"What I am fighting is words. I am fighting to get through. There is an absence to be filled, the opening between you and me. It is the fault at the heart of every family and community—nobody's fault, really, just the fact that we can't make communities out of materials, riches, or accumulated wisdom, but only out of needs."

--Lionel Basney
The Space for Grief
Dialogue is a journal of commentary which seeks to describe and stimulate the intellectual and artistic ferment at Calvin through articles, interviews, fiction, poetry, book reviews, visual art, and satire. As such, Dialogue supports artists in the college community, working in all media, encouraging them to express their insights regarding how to closely reflect the image of God to the World.

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Dialogue

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Editorial: A Bucket of Marbles

I once heard the story of a vase that was broken to free a child's hand, which was wedged in the mouth of the vase, obstinately fisting a marble. I've heard the story of a woman who held so dearly to her home that she sacrificed herself, as a pillar of salt, to gather its skyline one last time. I have also heard the story of a man who was so focused on what he thought was his purpose that he found himself alone, and sixty-three, the next time he stopped to think about it.

An artist friend of mine talked with me once about how his work allows him to let go of that which is out of his control. He described his vocation as "the circling of truth," - a truth he doesn't need to fully understand. He chooses instead to circle the absolute nugget of things, and to ask questions that will swivel him to another angle, to another point of view. He finds contentment in the absence of answers. He's learning to let go.

During his stay, Wendell Berry spoke about this issue more academically, saying that art is the transmission of intricate human experiences "evoking both order and disorder." He stressed that any attempt to solve the disorder is futile. "Explanation is reductive it is a bucket, not a well." He chooses to resign from an explanation of art, grace, academics and so on. In short, he chooses to let go.

A gallery opening I attended in the fall that showcased 40,000 tiddly winks reinforced this idea. The tiddly winks were strewn about the floor in the pattern of a flower while the opposite wall was hung with cibachrome photographs of carved wooden flowers. In order to reach the photographs on the wall, the observer would have had to shuffle through the spread of tiddly winks, disturbing their arrangement in the process. Ultimately, the observer could not get any closer to the piece without destroying it in the process. The observer was forced to let go.

Christianity nourishes this idea: we must let go of whatever clogs the God shaped hole in His absence. There is a proverb that goes something like this: "A spiritual life is a life of subtraction," I cannot trace its origins, but the message is inarguable. I don't think I'm alone when I collect noble personality traits to adopt as my own in order to get better, to be a little closer to either God or a Godly self-concept. We are bent on perfecting ourselves. But spiritual success is found in the release of this collection.

I see this as a practice in humility, a continual self-expulsion at God's feet. It is a continual practice. It is not something that can be grasped, that would contradict the entire point. You cannot achieve humility any more than you can get a handle on letting go. The struggle to "let go", must be fought with loose limbs, closed eyes and open hands. We are of better use that way.

--Peter Stroobosscher
incense clings to the threads of our clothes, the stitches of our flesh, a saturated weaving of faith and fear, in a quiet chapel, unadorned

voices chant like a clockwork of mysticism: "our father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done . . ."

harmony rising, tears falling, bodies bowing, our unruly scrawl voices a quiet prayer for peace, for love, for God

rejoining the light, the bodies, the faces, the knowing eyes that ache to remind us of the long, winding road for the searching souls

driving far from the quiet chapel, unadorned peace subsides and chaos burns my plea "may the divine help be with us always."

on slabs of concrete sits the mother of pearls, dying bluebells construct a shrine at her feet, a blond krishna goddess with a book of fiction,
she flips pages and glances at her child who stands rooted in the thick, riverbank mud as deep and content as the oak towering above,
small awkward fingers clutch circular stones that break the still, country air as they skip above the water, slipping gently under the current,
to be those small weathered stones resting in the silence of the patient river, fortunate victims of ambiotic cleansing

nestled in their seats to watch mother and child hold the river, the clams, the bluebells, the stones, the summer breeze and the shade of a large oak.
untitled   oil on canvas   Aimee Bell
"Three Berry Poems"

by Rebecca Ruth

I. Berry Picking After Church

Between the rains a tenant farmer
laid his compost in the ruts--
even so, the station wagon chugs
along the unpaved road.

At the garden we survey the harvest
for what a week has done
to find that weeds have come
and crowded out the plantings.

As we set out across the rows
we ball our skirt hems into fists.
The plastic buckets bob against our hips.
Our hands are full now, and we do not think
how we will get back.

II. Out Far and In Over Our Heads

The house our families rented for a week
was stocked when we arrived. We thought,
Everything was ours, and Everything was free:
the berries we picked along the path,
the fish Chris caught, the shark he threw back,
the games of cards, the thunderstorm
the sky beyond our window in our living room.

So Allie and I take the motorboat out for a

---Out too far, like when we were young,
how we dared destroy and our mothers
to wring our little necks;
we scaled the sides of chimneys
to hang from jutting bricks; we walked
in deep woods after supper, just to taunt the
darkness.

Now I am older and wishing I knew more
about the physics of water. Allie assures me
from the aft, The swells are supposed to look
like that.

We sputter to an island where the grass grows
past our shoulder blades. We stumble onto a

---A cache
of seagull eggs. This is tops, we think
to ourselves,
The real limit. Until we circle round
to where we'd lashed the boat to a rock
and find we've no way back to the shore.
III. A Limited Feast

It was no accident we pulled to shore where blackberry bushes lined the Klamath. A weary and hungry crew, we were eager to clamor several yards from the canoe, but for this one excess, he signaled—No.

We hovered on the bank gluttonous, grabbing at the ripe, turgid fruit, while the guide stood anchor with our backsides turned to him and we were not ashamed.

This was not the garden at home where we collected them for topping on ice cream at ten o'clock. We could not even stop to choose carefully the sun-warmed, succulent next bite, but to be stung by the swarm of bees we did not swat—Oh, let them come—so long as another blackberry hung on the vine. There was no holding back, no saving to sort out later. Only now without buckets and rapids ahead.

In reluctance we withdrew from the bank, knowing we had eaten our fill. Only then could we maneuver the rapids with safety, and at one point, we even took a swim.

Still, we beat the others to the landing, with stomachs full of berry juice and red stains on the tips of our fingers, able to consider ourselves among the satisfied.
"Fire Barrel" mixed media Luke Moore

Since my transfer to Calvin College two years ago, I received regular exposure to art forms and applications to which I was previously oblivious. Learning about installations, earthworks, public and collaborative work as well as artwork made with new or unconventional materials has expanded my preconceived notion of what sculpture can be and what it can do. I knew that I should begin to explore the possibilities; therefore, during the last twelve months, as the opportunities arose, I began to venture outside of a detached studio space to learn, first hand, what it takes to make "public" art.

As anyone can see, I am still in the midst of the learning and making processes.
One of three attempted projects, The Spiders, is complete, while the other two either await the help of young gardeners and climatic weather or the expertise and consent of the college's engineering department. Cooperating with other artists and professionals throughout this process is both fulfilling a vision for the vital community and proving to be extremely complicated, therefore, a challenge.

The remaining artwork in this exhibit is more the product of personal conviction and identity. It is an attempt to use materials that are commonly available and economical, while, at the same time, embodying meaning that is relevant to the lives of a wide range of viewers, not just my own.
One knelt quietly on a floor littered with dirt and crumbs. Troubled, the other, quickly, tried to cleanse the house, caring only to impress the unexpected guest, not realizing that he already knew the condition of the dust.
untitled  mixed media  Matt Stolle
The festival this year was big and in the conglomeration of seminars, readings, lectures, and movies many words were disrupted before they had a chance to settle in. Maybe after some time and reflection, new knowledge might be gained from a few printed interviews and essays and a new unity can be lent to the Festival of Faith and Writing 2000.
An Interview with Walter Wangerin

Walter Wangerin is a Christian author, storyteller, and minister. Recently he was one of the featured writers at the Writers Festival, and Dialogue’s Peter La Grand had a chance to interview him.

Dialogue (D): Could you talk about the Christian as an artist? In Chaim Potok’s words, he always has this tension between the orthodox and the artist who wants to stay in the fold, but at the same time can’t deny his voice.

Walter Wangerin (WW): What Chaim Potok talks about in terms of the difference or the fear that orthodoxy has for the artist is my experience as well. And I think that it is not religion that’s fearful and certainly not faith that’s fearful of the artist; I do think it is structure and persistence of certain traditions. And as you would say, orthodoxy, because the artist speaks in ambiguities.

D: Is it the institution that is afraid of the artist then?

WW: Well, institution would be the visible form of what I am talking about. There is a difference between certain Judaistic mindsets and Christian-Protestant mindsets. So I am talking about something which is like Potok’s experience and unlike.

Here is where it is perhaps unlike. The Protestant, both the church and faithful individuals, unconsciously often think the truth is served up in propositional language. That truth can be something like this: “God is love.” There, that’s truth. Or truth comes in statements we make doctrinally. We teach truth. Truth is received by the mind, the analytical self-conscious mind. And therefore, with Protestants, sermons generally teach. They give instructions on how to do things or else they give explanations of what the meanings of things are. And it’s pretty much the activity of the analyzing brain.

The artist doesn’t do that. What the artist offers is experience, without interpretation, without standing out of the extremes and saying ‘Now let me tell you what this means.’ I’m Lutheran, and so the Lutheran tradition at least has one foot in the arts, but not the verbal arts. I mean, a lot of it rejoices in music—particularly in music—somewhat in architecture, and so forth. It doesn’t turn its nose up at statuary, but it isn’t as active as the Roman Catholics are. In other words, there is an element of the unrestricted art within my tradition; but where Lutherans unconsciously get upset or fearful, is when art comes in language, in words. So, therefore, stories. If I would get up to preach, if I were speaking for a general Reformed or German audience...and simply told a story, they would think that I had wasted their time, because they had come for the
truth. And so in that sense there is this persistent fear and sort of a division, a watchful suspicion, in that sort of orthodoxy in my place for the artist.

**D:** What does the orthodoxy lose by, maybe, discouraging many of its artists if they are devout to speak openly?

**WW:** Often they have the incapacity to recognize the artist in their midst. They don't know when the artist is there, number one. Number two, they don't always recognize that the artist who is there is a member of the body to be fostered and nurtured. What do they lose? They lose incarnation, they lose their rejoicing in the wholeness of their own person - I'm talking about individuals now. Where the brains get really, really big, the brains become the repository of religion and faith, and piety is in the hands - it's the things that we do, right or wrong. Or in the things that we speak with our prayers and our mouth. What they lose is the whole human capacity to respond emotionally, to respond with awe, to respond with wonder, to respond with imagination. A remarkable part of us is that with the imagination we can image and then enter into the image of something which isn't in fact there. We lose the beauty around facts. We get facts only and not the shimmering beauty and the sense of meaning. We lose the encounter with Jesus. We'll only allow Jesus to take place and we get a little bit nervous if we can't control those encounters.... We lose the possibility of something happening which is not in our control.... We lose the glory of God around the mountain, the sense of the presence of God.

**D:** How do we create space for artists, acknowledge them as valid, and somehow learn from them?

**WW:** Within the Protestant tradition, we judge right and wrong by pragmatism, we judge good and bad by practicality. If it produces, it's "good." If you can make money from it, and we say kindly, and therefore support your family and keep people stable and safe, we call that "good." If we can see no product [as it is sometimes seen] in the art world ... then we suggest our children do something else.

**D:** As in the attitude that art is a good hobby, but as a real vocation anything but art?

**WW:** Yeah, art is nice, but it can't support you. You know, we scarcely know that we've bought into a serious European work ethic concept, which is highly Protestant, is not necessarily religious, and may or may not have anything to do with faith.

The second thing I wanted to say is, there is a critic from the '60s and the '50s and the '70s who is himself
clearly not a Christian. What he says is that the job of every artist is to overthrow the false pretensions of the authorities that are around them at the time, and he often means the authorities of government and the mindsets that exist. But the thing that I would say to an artist of any sort is that the people, the orthodoxies who fear you, sometimes have a right to fear you, because over and over again the artist unconsciously - and nobody teaches the artist this - in declaring a certain kind of truth, declares truth naked. Art does not necessarily accommodate for the ways in which power has established itself - even within the church - and I don't mean, you know, bloody or blood-lusty or self-conscious power - but I do mean the power that says we must preserve certain things the way they are and I am the one who deems that.... So the second thing I wanted to say is: the artist sometimes creates his or her own space and pays for it, it becomes a prophetic act.

Third answer to your question, and this is terribly important, is that the church itself really ought to recognize artists and give them place. This is where youth comes in. One of the ways the church gives place - space for artists to work - is when the young people who haven't made commitments to the power, commitments that they can't withdraw from, when they really still live in a kind of freedom, there is a recognition (a) that they are free, (b) that they have a certain authority in their freedom. But when young people respond to the artist and say, "I like that," and, "Read that artist" if it's a writer and talk about it... you are literally giving a spiritual place as you grow older - First of all, as you are here at Calvin College, it's the students at Calvin College who may have the greater freedom to give place to the artists, (even though good teachers will do the same thing as well).

So, I'm right now speaking to the youth which is alert and is talking and which is responding - not the youth which is already bowed down and deciding its own path in life. So, it's a very important answer, that the students are the ones who begin to recognize artists. ... I mean writers, I mean painters, I mean composers, I mean musicians and all that sort of stuff ... And I don't mean the people on this campus - I mean throughout the nation when you begin to hear that someone is speaking faithfully - even if it's a 56-year-old fellow, but recognize that - it's the students who give place, and if they continue that talk as they get older and be very, very careful unto whom they make commitment, onto whom they give over their freedom - because youth will give its freedom away as it gets older.... But if they do it properly, they will always have a voice yet to invite the artist in. The best thing that you can do for an
artist is both listen and praise.

D: There's in me, as I look at things or create things, this fear of dealing with the sacred and having it treated as not sacred by the audience. That worries me as a Christian and maybe as an artist. There is space for artists, yes, but then there's also a certain sense where if they are dealing with these things with the awe of God

WW: You just defined the two dangers of being a Christian artist in the world. One is the church itself and how it will or will not receive what the artist offers as a gift to the church. And the second is the world. It doesn't recognize awe-full things, things that are really of awe, and therefore chew it up and spit it out. Both those things exist ... the one thing that I would say to the artist here is that I would hope the artist would never lose that fear that you just described. That fear is absolutely imperative. Because if you, when you accomplish your art, always stand in a sense of awe-fullness before the sacred things that you are handling, then you will not be the sinner. At this point, what I would say is, however the world handles it, it cannot destroy the sacred. This is what Scripture knows when it cries "blasphemy" - it gets horrified that somebody would blaspheme, but it also presumes that God is untouched by the blasphemies of the mindless. If you blaspheme - that would be horrible. If you began to handle the sacred things as if they were not sacred at all, because you have knowledge, that's blasphemy. If the world handles it that way, it defines itself. Therefore the issue is to do it - to continue to do it - but do it with awe-fullness and grieve when the world misunderstands.
I have developed a taste for uncertainty, a taste for a peculiar species of doubt which nurtures rather than undercuts faith.

-Scott Cairns, quoted in *Lingua Franca*, January 1998

"Journey" is not a new metaphor. Furthermore, many books and poems begin, have a "middle," and end. Something prompts the writer to write, anxiety surrounds an issue, and a resolution is eventually achieved. The tension of a work of literature is what keeps the reader and writer interested and discovery takes place in continual interaction with it.

In a writers' session at Calvin's *Festival of Faith and Writing* entitled "The Importance of Place," the poet Scott Cairns set himself apart from the other panelists by saying that he had no well-defined "sense of place." He said he was a vagabond of sorts, having never stayed in any town for more than about four years. The other authors, Hugh Cook and Virginia Stem Owens, although not in contradiction to Cairns, primarily spoke of the sense of place in their writing as a hometown or a setting the writer needs to know before engaging a story (Cook will visit a butcher shop, for example, to develop his "sense of place"). Place, in their writing, seemed to be defined by being sure of where they are, whether it be a small town in Texas or Dutch immigrant-populated, southern Ontario.

Cairns, however, as a vagabond, lacks a place to call home (the Pacific Northwest is as precise as he could get) and in doing so shifts emphasis from the static home to a wandering uncertainty to gain insight. It was with this information that I read Cairns latest volume of poetry, *Recovered Body*. My understanding of Cairns' lack of place prepared me to look for clues pertaining to life in the middle, in the landscape where discovery occurs, to life, in a word Cairns frequently uses, in the "interval," the place in between. This predisposition to read for a specific motif proved fruitful, but only in the sense that Cairns exudes a confidence and pleasant comfort in absorbing insight from the dialogue between a person and his or her anxieties about life. Cairns deals not with what was or will be but with the present, and his interactions with and insights from it.

In an unpretentious way, Cairns struggles with being a Christian and a person and in the process he earns insight. In the second poem in *Recovered Body*, "Alexandrian Fragments," the voice surveys the disaster wrought after the fire in the Alexandrian Library. The smoking ruin demands "either new and strenuous reply, / or that we confess our hopelessness and turn away" (19). Here, Cairns hints at a reader's choice to try or to not try to understand the misgivings and ambiguities of living, of being a believer. This seems to strike at the heart of what it means for a Christian to understand how to live her life.

At this point, Cairns slaps the reader for allowing such a simple understanding of a situation. In "Deep Below Our Violences," the clarity of a simple conclusion is muddled:

Up or down, it's all pretty much a puzzle, and such requests as the heart of the matter or the root cause may be best left to those
who like their fictions pretending to be otherwise. (23)

Cairns seems to suggest that truth and understanding occur not in the solidifying of an example or experience but in the ever-changing and nuanced re-understanding of it. Earlier in the same poem, a clarification of this matter occurs when the reader finds that

Still, there is a path, and though you must take it with no indication of progress,

you come to believe that things look better in transit. (22)

The interval seems to be a landscape where the reader can play with questions of ambiguity and attempt an understanding. However, this understanding should be fluid, ready to adapt to a new aspect or development. Cairns is interested in etymological searches and in the insight gained in the creation of fictions. In "Archaeology: A Subsequent Lecture," the reader who explores the meanings of words, the creation of fiction will

...be surprised how thin the veil turns out to be. You'll be surprised

how much survives interment, how little survives intact. For the most part, our city comes out in pieces, puzzling as any

deliberately jigsawed for an evening's entertainment. And as you've heard (if not, here's Lesson Two) the pleasure lies

in fingerling loose ends towards likely shape, actually making something of these bits... (20)

Cairns instructs the reader in what he eventually calls "the dig" (20). In digging, parts are found and fiction must be used to create meaning. The second section of the book, "The Recovered Midrashim of Rabbi Sab," exhibits the playfulness and insight to be discovered in fiction-making. The section is based on a Jewish sage who engages the dual Torah for the purpose of understanding more clearly. Cairns creates fictional works for a person in the style of Jorge Luis Borges. He writes midrash for Rabbi Sab and calls them "recovered" commentaries. In this dimension of fiction-making, Cairns gains insight into Christian experience through the exploration of old texts from different points of view. For example, in "The Sacrifice of Isaac," the poet reinterprets Genesis 22.9-10 so that Abraham did indeed sacrifice his son Isaac at God's command but:

In pity, then, the Lord briefly withheld time's aberrant fall, retracted the merest portion of its descent, sparked a subsequent visitation of the scene.

However:

Just outside time's arch embarrassment - in the spinning swoon of the I am - the boy is bloodied still upon the rock... (43)

Cairns takes liberties with the language to encourage ambiguity by using words such as "fall" and "aberrant" (is God infallible, omniscient?) which force the reader to think about new levels of meaning. He engages in fiction-making to create an understanding, but also sets ambiguities for contemplation. Possibly, the reader can come to know God better through dialogue with holy texts. Cairns shows the writer of fiction and, by extension, every person, how to make sense of anxieties and tension. The last poem in the second section, "Exile," explains of the wanderer (presumably us) that:

They have their etymologies too, after all—Holiness finding at its root a taste for separateness, fragmentation, periodic disruption in the status quo. Of course they are wandering toward something, but not in any great hurry. (54)

Wandering cannot go on forever when insight happens and eventually the book must come to an end. In "The Estuary," the voice keeps
the outboard engine roaring in reverse,
not to retreat, exactly, mostly just
to hold my place until progress appeared
more possible. (29)

Eventually, the boat will maneuver or
run out of gas and drift, with grace or
violence, to "the blue expanse...farther
out" (29). In the final poem, "Short
Trip to the Edge," the voice is suddenly
confronted with the abyss. After play­­ing in ambiguity, the journey must end—
but Cairns still denies the reader an
absolutely comfortable ending. He com­­ments on everything that happens up to
the point of going over the edge. Where
might that be? Is it where you have come
to understand you will be in your
search? For Cairns

[t]he enormity spun,

and I spun too, and reached across what must
have been its dome.
When I was good and dizzy (since it was so
near), I went home. (74)

After reading Recovered Body, I was a
bit dizzy. Recovered Body contains
poems of depth, poems that a reader can
come back to again and again to glean new
insight. And Cairns leaves no choice
but to continue to read, to search out
new meanings and understandings. This
is what makes this book so valuable. I
can read Recovered Body with the incli­nation to look for a motif concerning
the interval, the time in between—but
next time I could read and find new ideas
into what it is to be human and what it is
to be a Christian. Although Cairns left
me with an oddly comfortable anxiety and
a willingness to continue to live and to
look for a deeper understanding, he does
not offer a guided tour and shows no
clear, unambiguous signs. The wonder­ful thing about Scott Cairns is he
offers a fresh look into our own lives—
lives often mauled by chaos, an interval

between birth and death involving the
difficult process of becoming a
Christian.
An Interview with Chaim Potok

Chaim Potok is a Jewish author, storyteller, and minister. Recently he was one of the featured writers at the Writers' Festival, and Dialogue's Peter La Grand had a chance to interview him.

Dialogue(D): My first question is about the tension between Orthodox religion and art. Do you see any parallels between Christianity and its treatment of artists, and Judaism's treatment of its artists?

Chaim Potok(CP): There are parallels and there are dissimilarities...the artist wants to express his own individuality. No matter what, he has to be contrary to the particular beliefs of the group to which he belongs. Those moments of individuality would take the place of the news or some sort of form of art that is contrary to what the Christian really believes in. It would usurp the prerogative of the individual over the demands of the collective. So, that sort of dynamic is the same in all religions. It has nothing at all to do with this or that particular religion. In other words, you would take the place of point A and insert it in the place of the community of shared belief, point B, and erase the shared belief.

Take anything...take that place, emphasize that as the point of your art. That is contrary to what the community wants as its art. It's a little different in Judaism. The Jew has really not participated in Western art until the last two hundred and fifty-three years, so that all of the forms in Western art are basically Christian. Not all of them, but almost all of them. So the Jew has another point of contention altogether, and that is how he enters that world as a member of the Jewish tradition and as a member of western art. So, that is a much more exacerbating situation.

D: Because it is hard to get a foothold, and there is no one who came before to look to?

CP: Well, there was no one in Judaism that participated in western art because it was Christian.

D: What comes to mind is Flannery O'Connor's Mystery & Manners. She writes about herself. As a Christian artist, her role is to travel along the
path which is her faith and look at the
dragon that is society and speak of it
from that viewpoint.

CP: She is exactly correct. She was
looking at the deviant, from the point
of view of her Catholicism, and writing
about that. She was not making the world
pretty, but she was making the world
horrible from the point of view of her
Christianity. Asher Lev is making the
world awful from the point of view of his
Judaism.

D: I found it interesting in My Name is
Asher Lev that at the beginning, when he
is asking his parents why his ancestors
traveled, they reply that it was to
"bring the master of the universe into
the world and to do good deeds." Then at
the end, when Asher walks out of the
office, the voice of God tells him: "Go
out into the world with me and show the
world the pain." This seems to tie him
in as devout even as the religious lead­
ers are pushing him out of the communi­
ty of faith.

CP: He is doing the best he can under the
circumstances. He is being devout on a
different plane.

D: It seems that religious leaders have
this fear that art may make what is holy,
profane; so they discourage the artists
from fully expressing their vision.
What does the community lose when it
loses the artist?

CP: Well, the community has artists,
but they are always for the purpose of
enhancing the tradition. There are
artists in Judaism.

D: But if it loses its visionary
artists?

CP: If it loses its artists that are
willing to take risks . . . but all reli­
gions go through that.

D: Is the alienation necessary to the
artist in order for the artist to have
the freedom to honestly express the
vision?

CP: It is not anything that you want,
its something that happens, but you have
to cope with it. He is going to spend the
rest of his life painting themes that
are going to throw his community off
balance, and they don't know how to
react to that. That is his very nature,
he can't do anything but that. He real­
izes that, and at the same time he real­
izes that he has to pay a terrible price
for that.

D: In Asher Lev, there is this image of
Asher being born with a gift. What do we
lose if a religious community is not a
safe place to use this gift . . . how many
people choose to deny it for the sake of
staying in their community?

CP: Well, if you deny it, then you don't
have it.

D: It's too powerful to deny?

CP: Yeah. It's the same thing with writ­
ing. If you deny it, then the gift is not
quite yours. There is no choice
involved in this kind of a situation. If you're a writer, then you've got it, and you've got to do what you've got to do with it. If you don't have it, it's not a problem. You'll piddle and you'll paddle and that's about all. I'm not talking about that individual, I'm talking about an individual who has no choice. A person who has a choice will always end up choosing what's more comfortable. He may fool around, he may anguish, he may talk about this and that, but in the end he'll choose what is more comfortable.

D: It's not a choice then.

CP: It's not a choice, that is exactly what I'm saying. If it's a choice, then you're not choosing. That's why I said he was born with a gift. When you've got the gift then you've got to spend ten to fifteen years of your life developing it. That's what it means to be born with a gift. If you don't have the gift you don't have anything to develop. The gift isn't given to you and then you go out and paint. The gift is something that is given to you that you then go and develop, then you become a painter. You have no choice but to develop it.

D: I've heard you described in all your pursuits as a mapmaker of your religious roots. That made sense, and I wonder if you think that being a mapmaker is something that everyone must do in order to progress? Do we all need to know our spiritual roots in order to move forward? And if so, what happens to those who cannot trace their past? What of the African Americans whose past goes no farther traceable than to slavery?

America sometimes seems to have an inherent emptiness, and I wonder if this is not due in part to the absence of these maps?

CP: I'm not altogether sure that America is altogether as fractured as you say it is. This country is not falling apart at the seams. It has tremendous problems. America is different from any other country in the world in that it is a country of immigrants, and a country of immigrants is always going to be destabilized in a certain respect. As much as we might want the country to be stabilized and shut the immigrant adventure down, we're not going to shut that immigrant adventure down. Now we're opening it up not only to Latinos, but to Asians. The country is constantly being washed over by immigrants.

The Blacks don't have an immigrant culture. They were here from the very beginning, but they were here as slaves. So they are a unique element of civilization. There were Americans that were here, the original settlers, but they were here as free people. That makes the blacks very different from the rest of the country.

We've taken care of the problem of the American Indians by killing them, which was a terrible thing to do. Many of us are very sorry about that, because we eliminated a great culture. There is nothing to be done about that, except to say how very regretful we are.

We have things in common in the United States that hold the country together. We have loyalty to the constitution. We have loyalty to the Supreme
Court. There are things that are profound in the United States in terms of basic institutions to which we hold a belief in. So it's not that the country is going to the dogs.

D: Books have been described as balls of fire in relation to their potential and their effect. What are your motives when you write your books?

CP: What I try to do with my books is to write a good book. That means developing the ambience, the characters, the motivation, the plot, the tension, and so on and so forth. I write about people who are very real to me. And I write about a world that is very real to me. If I somehow can get across to the reader the reality of that world . . . . so that even though my world is a particularly Jewish world, when the reader reads that he translates it into his or her different world, then I have succeeded in writing a good book. I have no way of knowing what the effect of the book is. People tell me this or that or the other thing.

D: Are you surprised by what they tell you?

CP: I am gratified. Profoundly gratified. But you cannot write a book with that as the goal, because then you end up writing propaganda or whatever, and that is not the point of literature. If the books have a profound effect on people that is very satisfying, but that is not the goal of the book.
"An Afternoon with Donald Hall"

by Jay Robinson

Just before a reading on the Festival’s second morning, I hear a whisper from a friend that Donald Hall is late in coming. It’s noon. I know he has a reading at 3:00. His flight has been delayed, I figure, dismissing my worry.

Waiting for the reading to begin, I imagine him waiting in Detroit for his connection flight, grumbling like my stomach. But as I wait, without my knowing, he is already in the air, leaving behind his own worries, and perhaps taking on more like baggage.

He arrives with a whisper too. Suddenly, at 3:00 he is onstage behind the podium reading his own work and some of his wife’s, the late Jane Kenyon. Later, I will find out he has arrived a tad under-prepared, rushed perhaps by his climbing age or diabetes. At home, he has forgotten his copy of The Old Life. Still, he wishes to read from one of its poems, "The Thirteenth Inning," a rambling dialogue of sorts. His student host, Joe Lapp, happens to be a friend of mine who borrowed a few of Hall’s books from me earlier in the month. Immediately, Joe offers him my copy just before the reading, taking it from his backpack like a gift. And then Hall is onstage with a book of mine pressed to his palm, in the same fingers which have written the words I so admire.

When I find this out in the evening while working out my plans with Joe for the next day, the day I drive Donald Hall to a book signing in the morning, the story resonates immediately. "Donald Hall and I have read from the same pages?" I ask myself, not thinking to answer. It is a gesture likely unrecognized by Hall himself. For his part, he would have taken any copy of the book to solve the problem. The gesture, however, functions like good writing, like Hall’s own work. It works without working, both immediate and effortless upon impact. Like anything within Creation, it is simply breathed, both inhaled and exhaled, in this case by both reader and writer.

Writing this, I pause: How quickly I forget that I am not even fond of "Thirteenth Inning" and that the gesture was truly Joe’s. How quickly I am willing to pin greatness onto the pleated breast of one whom I already admire.

Donald Hall is a prolific writer of books of poetry, prose and children’s literature. He writes about his life experiences whether uplifting, heart-breaking or convicting. No matter the nature of the story he tells, his strength is in the honesty of his words, and his words have won him critical acclaim throughout his career. Realizing this, I think: "I have never met Hall, but today I will."

Between our chairs, in the darkness that swallows the lobby like a
pill, a plant keeps Joe and I company while we wait for Hall to return from breakfast and meet us. We sit talking about Hall's *Without*, a book lamenting the death of Hall's wife in 1995 from a bout with leukemia. We refrain from calling it a great book. The word "great" signals excitement and a quality of wonder. Indeed, *Without* is not a great book, but a necessary one, a photographic glimpse into Hall's private grieving, grieving he has chosen to keep with him like an old shirt: tattered, but comfortable in its familiarity. Instead, depth characterizes *Without*. Its words move us beyond the page and into the margins of our own hearts like a note we scribbled to ourselves in private and left on the nightstand for someone else to read.

We pause. Joe and I stare at the plant that stares back at us with its bulging green eyes. I ask myself what I am looking forward to today. I suppose I am looking forward to a "great" day, a day I will grieve for only later, in the evening, when Hall will already be making his way back home to New Hampshire.

3

The first time I see him, he is coming down the hallway walking arm in arm with another man a bit younger than he is. Joe and I look at each other. Hall seems a little scattered, dodging glances from the hotel staff like morning traffic. He is seventy-two years old. But once he sees Joe, he tells him the story that answers our question: "I fell last night when I was taking off my shoes. When you're old, your balance is the first thing to go, Joe. I can't even put my own socks on this morning."

We walk him out to my car. Joe takes him by the arm like he would his own Grandfather. It makes me smile. On the way, Hall talks and we listen, each of us assuming our familiar roles. He asks if we could find him some aspirin and a cane perhaps, "but the aspirin for sure." Throughout the walk, I am the consummate doorman: glass doors to the lobby one by one, and then the car door a minute later. It is a safe way to lend a hand. It will not offend with over-sensitivity, or leave him needing more.

It is a good reaction to the situation, or so I think. In our culture, we tend to turn our cheeks when our heroes gray, abandoning them when they finally need us. A generation ago we let Willie Mays play baseball a few seasons too long and then criticized him later when he was still within range of our voice, still criticizing him today when we can. Strangely, we like to watch our heroes fall, and we cheer when it happens. We try to suggest otherwise, shaking our head, but we always pause later and ask for all the details during a commercial break. Think Mike Tyson. Think Hollywood.

Ironically, heroes crumble against their own will. They age, get diagnosed with cancer or diabetes, or lose their balance, falling toward the carpet like a leaf, leaving a naked limb
hovering above them. We cannot forget them though. They remain true in their inspiration. One cannot help but think of Jane Kenyon, Hall's wife, stricken with leukemia. In the poem "Her Long Illness," a poem so potent in Without it can only be given to us in fragments, Kenyon whispers to Hall in Latin: "The fear of death confounds me." In the end, the love of the game or the written word confounds the hero. They are defeated, and their duty becomes our own. Actions become our words, our new vocabulary, and our heroes listen, thanking us.

However, the lesson learned from Hall is a different one altogether. He is not a hanger-on. His words of the past decade have resounded more profoundly than any written by him before. The lesson learned from the hours spent with Hall is not that the hero crumbles, but that the hero is no different from us. It is an unmasking of sorts, an unveiling of my own misperceptions.

For most of the signing, Hall is doing what he is there to do: sign books. Once he leaves to have a cigarette and returns, explaining: "I have to keep the cough coming." Jack Leax, another writer I admire, is also there to sign. His new book of psalm-like poetry and prose debuted at the Festival. While the line in front of Hall builds, Leax turns to me: "I kind of figured today would be an easy day for me and my wrist." Then he laughs. The one-sided fan of Hall's.

Ironically, I find book signings to be such an awkward exchange, a fixed way of saying "hello" for both writer and reader. Books signings lack the sincerity that the printed page offers. However, writing is an altogether different way of communicating. In some ways, it offers more control. It is the opposite of conversation. Writing is most like our apologies. It is a working revision of all we have done wrong, and we pile draft upon draft in our daily repentance.

A book signing is an awkward exchange, I think, because both parties are willing to commit to such specific conditions. Each person is willing to introduce themselves to the other at a certain place, at a certain time, under the condition of a certain exchange. You bring (or buy) my book and I will sign it for you, to you. It introduces a different way of communicating for both parties, putting a face with a name, a voice with its syntax. All this is not to discourage book signings, but to compare them to a date between friends where each person knows the other well, but suddenly finds themselves eating dinner with a stranger.

The day ends just when it is getting comfortable too. After the signing, we take Hall back to his hotel room and help him into bed, to rest for a half an hour and talk. We chat about baseball, and the Red Sox and whether or not
they should get a new stadium. We all vote for Fenway and its haunting history. At one point, he speaks of the gracious gestures of his in-laws. He even tells us a story or two about his late wife that leave him smiling out of the corner of his mouth, looking past us and past the wallpaper flowering at our shoulders.

Then he goes outside to have a cigarette. We share a story or two about smoking, and the day ends with a nod, me moving toward my car with Joe. It is just a nod between strangers really, each thankful for the other, but it is a nod nonetheless, a fixed way of saying "hello."
Interview with David Bazan, lead singer and songwriter from Pedro the Lion. The interview was performed by Peter La Grand on behalf of Dialogue.

Dialogue (D): Your latest album is on a new label, what is different about this label?

David Bazan (DB): It’s a label on the East Coast that we’ve known about for awhile, it’s called jade tree. They’ve been putting out punk rock for the last nine years, and just in the last couple years they’ve started doing it full time. The thing that they have to offer is that they are just extremely organized, and extremely efficient at what they do.

D: You are a Christian?

DB: Yes.

Dialogue: And you write as a Christian?

DB: Yes.

D: But you are not writing what would be seen as Christian Contemporary music. How is your writing, or your art, an extension of your faith?

DB: I’ve gone through a long process. I’ve gone through trying to figure out what art has to do with being born again, and the pursuit of that. Some of my buddies used to talk about art for art’s sake, and how they were doing art for art’s sake. Their spirit and the whole thing really offended me, but now I’ve really begun to realize that what I would say is that I am attempting all the time to do art for art’s sake, but with the clause that art’s sake is God’s glory because He created art for a reason. He is the creator of creativity in general, and as part of common grace He gives everybody these gifts in certain fields and art is one of them.

Everybody is talented, Christian or non-Christian, because it is common grace and because we were created in His image. So art’s sake is God’s glory. He created art to glorify Himself. So what I am attempting to do is, knowing that the Holy Spirit lives in me, trusting that my faith is real and not something that is tied to a culture, or dependent on me being in the cloister... that my faith is something I am compelled to do intrinsically because of a real connection I have with God rather than being compelled by a culture to do because my insides are empty. And because I believe that my connection with God is real and that I feel intrinsically compelled to do so, I am compelled to serve Him, and to respond in love to the overwhelming sense of His love, I know that if I pursue creativity and try to make the path between the creative impulse and the creation itself as small as possible, that whatever I do will glorify God, and that I don’t have to worry about the other stuff.

Now that’s my feeling about it, and other people feel a little differently about it.

D: Yes, but that’s the beauty of the freedom of Christianity, the freedom to interpret differently.

DB: Completely.

D: It seems that you are a very strong believer in common grace. Also it seems that you living as a Christian means you living your life with the gifts that God has given you to the fullest in order to glorify Him.

DB: In worship of Him. Yes. It’s amazing.
Art is at its best when it's not direct. Art and a newscast are on different ends of the spectrum. I believe that God created art because it attacks our emotions first and sort of gets at our intellect from underneath in many ways. Because He has written into history and humanity so many elements of redemption, there are so many different angles he can use through the holy spirit to ignite our hearts, and we see it all the time where people come up to us and they're like 'I don't know what is going on, but there is something that is really compelling about your music...' It happens too much that it's a coincidence. He is the one that does it.

D: So your job is just to tilt people's heads upwards so that they can find God, to let God's message work itself in your life and show that to people.

DB: Yes, He will prove Himself. That's the premise, basically. I grew up in a Pentecostal church, so I grew up completely Arminianist by default. In college I went to an assemblies of God College where there were a lot of really smart professors and a handful of really smart people. God's sovereignty figures in so much more heavily than it did when I was a kid. That has a lot to do with it too, his role in the whole thing is so much bigger than it ever was before. I'm not a five point Calvinist, but I'm probably a three point...maybe even four. I know that a Calvinist would say that they are all interdependent, and to not except one is to throw the whole thing out, but limited atonement I'm not totally...

D: Earlier in the day they had a talk with two storytellers, and they said that the story is first and the interpretation is secondary. The story is what you need to get across, and if you get that to people, that is the focus...the interpretation is secondary. And so I think that would be exactly what you are doing as you attempt to do art and not so much tell people, but show people. I'm wondering if you are deliberately on a secular label, and how do you view the, quote, Christian music scene?

DB: I really feel that the pretence of something being Christian or not ruins any chance of it being truly great artistically. There is a lack of faith in God's sovereignty and in His grace that is inherent in something needing the pretense of being Christian. My sincere hope is that Christian Culture in the next twenty years disappears completely, or is reduced to the same area that clucking and barking in the spirit is in popular opinion. That it is seen as inbred and invalid in a matter of twenty years. But without giving people a similar alternative. Instead saying look, come outside the cloister, God is big, God is real, you have nothing to be afraid of. If God is for us, who can be against us? Romans 8:38&39. There would be a greater sense of community between Christians and non-Christians. There is a fundamental difference, but there are very many issues that can be addressed as a wider culture.
It seems nowadays that the only time that Christians talk to non-Christians is to evangelize, and that is not Jesus' example... clearly.

D: And yet there is room for good evangelizing, but that entails loving people, not just talking at them?

DB: Yes, yes.

D: Those are strong words about the Christian culture, wanting it to disappear...

DB: I should say the Christian industry.

D: One of the guys from Vigilantes of Love once said there should be good music and bad music, no CCM (Christian Contemporary Music), and secular.

DB: Definitely.

D: The problem with CCM is that art becomes good only in how it works as religious propaganda, and it ceases to be graded on its craft, but on its effectiveness as a tool for Christians to wield.

D: That again is why there is inherent lack of faith in God and in the Holy Spirit. It is really ironic. Growing up in the Pentecostal Church the Holy Spirit is such an important part of everything, but when it comes right down to it people don't attribute to the Holy Spirit the job that He was given by God the father. They lack faith in the fact that the Holy Spirit is present to stir hearts, to guide us and non-Christians. The Holy Spirit's job is to cut our hearts to the quick, and He does that, if we let Him.

As far as the Christian industry, the more that we interact with it, the more that I believe wholeheartedly that there is not thing one that is positive about the Christian industry. It does nothing for the culture, it does nothing for the art, it does nothing for the message... It cheapens the message of the gospel... every time a (CCM) record comes out, the message of the Gospel is cheapened. As for Pedro the Lion, we play two maybe three Christian festivals a year, and then we try to play Christian colleges where there are people that are thinking and that are progressive.

Our hope is to be an example of people that are genuine enough so that people can see that Jesus is everything to me. I would rather ask a question that has God in it than give anybody any sort of answer, so that they're like "0 that is a really compelling question and he doesn't seem to be answering it..." Then they walk away with a query in their head and who answers it? The Holy Spirit, every time.
untitled  silver gelatin print  Christopher Filippini
Addressing themes of opposition, the primary goal of my work is to find harmony in the many dualities of contemporary existence. These themes include spirituality and materiality, individuality and conformity, reason and passion, presence and transience. Furthermore by understanding the act of painting as an idealist gesture in the realist context of our culture, my work seeks to establish the importance of the artist's work. Not as the exclusive right of an elite to create iconic objects, rather as an active agent useful for everyone as a means to address culture.
"Monopoly" oil on board four panels 24" x 24"

The contemplative, singular nature of the artwork contrasts the high value society places on the speed and efficiency of mass production. And its visceral presence provides relief from the "anti-space" of the digital terrain. Through this opposition the handmade work of the artist is becoming increasingly important in an era infatuated with digital technology and mass media outlets such as cinema, television, and the Internet.
"Depression"

by T. J. Grant

Oct. 18 1999. Monday 4:15 pm

Life is a scavenger hunt. I get little clues that tell me what to do next. Most of the time they tell me to pass my classes, but the other day listening to the Smashing Pumpkins reminded me of how I felt during my depression.

Billy Corgan screams and screams and screams--screams like I wish I could. I smile, so happy it almost brings a tear to my eye.

8:15

I press the metal point against my skin, excited, wondering if I'm really going to do it. I start pressing to find out. I press until the pain tells me to stop. Then I keep pressing. Now the pain is really telling me to stop. I wonder if I will. I consider the alternative, then persist. It becomes too much. I continue, slowly experiencing what too much feels like... it's like a silent roaring wind in my head...

The skin breaks, blood comes out. I stand up panting, sweaty, dizzy. The tach drops to the floor rolling in a half circle, its tip shiny. I collapse into my couch, comforted by its half embrace, glad it is cool and dark in the narrow confines of my room. Time to think about my problem. Seems like it's always that time.

The problem isn't stabbing myself, that's actually the best solution I've come up with. Stabbing myself distracts me, makes me feel something different. Something other than the hate.

I glance at the clock. Time has been standing still for a long time. Of course I can't be sure about that, I can only guess. I wonder what to do next, remember how much I hate myself, then think perhaps I could eat. Not at the dining hall of course, the people draw razors across my skin with their eyes, their smiles, their esquires.

I get a candy bar from the junk food machine down the hall.

On the way back to my room I pass someone in the hall. I wish he wouldn't see my unkempt appearance and the candy bar in my hand. But I can't do anything about it, can't hide myself any more than I have been. I pretend that it is o.k., inside my gut is squirming like a crushed worm. Back in my room I eat the candy bar and hate myself for eating junk food. I get sick because my stomach can't seem to handle the sweetness of it all.

I hate life, but look at the clock anyway to see how it's going. Only 2 minutes!? I clench my teeth together, tightening the muscle as much as I can. After a moment I wonder if the teeth will shatter, that thought sort of sickens me so I stop. I feel ill. I hate myself for being weak.

I sit on my couch alone in the dark. There seems to be a pain inside my skull right behind the left temple. It feels just like someone is physically hurting me in that spot as someone might hurt my arm. I wish it would go away.
can't concentrate with that pain gnawing on me, can't read, or follow a movie, which means I can't escape. And I really need to escape. Somehow I know that this strange pain has to do with how broken I am, as if my problems could be needles cutting at my mind.

Five minutes have passed. That's great, maybe I'll make it through this Godforsaken day. I let my mind wonder and I wonder if maybe getting out, hanging out with people might help. I suppose it would, except for how nauseous people make me feel. Just remembering past encounters brings up bitter stomach acid. I've tried hanging out despite this fact, I guess because sometimes I'm that lonely, or maybe I just want to introduce some variety. But people always make me feel worse. So I've said goodbye to all my friends, we've parted ways. Left to myself I can at least faintly hope that I could one day connect.

It's much safer in my head, not exactly comforting, but less demanding. My thoughts aren't good company, sometimes I really can't stand them anymore. But they don't turn off. I watch them going round and round, childish and redundant. I think about how disgusting it is that I sit in my room doing nothing for I don't know how many days now. I've thought this thought before and I know where it goes next. My mind asks, "Isn't there something else that I could do, just to brake the monotony--which has begun to be its very own very real pain just behind my left temple?" First, I remember the tack on the floor, but no, we'll save that for later (I think of myself as "we" because my person seems to exist only as a crowd of domineering voices.) Surely something else. Weightlifting might work, but it is really too much effort. When I've gone, I do my favorite exercise, bench-press, and when I have to start willing myself to work through the hard part I discover I simply can't make the effort. I'm not physically exerting myself, but sweat breaks out on my forehead as I try to keep doing what I have no will to do. I don't understand. I rest the weight on my chest as I try to figure out how to keep lifting. I want to lift it back on the supports, but I can't seem to muster the effort, I become a little afraid. It makes me angry, but it is a hopeless anger that doesn't help me with my benchpress. I get the bar back up. I'm so confused. I try another set thinking I'll stop before I really have to fight, that way I might still get something done, but without the fight I don't get very far. I feel nauseous and unspokenbly exhausted, and as long as I sit in the corner trying to figure it out...I just can't. I don't understand how, and I don't know why--I have nothing to work with. I go home defeated and I hate myself for this defeat.

The more depressed I become, the less I can do. Activities require everything the truly depressed person is lacking. I desperately try to devise something I could do, but things are the things I can't do and there doesn't seem to be any way around that. I seem to have lost the ability to act. Perhaps I'll
Stafford Trapp

I am interested in the role that objects fill as a form of escape. As well as where escape fits with entertainment, fantasy, and play. The objects that I use such as UFOs, sit-corps, B-movies, and toys are all chosen to help explore the ideas of escape and to show some of its consequences.
dialogue

four details of Untitled

mixed media
get better, or perhaps I'll get worse, neither actually seems to help me here. I stare at the opposite wall through unseeing eyes. Inside I imagine myself crawling on bloody knees across cold sharp rocks in a dark world. The wind picks at my raw skin and dirty rain covers me. Lightening flashes, but this only seems to emphasize how gloomy it really is. I stare up at the sky and am sick with dizziness as I feel myself falling into the dark heavens. I wonder how I'm going to get through the next hour and I become ill thinking about it. I've been feeling ill for days straight now so I haven't been eating. And the longer it goes on, the worse it becomes, the less I can handle it. The more things I try the more I prove myself worse than useless, and my hope crumbles. Finally I can't try anymore, I just stop. I am paralyzed. Most thinking is a tiresome fight. So I pass the time remembering and hating. I remember every moment of how good life used to be and it hurts me. I remember all the bad and hurtful things I've done to others, and the more pain I remember the more I hate my awful self for causing it. The memories lance me and become actual convulsive pain in my gut. My arms twitch and fold--like a dying spider. I wish the pain would leave me or stop, but I am my pain and I can't figure out how to stop. In my room I curl into the fetal position and find that it cannot save me. I am struck blow after blow, I try slapping my face to cope with this onslaught, I stagger to my knees and punch the brick wall of my room, I just keep punching it--as hard as I think I can without breaking my hand. But my arm is starting to tire, I can't keep it up. And then I just lie twitching on the floor, exhausted, still twitching... The pain continues and fades at the same time. Then I put a finger to my mouth as if to say "shh." And I crawl forward on my knees. I crawl behind my desk, to the darkest corner of my room and get down on my belly to wiggle under the place I might have worked at. And into that empty corner I speak, I whisper, I shout, I scream, 'Do you know what?' I ask the corner. The corner knows but I tell it anyway. "I'm lost," I tell the corner. The corner knows. "I do not know where to turn." The corner shows nothing. That's nice, but it turns my head into mush. Now I go for whole stretches of time without a single coherent thought. I pass the time making baby noises, muttering gibberish. I feel numb all over, more and more numb. I wonder if I'm losing my mind. I don't feel human anymore. I can feel myself cracking and I wonder if they are the cracks that I can repair or if they are the kind I have to live with for the rest of my life. Surely death would be better than carrying on in utter misery. Unless death means unending misery. But isn't that where I am. Aren't I already dead and burning in hell right here?! And why? my mind screams. I've
been so abundantly blessed. I'm surrounded by loving people, comfort, and good work. Why can't that be enough? If that could be enough I would be so happy--I have so much of that stuff. I wish I wish I wish that could be enough. But good things quickly burn in the fires of self hatred.

I find I've traded all the good in me for shit, and I hate that so much. The only emotion I can feel is hate, all the gentler feelings seemingly crushed by this one dark feeling. Sometimes I look at funny, sad, and beautiful things that I know should make me feel other emotions, and they simply don't. I feel the sick absence of a recently emptied eye socket. I know it shouldn't be empty, but that's the only thing it is. I can only feel anger and hate about it. So I hate everything, I hate the butterflies, I wish I could crush and kill every one of them between my fingers. I hate it when people do nice things for me or smile at me. It makes me want to stab them in the face! I hate the sunsets and the beautiful days. I wish it would always only be cold, wet, and shitty out. Most of all I hate myself for feeling all the wrong things, for feeling these ways--so much hate. I hate the hating and can't begin to stop it. I hit the wall fifteen times, the wall knows I hate it.

But sometimes I wake up and I don't feel anything at all, not even hate. With the absence of my last emotion I wonder if I can still be human. Inside is an endless field of bleached sea shells, all the emotions burned out of every last memory. I feel only half present, the volume turned down. The memories that tore me apart yesterday stir nothing at all. I am frantic. Surely there is a little more revulsion I could feel toward myself. I've got to get those fires of hate burning again, hate is the last thing I have and I don't think I'm ready to lose that. I cling to my hate and don't remember any other way of existing.

But I wonder...

Perhaps, maybe, I could really feel again. I close my eyes, tilt my head back and try to taste what that would be like. For awhile I let myself just exist in the stillness. I wonder if that is what "good" feels like, an absence of hate. For a moment--I let go of the desire to hate myself, and in that moment I think I glimpse something across my empty soul, an infinity away. I hope that I see what it might feel like to smile again.

I look at the clock and realize I have been sitting on my couch in the dark for six hours.
"Your tree" mixed media Eric Ebels
"Insides Out"

by Fled

a hungry motor twists
free from gloved hands
and over the guardrail

while inside things
come unstrapped
and crackle

a floating something
slips finally through the shield
with a hiss

and there are
whispers from sirens
hot babbling voices
and tongues of fire

(they are calling for her)

until
out of pity
and shame she
returns to
the husk of a
girl who will
no longer
move her limbs
Driving through night,
southwest, down Interstate Fifty-Five
in Illinois,
headlights flicker
like a string of candles
set along the mid-western skyline
in the rearview.

After four hours
the road opens
to a cracked lens:

the vacant billboards,
the road kill,
the pacing hitchhiker,
the faded signs,
the cracked bridges,
the graffiti,
the out-of-place restaurant,
the stranded motorist,
the dark farmhouse.

After four hours,
this is all that is left:
five more to go
and a sunrise
three hundred and twelve miles away:
the first picture
to frame.
from a main floor window
cornrows face the house:
a field of shortened stalks, cut down.

Like tree stumps,
most stalks still stand.
Some lie, others lean against another:

clinging to the earth,
using each other
like canes.

We remember
the thick stalks
that rose there,

their wet leaves enveloping the ears
like a Grandmother's hands
remembering her new daughter's cheeks:

Now though,
acres in the distance,
crabapple trees head-high

mark the property line.
They crouch together,
hunch-backed
and naked.
As an artist, I delight in the complexity and power of experiencing other human beings. God has made each person in His creation with a beautiful and intricate soul, so much of which can be seen simply by visually experiencing a person's body language and facial expressions. As I render and interpret people's faces, actions, and gestures, I grow in appreciation for the power and expressiveness of the human body. I am inspired to stand in awe of the Creator, His incredible knowledge and the creativity which enabled Him to design such multi-dimensional beings as humans. And these various dimensions of the human being—emotions, spirituality, intellect, and physicality—can all be exhibited to some degree in the visual rendering of the human body. As an artist, I am putting on display the genius of the Creator God. In my
presentation of the human figure, I am glorifying the work of God and prompting my 
viewers to consider the awesome depth of the human soul as expressed in the body. I 
am exalting the beauty of the physical body while calling attention to the character 
behind the surface.

In my use of figurative subject matter I am also touching on deeper spiritual 
issues-some of which arise from visual symbolism in Jewish Levitical tradition. The 
Scapegoat and Priest works were inspired by a study on the book of Leviticus, in 
which many connections were made between the ancient rituals, the work of Christ, 
and the role of Christians today.
"Archaeology"

by Amy Cloud

I pick myself clean.  
Dry, white bone.  
Another artifact  
To reveal  
When I finally begin the dig.

Untitled

by Amy Cloud

And not that I know light,  
or darkness, or color,  
or cloth, or stones,  
brine, knowledge, or God  
by sight. For I have closed my eyes  
but still see white stars. I have felt  
with my hand the hardness of a seat and sat  
and not turned my head. Entities unknown,  
by faith, I know they are alive.  
Moments will slip like sand through  
my fingers and never be acknowledged or felt  
but they leave their being. All the while  
we live. And not see, or feel,  
or know, or behold,  
but become bold in the living  
of what is eternal, invisible, and present.
every night of Lent, at six o'clock, down Calkins
some church bells play "O Sacred Head Now Wounded,"
and lapsed Catholics think of fish dinners

but i'm prone, more, to remember how last March
in the middle of writing a test in art history,
i forgot everything but Jan van Eyck decorating cakes
on days he wasn't painting, and i couldn't help wondering:
the next day, back in his studio,
did he forget himself and lick his fingers
expecting the taste of icing

later that night, at a coffee shop, a man i didn't know
came in with an ash cross under his bangs
and prayed loudly from the booth behind me
"Most Merciful Father, in Lent we pray to stumble
over something more than loose gravel."

but it also goes the other way. In March
when there's still a thin lid of ice on small lakes,
it's the best time for kids to learn how to skip stones
while elsewhere someone makes frosting out of egg whites,
saving the yolk in a bowl at the bottom of some stairs
for a painter to mix into tempera,
but only, i guess, after he tacks the last candy rosette
on a birthday cake for someone born in spring
This body of work is an effort to emphasize the potential of physical and spiritual activity in all space by presenting compositions that function as visual theology. The constructions, by their specific composition, are intended to communicate interconnections between components of concepts.

My work has various influences, some of which include the artists Mondrian, Calder and Eva Hesse, as well as my experience in dance, and interests in science and Christian theology.

In this body of work, my exploration focused on communication in subtle spatial relationships. This communication is related to my interest in the set structures that balanced physical forms and the logical relationships found between symbols.

The planes of acrylic paint I use serve as actors within a theatrical space, as
"placeholders" that perform functions, or as symbols of a syntactical structure. Essentially, I intend for each acrylic plane to be a sector of a far larger dimension and, in some of the pieces, existing in interrelationship with other dimensions. The acrylic planes are a kind of slice or sectional "peel" out of reality.

It is my hope that each piece depicts a truth and allows the viewer to enjoy the wonder of that truth.
"That quarter-mile stretch of road nobody's done much to, it's between the four/five acre field of Graber's and Downing's place with all their Christmas trees. About the turnpike bridge up there, it gets busier, more houses have been built. But twenty yards before the bridge there's that little plot with all the graves—that's where I want to be buried."

He raised his hands from the arms of the chair and laced them in front of his chest; they fell to his lap. The answer from his daughter came abrupt:

"No one's been buried there for forty years, besides, who would I ask? The township tends it now, and most of those old stones are broken. The marble looks like rock salt."

"When have you seen it? I hardly thought you knew it was there—"

"Just the other day I took a walk down by that way. I stopped out of curiosity. You've mentioned it before, you know."

"Listen, Dad, you don't get out from here now. You forget, forget... how things are—that old cemetery is lonely, god-forsaken, nobody visits it now except the township workers."

Furrows dragged by yoked plow lined his brow; inside tines battered sod. The old man rubbed the mole beneath his eye and cleared his throat.

"There's a grave there for 'Cristene'—I think that's the prettiest name... And a little baby's there too, 'Cora Irene Toot,' born eighteen ninety-nine, died nineteen hundred. There's a lamb carved on one corner of her stone and a dove on the other. I never knew the families there, but I could cry to think of them. Found by the turnpike and left to be dead. Back behind it's that swampy ground with trunks standing—" 

"God, Dad, I swear, the things you remember! The only things those headstones matter is the damned potholed backroads named after them, one family at each end. . . ."

"This is what I want. Why is it too much?"

"Fine. We'll make arrangements." She exhaled, shook her head and in the sockets of her eyes, cupped her heels.
dialogue

"Wonderstone"  wonderstone  Travis J. Blom
In whatever medium I am working in, I can't help but examine the nature of that medium, its history, and its strengths and/or weaknesses. My photographic work examines the roles which photographs play in our culture today. The work was inspired by a professor who said, "Memory isn't like a picture...we remember bits and pieces and fill in the gaps by reconstructing events in our mind." Implicit within this claim is the idea that the photograph represents an objective truth of reality. I then began to explore the idea of the photograph as evidence of some objective or subjective truth. In my photographs as well as the rest of my work, wit, humor, irony and satire are prevalent themes. They are not the sole content of my work, and thus more effectively communicate my intent.
"The Third Futile Attempt to embed the Klein Bottle in 3-Space" and/or "The Limitations of Calvin's Glass-blowing Facilities"
you can smell the cold.
it clings to coats and faces for minutes
after the door has been closed.
it bites at the window and
waits for something to be good for ... 
but what are these sails with no cold air to move
the clouds, the trees, this tired ship?...
clouds move like hands, caressing the sphere,
look down to what's below, where 'ants' scurry
to no uncommon castles; each on a separate mission.
you can tell a person by the way they walk;
maybe there's no face, no front side visible --
but you can be identified by how you carry yourself
from far away... a clutched brief case, a book,
a bottle or a guitar held onto
-- like a life preserver.
all have hands in pockets, pulling coats over chests and necks
to keep out the cold's cruel tricks,
all save the girl in the long purple skirt;
she walks with an unwandering stare, steady and sound.
the rest lend trust to neutral trends and seemingly fair-weather friends
on this gray day.
they criticize and crave, look at the ground
and look for each others eyes there,
those half moons, broken windows
rolling and screaming
to break out of this show as well.
is there anyone else who hasn't seen the gray sky today?
or can you tell me all about the balding grass?...
you walk with your head in a sad slant,
your thoughts in a nullified knot...
it's 2 a.m., raining and just a tuesday open-stared-sky,
but from your fragile frown, i'll take this november air
and make it my religion tonight.
maybe from the freeze of all expression, you can tell whether i am
timid or tame by all the silent smiles that
steal me from my own company...
after all, who can care for the unwatched, unstayed, unconscious?
will your hands reach down behind the garbage cans?
i take all of the day's shadows and hide them there
with the virtuous vagrant who shares with me
a plate of pregnant silences and dead-end glares,
stares of big eyes out of small windows,
into the cold air of cluttered clouds...
certainly these sails go somewhere.
For me art is just as much the process involved in the creation of the work, as it is the work itself. When I come up with an idea or concept, I take great care in selecting the material and method that will best express these ideas. Once selected, the concept is then married with the material, and the work is both process and product. As a result, the work presented here is an eclectic array of media dealing with process.
“Paper Cranes”

details of "Paper Cranes"

folded Bible pages

folded Bible pages
If the world were a global village of 100 people, one third of them would be rich or of moderate income, two thirds would be poor. Of the 100 residents, 47 would be unable to read, and only one would have a college education. About 35 would be suffering from hunger and malnutrition, at least half would be homeless or living in substandard housing. Of the 100 people, 6 of them would be Americans. These 6 would have over a third of the village’s entire income, and the other 94 would subsist on the other two thirds. How could the wealthy 6 live in peace with their neighbors? Surely they would be driven to arm themselves against the other 94... perhaps even to spend, as Americans do, about twice as much per person on military defense as the total income of two thirds of the villagers.