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# Dialogue

March 2008

*Dialogue* is Calvin College's student-run journal of commentary and the arts, published quarterly, plus a musical release in conjunction with Spring Arts Festival. *Dialogue* is a magazine dedicated to enhancing productive discourses, nurturing artistic growth at Calvin, and engaging culture through images, words, and ideas.

We welcome submissions of articles, reviews, essays, literature, and visual art of every sort. Submissions, questions, feedback, and all other correspondence may be addressed to the editor at [dialogue@calvin.edu](mailto:dialogue@calvin.edu).

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# Dialogue

Volume Forty: Issue Three

Calvin College's Journal of Commentary and the Arts

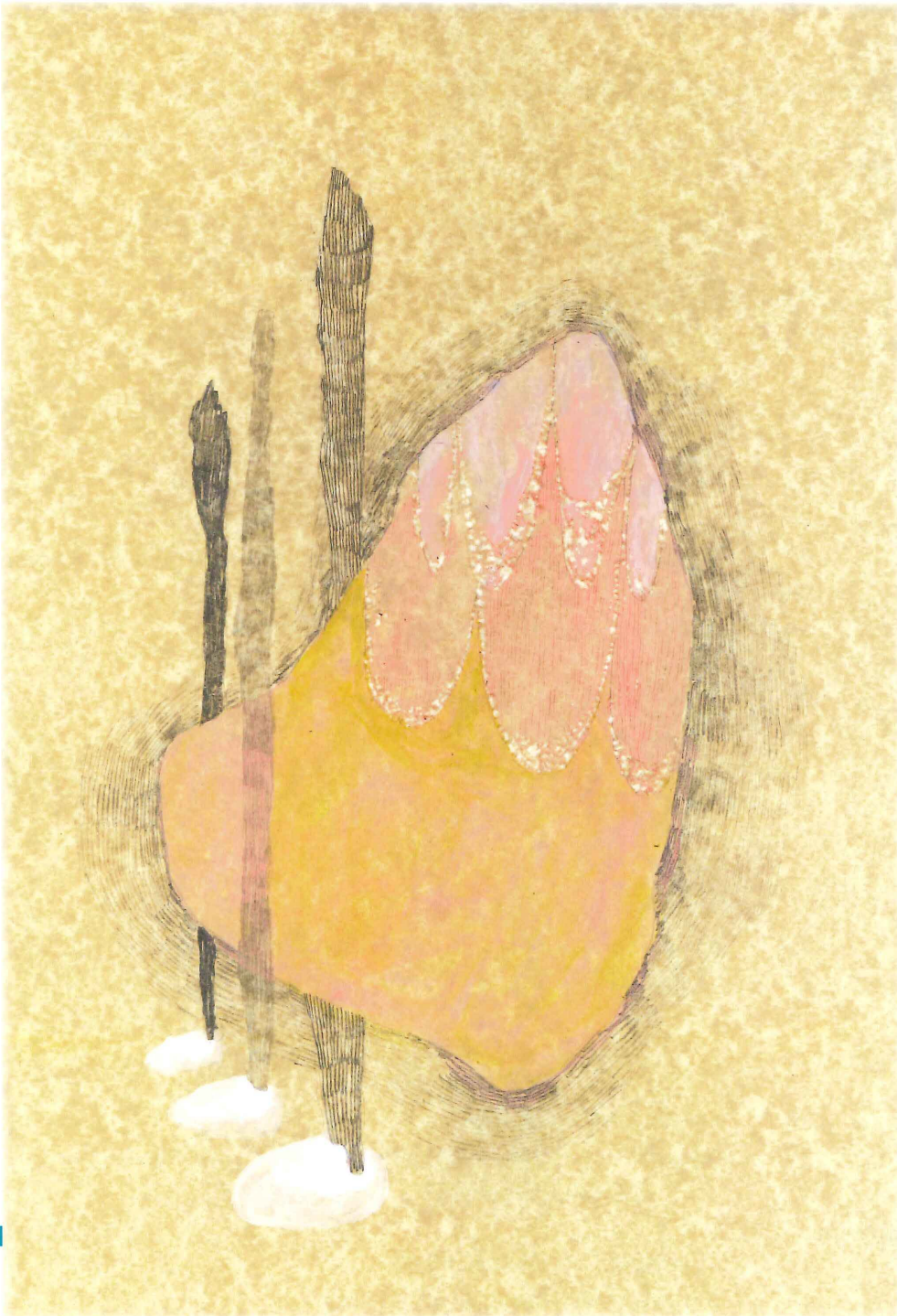
March 2008

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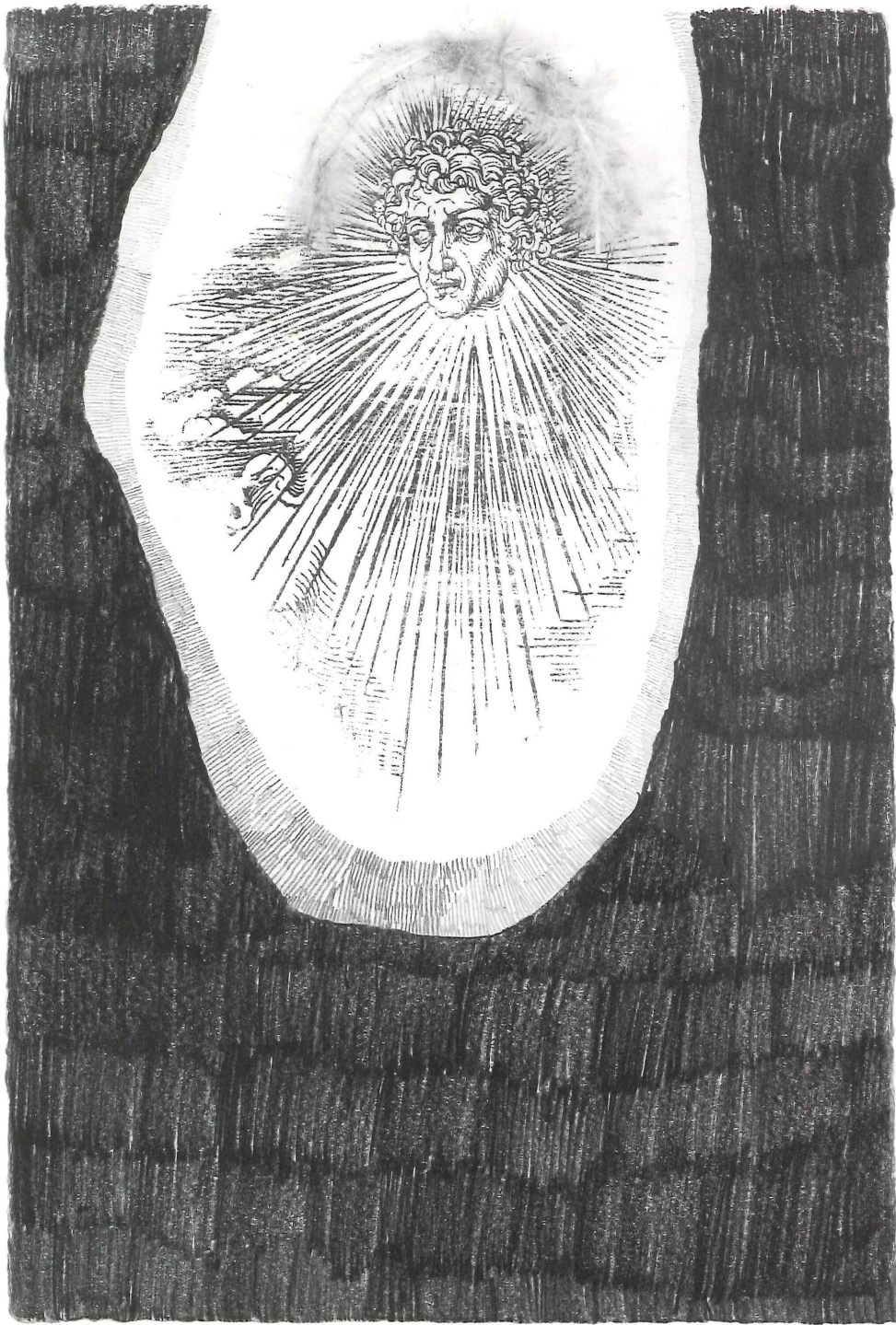
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Landscape #4 with stalagmites, Natalie Good  
acrylic and graphite on construction paper



## Stars Stream

At twilight —

Piercing reality, they  
Cut through the smooth weave of sky,  
Pass the dark glass,

Denying the world an hour longer.

Then the heaven threaded  
Through the eye of man

Breaks with the day.

And we are left with plain day, the  
Good faith of plain, beautiful day:

Lost, the other-world longing,

Stars  
Stemmed.

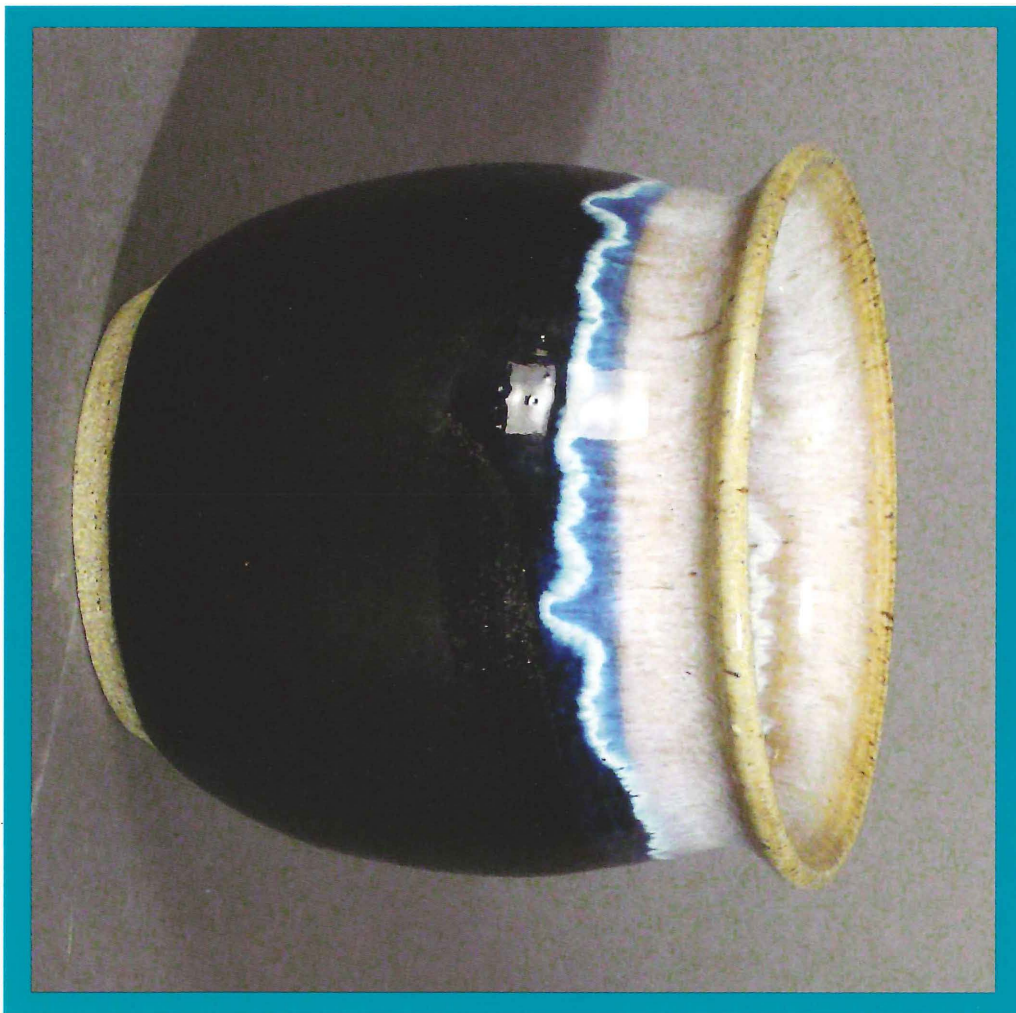
Amanda Hayes

Holy Spirit  
graphite, durer transfer, chicken feathers



Sea Fan Vase, Jenna Sue Vanden Brink

thrown stoneware, sea fan



Black Vessel with Cobalt Ring, Jenna Sue Vanden Brink

thrown stoneware

**Excerpts from Artist Statement** Jenna Sue Vanden Brink

For this collaborative project, Tim and I incorporated natural materials into hand crafted stoneware forms in order to connect clay, which comes directly from the earth, with other earthy objects.

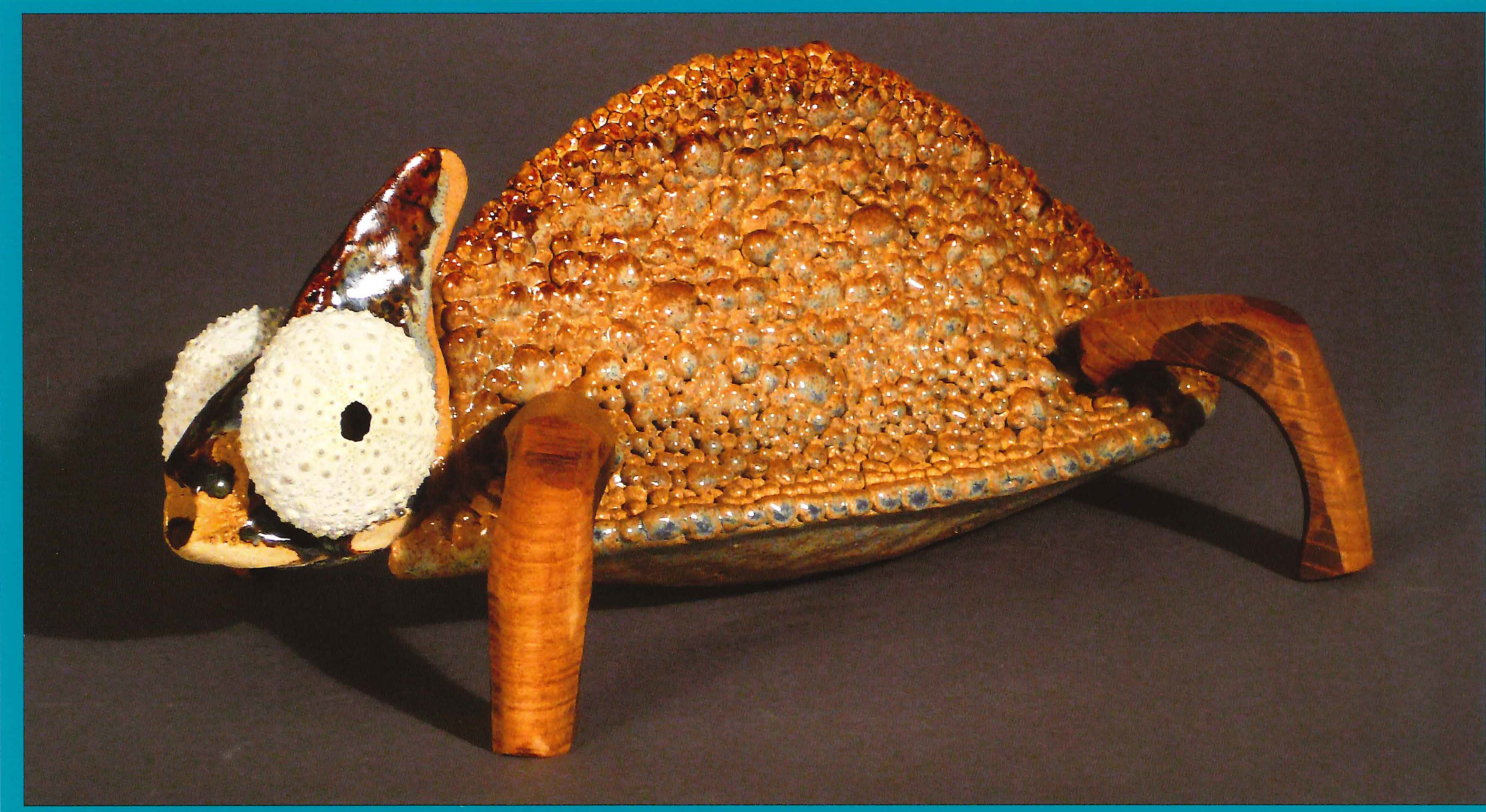
The month of studio time resulted in a series of corresponding pairs, relating to each other through glaze color and technique, form, or integrated material. Tim produced the hand-built creatures, while I threw most of the corresponding vessels on the wheel.

We chose to use stoneware, a category of clay, for its appropriately earthy quality. Found or donated natural materials factored significantly into the inspiration process. The textures of stones,

the shape of a log of driftwood, the colors of old peach pits—all helped steer the direction of the pieces.

Fingers crossed, we attempted new glazing techniques, which provided surprising results. We also pit-fired two pieces in my backyard, using the oldest method of firing, though unfamiliar to us.

The crab and stilted slab vessel pieces [cover] were constructed with slabs stiffened over bowls to give a rounded shape. We added the thorns and wood stilts after the final firing. We added dried sheets of seaweed to the layered glazes with the hope of a dramatic chemical reaction during oxidation. Though not what we expected, the results provide visual interest.

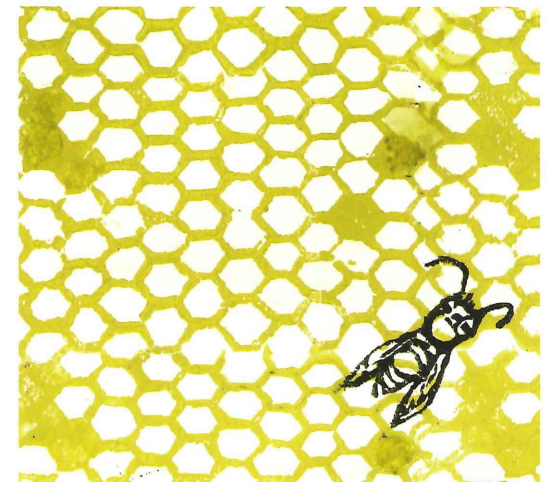


Chameleon, Tim Hurst  
handbuilt stoneware, sea urchin, wood





Excerpts from Considering Colonies series, Sara Bakker  
mixed media, each 8" x 7.5"



## Honey Bees and Fireflies

Robert Zandstra

The year's first firefly flashes tonight,  
as unexpected to the boy as his first bee sting  
there beneath the clothes line earlier today.  
He wailed for his mother, who smiled  
as she tweezed the barb from her son's bare foot.  
Now he leaves her side to chase the insects,  
joy rippling through him  
like distant thunder through a clear, June night,  
his hair and shirt the color of the moon.



The next day, he peers into a rusty coffee can  
in the grass, a quarter full of rain water,  
watching the honey bees crawl down the side to drink.  
He crouches down, knees in his armpits.  
His hands hold a twig or cradle his head  
as one bee, growing greedy, and another,  
nudged by a neighbor, drop into the dark water.  
He lifts them out in turn, breathes on their wings,  
and sets his teeth as he sets them on the tin can's lip.  
More bees come, attracted to his flowery hair,  
and, unable to assist in its pollination,  
stay to drink the water like nectar.

A firefly hadn't crossed his mind in years  
when he saw one through the kitchen window,  
flying like a satellite across the silhouette  
of the old oak in the front yard.  
That night, in a lucid dream, he has caught  
in a canning jar enough fireflies to read  
a book in bed. His mother says his name  
as she enters his room to kiss her son goodnight.  
Hearing her voice, he closes the book and smiles  
first to her and then to the fireflies.  
Enough light shines from their longings,  
the color of honey, to illumine  
the soft and subtle comfort of her lips.

## Chapter 4: Heartwood—the Biology of a Tree in Love.

Jessica Miller

Trees do not know how to stop loving.

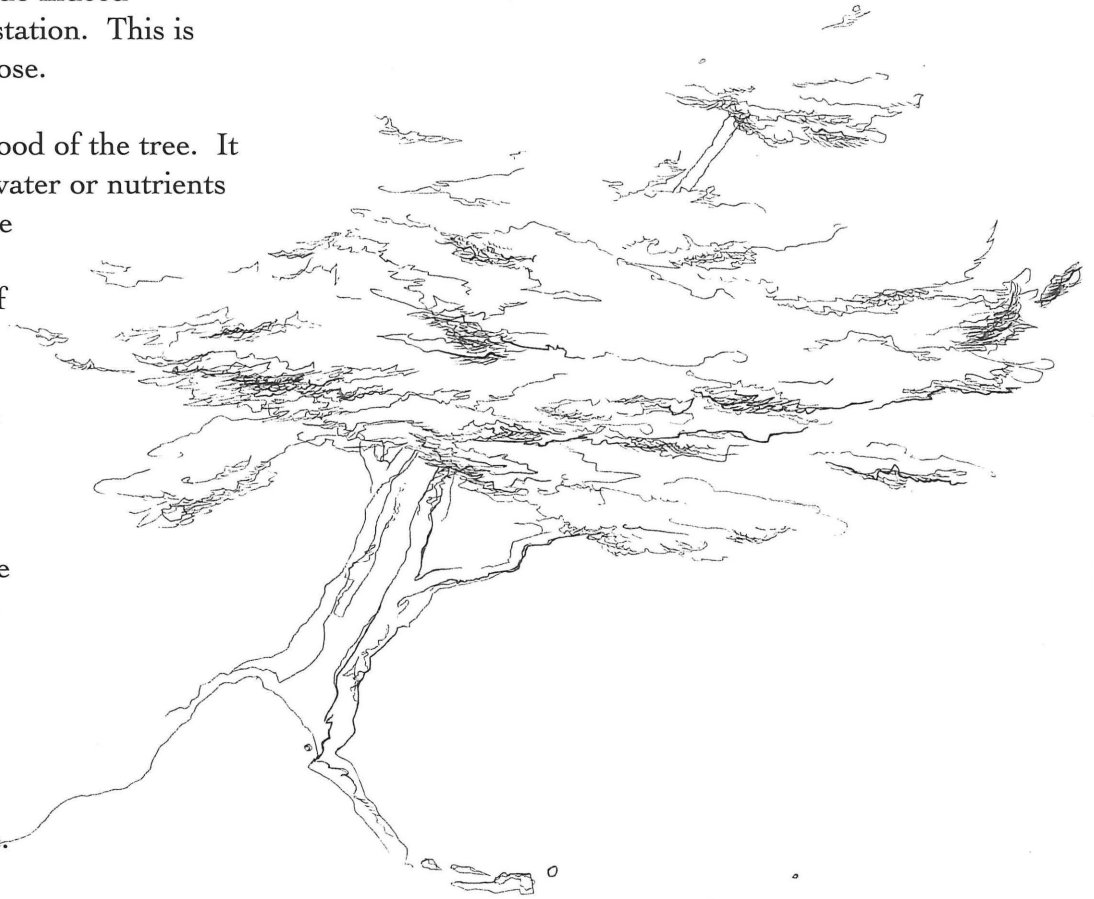
Trees love deep in the heartwood, at the very core of their trunk.

The word heartwood metaphorically anthropomorphizes the plant and should not be confused with the circulatory organ in the thoracic cavity of most cephalized vertebrates. “Heart” has often been a figure of speech for the seat of the many forms of “love” that a human may experience. As we now know, love does not reside in the organ itself. This discovery in humans has allowed the broken-hearted to avoid the rather dangerous and desperate transplant procedure.

It is critical to understand that trees do indeed experience love as a physical manifestation. This is where the heartwood serves its purpose.

Heartwood is the hardest, densest wood of the tree. It consists of layers of dead cells. No water or nutrients have been known to flow through the center of the tree. Only ring after ring of history patterns the viscera of its memories. Similar to many humans, a tree can be quite private, its history hidden on the inside. Like Emily Dickinson, a tree will usually only give up a sparse few of the secrets of its years posthumously (*Note: The methods for extracting the inner life of Dickinson differed from that typically applied to trees—a standard cross-section or the application of an increment borer*).

In the heartwood lies the story of all the years. Its record is unchangeable.



Humans have been so fortunate (or unfortunate) as to be able to undergo the semi-reptilian process of forgetfulness by shedding their memories or emotions. Memory typically grows laterally for humans, while it remains medial in trees (*Note: In a few cases, humans have experienced ingrown memory, a variably benign or malignant condition, depending on the nature of the memory*).

*Example:* A bird lands on the uppermost branch of a **Sitka Spruce** (*Picea sitchensis*) one day. It is an **American Robin** (*Turdus migratorius*) with a song that melts through his canopy and makes his soul tremble. The robin proves to be different than the rest, due to a certain tenor in her lilting whistle. He falls in love with her. That red-gold love for the robin will be permanently etched into the ring which will turn into heartwood after a few years. Time makes the love grow denser, harder. This process poses a difficulty: Trees grow slowly, and birds fly quickly. Before the spruce can get a word out to respond to the robin, she will pluck a leaf from his crown and flit away without a backward glance. The spruce cannot uproot himself and follow her, and, although

extremely patient, he does not have time for resentment. Resentment stunts growth (*Note: Resentment can be identified by characteristic narrowness in the smallest layers between rings, and often appears in the outer layers of secondary xylem. As resentment will give way to apathy, a tree slowly ceases to transpire and often dies of thirst*). And a tree cannot afford to be heartbroken, for a heartbroken tree will inevitably grow frail and topple in the slightest breeze. So, the Sitka Spruce weeps a few tears of bitter sap, forms a new layer of bark, allows that ring to die, and waits for another graceful, flying creature to land. But he will never stop loving that bird. The bright chirp and woody echo of her song enters the ring, and eventually his heartwood solidifies in its color: A red-gold circle amid the many others.

Thus, heartwood is characterized not by life and water, but—in healthy trees—by love and memory.

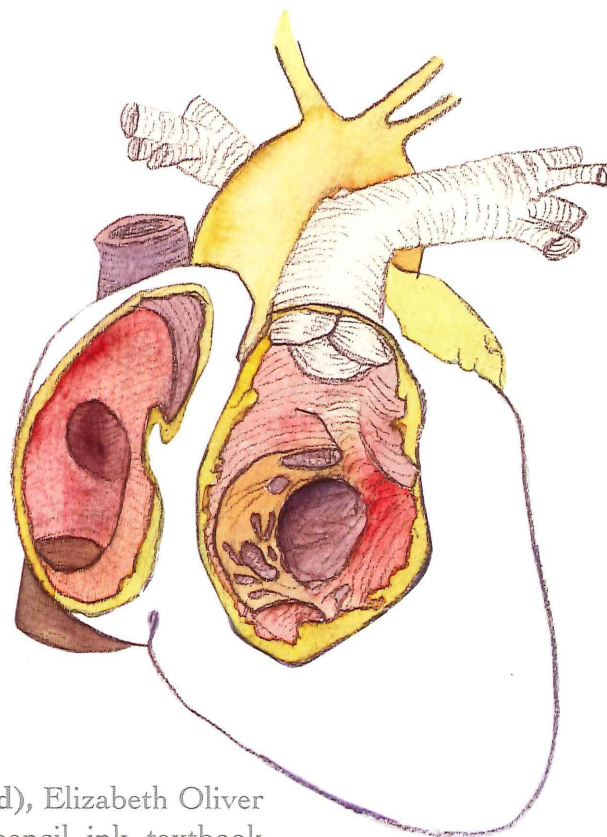


Illustration (Heartwood), Elizabeth Oliver  
goache, pencil, ink, textbook

**Dear Pariah**

Luke J. Robinson

Oh, desperate eyes do wander,  
And the restless minds do ponder,  
For here in depths of what man's hoarded,  
There is a potion of makers sordid.  
In the fires from mortals created,  
Desired alchemy by those sedated.  
Color of innocence tricks the few,  
For immaculate is its only hue.  
Kiss on the nose from lying lover;  
On tattered wings, the seraphim hover,  
To view this den of thieves congested,  
With sweetest poison. I invested  
In this nectar, bride in white;  
My cold Madonna in the night.

## Ganges Runs Dry

Rachel van Wingerden

Wineglass rests beside her  
Soft classical wisps fill the cracks of silence  
She clenches the bathtub rim  
Knuckles bloodless  
She sits alone—  
Angry in an empty tub

Chilled by inescapable barrenness  
A void felt inside and out  
She slouches down a little more  
Pulling knees to chest  
Thin nightgown stretching to accommodate  
A deep sigh echoes

Picks up wine-filled flute  
And forces a swallow to go down—  
Past sage-brushed constrictions to her pit  
Vacuous—a Dead Sea  
Its failure to hold life  
Causes an unchecked groan

Rests wineglass on flat, desert stomach  
Where only skin covers bone  
Everything else beneath has died  
Its inability to have rhythm or rhyme  
Quietly silences her  
Vacant eyes stare into nothingness

No consecrated water  
Her Ganges runs dry  
Withholding healing power  
And a well of hushed waters offering rebirth  
The naked womb—parched  
No oasis in sight

Finch has always had a Mustache  
He can only remember shaving it once.

(When you were 5, what did you want to grow up to be?)

Finch: A fireman.

(When did you stop wanting to be a fireman?)

Finch: When I got burnt.  
Playing with matches.  
Not kidding.

We went on a trip to the fire station. I got picked to wear the hat--  
The only kid that got to wear the hat. That was pretty cool.

(You were that kid... the kid everyone wanted to be.)

Finch: Yep. Still am.

(What's your favorite food?)

Finch: A tie between steak and lasagna.  
I am a master cook.  
My mom taught me to be a master cook.  
I can also sew.

I'm fairly intelligent.  
I've always been a leader.  
I know what makes people tick.  
I've always liked construction.  
I'm a great teacher.  
And I'm streetwise.

There's just one reason why I'm down here...  
...Cocaine is a M.F.  
Excuse my language.  
I've been on both sides of the tracks.  
Drugs brought me down, and now I'm headed back up.  
It's going pretty well.

Finch: Growing up in high school, I was so uppity.  
I was rich. My friends were rich. I was such a jock.

(What sports did you play?)

Every sport. Football. Basketball. Golf.  
Ferris gave me a scholarship for golf. I didn't take it. I wasn't ready.  
I messed up right out of high school.  
No  
Direction.

(What are your goals?)

Finch: I don't have any. I never have. That's why I'm here.  
I'm independent.  
I've always been the tough guy, even if I didn't want to be.  
I'm just not scared anymore.

Finch: I'm independent. I've always been interested in good looking women.  
This concludes our interview.

Joel...  
REPO MAN!  
POOL SHARK!  
HUNTER!

...is armed, but not dangerous.

Joel: I used to have a license to steal cars.  
Other repossessioners went during the night, but I went during the day.  
I would walk right up and ask for their keys.  
I only got in a fist fight once.

(What did you do after you were a repo-man?)

Joel: Repo work got slow, so I found another job.  
I managed a pool hall in Cadillac.  
I was so good. A real shark. Ranked 7th in the state.  
I should get back into that.

(Why did you stop?)

DEVOTED SON!

Joel: My mom got sick.  
When my step dad died, I took care of my mom.  
Her MS won't kill her, but it's left her in a wheel chair.  
When my step dad died, he left his house and money to his son.  
I lived with him for 10 years.  
Then he called the police to get me evicted.  
He told them I was armed and dangerous.

(Then where did you go?)

Joel: To jail, for two days.  
Then I went to take care of my mom in Muskegon.  
The Muskegon Mission sucked.  
I mean sucked.  
Those hypocrite Christians.  
So I took care of my mom, living in a shed.  
It was cold.

Joel: And that's why I want an I.D. So I can get into the bar and play some pool.





Untitled (Managua 2008), Paul Miyamoto  
digital photography

Selection from artist book, rachelle allegrina marie sartini  
mixed media and watercolor



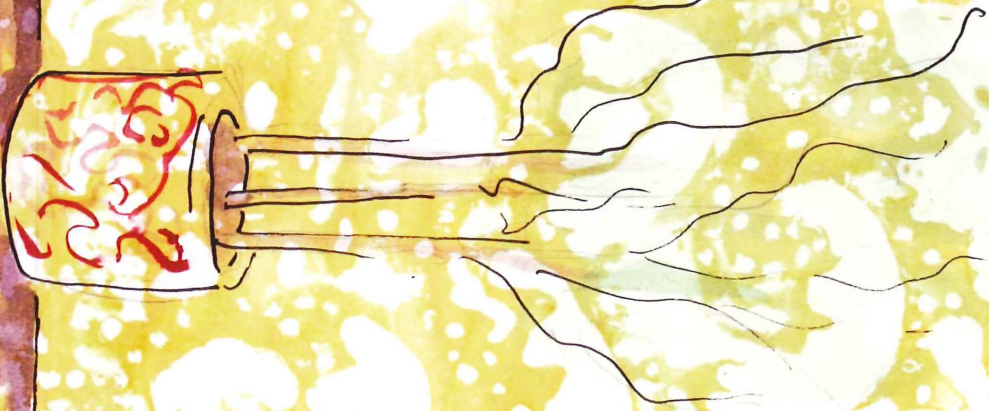




Quest I and II, Jo-Ann VanReeuwijk  
fiber, cast handmade paper (abaka)



ugly dress.





Got the time [1] and [2], Elizabeth Wroughton  
ink on paper

# Interview: J. Hillis Miller

Last fall, Paula and I had the chance to spend an afternoon with professor and literary critic J. Hillis Miller. We asked him some questions about the talk he had delivered at Calvin the night before (“Literature and Fiction: An Impossible Filiation”) [October 18, 2007] and asked him what he thinks about reading and deconstruction. What follows are excerpts of what he had to say:

## ON READING LITERATURE

There’s no such thing as a really objective reading of any piece of literature, and we might as well know that. Naturally, we bring something to a text. You might think that the idea was to be absolutely detached and objective, but it’s not possible. So there’s no shame in bringing your own interests and preconceptions to reading, because you’re not really going to be able to avoid that, including religious ones. So I don’t have any problem with the idea of a religious reading of a secular text. How could you do otherwise, in the midst of a religious commitment?

On the other hand, it’s a good idea to be aware of these, to be a little self-conscious about things. I think I would argue against assuming that every work of literature has a religious component or that you’re going to get mileage out of every work. In that way, I see the relationship between religion and literature as a complicated and problematic one. It’s a very tricky business to look for things where they may not be. It’s not all that easy to do, any more than it’s easy to give a fair political reading, having political convictions.

As for as how I read personally, I think what fascinated me about literature from the beginning was its strangeness, its peculiarity. I started off at Oberlin College as a physics major, and I thought I was going to be a scientist. I had essentially nothing but science classes then, but in the middle of my sophomore year, I decided I wanted to do

literature as my real vocation. I can say that what motivated me was a sense that literature really needed some explaining. A lot of things struck me, from the point of view of my science education, as nonsense.

I remember an example: there was a poem by Tennyson, “Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean, tears from the depth of some divine despair rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes in looking on the happy Autumn-fields.” I thought, “What does that mean? Tears don’t gather in the heart and rise to the eyes. They come out of the tear ducts. And what are ‘idle tears,’ anyways?” I wanted to make these lines mean something, but it seemed to me that they were very strange, and I found it very strange that anyone, in this case the Poet Laureate of England, could use language in this peculiar way.

In a sense, that has remained my motive; that is, I expect whatever work of literature I pick up to be peculiar in some way, to be different from all the other ones, and not to be easily assimilated into categories. Citing Tennyson’s poem as Victorian doesn’t quite explain these “idle tears.” And so I’ve spent my whole life doing that—not without preconceptions of my own—attempting to figure out how you could say something sensible about “idle tears.” In fact, about thirty years after this conversion experience, I did write an essay on that poem, which I would suggest that you maybe read, if you’re as puzzled as I was.

## ON DERRIDA AND DECONSTRUCTION

When I used to teach literature at Yale, I would very innocently begin my courses by asking students to write a bit—just to make sure they could put some sentences together. My question was, “How would you know that you had a poem right, that you had the right reading?” When I did this sort of casually the first year, I was amazed that, over and over again, what they said was, “There is no right reading. You can make it be whatever you want.” I would say about ninety percent would say some version of this, which I happen to think is wrong, and I did this several years in a row, to the same result. So this means that these kids had come to Yale somehow having the idea that reading a poem or a novel is a free country, that you’re not in any way obligated to what the text says. I don’t know where they got these ideas in high schools, but it surely wasn’t from being brainwashed by Derrida. They had never heard of Derrida in their lives. So I think this idea in the newspapers that deconstruction is relativistic and says that texts don’t have any meaning is, very strangely, a reflection of this widespread assumption on the part of our culture.

So what would Derrida or I say in place of that? What is deconstruction? One of the things that I’ve always resisted is the idea that, since there were some American deconstructionists doing literary studies, they ought to be able to say something in a few words that would be comprehensible to just anybody, whereas, people accept that

a scientist is going to say something very hard to understand and hard to explain, for example, about the Theory of Relativity. I don’t know how you feel about Shakespeare, but I have the feeling you could spend the rest of your life trying to understand Shakespeare. To expect someone to be able to say something about Shakespeare, or any other literary topic, including theoretical ones, that is understandable by everyone, does not seem appropriate. I understand the ideological reasons why that is assumed to be the case, because you assume that anyone can read Shakespeare, but these things are not always the case. What I’m saying is that I don’t think deconstruction or other theoretical approaches are any more complicated than other literature, say Ulysses, but that doesn’t mean they are easy to understand.

That being said, deconstruction obviously has a linguistic orientation. It means a real—“suspicion” is a strong word—but at least a “self-consciousness” about the way ordinary language tends to reinforce the areas of thinking, including philosophical ones, that are somehow built into the very terms that we necessarily use. Derrida’s name for this, which seems very strange to an American, is “metaphysics.” He called this “Western metaphysics,” as a kind of system descended from Aristotle and Plato, translated into Latin first and then the vernacular languages, which, according to Derrida, inhabit our everyday language and involve certain presuppositions,



which he wanted to identify and to be critical of. So that was his project, to be a sort of close reader, to bring out the latent presuppositions in anybody's work.

What I discovered, and what Derrida or de Mann articulated in a more sophisticated way than I do, is that if you candidly read works that everybody agrees are powerful piece of literature, like "Tears, Idle Tears," it's not that it has no meaning, but that it has a meaning that is complex enough that it can't be reduced to an organic unity. Its meaning, then, is the possibility of two or more interpretations, which are based on the words in the text so that it's not relativistic. It's not saying, "I can make it mean anything I want."

What's the test of a reading? The test is to cite passages and to claim what those passages mean. That can be a little tricky, but that's what you tell students: "Don't say anything about the text that you can't support by a quotation." When you try to do that, I think I had already found on my own, and I learned from these so-called deconstructionists, that you find that there are two or more possible readings that you can support by quotations even, which are related to each other but are contradictory, and that the meaning of the text is the relationship between these alternatives.

Derrida coined the word "de-con-struction," which is in a sense oxymoronic in that it combines destruction and construction in the same term. I think it's a mistake to think of Derrida as simply destructive of Western traditions. It's also an act of construction. People who characterize Derrida, and deconstruction in general, as relativistic or nihilistic or as destructive of Western civilization—that's not true. You might say that's a form of deconstruction that exists in the newspapers, but it is not at all true to what Derrida was actually doing, which was consciously constructive, although he thought there were some things that needed a little undoing.

## ON IRRESPONSIBILITY

After Derrida died, I found myself being repeatedly asked to write these pieces on him, for conferences and such. One of these conferences was really neat, in Singapore, and the topic was "Irresponsibility." So I wrote about Derrida's coinage "irresponsibilization" (not quite a word—perhaps it's irresponsible to make up words like that). So I wrote a paper about what it means to make yourself irresponsible, and there were people from all over the place all giving papers on irresponsibility. What I wanted to do was to go all the way to Singapore, which is a pretty long plane ride, and get up there on the podium in front of the audience and say, "I'm sorry to say I've come all the way over here, but I haven't written a paper. Thank you very much." Then I could simply sit down, having manifested irresponsibility for my colleagues. I couldn't quite bring myself to do it, but it was a big temptation.

## ON FUN

You never know which essays you write will get to be the ones that are anthologized for everyone to read. I didn't know that when I wrote "The Critic as Host," but I certainly was having a lot of fun writing it. And that's another point worth making: I think that reading literature, that teaching it and writing about it, ought to be fun. So it's a sort of exuberance in saying, "What does this mean?"

Ryan Weberling, interviewer, is in his third year of studying English and Philosophy at Calvin. He owes one to Paula Kielstra and John Scherer for their help, and especially to Mr. Hillis Miller for being such a kind and generous interviewee.

## Little Lady

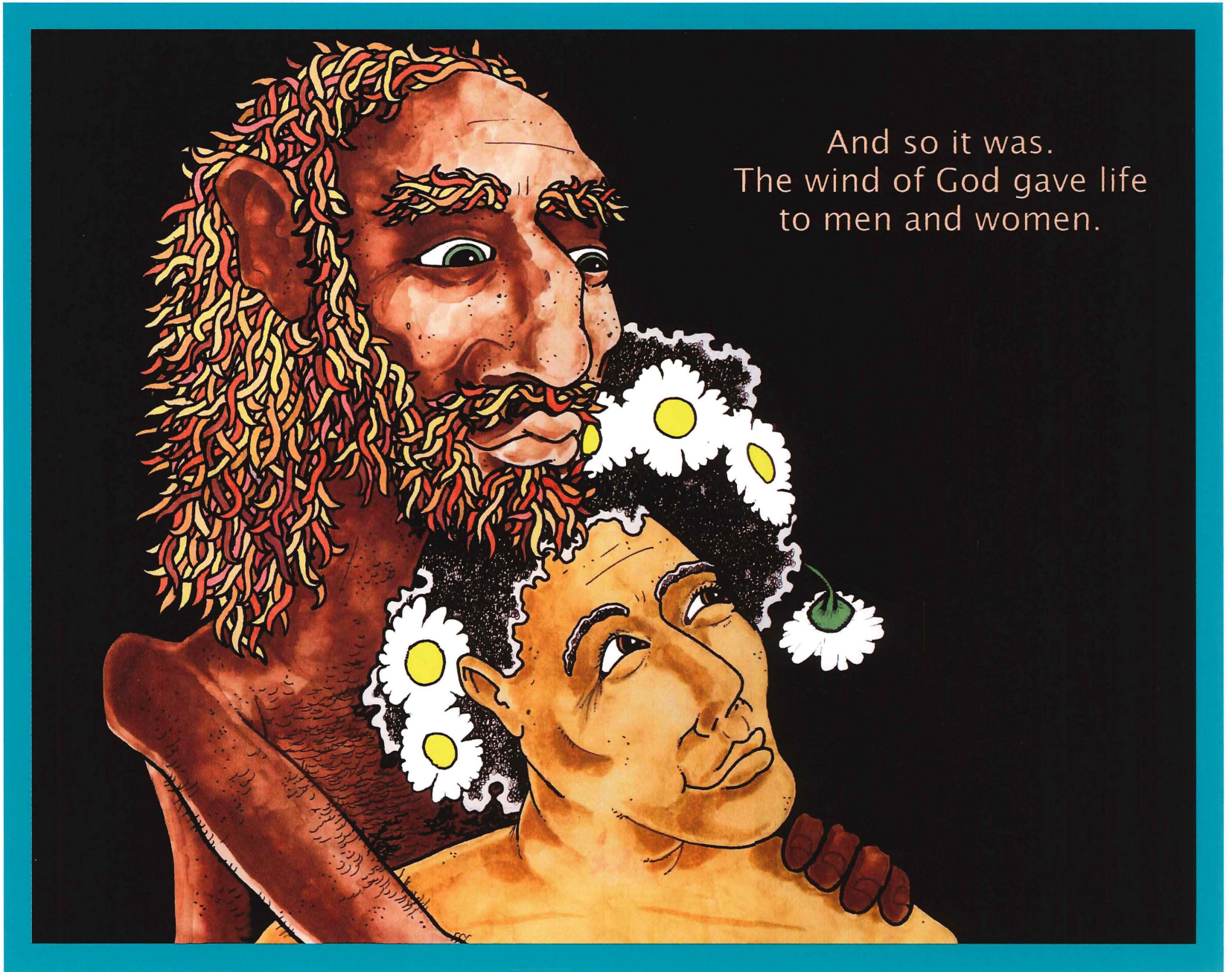
Lauren Schelle

G C  
Little lady  
Em D  
Lost in a big world  
D Em  
Eyes wide open  
D C  
Behind her hands  
G C  
Baby brother is  
Em D  
Her best friend  
G Em  
And the only one  
D C  
She's confided in  
G C  
But she's a Rembrandt  
Em D  
In Picasso's playground  
G Em  
She's a red dress  
D C  
Everyone else wears brown  
G C  
She's a real girl  
Em D  
Who lives next to Barbie

G C G C G C G C  
She's a good book, corner nook, center stage, first page, new day, better way, grande caramel latte,  
G C G D  
now-you-see-her-now-you-don't, better grab her 'cause you won't  
Em D C  
Find a better lady  
  
G C  
She's blind to herself but  
Em D  
She's more than she can see  
Em D  
Lost in a big world  
C G  
I'm glad she found me

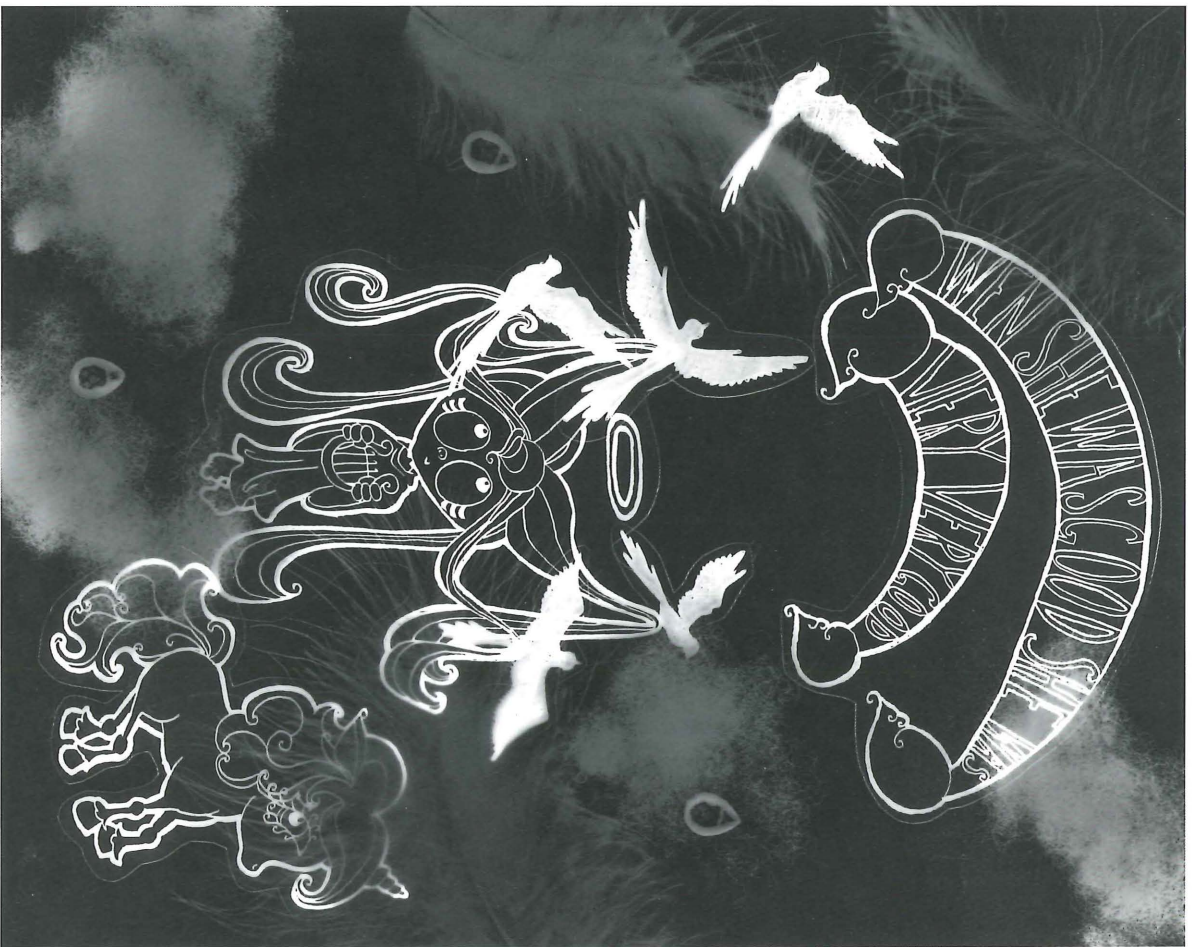
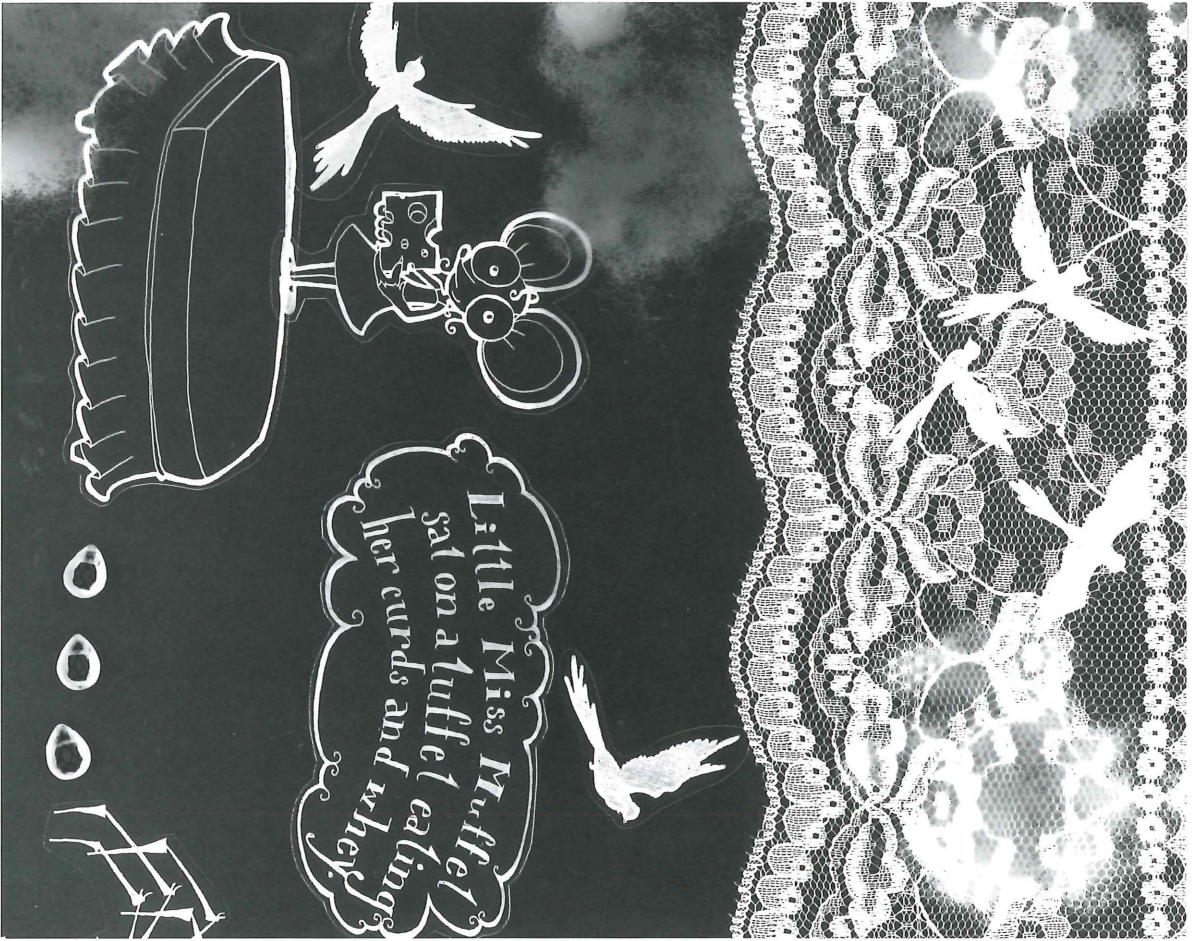


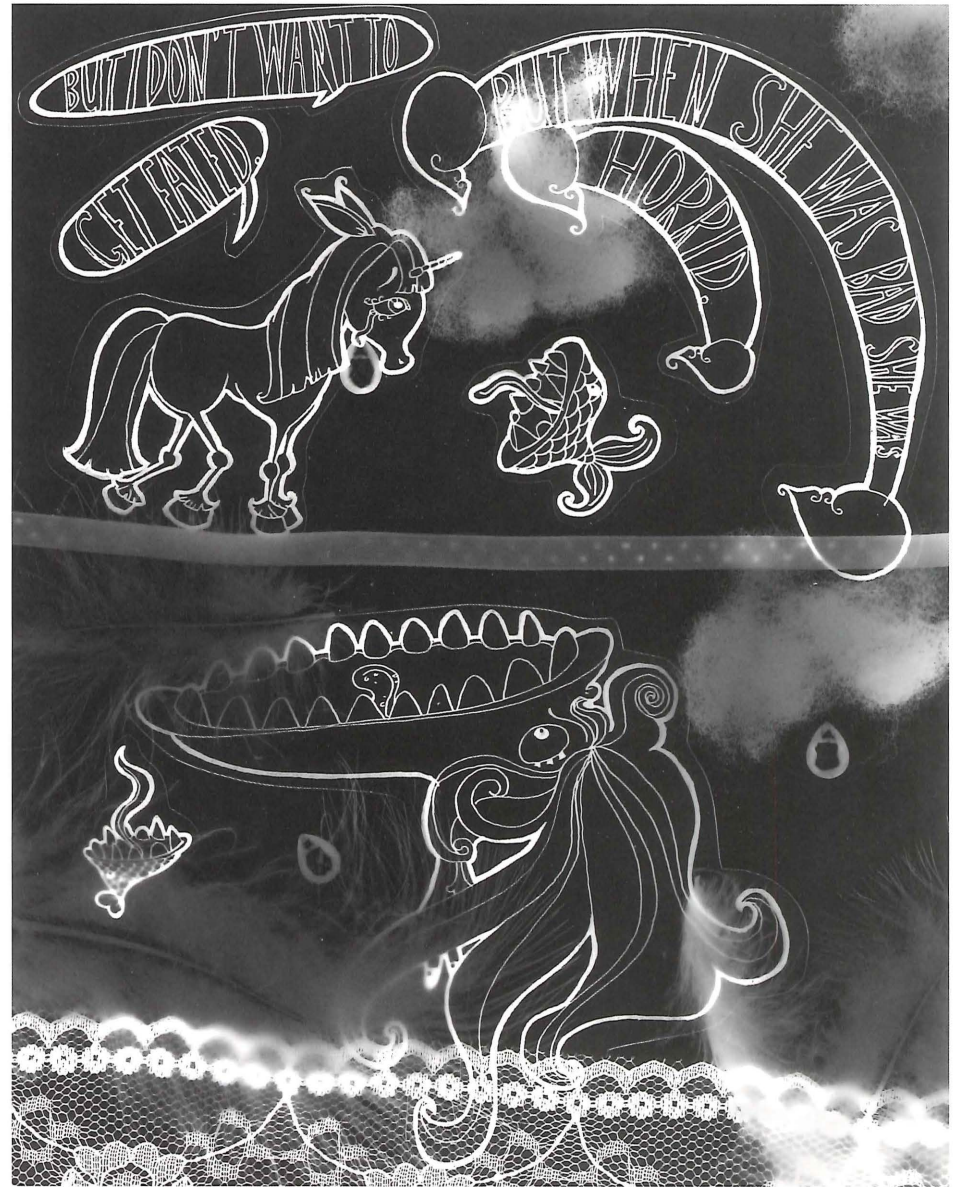
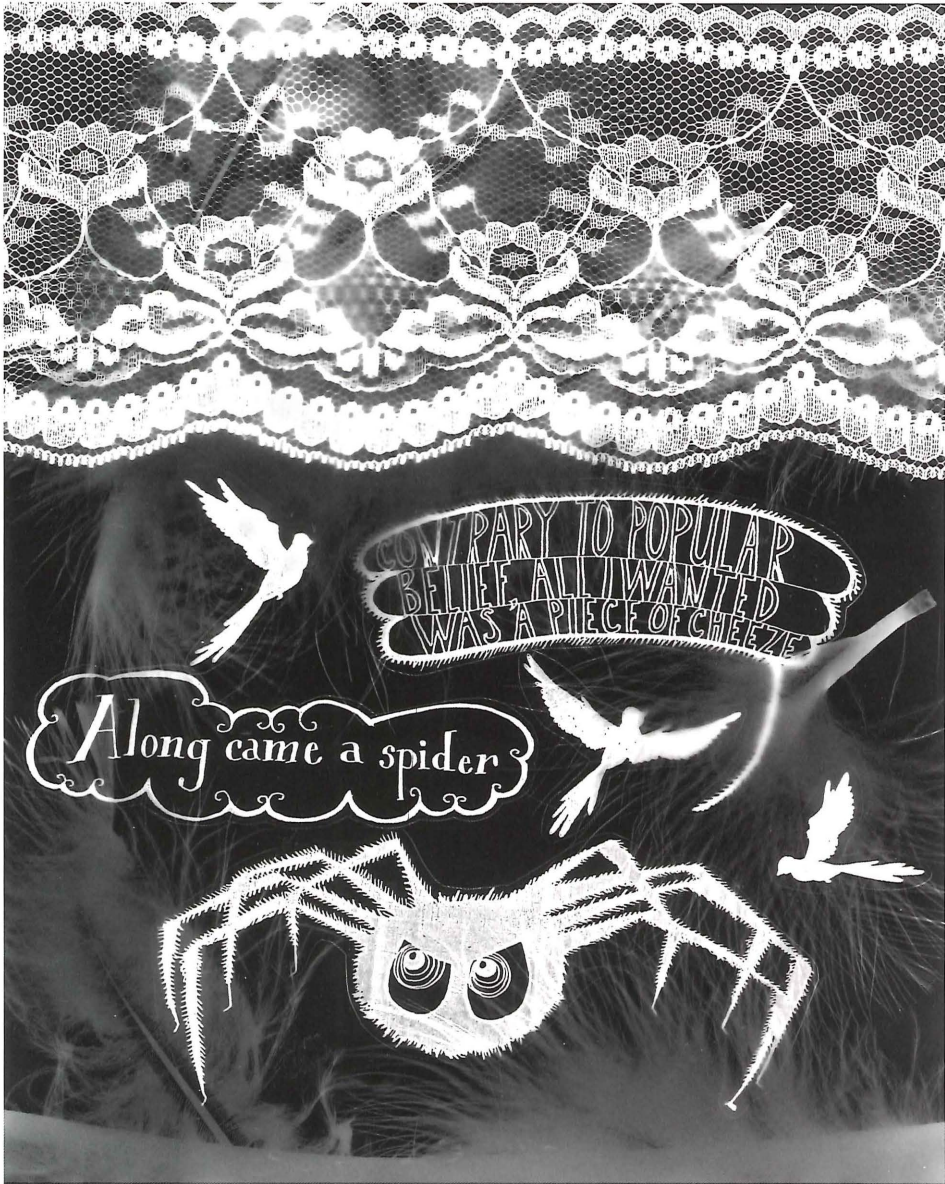
Skyline, Lee Bolt  
screenprint



And so it was.  
The wind of God gave life  
to men and women.

Eve & Adam, Norm Zylstra  
made with whatever's close to the table





Excerpts from *There Was a Little Girl and Little Miss Muffet*, miranda brouwer  
photograms

## Faith

I have no faith...

... In flight

Some say His eye is on the sparrow

Them eyes must be shut pretty tight

Because there is war and there is death and there is cancer and there is pain

And there is grief and there is strife and there is loss with little gain

And we stand at the edge of high towers looking down at our own death

To test out premonitions

Is He done with us yet?

I have fear in flight

Because there is no wind beneath my wings

But I have faith where there's no sight

When I hear Creation sing

Sarah Anema







# Could Somebody Point Me in the Right Direction?

Isaac Groenendyk

A remarkable thing happens when a farmer is born. Right before the bright lights of the hospital room pierce the adorable face, God installs in them a compass. Don't ask me how it works. I just know I don't have one.

You see, a farmer (or apparently anyone in Iowa) possesses an amazing gift. You can toss them into a twister blindfolded, dunk their heads into a dozen flushing toilets, and imprison them in a silo, and they will know, at all times, which way is north. They speak in directions such as north, south, east, and west. But for somebody like me, they speak in a foreign language:

"Oh, the gym? Just go north until Roosevelt Street. Head northeast for about a mile past the post office, and then it will be the building just south of the school."

This wouldn't be so bad if I could figure out which way is north in the first place, but for this ole '87, that talent doesn't come standard. I speak in terms of "this way" and "that way" or maybe "right" and "left."

"Oh, the building of basketball paradise? Just go this way for three blocks, head kitty-corner to your right a bit past the mail place, and then it will be the building opposite from the prison of learning."

Now you're talking.

I understand, though, that if everyone learned directions like me, the world would be a very confusing place. I get it. I know. I suffer from a disease called "Directional and Functional Losing Disorder." In short, I get lost. I lose things. I'm not alone. But for those of you who have your mental weathervanes right-side-up, let me be your tour guide into our confusing little world.

I wake up thinking my head is where my feet are. Haggardly, I stumble my way into the bathroom and catch myself almost brushing

my face and shaving my teeth. Do not be humored. It doesn't get any better.

I go the gym to play basketball in my workout clothes. I leave without my shirt or the basketball. I go outside for a walk and come back without my shoes. I get into my car to find I've lost my keys, reluctantly whip out the spare, only to get lost driving on my way. I always walk with one hand in my pocket because, well, I lost one glove. When somebody quaintly says, "I lost my marbles," I sympathize with them because I have, quite literally, lost my collection of marbles. Some say I would make a great magician with all my disappearing acts, except don't ask me to explain my tricks. Even I don't know how I do it.

I admit. I have a problem. Let's all circle around and I'll start.

"Hi, I'm Isaac."

"Hi Isaac."

"And I have been lost for two weeks..."

People notice my diagnosis, and I commend their attempts to help. But you see it's no use. One of my roommates bought me this handy key-finder. It's really quite remarkable. You attach the device to your keychain and merely whistle when you've lost it. The pitch of the whistle causes the device to beep, leading to a happy reunion of sorts.

Nice try. Before I had a chance to attach the device, I lost the keys. The next day, I lost the key-finder.

As for my driving woes, for Christmas I received another gadget: a GPS navigation system. I could see the relief in the eyes of the relatives as I caressed the thing that would cure my disease. Little did they know that it's contagious. The GPS could never find satellites to locate its position. Imitating its owner, it lost itself, and together we drive the streets in suspense of what road will appear around the next corner.

Before you begin feeling too bad for those of us with this disorder, don't. It's really not that bad living lost. It makes life exciting. For example, if Lewis and Clark went running about the US knowing where everything was, they'd never have needed Sacajawea, and today we wouldn't have the privilege of the golden dollar coin. Ok, so maybe the golden coin isn't that critical, but instead of seeing us as lost, see us as explorers. Except we're exploring something that everybody else

understands. We enjoy meeting our own Sacajawegas along the way, even if they are the local cashiers at Sunoco.

Think of it this way: If you never lost anything, you'd never have the joy of finding it. We're like the parable of the lost coin, but we've lost *all* our coins. Think of the party we would have if we found just half of them! Be jealous of me and my kind, because since we lose the most things, we experience more joy than the rest of you.



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# Editorial

Elizabeth Oliver

**Underground Art.** None of the doors to the fermented old warehouse actually looks like an entrance. I'm not convinced we've found the right place, but inside, up three flights of tipsy stairs, past a man holding a glass of wine and wearing a floor-length fur coat, we enter a drafty loft set up for the exhibit. My housemate, though not an artist, answered an ad on Craigslist to submit work to this rather dubious Robot Art Show.

Some time later I find myself talking to the man in the fur coat, who claims to be in charge of the event. He's one of those artist-types—speaks in circles, not always coherently—and I struggle to follow the thread.

He tells me about the shows he has brewing, the various venues in abandoned buildings around town, about struggles with the landlord not cooperating with fire code, illegal tenants calling the cops. He thinks I'm an artist. I'm not sure if I told him that. He knows I go to Calvin and he wants me to get my friends interested in his ventures. "Calvin artists make work that's different. It has more meaning, more philosophy," he says. It seems to be a compliment. "Calvin art is all about philosophy."

"Yeah, I guess that's true," I say, floundering. "We care a lot about what stuff means." After another vapid moment or two, he wanders back to the wine.

**Chinese New Year.** The house is full of philosophy majors, mostly seniors who know each other pretty well by now, and who share a common liturgy. I am clearly an outsider, although I recognize several faces, and overall people are friendly.

My last semester in college finds me scrambling to complete core requirements, and Chinese Thought and Culture (Philosophy 225) fulfills the necessary CCE. Thus the Chinese cultural event, which is turning out to be more of a philosophy majors' cult event. Both are foreign waters to me, so either way, I'm enlightened.

Someone knows I switched my major, from Nursing to Art, a wide swing from the excruciatingly practical end of the spectrum to the painfully impractical. I flippantly comment about philosophy not being

the most practical course of study either. Oops. Eyebrows move in such a way that I know I've said something wrong.

I try to recover. "I could have studied philosophy, actually." Not helping. "Probably." Nope, no good. In that moment of tipping past my balance point, I throw out one last attempt to avoid landing backwards in their puddle of condescension.

"Actually, Calvin's art department is very philosophical. I mean, philosophy is very important to Calvin artists."

Ouch. Oh, ouch. Landing hurts, and I wonder what it is about awkward situations that makes me spew ridiculous statements. I get three blank faces and a "Really? You think so?"

I sputter about for a bit, trying to find my feet, and explain that I know there isn't really any similarity. I'm groveling, or something, and I know I should eventually shut up. Finally I manage to pivot and retreat, hopefully giving my cheeks a chance to lose their crimson hue. I tell myself that if I see these people again, maybe they won't recognize me.

**Lunch at Marie Catrib's.** A friend and I share stories about how classes are going, trading bites of inspiration from lectures and readings. I mention Okakura Kakuzo's Japanese apology, *The Book of Tea*, and how it celebrates the unexpressed beauty intrinsic to mundane life. We both try to stomach the fear of getting a job.

He asks about my current painting project. I ruminate on the techniques I'm trying to employ, a few sources I draw from, artist influences. Then comes the gut-wrenching question: "Why? Why are you doing that?"

I know why, of course, but I've already been spitting vaguities while trying to keep my sandwich in my mouth. I'm not sure I want to further reveal my wavering clench on the human language by trying to express these sensibilities.

"I try to avoid talking about why," I apologize. "I'm afraid I'll ruin it. There's a lot of emphasis around here to analyze everything, but sometimes I find that too many words disembowel the truth."

# Comments

**Natalie Good** [04]

*The Peace of Wild Things* by Wendell Berry

**Amanda Hayes** [05]

Civil twilight starts at 7am.

**Anna M. Fongers** [12]

There are about 500 stories walking up and down South Division every day, and as I've begun to listen to them, each one has shown me my own ignorance and pride. "God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him" (1 Corinthians 1:27-29).

**Rachel van Wingerden** [15]

To all mothers who may pray for a child to grow inside and yet remain barren; to all mothers who face the ravaging pain of miscarriage time and again—barren, too. "Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not," for "He maketh the barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children" (Galatians 4:27, Psalms 113:9). I hope the Ganges floods waters of rebirth for us all.

**Jo-Ann VanReeuwijk** [18,19]

Vessels are indicators of journey. They are containers of hopes, tragedies, futures, quests, narratives and unrealized business.  
Photography: Jennifer Steensma Hoag

**Lauren Schelle** [25]

I've been writing lyrics since I was in kindergarten. I don't ordinarily write lyrics for specific people, but these are some lyrics I wrote last year for one of my really good girlfriends on her 22nd birthday. I also wrote the melody for it and had it recorded with acoustic guitar and vocals. The song is pretty simple, as you can see in the tabs.

**Norm Zylstra** [27]

Page 21 .... day six of a creation story picture book titled *Those First Few Days*.

**Sarah Anema** [30]

This poem is very significant to the spiritual journey I have experienced throughout my life. My grandfather used to always sing *His Eye is on the Sparrow* and it would always strike me how unreal it often felt. If God was really up there watching all these things happening to His beloved Creation, where was He? Why wasn't He doing anything? The truth is that He is there, despite the fact that questions of doubt so often over rule the rejoicing, there is no denying the joy that accompanies the song of renewal and life found in Christ.

**Kat Stahl** [30]

I have always been amazed by the detail of God's creation. Spending last semester in New Mexico gave me the opportunity to take a couple of macro shots of some of those beautiful details and bring attention to the little things in life, which we often lose sight of throughout our fast-paced lives.

**Isaac Groenendyk** [32]

Postscript: I've always had a reputation of losing things, but I had a string of days where it was just ridiculous. Imitating my favorite writer, Rick Reilly, I wrote this piece as an email back to home just to keep things interesting. They loved it, and it has now become a habit of mine to write such pieces. So I continue to write, and I'm loving every word of it.

**Hannah Piedt** [33]

There's something of an art to putting on the mask I want the world to see.

## Late Nights

Katherine Reyburn

i want to go to sleep in your arms and know you'll be next to me when  
i wake up....

...or out getting me coffee.

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