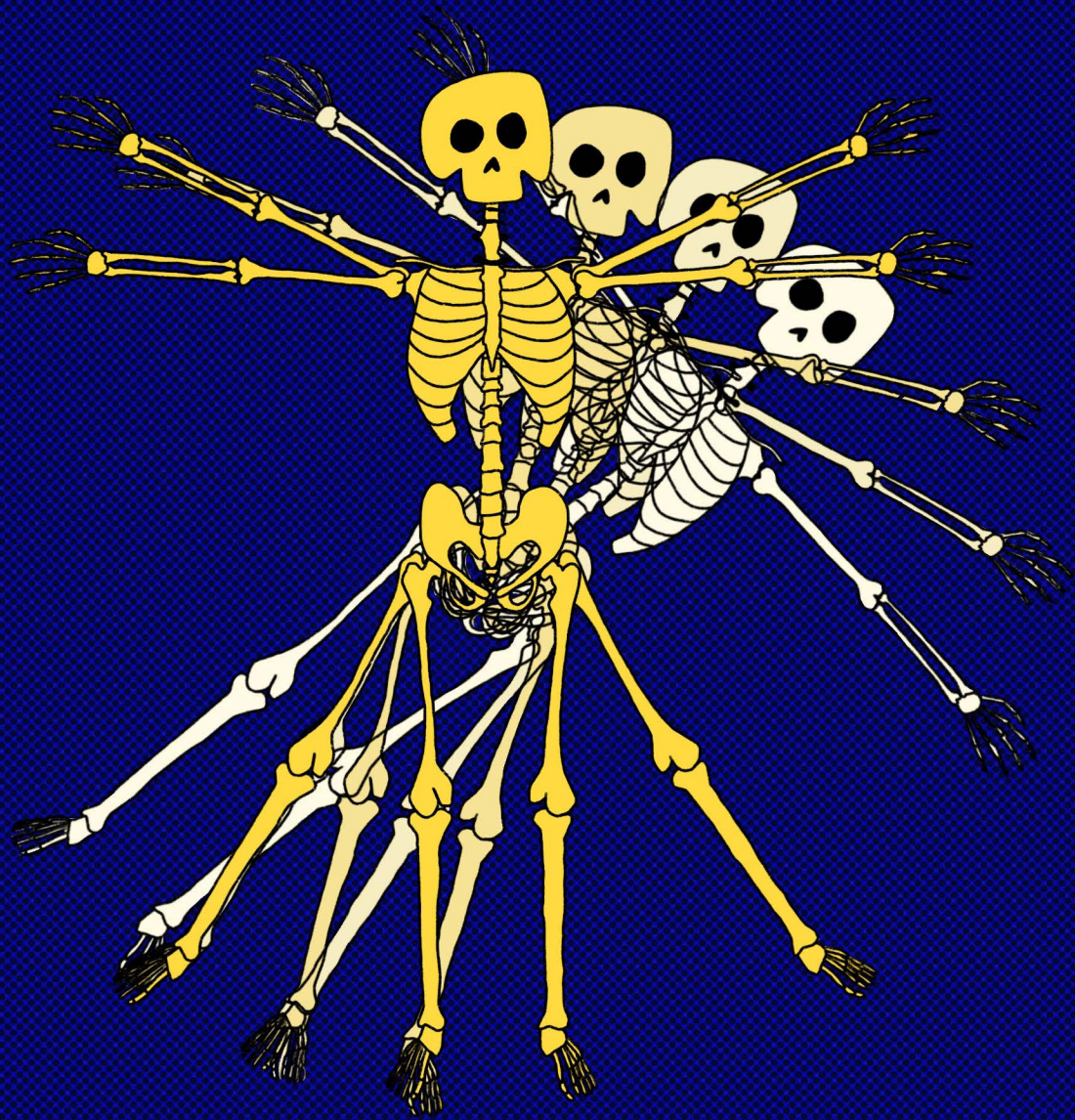


BODY



01

WINTER 2021

ISSUE 01: BODY

Bodies tell stories. They speak for us when words fail, say things we wouldn't ourselves. They are intricate and clumsy, poised and flailing; they bend and balance and break; they dance and rest, curl and stretch, reach and recoil; they morph and evolve, never still, not even in sleep. Hearts pump, skin crawls, tongues click and legs cross, and we want to experience it all.

Please enjoy the stories bodies can tell, in all their pain, shame and glory.



CONTRIBUTORS

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BPM

BETTY WHITE

Noah Farberman

Remember when Robin Williams died
And Candy, and the Beverly Hills Ninja
Remember when August Ames jumped the rope
When Garland sung too sharp

Remember those who've died too young
Remember those who died too soon
Remember those who made an impression by twenty-seven
Music, film, death, comedy, dead, dead

Betty White is
filled with life
Remember your first dead grandparent
If it's still bothering you, think of this

Betty White is your now grandparent
And she won't ever die so love her

DIRT

Jenna Geen

Bury me in the soil
with the thick of worms
wet dirt, and my lover's ash

delete the coffin
(replace with garden)

Bring your offerings to my tomb
and stuff blue roses into my mouth

Bury me in the forest
to breathe life into the earth
and shine my white light
into the souls of the dead

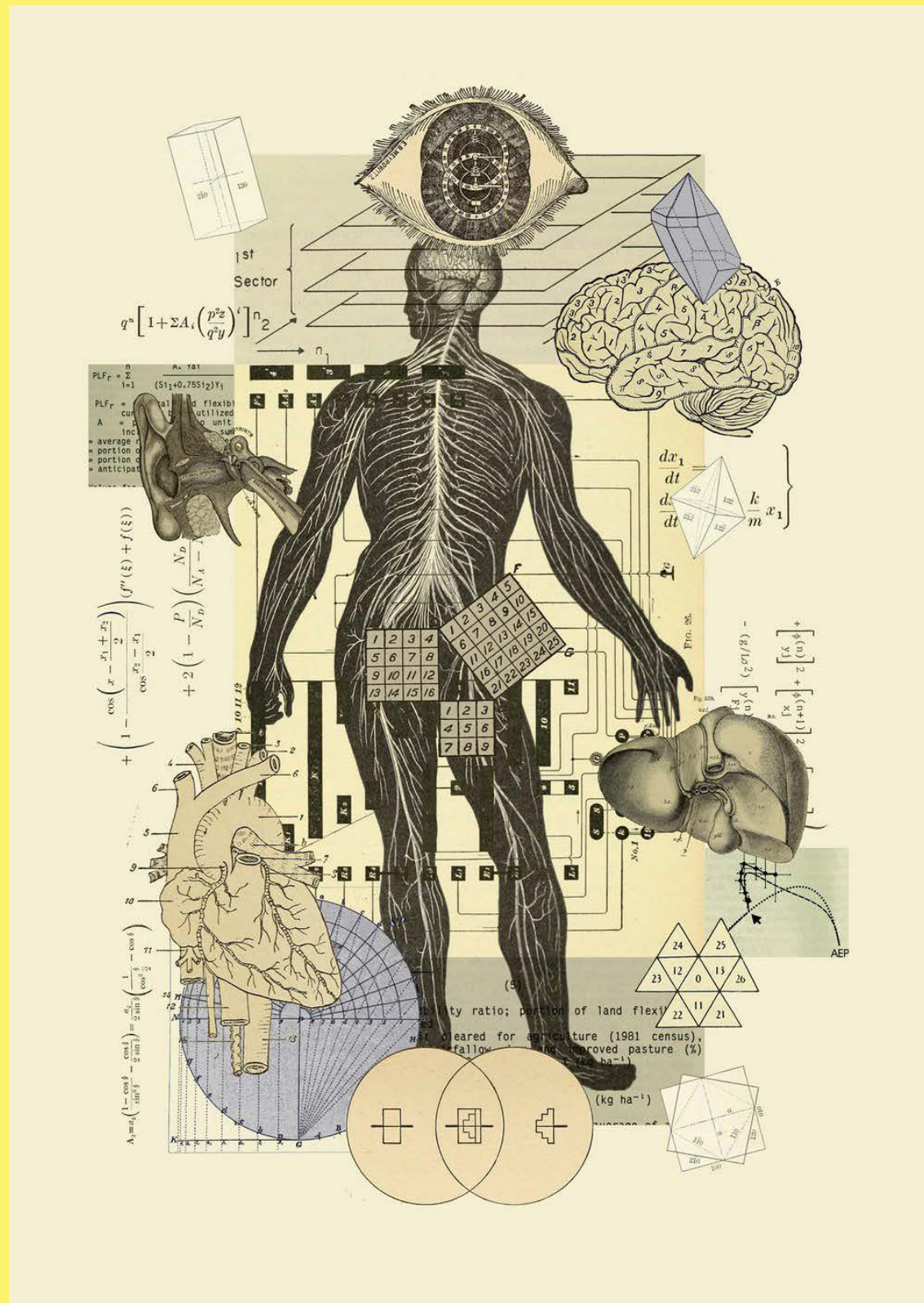
My dead neighbours, my brothers, my sisters
I want to become the Earth that Provides for All
The dead, the living, and the liminal

I will rot, gently, until I become bone

when my sinew hangs from tree roots
when my eyes decay into fossil
when the flowers in my mouth begin to dry
That is when I become Spirit
Spirit dies the coveted death of king

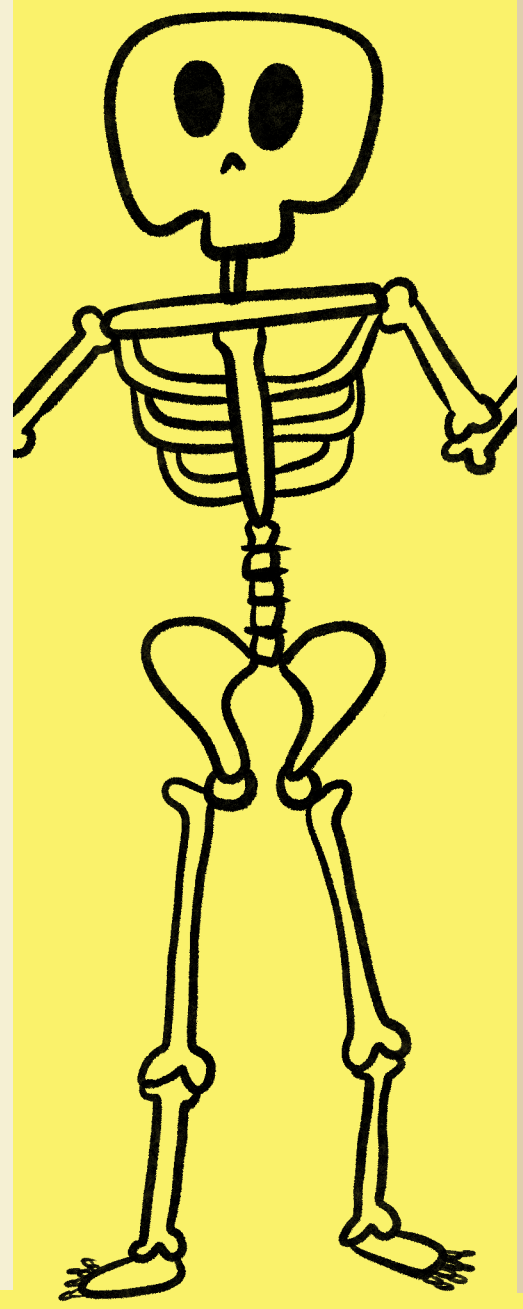
I die royally
With full body decaying
(blood pooling into my extremities)
veins gnashed like pumpkin
Abandon of ego
Soul touches sky
To meet creator

I spend eternity in pure source



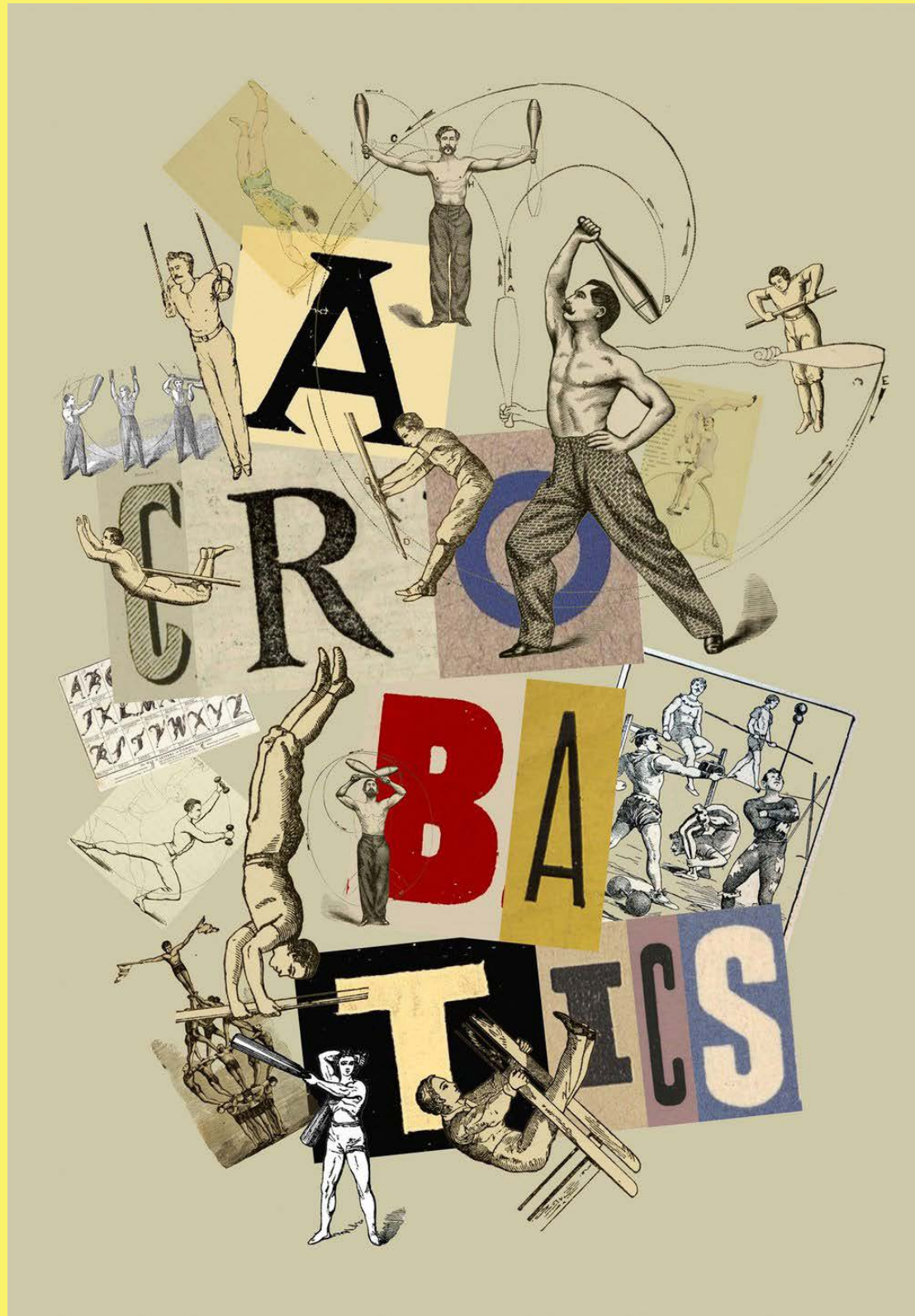
THE BODY IN ALGORITHM

Pawel Pacholec



FIGURES IN MOVEMENT

Pawel Pacholec



ACROBATICS

Pawel Pacholec

1986

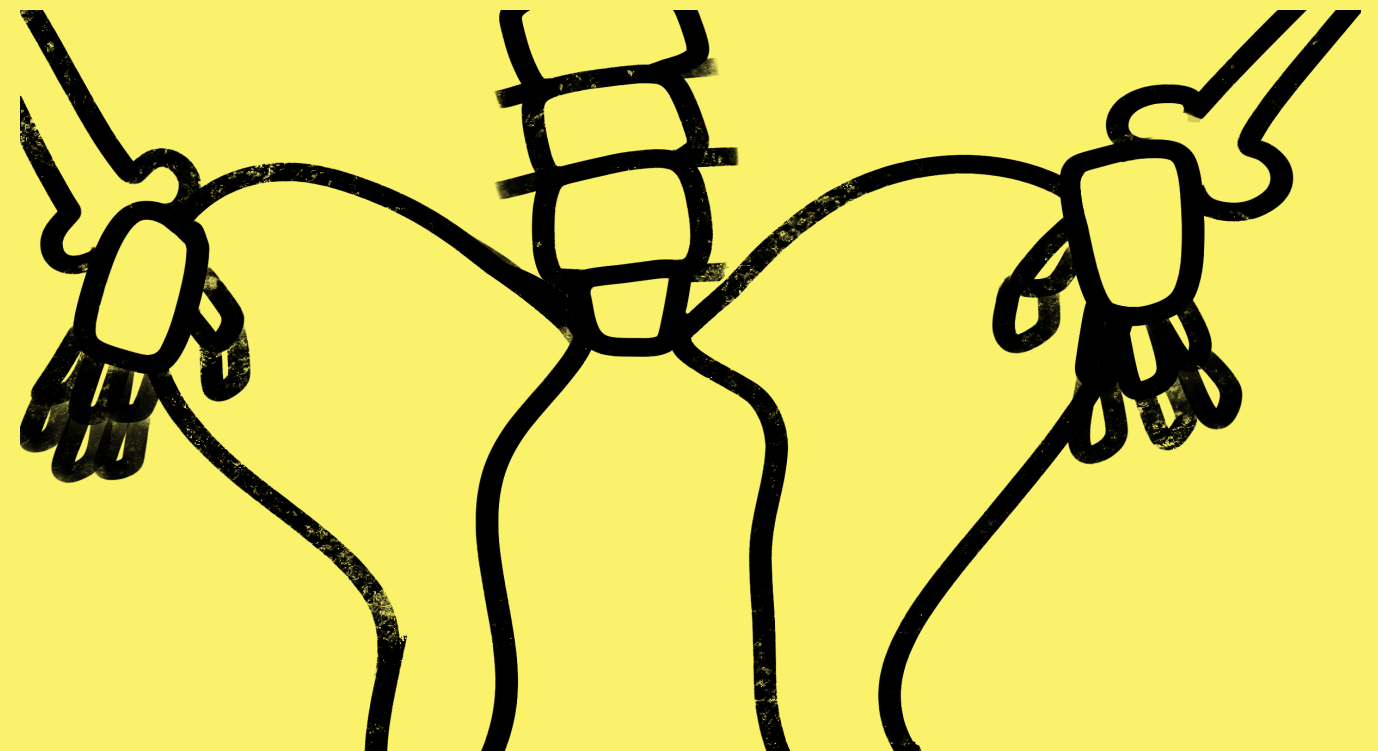
Lauren Dana Smith

On the best days we drank cold cans of apricot nectar, afternoon light and library book smell.
 Inhale.
 Yellow leather and lilac-colored wall-to-wall carpet.
 Exhale.
 Plastic everything. Rainbows and iridescent star stickers on my face.
 This is where I am cracking open in the golden hour.
 Inhale.

This is where I fold up my wing collection,
 carefully disguised as tiny paper daffodils, and tuck them in my blue jeans pocket,
 knowing they will be crushed when I sit down,
 and yet hoping they will regenerate.
 Exhale.

They told me there would be robots who would do my homework,
 mow our lawns,
 and pour our cereal into bowls every morning.
 But the grass is grown over
 and the shelves are dusty.

Exhale.
 Maybe the robots will also plant us new flower beds and sing us lullabies.



ECOTONE

Lauren Dana Smith

It could be that virus,
Or it could be leprosy, or maybe just Alzheimer's.
Who can tell these days?
This is an exercise in memory.

Hers is a skin-wrap-job over old bones,
floating on a little boat.

She is so damn dug out and dark that I don't see my hands or feet
as they try to touch the bottom.

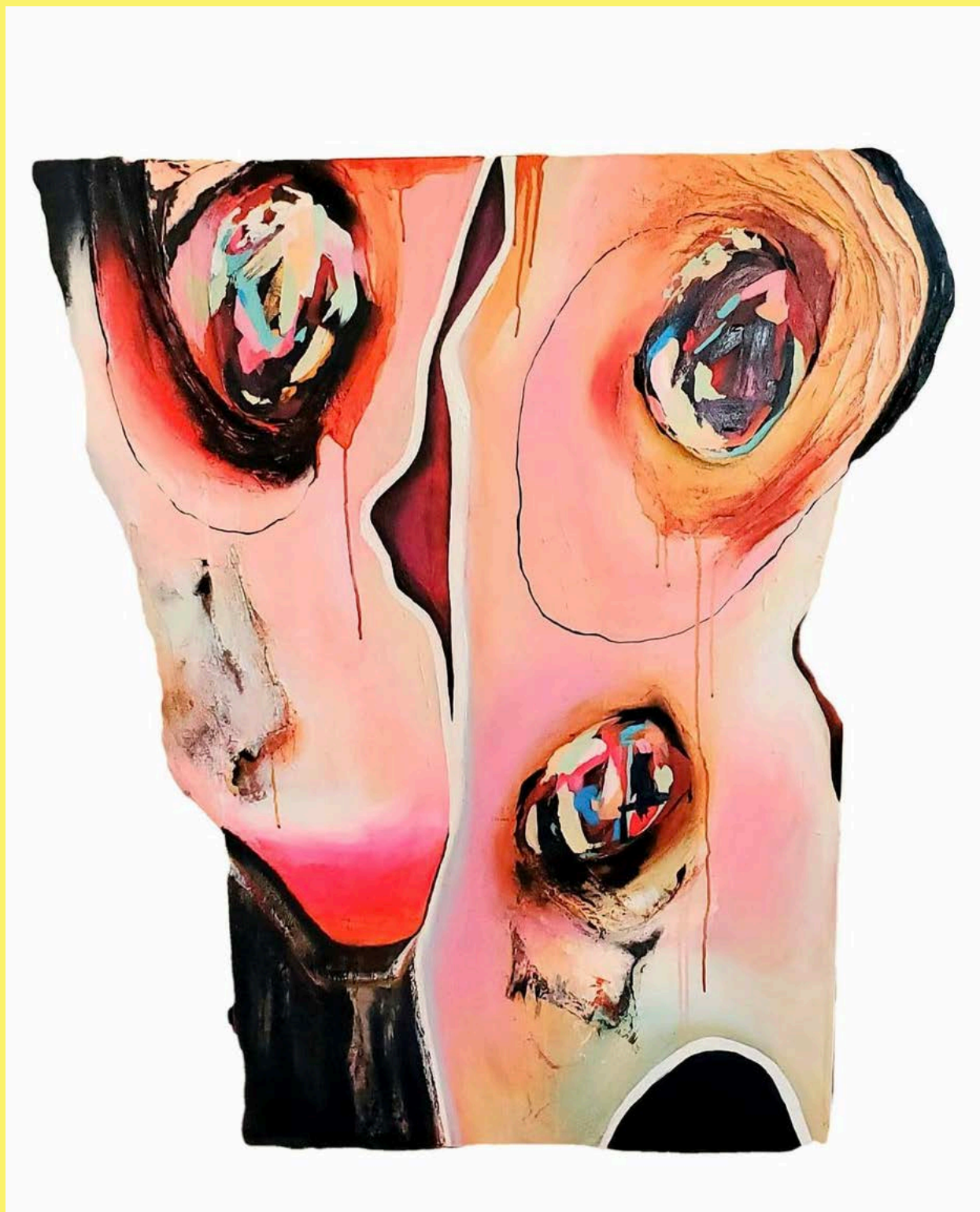
They told me to keep going, so I did,
swimming laps through her bodily vacancy.

On land, under these hot lights, this iodine-soaked cotton ball swabs
the full length of your torso and runs off into slick pools under our heels
like Grade-A pancake syrup.

I stop swimming.

If I weren't here, I'd be in that photograph;
the one where you are wearing faded blue cotton
and I am in red corduroy overalls.

The lace collar on your dress catches a perfect corner of light from the flashbulb
and it appears like an electrified dove, perched on your shoulder,
stunned into our memory.



ROSE WINDOW

Lauren Dana Smith

MELON FACE

Jingshu Helen Yao

She cut through the bright yellow skin of the canary melon and snapped the fruit in half. The melon was fully ripe, with its sticky juice running across the cutting board, soaked onto her hands. The sweet scent made her wince. Simply imagining the tangy flavour made her throat feel uncomfortable.

She hated melons; no matter if it was honeydew, canary, cantaloupe, or Galia, but they happened to be her father's favourite. That was probably why he used to call her "Little Melon" when she was young, though she was never enthusiastic about the fruit herself.

She bent over the kitchen bin and scraped the seeds out. Some of them spilled out onto the floor along with the dripping juice. She sighed; it would take a while to clean up, for the sugary liquid makes the kitchen floor uncomfortably sticky.

She was never too picky over food. Living and cooking for herself most of the time, she usually made do with anything edible. Her dislike of melons was somewhat surprising because she didn't recall one particular occasion where she tried the fruit and decided that they tasted terrible. Many people's fondness for exotic food like blue cheese or durian was developed through time, same with her hate for melon. It was an acquired distaste.

She returned the melon back on the cutting board and decided to deal with the mess on the floor later. Slicing the half fruit into quarters, then into eight even pieces, she followed the procedure her mother taught her a long time ago. Her father loved melons, but he didn't bother to get in the kitchen and pick up the knife. The melons were always sliced, un-skinned cut into bite-size pieces before serving in a bowl. But the fruits didn't cut themselves. It used to be her mother's job, but now she took it over.

She placed the knife horizontally and sliced off the yellow skin, taking out the sweet, juicy orange part. Her Ex gave her the nickname "Melon Face". He said that her face looked like a melon, without knowing that it was the only fruit that she hated. He said it as a compliment because he thought round faces were cute. She never considered her face as rounded before he even mentioned it. She certainly put on some weight during the past few years, and her East Asian facial features only added to the result. She remembered looking into the mirror and wondered if her face truly resembled a melon to other people, whether or not they thought it was beautiful. She told herself that she liked the simile despite her hatred for melons because she loved the person who said it. But after they broke up, she slowly realized that she hated the resemblance as much as the fruit itself.

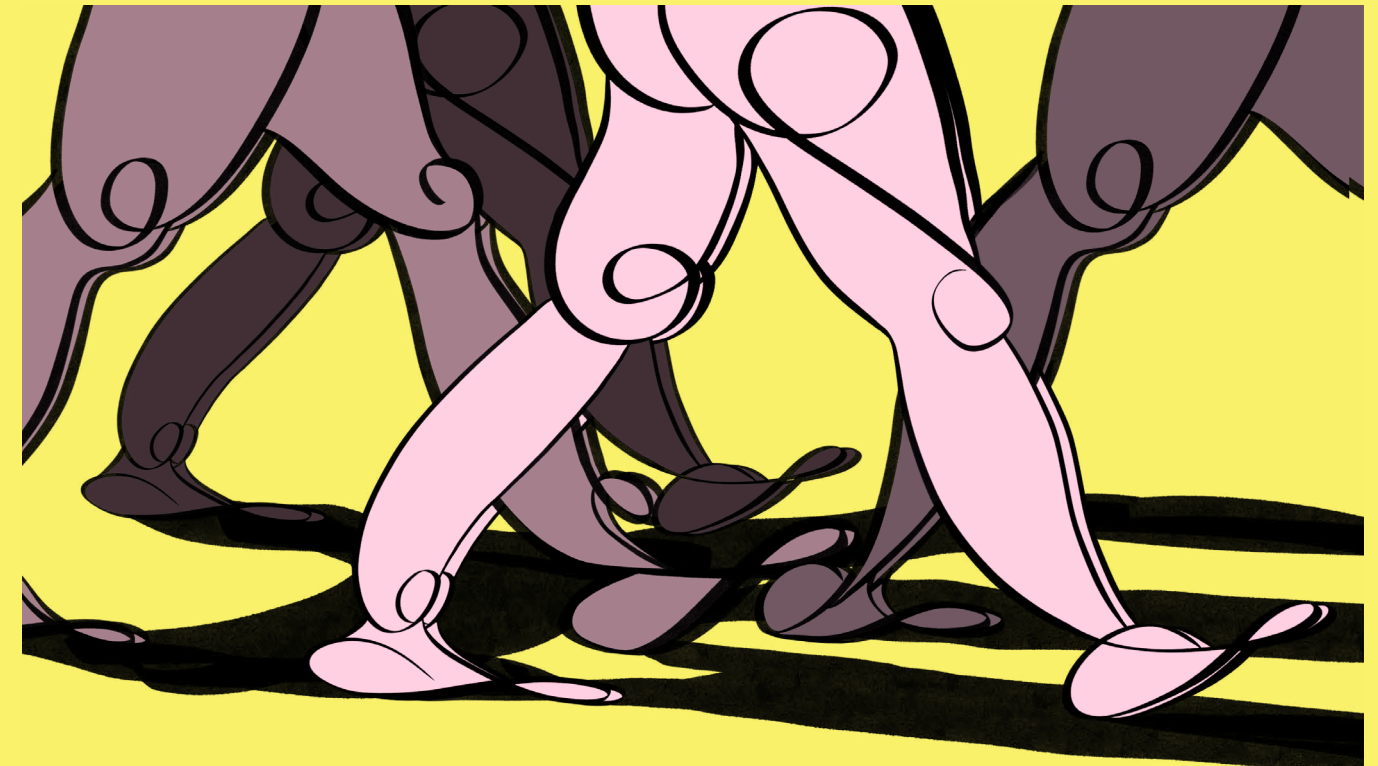
She piled the melon into the serving bowl, knowing that her father would probably finish it right away. She didn't have many opportunities to cook for her parents. Being on different continents made the visit home a luxury she usually couldn't afford. This was the end of the summer, and the melons wouldn't be in season for long. She hadn't returned for two years and would soon be on her way again after only a short stay. She had no idea when the next trip might be.

She truly disliked melons but she didn't mind cutting them. Slicing through its shiny, smooth skin that was very much similar to her own, she imaged the knife running through her face that shaped like a melon. Imagining that was terrifying and soothing at the same time. Sometimes the stickiness of the juice made it difficult to hold the knife still and it ran dangerously close to her fingers. The juice drip onto her fingers, warm and icky, the scent made her sick. She felt the same about the red juice running under her skin.

She took a step back and found herself standing on top of the spilled melon juice. With each tap, the button of her shoes made an ugly noise and stuck on the kitchen floor.

She stared at the uncut half of the melon, rounded like a full moon, like the reflection of her own face in the mirror.

She reached for the knife again.





FLESH BODY

Erika Rowe

DEVORARME

Alisha Brown

I am pink summer

s p r e a d

(cheeks, cupped, colouring—)

blossom grass

and cherry funk

fingernails digging deeeeeep

(the skin, our skin—)

a branch

atop my tongue

these

honey petals

in your

open lips

(my hips, your hands, the sap of it—)

bright sun,

edge us inseparable

bright sun,

empty me

fibre and flesh

onto

a dew-rimmed chin



MY ANCESTORS FEEL BAD ABOUT MY BODY DYSMORPHIA AND SO DO I

Maya Kompella

I. Spring, and I can't breathe

I cower from the sun;
her sharp teeth digging,
clawing at me, tearing me apart,
 lighting all
my flaws— She
 leaves me
incapable
of cover, strips me
of lies, asks me
 to lay myself
bare & barely breathing
 at her feet.

I am left
with the big-L Lonesomeness
of the cowboys—
acres of life around, yet them
feeling like the only things
left living.

Fragility
surrounds my
movements;
I walk the bridges
I have built
myself, reinforced
with worry.
I try to walk
with care.

II. Summer, and I hopscotch out of myself into my ancestor

A helicopter seed bounces off the windshield
of a moving car, twirls back up
with borrowed momentum. The cicadas catch it

in their song as they do
with the entire world in summer,
turning the earth into a soup

of their sounds, the humidity,
the grass, the sun. And this blur,
this mugginess, this sheen of light

hovering lazy off the pavement
creates a mindless haze
which I can finally live within. The earth

seems to be suspended in layers I can
move between; the ground beneath my feet is less
exact, less harsh in this morass of swelter.

When I get home, I turn back and forth in the mirror
looking for a space to jump through;
and finally there—I catch the corner of this slice in time

and lift up. In this uncreation of the universe
I break apart into my atoms and rearrange
into those I imagine I could be, falling

through myself into the ones who came before me.
My big-L Lonesomeness gets a little smaller,
I put my pain somewhere that makes sense: in the hands

of another who stands where I do, holding my body
inside of hers so I can step out of this skin-suit
for a moment, give myself the mercy she needed herself

so I can learn this life again
for the both of us, for all of us; so I can find
a way to muddle through it.

III. Fall, and I go cold

Summertime has come and gone. September takes hold
with a gripping melancholy, shrouds the evenings
with a chill that soaks through to the bone.
Cold August nights never feel like this.

The first dry leaf explodes in sound
under my heel and I am both huge and nothing at all,
all at once. The cicadas drone on less and less,
and I hear myself more and more.

And now the wind picks up, whistling as it passes
through all the hollow parts of me.
And I try to work on myself, but
my sadness is wide, wide, wide.

It leaks out faster than I can reel it back in;
I try to stand outside my body, in front of myself
and push it back into the heart-hole it flows out of
but it's too much, so all I manage to do is stain

my hands. It gets all over the floor and I slip on it and away
from my body—giant, looming, leaking, emptying out.
And the wind continues its vicious onslaught and I
stand there and take it, an empty vessel howling in the wind.

My fingers find my esophagus, pressing,
looking for an invisible button that I can press and release me
from this skin-suit, this bone-bag, this mess
of throbbing arteries and veins, hair nails and scar tissue.

But then the rain comes and fills every opening and
the sun turns grey and the sky does, too, and I can't see anything
much at all so finally I can close my eyes and see
one season more of life ahead of me.

IV. Winter, and some great-grandmother of mine wants the best for me

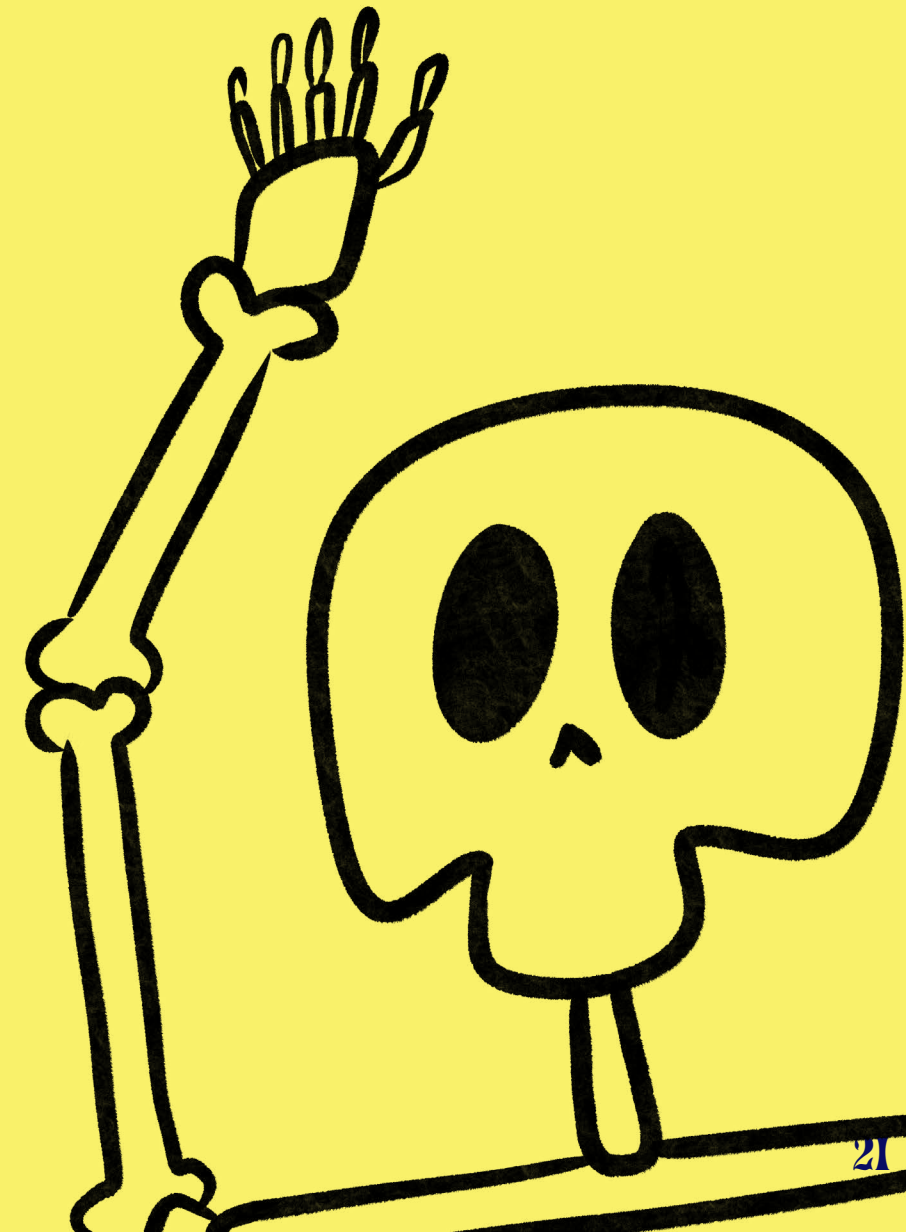
Some days, my skin feels like the unrest
of the Hadean world, those early days on Earth
when searing rocks flowed liquid.

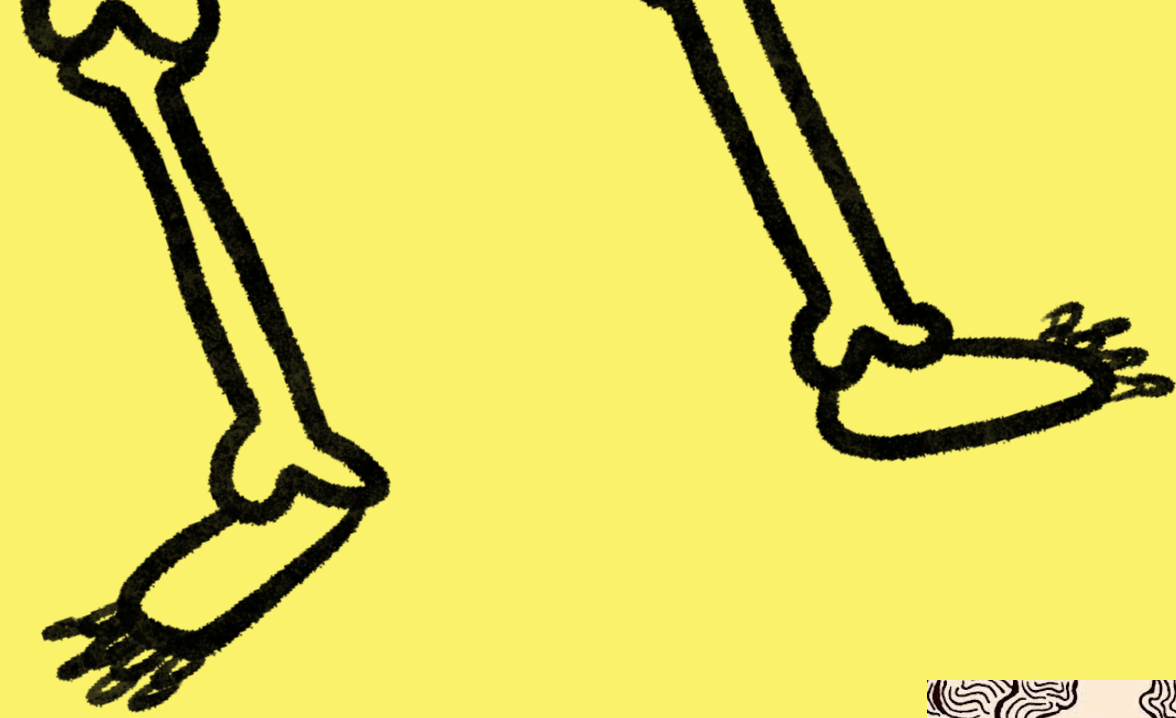
But then you come along, floating ghost-like
through the back of my mind, taking residence
with your heavy undone hair flooding

down your spine like the rains that cooled the Earth
back then. And if I close my eyes
hard enough, you make your way through time to me,

And where you touch me life begins all over
the way it did four billion years ago
in the depths of Earth's young oceans;

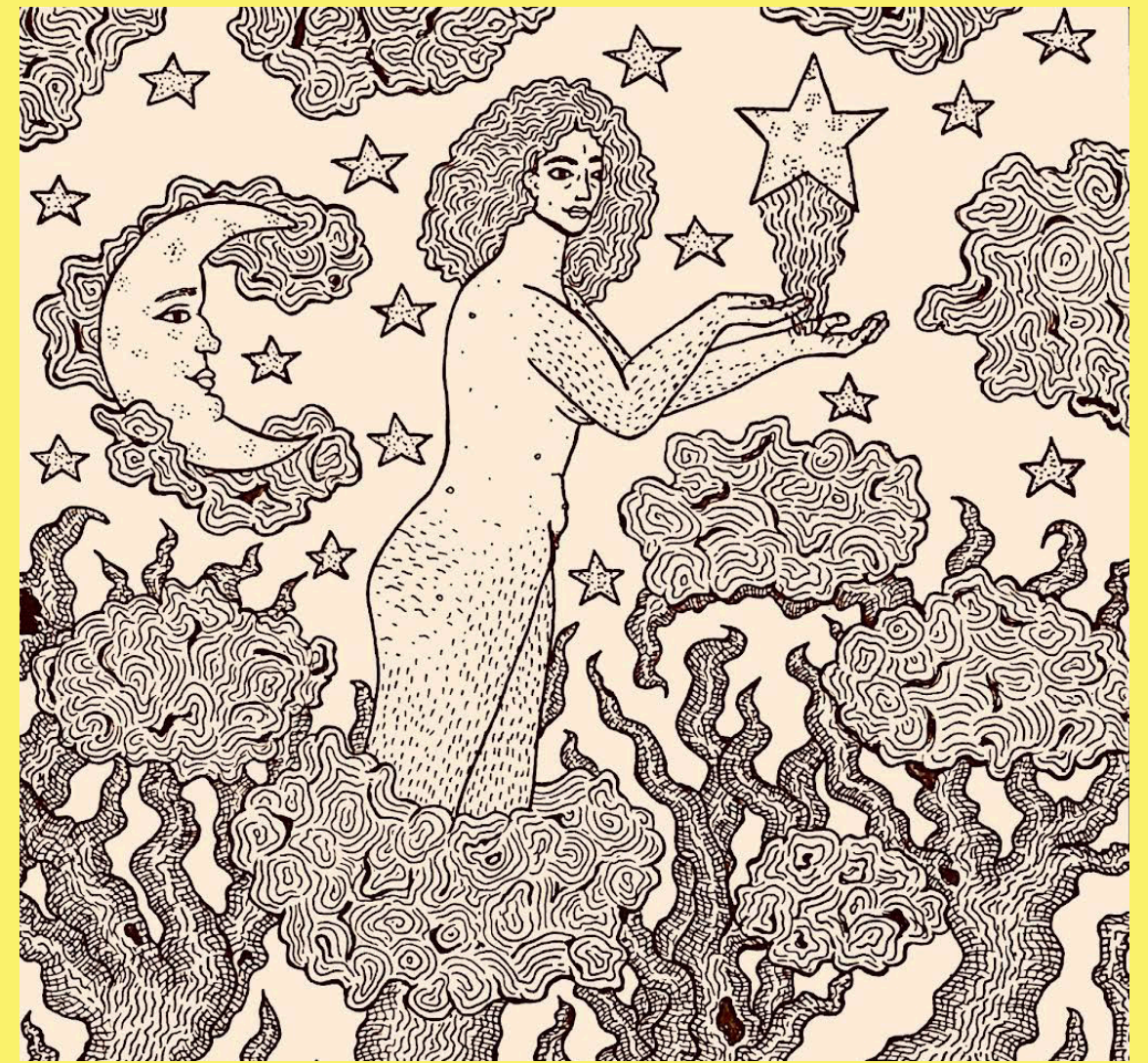
slow, and raw, and owing no one.





RECLINING NUDE/SPIRALING

Nina Osoria Ahmadi



STAR GODDESS

Ayshe-Mira Yashin

(I MADE) FRANKENSTEIN'S MONSTER

Amna Alvi

Gaze

lingering, hovering over that moment before a warm breeze shifts
cold

When dreams sketch out
every limb
I must gather

Itching to find reprieve, searching;
callous hands, the padded skin of your thumb
from

a butcher's son
He can no longer hold down sacrifice

for the slaughter

Poised fingers are his chisel

sculpting knife in hand
but do not worry

the only streaks of blood on the blade will be his

own;
curls cut off

before they were straightened
The woman was left sleek

roped hair like mine
shining, bald;
jealousy built in your eyes
envy green against the dulled shade of my own, the color from
and who was I to refuse

the little boy that offered
such a gift?
Luminescent and vivid
I still remember

how jade those eyes looked
before they popped out of his socket

do not worry
was the loudest

His silence

scream; thighs, legs and feet
and now the runner can not

run She was
left behind with the dust abandoned like me

Where agony can reach forever
like space and stars that

s t r e t c h

and never miss, but do not worry
you will walk again, your first step
like a wobbling baby's crawl;

chapped lips make your smile

carved out of flesh
The goddess whose mouth I stole
is now sewn

shut the saccharine melody of her voice is a distant tune
For she will not speak again;

The stitches that bind your skin
will be tighter

Do not worry
they won't unravel, duct taped

Every piece I am is now yours holding together
stolen, perhaps
but that does not make them any less mine or any less yours
slotted like the catacombs of a bee's

home
Honey-stained fingers brought close clinging
You & I

Under the last rays and the first
when flickering lights whisper out

leaving behind the dark absence of night
that even a blind man can
do not worry

see
Your body will be slick, rubbed with oil the taste of torn flesh
on your tongue

bathed in the unholy essence
of tears the crush of your throat

has your breath
rattled

Sweet
is the smell of your rotted body a corpse
I think I made you the monster
underneath my bed; sleep evades me

As I glance at the edges of a broken mirror
I see your face (rise again.)

CONVERSATIONS WITH THE SUBCONSCIOUS

Alisha Brown

“How do you feel?” she asks me, the corner of her eye opening and closing like a pink anemone.

“Indifferent,” I say, though what I really mean is different, as in, I know these hands are mine, but this morning by the beach I watched them peel an orange and realised I was not entirely sure what they were about to do next. My observer’s mind flushed with a peal of surprise. I let it ring through me, felt the vibrations leak down my neck, my limbs, and waited for them to reach those fingers, my fingers, but they just kept on peeling, oblivious. Hungry.

“Have you ever loved someone you’ve never met?” I ask.

“No,” she says.

“Me neither.”

She is darning her skirt again, mending this hole or that one, or adding a new face to the motley patchwork, perhaps. The cheeks are stretched at the stitching but otherwise well-rendered, lifelike, smiling and not. I recognise myself and turn away from the intimacy.

“Do you ever wonder if all your problems are nothing but a tiny, tiny pebble, and it’s sitting on your tongue, sleeping there, and you’ve convinced yourself that to swallow is to die?”

She laughs.

“Are you really so afraid of death?”

That catches me, and she knows it. We are both silent for a while, her with her needles and stoicism, me rolling the pebble across my teeth, weighing the shame of the question.

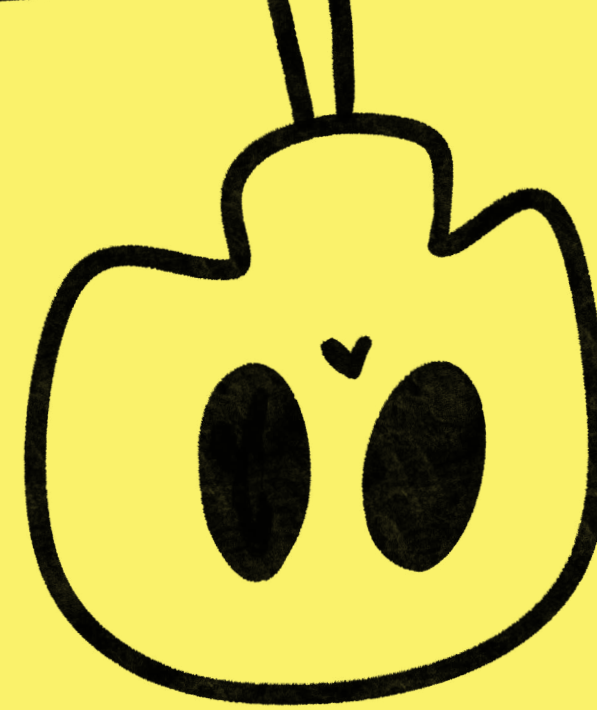
“What if...”

“What if?” she presses.

What if it were possible to be poetry without renouncing oneself, what if the wind blew upon my face and not right through me like a weary memory, what if I did not have a body, this body.

“What if I just rested awhile?”

Her cheek ripens, an envelope sealing. She nods. I lay my head on her lap, those broad thighs yielding sweet warmth, sweet familiarity. I feel myself ebb to her. My face against the fabric, pressed against another face, all my faces, peering. The needle moves in and out.



TREAD II

Richard Nattoo



UNTITLED I

Emma Phillips



UNTITLED II

Emma Phillips

FLOWER BOY / STONE BOY

Jay White

Honeysuckles grow
along the neighbor's fence
but they find their way
between the gaps to him. Songs sung
by suburb cicadas fill night air
and he tastes one last stem of nectar
before he's called in for bedtime.

In the mourning, he has
tattoos. Someone more talented tries
to smooth ink over older, harsher
surfaces. They are cave paintings
only he knows the meaning of.
When he is lost the language of him
will be lost. A dead civilization, once
alive in a body before bedtime.

Streams of water from seaside
blue eyes carve seams on stone
skin now. He remembers a dress
he wore, now old. Daisies on the hem.

Petals stiffen to pewter or pumice
and he habitually tears off
pieces that are substantial
and casts them out to sea to sink or
to find the soft skin underneath
dressed in daisies and free
from blood mixed with ink.

Either way, wanting. Overly
encumbered then overly eroded,
this is how he starves
himself. Standing in tepid, pale pools
alone, looking for what is left
and what is lost to water or wind
or hands. He tears at flesh

like a rose on a playground
and wonders why he did that.
He can't answer. Stone joints
move like honeysuckles looking
for a boy in a dress between
gaps in the fence long gone.



EMBODY

Nino Eliashvili

HEART IN MY THROAT

Namitha Rathinappillai

I belong to a family that does not experience pain.

Our family crest reads:

“If you do not name it,
it does not exist.”

So, when my mother tells me,
while at an appointment for my esophageal spasms,
that my grandmother had the same pain,
my spasms nearly stop in shock.

To this day, I hear my mother whisper,

*If you do not set a place for your chronic pain at the dinner table,
it will starve to death and cease to exist, you see?*

I nod while under the table I feed

my pain like it is our family dog

because I fail to tell her that I cannot starve something that is me without also starving myself.

Sabrina tells me her tumour that once made a home in her throat was from swallowing her words and I wonder what words are trying to climb out of mine when it spasms?

What words crawl their way up my belly,
tired of being stomachached?

The doctor tells me these spasms are often mistaken for heart pain,
And maybe my organs talk to each other of their aches.

I want to catch my spasms

like fireflies in a jar and hold them up to my ear,
ask them what they are trying to tell me.

Is my grandmother using my body as a vessel,
seeking a posthumous diagnosis?

I tell her that if this is so, that I shall listen.

I let these words sink all the way down to my belly
and I feel full.

I ask the spasms to tell her,

*“Our endeavour will be fruitful
and its juices will dribble down our chins as we eat with delight.”*

To tell her that,

*“We will no longer be lawyers in doctor’s offices,
arguing that our pain is real.”*

To tell her that,

*“Chronic pain is not my fault,
not your fault,
not a fault
at all.”*



CIELO Y CUERPO

Rebecca Reyes



INVISIBLE ILLNESS

Madyson Ysasaga



MY TEETH ARE UP HERE

Alexa DiFrancesco

I lost my front baby tooth at six years old, minutes before dinner was served at my grandmother's Easter party. My mother was coating lettuce in ranch dressing at the basement's back kitchen; she had already set me on the granite counter as to keep watch of her child and her creation simultaneously. I was swishing the loose tooth with my tongue, my mother was gently offering to pull it but-not-yet, or else my gum's blood would soak onto her hands and contaminate the salad the family's entertainment would be eating. I hadn't known that a tooth's removal would draw my blood; in considering the thought, I start to cry. My mother dropped the tongs she'd been toying with and reprimanded me at once, insisting that losing a tooth will make me mature and mature young ladies do not cry. I was silent as I fell maneuvering the salad bowl up the staircase. I was inaudible as I caught hint of the blood I was warned of when my jaw hit a railing. I made it priority not to notice the gap in my teeth as I returned to the basement to retrieve more dishes.

During dinnertime chatter, my grandmother squeezed my cheeks until they blushed before bringing me to the elders' table. Such is where my great-grandmother and her friends were placed; it was there that they monitored the helpings of food being claimed by guests, and here they reached behind their limp bodies to place their dentures on my grandmother's bookshelf. My grandmother held my hand and pulled out the chair at the head-of-the-table. She beamed as she recited an encounter she'd had when walking me to school, in which my kindergarten teacher had told her I was the best writer in the morning class.

The old ladies requested to witness my talents and I was given a copy of Peter Rabbit to read to them. As I took my last pause, they commended my mother and grandmother before leaving to the bathroom to freshen up.

When alone with me, my great-grandmother asked if I was excited for birthday next month. I nodded, mimicking the beam my grandmother had given her. She wondered if I've been taught to read a Bible passage yet, and I replied that I hadn't. She insisted that all mature six-year-old ladies learn to read Bible passages.

As my mother iced the dessert cake, I wet my pants searching for the tooth I'd lost.

The first male to instruct me to open my mouth wider was my father. It was a weekday night, and he had returned from work to find me taking care of digital dogs on a light orange game console. He could not see that its screen was stained with my saliva; I'd been sucking my thumb hours beforehand because I knew my mother had relayed to him the results of my dentist appointment. I smiled and coated my screen with hand-sweat as I gazed into the glare of his flashlight. As I waited, I schemed about convincing him that I preferred how my now-adult incisor protruded space I will need for other teeth, how it had made itself such a wide home in my mouth.

Following his observation, my father explained that I was not a lost cause; it was simply unfortunate that this intruder had chosen to reside in a space of otherwise straight teeth. He teasingly tapped the outlier with a corner of his tool and concluded that I was not to fall up any more stairs, or my other teeth would grow in as crooked as this one had.

I counted his steps until I knew that he had disappeared upstairs. I half-listened to him discuss with my mother my recent transition from wearing children's garments to preteen garments; the other half of my energy spent tiptoeing to the kitchen for baby-wipes to clean my dogs.

I completed my science homework before the allocated time ran out, whispering giddily to my seat-partner as we waited for the rest of the class to finish. The exercise had been discussing water, and we didn't quite understand why temperatures were cooler by the lake in the summertime but warmer in the wintertime. We knew we'd written enough to bullshit an adequate-enough response for when our teacher would call on us, so we carved mini lakes in our desks with craft scissors to celebrate.

Our desks were pushed beside the class' communal paper towel roll, a placement we enjoyed because we'd attract large amounts of daily visitors. Whenever a worthy boy would visit, we'd place our glasses inside our desks and pinch the sides of our blouses so our waists would appear skinnier. Weeks before, my had grandmother found the stash of brightly-coloured crop-tops and jeans I'd hidden in her laundry basket; as I dressed each morning, I'd slide these under the clothes she'd dress me in, removing the top layers in the school washroom. In our subsequent fight, it was ruled that I could buy new school-clothes and training bras. I'd immediately kept a roll of paper towel and a Tide-To-Go in the slot of my desk to treat stains on these garments without anyone knowing.

Concealed cleaning was a notion not-yet-discovered by many of the class' naïve girls, including the trembling one who'd now approached our paper towel roll. In our conversations, my grandmother had referred to girls such as her as 'not that bright'; a reasoning I'd remind myself of at any moment my confidence was threatened by their big chests and delicate wrists. But this girl, the one who'd obliviously and forcefully ripped three pieces of paper towel to store orange peels in, could not be, in good faith, passed off as unintelligent.

She was the brightest student of the twenty-eight in my class, and the brightest student in the four graduating classes of my elementary school. Such was a certainty that could not be debated, despite the extent of my or my seatmate's envy. She was expected to sweep all the major awards at our convocation ceremony; it was apparent from the way in which our teacher had lifted his no-eating-in-the-class rule so that still-writing students could listen to her mindless chomping as ambiance noise. My seatmate and I, in-denial of this predetermined outcome, had made it habit to discuss homework answers with her, jotting her ideas in the corners of our papers and raising our hands to respond before she got the chance.

The girl continued to chew on orange segments as she faced me, explaining in detail how water heats and cools at a slower rate than land masses. She sat on the corner of my desk, her thick leg threatening to tip the Tide-To-Go that was jutting out of its inside. She wiped her mouth on the paper towel she'd taken before setting it on top of my worksheet. We both accepted this as a calculated plan to stop me from notetaking. When her voice enunciated the vowels of her response, she squirted orange juice onto my blouse.

I refused to acknowledge the bits of mush that cascaded onto her tongue as she spoke. I refused to acknowledge the elbow-jab of my seatmate, probing me to ask her to return to her seat before our class' working period finished. I refused to acknowledge the cold-stare that was directed towards me as the girl continued sitting on my desk while our teacher evaluated our homework responses.

I'd waited until the girl had shifted her thick legs to obstruct any glimpse of my crooked front incisor. It was then that I'd beamed, sharing that water heats and cools at a slower rate than land masses.

I was practicing for my driver's examination in a grocery-store parking lot when my mother told me that she and my father had booked an orthodontist consultation on my behalf. I slammed my foot onto the car's break, narrowly avoiding collision with a produce supply truck.

"Could've used my boobs as airbags," I joked to my mother as we jolted forward.

"Could've knocked that tooth back into place," she snapped back.

In my sophomore year of high school, I was invited to perform a monologue at an arts showcase. The event – traditionally reserved as an excuse for teachers to let their students skip a period of learning to watch dancers parade extravagantly – was managed for the first time by drama teachers. These teachers had managed to wean their influence to invite four lower-year students to perform at intermission. The competition was selected from a monologue project given to us in class. I'd never read a monologue before, but I'd spent months memorizing each word on the paper assigned to me. I screamed until my throat ached, then meekly asked my teacher for his feedback. I memorized how his comments covered my page, marking it with line breaks and important punctuation. When I was invited to perform, I was able to recite the piece in less than a minute when prompted.

At the tech rehearsal of the event, headgear was glued to the top of my jaw. Its metal slab coated the roof of my mouth, with the exception of a small slot for aggressively-chewed food and liquids to fall into. At its centre was a small lock, one for which my father routinely made me lie on a bed so he could jam a key into. Such had become our nightly routine. I had not yet spoken with this new accessory; it was only given to me the day before, the dental hygienist warning that, because my voice would be sore from glue, I should preserve it.

A senior student presented me with another gift; a handheld microphone, the commercial-type which most would buy for karaoke parties (before my actual performance, said senior would hook the microphone's wire to the back of my bra, their hands lingering down my back after the task was accomplished). I walked with determination to the right corner of the stage, glaring into the catwalk's spotlight as if it were a challenge. I opened my mouth and asserted each syllable as if I was eating an orange, monitoring my still feet as I remained planted in the spot I chose. When I finished, I nodded, the spotlight dimming on my cue. I watched as shadows swayed against the back wall of the auditorium, blurring into a cloud of darkness.

A friend told me the shadows were laughing when I hit the outside pavement, shielding my eyes from the sun just as I did the spotlight. A trained dancer, I'd seen her drift from her friends to stand before me, swaying her left heel back and forth as if participating in a warm up drill. Her small frame was coated in a tight black uniform; she appeared to me as a punishment, delivering bad news with the same fragility as her body. She said the words sympathetically, although the corners of her mouth were curled with amusement as her head turned to her friends. I felt their returning smiles on my back and she informed me that headgear had left me with a lisp.

I endured two blocks before my throat clenched in front of my mother. She no longer wasted breath convincing me that crying is a weakness; instead, she ushered me to my bedroom and gave me the Catholic Youth Bible, instructing me to read her a passage. I spent three days reading her passages before I noticed the lisp had vanished.

"You just love your teeth, don't you?" my best friend snared. I was pressed against an orange-stained wall in his bedroom; he was sturdy in front of me, his erected penis entered and left my lips in quick motions. I jerked my head back in reaction as he thrust, the tip of his penis triggered my gag reflex as it entered the roof of my mouth. I kept my eyes focused on the image of a faceless, naked model he had pinned to his walls.

It had been a year since I had worn any metal as accessory. I was no longer accustomed to my jaw being stretched with gel pads for the duration of orthodontist appointments; years without a male attention had left my muscles vulnerable to exercising. As I mourned for my bones, I remembered previously bragging to the man in front of me that braces had prepared me well for giving head as he'd pleaded to take my virginity. The man interpreted my grunting as a sign to continue thrusting. I decided it would be foolish to explain otherwise.

His penis jabbed me as aggressively as the rest of his body moved. His greasy, wet hair was entangled onto the sticky side of the duct tape he'd attached to my mouth. On an occasion he'd thrust further than I could bare, I'd attempted to remove it, having momentarily forgotten that he had restricted my hands and legs.

He called himself daddy on my behalf. Immediately after, as if remembering his role, he called me his slut. As if remembering my voice, he'd asked if I'd wanted to use the ball and gag that he kept on his bookshelf for no particular person. I winced. His bedroom window was open;

we acted in daylight and his neighbours were observers outside. He released a moan when I grunted again, as if coaxing the muscles of my jaw. I wondered if he'd thought of me as sexy when I nothing more than a best friend; when I'd shown suffering to him by crying in his arms.

I'd visited his house while menstruating; he'd insisted that pleasing him would somehow also pleasure me. This idea was quickly retracted as I once again choked. Before he freed my skin, he'd shoved me to the floor, dangling his penis in my face. I saw a trail of bite marks on it; an apology had left my lips as he'd ripped the tape off of them, peeling the fragments of my lip in the process.

He sucked my tongue with his teeth, clenching it sharply it as he kissed me goodbye. The impact let me know he'd miscalculated his landing; his front tooth had collided with mine, chipping my front incisor. I spat out its missing chunk as he held me in front of his mirror, making him watch as it fell on the duct tape below

The dental hygienist threw the crumpled piece of paper onto my purse. "You can't keep breaking your retainer. We covered the cost the last two visits. You're growing up; you need to be more responsible."

The over-working fan buzzed sharply above us, blowing quick, unreliable puffs of cool air onto my midriff. Rebelliously, I dipped one hand into my chair's accompanying mini-sink, and the other onto the switch to turn its water on. I lifted the hem of my skirt and hastily watched the drops that stuck to my fingertips melt onto my thighs.

The middle-aged woman's eyes widened. She had become familiarized with myself and my family since my first consultation, as had the entirety of my orthodontist's staff. During the course of my appointments, she'd seen my legs grow taller and I'd witnessed her eyebrows grey. I assured her that I was growing up, citing my upcoming eighteenth birthday as proof. The hygienist informed me of her literacy and reminded me of her access to my patient file. She swatted at my arm, still lingering on the edge of my skirt, and told me she'd return with the debit machine.

The orthodontist visited my cubicle then, greeting me with the uniform warm smile he'd welcomed other patients with. I remembered reading his reviews online; five orange stars accompanying his name on his website.

"Which grade are you in next year?" he asked as he scribbled in my file. My gaze darted to the portrait of his daughters, both my age, that hung above the office door. The debit machine, in front of me, lay coated in the sweat of the dental hygienist's palm.

"University." I corrected him, lifting the hem of my skirt with my fingertips. "I turn eighteen next month."

I watched my lover's golden curls flap out the open car window and into the dewy breeze; his locks blended into sunset looming behind us. The boy's knee clutched the parking break protectively; his left hand petted my own hair in the habit it had become. In his dominant palm sat his iPhone; on it, we watched the newly-discovered home videos his family had sent him.

"This was last Easter," he told me as I watched his mother tiptoe up a staircase with a basket of brightly-painted eggs. She stood gracefully, blonde and tall, shaped like the faceless model I'd become familiarized with seeing in various households. Giggling, the woman dropped two eggs into a liquor cabinet, and I admired the thinness of her waist despite the bottles behind her standing three-quarters empty.

Her son immediately misinterpreted my disgust. He hovered a finger above the screen, trailing the movement of a younger woman that boasted red tattoo ink over perky cleavage. "It's all my mom and my sister's," he stammered, tapping over her design. "I don't drink. I know how much that means to you."

I loosened the collar of my blouse on the first attempt, letting out a long breath as I felt blood rush to my neck. I used this newfound confidence to remind my partner that his alcohol consumption was irrelevant to my personal choices.

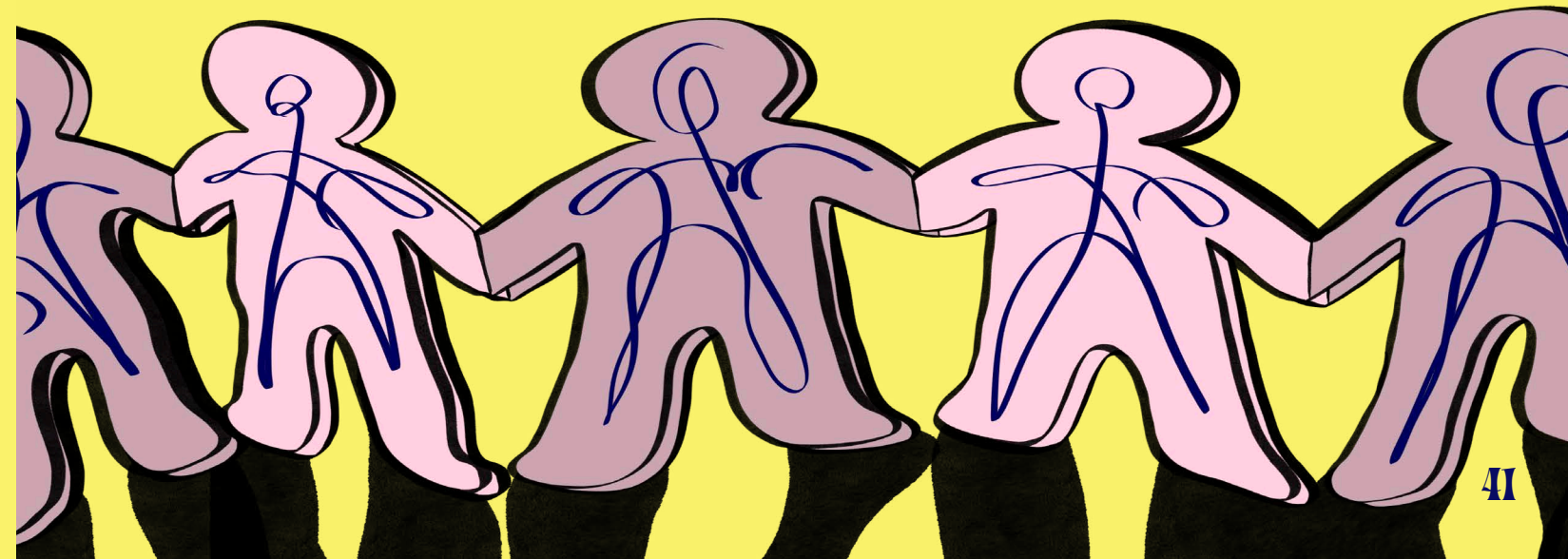
"Right," he agreed in a whisper. We paused for a moment and I pretended not to notice his silent self-chastising. When we finished, his attention fell back to his sister, whose fist knocked against a bedroom door. The knob rattled furiously until a young girl bolted out.

"Callie," he clarified. "My niece. She's just started kindergarten and she's crazy mature. She loves to read."

In the next room, Callie somersaulted onto sofa cushions, her hair entangled with her facial features as she sat up. She bounced on top of a pillow and squealed; her mother squeezed her cheeks when she landed.

"Our kids could look like that, you know," the boy teased, and I felt my throat beginning to clench. "Her dad has hair as dark as yours. That's what happens when it mixes with blonde sometimes; all that orange."

He broke into laughter, encouraging me to chuckle. Instead, I ran my tongue along the flat surface of my smile, granting myself honesty for the first time. "Your family should look into that gap between her teeth. She'll need to fix that as she gets older."





BIOGRAPHIES & ARTIST STATEMENTS

Noah Farberman

Noah “Noah Farberman” Farberman (he/him) is a Toronto writer and comedian. Noah has been published in Storm Cellar, Rabid Oak, Raven Review, Perhappened, ISSUE 3 and ISSUE 7 of long con, Pioneertown, and elsewhere. His work has been anthologized by Applebeard Edition and he is a finalist for the 2021 Arts and Letters Unclassifiable Contest. Currently, Noah studies Creative Writing at the University of Toronto Scarborough Campus.

“Betty White” is, to me, as famous a name as Caesar. She is a part of the zeitgeist, has been, and will be. People like John Candy and Chris Farley are part of my zeitgeist of SNL, Canadian sketch, and eighties-nineties comedy fame. They are well known enough that a nickname or last name would identify them. And then there’s Judy Garland, who is probably on that Betty White level, but in memory. Fame infinite. This is a difficult subject, all of the celebrities I name died either from self-harm or overdose. All, younger than they should of been. What I want this poem to express is that death is not the end. But for celebrity culture, being forgotten is.

Jenna Geen

Jenna Geen (she/they) is an interdisciplinary performer and writer, with a passion for abstract storytelling. She is an emerging playwright, with work that boldly challenges traditional forms, and poses impossible questions. Most recently, Jenna was a member of the Tarragon Extended Young Playwrights Unit (2021). Jenna is also a musician, classically trained vocalist, and an emerging sound designer, selected to participate in the 2022 Paprika Festival’s sound design lab. The self-produced music video for her first single, nobody hears you, is available to stream on Youtube.

Jenna’s poetry explores the relationship between life and death; the spaces in between what we know and what we don’t. Her work as a poet is immersive, often combining visual and literary components. This piece, “dirt,” was inspired by their walk past a graveyard one evening, and the feelings that were evoked in that sacred (and perhaps haunting) place.

Pawel Pacholec

Born 1986 in Poland. In his work he often refers to classic, traditional techniques and ways of expression. He creates his works in a balanced and thoughtful way based on visible structures and forms. For an inspiration he looks in such trends as constructivism or industrialism and also those from the other side like dadaism or expressionism. While creating, he tries to relate to geometry and mathematical proportions which he sometimes breaks with something completely oppositional like an irregular shape or expressive gesture. He often use photography into graphic activities (e.g. through collage or photo graphisation). I prefer prose over poetry.

Lauren Dana Smith

Raised in the Northeastern United States, Lauren Dana Smith is a painter and art psychotherapist who lives on the mesa in Taos, New Mexico. She creates textural and sculptural paintings that explore the interior spaces and exterior boundaries of physical form, the natural world and human consciousness. Her digital work expresses the tension and musculature of body and soul; the interior spaces we occupy, and those which inhabit us. A visual artist and mental health care worker shaped by many years of clinical experience in hospitals, her recent series brings arts-based perspectives into the dialogue around living, dying, healing and wellness in this country. She is interested in honoring the depth, contour, palette and narrative of the American Southwest and its parallels to personal histories, myths and memories.

Based in Taos, New Mexico, Lauren Dana Smith explores the climate of internal place, through the layering of unexpected yet familiar corporeal forms, the emotional saturation of color and the stillness of memory. Smith’s feminist approach tests the personal body boundaries we choose and those we don’t. Interested in honoring the depth and narrative of the American Southwest and its parallels to personal and ancestral memory through a contemporary lens, Smith’s work analyzes color, texture, climate and existential presence in a departure from the familiar iconography of traditional Southwestern art. Smith’s process-oriented approach, whether through using mixed media (plaster, wood, canvas) or in the digital realm, considers the psychology and politics of land and body. A viewer may feel that they are simultaneously hovering above the work and suspended inside of it. At play is tension between our inner landscapes and outer environments: a constant rupture and repair. Each work considers the bodily experience of the land and the mirror it provides to us in times of calm and times of chaos.



Jingshu Helen Yao

Jingshu Helen Yao is a creative writer based in Toronto. She studied creative writing at the University of Toronto and her international study experience inspired her to explore multicultural themes in her writings. Her short story “The River” is published in Tint Journal, and “Have You Forgiven Me” on The Roadrunner Review.

Melon Face explores the idea of breaking free from the male expectations for female responsibilities and body parts. The character remained nameless throughout the story but every paragraph starts with her pronoun, hinting on the missing identity and the need to break free.

Erika Rowe

During this painting I thought a lot about the process of learning to love and take care of our flesh bodies, self acceptance and becoming comfortable in it— realizing it’s a beautiful vessel for our infinite being.

Erika Rowe is a 22 year old female artist based in Ontario and Vancouver. She’s a graduate of VCAD (visual college of art & design) where she obtained her diploma in Graphic Design. Her passion for art really ignited when she gave herself permission to be more free and intuitive in her paintings. As she leaned more towards a ‘trust the process’ approach it’s proven to be very therapeutic and is often a tool for self-discovery; allowing a visual conversation between the canvas and her subconscious. Fascinated with the symbolism, images, colours and textures that appear, this often helps her make sense of emotions and the way in which she views the world. She believes not fearing mistakes and creating intuitively helps to form a balance for when she plans a more detailed and technical painting. Her inspiration comes from the surrealism and meaningful symbolism of dreams, the body, duality, spirituality, emotions, expressionism and psychology. When she’s not painting or drawing she’s usually crocheting, walking or reading at a local coffee shop in Vancouver.

Alisha Brown

Alisha Brown is an emerging queer, disabled writer living on unceded Yuin country. She has a poem forthcoming in the South Coast Writers’ Centre anthology Legacies and her words appear in Baby Teeth Journal, Art Collector Magazine, Honeyfire Literary Magazine, ARNA, and Hermes. Her poem ‘Devorarme’, which translates to ‘devour me’, indulges in the lyricism of lust through the lens of body as landscape, body as season, body as pleasure.

Maya Kompella

Maya Kompella (she/her) is an undergraduate student at Northwestern University studying Biomedical Engineering and Creative Writing. She serves on the poetry staff of Helicon, an undergrad-run Literary & Arts Magazine. This poem would be her own first publication.

About the poem: This work of poetry is a look at the way it feels to inhabit a body that one feels intense shame and awareness of as the seasons change, and placing this physical discomfort in the hands of ancestors as a way to try examining the otherness of the body through a lens of sameness rather than difference.

Nina Osoria Ahmadi

Nina Osoria Ahmadi is an interdisciplinary artist who explores themes of the body, gender, and memory in her work. She works in photography as well as painting, drawing, printmaking, and performance. Nina grew up in Miami, Florida, and currently resides and studies in New York City.

In this piece, Ahmadi explores similar themes to her other work: the rhythmic nature of the body and thoughts of self as well as the way these thoughts often spiral into chaos.

Ayshe-Mira Yashin

Ayshe-Mira Yashin (she/her) is an 18-year-old illustration artist from Istanbul, Turkey, and Nicosia, Cyprus. She is based in London, England, and is an art foundation student at UAL (Camberwell). She is of Jewish and Muslim heritage, and is a practicing witch. Themes of the occult and spirituality are often incorporated into her art, one of her most recent projects being the Sapphic Enchantress Tarot Deck, a tarot deck representing queer and femme bodies, exploring divine femininity. You can find the tarot deck, as well as her other zines, handmade notebooks and art prints, on her independently managed shop, or on Etsy (see links below). She is currently working on an illustrated poetry zine, to be published by Zines and Things (Portland, OR) in 2022. Her art has been exhibited at The Holy Art Gallery (Hackney, London) and at M. A. D. S. (Milan, Italy). She was awarded the Power of Creativity award (by Contemporary Art Creator Magazine) in 2021.

Stars exist as a point of focus in almost every pagan practice, symbolising hope, faith, inevitability, and spirituality. The Star Goddess emerges from the clouds, inhabiting the night sky, in expression of her mystical, spiritually enlightened form. A star emerges from her hands, symbolising her power to manifest hope in dark times, and her shining a light path through the night. The moon, situated beside the Star Goddess, is ever-changing, unpredictable and cyclical, and so it represents emotions and the subconscious mind. It also symbolises wisdom, spirituality, and divine femininity.

Amna Alvi

Amna Alvi (she/her) is a first year student at the University of Toronto, studying for a bachelor’s in business administration. She has a vested interest in reading, poetry, and all things literature. She has published two of her works in a deardearestca Homecoming expo, as well as a piece on INKspire. This year, she is the Editor-in-chief of the magazine The Message, which will be out near the start of 2022. The work “(I Made) Frankenstein’s Monster” was inspired by the idea that people are made of different parts of the experiences they’ve had and shared with other. The poem goes into the horror and fantasy of collecting body parts of people the protagonist relates to so she can create the monster.

Richard Nattoo

Jamaican visual artist and writer Richard Nattoo enjoys creating surreal, dreamlike images that explore different human emotions. His works have been displayed at various premier exhibitions at the National Gallery of Jamaica since 2012. Richard is a recipient of the 2020 Prime Ministers Youth Awards in the Category of Arts and Culture.

There's this interesting connection between the black body and water. Looking at where we are now and where we're headed we can say water has attested to our resilience as a people.

Water is life and death. Water keeps us alive but has the ability to drown. This piece speaks to that symbol of water presenting a question. When you get thrown into the waters of life, struck down by waves of depression, self doubt or any instability. We're presented with a question - to sink or to swim?

Emma Phillips

London based artist from Hertfordshire with a BA in Fine Art Painting from UAL, researching alternative landscapes, liminal space and edgelands through drawing, painting and writing.

With a focus on drawing and an interest in liminal space, my work often depicts subtle moments of everyday surrealism, where bleakness meets romanticism, or the industrial meets the ancient. These particular works, inspired by found objects, also lie somewhere between drawing and sculpture, eroticism, and horror, playing on our innate, visceral anxieties around restraint, suffocation and fragility of the body, as felt most keenly over the last two years.

Jay White

Jay White (he/him) is a queer poet that lives, works, and writes in Washington, DC. Jay's poetry has appeared in Beyond Words Magazine's Beyond Queer Words and Day Eight's art magazine Bourgeon. Jay earned his BA in Communications from the University of Maryland and loves low-budget ghost tours, iced coffee, and the month of December. His poem "Flower Boy / Stone Boy" reflects on the harsh contrast between a young boy's soft suburban upbringing in a backyard perfumed by honeysuckles and the hardening and tattooed statue he finds himself becoming in adulthood.

Nino Eliashvili

My name is Nino Eliashvili, I'm from the country Georgia. I'm a drawing artist and an illustrator. My workspace is my studio in my hometown Tbilisi. My work is inspired by capturing spiritual states, colors, sexual identities, suppressed emotions and beauty. My goal is to inspire people to discover beauty in unusual things. I work with acrylic, watercolor and oil, but the process of working with the watercolor I find the most interesting as its softness allows me to project emotions instantaneously. I'm currently working on a series of watercolor paintings.

The artwork depicts the embodiment of the qualities such as confidence, self-esteem, empowerment and freedom by one posture alone

Namitha Rathinappillai

This piece, "Heart in my Throat" is a poem about generational chronic pain and how the feelings of loneliness and isolation that one can feel through the experience of chronic pain can be mitigated by the deep ancestral pull of family members who have walked the same path as you. This poem explores the relationship between a maternal grandmother and the author and their shared experience of navigating the medical system as women of colour whose pain is not seen.

Rebecca Reyes

Rebecca Reyes was born in Mexico City 1996, with a Bachelor degree in Visual Art from Universidad de Monterrey UDEM.

Rebecca is a visual artist and explores techniques like engraving, painting and cyanotype. She is interested in topics like Multispecies Family, companionship and Symbiosis. Dogs and women are always the protagonist of her pictorial imagination to speak about symbiotic relationships, companionships and affective dimensions between species. She finds most of her inspiration in texts from Donna Haraway, Clarissa Pinkola Estés, Simone de Beauvoir. As well as artists like Elina Brotherus, Paula Rego, Ana Mendieta.

Cielo y cuerpo, this woodcut printed on paper represents an emotional attachment to dog and companion. The word companion originated from the Latin word companies which means one who breaks bread with another. The memory of this companionship is carried in the stomach and gives way to the awareness of this spiritual connection with another species.

Madyson Ysasaga

This work is a response to the artist's questions about the repercussions of living with an invisible illness. In particular how living in an ailing body influences her relationships and public behavior. She is interested in challenging societal norms and expectations of how illness and disabilities manifest themselves in public and private life. Physical ailments are often a matter of social taboo; something to be concealed and hid. The act of concealment becomes a barrier to connection and a catalyst for increased confusion. It is not the diagnosis itself that is lethal, but the violent social suppression of it. Ysasaga's works have previously been published in Inscape Magazine and the 35 x 35 USA Art Project, published by Dimitris and Sandy Copelouzos. She lives and works out of Houston, Texas.

All of the following images are of the work "Invisible Illness" A range of angles and photographic range are included in this email for your consideration. Should my work be curated into the magazine, select, size, and arrange the provided images as desired.

Alexa DiFrancesco

Alexa (she/her) is a non-fiction writer who's a creative writing student at UofT. Alexa is also the Arts & Culture Editor of The Varsity, and a member of the English Honour Society, Sigma Tau Delta.

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Thank you to Abigail Wiley.

From Block Party's earliest days of operation, Abigail Wiley has supported us with her immense talent for graphic design and media conceptualization. Block Party's branding has all been possible because of her. Abigail, we cannot express enough how grateful we are, and continue to be, for your contributions to Block Party. But we will try, thank you a million.

Thank you to our peers in the writing and arts community.

To our peers, professors, mentors, and teachers from AP English in high school to Fiction II in university, we are endlessly grateful that we can continue to share our love for creative expression with you. Without your ongoing encouragement, Block Party Magazine would have never been possible. Thank you being the first to read our work, and the first to support us on projects like this.

Thank you to our friends and family.

The unwavering support you have offered since we first conceptualized Block Party Magazine has been overwhelming and we couldn't be more appreciative. This magazine could never have come to fruition without you standing behind us.

Thank you to Maddie Frechette.

Everything we do is motivated by you. Thank you for your endless love and support, we hope to return the same tenfold. If this first issue is to be dedicated to anyone, it's you.

A FEW WORDS FROM ISLA & JOSEPH

Hello friends!

Once again, thank you. Block Party began as a summertime project between Joseph and I, as well as Abigail Wiley and everyone who would listen. It's insane to see that the magazine is finally alive.

I don't know if I knew what it was like to have a body until I saw all the work we received. I hope this does the same for you all.

Cheers to BODY and as many more issues as you will gift us with - Joseph and I are only the robots behind the scenes, you all are the flesh and blood that gives the magazine life.

With endless gratitude,
Isla

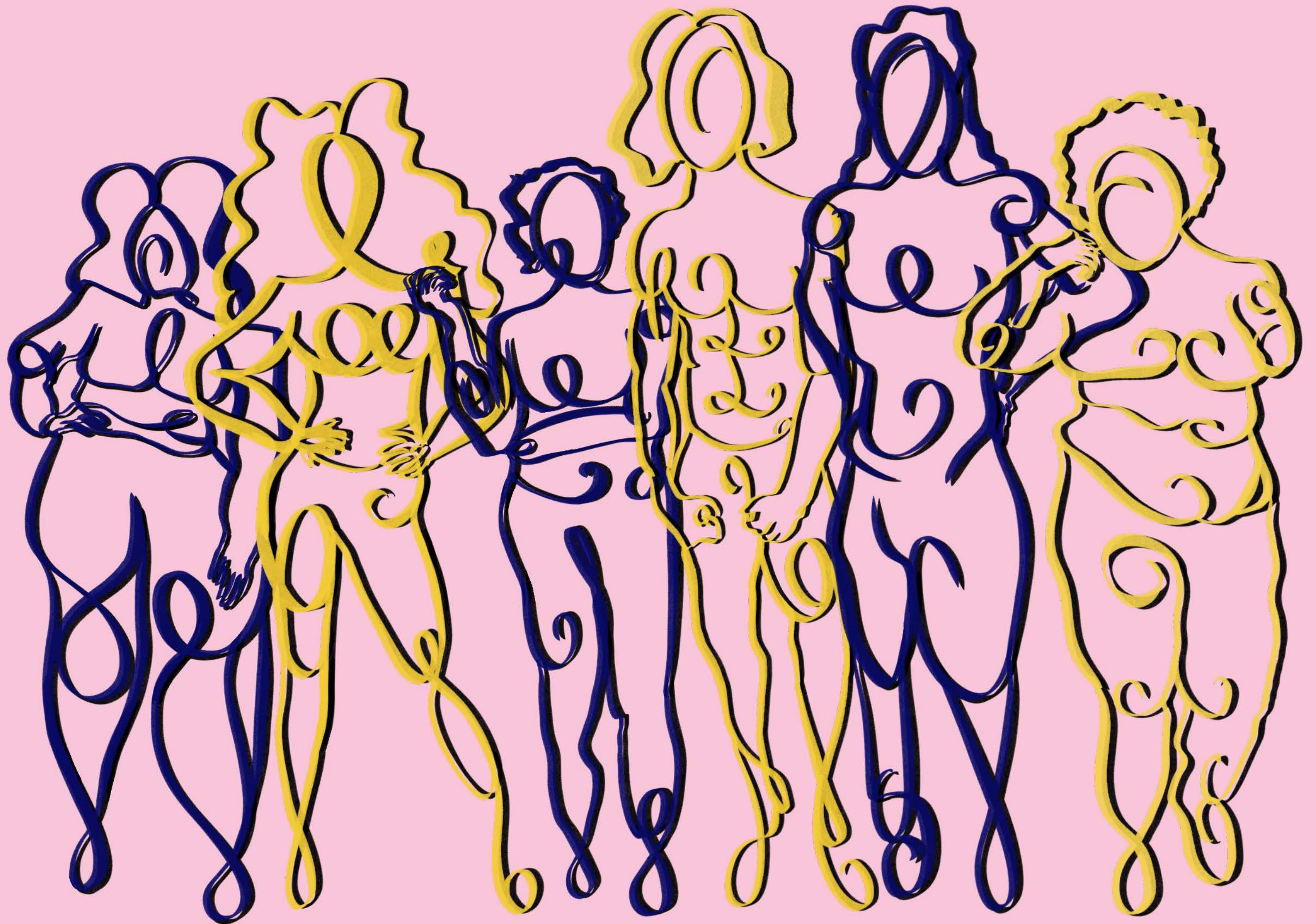
Hey,

When Isla & I first had the idea to create a magazine, we never imagined it would be as successful as it's been. I had hoped for at least 10 submissions and we ended up receiving over 100, which obviously blew my mind.

This issue features many different kinds of artists from all over the world, which perfectly encapsulates what we strive to achieve with Block Party Magazine - a widespread celebration of art.

Thank you to anyone who has ever interacted with Block Party Magazine in any way; I'm so excited to finally share with you all this amazing work!

- Joseph 🧐



BLOCK PARTY

Edited by: Joseph Donato & Isla McLaughlin Logo designed by Abigail Wiley.

All artists retain the rights to their work.

Block Party is based around Tsi Tkarón:to (Toronto, Ontario) on the traditional lands of the Huron-Wendat, the Haudenosaunee, and the Mississaugas of Scugog Island.

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