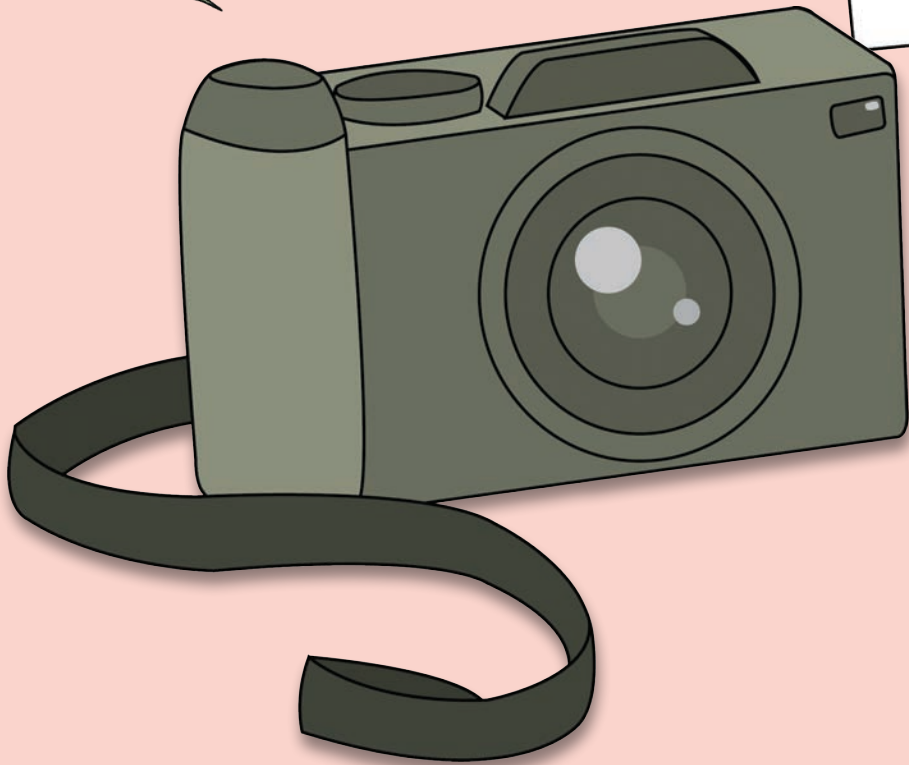
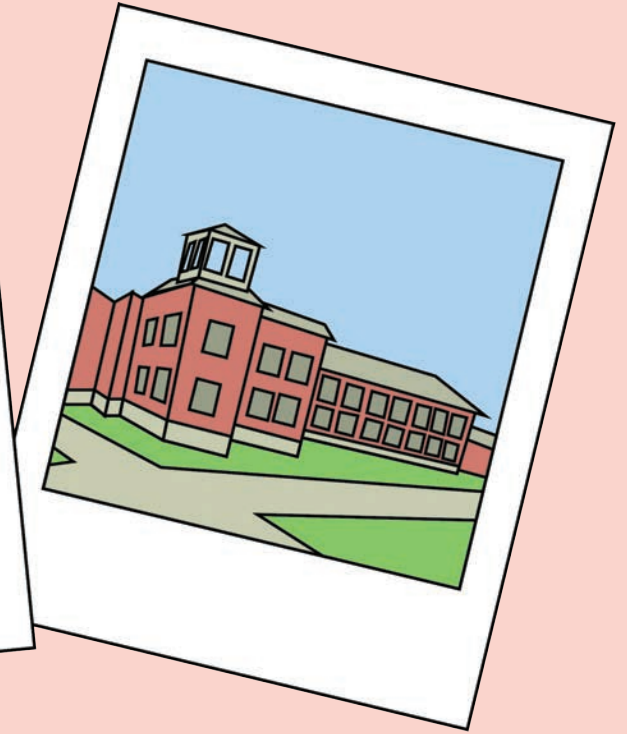
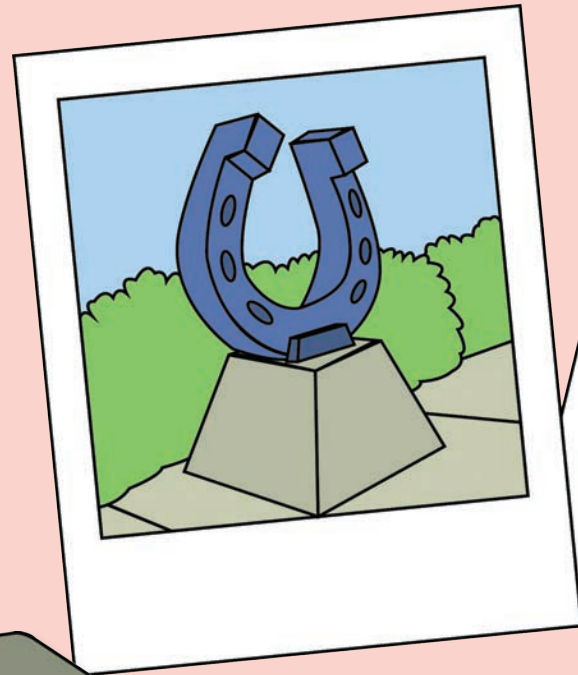


# collage

A Journal of Creative Expression  
Spring 2021



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# From The Editor

The feeling of being granted a new beginning at the turn of this year was more poignant than it has ever been. Often, I find myself unmoved by the ever-changing number on the calendar, but after all the losses of 2020, I was relieved to turn the page. With a new year comes new hope—a chance to try again. As we continue to rebuild from the shambles of the past year, it is encouraging to see that creativity has not waned.

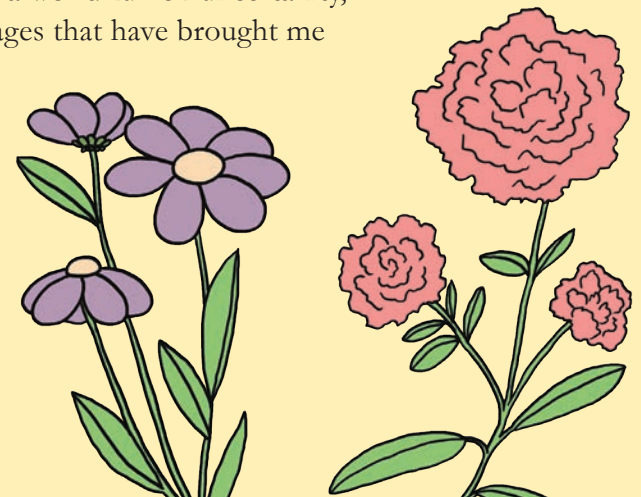
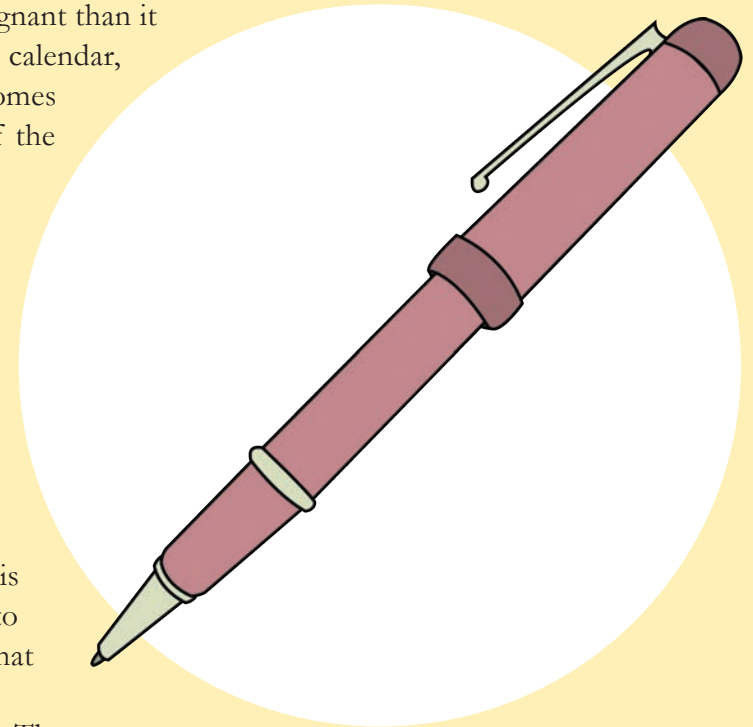
I have had the joy of being on the staff of *Collage* for eight semesters now. When I was recruited my freshman year, I had no idea of the impact this journal would have on me. From the first meeting, sharing our ideas and love for art, I knew that I had found my place at MTSU. *Collage* has continued to be a home for me through many changes in my college career. I am honored to be able to contribute to this journal that has given me so much—a voice for my love of art and a community of fellow creatives.

This season has perhaps been the most challenging as we adapt to virtual meetings and the unique difficulties of producing a physical magazine in an online era. But what continues to amaze me is the dedication and resilience of our staff. Despite it all, the staff rises to the occasion, pouring over each submission and crafting an edition of *Collage* that is fitting for this global moment. Though we all come from different backgrounds, we share a common goal: to showcase and encourage creative expression of all kinds from our fellow students. Without that passion and the support of our faithful faculty adviser, Marsha Powers, there is no *Collage*.

I hope this issue of *Collage* can be a shimmer of light, an invitation to believe in better days. The past year has torn us apart, both in our personal lives and as a global community. I believe now more strongly than ever that art and creativity will be the glue that pulls us back together. Creativity will send us forward into the unknown, armed with an unmatched resilience to face the challenges ahead. Now, as we approach graduation and enter into a world full of uncertainty, I carry with me the memories of each semester of *Collage* and the incredible creators within the pages that have brought me so much comfort. Thank you, *Collage*.

To new beginnings,

*Katrina Scott*



# Content

## Art

- 02 **The Refugee** | Mary Kenley Tugman
- 03 **Valley of the Primordial Sea** | Jake Yandle ★
- 03 **The Color** | Jon Lee
- 06 **Flood** | Chelsea Gardiner
- 09 **Mind Fog** | Morgan Ruth
- 10 **Freedom** | Mary Kenley Tugman
- 12 **John** | Jillian DeGrie
- 16 **Zooplankton from the Seafloor** | Morgan Ruth
- 16 **Gustav** | Anna Inthirath
- 17 **Euphoria** | Amber Puls
- 18 **Not So Far Away** | Elizabeth Clippard
- 19 **Ana** | Eli Ward
- 19 **A Self Portrait of Anxiety** | Mary Kenley Tugman
- 21 **Hound** | Morgan Westerbeck
- 22 **The Story of Roxanne** | Jillian DeGrie
- 23 **Lip Service** | Whitney Fraker
- 24 **The Second of May 2020** | Steven Gavel
- 25 **The Hive** | Rylee Campbell
- 25 **Untitled #1** | Alaina Miller
- 25 **Their Beauty** | Kiara Skinner
- 26 **Intrusion** | Mo Overholt
- 26 **MAD W!ZARD** | Alice Rethi
- 28 **Still Life** | Adriana Castro-Garcia
- 30 **Blue Law Series** | Amber Puls

## Features

- 14 **Champagne Taste: The Gilded Era** | Kelsey Keith
- 15 **“On the Periphery”:**  
**An Inside Look** | Keisha Lambert

## Poetry

- 03 **Broken Open** | Sarah Garris
- 04 **Extinction** | Fritz Valentine ★
- 06 **The Thunderstorm** | Fritz Valentine
- 08 **My Friends and Their Addictions: Part 1** | Morgan Fipps
- 09 **Namesake** | Courtney Anderson
- 12 **Para Papy** | Nallely Ortega Prater
- 13 **Collecting Dust** | Camrin Owens
- 16 **Spaces Between Stars** | Carrie Wright
- 17 **Paradise** | Nash Meade
- 17 **“A Rose is a Rose,” a Reflection on Gertrude Stein** | Susanna Deter-Wolf
- 20 **To All My Dear Friends:** | DeAnn Bingham
- 21 **Shedding** | Dominic Macoaldi
- 22 **Boy Named Art** | Sydney Robertson
- 23 **Poet’s Block** | Livi Goodgame
- 25 **Mother Fly** | Sarah Garris
- 26 **Thesauritis** | Anthony Czelusniak
- 27 **Vignettes of the House I Grew Up In** | Abigail Wells
- 28 **Home** | Morgan Fipps

## Prose

- 02 **Dysplasia** | Rachel Booher ★
- 07 **The Man Who Touched the Sky** | Avery Alsup
- 10 **The Antidote** | Rachel Booher
- 18 **Chapter VIII** | Anonymous
- 24 **Things I Want for Her** | Ashley Barrientos

## Photography

- 04 **Flipped** | Kristine Gibson
- 05 **Phoenix of Pompeii** | Valkyrie Rutledge ★
- 05 **To Reach You** | Nallely Ortega Prater
- 07 **Water** | Kerigan Standtler
- 08 **Smoking Kills** | Keely Ginder
- 08 **Morning Stroll** | Destiny Seaton
- 11 **Faith in Paradise** | Destiny Seaton
- 13 **Cold Room** | Justine Clifford
- 13 **The Raven** | Danielle Mead
- 17 **A Blissful Prayer** | Valkyrie Rutledge
- 19 **Posh** | MaKayla Stovall
- 20 **Cowgirl Blues** | MaKayla Stovall
- 23 **Mother of Mankind** | MaKayla Stovall
- 27 **Waiting** | Destiny Seaton
- 29 **Scenic Collage** | Winter Wingfield
- 29 **A Wee Wander** | Laine Matthews

## Audio

- 08 **OMg** | Cam Herring
- 24 **Better Days** | Nick Edgerson ★
- 30 **Mal Escrita** | Daniel Avila

## Video

- 21 **Orange Juice** | James Roberson
- 28 **Elizabeth’s Houses** | James Roberson ★
- 29 **Bongo Dodgeball** | Julian Brown

Careful hands softly touched the darkened lines upon *my* cheeks, where wonderings dwell. Shards from my past engraved on scarred skin—solid, smooth, and leather-bound—flecked with the colors of parchment and sand while drifting in the sea of wet stones and choices.

If only I could speak to her. Just one drop in the ripples of time is all I would need to forever change our fate. Staring into the yet-to-be-tainted eyes of myself, I... I am unsure. Would I grovel and plead? Would I cry out with the anguish of a childless mother? Would I beg her to remain whole, unbroken—striking fear into her heart with the double-edged *mistakes* from my youth? Would I grow jealous and angry? Green pins of envy would spring from my skin in the presence of her hope, settling like mist after fallen rain. But from the moisture, the mildew would spread, seeping through the crevices of my lips and rusting the pins, breeding the *Clostridium tetani* under the storms from my eyes.

She would pity me. I know my expressions would reflect the wraiths of regret, but I would reassure her that my ghosts *do* not exist to haunt her dreams. Tasting the burn of gunpowder and bile, I'd swallow the lie, pluck the emerald pins from my skin, and attempt to sew the lines of my face back together.

What would I tell my fifteen-year-old self? Would I tell her that love is like a greasy cheeseburger that goes down savory and smooth, right before the heart attack? The bill and the beatings are *not* worth it. Should I tell her that drugs and alcohol are like money? Should I tell her that she will spend her identity, stretch marks, and prom on people who will only steal her fortune? Once broke and broken, she'll trade all she has left and end up alone, in her paper fountains and powder rooms, waiting for the



*The Refugee* | Mary Kenley Tugman | painting

rifle to misfire in her veins.

As I sit upon my iron throne, riddled with scars and miracles, I drag shards and choices across the sea of wet stones. The forges burn, the shards blaze, the choices spark, and diseases die under my *rule* as I pluck the last pin and gaze into the mirror. I would tell her nothing... Except maybe to hold strength and resilience like vises.

Spoken in urgency, I beg her, “Keep the maws open wide, and when you smell the stench of

mildew and death, use *your* agony and pain to clamp down and hold. The sand will melt, the parchment will burn, the glass will shatter, the shards will form, and you will grow—solid, smooth, and leather-bound.”

“Once cooled and honed by the sea of wet stones, you...” I sigh as I reach toward the mirror, resting careful hands upon wonder-filled cheeks. “You just might be sharp enough to survive the shards of my *life* and become me.” ●

*Broken Open* | Sarah Garris

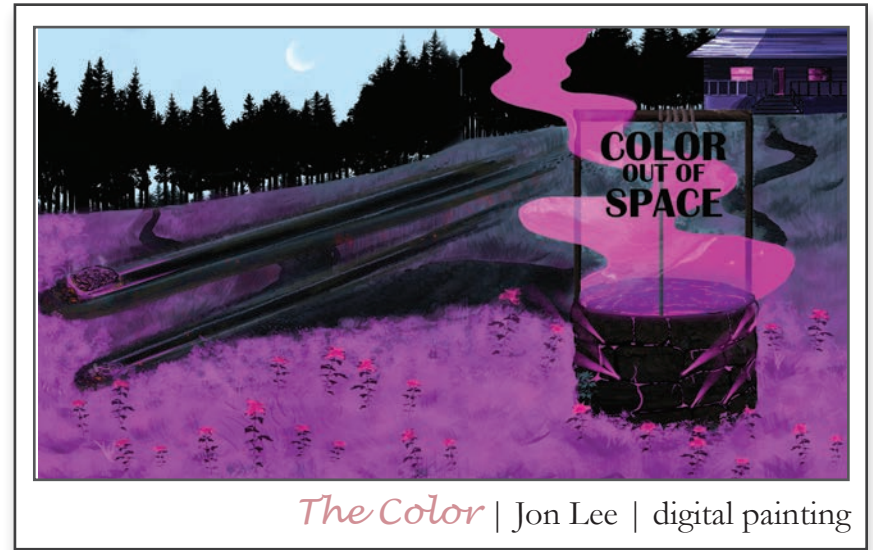
Sitting in the circle of a perfect wasteland,  
I pull the emptiness towards me and push substance out.  
Flashes of burnt orange desert shift to gray across my eyes as I stare at all the nothing.  
My need for people is only outweighed by fear.

How does the touch of one person create such vulnerability?  
The brush of fingertips opens deep fissures in my skin,  
And the aching, dry split of flesh burns in the salted winds.

As I reach for more person, more humanity,  
My burning pain forces me to recoil,  
Curling into myself, protecting the deep softness of tissue within.  
No matter how tightly I twist, the cracks don't close.  
Sand and grit press into my being and pulverize my insides.  
The raw won't leave.

This pain of openness, this exposure, this vulnerability,  
It's ground my insides to a perfect surface.  
A smooth, hard casing in the center of the desert.

The more time I spend here, the more my shell breaks apart,  
I become the pieces of sand around me,  
Assimilating into the broken parts of others that lost themselves.



*The Color* | Jon Lee | digital painting



★ *Valley of the Primordial Sea* | Jake Yandle | digital 2D



★ *Extinction* | Fritz Valentine

My friends and I sit in a tent,  
a lighter and a melting water bottle between us,  
silent and drowning because  
maybe there was a sound outside and that means  
definitely the cops are kneeling,  
ears pressed to the dirt,  
right outside,  
until someone starts laughing  
and then no one can stop.

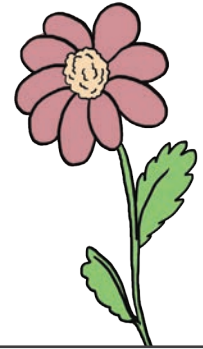
The speed limit is 30 but we're pushing 28  
and it's still too fast,  
but my song is next in the queue,  
so it's okay—  
because worries are like wishes  
and if I have enough  
then none will come true.

We are the accumulation of yesterday and yesterday  
and today, rolled up like cigarettes, and one day  
it will all go up in smoke.

We share our reckless genealogies  
over morning coffee, brush our teeth and chase  
with OJ, because the abuse will follow  
farther than I can spit,  
but that's not all we are.  
It's not a life story until it's over  
and ours is going to be so fucking queer.

There are lyrics that we pass  
around like medication,  
taking just enough to get us through the day  
to stop our hands from shaking  
to stop our hearts from aching like punched-out teeth for  
talking too loud too much about the things that we love.

I don't like hugs,  
but sometimes I can't let go  
because tomorrow we will be new people,  
all of us,  
and today is the extinction of a species  
even if we never stop laughing.



*Flipped* | Kristine Gibson | film





★ *Phoenix of Pompeii* | Valkyrie Rutledge | photography



*To Reach You*  
Nallely Ortega Prater | photography





*Flood* | Chelsea Gardiner | oil on board

## *The Thunderstorm* | Fritz Valentine

Standing out  
beneath the sky,  
purple clouds growling  
like an upset stomach,  
I reached up,  
apathetic,  
as nature's brutal fingers  
reached back,  
forcing themselves down  
my throat: a reminder.

I don't remember it now,  
if I'm being honest,  
but that night I had a dream  
I was a magic bottle  
full of poison,  
that when poured,  
filled with potion  
vitriol and contentment,  
in equal measure,  
and I was never empty.

It might have been  
the electrocution  
killing all my brain cells,  
but I awoke  
the next day  
in the warm-wet grass,  
wanting to feel  
everything,  
stretching out  
towards the sun.



## The Man Who Touched the Sky | Avery Alsup

**Once upon a time**, when people were made of stone and water, there was a man who could not stop watching the sky.

While his fellows spent their hours toiling in the earth, searching for metals and jewels to cover their stony flesh, this man only looked to the sky.

Each morning, as the others would make the journey from their glittering sea caves to the surface, he could already be seen standing at the top of a mountain, arms wide and eyes open to embrace the sun and its colors as it rose.

His fellows could not understand his fascination with untouchable things. If you could not hold the beautiful and the treasured in your own hands, how then, could it ever be yours? And if it wasn't yours, what was the point?

To this criticism, the man would only shrug his stony shoulders and turn his face to the light once more. He was a man of few words, and that suited him fine. He often believed that beauty was easily disturbed by their hard voices of stone.

---

**One evening**, he ceased to make the journey back to the sea, and every night hence he spent it staring at the multitude of stars, brighter and finer than the rarest gems coveted in the deepest mines.

He lost track of time and only recognized its passage in the sun against the sky. His stony flesh grew soft moss, and animals began to regard him as a facet of the mountainside.

Where his fellows slowly grew more polished and bejeweled from their constant trek in and out of the water, he remained rough and jagged.

But this did not matter to him. He was content. It was quite a new and satisfying sensation, one that

made little sense to his immovable fellows with always grasping minds. They had the temperament of water with all the stubbornness of granite.

But not this man.

All his days spent away from the water and under the sky were changing him. The wonder of the beauty around him was making him whole but cracking his stony flesh.

---

**His fellows were right** that he would never touch the sky, but he did not mind. His heart was not as watery as theirs were; his awe and affection for beauty were resolute.

With each sunny day that passed, his being was slowly evaporating into the sky.

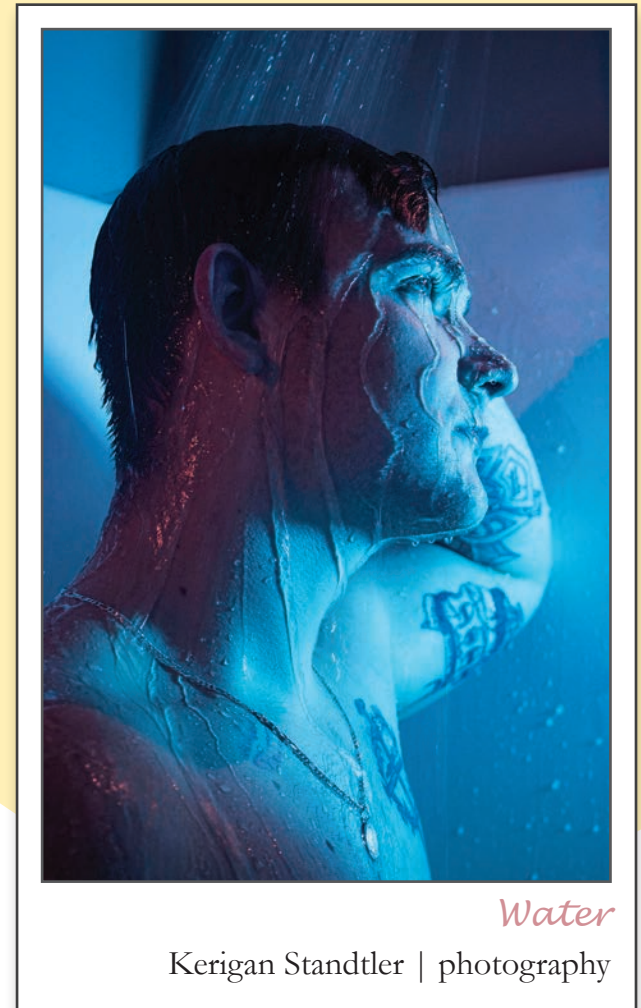
Oh, how he longed to be just a ray of light or wisp of the cloud, maybe just a pigment in all the colors of a sunset!

Eventually, being gone from the sea for so long dried him out, and the last of his soul was etched into the tears of wonder creating ravines on his stone face.

When the sun rose on his final day, he was overcome with the magnitude of his contentment, and the sun's heat stole his tears into the sky.

He never knew the cool embrace of the air, or felt his molecules collect and grow heavy in the clouds, but it did not matter.

He had been a collector of small wonders, and his jagged, rocky form still grows moss and flowers as a testament to the joys of being happy just to be an observer of beauty, rather than remain a collector of sorrow, as all his race of stone and water were meant to be. ●



*Water*

Kerigan Standtler | photography



*My Friends and Their Addictions:*  
*Part 1* | Morgan Fipps

I hate the way you poison your lungs  
with that thing  
you hold between your fingers every  
morning, noon, and night.  
I hate the way it encompasses you  
in its secret embrace  
and its smell clings to your clothes  
like a lover's cologne.  
I hate seeing your body  
shake with aggravation  
when it's been too long without  
your secret lover's kiss.  
I hate that it steals away  
the stars in your eyes and  
replaces them with empty, bloodshot rivers.  
I hate how you answer its call  
so willingly, so easily,  
but leave mine ringing in the background.  
I hate how it sneaks away pieces of you  
to hide away for itself  
and leaves me with nothing but  
your empty husk.  
I hate that it has formed you into  
someone new,  
leaving me to love a stranger.



*Smoking Kills* | Keely Ginder | photography



*Morning Stroll* | Destiny Seaton | photography

*Namesake* | Courtney Anderson

You ask me what my name is.

I tell you,

I am but a bolt in the structure of Grand Central Station,  
an unlit cigarette dangling from the mouth of a journalist.

A collected can of street beggars.

I am the mouth of God in Times Square,  
blowing hot and dirty gusts from the subway grates.

I am a murmur in the heartbeat of the busiest city.

You ask me what my name is.

I answer,

I am a graffitied Broadway billboard.

A broken ATM used by a young woman,  
alone,

at night.

I am the cracks in the concrete where your solemnest grievances grow.

You ask me what my name is.

I tell you,

I am a broken department store window,  
a stolen bottle of Chanel No. 5.

I am an unsigned check,

a tip in a jar,

a rip in a dress.

You ask me what my name is.

I answer,

I am the first deep breath of a cigar.

I am a shock of liquor on the tongue.

I am a stolen dance,

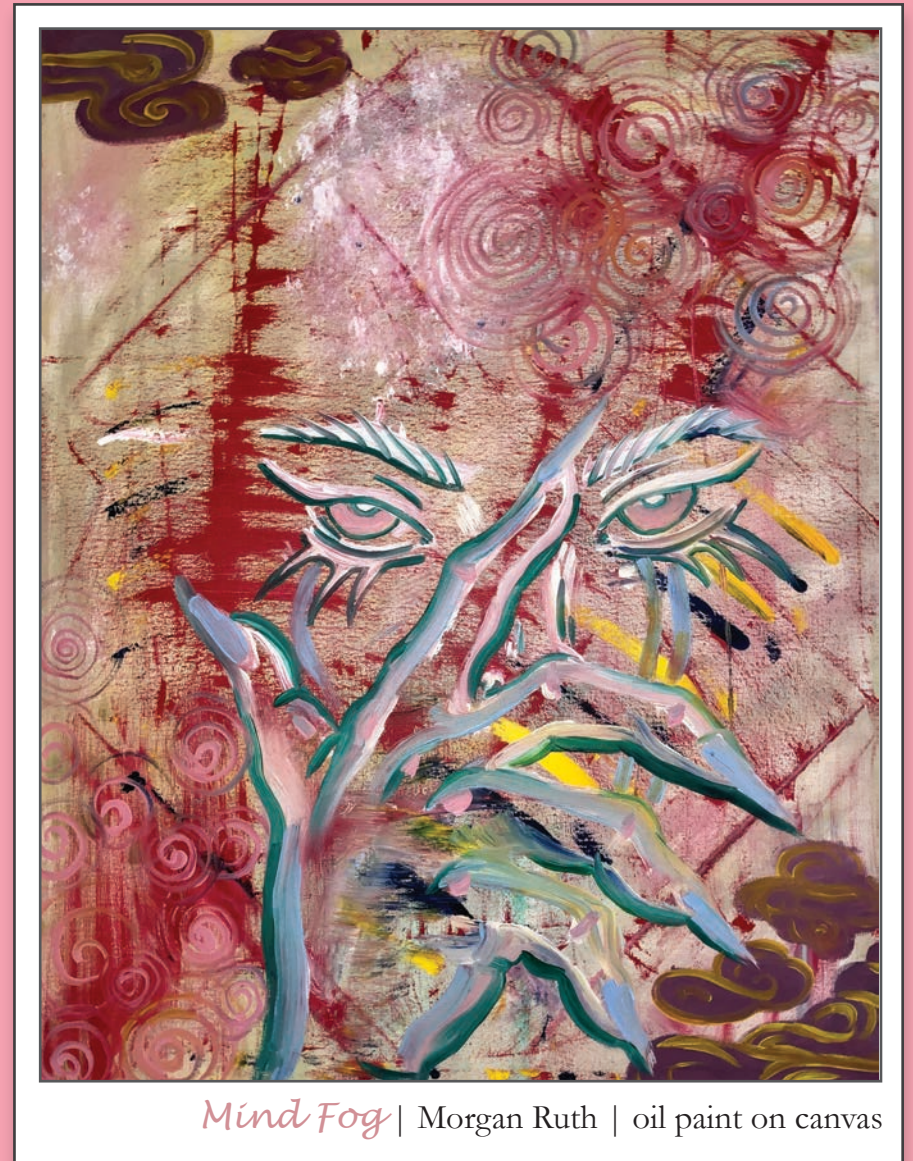
swaying to each note of the urban ballad that tells you what you want to hear.

You ask me who I am.

But you already know me.

I am no one but myself

And who you imagine me to be.



*Mind Fog* | Morgan Ruth | oil paint on canvas

There is no other experience more humbling than finding yourself in a rehab facility. It is rock bottom, the last glimmer of hope, and a receipt for a lifetime of suffering. Imaginations can run off a cliff when thinking about rehab: such things like padded walls, straitjackets, and enough sedation to fill a Mack truck. And don't forget the screaming and crying, echoing down sterile hallways bleached a pasty, unfriendly white.

All these pictures flashed through my mind as I stumbled into a building that reminded me of the Caribbean hotels in commercials. Palm trees, fountains, cobblestone paths leading through lush gardens, and sliding doors that were almost inviting. I was met with smiles and welcomes, gentle hands guiding me to the admissions office while bright pink scrubs took my luggage away.

The memories after intake were hazy and blurred, filled with questions, half-slurred answers, and general explanations of rules and expectations. My mind was elsewhere, still within its alcoholic haze, drifting lazily out the door and to the exit. It smelled as clean as a rainy day and lemon Lysol. But these rooms were too bright, with their windows and outdated floral wallpaper. Random laughter echoed from beyond a distant room. I wondered, briefly, if someday I would be able to laugh again. That thought was fleeting, as I felt rather than heard the nurse say she would show me to my room.

The tropical details and comfy halls did nothing to ease my fears of what would come next. Once inside my room, alone with myself and the silence of the furniture, I fell into a nightmare. The only difference was that I could not wake up this time. I began reliving seven years of alcoholism, abuse, suppression, trauma, hopelessness, and despair. The



*Freedom* | Mary Kenley Tugman | painting

screams echoing in the hallways of my mind were very real and the toxicity of my past writhed around my nervous system. The padded walls of four comforters and a mattress could not relieve the arctic freeze that took over my body. Muscles and bones grinded, twitched, and shook, spasmodically erupting like a volcano of ice and snow. My internal organs could not keep pace as every fiber of my body ejected any extra cargo with dry heaves and cramps. I prayed, cried, screamed, groaned, shivered, and willed the pain to be gone. The haze was only interrupted by the occasional beep of the vitals monitor, reminding me of my own heart's existence.

For the first time in years, I felt again. Every tragedy, every beating, every stick, stone, and word, thrown like a dagger at my back, came to life as my blood flowed once more. The poison within my core slowly leaked out along with pieces of my old self. My heart picked up speed, running on adrenaline, fear, and its own instinct. Inside my new cage, at ninety-nine degrees Fahrenheit, my frozen identity gradually melted back to life.

After three days and nights, the storms passed, and I was finally able to move. The whale had dislodged me from its stomach. I hadn't showered, and the stench of sweat, tears, and bodily fluids

hung heavy in the heated air. Slowly, I forced my body to remove itself from the padded safety of the bed and stepped onto the carpet. It was soft under my toes, as I wriggled them a bit, enjoying the first tender touch I had received in years. Placing my hands under me, I felt the true weight of myself for the first time. Surprised, I realized how light and easy it was to lift myself off the sheets. Colors began to pop as sunlight filtered into the room from behind closed curtains. I could see the moisture from my mouth as I exhaled my exhaustion and took my first steps. Birds sang, voices murmured, the heater rumbled, and somewhere, laughter still echoed in the distance. "This must be what the world sounds like," I whispered to myself. Startled, I stopped. Was that voice truly mine? Scratchy, rasping and dry, like a crinkled potato chip bag, it slipped from my voice box. When was the last time I heard myself speak? Probably sometime long before HE took my choice away. Then, I turned and stepped into to bathroom where I gazed upon the image of a stranger. Scabs, scrapes, scars, bruises, and half-moons stared back at me. I didn't know this person. Unsurprisingly, I had forgotten my appearance. When was the last time I looked in a mirror? Probably sometime long before HE shattered my self-reflection and confidence.

At that moment, my reality became clear. I was a twenty-five-year-old woman who had been in a self-induced coma for seven years. Hidden behind the medicating and the wounds was still a woman I knew could be me, balled up and terrified in some corner of my soul. "Future" was a foreign word, but as I gazed at my haggard face, I made a choice. Clenching my jaw, despite the pain, I saw my features harden in determination. Freedom was within my grasp and I decided to take hold. I knew that this road was going to be tough, almost impossible, but I wanted to try. I wanted to live. I wanted to know how it felt to wake up to a day without the toxic

stench of fear plundering through my veins. Already, I could smell victory as I inhaled the muggy, humid air within this cage, my personal boxing ring. I fought the alcoholism, the suppression, the nightmares, and I won this round. My enemy was down and now was my chance to escape, to train, to fight. Steeling my resolve, I prepared myself for another war. Saying goodbye to the face in the mirror, I cared for my body and bruises for the first time. I left behind a dream that had cost me seven years of my life, a dream of family and love that ended as a broken tragedy. So, I opened the door to my soul, gently picked up a broken little girl, and carried her back into my life. Inside of a rehabilitation center on the other side of the United States, a sleeping lioness had awoken, and she craved freedom. Nothing was my freedom and my antidote.

Many fond memories still come to mind when I mention the word rehab: catalyst, battleground, freedom, enigma, beginning. Rehab is the place where I discovered the kind of nothing from which

universes are born, and it became my foundation. That little girl is now a married woman, blessed beyond words with a new life created from that special kind of nothing. There are no more secrets, fewer tears, and many scars. Now, she travels and seeks out other doors, resting her ear upon their frames, and listens. Gently caressing the handle, she requests permission to enter, to help, to heal soft, smoldering souls. Dusting away the charcoal and ash, she continues to search for survivors. There are thousands of little girls, huddling in dark corners of musty rooms, broken, forgotten, and silent. Their silence is the loudest whisper in her ears. The answer is never complicated, despite what experts may say in the latest mental-medical magazine. Hugs, hands, and holding frail limbs to her chest, she weeps. Their pain is her pain, and she gives them all she has in her heart and soul. I was that wayward girl, now a wanderlust woman. Sometimes, nothing is all you have to give and sometimes, it's enough to start over. ●



*Faith in Paradise*

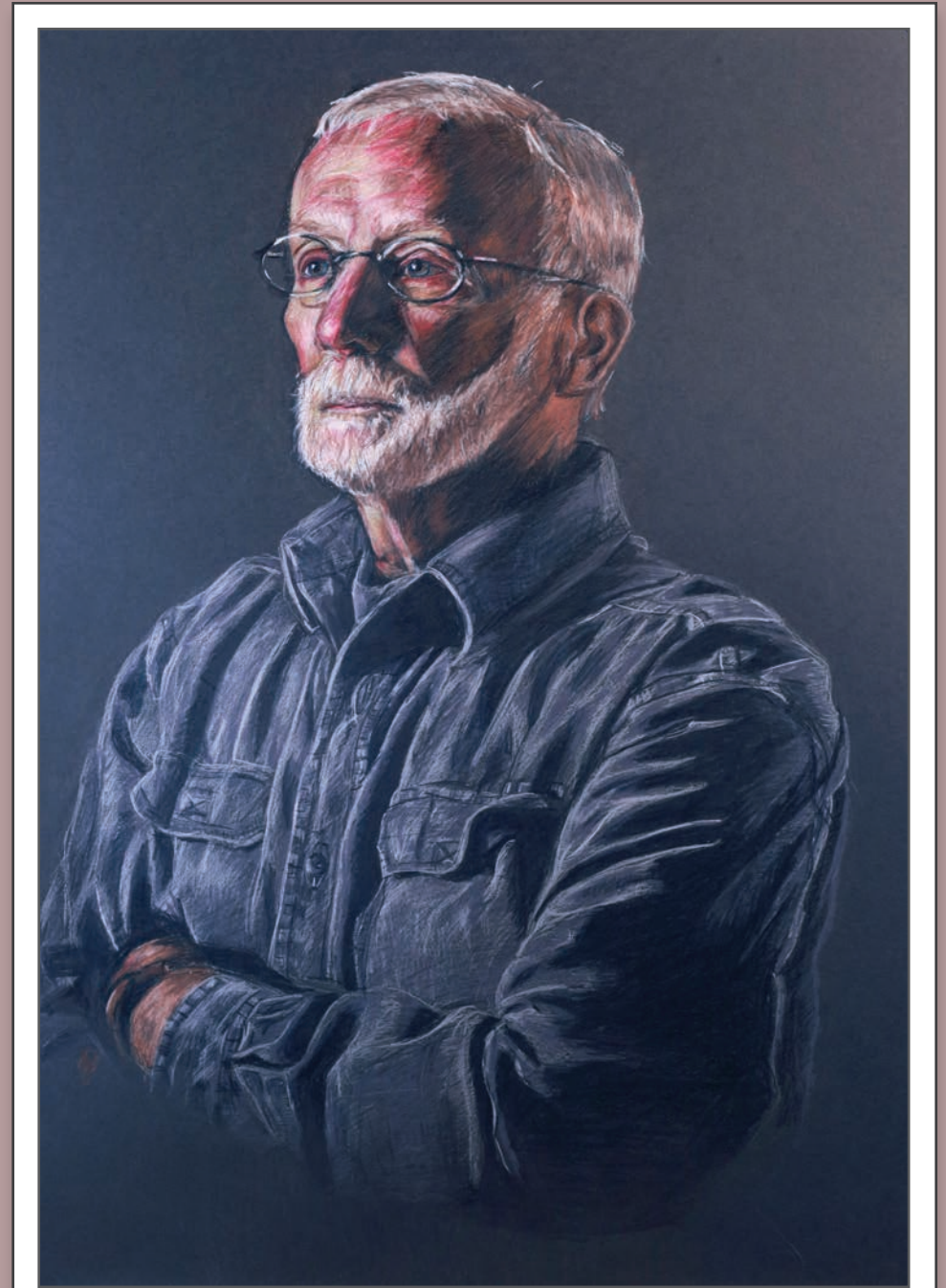
Destiny Seaton | photography



*Para Papy* | Nallely Ortega Prater

We planted a tree for you today.  
An oak,  
The strongest,  
Like you,  
And as we dug deeper  
I felt my heart become weaker  
Soft,  
Like that muddy dirt below.  
It's a strange feeling,  
Letting the grief come up,  
Wanting to hold back the tears.  
Not let go.  
But then the shovel hit water  
And the well within me opened up  
With thoughts of life, death  
Sorrow, loss  
But then... again... the shovel hit water,  
And it began to puddle up.  
The very thing that gives us life,  
Keeps us from drying up....

We planted a tree for you today,  
We planted it in some muddy dirt.  
The roots will seek the water,  
Swallowing it up.  
Its trunk will grow thicker  
Withstand storms to come,  
Its branches will reach up and out  
Like a hug from above.  
I can already see the beautiful leaves it will grow,  
His shade a safe place to go,  
Green in the spring and summer,  
Red in the fall  
Holding on to his colors until that time comes  
For the strong oak to sleep, until once again we meet.



*John* | Jillian DeGrie | colored pencil on black paper





*Cold Room* | Justine Clifford | photography



*The Raven* | Danielle Mead | film and digital edit

## *Collecting Dust* | Camrin Owens

Deep inside a mansion dim  
With crown molding and elaborate trim,  
I wandered through the cedar door  
Of an elegant room to explore;  
Yet for all its beauty, the room was musty,  
The curtains drawn, the tables dusty.

I paused my walk to have a look  
At figurines tucked in a nook.  
As I examined them, my imagination stirred  
And I wondered what all they had seen and heard.  
The mansion was deserted, plain to see—  
But why? What could the reason be?

Could the mansion's ancient story  
Be dark, mysterious, or even gory?  
As my imagination ran wild,  
I heard a moan... low and mild;  
Then the floor creaked beneath my feet  
And the shutters banged an uneven beat.

The figurines suddenly sinister seemed,  
Like hardened souls of the unredeemed—  
How long on that shelf had they been?  
What terrors and evil had they seen?

The moaning, the shutters, the creaking floors  
Frightened me to my very core;  
Run from that mansion I felt I must,  
Far from those figures collecting dust.

## Champagne Taste: The Gilded Era of Collage

by Kelsey Keith

For years, an undated issue of *Collage* sat in the archives, green, with pressed gold detailing on the front cover. The magazine looked significantly different than any of its contemporaries, and, naturally, I found myself wondering when this “Spring” issue was published. Being of the mind that you can find most things on the internet, I set out to find the anonymous issue’s editor. Not too long after I started digging, I found a fellow named Crouse Powell on LinkedIn who seemed to match all the information I had. I shot him a message, and thus began my most recent conversation with a stranger on the internet.

“I had champagne taste on a beer budget,” he said with a laugh. Crouse and I were settling into our seats and adjusting our screens when I asked him about the mystery issue. Turns out the ornately constructed journal was from Spring 1978, and Crouse himself was editor of *Collage* during the 1977/78 school year. He explained that many aspects about those early days of *Collage* were fairly different than the magazine we recognize now. Crouse was



*Collage Spring 1978 Cover*

one of only three people on the staff, and he was specifically in charge of content, while the other two members focused on the design elements.

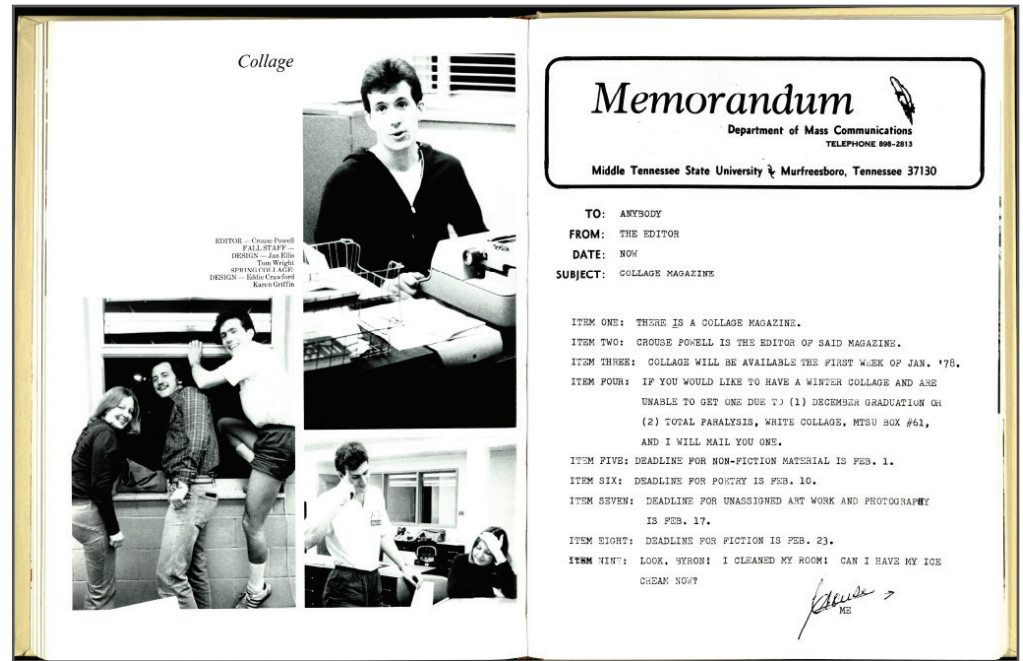
When soliciting submissions, people would physically turn them in or be sought after by Powell, who often tracked down writers or artists whose work he admired. Some of the designs in the journal were even created to accompany certain written pieces.

Crouse Powell, like many students who have worked on the magazine over the years, had an eclectic background. Originally from Murfreesboro, Powell graduated from Riverdale High School where he was active in theatre, a passion that he briefly pursued at the beginning of college. He had also worked as a disc jockey for WGNS. These experiences brought him to MTSU, where he eventually majored in Public Relations/Advertising and Broadcast Journalism, with a minor in English. Even prior to *Collage*, Powell frequently wrote for *Sidelines* as a music reporter. At one point, he had his own column called “B.S. and Balderdash” that he claimed got a “bit controversial.” Indeed, for as many things as he wrote, there were quite a few people who wrote in to protest.

So when it came to *Collage*, Crouse had a distinct approach, blending his taste for the fanciful with his tongue-in-cheek personality. Throughout the Spring 1978 issue, there are elaborate drawings and

photographs alongside a few literature pieces, one of which was written by Powell himself. On page 13, you can also find a poorly-done photograph that is accredited to Roger Humphreys.

“I included it as a sort of political jab,” Powell added wryly. According to Powell, the piece was contextualized by the removal of then-Governor Ray Blanton, who, as one of his final acts, pardoned one of his supporter’s sons. That son, Roger Humphreys, was a convicted murderer and had served fewer than four years of his twenty-to-forty-



*1978 Midlander Yearbook*



*Crouse Powell*

year sentence. Crouse claimed Humphreys was working in photography following his release, and the photo was meant to poke fun at the absurdity of the situation.

Aspects like the planted photograph prove that this era of the magazine was largely shaped under his vision. Though these days *Collage* is a bit larger and more democratic, Crouse maintains that being part of the journal, whether as a contributor, staff member, or reader, can still be a source of creativity and collaboration as it was for him. He has seen these qualities play out in his own career.

After college, Powell joined the military, serving in Germany and Korea, where he began his career in information technology. He says that serving as editor helped prepare him for his IT career because it taught him to write well, communicate, and present information in interesting ways.

“Creative vision is key,” he stated, saying it’s crucial to know what your intent is and learn how to build upon those ideas with other people. He asserts how fulfilling it can be to watch the creative process be realized. These days, Crouse Powell owns his own photography business, and while he doesn’t work with quite as many folks as he did in the IT world, the poetic nature of his journey is not lost on him. His work is still a matter of being passionate enough to put a plan into action.

As we wrapped up our talk, just before the final pleasantries and exchange of pandemic-era well wishes, he smiled and nodded back to his early days in *Collage*, saying, “It’s like I went full circle.” ●

## “On the Periphery”: An Inside Look

by Keisha Lambert, Curator

**M**T Power of ONE is a campus resource located in the Center for Student Involvement and Leadership (STU 330). It seeks to empower students to take a stand against gender-based violence on campus and within the community. During January’s Stalking Awareness Month, the office hosted a campus-wide art competition called “On the Periphery.” The exhibition conveyed the powerful testimonies of survivors and highlighted the true effects of stalking, as well as other forms of gender-based violence.

“On the Periphery” showcased an emotive range of textile works, large-scale paintings, and detailed works on paper. Each piece used a unique approach to unveil the psychological impacts that stalking and other forms of gender-based violence have on survivors. “Me Too” was chosen as the “Critic’s Choice” of the competition. The following is an excerpt from the artist’s statement of the



*Me Too*

collaged work:

“...[M]y face is an image I use often to show that no one ever knows what lies below the surface of the masks we all use. My goal is to show viewers and other survivors to let down their masks and that it is possible to create beauty from chaos and tragedy.”



*Performance*

Concurrent with the art in “On the Periphery,” the Legal Aid Society of Middle Tennessee displayed an educational video that gave legal insights on how to approach instances of stalking crimes and available avenues of assistance. “On the Periphery” opened the conversation on hard-to-approach topics of gender-based violence and allowed a platform for student artists to become a conduit for social change on campus.

“We wanted this exhibit to be a safe space for students to learn and creatively educate their peers about the magnitude and prevalence of gender-based violence in our community,” stated Power of ONE Program Coordinator, Tatum England. “I am amazed at the bravery showcased in every piece of artwork. The perspectives conveyed inspire me and have started a powerful conversation on our campus rooted in resilience.”

For resources and more information on upcoming campaigns, follow @mtpowerofone on Instagram and like MTSU Power of One on Facebook. ●

*\*Artists’ names were omitted for anonymity.*

*Spaces Between Stars* | Carrie Wright

If I wanted  
I could cast my self  
Into the spaces  
Between the stars  
And float around  
In musing spirals.  
I could wrestle  
My regrets of the past  
I could finagle  
My fears for the future  
I could try defining  
My ultimate Place in  
The Universe  
Like everyone does at  
2:30 A.M.

I could.  
But,  
If I got lost  
In the spaces  
Between the stars  
Chasing circles and  
Empty questions,  
I'd forget  
The ones who need me  
In the morning.



*Zooplankton from the Seafloor* | Morgan Ruth  
watercolor and ink on paper

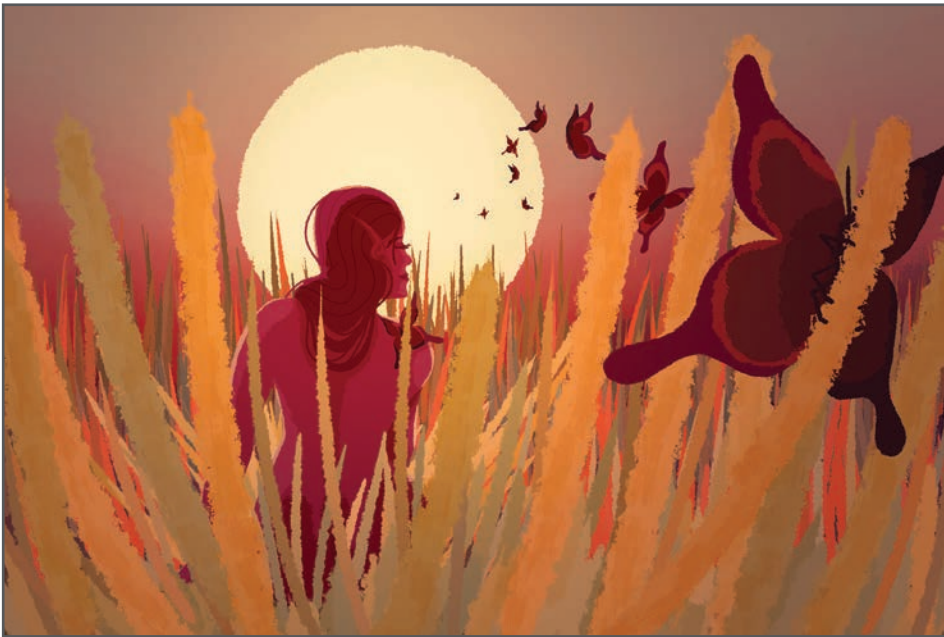


*Gustav* | Anna Inthirath | acrylic painting



*Paradise* | Nash Meade

Why would one rather dream of streets of gold,  
Of crystal seas and pearly gates of light,  
Than look upon this lovely world at night,  
When light has left and air is deathly cold?  
Why cry for grander days on heaven's shore,  
Instead of looking at this work of God,  
This world of painted fields, of ocean's broad?  
Oh mighty man, pray not, "so much the more,"  
But walk among this mortal realm designed  
For you and I, designed for lovers' eyes.  
One keeps the faith when one, beyond the lies,  
Can love this world without a troubled mind.  
Be still, young faithful; find your lover here,  
Instead of seeking life beyond your years.



*Euphoria* | Amber Puls | illustration

*"A Rose is a Rose," a Reflection on Gertrude Stein*  
Susanna Deter-Wolf

"A rose is a rose"  
A thistle a thistle  
Dandelion a weed  
The child sees all  
as they may be.  
Each a flower to  
her eyes;  
No judgement of  
wrong or right.  
A flower is a flower,  
with thorns or petals or fluff  
to blow into the wind.  
Each a flower, pleasure  
for a child to find.



*A Blissful Prayer*  
Valkyrie Rutledge | photography

## Chapter VIII | Anonymous

During the first year of COVID, I could never get a ripe tomato. You know, the kind you see in Kroger beckoning you with the “vine-ripened” sticker. That one sticker that’s almost free to Kroger gets them fifty cents more a pound when you check out. Maybe I needed stickers to mark my expectations.

It wasn’t for lack of trying. The garden produced a dozen different ripe vegetables that year, and the several yellow and red tomato plants grew heartily and well. We had good rain, and when we didn’t, I watered. The problem was my partner, who could not stand ripe, red tomatoes.

She would pick the tomatoes green and fry them up as her special snack. Oh, not the fried green tomatoes of Southern legend. Not the ones soaked in a mixture of egg and milk, dipped in cornmeal and flour, and then fried in the smoking bacon grease of the black iron skillet until the outsides were hot and crunchy. No, not those that made your mouth water every summer lunch at grandmother’s.

She fried them according to her mother’s Wuhan Chinese recipe. In a wok, with soy sauce and red pepper flakes to a state that shares a woman’s name: blanched.

Luckily for me, I stopped eating fried green tomatoes in 1958. Aunt Helen cooked up a bunch while keeping me so my Mom could go by Tupelo’s bootlegger and get some “medicine” for an evening’s celebration following my father’s place victory in the second flight of the Mississippi Senior’s Golf Association tournament. Let’s just have the understanding that Aunt Helen’s thoughts weren’t about the cooking that day, and her treat for me was impactful, bless her heart. So, experience previously shared, I wasn’t expected to eat the green tomatoes



*Not So Far Away* | Elizabeth Clippard | gouache

my partner cooked up, praise Jesus.

Yet, I found myself a little resentful anyway. A ripe, red tomato fantasy is always better than the reality. The dream acquires impossible perfection the longer it’s unfulfilled. And so it was with me. Watching the tomatoes grow, waiting for the ripe one to turn that perfect garden red, tasting the acid bite of freshness... and frustration as they disappeared to the wok.

But she was clearly enjoying a special pleasure, unburdened by the particular guilt of my desire. Nothing was said except in acknowledgment of how nice it was that the garden produced such a treat for her. She ate in peace, and I nourished my resentment

silently. After all, is a tomato everything?

One day, a visitor from her hometown stopped by, and of course she picked some green tomatoes, blanched them, and served them as a snack. Our visitor was mightily impressed and thoroughly enjoyed the surprise. Later, alone, I asked him which he liked better, ripe, red tomatoes or fried green. His answer surprised me.

He was a generation before my partner and lived through the collective starvation of the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution. They didn’t let the tomatoes get ripe because they were hungry, they might be stolen, or they might be reported as hoarders. As soon as one popped out, it was



*Ana* | Eli Ward | colored pencil portrait on paper collage

destined for the wok. A tradition handed down from mother to daughter, surviving as a silent homage to cooking in a time of great scarcity. Yes, he only ate green tomatoes too.

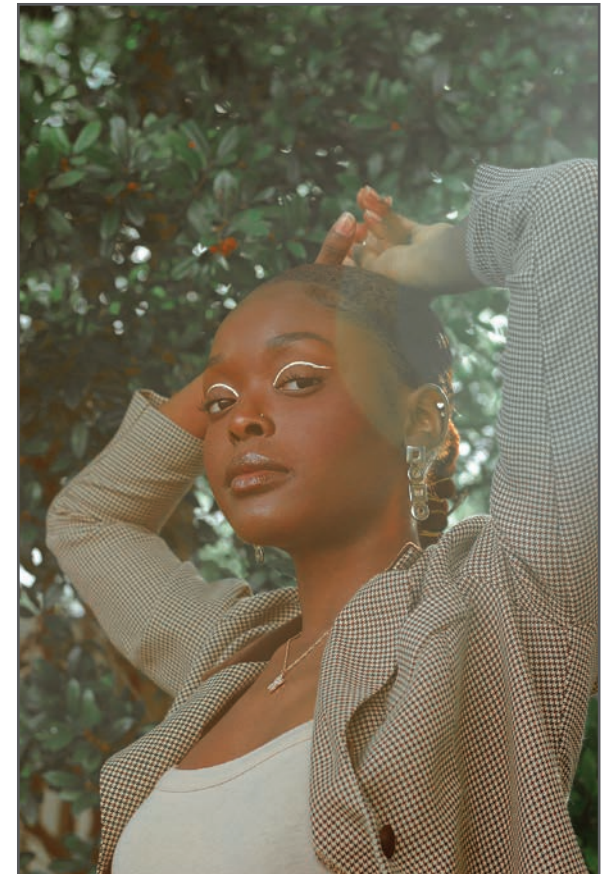
Needless to say, I wound up ashamed of my secret resentment. Never having known hunger or considered eating a green tomato as a necessity, I, instead, now celebrate my partner's victory over hunger and even point out to her when one is wok-ready. She thinks I am considerate. It's merely my penance for not being able to see with clarity.

It turns out that the plastic-bagged "vine-ripened" tomatoes I get at the Kroger pick-up suit me just fine. My imagination is free to seek other delights. Sometimes, letting go accomplishes the dream. Seek clarity in your resentments, and maybe they will go away as fast as my partner's Wuhan blanched green tomatoes disappear from our seven-year-old daughter's plate, bless her little heart. ●

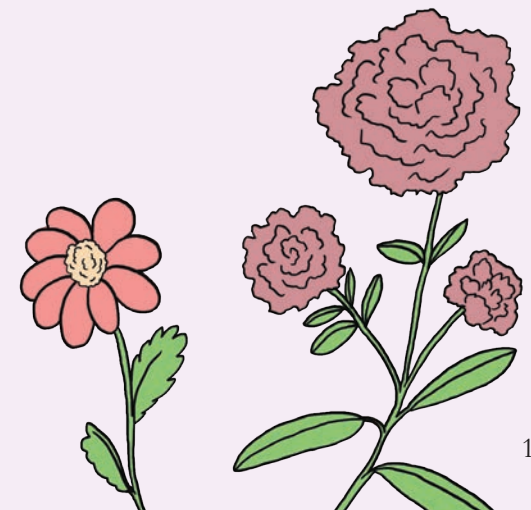


*A Self Portrait of Anxiety*

Mary Kenley Tugman | painting



*Posh* | MaKayla Stovall | photography



*To All My Dear Friends:* | DeAnn Bingham

Lots of folks today  
are concerned by their seasonal friendships,  
but those are the ones I enjoy the most  
and the type of amiability I seek.

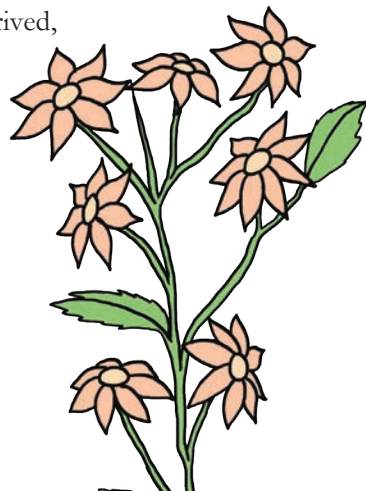
Because this type of companionship  
best reflects the world in which we live  
this crooked blue sphere—  
which causes us to pass through different seasons.

So hey,  
if I see you today,  
that would be great.  
I've sure missed your face  
and your company, dear friend,  
like I miss the blazing summer sun  
shining its rays on my golden skin.

But summer is not the preferred season amongst all my friends.

We are not all birds of the same feather.  
We thrive in different weather.  
So, whenever this spell ends,  
I'll still be here for you, friend,  
When it is time to put on your sweater.

Or whenever your peak season is at last arrived,  
And once again, you can thrive.



*Cowgirl Blues* | MaKayla Stovall | photography



*Shedding* | Dominic Macoaldi

When I was a child,  
the dog would shed  
on the furniture.

They'd make him stare  
blue-eyed through  
a gate.

And he'd stare,  
begging every breakfast, at  
that child learning  
to take  
the pills.

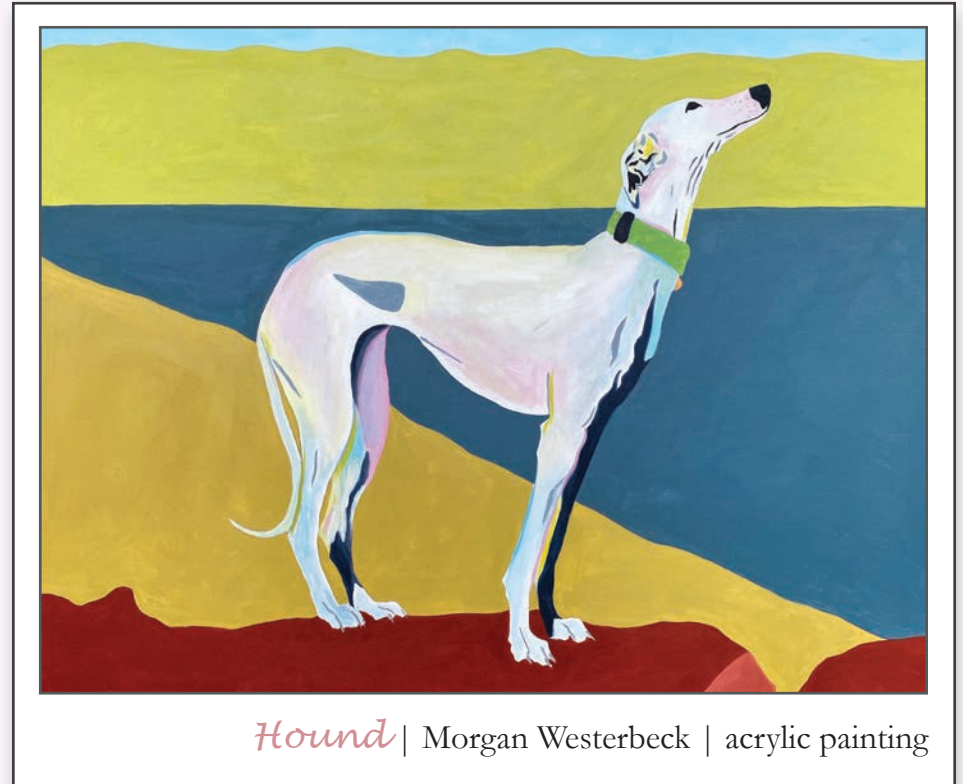
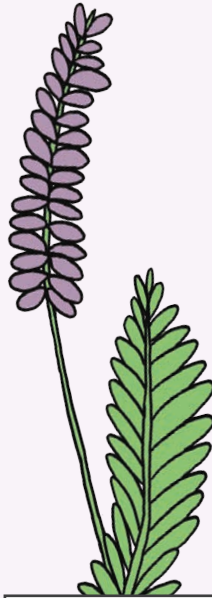
In a purple bucket  
that child would mix  
dog hair and pills,  
toothpaste, rocks, and frogs  
in water.

And he'd stir  
a changing potion,  
that child thought.

The dog was buried  
next to the frogs.  
I still take the pills  
every breakfast, staring

shadow-eyed  
at the days,  
begging them to stop

shedding.



*Hound* | Morgan Westerbeck | acrylic painting



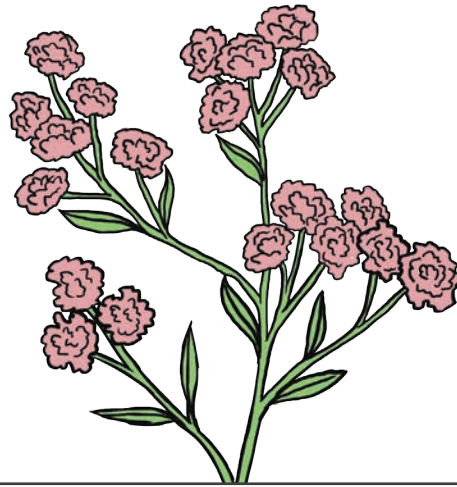
*Orange Juice* | James Roberson | video





Poet's Block | Livi Goodgame

The words have run dry.  
The phrases are spent,  
Fallen down from clouds  
Of creativity that once meant  
Something to the soul,  
Like rain to deep roots.  
But when it's all soaked up,  
What am I to do?  
When the rainclouds dissolve  
And leave the heavens empty,  
When every idea we conjure  
Dries up the originality—  
Boundless but limited,  
Because when all has been said  
By the growing population  
Of the living and dead,  
When we run out of new thoughts  
And alphabet arrangements,  
Will we start over?  
Repeat it again?  
The evaporation of creation,  
Returning to the skies  
Only to descend again  
In drops back to the tide  
Of historic repetition, a cycle  
Of “New Age” thinking.  
If it rains down once more,  
Will it still carry meaning?



*Lip Service*  
Whitney Fraker | graphic design



*Mother of Mankind*  
MaKayla Stovall | photography

*Things I Want for Her* | Ashley Barrientos

1. A yard, peppered with orange trees, bearing promising fruits of a future that is colorful and sweet and tart and dripping so richly with juice that it dribbles down her chin when she bites into it.
2. A kitchen, where she doesn't have to worry about the toaster breaking again, or the ominous stash of bills stuffed away in the cabinet drawers. (She pretends she can't see them!)
3. A front porch, lined with old coffee cans and glass spaghetti jars brimming with wet, black soil and angry, blue flowers. She can drink her artisan teas and coffees here, and her tongue will forget the taste of drugstores or gas stations.
4. A quiet sunrise and a violent sunset, every day.

5. Mom, why are you so sad?
6. An apron, mottled with embroidered baby pink flowers, so that when she cooks big pots of rice and beans and vegetable soups, the sun-bleached cotton and washed-away denim that hugs her skin will be protected.
7. I will give her everything one day I promise I promise just a few more years I promise and the words I write will pay for your rent.
8. A lawyer that won't let them take her away from me, won't let them ship her off like she is a crate of fruit to a place where the women are murdered and the politicians are swollen fat with dirty money and blood, like a mosquito.

9. An olive green (or maybe red clay) dress that will convince her of the beauty I see in her every day.
10. A job where she doesn't have to wait on people and smile at them when they exoticize her, or call her "smart for a Mexican," or call her sexy, or ask for her number, or tell her they can shower her with money and gifts in return for just one thing.
11. Strawberry fields, stretching miles wide, the little red fruits speckling the vast, green earth like the white foam of the ocean. We can go picking on Mondays in the summer.
12. A life free from fear. ●



*The Second of May 2020* | Steven Gavel | oil on canvas



 *Better Days*  
Nick Edgeron | audio

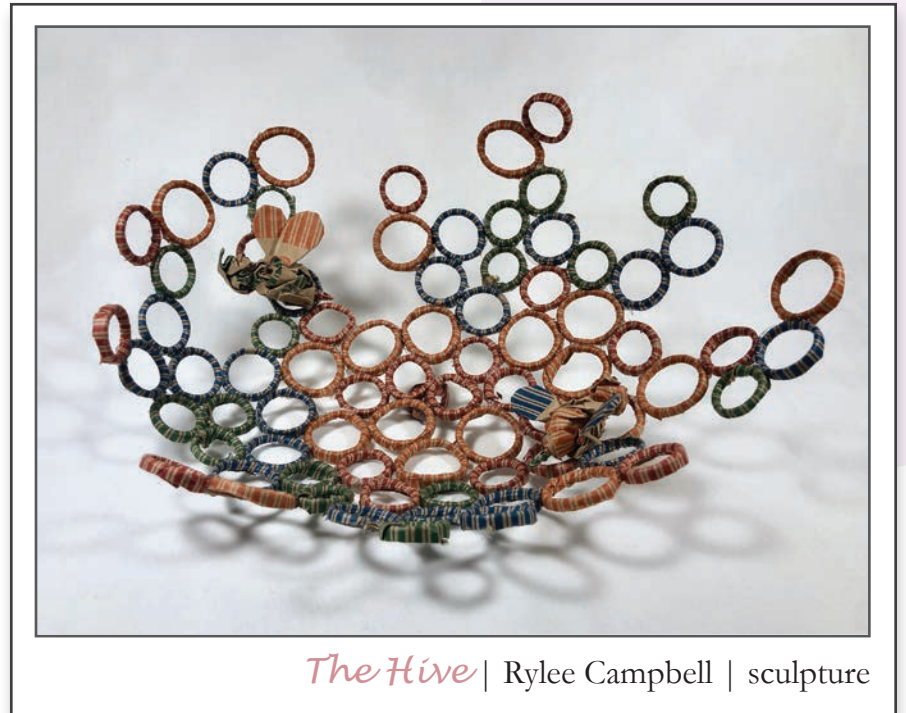
*Mother Fly* | Sarah Garris

Insidious whispers creep into my skull and lay their eggs.  
I feel every spiked leg and feeler as they brush through cavities in my head.  
The tickles trail like whispers through my ears, into my brain.  
Burrowing to make nests.  
Their colonies in the corners of my mind.

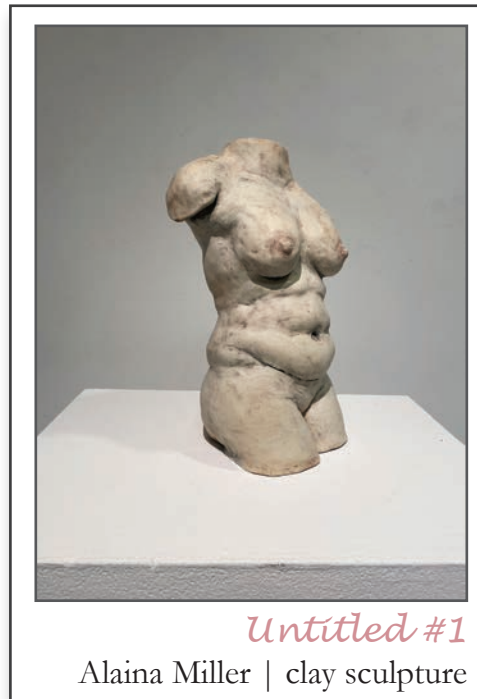
The aggressively gentle buzzing of persuasion tickles my ears from behind.  
Infectious, incorrigible orders.  
Maternally meant,  
Meaningfully missaid.

Innocently noxious opinions and criticisms meant to build a person,  
No, not a person.  
A surface that reflects herself.  
A thing of her own creation.

Seeping in through my eyes, my ears, my unfocused heart.  
Her constant buzzing clouds my mind.  
My reality tinged by strings webbing over my vision.  
The source, now nested, is always present.



*The Hive* | Rylee Campbell | sculpture



*Untitled #1*  
Alaina Miller | clay sculpture



*Their Beauty*  
Kiara Skinner | graphic illustration



### *Intrusion*

Mo Overholt | drawing

### *Thesauritis* | Anthony Czelusniak

When looking to spice up one's lexicon, a trip to the thesaurus is often desiderated. Though, it's worth exercising circumspection as there is a common trepidation of the use of words that are recondite. Take caution lest you should sound grandiloquent. Thus, this humble author supplicates writers of all walks of life, hearken this advice: avoid language that's overly sesquipedalian.



*MAD WIZARD* | Alice Rethi | pen and ink

## *Vignettes of the House I Grew Up In*

Abigail Wells

the bathroom bleeds beige from showers scalding  
beads drip down  
like a fever even this house cannot sweat out  
i write my name in the steam of the mirror  
then, lightheaded, lie down to count the tiles

toothpaste stains in the sink & tufts of hair unswept  
i reach for a towel in the dark  
everything has its place  
so nothing ever changes

i have come to believe this is mine

in winter, cracks form between adjacent walls  
i braid the afghan's fringe & listen to the ticking clock  
a garland of paper dolls festoons the mantel  
fire blazing below, i pray  
the girls do not let go of one another's hands

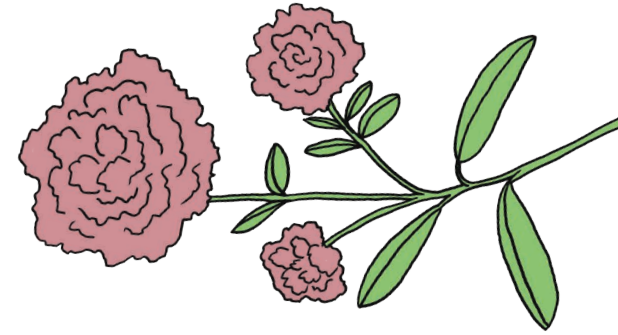
books sit on the coffee table, unread pages yellowing  
while hellebores wither in a vase of stagnant water  
a barking dog then breaks the silence  
i scream into the couch cushions

the soundtrack of a life i wish to leave

the white walls of my bedroom are covered with  
dried flowers & dead butterflies  
i tape up bags of tea i will never drink  
stolen photos of children i will never meet  
sepia maps of places i will never go

for i am trapped under the pin-prick  
the same patch of blue & white sky  
whose clouds barrel towards me  
then leave me far behind

still tapping on the glass of the bell jar



*Waiting* | Destiny Seaton | photography





*Still Life* | Adriana Castro-Garcia | oil painting



★ *Elizabeth's Houses*  
James Roberson | video

## *Home* | Morgan Fipps

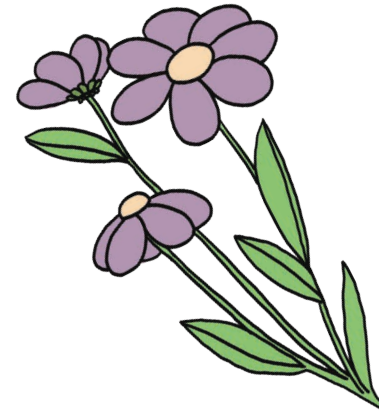
Home is the smell of a linen closet,  
with its never-ending array of  
canvased colors consisting of  
extra bedding for the unexpected sleepovers.  
Home is the bruised hardwood floors  
that have felt the resounding thumping of  
shoes, bare feet, and paws,  
silently, sweetly, and sometimes sneakily  
wash over their surface.

Home is the sound of twinkling letters  
floating in the air to form sentences,  
to dish out advice and stories of adventure because  
aunts, uncles, grandmas, and grandpas  
were once young too.

Home is the taste of  
love baked into the endless casserole dishes  
or

the warm, worn soup pot on the stove  
filled with the sun-ripe vegetables  
that remind you of the dew-encased summer mornings with Mamaw,  
delicately picking beans with warm hearts and worn fingers.

Home is the touch of a gentle mother's hand,  
putting a cool washcloth to your neck,  
or the sweat making your back stick to the  
wooden railing of the front porch,  
where sweet tea was sipped slowly from Mason Jars,  
and stories were slowly woven into the dance of the lightning bugs.







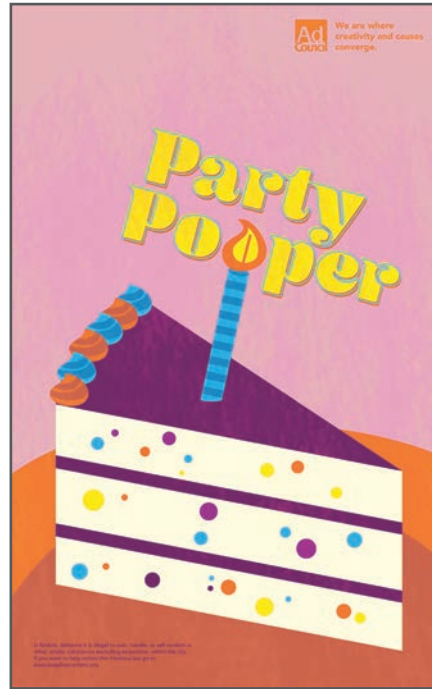
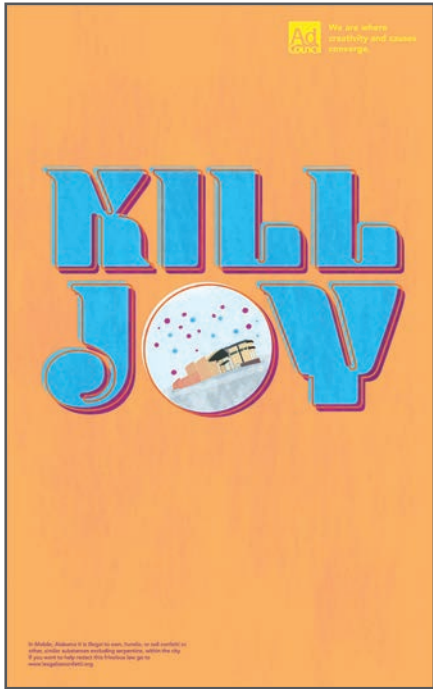
*Scenic Collage* | Winter Wingfield | photography



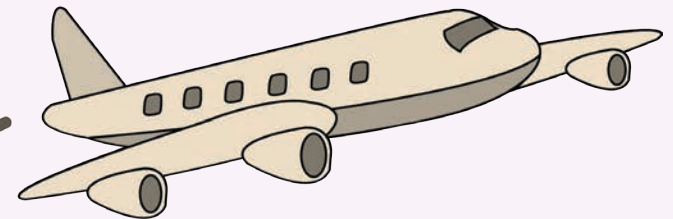
*Bongo Dodgeball* | Julian Brown | video



*A Wee Wander* | Laine Matthews | photography



Blue Law Series | Amber Puls | graphic design





Collage



@mtsucollage

## About Collage

*Collage* is a biannual publication of the Middle Tennessee State University Honors College. All submissions were reviewed anonymously and selected by a student editorial staff. The materials published by *Collage* do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the *Collage* staff, Honors College, MTSU student body, staff, or administrators. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or utilized in any form without written permission from the editor or adviser of *Collage*. Inquiries should be addressed as follows:

Middle Tennessee State University  
1301 East Main Street, Box 267,  
Paul W. Martin Sr. Honors Building, room 224  
Murfreesboro, TN 37132

## Submit to Collage

*Collage* accepts submissions year-round. Online submissions may be made through our website, <https://www.mtsu.edu/collage/staff.php>. Creative work, such as art, photography, design, short stories, creative nonfiction, short plays, song lyrics, poetry, videos/films, and audios, may be submitted online or at the *Collage* office, Honors 224, between the hours of 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m.

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## Creative Expression Awards

Each semester, six submissions receive Creative Expression Awards, one from each major category: art, photography, poetry, prose, video, and audio. Winners receive \$75 awards.

- ★ **Dysplasia** | Rachel Booher | prose
- ★ **Extinction** | Fritz Valentine | poetry
- ★ **Valley of the Primordial Sea** | Jake Yandle  
art
- ★ **Phoenix of Pompeii** | Valkyrie Rutledge  
photography
- ★ **Better Days** | Nick Edgerson | audio
- ★ **Elizabeth's Houses** | James Roberson | video

## Columbia Scholastic Press Association Awards

Gold Medalist Certificates – 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2020

Silver Crown Awards – 2007, 2008, 2011, 2019, and 2021

Gold Crown Awards – 2012, 2013, and 2015

## Production

Technology

Adobe InDesign CC

Adobe Illustrator CC

Adobe Photoshop CC

Apple Macintosh Platform

Windows Platform

Typography

Lucida Handwriting, Garamond

Paper

100 lb. Athens Silk Cover

80 lb. Athens Silk Text

Binding

Saddle Stitch

Printing

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# MIDDLE TENNESSEE

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STATE UNIVERSITY



Collage

