

The Hour of the Pearl

Literature & Art from the Steinbeck Youth Institute



Justin Best

Volume II Summer 2020



Katie Osaki

THE HOUR OF THE PEARL

Literature & Art from The Steinbeck Youth Institute

DIRECTOR
Pete Barraza

MANAGING EDITORS
Chloe Forssell
Tupelo Sullivan



Kyle Walker

Copyright 2020 by SYI
All rights reserved to the original
artists and authors.

steinbeckyouthinstitute.org



SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With special thanks to all the SYI scholars and parents for their endless support. To Bo Kwon for helping to keep us current in the search. To Joe Pertel for his ongoing and generous support in making the publication of this journal possible once again. To Susan Shillinglaw and William Gilly for their many years of influence and guidance, and for always sailing with us no matter what. To Cindy Milwe and George Wallace, muses of poetry, for their lifelong mentorship of so many students. To Kyle Walker for his friendship and photographic stories. To Kimi Holsapple for giving us the interstate to move through these pages. To Anya Pertel for her artistic vision and her tour de force with every stroke of the brush. To Katie Osaki who helped to start this fire. To Laura Simone who has been a part of this before it ever began. To Jim Montoya, Gabriel Flores, and Tom Gammarino, who by now should know why. To Chloe Forssell and Tupelo Sullivan, editors and captains of this journal---without your commitment and stewardship, this galleon of pieces would remain anchored without sail. To you J.S. for giving us the pages to write our own. And finally, to Kate, Varona, and Mateo---thank you for always reminding me that “it is advisable to look from the tide pool to the stars and then back to tide pool again.”

-P.B., Director of the SYI



Pete Barraza



Table of Contents

<i>Neon Fireflies in the Afternoon</i> // Pete Barraza	01
<i>A City Built for the Stars</i> // Katie Osaki	03

I. The Beautiful

<i>An LA Sunset</i> // Rachel Rothschild	06
<i>Sharks and Pilot Fish</i> // Max Baker	08
<i>Gilded Child</i> // Anouk Jouffret	11
<i>Early Mornings</i> // Eleanor Winterer	14
<i>Chasing the Wind</i> // Emma Guerrini Romano	19
<i>Ode to the Bookstore on Third</i> // Eleanor Winterer	20
<i>Learning to Wait</i> // Tom Wickline	25
<i>Yunnan Restaurant</i> // Thatcher Lee	26
<i>The Portrayal</i> // Catherine Taghizadeh	28
<i>Steinbeck and the Grateful Dead</i> // Liam Bartlett	31
<i>To the Skatepark</i> // Jersey Sullivan	32
<i>Sweet Taste of a Hurricane</i> // Clair Davis	34
<i>A Pier to Ponder</i> // Marcos Sandoval	37
<i>McCabe's Guitar Shop</i> // Sawyer Savage	40
<i>On the Lower Jurassic</i> // Anya Pertel	44
<i>Writers of Los Angeles</i> // Tupelo Sullivan	46
<i>Kyle</i> // Ryan Kashanchi	48

II. The Ugly

<i>The City of Broken Dreams</i> // Erkki Forrester	52
<i>A Story About a Patch of Sand</i> // Auden Koettters	54
<i>Santa Monica</i> // Phoebe Liskin	56
<i>Oz</i> // Auden Koettters	58
<i>A Curious Conflict</i> // Chloe Forssell	63
<i>Attached</i> // Cindy Milwe	66
<i>Anza Borrego</i> // Cindy Milwe	67
<i>Reading Roethke</i> // Cindy Milwe	67
<i>Hemingway's Favorite Bar</i> // George Wallace	69



<i>Yellow Moon Gone Pink // George Wallace</i>	70
<i>Good Morning Rainbird with</i>	
<i>Ocean in your Wings // George Wallace</i>	72
<i>O Wakare to Manzanar // Riley Masterson</i>	74
<i>A Deceptive Oasis // Sara Akiba</i>	76
<i>Messenger, me too // Chloe Gottlieb</i>	79
<i>Ddeokguk // Kaelen Song</i>	80
<i>90291 // Tupelo Sullivan</i>	86

III. Somewhere In-between

<i>Malleable Metropolis // Bria Stocker</i>	92
<i>Angels in the Pages // Max Forssell</i>	94
<i>Three Little Words // Eleanor Winterer</i>	97
<i>Collective Vision // Aidan Blain</i>	98
<i>Symphony No. Education // Yvonne Liu</i>	99
<i>Snapshots // Thatcher Lee</i>	100
<i>The Dis-located Imagination // Thomas Gammarino</i>	104
<i>Freeways // Nathan Wetmore</i>	106
<i>Shifting Sight // Leo Gilman</i>	107
<i>Songs of Steinbeck // Jersey Sullivan</i>	108
<i>Wabi Sabi // Grace Sencio</i>	114
<i>The Fourth Estate // Kyla Walker</i>	116
<i>Life Itself // Catherine Taghizadeh</i>	121
<i>A View of East LA from</i>	
<i>Mount Washington, July 4th // Cy Gilman</i>	123
<i>Unanswered Questions // Eva Lynch</i>	124
<i>Ghost Trees and Strong Winds // Emily Putnam</i>	131
<i>Dear Old Friend // Benny Adler</i>	134
<i>Ocean Front Walk // Marcos Sandoval</i>	136
<i>Persist // Ryan Kashanchi</i>	138
<i>On the Paper Wings of Angels // Lily Yost</i>	140
<i>Seismic Drifiting // Chloe Gottlieb</i>	142
<i>A Golden Prayer // Pete Barraza</i>	148



Neon Fireflies in the Afternoon

By Pete Barraza

Growing up in Highland Park, a hilly neighborhood in Los Angeles, I enjoyed the daily odyssey to Monte Vista Elementary School, with my *Space:1999* lunchbox and an imagination hungry for all the things and people that might appear along the way. That urge to explore continued into my adolescence, sustained by many voyages with my father into the stretched out diaspora of the LA galaxy in his 1975 Monte Carlo. Whether it was a visit to my grandmother's house in Lincoln Heights, a short stop on N. Broadway in Chinatown to buy a birthday cake at the Phoenix Bakery, or to Elysian Park for a Dodgers game, "Pay attention to the street names," my father would say, "...to the freeways...to the way the neighborhoods change."

I blame my father for my love of Los Angeles, my fascination with its cultural hybridities, its history of water, traffic, and displacement. Every time Vin Scully said goodnight from Chavez Ravine, I knew what he was talking about. Today, as I drive through the city, I imagine it to be some giant jar of neon fireflies, lighting up the streets and enclaves in celebration, as a protest to its daily tragedies and tiny earthquakes. As someone who is in the late afternoon of his life, I have begun to take solace in the spaces and places that give definition to my life as an Angeleno. Driving on the Arroyo Seco Parkway on my way to the foothills of Monrovia to visit my brother (when the fires are not raging), I point out to my son, again, "Mijo, that's where I was born, in the French Hospital." Before permanently closing in 2017, it was the oldest hospital in Los Angeles, established in 1860. I still point out the empty building, remembering the Joan of Arc statue at the front, a symbol affirming my place in the history of the city.

Recently, I took a drive through Highland Park and Lincoln Heights, in search of my childhood home on Aldama Street and my grandmother's home on Baldwin Street, the home my father grew up in during his teenage years. Both are no longer there, one torn down in the name of gentrification, the other simply no longer there as I remember it. When I moved back to Los Angeles six years ago from Honolulu, into the Mar Vista neighborhood, it seemed like every home was being torn down and replaced with the new California dream. Today, places and people are being lost, permanently, a different kind of light needing restoration.

As an educator, I am regularly edified by the ventures of my students, of course their aim to do well in school, but more by their efforts to capture, usually through words, music, or visual arts, what is possible in the face of social darkness or stagnation. It is these efforts that have resulted in this literary endeavor, a collection of creative works rooted in some connection to the life and works of John Steinbeck. Not too far from where I grew up, California's most revered writer lived in Eagle Rock for a few months in 1930, and in Montrose in late 1932, early 1933. This collection of poetry, prose, and visual arts serves as an homage to Steinbeck's ability to celebrate community in many of his works, and more directly as an illumination of the many voices and people of El Pueblo de Nuestra Señora la Reina de los Angeles de Porciúncula. This journal also recognizes many other influences, such as Jonathan Gold, Kobe Bryant, Octavia E. Butler, Raymond Chandler, Charles Bukowski, John Fante, Charles Mingus, Ruben Salazar, Joan Didion, Luis Rodriguez, Wanda Coleman, and so many other angels of this literary city. More importantly, it is the voices in this journal, each in its own medium, that will certainly continue to light things up, like neon fireflies in the late afternoon, just before the hour of the pearl, reaching—we hope-- the places and people needing it most.



Justin Best

A City Built for the Stars

By Katie Osaki

Building a city is like planting a weed. It's something that contrasts the natural landscape and grows and spreads in all directions with no particular destination, with only the purpose of overtaking the prior order of the land. While many of us don't think of our city like that, imagine what it was like once before. It was an ecosystem, a community of organisms that never thought that one day it would be displaced. But like all succession stories, natural and classical, something must give. And, as the Joad family would explain it in John Steinbeck's 1939 American realist novel *The Grapes of Wrath*, floods of migrant people slowly but surely made their way here, to this wonderful place of angels.

Los Angeles spans across mountains, trees, rivers, creeks. It grew from one building, then to the next until those buildings made blocks and those blocks were connected by streets, streets that all one way or another led to the ocean. Now, these buildings are filled with people, communities. These communities come in all shapes and sizes, color and race, sexualities and religions, genders and faiths, each its own unique ecosystem, a tide pool filled with different organisms, prey and predators. But, despite dividing lines and clear-cut rivalries, each organism depends on the others to survive. In Steinbeck's 1945 novel *Cannery Row*, Mac and the boys cannot live without Lee and in some paradoxical way, Lee cannot survive without them either. Sometimes these communities make no sense, but like the streets that connect these Los Angeles communities, they don't have to make sense.

Growing up in Los Angeles is like growing up in a place that doesn't exist. Only through casual chatter, over food and wine or sitting around campfires reading self-written poetry, does this place come to life. It lives through the stories that we tell of it. Stories that act like stars, burning for millions of years for the whole world to see. Consider the stories in this journal like those stars and when you look up at the night sky you might just be able to make out the city built for them.



Kiyono Gray

The Beautiful

“There’s more beauty in truth, even if it is dreadful beauty.”

- John Steinbeck, East of Eden



An LA Sunset

By Rachel Rothschild

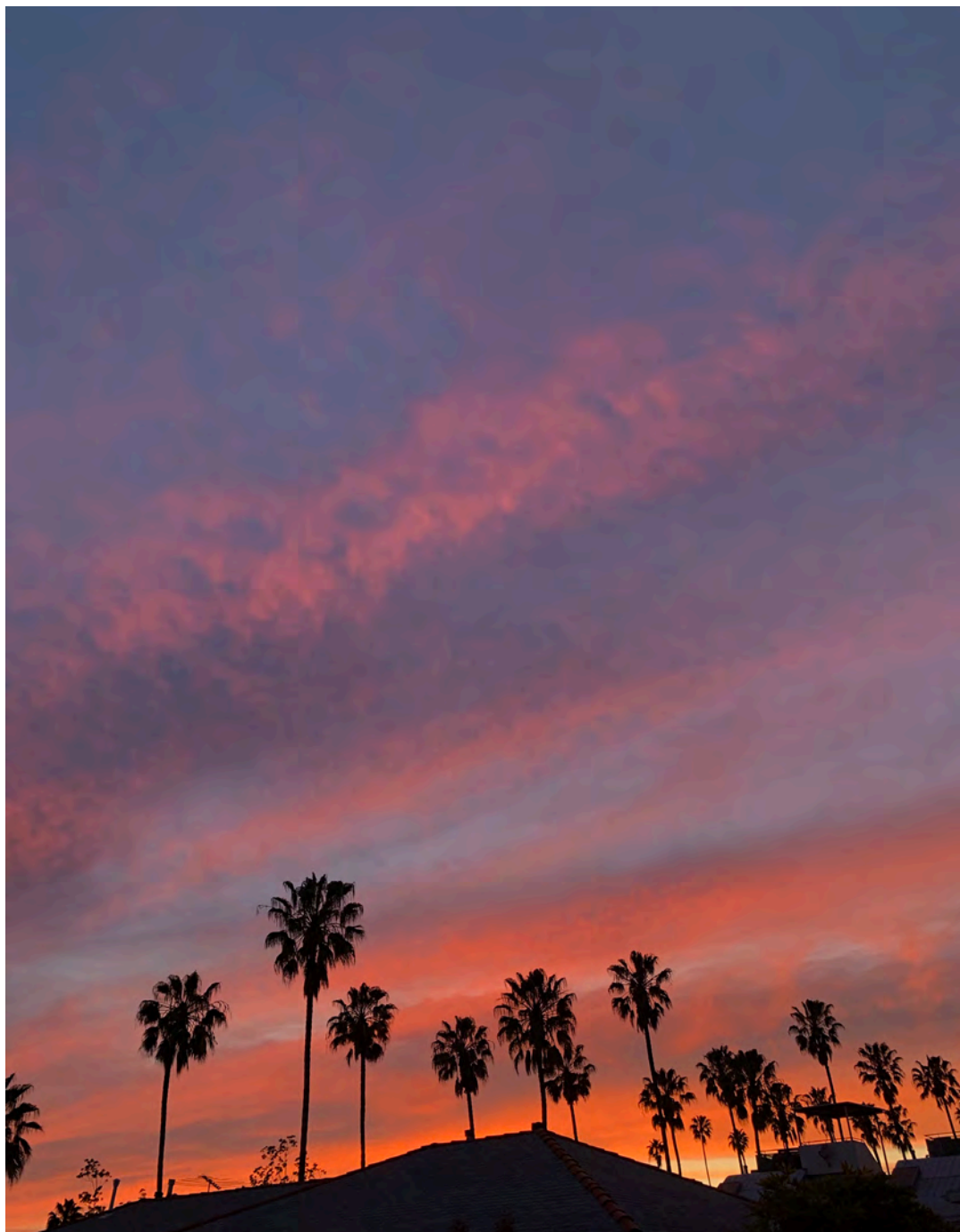
My rusted car is perched along the rugged mountain cliff
overlooking the Pacific Ocean,
an endless turquoise body
punctured by small wakes.

A shining red convertible parks in front of me,
blocking the vibrant orange poppies in the dewy field ahead.
Its melodic notes waft through my open window
and down the canyon.
The broad leaves of the palm trees below
bristle softly at first,
and then faster and faster as the music picks up speed and the notes are
carried by the wind, stretching the puffy clouds into wisps
grasping the last rays of pink light.

My eyes are tracking the sun,
an orange marble
falling toward the water.
It only takes seconds to disappear,
extracting the rosy hues that paint the city
to leave behind the lamp-lighted darkness.

In its place, a fierce red seeps across the horizon until it is
halted by the mountains.
The stretch of sky above follows,
unfolding into blood orange and brazen purple.

The music returns, the vibrations swaying my car.
And the convertible fades with a red trace,
taking the crisp wind with it.
The palm branches droop into an archway over the highway below,
and the ocean glosses over to mirror the still sky.
The neon lights of my car flare on,
casting a grey haze on the concrete road.



Chloe Forssell



Sharks and Pilot Fish

By Max Baker

A match head begins to fade below the horizon.
A silent poem
Written across the sky.
A much-needed flicker,
Extinguished quicker than expected.

Bike lights cut through the fog as the sun shatters.
Morphing from a sky of giving,
To one of taking.
The city presents it with a shower of gorgeous rays.
A gift,
In return for the day's light.

Wet sand glows black,
As it reflects incoming light from all its various sources.

A Ferris wheel branching out from the pier,
Acting as a cordial bonfire to warm the people.
The moon and city blend to create magnificent colors.
Hues of yellow, chartreuse, purple, and grey-
Unable to be recreated by any natural or man-made contraption alone.

The ocean sends a cool breeze.
It washes over a man wearing expensive athletic gear.
A large water bottle rests in his bike's cup holder,
And a silver watch shackles his wrist like a one-sided handcuff.

Another man follows behind on a rusty tricycle,
Old and morose.
Bags and bags of shoes and cans weigh him down.
He looks out at the night like a longing son looks to his mother.

Then the rich man stops.
He sits by the sand as the older man slowly rolls by.
Strangely,
He offers the gentleman some food and water.

They both sit in a meditative white noise,
Sharing a moment,
Behind the melancholy backdrop of grinding bike chains,
Car engines,
Crisp, skin-splitting winds,
And the contrast of deep blacks and azures.

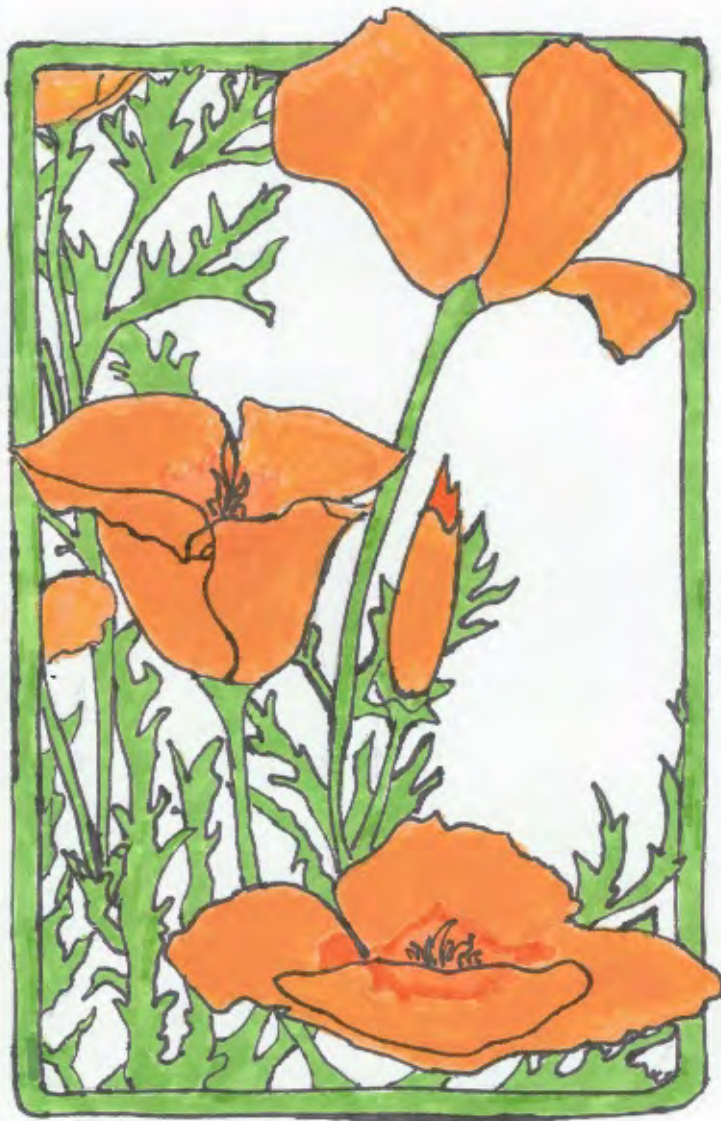
Graceful clashes of black and white waves,
Creating a song,
Of yin and yang,

Veiling the two in a blanket of Chaos,
Impermanence,
Progress,
Development,
And Synthesis.

Nature herself dances with the city,
swimming like sharks and pilot fish.



Max Baker



Bria Stocker

Gilded Child

By Anouk Jouffret

Young are your monuments and young are your people
Childlike and filled with fantasy are the suppositions
Of your resources of gold,
Of fame and recognition,
That- In the reflection of your sunny skies of endless opportunity-
Anyone, anyone,
Could find their gold, their limelight.

But with light comes shadows,
Shadows in which the misfortuned set up their tents,
In a last resort for shelter.
Shadows in which the Tom Joads of the world also search for new beginnings
Forced into
The merciless claws of prejudice and power.

So I ask you,
Dear Los Angeles,
Is this another Gilded Age?



Kyle Walker





Emma Guerrini Romano

Early Mornings

By Eleanor Winterer

She wipes the sleep out of my eyes as I blink rapidly,
Vision coming to focus in the warm glow of the rising sun.
I cling to the white cashmere of her cardigan in the struggle
to understand my hazy existence,
tinted with the outline of dreams so recent I can touch them.

Quiet tears run down my face as she traces the skyline with my finger,
Touching the downy wings of the birds gliding through the orange sky.

She sings softly to me...
“When I wake up in the morning, love
And the sunlight hurts my eyes...
Then I look at you, and the world’s alright with me.”

The hum radiates through me, pacifying the fear,
quelling the tears to the occasional snuffle.
Wide-eyed, I watch the birds flit to and fro, listening to their warbles and chirps
As they blend together with the bass of her luminous voice, singing backup,
the rising sun as their stage.



Icy Liang



Kyle Walker





Eleanor Winterer



Kaelen Song

Chasing the Wind

By Emma Guerrini Romano

It begins out in the sea
Rocking boards and boats into a damp lull
It stretches its arms
Brushing its fingertips on the prongs of palms
A flock of crows go flying
Stooping down low
Running in and out of the cracks of the Earth
Whistling its jolly tune
Weaving its fingertips through buildings
Enjoying the way the sun waves hello
It takes the 10 Highway
Skipping between bumpers
Dodging the horn calls
It dances to the tune of Chavez Ravine
Letting the crack of the bat pick up its pace
It carries aromas across the hill
Through the O and past the D
To the encampments on Flower Street
Stopping for a moment to catch its breath
Then going westward to relish the spray
It dives to the shore
Racing in and out of the spokes on the Ferris wheel
Burying its toes into the sand
Chasing gulls over dunes
Its laugh bounces off the bluffs
Creating crisp barrels in sea
The ebb of the tide tickles its palms
As it caresses the surface in goodbye
Before jumping off into the orange dusk
To kiss Los Angeles goodnight
In one final sweep
It skips past Grand and Disney Hall
Relishing the way the vibrato of the cello makes it tremble
Twirling over mountains and into the valley
Where it sweeps up remnants of fires
Blackening the final glow of the sun
Leaving dogs barking in its wake
It glides past the lovers
Mesmerized by the sky's fire
Back out to the familiar sea
Looking back at its realm

Ode to the Bookstore on Third

By Eleanor Winterer

Your heady mix of ink and new paper
Wafts around me, wrapping me up in warm embrace.

In your second aisle, Peter Pan presides
Along with boy wizards and the occasional Greek god.
Laura Ingalls Wilder calls to me from the next.
Her hand outstretched, she pulls me into her wagon
I clutch her and the entire prairie to my chest
And find the nearest corner.

You may not seem like much at first glance
Cobwebs in your eyes,
The almost imperceptible skin of dust.
Quiet solitude about you.

The thin paper of your bones
Holds the holy weight of dreamers
And your heart,
Their god, the word.



Pete Barraza



Kyle Walker





Justin Best



Kyle Walker

Learning to Wait

By Tom Wickline

silent neighborhoods stretch for miles
a bustling city becomes a ghost town
streets of closed doors,
a population kept apart
the world falls asleep
the people go insane
life goes nowhere
the people want out

Wait

clearer waters reveal nature's beauty underneath
cleaner skies uncover breathtaking views
the ocean begins to glow
families forced to grow closer
a human race forced to respect the planet
a people forced to stop for a second
forced to think

Los Angeles goes dormant
as those inside wish for greener grasses
And a population learns to wait

Yunnan Restaurant (云南过桥米线) *Yun Nan Guo Qiao Mi Xian)*

By Thatcher Lee

Many of the Chinese restaurants in LA are spread out from each other, but a concentration of some of the most authentic ones are located in Monterey Park along North Garfield Avenue. As soon as you exit the 10 Freeway, it's as if you've stepped foot into a semi-resemblance of China. Signs all over are in Chinese characters as the cracked streets resemble the neglected ones of back-street alleys of small-town China. But the street signs in English pull you back to California, as the warm, lazy sun affirms you're still within the boundaries of Los Angeles.

Yunnan Restaurant was opened around twenty years ago, according to one of its waitresses (I was continually unable to get a hold of at least one of the owners of the restaurant). The restaurant's purpose was to make money with a side benefit of spreading Chinese culture. Since the restaurant had many owners that came from different parts of China, the restaurant itself -- although mainly Sichuan and Yunnan-themed -- offered dishes from around China as a whole.

There are two entrances to the restaurant. The front entrance is a glass door that opens up to a noisy interior, decorated with small and modern hanging lights and red lanterns with a large character, Fu, (福) meaning "luck," printed in the middle of the lanterns, meant to bring fortune (in the form of money) to the restaurant. The front entrance immediately opens to a seating space with cushioned benches by the widows and individual tables in the middle of the room. The smell of hot chilli oil circles the room, but the AC keeps the place cool. The back entrance is a small door that is propped open and welcoming as it leads through two other seating areas. The decor is nothing exciting, but the authenticity and vivid taste of the food masks all the physical imperfections of the interior.

With people coming in from both entrances, waiters are dressed in a neat outfit consisting of a black shirt and pants and their signature black apron, greeting customers with the standard Mandarin phrase, "Hello, how many are in your party?" (你好, 几位? *ni hao, ji wei*). Most of the time, there is a short wait to be seated. As soon as customers are settled in at their table, they immediately nominate one or two representatives to order at the cold-dish counter while the rest of the party studies the extensive menu.

At the cold-dish counter, customers are able to choose between a small plate of one dish or a large plate with three different types of dishes from the variety of options before them: pig ears, chicken gizzards, spicy tofu, chicken feet, shredded potatoes, seaweed, and many more options. Most of the time, cold dishes act as an appetizer before the main dishes are served.

The signature dish at Yunnan Restaurant is the "Yunnan House Special Rice Noodle Soup (w/ Bone)" (云南风味过桥米线 *yunnan feng wei guo qiao mi xian*). It consists of a soup made from bone with ham, leek, eggs, and other ingredients that the waiters add into the soup after they carry it out to the table. The taste is as rich and flavorful as the history behind Chinese cuisine.

Chinese cuisine is split into mainly eight regional cuisines: Lu (鲁), Chuan (川), Yue (粤), Su (苏), Min (闽), Zhe (浙), Xiang (湘), and Wei (徽). However, there are provincial cuisines like Xibei (西北), Yunnan (云南), and Shanxi (陕西), to name a few.

Yunnan Restaurant is mainly a combination of one of the main Chinese regional cuisines: Chuan (川), the abbreviation for Sichuan, and a provincial cuisine, Yunnan (云南), with a variety of dishes from all over China as well. Yunnan literally means “southern cloud.” It is a province in the southern part of China (abbreviations: Yun (云) or Dian (滇)), and the southern neighbor of Sichuan. Sichuan, for the most part, has a very humid climate where the inhabitants combat this humidity by eating spicy and numbing foods, mainly in the form of putting Sichuan peppers and spicy chillies with lots of oil in all of their dishes. Yunnan Restaurant offers a variety of Sichuan dishes with their signature red chillies and/or red chilli oil.

While Sichuan dishes consist of a large part of the menu, Yunnan Restaurant’s most popular dish is the rice-flour noodles. Rice-flour noodles, or literally translated from Chinese as “noodles from across the bridge” (过桥米线 *guo qiao mi xian*), is a traditional food of Yunnan. There are five legends as to where this name originated from, and the main gist from two of them are that a nerd, specifically a scholar that was preparing for the imperial exam, had a really virtuous wife that worried that he would always eat cold food, which was bad for his body, so she found that by putting a layer of oil over the soup, it would keep warm for a long time. Every day she crossed the bridge to the center of the lake where the scholar was studying, and at the destination, she would pour all the premade ingredients into the soup and he would have a warm meal that would stay warm naturally on its own for a really long time. This was needed because the scholar constantly lost himself in the world of scrolls and forgot to eat at a reasonable time. And in respect to the wife, the rice-flour noodles were named “across the bridge.”

Yunnan Restaurant offers a variety of dishes from across China, giving Angelenos the opportunity to expand their palates as well as an opportunity to learn more about Chinese culture and traditions through the historically rich backgrounds of the dishes.



Kyle Walker

The Portrayal

By Catherine Taghizadeh

Sitting in my car with no headlights,
With my head in the lights of the car behind me
And my eyes raised above.
This isn't a prayer.
This isn't a wish for life
To have more Taco Tuesday nights,
More early morning coffee runs,
More open-mouthed laughs,
Less tear-stained pillowcases,
More tear-jerker jokes,
More top-down drives on PCH,
Less traffic to think in,
More karaoke of 2010 hits,
More nudges saying *I'm with you*,
Less days that overcast the sun.

I love the way LA smells like the baked banana bread
In my grandma's house.
Or maybe it's the perfume she wears,
Clouding the room and my judgement
To make me believe there's nothing more perfect
In all the world.

I drive like I live—
Mad,
Almost like I want to see my face painted on the pavement.
I veer with headlights blasting like caution signs,
Dancing between cars like care never knew me,
Rolling every stop sign like eternity favored me,
Screaming Billy Idol like I too am a rebel.
Always crying when I crash.

What if I begged my madness to receive some reason?
Could all the Taco Tuesdays in the world give me that?
Or will the sway of headlights put me to sleep?
I gaze up at the grey sunset and I know the answer.
This isn't a prayer.



Pete Barraza



Eleanor Hutman



Steinbeck and the Grateful Dead

By Liam Bartlett

Perhaps Steinbeck's most well-known story, *Of Mice and Men*, has been adapted into a number of successful plays and movies, even transformed into an opera in 1969. But the tale of George and Lennie also served as the framework for a Grateful Dead ballad that was written by lyricist Robert Hunter and guitarist Bob Weir. The song, "Jack Straw," tells the familiar story of two old friends, Jack Straw and Shannon, who are on the run, although unlike George and Lennie who have left their town because of Lennie grabbing a woman's dress, they've just escaped a Texas prison. As they were doing so, Shannon, who like Lennie is "moving much too slow" and is the one causing problems for the duo, kills a watchman for his ring and four dollars. He claims that this was heaven-sent, while Jack Straw knows that this murder has condemned him as well, saying, "hurts my ears to listen, Shannon, burns my eyes to see, cut down a man in cold blood Shannon, might as well be me." They catch a train heading west, and while Jack wants to ride it all the way to the coast, Shannon wants to go to Tulsa, Oklahoma. He's "gotta settle one old score, one small point of pride." Jack tries to suggest that this will only add to the problems that Shannon has brought upon them: "there ain't a place a man can hide, Shannon, will keep him from the sun, ain't a bed can give us rest now, you keep us on the run." Shannon doesn't care, and after they get off in Tucson, Arizona, with Shannon still intending to catch the first train they can ride to Tulsa, Jack Straw knows what he has to do, the way George knows what he must do after Lennie kills Curley's wife. What begins as a slow song builds speed and complexity as Shannon gets the pair into increasing amounts of trouble, with Bob Weir's rhythm guitar keeping the band steady while Jerry Garcia is free to solo, analogous to George finding work for Lennie and himself and trying to keep him out of trouble while Lennie goes about doing whatever he wants to do. Then before this last verse, as the song reaches its peak, there's always a monster Jerry Garcia solo leading up to the line, "Jack Straw from Wichita cut his buddy down, dug for him a shallow grave, and laid his body down." When they were first performing "Jack Straw" in 1971, Bob Weir sang the entirety of the lyrics, but starting during their legendary Europe '72 tour, Jerry Garcia sang Shannon's lines, and Bob Weir sang Jack's. This change really highlighted the two distinct characters and their differences. The first time they played it this way was May 3th at the Olympia Theater in Paris, and it worked so well that it was the version that ended up being put on the live album.

Recommended listening: 5/3/1972, 1/22/1978, 5/8/1977, 10/22/1978

To the Skatepark

By Jersey Sullivan

I would always watch them go by,
passing my mom and I on the sidewalk
with their loose cargo pants and oversized tees
flowing, cutting through the air on their beat-up
boards at a thousand-miles-per-hour.
Their wheels plowed across the rough concrete
and deafened everyone around them,
but I didn't mind.

My grandparents bought me a gift certificate
to Maui and Sons on the boardwalk
to get a skateboard of my own;
It was a $\frac{3}{4}$ -size with clear grip tape
so I could still see the red paint on the top of the deck,
and I placed stickers all over the bottom, careful
not to obscure the Anti-Hero Skateboards' eagle graphic.

I spent the summer before fourth grade skating
up and down my street, deliberately scuffing
the bottom of the board on my front porch
so it looked like I could grind.

I would go down to the Venice Skate Park
and watch the most creative skaters perform
all kinds of tricks and flips and grabs.
But most impressive was their ability to glide
through the empty pool like it was still filled.

Enamored by these artists who spent their days
by the ocean honing their craft,
I ended up with my $\frac{3}{4}$ -sized board,
denim cargo shorts, knee pads,
wrist guards, and helmet standing on the ledge
of the sunken pool with my front wheels in the air,
ready to drop in.
It only took a shift in weight from my left foot to my right
for gravity to take hold.

Momentum carried me up the pool wall.
I tried to emulate everyone I had seen perform this move --
to lift my wheels off the wall and pivot to face the other way.
But the sharp tangy splatter of my blood stained the pavement,
and I retreated to the crowds of onlookers, no longer part of the show.



Eleanor Winterer

Sweet Taste of a Hurricane

By Clair Davis

“Skaters by their very nature are urban guerrillas: they make everyday use of the useless artifacts of the technological burden, and employ the handiwork of the government/corporate structure in a thousand ways that the original architects could never dream of.”-Craig Stecyk

The Santa Monica and Venice areas will forever be known as the birthplace of skateboarding, with the group of surfers known as the Z-Boys acting as the spark that began a revolution. The early days of skateboarding were largely derived from surfing, using concrete hills and banks as solid waves to ride on. The Z-Boys would scour the greater Los Angeles area for locations that held the potential for riding. Full of steep banks and curves, Paul Revere Middle school was one of the most ideal places they found. In time, skateboarding began to evolve. The Z-Boys would drive through the wealthy neighborhoods of Santa Monica looking for empty pools to ride. This marked the beginning of the skateboarding renaissance. With the coming of the Bones Brigade, a skateboarding team composed of what started as a ragtag group of kids, no longer was skateboarding an extension of surfing, but rather its own practice with an entirely different set of skills and a unique culture in its own right.

Nowhere is the unique culture and style of skateboarding better reflected than in the Los Angeles area. The very heart of skateboarding culture is the freedom to take your own journey with it, regardless of how you do it or what it looks like. It was this freedom of self-expression that made me fall in love with skateboarding.

The various skateparks around Los Angeles each exemplify a different genre of skateboarding. The Cove Skatepark of Santa Monica, Stoner Skatepark, and Venice Beach Skatepark, to name a few, each have different styles of skateboarders and different cultural behaviors. In my experience, people skate the way they live their lives. Someone who is highly motivated but meticulous will show it in his or her skateboarding by calculating the angles and specific body motions that are required to land a trick as cleanly as possible. Likewise, someone who is hot-headed and wild will skate as though nothing can stop him or her, without care for technique or consequences. No two skateboarders skate the same.

Being born in Santa Monica, my first experience skating was at The Cove Skatepark. The Cove is primarily a transition-oriented skatepark (meaning it has mostly bowls and pools) that maintains a safe and respectful environment. It is a laid back and inclusive space where people of all ages and skill levels can skate. Young kids just learning can go there without feeling intimidated by the other skaters and find relatively simple obstacles suited for their abilities. Just as easily, older and more experienced skaters can push themselves and progress further on the more difficult and intense areas of the park. I started skating at The Cove when I was nine years old and it has played a significant role in my skateboarding style. The relaxed setting taught me to approach my tricks with a cool head while remaining attentive and focused.

Stoner Skatepark houses a different crowd of skateboarders. Mostly composed of teenagers and young adults, Stoner is a street-oriented park (meaning it has mostly rails, ledges, and stairs) with no rules other than the unspoken behaviors set forth by the locals. The vibe at Stoner is slightly more intense than The Cove, but is still rooted in having fun and progressing. Similar to any other skatepark, the locals are a tight-knit group that inspire one another to excel and skate to the best of their ability. Though it is not my favorite place to skate, Stoner is an excellent park for street skateboarding and it has definitely provided opportunities to expand my style and capabilities.

is very much reflected in its environment. The old school intensity and extreme attitudes stemming from the skateboarding pioneers in the 1970s are exemplified by the locals. At Venice, if you hesitate, you get cut off by someone faster, stronger, or more fearless. If you get in someone's way, there is likely no exchange of "I'm Sorry," only a quick glare and an eye roll if you're lucky. The park is a mix of street and transition, with a bowl, pool, stairs, rails, and ledges. Located right in the middle of the Venice Beach Boardwalk, tourists and LA locals alike swarm the park to watch the skateboarders in awe. Venice is my favorite place to go when I feel like switching things up. The intense vibe pushes me to try tricks I normally wouldn't, and the sea of eyes surrounding me pressures me to land them. A skatepark is a skatepark, so regardless of whether or not the environment or the layout is what a skateboarder is used to, there is always a way to have fun.

The beauty of skateboarding is that no matter which skatepark you identify with, you can go to another park and still connect with the locals and the style of the park itself. There is always room for improvement and growth, not only in your skateboarding abilities but in your mindset, in your learning style, and in your boundaries. By going to any skatepark in Los Angeles you can learn something new. There is no limit to what can be learned in skateboarding nor where it can be applied. The members of the Z-Boys and the Bones Brigade nearly single-handedly invented most of the tricks in skateboarding, or at least the tricks from which others were derived. Their creativity and defiance of what was accepted as being possible at the time is what ingrained skateboarding culture with such uniqueness and appeal. The legends of skateboarding — Tony Alva, Jay Adams, Steve Caballero, Tony Hawk, Mike McGill, Rodney Mullen, and many more — showed the world that skateboarding isn't just an activity to keep the hoodlums and druggies occupied. Instead, it is a lifelong learning experience and a vehicle through which people can express themselves.

Though Los Angeles is one of the major epicenters of skateboarding, it has spread to virtually every corner of the earth. It was announced that skateboarding was going to be included in the 2020 Summer Olympics, with a men's and women's division in both park and street. The lowbrow lifestyle started by the Z-Boys and the Bones Brigade began as nothing more than a way for them to pass the time and have fun. However, they unwittingly revolutionized a culture of creativity and freedom, the impact of which can be seen across the world.





Kyle Walker

A Pier to Ponder

By Marcos Sandoval

A frenzy of seagulls squawk
To announce your arrival.
Grains of sand strewn across
The walkway as if awaiting
A tap dance-off.

Along its barriers, fishermen
Seek a taste of the Pacific,
Yet the playful sea lion seeks
A taste of their chum.
A pelican swoops in
Skimming the ocean's surface
To prove Darwin's theory
Of natural selection.

At the pier's tip, inhale its essence
Of sand, floating seaweed, and teal water.
Become entranced by the far-off blue ripples
And the neighboring sea foam green tide.
Witness a solarbeam's spindrift,
Towards a destination,
Where the ocean meets the sand.
A single seagull squawks at your
Departure.





McCabe's Guitar Shop

By Sawyer Savage

The first employee I encountered when I entered the old-school music store on Pico Boulevard in Santa Monica had long hair and a perfect hipster beard. So did the second one. They both made a perfect fit for the place. I met a few more workers, some teachers, others instrument repairmen, and they all held that same, laid-back, cool musician vibe. After all, McCabe's is, as the first one described it, "the hub of folk music in L.A." There is no doubt he's correct. Arlo Guthrie played on the small stage set up in the back room here. So did Richie Havens, and Nils Lofgren, and Stephen Bishop, and Jackson Browne, and Graham Parker, and a thousand others. Sure, my dad had to impress upon me how cool many of those names are, but I looked them up and they are all the "real deal." No other place in the city can rival the legacy of this mom-&-pop guitar shop, not only for its influential role in the music industry, but also for its proud role in the Santa Monica community.

By the door you have the chance to pick up the day's paper from four different local publications: LA Weekly, The Argonaut, Santa Monica Daily Press, and the Santa Monica Observer. Pulling on the door handle that's shaped like a guitar neck, the door creaks open and you are immediately greeted by funky trinkets that were quite possibly picked up at a flea market: a massive, old-time National cash register and a vintage traffic light stand. No reason for them to be there, other than the fact that they're cool. Walking fully into the main room, the air is still and musty, and filled with the aroma of freshly brewed coffee--every visitor gets a free cup of joe and a guitar pick.

In front of the main counter I was greeted by a little dog named Riley. He was a mirror image of his owner, one of the bearded men I mentioned earlier. I mentioned that I went to Santa Monica High School and asked if I could look around, ask a few questions, and maybe take a few pictures. One of the men smiled and said he had gone to school at Samo as well and that I could take as much time as I needed. Yeah, this place was definitely local.

Getting my first good look around, I saw what this place truly is. It's a haven for people who make music, and, just as important, the instruments that make the music. The centerpiece of the front room is an instrument repair shop inhabited by a serious-looking guy who was busy working on an electric guitar, showing great care in restoring it to perfect condition. The repair shop is one of the main facets of the business. McCabe's is a store known for taking on any project of restoration that other shops won't take on, such as binding work, finish work, and crack repairs. Cooper, the other bearded employee, explained that they do a lot of "set-ups," which is adjusting the strings on a guitar fretboard, or the "action" as they call it. As Cooper said, "the set-up fully intonates the instrument."

In the front room there are shelves filled with music books and walls lined with guitars, ukuleles, banjos, mandolins, and several "world instruments" such as a sitar, an African kora (which is like a hand-held harp), and a shahi baaja (a type of Indian zither with keys like those on a typewriter that change the pitch).

In the back of the shop is a larger room that is also lined with guitars for sale, both electric and acoustic (in fact, there isn't any wall space that isn't taken up with either an instrument, vintage photo, or concert poster). But the main attraction in the back is the small, black stage sparkling with the magic of musical performances that grace the stage week after week, with acts stepping up from all across the country on which countless musicians have performed. McCabe's has mini concerts every weekend, with acts coming from all across the country.

Up a narrow staircase you'll find yourself transported to a cooler version of the attic in your grand-

parents' home. The ceiling resembles cottage cheese, dust is accumulating on a few of the ever-present instruments mounted to the walls, the floor is covered with dark burgundy carpet, and dim light comes from bare lightbulbs. Endless black-and-white photos line the single hallway, showing the faces of legends living illustrious careers, such as Beck (who took guitar lessons here as a kid), Linda Rondstat, Tom Petty, and Flea, the bassist for The Red Hot Chili Peppers. For those who don't recognize the famous - and not-so-famous - faces, there is a legend posted to the wall to help identify them. Doors on either side are closed, but the sound of guitar and violin lessons seeps through, bringing the musty space to life--while also providing aural evidence that every great musician had to start somewhere.

Nobody rushes you here. Nobody shadows you to see what you're up to. If you want to play one of the guitars on the wall, then you just take it down and play it. And people do. I encountered an older man, who wore ratty clothes and had hair that clearly hadn't been washed in some time, and I listened to him for a while. He played an acoustic guitar like it was an extension of himself. The notes bent and vibrated. He didn't need sheet music because the music was in him.

Once I left the shop, I saw the guitar-playing man outside, lingering by the front door. If I had passed by him an hour earlier, I might have easily mistaken him for homeless. Maybe he was, maybe he wasn't. But one thing I do know was that he was a musician. And, that's how he was treated inside McCabe's. He belonged there, just like those famous faces on the walls and the folk band set to play there that night, and the kids taking lessons behind those closed doors in the musty hall. Everyone belongs at McCabe's Guitar Shop on Pico Boulevard in Santa Monica. It's been around for over six decades and the music is still going strong.

That's what makes it a local legend.







On the Lower Jurassic

By Anya Pertel

From the sidewalk, you cannot hear the doves cooing. In fact, the thought that there could be doves on the roof of this unassuming building in the middle of Culver City would never even cross your mind. All you can hear from the sidewalk is the rush of Venice Boulevard and the frustrated hum of the 10 Freeway at 5 P.M. and the rustling of leaves in the dry, flammable, Southern California breeze. If that breeze is blowing in the right direction, you can smell the aloo gobi from the Indian deli down the block, and if it blows the other way, the fry oil from the In-N-Out. Around the corner is the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, and if you walk past it on a Sunday you can see the Krishnas in their robes puttering around in the paleing tile courtyard.

Stuck to the hip of the 10 Freeway at the Robertson exit is Culver City. Founded first as an all-white planned community, then later the home of the MGM and RKO backlots before MGM became Sony and RKO became industrial warehouses, Culver City today is where parking lots turn into prefabricated apartment complexes, which turn back into empty dirt lots. It is where high schoolers do raunchy things in the backseats of their cars while the LA river takes the slow-moving sludge of last month's rain to the Marina del Rey. Past barking seals and wealthy Hollywoodites on sailboats, those same high schoolers row eights in the blinding sunlight off the Pacific.

Venice Boulevard, that broad, bleached artery of the Westside of Los Angeles, comes to its full eight-laned glory in Culver City, but Venice Boulevard here could not be more different from the Venice Boulevard of Venice-proper just a few miles west. In Culver City, there are no stoned teenagers on skateboards or bodybuilders with glistening, oiled-up biceps. In Culver City, the marijuana dispensaries only serve bored, young moms and washed-out, greying extras from 80's TV commercials. On the cracked asphalt of the third lane, a mirage shimmers for a second, only to be dried up by the tires of a westbound Toyota Prius.

And here, on the corner of Venice and Bagley, sits an unassuming building with a fountain that sometimes works and sometimes doesn't, shaped like an open-mouthed face with corroded blue stains running down its chin. The building's green paint is faded and peeling off in sheets and the few windows that break the facade are blacked out by heavy fabrics. From the sidewalk, the only indication of what this building contains is a laminated piece of paper stuck in the grates of its turquoise metal door with its hours, and a weathered red sign that reads, "The Museum of Jurassic Technology."

As you duck through that turquoise metal door, it becomes immediately apparent that this is no longer the world of Culver City. Your pupils dilate in desperate search of enough light to make out the contours of a gift shop and a desk and a twenty-something-year-old docent. I have been here many times but my eyes will probably never adjust to the dimness, nor my ears to the muted drone of the next room's exhibition, nor my nose to the smell of stale air and dust. Next to the desk is a Russian translation of *Alice in Wonderland* and a speckled bird's egg on a golden chain and a T-shirt that says, "NO ONE MAY EVER HAVE THE SAME KNOWLEDGE AGAIN: Letters to Mt. Wilson Observatory, 1915-1935."

The Museum of Jurassic Technology's website states that it is "an educational institution dedicated to the advancement of knowledge and the public appreciation of the Lower Jurassic." However, the museum's relation to the Lower Jurassic—a geological epoch about 201.3 million years ago, during which dinosaurs roamed the Earth—is curious. In fact, there is no acknowledgement of the Lower Jurassic or geological epochs or dinosaurs in the museum at all. Here, the Lower Jurassic is just simply the "Lower Jurassic."

Past the docent, there is a dull TV screen framed by heavy velvet curtains and a dusty glass pane. Over hidden speakers, a bored-sounding woman's voice recalls some history, possibly related to the

museum, but I would not know. Every time I have come here I have tried to grasp the meaning of these words, to create any semblance of comprehension, and every time I have failed, because if you listen, you will realize that the bored-sounding woman's words and sentences are just sounds. The sentences spin around on themselves, tying linguistic knots with hypnotic monotony. I do not mean that these sentences do not make sense—they are grammatically correct and have verbs and nouns and clauses—but their meanings somehow slip past conscious retention and, like mist, evaporate the second the mind shines its light on them. You must accept this as a fact and move on if you are to see the whole museum today.

Around the next corner are the permanent collections. A horn is mounted perpendicular to the wall, sagging slightly from the burden of gravity. It supposedly grew from the back of the head of a woman named Mary Davis of Saughall, and the plaque beneath it ponders the curious nature of the fact that menfolk bear their horns on the front of their heads and women, on the back. Although I have never witnessed such phenomena—despite being a woman, my horn does not seem to grow from the back of my head—I have never wanted to know if there really was a Mary Davis of Saughall with a horn growing from the back of her head. Sometimes it is enough for a plaque to say that menfolk bear their horns on the front of their heads and women, on the back.

The next table holds a microscope whose lens has zoomed in too far, shattering the petri dish at which it was looking. A sign taped to the glass reads, "Out of Order." I have never seen it "in order." It was probably "Out of Order" in 2001, when the museum received a MacArthur Foundation fellowship, and it probably still will be when the museum is claimed by the same dust that claimed MGM and RKO.

The museum's labyrinthian corridors do not say where they will take you. The first time I went to the museum, those corridors led me to "Athanasius Kircher: The World is Bound by Secret Knots." Kircher was a seventeenth-century scholar who believed that magnetic attraction and repulsion governed everything from love to hatred to planetary actions to musical harmonies to God, whom he deemed the "Central Magnet of the Universe." The world as Kircher saw it, in all of its vastness and complexity, is interconnected by magnetic chains and every action creates a ripple that influences the whole. Even in a world of modern science and formal academia, I have not been able to shake the feeling of these knots.

In high school, I used to bring all of my first dates to the Museum of Jurassic Technology. The museum functioned as a litmus test, checking my date's ability to suspend their belief in concrete knowledge for something a little more fluid. An if-you-don't-like-it-then-I-just-don't-think-we'll-get-along kind of place. A place of disbelief and soft sounds of wonder and inside jokes for later. A place where there is a library with twenty volumes on Soviet astronomy and a book called *How Long Things Live*. Mayflies live five minutes. Jellyfish might be immortal. I stopped bringing my dates here once the thought of mayflies and their radiant five minutes of life began to make me sad and I could no longer think about secret knots without thinking of the ones that had come untied.

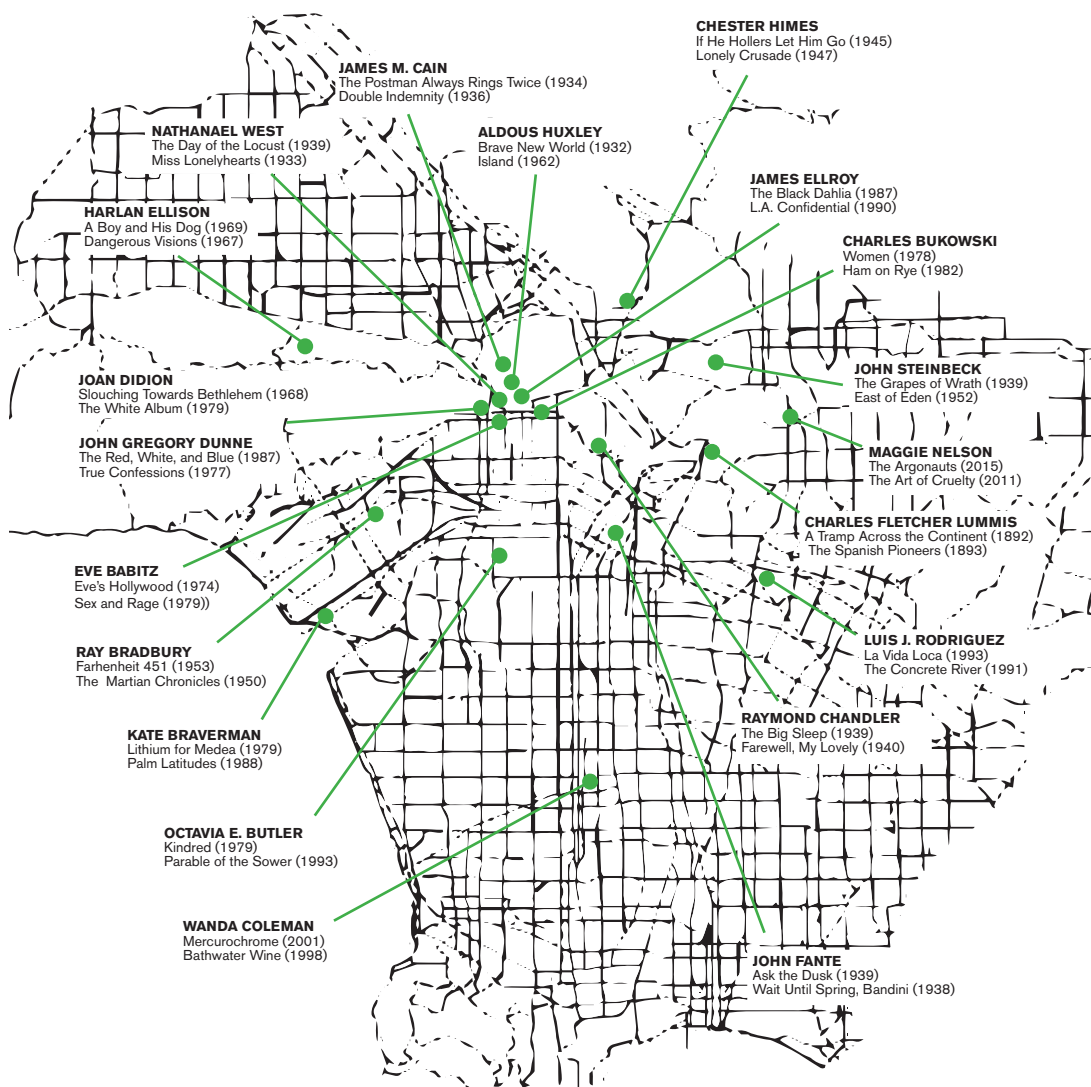
If you are lucky, the corridors might take you to the foot of a steep, velvet-lined staircase, which will take you up past drawings of the moon and its craters and deposit you in "Lives of Perfect Creatures: Dogs of the Soviet Space Program," an exhibition of paintings of every dog the USSR has ever sent to space. You will then enter the Tula Tea Room, where an elderly borzoi named Tula (the room's namesake) sleeps on the cool marble floor and tea is made by a woman with an unplaceable accent. I do not know what kind of tea it is, but such things are not important and I have never had it anywhere else.

And, for the first time since ducking through that turquoise door, you see natural light. The sleepy, swaddling dimness of the museum lifts, and the sunlight streaming through the low archway of the door draws you onto the roof. In this shaded courtyard, where the air is soft and the sun maps shadows across the marble, doves sit perched on the stalks of wide-leaved plants that glow against the white columns. From the atrium, you cannot hear the sigh of Venice Boulevard or the flammable breeze tapping the stuccoed facades of the shopping plazas and warehouses. You can only hear the cooing of doves.

Writers of Los Angeles

By Tupelo Sullivan

Los Angeles is a world-renowned hub of art, culture, and fame. In the spirit of John Steinbeck -- who spent several months in Eagle Rock -- we curated a map highlighting 20 unique writers of all genres who lived in the city along with two of their most prominent pieces. Though this number is minuscule compared to the bounty of talented artists across the city, it highlights the depth and multifaceted nature of Los Angeles.





Kyle

By Ryan Kashanchi

His name is Kyle. He is about my age, a soon-to-be Harvard undergraduate student, and - like myself - a classical music enthusiast.

Over the span of a single summer I began to learn Kyle's life inside and out. His likes, dislikes, favorite food, medication schedule, and even the nurses who were assigned to monitor his room. When his mother asked me to sign my name in this notebook for him to read later on, I saw pages and pages of drawings, poetry, essays, and photographs as I flipped through to finally find a clean sheet. To the right of the door I saw gift baskets with knick-knacks, all presumably catered to Kyle's tastes. Autographed footballs, exotic junk food, music albums, books, and teddy bears all lined the walls and shelves. And although I'm pretty sure they're not allowed in the ICU, I saw hanging banners and family photographs dangling from the ceiling. Everyone who came to visit made his room more special, more Kyle-esque. As I signed my name and wrote my best wishes to Kyle's health and his family, I was impressed. There was undeniably a lot of love in that hospital room.

Unbeknownst to me at the time, it turns out Kyle had been unresponsive to stimuli for the past few weeks. Though I didn't know that upon walking into his room for the first time, I could immediately tell that his situation wasn't too great. He was in a full body cast, legs and arms floating up in the air by means of poles hanging down from the ceiling. All his food had to be liquefied and his heart rate had to be checked every few minutes. It was sad, a young man of this caliber to have been reduced to this limbo of life and death. I knew he was alive, but some would say that his current state was no life to be living. In his small cubicle-of-a-room, the only sound Kyle heard was that of the nurses' hasty footsteps or the continuous hum of the air conditioning. He was confined in there for 24 hours a day, so I did what anyone else would do. I tried to help.

UCLA Hospital isn't really known for its music or volunteering program, let alone the small coalition of musicians within the volunteering program, so I wasn't surprised when the nurses were confused as to why I wanted to enter the ICU. "Yes, I'm here for a patient. Kyle Ying, Room 4024? They requested some live music and I brought my keyboard to play for them." Immediately the ICU's doors opened up and I was escorted by four nurses, all of which were bubbly and cheerful in personality, into Kyle's room.

Once I got there I did what I always did for the patients. Same old routine. Change the keyboard settings so they emulate a harp sound, do a silent little warm-up, and turn the volume up to the penultimate level. Normally I'd engage in a little small talk with the patient and family, but given that his mom's face was buried in her palms, I could tell that the small talk wasn't going to work here. So, I decided to play Debussy's "Clair de Lune," a classic piece, used almost as extensively in piano pedagogy as Beethoven's "Für Elise," and heart-warming to listen to in environments like these. "You could never go wrong with Debussy," I thought.

By the third measure, Mrs. Ying tilted her head upwards to look at me. Although my eyes were focused on the keys, I could see her watching me through my peripheral, turning her head to stare at her immobilized son in the bed. Suddenly, she got up and ran towards the medical station, and after a few seconds the room was packed with nurses. Mrs. Ying covered her mouth with one hand and pointed excitedly with the other. I looked up to see what it was

simultaneously with my own as I played.

The hospital staff on the fourth floor of the ICU began to crowd around Kyle's room. As he and I both finished the piece, we were met with a thunderous round of applause echoing down the hallway. When his mother tearfully asked him if he enjoyed the piece, he put his thumbs up and nodded up and down. Mrs. Ying gave her son a kiss on the cheek, and she begged me to play another piece. Happily, I put the sheet music for Joplin's "The Entertainer" up on the stand. Kyle and I began to perform.

Apparently "The Entertainer" was one of Kyle's favorite pieces to play, since every time I'd come back he'd always want to start with it. Soon, it became one of my favorites, too, along with Mozart's "Rondo Alla Turca," Chopin's "Nocturne in B flat Major," Bach's "Cello Suite in G Major," and the piece that started it all, Debussy's "Clair de Lune."

These pieces, along with several others that I've compiled over the years, have demonstrated to me the power music can hold for some. I kept these pieces in mind for when I played for a terminally ill patient's wedding last winter, when I helped soothe a grieving family's emotions regarding their father's recent euthanasia, and when I played for my grandmother as she remained in the hospital for days due to postoperative protocol. The common theme uniting them all, though, is the power of a single melody effecting ripples of change wherever it is heard.

There is no doubt that Kyle and I will continue to stay connected as we both embark on our individual journeys into the unknown. Oddly enough, it appears that the aphorism "It's a small world" is more prevalent than I once believed. It turns out that Kyle is actually a neighbor of mine, living only a few blocks away from my house. His mother and I speak periodically every now and then and she has assured me that Kyle is well and has made a full recovery. He plans to return to school this fall. And while life has made it difficult for us to see each other and our last encounter was in that hospital room months ago, I know once we finally meet again we'll pick up right where we left off, speaking through words *and* melodies.



Kyle Walker



Xander Lee

The Ugly

“Maybe we all have in us a secret pond where evil and ugly things germinate and grow strong. But this culture is fenced, and the swimming brood climbs up only to fall back. Might it not be that in the dark pools of some men the evil grows strong enough to wriggle over the fence and swim free?”

- John Steinbeck, East of Eden



The City of Broken Dreams

By Erkki Forrester

The push of a button winds the cassette
My road that has carried me from east to west,
Finally touches LA.

The old cassette rolls and turns until it remembers its purpose;
Singing the melodies of Ah Um
Whilst I drive through Chinatown,
Built on the sweat of Chinese immigrants seeking the dream that I once believed in.

Down South I can see the Watts Towers sticking their heads out of the city's skyline,
Mimicking Mingus' pleas,
Asking for the system that separates man from man to be brought down.

To my right, the outlines of Little Armenia
An enclave, a refuge, from the horrors back in the mainland
I smell what they have brought with them,
The charmingly aromatic crust of falafel.

Towering over me are the hills of LA
Mansion after mansion erasing the green
Painful wounds on the skin of nature, the homeland of the Tongva.

Now Sawtelle is in the corner of my eye, embedded in my heart.
Once it had flourished, until it was ripped apart and its citizens locked up,
Only slowly finding its rhythm again, in the food of its motherland-
An improvisation with Mingus' bass.

Ahead of me, the ocean and the half-mooned sun and the purple sky
Approaching the cliff, the road lengthens, the sun won't set
Mingus' notes stretch and widen until I can't find the horizon
In the city of broken dreams.



Anya Pertel

A Story About a Patch of Sand

By Auden Koettters

In the scrub brush smoky valleys of Los Angeles, you can still hear the echoes of the Chumash and the Gabrielino pounding their acorns and catching their water in granite pocks. The mispronunciation of Pio Pico has fluttered off people's lips since 1846. Guadalupe Hidalgo and what was Spanish (or maybe German, or maybe Mexican) has now become "American," or whatever that stands to mean. The battle of San Gabriel resulted in two warring nations emerging as one only to fulfil an empty dream to "manifest destiny." Better yet, bells begin to chime across the nation. "Come westward," they preach, "quickly," with promises of gold hanging in the air. Now a new profit emerges; thousands of people come to the West in search of their fortunes by prospecting for gold. So soon after come real estate scams, and promises of health; the wealth and prosperity rising from the dust that was unearthed by travelling covered wagons.

This sanctuary begins to offer a safe harbour in evanescent waves of dreams about the Promised Land. Water, water, water, and a rail line, and a port. For some, this place is a dreamlike fantasy. Like the Gilmore Adobe, its market, still a resplendent Grove. Like Mulholland, Chandler, Huntington, Nordhoff, Isaac Newton, Van Nuys... each advertising their own paradises, and in doing so, tricking the masses to get off their asses to come and build it themselves. They advertise, "California for Health, Pleasure and Residence," and pay them to do it.

You could get here from Kansas City for one dollar I guess. So, why not take the chance? Why not move to this emerging paradise? Otherworldly perfection of Aimee Semple McPherson, and her foursquare apostle. Ramona, her blusas unbuttoned under trickling tresses of dark black framing, a maternal cornucopia: almonds, oranges, tangerines, bananas. A Western Plenty that was promised to all. So many promises. Promises, promises, promises that one day will ride waves in the air to all the world, making pictures that move, and talk, and seem real, and become so real, that they will be the only attestation of reality left.

The same year the railway began to connect this small land to the rest of the United States, Los Angeles got its first recorded snowfall, creating a chilling metaphor for the scam about to unfold. They built a park called Westlake, but they soon turned it into oil fields, and then one day named it after the Imperialist Monster MacArthur. By then, that little land tract bought by Wilcox that no one cared about would begin poisoning the minds of the world over screens, in boxes, pretending paradise had been found by all the dreamers who'd come to be broken drudges working for the wealthiest men in the world, living in clapboard boxes, and riding trolleys to work long hours in a barely converted desert. Bradbury let a hundred men die mining his gold, and only built a building of concrete pain. Five hundred oil wells were built next to that same park in the 1890s. That was one for every 100 people at the time.

Hollywood Cemetery forever broke dirt in 1899. It waited for Chris Cornell, Mel Blanc, Bugsy Siegel, Cecil B. DeMille, and Judy Garland. Tobacco kills but also builds when Abbot Kinney brings his money to churn out a new kind of Venice, canals and all. Trucks hauled in sand from the scorching desert in lines of dump trucks as far as the eyes could see. Either Philipps or Cole's started around 1908. They're both still French dipping. Around then D. W. Griffith starts the biggest scam of all. Gish, Pickford, Barrymore... unprofound fantasies in an endless quest for the grandiose. The city still grows in number. Each day another unsuspecting soul is taken in. Only the broken one knows. The rest of the world hopes it's as good as it seems, to make up for their own deferred dreams. Angels Flight sends bright trails into the ether from the West.

And then after that, it's all cinemas, and aqueducts, and ports, and swimming pools, and cars, and museums, and annexation, and architecture, and subdivision blossoming out of the manure of corruption into Hollyhock and Barnsdall, Greene and Greene and Mayan Revival. And down in the muck, underneath every step of the way, from the barrios of the '20s to Bloods and Crips of the '60s to Asian Boyz and 18th St., White Power and Sureños it all just gets too hard to wrap my mind around. So when I walk around now and it's all locked down, I know all this history is here, but now we're going to die from some invisible thing.

The West is the Best seemed so Romantic, but my Okie grandmother ended up in juvie in Long Beach where she claims some priest sold her to a guy in a Cadillac, and though I have no idea if that is true, I do know that she just left one dustbowl for another, like everyone else who comes to Los Angeles. Now, fifteen-year-olds sit in their classrooms and are told to write about their histories, yet were never taught of Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo, or how he stole one tribe's dreams to create his own. But what they do know is that as they walk home from school people are living on the sides of streets, because, by one misfortune or another, they were shaken down by the earthquakes that tremble this city, and by one misfortune or another, they learned that paradise isn't always what it seems.



Santa Monica

By Phoebe Liskin

A city full of tourists
looking for the magic they've seen in the movies,
like the pier destroyed in Sharknado,
or Beverly Hills Cop's Harvelle's.
But where is it?
When I think of Santa Monica,
I think of
24-dollar Erewhon tomato sauce
and moms in Lululemon leggings
pushing their strollers quickly
past parks full of the homeless.
I think of the pier on a Sunday afternoon in July,
sinking under the weight of thousands of visitors.

Tiny,
packed together like jelly beans in a jar,
melting like hard candy
under the slow-burning,
unrelenting
summer sun.

I think of the superficiality
the carefully staged Instagram photos
that all look the same.
Everyone is looking for happiness
(of course),
a quality which is difficult to attain
through the ritual of Soul Cycle
and kombucha, the panacea for all ailments.

That isn't to say I don't see the true beauty
that goes beyond the clichés;
my favorite part of Santa Monica isn't the palm trees,
or the beaches,
or the pier,
or the Promenade,
but the way that all different kinds of people coexist
and the freedom to be yourself,

if you want to,
whoever that may be.

When I think of Santa Monica,
I see glamour and grunge intertwined,
I see individual freedom and suffocating pressure to conform,
to be the type of person someone thinks of
when they think of Santa Monica;
Two ideas battling,
clashing like the waves
colliding on those iconic beaches.



Kyle Walker



Kyle Walker

Oz

By Auden Koettters

Dimmed were the lights of my future
Bright were the lights of the city

The city
Opening up to swallow another unsuspecting victim
Drawing them by the tips of their hopes and dreams
Wrapping its long claws around their precious naivety

I was once reeled in by the bright lights
The producers
The cameras
The stages
The allure of fame

I had wanted what so many want
I tried to follow the yellow brick road
But I never found Oz
I was stripped of my ruby red shoes
My innocence unbraided like my twin tails
My fair skin was burnt by the California sun
My chestnut hair bleached to look like Barbie's

I had sold my soul to the devil
Yet I was not where I wanted to be
I wanted to be back
Before the bright lights
The producers
The cameras
The stages
The allure of fame

No one sees me
Everyone sees the people who make it to Oz
Who follow the yellow brick road
Who strut their ruby red shoes down the runway
Who have their twin tails braided by couture designers
Whose skin is perfectly tanned by the California sun
Whose hair bleaches to perfection
The bright lights
The producers
The cameras
The stages
The allure of fame
It's all for them

No one sees
The washed-out
The used
The unwanted
The broken left behind
We are all just bricks
In their yellow brick road





Henry Hume





Kyle Walker

A Curious Conflict

By Chloe Forssell

Coursing down dirty LA sidewalks
caked with footsteps and fallacies,
the pungent scent of injustice
is thick in the air.

Its city residents breathe gulps of inequality,
and muddled eclectic diversity,
because beneath the smiles and Hollywood sign,
there is a barrage of daggers
all poised and ready to strike,
stabbing those who
do not belong.
Yet, we all belong.

A city like this one breeds on its inhabitants
turning the other cheek,
heading down through the bustle of buses and breaking bureaucracy.

A city like this one mourns its diversity,
a curious conflict.

This city feeds lies like spoonfuls of sickly sweet honey,
tricking its believers into submission,
who then fall with
every misstep.

Begging for mercy,
drowning in manipulation,
Clawing for the dream that is just out of reach,
Once free, now burdened by the lies of the world.
This is our city.







Selected Poems

By Cindy Milwe

Attached

When I moved from New York to California,
I thought I could wear a sundress every night.

I refused to buy sweaters and shivered,
my words slurred by my chattering teeth.

Men gave me their jackets in movie theaters,
and I never rolled up the sleeves. I wanted

to feel their largeness on me, see my body
get lost in the heat. Now, my favorite sweater
is my father's: a ropy cotton, shapeless
where it hangs near my knees.

One Passover at the fourth cup of wine
he started to sweat, then pulled it over his head

and jammed it in my lap. "Hold this," he said,
and rushed through the story of the plagues.

My father is always hot. As a little girl,
I noticed underarm stains on his polo shirts,

tweed jackets with patches soaked-through.
At night, my sister and I listened to the arc of piss

through the bathroom door to know how much
he had to drink and how scared we should be.

Before passing out, he'd yell for one of us
to get him ice water or turn up the air.

I was always too cold. I wore his sweatpants
to sleep at night, and rubbed my feet together,

hoping to start a fire.



Anza Borrego

That night, the desert,
the silver sand's expanse
made bigger by our being

lost, stuck in my hatchback,
that poor car spinning its old wheels
in a ditch back-lit by stars

and lush planets, visible
as our naked limbs
in the creosote dusk.

I was 21, spent from the city,
night's pink-tinted sunrise
a gift wrapped in tissue. And you—

your chipped front tooth,
the Badlands' glare.
Our future dangled in dry air.

Reading Roethke

Sap and loam. Root and weed.
The underbelly of your yearning

rises to the surface like sulfur.
Its stink is what you love

and can't endure—its mulch
and rot; its pure dark rank

unfurling. I think of you
ordering a piece of raw steak—

tearing at its sinew with your teeth.
How can I sink into flesh like that?

How can I join the animal world?
The kingdom of plants?

Volcanic ash, broken shells,
the crusty, muddied earth?





McKenzie McDonald



Selected Poems

By George Wallace

Hemingway's Favorite Bar

sloppy joes corner of duval and green
mile zero on the highway that leads to
anywhere you wish you would have went
but didn't, two go-to sisters at the end
of the bar order a drink (look they call
it 'siren on the rocks' that's a laugh) --
they are drumming on their cocktail
napkins with their nails done sharp
as a six toed cat they are eating salt
peanuts they are from wisconsin they
only have three hours to pick up men
now this is a sight worth remembering
in walks this exotic looking (now there's
a real tan, grizzled chin, that patch over
one eye is probably overkill) gentleman
plenty of free-flowing cash hell why not

looks like odysseus and his crew of shipwrecked sailors
are going to get lucky tonight

the party is on they have turned their
backs on time while outside in the key
west sky the sun is slipping on its pink
and red negligee and is taking a nose
dive into the gulf of mexico o! pay it no
mind ladies (the cat-juggler is warming
up his act the tourists are beginning to
arrive here comes the tight rope walker
in his orange cargo shorts) -- it's 7:57 in
mallory square hemingway's favorite bar
is emptying out better move quick ladies
this is mile zero on the great american
highway your fantasy vacation is only
a sunset away from erasure



Yellow Moon Gone Pink

New York Harbor, dark waters, the Great White Way is shuttered now, Fifth Avenue's a drag strip for cop cars and emergency vehicles, and a big damn moon is rising like a single daffodil over the city, hangman moon, like an innocent bird of prey

And the ships roll in
And the ships roll out

Except for one ship that's parked off shore by the Verrazano Bridge

Waiting for the all clear sign
Waiting for the gangplank to roll
And sweet release from the quarantine ship

Don't be afraid of each other or yourselves, people! The invisible invitation to die has already landed and spread across America.

Safe Harbor? No harbor is safe! Never was, never will be. Release the passengers of the good ship plague, this town has seen it all before

Small Pox Yellow Fever Black Death Spanish Flu Polio Plague -- all landed here

Covid 19, same old story

The ships roll in, the ships roll out -- from Liverpool Bremerhaven Wuhan Yokohama Port au Prince -- cargo ships, cruise ships, tugs and tankers and barges too; cars refrigerators palm oil crude oil bananas and grapefruit and sand. And women and men -- social climbers, grifters, up tight, chill; undiscovered and overrated; the talented and the decrepit and the young. And plenty of illegal whiskey.

Stowaways too, and rich Americans with private cabins and obscene spending money.

Piraeus Le Havre Denmark Italy Holland Portugal South America Spain. All the same -- And the jumbo jets, pregnant with hope and money and death, flying in over rooftops and tenement buildings, from here to Far Rockaway

And the oil refineries in New Jersey.
And the sugar refineries in Brooklyn.
And the power plants along the East River.
And the water towers and interstates.



And the hallways ringing with the ghosts of centuries, other generations of quarantine,
soup in the kitchen, radiators banging and wet socks; and the crying and laughter of the
ones who made it, or didn't, gathered at the table to pray

To pray and to make it and to raise All-American children and grandchildren taught to
make it too.

Old men and women themselves, now, waiting at the quarantine window to live or die.

What's the news.

When's the all clear sign.

There may not be an all clear sign, brother -- just a temporary end to the hostilities
And a list of the dead, hastily scrawled.

This one wrote a rock n roll anthem.

This one wrote checks to charities.

This one emptied bedpans at night.

This one filled the mouths of the poor.

This one was a priest in the Orthodox church.

This one lectured to empty rooms.

This one invested in slum buildings.

This one invested in stock futures.

This one ran thru money like a fish thru water.

This one drowned himself in a sea of movie scripts that he sent to Hollywood and they sat
on shelves for years and years gathering dust.

This one owned a villa in Spain.

This one was a shrink in a cheap hotel.

This one ran a dance studio for troubled teens.

Ring out the dead, the hospital corridors are full of them. The refrigerated truck is idling in
the hospital parking lot.

Stack them up, ship them out

No time for flowers or funerals

No time for family goodbyes.

Just bury them now, or spread their ashes.

We'll remember them next Spring.

Under a yellow moon gone pink,

A yellow moon rising.



Good Morning Rainbird with Ocean in Your Wings

It could be any ocean, any ocean, but it is this ocean, the Pacific a supple beast of air, and you could be any bird, but you are rainbird with ocean in your wings, whalesperm in your bones, turtleshell in your buttback and a walrus tusk in your pistol belt, born of a volcano and the hillsides of Southern California burn for you, the canyons of Central Coast are pregnant with the coldblood and winesap of your mother

and you are rainbird but volcanobird too, the cliffslides of Big Sur worship you, Monterey falls face forward into the mud before you, San Francisco is your rosetta stone Marin a mudbank of harbor seals and flocks of migrating birds, entire histories of humankind travel in your belly, entire generations of extinct creatures fester in your bowels,

species of the crawling depths rise up from the seabottom, rainbird! you seize your prey like the jade creature of myth, bright mother of pearl kestrel with your animal elegance, strange as a sea cucumber

voracious bird, ruthless as European civilization, rusty as the hull of an iron warship, abalone bird with a breast like a one quart canteen, i have seen the bullet in your eye, i have felt your peeling wind ready to strike, porous and post apocalyptic,

bird of rain, forager of the dunes, voracious as Russia and Spain in a head-on collision, and voracious and foul, you could eat anything rainbird but you eat fishegg and squid, you eat oysters, you eat ligament and bone and plastic plucked from Oregon garbage cans

and it could be any bones but it is these bones, Jack London's bones and the bones of coyote eating crickets

and i have seen Cortez rising out of the marrow of your bones, like old Oakland, raucous, macho, classically colonial, like squid rising to the surface of an ocean at night, elegant! and i have seen oil merchants in their lonely pursuit, whale oil, crude oil, and Teddy Roosevelt holding hands with Cesar Vallejo and Junipero Serra on the malarial shore, it is all the same



i have seen the bifurcated starlight guiding your way east, it could be any star but it is Magellan's star, rainbird and you have crossed ten thousand miles of open water from Japan or China, it is Arcturus you have sailed by, you've just got back from the Alaskan tundra, wrong way
papyrus in ship of cloud

this is memory, gold digger bird, this is scent,
sage and haunted wildcat bird,
bird of salt air

and it could be any ocean but it is this ocean, and you are cloud and cloud is ash, and nuclear blast on the atoll is punishing and that rustle in the bunchgrass is a soldier who never gave up and never gave in

and you are no surrender, you are American as hell, a helicopter in the Mekong dawn, you are a Laysan albatross, hatched in sand, bred on atoll, missing in action and a Midway baby in your radioactive nest, and maybe i'd say created by coral growth, maybe i'd say seamount, and maybe you are jungle jacket or agent orange -- a steady rain hisses in your wings like chemical madness

and, rice paddy bird populated by palm trees, you are taro and wild boar rampaging through the crag, let off on insufficient evidence, you are My Lai in the sandalwood, you are napalm scrawled in the written volcanic eye, rainbird!

you have crossed my ocean too, you have returned me to original being, you are devil of made air, fresh, fresh, temptation incarnate, fragrant as eucalyptus, insulting as flak that cuts through the Pacific fog, suffusion of bluegill in the mangrove swamp, atmosphere in the making, seed of terrible new conquests, civilization stuck in your mighty aviator maw -- it could be any ocean, rainbird, any ocean,

but it is this ocean, good morning!



O Wakare to Manzanar

By Riley Masterson

She held the stick in her hand and drew circles in the dirt. Sweat dripped down her face and her hair matted to her forehead but the horse manure made her eyes burn. While she coughed on dust the younger children tossed around a ball behind her in the courtyard. Her stomach moaned and told her she was empty. Mama couldn't bring her cut-up persimmons anymore; the families were fed when the schedule wanted to feed them.

And all because of that infamous date. After that her friends at school became fairly mean and rather unfriendly, but what was really bad was that night when the neighbors broke Kimura Family All-Purpose Grocery Store's windows and her spirit. And then they were relocated the week before her senior prom. It was awfully tragic.

So here she was three months later under the August sun in the summer of '42, amidst the nowhere that was Owens Valley, California, gripping the crisscrossing south fence which separated her section of the camp, 2-A, from section 3-A.

Then she saw her. Rosalind Russel, with colored hair, along with eyes that glowed brighter than the guards' flashlights, could almost always trigger a quickening heartbeat. She was really quite remarkable, that girl from 3-A.

"Hey." She had a grin that could make all hell break loose and maybe it could have. The schedule of the blending-together days was mundane; she was not. She sat down in the dirt.

"Hey." Her face lit up but then dropped, just as the sun would soon.

"So."

"So..."

"Do you know what day it is?"

No response.

"It's August 31st."

Right then a baseball from the game to the far left crashed into the fence which stood between them. An "Ooowee, why don't ya stand up and give us a better view, honey?" was also thrown. Ah yes, boys. And adolescent and hormonal ones at that, neither of which the two were particularly fond of. A unison eye roll.

"August 31st. You know you were supposed to start Watson Secretarial School tomorrow. And I was-"

"It wouldn't have been all that bad. You have Kojirō and he-."

"No, my parents gave me Kojirō."

"And?"

"And what? You think I wanted to be basically sent off to be engaged to a family friend and not go to school like you? We missed it. We missed it all. Our last summer before everything would change."

3-A also missed McKinley High School's senior prom. But unlike Barbara, Joan, and Ruth, she was no fair-weather friend.

"Akachan-" she began to plead.

"Don't call me that," 2-A said with a slight shudder and a wave of pink. "Not here."

"Old habits. Look at me." Their eyes aligned through two iron diamonds. "This will be over soon enough. The Center's not so bad."

“Are you sure about-”

“Stop that. Things will go back to the way they were. And then we’ll be...” she searched to find a word in time.

“God, that’s reassuring.”

“What we will be is alright,” she said forcefully with indignation.

“But can you promise that?”

“Hey! Hey you! Get off the fence,” a guard ordered, strolling toward the two. She knew there was no real chance of punishment as long as she did as she was told. The guards didn’t care enough for that; there were other things to deal with. Two girls talking wasn’t the end of the world.

“I’ll see you tomorrow. O wakare.”

3-A’s scratched knees lifted her from the ground as she answered the question with the same force and certainty as before.

“Hai.”



Pete Barraza

A Deceptive Oasis

By Sara Akiba

Why would a piece of land,
with such static seasons,
prove to be so attractive to the outside,
to people of different financial circumstances
and cultural backgrounds?
Why would such a desert with no natural oasis,
--a megacity,
an economic superpower,
the second largest city in the country--
be the site
dreamers set their anchors?

Perhaps it is the ominous culture;
no where else would you find such extremes:
diversity, activism, fame,
inclusiveness and fusion of different cultures.
No where else is the epicenter:

trends,
fashion,
art,
innovation,
technology,
entertainment.

Diversity of languages,
widespread love for cuisine,
and self-expression,
alongside the industry of tourism and film.

Perhaps it is the environment,
drift between the bustling city,
and the nature at the periphery of imagination,
to encompass the beauty of mountains, oceans,
and the parks of whatever is left.
No where else can you experience such unique weather,
Helios embracing the city as a whole,
without a speck of a cloud in the heavens.
Snow-capped peaks
behind the skyline of downtown;
silhouettes of palm trees
framing the everlasting yellow pink sunset.

Perhaps it is acceptance,
the warmth it emits.



The recognition of identities:
religious,
political,
cultural,
and of any gender.
A difference from the home
they were forced to abandon.

But, above all, it is the advertised opportunities,
the wealth and success
seen through the predecessors, the legends,
hiding the truth
of the existing racial stratification.
The robust economy
from manufacturing to entertainment,
comes myths of all-accepting jobs,
a never-ending list of options.
Rumors of education and degrees
one only dreams of having,
presented at one's fingertips,
as if one were a unique individual
the corporation was searching for.
The puppeteers, however, drawing in the victims
from beyond the city, state, and country borders;
their promises never fulfilled.



Kyle Walker



Pete Barraza

Messenger, me too

By Chloe Gottlieb

I saw Hermes down on the Pacific Coast Highway
Hermes with wings on his sandals
crying begging but no longer expecting
Hermes with all-too-fast-legs and a need to be remembered
messenger, carrier, holding the Gods' love letters in his palms
Hermes with a vacant father
and a mother whose name no one ever spelled right,
no one ever sent her love letters

being made up of marble and bronze
leaves so much space for emptiness
it's no wonder he flew whenever the chance arose
he does not smell like wine or honey or fruit pits
he is not wonderfully short-tempered
or filled with a lightning-bolt's thunder

Hermes carried words
like he doesn't realize
the gold ties around his ankles could take him anywhere, everywhere
like he never found out
his grandfather once held all the Earth

Ddeokguk

By Kaelen Song

이

Hae-in Jeong had not seen her brother for two years.

The siblings were only fourteen and eleven when the Korean War had begun. In the northern part of Korea, the Jeongs had been farmers, growing all their own food, and selling to local businesses. When the war had started, the Jeong family had not wanted to leave their farm. They stayed as long as they could, grasping onto that last bit of hope that maybe the war would end soon. However, staying longer only made the escape harder. Soon the communists began to advance further, and gain more power. The family knew they needed to get out fast, before it was too late.

It was the dead of a harsh, Korean winter, when the family packed only what they could carry. The Jeongs tried to pack all that was dear to them. Hae-in packed all the clothes she could carry, her jewelry, photos, and recipes. Hae-il, their mother, Yong-Ho, their father, their uncle and two cousins slung their luggage over their backs. The family waited until nightfall in hopes that the crowds would thin out and the chance of getting caught by communist soldiers would diminish. As the air became more frigid and the sky became darker, Hae-in's father laid out the plan. The family was to split up in case one group got caught. The women and girls were to go on a safer route, while the men and boys were to go on the more dangerous one. After the escape they were to meet in a town, Haenam-eup, on the southern tip of Korea.

The family silently agreed. The Jeong cousins and uncles and mothers and fathers embraced each other. Chills shot down their spines. Full of fear, doubt, but with overwhelming hope, the family began the treacherous hike. Hae-in's mother walked with false confidence, though the act fooled the kids. Hae-in trailed behind her mother and her two girl cousins, trying to trudge quietly in the snow. Hae-in wondered what her brother, father, and uncle were doing. She thought of all the fun they could have when they were reunited again, fantasizing about the overwhelming relief that would flood her. The swarm of infinite thoughts was almost enough to distract her from the frozen air nipping at her nose, piercing her cheeks.

As the women advanced in their journey, more and more families joined them in their quest to escape south. Some were carrying children on their backs, others pushing wagons of belongings, some with nothing but the clothes on their backs. Hae-in recognized a girl from her town, the richest girl she knew. The girl wore a ruby red coat. Hae-in recalled how the girl would get piggyback rides to school everyday. She found humor in the fact that she and the rich girl were now both walking the same path, sharing the same hopes. Hae-in faintly smiled to herself, but the smile was quickly extinguished by the shouts of communist soldiers.

"Run!"

Hae-in's mother snatched her arm, zipping and weaving through the frenzy of people. The cousins followed close behind. Hae-in could hear the shouts of the soldiers from behind her. She heard the crack of their rifles into people's skulls. Hae-in dared to glance back for a moment. The faint moonlight outlined a soldier beating a girl, dressed in a ruby red coat, with the back of his rifle. Hae-in willed her legs to run faster, flying through the red landscape. The frightened souls ran and ran until they were far enough away.

이

The family of women and girls trekked on and on for weeks. They caught rides on the back of rice-hauling trucks, packed with other disheveled families. They rummaged through the passing villages, the trash for their next meals, ate whatever they could. At last they made it to their destination, to Haenam-eup. The town was bursting at the seams with more and more people fleeing to the south. The women and girls were overjoyed to have finally made it to their journey's end.

They searched the town high and low, combing through the masses of darkly clothed zombies. They searched for the men and boys of their family. They searched for hours and then days and then months. They waited for the moment when they would see the faces of those they loved. They waited for the day when all the worry would fall from their shoulders. They waited for the day when the gaping hole would be filled. They waited. Eventually, the women of the family began to settle in the southern town, trying to keep hope alive.

A year and a half later, the war finally ended. A sigh of relief swept over the country, but only for a moment. The country was in shambles, so many families shattered by death and separation. Now the border was set in stone.

Hae-in, her mother, and her two girl cousins began their new life in the new town. Her mother got a job at a factory, making cups. Hae-in and her cousins started attending school. The team of girls worked any and all odd jobs. After a few months of saving, they finally had enough money to move into a single house in town, one they shared with another family. Prior to that they simply slept in whatever shelter they could find. They spent sleepless nights wondering if and where and when they were ever going to see their brothers and fathers and uncles again.

삼

Every day, someone would make a trip down to the post office in town in hopes for a sign of a possible reunification. The woman and girls would alternate turns. Today was Thursday. That meant it was Hae-in's turn to check for lost hope. Hae-in felt the same flutter in her stomach as she swung the door to the establishment, a little snow falling on the top of her head. The door jingle-jangled, adding to the little sparkle at the bottom of Hae-in's tummy. Hae-in's eyes whizzed across the rows of wooden cubbies mounted against the walls. The scent of worn paper and polished wood warmed her senses. She briefly smiled at Joon-Soo, the owner of the post office, as she half-walked, half-skipped over to the countertop. Hae-in tried to stifle her hopes, to stay realistic, but her hopes sailed high above her control. Hae-in bowed to Joon-Soo, as Joon-Soo was Hae-in's elder.

Before Hae-in knew it, words flew out of her mouth. "Is there any mail for me or my mother?" Hae-in optimistically asked.

"Yes, today there is mail for you," Joon-Soo calmly explained as he handed Hae-in a letter.

Hae-in froze with excitement. She felt little tingles scurry down her veins to the tips of her fingers. Her fingers, more nimble than ever, more focused than ever, slid under the flap of the envelope to open the surprise package. Hae-in slid out the paper, trying to calm the shakiness of her breath and body. She unfolded the paper. Hae-in's eyes zipped across, trying to absorb all the words at once.

Dear Family,

We are alive. We will reach Haenam-eup on the eve of the new year. Look for us

at the old post office. Love and hope.

Signed, Yong-Ho

All of Hae-in's senses went blank, completely consumed by the paralyzing hope, excitement and fear. In her mind she painted a picture. She saw her mother, her cousins and herself waiting outside the post office. She saw the image come into fruition, when she would see her brother again, when she would see her father and uncle again. That moment when they would embrace, and all their worries would slip off their shoulders.

She stood there frozen in time, in front of the counter, in the post office. Time finally caught up with her and pushed her legs from under her. Hae-in fell to the wooden floor for just a moment before springing back up, letter in hand. Hae-in blurted a quick thank you to Joon-Soo before bolting out the door to tell her mother and cousins of the newly received fortune. She zig-zagged through the streets, kicking up snow as she ran. The wind whipped her face as she turned the corner catching sight of her house. She pounded on the door, pleading for her mother to answer. Hae-in's mother answered, demanding to know what all of the ruckus was about. Hae-in waved the letter around like a mad woman making new crinkles in the fresh paper. Hae-in squealed with excitement, showing her mother the letter.

Her mother, overjoyed, melted to the floor while Hae-in went to deliver the news to her cousins. The family rejoiced. The girls spent the night preparing all the food they had in the kitchen, and planned to get more the following morning. Tomorrow was Seollal, Korean New Year. It was Korean tradition to have Ddeokguk (Korean soup) during the turn of the new year. The girls decided that spending their hard-earned money on this meal was well worth it. No one got much sleep that night.

The second the sun rays started peeking through the sheer curtains that lined the windows, the girls were up. Hae-in rushed to the market to pick up ddeok (rice cakes) for the soup while Hae-in's mother and cousins prepared banchun (Korean side dishes), including bindae-tteok (Korean scallion pancakes), kongnamul muchim (bean sprouts), kimchi, pickled cucumbers, and mandu (Korea dumplings). When Hae-in arrived back home, ddeok in hand, the house smelled of spices, seasoning, warm broth and all good things. The girls peered over the bubbling pot of soup watching the steam escape and fog the kitchen window. In the steam they drew pictures of the family back together again, imagining what it would be like. They watched as the broth gleamed in the morning light. Their eyes gleamed back, full of hope.

사

The clan of girls trudged through the snow in silence. Hae-in's mother carried the pot of soup, careful not to spill any. Hae-in and her cousins carried the banchun. The four women and girls were too full of excitement and nerves to speak. The girls sat in the snow outside the post office and waited. Hae-in ran her gloved fingers through the snow, creating little tracks and designs. Hae-in's mother studied all the faces passing by, to be sure that she wasn't missing her husband, son, or brother-in-law. Hae-in's mother studied the tired faces of the people passing and wondered if her husband's would be the same. Would his face share the same exhausted veil that the war had given everyone? She stared intently at an older man, next a young woman and her child, then to a middle-aged man who was aching familiar. His features matched those of her husband. Putting the soup down, she flew towards him, racing through the freshly fallen snow. She recognized

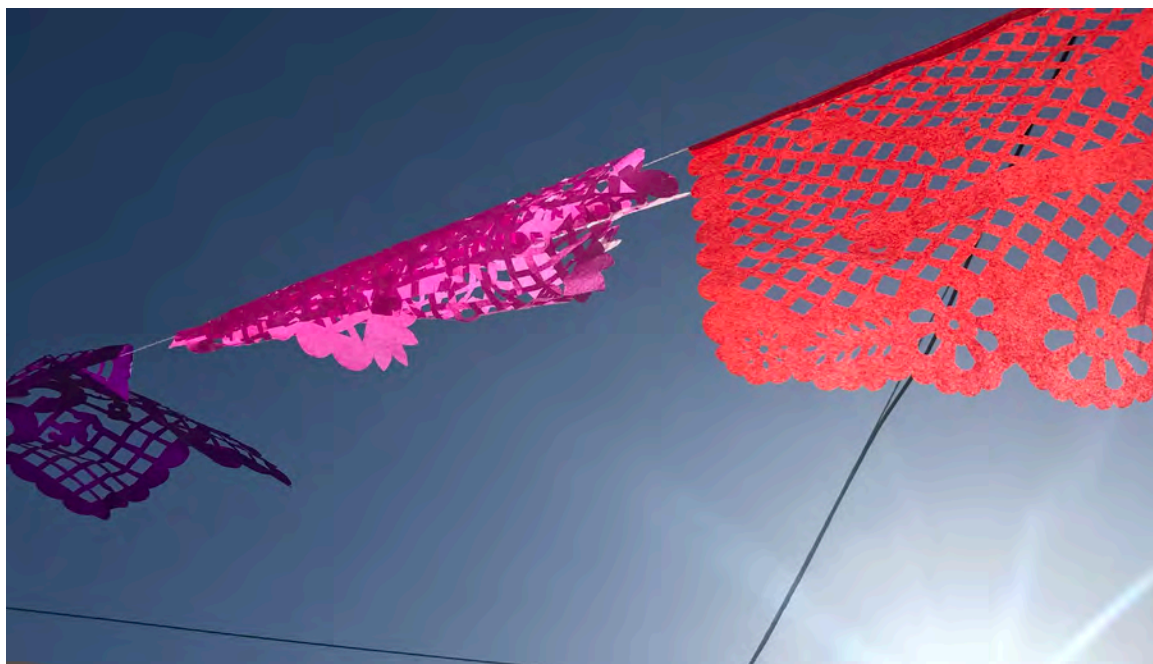
the face of her son, Hae-il, and her brother-in-law. She cried, she laughed, she almost passed out. She embraced them with every cell in her body. She told them how much she loved them.

Hae-in and her cousins ran towards her family. The rush of wind in her face, the love in her heart, pushed her towards them. She squeezed them and never wanted to let go. Her father held her in his arms. Hae-in inhaled his presence. Muffled in his embrace, it was the first time since the war had started that she had felt truly whole and eternally safe. There was no longer anything to wish for. The stars had showered her with good fortune. At last Hae-in released her father to join her brother, Hae-il.

Hae-in traced the lines and contours of Hae-il's face, her mind moving quicker than her eyes could. She traced the lines of his broad nose, his heart-shaped lips, noting how his face had matured, noting the newly formed carving of granite cheekbones, the new and old shadows of his face. She traced his eyes. She simultaneously recognized the same deep brown pools of honey that filled the kind eyes. The same eyes that had given her comfort, made her laugh until her stomach ached, the same eyes that meant she was home. She held onto him, remembering what it felt like to be in his arms again, what it felt like to be a family.

오

The family, still full of tears, still shaky from the overflow of passion, began to feast on the steaming dumplings, flavorful banchun, and warm soup. They sat in the snow outside the post office, the awning protecting them from the falling flakes. Hae-in glanced behind her, into the post office, to notice Joon-Soo alone. She saw how he wishfully watched her family devour the dinner. Hae-in suggested that they move the party inside to share the New Year's feast with Joon-Soo. The family packed up the food once more, and moved inside to offer Joon-Soo a seat at their imaginary table. They insisted he join them. He willingly obliged. The newly reunited kindred laughed and conversed, their minds, souls, and bellies full.



Pete Barraza





Kaelen Song

90291

By Tupelo Sullivan

My hair flies high when I bike the scuffed block,
as the yellow “Gold’s Gym” logo beams down.
Outside the bros down protein shakes and talk
about the newest CrossFit shoes in town.
Just out of sight a different scene zooms in:
sidewalk tents of darkness and lost hope.
I jolt my head around and bear the sin
of leather-skinned faces who cannot cope.
Though I am free from facing their befall,
with every weight I heave I feel ashamed.
Two worlds divided only by a wall.
I oil the system, so should I be blamed?
The thought escapes as I wipe off my head,
and trudge to Gjusta where I buy warm bread.





Pete Barraza



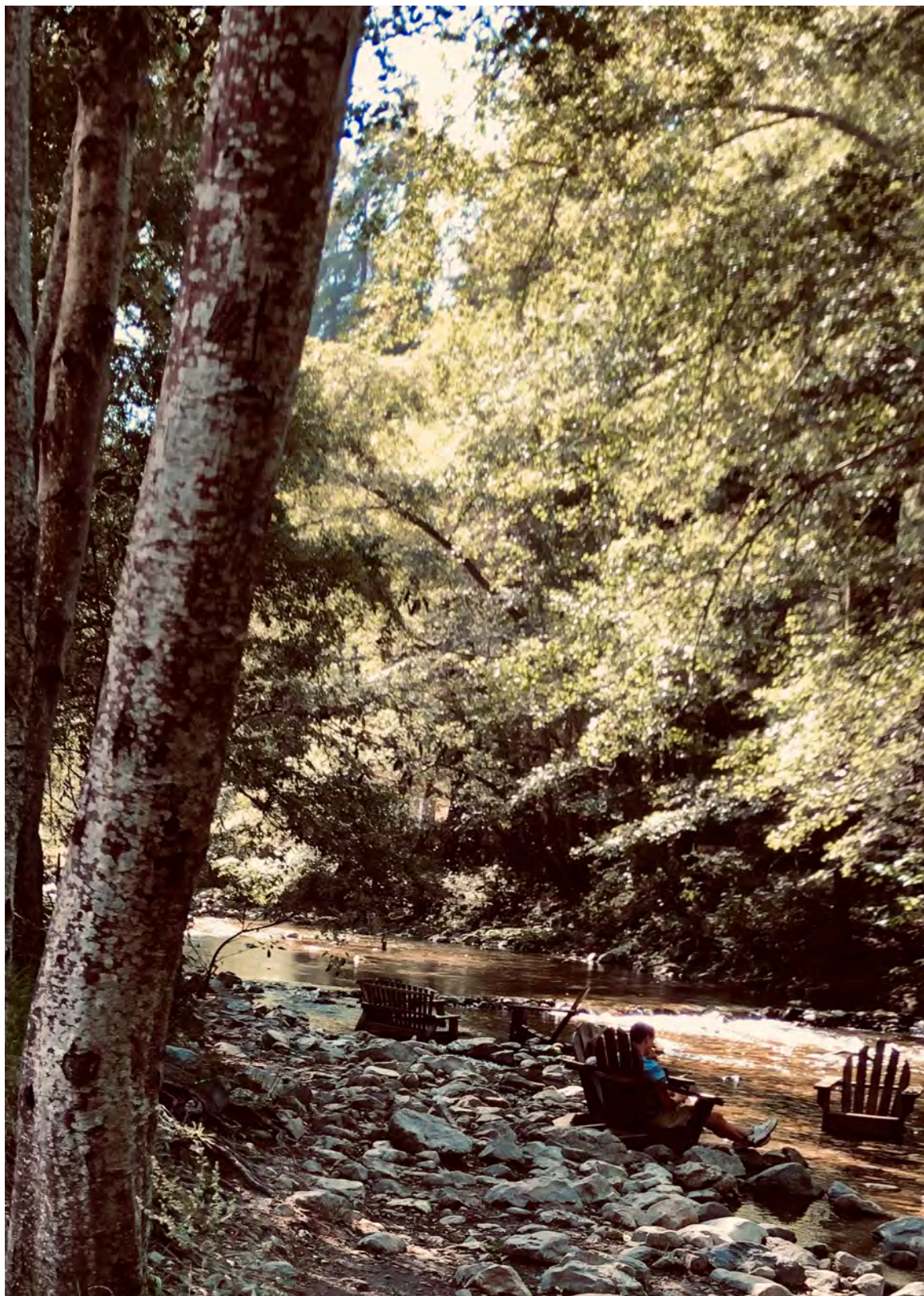
Chloe Forssell

Somewhere In-between

*“It is the hour of pearl — the interval between day and night
when time stops and examines itself.”*

- John Steinbeck, Cannery Row





Kyle Walker





Kyle Walker

Malleable Metropolis

By Bria Stocker

A city so absorbed in itself
Won't bring you a welcome gift.
It won't give you directions to a better life.
There would probably be too much traffic anyway.

It won't hold the door for you,
Though your arms are full.
And it seldom remembers your birthday.

But, like how a wet clump of clay,
Content on where it lays
Demands a sturdy hand
To make a work of art,

Los Angeles
Is what you will it to be.

You can find the best beaches
To fill pockets
With hand-picked seashells.

Discover hidden music festivals
Where the amps are never turned off,
And the artist is always changing.

Or create the perfect backdrop
For the next hit reality TV show.

The city that gives you nothing
But promises everything.
And all that's required
Is a sure and persuasive mold.





Izzy Lewit

Angels in the Pages

By Max Forssell

The city of Los Angeles is a very unique place. It's a cultural hub where people of all different races, religions, ideologies, and economic classes come together in search of a common goal: success and prosperity. Whether they have dreams of achieving fame and riches in Hollywood or seek ownership of a Fortune 500 company downtown, they all come to the same city. This blend of people from all different nations and backgrounds creates a distinct cultural identity that can be found nowhere else. It wasn't until I started researching the history of LA and the nuanced intricacies of the various communities within it through a literary lens, however, that the real beauty became clear. Seeing the ideals and themes that LA represents told again and again in new ways caused me to search for these hidden messages within California literature, more specifically in the works of John Steinbeck, esteemed twentieth century author native to California.

Being one of the most diverse areas in the world, LA has a plethora of cultural and ethnic influences that shape it into the city it is today, allowing diversity to be one of the more defining characteristics of the bustling community. I remember walking the streets of Los Angeles as I grew up, inhaling the contrasting smells of hot Chinese food and fresh baked Naan. Strolling around the city, I met people from all different communities and walks of life, and found wisdom in even the most unlikely of places. In LA, everybody has an interesting story and has lessons to teach regardless of who they are or where they come from. This concept is inherent within *East of Eden*, a novel by John Steinbeck about two families living in the Salinas Valley. *East of Eden* is rich with universal wisdom and insights that are pertinent to all humans around the globe. The majority of this wisdom comes through Lee, a first-generation Chinese-American who works as a cook for Adam Trask, a wealthy white landowner in the valley. Lee and Adam frequently discuss many aspects of the human condition, and Lee, being one of the most educated and well-read characters, consistently provides interesting and insightful perspectives. This is a substantial role reversal, coming from a time when white men were commonly seen as the educated and intelligent class of society. By making the voice of wisdom in the novel a first-generation Chinese-American, Steinbeck simultaneously challenges the preconceived notions readers may have about foreigners and emphasizes the value and importance in having a diverse society. This notion is epitomized by Los Angeles, a city in which diversity is ideally embraced and people of all nationalities share ideas and beliefs with others.

All these cultures and nationalities, however, are just pieces of the puzzle. Individually, they each represent a small part of the city, a neighborhood perhaps, or a district. Only when combined together do they make Los Angeles something authentically beautiful. LA is the perfect example of a place where the whole is truly greater than the sum of its parts. This idea of one big community made up of smaller ecosystems and individuals is also explored in Steinbeck's *Cannery Row*, a book about a coastal avenue and the intricate, intertwining lives of people that live there. Steinbeck cleverly compares the town to a tide pool, where many smaller organisms live independently yet rely on each other entirely for survival. Just as algae and coral rely on starfish to hunt their predators, Mack and the boys, a group of homeless friends on the Row, rely on Lee Chong, the local grocer, to provide them with credit for food and drink. On the surface it may seem like each group or person operates individually, but occasionally, when looked at through a wider lens, everything comes together and functions as one. When an influenza outbreak occurs on Cannery

Row the whole town takes action. Doc, a marine biologist, “found himself running from shanty to shanty taking temperatures, giving physics, borrowing and delivering blankets and even taking food from house to house.” Dora, the owner of a brothel called the Bear Flag, “went back to the Bear Flag and organized it for service.” The girls that worked there “went in shifts to sit with the families, and they carried pots of soup when they went.” Everybody in the community rallied together when it was in danger and acted in unison, doing everything they could to minimize the damage caused by the virus. Los Angeles is real-life embodiment of this fictional community. To an outsider, LA may seem like a mismatched mess of disharmonious cultures and enclaves, but when viewed as a whole, it all comes together as one coherent unit, even with its jagged edges.

Fundamentally, Los Angeles is an epicenter for hope and ambition. This idea of shaping your own destiny is an incredibly prevalent theme in *East of Eden*, where Cal Trask, for example, struggles with an internal battle between good and evil. He believes that because his mother is a criminal, he has inherited traits that will prevent him from ever truly doing the right thing. When Adam - Cal’s father - discusses these concerns with Lee, Lee references the biblical story of Cain and Abel. He recounts the story, and describes how at the end God proclaims that “thou mayest rule over sin.” He argues that the phrasing “thou mayest” is important because it implies that there is a choice. This is not a commandment or a promise from God, he says, but rather an opportunity. This is the ideal that LA represents, the ability to take your destiny into your own hand. This modern American Dream is one of resolve, hope, and ambition, traits which are all deeply embedded in *Of Mice and Men*, a novella by Steinbeck about two migrant workers working on a ranch in Soledad, California. The protagonists George and Lennie dream of living “offa the fatta the lan” and having their “own place where we belong.” Curley, the son of the ranch boss, dreams of being respected and feared as a landowner, not looked down upon because he’s small. His wife, whose name we never learn, dreams of making it big as a movie star in Hollywood. The American Dream is clearly a major theme in *Of Mice and Men*; however, it’s not always painted in a positive light. Steinbeck doesn’t just weave dreams and aspirations into his story. He also shows how difficult they are to achieve and how frequently they fail. George and Lennie’s dream ultimately gets crushed by an unfortunate series of events. Curley ultimately is unable to live up to the expectations of his father, and Curley’s wife dies on the ranch without ever seeing the front of a film camera. People may have big dreams, Steinbeck argues, but ultimately very few will ever achieve true success and most of these dreams will remain unfulfilled. This darker truth to the American Dream is apparent in Los Angeles if you simply venture downtown into the Skid Row district of the city. Skid Row is home to one of the largest stable homeless populations in the world and is lined with back-to-back tents and encampments in which people sleep. Looking at a city with such a large homeless population, it becomes clear that these values of ambition and desire don’t always end well for those that hold them.

Being a city of opportunities, naturally Los Angeles perpetuates a very competitive environment. Actors fight tooth and nail in Hollywood to get the next big job, often living paycheck to paycheck and executives work endless hours to beat out their competitors. This climate can create a very consumerist and wealth-driven society at times, something that Steinbeck doesn’t hesitate to critique in *Cannery Row*. Throughout the novel, the happiest and most fulfilled characters are consistently those with the least amount of wealth, while the least happy are those that would traditionally be considered more successful. Mack and the boys, despite being homeless and living almost entirely off of credit, are described as people who “know everything that has ever happened in the world and possibly everything that ever will happen. In a time when people tear themselves to pieces with ambition and nervousness and covetousness, they are relaxed.” Doc, one of the more financially stable characters in the novel, is described as “...a lonely and a set-

apart man [...] In a group, Doc seemed always alone.” His melancholy is very apparent throughout the novel and serves as a testament to Steinbeck’s belief that money can’t buy happiness or friendship. By portraying the characters of *Cannery Row* in this way, Steinbeck argues that the pursuit of wealth and material possessions will almost always lead to loneliness and dissatisfaction in one’s life, a sentiment supported by the discontent within much of the Los Angeles population. Everybody has ambition, but very few actually end up on top. This drastic wealth inequality could be contributing to the revival of Eastern Philosophy within many LA communities. People have finally realized the unhappiness that consumerism can bring, and now trend towards a slightly more altruistic, perhaps happier, lifestyle.

It is often said that history repeats itself, a sentiment that is extremely applicable to Los Angeles. Whether it’s explosions of tech startups making it big internationally or riots eerily similar to those of 1992, we can see the cyclical nature of both the activities of the city and the ideas of those who inhabit it. By recording the lessons embedded within these cyclical patterns, Steinbeck strives to create a repository of wisdom that people can draw upon in times of necessity, allowing society to continue to evolve and grow as time passes, not remaining stagnant in the waters of the past.



Kyle Walker



Jack Kendall

Three Little Words

By Eleanor Winterer

I smile at you, the gold and green flecks in your eyes sparkling like fish scales.
I love you, you whisper
But you don't, not really.

You think you do, but that's the fragile naivety that comes with being sixteen.
In one month's time you can barely grow a beard, much less learn
My mind, my heart, my body
Know the songs that make me cry
My favorite weather.
Blustery, cold and clear, by the way
Sit in silence together without needing to fill it with empty words.

At least that's what I imagine love is.
This is infatuation, lust, a longing to be understood.
Lost in my eyes, you mistake the skip in your heartbeat as more than the animalistic coding of the human brain.
But I feel it too.

I love you too, I say
But I don't, not really.



Collective Vision

By Aidan Blain

A twisting corridor of doors unfolds
As stories speak before they go untold
Opening barriers that remained closed
Releasing fears once imposed

Mellow shadows rest in the yellow glare as
Vague images dance without a thought to spare
Laughter sparkles and prances across the sky while
Tears weep to vacant hearts with no reply

Plane glass magnifies the hope of a fire burning
Drapes disguise the misfortune of a soul yearning
Dreaming of something more than what has been prescribed
Longing for feelings only movies could bring alive

Weighing my interpretation of the lives I see,
My glimpse inside steals secrets that were free
Imagination extends as far as thoughts can reach
Creating a vision where stories are shared by each



Ian Richardson

Symphony No. Education

By Yvonne Liu

We came to America for you, to give you better education. My parents religiously echoed this as they pronounced e-du-cation in their distinctive Chinese-English accent. This would always follow a digression about how fortunate I am to be “Made” in America.

My parents handed me the world, literally. They travelled from China to France to Canada in hopes of finding me a place to grow up. When my mother’s swelling belly was due, there I was, born in Vancouver, Canada with my father living 150 miles away. However, the day my mother opened that acceptance letter (oh the irony) in a tiny snowed-down apartment, my father no longer needed to drive back-and-forth across the international boundary. This congratulatory letter informed us of being randomly selected to stay in the U.S. as permanent residents. I can only remember the bold “Welcome to the United States.” How patriotic. My mother always tells it the best: As I was swooped up from my high chair, she grasped me tightly while on the phone with my father, exclaiming, “We’re Americans now! It completed our “Star-Spangled Banner” chorus as we harmonized in our distinctive English-Chinese accents.

We got into the country, but now carried the weight of finding stability in this foreign land of the free. But this isn’t the cliché immigrant autobiography my mother forbade me to write. It’s a story of gratitude. I’m grateful for my parents, leading me to join the rhythm of American education. After awing the shiny violins of the American, pig-tailed schoolgirls, my parents dropped me off at my first Santa Monica Youth Orchestra (SMYO) rehearsal. Over time, these members came to be family, offering me stability, a home I finally felt grounded to. Through eight nurturing years, beginning as a toothy-elementary violinist timidly stepping through the rehearsal doors I could barely push open, I’ve grown. Now as a SMYO faculty member, I reconcile the familiar distance between teacher and student. This beautifully intricate connection is so powerful that it has composed my symphony for education.

Little did my immigrant parents understand the irony for their disapproval of my career choice. I’m not pursuing a well-respected “Asian” profession, but it was them that so desperately tried to transition me into American culture. An educationist isn’t a doctor, so it’s difficult to convince them that I still appreciate their sacrifices. It was a turning point when they realized that my American Dream was different from theirs.

People come to Los Angeles for their dreams, but mine was envisioned in the multiculturalism of this metropolis. It homes angels from all socio-economic backgrounds, similar to the ones that SMYO unites to complete its symphony. Their notion of equal education counteracts Jonathan Kozol’s theory about the injustice that arises when society neglects its vulnerable members. Every Sunday, I witness the integrity my students grasp because of this diverse student body.

I’m majoring in education as a tribute to my parents because I took for granted the opportunity I received at their hands. *We came to America for you, to give you better education.*

As I stand on the podium, I lift my arms to conduct. But what about the others, deaf of the education I was gifted? As someone who is grappling with the meaning of education, I recognize the absolute hypocrisy within our nation. The equality I was so patriotically drawn to is crumbling at the forefront of our education system. This defines the Kozolian nightmares as reality. All children should have a “better education” to envision their own American Dream, to write their own music. Thank you, as I bow to my parents and the Santa Monica Youth Orchestra for composing this Symphony for Education.

This is the story of a Chinese, French, Canadian, American little girl whose parents’ complete disapproval commenced from complete gratitude.

Snapshots

By Thatcher Lee

The wishing wind, swept away,
By the acrid smell of burning wood that slithers in and settles into place.
A moribund monarch butterfly flutters,
Its wings singed and colored by the flames.
Faltering, fluttering, falling.
It drifts down, caressed by the wind, as the sycamore trees wail,
Mourning the ashes of the fallen.
Unanswered by the skies,
Not a drop to spare.

Old Town movie backdrops of the American West,
A mirage for the young and the desperate seeking an oasis.
A chorus of sirens chant the chorale of calamity,
Racing through the harrowing streets illuminated by the dim lamplight.
Desolate pavements painted with grime,
Offer the last destination of solace to the ambling wanderers that have been led astray.

The sun rises, casting a glow onto the waking city,
Coffee shops rumble a morning greeting to the bleary-eyed white collars.
The midnight wanderers fade into the tunnels,
Their silent cries deaf to the frigid metal of the cars zooming past on the 405.

The city's arteries are filled and flowing,
But its eyes are closed, its breathing hushed.
The city's mind is whirling,
But so many slumber through their days, never peering past their windows.



Chloe Forssell





Jack Kendall



The Dis-located Imagination

By Thomas Gammarino

I've been living in exile for forty-two years now, about half of them away from home.

If that's as good a line as I think, it's because, as Lao Tzu has it, "The truest sayings are always paradoxical." This one's not really a paradox, of course, and the idea that one might be an exile in their own home probably requires little explanation in a literary journal. But let me try to explain anyway.

I grew up in suburban Philadelphia, left at twenty, and have since lived in Japan; Queens, New York; and, for the past fourteen years, Honolulu County. To be sure, I can't really call any of these displacements "exile"—I was drawn to these places for various reasons and found opportunities to live and work in them. The part that bears some family resemblance to exile, though, is less to do with the pull-toward than the push-away.

Recently I was reading Steve Almond's appreciation of Kurt Vonnegut, my first-ever favorite writer, when I found myself nodding at the following passage: "Vonnegut even seemed to intuit the emotional crises of my life: that I felt exiled by my family, simultaneously disgusted and humiliated by the world of men, desperate for human comfort. He [Vonnegut] characterized writers as people "who feel somehow marginal, somehow slightly off balance, all the time."

While I agree with Vonnegut, a chicken-and-egg problem rears its head. Vonnegut says writers feel marginal; I wonder if it isn't more often the other way around: marginalized people, freaks and misfits of all stripes, are drawn to writing, the seductions of which are legion but can be roughly divided into what I'll call the therapeutic and the escapist. On the one hand, writers work through their problems—loneliness, depression, rage—on the page, however vicariously or symbolically, sentence by sentence. At the same time, writing taps into our utopian capacity, and our Platonic, beauty-seeking one, allowing us to design and inhabit worlds more suited to our individual temperaments than is the one we are met with. Almond has something to say about this too: Vonnegut, he writes, wanted us to understand that "Despair is a form of hope. It is an acknowledgment of the distance between ourselves and our appointed happiness."

So what was so despairing about the suburban Philadelphia home I grew up in? Objectively nothing. We were solidly middle class, back in the days when that was more of a thing. I'm Italian on my father's side and Irish on my mother's, so white, more or less. I'm heterosexual. I'm not a refugee. I haven't sought asylum. I'm not "banned." So why was it so clear to me that, as soon as I was able, I needed to leave?

Maybe it was the Pennsylvanucky politics of my town. Or—and this sounds elitist, but so be it—maybe it was the relatively anti-intellectual climate; I was, after all, the first male in my family to finish high school, let alone college or graduate school. Maybe it was to distance myself from that contingent of my family that equates success with money such that I was—and am—on a terribly disappointing path. Maybe it was the Catholicism, which, after twelve years of Catholic schooling, I'd decided was 9/10 sanctimonious bullshit. Maybe it was just because of the cruddy winter weather, I don't know, but when, having been away, I come home, as I did a few years back, on sabbatical—and, paradoxically, I'm still in the habit of calling Philly "home"—I have to admit it's largely the grit and the chill and the unpretentiousness I now embrace, having in some way missed it. And I love my family deeply, despite our differences. Still, when I beheld all the Trump signs that fall, and when, the day after Christmas, I got in a heated debate with my uncle, who doesn't believe in climate change or evolution, I experienced those get-me-out-of-here willies all over again.

My fundamental problem was simply—and I suspect it's one many writers can relate to—that

I emerged from the womb sensitive and artsy into a hardscrabble, blue-collar world where such qualities were something of an embarrassment. If you can imagine Stephen Daedalus being raised by the Sopranos, you'll catch my drift. I spent my adolescence doing tricks on my bike in parking lots and playing guitar in my room, sometimes with others who didn't like football or cars as much as they were supposed to, but usually alone. These passions of mine, I knew, were very cool, just not around where I lived. And so eventually, when I was old enough to move away, I did—first to study in France, that old expatriate mecca, then to live in Japan, where I found every day an exercise in defamiliarization, and then to New York—which is the US, yes, though I think I understand what Charlotte Perkins Gilman meant when she called it “that unnatural city where everyone is an exile, none more so than the American,” and finally to Hawai‘i, where I’ve been living these past fourteen years, and which exists in the quantum superposition of being both the US and not.

I’ve now mostly aged out of my wanderlust, and have come to accept that, as Tony Soprano himself once put it, “There’s no geographical solution to an emotional problem.” I love living in Hawai‘i, and in my more self-absorbed moments, its flickering, liminal status feels like an objective correlative to my own, but always I’m hounded by that marginal, off-balance feeling Vonnegut spoke of, and a kind of constant, low-level guilt too, that I fell so far from the tree. I don’t know, maybe exile is simply an occupational hazard. As the great fiction writer James Salter once put it, “a writer is an exile, an outsider, always reporting on things, and it is part of his life to keep on the move.”

These days, my movements are restricted mainly to the page—the read one and the written one. My favorite writers for years were those arch-exiles James Joyce and Vladimir Nabokov, though in recent years I find myself drawn primarily to science fiction, which has always specialized in those inevitable *métiers* of the exile, estrangement and alienation. At no point did I ever decide that exile was going to be my grand overarching theme, and yet there it is on virtually every page I’ve ever written. At the same time, the number 243 pops up in every one of my books at least once. That number, my insider Easter egg, is the street address of the home I grew up in, and there it is in all these works about exile and alienation, like the still point around which my centrifugal life has turned.

One of my very favorite writers, Ursula Le Guin, once wrote that “True pilgrimage consists in coming home”—another gnostic paradox I ought to like. I can’t pretend to understand what she meant by it exactly, nor do I imagine it feels true to more bona fide exiles than I’ll ever be. It does make me wonder what we mean when we say “home,” though. Is home just a bit of property? A community of people? A culture? Can language be our home? If so, it’s a curious one, having been borrowed from others. But then what isn’t borrowed? Our bodies are made of recycled elements, after all. Indeed, without exception, everything around and inside of us is in flux. Science fiction writer George Alec Effinger has a story called “One,” in which this sanguine, exobiologist couple, armed with the Drake Equation predicting lots and lots of life out there, goes spacefaring in search of other worlds. After decades of fruitless searching and the death of his cat and his wife, the husband’s prospects are looking grim. But then at the very end of the story comes this satori moment, this mystical epiphany, when he realizes, “It made no difference at all where [he] was headed, what stars he would visit: wherever he went, he understood at last, he was going home.”

The truth is, that climax doesn’t work very well in the context of the story—it feels unearned—but I do wonder if maybe there’s a kernel of poetic truth in it? Like maybe, if we truly understood and accepted what we are—star stuff and all that—we’d know that the specter of exile simply doesn’t exist in any ultimate sense. Wherever we go, there we are—and like it or not, we’re going together.

Freeways

By Nathan Wetmore

The Ten (I-10), the Four-O-Five (I-405), to the One-O-One (US 101),
And every once in awhile the One-Ten (I-110)
East to West, North to South, and slightly more North and slightly less South.

Some say walking is therapeutic but I'm far too lazy for that.
Although I do think I somewhat understand what those asphalt travelers mean.
When I'm cruising down one of the aforementioned freeways,
windows down, I wish, but movies lie—freeways are loud.

I listen to whatever I need at the time,
the radio when I'm feeling spontaneous,
RHCP or Radiohead when I'm a little down and need something familiar,
or podcasts when I feel the need to be “productive.”

While I'm often disillusioned that there are so many parts of LA I've never explored,
there are countless others I've driven by without stopping.
All I catch is a series of glimpses, signs
towering over the city and in the distance beyond the freeway's walls.

So many communities under the umbrella of “LA.”
My hometown that I will be associated with for the rest of my life,
yet my only interaction is taking my eyes off the road for a moment,
just for a glance as I continue searching for home.



Shifting Sight

By Leo Gilman

They all left last night,
But I don't know what they were.
Outside nothing has changed,
The trees are still green,
The sky a robin blue,
But it might as well be blank,
And the trees could be bare.
I know my window view from heart,
But I can no longer see trees;
Every time I look its something else,
Not the bell seeds,
Not the spear buds,
Not the rope twigs.
I wish for what's not there,
The marbled warblers and flitting wrens,
And don't see the rest.
I look forward to freedom,
Still a world away,
But I let my life go right on by.
But maybe I'm just crazy,
And all this thinking
is just another way to avoid my work.

Songs of Steinbeck

By Jersey Sullivan

Masterful works of art, no matter the genre, capture the complexity of humanity. Exceptional paintings, emotional choreography, riveting theatre, beautiful music, and powerful writing all have the capacity to truly move the hearts and minds of audiences. John Steinbeck, the great American novelist, is widely accepted to be someone that created art of this stature. His novel, *Cannery Row*, is set in Monterey, California during the Great Depression. Though this book was published in 1945, the writing is timeless to the extent that it parallels several musical compositions written over 50 years later. Throughout the story, the musicality of Steinbeck's language echoes contemporary songwriting and conveys the wide range of human experience found on a working class street surrounded by sardine canneries on the coast of Central California.

“Weird Fishes/Arpeggi” Radiohead

Doc is to most characters the heart and soul of Cannery Row, as he is always very thoughtful and sympathetic and everyone considers him a good friend. However, he constantly feels alone and empty inside, and chooses to fill the void with alcohol and women (and Gregorian records on his phonograph). Mack notices this and realizes that “even in the dear close contact of a girl” Doc would be lonely. The music of Radiohead’s “Weird Fishes/Arpeggi” reflects his feelings of desolation even with the company of a woman or a quart of beer. Singer Thom Yorke writes: “In the deepest oceans / In the bottom of the sea / Your eyes / They turn me / Why should I stay here?” Yorke’s words mimic Doc’s experience of falling into a rut of isolation and depression, but seeing the temptation of a woman to pull him out. The instrumentals underscore these words of slight desperation with soft but persistent drums and building melodic guitar harmonies that seem to inquire about the possibility of a meaningful relationship. But Yorke sings: “Turn me on to phantoms / I follow to the edge of the earth / And fall off.” There is no love; there is only eagerness to feel something for once. As the instrumental reaches its climax and the listener feels completely swallowed by the array of harmonies, everything is cut off and replaced by an atmospheric synthesizer as Yorke sings, “I get eaten by the worms / And weird fishes.” Doc accepts that the relationship does not and could never mean anything, and falls back into the depths of depression and loneliness. The song comes to a conclusion with a somber instrumental outro, and Doc puts another Gregorian record on his phonograph to dull the pain.

“All the Same”

Deerhunter

Mack and the boys, as described by Steinbeck himself, are “the Beauties, the Virtues, the Graces” of Cannery Row. They live day-by-day in an old run-down fish meal shack, laughing together and drinking from a jug filled with a strong concoction of every alcoholic drink you could possibly imagine (courtesy of Eddie, the part-time bartender at La Ida). To the rest of society, however, Mack and the boys are seen as “no-goods, come-to-bad-ends, blots-on-the-town, thieves, rascals, bums” who have failed at life as a whole. This does not get under the skin of this group because they realize they haven’t fallen into society’s trap, and continue to live a life of freedom. The song “All the Same” by Deerhunter reflects this life outside of society’s norms with its optimistic instrumentals and carefree, confident lyrics. Deerhunter’s frontman and songwriter Bradford Cox sings: “My home, anywhere / Expect no comforts save for air / Take it anyway / I could leave or I could stay / Wouldn’t matter much to me.” Cox’s lyrics convey that the protagonist in this song, like Mack, gave up trying to build a life of comfort so he could do whatever he wants to do. The line “Take it anyway” implies that someone like Mack couldn’t care less about living a typical or comfortable life, and he would easily sacrifice these things for freedom. Mack no longer cares about any of this either and will continue to roam wild and free until the end. The jangly guitar chords, loose tambourine, and airy keyboard accentuate the easy-going nature of the song. These instrumentals are accompanied by a driving kick and snare drum pattern which adds an element of pride, symbolizing that the protagonist is content with his lifestyle and will stick with it. Additionally, Cox sings: “My home it’s so cold / Air conditioned to the bone / Take me anywhere / I could see a light out there.” These lyrics apply to Mack in the sense that he feels that most people’s normal lives are cold and dark, but sees opportunity in having no responsibilities and being free. This is best shown by Jones when in conversation with Hazel, two of the boys belonging to Mack’s motley crew. Hazel says to him: “I bet Mack could of been president of the U.S. if he wanted.” Jones replies with, “What could he do with that if he had it? There wouldn’t be no fun in that.” Mack has the wit and the potential to do whatever he sets his mind to, but as Jones explains, he seeks much more than conventional success. He has, in fact, “[stepped] over the noose” of society and is living the life he wants to live.

“The World in Perforated Lines”

Don Caballero

Everyone on Cannery Row knows the tragic story of William, the watchman at Dora’s Bear Flag Restaurant before Alfie took over. After being socially rejected by Mack and the boys because they simply don’t like him, an avalanche of dark thoughts hits William like an anvil. It is at this moment that the music of instrumental/math rock band Don Caballero’s “The World in Perforated Lines” becomes the soundtrack of William’s

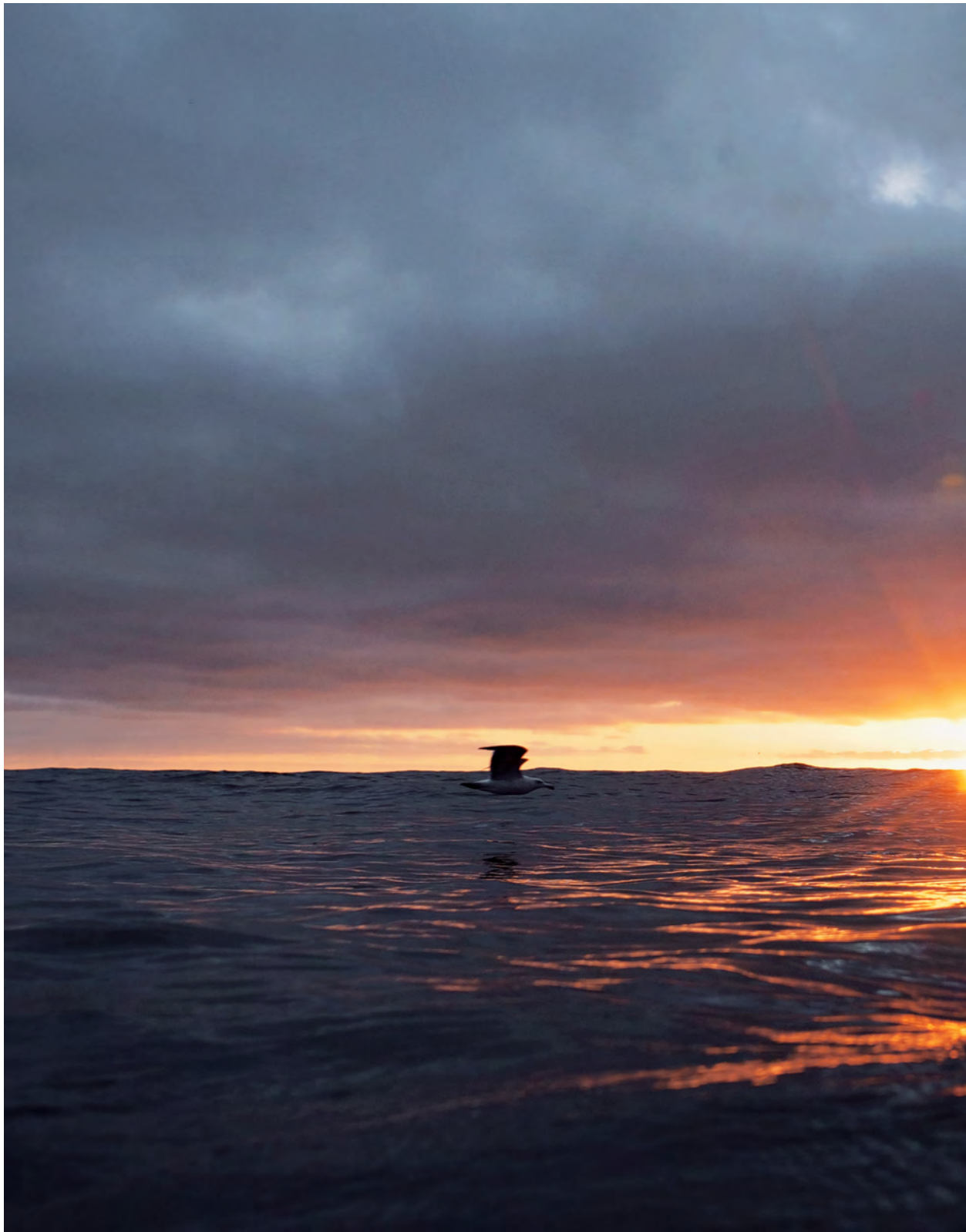
demise. The song kicks off with a few dark, off-kilter guitar chords and shortly after, the rest of the instruments match this pattern. The timing of this section is 5/4, further emphasizing the staggering melody that seems to be just hanging on by a thread. At this point, William makes his way back to the Bear Flag and tells Dora that he might “bump [himself] off” and Dora brushes him off with her reply, essentially not taking him seriously and making it explicitly clear. The unbalanced melody continues but with a dissonant guitar line in the back of the mix, indicating that William’s encounter with Dora pushes him even closer to his tipping point. He tries to talk to Eva Flanagan who works at the Bear Flag, but when he mentions he wants to kill himself, she yells at him and calls him a “no-good bastard.” While Eva is still screaming at him, William takes his last couple steps to the kitchen as “The World in Perforated Lines” builds in intensity. The drums increase in volume and switch to a double-time pattern as the guitars become more urgent and frantic; meanwhile, the distorted bass steadily outlines the ominous chord progression underneath. The Greek chef greets William in the kitchen, and William, once again, indicates that he thinks he should just end it all, and the Greek’s response is a very unwise one. “I hear like the fella talks about it don’t never do it,” he says, and William decides that he has heard enough. His hand darts to the ice pick on the stove, he looks into the Greek’s eyes, and he stabs himself directly in the heart. Before this point in the song, it almost seems like every instrument is playing its own piece independently, but now every instrument comes together. Mirroring William, all the separate thoughts of everyone who ever rejected, mocked, or doubted him play out inside his head. Like the instruments in the song, all of the people who misunderstand him finally come together with a force that propels him to end his own life. In unison, the entire band repeats the same note in an aggressive manner with as much power as it possibly can, echoing the action of the ice pick piercing William’s flesh and sliding into his heart.

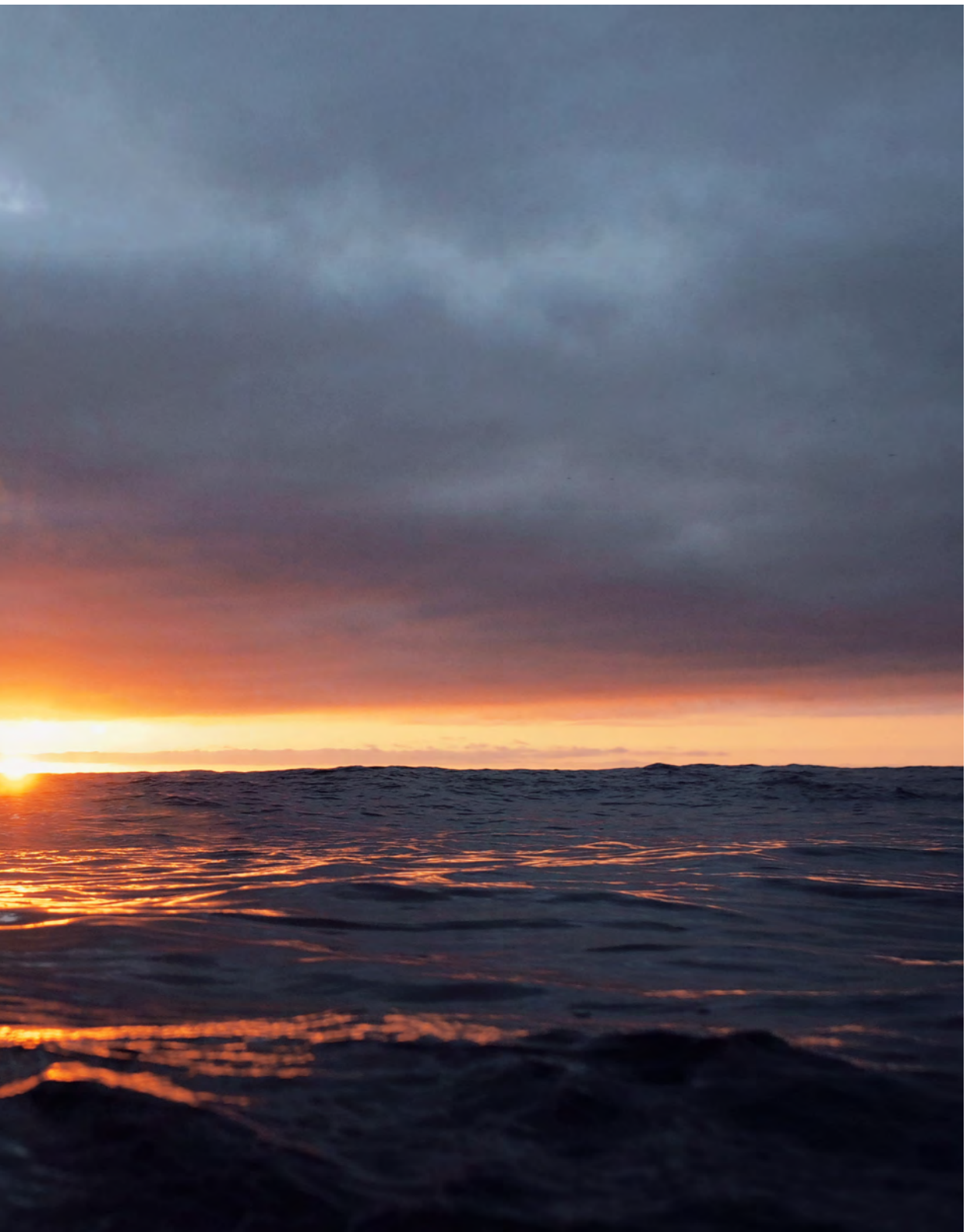
“Lazarus” David Bowie

When Doc is in the tide pools at La Jolla collecting octopi, he is completely on his own. As mentioned earlier, Mack notices that Doc always feels alone even in a group or intimate setting, but now he is in true isolation. When Doc is about to leave, he comes across a floating corpse of a girl in the water, stuck between two rocks. He is shocked by what he has just witnessed, but he also sees beauty in the girl, to the extent that “he looked at it for many minutes, and the face burned into his picture memory.” Doc also observes “comfort and rest” on the girl’s face, and seems to feel somewhat envious of the tranquility that this dead person has obtained. The music of David Bowie’s “Lazarus” from his final album *Blackstar* reflects Doc’s desire for the peace that one seems to have in death. David Bowie wrote *Blackstar* a very short time before he passed away due to a battle with cancer, and some speculate that he wrote this album knowing that he would die shortly after. The song opens with a slow, melodic guitar

line and a simple drum pattern, and then the full band joins, featuring somber saxophone harmonies and soft, serene chords played on a Fender Rhodes keyboard. Bowie begins to sing, “Look up here, I’m in heaven / I’ve got scars that can’t be seen.” These lines reflect Doc’s experience and can be interpreted as if the dead woman were talking directly to him to say that in the afterlife, the day-to-day suffering that he endures will be over. Bowie continues to sing, “Look up here man, I’m in danger / I’ve got nothing left to lose.” In these lines, Bowie seems to be accepting of his cancer and is no longer worried about death; on the contrary, he is almost welcoming the idea of it. This acceptance applies to Doc as well, because he is constantly alone and simply feels like he doesn’t want to continue living, especially when he sees the resting corpse. As each instrument becomes louder and starts to add small melodic fills in between lyrics, Bowie sings, “Oh, I’ll be free / Just like that bluebird / Oh, I’ll be free / Ain’t that just like me?” The bluebird is a prevalent symbol of freedom in art and culture, and it seems like it is being utilized in this situation to show how Bowie is looking forward to the freedom that death provides. The simplistic final rhyme in a mostly non-rhyming song symbolizes one last moment of perfection when contemplating the end of a life. Both Bowie and Ed Ricketts (though in very different ways) were known for helping many people during their lifetimes, and this final rhyme punctuates the success they hoped to achieve. The song enters the beginning of the end with an extremely powerful saxophone solo while the rest of the band matches its intensity level. When that is finished, a short ambient bass solo plays while each instrument trails off, and the song is cut off with a sharp, reverberating power chord played on the guitar. The dramatic song ending is similar to Doc’s inability to do anything about his desire to rest. He is left with “goose pimples” from the hauntingly beautiful image that he has just seen, just like one would after hearing “Lazarus.”

Like Cannery Row itself, the playlist that goes alongside it is made up of disparate elements to form an eclectic whole. Only a genius such as Steinbeck could unknowingly pull together brilliant musical minds to shed light on his work. Despair, loneliness, freedom, and isolation are ideas that never go out of style in art of any genre, and there are so many songs in the world that speak to Steinbeck’s complicated vision of humanity. It would be incredible for him to listen to the vast landscape of musical expression that came to fruition in the 50 years since his death. If he had the ability to download Spotify, which songs would he choose to provide inspiration?





Wabi Sabi

By Grace Sencio

Los Angeles is constructed on layers of duality. Man-made architecture dances with the natural landscape and amusement parks are manufactured to look like the jungle. The world famous Getty Center Museum erupts from the mountaintop. Concrete highways, packed with pedestrians and presidents, slither through the wilderness to the ocean. LA is a city that loves the mirror of the water, a place that makes movies about itself. It is mystical and mundane. It doesn't end. The "City of Angels" is perpetually transforming.

The Persian surfer eats his Mexican sushi. The Romanian plumber makes sure the toilets flush. The waste is processed, then jettisoned 22 miles deep into the Pacific – a baptism of technology and nature. Yet, the palm trees still billow at sunset, as the dolphins dive through the waves, none the wiser. Salt water is nature's relentless, glorious purifier. The Santa Monica Mountains watch silently as the day vanishes. What are they thinking? Los Angeles, resilient, imperfect, beautiful.

Tattoo parlors and the UCLA Medical Center. In & Out Burger and the fortune teller. The Cannabis Delivery Service and the casting agency. Everyone here is in this movie. Korea Town, South-Central, Beverly Hills, and Venice Beach - how does this all work? There is no place on earth like LA LA Land. The Catholic Church, the Jewish Temple, the Buddhist Shrine and Chuck Darwin all live here, where the desert meets the ocean. Priests and pornographers, scientists and skateboarders, the Swami and the soccer mom - rumor has it "variation" is an essential feature of biological populations. The hypothesis? Genetic diversity builds strength. It nurtures Los Angeles.

This weird miracle is not lost on humanity. The world is watching, fascinated. The Japanese exchange students visit the high school, immaculately dressed in matching uniforms, respectful, enthusiastic, smiling, and curious. One of the local students asks their translator if they have "diversity" at their school in Tokyo? They shake their heads "no."

Southern California is a global magnet. There are multiple forces pulling souls to The City of Angels: technology, the weather, urban amenities, stunning landscapes, and more. Let's be honest, though, one element trumps all others. How can we neglect the most sacred feature of the dream factory? Our Father who art in Hollywood, hallowed be thy name. Blasphemy? No - just satire. Ever heard of "false idols"? The City of Angels still loves Jesus - the meek shall inherit LA LA Land - perhaps not now, but in time. The followers gather at the Hollywood Cemetery on Halloween. The "outdoor movie" under the stars is *Abbot and Costello Meet Frankenstein*. Hundreds of strangers from every conceivable walk of life, on sacred ground, silent, symbiotic, communal, mesmerized by the silver screen. The children are in awe.

With so much rage on our planet, how can Los Angelenos come together like this? Shoulder to shoulder, total strangers, watching a movie in the dark, in perfect harmony. Life, death, wealth, poverty, opportunity, injustice, art, science – we are a city of existential tension. How do we survive? One word at the very core of Chuck Darwin's theory – adaptation. Breathe that in – deeply. Adaptation. A century from now, Los Angelenos will look back at the global pandemic of 2020 and know "back then we did something right." We've shipped 500 of our state's ventilators across the country to people who can't breathe. The staggering irony. The city that created smog is surviving a deadly respiratory disease. How? Adaptation. Earlier than others we were told that in order to survive, we should stay at home for a while – so we did.

It seems the world is built on repeated patterns. In our City of Angels, the streets crack, then are repaved. The termites eat our house, so we replace the wood. The gigantic mural of Jim Morrison in Venice Beach fades so the locals repaint it. The aroma of the boardwalk, the grilled beef, simmering onions, the

fried dough with powdered sugar and the mix of burning incense weaving through the wandering tourists, has been gone for a while now. It's been some time since anyone has heard the street musicians or the drum circles gyrating around bonfires, celebrating the rise of the night. These Los Angeles rituals will return – it is the cycle.

For now, the local children lay in the grass in their backyards staring at the fruit in the orange trees. The oranges are all different sizes, some eaten by rats, others models of sweet perfection. No two are identical but they are all from one source – one jagged tree with many branches. Los Angeles is an orange tree and we are the fruit.

Wabi Sabi is the ancient Japanese wisdom of seeing beauty in the simplicity and imperfection of nature. The ancients accepted the natural, inevitable cycle of growth, decay, and death. Wabi Sabi is sometimes described as “imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete.” As the mantra goes: “Nothing Lasts, Nothing Is Finished, Nothing Is Perfect... Nothing Lasts, Nothing Is Finished, Nothing Is Perfect.” Beautiful and imperfect - Los Angeles is Wabi Sabi.



Photo by Pete Barraza

The Fourth Estate

By Kyla Walker

I couldn't tell if they were crows or ravens circling above the Georgian Hotel across the street that night. They were lost in a circle of unwavering dance, wings frozen by the wind of a September Santa Ana. I was eager to escape the small talk of the cigar club no longer worth an ear. I checked my watch, and saw a tan line, actually a pale line. Then I remembered that I'd somehow lost my Rolex Oyster while I chased a story in Echo Park last night. I had been stuck with just a notepad and my camera—all that an old-fashioned reporter like me would ever need.

"Hi-de-ho Rogers!" A man in a brown suit and tie grabbed my shoulder and pulled me down to the couch.

"Hey Lance, happy birthday man!" I glanced away and scanned the room to check who was watching us.

"Thanks, Rogers. I've gotta tell ya, though, don't recall ever having a good birthday on a Friday the 13th. But hey, it's been a long time. How ya been lately? You must've heard of the Daily News racking up those numbers, huh? What a lucky cycle..." Lance grabbed another Cuban from the table. He had grown a little more stubble or maybe it was just a five o'clock shadow.

"Yeah, I heard. The crime section of their paper seems to be getting a lot of attention these days for some reason," I said as the chatter around the room came to a lull. After the war ended two years ago, papers around the city started going under. The public lost interest in the normalcy of life and the latest update on City Hall's reconstruction. They began to miss the Nazis and the lost soldiers perpetrating concentration camps. Too many chrome-domes had joined the business of investigative reporting and now were left trying to turn dirt into Mars bars.

"The whole city's on edge, wondering where the Hawk will hit next! Did you read about that poor kid? What a shame." Lance kept talking.

"Billy Donnell. I followed up with a story about him in The Examiner a few weeks back."

"A few late, though. I don't think anyone's reading anything but The Daily nowadays. That Roy Ringer sure is a gritty reporter. I bet he's got an in at the police station."

"I don't know, Lance. My editor—Nate Hansen—is good buddies with the staff over there, and apparently they've been lying low lately. Yet, they still get the scoops every time man."

"Oh, I hear you, but that's the game in the City of Angels."

"Sure, Lance. Sure," I said as I got up from the couch that had already memorized my indentation.

"Ah Jimmie, don't go yet. Here, try a Swisher." Lance handed me a roll and smoke filled the air like a bonfire at sleepaway camp.

"I really should be going. It's already ten, I'm pretty sure, but thanks anyway." I checked the room one last time. A line of pale women and dirty men stood in my way of the door.

I slid into my car as the moon rose above the Ferris wheel. It was one of those unromantic nights when the white rock was three quarters full and counting. I knew where I had to go next. The Daily News headquarters was smack in the middle of downtown. I'd be damned if I went home now.

It was a small office on the top floor. The only distinguisher was the American flag sticking out of a dark window where the Editor-in-Chief worked. The Daily News was a respected paper

by the people here. They trusted it. But I could feel the trace of Roy Ringer, a whiff of spoiled milk. It started last month when the first story of the Hawk hit the newsstands.

“Three people arrested in Valley operation selling more than 500,000 gallons of gas on black market (August 13, 1947).”

“Three houses robbed with thief on the loose on Mulholland Drive! (August 24, 1947).”

“Murder in Union Station leaving 1 dead and 2 in critical condition! (August 30, 1947).”

“Police find legitimate note from Bill ‘Hawk’ Johnson bragging about the August crimes! (September 8, 1947).”

The Hawk is still missing and now on the Most Wanted list. All four stories were written by Ringer, and I was destined to find out how he printed before anyone else.

I started up the staircase that reached seven floors up but bumped into a dame on the second floor. Her papers fell and flew through the stale air. She wore a red dress that wrapped around like that of a china doll. She looked up while trying to grasp the last file, and I caught a glimpse of her eyes that burned as much as whiskey on a cold night.

“Are you just going to stand there?” she asked in a reporter’s voice.

“Hey, hey no need to snap your cap, lady.”

“Well excuse me, but some of us have places to go on a Friday night.”

“Oh yeah, it’s a little late though missus. Would you maybe need a lift home?” I asked, hoping she’d decline.

“What are you talking about? I grew up in this city, the one that never sleeps, a lot like me. I only do my dreaming during the day. We’re going to the Griffith Park Observatory,” she said, glaring into my glasses.

“Alright... You work on the seventh floor, don’t you?” I already knew the answer.

“Maybe. The name’s Violet Sawyer, and you?”

“James Rogers. Call me Jimmie.”

“Huh. The Examiner, right?”

“You betcha. Let me take you to that old park,” I told her. She smiled.

I helped her pick up the dozens of stories lying on the floor and we carried them to my Buick. Violet flipped on the Motorola, and we listened to Frank Sinatra tunes on the way there. She didn’t like questions, so I had no clue why we were on this winding road past 10:30 pm. As she sat in the passenger seat, she wouldn’t let go of a purple folder through the whole ride and seemed to hold on to it so tight I could of guessed that it was the last good hand of a poker game.

When we finally arrived, I felt a stain of regret as she stepped out of the car and looked at me expectantly.

“Well, we don’t have all night Jimmie Joe,” she said.

“Hey, only my friends call me that.”

We stood together on the edge of the mountain beside the observatory named after a convict. The cars were parked like there was a drive-in theater before our eyes. The screen was the horizon. The actors could be seen in the lights from the desk lamps of skyscrapers to the dinner tables of suburban halfway houses disguised as homes. They were sparkling down below, making Hollywood look like a movie. And the moon was setting the spotlight, but the only stars out tonight were the ones dancing at a house on Mulholland Drive.

“You know, I heard this place was haunted by its first owner, Don Antonio Feliz. They say he still lurks among the black stallions of the carousel ride. I came out here to check it out,”

she said.

“You mean you dragged us out here to chase a ghost that’s been dead 80 years?”

“Not just ‘a ghost,’ but a curse that’s echoed in the lives of each property owner and social elitist that’s been greedy enough to steal the land of the people and the park that is rightfully ours,” Violet said with the same subliminal fury I had first seen in her back on the staircase. But her smile broke just then as a scream erupted from the other side of the hill.

I ran back to the car to grab the pistol in the hood. Violet’s papers flew across the front seat, but she was already at the scene. I caught up with her and saw the blood first.

There was a body, mutilated in the shape of a heart and lacerated with the skills of a neurosurgeon. It had been a girl with a face of soft curves and of tough luck. The scream had come from a dish in the arms of a Zoot Suiter while looking at the stars.

“What happened?” Violet asked them.

“Lo siento, no hablamos Inglés,” the Pachuco replied.

Violet turned to me, “I betcha I know who did this.”

“Oh yeah, you think the Hawk was here? Dontcha?”

“I know it. Either him or Don Antonio. I’ve gotta get back to the office, now.”

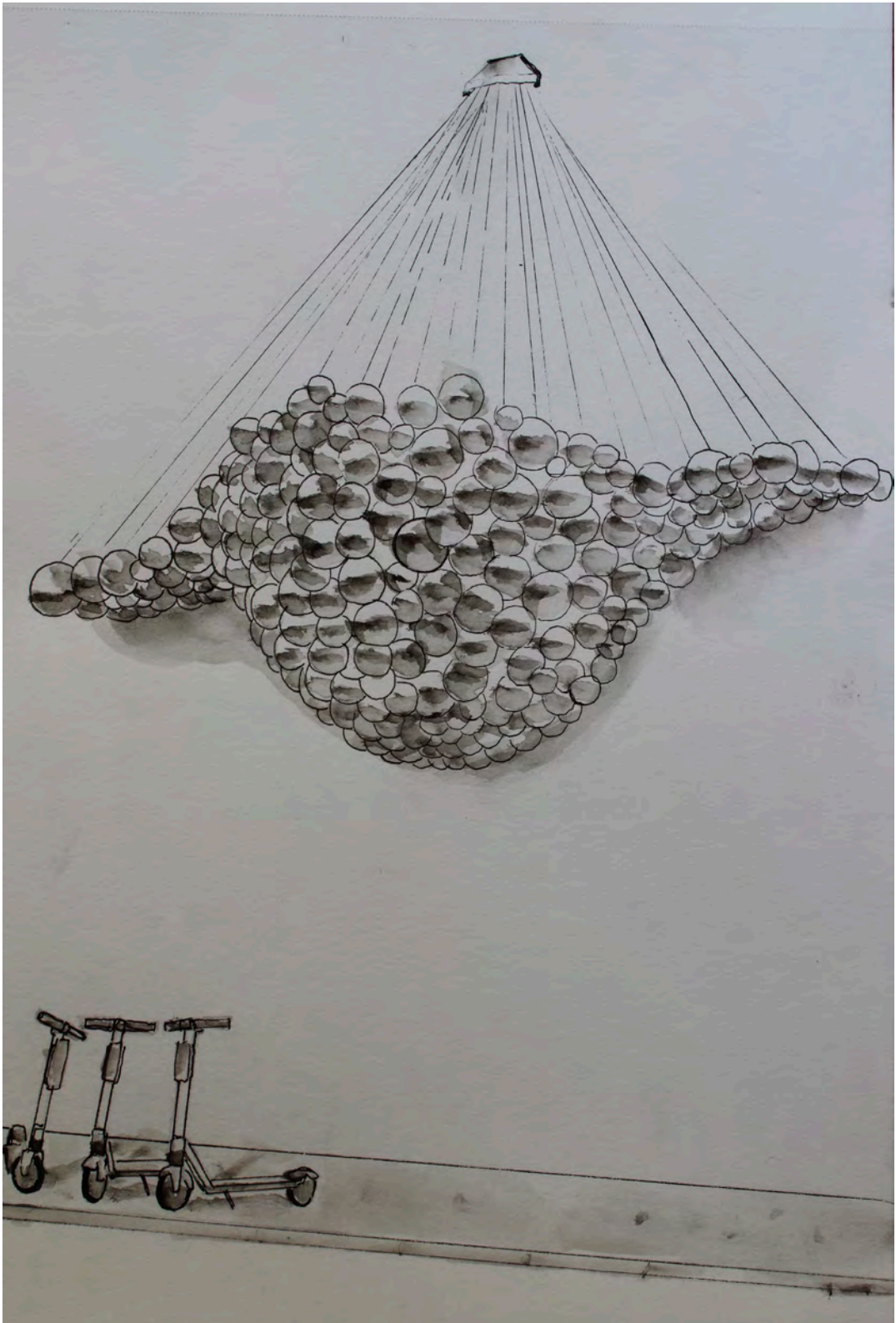
“No you don’t. I’m grabbing this story. The Daily has had its fair share of scoops,” I said. I ran back to the car. I knew what Hansen had been saying to the other editors. The Examiner was going bankrupt. This story could turn everything around for us. I shut the door and turned the ignition faster than I ever had, and the old Buick revved up and was gone with the wind.

I could see Violet in a mirage of smoke and Swishers. I could see her sprinting behind the car in the rearview mirror. She was screaming with that sunbursting smile I almost missed. But, hey, that girl needed to stop chasing ghosts.

When I got back to The Examiner headquarters, down the street from The Georgian, I noticed the purple folder in the corner of my eye. It had fallen below the passenger seat. I saw a story that sat on top with a headline that made my bones drunk and my blood hungover.

“Broken heart found in Griffith Park. Girl mutilated by the Hawk and discovered by young Mexican couple (September 14, 1947).”

Sitting next to the article was that old Rolex Oyster, reading 11:30 pm, 9/13/47, ticking with the beat in sync with my phantom heart.



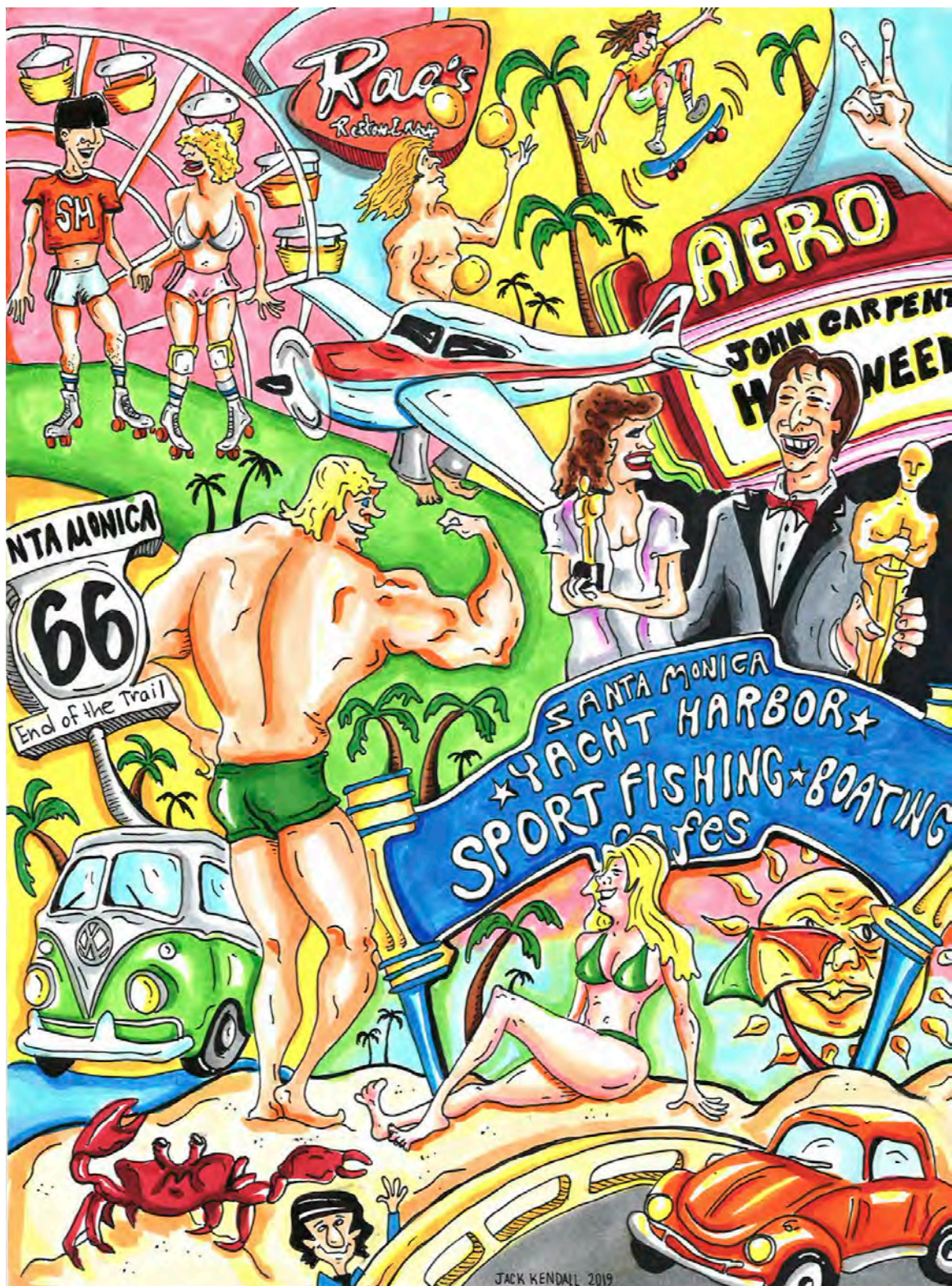


Kyle Walker

Life Itself

By Catherine Taghizadeh

The beat of the drums outside,
Pounding into my head
By the rain
And a bit of the ocean breeze.
Like exotic bongos,
Being played with a familiar rhythm
Similar to the sound of the metronome
Within my own chest.
The beating drum tells me
Of laughing lives,
Crushing heartbreak,
And quieted anticipation.
The screaming of the wind
Mimics me
When I open myself up.
My heart bleeds through these holes,
Reminding me to heal and pray
That I will never open up again.
The cries of the gutter
Quiet me at first,
Then invite me to join in,
Whispering,
“You’re like me too.”
The hollow bowl
That collects the tears
Has a familiar emptiness,
A life-like quality that I know too well,
A thing everyone fears.
For no matter how many drops
Drip into that shallow bowl,
It will never be quite satisfied
With how full or how empty it is.
At midnight,
When the dread of the new day arrives,
The rain reminds us
To capture what we have,
Even if it’s too much of life itself.



Jack Kendall

A View of East LA from Mount Washington, July 4th

By Cy Gilman

Independence Day in Los Angeles
doesn't happen in a straight line.
There is no First Float with all appropriate Pomp and Circumstance,
no Word needed to commence letting the Light be.

It's hard to say where it begins, exactly,
but as soon as the sun twitches in her vigilant stare,
the rebels have already emerged: popping and banging and hooting and hollering
and cackling as they start chasing her away.

Night falls, and the radioactive clusters go forth and multiply,
bunches of flares sent upwards like raindrops in retrograde,
bunches of flowers across the horizon, blooming and dying in rapid succession;
Neon tidepools swell, fill, and overflow,
soon submerged amidst the pyrotechnics of a glittering abyssal plain;
The holy cacophonies of each bombardier blend and harmonize,
and the city roars:

it's daring the nation
to call it unpatriotic,
sun-bleached,
disinterested

daring the dried-up hills
to come alive and send
the whole thing up in
flames

daring the ocean to pull it
off the side of the world
and send it tumbling into
the deep below.

With eyes aflame and concrete teeth,
LA is smiling.

Unanswered Questions

A Fictional Seance with Steinbeck

By Eva Lynch

Kyle drove his Prius up to the parking lot of the small strip mall, before pulling into a spot just below a bright purple sign which read Psychic Marie - The Marina Del Rey Medium, in wonky, golden swirls. He fished around his car until he located a brown satchel, then hopped out of the driver's seat and adjusted his glasses before walking through the front door of Psychic Marie. The bell on the door jingled softly as he entered the dimly-lit reception. A tall and lanky woman, dressed in a long floral gown and a thick fabric headband, breezed in from the back room.

"Hello, you must be Kyle."

"Hey." He adjusted his bag as he offered her a firm handshake. "Nice to meet you."

"You too dear. Everything is set up and ready to go, if you'd care to follow me."

She turned on her heel and walked back through the crushed velvet curtains which hung in the doorway. She reached a large round table in the middle of the room and spun around swiftly.

"Did you bring the objects?"

"You betcha."

With a grand flourish, Kyle placed his bag on the table and rifled through its contents. He produced a sack of feed, three mid-sized sugar beets, a collection of paper napkins which were smudged with ink, and a worn copy of *The Grapes of Wrath*.

"Are you sure these are objects of significance?"

"This was the best I could do."

"The best? This will only work if you chose the proper things."

"It'll work, don't worry. There's no way he'll be able to resist this."

"And what exactly do you mean by 'this'? Are these beets?" she asked, gingerly picking up one of the plants by its leaves.

"Yeah," he shrugged. "Sugar beets to be specific, and a bag of wheat grain. He harvested them for a few summers, and he owned a feed-and-grains store. He did for a little while at least -- it wasn't a total success, but hopefully he doesn't get upset about that."

"Uh-huh," replied Madame Marie, unfazed. "And what are these?" she asked, pointing to the stack of crumpled napkins.

"Well, Steinbeck wrote a lot of poetry as a teen, but his actual poems can be pretty tough to track down so I figured my own poetry would do. All poetry is kind of the same anyways, right? A little bit of angst, a little bit of wonder, add in a desire for freedom and boom, poem."

"So you're telling me, you've brought in a pile of your own poetry, with the hopes that it will somehow channel the great American author, John Steinbeck?"

"Not just any poetry, poetry I wrote when I was a teen."

She took a second to look at the papers in front of her. "This one has a bit of sauce on it."

"Well, I'm sure he liked barbeque."

Madame Marie sighed. "Honey, that's not usually how this works. It's better to have items that are personal to him."

"I know, I know," Kyle said. "Can we still try?"

"Fine. But don't get your hopes up."

"I won't, but I have a good feeling about this."

"Well I have a feeling my uncle Les is going to appear. Liking beets, poetry, and *The Grapes of Wrath* isn't exactly a unique personality."

Kyle smiled to himself. "I guess we'll just have to see."

She shook her head as she reached across the table to grab the pieces and spread them out. She arranged them in a triangle around her large crystal ball and gestured for Kyle to take a seat, before settling into her own chair across the table. She closed her eyes and raised her hands to the ceiling.

"Wait! I have to start the recording." Kyle reached into his jacket and pulled out a slender voice recorder, pressed a large red button on its side, and slid it back into his pocket.

"Ready?" asked the medium.

"Ready."

She muttered under her breath and raised her hands to the sky once again. "Welcome, spirits. We invite you in with open arms." She paused. "We call upon you at this hour in the hopes of speaking to the great John Steinbeck, son of Olive and John — if he is here, may you guide him to us, great spirits. John Steinbeck, we ask you to make yourself known."

The parlour was silent for a minute as neither Madame Marie nor Kyle made a sound. The candles flickered and just as Kyle was about to give up the game, they heard a dry cough crackle through the room. The cough escalated until it was cut off by a loud wheeze and they heard someone clear their throat.

"...Hello?"

The medium scoffed softly, "Well I'll be damned."

If Kyle heard her, he made no comment.

"Is, uh, is this Mr. Steinbeck?"

The voice grunted. "Yes...it's John. Who are you?"

"Me?" he spluttered. "Me, my name is uh, I'm Kyle."

"Alright, nice to meet you Kyle. Can I help you somehow? I don't mean to be gruff. I don't get a lot of visitors, but it just so happens I'm right in the middle of a big project right now and--"

"Oh, is it your book on Arthurian legends?"

"No, it's-- hang on, how do you know about that? I haven't published that yet."

"Uh," Kyle scrambled to figure out what to say. "I wouldn't worry about it if I were you."

"Did one of my friends tell you?"

"Well... This is a little awkward, but it uh, it was published."

"Oh. Right, well this is very strange indeed. I guess it's good that people can read it. This new version I've been working on is much better, but the old one will do... Say, what year is it?"

"It's 2020."

"By god. Are you serious?"

"I am."

"And what's it like?"

"I'm not sure what to say. The whole world has changed."

"Well, what's one big thing?"

"They sent the first man to the moon right after you died, and now, they're planning to colonize Mars."

“Wow.” The voice took a second to process. “Are you all able to go into space?”

“No, nothing like that, only astronauts can go. Are you able to tell me where you are right now?”

“I’m afraid not. Unfortunately, it goes against the non-disclosure agreement.”

“Well, maybe you can tell me this. Who is the most interesting person you’ve met in the afterlife?”

“I think I can say this one. Karl Marx.”

“Wow, really?”

“We had a wonderful chat.”

“That’s so cool.”

“Indeed. On the note of chats, I really must ask, why have you called on me?”

“I’m a journalism student at USC, and I had some questions I was hoping I could ask you.”

“Hang on. Was it your poetry on those napkins?”

“It was!” Kyle replied eagerly. “Why do you ask?”

“Well, it wasn’t familiar... but it also wasn’t very good.”

The medium tried to disguise her laugh with a cough.

“That’s awfully rude.”

“I apologize son. I’m only being honest.”

“Well, if you’re done insulting my 15-year-old self, what are your thoughts on answering a few short questions?”

Steinbeck sighed. “Why not. I’ve got the time if my book is already out in the world, like you say. Let me guess, though; you want to know where my ideas came from, which character I most associate myself with, and if I knew the books were going to be so big?” He droned on, his tone becoming more tired as the list continued: “You want to hear how my upbringing shaped my writing, what my process is like, and so on and so forth. Am I correct?”

Kyle hesitated. “Not quite.”

“It’s fine, really. I’m happy to comply.”

“Actually, I’m not interested in talking about your books. Not in the most traditional sense, anyway.”

“You’re not?”

“Not really.”

“Then why go through all this effort to talk to me, if it’s not about my books?”

“Don’t get me wrong. You’re an American great but those answers are already out in the world, and there is so much more to you than people will ever know.” Kyle shrugged. “I want to focus on the mundane things. You can write a Pulitzer-Prize-winning book, but I’m still going to wonder what your favourite ice cream flavour is. This is the chance for people to see what you were like, instead of who you were.”

“Interesting,” said Steinbeck.

There was a long pause of silence, and Kyle held his breath as he waited for the other shoe to drop.

“Well, it’s a hard toss up, but I think I’m going to have to go with vanilla.”

Kyle broke into a smile. “Excellent choice. So, John... can I call you John?”

“Sure.”

“If you could have dinner with three people in the world, who would you choose?”

“I’d say Ed, my wife Elaine, and maybe my pal Carleton Sheffield.”

"No, no, no. I'm talking anyone in the world, from your time or before. Not just your close friends."

"Well, it is always quite fun when we all get together. We usually talk at great lengths about our past adventures. You know, Carleton and I almost opened up shop together, making plaster casts of the rich and famous. Who knows where I'd be if we hadn't decided against it."

"That's lovely and all, but I was thinking more of people you wouldn't normally eat with. Like Obama."

"Who is Obama?"

Kyle huffed a sigh. "Don't worry about it. Let's just move on."

"Wait. I think I understand. You're looking for bigger names."

"That's generally the idea."

"Then, I'd go with Charlie Chaplin, he's a friend but still quite well-known, King Arthur, and perhaps Shakespeare."

"Okay, interesting choices. I have to say, I'm surprised that there aren't more writers."

"Oh no, I'm done having dinner parties with writers after that disaster at Hemingway's house, and then that dinner with Faulkner. Faulkner and I might have become friends after the fact, but good god that's it for me. No more dinners with writers. Shakespeare is my exception because, frankly, I believe he was the greatest dramaturg to have ever existed."

"The dinner was that bad?"

"It was terrible — not my scene at all. I loved Hemmingway's work, but writing is sometimes best at a distance from its author."

"Speaking of distance, you and your dog Charley covered quite an expanse of the country, in your travelogue *Travels With Charley*. On your road trip, did you stop by any odd landmarks? Roadside attractions? Obscure stops that didn't make it into the book?"

"I'm afraid I did not," he said with a chuckle.

"No? You didn't stop to see the World's Largest Chest of Drawers, or the Leaning Tower of Niles?"

"The leaning tower of Niles?"

"It's like the Leaning Tower of Pisa, but smaller. And in Illinois."

Steinbeck laughed. "You really are a peculiar man. I was chasing bigger fish on our trip, but I also hadn't heard of those when I set out with Charley."

"Did you ever have any pets other than Charley?"

"I had another dog named Toby, and he actually ate my first draft of *Of Mice and Men* when I was writing it. Probably for the best you know. My wife Carol and I also had two ducks when we moved in together, Aqua and Vita they were called, and they were more docile than Toby but where's the adventure in that?"

"Wow, he must have had quite a sharp set of teeth on him."

"Indeed."

"Speaking of, how do you feel about vampires?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Vampires. In real life, in your novels, what are your thoughts?"

"Who says my books aren't real life?"

"Good point. Would you ever write about vampires?"

"I tend to write about lifesucking forces rather than bloodsucking ones."

"What about fantasy in general? I once read that you wrote a story about a spaceship?"

"I wrote about people and their reactions to a spaceship."

"So not a space opera."

"Quite the opposite I'm afraid. No science fiction sagas to be found."

"Well, I should let you know, nowadays vampire books are all the rage, particularly ones involving romance."

"Now how would that work? Is it about a vampire falling in love with another vampire?"

"Not usually--"

"Well, wouldn't a vampire consequentially turn any human into a vampire?"

"I--"

"It makes no sense, unless they turn their partner into a vampire as well, and an eternity with anyone is an awfully long time. Might it not turn awkward after a few centuries? Stale even?"

"I guess, but I think you're overthinking this."

"I'll say. It's a good thing I've never tried to write what's popular. I'd be lost."

"You might not have always aimed to please, but you have still written quite a range of novels."

"It's true, but I've always felt that most people tend to only remember the solemn tales of mine."

"How do you want to be remembered?"

"Hopefully for my books, but I think I'd like to be remembered as someone who cared. I had the reputation of being quite distant, but all I've ever done is write stories of the people I saw all around me and try to give them a voice."

"And to you, what's that voice saying?"

"It's saying simply that these people exist and that their stories deserve to be heard."

"What got you into writing?"

"Honestly, it was reading. My mother and my high school math teacher Miss Hawkins were both hugely influential, and they encouraged me relentlessly to keep writing and reading."

"What would you have done if you weren't a writer?"

"I think I would have always written even if it was just for myself, but I probably would have stayed in Eagle Rock, lived day-to-day and juggled jobs. Nothing ever really stuck, but I tried to just keep my head up and not let my nerves get the best of me."

Kyle was about to ask his next question when the forgotten medium interrupted him with a quiet clearing of her throat and a pained smile. "Time is running out honey. I feel him beginning to fade." Kyle nodded and clasped his hands together as he turned his attention back to the empty area above the table.

"Are you ready for the rapid fire round?" he asked.

"Rapid fire?"

"You'll get the hang of it. What's your favourite book?"

Steinbeck hesitated for a second. "It's between *Winesburg, Ohio* and *Le Morte D'Arthur*."

"Favourite food?"

"I love any fresh seafood -- especially something I caught myself."

"And if you're not by the water?"

"An old-fashioned cup of pozole."

"What's pozole?"

"A can of chili and a can of hominy mixed together in one big pot."

"Tasty. Favourite day of the week?"

"Thursday."

“Perhaps less unexpected after *Pipe Dream*, but my love of musicals.”

“If you had the chance to learn another language, what language would you choose?”

“French.”

“Who is your celebrity crush?”

“Hedy Lamarr.”

“Who?”

“Hedy Lamarr?”

“It doesn’t matter. I’ll look her up after. If you could return to somewhere in the world you’ve already visited, in the current year of 2020, where would you go?”

“I’d want to go back to Vietnam and see what it’s like after recovering from the war.”

“What’s something you wish more people paid attention to?”

“There are too many to choose from. If I have to pick one, I’ll go with the mistreatment of migrant workers, but there are a lot of social issues which are not talked about enough.”

“Where do you feel most at home?”

“Salinas.”

“If you had one last day on earth, what would you do?”

“I’d watch the sun rise in Salinas, and then I’d go to the ocean.”

Madame Marie tapped her wrist and Kyle let himself smile before speaking again.

“Steinbeck, it’s been a pleasure and an honour. Thank you for your time and for doing this interview with me.”

“Well, it’s not as if I had a choice, really,” Steinbeck grumbled, “but I will say I enjoyed this. Might I ask one question before I go?”

“Of course.”

“What do people think of me, in your day?”

Kyle paused thoughtfully. “You’re a legend.”

Steinbeck let out a small hum. “Thank you, Kyle.”

A heavy silence settled over the room and the nearby candles flickered out slowly. Madame Marie got up and pulled a long match from the top drawer of a dresser to her left. She struck it forcefully and carried the match around the room, relighting candles until the salon was aglow once more.

“Well, you must be feeling pretty good about how that went.”

Kyle retrieved the voice recorder from his pocket and pressed the large, red button. “I just can’t believe it.”

“Never in my life have I experienced anything like that,” said Madame Marie.

Kyle just shook his head. “No one is going to believe me.”

“Does that matter?”

A grin crept onto his face. “Not at all.” He jumped up from his chair with sudden purpose and reached for his bag. “I’ve gotta go, though. This article isn’t going to write itself!”

He pulled out a crisp envelope of cash and handed it over to Madame Marie. “Thank you, really. Thank you so much Madame Marie.” He grabbed his beets, feed, poetry, book, and ran out the door.

“Don’t forget to review us on Yelp!” she yelled, counting her money. “It’s Madame Marie, with an E!”

The only response was the chime of the tin bell as the door shut softly behind him.



Emma Guerrini Romano

Ghost Trees and Strong Winds

By Emily Putnam

Her hand slid across the table to the speaker. Haphazardly, she turned down the volume. David Bowie's voice faded off, and her veiny hand was quickly back on the stem of her wine glass.

"Silhouettes and shadows," he sang, "Watch the revolution."

She took a sip of the cheap white, eyes not moving off me, fingers light and graceful as she set her glass back down on the rickety table. I waited. She grinned.

"Did I ever tell you that story about when I solved a murder?" she asked, eyes wide, smile big enough that her shiny pink gums were in view.

"Yes," I replied. "But tell it again."

Her smile got impossibly wider, and then abruptly darkened. I settled in as she shifted in her seat, readying her hands to shape the story in the air.

"I was just 13," she said.

It was a sunny day - it was almost always sunny. The air hung hot and heavy, making her brow wet. She looked up at her father, his face obscured by the sun. He was looking straight ahead, his breaths unlabored. They were hiking up the slope behind the house, as they often did. Her mother, father, and brother had moved around quite a bit; she had seen different parts of Malibu and inland - out of all the houses, this one had been her favorite. She was not eager to leave, although she knew they would eventually. It seemed like the entire Garza family lived just up the street, their presence bleeding into the house, filling it with abandoned beer bottles and rapid conversation. She would play in the yard with the other kids, chasing the dog and doing all the classic activities that mark a happy childhood. The house always smelled like chiles en nogada and charm.

The Palisades streets glimmered with the heat below them as they continued up the rocky path. She could hear sparrows in the bushes and watched a rusty brown lizard lazing on a rock, warming in the sun. It skittered away into the underbrush as they approached. She stared at the back of her father's neck as they continued up the incline, feeling the Santa Anas blowing her up the hill. They always blew hot and unpleasant this time of year, but the days were long and beautiful, skies empty and limitless.

They turned down a path they had not been on before. Each step was punctuated with a crunch, eucalyptus and oak leaves giving off a strong smell and completely obscuring the reddish dirt. The shade from the canopy above them was a relief. If she squinted, she could still see the ocean. She turned around to look at it multiple times. Its presence made her feel like she couldn't get lost.

The path came to an incline yet again, thinning slightly. The dark bushes along the side of the path scratched her bare legs. Soon, the tree line was less thick, the light brighter and hot wind flowing through the trail like a fast moving stream. They found themselves in the sun again. Her father sliced open a cactus fruit with his pocket knife. He sat down on a fallen tree and handed her half of the fruit. It wasn't ripe enough, but the juices were refreshing. They slid down her chin and onto the neck of her white t-shirt. He grimaced.

"I'm gonna go look around," she said, bottom lip pushed out in an artfully crafted pout. She turned away and started walking towards a rock formation. She set the fruit down on the ground, half finished, needing both hands to navigate among the rocks protruding through the gravel.

After climbing over rocks and crawling through a bit of underbrush, she found herself on her knees in front of a cave. Pale green lichen dotted its surface, blooming out of the cracks like moss-colored constellations. The cave was on the small side, opening towards the ocean, its image tempting unwise ideas from her mind. From this height, the view was impressive. Valleys opened up below, no sign of humanity in sight. In the distance the sea was silent and deep green. Her gut told her not to go into the cave. It looked dark. Unstable. But, feeling a little rebellious and craving some adventure, she crouched and fit her small frame through its mouth.

Rays of light bounced through the opening and into the cavern. Columns of dust floated through them, thick and mystical. Her body eclipsed the sun coming through the mouth of the cave, forming a strange penumbra - she found herself moving, entranced by her shadow writhing on the ground, made undulatory by the jagged rocks. She felt far away from the hiking path, far away from the sky, from the ocean. She felt lost.

The ground was rocky and a little damp. Something was running down the walls, and off the ceiling it dripped, the sound echoing through the small space. As she continued through the tunnel, it narrowed steadily. She eventually found herself crawling, the gravel piercing her forearms. After a period of pure feralness, crawling with her stomach flat on the ground, feeling around in the dark, she found herself at the end. As if it commemorated the moment, she placed her hands squarely on the cold rock that closed the passage. It was so empty. And it was silent now, even the dripping gone quiet.

Very suddenly, she found herself rapidly blinking, the hairs on her shins and arms rising. It was instinct, maybe because of the silence, maybe because of how very enclosed she was, maybe somehow her body predicted what would happen next and what it would mean.

Trying to center herself, she turned slowly, as if approaching a frightened animal. She rested her back against the wall, breathing in the musky scent of the old water and moss. She placed her hands beside her on the ground, reaching for some steadiness that at this moment was hard to find. A full body flinch came upon her as her left hand made shaky contact with a strange shape poking out between a rock and some gravel. She couldn't see a thing, the fear becoming more palpable and somehow desperate - she knew that she had to acquire that strange object, hold it in her hands. Digging it out, hurriedly and curiosity becoming more acute, the fear began to lean more towards excitement. She felt like she could hear the winds picking up, but maybe it was just the blood pounding in her skull. With a final pull, it was unearthed. She found that it was lighter than she expected. It was hard, like the surface of a thick shell and cold from being half in the ground. Probing it with the tips of her fingers, she felt little indentations and the soft curves of its structure. She was fascinated - she could wait no longer to see what it was. She crawled out, finding a new speed and ran, clutching the object to her chest as the tunnel widened. After her eyes took a moment to adjust, she immediately recognized it as a jaw bone. It looked big enough to be from a mountain lion and had a few molars in the back. It was exciting. She had not ever found anything like it in the mountains. After inspecting it briefly, she could no longer stop herself from running down to show her father.

Crawling through the prickly bushes and scrambling down the rocks felt quicker this time with the bone in her hand. Soon she came upon her father, still sitting on the fallen tree. He was staring into space. She felt the Santa Anas blowing dust into the cuts on her legs. "Look what I found," she commanded. He glanced up easily, eyes widening at the object of excitement cradled in her small hands. He noticed her dirty fingernails and the sticks and leaves riddled in her hair. He said nothing, just placed his open palm in front of her. She gingerly set it in his hand, his fingers quickly wrapping around the round bottom.

"I wanna show this to someone who would be sure what it is. Maybe your dentist."

"Would he know what kind of animal it is?" she asked quietly, following him as he started to descend the hill.

"Animal. Yes," he said, avoiding her eyes.

When they returned home, seeing it in his hands, her mother recoiled, and jumping to grasp the cross around her neck.

"What are you doing bringing that in the house?" she asked, voice stern, eyebrows furrowed.

Later that week, they went down to Dr. Bernard's office. When he came out of the side door, her father handed the bone to him and he inspected it. After a moment, Bernard took her father into the other room, silent, lips pursed. He looked down at her before gently shutting the door. The receptionist sighed as she scrambled to put her ear against what separated her and her father, what separated her and excitement.

"Put it on the table," Bernard said. "Do you remember where she found it? You'll have to tell the police."

The next few days were a blur of questioning and suits. It was possibly the most interesting thing that had ever happened to her. Her mother was horrified, of course, while her father was his usual silent self. Her brother seemed jealous that he hadn't found the object - what was now evidence.

She found out soon that more bones had been found in the cave - the remnants of a skull, a few vertebrae. Her parents didn't tell her until years later that the rest of the body had been found on a beach, buried deep under a grove of some ghost trees.

"What happened next?" I said, desperate for closure, in the same tone I had taken each time I was told the story.

"That's it," she answered. "They found the guy. He had been taken in for domestic violence before."

"So he killed his wife."

"Seems that way."

"Did you find out why?"

"Well, I think he was sick. I don't know why else anyone would do that. They lived up in the mountains, far from us. Far from the sea."

"Hm."

She was silent for a moment, looking at me. I felt the dynamic change - the conversation was going to devolve in a way it hadn't before.

"You know, we did all kinds of shit when we were kids - there was a lot less adult supervision than there is now. We just walked off into the forest in the morning and came back for dinner. We found other strange things, too, maybe more strange than those bones. Abandoned cabins, weird ropes hanging from trees. Animal skulls all lined up. I think my brother found a bunch of knives. And I know it was just some kids messing around, but I used to think the whole place was haunted when those winds blew. Everything was red dust, just empty. It didn't feel like Earth."

"I wish we lived more near that now. The woods, I mean."

She looked me in the eyes.

"No, no you don't."

Dear Old Friend

By Benny Adler

Dear Old Friend,

I miss the way I couldn't quite fit my legs in any seat of the Big Blue Bus, sharing airpods so we get the best of both worlds. I can still feel the cool air and pedestrian grime reaching out to me as I walked up Culver Blvd. I can hear the prickly grass in my ear.

This grass wasn't dead, if I remember. The other grass went up in flames. I miss the way the beach and 12th Street are the only places of complete darkness at night. Everywhere else you have to feel the dark.

I know it from the blur of four lanes of cars on Bundy. Yesteryear is folded in among the dusty bookshelves in the back corner of the last bookstore. You know the one, by the used test prep books. Maybe it was in the study room of that strange green swoop of the Pico Library. We strived for weariness. In Summer's backyard where the smoke hung like a curtain and he knocked their drinks off the stone wall. Those streets ran like the lines on your palm. Always back to the taco stand, for me at least. I savor the calm after the storm. But again, what storms came here? We lived untouched and careless like the wind that blows up Adelaide to ruffle the sweat on the backs of joggers.

You see LA is love,
But not lovers,
It must be the sea air
It's just the beginning
No end.

LA looks like someone dropped a city from 23,000 ft and we're all just living in the splatter.
Bacon grease and fork-scrambled eggs and dark,
Peete's ground coffee,
Those were the mornings,
when the marine layer swathed the day in a simple gown
Hiding us from the scorching truth and blazing reflection.
The gown swaths us in desire, not seafoam but fear of missing out

Desire for acceptance in a place too fractured,
one must find a nest in the folds.
The folds where LAN cables and thrift stores meet.
Where yoga classes and day hikes cuddle each other
like two drunk teenagers in some big backyard North of Montana Ave.
A month ago I hoped to say goodbye forever to a disparate city.
Today, I think I need to find dirt under fingernails in the West.

With Love,

Benny





Kyle Walker

Ocean Front Walk

By Marcos Sandoval

West of Speedway lies . . .

The world's Famous Wino
with his beer goggles and
plush top hat ranting
every minute for your
Eardrum's pleasure,
"JINGLE-BELLS, JINGLE-BELLS,
HELP ME GET DRUNK!"
A hippie's Wall Street
has hemp bracelets on the rise,
while tie-dye is way down,
and as usual,
sage dominates the marketplace.

Somewhere between Muscle Beach,
and the b-ball battleground,
never-will-be rappers
debate over whose EP,
of bling-bling, SUVs and
million-dollar real estate, can
emancipate
a tourist's shackled wallet.
Shells of authority,
known as the Bicycle Patrol,
chuckle at the tweaker shivering
under Apollo's idle eye.

Beat-itude poets
gather around the Windward Plaza
reflecting on a more majestic atmosphere,
of a time Philomene released
herself from the garments
of servitude to roam
shoeless along Wonderland's summer shore.
New and used street kids,
with pupils dilated,
pay homage to their 3 stories
version of Dionysus.

Wary white-collared thoroughbreds
showcase fickle,
Pinkberry smudged smiles.



Awestruck Europeans
dangle passports
around their necks
like Olympic gold medals.
Among these caricatures
are the moment-snatching,
photo-snappers, so eager
to capture your soul.

Of course all are in a synchronized
cartoon thought bubble:
(I bask in the glory,)
(of the 60's)
(Renaissance revival!)

confusing the illusions,
of \$1 for a show entertainers
with prosperity.

Ink junky skater boys filed alongside a Tattoo Asylum, await the next session of permanent expression. Stoners and burnouts flock to the closest Head Shop for wraps, vaporizers, bongs, sneak-a-tokes, peace pipes and detox.

... a cornucopia of human existence.

Persist

By Ryan Kashanchi

I know for a fact that this Steinbeck Youth Institute Journal will be like no other. Years from now, when all of this has finally cleared up and the world is safe, I want this essay to be a reminder about what happened during this time. When people read this in the future, I hope they know that they made it. They are alive. More alive than they ever have been before. This life we all have, this peculiar balance of mind, body, spirit, and health, is precious. It deserves to be guarded and kept safe.

I write this at 9:33 PM, April 5th. Sunday. The final day of our trip to Monterey. Except our trip never happened. There were no photos, no memories, no “fun times.” There were no literary landscapes to immerse ourselves in, no historical landmarks to appreciate, and no icky squids to mercilessly dissect. There was nothing. An absence of something, yes, but still nothing all the same.

But simultaneously during this “lack of something” I feel an abundance of change swirling around me. The world is rapidly changing during these times. Paranoia and sensationalism seem to be paving the way for a new way of living. Walking into a public area without a mask is now taboo. Stepping within six feet of a random stranger is the equivalent of begging for mankind’s death. Loving a relative now ironically means less visits and less contact. It seems as though the pathogen has jumped through the physical realm and barricaded itself into the human psyche. Embodiments of fear, anxiety, and desperation walk through the streets timidly and cautiously -- emotions perhaps more contagious than the virus itself (but as the public and media never fail to remind us, not nearly as deadly).

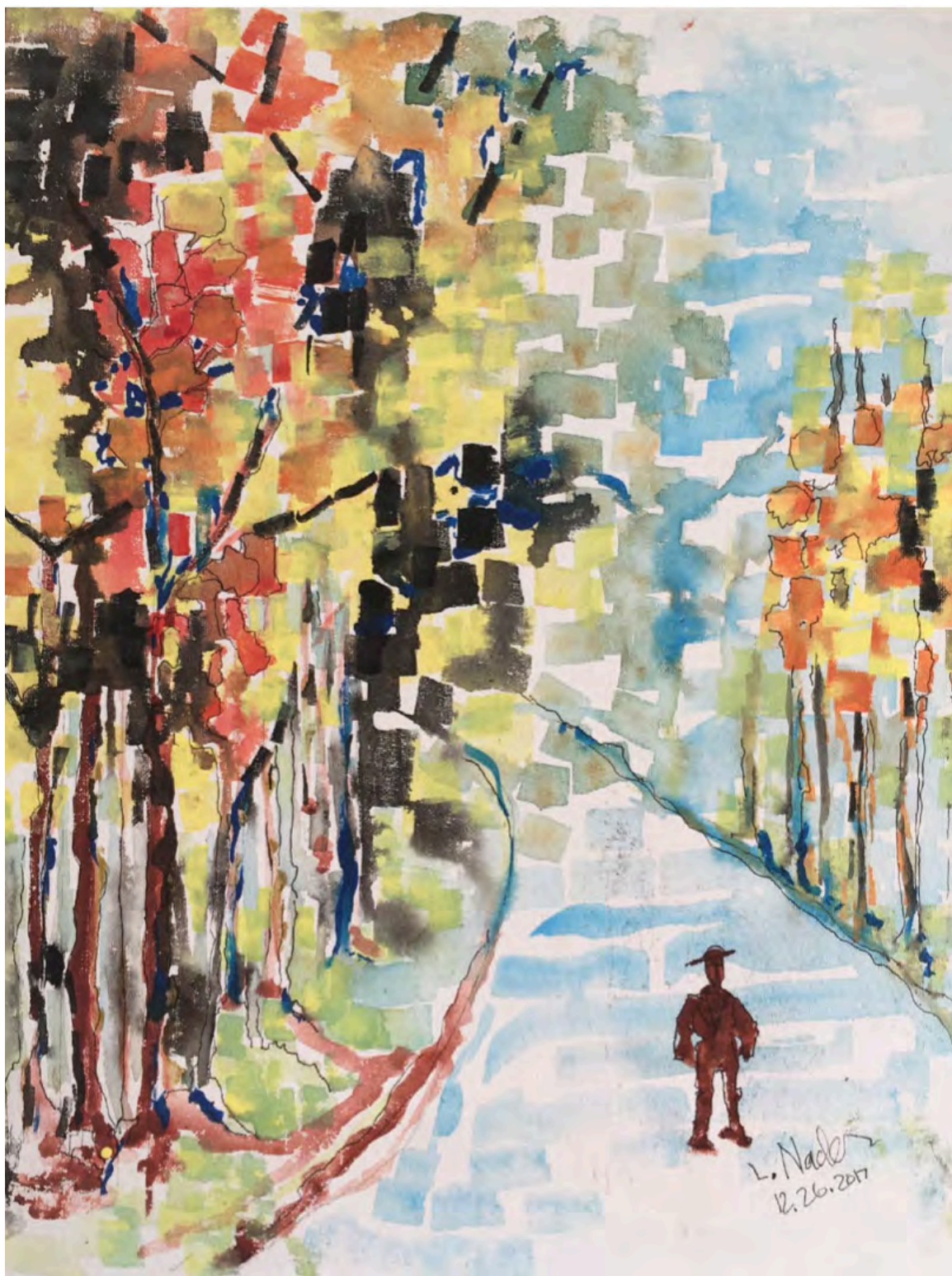
This is no happy story. There exists no twist ending or serendipitous conclusion. We are the Lennies in a world full of a viral, gun-holding George. Though not nearly as depressing nor grim, we are still at the mercy of a miniscule mastermind. It dictates to us never to leave our homes, always cleanse ourselves thoroughly, and constantly preoccupy our thoughts with those painful “what-ifs.” It makes us regret the split second we congregated a little too close. It forces us to criticize those who gamble with their lives and the lives of others as we watch them leave their safe havens. In this global classroom it appears that we are the students -- with the virus teaching us to always be afraid.

But what if we saw the world in a different light? In the form of shining, promising, and bright rays of hope? In the face of this seemingly apocalyptic pandemic we have demonstrated our resilience and our power to endure. Every day and every night society continues to resist the impending storm. Neighborhoods have flashed their lights and honked their cars in support of medical practitioners around the world. Charitable donations from families who they themselves are struggling to make ends meet keep rolling in. Melodies ricochet off the balconies of suburban Italy and echo into the desolate streets. The human soul fights with fire to preserve the present and to ensure the future.

If this essay is ever to be read, I would hope for it to be at the right time, in the aftermath of all the chaos. In a time of peace. I want the future to remember that our words can leave the biggest marks and inspire the greatest change. These timeless impressions we mark onto our present will serve as bittersweet recollections of the past. Far after we leave this world it will indeed be our machinations of mind that will live on.

I need not be hopeful or even faithful that mankind will carry on. We have done it before, and we will do it again. For that is what we do. We are humans. We persist against all evolutionary and mathematical odds; stubborn little creatures that refuse to die out. My simple request for when the future comes to seek counsel from the past in other times of panic, I urge that it repeats these words: the homo sapiens shall persist.

My grandfather, Nader Lahijani, is an artist, but more importantly a man of love and kindness. A man of few words, he uses paints and canvases to express himself to the world.



On the Paper Wings of Angels

By Lily Yost

Dodging the fresh spray paint on the pavement, I weave through clusters of artists, musicians, and dancers. I enter the studio and Karla greets me with enthusiasm: “Lily! Guess what? Those students upstairs, they’re making a documentary on the crane memorial!” I bolt past her to find the film crew, introducing myself and thanking them for capturing something so important to me. The hours spent folding the delicate-patterned paper to create thousands of unique birds—a bird unique to each person lost from the pandemic—will be documented to help us cope with this immense loss.

Karla started folding cranes on her own. When she shared her project, it filled me with relief, presenting me with a creative means of catharsis. The pandemic introduced an unknown feeling: hopelessness, something that rarely interfered with my plans of action. Protesting, contacting politicians, and changing my habits to adapt to the needs of environmental, political, and social grievances dominated my free time. Climate change prompted me to stop eating meat and dairy. A lack of mental health resources in public education forced a letter writing and phone calling campaign to the California Senate Committee of Education. Food insecurity at my high school drove me to set up an “Extra Table” where students could drop off or pick up some extra food. But with COVID-19, I was resigned to wearing a mask, six feet away from my friends. And it wasn’t enough— not until I started folding and hanging the paper cranes, boxes of them landing in a little art gallery in West LA.

The five minutes it takes to make an origami crane symbolizes a death, but I can’t conceptualize this. So I fold to understand. Most importantly, I’m learning about the necessity of creativity during a time of tragedy.

I give this gift to neighbors, tourists, and suffering families. I see them sauntering along the gray cement, their eyes illuminating with the sight of thousands of colorful origami cranes.

Today, I’m at the studio for Juneteenth, and people will be coming to celebrate with motivational speakers, musicians, and visual artists. A few of us will be teaching people how to fold cranes from a distance, and Karla will be showcasing paintings and photographs from local black artists. So, I set up my latest batch of cranes: uniform in color, black, to memorialize the harrowing deaths of marginalized Americans who have died in the hands of an unjust system.

I reach for the White-Out pen and immediately question its purpose. I could conceal the mistakes of a deceptive system, but instead I reveal them. I inscribe the names of black fathers, sons, athletes, and artists— evidence of the brutal stories of this volatile country. Name by name, letter by letter, the weightless wings struggle to carry the growing burden of fragile lives. And yet again, I find myself with too many. Too many names, and too little space.

The door swings open, and a gentle gust of wind disrupts the stillness of the cranes. The wings of Emmett Till, Tamir Rice, and Breonna Taylor flutter, and yet they remain chained down by an invisible string, tied to the ceiling of an art studio.

In walks a middle-aged woman, and through a brief exchange I find out she lives by herself a few blocks down. I respond with a gesture, showing her a table and a set of chairs. After teaching her how to fold a crane, I string it up to hang from the ceiling. We feel a gust of wind, and this time in walks an older gentleman. The woman shows him the table and the set of chairs. She gets the paper, sits down, and continues what Karla and I started. I thread two more black cranes, listening as a gift is shared. A flock of cranes encircles the room, surrounding three grieving strangers adjusting to an unfamiliar life.



Photo by Pete Barraza

Seismic Drifting

By Chloe Gottlieb

The state of California gets her name from a chivalric romance novel written in 16th-century Spain. *Las Sergas de Esplandián* depicts a fictional island composed entirely of female warriors, ruled by Queen Calafia. They used weapons and tools made of pure gold. Spanish cartographers and explorers who learned of what is now called Baja California misunderstood it for an island (it is a peninsula), and having heard the rumored isle was populated by Amazonian women, named it as such. This is not the California I know.

The California I know is shimmering mirages, and airports that smell of sunscreen and car exhaust, and David Hockney swimming pools, and winding drives, and all the days and years blending because seasons aren't there to change or denote time. Even the switchblades sold on Crenshaw are golden, perhaps an homage to Calafia. It is the best place in the United States to grow up, and everyday this feels less like opinion and more like verifiable truth. As a native Los Angeleno, yes, I am biased. That doesn't mean I'm wrong.

I don't mean so much the obvious material concerns, although it was nice to have a high school surf team and to be unfamiliar with the bitter winter of real weather. Rather, it is the zeitgeist of living in a place that constantly reinvents itself, that decides where and when and for how long and we are simply swept up in it. That is what's appealing. More or less, it is a gilded place of longing. People fly in from all over the world to hunt down a dream, to be the one who really will make it and prove it's so completely different this time because this time it's them and they will succeed, they promise. Everyone is the exception, everyone wants it the most. This is not confined only to places like Hollywood, but throughout the entire state. We all want to live in California, even people who do not want to live in California. Often it is more of a mindset than a location at all, an emotion people inhabit. If someone tells me they hate California, they're really telling me they either haven't had an authentic visit. My friend likes to joke, "I'm a Californian before I'm an American."

In turn, California is as lovely as it is mournful; it is a series of nonlinear associations and a place of loss. Loss of naiveté, of first loves, of stability. It is a loss of home the way only a liminal space ever could be. Because that's what California is at its core-- a liminal space. In between "what was" and "what is next" sits Los Angeles and Salinas and San Francisco, and even parts of the Redwoods.

In high school, I went on a five-day field trip up the coast of California to study the writing and ecosystems of John Steinbeck. While "field trip" is the right term, this felt more like summer camp. Although it was dressed up in academic language, and accurately so, the excursion was also an opportunity for my English teacher to channel his inner John Keating, to take his literary research students to jazz concerts and whale watching expeditions. As a group of teenage readers and writers, we embraced the poetry workshops and the phenomenal natural landscapes, each one glittering more than the last. Sure, we studied and learned, and I can talk to almost anyone now about how tidepools influence western literature or how Steinbeck encouraged non-teleological thought, but the genuine and palpable connections forged outside the lines of books were the real meat of the voyage. In trips like these, if there are trips like these, people speed-bond. Through the hours-long conversations in the vans driving, through the vulnerable sharing of prose, through the "Look, look how beautiful."

I'd been on the inaugural trip the year before, but almost suddenly and all at once it was the tail end of Senior Year and officially The Last Time we would go, and with it came twinges of nostalgia, melancholy, and unabashed platonic love. We were so young, young enough to not see the clichés. It was an early nostalgia, pre-emptive, knowing these moments were fleeting and we would not feel these same emotions again. Or, if we did feel them, it would never again be with the same people.

I would be leaving California for college, for what was in my mind's eye the cartoonishly somber, cold, and metallic streets of New York City. I had been so passionate about moving to the City for so many years, it had become an idea more than a reality. Fun to play pretend, hard to imagine actually living there. As eager as I was, knowing my time in California was dwindling felt not unlike hearing a relative is terminal; I was on borrowed time. Stuck, it seemed, in between the life I'd lived and the complete dissolution of it. For as many times as my mother reminded me I'd be returning over holidays and breaks in the school year, I also understood coming home would mean being a tourist in the place I was raised.

Driving to Monterey on the Steinbeck trip gave me hours on PCH, imprinting the lifeline ups and downs of the coast in my head. The Pacific Coast Highway is a love song and a self portrait, filling both time and space. It is my favorite highway. It chews and spits up the congested 10 and makes the smog-ridden I-90 look like a goddamn joke. Colloquially known as PCH, we drop the "the" even if it is grammatically correct, and add it to "the 405" which in turn makes that not grammatically correct. Two wrongs, I guess. As much as SNL likes to mock the traffic-heavy world of Californians, it's hard to care when a commute to work overlooks cerulean water, sandy dunes, and yellow-orange flower buds we only ever seem to find on the beach. At a certain point, something stunning can be photographed only so many times. Being exposed to that much beauty turns documenting superfluous.

One of the spots we visited was the Montaña D'Oro, aptly named after its populous golden flowers. Eroded rock formations jutted into the turquoise and indigo water, and the sandy brown path dirtied our shoes in a way that never fully washed out. Sea stacks and caves hid in between charcoal rocks, and we peered across the massive plunge down to them, only slightly frightened by its vastness. My friend's mom was a chaperone, standing near us. As a fourth-grade teacher, she knew lots of short but interesting facts, the kind specifically tuned into the attention span of ten-year-olds. "The continents are moving as quickly as a fingernail grows," she told us, holding up her thumb. "One day the land we're standing on right now will wind up near Alaska."

Growing up in Southern California, the mythical sword of Damocles hung over our young heads in the form of earthquakes. Specifically, The Big One. From elementary school onwards we spoke in hushed voices about the destruction and brutality it would bring. Death became very easy to imagine. Parents begrudgingly admitted, yes, a somewhat large earthquake is maybe probably coming at some undetermined time far in the future, but were quick to add, "We'll be fine." Even in childhood we were wary to believe them. "What'll you do when it hits?" was as common a question as "Wanna trade your pb & j sandwich for my egg salad?" It was a matter of not "if" but rather "when." At seven years old, we were so sure of our mortality. Words like "tectonic plates" rolled off even the unsophisticated tongue and logarithmic scales were memorized long before multiplication tables. School drills revolved around where to go (door frame), how to hide (under a desk), what parts of the body to cover (hands behind neck). This was right before active shooter drills became a frequent necessity, and the greatest threat to our lives was basaltic architecture rather than an individual. Californian children realize early their lives are imbalanced,

wavering.

The slight tension and general unease that was instilled in all of us was minute but common, a low-level constant pressure much like the earth's tremors themselves. This discontent was punctuated by the small earthquakes that hit intermittently, as well as by the stories that came with them. My aunt once thought her refrigerator was chasing her. A friend's armoire full of glass animals shattered decades of family collectables. My brother fell off his bed in the middle of the night, like when a poor magician tries to swipe a tablecloth and all the dishes and flower vases fly off. As real as The Big One felt, it was impossible to imagine it in any authentic way. I couldn't help but picture the school field cracking open and the club soccer team falling in, blue jersey after jersey. Natural disasters were far too whimsical, prone to being weaponized in the metaphors of poetry. Instability is easier to turn into art than reality; it's unnerving to imagine the very ground we walk on betraying us. It seems time and time again, California is a place of fluctuation simply pretending to have achieved equilibrium.

The mere traveling of continents, however, never crossed my primary school mind as something to be just as scared of. It seemed both insidious and exquisite. Devastation doesn't always announce itself with a clamorous tsunami; sometimes it creeps up and puts us in place and absorbs us silently. Not only was our temporal space dwindling as we left our high school lives, but it seemed we literally could never go home again.

And somehow, at the same time, a poignancy and perspective was gained. How lucky to be here and now, and not there and later. How futile it is to try to hold on too tight, to try capturing that feeling with a photo or postcard. Even as we live there we are losing California to time. Each fingernail a hello and a goodbye, wrapped up in one.

The rest of the trip didn't induce as many existential melt-downs. We played truth or dare. We collected sand dollars. We read our poetry at a bonfire, and then again to the police when they arrived to say bonfires were illegal here and while the poems are very pretty if we could all leave now there would be no more trouble thank you. We went back to our homes, journals full of new experiences and new words strung together in new ways and the smell of smoke impossible to wash out of our hair with regular shampoo. I felt like an addict who finished her final bender; I absorbed as much of California as potently as possible before quitting cold turkey for NYC.

Nowadays, in New York, I am reverted back to a child-like state of mind when it snows-- I missed the excitement and beauty of terrible weather as a kid, so now is the first chance I've had to make up for the last eighteen years. As a child I loved the rain; grey skies were not depressing but alluring. In a place where the sun shines 364 days of the year, anything deviating feels special, magical. Being so starved for inclement weather turns the possibility of a thunderstorm into a feast.

In California there are certain times the brightness is not welcoming but an affront. How are we supposed to deal with sorrow or grief when it is 72 degrees and sunny? Four days after my ninth birthday my father's mother died and he spent two full days on Point Dume Beach in Malibu. I remember thinking at the time mourning feels wrong on a beach, maybe even offensive. I wondered how the sun continues to shine graciously and how that felt like squeezing lemon juice in a gaping wound. Like day-drinking, sunlight hitting this vice felt unnatural. I figured both crime and pain should be ushered under darkness.

This was part of the allure New York had held for me before I moved; sadness wasn't hidden but announced. It was a place loud and inexplicable and dirty in a way, say, California mudslides are not. New York held its own particular appeal, rooted in opposing almost every aspect of Los

Angeles. Life was built upwards, rather than outwards like it is in California. People were rushed. How lucky you must be, I would think, to be rushed in New York City. It was a holy land of creatives and cigarette smoke and new people to absorb and 24-hour delis (California, on the other hand, only had 12-hour delis and that half-day seemed long enough to encompass a whole other life, one that was evidently waiting in New York). As teenagers, we wanted what we couldn't have more than almost anything else. New York was that faraway Mecca, just out of hand's grasp and therefore all the more attractive. It was hard to see then that California was offering the same promises. I will say, one similarity I've noticed is the abundance of beautiful people in the two states. It was not surprising to learn actors seem to like both coasts, too.

Writing now from across the country, it doesn't take much to remember the past with rose-colored glasses. So much of California is rose-colored glasses that seeing in shades of red feels normal. Homey, even. The heat is so high and unadjustable in my dorm I am reminded of summer in Santa Monica, and I crave it.

Los Angeles gave me the loves of my life and so much laughter I couldn't even quantify it. What did New York have to offer? The first real heartbreak of my adult life and a college-mandated Pulp Fiction poster? This was how I began feeling in the few days leading up to moving. I had grown so accustomed to waiting for the world to shake and shatter, it felt very odd to suddenly leave that anxiety behind and learn instead to fear hurricanes, or whatever it is New Yorkers fear. It felt very odd to no longer have something to wait for, to tuck into. Having spent years idolizing the City, when I was finally handed the ability to go I froze. Leaving meant leaving. It meant measuring my life in subway stops rather than gas stations, meant cutting out a me-shaped hole in the landscape and putting it on an airplane. That was how tangible the loss felt. Part of it was California, but part of it was also the closing of something, the end and resounding shut to a chapter of my life. California doesn't have endings like that-- it just starts over. But New York has endings like that. I am still not very good at goodbyes, even for a girl who had a living will in the fifth grade (just in case The Big One did arrive sooner than anticipated).

Sometimes I think it is easier to define something by its opposite, to use shadow to form existence. In New York I take short showers; they do not feel short to me but they are short for New York. California has been in a drought for as long as I can remember, and I have been trained to preserve water at every chance. I use words my new friends haven't heard before and keep an ongoing paragraph of Los Angeles slang on my phone. At parties we compare lexicon. Something like that would never happen in LA, could never happen. There, I am. Here, I am a Californian.

California will always be young to me personally because every experience I have there is inherently tied to my youth. Yet, it would be unfair to say that California's appeal is due to my own childhood; I come close, but I'm not quite so self-centered to think that my experiences were totally unique, or lone, or that no one else feels what I have felt. It is actually the very opposite. There is a collective consciousness, a uniform adoration. My friends stick-n-poke tattoo'd the numbers 310 on each other, our neighborhood's telephone area code. Parents understood gas money was more valuable than lunch money. All of us walked around with fine grains of sand stuck in our soles.

We all built a world around the natural phenomenons that grew to feel very *quotidienne*. It took Rome six days to burn down; wildfires have tried for 169 years to scorch California. About once a year the sun turns red and ash falls like a brown blizzard. The grass along PCH chars, and classes are cancelled for Smoke Days just in case our lungs aren't yet accustomed to the annual dose of pollution. Animals suffocate in the fire-infested hills, houses burn. Celebrities hire private firefighters, while farmers' livelihoods are destroyed in days. Hours, sometimes.

And somehow, every year, we get through it. Some years are worse than others, as California moves in circles. When it's one of those worse years, we host each other and dress up salvation as a sleepover. A party. We donate resources and money, and if you don't have any of either you go to the ocean and simply wait for the winds to die down. We do not try to tame. The natural world does not dictate how we live, it merely reminds us California is always changing. We can stand in a threshold for only so long. The doorframe that provides cover in an earthquake will not always be able to protect us-- we have to move through, keep going, embrace the liminality.

A community constantly faced with disaster fuses; trauma is the best bonding agent. This communal energy and acknowledgement does not change the fact that every memory of mine held there is frozen in time, fossilized in amber, individual to myself. Each one is from before the age of nineteen, before college, before coming back in December and feeling so acutely aware of the memories on every street corner, billboard, and In-and-Out. I can't even look up in the car without reminders being cued from adolescence. I see them play out like a film reel or flipping through the pages of a journal; the now-foreclosed dingy ice cream shop we went to Wednesdays after swimming, the repertoire with mango and strawberry vendors on the highway, the first time falling in love, the pulling over to open a college acceptance letter because who could wait the drive home for such a thing, the white marbled Getty Museum and the Van Goghs inside, the road-trips to Mexico and on the way back Ikea, the less shiny first time falling out of love, the Japanese liquor mart that never cards but remembers my name, the standing outside a UCLA-extension hospital convincing my friend his insurance would not cover checking himself in for being "too high," the funeral-themed party we held in all black, for our youth, the summer after graduating.

The mythology of California is overwhelming. It can be pinpointed in the impermanence and demolition the natural world brings in Santa Ana winds, wildfires, El Niños, droughts, earthquakes. It is landlord to the golden state American Dream to begin again, one that is always present even when dormant. The mythology of California will forever be enticing, off-putting, and beckoning. Its very namesake is folklore and reinvention, both the fictional story and the way its author formed places and people seemingly out of thin air. California does the same.

On the weekends I am twenty-one and from the Midwest, according to the driver's license my brother bought me on the dark web. I order a drink at the bar, and the guy next to me spots this. He turns and says, "You're from Michigan too! Ann Arbor?" I feign remorse, and with a frown, "Ypsilonanti." I return to my friends, unable to focus on anything other than the idea that not only is New York not really my home, neither is California. In one state I am a temporary student, in the other I am the traitor who left. I am stuck in between, faltering, jarred by the almost sudden realization that I do not own the life I am living. I tell myself New York is new and short-term, and that that is why it feels surreal to be here. Guilt creeps in. Even worse, so does doubt. My life here is full and gratifying. I am so happy but on the wrong coast, I think maybe I don't deserve to be this happy. Especially in such an eastward state. Because if I have joy here, maybe it is permanent. Maybe I won't ever go home again, not in a real way. I would rather the earth beneath my feet abandon me and move to Alaska than have to face the fact I was the renegade, that I said goodbye first.

I go back to the dorms, label it "home," and tuck myself into bed. I do the math to see what time it is in Los Angeles and call my mother. She tells me it has been grey and raining for weeks, that there haven't been storms like this in decades, since before I was born. "Does it weigh on you?" I ask her. "Yes," she tells me. "Yes, but it's good for the drought, we need this," she tells me. I remember I used to say the same thing on rare rainy days in high school. We need rain like it is a baptism. Missing that home, that time lived there, feels dry in my throat. Water is the same remedy to opposing forces; both fires and droughts. Somehow, I am still so thirsty.



Kelly Dunn

A Golden Prayer

By Pete Barraza

She said the pastors used to come over to eat honey after church.
She then proceeded to recite a poem she learned in third grade,
words she read
as if back on the playground pulpit
earnest and absent of war-torn omens.

When I asked her who the poet was,
she didn't remember---but that didn't stop her from performing in the passenger seat of my car
on the old angel highway...

My seventy-five year-old aunt, reincarnated in pigtails and poesy.

When we reached her home, to be abandoned when she dies,
She said that the bees are all gone now---
Somehow, I didn't believe her, as I felt like a pastor in the presence of a queen ready for flight.

The Contributors

Steinbeck Youth Institute Scholars (see website for bios)

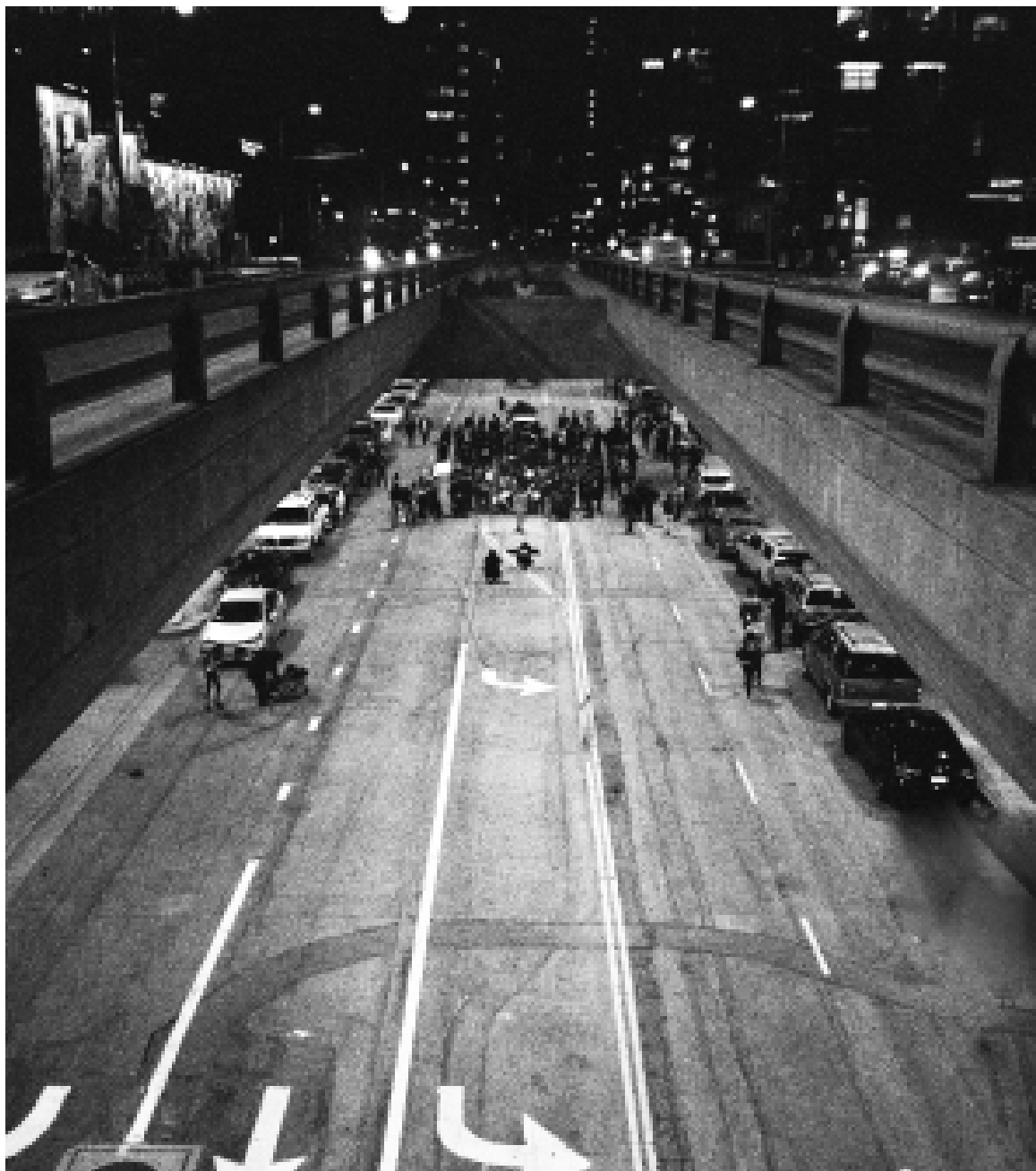
Benny Adler	Akin Gruner Domic	Rachel Rothschild
Liam Bartlett	Emma Guerrini Romano	Anastasia Shakhidzhanova
Justin Best	Anouk Jouffret	Kaelen Song
Aidan Blain	Ryan Kashanchi	Bria Stocker
Clair Davis	Auden Koettters	Tupelo Sullivan
Rex Evans	Yvonne Liu	Nathan Wetmore
Madeleine Forrest	Eva Lynch	Tom Wickline
Chloe Forssell	Riley Masterson	Eleanor Winterer
Leo Gilman	Emily Putnam	Karina Wisen
Kiyono Gray	Ian Richardson	

Professional Contributors

Pete Barraza
Thomas Gammarino
Cindy Milwe
Marcos Sandoval
George Wallace
Kyle Walker

Additional Student Contributors

Sara Akiba	Izzy Lewit
Max Baker	Icy Liang
Kelly Dunn	Phoebe Liskin
Erkki Forrester	Mckenzie McDonald
Max Forssell	Katie Osaki
Cy Gilman	Anya Pertel
Chloe Gottlieb	Sawyer Savage
Henry Hume	Grace Sencio
Eleanor Hutman	Jersey Sullivan
Jack Kendall	Catherine Taghizadeh
Thatcher Lee	Kyla Walker
Xander Lee	Lily Yost



Xander Lee



Anya Pertel