The Silhouette is committed to celebrating the art and ideas of the students and faculty of Shawnee State University and of the community at large. We welcome submissions of art, poetry, and short fiction.

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"Holocaust I"

Chuck Davis
sculpture
White Boy drove up one day when Roy’s half-brother Luther was drinking in the yard. Had been drinking all day, while Roy cooked “for the man”, and he was ugly drunk and just out of Parchman after twelve years for killing a white man in self-defense.

“Now, that’s a white boy coming there in that truck, Luther, and if you raise a hand against him I’ll knock you up against the barn,” Roy spoke low and serious.

“What the fuck you mean, a white boy?” Luther, getting that kick-ass glint in his eye.

“A friend of mine, not someone you want to mess with.”

“What the fuck you talking about, friend and white...”

“Just what I said.”

“Hey, Roy,” White Boy getting out of his truck, and Luther lurches that way, actually throwing a punch. Boy catches the punch, as if it was a greeting and sets Luther down on the ground with a handshake.

“Told you, asshole,” Roy jerks Luther up and boots him further away. “You raise a hand against him again, and you’re dead.”

I come flying out the door, still holding a book, “The Orchard Keeper”, and the first thing Boy says is - “What do you think about that?”, pointing to the book. And I say something about dark and dreamlike, and he says, while Luther is still crawling up off the ground, “See how he uses Faulkner and Flannery O’Conner?” As if the chain of authenticity was a tangible thing, something we could see and discuss, even the fight was just a way of dating.

Roy told the story, for the rest of his life, how Boy took his Mississippi Sleigh Ride. He’d built his hog pen in a bottom, straddling his two rotating gardens, and his problem was that he needed to get a hog to the ridge-top, so he could truck it to a buyer. He called Dad, and Dad’s solution was the way a three-hundred pound black guy moved a hog.
“Grab a pail of corn to keep her head down,” reaching in the back of the truck for a limp piece of hemp he used for this particular procedure.

Boy did as he was told, and they traipsed down the clay path to the bottom, in what has become a day of severe clear, in the telling, but was actually a cloudy and ugly day.

Anyway, there were four hogs, and the point was to separate one out and get it to the top.

“Does it matter which one?”

“No.”

“Then just pour some corn in the trough, and we’ll see which one is gentiest.”

To be fair, Roy had done this a thousand times, and the Boy had never seen it before, so he didn’t know what to expect. Roy slipped in slow, so as not to spook, patting hogs on the butt to find the least skittish and, when he found her, dropped the hemp at her side. Talking to her and scratching her back, he slipped the one end of the rope under her belly just aft of her front legs. He brought out three or four feet of line, took it around her neck and tied the free end, with a slip-knot, to the rest of the piece. Now he had her in a harness, and if she pulled against him she would choke herself. Doubled the line around his wrist and said to Boy: “Open the gate.”

“Them other pigs got their heads down, you ain’t got to worry about them, just open the gate.” He jerked her harness and she snuffled off, toward the opening and through, into the world out there. And when she took a misstep, Roy would just plant his heels and set back on the rope, and she was stopped dead. Pigs are smart, and she got the message fairly quickly, trotted up the path.

“At the tail gate of the truck,” Roy wheezing, “grab
my arms under her belly." And White Boy was sharp enough that they had the pig in the truck and the tail gate shut before you could blink an eye. Roy always said later, that he knew right then that the Boy was a keeper, because it was not that easy to balance a 240-pound live hog and keep your grip. And they conspired to execute this maneuver as often as possible, because they liked working together. No one had ever engaged my Dad like that. Came the day, though, that Boy needed to move a pig and Dad wasn't around (I get this story from one of the girls), and he harnessed a big sow, destined for sausage, and tied the line around his waist, gripping with both hands. But the sow weighed 380, and he clocked in at 150, and that pig went exactly where she wanted to go: he was dragged through the muck of that bottom until the tearing audience could finally come to his rescue. And he was laughing too, when they finally got the pig in the truck and on it's way, with rope burns all over his body. You got to hate someone like that.

I used to sleep over, on nights when the conversation went into the morning, usually nights when someone else was there, but not always: sometimes I could catch him spinning a tale and be a 'good listener'; or, lord knows be off on a tirade of my own. And now I know that Roy thought we were sleeping together and it was okay by him; he would be, any of his friends would be. The one prick I never could control, what can I say? What he said was - "Holly, go lightly; your dad would fucking kill me" - and I knew he was in a different universe when he didn't roll down my panties and lick me.

Something I found recently, in a book from his library, for which I find myself executor, was a ripped-out page from a journal, being used as a bookmark, that said 'you didn't miss me the same way now', and that that meant whatever this was was over. Plain and simple, you have to love it. I wonder, did he want me NOW the way I wanted him, then? Still, he did think it, there's a record going back in time.
“Roy, we got to go to a roadhouse (I remember this conversation!) and listen to some blues,” Boy, ensconced with a quart of elderberry wine; and Son House was playing in Tchula, and they went. And they were gone, after that; they’d be anywhere someone was playing. I hate the way that bastard could pass as black when I was playing the opposite game. Trying to fit in at Iowa, while he was digging the blues in Sidon. I look around myself now, outside of Cambridge, and think books must have always been the difference, the way I could tell. What was learned in the reading. What he was saying was really a very simple thing: engage yourself at the moment.

It was the way he worked: jamming his foot in and controlling. I’d love to know what was in his mind. What was in mine was he knew what I was thinking and took every advantage of that. This is Men in My Life, a book I’ve meant to write; and it would sell and everything, but be flip and very sarcastic, and I know that I would know it would be low art and not really worth any consideration. Playing at form, as though we were saying something, when we weren’t saying anything, just obeying the obvious clues. It might be better than that, but that would be trusting in doubt and not something we would enter into lightly. As he said, there was always cost for what we thought freely given, as I’ve realized too, using him and my life the way I have. And cost is relative, freedom worth any price. I still visit Duck Hill. Dozens of relatives there; I could as easily have been forty, a grandmother, tenant farming in Babylon, living in a tarpaper shack, as an over-educated Bostonian. I don’t know how I knew to do that, the very thing he offered was the obvious choice, he was there and did what was necessary. After he befriended Thad and floored Luther, who had killed, his stock went up, he could do no wrong, and the whites were afraid of him, because he walked so freely among us.
Flood
Jennifer Lynn Hall

For Ace

Bridges made of sticks
float down
this river
we call ours.

We wonder what pushes them,
what’s beneath...

We sit awed on a forgotten tree
putting words in bottles
hoping someone
will find them and say

“I understand.”
"Little Monsters"

Andrew Lee
Feight
"Equipus"

Eric Hardin
high-fire stoneware glaze
1368 Norfolk: a eulogy in two parts

“The world is a burning house”
Siddharta Gautama Buddha

looking back now
we lived suspended between disasters
between the lightning strike and the fire
that would finally cleanse
that fallen sodden rotting nightmare of a house

we lived in the space between cause
and effect
the respite between the hammer swing
and the nail biting into wood
the roof was split
and the sky showed through
but we lived as though
all the world could not see
every horror behind the flyspecked lace
that hung over clouded glass

the tree that fell with the lightning
drove branches into the earth
gnarled willows clutched their way out of the soil
and still the fire would not come

absurd dreams of renovation were made
and lost in the frenzy of destruction
the walls were ripped out and scrawled messages
left in the empty spaces inside
but no new walls came to cover them
and they found no readers but the fire

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water gathered and books mouldered
and I memorized nonsense
before broken mirrors at the end of a hall
that I can still recite, trippingly
smelling mouldering paper
and raw sewage and dust and damp
in memory
these are my poems

these letters in wax on the paper back of drywall
read only by the flames
these letters in bloated waterlogged books
crawling with silverfish
that cracked when opened
meaningless illustrations in millwrights manuals
and a crumbling set of first editions

and this is what shaped me
dead ancestors blank sepia gaze
and the silence between a sin and its confession
a silence which stretches now to thirty years
our lunatic hovel and its small theater of terror

one morning I woke
to see the walls and floor
couch, chairs, tables and televisions
crawling with a writhing blanket
of live wasps
mistaking electric light for the sun
they were frightened
and angry to find the ground built of harsh angles
and rank fabric, a cracked plaster sky
closing the world

this also is how we lived

II

A window in a wall
in a room that is now ash
looked out not outside
but into a decaying courtyard

enclosed in tar paper and rotting wood
a monstrous heap of truck tires
baby carriages, waterlogged paper
broken equipment, antique underwood typewriters
and assorted flotsam of a generation

the door would no longer open
to the funhouse room
where a dead great grandfather
held court over a swinging light fixture
a burst and rodent infested couch
and the aperture to the sky

the tree cleaved this room like a headsman’s axe
and so it stood for my youth
allowing in the rain and snow,
the roof drooping slowly until it touched the floor
and tattered banners of insulation
acknowledging defeat, inviting
the fire it took to erase it all

now a cement slab remains
there is no epitaph
Tears
Mary Apel

My mother always told me to watch out for the people who don't cry.
Watch their eyes, she told me. Don't dive in.
Because tears unshed build up into bitter rivers
and those dams just break someday, she said,
shooting streams of anger like bullets into brittle ground.
My mother's rivers turned to stones
Cancer stones, that ate up her soggy body.
I never understood how that could happen,
how reservoirs of salt and sadness could still form,
after so many had already escaped.
So many have always escaped.
I guess in some women lies an eternal fountain of sorrow.
I guess for my mother all the aches of the world spew forth,
leaving her own hurts inside to pool and curdle.

But when my mother laughs out loud,
the tears sneak out and slide through
channels of joy carved into her sunny cheeks.
Quietly they go then, and with respect,
seeping softly into the desert around them.

And, Oh, you should hear my mother laugh!
“Nude”

Linda Frayley

color painting

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“Fallen Angel”

Amanda Ellis
photoshop 5.5
NFS

https://digitalcommons.shawnee.edu/silhouette/vol2002/iss1/1
Elona Musha
color graphics
“Smile Bang Fun Slide”

Andrew Lee Feight
Drumdance
Jason Kindinger

the dancers wore reds and feathers
their skin was tanned
from the lights
that escaped the clouds

the voices that were like
those of ghosts and fists thumped
drums to the frenzied dance
where their hair bobbed and
tangled to the beat

there was half a dancer
a girl who stood waist high
she was the best to find
the sounds as she stepped

her feet were drums
and her skin was earth

and when the singing ghosts ended
the beats silenced
she kept moving

for an instant the wind
was second to her steps
and as they smacked the dirt
dust rose showing visions
from underfoot
For the first week after Jessica departs, Roark stays home. He has plenty of sick days at the insurance company where he works, and he just takes them. In a way, after all, he is sick: he feels rudderless, floating—perpetually on the edge of a queasy nausea that is more than palpable. He lacks direction. He is hungry sometimes, but it is difficult to summon the energy, which the preparation of food requires and he doesn’t want to go out. He certainly doesn’t want that.

Roark and Jessica moved in together two years ago, while she was still in school at Ohio State. A year younger than Roark and much more motivated, Jessica was in the process of completing a master’s degree in theatre, one that landed her an immediate job with a semiprofessional company there in Columbus. Roark had already wandered his way through the twisting thicket of an undergraduate curriculum, which somehow led him to credentials as an actuary. It suits him: at the office he has his own small space. Nobody make him meet the public. He spends his time calculating the dice roll of death.

Jessica was going to be Roark’s human link; his plunge into the kind of commitment adults are supposed to make. And initially she was, too: both of them agreed from the start to try monogamy without marriage and see, for a reasonable interval, what might develop. In fact, that was exactly what Jessica had told Roark the Friday afternoon he came home to find her loading up her Mazda with pretty much everything she’d come with. “What’s going on?” he had demanded. And she had replied: “Nothing developed.”
One thing, which Roark now finds far more irritating than he thought he would, is the fact that Jessica has taken the television. True enough, it was hers in the first place, but after seven days Roark is really missing The Weather Channel. Sometimes he misses it more than he does Jessica. He became a junkie after 9/11, when he was desperate to escape the news. For him, there turned out to be a great sense of order about regular segments like Local Update and Traveler’s Forecast, not that Roark was or is about to go anywhere. It’s just the wonderful reliability of repetition.

And so he had gone forth to REX and purchased a new Sony television, along with a tape deck. The salesman tried to pitch him on a DVD, but Roark couldn’t imagine under what circumstances he would ever want such a thing. He didn’t even want the tape deck, but it was thirty percent off. All he really requires are The Weather Channel and the occasional Discovery documentary. Of the latter offerings he especially likes episodes dealing with the South Pole: the snow makes it seem so orderly there.

Even so, the salesman did convince him to invest in a One Touch remote, a device that would control both the television and the tape deck from a single source. Once he had hauled his new contraptions into the ominous quiet of his empty apartment, though, and had actually tried to set up what the salesman had sunnily called his New Home Entertainment Center, Roark found himself confounded. He couldn’t make the remote work. Off and on he worked with it for two days, all the way through the weekend. At one point he realized that he was standing in front of the television just as his own dead father had, back in the 1950s, one hand cocked on his hip, waiting for something of significance to appear on the screen. He looks down now at the hand that holds the remote. It is indeed his father’s hand which hangs out of that sleeve. Ah. His father, whose own phobias and terrors Roark had sworn even as a teenager that he would never succumb to.
Now it is Monday and he has given up. Jessica has been gone exactly a week and three days. And Roark can't make his remote work. He has not only lost a woman; he has lost The Weather Channel. Giving in to the chasm of his loneliness he considers calling the REX salesman, but he doesn't trust the guy. Maybe it's the ponytail. Instead, Roark reads the directions again. This time he discovers a bordered box of copy, which reads:

Having Trouble?  
Dial Our Hotline Service 24/7

An 800 number follows, offering itself up like a life raft. Roark calls the number, which is answered after three rings. The voice on the other end is female, a little husky as if maybe she smokes.

"Hotline," she says.  
"I bought one of your remotes," Roark tells her, "and I can't make it work."
"What do you want it to do??
"Well, I'm?.” I guess I'm trying to program my television through my VCR."
"And what brands are we working with?"
Roark is wary of the intimacy of the pronoun, although he supposes that they are, after all, working together. But he likes her voice. "They're both new SONYs," he tells her.
"And you've followed the program codes."
"Well, I thought I had. But neither one seems to be coming on."
"OK," the voice says. "Are we near the television?"
"We're right in the room with it," Roark says. "I'm standing here with the remote in my hand."
"Good." She says. "That's where we want to be. Make sure the television is on."
Roark pushes the POWER button on the TV. "OK," he says.
"Now turn on the VCR."
He does as he is told.
"Now let's program our codes again."
Roark squints at the little codebook and punches in numbers.
"Still nothing," he tells her.
"Just hit BACK on the lower part of the remote; the part that controls the VCR."
Roark does so. Both machines hum miraculously into action.
"They're working," Roark says. "This is amazing."
The voice chuckles. Roark likes that even better. He knows that chuckle.

Good God.
It's Jessica's.
"I feel stupid," he says. "I'm sure if I'd just read the

directions more carefully."
"Don't feel stupid," she tells him. "I do twenty calls just like this a day. All those people can't be stupid, can they?"
Jesus, Roark thinks. She sounds like
Jessica. Just like her. Not Jessica when she left; not the one who said “Nothing developed.” This is the Jessica whose voice he heard for the first time when she had sat down beside him now three years ago on a sunburst of a fall afternoon at the counter of the Dog ‘N Beans down in German Village, where he always had lunch in those days. She had said “Can you hand me that menu?” and because he had immediately wanted to hear that voice again he had said “Sure, but it's basically Dogs With and Dogs Without,” and she had laughed at that, and her laugh had been a sunburst too.

Roark had no skills with women, but he had moved into conversation with her almost effortlessly, propelled by her openness and by his inability to pull away from the straight and silky hair that framed her face in dark wings; the resolute set of her chin; that voice and of course that laugh. Ah, God. In those early days Jessica had laughed so much. And Roark remembers, now that he dwells on it, so much else. The way, when he brought takeout home, she would have of biting into an egg roll and saying: “You're such a good cook.” Or the way that during sleep, always and inevitably, their bodies would entwine and they would wake to most days in a position that never failed to remind Roark of that drawing Picasso did with the peasants named what? “The Lovers”?

And then he realizes that he cannot remember when, precisely, they made love for the last time.

“So are we all set now?” the Jessica voice asks.


“Good. Call us if you have any more trouble.”

“Could I?.” He begins.
She waits. “Yes?”
“Could I know your name?”
Just a hint of the laugh. “We’re not supposed to say,” she tells him.
“Oh,” Roark says. “Sorry. It’s just that?.”
“Well,” she says. “I’m glad you’re set. Thanks for letting One Touch be of assistance.”
“Oh, yes. Thanks. And goodbye.”
Still he is reluctant to hang up, and that is why he is still holding the receiver when, just before she rings off, she says: “It’s Gina.”
“What?” Roark says.
“My name is Gina,” she says again, and then she is gone.
Damn! Roark realizes that he is staring at the receiver. He hangs it up, goes into the kitchen, and hauls down the scotch bottle from the cabinet above the refrigerator. He almost never drinks: this is the same bottle of single malt he was hoarding when he met Jessica, and it’s still half full. But now he pours a good slug. He goes back to the telephone and calls the same 800 number again.
“Hotline,” a male voice says.
“I?.” Roark is confounded. But what did he expect? He doesn’t even know what city he’s calling. On the code book it says that One Touch Remote is home based in Chicago, but that might not be where the Hotline originates. And he has no idea how many people answer these phones. Did he really expect to get her back?
Even so, he says: “I was just talking to Gina?.”
“No Gina in this office,” the voice, gruff to the point of offensive, informs him. “Do you need help programming?”
“No, I just?.” Roark is tongue-tied over this. “Can you tell me where you’re located?” he asks.
“Washington, Pennsylvania,” the gruff voice says.
Washington! In Pennsylvania? That’s less than three hours away! He and Jessica had gotten trapped in a snowstorm there two Christmases ago on the way back from her parents’; spent the night in a Ramada Inn up high on a hill above town. Roark’s mind careens. But all he says is: “Thanks.”
And thanks, indeed to Gina, Roark is now able to watch The
Weather Channel. Though he had been planning to go back to work the next day, he now calls in sick for the rest of the week. That will do him, if he still wants his job. But he has to have this week. He has to get more organized; adjusted. The next day at four he calls the 800 number again. This is the time he called yesterday, and he thinks Gina might answer. But this time he gets a nasal crone who’s 70 if she’s a day. He asks her about Gina too, but she just keeps offering to help him program. And the third day things are even worse: he gets a male voice again, this one afflicted with a lisp that could only be called terminal. All right, Roark thinks. All right. He is feeling betrayed.

On the fourth day he becomes promiscuous. In his betrayal, he feels entitled. He starts inspecting the products of his household for other Hotline numbers. Though he’s just 30 he’s had male pattern baldness at the crown for years, and he now finds that his hair restorer, the Lazarus Renewal Process, has an 800 number. He calls that one and gets a menu. It’s not mechanical voices he’s after. The Drano Hotline does no better by him: he gets a real person, but all she wants to know is whether he has swallowed the stuff. Jesus! He’s not suicidal! He’s just - just?. He doesn’t know what.

Now he hits the Internet. There is an 800 number, it turns out, for everything currently being
manufactured, bred, or bottled. A host of wineries have them: maybe they’re party types, not that Roark wants a party. He wants a voice. Here’s the STD Hotline - No; skip that. He calls a few automotive Hotlines at random. What is he looking for here? Does he think Gina has changed jobs; that she goes from Hotline to Hotline, climbing some corporate ladder of disembodied success, her voice floating ever more heavenward; becoming ever more unreachable? This is insane. He toys with switching to 900 numbers, but you have to pay for those. Besides, it’s not sex he’s after. It is indeed the sound of a voice; the sunburst of an autumn afternoon in German Village.

On Sunday afternoon, Roark sits in a living room detritus of discarded newspapers, empty Corona bottles, and dead delivery containers, all of them from the same Chinese place where he used to pick up takeout to bring home to Jessica. He finished the scotch three days ago and had to go out for the beer. The Chinese he has ordered. He can’t bring himself to cook; he can’t think. He’s a god-dam mess. October light filters in on him. He is unshaven and tousled.

He has accomplished nothing in two weeks of sick days except the programming of his VCR, and Gina really did that. Jessica has been gone for two weeks and five days. She isn’t coming back. Roark is due at work in the morning. He doesn’t know if he can physically bring himself to return.

At four o’clock he calls the Universal remote Hotline. The voice that answers is Gina’s. He knows it immediately.
“Hotline,” she says.
“Oh,” Roark blurts. “Is this - Are you Gina?”

Just a touch of the husky laugh. “This is Gina.”

“You helped me about a week ago?.”
“I remember you. Is your equipment working all right?”

Sadly, this seems to be said without a hint of double entendre. “Yes,” Roark says. “You did a fine job.”

“Thanks,” she says. “How can we help you today?”

“Why are you working on Sunday? I mean?.”

“Twenty-four Seven means what it says,” Gina replies. “What difficulty are we experiencing today?”

“It’s not a difficulty,” Roark says. He is being propelled along now just as he was that first day with Jessica. He is sleepless and near something like nervous collapse; another of God’s little creatures at the end of its rope. But he knows what he wants.

“I just wanted to hear your voice again,” he tells her.

“It’s a really nice voice.”
“That’s good to hear. Look, I gotta take some more calls.”

“Could you just tell me?.” Roark begins.
“Yes?”
“Are you really in Washington, Pennsylvania?”

And for what he knows will be the last time, he hears that laugh. “No,” she tells him. “Good talking to you.” She is gone.

Roark sits in his own People’s Republic of a living room, all rotting Chinese food and empty Corona bottles, receiver in hand. Once again he can’t hang up. Presently the dial tone turns to an angry squawk. He cradles the phone. The slits of autumn sunlight are coming in at a lower angle now. Eight after four. Time for Local Forecast.

He picks up the remote and flicks on his Home Entertainment Center. Then he flicks it off and just sits, listening to the late afternoon. Wanting everything; wanting nothing. Thinking about sunbursts on a fall afternoon, and laughter of just the right kind, and of all the good thingsthat time takes away. Maybe he’ll go back to work tomorrow and maybe he won’t. Truth be told - he just isn’t sure.

About much of anything any more.

Anything at all.
I Am the Tin Man
Jason McGoron

I have stopped
in my own hell,
and watched
my mind run away,
der under my feet
the grass turns white,
life shrivels,
decays
and you were shocked to meet
that night
locked in a wall of gray
me
my underbelly gut
under six feet of concrete
and rusted completely shut.
Dorothy...
Dorothy,
put the oilcan down.
I slowed to a halt here on purpose.
Go back to town, I'm a toy on a shelf
You can go to brick roads
All by yourself.
I'm the tin man, sweetheart
Frozen hands and clunky shoes
And I can't start
Can't jump through this hoop.
She stood there frustrated
then started to cry
If I could have just opened
I'd have let her inside.
“In The Beginning”

Karen Litteral
ceramics
"Frenzy"

Jason Osborne

ink. watercolor. acrylic

https://digitalcommons.shawnee.edu/silhouette/vol2002/iss1/1
Debbie Wade

oil painting

“A Resting Place”
"Wounderment"

Terry Allen

color photo
No One Will Know How Brilliant You Are
Ace Boggess

Libra, February 4, 2001

Comes this promise, my biggest fear: no one will know. Whatever words I slant in vulgar bodies, what histories I imitate in chapter dialogues, what sonnets reenact the great orations past — I’m licensed to be overlooked, ignored. No colorful light show or spectacle of whispers ignites the gossiping tabloid art of fame. Should I ink words for the most obscure man among men. The many must know him without encountering me. If I write of my private Beatrice, my Matilde or Juliet, they will say she has lovely eyes, green-brown as aurora in a sun-flash-driven sky, and never see the blood that flows from my eyes when I laugh/dream/curse/ache/dread. Nothing reveals me, makes me immortal in my heart’s unlimited hours. No one will know. Not a scientist of pretty words, not a lonely soul reading volumes of verse in any deserted library at dawn. I’m a faceless,
Love Poem
"my love is like an ocean"
Mary Apel

I say you are the ocean,
And I your two-bit shore
Lying vast and motionless
As you come in to me time and time again;
Always breaking, and then receding;
Always taking, and giving back.
Grain by grain I erode into you,
Erased by your constancy,
Replaced by what wreckage you've carried
Within you for all these years.
You leave me with beautiful, but empty shells.
Embedded in me are the broken remains
Of lost lives, and lands, and loves.
And I accept, and I return.
And you return, and you accept.
And so it is we overlap,
Or so we collide.
And in such I am refined by you,
Indented and inclined by you.
In such, I've been defined by you
As a place for you to crash.
In such, I am your beach.
"Holocaust II"

Chuck Davis
sculpture
In Bodies That Have Always Been Ours
Jennifer Lynn Hall

Flowing through,
being at home
in bodies that have
always been ours.

Fingertips touching
as if feathers
just enough
to ruffle and fall —

weightless.
Thoughts escape
without words,
language created
by this moment
aware I don't
need to tell you...
"The Name of this Man is... David"

Virginia Seale
mixed media
"Untitled"

Giovanni Stout

https://digitalcommons.shawnee.edu/silhouette/vol2002/iss1/1
Darren looked at the crumpled ball of paper lying before him. At first, he had been angry at whoever had thrown it at him, but now he wondered if maybe it was some sort of message, rather than simply a tool for getting his goat. Slowly, he uncrumpled the paper, being careful so as not to tear it in the process. He smoothed it out on the desktop and looked at it carefully.

It didn't say anything.

That afternoon, Darren dreamt he was a male praying mantis. He had just finished mating, and the female mantis was about to bite his head off.

"Can't we work this out?" Darren pleaded to the female mantis.

"Sorry, there's nothing I can do."

"What do you mean? Have you no free-will?" asked Darren.

"Not even the luxury of free-will can sever the ties of sex and death," replied the female.

As she bit into his shiny, green exoskeleton, Darren woke up.

Darren decided to get something to eat. On the way to the kitchen, he struck a deal with God: If there were any frozen waffles left in the freezer, he would give up his dream of becoming a well-known artist and, instead, become a missionary in the Third World. Darren regreted making this deal as soon as he proposed it, but it didn't matter, because they were out of waffles. This was a great relief, since he knew he wouldn't have held up his end of the bargain.

Finding nothing in the pantry to his liking, Darren decided to walk to Taco Bell. He hoped the mentally handicapped girl who worked there wasn't on shift. Retarded people always caused him a sort of unprecedented discomfort.
Walking down the street, Darren spied a pair of broken and abandoned sunglasses on the sidewalk. They were the kind with the little, purple-tinted, rectangular frames, that you could imagine perhaps a hippie would wear. He picked him them up. They were completely normal, save a missing left lens. Darren knew they were useless, but nonetheless felt bad that 85% of a perfectly good pair of sunglasses were going to waste. He put them in his pocket, knowing full-well he would only throw them away, later.

“I should stop feeling sorry for inanimate objects,” he thought to himself.

“What can I get you?” asked the obese lady at the register. She looked at Darren placidly, perhaps with a tinge of contempt. It was obvious she hated her job and everything else in the world.

Suddenly, Darren was no longer hungry, but as he had come all this way, he felt he should order something.

“I’ll have a large soda,” he told the obese clerk. She frowned at him and waddled over to get him a cup.

She was wearing Spandex pants. Darren cringed.

While walking home that evening, Darren passed a bench that had an advertisement painted on it.

“WIG’S WIG’S WIG’S! By request wig shop.”

Darren wondered how such a glaring misuse of apostrophies could have slipped by unnoticed.

“I don’t like people very much,” Darren commented aloud. An old lady passing by gave him a distasteful look.
Here I am, eating this stuff again
I used to love it, but now it’s so
obscene
warm and thick and red
I made it for you
when you were sick
I begged you to eat the stuff,
made bargains with you
for an empty bowl
ok, half empty then?

But I swore it off
It tastes too coppery now
this blood of a tomato
pressed dry, skin discarded
and the way it plops into the pan
not in drops but in clumps
and thins when you heat it
a sort of reverse coagulation
The last time I tried to eat it
I threw the bowl across the room

Now there’s telltale splatters in the kitchen as well
to match the ones in my bathroom
the smears from your hands as I dragged you out
Of course, I tried to clean it up
It’s my job to clean up messes
but I don’t do it well
It’s never good enough
I always miss a spot
and it stains anyway
I’m Lady Macbeth
I’ll never wash this shit off
but it was your dagger
not mine
and I bear scars too
You don’t have to justify your actions to me  
I know that’s true  
and I don’t have to be the martyr  
I didn’t have to mingle my blood with yours  
People give me their burdens  
and I keep them  
and people say thank you and I say you are welcome  
and people anoint the saint and leave garlands at her feet  
and we say thank you and you’re welcome  
but people don’t notice that the saint has turned to plaster  
lips unmoving, permanent gaze heavenward  
hollow

waiting for the blow that will reduce her to shards  
The matriarch patiently waits, hands clasped in prayer  
thankful for the privilege of the sacrifice  
but knowing that the father and the son will ultimately  
receive the credit

Our lady is sustained on forty cent soup  
yet her milk nourishes the sons of god  
what a fuckin miracle
Across this
desert

vultures lift the flesh
of faces who’ve fallen
like angels drag souls
to hear the gavel smack

by God only the holy walk
in this heat and make it
to peer at Byzantium’s streets

my feet start
to run
across
this desert

to an oasis
i see so clear
yet i must be blind
as i discover

only a mirage?
To Charisse Schumate
Karyn Leitzell

The desert road wears thick, black rubber on asphalt.  
Stale air re-circulated conditioning sputters freon and it gives me a headache  
To complement my butterfly stomach of exposed anxious nerves  
As the van rolls into Chowchilla.

Home to CCWF and VSPW — the sisters of San Quentin.

I step into the dry heat,  
my skin prickles and shivers in the shiny steel glints of razorwire fences.  
The bright sun, shaking off the freon.  
Moist air sucked from my lungs  
No shade except the towers.

Amazed to find such an arid, sterile place.  
Eerily cool in the desert rock.  
The clamor of barks and buzzers serenade  
Strange inspections of the inspectors.

Again sterile and silent  
Lockdown into an animal zoo  
Warehouses of women  
The dank of souls in storage.  
Stuck, sucked, arid, sterile  
Seething from the heat  
Searing in their boxes and cages of barks and buzzers.  
Sick and tired of being sick and tired.  

Lockdown in Chowchilla.  

Stillness is so dry  
The sterility is a lie.
Industrial-strength smell masks
What is so obvious in the noonday sun.
What is so ugly and so real.
So few ever see the awful truth
That can tell you about it tomorrow.
Of souls in storage and warehouses of women.

Stuck in, sucked in
Lockdown in Chowchilla.

How babies are born with their mothers in shackles
And cannot feed from metastasized breasts
Guards who get their kicks in the night, right in the gut
And doctors using their slave labors as "market research."
Profiting from the pills they push down sterile silent throats.

Stuck in, sucked in
Lockdown in Chowchilla.

Back in the van and the desert road
Rolling out of Chowchilla.
Reflected in the glints of razorwire sunsets.
The souls in storage.

Sucked in, stuck in
Lockdown in Chowchilla.
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The Household Names

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