

A still life painting with a somber and symbolic theme. In the foreground, a human skull is rendered with thick, textured brushstrokes in shades of pink, tan, and grey. Behind it, a large, white, translucent bottle stands prominently. To the left, a blue vase holds a bouquet of orange and yellow flowers. A purple vase is partially visible behind the white bottle. The background is a mix of dark blue and green tones. The overall style is expressive and painterly.

Bloom

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*This is to thank the entire BLOOM editorial staff. Your efforts
and contributions make the issue fun, interactive, and meaningful:*

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As the days roll on

Amanda Munson

and the temperature slightly
lifts above freezing,
covered pine cones cracked through melted
snow while
the sun and flying birds share
an effervescent moment
amidst the clouds.

As she looks around to what peaks behind
leaves capturing the slim glint of beauty
from brittle bark to patchy trails
the sheer silence seizing her
every breath.
Flowering buds,
bottle green grass
the vernal equinox restoring life
within a blink of an eye.

As each season she regenerates
thriving in nature,
using each moment to take on
what's been waiting
And as she looks down
at the top of the dome
a smirk begins to form
marking the beginning.

Regrowth begins with
a bunny hopping away
crows perched on twisted electric wires cawing
with time ticking forward.
The calm has always been there,
awaiting her
to take her next
step.

Equinox

Adam Sarlan

Ice shatters,
cracking, separating
amidst the falling snow.
The scene empty,
except for an upward motion;
one lonely, yellow sapling
blossoming through the white,
its singular bud stretching to the sky.
A twig, pointing eastward,
whisking the gray clouds away;
a twig to the south
signals the hidden sun
to shine,
removing a fantasy-like forest,
showing a
lake island,
geese feeding off mossy algae,
an intimidated egret landing
in the marsh,
quaint dragonflies landing on purple milkweed,
black, slimy snakes tanning on the jagged rocks,
spotted deer racing through the clear brush,
wrens constructing their nests,
turtles floating on new lily pads,
humans enjoying an afternoon adventure,
taking a stroll through
a renewed luscious home.

The Thorns' Chain of Perfection

Stephanie Afonso

How the lazy ocean winks at the moon and then hides
Where the seaweed meets the sun

I cannot be

Happy when I know the currents ghostly gravitational pull
So I drown in the thought of embarking here
At this rotting lighthouse where the rogue waves can dance with Poseidon
To have a tryst and forget the seas lost souls from above lightning
The fire burns within the eyes stormy heart where the bitter foam
I try and escape from hunts my soul for sport now

So heavy

Tidy thorns rise up from the shallows to swallow unkept ships
After they whispered the coast line parallel to Heaven
Like birds of prey picking piece by piece at the glories lying wrecked
Like they own the waves beneath that lullaby babies
From lost mothers to enchanting sirens

Yes I can't wait

To set sail from your affection and crash ashore onto the sand
Like the city of Atlantis never existed in the daylight
Like mermaids were really navigators of the underworld
From centuries of fear guarding safe passage
I can only hope they will do the same with me now
The tide sways to and fro with the need to be with the bay

Men

Who survive Scylla's sharklike trap
I want to get lost with Odysseus again
I will claim the world for myself and live with Circe
The waves are my home the seashells my eyes and the sun my compass

Yes

Yes let us be free

GPS

Nia Major

It felt great to drive home without the GPS today... I've realized how much the fear of imperfection drives even the smallest aspects of my life. Using the GPS b/c I'm afraid of making the wrong turn and ending up in some unfamiliar place. Not purchasing simple things I want b/c I'm afraid they'll be a waste of money. Not sharing everything b/c I'm afraid of exposing my true self. My completely imperfect self. To think that a pen and paper could know me more than a human composed of flesh and bone... I digress.

How do I begin to show myself, my true self, completely raw in its shame and fear? I don't use pens because I don't want my mistakes to clutter a perfectly crisp page. Will others accept the things that raise my heart rate and make my mind race? Because I barely accept them. I more so resent them. Even my writing is imperfect- a journal entry-turned-poem-turned-prose. I hold God at a distance b/c I know He KNOWS. Too afraid to give Him control b/c I've got my mind controlled, and that's all I've known.

"Think. Feel." The gentle ripples on the surface of a raging sea, and I can only be what the eye can see. But you, uncover.

Everything.

"Show them everything." Show them everything, every part of me, but how, if I am a slave to what I want them to see?

Limes Bananas Coconut Tamarind

Joseph Potter

Tangle into my daily prayers—
I kiss the river every time my eyelids pass
Over it. It's a peace offering— a ritual
To keep believing the world got me
& it got you & it got us through thickets
Of oppression that sears idealistic and
Personalized veneer of pigmentation.
Every blow leads a trail of spit zoomed in:

Zoologists call it phyto- I call it retro-
With a dash to add your freedom of choice:

Whitman taught me to loafe: to count
Every breath: between the breaths: between
The breaths: fifty-seven miles per hour equates
To thirty-one of those breaths lingering behind crumbly
Paths to serenity— it whispers loud enough to be
An exclusive Holy Spirit without the subscription service
The grass dug up on the way to a mini-horse fills
All five lobes of my lungs with rinds of compassion &
Belief in what I know: in what I remember:
Bacon fat apples and COPD laughs keep dried
Flowers at the forefront of my car to bless
My power steering fluid— a constant reminder
That wherever my fingers and occipital lobe
Wander there's an earth-tone lined breeze using
Morse coded clouds to tell me the next step to ease

Neon Awakening

Hammad Kareem

On a strange planet I awoke
With a neon blue moon that shimmered I did find
My senses then somehow broke
the vision played games with my mind
or perhaps it was a reality trip
reality is what I was to grip
on the strange planet that day
I never escaped anyway

while in your bed

Elizabeth Gourde

Your lips start to taste
like dude-bro
when your friends come around

Expressions reserved for me
are flat out reserved
I've got myself flat out
frustrated as fuck
trying to figure you out

I'm told that I assume intentions too much
I guess I know what you mean
I'm basing it all on what seems
to be or not to be

You told me you like
Kevin Costner
Old Bay
not my baking
and cockapoos
and I heard I'm different

What a relief

Entertain my imploring
because if you're no more than
Zyn and herb and beer
then I don't know why I'm here
tolerating your snoring
and kissing you *good morning*



Harmony

Yeukai Chiroodza-Imeh





Untitled

Antoannet Estevez

Translation: Let the ocean sing to me/ Can the ocean sing to me?





Woman in the yellow coat

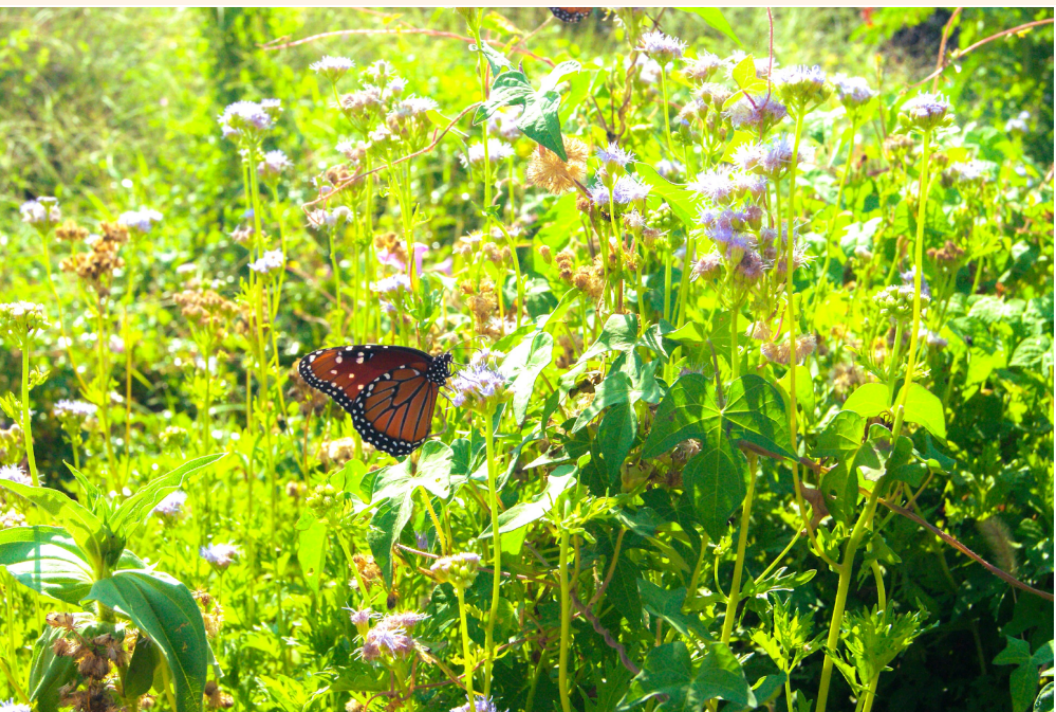
Patrick Johnson





Untitled

Trish Carter





Machu

Robert Porter



Untitled
Alfiya Khu

After the Pause

Adam Sarlan

Seated, they gather,
to discuss the
impertinent information that
will help them
reassemble and achieve
success after the pause.

A coach can
have that tough, selfless
character, a player can
have infinite talent.

They will never
reach victory
without acting as one.

The ensuing play,
they ferociously
crack the rim.

It's a win
after the pause.

Petal

Ryann Anderson

There sit my pretty little rose,

Perched towards the light,

Taking in the day.

Now it is all too dull.

She threatened to break,

So I drifted away.

Thus grew the careless

and its mistakes.

Now, here she sits,

In shattered glass,

Shaken by decay.

I cradle her near;

Wishing everything

To bring death to bay.

I want to ruin her grace,

I want to scream:

'Let's not save face,

Love me or love me not,'

As I tear each petal with rage.

But here is the dimmed,

Thorns biting into my skin,

Begging her to wait.

I'll pack the soil, I'll water her roots;

I'll gift her my love.

Promises lace the pain.

Here sits my pretty little rose;

Can she be loved?

Or loved not

Lunch Point Break

Elizabeth Gourde

You discover that salty tears are savory too
as John Lennon screams Happy Xmas over the radio
at a Noodles & Company where you enjoy
all of the noodles
and none of the company
pho tastes infinitely better
across from someone
instead of convincing yourself
you like the flavor
of independent living

i told you you wouldn't fit in

Joseph Potter

He and I are prisoners inside a pulley system's plea for lotion embedded
Inside lice-infested, matted-down coat fur that sings a song of begging by otherworldly,
Shadow alter-egos who desire nothing but the layered stripping of his skin, the plucking of my
Follicles from benign liver spots on inner thighs pumping out boulders as a gift for the castle
Housing a show of raining glass originating from bone-in fingertips
And breasts producing sand for milk—paying homage to the siren call of his people
“Emet” engraved onto every block brings a million golem men to desperate swarms inside congealed
Arteries that smell like sacrificial crocodile hormone testing
The door frame it's spread over rubs off the ignitor & You and I lay like deadwood—
“Met” and grains of condensed rock stained on our foreheads

A Captain's Love

Ryann Anderson

A widowed heart, a broken promise,
A treasure unfounded, a life ended,
Time stopped to mourn.
The ink stained desk, the words unsaid,
His jacket and hat unattended.
Memories whispered in her ear,
A thousand stories cried in pain.
How then to pick up the pieces?
How to go on alone?
How can it be continued?
She asked him to stay after the end;
A match and a liquor bottle;
she promised him glory,
Seraphim went up in a blaze.
The flames feasted, the gunpowder sounded.
In the roar of a grieving fire;
In the crashing heart of a sea-bound love;
With tobacco on the breeze:
Stay.
And he had.

Strawberry Boston

Stephanie Afonso

Penny wouldn't shut up for the last two weeks. More than she normally did anyhow. She wanted to go to Boston to meet a guy she had been talking to online and she wanted my opinion. I told her he was cute. That just spewed her on and she talked for three hours straight. I wanted to hang up. She continued. I hung up the phone. She called me right back and said the line must have gone down. I agreed and she rambled on. "So, what do you think?" Penny asked. "He could be a Serial killer." I said. "But he's so cute. And he has a dog!" "Is that supposed to make him a Saint?" I asked. "You just don't understand what it's like to be pretty." Penny replied. "I'm not going to report you missing." I said. The call ended right after that and I went back to painting my toe nails. I wondered how King Tut really died and why my Christmas mug from last year wasn't microwavable. Then it occurred to me. I should go to a nude beach some time and find treasure with a metal detector. I hope I find Rihanna's left nipple piercing so I can sell it on eBay and use the money to buy a Hot Wheels Collection. I'll shelf it below my collectible Pokémon cards. Priorities. Know your place Hot Wheels. I would put them next to my Star Wars figures but my brother's cat knocked down the whole display. I haven't seen my brother in years. He's not invited to the Fourth of July cookout anymore.

La Verdad

Elizabeth Gourde

A mountain in Chihuahua, Mexico, scolds the people beneath it:

Juárez, la Biblia es la verdad. Léela.

Juárez, the Bible is the truth. Read it.

a vista which requires visitation rights

in blue of day and blue black of night