

INVERTED **SYNTAX**



Fissured Vol V | May 2023



INVERTED SYNTAX FISSURED TONGUE SERIES

Volume V



"The Only..." by Lisa Berley, collage, acrylic paint on board, 12 x 16 inches, 2023



"The Only..." by Lisa Berley, collage, acrylic paint on board, 12 x 16 inches, 2023

About the Volume Five's Featured Cover Artist

Visual artist and poet Lisa Berley began her career as art director at KQED TV in San Francisco after receiving a BFA in painting and photography from the San Francisco Art Institute. At the intersection of art and media Berley began her pioneering work as an artist for Aurora Systems, developing one of the first computer graphics and animation systems for television. After returning to New York she raised a family, wrote a blog, and exhibited mixed media/collage works in galleries across Long Island culminating in a one-woman show in Geneseo, New York. In 2016 Berley moved to Boulder, Colorado and after her sons accidental death from a fall, began using methods similar to her collage paintings to create hybrid erasure poetry/collage. Her nonlinear approach to poetry/collage, redacting found words to create new reductive fragments, mirrors her journey of profound grief.

About the Art

I begin with words, then visuals and vice versa, to create erasure poems/collages by deconstructing and reconstructing found word and image fragments from the NYTimes magazines, forming new structures. The grief I experience is nonlinear, and writing with erasure/collage shapes the poems with the use of new juxtapositions, punctuation, and abstracted visuals. These constructions are a way of navigating a new path forward.

Inverted Syntax is published annually in print and online through the Fissured Tongue Series.

All included written work is assumed to be original and previously unpublished.

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We accept submissions only through our submission manager. Our 2023 general submission window will open March through June and our contest submission will open April through June. *Inverted Syntax's* Sublingua Prize for Poetry contest is currently open until June 2023.

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Letter from the Editor

Welcome to Inverted Syntax's Fissured Tongue Volume Five.

In this issue we have a number of multidisciplinary artists sharing powerful prose with us — artists, photographers, filmmakers, musicians both in the studio and on paper. No matter the medium, they bring us great gifts.

Revenants ride in water-cup waves, antique kimonos secretively tuck their voluminous layers into prosaic paper airplanes, and an artist/activist inspires beautiful ekphrastic poetry from a dreaming musician.

These pieces exist as scattered dots twinkling across a continuum that extends through cardinal and dimensional directions; babies scream on Santa's lap in the North Pole, a hot mess drives through the Mojave desert, a temple makes its home wherever you want it to, and somewhere in the unsettled past, wild curls bounce onto the gleaming floor of a drafty salon.

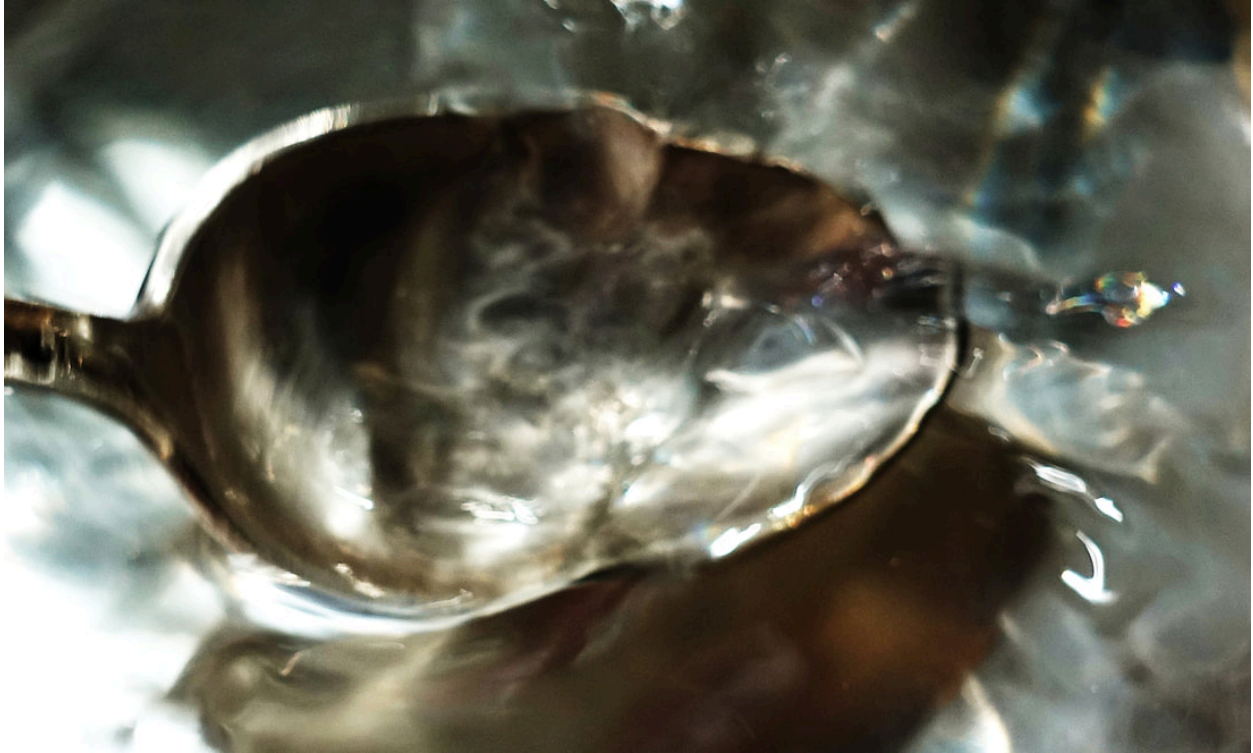
This is an invitation to approach these works as our writers do; as foragers, finding the beautiful gems scattered throughout this issue. Some hide in plain sight and others ask you to fill your nails with rich, loamy soil. No matter the costs, these treasures are worth the effort. I'm bringing my shovel.

Happy digging,
Yesica Mirambeaux

Managing Editor
Inverted Syntax
May 2023

From the Eye of Hart Crane

María DeGuzmán

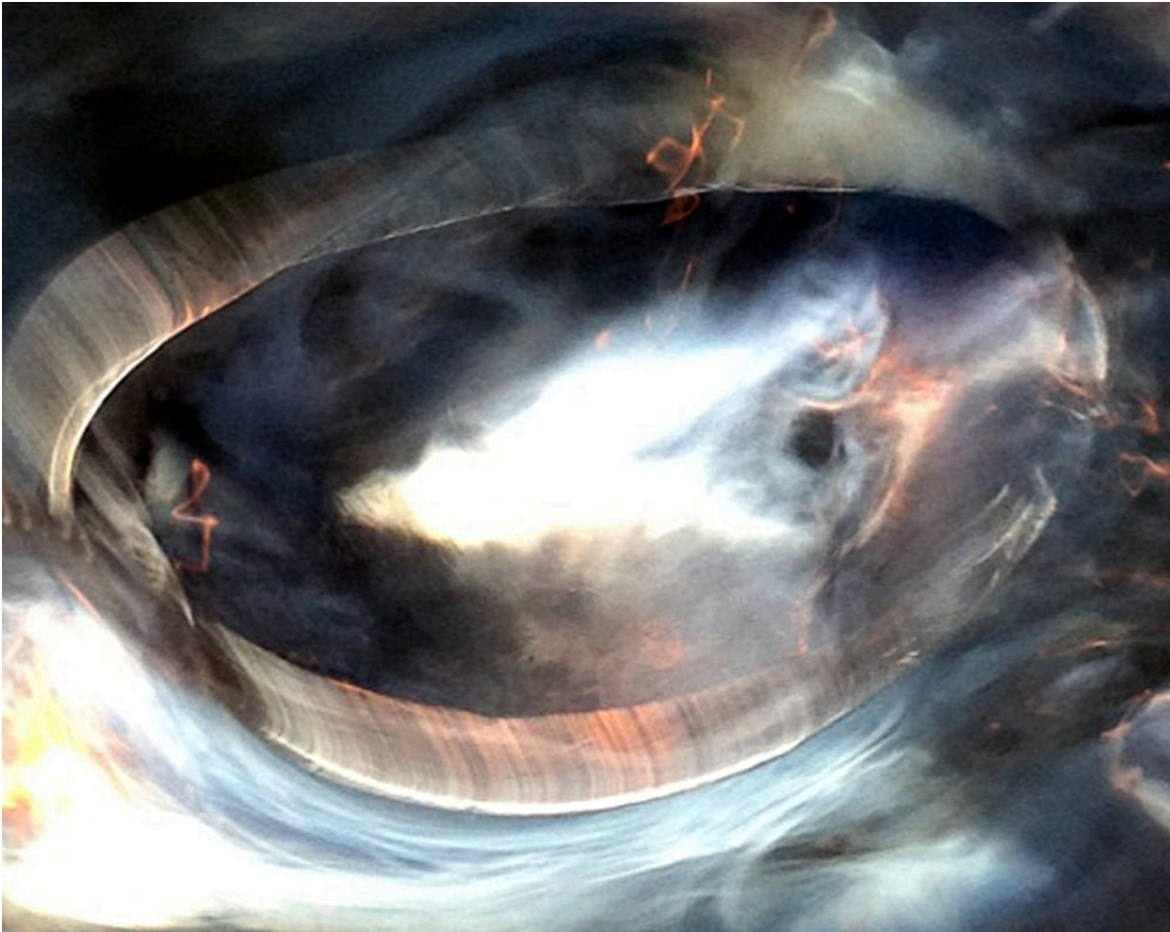


"Blurred Face and Oxygen Bubble" by María DeGuzmán, digital photograph, 2019

Blurred Face and Oxygen Bubble

You with an eye for the shirtless diver waiting by the grotto in buoy-red swim briefs, what are you whispering to me about the dead? From your parted lips, lost to the Gulf of Mexico after that headlong leap off the S.S. Orizaba just before noon that fateful April day in 1932, do I see sparks flying and a rainbow eidolon flashing equivocally? They say each drop of water has a face of its own. Are you telling me that forms pour out of the light from the curveship of a wave? That in another world, you are gloriously alive? Here you appear deathly pale, a revenant in shades of chalk and charcoal and sepia tint for flesh tones, mute blurred emanation from light waves riding waves of cupped water.

All we know of Heaven — and not for long — is a melee of emperor penguins in a shivering Antarctic blaze, an iceberg island adrift in unfreezing seas. And, in warmer climes, Heaven dwells in the brief exuberance of spinner dolphins out on the desert of the open ocean where meditation on the sun is all, under the cathedral of the sky that shades, by sextant degrees, into a Chartres blue.



"Eye of the Spoon" by María DeGuzmán, digital photograph, 2018

Eye of the Spoon

No Bishop Renaud is there to demand such a hue of blue and then, after sacrificial extortions, not live to see his stained-glass windows placed. To the humbled eye, the world is already dimensional. Magnified storms churning toward earthly shores rear up wave upon wave of drowned souls to crash in thundering echoes upon the sand. Does this flow have a face — yours, reconnoitered from the fatal tides?



"Sailor" by María DeGuzmán, digital photograph, 2019

Sailor

And do you appear as one you loved — a diver descending from your eye and a cig of sweet, sinuous
smoke between your teeth under mustachioed lips? And do I, looking down through a mirror darkly,
scan bright waves of light breaking in a sailor's cap becoming pearlescent abalone of paradise?

About the Author

María DeGuzmán is a scholar, conceptual photographer, writer, and music composer/sound designer. Her photographic work has been exhibited at The Institute of Contemporary Art (Boston, MA, USA), Watershed Media Centre (Bristol, England), and Golden Belt Studios (Durham, NC, USA). She has published photography in *Abstract Magazine*, *The Grief Diaries*, *Coffin Bell*, *Typehouse Literary Magazine*, *Map Literary*, *Two Hawks Quarterly*, *Harbor Review*, *The Halcyone*, *Gulf Stream Literary Magazine*, *Ponder Review*, *Alluvian*, *streetcake: a magazine of experimental writing*, *Galdrar of Tempered Runes Press*, *The Closed Eye Open*, *Gone Lawn*, *Apricity*, and *Phoebe*; creative nonfiction photo-text pieces in *Oyster River Pages*, *La Piccioletta Barca*, and *Tiny Seed Literary Journal*; photo-text flash fiction in *Oxford Magazine*, *Solstice: A Magazine of Diverse Voices*, *Pensive: A Global Journal of Spirituality and the Arts*, *On the Run*, and *The Bangalore Review*; photo prose poetry in *Landlocked Magazine*; visual poetry in *TAB: The Journal of Poetry & Poetics*, *Roanoke Review*, and *45th Parallel*; poetry in *Empty Mirror*; and short stories in *Mandorla: New Writing from the Americas*, *Huizache: The Magazine of Latino Literature*, *Sinister Wisdom*, and *Obelus Journal*. Her SoundCloud website may be found at: <https://soundcloud.com/mariadeguzman>.

About the Work

"This visual poetry piece composed of photographs and text functions as an informal ode to the work of US 'Modernist Romantic' poet Hart Crane, particularly to the collection *White Buildings* which contains "Voyages," a mystical and queer lyric poem sequence. "From the Eye of Hart Crane" is steeped in ecological concerns and an awareness of intensified ephemerality and extinction. The photographic images accompanying the text portions were obtained by agitating water with a spoon in a small bowl and photographing the water while stirring it. The naked eye cannot see what is happening at the time. The camera captures intriguing relations between chaos and order, between formlessness and form, between that which eludes the naked eye and visionary optics."

About the Author's Process

"For the last six years, since one bright hot morning in early July 2017, I have been composing visual poems, prose poems, and creative (non)fiction pieces from what is suggested to me by the interaction of light with water I have stirred up in a cup or bowl. I photograph the water while I stir with one hand. The small handheld camera, in my other hand, captures some arresting visual images out of the stream of images forming every millisecond within and upon the swirling water. By "arresting," I mean those images I have chosen from the myriad photographic images obtained in any given ritual meditation session of stirring and photographing water. Over days, weeks, months, and sometimes years, I dwell on the photographic images I have chosen. From that d(welling) emerge the stories told in these poems and creative (non)fiction pieces. I view the process, from commencement to infinity, as telegraphed interference patterns produced by the interaction of waves — waves of light, waves of water, and waves of thought, open to ongoing interpretation."

Break

Piper Martin



"Portrait" by William H. Johnson; oil on plywood; 31 1/2 x 25 3/4 in; 1944-1945; open source from the Smithsonian American Art Museum and Renwick Gallery.

I'm sitting in my parked Honda Accord outside a shopping mall in Alpharetta Georgia. It's cold. The asphalt is icy from left over snow. It's around midnight and the security guards are beginning to lock the main entrance. I watch the man who just played Santa leaving the back entrance. I wave as I lazily take off my apron and elf ears. I got this job from the mom of the girl who married my brother. Now I sit and watch kids run through department stores like the elves they are for twelve hours a day, as I take pictures of screaming babies perched on Santa's lap. Santa, who is actually Steve, who I've known since I was a little girl and who occasionally attends family gatherings.

Somewhere in an old drawer, there's a photo of me sitting on Steve's lap. Back when my mom used to dress me and my brother up in bright red outfits and bribe us with candy to sit still. I remember when I started work I noticed how much smaller the Santa sets seemed to be. As a kid, the white reindeer used to tower over head and sparkle against the florescent lights. What felt like a fairytale at age six was now revealed to be cardboard cut-outs run by pot heads with anger issues. Santa lives in Dawsonville Georgia, not the North Pole. I put my duct taped car keys in the ignition and drove home.

About the Author

"My name is Piper Martin. I'm twenty-three, and I recently graduated from Georgia College and State University with an English degree in hopes of pursuing a career in journalism or book publishing. I'm thrilled to say this is my first time being published. Break is a prose poem I wrote my senior year of college, and is one of my favorite pieces."

About the Work

"When you ask a kid what their favorite holiday is or what they want to be when they grow up, their answer will be instantaneous. Children have the freedom of seeing life for all the good it has to offer. Their favorite holiday is Valentine's Day because they like giving candy to their friends, and they want to be a vet because they like animals. For them, it truly is that simple. On the other hand, when an adult is asked these questions their answer is more hesitant. It's hard to allow ourselves to only see the good once we've seen the entire picture. We can't see Christmas lights without remembering the stress of emptying our savings to buy gifts for friends and family.

I wrote "Break" my senior year of college, when the safety net of adolescence felt less present than ever. It's about the pain of realizing life won't be sugar-coated for you anymore, but it's also about the safety in realizing life isn't sugar-coated from anyone. While it might be harder to acknowledge the good in things, the bad makes us appreciate them more. It's important to allow the kid in us to have a favorite holiday."

About the Author's Process

"For me writing has always felt visual. Whatever I write begins with the outline of an idea. It has a mood, a color, even a shape before any words are put to paper. I always know what a piece is supposed to feel like before I know what it's supposed to say. I have a yellow Five Star notebook that sees every step of the process. To start I make a bullet-point list of the first words that come to mind. A piece about a childhood dog might have words like nostalgia, comfort, loud, and reminiscent. Once I know what I want to say I map out its order. On the side of the paper I make an arrow from top to bottom planning out how I want the piece to feel. For example, if I want the piece to start pessimistic then end hopeful or start youthful and end mature. Then I'll organize some main words from the bullet-point list in an order that fits the emotional flow I want, and begin to expand the ideas. If I need research on a topic or notes of any kind I'll list them here. At that point I begin free writing on each individual idea, then its time for retyping everything into a word document and final editing. The end product usually ends up being different from the initial brainstorming, sometimes a piece will turn into something new in editing, but the feel is always the same."

The Story

Lawrence Bridges



"The Loge" by Edgar Degas; oil on wood; 5 x 8 5/8 in.; 1883; open source from the National Gallery of Art

The story
Today
Begins with the wheel
Through snow and
Industrial steel.
I wish I had
The strength
To not love
Sometimes
And just roll
In my tracks
And not hold on
No hands
Until I don't know
Where you live

About the Author

Lawrence Bridges' poetry has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Poetry*, and *The Tampa Review*. He has published three volumes of poetry: *Horses on Drums*, *Flip Days*, and *Brownwood* with Red Hen Press.

About the Work

"Falling in love begins a journey that sometimes leads through harsh environments. If unrequited, moving on is only possible by forgetting, or as Bob Dylan says, 'I'm sick of love ... I wish I'd never met you. I'm sick of love ... I'm trying to forget you. Just don't know what to do. I'd give anything to be with you.'"

About the Author's Process

"I'm a forager. I seek, mischievously and often, in my work, and employ the deliberate use of shock while seeking the truth in human behavior."

On Ongoingness: Four Stages

Alison C. Powell



"Uprising of the Mujeres: Study for Figure One" by Judith F. Baca; pastel on paper, 21 × 24 1/8 in.; 1977; open source from the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

To the East

You were twenty-three and did not know what to do. You had an idea for yourself, so you followed it. A place and a time. This is you all over. You maintain now that the idea was to go to a big place to learn what to do. You sold your hours for pennies, the trade: you would appear at the coldly precise time and disappear eight oiled hours later, troubling no one in between. Hours of performance held at each end by fixtures of friendlessness. No one is playing a game. No one is drinking from a common cup. No one wants to be there. And yet, you stay. Good for you.

To the West

California Zephyr Car #532, Sleeper 53. My chest feels as it has for days leading up to this moment, full to bursting. Designated smoke stops are Illinois, Iowa, and Nebraska. The conductor says, "Enjoy your trip across the breadbasket of America, the greatest country on Earth." The sun flashes in and out between the cars of a passing freight train. A red boxcar reads "Burlington Route: Everywhere West." I want to cry.

To the North

In Barstow, the anesthetic wears off. I thought I could make it across the Mojave before the pain in my jaw set in. (Root canal, punchline.) As narrow as I've made that desert through a hundred crossings, this time it would widen out, stretching me with it. I pull off to take a pill, but I can't chew or swallow, which is funny to me because I'd been eating crow for weeks. (Divorce, eviction.) There is nothing out here but bats, blown treads, and that vast desert with enough room even for a hot mess like me.

To the South

One of the features of divorce is that the day comes when no one cares what's become of you. Coordinates no longer matter, so you roam. Might as well. We had both become missing persons that no one was missing. The leash grows long when no one is watching. And so, we arrive in a town called Independence, California. It looks as it did in my mother's day, when as a scout leader, she too roamed here, off in the woods and telling stories over fires. No one observing. No one remarking. No one correcting faults. We are free. We are free. We are free.

About the Author

Alison C. Powell is a fiction writer, critic and essayist whose work has appeared in *Seneca Review*, *Oxford American*, *Typishly*, *Colorado Review*, *The Guardian*, *Interview*, *Guesthouse*, and the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, among others. She holds an MFA in Fiction from the Warren Wilson College Program for Writers and lives just north of Dallas.

About the Work

"On Ongoingness: Four Stages" was designed to be a progression, examining specific moments in life as part of a continuum. But I soon realized that the continuum was neither a straight nor a curved line. The course appeared to me as directionals, each represented by a set of images or an episode, together suggesting a kind of compass of choices. In my lyric work I am either attracted to symmetry or to a breaking of form. Here, the goal was to create a tight symmetry, compact and contained, like a body, through the four directions as well as through sections of approximate equal length. I am the container making progress, like a shipping container, up and down, back and forth, a different load carried at all stages."

About the Author's Process

"2022 was the strangest year of my life and I was forced to broker a new creative process as a result. When both of my parents died within a few months of each other, I was thrown into a world short on time, space, or appetite for concentration. And yet, I was not going to stop writing. Working in a tight temporal corner meant my lyric work became more compressed; I found that within the endless cloudbank of loss, images actually became sharper. In the lyric I could focus, and narrowing the field brought comfort—perhaps not unlike the security felt by a swaddled baby. I produced and edited in short bursts and emerged refreshed. In general, I work at two ends of the extreme, flash nonfiction and long narrative pieces, fiction and non-fiction, though I'm currently exploring the middle ground of short fiction."

keep

Courtney Elizabeth Young



"Georgia O'Keeffe" by Alfred Stieglitz; platinum print; 1919/20; open source from the Art Institute of Chicago

keep

The work days continue, long, but not as long as the waits in waiting rooms where I wait with you. Today, we wait for the woman my doctors call The Wig Lady, who specializes in wigs for women who have the type of breast cancer I have, who have the same limited treatment options I have, who have a baldness I will have.

When we get to her salon, I notice things I know you do not. I have not met her yet, but I already do not trust The Wig Lady.

I don't trust her secretary either, her demeanor as soft as the pastel walls. My leg bobs involuntarily as I stare at the "Living with Cancer" pamphlets that line the tables. The women in these brochures don't look like me. They're older, they're heavier, they're blinding white. One cover smiles at me like the loss of eyelashes are a liberation; like the pink scarf over her head is the latest fashion to which she has some sort of exclusive, coveted access to. My eyes bore into her until I hear my name.

The Wig Lady looks nice enough and you smile in pleasant greeting while my face is set in speculation, holding my judgments against her against me like a shield. She leads us into her studio: where wigs line the walls. Wigs all pressed and flat and straight and all the things I do not want to be. They frame the soft-featured faces of mannequin heads that I look nothing like, that you look everything like, looking down on me.

I take my hair down from its tight bun and it tumbles in wild wavy tendrils all around me, taking up half of the mirror I sit in front of. My hair betrays the illusion of careful composition I strive to maintain. My hair takes after me.

“Wow! That’s a lot of hair!” The Wig Lady exclaims as she clicks on her high heels, fetching a wig cap to tie up and tame and tamp down my mane.

“Yes, I’ve only cut it once in my life,” I try to ignore the unblinking eyes above me staring — model-polished and tame, smooth cuts and crops and cherub-faces, contrasting with the ribbons of refusal that sprout from my head.

“She’s my wild child,” you sit next to me on a chaise lounge, like the one I used to sit on when I would go to the hair salon with you.

I am 8. Mary and I are watching you get your hair done at Taylor & Taylor, a fancy, stuffy salon in one of those old Victorian houses you wish you had instead of the one we live in.

Mary and I sit still and silent, admiring you while you look in the mirror, fanning out your beautiful blonde hair along your shoulders as the stylist comments on how healthy it is. The scent of your hairspray makes my head buzz as you casually run a hand through. The look in your eyes is one of disgust as you casually speak of cutting things away.

I touch my own wavy tresses, sun-bleached and straggly with wild waves, then reach to touch Mary’s, who swats my hand away.

Mary and I will keep growing our hair until she is 14 and I am 13; until she wants to get her hair cut for the first time. When she does, it is a special occasion, it is a rite of passage. You take her to Taylor & Taylor and when you come home I see you went out for lunch together. You had fun together. You are both a bright blonde to my dull brunette, but maybe if I got a sweet face-frame, too, the darkness wouldn’t matter.

I want to get my hair cut, too. I want to get lunch with you, spend time with you, smile into a mirror with you. But you do not take me to the place where there is a baggie waiting to catch your hair before it falls to the marble floor, tie it and give it back for you to keep, to donate. You do not take me anywhere at all.

Dad takes me to Cost Cutters. When they cut it off it all falls to the floor too quickly. I reach up to touch the place my hair should not end but now does. The woman behind me tells me to put my hands down. I stare at my palms no sooner than she barks at me to look straight ahead. My eyes snap back to the mirror where Dad stands off to the left. He smiles, but I cannot. I look back at myself and do not see sweetness and softness, but instead a botched attempt connection.

I watch her sweep away my locks. They curl into a dustpan, kicking up in flight during the quick walk to the trash; still moving, still wild, still answering to the wind, until she dumps them into the garbage.

When she is finished, I run over to the trash can and stare down at what mirrors my innards: a thousand broken pieces that still pull at me but cannot reach me; cannot do anything except twitch toward each other.

Cutting my hair didn't get me closer to Mary or you. I came to know by the way neither of you noticed me when I came home, that Mary wanted to cut her hair for the reason opposite of mine. I was holding on, and she was letting go.

Back in the mirror at The Wig Lady's, I watch her wrinkled and liver-spotted hands strain to stretch the wig cap meant to compress my wildness, but I am tired of tamping myself down. You both laugh, but I am tired of people laughing at me.

I shrug off her hands, duck away from her fumbling fingers, hair spilling out as the cap slides to the floor. I don't like how it looks on me, and if that's any prelude to how I will look bald then I want no part of it. The Wig Lady doesn't have wigs for women like me, women who wear their hair wild and long and free. The longest lengths are just past the shoulders.

I feel your hand on my leg.

"Sweetie," you plead, accentuated by raised eyebrows. "Think of Dolly Parton, how much fun she has with her wigs."

Fun? Dolly Parton? My neck jerks toward you. "Oh she had wigs? Did she also have fucking cancer?"

Even The Wig Lady retreats as we stare at each other as if in a stand-off. She busies herself by grabbing another wig-cap, another wig. I set my jaw, straighten my shoulders, look away. You look at me as I imagine I looked at my hair in the trash all those years ago.

I turn back to the mirror and settle into the chair as you sink into the chaise lounge. I let The Wig Lady wrap up my hair again and simulate my baldness. I let the tears from her pulling burn my eyes. I do not blink.

cut

I bite my nails as I wait for you to arrive in the blistering cold.

When we open the door the wind kicks up behind us, ushering us out of the empty parking lot and inside where the flickering sign blinks at our backs, buzzing as if on its last breath. My face is fixed but my eyes dart from the shears to the blow dryers, from the combs to the brushes. The fluorescent lights we stand under deepen the lines on our faces.

Kenzie clicks forward in her high heels. I stare at her name-tag instead of making eye contact, no sooner than she approaches the counter do I clear my throat and smile tightly when I say, "I want to cut it all off."

"Oh! But it's so beautiful, why would you want to cut it off? I wish I could grow my hair that long," and before I lose composure, before she makes me say it, "*I can't donate my hair after I get pumped full of chemo,*" I am pushing my debit card toward her and saying, "all of it off, please," over her pleading.

I walk away, choosing a chair at random, the tattered cushion heaving a sigh through its cracked leather when I drop into it. I glance in the mirror, see you behind me, your eyes heavy, your voice soft. When her face falls I take out my phone. I pretend your kindness means nothing to me. I pretend I do not even see it.

Nervous tics counter the swell inside me that I cannot combat while sitting in a hair salon: I bob my leg, I flip through travel photos.

In all of them, there is me and my hair, thus, my honesty: I hold onto things long after they need to be cut off. I do not have any rhyme or reason that is not of the wind or the water or the world's hands tousling it. Instead, I tumble wildly, grow every piece of me as long as I can so that I can feel more of life in the wind, in the water, in the wild.

You come and sit in the chair where a draft still blows in through poorly insulated windows. You are still in your winter coat when you pull out your phone. "Sweetie," you say gently, gesturing for a photo.

I give a weak smile and hear the camera click. Later when I look at this picture, I will see the single tear that I shed, knowing then that you saw it, too.

But for now, Kenzie pumps the pedal on the back of the stool silently, flipping the open sign to closed before pinning the bib around my shoulders.

There is no yanking or pulling and tugging the snarls out, just gentle caresses with the comb, the shampoo, the conditioner. She brings me back to sit down, asks if I'm ready. I nod, jut out my chin, and look straight ahead. The tears that fall do not belong to me but to you and Kenzie, this stranger who takes my mane, the one who works in silence aside from a quiet snuffle.

You, I watch from the mirror. You do not wipe your eyes because your hands are busy holding the ponytail you do not let fall to the floor.

I don't notice what you did until it's over, until I look down and into my lap. My hair, a whole three feet of it, tied with a bright pink ribbon.

About the Author

Courtney Elizabeth Young is a 33-year old internationally published author and photographer who holds an MFA in Creative Nonfiction from Southern New Hampshire University. She has lived on and backpacked 6 continents and over 30 countries alone so far — but isn't done yet. A proud owner of both the DRD4 and MAOA gene, she has lived out loud her wild ride through life on everything from cocaine to camels, from crocodiles to cancer.

Her work has won awards, is featured, or forthcoming in: *The Los Angeles Review*, *Inverted Syntax*, *DRIFT Travel*, *Barren Magazine*, *Palooka Magazine*, *Cleaver Magazine*, *The Write Launch*, *Elephant Journal* and *Tipping the Scales SHE SPEAKS!* and *Hour of Women's Literature*.

About the Work

"This work details the complicated relationships young women have with their hair: woven into the thumbprint of their identities. Triple negative breast cancer, only impacting about 10-20% of women, has treatment options limited to chemotherapy, radiation, and surgery — unlike other breast cancers with more options for hormonal treatment. Thus, a diagnosis of TNBC almost always guarantees the survivor will, if she undergoes the type of chemotherapy necessary to survive, lose all of her hair."

About the Author's Process

"I take photos for inspiration, write about the scene they came from to get my wheels turning. Or, I peruse older work and make edits, reminding me how much I have grown as a writer. I am by trade a photographer, so the colder months are a bit slower, and more ideal to focus on my true love, writing."

Two poems

Temple of Stars

Causation

Dana Curtis



"Metamorphosis II" by Peggy Stieler Wahrmund; cotton; 57 7/8 x 39 1/4 in.; 1990-91; open source from the Smithsonian American Art Museum

Temple of Stars

Flowers and birds collaborate
to create new constellations
for this newly molded world,
radiant and empty. Welcome,
I whisper in my most
sinuous voice. I imagine you
will finally hear me
at the crossroads with all
its pretty crosses made of

frost and permanence. You are not
mine in the rain, lost again
amid all that we began.
There is a slight sense of
longing, regret, and distance:
we will no longer look
for boxes full of night
and promise.

Causation

I walked down a light studded sidewalk, tearing
heavy air into tiny pieces of crystal, scattering
them like glitter. You want to know when
to begin and I want to remember what to call you
in this morning of orange ice and careful
remnants of the god yet to arrive: the shrine is simply
not good enough. We have offended and
the world is taking tickets for our finale; I feel
you near me, beside something bottomless that is not
a well or an ocean or a sky. Our creations
are water eyed and caustic. Our intentions are not
real in this wheat field full of hungry artifacts
not yet conceived. I have many questions for this
new deity: did I invent the flowers in your hair?
Was I the one who buried cities with my cells? Who
are you to emerge from a mirror and put on
feathers and stars, hemlock and ash?

About the Author

Dana Curtis' fourth book of poetry, *Directed by Lilly Obscure*, is due out from BlazeVOX Books in 2023. Her third full-length collection, *Wave Particle Duality*, was published by Blazevox Books in 2017. Her second collection, *Camera Stellata*, was published by CW Books, and her first book, *The Body's Response to Famine*, won the Pavement Saw Press Transcontinental Poetry Prize. Her work has appeared in such publications as *Ploughshares*, *Hotel Amerika*, *Indiana Review*, *Colorado Review*, and *Poetry Northwest*.

About the Work

Temple of Stars: "I've written several Temple poems. In many ways, all my poems are Temple poems. I think most people agree that all poetry is spiritual, either overt or covert. Whether you believe in the soul or not, it sits at the heart of every poem, every creative endeavor. I spend way too much time looking at the sky, so Temple of Stars was necessary and inevitable."

Causation: "Causation" imagines a god of cause and effect. Of course, this God is not happy with the human race. Eventually, we will have to deal with this God; we will be required accept and remedy our many offenses against ourselves and the world. And if there is no remedy, who knows? I'm sure it won't be good. This poem is confession and supplication.

About the Author's Process

"As for my process in general, my basic physical process can begin in a few ways. Sometimes, a line occurs to me and I follow it wherever it takes me. However, there are some poems, usually long ones, that required a lot of planning, forethought, and sometimes, research. My next book, *Directed by Lilly Obscure*, is transgenre with its main focus on movies. I watched a lot, I read a lot, and discovered both the insistence and illusion of genre. Everyone's process is their own; there is no right or wrong. Usually, the work makes the decisions, and I am dragged along whether I want to go or not. I accept it; I can't live without it."

The Invention

Anna Marie Ray



"Femmes au bain" by Suzanne Valadon; soft-ground etching; 1893; open source from the National Gallery of Art

Give her a *whirl*; make the siren sing.

 The prompt, echoing in my head
as she draws like Betty, so familiar

 with the female form

Yet with some reluctance

 a hesitance to

 give in

to the urges

 that dare to

 Overwhelm.

Lights reflecting off metal structures,
 blurred by each revolution of passengers
on their own questionable journeys.
 But to them I can pay no mind.
My eyes I cannot tear away
 from chestnut bob,
miniature backpack,
 wonders that it holds,
thrifed, sporty romper,
 a challenge.
 A touch
on the arm
 as a hall of mirrors
 claims the last sense
 Of reality.
Placards that conflict
 Stop. Go. Wait.
 While tongues begin
 work like juicers
 behind a bar
 Efficient
Providing pleasure, flavor,
 textures brought
 to the mouth, unfiltered,
 bypassing the accompanying
glass filled with bubbles.
Spilling over into puddles
 of nectar, sweet
 but sharp with acidity
the combinations endless and gratifying
 in ways more sustaining
 than even hydration.

Not to be let off so easily,
 insatiable, she pursues.

the thrill, ultimate,

 Devastating,

 yet empowering in its

dynamic pull.

 This new journey

 exposed together

embracing the possibilities

 a newfound lack of romanticism

 Betrayed only by intimacy.

About the Author

Anna Marie Ray (she/her) is a queer, polyamorous poet and musician with a background in musical theatre performance. Having lived in New York City for a decade, Anna Marie has pursued constantly evolving dreams which inform her work. These range from mixology to politics, with a constant focus on language justice and accessibility. Currently working for an Ambassador to the United Nations, Anna Marie is passionate about global issues as well as local happenings. Her debut poetry collection is in progress, featuring erotic and engaging pieces exploring relationships that challenge tradition.

About the Work

"The Invention is dedicated to artist and activist Betty Dodson. The piece was inspired by a unique experience of her art with a date who helped to develop who I am as both a creator and a partner. Those things are inseparable in my forthcoming collection, but certainly in this particular poem, drawing on my loves of New York, music, women, and life."

About the Author's Process

"Writing through 2022-2023 has been such a privilege for me as a creative. Having returned to poetry during the pandemic, I dedicated the past year to composing my debut collection, working closely with Alice James Award-winning poet Rosebud Ben-Oni and a wonderful cohort. Additionally, music has always played an integral role to my art in all forms, but it has truly carried my work through this period of new and unexpected circumstances."

Tentative Titles for Poems About Former Roommates

Kate Polak



"Niagara Falls, New York. Elaine Colgan's bureau in Mrs. Hannegan's boardinghouse. In the mirror she can be seen reading a letter from home to her roommate, Alice. Girls live two and three in a room; pay eight dollars a week board. Receiving and writing letters is their favorite pastime" by Marjory Collins; photograph; 3 1/4 x 4 1/4; May 1943; open source from the Library of Congress

Early to Rise, Early to the Grave

I'm Going to Pound on This Goddamn Wall Until You Turn That Crap Down

So Not Cleaning Up Your Vomit for You

Where the *Fuck* is My Favorite Fork?

If You Wanted to Eat, Maybe You Shouldn't Have Spent All Your Money on Drugs

I'll Show You Inappropriate

Did You Cut This New Hole Through the Wall?

Who Is That Partly Nude Woman Eating My Yogurt?

Please Stop Watching Me Sleep

If You Forget My Coffee Cup in Your Car, I Will Forget to Not Slash Your Tires

Don't Take That Tone with Me, Missy

Do You Absolutely Need to Be Naked for This Talk?

As Per Our Agreement

The Louder You Fuck, the Louder I Sing

We Need to Have a Talk About Your Taste in Music

Okay, I Swear This Is Going to Sound Wild, But

Yeah, About What I Said Last Night

I Didn't Drink All the Wine—You Had a Glass

I Promise I'll Do the Dishes Tomorrow

Wait, That Was Your White Cheddar Popcorn? My Bad!

Totally Forgot to Tell You: We're Having a Party Tonight

I'm So Sorry I Nailed a Creepy Clown Painting to the Ceiling Above Your Bed

About the Author

Kate Polak is an artist, writer, and teacher. Her work has recently appeared in *Plainsongs*, *McSweeney's*, *So to Speak*, *Barzakh*, *The Closed Eye Open* and elsewhere. She lives in south Florida and aspires to a swamp hermitage.

About the Work

"This poem is based on entirely true stories, including those in which I am the villain."

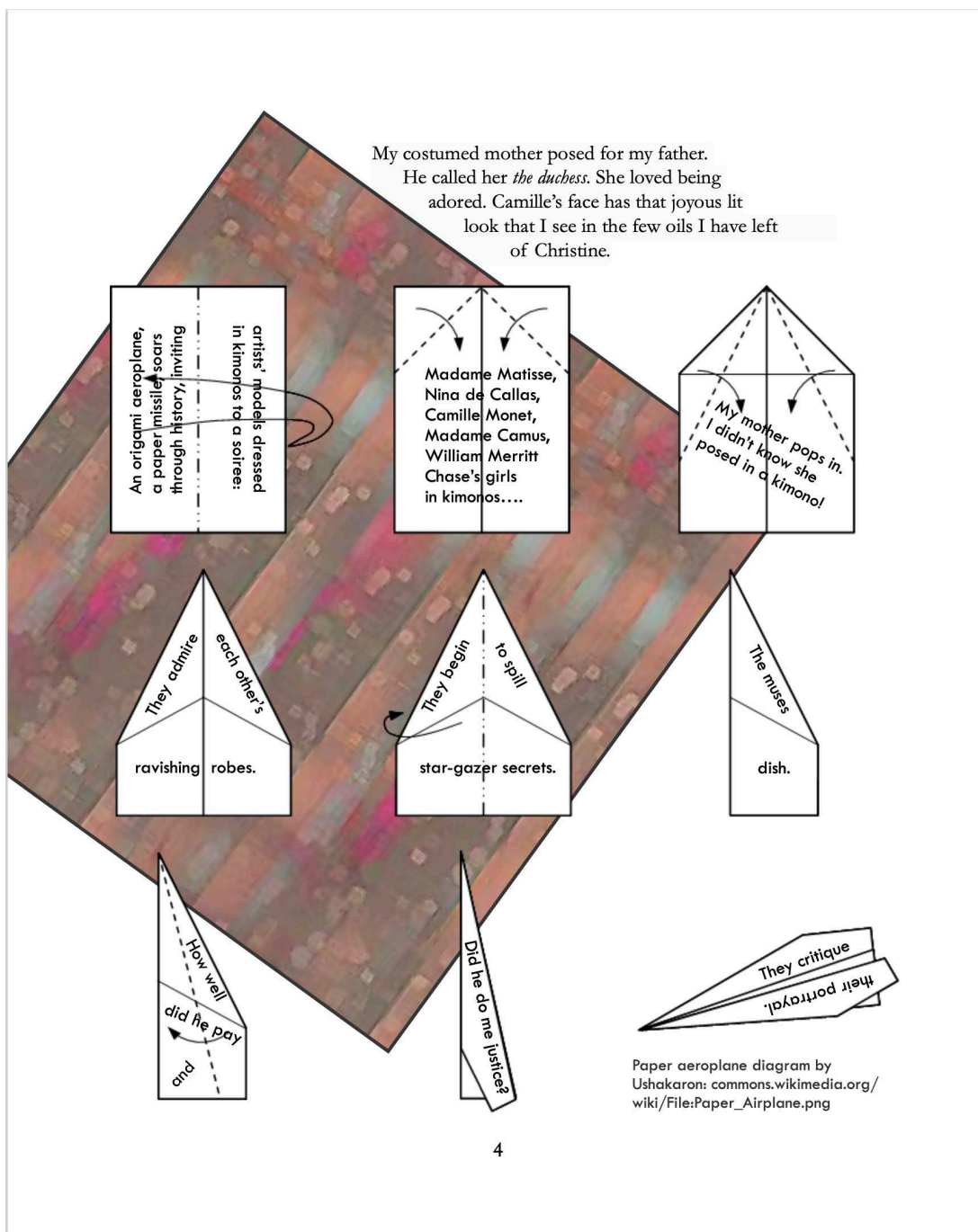
About the Author's Process

"This piece I initially envisioned as a series of interlinked roommate poems, but as I compiled partial drafts, I slowly realized that the titles themselves were more than sufficient for the narrative arc I was seeking. Some of the poems came together, some of them haven't (yet?), but the titles all told the story I wanted. I finally decided that while the concept was great, I wasn't actually producing great poetry about it, but I *was* producing great titles.

Beyond this, my writing process is rooted in the everyday. I spend time taking notes, seeing how things align, writing in many different modalities (lists, notes, journal, poems, comics, etc.), but the question is how one method can slide into another. And that usually takes some reflection where the pen is not in my hand and the keys are not under my fingers, and I have left my phone inside and I go outside and let it all sort of swim together."

The Paper Aeroplane

Christy Sheffield Sanford



"The Paper Aeroplane" by Christy Sheffield Sanford; materials includes Pages, Photoshop Elements, image sourced from "Paper aeroplane diagram" by Ushakaron on Commons.wikimedia; 8 x 10 inches; 2021

About the Author

Christy Sheffield Sanford is an artist-writer living in St. Augustine, FL. She has won an NEA in Poetry and is the author of numerous mixed genre and multi-disciplinary works. Her animation "Squid Tentacles on a Plate" was recently published by *Hole in the Head Review*. *The Ekphrastic Review* published a collaborative art-music-poetry video "Birds of a Feather." Sanford was a "Platforms and Narratives" panelist participant for the ELO (Electronic Literature Organization) Conference in May 2021.

About the Work

The paper aeroplane page focused on the artist model and included my mother, who posed — not in a kimono but often in costume — for my father. I had read about a poet in France who sent his poetry flying out his window in hopes people in the street would read it. That charming act played a role in the idea of writing on a paper aeroplane. Using an origami object seemed an ideal way to create this particular page and honor the Japanese art of paper folding.

About the Author's Process

I began this work after I read the story of a 2015 scandal at Boston Museum of Fine Arts. As owner of Monet's "La Japonaise" a portrait of Claude's wife Camille, the museum hosted Kimono Wednesdays. Art lovers donned a replica and posed before the painting.irate protestors appeared carrying signs: Exoticism, Racism, Appropriation, Imperialism, and Murder. To meditate on Monet and cultural appropriation, I manipulated 1600s kimonos from Boston Museum's book collection. I wrote about Claude, Camille, and Japonisme and responded to images of my own, creating a reflexive ekphrastic form. I want the two disciplines art and writing in some manner to spar, dance, entwine, interact.