When our magazine began in 1968, our nation was facing many grim and formative realities. I fear this year will be remembered similarly. Yet what gives me peace is knowing that Collage demonstrates the prevalence of art through turmoil. As we reckon with our global and national struggles, we are also doing our best to remain whole ourselves. It is no small feat to take care of oneself these days, but I am proud that in the midst of such great tragedy, we have continued to create. Here we have a magazine that is eclectic in the works it showcases, brought to fruition by the adaptable and incredibly talented students of our university.

I am so grateful to have been able to serve this magazine alongside a resilient and hardworking staff under the guidance of our heroic advisor, Marsha Powers. I am also grateful to all the folks who submitted, for without you, there is no Collage. As I have been since my first semester on staff in 2017, I am endlessly inspired by the talent that we see each year. This semester has been no exception. I hope that one day, when this edition is old and our memories have grown fuzzy, our magazine will serve as a testament to this year. We are cementing ourselves in the literature and arts of these pandemic-stricken times, and our successors will look to us to see how we created something beautiful while humanity and morale were at terrible lows.

Though there are few who will leave this year unscathed, I hope that in these pages you feel safe to seek refuge and vulnerable enough to be seen. And please take care of yourselves and your neighbors.

With love,
Kelsey Keith
The earth is frozen, the distant mountains imposing and jagged, stark in the night. The vault is buried deep within the chilled ground, where patient seeds hope for heat, water, growth. The sturdiest people of the town appear in the cold shadows to crack open the door. Their shoulders strain beneath woven sacks, and they gather loose seeds into gripped aprons. Flurries of snow fill the now empty vault.

I've used up the canned food from Summer's harvest meant for my growing children, who once skipped along the clear rivers of my mind. Now the ice rises to meet the sky and pierce the shimmering fabric above. These travelers are my last resort, the waiting inhabitants of the town are frost-bitten, their hands locked into prayer for a thawed Spring morning. Those carrying the seeds go as quickly as their stiff joints allow. But no, the cloth tears near a loose thread, the seeds spill across the bitter landscape, and my thoughts escape me.
I am “shoulder-length beard” years old. Where my neck meets my shoulders. That’s how old I am. I don’t know how old I am now, although that probably doesn’t matter. All I know is that my beard now grows past my shoulders. Sometimes I forget I wasn’t born here—in the Landfill. Something like that. It’s so hard to remember. It’s like drowning in freezing water, but without the water.

I think I remember learning about space in school: what the emptiness of the air was suffocating me. Like space. I remember feeling so alone that I couldn’t breathe, like as the feeling of it all. I remember crying endlessly, my cheeks into my blubbering mouth. I remember the cold salty tears stinging my eyes and running down my soft cheekbones. I remember the cold nights. Then the cold overpowered me, so the hope became my coat, keeping me warm in the long nights. Then the hope became my light, guiding my way through the landfill. Then I made and come rushing back to me. He would embrace me—indeed, like He himself was—I will be a benevolent and kind ruler. When I become king of this landfill I will organize them all and lead them out of here into the land of the living to take back what is ours.

I am not a child anymore. I understand that He is never coming back. I have abandoned my hope—my delusion—and in that abandonment I have found power. Somehow, I will find Him, and I will lead my army straight to Him. We will try and apologize, to explain Himself, to ask for my forgiveness. I will not forgive. I will punish Him. If He will not come to the landfill, then I will bring the landfill to Him, to everyone. Everyone who discarded us and abandoned us, neglected us and forgot us will stand trial for their crimes. They will be put to a cruel and just death, and I will build a new landfill around their homes. The bodies of the traitors will be piled up into the heavens. When the sun sets over my empire, the sky will become a bloodly shade of red, and it will be beautiful.

I think they’re afraid of me. They don’t respond when I talk to them. They must not trust me. As long as I’ve been here, I think they’ve been here longer. Maybe even before she took over. Perhaps she led us around them, and they have adapted to it, learned to camouflage themselves. I think they’ll try and win myself over to them. For I have much to learn from them. However, they have been here so long, I may be able to reach them too. Perhaps they need a leader. Why not me? I would not be an evil, tyrannical king. Like one from the stories He told me—indeed, like He himself was—I will be a benevolent and kind ruler.

I have made a shelter here out of metal sheets and canvas. It is so humble, the stacks that come to deliver more of mankind’s decadent waste don’t even notice it, for it blends in with the mound so well. During the day, I go out and collect things: random artifacts from a faraway land. At first, I tried to make beautiful things out of them. I’m most proud of a dragon made of screw and rusted metal with strings, and wings of shredded newspaper. After a while I had to give this childish hobby up. I had more immediate concerns. Who has time to be a lowly artisan when they are destined to become a king?

I had more immediate concerns. Who has time to be a lowly artisan when they are destined to become a king? However, they have been here so long, I may be able to reach them too. Perhaps they need a leader. Why not me? I would not be an evil, tyrannical king. Like one from the stories He told me—indeed, like He himself was—I will be a benevolent and kind ruler. When I become king of this landfill I will organize them all and lead them out of here into the land of the living to take back what is ours.

I have found that I am not the only one here. This spot is a collection of bodies of the traitors will be piled up into the heavens. When the sun sets over my empire, the sky will become a bloodly shade of red, and it will be beautiful.

All I need is a pair of shoes.
Sometimes I wonder, 
If your thoughts sit heavy 
with a canyon between them. 
If a river carves out the spaces between your ribs. 
If your sighs act like 
hurricanes spiraling till they’re set free. 
I didn’t realize what it meant when your body sang to me.

Sometimes I wonder, 
If your fingers are spread 
so they can pluck at every drop of rain. 
If your eyes ebb and swell with an icy tide. 
If your lips, spit-slick, 
could water the cracked desert of mine? 
That’s what I meant when I stopped saying it’s fine.

Sometimes I wonder, 
If your hands still know my shape, 
the ghost of my body coiled and splayed. 
If you knew before I did what I was going to do. 
If your heart broke too, 
quieted by footsteps as I walked away. 
I still don’t know what I meant when I left that day.

Sometimes I wonder, 
If your neighbor overhead. 
They are troubled tonight. 
They do not know, but those ceiling creaks 
tell a finer story than words. 
Yes, they’ve been pacing fifteen minutes now, 
Even Steady Rhythmic. 
I wonder what concerns them, 
My neighbor overhead.

Are they, perhaps, like the woman 
Weeping at the doctor 
From news too heavy to hold 
And smothering under the weight, 
Fighting for each gasp of air. 
Do they, like her, have no one 
To whisper, “I’m here. I’m with you. I love you.” 
Perhaps they pace in the dark 
Scared Worried Alone. 
And my heart aches for them, 
My neighbor overhead.

My clock reads one fifty-three; 
The hour and creaks above beg: 
Why are they yet awake, 
My neighbor overhead? 
Perhaps they are like my banker, 
Just dismissed from their job; 
Three children to feed, 
Gas bill to pay and— 
And the smallest has outgrown her shoes. 
Perhaps they pace to cope with Fear Anger Angst. 
And my heart breaks for 
My neighbor overhead.

My clock reads two seventeen; 
Sleep drifts closer, 
Yet the nighttime vigil continues 
For my neighbor overhead. 
Do they, like me, find 
The burden of school 
Too fierce a monster for Sleep to fight? 
Its claws are sharp, its teeth are bared 
But its voice is smooth as silk— 
Are its same words, those agonizing doubts, 
Caressing their anxious mind: 
Can I do it? 
Am I enough? 
Will they be proud? 
And my heart reaches out to 
My neighbor overhead.
This Summer
Livi Goodgame • Poetry

Quarters are saved for the lemonade stand
Up the street in the shade—
An excuse to stretch my legs.
Red, plastic lawn chairs set in a circle
Await conversations of uncertainty.
Neighbors wave and leave out gifts:
Tomatoes from the garden, water bowls for the dogs.
Inside, we cook, clean, and count the days.
No comings, no goings, but
Everyone takes a walk.

Dawn of Incandescence
Timothy White • Photography

An Unlikely Visitor
Aemily Culpepper • Photography

I trade my life to others.
Weeks at a time are bargained for help, love, approval.
It’s the only currency I have.
I am a shining, golden coin.
My time shows the tarnish of trade.
Each week of myself, sold for a piece of nothing.
In slowly eating my life.

When I was younger I couldn’t haggle.
Instead it’s a trade, my time was just taken.
A whole summer gone.
Shared from person to person, home to home.
And each person, each time, demanded a different me.
The consumption of time ate my being.
Degradation from solid to liquid.

Even when my time is asked of, hours of my life,
I wear an unarrowed burden.
Cheap to purchase and pushed on a dusty shelf.
Pieces of my person are taken for show.
The pen and a bit of a complete set.
That’s all I am.
A piece in an existing display.
My only value isn’t even held in myself.
My cost, my price, is what people believe it to be.
Speaks to quite audacity.
When the show ceases to hold their interests.

The Last Sunset
Celeste Maas • Audio

Negotiating Time
Sarah Garris • Poetry

I made my life fit others.
Weeks at a time are bargained for help, love, approval.
It’s the only currency I have.
Others are shining, golden coins.
My time shows the tarnish of trade.
Each week of myself, sold for a piece of nothing.
In slowly eating my life.

When I was younger I couldn’t haggle.
Instead it’s a trade, my time was just taken.
A whole summer gone.
Shared from person to person, home to home.
And each person, each time, demanded a different me.
The consumption of time ate my being.
Degradation from solid to liquid.

Even when my time is asked of, hours of my life,
I wear an unarrowed burden.
Cheap to purchase and pushed on a dusty shelf.
Pieces of my person are taken for show.
The pen and a bit of a complete set.
That’s all I am.
A piece in an existing display.
My only value isn’t even held in myself.
My cost, my price, is what people believe it to be.
Speaks to quite audacity.
When the show ceases to hold their interests.

The Last Sunset
Celeste Maas • Audio

Negotiating Time
Sarah Garris • Poetry

I made my life fit others.
Weeks at a time are bargained for help, love, approval.
It’s the only currency I have.
Others are shining, golden coins.
My time shows the tarnish of trade.
Each week of myself, sold for a piece of nothing.
In slowly eating my life.

When I was younger I couldn’t haggle.
Instead it’s a trade, my time was just taken.
A whole summer gone.
Shared from person to person, home to home.
And each person, each time, demanded a different me.
The consumption of time ate my being.
Degradation from solid to liquid.

Even when my time is asked of, hours of my life,
I wear an unarrowed burden.
Cheap to purchase and pushed on a dusty shelf.
Pieces of my person are taken for show.
The pen and a bit of a complete set.
That’s all I am.
A piece in an existing display.
My only value isn’t even held in myself.
My cost, my price, is what people believe it to be.
Speaks to quite audacity.
When the show ceases to hold their interests.

The Last Sunset
Celeste Maas • Audio

Negotiating Time
Sarah Garris • Poetry

I made my life fit others.
Weeks at a time are bargained for help, love, approval.
It’s the only currency I have.
Others are shining, golden coins.
My time shows the tarnish of trade.
Each week of myself, sold for a piece of nothing.
In slowly eating my life.

When I was younger I couldn’t haggle.
Instead it’s a trade, my time was just taken.
A whole summer gone.
Shared from person to person, home to home.
And each person, each time, demanded a different me.
The consumption of time ate my being.
Degradation from solid to liquid.

Even when my time is asked of, hours of my life,
I wear an unarrowed burden.
Cheap to purchase and pushed on a dusty shelf.
Pieces of my person are taken for show.
The pen and a bit of a complete set.
That’s all I am.
A piece in an existing display.
My only value isn’t even held in myself.
My cost, my price, is what people believe it to be.
Speaks to quite audacity.
When the show ceases to hold their interests.

The Last Sunset
Celeste Maas • Audio

Negotiating Time
Sarah Garris • Poetry

I made my life fit others.
Weeks at a time are bargained for help, love, approval.
It’s the only currency I have.
Others are shining, golden coins.
My time shows the tarnish of trade.
Each week of myself, sold for a piece of nothing.
In slowly eating my life.

When I was younger I couldn’t haggle.
Instead it’s a trade, my time was just taken.
A whole summer gone.
Shared from person to person, home to home.
And each person, each time, demanded a different me.
The consumption of time ate my being.
Degradation from solid to liquid.

Even when my time is asked of, hours of my life,
I wear an unarrowed burden.
Cheap to purchase and pushed on a dusty shelf.
Pieces of my person are taken for show.
The pen and a bit of a complete set.
That’s all I am.
A piece in an existing display.
My only value isn’t even held in myself.
My cost, my price, is what people believe it to be.
Speaks to quite audacity.
When the show ceases to hold their interests.

The Last Sunset
Celeste Maas • Audio

Negotiating Time
Sarah Garris • Poetry

I made my life fit others.
Weeks at a time are bargained for help, love, approval.
It’s the only currency I have.
Others are shining, golden coins.
My time shows the tarnish of trade.
Each week of myself, sold for a piece of nothing.
In slowly eating my life.

When I was younger I couldn’t haggle.
Instead it’s a trade, my time was just taken.
A whole summer gone.
Shared from person to person, home to home.
And each person, each time, demanded a different me.
The consumption of time ate my being.
Degradation from solid to liquid.

Even when my time is asked of, hours of my life,
I wear an unarrowed burden.
Cheap to purchase and pushed on a dusty shelf.
Pieces of my person are taken for show.
The pen and a bit of a complete set.
That’s all I am.
A piece in an existing display.
My only value isn’t even held in myself.
My cost, my price, is what people believe it to be.
Speaks to quite audacity.
When the show ceases to hold their interests.

The Last Sunset
Celeste Maas • Audio

Negotiating Time
Sarah Garris • Poetry

I made my life fit others.
Weeks at a time are bargained for help, love, approval.
It’s the only currency I have.
Others are shining, golden coins.
My time shows the tarnish of trade.
Each week of myself, sold for a piece of nothing.
In slowly eating my life.

When I was younger I couldn’t haggle.
Instead it’s a trade, my time was just taken.
A whole summer gone.
Shared from person to person, home to home.
And each person, each time, demanded a different me.
The consumption of time ate my being.
Degradation from solid to liquid.

Even when my time is asked of, hours of my life,
I wear an unarrowed burden.
Cheap to purchase and pushed on a dusty shelf.
Pieces of my person are taken for show.
The pen and a bit of a complete set.
That’s all I am.
A piece in an existing display.
My only value isn’t even held in myself.
My cost, my price, is what people believe it to be.
Speaks to quite audacity.
When the show ceases to hold their interests.

The Last Sunset
Celeste Maas • Audio

Negotiating Time
Sarah Garris • Poetry

I made my life fit others.
Weeks at a time are bargained for help, love, approval.
It’s the only currency I have.
Others are shining, golden coins.
My time shows the tarnish of trade.
Each week of myself, sold for a piece of nothing.
In slowly eating my life.

When I was younger I couldn’t haggle.
Instead it’s a trade, my time was just taken.
A whole summer gone.
Shared from person to person, home to home.
And each person, each time, demanded a different me.
The consumption of time ate my being.
Degradation from solid to liquid.

Even when my time is asked of, hours of my life,
I wear an unarrowed burden.
Cheap to purchase and pushed on a dusty shelf.
Pieces of my person are taken for show.
The pen and a bit of a complete set.
That’s all I am.
A piece in an existing display.
My only value isn’t even held in myself.
My cost, my price, is what people believe it to be.
Speaks to quite audacity.
When the show ceases to hold their interests.

The Last Sunset
Celeste Maas • Audio

Negotiating Time
Sarah Garris • Poetry

I made my life fit others.
Weeks at a time are bargained for help, love, approval.
It’s the only currency I have.
Others are shining, golden coins.
My time shows the tarnish of trade.
Each week of myself, sold for a piece of nothing.
In slowly eating my life.

When I was younger I couldn’t haggle.
Instead it’s a trade, my time was just taken.
A whole summer gone.
Shared from person to person, home to home.
And each person, each time, demanded a different me.
The consumption of time ate my being.
Degradation from solid to liquid.

Even when my time is asked of, hours of my life,
I wear an unarrowed burden.
Cheap to purchase and pushed on a dusty shelf.
Pieces of my person are taken for show.
The pen and a bit of a complete set.
That’s all I am.
A piece in an existing display.
My only value isn’t even held in myself.
My cost, my price, is what people believe it to be.
Speaks to quite audacity.
When the show ceases to hold their interests.

The Last Sunset
Celeste Maas • Audio

Negotiating Time
Sarah Garris • Poetry

I made my life fit others.
Weeks at a time are bargained for help, love, approval.
It’s the only currency I have.
Others are shining, golden coins.
My time shows the tarnish of trade.
Each week of myself, sold for a piece of nothing.
In slowly eating my life.

When I was younger I couldn’t haggle.
Instead it’s a trade, my time was just taken.
A whole summer gone.
Shared from person to person, home to home.
And each person, each time, demanded a different me.
The consumption of time ate my being.
Degradation from solid to liquid.

Even when my time is asked of, hours of my life,
I wear an unarrowed burden.
Cheap to purchase and pushed on a dusty shelf.
Pieces of my person are taken for show.
The pen and a bit of a complete set.
That’s all I am.
A piece in an existing display.
My only value isn’t even held in myself.
My cost, my price, is what people believe it to be.
Speaks to quite audacity.
When the show ceases to hold their interests.
I never close my blinds all the way at night. I keep them pulled up, just a tad, floating about five inches above the windowsill. It's perfect because with the celestial alignment of my bed and window, Dawn has just enough space—in that five-inch gap—to greet me each morning. She is quiet about it, first waking herself, I guess. She yawns and stretches her arms and slowly stands on the horizon.

She lifts herself on the lowest rung of my windowpane, peering over it like a curious child trying to catch a glimpse of what's on the kitchen counter. Too short. She taps on the glass of my window, and her golden honey color spreads over the backs of my eyelids—a gentle alarm that she has arrived. The day has begun.

Some days, Dawn is playful. She throws rainbows dancing over my sheets to tickle me awake. Other days, Dawn is only just there. She doesn't come knocking on the window but pulls the clouds over her head like a dense, gray duvet, reluctant to wake. Most days, I follow her lead.

On her brighter days, though, after she's gently brushed back my eyelids, we will lie there, Dawn and I, wrapped in each other's warmth like a pair of lovers. Tangled in the sheets. Content. Flooded with hope for a new day.

Do you ever wonder what we could've been? Not constantly, but consistently. Do you lie awake at night as I do, looking out silvery paned oriels Thinking about me, as I think about you?

Dawn
Emily McTyre • Prose

I never close my blinds all the way at night. I keep them pulled up, just a tad, floating about five inches above the windowsill. It's perfect because with the celestial alignment of my bed and window, Dawn has just enough space—in that five-inch gap—to greet me each morning. She is quiet about it, first waking herself. I guess, she yawns and stretches her arms and slowly stands on the horizon.

She lifts herself on the lowest rung of my windowpane, pecking over it like a curious child trying to catch a glimpse of what's on the kitchen counter. Too short. She taps on the glass of my window, and her golden honey color spreads over the backs of my eyelids—a gentle alarm that she has arrived. The day has begun.

Some days, Dawn is playful. She throws rainbows dancing over my sheets to tickle me awake. Other days, Dawn is only just there. She doesn't come knocking on the window but pulls the clouds over her head like a dense, gray duvet, reluctant to wake. Most days, I follow her lead.

On her brighter days, though, after she's gently brushed back my eyelids, we will lie there, Dawn and I, wrapped in each other's warmth like a pair of lovers. Tangled in the sheets. Content. Flooded with hope for a new day.
Deep beneath the Greek oregano, the onion chives, the star jasmine, and the yew live my skinks. Midday they climb up onto the patio bricks to lie in the sun, warming themselves. They are five-lined skinks, the young of which have blue tails. If I’m still, I can watch them on patrol. Did I gasp, and then smile, when an adolescent threw itself off the brick’s edge into the jasmine roots. It was a flying leap, legs splayed, what I hadn’t expected; and, as silly as it might seem, I believe the skink relished the maneuver. Perhaps after a worm, this member of the infantry unit landed in the combat zone ready to devour the invader.

I’ve yet to see one of my skinks eat a slug or a fly or a grasshopper, but I know they do, handfuls every day. So, not only are they entertainment, they’re also pest control.

Lying in the sun, the skinks’ smooth, flat scales make their gray-brown bodies and their silver stripes shimmer. Skinks are lizards, small ones, their bodies five inches, their tails six. What makes them unique lizards is that the female stays for six weeks under a rock or log with her eggs until they hatch out as one-inch babies. On the young, the five lines and the blue tail are distinct, fading with maturity to brown.

And mama skink hasn’t to worry for her eggs or for her babies, for I’ve spread no “agent orange, mustard gas, or napalm” to disable my new, little recruits.

Five-line skinks are sometimes thought to have poisonous stingers. They don’t. It’s said that they taste vile. Oh, I hope that’s so.

For their assailants will then sample the full measure of their noble name—Eumeces inexpectatus—the unexpected.

Warm days, brown veterans, and blue rookies defend my garden from aphid, whitefly, and mealybug assault. But when chasing after and landing on foe in 90-degree heat leaves my troopers fatigued, they take their leave in the shade of lemon verbenas in their clay pots. Troopers sip from a low pan of water. And like their allies—spiders, toads and ladybirds—they secure respite in the cool green I’ve preserved for them.

Come winter, my regulars hibernate in the earth beneath my rosemary, jasmine, and yew, their services wrapped and appreciated until heat and bugs bring them out once again to active duty.
How much time has passed?
How many days did I lie paralyzed in my bed?
How do I stay connected to my humanity
With no one around?
Bake bread, binge-watch, better yourself
They say.
But motivation has evaporated into a thin mist
That cannot penetrate my mask.
Complaints fill the air,
But anxiety constricts my breathing
More than a piece of cloth ever could.
I see people hoping, praying, pleading
For “normal,”
But even normal wasn’t okay.
We just have something new to blame.
A mirage trembled and shook
Over the blacktop
While I watched my shoes melt,
White rubber dripping.
Sweat slicked my back,
Your glasses foggy like a bathroom mirror.
The neighbor’s dog,
A grayed little beagle who loved to howl,
Combusted into dust and char.
My car was a blasting furnace,
The seatbelt buckle branding my bare hand
As I start to liquefy and the AC chokes
And sputters,
Drowning in the waves of heat.
But you look at me,
My gray hoodie loose on your frame,
And ask,
“Is it cold in here to you?”
Artist Mary Watkins: From MTSU Student to Community Icon
By Hanan Beyene

Mary Watkins is originally from the Rutherford County area, and was one of few Black students at MTSU. She went to her great-aunt’s house and found a painting signed “L. Murfree,” dated 1893. “[I want] to preserve history for the younger generation so they know from which they came,” she says.

Growing up in the Jim Crow era, Mary Watkins attended segregated schools. Even by the time she attended college, it wasn’t until 1966 when Watkins majored in Art at MTSU that she learned specific techniques, histories, and appreciations. After graduation, Rutherford County lacked opportunities for art teachers, and Watkins would go on to teach special needs post-graduation. Yet, she still incorporated art into classes and found outlets working with seniors, art camps, and other places to share her knowledge.

When speaking with Watkins, her passion for art is crystal clear. She believes that people relate strongly to portraits specifically, and has an urge to draw people’s faces to capture their essence. She’s even been known to stop strangers and ask for a photograph, in hopes of capturing their essence. She’s even been known to pull out her own phone and take their photo. Watkins says, “I just wanted to capture their essence.”

Mary Watkins’ race greatly affects her art, and Black Empowerment is a central theme in her work. Watkins proudly displays natural Black hairstyles and culture. In her piece “My Roots Run Deep,” Black natural hair is displayed prominently as a response to the notion that Black natural hair is "unprofessional" or "ugly." She specifically cites several stories of Black people who were told to straighten their hair or cut it short. Watkins' work seeks to validate the Black Experience and empower Black people through art and multimodal works with genealogy. Currently, Watkins is working on a “Hidden Figures” calendar that highlights the lost stories of Black women who contributed greatly to the Rutherford County area. “It’s important the young people know these histories,” she says, because these histories connect the common narrative of the past. She also writes plays and is currently working on one that involves the story of sixty women from different races and backgrounds who fought for women’s and Black rights. Like all her work, she plans to uplift people’s stories and achievements.

At one point in our talk, Watkins put me on the spot, asking me if I was familiar with some of the “Hidden Figures.” She asked if I knew who Sampson Keeble was. When I shook my head to say no, she explained he was the first Black Tennessean to serve in the state legislature. Watkins then asked me if I knew Collese House. When I answered no, she told me how House fought for reparations for formerly enslaved African Americans. Despite growing up in the area, I was never present for any of these stories, which is precisely her motivation for creating “Hidden Figures.”

“Stuff like the [Hidden Figures] I feel is important so that the young people know. Because for me, all I knew was [Black people] being enslaved,” she said as I started to tear up. “In Watkins’ art, genealogy, and teaching all illuminate the unshared stories of the Black community and empower the youth, so that they can move forward with a stronger sense of heritage and identity.”
My father is a tall man
lean-limbed and a little
out of reach

He pulls a sweater over me
shakes his head
pinches his lips
pats over a different sweater or
a button-up
some knee-long khaki shorts
Vileiso lace sneakers
navy down jacket
this goes on

I see the tremor in his fingers when
on our scrappy little balcony
he smokes and sits and rakes
his nails through his hair
I don’t know if he’s praying
or laughing
at the sorry misery
that is our kitchen sink
crusted and clogged
from when we wash our hair out
with old dish soap
he rinses my scalp
and the water trickles down
my forehead
onto my knuckles
and I remember him
humming
so I hum

Back inside he tosses the tags
his fingertips are red-raw from
clothing me

We are in church now
showered and clean and the fluorescents
white-bet in the lobby
my father wipes his forehead
with the Ross receipt
and trails a tray
of holy oil capsules
rubs one into his palm
and pats it up for me to see

The linework glistened
glowing
the Lord’s work
I stare at his hand and imagine
what it would look like
with mine in it
A single petal disconnects, softly floating from her home.
I watch you journey upon the wind, kissing the breeze with a tender embrace.
A golden light shifts and shines, illuminating the flow of your silk.
Swirling and swishing through a dance, 
Twirling the ruffles with every curve, 
Each vein of lace profoundly enhanced, twining throughout your bodice.
Oh, how exquisite!
Suddenly, a gust shatters your dance, as you chaotically twist and flee 
Far, far away from me 
But I know, deep in my soul, your voyage continues.
Because you and the wind are lovers at heart, the black and white, 
Your day and his night, the mixture of clear and bright.
And through your soft, embellished dance, 
I see a golden light reveal a union, vibrant and flawless, 
As the silken petal glides on forever, dancing with her storm.

Incessant appeals to heaven gone unheard
Continual confessions yet still unspoken
We labour beneath the same sky, hugging down those narrow halls
We want to live a thousand lives at once
Walking through white-painted grass and seed
Or ride the train and talk about the war
And how we both want something more
than This
But we do not know what we desire
Or if we even deserve each other—
What will it cost us both to get to where we’re going?
When you decide to leave—
I will not ask to come with you
I refuse to profess the words I know you can’t say back
Safe from Chaos and Collapse, you say time moves slower in Cape Cod
But until then we are forced to yomp through battlefields, dodging bullets
Breath still healing, we pick ourselves up like ripe peach
The Fall lends itself to new life—
You, a freshly reborn phoenix, Saint Lazarus
Keeping vigil in a Chinese restaurant, waiting for a miracle
Drudgy in sweatshirts, but soon draped in Ivy
Memorizing bird calls like theokratops purr over holy scripture—
Will you, years from now, be able to recognize my voice too?
My yearning for reciprocated stolen glances
I grow, like kudzu vine, all the more madaini over you
I study your face like star maps, or a missing child’s photograph—
For I know one day I’ll have to describe your skin from memory
(Drained from harsh summers, soft despite scars, smooth like Bitterroot flesh)
I refuse to profess the words I know you can’t say back
Yet now, in my despair, I confess:
I love you as best as I know how to

A single petal disconnects, softly floating from her home.
I watch you journey upon the wind, kissing the breeze with a tender embrace.
A golden light shifts and shines, illuminating the flow of your silk.
Swirling and swishing through a dance, 
Twirling the ruffles with every curve, 
Each vein of lace profoundly enhanced, twining throughout your bodice.
Oh, how exquisite!
Suddenly, a gust shatters your dance, as you chaotically twist and flee 
Far, far away from me 
But I know, deep in my soul, your voyage continues.
Because you and the wind are lovers at heart, the black and white, 
Your day and his night, the mixture of clear and bright.
And through your soft, embellished dance, 
I see a golden light reveal a union, vibrant and flawless, 
As the silken petal glides on forever, dancing with her storm.
An Ode to Icarus
Sydney Robertson • Poetry

In the corridors of the Minotaur
Your wings hid their luster
Two steps off that cliff
You saw for the first time
That freedom made your wings into wings
More than your father's wax and feathers
All your father could give you were limits to freedom
The sun called louder than your father
The wind felt better than his coarse hands
The light gave you shivers that the cold never did
You walked between stone walls
Beneath a palace full of gold
Now the palace is below you
The heavens above you
The sun promises to hold you
More than your father ever did
They call you foolish
For grabbing hold of the sky
Because they will never fly
You couldn't spend your life surrounded by rock
Your father is the foolish one
For showing a trapped boy his wings
The sky's arms were open
When you stepped off that cliff
But the sun didn't tell you she'd burn you
The wax didn't tell you it'd hurt
Rivers burned through your bones
Numbing muscles crumpled
Softening your fall into the sea
Still they call you foolish
Because you laughed on your way down
Laughed because you knew
It is better to fly once than to never fly at all
You blew a kiss to the sun on the way to your marbled grave
Beholding something so magnificent is worth the burn
The oceans caught you in your glorious fall
She froze you
Ripping up your wings
But you loved her
Just as much as you loved the sun
You preferred your grave to beneath crashing waves
Than these deadly cold corridors
Below that wretched palace of gold
You shone brighter than the gold ever will
Though they call you fool
You Flew

Hair Like Mine
Jordyn Hall • Painting (bottom)

My Grandpa Gary
Maggie Strahle (top right) • Oil paint

An Ode to Icarus
Sydney Robertson • Poetry

In the corridors of the Minotaur
Your wings hid their luster
Your father breathed into them life
Two steps off that cliff
You saw for the first time
That freedom made your wings into wings
More than your father's wax and feathers
All your father could give you were limits to freedom
The sun called louder than your father
The wind felt better than his coarse hands
The light gave you shivers that the cold never did
You walked between stone walls
Beneath a palace full of gold
Now the palace is below you
The heavens above you
The sun promises to hold you
More than your father ever did
They call you foolish
For grabbing hold of the sky
Because they will never fly
You couldn't spend your life surrounded by rock
Your father is the foolish one
For showing a trapped boy his wings
The sky's arms were open
When you stepped off that cliff
But the sun didn't tell you she'd burn you
The wax didn't tell you it'd hurt
Rivers burned through your bones
Numbing muscles crumpled
Softening your fall into the sea
Still they call you foolish
Because you laughed on your way down
Laughed because you knew
It is better to fly once than to never fly at all
You blew a kiss to the sun on the way to your marbled grave
Beholding something so magnificent is worth the burn
The oceans caught you in your glorious fall
She froze you
Ripping up your wings
But you loved her
Just as much as you loved the sun
You preferred your grave to beneath crashing waves
Than these deadly cold corridors
Below that wretched palace of gold
You shone brighter than the gold ever will
Though they call you fool
You Flew

Hair Like Mine
Jordyn Hall • Painting (bottom)

My Grandpa Gary
Maggie Strahle (top right) • Oil paint

An Ode to Icarus
Sydney Robertson • Poetry

In the corridors of the Minotaur
Your wings hid their luster
Your father breathed into them life
Two steps off that cliff
You saw for the first time
That freedom made your wings into wings
More than your father's wax and feathers
All your father could give you were limits to freedom
The sun called louder than your father
The wind felt better than his coarse hands
The light gave you shivers that the cold never did
You walked between stone walls
Beneath a palace full of gold
Now the palace is below you
The heavens above you
The sun promises to hold you
More than your father ever did
They call you foolish
For grabbing hold of the sky
Because they will never fly
You couldn't spend your life surrounded by rock
Your father is the foolish one
For showing a trapped boy his wings
The sky's arms were open
When you stepped off that cliff
But the sun didn't tell you she'd burn you
The wax didn't tell you it'd hurt
Rivers burned through your bones
Numbing muscles crumpled
Softening your fall into the sea
Still they call you foolish
Because you laughed on your way down
Laughed because you knew
It is better to fly once than to never fly at all
You blew a kiss to the sun on the way to your marbled grave
Beholding something so magnificent is worth the burn
The oceans caught you in your glorious fall
She froze you
Ripping up your wings
But you loved her
Just as much as you loved the sun
You preferred your grave to beneath crashing waves
Than these deadly cold corridors
Below that wretched palace of gold
You shone brighter than the gold ever will
Though they call you fool
You Flew
How can you find a single word, only one that describes such a feeling? "Lovely," "comfort," "home." None of them do justice.

It's the comforting warmth of the sun on your back, rays stretching through the window on a chilly autumn morning.

It's the colors of parchment and used tea bags, the smell of roses, their petals glittering with dawn dew.

It's the sound of a full orchestra, the rich wooden instruments sharing a melody in the dark. The chord swells.

I feel at home in this new place, comforted and loved.

If only you could understand, we could define the feeling and bask in it as one.

Dépaysement  
Emily McTyre • Poetry

An Innocent Victim  
Katrina Scott • Oil, paint, cold wax medium, paper collage
The House
Camrin Owens • Poetry

Dust rises in the stagnant air
Art wanders
The cold, empty, forlorn
House.

Cracking floors, complaining
Under my weight, keep me a sad sort of company.
It's here a while, they seem to say
And I—
I can only agree.

My fingers can just distinguish traces
Of wood grain in the handrail
Worn—albeit—smooth from three decades of use.
The stairs murmur
Kinder greetings and lead me
Slowly, slowly
To my old bedroom.

Slate and silent. Cobwebs
Decorate, in method triumph
The corners
The ceilings
The comforter—
I flee in heated anguish
Damming the scream
Clawing my throat for Mama to come
Save me.
My foot slips; I tumble; I crash
On the dulled cedar floors below.
What did you expect? they ask.

A moan from deep within
Escapes my throat but not
From the fall.
I can feel them now, the tears.
They are coming, coming like
A hurricane, a wild storm,
A force uncontrollable.

Picture frames smile as I make my way
To my feet
And down the dim hall
The doorknob, whisper the floors.
I must.

The ghosts of familiar scents
Bombard me at—crusely—step foot
Into the kitchen.
The hurricane breaks landfall.
The tears of grief are bitter on my tongue.
Mama should come now, my soul wails.
She should be here beside me.
But the beating heart
Of this home
Sleeps in the graveyard.
This place of life, of laughter, of love
Is now
Just a cold, empty, forlorn
House.
The human brain weighs as much as six human hearts. But sometimes the heart feels so heavy there might as well be no brain at all. Looking at a picture of Katie—the person who, for the past five years, I’ve variously known as My Love, Freckles, and Starmate—I use my finger to trace the outline of her face. Our past life together flickers in my thoughts. Tears and laughter and pain and joy, I see it all playing out in my brain. Things are over between us now, our relationship ending right along with our twenties. Good things must come to an end, that’s what a refrigerator magnet told me once. Why should my relationship be any exception? It’s all for the better, I tell myself. But I don’t believe it. Instead, I feel frozen. I stare at her picture, the room motionless, my memories alive. The freeze is interrupted only by my heartbeat. Someone tapping from inside, awakening me, reminding me I’m not dead, pounding out the old Plathian brag: ‘I am, I am, I am.’
The room is still, apparently serene—but here’s my heart pattering away, indifferent to the stillness of its surroundings.

My mind feels overwhelmed with thoughts of loss. I want to think about something else—anything else. I decide to think about my thoughts. I have thoughts. Here they are, there they go, zipping around inside me. Here, like every other human, I have this three-pound mass of wrinkly, electrified meat trapped inside my skull, and it is busy. My mind is connected to the network of nerves throughout my body: more signals than all the phones in the world combined. These signals are constantly being sent and received, making me. I want to reach inside and pluck out one of these mysterious thoughts, but they are too elusive. The entire brain—no, the whole damn system—is at work, the brain just a bulbous gob situated at the top of a spinal cord that stretches and connects through all of me. I have a nerve—the vagus nerve—that can be triggered to make me feel butterflies in my stomach as I fall in love, and that I feel aches in my stomach as I fall out of love.
of the Milky Way. Faster still, our plasma deity, a cache of rainbows, blazing white, forging
Wanderlust still not satisfied, we spin and plummet along with the sun and moons and
perfectly complemented by this stellar waltz, a waltz moving at 90,000 feet per second.
slide. Our fiery deaths prevented only by inertia, the never-ending quantum shuffle
warps the cosmic fabric, taking us on a supersonic ride down a gravitational toboggan
locus of our solar system. The sun, a massive million-degree bubble of unbound particles,
circumference of our globe. As Earth rotates on its axis, it also careens toward the blazing
at more than the speed of sound. Spinning and spinning, each and every day we travel the
human, the terrain below, and me along with it, is spinning around the Earth's iron nucleus
frozen tableau, is at its most basic level utterly dynamic. The subatomic scaffolding of
motion. All of them, all of me, and all that's around me, everything that makes up this
immense tableau is in motion. Atoms accelerate, orbit, oscillate, vibrate, and teeter, each
and racing, particles with all sorts of exotic names—bosons, gluons, charm quarks, and
these stolid and solid walls, if we could look close enough, would be jittering and jiggling
energy and matter, and the universe is all of this. As I gently roil, I remember the
muons—popping in and out of actuality, moving at incredible and erratic speeds, blurry
and racing, particles with all sorts of exotic names—bosons, gluons, charm quarks, and
these stolid and solid walls, if we could look close enough, would be jittering and jiggling
energy and matter, and the universe is all of this. As I gently roil, I remember the
muons—popping in and out of actuality, moving at incredible and erratic speeds, blurry

      (Continued from page 31)

A moment of deciding whether to hug or shake hands. We hugged.

That first night we spent a lot of time looking into each other's smiling
eyes. The light would have reflected from her, coming at me as fast as anything in
the universe possibly can, the light from her eyes would have embraced the cells in
me, my people expecting to take more of her in, sending information to where
around my occipital lobe when I tried to wrestle, the light would have engulfed itself into
my grey matter like loving encroach their love into the skin of a tree, the pheromones'
of my odyssey now forever altered by her, her pheromones' odyssey now forever altered by me.
forever, forever changed. No matter what happened or happens our thumbprints normally
proud into the cosmos. Yet time battles forward toward an unknown ending, wholly
fear of anyone's protests. Human lives so full of meaning and significance, pain
and suffering, laughter and friendship—are we still mediated in time, immense
and imperishable. We are unattached fallen on the hearth fire.

But here I am, alive and conscious. The room is still, but only in appearance.

... (Continued from page 32)
There is a lone crow sitting on the wire outside my house, And I’m sure he has not noticed me the way I have noticed him. There is a leaky faucet crying out into silence, And I’m sure there is no one to turn it off. Do you ever think of it all? The sound of someone you love, Walking down the stairs in slippers. You know it is them before you see them. Think of it all, The crow, the faucet, the floor, the slippers, the sound on the stairs. Some things are alone, and some things are broken, And some things are warm, warm, warm like hot chocolate, And as sweet, too. The crow is only ever a crow, but I still think it is lonely. The faucet is only ever a faucet, but I still think its heart aches. The stairs are only ever stairs, but sometimes they are excited by the sound of you coming home. When I think of it all, I feel it all.

I am still this body, And I am still this soul And knowing I will always be so –No matter what wind blows around me or earth shakes beneath my feet– Has become a consistent answer in this world of consistent change Knowing I can never leave myself Has become my freedom Not my cage.

Bearded Vulture
Ox Zante • Photoshop

Wonder
Chelsea Gardiner • Oil on masonite

Freedom
Elise Sandlin • Poetry

Things + Feelings
Emma Bradley • Poetry

About Collage: A Journal of Creative Expression

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 material 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:

Collage
Middle Tennessee State University
190 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/submit.php. Creative work, such as art, photography, design, short stories, creative nonfiction, short plays, song lyrics, poetry, videos/films, and audio, may be submitted online or at the Collage office, Honors 224, between the hours of 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m.

Policy Statement

Collage: A Journal of Creative Expression is a creative 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 sponsored by the University Honors College, Collage staff members and editors 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. Go to https://www.mtsu.edu/collage/staff.php to complete an online staff application.

Middle Tennessee State University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, ethnic or national origin, sex, disability, age, religion, veteran status, sexual orientation or gender identity in its programs and activities, see full policy at www.mtsu.edu/titleix.

Columbia Scholastic Press Association Awards

Production

Technology
Adobe InDesign CC
Adobe Illustrator CC
Adobe Photoshop CC
Apple Macintosh Platform

Typography
Yeseva One
Delius Swash Caps
Cormorant Garamond

Paper
100 lb. Athens Silk Cover
80 lb. Athens Silk Text

Binding
Saddle Stitch

Printing
Pollock Printing of Nashville, Tennessee printed approximately 1,000 copies of Collage.

ISSN 2470-3451 (print)
ISSN 2470-3494 (online)
1120-9294

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.

King of the Landfill
Matthew Morris • Prose

Swallhard
Lia Harder • Poetry

Stressed
Hari Rattan • Art

The Fall
Ross Silkey • Photography

Resisting Nihilism
Oselin Woody • Audio

Ubered Lift
Boryl Hickman Jr. • Video

mtsucollage