

# TRANSOM ISSUE 17: ON THE PORCH

{wherein we hear each other start to sweat}



Beyond Suns  
Stuart Gerard Walker  
Film, 2023

**AUTUMN EQUINOX 2023**

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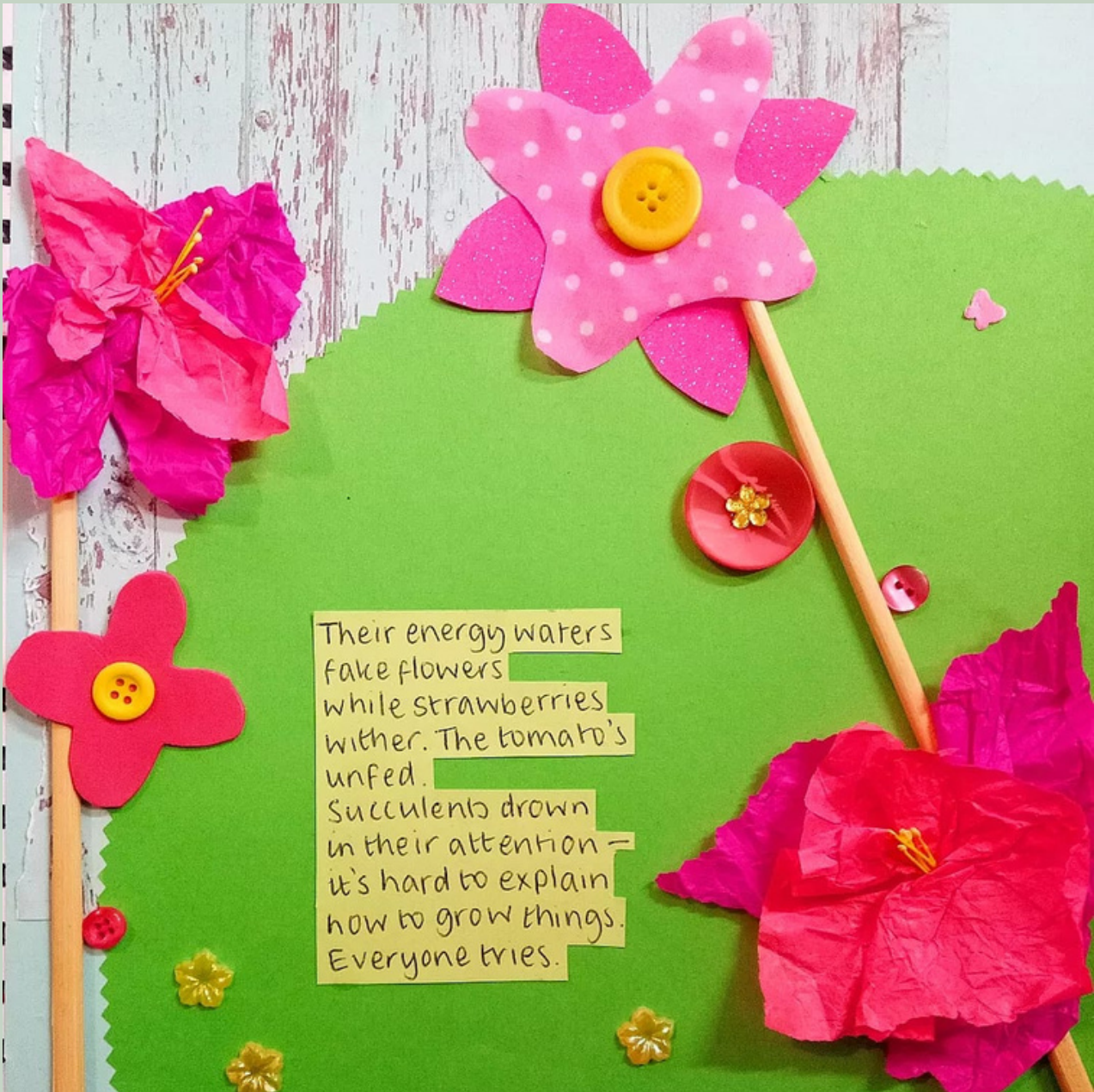
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# Miriam Taylor

## How to Grow Things



Their energy waters  
fake flowers  
while strawberries  
wither. The tomato's  
unfed.  
Succulents drown  
in their attention -  
it's hard to explain  
how to grow things.  
Everyone tries.

“Their energy waters  
fake flowers  
while strawberries  
wither. The tomato’s  
unfed.  
Succulents drown  
in their attention -  
it’s hard to explain  
how to grow things.  
Everyone tries.”

# Keith Gaboury

## Dear Yesterday's Imagined Future

Remember you visualized the world of 2000  
in Tottenville  
with parks and playgrounds and houses  
The heart  
a business factory Beyond a concentric circle  
raw coal and polluted  
smoke and soot used to warm  
the chemical  
industry for their values laundered to a thousand communities

*Popular Mechanics Magazine*. "Miracles You'll See In The Next Fifty Years." Waldemar Kaempffert. February 1950. 114 - 121.

Edward Supranowicz

Glamour 4cc



## Sarah Koenig

### **The Blackbirds**

while they sleep  
you make all the difference –  
soften the tree branches  
explain things to the overfed police  
shift the quiet sunlight  
from the window  
till my skin is full of light –  
till my fingers  
dial in the right number  
connecting with a someone

Lucie Chou

**Encounter: A Cento after George Oppen**

*What if I had never seen this before? What if I knew I would never see this again?*

—*Rachel Carson*

in the steadfastness      of the world

deer      nibbling      the moist

luscious      solitary      word

letting the grass have sex

canopy of trees      hide and seek

your eyes      a vase as wide      as the field

the sun has dipped its brush in gilt

in the boat of      your young

lemony      tongue

wind-whipped heart

eyes green & sincere

my skin singing

have you

popped up beside me love

with the tip of a tendril

I can break my own heart

as birdsong over us

breaks

rest my forehead against the planet



Source texts:

Ochirbatyn Dashbalbar tr. by Jessica Madison Pískatá, "Ode to Grass"

Chard deNiord, "Thistle"

Hannah Fries, "House Plant"

Robert Gibb, "Rewilding the Yard"

Forrest Gander, "Forest"

J. P. White, "The Fig Tree in Lourmarin"

Anne-Sophie Balzer, "Invasive Species"

Tara Bray, "Lemon Verbena"

Barbara Crooker, "Credo"

Khadija Anderson, "Eaton Canyon Wash"

Erin Lyn Bodin, "Birch Tree"

gracias to the biodiverse commons of *Plant-Human Quarterly* & *About Place Journal*

## Sarah Koenig

### Missive

I remember the phone books  
like much else they are gone  
beautiful country

even the clouds have seeds  
the trees poke me with bare branches  
their touch is a vaccine

I want to reach out to everyone  
with the right amount of love

Edward Supranowicz

Serious Misgivings



## John Zedolik

### **Animal Instincts**

Battler, pill bug—  
feelers ahead and above—  
in its segmented silver  
crustacean armor defies  
gravity upward along  
our yellow bathroom wall.

The stretched flesh  
of the punch-swollen fist  
defies the same,  
stiff and iced—  
still adrenaline-drunk  
at four a.m.

well after the bars have closed  
and longer since the knuckles  
flew into bone,

so if the unnatural way  
is natural after all, let us hope  
for it all the way as our  
carbon and water combos

of whatever configuration  
fight the drag to downward  
upon walls upon carpet or concrete  
scuttle, swell, or saunter—  
erect, upright.

Lucie Chou

Dwelling in the Mountains These Summer Days

in a pavilion  
with winds for walls  
face naked| to  
pine pollen  
blown from  
small male cones  
to female ones  
a thousand times  
larger  
(yin and yang  
moon and sun  
all relative)  
breathing in  
turpentine  
breathing out  
tranquility  
observing  
light shifting  
over needles

copying  
with pale ink  
each stroke  
each time  
a short sharp green  
thing pierces  
the void  
glimmers through  
mountain mist  
befriending  
mosses growing  
lush where waste  
water is thrown  
each morning  
thinking how  
Wang Xizhi writes  
the preposition *of*  
hundreds of times  
throughout a scroll  
not two alike  
each bearing a  
unique  
relation

(to what?  
context?  
one another?)  
it is true  
no word  
can ever mean or  
be  
the same  
peering into  
myriad  
wrinkles in  
Taihu stones  
watching water  
turn from mist  
to rain to rill  
to river to time  
to mist to void  
again  
again  
charred pinewood  
powder floating in







Ekphrasis: Wang Xizhi, “after Wang Meng, Mountain Dwelling on a Summer Day,” ink on paper, 1694 (image via Wikimedia Commons).

## John Zedolik

### Telling Take

This Polaroid's white border  
marks the limit of the present,

separates the stuff of fast, live  
color from the yellowing past

where I, in Toughskins jeans  
that flare moderately at the calves,

hold the pickerel my father  
has caught and try to curl

a smirk around my baby teeth  
as the big fish's own insist

upon digging their close-ranked  
needles into flesh of forefinger and thumb,

and its slick weight threatens to pull  
down my single-digit arm,

from wrist all the thin way to the socket,  
leaving me limp, unable to raise a rampart

to crane up the water-kingdom's prize  
for the backyard display and awe.

\*

Perhaps I should have been wearing  
only Somewhat-Toughskins

(despite their reinforced fabric squares  
guarding—grass-stained—growing knees).

or at least a name qualified by the scant strength  
that the age of little body-hair brings

\*

I think the vanquished beast would win  
If I had to pose at length, frozen-proud

in imitation of paternal glory,  
but the photo, slightly curling,

if taken from the ancient album  
doesn't speak, but I'll reveal the secret

strain, leave the lad to tough it out  
between the faux-leather covers,

more years to proffer his grit  
to any rare seekers, takers

in the unquestioning—  
unquestioned—hollow

of a closet's keeping,  
a silent, storied dark.

## Vishal Prabhu

### **Impressions on hearing the azaan**

Like a ship's fog horn  
Made lyrical—the monosyll  
able rising and falling—like a  
Ship's fog horn sounded multiply—

The same or different ship—like a

Ship's fog horn hollowing out  
The time of the day—like a  
Ship's fog horn come  
From off the land

# Sarah Koenig

## Flamenco Sketches

*after Chen Chen*

people person seeks  
soft percussive cymbals

if you like I can show  
you many such properties –

tiled floors  
quiet bass –

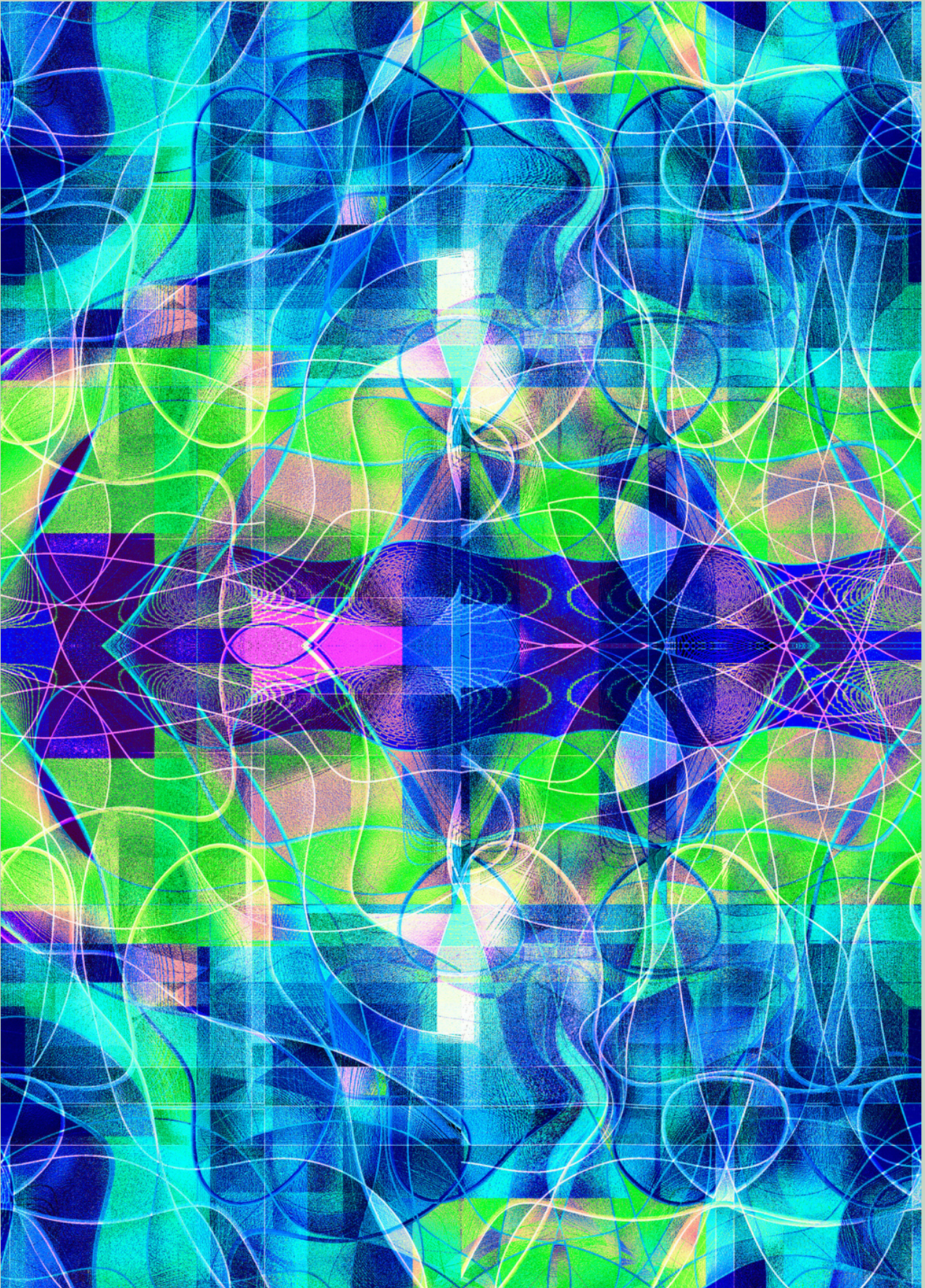
I excel at whispering  
through bookstore windows

I like a good skyscraper –  
a black and white photo

of a park bench

Edward Supranowicz

**She Dances in the Blue Darkness**



## Lucie Chou

### **Tenebrae / Luminae**

1.

We drive against an imminent storm  
into Xishuang Banna botanical garden.  
The clouded firmament darkens  
like an apple sliced open, oxidizing  
inexorably. At eight o'clock we walk  
a hundred steps from our hotel lobby  
into complete darkness. The driver  
who takes us here to the rainforest's  
heart says the nearest "starry night  
fair" flashes with LEDs, fluoresces  
in the fifty miles distant downtown.  
But here the night is opaque, black  
enough to prompt us to contemplate  
the original nature of light's absence.  
We sigh our regret that the sky  
has not faired in time for darkness  
to light up with real bands of stars,  
for the holy spirits of luminescence  
to come into glorious manifestation.  
We know they always exist, abide  
there even in the brightest daylight.  
When we chant prayers to serenade  
electric power to sleep, sisterhoods  
of sparkling eyes may or may not  
awake, take wing, swing abroad and  
aloft, alight in our field of vision.  
Sometimes they are swaddled in  
the bat-like plumage of Thestrals.

2.

Eight years ago we lay open-eyed for three nights  
in a holiday suite on the shore of Lake Erhai  
which had been contaminated by rampant algae,  
water hyacinths, untreated effluvia from villages,

thus unfit to nourish *Ottelia acuminata*, an imp that indicates the health of waters. Every effort had been taken to disentangle the miasmic mesh. By the time we went there, silver fringes of petals were again whiffling in the fragrant, transparent night air, sparkling on the starlit dark waves. The skies over it sympathized with the lake by pulling off shrouds of amaurosis to show the efflorescence of their own indicator species: the heavenly fellowship of planets and stars. We lay on our backs, feeling eyeballs unmoored between lake and sky. We remember turning our fancy candelabras off and falling asleep while *Ottelia acuminata* bloomed, Orion blinked.

3.

And there is another memory deeper back in time: ten years (or is it eleven?) back from the present, we drove forty miles into the mountain to a valley where we spent the night in a farmer's cottage lit with dim wavering flames of a kerosene lamp. It was summer, mosquitoes having orgies, but we lay in the yard in cool breezes under a pear tree whose green fruits merged perfectly with leaves. We gazed through the foliage's traceried windows at the Milky Way, fully revealed for the first time in our family's penurious experience of nature, gazed, gazed, and gasped, speechless, all words vanished into ineffable phenomenologies of stars. The skies were so dark we had to grope around for the bridles and saddles of our own souls. The galaxy coruscated so brilliantly that they galloped into our dreams. For years their ghosts would dance among our rapid eye movements. That midnight my uncle rushed to the outhouse over which he glimpsed the Leonid meteor shower.



4.

After two nights in the rainforest scanning royal waterlilies with flashlights, we visit a National Geographic exhibition in Kunming. It shows a photograph titled Dark Night Sky Park selected by International Dark Sky Association. We linger in front of the starry sky framed and fixed on the limelit wall to read a dialectic of darkness and light, to recite a Tenebrae of the text:

*The night is disappearing. The Owachomo Bridge at Natural Bridges National Monument, Utah, USA, speaks of the fact that “natural darkness” is also something to be conserved, like endangered flora and fauna. Light pollution in the city has taken away a lot of stars from us. People who visit this place, which the International Dark Sky Association named “Dark Night Sky Park”, say this—  
“It feels like the sky has been restored.”*

disappearing. “natural darkness” is also endangered flora and fauna. Light pollution in the city has taken away stars from us. People who visit this place, which the International Dark Sky Association named “Dark Night Sky Park”, say this—  
“It feels like the sky has been restored.”

endanger  
Dark Sky  
restored.”

Tenebrae

Luminae

symbiotic algae and fungi

lichens

live and die

on roof beams

of deep time

## John Zedolik

### Work Related

Thunk!—the usual—no . . .

a sliver of sharp sound  
through the cardboard's corrugated hide

the beast is broken

a tang sweet and medicine bitter,

shadow spreading outward, under the box

dampens the concrete and steel lip  
underbiting at the open truck-dock

“Damn—I think we finally broke a bottle,”  
says one of bending team to the other

within the close confines of the trailer  
as the aroma wafts—“peach or something”—

But they can only resume removing the cartons  
from the deposited palette, push the leaker to the side,  
await the boss's response, hope he lets slide

the honest mistake in the heat of effort—  
one of a thousand spirits if not more—

imagine the orchard while the fumes rise  
in the still summer afternoon,

just beyond the bleached asphalt,

waiting with sweet fruit and cool juice.

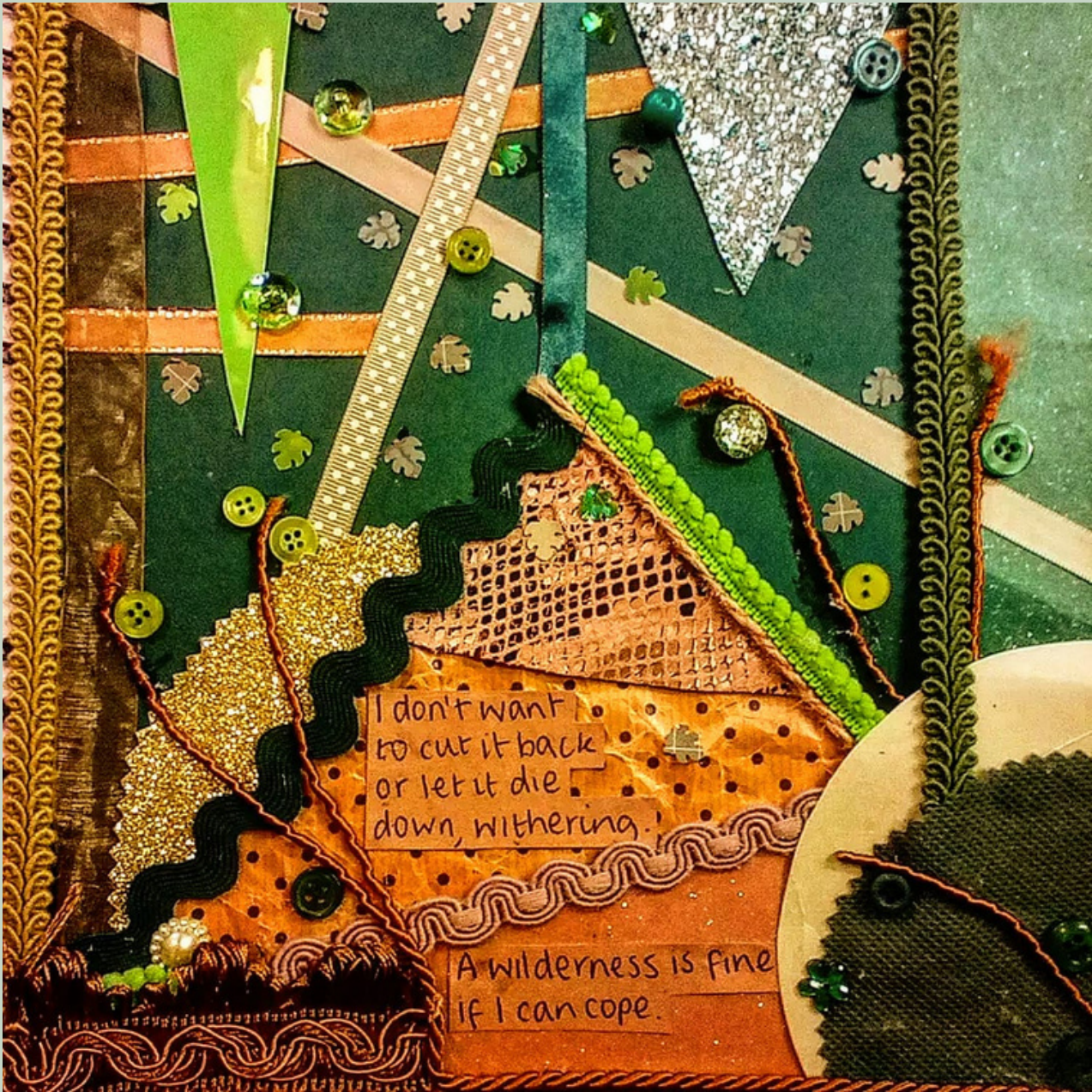
## Michael Kozlowsky

### **The Wheelchair is the Weapon**

Fires or fireworks, people will gather  
With folded chairs and alcohol in hand to spike the spirits.  
Children of all ages escape out the center of a swollen year  
Or the center of a house  
Where the father isn't what he used to be  
And watch as a fraudulent sky is littered with light  
And smoke that doesn't drift  
But settles like a dry fog,  
Secondhand fun for all the lungs  
Opened like the trunk from which the fireworks are pulled  
By a cousin who absorbed his twin at birth  
Two penises between his legs  
And searching for a good time.  
The sky is punished for hours for things it didn't know it did  
A beating so bad the cops were called  
By neighbors screwed in too tight to their floorboards  
Too late to tend to my brother  
Who lit a pack of jumping jacks  
And attempted to throw them underhand,  
An exploded palm and a cradle of blisters  
For his troubles.  
Far closer to earth,  
the police brought their own sound and light show  
And were met with a blockbuster of boos.  
Hands on hips beside their own explosives with short fuses,  
They wanted to know who was running the show.  
Running the show?  
Why, officer, I thought we were all let loose and alone out here,  
But from the shadows comes my mother wheeling my father  
Slumped over in his chair, half paralyzed with eyes  
That screamed damage from within.  
His speech was broken, American,  
But he took responsibility for the chaos  
And the cops couldn't meet his eyes  
When they stammered their muted threat

To try to wrap things up as quickly as possible  
And to enjoy the show  
Which everyone did  
For a time.

Overgrowth



I don't want  
to cut it back  
or let it die  
down, withering.

A wilderness is fine  
if I can cope.

“I don't want  
to cut it back  
or let it die  
down, withering.

A wilderness is fine  
if I can cope.”

## Interview with Miriam Taylor

**Q: Which aspects of these pieces were foraged, I.E. found and incorporated into the collages, and which were cultivated, made specifically for them?**

A: In a way, everything I use is foraged. Even the words. I don't go out seeking materials for a particular project, I find the project is inspired by the materials I have. I keep everything and anything of interest! Just as poems often begin as a list of words, their collages start with the process of rummaging. It makes a terrible mess! I'm completely absorbed by what I have in front of me. I don't really consider what I don't have.

**Q: You mentioned in your cover letter that you make pictures “for” your poems. Does this mean you always start with the poem and build the imagery around it? Have you ever tried the opposite? Do you find one aspect incomplete without the other?**

A: I do always start with a poem. Although at the beginning of lockdown there were a few collages that didn't have words. I was finding words hard to come by. The poem and the image exist separately, but together they create a third thing. I learn a lot about a poem I have written when I've finished its picture. It becomes a page in my scrapbook.

**Q: When it comes to the creation process, do you see yourself as a garden, a gardener, both, or maybe neither?**

A: I've not considered this before! Both, I think, but at different times. It depends a great deal on how connected I feel with my body and with life. My experience of having this particular body and life, is of managing it. I find the poem “Overgrowth” very touching to read. It clarified my feeling, it reminds me that my actions in 'cutting back' my physical form and my lived existence, are a cause for sadness. I cut myself back very literally, relying on anorexia to limit who and how I was, to something I could cope with. It was never what I wanted, it was my compromise. While I have found life overwhelming and felt it impossible, at times, I've never wanted someone else's. Everyone has struggles, in a way I am lucky to know what mine are. It goes back to my prayer, as a child, I asked God to help me to cope. My body, with it's disability, my physicality, is like the garden. I am both grateful and annoyed to have been gifted this life. It's as if someone I care about, hugely, and value, left me with a precious pot plant that is delicate and hard to take care of. I want it to survive and be thriving when they return. I have been made a gardener and want to do this job well. I don't want to kill it. I'm afraid that I will. The person who creates, though. The writer, the artist, who finds

words to explain. They are the watcher in the wilderness.

**Miriam Taylor** is a poet and collage artist based in London, living with C-PTSD and brittle bone disease. Her work explores the intimacies and intricacies of her experience with disability, and the ways that life can bloom where it is planted.

**Artist Statement:** On “How to Grow Things” - I live in supported accommodation, and the staff here help me by living my life with me. They help me manage my physical healthcare by supporting my mental health; I am very lucky to live here. People come and go, but this is a place you can flourish. It's my first real home. There is a sunny garden that we share and recently, it was given a spruce up with new furniture, plants, and much to my amusement, pretend flowers. It looks nice. However I've discovered Londoners (I grew up in the countryside) know as little about nature as I knew about the tube trains. One day, I noticed a staff member watering the plants and went out to thank them. But he was watering the fake flowers! He wasn't sure what was real or not. I enjoyed showing him. We all water fake flowers, in some way. Fake flowers are nice to look at, but don't need our time and energy. They're forever the same. The apparently-empty pot of earth is what needs the watering. That's where we planted the seeds.

On “Overgrowth” - I have to communicate effectively in order to stay safe. I look fairly normal and didn't always use a wheelchair, so if people didn't understand or believe me about my fragility, disasters occurred. (At preschool, my mum made me a badge that said 'fragile - do not pick me up'.) As an adult, I displayed my bones by being severely anorexic. I've changed. Expressing my truth in words and pictures is much more fun and hurts less! This poem is particularly special to me because it says exactly what I mean, but have struggled to explain in the past. I don't mind my life being so full of collapses and recoveries, being so full of everything. I don't want anyone else's life. As a child, I only prayed for one thing: “dear lord, please help me cope.” I don't want to cut back my life and tame it. I want this life, the one I was given, I just need to be able to cope. I hope this image conveys what I'm trying to do everyday. I don't think I'm alone. I'm lucky to have words to share with others.

## Interview with Keith Gaboury

**Q: Poetry and the sciences are often placed at odds with one another, whether they are truly all that fundamentally opposite or not. What drew you to this issue of Popular Mechanics as a source for your erasure?**

A: I've always been interested in science. I remember reading Scientific American as a teenager. To this end, I have a full-length poetry collection titled *The Cosmos is Alive* that I believe poetically scratches my scientific itch. With "Dear Yesterday's Imagined Future," I wrote the erasure poem this past April 2023 when I wrote a poem everyday for Hollie Hardy's 30 For 30 Challenge as part of National Poetry Month. Over 30 days, I was given 30 poetry prompts. The prompt on one particular day was erasure. Through some online research, I went down a little rabbit hole where I read a smattering of writing that attempted to predict the future. There's a universe of writing and artwork out there that works within this predictive space. When I found an article predicting the future in the archives of Popular Mechanics, I was immediately interested. From there, my erasure play took over.

**Q: Where is the hinge point for you between the clean utopia and the ugliness of what it takes to build it? Is the destruction of the natural, the human, a feature or a bug?**

A: On a cosmic scale, one argument in favor of humanity being alone in the universe is that there's a cosmic filter at a certain point that humans on Earth have not yet reached. Are all conscious organisms doomed for a fate of self-destruction? Perhaps the universe hosted a species in the distant past who annihilated themselves in an event akin to a nuclear fallout. In order to build our version of civilization's clean utopia, must humanity destroy the natural environment? If so, this clean utopia has a relatively short shelf life since utopia requires a stable environment for people to inhabit. Moreover, if one argues that destruction of the natural environment is a feature, then the logical extension of that argument is that humanity's destructive environmental actions deserve a pass without any consequences. I refuse to make that argument. While we don't know with any factual accuracy if there's a cosmic filter, humanity can and must control how we treat the natural environment on Earth. Therefore, I believe that if (and when) humanity is destructive in order to build civilization in our twenty-first century image, this behavior is a bug that we must fight against.

**Q: Is a city a kind of body? What is corrupted when the heart itself is a means for harm?**

A: A city is a great metaphor for a body. I enjoy writing poetry that follows a



metaphorical chain. If a city is a body, where in the city is the liver, the lungs, and the heart? The answers to these questions are very subjective. A city's heart can be a human-made building, a natural geographical feature, a group of people, and other possibilities too. For instance, one person could argue that a city's heart is a specific building while another person could say that the same city's heart lies instead with a group of people. Between structures, people, and nature, a person's choice in turn reflects their values. There is no wrong answer. One person's answer is right from their perspective. If a city's heart is used for a means of harm (wherever the heart resides), then the city itself is corrupted. Since the heart pumps blood throughout the body, the heart's corruption spreads throughout the city. If a city can survive, its corrupted heart must be removed. The corruption must be physically, psychologically, and/or emotionally removed. Ultimately, the city will be remade anew.

**Keith Mark Gaboury** earned a M.F.A. in creative writing from Emerson College. He has two full-length poetry collections forthcoming from Kelsay Books and Falkenberg Press. Keith is also the president of the Berkeley Branch of the California Writers Club. Learn more at [keithmgaboury.com](http://keithmgaboury.com).

## Interview with Edward Supranowicz

**Q: As a digital artist, what is your program of choice? Has what you've used to create your pieces changed much over time, or are you fairly constant in terms of hardware and software?**

A: I started out with Photoshop. But when the one computer I had crashed and Photoshop changed to a monthly fee, I switched to GIMP which is open access. I found that I could do as much or more with GIMP, and was pleased that GIMP notified users of any improvements and updates. I use and appreciate tech, but try to keep it at a minimum, so that the art retains its human feel. My computer is a \$350 HP desktop; a more expensive version would not necessarily help me to create better art.

**Q: Do you start a piece with its title as a guidepost, or do you assign one afterwards based on how the piece comes together?**

A: I work intuitively, always have. The basic processes of computer work are similar to those when I was doing acrylics and oil paintings and ink sketches. The title of a piece and the piece itself progress at the same time until one fits the other.

**Q: The contrast you created within each of your pieces, both with and without color, really drew us to them. Do you generally prefer working in colors or black and white?**

A: Black and white work and color works both have their strong points and appeal with the ineffable effects they have on space, interplay of shapes, and contrast versus unity. Every once and a while I will deliberately do black and white pieces as discipline, i.e., to make sure my forms are crisp and clear and contrast between shapes maintain unity and cohesiveness. I find that the practice improves both my black and white pieces and my color work.

**Edward Michael Supranowicz** is the grandson of Irish and Russian/Ukrainian immigrants. He grew up on a small farm in Appalachia. He has a grad background in painting and printmaking. Some of his artwork has recently or will soon appear in *Fish Food*, *Streetlight*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, *Door Is A Jar*, *The Phoenix*, and *The Harvard Advocate*. Edward is also a published poet.

**Artist Statement:** I do not believe in formal artist statements. Art should speak for itself, and the artist should maintain a respectful distance and silence. I work intuitively and compulsively, probably believing that there are archetypes that are shared among us all, but amenable to being expressed in one's own individual style. I have been doing

digital paintings and drawings for the last 10 or so years. It is a good fit to my personality and nature, being able to go forward, then back, then back and forward, and not having to worry about wasted canvas. And digital work allows for sharing work with more than one person rather than just one person “owning” a painting.

## Interview with Sarah Koenig

**Q: “Missive” and “The Blackbirds” both have a vivid tactile quality about them, making hands out of the speakers’ desire, yet the former feels more fraught.**

**What is at risk when those hands reach out to touch?**

A: There is always danger and vulnerability in reaching out, as well as in being close to someone. Relationships and friendships can change or be lost. Paradoxically, the ability to be vulnerable is strength. Also, I really do miss phone books.

**Q: How did you approach the consonance and mouth-sounds of “Flamenco Sketches?” What elements came from the Chen Chen piece, and did those take you anywhere you didn’t expect in your own poem?**

A: “Flamenco Sketches” is the title of a song on Miles Davis’ “Kind of Blue” album. I was listening to this album when I wrote the poem and some of that sibilance slipped through. I think this also explains the skyscraper, park bench, etc. – jazz, which I don’t listen to very often, brings back New York City images. My poem was inspired by Chen Chen’s poem “In This Economy,” which reads like a cover letter but instead lists personal and whimsical details (i.e. “I am knowledgeable in advanced aftermath.”) It’s delightful and inspired me to write a little sketch of myself with similar language.

**Q: All of these pieces pay careful attention to brevity; what’s your process for cutting a poem down into its final form?**

A: I let most poems sit for several months. Only then can I really see what needs to be cut and what lacks energy. I was a reporter and still have the urge to slice and dice to make things as clean as possible. These poems started out short, though – my usual challenge is to keep going and make poems longer!

**Sarah Koenig** lives in Seattle, WA. Her poetry has appeared in Barrow Street, PANK, the Bellevue Literary Review, the Bellingham Review, Cutbank, DIAGRAM, Sixth Finch, Poetry Northwest and Faultline, among several other journals. Her work is forthcoming in Cimarron Review and Sugar House Review.

## Interview with Lucie Chou

**Q: In your poems, there was an astounding variety of form. Do you default to any particular form, say, on a first draft of a piece? Did any of these poems drastically change their form from inception to now, or were the forms a part of them at the onset?**

A: In terms of form, the places where my poems begin are wild and teeming with strange critters. I go to them as a naturalist ventures into nature, without preconception, following the fortuitous colors, textures, smells and sounds of that terrain on that particular day. I start poems intuitively, wait for them to tell me whether it is a big dense stanza, a slender column, a mazy meandering page, a crazy quilt or a vertical scroll they would like to morph into. There is not exactly a default or go-to form, but many poems bide in the limbo of a single stanza of medium line lengths before differentiating into variegated emergence. In “Tenebrae / Luminae”, all but the erasure section came out as they are now, with only minor changes to words and syntax, but the erasure part began as a mere re-lineation of the quoted text, and got stuck. Then I abandoned the poem, went out for a walk while listening to a poetry lecture by Alice Oswald, then got struck by torrin a. greathouse’s invented form “the Burning Haibun”, and, pacing furiously up and down the boulevard, took to some radical and frenetic revisions on my phone. “Dwelling in the Mountains These Summer Days” started as a slim, left-justified cascade of words, pretty much like conventional free verse. Immediately after getting up very early to write that first draft, I attended a poetry revision workshop where the instructor suggested blowing up the form of poems without caring about the result. I rewrote it during a ten-minute exercise session, was somehow happy with what I discovered, and made some final changes later that day—then here it is! The cento was deliberately conceived as a cento, also my first attempt at the form. But the fresh meaning that emerged in the collaging process was like, as Stevens said of his sun, “news from Africa”.

**Q: The three pieces we’ve selected all speak to, and exist in conversation with, other works. To your knowledge, has anybody ever built off of your writing in a similar way? How would you feel if someone were to connect with your work in that way?**

A: I have not yet had the honor of other artists responding to or taking inspiration from my writing, though I would dearly love to! The poet Lana Hechtman Ayers talked about writing “after poems”, and I love how poems violate the mechanical principles of the Newtonian universe—they potential and kinetic energy contributes to each other’s increase, and intimate, empathic contact sparks so much creativity. Having someone

connecting with my work in that way would feel as if “I visit the orchards of spheres and look at the product, / And look at quintillions ripen’d and look at quintillions green” and I were one of them.

**Q: In your Cento, what informed your decision to open with a quote from Rachel Carson? Did that quote ever find itself in the body of the poem, or was it always separate?**

A: Actually, it was the Carson quote that provoked the cento. I read that quote in a poet’s statement in *Plant-Human Quarterly*, and found myself re-examining my noticing of the everyday nature around me: all this ordinary green, ordinary song, used as I am to their abiding presence, are actually extraordinary if every moment of encounter and awareness were unique and unrepeatable. I decided that going out of my usual way of writing about nature and re-encountering it through other poets’ lines would be a possible way to reinvigorate my perception. While sewing the patches together, a patterns sailed within my ken: George Oppen’s “Psalm” with the startled deer in it. So I paired tribute to all of those, thanking them for letting me imagine the living world anew. The quote never entered the poem’s body. It remained at the threshold. Because it was the voice that welcomed me into the making of this poem, it may also welcome readers into its being received.

**Lucie Chou** is an emerging ecopoet residing in mainland China. Her poems are published or forthcoming in *Sky Island Journal*, *Tofu Ink Arts*, *Tiny Seed Journal*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Black Earth Institute Blog*, *Entropy Magazine*, and elsewhere. Her debut collection, *Convivial Communiverse*, came out from *Atmosphere Press* in March 2023. When not reading (the Romantics, Hopkins, Jorie Graham, Jane Clarke...) or writing, she forages for weedy beauty in concrete jungles and gardens on her dorm’s cramped balcony.

**Artist Statement:** “Dwelling in the Mountains These Summer Days” is a loose ekphrasis of the image that follows it, an ancient Chinese landscape painting scroll by Wang Xizhi. Wang Xizhi was a renowned Chinese calligrapher known for his *Preface to the Orchid Pavilion Anthology*. Taihu stones are rocks from the Taihu Lake region whose singularly craggy shapes were aesthetically preferred by ancient Chinese painters and writers. The poem also alludes to Buddhist and Taoist philosophies and to Wittgenstein’s notion that no word is ever used exactly in the same way for more than one time.

## Interview with John Zedolik

**Q: A boy, a bug, and a broken bottle are all seemingly small presences that carry a deceptive amount of tension and weight as you expound upon them. Do these images usually come to you first, or are you initially drawn to what lies under them?**

A: "[T]he images come to me first," but there is a near instantaneous connection with "what lies under them." If I observe certain phenomena, the observation almost always strikes me as a way to communicate something beyond the physical qualities of these phenomena. Sometimes the objects connect with memory or just with some other meaning (or, as you say, provide some sort of "tension"). I'm not sure why certain objects trigger these connections (it's not that certain categories or kinds of objects stimulate my poetic impulse), but I know almost immediately if these objects will provide an embryo for a poem. So, for example, regarding "Animal Instincts," I saw a "pill bug" crawling up our bathroom wall, I believe, and its "gravity"-defying tenacity immediately connected with a moment years ago when I had been in a fight. I cannot say why this connection formed immediately after I witnessed the "bug" in action at this moment, for I have seen many of these wandering around outside our house. Perhaps it had to do with an identification between me and the "bug" in terms of tenacity. Sometimes, these objects, such as the "pill bug," are what many would consider "unpoetic." I have a piece of paper taped to my bedroom wall with the printed quotation, "Happy are those who can see beauty in modest spots, where others see nothing," by Camille Pissarro. I think this encapsulates my aesthetic well; for whatever reason, some "modest spots" are inspiring to me.

**Q: Is "Telling Take" an ekphrasis of an actual photo? If so, do you still have this picture? Do you feel differently about it than you did before writing this poem?**

A: Yes, "Telling Take" is "an ekphrasis of an actual photo" from long ago, in an album buried somewhere in the closet of my parents' bedroom (if one of my sisters hasn't taken the album). So, the poem is based upon a memory of that photo because I haven't seen it in MANY years--and I don't know if I could even find it now. I don't think I "feel[. . .] different" about the photo now. For some reason--related to what I mentioned in the first answer--this photo stuck in my head. Perhaps it's because the photo shows me trying to emulate my father--trying to be strong and masculine--but, as a boy, that's difficult. Perhaps this relates to what many sons (or offspring in general) feel in relation to a parent, perhaps for their entire lives. So, I think this photo must have meant this to me for many years but, for whatever reason, I was only able to articulate it recently.

**Q: Does the dialogue in your poetry sound like anyone in particular in your mind? Or do you read it in your own voice, or the voice of the speaker? Does anything about it change when you read it out loud?**

A: The dialogue in the poem(s) is based upon loose recollection of other people and (sometimes) me. So it represents a single moment as well as moments such as the one in "Work Related." When I read the dialogue out loud--just now--I wasn't sure who it represented: me (as a young man) or my co-worker(s). I suppose the identification or characterization is not as important as communicating something about the situation--and the work situation in general. Thanks for the question, as it encouraged me to read the lines out loud and think about dialogue in my poems, which I use, I believe, not so much for characterization as for a general communication of the situation or environment in which the characters are living and working. However, perhaps in the future, I will use dialogue more for specific characterization, though I can't say I've never done that.

**John Zedolik** is an adjunct English professor at Chatham University and Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, and has published poems in such journals as *Abbey*, *The Bangalore Review* (IND), *Commonweal*, *FreeXpresSion* (AUS), *Orbis* (UK), *Paperplates* (CAN), *Poem*, *Poetry Salzburg Review* (AUT), *Third Wednesday*, and in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. In 2019, he published his first full-length collection, entitled *Salient Points and Sharp Angles* (WordTech Editions), which is available through Amazon, and in 2021 published another collection, *When the Spirit Moves Me* (Wipf & Stock), which consists of spiritually-themed poems and is also available through Amazon. He recently published his third collection, *Mother Mourning* (Wipf & Stock), again, available on Amazon. John's iPhone is his primary poetry notebook, and he hopes his use of technology to craft this ancient art remains fruitful.



## Interview with Vishal Prabhu

**Q: Sound is a mutable force in this piece, the “fog horn” moving from one acted upon, “made,” into a sound that “hollow[s] out the time of day.” Do you feel like the agent in your writing process, carving each element? Or do your ideas guide you into the frames that you then work through?**

A: The best executed poems, to my mind and observation, are the ones whose core stimulus is such a strong feeling, that the entire form machinery of the poem comes out in the most clear-eyed, harmonised dance, tango if you will, all through which the active role of the poet is just to minimally round off the edges of each flow movement. While this is the case with the actual writing of the poem, the vast and complex stockpile that the poem’s stimulus draws from for its substance, has to be what the entire person of the poet, till that time, has been and become.

**Q: Is the visual form of the poem in itself a call? What led you to shape the text in this way?**

A: Oftentimes, the text of a poem sits in some preliminary form, waiting for a revisiting which might happen maybe after years, whereby all the contesting claims of writing the poem have dissolved, leaving just a primal reckoning with the essence of the poem, again, or for the first time even. It is in such a revisiting, that the poem itself proffers its ideal form. Such was the case, with this piece, in a revisiting that happened after more than ten years. The form itself mirrors the ‘rising and falling’ nature of the call (to prayer), pivoted about the centre – which is locating the source of the call itself.

**Q: Does the evocation of sound in the poem change when read aloud versus read silently? What changes when given a voice?**

A: As opposed to normal, unpoetic text, the reading of a poem, perhaps, is always a reading aloud, even when read silently. That being the case, the accompaniment of voice is always inherent, and moves with the natural cadence of the poem, un-beleaguered by the push and pull of one’s breath – which might not always be in sync with a seamless reading (aloud) of the poem.

**Vishal Prabhu** Educated as a chemical engineer at Bombay, Cleveland, and, for a while, at Georgia Tech, Atlanta, Vishal Prabhu has since tried to live and travel, simply, in bare conditions. Over the years he has stewarded a forest, worked the chops in a film institute, lived in a strife zone, learnt languages, taught English, and written poetry in English and Hindi. More recently, he has managed a museum, and an art gallery, related to Himalayas and Spirituality.

## Interview with Michael Kozlowsky

**Q: What is your approach to building tension in a poem? Do you start knowing where things come to a head, or does the turn develop as the rest of the piece takes shape?**

A: As this poem is autobiographical, I began at the core of the memory: my father being wheeled out to the police as a weapon against their pursuit of conformity and control over hardworking people who meant no harm in their festive release. The poem spilled backwards from there and as I organized the mess of words I found the deeper meaning I was searching for, the tension building naturally, almost of its own accord.

**Q: The speaker imbues each moment we see with both a sourness and an intimate understanding. Are nostalgia and pain contradictory? Can they meld into one thing?**

A: Nostalgia is pain. It is the bitter understanding—the brain and the heart’s ache—that we can’t go back again. Perhaps, in that sense, it’s the ultimate pain, because at nostalgia’s start there is beauty and laughter and innocence and a deep yearning for a return to these days, these feelings, before we realize that we can’t ever have them, not again. It’s a rug being pulled out from beneath us. Looking back is never pure and those who dwell in the past most often may be the bravest souls of all.

**Q: What does a celebration hide underneath it? Is there a way to refuse to bear the consequences of empire and still “enjoy the show?”**

A: It’s these fleeting moments, these desperate escapes from life that we all seek in celebrations. We all know of the world’s flaws and constraints; let us have this, we plead. Let us have the illusion of something better, if just for a moment. When we celebrate, we’re not ignorant; we’re not blind or obtuse or turning our backs on others. We know the world all too well. It’s why we celebrate in the first place.

**Michael Paul Kozlowsky** is the author of *SCARECROW HAS A GUN*. His children's novels, written under M.P. Kozlowsky and published by HarperCollins and Scholastic Press, include *JUNIPER BERRY*, *FROST*, *ROSE COFFIN*, and *THE DYERVILLE TALES*. He lives in New York with his wife and two daughters.

## Editors

**Jodi Hooper** (she/her) is a poet and fiction writer based in Louisville, Kentucky. Her work explores themes of the self, learning to embody that self, and the fraught experience of human connection by the way of carnivorous plants, vampirism, and the ever-closing gap between monster and man. Jodi led the writing workshop “Monstrous Poetics: the Abominable Self” in 2022 as a part of the Poetx in Flux writing program, and her writing has appeared in Folx Gallery’s “Absolute Pleasure” exhibition, Raptor Lit online, and Miracle Monocle’s MONSTER micro-anthology. No matter where she wanders off to, you can always (eventually) find her out in the breezeway, eaten up and rapt in the light of a bug zapper.

**Nate Cheshire** (she/her) is a visual artist who fell in love with literary journals during her time in undergrad at UofL. She loves mediums, such as comics, that bring art and words together, as well as dense visual and written symbolism. She’s especially fond of: benches shaped like giraffes, yellow paint sun-faded and covered in birdfeed, washing green onions in a huge blue bucket while the smell of overgrown mint wafts by, and the feeling of a squirrel’s paws on her palm as it eats from her hand.

Special thanks to Kay August Shamblin for helping us distill this issue into a title!

**Thank you all for reading.**