


ICARUS

Cadet Journal of the Arts | 2020

since 1965 



front cover image:

Harry Andriantavy, "Roadtrip"
Sony a6000 and Adobe Lightroom

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Icarus: A Cadet Journal of the Arts has been published at the United States Air Force Academy since 1965.

Its mission is to provide a venue for the creative arts at USAFA, showcasing the best of cadet talent in fiction, music, poetry, essay, photography, sculpture, and visual arts.

A Letter from the Editors


We had hoped that the 2020 issue of *Icarus* would be a pivotal moment for the revitalization of *Icarus*, which had once been a landmark piece of the Academy's history. But in the face of a newly organized world, we now simply hope that it will be a conduit which may encourage reflection during our long stay in limbo.

We have both been with *Icarus* for several years, back when it was just beginning to catch new life, and we started to dream of a newer, more vital publication which would be a common dorm-room phrase among cadets. *Icarus*, for decades, was a well-regarded publication at the Academy. But in the wake of 9/11, entering a war which demanded action first and reflection second, *Icarus* fell to the wayside. There were several years it went unpublished, and its treasures were lost to a Department of English & Fine Arts bookshelf.

We began 2020 hoping to bring *Icarus* into a new life: still as a publication, but also a place where cadets could develop and cater to their creative passions. We knew love for art was an amber heat in many cadets, dormant but warm from bashful coaxing, and even as we continued to fight wars nearly as old as us, we knew that art would be pivotal in developing the dispositions which would eventually represent our character as officers. Even if 2020 was not a major change, we could at least usher in a new era for *Icarus*.

And then came Corona, and the world was rushed into a stand-still. Initially we felt that whatever success we might have had with *Icarus* was lost with the spring. Yet, with time strained but presented to us without dictation, we feel that art is the one thing which has carried us through. It has been consumed and created with unequivocal vigor and, while it may not get the pomp and circumstance we had hoped, we think that the *Icarus* 2020 issue is still the impactful issue we had hoped it would be – even if not in the way we had once envisioned. This issue demonstrates that courage in expression may be more efficacious in rousing the need for art, now more than ever.

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The Creativity of Gods

Rachel Werner



Lexi de Villiers, "refraction"
ink on canvas

You scrawl your own gods on lined paper
Endless, flawed infinity resting on the page
They haven't made new gods in a long time

Although they forgot to tell you how those old gods were made, didn't they?

Shrouded them in myth, immortalized them in legend after legend.

Tried to hide that they were just

Bloody explanations spilled out on parchment scrolls

And they are scared that you can, that you dare, here

Beneath the half-finished math problems and forgotten history lessons

There is no blood there, but that doesn't make them any less

Holy

Blasphemous

Powerful

Desired

Was this not what Icarus was struck down for?

For reaching too high, for daring, for dreaming?

The gods (one God, they tell you) can drown you too,

Clip your wings tipped with leaden stories until you are crushed in the depths of the sea

But darling

First they must reach you

And tear you from your own ink stained hands

You have made your own gods to save you

And they think they are not up to the competition.

Burning Sustenance

Desiree' L. Reed

A fleeting moment of heat in the barn

I treaded about the fields

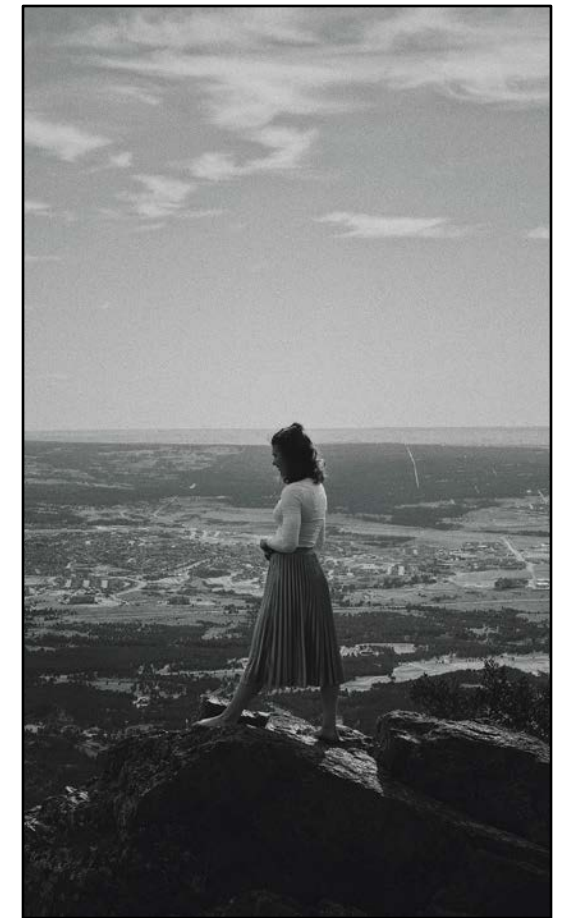
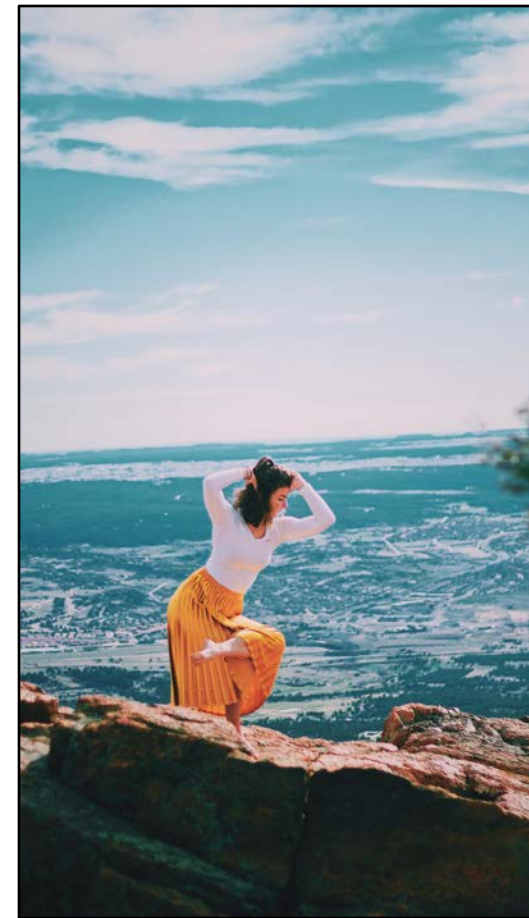
And discovered the light so bleak

Like this Sunday's church service

I did not stir, but winked

And the clouds were fine as they were

It was the stars that caused me to burn



Jared Wright, "Slow Dancing in the Sky I and II"
digital photographs

Not All Doctors

Are the Same

Daniil Tourashev

He picks without feeling of shame.
They go to him right from the train.
He says who lives or burns in flames.

Who could think it was just a game?
An intense sound of falling rain.
He picks without feeling of shame.

Old and weak are whom he will claim.
There isn't enough time to explain.
He says who lives or burns in flames.

No need to obtain their first name
As there is nothing they can gain.
He picks without feeling of shame.

They scream for help, but it's just pain.
It is now useless to complain.
He says who lives or burns in flames.

As in the end, he is to blame
For shooting them right in the brain.
He picks without feeling of shame.
He says who lives or burns in flames.

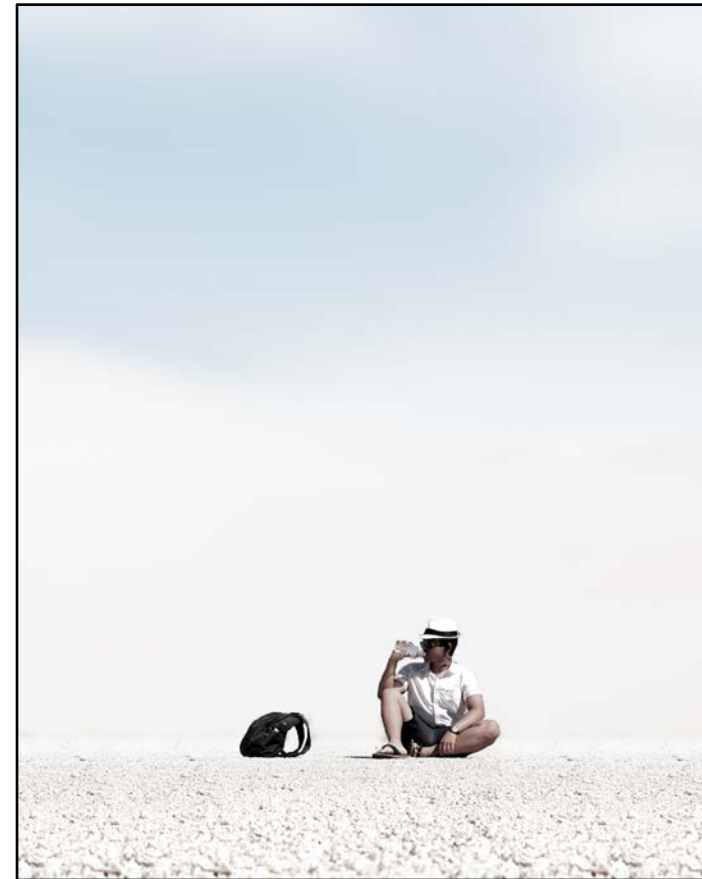


Kelly Jackson, "Evenings in the Streets"
digital photograph

Memento Mori

Daniel Perry

Salve, ego sum tibi.
Who are you?
You are me.
We are marching a steady beat.
A beat of what?
Mortality?
Not even. That's too deep.
It's more related to morality.
Nothing lasts forever,
That's clear to see.
Open your eyes.
I'm scared to be
Exposed to all of this.
That's no surprise,
You must realize
Nothing lasts the rest of our lives;
I am content.
Let it be,
For the memories you make
Memento mori.



Harry Andriantavy, "Out in the Wild"
Sony a6000 and Adobe Photoshop/Lightroom

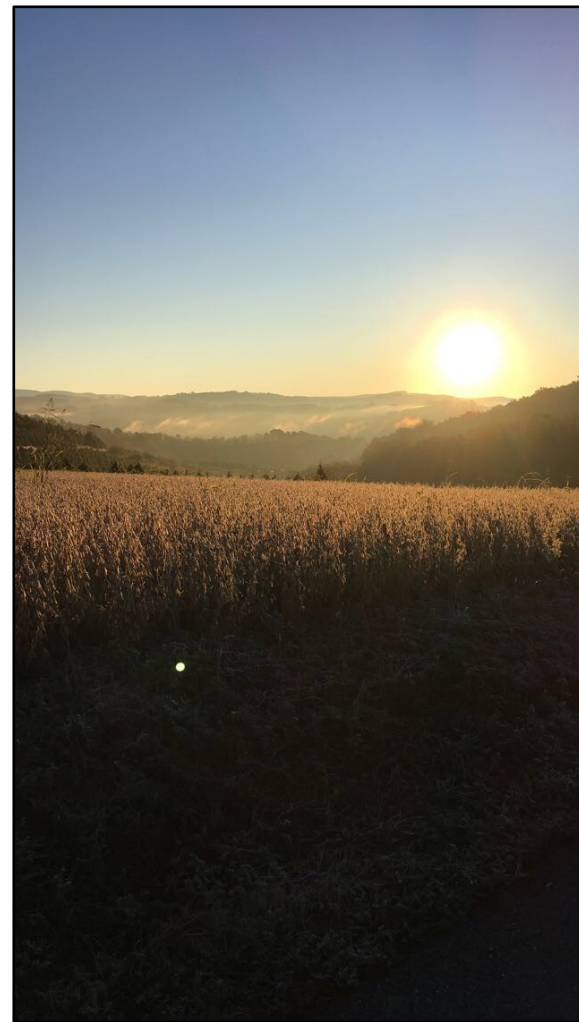
Fire

Anna Little

She made a fire in the fireplace.
 He made a bonfire in the backyard
 With sticks, twigs, and sawdust to fill the space
 And logs that still can burn, already charred.
 I knew not which of these two was warmer
 So I sat down evenly in between.
 I spent my time mostly at the former,
 Some at the latter, though it was less keen.
 While both the fires were busy burning
 I stood still staring stunned up at the sky
 As billowing clouds anxiously churning
 Appeared and felt more like smoke in my eye.
 Those fires burn distant, and even yet
 The familiar and constant make me fret.



Lexi de Villiers, "loading screen"
digital photograph



Samantha Thompson, "Pennsylvania Wheat"
digital photograph

Memories Made

Samuel Krebs

Memories made, moments shared, a path of stepping stones into our past.
 Circumstances rearranged what we had and seasons changed,
 but the feeling enkindled from that first night wanted to last.
 And I walk the path along my mind, the trail through time unwinds like these lines inscribed
 upon this page,
 words etched on my notebook heart, my lyrics for the loss of our former days.
 While inside my soul there's a flame, and the fires rage,
 I hope a spark from the interior will light a twilight blaze.
 Under an autumn sunset I wait for fate to allow me to escape from a landscape of indecision,
 but description is eclipsed by the dark moon's hidden vision,
 and the shadows that cover what remains call out the voices of derision.
 I cast lots in the hopes of being in semblance with you: salt and light,
 but as the shooting star passed I looked back and turned to a pillar of salt standing still as
 Lot's wife;
 your absence a recess of bitter empty strife, twisted like a knife
 into my pierced heart, still beating in my chest, the life dripped cataclysmically into the
 chasm of what's
 left.
 But I think back once more to times together beneath amber skies,
 when the dusk on the cusp reflected off your eyes
 and dispersed the sands in the hourglass that threatened our time;
 time irrelevant, I never will forget,
 and until you're back in my arms,
 I'll walk the road that you made on my heart
 in the dark.

For Starters...

Savannah Petty

There's a First and a Last for everything.
 The first word of a sentence,
 The last breath of a note.
 The first kiss on the lips,
 The last dance of the night.
 Everything, and Everyone
 Will always meet their Beginning and End.
 Approaching an End is nothing to be afraid of,
 For it was predestined once begun.
 Once you understand that to begin also means to end,
 You'll enjoy the journey between each point.
 And in that alone, the Beginning and End become seamless.

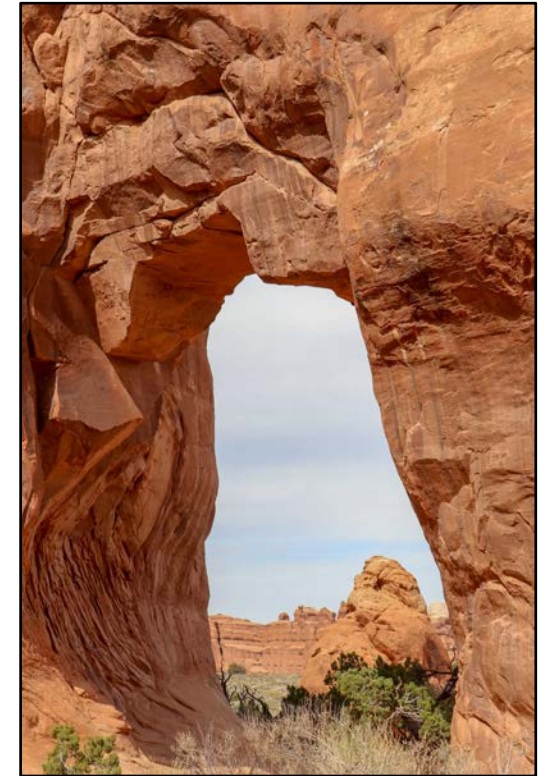


Seth Finley, "Glory"
Photoshop composite

A Lonesome Traveler

Daniel Huntsman

A Lonesome Traveler i seem to be
 My happiness has deserted me
 For a year we traveled, You and i
 And the sun smiled brightly in Our sky
 Until a crossroads We did reach
 A fork in the path one for each
 i travelled on straight and true
 With the thought i'd always have you
 But like a vagabond with no home
 i suddenly found myself all alone
 It brought my heart a tortuous pain
 As shock and betrayal scorched my veins
 For though Our paths diverged in this wood
 You said We'd cross them when We could
 And that as We wandered beneath Our sun
 We would someday meld them into One
 Alas they have crossed but not entwined
 That was Your choice and not mine
 So a Lonesome Traveler I shall be
 Until I find happiness that will not leave
 And then on a different road you'll see
 The mistake you made when you left Me
 For this Lonesome Traveler who stayed true
 Found He never needed you



Taylor Morris, "Gateway"
digital photograph

A Prayer Scratched Into the Side of the Church on the Corner

Rachel Werner

Congregation of one, see them there
Kneeling in the front pew
Or maybe at your feet, bent not
Humbly, but broken. Bathed in the
Kaleidoscope of what Man
Thinks is your Grace.
The shattered shapes of hollow eyes and open hands.

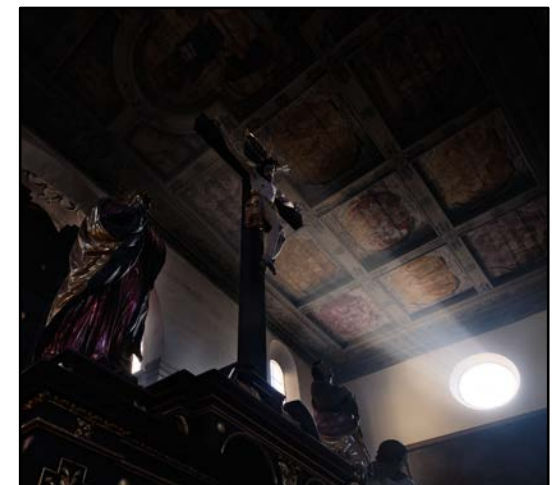
This place has so many bright
Colors. They should be lively. They should be
As vibrant as the lilies, heavy and sweet and thick,
The roses bending, the carnations reaching down,
Their lovely kisses pressing to your neck
Unfeeling. Numb.
Suffocating.

Their face twists, says
I am suffocating here
Without you. Their hands say
Send me an angel
Please.

The one covering its face
With golden, glittering wings.
The one with sharp hands and broken glass
For eyes, bleeding, refracting impossible
Divine light.
The one with a dozen faces all
Weeping, snarling, choking

Sand filled chests, spilling from their mouths.
Lips touched with
Eternal, ephemeral, empty
Songs.

So, singular witness of the unspeakable,
Enter barefoot this lifeless room.
Kneel in the back. Listen.
Do not sing
Let the dying candles speak.



Andrew Lemke, "Ambulatory Contemplation" (top left);
"The Second Law of Nature's Dynamics" (top right); "A
Walk in Regensburg" (bottom left); "Humble Reception
of God" (bottom right)
Fujifilm XT-2, 18-55mm and 10-24mm lenses

Forever

Samuel Krebs

Forever

So it seems that I've longed for the warmth of your fire, for the blinding of your light that by its essence can melt away the hardness of my heart and knock me off my steed of false isolation, removing the scales upon my pupils to give me clarity and consolation

Forever

So it seems I was lulled into false senses of security to expose myself in vulnerability to the oceans of deep mystery upon which my ship was battered by waves and the strings of my heart were frayed by the spray of tossing seas, as the ropes which moor the sail to the mast become tangled in terrifying gusts and the stability that guided me was assaulted and tattered, lost to Poseidon's striking fury

Forever

So it seems I would lie awake, tossing and turning, too tired to sleep, too tepid to dream, imagining a future that was yet unforeseen, with your heart and mind and body and soul pristine and pure, your existence my medicine, your presence my cure, the pearls of your gaze fixed upon mine secure

Forever

So it seems I searched with my eyes and wandered through my mind on a journey without a map, no surety of navigation without starlight or sextant, destination upon dark waters unknown but with the notion of home a guiding light on a midnight escapade in a vessel unfettered; until the glow of your shores called out and beckoned on a horizon encapsulated by the dawn blush of a new day and I set a course for you

And it seemed that the closer my ship to the sanctity of your harbor, the harder the labor, the heavier the ardor of my heart beat with the waves, and the light of your security was all that I craved and at last on arrival after forever, so it seemed, my weary wandering battered barque was settled, my anchored heart was set free

And now we're together

And all we have is

Forever



Megan Irvine and Michael Rhoads, "Light of the Sea"
jellyfish-shaped chandelier



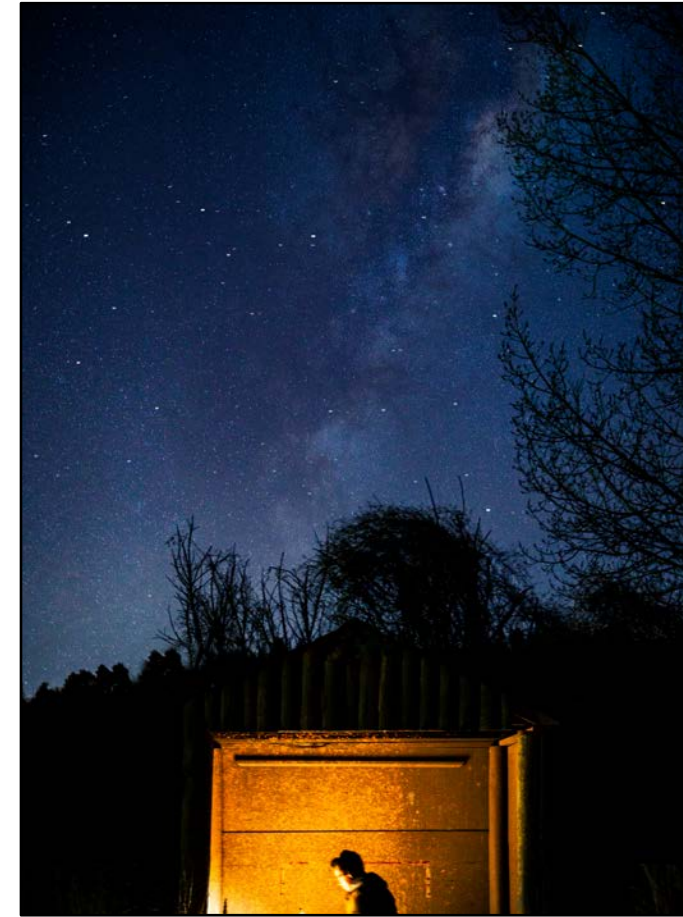
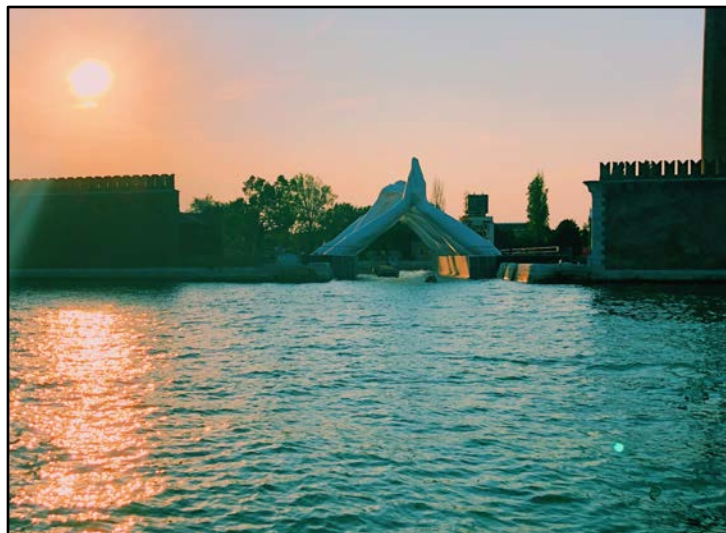
Nathaniel J. Stout, "Reflections" (top left)
digital photograph

Andrew Lemke, "Work in the Budapest Grand
Market Hall" (middle left), Fujifilm XT-2,
r8-55mm lens



Lexi de Villiers, "in the midst of all
this" (middle right), digital photograph

Kelly Jackson, "Holding Hands
Together" (bottom left), digital photograph

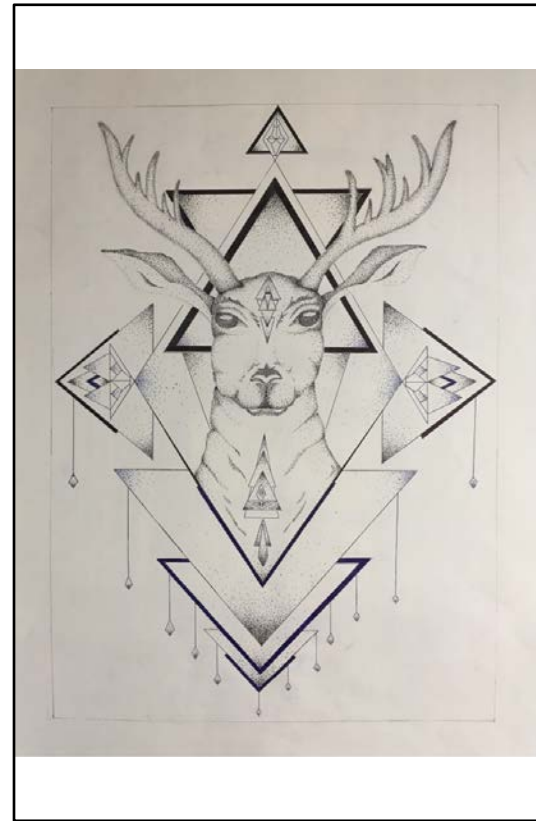


Harry Andriantavy, "A Starry Night"
Sony a6000 and Adobe Lightroom



Lexi de Villiers, "green haze"
digital photograph

Kaitlin Lee Nethercutt,
"Equilibrium" (right)
ink on paper
"Hidden Animals" (below)
colored pencil on paper



Kaitlin Lee Nethercutt, "A moment
suspended in time" (above)
acrylic and colored pencil

Meredith Hickman, "Toby" (right)
acrylic on matboard



Nathaniel J. Stout,
"Patience" (top)
"God's Peace" (bottom)
digital photographs

Jared Wright, "Slow Dancing
in the Sky III" (middle)
digital photograph

A Quiet Dawn

Robert W. O'Connor

The new day was gentle but for the rumbling of the train across the desolate landscape. John gazed sullenly out his window, as somewhere past the end of the world the sun began to glimmer, and gradually the spreading light confronted rolling grassland with the naked stare of another dawn.

The sky radiated along the northeast horizon, illuminating sparse wisps of clouds with a pale yellow glow, and cast shadows across the untempered vista. He stared with red and sunken eyes at passing fields, rolling hillsides, ever increasing farms and, more frequently now, trees and patches of forest decorating the scenery. He stared as the light grew with intensity, until at last he threw the curtain across the window and cast the compartment back into darkness. The plainly-dressed man across from him slept soundly, oblivious to both dawn and dark.

In his right hand John clutched a letter. The paper was creased and cracked like the dry hands of a sickly old man. It was damp also, stained and corrupted by the sweat of fists clenched just a little too tightly. The words on the paper were marred and worn, the ink smeared to the point of illegibility, but their conveyance was impervious to the degradation of stress and time.

Each word was branded into his memory like a declaration of ownership. Three days ago, the words had unceremoniously seized his trials and labors, his education and endeavors, and mockingly cast them all into a vast expanse of vanity. They carried a weight with them also, an indescribable sadness that permeated his body and burned him down to the bone.

Three days had changed everything. The week before, John had been blissfully ignorant and his life thrillingly promising. Melissa was already dead by then, but he had no knowledge of it. There was no sign from God, and no great disturbance in his mind. She was alive in his head long after the final breath had slipped past her gentle lips. It was only three days ago, after he carefully opened the letter, that there was reason to grieve. He had truly loved his sister. She was terribly quiet and mild-mannered, but carried a sweetness and compassion about her one could only notice if they endured a great amount of time in her company. Much like a wildflower growing quietly in dense undergrowth, Melissa was beautiful and rare, but so easily overlooked. Three days ago she wilted into oblivion, never to be overlooked again.

The compartment was too damn dark. John violently threw open the curtain and found himself blinded by the brilliant morning light. It burned his eyes, and an inconsolable rage swelled in his chest. Fuming floodwaters seemed to shatter his tired heart, channeling fire and frustration through his arms and legs,

into the tips of his fingers and fibers of his muscles. He grabbed the curtain again and yanked it closed.

The sleeping man stirred at the sound of ripping fabric, then opened his eyes to cheerful daylight filling the compartment. His eyes were groggy, but he could've sworn he caught a glimpse of his cabinmate abashedly stuffing a velvet curtain under his seat, cursing under his breath. The man frowned slightly, and decided it would be better not to ask. There was a brief moment of awkward stillness, and then he sighed and closed his eyes, resuming a peaceful slumber.

*Loss, or maybe love,
somehow transcends
distance and space, and it
found him even in the outer
reaches of the west.*

Even as John disgruntledly shifted his gaze back outside the gently rocking train car, his eyes painfully adjusting to the fresh daylight, he began to realize his own exhaustion. It was not only the loss of his sister, though that imposed a great burden itself, but also the complete upheaval of his life. Melissa's income as a bookkeeper, while meager, was the lifeblood of his parents and, devoid of it, they had nothing. Pa couldn't work since the fire had taken his leg, and Ma had long since been overcome by the demons of her mind, confining herself to bed for weeks at a time, her babbling only interrupted by sobbing, and

occasional restless sleep. Three awful words of Aunt Annie's letter bled through its crinkled paper and into John's mind. *Please come home.*

Home, he thought, is such an odd malfunction of the human condition. A man could run across an entire continent, hide in the unreachable hills of California, distract himself with the lure of science and progress, and somehow still be captured and dragged screaming back to the godforsaken ashes from which he was created. What difference do the dead make? Dead or two-thousand miles away amount to the same nothing.

But of course he knew that was a lie. There is a world of difference between dead and distant. A small child with covered eyes may not believe his blanket is still there but when the room is revealed, it will be sitting in front of him, as comforting and warm as ever. The dead are gone, buried, even risen, but always forever.

Loss, or maybe love, somehow transcends distance and space, and it found him even in the outer reaches of the west. His primitive mind hadn't even hesitated. He was needed and he would come. How quickly could a man throw away everything? It didn't take him long to abandon his dreams of gold and fortune and valor, and trade them all for a cramped eastbound train car.

Outside, the sun had consumed its part of wandering sky and was steadily clambering for a higher vantage, overlooking the expanse of Ohio farmland and the tired train, claiming miles as they passed. Only a few hours from an old home, John allowed his head to fall back against the window, and moments later slipped into a troubled and uneasy sleep.

Jesus is Dead

Connell Swenson

fractal; *noun:* a self-iterating geometric shape which is identical across different scales and comprised entirely of smaller parts of the same shape. A fractal is a never-ending pattern. They are created by repeating a simple process over and over. They model snowflakes, crystal growth, coastline erosion, galaxy formation. They are simulations of a dynamic universe. They are the pictures of Chaos.

* * *

I grabbed a smoke from my pack of Marlboro Reds and patted down Rachel's futon for my Zippo. We were laying side by side, the sheets wrinkled around our ankles, sweating in the midnight August heat of Great Barrington, Massachusetts. The futon was crammed into the corner of Rachel's room, which was decorated by a couple of boxes strewn across the pinewood floor: old remnants of a fresh start.

When I found my lighter, I flicked the spark wheel and sucked in deep. The smoke curled into the room adding to the heat. I let the nicotine rush down into my body like water



Nathaniel J. Stout, "Snow-Set"
digital photograph

spilling over a dam and sank into one of her pillows.

"You want one?" I said.

The silence lingered for a few seconds and then she crawled over my body and reached for the pack. Rachel's skin was sticky from the humidity. She grabbed the lighter off my stomach and sat up legs crossed, throwing her head back with the first drag.

"Do you ever feel like you're doing the same thing over and over?" she said.

I just blinked, waiting for her to fill in the blanks.

"I mean it's this town, same customers at work, same friends afterwards, same drinks around the same fire, same cops breaking up the same parties. I need to get out of this place. I can't wait to get to college."

"I can't believe you're going to California," I said.

"Everything will be different there."

"It'll be different here without you."

She shifted her eyes from me and put her cigarette to her lips for a long drag.

"You should come out to California," she said, after a long exhale of smoke.

"I don't think I'll make it out of here."

She looked down at the floor and straight past me with a smoke-gloss coating her milky brown eyes; she knew it was true.

I looked up at the wall, which was covered with hand-drawn pictures, all on 8 1/2-by-11-inch printer paper. It was like an acid trip. One of the drawings was an eye made exclusively from blue ink in excruciating detail. There was no eyebrow attached to it so the white of the page was an endless sea of skin. That blue eye was drawing me in like it had its own gravity, its own magnetic field.

"You know Maia drew most of these," Rachel said.

Maia Stanton was a friend of ours. She had crystal blue eyes that were so bright you either had to stare into them or look away; they had that same kind of gravity as the picture, a magnetic field of their own. She had been killed in a riptide off the coast of Rhode Island a little over a year ago. And in a way, her death was what made Rachel and me grow close. That summer was the first time we ever made love. Eight months after Maia drowned, Jessie DuPont was dead. Being a DuPont in Great Barrington meant two things: he was the star on a bad football team, and his options in life were landscaping, crime, or alcoholism. In a ploy to skip out on his destiny, he tried to hang himself from the water tower in the early hours of a March Sunday morning. The rope snapped and he ended up falling to his death.

I saw his ex-girlfriend a couple weeks afterwards. We were partying in a motel room with a few friends. We played drinking games with a handle of Tito's Handmade Vodka until she ended up ripping her shirt off and running down the street. Her best friend spent two hours patrolling the roads like a police cruiser looking for her. I sat in the motel watching TV.

You either had to stare into them or look away; they had the same kind of gravity as the picture, a magnetic field of their own.

After Jessie, Kenny Krom ended up dead in early April when party season started and the weather broke. Kenny was a boisterous guy, six foot nine with spindly arms. He was famous in every party scene up and down the rural Massachusetts New York border for yelling "Sound the Horn" at the top of his lungs before swilling down a few gulps of Tito's. He drove himself off a bridge on his way home from a house party and died in a hospital bed the next day. I had bummed him a cigarette before he left. His mom started a "campaign to end drunk driving," but nothing changed; she barely raised enough money to cover the funeral costs.

Kenny's best friend David Ibanez was the foster son of the high school Spanish teacher. She was a kind woman and a lousy teacher. I learned more Spanish from my fluent friends trash talking at parties than from four years in her classroom. David was a pot dealer who was

always in debt for using half the product. When Kenny died, David smashed his car into a tree on Route 4,1 going 60 in a 35 where the road makes a sharp left leading into the outskirts of Housatonic. He was ejected from the car almost forty feet but walked away with nothing but a neck brace and a broken arm. His foster mom assumed that that would be the end of it, but once David got the neck brace off, he strapped a cinderblock to his foot and jumped in the reservoir on East Street.

I grabbed another Marlboro and lit the tip with the butt of the one I just finished. The smoke forced my stare away from the blue-ink eye and onto Rachel.

“When are you heading out to California?” I asked.

“I leave next Wednesday. All the girls are throwing a going away party at Lydia’s are you going to be there?”

“Yep. I’ll have my guy pick us up a handle or two of Tito’s. It’ll be a good night.”

My words just lingered in the air, like they were trapped in some invisible force field. I snuck out the front door a few minutes later in total silence.

* * *

Rachel left and seven months blurred into a stream of work, cigarettes, and vodka. She was right: It felt like I was doing the same thing over and over. I started taking community college classes at the beginning of the spring semester. I was in my Intro to Writing and Composition class when I got a text from my best friend.

“Did you hear what happened?”

I walked out of class and gave my professor

the ‘don’t fuck with me’ look. She scowled and kept talking about how to frame a quote. I walked out of the glass double doors, leaned back against the handrail, lit a cigarette, and called my best friend.

“What’s going on man?”

“Listen, I’m just going to say it: Jesus is dead. They found the body this morning.” His voice sounded sober and shaky.

“Our friend Jesus?” I said.

“Who the fuck else would I be talking about? Yes, our friend, Jesus Santos. He drove his car into a tree last night, drunk and coked up, I think. He died on impact.”

*Being a DuPont in Great
Barrington meant two
things ...*

I wanted my body to collapse to the cement, or start breathing heavy, or maybe just muster a little lump in my throat punctuated by a tear. But it didn’t. Instead, I started walking to my car, a half-silver, half-rusted 2001 Volkswagen Jetta with no front bumper and mismatched hub caps. I cracked the window and chain smoked on my way to the package store. The cashier didn’t care that I wasn’t 21. I must have still had that ‘don’t fuck with me look’ on my face. I bought a handle of Tito’s and made my way over to my best friend’s house, taking big pulls straight from the brown bag the whole way there.

The funeral was two weeks later and, in a messed up way, I was excited because I knew Rachel would be in town. Maybe I would finally tell her I loved her. Maybe I would tell her I was

trying to make something of myself, how I was taking classes again, how I was talking to the Air Force recruiter. Maybe I would tell her that I could really make it out to California one day. I didn’t see Rachel until just before the service was set to start. She was wearing a black trench coat which matched her straightened hair. Everything about her was exactly how I remembered. I got through the service by watching the familiar heave and fall of her breath out of the corner of my eye. It kept me from focusing on the casket, just out of arm’s reach, where Jesus was being lowered into the ground.

After the service, Rachel and I walked slowly under the dead trees at the edge of the graveyard. Her face was sunken and twisted.

“What’re you thinking about?” I said.

“Why him, why did he have to go?”

“This place changes people.”

“He was always so happy.”

“It’s hard to do anything but drink your life away here.”

There was a long pause and a dry wind made the dry branches crackle into a dance.

“Do you know what fractals are?” she asked.

I looked up and her eyebrows were curled in on themselves like she was solving a math problem. The corners of her eyes were wet with tears. “One of my math professors always talks about them. He says that they’re the geometric equivalent of the god particle, or something like the big bang. He says it’s a shape that explains the whole universe.”

“Well what does it look like?” I said.

“It can look like all sorts of things, but it doesn’t matter what it looks like. What matters is that it’s made up of a bunch of small parts of the same shape. And those parts are made up

of smaller parts of the same shape and so on. No matter how small you go, it’s the same thing over and over. You can’t ever escape that shape.”

“So what?”

“Don’t you see it? He’s right. The whole world is a fucking fractal: same thing over and over. You can’t get away from the shape.”

“But you’re out in California, you’re going to college. Isn’t that a different shape?”

She turned on a dime and looked right through me. I grabbed her hands and pulled her close. Her skin was cold. I leaned my lips in as if a kiss might cure everything bad that ever happened to us, to this town. She ripped her hands away.

*He says that they're the
geometric equivalent of the
god particle ... it's a shape
that explains the whole
universe.*

“I’m sorry, I can’t do this.”

She brushed past me and headed straight to her car. I watched her zip down Elm Street until the tail lights faded into nothing. ‘The same shape,’ I thought to myself, ‘the same goddamn shape.’

I slid my pack of Marlboros out from my front pocket and fished for a cigarette. There was one left in the red and white packaging which I planted in my lips. “You’re next motherfucker,” I whispered through my teeth as I reached for my lighter. The cigarette wobbled up and down in my mouth. “You’re next.”

The Wall

Cassidy Bassett

No. They are being absurd. I will stay.

The wind picked up. The wall moved closer.

This always happens. The walls approach and leave like windows of opportunity in life. They always pass. Everyone overreacts, but I never do. What is there to overreact to? Oh no, the clouds are crying. Oh no, the sun is hiding. Oh no, the heavens are screaming their ghostly wails that no one can understand. If they are not understandable, then do not listen. It is simple as that. Yet everyone tries, and they are so surprised when they discover the heavens were only fooling them with their twisted antics that only the gullible could possibly fall for. This is just another window. Nothing that I would ever spend my precious time worrying about.

But why did everyone leave? The question befuddles me. They somehow believed the lies they were fed by the media. This wall is deleterious. Please do not stay for this wall. You will regret it.

No. They are being ridiculous. I will stay.

The rain picked up. The wall moved closer. Closer.

My window is shaking. The constant *pap-pap-*

pap of the rain on the glass is the only sound I hear. *Pap-Pap-Pap*. More rain. *PAP-PAP-PAP*. The only sound I hear.

How did the wall get here so fast? It should have taken longer. I thought it would have taken much longer. Why was I not right? I am always right.

No. They are being stupid. I will stay.

The storm picks up. The wall is here. Here. Here.

Please do not stay for this wall. You will regret it.

Thunder shakes my house. I feel the foundation vibrate under my feet. It shakes and quakes and rumbles with trouble, but still. Nothing to worry about.

Right?

I can't hear anything. Is the *pap-pap-pap* the rain or just the buffer in my head? I can't tell the difference anymore. Occasional *booms* crack my mind in half. They make me dizzy.

Dizzy.

Pap-Pap-CRACK. What happened to the *BOOM*.

Where did this water *BOOM*.

Where did the wind *BOOM*.

I can't think. My thoughts are the clouds, overlapping, combining, crossing, leaping, jumping, crawling, screaming, black.

My skin is cold. Cold. Cold.

My toes are numb. Numb. Numb?

My mind is blank. Blank. Blank!

The water's in my house! House!

What do I do? Do? DO?

No way out! No way out?

No air! No air? Where is the air? There is no air. There is only water. Water everywhere. Everywhere. Everywhere. I can feel the water. I am the water.

It's my clothes, skin, body, hair, ears, eyes, face, mouth, nose.

Why did I stay?

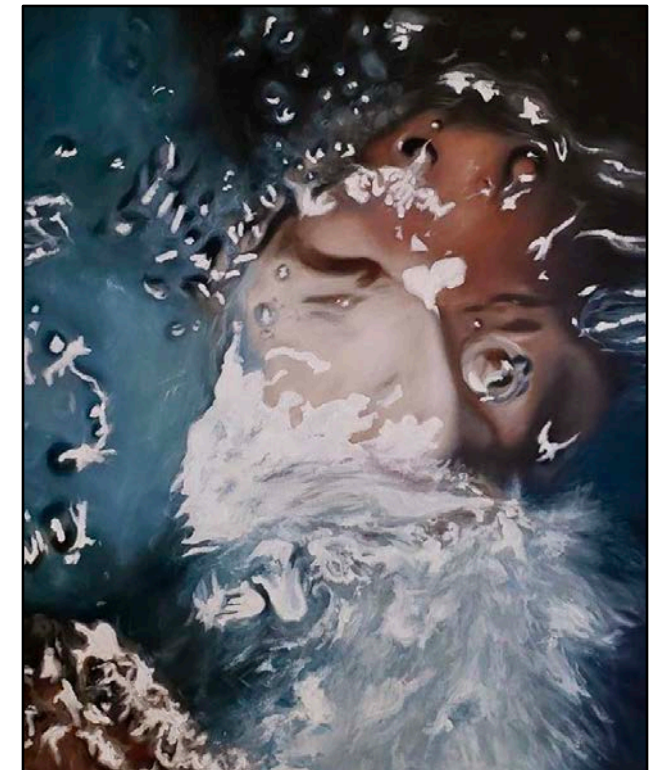
Everyone else was right. I was wrong. How could I be so wrong?

Face. Mouth. Nose. Mouth.

It's going to take me.

Mouth. Nose. Mouth. Nose.

I can't brave this. I'm not strong enough. I can't get out. There is no way out.



Lexi de Villiers, "coming up for—" oil on canvas

Mouth. Nose. Throat. Throat. The water is swirling, whirling, crashing, lashing, black.

Throat. Throat. Lungs. Lungs.

What can I do? Nothing. Nothing. Nothing.

Black.

Jewel, the Black-Footed Range Rider

Breven Engelson



Harry Andriantavy, "Winter"
Sony a6000 and Adobe Photoshop/Lightroom

The desert sun blazed down upon his back. A warm and light breeze shifted through the rustic little town. The town looked like it could have been from 1850 and there wasn't a soul in sight. Ironically, a tumbleweed tumbled through the town like they did in the old western movies he never watched. His F-250 was tucked away in the Nevada Mountains twenty miles away. His horse rested uneasily between his tired old legs and sought comfort from him. He offered a quick rub on the neck to calm the horse's uneasy spirit.

This secluded town was the end of his life-long journey.

A dusty broken saloon stood withering on

his left and was connected to the general store and sheriff's office. On his right stood the hotel and feed store. Each building was the same, dark, dusty-brown color. The road was straight dust with sagebrush growing close to some of the buildings.

His horse started to look for answers where his rider offered none. It had tried to walk, but the rider *who'd* the horse back ever so quietly. The rider was careful not to make any sudden moves. Rider and horse would stand in the middle of the road until he guessed someone would come out and accept him, or send him away.

A dark-black telescoping Great Basin

buckaroo cowboy hat adorned his head. The hat had a tarnished crimson-red ribbon running around it with speckles of dark black. Dust caked the brim and crown of the hat, providing a testament to the man's life and character. He shaved that morning, revealing his strong jaw line. Deep lines of age wearied his face, specifically around the corners of his eyes, but didn't take away from the scotch-whiskey attributes of his face. Grey hair protruded from underneath his hat band, bequeathing his face with a gentlemanly charm.

He wore a black long-sleeved, buttoned-up shirt and dark blue Wrangler jeans. Over his jeans, were chinks the same color of his hat ribbon. The chinks told the story of a buckaroo who had worked his whole life seeking the answer he had almost arrived at. Back-breaking labor from sunup to sundown was the defining characteristic of his life. The chinks had the obvious evidence of branding, for they were covered in dirt and blood stains. His spur straps matched the chinks and his hat ribbon, the blood of a man who lost all whom he had loved. The design of his boots could not be seen, for they were covered by years of dirt and grime. A six-shooter lay dormant, attached to his waist by way of a gun belt, marked with the carefulness of craftsmanship.

*

The door to the saloon opened ever so slightly. He dared not move a muscle. His horse picked up his activity, stirring to rear. The tall and weary rider offered it peace with his body, remaining perfectly calm in the saddle. He stayed straddled to the stallion, his

only real companion left.

The door to the saloon opened fully, revealing a young boy.

*

The kid came out and stared into his eyes. He didn't break contact. The kid's eyes searched for any sign of falsity. They were searching for the dark that was needed to survive. They were locked onto each other long enough for the rider to see his life flash before his very eyes. He saw every time his father had hit his mom, the dark times of his life and the pain he had conquered.

*Back-breaking labor from
sunup to sundown was the
defining characteristic of
his life.*

There was a burn afterwards, like the kid had seen something he had not desired to see.

"I am not sure what to think of you, mister."

He didn't move a muscle.

The kid turned around and ran back to the saloon, slamming the door behind him. Within his chest, he could feel a stabbing pain begin to form around the area of his heart.

He looked down at the stallion and noticed his color begin to change. White spots were beginning to form over the pitch-black horse's body. The white began taking over slowly. In less than ten seconds the white was fast, all consuming. Its legs began to burn. In fact, they started to smoke yes, this was good. He had read of this. Soon the smoke would permeate

the air and engulf him and the horse. His hands were starting to turn black, sucking in the colors surrounding them. He was clashing with the spectacular white brilliance of the stallion. His blackness and the horse's whiteness were blazing against each other.

He wished to be still, yet the stallion was attempting to run as any beast would if they were being burned. Hopefully the true unity he had developed with the steed would pull through the last test. He had spent his entire life building up to this ultimate test. He had spent the last fifteen years astraddle this horse especially. He managed to calm the beast down to the point of a slow walk in a circle. He did not pet the horse, for his hands would surely make the trial that much harder.

He had spent his entire life building up to this ultimate test.

The smoke continued to build around the two, slowly swirling as they walked ever tighter into a circle. Soon they would be standing still.

He was sure the entire town would be watching to see if he could make it happen.

The stallion slowed down even more and began to stand still while the two colors burned. The smell of burning flesh permeated the air of the town now, and a small flame grew around his foot. Then it spread to the horse and himself. It engulfed the two of them fully, with neither moving visibly. He could sense the inner turmoil of the horse: whether to obey its master's call to stand still or to go back to its baser instinct. He reassured it with his seat,

invisible to the rest of the world.

*

The kid ran out of the saloon again.

"You may dismount the horse now. You know what to do after that."

The kid ran back to the saloon and slammed the door.

*

He immediately dismounted the stallion. Both horse and rider returned to their original selves. He unsaddled the horse and took the spade bit out of his horse's mouth. He set both carefully on the ground. He withdrew the pistol from his hip holster and cocked it. This was, by far, the bitterest, sweetest moment of his life thus far.

Tears welled up in his eyes and a lump formed in his throat. The memories of all the years with his horse started to bombard his system. He thought he couldn't do it. Maybe he actually wasn't worthy.

He closed his eyes and raised his gun. Touching it to the horse's head, he pulled the trigger.

He grabbed his saddle, placed the bridle over the horn, and walked to the saloon hall's door. He set his rigging on by the entrance, turned the handle, and stepped inside.

The smell of expensive whiskey and cigars resounded throughout his nostrils. He looked upon the wall where the bartender was putting up a picture of a pitch black horse next to a bay and a buckskin.

"What do you want to drink?" exasperated the bartender.

"Pendleton is fine."

"Have a seat. You're welcome here now," a dusty man at the bar told him.

He sat down at the bar and took in his surroundings. Smoke drifted lazily throughout the bar, sunlight glistened through several windows on his right, and a cattle dog laid sluggishly in the corner.

"I got one question." He directed this towards the bartender.

"You've earned answers," the bartender replied.

"Was what I did outside worth it?"

The bartender looked at him with deep, pondering eyes. The bartender's gaze burned through his inner being, seeming to see things that even he didn't know about himself.

"Please leave this bar. There will be another horse for you to ride out on."

Fearing the repercussions of back-talking in an establishment like this, he decided to leave calmly.

Outside, the kid he had seen earlier was standing with a new horse saddled.

"Go ahead, mister. This is the best I could find. Also, never come back or I'll be forced to do you-know-what."

"I wouldn't come back if you paid me."

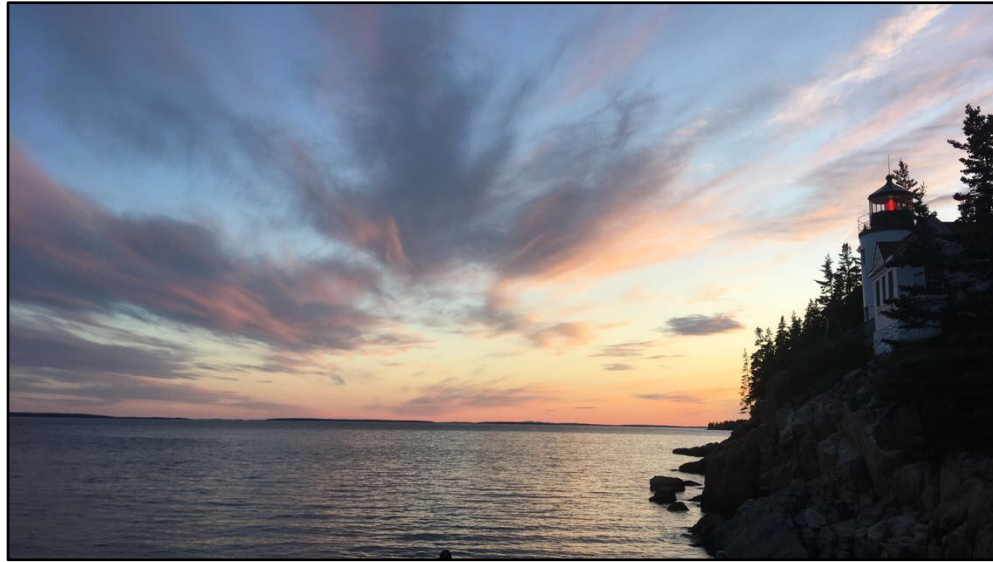
"We wouldn't."

He mounted the horse and spurred him into a gallop.

A single shot rang out from the direction of the town, and that was the last anyone had ever heard of Jewel, the Black-Footed Range Rider.



Taylor Morris, "The Smell of the Sea Breeze" digital photograph



Samantha Thompson, "Sunset Over Lighthouse"
digital photograph

CLOUDS

Christian Barrette

Every Commandant had gotten up on that staff tower before lunch and told us we would be the ones to change the world.

Perhaps this one meant our decisions and leadership would change the Air Force. Perhaps he was trying to help me win my buzzword bingo.

Did you hear what happened last night? DJ asked.

No, I said. Probably just another drunk Firstie getting caught doing something they shouldn't have been.

The government was reassuring every American citizen glued to their cellphones and televisions that we would not be engaging in

another "war to end all wars." My Facebook friends from high school, who had not shot a gun besides the one they just unlocked in Call of Duty, said this was a lie; they had, after all, just earned their combat keyboard ribbons.

Who was I to question their expertise? I could see absolutely no change in the Air Force Academy. It remained business as usual. Woven together, the red-, yellow-, silver-, and blue-colored walls were covered with blankets of snow that continued to come down and consume every northern city past Pueblo. We hadn't seen the sun through the snowstorm in weeks.

Do you think he means it, DJ whispered after hearing the Commandant put the wing at ease. I swear they always preach the same bullshit.

Why don't you go ask him?

Whether or not he meant it didn't matter to us, we both knew that. I glanced outside. How was the snow still drowning out the sun? It was already 1155.

Are you going to the mountains this weekend? I said.

Nope. I don't want to deal with the Californians and Texans out there on the slopes. I swear it's like I'm a magnet for shitty skiers.

Shaking my head, I realized I never heard him finish a sentence without some sort of insult towards Texans, but I couldn't blame him. DJ liked to remind me that he enjoyed skiing in the northeast more than Colorado, as Texans were too scared to venture up to New Jersey. He seemed more bitter than normal, maybe because it was Friday and he had three more classes to go. Maybe because he had just been reminded that the back of his ski jacket doubled as a target for the neon-jumpsuit-wearing skiers last weekend. As the faint voice over the speakers said *wing, take seats*, we reluctantly waited for our slop to be served.

You need to come this weekend. It's been a few weeks now since you and Mandy stopped talking, I said.

And how will this weekend help get her off my mind?

Well, it might not. But I heard from a pretty good source that we might be going to World War III, so wouldn't you rather spend it drunk on a mountain than in this place?

After I spent the rest of my lunch giving him the best sales pitch I could muster, he finally conceded that alcohol might help him get over Mandy. While chewing my cold sandwich, built of the finest slabs of pork paired with freshly unpackaged Kraft cheese singles melted for five seconds—no more and no less

I realized that I was done with class for the day. It was time to go pack.

Waking up that Saturday, I pried my bloodshot eyes open and tried to blink away the dryness. Only getting four hours of sleep was a mistake, but one I was willing to deal with. I could sleep in the car. Ola, the person I woke up in the middle of the night with my snoring the last two years, said that he would drive. As we slung our thousand-pound ski bags over our shoulders, we prepared ourselves for perhaps the biggest challenge of our cadet careers. Walking from Sijan to Vandy Hall in the snow and wind of USAFA was not a task to be undertaken by the weak-hearted. How was it still snowing?

*We hadn't seen the sun
through the snowstorm
in weeks.*

DJ's little silver Volkswagen was able to fit all of our skis and overnight bags; I was a master at Tetris. DJ didn't believe in purchasing an AUX cord, so we were forced to listen to the radio. These disc jockeys had to have seen my brave Facebook friends' posts all they could talk about was the fright of a nuclear winter.

I guess the stations all got together and

decided that music wasn't important today: Only fear mongering would be heard. Lucky for us, DJ clicked the radio off and turned up the heater. The drive felt over in the blink of an eye, and it was, for me at least. After fighting with sleep, I decided it was the most beneficial for everyone if I rested my eyes while Ola drove.

What had to have been three hours later, I was awoken by the slamming of DJ's passenger door. I looked around and decided that this was the familiar drive through the town of Corkthorn. While DJ was inside paying for gas, I laid my head against the iced-over window.

Did you get the email invite to attend the fitness test? I said to Ola. I am so thankful they like to remind me of my impending failures.

Yeah, didn't we all?

I appreciate them giving me the invite, but I think I am going to respectfully decline. Do you think it will warm up at all today?

Why don't you just look at your phone? Believe it or not, we all have this thing called the weather app.

I was proud: I had successfully indoctrinated

Ola in the ancient art of the sarcastic asshole. I removed the iPhone out of my black ski pants, just quiet enough to not let Ola know he had won the exchange. I saw that, in fact, it would not warm up: cloudy, cold, and more snow. I already knew this would be the case; why did I open up the battery-burning app? DJ got back to the car and started to pump the gas, but something was off. He threw the sampler 24-



Caitlyn McGarry, "Brian"
acrylic on canvas

pack of White Claws in the trunk zero calorie, of course, due to my test coming up. He put the nozzle back on its station and got back in the car without a word and started to drive towards the resort.

You'll never guess who I just saw in there, DJ said.

Gandhi, I joked.

Haha, very fucking funny.

I knew what this meant. Every cadet *did* go skiing at the same two resorts some three hours away from the Academy. I knew there was a shot but out of all the gas stations, she had to pick this one? Lucky for me I had already popped a White Claw, and sat back ready to take whatever rant was about to come from DJ.

Of course it was Mandy. Why would I get a break from her this weekend? She doesn't even

like to ski. She actually complained the whole day I taught her. But now that her new cadet boyfriend is taking her, she suddenly loves it? It's whatever. I'm not mad. He's not even good looking so I'm not tripping. I just think it's funny that he doesn't even know what he's getting into, DJ said.

I sat staring out the back window. I had heard this before and I knew I would hear it again. Was I already four White Claws in? It had only been 30 minutes from the gas station to the resort's parking lot. It couldn't have been past 0815 when we finally pulled into our spot and unloaded all of our gear. Ola had been working out in preparation for his test far longer than my one week, and it showed. His jacket fit tight, which was an inconvenience to me. I guess I would just have to be the kangaroo mom to my baby White Claws. By the time we got to the lift line and started to go up, it was 0845 and I had added two more empty Claws to my collection.

Going up the lift, I was shocked at how few people had been in the parking lot. Come to think of it, we parked in the very front. This almost never happened, but it must have been too early for everyone else. We did get there before the resort even opened what's the saying about birds and worms? Either way, it didn't matter to me. I was just excited to see all this fresh white snow with barely any ski tracks through it. By the time we had reached the halfway point of the lift some five minutes after climbing on, only three of those bubbly beverages remained. I had silently decided for the group we would shotgun them at the top. It was a tradition, even if we had only started it last weekend.

With about two minutes left on the lift, the clouds got very thick and you could barely see past an outreached arm. Then, as if God himself had blown right on the ski lift, we passed through the clouds into the wide open blue skies. It was breathtakingly beautiful, or maybe it was just cold. We skied off the lift ramp and decided to unbuckle from our skis to do a quick hike and carry out our ritual. After walking for what felt like an eternity, which Ola swore was only ten minutes, I saw it. The perfect ledge, overlooking all the other mountain tops whose tips were fighting with the clouds to be exposed. It was silent: Not a distant bird chirping or gust of wind was louder than our three heartbeats.

Then, as if God himself had blown right on the ski lift, we passed through the clouds into the wide open blue skies.

I pulled out my keys to create the all-important cutout to shotgun my White Claw. I had just seen it on my Instagram feed, but the sorority girls made it look easier than it turned out to be. After a few moments of frustration, I decided that chugging it was manlier anyways, so that's what we all would do. I popped mine first and held it up to the sky. Ola was next, and his was quieter than mine; I must have stirred up the carbonation when I fell getting off the lift. DJ tore off his tab after struggling with it. I told him I would let him use my keys to open it but my offer was drowned out by more popping.

Did you hear that? DJ said.

You mean the loud-ass pop that we obviously heard because we're standing right by you? Ola said.

There it is again.

One after another, we started to hear a symphony of White Claws being opened. We looked in the surrounding trees for any signs of people next to us, but didn't see any ski tracks. DJ swore it was Mandy and her new boyfriend stalking us. But the noises kept coming, getting louder and louder.

Alright, not funny anymore. Who's out there, I shouted.

Silence. Then, as if DJ and Ola were taking a picture with flash on right by my eyes it happened. And then again. I knew it wasn't my phone's flash I had checked it on the lift up and it was dead. I should have uninstalled that damn weather app. Was it paparazzi? I knew

we were good-looking guys, but even this felt excessive. We ducked down, panicked and scared, almost slipping off the icy cliff that just fifteen minutes ago I decided was the safest spot. I couldn't see anything. My eyes were open but white was drowning everything out. Was I having a stroke?

Oh my god, Ola and DJ said simultaneously.

When I was finally able to see again, I wished that the white had completely taken away my vision. I turned seven hundred and twenty degrees, and kept counting more. One mushroom cloud. Then three. Then eight. This was it. Parking up front was too good to be true. I couldn't believe my eyes. I turned to my friends who were sobbing. DJ was crying for Mandy, Ola was crying for his own Mandy.

I said, Well, at least there will be no Texans to run into us while we're skiing.



Lexi de Villiers, "what do you see?" digital photograph



Taylor Morris, "Moving Foward" (top);
"Ancient Flight" (bottom left);
"Temple with a View" (bottom right)
digital photographs



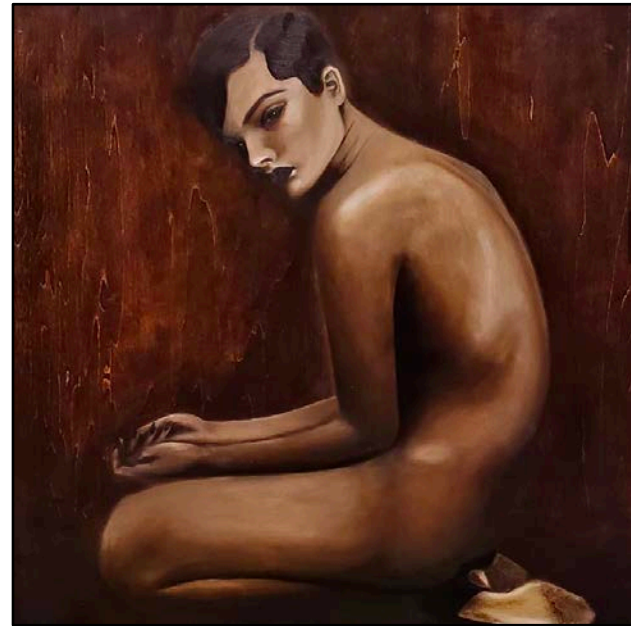
Logan Santiago, "Shadow of Our Past"
Canon T6i with 58mm lens



Desiree' L. Reed, "James Baldwin's Room"
acrylic on canvas



Harry Andriantavy, "Future of Computers"
Sony a6000 and Adobe Photoshop/Lightroom



Lexi de Villiers, "pure terror" (above)
oil on wood board

Nathaniel J. Stout, "Waves of Freedom" (below)
digital photography



Matthew Simmons, "Bloom at Midnight" (top);
"First Snow" (bottom);
acrylic on stretched canvas

Savannah Petty,
"Untitled" (middle)
oil on liquid white foundation



Bella Ilchenko, "UnderWater" (top); "OuterSpace" (botom)
marker on paper



Caitlyn McGarry, "Lotus"
clay and cone 5 glaze



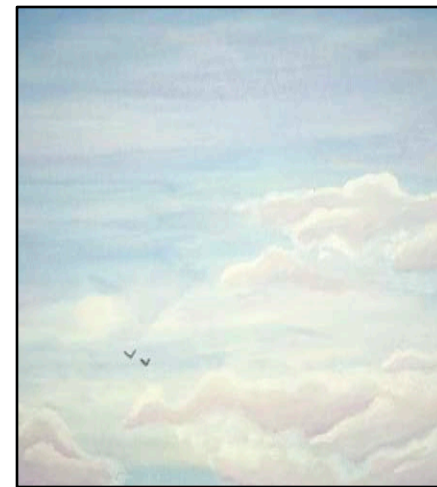
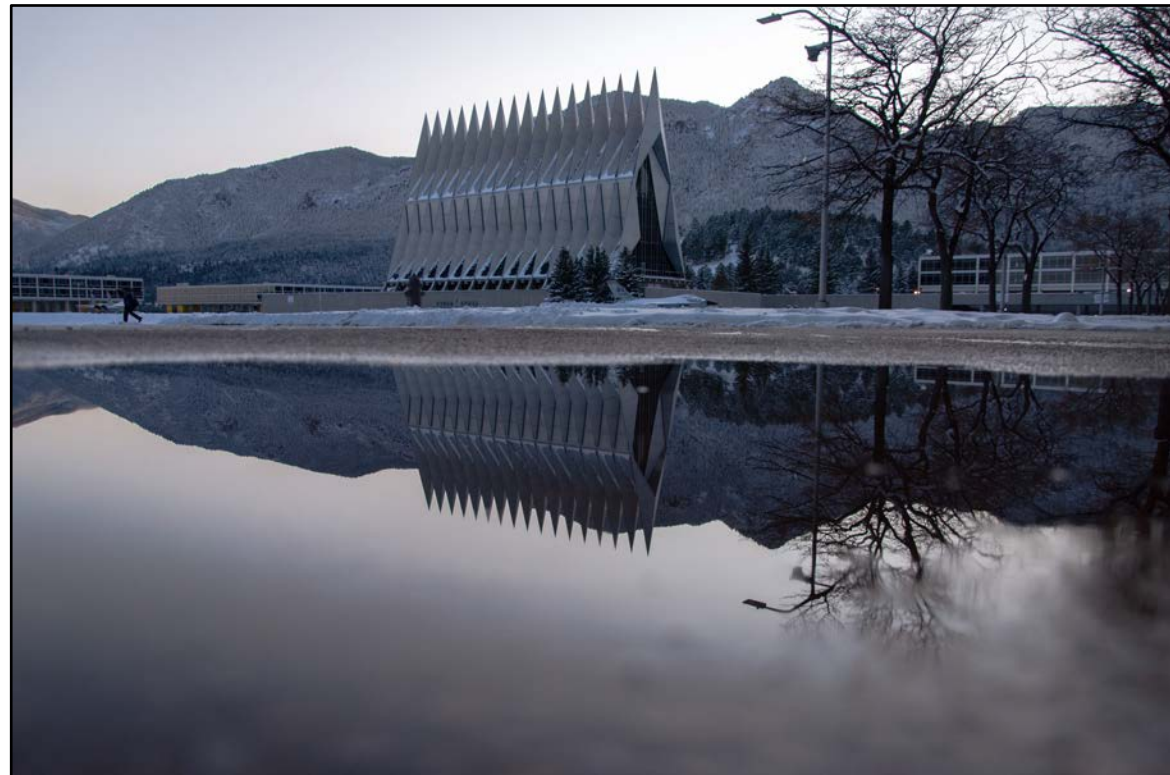
Kaitlin Lee Nethercutt, "Italy's Beauty in Bloom" (above)
"Elephants of the Future" (right)
ceramic





Erica Rivera, "Winter Wonderland" (top)
digital photograph

Isaac Fisher, "Solitary Chapel" (bottom)
digital photograph

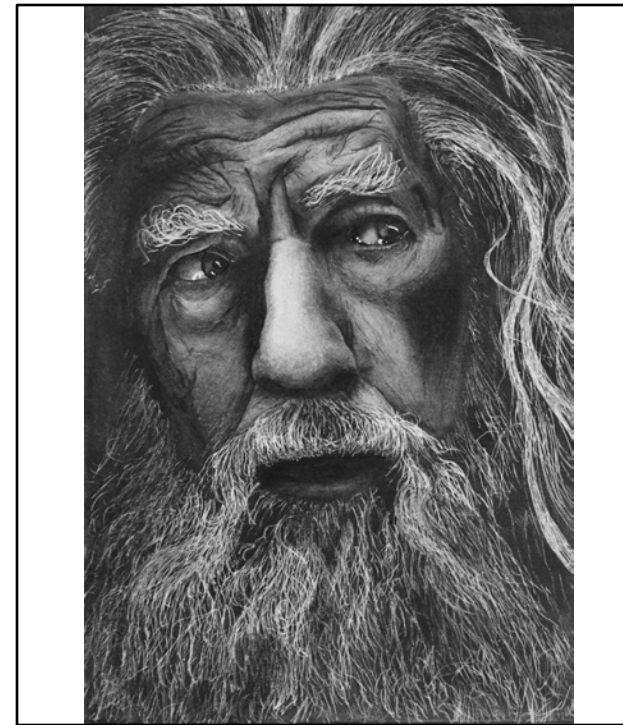


Savannah Petty, "Untitled" (left and right)
oil on liquid white foundation

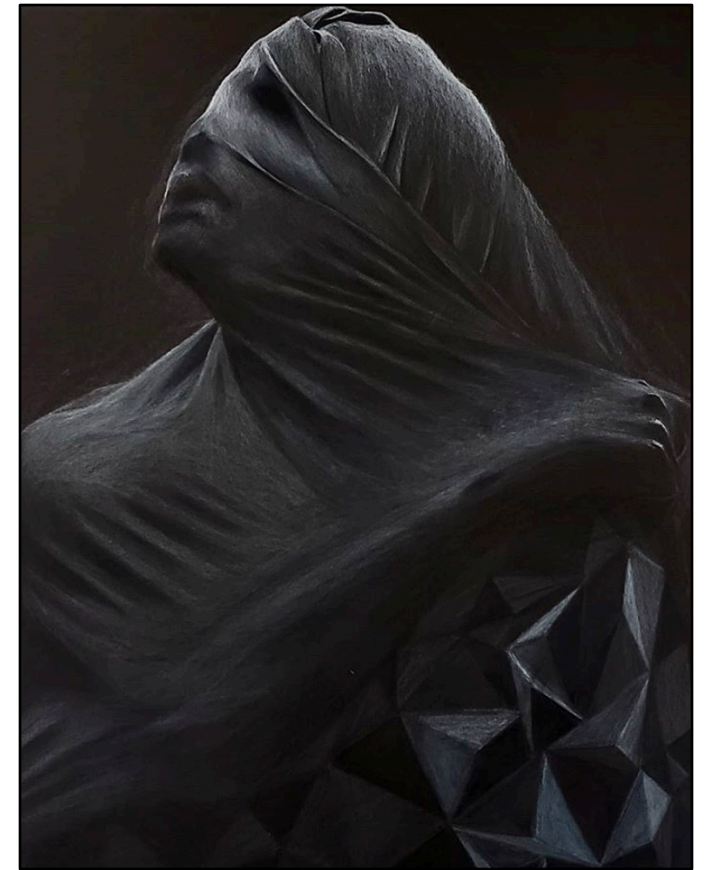
Chia-Hsiang Shen, "Air Power" (middle)
Canon EOS 70D with Sigma 150-600 C lens



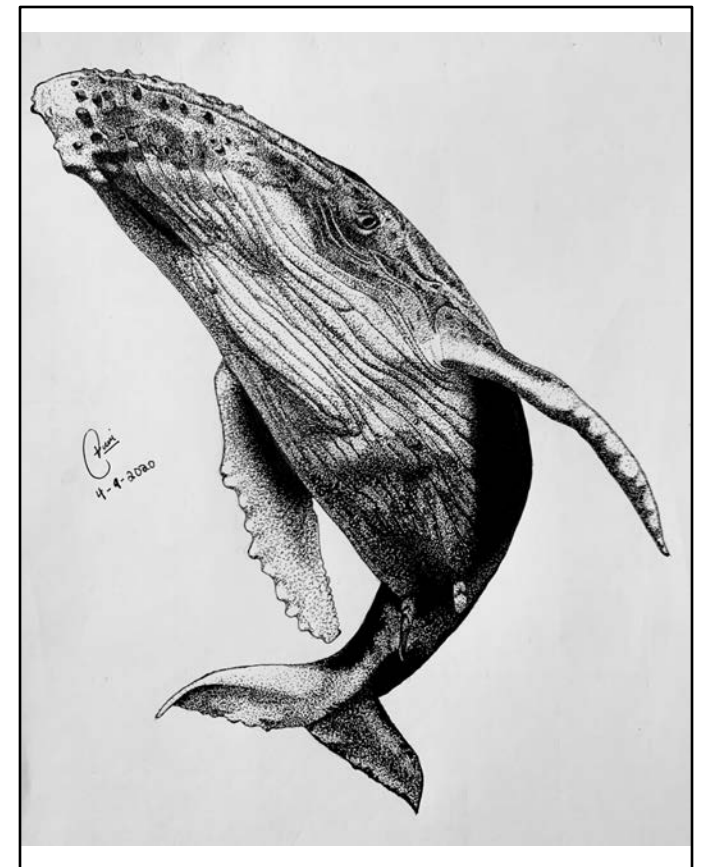
Isaac Gwin, "Smaug"
graphite, charcoal, and white ink



Isaac Gwin, "Gandalf" (top left), graphite, charcoal,
and white ink
"Humpback Whale" (bottom right), black ink



Lexi de Villiers, "resist" (top right), colored pencil on
black matboard
"dead tooth" (bottom left), digital drawing





an interview with HUNTER DIEHL

conducted by *Christian Barrette*

Hunter Diehl ('23) was born and raised in small-town Idaho and has been playing and writing music since he was young. Icarus staff member Christian Barrette sat down with Diehl recently to talk about life, music, and several of his songs, soon to appear on the updated Icarus website!

Christian Barrette: You definitely have an awesome and unique voice. To me, you sound like Hunter Hayes with a little bit of Jack Johnson's vibe sprinkled in. Who has been your inspiration musically?

Hunter Diehl: You honestly nailed it on the head with Hunter Hayes and Jack Johnson. I started out playing Jack Johnson songs at talent shows in elementary school, and I've always liked Hunter Hayes's style. So those two are definitely foundational inspirations for [my] music. As far as songwriting goes, I really lean towards a mix between Sam Hunt and Luke Combs for sound. Chris Stapleton and Morgan Wallen are also big motivations for me to write.

CB: Your first song ["A Call Home"], about leaving home and your family for a new experience, is something that a lot of cadets can relate to. What were your thoughts when writing and recording this song? Do you think expressing this through music helped you cope with this fresh start?

HD: When talking about "A Call Home," I look back and see it as a truthful song that described my situation before BCT. Originally, though, it was more of just an idea with a verse and a chorus. It only took me a few hours to write it, but halfway through I realized I needed to make it personal, as those details would make it that much more relatable for more people, whether it be fresh high school graduates or people getting ready to enlist or even go on deployment. I've never really thought of myself as emotional or needing something extra to cope with hardship, but soon enough I found myself singing "A Call Home" in my head through BCT, and I think this outlet got me through a lot of tough times in the past year at the Academy alone.

CB: The song ["Dance in the Rain"] about going through a "storm" really hit home. It has been a tough year for cadets at USAFA, and just a tough year for the world in general with the pandemic. What was your motivation behind this song? Do you think this will relate to cadets and civilians alike?

HD: A lot of times when writing a new song, I just think about a common, relatable problem, find a chord progression that fits with the mood of that problem, and simply start thinking of a first line of the first verse. The rest comes naturally for me. For "Dance in the Rain," I actually had a birthday card sitting on my dresser that said "life isn't about

waiting for the storm to pass, it's about learning how to dance in the rain." I'd been staring at the note for a few weeks after my birthday because I feel bad throwing out birthday cards, and I finally realized it would be a great song. At the time, a girl who was a firefighter in our town who was also an avid fisherman died in a car crash. Everyone knew her well, and my little town was going through a lot of grief. So I thought "dance in the rain" was the perfect middle ground for both sadness and then rebounding and getting back on one's feet. Obviously it relates to civilians because everyone has a goal they hope to reach, and they may get ridiculed for it, but cadets also "dance in the rain" every day. The Academy is hard and many people outside definitely scoff at cadets. Friends at normal college either make fun of cadets for doing something different or simply don't understand the massive difference and undertaking that cadets take on.

CB: This might be the English major in me, but I feel like you can learn a lot from listening to your songs. Is there something that you'd like to express or say to the people that are interested in your music?

HD: All I have to say about my music is that I do it for two reasons: an outlet of my emotions/creativity, and for other [people]. I'd say I'm a pretty

normal guy that does normal things, some crazy hobbies here and there, but I want to give others like me happiness and the knowledge that we all go through the same things whether it be heartbreak, a new chapter, a new challenge and that life is full of ups and downs. No one's alone on this spinning rock.

CB: This question is half-joking, half-serious, but as you might know, the Academy's In the Stairwell had an impressive run on *America's Got Talent*. Has competing on this type of show (e.g. *The Voice* or *American Idol*) been something that you have thought about?

HD: I've always thought about going on TV shows but I've never had the time for it with competitive skiing, school, and everything in between. I honestly think of myself more as a writer or a storyteller. I don't have Adele's voice or Hendrix's guitar skills, so I like to say my talent is writing music that anyone will nod their head to. There's a new show called *Songland* that I'd like to look into, though.

➡ *Many thanks to Hunter for chatting with us. Check out his songs "A Call Home," "Dance in the Rain," and "Switch" on Icarus's updated website this fall, and listen to his entire album Crossroad on Spotify, Soundcloud, or iTunes!*



photos courtesy of Hunter Diehl

An Open LETTER: To Anyone Who Will Listen

Maria Gianna Gasparovich

I do not think I have ever felt so supported and alone in my entire life. Who would have predicted that I would have made it into one of the hardest schools in the country, but life would decide to unpack my darkest moments all when the finish line is just skimming the horizon? I am gray in a world that begs for black and white. You see, I'm not a fan of categories, but that does not mean I don't understand their purpose. What a predicament it is when you are an oval trying to fit into the perfectly symmetrical circle that the black-and-white world so desperately wants you to fit in. I am a survivor, this is true, just not of the variety that catches headlines here. My innocence was taken from me at twelve years old. The tragedy being that I had no idea the gravity of what had happened to me. So like anyone I packed it in a box. Then I took that box and threw it in a trunk. I wrapped it with steel chains and the



Kelly Jackson, "A Look into the Garden"
digital photography

biggest padlock I could find. As anyone would expect, I threw that trunk into the river I so effortlessly call my mind. But like any river, the things we throw in eventually make their way to the top. The lock rusts as the chains loosen. We could perform an infinite number of experiments, but scientists around the world still couldn't tell you exactly when that box reaches the surface.

For me, that box exploded during my second year. Nine years exactly from the date. This singular event that I was so happy to be ignorant towards came hurdling toward me without a sound. The funny thing is when you've gone nearly a decade without connecting a memory to something horrific, you think you're relatively normal. Since

you've read this far, won't you humor me as I walk you through a little role play? Imagine you're closing your eyes and can feel yourself behind the controls of your dream airframe. What was a steady and perceptively uneventful flight begins to death spiral. Your body forces you awake at 0300 at least three times a week. Alone, frozen in your black-and-white bed as gray tears slide down your oval face. As trained, you check your emergency procedures. In a fervor, you over-analyze, connecting all of your behaviors to the period of your life where you were supposed to just start learning about yourself. Now you're in an uncontrollable stall. "If this didn't happen to me would I trust people differently?" "Would I have allowed myself to be vulnerable sooner if so?" "If I am broken, what is the point of trying to fix things?" Pulling on the controls for dear life, you recover from what should have certainly been your death. Like the good pilot you are, you do exactly as your training has taught you after a mechanical failure. You start to recover altitude and without a second to think you are already reaching out for help over the radio.

*But like any river, the things
we throw in eventually make
their way to the top.*

The recovery continues and you make your approach back to home. You're scared. Mostly because you've been the only one in the plane and now your confidence has plummeted, sinking to the bottom of your boots. Now, we've put the gray into terms of black and white

so the world might not feel so lonely. This one event, after all, changed the entire trajectory of a young girl's life and she wouldn't know it until the world considered her a woman. I could be as poetic or straight-laced as I like, but the truth is my experience is still in the process of getting dredged from the river. We cling to this category of "survivor," hoping that this universal string that bobs and weaves to connect all of us together can provide at least some shred of shared unity. Maybe it was a miracle that I have been forced to deal with my past when I am going through the most physically challenging time of my life. Maybe, just maybe, this place has provided me with the structure that my past so grossly lacked to overcome this unpredictable hurdle. As optimistic as the previous words may seem, the nihilist in all of us hungers to scream out that it isn't all sunshine and roses.

I still have only begun my journey to find peace and, so far, it still stings worse to hear the ugly words others have to say than the uplifting ones. It is at these crossroads that I would like to impart a few words of advice. To anyone that will listen: (1) be careful what you say because you do not know who is listening back, (2) it is not our place to offer opinions when we are explicitly asked to listen, (3) in a world of black and white be the gray that invites others in, and (4) it is okay to feel alone and supported all at the same time. The Academy has taught me all of these things as I've slowly worked my way out of my metaphorical stall. Not all advice is universal, but just as you've lent me your ear, I am always willing to be the one person who will listen. Thank you.

Sincerely,
A Survivor

CONTRIBUTORS

Harry Andriantavy, '21: Me and a group of fellow photography enthusiasts are always eager to find new challenges for ourselves. These pieces of artwork are a result of that: from a nighttime road trip in the darkest places across America to take pictures of stars, to walking in the desert to find the most empty places to get stunning visuals.

Christian Barrette, '21: Christian is a member of the class of 2021 and an English Major. His favorite author right now is Stephen King, and he hopes to be able to capture the reader's attention one day the way that King does. When not doing schoolwork, he enjoys skiing and hanging out with his friends (a major influence for this story). USAFA has been his "home" for the last few years and hopes that his story is able to relate to cadets' experiences, from doolie to firstie.

Cassidy Bassett, '21: My name is Cassidy Bassett. I am in CS-31, "Grim Reapers," and in the Class of 2023. I am from Hurlburt Field, FL. I am looking to major in either Physics or Meteorology and minor in Spanish. I play on the women's club lacrosse team and sing in the Cadet Chorale.

Lexi de Villiers, '23: Lexi de Villiers has been interested in art since she was in elementary school, and continues to pursue it. She created all of these pieces in high school, where she received the award of Art Student of the Year two years in a row. She continues to produce artwork in her free time, and intends for her art to evoke emotions in the viewer that are tangible and hold meaning.

Hunter Diehl, '23: I was born and raised in a small ski town in Idaho. I love the outdoors as a hunter, fisherman, freestyle skier, and more. From a young age, I taught myself to play guitar. After losing interest in playing other artists' songs, I decided to write one of my own when I was 13, and a passion for music came to life. I have written nearly three dozen original songs. I recorded 12 in the same studio that Hank Williams, Jr., Willie Nelson, and countless other music legends produced their work. These songs are available on all streaming platforms.

Brevan Engelson, '21: The most gentlemanly of gentlemen.

Seth Finley, '22: He is a 21-year-old from Virginia Beach, VA, who got into photography and Photoshop art recently. This image was a version of a photo of the Chapel from November 2019 where the Milky way was blended above the original photo.

Isaac Fisher, '22: Isaac Fisher is a third-class cadet at the Air Force Academy. Isaac is from North Carolina and grew up watching his mother take sports and portrait photography. Isaac is passionate about capturing moments of emotion with his pictures. This picture was taken as a gift for his Sponsor Parents, the Fulops.

Maria Gianna Gasparovich, '21: C2C Maria G Gasparovich is from Cadet Squadron 34 and originally from Philadelphia, PA. During her tenure at USAFA, she has become an advocate for mental health awareness and done research and spoken on various issues related to sexual assault in the United States. The essay titled "An Open Letter" is supposed to be raw and as vulnerable as a journal entry. It is the first public acknowledgement of being a survivor of assault for Gasparovich and was written for all audiences to be able to engage in topics of both mental health and sexual assault.

Isaac Gwin, '22: I am Texas born and raised, and have enjoyed drawing as long as I can remember. I compete with the men's intercollegiate swim team. I used to rush through without paying as much attention to detail just so I could see the final product. It wasn't until around 2017 that I made the effort to take my time and put every detail I could see down on the paper and it paid off! I do get impatient still, but I know the extra effort will create more satisfaction at the end of the process.

Meredith Hickman, '23: Meredith Hickman is a member of CS-37 from New Windsor, New York. In high school, Meredith took drawing and painting classes, including AP Drawing, and received a regional Scholastic Art Gold Key award as well as two regional Scholastic Art Silver Key awards. A lifetime lover of the arts, Meredith hopes to continue making art in varying mediums throughout her life. At USAFA, Meredith is a member of the Cadet Chapel Praise Team, Navigators, and the Marathon Team. Her piece "Toby" is a painting of her dog of the same name.

CONTRIBUTORS

Daniel Huntsman, '22: Daniel Huntsman is a military brat from Northwest Arkansas who has dreamed of becoming a pilot since he was a little boy. Daniel developed a passion for writing in high school and although he has written several poems, this is his first time sharing his work with the public. When he is not writing or working on school, Daniel spends his time at midfield flying gliders, playing guitar in his room, singing with In the Stairwell, or wandering the foothills of the Front Range. He is very excited to be featured in *Icarus* and hopes you enjoy his work.

Bella Ilchenko, '23: I'm a freshman at USAFA from Wisconsin. I've always loved painting with watercolor, but only began drawing with markers in early winter of 2020. These two pieces were my first explorations of what one can do with markers, and since these, I've enjoyed this medium quite a bit.

Megan Irvine, '20 and Michael Rhoads, '20: Just a couple that decided our first project together would be creating a jellyfish chandelier!

Kelly Jackson, '22: Kelly Jackson is currently going into her junior year at the United States Air Force Academy, where she is studying to be a Political Science major. Kelly calls Vienna, VA her home, but she moved frequently due to her father's military service. Her love for art started at a young age. Kelly likes to spend her free time taking photos and painting. She has been recognized for the three separate murals she painted within her squadron area.

Samuel Krebs, '23: "All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone" – Blaise Pascal. Small town Midwestern Catholic kid slightly disenfranchised with the seeming superficiality of modern secular society; interested in coffee, silent contemplation, philosophy, paradox, and poetic justice. Philippians 3:8.

Andrew Lemke, '21: I picked up a camera the winter before last, enamored by the technical aspects of photography, and a few weeks later, I eagerly published my first photo online, where it was savagely ripped apart. Taking the hint, I then started learning about the art of photography and have been enjoying the expressive qualities of the medium since.

Anna Little, '23: Anna Little is a member of CS-04 from Norwalk, Ohio. Besides studying for her computer science major, she spends her time singing with Cadet Chorale and acting with Bluebards. Her participation in her squadron's unique club, Dead Poets Society, is the source of her motivation to write this poem, and she is delighted to have it included in this year's issue of *Icarus*.

Caitlyn McGarry, '23: My name is Caitlyn McGarry (CS-37) and I'm from Boise, Idaho! In high school, I took ceramics for three years and painting for one. I spent a lot of time focusing on complementary and contemplative pieces with lots of movement. While I don't have much time for making art now, I hope to get back into it while we're all stuck at home!

Taylor Morris, '20: I am an aspiring artist and photographer. Although I have not included any of my artwork here, I hope that my photos are able to convey the way I see the world. I'm hoping to travel to more picturesque places in the future. I post some of my art on my Instagram: @Taylinguist.

Kaitlin Lee Nethercutt, '23: My passion for art started in the sixth grade when I took my first art class. I was fascinated with the 3D-ness of objects that you can create with any medium on any paper/canvas. It helped me later in life by focusing on attention to detail. I have always loved different mediums because I enjoy the challenge they offer.

Robert W. O'Connor, '20: Robert O'Connor grew up outside Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He enjoys baseball, reading, playing music, and hopes to fly after graduation.

Daniel Perry, '23: Hi, *Icarus* Supporters and Literary Enthusiasts! My name is Daniel Perry. I'm currently a 4-dig out of CS-39 (Jedi-Knights) from Clemson, SC. I submitted a poem titled "Memento Mori". The Latin title translates to "remember to die", and I feel like that's fitting because this poem is about cherishing the memories you make, as they quickly fade away. The first line in the poem translates to "Hello, I am you". There exists an internal dialogue between two individuals, but the identity of said individuals is left up to the imagination. I hope you enjoy this piece, and remember: Memento Mori.

CONTRIBUTORS

Savannah Petty, '23: Southern California native. No, not necessarily LA. Loves to play basketball, anytime, anywhere. Avid anime watcher. Loves every Kanye album except for Ye (will elaborate if asked.)

Desiree' L. Reed, '23: I'm from Memphis, TN. I am a FAS Poli-Sci Major and a French Minor. I hope to be an Intelligence Officer as my primary AFSC, and then a Foreign Area Officer in Africa as the years roll by. However, I've always enjoyed art, whether it's music, poetry, or even paintings. I've been writing poetry for years and it has been my go-to ever since. My painting on James Baldwin depicts his overlapping life of conformity and homosexuality like his book *Giovanni's Room*. My poem is about finding a deeper meaning in a simple mundane country life.

Erica Rivera, '23: Erica Rivera is a fourth-class cadet at the United States Air Force Academy, majoring in Astronautical Engineering. She was born in San Diego, CA, then moved to Tucson, AZ, where she was raised with four younger brothers. Erica graduated from Flowing Wells High School in Tucson, AZ. Before entering the Air Force Academy, she spent a year at the Air Force Academy Preparatory School. In her free time, she plays the trumpet for the Drum and Bugle Corps and enjoys photography as a hobby.

Logan Santiago, '23: I'm from South Mississippi but go to school in Colorado now. Took this picture at the 9/11 memorial on a trip with my parents to New England. I've been into photography since about sixth grade and have been practicing over the years, especially for documenting my camping trips, such as the Appalachian Trail, the Florida Keys, and the Boundary Waters in Minnesota.

Chia-Hsiang Shen, '23: This picture was taken on 1 Nov 2019, which was a day that had a lot of aircraft flyovers above the Terrazzo, and some landed on the Terrazzo. So I decided to record some beautiful figures of the dancers in the sky. Of course, the element of FREEDOM is necessary. Aircraft model: USAF CV-22.

Matthew Simmons, '22: Matthew Simmons is a third class cadet from Washington, D.C. He has always had an interest in the arts and began painting as a hobby in high school. He continues to paint at the Air Force Academy to relieve stress and have fun. This is his first time being published in an artistic journal.

Nathaniel J. Stout, '23: My name is Nathaniel Stout. I am from Sterling, Illinois. My hobbies include hunting, fishing, music, golfing, bowling, tennis, running, and photography. I am an aerospace major with a minor in French. My favorite time of the week is when I play drums for my church praise band. God is my strength and blesses me more than I know.

Connell Swenson, '20: I am an English Major in the class of 2020. I will commission directly into the Space Force as an Intel officer. My hobbies include rugby (I played all four years here and was Captain for the 19/20 season), snowboarding, and writing. I will be going to grad school as an English GSP recipient at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, where I will study literature.

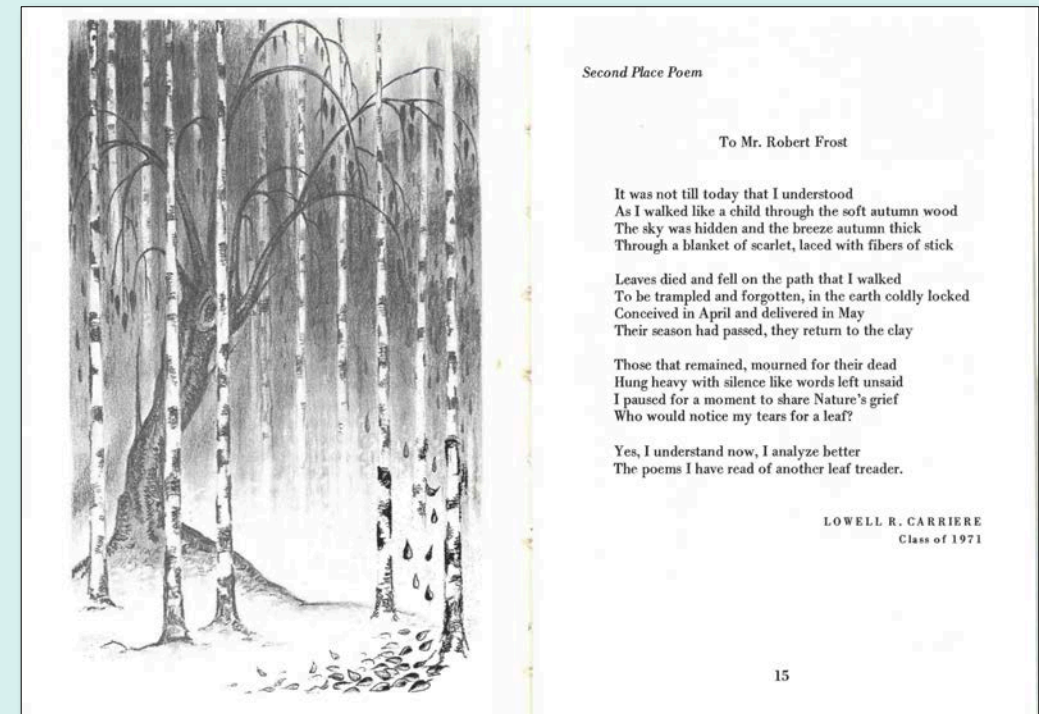
Samantha Thompson, '22: Samantha Thompson is a member of Squadron 9 and competes on the intercollegiate women's boxing team. She is a native of Hughesville, Pennsylvania, a small town located in the countryside where she takes many of her pictures. Samantha is a Legal Studies major with a Spanish minor and hopes to become a pilot upon graduation.

Daniil Tourashev, '23: A Florida native, Daniil is a Foreign Area Studies and Political Science double major and a Russian minor. He is on the Academy's water polo team and is one of the Russian Wing Tutors. After graduation, Daniil plans on working in Intelligence and applying to be a Foreign Area Officer. His hobbies include reading and learning more about the world.

Rachel Werner, '23: Hello! I am C4C Rachel Werner. I am majoring in Political Science and Foreign Area Studies with a concentration in the Middle East. I love learning languages and history, and I spend most of my free time writing, reading, or plotting out my second novel. When I graduate, I want to be a fighter pilot, ambassador, and author.

Jared Wright, '22: Hi, my name is Jared Wright, and I am the Track and Field/Cross Country photographer and videographer. I like to snowboard, make videos, and play with my cats, Forrest Gump and Catniss. I love to play with colors in my photos and reimagine locations; I like to think that my photos not only play upon uniqueness but dramatics as well. If a picture is worth 1,000 words, then make that essay worth reading!

Looking Back: From the Archives



Although the first issue of *Icarus* was published in 1965, it wasn't until 1969 that the journal was re-imagined to focus on creative work after the Department of English held a wing-wide Creative Writing Symposium. Above, see the second place prize-winning poem from the 1969 issue of *Icarus*, digitized as part of the Preserving *Icarus* project through the Department of English & Fine Arts.

Looking Ahead: Icarus 2021



We're hoping to make *Icarus* 2021 our best issue yet! We'll be launching an updated website during the 2020-21 academic year, and we'll be looking for new staff members to join our team. Look out for calls for staff in fall, or email us anytime at icarususafa@gmail.com and we'll add you to our mailing list. We'll be opening submissions for the 2021 issue this fall, and we'd love to publish your work next year!

back cover image:

Lexi de Villiers, "the long walk"
digital photograph



