

LESBIANS are MIRACLES

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Transformation & Rebirth

No. 4



Lesbians are Miracles Magazine

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Transformation & Rebirth

For whom does the idea of “transformation and rebirth” resonate more deeply than a queer person? This issue is a testament to our journeys, our evolutions, our fluidities and fluencies; our ability to reinvent and renew, to find the forms that fits us best and to shed the skins we’ve grown too great for. It is dedicated to who you are, who you’ve been, and who you’ve yet to become.

To all of your infinite possibilities,
With all of my love and respect,

Lia Ottaviano
Lesbians are Miracles



— In Conversation with Roxana Halls —

Roxana Halls has held numerous solo exhibitions including at The National Theatre, London. Halls has received several awards, including the Villiers David Prize, The Discerning Eye Founder's Purchase Prize, The Derwent Special Prize and the Elizabeth Greenshields Foundation Award. She has been featured on BBC Woman's Hour and Radio 4's Only Artists, recorded in her studio. She is exhibited & collected in the UK and internationally, including St. Catherine's College Oxford & The Scottish National Portrait Gallery.

1. What was your inspiration for creating your Laughing While series?

For some years now I've been making paintings of women laughing while freeing themselves from traps, the *Laughing While....* series. They began with one painting, a self-portrait called *Laughing With My Mouth Full*. In this painting I wanted to convey with visual economy a simultaneous constraint but also excess, all centered around the mouth, that site of restriction, censure and hazardous communication.

This lead me to investigate the implications of laughter and to question the relative lack of it in figurative art. When I first began making these I had an overwhelming sense that I was a detective picking up a scent and following a trail and that feeling still hasn't left me. The excitement of where it will lead has yet to wane.

Inevitably, my *Laughing While...*paintings have continued to evolve and many of my latest works are less concerned with fleeing but rather with retaliation, several of which are a direct response to Artemisia Gentileschi's *Self Portrait as Saint Catherine of Alexandria*, with a nod to genre paintings of female martyrdom, situated in a cinematic realm.

2. Can you talk to us about your process for bringing your paintings into being?

The process begins with a spark. An image flashing before my eyes seemingly out of nowhere. Mostly, they come as unbidden surprises and not always entirely welcome: often they ask that I paint something which I don't yet entirely

know how to make. When I come to actually create them, while the act of painting is a relatively straightforward, solitary activity, they often involve a lengthy behind-the-scenes process.

I start from the guiding principle that I will do whatever is necessary to make the image in my mind exist. I make no preparatory sketches at all and paint direct to canvas but the

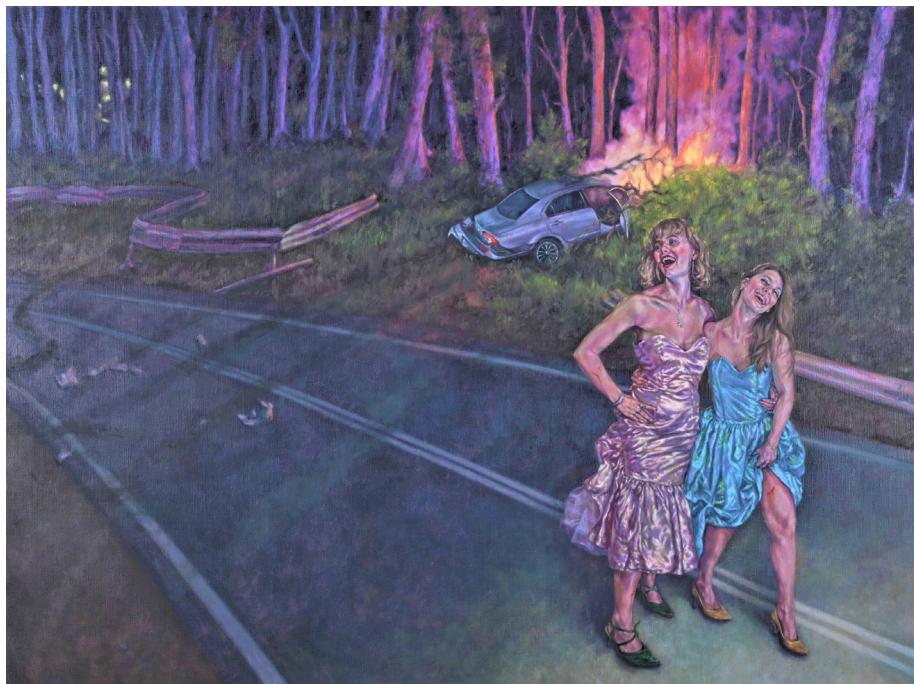
images from which I paint are carefully constructed tableaux which resemble film stills or frozen theatrical moments. I cast my models in a role, costume them, give them props, then either describe a scenario within which I would like them to perform or otherwise pose them exactly. I've mostly worked from life in the past but currently I film and photograph my models, then build the composition around them, situating them in

whichever location most befits the intention.

I generally find that my mind generates a great many more images than I can possibly manifest and this is a constant source of frustration for me. I work consistently and am fairly productive, but paintings take time and the act of making images only encourages my mind to keep firing off more, so I find that it is as critical an aspect of my creative process to select from among these ideas that my overzealous brain generates as it is to actually make them.

3. What themes or conventions does your art uphold? What does it subvert? What does it transform or make anew?

My work has always been underpinned by a commitment to the painted image and all that it can achieve, and I do



think of the canvas as an endlessly fascinating stage on which to create an engaging, challenging image. Once the viewer is in I hope they will offer up a lot more over repeated viewing. I cannot see why an oil painting is automatically any more anachronistic than a novel if it responds thoughtfully to contemporary life.

The potential for transformation and evolution remains central to my work, as is refusal, and key is license, the taking of it. I would describe it as wayward and feminist to the core.

I examine how class, sexuality and gender intersect and inform the apparent repertoire of roles available to women. I'm skeptical of straightforward narratives of empowerment and self-actualization and generally swerve away from some kind of strong/weak binary by showing women in a range of less heroic, more plural guises.

4. What has been the most surprising or unexpected part of the feedback you've received from your art?

Male viewers regularly and exclusively tell me that they don't like seeing pictures of women with their mouths open and teeth bared. There are many men who really respond to and support my work, but just as there's a subsection who don't read books written by women or listen to their music, I suspect, similarly, that there are some men who wouldn't give my work much consideration. That's just fine.

5. What is the singular through line or common thread in your art?

Refusal.

6. How does your identity inform or influence your art—what parts of yourself are at play in your paintings?

It is inevitable that my sexuality informs my work just as my politics, age and class does. I think my gender affects the way my work is read and categorized. While I paint women mostly I'd suggest my themes are on the whole universal. It is, largely, women for whom my work engenders an intense sense of recognition, when it does, but I've been really moved by some of the reactions I've encountered, one of the most moving of which came from an intersex person who said my work really spoke to their experience.

Embedded in your question is an emphasis on which parts of the self are at play, and that is key to the making of my work, especially as so many of my work's themes stem from self-portraiture and self-examination and I use myself as a tool for experimentation.

Is all work, on some level, some form of self-portraiture? I think that's debatable, but I'm not conventionally feminine and my work certainly isn't.

We spend our lives trying to present our "best face" to the world, so to instead depict our worst and to overcome self-consciousness and embarrassment can prove immensely liberating for our own selves and for others.

The word embarrass derives from the French embarrasser: to block, hamper or impede—just what we must abandon at the dock if we are going to embark on a voyage of self-discovery and liberation.

7. From where do you draw your inspiration?

There's so much to counteract, fight against and refuse out there in terms of misogyny and class prejudice so while I don't see my work as a direct reaction as such I suspect that's a component. I'm an avid cineaste so that's in there, certainly. I can be inspired by things I've found or been gifted. Something I've read. In many ways I can't tease out why I've painted something until long after it's made; it's all a process of filtration. But I'm considered about what I ingest and try not to fill my mind with trash....apart from the best kind of trash.

8. How can our readers view your art?

At www.roxanahalls.com or on Instagram @roxanahallsartist.

CRIME SPREE, Halls' next solo exhibition of a new collection of paintings on the Laughing While theme , will be held at RCFA Gallery, Birmingham in September 2021.

Halls' portrait of Horse McDonald was recently acquired by the Scottish National Portrait Gallery and will hang in the Great Hall of the gallery until mid 2021.

Halls was recently commissioned by BBC Arts and Avalon Productions to paint the portraits for "Sitting" by Katherine Parkinson, which was screened on BBC Four in April 2021 and is now available to view on BBC iPlayer.

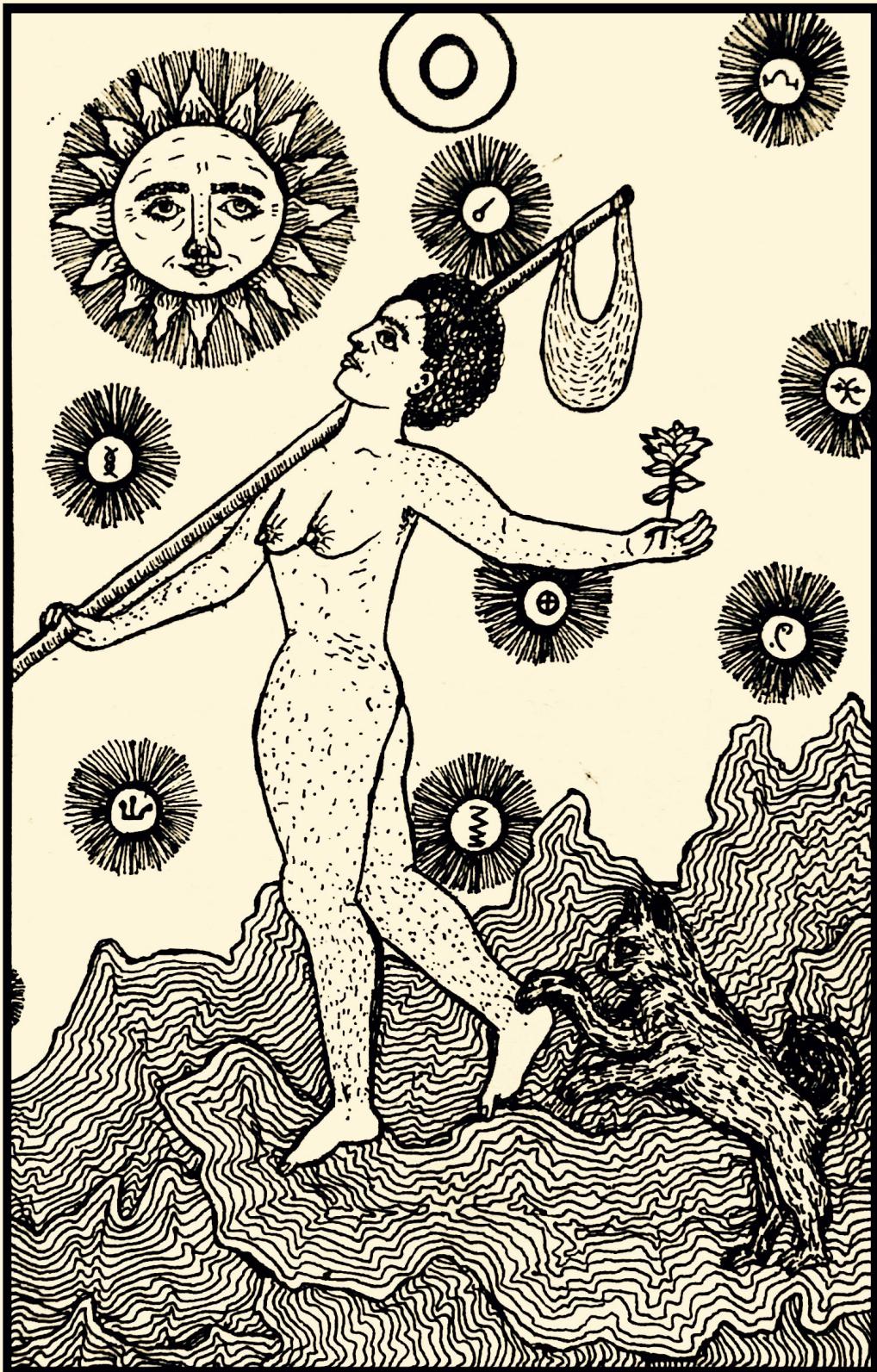
Halls is co-curating a group show 'Biting Back & Enjoying The Taste' with In Fems—Intersectional Feminist Art Collective, of which she is a co-founder. The show will be held at PADA Studios, Lisbon, Portugal from August 6th - 20th 2021. ♦

Roxana Halls



Roxana Halls





THE FOOL



THE WORLD

TRANSFORMATION & REBIRTH

Dany Greene



Reading Rilke in the Evening

by Amy Spade

When darkness takes its shape in the sky,
moths become desperate to get at the light—
any light—but you are content without
the sun trading angles with the trees.

In darkness what a clangor those crooked,
wind-bent fingers can make, but sometimes
there is a fine music above the gusts—
scales moving up and down each lonesome breath.

In darkness the fearful, the possible,
the ready all knit themselves into something
you know and accept for only that instant,
your self at once brittle, and utter, and vast—

Dim the Screens

by Anne Walsh Donnelly

Step into January air,
shield your eyes from winter sun,
listen to childish whispers,
or, perhaps, a distant cuckoo's song,

and the lowing of a pregnant cow.
Walk muddy paths by the Barrow
feel squelch of black muck
engulf your synthetic soles.

Face into the frosty breeze,
stand at the water's edge
but keep your distance
from those stinging nettles.

Sit on the bench, acned with moss,
let it cushion your weary body,
cast your eyes over a flash
of white; a swan resting in the reeds.

Remember the maternal love
that once unearthed your voice,
then, like a sloth,
hang from the branch of a river Birch

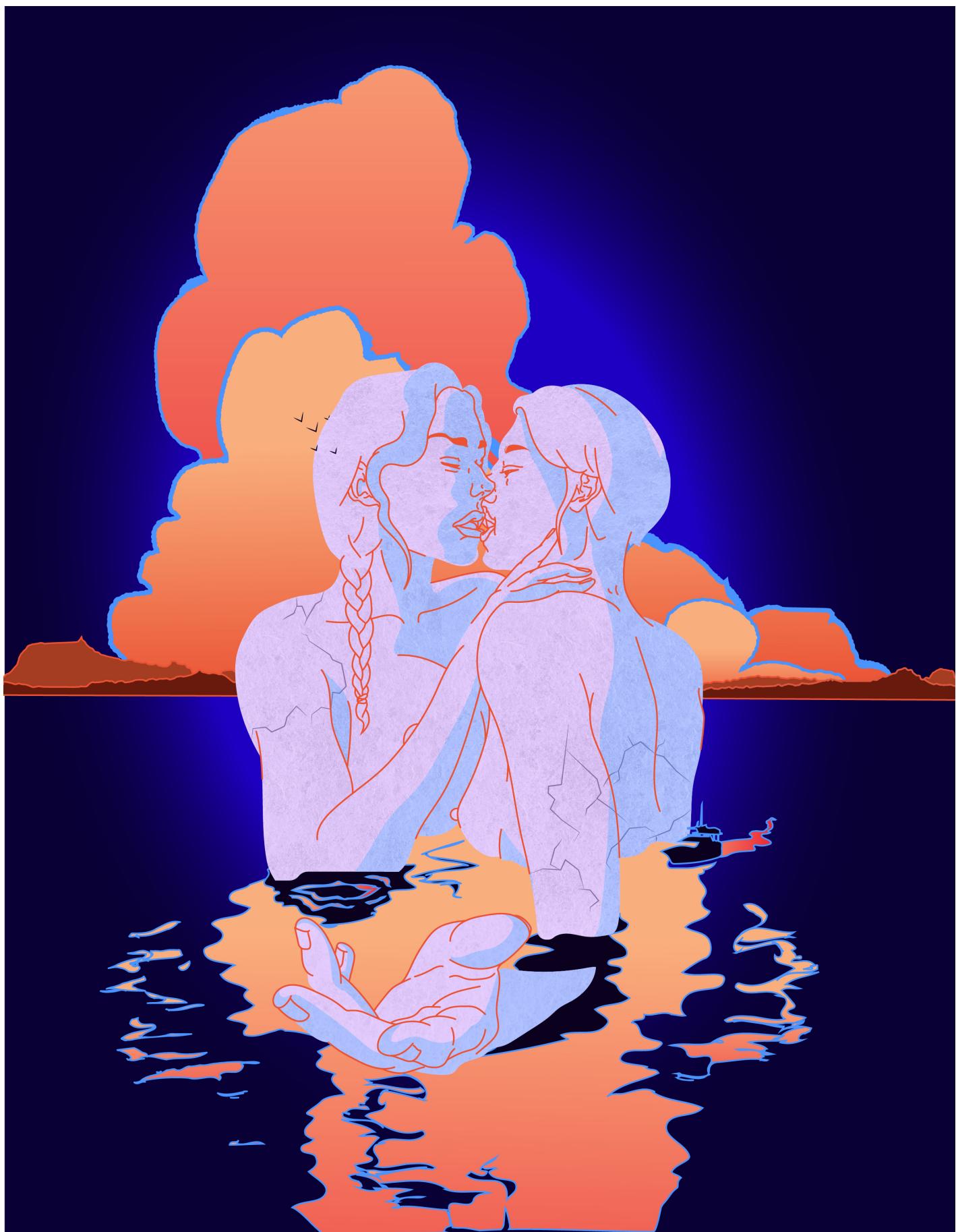
its canopy - the roof of your heart.
Eat and sleep there,
let new poems find first breath.





TRANSFORMATION & REBIRTH

Sarah-Rose Crossley



Rain

by Nicole Reyes-Rain

I love the rain
The way I love my ex husband

For its necessity
For its requisite part in growing the garden of me

I remember my bones being crushed to dust
Under the weight of our union

Washed away in a river of codependency
birthing a singular destructive mass
birthing a
I remember never feeling welcome
In the home I bought to save us

Still it changes me
I almost didn't write this because I
was protecting you
Or maybe
Me

I didn't want to feel unwanted again
I didn't want to raise my arm in defense for fear of being hit

Because for me
The experience of expressing myself
has always been tethered to a possibility of harm

...

They don't tell you the end is not the end.
A divorce decree cannot free you
from the reflex of your fear

They do not tell you the end is just
the morning after the storm,
Is just the beginning,
again

Prayer

by Nicole Reyes-Rain

To hear your name said by a woman
you love is to hear a prayer

I am learning how my name sounds
from the throat of God

I am learning to pray for myself for
the first time with the force of the
church I was raised in

I am learning to pray from your
mouth





TRANSFORMATION & REBIRTH

Angela Masker



It's a Mess and I'll Take It

by Byuka Krow

i watch this ted talk on gay genes
and how nature structures them to increase
the survival possibilities of the clan. i eat oreos
cause i found out too late they're vegan & telepathically,
i'm sending the link of this talk to all my highschool classmates
i find myself daydreaming about
but haven't seen for years.

it's the usual deal: the dead are not only ancestors,
but ghosts of those
filtered thru my defence mechanisms: a psyche that wants
to make me feel safe
even if it isn't.

in my walks thru the city
i indulge in school reunion fantasies
where all my bullies
became queer activists and wanna join my anarchist band
in our ecovillage.
indulgence like expired glue
on open wounds.

TRANSFORMATION & REBIRTH

Esther Renahan



give/take

by Natalie Geisel

i swallow my tears in one gulp while pouring boiling water into a coffee filter
making sure to brew yours first as an empty mug sits
stiller than the morning air and i grasp your cup and my hand starts to swell.

my knee nudges your bedroom door open and the sun floods
into my mouth, burning my tongue with your burnt coffee held by my burnt hands
you acknowledge me without looking, tending to your monstera
and light expands to my fingertips and stomach and ears, drying my wet face
with the warm eyes on the back of your head.

you whisper: “thank you,” pouring room temperature water into
your ivy and my heart and i kiss your cheek, placing my burnt hand on your shoulder
trying to spread the heat you gave me back to you, recycling our love
back and forth, give and take
and i crawl into our home, rediscovering your warmth through the smell of your sheets.

i hastily say: “do you have to take care of your plants every day?”
as if i didn’t admire your excitement about their uncurling leaves and new growths
i hold the back of my neck with my pink fingers, reminding myself
of the garden we grew sprouting out of our shoulders, it travels
to my chapped lips and flushed cheeks, exploring the parts of me that you called your own
nine hours ago and i realize:
i love all of you, but you love all of me (and more).

you avoid a response by meeting your lips to your coffee and swallowing
my daily reminder of adoration, slipping into your sheets and planting your warm lips
on my heavy eyelids and i feel the seeds you sowed become vines
swelling through my head and toes.

i swallow my tears in one gulp, stinging with bittersweet salt and
stare in my mirror, months later, watching leaves uncurl on my forearm.

TRANSFORMATION & REBIRTH

Leeza Lakhter



LETMEPOKEU



TRANSFORMATION & REBIRTH

Elise G.



Come Ghazal

by Raina K Puels

I know we should meet in public... but wanna come over? See if we talk as well in the flesh? Yes, come (;

Foyer. Living room. Bathroom. Sorry it's scum
my. Kitchen. Ignore the moldy cucum

ber. My bedroom's down the hall... Welcome
to my sparkly, purple wonderland! Wanna come

sit on my bed? That's my cat, Holcomb.
She scares easy. If you're lucky, she'll come

back. I know you're a newcom
er to this & I don't wanna make you uncom

fortable. So. What're you into? I also love deep kisses & come hither fingers. How'd you feel
if we unencum

bered each other of our clothes? Mmm, yes. Come
straddle me. I never want you to feel a modicum

of shame, or like you have to circum
vent the truth if I'm not sufficiently succumb

ing to your desires; my pleasure is always incum
bent on yours. Aww, the cat did come

back! Do you wanna keep petting her or slide up & come sit on my face?

Oh my goddess, your moans make me come

undone. I loved when you said: 'Raina, no man has ever made me cum, let alone cum & cum & cum.'

TRANSFORMATION & REBIRTH

Danielle Scott





Transformation & Rebirth

by Cyote

Wilson and Jones.
Dripping Springs Road.
Home to a king snake livin'
under my porch.

Wilson and Jones is both the hospital I was born in and where I would later receive my COVID-19 vaccination during Easter week of my “Jesus Year,” at age 33.

My first home was on Dripping Springs Road in the same town, but further out into the fields. They say your “stripper name” is the name of your first dog plus the first street you ever lived on. Mine is “Ivan Dripping Springs.”

Our little corner of Sherman, Texas was also home to a big black king snake who lived under our front porch. When the weather agreed, they would sun themselves out in the driveway between rounds of hunting any field mouse that dare brave their vicinity. We didn't last long in that house...nor would we in any other house I'd live in between then and now.



Growing up, I was very much the “tomboy” of my class, always excited for lunch, P.E., and art class. I remember the magic of learning how to create a clam shell with a perfectly round pearl seated softly in its center. I remember the fastest boys in my class challenging me to races and crying when they couldn't win.

On Tuesdays, I would always bring my own lunch and eat at the far end of the cafeteria because I couldn't stand the smell of fish sticks: a weekly staple at our school.
On Fridays, I would BEG

my mom for two dollars to buy two slices of cheese pizza from the ladies who were raising money for something new every week. It was a Christian elementary school near the border of Texas and Oklahoma. “Texoma” Christian School...we were always raising money for something.

Religion was a big part of my childhood, but so was divorce, so our attendance at church didn't last for long. My family was more concerned with manners and morality than they were with faith, but that

didn't stop my Southern Baptist teachers from making their mark, teaching us to be fearful of all the things that could erase your name from the Lamb's Book of Life, a.k.a. your ticket to Heaven.

In the 8th grade, my boyfriend broke up with me because his best friend told him that I looked like, acted like, and most likely was a lesbian. No one would even look in my direction after that. Looking like you might be gay was enough to crush any hope of a date to the dance, an invitation to the next birthday or anything else that wasn't sports-related. I had respect in the gym but the second that bell rang for class, I hid myself behind a sense of humor, trying desperately to distract myself from the feeling of wanting something that didn't exist in this world.

Then, without warning or want, I felt my skin peel away to reveal a new layer. My mother moved me (ironically) to what was called the "Big D"—Dallas, Texas. I had auditioned and was accepted into an Arts high school there, where everything I had known to be taboo was now showcased for applause. I replaced athletics with art history, my basketball for mime makeup, and gained a circle of friends who taught me the beauty in eccentricity and the bravery it took to embody my own.

It was during my senior year there that I fell in love with my best friend. The first time she kissed me I threw up right afterwards because even though I wanted it more than anything, my body and everything it was ever told knew that this was not something I was supposed to allow. But it wasn't a concern for long: I was accepted into Cincinnati, Ohio's College Conservatory of Music while my first love made her way to Oklahoma City's University. We would entertain the idea of a life together after college via email for years, but time would ultimately take too long for our daydreaming to last. She eventually shattered my heart into a million pieces, and my art became my new passion, my new lover, my new layer of skin.

I moved from Cincinnati to Brooklyn after teaching myself how to exist in the bitterness of real winter weather and found a new home working in the music biz. Exchanging business cards that had "an optimist!" written coyly below my contact information, I began a collection of others that would quickly evolve

into a chosen family of friends, collaborators, and co-workers. To my absolute delight, I was almost immediately surrounded by the influence of strong women, queer community, and a real sense of culture that arrived and evolved from all over the world. New York was full of all kinds of diversity that I had never experienced, and I was completely mesmerized by its potential for adventure no matter how grey the day or how little graced my bank account.

This big city skin had a thicker feeling to it; something that felt more comfortable to wear; something that was made to last a bit longer than before. Life in Brooklyn introduced me to the Artist who had been living under these layers all along: an identity that could only surface through accepting departure from the exoskeleton of my past.

Ten years later, I write to you from my father's kitchen in McKinney, Texas. I'm here to mourn the loss of my grandfather—the man I was named after—and to nurse my family back to health after a year of the kind of adversity most of us could have never predicted. I sit listening to my weekly astrology reading by Chani Nicholas as I make my to do list for the week, a (relatively new) Monday morning ritual of piecing together a master list sprawled out on post-it notes of errands, reminders and Zoom links. Chani notes the position of the planets as they pertain to my Aries rising reality this week. The sound of sizzling from my father's scrambled eggs reminds me that I am loved by someone in what now feels like a home away from home.

When I left Texas, I left because I knew I couldn't find, be, or love myself here. I didn't feel comfortable or supported in my community, and each time I did come back was only brief. I spent over a decade erasing a past I didn't want to be mine anymore, but the longer I am here now, the more I'm able to re-discover and reclaim the history I often choose not to recall.

I am sitting with myself where my transformation began. Sometimes the pathway to healing is just that simple. Allowing my inner child to exist again rather than be this stranger I left here a long time ago. ♦

TRANSFORMATION & REBIRTH

Danielle Scott





Esther Renehan



How It's Like to Stay In Your Own Head and Hear the Sea Roaring

by Byuka Krow

green tea with rose:

plant spirits kissing our insides.

I'm taken on a journey through my veins. soft veins. soft. the
skins of my organs- soft.
like flower petals.

slow tunes to soothe the unrested eyelids
i feel your smell again that trickles
under

hypnotizing me
like a dog. that smell &
your pale face
reminding me of snow.
I missed your hands
and your body somehow pressed
against mine improvising
sculptures of care and lust
under the blankets.

and your presence
takes me back
to when
matter aligned against anti-matter:

a vortex of heart collisions
a fertile chaos.

i'll lick
the centre of your celestial mass
&
wait for the
endless potentiality
to activate.

i do not remember my roots

by Kaylin Moss

No, no, I don't want one, you pleaded. As if you had a choice. Are you sure? Your hair will be so long, she insisted. You heard beautiful, and were confused. You were not sure, you were adamant. The stupidity of her question left you dumbfounded. Don't put your hand on active stove eyes, don't look directly at the sun, don't set fire to your hair.

Didn't your mom get you a perm
 Child, you got some thick hair
 Your hair is too nappy
 Didn't your mom get
 Child, you got
 Your hair
 Didn't
 Child

Mommy, I want a relaxer, you said. You did want one, your desire was genuine. You listened to their lies and deceived yourself. Later, you would learn, you just wanted the words to stop. Beauty hurts, but assimilation sears. As your hair ignited, the words burned, too. The beautician's chair was the kind of plastic that screeched with every minute movement you made. Your hairdresser spewed garbage and contributed to the salon's cacophony of untruths. By the time you reached 7th grade, you thought your hair had stopped growing. You didn't realize it was your psyche that was stunted. Stunted, but alive. Living paycheck to paycheck was survival. Your mother wanted you to thrive. Language was another crucial role in your assimilation. Your mother taught you Ebonics, then banned it. This language could not be spoken at home, and soon you forgot how to speak it. A mirror reflected your chalky image. Your mother beamed. A perfect fit.

Your mother taught you life emerges from flames. Each day was scalding. You set your identity ablaze and poured it into a porcelain mold. The remaining hours you spent asleep. Racism and discrimination were like the murmur of a television show on low volume. The Star Spangled Banner was deafening. Racists were red-necks in rural towns. The Confederate Flag was in textbooks, not your middle class suburbia. When prejudice came from a black person, your porcelain shattered.



At lunch, when your friend asked you what classes you'd be taking the next semester, you replied with honors this, and honors that. The cafeteria: where belly laughs and smacking mouths masked the segregation. A stranger with a stranger posse strode past the whites only sign and stopped at your table. She blurted you taking those white people classes? You're like an Oreo, black on the outside, white on the inside. Each smug syllable was accompanied by a swish of her waist length braids. You heard an insult and were confused. You heard high academic performance wasn't in the definition of authentic blackness, you heard your experience was invalid, you heard you couldn't exist without sacrificing your skin. Well, ain't you got something to say, she spat.

A millennia elapsed, and, still, you didn't have a response. She extinguished your internal hellfire in that small eternity. The bell rang. The moment whizzed by. You tried to relight your fire but were left with embers. You attempted to pour yourself back into porcelain. You remembered the mold was beyond repair. You couldn't recall what else occurred at school that day. At home you rushed to the bathroom mirror. You rubbed off the chalky exterior. You severed all your scorched strands. You marveled in your reflection. You stopped wishing you were white. You questioned everything. How does race affect how you perceive yourself? Why do you have a narrow definition of blackness? In that moment in the cafeteria, you wish you could've told the girl with the long braids, "This is what a black girl looks like." ♦

Willie the Genius



Topography

by Leah Blooms

There are sun flares on my breasts, bursting outward from my nipples, after carrying and nurturing children.

Lightning bolts touched down and etched themselves across my hips and there are jagged dunes among the many dips and craters in the meaty expanses of my thighs from years of eating disorders, yo-yoing weight, and self-harm.

I often use my hands when I talk, which encourages the heavy sections under my arms to wag, as if to slowly emphasize, about a beat too late, whatever I'm gesticulating about.

My forearms are permanently painted with my stories to remind me of where I've come from, so I won't forget those lessons; they point me to where I'm heading next. My wrists hold the emergency codes to staying alive during suicidal ideation.

My hands and feet are useful, but not lovely, which on some days is fine and on other days is very painful to witness. My queerness, genderfluidity, and transness mean there is no destination for how I should permanently look, and I'm finally all right with that.

My belly is soft and large and contains the wounds and memories of motherhood and the aches of childhood trauma. I am in awe of its ability to expand and make room for creation of all kinds. It feels slack and empty when there's no new ideas brewing.

My hairy shins and calves held the promise of running away when I was a child, if I stayed strong and prepared, but now are really just reminders of how I'll probably never sprint or hike again.

My sacred cavern between my legs encases the memories of medical trauma and molestation, next to folders and folders of new experiences embracing my gender where I've felt more joy and pleasure than I ever knew possible.

My ass, which my partner can't keep her hands off of, holds the aftermath of forced entry with a kiss of near death, as well as the recent possibilities of trying new things.

My back aches almost all the time and requires a constant intake

of anti-inflammatories to hold me upright. My back also has curves and strength I love and shows off a tattoo I used to hate, but now am quite fond of, which reminds me of how far I've come.

My shoulders are wide and have become quite particular about the weights they allow themselves to hold up. They are one of the rare parts of my body that consistently receive praise based solely on their looks and not their usefulness.

My neck is forming jowls and loose skin rings and other signs of aging, as if holding my head up for fifty years, turning it this way and that, deciding what to look straight into, with a steady gaze, has taken its toll.

The brown spots on my face tell the story of secretly climbing the outdoor grill's smokestack in my bikini as a teen, up to the roof of the tar-finished carport, where I rubbed Crisco on my body to bake under the 110-degree Southern Utah sun.

My lips are lower on the right side and create a slightly lopsided resting face. My smile is too wide, gives too much away, nervously tries to cover up my discomfort, begs to be kissed even by strangers, and is one of my best features. I lick and bite my lower lip zillions of times per day, which requires a constant application of lip balm to soothe and protect my mouth from the elements and from saying too much, too soon.

My hair holds hours and hours of dissociated time, along with the privilege of being the first part of my body that was shaped into something that reflected my emerging gender journey. My partner shaves the sides and trims the top during what has become a surprisingly loving and anticipated activity during the pandemic.

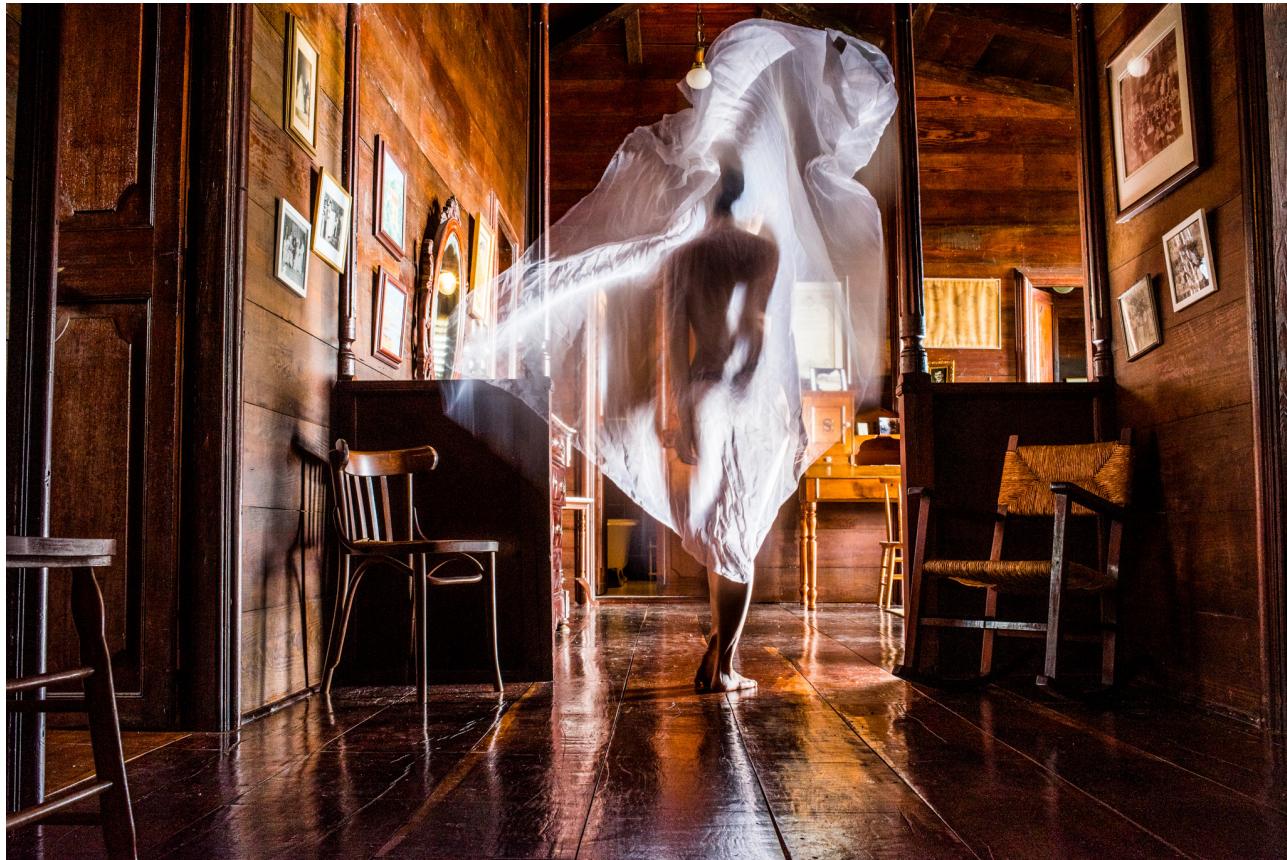
My eyes contain multitudes of unshed tears, next to galaxies of seeing new ways to be and feel and move in this world. They scan my topography and the horizon for beauty, pain, and impending trouble. My eyes tell the truth, even when my mouth can't.

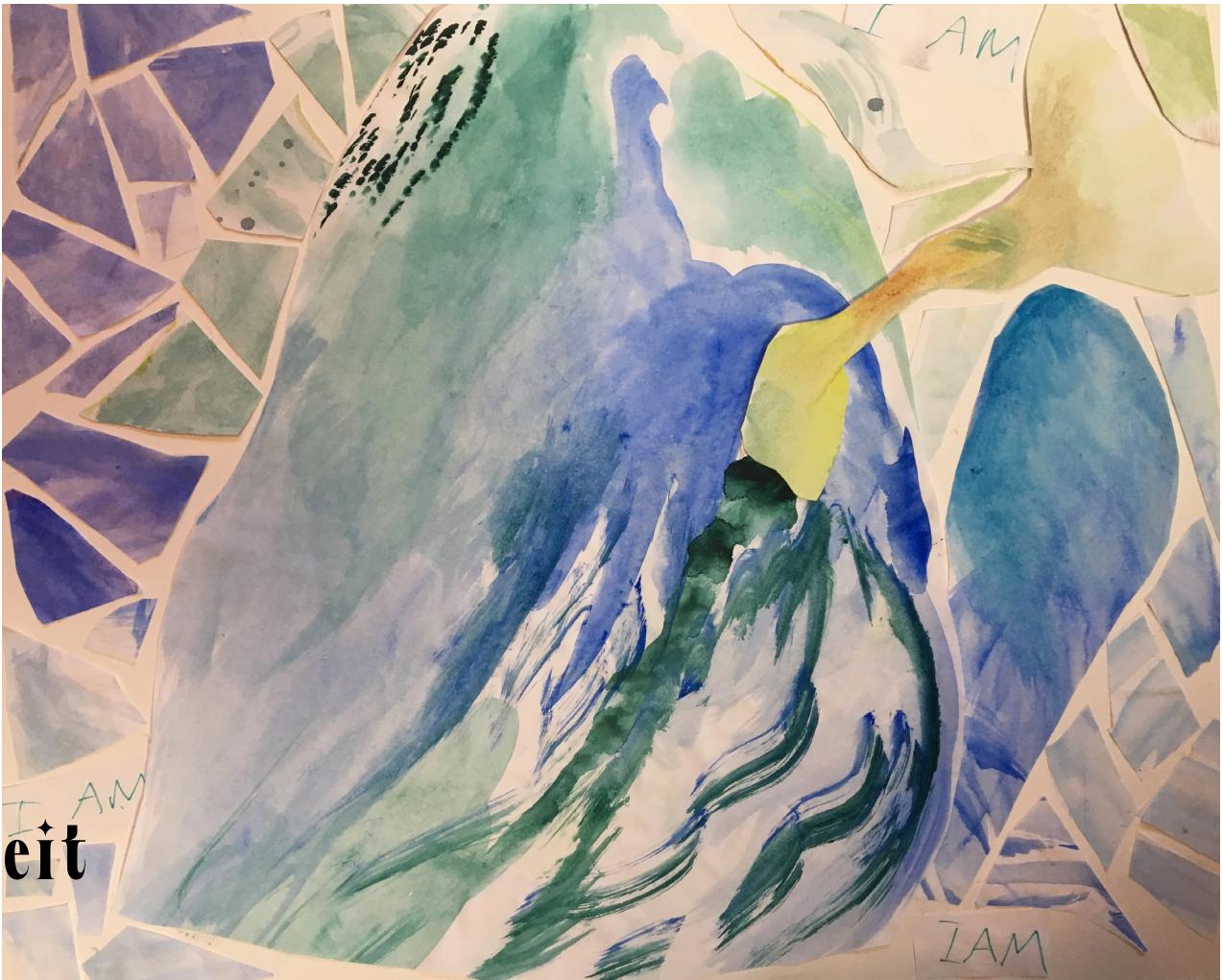
My heart, beating inside my weakened lungs and chronically inflamed ribs, holds acres and miles of codependent conversations, knee-jerk reactions, piled-high guilt, shame, and blame from people who have no business being in there.

I'm pleased to say those people are leaving, a few at a time, through the back alley, because the new architecture has no place for them to hang out, chain smoking and bitching at me for all my failings. I've got grand designs for the rooms they leave behind. ♦



Frances Davis





Doykeit

by Eli Gale

before, i was always a few steps behind, dropping pieces, carrying too much in my arms.
 trying to gather all of the falling parts,
 to put myself back together.
 shouting for help,
 but only air would leave my lips.

i could never catch up,
 i couldn't plan.
 i could only see the next week in front of me, the future was an abyss i would never reach.

i was deeply afraid to be found out, that it never felt right, that i couldn't fully connect.
 that i always wished milestones were spent with someone else, as someone else.
 that i loved my best friends more than any boy.

for the first time, i feel like i can look out, i can take a breath.
 i don't need to be saved.

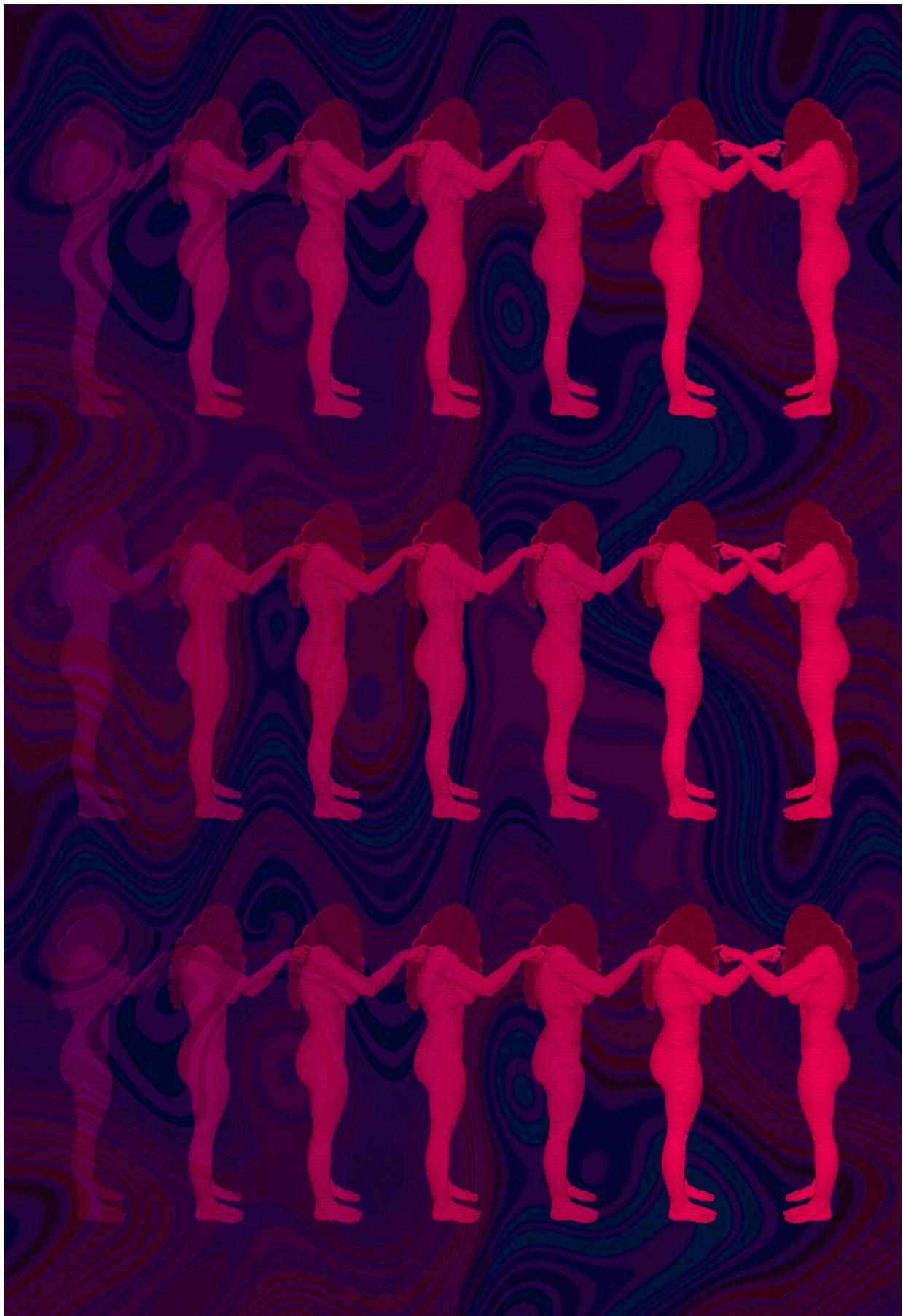
i have less to carry.

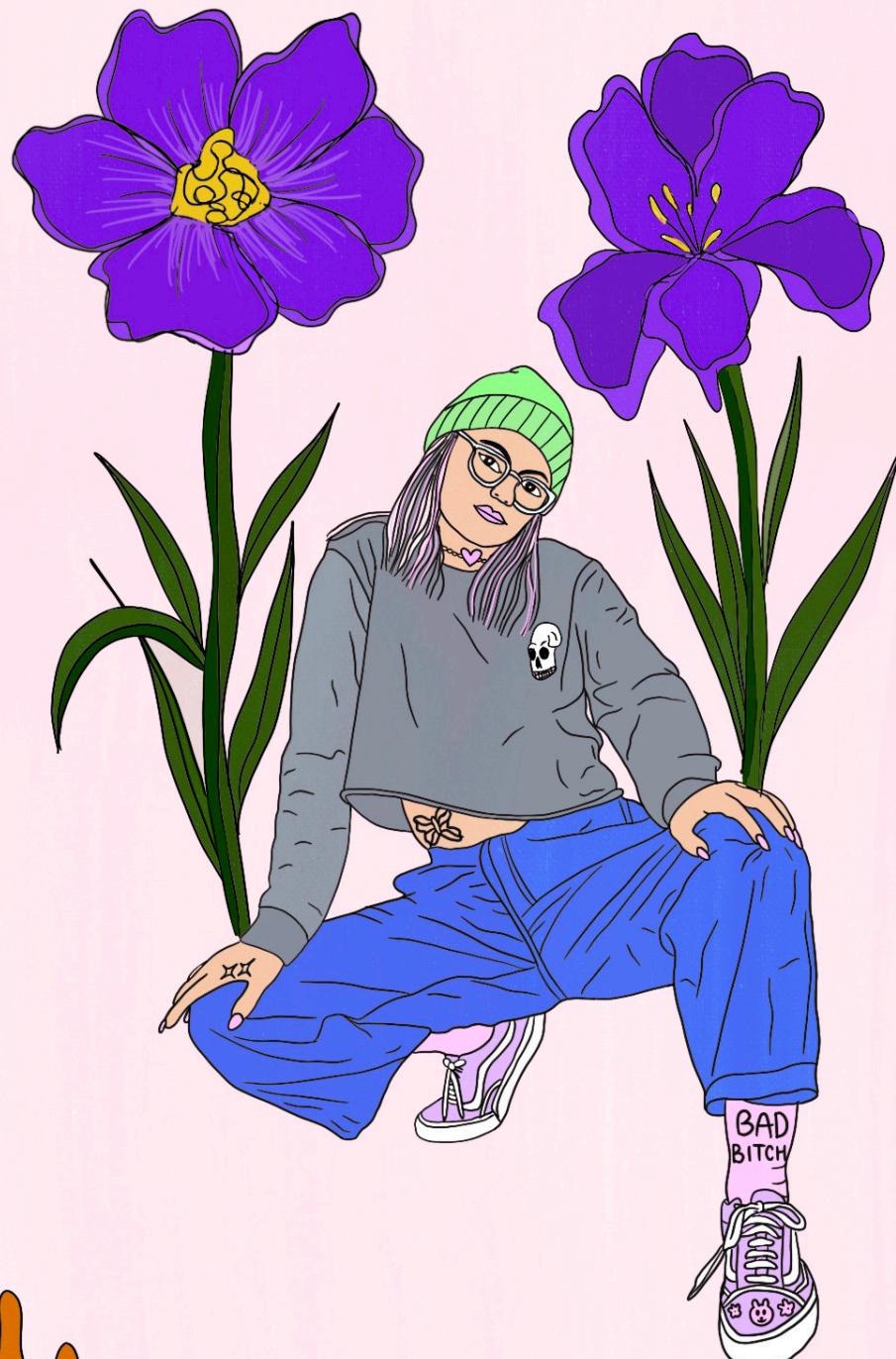
the dust is falling off my limbs and i see myself underneath.

* Doykeit means 'Here-ness' in Yiddish, inspired by JB Brager's zine *Doykeit*









YOU ARE WORTHY



Lory Lyon



Lory Lyon



TRANSFORMATION & REBIRTH

Lory Lyon



Finding Hope

by Leeza Lakhter

Throughout my life and journey, I have often felt like I have multiple identities and have never known who I truly am. As the years go on, I feel more and more like myself than I ever have, but for a long time I didn't believe that this kind of growth and happiness could happen for me. Since I was a child, I struggled with school, friends, and my mental health a lot. However, I didn't really focus on or learn about it until I was older and struggling to the point of hospitalizations and self-destructive thoughts and behaviors. I was at a point where I felt I could not avoid or ignore these issues anymore, even though that's what my family and community around me wanted me to do.

After being hospitalized and diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) at age 19, I began searching for more information and others who were having similar experiences and struggles. I wanted to find information and a community but had little interest in going to therapy because I was very sad and hopeless at the time. However, it was mandatory after getting out of the hospital, so I was doing a lot of research on treatment programs and support groups. Many therapists refused to treat me because of my disorder, and I struggled to behave and engage in therapy, causing me to get kicked out of various treatment programs time and time again. There weren't many treatment centers that took my insurance, nor knew how to treat BPD. I was struggling to find a safe space, to find help.

Soon enough, I found a non-profit organization called Emotions Matter; they invited me to their private Facebook group where other people with BPD were posting things about their treatment. Another person posted about their positive experience and recovery with Brooklyn Minds, a treatment center located in Brooklyn. They specialize in Mentalization Based Treatment (MBT) and another treatment called Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (TMS) for depression, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). I was able to finally start an intensive therapy program that actually helped me. I was attending therapy five days a week and underwent TMS for depression and OCD. It was really hard work and took me a long time, but I began to see a light and feel like I could actually get better. Therapy taught me how to mentalize and how to think about how my actions affect other people and the world, in addition to learning skills and other healthy coping mechanisms. I felt more comfortable attending therapy at Brooklyn Minds because they were open and educated about BPD. I felt like I was getting help and real support for the first time and could finally commit to getting better.

Around the same time, I met Mia, my partner for over two years now. We started dating at a time when we were both vulnerable and had just left toxic relationships.

We were both struggling in different and similar ways. It wasn't easy or perfect at first, but I think we knew that we could help each other, and we wanted to be together. We fell for each other so fast. We could barely handle being apart. Mia brought so much positivity and light into my world. She also allowed me to explore my sexuality and identity, which were distant and suppressed up until then. For the first time, I was able to be open about my queerness and not feel judged or unaccepted. Mia helped create a safe space for us to explore together. She helped me keep track of my mental health and stay positive, and I also helped her learn more about mental illness and encouraged her to go to therapy. I felt so much safer and more present in my life when with her.

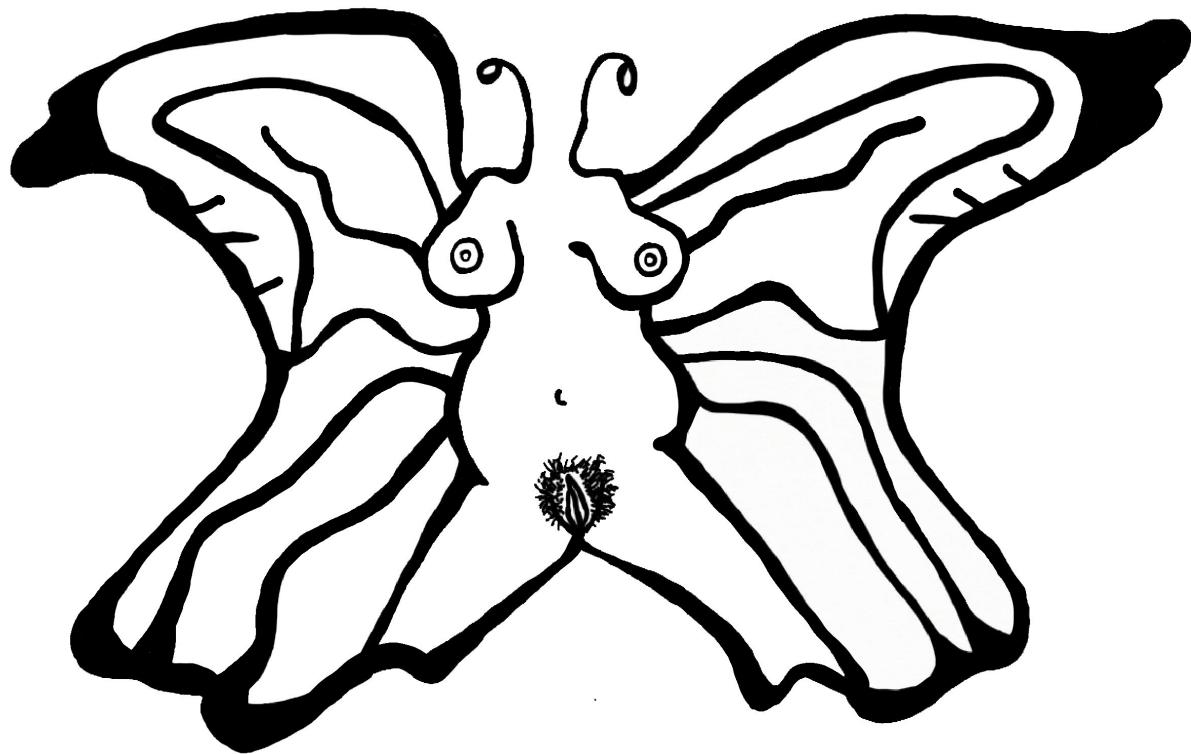
We encouraged each other to explore our identities and emotions through our art forms. Mia was in school at the time and began making her senior thesis film about our relationship and how BPD was affecting us. I was drawing, tattooing, and working on building a tattoo business. Mia helped me come up with my business name, LETMEOKEU, and soon enough we were traveling to different events all over New York City, promoting the business, trying to gain more clientele and get our names out there. I was struggling with lots of anxiety and Mia was always there by my side helping and supporting me. With time, we created a safe and comfortable studio space for people to get tattooed in because we recognized that there weren't many tattoo spaces that feel safe and welcoming to the LGTBQ+ and mental health community. It became extremely transformational for me to work with a needle in a safe and artistic way, instead of a harmful and scary way.

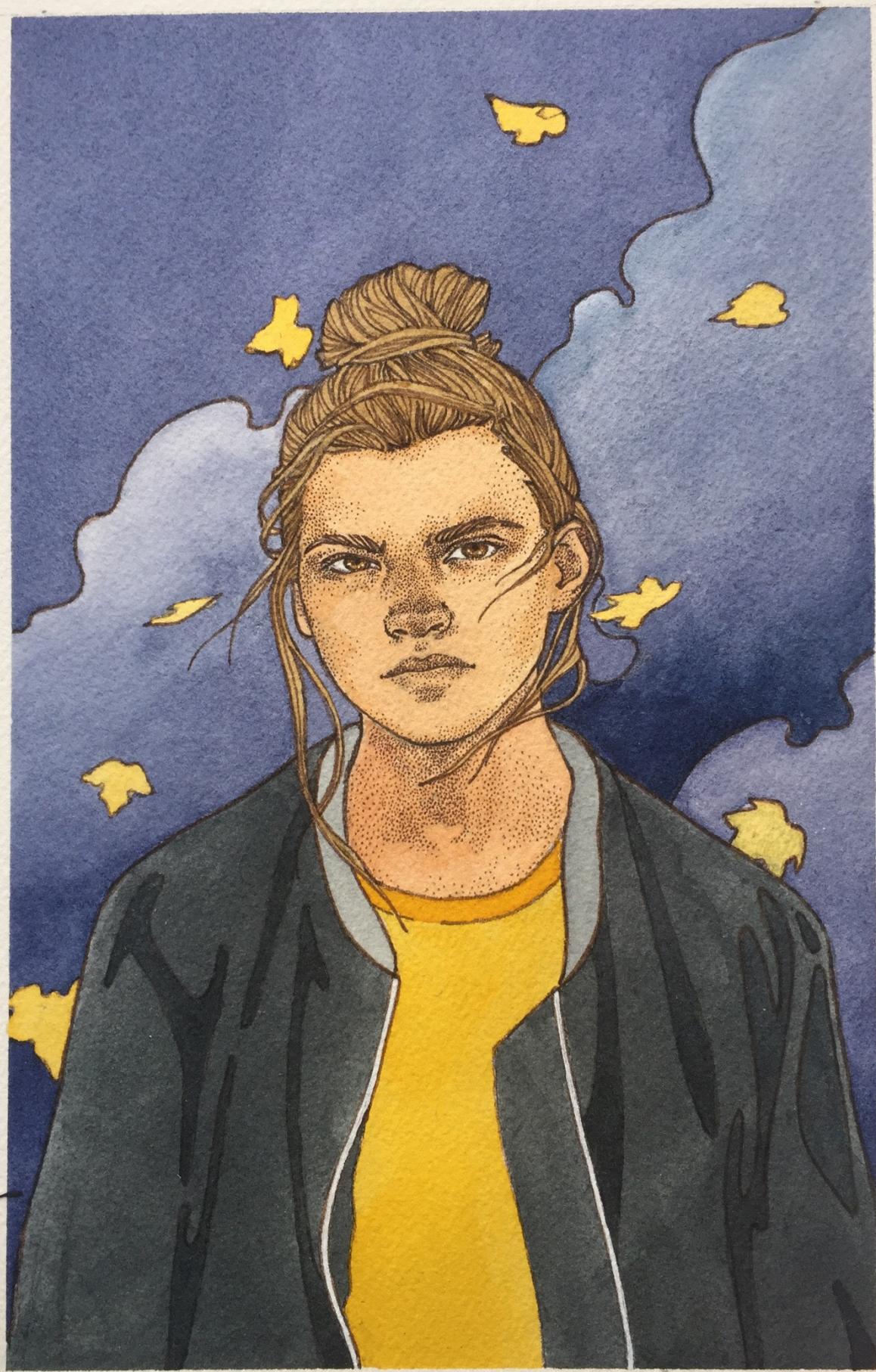
For the first time in a long time, therapy, my relationship with Mia, and tattooing, brought me a strong community and hope for a better and happier future. Being able to do what I love every day, while also building a community and being open about my mental health, has been life changing. It is not easy and takes dedication and time, but I have become someone that has a lot more control than I used to. I'm sober from alcohol for almost three years and have the potential to be happier and more successful than I ever have been. Every day I work on my mental health and every day I find reasons to keep going.

Finding the right treatment programs, support groups, information, and medications can take not only a lot of time and energy but can also be extremely financially taxing. I'm so grateful for my family's support, but I recognize that not everyone has that help or access to the same programs as I did. I strive to talk openly about my experiences and the resources that have helped me because I want others struggling to know it is possible to get better. I aim to make these resources more accessible to others struggling and to destigmatize mental illnesses and talking about mental health. ♦

TRANSFORMATION & REBIRTH

Stray Hare





From a Dream

Ayshe-Mira Yashin

you emerged into my life from a dream
a dream of Autumn forests
of Nicosia Autumn forests to which
I know that one day I'll return

I lived the entire dream
in the moment of awakening
and waking up felt like a State Change
like the browning of Autumn leaves

your hair it smells like Autumn
your body is reeking of Autumn

I'm trying to find the chestnuts and cloves
hidden in the hairs of other girls

Ayshe-Mira Yashin



Alicia Holder



NAZ & ELLA



Internalised is about the fear of “coming out” to yourself. We drew on our experiences as queer women, sharing our stories navigating internalised homophobia within a relationship, highlighting the guilt and shame it can evoke, as well as the inner turmoil with regards to gender expression. It was important to us that this song conveyed an emotional journey with a light at the end of the tunnel. The song starts with fear and pain, and ends with the overwhelming relief that comes with finally accepting yourself and being proud to be with the person you love. Internalised is the first single we released off our EP (DE)HUMANISE, out on 7 May 2021.

FFO: PJ Harvey, The Cranberries, Warpaint, Phoebe Bridgers, Nirvana

Internalised

Not sure who I am
Know who I'm meant to be
Which story today
It's getting harder to breathe
Long hair, flowing dress
Am I the woman society wants me to be?

**Is the threat real
Or is it in my head
I wish I could read their minds
Come clean
I'll set me free
Is it all internalised?**

Girlfriend
A word I can't get off my tongue
Can I call you my friend
What does it matter anyway?
Drop your hand
Look the other way
Too many years of hiding in the shade
Wrapped in shame

**Is the threat real
Or is it in my head
I wish I could read their minds
Come clean
I'll set me free
Is it all internalised?**

I want to leave my head
Tear down the walls
Hold your hand in mine
Out in the light

And for the first time in my life
I'm proud to call you mine
To call you, to call you mine
To call you, to call you mine (I feel the shame melt away)
I feel the shame melt away (hold me close)

Follow us on Instagram at: **@nazandella**
www.nazandella.com

TRANSFORMATION & REBIRTH

Sydney Waldron



Willful Fools

by Violette Taylor

fire,
and ice

burning our skin

as we become
one

under
frozen bridges

speaking in tongues

stationary,
and moving

a disposition of absurdity

we are always
dancing

craving
sweet sorrow

tempting fortune with unflinching prose

By the Sea

by Violette Taylor

Did she catch me tossing pennies in the puddle
outside the weekend bedroom

where we weighed indecision in the balance
and were left dancing around boundaries?

We showed our hands – a little more than
friends, less than lovers.

Breathing the same air, paying tribute to
all the moments of fervent bravery

laced with potency in the place of longevity –
I'm saving a seat for this fleeting memory.

I hope my muse is happy to live forever
through my words and folklore,

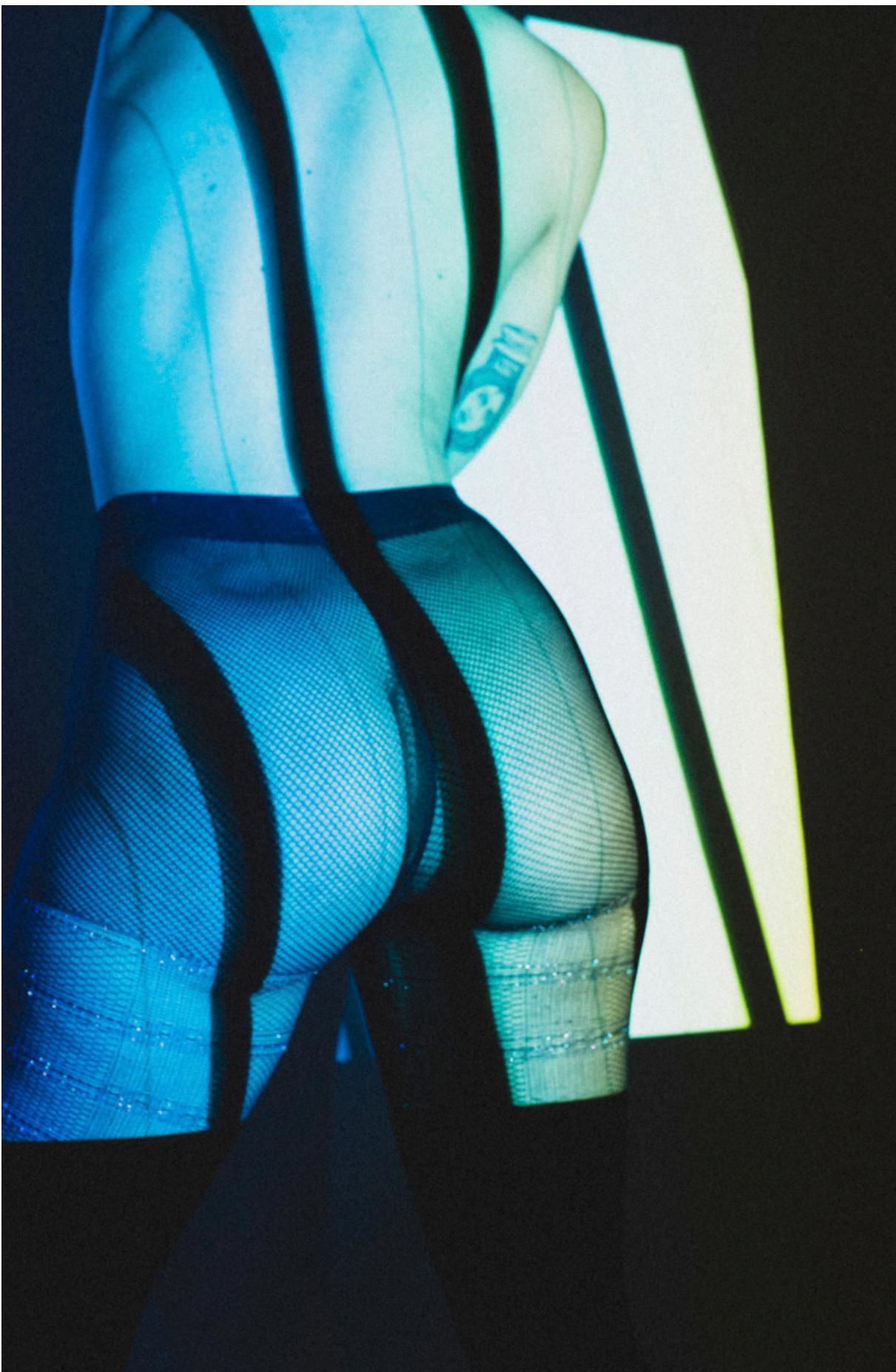
for I knew she was better than me when
I watched her help strangers in the street

and the morning she stopped me from
drinking scorching tea –

We are pledging allegiance to these
junctures of exploration and brevity.

TRANSFORMATION & REBIRTH

Jakob Leitenmeier



Snooki and I Walk Into a Bar

by Alexandria Juarez

Snooki and I walk into a bar. She buys me a shot and I thank her by telling her a bad joke.

I start, “A deer jumps in front of a car, but not me this time. The driver texted me when I was asleep on a couch in a stranger’s apartment. When I woke up, thirsty, I saw the message.”

The bar is actually a dance floor and I am wearing my going-out clothes: a red shirt that shows plenty of cleavage lopsided and splayed to their respective sides, no underwear, bike shorts with slits up the size to emphasize the lack of underwear. The lights are flickering so quickly it is hard to keep track of the bodies around me.

I continue, “After I got the photo of the deer and drank some water, I couldn’t go back to sleep. I stayed up for another hour shaking because I felt like it was an omen. I played a game called Block!TrianglePuzzle! but it didn’t help.”

Snooki and I sip. I think they gave us more than a shot, and I stare at her small frame. There was a time when we thought her large, and for that, we should feel bad.

She opens her mouth and I can’t hear what she is saying, the bass of the DJ is thumping into our ears and sternums.

I don’t think she can hear me, but I keep telling the joke, “During my lunch break the next day, I tangled myself through cars and construction sites. I knew that if I walked far enough in either direction. I would reach the water.”

There is a girl near us who is beautiful in every usual way. I want her to be inside of me and I try to raise my voice so she can hear. Snooki is getting another shot and I tell her to grab me one. I make eye contact with the girl as I lick the wedge between my thumb and index finger, preparing for salt.

“When I got to the water, there was no shore, just building and then crashing. I thought it was the ocean and not a river, but in the city, you can never tell. Everything feels so big, so we can feel small enough to tuck ourselves in spaces between. I sat next to a man in a dress shirt and no shoes. We looked at each other for long enough to see the gooey bits, uncooked at our centers. I think he felt guilty for consuming so much while others have nothing. I desire endlessly.” From the stool next to me, Snooki is cloaked in a backlight. I want to be the red around her, shoving itself through her extensions and sheer shirt.

When the bartender is away, she reaches over the bar and grabs a cherry from the box, placing it on my nose and then into her mouth, a void.

The beautiful girl near us is dancing closer and closer and I imagine my lips on her neck, grabbing her hair, sweaty and knotted, into my fist and pulling.

“The driver who hit the deer worked at a sandwich shop in the Rocky Mountains, and I would dream about her apron. I made up elaborate role-playing fantasies to compensate for the distance. I would walk in one day and she would ask “What cheese?” When we made eye contact we just know. I would shove my hand over the counter and say “Swiss. I’m Alex.” And when she would shake it, the wetness of the sandwich innards would coat my hands and I would lick it off, as if to say, I want to taste you. Then, she would show me around the town and when we would pass the big lake, the one she wants to live next to forever, the one I wanted to be enough to stop my landlock, I am outside the car, antlers formidable.”

Snooki finds someone to grind her body against, so I move to see if the girl who is beautiful in all of the usual ways kisses in all of the usual ways. In the annals of my camera roll is the shit-covered car. ♦

TRANSFORMATION & REBIRTH

Megan Cox





we love our Contributors!

Leah Blooms (he/they/she) is a mentor, Pro Domme, writer, artist, and sex educator who is passionate about learning, sharing, and empowering others to live their best lives. Their mentoring focuses on intimacy, mental health, gender, sex, and practical self-care. He helps clients understand where these major components of life converge and how our responses to them impact our ability to be successful. Follow Leah on Instagram and Twitter @leahblooms, and visit them at www.leahblooms.com and <https://www.patreon.com/leahblooms>.

Sarah-Rose Crossley (she/they) is a Brighton-based, lesbian artist and project manager. Drawing upon the duality of the female form, illustrator Sarah explores absurdity through perspective. Playing with composition, her work centers on desire, dykehood and the beauty and complexity of sexuality. Follow her on Instagram @sarahrcrossley.

Megan Cox (she/her) is a NY based writer, satirist, and digital artist. Her work has been featured on sites like *The Hard Times*, *Here is What I Know*, and UCSD's Satire Newspaper *The MQ*. She has a passion for film and comedy and is currently interning at The Syndicate and High Octane Pictures. Most importantly, she cares deeply about finding the best bagel in New York City. Follow her on Instagram @meganmariecox.

Cyote (she/her) is the moniker of Carter Lou McElroy (she/her), a mixed-media artist and songwriter based in the Hudson Valley of upstate New York. In February of 2020, she debuted her first single & video for "red" via BUST Magazine + held her first artist residency at the Athens Cultural Center in Athens, New York later that summer. Most of Cyote's creations exist in the digital space via animation, video shorts & collage photography. She is inspired by art that provokes action + avenues of storytelling that strengthen the concept of Community. Follow her on Instagram @_cyote_.

Frances Davis (she/her) is a photographer, digital artist and art director. Her professional work includes photography for a wide range of clients in different industries including cannabis, fashion, beauty, and entertainment. She is a prolific artist and creator whose personal work takes her into the realms of visionary photomanipulation, experimental portraiture, and a wide variety of creative collaborations and projects. The model that appears in her work is Lauryn Otten

(Instagram: @suggalala). Follow Frances on Instagram @madfizzymedia and @hastaindavisstudios and visit her at www.madfizzy.com and www.hastaindavis.com.

Olivia Dawson (pronoun indifferent) is a figure drawer based in Salt Lake City who focuses on queer identity and gendered expression. Originally from Santa Fe, New Mexico, she moved to Utah to pursue a Bachelor of Art degree at Westminster College and graduated in 2019. Follow Olivia on Instagram @dawson_0p.

Anne Walsh Donnelly (she/her) lives in the west of Ireland. She writes poetry, prose and plays. Her first full length poetry collection, "Odd as F*ck" will be published in May 2021. She is also author of the poetry chapbook, "*The Woman With An Owl Tattoo*" (Fly On The Wall Poetry Press, 2019), which is a reflection on her growth since the ending of her marriage, an exploration of her sexuality and coming out in mid-life. Anne travels purposely in life towards an as-yet-unknown destination. You can find out more about Anne and buy her books on her website www.annewdonnelly.com.

Eli Gale (she/her/hers) is a Jewish lesbian interdisciplinary performance artist originally from New York State with a BFA in Theatre and Development from Concordia University in Montreal, Quebec. Her research and art practice endeavor to challenge and investigate social constructions of gender and sexuality, excavate Jewish LGBTQIA+ history, and create space for queer struggle and joy. Follow Eli on Instagram @elllllli_ and visit her at <https://elizabethgale.squarespace.com/>.

Natalie Geisel (she/they) is a 22-year-old writer and digital strategist with a degree in gender and sexuality studies. When she's not writing, you can find her watching lesbian films, talking about mental health and astrology with everyone she meets, or crying to Phoebe Bridgers' music. They are an avid wearer of sweater vests and impulsive buyer of Trader Joe's plants. Follow Nat on Instagram @nat.geisel.

Naz & Ella (both she/her) are an alternative-folk duo from north London, UK. Known for having their "beady eye on social issues," the duo channel their anger and frustration at the world through tightly wound harmonies and intricate guitar riffs. Their EP *(DE)HUMANISE*, which is out on 7th May 2021, takes a moody and gritty direction while still

retaining their raw and intimate sound by blending folk, post-punk, and grunge influences such as The Cranberries, Nirvana and PJ Harvey. Follow them on Instagram @nazandella and on Twitter @nazandellamusic.

Elise Grakowsky (she/her) is a Brooklyn based queer artist and graphic designer. She enjoys creating thought provoking and dream-like designs through multiple medias. More recently she is exploring the human experience and sense of self through photography and photo manipulations. You can find her on Instagram @elisegr.design.

Dany Greene (they/them) is a non-binary artist living in Harlem, New York. Dany is self-taught and their art combines embroidery, watercolor, and printmaking. By day Dany works as a public criminal defense attorney, but spends as much time as possible creating art. Profit sharing is an important part of Dany's art practice, and as such, 35% of every purchase goes directly to a trans or BIPOC led organization of the buyer's choice. Dany's artwork can be found on Instagram @stick.and.sew or on Etsy at stickandsewart.

Stray Hare (she/her) is a self-taught cartoonist and self-taught lesbian, hopping onto the Portland street art scene, particularly the city's subversive sticker culture. Stray Hare's work focuses on themes related to existentialism, mental illness, and gender identity primarily through bold line art, both hand-drawn and digital illustrations. To gawk at some weird art, follow @stray_hare.

Alicia Holder (she/they) is a 37-year-old lesbian artist living in Minneapolis. Alicia's work is mostly woman focused and is also heavily inspired by nature, interactions with their environments, fantasy, and spirituality. Alicia lives with her dog and two cats. Follow them on Instagram @redloh_9.

Naia Ithurritze (she/her) is 25-year-old French architect, part-time illustrator and full-time intersectional feminist. Her work is heavily based on photographic and cinematographic pieces that inspire her and mainly represents women. Follow her on Instagram @naiaitz.

Alexandria Juarez (they/she) is a Chicanx lesbian writer, editor, and Jersey Shore enthusiast from Long Beach, CA. A graduate of the BFA Writing Program at Pratt Institute, they have work in *Electric Literature*, *X-R-A-Y*, *SFWP Quarterly*, and more. Follow them on twitter and Instagram @alexbethjuarez, and/or follow their meme account @sapphichardcider.

Kerry Kennedy (she/her/hers) is an art student-turned-corporate-whore who lives in Brooklyn, NY. She has a habit of compulsively doodling grotesque figures when she is supposed to be paying attention to something more capitalist or heteronormative in nature. Follow her on Instagram at @kerry_paints_cattos and #metaleylash_art. Black Lives Matter.

Byuka Krow is a non-binary witch & artist playing with poetry, ritual and dance. Their practice investigates hybridity, menstrual activism and conscious intimacy practices. Byuka is the co-creator of the Intimate Animals collective, where they explore animism through interspecies healing practices. Their work is also focused towards community engagement and ancestral connection work through the collaborative project "Your pain is humming in my vertebrae." They write about queerness, magic & belonging, researching how to tap into the sensual ceremony of life. Find them @_nymphology_ @intimate.animals.

Leeza Lakhter (they/them) is a queer, self-taught artist from New York City. Leeza's mission and artwork centers around spreading awareness for mental health, body and sex positivity, LGBTQIA+ empowerment, and gender issues, just to name a few. Leeza is best known for their tattoo artwork, drawings, graphic art, mixed media, and photography, highlighting the importance of self-love, acceptance, and mental health. Leeza has a safe and comfortable space for their clients to get tattooed in—open to all bodies, races, genders, aliens. Follow Leeza on Instagram @letmepokeu.

Jakob Leitenmeier (he/him) is a trans man, a writer and a photographer based in Berlin. He dedicates his work to all the gorgeous people who are standing courageously in front of his camera, uncovering more than just their bodies. It's about seeing beauty in the light of different bodies, stories and characters. You are free to book a session and see his work on Instagram @peopleinfrontofmycamera.

Angela Masker (she/her) is a lesbian artist based in Phoenix, Arizona. She is currently finishing her degree in Art History and Museum Studies and has been studying drawing and painting for about 8 years. Angela's work centers around self, memory, and personal experience. Almost all of her recent works are self portraits, with her own face and body serving as reflections of thoughts and emotions that she has grappled with during quarantine and isolation this past year. However, the subjects in her paintings are often depicted in ways that allow viewers to project their own story onto them. Each piece acts as a documentation or an entry in a non-verbal diary of sorts. Like pages in a diary, the works are small and intimate; one must get up close and personal to view them. Find more work on her Instagram: @angelamaskerart.

Caroline McAleer (she/her) is a graphic designer/visual artist from County Mayo in Ireland. Her work is influenced by her surroundings in the West of Ireland and the repetitive systematics of nature. The work represents this idea of pattern while incorporating aspects of shape, line and type. With each cycle of change in nature there is a transformation and this process can provide strength and vulnerability. It is a love of nature combined with a love of colour and graphic design. Follow Caroline on Instagram @caromcaleer.

Kaylin Moss (she/her) is a model, writer, and photographer from Charleston, South Carolina. Her writing focuses on belonging, and the pressure to conform to America's idea of blackness. She is currently studying computer science at Marist College in New York, where web design is another medium for her art. Follow her on Instagram @justchillkay.

Mia Paden (she/they) is a content creator and videographer based in Brooklyn, NY. Mia is passionate about mental health, LGBTQ+ and human rights, body and sex positivity. She aims to spread awareness and break boundaries through her work. You find out more about Mia and her work at thinkmiamedia.com or on Instagram @thinkmiamedia.

Raina K. Puels (she/her) is a queer/poly Boston-based writer, educator, & kinkster who really loves Lil Peep. She holds an MFA from Emerson College. You can read her writing in *The Rumpus*, *PANK*, *Gay Mag*, & many other places you can find on her website: rainakpuels.com. Follow her on Twitter: @rainakpuels, or Instagram: @rainaaaaaaaaaa.

Esther Renahan (she/her/hers) is an artist, illustrator and dog walker living in Clerkenwell, London. An art school dropout, she honed her skills through many different media, including sculpture, felting, crochet and painting. She is currently focusing on digital illustration. Her art is influenced by nature, fat bodies, the occult, old movie musicals and abundance. Follow her on Instagram @clouds.and.cakes.art.

Nicole Reyes (she/her) writes, thinks about systems that govern our lives and tells the truth about how to change them. She dreams about what freedom may look like beyond those realities and tells the stories of Bridgewalkers, people who walk between worlds (and identities) developing deep empathy, facilitating understanding and building superpowers that are shaping our world. She is a proud daughter of immigrants, dog mom, divorcee and late gay . Follow her on Instagram @nicole_reyes (personal); @shrinkingdelta (writing); and @thickthighsceramics (ceramics).

Danielle Scott (she/her) is a mixed-media assemblage artist and grew up in Jersey City, New Jersey. Danielle holds a B.F.A. from the School of Visual Arts in New York, graduating with a triple major in Fine Arts, Art Therapy and Art Education (Honors Fine Arts). She has taught Art at the Academy of the Art's at Henry Snyder High school in Jersey City for nineteen years . Danielle's latest pieces are brazen offerings conveying the intense beauty and wretched pain the artist absorbs from the world around her. She creates using photo montage, found objects, paint, raw materials, old books and collage, and chooses to explore and connect the intertwining relationships between social justice, equality, human and women's rights, police brutality, femininity, and culture. As a woman, a mother and self-identified lesbian, Afro-Cuban, Polish-Jew in America, Danielle Scott's perspective has been shaped with merciless hands yet has not been tainted by apathy. Her perspective gives way to audaciousness of hope.

Amy Spade (she/her) lives and writes in Oakland, California. Her poetry has appeared in many journals, including *Nimrod*, *North American Review*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, and *Cottonwood*. Follow her dyke/ writer/ cook/ gardener/ old-house-restorer adventures on Instagram at @spade_amy.

Violette Taylor (she/her) writes to make her favorite tiny moments big enough for others to see. She has been published at *One Sentence Poems* and *Windows Facing Windows Review*. She has work forthcoming in *Journal of Erato*, *Southchild Lit*, and *Lady Anus*. She currently lives and studies in Paris. Follow her on Twitter and Instagram @violettetaylor_.

Sydnie Waldron (she/they) is a queer artist currently living and working in Hastings, Nebraska, and is a bachelor of arts candidate at Hastings College. Her practice explores concepts of materiality through notions around intimacy and eroticism revolving around the celebration of queer bodies. Her work has been shown in solo shows at the Carnegie Arts Center in Alliance, Nebraska, and participated in group shows at the Carnegie. She has also had the opportunity to participate in several student exhibitions at the Jackson Dinsdale Art Center in Hastings, Nebraska. Waldron is the curator of an upcoming group show that will be taking place in the summer of 2021 at the Carnegie.

Willie the Genius (he/she/they) is an unapologetic Afro-Queer hip-hop lyricist and soul singer from Houston currently residing in Bed-Stuy, Brooklyn. This April Fool's day was Willie's ten-year anniversary of being HIV-positive, which he revisits in his theater show WILLIE GETS NAKED in the spirit of being reborn. Follow Willie on Instagram @williethegenius.

Ayshe-Mira Yashin (she/her) is a lesbian artist and poetess from Istanbul, Turkey, and Nicosia, Cyprus, currently based in Cambridge, England, and planning on studying art in London in the autumn. Her poetry explores her intersectional and hybrid identity as a Middle-Eastern lesbian of Jewish and Muslim heritage (and a practitioner of eclectic pagan witchcraft). Her written work is riddled with metaphors connoting pagan herbal correspondences, and is largely intertwined with her visual art practice, where she makes feminist sapphic illustrations and herbal collages. She is currently working on her first self-published illustrated poetry collection, which will be sold on her shop (www.ayshemira.com/the-illustration-witch-shop) where she also sells handmade bookmarks, necklaces, stickers, zines, art prints, handmade notebooks, and her Sapphic Enchantress tarot deck. Follow her on Instagram @illustrationwitch to stay in tune with her art and poetry!

