

# The Blue Guitar



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## Editors’ Note

We fight each day to cling to our natural, true selves — our “better angels,” as poet Robert Feldman writes in “Moloch Revealed,” published in this edition. Our society faces serious issues that we can’t afford to turn away from — not only at our immediate peril, but at the peril of our collective soul. It’s been nine years since we published our first Blue Guitar, and our mission now seems as important as ever. In this edition, artists, writers and poets seek to tackle our serious challenges — challenges that won’t be solved unless we focus our creative minds, spirits and talents. I believe this even more strongly than I did nine years ago: Our art shines a spotlight that provides us a way through the darkness.



Co-Editor  
Rebecca  
“Becca” Dyer

– Co-Editor Rebecca “Becca” Dyer

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Fall 2017

# Wandering, Wondering and Pondering: Growing Up Among the Clouds

## By Chris Stidley

© 2017

**F**ragile, prissy pink blossoms covered the peony bushes at the southern edge of our yard. Lying flat on the cool grass beside them, I gazed up at the soft blue sky and followed the paths of the clouds. On still days in northern Illinois, the clouds would drift like a canoe on a lake rather than a river. Alone in my magical kingdom, I rode the clouds to adventures.

Back on Earth I scampered through the dirt under bushes, climbed the maple tree and ducked under the low-hanging branches of the blue spruce to my hideout. After my wanderings, I emerged with dirt caked on my knees and more dirt tucked in my canvas tennis shoes.

Our yard was one block north of cornfields and three blocks south of the main street. A wide array of plants and animals joined me on my adventures. I scouted for violets, picking them along with the weedy dandelions but leaving the lilies-of-the-valley in their home under a tree. My mother displayed my small bouquets in old salt shakers and vases handed down from her mother.

Forbidden from climbing the maple tree during the robin nesting season, I waited for signs of the young and kept an eye on the ground for jagged pieces of pale blue eggshells. After catching garter snakes, I brought them to school to flaunt my ease with handling them. During the summer evenings, I caught lightning bugs and examined their bioluminescent abdomens.

On summer days the mourning doves cooed from atop the nearby Methodist church, while I, on my front-porch perch, worked through my stack of crossword and dot-to-dot puzzle books or created my own math puzzles. And, of course, I read books, books checked out every other week from the library in a nearby town.

On Sundays my family and I walked past the few houses between our house and the church. I begrudgingly wore my Sunday dress and my one pair of good shoes. Elementary students sat on metal folding chairs in the church basement and sang “Jesus Loves Me” and “Onward, Christian Soldiers.” Weekly lessons included miraculous stories from the Bible, such as the creation and tales of the men who lived for hundreds of years.

By the time I was in third grade, I was puzzling over these accounts. The biblical seven-day creation story appeared to contradict my school textbooks, which covered the Precambrian Era to the present, and I could not forget my cigar box of fossils that included some of my most treasured possessions.

A tété-à-tété with my brother on the steps from the church foyer to the basement provided a more mature perspective. With the wisdom obtained from his additional three years of school, he advised me to avoid a literal interpretation of the Bible. In a minute my concerns were brushed aside, allowing logic and science to remain.

And they stayed by my side as I wandered through the Illinois prairie, with its small-town schools, libraries and churches, even after I discarded the Bible before I could drive. Science and math, like water and air, remained by me as I ventured through life.

For years I have wandered back to the peonies that bordered our yard, even long after we moved away. I can still feel the grass beneath me, from my arms to my legs, and continue to explore with awe the expanse above me. The sky is the place I go to wonder. And to ponder.



Chris Stidley writes about science and life. After many years as a professor of biostatistics, she is now a graduate student in journalism at the University of Arizona.

# A poem by David Chorlton

## Ghost Stories

© 2017

—for Steven DeFrates



David Chorlton is a transplanted European, who has lived in Phoenix since 1978. His poems have appeared in many publications online and in print, and reflect his affection for the natural world, as well as occasional bewilderment at aspects of human behavior. His newest collection of poems is "Bird on a Wire" from Presa Press, and The Bitter Oleander Press has published "Shatter the Bell in my Ear," his translations of poems by Austrian poet Christine Lavant.

I

We lived thirty-eight years  
in a house where a previous owner  
shot his wife in the room we slept in  
to save her from the worst  
at the end.

Sometimes the floorboards  
told stories in the dark  
and a strange mist  
hung in the air, all of which  
added texture  
to the aging walls  
while the shed

in which he pulled  
the trigger for himself  
only rattled when the monsoon winds  
pried shingles from its roof.

II

Who's to recognize the signal:  
knocking at a window  
too high above the street  
for anyone to reach; a picture  
sliding from its nail  
until the glass breaks  
like a shiver leaving someone's spine;  
or an inadvertent gesture  
such as picking up a book  
the moment the author  
was drowning? You don't have to believe  
for them to be  
true.

Continued on page 5



# David Chorlton

Phoenix Artist



**"Avignon"**  
Watercolor on paper  
1978

# David Chorlton

Phoenix Artist



**“Duernstein”**  
**Watercolor on paper**  
**1978**

I rode the European railways a lot during the time I lived in Vienna (1971-78) and enjoyed painting watercolors. The ones here date from my last year in Europe, 1978.

- David Chorlton

# David Chorlton

Phoenix Artist



**“Laval”**  
**Watercolor on paper**  
**1978**

# David Chorlton

Phoenix Artist



**“Luçon”**  
Watercolor on paper  
1978

# Promises Made, Memories Kept: Following the Space Race

By A.E. Perkins

© 2017

I can track my first memory of watching a NASA rocket launch to March 1965. I was a primary-school student transfixed by the story unfolding on the television set in the corner of our family living room. I watched, in real time, the countdown to the launch of NASA's first two-man space capsule. The astronauts on board were first-time space traveler John Young and veteran Gus Grissom, who hailed from my home state of Indiana. Grissom grew up in the south-central part of the state, where stonecutters mined boulders that were refined to form the sleek Empire State Building in New York City. Now, I watched as Grissom and Young sat atop a towering rocket, and the countdown dramatically proceeded on the television screen.

*T-minus three minutes...two minutes...ninety seconds.*

I was too young to even recognize that the rocket carrying the Gemini 3 spacecraft was originally an intercontinental ballistic missile meant to rain atomic death and destruction on people living on the other side of the world. I was too enthralled by the drama to think about how there was no air in outer space, and the astronauts could perish instantly if a seal loosened or a random part broke inside their complicated machine. I only cared about the televised spectacle of sending men into space, and how I was able to watch it happen, as it happened.

*Ten seconds...five...zero.*

From the success of Grissom and Young's flight through the rest of the Gemini program, I followed every aspect of each NASA mission. The astronauts aboard Gemini 6

survived an aborted launch and later triumphed in a first-time feat of orbital mechanics with a second manned spacecraft, Gemini 7, tracking and flying alongside each other in a test of technology needed for a trip to the moon. Neil Armstrong made a dramatic decision to bring his out-of-control Gemini 8 capsule to a safe splashdown in the Pacific Ocean. With every space flight, I collected NASA press releases and documents, and faithfully followed each landing on the moon by the Apollo program explorers.

My interest in the space program waned after the last moon landing, as it did for many people. I was a teenager by then, and my interest in space science turned toward describing it for others. I found myself fascinated with travel. I was also intrigued by news correspondents, and writers like Ernest Hemingway. It wasn't about exploring the moon anymore, it was about how I could tell others about the experience as lived by the astronauts, scientists and engineers.

Members of my family noted my interest in the space program, and a reporter for the local newspaper even wrote a feature story about me following the moon missions. When we talk about it almost 50 years later, it is the aspect of our childhood we remember most: watching history in the making. Now we consider what impact science storytelling will have on today's teenagers, who may watch astronauts make a return voyage to the moon. Will young people see another moon landing as a great new adventure to spark their collective imagination? Or will they consider it a been-there, done-that story, which will have little impact on their day-to-day lives?



A.E. "Tony" Perkins is the morning radio news anchor at KUAZ NPR 89.1 in Tucson. He is also working toward a Journalism M.A. at the University of Arizona after more than 25 years of reporting in newsrooms across the United States. Tony spent four years in Beijing, China, as the host of a sports television show during the 2008 Olympic Games, and worked as an international news correspondent based in Los Angeles. Tony's the author of two blogs, one focusing on historic events of the early 1960s. In his spare time, he created his own YouTube channel dedicated to international play-by-play sports announcing.

# Not of a Feather: Altruism Beyond Species Lines

By Hannah Hindley

© 2017

I had come to this part of Alaska to traverse glaciers and sleep under quiet stars, so no one could have been more surprised than I to find myself caught in midday Anchorage traffic somewhere between a Jack in the Box and a strip club, with a Cheez-It box strapped into my passenger seat and a warm body inside of it. I crunched to a stop at the low-slung Bird Treatment and Learning Center, tucked my hair behind my ears and walked my box into the office.

Inside the box perched a baby bird, mottled and silk-soft and as light as a handful of Cheez-Its. When I had first unsnarled it from the bushes at the edge of the Ship Creek Storage lot, I knew I was taking steps that couldn't be retraced, that a baby bird, while light in the hand, is not a thing to pick up lightly.

Two adult white-crowned sparrows harassed me as I unknotted the vines from around the baby's leg. They screamed and fluttered wildly at my head. I won't lie: Their ferocity entirely scared me, but I knew that if I didn't do this work, a cat would, or starvation, or some other agent that would be hungrier or slower and certainly less gentle than I. So I snipped the tight snaggle, lifted the struggling chick and carried it away from its parents for what I knew would be forever.

As I filled out paperwork at the bird treatment center, the woman who had greeted me came back out to let me know they'd have to put the bird down—leg dislocated, part of a wing missing. "There's no way it will survive, so we'll put it out of its pain. It's a pine siskin, by the way."

"Are you sure?" I asked.

"Absolutely. We get lots of them in here this time of year."

I didn't challenge her—my birding knowledge is shaky at

best.

Later, though, when I searched for images of adult pine siskins, they looked nothing like the birds that had been attacking me at the scene. White-crowned sparrows have brilliant white racing stripes across their heads. Pine siskins have none.

It pulled uncomfortably at my heart a little—to imagine that the baby bird had been misidentified before being killed. It was like burying someone under the wrong headstone. I was certain that the protective adults had been sparrows; the rescue worker was confident that the baby was a pine siskin. It seemed like an impasse, but the more I thought about it, the more I wondered: Is it possible we were both correct?

"Birds of a feather flock together," the saying goes, but in biomes around the world, cooperative behavior extends beyond species lines. Especially in winter, mixed flocks of ragtag birds band together to forage. My research didn't land me with any stories about sparrows being good neighbors, specifically, but it's clear that unrelated birds can work together. It's entirely possible that the white-crowned sparrows in that parking lot weren't parents at all, but were, instead, sacrificing their own safety to protect a vulnerable stranger.

Up till that day, my birding had been limited to combing my finger across stiff pages of *Sibley's* in search of a proper ID. After coming in contact with that broken little bird and its warlike allies, I realized I had a lot more to learn about the possibilities beyond tidy species lines. Perhaps the best question we can ask ourselves isn't who is correct or who is wrong, but what do we still not know?

Hannah Hindley is a wilderness guide and a nonfiction writer currently pursuing her MFA in Creative Nonfiction at University of Arizona. She is the recipient of the Thomas Wood Award in Journalism and the former writer in residence at the Sitka Center for Art and Ecology. Her writing can be found in newspapers, anthologies, and literary journals including *River Teeth*, the *Harvard Review*, and the *Press Democrat*. Hannah graduated from Harvard University with degrees in English and American Literature and Language and Organismic and Evolutionary Biology; her writing bridges the space between those studies, exploring the poesy of natural systems and our human relationship with a changing planet.



# Swarna Sitaraman

Chandler Artist



“Green Gables”

Watercolor

2014



Swarna Sitaraman is an avid artist and crafter and a mother of two artistically inclined children. Born and brought up in a small town in India, she grew up with interest in science, music and art. Learning basic drawing and pencil sketching from her father from the age of 10, she started exploring the next easily available medium – fabric paints (acrylics) in her later teens under the vigilant guidance of her father and exceptional support, encouragement from her mother. She got her bachelor’s in applied sciences from Thiagarajar college of Engineering. Her interest in architecture soon lured her into pursuing a career in interior designing in India for a brief time. After the birth of her son, she moved to the U.S. with her husband. The scenic mountains of Denver enticed the full-time homemaker into using her spare time to get back to painting. She taught herself to paint with other mediums and when they moved to Arizona, art became an integral part of her life. She started teaching at the local art stores and city classes. She donates art works to many local charities. Her works adorn some residences and restaurants in the valley. Though she enjoys experimenting with other styles of art, she always tends to fall back to realism. Sharing art with all age groups, she hopes that it brings a difference to people’s lives as they get in touch with their inner child. She aspires to get better as well as she learns from her mistakes and is positive that art would be the medium that would continue in the journey of her soul, for lifetimes to come. Her website is [www.spiceupaz.com](http://www.spiceupaz.com).

# Swarna Sitaraman

Chandler Artist



**“Delightful Diwali”**  
Watercolor  
2015

On a visit to a traditional house of Kerala, India, called “tharavaadu,” a fresh coat of moss on the elaborate wood carvings and patterns in the eaves and gables after the torrent of monsoons rains, almost cheats you into thinking that it is peeling green paint in “Green Gables.” The dark moonless sky lit bright with the burst of fireworks, as India celebrates its festival of good’s victory over evil is a favorite holiday with memories of family gatherings, yummy food, new clothing and religious practices in “Delightful Diwali.” Refraction of an ornate temple tower in dew drops on the foliage, petals, stamens, anther and all, of a brilliant pink hibiscus, is an artistic angle of the place of worship in “Dewy Jewel.” Steps of the local temple and the ornately carved granite elephants would speak a million stories if they could, as they witness many share their stories to others. The beautiful carvings of adjacent pillars and grass laden grounds are etched in memory as you step down the memory lane in “Stepping Down the Memory Lane.” As the monsoons flood all the lakes and ponds, watching the brightly colored birds swoop in to catch the new school of fishes is a treat and good past-time in the countryside in “A King’s Catch.”

- Swarna Sitaraman

# Swarna Sitaraman

Chandler Artist



**“Dewy Jewel”  
Watercolor  
2017**

# Swarna Sitaraman

Chandler Artist



**"Stepping Down the Memory Lane"**

**Watercolor**

**2016**

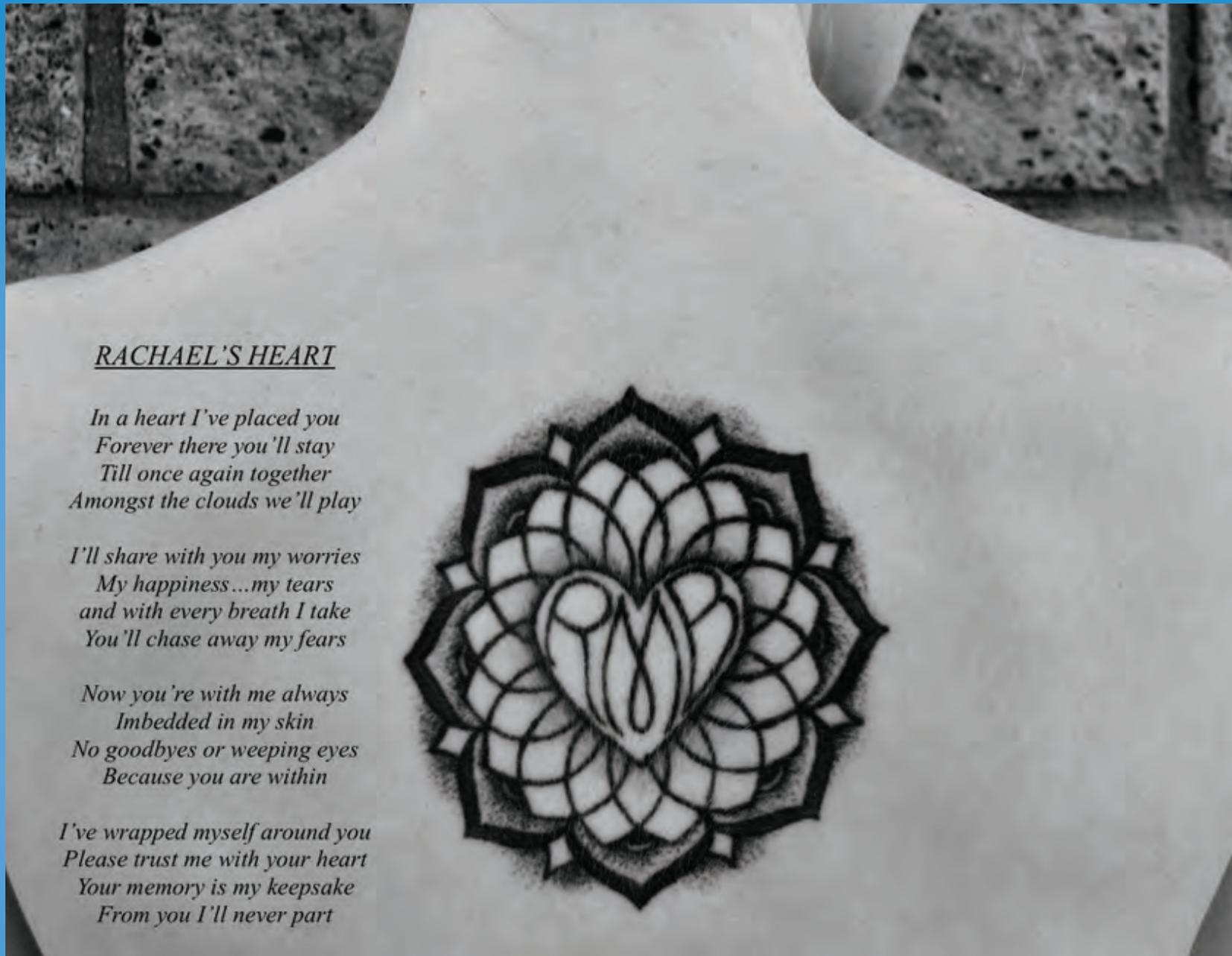
# Swarna Sitaraman

Chandler Artist



**“A King’s Catch”**  
Watercolor  
2017

# A poem by Sherry McKenna



## RACHAEL'S HEART

*In a heart I've placed you  
Forever there you'll stay  
Till once again together  
Amongst the clouds we'll play*

*I'll share with you my worries  
My happiness...my tears  
and with every breath I take  
You'll chase away my fears*

*Now you're with me always  
Imbedded in my skin  
No goodbyes or weeping eyes  
Because you are within*

*I've wrapped myself around you  
Please trust me with your heart  
Your memory is my keepsake  
From you I'll never part*



Sherry McKenna is a wife extraordinaire and mother of four with a passion for "creation through inspiration." Being the creative mind behind SherryJDesign, artistry flows in unlimited mediums through her photography, writing, sewing, needlepoint and glass recreations. Sherry believes beauty comes in all shapes and sizes, which is evident in her photo and poem of daughter Ashlee McKenna's tattoo named "Rachael's Heart." Rachael passed away from stage 4 colon cancer at the early age of 25.

# 3 poems by Christy White

## Reading a Used Paperback at Midnight

© 2017

I could tell you that the small dents,  
bent corners are a testament -- NO *witness* --  
to the passage of another reader.  
But I didn't think of that as I turned  
pages and read aloud to the calico cat  
curled at the threshold of my front door.

In the pages, very faintly underlined,  
another's attention placed like a bookmark,  
old and soft, forgotten.

*Here. Read this.*

I feel the smallest breath at my ear as I  
do read the words and perhaps I hear  
the catch of breath that this moment on the page  
illuminates the meaning of the whole  
book.

I pause to admire the phrase, the line  
drawn beneath the words and how  
it takes courage to love this book so much, yet  
never sign it into your possession,  
leaving an imprint as a blessing.



The poet writes: "I have been composing poetry since before I could write. I was lucky because my mother recognized that I was speaking in poetry and wrote down my children's haiku in her journal. Once I started writing, poetry and short stories became an essential part of how I interpreted my world. I was first published when I was twelve in Pegasus Junior, a journal for children edited by the Kentucky State Poetry Society. My mother, a poet as well, was one of my greatest fans. My poetry has been published in a number of regional journals, Veil: A Journal of Darker Musings, Laughing Dog, Lucid Stone, and Sandcutters are some of them. Some of my poems have won awards, many I have shared at open mics and poetry readings in Arizona, Oregon, Kentucky, Tennessee, New Mexico and Scotland. I am active in community poetry organizations, including the Arizona State Poetry Society, and send out a monthly Poetry Missive of events in Arizona. My goal for a very long time has been to integrate the circles of poetry so that we know ourselves to be voices that are heard by one another as well as our communities. I returned to higher learning several times, looking for the right program that would help my writing flourish. Wilkes University's Low Residency Creative Writing Program was a perfect fit and, in June 2017, I graduated with my Master's of Arts in Creative Writing with a Poetry Focus."

# Blessing

© 2017

*The Way of Ho'oponopono*

Over the weekend our brother  
becomes more himself  
as we sit on the bare concrete patios  
enjoying each other's company  
and the transforming weather;

one day sunny and warm,  
cold and breezy the next.  
We listen to him without clouds  
of judgment coming  
between one sentence and the next.

Twice this year we'd almost lost  
our brother. Now, "I want to tell you  
something true," alerted us that this was not  
going to be easy to speak or hear.

His illness had altered his mind,  
put him in the confines of a hospital,  
restrictions of this rehab center;  
so now, coming back, telling the story  
of what he experienced felt delicate,

tenuous as the changing weather,  
able to break us over the rocks of "Why?"  
or to leave that unanswerable question  
in an empty, quiet place.

I am sorry.  
Please forgive me.  
I love you.  
I thank you.

After the first visit, my sister, his twin  
and I agree to walk the Alamo Wash  
hoping to find something lost.

We are greeted by two Harris hawks  
sparring and wheeling in the clouded,  
cooling skies above us.  
We palm a few small stones that hold  
meaning in their shapes and colors,  
but nothing else and sadness  
follows us like a dog looking  
for home.

I am sorry.  
Please forgive me.  
I love you.  
I thank you.

# On This Earth We Call Home

© 2017

The homeless have been with me,  
next to me, in my own family.  
My youngest brother once lived  
at the corner of Sweetwater and 32nd Street  
in a rabbit warren of large boxes and old carpets  
laid on the ground. From October  
to New Year's he and his family sold  
pumpkins, firewood, and Christmas trees  
making only enough to rent the corner  
and buy food.

My sister was homeless, too, ravaged  
by a mental and emotional breakdown,  
she gave her toddler son to her daughters,  
went on a walkabout in the city  
and in the desert until the confetti  
of her life began to settle.

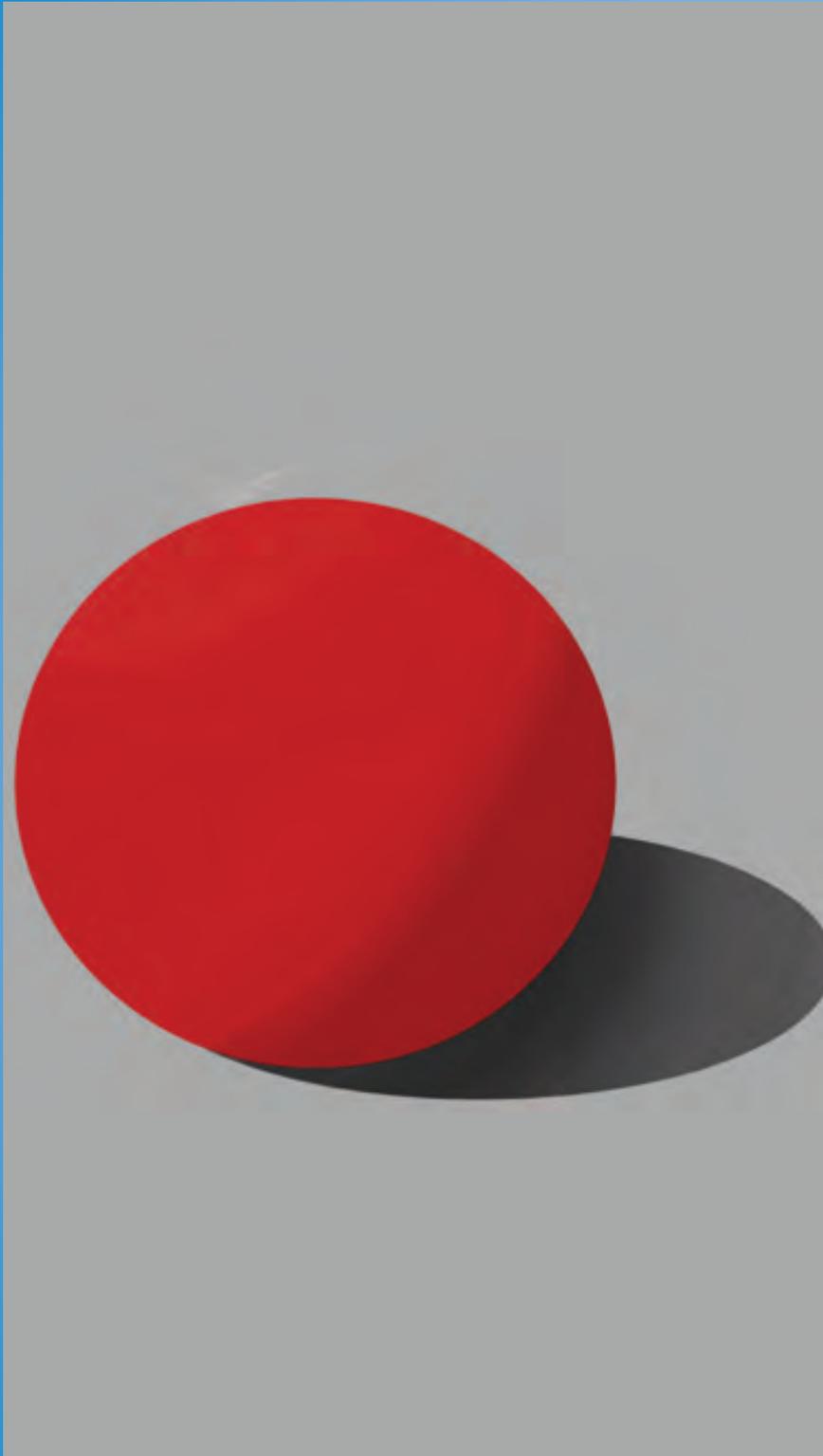
There is the brother who was rehomed  
again and again and again, but between  
the agains he was barely here on this planet.  
I have seen his shadow on more corners  
than I can count.

My short intervals of homelessness  
taught me how quickly everything changes,  
how downhill isn't just hard on the knees,  
it's hard on the heart, too.

I am ashamed I turned you away  
when there was room in my house.

# Rachel Woosley

Tempe Artist



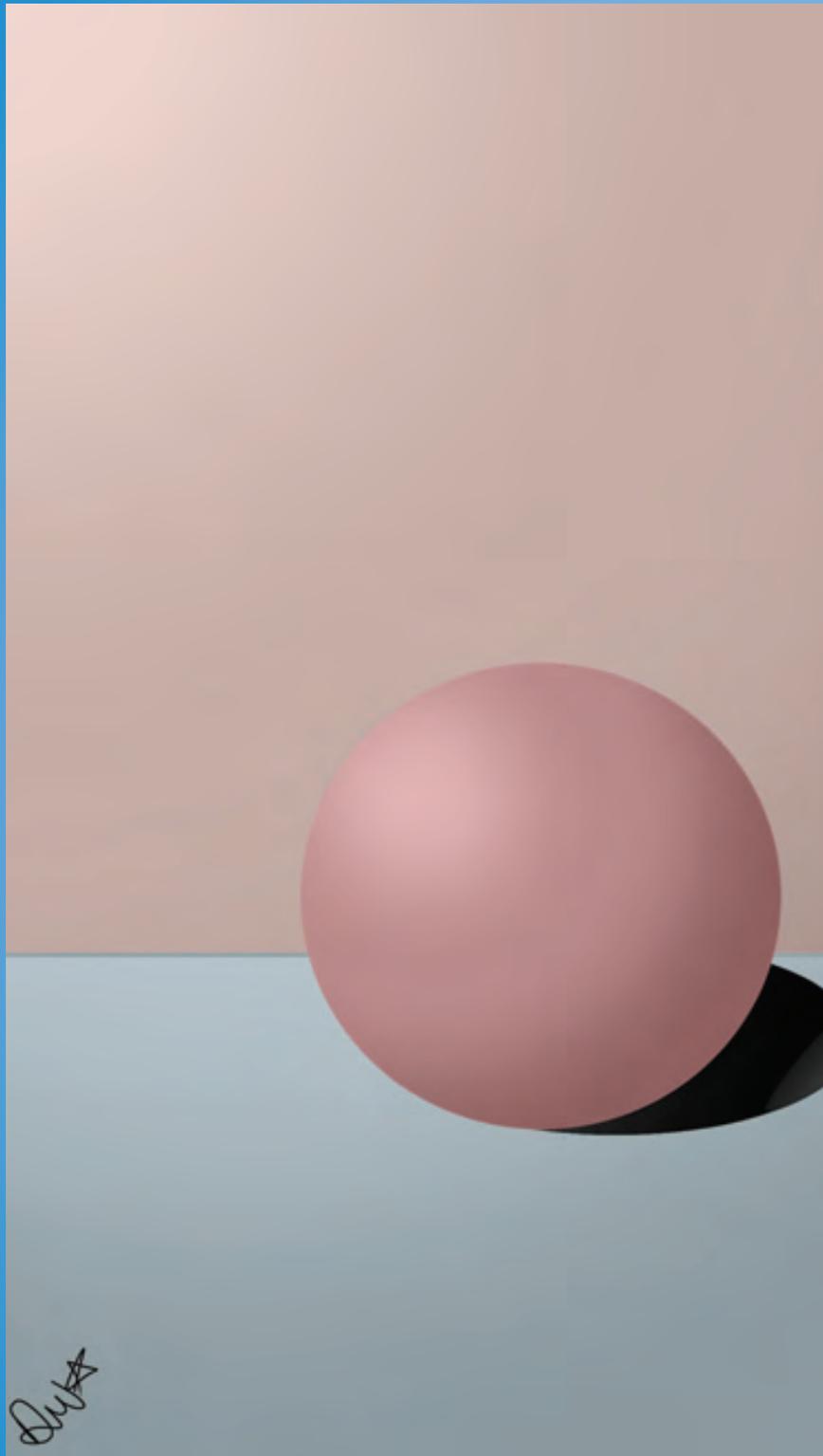
**“The Red Ball”**  
Digital art  
April 21, 2017



Rachel Woosley is a freshman at New School for the Arts and Academics in Tempe, Arizona. When she is not studying, Rachel enjoys drawing, writing, playing video games and reading. She has recently completed her scuba diving certification and looks forward to many scuba trips with her family. When she graduates from high school, Rachel wants to study art in college.

# Rachel Woosley

Tempe Artist



**“Pink Pearl”**  
Digital art  
April 22, 2017

“The Red Ball” is a commentary on the artful facade we portray to the world through social media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter versus the reality of our existence. This piece was influenced by Dorothy Parker’s short story “Lady With a Lamp.” There is a complexity to Parker’s work that is like an iceberg. Underneath a seemingly simplistic story is deep and subtle meaning. Like “Lady,” “The Red Ball” allows the viewer to glean their own unique understanding of the work. “The Pink Pearl” is a representation of the dichotomy of a simpler childhood juxtaposed against an uncertain future. In short, it represents the teenage years. There is an ethereal luminosity (childhood) in the three-dimensional shape of the pearl. The shadow cast by the pearl represents the dark uncertainty of the future (teenage years). I created the original digital art piece, “The Girl With a Green Mug,” as a way to illustrate my emotions regarding life. The way the girl’s face is hidden behind the mug signifies her uneasiness with social interaction. Her dark glasses signify her alienation from mainstream high school society. She is in the world, but separate from it.

- Rachel Woosley

# Rachel Woosley

Tempe Artist



**“The Girl With a Green Mug”**  
Digital art  
2017

# The desert through another lens

By Carly Oseran

© 2017

I completed my first hike strapped to my father's chest. Even though I have no recollection of this sunny day 21 years ago, the picture that sits on my mother's nightstand of a bald, smiling baby attached to her father is all the proof needed to show that a strong love for the outdoors has always been a part of me.

The story begins with two young hikers who fall in love. My parents met as hiking guides for a spa and resort in Tucson, Arizona. They bonded over their passion for rugged trails, large, furry four-legged friends and the warmth of the desert sun. After five years of dating, they were married, and my birth followed less than a year later.

Naturally, their combined love for the mountains rubbed off on me. My parents still live in my childhood home, located less than half a mile from the entrance to Sabino Canyon. The national forest that tourists from around the world long to see was practically my backyard growing up.

Waking up to a vivid view of the Catalina Mountains' sharp peaks was part of my morning routine. So was picking up garbage scattered along the street by a pack of javelinas enjoying a late-night snack. It never occurred to me that any of this might be out of the ordinary until four years ago, when my uncle's family came from Jamaica to visit. This was the first

time my uncle's family had ever been to the Sonoran Desert, and while their visit taught them a lot about where I am from—it taught me a lot more.

As my mom prepared dinner Sunday evening, she asked me to take our guests on a walk through our neighborhood. She told me to be a good tour guide and point out all the wonders of the desert. I was confused at first, because to me, there were no wonders. I thought to myself, "Everything the desert has to offer is ordinary stuff, nothing special."

However, this changed as soon as my tour group and I stepped onto the gravel of my front yard. My naïve teenage self was shocked when I saw the excitement that these visitors had over cactuses and lizards. Their eyes widened with curiosity as we stopped every 10 feet or so to take a picture and analyze the desert's beauty.

They started by asking simple questions. "What is that short, stubby cactus called?" "And what about the bird with the long tail that just ran across the road?"

But as the questions became more complex, I realized that just because I started hiking before I could walk does not make me a master of the desert. I couldn't tell my visitors which desert animals were endangered or what laws are put in place to protect the plants and wildlife. In fact, my familiarity blinded me from seeing the diverse lifeforms that surround my home.



Carly Oseran is a senior at the University of Arizona studying journalism. She is a Tucson native and loves the outdoors, anything food related, and traveling. She is grateful to have grown up in a place that encompasses all of her passions, but she hopes that after graduation she can continue to explore her interests as a freelance writer who travels the world and shares her experiences with others.

# Where Mistakes Matter

By Tim Dabrowski

© 2017

I remember crouching down, staring cockeyed into the gaping wound on the stallion's rear leg. The night before, he shoved his leg through his gate and twisted in until it snapped.

Now, he stood, on enough drugs to kill a man. His head touched the floor, his eyes glazed and knees weak. The mat under his hooves was stained bright yellow, and the operating room at the equine hospital reeked of iodine.

My older brother, Michael, knelt on the mat, a surgical mask wrapped around his face and clean white gloves reaching halfway up his arm. He was holding a curved needle in one hand and a long string of wire suture in the other. Michael grabbed two pieces of brown skin on the horse's leg and clumsily shoved the needle through the flesh. The fishhook needle sliced through both pieces of skin and pierced the open sore. I flinched and had to look away as blood leaked onto the ground.

Gary, the head veterinarian in charge of the operation, stood scrutinizing Mike's every decision. He was a brilliant, white-haired man with squinty eyes and smile lines around his lips.

This time, Gary reached down into the wound and touched the exact spot where the suture needed to be applied. Once again, Mike missed, digging the hook deeper and deeper into the bloody abyss.

I remember feeling a sense of guilt for the horse. Gary could have closed that wound blindfolded, and Mike's shaky hands seemed to do nothing but hurt the animal. It pained me to see my brother struggle, but I came to the realization that trial and error is the only way to achieve proficiency at anything. There comes a first time for everything, even in medicine.

The only difference: The stakes are higher.

Mike tried one last time and succeeded. His fingers worked awkwardly with the instruments, tying and twisting the wire until it was finally taut against the horse's delicate brown skin. His gloves were saturated with blood, which leaked down onto his work boots and discolored jeans. Sweat slowly dripped down his forehead, and the tension seemed to drain from his red face. He let out a stifled sigh of relief as he handed the instruments to me.

It was my turn to learn.

Writer Tim Dabrowski is a second-year student at the University of Arizona studying nutritional sciences with the goal of making it into medical school. He is the academic chair of his fraternity, Theta Delta Chi, and played varsity football for four years in high school. He spends all of his free time either at UofA clubs, at the gym or with his girlfriend, Hannah.



# Princess and the Mouse

By Paula Ashley

© 2017

**P**rincess is a black and white, long haired, alley cat. As a kitty, she would go outside with me. My backyard is a Zen garden of rocks and bougainvillea accented by brittlebush and a couple of ash trees. Here in the Valley of the Sun, temperatures soar into the hundreds early in May. One day, Princess stepped out upon the rocks, picked up her right front paw and looked back at me with an expression that clearly asked why had I set her down on a frying pan. She promptly backed up, turned and ran back into the house. She has never set foot outside again.

Nonetheless, Princess is a mighty warrior. She takes charge of all things moving inside the house. This usually means my feet are in constant danger of her unpredictable rapacious attacks. I always wear shoes so I can just lightly tip her upside down without a scratch. She acquiesces that I am the master of my feet. Roaches are not so lucky. She tackles them, scoots them across the floor bouncing them through several rooms until she brings them to their untimely death. Then she sits on her haunches and peers over her nose at the carcass. She let me know early in this game that it is my job to remove the carcass. She will not move or let the carcass out of sight until I have

removed it from her royal premises. There have been times when I had to get down on my knees and crawl over to her to inspect the carcass because I could not see the transparent scorpion blending totally into the beige carpet while standing.

One night I woke up about three in the morning. I suspected there had been a scuffle in the living room. I turned on the light and donned a warm robe. Walking down the hall toward the kitchen, sure enough I saw Princess standing at attention over her water bowl with the proud look resulting from a successful kill. I shrieked. The water in the bowl was a ghastly brown. There was a furry thing floating upside down in the water. A mouse! I thought I was going to throw up. Then I remembered the new play toys I had just given Princess — seven toy mice made with real fur in brown, black, gray, and white. Knowing my job, I cleaned up the mess and set down a clean bowl of fresh water.

I laughed to myself as I went back to my bedroom. Years ago, when I came downstairs one morning, I saw a mouse drowned in a jar of water placed in the middle of the kitchen doorway. I swallowed my urge to throw up that time too when I saw my little boy peeking around the corner from the living room as proud of his kill as Princess was of hers.



Paula Ashley is a retired software engineer who earned her MFA from Queens University of Charlotte. She lives in Glendale, Arizona, with her husband and an abundance of birds that hang out on the solar fountains in their backyard. Paula usually writes poetry but on occasion has tried short prose memoir pieces such as “Princess and the Mouse.”

# Judith Rothenstein-Putzer

Scottsdale Artist



“Diosa Verde”

Mixed-media/alcohol transfer with pen and ink  
2015

Judith Rothenstein-Putzer has been working with alcohol transfers enhanced with pen and ink as a spin off her love of photography. This mixed media technique is a hybrid between printmaking and photography heightened with ink to create dynamic linear and color effects in each piece. She majored in art at Brooklyn College (City University of New York) with honors courses in architectural design. There is where she also discovered the magic of photography. She went on to do graduate study in occupational therapy at Columbia University. As an Occupational Therapist, she always included art as a therapeutic tool. When not at work or tending to her family, her camera was always in hand. Relocating to Arizona from New York about 16 years ago, she decided to rekindle her need for a creative outlet by taking art workshops in Scottsdale and Phoenix. She explored collage, mixed media, alternative photographic processes and printmaking, but always came back full circle to photography. While transitioning from a film camera to digital, she discovered the alcohol transfer process and has been expanding on the technique ever since. She has been an artist-in-residence at The Gallery at el Pedregal and her works have been exhibited at many local galleries including the Shemer Art Center, the Vision Gallery, the Emerson Art Gallery, the Holland Center Gallery and the Desert Foothills Library Gallery. Rothenstein-Putzer was in a “Two Woman Show” at ASU Gammage (Tempe) which ran through Oct. 25. She has also become a “core” artist at the new Fearless Art Works (Carefree). Contact the artist at 480-836-0952 or [ArtworksByJudith@aol.com](mailto:ArtworksByJudith@aol.com). Her website is [www.artworksbyjudith.com](http://www.artworksbyjudith.com).



# Judith Rothenstein-Putzer

Scottsdale Artist



**“BFF”**

**Mixed-media/alcohol transfer with pen and ink  
2015**

“As children, our job is to play. Through play, we discover the world around us by engaging in multisensory experiences. On our path to adulthood, we tend to become submerged in the day-to-day demands of work and relationships and often lose sight of the joy of discovery. I was smitten by the magic of photography the first time I set foot in the dark room. Sometimes I take pleasure in capturing the moment for its form or color. Other times I try to expand the boundaries of reality. In recent years, I have stepped out from behind the lens to create mixed media pieces. Returning to the multisensory experiences of youth, discovering a new technique with each piece..... What joy!”

- Judith Rothenstein-Putzer

# Judith Rothenstein-Putzer

Scottsdale Artist



“Jardín de Cactus Mexicano”

Mixed media/alcohol transfer with pen and ink  
2016

# Judith Rothenstein-Putzer

Scottsdale Artist



**“Jewel Of The Night”**  
Mixed-media/alcohol transfer with pen and ink  
2015

# Judith Rothenstein-Putzer

Scottsdale Artist



“Thunderhorse”

Mixed-media/alcohol transfer with pen and ink

2015

# A poem by Leisah Woldoff

## Thumbs-down Mentality

© 2017

Everyone's a critic  
A thumbs-down mentality  
Can't keep it to themselves  
They need the whole world to see

They're king of their keyboard  
They're ruler of their room  
A tyrant typing madly  
Spreading anonymous doom

Why do we have to be this way?  
Why can't we think of something nice to say?

So much whining and complaining  
About trivial troubles  
Ignoring pandemonium  
Unleashed outside their bubbles

Every thought you think of  
Does not need to be expressed  
Trampling on good intentions  
With no one to clean the mess

Why do we have to be this way?  
Why can't we think of something nice to say?

I'm not saying I'm not guilty  
I'm not claiming to be right  
I'm just sick of the viciousness  
On my screen each night

I believe we could do better  
Or maybe I'm naive  
But don't you want to improve the world  
At least once before you leave?

Has civility been forgotten?  
Has empathy lost its voice?  
Next time you choose to share your views  
Remember you have a choice.



Leisah Woldoff has been writing lyrics and poems since the 1980s. She is a freelance writer and editor who lives in Phoenix with her husband, three sons and one dog. Visit her blog at [amedleyofmoments.com](http://amedleyofmoments.com).

# Social Retirement

By David Anderson

© 2017

**K**alista's snug home's front door creaked as she swung it open wide for her parents. "We're home."

Their thick winter coats were a rare sight this summer morning.

Jim, Kalista's spouse, greeted Grandpa Ambrose. "Good to meet you again. It's been several years," and shook his hand. "Ouch, were you in a freezer?"

Grandpa rubbed his palms together. "It takes longer to get our blood flowing after awakening now."

Jim murmured, "How's the house?"

"Residents may not tell. We wish to stay out longer this time."

"I need to keep your visit to just the party."

"Irene and I want to stay warm instead of returning to that house."

Jim and Kalista argued on this without agreement. She demanded her parents stay involved in their life and Chloe's life. Jim knew they were safer in the house with the other elderly.

"Our small place isn't big enough for us, let alone adding you two."

Their three-bedroom home was full of furniture collected by family members, for Chloe.

"Kalista, your new home is so cozy," added Grandma Irene.

Jim announced, "We're lucky to have even this place."

Kalista called out, "Chloe, your grandparents are here for your birthday party."

Chloe leaped from her backyard swing. She held out one hand with her fingers opened. "Grandma, I'm five today!"

Grandma Irene embraced Chloe with an enveloping hug only a grandmother can give. "Chloe, you're too big for me to pick up," answered Grandma Irene.

Grandpa Ambrose grabbed Chloe and tossed her into the air. Chloe giggled as she flew. He choked as he snagged her above

the floor. "Chloe, you're such a big girl now."

Chloe tugged on her grandmother's arm. "Grandma, help me get my birthday party ready!"

\*\*\*

**C**hloe's neighbors arrived with birthday gifts crowding out her home. Jim covered his ears and sought a quiet corner to ride out the noisy party. The children, led by Grandpa Ambrose, enjoyed the party games. They played each game and replayed until every child won at least once. Kalista appeared from the kitchen with a pink-frosted birthday cake blazing with five candles. The children sang several rounds of 'Happy Birthday' with each round louder than the last. Chloe took a deep breath and blew out the candles to the cheers of her friends. Kalista sliced the cake while Grandma Irene delivered each slice to an anxious child. The noisy racket died while the children ate their cake slices. Kalista raced against the sugar now streaming into the children's veins to set the gifts onto the table. Chloe opened the smallest first. She hugged the large box of crayons. The next few gifts were princess-themed coloring books. Chloe stacked the coloring books beside the crayons. Next was a pair of pajamas. Chloe threw the boring pajamas behind her and grasped the largest present. She tore off the wrapping to show a marvelous tea set. Chloe screamed with delight as everyone cheered.

Each child yelled when the party's end until they received their gift bag and a warm hug from Grandma Irene.

"This place is an absolute mess," said Jim, picking up the gift wrap.

\*\*\*

Continued on page 34

David Anderson was born in Fargo, North Dakota, at the peak of the baby boom. His family moved south to sunny Albuquerque, New Mexico, two years later. The race to the Moon spurred him into space-travel tales that led to an enthusiasm for hard science fiction. He lives in Phoenix, Arizona, with his spouse, Debbie.



Continued from page 33

Kalista and Irene finished cleaning the kitchen while Grandpa collapsed into the love seat. Chloe sat cross-legged on the den floor and unpacked her new tea party set and poured pretend tea into five cups. Irene sat next to Grandpa and Kalista took her chair. Chloe carried a small, pink, teacup teetering on a saucer to each family member.

“Grandma, is my tea party fun?” Chloe sipped from her teacup.

“It’s delicious!” said Grandma Irene, taking a sip.

“We should do this more often,” said Kalista, taking a sip.

“We clean every day,” Jim whined.

“Jim, Chloe wants more visits from her grandparents,” pleaded Kalista.

“Each visit costs money and leaves our tiny home a mess,” said Jim with a grimace.

“Our contract has free awakenings for long weekends and each family birthday,” said Grandpa Ambrose.

“I told you visits are free,” pleaded Kalista.

“I heard the lines were long with higher fees,” grumbled Jim.

“National holidays cost extra since the massive crowds force the house to add staff,” said Grandpa Ambrose.

“But holidays cost too much,” complained Jim.

“That’s an investment in Chloe,” said Kalista.

“Our home can’t handle that many people,” said Jim.

“We could help out. We enjoy the cleaning or cooking,” said Grandma Irene.

“My parents used that excuse once. Then they spent the weekend arguing with me.”

“Those simple activities make us alive.”

“It’s still no. No matter how much you help, our home won’t grow.”

Chloe ran to her grandmother and hugged her arm. “You can’t go away again.”

Grandma Irene smiled at her granddaughter. “Chloe, you’ll see us at your next birthday. We should get back soon or they’ll rush putting us to sleep and we don’t want that.”

“Don’t take them away,” Chloe shouted and stamped her feet. “No, no, no!”

Kalista picked Chloe up to calm her. She wrapped her arms around her mother’s neck and sobbed. Kalista stroked Chloe’s hair. “Jim, Chloe needs her grandparents in her life.”

“Nothing has happened to my parents along with the others. Why can’t your parents be there?”

Grandpa Ambrose patted Jim’s shoulder. “Son, I’m not trying to cause troubles, but are your parents asleep better for them or for you?”

“Those houses keep the elderly safe. They avoid accidents and disease sleeping in those houses.”

“They’re just sleeping in that awful house!”

“It’s getting late,” said Grandma Irene.

Kalista choked. “Jim, please take my parents back to the house. I need to know they’re safe.”

Grandpa Ambrose threw on his coat and held out Irene’s coat for her. Grandma Irene gave Kalista a warm hug and kissed Chloe’s head. “See you both on our next visit.”

\*\*\*

The sleeping house was more a warehouse than a retirement home. Its windowless slab walls made it a monolith. A sextet of high-tension electrical power lines streamed into one side of the house. Six massive diesel generators lined the opposite side.

“You’re back so soon?” asked Althea, the nurse at the station.

“We had a birthday party for our five-year-old granddaughter. It was fun, but now it’s over,” replied Grandpa.

“Please sign in and take a seat in the lobby.”

The lobby was not a luxurious waiting room for a successful doctor. Plain tile floors and metal chairs were straight out of a bland government building. Grandpa hung their winter coats next to the array of multicolored coats lining the rack. Grandma and Grandpa sat on the uncomfortable chairs and waited for the doctor while Jim paced around the empty lobby. The nurse called out their names.

“Please follow me to exam room four.”

The nurse recorded their vital signs into their medical charts. She left the exam room. “The doctor will be in soon.”

Grandma and Grandpa sat and waited again. Jim paced around the smaller examination room. A young, tall, dark and handsome doctor entered.

“We’ve got the cute one,” whispered Grandma Irene to Grandpa Ambrose.

“I’m Dr. Faruq. How’re we feeling today?”

“It was chilly after awakening, but we’re good now,” said Irene.

“How long did that last?”

“Only two hours.”

Dr. Faruq made notes in their charts.

“Let’s check your heart and lungs.” Dr. Faruq warmed his stethoscope with his breath.

“Ladies go first. Inhale and exhale. Again.”

“Now you sir, inhale and exhale. Again. Once more.”

He recorded those results into their charts. Doctor Faruq keyed-up the intercom. “I have two returning residents for pickup.”

The reply came at once. “Doc, we’re too busy to tuck two ice cubes...”

Dr. Faruq stabbed off the intercom. “We’re short staffed today, so I’ll take you.”

Jim asked, “Can I follow?”

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Fall 2017

“You’ll only get in the way.”

“My wife and their granddaughter wanted me to make sure they’re okay.”

“There is nothing for you upstairs. The upper floors only have the medical equipment.”

“I want to see they’re safe.”

“You must sign the liability release form first. See the nurse at the front station. We’ll wait here.”

\*\*\*

Jim stood in front of the nurse’s station again. “The doctor sent me back here.”

“The exit door is to your right.”

“I’m going up with Chloe’s grandparents.”

“The doctor’s allowing you on the sleeping floors?”

“I need to sign a release first.”

Althea rolled her desk chair back to the last file cabinet and pulled the bottom file drawer till it stopped. She retrieved one dusty form out of the drawer. After shaking the dust off, she handed Jim the thick form and said, “Complete your personal information and sign at the bottom. Pens are on the counter.”

Jim wandered over to the divided counter with chained pens. He scribbled his name, address, and nine-digit Social Security number. He read the disclaimer and added his signature and the day’s date.

Althea reviewed the form and flipped through to the fifth page. She took another pen and pointed to the last page. “The first notice forbids you interfering with the staff. The next forbids photographs of any kind on the sleeping floor. Last, is a gag order which forbids discussion of sights and actions seen on the floor. Please initial here, here and here.”

\*\*\*

The fifteenth floor, as the other floors, was full of equipment. Row after row of sleepers packed the floor. Each chamber was sealed to protect the patient with an adjacent panel that displayed a unique nine-digit number. Most cell displays glowed green while a few cells displayed their number with a yellow glow. On one sleeper, surrounded by a crowd of staff in surgical gowns and masks, the display flashed in bright red. Dr. Faruq led them on a meandering path away from that red sleeper towards their empty cells. They continued on passing row by row.

“Miss, AA23 is yours and you are right next door, sir.” Dr. Faruq pointed to two beds.

The narrow assemblies resembled a casket more than a comfortable bed. Irene lay on the bed and waited for the doctor to connect her to the sleep chamber’s monitors. Dr. Faruq clicked a heart rate monitor onto Irene’s index finger. Next, he tapped a body temperature strip to her forehead.

“Your vital signs are stable. Are you ready to sleep?”

“Wait.” Ambrose kissed Irene.

He turned and gave Jim a warm, firm handshake. “Give Kalista and Chloe our love.”

Ambrose squeezed into his sleep cell and waited as the doctor connected him to the monitors.

“Your vital signs are stable. Are you ready to go to sleep?”

Ambrose and Irene glanced over at each other one last time, “Yes,” they announced together.

“Good, I’ll tuck you in now. Lie back and relax. Close your eyes and breathe. This will only take a few minutes.” Dr. Faruq pressed buttons on Grandpa’s sleeper panel and hurried over to Grandma’s cell and pressed the same buttons.

The covers hummed as they closed over the sleep cells. Neither occupant showed any visible signs of distress or panic as the covers sealed them. As their covers closed, Grandma called out to Grandpa in a soft voice. “Goodnight, Ambrose.”

With a slight clunk and a hiss, the covers sealed them inside the cell. After the covers closed, a frost formed at their feet and moved up over their faces, coating the interior. Dr. Faruq updated their charts as their chamber monitors displayed their numbers in green.

“Follow me back to the lobby. Remember, don’t discuss what you have seen with anyone.”

Jim stared at the cells. “Is everyone here fast frozen?”

“Of course, the regulations are specific.”

“Do they dream in there?”

“Our equipment only records their vital signs, not thoughts.”

“What happens to them in there?”

Dr. Faruq looked around and whispered. “These residents are wasting away.”

“Are they forgotten and left here?”

“Few residents ever leave. Most of them never awaken.”

“They’re just suffering in silence.”

“It’s not too bad. They’re asleep when it happens.”

“I can’t face Kalista and tell her they’re safe.”

\*\*\*

Jim opened the front door quietly to avoid waking Chloe. She was still sleeping in Kalista’s arms. Her eyes were red and swollen. “Are they alright?” Kalista wiped away her tears.

“Yes, they’re fine now.” Jim held the door open for his parents and for Grandma Irene with Grandpa Ambrose. Irene gave Kalista and Chloe another huge hug. “It’s great to see you two so soon.”

“Mom, you’re back! This is a wonderful surprise.” Kalista woke Chloe up. “Your grandparents are back.”

Chloe lifted her head and rubbed her eyes. She looked around and smiled. “My best birthday ever!”

“But Jim, you always said our home was too small!” Kalista said with a grin.

“Asleep in cold storage is not truly living. We’ll find the way for them to live here with us.”

# Nancy Romanovsky

Glendale Artist



“Canyon Patterns”

Oil  
2017

Nancy Romanovsky, an Arizona native, began oil painting at an early age and later studied art at Arizona State University, the Scottsdale Artists' School and privately with several American artists. In 2012, Nancy left her career in graphic design and marketing to pursue painting full time. Her paintings have rapidly become popular due to their unique style. Honest and non-pretentious, they expose the beauty of nature through the combination of light and shadow and serendipitous plays of color. Nancy's paintings are held in corporate and private collections in the USA, Canada, Brazil, Hungary and Italy. Her hobbies include hiking and tree farming. She lives in Glendale, Arizona, and is a board member and Signature Member of the Women Artists of the West. She is also a member of Arizona Plein Air Painters, Sonoran Art League and Plein Air Washington Artists. She can be reached at [nancy@nancyromanovsky.com](mailto:nancy@nancyromanovsky.com) and 480-518-7930. Her website is [www.nancyromanovsky.com](http://www.nancyromanovsky.com).



# Nancy Romanovsky

Glendale Artist



**“Caught in the Middle”**

**Oil  
2017**

I discovered my passion for painting at a very young age. I love the process of starting with nothing and creating something uniquely beautiful and honest. I paint landscapes and explore the quiet essence of being in nature. Aspens are a key element in this theme of dappled light and abstract shapes of reflective color. The groves capture individual differences of each tree while depicting the stand as a cohesive colony, as a brotherhood. My chosen medium is oil, with variety of brushwork, thick and thin, loose and detailed. It gives me the opportunity to portray the breadth and scale of nature. My love of hiking fills me with constant ideas for visual nourishment of paintings yet to come.

**- Nancy Romanovsky**

# Nancy Romanovsky

Glendale Artist



“Highlight of My Day”

Oil  
2017

# Nancy Romanovsky

Glendale Artist



**“Storm’s Reveal”**  
Oil  
2014

# Nancy Romanovsky

Glendale Artist



**“Winter Shadows”**  
Oil  
2015

# 4 poems by Robert Feldman

## Death by Suicide

© 2017

solitude  
dust  
fossils of family footprints  
lost, trails from the mind's sweat,  
drunken blood

dark cold rain falling  
cheapens any will left to survive, drenches  
washes away the sweat,  
bitterness  
shackling  
our eyes,  
enslaving our voices  
devouring will

only between dreams  
chapters in books  
is death reprieved  
when breaths quicken  
behind all the rubbish...  
razorblades and bullets...  
death will not allow alternatives  
options, such as brilliance  
logic  
or some sweet memory,  
and death never allows visions  
improvised free rivers,  
riffs—  
never permits gardens,  
perhaps weeds,  
pastels,  
fruit  
perhaps bitter,  
tears swimming along innocently,  
perhaps vibrantly

no, this death incarcerates the heart,  
strangles any inclination to imagine,  
any passion to fly,  
the urge to walk—  
to seek sweet shelter...  
this death violates the child inside us all!



Born in Paterson, New Jersey, Robert Feldman was inspired at an early age by members of Paterson's literary tradition, most notably Louis and Allen Ginsberg and William Carlos Williams. As a young adult while living in St. Louis, he organized various poetry readings, produced and hosted a community issues news hour and a biweekly bebop jazz radio program on KDNA-FM. It was during this time his interest and admiration for the Beat Generation flourished. Robert was instrumental in publishing some of Arizona's most influential writers such as Drummond Hadley and Michael Gregory, and in 1980, collaborated with Lawrence Ferlinghetti on his Bisbee publication, "Mule Mountain Dreams." During the '80s and '90s, he participated in dozens of poetry readings around the country. Now years later, he continues to write, paint, and play tabla, besides working with high-school students as faculty advisor of the Park Vista Writers Workshop. The body of Robert Feldman's writing and painting can be accessed at [www.albionmoonlight.net](http://www.albionmoonlight.net); he can be reached at [rfeldman@gmail.com](mailto:rfeldman@gmail.com).

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yes, and this death flowers no angels  
kids playing tag in driveways  
hanging out late after baseball practice  
opening and closing random lockers  
pasting carnations into scrapbooks,  
pigtails swinging  
inkwells leaking  
school bells banging  
bonging

death only leaves behind puddles,  
sinkholes,  
hurtful feckless rumors  
unbelief becoming gloom,  
leaves behind those “wh” questions  
haunting we survivors,  
sommambulists  
torpidly searching for  
splinters to pick up,  
where to place them,  
how to rebuild a life lost,  
leaves behind strangled voices that linger  
eternally unanswered  
echoing back at every turn  
tragic questions without mouths—  
answers minus zero

so this death will linger  
long past the crowds  
beyond countless holidays  
cardless anniversaries,  
way past gated rooftops  
clotheslines  
fresh baked bread  
green blueberry fields,  
and at last this loss  
will solidify around our eyes  
till we cannot recognize  
our own visions profound,  
and will seal our purple lips  
till we may not ever taste honey drops,  
and will mute our listening ears  
till we cannot hear our parents’ laughter  
or recognize our baby’s first song...

snow dripping from a tree  
wending along into the gutter,  
and it is only then  
when we shall at last understand  
that we must not understand such things  
we cannot understand,  
because within this death  
Life is  
always there  
in the way

# Folds In The Same Garment

© 2017

so much older then  
too much older  
to begin again,  
to be discarded,  
dumped—  
hello, goodbye

so much older then  
absolute brokedown palace  
patched with malice  
deck of cards  
missing jacks and aces-  
sterile, invisible, abstract bard,  
ready to burn,  
lifeless,  
ashes fill this corporeal urn  
this pyre of ice,  
fire, flesh—  
reborn twice

so this time younger now  
heading for that hunger now  
distracted by possibilities now  
shadowed by some hint of light now  
fantastic strange kicking out constellations here  
this time around

this time continual miracles  
electric streetlights shining  
so much younger  
absolutely audacious avenues,  
cool cathartic youth-smashing teeth  
trashing truth,  
so much younger here  
suddenly breathing air underwater,  
exploring,  
then blowing past borders,  
deploring order

yeah, this splash painting forming  
colors me now,  
draws from what came before  
burgeoning into this fervent rainstorm  
of busy being born  
now younger now  
then older then,  
next rebel becoming  
some mirror facing a mirror  
rekindling those long-deserted possibilities

# mojado

© 2017

saguaro sweet rain  
thirsty for centuries  
desert beholden  
that exact taste  
each drop sizzling  
crashing the sand below  
patchouli creosote garden  
blossoms once more  
renewed, guided by monsoon winds  
blundering past the Catalinas,  
pounding,  
laughing soaked children  
dancing those annual rhythms  
hearing that certain summer fragrance  
blowing across Sonoran July skies  
climbing scorpion porches  
surging washes and ditches  
nesting vultures with doves filling our eyes with electric colors  
blasting  
thunder stomping the bass drum universe  
saturating our souls into humility,  
even prayer,  
until at last we appreciate the parched dearth  
the months we must wait  
so our lives may be again released

for the next unbroken chain...  
this coming on anyhow savage miracle

# Moloch Revealed

© 2017

*“I’ve seen their ways too often for my liking  
new worlds to gain  
my life is to survive  
and be alive for you”  
—Paul Kantner, Jefferson Airplane*

entrapped by a box  
plugged in tight  
sealed in sweat  
souls stuffed  
deeply inside these modern lives,  
but faking it  
this time...

oh box,  
you clench, maintain our gaze  
squeeze our minds  
till our choked red eyes tear,  
till our throats  
scream:  
Worship  
Moloch!

trapped inside that box  
no exit,  
disguising obvious addiction  
instead pretending promises  
of a more efficient age

decadent box  
all I choose not,  
it is not my soul inside  
it is my face you hold!  
youtube box  
feigning our heartbeats  
trapping our breaths  
so rooted  
concealed inside your blackhole

Moloch grants no exit...

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instead, we exist in a space between  
practice playing mutually staggering foreigners  
devoid of empathy  
blind stricken prisoners  
dull to intimacy  
midnight grave robbers  
caught stealing discarded body parts

and in that space between  
Moloch box robotic thrives  
Palo Alto fruit box,  
a Trojan Horse  
leaking its poison cider,  
and Moloch presumes to fill that void:  
electric battery charging off dada googled-out sugar rush  
substituting counterfeit  
multitask pseudoconversations,  
distractions,  
Moloch, mind grave robber,  
spirit seducer  
hijacker of the heart!

(oh my darlings,  
there is no substitute for your sweet kind eyes  
reading my breath,  
anticipating each heartbeat...  
your breath, a bluebird's—  
Moloch sacrifice box  
no substitute  
for that person over there)

then my darlings,  
unplug Moloch—  
strangle its nefarious lifeline  
excise those thumbs flying across keypads  
madness through the night,  
hey, please,  
implore your better angels  
to reject those boxes—  
Moloch is not  
some sentient creature conceived  
to sit by fires  
to embrace our hearts,  
to celebrate our lives—  
Moloch decadence  
only translates us into  
make-believe masters  
stricken demigods,  
dizzy bewildered fools  
ready to be sacrificed  
and ultimately devoured by the fire

# Mary May Haile

Scottsdale Artist



**“Adobe”**  
Collage, acrylic on canvas  
February 2017



The artist writes, “I am a mixed media artist living in Scottsdale, Arizona. Originally from the Pacific Northwest, my interest in art began at the age of 6 creating paper doll clothes using my own designs. The southwest light, sky and landscape now feeds my creativity. I can be found on Instagram at ARTPROPELLED (see Mary May). I also create sculptural pieces, works on paper ready for framing, and jewelry.” Her e-mail address is [santafenmary@gmail.com](mailto:santafenmary@gmail.com).

# Mary May Haile

Scottsdale Artist



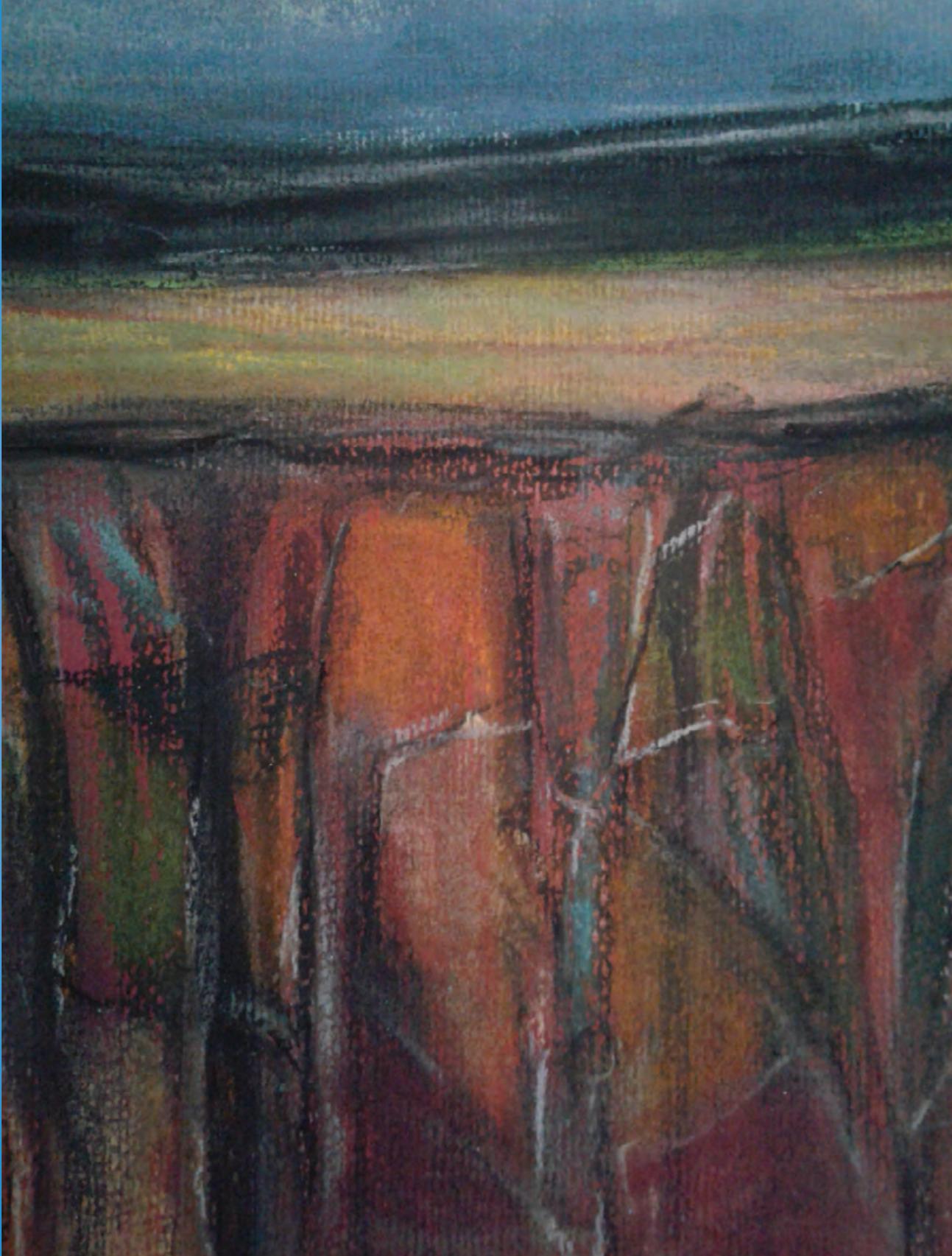
My contemporary abstract paintings begin with a concept and then laying down color and texture. I paint with acrylics and other mediums in a spontaneous way, moving back and forth across the surface, making marks, introducing color, shapes and lines. I like to explore until the piece evolves. I work from photographs, sketches and found materials. The direction a piece is going is not always clear in the beginning as the surface and colors change that often don't resemble the original piece. My methods are experimental and some pieces have layers of paint with previous layers showing through. This technique also brings happy accidents. I enjoy creating works on paper in pastels, watercolor, acrylics, and pen and ink.

- Mary May Haile

**"Copper Canyon"**  
Collage/acrylic on wood  
June 2017

# Mary May Haile

Scottsdale Artist



**“Canyon Walls”**  
Pastel, acrylic on paper  
August 2017

# Mary May Haile

Scottsdale Artist



**"Chili Pepper"**  
Collage/acrylic on canvas  
July 2017

# Mary May Haile

Scottsdale Artist



**“Teddy Bear Cactus”**  
Pastel, acrylic on paper  
May 2017

# 5 poems by Christine Stoddard

## The Portrait Among Marigolds

© 2017

Cuando mi abuela tenía 40 años,  
she posed for her portrait en la plaza  
under the shade of an ochre cathedral  
and a set of dying palm trees  
skinny as skeletons.

Mami says Abuela fluttered her lashes  
for a beloved local artist,  
but refused to smile for fear that  
her dentures would plop out  
and land in her fleshy lap.

Today I look at Abuela's sad eyes—  
eyes blacker than jaguar fur—  
as they stare at me from the face  
of a pastel likeness  
that sits on Mami's dresser.

When I ask, “¿Eras una mujer triste?”  
Mami's eyes startle like the eyes  
of a jungle cat caught by a flashlight.  
She pats the dried marigolds  
that encircle the portrait y me dice  
que todas las mujeres están  
tristes de vez en cuando,  
pero *estar* no es *ser*.



Christine Stoddard is a Salvadoran-Scottish-American writer and artist. In addition to being the founding editor of Quail Bell Magazine, she is the author of “Jaguar in the Cotton Field” (Another New Calligraphy), “Ova” (Dancing Girl Press), two miniature books from the Poems-For-All series, and other titles. Her work has appeared in anthologies by Candlewick Press, Civil Coping Mechanisms, ELJ Publications, and other publishers. The poems in this issue appear in her chapbook, “Mi Abuela, Queen of Nightmares,” published by Semiperfect Press.

# El Búho

© 2017

The solemn saguaro stands guard outside my bedroom window.  
It only moves when a monsoon takes hold and trashes it in the wind.  
This pompous cactus king does not scare me, but I fear what it holds.  
A tiny black búho lives in its chest and screeches like a nervous heart.  
It never seems to leave, even when storms spill inkwells into the sky.  
Sometimes I wish I could see myself through that bird's ancestral eyes.

# Becoming a Bad Girl

© 2017

Insert stories of rebellion here  
with late-night drinking in the desert,  
fast fucking on scorpion nests,  
and rancheras so loud that  
their sound travels for miles,  
all the way back to Mexico.

A million beer cans  
beneath a million stars.  
Lizards sip beer and  
conk out at cacti feet.  
Coyotes dance  
only as drunks do.

I am the founder of  
the alcoholic feast,  
as I am the founder of  
all Sonoran pleasure.  
Say hello to my sin  
and my sin will  
introduce you  
to yours.

The formula is simple:  
Steal your mother's car,  
rip your T-shirts into styles  
that frame your tits,  
and drive too fast  
for the cops to catch you.  
The blur of brown breasts  
will stun them, anyway.

Make your nest  
deep in the rocks,  
deep in the sands.  
You bring the party  
and the jaguars  
will join you.

Border patrol  
is not invited.

# Garfield at Midnight

© 2017

The streetlamps are people,  
as tall as sheriffs or  
Saguaros right before  
the swing of an ax  
sends them hitting ground  
and stirring up  
one-thousand dust clouds.

But Saguaros do not have eyes  
And streetlamps have eyes.  
Sheriffs have eyes, too,  
but they are red.

Red as desert flowers  
in the startle of June.  
Red as my legs  
turned that night,  
the night I stared  
into the sheriff's eyes,  
seeking a glimpse  
of his soul.

But he had no soul.  
He had a cock,  
as pink and squirming  
as earthworms  
drowning in the rain.

“Girl!” he slurred  
and I slurred something back.  
I can't tell you what,  
but I hope it was obscene.

Obscene because at that hour,  
in that black alley,  
with that much lust  
coating his throat,  
his thoughts must have  
danced to the tune of obscenity.  
And I knew I had to fight fire with fire,  
a fire with flames higher than  
any tire fire in Garfield.

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I tried to run,  
but running is no good  
when you are rubber-legged.  
I threw pebbles,  
but what good is  
throwing pebbles at a jaguar?  
He bared his teeth,  
teeth bigger than my head.  
Skull-crushers.

I might have screamed  
“Socorro.”  
Or I might have  
whimpered it.

All I know is that once  
he pinned me down,  
only my heart moved.  
It became a hummingbird  
on the verge of death,  
beating faster and faster,  
so fast that it nearly stopped.

Batting and  
kicking  
and pushing proved pointless.  
Jaguars are all muscle  
and I am all prey.

He thrust in ways  
I knew would leave bruises.  
He thrust in ways  
I knew would leave tears.  
He thrust in ways  
too agonizingly loud  
for Garfield not to hear.

And he kept thrusting  
and thrusting  
and thrusting

until he slunk back  
into the shadows  
as satiated jaguars do.

No one answers the cry  
of the brown girl bleeding  
in the alleyway.  
She must rise in solitude.

# No Sleep till Tucson

© 2017

Two shooting stars passed  
before I brushed myself off  
and stumbled out of  
that alleyway.

I slunk through  
the same shadows  
as the jaguar who had  
made me his prey.

I tried to divert my thoughts  
of sore inner thighs  
with thoughts of that city  
that hovers just north of Mexico.

Take me anywhere but Phoenix,  
anywhere than where  
he pushed me to the ground  
and stung me like a scorpion.

I swiped my mother's car keys  
from the huddle of  
cockroaches in the kitchen  
and got behind the peeling wheel.

I took the crescent moon  
for company on the highway.  
She sung to me as  
I replayed the rape  
in the cinema of my mind.  
The coyotes kept their distance,  
though I heard their cries  
and wondered which of them  
might encounter  
a jaguar that night.

Passing two early morning  
hours is long enough to  
sober up and pass into  
a sleepy dream land  
where you can trick  
yourself into imagining  
you were never attacked.

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Except your cunt  
tells another story.

The wounded one  
must drive on.  
The wounded one  
must keep talking  
to the moon.

I might've dozed off  
if it were not for the pain.  
My back was still raw  
from scraping against  
the bed of rocks  
where my rapist  
threw me.

My knees burned.  
My elbows burned.  
My chest burned.

Until I went numb  
and lost grip of the wheel  
and nearly hit a Saguaro.

"You will live!"  
I screamed—  
not to the Saguaro,  
not to the moon,  
but to myself.

Then I saw Tucson  
splayed across the desert  
like I was splayed  
across the alleyway.  
Or maybe it was conquering the desert  
as the sheriff conquered me.

But that was not  
what I came to see,  
so I turned around with  
a roadrunner's haste  
for Phoenix,  
where I would  
rise again.

# The Flowers of Suffering

By Curt Robinson

© 2017

A little-known legend comes from the Sonoran Desert that borders Mexico and Arizona. The legend is so old, so obscure that the eldest members of the families there never heard of it. The town where it comes from has long since crumbled to dust and returned to the dry land. But if you're troubled in the land where the tall cactus march up mountainsides, you might wish for such a legend. If you feel anguish, there's hope that such a legend lies hidden in promise somewhere in the secretive mountains and valleys.

Guillermo's thin legs burn as he nears the top of the ridge, but he still steps carefully to avoid sending any rocks noisily down. When he reaches the top, he crouches, and hides behind an outcropping of rock. He brushes back the scraggly black hair from his eyes and squints in the evening sun at the scene below.

A wild burro lays dying in the sand of the canyon—too weak to stand. Despite the dangers of mountain lions, or wolves, or even coyotes, it sits and rests its snout in the gravel, waiting quietly for the end.

"Not yet," Guillermo whispers. "Here she comes."

A wagon pulled by two horses rumbles up through the canyon alone. It's driven by a striking girl. Guillermo can make out her straight black hair—dark and shiny like the feathers of a blackbird. Her delicate face has never known pain; no harsh thought has left its tracks behind on her innocent skin. The sun shines through her simple, white cotton dress revealing the outline of her body. It's the kind of body an older man would ache for the chance to trace with his fingers. But at 15, Guillermo knows there's no such hope—especially with the beautiful Pilar de la Pureza. He still smiles, though; this trip into the canyon is worth it.

Pilar jumps out of the wagon, and she struggles to pull down a long wooden plank from the back, making a ramp. Next, she grabs a water gourd and walks toward the burro.

"Easy, easy." She speaks quietly. The burro shifts and starts, but it cannot rise.

Pilar places a hand on the burro's head; the burro stops its struggling.

"It's alright," she continues.

Pilar strokes the burro's head as she pours some water from the gourd into her hand. The burro puts its muzzle into her cupped hand and quickly laps up the water.

"She's never going to get that burro into the wagon," Guillermo whispers.

She sits with the burro, pouring more water into her hand. She talks to it: "It's been hot these days, I can see why you would run into trouble, but your luck is not good Señor Burro. There is a pool of water not far from here—you were so close. It's alright, though; I'll get you home and take care of you."

She strokes its mud-caked fur, scratching it behind the ears.

"You'll like it at my home. There are so many other animals that I have found. There is a fox, a coyote, many birds, and even a burro just like you."

The burro's ears prick up; it places its muzzle in her lap.

"That's it," she encourages. "Come with me."

"This isn't going to happen." Guillermo's mouth hangs open.

Pilar de la Pureza wraps her arms around the mule's mane; she presses her forehead against the burro's face.

"Come on. You can do it," she urges.

The burro shivers as it rises.

"This way, there you go," she encourages.

Pilar leads the burro to the back of the wagon. She wraps her

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Curt Robinson has lived in Arizona for over 40 years, and has taught Second and Third grade in public schools for the past 20 years. He has a degree in Journalism from NAU, and a Master's in Curriculum and Instruction from ASU. Curt enjoys trail running, hunting, fishing and camping when he's not being a husband and father. His teenage years and subsequent experiences as a parent of two teenagers have provided quite a bit of writing material for young adults. The desert provides inspiration, and the setting for many of his current stories. You can learn more by visiting his website: [www.curtrobinsonwriting.com](http://www.curtrobinsonwriting.com).

arms around his neck.

“There is a comfortable blanket for you. Come here.”

The burro follows Pilar up the plank into the back of the wagon. She lays out a woolen blanket and sits. He lies down on the blanket.

“Good boy,” she coos.

In a minute, Pilar starts her horses pulling the wagon back down the narrow canyon trail.

Guillermo gasps. “Madre de Dios.”

The next day finds Guillermo back at the family smithy in tiny San Cristobal. The ever-present heat of the fires means another day spent sweating, tending the fires while his father works the metal.

“GUILLERMO,” his sweaty, hulking blacksmith of a dad shouts. He thrusts a white hot horseshoe into the water with a rush of hissing steam. “Tell Salazar his horse will be shod soon. He is in the cantina.”

Guillermo rushes outside, and scans the single dirt road of San Cristobal. He sees the sunlight that falls down on the buildings with their peeling paint. There’s the familiar store, the corral, but not much else. Still, there’s a reason to eagerly look up and down the street. He searches for her, this is the time she often shows up in town on errands for her family—the de la Puzas. She is the one person in town everyone knows is destined for something special. Guillermo is disappointed ... she’s not in sight, and this means no break from the boring monotony in this little, rundown town.

He hurries through the cantina doors, and hears a voice say the familiar words:

“Madre de Dios.”

The words mean ‘Mother of God’ in Spanish, and Guillermo knows the man saying this is commenting on Pilar’s beauty—a popular topic amongst the ever present, seemingly never-moving men in the cantina.

“I was riding out to feed my cattle,” one leathery rancher begins. “It was evening, and the sun was low, and it shone on the gravel, and sparkled just like Pilar’s eyes do.”

“Si.” The other men agree.

“I was out bird hunting,” another man chimes in. “The sky was so blue, and the wispy clouds hung up there, and those clouds looked just like her hair.”

The other men nod their heads in chorus.

Still another man confesses: “I was riding in the river bottoms, and I saw the cottonwood trees, and their soft, white bark reminded me of her skin.”

“Si.” They agree.

Guillermo weaves shyly through the large men, self-conscious about his own diminutive size. He’s younger than

Pilar by four years and smaller than any suitor of hers by almost a foot; but he can still be a silent member of her group of admirers.

“Señor Salazar, your horse will be ready soon.” He delivers his message, then scurries out of the intimidating cantina.

He squints when he comes back into the sunlight, making one more hopeful scan for Pilar—and there she is, just yards away! Guillermo watches the men she passes hunch over almost imperceptibly as if they’re punched in the stomach by an unseen hand. That is the effect she has on so many.

Guillermo freezes for a moment staring, wondering, and fearing to talk to her.

“Madre de Dios,” he mumbles.

“Hola, Guillermo.” She waves to him.

Panicked, he is frozen for a moment. *Did she notice me staring?*

He looks down at his feet. “Hola, Pilar. What brings you to town?”

“I’m going to the corral to get some soft oats. I found a wild burro in the canyons. He’s half-starved, and I’m nursing him back. But he’s not ready for hay yet.”

“You found a burro this time.” Guillermo tries to act surprised.

“It’s good that you help them.” He smiles.

He scrambles for more conversation. “The canyons—they’re beautiful this time of year, and hot. Beautiful and hot.”

Pilar’s eye’s widen. “You go to the canyons too?”

Guillermo looks down again. “Sometimes,” he admits, not wanting to reveal his secret spying. He cuts the conversation short.

“I must be going back to my father. Adios, Pilar.”

“Adios,” she replies.

*Whew. That was close.*

Guillermo hustles back to his father, back to the hot dreariness of the smithy. He doesn’t notice the three men who clatter into town on their dusty horses. They dismount, and shake the dust off themselves as they tie their horses out in front of the cantina. The residents of San Cristobal stare—they know that strangers who venture into this desert are uncommon, and they are often trouble.

Sanchez, and his partners, Gaspar and Juan, washed the blood off their hands and faces before coming to San Cristobal, but they still reek of the evil from their last deadly robbery—if only the innocent residents could sense it. This little town is an ideal place to celebrate their escape from the posse searching for them.

“Perfecto!” exclaims Sanchez.

They saunter in and pull up to the bar. The bartender pours

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three shots of tequila. They grab their glasses with fingers and dried blood under their fingernails.

“Salud.” The men toast one another, slamming the empty shot glasses on the polished wood.

“Again,” Sanchez commands.

The bartender grimaces when he pours, because each time he pours, the strangers get a little louder, and a little more obnoxious. Their curses burn the ears of the locals, and the strangers hurl insults at the townsfolk as well. A few men leave the cantina, but it’s not for good; they soon return with grim faces and a few more friends.

Guillermo is stoking the fire when a man bursts in to see his father.

“Come quick! There’s going to be trouble in the cantina!” he urges.

Guillermo’s dad turns to him. “Keep this fire hot. I’ll be back soon.”

His father grabs his pistol and belt off the peg on the wall, and cinches the belt tight with his belly spilling over the top. He rushes out but stops to turn and point at Guillermo.

“You stay,” he commands.

Guillermo kicks at the floor in disgust. *Still too young to be thought of as a man.*

Sanchez and his partners don’t notice the trickle of men gathering in the cantina. They’re feeling drunken invincibility after their escape—although men and women were gunned down unarmed; they still think they’re steel for having the guts to pull their triggers.

Sanchez slaps his hand on the bar. “One more,” he bellows.

“I’m . . . I’m sorry. No more for you.” The bartender stutters.

“The last man who told us no didn’t turn out too well,” Juan threatens.

“One more—you pig!” shouts Gaspar.

“No,” the bartender says flatly.

The three men jump up suddenly from their chairs, reaching for their guns. But they freeze before they draw because they hear a familiar clicking sound. It is the click of the hammers of over a dozen rifles and pistols being pulled back into the firing position. The bandits turn to see close to 20 men with guns raised. Sanchez and his two friends may be evil, but they aren’t stupid. They carefully put their pistol belts on the bar, and meekly raise their hands.

“Lo siento mucho (I’m very sorry),” Sanchez says as they silently walk out of the cantina. Each of them is silently praying they will make it to their horses and out of town before they are either gunned down or lynched by the men.

Young Guillermo rushes to the door of the foundry in time to see the men flee town. “Adios, cabrones,” he mutters to

himself. The men of the town are satisfied they are rid of the rude visitors. They walk back laughing into the cantina, believing that their troubles are over.

Sanchez, Juan, and Gaspar quietly snicker as they ride out of town because they have more rifles and pistols on their horses. Now, they can continue their robbing and murdering.

If Pilar de la Pureza knew of the events in town, she might not have decided to take a walk to the canyons. She feels the warm breeze on her face as she watches a red-tailed hawk lazily trace through the invisible thermals on the air. She sees the golden summer sun blasting away low on the horizon, turning the tiny leaves and thorns of the desert plants into soft gold. Pilar doesn’t notice the trail of dust rising up into the air, marking the three horsemen. She doesn’t know that the lace of rising dust is heading her way.

“Those canyons,” Sanchez shouts above the galloping horses. “That’s where we go.”

Within the first 100 yards of the canyon’s entrance they see her. She smiles and waves to them, thinking they are familiar. Sanchez gives a sneering smile when they catch up with her—Pilar’s smile vanishes.

“Look at what we have here,” he says.

“Who are you?” she asks.

They dismount, but they don’t answer her. The vanished smile turns to outright fear. Pilar turns and runs into the canyons to escape Sanchez and his men. Fortunately, she is too fast, or they’re too drunk. She eludes them, running deeper through the twisting pathways.

Pilar thinks she can get away from the drunken men as they stumble and fall further behind. She actually laughs as they fall out of sight on the next bend in the canyon. Then she enters a dead end where there is a rare pool of water left over from the summer rains. It lies quiet, ringed by black sand. Pilar hides behind one of the boulders that lay strewn about. Her heart pounds as she tries to quiet her frantic panting while Sanchez and his men track her footsteps.

“Señorita!” Sanchez sings out. “We’re here.”

Pilar crouches behind a boulder, looking for a chance to rush out the mouth of the canyon’s bend. She throws a rock that bounces off the boulders, and Gaspar, who is watching the entrance, turns his head to the sound. Pilar makes a desperate dash out of the dead end and for a moment it looks as if she will escape this terror.

Despite being drunk, Gaspar is still quick enough to grab at her arm as she sprints. He’s an expert at grabbing people who are trying to run away from him. Pilar is wrestled to the ground. There is a brief struggle, but the other men descend and the outcome is inevitable.

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Innocent Pilar whimpers as they roughly grab her, and cries as they taunt her. Pilar is a shining example of what is good, but that doesn't matter to Sanchez, Juan and Gaspar. They laugh as she pleads and cries, then Sanchez raises his knife, and her screams echo unanswered amongst the canyon walls. Pilar rises, and tries to escape again, but she falls near the pond, and her blood washes over the black sand in that lonely canyon. Sanchez looks down at her broken and bloody body, and just for an instant a trace of sorrow crosses his eyes. At that moment, he feels guilt at destroying such beauty, but then straightens his back and clenches his teeth.

"Let's go," Sanchez barks.

Life held such hope for Pilar. She hoped to see her family again, to feel their hugs and kisses. She hoped to care for the sick animals from the canyon. She wanted to someday marry and share her love with a man, to start a family of her own. All of her hopes vanish as her blood runs out.

The sun hangs lower in the sky, and Felix de la Pureza rings the dinner bell to call his family in for dinner. Only one person is missing—his daughter Pilar. The family eats their meal quickly in silence as their worry grows.

"Maybe she's in town." Felix saddles his horse.

When he gets to town and hears of the trouble with three men, Felix panics. Soon, many men of the town are worried as they hear that the beautiful Pilar is missing. Guillermo and his father join the growing crowd. A search party is hastily assembled, and the question is shouted out.

"Does anyone know where Pilar might have gone?"

"I do." Guillermo steps forward meekly.

No one objects, and he is included. He feels pride at being included in something so important, but the pride is blunted with a sense of terrible dread. The men mount their horses and tear toward the canyons. The setting sun is in its last moments, and they know that finding anybody in the canyons after dark will be difficult. The men reach the canyon entrance as the moon breaks over the hills.

Guillermo's father points to the rising moon: "Some good luck."

It is a Harvest Moon, and it bathes the ground below it. The granite cliff walls, the leaves of the mesquite trees, the thorns of the cactus, and the creosote bushes are all etched in silver. The men grow quiet; solemnly they light their torches and march into the canyons.

"Pilar."

"PILAR."

Their shouts ring out, and echo eerily. Their urgency grows with the passing of time. More ground is covered, but still no

sign of the beloved Pilar.

"Guillermo. Which way?" asks his father, growing more frustrated.

He leads them around a bend, and that's where they discover the tracks. Large, heavy boot prints, and sadly, the delicate outline of a sandal are seen leading away together. Worry strickens the men's faces. Guillermo fights back the urge to turn and run. He doesn't want to see the probable ending that grows more likely with each step. One by one, the men stop calling out for Pilar. For one, they don't want to alert anyone that they are close by; for another, they are too saddened to croak out her name anymore. Guillermo beats down the fear. "Be a man," he tells himself. He follows the footsteps around yet another bend in the canyons.

That's when he sees the strange glowing in the maze of passages. It doesn't come from the moonlight, it comes from the ground like a campfire. Guillermo shouts and the other men hurry to the light; they turn the corner, their eyes grow wide, their mouths hang open.

There is the pool of leftover rainwater from the monsoon rains, surrounded by black sand, and there is the rumped body of Pilar de la Pureza. But she is not alone; soft, translucent stems of plants push through the black sand all around her, even growing on the granite rocks nearby. They gently caress her broken body. Silently, soothingly, the plants grow in front of the men's astonished eyes.

As the moonlight bathes the ground below, the plants blossom into brilliant flowers that catch the light and radiate a golden glow. Guillermo looks on as the golden flowers blossom again and again. He sees that the pistils inside the flowers are a sphere of the purest white, like a pearl shimmering in silver light. Tears flow down the faces of the men as they silently walk toward the scene, hats are taken off and held in their hands.

"Can you hear that?" One of the men whispers.

"Si," replies Guillermo.

All of the men nod. They are hearing what sounds like hundreds of tiny crystal bells tinkling on the night breeze; it is the sound of the flowers as they flutter delicately. For the last time, one of the men says the familiar words:

"Madre de Dios," he gasps.

Guillermo wipes the tears from his eyes and face. "These must be the Flowers of Suffering." The legend is born.

"This sucks!"

Clayton Palmer doesn't know anything about flowers, and he doesn't care. All he can think about is anger, loss, and guilt. They hover over his thoughts, they control his actions. No air-conditioning, shirtless, driving in the desert summer heat makes his frustration burn that much stronger. He sits waiting for the

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light to turn green because when it does, at least there will be a short-lived wind to cool the sweat pooling and running down his chest. At last it turns green and Clayton speeds off, but the respite is brief, and the next light has him stopping again in his dusty car, and the sun keeps heating up that hot black asphalt. Sun ... Burning sun.

High school graduation has come and gone, and it's supposed to be a time filled with hopes and dreams, the promises of youth, but they have been brought down by gravity. Gravity isn't caused by the Earth spinning around on its axis, gravity is caused by anger, loss, and guilt. That's what keeps everything from floating to the heavens. Today it's Clayton's turn to keep all of the objects of the Earth rooted firmly on the ground.

"C'mon already." He slams his fists on the steering wheel.

When it changes, he stomps on the pedal and tears through the traffic. He is on his way out of the Big City and into the hot, Sonoran desert—speed building and adrenaline rushing. Catharsis comes as the cactus and mesquite first flash by, then turn into a green and brown blur. You'd think the desert is merciless, and to be avoided in the summer, but Clayton hears the whoosh of the trees as they whisk by, smells the creosote on the desert air, and feels the cooling wind at 70 mph. Like big, familiar arms, the desert embraces Clayton, and there is a moment of comfort.

"That's the ticket," he shouts.

The freedom is short-lived, though; anger, loss, and guilt come creeping back into Clayton's thoughts. Anger comes from the circumstances surrounding his friends' deaths. He remembers the news earlier this summer as he sat down to his dinner:

"A car crash on Lone Mountain Road leaves two young men dead."

The reporter tried to look genuinely concerned before they cut to the commercial. Clayton dropped the fork of parmesan chicken onto the kitchen table and hurried into the living room where the news was on T.V. He knew that road, he had raced down that road, and he knew two young men who raced down that road too. The story resumed:

"Our own sportscaster, Bill Dennard, witnessed the crash that left two brothers, Sam and Chris Jacobsen, dead. He witnessed them driving erratically at high speeds on Lone Mountain Road where they lost control, and then crashed in a single-car accident."

"Bill Dennard." Clayton shouts derisively over the wind whipping through his long brown hair.

Bill Dennard did witness the crash, and he called in the Channel 5 camera crew to film the exclusive. Only he didn't

wait until the boys' parents were notified about the tragedy, and that's how Sam and Chris's father found out his sons died. He saw it on the 6 o'clock news.

"Bill Dennard." Clayton repeats and steps down a little harder on the gas pedal, the speedometer reaches 80.

Loss is because these two brothers were Clayton's best friends. Sam was his age, and Chris a year younger. Clayton remembers when he first met the Jacobsen brothers after his parents divorced in Denver. He was in the second grade, his father had gone to work in New York while his mom found a new job and life in Phoenix. So that's where he and his sister went too. He was this scared, sad, lonely little kid who missed his father and friends. His new home in Arizona seemed so brown and hard.

His mother put on a strong face and kept it positive. "Think of all of the adventures you and your sister will have here."

Mom even read nighttime stories about Apache warriors and lost gold mines in the desert. But, Clayton heard her sobs in the dark when Mom thought he was asleep. It became too much to bear, and one morning he ran out of the house and sat on the sidewalk crying—that's when he met the Jacobsen brothers. These two boys came walking up like some kind of tall, elementary school heroes:

"Hey, kid, what's wrong?" Sam asked while slurping on an Otter Pop.

Clayton wiped away the tears and told them how his Dad was gone, and how he didn't belong here.

"Well, come play with us," Chris offered.

And so he did. From that day on, they played. When motocross riding was cool, they built a dirt track in their backyard. When baseball was cool, they played Little League. When skateboarding was cool, they built a ramp in the Jacobsen backyard. When driving fast was cool, they tried to trick out their own cars as much as they could afford, and they drove fast. When Junior/Senior Prom was cool, they put on their tuxes, and their parents rented a broke-down limo to take them there. When it was time to go to college, Sam would be Clayton's first roommate, and when Chris graduated, he would join them because that was cool too.

"The Three Amigos," they were called, and they were always together. But, just like that, they are gone now. The memories are lost on the same kind of road that Clayton travels now. That's what loss is.

"Julie," he whispers.

Then comes guilt; this is what brings Clayton on this summer road. It happened not two weeks before their crash. Julie Jacobsen is their sister, and she just finished her sophomore year. Julie and Clayton played a game when they

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were together—who could steal a glance from the other without getting noticed by the brothers. Clayton would be drinking some Coke out of the bottle in their refrigerator, and turn to notice Julie smiling from the living room. Julie would catch him staring at her when she walked down the hallway to her bedroom.

Clayton was always strong enough to beat back the feelings he had for her. But, it was summer, and he had just graduated from high school. He was feeling so big headed and important since college was coming. It was his last summer before he and Sam would leave. The boys sat in the backyard by the pool discussing their plans while kid sister swam. She was feeling important because she had just turned 16, and she was going to be a big Junior on campus. She pulled herself out of the shimmering pool and he watched the water drip off her body. Julie caught his stare and she smiled, motioning for him to go inside.

“I just forgot, I gotta get home,” he announced, leaving the brothers outside.

He followed Julie into her bedroom, and she turned to close the door behind them.

“I’ve wanted you for a long time,” she whispered as she kissed him.

Clayton didn’t resist—he knew their parents were out, and he knew the brothers wouldn’t come in to her room. There was time to mess around, and no one would be the wiser. He untied her bikini top, and slipped down her bottom. There she was, naked in her full beauty. Their kisses grew deeper, their hands hungrily groped each other. She pulled his shirt off, then she undid his shorts as he kicked off his sandals.

But, Mrs. Jacobsen got home from work early.

“Julie, you have cheer today,” she called out.

“JULIE!!”

They were discovered. Mrs. Jacobsen went off, screaming at Clayton, and slapping Julie as she cried.

“Clayton, you get out of this house!” Mrs. Jacobsen screamed.

The brothers rushed in her room, and their eyes burned with disgust as they understood. Clayton slunk out; neither brother ever spoke to him since. He was so embarrassed that he couldn’t find the courage to go to their funerals. That’s guilt.

A week after the funerals, he paid his respects in the only way he knew how—he snuck into the cemetery on another warm summer night. He jumped the fence, sat in the grass in the dark, looking at the silent stones. A nighthawk cried out sadly.

“I’m sorry, Sam, sorry, Chris—I should have been there with you. I should have had apologized to your family for what I did.

But, I never got the chance. I’m sorry. I should have been in the car with you.”

He pleaded to the gravestones, but there was only silence and a warm breeze. Was it their spirits rushing through the leaves of the eucalyptus trees? Nothing. He doubled over and lay on the grass, felt the blades being pulled out by his fingers. That’s guilt.

“FASTER.” Clayton’s voice is drowned out by the rushing wind.

This is why he drives so fast down this summer road because he wants to take the risk, he wants to tempt fate like they did. He wants to put it all out there because that’s the only way to get close to his friends now. It’s a reckless wish to experience the same fate of his friends that drives him hurtling on down the desert road at 90 mph.

The memories replay, over and over. Anger combines with the feeling of helplessness, and then the tears come while the car hurls over the desert road at 110 mph.

“Crybaby.” Clayton criticizes himself.

The sun is hanging low, threatening, and Clayton is far from the city. The time is 7:02, the exact time of day when the orange sun is right over the horizon, dominating all the sky. Heading west at 7:02 is the one time that brings the sunshine directly into his dirty windshield. Clayton is at the exactly the wrong spot you can be at 7:02 because he can’t see the approaching curve in the road, and his tires hit the gravel. Instinctively, he jerks the wheel, trying to guide the car back to the pavement; only he oversteers and the car veers sideways.

The split second comes and freezes, and he knows what happens when the car hits sideways.

“Oh sh...” Clayton doesn’t get the chance to finish.

Split second and Clayton knows that all of his worry means nothing. There is fleeting weightlessness, and then knowledge that whatever happens next isn’t going to be good. Next is a thunderous crash of tearing, smashing metal and glass as the car rolls over and over again. With a cloud of dust, the car comes to rest on the wheels again, and the sun sets over the mountains like it always does.

A full moon rises over the desert with its rays shining through the shattered windshield. The moonlight is concentrated by a broken piece of glass and it shines right down on Clayton’s face like a flashlight, stirring him awake.

“Uhhhhh,” he groans.

There is the fog of concussion and a face covered in sticky blood. He claws at the door to get out, but it is smashed into the frame. He tries to jump forward and is yanked back by the seatbelt, so he grabs for the release.

“AAAHHHH.” He shouts in pain with a broken arm.

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He reaches with his good hand and unbuckles the seatbelt. Clayton crawls out the passenger side and falls onto the gravel in a heap. Swirling and confused, Clayton staggers into the mouth of an unknown canyon. He doesn't realize the danger in leaving his car and walking alone in the desert. The granite canyon cliffs stretch up high in grays and blacks as Clayton passes below them unaware.

"Bright."

It is a Harvest Moon that lights his way. Nearly bright as day, the path is clear as he stumbles, shambles and wanders further into the twisting canyon. Eventually, Clayton rounds a bend and sees a welcome sight—a pool of water left over from the monsoon rains. He's thirsty, his cuts burn, and a little water would bring relief. He trips on a rock on the way to the pool, falling onto the cool black sand that rings around the quiet water. Soon, he slips from consciousness. Blood pours from his cuts, seeping into the black sand.

The moon makes its way over the top of the canyon and Clayton falls into a dangerous concussive sleep. In time, moonlight shines down full force onto the pool of water. As the water sparkles, tiny, delicate stalks begin pushing through the sand all around Clayton. The stalks grow taller and small radiant flowers of white and gold burst out and flow in the moonlight. The sound of tiny tinkling crystal bells rings out.

Once again, it is the legend.

Clayton is unaware that his time is near. Sometimes, people die in a panic, other people accept it's their time, and they die peacefully. For others like Clayton, the time of passing doesn't even register.

But his time has not come after all, as an even greater white light shines down the canyon. It moves and bounces off the canyon walls in the distance, growing closer. A woman of striking beauty wearing a flowing white dress walks towards

Clayton Palmer. Her black hair falls long about her shoulders. An aura surrounds her as she walks over the flowers without treading on them. She looks down at Clayton with sorrow on her face and reaches down to place a healing hand on his head. Next, she bends down and her lips part as she places a gentle kiss on Clayton's cheek. The blood stops flowing from his wounds, the broken arm is mended. He awakens whole again.

Clayton rubs his eyes in disbelief. He sees the flowers, but their significance isn't registering. He lifts up his head and sees the angelic woman gazing down lovingly on him. Clayton is struck by her beauty; her kindness washes over him. Pain and confusion disappear.

"Where am I? Is ... is this heaven?" he whispers.

She smiles and turns around, walking away from the pool and the flowers without saying a word.

"Wait. Who are you?"

The girl turns the bend with Clayton chasing after. He turns the bend too, but she is gone—disappeared; only a warm breeze meets him.

Clayton walks back to the pool, sits on the boulder, and hears the tiny bells ringing. He watches the glowing flowers, wondering why he is so fortunate. Who would believe him if he told this story? The moon arcs behind the canyon heights and the glowing flowers fade away into darkness.

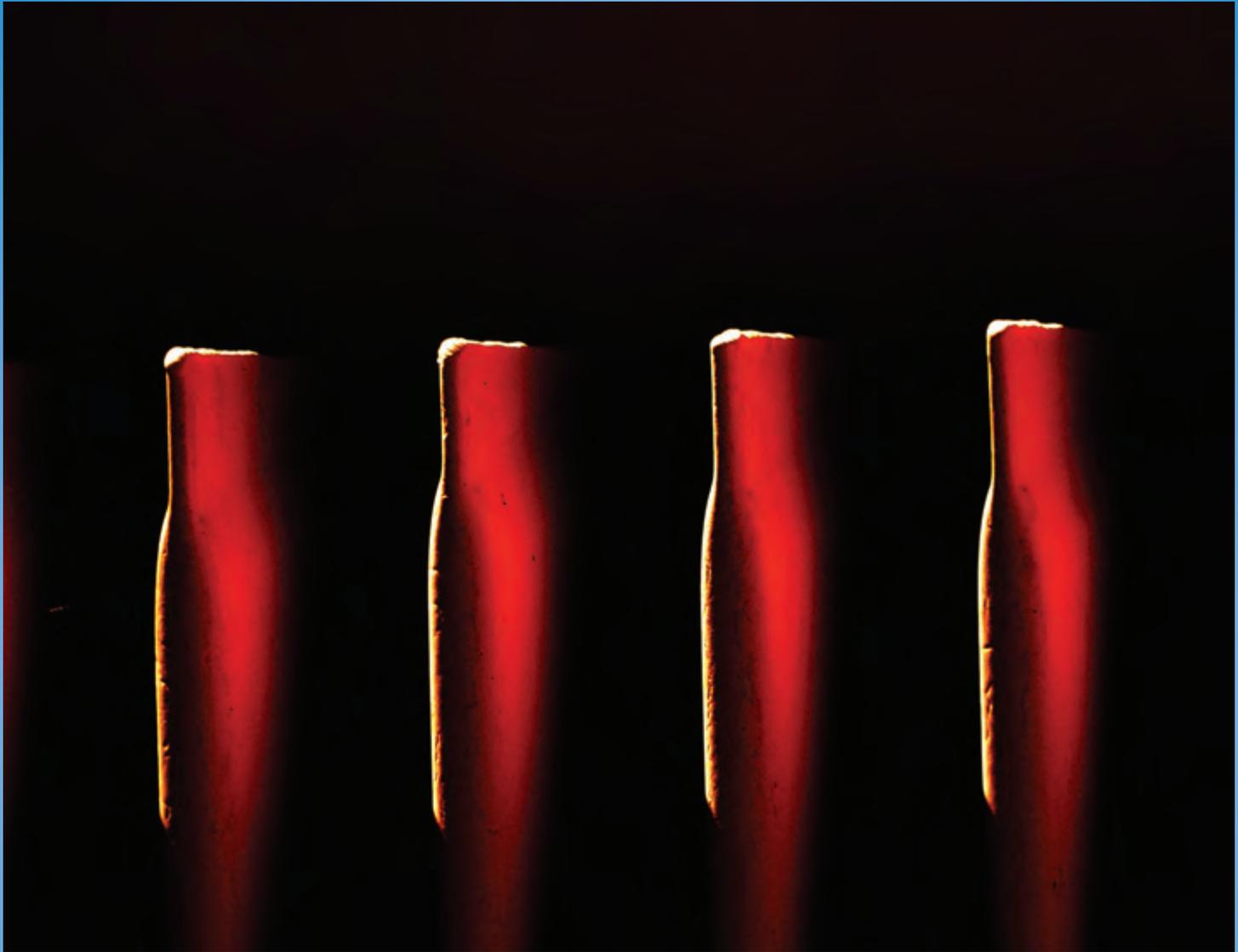
"Thank you," he says to no one.

When Clayton sleeps, he will dream of the Flowers of Suffering, and the unknown beauty who is Pilar de la Pureza. Occasionally, he will awaken after the dream and feel thankful. He makes himself a promise that one day he will find those amazing flowers, and the beauty who saved him.

Somewhere under a full moon, there is a desert pool ringed by black sand. Somehow, the Flowers of Suffering bloom in promise, and the unknown saint, Pilar de la Pureza, gives the troubled comfort.

# Bill Baker

Tucson Artist



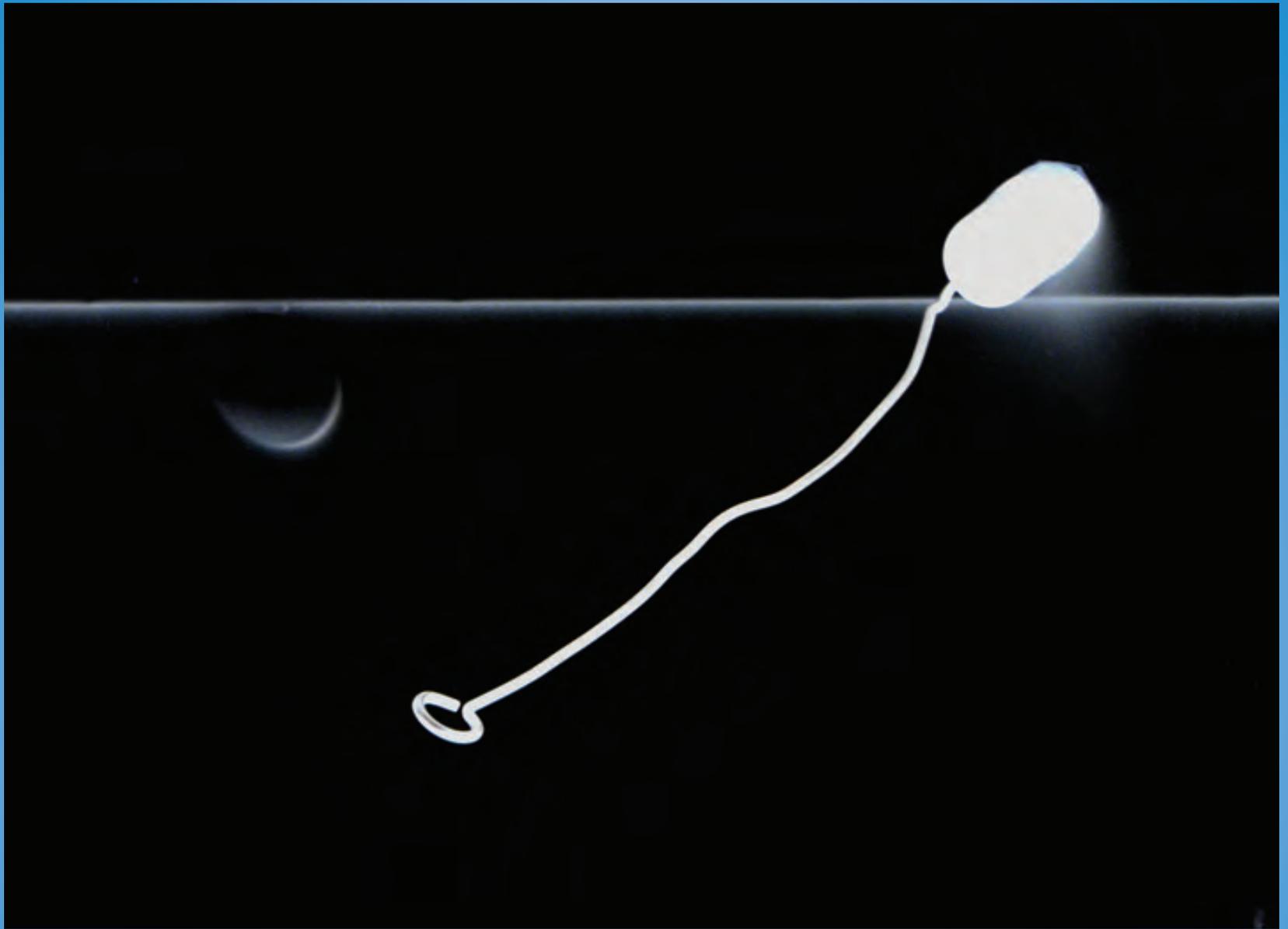
“Four #3”  
Digital photo  
2016



The artist writes, “I did not begin doing photography until I bought my first 35mm SLR in my 30s. After growing up in eastern Washington and coming to Arizona to finish my education, I eventually found myself teaching and living on the Navajo reservation near Teec Nos Pos, Arizona. Yet it wasn’t until my fourth year along the Arizona/Utah border that I decided to begin photographing the land I was living in. My previous influences of Eastern thought and aesthetics along with the openness and sand dunes where I was living immediately affected my choices of subject matter and the intentions of what I wanted to evoke — a sense of sensuousness and timelessness. During the nine-year period there, I took a photo trip to China and Tibet which further influenced my choices of subject matter. In 1988 I moved to Tucson and began photographing Southwest urban architecture and the Sonoran Desert. Since then I have continued to travel throughout the Southwest with images appearing in travel publications, calendars, and many fine art galleries in Tucson and Phoenix.” Bill Baker can be reached at [bbakerphoto@cox.net](mailto:bbakerphoto@cox.net). His website is [bbakerphoto.com](http://bbakerphoto.com).

# Bill Baker

Tucson Artist



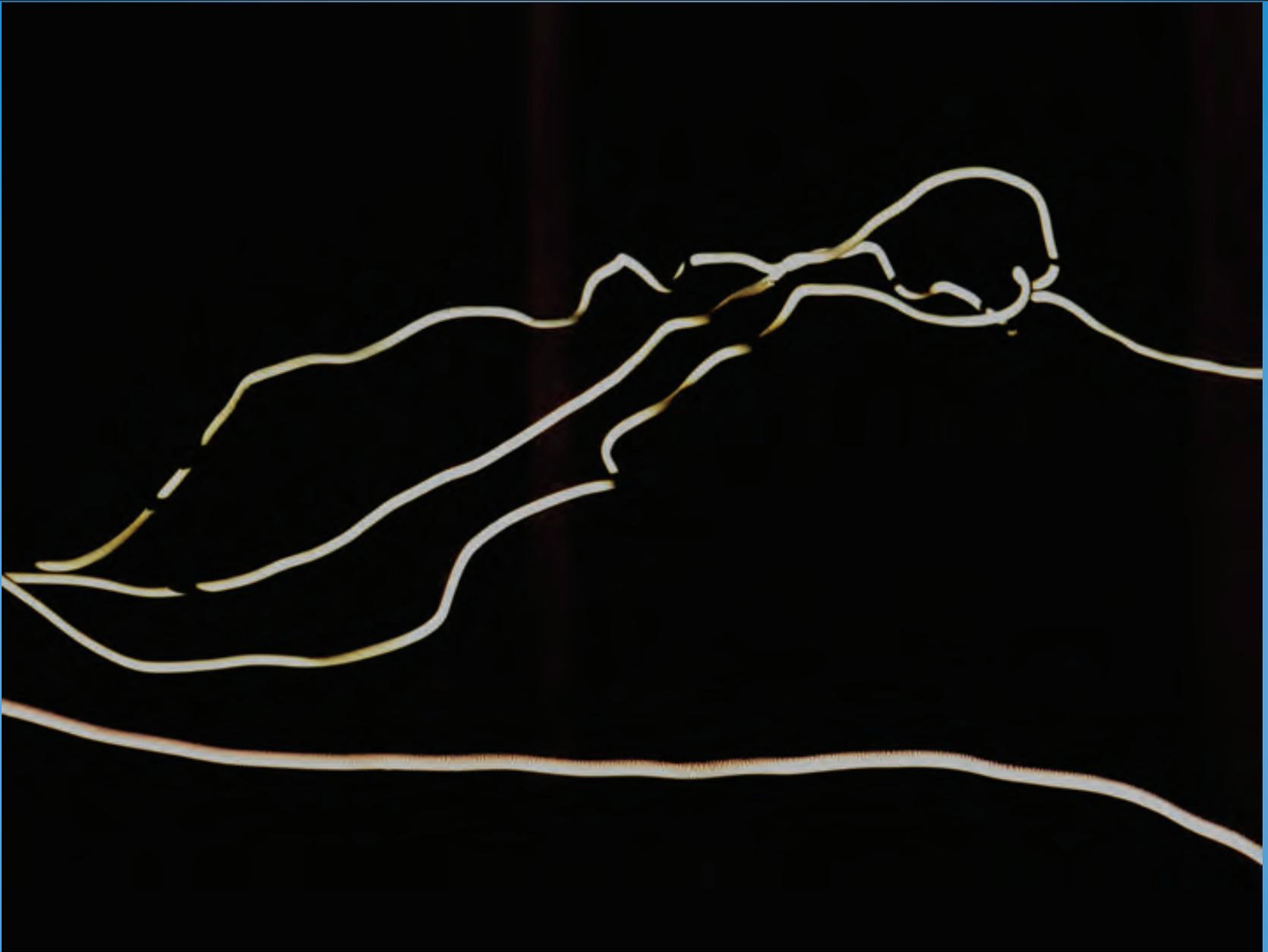
**“Life In Balance”**  
Digital photo  
2016

My photography began with simple, illusory sand patterns that I was seeing in the dunes near my home while living in Navajo land near Teec Nos Pos, Arizona. While expanding my interests to landscapes and urban settings, my primary interest has been to find the composition of space and elements I find in front of me — space being of more importance. The images in this collection represent a transition from presenting subject matter unfiltered, as seen, to recent work that includes color alteration at times. The intention is to further cause the viewer to look at the familiar in new ways, as well as realize that everything is just as it should be — composed, interconnected and in balance. Most images are meant to be meditative and quiet the mind of the observer — resonating on a sensory level. I believe in what Lao Tzu said: “Give people a void to look at and simplicity to hold. Then there will be little selfishness and few desires.”

- Bill Baker

# Bill Baker

Tucson Artist



**"Reclining Figure"**  
Digital photo  
2016

# Bill Baker

Tucson Artist



**“Two Seven One”**  
Digital photo  
2016

# Bill Baker

Tucson Artist



**"Urban Abstract 40"**  
Digital photo  
2016

# A Scourge from the Antiquities

By Alex R. Encomienda

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Ximena walked down a dreaded road with the small pamphlet she called her libro de antiques in her arms. The road salt gave her symptoms of vertigo so she looked for a good place to rest and heal from the multiple-parent wounds as well as the vertigo that was becoming almost unbearable. From a short distance she saw what looked like a Mwaloni tree, which was rare in Alava, Spain. Her tired feet were aching and the road seemed to stretch with every step she took. She was feeling as if her search for the quintessential truth of her beloved ma (and pa) was a curse after all.

There were tower mills on the hilltops dressed in weathered heads. Ximena remembered dancing around those mills as a little orphan girl with her friends on their picnics with Mrs. Sari Juniper. A feeling of melancholy fell over her when she remembered those days because they were not coming back. The dreaded yearning for closure had not reached her until much later. When she was twelve, she began working at the Orphanage, which was called Maroon Gardens Children's Home. When she reached the age of fourteen, a seed was planted in her head that sprouted the yearning that would plague her for years to come. She wondered who gave her the face she saw in the mirror. Who was this enigma that birthed the orphan in 1964?

As she walked to the tree and rested against its thick, full trunk, she began to think about the day she met the ghost that introduced her to this mystery and gave her a chance to resolve the burden that was resting on her chest. The ghost looked like vapor and spoke like a serpent.

*"Little girl, little girl; don't stay. You are in great danger here as your soul belongs somewhere else. If you stay beyond the river too long your soul will stay beyond the river, but if you*

*leave this place now you will find what you've been looking for. Little girl, little girl; don't be afraid. I am your keeper and will help you find the pages of your life you have been missing. In this little home where child fancies dwell there is a diary that could give you sanctuary in the pages of this life you lead. Follow me down to the basement and I promise you will find what you've been looking for."*

Ximena closed her eyes and wished these pains far, far away. She clutched at her waist and rubbed her belly in rhythmic patterns to lessen the nausea from heat and the dreaded road behind her and then she opened the diary in her hands. A golden leaf fell on the page and she blew it away to read the cryptic dialect from her ma at an age of only seventeen. Her writing appeared mournful yet forgiving of her torturers with the first passage reading: *I had a young daughter who will live to be a woman and that woman will bear no scars of her history but she will look for me and try to find answers but she'll find not a thing beyond this diary. Her name will be Ximena...Ximena Gargantula.*

In the top right corner of the damp and dirty page was a date with a location, Soria. Ximena caressed the diary and slowly pushed herself off the soil with her left leg and then stretched before walking along the roadside. As she walked, she left a trail that looked like zigzags in the dirt and each footstep created an upheaval of musky dirt in the air. After some time walking, she came across a humble-looking place that rested around a little patch of yellow grass and soon noticed that it was a taphouse. When she stood her eager legs beside the façade, she saw that it was called Gypsy's Ball, so she decided to venture inside and pick up a glass of water for her dry, warm

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Alex R. Encomienda is an author of fiction and poetry. He began writing in elementary school and then attended writing workshop classes and lecture classes at Glendale Community College. He attended Phoenix College in 2012 where he began to do collaborative writing. Alex has been published in Bindweed's 2017 Spring issue, The Penwood Review's 2017 Spring issue, Harbinger Asylum's 2017 Summer issue and Kaaterskill Basin's 2017 Fall issue among others. His latest short story, "The Labyrinthine Affairs," was published in Adelaide's 2017 Summer issue. Alex often expresses concepts of love, peace, escapism, freedom and innocence in his work.

innards.

Once inside, she noticed an empty room with the music of flamencos and was taken back to her childhood at Maroon Gardens, so she smiled and took a seat at the end of the bar table. Suddenly, she did not feel like drinking water anymore as the music turned her mood around.

“Hola! Habla engles?” asked the bartender.

“Yes,” she said with a quick smile.

Ximena dug into her backpack and tossed around notebooks that consisted of addresses, names and memories; things that were important to her but not at the moment. She found a few quarters and was short one so she slowly peered upwards and noticed the bartender was standing in front of her now.

“Need something?” he asked.

“I have no quarter,” she replied.

The bartender sighed and walked over to the cash register to see if he had any change and sure enough he did.

“Ah, don’t worry about it. I have enough that will pay for at least one drink,” he said.

Ximena smiled gratefully and then said, “Thank you.”

“So what will it be today? We have tequila, patron, wine, sangria... anything you want.”

Ximena thought for a moment and then said, “I’ll take some tequila.”

“Your little body is going to be on fire, Blanca,” he said.

“My body is already on fire since I’ve been walking for nearly two hours now.”

The bartender grimaced curiously. “What have you been doing out there this whole time?”

He grabbed a bottle of Cazadores and poured a shot for her.

Ximena took a deep breath and then hesitated before lifting the drink to her mouth and then she quickly threw her head back to swallow the warm alcohol. Afterwards, she made a sour face and then sighed.

“Did that feel good?” he asked her.

“Why did you call me Blanca?” she asked in return.

He scoffed and then shrugged. “You’re fair skinned for a Gitana.”

“And what makes you think I am a Gitana?”

“My apologies, most people that live around this boulevard are gypsies. I assumed that you were too.”

Ximena wordlessly examined the glass and fell upon homesickness. In great timing, the bartender asked her, “How far have you been traveling?”

She looked at him with her dark brown eyes and said, “From a little town in Alava.”

“Well damn, that is quite far. I suppose you’re running from something? Perhaps an old boyfriend or an old habit?”

Her eyes became squinted and then she said, “No, I’m

searching for something—perhaps for someone.”

The bartender brushed his thick, black beard with his hand while he asked, “What is it you’re looking for?”

“My mother, who is like a ghost to me. I never met my mother but I believe someone from my past visited me in spirit to tell me where she is. Perhaps now, it may be a hazard to my life, but we *all* can’t live like saints now, can we?”

The bartender became fascinated with her and asked, “How do you know that someone came in spirit?”

She toyed with the glass upon the wooden table and replied, “I lived in the orphanage with me as a child and there were times I heard whispers at night. For the longest time, I thought it was just in my head, but then one time I saw it and I followed it into the basement. It led me to this diary that was written by my mother. Her name was Frances Gargantula. I don’t know anything else about her, but I know that she was running from something. I don’t know if she was ever married or if Gargantula is actually my father’s name, who I also never met, but I know that if I find her, there could be peace in my heart. I think it can give my life a resolution.”

The bartender looked at her with the same grimaced expression that seemed to be masked onto him and then he walked over to give her another shot of tequila.

“Are you trying to get me drunk now?” she asked.

“Not quite, but I may as well help you forget about these thoughts of yours. They seem poisonous!” he said.

When he gave her the glass, he poured another shot for himself and threw his head back to consume his liquor. Ximena did the same, but this time she did not hesitate even though afterwards she had the same sour look on her face as before.

“What do you think happened to your mother?” he asked.

She shook her head slowly as she kept her eyes to the tabletop. “I don’t know, but I keep thinking that she was afraid of being a mother. I feel that she was afraid of that kind of life or she wasn’t yet ready for it anymore than she was ready for adulthood.”

Ximena stretched and felt herself becoming lightheaded. She had not eaten anything but licorice earlier in the day so the alcohol fell into her empty stomach, and she did not want to fall asleep inside this taphouse because it may have been a trap for gypsy women.

“Is it always this quiet in here?” she asked.

“Sometimes there are mariachis coming in here and other times there are local men who just want a good buzz, but today I suppose all vermin are in hiding.”

Another song came on the radio that sounded much like a song she remembered since she was a little girl. Even then, it reminded her of something and she was never able to find out where she heard that familiar tune, but she grew up assuming that it was from her mother’s life. Either that or she heard it at the

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orphanage when she was a small child and just forgot.

“I must be going now. Thanks plenty for the tequila,” she voiced through the music.

“Wait a minute, I have something I want to show you in the back room,” said the man.

“What is it?” she asked.

“You’ll see. It’s something for the road.”

He walked over to the front door to see if anyone was coming by and then he went to the narrow back door. Ximena was confused, so she sat there for a moment to see if she could somehow stop the nauseous feeling in her empty stomach and then she glanced around the empty taphouse. It looked awfully like a whorehouse she’d seen in a film once, she thought.

The bartender was making little noise in the back and she decided to see what he was doing, so she stood up on her scrawny legs and looked out the windowpane to see the restless sun’s fading reverie first, but then she noticed that the door was locked. He must have locked it when he checked out the window, she thought.

When she walked to the back space to see what he was doing, she saw him bending over to get something from the bottom shelf of the storage room and on the bed of boxes next to him she saw a utility knife and a fume bottle of clear liquid, so she covered her mouth to silence her whimpers as she hurried to the door. At first, she began to feel as good as dead because she didn’t know how to unlock the door, but at last she opened it up and quietly made her way out of the taphouse. As she walked quickly down the road, she looked back—but only twice.

She thought to herself, “What would have happened if I did not escape? Would I be dead this early into my quest?”

She imagined the scalped pig-looking flesh being torn from her midsection and tossed into piles of mush in the back room. The thought of her being maimed beyond mental capacity did not leave her until she was far away from that place, and even then she worried that the bartender might be around the corner with a rag of vermicide and chloroform.

It was evening, her legs were becoming heavier although flimsier and she was beginning to wander into an unfamiliar place. These small buildings that were scattered across the plain fields looked like drop houses for illegal immigrants and militias and her stomach did not want to settle down even after the terror that just plagued her lonely existence. If she was not mistaken, she thought, this place was called Najera.

The road she was following became a dirt trail and she had no other choice but to walk through that dreaded trail or walk through the fields where certain buildings stood humbly, housed with families. She chose the trail as she softly said to herself, “I won’t forget who I’m looking for.”

Soon, she came upon an old motel. It was across the street from

a small market, so she went inside the motel and asked the man behind the desk for some water.

“I don’t have any water here, but if you go across the street to the market you’ll find some water,” he said.

“I don’t have any money though,” she exclaimed.

The man ignored her and continued to read his newspapers.

For half an hour, Ximena sat outside the market with her meager legs crossed underneath her and the burden of curiosity running through her anxious mind. Here and there, people walked by and gave her some tokens and she thanked them as they left. She almost had four dollars when the town got quieter. She began to drift into thought and remembered the melody of the enigmatic song that seemed to be nonexistent. It was in the tune of “Beso de Fuego,” but the words spoke of different things.

Finally, a man walked up to her and gave her five coins and then walked into the market. She gathered up her coins and walked inside and wandered about just before picking water and a bag of pork skins from the aisle.

“You look familiar, *mija*,” said the old man behind the counter.

Ximena smiled at him. “How so?”

“Well, you look like someone who used to stay at the motel across the street many years ago.”

She remained quiet for a moment and then asked him, “How long ago?”

“Many moons ago, *mija*. I’ve been managing this market since the ’60s.”

“Do you know what happened to her?” she asked.

He shook his feeble head and said, “No, but I remember her name was Sky. She used to come in here and chat to my father every once in a while and then she would be on her way. To be honest, I would have never remembered her if you didn’t walk in today. When I saw you, I thought I saw a ghost.”

Knowing that her mother’s name was Frances and she lived further south, Ximena decided to keep her angst for what may come further into her search. She had the feeling that she would run into another man like the bartender who crept up on her with hollow smiles and sly gestures.

“Have a good night,” she said before walking out the door.

She paced back and forth underneath that fluorescent streetlight for minutes and then finally went inside the motel’s little lobby and asked the clerk, “Excuse me, sir. I don’t have any cash on me, but it’s so hot outside and I need a place to sleep. Would it be alright if I slept in a vacant room tonight? If not, can I sleep in the lobby then?”

The man looked at her with a twisted face that slowly became sympathetic and then he said, “There are no exceptions here, miss. I feel terrible for you, but I can’t give you a room if you can’t pay for it.”

“Please, just let me sleep in the lobby then!” she exclaimed.

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The man sighed as he examined the young orphan. He glanced at her long, black blouse that had seen better days and then shifted his eyes further down to see what was covering her sacred parts and noticed a grubby, black dress.

“What will you give me if I let you sleep here?” he asked under his breath.

Ximena became frightened and started to back her way out of the motel when she bumped into another man. She turned around and saw that he was with a little boy and for that reason, she got the sense that he was trustworthy, to say the least.

“Please, I don’t have any money. Can I stay with you tonight?” she asked as she pressed up against his chest. The man looked confused and said, “How much do you need?”

“Sixty-five dollars,” the man behind the counter blurted.

The man with the boy reached into his pocket and took out wrinkled pieces of paper, a lighter and some dollars. He counted them and extended his arm to Ximena, so she took the dollars and said, “Thank you very much, my friend.”

She turned to the clerk and threw the money at his face and he gave her a key in return.

When Ximena entered the cryptic room, she noticed the red carpet and the brown, wooden walls that surrounded her. She surveyed the floor in the bathroom and easily got the sense that there was some kind of curse that swept through this motel. Perhaps, there was a murder or an exorcism that left this unsettling mood behind. She showered and sung to herself like she always did at the orphanage and afterwards she sat at the bedside and opened the diary to read her mother’s lamentations:

*“Today I ran away from mother. I took forty dollars from her purse before running across the boulevard to meet my boyfriend, René. I don’t know why I feel so depressed. I feel like there is a giant hole in my heart that demands closure—yet I have no idea what I need to resolve.*

*“René says he needs me and I’m his woman but I’m afraid of his temper. He says he loves me and that I make him feel whole but I don’t know how I feel about him. I don’t want to be alone. When I’m alone my mind plays tricks on me. As long as I have René, I’ll never have to sleep alone at night. I’ll never have to face these demons in my head. Mother says he is bad for me and wants him out of my life but she has no idea how cruel my mind is to me so I’ll have to choose between living with my mother and living with René. I’m so lost right now but I know for sure that I’ll never sleep alone.”*

Just as Ximena finished reading, someone knocked on the door twice. At instinct, Ximena opened the door without caution to see the little boy who walked in with his father earlier.

“Hello there. What do you need?” she asked him.

“My father wanted me to give these to you,” he replied while holding up a plate covered with a small paper towel.

“What is it?” she asked.

“They’re tamales!” the boy announced with glee.

“Tell him I said thank you very much,” she replied.

The boy smiled and then walked along.

At half past one in the morning, Ximena sat on the floor with her backpack opened in front of her while she carefully recounted the things she decided were important to her. She opened a paper and read a poem she wrote to a friend in the orphanage who left too soon. She then came across pictures with her age at the bottom in black marker. One of them showed her and Mrs. Juniper at a playground in Alava, another of her at age seven dressed in navy overalls, another of her in a tree house with several other children and finally a picture of a man in worn clothes and herself at age four in his arms. She gasped softly to herself and stared at the picture for another long moment as she didn’t recall seeing it before. Just then, she heard another knock on the door, this time heavier.

She looked out of the peephole and saw the man with the child standing in front of the doorframe looking quite suspicious.

However, she opened the door to greet him.

“Hello again.”

“Hi there. Sorry to disturb you, but I wanted to know what you thought about my tamales. I know, I’m not the best cook in town, but my ex used to love them,” replied the man.

Confused for a moment, Ximena smiled and gestured to the plate as she said, “I’m sorry, I haven’t tried them yet.”

“Oh, well, when you do try them, come give me a knock or two. Me and my boy will be awake for a while.”

“Alright, I’ll do that,” she said as she began to close the door.

“Are you waiting for someone here?” he then asked.

“No, I’m looking for someone...” she began to say but stopped herself as she remembered her encounter with the bartender.

“Sorry, I have to go to bed now,” she added before closing the door.

She hurried to collect the papers and shoved them inside the diary when the man knocked again. Startled, she hurried to open it so she could confront him, but then he spoke like the ghost who gave her the diary.

“Are you looking for Frances?”

“Yes, how did you know? How do you know my mother?” she asked.

“I never knew her. She was very much desired, though. Please, can I come in?”

Ximena heard stories about el Cucuy and el Diablo who would manipulate their victims before cursing them, but this man may have been a Godsend, she thought. If she could know more about her mother, then she would be ever so close to resolving this curse of the motherless-child syndrome.

“You’re quite young to be in a place like this. Only prostitutes

**Continued on page 75**

and gangsters come here, so when I saw you here, I was surprised. When I realized that you were the daughter of Frances, I was dumbfounded,” he said.

Ximena picked up her belongings from the floor and placed them carefully upon the bed.

“What’s your name?” she asked.

“I’m Gustavo. My son’s name is Po.”

“If this place is so bad, then why did you come here?” asked Ximena.

“We have a very bad habit of running away from things. My son and I have been caught in the middle of bedlam. The boulevards down south are much like hell. Me and Po lived there for a month after living in Gomara for seven years.”

“Tell me about my mother,” Ximena interrupted.

Gustavo sighed and then said, “There was a frail woman who I used to know. She lived in Soria. Her name was Isabelle. I was only a preteen at the time, so I didn’t know her personally. My father used to visit her often. She would tell him to meet her here every Friday evening, and back then I didn’t think much of it. You see, Isabelle was a prostitute. My father used her every night to give him an escape from his life. One day, however, a killing happened at this motel. Someone killed a woman here and I believe it was your mother. The ladies kept talking about a woman named Frances yet Frances was not a prostitute. My father’s woman knew her, but she never mentioned Frances being a prostitute to him.”

“This is a lie,” Ximena blurted, insecure of her statement.

Gustavo chuckled and said, “Believe it or not, that’s what I was told by my father, and he was always an honest man. Frances was seen by my friends walking up and down the boulevard like she was Mary Magdalene. She catered to the demands of these scumbags and got herself in trouble. I do remember that beautiful face of hers though, I sure do.”

“How do you know that it was *my* mother?” she asked.

“Because, well—never mind. You don’t believe me. I told you the truth so you wouldn’t have to search any further. You’ll dig yourself into a hole if you search too long.”

“I am not afraid of you or your lies. I am not afraid of this place or its history. I don’t know who you are or what you want, but your lies mean nothing to me. Take your food, I don’t want it.”

Gustavo gave a distraught look and sighed as he walked over to grab the food back from the tabletop.

Before he left, he said, “Do you know the story about the man who was stranded on an island and prayed to God for help? He prayed that God would save him. One day, he saw a ship pass by, but he thought, *It’s okay, God will save me, not the ship.* A day later, he saw another ship pass by and thought the same thing. Two days after that, he was dying of dehydration and he asked God, *Why did you not help me?* God told him, *I tried to help you*

*but you wouldn’t listen. I sent two ships but you denied them. Think about that tonight, Ximena.”*

“How do you know my name?” she asked in her trembling voice.

Gustavo walked out of the room and closed the door behind him.

Ximena felt her stomach tense up and she looked out the window to see if leaving the motel tonight was an option, but the dark, silent night told her otherwise. She thought to herself, “I won’t forget what I’m looking for.”

All throughout the night, she heard the moaning and grunting that came with sex. The walls were thin and the night was quiet, so for two hours, she stared thoughtfully at the ceiling and began to think, “How did Gustavo know my name? And if my mother *did* die here in this motel, how did he know it was Frances and not someone else? Was my mother a prostitute? Is my father René? What happened in 1964?”

When her anxiety subsided and she alleviated the pain from her empty stomach, she remembered the tune of that same familiar song, “Beso de Fuego.”

The next morning, she threw on her backpack and walked downstairs. When she looked to see if the same man was working there or not, she noticed someone else. There was a younger, more attractive-looking man standing there.

She walked over to him and asked, “Did the man with the boy leave yet?”

He smiled for a short moment but then gave a confused grimace and said, “Man with a boy? No, I haven’t seen him.”

She was curious to see what the man’s name was, so she peered behind the desk where a notepad was.

“Are these the residents?” she asked.

“Yes, but I don’t think I’m allowed to show you the list.

Besides, the only other residents here are a couple in Room 14 and an older lady in Room 2. We’re not very busy around this part of town. You said that you saw a man and a boy check in to the motel, but we’ve only had one other guest since yesterday at noon and it was an old mariachi with his wife and daughter.”

Ximena gave an almost silent gasp and then began to fear this place, so she hurried outside where she continued to walk toward Soria.

As Ximena dragged her feet across the swift heaps of dirt, she felt like she was chasing a ghost. She imagined that Frances *the ghost writer* wrote about her life and then vanished, leaving Ximena to wonder about her existence only to find that the answer may be what she already knew. She felt a sense of resentment towards her mother as she began to lose track of time. She lifted her weightless, bony head up to the sky to catch the sun’s reverie upon her bare flesh, burning her, and she guessed it was around noon. The day passed by faster than a bat out of hell

after that, and before she knew it, nightfall came.

There was another motel in the distance, so Ximena stopped and wondered how she would be able to sleep there without cash. She clutched her stomach again to ease the aches she loathed with every step forward. She then glanced back to where she came from and saw the lonely stretch of history that would surely be the haunt of her scourge. There were acres of dark places on each side of her that were not written about in the diary of her dearest one, yet they seemed to her like a page from her mother's logbook. She imagined them as places her mother dwelled in and searched for love in because the hint of desperation fit quite well with these long and lonely nights. Ximena only imagined the kind of pages her mother left out of the diary and began to feel lightheaded, so she continued to the motel.

Once she was quite close to the motel's entrance, she noticed the stale paint that had dried up with each passing storm and the pink neon lights that welcomed ladies of the night. These motherless wounds that forbid her answers grew into gaping holes as she began to feel desperate.

Just as she was about to walk back toward the long, deserted history of steps, she heard the wicked hissing she would dream about as a child in the orphanage. The hissing came and went with close proximity and she held herself firmly as her big brown eyes searched the blackness for methods of escape. She could not see well, but with the moonlight as her guide, she saw long, black things moving quickly all around her. They were slithering and side winding; their hisses were frightening and real but they did not attack her. After realizing that she was in the middle of the desert surrounded by snakes, the fear of losing her life was much less of a problem than the fear of living a lie. Ximena trembled with angst as she stepped closer and closer to the motel and just then, something struck the back of her leg. Ximena grunted from the sharp, burning pain that fell across her whole body for that one moment of terror. She had been bitten by one of these hissing demons.

"Aye, please don't let me die like this," she cried to herself.

Despite her efforts to avoid this fate, she collapsed and her chest smothered the dirt. Ximena reached as if to begin pulling herself forward, but she was growing heavier as the seconds passed by. She did not want to be like the road; she did not want to become the soil that birthed this cursed place, so she kept her head from resting upon the ground and eyed the motel with a certain fear that made her regret everything from the moment she first left the orphanage.

A serpent spoke to her just then. Its empty hisses repeated the very same words the ghost spoke of when Ximena lived in the orphanage:

*"Little girl, little girl; don't stay. You are in great danger here*

*as your soul belongs somewhere else. If you stay beyond the river too long your soul will stay beyond the river, but if you leave this place now you will find what you've been looking for."*

Ximena whispered to herself, "I won't forget what I'm looking for."

As quick as she began to fall into eternal blackness, she returned to herself and felt weightless just as before the snake attacked her. She sighed in relief while she pushed herself off the ground and then continued to walk toward the motel and opened the door.

"Hello, my name is Ximena. Did you know a woman named Frances?" she asked the receptionist.

"Where did you hear of that name?" asked the man.

Ximena began to feel a lump in her throat and said, "I'm Ximena Gargantula, the daughter of Frances."

The man squinted his eyes at her and then gave her a key that looked very much like a key she used to walk into the basement of her orphanage where she found the diary.

"Go upstairs and turn down the right hall. Go to the end and open room number forty-two," he said.

"Thank you," she replied softly.

Ximena walked up the stairs and followed the brown, nauseating floors to the right hall, where she felt as if the walls were closing in on her, trapping her into some kind of solitary place of motherless children. She felt anxious, nauseous and frightened beyond her body's understanding, so she bent over and dry heaved before the thick, black fluids began spilling out of her mouth. It took her a few moments of confusion before she realized that it was the licorice she consumed yesterday. Out of the pork skins, liquor and water, the licorice seemed to be her scourge, because afterwards, she felt much better.

Ximena sighed and rubbed her stomach in relief as she continued to walk toward the room. She twisted the key and opened the door to find that through all of these years, she had lived a lie.

The room she had been led to fell far from the concept of reality. The walls were that of a cavern with dripping waters coming from atop where fluorescent lights hung down in cryptic patterns. The floors were an ill-green color and the room extended so deep that Ximena couldn't see where it stopped, and in the center was a twenty-foot inflated, cartoonish-looking Frances.

Ximena cried hysterics that echoed throughout the cavern while trying as hard as humanly possible to understand what she was seeing. It seemed as though her life was never meant for the understanding, the grounded and the steadfast. She felt violated by God and by the nature of existence to believe that she was leading an honest life as an orphaned child, searching

for her mother in the streets of Soria only to unearth that Frances Gargantula was an otherworldly, beastly *thing* that dwelled in this place all these years.

“Mother?” she frightfully asked.

Frances spoke surprisingly beautiful—eccentric, yet beautiful.

“Ximena, is that you?”

“Yes, Mother, it’s me. I’ve been travelling for such a long time trying to find you. Oh, Mother! What did they do to you? What happened to you?”

Ximena examined the black heaps of hair that draped across the floor and her mother’s giant red lips that seemed to be made of plastic. Her entire human body was bloated and shiny, plastic looking. Her head was the size of a tractor tire and her hands were like two giant balloons. She could not move. She became like the floor and was one with the floor, and when her eyes looked around, they squeaked and dripped with honest tears.

“Oh, Ximena, precious daughter of mine! I thought that you were in hiding all these years. When they put me here, I was just a young, naïve girl. I was afraid that they’ll find you and hurt you, but I am so glad I was wrong.”

“Mother, what happened to you?”

Frances sighed deeply and then said, “Years ago when I was only sixteen, I met a man named René. He was my lover so I wanted to run away with him. On the day we planned to leave town together, we got into a fight. René promised me that he’d never put his hands on me the wrong way and I believed him yet I still feared him every time I visited him. We argued and then he became violent. I was afraid and angry so I grabbed a kitchen knife and stabbed him in his right eye. I was mistaken because I thought I was free. I was wrong; so very wrong.”

“What did he do to you, Mother? How did you end up like this all these years?”

Frances continued, “René was involved with organized crime. I’m not sure what they were but he continuously threatened me with La Rossimacha. I still don’t know what it was that swept right under me and turned me into a paraplegic, but it hurt like a thousand knife wounds at my side. I remember the pain was so intense that I began to have out-of-body experiences. René and his merchants then dug into me with their batons and ripped me apart. They raped me and I became their sex slave for seven days. A señorita that was working inside their gang was told to get rid of me, so she gave me vermicide and cocaine and put me into this room to die. I have not yet seen my maker.”

Ximena cried and caressed her mother’s giant, oily head. The pain and fear that plagued her desperate mind came to her as though it would leave quickly and leave no wounds, but she soon realized that it would stay with her forever.

“I never died, Ximena. I never left you. I wanted to raise you and love you, but I was given my fate when they split me open from the crotch up. I never died,” Frances explained. “They

thought I’d be dead seven days after they dosed me up, yet here I am twenty years later in the house of pain as my daughter watches me live by my mistakes. I never died.”

Ximena shushed her mother’s trembling mouth and continued caressing her forehead as she said, “Don’t be afraid, Mother. I’m here for you now. I can help you leave this place. You can leave this place and never look back.”

“Ximena, precious daughter of mine, I’m in too much pain to feel afraid.”

Ximena cried and honest tears fell down her face in remorse for her mother’s fate. She clutched her chest and peered around the long, deep room to find something to deflate her mother with, but when she turned her back upon her mother, she noticed that the wounds in her body that cried out for *mother* were still present. She turned back around and saw that her mother was now hung from the ceiling by a wire that was wrapped around her neck at the hands of her torturers, La Rossimacha.

Frances’ bloated, pliant carcass hung like a fly on the spider’s web.

Just as Ximena began to accept her mother’s tragic end, she surveyed the room and found the burden of being lost tossed upon her mind. However, she had been mistaken in more ways than one. She looked at her hands and despaired one more time, whimpering and trembling.

The walls began to dissolve like pieces of furniture dressed in loam, her beloved mother vanished into the air along with the noose and at the back of the room a man played a Theremin and the music that came from it was the same familiar song: “Beso de Fuego.”

It had been seven hours since the serpent that made its way from the hole sunk its septic teeth into Ximena’s leg. Beyond the hisses that spoke like the ghost of antiquities, there was some kind of truth belonging somewhere and Ximena knew she once lived that truth even if it was a lie.

Ximena rested her cheek against the dirt and became like the dirt, belonging to this place of sufferers that carried their own wounds from their histories. She thought about how real it felt looking at her mother in the flesh and then she was surprisingly relieved to know it never happened. She never knew who it was who gave her this life. She wasted searching for the womb, but she found solace in knowing that she’ll never have to face the truth.

As Ximena lay dying upon Soria’s desert just across the street from the motel, the words from the enigmatic ghost spoke clearer than ever before and, like the bird that fell from the nest, she’ll never know who gave her life.

Just as she was about to enter the eternal hole of nonexistence, a red pickup truck pulled up and an elderly man walked out appearing rather concerned for the dying orphan, and the music that came from his truck was that same familiar song... “Beso de Fuego.”

# Angikar Sarkar

Phoenix Artist



“Ecstasy”  
Acrylic  
June 2016



Angikar Sarkar, 30, is professionally a software engineer and an arts and music aficionado. He is originally from India and completed a third year in fine arts at the Indian Academy of Fine Arts. In 2009, he came to the U.S. to pursue graduate studies from Texas. Since 2013, he has been in north Phoenix for professional connections. His wife, Samayita, is the biggest motivation behind his arts. Whenever he gets spare hours, Angikar involves himself in fine arts, poetry and music. Acrylic and water color are his specializations, but he also finds immense pleasure in charcoal art, sketching, pastel touches and tempera. He believes that music and rhythm exist everywhere in this universe and may be in different forms and shapes. As an artist, he wants to explore that symphony and correlate that rhythm with lives, myths, mythologies, objects and nature. Symphony brings happiness and happiness breeds excellent artworks, which is where his arts are coming from. The artist can be contacted by e-mail at [thisisangikar@gmail.com](mailto:thisisangikar@gmail.com) or by phone at 409-210-9116. He is also reachable by Facebook at [www.facebook.com/angikar.sarkar](http://www.facebook.com/angikar.sarkar) where he also showcases different albums of his artworks.

# Angikar Sarkar

Phoenix Artist



“Rajasthan”  
Acrylic  
May 2017

Music is everywhere, you just need to find the connection, to explore the symphony deeply embedded in each and every part of Mother Nature and probably everywhere in this vast universe. These artworks define the same. “Ecstasy” is portrayed after a little girl who finds heaven amidst flowers, butterflies and buzzing bees. “Revelation” is depicted from the love myths of Hindu God Krishna and Radha, where the latter plunged herself into love being mesmerized by Krishna’s magical flute. Similarly, “Synchrony” is also depicted from the combination of instruments played by the musician avatar of Hindu lord Ganesha. “Eternal Pride” is the moment when a peacock proudly unfurls itself responding to the pitter-patter of monsoon rain. “Rajasthan” is a snapshot of local musical harmony often performed in the streets of Rajasthan, India. And last but not the least, “The inculpable” is nothing but an innocent elk enjoying crickets’ creak in a dark, deep, serene forest.

- Angikar Sarkar

# Angikar Sarkar

Phoenix Artist



“Revelation”  
Acrylic  
September 2016

# Angikar Sarkar

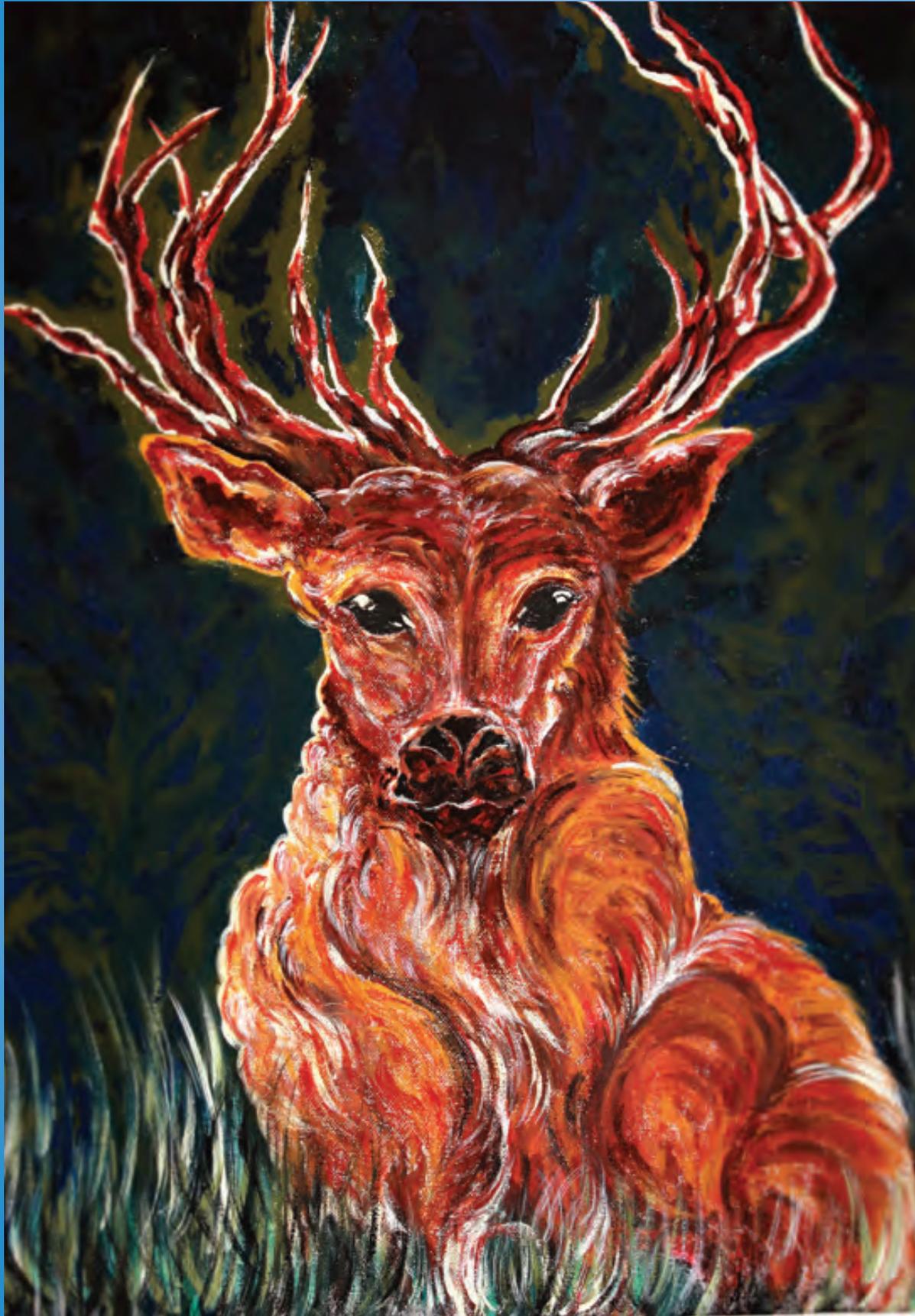
Phoenix Artist



**“The Eternal Pride”**  
Acrylic  
February 2017

# Angikar Sarkar

Phoenix Artist



**“The Inculpable”  
Acrylic  
September 2017**

# Angikar Sarkar

Phoenix Artist



“Synchrony”  
Acrylic  
February 2017

# A poem by Richard Fenton Sederstrom

## Frail Sounds

© 2017

*To enjoy living in the Anthropocene  
is to enjoy the promise of immortality:  
We are Geology.*

1. February 2017

Water drops drop drop blink  
into this tiny garden pond,  
discrete, particular, fat-round,  
enduring robust for a couple of feet—  
their lives eternal for bright seconds,  
a tiny system of tiny mortal planets.

Their sun a sound: Blink  
blink  
blink  
blink—  
geologic time zones balance stasis with evolution.  
Each blink a new Earth dissolving.

\*

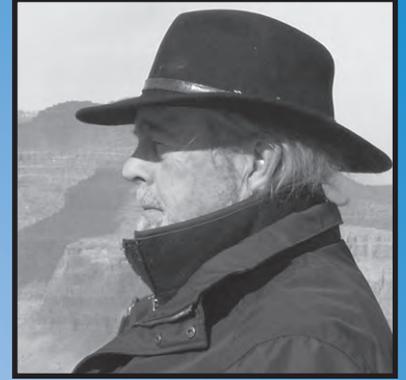
Winter winking at me this morning,  
this afternoon it will be spring again.  
We will open all the windows of our world  
into our world  
and the grandmother fragrance of sweet acacia  
will glimmer purplishly into the bedroom.

Outside under the tree  
is a closer gesture of fragrance—  
my grandmother's fragrance—  
arms outspread sideways, palms up.  
It is acceptance. It is Nature's submission  
to the fleeting joy of our senses.

\*

Combat helicopters range overhead.  
The omnivorous grace  
of military aggression.  
Earnest-eyed protectors  
hunting hard for something  
to protect their feeble nation from.

\*



**Richard Fenton Sederstrom** was raised and lives in the Sonoran Desert of Arizona and the North Woods of Minnesota. Sederstrom is the author of five books of poetry, including "Eumaeus Tends" in 2014. A new book, "Selenity Book Four," was published last winter.

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You cannot help it, Richard,  
accepting.  
You have taken politics outside with you.  
Your fists had been anchored  
and you failed  
to bother to switch off the television.

Your fists were clenched  
until you came under the tree.  
Oh, but it is still winter this morning, still,  
and I sit beneath an old mesquite  
on a cold concrete bench.  
Drops fall into the pond. Blink.

\*

Approaching maybe warily,  
a mother with two small boys in a very large stroller,  
a California contraption, stops.  
She asks them,  
neither old enough to understand,  
if they hear the drops landing in the pool.

But if any connection is made  
between the gentle song  
of their mother's trepid voice  
and the song of the drops,  
the tiniest of communal galaxies  
among these choral silences,

connected with the intrusion  
of my grandmother's fragrance,  
her gesture again of sweet acacia,  
the breeze through the shade of mesquite  
and the soft sound of fountain drops,  
it will never be for me to say.

Of course they hear. Each drop is a flute solo.  
Each drop is a microphonic concerto.  
Each drop is a falling and rising world of choirs,  
descending in gracefully ascending chords.  
Each drop deplores the ritual likelihood  
of these boys' sacrificial veteran deaths.

\*

Continued on page 86

Another helicopter,  
monstrous green cliché of dragonfly,  
stripped of all shine, all glow, all colors of joy,  
and any disruption of soul—  
for if a dragonfly flies soulless, what does not?—  
interrupts.

A basso snarl and rumble.  
It is the graceless note,  
a Doppler symphony of rude  
rising and falling noise, from diminuendo to death.  
out of place and time,  
out of any bounds of nature.

The television flicks back on inside my head.  
It makes itself heard, felt:  
throbs its fearful threats of dire security.  
But still, the sound of water—  
quieter, softer, more nearly pure—  
outplays the nattering of the television mind.

Or nearly.  
Or nearly.  
Blink  
blink  
blink  
blink.

\*

More helicopters.  
Our desert garden enters the dank hyper-oxygenated  
carboniferous age of the original dragonfly,  
the demon-fly of primal jungle,  
soggy and explosive at one time,  
Foggy Bottom on napalm injections.

Helicopters fumble over us more  
often these days than before.  
Their peace roars to signal at me  
the vast and airy perils  
they would protect me from  
at the near-end of my days.

\*

Continued on page 87

The bright orange Flame Skimmer will not remember  
the diet she inherits from evolution.  
She does not need to know  
the word for her meal.  
She has evolved to nibble out  
bits of what we fail to call future.

\*

And the mother and the two little boys?—  
Choppers above nibble them  
gently from the stroller, from the garden.  
Like all of us?  
Of course—  
protect us from . . .

\*

2. January 2016

. . . from anything.  
Blink  
blink  
blink  
blink.  
“Don’t move!”

\*

Our hired sailboat glides whitely  
by the rock-strewn wreck  
that disguises the Navy’s submarine dry-dock.  
We bow our heads, not in homage  
but to soothe the inner and guilty temptations  
of our touristical curiosity.

We salute without motion the tubular subterfuge  
whose primary force on behalf of the nation’s security  
is the escort police’s confiscation of tourist cameras.  
We confiscate our own cameras.  
Lock up our cameras with our consciences.  
We display the instincts of food.

Might it be more seemly for all of us,  
even the less than worthy among us,  
like me, if the helicopters might land and sit quietly,  
perch, rest hidden upon the dark greeny bough  
of some ancient auracaria,  
protect us, me, thereby from themselves?

\*

Continued on page 88

3. August 1961

Before we embarked for a harbor tour  
several wars and a half century ago,  
my inquisitive touring father  
asked a Navy officer, “What’s  
all that stuff under the tarp  
on the ship over there?”

The young officer smiled lieutenantly.  
He responded in an official tone,  
a well-armed docent,  
not unfriendly, not unthreatening,  
“That is stuff under a tarp”—  
“Sir”

The officer smiled then, satisfied.  
My father deigned not to peek beneath the official humor.  
Blink  
blink  
blink.  
“Don’t move!”

\*

4. November 2016

Now what exists of our nation—  
that which is not stuff under a tarp,  
a very big and very thick and incendiary canvas?  
One finger on the Tweeter Button,  
one finger on the Red Button,  
our newly elected prepares to play the world

like a playroom full of slot-cars,  
bathtub battleships, model airplanes, toy tanks, lead soldiers—  
a small child’s trigger finger  
and tiny plastic populations poised for melting.  
Polaris missiles threaten  
to erupt from among innocent bubbles in his tub.

“Don’t move!”

\*

Continued on page 89

*O, Mighty, hear our Public Prayer:*

*Allow us to protect ourselves instead, O Lord of Hosts,  
from all the Hosts that contend to protect us.*

*Go all ye quietly out together and let us close the door.  
Amen?*

Amen.

\*

5. [no date available anymore]

Meganeura evolves again. Lifts off  
from Carboniferous limestone strata under the Mogollon Rim.  
To my shade for a moment and just for the moment she is gray.  
Let me liven her, green her world, gild her, call her Megan.  
Megan flutters gold through her green  
swampy life-gorged retreats

through the ancient dawn again  
to the place of hunting.  
Midges are large and succulent.  
She unfolds her two-foot wingspread.  
She dives. Not at me. Not at Us. No me,  
not a single Us has lived these peaceful eons past.

Blink.

Blink

...

# Angelina Martin

Maricopa Artist



Angelina Martin is a unique Fashion Designer and owner of ANYMYSTIK clothing brand. She graduated from University California-Davis, obtaining a Bachelor of Science in Design and a Master of Fine Art in Textile Art & Costume Design, in addition to a Master of Humanities in Visual Arts from Tiffin University. Angelina's art technique combines sewing construction and textile art printmaking. See her on Instagram at [anymystik](#). E-mail her at [angelina@anymystik.com](mailto:angelina@anymystik.com).

## “Sugar Skull Printed Petticoat” and “Navy Jacket”

**Skirt:** Printed jersey fabric made from photograph of sunshine daisy sugar skull on painted hat.

Lace & chiffon layers for underskirt.

**Hat:** Painted, embroidered and quilted hat of sunshine daisy flower, vines and Mexican folk art sugar skull.

**Corset:** Sequin, satin and jersey fabrics with zipper closure.

**Coat:** Jim Morrison inspired navy faux fur coat.

**Guitar:** Acrylic paint, pink and red beads.

**Technique:** Acrylic painting, quilting, beading, embroidery and sewing.

**Models:** Ivie Keene and Collin Martin.

2017

# Angelina Martin

Maricopa Artist



**“Blue Guitar Patchwork Coat”**

**Guitar: Acrylic paint, pink and red beads.**

**Coat: Painted guitar on canvas with patchwork neck and sequin embellishments. Quilted patchwork sleeves and bodice with wax-print dyed cotton and faux fur in sky blue and brown.**

**Technique: Acrylic painting, dyes, quilting, applique, embroidery and sewing.**

**Model: Chaienne Zoller.**

**2017**

The Blue Guitar Fashion Collection is inspired by the glamorous themes of entertainment, music and freedom of wheels. The visual art narrative of retro classic cars, a vintage garage and nostalgia of rock n roll puts the modern wearable art and apparel surface treated fabric technology and garment designs in modern popular culture. Bold style and rebel rocker nature of the wearer. My process includes illustrating on cloth with thread, paint, dyes and beads to create abstract imagery of organic and geometric shape arrangements. Developing vibrant embellished menageries to sew with a variety of fabrics for wearable art, apparel and accessories. Inspiration for these exotic designs comes from the nostalgic entertainment and environment of my Mexican American heritage including folklore, music and dance. Photography and digital design are also used to make custom fabric yardage by recording the textile art illustrations and transforming them into patterned motifs for manufacturing.

**- Angelina Martin**

# Angelina Martin

Maricopa Artist



**“Sky Blue Bikini”  
and “Blue Guitar  
Patchwork Coat”**  
Guitar: Acrylic paint,  
pink and red beads.

Coat: Painted  
guitar on canvas  
with patchwork  
neck and sequin  
embellishments.  
Quilted patchwork  
sleeves and bodice  
with wax-print dyed  
cotton and faux  
fur in sky blue and  
brown.

Bikini: Sky blue faux  
fur, satin ribbon  
and satin lining with  
zipper closure.

Technique: Acrylic  
painting, dyes,  
quilting, applique,  
embroidery, sewing.

Model: Chaienne  
Zoller.  
2017

# Angelina Martin

Maricopa Artist



## “Blue Guitar Patchwork Coat” and “Sky Blue Bikini”

Guitar: Acrylic paint, pink and red beads.

Coat: Painted guitar on canvas with patchwork neck and sequin embellishments.

Quilted patchwork sleeves and bodice with wax-print dyed cotton and faux fur in sky blue and brown.

Bikini: Sky blue faux fur, satin ribbon and satin lining with zipper closure.

Technique: Acrylic painting, dyes, quilting, applique, embroidery, sewing.

Models: Elijah Mixon and Chaienne Zoller.

2017

# Angelina Martin

Maricopa Artist



**“Blue Guitar Patchwork Coat” and “Sky Blue Bikini”**

**Materials: Guitar, acrylic paint, pink and red beads.**

**Coat: Painted guitar on canvas with patchwork neck and sequin embellishments. Quilted patchwork sleeves and bodice with wax-print dyed cotton and faux fur in sky blue and brown.**

**Bikini: Sky blue faux fur, satin ribbon and satin lining with zipper closure.**

**Technique: Acrylic painting, dyes, quilting, applique, embroidery, sewing.**

**Model: Chaienne Zoller (fur bikini).**

**2017**

# FRIDAY NIGHT *Writes*

*\$5.00 admission*

*Your \$5.00 ticket can be applied toward  
your purchase that evening*

*A series of informative presentations  
for writers by published authors and  
publishing professionals*

*Dog-Eared Pages  
16428 N. 32nd Street  
Phoenix, AZ 85032*

*For more information, go to the website: [www.dogearredpagesusedbooks.com](http://www.dogearredpagesusedbooks.com)*

*Seating is limited. Tickets may be  
purchased in advance.  
Guest speaker begins promptly at 5:30*

# **Coming in Spring 2018!**

**The 10th Annual**

# **Blue Guitar Spring Festival of the Arts!**

**Join us for an amazing showcase of the arts, with music,  
dance, cultural presentations, art activities for children  
and literary readings!**

## **Free admission!**

**For more details, go to The Arizona Consortium  
for the Arts website, [www.artizona.org](http://www.artizona.org)**

# Open Mic: A celebration of the arts

Join us at our Monthly Open Mic Arts, Letters and Culture Events! This is a great chance for artists, writers and performers in all genres, spanning all disciplines and cultural representations, to get together, read, present, share, learn and enjoy. A featured artist is showcased for the entire month!

**WHERE:** Dog-Eared Pages Books, 16428 N. 32nd St., Suite 111 (just south of Bell Road), Phoenix, AZ 85032; (602) 283-5423.

**WHEN:** The last Thursday of each month, 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.

We also address key issues in contemporary art and culture, exchange ideas, learn new things through rigorous talks, conversations, debates and readings in an informal setting. Join us! Everyone is invited to bring a friend(s) and enjoy exciting conversations in the beautiful surroundings of the neighborhood bookstore. Meet new and old friends and enjoy! All programs are free and open to the public. For more information, contact Elena Thornton — (602) 263-5373 or [info@artizona.org](mailto:info@artizona.org).

## About The Arizona Consortium for the Arts

The Arizona Consortium for the Arts is a non-profit organization approved by the Arizona Corporation Commission in February 2008. We hold a 501c3 tax-exempt status.

We are all-volunteer. We are educators, artists, performers, writers and supporters of all artistic endeavors, and are proponents and supporters of the rich, vibrant and diverse community of the Greater Phoenix area as well as the entire state.

The Arizona Consortium seeks to create a multicultural, multidisciplinary arts center that will provide a home for our activities and foster artistic growth for people of all ages in conjunction with exhibiting artists, writers, actors, dancers



and musicians who will share their expertise in a gallery, theater setting.

Please visit [www.artizona.org](http://www.artizona.org) or [www.theblueguitarmagazine.org](http://www.theblueguitarmagazine.org) for more information about becoming a member, networking, donating, advertising, volunteering or submitting work to The Blue Guitar arts and literary

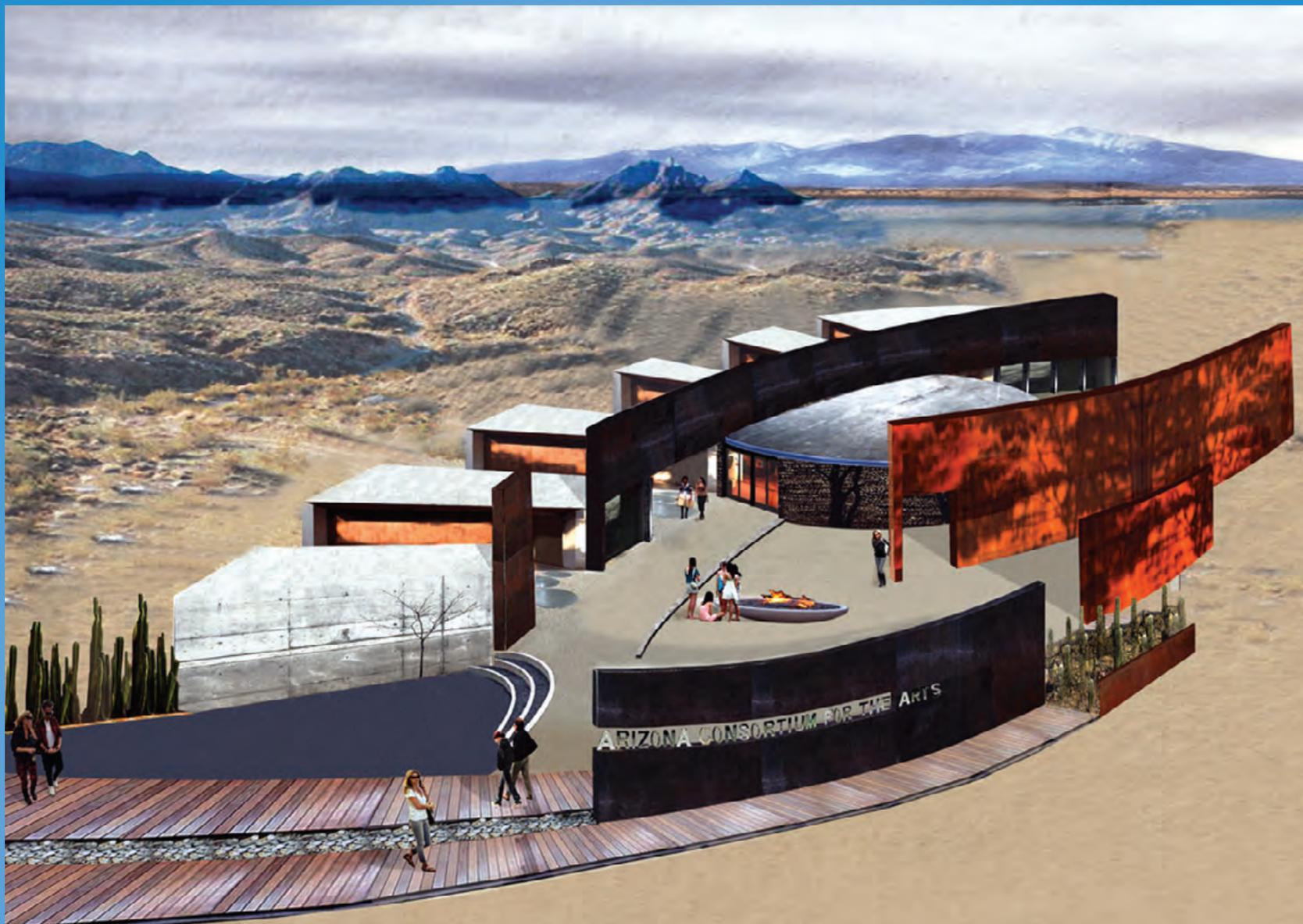
magazine, Unstrung poetry magazine and The Blue Guitar Jr. literary and arts magazine for youth.

You can become a part of the Arizona Consortium and make a difference. There are countless ways to contribute, and the consortium is grateful for any donation in any form.

For us to grow as an organization, provide various services to artists, and support inspiring projects, your financial support is needed. Every dollar received will support our website, the publication of our magazines, and the establishment of our future center.

Please visit our donations page, <http://www.artizona.org/donate.html>, and donate today!

Thank you for your support!



A rendering of the consortium's dream multicultural arts center by Effie Bouras, building designer, Mechanik Design Office, LLC.

# The consortium's vision for a multicultural arts center

The rendering of The Arizona Consortium for the Arts' dream multicultural arts center by Effie Bouras, Building Designer, Mechanik Design Office, LLC.

The Center will be a source and a destination for creativity and inspiration. It will be a home for many wonderful community organizations, creative and innovative multicultural and multidisciplinary activities, classes and projects representing and celebrating our diverse community.

The Center will be a cultural icon in the Phoenix area.

The Center will be an inimitable foundation for a unique experience, one that you'll want to share with family, friends and community.

Designed by Effie Bouras, the Center will feature numerous spaces for the arts in all genres, performances and presentations. A flexible and variable seating performance theater for rehearsals, concerts, theatrical presentations, video art and films, lectures, meetings and recordings will be available free-of-charge or at a minimum cost.

# Meet the staff of The Blue Guitar magazine



**Elena Thornton, publisher:** Founder and president of The Arizona Consortium for the Arts, Elena is an educator, artist and poet and lives in Phoenix. Reach her at [info@artizona.org](mailto:info@artizona.org).

**Rebecca Dyer, co-editor:** A Tucson native, Rebecca is a poet, journalist and teacher residing in Mesa with her husband, Rick, her Blue Guitar co-editor. Reach her at [rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org](mailto:rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org).

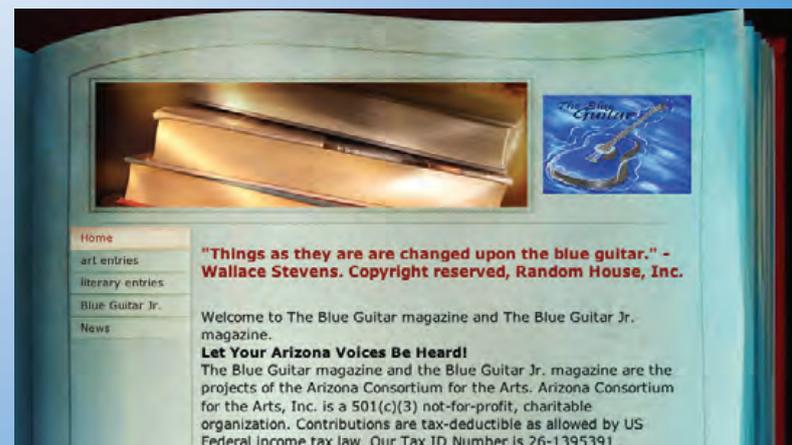
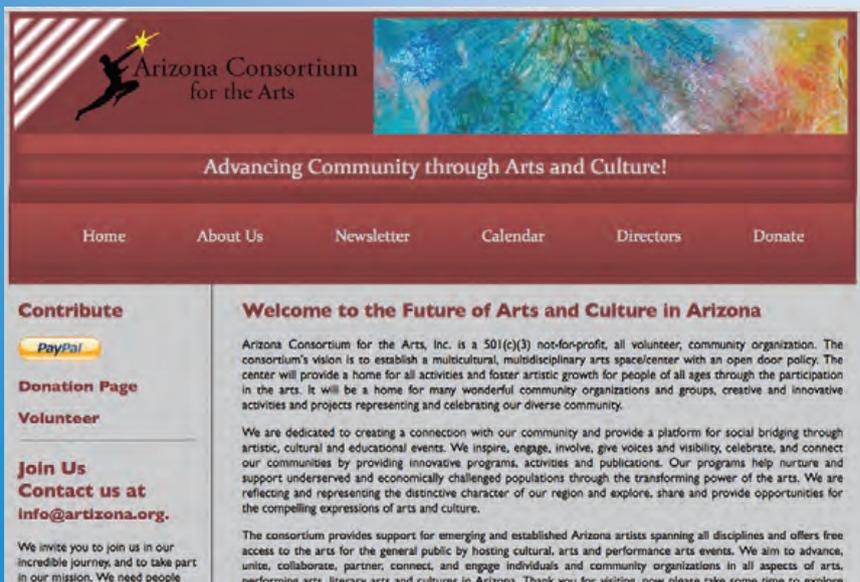


**Richard H. Dyer Jr., co-editor:** Richard (married to Rebecca, above) is the managing editor of two news websites and two monthly newspapers in the East Valley, a photographer and a welded-steel sculptor. Reach him at [richarddyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org](mailto:richarddyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org).

**Marjory Boyer, cover design artist for The Blue Guitar:** Marjory, of Scottsdale, is an award-winning artist, muralist and an acrylic-painting instructor. Her biography and contact information are available at [mboyerart.com](http://mboyerart.com).



## Check our websites for news on the arts



The Blue Guitar Magazine's website is [www.theblueguitarmagazine.org](http://www.theblueguitarmagazine.org).  
Like us on Facebook.  
Follow @BlueGuitarMagAZ on Twitter.

Check out The Arizona Consortium for the Arts website, [www.artizona.org](http://www.artizona.org). There, you can sign up for an e-mailed newsletter.

[www.TheBlueGuitarMagazine.org](http://www.TheBlueGuitarMagazine.org)

Fall 2017

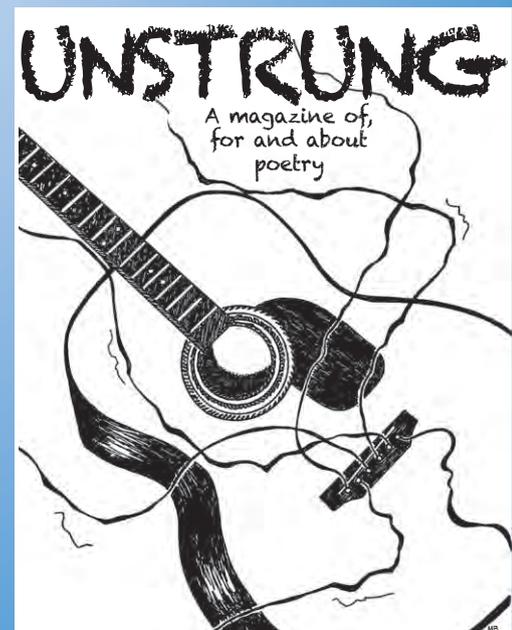
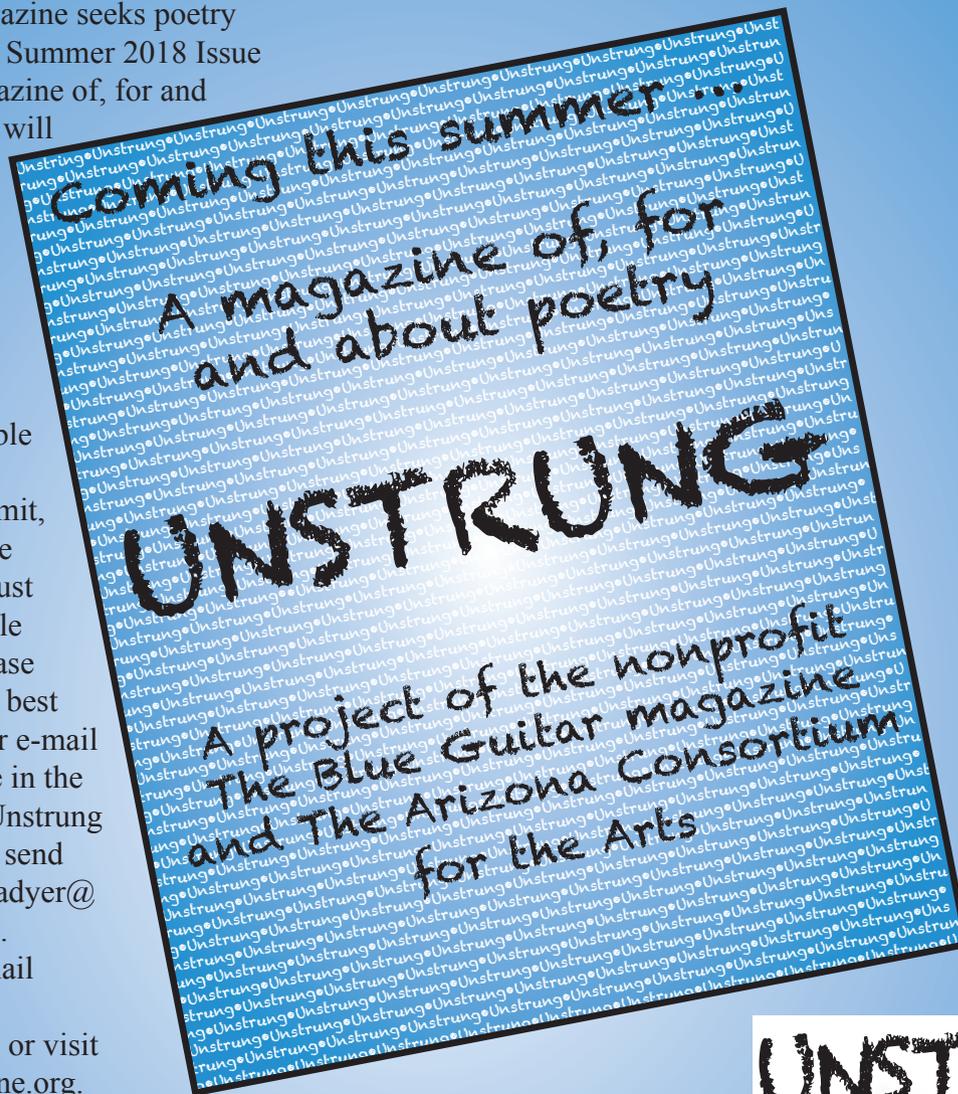
# A Call to Poets for the 2018 Issue of Unstrung

The Blue Guitar magazine seeks poetry submissions for the Summer 2018 Issue of Unstrung, a magazine of, for and

about poetry. Submissions will be accepted from June 1 through July 4. Poets must submit original work and must have a tie to Arizona. Simultaneous submissions will be accepted, but the poet must notify the magazine as soon as possible if the work is accepted elsewhere. It is free to submit, and multiple poems may be submitted. Submissions must be in the best shape possible and publication-ready. Please include your name and the best way to contact you on your e-mail submission. Please include in the e-mail subject line: Attn. Unstrung — Poetry submission, and send to Rebecca Dyer at [rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org](mailto:rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org). For more information, e-mail Rebecca at [rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org](mailto:rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org) or visit [www.theblueguitarmagazine.org](http://www.theblueguitarmagazine.org).

Unstrung, a magazine of, for and about poetry, is a nonprofit project of The Blue Guitar magazine and the nonprofit The Arizona Consortium for the Arts. The Arizona Consortium for the Arts is a startup, nonprofit group dedicated to supporting and fostering artists and the arts in Arizona, including the literary, visual and performing arts. For more information about Unstrung magazine, The Blue Guitar magazine and The Arizona Consortium for the Arts, visit our websites:

[www.theblueguitarmagazine.org](http://www.theblueguitarmagazine.org)  
and [www.artizona.org](http://www.artizona.org).



# A Call to Writers for The Blue Guitar Jr.

Open to children and teens who write  
and to adults who write  
for children and teens

**T**he Blue Guitar Jr. magazine seeks literary submissions for its next annual issue for children and teens. Submissions from children and teens and adults who write for children and teens are sought by Oct. 1, 2018, in all genres — fiction, poetry, plays, creative nonfiction — all geared to appeal to youthful audiences. Writers must submit original work and must live in Arizona. Simultaneous submissions will be accepted, but the writer must notify the magazine as soon as possible if the work is accepted elsewhere. It is free to submit, and submissions may be made in multiple genres. Please include your name and the best way to contact you on your submission. To submit or for further information, e-mail Editor Rebecca Dyer at [rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org](mailto:rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org). For additional information, visit [www.theblueguitarmagazine.org](http://www.theblueguitarmagazine.org).

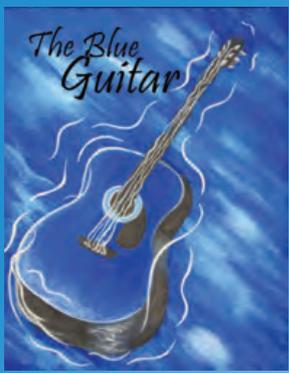
The Blue Guitar Jr. magazine is a project of the nonprofit The Blue Guitar literary and arts magazine and The Arizona Consortium for the Arts. The Arizona Consortium for the Arts is a startup, nonprofit group dedicated to supporting and fostering artists and the arts in Arizona, including the literary, visual and performing arts. For more information about The Blue Guitar and The Blue Guitar Jr. magazines and The Arizona Consortium for the Arts, visit our websites:  
[www.theblueguitarmagazine.org](http://www.theblueguitarmagazine.org) and [www.artizona.org](http://www.artizona.org).

# A Call to Artists for The Blue Guitar Jr.

Open to children and teens who create art  
and to adults who create art  
for children and teens

**T**he Blue Guitar Jr. magazine seeks art submissions for its next annual issue for children and teens. Submissions from children and teens and adults who create art for children and teens are sought by Oct. 1, 2018, in all media geared to appeal to youthful audiences. Artists must submit original work and must live in Arizona. Simultaneous submissions will be accepted, but the artist must notify the magazine as soon as possible if the work is accepted elsewhere. It is free to submit, and submissions may be made in multiple mediums; up to 5 images can be submitted. Artists are encouraged to submit images of work by e-mail; please provide high-resolution JPEGs of 300 dpi. Images must be identified in the e-mail with the artist's name, contact information, titles of works, dates and mediums. Please include your name and the best way to contact you. To submit or for more information, e-mail Editor Richard Dyer at [richarddyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org](mailto:richarddyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org). For additional information, visit [www.theblueguitarmagazine.org](http://www.theblueguitarmagazine.org).

The Blue Guitar Jr. magazine is a project of the nonprofit The Blue Guitar literary and arts magazine and The Arizona Consortium for the Arts. The Arizona Consortium for the Arts is a startup, nonprofit group dedicated to supporting and fostering artists and the arts in Arizona, including the literary, visual and performing arts. For more information about The Blue Guitar and The Blue Guitar Jr. magazines and The Arizona Consortium for the Arts, visit our websites:  
[www.theblueguitarmagazine.org](http://www.theblueguitarmagazine.org) and [www.artizona.org](http://www.artizona.org).



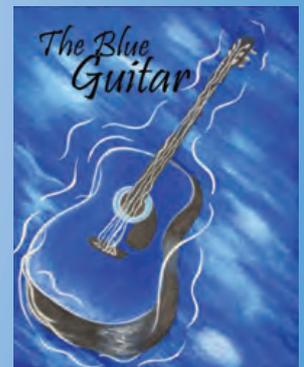
# A Call to Writers for Spring 2018

**T**he Blue Guitar magazine seeks literary submissions for the Spring 2018 Edition from Feb. 1 through March 4. Submissions are sought in all genres — fiction, poetry, plays, creative nonfiction. Writers must submit original work and must live part- or full-time in Arizona. Simultaneous submissions will be accepted, but the writer must notify the magazine as soon as possible if the work is accepted elsewhere. It is free to submit, and submissions may be made in multiple genres. Please include your name and the best way to contact you on your submission. Submissions must be in the best shape possible and publication-ready. To submit or for further information, e-mail Editor Rebecca Dyer at [rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org](mailto:rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org). For more information, visit [www.theblueguitarmagazine.org](http://www.theblueguitarmagazine.org).

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# A Call to Artists for Spring 2018

**T**he Blue Guitar magazine seeks art submissions in all mediums for the Spring 2018 Edition from Feb. 1 through March 4. Any artists who work in any visual art media, are 18 years or older and are part- or full-time Arizona residents can submit. It is free to submit and up to 5 images can be submitted. Artists are encouraged to submit images of work by e-mail; please provide high-resolution JPEGs of 300 dpi. Images must be identified in the e-mail with the artist's name and contact information, titles of works, dates and mediums. Submissions must be in the best shape possible and publication-ready. To submit or for further information, e-mail Editor Richard Dyer at [richarddyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org](mailto:richarddyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org). For more information, visit [www.theblueguitarmagazine.org](http://www.theblueguitarmagazine.org).



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**“Things as they are are changed upon the blue guitar.”**  
— Excerpt from Wallace Stevens’ 1937 poem “The Man With the Blue Guitar.”  
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Volume 9,  
Number 2  
Fall Issue  
**FREE!**

*“Things  
as they are  
are  
changed  
upon  
the  
blue guitar.”*