
MANNEQUIN ENVY

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ABHA IYENGAR

Nothing Really

When she was cleaning the toilet, a little drop of water jumped up onto her face, from within the toilet bowl. It touched the side of her lip.

She spent the whole day, touching that side of her face, worrying about it, the side of her lip, some germ may have got in.

The area began to get red, she kept touching it on the train to work, rubbing it, though she had washed it with antiseptic before she left home. She returned from work, saw that it had become sore. She put an emollient, but could not stop worrying about it.

After two weeks, she had developed an itch behind her neck and on her scalp. She decided to go to the skin specialist. He said there was nothing wrong with her, but she needed to treat the boil on the side of the lip.

He gave her antibiotics. The boil did not subside. The itch grew.

Something bothering you? The skin doctor asked her when she visited him again. Worrying about your job, your son, something?

No, she said. There is nothing really on my mind. Nothing, really.

ALISON EASTLEY

On the half-shell

*"His heart felt open and exposed as a shucked oyster on the half-shell,
mantle curling at the first cut of lemon" Peter Matthiessen*

The slightest squeeze is two people
walking on the same street
where you're likely to be arrested
for talking out loud
and the loudness is never as noisy
as the silence the time I tried to find him
in the dictionary. I looked under 'shy,'
then moved about like an itinerant before sleeping
near the sea
here on the coast I tossed and turned
on the edge of a bad dream where he wouldn't speak
and it only reminded me to look under 'recluse'
for solitary confinement he said he
preferred to be alone
although hunger and something else
stirred unexpected, almost savage, almost
what others may describe as a need
and I know that need. At the restaurant he always
ordered natural oysters,
then the bloodiest steak and he'd take me home
for sex and sometimes he'd be as confused
as I, mention love, then run
and this is understandable. He also needed distance.
He needed distance more than this overwhelming
fear others may name it intimacy
combined with desire. I tried
to find him when he hadn't moved.
When he hadn't been out
of his mind, just like that he decides to talk for a while.

BARTON SMOCK

comics

it was our dog
killed

the neighbor's dog.
hours
my brother and I
we washed its mouth and cried.

dad came home early.
black as

stove.

mom
whatever she had to put on
she put on

for dinner.

we ate. we were a hungry lot.

they have another dog, mom said.

dad
he just howled
and pulled her to his lap.

he put his hands all over her dress
which she had worn the week before
to a wedding.

BRIDGET GAGE-DIXON

Fireflies

Inside the plastic bottle on the table
they flash furiously as they climb
the severed blades of grass our sons
plucked from the lawn before they slid
sticky palms around these creatures
who hours ago rose above the grass
and ignited.

The boys don't care that each flash, once desire
has turned to fear, that air siphoned in
through slits is not the same as the air
that flowed beneath their wings outside.

I see you, half asleep on the couch,
caught between the blue glow of the television
and the random yellow sparks inside the bottle,
and try to remember that summer before college,

the two of us scaling the fence at Thompson Park
at 2 a.m. to lay a blanket down on pine straw.
Fireflies hovered across the open field,
a hundred iridescent bellies the only light around us
as your hand slid back my skirt,
the scent of beer and cigarettes mingling in our mouths.

Tonight, you don't seem to notice the small sparks
bursting below wings sticky with the syrup
that still coats the old container.
And though our sons' small faces may crumple
tomorrow morning when they see the empty bottle,
I walk outside, untwist the lid
and watch fireflies climb the bottleneck
and escape into August air.

CHARLES RIES

LOS HUESOS (the bones)

I sit with the dead tonight. I have brought my father's tobacco and my grandfather's beer. Between their tombstones, I light a sparkler and (with eyes open) imagine them standing and dancing before me. So I get up and dance with them, turning, spinning, and falling to the ground. As I catch my breath, I look up to see their smiles shine down like porcelain stars. They point at me. "There's our boy, he's come to drink and smoke with us. He loves the lost ones with a heart as big as heaven and inhales our graves as if they were fields of red roses."

The beer widens my eyes, makes the deep night opaque. Revealing a tribe of dead lovers who protect us from devils and demons, insuring our first communions and last rites, ready to welcome us back home with cold soft hands.

The graveyard is full. The living and their dearly departed sit in tight family circles telling old stories that recall ancestors whose names have now been given to babies.

We pass funeral cards, rosaries, and wedding rings among us - tiny monuments to people whose portraits hang along the stairs leading to the cellar where we make our candles, crush hot peppers, and shed our tears.

We slice lemon cake, eat chicken breasts,
and drink tequila in the Cemeterio de Santa
Rosa. The ghosts are all brown, except mine.
Pale faces who've passed over - German,
pot bellied, serious white people, who,
in life, had things to accomplish.

We sing and dance to all the dead gone.
Mock death and remember a cast of bit
players who slip into our dreams with
whispers just before dawn.

As I pour my tequila into the earth I see
their spirit mouths open and skeletons
rise to dance three feet above the ground.
White vapor swirling like clouds. Sweet
misty blankets that embrace the tombs
of my family.

C H E R Y L S N E L L

Poem with Spring Fever

If the dark weighs you down
and you're covered with peat
you might be a plant. To make sure
this is not a metaphor, attend to
what's winding around
your southernmost tip. Loosen
your entanglements. Sharp-toothed
animals are good for this. Otherwise,
spin the situation, take comfort
in your sturdy foundations. They might
last forever, despite the fiction
of biodegradables. Sooner or later
your head is bound to swell, the green
bursting through to where the sun
pulled the sky close against winter,
and it will open you like a canopy.
It will announce your name to the world.

Neither Here nor There by Cheryl Snell

We were always on the way to someplace else.
Like that time we ate up the road
to Pittsburgh, spitting out exhausted miles,
bickering over every toll.

Don't look back, you told me, I'd hate to lose you---
as if we'd hadn't fought all night for each other,
our language a tangle of stop signs
and danger crossings.

By the time we arrived at the wrong church
for someone else's I Do's, we'd decided
to make the best of it. We toasted
to the road's blind spot
and serenaded the newlyweds with a song
we'd made up along the way.

We didn't mean one word of it.
We counted the verses out like change.

DANIEL CROCKER

Apathy

What do you do
when your wife wants to
leave and you just don't care
anymore

It's not that you shouldn't care
she's done nothing to harm you
it's just that you don't

Everything else has won
the things she used to take from you
aren't there to take

The job has won
the rent has won
the car payment
the mortgage you didn't get
won

You've been beaten

The drinking doesn't
make you beautiful like it used to
and don't fool yourself, kid,
it used to

DAVID JORDAN

Pervert

“Don’t do that!” cries Sara Majors, splaying one hand over her naked breasts and the other over her pubic hair. “Stop it! You can’t just stand there leering like some pervert!”

Toby holds the shower curtain open with his right hand. He watches glistening water slide across the soft, pale contours of his wife’s flesh. “Derek wants to know if he can take the Volvo,” Toby says. “He’s going to a movie.”

“What?” Sara snatches the curtain from Toby’s fingers. Her body disappears behind a sheet of plastic painted with white-and-yellow daisies. “The Volvo? I don’t care.”

Toby lingers in the doorway of the tiny bathroom off their bedroom. The shadow of Sara’s body floats behind the shower curtain. “I thought you needed it for Garden Club. You said you were going to Tualatin.”

“I don’t care. Tell him to take it. Now -- do you mind?”

“I thought you said about Garden Club. Mind what?”

“Carla is driving. We’re taking her car to Tualatin. Leave, please. Close the door.”

Toby steps back and swings the door shut. He starts to walk away, but pauses. He returns to the door and opens it again.

“Pervert?” he says. “What the hell does that mean?”

“Toby, please,” Sara replies. “I’m trying to shower.”

He closes the door part way, halts, sticks his head back into the steamy little room. “Don’t call me a pervert,” he says.

One edge of the shower curtain crinkles and Sara’s wet face appears, surrounded by daisies. The short curls of her gray-blond hair -- she recently stopped coloring it -- droop. Water drips from her forehead into her blue eyes.

“I’m sorry,” Sara says. “It’s the fat girl syndrome, I guess. Just like when I was ten years old, I don’t like people looking at me naked.”

“You’re forty-nine, not ten.”

“I know. Still...”

“We’ve been married twenty-four years.”

“I know.”

“We have two children. Including the one who wants the car.”

Sarah sighs.

“I’ve seen you naked before. On occasion.”

Sara stares silently at Toby. He stares back.

There are so many things Toby wants to add, so many of Sara’s rebukes and dismissals and stiff-arming over the years he wants to itemize, to present as a grand total of sexual shortchanging that has culminated somehow in this insult. But he senses they teeter at the edge of a marital abyss. A single misstep could send them toppling into unending darkness. Words flee from him like startled deer.

He shuts the bathroom door, walks away. Exiting the bedroom, he mutters: “Perverts have syndromes. I don’t.”

Tree

I'd like to build a house out of your legs.
You could hold me as high as an intrusion
Or as ineluctable as fate.
Listen to the log.
I hear termites eating wood.
I miss your withdrawals and the cold turkeys
Of emotion running out of your veins.
I am addicted to rejection.
It's love in an Easter basket and resurrection
In a clam.
I like the train grass and the foil.
I like to wrap the eggs in shreds of green
Cellophane.

DENNIS MAHAGIN

Shortest Tale Of An Unrequited Crush Ever To Make An Amtrak Porter Blush

Pleasure and pain,
two trains

coupling... She called

out his name,
over the shriek
of steel wheels

braking... Then she got

off.

Grown Man, Crying *by Dennis Mahagin*

In the claw foot
tub running over,
his purple corona bobs
like a bell-shaped buoy
in the white-capped
suds,

he hums and scrubs
peppermint soap into
tingling scalp, sheepishly smiling,
watching her do up the lacy black
garter snaps

with one stiletto heel hitched high
on the toilet tank top, and a long strand
of raven hair balanced on the bridge
of her nose. When she blows

the bang, exasperated, across
her brow, saying "What did I tell you
about putting the seat down, Calvin?"

--he thrashes in the water
like an alligator on a goose neck,

the shampoo running slowly down
into his brown eyes held wide open
to the sight of her sex now

straddling
the still-running tub faucet a few
steaming feet from his face.

And how can we begrudge
this man his tears, as he rises

slowly out of the water
to the beckoning crook
of her wet forefinger for
yet another lesson?

DON SHAEFFER

An endurance head
of an ancient survivor race,
that lasted but never thrived,
nodded when the man beside her spoke.
She heard him and her eyes
wandered into the void of the burr floor.
The **yes** was a signal that she hoped would make him stop.

Her face was labor,
attached to a hard round body,
spine bent and enduring,
but never rebelling.



The question written into it was how
do I handle joy.

Woman I wish I could have photographed
10.08 Dmschiff

DON SHAEFFER



DON SHAEFFER



DOUG RAMSPECK

Common Things

So imagine you found a seeping robin's egg
on stone steps and made of it an omelet.
The sky was the color of a crocodile's green eye.
In the distance a train was coming closer
and closer and then it wasn't.

I kept saying Are you sure?
and you kept saying, About what?
It was the summer of all that whispering,
or maybe the summer after all that whispering,
when everything was wrapped in cellophane,
and you found an oblong pebble
clinging to your boot bottom as a talisman.

You kept telling me about a dream
you were having about being wrapped in a burlap sack
with an exotic shorthair that kept purring and purring
until you scratched out both its eyes,
which I took to be a symbol of
devotion.

All summer you offered
me the gift of common things: a smear of blood
on a white T-shirt, a yellow epaulet ant
from Australia, a noun made of turkey grease
and the stewed tail of a five-lined skink.
There was so much chlorine in the pool
our eyes were forever raw red,
but for all that I couldn't believe you as the temptress.
No one thinks you were the one who climbed the tree,
who rolled the robin's egg like Sisyphus from the nest.
You told me once that all I ever wanted
was the burlap sack. I told you once
that all you ever wanted was to seep.

HENRY LOUIS SHIFRIN

A Pen in a Pen Museum

My barrel still echoes the press
of my Mona Lisa's lips. Behind glass
I am. Unknown. Many years from December
1503, the last time I played cigar
for her, pretended to let loose
ash when she gently flicked

me. Us two in the mirror. My reflection
much prettier as complement
to hers. Had anyone recorded

her bite, they could match the incisor
marks I keep along my side.
They are mine. Gold coins
to me, and no one else can pocket
them. The oil Leonardo brushed
on poplar, only strokes of connotation:

a faint smile trapped under his closed
lids, his Mona. A sly incubus for dry minutes,
she knows damp light, mildew on pale fingers

and museum walls, rose-petal musk
of cuffed slacks, the clack of heel on tile.
But not my Mona. I followed her fingers
across the page, whether sunlight,
moonlight or candlelight glowed
a star to my moon of nib. Her mint breath

flowed like her hair and her thoughts
sang in the voice of a sparrow, beat fists
against the door her father often locked.

How she loved a stretch of meadow, the wings
of butterflies, a cascade of lavender. She'd bite
her lower lip to control a shiver when she explained
a cloud's change from cotton to gray, her cherub
cheeks darkening. She knew rain. Understood
an involuntary fall, the eyed object left silent.

JOHN SWEET

spark

and we were out there in
america and we were lost

end of summer in a third
floor apartment, fucking like
animals, bleeding like
minor gods

all of those towns
were the same

all of our lies felt
like revelations

woke up that last morning
said *my mother is dead*
and i was so used to laughing
that i laughed

reached out for your naked
body, for your warm flesh
and milkwhite breasts, but
you were getting dressed

you were screaming at me

i couldn't remember where
i'd left any of the maps

malice by John Sweet

a lack of pain, maybe,
or at least a diminishing of it

warmth, but not peace

tension, yes, fear, yes, on and
on both of them until they feel like
all you've ever known, and when
you tell the kid to cut himself,
he does

when you tell the woman to
get undressed, to get on
her knees, she does

sorrow is its own
form of blindness

hatred is the driving
wheel of western thought

if you close your eyes, you
can already hear the next
war approaching

KATHRYN JACOBS

Limiting the Damage

At 3 A.M., there's nothing you can do.
When moonlight fractures outlines into smudge
and splinters integers to decimals;
when dustballs shine with what are clearly teeth,
you're down to fingertips. Then what you touch
is all that's left of real, and sense of self
shrinks back to arm's reach -- swallowed in the dark.

At 3 A. M., when every sound sprouts legs
and dreams wear suction cups like octopi,
you let it happen. But you draw the line
at afternoons: as soon as solid folk
grow fuzzy at the edges, do something
(like what, you wonder? Eye-doctor, a shrink?
Don't ask hard questions). Look for warning signs:

If airports bounce about and you play chase
and dead men leave no body and the fridge
prefers to hum in English, you're far gone:
my principle of sane is "*know thy fridge*" –
personify him later. Don't forget.
Same goes for elevators, dishwashers
and ticking clocks: they're just electric, folks.

Like fuck-buddies; you don't get too involved.

LOIS P. JONES

Triptych in Honor of J. Michael Walker's Bodies Mapping Time

1. Exposed

I am not the swells that run the edge
of a dove's spine--not the dried twigs
in this bird's gullet that did not bear fruit.
You didn't ask if or why and I am grateful.

Grateful for the light that shelters,
for the deep fuchsia of bougainvillea
in your garden that protects me
from the world.

I am not this body.

Not a mallard to be brought down
with buckshot.

I am a hammer on the nail,
the woodpecker who drills down
into sap looking for the right word.

I let you see me naked
but clothes are nothing

to a bird. It's the glint in an eye
foraging for generous seeds.

You slice the white rectangle of light
with the edge of your lens.
Who but you to open this shutter,
release a wing.

2. Why the Mannequin Envis Me

I listen to the story of your body.
This flesh you could not tamp down
in time for the date,
the undressed plate of figs

you laid open on your lover's bed.
I desire each wrinkle, these folds
that find your face, undulating time—

sacred experience. I covet fingers
that find the ridge
of a scar. A memory of the knife

and table. That which kept you alive—
sewed your limbs back to fleshly doll.
Envy the pull of breasts that carry

the mother load, a bud of a belly—
the possibility of being
grateful, able to slip out of more

than silks or plaids. To feel the earth
ooze between my toes. And for once
close these spangled eyes to dream.

I will never manifest as something real,
though you see me through the glass
of this shop-keeper's window,

faux Jesus of the fashion world.
I want to pull the pegs
from my palms and feet, step down

from this steel rod and into your skin.
Feel that lightness of bone. Press my lips
into your yield.

3. Where did the full moon leave its sack of flour tonight?

Title from Pablo Neruda's "Book of Questions"

It was a day sheltered by the weeping fig.
Gerda's dog sleepy below the bench
in Michael's garden. Our bellies full

of ambrosia, of almond milk and tamales
freshly offered. Our bowls empty
of shame—laughter spilling over the lip

of the pond. Each recognizing herself
in the other. No longer the lone field.
We'd shed our clothes to taste our own fruit.

To become unafraid of Eve's gifts.
Each our own bounty—tender skins of grape,
golden mango, berries tart and sweet.

A new garden and the spirit of its gardener
incapable of judgment, who loves
as a farmer loves a root. The afternoon

scattering its seed—brave women,
who bared their skins of motherhood,
of accidents and extravagance—

the lies of too much or too little. Women
of grace and light whose flour poured free,
unsifted as stars.

MARKIE BABBOTT

Namesake Rising

Now I watch my daughter consumed with her art—

a sheet of tracing paper stretched over your granite headstone,
a thick stick of charcoal.

Her fingers black dusted, she kneels on lichen,
rubs harder and harder until the carved letters,
numbers, roses emerge,
her namesake rising as if out of the sea;
she rubs vigorously,
as I did that morning when your skin was blue
wake up, wake up.

MATHER SCHNEIDER

Bicycling Down Highway 101

This morning at the campground
I found a pair of women's panties
mixed in with my clothes in my pack.
Some girl must have forgotten them in the drier
at that last campground laundry
and I accidentally scooped them out with my load:
tiny black string panties
delicate as a spider's web in the early sun.
I was far from home, alone,
and I considered for a second:
I could tie them up on my handle bars
like dangling a carrot in front of a mule;
I could spend my trip searching
for the woman they belonged to
like Cinderella's slipper;
or perhaps I could don them myself
under my shorts to give me focus like that
half-wit pitcher in Bull Durham.
The rising sun snapped
me back to reality.
My withering morning fire
consumed the last sappy twig,
and I tossed the underthing
into the hungry flames.
With a virile grip they took
the flame inside them, burned with a hiss
of orgasm, and then finally to ashes
curling like toes.
The sky wore nothing but a negligee of smoke
and I stood there
undressing it with my eyes.

RICHARD LIGHTHOUSE

holding air

missing you is easy.
i've rehearsed it well.

missing the ease
that un closes your smile,
missing the spell
in your eyes,
missing the air
where you leave.

tonight, i will practice
misplacing you again.
moving empty
hands thru air and holding
open where you
should be.

ROGER PFINGSTON

That Morning

he was coming up out of the woods,
half expecting to see her waiting
at the back door, shaking her head

at his coatless indifference to the cold,
when he stopped for no good reason
other than the weight of another year

newly hung on the kitchen wall
above the coffee pot, its red
light still burning. When he

opened the door, a voice
enamored of itself told him
what time it was, expected highs

and lows. He poured the remaining
coffee into his cup and joined
the cat at the window. He stood

there, thinking it was longer
than he should; he stood there,
thinking it didn't matter.

And then he stood there
until it did, his turning away
scattering birds from the feeder.

ROY LEWIS

Excerpt from the Diary of Olga Rudge

Rapallo, Italy

May 1, 1929

And so, Sunday you were surrounded by friends, they saw a smile. You are such a solitary being. "Let me seek seclusion" is you're mantra. You're complete in yourself and all the friends on that hillside of houses couldn't bring you the peace you need.

May 7, 1929

Am I in a competition? This is what Ezra Pound, my lover, asked me today while he read my poetry. I wasn't sure how to respond to him. I continued to write sitting at the desk as though he hadn't asked his question. And of course I'm still sitting at the table now as I write this. Why would he ask that question? Surely he isn't threatened by my work? Ezra says, see things for what they are—everything is itself entirely. Then should I read something into what he said to me? Or should I look for another interpretation? Has Ezra said precisely what he meant without metaphor? There is a spider crawling up the window frame. Since writing this sentence it has climbed a good four feet up the eight foot frame very quickly. See there, now I've just failed to be precise. I can't read the tiny numbers on this wooden ruler because vanity won't allow me to wear my glasses while Ezra is at home.

May 14, 1929

Ezra feels very much at peace in the quiet of our home here in Rapallo. He has shared with me that in the wee hours of the morning he feels at peace amongst the sleeping bodies. "My work flows freely then.." he says. "This is my sanctum sanctorum." Once in the early morning I woke suddenly to discover that Ezra had abandoned our bed. I found him sitting in the dark writing by candle light. I was loathed to disturb him. He deep in the world of his private imaginings, a sacred room in which the uninvited do not enter.

SIMON PERCHIK

The same Krupp? this coffee mill
arm and neck
on orders and German engineering
and now each morning
the way marrow darkens
fresh ground from smoke and seawater

--who can drink from such a place
can touch this switch as if the trains
would stop, back up without expecting clouds
that have my nose, my eyes, my lips
sit down at the table, ask what's new.

The clerk in back of the counter
is next, wants me to know
these playful mills are made
only black or white
photographer unknown
exhibit at Nuremberg trial
--talks from behind some valve
he's opening, sticks a little --a few seconds
is all it takes --I can't make out the words

--even at home, hour after hour
I listen to its motor --no water, no beans
just the blades over and over
like a plane trying to get it right.

* *by Simon Perchik*

This flower pressing against my palms
--celestial navigation must come easy
scanning my hands for arcs and islands

--I want to be there when its fragrance
finds where you have hidden your breasts
from the silence --it's still worth while
to take hold, empty this flower
follow it in the dark --don't ask me why

but before bending down
I stood on just one foot, eyes closed
trying not to lose my balance

or breath --a haphazard touch
imprinted by exploding galaxies
and I too would change course
into a scented breeze
and these dry, small hands
that live too long.

TIM KAHL

The Mannerist

The comic gropes a woman in the crowd,
takes her into the men's room, leaves the club
and urinates on the sidewalk outside.
His manners suffer, but he understands
the appetite for outrage.
He understands the crude smack
of the lips, the vulgar leer
that makes you so uncomfortable.
Oh, yes, you, the mannered poet,
the one who likes to play
hide and seek among the commas,
I watch you ration your lines:
canapés, kipper snacks, no lunch meat, *trés chic*.
I admire the cramped quarters you design,
the caution you display to keep your
interests safe. You inspire the backslapper
in me, so I throw an elegant party
and threaten to breastfeed
all my guests. I am not mannered
so much as manured, mired in
my own eccentric habits. The door stays
open when I'm on the throne,
for everyone to see. I urinate out
in the tulle after I've coached Little League.
Pity those of us who don't know better . . .
go ahead, begin! Oh, you mannered poet,
who fails to escape through the labyrinth
of your lines' sharp turns, lead
your reader to follow the tortured rules
of your turn, turn, turn
into the maw of emotion—
heightened for effect.
Then raise your reader
out of his theater seat
to walk out of the poem later
with a feeling deserved and named
so he doesn't feel cheated.
This I ask out of respect
for your sophisticated direction
of the comma and the colon.
Oh, you mannered poet,
you look tired after all your effort.
Wend your way to the gentle finish.
Go home and get some needed laughs.

The Great Book *by Tim Kahl*

I had a great book which kept track of
every instance of human exchange.
. . . I wanted to be a different species,
a bat that fluttered between the blood meals
it shared. But I am not a bat.
I am not a moral beacon either. I repeat
a game where the winner is allowed
to cross over into childhood.
There are four of us now digging in
the sand together. Then one boy runs
and takes all the shovels. The rest
of us wear our buckets on our heads.

I guess the subtle thoughts of the ethologists
who are watching us. They denote our status
with a series of crude symbols and hashmarks.
I have seen the great book they have written,
kept a copy locked in my filing cabinet
with my dull knives and fishing tackle.
Tonight I dine alone on three blood oranges.

Again I read all the names mentioned
in the great book of the ethologists.
They insist I have ruined my species.
But I assured them the situation is
more complicated—it is easier to be
selfish the more anonymous one is.
So I leave tomorrow with the great book
strapped around my waist. My destination:
the barely disguised expanse where
the great book has finally found its audience.

Three Middle-Aged Postures of Futility *by Tim Kahl*

I wrap my life in aluminum foil
for the kids to find me later
on a shelf in the fridge
where I can linger past my freshness date,
knowing I serve to sate their hunger.

I could be collectible bear
stuffed with the soft filler
of my grandiose adolescent
dreams. Now I'd settle for
simply being necessary,
not stuck in dust motes
on a ledge, overlooking
the pranks of my five-year-old
passing out of his adorable stage.

I am the last move left on
the chess board, still insistent
that king is slain by pawn.
I argue with dusk's lamplight,
draw moustaches on the well-groomed
models in *Sunset Magazine*.
I am angst mixed with venom,
roiling. My body hiccups, growls
and burps. It attacks. I publish
my most desperate groans and sighs
in the air-conditioned air.

TONY LEUZZI

Now

For
years
when I
would have sex
with someone I would
think of having sex with someone
else, or of someone else having sex with someone else.

The
less
he was
and the less
I was the more we
disappeared behind bodies not
our own and became, in our writhing, anxious voyeurs.

But
now
with you
I can't think
of anyone else.
Hell, I can't think at all! Your skin
against mine, my flesh, your flesh, the immediate this.

Return by Tony Leuzzi

When
we
called it
quits that third
and last time, I swore
no amount of booze or games or
emptiness could entice me to your dark apartment.

But
there
at Rook's,
where ghost-faced
loners bend before
their doubles, you whisper gin-soaked
nothings in my ear and run your hand along my thigh...

One
thing
leads to
another
and I'm back again
in your cramped rooms overlooking
empty streets, the tarred park, and, beyond, the black river...

FEATURED ARTIST:

JULIE STEINER

Interview by Alex Nodopaka

View Julie Steiner's artwork online at MannequinEnvy.com

MannequinEnvy: We read about other artists but mostly it is viewing their work that influences our techniques & styles & visual semaphoring. Julie, you claim to be self-taught but some art may have influenced you. Which artists?

Julie: I can't recall being influenced by any other painters in the beginning of my painting experience because in the past, most of the creative projects I had done were sculptural. I made fiber jewelry for a while, and did some gourd work after that, some dolls and Santa's...mostly just crafty stuff, influenced by some local artists here from a basket-making club. Organic materials, natural, neutral colors...SAFE. I liked color, and admired others that used it, but I was afraid of it, so it was never anything more than that. I simply was not good with color. I didn't paint, so it didn't matter really.

Someone told me once that my work reminded them of Fredrich Hundertwasser. I had not heard of him so I looked him up and I do agree. I subscribe to Juxtapoz Magazine now, and enjoy looking at the featured artists. They are young, fresh, innovative and certain artists stand out. I am drawn to the artists that create figures in their works though.

MannequinEnvy: Are you doing art for the sake of art?

Julie: That question is very good, and the timing is quite relevant actually. I did art for sake in the beginning and it is how I started out BUT most recently I have done it to try and make money and for 2 years I spent a lot of time thinking about marketing the art. About 2-3 months ago, I felt I had to simplify the things that were stressing me out and I realized that I spent a lot of time trying to figure out how to get my art noticed. I found my creative ambition stifled, and excuses why I did not have time to paint. I was grumpy. It was becoming a job...a JOB and I already had one of those! AHHHHHH! Right then and there, I stopped trying to market my work. I decided right that second, because in the past, opportunities

always had a way of finding me and they would again that's how it rolls with me I always say I am the luckiest person I know. Anyhow, after coming to this conclusion/decision, I did not allow myself to paint or think about marketing at all, or art for that matter. A cleansing period so to speak! Then it happened. The frenzy. The passion. The stories. The process that happens when no product is the result in mind. As of this writing I have 12 new canvases in process and 3 more I did last night. Frenzy, like I said. So now. I am doing art for art's sake again but it has come full circle for me. I lost myself in the process of trying to find others to agree with me...buy my art, validate me. Just how it started, it stopped now I understand, and my art is speaking to me again. That just sounds so psycho to me saying it out loud like that I wish someone would explain it to me actually. Most people who know me personally do not know I paint. I do not like to show people I know, because I do not want to see their reaction they know me in a different way. My own mom does not even know I paint. She saw a painting on my wall one time and told me she didn't like it. I didn't tell her it was mine. I don't like to talk about my art. I don't want to tell people why I decided to put that line there instead of somewhere else. I don't want to hate art again. I just want to paint. I like others to tell me about it instead.

MannequinEnvy: Well, I understand your enthusiasm. That's probably how God felt once creation was undertaken... lol and it snowballed. Isn't it marvelous about art that one creation leads to another with often-unexpected results? What do you think about the future of aesthetic representation? Specifically about art that encompasses acres of space and must be experienced in situ? What's your opinion about the future of art that cannot be brought home?

Julie: The future of art that cannot be brought home? Are you referring to something like graffiti or street art, performance art?

MannequinEnvy: I had in mind Cristo for instance whom I admire for being a great exaggerator of beauty comes in a small package but that he wraps complete buildings and islands in plastic sheeting. The one artist I greatly admire is the Australian Andrew Rogers who created Rhythms of Life. He sculpts with organic material and has 100's of participants. In other words his art cannot be hung on the wall or put into an album like a stamp collection. Another would be performance art, like shooting oneself in the foot.

MannequinEnvy: What prompts you to create?

Julie: I guess it is just an energy that has to escape...and if it does not, it gets negative and ugly...I get moody, and impatient. Just like some people have to work out...I paint now. It's not something I talk about really. I just do it. I go in spurts, the big ideas start in a frenzy of motions, then eventually develop over longer periods of time. I work on many canvases at once. They get finished up here and there. I actually work on pieces in mini sessions, 5 minutes here, 20 minutes there. I have never had a full day (like an 8 hour day) that I have actually worked on things. I have 3 little kids and a full-time job, my paintings have to fit into my lifestyle, my lifestyle has to fit into my paintings.

MannequinEnvy: Why do you call yourself an outsider? In my understanding it means not only lack of academic training but also a childlike, naïve manner of rendering a visual. In your case you have quite a grasp of harmonious proportions and coloration. Frankly, for a natural you have quite an experienced brushstroke and style

Julie: I am self-taught, except for the high school art I took, which was mostly sculptural (clay and fibers). I don't recall ever painting anything, except a rainbow in art class in 9th grade, which my mom kept, and it looks like something my 8 year old could do now.. I did take one college art class, but was too into the social life of college to do the work that was required, plus the fact that the professor wanted to know what I was feeling and why I put that line there etc (it was a drawing class). It was boring and time consuming...I was very turned off...so I quit going to class. I hated art after this. It was not until I was 40 years old that I started painting (I'm 45 now). I had just had twins, and also had a 3 year old. My husband was busy with school and work, and I was also working full-time. We had no family in town to help. I was exhausted, and stuck in the house. I just existed. I don't remember much of that first year. I had never painted before, and really do not know what compelled me to paint one day, my 40th birthday and when I did I painted a self-portrait. I did not set out to paint myself that day, but in hind site, maybe it was my way to give myself life again...painting this worn person I had become. But the colors were bright, and whimsical, the lines structured amongst the chaos. I can't explain it except to say that when there was no purpose in mind, no end product, just process, it just happened. I believe I went through some sort of metamorphosis. I could not have done something like this in the past but I was compelled to do it. I wonder sometimes if hormones had anything to do with it. Divine intervention? I'm not religious. I wonder, I still wonder, I just know that I cannot stop. My style has evolved through

practice and repetition. It is compulsive. Always figures. I estimate I have painted over 500 paintings. Most are small. I like the larger canvases when I can afford them. I call myself an outsider because I have never taken a class before. I have tried classify my art to a specific genre, but have no clue what label I would wear, where I would fit? I am no art expert, what would you call my style Alex? I'm interested to hear your thoughts and why you chose me for your interview.

MannequinEnvy: Julie, yours are very enlightening responses. I feel you become alive and your enthusiasm is contagious and that is a high sign of creativity. It translates into your expressionist but controlled and clearly defined brush stroke delineating the figure similar to the French artist Georges Rouault. Portraiture may be your avenue searching into your soul through images. You recreate or are reborn with different facets with each new image. Julie, are you doing any art for the sake of art?

Julie: That question is very good, and the timing is quite relevant actually. I did art for art's sake in the beginning and it is how I started out BUT most recently I have done it to try and make money and for 2 years I spent a lot of time thinking about marketing the art. About 2-3 months ago, I felt I had to simplify the things that were stressing me out and I realized that I spent a lot of time trying to figure out how to get my art noticed. I found my creative ambition stifled, and excuses why I did not have time to paint. I was grumpy. It was becoming a job...a JOB...and I already had one of those! AHHH, right then and there, I stopped trying to market my work. I decided right that second, because in the past, opportunities always had a way of finding me and they would again that's how it rolls with me I always say I am the luckiest person I know. Anyhow, after coming to this conclusion/decision, I did not allow myself to paint or think about marketing at all, or art for that matter, a cleansing period so to speak. Then it happened. The frenzy. The passion. The stories. The process that happens when no product is the result in mind. As of this writing I have 12 new canvases in process and 3 more I did last night. Frenzy, like I said. So now I am doing art for art's sake again but it has come full circle for me. I lost myself in the process of trying to find others to agree with me buy my art, validate me. Just how it started, it stopped. Now I understand, and my art is speaking to me again. That just sounds so psycho to me saying it out loud like that. I wish someone would explain it to me actually. Most people who know me personally do not know I paint. I do not like to show people I know, because I do not want to see their reaction they know me in a different way. My own mom does not even know I paint. She saw a painting on my wall one time and told me she didn't like it. I didn't tell her it was mine. I don't like to talk about my

art. I don't want to tell people why I decided to put that line there instead of somewhere else. I don't want to hate art again. I just want to paint. I like others to tell me about it instead.

MannequinEnvy: If you had 4 artworks to choose from your available collection, which they would be and why? Can you tell us about your thought process about titling artwork?

Julie: Alex, are you asking about favorites above? The question is a bit unclear...so I will answer it the way I think you meant. I don't have any favorites actually...usually it is the newest one that is my favorite...I think most artists feel that way. I try not to get too attached...I can paint more! But I do have one that I will probably keep at this point...it is a woman that I did a couple of years ago...her body turns into 3 heads attached at the rib cage area. It is symbolic of my situation, being tied to my 3 boys. It is a bit dark and gloomy, but I love it. I just started titling my works recently...Naming things is such an important final decision that I have avoided it in the past...but now that I see more meaning in the larger works, so it seems easier to be able to give them a name. I didn't have names for my twins until 5 days after they were born...

MannequinEnvy: It is an established fact that Woman is a great multi-tasker. Still it seems you have your plate full between your everyday routine life requirements & art being the "relaxation... meditation" segment. Any particular reasons why your main subject matter are portraits? Do you plan on venturing below the neck... lol?

Julie: I am a people person, always have been. I have tried to paint other things...but am always dissatisfied with the results. However, I notice when I paint the other things in with one of my figures, I like it. Lately, things like birds, houses and flowers have had some significance in my paintings...but in isolation, they look stupid to me. As for below the neck...I have started venturing there more (such a guy question!)...Last year I started painting these circles near the chest...later when I identified them, they became what is representational of a heart. I also just started painting women in the past year or so...prior to that it was 90% men or androgynous. All the members in my household are male, the 3 boys and my husband. After something happens for a while in my paintings, I am able to make sense of it. The newest figures have wings...I think I know where I am going with this one!

Contributors

Abha Iyengar is an internationally published writer and poet. Her work has appeared in several anthologies, magazines and literary journals, such as the Chicken Soup series, Gowanus Books, Mannequin Envy, Conversation Poetry Quarterly, Nefarious Ballerina, Nothing but Red, etc. She is a Kota Press Poetry Anthology contest winner. Her story, 'The High Stool' was nominated for the Story South Million Writers Award. She is a member of The Poetry Society of India and 'Riyaz' Writer's Group at The British Council, New Delhi. She writes articles on health and spirituality for several Indian magazines. She is Fiction Editor with Frog Books, Mumbai. Abha has recently produced a poem film 'Parwaaz' (flight) that is being screened at international film festivals.

Alison Eastley "I live in Tasmania, Australia with my two sons and a staffy pup. Previous work has been published in The Absinthe Literary Review, Stylus, a pos tro phe, the-hold.com and thieves jargon."

Barton Smock lives in Columbus, Ohio, with his wife and four children. He often calls his brothers on the phone in the a.m. to recommend, again, that they watch the movie Shotgun Stories.

Bridget Gage-Dixon's work has appeared or is forthcoming in Poet Lore, Inkwell, U.S. 1 Worksheets, and Gargoyle as well as several others. She received her MFA from Stonecoast/USM. She lives and teaches in central New Jersey.

Charles Reis lives in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. His narrative poems, short stories, interviews and poetry reviews have appeared in over two hundred print and electronic publications. He is the author of THE FATHERS WE FIND, a novel based on memory and five books of poetry. Most recently he was awarded the Wisconsin Regional Writers Association "Jade Ring" Award for humorous poetry. He is the poetry editor for Word Riot . He is on the board of the Woodland Pattern Bookstore and a member of the Wisconsin Poet Laureate Commission. But most of all he is a founding member of the Lake Shore Surf Club, the oldest fresh water surfing club on the Great Lakes.

Cheryl Snell's books include a novel, Shiva's Arms (The Writer's Lair Books), and five collections of poetry: Flower Half Blown (Finishing Line Press), Epithalamion (Little Poem Press), Samsara (Pudding House), Prisoner's Dilemma (Lopside Press) and Multiverse (GOSS 183).

Daniel Crocker is the author of two collections of poetry, and two books of fiction—all from the now extinct Green Bean Press. His work has appeared in a lot of places. He's currently working on a PhD at the University of Southern Mississippi. In his youth, he was a thief and a gambler.

David Jordan, who lives in Bend, OR, is a former newspaperman and teacher turned fictionwriter/poet. He has published work in more than 100 literary journals, including Nimrod, Rattle, Comstock Review, Thema, The Chaffin Review and Red Wheelbarrow. His stories and poems appear online in such e-magazines as Zygote in My Coffee, Opium, Word Riot, Thieves Jargon, The Dead Mule, Right Hand Pointing, The Circle, Spillway Review and The Fossil Record.

David Lawrence teaches boxing at Gleason's Gym in Brooklyn. He joyfully believes he has the perfect life--writing and fighting. He lives in Manhattan with his wife.

Dennis Mahagin is a writer and musician from the Pacific Northwest. His poetry collection, entitled "Grand Mal," is now available at Amazon Dot Com's Kindle Store -- with brio, and a bargain basement price tag. fourhourhardon.blogspot.com

Don Schaeffer Born in the Bronx, N.Y. in 1940. Ph.D. in Social Psychology from City University of New York (1975). He is self-taught through a lifelong interest in visual art, drawing and painting and photography for more than 50 years. He established Enthalpy Press and published 5 chap books including "Time Meat" and "The Word Cow and the Pig O' Love. Recent poetry published in The Writers Publishing, Burning Effigy Press, "Understanding Magazine" and "Quills."

Doug Ramspeck's poetry collection, Black Tupelo Country, was selected for the 2007 John Ciardi Prize for Poetry and is published by BkMk Press (University of Missouri-Kansas City). His chapbook, Where We Come From, is published by March Street Press. Several hundred of his poems have been accepted by journals that include Prairie Schooner, Epoch, West Branch, Third Coast, Northwest Review, and Hayden's Ferry. He was awarded an Ohio Arts Council Individual Excellence Award for 2009. He directs the Writing Center and teach creative writing at The Ohio State University at Lima.

Henry Louis Shifrin's main language is Java: both the speech of virtual-machine-interpretted conversations (software) and the talk of coffee beans (caffeinated tongues). He lives in St. Louis with his wife Julie, daughter Josie and son Ezra.

John Sweet was born in the summer of winter 1968. have not yet died. a believer in writing as catharsis. opposed to a great many things, but i keep it all inside until that day i go berserk and open fire. single father of two. owner of a house that might or might not make it thru to 2010. size 11 shoe, 31 waist in pants, but they're a pain to find, so i usually settle on a 32 and wear a belt. on the writing front, recent collections include *ASH WILDERNESS* and *FALSE HOPE*.

Kathryn Jacobs is a poet and medievalist at Texas A&M University. Her chapbook of poetry, *Advice Column*, appears from Finishing Line Press in November, and she has an e-chapbook sponsored by Poetry Midwest (*The Boy Who Loved Pigeons*). Her poems have appeared widely in such journals as *New Formalist*, *Measure*, and *Road Not Taken*. She has also published a scholarly book on literary marriage contracts in the Middle Ages and Renaissance and sixteen articles in periodicals. She has two daughters. She lost her 18-year old son, Ray, in 2005.

Lois P. Jones believes in all manner of flying and can claim skydiving and hot air ballooning as her introduction to highfalutin. When she isn't dreaming of dirigibles, she makes herself useful as co-founder of Word Walker Press, co-producer of Moonday's monthly poetry reading in Pacific Palisades, California with Alice Pero and guest host of 90.7 KPFK's Poet's Cafe. She is the Associate Poetry Editor of *Kyoto Journal*. Her work has been published in *Rose & Thorn*, *The California Quarterly*, *Kyoto Journal*, *Prism Review* and other print and on-line journals in the U.S. and abroad.

Margaret Babbott is a psychologist and mother, lives and works in Northampton.

Mather Schneider "I am a cab driver in Tucson living with a Mexican girl and trying to learn Spanish. I have a book coming out by Interior Noise Press very soon."

Richard Lighthouse is a contemporary writer and poet. He holds an M.S. from Stanford University. His work has been published in: *The*

Penwood Review, West Hills Review, Mudfish, and many others worldwide.

Roger Pfingston has new poems in Main Street Rag, Front Range Review, and Chiron Review. He also has a poem in a new anthology from Holy Cow Press titled *Beloved on the Earth: 150 Poems of Grief & Gratitude*. As a photographer, his work has appeared in recent issues of *The Sun* and *Tattoo Highway*.

Roy Lewis has been a professional actor for over twenty years. He has worked across Canada and more notably at the Shaw Festival, the Stratford Festival the National Arts Center. He has been a University lecturer in Theatre. As an actor his favourite roles are Prospero in the *Tempest*, Posthumus in *Cymbeline*, Lysander in the *Dream*, Lightbourne in *Edward the Second*, Norfolk in *A Man For All Seasons* His love of the theatre inspired him to work as a writer in earnest. To this end he continues to write plays and poetry and he has directed *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Cymbeline*, *The Tempest* and *Waiting for Godot*.

Simon Perchik is an attorney whose poems have appeared in *Partisan Review*, *The New Yorker* and elsewhere. *Family of Man* (Pavement Saw Press) is scheduled for Fall 2009. For more information, including his essay "Magic, Illusion and Other Realities" and a complete bibliography, please visit his website at <www.geocities.com/simonthepoet>.

Tim Kahl was born in Chicago and has been published in many journals in the U.S. He has translated German poet Rolf Haufs, Austrian avant-gardist, Friederike Mayröcker; Brazilian poets, Lêdo Ivo and Marly de Oliveira; and the poems of the Portuguese language's only Nobel Laureate, José Saramago. He also appears as Victor Schnickelfritz at the poetry and poetics blog *The Great American Pinup*. His first collection is *Possessing Yourself*. He is also the editor for Bald Trickster Press, which is dedicated to works of poetry in translation into English. He teaches at Sacramento City College and is the Vice President of the Sacramento Poetry Center Board.

Tony Leuzzi