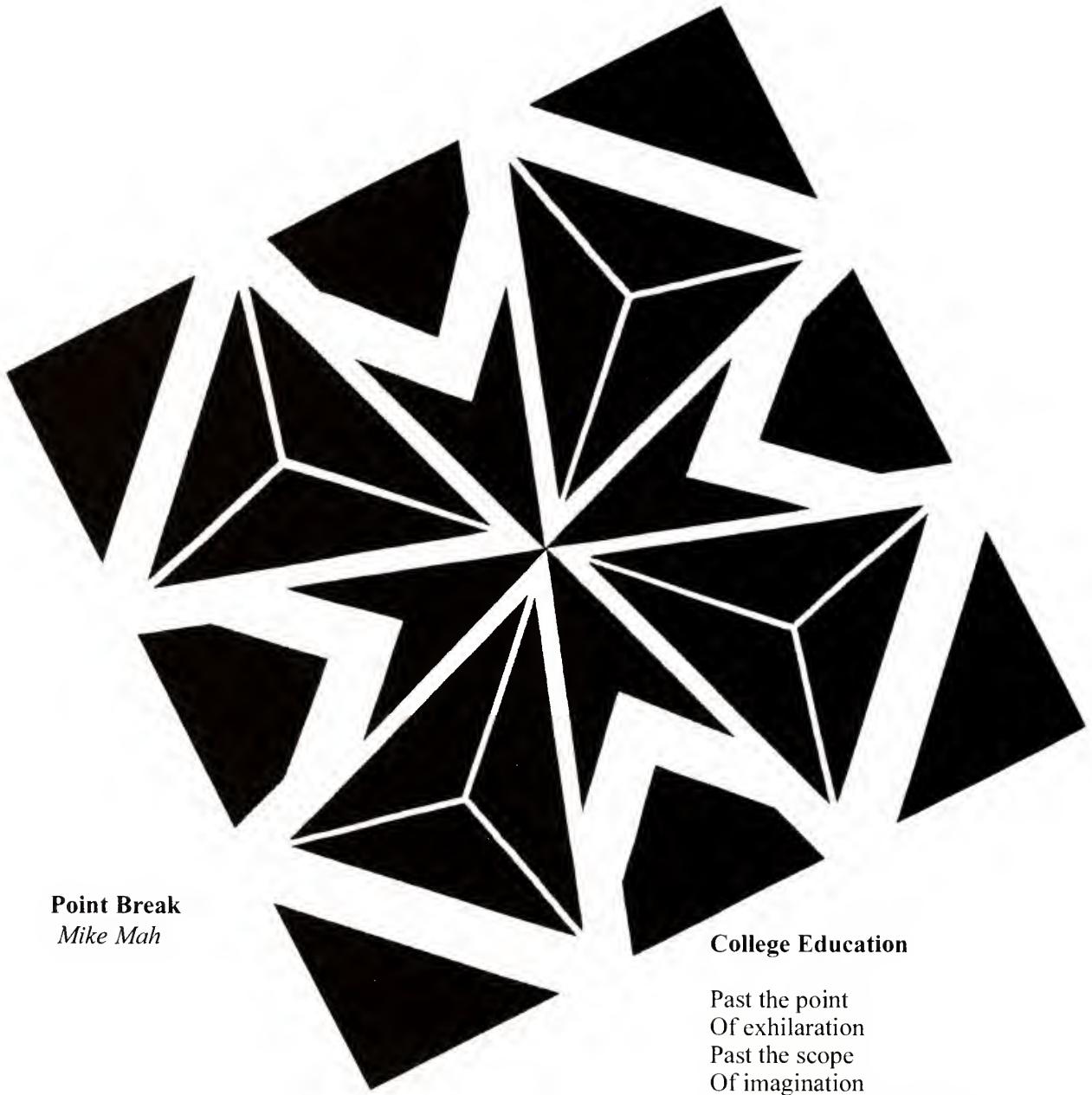
Where are you, my heart?
Still entwined within my soul
Bringing feelings to my body and contentment to my
mind—or only caged firmly inside my chest?
Are my emotions so drained that you've had to retreat?
So sorry I am for depleting
your reserves.
Fill quickly and return!
Was my happiness and peace only an illusion? Was it real?
I clung to the desire for such foolishness so desperately.
Foolishness it is!
However, I still have the spark of hope. Soulmate—myth?
No care to the amount of hoping, wanting, or praying,
There is no one who is “the one.”

We struggle and search. In the end we settle.
Settle for almost.
Settle for beauty.
Settle for security.
Settle for the need of companionship.
Settle for all except our hearts' dreams.

I cannot tell you, but my heart knows what love feels like.
Somewhere, sometime, I have had love.
The feeling is strong and vague at the same time.
Like a soulful, pining wail—heard throughout time.
It calls to me, yet I cannot answer,
For I have not yet seen the heart that pines for me.
I tire of looking,
I tire of settling,
I tire of giving, for none have given back,
Sworn their devotion, love, and faithfulness,
Never to show evidence of these through actions.
None have given!
All waiting to receive.
Hands stretched greedily out.
No one who stretches out his hand
To reveal the heart I search for
Will be the one I take.
Fantasy it is!
I search endlessly, never to see my love.
Does he await in some faraway place, in another time,
Or perhaps more honestly, only in my heart,
Never to be seen by my eyes,
Only felt by my soul!

Where Are You?
Crystal Hill





Point Break

Mike Mah

College Education

Past the point
Of exhilaration
Past the scope
Of imagination
Compelled by something
For education
But known not to me
It used to be a simple thrill
But as time waned
And I continued in my travel
I stretched and pained
To grasp at gravel
What propels me to know
Must be a longing to grow
That is planted deep inside
And now emerges here to guide
Maybe someday I'll appreciate
Temporary torture as beneficial fate

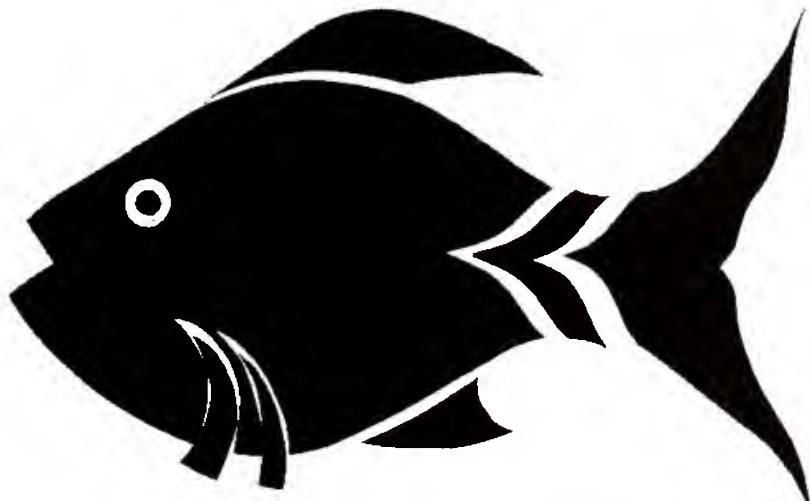
Rebecca Whitman

Tulls Bay Marina

Laura Moon

My belief is that the perfect breakfast consists of omelets and atmosphere with a side of hashbrowns and toast, of course. For several years I worked in a little restaurant situated in a tiny water-front community far off the beaten path. Being the only eating place for several miles around, it was a gathering spot for many. On any given Saturday or Sunday morning, most of the residents of the small town of Moyock could be found there. The diner's proper name was Tulls Bay Marina. The locals called it, simply, The Marina. Among the "old timers," it was the place to see, be seen, and have a really good breakfast dished up by Ms. Lena, who had cooked there for twenty years.

Outside, the early morning fog would roll gently in off the boat basin and then hang limply near the ground like so much tattered lace dangling from a dress hem. Inside, cigarette smoke clung in thin layers to the ceiling after swirling softly up past the age-faded, crookedly hung paintings which adorned the tobacco-yellowed walls. The steam from freshly brewed coffee hovered over the tables while conversations of hunting, fishing, and farming could be heard all around. Sometimes the voices were quiet, and other times they were so loud they would nearly drown out the sound of coffee cups clanking upon saucers. The scent of frying bacon and hot buttered toast drifted from the kitchen so thickly I could almost taste it. The aroma of a slowly roasting prime rib being prepared for the dinner customers nearly permeated the woodwork. I could almost always be found in the kitchen doorway enjoying the atmosphere of the place while waiting for the next order.



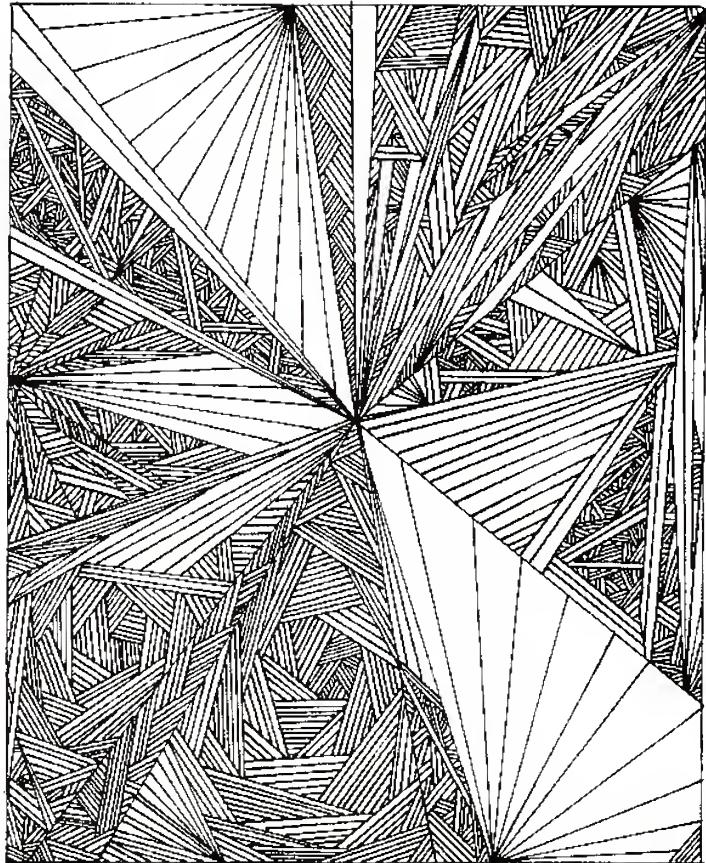
Mr. Fishy

Kristina Willisms

Single Mass Confusion Reined in by Hope

I could have had you.
You were there within reach.
But I couldn't.
I turned away,
Scared of life and myself
And things I don't even know.
If only I could ignore these voices
Arguing in my head,
Striving to be heard.
I'm so tired of trying
To sort everything out.
I just want to live without
All these worries like a burden
Bearing down on me
Like a vise, clamping out
The free joy I know I have
Hidden deep inside. . .
Somewhere.
How I just want to go home
And rest forever.
But it is not for me to give up,
And it is not my time,
Not my time to go yet.
Someday I will look back,
And this will all be a distant
Memory, nothing in the
Context of what I think it is.
It'll be just a stroke adding
Perfection to a previously
Doomed canvas:
Saved by grace.

Rebekah McInnis



Mass Confusion

LaHoma McCardell

Liar

i say i Love you
but it's empty
because i'm empty
and you feed my emptiness,
yet you manipulate me to believe i own the ecstasy of full—
simply because i can hold
no more empty within this skin.

Carrie Holkan

Dorrie and the Shotgun

Dot Elledge

Dorrie grew up in the high foothills of Western North Carolina. There, in the mid-twentieth century, guns were very ordinary items in most households. Rifles and shotguns were more common than handguns, but for many families, gun ownership was just another fact of life. Target shooting was a frequent pastime for men, boys, and many women. Fathers taught their sons, and often their daughters, how to shoot and safely handle guns.

Dorrie's father was no exception. He started teaching her to shoot when she was quite young. In fact, the first time he showed her how to aim and fire a rifle, she was so small he had to help her hold the gun. It happened one Saturday afternoon when Dorrie's father and grandfather were getting in a little target practice, and Dorrie begged to join them. By the time she was thirteen or so, she was a good shot with a rifle and had learned to handle a pistol. But she finished her sophomore year in college without ever having fired a shotgun.

That summer her younger brother, Charlie, decided it was time she learned to shoot a shotgun. One bright summer day, he talked her into trying it. "We'll use Dad's twenty gauge," he told her. "It doesn't kick as bad as mine does."

So even though Dorrie still wasn't sure this was something she really wanted to do, she agreed to try. After all, if four-years younger Charlie could manage it, there was no reason she couldn't, too. They took the shotgun and some newspaper sheets to use as targets and walked up into the wooded hills behind the family home.

They found a good spot for a backstop beside a logging road. Charlie put up a paper target, loaded the gun, and handed it to his sister. But he forgot to tell her one important fact, and she didn't notice another.

Most of Dorrie's shooting experience had been with a twenty-two rifle, a gun that even when held loosely against the shoulder has very little recoil and doesn't produce bruises. Charlie didn't think to tell Dorrie that shotguns should be held very tightly and firmly against the shoulder. Otherwise, the recoil-kick can seriously bruise the shooter's shoulder or even cause him to fall backward.

Holding the shotgun the same way as she did a rifle, Dorrie sighted on the target and squeezed the trigger. The gun kicked against her shoulder hard enough to rock her back on her heels, but she was shocked and frightened by a sharp blow to the middle of her forehead. "What happened? What did I do?" she cried in a panic, wondering if she had somehow managed to shoot herself.

Charlie almost managed not to laugh at what had happened. Dorrie had paid no attention to the position of the breakdown lever, located just behind the breach. And neither she nor Charlie had noticed that the way she held the gun meant her thumb was just behind the lever. The recoil had pushed the lever against her thumb, breaking down the gun and ejecting the spent shell. The shell had struck her forehead.

Fortunately the blow to her forehead did not leave a visible bruise, but it took a week for the purple print of the gun butt on Dorrie's shoulder to fade. It was several years before she fired another shotgun, but she never felt as if that first lesson was a failure. In spite of everything, she had managed to put more than half the load of shot into the target.

Closing Time

Ashley Barnes

Have you ever noticed the different shades of first blue, then purple and last a mauvey-pink in the late August sky?

Or how warm the water feels at the end of the summer, the closing of the day? How tempting it is. . . just to declote and submerge!

It's so quiet here, so peaceful, so calm. The water is like glass—THEN A FISH JUMPS!!!

A small ripple, a wave, breaking the stillness.

I can see some boats, now abandoned and sleeping for the evening—for the winter, bobbing to the left and right with the exercising waves.

The fish, moving closer to shore, seem ill with confusion. “Where is everybody?”

Silhouette of a fisherman in his small skiff divides the grey-to-black tones of the water and the vibrance of the painted sky.

The sun, shining in all its golden brilliance, leaves the surf shimmering and glistening in the darkening whisper of dusk. Reluctantly, it inches its way behind the mystical purple trees and Spanish moss across the canal. Off to shine in someone else’s sky, in another world somewhere.

I smell a cookout, and a man’s laughter traveling on the wind interrupts the silence. This is followed by the squawking of a queer bird, circling overhead quite obviously startled, though I’m unsure of the cause. Perhaps this bird, like the reluctant sun, doesn’t want to go to bed.

This is the time when ridiculous shrimp and minnows frolic and spin through the dusking sea. A mischievous dragonfly examines the scene. It’s a still evening.

I can smell the mud, leaving the ground soft after the recent storm. Quarreling herons spit and squabble in the tall marsh, leaving it disturbed and trampled in disarray from the summer’s traffic and excitement.

I wonder what it would be like to join that curious striped fish in its efforts of patrolling the tips of my toes that dangle just beneath the surface of the water, disproving the illusion that it is a single pane of glass.

Imagine what it would be like to be more than just a visitor, an onlooker to this majestic environment—to be a member in the uninvaded home of more creatures than my shorthand is capable of documenting and more mysteries than my imagination can consume.

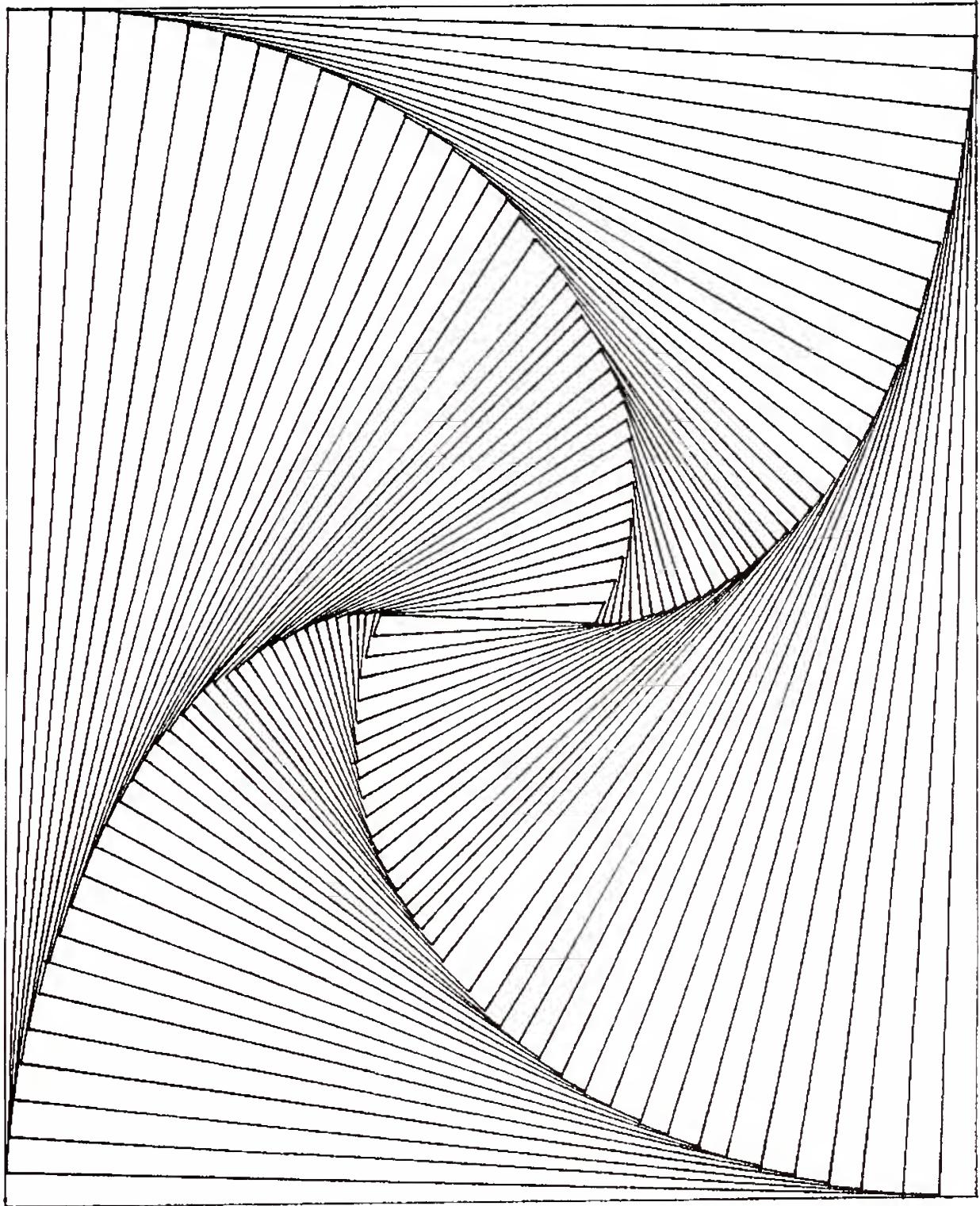
The water has darkened now and the sky as well. More daring shades of wine colored clouds have graced the sky, and brilliant oranges have splintered through the gray haze that is darkness—fighting the sunset.

Lights, waving at me across the water, are visible now, and the horn of a sailboat sounds. They do not belong here. They, too, are unwelcome invaders.

The moon is shining bright, with the sun gone, just before the darkness caps my pen and closes my eyes. It is just a faint arc above the drifting clouds, almost smothered by the smoke of a distant campfire across the bay, glowing and dancing in a forest of trees that no more invite its presence than the fueling logs.

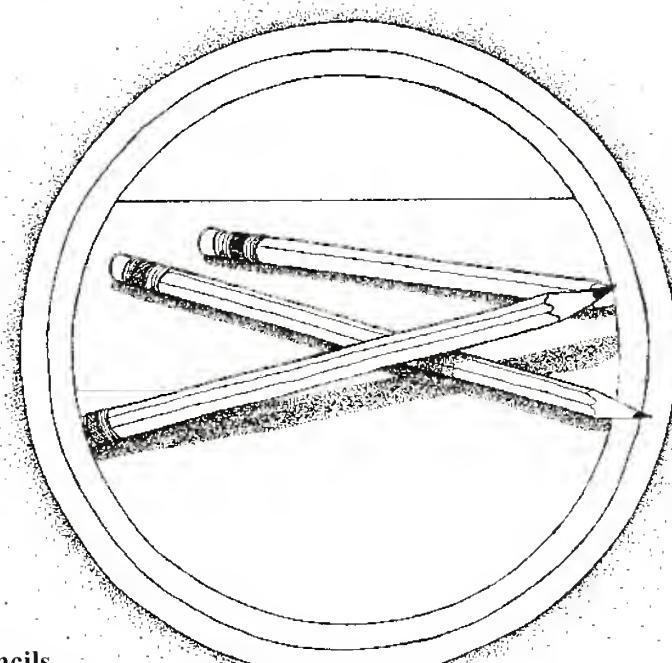
The pink has almost disappeared now from the sky, and the blare and drone of a radio in the distance replace the sounds of the gulls and the herons. The shrimping boats sail in; I can see their flashing green lights heading my way.

They come to disturb that ironic peace the world does still possess. As the water cools on my toes, the mighty, patriotic sun surrenders its fight for the day and slips silently behind the last of the trees, submerging in darkness the beauty I was granted a chance to see. I suppose now I too will retire for the evening—at the end of the summer, closing of the day. . .



Swirl

Chanda Best



Jessica Lane

She had a way about her,
Miss Jessica Lane,
All in the town thought so.
With curls a-bobbing
and never stopping,
she flitted to and fro.

Each greeting delivered
by Jessica Lane
caused many a man distress.
Her infectious giggle
and luscious wiggle
were paraded in a little red dress.

One warm summer day
Miss Jessica Lane,
with all of her delicate grace,
took to the air
from the top of the stair,
And fell on her tear-stricken face.

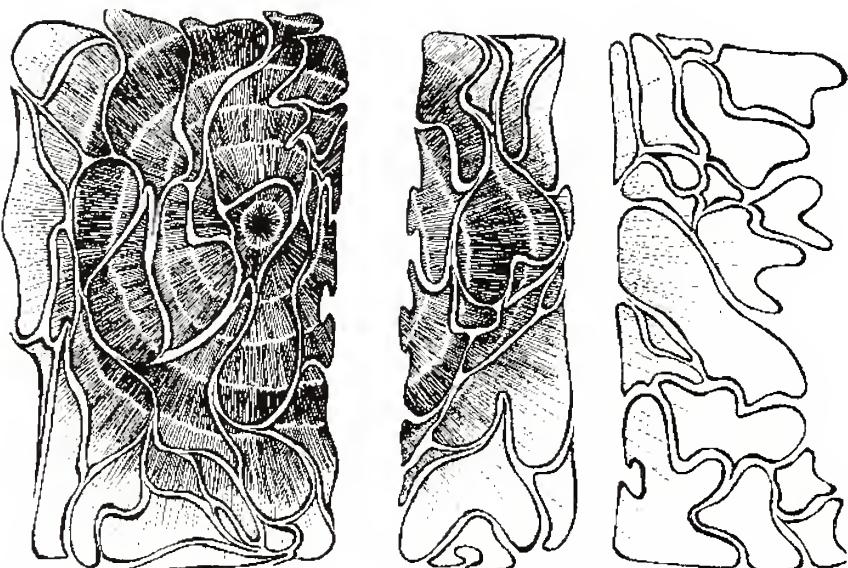
Sam Davis

Pencils
Sam Davis

Seasoned Dreamer

Delicious kisses unclaimed,
Precious wishes unnamed,
With dresses worn
and tresses shorn,
She cries to sleep again.

Sam Davis



Liquid Light

Sam Davis



Self-Portrait

Sam Davis

Nature Man

The Man and the Earth fighting
Both the predator
Both the hunted
The Man old and weather-beaten
But Mother Nature does not relent
She lashes out!
Striking her target
Time and time again
He cries out one last time
Then rises
He and the Earth as one.

Mary Drake

Eve of Construction (Response to Wordsworth)

Michael Yates

On this, the first year of the new millennium, I am upset with the world. On New Year's Eve as the doors to bunkers locked around the globe, I did not see the end coming, the riots, the total annihilation of civilization, or the need to store up seven hundred gallons of water. What I did see, in my mind's eye, was the hope that my computer at work would go down, maybe the cable and power going out and with all my heart that we would return to a simple way of life. I'd rather be a pagan.

The world is truly too much with us. We live in a plastic society that can no longer see the beauty of a sunset through the smog (North Carolina was ranked as the third worst air-polluted state in a recent study by the Environmental Protection Agency). Ask anyone what the "glomming" is and I will put real money that they say, "a hockey team from Maine," or "something you do in the dark after a nuclear accident." Does anyone know that it is to look into the sunset and see the face of God? We have given our hearts away, and in doing so we have lost them.

By becoming a people who can look at a field of flowers and see only the great parking it would make for a new restaurant or strip-mall, we have lost our tune with nature and everything. "It moves us not--Great God!" But--a new explorer will. And while we drive, the world shuts down into a dormant bulb.

Man is now judged not by the strength of his creativity or his passion for life, but by what he gets and spends. We have left our nature behind and created something to make it cleaner, easier, and not so natural. We are more confident behind our glass cages and are terrified to simply be in the woods (Blair Witch Project). How ridiculous.

Well, as can be seen, the computers didn't stop, and the chaos didn't release us to wander by the ocean or cook over a fire. So, until I have glimpses that would make me less forlorn, I will stand alone in the woods in winter and look into the glomming, because I am not afraid. In the summer, I will bury my hands into the soft, warm ground and find the parts of nature that will renew my powers.

Reapers

Julie A. Aycock

When I was a little girl, my daddy and I would go out and pull up weeds in the endless sea of soybean fields on our farm. Standing chest deep in the turbulent green, I'd breathe in the fresh air and feel the sun on my face. The soil below was cool to my bare feet, and the wind was heaven on my sweaty neck. Fat, white clouds drifted by in the pristine, blue sky. Daddy would sing or whistle, and I'd join in if I knew the song. We would talk and laugh for hours as we worked. The tenor of my daddy's voice always made me feel safe.

My daddy was unaware of the feelings that I felt for him on those occasions in the fields when I felt that sweet kinship with him. I felt the sacredness of open fields and shady forests, even as an uneducated child. There is something wonderfully simplistic and beautiful in working the land and bringing in crops. Even surrounded by technology, one still has to contact the soil, a touch that transcends the centuries. Love of mankind and nature cannot be planned or duplicated; it just is.

Someday, when time has passed away, I'll walk through shady forests and green fields, take in the beauty of nature, and feel the ultimate kinship of souls.



All A Flutter

Rebecca Whitman

The Meaning of Death

Betty Wellons

It has taken me a lifetime to understand what dying means.

I was five when I had my first experience with death. I awoke from a restful sleep one morning before daylight. As I gazed sleepily around the room, I remembered how the night before I had come into my room exhausted and climbed on my bed and sank into a deep sleep without removing my clothes and putting on my gown. Looking down at myself, I realized that I was still in my clothes and lying on top of the covers. No one had bothered to tuck me in during the night. I wasn't surprised though. I had not been getting very much attention lately. Everyone had been too busy taking care of Grandmama to do things for me.

Grandmama had been staying in bed all the time lately. I had noticed that she didn't get up to sit by the window and bathe in the warmth of the sun anymore. She didn't hold me on her lap and play with me. I didn't understand what was happening, but I did know that something unusual was going on. I could feel the strange tension in the air filled with sadness. My mother was not the same smiling, happy person she used to be. My father was quieter than usual. More company had been coming and going recently. The adults acted strange. They talked very quietly, especially when I was around. When my cousins came over, the adults hushed us and told us to play quietly. If it was daytime, we were sent outside to play, but not under Grandmama's window because she was "resting."

Once my cousins and I discussed the situation. Carol, who was eight and knew everything, told us in a cautious whisper that Grandmama was sick and she might "die"! I wasn't sure what Carol meant by die, but it made me feel uneasy. The gasps from the other children, who were all older and more knowledgeable than I, just intensified the fear I felt inside.

Suddenly I was aware of voices coming from a distant room and something else—crying. Yes, I could hear someone crying. I got up and walked slowly down the hall to the living room. I stood unnoticed in the doorway for a minute or two. I saw my father and Uncle Alvin standing in the middle of the room talking to a strange man. My mother and Aunt Sue were sitting on the couch hugging each other and crying. When Daddy saw me standing there, he picked me up and gave me a hug.

"Daddy, why are Mama and Aunt Sue crying?" I asked innocently.

"They are sad because Grandmama left us last night," he answered.

"Where did she go?" I wanted to know.

"She went to live with Jesus," he said, giving me another hug.

"Why?" I asked.

"Because there she can get the rest and the peace she needs," he answered soothingly.

"But, Daddy," I complained, "she left without telling me good-by."

"I know, honey, but you were asleep, so she told me to tell you good-by for her," he assured me.

"When is she coming back?" I asked.

"She is not going to come back, dear. "Someday we will all go to live with Jesus, and then we will see Grandmama again."

I was hurt and sad because I loved Grandmama and I wouldn't see her for a long time, and I hadn't had a chance to tell her good-by. I wanted to ask Daddy if Grandmama had "died," but the word stuck in my throat. I found it easier to accept his explanation that she had gone to live with Jesus although I wasn't sure exactly what it meant. Daddy kept trying to reassure me that Grandmama was much better off than she had been when she was with us. I couldn't understand how anyone could be better off dead than alive.

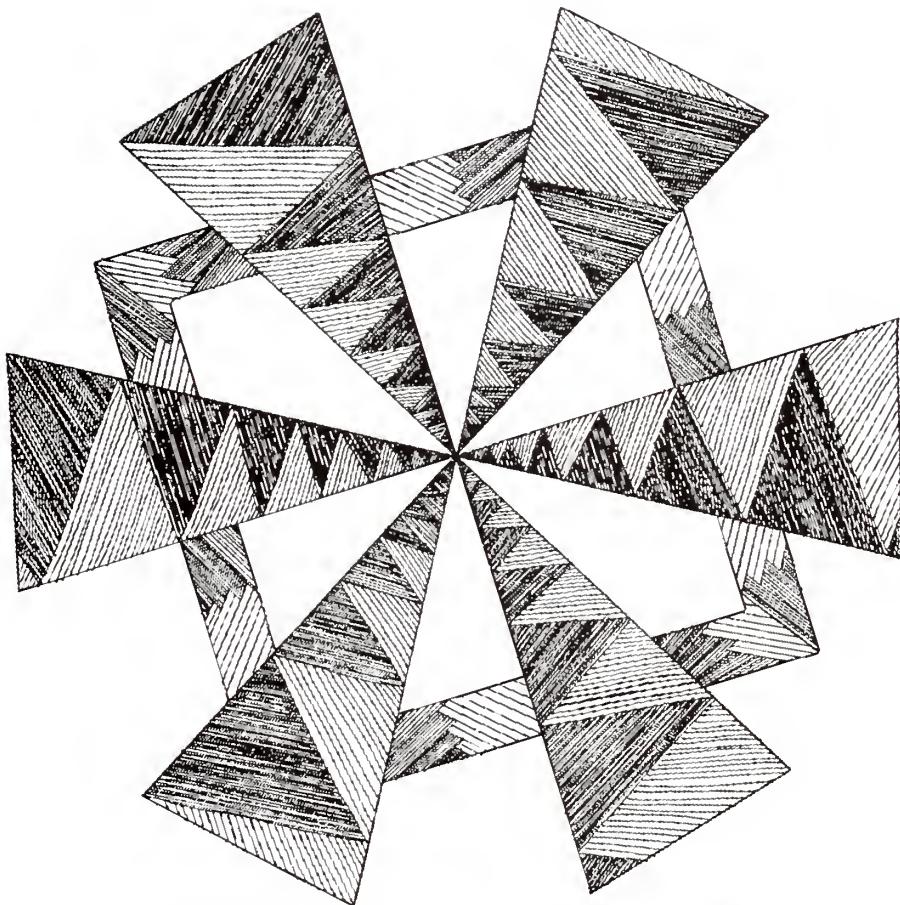
Thirty-five years later, I finally understood what my father was explaining to me early that morning. As I sat by my father's bedside in the hospital and watched his near lifeless body, my mind returned to my grandmother's death. In those days, people took care of the dying at home and let nature take its course. They didn't try to push the hand of God away by prolonging life with artificial means. I looked at the IV's stuck in my father's arms, at the tube which ran from his nose, and at the larger pipe which ran from his mouth to the breathing machine which kept him alive. It broke my heart to see this man who was once full of life and vitality reduced to an invalid. I suddenly realized that death would be a relief to him. It would even be a blessing because then he could get the rest and peace he so badly needed. I also believed that he would live again with Jesus—just like Grandmama.

Chimney by the Road

The chimney stands,
sole survivor of a fire
and of a history that it
warmed and witnessed.

If it could speak,
what memories would it share,
or would it keep the stories
secret, silent as the charred
remains that mark their setting?

Rosalyn Lomax



Coming Out

Connie Lamb

Lights Out

I was sitting at my home
One dark and stormy night,
Watching television
By single candle light,

When all of a sudden,
A power line went down
And knocked out every light
All over simple town,

The movie I was watching
Was at a crucial scene
And so I started praying
That it soon would reconvene

After half an hour
I finally shook my head
And said, "Oh, well,
I guess I'll go to bed."

All was deadly quiet
Then came a sense of fear,
and I knew the horror movie
Was NOT a good idea.

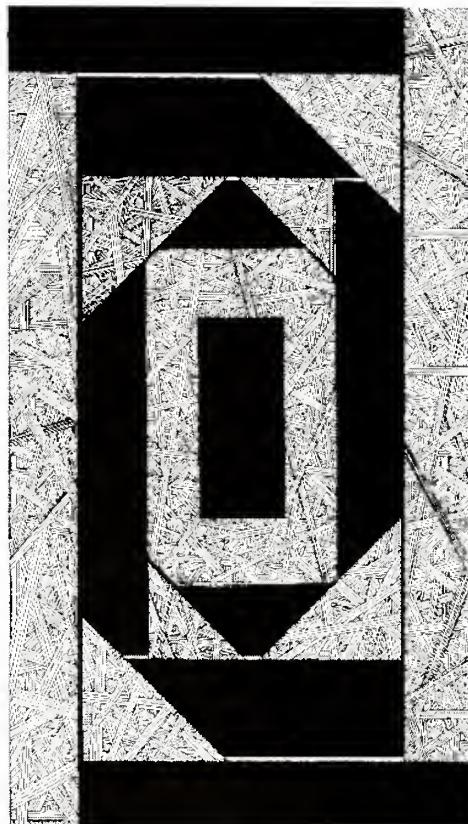
I was sure that all the killers
Broke out of jail this night
And were looking for a quiet place
So they could hide out of sight,

And so amidst my trembling
I raced to get my 12-gauge.
I knew if they tried to get me,
I'd shoot them in a rage.

As I got back to my room,
I heard a banging sound.
I thought it was a tree branch
But I could feel "them" all around.

Just when I was about to put
Buck shot through the door,
The lights came on and I wasn't
Fearful any more.

Taloned fiends and boogie men
Were never to be found.
I had a restful sleep that night
And heard no other sound.



Monotonous

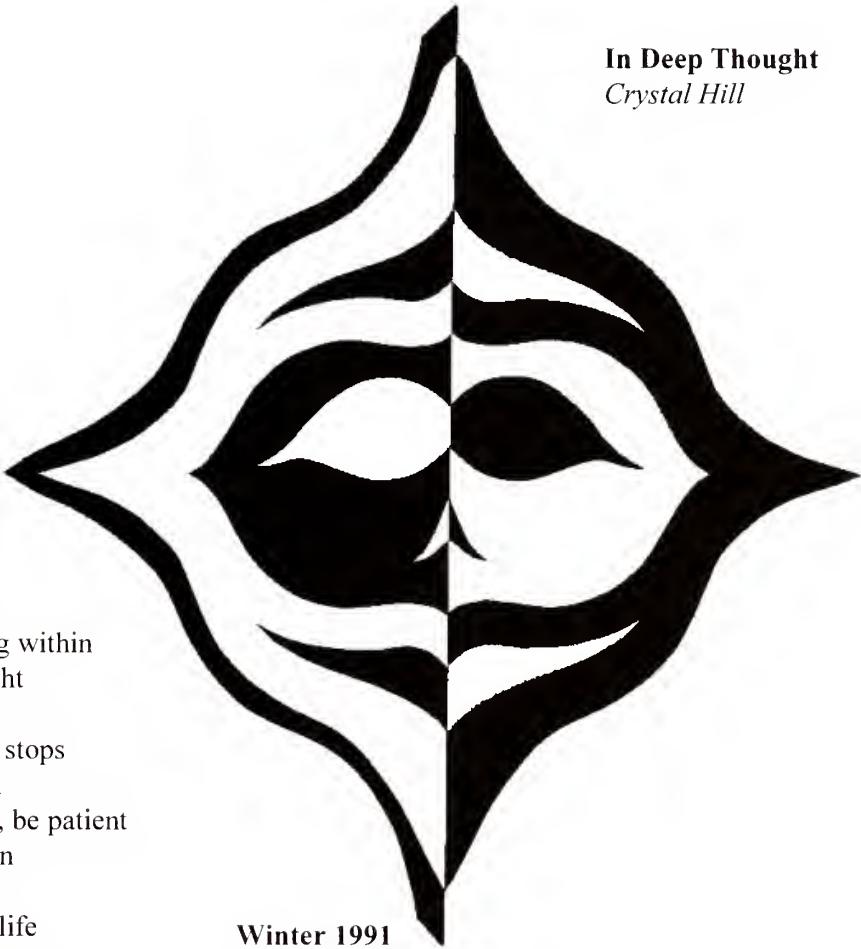
Crystal Hill

Millennium Madness

'Twas the day before New Year and all through the stores
Not one polite person had walked through the doors
People were grabbing before things were stocked
Impatient people walked by cans they had knocked
Children were wondering what was the matter
As they watched moms grab milk, bread, and then scatter
People rushed to the bank to withdraw all their savings,
As mad employees smirked at their misbehavings.
"Y2K compatible" the employees did shout
With people disbelieving and having their doubt
Power, money, life is what they say will go
All I can say is it's just another day though
Mom drops to her knees while Dad drinks his beer
Wondering what is coming in this New Year.
This millennium madness made people uptight.
But Happy New Year To All, And It Was A Good Night.

Kerri E. Nelson

In Deep Thought
Crystal Hill



Searching

Traveling around the world
Searching for a meaning in life
From the guiltiness I was feeling within
The life I was living was not right

Upon reaching one of my many stops
Unsure of my purpose or reason
A gentle voice whispered to me, be patient
It is not your time or your season

The words were strength in my life
And I began to look around and see
That the difference wasn't in where I was
The difference had to start within me.

Kenneth Robinson

Winter 1991

All the things that I once knew:
Torn asunder, stretched, confused,
Distorted, divided, despaired; the night
Unfurls its colors, dark but divine.

“To the light, to the light!”
A shrill voice cries.
I turn to look—
Only a kildeer flies.

The wind is not a heartfelt friend.
It blows, it stings, and follows in,
Through open doors, cold uninvited guest,
Chilling the moment's quiet unrest.

Home again, home again,
I think as I lie,
Saying “Everything's all right.”
Love strikes blind.

Jeff Williams

Response to “Susan’s Song”

“When the fire burns low,
When memory rises upon the sparks of settling logs,
When the wine and the words flow freely,”
I will speak for those I love who have gone before.

The memories sweet of laughter shared,
The exchange of books, a whisper of Fabio,
I will not forget.

I will speak of days gone by,
Though not my child, you touched my life.
Your laughter loud, I’ll remember that sound—or was it a cackle?

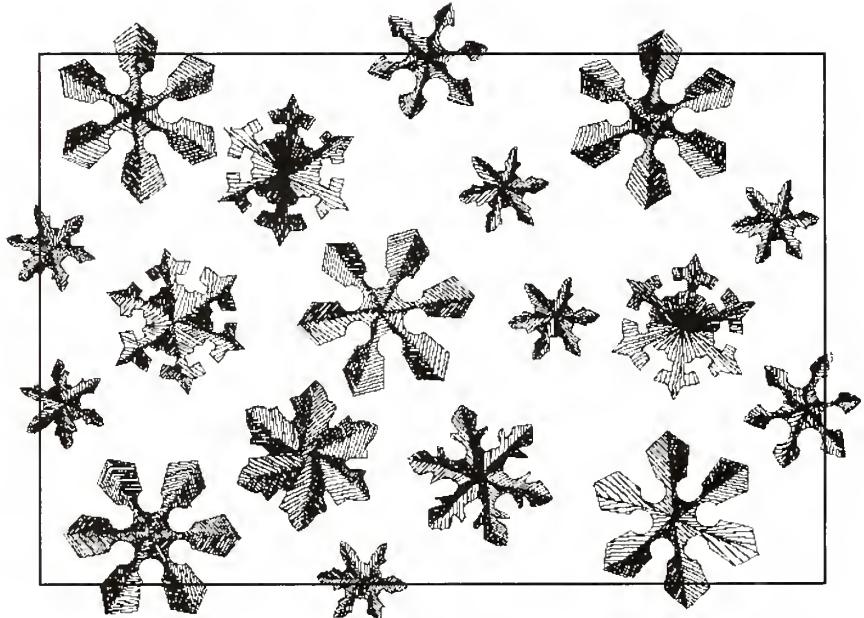
And what of Will and Eleanor?
Not from your loins, but from your heart.
They will sing for you; they will not forget.

I pray my child will toast my life,
But what if estrangement arrives, its bitterness cutting the cord.
Will he sing for me? There is no guarantee.

“As the warmth of fire and wine and memory fade,
Whisper a prayer for those who have gone before
Now ashes upon the hearth.”

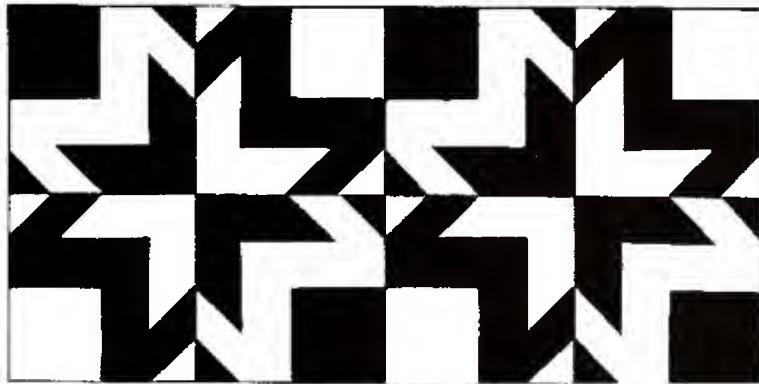
We are all gardeners.

Peggy Womble



Feather Snow

Rebecca Whitman



M&M's

Mike Mah

Maternal Instincts

Sam Davis

Mother tended her life as she tended her garden. The well-worn path welcomed her each morning as her feet invariably followed the same steps as the day before. It was comforting to walk through the garden and marvel at its simplicity. She felt a kinship with the plants, each one reaching for the sun, striving to bear fruit, and yearning for attention.

Her crowning glory was her rose bush. With great expectations, she nurtured it. As it grew, Mother anticipated what was to come. She dismissed the pain as the thorns seemed to seek out her flesh. *The pain of nurturing this bud pales in comparison to the joys yet to come.*

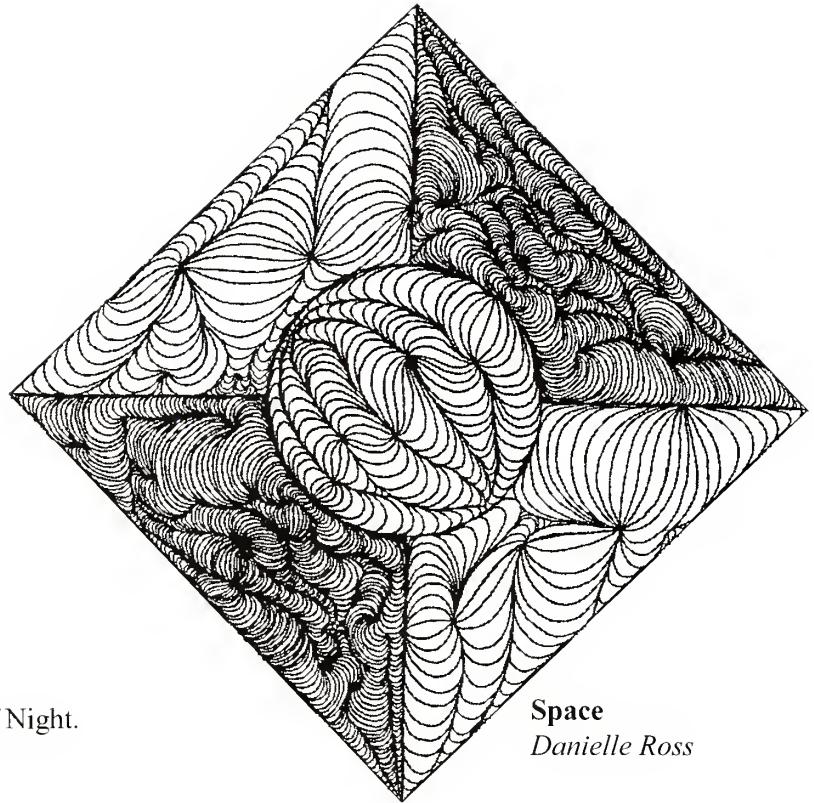
Her days were spent in the garden, her nights consumed with thoughts of the future. One morning as her feet walked the familiar path, a hint of color arrested her. Mother knelt at the small wonder peeking through the leaves amidst the thorns: a bud. *A glorious pink bud.* Its tear-drop shape was balanced delicately on a slender stem. *This is the most perfectly formed bud.*

Each morning, Mother raced to the garden to tend to her rosebud. Other buds sprang forth, yet none was as perfectly formed as the first. Mother knew she had to protect her creation from the weeds and vicious insects that seemed to plague her garden. *They are after my dainty rosebud.* Mother purposefully brought the shears to her beloved bud and forever severed its ties to the garden. Cradling her creation, she placed it lovingly in a vase. The cold glass tower overwhelmed the warm pink bud, and Mother smiled. *Surely this bud will become the most beautiful rose of all.*

As the days passed, the vibrant color waned in Mother's garden. Vivid beauty was traded for common practicality. Day after day she toiled in the garden, feeding each plant with her sweat as her lone rosebud remained closed. In the garden the rose bush boasted many buds, each one unfolding to share its beauty with the world. Each blossom tormented her; each bloom gave a painful reminder of her single rosebud, still closed. *Closed to me.*

Occasionally, she brought flowers to accompany the single bud, but none seemed to suit the beauty that lay within the constricted petals. Alone it stood in silent testimony to her achievement. Mother greeted each morning with a burst of hope as she rushed to see her bud blossom. Each night she shed tears of disappointment as the bud remained closed to the world. *I cared for and nurtured this bud. Yet it mocks me, refusing to open.*

Time transformed the bud into a muted gray, all evidence of the warm pink color gone. The brown edges of the petals curled, and the stem became horribly twisted. Consumed with rage, the realization dawned. *This bud will never open. Never will the world smell the sweet fragrance of the most beautiful rose.* Mother's gnarled hands closed over the wilted bud, and in one defiant act of disgust, she crushed it.



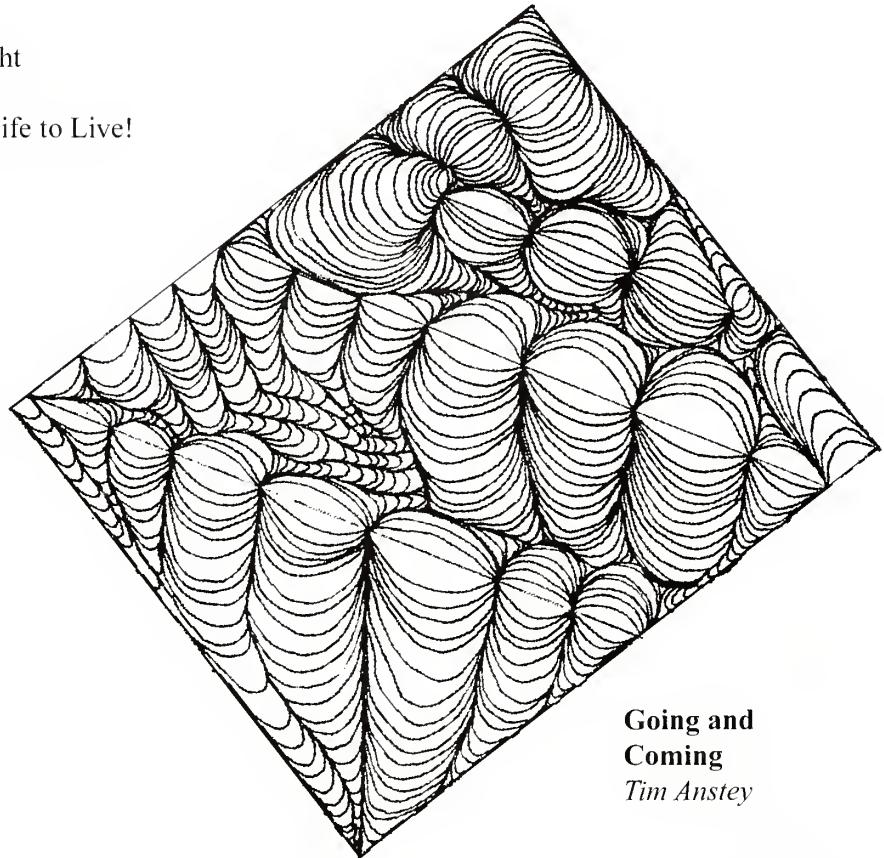
Living in Soaps

As The World Turns
and we are led into the 21st Century
by the Guiding Light,
no one knows why we
Search for Tomorrow by the Edge of Night.

Space
Danielle Ross

Still, our Young and Restless
children are striving to be
Bold and Beautiful.
This drives the elderly straight
to General Hospital
because we have only One Life to Live!

Wilma Woody



**Going and
Coming**
Tim Anstey

When Floyd decided to turn our electrical power off, did you notice how dark it is on a cloudy, stormy night? How many times did you flip the light switch to no avail?

Stephany got up one morning concerned about what to wear because she couldn't iron without electricity and then she had a brainstorm - she would just throw them in the dryer for a few minutes!

Mind you, I know that Bryan Weaver was distraught over his loss of so many turkeys, but he is always thinking. In his exhausted state of mind, he was driving down the road and saw a store with a drink machine sitting outside. He decided to whip in there and quench his thirst. He put his money in and it fell back out. He tried again. Then he looked around and wondered where everyone was. That's when he saw it -- the store owner had unplugged the drink machine! Such foolishness, thought Bryan. He worked the machine out far enough to get the plug in and went around front to insert his money. At that quick moment his brain clicked into gear when he remembered that the current was off. You go Bryan!

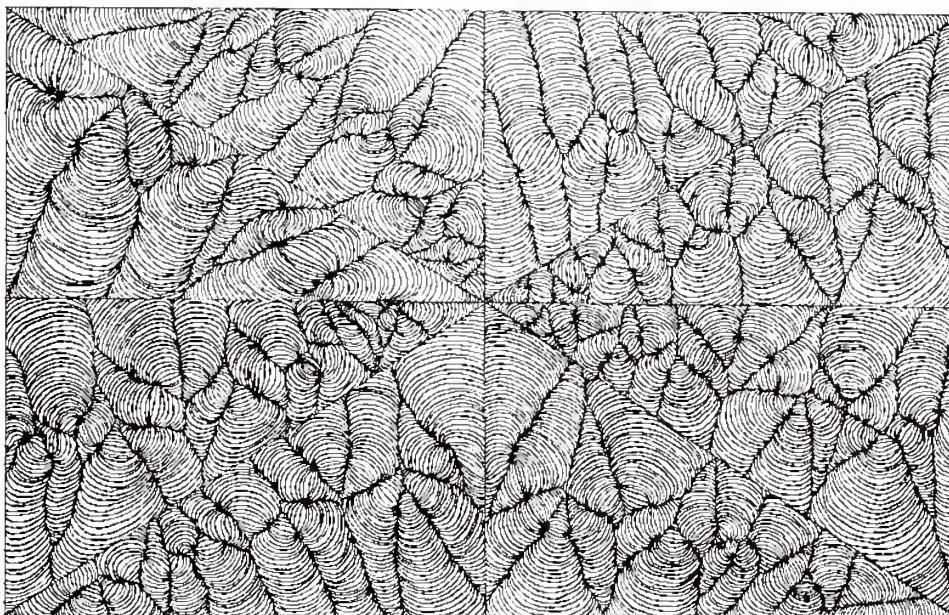
Isn't it wonderful that the power of God never stops? His lights are always on and brightly shining. And we, as His children, are filled with that light. As Christians, we are responsible to let it shine before men. It's there to warm us, to keep us content and to put a smile on our faces and a sparkle in our eyes. People are attracted to light and to others that let God's light shine through.

Grace Lutz

The Light Within

Have you ever noticed
That someone with a grin
Has an appearance
Of a light within?
And those who are always happy,
Have a sparkle in their eye
Of something very special,
A light you can't deny.
And have your ever heard them
Speak of God's love in their heart?
That's when from deep inside
The glow begins to start.
Lord, make me as a beacon,
Shining bright as day
And as I walk the paths of life
Your love will light the way.
And let it shine for others,
Your wondrous love to see,
And my life in your service
Will bring glory unto Thee.

Grace Lutz



Every Angle

Tiffany Zwerling

From the Master's Table

Joy Victoria Whittaker

I remember it like it was yesterday. We would sit on the old wooden porch that stretched across the front of the house. No green grass on our side, just dirt in front of our porch. I spent hours play-acting and making delicious mud pies while my cousin, Sweetpea, fascinated Grandma with her wit and beauty! “That’s right; y’all be sweet gals; Grandma luv you both!” were her famous words. As she braided our hair, which sometimes took hours, she’d sing and talk to God, “Lord, yuz been mighty good!” I remember her soft wrinkled hands smoothing my rough edges and saying “Gotta keep the kitchen up!” She was my genuine jewel. In those days, she could make magic. She could squeeze blood out of a turnip; she could pay bills without money, and she could heal the sick like Jesus does. But, most of all, she was the best storyteller in the world! She told us riveting stories that made us believe in magic. We had very few visitors, some seen, some unseen. When an unseen visitor would come, that old cracked porch would give a crippling sound as if to say, “I’m on my last leg, and even the spirits are too much for me now!” I was afraid of the unseen. My grandmother would say, “Don’t worry about the unseen; it’s the seen that will try to kill you. Satan, get behind me!”

My grandmother and I had a special way of communicating without saying a word. The fact is, I didn’t talk much anyway. Grandma believed that everything had a purpose: “Yuz don’t talk much, but yuz sho’ is chere for a reason! God’s got it all under control.”

We didn’t go into town much because Mr. Vanderbilt who wore many hats from over yonder would come by on his truck and haul us in some “goods.” Whenever we heard his loud truck and his mean dog barking, Grandma would say, “Don’t ever let yo’ right hand know what the left hand wuz doing!” It was Sweetpea’s cue to run and hide. Grandma used to always say that Mr. Van was a good man. She said it so much that I wasn’t sure if she was trying to convince me, Mr. Van, or herself! Mr. Van went through his regular routine of trying to convince Grandma that there was something wrong with me and that I should be sent away. “That gal ain’t quite right!” Mr. Van would say, alarmingly, trying (unsuccessfully) to sound compassionate. “Tis so, but ain’t nuttin God can’t fix!” Mr. Van would always get quiet around this time. He could not dispute Grandma’s faith in God or what God could do because he didn’t know God. I’d continue my play rehearsals; the hens were great critics. Mr. Van continued to watch hoping to find me guilty of insanity. Once, I made the mistake of eating some of my delicious mud pies and it set off his alarmed response, “There’s clear evidence that she’s a danger to herself. They’ve got special schools for her kind!” Mr. Van made his closing arguments, but as usual, Grandma shut him up by saying, “Oh, my God’s got it all under control.” He’d rest his case by saying, “We’ll see!” Before he left, he’d always take with him some fried chicken, biscuits, and a jar of molasses.

I had another cousin, Neckbone, who was a drunk pure and simple. He would not do anything to hurt anybody, and he was a straightforward person. Being a drunk wasn’t so bad, but being an honest one was dangerous. When drunk, Neckbone was a revolutionist. One day, when Grandma was out in the field picking cotton, Mr. Van came up on a quiet Cadillac without his dog. He saw Sweetpea and was asking lots of questions. Although Grandma had always warned Neckbone to keep his mouth shut around Mr. Van, Neckbone was in a drunken stupor and gave Mr. Van a piece of his mind. “When you dun cheated everybody out of their land, you gone own all of Mississippi! I guess you gone be God! I still ain’t calling you Mr. Van, even when you becomes God! You shiftless, lazy, no count trouble maker; you’ll be dead fo’ sundown!” Mr. Van left, and I never saw him again!

No one seemed to understand Neckbone. He had a stone face, but his heart was full of expression. When he thought no one was watching, he would break down and cry. Some called his kind shiftless and lazy, but he wasn't. Neckbone used to work his fingers to the bones. I believe that Neckbone's soul was left in an old wagon underneath two hundred pounds of cotton. When he was twelve, I was five years old. Grandma would pick cotton from sunup to sundown while I followed Neckbone as he tried to get that stubborn mule Reddy to carry the wagon loaded with cotton. Reddy was everything but ready, and he had a mind of his own. "Come on, Reddy!" Neckbone tried to make him mind, but that old mule would fall in a big waterhole and land on his back, every time! Neckbone also had to take our cow Tricks to the pasture. Tricks was always playing with our lives. She'd chase us around the field and scare us almost to death because she knew that she was bigger and stronger. When Tricks got tired and laid down to rest, we'd tie her to a stake. She'd wrap herself around the stake until we untied her. Although we couldn't afford to lose her milk, I prayed that she would die before she killed us. One day she got angry and was stepping in the bucket of milk and kicking it. Neckbone scolded her, and she chased him around the field in a wild rage. While Neckbone ran as fast as he could, I prayed as hard as I could. I learned very early that you can have just what you say. I had always said that I hoped that old cow would die before he killed us. As soon as Tricks had Neckbone cornered to kill him, Tricks was suddenly struck down by lightning. Neckbone and I danced and rejoiced over the death of that cow. I knew that there was surely a God! Nevertheless, I still had questions, "Why did God make people different? Were there separate doors to heaven? Will I ever kiss a boy?"

Neckbone used to help Grandma do everything. Neckbone would shoot anything that moved, like squirrels, rabbits, and coons. Sometimes he would kill a possum, bring it home, and help Grandma cook it. They'd singe the hair off, scrap him, gut him, boil him, and bake him with spices and sweet potatoes. That was some good eating! We would eat possum, sweet potatoes, collard greens, and corn bread with our hands; it tasted better that way! It was even better if you had some crackling bread to go with it. Grandma made cracklings by cooking lard in a large wash pot. We used to pick wild blackberries, and Grandma would make a blackberry pie. Grandma and Neckbone never threw anything away. They used old fat meat grease and lye to make soap. They'd scrub clothes on a wash board with lye soap, boil them, and hang them out on a line to let the sun bleach them dry. My grandma would use a smoothing iron to press clothes; she'd heat the iron on coals and make starch with flour and water. In between picking cotton, making tubes of sausages, and washing chitterlings, she always had time to pray. As Neckbone grew up, he was allowed to go to school during off seasons when there was less work in the fields. He received very little education and had even less time to play. In those days, we didn't have fancy computer games; my cousins and I played jack-rocks and hide-n-seek and raced with our dogs whenever possible. Sometimes Sweetpea and I would play-act, dreaming that we were princesses, and throw watermelon rinds to the pigs who represented a low ranking society. The irony is that of all the animals, the hog was probably the most important animal. We used everything on the hog from the "rooter to the tooter." The hog hoofs were used to make tea which helped heal ailments. Everything else was good, especially the fat, for eating or selling.

My grandma used to make me dolls out of socks and strings; they were my first puppets. Grandma smiled all the time; you'd never know that pain she was in. At night, I saw her bloody hands, her raw knees, and her blistered swollen feet. I'd help her wrap her wounds and pick kookaburras (briars from the cotton plant) out of her clothes and skin.

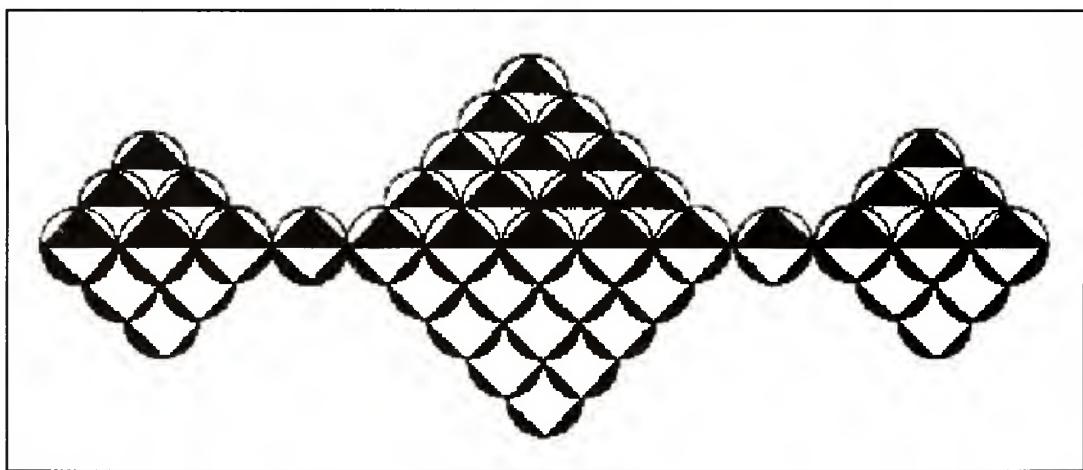
Grandma and I found refuge in the church. Some Sundays the church would be so hot that you could barely breathe. The “younguns” had to fan the grownups while they shouted; if we got close enough to someone filled with the spirit, we caught it too. One Sunday I caught the spirit.

Neckbone caught a different spirit. He started drinking moonshine to relieve his anger and frustration. He made corn liquor with wheat and rye, or he’d make wine from fresh corn, or peaches. He’d sometimes sneak down to the joint or the liquor house and get some of the so-called “weak stuff.”

I always knew when a storm was coming. The day Neckbone spoke his mind to Mr. Van was a very stormy day. Sweetpea wasn’t with us. Grandma and I had gone to take care of a sick newborn baby. When we returned home before sundown, we saw Neckbone hanging from our front porch like an animal for slaughter. Grandma covered my eyes, but I had already seen death in Neckbone’s eyes and had seen his soul drift away earlier that day. I can still hear my grandmother’s wail. It was as if she had been told there was no heaven. It was a sound I pray I never hear again. In those days, many people died of a broken heart. Some people would cry themselves to sleep forever. Some people would shut themselves off from the world and just live in sorrow and grief. Some people like us (me and my grandmother) would bury our pain, allowing no one to see our true souls. Sometimes, though, if you catch us when we don’t think you’re watching, you can see Neckbone in our eyes.

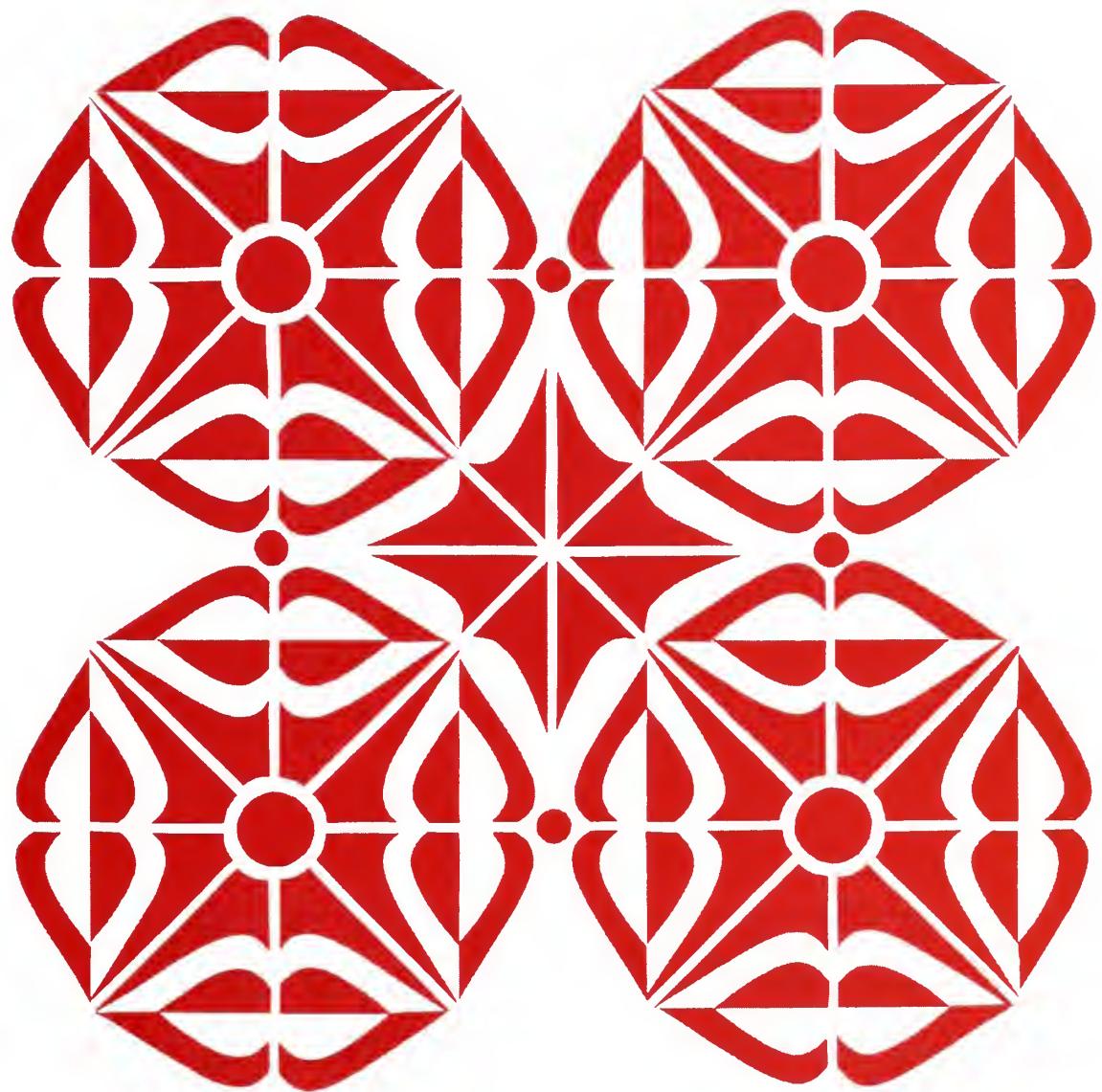
Mr. Van had a heart attack and died, leaving my grandmother lots of land. My uncle (Sweetpea’s father) safely handled Grandma’s financial affairs. He wanted us to move to the city with him, but Grandma refused. I had to be strong for Grandma. I promised her that I would become a world renowned author. I wasn’t afraid of the unseen any more. At night when that old porch gave a crippling sound, I’d get out of bed and say to those old spirits, “Even the dogs eat the crumbs which fall from the master’s table, but I’m a child of God!”

Decades later, my cousin Sweetpea was killed by a drunk driver. My wounds are still raw and bloody, but I fill them with determination. I fill them with faith! My cousins would be proud of me if they were alive today.



Mesmerized

Connie Lamb



Profusion

Mike Mah



Heightened Awareness

Mike Mah

Stages

I was a baby when I came into this world,
my mother groaned and my father wept.
I came into a dangerous world,
but this was a happy time.
I was helpless in my father's hands,
and he knew that I would soon be able to stand.
Until then, they would guide me every day,
helping me to learn, grow, have fun, and play.

I was a child on my first day of school,
my mother groaned and my father wept.
I was going into a dangerous world,
but this was a happy time.
My mother and father walked with me to class.
Approaching the door, it was time
To start Kindergarten at last!
Hugs and kisses. My mother cried.
I was no longer right by her side.

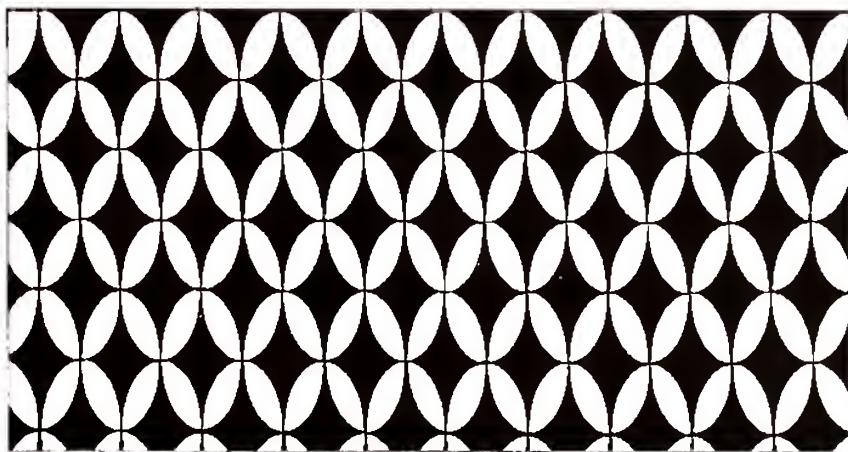
I was a teen on my first date,
My mother groaned and my father wept.
I was going into a dangerous world,
but this was a happy time.
I was nervous and asked what I was to do.
My parents said it was normal,
especially since I was starting something new.
As I walked down the sidewalk
And got into his truck,
I turned to wave,
and saw my mother as she shook.

I was a young lady, a freshman in college,
my mother groaned and my father wept.
I was going into a dangerous world,
but this was a happy time.
Helpless—for the first time I was on my own.
I didn't think it was such a big deal. If only I had known!
Hugs and kisses. It was time for them to go,
Making my own decisions now
With only what they taught me to know.

I was a young woman on my wedding day,
my mother groaned and my father wept.
I was going into a dangerous world,
but this was a happy time.
Walking down the aisle by my father's side,
the swaddling bands unraveling with every stride.
At the front of the church,
it was time to say our good-bye's.
As I turned to say, "I do,"
my strength was now in someone else's eyes.

I was a young wife, when my first child was born.
I was the one who groaned, while her father wept.
She came into a dangerous world,
but this was a happy time.
She was helpless in her father's hands,
but we knew that all too soon she would be able to stand.
Life would progress just as we planned.
Until then, we would guide her every day,
helping her to learn, grow, have fun, and play.

Ashley Helms



Flowers or Diamonds

Danielle Ross

A.W.-Superstar

With
BIG WORDS memorized from dictionaries
(forgotten in an hour),
and profound thoughts
stolen from fortune cookies,
spouting plagiarized theories as your own—
you are dressed to impress.

Practice the lingo,
as well as that slow and rhythmic voice
you believe screams intelligence, though
you simply sound
incapable of finishing a sentence—
like a third grader that's been
hooked
on phonics.

Don't forget to spend
an hour on your hair and bathe in your cologne.
Grab
the book that strange girl gave you
(your personal Oscar)—carry
it around and pretend to comprehend.
And now you're ready—
for the world to fall apart at your feet
as you frantically strum your guitar
like some guilt-ridden rock star
as you whine and complain and finally proclaim
(and most everyone agrees)
I AM YOUR GOD!!!
Come and worship me.
(just thought you should know I can see you).

Carrie Holkan

Lunch Time

I glance around me,
Regret it.
Too many people
talking at once,
Voices mingling into an
overpowering roar,
I long to cover my ears,
I resist. . . barely,
My heart pounds so loudly,
Can anyone not hear it?
The sandwich sticks in my throat,
I force drink past my stiff lips,
“Almost there,” I console myself,
Just a few seconds longer,
4. . . 3. . . 2. . . 1. . .
“Ring!”
I gather my books
and bolt out the door,
Lunchtime is over!

Mary Drake

Killideascopes

Talk your talk.

Regurgitate lists of words and phrases
Extracted from the unculture that molded
You, not of which you molded yourself.
Mass media and youth emulating adult
Engineered slangs and hooks.
Manufactured pap slung back and forth
Oppressing the oppressor, like the slave
Master's
Whip on his own back, boot heel on his own
Cheek.

The politics of war and life.

The unconscious order of conversation.

The insanity of the eccentric.

The aggression of the sane and noble.

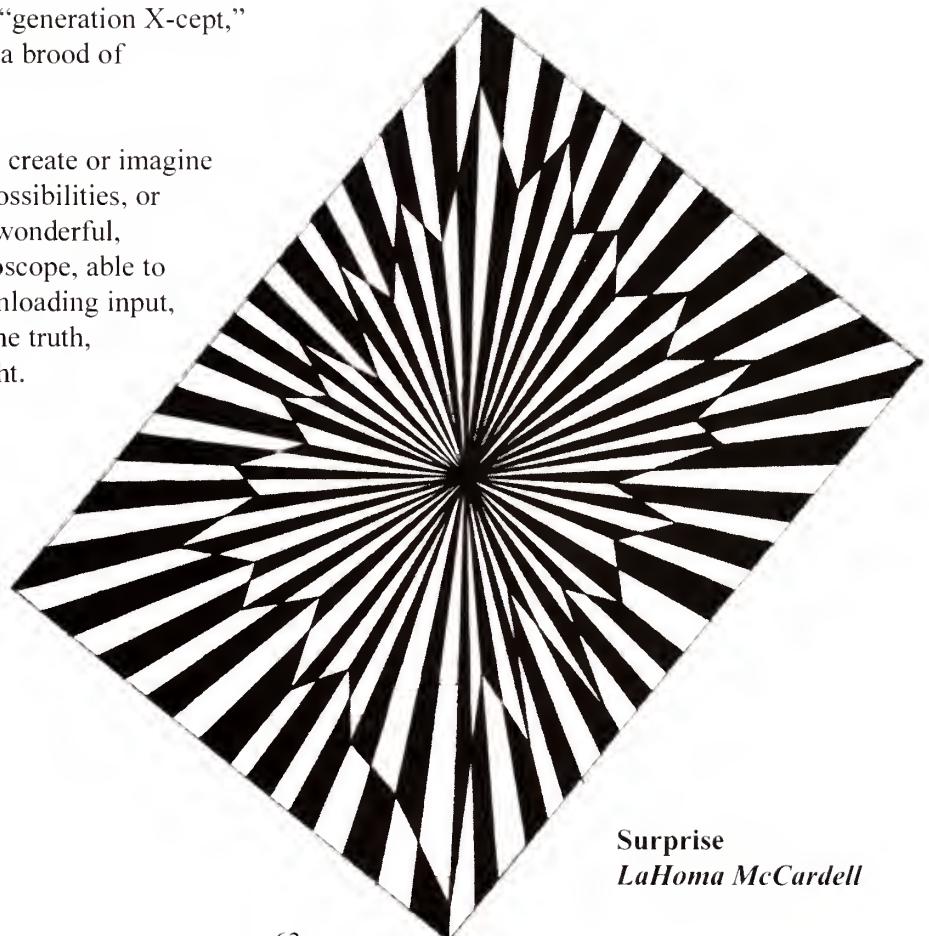
The lunacy of the creator.

The compassion of the weak and simple...
wrong.

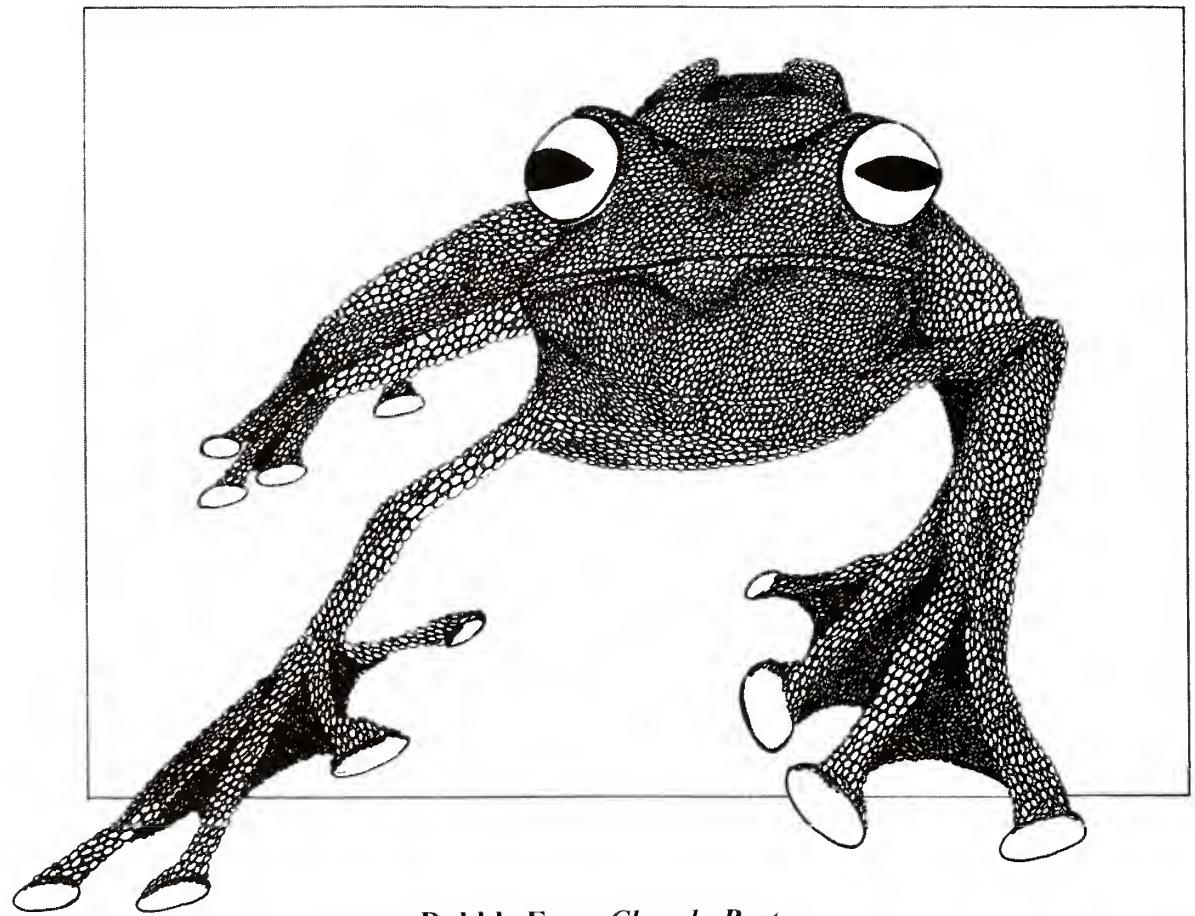
This "I hate Christmas because it's so
Commercial," "spoon-fed," "generation X-cept,"
"DIY society" has spawned a brood of
Collidescopes.

Not possessing the ability to create or imagine
New landscapes, realities, possibilities, or
Perceptions... all new and wonderful,
Numb, only, like the kaleidoscope, able to
Rearrange and recycle, downloading input,
Manipulating and bending the truth,
As a kaleidoscope bends light.

Ty Higgins



Surprise
LaHoma McCardell

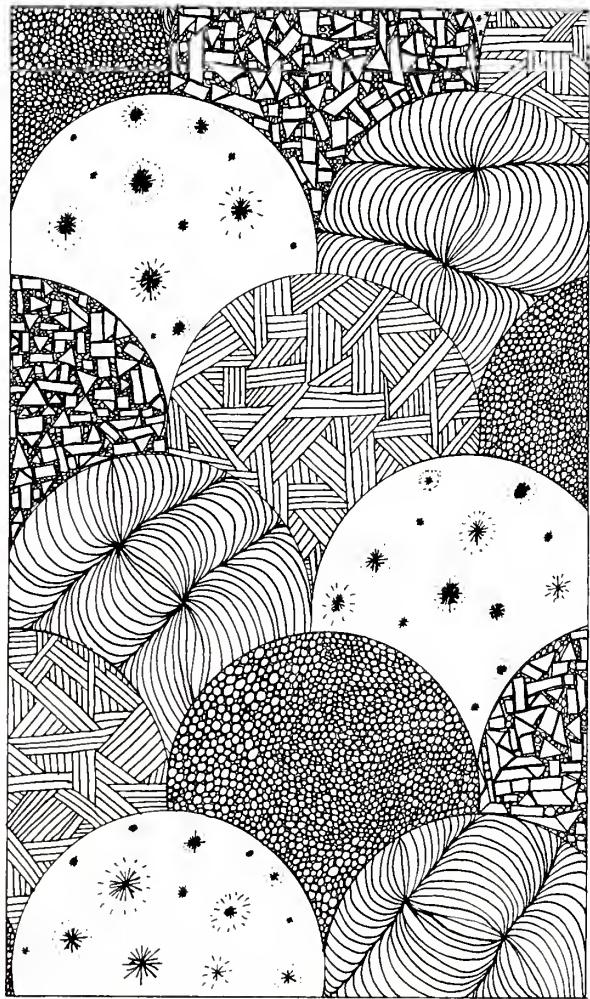


Bubble Frog, Chanda Best



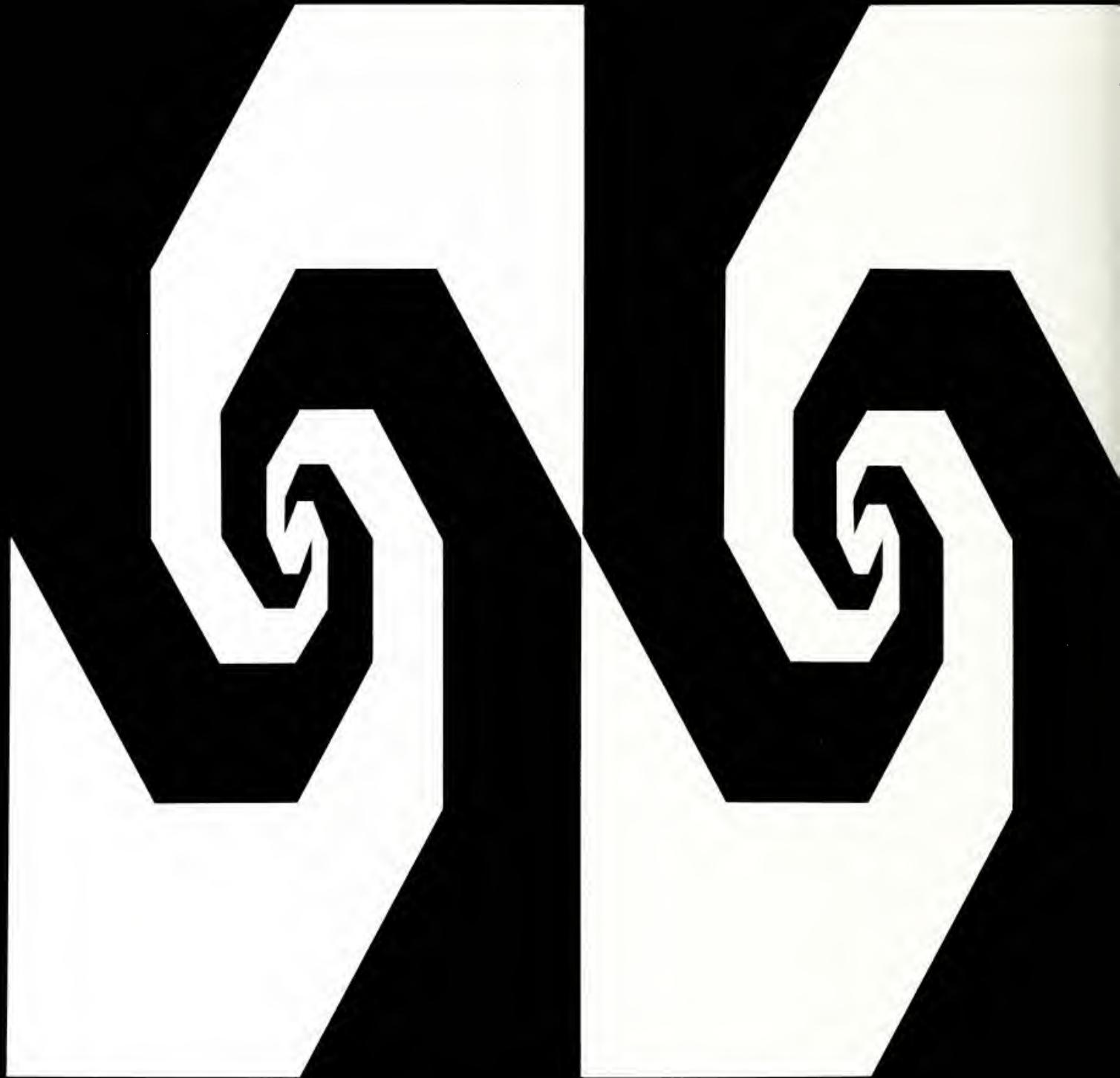
Falling Leaves

Christy Williams



Patches

Courtney Smith



Renaissance 2000