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Creativity in Unlikely Places

For the past four semesters, I have been a part of the incredible, and sometimes wacky, Collage staff. What has struck me the most is the outstanding variety of talent that sends in submissions each semester. It’s easy to assume that only the art majors or the English majors are getting published. That assumption is patently false. While I haven’t been keeping a comprehensive list—that’d be a little weird—I have looked up some of our published authors and artists and found a veritable smorgasbord of majors. They have included chemistry, computer science, psychology, journalism, public relations, biology, fermentation science, animal science. The list goes on. It seems that at every corner of campus, there is someone ready to write prose or take a stunning photo.

And you know what? Why the hell not? Whoever said that the STEM folks must stick with the math and science, and that the writing or painting is left to the English and art majors? No one, that’s who. Well, some have, but they don’t get it. Not like those of us who go outside our lane to create works of art and those of us who understand that creativity is an innate, foundational condition of being human.

That goes for the Collage staff as well. We’re not a collection of snobby know-it-alls neck-deep in English and art majors. We’re a collection of regular students with majors all over the university and a love of creative endeavors. We’ve recognized that everyone at MTSU can be a creator. Anyone can wordsmith a poem, anyone can paint a breathtaking painting, anyone can create art. It’s just a matter of realizing that they can.

That’s why we go out of our way to break past those walls. Walls that someone might have put up to stop another’s creative flow. That’s why we deliver the best of the creative community on campus. Because that creative community permeates every single part of Middle Tennessee State University.

Anthony Czelusniak
Beneath the water, the bottles lay poised, concealed weapons manned by the creek. My feet, pillow-soft from wool socks and plush carpet, plunge through the mud-dappled surface and rip apart on the sharp edges of amber-colored glass.

I do not scream, but my blood fills the water.

For sharks, that is enough.

I stumble, knees splashing and scraping across stones smoothed by the current but not softened. My dress, drenched, anchors me to the creek bed. By the time my shredded feet find purchase, they are circling along the banks, whistling, “Baby!” through gleaming, sharp-toothed grins.

They wait patiently, like natural-born predators, and I wish I had known that sharks swim in freshwater, too.
Peace In the Quiet
Noah Halford
Digital Photography

The Peak of Dawn
Noah Halford
Digital Photography
I believe it was Poe who wrote about “The Imp of the Perverse,” a little horned demon looming over your shoulder. He would encourage you to do the wrong thing at the moment it is most unnecessary, pushing an otherwise decent person to jump without thinking.

I was deep below the city’s bustling mess on a rather empty platform for the B train. From the far end of the station, I heard the echo of a bucket drummer, his syncopated beat ricocheting off the tile walls as it made its way to my ears. A woman and her congregation of plastic bags sat on a bench. A tailored man checked his watch, his leather briefcase clutched tightly in his opposite hand. My nose caught wind of the bag’s earthy, slightly sweet scent. When I inhaled again, it was gone, replaced by the dingy, scummy slosh of the trains’ wake. My nose scrunched at the subway’s unsatisfying substitute.

It was just us four on our side of the waiting room. Two others stood across on their way north. Like a birdwatcher, I quietly observed them through the thin forest of steel beams that held the world above our heads.

What if it collapsed?

I looked up to the ceiling, or rather the ground, in response to the question. Before my mind could wander much farther, I shook my head, throwing the thought onto the tracks. My eyes followed. A filth-camouflaged rat scurried across the rails, its tail sweeping as its claws clinked against the metal. Its beady eyes glanced up at me as it sat down. I stared back. The wind picked up. I heard the man nearby adjust his case, readying himself to board. The rat wouldn’t move.

You could be down there, too, you know. Could save the rat. Put yourself in its place.

I watched as my body responded to the proposition, my eyes hanging back as my legs stretched forward. I crossed the yellow line and jumped into the ditch. The train’s glowing eyes appeared in the recesses of the cave as the wind pulled my hair into a fervent dance. The rails shook the rat from its perch, and it disappeared into a nearby pipe. I was left alone, the silver bullet flying closer. Just as I had braced myself for the impact, I was back on the platform, gently knocked sideways from the gust of the passing cars, completely safe and unharmed.

I boarded the train behind the tailored man, held onto the first pole, and turned to watch the doors clamp shut. Just as they did, I saw the Imp sitting where I had been standing. He smiled a sickly smile.

I only said ‘could.’
Gaudy hedges and antique lamp posts and a whiff of contrivance permeating the neighborhood.

An endless beige void staring back at me. Sapping all forms of creative flow and form.

Look upon corporate works ye meager, and despair. Eldritch beings of vinyl were crafted without love.

Do you know them? The strangers next door. I offered a passing glance once, just to be rebuffed.

What value is there, then? In these streets where my dreams came to die.
As a child I feared everything but Morbidity, chasing trails of Worry to their fateful ends. I tied knots in my free time, Loose strings trailing behind me, Fears that would never come true.

I don’t know why I share this now, Some remnant of self-importance Scribbled out in pages of diary entries Left untouched next to wilted flowers.

But now, I make my bed and Remember to water my plants.

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**Introspective**

by Lisa Hardie

Toys for Sale

Emily Rink
Charcoal
Hidden Fear
by Bae Dedicatoria

To see and not be seen
To feel and not be felt
are two things you warned me of
every night as I fell asleep
So I watched behind closed doors
and imagined what it would feel like
To see and finally be seen
To feel and have someone feel
every inch of my being
all the good that's in me
even the scars still tender
if one dared to come near

I flinch
as the thought crosses my mind
For I know what is to come
if something like that were to be
So I close my eyes
slowly pulling away
While my brain replays
your lovely warnings

Be careful, my dear
you come, closer
Their looks can slice you open
you lick your teeth, slowly
And their touch poison your soul
I feel my cheeks, burn
So why not stay by my side
you tip my face, up
And I shall always be your guide
as you bring yours, closer
I’m Sorry
by Emily McTyre

Too often I feel the syllables trickle from my tongue.
“I’m sorry,” I say, before the damage is even done.

Once upon a time, I spoke the short words out of fear.
It switches on like a force field, a habit born from you, my dear.

I don’t always mean it, but it comes forward despite
any wish I may hold to keep my lips tight.

And for that,
I am sorry.
An errant spark lights a flame
Which burns from its start,
In a hoping heart,
To stake its deadly claim.

The flame crawls from heart to head—
A blaze of emotions,
Not held by devotions,
Leaving a body sleepless on a bed.

Like a flash of lightning, the flame goes out,
Dousing the passion
In criminal fashion,
Leaving a grieving heart to shout.

The heart, once alight, now starts to crash,
And happiness is drained
Through melancholy rain,
Turning the heart to Phoenix ash.
Old Trees
by Jared Frazier

Old trees see much and tell little.

Meekly, creaking limbs will cry out
As a gust of winter wind or length of hempen rope
Challenges their venerable vitality

Steadied by thousand-year stalwart arms
An old tree’s weathered hands grip the earth
Boring wounds from which they sap sustenance

Yet the earth’s
Noxious poultice of mossy memories seeps
into the crevices of the ancient wooden bulwark

And

An old tree quaffs the tears of the young—
Those who wept and were comforted by its gnarled lungs

An old tree imbibes the blood of the fallen—
Those who served causes long forgotten

But a tree will tell,
Only if you listen close,
Soft-spoken tales told tentatively by the crack of vestigial twigs
Ever tantalizing tempted ears

And oh-so-gaily the scintillating starlight will dance
Among those verdant and deceptive leaves

Old trees see much and tell little.
I began to press flowers that summer in a journal I dug out of the clutter that covered the floor of my room so I might preserve the bewitching blooms and never lose their color.

I pressed honeysuckles that grew down by the creek and counted the petals of each flower, so unique. I plucked tulips and gathered daisies then went to work putting them between pages when the heat made me lazy or when the weather was thunderous and bleak.

This journal stayed close, in my backpack each day, it accompanied me on my journeys as I began to find my way. I named each and every flower when I showed it to my lover, recounting as I traced the cover the trials of assembling my flattened bouquet:

how I got stuck with thorns when I acquired the rose, how I can still feel the mud between my toes from when I went to pick a periwinkle after the rain had sprinkled like a dripping hose.

And now, in old age, I give it to you, its colors gold and blue, the flowers of my youth.
The First Night They Lit the Eiffel
Song Lyrics by Kelsey Keith

dancing in circles down cobblestone streets
the clicking of heels holding in swollen feet
life grabbed us by the throat but we still sang
you said you loved me the most and church bells rang

then a crash from outside breaks my wandering thoughts
and here in the present I feel that you’re gone
but this city keeps growing and it’s overflowing with lovers
and there’s talk that someday soon we’ll show it off to the others

CHORUS
the first night they lit up the Eiffel
I stared out my window and cried
how could they steal all the stars from your eyes
just to light up some tower in this city at night
the city of love they say
but now I lose you again every day

it comes back in visions and fancy perfumes
the way that our sheets lack the outline of you
the incessant demands of a mind that can’t quite grasp its fate
dinner for one and my food lies untouched on its plate

but the papers they cry of the progress at hand
the potential of light and the future of man
they act like it’s promised but at best it’s just promising
nothing stops life from coming revolutions or wedding rings

CHORUS
it’s on everyone’s tongues all the change to come
but I’ve seen enough change for a lifetime
and I cannot undo all that time took from you
so I don’t want to take mine
no I don’t want to take mine

now when they light up the Eiffel
I draw my curtains to a close
and I sit in the black of the pain of the past
while the city of love grows
Aluminum Chair
Lydia Sims
16” x 20” Oil on Canvas
Every image was captured in black and white. Tall, imposing, heartbreaking, a heavy weight taking up residence inside my heart. These images revealed the results of unthinkable violence, hatred, fear, and loss. Although I remember every photograph devoid of human life, these emotions nonetheless dominated each frame, with no clear ending in sight. There was one image I continuously returned to: A pale door, halfway opened into a house of rubble. The walls were missing—they had most likely been burned down. On the door, a dark substance. Was it smoke residue? Or was it blood?

This exhibit, *Dialogue on Fire* by MTSU professor Tom Neff, is one of many powerful curations I have seen inside the Baldwin Photographic Gallery. According to the gallery’s former curator Jackie Kerns Heigle, “The opportunity for students to view these works, meet the artists . . . [to] engage on a more personal level in a workshop . . . network . . . that gallery does it all.” Before the opening of Neff’s show, I attended his lecture where he discussed the background of *Dialogue on Fire*, the how and why of the project. Of course, nothing could prepare me for seeing his work face-to-face. It was a powerful illustration of loss in the aftermath of extreme rioting—abandoned houses, burned and warped architecture, collapsed buildings, destroyed businesses.

The Baldwin Photographic Gallery is dedicated solely to showing photography. In 1964 Harold Baldwin created the gallery, only five years after he started the photography program at MTSU. Baldwin served as the gallery’s first curator from its founding until his retirement. In 1996, the gallery was officially renamed after him. Heigle describes Baldwin as having “a multi-faceted legacy.” Even in his retirement, Baldwin continued tirelessly to support and work with the gallery until his death March 19 at the age of 93.

From 1991 to 2017, Tom Jimison served as the gallery’s curator. “Tom brought the gallery to its international reputation,” Professor Shannon Randol said of the late MTSU professor. Multiple professors agree that photography festivals are a hit because of Jimison’s original efforts. Internationally, many in the photography business associate Murfreesboro, Tennessee with the Baldwin Photographic Gallery. Someone once told me that there is only about “one degree of separation” between everyone in the photography profession. My professors know, and often have strong relationships with, photographers from all crafts and all walks of life. The idea of “one degree of separation” highlights the importance of networking and connecting to professionals inside and outside of one’s chosen industry. The significance of one connection might not reveal itself until that opportunity is either directly approaching, or it has already flown past. Jimison’s success in building a global name for the gallery allows for future curators room for expansion, such as continued exhibit and artist diversity and a solid foundation to continue to grow the gallery’s name and archive collection.
The Photography Department recently announced the promotion of Shannon Randol as the fourth curator of the gallery since its opening in 1964. He is preceded by Jackie Heigle, who is teaching her final semester at MTSU before retirement. Photography Professor Jonathan Trundle said that “Jackie paved a different direction for the [Baldwin] gallery. The gallery brings [together] the importance of [the] still image and the awareness of . . . different ways to see the world.” Heigle, during her curatorship, focused largely on expanding the diversity of both the art and the artists the gallery exhibited. It was difficult, she said, with only a few shows every year.

Randol gave credit to Heigle for “widen[ing] the scope” of the shows and the artists. “[The past curators] really laid the foundation for me to take it to the next level. I’m not trying to reinvent the wheel. I’m trying to hone it a little bit more, make it travel a little bit faster.” Randol’s focus for future shows is to help students “figure out what happens in that space between being a student and being a rock star.” When students see an exhibit on display, the artist is often immediately assumed to be “successful” and to have “made it” in the photography industry. However, there are many “successful” photographers who haven’t devoted their careers to the art form that the gallery has and will exhibit. Ultimately, Randol’s aim when working with students is to provide them with the necessary tools to build their futures, whether for professional or personal pursuits in photography. “Shannon is an incredible . . . forward-moving force,” Trundle said. He believes that Randol will have a “severe, positive impact on the culture of the gallery.” When asked what he felt his greatest strength was in his new curatorship role, Randol said: “I’m not afraid of rejection.” He explains that the worst anyone can do is say ‘no,’ but if you never ask, then you will never know what kind of opportunity you may have missed.

One of the fundamental purposes of the gallery is to serve as a teaching tool for students and the community. Visiting artist lectures and exhibits are free and open to the public. Student workshops provide personal engagement with professionals, as well as invaluable networking opportunities. Just as in many other forms of hands-on experience, such as internships, the photography practicum students are responsible for working with the curator to handle the various tasks of maintaining and preparing the gallery for each exhibit. It’s an exciting way for students to learn, in which they can directly engage with an internationally-recognized gallery. The Baldwin Photographic Gallery is on the second floor of the Bragg building.
Growing up in the sunshine,
I harnessed its gold on the top of my head,
spilling down my back like spun flax.
Old ladies with pink-tinted cotton,
touching and teasing my unease,
their envy whispered in shaky words,
“I wish I had this color,” unaware my skin is crawling.
“No soul,” echoed the middle school playground,
going burnt the first ten minutes of our half-an-hour recess,
being poked to see the white indentions fade back to pink.
Stares I feel, whispers I hear,
“I've always wanted a redhead,”
suddenly I am something to have, not a someone,
some thing to collect.
“We're are crazy in bed.”
All of my qualities boiled down to what I can do for them,
I am a ride to experience, a story to tell later.
Was I ever a person, or always an idea?
A shapeshifting focal point,
object of envy, subject of entertainment,
of the carnal or comedic relief.
Am I more than the shade rooted in my skull,
deeper than the sandalwood freckles set in ruddy cream skin?
Can the soulless live up to such intense expectations?
CTR
Makayla Stovall
Digital Photography

OK
Lucy Crow
Paper Collage & Photoshop

the look a man likes
Monday Morning
by Livi Goodgame

The roaring of the trees sank slowly into subtle whispers
As the waves of wind subsided,
While flecks of light pranced on the edge of the clearing
In a dance with green shadows that flit on the forest floor.
Staggered stutters of feathered twitters
Could not overpower the chirps and whirs
And clicks of the crickets.
A feather white fell from a height
To rest on the rocks ‘neath the grass.
Sun still rising,
Not yet noon.
Busy as a city, quiet as a thought,
A restless place for the soul to walk,
A quiet chaos to ease the mind,
A Monday morning
Once upon a time.
My brother and I grew up and left home, so Mom and Pop redecorated the house. First they cleaned out our bedrooms into guest rooms, so we would always be guests. They cleaned out my closet where I stored half-finished drawings of our Rottweilers, well-thumbed volumes of Lovecraft and Wells, boxes of rocks with calamites, arrow heads, train nails, tear-stained letters, and dead flashlights we used to find Sasquatch. They threw out the Wilson glove my brother used in his first pitch with the Hawkeyes, and the radio he never fixed, his Johnny Cash records, and the G.I. Joe figurine with a missing arm from a fight over who it really belonged to. They threw out the sofa where my brother and I stuffed dollar bills and pictures of Jayne Mansfield beneath the cushions. Then they ripped up the stained carpet and laid down a clean gray shag from Ashley’s Home Furnishings store. They peeled off the dark green Chester wallpaper in the dining and living rooms, painted them Seashell Gray and Ocean Blue even though we lived in the mountains. They knocked down a kitchen wall. Our height markings crumbled to dust. The house lost its smell. When I came home that Thanksgiving, the acrid smell of paint and carpet and cleaner replaced the years of dust and stains, while the closets gaped open, empty and unfamiliar.
One-Armed Bandit
by Anthony Czelusniak

Jackpot
Pull on the arm
again. No fanfare plays.
The losses pile, spin it again,
damn it.
Meet me at the edge of the mountain
With your arms around me, breath heavy.
Take me away, towards the persimmon sun.

Rest your head upon my shoulder
And share with me authors you read fondly.
Send me to a land, where gleaming parties and revolutions are canon.

Sit and read to me of Grendel
And the darklings of Keats, his solemn pastorals.
Protect me from all, Sir Beowulf, my knight with bravery ineffable.

 Traverse with me the woods
And away from the cabin, to the pond.
Tell me of the leaves you see—muddy, murky, made webbed.

Sing to the moon the poetry of your swoon
The light that cares and dusts away your desk.
O’ Gabriel, my knight and day, scare away his hooves.

Lead me to a life far from Auerbach
Yet so near, through your words on our mountain walk.

Knight and Day
by Mia Kuhnle

Moonrise Ski in the Alps
Destiny Seaton
Digital Photography
We are here in the presence of the clouds with miles of hills at our feet and cumulous showers looming around. We are here because you wanted to get away from the noise and the pain but you cried today and rocked under the moon.

The air syrupped with buckbean
I watch the circle of bees take their descent
Into the blue ridge.
You are the raindrops on the stone of this vista of life
never perfect but with his rib bone, making it evergreen and lush.

You release, a delight to us and the mountain as we race down the hill.

From your belly I hear a laugh and I want to tell you how beautiful you are here.
So purely, over the rocks you flood.
My ankle twinges as I slip on my weight But your showers heal and grow the elder buds.
Here, you are the rain.
Pollen
Dawn Fós
Digital Photography

Surveying His Fiefdom
Anthony Czelusniak
Digital Photography
Halloween Smoke Show
Jacob Jones
Digital Photography

Industrial Blue
Ox Zante
Digital Painting
My great-grandma Vina forgave the love of her life—her sweet, dashing Almarine Matthis. Even though he left her for another woman back in 1972.

That’s when she began to wear plain cotton dresses with sensible shoes and twist her curly dark locks into plain chignons hidden beneath snowy crocheted caps.

That’s when she moved away to Iuka, Mississippi alone in the yellow trailer on Morning Star Road where she grew carnations, lilies, and petunias and where she wrote every grandchild and great-grandchild happy birthday cards but never visited us.

“She was something else,” my mamaw would say to me as she squinted at a colorless photo from before 1972 showing her mama wearing pedal pushers and lipstick in front of the red Chevy Daddy Matthis bought her.

But in 1972, she stopped driving cars and stopped eating sweets, for Hill women—not Matthis women—were quiet, demure, and sensible. Women who saved emotions for The Word and crying only for Jesus.
Car stuff is men’s work
mom says
just like how she says everything outdoors
sweaty and greasy
is men’s work.
But sometimes there are no men around
and sometimes you get a flat
on I-840 heading west at midnight,
and now that you can drive
you won’t want to flag down
the first car that passes by.
Not these days.

So your mom crouches down
on the ground,
by the 1999 Alero
painted a shade of sea green
you’ve only ever seen on that Oldsmobile,
reminding you of the sea you’ve never seen.

She places the jack,
muttering curse words as she struggles with it,
and tells you to crank it
up, higher, higher, that’s enough.
She watches as you unscrew the lug nuts
with slow hands,
delicately handling a wrench
that she tells you needs more force.
She guides those same hands
as you pull the tire forward and off.

Then, she has you do the whole process in reverse
while you ignore your father’s red truck
parked behind you in the driveway.
When I visited the battlefield where Grant and Johnson collided two armies that spring of ‘62, kids scurried along the grounds.

They climbed over the canons peered and shouted into the black holes hearing the “Hallooo!” and “Shit face” echo back to them like squeals which amused their little minds.

And underneath their tiny shoes, the wet clay from the night’s rain clotted red and thick on their skinny, bruised legs and they laughed and laughed.

I laid a perennial beside the flag and walked to the hill’s crest where I looked at the rows of graves as the sun came out and hardened the ground.
Little Man
Hannah Calvert
Watercolor on Paper

360 Book
Jessejoie Curada
Book Arts

Process
Shelby Lemmon
Digital Photography
Costa Rican Kid
Noah Halford
Digital Photography

Southern Blue Eyes
Lydia Sims
Acrylic & Epoxy on 2’ x 3’ Board
Seeki the Hide and Seek Robot
Julian Brown
Video

O.C. Death
Gloria Newton
Video

Vitreous
Jonathan Bruce
Audio
Policy Statement

Collage: A Journal of Creative Expression is an arts and literary magazine featuring submitted work chosen by a volunteer staff in a blind grading process. The staff attempts to choose the best work without regard for theme or authorship.

Although Collage is a publication of the University Honors College, staff members and submitters are not required to be Honors students. Staff members are selected each semester from a pool of applicants and must have at least a 3.0 GPA and two references.

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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.

- The Imp
- Emily McTyre/Prose
- Already Dead Inside
- Ox Zante/Art
- Vitreous
- Jonathan Bruce

Freshwater Sharks
Addison Gentry/Poetry
Peace in the Quiet
Noah Halford/Photography
Seeki the Hide and Seek Robot
Julian Brown

Video and Film

Columbia Scholastic Press Association Awards


Production

Technology
Adobe InDesign CC
Adobe Illustrator CC
Adobe Photoshop CC
Apple Macintosh Platform
Windows Platform
Procreate for iPad

Typography
Baskerville, Tahoma, Helvetica

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80 lb. Athens Silk Text

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